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NEW TOWNS BIBLIOGRAPHY

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INTRODUCTION

abstracted from

New Communities for Pennsylvania?

by

David R. Powell
(Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Department of
Community Affairs, June 1970).

In the United States, plagued by the increasing complexity of urban problems and facing the prospect of even more urbanization, probably no idea has more firmly caught the imagination of planners than that of new communities, designed from the ground up to avert or minimize our past and present mistakes in town building. This interest has been heightened by a scattering of brilliant examples of new towns, most of them in other countries but a few here, which seem to show that given good planning and the needed capital, a new community is financially feasible and environmentally far superior to the "urban sprawl" to which we have become accustomed.

The term "new town," means something different to almost everyone who uses it, but generally it implies a kind of planning and development much different from the add-on kind of growth which typifies most of our present communities. The popularity of the term has resulted in its application to a wide range of small and large projects. But for most planners, a "new town":

1. Is totally planned before construction begins
2. Integrates the newest city planning concepts, which generally include a mixture of low and high-rise, cluster, townhouse and free-standing housing in close proximity; separated rights of way for pedestrian and vehicular traffic; neighborhood groupings which include schools, shopping and community facilities for each "village"; and large, open, green spaces for common recreational use at the expense of individual lot sizes, resulting in medium density and wide availability of open land.

3. Provides a range of employment opportunity in the community for its residents
4. Should include housing on a scale or prices to allow low as well as high-income persons to live there
5. Incorporates public transportation, both within the community and between it and the nearest metropolitan center
6. Often implies new, even experimental, housing technology.

Most new communities completed or in process in this country have 2,000 acres or more and are planned for populations of 50,000 or more, although increasingly smaller developments which incorporate a few new town features are being announced as "new communities." The original model of the new town was surrounded by a "greenbelt" of open farm or woodland which was not to be developed and which would limit the growth of the new town; this idea has been applied in many places with varying success. The ideal also was far enough distant from a large urban center to keep it from becoming another suburb, but in Western countries, including the United States, financing has dictated a suburban character for most new towns.

Despite the success of some modern, privately financed new towns in this country, there has been increasing pressure for government to assist in these developments. The major problems encountered by private developers are the great amount of money needed for public facilities over a number of years before any substantial return is realized, and the increasing difficulty of acquiring large tracts of land at feasible prices; others include local government restrictions, conflicts with new governments in the developing communities, and difficulty in attracting industry.

THE CHALLENGE TO GOVERNMENT

Do We Want New Towns?

Of the many decisions facing the Commonwealth regarding new towns, the first and most fundamental is: Should Pennsylvania lend, or spend, some of its resources in encouraging and aiding the development of new communities?

From the end of the Greenbelt Towns experiment in the 1930s until the New Communities Act of 1968 (Title IV of the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1968), government, Federal and State, has left the building of new towns almost entirely in the hands of private developers with private financing. But with the recent increase in the number of such projects, there has been increasing pressure on governments to encourage new towns by legislation which

would simplify the processes of land assembly and local code accomodation, and ease the great financial burden implicit in new town planning and building.

The essential decision is not whether development will occur. It will. The choice is whether an effort will be made to channel some proportion of the State's development into new communities which, by comprehensive planning, can be expected to offer an alternative to the urban--or exurban--spread now in process.

Every few months, metropolitan America will be building all of the houses, shopping centers, schools, industries, sewers, and other things needed to create a new city. The challenge is to organize the urban development so as to build new communities that are physically coherent, economically sound, and socially stable, instead of permitting our potential new cities to be scattered in bits and pieces over many square miles, in a pattern that is inefficient, unattractive, and segregated.*

The economic maladjustment, general inefficiency and social upheavals associated with unplanned growth of our urban areas also represent a cost, but one so diverse that it cannot be placed on a balance sheet for ready comparison with the cost of new towns building. Particularly, this kind of cost does not appear--at least under its own label--on legislative budgets and tax assessments.

