CHAPTER 1

Planning and the Industrial City

ON OCTOBER 25, 1945, Pennsylvania governor Edward Martin announced that the state legislature had officially authorized the creation of a state park in the city of Pittsburgh, at the "Point," the historic confluence of the Ohio, Allegheny, and Monongahela rivers. In less than a month, Pittsburgh's political and business leadership, led by the city's banking tycoon and civic luminary Richard King Mellon, mobilized the city's planning community and leveraged the state's modest $4,000,000 park appropriation into a joint public-private tour de force hailed as the "Pittsburgh Renaissance."

Mellon's figure dominated this epic moment in Pittsburgh history. A pre–World War II stalwart of the Pittsburgh Regional Planning Association (PRPA), who as a colonel during the war headed Pennsylvania's Selective Service Administration, Mellon helped found the Allegheny Conference on Community Development in 1943.[1] After the war Republican Mellon teamed with Democratic political machine boss David Lawrence to make Pittsburgh the bellwether of American postwar city planning.

Lured by Mellon's overtures and by the state's 1947 Redevelopment Authority Act authorizing local authorities to employ eminent domain powers for urban development purposes, New York's Equitable Life Assurance Company consented to risk millions of dollars on Pittsburgh's downtown redevelopment scheme. The Mellon-Lawrence plan featured the city's sixty-acre Point, in 1947 an ugly mélange of railroad yards and seedy buildings, as the urban renaissance centerpiece. An early model showed Point State Park as part of a much broader Golden Triangle extravaganza that included the gleaming chromed steel towers of Gateway Center. Pittsburgh, once America's quintessential smoky, industrial city and branded "Hell with the Lid Off," now seized the national and international spotlight as America's premier renaissance city.

A large crowd of spectators assembled on May 18, 1950, amid the crumbling warehouses, the junk-filled rail yards, and a small cluster of moldering ancient row houses that tottered unobtrusively and tremulously in the shadows of the historic Point. A giant steam crane slowly raised a one-ton wrecking ball into the air and then suddenly and violently unleashed it, crashing it against the scarred exposed side of one withered old commercial building. Demolition had begun. Twenty-four years, later in August 1974, surrounded now by a gleaming showcase of Renaissance I architectural fare—the sparkling new Three Rivers Stadium; the shimmering Gateway Towers; Penn-Lincoln Parkway; and the Fort Pitt Tunnels and Bridge—city and state officials dedicated Point Park. Speaker after speaker at the ceremony praised the city's history, especially the symbolic national importance of the "hallowed Point" in the struggle for Anglo supremacy over the continent. They alluded just as frequently to the park's key role in launching Pittsburgh's urban renaissance, underscoring the historic role of city planning in overseeing the physical rebuilding of the urban environment.[2]

Most historians of Pittsburgh's post–World War II renaissance push the origins of the movement to 1943 or 1945 and to planning decisions stemming from the Lawrence-Mellon progrowth alliance. Some histories of postwar city rebuilding trace the seeds of renewal farther back to the planning activity of the 1920s.[3] This book, however, discovers the roots of Pittsburgh's renaissance in a much earlier era, in the early decades of the twentieth century, when a partnership of public and private leaders formed to promote modern city planning—that is, comprehensive planning viewed as a process, and built upon an organic concept of urban space to be managed scientifically by educated professionals. These same disciples established planning in Pittsburgh, created a solid legal framework for planning practice, and set in motion the machinery that produced many landmark city projects such as the Pitt Parkway, Point Park, and the Golden Triangle.

Many historians, however, see some evidence of city planning before the advent of twentieth-century progressive reform. Planning appears in the ad hoc development of nineteenth-century urban infrastructure. Historian Jon Peterson argues that such uncoordinated, fragmented, "special purpose planning" of parks, sewers, streets, waterworks, and boulevards lacked any comprehensive basis. It resulted, instead, from ongoing informal conversations among city engineers, landscape architects, city boosters, businessmen, philanthropists, politicians, and others (including members of the city's notorious ring) about how urban space should be used to enhance the city's prosperity and prospects. This vital conversation about the uses of urban space constantly evolved. By the late nineteenth century, progressive reformers—that is, urban elites and middle-class professionals, organized as good government groups, women's clubs, neighborhood improvement associations, settlement houses, and other civic bodies, and outraged by the arrogance, cost, and sheer inefficiency of boss-controlled city building—recast that conversation into a progressive discourse about social order, good government, and the imperatives of modern science, reason, bureaucracy, and the public interest. From that progressive dialogue, not only modern city planning but also a new, but fragile, public-private partnership emerged that, after World War I, strengthened as an alliance of young professional planners and a committed proplanning business community. That structure endured until the mid-1930s when, under the extreme duress of the Great Depression, federal power and resources further enhanced the authority of planning while concomitantly energizing the private and paradoxically more activist side of the planning partnership, and catalyzed urban renaissance.[4]

