

GREATER MADISON
THE MONONA
TERRACE PROJECT
FRANK LLOYD
WRIGHT ARCHITECT

TALIESIN
WISCONSIN
1955

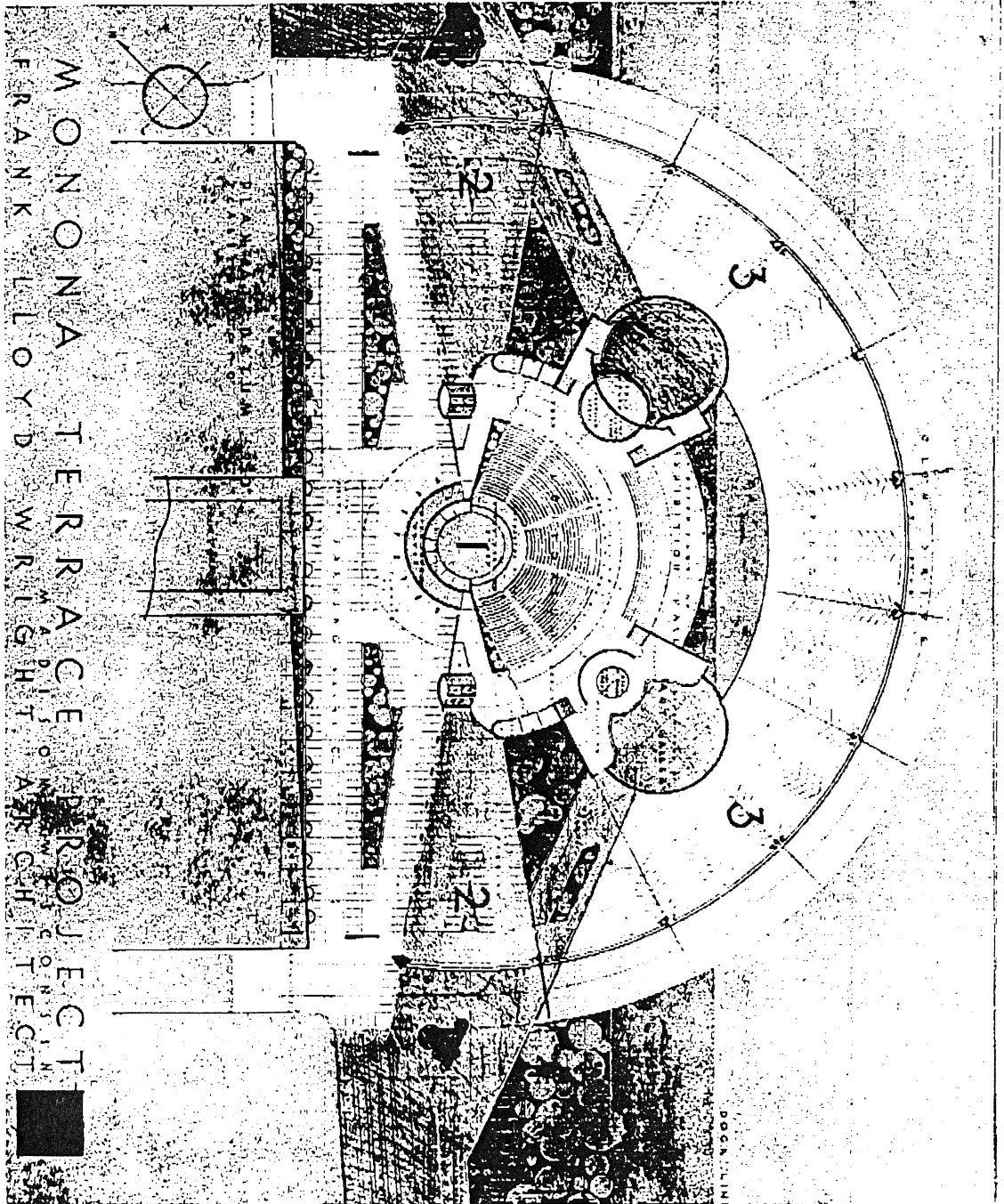
NOTE: Plan showing the several stages of progress proposed for the Monona Terrace Project.

