LINKS IN THE CHAIN: GREENBELT, MARYLAND AND THE NEW TOWN MOVEMENT IN AMERICA

AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY ON THE OCCASION OF THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF GREENBELT, MARYLAND

Compiled and Annotated by
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... I had come to the conclusion that the Greenbelt Towns were only three links in the chain of experiences that led from Sunnyside and Radburn through Baldwin Hills Village to the future New Towns of America.

Clarence Stein (1950)
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Introduction

The occasion in 1987 of the fiftieth anniversary of the New Deal experiment in establishing new towns would scarcely seem auspicious. The collectivist values behind such planned communities are on the defensive in the age of Reagan. The initiative of a previous Republican president, Richard Nixon, to revive new town planning through mixed public and private enterprise has been abandoned. Even the character of Greenbelt, Maryland, which inspired this publication, has been compromised significantly as it has been engulfed in the rapid expansion of the Washington metropolitan area. Nonetheless efforts to place Greenbelt in a historical context have more than simply academic value. In both the United States and around the world the problems which gave rise to the new town movement initially—congestion, poorly planned growth, and lack of adequate amenities to secure the goal of a decent living environment—persist. Because the greenbelt towns combined a coherent philosophy for improving modern living with practical building techniques, they offer a particularly useful perspective on enduring issues of metropolitan development.

Clarence Stein’s description of the greenbelt towns as links in a chain of planning experiments actually goes much deeper to a central tradition in American reform. The English founder of the garden city concept, Ebenezer Howard, was very much influenced by the utopian ideals of Americans, particularly Henry George and Edward Bellamy. As Robert Fishman reports, Howard was “fairly carried away” by Bellamy’s Looking Backward, published in 1888, reading the book in one sitting and describing his trip through London the next day:

as I passed through the narrow dark streets, saw the wretched dwellings in which the majority of the people lived, observed on every hand the manifestations of a self-seeking order of society and reflected on the absolute unsoundness of our economic system, there came to me an overpowering sense of the temporary nature of all I saw, and of its entire unsuitability for the working life of the new order—the order of justice, unity and friendliness.  

Although he has been criticized as being anti-urban, Howard’s concept of the garden city, which quickly found followers in Europe and the United States, was directed not against cities so much as towards a more fundamental correction of the excesses of capitalism. In attempting to meld the best elements of city and country, he hoped to utilize physical design to secure a more just as well as a healthier community setting.

Howard’s ideas meshed well with the reformist thrust of the progressive era, from the fact-finding studies of inadequate housing conditions done at Hull House and by the Russell Sage Foundation’s Pittsburgh Survey, to the initial efforts to bring social workers and architects together in the first national conference on city planning in 1909. United by the desire to relieve the congestion of cities, conferees embraced a vision of urban redevelopment that integrated social with aesthetic improvements. As the two strains of reform divided with the professionalization of planning after World War I, the integrated planning approach was kept alive by Clarence Arthur Perry of the Russell Sage Foundation in his concept of neighborhood planning and in the blueprints offered by Stein and his colleagues for the first new town efforts at Sunnyside Gardens, New York, and Radburn, New Jersey. Books and articles generated in the 1920s by Stein and associated members of the Regional Planning Association of America—
most notably Lewis Mumford—deepened and extended the progressive critique of a culture of privatism, distinguishing between what they called “old city planning” with its reliance on technical tools, such as zoning, to accommodate commercial progress and the new “community planning for the conservation of basic human values.” In adopting and promoting the garden city ideal in America, they sought not just an aesthetically pleasing residential setting but, through the power of a planned environment, a more vital civic culture.⁴

With the discredit of the dominant system of privatism in the depression years, the communitarian aspects of planning advocacy found support in the New Deal, in self-help cooperatives founded under the Federal Employment Recovery Administration, in the development of the Tennessee Valley Authority, and in the planned town of Norris, Tennessee. Rexford Tugwell’s commitment as director of the Resettlement Administration to build new towns in the garden city tradition thus drew on a collectivist ethos which was reflected inside and outside government, including the New Deal arts projects and the literature of the social sciences.⁵ As the climate for experimentation flourished briefly, planners took advantage of new tools of communication to produce a documentary film, “The City,” to promote the new town solution to urban problems. Initiated by Clarence Stein and narrated by Lewis Mumford, the film opened to large crowds at the World’s Fair of 1939 in New York City.⁶

Like other utopian visions, the greenbelt idea proved too advanced as well as too costly for some, even in a period of governmental expansion. As Franklin Roosevelt recast his administration in terms acceptable to private enterprise, the drive to build greenbelt towns was terminated in an early stage, leaving only the three communities of Greenbelt, Maryland, Greenhills, Ohio, and Greendale, Wisconsin, as tangible evidence of a program which once was intended to encompass as many as one hundred communities.

Urban growth and the associated problems of congestion and decay accelerated in the post-World War II era, and some public efforts, like the influential Policies Plan for the Year 2000 in Washington, embraced a vision of planned satellite cities as a means of directing metropolitan expansion. Major highway and urban redevelopment plans were promoted as “comprehensive” efforts in urban renewal, with the hope that better living conditions could be advanced in both city and suburb. But as the public mood shifted in the post-depression era, support for publicly directed solutions to urban problems waned. Just as housing reformers turned away from a fully public solution to rebuilding slums by offering incentives to private interests for the sake of urban redevelopment, so too advocates of planned communities sought tools to draw private capital into community building.

Even as private developers took the lead, however, the heightened social consciousness of the 1960s was incorporated in major new town initiatives. Reston, Virginia, and Columbia, Maryland, both adopted goals of racially and economically integrated as well as aesthetically pleasing communities. Federal assistance to such efforts was promised by the Urban Growth and New Community Development Act of 1970. Though gaining bipartisan support as a means of relieving the congestion of central cities and as a means of directing metropolitan growth, the consensus behind the 1970 act quickly unravelled. Pursuing the decentralization of power through its concept of the “new federalism,” the Nixon administration failed to make new towns a federal priority, while some critics, including Herbert Gans, a former consultant to Columbia, denied that new towns could solve the problems of central cities.⁷ The recession of 1973, inflation, and the lack of commitment from either the Ford or Carter administrations, ultimately undercut the intentions of the 1970 act. By 1978, seven of the ten new town projects funded under the act had defaulted on their mortgage commitments.⁸

Comparisons with similar efforts in other countries, especially England, which embraced new town development as national policy in 1946, and France, which has promoted a mixed-enterprise approach, reveal the cultural limitations imposed in America’s predominately individualistic culture. Today, few people expect the resurrection of a heavily financed federal program to direct national urban development. At the same time, however, a review of the concepts behind the new towns movement points up the limitations in contemporary planning.
In modern times policymakers have utilized more limited tools to direct development, even as they have promoted what they call “comprehensive plans” for cities and regions. Many are quite properly skeptical of solutions to urban problems that claim too much for the positive effects on social behavior of environmental intervention. And yet, if they avoid the pitfalls of the utopians in asking too much, they can still benefit from a greater appreciation for an ethos which combines a commitment to social cooperation with the environmental elements to back it up. The planning techniques pioneered in new towns, particularly the separation of automobile from pedestrian traffic, the clustered location of central facilities to serve residents conveniently in a way expected to enhance neighborly spirit, and the inclusion of green spaces as buffers from unwanted intrusions, are not to be undervalued in the modern era.

The works compiled in this bibliography by Susan L. Klaus, the Center’s Banneker Fellow in the 1985-86 academic year, provide the information which can help the reader reconstruct the greenbelt tradition. Scholars and social critics have contributed a rich literature on the subject, and the Greenbelt fiftieth anniversary conference planned for May 1 and 2, 1987, should deepen our understanding and appreciation of the new towns movement both past and present. For the moment, however, in an age of voluntarism, it may just well be the experience of Greenbelt residents which provides the most eloquent testimony that even utopian thinking can have its practical consequences in providing a better world to live in. The people of Greenbelt have extended and adapted to new times the spirit of another era, and on the eve of their anniversary celebration, we salute them for helping make the new town ideal a viable reality.

Howard Gillette, Jr.

Footnotes

1. Robert Fishman, Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century: Ebenezer Howard, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Le Corbusier (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1982 paperback ed.), p. 33. All references in these notes are further annotated in the body of this publication.
Note on Selection and Organization

The significance of the garden city concept to urban planning in America is not reflected in the number of such cities actually built. Nor have these experiments in community building been key to a broad, national urban policy as has been the case abroad. Nevertheless, America’s new towns represent an important area for study, both as heirs to a tradition that has linked social reform to physical design, and as pioneering efforts in comprehensive urban planning.

The greenbelt towns of the New Deal era are recognized as the most significant American effort towards building self-sufficient garden cities. Equally important, the greenbelt program marked the first time that the federal government became involved in a comprehensive effort to build total communities. At the time, many urban planners and reformers believed that the greenbelt program signalled the government’s recognition of the need for a national response to the problems of urbanization and industrialization. But the government’s active interest in controlling and directing urban growth proved short-lived; thirty years would pass before the question of a national urban policy would return to the national agenda.

The fiftieth anniversary of Greenbelt, Maryland, provides a fitting opportunity for reexaming the new town movement in America. The purposes of this annotated bibliography are two-fold: 1) to provide a guide to historic materials related to the development of Greenbelt and her sister cities, as well as to later evaluations and analyses of the greenbelt program; and 2) to place these greenbelt towns within the broader context of comprehensive urban planning by looking back to some of the ideas and experiments that influenced them, and forward to more recent community-building efforts both in America and abroad. Most of the literature on new towns falls into one of two categories: rationalizations of metropolitan growth (the macro view) or descriptions of the physical, social, and/or economic characteristics of individual new towns (micro views). The materials selected for inclusion here deal primarily with the first category, urban planning in a metropolitan context, and, to a lesser extent, with the effects of residential environment on community. Literature dealing with more specialized questions, such as housing technology, economic viability, and financing, is not included. An appendix lists a number of earlier bibliographies as an aid to the study of particular topics.

The bibliography is divided into four sections. Part I introduces the garden city concept as it evolved in England and then provides a brief historical overview of planned communities in the United States, from colonial capitals to the developments of the 1930s and 1940s that were contemporaneous with the development of the greenbelt towns. The organization of selections in this section is historical, by date of the communities described. Part II traces the story of the greenbelt program through contemporary accounts and later appraisals. Part III explores the legacy of the greenbelt towns in the revival of the new town movement in the United States in the late 1960s and 1970s. Part IV compares the American experience with some of the more significant international experiments in new town development. The entries in the last three sections are arranged chronologically.
PART I. Planned Communities and the Garden City Concept: Visions and Early Experiments


As Lewis Mumford notes in his introduction, Howard's classic work, which initiated the Garden City movement, "has done more than any other single book to guide the modern town planning movement and to alter its objectives." Although he has somewhat mistakenly been remembered for his contributions to spatial and aesthetic aspects of urban planning, Ebenezer Howard (1850-1928) was primarily interested in achieving a reordering of the economic and social underpinnings of society. For him, urban form and design were means to achieving these larger ends, not ends in themselves; in fact, the plans and designs suggested in his book are schematics. Howard focused on the processes necessary to bring about a balanced urban environment. He was less concerned with the physical form of the city and never intended his diagrams and plans to be more than suggestive of the garden city's layout. He believed that the specifics of a city based on his ideas would necessarily evolve from the actual conditions faced. His aim was to present his vision for new communities of the future that would integrate and achieve a balance between agricultural and modern, industrial economics in a series of linked cities providing the best of both city and countryside.

The essential components of his garden city concept have become well-known: planned population dispersal; limited town size; provision of a permanent greenbelt to both limit the size of the city and mediate the town/country relationship; permanent ownership and control of the land on behalf of the community; comprehensive planning; neighborhood organization; and attraction of commerce and industry. In the community ownership of land Howard saw the basis for economic and social revolution; he wanted the garden city to serve as a model of voluntary cooperation in all areas of community life.

Howard envisioned complete, self-sufficient cities, not the suburban bedroom communities that too often have misappropriated the garden city label. He conceived of a "town in the country," writing:

There are in reality not only, as is so constantly assumed, two alternatives—town life and country life—but a third alternative, in which all the advantages of the most energetic and active town life, with all the beauty and delight of the country, may be secured in perfect combination; and the certainty of being able to live this life will be the magnet which will produce the effect for which we are all striving—the spontaneous movement of the people from our crowded cities. . . .

From the contemporary perspective, Howard's major contribution may have been his regional approach to the problems of urbanization and the recognition that solutions must speak to the concerns of urban and non-urban areas alike. His ultimate plan was for development of the "social city," clusters of garden cities linked to each other and to the central city by rapid transport. These cities were to be physically distant, but socially and economically interrelated. Older, established cities would either wither away or, as slum property lost its rental value because the poor could afford to relocate to the new towns, they would be transformed into healthy, livable places. Thus Howard's garden city idea spoke to issues of urban renewal as well as the control and management of urban growth.

Following the publication of this book, Howard founded the Garden City Association in England in 1899 to promote the garden city concept and to raise funds to construct a city based on his principles. By 1904 the Association was able to purchase land for the first garden city, Letchworth, located about 40 miles from London. The firm of Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin was engaged to design the new town. Parker and Unwin had been early supporters of Howard's, but they were also influenced by William Morris and the social and aesthetic ideas of the Arts and Crafts movement. They used traditional village architecture to express the idea of community, drawing on the arts and crafts love of simple and honest materials. Thus, the architects introduced a nostalgic look back to the life of the old English country village that was somewhat at odds with Howard's confidence in the industrialized modern world.

The second English garden city experiment was realized some sixteen years later when Welwyn Garden City was begun on a site about twenty miles outside of London. The Garden City Association was renamed the Garden Cities and Town Planning Association in 1909 and became the Town and Country Planning Association in 1941. As noted in Part IV of this bibliography, this group was from its inception extremely influential in British planning circles and was to be a major factor in the development of Britain's post-World War II urban policy.

This book describes the urban visions of Ebenezer Howard, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Le Corbusier, each of whom explored the concept of the ideal city form for the twentieth century. All three sought to transform the urban environment through a rethinking of the principles of urban planning, believing that reformation of the physical environment could contribute to the transformation of the social one. In each case, the vision grew out of a reaction against the chaotic cities of their own experience. While they rejected the modern city, Fishman finds that they did not reject modern technology, but rather believed that selective use of technological innovations could be used to reinstate the inherently harmonious order of industrial society.

Fishman sees Howard's rejection of the contemporary city as a criticism of the extremes of wealth and power associated with it, not as a turning away from the urbanity and civic amenities of city life. The large cities had played out their role, Howard said; all that was genuinely valuable in the social life of the city could and would be preserved in the new garden communities he envisioned, where the best of city and country living would be combined.

The author traces the process through which Howard, an unknown without scholarly credentials or political or social connections, promoted his idea into reality. He won the support of middle-class reformers who saw the garden city as the solution to England's agricultural depression, while also providing land (without threatening private property) to those who wished to escape the city's slums. Others were attracted to the garden city as a method for decreasing urban social conflict without the necessity for government spending or intervention. From the time of the first conference promoting the garden city concept in 1901, Fishman observes, the idea assumed a place in British town planning discussion which it never lost.


In a concluding chapter entitled "The Legacy," Thomas places the greenbelt experiments within a tradition of utopian reform. Describing communitarian idealism as a reaction against the disruptions brought about by modernization, he links what he calls an "oppositional culture" to the reform movements of the Progressive and New Deal eras. He describes the adversary tradition as a "middle way" between pure communitarian and private ways of living, which thrived briefly during the depression years, but has suffered in the age of affluence which has dominated the post-World War II era.


Hall looks to the sources of Howard's ideas, citing writers and economists of the time, as well as the influence of his four years (1872-1876) in America. Chicago, where Howard spent much of his stay, had been known as the Garden City in its pre-fire years. Hall thinks Howard was moved by more than just the American landscape; he argues that American love of technology and innovation and freedom from the authority of inherited wealth and position also had an impact on Howard.

Hall comments that the subversion of Howard's principles began almost as soon as he stated them. He notes the irony in the post-World II adoption of a new town policy by the British government. Howard wanted the garden cities developed by private interests, free from government control.


In exploring the cultural implications of the garden city movement in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Creese observes that it was never directed solely to the future or presented only as an alternative to the modern metropolis. It always included an element of rediscovery and reconciliation of "the past with the present, town with country, and agriculture with industry." Creese describes English model villages; the company towns of Bourneville (financed by George Cadbury, 1895), and Port Sunlight (financed by W.H. Lever, 1895); and the early planned suburbs that predated Letchworth. He briefly explores the development of the garden city concept in America and Europe, focusing on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
Creese highlights the role of Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin in spreading the garden city concept both in England and abroad. Unwin in particular was an important influence on Clarence Stein, Lewis Mumford, and other members of the Regional Planning Association of America.


