

## The Turbulent 60s

It was a turbulent time in America. The decade of the 60s was fraught with international crises, nuclear brinkmanship, war, civil unrest, and cultural upheaval. Yet, despite the trials and tribulations of the times the nation and our young city managed to forge ahead.

The 1960s were a time of tremendous growth for The Village. The area south of Britton Road had all been developed. A flurry of new subdivisions now took center stage as development exploded north of Britton Road.

In 1960, the plats for the Casady Lakeside Estates 2nd & 3rd Additions were approved. On the heels of these developments, came a new spurt of growth in 1961 with the addition of the Casady Waverly Estates, Casady Manor Sections 2 & 3 and the Dobson & Winter 1st Addition. Soon afterward in 1963 the Dewey Waverly Addition was added. Within a year later in 1965 came the Quail Circle Addition. Then in 1966 the Casady Waverly 2nd Addition was added to the growing map of the city. Finally, in 1968 came the last major development of the decade with the approval of the Casady Waverly Replat.

Over the course of this extensive period of growth, the city struggled to stay abreast of the progress but endured the concomitant growing pains remarkably well. Aiding in the city's effort was the major financial boost that came with the passage of the city's first penny sales tax in November of 1965. The sales tax, however, did not come without a fight.

The municipal sales tax levy had been recently authorized by the state legislature and was promoted aggressively by Oklahoma City Mayor George Shirk. Shirk espoused the view that the sales tax proposition should be placed on the ballot in all the surrounding communities not just in Oklahoma City. To that end, Shirk convened a summit of central Oklahoma Mayors to discuss the tax. Shirk obviously did not want his city to be the only one having the dubious honor of having a sales tax. Oklahoma City merchants were probably not keen on the idea either. Ulterior motives aside, and with all due respect to Shirk, similar arguments were being bantered about in the suburban communities as well, including The Village where the sales tax met stiff resistance.

Floyd Harrison who organized retailers to oppose the tax led opposition to the sales tax locally. Harrison claimed that he was not opposed to the principle of a sales tax but simply did not believe that the city needed the money. That sentiment was echoed in a front-page editorial in the North Star News, which argued that there was "no compelling reason" for the sales tax. To make matters worse, full-page newspaper ads were also published berating the tax and all its evils.

Even the City Council was split on the issue. Council member Mowery sided with the opposition chiming-in that not enough study had been done on the question.

The remaining four members supported the measure, but with varying degrees of enthusiasm.

In the midst of the debate, one troubling uncertainty reared its ugly head. Casting a long shadow over the sales tax election was the nagging question of what would happen if the tax passed in The Village but went down to defeat in Oklahoma City. That eventuality would indeed be “the mother of all nightmares” for local merchants, as the resulting incongruity would put local merchants at a distinct disadvantage to their competitors on the opposite side of the jurisdictional boundary line. This incertitude was milked for all it was worth and opponents of the tax stirred up considerable fanfare over the question. Mayor Blakeley's repartee, however, was simple and to the point: The Council would repeal the tax if it should fail in Oklahoma City.

Reacting to mounting criticism and perhaps worried that the election might be slipping away, Blakeley felt compelled to respond to the relentless media onslaught. Having published an anti-tax editorial on the front page of the North Star News, the editor, with a bit of nudging, allowed Blakeley to respond in kind. Blakeley seized the opportunity and in a spirited letter to the editor appealed to the voters to support the city at this important turning point. The counterassault succeeded and a few days later the voters handily gave the nod to the levy by a hefty margin of 1,447 to 970.

The quantum leap made possible by this milestone enabled the city to expand the police and fire departments, improve drainage, augment street lighting, and begin much needed street maintenance. Over this period, extensive sewer system improvements were also funded to meet the needs of a growing population.

An inevitable consequence of the explosive growth in the 60s, however, would be bickering over land use, --a subject that would become a flash point in city politics.

A noteworthy zoning incident, which actually took place just before the turn of the decade, would pit the city against one of its founders, Floyd Harrison.

The zoning clash began when Dr. O. Alton Watson made application with the city to rezone a tract of land located on the northwest corner of the intersection of Britton Road and Waverly Avenue.

When Watson's land was taken into the city limits, it automatically became residential property in accordance with the provisions of city ordinance. Watson, however, wanted to develop the property for business and had previously sought and obtained commercial zoning from the County Planning Commission. The County Planning Commission's earlier rezoning action had withstood a challenge in District Court but at the time was awaiting appeal before the Oklahoma Supreme

Court. Since the property in question was no longer subject to County jurisdiction, it would appear that the appeal was at this point irrelevant.

