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## **Comprehensive Development: Twentieth Century Fox & Century City in West Los Angeles**

Due north of Culver City and southwest of Hollywood, lies Century City, an icon of midcentury modernism and urban planning (see Figure 2.1). Midcentury modernism in Los Angeles is most closely associated with sleek glass houses in the Hollywood Hills, while Los Angeles midcentury planning evokes images of freeways and the urban renewal scheme that leveled downtown's Bunker Hill. Absent the freeway building or single-family homes associated with postwar Los Angeles, Century City reconceived West Los Angeles as a mostly residential area into a high-rise center of economic and cultural activity. Continuing to puncture the myth of the jobless suburban fringe, the story of Century City highlights the might of international corporations' privately-funded developments—in the age of federal urban renewal, no less—in reshaping the economic and urban development of a metropolis.

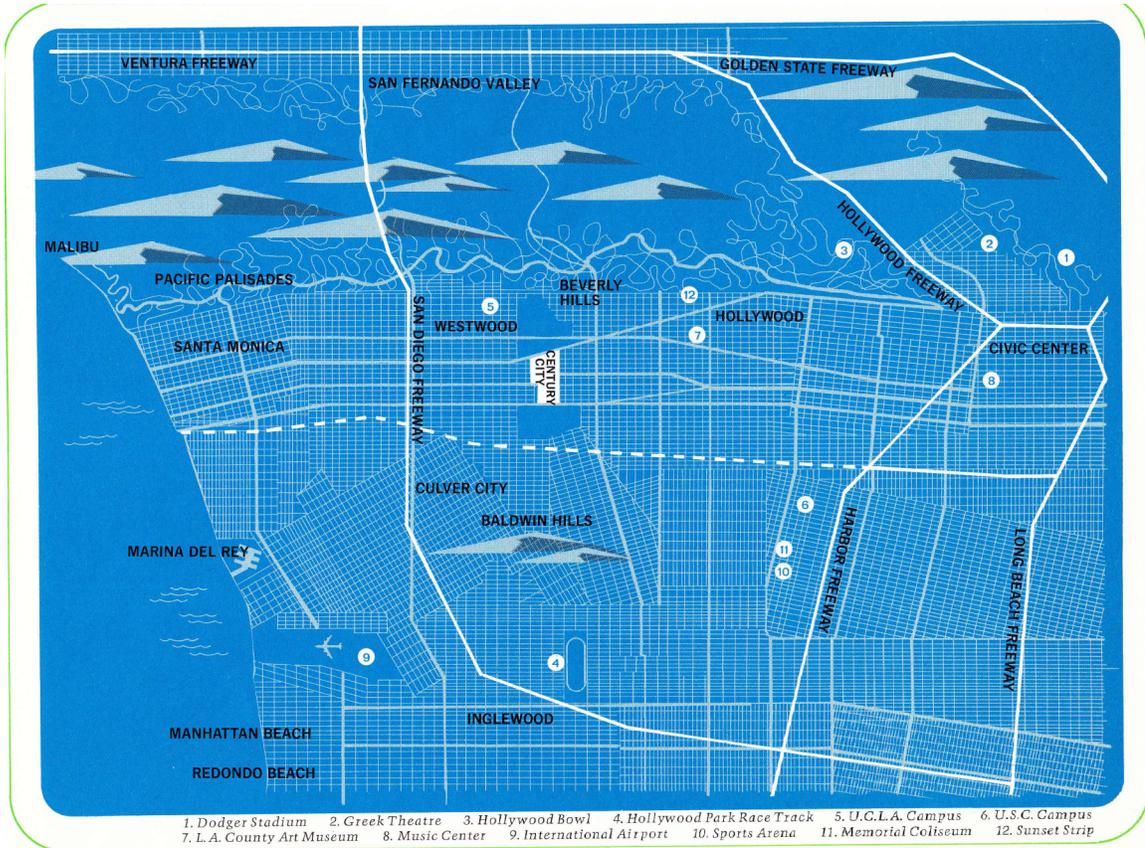
Popular wisdom holds that the budget-busting production *Cleopatra* (1963) forced Twentieth Century Fox (Fox) to sell its studio land, which resulted in Century City. This notion, propagated by the press, serves as Century City's creation myth. Even an undated press release from the Century City Chamber of Commerce cites the film's role in bankrupting and thus requiring the sale of the land to rescue it from ruin.<sup>1</sup> However, the timeline and financial facts contradict this story. Fox President Spyrous P. Skouras publicly announced the studio's intention to develop Century City in 1957.

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<sup>1</sup> Century City Chamber of Commerce, "The Century City Story," undated press release, Century City California Index File, Los Angeles Public Library.

**FIGURE 2.1 MAP OF CENTURY CITY IN CONTEXT.** This stylized map from a promotional brochure advertises Century City's central location. It shows Century City, Hollywood, and Culver City in the Los Angeles Basin.

Source: The Gateway Buildings (*Undated Promotional Brochure for Century City c. 1965*), CPC 17588, box 43309, Los Angeles City Archives.



Meanwhile, *Cleopatra* was on budget and on schedule until mid-1960.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, Century City predated *Cleopatra*'s disastrous box office results.

On Fox's former backlot rose Century City, a master-planned Corbusian-inspired node of commercial, residential, and cultural activities in large-tower superblocks. This "city within a city" was a paradigm of 1960s planning that reinforced Los Angeles's polycentric structure and remains a unique landscape within the city as well as an important economic center today. In the age of federally-funded urban renewal projects that wiped out the inner cores of cities across the country, Century City was the largest privately-financed urban development in the country to that point in time. Urban historian John Findlay describes Century City as a downtown substitute in vogue with his studies of "magic lands," or large-scale privately-planned developments that transformed the mid-twentieth-century urban West.<sup>3</sup>

While all major film companies reassessed and reimagined their land holdings after the collapse of the studio system, Century City remains a unique result from such processes. By hiring Welton Becket & Associates to master plan its site, Fox set in motion a complete transformation of that portion of West Los Angeles. Anticipating exponential growth of that part of the metropolis, Century City reconceived a low-profile industrial plant surrounded by single-family homes, golf courses, and high-income but low-rise Beverly Hills into a high-rise node of high-end economic and cultural activities, significantly boosting the city's economic development for the long term (see Figure 2.2).

In its comprehensive approach—through International Style architecture, master

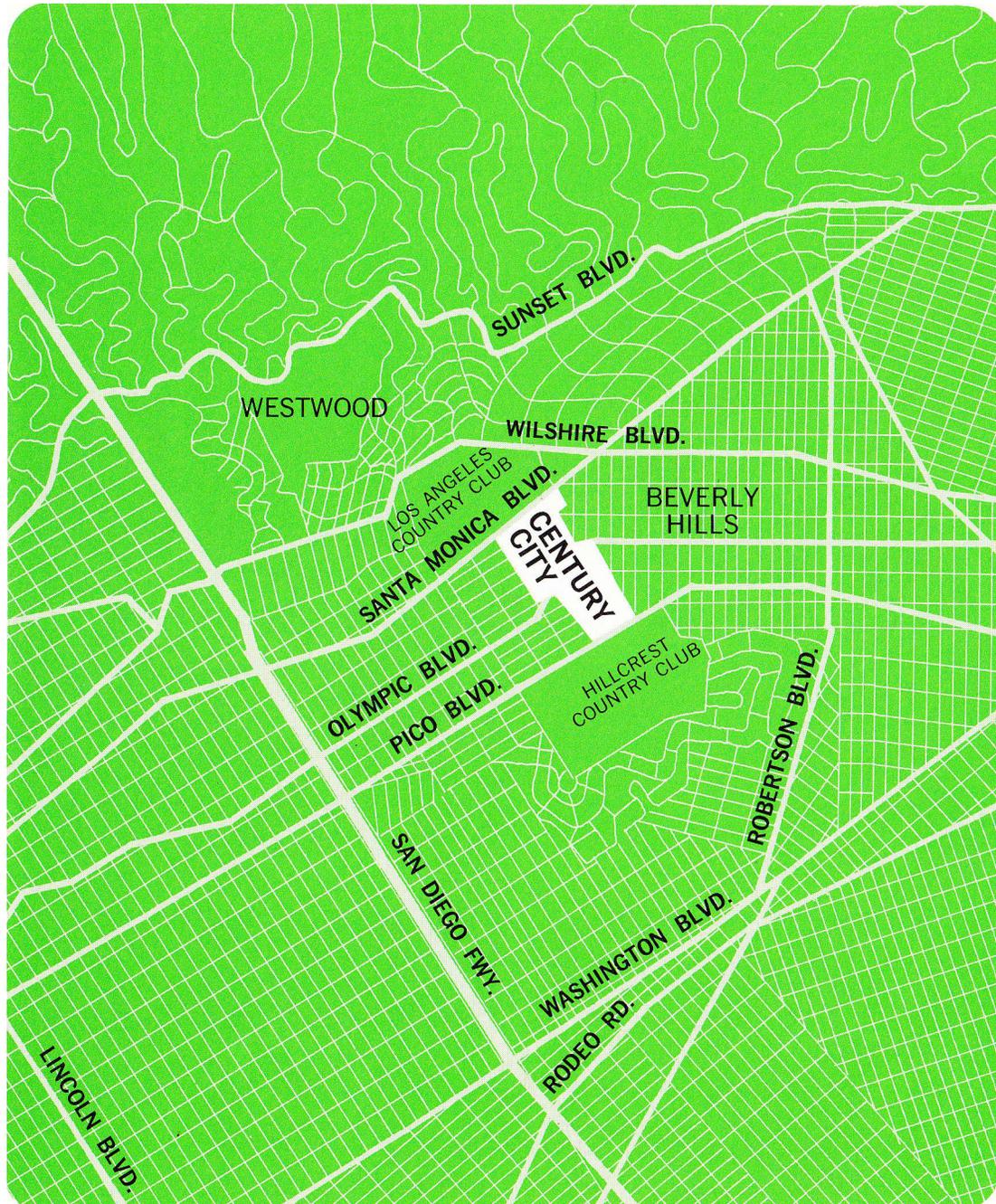
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<sup>2</sup> Aubrey Solomon, *Twentieth Century-Fox: A Corporate and Financial History* (Lanham, Md.: The Scarecrow Press, 2002), 141.

<sup>3</sup> John M. Findlay, *Magic Lands: Western Cityscapes and American Culture After 1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 286-287.

**FIGURE 2.2 MAP OF CENTURY CITY IN LOCAL CONTEXT.** This map from a promotional brochure illustrates Century City's location in West Los Angeles, surrounded by country club golf courses, single-family homes, and Beverly Hills.

*Source: The Gateway Buildings (Undated Promotional Brochure for Century City c. 1965), CPC 17588, box 43309, Los Angeles City Archives.*



planning, and scale of execution—Century City sharply contrasts with the other studios examined in this study. Although Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) sought Fox's assistance in redeveloping its own sprawling plant soon after the Century City announcement, when it finally did so more than a decade later, it sold off its land piecemeal over many years, under Culver City's strong oversight (see Chapter 3). Setting itself apart, Paramount expanded rather than contracted its main studio plant in Hollywood, navigating a complex incremental growth management constrained by its urban surroundings (see Chapter 4).

According to one critic, "Century City is one of the more instructive chapters in the annals of urban development."<sup>4</sup> Unlike most histories of urban development in the middle of the twentieth century, which are analyzed through the lens of urban renewal and narratives of urban decline, this chapter traces the actions of Fox's film operations and decisions as a large landowner in the creation of a new type of urban development in the Los Angeles metropolis.<sup>5</sup>

The chapter begins by documenting Fox's move from New York to Hollywood to the undeveloped urban fringe of Los Angeles. After examining the suburban single-family housing developments that would soon be built surrounding the studio, the chapter explores Fox's studio building and expansion until just before the collapse of the studio system. Next, the chapter details the decisions that led to the creation of Century City, whereby President Skouras, advised by his Los Angeles-based Directory of Property

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<sup>4</sup> John Pastier, "Century City After a Quarter Century: The Huge Los Angeles Complex Ends Its Architectural Drought," *Architecture* 77, no. 1 (January 1988): 60.

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961); R. Scott Fosler and Renee A. Berger, Eds, *Public-Private Partnership in American Cities: Seven Case Studies* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1982); Jon C. Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America, 1940-1985* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

Development, set forth to transform the studio land into an innovative development in order to aid the company's bottom line. When Fox realized it could not manage the development on its own, Skouras tapped his New York connections to bring developer William Zeckendorf, of Webb & Knapp, on board. Zeckendorf, in turn, enticed Pittsburgh's Alcoa to finance the project. In this way, Fox's headquarters in New York ensured New York and Pittsburgh networks directly shaped urban development in Los Angeles. Fox's Century City is the only case study to so clearly delineate New York's constraining influence on the film industry in Los Angeles. Further, the chapter analyzes the design and reception of Century City, placing the development in physical and critical context. Finally, the chapter concludes by analyzing Fox's unrealized ambitions to redevelop the remaining studio facilities into a residential and commercial development complimentary to Century City.