In Europe, where official encouragement of new towns is 20 or more years old, the fact that these programs have been continued and intensified is the best proof of their satisfaction that the "third alternative" is a good one, but even there experience is limited. In this country, most of the "new towns" we can claim are largely in construction or still on the drawing boards, and there is no great body of evidence to draw on. Studies have been made of the Greenbelt Towns, Park Forest and the Levittowns, from which some conclusions may be drawn (although these are not true "new towns"), and continuing studies are being made of Columbia and Reston. The advantages and disadvantages of new town development may be considered in view of these reports.

A "better way of life," -- Because a new town is built according to an integrated plan, it can be constructed to utilize the best practicable design and technology to achieve personal comfort and convenience, easy access to employment, supply of goods and services, and educational and recreational facilities. Because everything is new, the new town should embody the best present knowledge and concepts of aesthetics, a desirable social environment and a minimum of wasted time and space.

* Henry Bain, "Channeling the Inevitable Metropolitan Growth into Well-Planned New Communities," paper presented January 26, 1969, at the Conference of the National Committee on Urban Growth Policy, Key Largo.

The aesthetics of new town living is, of course, a subjective matter, and presumably the people who move into them are pleased with the environment. Letchworth, the Greenbelts and Reston all experienced disappointing early growth, but in each case the subsequent acceptance improved and, in the case of the older towns, later development has been dramatic. Park Forest and the Levittowns showed the opposite trend: Early acceptance was immediate, but later sales (Levittown) and rentals (Park Forest) declined. A tentative conclusion would be that the "dormitory towns" were the best answers to an acute housing shortage. Letchworth and the Greenbelts, however, attracted a more permanent population, and in those cases property values rose and are still rising. The values placed on a style of life can be expected to change slowly, but the experience of the older greenbelt towns, added to the increasing shift toward classic new town principles in "modern" development, are evidence that Americans are finding a new appreciation for them. Superblocks, cul-de-sacs, high-density clusters matched with common open space, the community center as a focus, and the surrounding greenbelt to limit growth and congestion have become accepted principles. It is a safe conclusion that for many of our urban and rural citizens, the new town offers a better, and better appreciated, way of life.

Economic efficiency.--Industry, offices, stores, transportation facilities are new, are designed for their specific, modern uses and are planned to function together in the community. If well designed, they will provide the optimum in efficiency and should need little repair, addition or reconstruction for many years.

The assumption is that the new town is a complete community, and in this respect the United States has limited experience. England has achieved a high rate of integral employment, but uses a degree of governmental encouragement which is not appropriate to this country. The Greenbelt Towns have developed almost no internal employment, and Park Forest, the Levittowns and most so-called "new towns" are essentially suburbs. Columbia hopes to offer 40,000 jobs and Reston 23,000; prospects in both have been encouraging (a General Electric plant in Columbia will hire 10,000 to 12,000) but it will be several years before a pattern can be traced. Some new towns - Lake Havasu City, for example - have been sited because of the location of industrial plants, and the New Stanton proposal in Pennsylvania would be a similar example. Much of Canada's new town development follows this pattern. Many areas of Pennsylvania know of the dangers inherent in the one-industry town, and therefore should be expected to guard against them by professional economic planning; meanwhile, improved transportation, better highways and the probable location of new towns within an existing economic area will tend to soften the threats of area unemployment.

The United States' performance with respect to public transportation to serve new towns has been poor. Levittown, Pennsylvania, and Park Forest were built near existing rail commuter lines; but new towns generally are highway-oriented. This is in contrast to England and France, where fast rail passenger systems are receiving high priorities in their over-all decentralization programs. Highway congestion and the high cost of new highways in urban areas, in both financial and human terms, indicate that public transportation should receive a higher priority in our new town plans. It also has been shown that greenbelts invite usurpation by superhighways, and to preserve the character of our new towns we will need a firm and permanent integration of town and transportation planning. Reston's residents started their own express commuter bus system, and Columbia has a minibus system operating on separate rights-of-way; generally the new towns are designed for easy walking to schools, stores, employment and recreation facilities. Initial elements of a de-emphasis on the automobile are implicit in new towns; they could play an important role in the development of better public transportation systems.

