

# Planned Communities

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•WRITING IN the New York Times, Columnist James Reston recently noted that, "In a fit of exuberance or absentmindedness we have increased the population of the United States by over 50 million since 1945."

As we all know, the exuberance and absentmindedness of which Reston spoke is continuing, and at such a pace that by the time the children of the past 15 years are grandparents, there will be another 125 million or so Americans. Moreover, at least 85 percent of the 300 million people in the nation will be living in urban places by the year 2000.

This growth is the most portentous single fact of our time—always excepting the thermonuclear threat. It means that in the next 40 years we will have to build as much housing, industry, highways and related development as we have built in our previous history. And it means, moreover, that the amount of land consumed by urbanization will be at least double the acreage now urbanized.

This tremendous population surge will be accommodated largely in what we today consider the metropolitan fringe, and, in many cases, in undeveloped or agricultural lands even farther out. By 2000, Megalopolis will be a fact, certainly the fast-growing East Coast "super-city" stretching from Boston to Richmond and the West Coast area between San Francisco and San Diego will appear, in another 40 years, as continuous urbanized places.

The previous 40 years of metropolitan growth has produced a phenomenon variously known as "Spread City," "urban sprawl" and "slurbs." In other words, much of our suburban development heretofore has been a mess. Not only has it resulted in ugliness and botched land uses, but it has also been tremendously wasteful. Community facilities, such as sewer systems and water supply, have been built on a piecemeal, too-little too-late basis. Roads and highways have been developed with little thought to repercussions on future land-use patterns, and commercial and industrial buildings have gone up, willy-nilly, wherever a local zoning ordinance could be obligingly bent.

This haphazard development has left us with a considerable deficit in terms of the physical condition of many of our suburban communities, and particularly in terms of their capacity to accommodate future growth. Ironically, however, in the midst of this physical chaos we often find a social uniformity which has provided much ammunition for pundits and philosophers alike.

Historian Oscar Handlin has perhaps put it best:

What is new in the long-term movement to the suburbs is the insistence upon constructing small, uniform, coherent communities and the surrender of the adventure of life in the larger units with all the hazards and opportunities of unpredictable contacts.

It is the stifling of opportunities and the minimization of choice that has most particularly brought much scorn on our suburbia of today. The one-class, one-color, uniform bedroom community so often satirized in modern fiction is, like most butts for satire, too sadly a fact.

Finally, the suburbs have, for a variety of reasons, grown intellectually and politically apart from the central cities. There is too little willingness to see that the problems of city and suburb alike are really the problems of a single metropolitan region.

Neither the problems of growth in the metropolitan fringes nor of decay in the older areas of the central city can be conveniently sorted out, as all transportation experts have long ago discovered. In fact, the rational development of transportation systems, with an optimum balance of mass transit and highways, offers a key opportunity for developing a truly metropolitan matrix in which the problems of the city and suburbs can be focused and delineated.

President Johnson, in his housing message a year ago, said, "If the taxpayer's dollar is to be wisely used and our communities are to be desirable places in which to live, we must assure ourselves that future growth takes place in a more orderly fashion."

In that message, the President proposed a new program to help meet the challenge of metropolitan growth. The program comprised aids to states or local governments for acquiring land and developing needed public facilities ahead of full-scale development, and also proposed mortgage loan insurance for private builders who would develop well-planned subdivisions or communities.

This program constituted a direct response to the threats of continued wasteful suburban development. It would have provided the Federal Government with the means to generate much greater interest in a trend already developing throughout the nation, the trend toward the building of carefully planned and, sometimes, fully serviced communities. Moreover, the program was designed to spur further the development of land in accordance with metropolitan area plans. For not only would the communities themselves have to be planned in a rational, orderly fashion, but they would also have to contribute to the broader scheme for total development of the metropolitan region.

The Federal program to assist planned communities was not aimed at merely creating a special variety of living mode. Fundamentally, it represented a bold approach to a higher order of comprehensive land use, with the emphasis squarely where it must be to meet the challenge of growth—on planning in a metropolitan context.

