Merchant of Illusion
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CHAPTER TWO

Reinventing the Capitalist City

The products of our creative genius are evident on every hand and nowhere so extensively as on our own shelves. But, so far, we have failed to apply this same creative vitality to bringing the physical city in which we live up-to-date with our knowledge and our hopes of how to live. The American people have learned how to live better, work better, shop better, than the central city can provide, and they will desert it in increasing numbers as better alternatives are made available to them.

James Rouse

To hypothesize the working city, the city where people were employed, had incomes capable of coping, lived in communities where there was a delivery of health care, where people were well educated, moved about in reasonable systems of mass transportation, where there was beauty and community health and a city full of spirit: now, that's not beyond our capacity.

James Rouse, “Utopia: Limited or Unlimited”

Whole city blocks no more than piles of rubble proved a good match to the left-wing aspirations of postwar European planners. The massive destruction of the Second World War led, in much of Europe, to far more far-reaching urban reshaping than was possible in the United States, untouched by bombing or warfare and hampered by laissez-faire politics. American city centers remained layered, thickly built places comparatively free of central direction and planning. Those who would completely replan the cities of the United States for the modern age, and show that the leading Western democracy could create a modern image of the capitalist city, had to invent the means of large-scale destruction in peacetime, as well as create the space for progressive planning in an atmosphere that distrusted centralization and leftist schemes.

A Life magazine reporter recorded one of Boston’s leading architects, William Greeley, showing just such enthusiasm for creative destruction in 1945. Presiding over an unveiling of radical reconstruction plans for postwar Boston, Greeley argued that “since Boston presumably will not have the ‘advantage’ of being destroyed in the war like London, it is up to
Boston’s citizens ‘to destroy our own diseased tissues and by heroic willpower rebuild our community as a worthy competitor of the newer type of city.”1 Architects like Greeley knew well that America’s oceans would not isolate the nation’s cities from international comparisons.

Architects and planners donated the artistic vision, but in the end they were not the engines behind this transformation. Only through business-led planning did these planning powers emerge, and they likely could not have emerged from any other quarter in the increasingly paranoid politics of the postwar period. In a time when state power in the United States was held in low esteem, only businessmen had the freedom to propose sweeping changes to urban policy. James Rouse, and figures such as Richard Mellon and William Zeckendorf in other cities, stood at the forefront of this expansion. During the 1950s and 1960s American city centers and their surrounding regions transformed themselves under business leadership as the stumbling blocks to comprehensive planning dissolved.2

What urban businessmen knew about cities of the 1940s and 1950s was

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Figure 4. Pittsburgh’s “Golden Triangle” project, including the Renaissance I Center, from the 1950s made a splash where the Monongahela and Allegheny join to form the Ohio River. A leading example of the renewed urban landscape pioneered in this great industrial city, this project resulted from the efforts of the Allegheny Conference, a dynamic private sector civic improvement organization. Rouse and businessmen across America found inspiration in the total transformation achieved in Pittsburgh’s central business district. Library and Archive Division, Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania.
fairly sobering. Dense urban centers constructed in the era of carriages and streetcars had failed to make an adequate adjustment to the mass popularity of the automobile in the 1920s. The lack of parking and fast roads gave advantages to emerging suburban areas, even by the 1920s. In a 1945 article in *The Nation*, Frank Fisher acknowledged that the United States had “escaped the more obvious destructive consequences of war. But the war has accentuated our long-standing housing shortage and accelerated the disintegration of many of our cities.” Much of the commercial real estate of cities in older buildings, although made up of a variety of impressive architectural styles, lacked the light and comfort that modern buildings possessed. Real estate owners did not necessarily update properties or were too busy in speculation schemes to concern themselves with property management.

City centers, mired in old ways, started to lose ground to the suburban edge. Older department stores in city centers, for instance, lost ground to new suburban branches. Between 1948 and 1954, retail trade in metropolitan Baltimore may have increased a strong 25 percent, but it sank nearly 2 percent in the downtown shopping district. Worse, “the assessed value of the central business district dropped from $175 million in 1931 to $128 million in 1947.” In 1946 *Life* found that “in the crowded center of car-conscious Detroit, property values have tumbled some 2,000,000 since 1930.” Shoppers “frequently take their business to suburban centers where parking is not so difficult.” Less value in the center meant diminished tax revenues, and cities across the country experienced similar or worse declines. The power of American management skill needed to be focused on the moribund cities in order that they, too, would reflect the benefits of the free enterprise system.

Massive condemnation was the first and perhaps the most essential tool of urban redevelopment. What bombs and socialism had done in other countries, condemnation had to achieve in the American city. Speculators and recalcitrant owners could not stand in the way of the greater good. As Rouse explained, as important as zoning and other powers were, without condemnation there could be little in the way of comprehensive planning: “you must USE THE POWER OF CONDEMNATION. You can’t flinch from it. Unless you declare the heart of the city a redevelopment area, unless you’re willing to go in and take steps necessary to make it work, you might as well give up . . . Streets need to be widened, closed, changed—the whole character of your downtown community needs to be revised, if it’s going to be workable.” “Whole character” meant excess condemnation (the destruction not only of a few necessary buildings, but also of whole districts deemed necessary to new planning) on a scale never before witnessed in America. Rouse honestly believed that there
was a greater injustice in not taking property for a greater civic good: “it's absolutely unfair to the city, it's unfair to the people who want to do the good things to say that the city doesn't have the courage to go in and use the power of condemnation.” Rouse's comment reflects a reversal in traditional thinking about the rights of urban property owners.

Rouse's philosophy paralleled and drew from changing ideas of local urban power around the country. Pittsburgh made great strides in condemnation, as did developers in New York during the 1940s and 1950s. New redevelopment authorities, many created to take advantage of provisions in the Housing Act of 1949, stepped up slum clearance projects adjoining central business districts, and the courts and state legislatures stood behind them. William Zeckendorf, one of New York's leading developers of the postwar years and a leader in Title I development across the United States, came down strongly for the expansion of this now controversial activity. American city government, he argued, “should be much more generous in its use of eminent domain for redevelopment purposes and it should also try to make a profit. This may be heresy, but I am against the windfall profit for the fellow who has nothing to do with the creation of increment through a communal development.” This condemnation, as has been widely described by urban historians, almost always led to displacement of poor urban residents. Even Rouse's early projects (described in the following chapter) displaced a number of low-income black residents. Zeckendorf, too, unashamedly saw the destruction of slum areas as an excellent opportunity for both private profit and higher tax revenues: “But one of the worst tendencies in redevelopment throughout the United States is to demolish slums close to the central core after condemnation, and then to replace them with low-cost housing. The downtown area of the cities in the United States should not be used for housing but should be devoted to high tax producing sites.” Rouse differed from this view only in believing that upscale housing should be integrated into redevelopment plans as part of increasing urban tax revenues.

