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FROM FUTURAMA TO MAIN STREET U.S.A.: ARCHITECTURAL
REVIVALISM, NEO-TRADITIONALISM AND HISTORIC
PRESERVATION IN A CONTEMPORARY
SUBURBAN LANDSCAPE

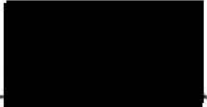
by
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A THESIS

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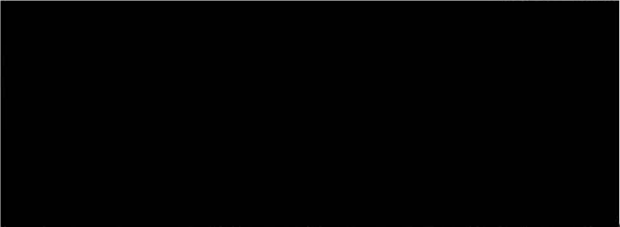
"From Futurama to Main Street U.S.A.: Architectural Revivalism, Neo-Traditionalism and Historic Preservation in a Contemporary Suburban Landscape," a thesis prepared by Jonathan Vines Smith in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Science degree in the Interdisciplinary Studies Program: Historic Preservation. This thesis has been approved by:

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Approved: _____

Dr. Michael Hibbard

Modernism and urban renewal rapidly altered America's landscape through large-scale suburbanization and reconstruction of inner cities. The conclusion of urban renewal, however, coincided with trends which reject modernism, including historic preservation, neo-traditionalism and postmodernism. Whereas confidence and the allure of a futuristic utopia dominated postwar development, and helped obscure its shortcomings, the more tentative appeal of the past marks contemporary movements.

After a literature review which discusses this shift away from modernism, this paper describes its impact on contemporary planning and design in a suburban area near Charlotte, North Carolina. The case study suggests that

while contemporary trends arose in reaction to modernist planning they do not significantly alter postwar development patterns, but simply repackage them in revivalist architecture and historicist imagery. Like the futuristic images of postwar suburbanization, this tends to obscure, rather than confront, the problems which result from low density auto-dependent development.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The post-World War II era ushered in some of the most rapid and large scale changes American cities have ever experienced. Financed by a strong industrial economy, the country tackled complex urban problems on a national scale. Deteriorating inner cities were demolished and rebuilt on the revolutionary principles of modern design. Interstate highway projects, housing construction and automobile sales boomed. Suburbanization spread rapidly along the urban fringe, promising an idyllic combination of country life and modern technology for the burgeoning middle class. The ultimate goal, as described by Robert Fishman, was nothing short of "urban utopia."¹

The latter years of urban renewal, however, coincided with, and helped spur on, a larger cultural trend in America marked by decreased confidence in the country's ability to improve the present or future through modern technology and design. Internationally, Modernism was reevaluated on all fronts, especially by critics of high modern architecture

¹Robert Fishman, Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century: Ebenezer Howard, Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1977).

and urbanism, such as Jane Jacobs, whose Death and Life of Great American Cities² became a classic text on the shortcomings of modernist planning and design.

The cultural shift that accompanied the failures of urban renewal, despite sweeping promises and massive government expenditures, spurred the rise of alternative design trends such as historic preservation in the 1960s and neo-traditionalism in the 1980s. Similar to revivalist architecture of the nineteenth century, these movements rejected an aesthetic of the New, calling for either the preservation of historic architecture or a reliance on historic design precedent. Many popular contemporary designers, therefore, speak less about the promise of modernism, technology and the future and more about nature, history and tradition as prudent guides. Both avant-garde modern architecture and the liberal politics which funded its realization in the built environment were rejected for more conservative agendas.

With this alternative emphasis and within a vastly different socio-economic context, the United States now confronts urban problems even more daunting than those of the postwar era. With the shift from a production to information based economy, the explosion of Edge Cities and

²Jane Jacobs, The Death and Life of Great American Cities (New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, 1961).

auto congestion on the urban fringe, rising crime rates, poverty and homelessness, the optimistic rhetoric of the postwar era has been replaced by the more tentative contemporary emphasis on the past. Whereas the allure of futuristic images and the promise of utopia helped popularize postwar policy, and obscure its shortcomings, the contemporary appeal of the past and the promise of stable small town life mark current trends.

The Charlotte metropolitan region, in the southern Piedmont of North Carolina, exemplifies many contemporary planning and design trends. It is one of fastest growing urban centers in the country and its continuing economic shift from agriculture and textile production and increasing national prominence in banking and finance is rapidly transforming the surrounding rural landscape. Historically dominated by farms and mill towns, the area is home to a growing number of edge cities and upper-income suburbanites. Despite the pronounced physical and socio-economic transition, references to tradition are commonly mingled with the rhetoric of growth and development.

As large metropolitan areas in the Northeast decline and Charlotte's economy continues to expand, the city has experienced a considerable population increase. The stereotypical image of a traditional Southern lifestyle helps entice potential homebuyers fleeing ailing suburbs throughout the nation. For many, the city's pro-business,

pro-suburb and pro-automobile climate offers another chance to achieve the suburban ideal promised by postwar development, but with a veneer of tradition which places additional emphasis on stability and security.

While the imagery is appealing to many, it tends to obscure, as did popular images in the postwar era, critical land use and transportation issues that will determine the area's development patterns for years to come. If not seriously confronted, the persistence of large lot zoning, low density and auto-dependent development will inevitably undermine the lifestyle touted by local policy-makers and developers.

This paper is an examination of some of the prominent popular images that help obscure these critical planning issues. A review of literature that discusses the shift away from the modernist emphasis on the future and new design, to the contemporary emphasis on the past and architectural revivalism will help frame the issue. The review will be followed by a case study which will clarify how some of aspects of this trend are realized in a contemporary suburban landscape south of Charlotte, North Carolina.

The case study describes three early residential settlement patterns and contrasts them to contemporary development. With these contrasts established, it moves to a discussion of (1) historicist reproductions; (2) "neo-

traditional" or "new urban" developments and; (3)the emphasis placed on tradition by planners, local officials, and developers. In an attempt to understand how a particular landscape compares to national trends discussed in the literature review, three questions will be explored: (1)What roles do contemporary planning and design trends which rely on history or revivalism - such as postmodernism, historic preservation and new urbanism - play in shaping planning policy, development and/or architecture? (2)Because these trends emphasize historic precedent, how does contemporary development compare to previous settlement patterns in the study area? (3)Why, is an image of tradition effective for marketing housing and suburban development?

CHAPTER II

PERCEPTIONS OF THE PAST AND FUTURE IN WESTERN URBANIZATION

Urbanization, Suburbanization and Nostalgia

Apart from the eclecticism of recent art and architecture, there are myriad repetitions in the postwar period: how are we to distinguish them in kind? How to tell the difference between a return of an archaic form of art that bolsters conservative tendencies in the present and a return to a lost model of art made in order to displace customary ways of working? Or, in the register of history, how to tell the difference between a revisionist account written in support of the cultural status quo and a genealogical account that seeks to challenge it?¹

Is [our preoccupation with history] anything more than a well-known habit of using the past, the "good old days," as a stick to beat the present?²

In an age marked by an increased popular interest in the past in every realm of culture, the questions posed by Foster and Williams should be considered, not only by artists and architects, but within a wide range of disciplines, including urban planning. Confronting problems inherited from modernist cities, policy-makers, designers and the public are challenged by a desire to draw from the

¹Hal Foster, "What's Neo About the Neo-Avant-Garde?," October 70 (Fall 1994): 5.

²Raymond Williams, The Country and the City (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 12.

past, without slipping into naive nostalgia for nineteenth and early twentieth century urban and architectural forms. The challenge includes, not only coping with rapidly changing metropolitan areas and global economies, but looking critically at what Raymond Williams called "the recurrent myth of a happier and more natural past" that, it is often suggested, offers remedies for contemporary economic and social problems.³

The urge to idealize the past is a hallmark of any period experiencing rapid shifts in technology and urbanization. Yi-Fu Tuan argued that nostalgia for rural life has been present during periods of urbanization at least since the Roman Empire.⁴ Likewise, Williams traced the long tradition of Western literary pastoralism which portrays a romantic arcadian lifestyle in opposition to contemporary life. Similarly, Leo Marx detailed the relationship between pastoralism and technology in American literature and philosophy.⁵ More recently Michael Bunce argued, while nostalgia for the countryside has been present during periods of urbanization throughout history, it has reached unprecedented intensity in contemporary Anglo-

³Williams, 40.

⁴Yi-Fu Tuan, Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 107.

⁵Williams, The Country and the City; Leo Marx, The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964).

American society. The ambivalence toward the city inherent in the idealization of country life has marked American intellectualism, popular culture and our dominant settlement pattern, suburbia.⁶

According to Bunce, it is in the modern city, especially among the middle-class of Victorian England, that the countryside begins to acquire a truly idealized status. This phenomenon was not simply a sentimental reaction but "an ideal which . . . emerged from the very nature of modern urbanism itself."⁷ The modern era intensified the distinction between country and city by clearly defining the latter as the primary seat of industrial production, commerce and government. In contrast, the countryside ideal arose in the arts and in the landscape as an arcadian alternative for an affluent and mobile middle-class seeking to distinguish itself from the urban poor.

Ebenezer Howard, in Garden Cities of Tomorrow, was a seminal figure in the definition of the ideal Anglo-American suburb.⁸ He described Garden Cities as a combination of

⁶In The Intellectual Versus the City: From Thomas Jefferson to Frank Lloyd Wright (Cambridge: Harvard University Press and M.I.T. Press, 1962), Morton and Lucia White trace the anti-urban tradition in American thought.

⁷Michael Bunce, The Countryside Ideal: Anglo-American Images of Landscape (London: Routledge, 1994), 11.

⁸Ebenezer Howard, Garden Cities of To-morrow (East Sussex: Attic Books, 1985). First published in 1898 as To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform. Reprinted in 1902 as Garden Cities of To-morrow.

the best of town and country; without the vice and corruption of the former and the isolation and provincialism of the latter. Howard's Garden City offered relief from the modern metropolis and blended two powerful images in Anglo-American culture (see Figure 1 and Figure 2). As Williams argued,

the common image of the country is now an image of the past, and the common image of the city an image of the future. . . . The pull of the idea of the country is toward old ways, human ways, natural ways. The pull of the idea of the city is toward progress, modernization, development.⁹

Suburbia, even before its defining elements were distilled in Howard's diagrams, was an attempt to blend the best of the city and the country, the present and the past. And, as popular views toward these poles shift, so too does the image of suburban landscapes and architecture.

Central to this idealization of rural existence, and in subsequent waves of suburbanization, is an ambivalence toward the city and a nostalgic yearning for a safer and simpler life which sidesteps the pressures of contemporary urbanization. In contemporary suburban landscapes, like those of the nineteenth century, the middle and upper-middle classes seek order by pursuing a lifestyle associated with nature or with the past.

"Every age has a distinct sense of the past," argues Steven Kern. His comments regarding popular late nineteenth

⁹Williams, 297.

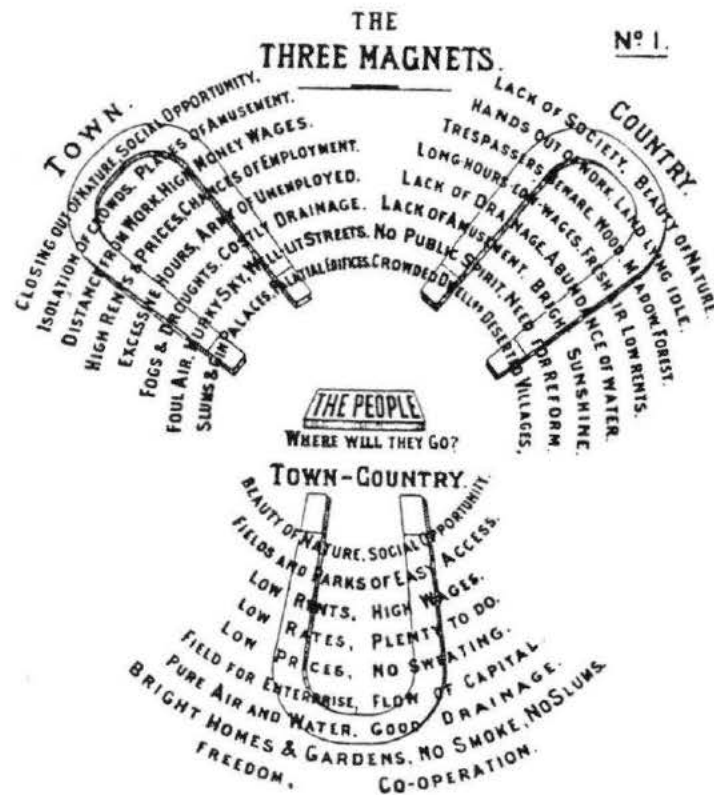


Figure 1. Howard's model provides the best of "Town" and "Country." From Ebenezer Howard, Garden Cities of To-morrow, East Sussex: Attic Books, 1985.



Figure 2. Howard's Model realized in the landscape. Howard claimed Garden Cities provide the country's "beauty of nature" and the town's "social opportunity." A group of families in Eugene, Oregon "camp out" in their suburban neighborhood.

century views toward history highlight similarities with contemporary cultural and design trends in American.

This generation looked to it for stability in the face of rapid technological change. Its thinkers developed a keen sense of the historical past as a source of identity in an increasingly secular world . . . [They tried to develop] the most effective way to recapture a past that had been forgotten.¹⁰

Prominent designers of the period also tried to "recapture the past." Camillo Sitte, through his revivalist designs in fin-de-siecle Vienna, was intent on creating a sense of community and a link to history through his work. Sitte argued that

"city building must not just be a technical question but an aesthetic one of the highest sense." He therefore set out to create interior spaces - plazas and squares - that would promote the preservation and even re-creation of a sense of community. He sought "to overcome fragmentation" and provide a "community life-outlook" for people as a whole. This deployment of art in the shaping of space to create a real sense of community was, to Sitte, the only possible response to modernity.¹¹

¹⁰Steven Kern, The Culture of Time and Space, 1888-1918 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 37. Similarly, historian Robert Wiebe describes Americans' response to the rapid changes of the late nineteenth century and early years of the twentieth as a "search for order." Quoted in David R. Goldfield, "North Carolina's Early Twentieth-Century Suburbs and the Urbanizing South," in Early Twentieth-Century Suburbs in North Carolina: Essays on History, Architecture and Planning, ed. Catherine Bishir, and Lawrence S. Early (Raleigh: Archaeology and Historic Preservation Section, Division of Archives and History, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 1985), 9.

¹¹Harvey, 276. Harvey draws heavily in this discussion from Carl Schorske's Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture (New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, 1981).

Similarly, David Harvey argues that the "ideological labor of inventing tradition" became important in this "era when transformations in temporal and spatial experience implied a loss of identity with place and repeated radical breaks with any sense of historical continuity."¹² Historic preservation, revivalist architecture and antique collecting all became fashionable in the late nineteenth century as preservation organizations developed in England, France, Germany and the United States.

The increased interest in history and historic artifacts was reflected in responses to improvements in popular media. The invention of the camera and phonograph earlier in the century allowed a much more thorough and meticulous recording of events. They were both praised for their provision of the "objectivation of our memory function."¹³

Harvey argues contemporary technological advances have resulted in an even more pronounced transformation of spatio-temporal experience than that of Europe during the Industrial Revolution. The collective sense of disorientation and discontinuity with the past (a break striven for by modernists) has precipitated similar

¹²David Harvey, The Condition of Postmodernity (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1990), 272.

¹³Kern, 38.

nostalgic and romantic notions as those in Europe of the Romantics.

Harvey's emphasis on the disorienting nature of contemporary spatial experience is supported by Kevin Lynch's ground-breaking work, The Image of the City. Lynch argued that in the modernist city the physical elements, such as landmarks, which allow people to orient themselves have been destroyed or misused. A healthy urban environment, according to Lynch, is one which allows individuals to develop a cognitive image of the city, made up of five defining elements: paths, edges, districts, nodes and landmarks. The incomprehensibility of contemporary cities results from continual destruction, expansion and the lack or misuse of these structuring elements which had more clearly delineated spaces within premodernist settlement.¹⁴

The modernist city as spatially and conceptually disorienting is the dominant theme that arises from arguments put forth by geographers and designers such as Harvey and Lynch. Lynch in fact devoted his career to teaching how more "legible" contemporary urban areas might be designed and his efforts to conceptually "map" the

¹⁴Kevin Lynch, The Image of the City (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960). Lynch's work is praised by Christian Norberg-Schulz. In The Concept of Dwelling: On the Way to Figurative Architecture (New York: Rizzoli, 1985), 31, he likewise argues the "actual loss of place mentioned in connection with the settlement as a whole, corresponds to a loss of [well defined] urban space."

contemporary city reflected in other disciplines as well.¹⁵ Representations of the city ranging from planning debates to popular literature reflect the same struggle to understand the modernist city. In Visions of The Modern City, William Sharpe and Leonard Wallock address the issue, not by studying the city itself but, by emphasizing metaphorical representations of the city in history, art and literature. Because language and metaphor reflect and shape the way in which we view the world, these theorists interpret them as reflections of changes in urban environments and as indications of our reactions to those transformations. The inability to arrive at an agreed upon description of the contemporary city, (attempts include: non-place urban realm, polycentric city, geography of nowhere, decentered city, edge city, cyburbia, technoburbia, disurb, etc.)¹⁶ is similar to our difficulty in conceptualizing the city as described by Lynch. According to these theorists, the phenomenon indicates a deeper crisis in our ability to comprehend, and therefore cope with and manage, the contemporary city.¹⁷

¹⁵Tridib Banerjee and Michael Southworth, eds., City Sense and City Design: Writings and Projects of Kevin Lynch (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1990).

¹⁶See Sorkin's Variations on a Theme Park for a discussion.

¹⁷William Sharpe and Leonard Wallock, eds., Visions of the Modern City: Essays in History, Art and Literature (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1987). Burton Pike, in The Image of the City In Modern Literature (New Jersey:

Just as recent design and cultural debate centers on the city as a disorienting and/or unattractive physical environment, the importance of our perception of the city as a threatening and dangerous place has, according to Mike Davis, become an increasingly powerful image in shaping urban policy. Rising urban crime rates and burgeoning middle class fear of the city have driven both increased security measures in urban/suburban areas and nostalgic tendencies that bolster suburban development. Davis describes the extreme security measures taken in Los Angeles in an attempt to provide middle and upper middle class

Princeton University Press, 1981), makes a complimentary argument, asserting the value of literature as a non-linear route providing access to a better understanding of cities. He relies on the assertion that Nathaniel Hawthorne's image of a "paved solitude" forms the Western archetypal concept of the city.