#### **FROM NEW YORK TO HOLLYWOOD TO THE URBAN FRINGE**

Similar to fellow film moguls, William Fox was a Jewish European immigrant to New York City that, despite limited education, first found business success in the garment industry. In 1903, at the age of 24, Fox sold his cloth-shrinking business and used some of the profits to purchase a nickelodeon in Brooklyn. The following year, he founded the Greater New York Film Rental Company to distribute films to his growing chain of movie theaters. Following a foray into legitimate theater and stage production, Fox began producing his own films in 1914 and incorporated the Fox Film Corporation in 1915 in New York City. Fox located his first film studio on Staten Island. In 1917, the company rented production space in Los Angeles and established a permanent facility in

Hollywood at Sunset and Western a couple years later.<sup>6</sup> Like other major film companies, Fox's corporate headquarters remained in New York until the 1970s. Thus, all decisions, including those about land use in Los Angeles, emanated from New York City.

As the film industry matured, the business model and standard practices of the industry evolved. With the establishment of the studio system, film companies required greater expanses of land to build and maintain their all-encompassing movie factories. As a result, Fox sought greater and cheaper land than available in Hollywood on Los Angeles's urban fringe. Fox was an early migrant out of Hollywood, following the Universal Film Manufacturing Company's lead in 1915.

Fox Film Corporation purchased the first portion of what became the West Los Angeles plant in 1923. In March and April 1923, real estate agents and property owners notified Fox's lawyers at the firm of Bauer, Wright & MacDonald of land they had available for sale for Fox's studio expansion plans. Most of the offers were located in the remote farmland of the San Fernando Valley; those properties were declined as "a little too far removed from the city to be of benefit for their purposes."<sup>7</sup> The only property offered in the San Fernando Valley they considered was one near Universal City.<sup>8</sup> By April 17, 1923, John C. Eisele, Treasurer of the Fox Film Corporation, based in New York City, had agreed to purchase property from the Janss Investment Company. On

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<sup>6</sup> Douglas Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System: A History* (London: British Film Institute, 2005), 37-38.

<sup>7</sup> Various correspondence, "Purchase of New Studio Property," Box 836, Fox Legal Records (Collection 95), UCLA Performing Arts Special Collections.

<sup>8</sup> Letter from Bauer, Wright & MacDonald to C.W. Howkings dated 10 April 1923, "Purchase of New Studio Property," Box 836, Fox Legal Records (Collection 95), UCLA Performing Arts Special Collections.

May 5, 1923, they executed a contract for \$300,000 for just under 100 acres of land between Santa Monica and Pico Boulevards just west of the Beverly Hills city limit.<sup>9</sup>

Maps and photographs indicate that the land was undeveloped when Fox purchased it. The 1921 *Baist's Real Estate Atlas of Los Angeles* illustrates the property as part of the vast Rancho San Jose de Buenos Ayres controlled by the heirs of John Wolfskill at the time of survey. The 3,300 acres of the Rancho San Jose de Buenos Ayres were part of the large Westgate annexation to the City of Los Angeles in 1916. Three years later, Arthur Letts, founder of Broadway Department Stores, purchased the land. Letts deeded a portion of it to the federal government for a veteran's home and sold another portion that was developed as the Los Angeles Country Club, directly northeast of Fox's property. In 1922, Letts sold the remaining land to the Janss Investment Company. Janss developed the stretch between Santa Monica and Pico boulevards east of Sawtelle first.<sup>10</sup> Janss likely recognized the added value to the land to have Fox locate within its first phase of development, drawing potential new homeowners to the area.

Soon after the purchase, Fox proceeded with plans to zone the property for film manufacturing. In August 1923, Fox's lawyers wrote Dr. Edwin Janss of the Janss Investment Company for assistance in moving through a petition to the City Planning Commission for the zoning of the site. Janss was tapped for his "contact with the Zoning

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<sup>9</sup> Western Union Telegram from John C. Eisele to Alfred Wright dated 17 April 1923, "Purchase of New Studio Property," Box 836, Fox Legal Records (Collection 95), UCLA Performing Arts Special Collections; Letter from John Eisele to Alfred Wright dated 25 May 1923, "Purchase of New Studio Property," Box 836, Fox Legal Records (Collection 95), UCLA Performing Arts Special Collections.

<sup>10</sup> G.W. Baist, Plate 45, *Baist's Real Estate Atlas of Los Angeles*, 1921, accessed on 9 Nov. 2011 at <<http://www.historicmapworks.com>>; Glen Creason, *Los Angeles In Maps* (New York: Rizzoli, 2010), 65, 82-83; Patricia A. Allen, *Janss: A Brief History* (Los Angeles: Janss Recognition Committee, 1978), 6.

Commission and the 'High Priest of the City Beautiful' department."<sup>11</sup> The Janss Investment Company was what historian Marc A. Weiss described as a community builder involved in "changes at the moderate end."<sup>12</sup> Janss and its cohort of builders purchased land, subdivided it, and built single-family homes in the subdivisions along with creating other community amenities, in contrast to earlier community builders who only subdivided the land for sale to wealthy individuals who then commissioned unique homes. Fox's lawyers likely assumed that such activities brought Janss in frequent contact with planning officials, which may have been the case. However, zoning for residential use was distinctly different than manufacturing, especially film manufacturing, which the Los Angeles City Council had designated in specific districts beginning in 1919.<sup>13</sup> In October 1923, the City Planning Commission recommended the petition be granted and the City Council and City Attorney took the appropriate actions to zone the property via ordinance.<sup>14</sup>

Although Santa Monica Boulevard had long served as a streetcar route between downtown Los Angeles and Santa Monica, the road remained unpaved in undeveloped areas. Subsequently, one of the first land-use actions Fox engaged after purchasing the property was the grading and improvement of Santa Monica Boulevard along its northern boundary. With the purchase, Janss Investment Company required Fox to improve Santa

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<sup>11</sup> Letter from Bauer, Wright & MacDonald to Dr. Edwin Janss dated 13 Aug. 1923, "Purchase of New Studio Property," Box 836, Fox Legal Records (Collection 95), UCLA Performing Arts Special Collections.

<sup>12</sup> Marc A. Weiss, *The Rise of the Community Builders: The American Real Estate Industry and Urban Land Planning* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 2.

<sup>13</sup> Ordinance 38,750 (N.S.), Box B-1413, Los Angeles City Archives.

<sup>14</sup> "Zoning of Westwood Studio Property" in Fox File 5/18/27, "Purchase of New Studio Property," Box 836, Fox Legal Records (Collection 95), UCLA Performing Arts Special Collections; City Planning Commission Minutes, 28 Sept. 1923, vol. 4, p. 226-227, Box C-408, Los Angeles City Archives.

Monica Boulevard. In late 1924, Fox received pressure from the Sawtelle and Hollywood Chambers of Commerce and others to commence the improvement. They offered to pay half the cost of paving, sidewalks, and curbs if Fox would pay for the grading and other half. Fox lawyers urged the company to take up the offer since it would be a savings of \$6,000; Fox would pay \$12,000 rather than \$18,000.<sup>15</sup>

In April 1925, concerns surfaced that new neighbors of the future Fox film studio would challenge its zoning as a nuisance and force the relocation of the plant. Sol Wurtzel, General Superintendent of the William Fox Vaudeville Co., based in Los Angeles, wrote to lawyer Alfred Wright to inquire about permission to build either temporary or permanent stages on the land to claim its use. William Fox, himself, was concerned that people purchasing new homes in the vicinity would petition to rezone the property. Subsequent correspondence between lawyers indicates that the Regents of the University of California did not favor the location of their new university near film studios. Ultimately, Wright advised Wurtzel that the company should not build anything on the land unless it would aid in film production. California Supreme Court precedent could compel Fox to remove film production facilities from the site—as it had with laundries and brickyards—if the zoning were successfully challenged.<sup>16</sup> The gap in the historical record indicates that Fox heeded the advice and did not build anything on the

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<sup>15</sup> Letter from Bauer, Wright & MacDonald to William Fox dated 11 Dec. 1924, "Purchase of New Studio Property," Box 836, Fox Legal Records (Collection 95), UCLA Performing Arts Special Collections.

<sup>16</sup> Letter from Sol Wurtzel to Alfred Wright dated 6 April 1925, "Purchase of New Studio Property," Box 836, Fox Legal Records (Collection 95), UCLA Performing Arts Special Collections; Letter from A.W. to Mr. Lester dated 13 April 1925, "Purchase of New Studio Property," Box 836, Fox Legal Records (Collection 95), UCLA Performing Arts Special Collections; Letter from Bauer, Wright & MacDonald to Sol Wurtzel dated 24 April 1925, "Purchase of New Studio Property," Box 836, Fox Legal Records (Collection 95), UCLA Performing Arts Special Collections.

property for the next three years. In 1928, Fox quickly constructed a new studio plant in order to manufacture sound films.

Despite or perhaps due to the early sale of the studio land, the residential subdivisions surrounding it remained unoccupied until years after the studio was operational. Although the area was virtually undeveloped when Fox purchased the land, the Janss Investment Company had subdivided vast acreage in the general vicinity for single-family homes and donated land to the University of California for its Southern Branch (later University of California, Los Angeles or UCLA). Janss developed Westwood, the area near the university, northwest of the studio site, in the 1920s. However, it appears that Fox's immediate neighbors trickled in until the mid-1930s. The Sanborn Fire Insurance Company did not map the studio until 1932 (four years after Fox built its studio), and did not document the surrounding residential subdivisions until 1936 with additional building evident in 1937 and 1938.<sup>17</sup> It was the early large landholders—Fox, the Los Angeles Country Club to its north, and the public golf course to its south—that set the development patterns for this portion of the city in an area otherwise zoned for residential purposes.

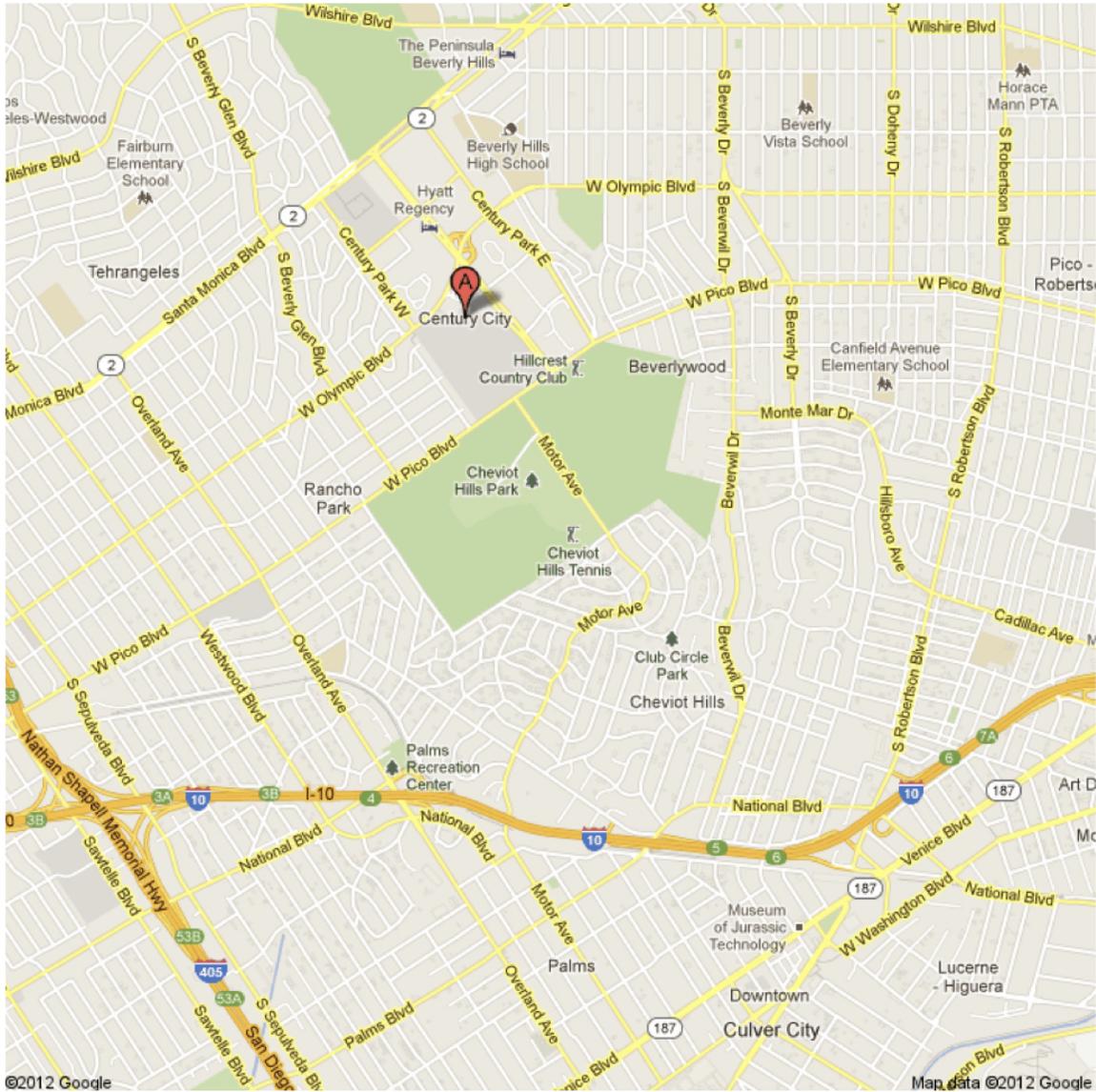
Rancho Park, a neighborhood of starter homes averaging less than 1,600 square feet in mostly Spanish Colonial Revival style, abuts the Fox studio's western boundary (see Figure 2.3). Originally developed by the Janss Investment Company, who sold Fox the studio land, in the 1920s and 1930s as part of Westwood Hills, Rancho Park took a new name and identity following the extension of Olympic Boulevard through the neighborhood in 1936, dividing the original development. Rancho Park, then, claimed the

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<sup>17</sup> Sanborn Map Company, *Los Angeles*, vol. 24 (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1926 updated to 1938), 2407-2409, 2414-2414, 2420, 2426-2427 via ProQuest.

