New Town Gaps Discerned at Seminar

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vice-president, field operations, of
the National Urban Coalition, who
said bluntly that new towns are not
meeting social objectives. She posed
some questions which should be
addressed: are there employment
opportunities for minorities: are
minorities involved in the decision
making process? She cited teens and
the elderly as special new town
problems, and fretted that new towns
are repeating traditional patterns.

Social objectives should provide
the framework for developing new
towns, she said.

The gap between concepts and
realities are also evident on the
developer front, a point reiterated by
Gulf Reston president James W.
Todd and former HUD new
communities chief William Nicolson.
Todd said that new towns are the
highest risk of real estate, that
private developers need other than
profit incentives to begin new town
projects. “The developer has to
believe it (the new town) will be a
superior development,” Todd said.

The realities change in political
climate, heavy front end costs,
changes in financing all serve to give
new towns “maximum exposure to
market risk,” Todd said. Stating that
Gulf’s carrying cost on undeveloped
land per month is $800,000, Todd did
not dwell upon the concepts of
continuing sewer service and public
facility construction, the lack of
which has plagued the development
of Reston during the past two years.

Nicolson cited a plethora of
problems associated with new town
development, observing that costs
are frequently under-estimated, that
there is confusion in role as to who
will provide the diverse public
facilities. Nicolson outlined
alternatives to finance, such as one
in New Fields, Ohio, where the cost
of housing and the range of housing
costs can be brought down to achieve
a better mix of low and moderate
income housing through
establishment of a New Community
Authority.

Albert L. Horley, Director of the
Office of Telecommunications
Policy, HEW, spoke of concepts in
regard to communication facilities.
Horley noted that in terms of
 technological achievement, the
“future is here today.” Noting that
the availability of hardware permits
use of cable television for uses so
diverse as provision of health care,
education and cultural opportunities,
Horley surmised that risk-sharing
between the public and private
sectors may ultimately be necessary
to bring these systems to fruition.

The new town gaps were perhaps
most poignantly illustrated by Alene
Smith, who recalled for the audience
that after a year in Reston, her
husband, Rodney, a founder of Black
Focus who gave it its name, died. She
said that she had to leave Reston for
either D.C. for a job, she had to leave
Reston for D.C. for socializing and
companionship, “Reston, despite the
rhetoric, has failed to offer the
most important ingredient which its
present inhabitants desire: that is,
clear-cut constructive purpose
which all of our diverse, peculiar,
and common aspirations can be
harnessed: that is, freedom of
lifestyle, socialization and
specialization,” Smith said.

She outlined a six-point “new
definition of social perspective which
carries us beyond the physical and
economic reference points through
which all now relate to this
community specifically.”

She asked that residents be given
a more substantial role in the
planning process, to determine what,
where and when new facilities will be
forthcoming and how these will
improve upon and serve the interests
of the community.

She asked that the question of
alternative lifestyle be frankly
dressed to deal with a rapidly
changing social environment, that
commercial facilities be encouraged
and established to carry a wide
variety of products which reflect an
up-to-date assessment of black
customer preference, that school
and recreation be improved to
achieve a better balance between
structured and unstructured
learning and playing environment.

She seeks a better program for
the inclusion of minorities in the
housing mixes available in Reston ...
a full-fledged effort to integrate
minority families and individuals
into the social fabric of the
community.

She also asked for a stronger
emphasis on non-material cultural
programs, such as music, art,
drama, poetry and dance so as to
give free flow to the expression of
ideas and forms which give vent to
the full range of creative
imagination.

“Reston must move from a
preoccupation with the merely
physical aspects of the ‘good
community’ to where it recognizes
the complex needs of its residents for
greater individual choice within a
community framework.” she
concluded.