Using Pittsburgh as a case study, we explore the origins, nature, and consequences of modern urban planning as it unfolded in the Steel City from the 1890s through 1943. It was amid the Great Depression and World War II, when fear of imminent deindustrialization and permanent high national unemployment mounted, that the federal government, through the Public Works Administration and the National Resources Planning Board, seized the urban planning initiative. Indeed, in 1943, as Allied expeditionary forces mobilized to strike at Hitler's fortress Europe, the federal government commanded American cities to undertake postwar planning. The order ultimately spawned the Allegheny Conference on Community Development (ACCD), the progrowth consortium of downtown lawyers, architects, university presidents, and business leaders pledged to undertake a massive physical rebirth of Pittsburgh. This study, however, focuses on the solid foundation for planning erected before Mellon, Lawrence, and the ACCD pronounced the rebirth of Pittsburgh. It probes the roots of the urban planning ethos and recounts the odyssey of that band of progressive-minded architects, landscape architects, civil engineers, lawyers, business leaders, and women reformers who, conceptualizing the city as an organic whole, sought to bring order and efficiency, as well as beauty, to the city's late-nineteenth-century and pre–World War II urban environment. Despite a myriad of obstacles to planning, political and otherwise, this modern city planning movement concretely impacted the physical shape and form of the city.[5] However, solidly rooted in conventional power structures, pre–World War II planning consistently sidestepped housing reform issues and never confronted socially sensitive urban equity issues such as race and poverty. The idealized urban neighborhood was lily white.[6]

THE ORIGINS OF CITY PLANNING

Pittsburgh's late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century quest for beauty and order occurred amid a broader discourse about social injustice and environmental squalor. The unprecedented economic misery and labor violence exacerbated by the depression of the 1890s catalyzed urban reform. City planning became a strategy in the reformers' arsenal to advance public good. Indeed, the idea of urban rebirth informed the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, which featured monumental baroque architecture arranged as a gleaming "White City" around a lagoon designed by Frederick Law Olmsted Sr. This tour de force of civic art, orchestrated by paragons of American architecture Daniel Burnham, Charles McKim, and Stanford White, among others, highlighted the power of planning, especially ensembles of great civic buildings, to engender order and stir civic virtue. In his magisterial *The Birth of City Planning in the United States, 1840–1917*, Jon Peterson acknowledges the significant role of both the fair and the subsequent 1902 McMillan Plan for Washington, D.C., for spurring the City Beautiful movement and laying the foundation for modern city planning. Peterson sees a highly receptive audience awaiting these events, the groundwork well prepared by a long history of nineteenth-century sanitary reform, park, and civic art achievements, as "antecedents" to the planning movement officially inaugurated by the National Conference on City Planning in 1909–1910.

Like historian John Reps, Peterson asserts that at the "townsite level," cities have been planned for millennia. However, none of the pioneers of modern urban planning, argues Peterson, neither John Nolen, Daniel Burnham, Charles Mulford Robinson, nor Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., regarded the early town-site plans for Philadelphia, Savannah, or Detroit as precursors of their discipline. Nor did they consider nineteenth-century park, water, sewer, and transit systems, and other special purpose planning to embrace a comprehensive perspective. Nineteenth-century urban form and the social order reflected therein were, we argue, primarily the result of a host of conscious decisions. While as Mansel Blackford and Christine Rosen have clearly explained, some nineteenth-century civic and business interests desired public works to promote economic growth and some saw park and other projects enhancing the social order, these voices of business were pluralistic, not monolithic.[7] The conversation, that is, reflected myriad discussions about how and where streets, markets, public buildings, offices, libraries, and parks should or should not be built, funded or not funded, taxed or not taxed. In this respect, writes historian John Fairfield, the American city "was in important ways 'planned' before the rise of professional city planning." But there was no larger vision of city form and little means to control city development.[8]