Tom Garrett, Sr. led the opposition to the proposed rezoning arguing that there was already enough business in the area. Garrett and his fellow “againers” cited the traffic problems that would be created and the precipitous decrease in property values that would surely ensue.

Dr. Watson countered by arguing that Britton Road had been widened to four lanes and that some six hundred new homes would soon be built to the north to support the proposed business area.

To some observers it might have seemed that Garrett had the upper hand in the battle as he was supported by some mighty big guns indeed. Joining Garrett in the fray were Casady Square merchants, Charles Farmer and Norris Whittaker and Casady Square developer and town co-founder Floyd Harrison. According to Harrison and his Casady Square compatriots, the area simply could not sustain additional business and they emphatically urged the Council to deny the rezoning request.

To hear this coming from Harrison might have come as a surprise to some astute onlookers. After all, just a decade earlier Harrison had helped found the town in order to prevent merchants in Britton from blocking commercial zoning of his Casady Square shopping development. Perhaps no one would notice the minor inconsistency in his rhetoric. In any event, Harrison ostensibly felt no compunction in the turnabout or for that matter in flexing his political muscle to prevent new business from competing with him.

The Council, perhaps seeing through this selfish guise, ultimately voted unanimously to approve the rezoning request. The shopping center that was subsequently built on this corner, although experiencing some setbacks over the years, has remained a vibrant and viable part of the business community. The development has also had little, if any, discernable impact on Casady Square which expanded to the east side of Pennsylvania Avenue in 1964 and then to the northwest corner of Britton and Penn later in the 1970s.

Less than a year would pass before the City would find itself locking horns again with Floyd Harrison. This time the clash was over the city’s sign regulations. The incident took place during the transition from the old three-member City Council to the new charter-mandated five-member City Council. In fact, the issue landed in the new Council’s lap on their very first day in office, --practically before the ink on their respective oaths of office had even had time to dry!

The quarrel was precipitated by the last action taken by the outgoing Council. In April 1960. In that final meeting, the Council voted unanimously to begin enforcement of an ordinance that restricted advertising signs to twelve square feet in

area. By virtue of this action, City Manager Gene Bumpass was instructed by the Council to contact the owners of nonconforming signs to advise them of the new more-stringent regulations.

At first, it seemed that diplomacy would prevail. Bumpass dutifully reported that all of the affected businesses had agreed to comply with the ordinance. It all sounded too good to be true, --and it was. The valiant but unavailing effort encountered a bit of a snag when it affected the towns most prolific homebuilder, Floyd Harrison.

When approached by Bumpass, Harrison balked at the notion of voluntarily removing the large 8 by 24 sign he had just placed at Lakeside and May to advertise his new housing addition west of May. Despite cordial dialog, Harrison refused to budge. The city responded by dispatching Police Chief Jack Reed to take enforcement action. Reed promptly served Harrison with four (4) citations, --one for each of the four preceding days. The summons ordered Harrison to appear in court the following Tuesday. Harrison, snubbing his nose in contempt, refused to appear.

Instead, Harrison directed his attorneys to file a petition in District Court asking for a restraining order and a temporary injunction against the city. The petition asked for relief from any police power, including fines or arrests, or from having, the sign removed.

*(May 12, 1960 was the court date. Don't know the outcome but assume the city ordinance was upheld more research needed here)*

Another skirmish, this time with Og&e, took place early in the decade over the electric company's proposed construction of a new high voltage transmission line. The 69 KVA line was to be built along the westernmost corporate boundary line of The Village from Britton Road to Hefner. The proposal met immediate resistance. Some 300 rankled citizens petitioned the city to block the construction of the unsightly and potentially dangerous line.

As a compromise, OG&E officials were asked to consider underground installation of the line. OG&E, however, flatly rejected the idea due to the high cost of construction.

Having reached an apparent impasse, an ordinance to regulate electric transmission lines was put on the table for consideration. The Council, however, was divided over the issue and the measure was defeated in a 3-2 split with Jerry Bell and Fred Blagg voting in favor of the Ordinance and Clark Horton, Tom Graham and Eugene Matthews voting against.

To this day, the high-voltage line graces the skyline of the far-western edge of The Village. Yet, a toll has been exacted on the apparent victor as well. OG&E has paid dearly over the years to replace wind-flattened sections of the line, --havoc and

expense that might have been avoided had the company agreed to put the line underground from the outset.