The Olmsteds, father and son, were leading figures in America’s parks and recreation and City Beautiful movements, both precursors to the modern fields of urban and regional planning. Frederick Law Olmstead’s design for urban park systems, planned suburban communities, and his highly influential layout for the Chicago World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893, to name but a few of his accomplishments, remain landmarks in landscape architecture and urban planning. Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., carried his father’s pioneering work further, in particular with his involvement in influential comprehensive plans for such cities as Washington, D.C.; Pittsburgh; New Haven; Rochester; and Milwaukee.

Both Olmsteds were influenced by English landscape gardening and residential design. In this letter to the editor, the younger Olmsted summarizes his impressions of English garden city developments following a visit to Letchworth. He praises the confluence of plan and topography, which resulted in “a degree of economy in construction coupled with an agreeable diversity of treatment.” He regrets the “apparent dominance... of straight and parallel-sided roads with entirely formal rows of trees, too suggestive of the shortcomings in this regard of nearly all American town planning.”

Olmsted contrasts Letchworth with the company town of Port Sunlight, built by the Lever brothers for their soapworks’ employees. Port Sunlight, he observes, might be seen as the more aesthetically pleasing; however, Olmsted finds something false in its atmosphere. It did not seem to “express the real interest and desires and character of the people who live in them.” Olmsted preferred the freedom of Letchworth to Port Sunlight’s benevolent paternalism.


This now classic statement was made by the English architect and town and regional planner Raymond Unwin (1863-1940) to the Garden Cities and Town Planning Association in 1912. Unwin’s influence extended to America as well. He consulted on the New York regional plan and was involved in the preparation of the 1934 report of the National Association of Housing Officials on low-cost housing which influenced New Deal Legislation on community building and slum clearance.

Unwin was strongly convinced of the need to limit the size of cities; when the optimum size was reached, a new community should be established nearby and the process of development would begin anew. He envisioned a “federation of groups constantly clustering around new subsidiary centres.” In this selection, Unwin tried to document the economic advantages of limiting the number of houses per acre, rather than crowding as many as possible on each plot of land. Unwin argued that neither the landowner nor the speculative builder need fear planned communities and land use.


Reps characterizes America as “a nation of new towns, towns deliberately founded and planned by men who understood that there could be no civilization without cities.” Thus, the use of planned new towns as an instrument of public policy has been an integral part of America’s political tradition. Reps looks at the extent of public involvement in new town development in the nation’s early years, not only to draw attention to an understudied area of history, but also to refute the idea that publicly initiated new towns are somehow un-American.

This brief historical overview points out that both colonial Virginia and Maryland created new towns, authorizing the public acquisition of land by purchase or eminent domain and setting aside certain sites for public uses. Both colonies created new capital cities that were made possible by public initiative, built according to a master plan, and located on community-owned property. The importance of Annapolis and Williamsburg. Reps observes, is that they demonstrated the superiority of pre-planned
cities and represented a conscious, government-backed attempt to create an urban environment that would be a model of the best that the country could achieve.

Reps summarizes the history of planned state capitals (from Columbia, South Carolina, in 1786 to Lincoln, Nebraska, in 1867, the last to be planned through public initiative) and lists a number of other publicly planned cities whose history needs to be explored. He contends that this American tradition of publicly creating new towns was forgotten in the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Present-day interests in controlling urban growth and development, he argues, presents a long overdue opportunity “to reestablish this early American tradition and recapture for the public the decision-making power over city development and the location and design of new communities.”


Sutcliffe considers the development of public controls on the urban environment in the four important industrialized nations of the pre-World War I era. He attempts to determine to what extent certain similar features of urban planning in each were the product of what he terms a common world urbanization process, and to what extent they merely reflected the diffusion of ideas.

Sutcliffe demonstrates that urban planning in Europe was closely linked to the development of municipal governments, while in the United States the idea of planning developed independently of local government institutions. Unlike Europe, America had neither a strong tradition of publicly regulating private building nor of housing reform. While planning in the United States was related to political reform movements, it initially developed as an expression of civic ideals, somewhat removed from the problems of the poor and of the inner city.

In terms of the international transfer of planning ideas, Sutcliffe finds that France was the least influenced by the experience of the other countries. The British were highly influenced by German institutional innovations, and the Germans in turn were impressed by British landscape architecture and residential construction and design. The United States contributed the idea of a park system as a structural element for an entire city, rather than simply as an urban oasis in the midst of buildings. In addition, American civic design, as epitomized in the City Beautiful movement’s comprehensive plans for such cities as the District of Columbia, San Francisco, and Chicago, had considerable impact on European planning.


Garner considers the model company town as one of the precursors of the planned community movement, citing its emphasis on comprehensive design and management approaches to both control growth and prevent subsequent decay and blight. Further, he points out that such communities attempted to provide a productive and healthful environment for their residents. Garner observes that company towns, corporate towns (those which outgrew the control of a single owner), and satellite cities like the federally sponsored greenbelt towns, all sought to impose some degree of social order on residents, and that in each the effect of physical layout on social behavior was a studied part of the design process. The fact that these towns were developed, administered, and owned by a single entity also links them to the garden city tradition.

The author characterizes the greenbelt town approach to urban problems as one of urban abandonment, similar to that of earlier twentieth century industrial satellite towns like Firestone Park and Goodyear Heights, Ohio; Torrance, California; and Hershey, Pennsylvania. But he asserts that because of their federal sponsorship, the greenbelt towns were able to achieve planning and design objectives not possible in the privately developed towns.

Garner thinks that neither the model company town, the satellite towns, the greenbelt towns of the 1930s, nor the modern generation of new towns has demonstrated a serious urban development alternative for the United States. Rather, their contribution has been in the more limited models they provide for site planning, landscaping, architecture, and environmental management.


The planned town of Pullman, Illinois, was established by George Pullman to demonstrate what he believed would be the beneficial effects of a model environment on labor relations. Pullman’s thinking
was in line with the traditional American faith in physical determinism: environment as an agent of social reform. The town of Pullman was seen as a solution to social problems; housing would be provided for workers in an environment designed to reinforce "proper" middle-class values and standards. Further, Buder observes that Pullman hoped to demonstrate that good business practices and industrial methods could be used to create a pleasant industrial community.

Buder argues that it was not paternalism alone that led to the failure of this experiment. Community instability because of rapid population turnover was a major problem. More importantly, it proved difficult to apply business principles and industrial techniques to questions of community development and life. In particular, Buder states, "no clearly defined manner of expressing and resolving industrial or community grievances existed," so that there were no mechanisms for resolving the problems of a growing urban metropolis.


The company town of Kohler, Wisconsin, is an interesting example of over sixty years of company involvement in a planned residential community. Walter J. Kohler, Jr., president of the Kohler Company from 1905 to 1940, made a study tour of planned communities in England and Germany before inviting German-born planner Werner Hegemann to plan his town in 1916. Elbert Peets, later designer of Greendale, Wisconsin, was engaged as landscape architect; subsequent development plans were prepared by Olmsted Brothers under the direction of Henry Hubbard.

Hegemann's concept was that of a garden city; he believed the physical and social plan of Kohler could serve as a model of how to avoid the monotony and deleterious effects of industrial life. The original plan called for a permanent greenbelt of agricultural land, which remained largely intact at the time this article was written. He envisioned the kind of cooperative economic and social institutions which would later be developed in Greenbelt, Maryland.

The authors conclude that while the paternalism of the Kohler Company resulted in several periods of tension for the community, the company's long-standing interest in the town and continued ownership of large amounts of land have contributed to the maintenance of a good physical environment.


This article traces the broadening of the housing reform concept in the United States to include not just the provision of shelter but the creation of holistic community settings capable of enhancing social and civic life. Part of that effort included the establishment by private philanthropists of the model town of Mariemont to provide housing for factory workers. Located on Cincinnati's urban fringe, Mariemont was designed by nationally respected planners John Nolen and Philip Foder. The town incorporated many of the elements called for by Ebenezer Howard; with its planned neighborhoods grouped around a town center providing shopping and recreational facilities. Mariemont could well have provided a design precedent for the greenbelt towns of the 1930s. However, Mariemont promoters made clear that they were not attempting to provide an alternative to city growth, but rather to accommodate it.


A comparison of the organizational chart of the greenbelt town program and the membership list (had one existed) of the Regional Planning Association of America (RPAA) would demonstrate that the members of this small, informal organization were disproportionately represented in the New Deal's major experiment in community-building. Founded in 1923, the RPAA brought together architects, planners, and others interested in problems of housing, urban revitalization, and regional development. Its early members included architect and planner Clarence Stein; author and social critic Lewis Mumford; Benton MacKaye, organizer of the Appalachian Trail; realtor Alexander Bing, backer of Sunnyside Gardens; economist Stuart Chase; Clarence Arthur Perry, the theorist of neighborhood planning; and architects Henry Wright, Frederick L. Ackerman, Robert D. Kohn, and Frederick Bigger. During the RPAA's ten-year active history other notable figures in the housing and planning movements became associated with it, including Catherine Bauer, Edith Elmer Wood, and Tracy Auger.

Lubove locates the RPAA in the history of traditional housing and planning thought in America, observing that the RPAA's community planning synthesis marked a new approach to urban form and
social organization. Coming out of the tradition of the late nineteenth century progressive reform movement, the RPAA linked older ideas about housing reform, landscape architecture, and land conservation with the new thought and practice about community planning developing in Europe.

RPAA members championed a regional approach to urban growth and development that would involve the rebirth of old urban centers as well as the creation of new ones. They envisioned a reciprocal relationship between city and country in which population, resources, and institutions would be distributed rationally throughout a whole region. They saw the need for a new institutional framework involving public and private interests through which architects and planners could address urban physical and social goals. They were equally concerned with the economics of land development and housing, objecting to current conditions in which cities sacrificed residential needs to real estate interests and market demands. They wanted to see large-scale group and community housing projects, financed in part by government funds and directed toward the creation of the regional city.

Lubove observes that RPAA members objected to many of the specific regional planning proposals put forth in the 1920s. For example, Mumford criticized the Regional Plan for New York and Its Environs, ten years in the making, because it failed to encompass the comprehensive approach to managing growth which he favored.

The RPAA's greatest contribution, Lubove thinks, was in exploring approaches to metropolitan decentralization while at the same time recognizing the need for innovations in site planning, residential planning, and financing.


In his introduction to this anthology of articles and speeches by RPAA members, Sussman argues that the decentralization philosophy of the RPAA has been misunderstood and oversimplified in recent years. Criticized as anti-urban nostalgists yearning for small town America, RPAA members in fact fashioned a sophisticated approach to metropolitan development based on "a regional ideal of a decentralized urban culture."

Included in this collection are articles by Lewis Mumford, Clarence Stein, Frederick Ackerman, Stuart Chase, Henry Wright, and Benton MacKaye. Two brief pieces deal with garden cities in England (by C.B. Purdom, then executive director of the International Garden Cities and Town Planning Federation), and America (by Alexander Bing, financial backer of Sunnyside Gardens). Also reprinted is Lewis Mumford's 1932 critique of the Regional Plan of New York and Thomas Adams' reply.


Designed by Clarence Stein and Henry Wright, Radburn, New Jersey, was the first American attempt to build a complete garden city. Stein and Wright were able to explore more fully some of the ideas about housing and community that they had begun to address in their design for the Sunnyside Gardens housing complex in New York. Stein noted that Radburn was conceived as a response to the motor age to demonstrate that it was possible to create an environment "in which people could live peacefully with the automobile—or rather in spite of."

Schaffer places Radburn in the context of the regional planning movement of the 1920s, pointing up the important contribution of the RPAA in promoting the English garden city idea in America. Radburn was seen as the first of a series of experiments in the kind of comprehensive planning and regional development approach that the RPAA members were attempting to publicize.

None of the now well-known design concepts demonstrated at Radburn—the superblock, separation of pedestrian and foot traffic, functional differentiation of roadways, orientation of clusters of houses toward open spaces—was new. (Stein and Wright had visited Letchworth and Welwyn, which Schaffer thinks were the likely inspiration for the separation of traffic, even though Olmsted's design for Central Park incorporating this concept was closer at hand.) Schaffer demonstrates that Radburn's contribution goes beyond its physical layout and synthesis of these design ideas. Its planners attempted to apply the principles of scientific management, large-scale production, and research to the process of urban planning and community development. Further, Radburn was the most tangible expression of the larger philosophy of regionalism which was the central concern of the RPAA.

Due primarily to the depression, Radburn was never completed (only 150 of its 1300 acres were developed at the time), nor did it incorporate several of the essential elements of the garden city—an encircling greenbelt, an industrial base, or common ownership of land. Nevertheless, it was the single most important step to date towards the construction of new towns in America.

Augur characterizes Radburn as “the first tangible product of a new urban science.” While he warns against considering Radburn as a panacea for all urban problems, he argues that new towns such as Radburn, functioning in a regional context, can be a step toward a new urban order. He envisions the new metropolis as an aggregate of smaller towns, “each planned for a definite function, each playing a definite role.”


Birch traces Radburn’s legacy as a permanent resource for planners. She attributes Radburn’s continuing influence to its appearance at a critical time in the development of the planning profession in the late 1920s; the publicizing of various aspects of the Radburn plan in a variety of New deal projects; and the continuing discussion of Radburn in the planning literature since 1929 to the present. Although at times the Radburn model has fallen out of favor with planners, the Radburn concept has remained an enduring “icon” to which practitioners of succeeding generations have returned in seeking solutions to the specific problems of their times.


The son of planner and architect Henry Wright reviews the history of Radburn. Even though the plan for Radburn was never fully realized, Radburn attracted national and international attention from its inception. Wright points out that the planners developed the superblock concept from the ideas of British town planner Raymond Unwin, who had attempted to prove that it was more cost-effective to make improvements and to provide services to a few large blocks of land than to numerous smaller ones. The resulting savings would be sufficient to justify setting aside large areas of open space for community social and recreational use.

While the initial reaction to Radburn was generally favorable, Wright describes later criticism of some of its most distinctive features, notably the two entrances (garden and service) of the houses, which were found to be confusing; and the park areas themselves, found by some critics to be amorphous, formless areas, neither private nor truly public in nature. Yet Wright cites recent survey data as proof of continuing resident satisfaction with Radburn’s recreational features and physical design.


Clarence Perry formulated the “neighborhood unit concept,” which became one of the important aspects of the garden city ideal during the late 1920s and 1930s. In the 1960s, new town developers would return to the neighborhood unit as one of the organizational foundations of their designs.

The fullest statement of the neighborhood unit concept as a key to successful urban planning appeared as part of the 1929 Regional Plan of New York. Perry believed that planned residential environments based on a strong neighborhood community would support a stable population, which in turn would encourage the rehabilitation of the urban environment and help stabilize property values. He enumerated six principles to be observed in development projects: 1) the school should serve as the focus of the community, and community size should be limited by the number normally served by one elementary school; 2) the neighborhood unit should be bounded by arterial roads carrying through traffic around it; 3) open spaces and recreational areas should amount to 10 percent of the area; 4) educational and service facilities should be grouped around a central point or common; 5) each neighborhood should be served by a local shopping district located on its periphery and linked to similar ones in adjoining districts; 6) each neighborhood should be served by a street system designed to facilitate internal circulation and discourage through traffic.

In 1933 Perry began to investigate how to apply the neighborhood unit idea to problems of housing and rebuilding blighted areas. Housing in the Machine Age was his attempt to demonstrate how his ideas could be legally implemented. In addition, Perry addressed the need to bring modern industrial
techniques to the housing industry. Perry envisioned large-scale housing projects in the context of public-private cooperative development ventures. A comprehensive plan dealing with housing, transportation, land use, and public services would be developed for an area. Local government would locate the project, assemble the land, and set goals and objectives for private developers; the federal government would support such efforts through publicity and guaranteed mortgage loans.

James Dahir’s 1947 annotated bibliography, *The Neighborhood Unit Plan. Its Spread and Acceptance* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1947), surveyed the extent to which Perry’s concept had been accepted and implemented, both in America and abroad.


Tracing the roots of Clarence Arthur Perry’s neighborhood unit planning idea to the progressive era, Gillette argues that the concept was stripped of its reformist connotations in the 1940s. While use of the neighborhood concept in the greenbelt towns of the 1930s represented an application of design criteria to enhance community, by the time the idea had been incorporated in the national Housing Act of 1949, it was perceived more technically as a means for attaining rights of eminent domain for private developers.


