

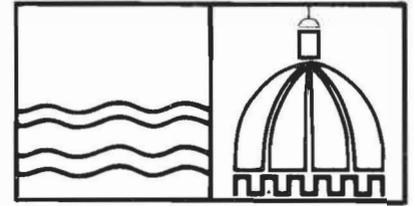
IMPROVEMENTS TO DURBAN'S CENTRAL DISTRICT

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In hierdie artikel word 'n bondige uiteensetting gegee van die hoofprojekte waaruit die herstruktureringprogram vir die sentrale gebied van Durban bestaan. Dit word deur die Departement van die Stadsingenieur aangepak en deurgevoer. Daar word op vyf gebiede gekonsentreer, wat uiteindelik, na implementering van 'n totale omvorming- en verbeteringskema

wat paaie, verkeersvloei, parkeerareas, die strandgebied en interskakeling tussen die verskillende areas insluit, die stadsgebied sal verfraai, beter sal laat fungeer en in alle opsigte daartoe sal bydra dat die stad 'n plek word waar mense graag sal wil wees omdat dit aantreklik, gerieflik en aangenaam is om daar te woon en te werk en te ontspan.



FOREWORD

The work I have been involved with for the Beach and City Steering Committee in Durban has been based on the premise that wherever possible, forward planning should be carried out by staff of the City Council, assisted only where necessary by consultants, and that it should be a continuous process.

My participation in the planning process has been facilitated in several significant ways. The first is the presence of the Beach and City Steering Committee charged with the task of presenting proposals for the area defined. The second was the establishment of the Technical Working Group, representing branches and departments involved in planning, under the chairmanship of the City Engineer. The third was the formation of a project team, drawn from the City Engineer's Department, and consisting of a core of planners and architects, supported by whatever skills were needed.

As one who was not a member of the Council's staff, nor a member of the public of Durban, there are some striking observations that should be made, which may be instructive:

- * Planning has advanced rapidly, and been effective, because there was a full commitment to it on the part of all parties concerned.
- * The proposals were on the whole well received because of the participation of the public through its representatives on the Beach and City

Steering Committee, and because the City Council went to considerable lengths to inform the press and the public as fully and as early as possible.

- * A major contribution has been the high levels of motivation displayed by all Council officials involved in the planning process.
- * The most important observation is that the City Council of Durban has on the adoption of planning proposals voted the considerable funds necessary for early implementation of major works, without delay.

My involvement in the planning of parts of Durban has been done in close collaboration with the City Engineer and his department. For me, it has been a stimulating exercise and an important learning experience.

*Revel Fox,
Cape Town,
March, 1984.*

Since 1965, when an Outline Plan for the City was adopted by the City Council, the Town Planning Branch of the City Engineer's Department has systematically undertaken the preparation of detailed planning proposals for each district of the City within the broad guidelines of the Outline Plan. By 1976 seven district plans had been prepared, advertised and following amendment,

adopted and work on the Central District was commenced.

The Central District is the focal point of a rapidly growing City Region of which the population could reach, or exceed, four million by the turn of the century. It has an area of some 1 380 ha and extends from the harbour zone in the south to the Umgeni River in the north. It comprises a wide range of activities that have developed over the past 150 years in response to local, regional and national needs and to the excellent and diverse opportunities afforded by its geographic features. Its functional centrality has been reinforced over time by a sustained investment in a highly supportive transport infrastructure, to the extent that in the decade up to 1976 90% of all new retail floor space in the region was developed in the Central District. It also offers employment to 1/6 of the region's workforce and has a resident population of some 40 000, a figure that is greatly inflated during the holiday seasons.

A feature of the Central District is the extent to which geographic associations and functional linkages have survived and been consolidated over time. The existing land use structure is thus appropriate to its situation and firmly established: service industry is located in close proximity to the harbour zone; the Central Business District has developed adjacent to the original market square; the seven kilometre length of Indian Ocean coastline has become associated with residential development for

both tourists and permanent residents, recreation and entertainment, while the flat, low-lying land parallel to the coastline and north of the Central Business District has been developed into a major sporting complex of stadia and golf courses.

Studies of the Central District in its regional context which were carried out in 1976 and 1977 resulted in an invaluable body of factual information that revealed on subsequent analysis a number of areas of potential planning concern. In view of public interest in the work at a time when there was considerable concern about the economy and Central Business District development prospects, and in order to involve informed sectors of the public in the planning process from an early stage, the results of these studies were compiled into a set of thirteen technical papers which, together with a summary report that drew specific attention to the planning issues that had been identified, was distributed to business, administrative and professional bodies for comment and discussion. Although the City Council's initiative was warmly welcomed by these bodies, a variety of

factors frustrated constructive engagement – unfamiliarity with public participation in this form being a chief factor.

