

Community Development: 1946 – 1959 in Phoenix By Sarah Schenck

Community Building and Civic Life

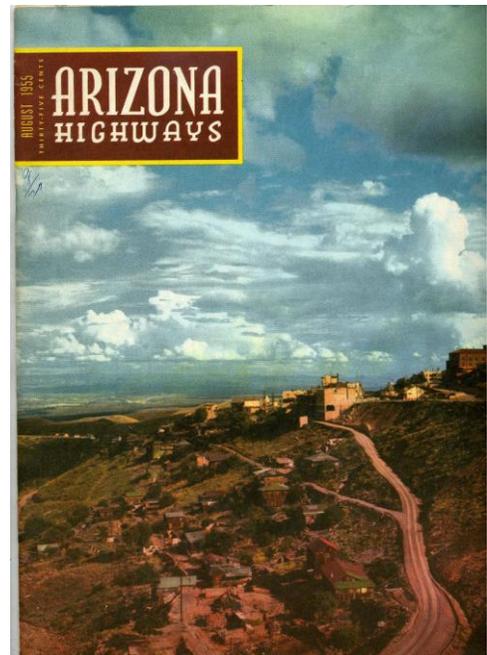
World War II was a dividing point in the history of Phoenix development as it drastically transformed the city in size and economy. However, some continuity linked prewar and postwar, as seen with the city's early development that stemmed from cooperative community planning plus effective lobbying to obtain federal funds. This continued after the war, as increased spending provided new development opportunities and taught Phoenix leaders more about planning and working with federal government (VanderMeer, 2010).

July of 1949 brought a new era of city governance and politics with the creation of the Charter Government Committee after anger at political manipulation, factionalism, fiscal maladministration and allegations of corruption escalated into its formation (VanderMeer, 2010). The new committee would select a slate of candidates for city office, and determine city funding priorities by creating citywide committees comprised of community voices from those active in service clubs, city boards, and volunteer organizations.

The Phoenix Chamber of Commerce, Maricopa County and the City of Phoenix exemplified the power of public-private cooperation in the mid 1950s when they joined forces to fund advertising campaigns, particularly with *Arizona Highways* magazine, to stimulate the economy by creating a national draw that brought tourism to Phoenix.

The Built Environment

In 1948, the past of electric streetcars came to an end as they were phased out while city buses and the raging new trend of personal automobiles swept the city. A major renovation of Hotel San Carlos took place in 1955 and the opening of the Phoenix Art Museum occurred in 1959, however little could stop suburbanization from taking its toll on the center of the city. Rapid growth resulted in economic decline for Downtown as postwar boomers sought a new life in the city's outer reaches. With the Federal Housing Administration and Veterans Administration providing mortgage loan guarantees, the population sprawled and cheaper infrastructure and subdivisions quickly sprouted up to accommodate the masses. In 1957, Phoenix's first shopping mall, Park Central Shopping Center, opened at Central Avenue and Osborn Street with 34 stores, sounding a death knell for Downtown's merchants. Goldwater's relocated there and J.C. Penney later followed suit (Davies, 2009).



Community Assets

The loss of bases and airfields in Arizona after the war was a blow to the economy, but postwar Phoenix didn't fail to promote its value as a destination for tourists and health seekers alike with its economy that included agriculture, wholesale distribution and retail sales; and a place with amenities suitable for families. Views about the natural environment and how to create a pleasing built environment had changed very little, which continued to bring migration to the city (VanderMeer, 2010). Economic capital additionally took shape in form of a combination of electronic and aerospace manufacturing and military spending. These provided large scale economies to match the metropolis's burgeoning population.

In 1946, Eugene C. Pulliam undertook a major community asset when he bought *The Arizona Republic*. He went on to wield great influence over everything from city government reform to freeway construction (Davies, 2009).

A public-private partnership was the key to community building in the postwar vision. The government recognized that building affordable housing and attractive neighborhoods depended on efficient city services, which required creating an effective political and governmental system. For the city to attract and keep an educated workforce and to enrich the quality of community life, it needed to improve its culture and living styles. This was the rationale for cooperative decision making and an openness to talented newcomers that proved essential to the creation of a new Phoenix (VanderMeer, 2010).

The dramatic population growth of Phoenix also impacted an essential asset to the community – its water. Growing numbers called for a larger water supply with an increase in pipelines, pumping stations, and treatment plants. This came in the form of an agreement with the Salt River Water Users Association in 1952, and by 1959 the Salt River Project which provided 85 percent of the city's water needs (VanderMeer, 2010).

Community Challenges

The continuing issue of brief tenure of city managers and political strife was one of the major community challenges postwar due to a serious financial crisis that required an increase in city revenues in 1947. At the same time, concerns about cracking down on prostitution arose which led to a division in the Greater Phoenix bloc and began a period of harsh political conflict and escalating factionalism (VanderMeer, 2010). However, this was later solved by the creation of the Charter Government Committee.

The Phoenix public transportation system and congestion from the increase in vehicles was another serious concern of the era due to enthusiasm for cars, the city's sprawling and increasingly low density character, and flawed understanding about the connection between transportation, population, and various economic and ecological issues (VanderMeer, 2010). The expansion of the metropolis also unearthed problems with traffic management and road maintenance as the city stretched outward.

Decisions over sewage treatment as well as additional water supplies and distribution brought Phoenicians together by 1960 as they worked with neighboring cities to determine future plans. This human capital not only aided the city's economic and social policy goals, but also forced community members to think outside of political boundaries (VanderMeer, 2010).

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