GREENBELT TOWNS

A DEMONSTRATION IN SUBURBAN PLANNING

BASIC PROGRAM

"TO OBTAIN a large tract of land, and thus avoid the complications ordinarily due to diverse ownerships; in this tract to create a community, protected by an encircling green belt; the community to be designed primarily for families of modest income, and arranged and managed so as to encourage a family and community life which will be better than they now enjoy, but which will not involve subjecting them to coercion or theoretical and untested discipline; the dwellings and the land upon which they are located to be held in one ownership, preferably a local public agency to which the Federal Government will transfer title, and which agency will rent or lease the dwellings but will not sell them; a municipal government to be set up, in character with such governments now existing or possible in that region; coordination to be established, in relation to the local and State governments, so that there may be provided those public services of educational and other character which the community will require; and, finally, to accomplish these purposes in such a way that the community may be a taxpaying participant in the region, that extravagant outlays from the individual family income will not be a necessity, and that the rents will be suitable to families of modest income.

"To develop a land-use plan for the entire tract; to devise a system of rural economy coordinated with the land-use plan for the rural portions of the tract surrounding the suburban community; and to integrate both the physical plans and the economies of the rural area and the suburban community."

The Resettlement Administration

Washington, D. C.

September 1936
INTRODUCING THE GREENBELT COMMUNITY

A DEMONSTRATION IN PLANNING

THE Suburban Resettlement Division of the Resettlement Administration is engaged in building several rural-industrial communities on the outskirts of badly crowded cities. These projects are intended to give permanent, valuable assets to the Nation in return for money spent on relief. Eventually each town will provide low-rental homes for 3,000 to 5,000 families, although only from 750 to 1,300 dwellings will be constructed at first.

In the strictest sense, the Resettlement Administration is not in the housing field at all. True enough, it is building houses, but its considerations go beyond the fact—important as that fact is—that millions of Americans need new homes if a minimum standard of decency is to be attained. What the Resettlement Administration is trying to do is to put houses and land and people together in such a way that the props under our economic and social structure will be permanently strengthened.

That is, of course, a huge task, but the Resettlement Administration is beginning modestly. Its suburban projects are being carried out only on a demonstration basis and are few in number. Yet if these communities are successful, they should prove invaluable as examples to local governments and private industry, and have a profound effect upon the future.
BLENDING TOWN AND COUNTRY

The new communities will be "greenbelt" towns, so-called because each of them will be surrounded by a broad girdle of park and farm land. A greenbelt town is simply a community built on raw land, in which every acre is put to its best use, and in which the traditional dividing lines between town and country are broken down. To the city worker, it offers a home in healthful country surroundings, yet within easy reach of his job. To the small farmer living in the greenbelt area, it offers better facilities and a steady market within a few hundred yards of his own fields. For both of them, it combines the conveniences and cultural opportunities of a city with many advantages of life on the land. Such a union of town and country has been made possible by technology, transportation improvements, and a host of other factors. We need only to make use of the tools which are lying at our hand.
A garden city development near Nottingham, England. Note the unusually large blocks, with parks in the center. The street system has been carefully designed to isolate most homes from the main streams of traffic.

TESTED BY EXPERIENCE

The fact is that nearly all of the principles upon which these communities are founded have already been tested and found worthy. The idea of a greenbelt town was first worked out in 1898 by a young Englishman, Ebenezer Howard, one of the pioneers of modern city planning. He pictured a union of city and country life in which every foot of land was planned to eliminate waste and to provide its inhabitants with pleasant and spacious living. Towns built to his model—such as Welwyn and Letchworth—have been operating successfully in England for the last twenty years. His ideas have had a deep influence on the better housing projects of Sweden, Holland, and Germany. The development of similar communities to house American families with modest incomes was urgently recommended in 1931 by the President’s Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership. Many of Howard’s principles have been partially carried out in Radburn, N. J., America’s first scientifically planned garden town.

