

# EMBATTLED LAWRENCE

## *Conflict & Community*

*Edited by Dennis Domer & Barbara Watkins*



# Building Community Power Structures, 1984-1998: The Rise of Grassroots Neighborhood Influence

**Steve Lopes**

Lawrence, Kansas, residents enjoy a benefit that any American city would envy: everyone loves it. That's the good news, but it's also the bad news. Lawrence may at first appear as simply another bland, colorless, unexciting but comfortable Midwest place name to those from the East and West Coasts who might be driving through Kansas at night. To those of us who stopped, Lawrence is one fine place to settle, and, perchance, to grow ... , and grow ... , and grow.

To quote the theme from the October 26, 1991, Lawrence League of Women Voters bus tour, "Larry, Larry, How Does Your City Grow?" The answer is: Bigger and bigger, reaching a population of 72,000 in 1991<sup>1</sup>; Lawrence is a fast-growing city. Some of us folks, however, don't think bigger is necessarily better ... or brighter. Unlike dying rust-belt cities courting any employer, no matter how sullied, Lawrence is attractive and some feel- too easy. Many in the "in-group" of establishment moneyed interests advocate unfettered growth, along with unlimited profits. The "out-group" challenges this easy virtue and advocates consideration of long-term consequences for the community.

University of Kansas political science professor Burdett Loomis characterizes Lawrence politics as an informal bipolar model<sup>2</sup>. On one side are traditional, establishment, mostly conservative interests best represented by the Chamber of Commerce, the media empire, and development cartel (real estate, banking, construction, etc.). At the other pole gathers a motley aggregation of single interest groups with tangential or occasionally intersecting collaborations.

These neighborhood activists, preservationists, environmentalists, growth resisters, artists, civil and human rights advocates, and others, congeal as common issues arise. The clashes between these opposing forces swing back and forth in cycles with one group holding a tentative majority while the other plays defense.

This discussion of the building of community power structures in the last two decades of the twentieth century will attempt to document the impact of perceived "out-groups" on Lawrence politics. I have not attempted to be objective in this analysis: my sympathy rests solidly with the grassroots community groups aligned to maintain and promote a collective quality of life.

## **The 1981 Rising**

City politics in 1979 were salad days for the solid establishment majority supporting city manager Buford Watson's agenda for an ever-expanding Lawrence. City commissioners Don Binns, Ed Carter, Bob Schumm, and Barkley Clark tolerated the continuing objections from spunky new commissioner marci francisco. But in the 1981 election, what candidate Mike Amyx called an "undercover coalition," was elected to join francisco. Amyx complained that candidates "Shontz and Gleason ... had been charged with being delegates of the 'no growth' coalition in town."<sup>3</sup> In protest, Amyx withdrew from the race.

Nancy Shontz topped the ballot, followed by incumbent Barkley Clark and Tom Gleason. Incumbents Schumm and Carter, both strongly endorsed by Lawrence Homebuilders Association and the Lawrence Labor Council, were ousted.

On April 5, 1981, the day before the election, a full page *Journal-World* ad, disguised as supporting Amyx' withdrawal, actually attacked Gleason and Shontz by name. This divisive election was characterized as "neighborhoods vs. the community" in the media, and was the first time an overtly pro-neighborhood majority was elected to the Lawrence city commission.<sup>3</sup>

Although Gleason and Shontz won, the pro-growth establishment, like the Empire, would soon strike back.

In the next two years, Gleason had to beat back a nasty recall election and the city commission majority denied Shontz her term as mayor. In each biennial election, three city commissioners are elected. The two top voter gatherers win four-year terms, while the third highest is seated for two years. It had been a tradition for four-year term winners to be elected to the largely ceremonial position of mayor.

In 1983, the growth group helped elect David Longhurst, Mike Amyx, and Ernest Angino. This majority elected newcomer David Longhurst mayor instead of Nancy Shontz. From 1984 to 1987, the pro-growth Empire held a solid majority on the city commission and was on the verge of erecting an imposing monument in the heart of downtown Lawrence.

### **Godzilla's Footprint: Citizens for a Better Downtown (CBD) vs. the JVJ Mall**

Lawrence has one of the few remaining viable and charming downtown commercial districts in the country, but it has been a political battleground. The 1964 comprehensive city plan called "Guide for Growth," suggested closing Massachusetts Street to create a pedestrian mall. This was followed by a 1974 retail, hotel, and office complex proposal suggested for the 600 Massachusetts block. In 1978, a "cornfield mall" plan threatened downtown and several other downtown proposals were rejected. In the early 1980s the Sizler development dueled with Town Center Venture Corporation (TCVC) for reconfiguring downtown.

On October 27, 1986, Cleveland, Ohio, developers Jacobs, Visconsi, Jacobs JVJ) and Town Center Venture Corp (TCVC) arrogantly presented the city with a mall proposal that would cover a downtown footprint from Kentucky to New Hampshire and Sixth to Seventh Streets. JVJ was the developer of record that had threatened to build the 1978 cornfield mall).<sup>4</sup> The audacity of this take-it-or-leave-it plan hit a nerve with the community.

