

ATLANTA

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It's called soccer (sok'ər).



ANATOMY OF A SUPERSCHOOL

The master plan for the stunning, split-level Georgia State College of the future is still largely on the drawing board, but need, logic, and vision are solidly in its corner, and the first steps have already been taken.

BY BRUCE GALPHIN

AN ATLANTA ALDERMAN looked with a mixture of admiration and doubt at the plans for the Georgia State College of the future, sprawling over ten blocks in the heart of the city, handsome buildings connected by tree-lined pedestrian plazas straddling the busy streets below. "Mr. Steiner," he asked, "do you believe all this will ever be?"

His skepticism was appropriate. A few years ago the school's home was a converted six-story garage, and before that it had occupied at least eight other sites in Atlanta under eight different names. But to Andrew Steiner, the Robert & Company architect who has spent two years developing the handsome and ambitious plan, the answer about its fulfillment is an emphatic "yes."

In fact, to a degree few Atlantans realize, the transformation is well under way. Georgia State already occupies four buildings; another is nearing completion; three more already have been funded and let to design contract. The Board of Regents has endorsed the entire master plan, and the city has approved the first two pedestrian bridges across Decatur Street that tangibly mark it as a split-level campus.

The multi-level, or "platform city," feature of State's master plan is of great significance functionally, aesthetically, and symbolically.

Functionally, it's the device that makes the whole scheme work: how to transform a few city blocks criss-crossed by heavily travelled streets into a campus for 25,000 students by 1975. By confining through traffic, deliveries, service, utilities, and parking to lower levels, the plan will permit a vehicle-free upper level connecting forty-four acres of campus.

The aesthetics of the future campus depends heavily on the platform concept. Principally, rising above city traffic will create a feeling of unity. This will be emphasized by landscaping, notably a tree-lined promenade above Decatur Street from the expressway to Courtland. But the platform, combined with landscaping and judicious placement of the buildings, will also allow dividing the campus into more intimate areas: smaller plazas, places for sitting to read on a warm day or informal gatherings, sites to display sculpture and other works of art.

As a symbol, a platform campus is peculiarly appropriate to Atlanta, for downtown Atlanta itself is largely split-level. Many newcomers (and quite a few older hands) don't real-