Edith Elmer Wood was one of the first professionals in the field of housing. In this influential book, she considered the problems of housing and homeownership in pre-depression America and reviewed public and private efforts in planned housing developments. One chapter is devoted to satellite garden cities and other new towns, including Kingsport and Happy Valley, Tennessee; Longview, Washington; Palos Verdes and Rancho Sante Fe, California; Mariemont, Ohio; and Radburn, New Jersey. Wood also described a number of cooperative and public housing projects.


The second half of this basic reference volume on the history of landscape architecture deals with landscape design and urban planning in America. Of particular relevance are three chapters reviewing the history of town planning in the United States from 1869 to 1948 which provide a concise overview of the major developments in planned communities. Included are discussions of Sunnyside Gardens, New York (1924); Radburn, New Jersey (1927); Chatham Village, Pittsburgh (1932); Norris, Tennessee (1932); the greenbelt towns; and Baldwin Hills Village, Los Angeles (1941). Baldwin Hills was an early experiment in private development municipal government interaction. The 80-acre site was annexed to the city of Los Angeles in order to gain access to city services; however, this meant the involvement of city engineers in the planning process and resulted in some compromises in the designers’ plans. The basic design concept was left intact, with the development organized around three interior spaces. Residential units were arranged around garden courts opening onto these greens. Clarence Stein served as consultant to the project, and Fred Barlow, Jr., provided the highly praised landscape design.


This magazine issue was published in conjunction with the 1981 exhibition at the Cooper-Hewitt National Museum of Design entitled “Suburbs.” Guest-editor Robert Stern contributed an essay on the development of the planned suburb in the United States. Individual entries on British and American suburban communities consist of brief descriptive narratives and excellent illustrative material. The suburbs are categorized as railroad, streetcar, industrial, resort, or automobile communities. Ranging from Llewellyn Park, New Jersey (1853) to Baldwin Hills Village, California (1941), a number of garden cities and garden city-influenced communities are described, including Forest Hills Gardens, Sunnyside Gardens, Letchworth, Mariemont, Radburn, and Greenbelt.

Mumford introduces a series of charts detailing twenty planned communities in the United States and abroad which were prepared for a traveling exhibition sponsored by the A.I.A. The exhibition committee included Mumford, Clarence Stein, and Catherine Bauer. The purpose of the exhibition was to demonstrate the possibilities of modern housing when the community rather than the individual dwelling is taken as the unit of design. International projects depicted included sites in England, Holland, Germany, Russia, Austria, and Switzerland. Among the American projects included were Sunnyside Gardens, New York (1924-1929); Radburn, New Jersey (1928); Mariemont, Ohio (1925); Paul Lawrence Dunbar Apartments, New York (1928); Michigan Boulevard Apartments, Chicago (1929); Amalgamated Dwellings, New York (1930); and Phipps Garden Apartments, New York (1931).


Schaffer relates the history of Norris, Tennessee (1934), built to provide housing for workers building the first Tennessee Valley Association (TVA) dam. Norris was to be a permanent community and represented “an attempt to stabilise [sic] the cultural environment in the same way that the construction of Norris Dam represented an effort to stabilise the natural environment.” Construction of Norris was under the auspices of the TVA’s Division of Land Planning and Housing, headed by Earle S. Draper. Two prominent Regional Planning Association of America members were involved: Tracy augur was Chief Planner for Norris and Benton MacKaye was the TVA Regional Planner.

Norris’ design was tied to the natural terrain of the area and provided open spaces, park areas, and an agricultural greenbelt. Population was to reach a maximum of four to five thousand. The town was based on the small village concept and had twelve different housing types available in styles derived from the vernacular architecture. A full range of social and educational activities were present, similar to the kinds of programs later developed in Greenbelt, Maryland.

The high cost of building Norris priced much of its housing out of the ordinary worker’s level, and the town was largely populated by TVA’s professional staff. Norris proved too remote and too rural to attract the industry necessary to achieve a balanced economy for the town, and its subsequent growth was slow.

In 1937, with the dam completed, the TVA prepared to sell the town; however, World War II intervened and Norris was needed to house defense workers from the Oak Ridge nuclear plant. After the war, the government moved to divest itself of its holdings in procedures similar to those followed with the greenbelt towns. Norris residents formed a Citizens Development Corporation in an effort to buy the town, but they were outbid by a private development syndicate.


Designed and built from 1933 to 1935, Norris was one of the first New Deal TVA towns. It incorporated some of Ebenezer Howard’s most important garden city principles, including provisions for an undeveloped greenbelt to contain and control future growth, and an economic base of agriculture and small-scale industry. This study places Norris within the history of American new towns and regional planning and looks to its impact on subsequent new communities.

The greenbelt towns project was directly influenced by Norris, and a number of the principal participants were involved in both efforts. Tracy Augur, Norris’ planner, was brought into the greenbelt project by John Lansill as the Resettlement Administration’s head regional consultant. Roland A. Wank, TVA’s chief architect, was co-architect at Greenhills. Jacob Crane, Norris’ chief regional planner, was one of the town planners for Greendale. Earle Draper, head of TVA’s regional and community planning activities, was policy formulation director for the Resettlement Administration. Cigiano notes a number of parallels between Norris and Greenhills, and the effect of Crane’s influence on Greendale.

“Town of Willow Run.” ARCHITECTURAL FORUM 78 (March 1943): 37-54, plans, drawings, floorplans.

Willow Run, near Ypsilanti, Michigan, was conceived as a World War II model planned community for the families of those employed at the Ford bomber plant; however, only 2500 units of temporary housing were ever built (the first units were opened in July 1943). Opposition by private building and real estate interests, distrust of newcomers, lack of strong federal direction, and vacillation of local
political and union officials all contributed to the short and problem-filled history of this project.

The town was designed by five groups of architects, each responsible for a neighborhood’s homes, schools, and shops. The town center was designed by a sixth firm. In this article, Architectural Forum printed the plans for the civic center and three of the proposed neighborhood units as examples of the kind of comprehensive planning that would be needed in the post-war era.

The designers of Willow Run acknowledged their debt to the plan for Radburn: however, they planned to replace Radburn’s cul-de-sacs with long loops from the main road to create traffic-free blocks. This, they believed, would add to each resident’s privacy, avoid the confusion caused by two entrances to each house, and be more economical besides.


This is a review of a quarter century of successful development in Baldwin Hills Village, Los Angeles (1941). Baldwin Hills was an early experiment in private developer/municipal government interaction. The 80-acre site was annexed to the city of Los Angeles in order to gain access to city services: however, this meant the involvement of city engineers in the planning process and resulted in some compromises in the designers’ plans. The basic design concept was preserved, with the development organized around three interior green spaces. Residential units were arranged around garden courts which opened onto these greens. Clarence Stein served as consultant to the project, and the development’s highly praised landscape design was by Fred Barlow, Jr.


In her discussion of different types of domestic dwellings that have formed the model for ordinary housing during various periods of America’s history, Wright explores the continuing tension “between the housing model based on communities of similar dwellings and the seemingly conflicting ideal of personalized, self-sufficient dwellings.” Several chapters deal with the company towns and planned residential communities of the first decades of the twentieth century and the public housing programs of the 1930s and 1940s. Wright focuses on what these private and public initiatives reveal about American attitudes and values regarding family and community.
PART II. The Greenbelt Towns: A Half Century of Appraisals

To obtain a large tract of land, and thus avoid the complications ordinarily due to diverse ownerships; in this tract to create a community protected by an encircling green belt; the community to be designed primarily for families of modest income, and arranged and managed so as to encourage a family and community life which will be better than they now enjoy.

To develop a land-use plan for the entire tract; to devise a system of rural economy coordinated with the land-use plan for the rural portions of the tract surrounding the suburban community; and to integrate both the physical plans and the economies of the rural area and the suburban community.

From: Greenbelt Towns. Washington, D.C.,
The Resettlement Administration, 1936

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE GREENBELT PROGRAM

Henry C. Wallace, Secretary of Agriculture
Rexford Guy Tugwell, Director, Resettlement Administration
John Scott Lansill, Director, Suburban Resettlement

Henry Wright, General Consultant
Clarence S. Stein, Architectural Consultant
Tracy Augur, Regional Consultant
Earle Draper, Policy Formation
Catherine Bauer, Special Consultant
Russell Bloch, Special Consultant
Tilford Dudley, Land Acquisition
Reid W. Diggs, Budget and Finance
Warren S. Vinton, Social and Economic Research

Frederick Bigger, Chief of Planning

The Greenbelt Program was first administered under the Resettlement Administration. Subsequently, it was placed under the Farm Security Administration (1937), the National Housing Agency (1942), and the Public Housing Administration (1947) until the sale of the towns in the 1950s.
MAJOR PARTICIPANTS IN THE GREENBELT PROGRAM

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GREENBELT TOWNS: Site Data

GREENBELT, MARYLAND
- about 13 miles from Washington, D.C.
- 2100 acre site, 217 acres originally developed.
- 885 units initially built: 574 group houses (3 to 6 units), 306 apartments, 5 prefabricated detached houses.

GREENHILLS, OHIO
- about 11 miles from Cleveland.
- 5930 acres, 168 acres originally developed.
- 1000 units initially built, about 50 percent group homes, 30 percent apartments, 20 percent single and double houses.
PART II. The Greenbelt Towns: A Half Century of Appraisals


Churchill lauds the Greenbelt projects as the first large-scale attempt in America to create a complete community in accordance with a definite conception of purpose: to provide and maintain decent housing and a quality environment. He sees the true importance of the greenbelt towns, not as a solution to the problem of mass housing, but rather as a social experiment demonstrating what planned communities could contribute to a new and better way of life. Low-cost housing, according to Churchill, was not an objective of the program, but rather quality, low-maintenance construction, which would result in lower rentals.


Newspaperman Aikman’s article was billed as an impartial description of the “Government’s new socialized community.” Characterizing the projected community of Greenbelt as “Atlantis-on-the-Hill,” he stresses Greenbelt’s differences from the typical suburban community, apparent even in the early construction phase: the minimum number of roads, the clustering of houses around open green spaces, the neighborhood play areas.

Revealing no expectation in this contemporary account that the greenbelt towns were to be socioeconomic experiments in living for mixed population groups, Aikman correctly observed that the tenant selection process guaranteed that the town would be founded on “almost complete economic homogeneity” and that the initial regulations concerning income limitations were designed to maintain this state.


This article is notable for its illustrations, models, and floorplans of the various housing models.


Sounding very much as if it were taken from Resettlement Administration literature, this overview of the three greenbelt towns under construction (as well as Greenbrook, New Jersey, which was subsequently blocked in court) hails the comprehensive planning effort as the beginning of a new era in American town planning and community development. The total approach to town design and the concept of a permanent single landowner are seen as factors which should encourage greater flexibility and innovation in site planning and architectural design. The importance of the experience in providing real data on start-up and maintenance costs was emphasized also.


In this reprint of a 1937 article, Peets discusses the process by which Greendale’s planners tried to work within budget constraints to achieve a 50/50 mix of rowhouses and single-family houses. Greendale’s designers liked the Radburn superblock concept but decided the midwestern residents would prefer to have their own yard and fence rather than share common open space. More privacy was also provided by having each entrance face onto a courtyard and by locating garages at the rear of this court. “The street,” Peets wrote, “becomes a defined channel of space, as it was in the old town plans.”


In a speech given at a meeting of the American City Planning Institute, Crane describes the greenbelt project as the important beginning of a substantial rebuilding program for America’s cities. Crane emphasizes that Greendale was to be one part of a comprehensive regional plan for Milwaukee to
control suburban development and to preserve open space. He terms Greendale a garden suburb, not “a self-contained garden city,” anticipating that most of its residents would be employed elsewhere. Crane hoped for a “closely knit suburban-rural community life, with cohesion and loyalty.”


This discussion by one of Greenbrook’s architects demonstrates that the greenbelt towns’ designers and planners were committed to a process that included extensive market research, detailed social planning, and meticulous cost-benefit analysis of the smallest design decisions. Indeed, Meyer believed that the lasting contribution of the program would not be the specific solutions arrived at for each site, but rather the planning/development process that evolved, which he hoped would serve as an example for private industry.

Mayer describes in some detail the procedures followed by the Greenbrook project team. Working from the requirements of the Resettlement Administration, the architects first collected data on existing costs and available structural systems and materials. They consulted the plans of Letchworth, Welwyn, Radburn, and several traditional residential developments to calculate the proper area, land use, and density for the town. Recognizing that they knew little about the living preferences of potential residents, the architects investigated local living conditions in adjacent industrial areas before developing housing models and planning layouts. Final decisions were based on research data, specifics of the site, and economic considerations.

In this contemporary account, Mayer commends the Resettlement Administration for the freedom given to the planners, which fostered the feelings of individual responsibility and intense personal involvement on the part of all those involved that made the project a success, at least from the standpoint of design and construction. He expresses the hope that the greenbelt towns will have an effect on what he terms an obsolete building industry, by demonstrating the economies and amenities of physical layout achievable in large-scale, comprehensively planned operations.


These two favorable articles on Greenbelt, Maryland, include contemporary photographs full of images of a better future, and interviews with some of the new residents, contrasting their old Washington neighborhoods with their new surroundings. The second article notes that the purpose of the greenbelt towns is to provide housing for “lower-paid white collar workers and to provide, within commuting distance from large cities, model communities with a setup for a healthy family and group life.” The social experiment which these communities represented is also emphasized. Greenbelt’s first City Manager, Ray Braden, is quoted as saying that educating the public to “help develop and further interest group living as contrasted with an individual philosophy” would be his primary job.


This document by one of Greenbrook’s architects was a draft for a projected book on the greenbelt program. Most of it is devoted to technical details of the projects; however, Churchill’s chapter entitled “Concepts” discusses some of the precedents for the greenbelt towns. Although he mentions the influence of company towns, notably in their control by one owner-developer, he points out that it was not the intent of the Resettlement Administration to create “government company towns,” but rather politically independent, economically self-sustaining entities. More immediate models for the Resettlement Administration’s program were to be found in Wright and Stein’s Radburn and more especially their site plan for Chatham Village in Pittsburgh. That experiment in large-scale housing development, unlike Radburn, operated as a rental project under the ownership of the Buhl Foundation and was planned around group-housing units rather than single-family homes. Both these practices were to be followed in the greenbelt program.

Although the designs of the greenbelt towns have so often been characterized as a radical departure in town design, Churchill’s contemporary account describes the greenbelt towns in conservative terms as an attempt “to combine the amenities characteristic of the early colonial villages with the advantages of our mechanized age.”

One of Greenhills’ chief planners outlines the basic concepts underlying the town plan: spaciousness; utility of circulation; sufficiency of commercial, educational, cultural, and recreational uses; efficiency of community operation; economy; protection against uncontrolled future development; and regional integration.

The designers hoped to create the effect “of a quiet rural village rather than that of a suburban section of a large community.” Hartzog details the essential elements of garden city design which Greenhills employed: the circuit road with connecting residential streets, superblocks with clustered housing, houses with service and garden entrances, and interior green spaces and playgrounds. This project was planned to include 12 percent detached and semidetached housing, 72 percent group housing, and 15 percent multi-family housing. It was anticipated that every house would eventually have a garage.

Hartzog recalls that one of the first decisions made was to build the town as completely and of as high a quality as possible, rather than just providing a minimum of facilities and basic infrastructure and leaving the town to grow. If the greenbelt towns were to be models of planned community development, the designers felt that they had to appear as attractive and as finished as possible for the first residents. Hartzog expresses the concern that Greenhills be fully integrated into the Cincinnati region physically, socially, and economically, noting that the town must be seen as operating to the benefit of the whole region if the greenbelt concept was to succeed.


This account by Greenbelt’s planner describes the major design choices in site selection and layout. In yet another reference to early American village life, Walker compares the placement of residential superblocks on the site’s crescent-shaped plateau surrounding a large recreational valley to “early New England towns with their town commons.” He explains that the multi-family housing units were placed near the athletic fields and the town center so as to bring the maximum number of residents into proximity with these facilities. The planners’ intention was that the shopping center would be the town gathering place, important not just as a commercial facility, but as part of the social and cultural life of the town.


This article is more typical of the early press coverage that the greenbelt experiment received. It reports that the government managed to reduce the actual cost of $16,000 per housing unit to a more reasonable $5,423 by writing off the surplus labor due to work relief; the cost of land left undeveloped; and the costs of the schools, business center, recreational facilities, and roads. Thus, says Nation’s Business, the government’s message to private industry is not to worry about reducing expenditure, just increase deductions.