The images of London evoked by Dickens in the opening lines of Our Mutual Friend, the streets of Paris in Baudelaire's "The Eyes of the Poor," or of New York in Whitman's "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" provide impressions of the nineteenth century city that are unobtainable from official documents, such as Daniel Burnham's famous plan for Chicago. Likewise, contemporary authors, such as Italo Calvino, in his poetic Invisible Cities (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1972), 156-157, offer insight into the contemporary experience of the city.

You advance for hours and it is not clear to you whether you are already in the city's midst or still outside it. Like a lake with low shores lost in swamps, so Penthesilea spreads for miles around, a soupy city diluted in the plain. . . . If you ask the people you meet, "Where is Penthesilia?" they make a broad gesture which may mean "Here," or else "Farther on," or "All around you," or even "In the opposite direction". . . . some raise their arms obliquely toward an aggregation of oblique polyhedrons on the horizon, while others indicate, behind you, the specter of other spires.

residents "personal insulation. . . . from 'unsavory' groups and individuals, even crowds in general."¹⁸ Walled developments, surveillance cameras and armed guards have become standard elements in many cities and suburbs (see Figure 3). In areas where crime is actually increasing, such as Downtown Washington D.C., most is contained within class or ethnic groups. However, middle class suburbanites, rarely exposed to inner city conditions, perceive a substantial threat. Surveys show residents of Milwaukee suburbs and of Washington's inner city residents are "just as worried about crime . . . despite a twenty-fold difference in relative levels of mayhem."¹⁹ Media images of urban chaos reinforce the popular that any chance for safety and security exists in suburbs rather than cities.

Further criticism of contemporary cities results from the increasing awareness that the postwar suburb, which promised relief from the maladies of urban life, has instead created tremendous problems. Once a vision of utopia, the low-density automobile suburb saddles metropolitan areas with increased auto congestion, failing environmental quality, loss of agricultural land and economic disparities. Literature regarding contemporary planning problems inevitably defines automobile suburbs as a central issue.

¹⁸Mike Davis, City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles (New York: Vintage, 1992), 224.

¹⁹Ibid.

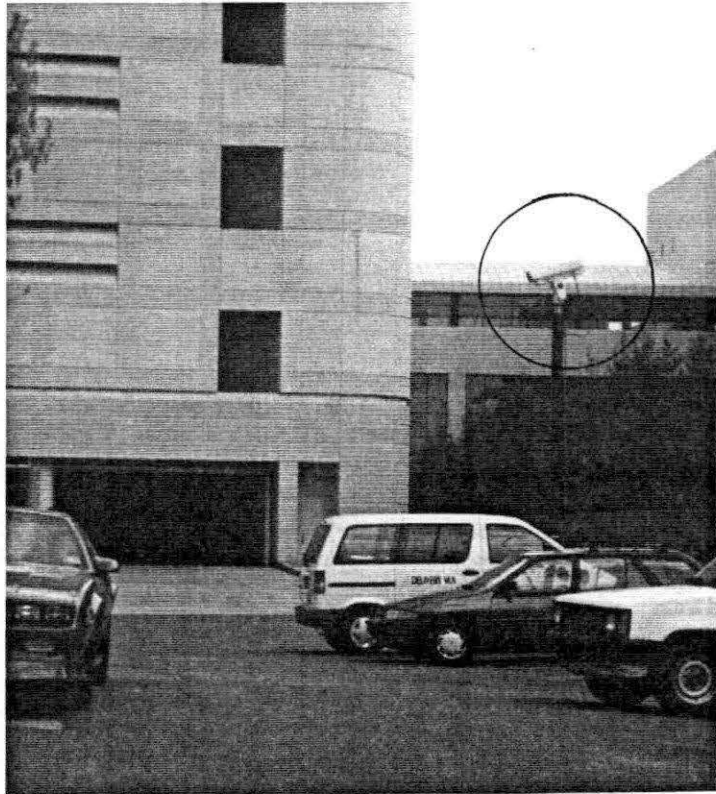


Figure 3. Cameras throughout Uptown Charlotte monitor public areas including streets, building entries and parking lots. Increasingly common in American cities they indicate continuing fear of urban areas which encourages middle-class flight.

The literature ranges from those who take an accepting but critical look at this dominant American settlement pattern and suggest practical improvements, and those who reject suburbia out of hand as modernist inanity. Girling and Helphand argue, while there currently

are substantial costs associated with low-density suburbs: loss of agricultural land, a decline in air and water quality, and exorbitant costs for sewers, power and roads. . . . [they can provide a] landscape supportive of individual fulfillment, and environmental sustainability . . . [provided we exercise] a broader, more comprehensive view of open space.²⁰

In contrast, James Howard Kunstler states flatly,

Eighty percent of everything built in America has been built in the last fifty years, and most of it is depressing, brutal, ugly, unhealthy and spiritually degrading. . . .²¹

The disorientation associated with the contemporary city, rapid technological and social change, deteriorating built and natural environments and uncertainty regarding the country's future all contribute to a yearning for stability. As David Harvey argued,

The greater ephemerality, the more pressing the need to discover or manufacture some kind of eternal truth. . . . The revival of interest in basic institutions (such as family and community)

²⁰Cynthia Girling and Kenneth I. Helphand, Yard Street Park: The Design of Suburban Open Space (New York: John Wiley and Sons Inc., 1994), 3.

²¹James Howard Kunstler, The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America's Man-Made Landscape (New York: Touchstone, 1993), 10. While Kunstler's polemic has been well received by many, he largely reiterates, with the benefit of hindsight, criticism put forth more subtly and eloquently in the postwar era by Lewis Mumford.

and the search for historical roots are all signs of a search for more secure moorings and longer-lasting values in a shifting world.²²

In this context, preservationists and neo-traditionalists search for stability and community. Neo-traditionalism is "family values architecture" according to Witold Rybcynski, "the real estate developer's answer to the inchoate yearnings for a proverbial simpler time."²³ Like their predecessors in the nineteenth century, preservationists and neo-traditionalists see the restoration or emulation of historic architectural and urban form as central to the task. While these movements are not wholly naive yearnings for the past, nostalgia is a very significant element in their development and increasing popularity (see Figure 4).

Nostalgia itself, in Europe of the Romantics and in contemporary culture, has been an important issue in cultural debates. From its inception, the term was associated with the concept of place. According to Jean Starobinski, "nostalgia" was coined by physician Johannes Hofer, from the Greek for "return" and "sorrow." He recognized it as the cause of "exiles [who] languished and wasted away far from their native land. . . ." ²⁴ In

²²Harvey, 292.

²³Witold Rybcynski, "The Rise of Family Values Architecture, This Old House," The New Republic, 8 May 1995, 14-16.

²⁴Jean Starobinski, "The Idea of Nostalgia," Diogenes 54 (Summer 1966): 84.

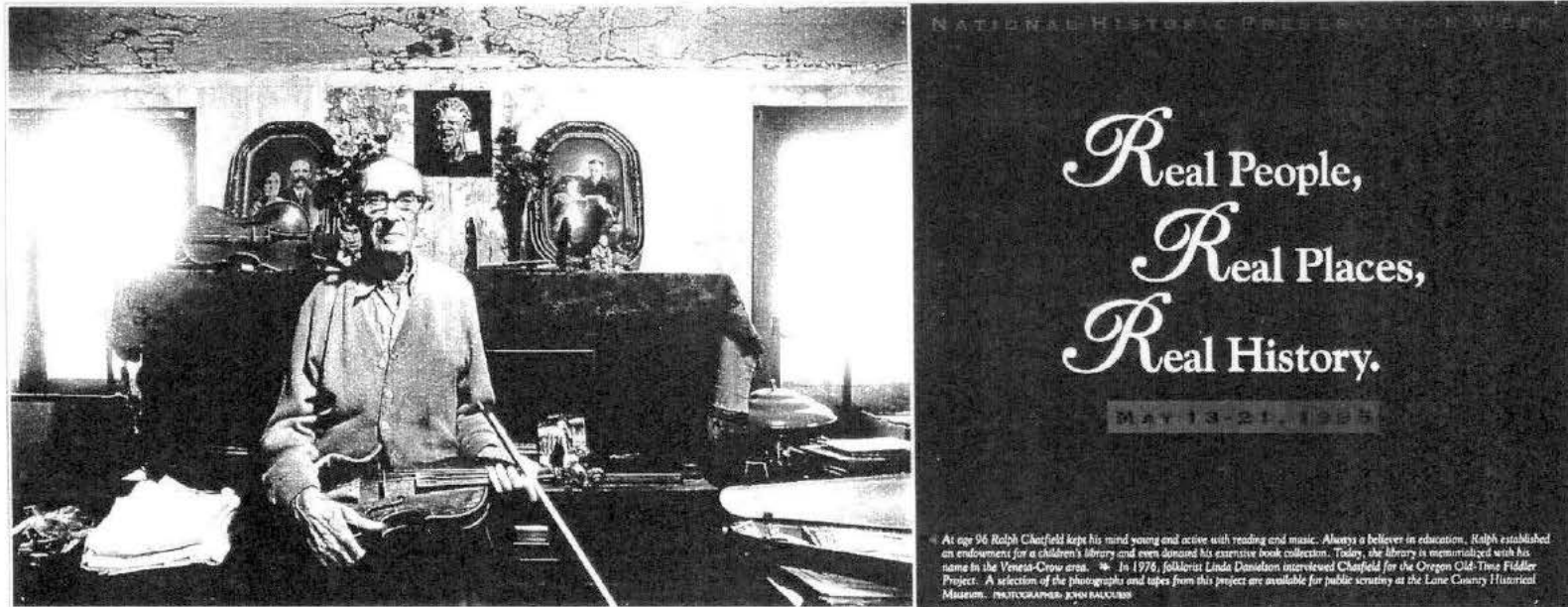


Figure 4. The 1995 Historic Preservation Week Poster. The appearance of authenticity is appealing in an increasingly ephemeral and uncertain age. As Harvey argued, The greater ephemerality, the more pressing the need to discover or manufacture some kind of eternal truth. . . . Photographs, particular objects (like a piano, a clock, a chair), and events (the playing of a record of a piece of music, the singing of a song) become the focus of a contemplative memory, and hence a generator of a sense of self that lies outside the sensory overloading of consumerist culture and fashion. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1990), 292.
Poster reprinted, by permission, from the City of Eugene, Oregon.

the eighteenth century people were fearful of long trips that might bring on the deadly disease. While doctors and philosophers argued over its cause, "throughout all the countries of Europe, all doctors recognized nostalgia as a frequently fatal disease. . . ." ²⁵ The quotes below give an indication of the era's preoccupation with nostalgia.

Hofer claimed that

Nostalgia is born of a disorder of the imagination, from which it follows that the nervous sap always takes the very same direction in the brain and, as a result, excites the very same idea, the desire to return to one's homeland. ²⁶

As a doctor, he sought the physiological cause of nostalgia in an attempt to cure what was viewed as a disease.

Immanuel Kant disagreed with Hofer's place specific argument and claimed

what a person wishes to recover is not so much the actual place where he passed his childhood but his youth itself. He is not straining toward something he can repossess, but toward an age which is forever beyond his reach. ²⁷

Disgusted with the era of nostalgia and historicism, Nietschze said that his age was

²⁵Ibid, 95.

²⁶Ibid, 87. Many medical practitioners argued that the most rapid and immediate cure was to send the patient home. The less benevolent claimed that nostalgia could be cured by "insighting pain or terror. . . One should tell the nostalgic soldier that a 'red-hot iron applied to his abdomen' will cure him immediately."

²⁷Ibid., 94.

suffering from a malignant historical fever. . . .
 [Anyone] who wished to feel everything
 historically would be like a beast who had to live
 by chewing a continual cud.²⁸

More recently, Frederic Jameson has argued that nostalgia is also a prominent aspect of postmodern culture. He describes the current world of art and literature as "the failure of the new, the imprisonment in the past."²⁹ He continues, echoing Kant, ". . . we seem condemned to seek the historical past through our own pop images and stereotypes about the past, which itself remains forever out of reach."³⁰

²⁸Quoted in Kern, 52.

²⁹Jameson, Frederic, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," in The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodernism ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1983), 118, 115. Also see Fredric Jameson in "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," New Left Review 146 (July/August 1984): 53-92. For criticism of Jameson's article see Mike Davis' "Urban Renaissance and the Spirit of Postmodernism," New Left Review 151 (May/June 1985): 106-113.

Jameson emphasized the popularity of "nostalgia films" and the prominence of revivalism and pastiche in the visual arts and architecture. Revivalism is also a force in other art forms which were very recently driven by more avant-garde perspectives. For example, New York Times jazz critic, Peter Watrous claims that

[N]ever has a movement as influential as the young jazz renaissance been as historically motivated. Young musicians. . . . have created a vocabulary that takes history and tries to manipulate it, to see if the past can be made new again. . . . [They ignore] the avant-garde of the 60s. . . . [in a] process of reexamining the past. . . .

In, "Young Pianist Tries to Reinvent the Past," New York Times, 14 May 1995, H28.

³⁰Jameson, "Consumer Society," 118.

Many social theorists and literary critics, such as Jameson, argue the decline of modernism has resulted in a general pessimism toward the deepest held beliefs of the Enlightenment. Assumptions regarding the ability of human rationality and science to overcome social, environmental and economic problems, the ameliorative power of technology and its ability to effect a utopian future, and the ability of democratic institutions to provide an equitable and stable society, have all met serious challenges in the late twentieth century. Questions arise, not only from theoretical inconsistencies in Enlightenment thought, but from the failure or negative impact of so many modernist technological programs that relied on those assumptions. This, it is argued, has precipitated and/or accompanied a new era in political, cultural, economic and art history marked by nostalgia, pessimism and fear.³¹ As Robert Fishman argued, in contrasting the utopians of the early twentieth century to contemporary planners,

Our present crisis is, in part, a crisis of confidence. The decay of our central cities and the wasteful, ever-expanding sprawl that threatens to replace them are national problems whose magnitude would seem to make some form of large-scale urban planning and reconstruction a national imperative. The tools for such a reconstruction exist, but we seem to lack the will to use them. For many contemporary planners . . . any action on

³¹Hal Foster's The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture (Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1983) remains one of the most impressive attempts to bring together the disparate and often contradictory viewpoints on postmodern culture.

the scale advocated by [Ebenezer] Howard, [Frank Lloyd] Wright, and Le Corbusier is a dangerous delusion. They argue that cities are too complex for us to comprehend, and that their problems are too deep-seated to yield to our limited understanding and even more limited resources. The best that we can hope for are small-scale renovation projects which might keep pace with the decay.³²

As Fishman emphasized, the pace and form of growth in American cities is cause for alarm. As computer and information technologies revolutionize national and international economies, widespread suburbanization continues as the dominant postwar development pattern. Jobs have steadily followed upper and middle-income capital to outlying areas. A new generation of suburbs, "Edge Cities" as described by Joel Garreau, is expanding further into the urban fringe. Michael Sorkin ominously claims the built environments (especially shopping malls) in these areas are totally foreign to traditional urban form and mark the end of public space in America. Manuel Castells and Peter Hall identify specific exurban areas as "technopoles" which will rapidly transform the global economy. Garreau sees Edge City as a new frontier and our migration there as the

³²Fishman, in Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century: Ebenezer Howard, Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1977), xi, criticized the likes of Jane Jacobs, for the suggestion that planners could never comprehend, and therefore never effectively deal with, the complexities of a metropolitan area. Anticipating the more conservative tone of current urban policy, Jacobs argued that the encouragement of small, independent entrepreneurialism, not large scale government intervention, is the key to a thriving city.

largest change in the past one hundred years of American urbanization³³

Edge City marks a shift in urban organization. However, it is also an intensification of the suburban migration which began in the late nineteenth century and became a large-scale national trend in the postwar era. In Edge City, as in previous American suburbs,

affluent and middle class Americans live in suburban areas that are far from their work places, in homes that they own, and in the center of yards that by urban standards elsewhere are enormous. [American suburbs are therefore defined by] population density, homeownership, residential status, and journey to work.³⁴

³³Joel Garreau, Edge City: Life on the New Frontier (New York: Doubleday, 1991). Edge Cities generally take root at freeway interchanges and reflect American reliance on the automobile and an ever-decreasing dependence on older core areas for jobs, retail and services. They are the employment base for the information economy, commonly providing software engineering, production and other high-tech jobs. Manuel Castells, in "European Cities, the Informational Society, and the Global Economy," New Left Review 204 (March/April): 18-32, and with Peter Hall in Technopoles of the World: The Making of 21st Century Industrial Complexes (London: Routledge, 1994), describes several prominent technopoles throughout the world as the production base for the emerging global economy. Technopoles are to the 21st century what steel mills and other heavy manufacturing were to the industrial age; loci of power and wealth that increasingly direct the economy and, therefore, urban form. Also see Michael Sorkin's Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space (New York: Noonday Press, 1991).

³⁴Kenneth T. Jackson's one-sentence definition of the American suburb in Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 6. While employment has moved to exurban areas, there is a low jobs/housing balance in Edge Cities. Rather than reducing trip length, suburb to suburb commuting has increased it. See Anthony Downs, Stuck in Traffic: Coping with Peak-Hour Traffic Congestion (Washington D.C.:

As Bunce and others have suggested, traditional images of suburban life are also associated with a tendency to idealize the past. So, while suburbia is defined by the demographic characteristics above, it also relies heavily on the mediation of powerful images - such as "country" and "city," "past" and "present" - discussed by Williams, Marx and Bunce. It is therefore "both a planning type and a state of mind based on imagery and symbolism."³⁵ Much of this symbolism is associated with nostalgic yearnings for the country or for small town life: an escape from the modern city of industry, commerce and vice to a simpler and safer life associated with the past.

Modernism: Planning, Design, and the Future

Marketing of early twentieth century and post-World War II suburbs emphasized the value of new design and technological convenience. These suburbs "coupled the promise of modernity and technological facility with the national cure-all, the elixir of nature - truly 'a machine in a garden.'"³⁶ In the words of Howard Mansfield, with the aid of modern technology we

would leapfrog into the future invention by
invention, toaster by blender, appliance by

Brookings Institution and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 1992).

³⁵Jackson, Crabgrass, 4.