For those who questioned such a major expansion of government powers at the expense of private owners, Rouse had a ready response, which was repeated in many speeches during the 1950s and 1960s. Plans for condemnation were rightly the activities of local government, and local government, even if benefiting from federal largess, remained distinct in its goals and values from the federal state. “We have found it necessary to progressively enlarge the powers of municipal government in order to make our cities fit places in which to live,” he explained to a national convention in 1957 and at many other times.

In a speech to Baltimore real estate men in 1964, Rouse tried to explain away the apparent contradictions in his support for the expansion
of local but not federal power: “I think that most of us tend to be conservative when we look at powers of government, and in our habit and tradition of conservatism we fail to distinguish between conservatism in the role of the federal government and conservatism in the role of local government. It’s conservative to be radical in giving powers to local government. Unless we give the power to local government to take the action necessary to solve the problems, we are creating a demand for the power of federal government to—that gets beyond their control.” Rouse in this quotation hints at both the New Deal and its more intrusive social programs as well as the leftist governments of Europe. Businessmen, however, need not fear local government, because “I don’t believe anyone has ever seen any city in the United States in which there has been an abusive use of too much power.” As evidence of the security businessmen could feel in expanding local government, he asked his audiences to consider “cities like New Haven and Norfolk, which are conservative cities both of them, and look at the enormous pace of redevelopment in those cities . . . because they weren’t afraid of their local government. They weren’t afraid a bit, because they felt they controlled their local government—and we do.” The “we” referred, quite obviously, to local business interests, which Rouse considered to be the guardians of civic virtue. Agents of local power, like redevelopment agencies or planning commissions, could be changed with ease if they got “very far off beat,” and it wouldn’t be “long before enough pressure can be brought on it to bring it back in line, or people get thrown out of office and new people elected.”

Local government and local businessmen could be trusted to do right by the city and even recalcitrant property owners. The identity of the powerful was as important as the powers granted to them.

The federal government did play an important role in the business vision of local government programs, and for this reason Rouse and others in development supported the creation of federal urban renewal and highway programs that subsidized local planning agencies. However, the provisions that federal money be distributed through local government and local redevelopment agencies carefully restricted the federal government’s role. The Housing Acts of 1949 and 1954 made money and power available to urban leaders interested in redevelopment, but no provisions were made for national planning agencies as occurred during the New Deal.

Local businessmen and elected officials promoted federal highway programs, too, their routes determined more often than not by local rather than national considerations. Federal highway funding began to flow in large amounts to cities as early as 1944, but the Interstate Highway Act made billions available to city officials after 1956. Half of the $27 billion
approved in the act “went to the fifty-five hundred miles of freeways that cut through urban areas.” Like most businessmen at the time, Rouse believed in urban highway expansion: “Major expressways must be ripped through to the central core and these expressways properly planned to give definition and boundaries to the residential neighborhoods surrounding downtown.” The Greater Baltimore Committee, of which he was a founding member, played a leading role in the creation of massive, and eventually controversial, urban highways through Baltimore city neighborhoods.

Rouse summarized the cumulative effects of these federal programs: “The Urban Renewal Program dates from 1954. We’re now underway with a huge highway program. Ninety-eight billion dollars is scheduled to be spent in America on highways in the next twenty years . . . by the Federal Government, states, cities, and counties. A very large part of it will be spent within the central cities, tearing out old areas, giving new boundaries to neighborhoods, and new shape and formation to the city.”

At long last the businesspeople and the planners had the resources and powers to make their dreams a reality: “for the first time in the history of the American city, the people who live there have the tools, the capacity, the organization, to make their city into what they want it to be.”

These enhanced local governments, running on a refined blend of federal funding and business leadership, then had to reshape the old city to suit modern suburban values.

Rouse himself was a leader in suburban development in Maryland and saw promise in the suburban lifestyle. He held a brief position as a clerk in the New Deal’s Federal Housing Administration in 1935, where “one of my first jobs was to try to persuade Baltimore lending institutions to make an FHA loan.” One year later, in 1936, Rouse, then only twenty-two, “talked Baltimore’s venerable Title Guarantee Company into letting him set up a mortgage department.” In 1939 Rouse started a small mortgage banking firm in Baltimore with a friend, Hunter Moss. The firm grew quickly but was disbanded during the war as most members of the firm went into the military, including Rouse. After military service, Rouse returned to Baltimore, and with Moss their “small, prewar mortgage banking business . . . turned into a booming postwar operation.” Moss explained that “the housing market grew like the dickens,” and the firm “represented life insurance companies, matching the firms’ money with developers in need of loans.” Rouse began a relationship with Connecticut General Life Insurance that would last his whole life and bring him to Hartford a number of times.

In an important speech of the late 1950s on one of those visits to the high modernist corporate campus of Connecticut General designed by
the leading architectural firm, Skidmore, Owings and Merrill in 1957, Rouse sketched what he considered to be the ideals for a capitalist urban society like the United States. The fact that Connecticut General had left the city center for a suburban campus was not a sign of urban decline per se, but of changing urban ideals that could in time act as a spur to further urban reimagination:

A great insurance company has pulled up stakes and withdrawn from the central city. It has been willing to sacrifice the proximity to people who work for it and with it; the easy access to its many business associates and public officials; the convenience of hotels, railroad stations, taxicabs, in exchange for the efficiency, the peace, the beauty of this magnificent building at the center of a 265-acre farm. This is not a flight from the problems of the city; it is a forthright attack upon them . . . it is a bold step forward in expressing how we can and ought to live and work.

