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A CITY WITHOUT A CENTER: HOW THE KESSLER
PLAN CAUSED DALLAS TO LACK
A CENTRAL IDENTITY

by

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Presented to the Faculty of the Honors College of
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April 20, 2018

ABSTRACT

A CITY WITHOUT A CENTER: HOW THE KESSLER PLAN CAUSED DALLAS TO LACK A CENTRAL IDENTITY

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The University of Texas at Arlington, 2018

Faculty Mentor: Kathryn Holliday

How a city is planned and developed impacts how people can connect with that place. Dallas is a city that has struggled with identity since its founding; it does not fit the typical “rules” that a successful city plan follows. In this study I argue that the roots of this problem lie in Dallas’ first city plan, designed by George Kessler. Kessler, a Kansas City based landscape architect and planner, developed his own standards of city planning based on ideas popular from 1890 to 1920 and worked from a standard idealized city prototype. Through a close reading of the Kessler plan for Dallas, site visits, and visual analysis of maps, plans, and photographs, I analyze Dallas’ urban form relative to Kessler's ideal plan and his vision for Kansas City. Rather than arguing that it is a successful or unsuccessful city because it does not fit accepted ideas about good city form, these comparisons allow us to understand the origins of Dallas' identity struggle in context. The alterations he made

to this prototype--including subtraction, shifts in scale, and insufficient mediation--allowed Dallas to fall victim to urban sprawl and lack a clear identity.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The way a city is designed creates a link between the people in that city and the overall context. A good city is hard to define, and while there have been checklists made by noted architectural writers and theorists, like Kevin Lynch,¹ diagrams made by architect Kevin Bacon,² or even main points discussed in Vitruvius' Ten Books of Architecture,³ there is no consensus about the perfect list of what makes a successful city. These lists establish a prototype of an ideal city, and cities that don't fit into this ideal are considered bad examples of urbanism. One of the most common examples of these cities is Los Angeles, which breaks every normal rule. According to most, Los Angeles is an urban disaster, but looking through a different lens, it is its own ecology.⁴ Dallas, according to urban historian Harvey Graff in his extended analysis in *The Dallas Myth*, is an example of a city that does not work. He states that Dallas is a "city with no history" and that the way Dallas has been planned has perpetuated the idea that it is an unsuccessful city.⁵ He is correct to an extent. Dallas does not fit into the ideal described by Bacon or the concept of imageability set by Lynch. It does not employ Jane Jacobs' style of effective building or

¹ Lynch, Kevin. (1960). *The Image of the City*. Cambridge: The MIT Press

² Bacon, Edmund. (1969). *Design of Cities*. Mexico: Penguin Books.

³ Vitruvius, P., & Morgan, M. H. (1960). *Vitruvius: The Ten Books on Architecture*. New York: Dover Publications.

⁴ Banham, R. (1971). *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*. London: Allen Lane.

⁵ Graff, Harvey J. (2010). *The Dallas Myth: The Making and Unmaking of an American City*. Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press.

demonstrate more recent ideas of ecological urbanism.⁶ This, however, does not mean that Dallas is inherently a “bad” city. To truly analyze Dallas as it relates to the ideas of urbanism, the discourse surrounding what a successful city is at the time Dallas was designed will be discussed. George Kessler, the landscape architect who created the initial plan for Dallas, developed his own city prototype.⁷ He took ideal city characteristics from popular ideas about urbanism at the time, and then altered the prototype to fit certain cities, such as El Paso and Kansas City. From that, Kessler’s prototype will be examined by comparing Kansas City and Dallas. Lastly, Dallas will be analyzed using the discourse from today to map how Kessler’s choices in the design have changed and how the city relates to other large cities in an urban way. Contrary to what Graff believed, the choices Kessler made for Dallas were not all bad, and most were positive at the time. As the city continued to grow, however, and ideas about urbanism changed, his ideas remained prevalent in the city, holding it back from growing into a more urban environment. He used subtraction, shifts in scale, and insufficient mediation to create the city plan for Dallas, which grew to be problematic, caused the city to struggle with identity, and become the city without a center that it is today.

