



Smokey Hollow: Urban Renewal and the Historic Displacement of a Black Community in Tallahassee

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Abstract

Beginning in the 1940s and continuing through the 1960s, urban renewal efforts across the United States displaced some of the country's poorest communities for the purpose of municipal construction and redevelopment. These communities, dubbed "slums", were appropriated for public use, often becoming urban road or park infrastructure, or resold to private developers. However, an effect of urban redevelopment efforts that went largely unaddressed by the government during this time was the relocation of Black citizens who comprised the majority of these communities.

This project examines the slum clearance of Smokey Hollow, a historically black community in Tallahassee, Florida that was repossessed for the construction of the Apalachee Parkway and Capitol Center in the 1960s. While the purchased properties were cleared for this urban renewal project, a large portion of them were left undeveloped. Thus, it is clear that slum clearance of Smokey Hollow, like many urban renewal projects at the time, was a thinly veiled attempt to rid rapidly developing parts of the city of Black citizens.

Methodology

Through the investigation of Florida archival documents from the 1940s to the 1960s, we hope to offer new perspectives on racial underpinnings of urban renewal efforts. Our research specifically focuses on critically reading the government archive to examine how planners and decision-makers rationalized the destruction of Smokey Hollow. Through examining the legislative, judiciary, and bureaucratic decisions that facilitated the condemnation of these properties, we seek to expose the often thinly veiled racial logic that justified these displacements.

Capitol Center Development

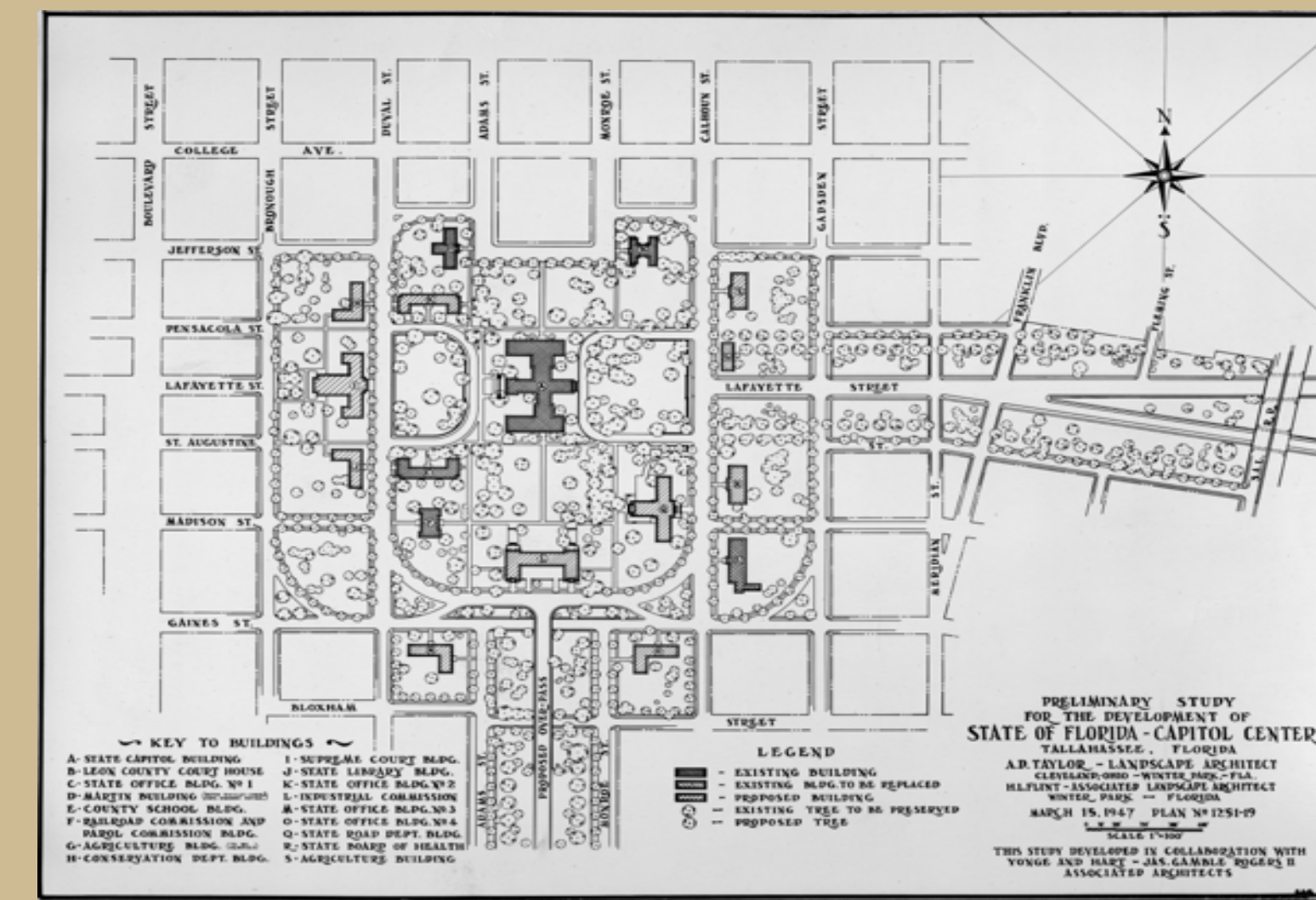
Throughout our group's archival search, we have gained contextual knowledge of the process of Capitol Center property acquisition and found numerous examples of Smokey Hollow's undervaluation. Some prominent examples include:

