

Haskell Loop...

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26 to 4. It seemed apparent to anyone following the course of events, that support for the road was general and well recognized.

Yet, even in the midst of what seemed to be consensus support for the Loop, a few neighborhood residents in November 1974 were circulating a petition against demolition of homes in the 800 block of Pennsylvania. More than 60 residents, all within a couple of blocks of the Loop right-of-way, signed in just a few days. Monthly meetings of the neighborhood association were marked by small verbal skirmishes; the Loop opponents were still bitter over the way in which Association members were fed information on the road.

Throughout the period in which the Association discussed the project, it seemed City officials and consulting planners and developers dominated the floor of discussion. Negative impacts on the neighborhood were not talked about. Instead, those interested were subjected to a barrage of maps and statistics which purportedly proved the need for the road, and demonstrated the positive changes which would take place in the neighborhood when it was completed. At one point, a City Commissioner threatened Association members with a blockage of all funds for improvements if they didn't stop bickering and get behind the Loop. Opponents simply felt that intimidation, subtle and not-so-subtle, had played a major role in obtaining a favorable vote of support of the road. The vote in 1974 had been particularly important in the face of federal regulations dictating cooperation between City officials and neighborhood residents involved in federally-funded projects.

Despite opposition, it seemed that the Loop was a dead issue. City plans were moving ahead as land was acquired and houses torn down in the 800 block of Pennsylvania. Opposition was discouraged. But by March 1975, City elections were coming up, and a wealth of so-called "neighborhood" candidates were on the ballot. In the general election, two outspoken Loop opponents were elected to the Commission. Discussion about the Loop continued, mostly low-key, for several months. By early July, heartened Loop opponents managed to see the issue again placed on the Commission's agenda. Since the governing body was now dominated by strong advocates of neighborhood preservation, it seemed certain that the bulldozers would be called off.

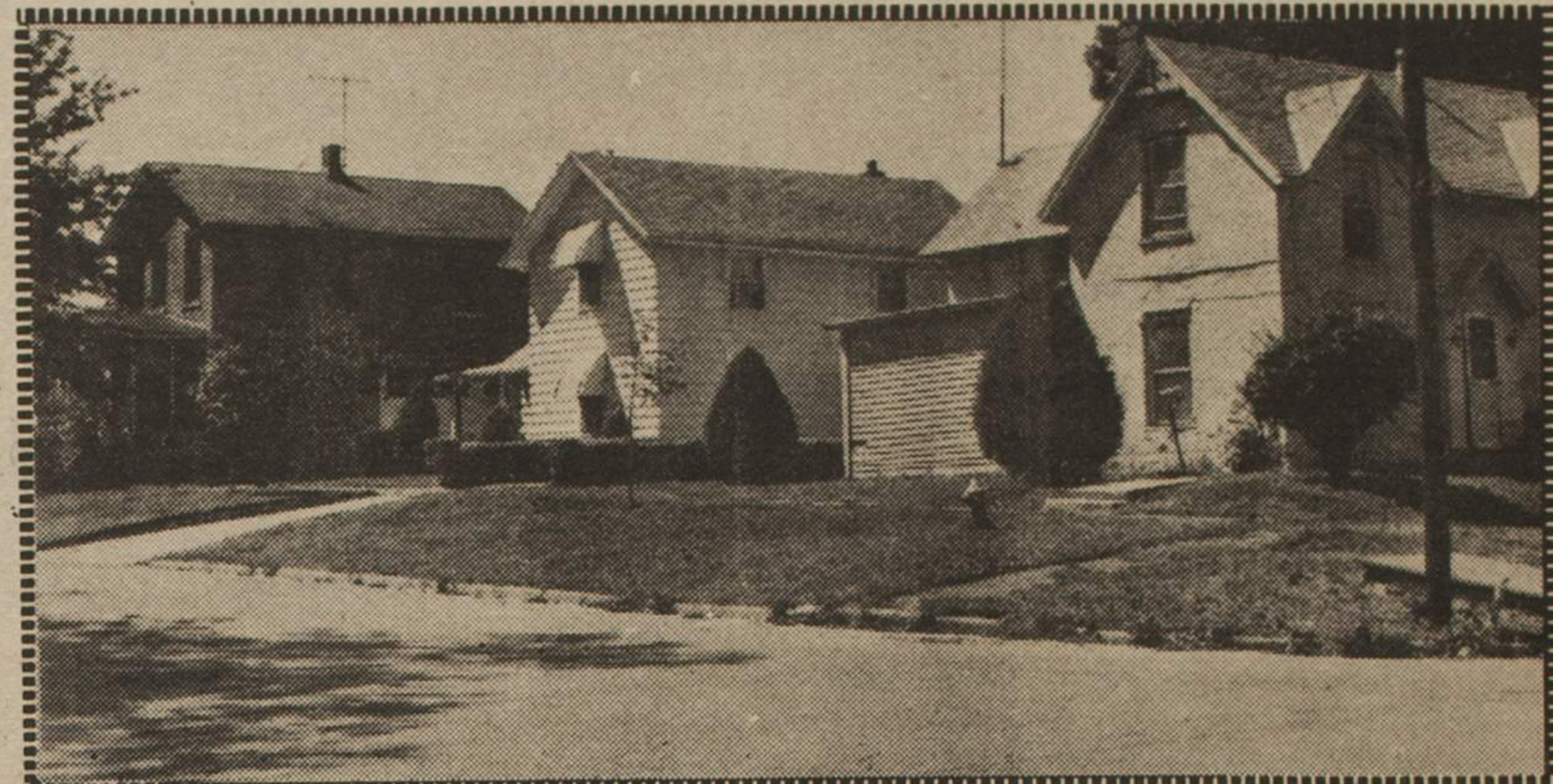
But, expectations of Loop opponents proved to quite naive. On the evening of July 29, at a so-called "public hearing" on the Haskell Loop, the Commission voted, following two and a half hours of debate, to build the roadway as planned, 4 to 1.

