United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 1

SIGNIFICANCE

Statement of Significance Summary

As a well-preserved, nationally significant example of urban redevelopment in the last half of the twentieth century, Cedar Square West qualifies for National Register designation under Criterion A. It is significant under the Area of Significance of Community Planning and Development because it physically transformed a highly visible area of Minneapolis and, in the process, was a national model for the experimental concept of New Towns-In Town. Cedar Square West was the first project in the country to receive Title VII funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and it is the larger of only two New Towns-In Town that ultimately qualified for that program. Title VII was an important step in the country’s efforts to address acute housing shortages and overall deterioration in the nation’s urban areas in the decades after World War II. These efforts evolved, both in language and philosophy, from “slum removal” to “urban renewal.” Finally, with Title VII, the focus became community building. While most of the funds from Title VII and related HUD programs supported the development of satellite communities, such as the contemporary Jonathan, Minnesota, Cedar Square West addressed a pressing inner-city need in an innovative and idealistic way. It received national attention as a prototype for this approach. Like comparable HUD projects from the period, it did not live up to the dreams of its developers. Intended to be the first phase in the redevelopment of the entire Cedar-Riverside neighborhood, Cedar Square West was, in the end, the sole product of this grand plan. The project did, however, serve as a catalyst to the neighborhood’s transformation, and it stands today as an exceptionally important representation of a distinct epoch in American history.

Cedar Square West also qualifies under Criterion C. It is significant under the Area of Significance of Architecture because it is one of the most important designs of Minneapolis architect Ralph Rapson (1914-2008). Its significance under this criterion is statewide. Ralph Rapson’s achievements have been heralded by many awards, including the AIA Minnesota Gold Medal in 1979 and the Topaz Medallion for architectural education in 1987. As the head of the University of Minnesota’s Architecture School from 1954 to 1984, Rapson influenced a generation of architecture students. Given Cedar Square West’s proximity to the university campus, the property was an inevitable model for those students. The multicolored towers are prominently sited at the intersection of two major interstate freeways on the edge of downtown Minneapolis, guaranteeing their status as visual landmarks to the broader public as well. Cedar Square West brought high-style mid-twentieth-century design to the state on a large scale.

Construction of the project began in earnest in 1970. The period of significance starts in 1973, when the first tenants moved in, and ends in 1974, when the construction was finished and the units were 93 percent occupied. This is less than fifty years ago, so the property must be of exceptional importance to qualify for the National Register under Criteria Consideration G. The country’s urban redevelopment efforts in the decades after World War II have been the subject of extensive analysis for many years, so it is possible to have an objective perspective on key periods and projects related to that context. Cedar Square West is clearly a pioneering urban redevelopment project resulting from a major federal initiative. As a result of the project’s exceptional national importance, it qualifies for the National Register under Criteria Consideration G.
Narrative Statement of Significance

The Accidental Developers
Cedar Square West was the product of the idealism that characterized the 1960s. A handful of individuals were responsible for its genesis, particularly Gloria Segal, Keith Heller, and architect Ralph Rapson. In 1962, Gloria Segal and her husband, Martin, a doctor, sought advice on investments and estate planning from Keith Heller, who taught at the University of Minnesota’s School of Business Administration. Heller recommended investing in real estate, which served as a tax shelter and offered the possibility of appreciation. Heller believed that the area around the University of Minnesota’s Minneapolis campus had particular potential for long-term investment. The post-war baby boom was swelling the student population, and university dormitories could accommodate only a fraction of the demand for housing. Acting on this advice, the Segals purchased an apartment complex, University Court, in southeast Minneapolis, and hired Heller to manage it.¹

Soon thereafter, the Segals began to think about redeveloping the site. They talked to Ralph Rapson, the head of the university’s School of Architecture, who drew up initial sketches for a new apartment complex with 300 to 350 units. Although the Segals did not proceed with the University Court project, they became acquainted with Rapson and had a brush with real estate development that whetted their interest in that process.²

This was further reinforced as they invested in more real estate, in partnership with Heller. He had switched his focus across the Mississippi River to an area known by the name of two major streets that intersected there: Cedar-Riverside. Starting in 1963, the partnership gradually acquired small parcels in the residential area east of Cedar Avenue. Other investors were active in the neighborhood as well, including the real estate brokerage company B. W. and Leo Harris, which concentrated on industrial and commercial land west of Cedar. In 1963, a major local contractor, the Knutson Company, retained Rapson to create a master plan for the entire area. While that plan was not implemented, it reflected a common belief that the neighborhood needed large-scale redevelopment.³

From Snoose Boulevard to the Electric Fetus: Cedar Riverside’s Colorful History
It was understandable that many felt the area, which had long served as an entry point for new arrivals to the country and a low-rent housing district for university students, was down on its heels. It had acquired a reputation as a first stop for new immigrants in the late nineteenth century, when a preponderance of just-off-the-boat Scandinavians and their ever-present snuff earned Cedar Avenue the nickname “Snoose Boulevard.”

