

"NEW TOWNS: PROSPECTS and PROBLEMS"

Paper of:

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NEW TOWNS: PROSPECTS AND PROBLEMS

Planning a conference on planning presents the greatest of challenges. Since planning is our business, our plan for an orderly exchange of ideas must be supreme....or we'll be out of business! To avoid being the maverick who causes planners of conferences or of New Towns so much pain by straying far from his assignment I shall try to fulfill mine according to plan.

For the past three years I have been totally absorbed--weekdays and holidays, awake and asleep--in what I consider to be the most rewarding adventure in our field....planning and building a New Town. This has been a period when my mind has stretched and my knowledge increased, a period of learning which will, I am sure, continue for as long as Reston is a-building. I am glad to share what I have learned with you.

The Reston plan encompasses 6890 acres, 900 acres of which has been reserved for research plants, light industry, and agencies of the Federal Government, with the balance of the acreage designed to accommodate housing, shopping and leisure time facilities for 75,000 people. Working on the Reston plan, I have the exhilarating experience of assembling and directing a team comprised of the part-

ners and associates of thirty-five consulting firms whose professional competence combine to encompass most of the arts of living, of recruiting a staff which now numbers 58 men and women to convert the planning into actuality, of working with a host of government officials - Federal, State and County - and citizen leaders of Fairfax County in which Reston is located, and of talking with friends and acquaintances, interested in one or more facets of our program.

Rather than attempt to squeeze a description of Reston into a digest which would, of necessity, be little more than a listing, I prefer to tell you about some of its concepts. As time goes on, a few concepts appear increasingly valid for New Town planning. Some seem equally valid for planning in general.

The First Concept: The beginning of a plan for a New Town must be philosophy not topography, not existing zoning and other ordinances of the community, not FHA regulations or other factors dealing with the money market. What does the developer want to achieve? There are many viable approaches. The developer must select his approach, list his objectives in order of importance and constantly strive - even fight - to preserve his program. Where an objective

low on his list collides with one higher on the list, the less important objective must yield.

For Reston, my objectives, in order of priority, are three:

1) For the people who live and work or both in Reston to have the widest possible opportunities to use their full potential of mind and body.

2) For it to be possible for any who want to stay in this single community to do so throughout their lives. Changes in circumstances of age, family composition or financial condition shall not make uprooting inevitable or even preferable.

3) For the importance and dignity of each individual to be considered over the importance of the community.

All these objectives are subject to the necessity of financial success. Unless Reston makes money, it can never be completed as conceived. These principles inevitably lead to another concept.

The Second Concept: The Chief Executive of a New Town must be the man who has worked out the guiding philosophy for its plan and procedure. He cannot successfully delegate his responsibility for creating concepts or enforcing their implementation to any individual

or firm.

His interest in people and in how the New Town he is planning will affect their lives is what will shape the community. If his interest is genuine and in depth, it will give him the strength to resist the many pressures from professionals and technicians which attempt to infringe on his order of priorities. If he is a dilettante, so much the better - he will have a broad range of interests.

The New Town Executive I know best is myself. My long interest in planning and real estate development has stood me in good stead with the Reston project. This I expected. But I did not anticipate that the crippling hours of work I put in on my perennial border and woods at home would help as it does when I talk with our forester, or that owning an outboard motor boat would lead me to intelligent decisions about boating at Reston, or that my interest in tennis, in music, in the various activities which have contributed to the good life for me, could somehow be translated for Reston's residents.

The Third Concept: It takes a sizeable number of widely diverse skills to plan a New Town. Initial planning - all major planning - should be done through consultants, implementation and coordination

by staff. I believe that the success to date of the Reston plan stems in great part from our having secured the services of the country's best social planners, land planners, economists, lawyers, architects, landscape architects, engineers and specialists in health, education, recreational facilities, graphics and lighting. Patently it is impossible to have in-house talent in any way comparable to the skills available from consultants; over the years, creative skill is dulled without the exposure consultants have to many clients and communities.

The Fourth Concept: The object of the planning exercise is, after all, to build. Without good politics there might be planning but there cannot be building. In Reston, an enormous amount of our time has gone into working with the officials and citizens of Fairfax County and of the State of Virginia. Out of this has come a program for working together on a basis of mutual respect and with pride in joint accomplishment. We have proceeded and shall proceed on the premise that any existing statutory or procedural obstacles to excellence will be eliminated.

The Reston Plan required revision of the County Master Plan and a

significant amendment to the County zoning ordinance. These were accomplished by unanimous vote of the seven-man Board of Supervisors. At present a committee is at work to revise outmoded procedures in streets and drainage for the benefit of all builders in the County. The School Board has accepted a grant from the Educational Facilities Laboratory for the design of Reston's first elementary school.

