

## Characteristics of the Terre Haute Central Business District

LEE GUERNSEY, Indiana State College

The Central Business District of Terre Haute is a rectangular-shaped area bounded by 2nd Street on the west, 9½ Street on the east, Mulberry Street on the north, and Walnut Street on the south. The area is 102.0 acres in size, and is bisected by Wabash Avenue (U. S. 40).

The Central Business District, hereafter termed the CBD for the sake of brevity, is the heart of Terre Haute. It is the place where individually, and collectively, business establishments do a greater volume of business than elsewhere in the city. However, the economic dominance of the CBD is being challenged today by two relatively new outlying shopping centers which provide for more spacious and more leisure shopping at slightly higher prices and somewhat less selectivity. As a consequence, downtown businessmen in Terre Haute are being forced to analyze the CBD more critically today than ever before. Most all CBD businessmen live in fear that competition of suburban shopping will become even keener.

The Terre Haute CBD is currently plagued with some difficult and challenging problems. Among them are obsolete and unattractive downtown buildings, nonconforming land uses, low assessed valuations, vacant buildings, and retail sales which are far below their potential. In addition, downtown traffic congestion is frequently observable, parking is often expensive or hard to find, and truck terminals are so limited that loading often occurs on public streets. Unprofitable or undesirable land uses are all too common within the Terre Haute CBD.

### Land Use

Of the 102 acres which comprise the Terre Haute CBD, 39.1 acres are in streets and alleys. This is the largest single land use shown in Figure 1 which depicts the street level use of all buildings and most all lots. Ranking second to streets and alleys in acreage consumed in the CBD is retail and service land use with 30.4 acres, and third is public parking with 10.5 acres. Institutional facilities and wholesale business and warehouse uses occupy 6.5 acres and 4.6 acres respectively. Within the street level of the CBD area only 2.7 acres are used by residences, 2.5 acres of the land are vacant, office space occupies 1.4 acres, transportation, utilities and communications occupy 1.2 acres and 1.1 acres are consumed by industries.

**Retail and Service.** Within the Terre Haute CBD, 30.4 per cent of the land is used for retail and service sales (Figure 1). The main retail area fronts on Wabash Avenue although numerous small specialty stores and service shops are located on streets a block or two away from Wabash Avenue. The largest department stores are located between 5th and 7th Streets on Wabash Avenue with the major exception of a large furniture store recently opened beyond the eastern edge of the CBD at 9½ Street and Wabash Avenue.

**Offices.** A large proportion of the total office space is presently contained within the rectangular area of the existing CBD despite the fact that only 1.4 acres of ground level area are occupied by offices. The offices of professional men are concentrated mainly near the center of the CBD