³⁶Girling and Helphand, 12.

appliance, until at last, all our devices in order, we would arrive at a utopia somewhere the other side of the checkout counter.³⁷

Influential utopian designers such as Le Corbusier, Frank Lloyd Wright and Norman Bel Geddes, like much of the public, believed technology would save early twentieth century cities.³⁸ In Fishman's words, they were

inspired by the prospect that a radical reconstruction of the cities would solve not only the urban crisis of the time, but the social crisis as well. . . . They did not seek the amelioration of old cities, but a wholly transformed urban environment.³⁹

Their rhetoric and design work sparked Americans' imagination, especially in exhibits such as "Futurama" at the 1939 World's Fair. Designed by Bel Geddes and sponsored

³⁷Howard Mansfield, Cosmopolis: Yesterday's Cities of the Future (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Center for Urban Policy Research, 1990), 1.

³⁸Robert Fishman in Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia and Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century: Ebenezer Howard, Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1977), offers a history of the utopian aspects of modernist planning and architecture. In the former, Fishman traces the history of suburbs from Manchester and London to America. He claims that suburbs have given over to exurbs, or actual cities outside of traditional suburbs and independent of core areas. This development, he claims, has brought the long history of suburbanization to a close. In the latter, Fishman compares the ideal cities designed by, and the lives and personalities of, the three men. Howard, in his plan for the Garden City concentrated on mutual cooperation and group ownership of land. Wright and his plan for Broadacre City concentrated on individual freedom, private property and the nuclear family. Le Corbusier's plan for the Contemporary City, Plan Voisin (the 1925 "Urban Renewal Plan" rejected by Parisians), and his Radiant City, all concentrated on the centralized authority of capitalists or the government.

³⁹Fishman, Urban Utopias, 4.

by General Motors, the immensely popular scale model of an American city in the "World of 1960" drew heavily from Le Corbusier and Wright. It featured skyscrapers set amidst parks and massive highways (from Corbusier's "Ville Radiuse.") and was surrounded by small experimental farms freely accessible by automobile (from Wright's "Broadacre City"). Like many popular and academic predictions it presented an effortless future based on technological conveniences. "Futurama" helped whet the public's appetite for subsequent large-scale urban renewal projects which sought to liberate American cities from restrictive historic urban form. Le Corbusier's poems were exemplary of popular and academic sentiment.

A new world: a high speed world.

A new life: the machine age.

A new ideal: use of the machine to liberate the individual.

A new daily round: productive, recuperative, joyful, healthy; the daily round of the machine age man in the Radiant City.

New cities for old.⁴⁰

Wright and Corbusier saw the skyscraper and automobile as saviors of the American city. "The highway," according to Le Corbusier, "is our means of salvation."⁴¹ He emphasized the skyscraper's potential to intensify urban development, bring nature into the city and do away with suburbs. He strove for a nation dominated by cities in the

⁴⁰Le Corbusier, Radiant City (New York: The Orion Press, 1967), 331. First published in France in 1933.

⁴¹Ibid., 139.

machine age. Wright, reflecting an American bias, envisioned a Jeffersonian suburban culture of independent farmers. He emphasized the automobile's potential to provide increased mobility and access to the small farms that were to make up much of his "Broadacre City" (see Figure 5). According to Wright, technology would ultimately preserve democracy by assuring the romantic Jeffersonian ideal of a republic based on a stable yeomanry. Post-World War II suburbs, like their predecessors in the nineteenth century and in "Futurama," promised stability to a populous threatened by the state of contemporary cities. Modernists embraced the machine but still offered the stability and romanticism of pastoralism.

Post-World War II planners also had unprecedented funding to rebuild cities that had languished since pre-Depression years. Eisenhower's interstate highway system, Urban Renewal and the social programs of Johnson's "Great Society" gave planners tremendous influence and freedom to shape American landscapes.⁴² Their's was a vision of urban and suburban utopia in which the union of technology, especially the automobile, and nature would provide a safe and healthy environment for modern living. Ironically, many contemporary planners target postwar planning, especially the emphasis on automobile use, as the source of our worst

⁴²Gwendolyn Wright, Building the American Dream: A Social History of Housing in America (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1981).

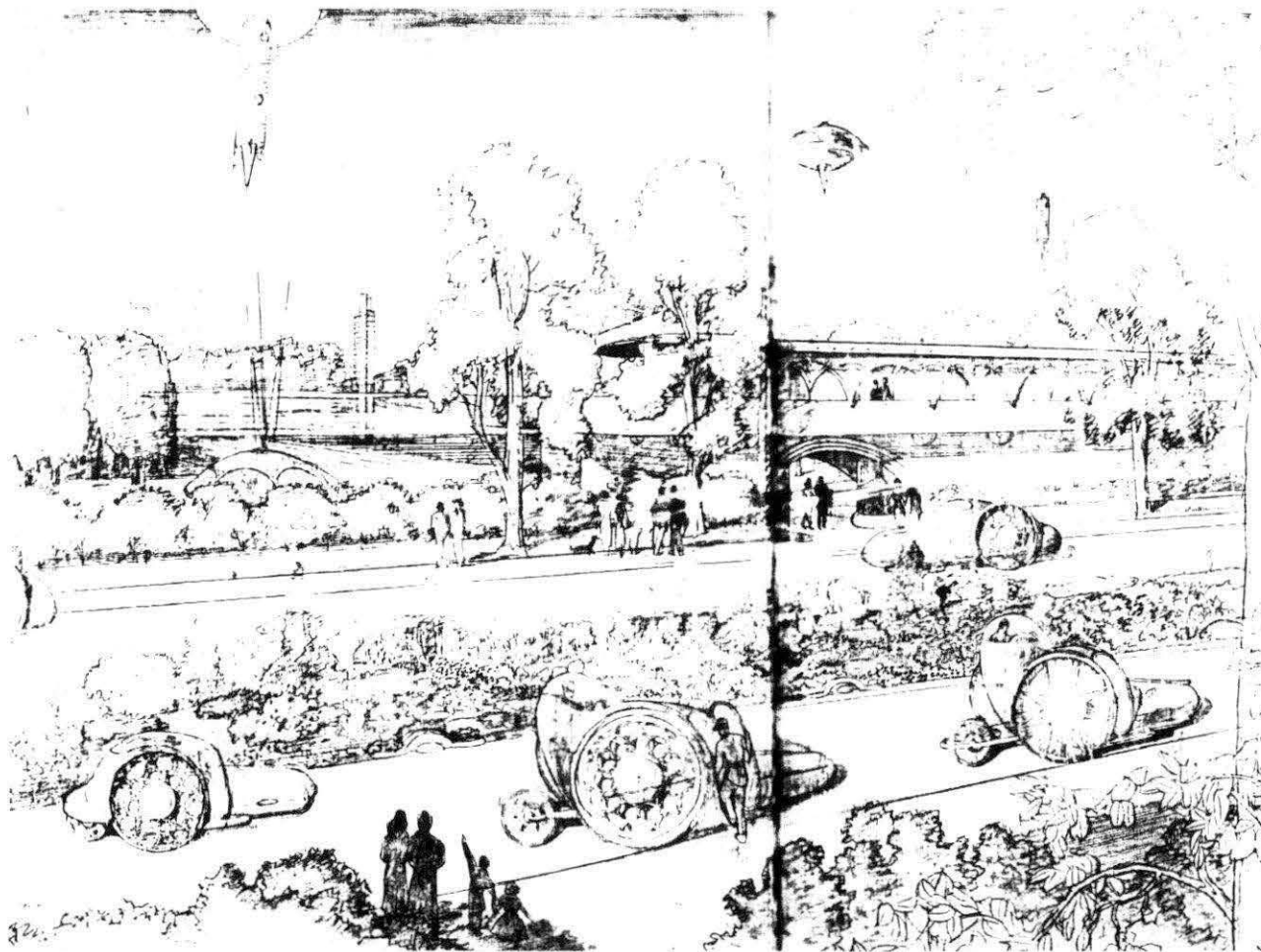


Figure 5. Yesterday's cities of the future: New cities for old. Scene from Wright's Broadacre City. Reprinted, by permission, from The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation. Copyright 1995 The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation.

urban problems, certainly not the solution.⁴³ So many bold promises were made regarding planners' power to shape a utopian urban/suburban environment that the endemic problems of many American cities have, with the benefit of hindsight, made the profession appear both naive and arrogant to contemporary critics of modernist urban plans.⁴⁴

Modernist planners and designers exemplified cultural beliefs that stem in large part from the Enlightenment tradition of optimism in the future, rationality and technology. They felt the future was their's to shape and the past something to be continually surpassed for a brighter future. Like the Cubists, whose aesthetic inspired so much modern design, postwar planners saw "new positive answers whose authenticity seemed to be guaranteed by the existence of new forces. . . . [they] believed, if not for themselves then for the future, in victory."⁴⁵ It was this intense optimism, coupled with the abstract Cubist aesthetic, which helped drive and shape urban renewal

⁴³Anthony Downs, Stuck in Traffic; Anthony Downs, New Visions for Metropolitan America (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution and Cambridge: Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 1994).

⁴⁴Robert Caro's The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York (New York: Knopf, 1974), details one of the most extreme and extended examples of the postwar emphasis on progress, change and modernity being used to shape a major city with many long term disastrous results.

⁴⁵John Berger, "The Moment of Cubism" in The Look of Things (New York: Viking Press, 1974), 140.

policy.⁴⁶ Just as modern art, through Cubism, heavily influenced postwar architecture and urbanism, by the 1940s, Ezra Pound's turn of the century directive for the modern avant-garde, "Make it new!," was realized in urban landscapes throughout the country. Massive demolition and reconstruction of inner urban areas were welcomed signs of progress. Federal housing loan programs and interstate highway subsidies opened the "crabgrass frontier" to World War II veterans. Relative income levels were high, unemployment low, and the nation's future appeared stable and prosperous. However, as the glut of contemporary criticism of modernism and urban renewal attests, modernists and the public in general, would have been well served by a more critical look at their assumptions regarding technology, progress and the future. With their eyes fixed on an inevitable utopia, the problems that would result from exclusive zoning, low density development and auto dependence were difficult to foresee.⁴⁷

⁴⁶To such an extent that Berger argues, "[a]ll modern design, architecture and town planning seem inconceivable without the initial example of Cubism." Berger, 134.

⁴⁷Some did foresee the problems of modern planning. Much of Lewis Mumford's writing focused on its shortcomings before and after they were realized in the landscape. His The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations and Its Prospects (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1961) is not only a world history of urbanization but a strong critique of postwar planning in America. Jane Jacobs', The Death and Life of Great American Cities (New York: Random House, 1961) is also a classic critique of modernist planning. A more recent but likewise scathing and readable critique of modernist planning is Lisa Peattie's Planning:

Many negative impacts inherent in the recommendations of designers such as Corbusier, Wright and Howard have been realized but most of the strengths have been overshadowed. Mounting traffic congestion and environmental problems from widespread automobile use and low-density development, economic disparities between fringe and core areas, declining urban infrastructure and rising urban crime rates are among the most pronounced.⁴⁸

Rethinking Ciudad Guayana (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1987). Like Jacobs, Peattie stresses the need for planners and designers to be engaged with "the site." She argues that without an intimate knowledge of the complexities of a place, its idiosyncracies, strengths and weaknesses, planners will inevitably fail. In a brief but powerful book Peattie elucidates all the hubris and shortsightedness of, not only our attempts to transplant the modern city into the jungles of Venezuela, but of planning in general. Peattie's The View From the Barrio (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1968), is a memoir of the months she spent working as an anthropologist on the Ciudad Guayana project.

⁴⁸While there was substantial optimism surrounding a purported middle class "return to the city" in the 1980s the actual demographic shift from suburbs to cities was negligible. Highly publicized preservation efforts in Baltimore and San Francisco for example, brought together civic government and developers' interests for large-scale highly publicized rehabilitation efforts. Likewise, the movement of artists into previously derelict buildings in areas such as Manhattan's Tribeca or the influx of a large upper-middle class gay population into San Francisco raised hopes about the revitalization of urban areas and anxieties over the impact of gentrification on lower income groups. See Sharon Zukin, Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991); Neil Smith and Peter Williams, eds., Gentrification of the City (Boston: Allan and Unwin, 1986). Small historic areas in mid-sized cities throughout the country, such as Charlotte's Dilworth neighborhood, were sought after and rehabilitated by young professionals. Rather than a large demographic shift however, these revitalization efforts often resulted in "islands of prosperity in a sea of decay."

Contemporary Trends in Planning and Design: The
Past as an Answer to Modernism

As a result of persistent urban problems, the contemporary city itself is cited as justification for casting off the design principles of the immediate past, which is viewed as naive and oppressive. The view is ironically similar to that held by modernists. Many designers and planners today do not attempt to "make it new," but rather, look to a more distant past, to local traditions or to nature for direction.⁴⁹ "[B]y returning to

Historic markets such as Boston's Fanueil Hall or San Francisco's Ghirardelli Square, bolstered consumption and tourism in core areas; neighborhood revitalization increased tax bases and preserved historic architecture but the inner city has retained the highest concentration of crime and poverty.

⁴⁹See Christopher Alexander's A Timeless Way of Building (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), and A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977). Alexander claims there are certain design solutions that are objectively superior, functionally and aesthetically, to others. Many are represented in vernacular forms. His very influential books attempt to provide practical tools for delineating these timeless solutions.

Architectural critic and theorist Kenneth Frampton also recognizes the value of drawing, not only from historic precedent, but from the qualities of a specific building site and regional vernacular traditions. In his "Towards a Critical Regionalism," In The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture, ed., Hal Foster (Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1983), 10,16-30, he encourages a "Critical Regionalism" but warns against the conservative political implications of idealizing the past and vernacular traditions. He points to the rise of Nazi Germany and its emphasis on folk traditions and revivalist architecture. He is also critical of those who encourage us to "to return to traditional forms and to render our new buildings - almost

traditions established in the nineteenth century, [they] explicitly jump over the city of modernism, hoping to drive that representational order out of sight."⁵⁰ These planners reflect broader cultural, social and economic trends which view the past and future in a much different light than did postwar America.

The negative impact of many postwar programs has forced a reevaluation of modern planning among designers, planning practitioners and academics. Their struggle echoes the broader theoretical critiques of Enlightenment thought which supported modern architecture and Urban Renewal. The "Rational Planning Model," the basic conceptual tool of the profession and a classic example of Enlightenment epistemology, has met with focused criticism from John Forester and other planning academics (see Figure 6).⁵¹

without regard for their status - in the iconography of a kitsch vernacular."

Similarly, David Harvey argues in The Condition of Postmodernity, 283, that "Geopolitical and aesthetic interventions always seem to imply nationalist, and hence unavoidably reactionary, politics. He, like Frampton, refers to Nazi appropriation of public spaces which Camillo Sitte designed in an attempt to create a sense of community and a link to the nation's vernacular past.

⁵⁰Christine M. Boyer, The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 5.

⁵¹Ernst Alexander, "After Rationality, What?" Journal of the American Association of Planners 50 (Winter 1984): 62-69.

Alexander, relying on Thomas Kuhn's ground-breaking work, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), claims a paradigm breakdown has occurred in the field as the inherent

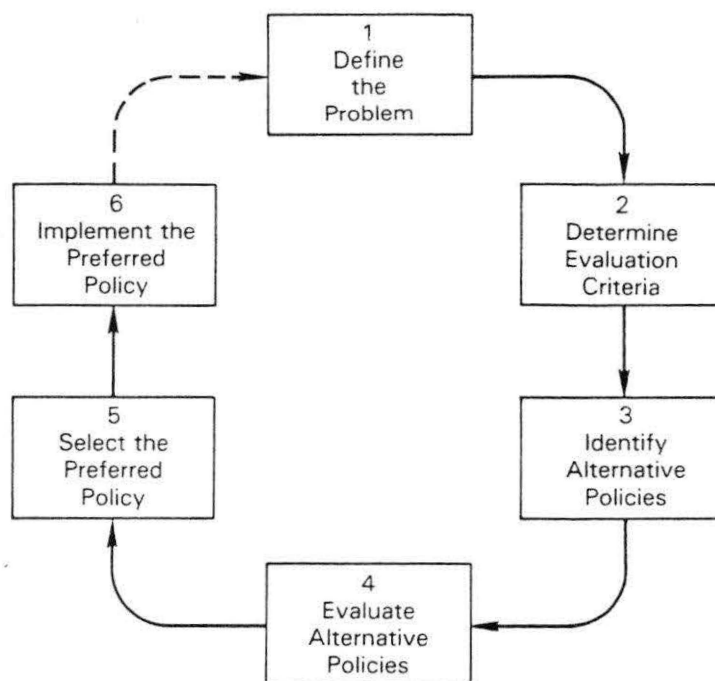


Figure 6. The Rational Planning Model. The basic conceptual tool of planning and policy analysis.

Practitioners, on the other hand, have been forced to reevaluate their assumptions regarding the relationship between professionals and the public (due to increased citizen involvement), between the built and the natural environment (through increased environmental and historic preservation activism) and between technology and progress (due to problems resulting from industrial pollution and an automobile dependent culture). "Community" and the environment have been asserted as critical aspects of planning, challenging the modernist view of the city as a "machine for living." Anthropocentrism and technology are questioned as valid directives for planning just as contemporary theorists and artists reevaluate the same modernist assumptions in other cultural arenas.

Reservations among many planners have sparked debate regarding what might be the most effective means for

weaknesses of the rational planning model become apparent. In The Argumentative Turn in Policy Analysis and Planning (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), Frank Fischer and John Forester present a series of essays that struggle with how the planning profession, born from the Enlightenment tradition, might surmount the shortcomings of the rationalist approach. Not surprisingly, these planners are not prepared to reject the modernist impulse altogether and rely on the theoretical work of Jurgen Habermas. Habermas argues that modernity is an "incomplete project" and denies the arguments of post-structuralists who claim modernism and the enlightenment tradition are practically and theoretically bankrupt. The Argumentative Turn is an impressive attempt to integrate theory into planning practice. See John Forester ed., Critical Theory and Public Life (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), for a more narrowly theoretical discussion of the integration of Habermasian theory and public policy.

instilling the profession with a sense of purpose, solidarity and renewed respect, especially in an era of fiscal uncertainty and conservative emphasis on deregulation. This challenge helped spark, especially in the eighties, an increase in planning history scholarship, along with calls for a return to the "roots" of planning.⁵² The sentiment is similar to contemporary designers' return to historic precedent.