The significance of a greenbelt town extends far beyond its own boundaries. Every growing metropolis should—if it is wisely planned—develop a chain of similar suburban communities around its borders. They would offer an opportunity for orderly, efficient expansion. Their greenbelts, linked together, would form continuous permanent open spaces around the city, protecting it and each suburb from overcrowding and sprawling, haphazard suburban developments and encroaching industries.
THE PENALTY OF BAD PLANNING

WASTE, UGLINESS, CONGESTION

UNFORTUNATELY, in the past almost no American city has had time for wise planning. Our towns have grown with feverish speed, and with virtually no forethought or control. This growth, in general, has taken two forms. The typical city shoots upward into skyscrapers and tenements, packing its dwellers closer and closer together. At the same time, it spreads aimlessly into the surrounding country, covering miles of land with uneconomic, half-developed subdivisions. The result, in most cases, has been an

Millions of farm families live in "rural slums." These homes frequently are even more insanitary and overcrowded than the worst city tenements.
ugly hodge-podge of towering offices, mansions, slums, warehouses, hot-dog stands, and decaying residential districts. The by-products are congestion, tangled traffic, damaged property values and wasted land.

The worst victim of this unplanned growth has been the American home. Year by year we have permitted our cities and rural communities to grow more ramshackle and crowded; until today fully 36 percent of all the dwellings in the United States are definitely substandard. As early as 1931, one of the committees of the President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership reported that our houses constitute "the largest mass of obsolete and discredited equipment in the country."

Our efforts to clean up bad housing areas have been, at best, piecemeal and uncoordinated. Frequently they have merely replaced old slums with new ones, such as Manhattan's "New Law" tenements and Boston's notorious three-decker flats. The great community resettlement projects of England, Sweden, and Germany have had no counterpart on this continent. While America has led the world in nearly every other line of material progress, in public housing it has been almost as backward as China. As a consequence, nearly 11 million families, urban and rural, are living in tumble-down insanitary homes.
DISEASE, SUFFERING, CRIME

THIS failure to face our housing problem is blighting our national life. The burden of slums upon the whole community was made plain by the New York Court of Appeals in its recent decision upholding the State Housing Law. Here is an excerpt from the court's opinion:

"The public evils, social and economic, of such conditions are unquestioned and unquestionable. Slum areas are the breeding places of disease which take toll, not only from denizens, but by spread, from the inhabitants of the entire city and State.

"Juvenile delinquency, crime, and immorality are there born, find protection, and flourish.

"Enormous economic loss results directly from the necessary expenditure of public funds to maintain health and hospital services for afflicted slum dwellers and to war against crime and immorality.

"Indirectly, there is an equally heavy

Sanitary system?—Laundry, toilet, and water supply. Cleanliness is our first defense against disease, yet a survey shows that, of low rental houses in 64 typical American cities, 34.8 percent have no bath or shower, and 24 percent have no indoor toilet.

Crowded homes and lack of play space are common reasons why children go wrong. In Chicago one-fourth of all juvenile delinquents come from a congested district which covers only 8 percent of the city's area.
Indignant New Yorkers recently carried their protests to the city hall, after a series of disastrous tenement fires had taken the lives of many children.

capital loss and a diminishing return in taxes because of the areas blighted by the existence of the slums."

The human costs of bad housing are appalling. In Washington, D. C., for instance, a third of the occupants of the city jail and a third of the occupants of the tuberculosis hospital in 1933 came from one district covering less than 4 percent of the city's area. Detroit has a blighted section on its east side consisting of less than 2 percent of the city's area; yet in 1927 this district had 38 percent of the felonious homicides. In Milwaukee, 83 percent of all delinquent girls in 1932 came from homes in congested districts. A 5-year study of the New York Association for Improving the

Baby gets an airing. Thousands of slum children suffer from rickets and tuberculosis, because they have no better chance than this to get sunshine and fresh air.
Condition of the Poor indicates that three out of four babies in the tenement population had rickets from faulty diet and lack of sunshine. After discounting the effect of income and race, it was found that the infant mortality rate in congested homes was still about twice as high as in homes where there was sufficient space. The evidence could be spun out indefinitely, but the point is clear enough. Slums are not the best places to breed healthy, useful, loyal citizens. All over the United States, our taxpayers must foot the bill for the bad health, the fire hazards, the juvenile delinquency, and crime caused by our neglect of housing conditions.

Indianapolis spends $8 per capita to prevent and punish felonies in one of its slum sections. The average expenditure for the city is only 60 cents per capita.

Fire protection costs $58 per family in the bad-housing areas of Cleveland, Ohio. In the suburbs, the cost is $4 per family.
IS HOUSING A PUBLIC RESPONSIBILITY?

A PROBLEM PRIVATE INDUSTRY HAS NOT SOLVED

MILLIONS of new homes are needed in the United States. In the five years since 1930 we built fewer homes than we used to build every six months before the depression. As a result, an acute housing shortage is rapidly approaching.