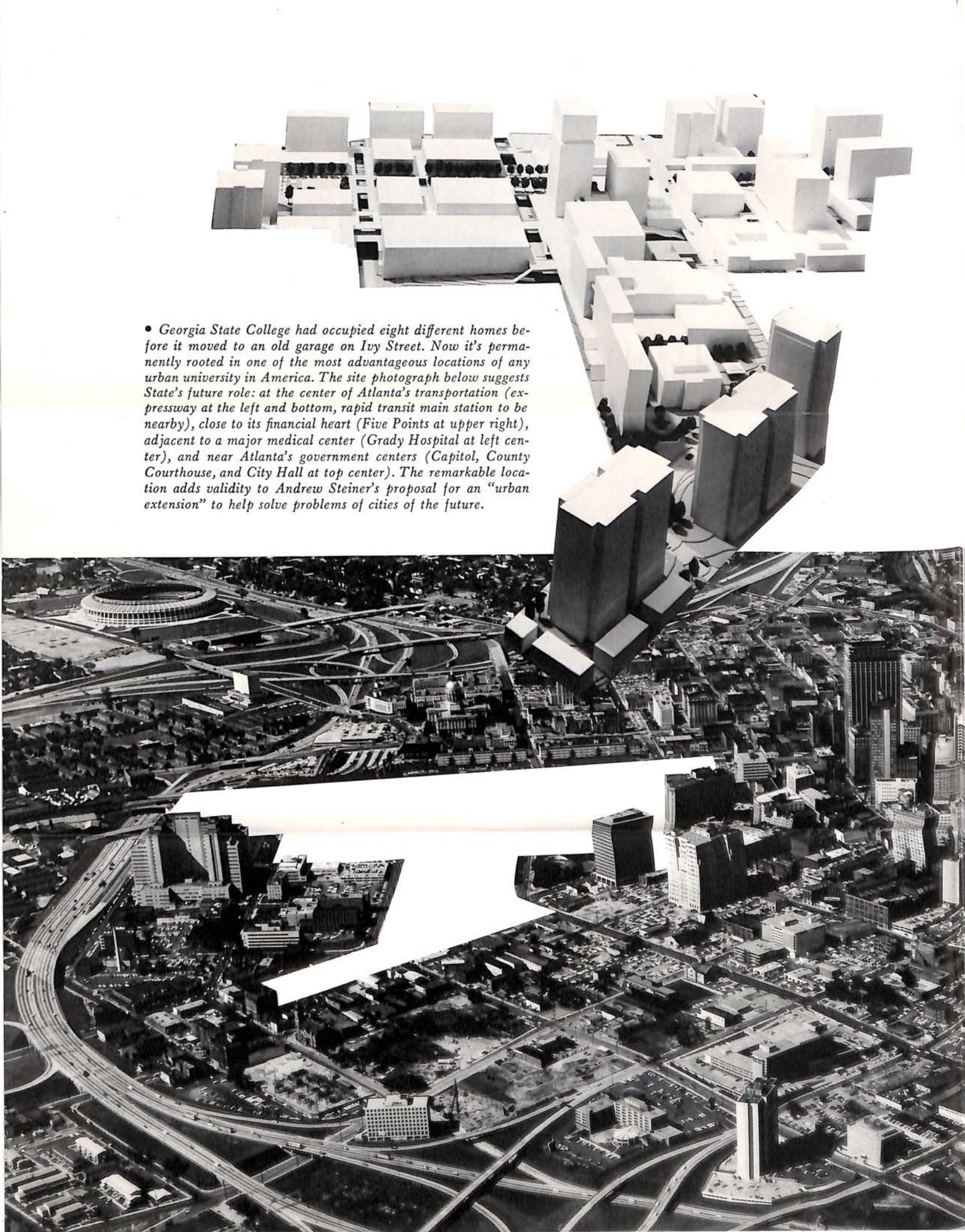
ize how much of what appears to be "street level" in the central city is really viaduct level. Few have explored the dusty old Atlanta beneath today's busy streets, though recently there have been suggestions of making it a tourist attraction. Even before the turn of the century, Atlantans had been forced to grapple with the fact of the city's sharp gradients and had come to a solution similar to the one now proposed for Georgia State. There are two main distinctions: Old Atlanta sealed off its earlier level from the light, whereas the Georgia State platform will be pierced to provide light and beauty of sight below; and even more important, older Atlanta made the mistake of letting cars come upstairs.

Though in a sense Atlanta already is one, the platform city is a hot item of innovation among civic designers around the country. If implemented on schedule, the Georgia State complex would be a trail-blazer. It's doubtful whether the example could be widely imitated on such a scale. For a flat city, the cost could be staggering. But Atlanta's topography is especially suitable. In the six or so blocks from Five Points eastward to the expressway, the altitude drops more than fifty feet. The original garage building of Georgia State sits on ground at least thirty feet higher than the lower end of the proposed campus.

Thus an artificially raised main campus level would be consistent with what Atlanta already has done to conquer its rolling terrain. It also would complement the recently announced commercial platform city planned to span the railroad complex north and east of the State Capitol.

The Steiner plan explains how the new pedestrian plaza could be woven into the fabric of the surrounding city without any rough seams or sharp edges. The reason that so few Atlantans realize how much of their downtown is artificially raised is that there are comparatively few visible seams. They can be seen from Central Avenue or Courtland Street, for these streets cross the railroad gulch. And an even more dramatic view of how Atlanta raised itself up off its tracks can be seen from the Techwood and Hunter Street viaducts, which span the vast rail yards that probably will be platformed over in future development of the city.