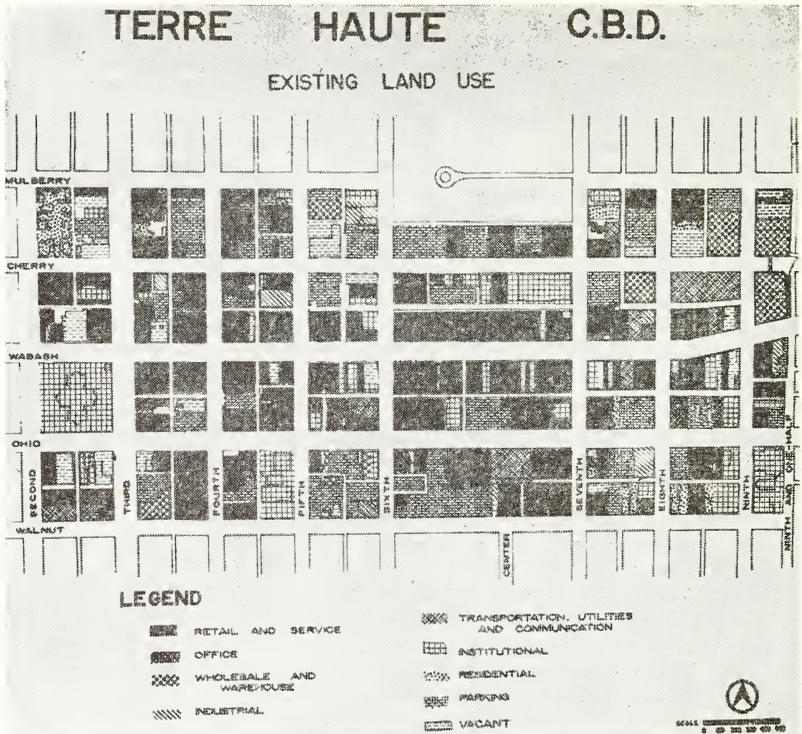


Figure 1

although some are moving to outlying areas. Lawyers, however, have tended to remain near the center of the CBD. Many physicians and surgeons are also located near the center of the CBD. Most professional and business offices are located in buildings with retail outlets occupying the ground floor. Within the CBD, 10.4 per cent of all the total building space is occupied by offices. They provide office facilities for about 15,000 workers despite the small area at the ground level which is occupied by offices.

**Wholesaling and Warehouses.** Most Terre Haute wholesaling and warehouse facilities are located beyond the western edge of the CBD. Wholesale farm produce, lumber, salvage and grain make up the main categories of wholesale companies. Currently, only 4.6 acres within the CBD are used for wholesaling and warehouses. Most of this acreage is located at the northeastern edge of the CBD (Figure 1). At the present time, a considerable amount of wholesale loading is done on public streets which causes problems of definite traffic congestion. Trends would indicate that at least twice the present acreage will be required for the future wholesale and warehouse use. Currently, Terre Haute uses only 723.0 square feet per employee, in contrast to 1,000 square feet per employee as an acceptable planning standard for wholesale land use.

**Industrial.** A wide variety of industries occupy only 1.1 acres within the CBD. Most are composed of diversified but intensive light industries

such as printing and publishing. Seven CBD industries are located in a scattered random pattern as shown by Figure 1.

**Transportation, Utilities and Communications.** Only 1.2 acres of land within the CBD are occupied by transportation, utilities, and communication facilities. The two largest spaces shown in Figure 1 are used by the bus station and by the telephone company. Most others are small scattered buildings. Contiguous to, but outside of, the CBD on the north, east, and west are 18.7 acres used for transportation, utilities, and communications. This is 15 times as much area as that so used within the CBD. Accounting for these acreages are mainly railway facilities concentrated to the north and east and trucking facilities and utilities which front along the Wabash River to the west of the CBD.

**Institutional.** About 40 per cent of all the institutional acreage of Terre Haute is located within the CBD. Institutional uses occupy 6.5 acres of CBD land (Figure 1). Churches, schools, fraternal organizations and government buildings make up most of the institutional land use.

**Residential.** Only 2.7 acres are classified as residential within the CBD. Most residential areas within the CBD have seriously deteriorated and most existing housing units adjacent to the CBD are also in poor condition. Many former CBD residential buildings have been adapted for small retail stores and office use, or cleared to provide land for parking lots and automobile service stations. But, a few old houses still exist around the CBD fringe, most of which are on the northwest and southeast (Figure 1).

**Parking.** Public parking occupies 10.5 acres within the CBD. It is generally placed within one or two blocks of the large department stores which front on Wabash Avenue (Figure 1). A survey of parking spaces conducted during the summer of 1960 revealed a total of 3,054 parking spaces. Of these, 1,370 stalls are available in commercial parking lots and 315 parking spaces are set aside for either private or institutional uses. The remainder of 1,369 spaces are "on street" curb parking.