At the new campus, Rouse believed that a transformation in living had occurred, creating a more pleasant and amiable form of capitalism: "an insurance company reveals itself as an organization of people. Every clerk has been made important by the environment in which he has been put to work . . . The people have been made important by their association with each other, their building and the country about them." The campus, in Rouse's opinion, had taken on the better aspects of the American small town: "The corridors are a series of main streets. Watch the exchange of greetings, the faces, the conversations as the huge clerical staff and the executives too respond to the openness, the color, the gardens and, above all else, the obvious concern for their welfare."18

This new campus reflected the potential of corporate welfare—particularly, the ability of a transformed environment to reshape urban relationships from strictly competitive and grinding to nearly transcendent: "The magnificent mechanical efficiency and smooth flow of this building is economically important, but the lake, the swans in the lake, the green grass, the trees, and just plain space, lift the souls of the people who work here and the company for which they work. Somehow, this building expresses the best of our technical knowledge about how to work and our human aspirations too."19

The Connecticut General campus thus set a standard to which the rest of the city, even the city center, should aspire: “Compare it with the city which it leaves behind. Compare it with the steel and concrete, the grim, impersonal jam which represents the city.” The pattern should be, then, of not shaping humans to fit a particular model, but reading the habits of Americans at their best, in suburbia, and projecting this vision back onto the city: “Station wagons, blue jeans, barbeques, give expression to the
casual, mobile, outdoor family living that marks the American family. They seek space and they are finding it, in the scatteration around our cities.” Even the malls he was building in this period fit in this new model. They were not harbingers of urban destruction, but a new vision of urban potential: “No longer blocks of stores piled into a maelstrom of people, automobiles, streetcars, buses, and traffic lights, noise and dirt, these new centers are convenient, gay and human. Ample parking and landscaped parking areas conveniently organized in relationship to the stores and their particular parking demands. The stores themselves face each other across landscaped malls . . . There are sidewalk cafes, exhibits and displays, families shopping together and music in the air.” These new institutions of office parks, malls, and suburban subdivisions set the tone of modern American living, the best that capitalism could provide, and cities had to be massively reshaped to fit these expectations. It could not be the other way around.20 Rouse was not alone in his celebration of suburban life, and dozens of urban redevelopment plans from the time reflected this thinking, but he developed the clearest vision of the impact of suburban innovation on urban centers, which contributed to his popularity as a public speaker.

When it came to specific reforms for urban areas that would match these expectations, Rouse promoted ideas that were not his own. He championed them so well, however, and for such a long period of time that he became strongly identified with this appealing vision of complete urban transformation. During the 1950s Rouse created a personal collage of concepts from different phases of American and European planning traditions. Because of his unwavering devotion to the free enterprise system, he was able to easily glide over the more complex social dimensions of some of the traditions from which he borrowed. All concepts were flattened into usable tools for an ambitious and idealistic businessman.

The American planning tradition was quite perfectly suited to his purposes in proposing dramatic transformations in American cities. In this case, however, Rouse made it clear that more dramatic action would be necessary to create a new city. The City Beautiful had offered the model of civic splendor and comprehensive regional planning that appealed to Rouse. He often quoted Daniel Burnham’s famous dictum—“Make no little plans, they have no magic to stir men’s blood”—and in practical terms was never afraid to cast his net over whole cities. Rouse knew that the power of certain private interests had stymied most idealistic planning in America before his era, but he still believed that the great plans had power to transform the city as a whole.

The notion of functional and efficient cities theorized and promulgated by planners since the turn of the century also appealed to a man who
wanted cities with high-quality services, the end of so-called blight, and rapid transportation routes. Great strides had been made in highway design, zoning, traffic signals, and infrastructure by the time Rouse appeared on the urban scene in the 1930s. He stood for the extension of these innovations on a wider basis and worked hard to promote new highways, zoning regulations, housing code enforcement, and improved sanitation systems.21

The modernist movement appealed to Rouse for its fascination with clean edges and new materials. While uncomfortable with the more radical edge of modern design for mass residential design, throughout his career Rouse selected crisp modernist designs for his commercial and urban projects. He did not care for the socialist politics that accompanied much of the movement (particularly in Europe), but was a dependable modernist patron. The identification of modernism with corporate America was solidified in the postwar period, particularly in office parks and downtown districts, what has sometimes been classified as American Imperial Modern style, to distinguish it from the leftist politics that accompanied much of European modernism.22

Rouse may not have agreed with modernist politics, but he did share the modernist taste for comprehensive planning. Modernists, and Rouse, aimed to destroy old cities to fit a new conception of urban form. Congested streets were the enemy of modernists and businessmen alike. Modernists envisioned separation of pedestrians and autos, high-speed expressways, and superblocks protected from automobiles; businessmen like Rouse supported these same innovations for improvements in downtown business. Modernists envisaged a much tidier city, with exclusive zones of industry, commerce, residence, and recreation; many businessmen predicted greater efficiency and property value appreciation from careful zoning of the city into separate districts. Finally, “towers in parks,” when divorced from social democracy, were efficient and profitable ways to house both the urban middle classes and poor people displaced by slum clearance.

In practical terms Rouse drew inspiration from business groups organizing around the country in the 1940s and 1950s to redevelop cities. Although Robert Moses of New York is most famously remembered for his role in transforming New York City during this period, businessmen were playing a more important role in urban form than public officials. In New York, for instance, William Zeckendorf and David Rockefeller were the outstanding examples of business leadership for civic renewal. Pittsburgh was particularly famous for its nearly complete transformation by business leaders. An Atlantic Monthly article of 1951 described the immediate post-war situation in Pittsburgh: “The decrepitude showed in its worn-out
office buildings, its degraded housing, its traffic-choked streets, its sordid
alleys, its polluted and uncontrolled rivers, and, above all, in the dense,
choking smoke that covered the city and the river valleys with gray
despair.” Business leaders like Richard (Dick) Mellon led the way in
changing the city: “During the war many of Pittsburgh’s leaders, men like
Dick Mellon and others of his generation, were away in the service.
When they returned they saw their home town in a different perspective.
They were shocked and awakened.” This may have been an old story in
America, the shock engendered by returning to American cities after a
European tour, but the results this time were different.
Infused with the generational energy that would fuel the postwar
boom, Mellon and his associates joined together (in 1943) to create the
Allegheny Conference, a voluntary organization with the goal of acting
“as a catalytic agent in fusing old self-interests and a new feeling of social
responsibility.” After the war, in large measure due to the organized power
of the Allegheny Conference, federal and local efforts brought highways,
flood control, and a new airport. Most notably, a smoke ordinance for the
first time drastically reduced contamination that had made some sunny
days near pitch black; the combined strength and prestige of the confer-
ence members finally forced local industries to reduce their smoke emis-

Figure 5. The Connecticut General Life Insurance campus on Hartford’s suburban edge
reflected the suburban ideal toward which Rouse thought the entire city should aspire.
G. E. Kidder Smith, courtesy of Kidder Smith Collection, Rotch Visual Collections,
MIT.
sions. An ambitious slum clearance program for what became known as Gateway Center, including new office towers and a park, replaced “an ancient slum on the site of birthplace of Pittsburgh,”[23] corporate head-
quarters, garages, and parks sprouted on cleared downtown lots. This redeveloped land at the confluence of the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers quickly came to be known as Pittsburgh’s Golden Triangle.