Loop opponents were crushed. Only days before, more than 240 signatures against the road were collected along a two-block-wide corridor abutting the project site. Led to believe that the new Commission was going to be more responsive to people's needs than in the past, Loop opponents were unprepared for their quick change of heart. It was obviously time to shore up for a long and hard fight.

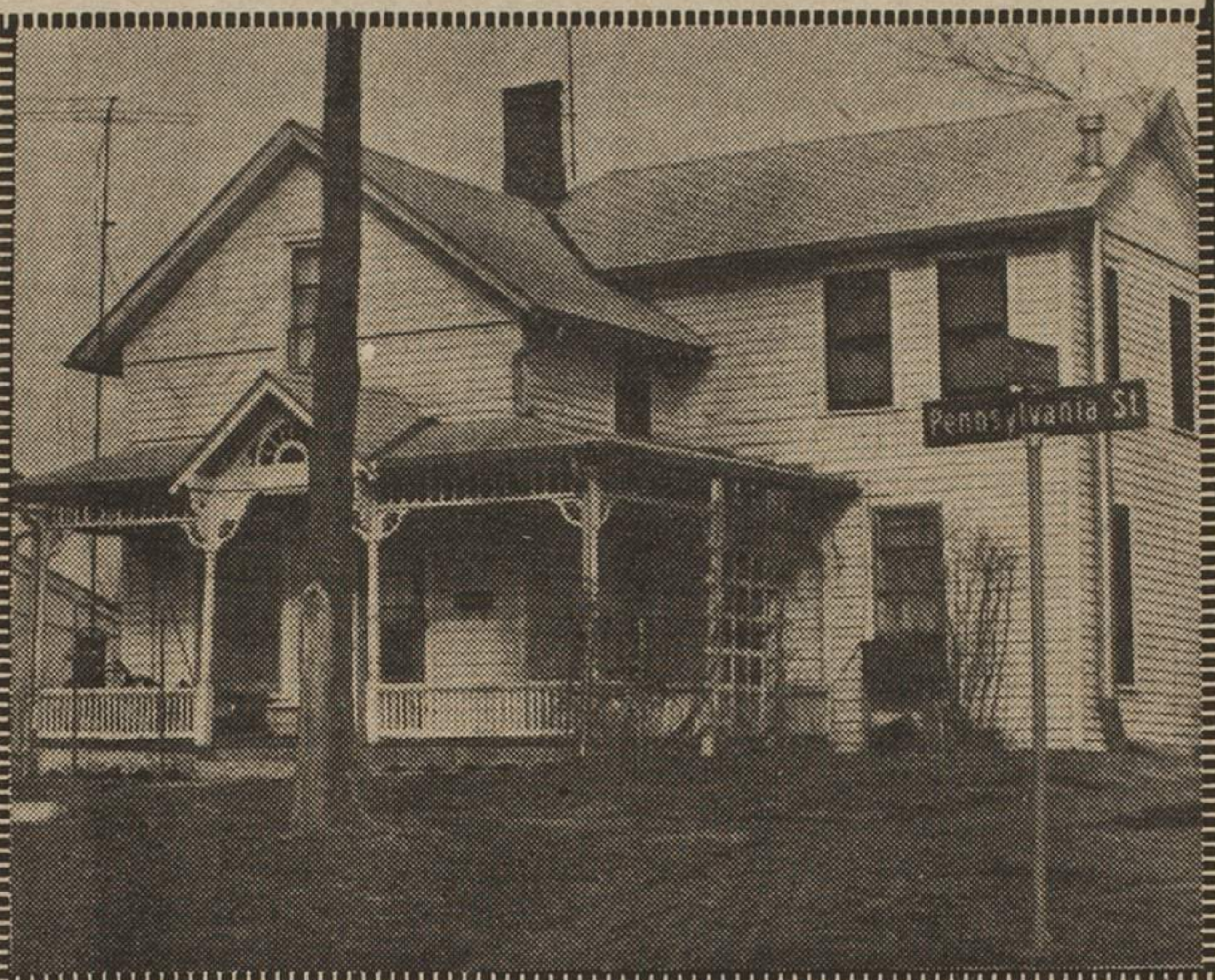
That fight began with the organization in December 1975 of the Citizens Opposed to the Haskell Loop, now called East Lawrence Citizens For Housing Preservation. The group formed around the nucleus



THE HOMES ABOVE & BELOW WILL BE TORN DOWN FOR THE LOOP. THE HOMES AT RIGHT WILL BE LEFT WITH THE ROAD IN THEIR FRONT YARD.



Does this 'blight' need cleaning out?



of petition carriers and signers. The process of beating the pavement in the petition drive turned up nearly unanimous opposition to the roadway. Although many people were basically ignorant about details of the planning for the road, it was clear that nearly everyone was against tearing down so many houses, and replacing them with rivers of car and truck traffic.

It was clear that there was no way to reach the hearts or minds of City government with neighborhood concerns. Business and industry had too many dollars on the line. Faced by the general support of the neighborhood, spoken and otherwise, the East Lawrence citizens' group quickly rounded up 80 to 90 interested opponents to the Loop. The group sent out letters and requests for help to federal and state agencies. Representatives in congress were notified and asked to help. Within a couple of months, the campaign began to pay off.



When you're in trouble there's no place like home

All along, the City knew that it would have to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement. The statement is required by the federal government of all cities and states using federal funds on construction projects. The City planned to have this statement finished by late spring of this year, until intervention by Washington forced the City and its consultants to consider, in writing, the effects of the destruction of the East Lawrence park system. The addition to the study incurred several months of delay.

At summer's end, things were at a stand-still. The City was anxious to release the Impact Statement in order to get its land acquisition program rolling down the 900 block of Pennsylvania. Facing an October 1978 deadline for committal of federal highway money with which to build the road, the City was very conscious of the time element involved. Neighborhood opposition was also anxious to get a handle on the study, knowing that here was their best shot at deflating the City's efforts to build the road before time and money ran out.

The Statement was finally released on Oct. 8, following another delay in which City officials returned the study to the drawing boards for a few last-minute cosmetic changes. As interested parties all over town began to examine the Statement, the winds of change were blowing stronger through East Lawrence. At the October meeting of the East Lawrence Improvement Association, long dominated by East-side business interests, the business slate of candidates was being ousted in the annual election of officers. The warm Monday evening brought more than 70 people to the East Lawrence Center to engage in the battle for

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