- In 1962, the portion of Smokey Hollow north and west of the Seaboard Railroad, south of Apalachee Parkway, and east of Adams St. was valued at \$497,770, while other properties within the same boundaries were valued at \$1,844,701 (S. 756 B. 15 F. 12). When comparing the ratio of property valuation to property size of these two categories, it is revealed that **Smokey Hollow properties were valued 116% less than the other properties** contained within these boundaries.
- In discussions of the Capitol Center and Apalachee Parkway's construction, we have found multiple references to beautification and Smokey Hollows elimination. These include "Mr. Taylor was complimented upon the **very fine work [his Capitol Center plan which included Smokey Hollow's elimination]** and upon motion of Mr. Gibbs seconded by Mr. Bannerman, and unanimously carried, the plans and sketches as submitted were approved" (S. 408 B. 62 F. 7) and "We are particularly interested in having the **development of the approaches from the south and east of the Capitol** coordinate with the Capitol Center and it's development" (S. 408 B. 62 F. 9).
- In an internal State of Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission letter from 1962, assistant director O.E. Frye, Jr., states that "He [City Manager for Tallahassee] also pointed out that the entire Smokey Hollow area, which is a colored section line east of the proposed building site, **will eventually belong to the state under the urban renewal program** and that acquisition of this property is to be undertaken very soon" (S. 408 B. 62 F. 2). This quote, in conjunction with more individualized acquisition discussions we have seen through our research, demonstrates how authorities targeted, consolidated, and accelerated Smokey Hollow's acquisition compared to other acquisitions in Tallahassee.

Taylor's Capitol Center Plan



In 1945, landscape architect Albert Taylor was employed by the Florida State Improvement commission to design the new Capitol Center. He planned 10 new buildings, including the Department of Transportation's W. Haydon Burns building - in the boundaries of Smokey Hollow. His plan was officially adopted by the Board of Commissioners of State Institutions in March of 1947. Below, Taylor's plan for the Capitol Center. Left, aerial photographs of the area surrounding the Capitol and Taylor's plan, circa 1947.