**FIGURE 2.3 MAP OF FOX STUDIO'S NEIGHBORS.** This 2012 Google Map shows the residential neighborhoods of Rancho Park, Cheviot Hills, and Beverlywood among others surrounding the Fox studio. The Fox studio is approximately marked by the red balloon.

*Source: Google Maps.*



development between Olympic and Pico Boulevards from Century City to roughly Sepulveda Boulevard on the west. Rancho Park Golf Course opened in 1947. Pico and Westwood boulevards serve as the commercial corridors of the community.<sup>18</sup> The immediate area south of the intersection of Pico and Westwood remained sparsely developed until the 1940s, after Paramount sold the land it purchased for a new, larger studio for housing (see Chapter 4).

Due south of Fox's studio, on the other side of Pico from the main gate and Rancho Park, is the residential neighborhood known as Cheviot Hills (see Figure 2.3). With street names like Dumfries, Troon, and Wigtown and architecture, including angled roofs and brickwork, and lush gardens and landscaping, the community of 1,450 single-family houses along rolling green hills is intentionally reminiscent of the namesake hills that divide England and Scotland. Begun soon after the arrival of Fox, in the early 1920s, the five tracts that make up Cheviot Hills, each built by different developers, were primarily built in the 1940s and 1950s. Houses that range from starter homes to quarter-acre properties with multi-million-dollar homes line its serpentine streets. Cheviot Hills Park and Hillcrest Country Club occupy about half of the neighborhood's area. Motor Avenue, the first paved road between the Fox and MGM studios, is Cheviot Hill's main thoroughfare. In the years after the Century City development, the neighborhood has born the brunt of the traffic congestion resulting from commuters to and from Century City and the 10 Freeway south of the neighborhood.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> H. May Spitz, "Neighborly Advice: Pancakes, Putting Green Just Around the Corner," *Los Angeles Times*, 4 April 2004, K2.

<sup>19</sup> H. May Spitz, "Neighborly Advice: The Burr of Scotland and the Whir of Cameras," *Los Angeles Times*, 26 Oct. 2003, K2; Martha Groves, "'Calmed' Roads Led to a Storm," *Los Angeles Times*, 20 July 2005, A1; Cheviot Hills Home Owners' Association, <<http://www.cheviot hills.org/>> Accessed 13 June 2012.

To the east of Cheviot Hills lies Beverlywood (see Figure 2.3). A planned community devised by Walter H. Leimert, Beverlywood opened in 1940. A prolific developer in California, Leimert created Leimert Park in Los Angeles and a tract in Cheviot Hills. The Beverlywood Homes Association enforces the codes, covenants, and restrictions placed on the development of 1,354 single-family houses. Bounded by Robertson Boulevard on the east, Monte Mar Drive on the north, Beverwil and Roxbury drives on the west, and Beverlywood Street on the south, but surrounding streets have claimed inclusion in Beverlywood, indicating its status as a desirable place to live. South Beverly Drive is the neighborhood's spine, complimented by a park, known as Circle Park, located in the traffic circle at the center of the development. The original houses were modest but with relatively large yards, which in recent years have attracted enlargement of some houses, all of which the homeowners' association regulates in order to maintain the character of the neighborhood. Many of the homes' enlargers are members of the Orthodox Jewish community, who have large families and a strong desire to live near the amenities of the Pico-Robertson cluster of kosher markets and synagogues.<sup>20</sup>

While few complaints arose from the operation of the film studio in close proximity to these conventional suburban residential neighborhoods, there have been grumblings about the increased traffic generated by the Century City development. The completion of Century City also increased property values and impetus to improve

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<sup>20</sup> H. May Spitz, "Neighborly Advice: A Mid-Cities Look That's Lasted," *Los Angeles Times*, 28 Dec. 2003, K2; Leimert Investment Co., "Developments," <<http://www.leimert.com/developments.html>> Accessed 13 June 2012.

nearby commercial areas as it solidified as an employment center.<sup>21</sup> The *Los Angeles Times* reported that after the initial Century City development “Los Angeles soon imposed limits on building heights, density and car trips in and out of the Century City area. The aim was to balance development and quality-of-life issues in adjacent residential areas, including Cheviot Hills, Beverlywood and others. It was agreed that both a Beverly Hills Freeway and a rapid transit line would be needed to make the commercial center workable.”<sup>22</sup> Neither the freeway nor the rapid transit line materialized, and the surrounding neighborhoods have absorbed the traffic of commuters to and from Century City and other Westside employment centers.<sup>23</sup> Before getting too far ahead of the story, let’s return to Fox’s land-use decisions that predated Century City.

#### **BUILDING THE STUDIO**

On October 28, 1928, the Fox Film Corporation dedicated its new Movietone City, named for Fox’s newly-innovated sound-on-film process, studio plant in West Los Angeles. In ninety days, 350 men working in three shifts around the clock had nearly completed the first set of studio buildings, which included the administration building, four sound stages, a film storage vault, other production and supply buildings, a hospital, power plants, and other industrial facilities. A 14-foot wall had been partially completed to surround the forty-acre manufacturing plant valued at \$10 million (see Figure 2.4).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Gerald Floyd, “Rancho Park: Shopping, Business Define Area’s Appeal,” *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, 18 Dec. 1988, A3, California Index, Los Angeles Public Library.

<sup>22</sup> Groves, “‘Calmed’ Roads.”

<sup>23</sup> Current plans to build a “subway to the sea,” an extension of the Metro Purple Line along the Wilshire Corridor, include a stop in Century City.

<sup>24</sup> William M. Henry, “Millions Spent in Sound-Proof Stages For Making of Talking Pictures,” *Los Angeles Times*, 28 Oct. 1928, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Movietone News Core Collection File, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

**FIGURE 2.4 1928 VIEW OF THE STUDIO.** This aerial photograph, looking southeast, circa 1928 shows Fox's new Movietone City studio. The upper right corner contains the administrative building, sound stages, and other permanent facilities for the studio facing Pico Boulevard. The remainder of the land includes a hodgepodge of temporary sets on the backlot. In the 1930s and 1940s, Fox expanded on the land to the east (where the oil rigs stand).

*Source: Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection*



The remaining nearly 60 acres were reserved for temporary sets on the backlot and future studio development. Fox oriented its studio to Pico Boulevard, its southern boundary, rather than its northern border along the more prominent Santa Monica Boulevard and streetcar line. This suggests Fox did not expect its employees to depend on the streetcar. Fox's locational choice contributed to Los Angeles's urban development trends in the 1920s: increasing decentralization, growing dominance of the automobile, and decline of the streetcar.<sup>25</sup>

The *Los Angeles Times* article announcing the opening of the studio focused on the innovative infrastructure, and for good reason: this was the first studio purpose-built for sound-on-film production. Complete with didactic illustrations of the features of sound-proof stages on the new lot, the article detailed the complex systems involved. Designed by expert G.H. Mulldorfer, the sound-proof stages were each a building within a building in order to omit unwanted sounds. A concrete shell encased an unattached inner building padded with cork. Mulldorfer claimed airplanes could fly directly above or an earthquake could rattle below without interrupting filming. The sealed-off nature of sound stages created a challenge for ventilation, however. A separate air conditioning unit pumped air in and out of the stages, heating or cooling as needed, without the aid of fans or other vibration-producing mechanisms. The air conditioning plant was the largest on the West Coast at the time with the capacity to transform 350 tons of air per day.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Mark S. Foster, "The Model-T, the Hard Sell, and Los Angeles's Urban Growth: The Decentralization of Los Angeles During the 1920s," *Pacific Historical Review* 44, no. 4 (1975): 459-484; Scott L. Bottles, *Los Angeles and the Automobile: The Making of the Modern City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 175-210.

<sup>26</sup> Henry, "Millions Spent in Sound-Proof Stages."

In the 1930s and 1940s, Fox expanded its West Los Angeles property. In 1936, the newly merged Twentieth Century-Fox purchased from Fox Hills Realty Company, of which Janss Investment Company was a majority shareholder, 97.62 acres for \$537,700. The land, adjacent to the eastern boundary of the studio, extended to Health Avenue south of Olympic Boulevard and north of Pico Boulevard.<sup>27</sup> The price of \$5,508 an acre was nearly double that paid 13 years prior; in the midst of the Great Depression that indicated the increase in the value of the land as a result of residential building in the vicinity. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) Land Use map of the City of Los Angeles illustrated this area as a golf course in 1939, indicating that Fox reserved the land for future development.<sup>28</sup>

In 1943, Fox, led by President Spyros P. Skouras in New York City, completed its land acquisition for the West Los Angeles studio with the purchase of the golf course north of Olympic Boulevard to Santa Monica Boulevard, from the studio boundary to Health Avenue. The 89.349 acres, purchased by the studio's subsidiary Fox Realty Corporation of California from Fox Hills Realty Company, cost \$491,419.50 (or \$5,500 an acre). Along with the deed to the land, the purchase agreement included the removal of restrictions for drilling for oil and natural gas on the previous two land purchases.<sup>29</sup> During the rezoning of this portion of the land, Beverly Hills residents, adjoining the studio, forced a 250-foot buffer zone of single-family residential along this eastern

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<sup>27</sup> Appellant's Brief *Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation v. Paul C. Teas, et al.*, United States Court of Appeals, Fifth Circuit, No. 18,245, pp. 2-3, "Fox Realty Corporation," Box 499, Fox Legal Records (Collection 95), UCLA Performing Arts Special Collections.

<sup>28</sup> Department of City Planning, *City of Los Angeles Land Use Map, 1939-1940*, Vol. 7, Sheet 34, Huntington Library, San Marino, CA.

<sup>29</sup> Appellant's Brief *Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation*, 2-4.

boundary. They took this action in order to limit Fox's potential nuisance, especially in views created by towering sets, according to later assessments from Fox's director of property development.<sup>30</sup>

On the recently acquired land, Fox expanded its production facilities in 1946. In addition to some remodeling, the building campaign included three new sound stages, a five-story wardrobe building, a prop storage building, a two-story production office building, scene dock buildings, and two rehearsal halls. Additional industrial facilities were also constructed, including a powerhouse, an electrical building, an incinerator, new storm drains, and electrical work.<sup>31</sup> The majority of the studio-owned land remained undeveloped for backlot and future development purposes (see Figure 2.5).

#### CREATING CENTURY CITY

The studio plant Fox expanded in the 1930s and 1940s, when greater capacity was a necessity, now exceeded its operational requirements. Fox misjudged the future of the film industry when it invested in the 1946 studio expansion. Although Fox and the major film studios did well during the war years, the anti-trust suit filed by the federal government in 1938 was finally adjudicated in 1945, which eventually ended their lucrative business model when the final decision by the Supreme Court was issued against the studios in 1948. Following the dissolution of the studio system, Fox's evolving business model, much like for its rival film studios, entailed stumbling efforts and gimmicks to attract audiences into theaters in order to turn a profit in the motion

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<sup>30</sup> Letter from Edmond E. Herrscher to Spyros P. Skouras dated 18 March 1958, Box 44, Folder 7, Spyros P. Skouras Papers, M0509, Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, CA.

<sup>31</sup> "New Buildings Planned By 20<sup>th</sup> Century-Fox," *Los Angeles Times*, 19 Feb. 1946, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Film Corporation (1946-1948) Core Collection File, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

**FIGURE 2.5 1956 VIEW OF THE STUDIO AND SURROUNDING AREA.** This aerial photograph taken in 1956, looking southeast, shows Fox's expansion and the in-fill of single-family housing around the studio.  
*Source: Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection*



picture industry. One thing was certain: without a chain of national theaters under the studio's control, there was less impetus to turn over product and thus fewer films were made. Fewer films meant that each film was more important in the bottom line and there was even less margin for flops, as well as diminished requirements for sound stages and other studio facilities. Subsequently, Fox sought to lower its fixed costs and expand its revenue sources by redeveloping a portion of its studio land.