Sam Bass Warner espied such planning in the "weave of small patterns" comprising the texture of Boston's "streetcar suburbs" of Dorchester, Roxbury, and Jamaica Plains. The weave reflected the decisions made by a multitude of landowners and small, speculative builders about house lots, house plans, and what architectural embellishments to employ. Other historians have observed that the culture and traditions of the owner/renter occupants themselves molded the fabric of city space.[9] At a different architectural and design level, Andrew Jackson Downing's rendering for the Washington, D.C., mall, and Frederick Law Olmsted Sr.'s designs for New York City's Central Park (with Calvert Vaux) and for the Buffalo park system, as well as for early suburban communities such as Riverside, Illinois, convincingly attest to the existence of a form of civic "planning" before the discipline was professionalized in the early twentieth century.[10]

But all this planning, as Jon Peterson insists, was ad hoc, uninformed by any comprehension of the city as a whole. Peterson labels this nineteenth-century design of parks, water and sewerage-carriage systems, and subdivisions, no matter how impressive, "special purpose planning." While entailing systemic design, this special purpose planning lacked coordination or a comprehension of the physical, social, or economic complexity of the city, and therefore contributed to the accusation that cities evoked haphazard, not ordered, development.

Still, urban park plans, and the rising authority nationally of urban sanitary engineers, underscored an intense environmentalism imbuing nineteenth-century middle-class reform. Olmsted Sr., the farmer-journalist turned genius landscaper, endeavored to create within America's rising industrial cities a new naturalistic landscape able to counter the popularly perceived, morally subterranean slum world of the immigrant.[11] Architects, engineers, and ardent disciples of municipal art societies and civic associations beautified vacant lots, abominated billboards, and placed grand Beaux-Arts monuments in city parks, convinced that physical improvements, parks, boulevards, water and sewer systems, and decorative horse troughs would restore civic order and nurture the good city. However, few of these environmental reformers shared Frederick Law Olmsted Sr.'s broad vision of linked urban space. They harbored only a rudimentary idea of the city as a biological system, a matrix of interconnected neighborhoods linked by streets, thoroughfares, sewers, and other vital infrastructure.

The important figures of nineteenth-century planning engaged largely in a more specialized, narrowly conceived discourse about planning, one meant to persuade urban constituencies to vote their approval of new bond issues and thus higher taxes for expensive infrastructure. Although extensive Gilded Age park, sewer, and water projects comprised systems, and boulevards may have joined peripheral parkland into a network or necklace of accessible individual urban parks that strove to meet citywide social-psychological needs, landscape architects and city engineers, like the authors of nineteenth-century model tenements, addressed not the city as a whole but merely discrete segments of the urban fabric.[12]

Only a few nineteenth-century visionaries such as Henry George and Edward Bellamy grasped the totality of the urban environment, especially the relationship between the unequal access to land ownership and power endemic to laissez faire economies and the deteriorating quality of urban life and concomitant social disorder. However, like the vibrant social gospel movement of the era, they posited millennial, apocalyptic solutions to the problem of social injustice. Miraculously, they believed that a suddenly enlightened citizenry would enact the single tax and that religiously warmed urban hearts would beget a cooperative commonwealth. Such millennial schemes, while attracting considerable attention and support in Pittsburgh and elsewhere, seemed disconnected from the entrenched, highly individualistic, laissez faire competitive order that in reality embodied the American industrial city.[13]

Modern American city planning arrived with the progressive urban reform movement that unfolded at the turn of the century. A diverse array of engineers, architects, social workers, housers, tax reformers, and progressives, such as Olmsted Jr., cast the conversation in terms of a moral environmentalism, the power of the built environment to shape human behavior. Moreover, an aura of science and deep reverence for efficiency imbued much of this discourse. In addition, aesthetic and bureaucratic values and a dedication to professional standards drove their quest and led them to replace informal, special purpose planning with "the plan."[14]