⁶ Jacobs, Jane. (1992) *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. New York: Vintage Books

⁷ Kessler, George E. A City Plan for Dallas, book, 1911; Dallas, Texas. University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History; crediting Dallas Municipal Archives.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

The project analyzes primary sources and compares secondary sources with my own conclusions. First, Kessler's prototype will be determined, and then compiling site visits with urban discourse will help me analyze Dallas. Research will involve examination of visual data, such as maps or city plans, as well as first-person experiences in those environments.

2.1 Close Reading

Kessler submitted a proposal to the parks board of Dallas for a city plan first in 1910 and subsequently in 1920. Throughout my research I will be using it as a primary source, gathering my own information and analyzing the visuals within it. The idea is to view Dallas through its own lens instead of through another more contemporary one in terms of success. Kessler's ideal city will be found through a review of the Kessler plan and images in both the Dallas and Kansas City plans. Common themes in both will lead to the composited prototype that Kessler created. I will be looking at how his ideal is altered within Dallas through the choices that he implemented in the plan and how those ideas evolved over time into problems that Dallas faces today.

2.2 Site Visits

It would be extremely difficult to discuss how a city functions without visiting that city. While on paper a city could be planned perfectly, how citizens interact with that city every day could prove challenging. As a result, my analysis of Kessler's plans also relied

on visiting Dallas and Kansas City to compare the two at first hand. In Dallas, Turtle Creek Parkway and Kessler Park were key sites; in Kansas City, North Terrace Park and Penn Valley Park were most important. Pairing my previous knowledge of plans and visuals and experiencing the city three dimensionally allowed me think more deeply about Kessler's ideal.

CHAPTER 3

DISCOURSE

The discourse around urbanism has changed since Kessler designed the 1910 original city plan. To understand why Dallas has become so problematic, it is important to look at both the past and present discourse surrounding the topic.

3.1 Urbanism in 1900-1920

In the early 1900s the idea of urbanism was still heavily impacted by the industrial revolution. Cities were concerned with how to incorporate cars into the urban fabric, and mostly focused on how roads should be inserted or formed within the city. The City Beautiful was also important during this time, as planners tried to combat the “paralyzing combination of stresses: the high tide of immigration... coincided with the burst of new technologies.”⁸

3.1.1 An Ideal City

Up until 1920, there were certain ideas circulating about how to form the ideal city. With the urban population explosion, many planners were seeking a way to maximize the uses of infrastructure. There was also a desire to keep the rural feel that is so heavily associated with 19th century America. The City Beautiful movement was popular through the 1910s because of this desire to pair nature with the city. It was an “attempt to refashion cities into beautiful, functional entities.”⁹ Essentially, citizens and city board members

⁸ Fishman, Robert. “American Planning Tradition, Introduction and Interpretation.” *The American Planning Tradition: Culture and Policy*, edited by Robert Fishman. Baltimore, 2000, 1-29

⁹ Wilson, W. H. (1994). *The City Beautiful Movement*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

desired their cities to be functional and aesthetically appealing to promote more balance in the daily life of citizens. The problem is that many City Beautiful actions also happened on the level of city infrastructure. It was not on a human level; rather, it focused on roads and large-scale landscape architecture. There was a focus “on creating grand public spaces: civic centers, boulevards, and parkways,”¹⁰ all of which were too large to really connect with the individual.

Elbert Peets, an influential architect and educator, published the *American Vitruvius* in 1922, the culmination of his decades of work teaching. In this handbook and textbook he focused on the relationship between built and unbuilt space in cities. While he was discussing patterns in Europe, it was also clear how these lessons could apply to the United States. He discussed how streets could potentially align with the rest of the city grid and how they would allow for public space to form afterwards.¹¹ While not necessarily an advocate for green space being incorporated into the city plan, he was focused on urban density and the city becoming less populated as the distance from the center increased.

These models of the ideal city discuss the idea of public space without showing how it would connect with the pedestrian. It was assumed that public space would function inherently as an area the community would flock to. They each neglect, however, to plan the city on a human scale. Everything is discussed in terms of streets or intersections, making it evident that vehicles were the biggest priority; public space is mentioned, but the individual is not. The city becomes about outside appearances and ease of use rather than the citizens having a connection to the place. Although it would be aesthetically pleasing

¹⁰ Fishman, Robert. “American Planning Tradition, Introduction and Interpretation”. *The American Planning Tradition: Culture and Policy*, edited by Robert Fishman. Baltimore, 2000, 1-29

¹¹ Peets, Elbert and Hedgemann, Werner. (1922). *The American Vitruvius: An Architect's Handbook of Civic Art*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press.

or have a positive impact on the quality of the city, public space should be discussed in its relationship to those who use it rather than how it fits into the larger plan.