Michael P. Brooks speaks to the sense among many planners that the profession has lost its way. Remorseful over planning's current lack of leaders and heroes, like Olmsted and Burnham, he argues that we must return to the "historical conceptions of the planners role." Planners need to, once again, "visualize the ideal future community and . . . work toward its realization." Utopian planning,

⁵²As Seymour Mandelbaum has suggested in "Historians and Planners: The Construction of Pasts and Futures" Journal of the American Association of Planners 51 (Spring 1985): 185-188, the tendency to look to the past has increased recently as planning "practitioners and academics have turned to the past to remedy what they charge is the amnesia of the profession and to bolster its flagging sense of identity and purpose." Recent works in planning history include: Carl Abbot and Sy Adler, "Historical Analysis as a Planning Tool," Journal of the American Association of Planners 55 (Autumn 1984): 467-473; Christine M. Boyer, Dreaming the Rational City: The Myth of American City Planning (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1983); Richard E. Foglesong, Planning the Capitalist City: The Colonial Era to the 1920s (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); Peter Hall, Cities of Tomorrow: An Intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design in the Twentieth Century (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988); Donald A. Kruekeberg, ed., The American Planner: Biographies & Recollections, 2d ed., (New Brunswick: Center for Urban Policy Research, 1994).

in Brooks' view is central to the vitality of the profession and Peter Marcuse likewise calls for a return to the utopian tradition.⁵³

It is not surprising to find policy-makers and the public, mindful of failed postwar projects, looking to a more distant past for indications of how to handle the future. In uncertain times our references to history provide, in the words of Williams,

the idea of an ordered and happier past set against the disturbance and disorder of the present. An idealization, based on a temporary situation and on a deep desire for stability, served to cover and to evade the actual and bitter contradictions of the time.⁵⁴

This turn to the past represents a profound shift from postwar planning and design.

Amidst these professional, stylistic and cultural trends, suburbia has remained the primary home of the middle and upper-middle class. Suburbs have therefore become a primary stage for the contemporary idealization of the past. Witold Rybcynski has claimed, "Traditional neighborhood development is about to become the hottest idea in suburban

⁵³Michael Brooks, "Four Critical Junctures in the History of the Urban Planning Profession: An Exercise in Hindsight," Journal of the American Association of Planners (Spring 1988): 241-248.

⁵⁴Williams, 45.

planning."⁵⁵ In the words of Peter Calthorpe, neo-traditionalism or the new urbanism, is the search

for nothing less than a new American dream, . . . one that restores public life to our communities, that trades half its 10,000 automobile trips per person each year for light rail and exchanges television and computers for face-to-face communication.⁵⁶

In contrast to the traditional American view that postwar suburbs are the ideal place to live and raise a family, criticism of suburban life and an interest in traditional communities have become widespread in popular media and in urban and suburban real estate marketing.⁵⁷

The trend to look toward the past for alternatives is evident in various design and planning movements, including historic preservation, new urbanism, and postmodernism.

⁵⁵Witold Rybcynski, "The Rise of Family Values Architecture, This Old House," The New Republic 8 May 1995, 14.

⁵⁶Barbara Flanagan, "The Search for the New Hometown: Yearning for Community, Americans Rethink the Suburbs," Metropolitan Home (March 1992): 57.

⁵⁷Jerry Alder's "Bye-Bye, Suburban Dream" was the cover story for Newsweek, 15 May 1995, 40. Also see Barbara Flanagan's article referenced above.

From contemporary film to real estate ads, criticism of postwar suburbs has become widespread. The close knit neighborhood, rather than the "sterile" suburban environment, has become a preferred image. In Spike Lee's "Crooklyn," a film about a middle class black family in Brooklyn of the 1970s, the neighborhood and its street life are portrayed as thriving and stimulating areas for local families. Human contact, the chance encounter with neighbors, and the sense of community are contrasted to scenes set in the suburbs of Virginia. There, cinemagraphic distortions, mildly neurotic characters and social isolation make the suburb pale in contrast to life in the neighborhood.

These movements roughly correspond to three different theoretical approaches to historic architecture and landscapes: preserving the past, using the past as design precedent, and 'quoting' from or replicating historic building types.

Historic Preservation seeks to preserve historic environments for what are seen as intrinsic values and as "documents" of architectural and cultural significance. A wide range of cultural resources, from historic battlegrounds to factories and worker housing are protected or restored. It is argued that historic buildings and landscapes are aesthetically valuable and offer information regarding previous building techniques, social customs, ways of life, and so on. Likewise, they are seen to embody and/or represent an irreplaceable legacy, providing important insight into historical periods that cannot be gleaned from written or photographic documentation alone. Therefore, preservationists stress preserving or restoring buildings and landscapes with as much accuracy as possible.

New urbanism, emphasizes the past as precedent from which to learn and draw design principals for building new, or improving existing, communities. Early suburban designs, such as Clarence Stein's Radburn Plan, are seen as time tested experiments that can provide insight for contemporary

design.⁵⁸ By increasing residential densities, providing alternative transportation, and reasserting mixed use development, new urbanism calls for more compact and pedestrian oriented communities that provide more human interaction than postwar suburbs. They hope to decrease automobile dependence, environmental degradation, and the social fragmentation of postwar American cities. New Urbanism is therefore not preoccupied, necessarily, with preservation or restoration of historic environments, but with using previously built or designed communities as design precedent and tools for social engineering (see Figure 7).⁵⁹

Postmodern architecture uses architectural references from the past in a piecemeal fashion. Designers reference disparate periods of architectural history with little emphasis on duplicating proportions or architectural details. Postmodernism is often denigrated as a superficial stylistic technique that "turns towards a past without any

⁵⁸Cynthia Girling, "The Pedestrian Pocket: Reorienting Radburn," Landscape Journal 12 (Spring 1993): 40-50.

⁵⁹A very complimentary and largely uncritical discussion of new urbanism is provided by Peter Katz in The New Urbanism: Toward an Architecture of Community (New York: McGraw Hill, 1994). The book includes essays by Peter Calthorpe, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, Andres Duany and Vincent Scully. Peter Calthorpe details his own approach to the New Urbanism in The Next American Metropolis: Ecology, Community and the American Dream (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1993). Calthorpe calls for linking neo-traditional communities with the central city via light rail lines.



Figure 7. Today's cities of the future: Old cities for new. A street scene from Lake Park Village, Union County N.C. Reprinted, by permission, from EDI Architecture.

idea of how to use it."⁶⁰. Some critics see postmodernism as a welcomed shift from modernist abstractions and elitism while others claim it is "pop architecture" that has uncritically embraced consumer culture. Postmodernism is therefore, less concerned with restoration or precedent than with, "pastiche," the fragmentary use of architectural details from various periods as a stylistic technique.⁶¹

Another significant trend in popular design is the replication of historic buildings. A less critical stance, in which historic houses are reproduced but include technological conveniences. This trend gives up, not only modernism, but the possibility of good new design altogether. The technique is more concerned with effective marketing than criticizing or reevaluating modern design and may or may not emphasize accurate architectural reproduction. The emphasis is generally on creating a marketable product by stimulating a "feeling" of the past. Whether this is accomplished through careful reproduction or proportional distortions, as in Disney's Main Street USA,

⁶⁰M. Christine Boyer, Dreaming the Rational City: The Myth of American City Planning (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983), 286.

⁶¹Robert Venturi in Learning From Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1977) and Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture, with an introduction by Vincent Scully (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1977) spurred and celebrated the use of pop images and pastiche as a liberating turn from minimalist modern design.

either technique is acceptable. In the words of Charles Moore, Main Street USA allows visitors

to start their exploration of the park at home. And since the street is not an accurate reconstruction of anything but a dreamlike evocation of that era, it finds resonance in many visitors ancestral memories.⁶²

These are the 'hyperreal' landscapes that prompted Umberto Eco to suggest "that there is a constant in the average American imagination and taste, for which the past must be preserved and celebrated in full-scale authentic copy. . .

. "⁶³

Each movement is an attempt to assert the past as a tool for contending with modernism. These brief descriptions place each trend - historic preservation, new urbanism, postmodernism and replication - in a general category regarding specific perspectives and treatment of the past. However, the discussion becomes much more complicated and contradictory when we view the actual results of these varied approaches. The most rigorous and conscientious preservation projects or new urbanist designs can result in environments that have an effect more closely associated with reproductions or Disney landscapes. Further, neo-traditionalists and preservationists, recognizing the powerful appeal of nostalgic imagery, may

⁶²Charles Moore, The City Observed: Los Angeles (New York: Random House, 1984), 39.

⁶³Eco, Umberto. Travels in Hyperreality (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1983), 6.

market their agendas by manipulating images in a similar fashion. In practice and in the landscape, preservation, neo-traditionalism and replication often become difficult to distinguish. To some extent, all produce environments which result in a "feeling" of another time. There is an element of nostalgia whether the landscape results from meticulous preservation of buildings, meticulous use of historic precedent or meticulous reproduction. As Alexander Wilson points out,

It is difficult for our experience of an old farmstead, for example, to be uncontaminated by a gauzy commercial with Grandma sitting at her spinning wheel and serving up Kraft slices. Our experience of historical landscapes is all too easily appropriated by the marketers of nostalgia and the status quo.⁶⁴

These inter-relationships are highlighted in John Dorst's The Written Suburb: An American Site, An Ethnographic Dilemma which describes an example of the "hyperreal" historic community. The Pennsylvania town of Chadds Ford is an upscale suburb and tourist destination. The town markets "tradition" through its annual celebration "Chadds Ford Days" and through house museums and art galleries. The local historical society and art museum have constructed a highly selective and readily consumable version of local history. One of the tendencies Dorst

⁶⁴Alexander Wilson, The Culture of Nature: North American Landscapes from Disney to the Exxon Valdez (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1991), 212.

emphasizes is the particular interest among consumers for the illusion of tradition. This is most evident at the Chadds Ford Days celebration which

reproduces a global image of a social environment characterized by symbolic exchange. The Historical Society [which sponsors Chadds Ford Days] devotes itself to the image of a general mode of social relationship and social time. . . . The raw material of this image is the domestic sphere of late colonial life [as depicted at the fair and house museums], including especially domestic crafts, foodways, architecture and the artisan mode of production in general.⁶⁵

Dorst interprets Chadds Ford as a community which has been shaped entirely around the production and consumption of a decontextualized image of history. In its gradual shift from an agricultural economy and landscape of production to a service economy and landscape of consumption, the image of a colonial past serves to legitimize, authenticate and stimulate the experience of consumption. In the shift from rural community to up-scale suburb, a consumable history has been written for the town and historic preservation functions as a tool for sustaining the imaginary.

Both Dorst and Bunce discuss the central role that images of history play in contemporary suburbanization. Sharon Zukin also emphasizes the power of historic imagery.⁶⁶ A central theme in her work is the emphasis

⁶⁵John Dorst, The Written Suburb: An American Site, An Ethnographic Dilemma (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), 15.

⁶⁶Sharon Zukin, Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disneyland (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

placed on an "ambience of authenticity" in contemporary consumer society and the role that history can play in creating such an image. Similar to the arguments of Dorst and Harvey, Zukin claims

Aspirations toward cultural power primarily clear the landscape of socially obsolete, and segmented, vernacular. But this process relies on a shift of perspective that in turn is tied to the social production of a new group of cultural mediators. They enable vernacular to be perceived, appreciated, and consumed as landscape - but then also appropriated, marketed, and exchanged in a more intensive way.⁶⁷

In contrast to the postwar era fascination with artifice, in the form of modern consumer gadgetry, contemporary designers and marketers rely on images of the traditional, authentic or vernacular. A valuable example is the work of developers such as Peter Brown, who argues "we need hometowns again." For Brown, history is a critical factor absent in the construction of new hometowns. As a result, in Montgomery Township, New Jersey he has proposed constructing the town in a manner which suggests it, "like a typical town of the region, had actually evolved from Dutch-colonial farms into a modern municipality."⁶⁸ As Harvey and Zukin argue, the illusion of tradition is just as appealing, possibly more so, than an actual historic landscape or building. In Montgomery Township, as in twentieth century utopian cities and in places like Chadds

⁶⁷Ibid., 214-215.

⁶⁸Flanagan, 57.

Ford, designers and planners not only construct cities and buildings, they also create images which may conceal the more pressing socio-economic and environmental issues which accompany suburbanization. In the words of Patrick Wright,

Abstracted and redeployed, history seems to be purged of political tension; it becomes a unifying spectacle, the settling of all disputes. . . . Where there was active historicity there is now decoration and display; in the place of memory, amnesia swaggers out in historical fancy dress.⁶⁹

The cultural, architectural and planning trends outlined above are not restricted to academic discussions and a few extreme landscapes, such as Chadds Ford, Montgomery Township or Disney's Main Street USA. Like any cultural or design trend, they are expressed in varied, often contradictory, ways across a wide spectrum of potential design and policy solutions (see Figure 8). In some cases, they are expressed in the careful use of precedent as a guide for altering inefficient postwar land use/transportation patterns and improving the environment. In others, the past is used simply as a real-estate marketing tool. In either case, and in examples that fit between these poles, the past remains an appealing image in contrast to the uncertainties of contemporary life. In the case study that follows, these issues are discussed in relation to a contemporary suburban landscape south of Charlotte, North Carolina.

⁶⁹Patrick Wright, On Living in an Old Country (London: Verso, 1991), 68, 78.

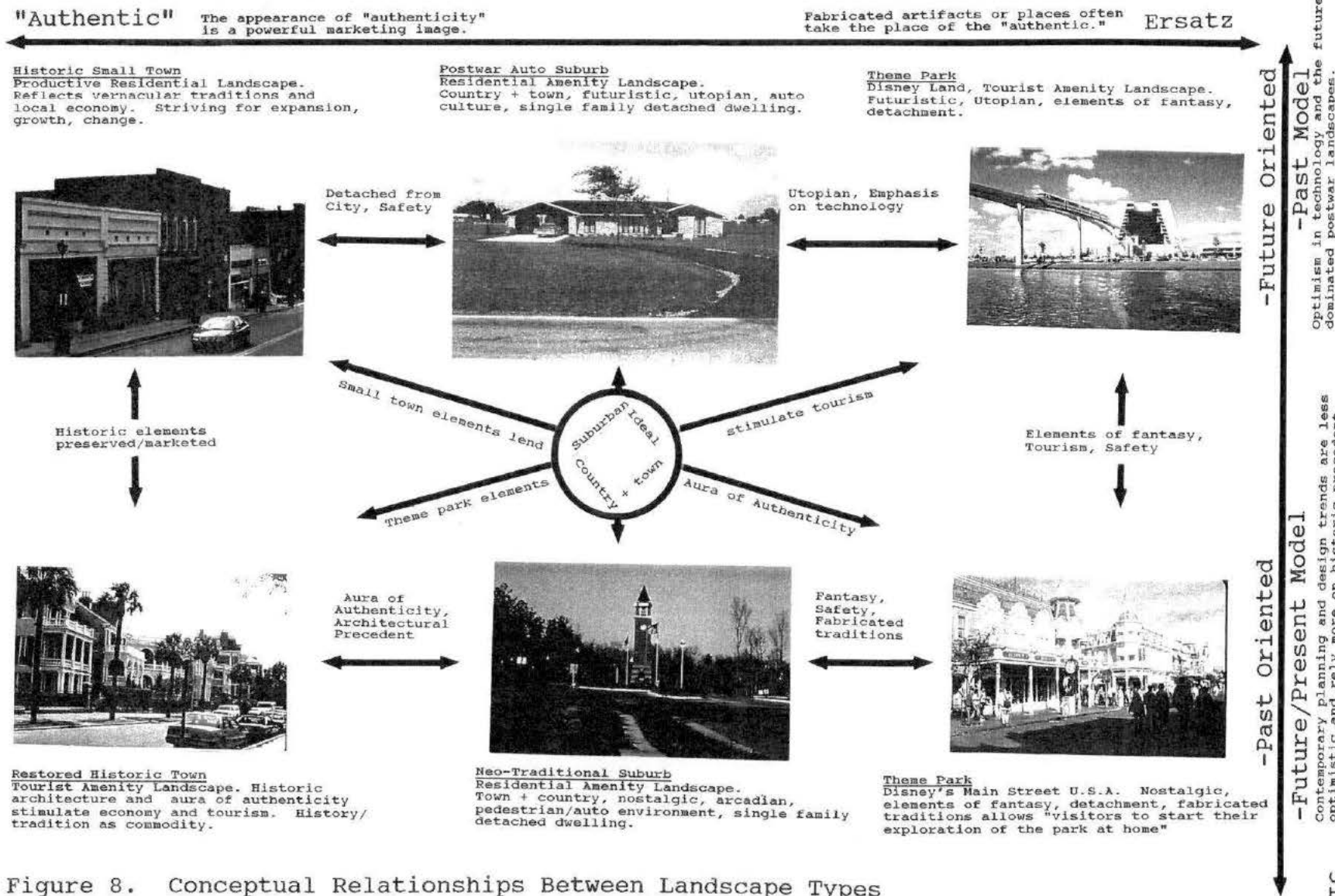


Figure 8. Conceptual Relationships Between Landscape Types

CHAPTER III

DEVELOPMENT TRENDS IN THE CHARLOTTE
METROPOLITAN REGION

Introduction

The Charlotte metropolitan region, in the southern Piedmont of North Carolina, is one of fastest growing urban centers in the country (see Figure 9 and Figure 10). Its continuing economic shift from agriculture and textile production and its increasing national prominence in banking and finance is rapidly transforming the surrounding rural landscape; historically dominated by farms and mill towns, the area is home to a growing number of upper-income suburbanites. Despite the pronounced physical and socio-economic transition in suburbanizing areas, references to tradition are commonly mingled with the rhetoric of growth and development.