Rouse admired the swiftness of urban change in Pittsburgh: “The Allegheny Conference in Pittsburgh represented an alarmed uprising by the business leadership of that City against its withering decay. The business community asserted the leadership which, working hand in hand with planners and enlightened public officials, resulted in the splendid Golden Triangle project and the overall reawakening of a new Pittsburgh.” Rouse applauded the Allegheny Conference for, among other things, creating new corporate headquarters buildings “on a former 123-acre slum” as well as smoke controls, parking garages downtown, a new airport, and expressways and admired the “tightly organized, like-minded business leadership group forcing action.”[24] Other cities also had groups of downtown interests pushing for radical transformations in the operations of the city: “Similarly, in St. Louis it is Civic Progress, Inc., in Cleveland the Cleveland Redevelopment Foundation . . . by which businessmen have responded to a new awareness of their responsibility for the way their city develops.”[25]

Inspired by these efforts, Rouse nevertheless learned the most important lessons close to home. He already had some direct experience in urban redevelopment, and by 1951 he had “two redevelopment projects under way in Baltimore. One is a 29 block project in the blighted Waverly area, where razing has begun. Rouse said 291 apartment units for middle-income families and a drive-in shopping center will be built starting next spring.”[26] Of questionable merit, these projects (discussed in the next chapter) nevertheless demonstrated to Rouse that comprehensive redevelop-
ment of cities was possible if businessmen took the lead.

Rouse also became a leading figure in the redesign of Baltimore’s downtown. The Greater Baltimore Committee, of which Rouse was a founding member in 1955, was modeled on Pittsburgh’s activist Allegheny Conference and played a central role in both shaping downtown and the surrounding districts and highways. The redevelopment project Rouse helped lay the groundwork for, known as Charles Center, became a favorite subject in his many speeches on the rebirth of the American city and was one of the most famous postwar redevelopment projects. Here, according to Rouse, was a leading example of the potential of private sector planning operating on a massive scale to reinvent an entire central portion of a major city. Referring to Charles Center: “This was possible in the
city because a great plan was produced, because it was produced by the sup-
port and with the leadership of the business community, and the business
community is responsible for it and has honored it." Rouse understood well
that the scale of redevelopment proposed in the hands of government
interests alone would have been far more controversial.27

Charles Center began through a series of meetings of Baltimore business-
mensmen concerned about the state of the city in 1952, including leading
retailer Louis Kohn, banker Guy Hollyday, Hunter Moss (Rouse's business
partner at this time), and Rouse. They decided to circumvent the more
conservative chamber of commerce, ascertain information about the
Allegheny Conference, and endeavored to identify other wealthy indi-
viduals they hoped to recruit.28 In a memo Rouse articulated the idealis-
tic flourishes that would distinguish his work for decades: “Small scale,
piecemeal approaches to this accumulation of neglect are futile, except to
the extent that they are useful as 'experiments' or 'pilots' to determine the
effectiveness of a particular line of effort.” The aim of total transforma-
tion became a familiar Rouse theme during this period and helped gain
interest in the project among local elites.29

The Greater Baltimore Committee, officially established in 1955 by
these idealistic men, grew in influence during the mid-1950s and ul-
mately included a large number of leading Baltimoreans. By 1959 the
Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC) consisted of seventy-one members
and the upper limit was set at one hundred in order to maintain institu-
tional focus.30 A report on the Baltimore experience for potential imitators
pointed out that leadership in Baltimore redevelopment came not from the
chamber of commerce, but “from the financial and insurance firms that
have had few connections to the chamber.” Not only were many of these
firms smaller and staffed by organization men with less attachment to place
(Rouse was a newcomer to Baltimore himself), but also “the crux of the
matter seems to be the orientation and philosophy of many C. of C.
groups. Traditionally they have been among the country's most active pro-
ponents of laissez-faire private enterprise and, in general, they have not
kept up with the enormous changes taking place nationally.”31 Postwar,
pure laissez-faire ideology was not closely tied to the businessman's utopia.
The GBC, then, represented the progressive voice of the business interests
of the city. An impressive number of Jewish business leaders, with whom
Rouse worked closely throughout his career, also became major players in
regional issues through the GBC, although before this period they had
been kept to the edges of local power politics. The emergence of a more
assimilated generation of Jewish business leadership played a role in rede-
development in many cities and merits further study.

Different subcommittees of the GBC worked hard, particularly the one
associated with downtown redevelopment. Rouse was not a member of this committee but evidently played a leading role in bringing the group’s work to fruition. Referring to redevelopment of business districts and explaining why private interests were involved in such a big study, “the sponsors of the study, particularly Hunter Moss and James W. Rouse, Jr., felt that there is a real role for a private planning organization. Their thinking was, and is, that such a private organization locally sponsored and financed can operate with relative freedom and confidential contracts of private enterprise.”

In 1956 the Greater Baltimore Committee joined forces with the downtown Property Owner's Association's Downtown Committee to create a planning council. The designer in charge of the project was David Wallace, a professor of planning at the University of Pennsylvania. Already the tone of the project was noticeably different from a municipally generated scheme. Wallace, not a mere government employee in a public office, was a leading professional from one of the top design schools in the country. According to Rouse, “Freed of budgetary controls and political pressures, the Council has been able to employ top-flight people at the salaries required to obtain their services.”

Through the Downtown Committee the businessmen collected $150,000 among themselves for the operating budget of the planning council, and the GBC gave $75,000. The leading lights of the administrative effort would become part of a familiar cast of Baltimore characters and included J. Jefferson Miller (a department store executive), Walter Sondheim (another department store executive), and J. Harold Grady (the mayor). Miller led the charge on the Charles Center organization and later plans for the Inner Harbor. He in turn recruited Martin Millspaugh in 1960, a former journalist (who wrote extensively on urban renewal for the Baltimore Sun), who was then serving as assistant commissioner for Research and Development of the U.S. Urban Renewal Administration. The Charles Center–Inner Harbor Management Corporation, as it was known in time, featured Miller as chairman of the board and Millspaugh as president. The corporation worked on a contractual basis with the city and hired planners like Wallace to devise quite extraordinary plans.

Although many leading individuals from the city were involved, David Wallace did not at first have a clear direction. According to Rouse, “[A]fter six months, Wallace came into my office and said, ‘The whole thing is fruitless; there’s no real interest in downtown Baltimore; nobody's planning to expand; there’s no real prospect of any real vitality occurring.’” Rouse remembered, “We talked about it and agreed that what ought to happen was the largest do-able project that could be done in order to raise the image of the possible, to create a new attitude about
downtown." Wallace explained many times that this brief conversation had a major impact upon his planning. Rouse consistently called for the most ambitious plan possible.