But for the most part, since buildings have been constructed right up against the downtown viaducts with few openings to the old city below, the viaducting is not so obvious. Under



• *Georgia State College had occupied eight different homes before it moved to an old garage on Ivy Street. Now it's permanently rooted in one of the most advantageous locations of any urban university in America. The site photograph below suggests State's future role: at the center of Atlanta's transportation (expressway at the left and bottom, rapid transit main station to be nearby), close to its financial heart (Five Points at upper right), adjacent to a major medical center (Grady Hospital at left center), and near Atlanta's government centers (Capitol, County Courthouse, and City Hall at top center). The remarkable location adds validity to Andrew Steiner's proposal for an "urban extension" to help solve problems of cities of the future.*

the Steiner plan, one would not lose all sense of the natural ground level at Georgia State. The present streets would continue to provide vehicular access to the campus, and the spans above would be pierced to admit light and views of the campus. To avoid abrupt drops around the periphery of the campus, Mr. Steiner proposes gradual dropping of the pedestrian level and extensive use of landscaping. Further, he suggests that the future campus' high-rise buildings — except for the administrative center which is the focal point of the entire plan — be placed on the outer edges, thus blending in with the city's other tall structures, private and public.

High-rise buildings are not ideal for heavily used classes. Either an unreasonable amount of space must be devoted to elevators, or there is an intolerable delay for students rushing to class. Since the entire 1975 campus is designed so that there will be no more than a ten-minute walk from any one class to any other, the question of building heights raises a problem. For accommodating as many as 32,000 people (including faculty and staff) on a campus of less than fifty acres necessarily means vertical expansion. Mr. Steiner solves the problem by keeping heavily used classroom buildings relatively low; the taller structures would be used for such activities as administration, research, and housing.

Georgia State President Noah Langdale, Jr., with customary enthusiasm and verbal color declares that "the platform complex resembles the raised plazas of the classic city of Venice." There is indeed, in addition to the modern elements, a flavor of old European capitals when monarchs had the power and the money to raze the old and ugly and build whole new cities in a centuries-long rivalry to create the jewel of the continent. The platformed Georgia State would have a unity and a sweep that evokes — well, maybe Venice or maybe Mr. Steiner's native Vienna.