**Vacant.** Within the CBD there are 2.5 acres vacant. Three such areas are found even at the choice locations between 6th Street and 7th Street along Wabash Avenue. The largest amounts of vacancies are in the three blocks between Ohio Street and Wabash Avenue and between 3rd and 6th Streets, and in the two blocks fronting on Wabash Avenue between 8th and 9th Streets (Figure 1).

#### Assessments

Since the very nature of the real estate market is a constantly changing one, it is never possible to obtain a precise picture of the pattern of values. Assessed values which are available from figures prepared by the tax assessor's office, give approximate relationships to true market values. These data were gathered for both land and improvements and are here presented as the total assessed valuation for the CBD area. These data were gathered on a lot-by-lot and building-by-building basis for the entire CBD and plotted by the generalized patterns shown in Figure 2.

A serious consequence brought about by the decline of assessable property values within the CBD is the financial loss to the City. Property

values have been reduced, not only as a result of the removal or demolition of buildings, but also through the loss of retail trade, unprofitable land use, and empty buildings. With the decline of CBD property values, the City's revenue from this source decreases proportionately.

In 1959, the total CBD valuation was \$14.6 million or an average of about \$3.50 per square foot. Land valuations totaled \$5.8 million and the total valuation for improvements was \$8.8 million. Despite the fact that the CBD only includes 102 acres of the approximate 16,000 acres in the entire city, this small area furnished one-seventh of the City's total property valuation in 1959.

### TERRE HAUTE C.B.D. TOTAL ASSESSED VALUATION

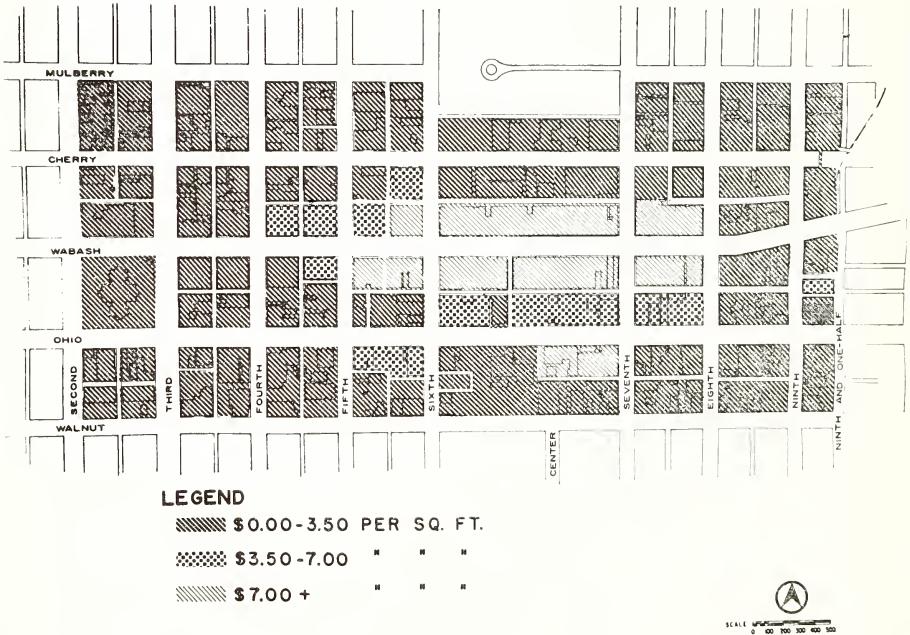


Figure 2

Figure 2 indicates that the blocks from 5th Street to 8th Street fronting on Wabash Avenue contain all the \$7.00+ per square foot assessed valuation with the single exception of the eastern one-half of the block between 6th and 7th Streets along the south side of Ohio Street. The area between 6th Street and 8th Street on the north side of Ohio has an assessed value on land and improvements in the \$3.50 to \$7.00 per square foot category. Other blocks having from \$3.50 to \$7.00 per square foot assessments are between 4th and 6th Streets and front on Wabash, Ohio or Cherry Streets, and a small area between 9th and 9½ Streets. Assessments of less than \$3.50 per square foot characterize all of the area west of 4th Street and all except one small area east of 8th Street.