Recent attempts to merge with Warner Bros. and then MGM signaled financial difficulties even if public records indicated that Fox had been operating at a profit since 1941.<sup>32</sup> While overall the company made a profit, the core of its business—the production and distribution of films—operated in the red.<sup>33</sup> The need to curb losses in Fox's principal business motivated Skouras to investigate other revenue sources and possibilities with its large real estate holdings. In 1952, Fox initiated an oil and gas lease with Universal Consolidated Oil Company in order to capitalize on its oil rights and untapped profits under the studio land.<sup>34</sup> Fox earned its first royalties from this arrangement in 1955, and by 1963, had earned nearly \$3.4 million in profit from the oil

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<sup>32</sup> "20<sup>th</sup>-MGM Near Deal on Merging Prod'n at Metro," *Hollywood Reporter*, 8 Jan. 1957, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Film Corporation (1954-1959) Core Collection File, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences; "20<sup>th</sup> Expores Move to MGM," *Beverly Hills-Citizen*, 27 Feb. 1957, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Film Corporation (1954-1959) Core Collection File, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences; "Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation/Fox Film Corporation Selected Financial Data: 1927-1976," *Daily Variety*, 25 Oct. 1977, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Film Corporation (July – December 1977) Core Collection File, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

<sup>33</sup> Spyros P. Skouras, Twentieth Century Fox Stockholder Meeting Speech, 21 May 1957, Box 80, Folder 53, Spyros P. Skouras Papers, M0509, Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, CA.

<sup>34</sup> Appellant's Brief *Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation*, 5.

rights.<sup>35</sup> While oil revenues were akin to printing money—since Fox collected royalties without any expenditures—the profits were not enough to satisfy the struggling studio. As early as the May 1956 stockholders' meeting, Skouras announced that the company was considering disposing of some of its assets not necessary to the production of motion pictures. These assets included real estate, a large library of motion pictures, and interests in oil production.<sup>36</sup>

In July 1956, Skouras's nephew-in-law and attorney-turned-aspiring-real-estate-magnate, Edmond Herrscher, based in Beverly Hills, recommended Fox engage the services of Welton Becket & Associates to plan the future development on the Fox studio property.<sup>37</sup> Herrscher's advice, which Skouras soon followed, to hire the Los Angeles firm was valuable local knowledge to a company in New York City making decisions about its assets in Los Angeles. Following Herrscher's second unsolicited missive on the topic a year later, Skouras hired him as Fox's Director of Property Development, based at the Los Angeles studio, effective July 1, 1957.<sup>38</sup> Herrscher was an eager developer and an advocate for Century City with invaluable local knowledge to a company based in New York and Skouras's ear, but he would prove too inexperienced to accomplish Fox's mission to develop the land on its own.

On October 1, 1956, following discussions with executives, Welton Becket submitted to Fox a contract for his firm to execute a land use study and master plan of the

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<sup>35</sup> Memo by Skouras with letter to Zanuck dated 17 Dec. 1963; Spyros P. Skouras, Twentieth Century Fox Stockholders Meeting Speech, 15 May 1956, Box 80, Folder 52, Spyros P. Skouras Papers, M0509, Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, CA.

<sup>36</sup> Skouras, Twentieth Century Fox Stockholder Meeting Speech, 15 May 1956.

<sup>37</sup> Letter from Edmond E. Herrscher to Spyros P. Skouras dated 8 July 1958, Box 44, Folder 8, Spyros P. Skouras Papers, M0509, Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, CA.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

West Los Angeles studio property. The agreement included a four-point economic survey and analysis, that included: 1) determining the most profitable use of the land and suggestions for structures most suited to it; 2) gathering and evaluating information on land values; 3) studying the effects of proposed freeways on proposed development and other traffic patterns; and 4) providing economic data to interested investors. The \$60,000 fee, paid over the six months of work, for Welton Becket & Associates also purchased a comprehensive master plan of the site, schematic renderings of the plan, drawings and a block model of the development, rendered solutions to screen or blend oil wells and related facilities, and six printed brochures advertising the master plan to potential purchasers, developers, or lessees. The contract stated that the firm strongly preferred to master plan the entire site, but it would provide alternative partial planning should Fox dictate it.<sup>39</sup>

According to *Los Angeles Times* reporting of the annual shareholders' meeting in May 1957, Skouras announced Fox's "very likely" plans to develop the "Radio City of the West" with office buildings, apartment houses, and stores on its studio property.<sup>40</sup> Studio operations would either remain on the lot in a concentrated area or completely removed to Fox's ranch near Malibu or to MGM in Culver City, with whom Fox was negotiating a merger of their physical properties (but not their business interests). Skouras informed shareholders that for many months Welton Becket & Associates, assisted by Homer Hoyt Associates, had been conducting a land use survey of the main

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<sup>39</sup> Letter from Welton Becket to the Attention of F.L.Metzler dated 1 Oct. 1956, Box 44, Folder 6, Spyros P. Skouras Papers, M0509, Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, CA.

<sup>40</sup> "Development Plan for Studio Told," *Los Angeles Times*, 23 May 1957, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Film Corporation (1954-1959) Core Collection File, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

studio property in West Los Angeles. While the results would still be unknown for some time, Skouras anticipated the report to recommend commercial and residential development for the “more valuable acreage.”<sup>41</sup>

In the more than thirty years since Fox purchased the studio land, the value greatly appreciated, especially in the postwar years as West Los Angeles developed beyond its sporadic settlements. What started on Los Angeles's southwest urban fringe as a movie studio island in the late 1920s with gradual residential neighbors became a central location in the rapidly developing Westside of Los Angeles with infill development, the rise of adjacent Beverly Hills as an economic node, and planned freeway construction. The western terminus of transcontinental Interstate 10, known as the Santa Monica Freeway west of downtown Los Angeles, had been plotted to pass just south of the studio, which it did when completed in 1964. The proposed Beverly Hills Freeway, along what is now California Route 2, would have transformed Santa Monica Boulevard's former streetcar line into a highway traversing Fox's northern boundary. Although neighborhood opposition derailed that plan, the proposed freeway shaped Century City planning as well as other plans in the area. The freeway remained in city planning documents at least through 1971.<sup>42</sup>

A map (Figure 2.1) within a promotional brochure for Century City depicted the development centrally located, with Los Angeles's central business district marginalized to the eastern edge.<sup>43</sup> This map illustrated the larger urban development trend in 1960s

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.; Skouras, Twentieth Century Fox Stockholder Meeting Speech, 21 May 1957.

<sup>42</sup> Department of City Planning, “West Los Angeles District Plan: Preliminary Plan” (Los Angeles: City Plan Case 22839, 1971), GP

<sup>43</sup> “The Gateway Buildings,” undated Century City promotional brochure, CPC 17588, Box 43309, Los Angeles City Archives.

Los Angeles: the commanding growth of the city's Westside. For instance, the West Los Angeles planning district, of which Century City is part, had a population of 72,800 people in 1969, which was a 24.17% increase over the 1960 population of 58,627. The growth rate exceeded both that of the entire City of Los Angeles (18.51%) and the Western Los Angeles Region (20.73%), which includes neighboring municipalities.<sup>44</sup>

In October 1957, Herrscher provided Skouras with a ten-page memo, including a comparison of the advantages and disadvantages of six strategies for managing the Century City development. Herrscher did not make any recommendations as to which strategy he would advise following. Nor did he analyze the ultimate path taken (the sale and lease-back of the property), but the nearest option was the outright sale of the land excluding the 80-acre core studio property and oil rights. Under that rubric, Herrscher listed two advantages: qualifying for capital gains tax and the proceeds would be available for corporate purposes. Meanwhile, he enumerated seven disadvantages, including that the purchaser would likely dispose of the property at a "considerable gain" and that the sale would mean the loss of a "valuable nest egg for a 'rainy day.'"<sup>45</sup>

According to Herrscher's estimates, the value of the real estate was \$80 million, the anticipated costs of buildings, improvements, and infrastructure was \$230 million, and that the net income from the development of Century City should be \$12 million. Following these estimates, Herrscher affirmed Skouras's \$70 million asking price for the land and oil rights. His report also included a list of parties interested in the development, including Sheraton Hotels, department stores, several supermarket chains, insurance

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<sup>44</sup> Department of City Planning, "West Los Angeles Economic Study" (Los Angeles, Calif., 1970), 6.

<sup>45</sup> Inter-Office Correspondence from Edmond E. Herrscher to Spyros Skouras, 28 Oct. 1957, Box 44, Folder 6, Spyros P. Skouras Papers, M0509, Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, CA.

companies, multiple banks, and the ultimate developer, William Zeckendorf.<sup>46</sup> Herrscher's analysis indicated that, as of October 1957, Fox fully intended to develop the property on its own to maximize its profits.

Fox publicly confirmed its plans on January 7, 1958, with a press conference on the studio lot and a press release folder on the proposed development of Century City. A six-page press release touted Fox's move to redevelop its 284-acre site as "one of the biggest land developments of all time" motivated by land values that had climbed steadily. Master planned by the Los Angeles firm of Welton Becket & Associates, 176 acres of the studio's 284-acre production lot, the press release read, "will be redeveloped in a sweeping change of land use that will include office buildings, a hotel, a shopping center, apartment buildings, parks, restaurants and broad concourses." The project would also include a "film industry center" with offices, an exhibit hall, a motion picture museum, a movie theater that seats 500 people, and multipurpose auditorium that will seat 4000 people, "large enough to handle award presentations."<sup>47</sup>

Meanwhile, Fox would invest \$12 million to \$15 million to improve its film production facilities with new sound stages and offices on the remaining 80 acres of the studio site. Some sets and backlot shooting would move to the 2300-acre studio ranch near Malibu. In 1958, the studio expected to spend \$65 million on film production, a \$15 million increase over the previous year. With the total value of the Century City project estimated at \$400 million, the first phase of construction was set to begin in July 1958;

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Welton Becket and Associates and 20<sup>th</sup> Century-Fox Film Corp., Press Release Wednesday, January 8, 1958, Century City Core Collection File, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

the first building to rise in Century City would be Welton Becket & Associates new headquarters.<sup>48</sup>

At the press conference, Becket explained the site plan (see Figure 2.6): the northern portion, along Santa Monica Boulevard, would be occupied by office towers 20 to 30 stories tall and a 1000-room hotel. Behind these buildings would be the shopping center with markets, shops, and a major department store surrounded by a huge double-deck parking lot. The southern portion of the site, near Pico Boulevard, would contain 18 apartment buildings of varying heights with parks, play areas, and swimming pools. The central artery of the development, traversing between Santa Monica and Pico Boulevards, would be the Champs Elysees modeled on the famed Parisian boulevard.<sup>49</sup> Perhaps realizing it did not resemble its namesake, the street was renamed Avenue of the Stars.

Studio officials, estimating the property alone valued at \$80 million to \$100 million, announced the studio intended to retain title to the site but would likely release some of the property for outside development on a lease arrangement. At the time of the announcement, financing had not been finalized, but insurance representative Fred Gebers said it was possible as many as 20 insurance companies may invest in the development.<sup>50</sup>

Rather than replicate the single-family housing patterns that surrounding the studio, Becket envisioned a new model of urban development (see Figure 2.7). The comprehensive development of mixed uses, called a “city within a city” and described as

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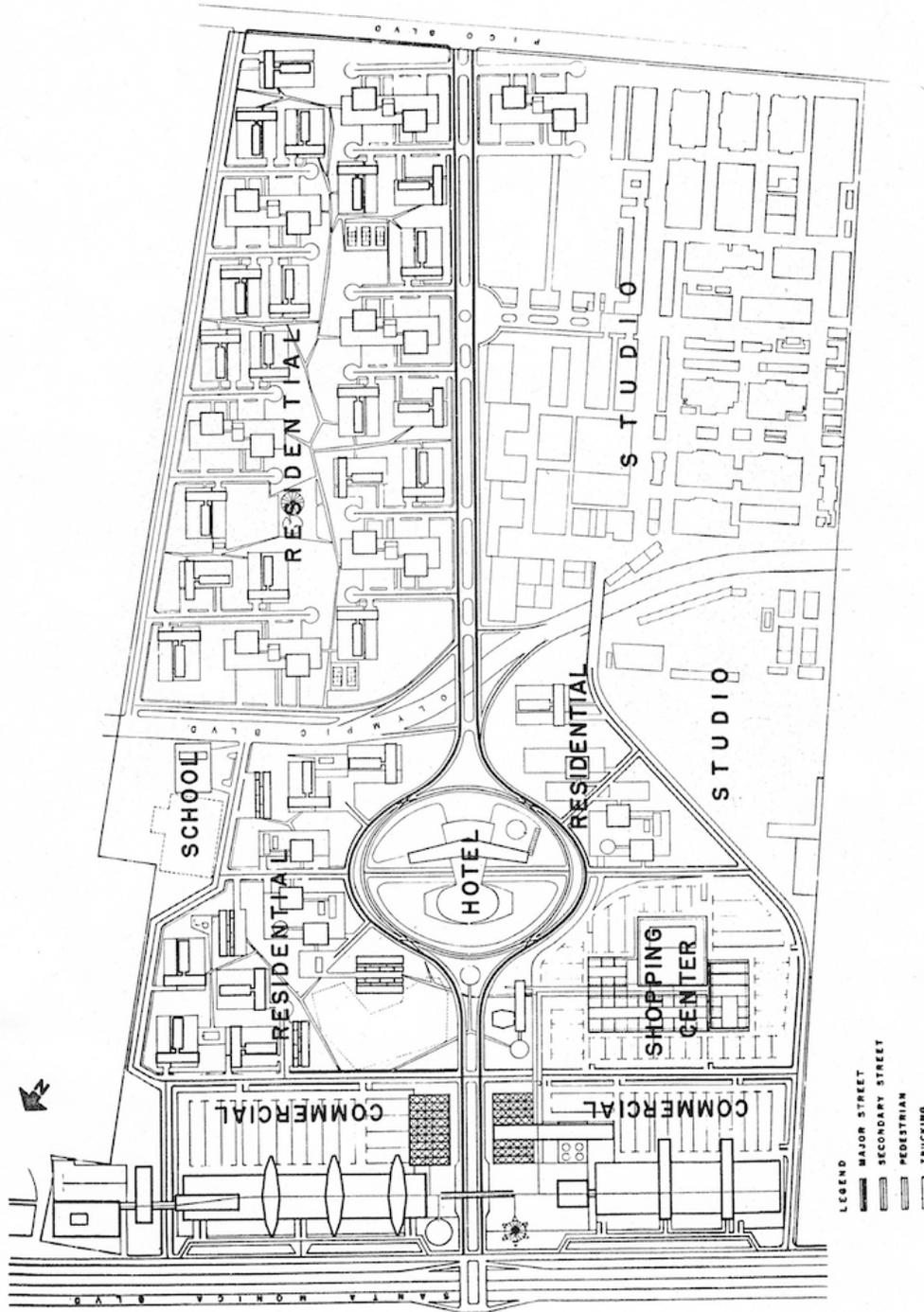
<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.; “\$400,000,000 City to Rise on Film Studio Lot,” *Los Angeles Times*, 8 Jan. 1958, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Film Corporation (1954-1959) Core Collection File, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