Inspired by the triumph of the "White City," and by the subsequent 1902 McMillan Plan for Washington, D.C., in the early twentieth century progressive architects and other reformers concerned about the order and management of urban space increasingly spoke of planning as a comprehensive exercise or process leading to a plan. Accordingly, planning came to be viewed as a clearly defined body of thought, a set of teachable principles concerned with achieving order in, imposing efficiency in, and exercising disciplinary control over metropolitan space. Numerous historians have demonstrated that this impulse toward a definitive social order welled up from progressive reformers' sensibilities about the superiority of the natural to the built environment, and from gnawing middle-class fears about excrescent urban slums and the putatively dangerous, foreign-born denizens of that urban underworld.[15] In the late nineteenth century in Pittsburgh and other cities, theologians, philosophers, landscape architects, settlement house workers, engineers, and enlightened businessmen grappled with the consequences of the modern urban industrial world. They fabricated a set of principles about space, order, beauty, morality, and the primacy of science and efficiency, which by the second decade of the twentieth century had been codified into what could be called the planning ethos. The ethos not only presumed a holistic view of urban space but first and foremost embodied moral environmentalism, the belief in the socially curative, morally rehabilitative effect of a cleansed, well-ordered cityscape. Several historians have observed that this planning ideal subordinated social to aesthetic concerns. For this reason, many settlement house workers, housing reformers, and social visionaries abjured the American planning camp. Among this last group was the founder of New York's Committee on the Congestion of Population (CCP) and advocate of strict German-style land-use controls, Benjamin Marsh, who stubbornly pressed for public ownership of transit and other utilities.

While sensitive to the social implications of planning, most progressive planners steered a more conservative social and political course. The disciplinarians that we explore in this study of Pittsburgh, particularly city planner Frederick Bigger, favored substituting expert, orderly, politically neutral public authority for the mayhem of the private marketplace in shaping the urban environment. In fashioning a more attractive and efficient city, planning would create a more socially equitable and just city.[16]

Supported by businessmen, architects, lawyers, and other professionals, twentieth-century planners, including Bigger, first and foremost saw themselves as members of a craft, a discipline, owners of a body of specialized knowledge. Like followers of the Chicago School of urban sociology, they viewed the city as a mosaic of specialized, but functionally integrated, spaces. In the 1920s the Chicago School's biological/urban ecological model of city form proved a convincing explanation for the functional relationship of urban spaces, "natural areas" such as the business district, the red light district, and the ethnic enclaves such as Little Italy, Polish Hill, or Deutchtown. This view reinforced the planners' faith in environmentalism, especially their hope for restoring community to immigrant neighborhoods deemed wracked by alienation.[17]

Above all, city plans served planners and public officials as crucial templates for making reasoned decisions and for educating the public about the wisdom and the timing of proposed costly civic improvements. Significantly, during the first half of the century, these master plans were invariably privately commissioned and financed.[18]

FRAGMENTED URBAN SPACE AND THE ROOTS OF PLANNING

Of all the late-nineteenth-century American cities, perhaps Pittsburgh most defied the progressives' ideal image of the rationally ordered metropolis. Marked by steep hills, cleaved by deep ravines and hollows, the city had long ago brashly surrendered its once verdant riverbanks to iron, steel, and glass industrialism. For most city families, acrid smoke, raining soot, and the din and deafening roar of heavy industrialism constantly assaulted the senses. A cluttered downtown of impressive public buildings, department stores, and offices clearly emerged after the Civil War, and on the urban periphery a world of middle-class gentility arose in juxtaposition to gritty, industrial suburban mill towns such as Braddock and Homestead.

Modernization and rapid urban growth brought a flood of immigrants into the industrial city and its suburban mill towns, differentiating and segregating urban and regional space. A patchwork of discrete neighborhoods unfolded, politically nurtured enclaves where ethnic loyalties trumped working-class consciousness and solidarity. Like New York's Lower East Side, Chicago's South Side, and Philadelphia's Poplar Area, Pittsburgh's Strip and Hill districts, for example, became home to a jumble of Irish, Jewish, Polish, and African American enclaves. Pittsburgh's suburban middle class viewed these regions as a moral underworld, home to the dreaded dangerous classes.[19]

A riot of telegraph and telephone lines, transit catenary, and the poles used to carry them, cluttered the air space over city streets whose surfaces were crisscrossed with the trackage of a myriad of trolley companies. Horsecars, cable cars, and trolleys vied with drays, carts, wagons, and harried pedestrians for lean space on the city's narrow streets. In the subterranean world beneath city streets lay a tangle of water, gas, and sewer lines, some lost or forgotten as rival utility companies were bankrupted or merged.[20]