While bringing together the best of "town" and "country," or "past" and "future," has always been a defining feature of American suburbanization, development within the study area reflects a shift from modernism to the contemporary preoccupation with historic precedent discussed in Chapter II. Planners attempt to change land use, transportation and urban design policy in a manner

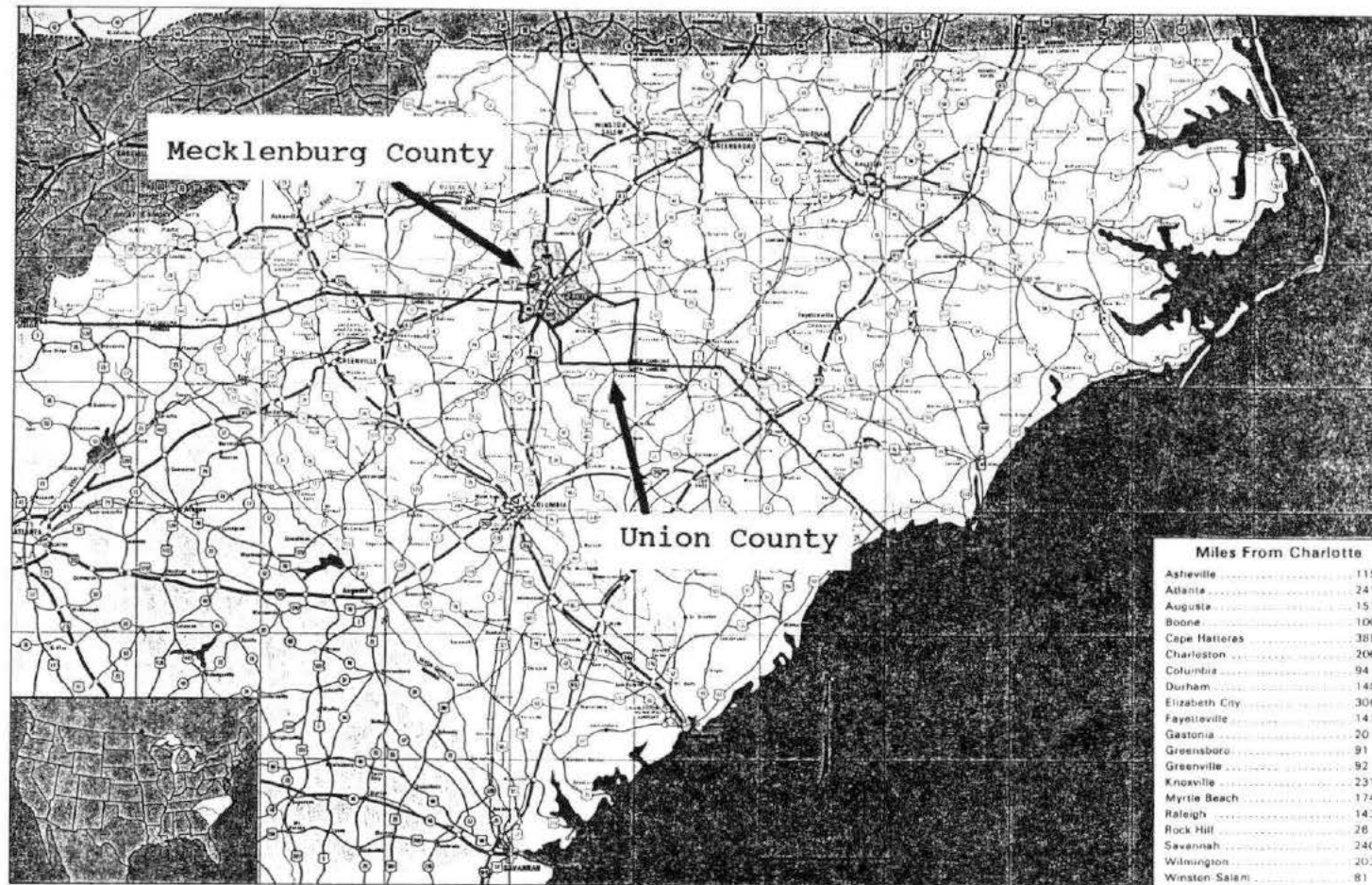


Figure 9. Charlotte-Mecklenburg and the Carolina Region. Reprinted, by permission, from the UNCC Department of Geography and Earth Sciences and the Urban Institute.

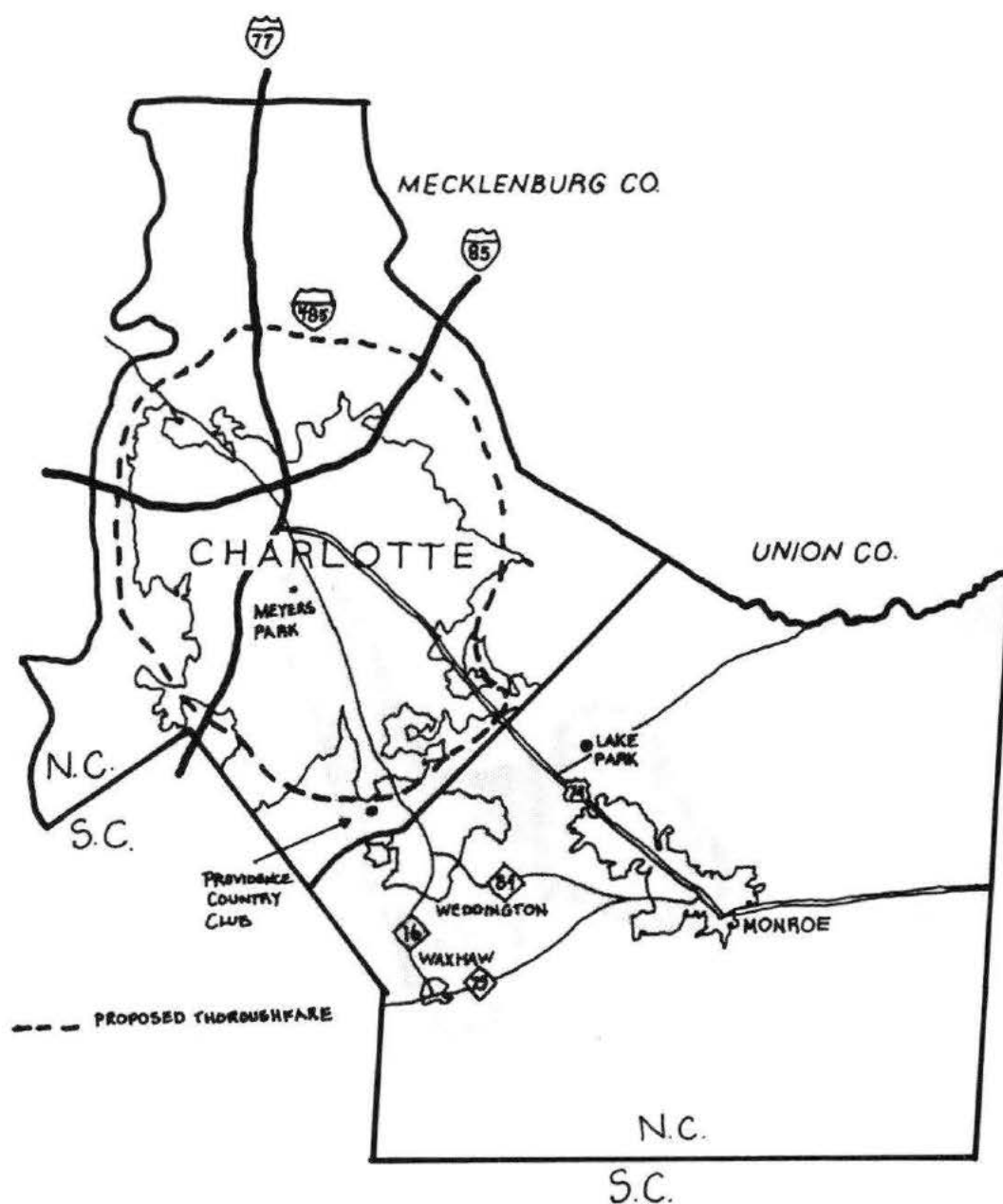


Figure 10. Charlotte-Mecklenburg and Union County. Study area in grey. The "Charlotte-Mecklenburg South District" lies approximately at the southern corner of Mecklenburg County, bounded by I-77 to the west and NC 74 to the east.

consistent with ideas which spring from new urbanism. Developers, on the other hand, apply historicist pastiche to architecture set amidst a land use pattern consistent with postwar suburbanization. In other cases, an idealized rural landscape or the nostalgic image of small town life on the urban fringe are used to market and develop outlying agricultural areas. The local population is surging toward Charlotte-Mecklenburg's South District and adjacent Union County. Home construction and sales in the area are booming as homebuyers respond positively to the lifestyle provided by outlying towns and the revivalist architecture which dominates the housing market.

An increased interest in historic preservation in downtown Monroe (the Union County seat), Waxhaw and other communities, the proliferation of postmodern residential architecture, and examples of neo-traditionalism all suggest an increased recognition that history, in one form or another, may provide a better quality of life while boosting the local economy. However, despite the growing interest in revivalist and historic architecture, contemporary growth in the region is dominated by what can be characterized as postwar suburbanization; land intensive, auto-dependent, low density development.

While contemporary trends - such as preservation, new urbanism and postmodernism - arose largely as reactions to postwar aesthetics and planning, they generally are

integrated with, rather than used to alter, suburban development in the case study area. And, as Charlotte continues to expand, the area's long history of low density development, or "urbanization without cities," has become both its most potent marketing image and its most problematic planning dilemma.

For instance, adjacent Union County, which serves as a bedroom community to Charlotte, relies on its small town image to attract wealthy suburbanites. In the case of the Town of Weddington, the preservation of the rural setting is the rallying cry of suburbanites who rely on local zoning requirements to ensure exclusivity, and low density, auto dependent development. In Lake Park Village, a recently incorporated upscale subdivision is marketed as a neo-traditional community, a genuine small town lifestyle is offered, "where your neighbors are vistin' neighbors." A little taste of the fictional Mayberry, North Carolina for upper income families who have recently arrived, primarily from the ailing cities of the Northeast, to take advantage of Charlotte's hometown image and rising status as the region's financial powerhouse.

This case study briefly describes the settlement history of the study area through examples of three prominent types of residential development: a dispersed agricultural community, a turn-of-the-century mill town, and an early streetcar suburb. These examples illustrate the

area's shift from a primarily agricultural population in the eighteenth and nineteenth century to a suburbanizing population in the early twentieth. The initial discussion puts contemporary development into a historical context, providing comparisons and contrasts between past and present trends.

The case study will then move to a discussion of various examples of contemporary historicist architecture, neo-traditional developments and the emphasis placed on tradition by planners, local officials, and developers. First, development in Mecklenburg County's South District is reviewed; second, contemporary suburbanization in the town of Weddington; and lastly, Lake Park Village, a neo-traditional development near Monroe.

In an attempt to understand how a particular landscape compares to national trends discussed in Chapter II, three questions will be explored: (1)What roles do contemporary planning trends, such as postmodernism, historic preservation and new urbanism, play in shaping planning policy, development and/or architecture? (2)Because these trends emphasize historic precedent, how does contemporary development compare to previous settlement patterns in the study area? (3)Why, is an image of tradition effective for marketing housing and suburban development?

Early Settlement Patterns in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Area

Charlotte is located in the Piedmont, a plateau which runs from Virginia to Alabama and is flanked to the east by the low lying coastal plain and to the west by the Appalachian mountains. The majority of the state's population is concentrated in the more urbanized "Piedmont Crescent" which follows the present I-85 corridor between the state capital, Raleigh, and the state's largest city, Charlotte (see Figure 9). The Piedmont became the prominent region for industry and commerce in the nineteenth and twentieth century when trade through the port at Wilmington, shallow and inferior to those of Charleston and Norfolk, was surpassed by interior overland trade.¹

Geography played a prominent role in early European settlement of the Piedmont. All streams run northwest to southeast and only one major river, the Cape Fear, feeds directly into the ocean. It is navigable for only eighty miles inland, to the fall line which forms the Piedmont's eastern boundary. Early white settlers followed two major routes into the region in the early to mid-1700s. The Scotch-Irish and Germans from Pennsylvania followed the Great Philadelphia Wagon Road from the north. The Scotch,

¹James W. Clay and Alfred W. Stewart, eds, Charlotte: An Analytical Atlas of Patterns and Trends (Charlotte: Department of Geography and Earth Sciences and the Urban Institute at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, 1992), 2.

English, German Huguenots and Swiss came up the Santee-Catawba River Valley from Charleston, South Carolina.²

Settlers were limited to notoriously substandard overland transportation. Even one hundred years later, during Frederick Law Olmsted's travels through North Carolina in the early 1850s, he described a harrowing passage by coach.

The road was as bad as anything, under the name of a road, can be conceived to be. Wherever the adjoining swamps, fallen trees, stumps, and plantation fences would admit of it, the coach was driven, with a great deal of dexterity, out of the road. When the wheels sunk in the mud, below the hubs, we were sometimes requested to get out and walk. An upset seemed every moment inevitable. At length, it came. . . .³

Poor roads and the absence of major navigable waterways stunted Charlotte's growth in early years but was overcome by development of the railroad in the nineteenth century and, more thoroughly, by the increased role of the automobile in the twentieth. Development of the North Carolina Railroad in the 1850s reinforced emerging Piedmont Crescent cities. Charlotte's prominence among them was assured by the termination of several rail lines at its

²Ibid., 1.

³Frederick Law Olmsted, A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States In the Years 1853-1854, With Remarks on Their Economy, with an Introduction by William P. Trent (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1904), 348.

depot.⁴ Its central location in the Piedmont of the two Carolinas, which had made it a hub for overland indian trade and a distribution center for early agricultural products, likewise positioned it as an important rail hub. Rail lines reinforced the early north-south orientation of transportation and Charlotte became a link between northern cities and the rest of the South. The city played an important role in trade and finance with the surrounding area made up of small mill towns and self-sufficient family farms.⁵

Early transportation limitations (and colonial restrictions on the size of tracts available to settlers)⁶ resulted in an economy based on small subsistence farms rather than larger slave plantations which marked the state's tidewater region. One traveller described the area as follows:

A single laborer, with an ox, a horse, plough and wagon, can, on a few acres, live independently and comfortably; and the lands are divided among a multitude of small farmers of this sort.⁷

⁴Allen W. Trelease, The North Carolina Railroad, 1849-1871, and the Modernization of North Carolina (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 345.

⁵Clay, 1,2.

⁶Douglas Swaim, ed., Carolina Dwelling: Towards a Preservation of Place, In Celebration of the North Carolina Vernacular Landscape Place (Raleigh: Student Publication of the School of Design, Volume 26, 1978), 14.

⁷Allen Tullos, Habits of Industry: White Culture and the Transformation of the Carolina Piedmont (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 137.

The Piedmont, therefore, developed a dispersed population of self-sufficient yeoman farmers. On small subsistence farms, with limited trade opportunities, small piedmont farmers relied primarily on their own resources.

Examples of Early Residential Development

Subsistence farming generated a settlement pattern in the region based on dispersed farms with modest houses and a few minor out buildings, usually a barn, corn crib and smoke house. The most common house types in the Piedmont, many of which remain in the agricultural areas around Charlotte, was the I-House form. While staple crops of cotton and tobacco increased incomes in the post-bellum era of rail transport, small farms continued as the dominant unit of the agricultural economy.⁸

Weddington: A Dispersed Agricultural Community

Figure 11 shows the western portion of Union County, including the towns of Weddington and Waxhaw, in 1907. Weddington developed along what is now Providence Road/N.C.

⁸Carl Lounsbury, "From Craft To Industry: The Building Process in North Carolina in the Nineteenth Century," (Ph.D. diss., The George Washington University, 1983), 30-31. More than one half of the small farmers owned at least a small amount of land which was uncommon in the rest of the state. Few had slaves and less than 25% of the total population was made up of slaves in the Piedmont by 1860. Most farmers lived in log or frame houses. Hewn log houses were common in Rockingham County and other areas of the Piedmont. Some can still be found in the Charlotte vicinity.

Figure 11. A 1907 Map of Weddington/Waxhaw, N.C. area.
Courtesy Union County History Room.

16 in one of the earliest settled inland areas of the state. The modest agricultural community experienced an economic boom with the arrival of the railroad in Waxhaw in 1888, evidenced by the prominent houses existing from that period (see Figure 12). The town itself developed at this spot due to the value of local farmland and the intersection, providing overland access to Charlotte (15 miles) to the north, the county seat of Monroe (ten miles) to the east and Waxhaw (seven miles) to the South.⁹ The store, cotton gin, school and church, formed the community's economic and social nucleus at this intersection. Small outlying farms were dispersed around these services. The cotton gin provided a convenient location for processing the local cash crop. The area had value for farmers who settled there due to the productive capacity of the land and climate which, before the railroad, allowed them to continue a primarily

⁹John Lawson, A New Voyage to Carolina; Containing the Exact Description and Natural History of That Country: Together with the Present State thereof. And a Journal of a Thousand Miles, Travel'd thro' several Nations of Indians. Giving Particular Account of their Customs, Manners, etc. Edited with an Introduction by Hugh Talmage Lefler (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967), 46. Lawson, was a royal surveyor dispatched from Charleston in 1699 and passed through this area, known as the Land of the Waxhaws, on his journey. He raved about the area's agricultural value claiming the land was as red as Blood. . . so durable that no Labour of Man, in one or two Ages, could make it poor. . . . Here were Corn-Stalks in their [the indians'] Fields as thick as the Small of a Man's Leg, and they are ordinarily to be seen.



Figure 12. Late nineteenth-century architecture in Weddington, reflects the area's prosperity at the time.

