

**Urban Triage in Cleveland and St. Louis**

by

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## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iii
Introduction.....	1
Urban Triage in Theory.....	4
“Classic” urban triage.....	5
“Narrow” urban triage: planned shrinkage.....	10
“Broad” urban triage.....	13
Urban Triage in Practice.....	17
St. Louis.....	18
Cleveland.....	33
Case Analysis.....	42
Conclusion.....	46
Bibliography.....	47

## **Abstract**

This paper examines the historical record of “urban triage,” a controversial planning policy that called for the rehabilitation of areas in the early stages of decline over those in greater need, with the goal of stabilizing the greatest part of the city with the least resources. Similar policies are being proposed today in response to enduring population loss and fiscal crisis in cities like Youngstown, Flint, and Detroit, but few contemporary planners are aware of the previous cases or the body of planning literature that arose in response to them. Using planning records, newspaper accounts, and interviews with planners involved in the cases, this paper first defines urban triage, situating the policy as a response to a deepening fiscal and urban crisis, cutbacks in federal aid, and the transition from categorical federal grants to block grants. It then analyzes the challenges planners faced, practically and politically, in their efforts to turn urban triage into policy in St. Louis and Cleveland. It argues that urban triage was distinct from policies of urban renewal or planned shrinkage and could be justified theoretically in terms of both efficiency and equity. However, in practice, the difficulty of implementing urban triage appears to have prevented the realization of either goal.

## Introduction

Since 1975, when “urban triage” first entered the lexicon of urban planning, the idea has generated considerable praise, protest, and confusion. As first defined by urban scholar Anthony Downs, urban triage was an implementation strategy for the Community Development Block Grant program. In order to make the most of scarce funds and stop the spread of blight, Downs thought cities should prioritize the rehabilitation of areas in the early stages of decline over those in greater need.<sup>1</sup> Controversial in its own right, the term came to symbolize much more. While many planners saw a modified form of triage as an efficient strategy for dispensing federal funding, others denounced it as unfair and unnecessary.<sup>2</sup> Other critics, seeing larger patterns of inequality at play, equated urban triage to urban renewal, benign neglect, and planned shrinkage, arguing its effects were both pernicious and pervasive.<sup>3</sup> By the 1980s, the term had largely fallen out of use, but today it is making a comeback. Few planners are familiar with urban triage by name, but

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Downs, “Using the Lessons of Experience to Allocate Resources in the Community Development Program,” in *Recommendations for Community Development Planning: Proceedings of the HUD/RERC Workshops on Local Urban Renewal and Neighborhood Preservation* (Chicago: Real Estate Research Corporation, 1975), 18-21.

<sup>2</sup> Richard P. Nathan, et al., *Block Grants for Community Development* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1977), 302-332; and Peter Marcuse, Peter Medoff, and Andrea Pereira, “Triage as Urban Policy,” *Social Policy* 12, no. 3 (Winter 1982).

<sup>3</sup> Conrad Weiler, “Urban Euthanasia for Fun and Profit,” in *Neighborhood Policy and Planning*, ed. Phillip L. Clay and Robert M. Hollister (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1983); James Kyung-Jin Lee, *Urban Triage: Race and Fictions of Multiculturalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 2; Deborah Wallace and Rodrick Wallace, *A Plague on Your Houses: How New York Was Burned Down and National Public Health Crumbled* (New York: Verso, 1998), 24; and John T. Metzger, “Planned Abandonment: The Neighborhood Life-Cycle Theory and National Urban Policy,” *Housing Policy Debate* 11, no. 1 (2000): 7-40.

its logic has reappeared in targeting policies in cities like Youngstown, Flint, and Detroit, reigniting the debate over its meaning, merit, and morality.<sup>4</sup>

This paper seeks to separate fact from fiction by examining the historical record of urban triage. First it clarifies the many meanings of the term, distinguishing “classic” urban triage from other policies that have been called urban triage by proponents and critics. Then, using planning records, newspaper articles, and interviews with planners involved in the cases, it analyzes the challenges planners faced, practically and politically, in their efforts to turn urban triage into policy in St. Louis and Cleveland.

The paper argues that “classic” urban triage, as advanced by Downs and as applied in the cases, was distinct from policies of urban renewal or planned shrinkage and could, in theory, be used to advance both efficiency and equity goals. Yet it proved difficult to implement. Urban triage ran counter to the logic of ward-based political systems, which demanded investment in every neighborhood, and to the spirit of the nascent neighborhood movement, which saw all historic neighborhoods as capable of grassroots rehabilitation, given the proper support. To critics, urban triage seemed to foreclose the possibility that majority black or Latino neighborhoods, which were often the most severely distressed, were capable or worthy of revitalization. Rhetorically, the term “urban triage” also came to symbolize existing policies that conveyed advantages to whites and the affluent at the expense of racial minorities and the poor. In the face of

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<sup>4</sup> For recent discussion of triage-like policies, see Robert A. Beauregard, “Strategic Thinking for Distressed Neighborhoods,” in *The City After Abandonment*, ed. Margaret Dewar and June Thomas (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 268-288; Dale E. Thomson, “Strategic, Geographic Targeting of Housing and Community Development Resources: A Conceptual Framework and Critical Review,” *Urban Affairs Review* 43, no. 5 (2008): 629-662; and Dale E. Thomson, “Strategic Geographic Targeting in Community Development: Examining the Congruence of Political, Institutional, and Technical Factors,” *Urban Affairs Review* 47, no. 4 (2011): 564-594.

such criticism, public officials rejected urban triage as unfair and politically unworkable, but leaders in shrinking cities today are reconsidering its logic as they recognize the need to strategically target scarce resources to spark and sustain a durable revitalization.

## Urban Triage in Theory

To understand the history of urban triage, one must first disambiguate the varied meanings of the term. Kleniewski identifies at least three definitions in the planning literature, which she terms “classic,” “narrow,” and “broad.”<sup>5</sup> The classic definition is the subject of this paper. It is the strategy articulated by Anthony Downs and proposed in somewhat different forms by planners in St. Louis and Cleveland in the 1970s. The narrow definition is better known as “planned shrinkage.” In contrast to the classic definition, the narrow definition implies the immediate withdrawal of services and the removal of residents from neighborhoods in severe decline in order to reduce the city’s costs. The broad definition of urban triage encompasses any urban policy that privileges areas in lesser need over those in greater need, whether intended or not. Critics have equated these three definitions, arguing that all forms of triage promote efficiency and reduce equity by denying governmental assistance to the geographic areas that need it most.<sup>6</sup> This paper rejects that definition, arguing that classic urban triage is distinct from the narrow and broad definitions. Classic urban triage can either support or undermine equity goals, depending on how the policy is formulated and implemented.

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<sup>5</sup> Nancy Kleniewski, “Triage and Urban Planning: A Case Study of Philadelphia,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 10, no. 4 (1986): 565-566.

<sup>6</sup> Marcuse, “Triage As Urban Policy,” 34.



*“Classic” urban triage*

The term “triage” comes from the French *trier*, meaning to pick or cull.<sup>7</sup> It first appeared in English in the 1700s in an agricultural context. To triage meant to sort goods by quality, usually into three classes: best, middling, and worst.<sup>8</sup> During World War I, triage came to mean the sorting of the wounded for medical care on the basis of efficiency rather than need.<sup>9</sup> Unable to treat everyone, doctors sorted incoming patients into one of three categories: those with minor injuries who could go without immediate treatment; those seriously injured who might survive if treated immediately; and those gravely wounded and unlikely to survive, regardless of treatment. In an effort to save the most lives, doctors gave priority attention to the second group—those most likely to benefit from treatment—rather than the third group—those in greatest need.

In the 1970s, this definition of triage was transmuted first to social policy and then to urban policy. A 1974 essay in *Time* argued that foreign food aid should be allocated not strictly on the basis of need but where it could do the most good—countries that had sufficient infrastructure and stability to distribute the needed aid effectively.<sup>10</sup> It called this triage. In 1975, Anthony Downs, a renowned scholar of urban policy and public administration who was then serving as president of the Real Estate Research Corporation in Chicago, became the first to apply the metaphor to the urban crisis.<sup>11</sup> He likened the city to a battlefield, with dozens of neighborhoods in need of urgent care but with too few resources available to save them all. In order to save the greatest share of the city as possible, he argued, policymakers had to strategize, giving priority to those

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<sup>7</sup> “Triage,” *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Downs, “Using the Lessons of Experience,” 18.

<sup>10</sup> “What to Do: Costly Choices,” *Time* 104, no. 20 (Nov. 11, 1974): 102.

<sup>11</sup> Downs, “Using the Lessons of Experience,” 18-19.

areas experiencing slight decline, which could be stabilized with lower-cost interventions, over those that were already severely abandoned, which some planners then thought could only be saved through total clearance and redevelopment.

His recommendations were framed as an implementation strategy for the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program.<sup>12</sup> The CDBG program had been established the year prior by Title I of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974.<sup>13</sup> It consolidated eight categorical programs—Model Cities, urban renewal, open space, urban beautification, historic preservation, neighborhood facilities, and water and sewer—into a single block grant, giving cities the authority to decide which program goals to emphasize and where. The legislation specified that cities should give “maximum feasible priority to activities which will benefit low and moderate-income families or aid in the prevention of slums and blight,” but the proportion of funds that went toward low-income versus moderate-income families was not specified, giving cities considerable flexibility in how they allocated the grants.<sup>14</sup>

The new law was representative of President Richard Nixon’s “New Federalism,” which devolved federal authority to local governments and shifted power from the central cities of the Northeast and Midwest to their suburbs and the Sun Belt.<sup>15</sup> Previously the main beneficiaries of federal urban aid, Rust Belt cities lost funding in the new allocation. This transfer of benefits occurred despite growing need in older central cities, which in the early 1970s experienced accelerating population loss and job loss. Unable to address

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>13</sup> For a full discussion of the Community Development Block Grant program, see Nathan et al., *Block Grants for Community Development*, 16-74.