Adding to this melee above and below, downtown streets already tightly packed with shops and businesses teemed with makeshift stalls and peddlers' carts. In 1895 some enterprising merchants, starved for space, hawked produce from freight cars parked on Liberty Avenue. Taprooms, saloons, brothels, and cheap theaters spiced the whole affair with moral ambiguity, which deeply affronted the hair-trigger religious sensibilities of middle-class social reformers. While industry-driven modernization intensified the civic and commercial use of urban space and spawned increasingly segregated communities, it likewise produced more highly specialized professions, organizations, and families, contributing to what historian Robert Wiebe has called the "segmented society."[21]

Political machines towered among the specialized organizations that flourished in the late-nineteenth-century city. According to historian Seymour Mandelbaum, the urban political machine may have functionally bridged the widening urban social gulfs and ethnic rifts that marked the boundaries of the fragmented metropolis. Pyramid structured with a base of ward heelers and precinct captains, the machine hierarchy ascended upward through lieutenants and to the city boss himself. Erected upon ward loyalties, it exquisitely epitomized urban segmentation.

Pittsburgh's Christopher Magee modeled his machine on New York's Tweed Ring. He emphasized public works and, rife with graft, abetted urban fragmentation. As in New York, most of the public works—sewer lines and water mains, paved streets, transit lines, and park projects—benefited the developing middle-class, tree-lined neighborhoods, where bosses harvested a fortune in inflated contracts and lucrative land speculations. This special purpose planning—despite the fact that some of it, like Pittsburgh's Schenley Park, Highland Park, and Grant Boulevard, represented signal contributions to the nineteenth-century built environment—lacked the systematic design and comprehensive features sufficient to make it modern, professional city planning. For Boss Magee and his chief cohort, William Flinn, as for his engineer and chief of public works, Edward Manning Bigelow, decision making remained ad hoc. Despite Bigelow's comprehensive approach to park and boulevard development, he never conceptualized the city as a whole. Moreover, bossism neglected absent or decaying infrastructure in poor and working-class neighborhoods. Machine politicians responded to ward demands only when politically, not socially, motivated. Although bosses "got things done," contract inflation, bribes, payoffs (boodle), and other forms of political graft proved costly; for reformers in an age of millennial religious fervor, the linkage of bossism to brothels, gambling, and the liquor evil easily entrapped public works spending with bossism in the larger deadly web of moral corruption.[22]

THE COMPLEX ORIGINS OF PROGRESSIVE PLANNING IN PITTSBURGH

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Pittsburgh progressives, outraged by threats of violence, smoke, and sheer ugliness, rallied to impose order on the dangerously mottled industrial city. These reformers added a new, powerful voice to the urban conversation shaping urban form and culture. They gave a face as well to the novel force of mass consumption reconfiguring urban space in the twentieth century. For elites and the "New Middle Class" retrospectively, the late-nineteenth-century urban world had appeared harrowing. Such evidence of social disorder, the imminence of Armageddon, only served to heighten their commitment to moral environmentalism. Seemingly in sympathy with middle-class aspirations, Pittsburgh's chief of Public Works, Edward Bigelow, beseeched greater control over land use. He called for coordinating new subdivisions, and, echoing Frederick Law Olmsted Sr., Bigelow lent his voice to those exhorting the need to develop large, accessible city parks. Under Bigelow, Pittsburgh, like Buffalo and Boston, undertook significant special purpose planning ventures, including the development of a magnificent park system with boulevards and a zoo. Along with Andrew Carnegie, Bigelow also laid the foundation for the city to create in the Oakland section a cultural and educational center.

However, in the face of urban disorder, some reformers seized upon more radical visionary schemes seeking to restore the simplicity of an imagined republican past. Henry George, whom many Pittsburghers embraced, espoused the single tax; others invoked Christian charity and the eschatological hope of a coming Christian commonwealth. Pittsburgh's Rev. George Hodges, like Marsh and many other reformers nationally, sought answers abroad at various French expositions or toured elsewhere in Europe and spoke excitedly about *la reform sociale,* and about British socialist housing experiments. These travelers, like Hodges, and like their many compatriots in the progressive reform movement, viewed the city as a mosaic of specialized, functionally integrated space.[23]

The environmental-reformist vision of the well-designed, park-served, and sanitary city captivated the nation's imagination in 1893 when Chicago hosted the World's Columbian Exposition. In the wake of the fair, in Pittsburgh as in hundreds of other cities, large and small, middle-class men and women enlisted in civic housekeeping, municipal art, settlement house, philanthropic housing, antismoke, and other social reform movements. Members of these movements marched with social gospelers, teetotalers, business boosters, and others in a crusade to smash the corrupt alliance of bossism, vice, and big business, and to restore democracy, civic virtue, and moral order to the city.[24]

