

Transition
Rochester 2010-2012

Sound Horn Theo Baart



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Sound Horn

the street. Summer has begun. This is a pleasant city.

The next day we drove into the center with a few people from George Eastman House. The neighborhood where we are staying gives an inaccurate impression; downtown is a different world. Empty spaces where buildings once stood have been turned into parking lots, store windows are empty, facades boarded up. Kodak buildings have been demolished and are now covered with grass. The parking lots next to the Kodak buildings that are still standing are empty.

Vitality and prosperity disappeared from the city some time ago. Rochester Parking City. Always a parking space available for \$3 per day, but why would you go there?

We drove on to the 2.5-mile-long Inner Loop, the ring road around the small city center. There is hardly any traffic. We got off again on the northern side of the city. In the early 20th century, extensive residential areas were built to house the employees of Rochester's major companies. Many of these houses are now boarded up. There are empty lots, green spaces where the municipality has demolished ruined buildings. There are no shopping malls, only a few corner stores and a large number of churches. These neighborhoods have the highest crime rate in the state of New York.

The City of Rochester is the heart of a large conurbation. In the suburbs, villas – so-called McMansions – adorn rolling hills. Comfortable cars drive to and fro and sprawling shopping malls are plentiful. But downtown, the poverty is abject. The contrast is overwhelming.

What happened? I wonder. What economic disaster unfolded here? Who are the people trapped here? And what are their prospects for a viable city?

I live with 16 million other people in the Netherlands, a country only five times larger than the Rochester NY Metropolitan Area which is home to 1 million people. The political culture in the Netherlands is very different from the United States. The constant struggle against the water has resulted in a political system based on cooperation, consensus and coalition-forming. Even so, we know that whatever happens in America will eventually happen here. Developments in spatial planning that have taken place in the Netherlands often began in the United States. Whether it is suburbanization, changed infrastructure or the decline of industrial cities, sooner or later it will come our way.

Can shrinking Dutch regions learn anything from Kodak City, especially at a time when the Netherlands' central government claims to be saying goodbye to spatial planning? This will now be handed over to local authorities and the market. It will be interesting to see how regions fare where there is a lack of overarching policy and where the market has always been the driving force.

Rochester was an intellectual manufacturing city. Knowledge and ideas led the way and Kodak was a global player, but still the city ran into problems. For me as a documentary photographer, it is highly symbolic that this city rose to prominence thanks to the photographic industry, and fell again by failing to respond in time to new photographic developments.

I decided to trace these developments by talking to residents, policymakers, entrepreneurs and political leaders and by photographing the city – another way of understanding what has happened.

Boomtown

The City of Rochester is the heart of Rochester, NY Metropolitan Area, which lies to the south of Lake Ontario. The Genesee River bisects the center. In the early 19th century, Rochester was a successful city, America's first boomtown, that expanded rapidly through grain trade and the textile industry. The business climate was positive, you would say now. Bausch & Lomb, which manufactured lenses and optical instruments, was established in Rochester in 1853. Xerox, which produced photo paper and photographic equipment and later printers and copiers, was founded in 1906.

George Eastman brought Kodak to Rochester in 1888. Eastman was a combination of Henry Ford and Bill Gates: engineer, entrepreneur and philanthropist; a visionary man who quickly built an empire around 'the image'. Kodak's growth was not based only on the success of easy-to-use technology and mass production; the company's marketing and advertising were groundbreaking. Kodak advertisements encouraged amateurs to capture the American way of life – on Kodak film, of course. "You press the button, we do the rest." In so doing, Eastman created a new and rapidly expanding market.

Boosted by Eastman's phenomenal success, Rochester grew to become the city of the image. It was the Silicon Valley of its time.

The leaders of Rochester's Big Three (Xerox, Bausch & Lomb and Kodak) were also the leaders of the community. They financed the university (University of Rochester) and RIT (Rochester Institute of Technology). What was good for The Big Three was good for the city, and Kodak, as the largest and richest of the trio, led the way. Everything was focused on innovation and growth, which required a well-educated and healthy workforce. Eastman also financed the Eastman School of Music, the Eastman Theater and various health facilities. He was one of the first captains of industry to provide for his employees' welfare. A job at Kodak meant security for life. Kodak was pleased with the city's development and from the 1920s it nicknamed Rochester The Kodak City.

Kodak made high-quality photographic products, but early on the company also started to collect movies shot on Kodak film (Eastman Color) and

photographs. Eastman's former residence was turned into a film and photography museum. George Eastman House still has one of the most important film and photography collections in the world. This includes a large number of 19th-century photographs of the American West and numerous highlights from early French and British photography.