Emboldened by Rouse’s enthusiasm, Wallace’s Charles Center plan ultimately covered twenty-two acres of the downtown area and proposed to clear or rebuild almost the entire business heart of the community. City
voters approved a bond for Charles Center in 1958 to the tune of $25 million, and the Baltimore City Council approved Wallace's plan in 1959. The Charles Center plan was one of the most comprehensive reinvented downtown spaces of this period and included not only the obligatory modernist office towers, but separated automobiles and pedestrians, buried parking garages under plazas, made future provisions for mass transit, and offered relatively inviting and well-conceived public spaces. The reinvented urban landscape advocated by Victor Gruen at Fort Worth (1956), never built but much admired, was partly realized at Charles Center. A modern downtown, reflecting renewed capitalism, the demands of the auto age, and the capacity of competitive capitalists to cooperate partially reached its realization here.

Rouse boasted of the achievement: “The Charles Center project involves the demolition, through urban renewal, of all but five buildings in a 22-acre
area at the very heart of the City. One of our main shopping blocks will be closed and all the stores on it demolished. Think of it—this project, including the ordinance to condemn, was approved by the City Council unanimously and without protest from property owners involved.” During discussion of the bond issue, members of the GBC went on the road “using slides and flip cards, before various local groups” and “insisted that there is no strong opposition, and that the public’s attitude has been highly favorable.” The first parcels became ready by December of 1959 and brought significant interest from developers. Aside from the selective preservation of historic buildings, it looked at first as though a bomb had gone off in the heart of Baltimore’s principal commercial district. By 1976, however, Charles Center–Inner Harbor, including the combined downtown and harbor commercial districts, represented a total of $375 million in private, public, and institutional investment. One thousand properties were acquired and 730 businesses were relocated during this massive reconstruction, but real estate revenues still increased by between three and four million dollars each year.

Nearly all of the critics at the national level found Charles Center to be a worthwhile addition to Baltimore’s urban fabric. According to Fortune, “The Baltimore project is magnificently different. It looks as if it were designed by people who like the city. . . . Charles Center is in downtown, and it is meant to bring its activities to a focus rather than distribute them.” Jane Jacobs, a tough critic of most redevelopment, praised the project plan, because it “blends the Center into the area that lies outside it. This means the Center will be less a ‘project’ than an integral, continuous part of downtown.” The manner in which the “continuity” had been established included tall buildings on the edges of the project at similar heights to surrounding buildings and a series of new public spaces linked to existing streets and buildings. Jacobs celebrated that “pedestrians are to have a complete street system of their own” and that cars were tucked carefully into underground garages. She particularly liked that “a 68-foot drop in topography is exploited both for continuity with the rest of the city and for its drama.” In sum, the planning “made possible, over the entire site, truly urban, concentrated, lively design.” In accompanying diagrams she showed a line of model urban projects stretching from the Piazza San Marco through Piazza San Pietro, Penn Center, Rockefeller Center, and finally to Charles Center. This was good company for any urban renewal project from the period.

In Rouse’s mind an important aspect of the project was not merely the physical reconstruction and good design, but the means to this desirable end. Business interests should be proud of “the creation of Charles Center Management, Inc., a private, non-profit corporation set up outside of city government to contract with the city to get the plan executed. And it’s
still the best model in America for an enabling process to bring about a plan.” Rouse also bragged that “there will be no Federal aid and no State aid in carrying the project forward... this project is a good, hard-headed investment for the city; [and] that the city’s total cash contribution will be repaid within an acceptable term and that all the collateral benefits to the city will thus be free.”

This boasting turned out to be premature. Indeed, federal funding and buildings were eventually necessary to help complete the project. Rouse rarely mentioned government financial support in speeches that focused on private sector prowess. Charles Center, and the Inner Harbor areas added to the planning districts during the 1960s, in fact received $88 million in federal urban renewal grants and $20 million for federal buildings. In time the city itself provided $76 million in loans. This was not a pure subsidy on the part of the government, as Rouse noted, because the project paid handsome dividends on public investment through enhanced tax revenues. It is ironic, however, to recognize that Charles Center, one of the leading examples of business redevelopment of the period, benefited mightily from government subsidy (some of which was originally intended to fund urban housing initiatives).

The federal government’s important role in staking Charles Center and redevelopment projects across the United States always faded to the background, crowded out by the businessmen claiming credit for reanimated downtowns. These new business districts did not begin as, nor did they look like, government “projects,” and businessmen did deserve most of the credit for generating and pursuing these projects; federal and local money served business interests well. At least in city center redevelopment, at Baltimore, Pittsburgh, New York, and other cities, capitalism had demonstrated both its resilience and its genius for urban form. The success of urban redevelopment gave businessmen the confidence to expand their field of action during the 1960s and 1970s.

**ACTION**

During the late 1950s Rouse tried to reshape a national organization to suit his ambitious goals for the capitalist city. ACTION, the American Council to Improve Our Neighborhoods, primarily focused on neighborhood renewal, preservation, and housing (described in chapter 3). The organization played an equally important role in galvanizing movement on urban redevelopment on a national level. Rouse was a founding member and guiding force of the organization in 1954, along with Andrew Heiskell of Time-Life and other wealthy and well-connected Americans.
After becoming president in 1958, Rouse tried to imprint a far more utopian cast to the organization’s efforts; his well-intentioned goal of using ACTION to promote unified urban redesign for cities as a whole exceeded his grasp.

ACTION had catalyzed business interest in urban renewal across the United States. New legislation and opportunities needed explanation and promotion, particularly outside America’s largest cities. Through a series of Regional Urban Renewal Clinics held between 1956 and 1958, “some 200 civic leaders from 325 cities took part in the programs discussing vital questions concerning financing, legislation, citizen information, construction and other technical subject matters.” A variety of Group Correspondents, local groups with an interest in new information, numbered about 150 by 1960.

Experts associated with ACTION created publications for the use of local groups. The “Urban Renewal Evaluator,” for instance, was developed “as a self-survey instrument for local groups that wished to establish a factual basis for their efforts in renewal . . . The copyrighted 28-page Evaluator, especially attractive to businessmen, afforded an intensive means of determining the possibilities for economic development in their communities.”