In an attempt to resolve the resultant deadlock the City Council subsequently endorsed a joint recommendation by its Management and Planning Committees that lead to the appointment of a seven member Steering Committee – the Beach and City Steering Committee – comprising the Chairman of these two Committees and five nominated representatives of business and professional bodies.* Although this Committee came into being in June 1981, it was not until March 1982 at a workshop convened by the Steering Committee that planning direction was firmly established. Planning issues previously identified were endorsed, improvement areas were defined and the basis for an organisational structure to undertake the work was agreed. In this last mentioned regard it was agreed that the work would

** Members of the Beach and City Steering Committee are: Councillors H. N. C. MacLellan (Chairman), Mr. S. Lurie (Vice-Chairman), D. C. Smith, Professor M. Kahn, and Messrs. T. P. Boyd, B. P. Lochner and S. N. Tomkin.*

be undertaken within the City Engineer's Department, in association with the Steering Committee's consultant advisor.

The first phase of the work started in July 1982 following the appointment of Mr. Revel Fox as Consultant Advisor for an initial period of six months and by December of that year a report on this phase was submitted to the Steering Committee at a public meeting. This report focused attention on five improvement areas within the Central District, setting out in each case its relationship to the whole, its needs and opportunities for improvement, conceptual planning proposals and recommendations for a 3-5 year design and development programme. The report in its entirety was approved by Council in March 1983 and since that date efforts have been made to bring about the highly complex integration of the various planning, design and implementation functions, for although the work has been undertaken by a small project team it has required contributions from other Branches within the City Engineer's Department, other municipal departments and from consultants. The integration of these functions has been largely achieved through the formation of a Technical Working Group under the chairmanship of the City Engineer that has met at monthly intervals to review and co-ordinate each aspect of the work. All proposals to the Steering Committee are routed through this Working Group.

A second report that incorporates and updates the content of the first report as a result of further work done during 1983 was submitted to the Steering Committee in December 1983. This reporting procedure is indicative of the on-going planning and development process that is a feature of the work as distinct from the traditional, and in this case, inappropriate single plan approach.

In the description that follows it will be noticed that all the proposals are con-



Figure 1. The heart of Durban's Central District. Beachfront in the foreground, the Central Business District with the Victoria Embankment on the left and the Centrum on the right.

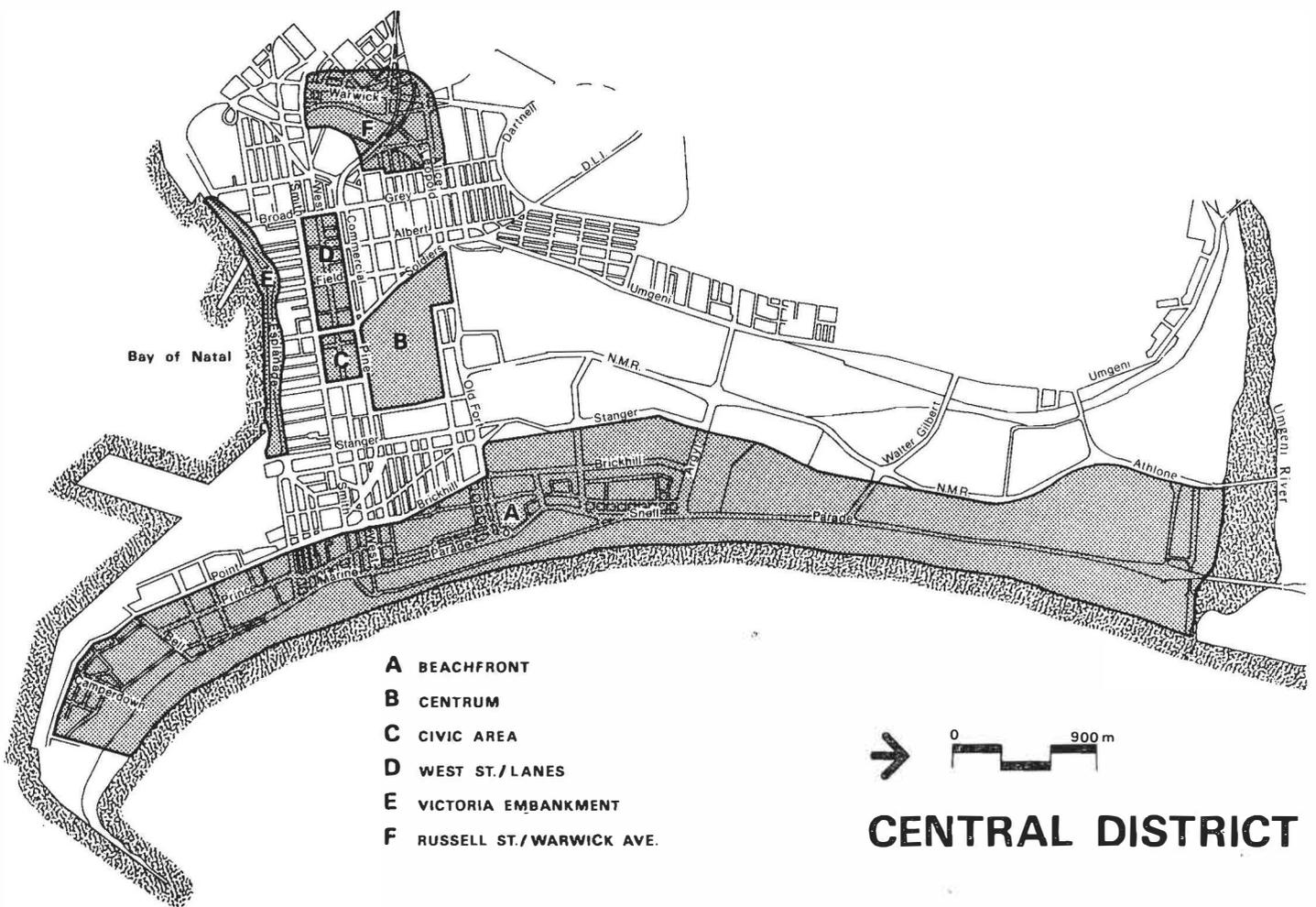


Figure 2. Plan of the Central District depicting current Action Areas.