<sup>14</sup> Nathan et al., *Block Grants for Community Development*, 302.

<sup>15</sup> Roger Biles, *The Fate of Cities: Urban America and the Federal Government, 1945-2000* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2011), 160.

the full scope of the urban crisis with limited federal aid or their own resources, older central cities were forced to invest strategically and partner with the private sector to leverage scarce funds.<sup>16</sup> Knowing that cities could not redevelop every neighborhood in need, Downs advised investing on the basis of triage, focusing resources on the neighborhoods that could be saved most efficiently in order to produce the greatest impact.

Doing so would require planners to categorize the health of neighborhoods just as doctors categorized the health of patients.<sup>17</sup> To determine whether a neighborhood was healthy, ill, or terminal, Downs developed a classification system based on five indicators of neighborhood decline: decreasing socioeconomic status; ethnic change from white to black or Latino occupancy; physical deterioration and decay of housing and infrastructure; increased pessimism about the area's future among residents, investors, and public officials; and economic disinvestment, leading to tax foreclosure and abandonment.<sup>18</sup> Based on the values of these criteria, neighborhoods could be classified into one of five stages. Stage 1 neighborhoods were labeled "healthy." These areas were well maintained, middle or upper class, and, at the time, almost always predominately white. Stage 2 and Stage 3 neighborhoods were labeled "in-between." These areas were beginning to show signs of neglect but could be restored to Stage 1 status through home

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<sup>16</sup> June Manning Thomas, *Redevelopment and Race: Planning a Finer City in Postwar Detroit* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1997), 138-139; and Anthony Downs, "A Basic Perspective Concerning the Community Development Program," in *Recommendations for Community Development Planning: Proceedings of the HUD/RERC Workshops on Local Urban Renewal and Neighborhood Preservation* (Chicago: Real Estate Research Corporation, 1976), 14-19.

<sup>17</sup> Downs, "Using the Lessons of Experience"; and Anthony Downs, "The Role of Neighborhoods in the Mature Metropolis," in *The Mature Metropolis*, ed. Charles L. Leven (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1978), 214-216.

<sup>18</sup> Downs, "Using the Lessons of Experience," 2-4.

repair, code enforcement, and other rehabilitation programs. Stage 4 and Stage 5 neighborhoods were labeled “deteriorated.” These areas were marked by high rates of crime, high rates of poverty, and widespread vacancy and abandonment. Once a neighborhood had fallen to Stage 4 or Stage 5, Downs argued, nothing short of total clearance and redevelopment could return it to “healthy” Stage 1 status.

This classification system reflected the conventional wisdom among real estate officials and planners that neighborhoods experienced natural and sequential decline as houses “filtered” down over time.<sup>19</sup> According to this theory, new housing in the United States was built almost exclusively for the middle and upper classes at the metropolitan fringe. As new housing was constructed, upper-income families moved outward, leaving behind aging housing stock in the central city that was passed down to white, middle-income families, and then, as the neighborhood declined and maintenance costs mounted, to landlords who subdivided the properties and rented the units to lower-income families and people of color. At this stage, further decline became inevitable due to redlining—the denial of loans to neighborhoods inhabited by people of color. The arrival of blacks or Latinos to an area was taken as a sign that it had reached the final stage in its life cycle and that further decline was inevitable; banks denied loans to homeowners on this basis, preventing them from upgrading their homes to stave off decline.<sup>20</sup> Unable to increase profits through renovation, due to lack of financing and lack of demand from higher-

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<sup>19</sup> Downs, “A Basic Perspective,” 2-4. For a disputed critique of Downs’s reliance on the neighborhood life cycle theory and Downs’s response, see John T. Metzger, “Planned Abandonment: The Neighborhood Life-Cycle Theory and National Urban Policy,” *Housing Policy Debate* 11, no. 1 (2000): 7-40; and Anthony Downs, “Comment on John T. Metzger’s ‘Planned Abandonment: The Neighborhood Life-Cycle Theory and National Urban Policy,’” *Housing Policy Debate* 11, no. 1 (2000): 41-54.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 43-44.

income tenants, landlords ceased to maintain their properties, renting the units until they were no longer habitable and then abandoning them. After this final stage of the life cycle, cities acquired the abandoned buildings, demolished them, and redeveloped the land for new purposes in a process that was called “slum clearance” or “urban renewal.”

Downs did not support the policies that produced the “filtering” process, but he saw its outcome—neighborhoods in distinct but definable life cycle stages—as an empirical reality, and one that planners had to address by tailoring policies. In areas with slight decline, for example, code enforcement could be an effective tool to prevent the spread of blight. Pressuring property owners to do maintenance would help keep up the character of the neighborhood and ensure further investment. But in areas that had already experienced severe blight and vacancy—where renting property was only marginally profitable—code enforcement might only accelerate decline by encouraging owners to abandon their properties. In these highly blighted areas, Downs believed, redevelopment would have to be preceded by partial or total clearance of blight through demolition. Like proponents of urban renewal, Downs assumed that badly deteriorated neighborhoods could only be revived through total reconstruction. Even then, redevelopment would only succeed if the blighted area were adjacent to a more stable neighborhood—isolated urban renewal projects often failed. That made “slum clearance” a costly and risky proposition.<sup>21</sup> The most effective strategy, Downs believed, would be to concentrate spending in areas with only moderate decline, where a minor infusion of resources might lead to significant improvement by restoring investor confidence and sparking private actors to contribute to the upgrading of the neighborhood.

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<sup>21</sup> Downs, “Using the Lessons of Experience,” 13-18.

Yet realizing that politicians would be under pressure to spend funds everywhere, Downs developed spending recommendations for all three neighborhood types. Healthy neighborhoods would receive the least funding; only low-cost, high-visibility projects, like planting trees and providing new street furniture, would be approved if politically necessary. More funding would be directed to very deteriorated areas, but only for demolition and the provision of social welfare. In these areas, gradual abandonment would continue, but the city would maintain public services and increase social welfare along the lines of the Model Cities program. The greatest share of funds would be targeted to in-between areas for physical redevelopment, where public spending could not only reduce blight but also induce further investment from the private sector, thereby maximizing the value of the public's investment.<sup>22</sup> Downs called this three-part strategy, balancing the desire for efficiency with political need, "modified triage."<sup>23</sup> Kleniewski later termed it "classic" urban triage—the prototypical case.<sup>24</sup>

*"Narrow" urban triage: planned shrinkage*

While Downs was the first to define urban triage, his is not the most common definition in the literature. The term urban triage has been used most often to refer to "planned shrinkage," a distinct policy that Kleniewski has called "narrow" urban triage based on its similar logic. Whereas "classic" urban triage called for the gradual clearance of the most deteriorated neighborhoods, eased by the maintenance of basic services and increases in social welfare to the remaining residents, planned shrinkage called for the immediate clearance of deteriorated areas through mandatory relocation and the

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 18-21.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>24</sup> Kleniewski, "Triage and Urban Planning," 565.

withdrawal of public services. The primary goal was not to maximize the impact of redevelopment. Instead it was retrenchment. Planned shrinkage aimed to reduce the effective footprint of the city; cleared land would be fenced off and withdrawn from the market, enabling the city to cut services and infrastructure to the area. The savings could be redirected to in-between neighborhoods, increasing the quality and concentration of services provided there. In-between areas would also benefit from an influx of relocated residents, increasing density and shoring up the tax base.

The lead advocate for this policy was New York's housing director, Roger Starr. In a famous *New York Times Magazine* article, published in 1976, Starr embraced the planned shrinkage of the South Bronx and Brownsville, two rapidly deteriorating New York neighborhoods. Given the severity of New York's budget crisis, and the stunning pace of abandonment in those neighborhoods, Starr thought the city should immediately cease all efforts to rehabilitate them. Instead, he proposed intentionally accelerating the decline of both by offering incentives to the remaining residents to relocate to other neighborhoods. Doing so would enable the government to cut off services to the vacated areas, realizing a cost savings, and let the land sit idle, perhaps for decades, until economic conditions improved sufficiently to justify their redevelopment. At the same time, Starr hoped planned shrinkage would directly benefit other areas of the city by sparing them service cutbacks and by adding to their density by relocating displaced residents.<sup>25</sup> As George Will, writing approvingly of Starr's plan in the *Washington Post*, put it, "Parts of the city may have to be allowed to die, so that the rest of it can live."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Joseph P. Fried, "City's Housing Administrator Proposes 'Planned Shrinkage' of Some Slums," *New York Times*, February 3, 1976, 35.

<sup>26</sup> George F. Will, "Selective 'Urban Death' For New York?," *The Washington Post*, November 11, 1976.

