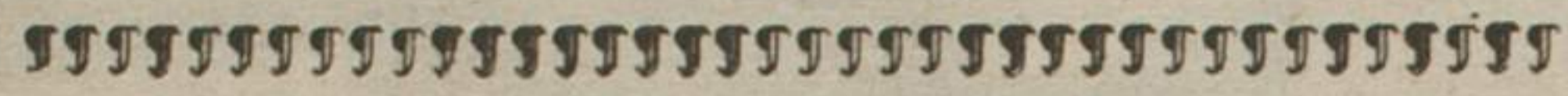


BOOM...

We found near unanimous agreement that several buildings in the block were horrors; that something should be done. The Underwood building and the old Bowersock mill received the worst rankings.

Although a couple of people suggested that it would be nice if some developer would resurrect the old Bowersock, rehabilitation isn't being encouraged by the law under which redevelopment probably will occur. Shiny new buildings will bring an economic boom, more growth, more business and more tax dollars. These are the bread-and-butter of those who run our town. These are the values that will shape the future of Lawrence, unless other values are introduced.



Beneath what many see as blight, ugliness and deterioration in the 600 block is a history rich and lively. This is the original town site, the root of Lawrence. The first structure, a log cabin, was built in the 600 block and it was here that the first industry began.

A century ago, J.D. Bowersock, once the Mayor and a congressman, owned the Bowersock flour mill by the Kaw and built a dam to provide power to grind the wheat.

A rival business, the Pearson Mill across the street to the south operated until fire destroyed it about 1904. Al Underwood's grandfather moved the Underwood building to Lawrence to replace the Pearson Mill. Parts of the building, built in the 1860s up north along the Delaware river, were hauled over land to Lawrence, but most of it was floated on barges down the Delaware and the Kaw rivers.

Al Underwood says that the building is still a solid structure, constructed of native wood; oak and walnut. The milling of wheat long ago ceased, though, and it's now being used by Underwood for storage, awaiting a move by the City and a private developer.

Black businesses flourished in the 600 block around 1900. Most prosperous, white businessmen had moved southward, on Mass. Before black businesses began to die out around WWI, there was a black pool hall, a laundry and a couple of eateries in the area.

A more recent change in the downtown was the \$1 million redevelopment between 7th and 11th streets in 1971. The street was completely resurfaced, sawtooth angle parking, cross-walks and street lights were installed and flowers and trees were planted.

This project, along with the construction of the high-rise First National Bank and the Office Tower, 9th and Mass., and the new pre-cast concrete store fronts of Area I, Weavers and others spread like a disease. Some say it has greatly improved the downtown, spurring business activity.

"Construction of the First National Bank has helped improve the 700 and 800 blocks of Massachusetts,"

Commissioner Barkley Clark said. "The bank has helped preserve the character of the 19th century facades. Other businessmen see the bank coming in with a really nice building, so they decide to get out and fix up their store front by painting and so forth."

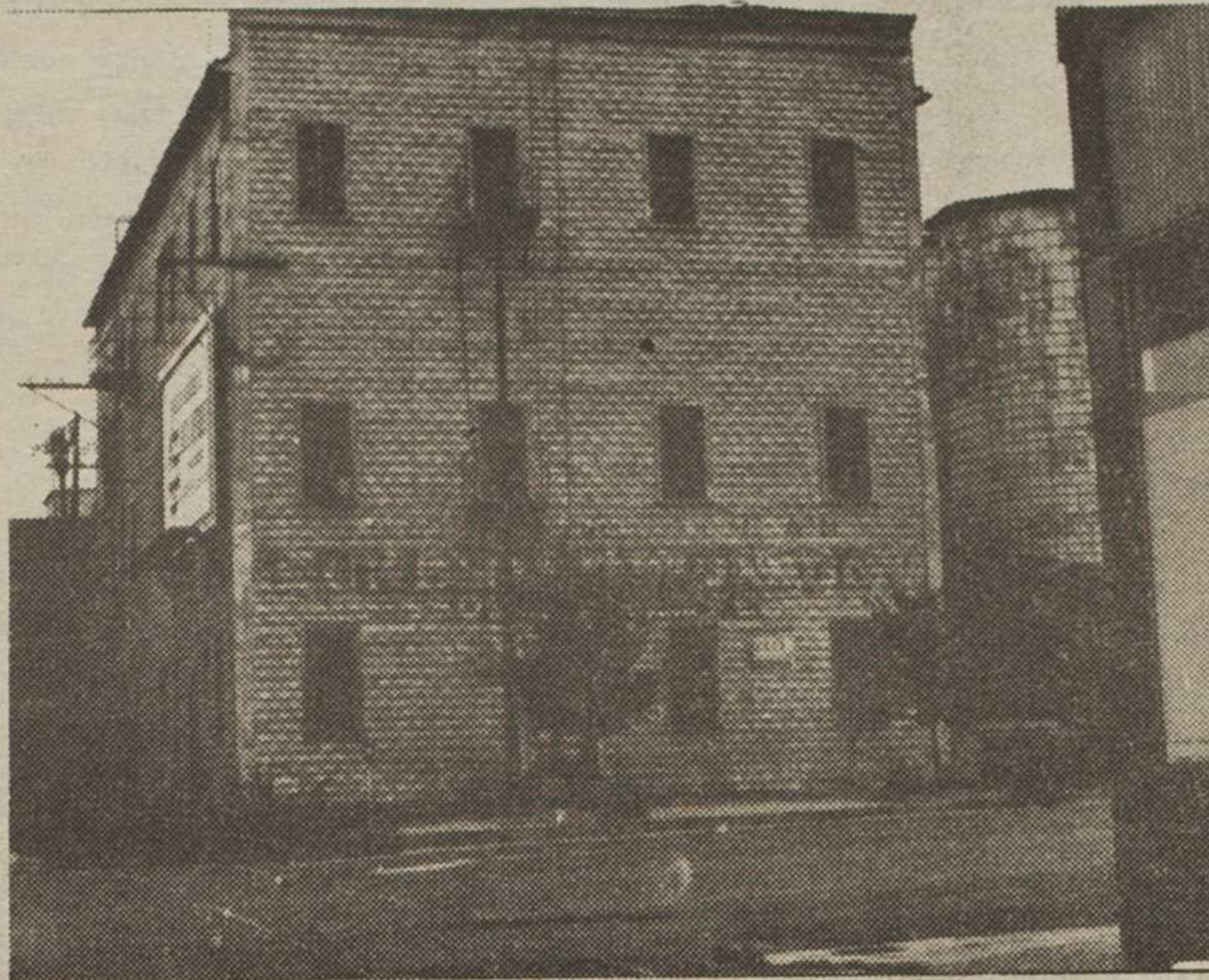
Glenn West, a Chamber vice-president, agreed with Clark. "I think those are good structures, positive improvements over what was there," he said.