cerned with improvements to the city fabric in some form. They are intended to make the city work better and look better. The advantages of the first are obvious; the advantages of making the city a place where people want to be because it is attractive and affords pleasure cannot be underestimated. Although nothing is as important to a city as to have a revenue base and an expanding labour market, many city authorities have found that the best way to begin improvements is to make their cities convenient and delightful places to visit and to work and live in.

The following is a brief summary of the planning proposals for the five improvement areas and the implementation projects that have commenced:

1. THE BEACHFRONT

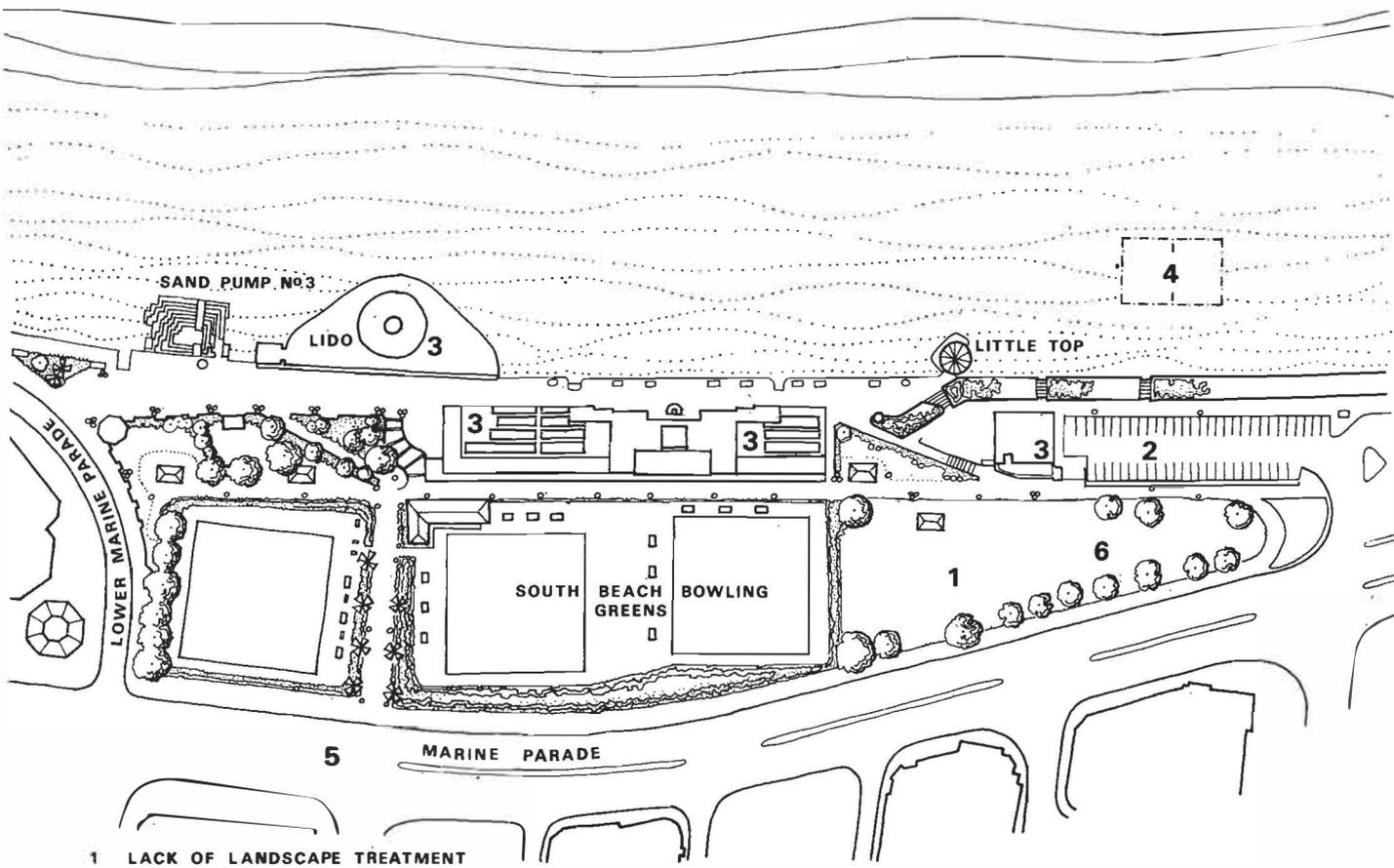
This area extends from the harbour entrance to the mouth of the Umgeni River, and inland to include land and development directly associated with beach usage. One of the most intriguing and attractive aspects of this area is the

number and variety of distinctive sections that make up the seven kilometre beachfront system. To this extent improvement proposals need to recognise inadequacies in the system as a whole as well as those that are peculiar to each section. Overall, there is a need to arrest the advanced erosion of the beaches, to remove through-traffic from the area, to improve the provision of parking along the entire length, to replace and deconcentrate unsightly and outdated concessions and to undertake a major programme of environmental improvement.

