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The University of Toledo

Finding Aid

Downtown Toledo Associates

MSS-027

Size: 2 linear feet and 3 volumes

Provenance: Lois Nelson, Executive vice-president, Downtown Toledo Associates, 1982

Access: Open

Related Collections:

Processing Note:

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Completed by: Paul Gifford, August 1986

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Introduction

The Downtown Toledo Associates Records, dating from 1955 to 1978, consist of correspondence, reports and studies, and newspaper clippings. This material largely concerns issues relating to downtown revitalization, since the organization mainly represented downtown retailers. These issues--parking, urban renewal, transportation, and others--reflect postwar ideas of urban planning. The Downtown Toledo Associates was inspired by a Toledo *Blade*-sponsored study made by Norman Bel Geddes in 1945 that called for a master plan for Toledo's development. As an advocate organization, members frequently participated on citizen's committees and commissions working closely with the City of Toledo on issues connected with the master plan, first drawn up in the early 1950s. Much of the material, then, is city-sponsored.

Historical Sketch

As Toledo sprawled in the postwar period and residents became less inclined to shop downtown, merchants in the core city began to suffer. In response to this worsening state of affairs, a group of downtown businessmen, mainly retailers, organized the Downtown Toledo Associates on June 1, 1955. Its goals were, at the outset, twofold: to work as a civic group with units of local government on matters concerning downtown revitalization. This second goal was sparked by the call, made by visionary Norman Bel Geddes in a Toledo *Blade*-sponsored study in 1945, for a master plan which would determine needs and priorities for the development of Toledo over the next thirty to fifty years.

The issues with which the Downtown Toledo Associates concerned itself and the activities it undertook changed over the years. Its first activity was to advertise in the newspapers special sales and parking rates. Lack of parking space was then felt by the group to be the chief impedance to attracting business downtown. By 1959, a major concern was the development of a downtown mall, a plan attempted in other cities but not successfully in Toledo. The DTA also sought, about 1959, to enforce state blue laws, as a means to fend off the threat posed by discount stores, but again, without success. Urban renewal was an important concern, at least until the late 1960s. It was seen as a way to make the downtown area physically attractive and to locate prosperous residents closer to the area. Finally, issues relating to transportation--expressways and mass transit especially--were prime concerns throughout the 1960s.

The composition and purpose of the organization seems to have changed over the years. Initially its members were primarily retailers, large and small, who banded together to find ways to improve their business. By 1970, however, the organization was dominated by bankers, corporation executives, and real estate developers, although the larger retailers still carried a voice. These people, influential in their own right, were more concerned with larger issues of development and planning than with the more immediate promotional activities of the group's founders. Phillip J. Zeller served as executive secretary from the end of 1955 to January 1962. He was succeeded by Burt Silverman, who held the office of executive vice-president until his death in 1978. These men carried on the lion's share of correspondence of the organization and coordinated its activities. At first, these activities were mainly luncheons that brought merchants together to hear experts on urban planning. Later, members participated in such groups as the Mayor's Parking Committee (1969-1971) and the Convention Center Advisory Committee (1969). The organization was also involved in the selection of parking structure consultants and architects for the convention center.

The Downtown Toledo Associates continued as an organization under the leadership of executive vice-president Lois Nelson until 1983. At that point the organization disbanded, Nelson becoming director of the Office of Promotion of the Toledo Chamber of Commerce.

Scope and Content Note

The records of the Downtown Toledo Associates document the organization's interests and activities from its inception in 1955 to 1978. Promoting business in the downtown area was its primary goal. At first advertising special sales and parking rates--direct promotion--was its main activity. These advertisements, run in the Toledo newspapers, have all been preserved in a scrapbook. Two other scrapbooks contain a full record of local newspaper stories touching on downtown developments in general, especially parking, from 1955 to 1957 and from 1960-1963.

The files in the collection are organized by topic. The topics of greatest concern to the Downtown Toledo Associates were parking, expressways, and urban renewal. Each topic generally contains correspondence, clippings, and pamphlet files. Much of the correspondence is with the parking consultant firm, Wilbur Smith and Associates, with retailers, commercial organizations in other cities, and especially with city officials.

Most of the published reports, and ultimately the topical files, have to do with the master plan, first outlined in the 1950s. The Toledo Regional Area Plan for Action, finalized in the late 1960s, was the end result of Gedde's Toledo Tomorrow (1945). The activity of the Downtown Toledo Associates and its executive Burt Silverman during the 1960s shows that their primary activity was to lobby city and county agencies for downtown development. Much city and county material, therefore, is contained in the files.

Box and Folder Inventory

Box	Folder	Arrangement
		Master plan:
1	1	Correspondence
	2	Phases one and two, Dec. 18, 1956-excerpts
	3	Phase two
	4	Toledo-Lucas County Plan Commission
	5	Toledo tomorrow (1945): An economic projection for the Toledo regional area, July 1965 A population projection for the Toledo regional area, November 1965 Goals for the region A summary of population A study of public facilities, June 1967 Community attitudes and preferences, March 1969 A parking space and use inventory, March 1969
		Convention Center:
	6	Committee-minutes and memoranda, 1969
	7	Architectural selection committee
	8	Correspondence
	9	Editorials and news releases
	10	Feasibility studies and reports
	11	Legal issues
	12	Material from other cities
	13	Newspaper clippings
	14	Personal notes
	15	University of Toledo-City complex, joint
		General:
	16	Newspaper clippings, 1955
	17	Newspaper advertisement, 1957-1968
	18	Industrial development
	19	Membership
	20	Model cities
		Parking:
	21	Committee-minutes and memoranda
	22	Bulletins and newsletters
	23	Consultant selection
	24	Correspondence
	25	Editorials and press releases
	26	Finance-reports and recommendations

	27	Maps
	28	Material from other cities
	29	Newspaper clippings
	30	Reports and studies
	31	Pedestrianization
	32	Safety Committee
		Shopping malls:
2	1	General
	2	Newspaper clippings
	3	Social functions
		Sunday closing:
	4	Bulletins and newsletters
	5	Clippings
	6	Correspondence
	7	Legal papers
		Transportation:
	8	Alexis Road extension-clippings
		Downtown distributor:
	9	General
	10	Maps and studies
		Expressway
	11	Addresses and editorials
	12	Correspondence
	13	Newspaper clippings
	14	Newspaper clippings
		Mass transit:
	15	Correspondence
	16	Financing
	17	Newspaper clippings
	18	Studies and reports
	19	Toledo Area Regional Transit Authority-Board minutes, 1970
		Urban renewal:
		General
	20	Newspaper clippings
	21	Printed material
	22	Reports-City of Toledo
	23	Reports-Lucas County
		Vistula Manor project:
	24	Newspaper clippings

	25	Reports
	26	Urban Renewal Agency
	27	Photographs
		Scrapbooks:
	Oversize Area	Newspaper clippings, 1955-1957
	Oversize Area	Newspaper clippings, 1960-1963
	Oversize Area	Advertisements, 1955-1959