Recreation, education and shopping facilities are so well recognized as essential to new towns that plans for them are basic elements of their design. The postwar suburban developments fared less well in recreation and school site planning; but Columbia, Reston and other new towns are built, for all practical purposes, around their lakes, golf courses, schools, and shopping centers.

Equal opportunity.--A racial and economic mix has been the announced goal of the typical new town in this decade; to date, achievement has been short of a reflection of the national ratios. All of the Greenbelt Towns have nonwhite populations, and Park Forest was racially integrated from the beginning. There was public resistance to the movement of black families into Levittown, Pennsylvania. Columbia has sizable minority representation, although officials now say that no records are being kept. Low- or moderate-income public housing is scheduled for both Columbia and Reston, under Federal assistance; the experience with these projects will be significant. The cost of homes in new towns so far has been restrictive; the average income of Columbia's residents is reported at \$14,500.

The surrender of the principle of a private yard for everyone, in favor of better, shared common facilities, has been elemental in new town planning; it should help to create an atmosphere of really equal opportunity. If combined with planned dispersal of moderate-income housing throughout the community, enlightened hiring and promotion practices among employers and provision of equal services by the commercial sector, new towns could achieve a genuine social integration long before our established communities do.

Local governmental adaptation.--New town development is almost certain to produce strains within the local government structure. The governments of rural areas, where new towns logically would be built, are not prepared, organizationally or financially, for sudden, large development.

The development of most of the large new communities in the unincorporated territory of rural counties presents perhaps the greatest governmental difficulties because basic decisions concerning planning, financing, and providing services and facilities must be made immediately upon the initiation of the project. Yet the county involved is usually ill-prepared to assist in or to assume these functions.*

There also may be local opposition to the principle of unit development, which will require a "selling" job by the developer to overcome. Rouse's version of this problem in the initiation of Columbia in Howard County, Maryland, may be an oversimplification:

These people were so resistant to urban growth, so concerned about sprawl, that the year before the people of the county had thrown out the Democrats and elected Republicans as county commissioners for the first time in 40 years. The only issue was zoning, with the Republicans promising to protect the county against development.

And one year later we arrived on their doorstep, saying we were going to build a city. Despite those anxieties and that skepticism, when we produced our plan for Columbia and laid it on the table, saying: "Here is what we propose; here is a rational city; here is a beautiful place; here the forests and stream valleys are preserved; there will be places to work and shop and have fun; here are stores and apartment houses"--here were all the things that these people had fought till midnight in zoning hearing after zoning hearing--yet when we went in for our zoning, not one single person in the county opposed it--not one.**

The Pennsylvania Municipal Planning Code, which went into effect January 1, 1969, has cleared the way for the kind of plans and zones needed for the development of new towns by allowing for density variations and by requiring countywide plans; it even provides for zoning and maintenance of permanent open space. The zoning ordinances of municipalities within the counties automatically take precedence over the county plans, and prospective new town developers increasingly will be dealing with the officials of rural or suburban townships, rather than the county planning agencies, as more municipalities adopt zoning laws.

* Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, Urban and Rural America: Policies for Future Growth (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1968), pp. 89-91.

** "The Next America," address to the Grocery Manufacturers of America, Inc., New York, November 15, 1966.

It was noted that where they have incorporated, new towns often have chosen a manager form of government (the Greenbelts, Park Forest). Levittown, Pennsylvania, however, remains unincorporated and is administered by four local governments. Hershey also continues under a township government. It is expected that Columbia will not incorporate, but will remain under county jurisdiction; the ACIR recommends this course:

Premature incorporation or hasty annexation under existing provisions in many states could result in the virtual abandonment of the overall plan....

Continued development under the county government which originally approved the new community project, however, would provide protection.*

Because of the division of powers among municipalities in Pennsylvania, a county would have little administrative role in any new town. The form of government to be used during and after development remains one of the problems in new community development in the Commonwealth.