Another proponent, urban planning professor William C. Baer, argued that shrinkage was necessary and salutary whether it was planned or not. Like Downs and Starr, Baer believed that urban neighborhoods passed through discernible life stages over time, but he denied that all neighborhoods could be revitalized. “There is a refusal to admit that older cities or neighborhoods can die,” he wrote. “They may be ‘sick’ or ‘deteriorating,’ but the belief is nevertheless held by expert and politician alike that with proper treatment these areas will recover to survive forever.”<sup>27</sup> Baer disagreed, arguing that the inevitable, natural, and final stage through which all neighborhoods must pass was death. “Urban death—or at least neighborhood death—in the nation’s cities is coming to pass. It may be hindered by expertise, detoured by cajolery, impeded by charismatic leadership, and delayed by simple faith; but it will come. It is an event inevitably linked to the preceding urban growth and development.”<sup>28</sup> He concluded that “inefficient triage”—that is, de facto triage, occurring unplanned through the status quo of abandonment—was the most practical vehicle for achieving neighborhood euthanasia, the just and necessary end, he felt, to dying urban areas.<sup>29</sup>

Economist James Heilbrun and lawyer Susan Hedges Patton, by contrast, sought to achieve the same end as Starr—the consolidation of neighborhoods—through more equitable means. In 1979, Heilbrun proposed a three-part program to achieve what he termed “neighborhood consolidation”: the federal government would finance housing allowances to enable displaced residents to relocate within the city to redevelopment areas; the city would compensate displaced residents and property owners with revenue from a special tax on redevelopment areas meant to capture the increase in value from the

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<sup>27</sup> William C. Baer, “On the Death of Cities,” *The Public Interest* 45 (Fall 1976): 3.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.



influx of residents and capital; and a new local public body would be created to plan and run the program.<sup>30</sup> In 1981, Patton, then a law clerk on the Sixth Circuit of the United States Court of Appeals, proposed an alternative plan in the *Buffalo Law Review* that would use land banking to obtain properties in vacated areas and hold them until redevelopment was both prudent and profitable.<sup>31</sup> Both these schemes endorsed the principle of clearing neighborhoods in order to reduce the effective footprint of the city and achieve cost savings, but tried to do so with minimum harm to displaced residents.

### *“Broad” urban triage*

Other commentators have used urban triage as a catchall term to signify any urban policy that benefits white, middle-income neighborhoods at the expense of low-income, nonwhite neighborhoods, despite greater need in the latter. This “broad” definition of urban triage is meant to encapsulate policies said to have the effect of triage, regardless of means or intent. It has been used to denounce policies that preceded the coining of “urban triage” and that followed its rejection. Despite the apparent failure of “classic” and “narrow” policies wherever they were proposed, critics argue that urban triage, in the broadest sense, has been widespread and destructive in application.<sup>32</sup>

Marcuse, Medoff, and Periera define urban triage as “the exclusion of a particular geographic area from service by governmental programs, despite its need for them, on the grounds that the very intensity of those needs make that service in the area inefficient.”

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<sup>30</sup> James Heilbrun, “On the Theory and Policy of Neighborhood Consolidation,” *Journal of the American Planning Association* 45, no. 4 (1979): 417-427.

<sup>31</sup> Susan Hedges Patton, “Fighting Municipal Economic Woes with Planning and Land Use Tools: Land Banking to Promote Urban Shrinkage; A Proposal,” *Buffalo Law Review* 30 (1981): 265-315.

<sup>32</sup> Kleniewski, “Triage and Urban Planning,” 564; and Weiler, “Urban Euthanasia for Fun and Profit,” 169-170.

Urban triage in this sense is often an indirect result of policy. As an example, they cite the allocation of library funding in Los Angeles on the basis of existing reader demand. Because reader demand is highest in affluent areas, the policy has the effect of funding libraries in high-income areas at greater levels than libraries in low-income areas, even though library services are arguably more important for low-income users. In a separate paper, Strickland and Judd offer another example of indirect triage: investment in central business districts rather than distressed neighborhoods.<sup>33</sup> Job growth and a stable tax base may ultimately benefit the poor, but if these long-term priorities come at the expense of community development, low-income residents may suffer in the short term as result of the tradeoff, while business interests will be enriched.

Urban triage has also been used in this broad sense to indict policies that preceded Downs's and Starr's proposals. Critics of planned shrinkage, for example, argue that although Roger Starr's specific recommendations were rejected by city officials, his ideas were already reflected in existing policy.<sup>34</sup> In particular, they argue that the burning of the South Bronx in the mid-1970s could be blamed, in part, on a 1974 RAND report, which the city used to justify the closure of several firehouses in the South Bronx.<sup>35</sup> The authors of the RAND report deny culpability, but it has been widely cited and is the subject of two books, *A Plague on Your Houses: How New York Was Burned Down and National Public Health Crumbled* and *The Fires: How a Computer Formula Burned*

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<sup>33</sup> Donald E. Strickland and Dennis R. Judd, "National Urban Policy and the Shifting Priorities of Inner-City Revitalization," *Journal of Urban Analysis* 7 (Winter 1983): 155-168.

<sup>34</sup> Wallace and Wallace, *A Plague on Your Houses*; and Joe Flood, *The Fires: How a Computer Formula Burned Down New York City—And Determined the Future of American Cities* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2010).

<sup>35</sup> Edward J. Ignall, et al., "Improving the Deployment of New York City Fire Companies" (New York: New York City Rand Institute, June 1974), P-5280.

*Down New York City—And Determined the Future of American Cities.*<sup>36</sup> These books argue that urban triage was the status quo policy of New York City. As Flood puts it, “Starr’s real mistake . . . wasn’t his ideas so much as his candor—the city already had a de facto planned shrinkage policy; Starr just wanted to admit as much and manage it more comprehensively.”<sup>37</sup>

Urban triage has also been used in this broad sense to describe neoliberal urban policies that harmed inner-city racial communities in the 1980s and afterwards. Lee uses urban triage as a synonym for “redevelopment,” David Harvey’s term “organized abandonment,” and Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s term “benign neglect.”<sup>38</sup> Both urban triage and benign neglect, Lee claims, were theses meant “to hasten death for urban communities of color deemed pathological and therefore expendable” and “to justify that principle as a matter of social policy.”<sup>39</sup> Weiler describes urban triage as a ruse for redevelopment and gentrification. “In essence,” he argued, “the triage argument really amounts to the following: inner-city land close to the downtown is or soon will be very valuable both to city governments and to private developers; let us systematically use government to clear it through triage for future private development and at the same time move its present occupants outward to outer-city or suburban locations where it may be argued they will be better off but in any case they will cost the city less than in their present location.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Jan Chaiken, Edward Ignall, Peter Kolesar and Warren Walker, “Response to Communication on RAND-HUD Fire Models,” *Management Science* 26, no. 4 (1980): 422-432; Wallace and Wallace, *A Plague on Your Houses*; and Joe Flood, *The Fires*.

<sup>37</sup> Flood, *The Fires*, 241.

<sup>38</sup> Lee, *Urban Triage*, xxix and 2.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>40</sup> Weiler, “Urban Euthanasia for Fun and Profit,” 174.

These critics saw little difference between classic, narrow, and broad urban triage. Weiler, for example, refers to “triage and its synonyms of planned shrinkage, planned abandonment, planned death, and such,” lumping all of these terms and their proponents, including Downs, Starr, and Baer, together.<sup>41</sup> But as the discussion of Downs’s proposal and the cases will show, “classic” urban triage was a distinct policy that could, at least in theory, be used in the service of efficiency *and* equity, depending on how it was applied.

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<sup>41</sup> Weiler, “Urban Euthanasia for Fun and Profit,” 168.

## Urban Triage in Practice

There are few cases in the planning literature of applied urban triage. An early study of the Community Development Block Grant program found that many cities followed a “modified triage pattern” as part of “a neighborhood conservation and growth strategy designed primarily to prevent urban blight,” but with the exception of Cleveland and St. Louis, the evidence does not point toward an intentional strategy of triage but rather a gradual shift of emphasis as ongoing Urban Renewal and Model Cities era projects were phased out.<sup>42</sup> Kleniewski cites Durham, England and Philadelphia as examples of triage to show that similar policies were proposed prior to the mid-1970s and outside the context of fiscal crisis, but neither case closely matches “classic” urban triage.<sup>43</sup> Schmidt analyzes a case in Milwaukee where planners applied a targeting policy that was influenced by urban triage. She warns that if the criteria for targeting are unfair or based on manipulated data, then neighborhoods will be wrongfully excluded from redevelopment and, in effect, redlined.<sup>44</sup> Finally, Pratter, an author of the so-called

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<sup>42</sup> Nathan et al., *Block Grants for Community Development*, 327-331.

<sup>43</sup> Kleniewski, “Triage and Urban Planning,” 566-575.

<sup>44</sup> Deanna H. Schmidt, “Urban triage: saving the savable neighborhoods in Milwaukee,” *Planning Perspectives* 26, no. 4 (2011): 569-589.

“Team Four Plan” and a proponent of urban triage in St. Louis, discusses the political obstacles that stopped the enactment of an explicit triage policy there in 1975.<sup>45</sup>

This paper adds to this limited set by analyzing contentious attempts to apply urban triage in St. Louis and Cleveland in the 1970s. In St. Louis, “classic” urban triage was proposed twice—first in the progressive 1972 *St. Louis Development Program* and again in the more divisive 1975 “Team Four Plan”—but one can see elements of a triage strategy as far back as the city’s 1947 *Comprehensive Plan* and its 1950s era code enforcement program.<sup>46</sup> In Cleveland, “classic” urban triage was first proposed in the 1975 *Cleveland Policy Planning Report* as part of a package of policies intended to promote equity.<sup>47</sup> Both the St. Louis and the Cleveland cases demonstrate the considerable barriers to implementing urban triage, calling into question whether triage can be an effective strategy for achieving its stated goals of efficiency or, in the Cleveland case, equity.