3.2 Urbanism in 1950-1970

Critiquing the large-scale, solely functional design that happened after the City Beautiful movement, architectural theorists in the 1950s desired more of a purpose in the city. The dialogue had shifted to favor the individual. In the 1930s-1950s cities “combined a poorly understood caricature of modern design with a top-down authoritarianism” which became known as “urban renewal.”¹² Afterwards, the foundations of contemporary ideas were laid in the latter half of the 20th century, and over a period of about 30 years those ideas grew together into the form of urbanism that is common today. Cities have been studied in terms of their local character and how successfully they have been planned. In addition to checklists that have been made to discuss how cities should be laid out and interact with their surroundings, a sense of place is introduced as making a city successful.

3.2.1 The Identity of a City

Kevin Lynch is one person who has made a perfect city checklist. He focuses on the idea of imageability in a city, and that city having a certain identity. How successful a city is can be determined by “studying [the] mental image of that city which is held by its citizens.”¹³ The five points that are supposed to make up imageability are paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks. These highlight the sense of place that one feels within a city. While one could theoretically look at a map to find each of these points, he walked through cities and asked residents questions about how he could get to different places.

¹² Fishman, Robert. “American Planning Tradition, Introduction and Interpretation”. *The American Planning Tradition: Culture and Policy*, edited by Robert Fishman. Baltimore, 2000, 1-29

¹³ Lynch, Kevin. (1960). *The Image of the City*. Cambridge: The MIT Press

This idea of walkability highlights the shift in scale. His ideas were focused on the individual person and navigability of the cities, which is a very important aspect of contemporary urbanism.

Edmund Bacon is another architect whose ideas are still largely followed today. He focuses on connecting spaces throughout the city, and using armatures to link the city.¹⁴ While he does not expressly mention Lynch's idea of imageability, Bacon does look at different ways of diagramming a city. Those that are most easily diagrammed do contain aspects similar to Lynch's research. Public space is often used in the diagrams as a way to find anchor points along the armature, but it is large-scale.

Jane Jacobs, author of several books including *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, was equally as influential during this time. She fought against urban renewal, knowing that they were destroying urban environments.¹⁵ She "provided what urban planning needed most in an era of decentralization... she provided a justification for the city."¹⁶ Jacobs allowed certain key points to show which areas are urban centers. She suggested a mix of old and new buildings, a sense of enclosure on the street, and consideration of how different neighborhoods interact in dense environments.¹⁷

All three of these ideal city models look at public space on a more accessible scale. They look at how people are expected to fit into these spaces and are altered depending on how people interact with the city plan. The problem is, however, that they still attempt to come up with a blanket "fix" for cities; they imply that if cities have a certain percentage

¹⁴ Bacon, Edmund. (1969). *Design of Cities*. Mexico: Penguin Books.

¹⁵ Jacobs, Jane. (1992) *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. New York: Vintage Books

¹⁶ Fishman, Robert. "American Planning Tradition, Introduction and Interpretation." *The American Planning Tradition: Culture and Policy*, edited by Robert Fishman. Baltimore, 2000, 1-29

¹⁷ Jacobs, Jane. (1992) *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. New York: Vintage Books

of these ideas in the plan, they will automatically be successful. A city should not be categorized by success or failure based on external factors. It is safe to say that Dallas does not adhere to Kevin Lynch's ideas of imageability, nor can it be easily mapped through connective city tissue like in Bacon's ideal, but this does not mean that it is unsuccessful. To reasonably analyze Dallas, it must be compared to the internal factor of its own plan. Kessler had his own prototype that was a compilation of the ideas of the early 1900s. Dallas will be compared to this prototype and the intent behind it, as well as Kansas City, which used the same prototype.

3.3 Urbanism in 2000-2020

One hundred years after the original city plan for Dallas, urbanism has cycled back to some similar ideas that were present in the early 20th century. Infrastructure is being investigated as a way to bring more than one service to residents. Walkability is a common buzzword in the discussion of successful urban centers, along with sustainability and mixed-use.

