



BLAIR

should, the demolition of these 100-year-old, well designed, well constructed buildings of irreplaceable charm that date back to the Oil Baron period (1880-1920) would not be taking place. It's quite tragic that there are no ordinances to protect these buildings from the sledgehammer and wrecking ball. And thus, we are eyewitnesses to the deplorable loss of some of the finest architectural examples that Baku will ever know. In reality, the cityscape that defined central Baku as Baku for the past century is fast disappearing.

Such a commission should study each building of that era, as well as those few that still exist from earlier periods, and commit to their conservation and restoration. Some of Europe's major cities, which survived the extensive carpet bombing of Europe during World War II—Prague, Budapest and Vienna—have grappled with such issues, and have adopted ordinances that forbid the destruction of buildings of specific historical periods.

If Baku does not act quickly, the unique legacy of the city's architectural heritage will exist only as a stack of old faded photos stashed away in a drawer of an aging historian. It would be such an enormous aesthetic loss to the city—the tragic consequence of unwise decisions in an era, marked primarily by greed.

### 3. CREATE RESPONSIBLE COMMISSIONS

An independent Architectural and Engineering Commission should be created, which would provide the ultimate authority to oversee all building practices and have both legal and executive power to recommend and implement the following changes:

#### 4. BUILDING CODES

The process of writing comprehensive National Building Codes specific to Azerbaijan would be a very involved and complex process. In the mean time, a stopgap measure could be to temporarily adopt Building Codes that have been implemented in other seismic-prone locations, such as Los Angeles, San Francisco, Tokyo or Mexico City.

#### 5. ASSESS ALL TOWERS

Evaluation should be made of all multi-story structures that have been built in last decade. Engineering inspections and tests should be made to ascertain if the buildings are in compliance with the newly adapted Building Codes in terms of both architectural and structural design. Highest priority should be



ASHAYEVA

November 2000. Consequences of the earthquake in Baku which registered 5.9 on the Richter Scale.

Top Corner: During the earthquake, one of the Twins on the pediment of a building dating back to Oil Baron times in the Pasaj fell to the street below. Above: Multi-story building on Azerbaijan Avenue across from the Museum Center collapsed. Masonry is the most hazardous construction technique in seismic conditions.

placed on determining whether the buildings conform to structural integrity in relationship to Baku's seismic conditions.

Buildings that are not found to be in compliance should be evaluated as to whether they can be upgraded or retrofitted to make them safe. Buildings that are determined to be unsafe and which cannot be salvaged should be condemned. A compensation package should be worked out between the City municipality and the owners. Negligence and irresponsibility on the part of both city and developer should be taken into consideration.

#### 6. FIRE COMPLIANCE

Compliance for fire and electro-mechanical systems, especially emergency fire exits, fire alarm systems and safe electrical systems should be required. Buildings which do not meet these standards should be retrofitted accordingly.

#### 7. SAFETY GLASS

Very few towers have installed safety glass—either tempered or laminated—in their windows. This safety

feature is absolutely crucial to reduce risk of broken glass. Since replacing all the glass in a building would be very costly, an effective compromise would be to apply a self-adhesive transparent safety film to all existing glass. Lamination of safety film prevents glass from shattering when it breaks and can save lives. In future buildings, the Building Code should mandate that tempered or laminated glass be used.

#### 8. PARKING

Parking requirements for each building should be established per unit. For example, in the U.S., the Building Code stipulates two parking spaces for each apartment. In Azerbaijan, minimally one parking space should be designated for each unit. To date, the majority of new residential towers do not allocate sufficient parking. Some totally ignore the issue and have not provided any parking spaces at all. Others provide a few spaces and sell them to owners at premium costs of \$15,000 to \$30,000 per parking space. Buildings should be required to resolve this problem by exploring the possibility of creating surface parking spaces on their sites or converting some of their lower floors to parking levels.



ELMAN GURBANOV

A frequent practice in Baku is to build a fence around the construction site that protrudes far out into the street (see top corner on right hand page and photo above). This obstructs public space and creates enormous traffic congestion. Techniques and methods exist for handling tight urban sites which do not intrude into public space but yet ensure the safety of pedestrians and the flow of traffic.

## 9. TRAFFIC

In regard to Baku's congested traffic, a comprehensive Transportation and Traffic Engineering Feasibility Study should be carried out, not on its own, but in conjunction with a City Master Planning and an Infrastructure Development Plan. In the meantime, some temporary solutions could be implemented to ease traffic bottlenecks. Many rules governing current traffic pattern flow are left over from the bygone Soviet era. The reality of a market economy makes them outmoded, obsolete and extremely impractical. For example, traffic rules forbid "left hand turns" and "u' turns". Coupled with the fact that many streets are designated for "one-way" traffic, drivers often have to drive far out of their way to reach their destination.