The area was included in the original boundaries of Minneapolis, which was incorporated in 1856. It was east of the commercial node that became the city’s downtown, and not far from the lumber and

¹ Judith Martin, Recycling the Central City: The Development of a New Town-In Town (Minneapolis: Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, 1978), 31. Martin’s book provides an excellent history of the Cedar-Riverside project.
² Martin, Recycling the Central City, 31-32.
³ Ibid., 32.
flour mills that soon clustered around Saint Anthony Falls on the Mississippi River. By the 1860s, Scandinavian immigrants were pouring into Minneapolis, encouraged by railroads and other businesses eager to attract settlers to the frontier. A concentration of Scandinavians first formed near the Milwaukee Road Depot on Third and Washington Avenues, then gradually moved southeast down Washington. In 1880, five of the community’s six Norwegian churches were in the vicinity of Cedar-Riverside. The area developed rapidly as it became more accessible by horse cars, then streetcars. In 1883, the Scandia Bank was erected at the intersection of Cedar-Riverside to serve the growing business and residential community. The location of the bank, in turn, stimulated the establishment of Scandinavian retail shops, grocers, service organizations, and entertainment venues along Cedar Avenue. “Beginning in the mid-1880s,” a historical report explains, “the Cedar Riverside area became noted for its abundance of saloons, theaters, and ethnic meeting halls.”

As the immigrants became successful and joined mainstream society, they moved away from the densely developed area. Their place was taken by other ethnic groups. These new groups and the Scandinavians that remained sometimes had a harder time achieving the American dream. Housing in the Bohemian Flats area along the riverbank, which frequently flooded, was woefully substandard, and residences on higher ground also became more marginal as they aged and maintenance declined. The neighborhood’s saloons and theaters began drawing a seeder clientele, further stimulating the flight of prosperous businesses and residents to other locations.

The Great Depression provided another blow. In *Social Saga of Two Cities*, an authoritative book on conditions in the Twin Cities in the 1930s, Calvin Schmid includes an annotated map of downtown Minneapolis and adjacent areas. The area north and west of the intersection of Cedar and Riverside is labeled “slum,” while the neighborhood east of Cedar and south of Riverside is identified as “residential, lower middle class.” Things had not improved by 1949 when the city conducted a survey of blighted areas. A number of blocks in the Cedar-Riverside area were found to contain a substantial percentage of deteriorated housing.

This was, from some perspectives, not entirely bad. By the 1960s, thanks to the nearby University of Minnesota campus, the area’s coffeehouses, bars, and cheap housing attracted a bohemian culture exemplified by its most famous member, Bob Dylan, and its most infamous record/head shop, the Electric Fetus.

The city, however, felt otherwise. In 1962, the Minneapolis Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA) initiated the area’s redevelopment with the construction of three apartment buildings for senior citizens. The buildings, each estimated to cost $753,280, were on the south side of Sixth Street South, directly across from the future site of Cedar Square West. Two city blocks and parts of additional blocks, all occupied by commercial and residential buildings, were cleared and the streets between the blocks were vacated for the senior housing project. The opposite side of the neighborhood, on the

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7 Minneapolis Building Permits B37709, B377410, and B37411, all dated February 2, 1962.
bluff above the Mississippi River gorge, was also experiencing change. The University of Minnesota, pressed for space on its historic campus on the Mississippi’s east bank, began planning to expand to the west bank in the late 1950s. It pushed across the river in the early 1960s.

**Concrete Idealism: The New Communities Programs**

Real estate investors—including the Segals and Heller—were closely monitoring these developments. In a remarkably short time, their concentration of small parcels east of Cedar Avenue became the springboard for a comprehensive plan for a one hundred-acre “New Town-In Town,” an idealistic development that anticipated a mixed-income, ethnically diverse, multigenerational population of 30,000.

It was not surprising that this idea took wing. In the mid-twentieth century, massive redevelopment projects were encouraged by federal urban renewal programs. The idea of establishing planned new towns in America, however, dates back to the Euro-American settlement period. Philadelphia, Savannah, and Salt Lake City are among the cities that still carry the framework established by their founders. Riverside, Illinois, Radburn, New Jersey, Sunnyside Gardens in the New York borough of Queens, and Greenbelt, Maryland, are examples from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Prominent new communities from the post-World War II period include Reston, Virginia, Columbia, Maryland, and Irvine Ranch, California. In 1969, the federal government identified sixty-three new communities that had been completed or were under construction from 1947 to 1969. Although they were scattered across twenty states, 50 percent were in California, Arizona, and Florida. Most were targeted at middle-class, young to middle-aged, Caucasian families. ³

By the 1930s, the federal government was involved in many major community developments. After World War II, the programs became larger, and often encouraged private investment by federal guarantees for funding sources. By this time, federal guarantees of home mortgages were fueling the flight to suburbia. This accelerated the deterioration of urban areas, already weakened by years of neglect during the Depression and war. Massive urban renewal programs launched with federal encouragement in the 1950s sometimes produced the exact opposite of the revitalization they intended to stimulate in blighted areas. With continued deterioration of the nation’s housing stock and a mushrooming population—projected to grow by 100 million people in the last three decades of the twentieth century—a new approach to address the shortage of good-quality housing was desperately needed.⁴

The idea of starting with a fresh slate was appealing. The federal Department of Housing and Urban Development was established in 1965. In the next five years, Congress passed three “new communities” programs, which are outlined in the following table (the titles are commonly referred to by Roman numeral, as highlighted in the table): ¹⁰

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⁴ Ibid., 260.

¹⁰ Table adapted from Table 1 in Hugh Mields, Jr., *Federally Assisted New Communities: New Dimensions in Urban Development* (Washington, D.C.: Urban Land Institute, 1973), 22.
Each successive program was less timid than the previous one, and had progressively more effect as a result. Title X, which provided mortgage insurance to private developers for improving vacant land, initially had a $10 million cap and could only cover 50 percent of the raw land value and 90 percent of the anticipated cost of the development. This was not enough to attract the attention of many developers. By mid-1972, HUD Title X guarantees totaled only about $50 million spread over approximately twenty-five projects.  