3.3.1 An Evolving City

Our ideas about the values and physical forms implemented in the ideal city continue to change. Mohsen Mostafavi's *Ecological Urbanism*, published in 2010, emphasizes "the interrelationship of organisms and the environment,"¹⁸ built or otherwise, and how this process can adapt or evolve over time to function as its own ecology, which challenges the earlier prototypes established in the 20th century. Although normally applied to natural environments, there is an argument that cities should develop naturally. Rather than be superficial or thought of as the built environment--imposing and taxing on

¹⁸ Mostafavi, Mohsen. (2010). "Why Ecological Urbanism? Why Now?" In Mohsen Mostafavi and Gareth Doherty (Eds), *Ecological Urbanism* (12-51). Karlsruhe: Lars Müller Publishers.

nature--cities should work in the context they have developed. Each should have different challenges associated with the site and be designed as a cohesive environment containing site, citizens, and infrastructure.

3.4 Urbanism in Dallas

Dallas was originally designed by George Kessler. Although it started in 1841, it was not formally planned until the 1910s. Kessler designed many cities. Dallas, El Paso, Kansas City and Denver are among this list. Being a landscape architect allowed him to see both the big picture and small picture when planning an urban environment. Some ideas are present in multiple cities, and these ideas seem to be the basis of his ideal. To fully analyze this concept, the ideal will be discussed in general. How it is employed in Dallas will be contrasted with how it is employed in Kansas City.

3.4.1 The Kessler Ideal

In any Kessler plan, bands of density around the city can be seen. These rings form the inner and outer core of the city. The inner core increases in density as time goes on. Kessler knew that cities continue to expand, so he built space into the plan to accommodate expansion. In Figure 3.1, the rings surrounding the city are diagrammed. From the center of the radial pattern, Dallas is positioned so that the downtown area is central.



Figure 3.1: Present Parks Map of Dallas, Sourced from the Kessler Plan¹⁹

¹⁹Kessler, George E. A City Plan for Dallas, book, 1911; Dallas, Texas. University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History; crediting Dallas Municipal Archives.

Large boulevards for efficient connections are the second point in Kessler's plans. He designed several parks and streets maps for the cities. Each one contained proposals for street widening and street extensions. This can be linked back to Peets' highlight of forming logical branches off a plaza as well as the grandeur of boulevards in the City Beautiful movement. He wanted to avoid awkward connections of streets, so he altered the function of the typical old plaza into the new, larger intersection.

Nature spanning out from the city center was also present in his plans. This is most likely from the City Beautiful Movement.²⁰ Having nature radiating outwards through parkways or planned landscaping not only helps connect the rings of density, but also highlights the importance of the center core, as seemingly the origin of each branch. Many of the cities Kessler designed were situated near rivers or creeks, and this use of nature also helped facilitate the difference between urban and rural fabric.

3.4.2 An Adapted City

The Kessler plan may have worked well at the time of implementation, but as the city progressed, it caused problems for the city.²¹ The ideas that are circulating about urbanism, especially today, are not aligned with the ideas Kessler's had when forming his plan for Dallas. Several terms that are associated with urbanism today are: walkability, mixed-use, and sustainability. Each point almost counters the initial ideas Kessler had when designing Dallas. He designed to help the city grow, since it was relatively small when the city plan was put in place.²² Planning for growth, however, becomes difficult

²⁰ Wilson, W. H. (1994). *The City Beautiful Movement*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

²¹ Kessler, George E. *A City Plan for Dallas*, book, 1911; Dallas, Texas. University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History; crediting Dallas Municipal Archives.

²² Fairbanks, R. B. (1998). *For the City as a Whole: Planning, Politics, and the Public Interest in Dallas, Texas, 1900-1965*. Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press.

when the patterns of that growth are unable to adapt over the time that it spans. In other words, while Kessler may have been successful for a short period of time, the ideas that Dallas needed space to expand, that districts should not intersect with each other, and that industry would be a major contributor to the growth of Dallas moving forward were not suitable as a long-term city plan.