- 1. Civic Center and Auditorium and appropriate parking.
- 2. Additional parking and approaches from Olin Drive around the lake. Municipal boat houses and museum and theater areas above.
- 3. Extended parking facilities and the Olin drive itself on terrace around the lake. Parking around on the lower terrace.

The civic gardens above, which apply to all three.

Finally there are the two skyscrapers for revenue.

The completed schema includes parking for more than 3,500 cars, the auditorium and civic-center buildings, together with the public pleasure gardens, boat houses and the picturesque addition to the drive around the lake. Where the Union railway station was proposed there is room for a sports-field or still more parking.



The Monona Terrace Project is what might well be termed "a Natural." That is to say, the features were all there and ready, waiting to be so combined into a work of Art — this time, the great art of Architecture — that Madison, so richly gifted by nature with beautiful waterfronts (as few cities have been), might do something useful and beautiful with them; "on her own." The town, itself centered nearest Lake Monona, has ignored and virtually lost the beauty of this lake because, contrary to state law, she has been cut off from the lake by railroad tracks running across the Monona water-front within two blocks of the center of town — now the state capitol — and the lake is left as a dead end only to an axial street two blocks long centering on the capitol building itself. Added to this, parallel to the tracks, the lake shore itself has been already filled in for a wide drive-way across the entire width of the city.

My boyhood in Madison was spent on the lakes. As an architect, omission by the city of their civic value

to the city plan seemed to me most obvious of the city's many sins of omission. In later years this feeling kept working upon me until about fifteen years ago, at my own expense, I worked out the original Monona Terrace Balcony Project. Editor Ewyue, of the Capital Times, impressed and since loyal, gave the drawings their first fine break in his newspaper; the State Journal followed. But Madison at that time had a mayor, himself a reactionary architect hating modern architecture in general and therefore myself in particular. There was, then (with John M. Olin gone), but little public spirit apparent. However, the University re-sponded by modelling the scheme through its landscape department under Franz Aust. But the project in its entirety was never really presented where it could be seen and properly understood by the Madisonians.

Fifteen more years passed, and yet citizens — by way of the Unitarian Church, the Harold Groves, Mary Lescohier and their many friends leading, inspired by the edifice I had built for them (the Unitarian Church) —

remembered the scheme and wondered why so great and obvious a civic advantage to the city of Madison had been left to die. Other citizens soon came in great numbers to their way of thinking and looking at the matter. Presently came to me a request from a "citizens' committee." This committee asked me to show the scheme again. The original model — so I found — had entirely disappeared. But the drawings were recovered, revamped, and Editor Ewyne went through the motions again of presenting them ably to the public. But — already — a project to build a six million dollar combination office building for the city and county officials, designed by Chicago architects, now held the center of the stage and the political members of the body-politic proceeded to buy a city-block on this same avenue and spend six million dollars upon it. They did not wish this, their own scheme, disturbed by what they chose to call "a mere dream." But several meetings were requested by more and more citizens and with the committee they were now trying to get the city council to join

in the revival of the original comprehensive Monona Terrace Project. Meetings were held against the official will and so without convincing the council. Their own office building project, being only a partial solution (no parking), it seemed reasonable for them now to combine with the Terrace Project, if only to secure parking facilities and save money on ground and construction. But no such program could be made and endorsed by the council. The citizens' Monona Terrace Project Committee, by this time feeling unduly put upon by "authority and the insolence of public office," the city now likely to be cheated out of a great civic-betterment to the glory of the people of Madison themselves, now came forward and demanded a referendum. To get this they had to secure six or seven thousand bonafide signatures of Madisonians. They did; finally getting many more than the needed number. The project then went to the vote, winning on all counts, with myself elected by the voters as architect. The democratic process worked. The people of the City of Madison were

to have a great civic-betterment according to their own choosing.