Title IV, passed in 1968, increased the amount that could be insured to $50 million, but HUD was hesitant to implement the program. It took a year and a half for the agency to issue instructions for how to apply, and program regulations were not finalized until early 1970. Significantly, the act listed four types of new communities that could qualify for the program: free standing, satellites of existing metropolitan areas, extensions of smaller towns, and new-towns-in-town. The latter were included to mollify urban mayors, who had opposed the legislation initially.  

By the time Title IV was finally operational, Title VII was on the verge of Congressional approval. It passed in December 1970. To counteract HUD’s lethargy with the Title IV program, “a separate corporation within HUD was established to assure that the new towns program would have special identification, would be highly visible, and that it would focus on the clear mandate in the Bill from Congress to actively and positively encourage large-scale, rational development. The Community Development Corporation was set up as one way of giving the program a ‘production’ orientation so

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11 Ibid., 24.
that the Administration would be encouraged to move the program ahead."\(^{13}\)

In raising the ceiling on guarantees for new communities to $500 million, Title VII made truly large-scale projects feasible. The program included a number of other provisions that supported planning for urban development and funded new public services. Importantly for the Cedar-Riverside project, the law “significantly expanded the concept of urban renewal to permit acquisition of land which was not blighted, including low utility land, inappropriately used land, [and] marginal land . . . for renewal purposes. This was done primarily to encourage and enable cities to undertake large-scale urban redevelopment projects, in effect, new-towns-in-town.”\(^{14}\)

As a 1973 Urban Land Institute study noted: “A Title VII commitment bestows almost instant credibility on the developer in the financial community, since it legally allies the federal government with the developer. It also reassures the local governments and communities affected of the developer’s real obligation to meet the planning, development, and environmental standards contained in federal law.”\(^{15}\)

Title VII was the ideal catalyst for the nation’s first New Town-In Town: the Cedar-Riverside New Community.

**Forming the Vision**

The boundaries of the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood were clearly defined by the construction of Interstate 35W to the west and Interstate 94 to the south in the early 1960s. The Mississippi River, which had a large bend to the northeast, edged the north and east sides. There were 340 acres of land within these boundaries. Five hospitals and schools, the 1962 senior housing complex, and city parks occupied 240 of those acres (see figure 3). The plan for the Cedar-Riverside New Community anticipated redevelopment of the remaining 100 acres with 12,500 new residential units and 1.5 million square feet of commercial space (see figures 4 and 5).\(^{16}\)

The concept, publicly introduced in 1966, had originally been called Cedar Village. It came from a collaboration between the Segals and Heller, who controlled a majority of the property east of Cedar Avenue, and the B. W. and Leo Harris Company, investors west of Cedar. The city was also involved after the city council directed its planning commission to prepare a redevelopment plan for the area in 1965.\(^{17}\)

In August 1966, the Minneapolis Planning Commission issued a report on “Riverside: The Next Twenty Years,” which proposed eliminating some streets to create superblocks for redevelopment. The Minneapolis HRA’s Cedar-Riverside Urban Renewal Plan was introduced in November 1967. In September of the following year, the Minneapolis City Council adopted the plan.\(^{18}\)

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 26.
\(^{14}\) Ibid.
\(^{15}\) Ibid., 3.
\(^{16}\) Ralph Rapson and Associates, “Cedar-Riverside New Community, Minneapolis, Minnesota [sic],” n.d., in Rapson Papers, at Ralph Rapson and Associates, Minneapolis (hereafter cited as Rapson Papers). The authors wish to thank Toby Rapson at Ralph Rapson and Associates for access to this collection.
\(^{18}\) Heller, “A General Chronological History.”
In the meantime, planning for Cedar Village was not going smoothly. The two main players—the Segals and Heller east of Cedar and the Harris Company to the west—had different priorities and approaches. Fortuitously, someone with sufficient capital and interest appeared on the scene: state senator and philanthropist Henry McKnight. From a wealthy and politically active family, McKnight had experience with business and real estate. He was already involved with the development of Jonathan, an innovative exurban new community west of Minneapolis. On February 13, 1970, Jonathan was the first project in the country to receive Title IV insured funds from the federal New Communities Program passed two years earlier. McKnight had connections both to the Twin Cities business community and to the political establishment in Washington, D.C.\textsuperscript{19}

In February 1969, McKnight purchased the property west of Cedar Avenue that had been assembled by the Harris Company. Later that month, he joined forces with the Segals and Keller, establishing Cedar-Riverside Associates (CRA) and Cedar-Riverside Properties. Stage I of the development, which become known as Cedar Square West, was on the superblock west of Cedar Avenue between Fourth and Sixth Streets.\textsuperscript{20}

Cedar Square West: Design and Construction

Gloria Segal recalled the sequence of events that led to Cedar-Riverside being the nation’s first New Town-In Town: “In February of 1970 we proposed a first stage project to the Minneapolis Housing and Redevelopment Authority. Preliminary approval was given in April of 1970. That spring a number of people began urging us to consider a New Communities loan guarantee application. A preliminary application was submitted in June and accepted in August of 1970. Final application documents were then prepared and a letter of commitment for a $24,000,000 guarantee was received June 28, 1971.” The project was to include housing for a range of incomes: 117 public housing units, 552 units subsidized by the FHA 236 program, 408 units targeted at middle-income tenants, and 223 “semi-luxury” units.\textsuperscript{21}