The effects of the sand pumping scheme that is being installed at a cost of some R11 million are already apparent, construction has begun on the realignment of the link road between the Northern Freeway and the Inner Ring Road that will direct through-traffic away from the beachfront and private enterprise is already taking advantage of new opportunities afforded it to develop major beachfront attractions, of high environmental quality, in appropriate locations.

The realignment of the main traffic route further inland, apart from re-

moving undesirable through-traffic from the area, will enhance the development potential of land to the west of Marine and Snell Parades by making it more visible, more accessible and more closely associated with the beachfront. In so doing an important objective of the proposals – to increase the effective depth of beachfront land – will be achieved when these roadworks are completed in 1985. In general terms many of the proposed improvements for the beachfront can only be undertaken after this date since the re-organisation of internal pedestrian and vehicular movement and parking and much of the consequential environmental improvements are dependent upon the removal of traffic. South Beach is less directly effected. All existing pathways at this beach that are to be retained in the proposals have been repaved and structural changes will commence later this year. These will involve the removal of underutilised facilities and the introduction of a children's play park, picnic and sunbathing areas and paddling pools all well lit and attractively landscaped and more closely related to the beach.



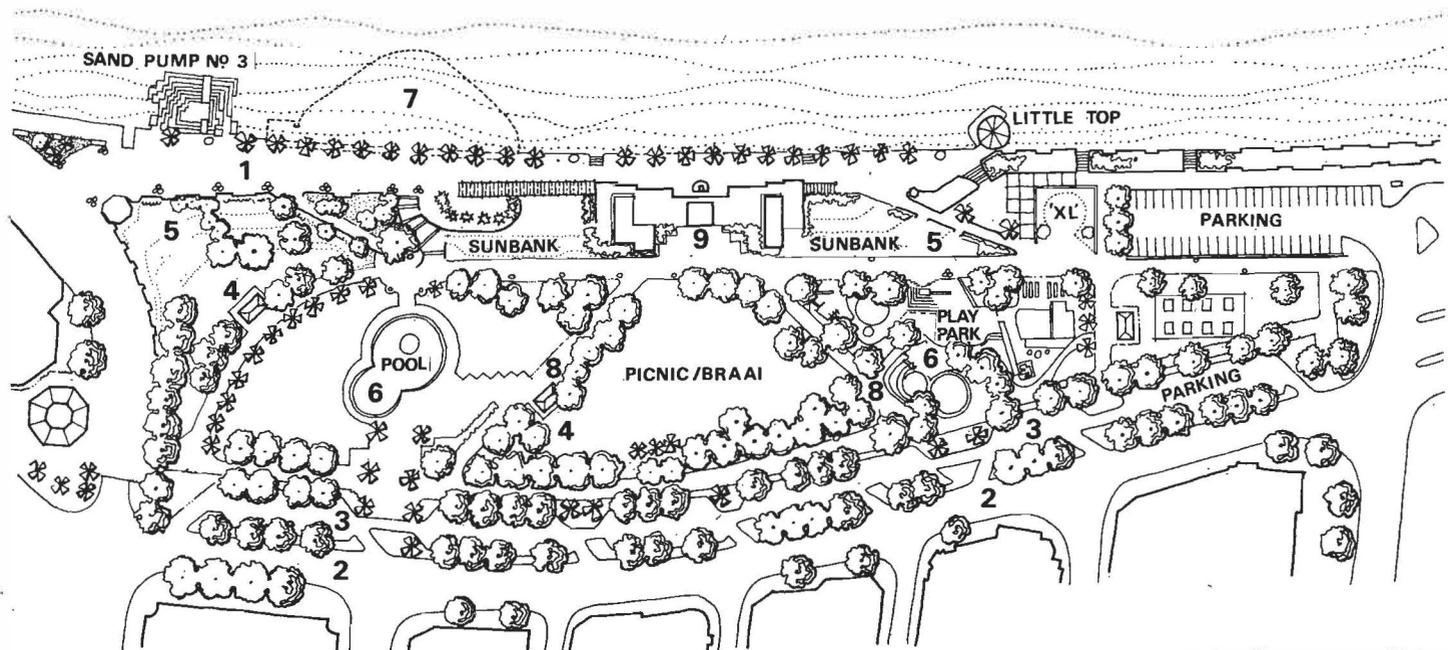
- 1 LACK OF LANDSCAPE TREATMENT
- 2 SHORTAGE OF PARKING
- 3 BUILDINGS INAPPROPRIATE OR UNDER-UTILISED
- 4 BEACH TRAMPOLINES REQUIRE RELOCATION
- 5 DUAL CARRIAGEWAY BARRIER
- 6 FEW BEACH BACK-UP FACILITIES



SOUTH BEACH ISSUES

Figure 3. South Beach: Planning issues. The area as it exists today.