Urban Renewal

Movie footage from the 1950s shows a bustling city. The sidewalks are filled with shoppers and traffic is backed up on the wide streets. Rochester was successful and wealthy. "I was very happy in the 1950s," says Nancy Muniz, an official at the City of Rochester's commercial refuse department, a municipal service that collects waste from businesses. Her father worked at a local branch of General Motors his entire life and her mother at Sharon Optical. "Nobody ever got laid off. It was safe." And downtown still functioned as the city's lively center: "The elegant women of Rochester came downtown every day with their make-up and their hats and their jewelry and they looked so beautiful. They would do their little bit of shopping downtown and stop at one of the nicer restaurants like The Manhattan and have lunch. After that they got on the busses and went home."

That all changed. After a century of accommodating a number of industries and generations of residents, Rochester's downtown was exhausted. In the '50s, many American cities faced the same problems: dilapidated buildings, congestion and a loss of residents and businesses to the emerging suburbs. Something had to be done.

According to Joni Monroe, an architect involved with the Rochester Regional Community Design Center, a private initiative that concentrates on sustainable urban development, the Second World War was the pivotal point for spatial planning in America. "After World War II we saw ourselves as a 'new' progressive country, discarding the old. In retrospect, we made a number of poor policy decisions which have affected patterns of sustainable living. We built massive numbers of highways and suburbs, building further and further out away from the centers. Our policies have favored investments in suburban development."

Three laws introduced by the federal government contributed to this. The most important was the GI Bill, a law dating from 1944 that gave veterans a financial incentive to attend college or build a house. This bill had a major impact on suburbanization because it did not help when buying an existing house. The banks wanted a large down payment on a house in the city, in contrast to a new house in the suburbs where the GI Bill guaranteed a mortgage. Veterans thus had no choice but to move to the suburbs. The GI Bill applied to 16 million veterans, but in its execution it frequently worked against minorities and women. As a result, minorities often stayed behind as tenants in the city.

Sound Horn, Proceed with Caution

When I was 14, I received an enlarger from a deceased uncle. I put a negative in the device, a tube with a light at one end and a lens at the other, and projected it onto light-sensitive paper. I then developed this in the dark, only turning the light on again when the print was fixed. I rinsed it with water and hung it up to dry. This was analog photography, a description that came into existence only with the arrival of digital photography.

In the village was Mr. De Bock's photo shop where I bought Kodak film and chemicals, expensive, but better than the German Agfa, said Mr. De Bock. I couldn't judge that, but I fell for the packaging and design of the Kodak boxes.

Five years later, by then a student at art school, I bought Kodak films in packs of 20. I enjoyed looking at them. Developing and printing are long gone, but I still keep some Kodak materials because they look so good: that bright yellow, the no-nonsense typography, and those four words that made my teenage imagination run wild: Eastman Kodak Rochester, NY. I knew that NY stood for New York and thought that Rochester was a district of New York City. I fantasized that it was an infinite industrial complex with smoking chimneys surrounded by apartment blocks, shopping malls and offices, and where everything was in abundance. I had to go there.

June 2009

It took some time, but at 52 I went to Rochester, NY for the first time. The photography exhibition Nature as Artifice about the malleable Dutch landscape was showing in the George Eastman House. It included the 45-foot-long installation Snelweg, Highways in the Netherlands, by me and Cary Markerink.

The flight from New York to Rochester takes an hour. Dusk was falling as we descended, but you could still see how green Rochester is. It resembles a large park dotted with generously spaced houses. It looks attractive from the air.

The next morning we made the 10-minute walk from our hotel to George Eastman House. The impression from the plane was confirmed: this is a city of beautiful houses set in leafy surroundings. After setting up the exhibition, we walked to Park Avenue. We ate a salad on the terrace at restaurant Magnolia. Cheerful people pass us in

In 1949, the Housing Act was introduced which ensured that municipalities could easily expropriate properties and that there were sufficient funds available for urban renewal. The National Interstate and Defense Highways Act of 1956 also contributed to suburbanization. Based on the argument that the Russian threat had to make rapid troop movement possible, a network of highways was built between the suburbs and the urban centers. Increasing wages meant that a car became affordable and commonplace for many middle-class families. The Russians did not come, but the suburbs did. Tenants became homeowners. The white middle-class steadily increased in size and the American Dream took shape.

By 1960, more people in the US lived in suburbs than in cities. Businesses followed their employees to the outskirts where land was cheap and parking easy. Those left behind in the city center faced significant problems. When this trend became visible in Rochester, City Hall introduced a range of measures intended to help them. But, says Stephen B. Ashley, CEO of the Ashley Group, a family of real estate and mortgage brokerage companies, they did not do much good. "Retail follows rooftops."