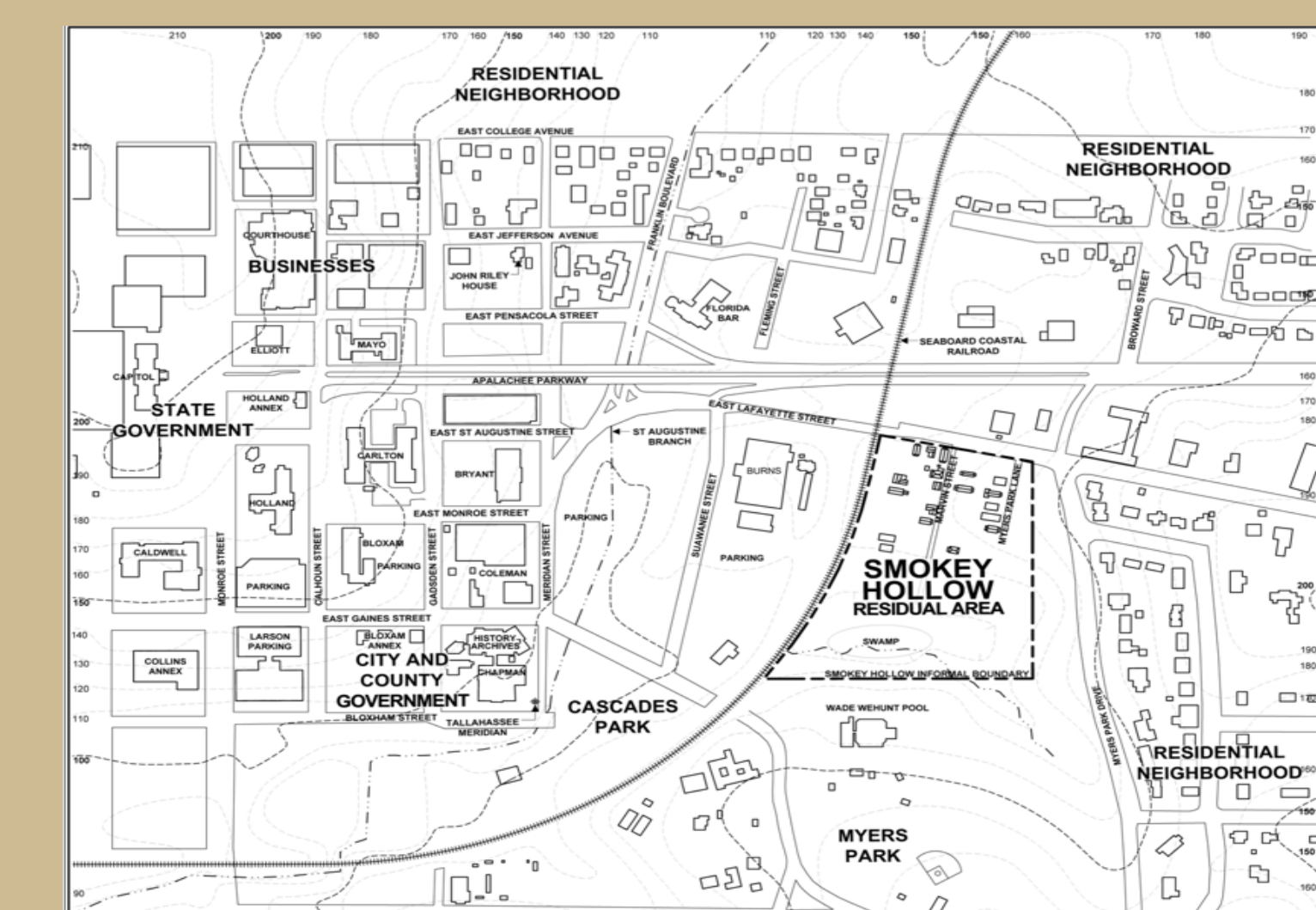