Imagine no Liberty Hall, no Free State Brewery, and no 600 block Massachusetts Street. Imagine the backside of a stacked parking garage facing our train park.

But worst of all, JVJ and TCVC's agents Dave Evans and Duane Schwada felt their mall *deserved* to own the heart of our downtown and said so in many full page newspaper ads. Lawrence was the largest city in America without a mall, and they made this sound like a serious liability.

Resistance was swift and fierce. In my role as Old West Lawrence president, I said, "It will create serious traffic problems around our homes. We've been worried about the fringes of our neighborhood especially with development on Sixth and Ninth and now with the mall on the east, we're beginning to feel like a fortress neighborhood."<sup>5</sup>

This mall initiative became a clarion call to many Lawrence citizens.

By January 1987, Pat Kedhe and Phil Minkin resurrected Citizens for a Better Downtown (CBD)<sup>6</sup> as a grassroots effort to stop the proposed 360,000 square foot JVJ development project. CBD called a meeting at the Lawrence Public Library February 3, 1987, to an overflow community response.<sup>7</sup> In the next nine days, CBD volunteers collected 4,430 signatures (2,263 were needed) on a petition drafted to thwart the mall project once and for all.<sup>8</sup>

CBD accepted considerable *pro bono* advice from Lawrence attorneys on how best to make the wording on the petition clear and most binding. The petition citizens signed asked:

*"Shall the following be adopted?(sic) Massachusetts Street and Vermont Street shall not be closed or vacated from Sixth Street to Eleventh Street?"*

A yes vote would favor the ordinance<sup>9</sup>. Kedhe and Minkin presented a package of petition signatures to the county clerk on February 13, tied with a big red bow. "It may be Friday the 13th for somebody, but it's the day before Valentine's Day for us," said Phil Minkin.<sup>10</sup>



The sitting commission unwisely divided this populist concern into three confusing ballot questions, which infuriated even more citizens.

1. *Massachusetts Street and Vermont Street shall not be closed or vacated from Sixth Street to Eleventh Street.*
2. *The City of Lawrence, Kansas, shall spend public funds, be they State, federal or local, for the purpose of assisting in the building of an enclosed shopping mall in the central business district of Lawrence, Kansas.*
3. *None of the streets in the central business district of Lawrence, Kansas, shall be vacated for the purpose of constructing an enclosed mall.*<sup>11</sup>

JVJ ran daily full-page ads (at \$758.62 each) urging a "No, Yes, No" vote while opponents decided on the bumper sticker "Keep Mass. St. Open: Vote Yes on #1.

"As the Old West Lawrence Neighborhood Association president I urged, "Let's get a new commission in there. I say vote 'no' on three incumbents; not on three questions."<sup>12</sup>

Tim Miller, editor of *Plumber's Friend*, was more succinct: "The incumbent commission has told 4430 citizens to go jump in the lake. Those 4430 persons have had their rights trampled by the commission's jackboots."<sup>13</sup>

On Election Day, the people spoke. In all thirty-two polling precincts, the contrived ballot questions were voted down 3-1, validating citizen disapproval of the JVJ proposal and the incumbents. More importantly, the idealistic petition carriers joined forces with the more practical Old West Lawrence Political Action Committee (OWL-PAC) to enter hardball electoral politics. All agreed in the end that what was needed were three friendly new faces on a reconfigured city commission, regardless of the referenda outcome.

### **OWL-PAC: The First Neighborhood Political Action Committee in Kansas**

Mary Thomas, a mild-mannered but politically savvy University Place neighborhood resident invited neighborhood activists to her Indiana Street home on January 29, 1987 (Kansas Day!), to meet her preferred candidates for the upcoming city commission election. She tried to convince the organized neighborhood association leaders to back a slate of pro-neighborhood/anti-mall candidates in the April elections. Most of the neighborhood leaders knew that their constituents were not ready for such a risky stand, but after spirited debate, they divided the question.

Those neighborhood leaders who were politically inclined gravitated to what would become the Old West Lawrence Political Action Committee (OWL-PAC). There was also interest among the organized neighborhoods to meet for what would eventually become the Lawrence Association of Neighborhoods (LAN). The parallel evolution of LAN will be discussed below.

### **OWL-PAC Is Hatched**

The Old West Lawrence (OWL) neighborhood is well known for outward charm and inward feistiness. After the Civil War and William Clarke Quantrill's version of urban renewal, the merchant class built fine Gilded Age Victorian homes that anchor the Old West Lawrence National Historic District. Modest bungalows and cottages along with compatible infill have promoted diversity and community.