There are, of course, other objectives behind the Federal proposals for assistance to planned subdivisions and communities. Insuring the construction of public facilities, often in advance of actual need, was one. This is to guard against continued waste and inefficiency in such development, particularly in the building of sewer and water facilities. In too many suburbs today, citizens find themselves faced with the prospect of heavy costs for these facilities, which should have been provided before total development. New York State recently proposed a multi-billion dollar program to build sewer facilities and clean up lakes and streams, now polluted by wasteful development. Wolf Von Eckardt, writing in the Washington Post lately reported President Johnson's affirmed and reaffirmed concern for these matters, saying, "He seems determined to reverse the tide of land, water and air pollution resulting from industrialization, urban sprawl, highway needs, builders' greed and mounting technological waste."

Another objective of the Federal proposals affecting urban land use was to guard against unwarranted kiting of the price of land. More rational use of land will minimize the rise in land prices which would be expected to occur with the provision of public facilities. Better land utilization, assuming a high order of consumer acceptance, should, in fact, provide developed sites at lower cost. This can be done through judicious use of the cluster principle, whereby higher densities can be achieved while still providing maximum open spaces for all families. This cluster principle has, in fact, been followed in an increasing number of new suburban developments and in most of the 170 planned communities currently being built by private enterprise throughout the nation. It provides for a higher order of open space and preservation of existing greenery than most of the subdivisions we have seen in the postwar years.

It should be noted that not everything called a "planned community" is necessarily the ultimate in living styles. Many of these will be little more than glorified subdivisions, and maybe not even so glorified. And where any development of over 30,000 or so population is planned and built without regard for the development of the larger region of which it is part, there are serious questions about the value of this sort of "planned community."

But where the job is done properly, as it is in many of the newer communities, there are some obvious advantages:

1. Land costs are lower because of the ability to utilize land farther out on the metropolitan fringe and because of the advantages of carefully planned land uses designed to reduce unit costs.

2. There is maximum choice of housing for a full range of incomes, low as well as high and medium, with many different housing types. Some new communities, although they are quite far from urban centers, are attempting to develop an urban feel, with some high-rise apartments clustered closely around intimate plazas and pedestrian shopping malls.

3. Development of open spaces and recreation areas is optimum.

4. A comprehensive transportation system for internal circulation, travel to the larger urban center and to other outlying communities is included. Almost every planned community under construction is oriented closely to a major highway or highway interchange. And even though some of the planned communities stress high levels of employment within the community itself, all recognize the continuing need for convenient and reliable central city travel. Internal systems of travel increasingly involve clear-cut pedestrian-auto separation and some use of special vehicles. At the new town of Columbia, to be built between Washington and Baltimore, small buses, somewhat similar to Washington's minibuses, are being considered for internal public transportation. They would travel over exclusive rights-of-way with frequent scheduling.

5. A high level of employment potential is forecast for some larger planned communities. This will mean that workers should be housed in the community and, therefore, enforces the need, and provides the market, for lower and middle-income housing. As these communities develop, it is also anticipated that, even as in the central city, service jobs will grow faster than any other category and, therefore, will generate still further demand for lower and middle-income housing.

6. A much wider range of cultural opportunities will be present in the better planned communities than we have seen in most of our suburban developments. The notion of suburbia as a cultural desert hopefully will be less true in the new communities now planned or to be built in the future.

7. Finally, the new community concept offers an opportunity for a completely planned environment, with the most efficient, least wasteful hierarchy of land uses and the optimum provision of public facilities. This will not necessarily mean that overzealous urban designers will wrap communities in a rigid pattern of development geared solely to their particular esthetic. Rather, there should be plenty of room not only for the pedestrian to ramble, but for the free spirit to ramble as well; some of the more advanced planned communities recognize the need for tranquility and solitude, as well as for gregariousness and congregate activity. Our land-use proposals would encourage such results in new communities and facilitate the maximum number of these advantages in the larger suburbs. They will not be uniformly effective, but they are consistent with our institutions and values, and they do represent a first, but important, step toward a new and rational approach to a long-neglected problem.

It might appear that the Federal interest in promoting more planned suburban development indicates a lessening of concern with center city problems. Certainly some of our old city friends seemed to feel this was so last year when they opposed our New Communities proposal. I have to say, with some sadness, that they were never more wrong. In fact, we are prosecuting our urban renewal and public housing programs with greater vigor than ever, and we intend to continue to do so. Moreover, those programs which most directly benefit the central cities will be continually improved and expanded to do the job which still needs to be done, the revitalization of our great cities to make them better places in which to live and work.