The fact that about 28 blocks (Figure 2) within the CBD have a total assessed valuation of less than \$3.50 per square foot represents a real loss of income to the City. It should be readily evident that it is of vital importance to the City to maintain or enhance real estate values. Even the smallest of such losses or reductions of taxes represents a trend toward downtown deterioration.

About three blocks are tax exempt. Churches, the County Court House, the Boy's Club, and several fraternal organization buildings comprise a few of the institutions that are located within the CBD which are exempt from real estate tax. Total tax-exempt properties in Terre Haute amounted to \$9,641,500 for the entire City in 1959.

**Buildings Ratings**

The conditions and appearance of buildings in the Terre Haute CBD were also analyzed during the summer of 1960. In the survey of these buildings, scores were assigned to each building on the basis of age, construction, condition and appearance. In this technique of scoring, a number was assigned to each factor. The factors were then totaled and plotted on a Cumulative Building Rating Map (Figure 3). In effect, the survey evaluated the overall physical condition of the structure. For example, a modern concrete well-maintained structure obtained a high score,, whereas

**TERRE HAUTE C.B.D.**

**CUMULATIVE BUILDING RATING**

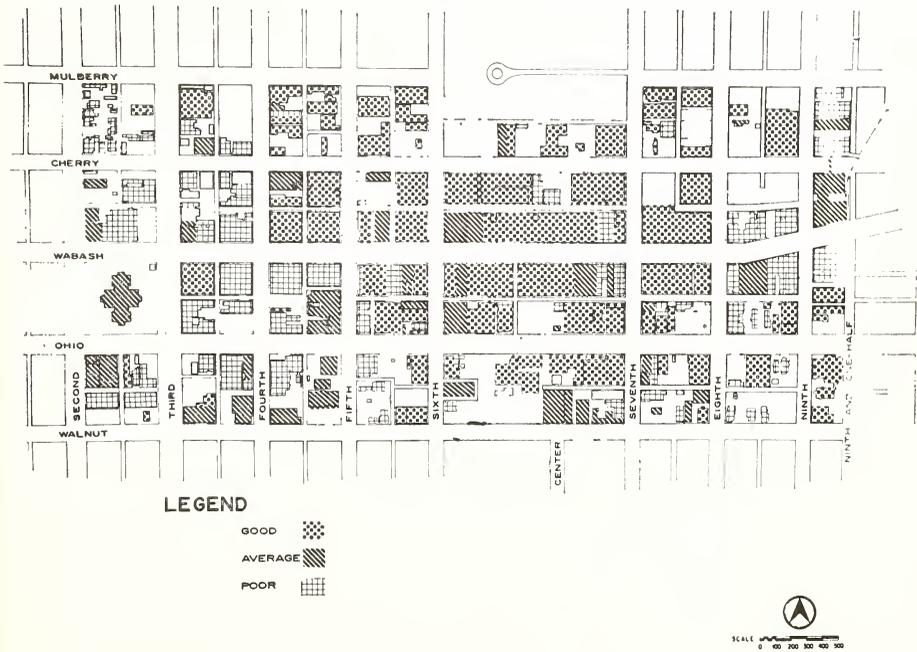


Figure 3

an older frame building in need of considerable improvement obtained a low score.

The cumulative building scores have been grouped into categories of good, average, and poor. The 243 buildings were found to be fairly equally divided into 3 categories. In fact, 73 were judged to be poor, 80 average, and 90 classed as good buildings. Correspondingly, the total amount of floor space shown in Figure 3 is 23 per cent poor, 25 per cent average, and 52 per cent good. Figure 3 depicts the cumulative scores and shows that most buildings having a good rating are located between 5th and 8th Streets. In contrast, most poor buildings exist to the west of 5th Street.