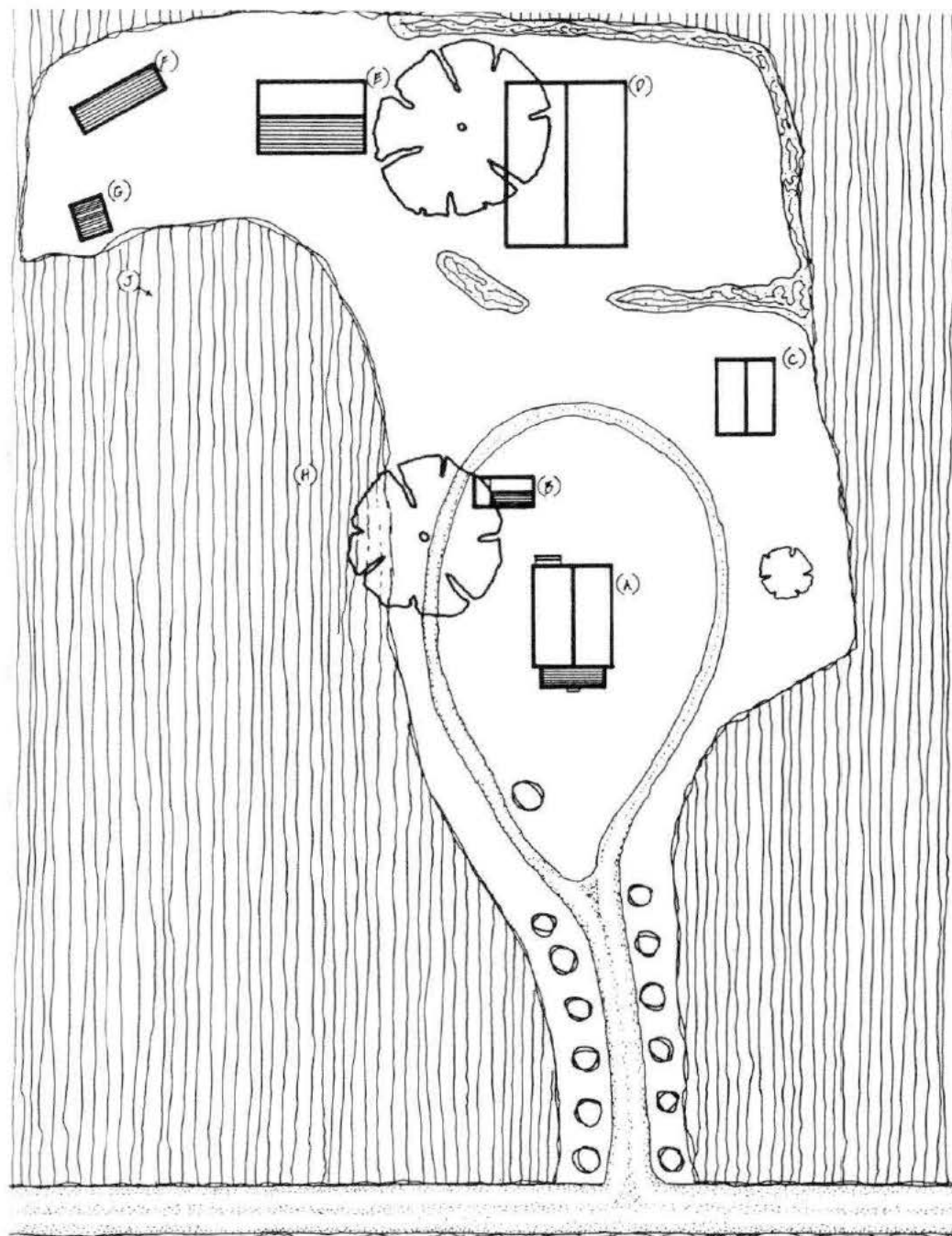
self-sufficient existence. It gained value as accessibility to markets for cotton increased.

The Two-Horse Cotton Farm: The Integration of Production and Amenity Within the Context of a Larger Productive Landscape.

Examples of piedmont yeoman farm sites exist in areas throughout Union County. The small subsistence farm in Figure 13 and Figure 14, although built in 1933, represents the long tradition of the self-sufficient yeoman farmer which dominated the North Carolina Piedmont from early settlement to the mid-twentieth century.¹⁰ The site stands much as it did in 1933. The modest house was built along a field road. Existing outbuildings include a smokehouse in the rear yard adjacent to the kitchen, a garage southwest of the house, the barn directly south of the house, a cotton house east of the barn, a chicken house and storage shed east of the cotton house. The tenant house which stood across the road no longer exists.

While the descriptions of farm life provided by early twentieth century farmers suggests theirs was an idyllic

¹⁰Former farmers, interview by author, 7 August 1995, Union County, North Carolina, tape recording. The farm included fifty cultivated acres at its peak. The standard unit of measurement for local farms was the number of mules required for its operation. Twenty-five acres was normally cultivated by one man and a mule. This farm with two mules, the owner and a transient tenant included fifty cultivated acres.



PINE FOREST
HATCHED AGRICULTURAL FIELD

APPROXIMATE SCALE



N
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Figure 13. Typical farm site plan. (A)house, (B)smoke house, (C)garage, (D)barn, (E)cotton house, (F)chicken house, (G)storage shed, (H)garden area, (I)former tenant house site, (J)camera location for following photo.

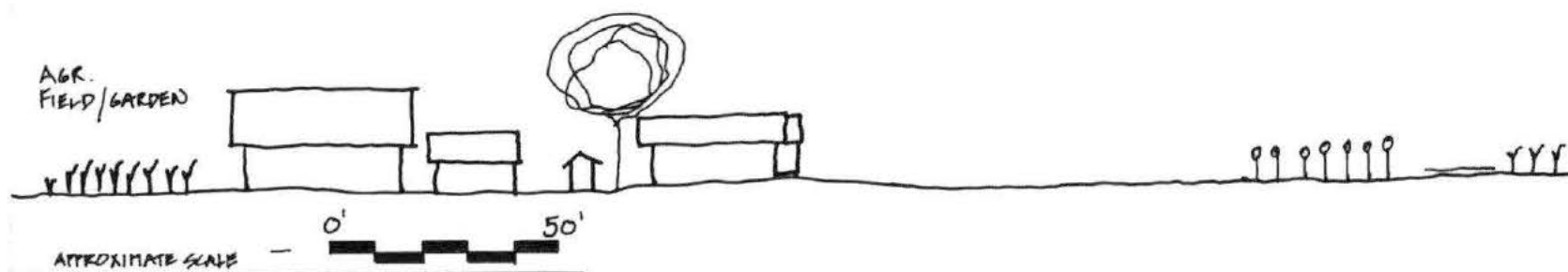


Figure 14. Photo of farm site and diagrammatic section looking west.

world of the Jeffersonian yeomanry, it was, above all, a life of constant work.

When we got through hoeing cotton it was time to come in and start cannin' for the year. When you got that done then you had to go back and pick cotton. So it was just work, work. . . . we had a wood [cook]stove and canned [vegetables] inside [during the summer]. [When I was a child] my mamma done lots of cannin' 'cause there was lots of us to feed. We never went hungry, we always had plenty to eat. We had good gardens, papa raised hogs. . . . You had plenty to eat on a farm but you had to work to make it.¹¹

These individuals describe a way of life that changed very little from their earliest childhood memories until well into adulthood. The farm site is expressive of that lifestyle and served numerous functions; it provided for food production, preparation and animal storage, access to agricultural land and wooded areas that served for both sustenance and amenity and provided ready access to community center. The site balanced production and amenity, domestic life and work life within the context of a larger agricultural landscape.

Waxhaw: The Rise of the Southern Railroad Mill Town,
1880s - 1940s

Like Weddington, the town of Waxhaw, seven miles south, developed along transportation lines which made it a profitable location for trade (see Figure 11 and Figure 15). In the 1700s it was the destination of Europeans trading

¹¹Former farmer, interview, 7 August 1995.

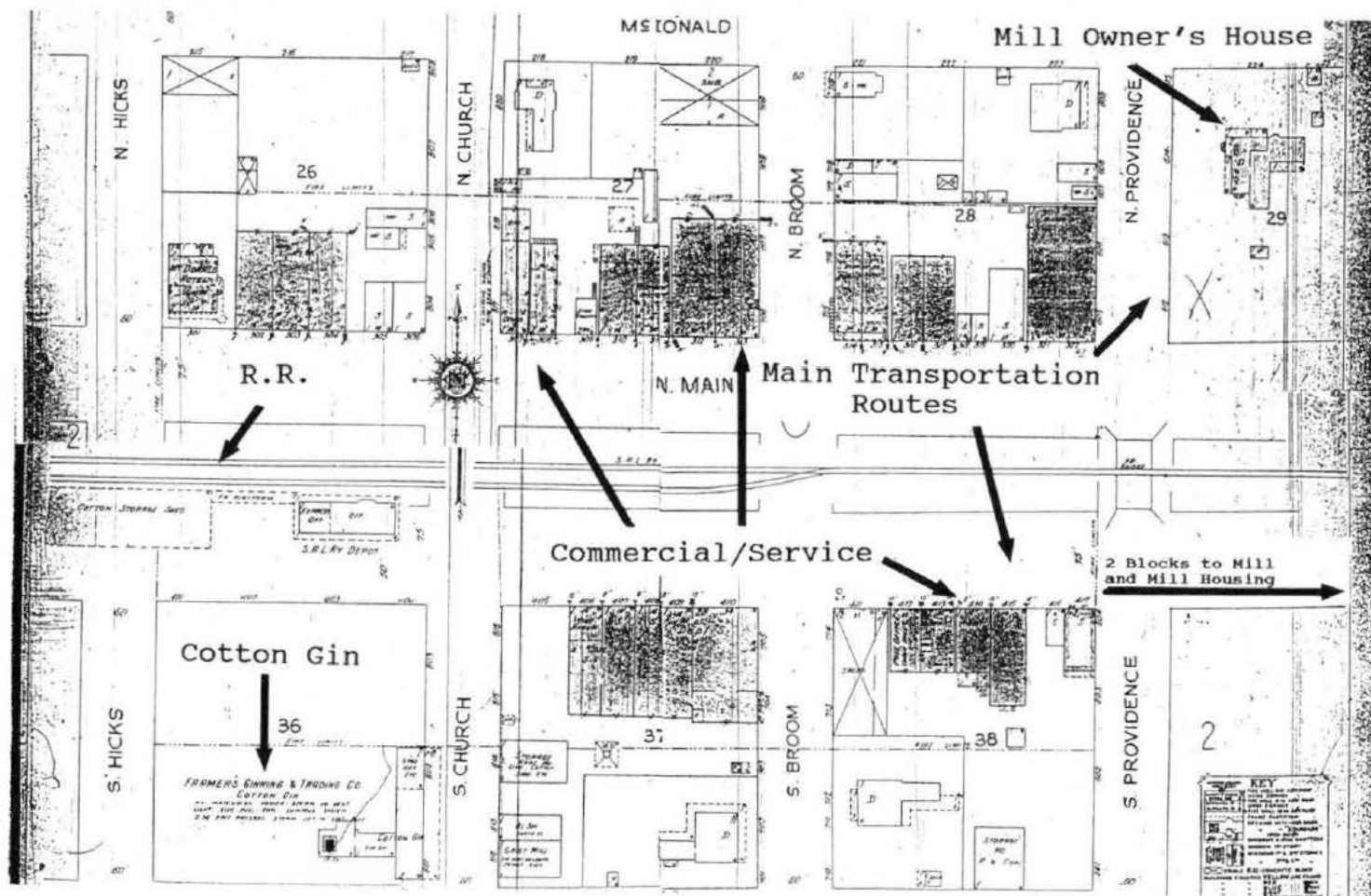


Figure 15. Sanborn map of Waxhaw, N.C., 1925. Text and arrow inserted by author on lower left of map show direction of the cotton mill and mill worker housing. Courtesy Sanborn Insurance Company.

with the Waxhaw indians that inhabited the area¹² Early in that century, with well established trading paths and the decimation of the native population, Scotch-Irish and Pennsylvania Germans began moving in and establishing the small subsistence farms that marked the region. The town's boom period came with the North Carolina Railroad in 1888. Roads in the town provided access to Monroe, Charlotte and South Carolina, with train service to Monroe, Charlotte, South Carolina and beyond. Accessibility, due to the intersection of roads and newly arrived rail lines set Waxhaw apart from other small communities.

While small-scale agriculture continued as the dominant economic force in the Piedmont, textile production became prominent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the late eighteenth hundreds the South began to challenge the textile industry of the Northeast as mills moved closer to southern cotton fields and to the region's cheap, docile, non-union labor.¹³ Tenant farmers struggling to survive moved to town permanently or seasonally for textile jobs. The paternalistic mill town of

¹²Suzanne S. Pickens, Sweet Union: An Architectural and Historical Survey of Union County, North Carolina (Monroe: Union County Board of Commissioners, 1990), 8.

¹³Thomas W. Hanchett, "Charlotte: Suburban Development in the Textile and Trade Center of the Carolinas," in Early Twentieth-Century Suburbs in North Carolina: Essays on History, Architecture and Planning, ed. Catherine Bishir and Lawrence S. Early (Raleigh: Archaeology and Historic Preservation Section, Division of Archives and History, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 1985), 69.

the South became a prominent settlement pattern as the majority of the population was divided between small farms and mill jobs.¹⁴

While some mills were established in larger southern cities, most owners preferred to locate in non-urbanized areas which would expose workers to fewer urban vices. Likewise, the move to a small mill town was a less daunting step for prospective workers relocating from the countryside.¹⁵ This development pattern reenforced the trend of dispersed development which marked agricultural settlements, contributing to the primarily suburban nature of most Southern cities and towns; a phenomenon referred to by historian R. Goldfield as "urbanization without cities."¹⁶

Small towns lucky enough to gain a train depot, like Waxhaw and Monroe, built mills and began to attract subsistence farmers from the countryside with the promise of modern housing and a steady income. By the early twentieth century, mill-worker housing was advertised offering indoor plumbing, electricity, a small yard with garden space, pig stys and community pastures. The new housing and technology offered a more convenient existence. However, the yard,

¹⁴See Glass, "Southern Mill Towns," for a more thorough discussion.

¹⁵Trelease, 328.

¹⁶David R. Goldfield, Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers: Southern City and Region, 1607-1980 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 32.

garden and provision for livestock production integrated the multi-functional site dynamics found on farms; an early working class version of the suburban ideal. It provided the continuation, on a smaller scale, of on-site food production which supplemented workers' diets and sustained the image of independence that had distinguished farm life (see Figure 16).

The Sanborn map above shows the town's organization. The railroad flanked by the businesses and department stores of North and South Main Streets forms a dominant transportation and trade corridor in the town. The most prominent point formed by the intersection of this corridor with Providence Road which runs north through Weddington and into Charlotte. Around this core are homes of prominent business leaders. Directly to the east are the mill and mill-worker's housing. While the town is much more dense than Weddington its central area is likewise formed by dominant overland transportation routes and is home to the town's wealthiest citizens and the focus of services and retail.

Early Twentieth Century Mill-Worker's House Site

Early twentieth century mill houses which remain, retain many aspects of the multi-functional site plan (see Figures 17 and Figure 18). Mill houses were often built

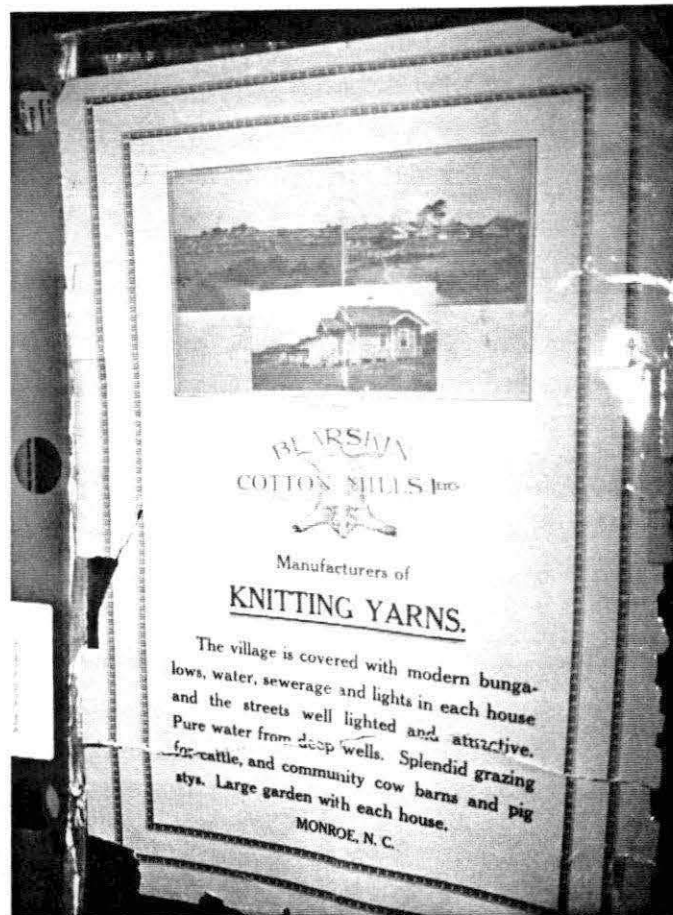


Figure 16. Early twentieth-century advertisement for mill-worker housing in Monroe, N.C. It stresses modern conveniences along with opportunities for agriculture and husbandry.

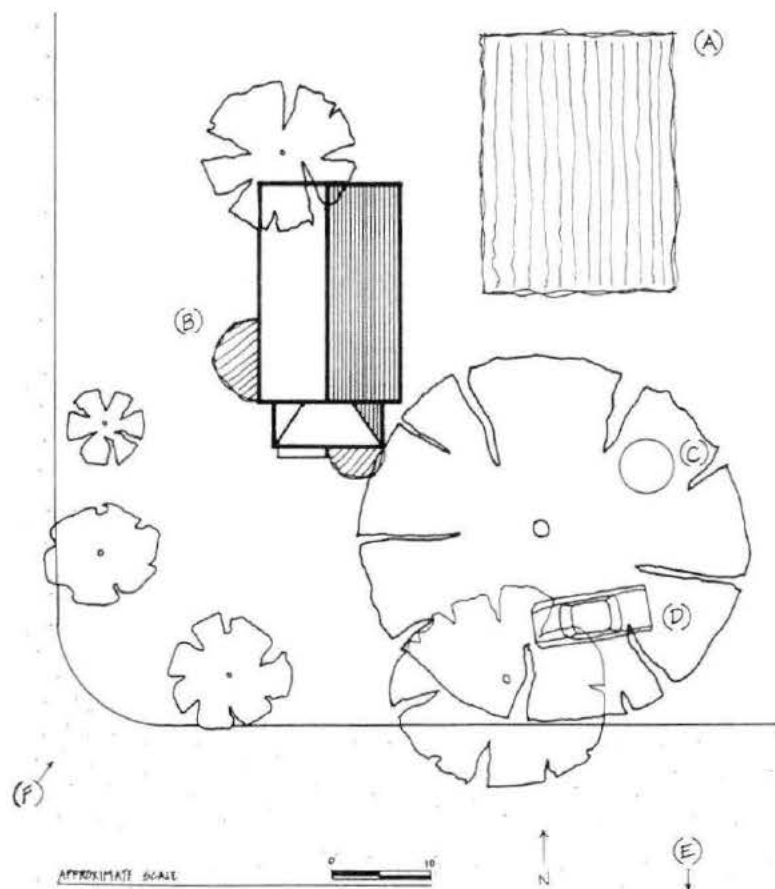


Figure 17. Mill-worker house site plan, Waxhaw, N.C. (A)garden, (B)ornamental plants, (C)table, (D)car, (E)mill, (F)location of camera for following photo.

