CHARLESTON RIVER PLAZA
HOTEL
Charleston, West Virginia

Joel D. Russell
May 16, 1980
Prof. Uwe Koehler
CONTENTS

Abstract
Forward
Introduction
Final Design
Conclusion
Media Coverage
Site Analysis
Schematics
Design Development
Program
ABSTRACT

The thesis project consists of a luxury hotel that is 12 stories plus 2 levels of parking below grade. The facility contains approximately 192,000 square feet and contains three restaurants and three bar/lounges along with a sternwheeler museum.

The beginning portion of this book contains the final design solution with more specific detailed information of the design process following. It includes project program, site analysis and documentation of schematic design and design development.
FORWARD

The growth and development of a city is dependent upon the quality of services and facilities offered. Historically, lodging facilities have played an important role in the evolution of urban areas. If one examines the growth patterns along the National Road, the present cities have evolved in places where successful inns have been maintained. Adequately serving visitors of a city leaves good impressions and encourages spending and return visits.

The present surge of growth in the Southeastern portion of the country has spread to include my home state. West Virginia is experiencing the growth with the major thrust being in the tourist industry. In the capital city of Charleston, construction is at a peak with the building of a new hospital, convention center, sports arena and the development of a large scale urban mall to be directly linked to the Central Business District. The number of visitors to the city has increased annually and the hotel and motel occupancy rate reflects this. The present hotel facilities are typical tower podium design solutions being developed specifically for the comfort and convenience of the user. These facilities have not taken advantage of the many vistas available around the city nor have they provided many extras for the active populace of Charleston. The lack of a new and different hotel facility for the city of Charleston along with a controversy over a prominent open site along a main artery sparked by interest in this project. A fight over whether to construct more parking facilities
for the county courthouse or to construct a new hotel on the site along the river is still going on at present. A developer wishes to build a new luxury hotel for the city yet the city officials have threatened to condemn the property in order to employ the site for parking. Located only a few short blocks from the Central Business district on Kanawha Boulevard and open to the Kanawha River, the site holds much more potential than the operation of government parking. Being a mountainous region, buildable land is rather scarce. Having grown up in Charleston, I hold strong feelings about the use of open land within the city. Charleston's present growth with both economy and tourism, and preoccupation with the river as an integral element of the city merits the development of a lodging complex which not only meets the needs of travelers but also enhances the lives of Charleston's residents.
INTRODUCTION

As previously discussed, the controversy over the proposed site sparked by interest in this project. Charleston holds the distinction of a beautiful setting being located in the Kanawha River Valley, with the city having developed in a linear fashion between the hills. Through public works programs after the war, the banks of the Kanawha River were cleared of structures and landscaped, providing pleasant views throughout the city. By code, no structures are built on the river banks and the city maintains two levels of walkways used daily by joggers and pedestrians and quite often for the observation of fireworks displays, boat races and a river festival. The function of the river as an aesthetic and recreational element of the city is of major importance. As land is tight in the city, the opening of any site, especially one with a close relationship to the river, merits special attention. The structures along the Boulevard provide a facade for the city and in turn, excellent views are available in all directions.

The site in question is strategically located with direct proximity to the Kanawha River, the county courthouse and the municipal auditorium and being fairly close to the new superblock development and the new arena and convention center. During the last nine months I have focused my energies on the development of this structure in response to views, and the provision of space and activities for both local and traveling users. I wished to reinforce the River facade of the city
and the current trend of an active role of the river in Charleston's overall scheme. I feel that the construction of a parking complex on the site by the county government would be a step backward for Charleston showing a common planning error of turning ones back to an urban river.

In programming the project I called for a specialty restaurant to be located on the river bank, accessible from the hotel by a bridge over the Boulevard. After many studios and much thought about the impact of such a structure this portion of the program was dropped as I found the openness of the River bank to be one of the major factors of the city's beauty. To provide instead a restaurant which would emphasize views as opposed to direct access to the river bank made more sense. Only one block from this site is the City levee, which is the center of most functions on the river.

The levee serves as the departure and loading point for the P. A. Denny, a sternwheeler which cruises the river daily in the summer months and is the site of most holiday celebrations. The Boulevard is closed on several nights during the Sternwheel Regatta Festival, making access to the levee no problem during this annual event.

Having identified the basic goals and philosophies of this project, design decisions will be discussed in more detail in the schematic and design development stages.