The architects primarily responsible for the design, Ralph Rapson and Associates, approached the challenge of this large, diverse project with substantial idealism: “The development of Cedar Riverside is based on the belief that it is possible to build a high density quality environment that will provide the setting for healthful and rewarding living within the central city; further, this philosophy believes that out of coordinated planning, representing all aspects of community design, a heterogeneous community will evolve that wishes to live close to major educational, health and cultural institutions. Planning goals and objectives have been directed at this total environment; concern for the individual and for construction designed at the human scale have been major objectives.”\textsuperscript{22}

Rapson wanted the project’s “architecture to reflect and accommodate the social diversity of its inhabitants,” according to his biographers. “Accordingly, he pushed for variety in building height and scale as well as in floor plans and the number of rooms in a given dwelling.” The master plan called for four residential neighborhoods and a “centrum” which, in addition to holding housing, would include a

\textsuperscript{19} Martin, \textit{Recycling the Central City}, 54-55.
\textsuperscript{20} Heller, “A General Chronological History,”
\textsuperscript{21} Gloria Segal, photocopy of partial article, n.p., n.d., in Rapson Papers.
\textsuperscript{22} Ralph Rapson and Associates, “Cedar-Riverside New Community, Minneapolis, Minneosta [sic].”
hotel and conference facilities, community rooms, offices, and retail space. These areas would be linked to each other and the university campus by an elevated trolley line. The ambitious plan would be completed in phases over a twenty-year period.\(^{23}\)

Rapson had a number of young architects in his office who shared his vision including Michael Niemeyer, Frank Nemeth, Richard Morrill, James McBurney, Joseph Vano, and Dennis Reseutek. His son, Toby, was also involved.\(^{24}\) The team identified four systems that would serve as a general framework for the development (see figure 6):

1. Land use: “Overall use of the land . . . will be devoted to institutions, parks and open space, housing and supporting commercial facilities.” The first phase would be primarily residential, although “there will be some convenience commercial within the interconnected central elevated walkway plaza. Additionally, cultural, educational and community activities and amenities will be provided to insure a well balanced and active neighborhood.”

2. Pedestrian circulation and open space: The development would be connected by “major pedestrian ways” separated from vehicular traffic. “By closely coordinating the parking structures and pedestrian systems, it is possible to extend the walkways through a series of landscaped rooftop plazas on or adjacent to which a variety of recreational, educational and other amenities and community services will be located.” Bicycle paths were also included in the plans.

3. Vehicular circulation and parking: For the first phase, “a central covered parking structure fulfills mandatory off-street parking while providing a large low base for the elevated pedestrian walkway system and activities plaza.” The plaza “will form the ‘heart’ of community activity.”

4. Climate and site considerations: “Broad climatic considerations, optimum orientation and views and noise factors generally directed the location, size and shape of structures.”\(^{25}\)

For the first phase, “The building form is composed of contiguous structures varying in height from four to forty stories. All buildings are linked by skyways and elevated pedestrian plazas creating a variety of spaces with separation of traffic systems. Resident parking is provided in a garage below the plaza. Edging the plaza and providing a transition to grade are commercial, education, day care, and health care facilities. Common laundry areas and community gathering areas are located throughout the buildings” (see figures 8-10). Structural and operational issues were also addressed as interconnected systems: “The structure throughout is reinforced concrete with post-tensioned slabs, and heating and air conditions [sic] are from a central facility. Facades are a combination of precast elements and masonry infill panels.”\(^{26}\)


\(^{25}\) Ibid.

The development featured the latest in technology. The central heating and cooling plant utilized “a high-temperature hot water distribution system instead of steam, a relatively new method for such a community-wide utility,” according to a contemporary source. Another described this “central ‘hydronic’ high pressure-high temperature system” as a “major innovation.” It was implemented in collaboration with two local utilities. In addition, the developers planned “for making maximum use of cable television for broadcasting, intercoms, public security and schools by laying the cable before building construction begins.” Gloria Segal’s vision of this technology’s potential, which she discussed in a Harper’s Magazine interview, was far ahead of its time: “‘If you are not feeling well,’ Mrs. Segal explained, ‘you can flick on your TV and report to the local health station. And you might do your shopping the same way. You could make up your grocery order from a list on the TV screen, a computer would register it, and in due course a box would appear at your door.’”

To accommodate the heterogeneous tenant mix that was anticipated, four types of housing units were planned for the development. High- to mid-rise towers would contain two types of units: standard single-story apartments arrayed along central corridors, and two-story “maisonettes” with interior stairs linking the living room/dining room and bedroom levels (see figure 12). Buildings with maisonettes would be served by two-floor skip-stop elevators. Three-floor skip-stop elevators would be in low-rise buildings containing “apartments with multiple exposures and through ventilation above and below the corridor level apartments.” Multilevel townhouses, usually with an outdoor patio at grade or plaza level, were larger for families.

Although economic and functional issues forced some modifications to the design, including substitution of commercial space for the townhouses, this vision was essentially what became reality at Cedar Square West, “Stage I” of the project’s phased implementation (see figures 1 and 2). Design development was clearly influenced by contemporary European architecture. An early model for the project had a dense grouping of high- and low-rise buildings. The rectilinear volumes were enlivened by offset massing, roof monitors, and an almost organic accretion of boxy, projecting balconies. As the design evolved—and as projected construction costs began affecting design considerations—the aesthetic moved from the chunky Brutalism of Moshe Safdie to the lighter forms of Josep Sert and Le Corbusier. Some of Rapson’s drawings for Cedar Square West show a lacy framework of balconies similar to Sert’s Peabody Terrace in Cambridge, Massachusetts, but the final design bears a greater likeness to Le Corbusier’s Unité d’Habitation. The first example of this design, Cité Radieuse, opened in Marseille, France, in 1952. Le Corbusier used a similar concept for several other developments in the following decade, including one at Firminy-Vert, France. (see figure 7)

The project was directly shaped by national and international perspectives. CRA assembled a team of advisors with broad credentials. As Rapson’s biography noted, “As the parameters of the project began to expand, CRA invited international planning professionals to bring their expertise to Minneapolis. This wise and unique decision generated national interest in Cedar-Riverside.”