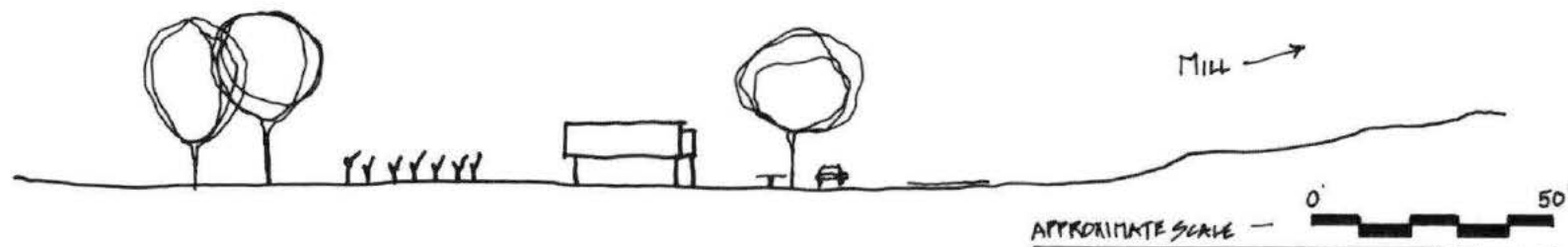


Figure 18. Photo of mill-worker house site and diagrammatic section looking east.

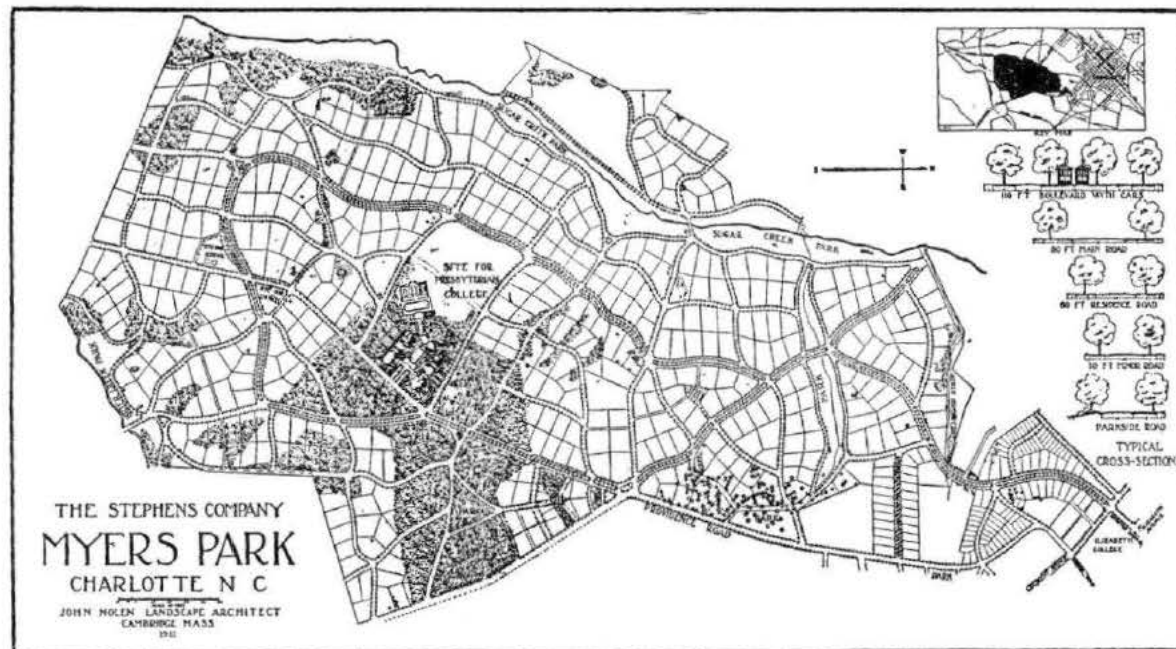
within view of the mill which provided for increased surveillance of the workforce.¹⁷ The house provides private living space while the porch serves as an intermediate social area. The ornamental yard and the garden provide amenity and small-scale food production. The front yard holds a table, chairs and a broken down car, providing living, storage and work space. Although the mill housing site deemphasizes productive activity it remained, as in the agricultural settlement, integral to a larger productive landscape with workers living close to their means of income.

Suburbia: Streetcars, Automobiles and Charlotte's
Suburban Expansion.

A third dominant type of regional residential development is the streetcar suburbs which developed south of Charlotte in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Figure 19 shows John Nolan's 1911 plan for Myers Park, one of Charlotte's most prestigious early neighborhoods.¹⁸ The curvilinear tree-lined streets and detached homes in a park setting defines this romantic streetcar suburb.

¹⁷Glass, 147.

¹⁸Hanchett, 73.



MYERS PARK, CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

Figure 19. John Nolan's 1911 plan for Myers Park, Charlotte, N.C. Reprinted from, John Nolan, New Towns for Old (Boston: Marshall Jones Company, 1927), 102.

Streetcar Suburb Residential Site

Figure 20 and Figure 21 show an early twentieth century residential site in Myers Park. In contrast to agricultural or mill housing sites, these completely exclude work, making the residential site a domestic microcosm of leisure and amenity. The vegetable garden of the mill house is completely replaced with ornamental plantings and the rear yard forms an isolated amenity landscape. Unlike mill houses which are within sight and walking distance of the mill, or the farmsite which forms a seamless landscape of work and domestic life, these homes, served by streetcar, more strictly separate the world of work and leisure. The plan is much more dense, restricting access to the rear yard. With the front porch, deemphasized as a living space and increased emphasis on the rear yard as a private arena social interaction with the larger community is downplayed. The fenced rear yard with patio, greenhouse, grape harbor and ornamental plantings, all under generous shade from oak trees, emphasizes leisure, amenity, privacy and exclusivity far more than earlier plans. The site is at once more accessible and further removed from the town center due to streetcar access to downtown, providing more mobility than early agricultural settlements and mill towns.

The development of Myers Park in Charlotte represents a very important shift in national and statewide socio-economic and technological change. With the prospect of

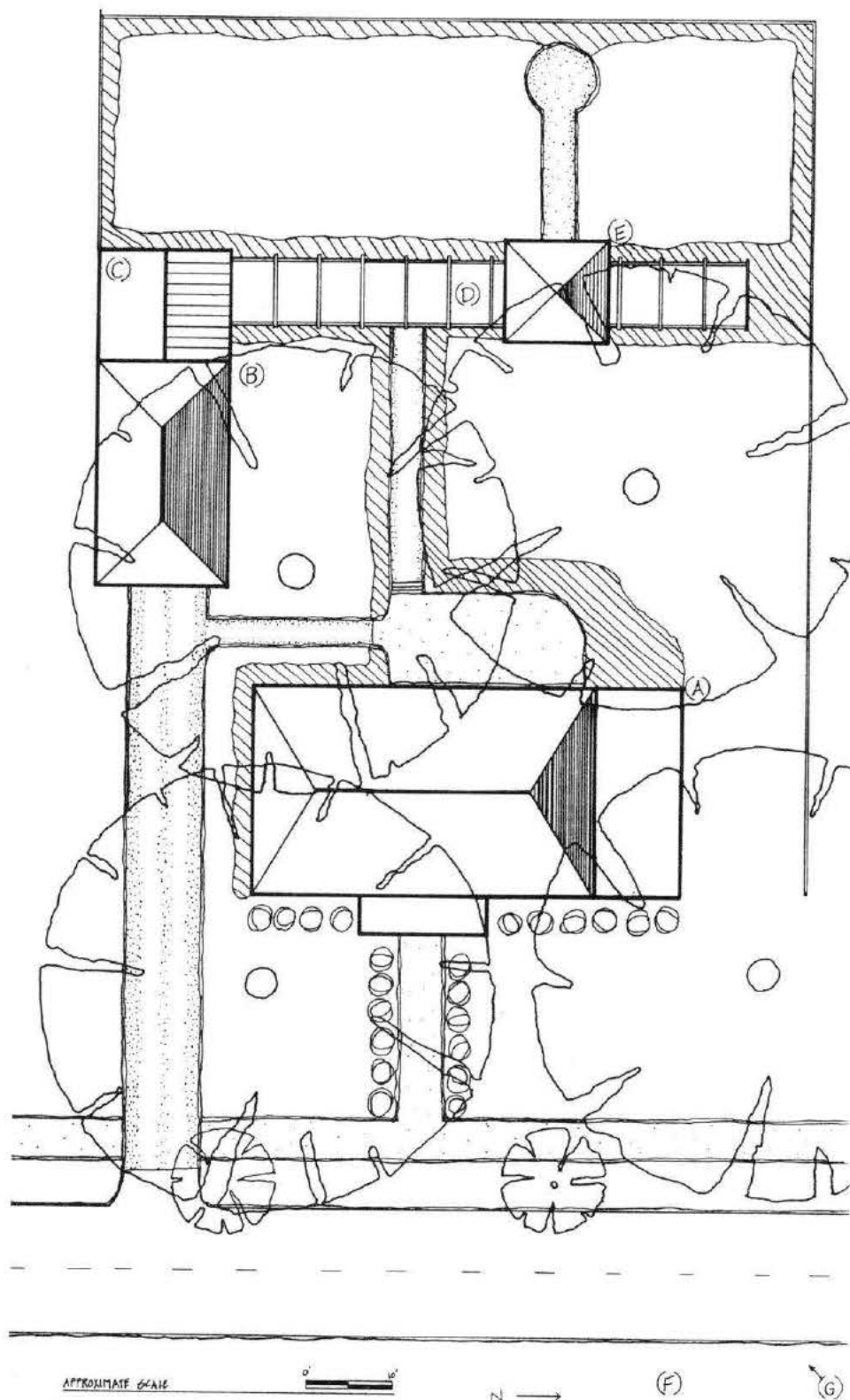


Figure 20. Myers Park site. (A)house, (B)garage, (C)greenhouse, (D)arbor, (E)gazebo, (F)abandoned streetcar line, (G)camera angle for following photo.

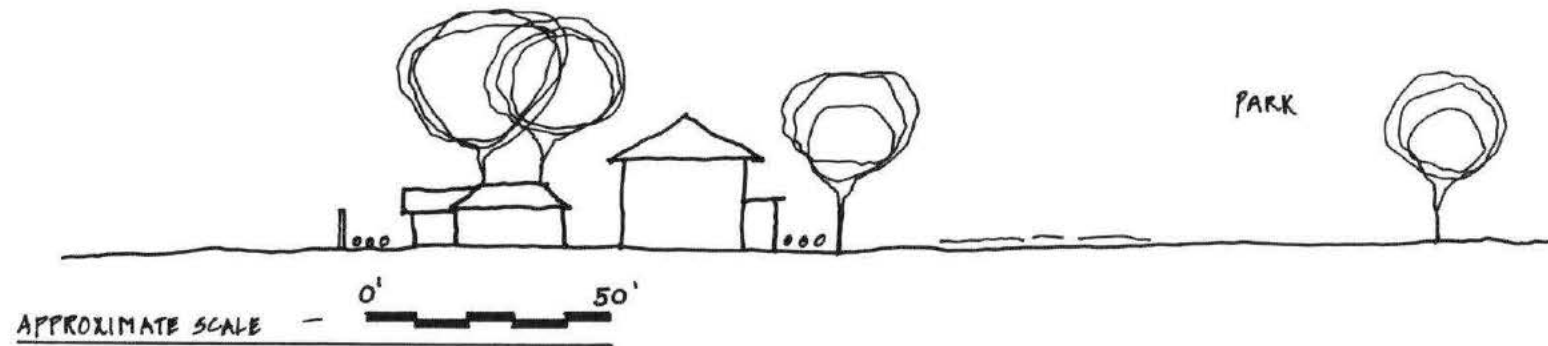


Figure 21. Photo of Myers Park site and diagrammatic section looking north.

overland trade provided by the railroad, Charlotte began its ascent to surpass the state's dominant port city, as the state's trade hub. Charlotte was the state's largest city by 1910, with a population of 34,000.¹⁹ The wealth and mobility generated by improvements in transportation, trade and textile production provided for the rise of a much larger textile elite, and expanding suburban areas.

Conclusion

The residential landscapes discussed above represent three critical stages in the landscape history of the Charlotte area: from a city surrounded by agricultural landscapes in a region of farmers, to the development of railroad mill towns and, finally, to the early stages of suburbanization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Suburbanization in Charlotte has continued throughout the twentieth century with the city experiencing rapid increases in its geographical size. Explosive growth of suburbs in the past several years has pushed suburban development into rural areas and small towns at an alarming rate. As automobile suburbs expand with a growing economy and highway infrastructure, outlying homes that were once

¹⁹Catherine Bishir, and Lawrence S. Early, eds., Early Twentieth-Century Suburbs in North Carolina: Essays on History, Architecture and Planning (Raleigh: Archaeology and Historic Preservation Section, Division of Archives and History, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 1985), 4.

working farms are given over to housing for suburban commuters. In such cases, the sites have shifted away from multi-functional characteristics and more narrowly emphasize the house and site as an isolated arena for domestic life and leisure. Agricultural areas and mill towns lose their value as productive landscapes and gain value for their amenities and their proximity to the retail and employment centers of Charlotte.

As a result of these land use transportation and development patterns, increased transportation demands have prompted the development of a regional transportation plan, the centerpiece of which is a circumferential highway. Along with associated road expansions, the highway strongly encourages the continuation of low-density, auto-dependent fringe development. Vast tracts of land with access to the loop are developing rapidly and nearby agricultural and mill towns continue their shift to bedroom communities for commuters (see Figure 10).

The majority of Charlotte's recent explosion in upscale residential development is occurring south of the city, as it has throughout the twentieth century. Growth also extends into neighboring Union County where lower tax rates, the opportunity to "live in the country" and ready access to Charlotte have spawned pockets of upper-income development in what were once agricultural areas.

CHAPTER IV

CONTEMPORARY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT TRENDS

IN THE STUDY AREA: IMAGES OF TRADITION

AMIDST RAPID SUBURBANIZATION

Introduction

This is home. We are not distracted by psuedosophisticated things. We don't go to power lunches or drink martinis. It's an environment in which you can know your people and your friends.¹

Despite the pronounced physical and socio-economic transition taking place in the Charlotte metropolitan area, references to tradition are commonly mingled with the rhetoric of growth and development. As large metropolitan areas in the Northeast decline and Charlotte's economy continues to grow, the city has experienced substantial population increases. The stereotypical image of a traditional Southern lifestyle - a slow-paced life of gentility, hospitality, and leisurely evenings on the veranda - helps entice potential homebuyers fleeing ailing

¹Cathy Newman, "North Carolina's Piedmont: On a Fast Break," National Geographic 187 (March 1995): 127. Hugh McColl, President of the country's second largest bank, Nations Bank, on why Charlotte was chosen as its national headquarters.

suburbs throughout the nation. For many, the city's pro-business, pro-suburb and pro-automobile climate offers another chance to achieve the suburban ideal promised by postwar development, but with a veneer of tradition which places additional emphasis on stability and security.

While the imagery is appealing to many, it tends to obscure, as did popular images in the postwar era, critical land use and transportation issues which will determine the area's development patterns for years to come. If not seriously addressed, the persistence of large lot zoning, low density and auto-dependent development will inevitably undermine the lifestyle touted by local policy-makers and developers. The following is an examination of some of the popular images which dominate contemporary development in the study area and the role they play in obscuring these critical planning issues.

Contemporary trends in planning and design discussed in Chapter II - such as neo-traditionalism, historic preservation and postmodernism - influence planning and design, to varying degrees in the Charlotte Metropolitan Area and nostalgia is a common marketing tool. In Charlotte's South District, it takes the form of historicist architecture set in exclusive automobile suburbs. In Union County towns like Weddington, the idealized rural landscape and image of a traditional southern community helps attract development and shape planning policy. In Lake Park, the

development which relies most heavily on the marketing power of nostalgia, the promise of living in "yesterday's village today" attracts homebuyers by offering both small town American life and exclusivity.

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg South District: Automobile Suburbs and Revivalist Architecture

Despite the increased popular interest in what are generally seen as reactions to the shortcomings of modernist planning and design, development continues in the mold of postwar suburbanization. With a strong regional emphasis on automobile transportation, as evidenced by the proposed thoroughfare in Figure 10, and increasing pressure from suburbanization, Charlotte/Mecklenburg planners warn that the area's

principal weakness appears to be holding to a growth pattern that can be characterized as rural/suburban, and that is: biased to the south and east of Charlotte-Mecklenburg [the study area of this thesis]; limited in its ability to meet changing population and job needs; institutionalized in the present zoning pattern; and likely to spill over into adjacent jurisdictions. . . . If a rural or suburban vision of the future dominates, we are not likely to retain the quality of life to which we are accustomed.²

The reasoning continues,

It is generally agreed that Charlotte-Mecklenburg's livability is a key factor in attracting business investment to the area. It is generally agreed that this livability is a result of the high quality of our environment and architecture. We must work hard to

²Charlotte/Mecklenburg Planning Commission, "Generalized Land Plan 2005" (Charlotte: Charlotte/Mecklenburg Planning Commission, 1985), 8.

maintain this quality if we are to remain a livable ,
economically healthy community. . . . we must give
careful attention to maintaining our
tree canopy . . .
historic preservation and neighborhood conservation;
provisions for open land . . .
stormwater management. . . .³

Similarly, in the words of UNC-Charlotte urban design and
architecture professor, David Walters, the most outspoken
critic of Charlotte's booming suburbanization,

If Charlotte's objective is to establish itself as
an attractive and sensibly planned city in the
dawning world of the twenty-first century - a
regional and national leader no less - its been
going about it in ways that are inappropriate,
downright perverse and, not to mince words, -just
plain dumb.⁴

Most suburban growth has occurred south of Uptown
Charlotte since streetcar suburbs like Myers Park arose,
just north of what is now the South District, at the turn of
the century.⁵ The South District, covering an area of
approximately 86 square miles, has consistently developed
with homes on lots ranging from one-third acre to one acre.
In the 1980s the district added 5,100 hundred new residents
each year.⁶ While the city and county attempt to shift
some of the expansion to other portions of the county,

³Ibid., 20.

⁴David Walters, "Fighting Our Suburban Virus,"
Creative Loafing, 17 September 1994, 11.

⁵Charlotte/Mecklenburg Planning Commission, "South
District Plan" (Charlotte: Charlotte/Mecklenburg Planning
Commission, 1993), 1.