With commercial threats along the north (Sixth Street), south (Ninth Street) and along its eastern border with the central business district, OWL has a long history of defending its turf. Rebounding from near-slum status in the 1960s, OWL has been rehabilitated into what *House Beautiful* magazine has described as "one of the finest residential neighborhoods in America."<sup>14</sup>

In late 1986, the OWL eastern front was threatened. The neighborhood was confronted with the possibility of facing the ugly backside of the proposed JVJ mall along the 600 Kentucky block and with a controversial city commission decision to rezone the residential 800 block between Kentucky and Tennessee Streets. This action would allow the Douglas County Bank to build a new parking lot after destroying eight homes and reducing the OWL neighborhood by a full city block (see *Historic Preservation Comes of Age*, below).

OWL-PAC started when beloved Old West Lawrence curmudgeon John Jennings stated in frustration at the January 28, 1987, Old West Lawrence Association meeting, "Well, hell, let's just start a PAC!" Many OWL members, annoyed with the pending JVJ Mall project, felt the CBD petition drive would be ignored by city officials.

To John's surprise, Phil Minkin, Michel and Burdett Loomis, and other OWL activists saw considerable wisdom in his lament. They met at John's home on Sunday, January 31, 1987, to found OWL-PAC, the first neighborhood political action committee in Kansas. "We wanted to give the neighborhoods some clout so the candidates and the commission will have to listen to our concerns."<sup>15</sup>

The mission statement was to the point: "The purpose of the PAC is to promote neighborhood issues, apprise candidates of neighborhood concerns and assess candidates in light of neighborhood issues. Membership is open to any Lawrence resident supportive of our positions."<sup>16</sup>

The OWL president (Steve Lopes) noted, "We are at a crucial juncture and we have the ability to take control of our collective destiny in Lawrence politics .... What we do by April 7 will be with us for a very long time."<sup>17</sup>

OWL-PAC guided the CBD anti-mall protesters toward a more effective outcome; that of electing friends to the city commission. It expended over \$4,000 from small donations for candidate media exposure and endorsement advertisements. OWL-PAC also sponsored candidate forums on February 22 and April 2, 1987, which allowed PAC members to ask each candidate pointed questions.

After each forum, dues-paying members (minimum \$25 contribution) met and voted on endorsements. In the primary, OWL-PAC endorsed Dennis Constance, Henry Johns, Mike Rundle, and Bob Schumm from the ten primary candidates. On primary election night, Bob Schumm, incumbent Ernest Angino, and Dennis Constance topped the ticket, followed by Mike Rundle, Howard Hill, and Ellis Hayden (who eliminated incumbent David Longhurst by five votes).

The March 4, 1987, *Journal-World* noted that the top three primary winners had always been the winners in every general election since 1975 and anticipated no change.<sup>18</sup> The editorial noted, "Three of the four people endorsed by the newly formed Old West Lawrence Political Action Committee made the finals, re-establishing the clout which neighborhood units can exert when they organize and concentrate on given issues."<sup>19</sup>

### **Chamber PAC "me toos" OWL-PAC**

In a survey, 243 of 1,500 members (less than one fifth) in the Chamber of Commerce responded to OWL-PAC with their soon-to-be named "Chamber PAC."<sup>20</sup>

"Jobs For Tomorrow" endorsed its pro-growth preferences- Ernest Angino, David Longhurst, and Bob Schumm.<sup>21</sup> Its members scrambled to replicate OWL-PAC successes, spending \$6,300 on political advertisements and direct mail to no avail.

Not coincidentally, the March 17, 1987, *Journal-World* editorial attacked OWL-PAC as a "special interest," ignoring any Chamber PAC "interests." OWL-PAC gleefully adopted this slogan in its logo, "Lawrence Neighborhoods: A Very Special Interest" and reported it in a letter to the editor.<sup>22</sup>

OWL-PAC also satirized the chamber PAC with a final political ad the day before the election: "OWL-PAC Job For Tomorrow: Elect Constance, Rundle, Schumm. "

The general election was an solid upset: the three OWL-PAC endorsed candidates- Bob Schumm, Mike Rundle, and Dennis Constance-were elected by wide margins. Schumm and Rundle were elected to four-year terms; Constance, to a two-year term. OWL-PAC now had elected to the city commission a solid majority who had agreed to promote neighborhood and preservation issues.

On election night, a record 12,861 voters (55.3% of those registered) replaced the incumbents with the OWL-PAC slate while smashing the mall referenda. In the coming two years, the majority on the city commission delivered on

many promises but more importantly, opened up the decision-making process to regular citizens. Lawrence city commissioners were no longer a wholly-owned subsidy of the Chamber of Commerce and development interests.

### **Historic Preservation Comes of Age: The Douglas County Bank Massacre**

The Lawrence city seal shows a phoenix rising from the ashes of the Civil War symbolizing a city rebuilt to spite the border ruffians. The Lawrence Visitors and Convention Bureau entices out-of-state guests to tour our historic districts. On the one hand, historic preservation is an attractive community asset. On the other hand, it's a nuisance to development.