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28 Ibid.

29 Hession, Rapson, and Wright, Ralph Rapson, 195; Ralph Rapson and Associates, “Cedar-Riverside New Community, Minneapolis, Minnesota [sic],” n.d.
Heiki von Hertzen, who had developed a well-publicized new town, Tapiola, in his native Finland, as a consultant for community development. Dr. David Cooperman was a specialist in "social planning." Architects assisting Rapson included local firms Gingold-Pink and Miller, Melby and Hanson. The prominent San Francisco landscape architecture firm Lawrence Halprin and Associates, which was responsible for designing the original Nicollet Mall a few years earlier, was also on board for environmental planning, although Halprin and CRA parted ways before the Cedar Square West design was completed. Peter Walker, a principal of landscape architects Sasaki Walker Associates in Sausalito, California, was championed by Heller, and his firm was ultimately responsible for the landscape design. Chicago planners Barton-Aschman Associates did engineering and traffic studies; their local office would eventually be in one of the commercial buildings at Cedar Square West. A Twin Cities construction company, Bor-Son Building Corporation, served as the general contractor, and also had a financial interest in the project. Minneapolis engineers Michaud, Cooley, Hallberg, Erickson designed the energy and mechanical systems; Crosier, Greenberg and Partners from Winnipeg were the team’s structural engineers. The economic side of the project was directed by consultants Hammer-Greene-Siler Associates, based in Washington, D.C.  

Land clearance for Cedar Square West began in earnest in 1970 (see figures 11 and 13). CRA received a building permit for F Building, the first structure in the project, in June 1971. By November, construction was underway on the rest of the complex (see figure 15). HUD Secretary George Romney attended the dedication ceremony in May 1972, and by December of that year McKnight Tower was topped out. In the same month, the project lost an important proponent with the death of Henry McKnight, an event that would have significant consequences when the project hit rough seas in the years ahead. F Building was ready for occupancy in January 1973, but because of issues with FHA related to the Section 236 subsidized units, residents did not begin to move in for several months.  

An advertisement in March 1973 announced that units in Cedar Square West were “now renting for spring occupancy.” Amenities included state-of-the-art technology such as “a master TV antenna, connected to TV outlets in each apartment by a network of wiring conduits,” and “an air circulation system created by positive pressure in the hallways [that] forces air from hallways into apartments and out through continuously operating kitchen and bathroom exhausts. This effectively controls odors and keeps hallways and apartments fresh.” Units also had access to an observation deck on the top of McKnight Tower. Some ideas seemed ahead of their time. Buildings had disposal chutes for dropping trash to a compactor and “research is underway on [the] feasibility of converting compacted waste to energy that will heat the apartments.”  

A neighborhood newspaper, Many Corners, reported that “the very first ‘pioneers’ moved in during the first week in April,” and by July “Cedar Square West is coming alive with people.” In May, the Cedar Square West Residents Association had its inaugural meeting. “The diversity of people living in the  

30 James H. Mildes, “Cedar Riverside Multi-Discipline Design Team,” n.p., n.d., in Rapson Papers; Heller, “A General Chronological History”; Martin, Recycling the Central City, 55-56. Barton-Aschman was the original tenant in Building D2, which is now occupied by a charter school.  
31 Heller, “A General Chronological History .”  
32 “Cedar Square West,” Many Corners, March 1973. Many Corners was originally published by CRA; it later apparently became independent. The authors thank Norma Nelson, who worked for CRA when the project was under construction, for providing copies of this publication.
new apartments was evident, with persons ranging in age from one to eighty-one, and coming from varied backgrounds.” By September 1974, all of the buildings were finished and occupancy stood at 93 percent (see figures 14, 16, and 17).33

The Cedar Avenue corridor benefited from the new development to the west. In December 1973, Many Corners noted: “For the past few weeks, they have been planting honey locusts trees along Cedar Avenue and putting the finishing touches to new terrazzo sidewalks. A skyway has been erected. The avenue has been remodeled by the Minneapolis Housing and Redevelopment Authority.” The skyway was to connect the pedestrian plaza on the roof of Cedar Square West’s parking garage with the commercial centrum east of Cedar, which would be built in a later phase of the development.34

CRA’s plans had anticipated the eventual demolition of most of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century commercial buildings along Cedar and Riverside Avenues. In the meantime, though, it encouraged cultural groups to come to the area “through subsidies, rent preferences and direct gifts to several organizations,” according to a contemporary article. “As a consequence the Cedar Theatre, formerly an ‘adults only’ movie house, is now the home of a ballet group, one of two in the area. Three art galleries, several theater groups (including Theatre in the Round), numerous small shops selling hand-made goods and the Center Opera Company of Minneapolis have moved into the area.” The Minnesota States Arts Council dedicated $20,000 of a National Endowment for the Arts grant to support cultural development in the neighborhood.35 This attracted the attention of a writer in Harper’s Magazine in 1973: “The project already has a thicker concentration of experimental theaters, handicraft shops, dance groups, leather boutiques, coffeehouses, and alternative-culture hangouts than any community I know of between Greenwich Village and San Francisco.”36