The following conclusions may be drawn from an analysis of the Cumulative Building Rating: (1) The tallest and most important buildings near the center of the CBD have the best ratings and the lowest cumulative scores were most often totaled for the buildings located on the periphery; (2) The good buildings have few vacancies, but almost two-thirds of the total space in the poor buildings is either vacant or is used as storage; (3) Approximately 48 per cent of retail and service uses are located in good buildings; (4) Seventy-three per cent of the office space is located in good buildings; (5) The majority of institutional uses (56 per cent) are located in buildings which are rated as average; and (6) The majority of industrial uses are located in either average or poor buildings.

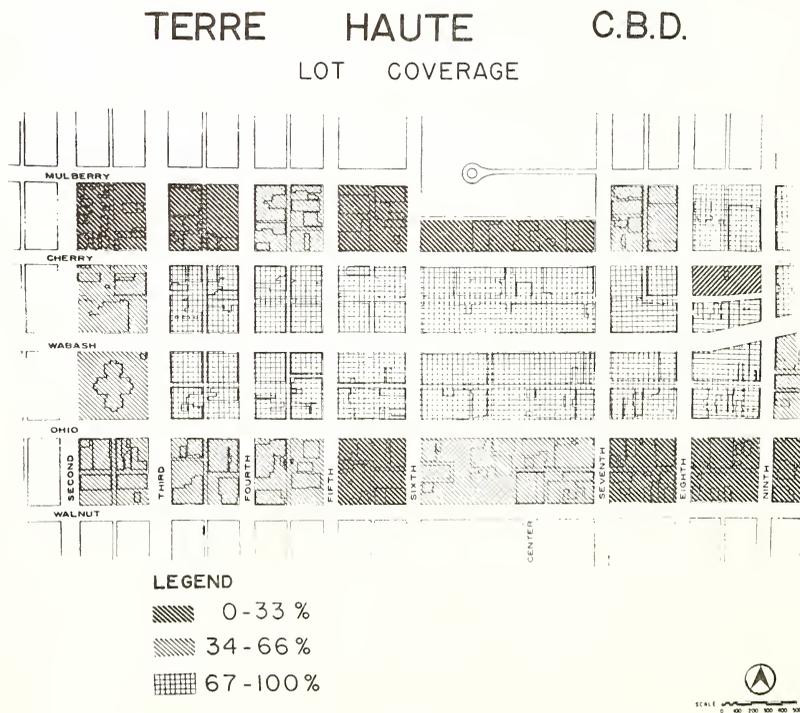


Figure 4

### Lot Coverage

The proportion of blocks covered by buildings, termed the lot coverage, of the CBD was also measured and plotted by entire blocks. Figure 4 indicates that the most concentrated structural density of buildings is located along Wabash Avenue from 3rd to 9th Streets. The extreme northeastern edge is the only other area to have more than a 67 per cent lot coverage. Nine blocks which are mostly located to the south or west have between 34 per cent and 66 per cent of the lot covered by buildings. The proportions of lot coverage of less than one-third covered with buildings are mostly located either to the southeast or northwest. In fact, some of these blocks would not be considered a part of the Terre Haute CBD if the Murphy and Vance CBD index method had been employed as the basis for delimiting the CBD.

### Conclusions

The best utilization of land occurs in the blocks between 6th and 8th Streets along Wabash Avenue, and on the south side of Ohio Street between 6½ and 7th Street. The lowest utilization of space is obtained between 2nd and 3rd Streets and between Mulberry and Cherry Streets. Other poorly utilized areas are located west of 4th Street, south of Ohio Street and east of 7th Street. A well-planned CBD rehabilitation program is needed to raise the assessed valuation, increase the structural density, improve the building rating and alter existing land uses. Many CBD buildings are structurally sound but functionally obsolete and unattractive. A well-planned remodeling and new building program together with an improved circulation system should help in revitalizing the Terre Haute CBD.