

A brief overview of some historical details of the city of Oak Ridge, Part 10

As we continue looking at some details of the history of the city of Oak Ridge, one resource stands out, *A City is Born, A History of the Oak Ridge Community Operations*. That very detailed document was published in 1961 by the Atomic Energy Commission as the city had just completed becoming incorporated in the state of Tennessee.

Changes began to be made as early as January 1947, when the AEC took charge of what had previously been the Clinton Engineer Works. The first entry in *A City is Born* states, "Effective January 1, 1947, the AIT [American Industrial Transit, Inc.] fee was reduced to \$8,000 per month, plus incentive fee. Commencing April 1, 1946, AIT had begun to convert subcontracted, off-area bus transportation to a non-contractual commercial system. Fees had been reduced commensurate with decreased operations from \$70,000 per month plus incentive, to the figure above noted."

During 1947 a total of 24 dormitories were sold "as is, where is." Additionally, the operations of another 18 dormitories and three efficiency apartments were advertised. James H. Moore Company was the low bidder and was awarded a lump sum contract to operate them.

During 1948 studies were completed by such firms as Lyman Moore on home ownership and private enterprise regarding future operations and management of the towns for which AEC had assumed responsibility, including Oak Ridge. An industrial-type cost accounting system was implemented in 1949.

Bus riders were among the first to see changes that affected individuals directly. "Effective July 1, 1948, price of school tickets and badges were increased from \$1.25 to \$2.00 per month. Use of tokens was discontinued; on-area fares became 10 cents or a valid transfer. A fare of 15 cents or a valid transfer and 5 cents was instituted for all express runs operating direct from the residential areas and Jackson Square to and from the three work areas. Many riders protested through discontinuing use of buses."

On September 17, 1948, J. L. Jacobs & Company, of Chicago, was engaged to "make a study of the most desirable method of establishing an incorporated government in Oak Ridge and a financial feasibility survey together with recommendations relative to a sound basis for fiscal relationship between federal, state, and city governments."

Skidmore, Owings & Merrill completed an economic analysis of Oak Ridge housing. In December 1948 a Master Plan to guide the physical growth and development of Oak Ridge was completed and delivered to the AEC. I have a copy of this well-designed Master Plan and find the early insight contained in the plan to be amazing.

Here is an example. Remember this was written in 1948.

"One of the most noticeable differences between Oak Ridge and a normal community is its lack of commercial facilities. There is no central business district as such. Jackson Square, the largest and most popular shopping center, was designed to serve only 12,000 people and is limited in its scope and variety of retail services.

"Grove Center and Jefferson Center are smaller commercial centers serving the west end of the city and the former dormitory area. Other facilities include some permanent and well-planned neighborhood stores, a few temporary neighborhood stores, and miscellaneous small enterprises scattered along Oak Ridge Turnpike.

"Less than one-third of the total number of buildings being utilized for commercial purposes are of permanent construction. Most of these are in the three original neighborhoods built around Jackson Square.

“Statistics show that Oak Ridge people buy their normal supply of groceries and drugs from Oak Ridge merchants but that they shop in Knoxville or elsewhere for most of their clothing and durable goods. The present plan to open the city and encourage private business enterprise should lead to the early development of a central business district providing an adequate number and variety of retail stores and other commercial facilities.

Of interest is an entry in this early Master Plan, considering the current planning for redevelopment of the “Oak Ridge Mall” area—the same area as was originally identified in the Master Plan for a “Central Business District” for Oak Ridge:

“The \$35,000,000 volume of retail sales and services estimated for the central business district, together with such other necessary facilities as a hotel, office building, library, post office, and so on, will require an estimated building area of approximately 24 acres The total area to be allocated to the central business district is approximately 100 acres.

“The determination of the location, size, and plan of the central business district was a most important consideration of the Master Plan. The objectives governing site selection include central location convenient to all the people of Oak Ridge, every access by main traffic arteries, serving both local and outside shoppers, elimination of heavy through traffic within the business district, and proper relationship to the adjoining administrative and cultural center.

“The selected site . . . [is] near the geographical center of Oak Ridge and close to the southeast and most important gateway of the city. It lies between and near the intersection of Oak Ridge Turnpike and Scarboro Road, the principal north-south, east-west traffic artery. These main highways together with connecting major streets form the boundary of the district but do not pass through it. Within the district itself, well organized pedestrian and motor traffic together with adequate parking facilities are an integral part of the plan.

“Oak Ridge has unparalleled opportunities of developing a complete central business district, planned and built as an integrated unit and incorporating all of the present-day concepts of commercial planning, which have been proved so successful in smaller shopping centers built recently in other cities.”

Next we will see the transition continue as we look at other changes in the 1950s and early 1960s.