The social and cultural impacts of the project were particularly important to Gloria Segal, who wanted “the existing community [to] be maintained and nurtured through the development process.” In an interview in the early 1970s, she contrasted this approach to “the old urban renewal,” which she described as “coming in, building a parking lot, going out for bids, looking for developers and then waiting for construction.” In the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood, “you have a very lively, diverse community already in existence that can only become more diverse with new construction.”37

Segal knew that urban living would not appeal to everyone. “Realistically, . . . the blue-collar worker with eight children will probably still far prefer Burnsville, or Bloomington, where his kids have space to run around, than the inner city. However, the craftsman, the businessman, the teacher and the student will live here. If you’re an ‘inner city person’ and like the inner city—like the theater, concerts, the lecture hall and the bar—then I think you’re going to enjoy living in Cedar-Riverside.”38

37 Close, “Creative City Excitement and Urban Renewal.”
38 Ibid.
New Community vs. Old Neighborhood

As 1973 drew to an end, plans were advancing for Riverbluff, Stage II of the Cedar-Riverside New Community. By this time, Cedar Square West was attracting a variety of tenants and seemed to be meeting many of the developers’ idealistic goals. Its physical presence, however, had galvanized the opposition that had been present since the New Town plans had been unveiled. The opponents drew from a number of groups including social activists concerned about the displacement of low-income residents and small businesses, preservationists opposed to the wholesale demolition of a vintage neighborhood, and citizens worried about the impact of high density on air quality, traffic, and crime. With Riverbluff on the horizon, the opposition took action.

Several young lawyers and community organizers formed the Cedar-Riverside Environmental Defense Fund (CREDF) and filed a lawsuit against HUD and CRA, charging that there had not been a proper environmental impact statement (EIS) prepared for Stage II—and for the project as a whole. In response, HUD hurriedly prepared an EIS, issued in October 1974. Hearings to obtain public comment on the EIS, held in November 1974, reflected the evolving tactics of the project’s opponents. Many Corners reported: “CREDF and its supporters stated that they did not oppose ‘high density’ housing per se (as they had previous to the hearing) nor did they want to bankrupt the project. . . . CREDF advocated cooperative housing, including transforming Cedar Square West into a cooperative project.” Also represented was the Cedar Square West Residents Association. They said that they “like living in the new town and like the basic concept. On the other hand, . . . there are many areas where improvements might be made and some of them are significant.”

In spring 1975, Judge Miles Lord sent the issue to a special master, who concluded in October that the EIS was incomplete and that the proposal for the New-Town-In-Town was contrary to public policy. Among the findings were that “the final EIS for the Cedar-Riverside project, both Stage II and the project at maturity, fails adequately to describe the proposed action and its environmental impact as required by NEPA [National Environmental Protection Act]. . . . The Cedar-Riverside EIS fails to adequately disclose and discuss reasonable alternatives. . . . The EIS does not meet the standard of objective good faith required by NEPA.” All in all, one of the project’s critics observed, “The EIS demonstrates a pattern showing bias on the part of HUD toward justifying a previously made decision.”

Minneapolis mayor Al Hofstede convinced Judge Lord to postpone signing the order so that Minneapolis HRA staff, members of the Cedar-Riverside Project Area Committee (PAC), and other parties could meet and try to come up with a compromise. Many Corners noted: “The mayor is particularly committed to getting construction started at the Riverbluff Stage II site, with or without

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39 Ibid.
Much to the surprise of many, the Minneapolis HRA and other groups reached a compromise as a result of their meetings after the special master’s findings. A key point was reducing the density of the proposed development by about one-half. The compromise was almost derailed in December 1975 when Mayor Hofstede, apparently bowing to constituent pressure, withdrew his support for Riverbluff and publicly stated that the development in any form was not financially feasible. Despite this opposition, the Minneapolis HRA accepted a revised urban renewal plan for Cedar-Riverside that month.43

CRA’s problems, however, were far from over. In the same month, some tenants of Cedar Square West filed a federal class action lawsuit against HUD and two subsidiaries of CRA, University Community Properties and Stage Land I Company.44 Because of the project’s financial and legal woes, HUD agreed to a two-year “forbearance plan.” During that period, Many Corners reported, “HUD would not collect interest and principal payments from CRA . . . while CRA made improvements in the complex, especially in the Chase House luxury unit (to attract new tenants)” and obtain higher rents. “These actions would presumably put the complex into a self-sustaining financial condition at the end of two years.” 45

Another chapter in the Riverbluff saga began in March 1976, when Judge Lord signed an order requiring that a new EIS be prepared.46 The momentum for the new community slowed. In 1977, the city council established a task force, which concluded that 2,000 new housing units should be developed in the area and many of the existing residences should be rehabilitated. The new plan was endorsed by the Minneapolis HRA, the mayor’s office, and neighborhood groups. It did not, however, meet with HUD’s approval. William White, director of HUD’s New Communities program, felt that the redevelopment should be on a larger scale. In spring 1978, a Many Corners headline asked: “Is HUD Blocking a Cedar-Riverside Solution?” 47

In the end, changes in HUD programs, political opposition, and lawsuits stopped the project from reaching the scale envisioned by its developers. Of the 12,500 residential units planned for the Cedar-Riverside New Community, only the 1,300 in Cedar Square West became a reality. Beset by problems,
Cedar Square West went into receivership in 1985, and HUD foreclosed on its loan the following year. To control the project’s future, the City of Minneapolis bought it in 1987. It was purchased a year later by a coalition of private and nonprofit groups that promised to maintain its mixed-income housing. To mark this transition of ownership, the project was rechristened Riverside Plaza.  