The article contrasts the federal government’s 100 percent commitment to the greenbelt program, which provided shelter for about 2,000 of the nation’s estimated 43,000,000 citizens in need of decent housing, with the provisions of the United States Housing Act. The federal government’s share in this slum clearance and housing effort was only 80 percent, and both public and private response to the program at the local level had been indifferent at best.


Urban critic Lewis Mumford was one of the founding members of the Regional Planning Association of America, and through his numerous books and articles he became the chief publicist for the regional approach to urban planning espoused by this influential group. A longtime resident of New York and confirmed urbanist (Mumford lived in Sunnyside Gardens for a number of years), he promoted a view of a new, “humanized” urban environment which could be achieved by directing and controlling future metropolitan growth.

Mumford’s sweeping urban history, The Culture of Cities, and his later work, The City in History (1961), provide the historical context for his urban vision. In the first volume, Mumford traces the development of the city from medieval times through the physical and social disruptions of the modern megalopolis. He calls for the reordering of the urban environment to create form, order, and design for modern civilization and to harness its attendant social and technological complexities. Mumford presents his concept for planned communities of limited size, density, and area to be located within a framework of regional decentralization.
In a brief section on garden cities, he emphasizes Howard’s ideas about common ownership of land, controlled growth and population dispersal, and functional balance. He praises Howard as the first modern urban theorist to bring a sound sociological conception to the problems of rational urban growth. In assessing the influence of the greenbelt concept in America, Mumford attributes the failure of the greenbelt towns of the 1930s to do more to spread the garden city ideal to the program’s lack of support both within the Roosevelt administration and in the local communities affected.


More descriptive than analytical, this thesis does provide some contemporary details of life during Greenbelt’s first years. While it concentrates on educational activities, many of Greenbelt’s community organizations are mentioned in passing. Larson observes that Greenbelt’s cultural and educational activities were unsurpassed in American towns of like size. The central theme of the Greenbelt way of life emphasized “constant enrichment for the entire population through educative processes and opportunities.”


John Walker had been involved with the development of Radburn and served as Manager of the Radburn Association. At the time of these articles he was Director of the Resettlement Division of the Farm Security Administration. These reviews of the early days of the greenbelt towns are noteworthy for their excellent pictures, house plans, and maps. By 1938 Greenbelt had a total of 885 homes: 574 group house units, 5 detached homes demonstrating prefabrication techniques, and 306 apartment units. House rentals (including heat) ranged from $29/month for four rooms to $39/month for seven rooms. Apartment rentals started at $18 for one and a half rooms to $32 for three rooms and a sleeping porch. Captions of interior pictures draw attention to the wood furniture, designed and manufactured especially for the projects and made available to tenants on liberal credit terms. For about $300, residents could furnish their whole house. A maple table and four chairs cost $31.50; two maple beds with box spring and mattress were priced at $41.

All of the articles stress the healthy aspects of the planned environment, referring repeatedly to room arrangements designed for cross ventilation and sunlight. The article on Greenbelt again evokes a nostalgic image, mentioning the resemblance of the town plan, with its prominent town center, to traditional New England towns and midwestern communities grouped around a town common.


By 1939 Greenbelt had 3000 residents and a municipal budget of $72,000. Bone observes that the federal government, source of most of Greenbelt’s revenue, was spending an equal amount to build a swimming pool and bath house.

This is the often-quoted article in which Greenbelt’s residents are said to be “overstimulated” because of the plethora of community activities available. Nevertheless, Bone finds citizen morale very high due in large measure to the intense community life of the town. He calls attention to the political ambiguity which still existed at this stage in Greenbelt’s history because of the town’s unique status as a creation of the federal government. He concludes that the most important community task remained the continuing education of residents about the social implications of the project.

Interestingly enough, with all the publicity given to Greenbelt’s safe road system, the article notes that there had been four traffic accidents in the town’s first fifteen months.


This contemporary assessment of Greenbelt’s first full year of operation concludes that the experiment had fulfilled two of its three stated goals: creation of work relief and demonstrating the cost-effectiveness of comprehensive planning. The additional goal of providing low-income housing proved more difficult. Greenbelt’s construction provided eight million man-hours of work relief; however, the necessity of relying on hand construction methods so that unskilled workers could be employed substantially affected the project’s ability to hold down construction costs. As many as 1600
men from Baltimore and 1200 from Washington were brought to the site daily, since the decision had been made not to build barracks to house them. Common laborers worked about 90 hours a month for which they were paid $49.50. Skilled laborers earned up to $1.65 an hour.

Low-income housing was being provided, but rapidly rising land values and the project’s attractiveness to more well-to-do tenants raised doubts as to how long this could realistically be maintained. The project was demonstrating that good planning and the provision of community amenities were powerful development forces. It seemed doubtful, however, to this contemporary observer that such a model would prove the solution to the problems of urban slums.

Form, William H. “Social Stratification in a Planned Community.” AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW 10 (October 1945): 605-613, references.

The author, a resident of Greenbelt for several years, describes the social structure which evolved in the town’s early development. He records a number of factors which were deliberately planned to prevent social stratification: the selection process, which assured social and economic homogeneity; the cooperative ethos which was promoted as the guiding principle of social and economic life; the encouragement of citizen participation in government; and the provision of self-sufficient organizations designed to satisfy resident needs and interests. Further, as a new town, Greenbelt had no precedents or established patterns to influence resident behavior. Nevertheless, within four years, a definite social status structure had emerged.

Form identifies eight major status groups: 1) federal appointees who managed the town, 2) the town’s economic elite who generally kept socially and organizationally apart, 3) about thirty town leaders who headed community organizations, 4) about sixty-four residents who headed up committees and had second-level organizational and government jobs, 5) ordinary clerical workers who made up the membership of community organizations, 6) manual workers, 7) maintenance workers, 8) and the 7 percent of the population who were Jewish.

Form concludes that status in Greenbelt was based primarily on organizational participation and secondarily on occupation. The planned features of the town enforced an ideology rewarding participation, service, and political power. Traditional bases for social structure, such as length of residence, age, income, and occupation, became increasingly important with time.


Written only four years after the first residents moved in, this account by Greenbelt’s assistant town manager is an early assessment of the Greenbelt experiment. It is replete with references to the anti-New Deal feeling which colored media accounts of the greenbelt program and which the author felt was a factor in curtailing some of the initial plans for Greenbelt, Maryland.

Fulmer presents a very positive picture of Greenbelt and its residents in a clear attempt to offset the unfavorable publicity that had plagued the town from its start. He emphasizes the pride of the residents in their surroundings and their awareness of their social responsibilities. He describes the active civic life of the fledgling community with its consumer, health, recreational, and religious cooperatives.

Fulmer saw Greenbelt as a hopeful alternative to the process of blight and decay that had not only overtaken America’s established cities, but could already be seen in more recent suburban development. At the time, Fulmer anticipated that the planned community of Greenbelt would be a major influence on the social and economic development of the United States.


Stephenson compares Greenbelt with the English versions of Howard’s garden city and finds that the cooperative aspects of Greenbelt’s social and economic life have gone beyond what English garden cities had achieved.

The descriptions of Greenbelt in this article call attention to the high quality of material used (floors of asphalt tile, steel window casements) as well as to the modern appliances provided to each household.


In this plea for sustained planning in Greenbelt, Gutheim reviews the principal criticisms which had been associated with the town: its lack of local employment opportunities, relegate it to the status of a bedroom community; and its high construction costs, attributable in large part to its involvement in the work relief effort. Conceding that subsequent experiments in large-scale, low-cost housing had
surpassed Greenbelt in terms of efficiency, convenience, and housing design. Gutheim nevertheless considers Greenbelt’s site plan and community amenities unsurpassed in the United States. Further, he sees Greenbelt’s continuing importance as a demonstration of total community building, as opposed to merely providing housing.

The Greenbelt design had provided a framework of community institutions which Gutheim found were still thriving. But he cautions that Greenbelt’s future growth would need to continue to be guided by good planning if it was to protect and conserve its planning heritage. A model of public-private partnership in community-building, Greenbelt was seen by Gutheim as a promising model for future free-standing satellite towns built by private initiative.


Asked to formulate a master plan to guide Greendale’s future development, Peets suggested several possibilities with differing land-use patterns, dwelling types, and densities. While striving to preserve the “social-esthetic standards of the greenbelt towns,” Peets was also concerned with keeping construction and municipal operating costs as low as possible. Planned to retain the idea of separation of foot and motor traffic, his designs display a more straightforward acknowledgement of the car than did the original scheme, using looping service roads instead of cul-de-sacs, and providing more room for parking. He also corrected what he had come to see as a defect of the 1930s plan by including a six-foot wide central pedestrian walk through the residential area. The front doors of new residences would be convenient to both center walk and service street, rectifying another often criticized feature of the greenbelt towns—confusion as to what was the main entrance.


On the tenth anniversary of Greendale, Stein offers a positive appraisal. He remarks on the town’s unity of urban and rural environments, the relationship of its plan and architecture to the site, the feeling of harmonious community which it evokes, and its safe and gracious living environment. The greenbelt had kept Greendale safe from unwanted change, limiting the size and growth of the community, as well as providing a sense of community identity. Stein did think that Greendale needed to grow to a more optimum size and he envisioned a constellation of neighborhood villages with their own architectural, social, and cultural character.


A major participant in most of the important housing and planned communities experiments in America in the 1920s through the 1950s, Clarence Stein served as the chief historian of the garden city movement in America. When Stein first published this book in 1951, the time appeared propitious, he wrote, “for making the next major step toward building New Towns,” and for achieving “a complete change in the form of the urban environment” both here and abroad. In his foreword to the second edition, he noted recent major experiments in new town development, including Kittatin, British Columbia; Vallingsby, on the outskirts of Stockholm; and Chandigarh, India. He believed that in America, too, the principles and practices pioneered in the efforts described in this book would inspire the creation of new towns and the redevelopment of older cities.

Stein had originally intended to write a book about the four Resettlement Administration (RA) greenbelt towns. He decided on the broader approach of this work because he had come to see these greenbelt towns as “only three links in the chain of experiences that led from Sunnyside and Radburn through Baldwin Hills Village toward the future New Towns of America.” To create these towns, Stein called for a new kind of civic development planning in which the unit of design would become the total community. The planner, he emphasized, must be concerned with the creation of a complete, living community, which would remain contemporary for long periods, incorporating in its initial design the ability to adapt and evolve over time.

In his discussion of the four RA greenbelt towns, Stein observed that they represented the first American attempt to combine the idea of the English garden city, the Radburn superblock and circulation concepts, and Perry’s neighborhood unit planning scheme. He focused in particular on Greenbelt, Maryland, exploring to what extent these ideas were actually carried out and how well they functioned over time. Stein thought that the Radburn plan incorporating the superblock, differentiated road systems and separation of pedestrian/vehicle traffic had worked well in Greenbelt’s original town center. In the later defense housing area, where these concepts were not followed to the same extent, he observed that “safety for children had decreased as had outdoor comfort and repose for adults.” Stein
felt that Greenbelt confirmed the practicality and benefits of neighborhood-centered development with housing located within a half mile of schools and shopping facilities. As the community grew, however, the shopping center proved inadequate for the needs of an increasing population; nor was it within walking distance of some of the newer residential sections. In general, Stein concluded that the greenbelt towns had demonstrated successfully new policies and techniques in planning, organizing, and operating communities.

This important book also includes Stein’s accounts of his work in Sunnyside Gardens, Phipps Garden Apartments, and Hillside Homes, all located in New York City; Radburn, New Jersey; Chatham Hills Village, Pittsburgh; and Baldwin Hills Village, Los Angeles. He also discusses another 1930s planned but never built community, Valley Stream, which was to be located in Nassau County, New York. The goals for this project were to provide jobs and revive the building industry, provide low-rent housing for 18,000 people, and to demonstrate a better way of planning for urban growth and development. Stein noted that he based many of his subsequent recommendations to the Resettlement Administration regarding the greenbelt towns on this project.


This study of Greenbelt’s government was undertaken at the request of the mayor and city council, at a time in which the town leaders were looking ahead to the final severing of ties with the federal government. Since 1943, the separation of federal and local political positions had ended the earlier practice of local officials also holding federal posts. The government still owned almost all of the town’s property, and its payments to the municipality in lieu of property taxes accounted for 80 percent of the town’s budget. The actual amount paid was decided in conference with representatives of the Public Housing Authority and the city government; thus, the federal government still played a major role in setting Greenbelt’s budget. An analysis of the town’s budgets since 1944 showed that public works accounted for one-third of all expenditures, with public recreation taking an unusually large portion of municipal funds, almost equal to the amount spent on fire and police.


This social history covering Greenbelt’s first sixteen years was written by one of its original residents. Warner’s list of civic activities during his three years in Greenbelt is an indication of the frenetic pace of community activity during this period, and his very personal account gives a sense of what daily life was like.

His account draws attention to the greenbelt towns’ ambiguous jurisdictional position, half way between independent towns and government housing projects, which created problems for early residents. In Greenbelt, Maryland, the federal government’s income limitation policy was an early source of conflict between tenants, who wished to remain when their income rose above the prescribed level, and their federal landlord. There was also difficulty in the first years with the state government until Greenbelt’s municipal status was clarified.

Although his account deals briefly with later developments, Warner left Greenbelt in 1941 before the 1000 units of defense housing, which markedly changed the town’s character, were built. This new construction represented a compromise in both design and quality of construction. More importantly, Greenbelt was forced to assimilate rapidly a large number of new residents, many of whom represented a different type of tenant from the original residents.

A brief introduction by John S. Lansill, Director of the Greenbelt Town Program, draws on his 1938 final report on the project. Striking the note of nostalgia present in so much of the contemporary accounts, Lansill describes the Greenbelt program as an effort “to return to the first American way of life.” The greenbelt towns, he states, controlled “their own destinies in a way that no community in the United States has done or been able to do since the first little towns were founded in Virginia, Maryland, and Connecticut.”


This account considers the greenbelt experiment in the context of the overall New Deal program for community building, which developed approximately one hundred urban and rural sites. Part I examines agrarian idealism, land-use planning, the garden city concept, and early federal involvement in national agricultural and economic planning. Part II describes the maze of urban and rural community-building programs that were ultimately administered by the Resettlement Administration,
including the Subsistence Homestead Program, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration Communities, and the Rural Resettlement Administration program. Part III presents case studies of individual communities representing the different community-building experiments of the New Deal programs. The chapter on the greenbelt towns, while characterizing them as one of the most influential of all New Deal accomplishments, provides only a brief summary of their history.

Conkin finds that the community program followed the general pattern for the majority of New Deal experiments: initial enthusiasm born out of the desperation of the depression, followed by a conservative reaction and consolidation of political opposition to large-scale reform programs. The New Deal communities never won Congressional endorsement as social or economic experiments, and by the early 1940s, traditional commitments to individual ownership, private enterprise, and local control had reasserted their influence on government policy. Conkin also labels the controversial and unpopular Tugwell, who was so closely associated with the greenbelt towns, as a major factor in the program’s inability to attract sufficient political or popular support.


In 1953 three Milwaukee corporations formed the Milwaukee Community Development Corporation (MCDC) and bought from the federal government all the vacant greenbelt land around Greendale, as well as its shopping center and administrative building. They retained Elbert Peets, one of the town’s original planners, to devise a development plan.

Bauer attributes the success of Greendale’s subsequent development to its continuing ownership by a single corporate body, the MCDC, which operates the town in the community interest. When a new area is deemed ready for development, the MCDC negotiates with local builders. Deed restrictions further ensure that new development areas are in keeping with the original character of the town. MCDC supervision and control, Bauer observed of the 1950s, had provided for orderly growth in which the rate of development was linked to the town’s service capacity as well as to market demand.


On December 30, 1952, the Greenbelt Veteran Housing Corporation, which became Greenbelt Homes, Inc., assumed control of 1575 housing units and 700 acres of undeveloped land as the federal government proceeded with its divestiture of the greenbelt towns. This thesis focuses on the organizational form of the cooperative and analyzes its management functions over its first nine years of operation.


This case study looks at the birth of the Greenbelt Citizens for Fair Housing, established in 1963, after a black University of Maryland student was denied the opportunity to rent an apartment. Noe looks at the program, leadership, and membership of the Greenbelt group and places it within the context of the broader metropolitan Washington fair housing movement.


McFarland considers the degree of federal government involvement in planning and managing the greenbelt program as its critical feature. Federal participation was the key to the creation of a legally simplified program, an effective method of land acquisition and control, and a mechanism for providing municipal services prior to the existence of a sizable population base.