If the amount of press devoted to ACTION in papers and national publications across America indicates influence, ACTION became a force in encouraging the extension of ambitious ideals about urban renewal across the country. The notion of designing perfect capitalist cities, however, became Rouse’s personal goal for the organization. Rouse traveled around the country advocating thorough reshaping of cities and proposing demonstration projects that would create an example of a slumless, perfectly planned American city in a certain number of years. In 1958 Rouse, recently elected president of ACTION, signaled the begin-
ning of a wider role: "The root of urban blight was the neighborhood and this is where ACTION had concentrated its efforts. But the decay of housing is only one problem of urban renewal, and now ACTION felt it must broaden its horizons and turn its attention to the problems of the whole metropolis." Rouse, "emphasizing that the decay of our cities had become one of our country's greatest domestic failures," cried out for "good housing in good neighborhoods . . . efficient highways and better transportation . . . vigorous commercial and cultural cores instead of obsolescence and scatteration . . . adequate financing for public and private improvements."46 The utopian glow in Rouse's speeches flowed through numerous letters and interviews he gave during this period. He admitted to being "determined that ACTION shall take strong leadership in lifting the sights of the cities to the goal of total planning—total programming for slumless, blight free, livable, efficient cities in 'X' years." This was utopian thinking on a par with any in Europe or the Soviet Union—in this case, separated from socialist goals by the private sector means to the idealistic ends.47

This wider vision of the ideal city could be found in ACTION docu-
ments of the late 1950s. A 1959 definition of a good community created by ACTION for a major Newark conference reflects the businessman's utopia as conceived by Rouse and many of those in ACTION. This document, “Agenda for a Good City,” gave a number of signs of healthy places, including high employment, peaceful social relationships, safe housing, low disease rates, good schools, and other facilities. This idealized vision of the capitalist city, although integrating an impressive number of civic and social improvements, would be created primarily with local government and business leadership and without altering the wider society.

Rouse made serious efforts to create a living demonstration of the potential for urban renewal on a metropolitan scale in the early 1960s, but the project ultimately fell through. Nevertheless, many of his letters sent to leading individuals during this effort reflect his urban idealism. Rouse proposed that a series of cities across America create comprehensive redevelopment plans and that these plans be on display at the New York World’s Fair of 1964–1965. According to Rouse, “It seems to us in ACTION that this lack of conviction [that the city can be made better] is at least partially the result of no one having seen (in our times at least) an efficient, slumless, American City equal to the full promise of our civilization, our political system and our productive capacity.” Rouse proposed that “Each participating city would study, plan and program the complete renewal and reorganization of that city into a slumless, blightless, livable community”; in other words, the planning would project a utopian vision onto existing cities. Such a major undertaking, he believed, would generate considerable excitement among professionals in a variety of fields: “The scope and challenge of the combined project would attract a variety and quality of talent never before applied in specific and detailed study of the problems of the city as an environment for living and working.” Even more promising, “private corporations also would be attracted to apply to the undertaking their new-product development and research departments.”

The ultimate goal of this flurry of comprehensive planning was a display that would show what private interests could do, offer a new path for reform, and showcase America's commitment to urban improvement: “Upon completion of the studies and plans ACTION proposes that they be incorporated in an imaginative and dramatic presentation of a ‘New Image for the American City.’ This presentation would incorporate the most advanced and useful techniques for making real to the American people what American cities might be like.” As in all of his projects, Rouse proposed that the project be multimedia, saying that “moving models, dioramas, pictures, charts, etc. would be put together in a mobile show of the ‘new image’ which would tour the town squares and public
Rouse pitched the New Image to Ford Motor Company, asserting that the popularity of automobiles could be paired with concern for the city as a whole. Rouse noted that “This point is illustrated in the plan of Fort Worth, Texas,” developed by Victor Gruen (in 1956). While “the purpose of the plan was to make downtown Fort Worth function efficiently and well for people,” such planning would result in an “almost ideal environment for the automobile.” Ford officials, although initially interested, eventually backed out of supporting this idealistic scheme. General Motors and Ford, however, both mounted glamorous futuristic urban visions at the New York fair. Their displays substituted an emphasis on auto consumption and futuristic designs for comprehensive planning of actual cities. America was not quite ready for Rouse’s utopian vision.

A Model Metropolis

ACTION may have faltered but Rouse sallied forth. Not only did he launch the Columbia new town project during the 1960s, but he also led one of the most sweeping urban renewal planning efforts ever undertaken. Rouse’s utopian urban pitch reached its zenith in dowdy Hartford, Connecticut, during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Jack Rosenthal, writing in the New York Times in 1972, called Rouse’s massive effort there “the largest, most visionary effort ever undertaken to renew and develop an entire metropolitan area in America.” Rosenthal was not alone in discovering Rouse’s ambitions at Hartford. Allan Talbot in City held up the effort as one worthy of display for foreign visitors seeking the best in American urban planning: “When the next planeload of foreign planners arrives to see what’s happening on America’s urban front, the State Department and HUD may well send them to Hartford.” Rouse proved again that he had the ability to generate national interest in his private sector solutions to America’s urban malaise.

Even though Hartford was home to the headquarters of many wealthy insurance corporations, the city suffered from a worsening divide between central city and booming suburbs. In 1969 Daniel Moynihan, then Presidential Urban Advisor, asked why after so much urban renewal activity, as represented at Constitution Plaza (which he described as “hideously separated from the life-giving river by a mindless submission to the highway engineers”) and other downtown redevelopment, Hartford was still so distressed: “How could this city come to the point where riot and disruption by minority youth should have become almost a constant
Embarrassment about these kinds of comments spurred action by local business elites and would, at least for a few years, quickly shift Hartford from its position as one of America's worst-case scenarios to a leading planning model to the federal government. Arthur Lumsden, president of the Hartford Chamber of Commerce, acknowledged that times had changed from the days "when six or 12 men could decide on a major project for a city—like Pittsburgh’s Gateway Center—and carry it through." Planning had to develop in partnership with the diverse constituents of the city due to “the revolt of minority people and the general agitation for involvement on the part of people little accustomed to being consulted.”