Today, the complex continues the neighborhood’s tradition of fostering new immigrants. A recent article in the Minnesota Daily reported that “about 60 to 70 percent of the [property’s] residents are Somali immigrants, with a noticeable population of Ethiopian and Vietnamese immigrants as well.” Commercial tenants include the East African Women’s Center and a charter school.

**Analysis of Historical Significance**

*Cedar-Riverside is the fruit of intensive study and forthright planning but it also is an experiment which could produce guidelines for the future.*

—Donald W. Hassenstab, Executive Director, Minnesota Society of Architects

Writing in 1970, on the verge of the groundbreaking for Cedar Square West, Hassenstab, expressed the sentiment of many who watched the evolution of plans for the Cedar-Riverside development with great interest and hope. At the time, planners assumed that over one hundred new communities, both in town and exurban, would be established by the year 2000.

In a profile of Gloria Segal in Harper’s Magazine in 1973, John Fischer opined: ‘If this large, economy-size dabble works out according to Mrs. Segal’s dream, it could change the life-style of millions of Americans. For Mrs. Segal hopes to create not only better homes but a new kind of urban environment, a potential model for much of the building this country must undertake during the next half-century. (It will not be the sort of environment I would choose, but Jane Jacobs and the Rolling Stones should love it.) Even if it falls short—and the risks are high—its failures will provide some useful lessons for every American city.’

The stimulus for creating new communities came from the federal government. Political scientist Helen Smookler wrote in 1975: “When the Urban Growth and New Community Development Act was passed in 1968, it was heralded as one of the landmark pieces of legislation on urban affairs of this generation. Many persons interested in housing and urban development saw in the federal legislation some seeds of hope for producing an alternative to monotonous and inadequately serviced suburban sprawl. This optimism was given some credibility by the stated provisions of the 1970 act.”

The involvement of Heike von Hertzen ensured that Cedar-Riverside would be subjected to international influences—and, in turn, be the subject of international scrutiny. A contemporary

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49 Alex Holmquist, “Riverside Plaza to Be Renovated,” Minnesota Daily, April 6, 2010.
explained that “von Hertzen deserves to be called the father of Finland’s new town movement.” Trained as a lawyer, he became dedicated to building a new town outside of Helsinki to address housing shortages following World War II. The result was Tapiola, which had a population of 17,000 by 1970. About 45 percent of the residents were low- to moderate-income families. This was an important model for Cedar-Riverside. There were, though, significant differences. To raise funds to complete Tapiola, von Hertzen’s group sold land to developers who agreed to build according to the master plan’s specifications. The developers sold the units to their occupants, resulting in a home-ownership rate of 90 percent. Also, while the development included condominium apartments, semidetached houses, and single-family houses, the density was 35 dwelling units per acre—in contrast to the 125 units per acre proposed for Cedar-Riverside.\textsuperscript{54}

Von Hertzen visited Minneapolis twice in 1969 to advise on the project’s plans. He “alert[ed] CRA to his concern about the density of the proposed development,” according to geographer Judith Martin in a historical report on the project. “In basic form and concept, however, he approved the Cedar-Riverside plan heartily.” She adds: The value to CRA of having von Hertzen involved had little to do with the volume or quality of planning ideas they expected him to contribute. Rather it had to do with the fact that, as the developer of perhaps the most successful New Town in the world, von Hertzen’s attachment to Cedar-Riverside, however peripheral, was singularly impressive.\textsuperscript{55}

Von Hertzen’s involvement is one of the many reasons that Cedar Square West, although not yet fifty years old, has received a good deal of attention over time. As the nation’s first New Town-In Town, it has been analyzed from the time its doors opened to the present by an array of national and international professionals including urban planners, architects, and historians. Although Cedar-Riverside was only partially implemented, Cedar Square West had a broad national influence as the country’s first recipient of Title V New Community funds from HUD. In 1973, shortly after the first residents moved into the complex, the Urban Land Institute issued a “Landmark Report” entitled \textit{Federally Assisted New Communities: New Dimensions in Urban Development}. The author reported that “two programs—New Communities Program: Loan Guarantees and Supplementary Grants (Title IV) and New Communities Assistance Program (Title VII)—have resulted in 13 new towns being launched between 1970 and the end of 1972. Prospects for the next year are for approximately 10 to 12 more new towns to be begun under the new communities legislation.” Despite this optimistic projection, the number of communities with funding commitments from HUD had grown to only fourteen by 1975.\textsuperscript{56}

There were only eleven HUD-funded communities as of July 1972. Nine, including Jonathan, were satellites of established metropolitan areas and ranged in area from 2,350 to 16,937 acres. These dwarfed the only New Town-In Town, Cedar-Riverside, which was anticipated to occupy around 100 acres.\textsuperscript{57}

The Urban Land Institute study noted: “Although satellite new town developments seem destined to

\textsuperscript{55} Martin, \textit{Recycling the Central City}, 63.
\textsuperscript{56} Mields, \textit{Federally Assisted New Communities}, 1; Smookler, “Administration Hara-Kiri,” 129.
assume the largest share of Title VII activity for the next few years, increasing numbers of public
development agencies are in the process of considering new-town-in-town applications to revitalize the
nation’s older central cities.” As it turned out, only one other urban project—on Roosevelt (formerly
Welfare) Island in New York—received support. The others were in suburbia or exurbia. The difficulty
of undertaking such a wide-reaching redevelopment in a built-up area underscores the achievement
that Cedar Square West represents, even if it was the only part of the Cedar-Riverside New
Community to be produced.