One of the first ideas Kessler incorporated into his plan was that Dallas needed space to expand. Originally, it was a small settlement, but Kessler saw the area develop rapidly and realized that if the city were to become successful, space needed to be built into the city plan. Kessler employed this idea mainly by “redesigning an existing city.”²³ He did not want to redo everything that had been built, but by redesigning things like roadways and major arterials, he could add space to the city. Additionally, he could connect outlying areas to the city, which would leave open space to develop later. Urban design was just starting to focus on the automobile and the City Beautiful Movement. At the beginning of the design, the city did not need to be walkable. Today, however, walkability is a major factor in deciding how successful a city is. The problem is, when sprawl was essentially built into the city, that model is difficult to change. Once the city started expanding, it continued to expand. While the city may have densified slightly, there was no way it could become dense enough to be inherently walkable after the traffic patterns were introduced to the area. It becomes almost impossible to take away something once it is introduced to an area.

The second main theme in Kessler’s plan was that districts should not intersect with one another. He stated multiple times that the business district should not leech into the

²³ Head, Louis P. *The Kessler City Plan for Dallas: A Review of the Plan and Progress on its Accomplishment*. Pamphlet. 1925

residential district, that the district involving industry should be placed so that it does not intrude on others, and that rails or thoroughfares can be established or extended to assure that districts will not get mixed up.²⁴ Having the use separated for each district created specific zones, and it was difficult to try to fit mixed-use neighborhoods together. Within his plan were residential districts, manufacturing districts, and business districts. He neglected to realize that instilling this form of separation between the districts would be very hard to break away from; there would be no need to build new infrastructure to meet the needs of one area if it was already existing in another. Having said that, one of the ideas of urbanism today is the idea of mixed-use areas. It is important for people to live, work, and spend leisure time all in one area. This allows for connections between neighbors, puts more people on the street, and promotes the feelings of a community.²⁵

The third point in Kessler's plan is not as clear. Through his design choices, however, it is clear he assumed industry to be the most important district to establish. He felt industry would help Dallas develop further in the future. He proposed moving the Trinity River and dredging the bottom so that the depth would be suitable for cargo ships. He wanted to set up rail lines that would interact with these ships at levees. He wanted certain manufacturing districts to be placed in the right areas so that they would have access to the new Trinity Canal. These choices placed industry at the forefront of development in Dallas. Again, this presents a problem when viewed from the third point in urbanism today, sustainability. Cities do not necessarily have to be green, but they should be able to function

²⁴ Kessler, George E. *A City Plan for Dallas*, book, 1911; Dallas, Texas. University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History; crediting Dallas Municipal Archives.

²⁵ Jacobs, Jane. (1992) *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. New York: Vintage Books

with their surroundings more easily. They can exist and act in a multifaceted way to help both residents and be more of an environmentally friendly system.²⁶

To compare the difference between Dallas and other plans that were based on his prototype, Kansas City will be studied. In Kansas City, the park board had specific goals they wanted Kessler to achieve. One goal was to keep the natural topography as much as possible; they did not want to flatten the city out. The other was to focus on creating density in the inner core of the city before proceeding to the outer rings. These two goals affected two of the points in a Kessler prototype city. Obviously, the rings of density would be skewed. Rather than leaving space to expand gradually, Kessler was instructed to assume that the inner core would be developed as much as possible before the city was to spread. This resulted in a more compact city center. The city viewed expansion as something that would happen after a center was fully established, and this resulted in the city having a unique sense of place and identity. The surrounding city was aware of the inner core's role in the system, rather than each inner and outer core being relatively equal at the beginning. In Figure 3.3, the density of Kansas City's center is very evident compared to the smaller houses to the east. City blocks are close together and dark, with a clear grid in between them.

²⁶ Mostafavi, Mohsen. (2010). "Why Ecological Urbanism? Why Now?" Mohsen Mostafavi and Gareth Doherty (Eds), *Ecological Urbanism* (12-51). Karlsruhe: Lars Müller Publishers.