<sup>50</sup> “\$400,000,000 City to Rise on Film Studio Lot.”

**FIGURE 2.6 CENTURY CITY SITE PLAN.** This site plan of Century City by Welton Becket & Associates was presented at a press conference and in a press release on January 8, 1958.

Source: *Welton Becket and Associates and 20<sup>th</sup> Century-Fox Film Corp., Press Release Wednesday, January 8, 1958, Century City Core Collection File, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.*



**FIGURE 2.7 1958 MODEL OF CENTURY CITY SUPERIMPOSED ON THE LANDSCAPE.** This 1958 photo shows a contemporary model of Century City superimposed on an aerial photograph with surrounding areas labeled.

*Source: Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection*



a downtown on the fringe, ultimately reinforced Los Angeles's polycentricism and capitalized on the postwar growth of Los Angeles's Westside.

In preparation for the development, Herrscher analyzed the current zoning of the property and its necessary adjustments in March 1958 while preparing a master plan for the rezoning of the property. The bulk of it or 233.33 acres, was zoned M-1-0 at the time, which permitted heavy industrial activity. Herrscher's main concern was 17 acres, buffering the eastern boundary of the studio and the Beverly Hills city border, zoned R-1-0, permitting only single-family residences. Welton Becket planned to build his headquarters on four of those acres, at the corner of Santa Monica Boulevard and Moreno Drive, which would require commercial zoning. Herrscher recommended Fox agree to Becket's offer to lease the land for fifty years, reverting to Fox afterwards, in exchange for an average yearly income of \$36,500 for the \$2 million building paid for by Becket that would catapult the Century City development into reality. The remaining 13 acres would require rezoning in order to fetch more value by the square foot. Another 9.25 acres of the property, along Santa Monica Boulevard between the auto gate and the northeastern boundary opposite the Beverly Hilton Hotel, was zoned C-2-0. This commercial zoning did not interfere with Fox's plans.<sup>51</sup>

Herrscher's rezoning plan intended to reduce the M-1-0 zoning to the appropriate commercial and residential designations for the Century City development, but to do so in a way that would not interfere with film production on the property in the interim between zoning and building. Fox pursued some of the rezoning agenda soon after. Both

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<sup>51</sup> Letter from Edmond E. Herrscher to Spyros P. Skouras dated 18 March 1958, Box 44, Folder 7, Spyros P. Skouras Papers, M0509, Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, CA; Telegram from Buddy Addler to Spyros Skouras undated (circa 19 May 1958), Box 44, Folder 5, Spyros P. Skouras Papers, M0509, Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, CA.

the rezoning of the property for Becket's headquarters and the remaining land zoned for single-family residences along the eastern boundary of the studio were rezoned for commercial purposes in 1959.<sup>52</sup> Los Angeles City officials did not protest the zoning changes. They encouraged the development by providing rubber stamps on these plans and other matters as the development went through the approval process.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported, following a Board of Directors meeting, in April 1958, that "no definite plans have as yet been formulated" to build Century City, according to Skouras.<sup>53</sup> Skouras's speech to stockholders in May 1958 relayed the Board's decision to "await the receipt of ten or twelve bona fide proposals from prospective lessees or buyers, before adopting a final policy for this development."<sup>54</sup> With this announcement, Herrscher warned Skouras that "Century City is in danger of becoming a ghost town before it is even begun." Herrscher advised, "To breathe new life into the project, we must undo what has been done by demonstrating in a tangible way that Century City is a reality. The best way to do this is to commence building, and the best impact that can be made in this direction is to have the master planner himself start the project." Herrscher added urgency to the message by declaring the next three years of development and building at Century City depended on building as soon as possible.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Los Angeles City Council File 93695, Box A-1551, Los Angeles City Archives; Los Angeles City Council File 91600, Box A-1545, Los Angeles City Archives.

<sup>53</sup> Qtd. in "Twentieth Century-Fox Has No Definite Plan Yet for Movie Lot City," *Wall Street Journal*, 30 April 1958, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Film Corporation (1954-1959) Core Collection File, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

<sup>54</sup> Spyros P. Skouras, Twentieth Century Fox Stockholder Meeting Speech, 20 May 1958, Box 81, Folder 3, Spyros P. Skouras Papers, M0509, Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, CA.

<sup>55</sup> Letter from Edmond Herrscher to Spyros Skouras dated 14 May 1958, Box 44, Folder 7, Spyros P. Skouras Papers, M0509, Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, CA.

Skouras and the Fox Board of Directors intended to wait to break ground on Century City, anticipating a flood of offers from companies and developers to help manage and finance the project. Meanwhile, Herrscher urged Skouras to strike while the iron was hot, fearing that failing to act quickly on an ambitious and unprecedented project Fox had widely publicized might cast doubt over the development's viability.

#### **SELLING THE LAND**

Fox's hesitancy to commence the Century City project and its strategy to wait for offers of developers and tenants rather than pursue the development with the gusto the company's earlier announcements exhibited indicates that Fox was struggling with how to realize such a grand-scale real estate development. At a time when the company struggled to run its studio, a business it had commanded for more than four decades, Fox strained to operate outside its film industry expertise with implementing the Century City master plan. While Herrscher continued to advise Skouras on the matter and urge to build sooner rather than later, his memos did not include actual steps to be taken or other services expected from a developer. Herrscher lacked the experience to execute such a large project.

Rather than scrap the project, Fox, determined to profit from its land, and escape its money woes, sought to sell the land to a developer. According to the eventual developer, William Zeckendorf of New York-based Webb & Knapp, Skouras approached him after several unsuccessful attempts with other developers around the country.<sup>56</sup> Skouras relied on his New York connections in cementing a development deal rather than

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<sup>56</sup> William Zeckendorf with Edward McCreary, *The Autobiography of William Zeckendorf* (New York, Chicago, San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970): 245-246.

pursue a developer more experienced in Los Angeles real estate. Zeckendorf, in turn, utilized his resources to finance the deal through associates in New York and Pittsburgh, not Los Angeles. This underscores the significance of the distance between Fox's headquarters in New York and its large landholdings in Los Angeles and the role the relationship played in the shaping of this part of the metropolis. While the design was local, thanks to Herrscher's insight, its capital and management was not.

Long experienced in large real estate developments, Zeckendorf almost immediately saw the potential in the Century City site. After convincing Skouras to nearly halve the price of the land (from \$100 million with oil rights to \$56 million without oil rights), Zeckendorf planned to sell Fox's lease on the remaining studio site to an insurance company to easily raise \$25 million for the purchase. However, the \$31 million balance was a large capital investment from a firm that was spread thin across the country and would eventually collapse under these obligations. Consequently, Zeckendorf arranged for Webb & Knapp to acquire the land in parcels and pay over time rather than in one lump sum. Zeckendorf intended to then sell off portions of the property to different interests, modeled on a technique he previously pioneered for selling fractional parts of and rights in a building, which he named the Hawaiian Technique.<sup>57</sup>

With the agreement in place, Zeckendorf worked toward organizing the financing. Webb & Knapp provided the initial \$2.5 million down payment in April 1959. To cover the expense, Webb & Knapp brought in the Lazard Freres investment firm with a "put" for the \$2.5 million borrowed against other property held by Webb & Knapp. The put meant that Lazard Freres could cancel the deal and demand its \$2.5 million back at any

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 245-247.

time.<sup>58</sup> Struggling since the beginning to secure financing, Webb & Knapp twice postponed a second cash payment of \$3.8 million by the time Lazard Freres, nervous about losing the down payment, recalled its \$2.5 million in 1960.

At the time, Zeckendorf was committed to building the Zeckendorf Hotel in Manhattan, which demanded all of Webb & Knapp's cash on hand. Zeckendorf had to decide between building his hotel and the investment in Century City. He chose the hotel, citing that his involvement with Century City had already brought the "project from the realm of fantasy to the world of the probable." Subsequently, Zeckendorf negotiated, over many sessions in New York and Los Angeles, with Skouras and his team at Fox to make it an all-cash deal for \$43 million, which was the current value of the land given the previous amortized arrangement. Next, Zeckendorf sold the contract to buy the property with the newly agreed terms to the Kratter Corporation of New York in May 1960. Marvin Kratter had previously offered to purchase Fox's land, exclusive of oil rights and 80 acres for the studio, in December 1957 for \$50 million, which would have been a more favorable deal for Fox. With Kratter poised to profit from the fractioning of the land, Webb & Knapp pocketed \$4.5 million and 25 acres of Century City for its trouble.<sup>59</sup>

From the start, Kratter had difficulty securing financing.<sup>60</sup> In June 1960, Kratter pulled out of the deal, "afraid of taking on such a great commitment," in Zeckendorf's estimation. Kratter blamed the dissolution of the deal on Webb & Knapp not agreeing

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 248-249, 254; Letter from Edmond E. Herrscher to Spyros P. Skouras dated 8 July 1958, Box 44, Folder 8, Spyros P. Skouras Papers, M0509, Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, CA.

<sup>60</sup> Letter from Spyros Skouras to Darryl F. Zanuck undated (in response to letter of 11 July 1960), Box 44, Folder 5, Spyros P. Skouras Papers, M0509, Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, CA.

with the terms of a sale of a portion of the property to Webb & Knapp. Zeckendorf was in a difficult spot. Lazard Freres required its money by August 1960 and the \$3.8 million was due to Fox. If Zeckendorf did not find another investor, Webb & Knapp would lose the land and the \$2.5 million down payment.<sup>61</sup>

In a daring move, Zeckendorf made a last-minute pitch to the Aluminum Company of America (Alcoa) in Pittsburgh to secure the financing. Alcoa, not sure about entering real estate having never deviated from aluminum before, accepted the proposal. Zeckendorf proposed that Alcoa put up two-thirds of the investment at Century City and Webb & Knapp would contribute the other third but the profit sharing would be reversed. Alcoa agreed and gave Zeckendorf a check for \$2.5 million to cover Lazard Freres.<sup>62</sup> In late August 1960, as Webb & Knapp and Alcoa announced their partnership in New York, Welton Becket and Associates moved into its new \$4 million headquarters in Century City, the first completed building in the development.<sup>63</sup>

Business historian George David Smith devotes few pages to Alcoa's introduction to real estate or its later sizable investment in real estate in his history of the corporation, but yet offers some insight into the significance of the transaction. Smith describes Alcoa's partnership with Zeckendorf in Century City and entrance in real estate development as inadvertent, but reports that afterwards Alcoa pursued real estate

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<sup>61</sup> Zeckendorf, *The Autobiography of William Zeckendorf*, 249; Kratter Corporation, undated press release circa June 1960, Box 44, Folder 9, Spyros P. Skouras Papers, M0509, Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, CA.

<sup>62</sup> Zeckendorf, *The Autobiography of William Zeckendorf*, 249-253; Zeckendorf erroneously names Frank Magee as "Frank McGee."