In 1956, the owners of the McCurdy and Forman department stores invited architect Victor Gruen to devise a plan for downtown Rochester. His proposal was an indoor shopping mall. The plan was remarkably ambitious: not only would two streets and two blocks have to be cleared, but he also suggested building an 'inner loop', a ring road around the city center.

Rochester was at the height of its prosperity and felt it should embrace modern times and ideas. A pact between businesses and City Hall put the great renewal process in motion. Old buildings were dismantled and modernist office buildings and large parking garages took their place.

Midtown Plaza shopping mall was opened in 1962. It was a 'suburban solution' for downtown: the success of the suburbs, which boasted numerous shopping malls with ample parking, was duplicated in the city center. Large swathes of downtown were cleared to make room for the ring road. From day one, the road was controversial. It was seen as a harsh division between the center and the surrounding residential neighborhoods.

In July 1964, Rochester got an unwelcome wake-up call. The first race riots in the United States were not in the segregated South but in the northern city of Rochester. Fifty years later, the consequences of those riots are still visible. Nancy Muniz (now a government official, then a schoolgirl) was raised in a traditional white working-class environment and still lives downtown. "We could not really fathom why the hell our parents were fighting so hard into the night every day." It was quiet during the day but at night you heard gunshots. "We remained friends at high school but our parents did not. And that was the hard part for us to

understand. The big divide started then." During the riots shops were looted, many of which have never reopened. Muniz sees the race riots as the beginning of the decline of the northern part of the city center: "I do not think it was the poverty level, that was small and different from what it is today. I think white people in general in the city did not understand then how bad it was for black people and why they had to do what they did. The race riots put up walls around the neighborhood. That was the biggest thing that ever happened in our city. The damage was to people, neighborhoods, lifestyles and trust. Fear knocked at the city and stayed."

It was not only the city that changed; the economy changed too. From 1900 to 1970, Rochester had been filled with innovative industries which, based on research and marketing, had a major advantage over the competition. Xerox and Kodak, together with the industry that supported them, were responsible for three-quarters of the economic activity in the region. By the end of the '80s, their influence had dwindled. Although Kodak had made important discoveries in the field of digital photography (such as the high-resolution sensor), the company's management opted for analog photography. Japanese competitor Fuji Film sparked a price war with photo paper and film, products on which Kodak's success relied. Kodak began to shrink. It was the price paid for the rapid rise of digital photography and the loss of market share of its traditional products. Eastman Kodak, which in 1982 was the largest employer in the Rochester NY Metropolitan Area with more than 60,000 employees, had dropped to third place in 2010 with 7,400 employees.

Xerox did not fare much better: the research department made significant discoveries that the management team did not pick up on but its competitors did. The company almost went bankrupt in the late '90s, made 20,000 employees redundant and moved its headquarters out of Rochester.

The city was soon confronted with the consequences of the enormous loss of employment, becoming one of the top three American cities with the largest decline in industrial sector jobs. Businesses closed down, buildings were demolished and downtown emptied. The panacea from 1962, Midtown Plaza, also became obsolete. It stood empty for years before being demolished in 2010.

Doughnut City

The center of Rochester resembles a doughnut: a hollow core surrounded by suburbs, independent municipalities which do not fall under City Hall. Downtown and its residents face poverty and decline, while the wealthy suburbs prosper.

Elaine Spaul is vice chairwoman of the Rochester City Council. She sees the consequences of the shrinkage everywhere. "For example, when we used a lot of water and energy you had a critical

mass of utilization that kept supply and demand in a way that drove prizes down. Now that our water utilization is lower, the per-unit cost is very high." Then there is the dramatic loss of jobs. "You lose your tax base and you have a lot of empty facilities."

In 2000, the overall vacancy rate in Rochester was 12%. In the city's popular neighborhoods that was 5%. Charles Thomas was the city planner until February 2011. He addresses the surplus of houses. "That means some neighborhoods experienced the bulk of disinvestment and the flight to the suburbs. Those neighborhoods have vacancy rates of 40% or greater." The overall vacancy rate of homes in the city is expected to be 19% in 2011. There are 100,000 homes, which is 20,000 too many. The City of Rochester's population shrunk from 300,000 a few decades ago to 207,000 in 2009. Thomas believes that Rochester needs to accept that it will become a medium-sized city with fewer than 200,000 inhabitants. "We have to look at the built environment and ask how we can change it to be more marketable, more secure and safe for the population."