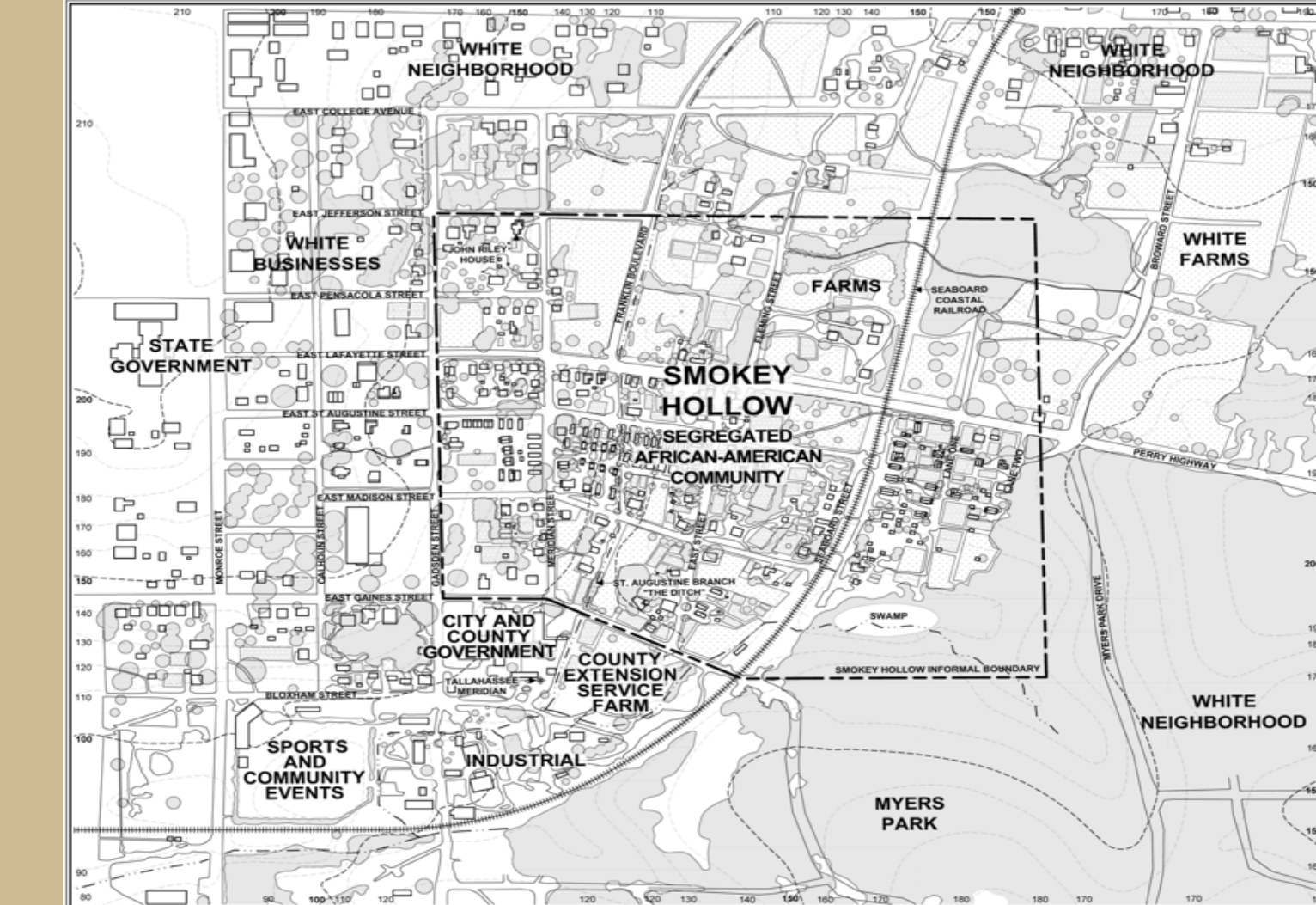
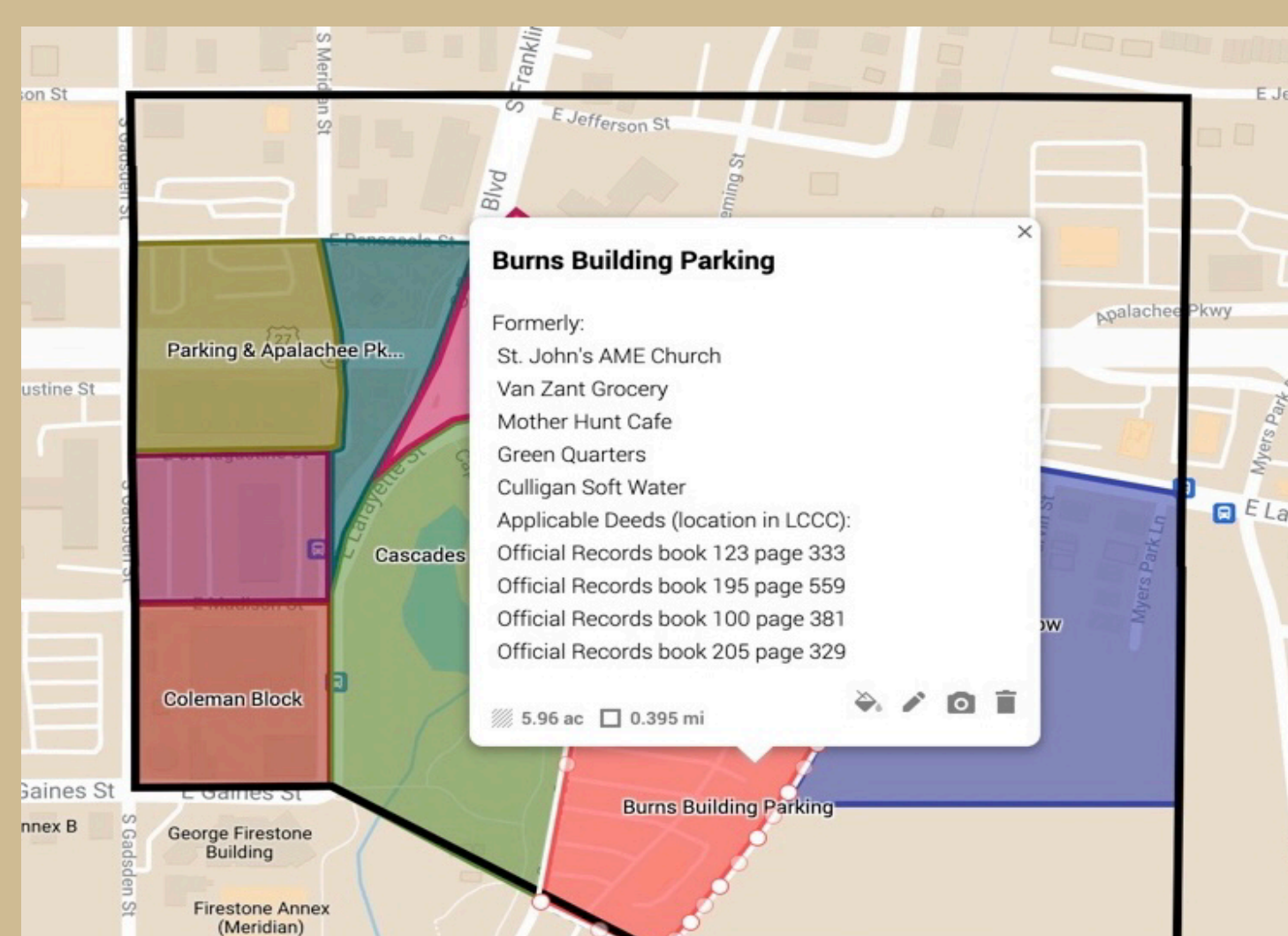
