Assignment #2: Summarizing Land Use Change in Austin

Block group 1, containing blocks 36, 37, 39, 40, and 41, is bound by 18th Street to the north, by Colorado Street to the east, by 15th Street and 16th Street to the south, and by Guadalupe Street and Lavaca Street to the west. The block group shows a trend moving from vacant open space and residential area to a more commercial and service driven block set. In 1885, this block group was dominated by single-family dwellings and vacant space, but by 1935 these vacant spaces became incorporated into more dwellings except in blocks 37 and 40 which showed residential land giving way to commerce and services. Finally, in 2019, blocks 37 and 41 exhibit the area’s transition to food and entertainment services backed by sufficient parking for their customers. Therefore, the land use transformations within block group 1 demonstrate a general economic restructuring from residential development to the current commercial and service industries.

Starting in 1885, vacant open space was the primary use of land on blocks 36 and 39 with a smaller presence on block 37 and 40. Block 41 had been completely developed leaving no space unused. Residential land use was present in all blocks but with varying presence. On block 36, three residential dwellings were present. Only a single residential dwelling existed on block 37, situated on its southeastern corner. Block 39 had two residential dwellings, surrounded by vacant land. Blocks 40 and 41 each had four individual residential dwellings. Block 41 had a single small specialized retail carpet shop, one women’s dress manufacturer, and two service land uses, a specialized roller rink, and a non-specialized saloon. The remaining land use within our block group not previously mentioned was only present on block 37, where there were many storage structures and a large wagon yard (parking). There was minimal land use concerning
commerce and service. Block 36 had one small portioned use for specialized industrial manufacturing and another small area used for non-specialized retail commerce. Block 37 has the widest presence of commercial and service land use. On block 37 there were two non-specialized wholesale commerce developments, a general merchandise vendor and a grocery store; there were also three non-specialized service developments here, two being small blacksmiths and one small saloon.

In 1935 we see an increase in single-family residential, commercial, and manufacturing and service land use. We see a heavy developmental rise in residential land use mainly through blocks 36, 37, and 39. However, it is block 39 that a change occurred from mostly vacant lots that were transformed into a block that was mostly dominated by more inner-city dwellings running along 15th and Colorado except for an auto filling station on the north western corner of the block. In block 37, we see a separation between the newly developed residential sites and the commercial land closely placed on either side of the alley running north between Guadalupe and Lavaca. The dwellings began grouping and separating from the more industrial and commercial land uses and moved to dominate a focused spot within the block when compared to the 1885 maps. Much like block 39, block 36 also dominated the land use with residential buildings as a development from mostly vacant lots, and like block 37, we see a more focused organization between the northern and southern part of the block between residential and commercial land use. There was a distinct rise in wholesale and retail commercial land use. We see a trend throughout all the blocks that show a largely more condensed site of infrastructure. For example, in block 37, we see an abundance of stores begin to dominate on the eastern side of the northbound alley between Guadalupe and Lavaca. When compared to the 1885 maps, the block holds much smaller, but more frequent shops. Similarly, in block 36, there are far more land uses
being put into play in retail and wholesale following the residential land use. In block 40, there are three large instances of wholesale commercial land use that replaced some of the residential dwellings in block 40 in 1885. This also caused the residential land uses to concentrate in one area of the block, that being the south-western corner running along W. 16th Street. Although residential and commercial land use were dominating the area in 1935, we see a few changes in the frequency of services and manufacturing. In block 40, we see an increase in services on the northern half of the block running along E. Pine Street. These services replaced a couple dwellings that existed in 1885 and took advantage of the open and vacant space on the north side of the alley. The alley between 16th and 17th Street was also an addition to the 1935 block layout, which again encouraged the further separation of the residential land uses and the commercial land uses by moving mostly automobile services side by side. In block 39, nearly a quarter of the area is taken by an auto repair and filling service station, which is the only other land use on this block next to residential. Block 41 has followed the trend in separating along the alleyway as well and most services are on the northern side of the block. The only source of manufacturing history on this block was the dress making building found in 1885, which was replaced in 1935 by another filling station.

Now in 2019 we see a large decline in residential land use, with every block in the set experiencing either a decline or complete loss in overall land used for residential purposes. By 2019, only block 36 and 37, with one apartment complex each, still contain residential land. The most dramatic changes occur in blocks 37 and 39. Block 37 was dominated by single-family dwellings in 1935, and today there is just one apartment complex, located at the corner of Guadalupe and Lavaca. Block 39 was also dominated by dwellings in 1935, but today is almost entirely a surface parking lot that backs up child care services buildings. There is not a massive
change in the amount of land used for commercial purposes from 1935 to 2019, but there is a slight decline, mostly in favor of parking lots and services. The biggest change occurs in block 37, which in 1935 contained multiple wholesale and retail stores, but today only twin liquors on the corner of 16th and Lavaca remains. As we saw the decline in residential land use from 1935 to 2019, we see an equally substantial development in land used for services. Each block in the set experienced an increase in the amount of land used for services during this period. On the eastern side of blocks 36 and 37 between 16th and 18th Street we see a significant increase in the number of restaurants, taking the place of residential land in block 36, and wholesale commerce in block 37. Additionally, as we saw in blocks 36 and 37, services including hotels take the place of residential and wholesale stores in blocks 40 and 41. In addition to land use for services, the emergence of parking lots was a big trend from 1935 to 2019. In 2019 each block in the set has at least a small amount of land used specifically for parking, with some of the blocks becoming dominated by parking use. Block 39 saw perhaps the biggest change, with almost the entire east side of the block between 15th and 16th Street now serving as a surface lot. Block 37 was the only block in the set with parking use in 1935, but it also saw a big transformation, with parking replacing vacant lots as well as residential spaces on the west side of the block between 16th and 17th Streets. These parking lots in block 37 provide a good example of the overall trend of transformations that occurred in our block set from 1935 to 2014, showing the rise in parking space in reaction to an increase in service-related establishments.

This section of downtown Austin has had an interesting history of growth. In 1885 this block group was primarily occupied by dwellings and vacant open space. By 1935, the block group had been transformed into an area dominated by residential and commercial land use, while in 2019, the area’s land use is now predominantly service, commercial, and parking. Lying
out on the northern edge of the initial square mile grid of the city, the 1885 maps show a small community of dwellings, saloons, a grocer, and a lot of vacant space. These are perhaps most exemplified by the blocks 37 and 39. These blocks sit catty-corner to each other and exemplify the opposites of land use for their time. 39 has just two dwellings right next to each other with vacant space taking up the rest of the block. 37 however, is more compact and diverse in its usage. Its space was used to house a fire station, a blacksmith, a saloon, grocer, as well as a dwelling. Nonetheless, there is a vast open space in the interior of the block. All residential housing in this period is for single-family use.

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automobile, a filling station, auto repair shop, and numerous parking lots appear on blocks 39, 41, and 37 respectively. Multi-family housing begins to appear but only on block 41. Many of the stores here go up to the street front and there are significantly less vacant spaces in the interior of these lots. By 2019, parking and dense, multi-family housing have taken priority in many of the blocks land use. Several restaurants and stores appear, but only on blocks 36, 37, and 40. From 1885 to 1935, and 1935 to 2019, our block group’s land use dramatically shifted and transformed corresponding to the area’s economic needs at the time.