

New Towns: An Urban Frontier

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American breed—the city
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Rouse Co.

by Patrica McBroom

Following World War II, England built new towns, the United States built suburbs. England controlled land development through the power of the central government; the United States left land development to private enterprise and thousands of small construction companies capable of building 50 or 100 homes at a time.

The urban scene that developed in the United States has been variously characterized as "slurb," "blob," "sprawl" and "mess." But there are signs the pattern is changing. New towns have become an urban frontier. It is too early to tell how far the trend will go, but some 35 to 40 new towns, averaging 10,000 acres in size and planned for some 100,000 people apiece, are currently underway around the country. Upon the wisdom of their builders may hang the quality of tomorrow's urban scene.

Unlike the British pattern, new towns in this country are strictly a private enterprise affair, with most of the financing coming from oil, rubber, electronics and insurance interests.

The Federal Government is only

As a prototype, Columbia, Md., utilized the advice of social scientists.

vaguely involved through FHA loans, preferring to concentrate on deteriorating old towns. Scientists are following suit, with their recent decision to study such knotty problems as pollution, traffic congestion, city discomfort and inequities of all kinds. Their main task at the moment is just to work out an approach for studying this bewildering array—answers are far in the future, as a recent symposium on science and the city demonstrated. It was the first such symposium held by the National Academy of Sciences and the Academy of Engineering.

But except for one project, the town of Columbia in Maryland, the scientific community is not involved in new town planning.

For better or worse, new towns in this country are largely the personal expression of an elite group of businessmen, architects and designers. The question is: will they build better cities and a richer human environment, as their advertisements claim, than the United States has had in the past with its unplanned, ignorant sprawl?

In a book to be published later this

month, two California authorities on community development note a special sense of mission common to the city builders. But they doubt that most of the new towns represent a major break from old suburban patterns.

It may be due to the early stage of building, comment Edward P. Eichler and Marshall Kaplan in "The Community Builders" (University of California Press), but "we have been unable to find in the actual (California) developments to date, or even in the plans for future developments, much that is not present in many California 'unplanned' communities."

Similarly, the much-publicized new town of Reston, located in rolling Virginia hills near Washington, does not represent a radical break with the past. Its major innovation is architectural.

Only the builders of Columbia, a new town located between Washington and Baltimore and officially opened last month, did extensive intellectual digging into requirements of a good city before breaking ground.

For that reason, builder James Wilson Rouse views his city as a prototype,

and others certainly would agree.

"Columbia is the only one of its kind," says Dr. Leonard J. Duhl, a psychiatrist and special assistant to the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. "Its ultimate design is based on the concept of a full-mixed city."

Dr. Duhl was one of a group of 14 social scientists and urban specialists who sat for seven weekends in 1964 discussing what kind of city should be created on the Rouse Company's 15,000 acres in Howard County, Md.

The planning—for a population of 110,000—was strictly humanistic, not analytical, says Rouse Co. vice presi-

Michael, a social psychologist from the University of Michigan, "but to produce as large a variety of alternatives of living as we knew how."

That means, for one thing, three transportation systems instead of a single one dominated by the automobile. Columbia doesn't do away with the car—"We decided we had to live with it," says Finley—but the city does subtly discourage its excessive use.

Besides the usual roads, Columbia is planned for a minibus system, running on its own right-of-way and connecting schools, shopping areas and residences.

Bicycle and pedestrian pathways,

dren when they walk out the door, she is released as a person."

In its broad aspects, Columbia follows current thinking in urban design; a series of villages, each planned for 10,000 to 15,000 people, form a circle around downtown. While the villages have their own clustered shopping centers, schools and churches, downtown plans call for an open-air music pavilion, a concert hall, department stores, a hospital and a college clustered on a lake front.

Urban planners have been talking about clustering for years; Columbia achieves it to an unprecedented degree.

But perhaps the town's most unusual accomplishment lies in the ecumenical agreements it won from the major religions. Fourteen Protestant faiths will share the same facilities. Protestants, Catholics and Jews will jointly conduct religious training, and together they have formed a corporation for building and administering low-income housing.

Obviously, the concepts behind Columbia are not novel. What makes the new town distinctive is that Rouse, fueled by his work group and his own ideas, intends to implement them.

So it is with social and racial integration. The villages are planned for a range of income levels—with houses ranging from \$14,000 to \$100,000—but the neighborhoods are not, based on the idea that social distance serves a purpose. Putting people of different social classes side by side on a block creates dissension, says Finley, since their styles of living are dissimilar.

But a builder has the responsibility to plan for integration—both social and racial. "We believe that if we carry out integration sensitively, people's lives will be richer; the child will grow up in an integrated community and the tensions he carries around with him will be different."

At the moment Columbia is no more than a music pavilion, a few buildings and dusty roads snaking through trees and over hills. Between now and its date of completion in 1980, the people living there will be the ones deciding whether or not they bought a richer human environment.

If the city goes over in a big way, particularly financially, it could encourage other developers to follow suit.

"But there are not many developers with the intelligence or humanity Rouse has," comments Dr. Michael. "If this works, it might provide an incentive for the Government to get into new towns. Most observers feel that unless Government does, we're not going to deal with the terrible population press."

"As far as I am concerned," says Dr. Duhl, "all Columbia has to be is 10 percent better than what now exists. I think it will do far better than that."



Ezra Stoller Assoc.'s

The model depicting downtown Columbia represents a tenth of the city.

dent William E. Finley. He, Rouse, and the specialists ranged through such topics as the resentment of housewives, the advantages of bicycle riding, the desires of elderly people for contact with or escape from the young, the role of churches, the advantages of small schools versus large ones, social interaction, city identity, politics, family tension and racial integration.

"Our idea was not to prefabricate an environment, since we do not know what is best for people," explains work group chairman, Dr. Donald N.

interlacing the city and cutting under roads, make up the third system.

"We think the ability to get around on foot or bicycle is a desirable human activity," says Finley. He points out that one of the causes of tension between children and their parents is mobility—or the lack of it.

With a car, the mother is a chauffeur; without it she is stranded by her husband. "Social scientists say her deeply hidden resentment is absolutely true," Finley comments, "but if she can relinquish responsibility for her chil-