Such an approach was unique to its time and is no longer politically or economically feasible; however, McFarland contends that the greenbelt program does provide some enduring lessons from which modern new town programs can profit. He recognizes the contemporary need to involve all levels of government as well as private interests in community building efforts. Nevertheless, he argues that a significant role must be played by the federal government in setting national urban policy and in providing essential financial backing.


The fourth greenbelt town was to have been located five miles west of New Brunswick, New Jersey, about halfway between New York City and Trenton. Fine argues that the success of a handful of local
lowness in stopping the project demonstrates two of the major weaknesses of the greenbelt program as a whole—its failure to inform and educate the public about the goals and objectives of the new communities, or to involve citizens in the planning process.

Plans for Greenbrook called for 750 housing units to be built in the first phase, with 70 percent row housing, 20 percent semidetached, 7 percent group apartments, and 3 percent detached homes. The plan incorporated many of the elements seen in the three other greenbelt communities: superblocks, separation of pedestrian and vehicular traffic, interior park system, and a town center geared to pedestrians. A unique feature was to have been the provision of a small garden plot for each unit.


In 1966 architect and planner Mayer, one of the project architects for the never-built Greenbrook site, revisited the three greenbelt towns to assess their development and the relevance of that experiment to the kinds of urban renewal and community development programs which many cities were undertaking in the late 1960s. His study was supported by the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Mayer concludes that because of 1) the lack of a sustained commitment to the greenbelt program by either the federal government or a significant part of the professional community, and 2) the unavailability of adequate financing at the time of transfer of ownership to the private sector, none of the towns had an opportunity to demonstrate whether their original objectives or methods were valid. The greenbelt towns might have and should have become powerful models for a new type of urban development. That this did not happen he attributes in part to the lack of continuing, sustained public debate about the experiment and what could be learned from it.

Mayer found no enduring civic or social characteristics that would set the three towns apart as “greenbelt towns.” Their distinctive physical and design elements, however, had lasted and could serve as models for future new communities. But Mayer predicted that soaring land prices and the pressures of uncontrolled development of the post-World War II era made it unlikely that the goals of protected green space, rural/suburban land use, and balanced population mix would be attempted in future development projects. If future new towns ever were to serve an economic cross section, they would have to provide an initial stock of low-income rental housing and a strong mechanism for maintaining it.

Finally, Mayer points out that at the time of federal government divestiture of the greenbelt towns, no requirements were placed on private developers for following a master plan in completing the communities. Residents of Greenbelt, Maryland, interested in continuing the planning principles on which the town was established found that state law gave the authority for adopting such plans to county commissioners, who did not necessarily agree with residents. In the late 1960s the county’s recommendations calling for relatively high population densities as well as high-rise buildings were strongly opposed by the Greenbelt government and concerned citizens, who had not been involved effectively in the planning process. Residents contested the plan, but the courts upheld the powers of the county commissioners.


This comprehensive review article provides a concise review of Greenbelt’s history based on the published literature.


Scott’s book has become the standard reference on the development of the profession of city planning in the United States, tracing its origins from the reforms of the 1890s through the urban disruptions of the 1960s. The section on the greenbelt towns gives a concise history of their origin and development, emphasizing the “rural village” ideal which permeated the designs for all three towns. This account also calls attention to the careful relationship of plan and site, and the preservation and use of natural features. Scott underscores the importance that John Lansill and Jacob Crane in particular placed on the greenbelt concept as a method of preserving open land, controlling growth, and directing land development. Their hope was that the experience of the greenbelt towns would lead to the widespread practice of purchasing open land and planning for its future use, thus providing an alternative to urban sprawl and uncontrolled growth. Scott suggests that had the greenbelt towns been conceived as joint public/private ventures, they might have had a better chance of insuring continued federal involvement in comprehensive planning for urban growth.
This work is also useful for an overview of other government-sponsored housing and community-building projects of the depression and War World II eras, including the TVA towns and defense-related communities, such as Willow Run, near Detroit, and Atomic Energy Commission towns, such as Oak Ridge, Tennessee, and Richland, Washington.


This discussion of the formative influence of the garden city concept on urban reform in the United States focuses on the activities of the Regional Planning Association of America as the chief publicists of the garden city ideal. Cady reviews important housing and community-building efforts from the federal housing projects of World War I through the greenbelt town program.


Arnold’s detailed history of the planning and execution of the three greenbelt towns ask why they failed to affect a fundamental shift in America’s traditional patterns of urban expansion. The greenbelt experiment was designed to demonstrate that comprehensively planned self-sufficient towns would provide a superior urban environment and foster a true sense of community for all classes of residents. In this, Arnold argues, the greenbelt program presented a challenge to well-entrenched social and economic aspects of urban life. Therefore if the program was to become an influential model for the future, it would need to win the support of politicians, planners, and private building and real estate interests, as well as the media and the general public. Arnold sees the program’s inability to garner such popular and political support as the underlying cause of the failure of this New Deal in the suburbs.

Opposition to the greenbelt program centered on three points: 1) the competition between the federal government and private enterprise which it generated; 2) the perception of the program as part of a trend toward socialism under the guise of cooperative planning; and 3) the unwillingness of the public to face the severity of the housing crisis and urban conditions in the country. Private real estate and building interests successfully portrayed the new towns as financially unsound and vaguely “un-American.” While the program did attract the interest and support of a number of planners, it was not universally applauded by planning and housing professionals. The high costs of the towns led many to view them as utopian visions, economically unfeasible. Some, like Harland Bartholomew, felt that revitalization of established urban areas was the more cost-effective and practical solution for America. Others who did favor decentralization did not feel that the greenbelt approach was the correct solution.

In assessing the achievements of greenbelt towns Arnold finds that they were far bolder in their physical planning than in social experimentation. He notes that while the program’s planning staff was willing to attempt an innovative physical environment, they were considerably more cautious in their approach to social engineering. The tenant selection process was conservative in the extreme (although residents of all political viewpoints were included) in its effort to avoid any negative publicity about “problem” tenants. The discrimination against blacks, which Arnold sees more as a response to local sensibilities than as an expression of government policy, prevented the towns from providing a model for community housing projects of later decades.

The greenbelt towns’ most enduring legacy in the author’s view is in the models they provided in physical planning: overall design, site planning, and architectural innovations. But the socioeconomic aspects of the experiment—the attempt to create socially and economically integrated communities; to operate cooperative economic, educational, and medical institutions; and to give residents a degree of legal control in public housing projects—did not provide the basis for further experimentation by either private or public developers.


Brennan looks at the continuing viability of the Greenbelt plan in terms of its 1) ability to integrate numerous specialized activities into a complex urban system; 2) to accommodate social, economic, and technical changes within its existing or planned framework; and 3) to foster perceptual clarity of the community. He finds that the city’s commercial core had lost its original competitive advantage because of subsequent commercial development in adjacent areas. Its ability to expand was limited by its small market area, compact physical location, and limited accessibility to those outside of the original development area. Greenbelt’s road system had changed to accommodate modern needs, but this
flexibility had been achieved at the expense of the original goal of traffic separation. In the original development areas, the physical plan had been substantially preserved, but Brennan characterizes the planning of the northern and peripheral areas of the town as poor. The greenbelt itself, while somewhat compromised, retained its purpose of providing a perceived identity for the community. Greenbelt’s plan, he concludes, remains viable, but he questions whether the sustained planning process necessary to maximize the original plan’s potential would be forthcoming.


Myhra argues that the philosophical origins of the greenbelt program came less directly from the English garden city tradition than from Rexford Tugwell’s view of the future course of America’s economic development. Tugwell, an agricultural economist at Columbia University at the time he joined the Roosevelt administration, believed that rural America was in permanent decline: that urban growth was not only inevitable but the future hope of a prosperous America; and that creation of a policy for planning and controlling urban development was the challenge that had to be faced.

Tugwell attempted to convince President Roosevelt that the resettlement of the displaced rural poor in new towns created on the edge of urban areas was a more practical and less expensive answer to the problems of rural poverty than making an economic and social investment in rural development. Myhra contrasts Roosevelt’s continuing sentimental commitment to a back-to-the-land movement with Tugwell’s view that the time had passed for rural renewal and that America’s cities would have to be readied to cope with thousands of displaced farm families.

This article provides insight into the variety of factors that influenced the design of the greenbelt towns. Myhra cites the writings of John Lansill, Director of the Suburban Resettlement Administration, in suggesting that the planned American communities of the 1920s and 1930s, which sought to cope with the new age of the motor car, were more immediate models for the greenbelt towns than was Howard’s Garden City. Myhra found that Tugwell’s original concept for the greenbelt program was influenced by Le Corbusier’s 1924 skyscraper-dominated design for the “Ville Contemporaine,” a greenbelt-encircled office City of Tomorrow. It was Lansill, Myhra writes, who persuaded Tugwell to adopt a more traditional suburban housing model for the greenbelt towns. Further, Myhra notes that the task of designing the towns was given originally to government engineers, who came up with a traditional grid design. Lansill and others were able to persuade Tugwell to set up a team of planners and architects for each of the towns. Once this was done, each team enjoyed a measure of freedom unusual for a government program.

While the greenbelt towns did successfully demonstrate the ability of comprehensive planning to achieve a pleasing living environment within an urban context, Myhra notes that the experiment was largely unappreciated and ultimately rejected. Congress, he contends, was as critical of Tugwell’s vision for America’s future as it was of the man himself.


Elaborating on her earlier study of the relationship between residential siting and neighborhood interaction, Rogers looks at the relationship between physical planning, residential satisfaction, neighborhood and community interaction, and the potential for integration in Greenbelt. She focuses on two planning periods in the life of the town, one of high planning between 1935-1951 and one of fragmented planning between 1952-1975. She compares the type of resident attracted in each period and the correlation between level of resident satisfaction and degree of physical planning, as well as community openness to integration. Her literature review summarizes work dealing with community planning, residential satisfaction, architectural determinism and racial integration, and architectural determinism and provision of amenities.


Christensen explores the cultural attitudes which underlie urban planning in America. Culture’s role in urban planning, she argues, is particularly clear in the new town experiments (such as the greenbelt towns) which sought to bring Howard’s garden city concepts to America. In spite of all the rhetoric hailing these towns as a means of cultural reform, Christensen believes that American planners consistently have misread Howard, ignoring those elements of his proposals which called for institutional reforms and for a radical reorganization of society. In short, she finds that “Americans have
embraced the ‘garden’ more than the ‘city’ or even the ‘concept’ and have used the garden city idea merely as means for avoiding the worse evils of megalopolis. Christensen explores the reasons for the American emphasis on the physical environment to the exclusion of Howard’s social and economic vision and his hopes for redirecting urban civilization. She compares several representative garden cities (Radburn, New Jersey; Greendale, Wisconsin; and Columbia, Maryland: along with a more conventional suburb, Levittown, New Jersey) with Howard’s ideas and relates the differences she finds to American attitudes about nature, space, and the city. She concludes that the traditional American ambivalence toward the city has severely limited urban experiments. Americans have tried to “restore the innocence, simplicity, and aesthetic appeal associated with village life while still retaining the economic and technological benefits of urbanism.” American town planning has looked to the past rather than confronting the future; thus, she contends, it has been a reflection of American culture rather than an agent of reform.


By the late 1930s, American proponents of urban reform through regional development were looking for ways to counteract the wealth of negative publicity which the greenbelt towns had attracted and to win public support for their ideas. They seized upon the occasion of the 1939 World’s Fair as an opportunity for achieving maximum exposure for their views through the medium of film. This article describes how the interaction of the urban theorists and the filmmakers influenced both the form and content of this now classic film, which contrasts the horrors of the contemporary urban environment with the promise of the decentralized city of the future.

The impetus for “The City” came from Clarence Stein, the spokesman most closely associated with the new town movement. He enlisted the support of several of his Regional Planning Association of America colleagues in promoting the film, which was financed by $50,000 from the Carnegie Foundation. It was only to be expected, Gillette observes, that these reformers would use the film as a propaganda piece for the garden city idea: a visual representation of their belief in the ability of planning to restore modern urban life to the attractive, healthy, communal environment which they associated with the villages and towns of early America. These planners wanted to promote the greenbelt towns as models for the urban community of the future. The filmmakers, as noted here, were somewhat less taken with the planned environment, which they found to be visually dull and sterile. Further, according to producer Ralph Steiner, they felt that the commentary provided by Lewis Mumford was overly idealistic, often gratuitous, and at cross-purposes with their desire for dramatic effect.

Yet even though the filmmakers’ goal of dramatic entertainment at times conflicted with the urban planners’ desire to promote their social and planning philosophy, Gillette concludes that in large measure the film succeeds on both levels. By wedding powerful visual imagery of the old and the new city with the message of the planners, it demonstrated the role a planned environment could play in redeeming American urban life.


Miller traces the history of the comprehensively planned town of Forest Park, which was developed on part of the agricultural land included in the original plan for Greenhills, Ohio. When the federal government began to phase out its involvement in the greenbelt towns in the 1940s, Justin R. Hartzog, chief planner for Greenhills, was hired to devise a plan for its future development and to advise the government on how best to dispose of the town. At about the same time, concerned Cincinnati citizens became interested in the development of a master plan for the metropolitan area which would include the Greenhills site.

As was the case with her sister cities, the disposition legislation passed by Congress made it almost impossible for Greenhills to pass intact into the hands of one developer. Over three thousand acres in an area that came to be known as North Greenhills was eventually acquired by a limited-profit company which was to develop it in accordance with the Cincinnati master plan. Renowned planner Ladislas Segoe was engaged to design the area. His scheme called for a reasonably self-contained, predominately residential community, which acknowledged its relationship to the larger metropolitan area. Such a plan would have been compatible with the ideas of metropolitan growth and development implicit in the original greenbelt program. By the time private developers were committed to the project, however, Miller argues that interest in metropolitanism had passed. It was replaced by the rediscovery of local community, in which suburbs were seen, not as an integral part of an urban metropolis, but as sharply differentiated from the city and often in competition or conflict with it.

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This article reviews the opposition to Greenbrook, New Jersey, the proposed fourth town in the greenbelt program. Local citizens waged a legal battle which ended with the D.C. Court of Appeals finding that the Resettlement Administration’s program represented an unlawful delegation of legislative power to the president. Schaffer believes this decision marked the beginning of the end of the greenbelt program, which had never enjoyed firm political support. Rexford Tugwell resigned from the Resettlement Administration soon after the Court’s decision, depriving the project of its primary backer. Roosevelt, Schaffer asserts, was not about to wage a fight on behalf of the unpopular Resettlement Administration in an election year: both Tugwell and the greenbelt program were thus expendable.


This review article traces the development of Greendale’s spatial design and social character. Greendale was considered by many to be the most aesthetically pleasing of the three greenbelt towns. Planner Elbert Peets incorporated references from colonial towns, Midwestern county seats, and European Renaissance cities in his design. Greendale’s plan came closest to a conventional grid layout, not only because of Peets’ classical bent, but also because the topography did not lend itself to the superblock plan.

The authors conclude that Greendale in the 1980s had retained its distinctive physical plan: however, they find it socially, economically, and politically distinguishable from other garden suburbs. Greendale provides safe and quiet streets, parks, sustained property values, and some degree of economic self-sufficiency. It has not achieved the original goals of providing low-income housing, preserving farmland, maintaining the communal feeling of a suburban village, or promoting a regional approach to planning.


In this recent assessment of Greenbelt’s development, Arnold notes that encroachment on the original vision of Greenbelt’s development began even before construction, when it became clear that available funds would only be enough for a bare beginning. With no support for the completion of the project forthcoming from Congress, the real development of Greenbelt came after the sale of the town to private interests. Arnold found that Greenbelt’s distinctive layout, physical amenities, and architecture had influenced the quality of subsequent development: nevertheless, the chance to complete the town according to a single, comprehensive plan was lost.

The reason, Arnold suggests, was the diminishing appeal of the original greenbelt concept. After the war, there was a rapid reassertion of the traditional American preference for the single-family home on its own lot. Further, the small-town charm of the walking city, Arnold writes, was still admired by residents, but was no longer practical for a lifestyle built around the car and an ever-growing demand for access to a wide range of goods and services. Subsequent development thus changed both the physical and social character of Greenbelt. The intrusion of the Baltimore-Washington Parkway and the Capital Beltway divided the town into five separate residential areas, all accessible by car. While the 1950s saw mainly residential development, the 1960s and 1970s were characterized by an explosion of commercial development in areas adjacent to the new highways. Such commercial development, Arnold notes, contributed positively to the town’s tax base but at the cost of changing the physical scale of Greenbelt, as well as its quality of urban living.