Planners employed as part of a Rouse subsidiary, the American City Corporation, created the Greater Hartford Process, Inc. (initiated in 1969), an ambitious planning process and an eventual series of proposals for the entire region. Rouse and his planners did not decide randomly to focus their attention on Hartford, but were called in by “27 Hartford area businesses who have put up more than $3 million for the planning.” This group of leading businessmen was known as the Greater Hartford Corporation and operated like the GBC in Baltimore. As in Baltimore, success in downtown redevelopment emboldened progressive business leaders to look beyond business districts: “The completion of Constitution Plaza in the mid-1960s encouraged Hartford’s business establishment to think more about how they could build upon the successful, albeit limited downtown project to do more for their home city and its surrounding suburbs.” According to the Hartford Courant, the businessmen viewed the problems of the region largely in management terms: “These businessmen were searching for some efficient way to pull together all the programs and money in the region to halt the disorderly sprawl of a growing metropolis.” Local press welcomed this growing public spiritedness in part because corporate wealth indicated a kind of talent that could benefit the region beyond the bottom line: “And since on all sides the prosperity of the business community here may be monumentally seen in quite a literal sense, the value of such acumen and energy is more than obvious.”

Rouse, indeed, was not out merely to rebuild Hartford, but aimed to create a model of the utopian abilities of the private sector: “We have to
believe that with the affluence and management capability that exist in this society, it is possible to produce a working urban environment.”61 Drawing on the abilities of on-site administrators and some of the same planners from the Columbia project, he provided less direct leadership in this particular project. His distance from the leadership makes it difficult at points to know which particular aspects of this comprehensive planning effort he endorsed. However, the planning documents produced fit so closely with almost all of Rouse’s view of urban affairs that they can be considered part of his corpus. To begin with, this was no little plan. Large swaths of the central city were projected for redevelopment in tandem with a 20,000-person, multirace and mixed-income new town in a suburban region closely based on the Columbia model (see chapter 6). The center city redevelopment, an ambitious $780 million project, aimed to transform “40% of its population, and 75% of its commercial and office base.” Planners sought to reshape existing neighborhoods through rehabilitation, planning, and clearance into new neighborhoods grouped around schools, community centers, and shopping (also on the neighborhood unit and Columbia model). The process of redevelopment, designed to last twenty years, included “rejuvenation of half the city of Hartford itself, including its downtown and some of its worst sections.”62 In terms of scale and ambition, Hartford Process matched Rouse’s private sector ideals. A well-designed, socially just city would entirely replace the existing Hartford.

The Process reports, like Rouse’s many projects, proposed massive changes in American society without fundamental shifts in social or political systems. Leading planner Leo Molinaro, in an early presentation, for instance, sounded like a socialist when he proposed some final goals of the project: “Social service will be available on the same basis as other public utilities and every family will have access to these services just as they now have to public utilities . . . every family will have the opportunity to earn enough income to meet their basic needs,” and every adult “will be given the opportunity to perform in a community capacity appropriate to his talents and desires.”63 These goals would be achieved in Hartford, and any American city imitating the Hartford example, with a minimum of state and maximum of business direction. Nowhere in the documents is there a call for profound political or social reform to match these ambitious planning goals.

With the exception of creating a progressive state income tax to equalize funding across school districts, and limited federal money to create model programs, most of the money for these ambitious plans would come through a mixture of private investment, systematic organizational changes, and leveraging money from future local tax revenues that would
accrue from effective center city redevelopment and new town construction—rather than state largess. One of the early planning documents indicates this faith in cost savings through management expertise: “That present resources are available in America, and in Hartford specifically, sufficient to allow the development of a much higher quality [of services] than presently exists . . . Resources range from knowledge of urban processes to financial capabilities, from management organizations to . . . communication techniques.”64 The planners had to steer clear of more extreme calls for funding, but their faith in future savings and earnings was hard to square with such mammoth changes.

Nevertheless, social change demanded ambitious programs for the city as a whole, including regional vocational training and job banks, education reform and an open university, integrated health systems and region-wide HMO, early childhood care, enhanced community development corporations, a recreation system organized on the community association model for the city as a whole, and unified systems for mostly nonprofit social welfare services administered through a system of neighborhood Community Life Associations. The planners took a “systems approach” to urban problems that they thought would integrate existing and new services in a more effective manner. Management skill would be able to create these new structures without significantly expanding a social welfare system.

The skeptical voices during the Hartford Process made their opinions known. Local citizens feared that the needs of the poor and minorities would not be taken into account, because much of the planning was developed in private. Although the planning team worked admirably with some local groups, transparent methods of citizen participation never crystallized. Christopher Feise and Peter Friedland, local activists, were unimpressed with participation by average citizens: “with a board stacked with establishment and corporate representatives, and the [public] forum not in existence, the clearest and most obvious power and constituency resides in the business community of Hartford.” In addition, as a private organization, “Process and Devco [the new town development company] meetings are secret, the minutes are secret, the files of Process are not open to the general public,” and local press sources took a less than critical approach to the project. These activists viewed Process as the leading edge of regressive national policy: “The commitment to citizen participation was and is being eroded by the Nixon administration in favor of strengthening the local unit of government. With the introduction of revenue sharing and fund cuts in the federal housing, poverty and model cities programs, Nixon places the responsibility for the poor and slum/ghetto back in the hands of local politicians and private corporations neither of which freed the slaves, gave blacks civil rights [etc.].” They
documented numerous instances where Process planners kept activists and citizens (particularly minorities) at the margins of decisions, even bucking advice from The Rouse Company home office and former secretary of HUD, Robert Weaver, to expand citizen participation. Skepticism in the region, in part fueled by lack of access to the planning, grew and spawned conspiracy theories about Process's actual as opposed to stated goals.65

From a distance of many decades it does appear that the Process was, in large measure, predetermined to choose Rouse's preferred outcomes. Were neighborhood units and a new town really best suited to the needs of Hartford, or were they just the ways of looking at the world that the planners found most comfortable? Was clearing much of downtown and surrounding neighborhoods really the best way to rebuild Hartford? By creating high expectations for citizen participation, yet settling on familiar planning concepts, Process planners undermined rather than catalyzed public support.

Experts looking in from outside had doubts similar to those of the activists. A perceptive critic in City magazine noted the lack of a “new public mechanism” to carry out these ambitious plans, a shortsighted strategy designed to build local political support by not challenging existing politicians. He also was skeptical that the project without Rouse in situ could succeed in any measure. The project needed “a full time promoter . . . The problem with the Process report is that it has the Rouse touch, but it lacks his presence.”66 Another City article posed tougher questions: “Is the business consortium attempting tasks that belong in the public sector? Are the people of Hartford, particularly the poor and minorities, being offered elitist gifts and visions instead of fundamental change in public institutions and power arrangements?”67 In 1972 the Wall Street Journal reported that although teams from other cities had come to see the Process in action, “What they have seen is so utopian in scope that, given the disappointing results of past urban-renewal attempts, the hoped-for results must be viewed with skepticism.”68

All the attention notwithstanding, the visionary plans failed to garner sufficient community support. Among many reasons, aside from the utopian quality of the planning, both suburbanites and inner-city leaders remained skeptical about the goals and tactics of the planners (suburban whites feared black exodus to the planned new town, and black leaders feared massive urban clearance), and established politicians panicked over the potential loss in power to a new regional government that might grow out of Process. Rouse acknowledged the failure years later. In 1975 he wrote in a personal correspondence that Hartford Process “was acted upon favorably by the business community and set in operation. It has
failed to receive the support in city government which it needs, and the economic recession knocked out the new town development after the land had been acquired. Thus, its hopes have not been fulfilled. However, I remain persuaded that the image is sound and that the strategy for achieving it is attainable.” Ever the optimist, Rouse always felt that execution rather than concept marred his failures.