This is not to say that we are ignoring the very real conflicts that will continue to exist between central city interests and suburban interests. But we certainly do not intend to aggravate them. Rather, we intend to help upgrade the quality of the total metropolitan environment and to expand the fullest range of choices—in jobs, housing and leisure activities—for all persons throughout our great urban regions. Some activities are better and more economically performed in one part of the metropolitan area than another, and those choices will have to be made in the typical American fashion

of private market accommodation to public purposes. In any case, these choices must be weighed in a truly metropolitan context.

This is a perspective which is increasingly recognized as the most effective way to handle the broad range of growth problems, and it is a perspective which we in the Federal Government intend to continue to foster.

As the late Catherine Bauer Wurster has said:

In order to predict the effect of potential changes in specific environmental factors, we are trying to understand the inner dynamics of the urban development process. And to this end we are borrowing the most refined theoretical and mathematical methods from technology and social science. In the analysis of urban form and structure, and even in the esthetic and cultural aspects of urban design, systematic approaches are increasingly being employed.

Catherine Bauer Wurster was one of our great pioneers in advanced thinking about metropolitan problems. We miss her wisdom and probing mind. She understood, perhaps better than anyone, that the challenge of growth could not possibly be dealt with in any but a metropolitan context.

Transportation planners have been, in major respects, the trailblazers in applying modern scientific methods to the problems of interrelationships between metropolitan sectors, such as various land uses and their ties to transportation. Such studies as the Tri-State Transportation Committee and the Penn-Jersey experts have been carrying out point the way to a more rational metropolitan development pattern throughout vast areas. If much of the work seems to generate as much scepticism as fact and fails to generate sufficient political backing, it nevertheless is drawing us relentlessly closer to meaningful solutions. I might add that the scepticism is a valuable byproduct, and the political backing will come.

The Federal Government has been busily boosting the cause of metropolitan planning through a variety of programs. Our Section 701 program of urban planning assistance has been most valuable. It has already made more than 325 grants to metropolitan and regional planning agencies and another 1,200 or so to states for urban planning in smaller localities and for statewide planning. Under the New Communities proposal, this assistance would have been extended and expanded.

Planning is also a major objective in our open space and mass transportation programs. Both require that grant funds be used in accordance with approved urban area plans, and thereby they tend to generate such plans. There have been some complaints that this requirement tends to slow up the mass transportation program. But this vital program is not a catch-as-catch-can vehicle for shoring up failing transit facilities without any considerations of broader needs or taking into account future growth. Not surprisingly, those areas which have done the most planning and thinking about the future have the least difficulty putting together a sensible proposal.

Finally, as you all undoubtedly know by now, Federally assisted highways to be built in larger urban areas after July 1, 1965, will have to be based on a continuing comprehensive transportation planning process. Moreover, this planning process must take into account needs for all forms of transportation and the potential effects of the evolution of such systems on future land development.

What we are saying in these programs is that the critical relationships between transportation systems and land uses must be carefully thought out before it is too late. We have made too many mistakes in the past to be able to afford more. There are alternatives to sprawl and unguided metropolitan growth, and we are asking you to look for them. We are not attempting to dictate forms, nor methods. Alternatives take many shapes: corridor patterns, satellite cities, clusters of semi-urbs surrounding a highly specialized core city, and others. The interest is obviously high. For instance, both California and New York, our two biggest states, have recently come out with reports urging comprehensive community development throughout broad metropolitan regions. New York has conceived a statewide system of development, following very generalized patterns of land use, within which specific situations can best be accommodated.

In all of this fast-growing interest in metropolitan area planning, the role of transportation experts will be pivotal. Soundly designed systems can be instrumental in shaping desired land-use patterns. This is quite different from most of our previous experience, of course, where land uses, like Topsy, just "grewed" as a consequence of highway routes, which in turn were usually designed strictly to get people and goods from here to there without much regard for what happened along the way.