Small bands of local guerrilla preservationists come together to resist development that threatens historic structures. The event that galvanized Lawrence preservationists came on a hot Saturday morning in June 1987, just weeks after the city commission elections.

Throughout the 1980s, the Douglas County Bank (DCB), at Ninth and Kentucky Streets, had been quietly buying homes on the 800 block between Kentucky and Tennessee. The Old West Lawrence Association (OWLA) learned that DCB intended to raze these homes and attempted for several months to negotiate saving some of them. For no apparent reason, DCB unilaterally terminated the negotiations at 6 AM on Saturday, June 27, 1987.

#### **"June 27, 1987: The most destructive single day in Lawrence since Quantrill's raid." <sup>23</sup>**

The DCB's landlordship had been classic "demolition by neglect" in that each of the eight houses had been allowed to deteriorate. DCB representatives said they needed the land available immediately for construction. They lied.

Wednesday, June 24, Oliver Finney wrote, "Steve: Houses in the bank block are being seriously looted."<sup>24</sup> On Thursday evening, June 25, Lois Orth-Lopes and I toured each of the eight homes through opened doors and noted obvious removal of banisters, fireplace mantels and other materials.

Late morning Friday, June 26, I contacted the Lawrence Police Department after observing looting at the historic "Oliver House," at Eighth and Tennessee. The police responded and released the vandal after a Douglas County Bank vice president confirmed at the scene that the bank sanctioned the removals.

While OWLA residents were waking Saturday morning for their prearranged annual alley cleanup, Dunbar Wrecking Company's machines of destruction simultaneously started destroying each of the homes starting at 6 AM. By noon, the entire block had been graded smooth and seeded with rye grass. Newly elected city commissioner Dennis Constance said Lawrence had not seen "...that much property damage in a single day since Quantrill burned most of the town down."<sup>25</sup>

What the DCB didn't anticipate was that its rash action would spark a movement to invigorate a renewed appreciation for historic preservation.<sup>26</sup> "[OWL President Steve] Lopes said "...the demolition would galvanize opposition to future demolition of neighborhood houses deemed historically important and worth preserving."<sup>27</sup>

The Lawrence Preservation Alliance (LPA), was slow to act on this outrage, so it fell to the OWL neighborhood to respond. Oliver Finney called a meeting of preservation and neighborhood leaders at his OWL home, 821 Ohio, on Sunday, June 28, to meet as an "Ad Hoc Committee to Respond to the Destruction of 800 Tennessee/Kentucky Streets." This group unanimously "agreed to ask the city commission to pass a resolution at its July 7th meeting creating a committee to work toward a local historic preservation ordinance and to support in principal the creation of such an ordinance."<sup>28</sup>

OWL also asked state Representative Jesse Branson to seek an attorney general's opinion regarding the authority of the city to allow the demolition. Eventually, Attorney General Bob Stephan decided that OWL was right, and that the city neglected to do a proper historic review. "Accordingly, a city is required to give the state historical preservation officer notice of an opportunity to comment when such change or amendment is being considered. The term 'environs,' as used in the Kansas historic preservation act, may include property surrounding a designated historic site even though said properties are not adjoining."<sup>29</sup>

Neighbors sent kudos to Jim Postma for his pro bono legal work on behalf of OWL and Lawrence historic preservation. The good news was that rash action by Lawrence officials, specifically Mayor Sandy Praeger, and the Douglas County Bank actually strengthened preservation law throughout Kansas.

### **Benefits from the Douglas County Bank Fiasco**

*Community Demolition permits.* Newly elected Commissioner Dennis Constance proposed a thirty-day waiting period for any anticipated structural demolition in Lawrence after the DCB incident, which was adopted. Now neighborhood association leaders, preservationists, and other interested citizens will be notified in writing of the owner and location, allowing time to challenge demolition of any structures.

*Historic Preservation Task Force (HPTF).* Another outcome of the 1987 elections was the appointment of a task force to study and recommend an ordinance establishing an Historic Resources Commission (HRC). Local attorney Ron Schneider, who has since become the legal counsel of choice for preservation activists, chaired the HPTF. Nevertheless, Mayor Mike Amyx attempted to pack the HPTF with a majority of pro-growth, anti-preservation appointees.

The most vocal anti-preservation appointee was Arly Allen, of Allen Press and owner of the Old English Lutheran Church at 1040 New Hampshire. He was determined to raze the church in order to expand the parking lot for Allen Press while he was serving on the Historic Preservation Task Force. This church was ultimately bought and saved by Tripp Anderson and became a model for adaptive reuse as an attractive suite of offices.

On November 15, 1988, the city commission finally approved the *Historic Preservation Ordinance*. Although far from perfect, it was the best preservationists could get approved and is one of the strongest in any Kansas community. Since that time, the HRC reviews have anticipated how construction will infringe on designated landmarks and may lead to a search for "feasible or prudent alternatives."