If we are to make any real improvement in our housing standards the great bulk of our new housing should be built directly for families with modest incomes. These are usually forced to live in old dwellings—often dilapidated and substandard—originally built for the well-to-do. Even in the best of times unaided private enterprise has found it profitable to build only for the wealthier half of our population. Thus, little headway has been made in solving our real housing problem.

Here are the underlying facts. Today, more than 63 percent of our city dwellers have family incomes of less than $1,500.

The low-income groups, in other words, do not consist only of unfortunates and unskilled laborers. They are made up of substantial citizens, the great mass of office workers, factory hands, stenographers, mechanics, clerks, and small business men. Now, it is a well established rule among economists that when an average family buys a home costing more than twice its annual income, or pays more than 20 percent of its income for rent, it must lower its living standard undesirably in some other way.

Yet in 1929—the last year in which there was any considerable building activity—less than 6 percent of the building permits issued for single dwellings were for homes valued at less than $2,840, including land. Today, even the most modest homes cannot be commercially built in most cities at prices within the reach of families with less than $1,500 per year. In other words, over 63 percent of city families are outside the market of commercial building. Unaided private enterprise simply cannot produce houses which they can afford.
SUBSTANTIAL CITIZENS Eleven million of them do not have decent homes for their families. Under present conditions, commercial enterprise in most cities finds no profit in building for families with yearly incomes of less than $1,500. And 63 percent of city families have incomes below this level.
Many realtors and builders are keenly conscious of this condition. The president of the National Association of Real Estate Boards, recently summarized the situation in these words:

"Not today, nor for 35 years, has it been possible to build for the low-wage group at a rent that group can afford to pay, whether the improvement is constructed well or ill."

WHAT OTHER NATIONS ARE DOING

OTHER nations have long recognized that private enterprise alone cannot meet the demand for low-rental homes. As a consequence, virtually every European government has found it necessary to engage in public housing on a large scale. Since the World War, 11 European countries, not counting Russia, have built more than 4,500,000 dwellings with public aid. Great Britain alone has put up 1,200,000 homes with public aid in the 17 years since the Armistice.

Such activity has had no depressing effect on private industry. On the contrary, England’s public housing program has been accompanied by the biggest private building boom that country has ever known. The business and assets of building and loan societies in England have increased nearly 700 percent since 1919, though in the same period nearly half of the houses constructed received government subsidy. Low-rental public housing, in other words, if properly restricted to low income families, does not interfere with private enterprise and thrift.

WHAT AMERICA IS DOING

IN THE United States as well, public opinion gradually has been forcing government to lend its aid to home building. The Federal Government has already begun to assume some responsibility for seeing that our people are decently housed. During the depression the Government has saved millions of homes for their owners through refinancing. Through the Federal Housing Administration it insures mortgages in order to stimulate house construction and repairs. Under the Public Works program, a beginning has been made on the huge national task of slum clearance.
Germany has provided homes for two-and-a-half million low-income families in such public housing developments as this.

Above: During the last decade Great Britain has spent 3 billion dollars on homes similar to these. The public housing program has been accompanied by the greatest private building boom that England has ever known.

Right: Interior of a typical home built with State aid at Neubuhl, Switzerland.

Tiny Holland, with a population smaller than metropolitan New York, has built 10 times as much public housing as the entire United States.
WHAT OTHER NATIONS ARE DOING

Above: Every family has its own garden in the huge housing projects near Frankfurt, Germany.

Left: Sweden has built healthful, modern homes for 57,000 of her poorer families. Many of them live in cooperative communities like this development at Kvarnholmen.

Below: By means of public subsidies and loans, Belgium has built 250,000 low-rental homes.

NUMBER OF HOMES BUILT WITH STATE AID 1918 TO 1934

GERMANY 2,500,000
GR.BRITAIN 1,200,000
FRANCE 429,000
HOLLAND 300,000
U.S.A. 31,000
THE TASK FOR RESETTLEMENT

THE Suburban Resettlement Division of the Resettlement Administration has its own place in the Federal program. Today, after five years of almost complete paralysis, the construction industry seems to be coming back to life. There is real danger that the next wave of building may serve only to increase the Nation's litter of badly planned—and often badly built—houses.