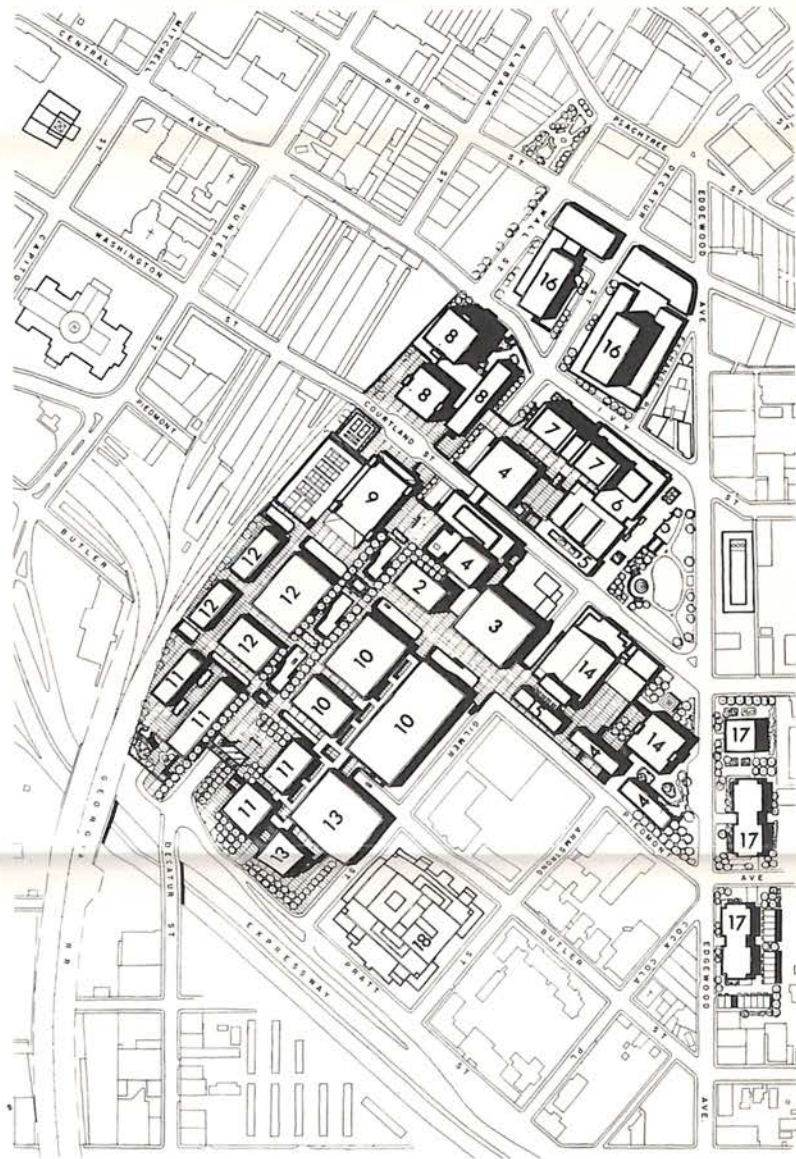
The platform would begin to the west of Courtland; drop slightly below Courtland, which itself is a viaduct; rise back up; and then begin an uninterrupted sweep almost all the way to the expressway. This would be the main axis of the new campus. The minor axis, crossing at the administration building, would be a smaller spine extending northeastward along Piedmont to a point beyond the rear of the old Municipal Auditorium. Decatur, Piedmont, and Butler all would be bridged.

Because the natural ground level drops rapidly toward the east, there would be room for as many as four layers of parking below the plaza, an important consideration, since estimates for the 1975 demand run from about 4,400 to 8,750 spaces, depending on the availability of rapid transit and other public transportation.

On the uncluttered platform above, according to the Steiner plan, "landscaped plazas are one of the most important unifying elements of the campus and should be designed to create a rich and varied environment, including intimate seating and reading areas. Other important parts of the landscape treatment are such elements as street furniture and the many small details which can make life on the campus pleasant and exciting. By street furniture we mean all the objects that furnish our sidewalks, such as lighting standards, signs, baskets, benches, flower boxes and containers, vending machines, kiosks, and shelters from wind and rain. In some of the open spaces, book stalls, flower stalls, and even outdoor cafes and small structures for sale of soft drinks and sandwiches could be an important part of the overall design." Hurt Park, the only major greenery that relieves the starkness of the present complex, would be drawn even more intimately to the future campus when the block of Gilmer Street between the park and the college is closed.

In its expansion, Georgia State is performing the not-at-all-incident job of urban renewal. Most of the existing campus space was acquired with federal urban renewal assistance, and college officials hope to obtain even more of the future re-

The 1975 campus is designed so that no classes are more than a ten-minute walk apart.



1. Campus Plazas 2. Administrative Center 3. Communications Center and Theatre Arts 4. Central Library Complex 5. Sparks Hall — Classrooms 6. Fine Arts Building — Classrooms 7. Arts and Sciences — Classrooms 8. School of Business Administration 9. Physical Education Building 10. Science Center — Physical Sciences 11. Medical and Nursing Center 12. Future Expansion Area 13. Grady Hospital Expansion 14. Student Activities Complex 15. Special Studies 16. Private Development (possible cooperative use) 17. High Rise Student Housing 18. Grady Hospital

The proposed expansion plan will enable community and college to make immense reciprocal contributions.



quirements through the same method. The college already has swept aside some of the city's worst slums: rows of pawnshops, cheap hotels, rundown warehouses — areas which contributed heavily to the city's crime rate.