As a result of administrative fragmentation – the city with its independent suburbs – everything in the Rochester NY Metropolitan Area is done multiple times: there are separate police departments and school districts. It is not very efficient. According to Elaine Spaul that will not change, for fear of relinquishing control. "We know that there is a tremendous connection between education, public safety and economic development," she says. Fewer than half of the high school students who sit the final exams graduates with a diploma. "It's still too low. The other thing is that many of our young people who graduate from our high schools graduate by the skin of their teeth, so even those who graduate are not always fully prepared for vocational work or for college." In 2009, 32% of students in Rochester City dropped out of high school. In the neighboring municipality Pittsford, 97% of the students graduated successfully.

According to city planner Thomas, the region has not grown over the past three decades but everyone who could afford to has moved to the suburbs. "Developed residential land use in the same time has tripled. It has exploded in the secondary and tertiary suburbs." Regional planning could keep suburbanization under control, but in the state of New York, every municipality has "total control of its land use and doesn't have to consult with its neighboring communities. So the City of Rochester must rely upon the goodwill and cooperation of its neighbors, and that is not happening." Regional administration and planning may not be in the short-term interest of the suburbs because they are doing so well, Thomas believes, but they are in their long-term interest because a vital city center with employment opportunities, restaurants and culture benefits the entire region.

The result of the lack of goodwill from its neighboring municipalities is an accumulation of

problems: middle-class families leave the city and move to the suburbs, while poor inhabitants are left behind. The city's costs are rising, and the revenues are disappearing.

An administrative reorganization which could ensure regional planning and development is not on the horizon. However, Thomas does see unorthodox alternatives to curb suburbanization and offer a sustainable alternative. "The single greatest thing to consider in preventing this continuing sprawl is access to water and sewer infrastructure," he says. "If the region froze all the water districts and sewer districts now, the immediate effect would be an urban growth boundary that could not be extended." That will not happen either because the water and sewerage companies are also autonomous. A sustainable alternative would be to renovate the empty buildings connected to the existing infrastructure or to build on vacant lots.

The experts have the insights but there appears to be a lack of political will to make concessions and to formulate a long-term policy. In America there is never a lack of space, land is cheap and the attitude towards the government is ambivalent, to say the least: government intervention has traditionally been viewed with suspicion. The market is always right.

February 2011

This is my fifth visit to Rochester in 18 months; a metropolis which expanded and grew rich on knowledge-intensive industries and on paternalistic but generous employers, and which in the space of 20 years has dwindled to a segregated city. Behind the Inner Loop are extensive neighborhoods plagued by poverty, crime and addiction. At a safe distance are the new residential estates for middle-class 'escapees'.

A thick layer of snow covers the ground. It is 5°F and a strong wind is blowing but the sun is shining. The street is virtually deserted. Midtown Plaza's office building is still standing, but the rest of the mall has more or less disappeared. When I photograph the remains on Main Street, several passersby approach me: "This is where I got my nose pierced," says a young woman and points to a pile of twisted steel. A man explains that he spent an important part of his life in Midtown Plaza: "This was where it was at, this was where the action was."

I visit a real estate agent's website and make a list of houses on sale for between \$7,500 and \$15,000. I get in the car and go and see them. These houses in the lowest price bracket are often – although not always – boarded up and in bad neighborhoods. Why doesn't anyone want them? I ask the occasional passerby in the biting cold. I am told that if you buy a house for \$10,000, you have to have sufficient personal resources to make the house habitable because the bank will not give you a loan against this collateral. But if you have sufficient

renovation funds, you do not have to buy such a cheap home. For \$50,000, you can find a nice property in a reasonable neighborhood. These are unsalable houses in desolate neighborhoods. When I return in May, not a single one of them has sold.

One Saturday I visit FoodLink, the food bank that distributes food to churches, soup kitchens and homeless shelters. Volunteers make up food packages in an old warehouse on the south side of town. Much of the food comes from the successful regional supermarket chain of Wegmans. Wegmans sells premium products at prices that are not too much of a stretch for the wealthy suburbanites. The supermarket's quality standards mean that the products' appearance is quickly deemed unacceptable, even though they have not yet reached their expiry date. These items end up at FoodLink.

The extent of Rochester's poverty is also visible in the free meals served at schools. In the inner city, 90% of school children receive free meals; in the suburbs that figure is 10%. During school vacations, FoodLink provides 15,000 lunches per week.