West and Dick McClanathan, planning director, both said they would have no qualms with the construction of 5-6 story buildings.

To make up your own mind, go to the 4th floor office of Buford Watson, city manager. Look out the window. Note the broken lines, the utility poles and wires, the fire walls, the tarred and tinned roofs, chimneys and pipes. It wasn't meant to be seen. Which buildings appear to be misfits?

The buildings that spurred the initial growth of Lawrence, that brought people and jobs, that made this a boom town, are now barriers to progress.

Commissioner Carl Mibeck called the block, "pretty crummy." Commissioner Marnie Argersinger said, "That awful Bowersock Mill is really an eye-



THE UNDERWOOD BUILDING: LAST OF ITS KIND?

sore. Just a disgrace."

The First National Bank becomes the norm and the original buildings become the deviants. New is in and old must go.

Preservation of the old, and control of architectural style reek of regimentation to some officials interviewed.

"Your questions imply that there ought to be some regimentation in what things should look like," West said. "I think if you let free enterprise alone and let business do what they want to do then it works out best. The vast majority think that things are all right or they wouldn't shop at these places."

"Aesthetics are something that have to be judged individually. What I like you might not like. And that's one of the great things about the free enterprise system of competition. If you don't like the appearance of my business, then you can just go to another business that does appeal to you."

Clark also fears regulation of architectural styles.

"I don't favor a board of people that would enforce adherence to architectural styles," he said. "I like the old 19th century buildings too and I wouldn't mind seeing just that in the downtown area. Ideally it would be nice to preserve them, but I don't think government should be required to tow the line in that area. It's going to take a mixture of architectural design, both old and modern."

Mayor Fred Pence said of historical import, "I'm not too interested in the history of a building. If its lived out its usefulness then I think it has to be torn down."

I'm not such an intelligent man that I got all the answers, but when you come into town after those two new bridges go in, it'll be the first thing you see. And it looks bad.

If you'd asked me about mums, then I could tell you all about them...I think that something should be done. It takes a lot of foresight and planning and studying and I'm not no expert.

The previous City Commission was concerned enough about the blighted 600 block that they gave a Kansas City consultant firm, the Lawrence-Leiter Co., \$19,000 to study the problem and come up with some proposals. The consultants showed little sentiment in the matter. They recommended tearing most of the buildings in the area down, including the Opera House.

The Leiter Report isn't binding. The City can toss it into its library at City Hall along with other consultant reports. But it could play an important role in what finally happens.

Commissioners Argersinger, Clark, Planning Director McClanathan and West all expressed approval of the Leiter Report.

"The Leiter Report will probably be a guide in the actual development of the 600 block," McClanathan said. "I think the best thing that could happen to the downtown area would be for a Sears store to come in in."

Clark said that a hotel-motel combination, as shown in the report, was a possibility. Argersinger said the report had possibilities since it showed a convention center. She also mentioned the possibility of using tax-increment financing to help fund the construction of a new City Hall in the 600 block.

West said the report was a good investment. Commissioners Mibeck and Donald Binns said they had never read the report.

But none of those interviewed said they favored as much demolition as the Leiter report suggests.

"We're not talking about leveling the 600 block," Clark said. "The Leiter Report shows just one option. My own feeling is that this building (the Underwood) is non-rehabable. Certainly with the Mercantile building and the Opera House, it's a different situation."

Argersinger and McClanathan said that the Opera House should remain.

Below is a map of the proposed development plan for the area north of 7th Street, Kentucky to Connecticut. Of course, this is just the fantasy conjured by the consulting firm hired by the City to develop the idea. Actual work would be based on agreement between City officials and the private developers chosen for the job. The code for the circled numbers is as follows: 1) Proposed retail center 2) Proposed hotel convention center 3) Lawrence Ice Company (existing) 4) Lawrence National Bank (existing) 5) Proposed parking structure 6) Lawrence Daily Journal-World (existing) 7) Proposed office complex 8) Proposed retail center and restaurant 9) K.U. extension building (existing) 10) Bowersock mill (existing) 11) Proposed transportation center 12) Kansas Fiberboard Company (existing) 13) Reuter Organ Company (existing) 14) Journal-World Cablevision (existing) 15) Proposed home improvement center 16) Coca Cola Bottling (existing) 17) Proposed out-door amphitheater 18) Proposed Community Center 19) Central Park (existing) 20) Proposed parking lot 21) U.S. Post Office (existing) 22) City Library (just off the map, below the Post Office) 23) Proposed tennis courts 24) Proposed river outlook. (Courtesy, Lawrence-Leiter Co., K.C. MO.