The Resettlement Administration hopes that its few greenbelt communities will be trail-breakers, which will open a new road for America’s builders and money-lending institutions. These projects constitute a thorough-going demonstration in modern community building, based on carefully calculated costs of operating a town with all its public services. They are producing a wealth of new information on modern planning, modern mass production methods, and economical community organization. They are intended to show, in particular, how both city workers and farmers can be provided with low rental homes, equipped with all the facilities for healthful and decent living. For both private builders and public housing authorities, these projects may serve as invaluable examples.
LOCATIONS for the greenbelt towns were chosen after a detailed study of social and economic factors in about 100 major cities. From among this group, a few cities were selected which had a long record of steady, regular growth; sound economic foundations; diversity of industry; good wage levels and enlightened labor policies; and finally, an acute need for housing.

Once these general areas of operation were decided upon, the next step was to pick sites for the new communities. The requirements were rigid. One of the most important was cheap land; when building sites cost
from $100 to $300 an acre instead of that much per front foot, a major obstacle has been overcome. Each community, moreover, has been located within easy reach of stable employment opportunities. It fits into the trends of the city's growth and industrial decentralization.

Other major considerations were suitable topography for building homes and constructing roads and for future expansion; fertile soil for gardening and farming in the greenbelt; wooded areas, rolling hills, and small creeks, which could be developed as parks and recreational areas.

One hundred metropolitan areas were carefully investigated before sites for the greenbelt towns were chosen. The four areas finally selected have unusually stable industries and excellent prospects for steady employment. Here are four of the charts used in the investigation of the region surrounding Greendale, Wis.
MILWAUKEE AREA

Employment available in Milwaukee—Each dot indicates 100 jobs in manufacturing or major commercial establishments. There are an additional 50,000 jobs (not shown) in the central business district.

TRAVEL TIME BY AUTOMOBILE IN MINUTES FROM CENTER OF SITE

13,000 jobs . . . within 10 minutes travel time.
48,000 jobs . . . within 20 minutes travel time.
141,000 jobs . . . within 30 minutes travel time.
ULTIMATE LAND USE IN A TYPICAL GREENBELT COMMUNITY
TO LIVE IN

THE GREENBELT

WITHIN such a site every acre is assigned to its own place and function in an expertly designed plan. Around the town's edge is the greenbelt, the distinctive feature of all the Resettlement Administration's suburban communities. This girdle of permanent open space is intended to protect the town forever from overcrowding and undesirable building on neighboring land. In addition, it offers special opportunities for both recreation and gardening. Part of the area is reserved for parks and playgrounds. Other tracts are set aside as gardens, for families which wish to supplement their incomes by raising their own fruit and vegetables. Still other sections are allotted to full-time farmers, who can bring their produce to market simply by crossing their own fields. All the sites have ample land for the future expansion and growth of the community.
THE TOWN PLAN

The newly designed town plan is adapted to the familiar pattern of American community life. There is the town common, traditional in a thousand New England and Midwestern villages. At the center are grouped stores, post office, bus terminal, film theater, and other business establishments. Here, too, there will be a community building, serving as an elementary school in the daytime and as a town meeting hall at night.

UTILITIES

In building a modern suburban town not only planning and construction problems must be studied, but also those relating to the costs of maintenance and operation. All community facilities and utilities must be carefully considered in terms of the present and future use of the town. And for the sake of long-time economy they must be built in the most modern and efficient manner possible.

GREENDALE, WISCONSIN

These single-family houses introduce a new and practical idea in plot planning. Useless dark and narrow sideyards have been avoided by building each house close to its property line on one side, creating a maximum of garden space.
At the same time, the greenbelt community has been designed especially to meet the needs of a modern motor age. To protect it from the danger and annoyance of heavy traffic, the town has been located, where possible, a considerable distance from all arterial highways. In some cases underpasses are built at points where footpaths cross busy streets, so that residents can walk to shops and school in perfect safety. There are fewer streets than in the ordinary town, without any loss of convenience but with considerable savings in first cost and in highway maintenance and repair. Usually this street pattern produces blocks five or six times as big as an ordinary city square. Each one resembles a small park, with about 120 dwellings grouped around its borders.

GREENHILLS, OHIO

These homes are being built around the edges of large blocks, covering from 20 to 30 acres. Each of these has been designed with a park and footpath system within the block. The results are economy in paving costs, and a maximum of sunlight for every dwelling. The above plans illustrate the convenience of arrangement and adequacy of light and air in a typical home for a large family.
GREENBELT, MD.

One of the larger units in the interior of a super block. Casement windows afford a maximum of light and air for homes which vary in size from two to six rooms with bath.