Figure 3.3: Figure Ground Map of Kansas City, Produced by Author

The other point is the large boulevards that could not be as present in the plan. Because of the topography and the city's desire for it to remain mostly natural, it was difficult for Kessler to expand the street sizes as in his other plans. Rather than having one main street that dominates the grid, the grid becomes more even and balanced. There are streets that work together to form urban spaces rather than the street being used as a means of efficiency to get somewhere else. The prototype is effective in Kansas City because it was slightly altered to meet the needs of the place. The city had goals in mind which resulted in the plan for the new city forming around their identity. In Dallas, the prototype was not as effective.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

In Dallas, Kessler was not given any set guidelines. There were challenges presented by the Trinity river, but the city did not have a list of set expectations. As a result of this, Kessler did not have a framework to fit with his prototype. Instead, he used subtraction, shifts in scale, and insufficient mediation to create the city plan for Dallas. This, rather than becoming an adaption of his original prototype, effectively changed the ideal. Dallas struggled to find an identity and hence became a city without a center.

4.1 Subtraction

Subtraction, or rather the lack of addition, can be seen in Dallas today. There is not a planned, cohesive city center. When designing the plan for Dallas, several people disputed over the inner core. There were different city grids and the downtown area was not one urban fabric. In Kessler's ideal, he employed rings of density around a core, but rather than attempting to unify the core, Kessler chose to focus primarily on the outer rings of the city. Essentially the core was left alone except for superficial alterations. Some street extensions or widenings were planned, as well as certain interior parks, but there was not a focus on this part of the city. This choice to focus on the exterior portion of the ideal rather than the interior is one of the main reasons Dallas is struggling today. Kessler made the city plan for Dallas with certain gaps so that the city could have space to expand, but when the city expanded with no real path or intent--especially in the urban core--it became difficult to address issues of sprawl.

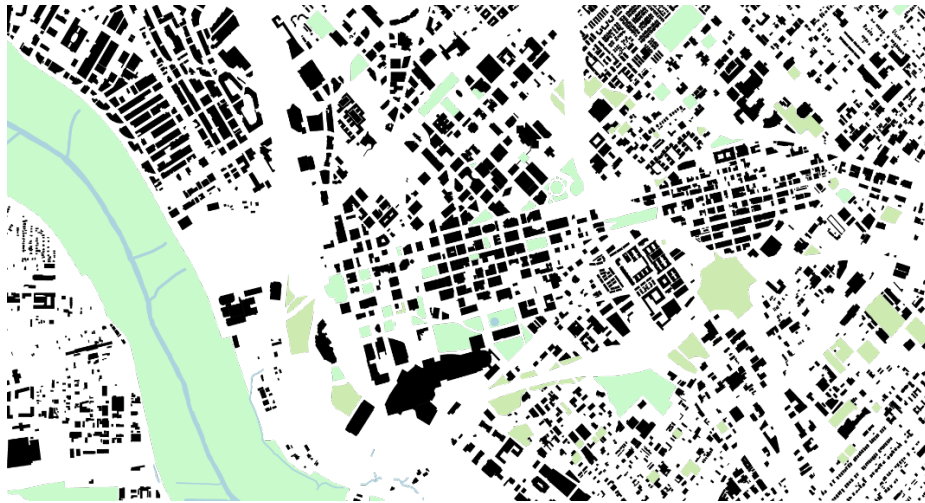


Figure 4.1: Figure Ground Map of Dallas, Produced by Author

Some could say that leaving the original city core was a good, conscious decision, and that it should have given Dallas an even stronger sense of identity. While this could have happened, the choices Kessler made to expand the areas outside of the city caused decentralization of the core. This made the identity within the city even weaker. When people left the city center to move towards the outer core, the originality of the core began to vanish. It allowed newer companies to move in and newer buildings to become the focus. In Figure 4.1, the center of the city is difficult to distinguish because the density in the surrounding areas is almost as high. The only differentiation is the stark difference of grids. Had Kessler chosen not to subtract the center of his prototype, the city would appear much more cohesive because he would have been designing with the city, not around it. Again, this is not inherently negative; growth of a city center over time is positive, and it would make sense to have density spreading to the surrounding areas. When it happens rapidly, however, and with no clear goal or framework around the city center, it causes the surrounding areas to struggle with finding identity as well.

