

Mercer Seeks Urban Renewal With Macon

University Officials Make Proposal To City Council

by Tom Cauthorn

Mercer Asks Growing Room headlined an article in the Telegraph which told of the 35 acre area east of College Street and west of the Central of Georgia Railway that the University needs for physical expansion. Mercer officials on Thursday, March 21 asked the Macon City Council to sponsor an urban renewal project in this eleven block area. The cost to exceed \$1.5 million dollars would be shared by the federal government and Mercer with no cost accruing to the city.

Mercer requested the city to act as the agent in exercising eminent domain in securing the land. The university would pay the city's share of the urban renewal program with the federal government financing the rest. William Haywood told the City Council that Mercer plans to construct \$11 million worth of new facilities by 1980.

Adley Associates were engaged by the university to study the greater area surrounding the school and specifically that sector between Plant Street and east to the railroad and Alabama Street. Adley Associates found that, "Although in need of more acreage, Mercer University's expansion area is somewhat determined by significant constraints in all four directions." Namely, Tatnall Square, the east by the railway and Tindall Heights Homes, to the south by Porter Stadium and to the west by Interstate 75; now under construction. They concluded: "The resulting 15 block expansion would provide 35.3 acres to the east of the existing campus (11 blocks) and 26.4 acres to the west."

Eric Welsh, Telegraph Staff Writer, reported that the university officials found 74.5 per cent of the dwellings in the eastern sector substandard. The blocks range from 30 per cent to 100 per cent substandard but he wrote, "only two of the 11 blocks are rated below 50 per cent substandard homes. The racial ratio is almost 1 to 1."

On March 26 Mr. T. Baldwin Martin (Chairman of Executive Committee Board of Trustees of Mercer University) stated Mercer's "serious" need to expand. He stated that "the University's long-range plan has been consistent with the principles employed by college and universities throughout the country." He outlines the increasing budget of Mercer from \$1.6 million in 1961-62 to over \$5 million for 1968-69.

He outlined the university's physical expansion from 1963 in excess of \$3.5 million: Law Library, Freshman Woman's Dorm, Freshman Men's Dorm, Stetson Library, Physics-Math Building, Connel Student Center and the nearly completed Wilet Science Center.

Mr. Martin "conservatively estimated" that each of Mercer's 1800 students spend an average of \$500 per year in the local community. This figure coupled with the \$1.5 million annual payroll of Mercer's 350 employees and the University's \$1.5 annual expenditures in Macon for her operating needs gives the total University impact on Macon annually as between 40 and 50 million dollars (based on the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's estimate of a dollar's turning over seven times before it leaves Macon).

The "Martin Report" answered Mayor Thompson's objections to the re-routing of traffic from College Street on the basis of the Adley study which predicts the street's daily traffic to increase from 9,069 cars per day at present to over 18,000 cars per day by 1975. Martin also stated that there are only two blocks under

50% substandard and that in total of 117 houses in the 11 block area only 15 are rated as standard houses. He concluded his statement by emphasizing the cramped conditions of the campus and the unconditional need for more area for Mercer to expand.

In answer to the "Martin Report" Mayor Thompson, that same afternoon in *The Macon News* was quoted as considering the University request of the city as immoral. He further explained that this would be an immoral act by the



Many of the children in this area come across the Georgia Central Railroad track from school every day. This path takes them into the easternmost end of Edgewood Avenue, the same street that runs in front of Shorter Dorm for men.

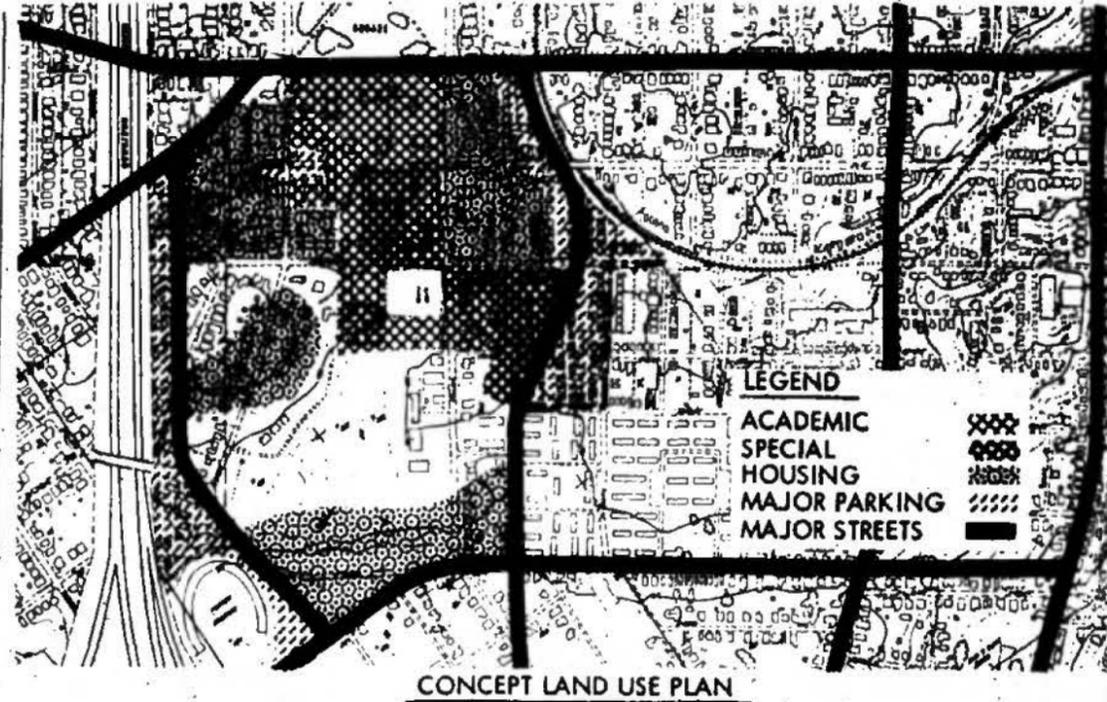
city because it would be forcing one private individual out to turn the property over to "a private institution or person, whether it be Mercer or someone else."