### *St. Louis*

In St. Louis, planners have warned for a century that the city’s inability to annex land—owing to its legal separation from St. Louis County in 1876—would lead to the

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<sup>45</sup> S. Jerome Pratter, “Strategies for City Investment,” in *How Cities Can Grow Old Gracefully*, Subcommittee on the City, Committee on Banking Finance, and Urban Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office), December 1977, 79-90.

<sup>46</sup> St. Louis City Plan Commission, *St. Louis Development Program* (St. Louis, MO: St. Louis City Plan Commission, June 1973); Team Four Inc., *Citywide Implementation Strategies: The Draft Comprehensive Plan* (St. Louis, MO: Team Four Inc., April 16, 1975); Harland Bartholomew and St. Louis City Plan Commission, *Comprehensive City Plan: St. Louis, Missouri* (St. Louis, MO: St. Louis City Plan Commission, 1947); and Michael A. Quinn, “Urban Triage and Municipal Housing Code Enforcement: An Analysis of the St. Louis Case,” in *Administrative Discretion and Public Policy Implementation*, ed. Douglas H. Shumavon and H. Kenneth Hibbeln (New York: Praeger, 1986).

<sup>47</sup> Cleveland City Planning Commission, *Cleveland Policy Planning Report* (Cleveland, OH: Cleveland City Planning Commission, 1975).

gradual loss of its tax base as industry and wealthy residents relocated to new facilities and housing in the suburbs. The 1917 plan, written by Harland Bartholomew, the city's first and longest-serving "Engineer" of urban planning, identified suburbanization as one of the principal threats to the future of St. Louis.<sup>48</sup> The 1936 *Urban Land Policy* warned that decline was already taking its toll: "To state the condition in its simplest terms—if adequate measures are not taken, the city is faced with gradual economic and social collapse. The old central areas of the city are being abandoned and this insidious trend will continue until the entire city is engulfed."<sup>49</sup> By 1947, the *Comprehensive Plan*, the last of Bartholomew's tenure, warned that a full third of the city required substantial rehabilitation or redevelopment. The plan labeled seven percent of the city "obsolete"—requiring complete clearance and redevelopment—and another 27 percent "blighted"—requiring substantial rehabilitation.<sup>50</sup>

In a harbinger of urban triage, the plan called for prioritizing the rehabilitation of blighted neighborhoods over the reconstruction of obsolete areas.<sup>51</sup> This preference for rehabilitation of "blighted" neighborhoods over the reconstruction of "obsolete" areas is not clearly reflected in the planning history of St. Louis in the 1950s and 1960s. After the passage of the federal Housing Act of 1949 and the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956, St. Louis aggressively pursued clearance and redevelopment, particularly in its

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<sup>48</sup> Harland Bartholomew, *Problems of St. Louis: Being a Description, From the City Planning Standpoint, of Past And Present Tendencies of Growth With General Suggestions for Impending Issues And Necessary Future Improvements* (St. Louis, MO: Nixon-Jones Printing Company, 1917), xviii-xix.

<sup>49</sup> St. Louis City Plan Commission, *Urban Land Policy* (St. Louis, MO: St. Louis City Plan Commission, 1936).

<sup>50</sup> Mark Abbott, "The 1947 *Comprehensive City Plan* and Harland Bartholomew's St. Louis," in *St. Louis Plans: The Ideal and Real St. Louis*, ed. Mark Tranel (St. Louis, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2007), 125; and Bartholomew, *Comprehensive City Plan*, Plate 13.

<sup>51</sup> Bartholomew, *Comprehensive City Plan*, 33.

central corridor, primarily for the purpose of industrial development.<sup>52</sup> However, one can see the emphasis on rehabilitation in the city's code enforcement program. Started in 1953, the St. Louis Neighborhood Rehabilitation Program concentrated enforcement in neighborhoods in the early stages of decline, like Cherokee and Hyde Park. These neighborhoods were typically white, middle-income, and home to active residents; black neighborhoods were also chosen for concentrated enforcement, but only if the racial composition of the neighborhoods was deemed stable, not in transition.<sup>53</sup> This emphasis on racially stable neighborhoods in the early stages of slight decline continued until the mid-1960s when, facing criticism in the press and pressure from neighborhood organizations, the city chose to target the new Federally Assisted Code Enforcement (FACE) program to neighborhoods in greater distress. Evaluations of St. Louis's FACE program found this new need-based targeting strategy to be less effective than the prior strategy, and in the early 1970s the city returned to emphasizing efficiency rather than need as the basis for concentrated code enforcement.<sup>54</sup>

This renewed emphasis on efficiency is evident in the 1972 *St. Louis Development Program*, an ambitious, 15-year, \$1.4 billion plan to revitalize the city. Like the 1947 plan, the 1972 plan advocates tailoring different services to different neighborhoods: "This strategy is based on the concept of first preserving those neighborhood districts which are still essentially sound, maintaining and improving districts which are threatened by encroaching blight, and systematically rebuilding and

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<sup>52</sup> Joseph Heathcott and Malre Agnes Murphy, "Corridors of Flight, Zones of Renewal: Industry, Planning, and Policy in the Making of Metropolitan St. Louis, 1940-1980," *Journal of Urban History* 31, no. 2 (2005): 155-166.

<sup>53</sup> Quinn, "Urban Triage and Municipal Housing Code Enforcement," 134.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 138-139.



rehabilitating those districts which are extensively deteriorated.”<sup>55</sup> But the plan goes on to acknowledge that many of the areas requiring reconstruction could not be feasibly redeveloped within a 15-year time span without significant increases in federal aid. With the exception of designated Urban Renewal and Model Cities areas, the plan labeled these areas “Interim Action Areas.”<sup>56</sup> These were to receive increased community services; increased social services, particularly for youth; and a program of land banking to gradually prepare for future redevelopment. They would not be redeveloped in the foreseeable future, despite their need. In other words, the *Development Program* called for urban triage, three years before Downs coined the term.

This strategy was echoed by a 1973 RAND report that shocked city leaders with its dour assessment of St. Louis’s future. Based on projections carried forward from the late 1960s, the RAND report assessed three possible futures for the city: “continued decline; stabilization in a new role as an increasingly black suburb; and return to a former role as the center of economic activity in the metropolitan area.”<sup>57</sup> Of these, the first, continued decline, was deemed the most likely, while the second, a new role as “a large suburb among many other suburbs,” was considered the best-case scenario. Even this limited positive outcome would not be possible without a significant commitment of external revenue from federal revenue sharing, state revenue sharing, and the creation of a regional income tax or revenue sharing base. Like the 1972 *Development Program*, the RAND report also called for tailoring services to varying neighborhood needs, upending the principle of providing the same set of public services and enforcing the same

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<sup>55</sup> St. Louis City Plan Commission, *St. Louis Development Program*, 104.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>57</sup> Barbara R. Williams, *St. Louis: A City and Its Suburbs* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1973), v.

regulations in all neighborhoods.<sup>58</sup> But it warned that doing so would not be sufficient to improve the city's trajectory—merely ameliorative.

This new emphasis on triage generated mixed reactions. In an editorial dated January 26, 1973, the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* board embraced the strategy: “The city can’t do everything at once – it must establish priorities, beginning with areas that are still savable from decay.”<sup>59</sup> They commended the city plan director, Norman Murdoch, for taking this approach. However, the black community began voicing discontent with the city’s planning strategy. In 1973, Dick Gephardt and John Roach, two white aldermen who represented South Side wards and identified with the so-called “Young Turk” faction of the board, proposed bills that would have allegedly authorized a massive program of housing rehabilitation on the South Side and housing demolition on the North Side.<sup>60</sup> Black leaders objected to these bills as an effort to save the South Side at the expense of the North Side. The bills were not passed, but they became a symbol of unequal treatment for the black community. Black leaders also objected to the city’s first CDBG application, which they felt did not target sufficient funds to North Side wards.<sup>61</sup>

These tensions erupted three years later after urban triage was proposed again, this time in more caustic language and with less emphasis on social welfare, through the so-called “Team Four Plan.” In 1973, the city began the process of writing a new

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-47.

<sup>59</sup> “Save Unblighted Areas First,” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, January 26, 1973.

<sup>60</sup> Board Bills 19 and 20 of 1973 are referenced in the following sources, but I was not able to locate copies of the bills in the aldermanic records at the St. Louis Public Library. “Blight in City Bill Proposed by Aldermen,” *St. Louis Argus*, November 8, 1973, 16A; and Jamala Rogers, “Statement of Jamala Rogers, Chairperson, Organization for Black Struggle,” in *The Use of Federal Housing and Economic Development Funds in St. Louis: From “Team 4” Into the Future*, Field Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity of the Committee On Financial Services, 110<sup>th</sup> Congress (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2008), 24.