### **The Borders Wars.**

In 1996, the Winter Group sought to develop the 700 block between New Hampshire and Rhode Island Streets, offering the north half of the block to the Borders book chain. Preservationists rallied but ultimately could save only two walls of the old livery stable, a sad monument. The bargaining threat was that Borders would take its development to South Iowa Street, drawing commerce from downtown. Nevertheless, the Borders competition devastated independent downtown bookstores. Other national chains such as The Gap and Abercrombie & Fitch also established a presence downtown. The introduction of national chains further altered downtown.

### **Lawrence Arts Center.**

The Lawrence Arts Center (LAC) had been a rent-free tenant in the city-owned Carnegie Library building at 200 W. Ninth Street for many years. When the LAC board launched an expansion project in the early 1990s that required razing six homes from the Old West neighborhood, preservationists again rallied to preserve both the original 1904 structure and adjacent housing stock.

In 1998, the HRC objected to the proposed design for expanding the Arts Center because it would damage the historic environs of the original Carnegie structure. In February 1999, the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) added objections about demeaning the original facility. The LAC board adamantly refused to consider scattered sites or a West Lawrence facility and appeared to have city commission support.

*Friends of the Carnegie Library*, an independent group of individual preservationists and neighborhood activists, donated nearly \$2,000 in legal fees over three years to preserve the building. After setbacks from the HRC and the SHPO "and the prospect of a potential years long battle in court, city and arts center officials started looking for alternatives."<sup>30</sup>

In a surprising turnaround, on March 26, 1999, the LAC board and the city reconsidered the pending expansion and looked at alternative sites, specifically the 900 block of New Hampshire Street. "It really boils down to cost, size,

accessibility and parking, (Mayor Marty) Kennedy said Thursday. And we can meet a lot of those needs in this different location."<sup>31</sup>

## **Preservation and Neighbors**

There had been historic preservation initiatives before and after that DCB Day of Infamy on June 27, 1987, but that event is foremost in the community's collective memory. The Lawrence Preservation Alliance has the potential to advocate for our heritage but thus far has a weak record of assertiveness. Instead, neighborhood activists, many of whom are affiliated with preservation movements, usually take the initiative. When *Friends of the Carnegie* sought LPA support for legal action, the LPA board demurred, fearing alienating supporters on the Historic Resources Commission. Preservationists must become more aggressive and build on the courageous efforts of those who have fought to retain our history in the face of overwhelming odds.

## **Early Attempts at Organizing Lawrence Neighborhoods**

The 1981 city commission election was characterized in the media as "neighborhoods vs. the community," when six organized inner-city neighborhood associations were called together by Mona McCoy (Pinckney Neighborhood Association) to take some action.<sup>32</sup> Ms. McCoy had hoped that the neighborhood associations could work toward common goals, but there is no evidence this happened. This group did sponsor a stormy candidate forum where neighborhood concerns dominated the debate,<sup>33</sup> but no lasting collaboration resulted from this one-time event.

On July 28, 1983, representatives from five neighborhood associations met for the first time to share common interests and strategies for citizen organizations in Lawrence. Soon to be known as the Lawrence Inter-Neighborhood Council (LINC), they hoped to become an umbrella organization for neighborhood associations, offering information exchange and expanding representation.

In a year of operation, LINC advocated for stronger neighborhood associations, developed a Small Home Improvement Grant Program for the 1984-85 Community Development program year, and cosponsored presentations on pending mall projects. A public forum, "Neighborhood and Community Development: Communication and Cooperation," was held October 12, 1983. LINC was an effort to bring low-income neighborhood associations together but for unknown reasons ceased to exist by 1985.<sup>34</sup>

## **Lawrence Association of Neighborhoods (LAN): From Crazy to Credible**

Established neighborhood association presidents for the third time attempted to organize, this time in the living room of Art and Mary Thomas's home, 1642 Indiana, on Kansas. Day, January 29, 1987. Mary called the meeting to discuss "The Downtown Mall," "The Southern Bypass and other environmental concerns," "Neighborhoods," and "talking with some candidates for the city commission."<sup>35</sup>

The lively meeting marked a turning point in Lawrence political history. After discussing benefits and shortcomings, the neighborhood association leaders chose to eschew direct political activism. Individual activists, however, chose to get involved in OWL-PAC.

The neighborhood leaders agreed to meet again on February 12 and subsequently every month for frequently contentious discussions exploring what was becoming a confederation of neighborhood associations. This budding coalition decided that while each neighborhood association has unique concerns, there is considerable benefit in agreeing to disagree while assisting each other's issues.

A shared vision eventually emerged, and on October 1, 1987, a mission statement and the name "Lawrence Association of Neighborhoods" were unanimously endorsed by affiliates.