<sup>63</sup> "Alcoa Buys Big Share in Century City," *Los Angeles Times*, 26 Aug. 1960, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Film Corporation (1960-1963) Core Collection File, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences; "Exit Zeckendorf," *Newsweek*, 30 May 1960, p. 70, Century City Core Collection File, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

deliberately. By the close of 1962, Alcoa was involved in seven major urban developments in Indianapolis, San Francisco, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and New York, mostly in joint ventures organized by Zeckendorf. Ten years later, Alcoa reported a \$68 million equity investment in real estate operations that generated \$38.6 million, or 38% of the company's total net income. Smith argues there was "no particularly strong strategic rationale for an aluminum producer to diversify into real estate," but the "initial justification" was that direct development might further the demonstration of aluminum for large-scale applications. However, Smith points out that moving forward in real estate developments, showcasing aluminum was less a priority, allowing architects to select the materials and aesthetics. Instead, government policies, including seed money for urban redevelopment and accelerated depreciation tax incentives, guided increased enthusiasm for developing real estate.<sup>64</sup>

Fox shareholders approved the new sale of the studio property, from its wholly-owned subsidiary Fox Realty Corporation of California to Webb & Knapp and Alcoa's joint subsidiary 91091 Corporation, on October 17, 1960. Skouras urged stockholders to approve the deal, declaring it the best obtainable for the management and the stockholders. The sale of the studio's more than 280-acre studio for \$43 million in cash, rather than a parcel-by-parcel deal that would have grossed just over \$56 million, also included a more attractive lease-back provision. For an annual rent of \$1.5 million Fox would retain its 76-acre studio for 99 years. After five years, Fox gained great flexibility with the lease; it could sell the lease or redevelop the property however it wished. When challenged by stockholders over the reduced price, Skouras informed that the corporation

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<sup>64</sup> George David Smith, *From Monopoly to Competition: The Transformations of Alcoa, 1888-1986* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 338-339.

was in no position to develop Century City on its own. There had been five unsuccessful attempts to dispose of the property. Meanwhile, the deal would also provide a \$9 million capital gains advantage.<sup>65</sup>

With the sale, Fox officially handed over the reigns of the Century City development to Zeckendorf and Alcoa, who later took over the sole management of the project (see Figure 2.8). Fox had commissioned the transformation of a portion of West Los Angeles. Without the capability of developing the project, Fox sought the revenue from the sale of the land. Ten years later, it pursued its own development addition to Century City with intent to level the remaining studio land.

Webb & Knapp and Alcoa completed the land purchase on April 16, 1961, with payment of \$38 million. Equitable Assurance Society of the United States and Mellon National Bank also contributed to the financing.<sup>66</sup> It was no coincidence that Mellon provided funding for the development, as Mellon was a large stockholder in Alcoa. Zeckendorf noted in his biography that General Richard Mellon had told him years later, while shipmates returning from abroad, that the purchase of Century City was one of the greatest and proudest milestones in the company's history.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Louis Pelegrine, "New Deal For Fox Lot Okayed," *The Film Daily*, 18 Oct. 1960, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Film Corporation (1960-1963) Core Collection File, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

<sup>66</sup> "20<sup>th</sup> Gets Final \$38 Million Payment For Studio Acreage," *Daily Variety*, 17 April 1961, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Film Corporation (1960-1963) Core Collection File, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

<sup>67</sup> Zeckendorf, *The Autobiography of William Zeckendorf*, 253.

**FIGURE 2.8 GATHERING TO SELL THE LAND (1961).** These 1961 photographs represent milestones in the creation of Century City. Top (left to right): Otto E. Koegel (chief counsel for Fox), Leon E. Hickman (executive vice president of Alcoa), Welton Becket (master planner), and William Zeckendorf, Jr. (executive vice president of Webb & Knapp) gather to overlook a model of Century City when signing the \$43 million land sale to Webb & Knapp and Alcoa. Bottom: a look at the model.

*Source: Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection*



## WELTON BECKET & CENTURY CITY IN PERSPECTIVE

Welton Becket, born in 1902 in Seattle, received his architectural training at the University of Washington and at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Fontainebleau, France. In 1933, Becket moved to Los Angeles and formed a partnership with University of Washington classmate Walter Wurdeman and older local architect Charles Plummer. The partners drew attention, awards, and praise for their Pan-Pacific Auditorium in 1935, and the earnings from the project were invested in a country club membership that then garnered many commissions for homes from the Hollywood elite.

After Plummer's death in 1939, Wurdeman and Becket continued their practice, surviving the lean building years during World War II with government contracts for thousands of housing units for military families and wartime workers. They also collaborated with other architects, including Richard Neutra, Paul Williams, and Gordon Kaufmann, in the design of Pueblo del Rio, public housing for African Americans in South Central Los Angeles. In 1943, Los Angeles community builder Fritz Burns commissioned the pair to design the prototypical and experimental Post-war House, which Becket updated in 1951 as the House of Tomorrow. Perhaps the most prominent of works by Wurdeman & Becket was the Bullock's Pasadena Department Store (1944-1946), which spawned additional commissions from Bullock's (Westwood, 1952), other department stores, and the Mobil Oil Company Building (downtown Los Angeles, 1946). After Wurdeman's untimely death in 1949, Becket continued the practice as Welton Becket & Associates, never to have another partner or shareholder in his firm until his own death in 1969.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Thomas S. Hines, *Architecture of the Sun: Los Angeles Modernism 1900-1970* (New York: Rizzoli, 2010), 658-664.

Following several modernist office buildings, Becket designed the world's first round office building as the Capitol Records Tower on Vine Street in Hollywood in 1956. Another Hollywood landmark, the Cinerama Dome, followed in 1963. In between, Becket designed hotels in Beverly Hills (the Beverly Hilton, 1955) and around the world. Following the initial plan for Century City and contemporaneous with the design and construction of buildings there, Becket designed the Los Angeles County Music Center downtown in the mid-1960s.<sup>69</sup> Architectural historian Thomas Hines described Becket's firm as "the most consistent in its development of the ethic and aesthetic of the International Style—with a preference clearly for its Latin American manifestations, particularly in the contemporary work of such masters as Lucio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer, the designers of Brasilia. More than any other West Coast office, Becket pushed that mode from its canonical successes in small and medium-sized buildings to structures of the largest scale."<sup>70</sup> Becket employed the International Style in these landmark buildings as well as those he designed for Century City.

Along the way, Becket developed his motto and mode of operation known as Total Design. According to architectural historian William Dudley Hunt, Jr., "In its simplest terms, the phrase connotes both architectural philosophy and practice that embrace all of the services required to analyze any architectural problem, perform the necessary studies and research to solve the problem, and translate the solution into a building or group of buildings complete down to the last detail of furniture, sculpture and

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 665-675.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 658.

other art, landscaping, and furnishings, even to ashtrays, menus, and matchboxes.”<sup>71</sup> Despite his mastery of the International Style of Modernism and completion of high-profile projects around the globe, Becket is largely unknown outside Los Angeles.

Without any accessible Becket archive, it is impossible to definitively determine the influence of existing plans and places on the innovation of the Century City master plan.<sup>72</sup> However, there are several noted examples that serve as Century City's design heritage: Le Corbusier's urban planning schemes, Rockefeller Center, and Park La Brea. While these ideas may have inspired Becket in the planning of Century City, it is important to note that Century City was part of the mid-century master-planning paradigm that realized several new towns across the country and the globe.

Eric Mumford has informed that the tower in the park concept usually associated with Le Corbusier and vilified for its failure in public housing complexes also independently occurred to American architects and developers in the 1920s.<sup>73</sup> Le Corbusier, an innovator in the International Style of Modern architecture, was more than likely Becket's influence. One need only compare the plans of Century City (Figure 2.6) to Le Corbusier's 1933 *La Ville Radieuse* (Figure 2.9) to see the similarities, especially in the geometry and quadrants of single use in an overall mixed-use plan. Figure 2.10 compares Le Corbusier's sketch of a potential streetscape from *La Ville Radieuse* with an actual photo of Century City's Avenue of the Stars.

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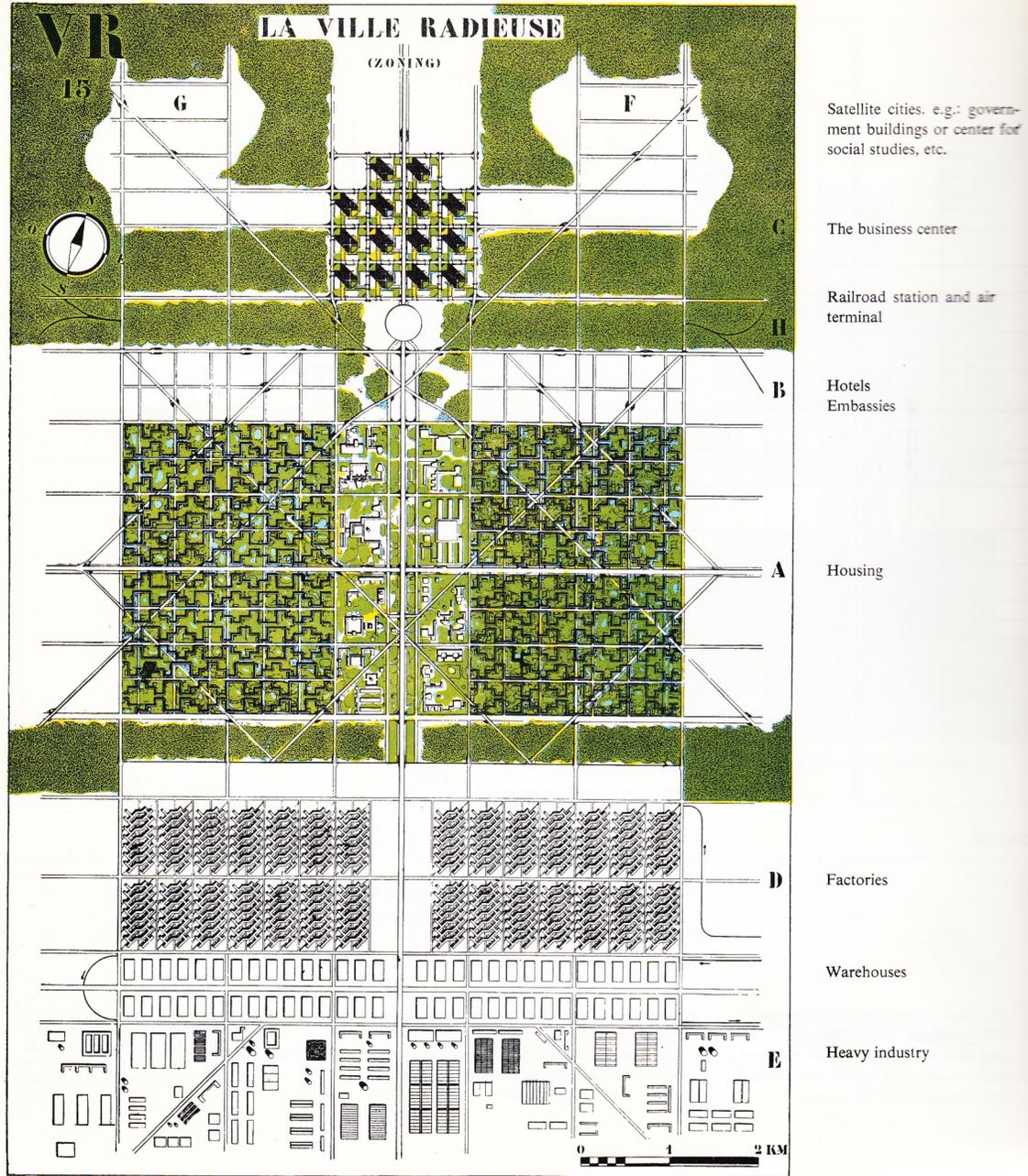
<sup>71</sup> William Dudley Hunt, Jr., *Total Design: Architecture of Welton Becket and Associates* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972), 4.

<sup>72</sup> The Getty Research Institute received architectural plans and photographs from the Becket family in 2010, but as of this writing, the collection remains unprocessed.

<sup>73</sup> Eric Mumford, “The ‘Tower in a Park’ in America: Theory and Practice, 1920-1960,” *Planning Perspectives* 10 (1995): 17-21.

**FIGURE 2.9 LE CORBUSIER'S ZONING PLAN FOR LA VILLE RADIEUSE.** Below is the zoning plan by Le Corbusier for his 1933 *La Ville Radieuse* (The Radiant City). Compare this to Welton Becket & Associates site plan for Century City (Figure 2.6), and the similarity should be apparent in the geometry of the plans, the quadrants of single-use with a mixed-use plan, and the strong central axis.

*Source: NEED TO FIGURE OUT WHAT BOOK I SCANNED THIS FROM*



Satellite cities. e.g.: government buildings or center for social studies, etc.