But a valid question remains whether this is the wisest use the city could make of the property. Since their conversion from slums to office buildings, apartments, and motels, other urban renewal districts are now adding millions of dollars to Atlanta's tax base. Why place Georgia State in such a potentially productive location? Few if any other major urban colleges occupy so much space so close to the city's commercial heart. And Georgia State has moved before — frequently. Since it was founded in 1913, it has occupied space at Georgia Tech, the Walton Building at Walton and Cone, the Peachtree Arcade, an attic at Auburn and Pryor, 106 1/2 Forsyth Street, scattered offices donated by Atlanta businessmen, 223 Walton Street, 162 Luckie Street, and finally the garage on Ivy Street which is the taproot of the present campus. It has been designated the Georgia Tech Evening School of Commerce, University System of Georgia Evening School, University Extension Center, University System Center, Atlanta Extension Center, Georgia Evening College, Atlanta Division of the University of Georgia, and Georgia State College of Business Administration.

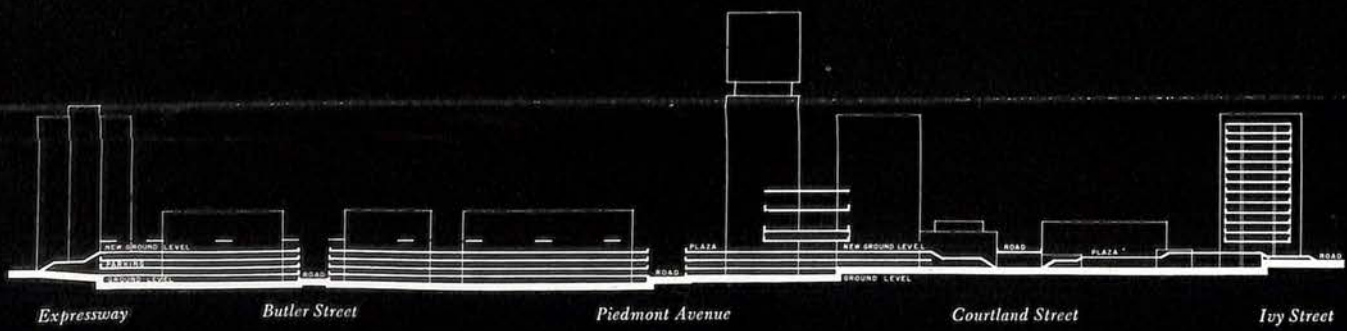
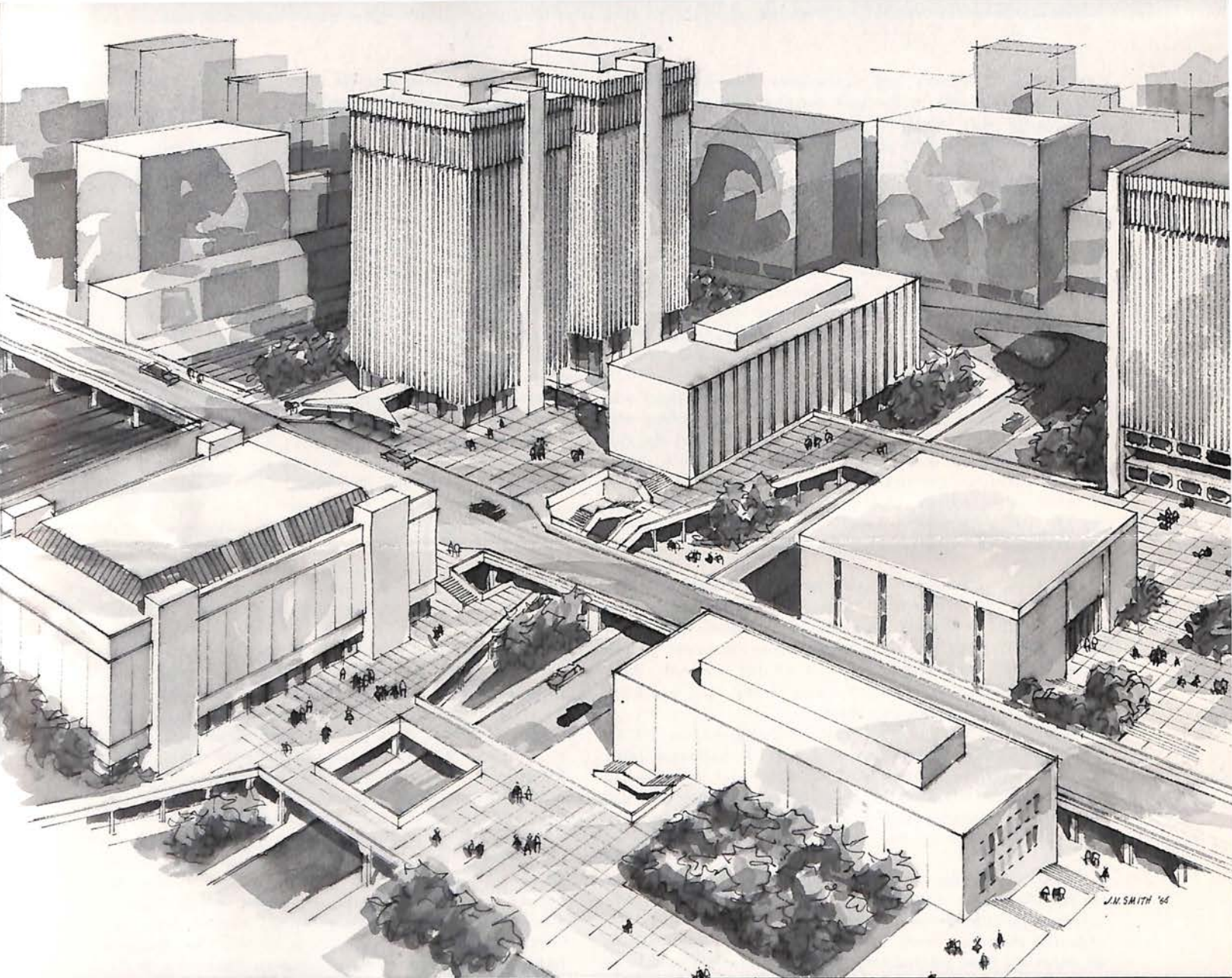
In 1962, Atlanta city fathers made their basic commitment to the proposition that Georgia State has found a permanent home. They designated an area of a little more than two blocks as the "Georgia State Urban Redevelopment" area, thus qualifying it for federal assistance. The White House announced approval five months later, in record time.