4.2 Shifts in Scale

The choices Kessler made also caused a huge, premature shift in scale of the city center. Dallas was extremely small compared to other cities that were undergoing planning to this extent. Because of this, the city was not as prepared for the results of the choices Kessler made; it was too small to carry out the planning decisions successfully. One of the main things that was implemented from the plan was to connect Dallas to the Oak Cliff area. To do this, Kessler expanded the outer rings of density that were common in his prototype. This pushed the older core into the position of a metropolitan center. While it was a smaller metropolitan area than DFW is today, for the time it was still the beginnings of a collection of several towns. The city had not grown organically to this point, so it was difficult to make it a clear center. In other words, Kessler took a city center that needed more planning and placed it in the center of an even larger city. There was no clear identity or purpose behind Dallas becoming the center of the area at this stage in its development. Most of the time, it would make sense to plan the city center and develop the outer rings naturally over time, but Kessler did the opposite. As a result, Dallas today does not have a center or its own identity. The identity of Dallas is formed by the cities around it rather than by internal dynamic of downtown. Figure 4.2 shows the overview of Kessler's plan in Dallas. The downtown area is just east of the river. In plan it is much more centrally located than it would be if Oak Cliff were not incorporated into the plan.



Figure 4.2: General Plan for the City of Dallas, Sourced from the Kessler Plan²⁷

Another example of this shift in scale involves the roadways Kessler proposed. Most noted is one that would span 200 feet.²⁸ While it was not implemented, Kessler took a developing area and gave it the treatment of the huge urban centers on the East Coast.²⁹ Each aspect of the city that he magnified placed Dallas further and further into a realm of urbanity that it was not ready for.

4.3 Insufficient Mediation

The last problem with Kessler's plan for Dallas was that it did not mediate the connections between the inner and outer rings of the city. In the inner core of the city,

²⁷ Kessler, George E. *A City Plan for Dallas*, book, 1911; Dallas, Texas. University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History; crediting Dallas Municipal Archives.

²⁸ Kessler, George E. *A City Plan for Dallas*, book, 1911; Dallas, Texas. University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History; crediting Dallas Municipal Archives.

²⁹ Fairbanks, R. B. (1998). *For the City as a Whole: Planning, Politics, and the Public Interest in Dallas, Texas, 1900-1965*. Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press.

Kessler proposed street connections and extensions. He did the same in the outer core, but the only way he connected the two was by using major thoroughfares. In some ways, this was similar to the City Beautiful ideas at the time: creating grand boulevards. As Kessler was planning Dallas with some of these ideas, however, he did not place as much emphasis on the smaller connections. The insufficient smaller connections between the Dallas city center and the outlying sprawl caused more people to use the efficient thoroughfares. This in turn led to more traffic and more need for the highways that disrupt connections in Dallas today. Not only are the interior and exterior rings not sufficiently connected, but the smaller level of connections within the city is also lacking. Kessler desired zones within the city that did not overlap, but he did not do anything other than extend roads to link sections. As a result of these poor connections, Dallas is a fragmented example of urbanity.³⁰ Figure 4.2 shows the proposed street extensions; compared to the untouched streets, he did not propose that many connections. He attempted to stitch together the parts of Dallas that had developed separately, but he did so by using roads, completely forgetting that the feeling of the spaces would remain unchanged.

³⁰ Graff, Harvey J. (2010). *The Dallas Myth: The Making and Unmaking of an American City*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.



Figure 4.3: Planned Street Connections and Extensions, Sourced from the Kessler Plan for Dallas³¹

4.4 Implementation

The ideas that Kessler formed by the original plan continued to affect Dallas even though not all of them were implemented. Turtle Creek Parkway and Kessler Park were big portions in his plan that were carried out. Additionally, some street extension proposals in the core were carried out by 1928.³² Even though so little of the original plan was implemented, the positioning of the pieces that were actualized still had the intended effects on the city. Both the parkway and the park bring nature to the plan, which is positive. They also, however, are located outside the city center. This makes it clear that he promoted the idea of growth outwards. There was no incentive for the city to grow within the downtown area, because it still was not functional. As a result, expanding into the outer rings of the plan occurred and urban sprawl became an issue. Figure 4.4 shows Turtle Creek Parkway

³¹ Kessler, George E. *A City Plan for Dallas*, book, 1911; Dallas, Texas. University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History; crediting Dallas Municipal Archives.

³² Fairbanks, R. B. (1998). *For the City as a Whole: Planning, Politics, and the Public Interest in Dallas, Texas, 1900-1965*. Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press.

and Kessler park moving outwards from the inner core. Little to no green space was added to the existing parks in the city center.