I decide one evening to go to the theatre or a concert. That must surely be possible in a metropolitan area with 1 million inhabitants. [City News-paper](#), the city's trendy newsweekly, has a long list. These are mostly amateur singing and drama performances and recitals by students from the Eastman School of Music. When I express my astonishment at the meager cultural offering, I am frequently referred to the annual jazz festival in June – a spectacular, compelling event. I only have to wait four months.

How to proceed?

The scant building activity taking place downtown is for 'empty nesters', parents whose children have left home. True revitalization will be difficult to achieve without improving the school system. And yet there is cautious optimism. Three thousand people now live inside the Inner Loop, and the municipality hopes that figure will have doubled in five years, injecting life back into the city.

The rise in oil prices and the lack of good public transport could also work in downtown's favor: returning to the compact city and walking to a restaurant or the theater instead of driving becomes an obvious choice. However, a structural recovery relies on the people who now move to the suburbs when they start a family, unless they can afford \$12,000 per child per year for a private school.

The future of the city is determined, according to Joni Monroe of the Rochester Regional Community Design Center, by the involvement of the people living there and their willingness and ability to contribute to the recovery. Her experience is that changes take place when a broad-based, inclusive

policy is introduced. Providence, Madison, Grand Rapids and Peoria are revitalized American cities where this approach has been successful. "Without leadership, I do not hold out any hope for true, visionary change that will transform our city."

Real estate expert Stephen Ashley hopes for a broad coalition. "One key is to get the engagement of educational leadership, elected leadership, business leadership and cultural leadership. All need to be working off the same sheet of music so that things are not spinning in different directions with different priorities. I think we are working at that."

Despite the problems with secondary education, education generally is seen as a source of renewal for the city. Higher education leads the way. Students come to Rochester for the university and technical college, but disappear again as soon as they graduate.

Tom Jackson, former president of the University of Rochester, says that cooperation between the city and the university has never been so good "because the town is trying to figure out how it redefines itself. It is looking heavily to education to help. To plant the seeds of new companies, new initiatives that, hopefully, will redefine the community of Rochester. Nobody knows what that will look like but there is hope that the university can lead the way." The university also has a vested interest in driving change: "We are trying to recruit faculty here who have national opportunities. How do you get the best people to the University of Rochester? Part of it is internally, you want to have a great department and great support. And frankly you want them to come to a place where they can have a great life in an exciting city, where their spouses can have exciting jobs, and where their children can grow up in a great environment."

The city should not pin its hopes on large corporations with philanthropic leaders. With globalization, the bonds between businesses and their hometowns have weakened. They may still be based in Rochester but they also have offices all over the world. They no longer have the same connection to the city that George Eastman had. Nothing stays the same in this world, including philanthropy.

John Bernunzio and his wife Julie run Bernunzio Uptown Music. They started out selling banjos and guitars through the internet, but five years ago they bought a large retail space in a new property around the corner from Eastman School of Music. Beautiful instruments hang on the wall and in the middle of the store is a comfortable couch. On Saturday mornings older musicians regularly take a seat there for a few minutes to play a \$25,000 banjo. The Bernunzios made the investment because a store creates contact with clients and because they believe that downtown Rochester is going to recover; or at any rate their neighborhood. "You have to see this city as the frontier. After 150 years, that's what it has become again. And if you

want to look at it like that, then you also see the many opportunities," says John.

May 2011

I walk through the center, past beautiful buildings from the city's first heyday like the Powers Building, which has been preserved thanks to private initiative. Not everything has been torn down, but the property tax makes it attractive for owners to demolish vacant buildings as quickly as possible. Buildings are taxed, not land. This explains the growth of the parking business.

Behind the gaping hole where Midtown Plaza stood is Manhattan Square Park. Well-meaning modernism from the 1970s aimed at human edification, the concrete expanse includes an open-air theater and ice rink. A couple of climbers scale one of the theater walls. It is not a bad place to train.

Cutting across the empty parking spaces I begin to fantasize about a possible transformation of this city. I imagine one big municipal park covering the parking lots. I imagine downtown Rochester as a vibrant urban center with terraces, bars, restaurants and specialty shops in historical commercial buildings, surrounded by the largest park conceivable, a city of music, images and education; a city that makes use of its rich collections and past and organizes festivals. I imagine the Inner Loop partially demolished, and on the vacant land a transition from municipal park to urban farming, joined by a pedestrian walkway to the Public Market. The market is the only place in this segregated city where the colorful diversity of its residents is visible.

This city is rich in possibilities and the people who can make them a reality are there too, I have noticed. The sometimes tangible lethargy needs to be overcome: neither Kodak nor George Eastman are coming back; small-scale projects and diversity are the pillars of a new viable city.