<sup>61</sup> Philip Sutin, “Plan Said to Hurt Black Area in City,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, May 19, 1975.

comprehensive master plan to replace the 1947 plan. Looking for outside opinions to both guide and challenge the city's planners, the City Plan Commission hired Team Four Inc. as consultants to the project.<sup>62</sup> Founded in 1969 by four graduates of Washington University—William H. Albinson, Brian W.P. Kent, S. Jerome Pratter, and Richard Ward—Team Four combined expertise in urban law, architecture, and urban design in one multidisciplinary planning firm.<sup>63</sup> The firm worked independently from the City Plan Commission, drafting seven technical memos to inform the planning process.<sup>64</sup>

One of these memos—Technical Memorandum 6b—gained notoriety as the “Team Four Plan.” This memo, titled “City Wide Implementation Strategies for the Draft Comprehensive Plan,” concerned strategies for adopting, staging, budgeting, and implementing the Comprehensive Plan.<sup>65</sup> Submitted to city officials on March 31, 1975, the memo recommended categorizing all areas of the city into one of three types—conservation, redevelopment, or depletion. The designations would be based on a set of criteria including the age and physical condition of the housing stock, the availability of private financing, levels of public service, and population stability. The city would then tailor its development strategy to each area type, focusing foremost on conservation areas, followed by redevelopment areas, and then depletion areas, in order to protect and grow the greatest share of the city's tax base with scarce funds.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Philip Sutin, “Commission to Draft Plan for Downtown,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, July 12, 1973; Pratter, “Strategies for City Investment,” 79; and Richard Ward, interview by author, tape recording, St. Louis, MO, March 7, 2013.

<sup>63</sup> Shirley Althoff, “Team Four Inc.: They're partners in urban planning,” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, November 16, 1969; and Laura Kennedy, “Planning for a New St. Louis,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, March 20, 1978.

<sup>64</sup> Team Four Inc., “Preface,” *Citywide Implementation Strategies: The Draft Comprehensive Plan* (St. Louis, MO: Team Four Inc., February 1976).

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Team Four Inc., *Citywide Implementation Strategies*, 49-51.

Conservation areas were defined as areas that continued to attract private investment. These were healthy areas of the city that already enjoyed abundant public services as well as private business activity. According to the memo, the success of these areas rested upon “continued high level public services.”<sup>67</sup> Any restriction of services could shake the confidence of private actors, leading the city to lose its most successful neighborhoods. “If these areas are lost,” the memo warns, “no plan or program can hope to save the City or renew what is left.”<sup>68</sup> The maintenance of high-quality services to these areas would therefore need to be a “top priority” for the city; conservation areas were to provide the foundation for the city’s renewal.<sup>69</sup>

To ensure the stability of these areas, the memo called for infill development that matched the character of existing housing; increases in school funding; greater police protection; strict code enforcement through an occupancy permit-based enforcement program; restrictions on transit-oriented development; and buffering between neighborhoods and new transit lines. The memo also encouraged private initiatives to supplement or replace public services. The memo recommended user fees for trash service and code enforcement; the establishment of neighborhood associations to fund special services and improvements; the creation of business associations to finance and manage industrial parks and shopping centers; and the creation of a private-public authority to manage the central business district and pay for improvements through a special assessment on central business district properties.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 4-6.

Redevelopment areas were referred to as areas “at the critical point between progress and decay.”<sup>71</sup> The memo did not identify specific redevelopment areas, but it suggested that any area suitable for Missouri’s Chapter 353 Tax Abatement program would meet the criteria of a redevelopment area.<sup>72</sup> Passed in 1945, the Chapter 353 program grants developers long-term tax abatements and the power of eminent domain over “blighted” properties.<sup>73</sup> The program is typically used to redevelop individual parcels in areas of potential growth. In 1975, most properties declared “blighted” under the program were zoned commercial or industrial, and they were primarily located in the central corridor—either in the central business district (the entirety of which was declared “blighted” under the program) or Central West End. As of 1975, only a handful of parcels had been targeted for redevelopment on the North Side.<sup>74</sup>

The memo recommended pursuing redevelopment strategically. Redevelopment projects would only be approved if they could be paired with capital improvements and an increase in public services, including the onset of strict code enforcement. Along with use of the Chapter 353 program, the memo also endorsed the use of special assessment districts to make redevelopment self-financing. Zoning would take the form of planned unit developments, enabling developers and the city to negotiate terms. Transit-oriented development would be encouraged, and where applicable, the city would use Missouri’s Planned Industrial Expansion legislation to spur industrial development when private

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Colin Gordon, *Mapping decline: St. Louis and the Fate of the American City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 162.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 164-165.

financing was not feasible. Each redevelopment district would also have a citizens' advisory council to ensure the fair treatment of current residents.<sup>75</sup>

Depletion areas were identified as “areas of spotty City services and red lining – where large numbers of the unemployed, the elderly and the recipients of welfare are left to wait for assistance which does not seem to be forthcoming.”<sup>76</sup> No depletion areas were identified specifically, but the memo notes that in 1917 there were 3,200 abandoned buildings in the City, and “virtually all of these were located in Depletion Areas.”<sup>77</sup> Then as now, the majority of the abandoned buildings were located on the North Side. The memo’s description of depletion areas acknowledges the hardship faced by residents due to the absence of both private and public investment, but it warns that the need for total reconstruction and the absence of resources puts the city in a bind: “Simply stated, the City cannot abandon those trapped in Depletion areas, nor can it ignore the eventual need for complete redevelopment of these areas.”<sup>78</sup>

In depletion areas, the memo recommended continuing basic services but prohibiting scattershot redevelopment. The memo was insistent that essential services should be continued: “Police, fire and sanitation service cannot be curtailed prematurely, as has been the case, according to critics, in these areas.”<sup>79</sup> However, the memo recommended restricting new development, requiring any development in these areas to be planned with concurrent capital improvements—investments that would be made first in designated Redevelopment Areas and only later in Depletion Areas, when a market had returned. In the meantime, the city would use its Land Reutilization Authority as a

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<sup>75</sup> Team Four Inc., *Citywide Implementation Strategies*, 7-14.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

land bank, gathering parcels through tax foreclosure and holding them indefinitely until market conditions permitted large-scale redevelopment of the area. The city would not seek short-term profit by selling the parcels or establish a homesteading program. At the same time, the city would not seek to accelerate abandonment, avoiding strict code enforcement in depletion areas for this reason.<sup>80</sup>

The plan registered as a shock to the public, especially the black community, in part because it came shrouded in secrecy. Following a tip, a reporter at the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* requested a copy of the memo and the most recent draft of the Comprehensive Plan from the mayor's office. The mayor, who was in an ongoing spat with the newspaper, refused to provide it. The newspaper then filed a federal Freedom of Information Act request, obtaining a copy of the memo through the Department of Housing and Urban Development. On May 19, 1975, the *Post-Dispatch* published the first excerpts of the memo under the headline, "Plan Said To Hurt Black Area In City."<sup>81</sup> Even after the story went to press, the Community Development Commission refused to release copies of the memo. After a week, the commission partially reversed course, providing copies to four aldermen.<sup>82</sup> It did not permit Team Four Inc. to release the full memo publicly—including a new preface defending the firm's recommendations—until February of 1976.<sup>83</sup> By then, the memo's reputation as a "secret plan" had long been set.

The *Post-Dispatch*'s article characterized the "Team Four Plan" as a strategy to reduce services to the predominantly black North Side and depopulate the area. Philip Sutton, the reporter, wrote that Team Four had recommended "deteriorating areas on their

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 15-30.

<sup>81</sup> Richard Ward, interview with author; and Philip Sutin, "Plan Said to Hurt Black Area in City."

<sup>82</sup> "Aldermen to get peek at secret plans," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, June 10, 1975.

<sup>83</sup> Team Four Inc., *Citywide Implementation Strategies* 1976.

way to abandonment get only a minimum level of services.” Quoting black community leaders, the paper reported the plan “could spell doom” for “an area generally bounded by Twentieth Street, Delmar Boulevard, Natural Bridge Avenue and the western city limits”—an area on the North Side that had been labeled “obsolete” in 1947 and in need of “reconstruction” in 1972 but was still home to roughly 166,000 residents in 1975. Former Alderman C.B. Broussard, a black Democratic leader in the 26<sup>th</sup> Ward, said that the city had already adopted Team Four’s policies but wouldn’t admit it: “It’s happening without a doubt.” The article closed with a fateful quote from Alderman Milton F. Svetanics, of the 27<sup>th</sup> Ward, defending the plan. He argued, “We have to make a choice about which areas we want to save. Other areas will have to suffer benign neglect.”<sup>84</sup>

The term “benign neglect” became synonymous with the “Team Four Plan.” Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, then serving in the Nixon administration as Counselor to the President for Urban Affairs, had coined the phrase in 1970 in a memo to the president on the “Status of Negroes” that was leaked to the *New York Times* and published on March 1, 1970.<sup>85</sup> In the memo, Moynihan argued that despite an increase in female-headed households and the high incidence of “anti-social behavior among young black males,” social and economic conditions for blacks were improving overall. “The time may have come,” he concluded, “when the issue of race could benefit from a period of ‘benign neglect.’ ... We may need a period in which Negro progress continues and racial rhetoric fades.”<sup>86</sup> Moynihan intended the memo as a rebuke to Vice President Spiro Agnew, whose racially charged rhetoric was inflaming tensions with the black

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<sup>84</sup> Philip Sutin, “Plan Said to Hurt Black Area in City.”