At the November 4, 1987, meeting, bylaws were adopted and eleven member associations cast ballots for the first set of officers for 1988.<sup>36</sup> The approved LAN Mission Statement was the result of many hours of compromise among the member neighborhood associations and stands to this day as the *raison d'etre* of LAN:



*To provide opportunities for networking among neighborhoods for the sharing of resources, information and expertise;*

*To encourage and assist in the development of new neighborhood associations within the City of Lawrence;*

*To encourage the cooperation of neighborhoods with similar concerns to facilitate the achievement of their common goals; ·*

*To identify more efficient ways to evaluate the effects of city government policies, services and programs on neighborhoods;*

*To encourage accurate and timely feedback to city officials on neighborhood concerns and issues regarding city policies, services and programs.*

### **Lobbying for That "Special Interest"**

In the early years of LAN, member affiliates invited city commissioners to visit their neighborhoods and observe their concerns firsthand. In 1988 LAN took its first official stand: opposing school board "pairing," an unpopular school board plan that merged enrollment boundaries. This plan was abandoned after organized neighborhood opposition.<sup>37</sup>

Established neighborhood associations were learning to cooperate on issues of mutual benefit. For example, every neighborhood has traffic and noise concerns. Therefore, LAN met with police Chief Ron Olin January 28, February 4, and 11, 1988, to learn that police would enforce laws if the city commission would create them. Subsequently, neighborhood groups were formed to lobby for an excessive noise ordinance and local street truck traffic.

The *LAN Truck Traffic Committee* was formed to address heavy truck traffic on neighborhood streets and to meet with the Lawrence Motor Carriers Association (LMCA). After two years of negotiations, the parties recommended a multicolored map designating truck routes through the city. LMCA also agreed to accept calls to a central dispatcher for neighbors to report large trucks on residential streets. The City of Lawrence agreed to fund the printing costs and to distribute maps to truckers new to Lawrence. The neighborhoods became quieter, and the truckers avoided a more restrictive ordinance. The agreement provided a hotline for citizen complaints.

The Schwegler neighborhood association urged LAN to create a committee to lobby for a noise ordinance. In spite of loud protests from the KU Student Senate, these efforts caused the adoption of an excessive party noise ordinance that has made Lawrence nights more peaceful for all residents.

In June 1988, Western Hills Neighborhood Association proposed the first *LAN Drainage Task Force* to study drainage problems in far west Lawrence developments. LAN quality-of-life issues, such as these recommendations, were regularly ignored by the city. Refusal to deal with these issues resulted, for example, in costly taxpayer storm water assessments levied in 1997.

### **LAN Sets Goals for Horizon 2020**

With elections pending, LAN sponsored a candidate social February 20, 1991, and a candidate forum March 18. The most important issue was discussion of a new master city/county planning document that would replace *Plan '95*, the comprehensive guide to county growth.

LAN leaders met in several retreat settings to prepare for the workshops and volunteered for important task groups. LAN established goals to address the environment, traffic, neighborhoods, economic development, education, and community identity topics as official LAN input to what became *Horizon 2020*, the new city/county comprehensive planning document.

### **Taking Risks with Other Issues**

By 1994 LAN had become more confident in representing all neighborhood interests and began to take riskier stands. It supported Simply Equal in its efforts to add sexual orientation to the Lawrence housing discrimination ordinance. LAN also adopted a resolution urging reconsideration of the South Lawrence Trafficway based on

twelve specific objections. LAN members assisted new affiliates in the development of neighborhood plans as the Horizon 2020 proposal became less neighborhood friendly. LAN also joined *Citizens Opposed to the Eastern Parkway*.

Because neighborhood issues topped the 1995 city commission retreat agenda, LAN leaders met September 9 and 23 to provide the commission with a list of neighborhood concerns. LAN members shared proposals on Communication (Ken Collier), Land Use (David Dunfield), General Consensus (Mike Rundle), Public Safety (Gordon Bower), Impact Fees (David Burress), and Infrastructure (Jim McCrary) in a city commission study session October 25.

Nothing came of this effort except negative press when City Commissioner John Nalbandian suggested giving neighborhoods a portion of the city budget to use as they saw fit, a suggestion that LAN vigorously rejected.<sup>38</sup>

### **Impact of LAN on Lawrence Politics**

In recent years, a more mature LAN has been accepted as a legitimate part of the political process. Neighborhood leaders are invited to study sessions and effectively lobby the city commission. City commissioners regularly appear at LAN meetings for feedback and insights.

LAN morphed from an outsider "special interest" lobby peopled by crabby neighbors into a respected citizenship partner. City staff and elected leaders realized that quarrelling neighborhoods really had gotten their acts together and could no longer be played against each other.

LAN delegates wisely put aside parochial angers and agreed to focus on matters of interest to the entire community. This won respect and real community power.

An important legacy of grassroots politics in Lawrence is the legitimacy that has been earned by the Lawrence Association of Neighborhoods. The challenge now facing this advocacy movement is to avoid the sin of co-optation by established power. But if LAN and LPA have become more establishment, more radical risk takers appear ready to root deeper grass.