To say goodbye to Rochester, I visit George Eastman's grave. It seems appropriate. I expect Eastman to have been given a tomb in one of the city's beautiful cemeteries. By the entrance to one of Kodak's is a flowerbed. In the middle of it is a sandstone column, not too high, and under the stone the urn containing Eastman's ashes. Behind the column is a factory which offers at least some protection. On the other side of the street is a barren expanse of land. On nearby West Ridge Road, most of the shops and restaurants that relied on Kodak employees have closed. The hairdresser's 12 chairs will never again be occupied.

Can we in the Netherlands learn anything from the developments in a city like Rochester? Perhaps to avoid falling so far, so fast. Complacency will be punished. Don't rely on the market to create the facilities that do not benefit the market, such as a varied cultural program, good education and spatial planning. These are government matters which should only be regulated at a regional or

even national level. A shrinking city without structural and administrative support from the region does not stand much chance of a better future. Segregation (division between rich and poor, black and white), a phenomenon that has manifested itself openly in the Netherlands in recent years, does not diminish socio-economic problems; at best it concentrates in certain areas. If you can afford it, you do not even have to see it, but the Netherlands is too small for such an approach.

I walk on, and pass an underground parking garage. At the exit is a sign that reads 'Sound Horn, Proceed with Caution'. It would be a good motto for the new Rochester.







Moses E. Robinson

School Resource Officer at Eastern High School
President of the East Coast Gang Investigators
Association, Western New York Chapter

What I Can Do Here

"I was a kid in North Philadelphia. I grew up at a time when there was a lot of gangs and a lot of child abuse. We lived in ghetto slums. I was in foster homes when I was seven years old. I reconnected to my family about a couple years before I was sent to my grandmother in Rochester. I was in gangs in Philadelphia between the ages of eight and ten years old. I had been in three gangs by the time I moved to Rochester. Wherever I moved there were always kids that looked for the new kid to terrorize, to beat up or intimidate. I didn't want to be the target of violence so I went along with it.

I lived with my grandmother on the east side of Rochester. Most kids want to associate with people they have something in common with; that should be family, that should be church, and that should be school, but I was disconnected. Even living in my grandmother's house I didn't feel like I belonged there. At junior high school I became involved with sports. I moved fast and I started to wrestle. I intimidated a lot of the kids based on my size. When you look at child development at that level most kids are looking for identity. Kids who have been the victims of violence and abuse, use what they have been taught or have seen as a weapon against other people. That's what happened to those kids who become bullies and gang members.

Sport gave me self-confidence but it didn't answer the questions of who I really was. I became frustrated, I was violent, I was angry. Being big the way I was I created fear in other people, and I used that as a source of power. In high school I started to play football. The football coach was African American. He was strict and hard. He had a sense that if he had to discipline you or wipe your butt, he would do that out of love, and you knew that. He became the father I didn't have. So I listened to my football coach. I never wanted to disappoint him. I was busy, I was playing football, I had direction. I felt secure. I had an identity and I became very successful and locally well known as an athlete, but as a student, I was not happy with where I was. I faked an identity that I was smart out of fear that people would find out that I wasn't. So I became what anyone wanted me to be.

I was growing up with people slapping me around, beating me up in my own home, calling me stupid, and telling me that I would never amount to anything. The only thing I wasn't stupid at was sports, so I excelled at sports. My dilemma was, was I smart enough to hold down college? I struggled about that my senior year at high school. I was never in trouble.

I was responsible. I worked hard. I had three jobs. I never hung out with people who did drugs. I didn't want to be at home anymore. I wanted to be away from the turmoil that was going on.

I believed I could go to college but I didn't want to fail. I wanted to see the world outside of Rochester and I did. This is a part of my life at eighteen when I was really alone. I signed up for college in New York by myself. I won a college tour by myself. I supported myself financially. My mother never came to see me play football. People were calling out my name from the stands, but not my family. It was the community that embraced me more than my family had.

I came home to Rochester and started working security at a hospital. I met police officers coming in the emergency room all the time with victims of violence. I met a lot of officers and I started to like them. They encouraged me to take the police exam, and I did. I hesitated because I'm African American and I know the dynamics of the African American community. People knew me. How would other people react? It was not an easy decision but I became a community officer because people knew me from high school and from sports. I knew them, and it was fantastic! People want to be treated with respect, even at their lowest points in life. Often, because of what they do, we as police officers meet them at that point.

I've been in law enforcement for twenty five years and a police officer at this school for sixteen years. The 'School Resource Officer program' (SRO) started under the Clinton Administration to facilitate more safety on school campuses. It's about building relevant relationships with students. A police officer at a school deals with law enforcement issues, with instructional and development issues, and acts informally as a youth counsellor.