The business center

Railroad station and air terminal

Hotels  
Embassies

Housing

Factories

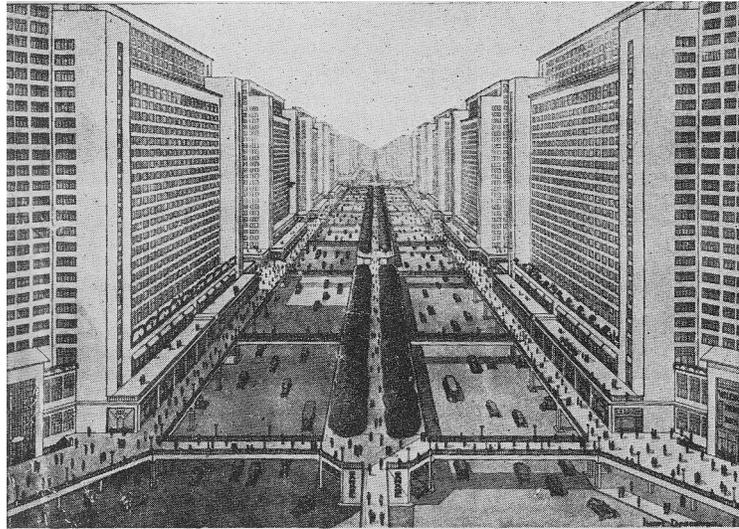
Warehouses

Heavy industry

**FIGURE 2.10 LA VILLE RADIEUSE & CENTURY CITY STREETSCAPES.** The top image is a sketch by Le Corbusier of a potential street in *La Ville Radieuse*, and the bottom image is a 1985 photograph of Avenue of the Stars. There is a striking similarity between the two streets lined with tall towers.

*Sources: Top: NEED TO FIGURE OUT WHAT BOOK I SCANNED THIS FROM*

*Bottom: Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection*



Le Corbusier first proposed widely-spaced towers set in parks in 1921 in a Parisian avant-garde magazine he edited, *L'Esprit Nouveau*; he expanded the idea in his scheme to remake central Paris, *Ville Contemporaine*, the following year, which included 60-story cruciform office towers and 6- and 8-story duplex apartment buildings.<sup>74</sup> The tower in the park construct was mostly executed in housing in the United States, especially public or low-income housing. Century City's initial design, which was largely executed, featured residential, office, and hotel towers in park-like settings and superblocks. While Becket and others absorbed Le Corbusier's design elements, his plans included the radical restructuring of society, a sort of socialist regime led by technocrats. In contrast, Century City was an entirely capitalist project engineered to aid Fox's studio money troubles.

Two master-planned, privately-developed tower in the park developments that predate Century City that may have served as examples for its plan are Rockefeller Center and Park La Brea. It may have been no coincidence that Skouras declared to the press his intention to build the "Radio City of the West."<sup>75</sup> Radio City was a nickname then in vogue for Rockefeller Center, so called for its inclusion of multiple tenants in the radio business (RCA, RKO, and NBC). Rockefeller Center, conceived on the eve of the Great Depression, executed in its midst, and expanded in the postwar era, is the Art Deco collection of skyscrapers in midtown Manhattan (originally bounded by 48<sup>th</sup> and 51<sup>st</sup> Streets and Fifth and Sixth Avenues) designed as a unit and formed an often-emulated prototype in the twentieth century. Promoted as a "city within a city," the original

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 18-19.

<sup>75</sup> "Development Plan for Studio Told," *Los Angeles Times*, 23 May 1957, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Film Corporation (1954-1959) Core Collection File, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

Rockefeller Center lacked housing and hotels but boasted expansive office space, multiple theaters, and public spaces.<sup>76</sup> Meanwhile, northeast of Century City's site was the recent Park La Brea development. Following the success of its tower projects in New York City, Metropolitan Life Insurance Company built Park La Brea in the Miracle Mile district of Los Angeles. Constructed during World War II, Gordon Kaufmann and J.E. Stanton combined the current trend of garden apartments around common greens, as in the Radburn Plan, with Le Corbusier-inspired cruciform tower apartments surrounded by green space. The community, exclusively housing, broke with the surrounding grid; in later years, this grid separation provided a course for gates around the perimeter, making Park La Brea a gated community.

Century City's concentration of multiple activities, or "city within in a city," in a new urban space is indicative of the rise of master planning on blank slates at midcentury. In *Reforming Suburbia*, Ann Forsyth offers critical analysis of three new towns, including Irvine, California, designed by Becket's fellow Los Angeles-based corporate Modernism architect-planner William Pereira (see Chapter 4 for Pereira's design work for Paramount). Forsyth identifies three strains of planning practices in the creation of master-planned new communities: the Garden City tradition, Modernism, and small-town nostalgia.<sup>77</sup>

Century City is squarely an example of the Modernism tradition. While High Modernist architects, planners, and engineers radically restructured cities through surgical urban renewal and divisive highway construction, others turned their attention to

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<sup>76</sup> Carol Herselle Krinsky, *Rockefeller Center* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

<sup>77</sup> Ann Forsyth, *Reforming Suburbia: The Planned Communities of Irvine, Columbia, and The Woodlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 29-33.

creating new towns in previously undeveloped or sparsely developed places. Internationally, Le Corbusier designed Chandigarh, India (1952), while Lucio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer designed Brasilia (1956). International new towns, including the aforementioned Modernist examples and those in Europe more strongly influenced by Garden City ideals, were developed by public and nonprofit developers. In contrast, new-town building in the U.S. has almost exclusively been undertaken for profit by private developers.<sup>78</sup> James Rouse planned suburban new towns Columbia, Maryland (1963), and Reston, Virginia (1964). Los Angeles-based architect-planners, such as Pereira and Victor Gruen, created the Southern California new towns of Irvine (1960s) and Laguna Niguel (1960), respectively. While most of the new town development was on urban fringes or exurban, Century City was a rare example of master planning on a *tabula rasa* within a developed metropolis. Its unique placement was due to Fox's land-use decision to raise money through the redevelopment of the majority of its studio land. Forsyth observes that James Rouse and architects, including Walter Gropius as early as the 1940s, saw new towns as models for the redevelopment of central cities.<sup>79</sup> Becket may have been the first to implement such plans with Century City.

Journalist Joel Garreau grouped Century City with Beverly Hills in his listing of nationwide "edge cities," which is his term for the exponential growth of decentralized office and retail space outside traditional downtowns.<sup>80</sup> Although Garreau fashioned the prototypical edge city as a phenomenon of the late twentieth century, urban historians have demonstrated that the mass decentralization of work, shopping, and leisure quickly

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>80</sup> Joel Garreau, *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 430.

followed suburbanites to the outer reaches of cities, beginning in the first half of the twentieth century, adopting new built forms along the way.<sup>81</sup>

The trend toward concentration of office space in decentralized locales is shared by Century City's innovation as an economic and cultural node between downtown Los Angeles and the Pacific Ocean, in an area of the metropolis that was expanding in population and wealth. In a 1970 plan for West Los Angeles, Century City was deemed the most significant center of employment in that part of the city with more than 10,000 employees at the time and another 4,000 expected over the next two years.<sup>82</sup>

“The success or failure of Century City cannot readily be predicted. Its undertaking, nonetheless, embodies the forward thinking optimism of California,” wrote *Interiors* in 1966 after the first set of buildings opened.<sup>83</sup> Century City was an innovative plan and remains a unique piece of the Los Angeles urban fabric, whose success is measured by traffic congestion and recent development pressures in the last twenty years that have demolished original buildings and replaced them with new ones. While from the start Century City conformed to Los Angeles's polycentric structure, it was and remains like no other place in the city. Los Angeles is frequently linked with Modernism, especially in art and architecture. However, the image conjured in this pairing is usually a sleek glass house in the Hollywood Hills rather than Century City's master-planned Modern landscape.

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<sup>81</sup> See, e.g., Greg Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles: Planning the Twentieth-Century Metropolis* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); Richard Longstreth, *City Center to Regional Mall: Architecture, the Automobile, and Retailing in Los Angeles, 1920-1950* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1997); Robert Lewis, ed, *Manufacturing Suburbs: Building Work and Home on the Metropolitan Fringe* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004); Louise A. Mozingo, *Pastoral Capitalism: A History of Suburban Corporate Landscapes* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2011).

<sup>82</sup> Department of City Planning, “West Los Angeles Economic Study” (Los Angeles, Calif., 1970), 14.

<sup>83</sup> “Environment: The California Concern,” *Interiors* 126, no. 1 (August 1966): 131.

Furthermore, Century City was ahead of its time. In 1966, after several buildings had been completed, the *New York Times* exclaimed that the development is “that of a vast, adult Disneyland, a spectacle in architectural and urban planning that is brimming with implications of what can be done elsewhere.”<sup>84</sup> More than forty years later, the same paper said Century City “resembled the New York World’s Fair of 1964-65, with its futuristic buildings and its park-like setting.”<sup>85</sup> Despite the publicity and boasting the largest private capital investment in an urban development, there were few appraisals in between.

One such assessment, by architecture critic John Pastier for the American Institute of Architects journal *Architecture* in 1988, explained, “this is not a place that the architectural profession cares to talk about. Century City has not been extensively published, and its planning and individual buildings are not often the subject of architects’ debates.” Pastier, citing “indifference,” continued, “Although its very earliest and latest buildings are well designed, the overwhelming majority are ordinary at best, and the visual relationships among them are usually haphazard or simplistic.” He referred to the reliance on pairs for the design of Century City’s largest buildings and the low-rise housing for their banality.<sup>86</sup> Pastier summed up his criticism, “In its treatment of vehicles, pedestrians, shopping, and housing, Century City combined urban densities with suburban values. In short, a rare opportunity for enlightened city-building evolved into an immense but rather ordinary real estate development.”<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Gladwin Hill, “Century City—New Stop on the Tourist Map,” *New York Times*, 26 June 1966, XX1.

<sup>85</sup> Fred A. Bernstein, “A Hotel’s Past vs. a City’s Future,” *New York Times*, 22 July 2009, B8.

<sup>86</sup> Pastier, “Century City After a Quarter Century,” 60.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

Century City is an ordinary real estate development by what standards? Pastier does not elaborate as to what that really means. My previous analysis contradicts his conclusion. Combining density with “suburban values,” as he puts it (presumably the accommodation and dominance of the automobile), is the contemporary trend in urban development. Rather than ordinary, Century City is forward-thinking and innovative, and despite some critics’ assertions that its design was immutable to change, it has evolved over the last fifty years.<sup>88</sup> In the end, Pastier’s architectural myopia may have clouded his understanding of urban planning and development. After declaring Century City “ordinary,” he does enumerate several favorable items about the development, including its success as measured by the City of Los Angeles’s need to restrict development in order to control traffic to surrounding streets’ capacities, its popularity with political leaders and Westside residents, its diversity of uses, its activity at night and on weekends, and that it is “generously and skillfully landscaped.”<sup>89</sup> The landscaping was boosted by Becket’s program to conserve 850 mature trees from the studio land for planting in Century City.<sup>90</sup>

After demolition of the site in August 1961, the first office building in Century City since the sale of the land opened in 1963 (see Figure 2.11). The following year, Gateway East joined Gateway West, a pair of aluminum curtain wall structured buildings on either side of Avenue of the Stars at Santa Monica Boulevard. Meanwhile, Century

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<sup>88</sup> For criticism of its immutability and attempts to mold Century City for twenty-first century planning ideals, see Josh Stephens, “Softening the Edge: Modernism May Get an Update in Los Angeles’s Century City,” *Planning* 74, no. 3 (2008): 26-29.

<sup>89</sup> Pastier, “Century City After a Quarter Century,” 61.

<sup>90</sup> “Set Razing at Fox Studio to Begin Today,” *Los Angeles Times*, 17 Aug. 1961, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Film Corporation (1960-1963) Core Collection File, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

**FIGURE 2.11 1963 VIEW OF CENTURY CITY UNDER CONSTRUCTION.** This aerial photograph taken in 1963, looking southwest, shows Century City under construction. Gateway West is complete and Gateway East is under construction fronting Santa Monica Boulevard, divided by Avenue of the Stars, which is also under construction. Welton Becket & Associates's headquarters building is in the lower left-hand corner.  
*Source: Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection*



City contributed \$400,000, nearly \$300,000 more than required, for a new sewer to serve Century City and other parts of West Los Angeles.<sup>91</sup> Also in 1964, the 15-acre Century Square regional shopping mall opened as did the individually-owned buildings for the Automobile Club of Southern California, headquarters for the National Cash Register Company, and headquarters for the Pacific Telephone Company.<sup>92</sup>

In 1965, the twin Century Towers apartment buildings, each 27 stories tall, opened (see Figure 2.12). Designed by I.M. Pei, Pastier more than twenty years later, declared that the apartment buildings, later converted to condos, “set a strong design standard” and “represent a milestone in local high-rise housing design.”<sup>93</sup>

Pastier offered tempered praise to Century City’s iconic building, the \$30 million, uniquely curved, 20-story Century Plaza Hotel, which opened in 1966 (see Figure 2.13). Minoru Yamasaki, the architect of ill-fated landmarks World Trade Center Towers in New York and the Pruitt-Igoe public housing complex in St. Louis, designed the luxury hotel. Pastier stated that it and office buildings opened around the same time “did not measure up to Pei’s work but still were solid, respectable efforts in the context of their time.”<sup>94</sup> Soon after its opening, *Architectural Record* featured the Century Plaza Hotel in a spread on hotels, declaring “the site is exceptional,” while cooing, “The Century Plaza Hotel is a glamorous paradox, a luxury resort on a mid-city site, designed to attract

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<sup>91</sup> “Set Razing at Fox Studio”; Tom Cameron, “Century City: ‘Frontier’ Movie Towns Supplanted by Huge \$500 Million Development,” *Los Angeles Times*, 10 June 1962, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Film Corporation (1960-1963) Core Collection File, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences; Los Angeles City Council File 95279, Box A-1568, Los Angeles City Archives.