<sup>85</sup> Daniel Patrick Moynihan, “Text of the Moynihan Memorandum on the Status of Negroes,” *New York Times*, March 1, 1970.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*



community, but instead the memo itself became a symbol of such rhetoric. The memo was widely denounced; critics accused the Nixon administration of treating the black community's concerns, in policy and in rhetoric, with "benign neglect."<sup>87</sup>

In St. Louis, "benign neglect" became the rallying cry against the "Team Four Plan." After the *Post-Dispatch* published its story, 200 people met at the St. Louis Urban League offices to protest the plan and form a coalition to organize against it. At the meeting, Ernest Calloway, a black urban affairs professor at St. Louis University, said that St. Louis banks and insurance companies had followed an implicit policy of "benign neglect" of the black community for many years, "and many feel it has been the city policy too."<sup>88</sup> At a later meeting, Alderwoman JoAnne Wayne of the 1<sup>st</sup> Ward warned that the "Team Four Plan" was designed to displace the black community from St. Louis: "The Team Four plan is a strategy to get rid of blacks, and baby, if we don't get together and really stick together, we'll be ... well, not right here in the city of St. Louis. I don't know where we'll be."<sup>89</sup> The *St. Louis Argus*, a black newspaper, characterized it as "the so-called Plan Four proposal designed to lift essential city services and let the near-North side of St. Louis die."<sup>90</sup> In July 1975, the Ad-Hoc Committee Against Team Four Projections—formed by the Federation of Block Units, Inc.; Yeatmen District Community Corp.; and Jeff-Vander-Lou, Inc.—circulated a petition opposing the plan. It stated, "We are disappointed and disgusted that we still have policies of benign neglect,

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<sup>87</sup> Douglas Schoen, *Pat: A Biography of Daniel Patrick Moynihan* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 165-168.

<sup>88</sup> Marsha Canfield, "N. St. Louis gets ready to fight neglect," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, June 28, 1975.

<sup>89</sup> "Opposition to city growth plan urged," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, July 21, 1975.

<sup>90</sup> "Block Units Strongly Oppose Plan Four," *St. Louis Argus*, June 19, 1975, 16B.

and it appears that many neighborhoods will be destroyed.” The petition continued, “150,000 families are threatened with displacement as part of the plan.”<sup>91</sup>

In point of fact, the memo did not specify the location of depletion areas, nor did it call for the withdrawal of essential services or dispersal of the black community. Team Four intentionally declined to map the location of conservation, redevelopment, or depletion zones or specify their size; the memo never discusses race; and the memo is clear that essential services like police and fire must not be reduced.<sup>92</sup> However, the firm’s urban triage strategy would not have been race-neutral and its likely geographic impact could easily be inferred. The memo refers to depletion areas as areas with significant housing abandonment. In 1975, those areas were almost exclusively black and on the North Side. The memo also connects redevelopment to the Chapter 353 program, which was used predominantly in the central corridor. So it not surprising that black leaders connected the memo to maps that had been published in the 1947 *General Plan* and the 1972 *Development Program*. Just as the 1972 plan had replaced “obsolete” areas with “reconstruction” or “interim action” areas, black leaders assumed the “Team Four Plan” would replace “reconstruction” with “depletion.”<sup>93</sup>

The controversy ultimately scuttled the proposed 1975 *Interim Comprehensive Plan*.<sup>94</sup> When the Community Development Commission released the third draft of the *Interim Comprehensive Plan* for public comment in June 1975, it included a statement that said the commission “rejects any plan, draft or strategy which advocates any no-

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<sup>91</sup> “Housing policies will be protested,” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, July 22, 1975.

<sup>92</sup> Pratter, “Strategies for City Investment,” 88; and Richard Ward, interview by author.

<sup>93</sup> Pratter, “Strategies for City Investment,” 88-89.

<sup>94</sup> St. Louis Community Development Commission, *Interim Comprehensive Plan: Draft III* (St. Louis, MO: St. Louis Community Development Commission, June 1975).

growth philosophy or any form of discrimination as to race, age, sex or creed.”<sup>95</sup> The commission also modified the plan itself, removing references to “abandonment” and deleting the map, printed previously in the 1972 *Development Program*, that identified areas for conservation, rehabilitation and reconstruction, and maintenance and improvement.<sup>96</sup> These changes were not sufficient to allay the black community’s fears, and the planning effort was ultimately abandoned. The 1975 plan was never adopted.

Despite its official rejection, many observers believe the “Team Four Plan” was carried out as the de facto policy of subsequent administrations. Pratter himself argued in 1977 that the “memo’s basic policies have proven to be ones that have been advocated under different names not only in numerous other cities but also in the city of St. Louis as well.”<sup>97</sup> While the city never adopted a no-growth policy for the North Side, St. Louis continued to target most of its physical redevelopment projects to the central corridor.<sup>98</sup> In the first decade of the CDBG program, St. Louis spent as much on brick-and-mortar projects in the four wards of the central corridor as it did on all twelve wards of the impoverished North Side.<sup>99</sup> On the North Side, CDBG was primarily used to fund social services.<sup>100</sup> According to historian Colin Gordon, “Targeted areas were identified less by demonstrable need than by the willingness of private interests to invest in them.

Redevelopment, in turn, rested on an elastic definition of blight that put the health of the [central business district]—and then simply the health of the overall “business climate”—

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<sup>95</sup> “No-growth policy not feasible, group says,” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, June 20, 1975.

<sup>96</sup> Philip Sutin, “Political Changes in Third City Planning Draft,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, June 22, 1975.

<sup>97</sup> Pratter, “Strategies for City Investment,” 89.

<sup>98</sup> Daniel J. Monti, *Race, Redevelopment, and the New Company Town* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990), 25.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 203-204.

<sup>100</sup> Gordon, *Mapping Decline*, 178.

at the top of the urban agenda.”<sup>101</sup> Black leaders also linked specific policy decisions—in particular, Mayor James Conway’s decision in 1979 to close Homer G. Phillips, a well regarded public hospital on the north side that was considered “the crown jewel of the entire black community”—to the enduring influence of Team Four.<sup>102</sup>

The “Team Four Plan” remains politically toxic today. As recently as 2008, U.S. Representative Maxine Waters (D-CA) held a Congressional Field Hearing in St. Louis to air grievances about the Team Four plan in light of new redevelopment plans for the North Side.<sup>103</sup> Barbara A. Geisman, then serving as Executive Director for Community Development for the city of St. Louis, testified that she had never read the “Team Four Plan” and that it had no influence over city policy: “I have never read it and I don’t know anybody else who has ever read it, and it really isn’t relevant to anything that we have been doing for the past 7 years.”<sup>104</sup> Nevertheless, several black leaders testified that St. Louis’s development patterns from the 1970s to the 2000s reflected the spirit of the “Team Four Plan,” if not the letter, noting that St. Louis’s central corridor had experienced a revival after decades of reinvestment but that the North Side continued to decline. The hearings prompted William Albinson, a principal of Team Four Inc., to

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Monti, *Race, Redevelopment, and the New Company Town*, 33; and Jamala Rogers, “Prepared Statement,” in *The Use of Federal Housing and Economic Development Funds in St. Louis: From “Team 4” Into the Future*, Field Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity of the Committee On Financial Services, 110<sup>th</sup> Congress (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2008), 79.

<sup>103</sup> Michael R. Allen, “Congressional hearing spotlights moving from ‘Team Four’ to North Side development,” *St. Louis American*, March 12, 2008.

<sup>104</sup> Barbara A. Geisman, “Statement of Barbara A. Geisman, Executive Director for Community Development, City of St. Louis, Missouri,” in *The Use of Federal Housing and Economic Development Funds in St. Louis: From “Team 4” Into the Future*, Field Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity of the Committee On Financial Services, 110<sup>th</sup> Congress (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2008), 8.

defend his firm's reputation in an op-ed in the *St. Louis American*, and city planners and elected officials once again politically distanced themselves from urban triage.<sup>105</sup>

### *Cleveland*

In Cleveland, urban triage generated none of the controversy of the “Team Four Plan,” but it also generated little public awareness or physical impact. Though a strategy of triage—framed in explicitly egalitarian and redistributive terms—is plainly evident in the city's 1975 *Policy Planning Report* and Community Development Block Grant applications, its practical effect appears to have been quite limited.

Cleveland planners first adopted “a triage philosophy” in the mid-1970s under the leadership of Planning Director Norman Krumholz.<sup>106</sup> Krumholz is well known among planners as the leading proponent of equity planning, a planning philosophy which stated as its goal the promotion of “a wider range of choices for those individuals and groups who have few, if any, choices.”<sup>107</sup> As an equity planner, Krumholz sought to act as an activist within government, using rigorous, impartial research to promote policies that would benefit the poor and disadvantaged. Under his leadership, the planning commission fought to maintain its independence from both elected officials and public opinion, basing its recommendations on policy research with little public input.<sup>108</sup> The commission also deemphasized zoning and comprehensive planning, dismissing them as

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<sup>105</sup> William Albinson, “North Side deterioration issue more complex than a conspiracy,” *St. Louis American*, March 27, 2008.

<sup>106</sup> Nathan, *Block Grants for Community Development*, 329.

<sup>107</sup> Cleveland City Planning Commission, *Cleveland Policy Planning Report*, 7.