Overall the thesis experience has proven a very rewarding, thought provoking experience. I have introduced myself to a project type and
size which I haven't dealt with before and have in turn introduced to myself personal aspects which were previously untested. The first quarter was spent in research, much more than I ever anticipated and the second quarter was spent deciphering and applying that research and very much catch up work in regards to the design. Once I attained a firm handle on the internal organization and its orientation, the project fell together to the present stage. I am pleased with the projects development and if nothing else feel that this book may serve as a guide to my working procedure and as a tool to encourage the employment rather than the exclusion of rivers in our city planning.

Found in the glossary of the textbook *The Practice of Supervision* by Andrew DuBrin is the following quote which I feel characterizes the past nine months of this thesis experience.

"type A behavior: A behavior pattern characterized by impatience, compulsiveness, high tension, high energy, and a constant striving for success."
CHARLESTON RIVER PLAZA
Luxury Hotel
Charleston, West Virginia
CONCLUSION

My original thoughts in taking on a structure of such scale and complexity were that my thesis year would be best facilitated by dealing with a larger scale project than my design experience had thus far taken me. Through this move, I have realized the scale makes no difference, that one can carry any project to what ever level is desired. I have gained a detailed knowledge of a specific building type and have encountered a positive experience with urban design as my site is included in an in-depth study undertaken by the comprehensive planning committee of Charleston.

The exercise undertaken this past nine months in thesis has proven to be an invaluable tool in the step from education to the working world. This project gave me a most interesting journey through architecture, along with the development of a better understanding of the Art.
MEDIA COVERAGE

City's Final Part In Revitalization Clears Hurdle

By DAVID GREENFIELD
Daily Mail Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON -- A program hailed as the final piece in Charleston's three-part plan for downtown revitalization has cleared its first major congressional hurdle.

A Senate appropriations subcommittee yesterday approved the $38 million program, which includes construction of two major parking garages near the expanded Civic Center, a pedestrian walkway from those areas to other downtown locations and the Capitol, relocation of the City Council from the basement to the building of one of the new parking garages, a new bus transit center near the Court Street area behind the Federal Building, and a pedestrian walkway to connect downtown shopping areas.

The program, which still faces several legislative challenges before final approval, is part of an $80 million national urban initiative planned under the Urban Mass Transportation Administration that is designed to help cities better integrate mass transit facilities into their overall downtown framework.

The Charleston grant, approved by the subcommittee pending a final application by the city, is included with two other grants to Boston and Indianapolis, which have already started preliminary work on similar mass transit developments.

The centerpiece of the "park and ride" development, if and when approved, will be a key component of the new Charleston Town Center, which will expand Civic Center to the rest of the downtown area and will allow out-of-town travelers better access to the city by both car and train.

The UMTA program for Charleston will still have to get approval by the full Senate appropriations committee and pass the floor before being reconciled with the House, whose bill does not specifically earmark funds for Charleston.

Mayor Hutchinson said today he was encouraged by the subcommittee action. "The fact the Charleston was included in the grant is a vote of confidence for the city," he said.

He added that the grant represented "an integral part of the overall downtown program." (Turn to Pg. 2A, Col. 1)
AROUND THE TOWN

A New Day Dawns For Our River Town

By Charles Connor

The announcement of the marriage of Forest City Enterprises and the Caffo Co. in the development of Charleston Town Center caught many by surprise. No one expected the two competitive mall developers to join.

Mayor Hutchison of Charleston had an idea that several weeks ago, but Mayor Jack of South Charleston was caught completely off guard. The Forest/Caffo company held its parade on Forest City Avenue.

It appears that the principal is not together on Charleston's Superblock — nags, Tower Center — developers because they needed each other. The Caffo site, which Forest City has the contract to develop, had been ready to go for months, but the developer lacked two anchor stores. Caffo had anchor stores lined up for its city parking development of South Charleston mall developers. Mayor Jack won the Forest/Caffo marriage is the frosting on Charleston's wedding cake.

While old news to Charleston, the president's policy on cities must be new in some areas. The latest issue of U.S. News & World Report reports this as tomorrow's news: "Developers will scramble about this. The White House wants to see new shopping malls that will lure city business districts, increase auto use. How? By denying federal funds for interstate roads, water and sewer lines for the projects. The malls are not economically feasible without such aid."

Caffo faced such a denial in South Charleston. He needed an access road. It was Mayor Hutchison's opinion, voiced in April of 1978, that neither federal nor state funds could be acquired for an access road to the proposed South Charleston site; therefore the development would seem impossible. At least it would not be given preference over Charleston's. The mayor's plan, based upon what he knew after discussion with Carter's urban policy, remained valid then and recent events have proved it to be true.

Hutchison has fought strongly for Charleston's completion as an attractive and vigorous capital city. If it could be viewed as a race between South Charleston and Charleston's mall developers, the mayor's man won. The Forest City/Caffo marriage is the frosting on Charleston's wedding cake.