### **Grassroots Politics at the End of the Millennium: Three Amigos**

Revolutions need to refresh their roots, and ad hoc radical reform groups in Lawrence are still flourishing. By 1999, "Friends of ..." had become the appellation of choice: Friends of Larryville (FOL), Friends of the Carnegie (FOC), and Friends of Douglas County (FODC). Each of these independent pressure groups impacted Lawrence politics as the century came to a close.

*Friends of Larryville (FOL)*. This is a group of "netizens" who met in the Community Forum on <http://www.larryville.com>, a free-spirited not-for-profit web page where hundreds of citizens share opinions and thousands of others lurk. Some FOL activists were asked to meet face-to-face by "l@rry," aka Doug Dubois, to put a face on an e-mail address and share his vision.

They serve as a diverse advisory board and list managers. The impact of larryville.com on the 1999 city commission elections (where the web page openly endorsed a slate of three candidates) was significant. This alternative source of information went from useful to valuable.

Most importantly, a well-handled Chamber candidate, Brenda McFadden, placed first out of a field of eleven in the primary election. But vigorous conversations on larryville.com raised questions about this candidate's qualifications, sincerity, and credibility. In the general election, this handpicked chamber candidate fell out of the running, and two of the three FOL-endorsed candidates came from behind to win. This was the first time city election and candidate campaigns were clearly influenced by web page activity.

*Friends of the Carnegie Library (FOC)*. As noted above, *Friends of the Carnegie Library* formed in response to the desire of the Lawrence Arts Center to expand its space at the original Carnegie Library. After FOC engaged legal

counsel, the LAC board finally gave up and accepted a wiser offer to build a new structure on much friendlier New Hampshire Street. As is typical of a citizen guerrilla action, there was no recognition for the organized citizen action impacting the face of downtown. Preservationists will take their victories, however, whenever they can be found, and the rewards are in continuing to see the prized structure flourishing at the site.

*Friends of Douglas County (FODC).* FODC subscribes to the principles of SmartGrowth, which urges wise development as part of a national SmartGrowth movement. Founded by Larry Kipp in fall 1998, FODC lobbies elected officials and educates the public on the consequences of sprawl. The organization also promotes innovative programs such as "living machines" to recycle sewerage. SmartGrowth is an alternative to a developer-driven agenda.

### **"We have tomorrow bright before us like a flame" -Langston Hughes**

More than a century ago, Lawrence rose from the ashes to become the vibrant city we all enjoy. The tide of social and political activism shows no signs of abating as grassroots organizations draw on Kansas University staff, local artistic talent, and a pool of committed citizens.

The residential turnover that is inevitable in a college town refreshes a hard core of Lawrence activists with new ideas and energy. The subjects may change, but there will always be committed citizens experienced in organizing around issues who will vocalize concerns when it matters. The community power structure building efforts from the 1980s are acknowledged, and in the case of the Lawrence Association of Neighborhoods, firmly established.

Grassroots organizing and citizen participation are the norm for Lawrence policymaking and the community benefits from these efforts.

### *Notes*

1. Estimated by the Lawrence Convention and Visitors Bureau, in the fall 1998-summer 1999 *Lawrence Official Visitors Guide*.
2. Burdett Loomis, "Lawrence Politics: Many Voices, Whose Tune," *Biography of a City: Lawrence*, televised course, April 21, 1998.
3. "Old Home Town: 10 years ago-1981" *Lawrence Daily Journal-World*, March 6, 1991.
4. "City Views Mall Layout Design Plan," *Lawrence Daily Journal-World*, 128:301, October 28, 1986.
5. "Mall Plans Draw Fire, Win Praise," *Lawrence Daily Journal-World*, 128:302, October 29, 1986.
6. In 1981, OWL resident Barbara Waggoner and Edger Boles formed the original Citizens for Better Downtown, a.k.a. Central Business District. This was in response to redevelopment of the 600 block on Massachusetts. "The area in question was the East side of Mass., 7th to 9th Sts., when [Lawrence Journal-World editor] Dolph [Simons] hatched a plan to put an enclosed shopping mall there." (Personal correspondence from Barbara Waggoner, May 15, 1999. The original CBD fought these plans for three years.)
7. "Group Calls Meeting on Mall Plan," *Lawrence Daily Journal-World*, January 24, 1987.
8. "Clerk Expects Mall Petition to be Valid," *Lawrence Daily Journal-World*, February 18, 1987.
9. "Mall Opponents Turn In Petitions to Force Vote," *Lawrence Daily Journal-World*, February 13, 1987.
10. "3 Questions Headed for Ballot," *Lawrence Daily Journal-World*, February 25, 1987.
11. Ibid.
12. "Ballot Question Spurs Split among Mall Opposition," *Lawrence Daily Journal-World*, March 18, 1987.
13. *Plumber's Friend*, no. 43 (April 1987): 3.
14. "About five minutes from the Eldridge Hotel, in the area around Louisiana Street between 6th and 9th streets, remains one of the finest residential neighborhoods in America. Old West Lawrence is distinguished ... by a graceful mixture of styles, a wealth of detail, and the careful siting of each house. As I walked its streets going from Gingerbread Victorian to Italianate to bungalow to those wonderful simple clapboards that stand up square and solid off the ground-I was looking not only at a good-natured competition to have the finest house, but also at a whole anthology of solutions to a comfortable and fulfilling family life." William Bryant Logan, "Crossing the Sea of Grass," *House Beautiful*, March 1995. From Virtual Old West Lawrence web page at <http://falcon.cc.ukans/~kdayton/vowl.html>
15. Steve Lopes in "Lawrence Section Forms PAC to Fight Development Moves," *Topeka Capitol-Journal*, February