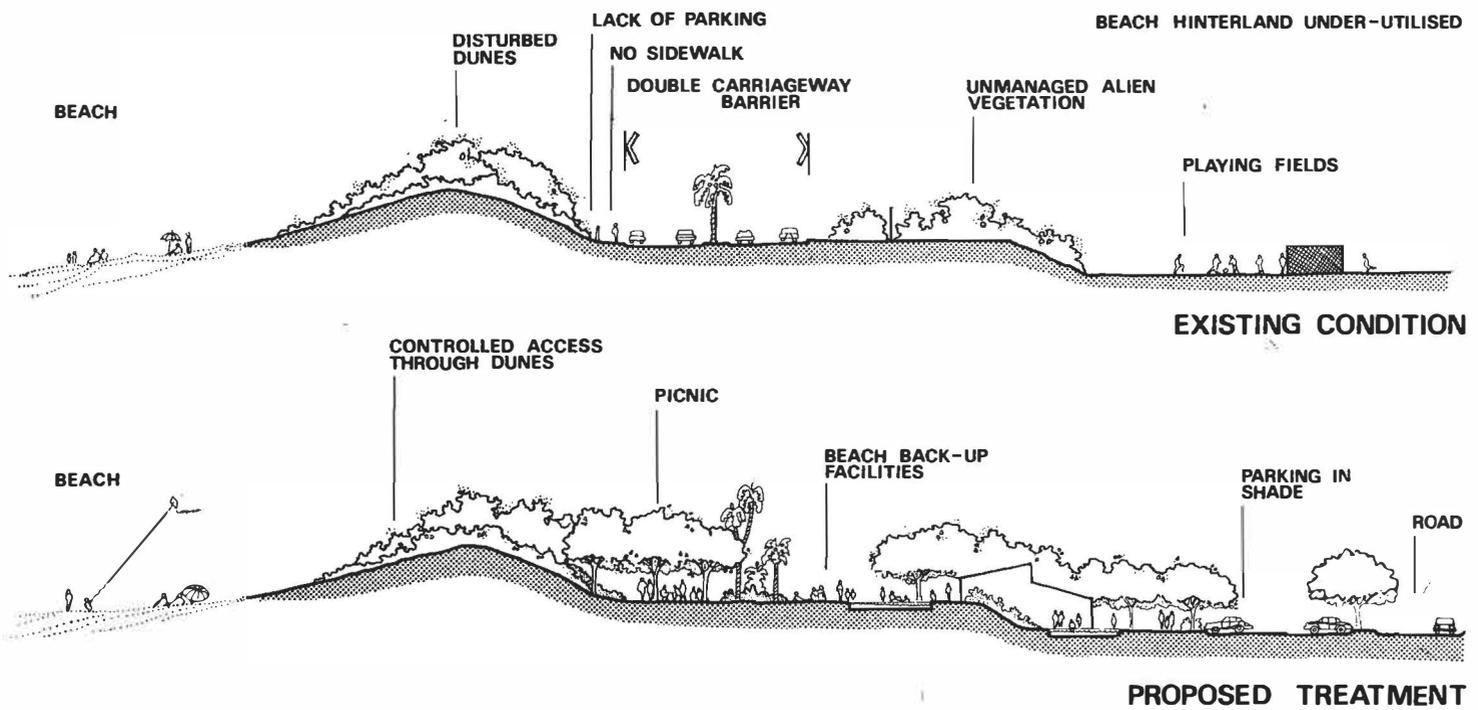
Figure 4. South Beach: Planning concept. Developments proposed within the coming three years.



- 1. PLANTED PROMENADES
- 2. SINGLE CARRIAGEWAY
- 3. LANDSCAPED PARKING
- 4. SHADE/WIND SHELTER
- 5. RETAIN VIEWING PAVILIONS
- 6. BEACH BACK-UP FACILITIES
- 7. OBSTRUCTIVE BUILDINGS REMOVED
- 8. ADDITIONAL PEDESTRIAN ROUTES
- 9. GRASS/PAVING OVER ROOF



SOUTH BEACH CONCEPT



NORTHERN BEACHES TYPICAL SECTIONS

Figure 5. Northern Beaches: Proposed changes to the existing cross-section arising from the relocation of the freeway.

2. THE CENTRUM

This twenty-eight hectare site of the former central railway station is perhaps the largest single area of central city land that has become available for comprehensive redevelopment since the foreshore in Cape Town. Sixteen hectares of this land have already been transferred to City Council ownership and the Council is negotiating with the South African Transport Services to acquire the remaining twelve hectares in order that it may effectively control its use and development in the best interests of the city. As early as 1965 the City Council was mindful of the site's exceptional potential and commissioned the late Lord Holford and Professor Kantorowich to prepare a master plan for its redevelopment, but largely as a result of changed circumstances their proposals were never executed.

The land is at present reserved for Government and Municipal purposes but it has become apparent that a wider variety of uses will have to be catered for. In principle the City Council has accepted that redevelopment of this land should complement and not com-

pete with the adjoining Central Business District; that it should be generally developed with low-rise buildings within a parklike setting and that connections to the city centre should be strong and direct. It is also clear that the area will have to accommodate parking for a large number of cars, both for its own needs and for those of the Central Business District.