You have to make the school a safe place. I have lost fourteen kids from the school to homicide in the neighbourhood. I would say that about 90 percent of the kids here are good kids. The rest of the kids are more at risk to violence, to the lack of education and lack of understanding. I treat them the same in the terms of care, respect, and love but some kids who come from tough stock are different from other kids. So you may let certain things go, understanding that kid, while you would respond differently with someone else.

I love this community and I think this community and our kids are worth saving. The best way to show that is by being here. There are a lot of people who left the community because they are afraid of it. I understand that, that is your own constitution. I reflect a lot about how I grew up, about what I was personally feeling. The reason I am here is because of everything I have gone through. These kids are going through it too. I don't care about politics. I have to focus on what I can do here. My name is Moses and Moses was a spiritual and a principled person. I am not in a position to lead but I do believe that having this spiritual name coming from the Bible, my name means something. My responsibility is to be here."











I Work with Ghosts

"I was born in the suburbs of Rochester. My father worked at Kodak as an electrical engineer. He worked on flash circuits. I went to college at RIT (Rochester Institute of Technology) in a cooperative education program. You go to college for three months and then you work for three months. By working you can save for tuition for the next quarter. I studied chemistry, chemical analysis. Kodak said this is the kind of technicians we need and they helped the colleges to train the students. Education was focused on the needs of the big companies of Rochester.

I worked for two weeks short of 25 years at Kodak and then I was laid off. The functions I was doing at the time often involved environmental regulations that Kodak still had to follow. I left on a Friday as a Kodak employee and came back on the following Monday as a contractor doing the same functions. What happened to me was that the contracting company that was hired by Kodak came to me and hired me to do the same work. I went to the same desk, and used the same Kodak telephone, but a different company was paying my check. It is sad. Kodak is nowadays a bunch of contractors that work together. Kodak used to do everything itself. The main thing I lost when I changed employers was vacation time, and I don't get the same benefits. Kodak does not have to pay my health insurance and other benefits any more. Contractors are used at Kodak so when a project is over Kodak does not have to fire people, they just break the contract. In the long term it is easier for Kodak.

I am doing something really sad. So many people I used to work with over the years were laid off and many functions they did that still had to be done came to me. So in three or four situations, the guys I was working with were laid off one week, and then I would start doing the work they used to do the next week. In my first few years at Kodak, you never worked alone. There was always someone training or helping with the job. Now I work with ghosts. I go to these empty buildings to take samples. There is still furniture, there are calendars on the wall but the calendars are three to four years old. We watched the place close down. It feels like closing the house of a deceased relative."







Charles Thomas

City planner of Rochester

transform itself to be still viable given the population stagnation in this region. Urban life is still extremely viable even in cities like Rochester which are struggling with depopulation, but urban vertical density needs to be rediscovered as a sustainable alternative to suburban sprawl. The region spread out because land was so cheap. During the late 1800's and the beginning of the 19th century land up here had no value. Space to expand was inexpensive. Even today land is so cheap that developers do not want to go vertical because going vertical costs more money. Zoning and land use regulations define character but they are not incentives in themselves to development.

