Beacon’s West End Story: A Historical Perspective of Urban Renewal in the 1960s and 70s
Beacon Historical Society Archives
Beacon Housing Authority at Forrestal Heights
Beacon’s West End: A Historical Perspective of Urban Renewal in the 1960s and 70s.
This is Beacon
Beacon’s West End Story
Podcast Series
iambeacon.org/this-is-beacon

Ruben Simmons and Brooke Simmons

Professor Hochfelder (left), Connie Perdreau (right)
Lecture on Urban Renewal
by Professor Hochfelder

Scope of Urban Renewal

- Nationally: $20B, 1,258 towns, 3,284 projects.
- At least 300K families displaced, ~1.35M people total
  (not including urban expressways, another ~1M).
- 364K acres demolished, 570 sites.
- NYS: $1.6B, 91 towns, 251 projects.
- Beacon: ~$10M, or about $800 per capita federal
  spending. (~$1200 per capita total).

Beacon Library Community Room
Beacon's West End Story: Portrait of a Community

Beacon Library Exhibition

Michelle Rivas & Leonard Sparks from the Highlands Current
Beacon’s West End Story: Summer of 1966

Beacon Library exhibition

Photos by Michael Raab

"Workers needed now in a racially torn city, 60 miles from NYC to work with recreation program for the underprivileged and organize community action groups" Village Voice, July 21, 1966
Video Interview and Chronogram Article about the Summer of 1966
Always Present, Never Seen
A Black History of the Highlands
By Britain Mann

There is a story that can be heard told from many mouths. The story is one of survival and achievement, of triumph against all odds. It is the story of a people who, against all the odds, have managed to maintain their identity and culture, and to pass it on to future generations. It is the story of the Black community of the Highlands, and it is a story that is as important today as it was in the past.

The story begins in the early 20th century, when the Highlands was a small, rural community on the outskirts of Beacon. At that time, the area was predominantly white, and the Black community was small and isolated. But the community was determined to survive, and to thrive.

In the 1930s, the New Deal's Public Works Administration (PWA) built a series of public works projects in the area, and the Black community was able to benefit from these projects. The community used the money from these projects to build schools, churches, and social clubs, and to improve the quality of life for its members.

In the 1950s, the community faced a new challenge: segregation. The community was forced to fight to obtain equal rights, and to ensure that its members were treated fairly. But the community was determined to fight, and to succeed.

Today, the Black community of the Highlands is a vibrant and thriving community, with a rich history and culture. It is a community that is determined to continue to thrive, and to pass on its history and culture to future generations.

.URBAN RENEWAL REVISITED

People and local Beacon residents to be featured in new exhibit

A West End house is being restored to make room for a development.

A Look Back at Urban Renewal

An exhibit and series of talks that begin next week will examine the "urban renewal" that altered the landscape in Beacon during the 1960s and 1970s, when the city demolished most of the buildings comprising the Black community on the West End. "Beacon's West End Story," organized by the Beacon Historical Society, Hudson Public Library, A.M. Beacon and The Highlands Current, will tell the story through historical documents, photos, news clippings, and histories and interactive programs.

Urban renewal was a federal relation to relocate cities with new construction. But as the organizers note, the program often had unviewed and unwanted consequences, particularly on marginalized communities.

"Drs is an untold story and history," said Corinne Whitener-Petrides, a former West End resident who worked on the project. "Beacon's West End was once a vibrant, thriving community full of vigor, talent and potential."
Rise Up at St. Andrew’s Church, the Foundation for Beacon Schools, and Beacon High School students
Museum Educator Grant
Pomeroy Fund, in partnership with the William G. Pomeroy Foundation and the Museum Association of NY.

Connie Perdreau, Museum Educator
Educational Programs at the Beacon Historical Society
Consider the Source New York - a program of the New York State Archives Partnership Trust, through a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services.
SENYLRC helping the Historical Society set up the New York Heritage Digital Collections

Michelle Rivas

Jennifer Palmentiero & Kelsey Milner
BEACON'S WEST END STORY

A Historical Perspective of Urban Renewal in the 1960s and 70s

Beacon’s Urban Renewal story is compelling, complex, and controversial. The story begins in 1962, when municipal politicians and business leaders looked for ways to rejuvenate the city. Beacon’s 19th century homes, businesses, factories, and infrastructure were aging. Industry was departing the city and small shops on Main Street were beginning to close.

A City Development Plan, created by city planning consultants, outlined ways to develop the central business district, clear “blighted” areas to make land available for industry and build an arterial highway/90 on the West End using federal and state funds. Soon after, the federal government agreed to a General Neighborhood Renewal Plan: a broad-scale revitalization program including improvements in housing, commercial and industrial areas, streets, parks, and community facilities. The proposed 10-year plan would encompass five distinctive projects occurring in overlapping years and covering over 20% of the city of Beacon.

By 1966, a substantial majority of Beacon residents opposed the Urban Renewal program. In September, they voted to stop it in a public poll. Concerns included fear of an overreaching federal government, increased taxes, lack of funding and local control, loss of community and property, and further marginalization of the Black community. However, a 3-2 vote from the city council decided the future of the city.

Beacon’s first and most ambitious project involved evicting and relocating a predominately Black neighborhood on the West End. The project also included the building of modern low-to-middle housing for those displaced, and the elderly. Connie Perdreau grew up in the West End on Beekman Street and noted, “It was a double-edged sword. Urban renewal destroyed our community and at the same time it allowed a lot of people to have better, more decent housing.”

All told, by 1975, there were over 500 new units of housing and 250,000 square feet of new industrial space with improvements to infrastructure. Urban Renewal claimed 142 buildings, 205 homes and over 35 businesses. Thirty buildings were accepted into the Neighborhood Improvement Plan and given low interest loans for renovations.

Using materials from the Beacon Historical Society’s archives, Beacon’s West End Story recounts Project 1 which included the demolition of the West End and the building of Forestal Heights and Unity Interfaith (now Davies South Terrace) housing developments, new industrial structures, and the Beacon Recreation Center playground. Additional materials are on display to give an overview of the entire project funded by the Urban Renewal Agency. Inflationary pressures forced the federal government to withdraw funds for further renewal, essentially saving many of Beacon’s historic buildings and neighborhoods from the wrecking ball.

Visit the Beacon Historical Society’s website at beaconhistorical.org/explore and then click on Urban Renewal.