There is more than ample justification for the aldermen's judgment. After all, expressways also remove huge tracts of land from the tax digest. (The Memorial Interchange, for example, occupies more acreage than the Steiner plan proposes for the 1975 Georgia State campus.) Yet expressways are vital; the expenditures of land are made. And it can be convincingly argued that a vital campus in the midst of the city returns far greater intangible values to Atlanta.

It is more than just a question of meeting the growing demand for higher education in Atlanta. It is more than allowing students to work downtown while also attending college — an unquestioned asset for the city. It is more than convenience for the Atlanta businessmen (with a surprising number of advanced degrees) who teach part-time. Given the near-complete expressway system and rapid transit within a few years, a downtown Georgia State is within an hour's journey of about half Georgia's population. It is immediately adjacent to centers of government, medicine, commerce, and finance. Community and college can have immense reciprocal contributions to make.

Mr. Steiner summarizes the potential as "urban extension" — a highly sophisticated cousin of the agricultural extension

• *Platforming is the key to solving space and traffic problems at the Georgia State of 1975 and later. It's a solution long used in Atlanta, which has been rising on viaducts above its railroad tracks for almost a century. But at State there would be a difference: The platforms would be for people, and the cars would stay below, where they would still receive daylight through perforations in the cover. The illustration at left (above) shows how the perforations might look at the pedestrian level. The rendering below it shows how platforming would affect the vista of a motorist. The overall view (right above) shows such treatment of Decatur Street. The location's sharp dropoff from Ivy Street to the expressway would allow increasing layers of parking and service access, shown in the cross sections at right.*



cooperation of colleges and agribusiness that has achieved such dramatic results in the past decades. The urban extension concept was suggested in the 1962 annual report of the Ford Foundation. Says the Steiner master plan:

"There are many fragments of theory, observation, empirical research, and practical tools of application, scattered through the related fields and disciplines, which could make major contributions to such a program. . . . Human ecology, physical planning, and urban design are concerned with different aspects of the geographic-physical environment and its organization into cities and regions. Economics has well developed macro and micro concepts which are every day proving their practical value in regulating the American economy and which are being extended to deal with international problems of finance and economic development.

"Political science, through techniques of interpersonal and group dynamics, is aiding the constructive understanding and control of the forces of social change. To all of these, the cultural interpretations of the creative arts and the mass media of communications are making a vast contribution. The value of mathematics, science, philosophic logic, and the computer are too well recognized to bear elaboration, but their critical and generalizing functions must be built into any total conceptual frame."

Thus Georgia State, which already has established excellent and reciprocal relationships with Atlanta's business community, in the future can be expected to expand its role to include the interests and needs of the entire community, viewing them with the integrated eye of all the academic disciplines rather than the narrower vistas of the mathematician, sociologist, artist, etc., working alone.

What would be the dollar cost of the ambitious Steiner plan? Obviously, it won't come at bargain basement rates. But considering the location of the complex and its scope, the estimate is relatively modest: about \$96 million for land and buildings not already funded. And of course this does not mean a cash outlay of that much by the Board of Regents

• *The view from Edgewood Avenue, below, indicates how existing facilities might be utilized and how the platforming could be tapered off and landscaped to avoid any sharp edges. Hurt Park, at present the only greenery around Georgia State, would remain an important focal point. Sparks Hall, right center, would tie in with future classroom buildings, and the old Municipal Auditorium, left center, also is included in the master plan.*

immediately or even over the next eight years. Some or all of the buildings could be constructed under bond issues, and many phases of the expansion would qualify for various federal assistance grants.

Some eyebrows were raised when Mr. Steiner included the present Atlanta Police Department headquarters in the overall campus. The plan also includes Georgia State's ownership of the old Municipal Auditorium. With the cooperation of the city government, these should prove no major barricades to the plan. A new auditorium and convention complex is being completed now on Piedmont between Forrest and Pine. When the second phase — extension of the convention facilities across Pine — is accomplished a few years hence, the city's need for the old auditorium will be at an end. Implementation of the Steiner plan would indeed require building of new police headquarters elsewhere, but the present building itself would not be razed. With some interior remodeling, it would become an integral part of the new campus, surrounded at its second-floor level by the platform which would be part of the principal pedestrian plaza of the future campus.

An expenditure that might cause greater controversy is the setting aside of 1 per cent of the total building budget for art. The idea is well established in Europe. In Zurich, the art allocation is 10 per cent. But in the United States, few government units have adopted the scheme for public buildings. Private developers have been bolder than the government in this respect.

The Steiner plan is insistent on the point. And it's not talking merely about paintings hung on interior walls. The unique plaza campus, the report asserts, offers unusual opportunity to create beauty, contribute to the status of art in the university system, and provide an outstanding example for civic design. The master plan urges immediate development for a "systematic, comprehensive, and ambitious" plan for art development and for appointment of an artists' committee with full power to pass on acquisitions and acceptance of donations.

Experience shows that it's a long trip from the drawing boards of ambitious master plans to realization. But the Steiner plan has overwhelming logic as well as beauty on its side. It accommodates the projected student load. It makes brilliant use of Atlanta's topography and the man-made delineations of rails and street patterns. Above all, it helps establish a clear definition of Georgia State's role in the future of Atlanta and the state.