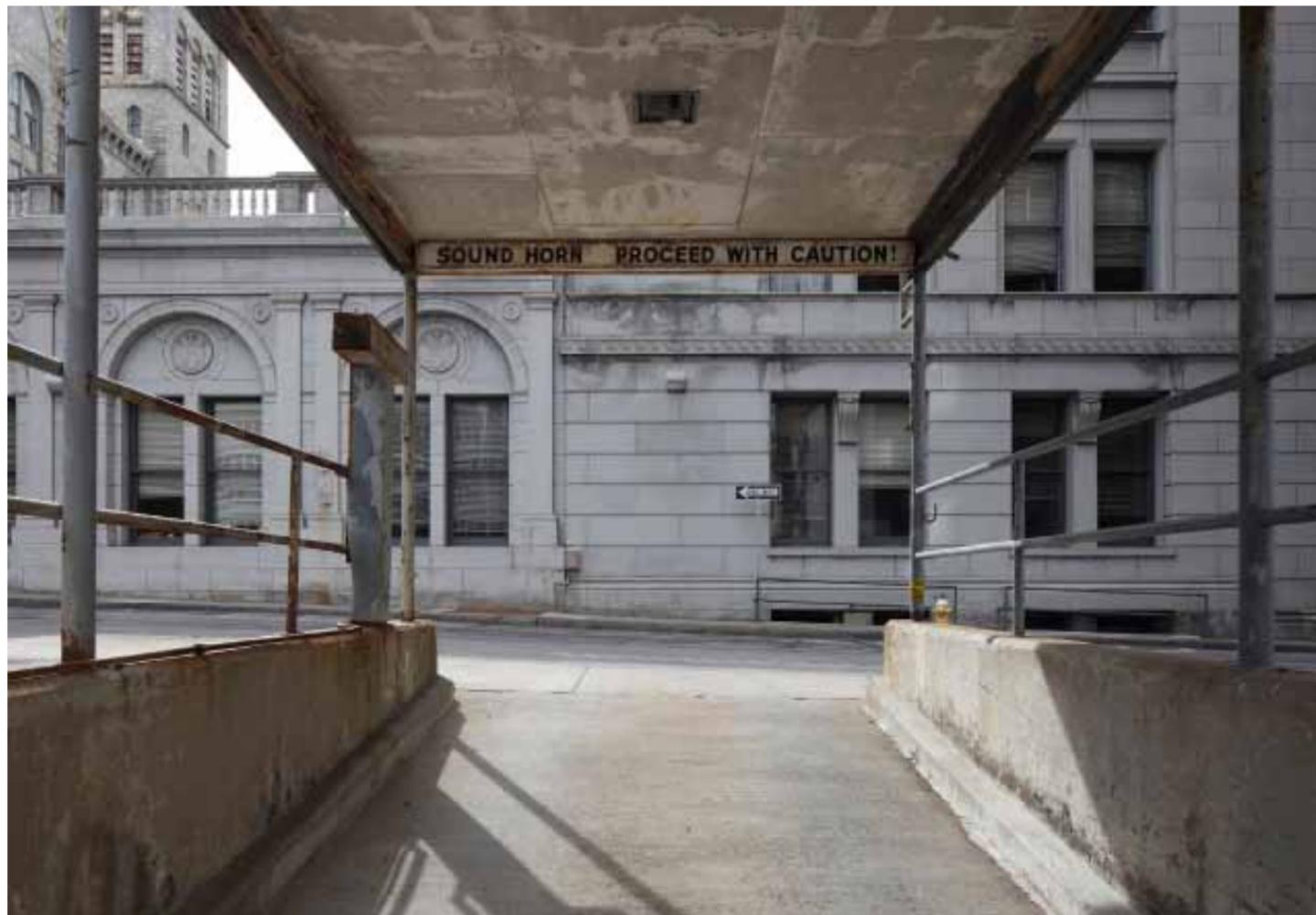
The Shrinking City: Too Many Houses

“Neighborhoods with an extremely high vacancy rate do not have a functioning housing market. The value of the house is such that you can't borrow against it to do repairs; you can't maintain the property. If you are a businessman and own several apartments in such a neighbourhood, it is possible that you have twelve months of rental habitation but your tenants pay for only six months. Renters move from one place to the next frequently to avoid their rental obligation. The process of eviction takes so much time that it exacerbates the situation. Basically the economy of these neighbourhoods is not working.

As houses become vacant and no longer suitable for habitation, they become the property of the city through municipal tax foreclosure. The city will take them down. But that is a random, opportunity driven process, not planned in any sense. You end up with scattered plots. That is hard to manage as a resource, and hard to adopt for other uses because of their size. We still need to take down buildings that are not suitable for habitation - and are scattered throughout the city - but we have to be much more strategic about how we deal with the vacancy issue. It will make more sense for us to develop more areas as green assets, take the inventory down and let some people relocate. Do it in a progressive way so that you end up with something that can be redeveloped when the market changes. So fifteen years from now you would have a green amenity, a neighbourhood surrounding it, and it can be redeveloped. It could be a park, it could be an economic development opportunity for commerce, and it could be, if the market re-emerges, housing. To create green amenities for recreational purposes and urban agriculture is viewed favourably by neighbourhoods. Bottom line is: treat the vacant land issue as a resource and an asset rather than as a liability.

Historically we are always planning for growth. People of my age group were taught to control growth, to make it better, to make it more responsive to human need, and less sprawled out. Quite frankly I saw every building demolition as a failure. The government response was to remove houses as abandonment occurred, without realizing there was a trend here that was going to continue. I didn't recognize the trend till the early 90's. It took a generation of planners to recognize that the biggest challenge was not growth but re-imagining how the urban environment has to





For Sound Horn I interviewed 20 people. Three of those interviews are included in this publication. The interviews, portraits and urban landscapes are the prelude to a larger publication about cities and regions which, hard hit by the departure of the manufacturing industry, are looking for new sources of income.

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