Resource direction.--Funds and expertise directed toward new town development would be diverted from the kind of subdivision sprawl which is the almost certain alternative; however, new communities also may be seen as diversions from urban redevelopment. This issue has been one of the principal areas of contention since the new towns movement began accelerating.

A new town development program, if adopted, should be geared to channel some of the new growth which can be expected to occur, not as a substitute for other elements of an urbanization policy.

Experience development.--New techniques both in planning and construction may be used, and the best talent can be encouraged to develop and improve technology without actually using new communities as "laboratories."

New towns have been models for new ideas, from the first "new homes" show used to publicize Letchworth soon after its founding. Radburn demonstrated the suitability of the superblock and the separation of auto and pedestrian traffic; the Greenbelt Towns pioneered the townhouse, the poured-slab house without a basement, and all copper plumbing. Walt Disney Productions, Inc., is building the Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow near Orlando, Florida, and Westinghouse Electric Corporation's Coral Springs, near Fort Lauderdale, will be an "urban laboratory" to develop and test construction technology. Reston's experience with ultramodern architecture, however, indicates that limits will be found to innovation. Both Columbia and Reston were planned by work teams which included not only planners and architects, but

* ACIR, p. 93.

also psychiatrists, psychologists, government and recreation specialists, educators, clergymen and others, to apply a systems approach to community building. We have seen that many ideas tested in older new towns have been generally adopted and we should expect similar results as more are built.

Psychological impact.--This includes a range of more subtle, but far-reaching, effects. An improved environment can have a positive influence on the self-image of the residents, and an atmosphere of newness and receptivity to ideas can encourage innovation and economic investments by private interests. The common goal of creating a model community can improve cooperation, compromise and development of mutually favorable attitudes among all involved. A new town, or a series of them, would be a point of pride for all Commonwealth citizens, and a few successful experiences could have a chain effect on other new developments.

It should be recognized from the outset that there are no local institutions, norms, aspirations, traditions, or social controls, therefore, a mechanism must be built in from the start to give all residents, including the youth, a sense of their incorporation into the development of these institutions and ongoing social structure. This mechanism must maximize resident participation and establish flows of communication between groups. It is possible that at first this will have to be done somewhat artificially until the community builds its own institutions and communications systems.

Special provision and awareness must be made of juvenile restlessness. There must also be activities for single adults as well as for families.

Since some people will be moving into this new town from large cities and rural areas, provision must be made to help these people with different adjustment problems.

It is also important to take into consideration the feelings and attitudes of people, business, institutions, who currently live nearby so that potential conflict can be minimized.*

Albert Mayer, in a review of the Greenbelt Towns, said he could find nothing to differentiate them socially; yet, most of the early new towns have been racially integrated quietly, and Columbia, at least, seems to be an "equal opportunity" town from the beginning. In Park Forest, despite stormy late-night meetings, the residents gave outstanding support to community projects. The psychological aspects of new town development is a complex matter, but the assumption here is that, given the proper use of present knowledge and planning, an improvement in community attitudes should be one result of new town building.

* Maurice D. Kelsey, former director, Bureau of Human Resources, Department of Community Affairs, departmental communication, March 19, 1969.

Area impact.--Although a new town may be relatively isolated, its construction can be expected to have a general effect on its economic area, resulting from the inflow of large amounts of money in payrolls and local purchases, housing and other needs of construction employees, and the continuing effect of cross-commuting and of general economic improvement. Side effects may be improved governmental structure, the availability of new educational and cultural resources, new markets for pre-existing farms and industry, a developing economic, integration and interdependency, and the pervasive effects of wider and more inclusive social interaction.

On the other hand, sudden, concentrated development, especially in an otherwise relatively undeveloped economic area, may have a wide range of undesirable results. The developer has little control beyond his site, and without prompt and cooperative action by all levels of existing local government the new town may result in the least-wanted kind of land exploitation--boom building and speculation in the surrounding community. This may be coupled with depression of normal, soundly based economic and residential growth in the area; wide fluctuation of land prices; and a general attitude of apprehension which could aggravate the reaction of the indigenous population against the development.