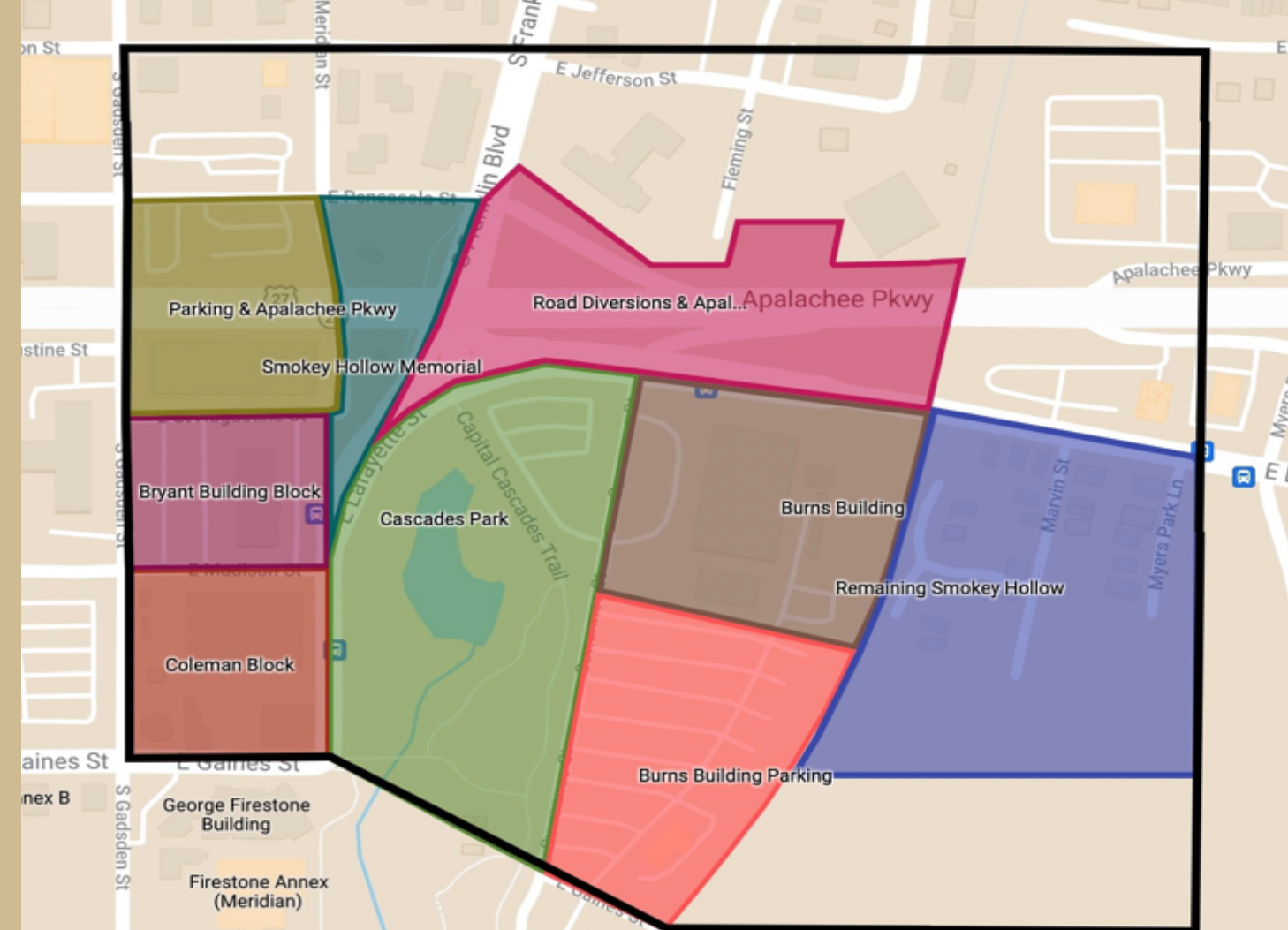