<sup>108</sup> Norman Krumholz, “Cleveland: Problems of Declining Cities,” in *Personality, Politics, and Planning: How City Planners Work*, ed. Anthony James Catanese and W. Paul Farmer (London: Sage Publications, 1978), 65.

ineffective tools for managing Cleveland's decline.<sup>109</sup> The *Policy Planning Report* was exemplary of equity planning in this regard. It contained no traditional zoning maps, but it cited 28 research papers in support of its policy recommendations.<sup>110</sup>

Krumholz was also known for his frank acknowledgement of fiscal distress—which Herbert Gans hoped would inspire a new era of “cutback planning.”<sup>111</sup> Soon after joining the Carl Stokes administration in 1969, Krumholz identified rising poverty and the city's emerging fiscal crisis as Cleveland's greatest challenges. In his first memo to incoming Mayor Ralph Perk in 1971, Krumholz listed ten pages of ideas for cutting costs and raising revenues.<sup>112</sup> His signature achievements as Planning Director included money-saving moves to offload the city's lakefront parks to the state park system and regionalize the transit system while locking in low-cost fares for Cleveland residents.<sup>113</sup> Krumholz also fought unsuccessfully to stop the mayor and city council from providing subsidies to downtown developers without guarantees of local hiring and increased tax revenues.<sup>114</sup> He opposed such subsidies on both moral and fiscal grounds. “While making downtown a more attractive place is a worthy goal,” he argued, “it is not as urgent as slowing the rate of deterioration in the city's neighborhoods.”<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Norman Krumholz, Janice Cogger, and John Linner, “Make No Big Plans ... Planning in Cleveland in the 1970's,” in *Planning Theory in the 1980s: A Search for Future Directions*, ed. Robert Burchell and George Sternlieb (New Brunswick, NJ: Center for Urban Policy and Research, 1978), 30.

<sup>110</sup> Cleveland City Planning Commission, *Cleveland Policy Planning Report*, 50.

<sup>111</sup> Herbert J. Gans, “Planning for Declining and Poor Cities,” *Journal of the American Institute for Planners* 41, no. 5 (1975), 307.

<sup>112</sup> Norman Krumholz, memorandum, November 8, 1971, Ernie Bonner Papers, 1919-2003, Portland State University.

<sup>113</sup> Krumholz, Cogger, and Linner, “Make No Big Plans,” 35; and Norman Krumholz, “A Retrospective View of Equity Planning: Cleveland 1969-1979,” *Journal of the American Planning Association* 48, no. 2 (1982): 168-169.

<sup>114</sup> Krumholz, “A Retrospective View of Equity Planning,” 168-169.

<sup>115</sup> Krumholz, Cogger, and Linner, “Make No Big Plans,” 36.

Although he has received little attention for his pioneering work in this regard, Krumholz is also arguably the first “shrinking cities” planner. He was among the first to contemplate what neighborhoods could become after abandonment if redevelopment were not possible. In a 1978 interview, Krumholz said, “It is very difficult to talk about cities like Cleveland—which are major urbanized, heavy production, durable goods-producing cities—becoming semi-rural, and yet in neighborhoods like West Central and Hough you can look through the blocks ... Nobody is there anymore.”<sup>116</sup> Krumholz did not consider these abandoned areas suitable for housing redevelopment due to the evident lack of demand. Instead, he envisioned new low-density uses: “Whether somebody will consume that for urbanized use or not, nobody can tell. But surely that land can be used for something more amenable, maybe a regional park, farmland, or who knows.”<sup>117</sup>

These concerns and convictions are evident in the *Cleveland Policy Planning Report*, the first plan in Cleveland to evince a triage philosophy. Published in 1975, the report called for bold public action on the federal and local levels to assist poor families. It recommended a federally guaranteed minimum income regardless of employment status; direct federal payments to low-income families to obtain housing in middle-class neighborhoods; and a local public service program to hire unemployed residents.<sup>118</sup> If the federal government did not provide direct housing payments to low-income families, the report endorsed the reinstatement of federal programs to build and repair subsidized housing. However, it opposed constructing low-income housing in deteriorated neighborhoods; any subsidized, low-income housing would be built in “small-scale,

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<sup>116</sup> Norman Krumholz, “Cleveland: Problems of Declining Cities,” in *Personality, Politics, and Planning: How City Planners Work*, ed. Anthony James Catanese and W. Paul Farmer (London: Sage Publications, 1978), 76.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> Cleveland City Planning Commission, *Cleveland Policy Planning Report*, 21-28.

scattered-site developments” and sited “in good residential areas, particularly in the suburbs.”<sup>119</sup> The goal of these policies was to enable poor families to move out of deteriorated inner-city neighborhoods and into middle-class neighborhoods that had higher quality housing, greater access to jobs, and less residential segregation.

These social and housing policies were coupled with a series of community development recommendations that fell within the rubric of triage. Neighborhoods on the verge of decline would be given higher priority for physical investment than neighborhoods in severe decline.<sup>120</sup> Rather than subsidize new housing in deteriorated areas, the city would prioritize the rehabilitation of existing housing stock in “middle areas,” where public investment could spur renewed private commitment to the neighborhoods. As the most blighted areas continued to lose population, abetted by the hoped-for federal housing subsidies, the city would move aggressively to demolish condemned structures, clear and maintain vacant lots, and control rat infestation, while maintaining all essential services.<sup>121</sup>

The report justified its urban triage strategy on grounds of both equity and efficiency. On the one hand, it argued that deteriorated neighborhoods were harmful environments that limited the prospects of the poor. The goal of increasing equity was therefore best served by relocating low-income residents to middle-class neighborhoods. On the other hand, it argued that deteriorated neighborhoods could not be redeveloped cost effectively due to the lack of housing demand. As Krumholz explained in a 1978 interview, “In some of the neighborhoods in Cleveland—the blasted kinds of neighborhoods where everything has collapsed: public services, school system, police

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 28-30.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 41-42.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 41.



force, and everything else—we are trying to encourage the city, through public services, to maintain at least the limit of the city’s own standards of health and safety. We are not recommending major capital expenditures in those areas because we feel a lot of emptying-out has to happen before the land becomes ripe again, if it ever becomes ripe.”<sup>122</sup> He also acknowledged that Cleveland’s fiscal crisis could prevent the city from realizing even its most basic commitment to maintain public services in deteriorated areas: “For the city to extend just its own levels, its own codes of health and safety, would probably strain the ability of the city budget beyond its present capacity now.”<sup>123</sup>

The clearest sign that the City Planning Commission sought to implement urban triage comes in Cleveland’s early CDBG applications. While nominally submitted by another department, these documents were revised and approved by the City Planning Commission, which used its technical expertise as leverage to shape the drafting of the city’s neighborhood rehabilitation strategy.<sup>124</sup> The documents clearly reflect a triage orientation. The CDBG application for fiscal year 1975-1976 stated as its goal “the creation of a stable and healthy neighborhood environment” through programs that will “arrest deterioration in the target areas.”<sup>125</sup> These programs—which included code enforcement and low-interest loans to homeowners—were targeted to neighborhoods with only minor blight. The deteriorated Hough area would be excluded, as would other

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<sup>122</sup> Krumholz, “Cleveland: Problems of Declining Cities,” 73.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Krumholz, Cogger, and Linner, “Make No Big Plans,” 38.

<sup>125</sup> Cleveland Department of Community Development, “Application for Federal Assistance,” in “City of Cleveland Community Development Block Grant Application 1975-1976” (Cleveland, OH: Department of Community Development, 1975), 13.

areas of the city previously targeted for Urban Renewal and Model Cities projects. By contrast, the CDBG application's proposed demolition program would be citywide.<sup>126</sup>

Cleveland's "Housing Assistance Plan," which accompanied the original and amended CDBG applications for fiscal year 1976-1977, also reflected a triage strategy through its eligibility criteria. The stated intention of the plan's proposed Neighborhood Housing Services Program, which would include concentrated code enforcement, public improvements, and low-interest loans to homeowners for housing rehabilitation, was to "preserve neighborhoods, which are basically sound, but are beginning to exhibit symptoms of decline."<sup>127</sup> Likewise, major housing rehabilitation under the Section 8 program would be limited to structures that were located "in localities that demonstrate initial stages of neighborhood revitalization with strong community organization and support to enforce and ensure the long term viability of the rehabilitated structures."<sup>128</sup> The plan also imposed strict locational criteria for new subsidized housing. To be eligible for new construction, neighborhoods would need to have fewer than 5% substandard units, fewer than 20% low-income families, fewer than 5% assisted housing, and fewer than 10% minority population.<sup>129</sup> These criteria were intended to increase neighborhood choice for low-income families by building public housing in middle class and suburban areas, but they also would have the effect of excluding deteriorated areas from one of the few sources of public development typically available to them.

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Cleveland Department of Community Development, "Housing Assistance Plan," in "Community Development Block Grant Application 1976-1977" (Cleveland, OH: Department of Community Development, February 1975), 149.

<sup>128</sup> Cleveland Department of Community Development, "Housing Assistance Plan," in "Community Development Block Grant Application as Amended January 12, 1976. 1976-1977" (Cleveland, OH: Department of Community Development, November 1975), 64.

<sup>129</sup> Cleveland Department of Community Development, "Housing Assistance Plan," in "Community Development Block Grant Application 1976-1977", 154.