The development of planned communities within the framework of a broader metropolitan scheme is perhaps our most creative means of evolving rational uses for optimum living and working conditions. In themselves, planned communities are certainly not the whole answer to the problems of growth without sprawl. In fact, most of our growth will not occur in so-called planned communities such as Reston or Columbia, but rather will continue to be accommodated through the efforts of builders developing smaller subdivisions. But we can continue to press for suburban developments of various sizes to occur within the framework of a metropolitan plan, and to see that there is adequate provision of facilities such as sewer, water and open spaces. And we can encourage and facilitate better land uses which preserve trees and contours while utilizing cluster development.

We make no pretense whatever that the Federal Government can, single-handedly, defeat the forces which turn growth into sprawl and waste. We can provide some means geared to national objectives, such as aids for planned communities and better suburban developments or better mass transportation, and then hope that local ingenuity can tailor them to fit individual situations. But one of the most perplexing problems involved in the disorganized sprawl of metropolitan development is the disorganization of government able to deal with the problem. So far we have had precious little luck in effecting meaningful political machinery for handling problems on a metropolitan basis. Advisory councils seem never to be more than that—and their advice is too seldom heeded—and congeries of local governments, on a voluntary basis, are subject to defections which usually destroy the chances for finding any consensus on which to proceed.

Metropolitan government has been discussed, advocated and attempted over the past three decades, but so far there are only two large areas so governed: Miami-Dade County in Florida and Nashville-Davidson County in Tennessee. There are still severe obstacles to metropolitan government as such, but there remains the desperate need for better means of putting decision-making power to work on a metropolitan basis.

The easy way out of the governmental bind in the past has been to establish special function districts, often to operate throughout a metropolitan area or at least across jurisdictional boundaries. The Port of New York Authority is a pioneer example. In fact, the State of New York today has over 4,100 special improvement districts (not counting 1,115 school districts) as part of its 6,846 different units of government involved in capital construction or outlays related to future development.

The special purpose district, then, has the virtue of being able to get going with its own particular job. But it too often has the drawback of operating in such a narrow context that there is little attention paid to the potential repercussions of its work on other programs.

One answer to the problem of achieving areawide consensus for rational metropolitan development is to get state governments more deeply involved. State governments are, after all, the ultimate source of political power for localities, the latter function through the delegation of powers granted under state charters and incorporations. The states themselves, of course, often establish special purpose organizations to deal with problems on a statewide basis, but these are not able to adapt very easily to special metropolitan problems, and are particularly handicapped in terms of planning objectives relating all the needed development activities for metropolitan areas. For instance, the lack of cooperation between state highway departments and state park departments in some places has approached distressing proportions.

Hopefully this situation is not such a handicap as it once was, and not in small measure because of our Federal planning requirements. This is the sort of conflict in which the Federal Government can play a valuable role, albeit a somewhat limited one.

I have no doubts that we shall find more effective political means for decision-making on a metropolitan basis. Many of our states are moving rapidly in that direction already, and I am confident there will be much more action soon. But I must stress the urgency of the situation as strongly as possible, for the growth of which I spoke earlier is upon us now. Land is already being consumed at the rate of nearly one million acres per year and urbanization will, if anything, increase that pace. Decisions put off today might find that there is no tomorrow.

If much of what I have said is unduly distressing, I can offer, by way of putting it all in perspective, a note from history. Very recently, a group of archaeologists discovered, in Turkey, the remains of a city believed to be over 8,000 years old. Moreover, they discovered evidence of a city plan, with houses and markets carefully laid out in ordered pattern. This is believed to be the oldest city plan in existence. I must add, though, that the residents of this ancient city were found to be preoccupied with fertility and death.

I am not saying that these preoccupations might be supposed, therefore, to provide the basis for city planning, although we are certainly much occupied with fertility, and unless we plan more carefully we are in danger of killing our chances for living decently.

What I am saying is that fertility—our great growth—should not be viewed as a death sentence for our great cities or their metropolitan fringes. Rather, in my view, this growth offers an unparalleled opportunity to achieve a standard and scale of living no society has yet been able to devise, to achieve a society which, in the democratic tradition, fosters the development of opportunity and choice for all—a society in which the human spirit, as well as the body—can grow and prosper, in a phrase, a truly Great Society.