There has been too little experience with new towns outside the sphere of larger metropolitan areas to assess these effects. A preliminary study of Columbia and Reston indicates that new towns are better neighbors for a larger economic area than are the usual subdivision-shopping center spreads.*

Capital demand.--New towns are expensive, and the slow return on investment increases the cost for debt service. This is aggravated by the need for planning, which costs initial time and money. Diversion of development funds into new towns entails less total development for a matter of years, because millions of dollars are tied up in land, planning, and public improvement costs before any return is realized.

After the Columbia and Reston developments, a \$50 million initial investment became a rule of thumb in new town planning--that was the approximate investment in Columbia before the first houses were sold. Because of cost increases since then, estimates of capital need now are approaching \$75 million. Debt service may cost \$5,000 per day--enough to finance another house every week. It is primarily the huge capital investment required which has limited new town starts, and made the participation of large corporations essential.

* Robert L. Morris, "The Impact of New Towns," Nation's Cities, April, 1969, pp. 8-11.

This is the problem which new town advocates have taken to the Federal government, and the result is the New Communities Act of 1968, Title IV of the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1968 (S.3497). Under this program, the Federal government may guarantee obligations of private new town developers up to \$50 million per project under a formula reflecting percentages of land cost (Sec. 405). However, the total program allows total guarantees of only \$250 million, enough to fund five projects to the limit; funds may be used to install streets and public utilities, but not for buildings except public buildings. There is no specification of time limits for these obligations, so that unless additional funds are approved this program will be severely limited in the number of projects which will be assisted. Financing is an area in which State government may be able to play an important role.

High per capita cost.--Construction of housing acceptable by current standards, added to the concurrent cost of new utilities, schools, streets, and land purchase, places unsubsidized prices of present new town residential units beyond the means of all except upper and upper-middle class families. This tends to aggravate, rather than alleviate, the problems of economic and social separation and to give the new town an unrepresentative climate.

The New Communities Act requires that provisions be made for low-income housing. The prices on houses in Columbia started at \$15,400 and in Reston at about \$26,000. In private developments, the prices must reflect the developer's costs and anticipated profit in addition to the cost of the house itself. Government subsidy is the only way to achieve an economic mix in a new community.

Difficulty of land assembly.--A private developer faces an increasingly difficult, costly and time-consuming task in purchasing and holding enough land to site a new town.

To build Columbia, the Rouse interests had to purchase 10 per cent of Howard County; it was done by the formation of several corporations to mask the assembly process. After the assembly, there remained pockets of development in which 8,000 people live--it was necessary to plan the community around them. Developments in the Western United States have more typically been on ranches and other large tracts already held by the developers, usually for an earlier purpose (this also was the case in Reston) but holdings of this size are rare in the East. As urban development, of one kind or another, continues there will be fewer potential sites and prices will be higher.

It has been pointed out that there is no location in Pennsylvania 20 miles or more from some existing settlement. It is not unusual for a new town to absorb an existing community--from Letchworth to Columbia--or to represent rapid expansion of an existing town.

A State policy for new towns would provide the advantage of influencing the location of new development, to help protect prime agricultural lands from urbanization and to help direct the founding and expansion of industry and commerce in areas which need and can best accommodate them. For the best protection of the rights of the indigenous residents and owners:

The siting of "new towns" and "new town" activities should grow out of the conditions that make it desirable (i.e. profitable) for the owners of the lands concerned to act as desired. The process suggested is, first, limitation on use of land in accordance with the "use area" classification as these uses are confirmed by or agreed to by local governing bodies and, second, by taxation assessment of all lands on the basis of their use classifications and, third, by applying a higher rate of taxation to land than to improvements.*

This process will depend heavily on implementation of the Pennsylvania Municipal Planning Code by county and local planning bodies, and the completion of a Statewide comprehensive plan by the State Planning Board. State and local industrial development authorities can assist this process; in fact, every State agency from the Department of Highways to the Department of Public Welfare, can become involved in the process of new town development.