In 1982 the City Council approved the appointment of Professor Brian Kearney to survey and catalogue all buildings and places in the city that are of architectural and/or historic importance. This concern with the need to acknowledge, and wherever possible, preserve the city's diminishing heritage led the City Council to the decision to retain the most significant former railway buildings in order to explore their potential for restoration and re-use. In total nine structures have been retained. A group of three consisting of two small workshops and a double-storey verandah house have been leased by a theatre group and three large workshops, the largest with a floor area of some 13 000 m², are to be substantially renovated by the City Council at a cost of about R11 million as an exhibition/indoor sports centre, pending the construction of permanent exhibition facili-

ties in another location. This work is proceeding with all haste in preparation for a major international exposition, Durban Expo '85. It is of interest to add, that in agreement with the theatre group, the organisers of Expo '85 have renovated the verandah house for their short-term administrative needs in lieu of rent thus relieving the theatre group of this financial burden and at the same time bringing about a start to the early redevelopment of the site.

The three other structures that have been retained comprise the main station building and adjoining covered platforms and another large workshop similar in floor area to that of the main Expo '85 building. However, in order to accommodate the proposed extension of Commercial Road, the rear portion of the main station building is being demolished and the large clear span roof structure over the platform area has been slid, by an ingenious method, over a distance of 18 m away from the main station building.

Redevelopment proposals for the main station building have been prepared by consultants Hallen, Theron and Partners in association with Interarc for the re-use of the building as shops and offices and although it is the intention for this work to be undertaken by

private enterprise on a leasehold from the City Council, restoration of the two existing street facades has been undertaken by Council.

The large workshop, by virtue of its size, design and location to the Central Business District, offers the possibility for re-use as a speciality retail centre similar to Quincy Market in Boston and other examples in the United States. In order to enable the private sector to participate in this venture a developer's brief for this building and for the main station building have been prepared and both have been advertised for public tender.

The space between the proposed speciality retail centre and the main station building forms the most obvious point of arrival from the adjacent Central Business District and Civic Area along the axis of Church Street and it is proposed to extend Church Street via an underpass as the major pedestrian route through the Centrum. In similar vein, east/west pedestrian routes through the site will extend the lines of existing streets outside the area in order to establish a strong visual and physical linkage between the Centrum and the surrounding City Centre.



Figure 6. Centrum: View from the north-west showing the extent of the former railway land and its relationship to the Central Business District.

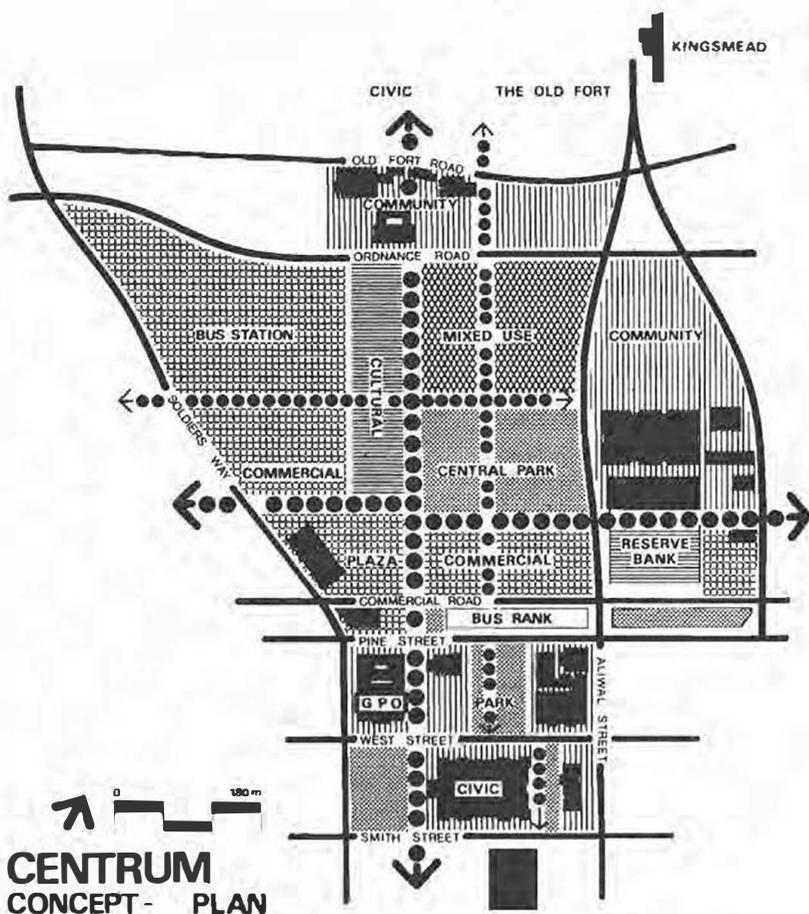
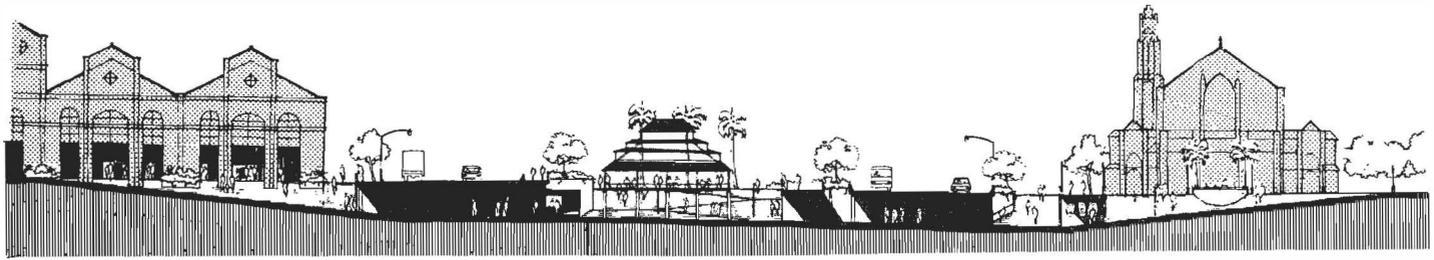