Legislation and Jurisprudence

- 1890s:** Smokey Hollow is established.
- 1937:** US Congress passes Housing Act of 1937, providing financial aid to states to develop public housing needed during the Great Depression.
- 1945:** Landscape architect Albert D. Taylor is hired to design the new Florida State Capitol Center. Taylor's plan is officially adopted in 1947.
- 1949:** Title 1 of Federal Housing Act of 1949 is passed, allowing State authorities to undertake slum clearance and urban renewal.
- 1952:** Florida Supreme Court rules in *Adams v. Housing Authority of Daytona Beach* that state efforts to carry out urban renewal according to Title 1 of Federal Housing Act of 1949 is unconstitutional. Florida is one of two states to reject federal funds.
- 1954:** Section 701 of Housing Act of 1954 provides matching grants to state urban renewal efforts. Florida is unable to participate due to *Adams* ruling.
- 1957:** Gov. Leroy Collins urges Florida Congress to rewrite Florida constitution to allow urban renewal projects to circumvent *Adams* ruling. His proposal is rejected.
- 1958:** City of Tallahassee adopts "workable programs", which allow communities at the city level to receive federal funding for redevelopment of land for public use. Allows communities to carry out urban renewal despite *Adams* ruling.
- 1958:** Both the Federal Government and Tallahassee's city commissioners approve Tallahassee's "workable program".
- 1958:** 66% of Smokey Hollow's 112 residential structures are deemed overcrowded and substandard. City passes resolution to eliminate Smokey Hollow slums through Tallahassee's workable program.
- 1958:** Construction of Apalachee Parkway, which destroys 50 acres of Smokey Hollow and divides the community, is completed.
- 1959:** Florida Supreme court rules in *Grubstein v. Urban Renewal Agency of City of Tampa* that cities may use eminent domain to condemn "slums" for urban renewal. The court emphasizes a distinction between slums (areas that caused "evils" against "the health, safety, morals, and general welfare" and blight (an ambiguous "aesthetic judgement"). The ruling from *Adams v. Housing Authority* is essentially nullified.
- 1959:** State of Florida agrees to pay Tallahassee \$188,000 to clear Smokey Hollow.
- 1960:** Tallahassee voters ratify Leon County Urban Renewal act.
- 1962:** Smokey Hollow's property value estimated at \$2 - 2.5 million, though it later sells to the state for \$1,146,359.
- 1963:** State Road Department begins condemning Smokey Hollow. By 1965, most of Smokey Hollow has been condemned.
- 1964:** State breaks ground on Smokey Hollow.
- 1971:** Cascades Park is completed, implementing Taylor's vision of replacing the historic Black neighborhood with green space.

Maps of Smokey Hollow

On the right, the maps depict the gradual shrinkage of Smokey Hollow from 1938 to 1972. On the left, the map we are constructing depicts current and former structures and deeds in the historic boundaries of Smokey Hollow. The top image is the map, and the bottom image shows the information for an individual map entry. Deeds listed by location in the Leon County Clerk of Courts (LCCC) and exhibit change in land ownership from residents and property owners to government entities.



Acknowledgements

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