Indirectly, the influence of triage can also be seen in the City Planning Commission's push to reform the tax foreclosure system. Inspired by the creation of Missouri's Land Reutilization Authority in 1971, which enabled St. Louis to landbank foreclosed properties, the commission initiated a study of tax foreclosure in Cleveland. As an aid to its analysis, it partnered with the Cleveland Foundation to hire Anthony Downs's Real Estate Research Corporation to categorize Cleveland's residential neighborhoods using a modified version of his 5-stage scale.<sup>130</sup> The resulting report identified two areas in Cleveland—East Hough and West Hough—as undergoing terminal decline, but, the report warned, “field research throughout the country suggests ... that few neighborhoods improve significantly once they are well into Stage 3 and decline is clearly underway.”<sup>131</sup> The study led to the passage of House Bill 1327 by the Ohio legislature. The law created a land bank in Cleveland and a two-part tax foreclosure system: foreclosures of vacant properties were fast-tracked so that municipalities could quickly acquire and landbank them, but occupied properties were processed more slowly to give homeowners time to make late payments and hold on to their properties.<sup>132</sup>

Despite the evidence that urban triage became policy in Cleveland, there is little evidence that urban triage attracted any public attention, positive or negative. A search of Cleveland newspaper records from 1970 to 1980 revealed no stories related to these policies, and in interviews, neither Krumholz nor his successor as planning director,

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<sup>130</sup> Susan Olson and M. Leanne Lachman, *Tax Delinquency in the Inner City: The Problem and Its Possible Solutions* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1976), 69.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>132</sup> Olson and Lachman, *Tax Delinquency in the Inner City*, 5; and Krumholz, “Cleveland: Problems of Declining Cities,” 67.

Hunter Morrison, could recall any public opposition, or even awareness, of the commission's triage philosophy during Krumholz's reign.<sup>133</sup>

That is likely due to the limited impact of the policies. One behind-the-scenes instance of conflict over the triage policy—which concerned the grassroots effort to bring new housing to the deteriorated Hough area—illustrates the point. In the late 1970s, the Hough Area Development Corporation (HADC), then led by Hunter Morrison, sought to build new, highly subsidized, single-family housing in the neighborhood as a symbol of revitalization. As planning director, Krumholz opposed the project.<sup>134</sup> The tax foreclosure study had concluded that land in the Hough area had “almost no market value” and its short-term reuse potential was “negligible.”<sup>135</sup> Previous projects in the Hough area, including subsidized retail and industrial operations, had largely failed, and Krumholz thought there was little the city could do to revitalize the Hough area short of total redevelopment.<sup>136</sup> But Krumholz's opposition held little sway politically. Despite his skepticism, the city council approved the project, and the opening of the housing project garnered considerable positive press as a symbol of the growing neighborhood movement.<sup>137</sup> This story was indicative of urban triage in action. Krumholz claims the ward-based council routinely overrode his targeting recommendations, approving any project that could garner the necessary financing, because council members saw their

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<sup>133</sup> Norman Krumholz, telephone interview by author, March 19, 2013; and Hunter Morrison, telephone interview by author, March 19, 2013.

<sup>134</sup> Norman Krumholz, telephone interview by author, March 19, 2013; and Hunter Morrison, telephone interview by author, March 19, 2013.

<sup>135</sup> Olson and Lachman, *Tax Delinquency in the Inner City*, 90.

<sup>136</sup> Norman Krumholz, telephone interview by author, March 19, 2013.

<sup>137</sup> Shuara R. Wilson, “Old and New Housing Is Looking Good in Hough,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, August 25, 1979; Marcus Gleisser, “Rebuilding Hough: Colony of New Homes on View Today,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, September 16, 1979, H1; and Alan A.A. Seifullah, “Buyers of New Houses Believe Hough Is Recovering,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, September 14, 1980, 27-A.

responsibility as promoting development in their own districts regardless of the likelihood of market success.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Norman Krumholz, telephone interview by author, March 19, 2013.

## Case Analysis

Theoretically, the St. Louis and Cleveland cases reinforce the difficulty of analyzing urban triage due to the multiplicity of definitions assigned to the term. These cases include at least three distinct formulations of “classic” urban triage: the *St. Louis Development Program*, the “Team Four Plan,” and the *Cleveland Policy Planning Report*. All three formulations share the essential characteristics of “classic” urban triage—neighborhoods are divided into three classes based on perceived health, and “middle” neighborhoods are prioritized for physical investment—but they defy the broad-brush characterizations of critics. None of these proposals called for the withdrawal of essential services from deteriorated areas. In fact, they called for the maintenance of essential services and increases in social aid. The *Cleveland Policy Planning Report*, in particular, was explicitly egalitarian and redistributive in its aims, positioning urban triage as a complement to policies that would enable low-income residents to move to better neighborhoods. The Cleveland case shows best that “classic” urban triage cannot simply be dismissed as equivalent to “planned shrinkage” or “benign neglect.” At least in theory, urban triage can be justified with reference to both efficiency and equity.

On the other hand, in practice, the term “urban triage” cannot be separated from the wealth of connotations it has acquired. Opponents of the “Team Four Plan” freely equated urban triage to “benign neglect” and even “urban renewal,” using it as an epithet

for any urban policy that would benefit whites or the city as a whole at the expense of the black community—an outcome that was, in fact, likely given the distribution of abandonment in St. Louis relative to the distribution of whites and blacks. Neutral observers also used “urban triage” loosely to describe related policies or outcomes. In St. Louis, observers called the 1950s era code enforcement program an example of “urban triage” because it targeted enforcement to neighborhoods in slight decline, even though the city was simultaneously clearing and redeveloping large swathes of deteriorated land in contradiction to “classic” triage. Likewise, St. Louis’s long-term commitment to redeveloping its central corridor has been called a strategy of “urban triage”—despite the absence of a formal policy dictating the outcome—because the North Side has languished at the same time. These examples show that while “urban triage” can be assigned a specific definition, like the designation of Downs’s “classic” urban triage, the term is inherently loaded and ambiguous, and therefore unsuitable for academic use.

The cases also call into doubt the viability of urban triage as implemented. While urban triage was clearly reflected in Cleveland’s CDBG applications, neither case suggests that urban triage was politically viable—at least in a ward-based political system, where elected officials have a strong incentive to fight any disinvestment in their wards. In St. Louis, aldermen representing the North Side led the successful fight against the 1975 Comprehensive Plan. In Cleveland, the evidence is less direct, but both Krumholz and Morrison cite the ward system as a source of resistance to targeting policies.<sup>139</sup> Nor did the plans in either city enjoy strong support from mayors. Richard Ward, a principal of the Team Four firm, doubts that the mayor of St. Louis had even

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<sup>139</sup> Norman Krumholz, telephone interview by author, March 19, 2013; and Hunter Morrison, telephone interview by author, March 19, 2013.

read “Technical Memorandum 6B” when its contents were leaked to the press.<sup>140</sup> He was therefore only too willing to distance himself from it. In Cleveland, Krumholz complained that elected officials refused to acknowledge the city’s decline, despite the plain evidence before them, because to do so would expose them to criticism, and so his recommendations to plan in response to decline were often ignored.<sup>141</sup>

More broadly, urban triage ran counter to the spirit of the nascent neighborhood movement. Residents of the North Side in St. Louis and the Hough area in Cleveland objected to the clearance-and-redevelopment schemes of urban renewal, fearing the displacement of their communities, but they objected equally to the notion that their neighborhoods were unsalvageable, doomed to gradual abandonment and dispersal. Groups like the Hough Area Development Corporation fought to restore the reputation of deteriorated areas and bring them back to health through a combination of grassroots self-help and government investment, just as middle-class residents were beginning to do in historic neighborhoods in cities like New York and San Francisco. In St. Louis, North Side residents found the “Team Four Plan” particularly objectionable because the black community would likely bear the brunt of an ostensibly neutral policy. While the city might benefit as a whole from triage, North Side activists fought to protect their own neighborhoods and community, arguing that morally, investment should be distributed on the basis of need, not efficiency.

The difficulty of implementing urban triage calls into question whether it can still be justified on grounds of efficiency or equity in practice. Many cities chose to shift funds in the 1970s toward neighborhood rehabilitation and conservation programs as

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<sup>140</sup> Richard Ward, interview by author, tape recording, St. Louis, MO, March 7, 2013.

<sup>141</sup> Krumholz, “Cleveland: Problems of Declining Cities,” 76.



federal policy and urban conditions changed. However, if cities like Cleveland and St. Louis, which openly announced triage strategies, were not clearly able to simultaneously restrict development in deteriorated neighborhoods, or provide increased aid or relocation assistance to residents in those areas, then it is difficult to distinguish their planning regimes from those of other cities. The question of whether “classic” urban triage can be applied in whole is especially important for judging the policy’s justification in terms of equity. If the equity trappings of the proposal—including increased social aid to needy areas—were blocked, but the moratorium on development in deteriorated areas persisted, then the argument for urban triage would rest on efficiency and market logic alone. It may still be justifiable, but it would be difficult to argue that residents of deteriorated areas would benefit, except through the long-term solvency of the city.

## **Conclusion**

This paper alone cannot settle the debate over the ethics or efficacy of urban triage—but it can inform it. It argues that urban triage was distinct from policies of urban renewal or planned shrinkage and could be justified theoretically in terms of both efficiency and equity. However, in practice, the difficulty of implementing urban triage appears to have prevented the realization of either goal. On the basis of this evidence, urban triage should neither be dismissed as incompatible with equity nor embraced as necessary and effective. Instead, these cases offer a starting point for debate, ensuring that references to the historical record of urban triage are accurate and that planners can weigh for themselves the merit of the cases and learn from this historical period, which so fascinatingly foreshadows the current era of “shrinking cities” planning.

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