Suggestions for State Action

The spread of the new towns movement in this decade has been accompanied by pressure for legislative action on the Federal and State levels by a variety of agencies and organizations. An incomplete list includes the U. S. Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations; the American Institute of Planners Task Force on New Communities; the Committee for National Land Development Policy; and the National Committee on Urban Growth Policy. All offer suggestions for governmental action. Meanwhile, New York State has established an active state development agency and New Jersey, in enacting the Hackensack Meadowlands Reclamation and Development Act of 1968, established state and local development bodies and gave the state broad powers to supercede local government activity in the long-range development of the marshlands.

Suggestions by the new towns organizations generally embody requests for financial assistance, of the nature of that provided by the New Communities Act of 1968. The programs suggested for state action agree that a state development agency should be formed, with powers to lend or use state funds for new town development, to take land where necessary, to direct local government during development and to buy or sell land as needed. Also generally recommended is the formation of local development agencies by local units of government, with similar powers to develop a single project.

* William A. Good, Housing Advisor, Department of Community Affairs, intradepartmental communication, April 3, 1969.

Land assembly and development financing are the most serious obstacles, and these are the areas in which the State can be most active in encouraging new towns. Because of its Constitutional prohibition against guaranteeing the securities of private developers and the formation of quasi-public corporations* the Commonwealth may be required to be more directly involved than would otherwise be the case; but it apparently has the authority to give the right of eminent domain to a private corporation if the Legislature declares new town development to be a public use.

The task is to provide for State assistance in the development of new towns, without the State's usurpation of what should be essentially a private enterprise function. The State must protect the interests of existing local government, yet provide a serviceable vehicle of administration during the development period and help with the inclusion of facilities which will be needed. It should enter the process with the expectation that over a period of years, a new town will pay for itself and be a continuing asset.

The Commonwealth can help the initiation and development of new communities if the needed legislative machinery is established and if the funds are made available in the amounts and in the manner appropriate to this kind of undertaking.

Findings

The new towns principle offers enough promise for a better kind of life for many Pennsylvanians, and a kind of economic and social basis which will endure and increase in value as time passes, that the State should commit a reasonable share of its resources and provide the legislative framework to encourage the development of new towns.

Pennsylvania has relatively vast areas of low population density; this factor alone may control the Commonwealth's destiny. Whether this factor itself is controlled or it, in turn, controls will depend on current and future policies of this State. The concept of new town development can be an alternate means of improving urban life and channeling economic growth.

The Commonwealth should therefore:

1. Establish a community development corporation which will have the authority to buy and sell land, construct or finance public improvements, approve plans of private developers or local development agencies, and administer funds as needed for new community development.
2. Provide for the establishment of local development agencies which may be delegated the powers of the State corporation for individual projects.

* Art. VIII, Sec. 8.

3. Provide for the establishment of local development districts to perform local government functions and provide local services within the area of development during the period of construction.
4. Permit the construction of public facilities, including highways and access roads, water and sewer facilities, schools, libraries, and others in advance of demonstrated need, with corresponding provision for State assistance as would be permitted if the need were existent, and from those funds normally provided for these purposes.
5. Assist in every way applicable in the securing of grants, loans, and other financial assistance which may be available from the Federal government for community development.
6. Permit statutory tax relief or rebates to private developers whose plans have been approved within the development for the period during which normal taxation would result in undue hardship or constraint.
7. Require that any development assisted must provide a range of housing so that all economic levels may be represented and may share in the public program, and that equal opportunities will be afforded to all persons for employment, housing and the use of public services.
8. Encourage commitments from industrial and commercial companies or corporations to the extent that employment will be available to a range of skills for approximately the number of families to be accommodated by the development.
9. Require that a viable local government for the community be functioning when development is generally completed.
10. Make available, from the general fund or by the issuance of bonds, up to \$50 million for each project not Federally financed, with all repayments to go into a sinking fund which will be used for retirement of debt and for funding additional new community projects.

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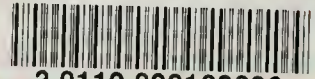
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