The failure of Cedar-Riverside to achieve its creators’ ambitious vision did, in fact, conform to the
pattern of contemporary HUD-funded projects. CRA was not alone in having financial problems. An
analysis of the fourteen such projects in 1975 found that all “are behind in their development
schedules, and most are near financial collapse.” Some of this was due to the era’s run-away inflation
and other turmoil during an economic recession. As one contemporary noted: “The lack of mortgage
money and the high interest rates have all but stopped construction of residential units—in new towns
and everywhere else.” In addition, the election of President Richard Nixon in 1968 resulted in a gradual
shifting of priorities in Washington. “Although the Republican administration claimed initially to support
the New Communities Act, it has always viewed it as a Democratic program.” A 1973 article saw a
“somber omen” in “the Nixon administration’s cutback last January of federal housing and rent-subsidy
programs.” The cutback “probably will not much affect the present stage of the Cedar-Riverside
development, for which funding is already committed, but unless new government money begins to
flow again within a year or so, the future stages may be hard to finance.”

Such proved to be the case. Regardless, the project has generated a lot of interest from government
officials, academic researchers, the press, and the general public over time and it continues to be a
subject of scholarship. A recent example is architectural historian Nancy Miller’s feature article,
“Arrested Development,” in the January-February 2006 issue of Architecture Minnesota. The same is
true for the project’s urban renewal context, on both a local and national level. The idealism of mid-
twentieth-century urban planners—and the realities that tempered that idealism—transformed
American cities. Cedar Square West, as the country’s first urban “new town,” was a pioneering model.
Rapson had to take Siegel and Heller on a tour of projects in Europe in the 1960s to help them
understand his vision. Even there, nothing matched the massive scale of Rapson’s concept.

In a 2003 article on “The Legend and the Landmark,” which highlighted Rapson and Cedar Square
West, William Swanson described the project as “almost breathtakingly larger and more complicated
than anything anyone was doing, or had ever done, in this part of the country, or, for that matter, in
most parts of the country.” He quoted Thomas Fisher, the head of the University of Minnesota’s
College of Architecture and Landscape Architecture: “‘We’d just walked on the moon. . . . We thought
we were going to eradicate poverty and injustice. We thought we could do just about anything, and,
frankly, I’d never want to be the one who says we were wrong to think so.” Cedar Square West
epitomizes the spirit of that era, which was characterized by an optimistic outlook and very big plans.

58 Ibid., 4.
61 Ibid.
Analysis of Architectural Significance
A monograph entitled *Ralph Rapson, Sixty Years of Modern Design* was published in 1999. In it, Rapson is credited as being “the most influential Minnesota architect of the twentieth century.” The book notes that “the building for which Rapson is perhaps best known, Minneapolis’s Guthrie Theater, was completed in 1963.” Coming only a few years after that project, Cedar Square West shares design characteristics with the theater: a modular approach to exterior facades, an irregular interplay of rectangular forms, and accents in primary colors, as displayed in the Guthrie’s seats and on the apartment tower panels. The plaza at Cedar Square West incorporates an amphitheater, a nod to Rapson’s enduring interest in performance spaces. The last chapter of the monograph discusses Cedar Square West, which can be seen as the culmination of Rapson’s long career, although he continued his practice until his death. The book notes: “The fact that all goals of the project were not achieved does not invalidate the ideals and aims of the original vision—the creation of a diverse, thriving, renovated urban community for people of a wide range of ages, cultures, abilities, incomes, and interests.” Rapson maintained his office in a building on Cedar Avenue, directly across the street from Cedar Square West, until he passed away at the age of ninety-four in 2008. Commenting on the project decades after its opening, he stated: “I think it has worked well.”

As the first to be awarded AIA Minnesota’s Gold Medal in 1979, Rapson’s professional leadership has been acknowledged. A fellow of the AIA, he was also twice a finalist for the highest national award, the AIA Gold Medal. With the loss of other key works by Rapson, including the Guthrie Theater on Vineland Place in Minneapolis and the Pillsbury House on Lake Minnetonka, Cedar Square West “will soon stand as Ralph Rapson’s most visible built legacy in Minnesota,” according to architectural historian Miller.

The importance of the project at the time of its construction was recognized in 1975 by a first honor award from the American Institute of Architects (AIA), as well as the AIA Bartlett Award for Handicapped-Accessible Design. The project also received other awards including a HUD Bicentennial Urban Design Award and a HUD Honor Award for Urban Design in the same year. The long-term importance of the project was confirmed in 2004 when the Minnesota chapter of the American Institute of Architects bestowed its “Twenty-Five Year Award” on the project. The chapter established this award in 1981 “to recognize architectural projects which have withstood the test of time.”

The buildings and the overall composition of the project retain very good integrity, despite some alterations. One of the most noticeable changes was the removal of an elevated concrete walkway over Cedar Avenue, intended to connect with a phase of the project that was never built. Some landscape features have been altered—the swimming pool has been filled in, for example, and that location covered by a playground—but a whimsical fountain (albeit no longer functional), period light fixtures, and the general circulation system remain.

63 Miller, “Arrested Development,” 40.
64 Hession, Rapson, and Wright, *Rapson*, 199.