The roots of planning in Pittsburgh, therefore, lay not only buried deep in the soil of nineteenth-century urban reform, and in an emergent professionalism imbued with science and efficiency, but also in moralism and civic righteousness, in the firm belief that the city's evil ring blocked any hope for a new moral order and the creation of a wholesome, well-scrubbed, civically righteous city. From this vibrant millennial progressivism sprang the vision of a "Greater Pittsburgh," the "city as a whole," which would embody in one glorious womb not only the economically and spiritually reborn city but also the whole region. From it, as well, came the seed of the Pittsburgh Survey, and the demand for active public intervention for social justice and against immigrant poverty and squalid tenements. And, finally, from it sprang the impetus for modern comprehensive planning.[25]

Planning historians, including those who embed the origins of planning in the nineteenth-century conversation about urban progress and city rivalry, agree that the Progressive movement launched modern, comprehensive urban planning. Historians, nevertheless, differ about the source of this early-twentieth-century planning ethos, which by 1910 had produced a host of city plans and clear evidence of a budding planning profession. Some behold this progressive planning movement more rooted in settlement house work with its passion for social work, for efficiency and professional standards, and for mapping and policing the use of urban space. Others espy business interests pursuing economic goals through planning. Some see social elites in the vanguard, seeking to rationalize and discipline urban space on behalf of social order and economic efficiency, the goal of permanence and the stabilization of urban land values made shaky by the bewildering pace of urban change. In this interpretation, the advent of zoning (New York City enacted the first American zoning ordinance in 1916) marked the triumph of business's desire to "put everything in its place." A final group of historians sees technological changes in transportation involved. Progressives disdained boss-tainted, inefficient mass transit and embraced the automobile. However, the automobile exacerbated street congestion and boosted the demand for professional planning to unclog urban arteries. Meanwhile, scientific-minded settlement house workers, physicians, housers, and architects gathered volumes of data about slum conditions, smoke, crime, and delinquency, all affirming that the sordid, overcrowded urban environment thwarted immigrant adjustment and contributed to the social and economic costs of urban life.[26]

Peterson, on the other hand, traces the origins of modern, professional city planning to social and aesthetic goals of architects, landscape architects, lawyers, and others enthralled by the promise of the Columbian Exposition and the achievement of the McMillan Commission in Washington, D.C. In the early twentieth century, pioneer planners such as Burnham, Olmsted Jr., and Robinson merged park planning and civic art toward a truly comprehensive vision of the organic city, where plans embraced the totality of the city, including its physical as well as it social, economic, and political complexity. From a detailed analysis and understanding of the multitudinous parts would come an orderly, harmonious whole captured in "the plan."[27]

But, as the Pittsburgh case illustrates, by 1910 planning's rigid focus on the plan and on planning as a complex, scientific process aimed at the more efficient management of the city left abandoned Benjamin Marsh's notion of planning as a tool for social betterment, the amelioration of insanitation, the improvement of housing, and the lessening of poverty. Marsh's had been Hodge's and the Pittsburgh Survey's dream of the planned city. Olmsted Jr.'s dethronement of Marsh at the 1910 National Conference on City Planning in Rochester, New York, held the same year that Olmsted undertook his *Main Thoroughfares* plan for Pittsburgh, not only established Olmsted's quintessential role in planning history but also sealed planning's divorce from housing until the 1930s, and confirmed the Steel City's pivotal importance in understanding the planning process and planning history. Pittsburgh became a laboratory, a testing ground for Olmsted Jr.'s theories of "Practical Planning."

The Pittsburgh plan also highlighted the importance of the public-private partnership in planning. Public-private collaboration had existed in Pittsburgh at least as early as the 1890s, when Andrew Carnegie worked in tandem with the city's Public Works director Edward Bigelow on physical and cultural improvements for the Oakland section, a verdant region where philanthropists, planners, and visionaries would later flex their imaginations about better urban form. That collaboration, like the conversation, remained loosely structured. More formally defined partnerships blossomed in the Progressive Era as a means by which businessmen, lawyers, social workers, and other elite and middle-class professionals demanded a larger role in a so-called urban conversation that, they believed, had been dominated in the nineteenth century by boodlers, ward heelers, and other political "hacks." Dedicated to the values of science and efficiency, progressives like Pittsburgh's Fred Bigger after 1915 crafted a new, purified vision of the urban polity, one that necessitated reconfiguring the metaphorical table and narrowing the conversation to the academically credentialed and enlightened few—planners, engineers, social scientists, lawyers, and their business and political elite allies. Although public-sector progressives like Bigger now occupied a prominent place in urban decision making, and in the 1920s forged strong partnerships with business-dominated organizations such as the Citizens Committee on the City Plan (CCCP), Pittsburgh illustrates that politicians like William Magee still retained the power to make the final decisions.