So what do we have to look forward to in the upcoming development of Charleston Town Center? A very exciting time, friends, if rebuilding "old river town Charleston" as the late Mayor Shanklin liked to call it, is up your interest alley.

The word is that Sears, Roebuck and Co., and Montgomery Ward & Co. will join the May Company and Penney's in Charleston Town Center as anchor stores. The word is that Lazarus is outside panning on the door to get in, but that the mall will be developed as originally planned — with four anchor stores and 139 smaller stores and garage parking for 5,200 cars to serve the stores. The hope is that a suitable place will be found for Lazarus, the Columbus, O., department store chain, to join the Charleston family of fine stores.

Ground will be broken this month for the new Marriott Hotel. It should be open next fall. Ground will be broken next March for the mall. It should be open in the fall of 1982. Mayor Hutchison believes that there will be two or three new office towers built in the city during the decade of the exciting '80s.

The mayor believes that Charleston finally is being discovered, that it often is overheard for its charm and size. How could a city of 65,000 pop up in a computer printout of possible growth areas? Outsiders fail to understand us as a Charleston community of more than a quarter of a million people, a vibrant whole made up of satellite cities with all of their industries and businesses. As more firms move in, such as Arden's, the word will get around.

So the outlook is good. After many years and millions of dollars spent on urban renewal in Charleston, millions in planning, property acquisition, clearance of old buildings, land preparation, etc., we've arrived at a most exciting period of time.
Revolution Eatery For Charleston?

Developer Says It's Possible On Boulevard

By NANYA GADD
Of The Daily Mail Staff

A private developer is seeking urban renewal land on Kanawha Boulevard to build a 150-room hotel that may include a revolving rooftop restaurant.

The proposal from James R. Clower and Associates has been submitted to the Charleston Urban Renewal Authority, said Tom Carroll, CURA director. The authority had advertised for proposals for two non-committed parcels of land in downtown Charleston.

Only Clower's proposal and two others were received by yesterday's deadline, Carroll said. The other two proposals were submitted by Forest City Enterprises, developers of the proposed Superblock complex, and the Kanawha County Commission.

Both Clower and the commission are seeking a parcel on Kanawha Boulevard that was vacated recently by the demolition of the old Superior Laundry building. Forest City wants to build a high-rise office building on the other parcel, which is adjacent to Superblock and was formerly the site of a motorcycle dealership.

Clower characterized the hotel his firm wants to build as "something different." It will contain two restaurants—one on the ground floor and one on the top.

"We are considering maybe a revolving, rooftop restaurant," he said. "It would be something completely new for Charleston."

The hotel would be part of a national chain, but Clower said he could not yet divulge the identity of the chain the firm is negotiating with.

A swimming pool and two floors of parking space—one underground—also are part of plans for the hotel, he said. One entire floor of the building would be used for conference rooms, he added, with a capacity for more than 500 persons.

Clower also is president of Potomac House Inc., a nursing home chain. The firm that submitted the hotel proposal was formed for that project and several others still in the planning stages, he explained.

The Kanawha Boulevard site is ideal for such a hotel, Clower said, and he hopes the authority will approve the proposal. "We're hoping something comes of this."

The site is a little less than 46,000 square feet in size and is the smaller of the two parcels advertised. CURA has said it will accept no less than $550,000 for the land.

The other site is about 151,000 square feet in size and is bounded by Washington, Court, Lee and Trustow streets. No minimum bid was set for the larger parcel.

As the only firm to submit a proposal for the land, Forest City stands an excellent chance of increasing the land it already has been designated as developer for in the urban renewal area. The parcel would complete a large square to be developed by the Cleveland, Ohio, firm, and the firm made known its intentions to seek the land several months ago.

The office building will be a part of the shopping mall complex, which also is to include a hotel and parking facilities. "There's nothing new in what we've proposed," said Mel Roebuck, vice president of Forest City Rental Properties. "This has been in our other drawings."

Parking facilities for the office building are included in the proposal, Roebuck said, as well as more parking facilities for Superblock itself.

(Turn to Pg. 3A, Col. 1)
New Annex

An architect’s sketch of Kanawha County’s proposed judicial building has been released by County Commissioners. The building will be across from the courthouse at the corner of Virginia and Court Streets. There will also be an underground parking area. No plans for a new jail were released.
Boulevard Tract Status Still Up in the Air

By Kay Michael

Staff Writer

County Commission President Henry Shores said Tuesday his interest in the Superior Laundry property on Kanawha Boulevard stems from a desire to see the boulevard beautified.