This leads to redundant traffic movement. It wastes valuable time, consumes excessive fuel which is expensive, and leads to unnecessary traffic snarls—all of which further pollute the environment. Traffic flow should be studied. More flexible and practical traffic patterns should be implemented to alleviate these situations.

Traffic patterns should also be identified during peak periods, both on a daily basis as well as on weekends. Plans should be tailored to alleviate problem areas. For example, in Los Angeles, traffic police have recently been assigned to busy street intersections during rush hour to facilitate traffic flow. The mere physical presence of an authority directing traffic at

those busy locations helps to speed up traffic, alleviate blocked intersections and other difficulties. In some cities, car lanes are reversed during heavy traffic periods to provide additional flow of traffic in a specific direction as needed.

## 10. STREET PARKING

One of the primary causes of the city's congestion is the manner in which drivers park their cars.

Vehicles are parked anywhere and in any direction: they're parked double and even triple, perpendicular or at angles to the curb, and even facing the opposite direction on one-way streets. These practices are viewed as the norm since no planned or regulated street parking exists.

Parking spaces should be designated properly and the road painted to help drivers become more compliant to standard, predictable parking. In the city center and commercial areas, parking meters should be installed. Presently, Baku has no parking meters at all. Meters could provide a steady source of revenue for the city and could help regulate parking and facilitate traffic flow.

## 11. RETRAINING TRAFFIC POLICE

Traffic police should be trained to take an active role in helping alleviate congestion and in facilitating the flow of traffic. It's not uncommon for



ELMAN GURBANOV

police to turn a blind eye to drivers going the wrong direction on one-way streets or when they double or triple park. These infringements are accepted as the norm, rather than as serious aberrations to the obstruction of public space and traffic flow.

Training should emphasize how to increase traffic flow and ease the situation brought on by Baku's crowded streets. It often turns out that the traffic police themselves are the cause of traffic jams because of the way they mishandle the traffic situation, adding more anarchy to confused situations.

## 12. CONSTRUCTION SITES

Construction sites should not be permitted to invade half of the street, setting up construction fences that protrude half way out into on-coming lanes of traffic. Currently, this is accepted as normal even though the duration of construction may last for several years. This practice should be stopped and not allowed as it obstructs public space.

## 13. GOOD TRAFFIC SIGNAGE

Clearly designated traffic signs that are based on standard international traffic symbols and standard international sizes should be erected in places that offer high visibility. Drivers should be informed well enough in advance so that they can respond quickly and appropriately to important regulations such as "One Way", "Stop", "Yield", "Do Not Enter", etc.

## 14. INTERSECTIONS

One of the major causes of traffic jams occurs when cars get stuck in intersections. Many countries forbid cars from entering street intersections unless the driver can successfully pass through to the other side. In the UK, this is known as the "Yellow Box Rule" because yellow lines are painted in the forbidden intersection area. Drivers are ticketed if they break this rule should they get stuck when the light turns red, as this interferes with the normal traffic flow from the intersecting street.

## 15. RETIREMENT OF CARS

Many major cities throughout the world insist on a retirement program for old vehicles. This helps to regulate the number of cars on the highway. Such a plan should be explored in Azerbaijan. A systematic car retirement program not only would eliminate old worn-out cars but it would help to reduce traffic congestion and cut down on pollution.



BLAIR

Heavy limestone blocks are commonly used as construction material in Baku as a substitute for lighter weight bricks or blocks (see blocks in the wall partitions in the high rise). The use of limestone blocks is extremely dangerous under seismic conditions. The abrupt lateral force of an earthquake will cause any wall without steel rebar reinforcement to collapse. This is the most common cause of death in earthquakes zones.

## 16. FUNERAL TENTS

Funeral tents that are erected in the middle of streets also cause serious traffic problems. Roads that are accessible in the morning are often blocked in the afternoon. Terrible traffic jams result.

Funeral tents provide a venue for friends and family members to gather and share their grief and condolences. The tradition is very valuable in society. Such activities would normally be held inside homes if they were large enough to accommodate all the guests.

But the time has come to examine whether the tents that are erected at the doorstep of residential buildings every time a resident dies is the most effective way to carry on this tradition.

There are several reasons why alternatives should be sought. First of all, there have been several occasions when speeding cars have accidentally driven into the tents and injured and even killed people.

Secondly, with so many towers being erected in the center of the city, the population is more highly

concentrated. Proportionately there will be more deaths occurring per square mile. It will become very impractical always to erect tents whenever someone dies.

Just as weddings are now organized in specifically designated restaurants, perhaps the time has come to explore the possibility of certain halls being used on the occasion of funerals. Funeral tents obstruct public space and should no longer be permitted.

## 17. PUBLIC SERVICE MESSAGES

The media could provide an incredibly effective tool for educating the general population. Public service messages should be created and presented on TV, radio and newspapers to emphasize safe driving practices such as the use of safety straps, the importance of not blocking intersections, consequences of double parking, hazards of changing lanes without indicating with blinkers, the importance of crossing the street only at intersections,