This seminal era of progressive-professional planning, 1910–1940, comprises the centerpiece of this study. In this era, voluntary or private planning organizations such as the CCCP worked in concert with newly formed and legally sanctioned public planning agencies to systematize and codify rules for city development. With these rules, professional planners—not political cronies or the whimsy of the marketplace—would guide the rational ordering of urban and regional space.[28]

The effort herein to probe more fully the planning experience as it unfolded in Pittsburgh discloses that during the crucial decade of the 1920s, this planning professionalism finally and firmly rooted itself in Pittsburgh. This imprinting occurred despite the host of obstacles or "frictions" or "limitations" that dogged and harried the fledgling planning profession and throughout the period obstructed efforts to implement major features of the comprehensive planning process. In fact, the obstacles to implementation enshrouded the process and obscured planning's successes. Early jurisdictional battles, the political warfare between city and suburbs, Americans' visceral distrust of government, the requirements of the automobile, and one of the greatest frictions or obstacles, the fixed nature of urban land uses and the political and social power sealing the permanence of those uses, severely addled youthful city planners such as Pittsburgh's Frederick Bigger.

It was the Olmsted Jr. and Bigger ethos of scientific, practical planning, absorbed from progressivism, that triumphed, especially the scientific survey and the collection and mapping of demographic and topographic data. The vigilant monitoring of street widths, subdivision plats, building heights and setbacks, and other building activity made "mole work" the specialty of the profession. Moreover, by the 1920s planning in Pittsburgh focused disproportionately on the details of zoning, of street alignments, of lot and arterial plans, convinced that urban order itself wrought social benefits: good streets and boulevards, and good parks and playgrounds, that is, made good people.[29]

Led by business organizations, architects, and civic bodies, prior to World War II Pittsburgh legitimized planning and made it a recognized routine public sector activity. Amid the urban economic crisis of the Great Depression, New Dealers nationalized the planning ethos and, as historian Mark Gelfand long ago demonstrated, forged a crucial urban-federal planning alliance that by the 1950s provided the massive funding for large-scale urban renewal and renaissance. In fact, as we argue in chapter 8, the federal assumption of much of the financial burden of city development, through public works, work relief, housing, and other New Deal programs, further narrowed the urban conversation. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when bonds funded development costs, the conversation had been somewhat inclusive. In the 1930s, with Washington holding the purse strings, action-oriented civic bodies such as the Pittsburgh Regional Planning Association, in partnership with city and federal officials, seized the reins of the conversation from those professional planners like Bigger, who by 1943 increasingly found themselves overwhelmed by planning details.

The jewels of Pittsburgh's historic renaissance, Point Park and Gateway Towers, which rose up from the site at the Point cleared of slums, rail yards, and warehouses, are a tribute to the strength of that partnership, but also to the limitations of city planning in prewar Pittsburgh. Indeed, this study is equally an exploration of those limitations. While Pittsburgh evidences a considerable record of planning success prior to the war, in 1943, the year this study ends, other facts, including slum housing, traffic-clogged downtown streets, unfinished projects, and stacks of dusty and dog-eared plans, attested to the durability of political fragmentation and other obstacles to planning, despite the triumph of the planning ethos nationally as well as locally. The glitzy towers that shimmered within blocks of the sullen Hill District revealed Pittsburgh planning's preference for physical over social goals. Housing issues had no place in the city's planning agenda.

Over time, however, limitations aside, Pittsburgh planning had profound consequences for the urban environment in terms of streets, bridges, and buildings, but also parks, playgrounds, and tree planting. Pittsburgh planners sought to create an accessible city, to untangle the automobile-clogged urban core, to unite the sundered parts of the fragmented metropolis and build the Greater Pittsburgh. Notwithstanding the existence of persistent social, economic, and political barriers, including chronic jurisdictional battles and other forms of fragmentation, by 1943 planners had left an important and enviable legacy.