- 16, 1987.
16. *Old West Lawrence Newsletter*, 26:2 (February 1987).
17. Ibid.
18. "If Trend Proves Primary Factor, Top Three Finishers Have the Edge," *Lawrence Daily Journal-World*, March 4, 1987.
19. Editorials, "Election Returns," *Lawrence Daily Journal-World*, March 4, 1987.
20. "Chamber Group to Support Candidates," *Lawrence Daily Journal-World*, March 20, 1987.
21. "Chamber PAC Endorses Commission Candidates," *Lawrence Daily Journal-World*, March 27, 1987.
22. The Public Forum, "Political Action," *Lawrence Daily Journal-World*, March 20, 1987.
23. Quotation on the commemorative quilt designed by the Seamster's Union as reported in "Quiltmakers Strike Back against Bank," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, November 26, 1987.
24. Oliver Finney, letter to Steve Lopes, June 24, 1987.
25. "Demolition Leaves Lawrence Group up in Arms," *Kansas City Times*, June 30, 1987.
26. For a more detailed report on the Douglas County Bank takings on June 27, 1987, read the tenth anniversary recollection in the *Old West Lawrence Newsletter*, 37:3 (June 1997). This text is also posted as "Douglas County Bank Stuns Old West Lawrence with Surprise Demolition as recalled by Steve Lopes," on the Lawrence Community Web Page at <http://www.larryville.com/dcbjerks.htm>
27. Op Cit. *Kansas City Times*, June 30, 1987.
28. Minutes of the "Ad Hoc Committee to Respond to the Destruction of 800 Tennessee/Kentucky Streets," June 28, 1987.
29. Robert T. Stephan, Office of the Attorney General, Opinion no. 87-114. August 5, 1987.
30. "Arts Center Puts Focus on N.H. Site," *Lawrence Daily Journal-World*, March 26, 1999.
31. Ibid.
32. "Neighborhood Groups Study Possible Coalition," *Lawrence Daily Journal-World*, March 24, 1981. The six organized neighborhoods at that time were: Pinckney, Old West Lawrence, Oread, East Lawrence, North Lawrence, and Far East Lawrence.
33. "Candidates Questioned on Neighborhoods," *Lawrence Daily Journal-World*, March 31, 1981.
34. Based on an undated, unsourced two-page report "Lawrence Inter-Neighborhood Council," courtesy Oliver Finney.
35. Neighborhood leaders Barry Shalinsky (East Lawrence), marci francisco (Oread), Steve Lopes (Old West Lawrence), Bob Moody (North Lawrence), Jim Patti (Schwegler), Laurel Krider (Prairie Meadows), and Jeanne Ellermier (Indian Hills), joined John Simmons (Agnes T. Frog committee), Lance Burr, John Jennings, and Phil Minkin. Candidates present were Dennis. Constance, Henry Johns, Ellis Hayden, Mike Rundle, and Bob Schumm. Source: Original agenda created by Mary Thomas.
36. "Neighborhood Groups Form Coalition," *Lawrence Daily Journal-World*, October 2, 1987. Officers: Steve Lopes (Old West Lawrence), Chair; Mary Thomas (University Place), Vice-chair; Jeanne Ellermeier (Indian Hills), Secretary; Sherman Yacher (Schwegler), Treasurer. Alan D. Long served as newsletter editor and designed the LAN logo. Founding neighborhood associations: East Lawrence, Old West Lawrence, Oread, Pinckney, University Place, Western Hills, Indian Hills, Schwegler, Prairie Meadows, Brook Creek, and Barker.
37. "Neighbors Oppose School Pairing," *Lawrence Daily Journal-World*, January 19, 1988.
38. "Neighborhood Proposal Raises Qyestions," *Lawrence Daily Journal-World*, October 29, 1995; followed by "J-W Access" question "Should the city let neighborhood associations make budgetary decisions," October 26, 1995, and an editorial "In the Neighborhood," October 31, 1995.