"I personally think that for years to come that property certainly would beautify the riverfront. My thoughts are that for future expansion of government agencies this would be the thing to do. I think we're short-sighted not to look way down the road, and I think beautification is very important."

Originally, it was announced that Shores was interested in the land for a parking building. However, his colleagues on the commission, Al Shepard and Robert Silverskin, have said they have no pressing interest in buying the land from the city Urban Renewal Authority.

A private developer, James R. Clowers and Associates, is interested in building a $6 million hotel on the property. Shores has said if the land is bought by the developer, the county will use its power of eminent domain to condemn the tract.

However, County Administrator Raymond Gauthier has said he plans to write to the authority asking that the county's bid on the land be withdrawn.

MEANWHILE, officials have begun renovating a garage located above the voter's registration office in the courthouse annex. Tom Carroll, executive director of the renewal authority, said it was his understanding that the building was to be razed and the property used for parking.

Renovation is being done to convert the garage into a county motor pool, a proposal criticized by several county officials on grounds that it isn't necessary. A motor pool head, H.C. Illks, has been on the payroll for several weeks, but hasn't had a pool to oversee.

If the county proceeds with plans to build a judicial annex across the street from the courthouse, Carroll said, it will be necessary to come up with a parking space for each 500 feet of new building. Although there's nothing in the renewal authority's agreements with the county that would force parking to be provided on the voter's registration site, he said, officials should check parking requirements to be assured they would comply.

A county agreement with the authority concerning the judicial annex was contingent on construction beginning by May 16. As of Tuesday, Carroll said, he had received no letter asking for an extension. Conceivably, the property could revert to the authority if an extension isn't given.

WITHOUT APPROVAL from Shores, commissioners agreed to convey a tract of land on Bakers Ridge to David Atkinson, a builder. Atkinson, represented by lawyer Tom Potter, has 375 acres in the area. To complete his property development, the builder is interested in a piece of land once owned by the airport authority as a beacon light site. The authority decided late last year, Potter said, that releasing the land would have no effect on airport operations. However, land relinquished by the authority must revert to the County Commission. Consequently, commissioners must agree to the property transfer.

Shores said he wasn't certain the transfer was proper, and voted against the proposal.

Potter is also counsel for the airport authority. He said he was asked by Atkinson to work as his counsel, and there is no conflict because the airport authority has already decided to give up the land.
SITE ANALYSIS

The development of concepts for the project are very much dependent upon the conditions around the site. Of primary importance is the traffic, both pedestrian and vehicular. Study of this along with the orientation in respect to solar angles, winds and other climatic conditions and the context are essential in developing a working concept. In the case of this hotel, the base of the building is structured primarily around circulation where the tower housing the rooms are oriented in respect to views.
CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

The above three ideas are a very important tool in the design process. In order to approach the design of a particular building type one can investigate existing solutions in order to attain some idea of a set of archetypes. The archetype can then be used as a point of reference in applying the specific constraints of both the site and program. In doing so, one must be careful not to let a given archetype dictate the design. Each problem being unique, requiring its own hybrid solution.

Hotel design: After studying existing examples of today's hotels, one can begin to group them in several different manners. Each example may fit into one or more of three basic archetypal concepts. As far as internal organization, these three categories are:

FIELD • AXIAL • NODAL

For the purpose of my particular project, I will deal primarily with the axial and nodal examples as field would refer to a larger-scale project with more diverse functions than a 'typical' U.S. urban hotel.
MUNICIPAL AUDITORIUM

DRIVE-IN BANKING FACILITIES

SITE FOR NEW CITY/COUNTY BUILDING

MAGOR BUS ROUTE

APPALACHIAN ELECTRIC CO.

Virginia Street (One Way)

EMPTY LOT
(SUBJECT TO URBAN RENEWAL AUTHORITY)

KANAWHA BOULEVARD (4 LANES)

KANAWHA COUNTY COURT HOUSE

GREAT-KANAWHA RIVER

(BOAT RIDE) FESTIVAL
SCHEMATICS

The documentation of the schematics stage of my thesis shows the troubles which I encountered due to the unrealized complexity of the program. At this stage I was somewhat landlocked by the process of integrating structure of the tower into the structure of the base. What resulted was an intense session of spatial organization, and re-organization. Once I freed myself from the rigidity of a structural grid the spaces worked much more easily. Near the end of this stage I re-evaluated my floor plans and proceeded with some major redistribution of spaces. Through further study of my program I realized that I had programmed nearly twice as much office space as was required. This alleviated some of my problems with the floor plans and the schematics began to prove my concept to be a workable solution. In this section I have documented several points of development in plans and sections.