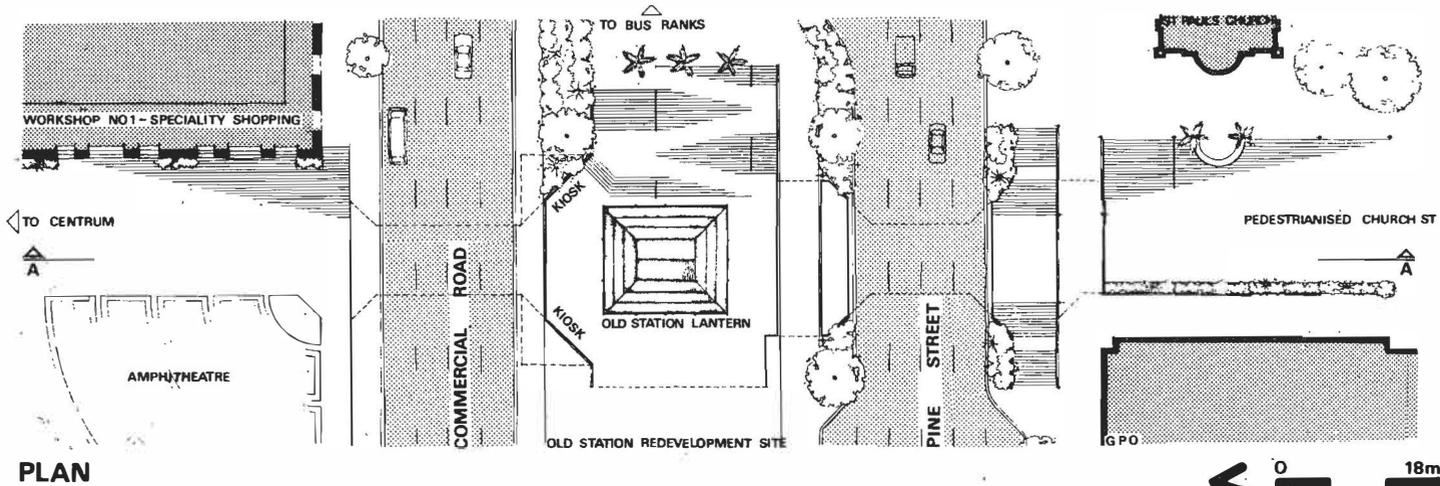
Figure 7. Centrum: Planning concept for the Centrum and adjoining civic area. Central Business District to the west, Beachfront to the east, recreation to the north.

At the crossing of these pedestrian routes and immediately to the north of the proposed speciality retail centre provision has been made for a central city park, bounded to the west by possible civic uses – buildings to house the existing museum and art gallery are required – and to the north by possible low-rise office development.

Work on the underpass, the main roadwork and underground services has begun and, together with the paving of the main pedestrian routes, lighting and landscaping, will be completed during 1985 in time for Expo '85. A feature of the plans for new roadworks is that they incorporate a tree planting servitude alongside each sidewalk as part of the major tree planting and landscaping programme for the Central District as a whole.



SECTION A-A



CIVIC AREA
CHURCH ST. UNDERPASS

Figure 8. Section 'A-A': Pedestrian link between the Centrum - re-use of Workshop No. 1 for speciality retailing - and the Civic Area - Church Street pedestrianised.

3. THE CIVIC AREA

This area comprises four city blocks separated from one another by West Street which runs east/west from the beachfront to the Central Business District and Church Street running north/south, which is to be extended as the major pedestrian axis through the Centrum. Each block contains important civic buildings and places, many of which are declared national monuments. The area generally suffers from the poor environmental quality of the two streets which form the main spaces about and between buildings and places of note. The extensions of Commercial Road and Aliwal Street that are currently in progress have enabled the carriage-way width of West Street to be reduced and Church Street to be closed to vehicular traffic. This will provide scope for the repaving of these enlarged pedestrian areas, additional street planting and the introduction of lighting and street furniture more in keeping with the surroundings. At the same time

provision is being made to widen the sidewalk and carry out similar improvements to the south side of Smith Street, in conjunction with the redevelopment of the Old Playhouse into an opera and theatre complex. These improvements are programmed for 1984/85 in phase with the Centrum and Playhouse developments.