The 1967 capital budget for the County library system provides \$650,000 for a branch library in Reston. Our hospital consultant working with County Health authorities is preparing a plan for Reston's health complex. And Reston is represented on the County Cultural Commission, Higher Education Commission, Chamber of Commerce, and a committee for fostering industrial growth. State agencies made the feasibility studies which preceded the impounding of water for a 30-acre lake and provided 30,000 fish for stocking the lake when it was completed; they tested the soil at the spot selected for the first garden plots; they have contributed to the recreational program. And the state provided 10,000 seedling evergreens planted out by our forester to implement his soil erosion and forestry renewal programs. Both the University of Virginia and Virginia Poly-

technic Institute have become involved in Reston, the former standing ready to provide extension courses in the Community Center, now under construction, the latter cooperating with us on an Urban Agent program.

A New Town's major resource is the community in which it finds itself. Early inclusion of appropriate representatives of the community in planning sessions and good communications at all appropriate levels thereafter are indispensable, and for New Town planning, are the essence of good politics.

A New Town, then, is planning, plus. It is politics. It is coordinated activity. It is concrete objectives and it is an underlying philosophy which determines them. Essentially, it is people. The achievement - or non-achievement - of its objectives rests with the people connected with the New Town, its chief executive, its consultants, staff and members of the community in which it finds itself... and, ultimately, the people who become the heart of the town, its residents.

Planners, I believe, typically spend too little time on the latent aspirations for living in the community they are planning, too little

time on the people who will bring their plans to life. They are likely to lose sight of the human element in discussion of design concepts, modules, questions of ideal densities, percentages of open space. Translate these ephemeral professional matters into human terms and they come into sharp focus; the focus is on people.

Reston's physical plan springs from its concept that people come first. The pattern for distribution of dwelling units reflects this. The usual pattern places highest concentrations in a central core with density decreasing in stages out to a low density perimeter. The result..most residents are separated from major recreation areas. Reston's desire to make these areas as accessible as possible to all residents sparked the Whittlesey and Conklin plan for a high density sinew that winds its way from North to South through most of the length of the tract. This plan brings all residents within walking distance of these recreation areas.

Reston's open space is conceived with what Lewis Mumford terms its "social function." Here again our objectives insist that open space per se-- without functionality-- is open, but only to criticism. Impressively large open space areas on a master plan too often prove

disillusioning. Visiting an English New Town, I searched on the ground for the open spaces I had seen on the plan; I found only thick forest which the New Town residents had not penetrated in more than a decade. A sophisticated planner compared Reston's 42% public factor with 90% in another fully developed community. In curiosity and a degree of chagrin-- for we are proud of the proportion we have achieved for Reston residents--I visited the community to find that vast acres of unused and unlandscaped open green space constituted most of the 90%. This, with Jane Jacobs, I lament as a purposeless inhibition to good communication.

At Reston, open space is planned for because it is needed by the people. Each acre has a purpose; if it is open, it is not by default but by plan.

Density zoning was a major innovation for Fairfax County; the amendment to their zoning ordinance to provide it was worked out between their staff and ours. The density for Reston was set at fourteen persons per residential acre. Many months of intensive work went into finding the right mix of housing types for the make-up of our residential communities. We do not consider this mix to be final,

but it is optimum for Reston in the light of the knowledge we have today. For us, the best mix is roughly 15 per cent detached houses, 15 per cent high rise apartments, with the remaining 70 percent in town houses and garden apartments.

In working on specific neighborhoods it has become apparent that each housing type profits from intermixture with the others. Our second phase of development, now being planned, makes even fuller use of the intermingling all three housing types than does the first phase, now under construction.

For the 15 per cent detached houses, built by individuals or builders on lots which they purchase, we have developed a small device which has large repercussions. It is simple enough... just a circle and a square..but it is a method to protect individual householders against misguided building next door. The circle drawn on each lot plan represents the area within which two-thirds of the residential structure must be built; the square shows the spot where the service area for the house is located. Each man can build his house with the comfortable assurance of knowing exactly where his neighbor's house and services will be. To date, there has been not

one objection to this part of our program from the twenty or more individuals and builders who have already signed land purchase contracts.

The prospects for New Towns in the United States and elsewhere are almost limitless for demographic reasons that do not bear repetition to you who are familiar with them. The problems involved are legion. Experience, bitter and sweet, make it possible to identify some problems now, although the majority, no doubt, are still to be encountered. It is perhaps fortunate that the clarity of hindsight was not available to me at the start, although I like to believe that I would have launched Reston even knowing the difficulties that have so far had to be met and surmounted.

Finance is a problem. Unfortunately the word "pioneer", in these times, in this of all countries, has unfortunate connotations. The difficulties in finding the necessary funds - working capital, construction loans and permanent mortgages - for New Towns will not be eliminated until there are many which have proven themselves successful. And for specific projects within these New Towns which have untried elements, financing will be more difficult than for conven-

tional projects. President Johnson's far-sighted program for Federal Government help to New Towns has run into heavy Congressional weather due, in no small measure, to opposition from the conservatives in the real estate industry. The logic of Robert Weaver's position (he was responsible for the President's program) - that government aid available to communities that are political entities i.e., cities, towns, villages, counties, shall be extended to communities that are being developed with private funds - is unassailable.