At last the democratic process had broken into politics in Madison by way of Architecture. Wisconsin was now and to this extent a "democratic state." The citizens were themselves interested and now increasing in numbers were asking for action. Aroused, they were telling their politicians what to do for a Civic Center on the Monona Terrace Project site. But it was too late for the City-County offices to become a feature of this new citizens' Monona Terrace Project utilized as a civic center. Politics had seen to that. But the awakened civic enterprise of Madisonians was now represented by their Monona Terrace Project; the great terraced balcony over the lake was to include a civic center and auditorium project. These buildings were to be embodied within the original terrace construction on the Monona Terrace site. Four million dollars was voted to accommodate the civic center. One and one half million for parking.

Encouraged by this new vision and vote of the people, I went to work to turn the original Monona Terrace Project into a complete, accurate scale model for a comprehensive civic center and auditorium, as well as the terrace-parking project which it already was, to be built in three stages, total cost eleven million dollars. The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation expended some three thousand five hundred man hours, besides my own previous and now new hours spent upon the creation represented by the model, and duly all was presented to the city of Madison by way of the city-officials. The new model showed all the economic parking and terracing of the original scheme, but the comprehensive civic center project by way of development was now designed to be built in several stages. This "being built in stages" would bring the whole scheme definitely into focus so far as the immediate money-matter for the civic center was concerned. This model, when presented as requested by the committee appointed by the council, seemed to clear up objections and end most

of the political opposition. The way ahead seemed clear and open for a time — to be exact, until the re-election of the mayor.

The scheme, now arranged in three stages of development, provides for extensive public and private parking of several thousand cars, Civic Auditorium, various Civic Center Activities now without a home, Civic Municipal boat houses, bathing beaches all favoring and featuring Lake Monona as of and for the enjoyment of the citizens. A Union Railway Station on the lower level was still a possibility. Many minor features were also included. The model was so carefully and accurately built to scale that it clearly showed the several stages or steps by which the civic improvement, as a whole, might become an accomplished fact with no actual cost in taxes to the taxpayers of Madison. This complete model demanded by the committee of the city council was the real document needed to show to all who really wished to see just what this greater-Madison project really added to the city for the

use of the people and to the life of the city at large. This comprehensive model was variously exhibited about town, generally admired and seemingly approved.

The long-delayed wedding between the City of Madison and beautiful Lake Monona — the lake nearest her heart (her heart being the state capitol) — had too long been delayed. Now by a simple extension of the two nearest central streets and the upper central street into a circular terrace and great balcony projecting over railroad tracks and over waste-ground which had already been filled in below at the lake level — at least ten and three tenths acres (this acreage multiplied by three levels) was added to the very heart of the city of Madison, reclaimed and added within two blocks of the capitol at no cost for ground at this crucial central point — an added area worth in itself to the city several million dollars. Not only was the city itself expanded to include a small overhead use of the lake but both city and lake were so joined

that both were made more beautiful by being thus brought together, increasing the beauty of both without sacrificing anything of either. These belated nuptials between lake and city, so long in coming, were at last evident in all respects in Architecture.

BENEFITS

Benefit 1: By way of this citizens' play-ground, the Monona Terrace Project — a great beneficence — Madison creates and adds about 32 acres of productive floor area to its city center within two blocks of the state capitol. This reclaimed area is in itself worth millions to the city. The city takes a proud place among cities of the world, adding other millions to its real estate values because of activity increased by greater interest.

Benefit 2: The capital city of the state at last thus becomes fully worthy of its position as such.

Benefit 3: The University need no longer look upon the town as a mendicant.

Benefit 4: The value of all contiguous real estate on the town square is especially increased, for the merchants there particularly, because of the greater dignity and beauty of the city itself and its increased attraction to travellers, world-wide.

Benefit 5: The many buildings needed by the city for its social activities are distinguished in nature and all are incorporated within the Terrace itself for practical economic development in several stages so that no expenditures are necessary for exteriors for any of these structures, such as would be the case in usual circumstances. A great economy effected by this joint realization of all features together in one building-construction that is no more expensive in itself than is the usual factory-building.

Benefit 6: The idea and the methods of construction throughout the project are scientific — the last word in modern building-construction. The Project has had and will continue to have the services of the greatest engineers and builders in the world during construction.