Although achieving few of its goals, the Hartford Process, like the Baltimore Plan, complemented antistatist national policy. The Hartford Courant noted that in the late 1960s, when the concept was hatched, “Washington was pleading for the participation of private enterprise on the urban front.” Nixon wanted to shed even the small urban programs created during the Great Society. The president of the Greater Hartford Corporation, which sponsored Hartford Process, explained, “In one sense the program is a response to the new (Nixon) administration ‘which has urged private enterprise to invest in regional development.’” In 1970 attention from the Hartford Process reached the White House, and “In May Rouse and the top executives at ACC [American City Corporation] were invited to the White House to discuss their efforts with President Nixon’s Urban Affairs Council. The President was originally scheduled to spend 15 minutes with the group; he lingered for an hour and in Rouse’s description asked tough and penetrating questions.”

George Romney, Nixon’s secretary of Housing and Urban Development, also announced in 1970 “that the comprehensive study financed by Hartford’s business community may become the model for future metropolitan planning throughout the country.” In 1971 Romney still portrayed the Hartford Process as an ideal solution to stretching increasingly stingy federal dollars. An article in the Wall Street Journal summarized Romney’s goals in its headline: “Romney Readies a Secret, Supposedly Cheap Plan to Attack Social Ills—and Help Nixon Win Votes.” Through private sector regional planning, Romney aimed to show that “a better living environment can be provided on a less costly basis” in contrast to the Democratic “emphasis on pouring large amounts and varieties of federal aid into relatively small urban neighborhoods” (“large amounts” only in the American context, of course). A few cities with the best comprehensive regional plans would be selected by Romney for priority funds; metropolitan-scale planning as at Hartford promised savings through regional cooperation and private sector multiplier effects. This plan, highly controversial even when announced, never emerged full-blown from the administration. In the meantime, Rouse’s utopian stances had proved valuable in lending legitimacy to antistatist political goals. As Romney made clear, his program responded to his sense that the federal government had so far “failed to tap fully the energies of private industry” in urban policy.
A Contented Reformer

James Rouse may never have achieved his utopian goals for urban redevelopment, but to the end of his days he believed that redevelopment on the whole had successfully reawakened the city center. This opinion stands in contrast to the successful critique mounted by Jane Jacobs, Lewis Mumford, 1960s radicals, civil rights activists, and many liberals: “In one city after another individuals less articulate than Jacobs but just as outraged were expressing complaints and raising questions about the justice and economic feasibility of urban renewal.” Urbanist Roy Lubove, for instance, in 1969 called Pittsburgh’s Golden Triangle a “keystone of the reverse welfare state” that “epitomized the managerial approach to the urban environment and culture.” Under the leadership of the Allegheny Conference, “[t]he CBD has been transformed into an enormous filing cabinet. . . . The expressionless stainless-steel facades . . . tower over grass and walks; no shops, no entertainment, no restaurants of note, no nightlife.” Even today, in many circles urban renewal still conjures up nothing but bulldozers and ugly office towers.

Rouse could not have disagreed more with the negative assessments of urban renewal. In a speech from the 1970s he celebrated “a new life at the center of America’s old cities” resulting from “the cumulative impact of what we have been about for 20 years.” Rouse was quite right that the American city by the 1970s, particularly in central business districts, was a far more impressive reflection of the ability of capitalism to create attractive environments than the city he knew from the 1940s and 1950s. The American downtown welcomed automobiles: “[I]t’s easier to get to the center of most American cities today than it was 20, 25 years ago . . . It’s easier to park once you get there than it was 20 to 25 years ago.” This was no small matter in downtown survival and had been a hard-fought battle that most thought cities would lose. Near the parking was an impressive amount of “construction of office buildings. We’ve seen them kind of one by one surprise . . . at the beginning of this, 20, 25 years ago, believing that the office market was going to be oversupplied, and it has been oversupplied. But that oversupply gets taken up and then we start again.” This cycle had brought “a lot of new office buildings, a lot of new jobs, a strong work force at the heart of the city, many new institutions from art museums to stadiums, theaters.” Rouse celebrated not only the postindustrial office complexes, but also the new “public squares, public places. Center cities on the whole are more rational, more beautiful, more livable than they were 20 years ago in America.” As proof of the success,
he noted that by the 1970s the “most hopeful and long-awaited movement of all has been the clear pressure, and it is now a pressure, of middle–and upper-income people moving back in the center of the city.”

Gentrification reflected the multiplying benefits of center city rebuilding. Baltimore’s Cinderella story featured prominently in many of Rouse’s speeches. He bragged that “in the last 20 years in Baltimore, a city that nobody ever thought anything of, has had probably the most remarkable regeneration of economic vitality and spirit of any city in the country, with 18 new office buildings, with 15 million square feet of space, [and] nine new national corporations moving in.” He rejoiced about the fact that “ten thousand dwelling units are built or rehabilitated or restored within ten minutes of the center city.” The credit for this transformation went primarily to business leaders like himself: “The energy emerged from the significance of the plans and the cooperation between the business community and the city government and an organization set up to carry out those plans.” Federal and local cash for land purchases, new highways and federal buildings may have made redevelopment possible in the long term, but that money faithfully served local business interests and their
goals. Baltimore’s renaissance was not singular. Boston, New York, Chicago, and many other cities transformed their downtowns for a reenergized modern capitalism on a postindustrial model. New highways, middle-class housing, public plazas, fountains, and gleaming skyscrapers made a powerful statement about the transformative power of capital on the urban scene. Idealism and massive reconstruction along planned lines was not the sole property of socialists; in fact, businessmen had proven their abilities in urban artistry. Rouse and other businessmen were never content with reshaping the central business districts, however, and as indicated by Hartford Process, made a number of successful bids to direct wider urban policy in America.