KITCHENS AND GARDENS

Housewives in greenbelt towns will enjoy compact, airy kitchens, fitted with modern and durable but inexpensive equipment. In the nearby allotment gardens, the housewife can raise her own fruits and vegetables if she wishes.
The superblock arrangement has several distinct advantages. It makes possible significant savings in the installation of paving, water mains, and sewer lines. Instead of facing only a barren street, all homes can look out upon the grass and trees in the block’s center. While each house has its own yard, much of the open space is pooled for the common use. In most cases, sidewalks will not be necessary along the streets, because a network of paths runs through the safe and pleasant surroundings of the interior park. Kitchen doors usually open on small service courts indented from the street. These courts provide space for garages, laundry yards, and delivery entries, and at the same time isolate dwellings from through traffic.

The homes are efficient, modern dwellings, built to strict standards of durability, comfort, sanitation, ventilation, privacy, and convenience. There is, of course, a wide variety of types and sizes, to meet the needs of different families. Some are row and group houses, since these are more economical to build and maintain than separate units. Apartments are available for single persons and newly married couples.

ROOM PLANNING

All rooms have been designed for the greatest comfort in living, and for the proper spacing of furniture.

FARMSTEADS

In the greenbelt around each town there will be farmsteads where full-time farmers can lease fertile land and decent modern homes at reasonable rentals. And just across their own fields, at the town market, they will find profitable outlets for their produce.
BUSINESS CENTERS

All stores and community buildings are grouped near the center of each town, within easy walking distance of every home. Residential districts will never be damaged by the invasion of shops and filling stations. Each business center includes an open-air market, the community management office, a garage, and a variety of stores, and there will be a place for a film theater. Below is the business center at Greenhills, Ohio.
COMMUNITY CENTERS

In each greenbelt town the community building will be the social and educational center. Here there will be rooms for meetings and entertainments, a gymnasium, and a library. Nearby there will be facilities for swimming, either in a pool or lake. Answers to thousands of questionnaires placed a swimming pool as a close second to a library in the list of community features preferred by prospective tenants. The illustration above shows the center at Greenbelt, Md.
IT IS not intended that the greenbelt communities will be "Federal islands." On the contrary, they will be normal American communities, in which every person has his full share of both duties and privileges. Once construction is finished, the Federal
GREENBELT, MARYLAND

This photograph was taken in September 1936, when five thousand men were being employed on that project. The crescent-shaped town and the main roads stand out clearly against the greenbelt of parks and small farms. Below is a photograph of two of the Greenbelt homes, taken when they were near completion. The first families will move in during February 1937.

Government will withdraw, except for insisting on competent management to protect its investment and interests. Public housing authorities or other local bodies will hold and manage the properties. In drawing the original charters, care will be taken that the towns will be permanently administered as planned communities. Land and buildings will bear their full share of State and local taxation, and from these tax revenues, schools and other public services will be supported in the normal way. The government will be that which is appropriate to the size of the town under the laws of the State.

In building greenbelt communities, substantial savings are being made through the use of cheap land. Careful town planning, sound construction, and excellent materials will keep operating and maintenance expenses down to the minimum. It must be remembered that the inhabitants will be supporting their schools, churches, stores, sanitary arrangements, playgrounds, and other facilities without the hidden subsidy provided in other cities by taxation on large commercial and industrial properties.

So long as more than half of our city dwellers have family incomes of about $1,200 a year, certain alternatives must be faced. Because the limited-income group must have adequate modern housing, the cost of housing must come down enormously, or we must compensate by providing an equivalent for the hidden subsidies which support the low rental housing areas in our large cities today. Greenbelt communities will have no hidden subsidies.

In a dozen quarters, there is evidence that Americans are gathering their forces for an attack on the home-building problem such as never has been made in this country before. The signs are multiplying in laboratories as well as in legislatures. Inevitably, there will be millions of new homes erected during the next decade. By 1937 the greenbelt communities will be going concerns. If their philosophy is sound and if their plans are well drawn, they cannot fail to exert a major influence on the social and economic development of the United States.
GREENBELT TOWNS
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NOTE.—Special credit should be given the staff of architects, engineers, draftsmen, specification writers, estimators, and research workers who have assisted the above technical groups in carrying out the projects. In addition, a large number of specialists in various fields have served as consultants both on major policies and on technical problems. Special mention should be made of the services of Tracy Augur, Catherine Bauer, Russell Black, Earle Draper, J. Andre Foulhoux, and Clarence Stein.

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