Despite these problems, Arnold is encouraged that, having lived through several decades of rapid development, many of the town’s current residents have become actively involved in developing a master plan to guide development for the remainder of the century. He hopes that the guiding ethos of the original planners and the continuing appreciation of residents for their environment will serve to maintain the high standards of town planning which Greenbelt has long exemplified.
FIGURE 1.

Site plan of Greenbelt, projecting the ultimate development of the town. The crescent-shaped plan was suggested by the terrain. The two main highways that define the site, Crescent and Ridge Road, follow the curve of a raised plateau. Cross roads cut through the site about every 1,000 feet, connecting the two main roads and dividing the area into superblocks of about 14 acres each.

All photographs are from the Farm Security Administration photographic collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.
FIGURE 2.

Franklin Roosevelt visiting the site November 13, 1936.
FIGURE 3.

- Resettlement Administrator Rexford G. Tugwell (center, white suit) on an inspection of the Greenbelt project, July 1936.

FIGURE 4.

Arial view of Greenbelt, November 1937, with the initial development phase nearing completion. Note the surrounding park land.
FIGURE 5.

Arial view of Greenbelt, September 1939, showing the clustering of housing within the superblocks. Note the differentiation of street width, according to function, and the internal pathway system. To the left center is the elementary school with the swimming pool behind. The shopping center is in the center of the picture. The pedestrian underpass is visible passing under the major street in front of the commercial center.

FIGURE 6.

Pedestrian walks lead to housing units fronting on common green spaces. Most of the original housing was row houses or low-rise apartments.

FIGURE 7.

Greenbelt's children could avoid major street crossings by using the underpasses that connected the major pedestrian paths to the school and the shopping center.
FIGURE 8.
Living room in a Greenbelt housing unit, November 1936. Furniture was specially commissioned for the greenbelt towns. Liberal credit arrangements were available to residents, who could furnish a one-bedroom unit for about $300.

FIGURE 9.
Kitchen in a one-room apartment, 1938. Contemporary accounts stressed the modern appliances furnished in every unit.

FIGURE 10.
Greenbelt school, September 1937. In keeping with the neighborhood unit concept, the school was located within a half-mile of all housing units and doubled as the community building.
FIGURE 11.

Shopping center, Memorial Day 1942. The commercial center was geared to the pedestrian; parking areas were located at either end. The shopping center included a bank, post office, and the cooperative supermarket. The mother and child statue was sculpted by WPA artist Lenore Thomas.

FIGURE 12.

Greenbelt gas station. This was another venture of the Greenbelt cooperative organization, Greenbelt Consumer Services, Inc.
PART III. The Greenbelt Legacy: Revival of the New Communities Movement in the United States


In this early piece about Columbia, Maryland, Canty writes that its developer James Rouse set about “to construct the framework of a society, based on the best information it can find about the wants and needs of people.” In creating Columbia, Rouse was establishing new precedents in financing, land assembly, and urban design.

Canty emphasizes the influence of the site on the design concept. Parcels of land not held by Rouse where one factor in the breaking up of the site into a series of communities, a strategy which complemented social planning ideas about the relationship between neighborhood, village, and the town as a whole. It was assumed that neighborhoods would be relatively homogeneous and that the village centers would be the places where residents would mix. Columbia’s planners were striving to make a wide range of housing choices available in an urban setting, while preserving a sense of community not usually found there.


This early review of Columbia’s progress focuses on its planning approach which addressed both physical and non-physical determinants. The physical design criteria were based on three major principles, which emerged from the deliberations of the project’s social and behavioral sciences advisors: 1) the school concept, locating an elementary school in each neighborhood and a junior and senior high school in each village; 2) the small bus concept, providing an extensive internal public transportation system; and 3) the village concept, encouraging each village to develop unique educational, retail, and cultural facilities which would be accessible to all.


The following five reports comprise this publication: “Planned Communities” by Robert Weaver; “The Bluffs: A Planned Community on the Irvine Ranch, Newport Beach, California” by K. C. Albright; “Columbia, Maryland, a New Town for America” by William E. Finley (a brief account of planning principles and design concept); “Lessons to be Learned from Europe” by Wolf Von Eckardt (with particular reference to Harlow, England, and Tapiola, Finland); and “Transportation Planning Criteria for New Towns” by H.K. Evans.


This entire issue was devoted to discussions of the new town movement in America. Along with two forum discussions, the following articles were included: “The New Town: Concept and Experience” by Chloethiel Woodward Smith; “The New Town: Recent European Developments” by John C. Morley; “Problems of the New Town Developer: Focus on Reston, Virginia” by William J. Conklin; “New Towns of the Future: Focus on Columbia, Maryland” by William Finley; “New Towns on the Past: Focus on Park Forest, Illinois” by Thomas McDade; and “Human Factors in the New Towns” by Paul Lemkau.


In comparing some aspects of the Greenbelt towns of the 1930s with the new communities proposed under the Urban Development Act of 1966, Edwards underscores the differences in program objectives of the greenbelt program, a child of the depression, and the New Communities Program, a reflection of American prosperity. The greenbelt program focused on the immediate need for jobs and low-rental housing, planning modest communities (Greenbelt, the largest, was planned for a population of 7000). The government’s program in the 1960s was encouraging private developers to plan real cities (50,000
to 100,000 in population) for low- and middle-income families that would meet the needs of an expanding economy and urban population.

Another major difference between the two programs was the need for the contemporary new communities program to deal with local and regional political factors. The greenbelt program, in contrast, was federally conceived, planned, managed, and owned. It did not depend on state or local initiative for support, which simplified matters considerably in getting the program started. Nonetheless, Edwards feels that a major lesson to be learned from the greenbelt experience is that the federal government cannot build communities alone. Federal assistance is necessary to begin the process, but private developers should plan, construct, and market the towns. Further, such towns will have to show a profit if the program is to have an impact on future urban development.

Finally, Edwards remarks that the greenbelt towns, while they may appear obsolete by current taste and standards, did demonstrate the advantages of well-planned land-use development within the large metropolitan context. He sees this earliest government venture into building satellite towns as a successful model for modern new communities. The greenbelt towns stand up well in contrast to the suburban sprawl of the 1950s and 1960s and still reflect the advantages of comprehensive community planning, development, and management.


The authors distinguish between “new towns,” created to be self-sufficient entities in which a large percentage of the population is expected to both live and work, and “new communities,” which are largely commuter towns in their early years of development. New towns, such as England has built, attempt to alter patterns of urban growth and manage development. New communities, which are more characteristic of American development, are more a way of ordering the business of land development around metropolitan areas. This book deals primarily with California development projects, but includes sections on Reston and Columbia as well.

Eichler and Kaplan identify a new breed of developer, the “community builders,” who began in the 1960s to recognize a market for “amenity-packed, planned communities.” Such developers are set apart from the more traditional “merchant developers” by the former’s sense of mission. The community builders see themselves as creating a new kind of environment in their planned communities, rather than just reproducing what has sold in the past; and they have the resources and the will to take the long-range view with respect to profits. Their projects differ from conventional land development operations in terms of their large scale, involvement of a variety of professionals in the planning process, methods of land assembly, range of facilities offered, and methods of financing.

Although they had originally been supporters of the government’s programs to help initiate new communities, the authors came to question the whole premise of new community development as an urban strategy. They find little reason to believe that such communities would actually mitigate urban sprawl; provide a better housing mix; attract a significant number of jobs close to residents’ homes; or demonstrate more efficient methods of site planning, more creative design, or technological innovation. There is nothing intrinsic to new communities, they say, that would insure any of these things and nothing to prevent them from happening in conventional subdivisions or indeed, older cities. They conclude that the costs and risks of new community development are too high and the potential benefits too low to justify the government’s program. If the aim is really to address major urban problems related to equality and choice and the quality of urban life, such issues can be dealt with more effectively through changes in institutions and laws.


In his testimony supporting what became Title X, Land Development and New Communities, of the 1965 Housing Act, James Rouse argues that neither the federal government nor the private sector has taken responsibility for city building and that no mechanism yet exists for undertaking the kind of comprehensive planning necessary for producing large-scale urban development. He argues for federal government-backed loans to local land development agencies so that local governments can assemble land packages, provide basic utilities and roads, and market projects to private developers who would build total communities. Rouse points out that what he was able to do privately in financing Columbia was the exception, not the norm. Federal assistance would be necessary to make private development a realistic option and to involve small and medium-sized development concerns.

Gelfand’s book provides the historical context for considering the federal programs supporting new community development in the late 1960s and early 1970s. He traces the evolution of the federal commitment to cities from the depression to the establishment of the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Gelfand observes that this gesture, affirming a national commitment to address urban problems, ran counter to both a traditional attachment to small town and rural America and a distaste for expanding the role of the federal government.

It was the New Deal which brought the federal government into urban affairs by establishing direct federal/municipal contacts. Gelfand demonstrates that throughout the 1950s, the continuing indifference of the states to the problems of the cities strengthened the federal/municipal relationship, even in the face of President Eisenhower’s resistance to the spread of federal authority. The return of the Democrats to power in the 1960s “consolidated many of the trends of federal-municipal relationships that had developed since 1933 and indicated the direction they would take for most of the decade.” Johnson’s Great Society urban programs, Gelfand finds, were created not so much out of a sense of urban crisis as from an intellectual commitment to domestic reform and urban renewal.

### FEDERAL NEW COMMUNITIES PROGRAM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Title</th>
<th>Legislative Source</th>
<th>Primary Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mortgage Insurance for Land Development and New Communities (Title X)</td>
<td>Housing and Urban Development Act of 1965</td>
<td>To insure mortgages for land acquisition and site improvement by private developers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Communities Program Loan Guarantee and Supplementary Grants (Title IV)</td>
<td>Housing and Urban Development Act of 1968</td>
<td>To guarantee bonds, debentures, and notes for private new community development of facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Communities Assistance Program (Title VII)</td>
<td>Housing and Urban Development Act of 1970</td>
<td>To guarantee bonds, for private and public new community development and to provide other assistance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Hoppenfeld, Columbia’s chief designer, had served previously as Chief of Urban Design for the National Capital Planning Commission. He uses the example of Columbia to describe its innovative approach to town planning: the use of a multi-disciplinary, comprehensive approach involving experts in every facet of community-building in a continuing planning-building process, ranging from conception, through construction, to resident feedback. Hoppenfeld emphasizes that those involved in such a project must share a common set of goals and values, and that it is on such a shared commitment that success depends. The fundamental goals for Columbia were 1) to create a people-oriented social and physical environment; 2) to preserve and enhance the qualities of the land; and 3) to make a profit for the developer, thus demonstrating that these goals are not in conflict.

While Hoppenfeld states that Columbia was never envisioned as a totally self-sufficient community (but rather as one integrated into the socioeconomic life of the broader metropolis), the goal was to achieve a truly balanced town. Yet he concedes that, in order to be economically feasible, Columbia had to be designed to appeal to the “economically viable” segment to the population; thus, Columbia was never expected by its planners to address in any significant way the major social problems of poverty and racism.

The author describes the now famous Columbia social planning process, in which interdisciplinary work groups met twice a month for six months, addressing each function of the community. The groups were requested, as developer James Rouse once wrote, to give the developer their view of what “ought to be,” without regard to financial or institutional constraints. The town’s overall plan continues to be modified as needed on the basis of experience in a similar process, in which day-to-day decision-making is approached from an interdisciplinary perspective and guided by a commitment to finding socially viable solutions to problems.

Columbia provides other lessons to developers. From the time the project was announced, the planners worked to cultivate a good working relationship with the citizens and local officials of Howard County. As Hoppenfeld points out, it was important that Columbia be accepted and integrated into Howard County’s long-range development plans. Secondly, Columbia’s design and planning process was guided at all stages by an economic model which was constantly refined as the project progressed. All design decisions were made within economic guidelines; the planners and designers. Hoppenfeld states, were always aware that they had to take into account a realistic budget as well as engineering feasibility, aesthetic satisfaction, and market acceptance.

Hoppenfeld concludes that city building must be an essential part of an industrial nation’s overall development process. It is only by undertaking efforts on this scale that the new housing requirements can be met; the economic benefits of the appreciated value of developed land be realized to pay for the costs of infrastructure and community services and facilities; the essential services needed for urban life be provided; and the needed entrepreneurial leadership and social inspiration be found to meet the challenge of building and rebuilding our urban communities.


On the occasion of the completion of the first five-year stage in Columbia’s development, Bailey examines the extent to which the town had fulfilled its economic, social, and physical goals. At a time when other new town developments (notably Reston) were floundering economically, Columbia had been quite successful. Bailey cites Columbia’s location “in the fastest growing metropolitan area in the east” as a major factor in its success. He observes that Reston had the better design; however, Reston (located “halfway between Washington and nowhere”) had not attracted residents in the expected numbers. Columbia’s planners, Bailey notes, also had design aspirations, but these were only one factor in developing the overall plan for the town. The article concludes that Columbia’s developers had followed through on many of their stated social and economic goals by providing a wide range of housing opportunities; a variety of social, cultural, and educational institutions; and an effective intricacy transportation system.

Using a number of planning variables (design process, social objectives, physical form models, and adaptive ability), Godschalk attempts a cross-cultural comparison of new towns in Holland, Scandinavia, and Great Britain. He concludes that the twenty years of experience in new town development since World War II have seen the development of a more systematic and comprehensive planning-design process that assumes the continuing evolution of the plan as it adapts to changing physical and social conditions. Further, he notes the shift in focus from planning the individual community to issues of regional development and integration.


Chapter IV of this publication includes an overview of the history of new town development in the United States and Europe from the nineteenth century to the present. A survey of recent public and private community-building ventures follows. Chapter V provides an analysis of some of the issues related to government involvement in public-private joint ventures.


In 1968 the National Committee on Urban Growth Policy was formed under the sponsorship of the National Association of Counties, the National League of Cities, the United States Conference of Mayors, and Urban America Inc. to study the new cities concept and other alternatives to urban growth and change. Following a tour of new communities in Great Britain, Sweden, Finland, and Denmark, the Committee held a series of conferences in which urban experts were invited to give their views. This volume contains a selection of papers prepared for the conferences, along with the Committee’s final report.

The Committee recommended that a national program to promote and assist new community development be established under a new mechanism created in the Executive Branch which would serve as the focal point for urban policy issues. They favored the development of a national urban policy which would include measures to assist in the redesign and rebuilding of existing cities, as well as organizing new growth in new towns on the periphery of metropolitan areas, and strengthening and expanding smaller communities in rural “accelerated growth centers.” They called upon the federal government to support the creation of one hundred new communities averaging 100,000 in population and ten communities with at least one million in population.


These articles address the fear that Title IV (New Communities) of the 1968 Housing and Urban Development Act would only serve to exacerbate the problems of older cities by putting new towns and established cities in direct competition. Morris argues that new towns could be a factor in revitalizing the older cities and would be a constructive alternative to continued haphazard dispersion. He draws attention to some of the lessons that can be learned from European development practices which have demonstrated that development can be consistent with a set of formulated goals and objectives for directing urban growth. He concludes that interdependence is the key to the coexistence of new towns and older cities.


Writing in the late 1960s, Gutheim expresses the hope that the recent federal support of new town development would result in a true national urban policy which would provide the context for future and larger programs. He reviews the experiences of Reston and Columbia, with particular reference to the influence of federal government policy and programs on developers’ goals, plans, and operations. While granting that new towns could not be seen as the solution to major urban problems, Gutheim nevertheless feels that their potential economic and social benefits warrant the continuation of the new town experiment.

In reviewing the major objectives which new town advocates predict they will achieve, Alonso finds little to support the idea that the new town program should be a major component of a policy to direct urban growth. Even a successful new town program, he asserts, would not significantly affect contemporary urban problems: focusing on new towns, in fact, only distracts attention from such problems in existing areas. Alonso does concede, however, that there may be some merit in a modest new town program that would use them as laboratory settings to develop and test technological, physical, and institutional innovations that might be applicable in expanding and rebuilding conventional urban settings.


This report urges that the opportunity not be missed to use new towns as demonstration laboratories for developing more democratic forms of local government. As effective methods of governing urban areas are tested within the new town context, they can be transferred to other urban settings.

Areas suggested for exploration include: 1) the European concept of “universal powers” where localities retain any powers not denied them, rather than only those expressly permitted; 2) new types of political subdivisions for new towns giving them broad self-governing powers; and 3) new ways of broadening and strengthening citizen participation in planning, developing, and governing. The report discusses the role of the private developer as well as state and local governments in planning for the political life of the new town.