Alderman Ivey, chairman of City Council's Urban Renewal Committee, said the day before the "Martin Report" that his committee could not go along with the University's proposal. He further stated that College street is a main artery and although the problem should be studied the street should not be closed.

Mayor Thompson told Telegraph reporters on March 24 that he could not obligate the city for another urban renewal project until the \$340,000 debt for the coliseum is paid in November. There is a conflict of facts between the "Martin Report" and Mayor Thompson's stand on economics. The University proposed to cover all the expenses incurred by the city in the project. Martin further noted the \$40 to \$50 million impact of Mercer on the community which would easily offset the \$20,000 loss of ad valorem taxes. The projected impact of the University by 1980 will be approximately \$150 million annually, which more than compensates for the loss of 12 years of ad valorem taxes.

Objections and counter objections have been the fare from March 21 when the university made the proposal to the City Council to just last week when the Atlanta Constitution again strongly editorialized its support of Mercer's expansion.

The plan proposed would turn a jungle of poverty into an educational paradise from the standpoint of physical cyzsearance. The University had hoped that the city would welcome the effort to aid in improving the cultural and ac-



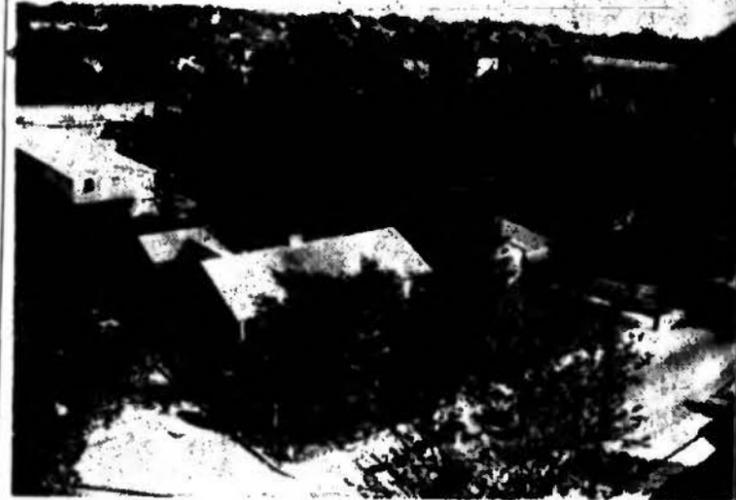
The completed expansion as projected in this diagram by Adley Associates will include both an area to the east and one to the west of the campus. The present proposal of the university concerns that land to the east of the campus extending to the east of the railroad and Alabama Street. The present proposal of the university is for Area I, Adley Associates diagram showing the two areas is below. It designates the blocks by letter.

ademic potential of one of Macon's oldest industries and certainly its best known; namely, Mercer University. Traffic would be rerouted through College Drive with the present College Street and perhaps Adams street no longer open to thru traffic.

Resistance of Mayor

The resistance of the Mayor and Alderman was noted last week by a prominent Macon attorney as resistance to the ideas that defeated B. F. Merritt — urban renewal. That same attorney later stated that individuals in the proposed sector should probably be given sufficient chance to sell individually to the University. But, he also noted that those who own real property in this area for rental and investment purposes are not in the same category as the individual, that they are in this community for profit and probably do not intend to cooperate with Mercer's offers; here eminent domain will be necessary, he said.

Tom Ivey, Alderman, through his position on the Urban Renewal Committee of City Council, had repeatedly objected to the Mercer proposals for the past month on



Some of the dwelling in this area are standard. Block H, pictured above in an ariel view, is only 30% sub standard. While Block E, the next block north is only a little more sub standard. Block H is all white and block E is all white. These two areas differ widely from those areas to the north and Block K.

four grounds: 1. The desire to buy the property owners first; 2. The widening and paving of new streets would be a cost to the city and not under the renewal program; 3. Cutting off College Street would sever a vital traffic artery that

does not seem at present to be congested; 4. And, the proposal does not include the possibility of the owner's bringing their dwellings up to standard using Federal Assistance as does the program in Unionville (west of Pio Nono Avenue between Columbus Road and Dempsey Avenue).

The "moral issue" at stake in the proposal is in Ronnie Thompson's words, "... taking people's houses from them against their will and then conveying the property to a private institution..."

The Macon Mayor has also seemed to fear the loss of \$20,000 per year in ad valorem taxes should this area revert to Mercer. He is most adamant of his objections in incurring the city in any more debt until the Coliseum project is paid off in November.

It has been noted that Baldwin T. Martin answered Thompson's concerns about loss of ad valorem taxes with a projected import of \$180 million by 1980 through University, employee and student spending.

On March 26 about 24 representatives of the area's 177 families appeared before City Council to "test the intent of Mercer University to have the City of Macon class our residential section as urban renewal area in order that it may be absorbed by the Mercer campus."