<sup>92</sup> Ray Herbert, “Century City Makes Magic Where Film Studio Used to Spin Fantasy,” *Los Angeles Times*, 18 April 1966, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Film Corporation (1966-1967) Core Collection File, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

<sup>93</sup> Pastier, “Century City After a Quarter Century,” 61.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 61-62.

**FIGURE 2.12 1965 VIEW OF CENTURY CITY.** This aerial photograph taken in 1965, looking southeast, shows Century City with several buildings completed and conveniently labeled. I.M. Pei's Century Towers are labeled "High Rise Apartments" in the upper right corner.

*Source: Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection*



**FIGURE 2.13 THE CENTURY PLAZA HOTEL.** This is an undated photograph of the Century Plaza Hotel along Avenue of the Stars, which opened in 1966. The Century Plaza Hotel is the icon of Century City and its most frequently appraised building, designed by Minoru Yamasaki. When it was threatened by demolition in 2009, there was an outpouring of support to save the building and a compromise was reached to retain its historic integrity.

*Source: Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection*



conventions and large events without interfering with the relaxed atmosphere of a resort.”<sup>95</sup>

When Century City's most reviewed and adored building was threatened with demolition in 2009, triggering a forceful response from local and national historic preservation groups—the Los Angeles Conservancy and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, respectively—the *New York Times* described the hotel as “hemmed in, with much taller buildings surrounding it.”<sup>96</sup> Oscar-winning actress and preservationist Diane Keaton, admiring its distinctive shape worth saving, compared the hotel to a “sexy woman surrounded by ogling men,” likening the Century Plaza in its current context to “Sophia Loren in the 1960s.”<sup>97</sup>

Meanwhile, Culver City-based postmodern architect Eric Owen Moss, arguing the Century Plaza was not a building he would fight to preserve, stated, “I think it’s a hotel you could ship to Sao Paulo or Singapore or Dubai and nobody would know the difference.”<sup>98</sup> While as an example of International Style architecture, you would expect to find this kind of design across the globe, Century City, and by extension the Century Plaza Hotel, were trendsetters and predate Sao Paulo’s, Singapore’s, and Dubai’s modernist skylines.

In September 1966, four 20-story apartment buildings, known as Century Park Apartments, opened for occupation. Reports indicated that half of Los Angeles’s new luxury apartment leases were signed in Century City, where rents commanded up to

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<sup>95</sup> “Hotels, Motels, Resorts,” *Architectural Record* 140, no. 2 (August 1966): 125.

<sup>96</sup> Bernstein, “A Hotel’s Past.”

<sup>97</sup> Qtd. Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

\$1,200 per month. At the time, Century City was expected to ultimately contain 5,000 apartment units in 20 buildings, housing 12,000 people, and 4 million square feet of office space in 28 buildings, with a daytime population of 20,000 people.<sup>99</sup>

#### FINAL ATTEMPT TO REDEVELOP THE STUDIO

Although the studio had recently operated over capacity and while some of master-planned Century City still lay undeveloped, Fox formulated plans to convert its studio facilities into another phase of commercial and residential development (see Figure 2.14). In 1970, Fox hired a real estate consultant, Lewis N. Wolff, to oversee its vast land holdings, and the following year, created subsidiary Twentieth Century-Fox Realty and Development Company and installed Wolff as president.<sup>100</sup> Under Wolff's leadership, in March 1971, Fox announced the development of a \$25 million medical complex on nine acres of studio land fronting along Avenue of the Stars.<sup>101</sup> These actions along with an announcement in October 1971 that Gruen Associates had been hired to conduct an 18-month comprehensive land-use survey of the West Los Angeles studio indicated that Fox was again seeking to profit from its land and escape the woes, at least temporarily, of declining box office revenues.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Herbert, "Century City Makes Magic."

<sup>100</sup> "Wolf To Develop 20<sup>th</sup>'s Extensive Real Estate," *Daily Variety*, 15 April 1970, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Film Corporation (1970) Core Collection File, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences; "Fox Plans Activity In Building," *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, 24 March 1971, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Film Corporation (1971) Core Collection File, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

<sup>101</sup> "Development Deal With Tishman, Others, For Century City Addition," *Hollywood Reporter*, 31 March 1971, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Film Corporation (1971) Core Collection File, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

<sup>102</sup> "Fox Westwood Lot Use Studied; Exploring Smaller, Modern Studio And Other Ways of Developing Acreage," *Daily Variety*, 19 Oct. 1971, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Film Corporation (1971) Core Collection File, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences; "Fox Film Corp. Lets Pact

**FIGURE 2.14 1971 VIEW OF CENTURY CITY.** This aerial photograph taken in 1971, looking south, shows how Century City has filled in but large gaps remain. This did not deter Fox from planning its own redevelopment plan for its remaining studio (the upper right quadrant).

*Source: Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection*



The biggest sign of intent to redevelop came in July 1973 when Fox purchased the 76-acre site it had leased from Alcoa since 1961 for \$21 million. In addition to the \$21 million for the title to the studio land, Fox paid \$18 million over twelve years in rent, at \$1.5 million per annum, a total of \$39 million. Fox received \$43 million for the more than 280 acres it sold, which provided Fox with only \$4 million in profit after the land exchange and millions more for Alcoa. The agreement included an option for Alcoa to buy back 17.5 acres fronting along Avenue of the Stars, and left Fox with 55 unrestricted acres to redevelop. With the announcement, Wolff reiterated his 12-year development program that would have luxury townhomes and condominiums and commercial space rise on the studio site.<sup>103</sup>

“The studio is old and inefficient and it is now an anachronism in West Los Angeles. It has a long history, but it’s out of date,” planner Allen M. Rubenstein, Gruen Associates partner, told the *Los Angeles Times* as he detailed his intent for the redevelopment master plan.<sup>104</sup> As the specific plan, a particular type of municipally-approved plan, moved through the planning process it received objections from the City of Beverly Hills and neighboring residents from Beverly Hills, Cheviot Hills, and other

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for Land Use Place,” *Los Angeles Times*, 24 Oct. 1971, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Film Corporation (1971) Core Collection File, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

<sup>103</sup> A.D. Murphy, “20<sup>th</sup>-Fox Buys Back 76 Acres From Alcoa For \$21 Million,” *Daily Variety*, 31 July 1973, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Film Corporation (1973) Core Collection File, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences; “Fox Will Pay Alcoa \$21 Million for Fee Interest in Studio Site,” *Hollywood Reporter*, 31 July 1973, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Film Corporation (1973) Core Collection File, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences; “Fox Film Agrees To Repurchase Land It Had Sold to Alcoa,” *Wall Street Journal*, 31 July 1973, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Film Corporation (1973) Core Collection File, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

<sup>104</sup> Qtd. in Gerald Faris, “Planners Will Lower Curtain on Fox Studio,” *Los Angeles Times*, 25 Nov. 1973, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Film Corporation (1973) Core Collection File, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

communities over its presumed traffic congestion and air quality impacts even though the details fell within the parameters set by the West Los Angeles Master Plan. Others criticized its lack of income diversity in the pricing for homes.<sup>105</sup>

Ironically, two years after purchasing the land in West Los Angeles, Fox was concerned that the trickle of new homeowners in the general area would challenge its zoning as a nuisance and force the relocation of the studio. Fifty years later, Fox's industrial practices were no concern but its plans to develop residential and commercial space and invite more congestion was an unforgivable nuisance.

Over the loud objections of its neighbors, the Los Angeles City Planning Commission approved the plan in October 1974. Throughout the process, the City Planning Director, Calvin Hamilton, was especially criticized for favoring Fox's plans, including a short public comment period on the environmental impact report (EIR).<sup>106</sup> In December 1974, the Los Angeles City Council approved the specific plan and rezoning of the property in a compromise between the developer and some neighbors' concerns. Beverly Hills, however, was not appeased by the compromise, and the following month

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<sup>105</sup> "B.H. Lashes Fox Studio Redevelopment Report," *Los Angeles Times*, 21 March 1974, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Film Corporation (1974) Core Collection File, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences; Ray Ripton, "Neighbors Oppose Project: Panel Will Act on Fox Development Plan," *Los Angeles Times*, 28 Aug. 1974, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Film Corporation (1974) Core Collection File, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences; Irv Burleigh, "Expensive Homes on Fox Property Win Planners' OK," *Los Angeles Times*, 17 Oct. 1974, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Film Corporation (1974) Core Collection File, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

<sup>106</sup> "B.H. Showing Concern Over Fox Property Development," *Los Angeles Times*, 20 Jan. 1974, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Film Corporation (1974) Core Collection File, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences; Skip Ferderber, "Hamilton Draws Fire on Fox Studio Complex," *Los Angeles Times*, 12 Sept. 1974, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Film Corporation (1974) Core Collection File, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences; Ray Ripton, "Alternatives for Fox Property to be Heard," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 Oct. 1974, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Film Corporation (1974) Core Collection File, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences; Irv Burleigh, "Expensive Homes on Fox Property Win Planners' OK," *Los Angeles Times*, 17 Oct. 1974, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Film Corporation (1974) Core Collection File, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

filed a complaint to halt the plan's implementation.<sup>107</sup> In October 1976, a Los Angeles Superior Court judge ruled in Fox's favor, permitting the plans for the 20 acres of commercial and 55 acres of residential development to occur. A *Hollywood Reporter* article cited an unnamed Fox official stating that the board had not decided whether to go ahead with the development plan when it was finally freed of all legal tangles.<sup>108</sup>

The development never came to pass, but at this point, it is unclear exactly why not. It may well have been the legal hurdles, but Fox may have also realized that the site was valuable as a production facility. The redevelopment of the remaining studio production facilities in West Los Angeles were usually discussed in tandem with the construction of new facilities elsewhere. Since plans for new facilities never materialized, Fox recognized the value in and the necessity to keep the studio. The recently instituted rental structure for the plant, providing a mechanism to keep stages from being idle, should have reorganized the financial situation to a profitable state. In January 1979, the *Hollywood Reporter* said the studio was "bursting at the seams, and there are several factors behind the burgeoning activity," chiefly television production.<sup>109</sup> The studio was so busy it had to rent offices nearby off-site and do double shifts in the dubbing rooms. They expected the pace to continue for awhile.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Ray Ripton, "B.H. Moves to Halt Fox Redevelopment," *Los Angeles Times*, 23 Jan. 1975, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Film Corporation (1975) Core Collection File, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences; Los Angeles City Council File 74-4757, Box B-545, Los Angeles City Archives.

<sup>108</sup> "Court Okays Fox Building Plan," *Hollywood Reporter*, 5 Oct. 1976, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Film Corporation (1976) Core Collection File, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

<sup>109</sup> Frank Barron, "20<sup>th</sup>-Fox Studios at Capacity, Expect Even Heavier Demands," *Hollywood Reporter*, 15 Jan. 1979, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Film Corporation (January – April 1979) Core Collection File, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

Meanwhile, Fox moved its headquarters from New York City to Los Angeles in December 1972, following the lead of Warner Bros. and MGM.<sup>111</sup> The move signaled another change in the business model. With film financing no longer reliant on Wall Street, the film industry shifted its headquarters to Los Angeles, which had served as the film production capital for about fifty years. It is more than likely that this shift in location for Fox executives informed their perspective on land use. While still based in New York, executives were keen to redevelop the studio site and seek new production facilities elsewhere in Los Angeles. In the twenty years since the creation of the Century City plan, Fox had been struggling all that time to efficiently run the studio while at times preparing to redevelop the remaining studio if one of numerous plans for new production facilities had materialized. Operating from Los Angeles, and gaining local knowledge in the process, may have presented the studio and its location as assets worth maintaining to executives.

In summation, as a large landowner, Fox shaped the urban development of West Los Angeles. First, by purchasing about 284 acres ahead of development in the vicinity before the collapse of the studio system, Fox's film plant and its neighboring golf courses set the development patterns in the area. After the collapse of the studio system, reassessing its landholdings and potential profits, Fox hired Welton Becket & Associates to master plan its redevelopment. The innovative "city within in a city" plan completely transformed the character of that portion of the metropolis, which had been fully developed by then. Relying on its New York networks, Fox's Century City development

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<sup>111</sup> "Fox Moving West," *Hollywood Reporter*, 22 Sept. 1971, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Film Corporation (1971) Core Collection File, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences; "20<sup>th</sup>-Fox Finalizing N.Y.-To-L.A. Move," *Daily Variety*, 29 Dec. 1972, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Film Corporation (1972) Core Collection File, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

demonstrated the Eastern influence on Los Angeles's urban development. After the headquarters moved to the Los Angeles studio at the end of 1972, Fox canceled plans to redevelop the remaining studio to compliment the Century City development. Ultimately, the comprehensive approach applied in the creation of Century City sharply contrasts with the land management of the other studios in the study, especially MGM, which follows in the next chapter.