Benefit 7: All tangible as well as the many intangible proceeds thus accruing to the present citizens of Madison are immeasurable in future. Both are great in every respect. In all the values that make Madison enjoyable as a city, Madison is involved.

Benefit 8: The remarkable character of the project as a whole is beyond question beautiful and appropriate, entirely within the city's grasp. This is civic betterment, if properly managed, earning its own way. No taxes need be paid by the citizens if the project is promoted and managed according to the laws governing publicly approved civic improvements.

Benefit 9: The Monona Terrace Project forms a great syndrome consisting of the Capitol Square, the Capitol itself, the central avenue from Dome to Terrace, the great balcony parking area over the wastelands below, and then the lake itself, intensified in beauty by the architectural foreground — all of which will have incalculable value to the present and future of Madison itself as a city. Madison

thus inspired will come alive as a more noble feature — a city among all great cities (even Venice) — a world-wide inspiration.

When the great advantage of this architectural synthesis is seen and realized, there will come what has always proved — the world over — to be the most lasting enjoyment of a civilization: a noble environment appropriate to nature and beautiful in style of construction.

Last, by her foresight and courage as manifest in the promotion of the Monona Terrace Project, Madison itself awakens as a city and ransoms its own beautiful site, combining her present civil assets with her future growth and power. A great pooling of her actual resources, in which she herself — Madison — creates wealth beyond immediate computation — a real wealth that is both physical and spiritual.

The immediate practical consequences of this coalition

of lake and capitol of the city thus effected are tremendous, both in pride and in economy. This civic project will proceed with reasonable care and intelligence and should, well within two years' time, be complete as to Stage One: the Civic Center and the Parking Areas belonging thereto — about 111 cars and 20 acres of floor space. As the scheme proceeds as shown from this stage of buildings to the Second Stage, and the stages thereafter, all meantime so planned as to be presentable at each stage as a whole, the parking advantages of the scheme are realized. To cap the climax when finished a pair of graceful young skyscrapers, fifteen stories high, costing about \$350,000, foundations integral with the Terrace, have been designed as not only feasible features of the general scheme, but desirable because they would hasten the liquidation of the whole self-liquidating improvement. As planned, the project entire has a self-supporting character by way of its many uses. Without detriment to the whole scheme, these slender tall buildings would not only increase the

distinctive use, economy and beauty of the whole, but might, by themselves, pay for the total improvement within sixty years.

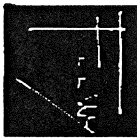
It is not too much to say that when the Monona Terrace Project is completed one of the most real and economic expressions of civic beauty in modern engineering-architecture yet put on record in the world comes to realization in Madison. Madisonians, by their own means, with no additional taxation, build not only their present city into the immediate future for their children, but for their children's children's children to enjoy. Meantime they would enjoy its use and they might justly be proud: a real sense of dignity and beauty is added to city-lives by their own vision and initiative, notwithstanding the doubts and confusion that characterize the beginning of nearly every such civic enterprise in these early stages.

The small area of the lake covered by the balconies of the terrace makes any filling-in of the lake unnecessary;