4. THE VICTORIA EMBANKMENT

Perhaps one of the outstanding images of Durban is that of the sweeping curve of the Victoria Embankment which with the flanking waterfront of the bay forms an edge to the Central Business District. Unfortunately, there would appear to be no possibility of removing the railway but earlier proposals to upgrade and realign the roadway that echoes the curve of the building edge, have now been postponed in favour of modest improvements to the existing road. Plans for the development of the waterfront, for increased recreational use and for the improvement of visual and physical links to the Central Business District are under examination. In this latter regard the many narrow lanes

that cross the Central Business District offer considerable scope for improvement. One has already been undertaken by private enterprise in design liaison with the City Council and proposals for another five, two leading down to the Victoria Embankment, are being prepared for implementation during 1984/85.

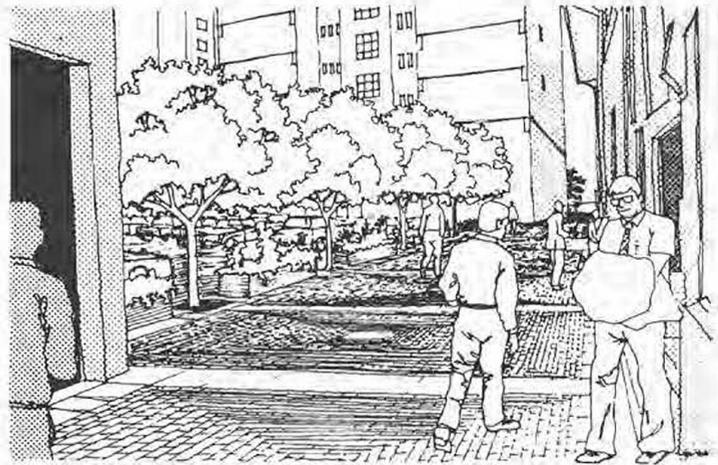
5. WARWICK AVENUE

Located along the Inner Ring Road and across the railway from the Grey Street Indian Business Area, this area contains a complex of retail market activities, the main non-White bus ranks and commuter railway station that collectively generate the highest weekday volumes of pedestrian movement in the city. Current studies of the market operations have confirmed the importance of their role and their location to non-Whites throughout the region.

The task before the planners is to resolve the competing needs for additional space for the markets, the bus ranks and roadworks and the, as yet, unsatisfied need for a safe and direct pedestrian movement system segregated from the



EXISTING



PROPOSED

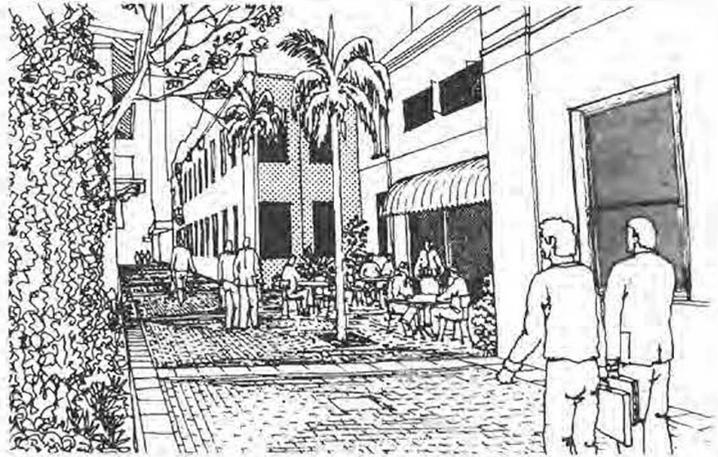


Figure 9. The lanes: Masonic Grove. Possibilities for the upgrading of the lanes that connect the Victoria Embankment with the Central Business District.

LANES MASONIC GROVE

road network. This work is still at the initial planning stages but promises to be the most difficult, if least spectacular, of the current development projects. Also, being at the edge of the Central Business District, it impinges on other neglected fringe areas, all of which would benefit from careful study and improvement.

The foregoing is a brief account of the major projects that comprise the first phase of the improvement programme for the Central District. The amount of work is indicative of the extent of renewal and replacement that must take place in order that the city can keep pace with the scale of growth and change that is occurring in South Africa's larger cities. Failure to undertake this work could lead to deterioration and decay and it is to the credit of the City Council that it has acknowledged both the need and its role in the

process. From the planner's point of view this commitment is of considerable importance. What exists is a unity of purpose and a sense of urgency evidenced in both the organisational structure that has been created and the value of work that has been approved for implementation within two years. This in turn has aroused public awareness and interest and since the building of cities depends upon a partnership between the private and the public sectors, the response to date from property developers has been encouraging. In this regard extensive use has been made of media coverage, exhibitions and meetings in order to publicise the work that is being done.

Figure 10. Warwick Avenue Area: View from the north showing the present configuration of major roads and railways. Bus terminus and markets to the west, Indian Business Area across railway to the east.