It follows that in the foreseeable future the financing of New Towns will be easier than it is today. I am happy to say that I very recently concluded arrangements with The Gulf Oil Corporation for the infusion of the necessary additional working capital for Reston.

Another problem; how does a New Town attract industry? One of the accepted criteria for New Towns is defined by NEW YORK TIMES critic Ada Huxtable in her recent survey as "provision for a variety of uses including commercial, industrial and civic as well as residential."

This provision is a valid goal; there are at least three good reasons for including employment centers in New Towns. Living close

to work minimizes commuting time for the worker and congestion on highways and in rapid transit facilities. The working community is home as well, allowing the citizen to concentrate his community efforts rather than having to divide them between where he lives and where he works. And a desirably broad base for tax assessment comes from this balance between residential, commercial and industrial space.

But it is easier said than done, however sound the reasons. New Towns in this country are democratic institutions, exponents of private enterprise and free^{of}/government control. The highly prized freedom deprives them of the power of the state to induce industrial development. In Great Britain, where New Towns are government developments, the government uses its power to support its enterprises. In the United States, the concept must sell itself in the competition of the market place.

It is too soon for us to know whether we shall have an employment center to match Reston's residential capacity. Beginning efforts to communicate the concept of Reston to industrial leaders and government officials auger well for the success of this part of the Reston Plan. Our location is an asset; Reston is eighteen miles from Washington, D.C.

and lies between it and the new Dulles International Airport. Our aim is to attract research and development plants, light industry and government agencies to Reston through its various advantages as a residential community. Employers are increasingly conscious of the value of offering staff a good place to live.

To the more progressive and sophisticated captains of industry, urban sprawl is becoming part of the vocabulary. To them, as to planners and critics, it is an anathema. They question, quite properly, whether New Towns, too, will within their borders harbor the same ugliness. Will patterns so pleasing on a drawing board or in aerial view actually look different from the usual suburban sameness on closer inspection?

I believe that the feeling of urban sprawl comes not so much from the broad strokes of a master plan as from the detailing of neighborhoods within it. Mass efforts at great design too often make a mockery of the hope that a man's home can be his castle. To achieve this universal desire, men must have a sense of identity which stems from variety. In variety there is free choice....and this gives the individual dignity.

If we are correct in thinking that monotony is the worst offense of urban sprawl, even surpassing wasteful use of land, there is an obvious answer. At Reston, we invited three distinguished architectural firms to participate in the beginning of our first village. Whittlesey and Conklin has designed the commercial space, 47 houses and 116 apartments for the village center. Charles Goodman and Cloethiel Smith have each designed 90 town houses. And now two additional firms--Keyes, Lethbridge and Geddes, Brecher, Qualls and Cunningham have been brought in to work on units for the next phase of development.

Our answer to the indignity of urban sprawl is the diversity which these superior architects - in combination - have created for us. The sum of its parts is more expensive than mass-produced sameness. The town house - intrinsically less expensive to build than the detached house due to savings on roads and utilities - brings our costs down to compete with comparable mass-produced detached houses. On the other hand, their cost is still somewhat higher than similar town houses built in unending repetition.

Will the market bear the additional cost of diversity and lively variety? We are curious to get the answer.

At this precise moment in history, New Towns in the United States have a unique opportunity. Social and industrial revolutions in this century have brought it into being; their product--modern man-- makes the opportunity a pressing need.

It is, in fact, a double opportunity that New Towns can seize. They can provide an orderly response to the pressures of a sky-rocketing population by bringing every bit of planning knowledge and experience to meet one of our nation's most serious internal problems. At the same time, a New Town has the opportunity to be a community unlike any that have ever existed because it meets needs that are completely contemporary. This mid-twentieth century need, vaster than ever and increasing every day, is to provide a decent even stimulating environment for the working man with leisure.

The modern man with leisure is restless within the confines of conformity. With time to do what he chooses and to live as he wishes, he will search out a setting which gives him the freedom to expand his capacities.

He will find it in a New Town planned with this new life firmly in mind, in the town which puts the individual at the top of its

priority list and keeps him there, regardless of pressures to compromise the objective. Here, at close range, he finds a variety of ways to live and things to do, a variety of people to do them with. Here he can develop latent interests and find new outlets for his energies. Here he has a chance to come closer to using his potential as a human being. Here he can, perhaps, justify the confluence of revolutions which have made him unique in our history.

New Towns will be a powerful social force in America. The challenge to make them a progressive force is heady wine, indeed. Planners, architects, builders, in fact every humanitarian, dreams of putting knowledge to work to take the world we live in a step forward. The opportunity is in a New Town. I, for one, find its adventure irresistible.