A background paper prepared by Royce Hanson reviews political institutions currently in use in new towns, including private homeowners or community associations as well as public bodies. Hanson identifies key issues in the development of new towns, noting that they require internal political mechanisms for self-government and provision of services, and external ones for regulating relationships with larger jurisdictions.


This volume synthesizes the proceedings of the 1971 “Conference on New Communities” sponsored by the American Institute of Architects. It includes schematic representations of the master plans of thirty-two American cities ranging from the European-influenced plans of Philadelphia, Savannah, and the District of Columbia; to the greenbelt towns and their progeny like Columbia and Reston; to experimental cities like Disney’s EPCOT; to new towns—in-town like Fort Lincoln, in Washington, D.C., and Cedar/Riverside, Minneapolis.

The first group of essays reflects the technical emphasis of the new town design and development movement during the late 1960s, when “systems design” was the key word for planners as they attempted to anticipate and interrelate the social, physical, economic, political, and psychological factors involved in community building. A second set of essays addresses the need for a national urban growth policy to control and order development throughout the United States. A unifying theme is the authors’ sustained belief in the use of physical design to effect desirable social and economic patterns.


This book discusses the rebirth of interest in public new town programs brought about in large part by the community-building efforts of private developers and some large corporations. The author notes the resurgence of public debate on the merits of the new town concept as a policy for controlling and directing metropolitan expansion, and as an organizing concept for pulling together a number of social, physical, and economic objectives expressed in a variety of public programs related to urban issues.

Observing that there is as yet no generally accepted definition of a “new town,” Clapp offers instead a list of some basic characteristics of new town development that appear to distinguish it from other forms of urban development: 1) they are founded for some purpose or objective; 2) the purpose generally reflects the sponsorship of their developer, private or public; 3) they are generally held under single ownership or control; 4) they are pre-planned, developed according to an overall design; 5) they aim to be self-sufficient and balanced communities; 6) they are developed on a larger scale than the typical suburban developments.

In summarizing the arguments in favor of new towns policy, Clapp distinguishes between those which
emphasize "intra-community" aspects, or the advantages of living in planned communities, and arguments which stress "inter-community" benefits, pertaining to the role of new towns in directing and controlling urban expansion on a regional basis. In the former category, he draws attention to the nostalgic longing for community life of early American communities, as well as the anti-urban bias of some of the proponents of the new town movement. In terms of new town policy as a means of controlling growth, he reviews the claims of those who assert that creation of new towns will successfully address problems of urban sprawl, help preserve open spaces and aid in land conservation, and help control and direct metropolitan growth on a regional basis. Based on the early experiences of the newest group of new towns as well as a review of some of the relevant social sciences literature, Clapp questions the relevance and feasibility of the new town concept as a solution to the problems of urban growth and development. He raises the question of whether urban policy should be founded on hopes and assumptions about the benefits of new towns that are essentially untested.

Clapp finds that there has been little evidence that private new town development represents any significant contribution to the solution of urban problems. Most private developers, with their concern for profits, focus on the physical and procedural aspects of new town development and have little commitment to the underlying philosophy of the new town concept. The government's recent support of private community-building efforts, he says, has been based largely on a reasonable hope of being able to wed private objectives to public aims through financial assistance. However, without a clear national urban policy and in the absence of significant federal control over either the private developer or local governing bodies, Clapp doubts that the federal government's program will be capable of achieving its social or urban planning objectives. Even if adequate public programs could be developed, he questions whether, in the current political, economic, and social climate, the new town concept is an appropriate way to deal with the problems of the modern metropolis.


Drawing on the records and recollections of those involved in Columbia's early development, Breckenfeld presents an extremely positive account of Columbia's origins and first years, including details of land assembly, financial arrangements, design concept, and overall development philosophy. Breckenfeld focuses on the personality and accomplishments of James Rouse to an equal extent. The book also includes a brief overview of new town development in Britain, Sweden, France, and West Germany, as well as a summary of the history of new town building in the United States.


This article looks at new towns as instruments or urban growth policy. America is now beginning to recognize the urban region as a social enterprise to be operated in the community interest. Berkman states. The small-scale development of the past is no longer a feasible method for achieving sound growth; large-scale development under single ownership is necessary to achieve integrated urban growth and development.

Berkman finds the fragmented political power structure of American metropolitan areas to be the major deterrent to a rational urban development strategy. Multiple political power centers impede a regional approach to controlling urban growth and form. He states that much of the necessary legal and institutional means for rationalizing public policy already exist; they just need to be applied consistently. In addition, new forms of federal and state loans and credits are needed to encourage new community-building.


This collection of essays is based on a symposium on new towns sponsored by the School of Architecture and Urban Planning at UCLA in 1972. The three major questions addressed were: 1) what can be learned from the experiences of other countries; 2) what human consideration must be considered in developing new towns in the United States; and 3) what alternative forms may new communities take. The central finding of the symposium was that the new town concept as embodied in Howard's nineteenth-century garden city ideal had evolved substantially to meet the needs of the late twentieth century.

Part I reviews experiences of other countries. Issues addressed include optimum size, need for regional integration, self-sufficiency and self-containment, and achievement of a balanced population. Part II looks at the federal new communities program, presenting conflicting views on the probability
of success of the federal effort. Part III considers issues related to living in new communities. Some of the questions raised include: the possibility of achieving meaningful social class and racial integration in new towns; perceptions about new town life and amenities and their implications for planning; the need for a major federal effort emphasizing new towns-in-town; and the possibilities for resident participation in governing new towns. Part IV looks at alternative kinds of new towns in the context of a national urban growth policy.


By all measures the attempt to build new towns on inner-city sites was a failure; only seven potential sites were located, and after four years of operation, only 120 housing units had been built (all in Fort Lincoln, in Washington, D.C.). The new town in-town program, Derthick comments, was conceived and planned at the federal level as an instrument of broad public policy designed for the good of the whole nation. But its implementation depended on local politics, which the federal government was unable to influence sufficiently, and on local support, which was rarely forthcoming.

The federal government, Derthick concludes, properly conceives of its role as reformer and innovator and accordingly tends to state objectives in ideal terms. In reality, however, federal programs only "work" when an accommodation between federal goals and local interests can be achieved. Such accord is particularly elusive in urban community development programs when so many competing political interests and local sensibilities are involved.


This book provides a useful summary of federal legislation on new communities of the 1960s and 1970s. It reviews the case histories of the first eight new town projects approved under Title VII of the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1970: Jonathan, Minnesota; St. Charles Communities, Maryland; Park Forest, Illinois; Flower Mound, Texas; Maumelle, Arkansas; Cedar-Riverside, Minneapolis; San Antonio Ranch, Texas; and Riverton, New York. These new towns were planned in accordance with the following objectives: 1) to encourage well-planned, large-scale development in the context of an evolving national land-use policy; 2) encourage the development of relatively self-sufficient communities; 3) provide jobs and housing on an equal opportunity basis; 4) take advantage of new technology and delivery systems to encourage innovative planning; 5) help revitalize older urban centers through new towns in-town; 6) encourage growth in underdeveloped or stagnating areas; and 7) maximize private involvement in new community development.

Mields sees three economic advantages to private developer participation in the program: 1) the potential for capturing all of the land value appreciation resulting from public and private improvements through total control of development; 2) the achievement of an attractive market situation in a shorter period of time than with smaller projects because of the ability to create a superior living and working environment on the total site; and 3) the savings achieved through economies of scale, improved management techniques, and improved coordination of development phases.


This report, prepared in 1970 for the U.S. Department of Transportation, looked at residents' responses to planned residential environments and compared their transportation requirements with those living in more conventional residential settings. A total of 1253 interviews were conducted in ten communities selected to represent three different levels of planning.

Overall satisfaction with the community in suburban areas was highest in the new towns of Reston and Columbia. In all of the communities, nearness or accessibility to work, shopping, and other facilities was the most frequently mentioned source of resident satisfaction. The extent of planning in a community seemed more a reason for moving to it, rather than a source of satisfaction once situated. Outdoor recreational facilities tended to be more available and more used in planned communities. Dwelling unit density was related to many factors touching on neighborhood satisfaction, although the correlation was not high. The best predictor of neighborhood satisfaction was whether the neighborhood was "well kept-up." There was no evidence that the total number of vehicle trips per family was influenced significantly by the level of community planning.

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This volume grew out of a series of lectures on new communities given in 1973 at Pennsylvania State University. The view of most of the contributors are covered more fully in entries elsewhere in this bibliography.

In his opening essay, Gideon Golany briefly reviews the new communities movement in America and discusses alternatives for future urban growth patterns as related to the issue of population redistribution. John W. Reps discusses the tradition of publicly initiated new towns from colonial beginnings to the mid-nineteenth century. Hugh Mields outlines the development of federal new communities legislation, and Jack A. Underhill describes the new communities planning and development process under Title VII, raising key issues related to a national urban growth policy. Royce Hanson looks at new towns as an opportunity to explore various forms of governance and civic experience. Robert Marans and Robert Zehner describe the findings of their research on resident satisfaction and behavior in planned new communities. Planner-developers Benjamin Cunningham, Charles Stuart, and Edward Echeverria recall the early days of Jonathan, Minnesota, St. Charles, Maryland, and Maumelle, Arkansas.

Golany, Gideon, ed. STRATEGY FOR NEW COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN THE UNITED STATES. Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania: Dowden, Hutchinson & Ross, Inc., 1975. 293 pp., bibliography, illustrations, plans.

This second collection of essays edited by Golany repeats some of the authors and/or themes of the first, including the role of the federal government, new towns and population distribution, and new towns as a means of improving the quality of urban life. Also included are articles by the private developers of Newfield, Ohio, New Franconia, Virginia, and Reston, Virginia: an analysis of Columbia, Maryland’s success and failure in meeting social goals by John Weakland; and an analysis of the economic planning process by Gregory Leisch.


In considering the modern new town as an alternative to uncontrolled growth, Campbell distinguishes among three types of new communities: satellite cities, on the edge of metropolitan areas and to varying degrees economically dependent on them; free-standing, self-sustaining rural sites; and new towns in-town, developed within existing cities. He uses a largely anecdotal approach, quoting liberally from residents, planners, and developers in tracing the history of seven new towns (including Columbia and Reston).

A brief section contrasts the American experience with several European programs. Campbell notes that the strength of the British new town program is in the commitment of the central government to using new towns as instruments of national policy. The whole process is supported by regional policies which coordinate commercial, industrial, and residential aspects of development. Similarly, in Stockholm, Campbell found extensive government involvement in regional development, urban renewal, and new town building. He was impressed by the degree to which unobtrusive government assistance to families in providing both social services and housing subsidies had contributed to neighborhood stability and the minimization of social problems.

Campbell feels that the failure of the federal government to respond to the Congressional mandate for new town development as reflected in the legislation of 1968 and 1970 is another indication of its continuing unwillingness to play its proper role in shaping a national urban policy.


The staff of the New Communities administration documented the first eight years of the federal New Communities Program (Title VII). Thirteen projects were approved in the first four years of the program: one new town in-town, one free-standing rural community, and the rest satellite cities in metropolitan areas. The economic recession of the early 1970s severely affected the program, and in 1975 a moratorium was declared on further applications.

Although economic conditions certainly exacerbated the program’s problems, two underlying defects inherent in the program’s statutory and administrative design were identified which have implications
for any future government involvement in community-building. First, the basic financing mechanism
(use of interest-bearing debt) for land acquisition and construction was unworkable for long-term
development projects of this scale. Early commitment necessary for acquiring and improving the land
left the developers into a substantial front-end debt situation, and they did not receive federal grants of
the type and amount necessary to offset it. Further, HUD had set its equity requirements unrealistically
low, adding to the working capital shortage in the early years.

Secondly, federal, state, and local governments all failed to use new community development as a
tool for controlling and directing urban growth. The projects were scattered haphazardly because HUD
was in the position of responding to applications received, rather than trying to generate interest in sites
chosen in relation to some regional development plan. Private developers tended to use sites they
already owned or controlled, and Title VII became more of an instrument for land speculation than
growth management.

Other program defects spelled out by this report include HUD’s failure to assemble a sufficiently
experienced administrative staff, thus putting the government in the position of relying on developers’
projections and estimates, rather than its own independent evaluation. HUD did not work to involve
actively state and local governments, but left the private developers to deal with them. Finally,
experienced developers were not attracted to the government program, being reluctant to commit to
some to the government’s social goals built into program requirements, and/or unwilling to deal with
the bureaucracy and red tape which government money inevitably brings.

Burby, Raymond III and Shirley F. Weiss. NEW COMMUNITIES U.S.A. Lexington, Mass.:

This study compares a group of seventeen new communities (thirteen privately developed communi-
ties, two funded under Title VII, and two specifically designed for the elderly) with a group of
less-planned, traditional urban communities similar in terms of the age, price range, and type of
housing available, and in location. The research questions focus on the relationship of new community
housing, neighborhood, design, community facilities, and governmental mechanisms to resident
satisfaction and perception about quality of life.

The researchers conclude that new communities do better than conventional ones in a number of
areas, such as better land-use planning and access to facilities; reducing automobile travel; providing
superior recreation facilities; enhancing community livability; and providing improved living environ-
ments for low- and moderate-income groups, blacks, and the elderly. New communities do not appear
to differ significantly from conventional developments in terms of resident satisfaction with the quality
of life in their new environment, perception of housing and neighborhood livability, sense of
community and degree of participation in community life, or in terms of provision of some community
services and community governance.

Study findings suggest that new communities have not achieved their full potential for addressing
urban problems and improving the quality of life. In part this is due to unrealistic expectations about
the degree of influence the physical environment has on social and psychological aspects of community
life. However, the researchers cite the following defects in public policy as affecting level of
achievement: 1) the unwarranted assumption that private developers would be able to assume public
sector responsibilities without corresponding increases in cash flow; 2) the decentralization of local
control and authority which results in fragmentation of public service responsibilities and insufficient
financial capacity; and 3) the lack of priority received by new communities in metropolitan planning at
any level of government.

In exploring the implications of study findings for public policy, the authors state that if the federal
government is going to require private developers to undertake a considerable amount of public planning
in terms of environmental control and community services, it must improve the public sector’s capacity
to plan and provide services. In addition, the federal government must seek ways to foster state and
local initiatives to establish new governmental structure to regulate and assist new community
development.

The study ends with the observation that new communities, with or without public support, are
unlikely to have a major impact on metropolitan development. Nevertheless, they can be models
demonstrating better approaches for channeling urban growth than conventional suburban development,
and they can serve as laboratory settings for testing innovative methods of community design, construction,
and management that can be applied in other development contexts.

This collection of reprinted essays reflects an anti-urban bias in the new towns movement which at the same time, according to Allen, actively embraces a "conservative utopian model of suburban communities." Irving attributes rising interest in new towns in the 1970s to a disenchantment with the conventional suburbs which mushroomed after World War II as they suffered some of the same problems traditionally associated with central cities.


Examining the actual performance of civic ideal, so widely promoted at Columbia, of a fully integrated community, Burkhat finds that blacks and renters lack influence equal to their numbers in the community. Although she finds that the neighborhood planning concept which attempted to encourage civic virtues at the most proximate level failed, she nonetheless sees hope in a pluralistic situation where residents both mixed with neighbors and at the same time formed associations throughout the city with those of similar class, race, or interest. While persistent patterns of exclusion remained, the city still managed to achieve a relatively high level of mixing and thus participation in local affairs.


In 1983 the Title VII New Communities Program was terminated, bringing to an end for a second time direct federal involvement in new community-building. This report documents the accomplishments, costs, and lessons learned from this most recent federal effort to support the development of new towns.

The twenty-year projections for the thirteen new communities begun under the program had targets for reaching a combined population of over 750,000, about 250,000 housing units, and over 200,000 jobs. By 1983 actual figures were 52,916 residents, 19,856 housing units (3518 units of subsidized housing), and 15,403 permanent jobs provided. Twelve of the developers defaulted on their loans.

The study concludes that Title VII was an extremely costly (total expenditures were about $561 million) and inefficient method for achieving the basic goals of high quality social and physical development, balanced land use, and diverse socioeconomic communities. This final report reiterates the basic program deficiencies of timing, financing, and administration mentioned in the 1976 study; it goes on to draw a number of other conclusions from the experience. Some of the Title VII communities did provide a greater mix of income groups than generally found in other new residential developments; however, there appeared to be little local support for this approach to new community development. Although the Title VII communities were generally comparable to private planned developments in terms of providing amenities and controlling land use, they failed to capture their anticipated share of the market.