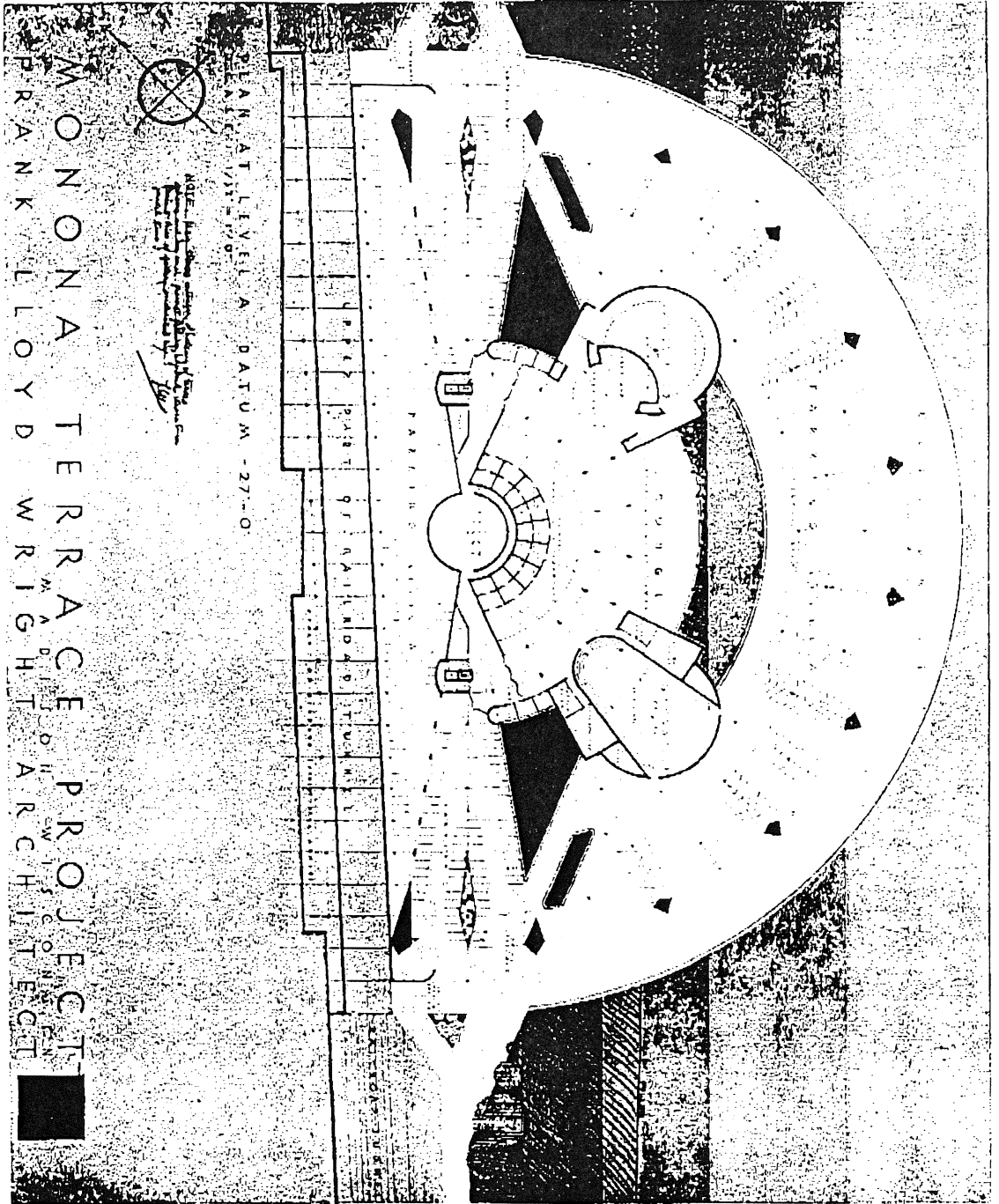
nor is its use diminished. No serious interruption of the use of the lake or the present drive beside it is necessary. The lake area thus occupied by the city (as Zurich uses its lake in Switzerland, for instance, or Venice) is small — but significant. When compared with the present encroachment of Olin Drive and the railroads right-of-way, the occupation of the lake is only by balconies extending over the lake. If the terrace-balcony is illegal, present encroachments are infinitely more so.

Concerning any present or future political opposition to the project: "Given the right idea, one man is a majority." John Bright said that in the House of Commons, and

proved it by himself. So in this case it will prove true. Nothing goes to politics — not a perquisite to politicians beyond the credit of rendering real service to the people who elected them. Counted in legitimate costs of the construction of the terrace — there is no cost of ground and no real-estate exploitation, although the value of every foot of real estate in Madison is increased by the project. This integrity alone may prove to be a political handicap to be overcome. Most needed now is the competent promoter familiar with the financial arrangements recently provided by law for the execution of meritorious civic improvements like the Monona Terrace Project.



FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT
Talesin, May 1st, 1955



NOTE: Plan shows extension of balcony of terrace above and beyond present filling on beyond shore line. Present line of filling indicated by lines.

Another water-front civic improvement by Frank Lloyd Wright. The Massieri Memorial (Dormitory-Library) for young architects on the Grand Canal in Venice.