Figure 4.4: Map of Parks and Boulevards, Sourced from the Kessler Plan for Dallas³³

The street connections succeeded in making it easier for cars to access the city. This was positive for the time period in which Dallas was growing, but it soon led to an abundance of cars in the city and a need for even more roadways. None of Kessler’s ideas were negative in the time period they were proposed. The problem with the Kessler plan was that after the initial plan was carried out, it did not leave much room for continual redesign. Kessler was specific that he did not want to “build a new city, but to rebuild an existing city.”³⁴ He realized that starting from scratch was not a viable option, and at the time the plan was established, the city was small enough that he could in a sense redesign it. As the city kept growing, however, redesign became increasingly difficult. Leaving space for the city only worked for so long until the issue of urban sprawl came into play.

³³ Kessler, George E. *A City Plan for Dallas*, book, 1911; Dallas, Texas. University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History; crediting Dallas Municipal Archives.

³⁴ Head, Louis P. *The Kessler City Plan for Dallas: A Review of the Plan and Progress on its Accomplishment*. Pamphlet. 1925

While each district was expanding they remained separate, but it led to the city being difficult to navigate. Although industry was important to the growth of Dallas, rail lines soon turned into roadways. Roadways turned into highways surrounding Dallas, which then became dividers of the city and are largely out of scale in the center of an urban environment.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Dallas should not be classified as successful or unsuccessful. It does not conform to urban ideas through the 1910s, 1960s or the early 2000s. To analyze Dallas, one needs to look at the original prototype used to design the city. The city, however, has been so far altered from Kessler's ideal that his intent has not materialized. Rather, the city is a collection of vague ideas and distant notions to the prototype. The intent behind Dallas shifted from something meant to make a city functioning and beautiful to something that was just meant to connect portions of the existing city together. The original Kessler Plan for Dallas was a superficial addition that did not connect with the original identity of the city. As a result, the city's identity is made up by its location at the center of other cities rather than being the original point of urban growth. The subtraction, shifting scales, and lack of sufficient connectivity in the Kessler Plan caused Dallas to grow into an amalgamation of areas rather than a city with a central urban fabric.

Graff was not correct in his assumption that Dallas was automatically an unsuccessful city.³⁵ Compared to its own prototype, it is true that Dallas is unsuccessful in carrying out the original intent of Kessler's ideal. Bringing in recent ideas of urbanism, however, a city is an ecology. It can continuously adapt and be altered. This exercise is important in studying how urban planning can affect a place over time. Even though not

³⁵ Graff, Harvey J. (2010). *The Dallas myth: The making and unmaking of an American city*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

that much of the Kessler's plan was implemented, the intent read clearly through how the early city developed. Cities are not good or bad, but they should relate to and interact with the people who live there. After the original plan, the citizens of Dallas were not able to find a sense of place or connect with their history because they chose not to have input when Kessler was designing. Rather than reestablishing this connection after the plan was completed, the city remains lost almost one hundred years later because of the choices Kessler made. Now that ecological urbanism has been introduced into the discourse, Dallas has a huge amount of potential. Since ecological urbanism is similar to the City Beautiful Movement in terms of infrastructure and the desire to provide multifaceted services to the public, the missing points of Kessler's prototype could finally be implemented. With a few tweaks to include urban ideas and link the two ideas, a cohesive city that relates to Dallas' history could finally be designed. The moment in urbanism today is an amazing opportunity to link the past with the present and create a definite identity in Dallas.

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Samantha Oliphint graduated from the University of Texas at Arlington, where she earned an Honors Bachelor of Science in Architecture with a minor in Environmental and Sustainability Studies. She was a member of Phi Kappa Phi, the American Institute of Architecture Students, and the National Society for Collegiate Scholars. Supported by her parents, sister, and pets, she plans to earn a Master of Architecture degree at the Massachusetts College of Art and Design. She is interested in exploring the different scales that architecture can exist in. With a focus on urban spaces after studying in both Limerick, Ireland, and Valencia, Spain, Samantha is excited about the prospect of creating small-scale architecture and promoting it as another form of urbanity. Ultimately, she hopes to open a sustainable firm to further explore her interests.