On the basis of this fifteen-year demonstration program, new communities are not expected to be a dominant force in shaping urban trends. It is considered unlikely that many private developers would be willing or able to assume the risks of creating total communities. Further, without federal incentives, it is doubtful that state or local governments will take up the program, particularly since there has been no strong public interest in it.


In reviewing the recent literature on new towns in the United States and abroad, Whelan depicts some common problems, in administration, financing, and the achievement of racially and economically balanced communities. He agrees with assessments that the United States has fallen behind the British in making a national commitment to the program and the French in developing administrative tools for planned development. Claiming that "there is little to suggest in these books that life in new towns is really better than it is in other environments," he suggests that it will take a dramatic escalation in land values "necessitating a jump to underdeveloped areas for the establishment of complete new communities" before support will materialize for reviving the new towns effort in the United States.

Hays places the new town of Reston in the context both of Ebenezer Howard’s garden city concept and the reformist thrust of the 1960s in which physical planning was once again invested with hopes to achieve social goals, not just for a better living environment but also for a more racially and economically integrated community. Looking specifically at developer Robert Simon’s high expectations for Reston, Hays finds them reasonably well achieved, despite a shift in direction after 1978 when Simon was forced to sell his interest to Gulf Oil. Under the ownership first of Gulf and subsequently Mobil Oil, physical amenities were compromised in order to make the project more economically feasible. Today social engineering has given way to “market driven” development, but Hays insists, Reston remains influential in setting high standards for contemporary suburban design.


Eisenger argues that the traditional American distrust of government-directed comprehensive planning, coupled with the characteristic responsiveness of the American political system to a variety of competing economic and political interests, has precluded the “adaptation of European national urban policy models based on central planning principles.” He traces the emergence of a national concern with problems of urban growth and development in the 1960s, citing the 1968 report of the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, Urban and Rural America: Policies for Future Growth. This report called for a national urban policy to rationalize urban growth and suggested the new town as an important component of such a policy. A second report the same year by the National Committee on Urban Growth Policy, entitled The New City, recommended a federal program to support the development of one hundred new towns housing twenty million people.

During the Nixon administration, legislation was passed to support the development of new communities; however, other political concerns combined “to broaden the scope and lessen the coherence of the national urban policy idea.” The Carter administration attempted to redirect federal support toward urban areas, but again competing political objectives diluted the urban focus.

Eisenger concludes that national urban policy proposals have lacked direction, coherence, and identity. Programs growing out of these policy commitments were often treated as proxies for addressing other, conflicting interests, and as a result urban problems remained unresolved.


Petersen describes the British new town movement as the “culmination of a half century of anti-urban writings” that were the reaction to the nineteenth-century industrial city. He argues that the concept of planned population dispersal to small, new towns is essentially “anti-city” planning, which assumes that it is not possible to solve urban problems within the metropolitan context.


Osborn took over the role of chief exponent of the greenbelt concept at the death of Ebenezer Howard. This book was originally published in 1945, when England was facing critical decisions in formulating post-war housing and urban development policy. Osborn believed then that the trend would be toward decentralization of population and industry from urban centers, thus favoring the garden city concept of development.

The first two sections of this book review Howard’s garden city ideal and describe the development of Letchworth and Welwyn. Part III looks to the place of greenbelt towns in Britain’s long-term planning policies. In a note written for the 1969 edition, Osborn concludes that the first twenty-two new towns in Britain could be termed socioeconomic successes as urban communities. In particular, the British experience had proven the efficacy of a government-appointed and financed, independent development corporation in planning and directing a national community-building program.

This is a broad overview of new town development in Great Britain in the post-World War II period. Part I, written by Osborn, sets the British program within the context of Howard’s garden city concept. He reviews the experiences of Letchworth and Welwyn, outlines the evolution of new town policy, and summarizes British legislative history pertaining to new town development. Osborn comments on both the achievements and failures of British new towns and discusses some of the arguments against them. The final chapter in his section briefly treats developments in the new town movement internationally. The major portion of the book, written by Whittick, provides descriptions, photographs, and plans for the first twenty-three of the thirty new towns authorized in Great Britain through 1968.


Strong offers a detailed and copiously illustrated look at national planning in Sweden, Finland, Israel, the Netherlands, and France. She selects these countries for the variety of approaches to urban planning they represent, the novel techniques they demonstrate, and the level of success they represent in actually realizing their planning goals.

Sweden presents an example of the efficacy of long-term municipal planning, exemplified by the city of Stockholm, with its efficient public transport system and rationally organized system of neighborhoods and satellite communities. Tapiola, Finland, is thought by many, including Strong, to be the finest new town built and is important to America as an example of a non-profit, privately financed venture. Israel demonstrates the use of a national physical master plan for controlling settlement, allocating land use, and managing scarce natural resources. Israel also offers insights into the sociology of community-building when dealing with a hetrogenous population. The Dutch have developed a highly democratic system of national physical planning which emphasizes local participation in the planning process. Finally, France demonstrates the benefits of tying a nation’s economic plan to a national environmental plan and has created a number of innovative mechanisms for implementing them.

Strong stresses that public ownership of land has been a crucial element of almost all successful European planning. Noting that approximately 40 percent of land in the United States is publicly owned or held in trust, she sees this as an opportunity for new city development in America.


Merlin describes new communities in England, Scandinavia, the Netherlands, France, the United States, Poland, and Hungary within the context of regional planning policy and national policies of land development. He attempts to show “how a new town policy reflects a national concept of urban life.” A concluding chapter compares and contrasts different national experiences with an analysis of site selection, size, zoning and housing distribution, role of the town center, provision of employment, and administrative and financial framework.


Robinson characterizes British new town policy as an attempt to achieve goals that were primarily political and social: American new town policy as an example of government incentives to encourage private developers; and Australian policy as an example of “politically neutral policy” emphasizing technical expertise. He raises questions about the function of the new town in today’s economy and about the appropriate mix of public/private involvement and control. Robinson concludes that to be successful, new towns must be incorporated into a broader urban strategy.
PART IV. The International Experience: Selected Examples from Abroad


Reviewing the progress of British new towns during the 1950s, Madge notes that they had shown a steady increase in profitability and that residents had experienced fewer problems than expected in adjusting to a new and usually half-completed environment. While residential architecture could be generally characterized as uninspired, there had been a number of innovations in the planning and design of town centers and commercial areas. At the time of this article, planning was under way for the next generation of new towns. The British new town movement continued to find “almost universal support” among both politicians and professionals alike. However, there was growing feeling that the administrative advantages enjoyed by new towns needed to be adapted for use in solving problems of urban renewal and rehabilitation in existing cities.


This group of papers was prepared for a United Nations-sponsored meeting on metropolitan planning development held in Stockholm and a subsequent symposium on new towns held in Moscow. Topics covered include urbanization, problems of growth and development, different national approaches to metropolitan planning, and the planning and development of new towns.


Gutheim reports on impressions gathered on study tours made to principal European new towns in 1965. European cities, he observes, have not followed the English model of setting ceilings on central city growth and creating wholly new settlements in outlying areas. Europeans have been more concerned with the reconstruction of older sections of their cities, similar to the American focus on urban redevelopment.

In comparing and contrasting the new communities program in various parts of Europe, Gutheim notes that southern and eastern European countries have more often created new town centers at some distance to the traditional city core, than whole new towns. France provides an impressive model in terms of planning theory; however, he finds that actual accomplishments are less notable. German efforts at urban reconstruction have taken a narrow view, being primarily concerned with housing, instead of total environments. The Scandinavian achievements both architecturally and socially have been most impressive, but the applicability of their experience to the United States is doubtful, he feels, because of the widely differing political situations. Further, the Scandinavians have tended to build bedroom communities that do not address the whole metropolitan structure.


The purpose of the conference was to identify the problems of designing, building, financing, and administering new communities in Britain and America and to consider what future plan of action might be taken in developing new urban communities. Conferences agreed on eight objectives which new town programs might fruitfully address: 1) reduce population, housing, and traffic congestion in large cities; 2) relieve pressure on overpopulated areas; 3) provide a better range of housing, employment, social, and cultural opportunities; 4) achieve a more economical use of land; 5) create opportunities for efficient development of technology applied to urban development and functioning; 6) create opportunities to experiment with new social, economic, and political systems; 7) demonstrate the appeal of quality low-income housing projects; and 8) link urban development with land conservation and reclamation.

It was further agreed that new towns must be integrated into regional economic and development policies. Public power and money are needed for site selection, land assembly, and servicing; then private enterprise can take over development and operate in support of public policy while still pursuing
a profit. If, as conference participants hoped, new towns are to meet social goals of achieving balanced communities, governmental entities will have to take the initiative in attracting industry and commerce, subsidizing low-income housing, and finding and assisting low-income residents.


This comparative study of the new town experience in Great Britain and the United States analyzes the influence of social and political philosophies on the creation of national land-use policies. Corden contrasts the English involvement of central government authority in creating new towns designed to achieve clearly articulated urban policy goals with the American insistence on leaving responsibility for building new communities to private developers in the absence of a defined national urban policy.

In placing the development of both British and American new towns in historical perspective, she finds that, with the exception of the greenbelt towns and Radburn, the garden city concept has had little impact on the mainstream of urban and suburban planning in the United States. During the post-war era, development took the course of creating homogenous garden suburbs rather than true garden cities. Corden argues that the temporary increase in federal participation in and encouragement of comprehensive planning during the 1960s and 1970s should not be overemphasized. By the time government interest in community-building reemerged in the mid-1960s, the pressing issues were the problems of racial inequality and the potential explosiveness of the inner city, rather than the older concerns of urban congestion and uncontrolled development. Further, lack of support from the Nixon administration, declining economic conditions, and internal problems with the programs themselves combined to discourage new community development in the United States. In the absence of a clearly defined and publicly supported urban policy, she considers it unlikely that the federal government will take more responsibility for new town development.

On the other side of the Atlantic, Corden finds that Ebenezer Howard’s vision of the garden city continues to provide the philosophical underpinnings for official policy regarding urban decentralization and regional development in post-war England. In her analysis, British new towns have been far more successful in achieving social balance and economic independence, due in large measure to the active role of the central government in their planning and management. But she concludes that neither American nor English new towns have substantially altered the traditional patterns of urban growth; neither country has achieved the goals of urban decentralization and urban renewal.


Contrary to the view usually taken by American observers of the British new town program, Aldridge contends that the British effort has not been guided by a clearly defined national urban policy promulgated and supported by the central government. Aldridge finds that the British program has been the result of not one, but a number of policies, which are themselves the product of “reactive, unrelated and incremental decision-making.” She states that belief in the program, which has been a consistent theme of successive governments, has not been enough to ensure central direction and interest: the program has suffered from lack of effective monitoring and direction, as well as an absence of interdepartmental coordination at the central government level. She cites a litany of familiar programmatic problems: staff shortages and limited budgets; no centralized system of data collection and analysis; no standard performance measure; and no standardized procedures for program evaluation and cost analysis.

Aldridge feels that a lack of public debate on the new town program has contributed to an erosion of central government commitment. Because the post-war program was founded on such widespread agreement, the program took on an “apolitical” nature. Planning was seen as being outside—or above—the political process. The technical aspects of town planning have been emphasized and the social and political aspects downplayed in an effort to avoid controversy. Further, the new town development corporations themselves are not accountable to an electorate, and the central government has resisted efforts on the part of local authorities to gain more voice in the development process.

Since the 1950s, she writes, there has been an increasing passivity about the need for radical social change. In the absence of any consistent social objectives, some aspects of the program have been regressive, resulting in the perpetuation of regional and economic disparities.

This book is based on papers given at the first International Conference on the History of Urban and Regional Planning held in London in 1977. Houghton-Evans used the schemes of the “Mark I” British new towns of the immediate post-war period to explore architects’ ideas about the ideal form of the city. While a number of experiments in design form are reflected in these plans, the author notes several common design decisions. There has been an emphasis on urban forms derived from lines and systems of lines, which seems to reflect a primary concern with systems of transport. Few schemes are based on focal points, probably a result of the lack of modern equivalents with the organizing power of the ancient agora, temple, or town hall. To some extent, public transport stops have come to serve this organizing purpose, giving rise to radial schemes with facilities clustered within walking distance of these points.

Even with the emphasis on linear concepts, the author draws attention to the persistence of separate land-use zones, dividing the city space into planes. Rather than a total segregation of work and living areas, the trend today is to scatter employment, commercial, and residential zones throughout the city. This coincides with what the author sees as the contemporary view of the city as an indefinite entity, growing by finite stages. The concept of the definite city, conceived in its totality, is being replaced by the idea of the flexible city, which is capable of indefinite expansion through the aggregation of modular parts. Such a view conforms to Ebenezer Howard’s vision of a regional cluster of linked garden cities, as well as to the idea of the city region as a cluster of neighborhood residential modules. Thus, Houghton-Evans finds, architects are reclaiming the human scale that has been lost in the modern megalopolis by focusing on the design of its multiple parts.


This assessment of the 32 British new towns finds that they have been innovative in design, construction, management, service delivery, and transportation. In the light of this success, concern is expressed that the British program is winding down without any clear regional planning focus or directives for future urban research or new community locations. Economic conditions have forced sale of new town assets to private interests rather than transferring them to local authorities as had been planned. Lessons learned from the British program point to the continuing need for public intervention and planning through a single development agency.


Brief articles in this British journal include suggestions for future roles for Britain’s experienced town development professional faced with the winding down of the government’s new town program; discussion of the role of Enterprise Zones in Britain’s town and country planning system; and an analysis of French models of new town development.


Although they have only received government support since 1965, new towns are being used successfully in France as instruments of public policy for managing urban and regional growth, organizing the expansion of metropolitan areas, and stimulating development of relatively poor regions. The French new towns, this book asserts, may provide a model more applicable to the American scene than the more well-publicized and older British program. Unlike the British method of a government-appointed development corporation for each new town, thought to be an unsuitable solution for America, the French have operated their program through traditional local government structures similar to those in America. The French method of financing their new town program has found a middle ground between the British system of massive central government support and the American piecemeal method of government loan guarantees, grants, and planning assistance to private developers.

Rubenstein thinks that the relationship between the private and public sectors in French new town development provides a workable model for the United States. The French government acts as the prime developer, assuming the bulk of the financial risk, while relying on private developers to manage units within the larger sites. This allows private companies to work within their accustomed scale of operation and avoids what the author sees as one of the major problems faced by American
developers—undertaking too large a project for their existing administrative, operational, and financial capabilities.

Finally, Rubenstein finds that the French program actually has achieved one of the stated goals of the American new town movement: creation of socioeconomically balanced communities. The provision of single-family, owner-occupied housing; good commercial and recreational facilities; and, most especially, of a good range of job opportunities have successfully attracted middle-class families to the French new towns, while government policies have made lower income housing practical as well.


The conclusions of this report emphasize the importance of the French new town experience in demonstrating that a national new town program can be based on strong private sector participation. The French new town program meets many of the expressed goals of the American new communities program of the late 1960s and early 1970s, including creating balanced communities at reasonable costs, while providing attractive and varied environments. The report also notes a number of problems faced by the French such as the difficulties encountered making accurate growth projections, as well as in trying to attract industry to already depressed areas. Specific topics treated include aspects of national and urban policy, administration, financing, housing, employment, transportation, and social factors.


Lord Esher, who was involved as housing and planning architect for three of England’s new towns, analyzes the post-World War II rebuilding of England, focusing in particular on issues of architecture and design. In five case studies, he traces the physical development of London from 1740 to 1980, looks at the evolution of three older regional cities (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Sheffield, and Liverpool), and describes the birth of the new town of Milton Keynes, conceived in the late 1960s.

Esher argues that the post-war faith in the ability of modern urban planning and modern architecture to create a new social order and a new urban environment was overly optimistic. He calls for a “retreat from heroic plans . . . and from self-indulgent architecture.” Planners and architects, he states, must realize that cities are to be lived in and used, not created and planned primarily as a visual experience.
Additional Sources of Information

A useful reference tool for locating detailed information on the development of Greenbelt, Maryland, was prepared in 1981 by students at the University of Maryland:


This guide provides a summary of microfilmed blueprints, tracings, and drawings. The compilers also surveyed federal and local government agencies, and a number of libraries and relevant organizations in the Washington area to ascertain whether or not they held material pertaining to Greenbelt and the greenbelt towns.

The guide is available from:
- Archives and Manuscripts Department
- McKeldin Library
- University of Maryland
- College Park, Maryland 20742

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