⁶Ibid., 2.

growth in the South District continues to outpace planning projections.⁷ Population projections for 1990-2015 predict a 38% increase from 141,711 to 195,000.⁸

The Charlotte Metro Plan 2015 and the South District Plan both express concerns regarding these trends, thus reflecting a shift from postwar planning rhetoric which encouraged constant change and new architecture to contemporary trends which stress stability and/or more controlled growth. They hope to establish "standards to protect areas that are already developed" and "adhere to the principle that the more developed and established a neighborhood, the greater the burden of proof is upon the proponent of change."¹⁰ Increased residential density and mixed use, less auto dependence, more contextually compatible urban design, historic preservation in older Charlotte neighborhoods are all recommended by the planning staff.

However, contradictions and ironies between policy recommendations and the actual landscape abound: Between warnings in the 2015 plan regarding low density development on one hand, and concurrent large-scale highway projects including the beltway, on the other; between calls for

⁷Ibid., 4.

⁸Ibid., 5.

⁹Ibid., 22.

¹⁰Ibid., 42.

preserving the character of South District residential areas, coexistent with the recognition that the rural/suburban land use pattern must be abandoned;¹¹ and, between recommendations for historic preservation and alternative planning in the face of explosive suburban development which, as if to stylistically nod to those insights, mimics the revivalist architecture of streetcar suburbs which local proponents of New Urbanism take as models.

While popular sentiment, designers and planners show an increasing interest in historic architecture, precedent and context, revivalist design and preservation is often used, not as an alternative to high modernist development

¹¹Charlotte/Mecklenburg Planning Commission, "South District Plan" (Charlotte: Charlotte/Mecklenburg Planning Commission, 1993); Local Planner, interview by author, 20 March, 1995, Charlotte, notes.

South District residents have been notorious for fighting increased housing densities. Most district plan recommendations for preserving and protecting existing neighborhoods amounts to suggested rezonings which will prevent "inappropriate intensification," that is, prevent increasing densities and mixed uses, in this area predominated by post war automobile suburbs.

Likewise, at least one dilapidated residential area, the "Allison Lane Community," became the focus of a historic preservation drive when South District residents realized historic status could block multi-family housing in a proposed mixed use area. Preservation in this case is used as a tool to fight important land use changes, rather than as a tool to improve the area's environment.

Increased residential densities (3-4 units per acre) are now allowed throughout the district for new construction but not for intensification in existing residential areas. New construction along the Providence Road corridor, however, does not reflect the allowance for increased densities (see Figure 24 and Figure 26).

patterns, but as an image of tradition which suggests stability in a landscape most clearly defined by extremely rapid change. At a time when nostalgic images of the past are idealized, outlying historic landscapes are gobbled up and replaced with fragmentary architectural references which mask and support, rather than challenge, development based on postwar transportation and land use patterns (see Figure 22 and Figure 23). Similar to the quote above from Hugh McColl, himself a driving force behind Charlotte's rapid economic transformation, revolutionary changes are dressed in images generally associated with the past or with traditional small town life.

The image of architectural tradition and the stability it implies, coupled with socio-economic exclusivity, and private security guards, are dominant aspects of South District subdivisions like Providence Country Club. Complex rooflines, out-of-scale Palladian windows, exaggerated arched entryways and false quoins are dominant motifs. Much more ornamental than the low, simple lines of postwar suburbia, the homes in Providence Country Club illustrate the rejection of modern architecture, just as the development's exclusivity and hired police force, reveal a distrust of contemporary public life.

In responding to popular stylistic trends however, Providence Country Club does not offer an alternative to modernist urbanism and architecture, but a continuation of



Figure 22. Typical South District commercial and residential architecture.

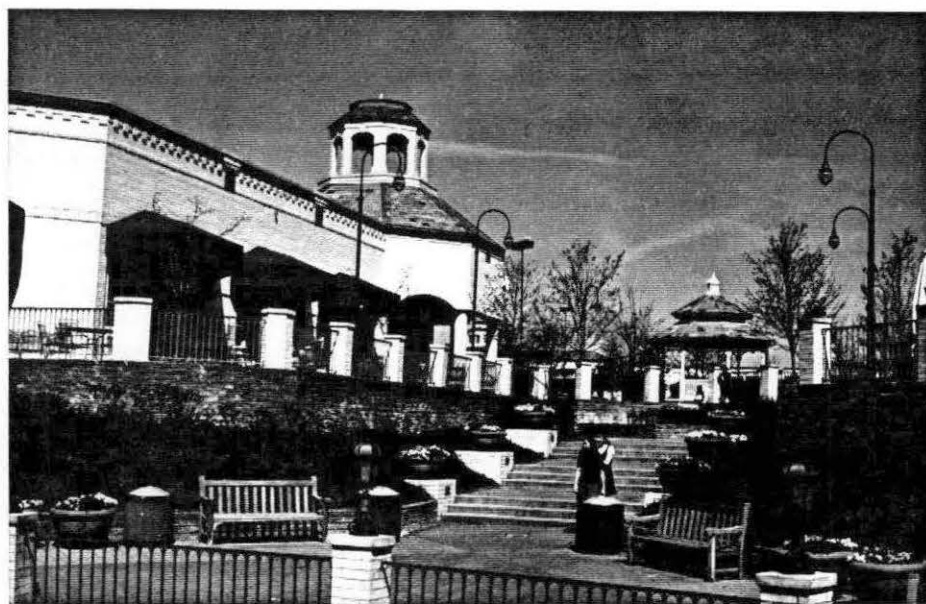


Figure 23. Typical South District commercial and residential architecture.

postwar suburbanization in an alternative historicist package. Figures 24 and 25 show the site characteristics are typical of, although much larger and more ostentatious than, those of a postwar automobile suburb. The large house set in an ornamental lawn, with emphasis on automobile access is far removed from shopping and the work place. The rear yard is reserved for private recreation. The site itself merges seamlessly into a larger amenity landscape of golf courses and suburban homes.

The subdivision master plan (see Figure 26) calls for low density, exclusively residential development amidst wide streets terminated in cul-de-sacs with little consideration for pedestrian amenities. These features, along with socio-economic exclusivity, environmental degradation from fertilizer-intensive ornamental lawns and golf courses, give Providence Country Club all the characteristics cited as most problematic about American suburbanization. The ultimate, social, economic and environmental implications, however, are disregarded for an emphasis on safety and stability supported by the romantic architecture which dominates the subdivision. The local historic landscape and modest architecture of nearby agricultural communities, in contrast to more prominent historic areas of the South, could not provide the same combination of tradition, opulence and exclusivity upon which the development relies. A fabricated architecture of tradition is required to create

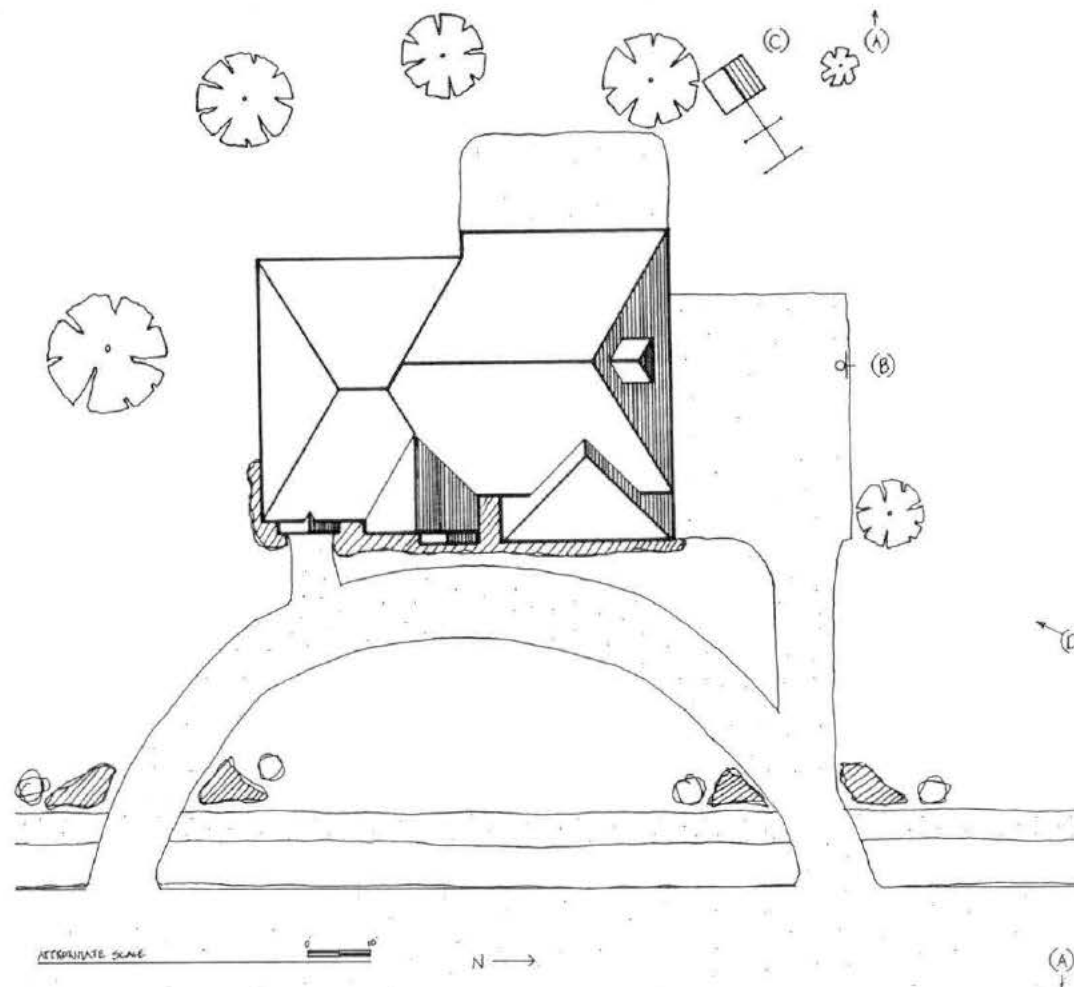


Figure 24. Site plan of typical residence in Providence Country Club. (A)golf course, (B)basketball hoop, (C)swing set, (D)camera angle for following photo.

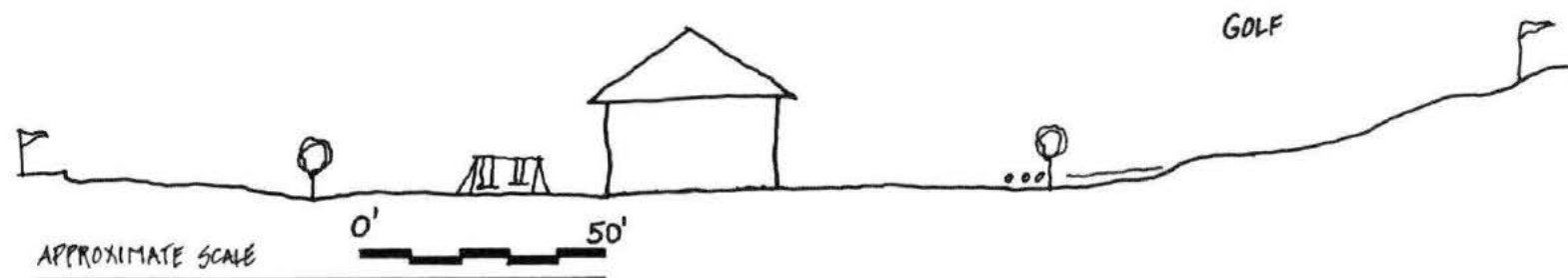


Figure 25. Photo of Providence Country Club site and diagrammatic section looking south.

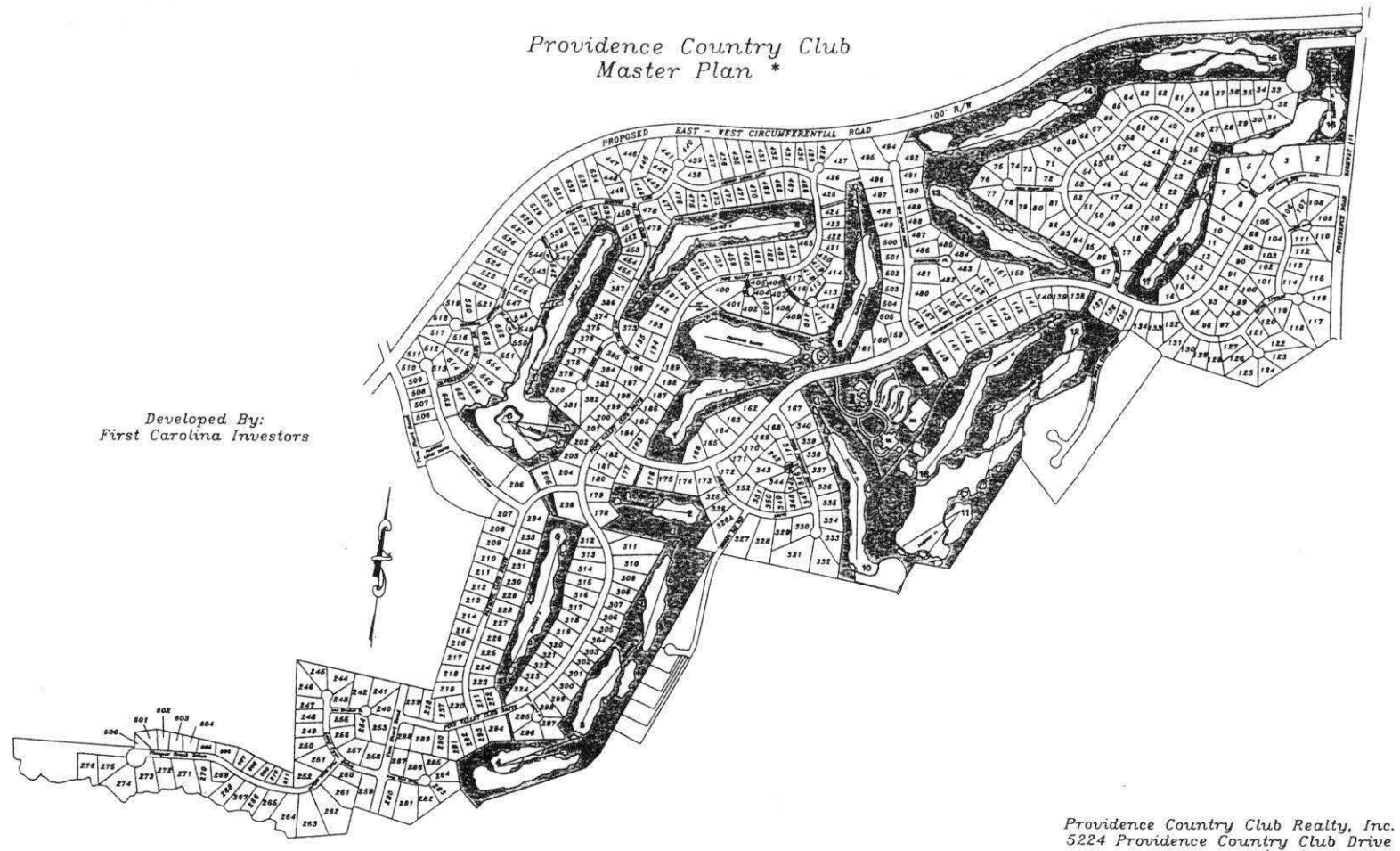


Figure 26. Providence Country Club master plan. Courtesy Providence Country Club Realty, Inc.

a landscape marketable to an upper middle-class jaded by modernism but pulled, nonetheless, by the lifestyle provided by an automobile suburb.

Suburban Development in Union County: The Idealization of the Countryside and Small Town America

Union County also shows an increasing interest in marketing tradition and small town qualities to stimulate economic and suburban development. With 268 subdivisions in the county, most concentrated along the western border adjacent to Mecklenburg county, it has become a prominent bedroom community of Charlotte. Promotional information from the county's Chamber of Commerce is dominated by themes of history, family and traditional rural life, all integrated with opportunities to live a contemporary suburban lifestyle. For example, the opening of a Chamber promotional brochure claims,

Despite - and sometimes because of - our growth, Union County is proud and protective of its heritage. Our roots run deep in the rich farmland that families have tilled for generations, and we cherish our relaxed lifestyle, family ties and long-standing traditions. We welcome your participation in your new community. . . .¹²

And, from another Chamber promotional brochure,

Just 20 minutes from the hectic pace of uptown Charlotte, the Carolina's leading city, thrives a county, a community, where life slows to a family

¹²Union County Chamber of Commerce, "First Impressions Newcomer's Guide: Union County Chamber of Commerce 1995-96" (Monroe, North Carolina: Union County Chamber of Commerce, 1995), 4.

tempo. Almost within sight of city skyscrapers are green pastures, woods and quiet streets, where little league and neighborhood cookouts take precedence over big business and power lunches. A community where all of the hustle and bustle of a cosmopolitan lifestyle are just a hop away from a quiet backyard. That place is Union County, NC. (see Figure 27)¹³

Historic preservation has become an important tool for sustaining this image. Downtown Monroe has received ... million dollars in private funding to revitalize its downtown economy, with a focus on facade restoration. The town of Waxhaw sees the preservation of the "historic setting and small town atmosphere," as a primary vehicle in protecting the local quality of life and improving the economy.¹⁴ Waxhaw's history as the oldest settlement in the county has given it a jump on marketing history as an economic development tool (see Figure 28). As a result,

It seems like every month there's an event - a Civil War reenactment, Scottish Games, antique shows, house tours, fire department fundraisers, a historical drama. The Waxhaw historic District is on the National Register of Historic Places, and residents and town government are also working on beautification plans.

As previously described, the Union County town of Weddington was a typical Piedmont agricultural community. Many historic buildings and traces of the agricultural

¹³Morris Phifer, "Union County: Charlotte's Best Neighborhood" (Monroe: Union County Chamber of Commerce, no date), promotional brochure.

¹⁴Centralina Council of Governments, "Town of Waxhaw Strategic Draft Action Plan" (Charlotte: Centralina Council of Governments, 1989).

Welcome Home to Monroe.

AND WELCOME TO OUR HOMETOWN COMFORTS.



Brew some coffee. Bake a pie. Make microwave popcorn. Read a good book by a cozy lamp. Watch your favorite TV show. Play a computer game. Or chat with friends on the front porch in the glow of twilight.

The City of Monroe takes special pride in our municipal electric system that has been providing power to our citizens since 1900. We welcome you as a new electric customer and invite you to enjoy the many benefits of our hometown utility. Always remember, we care, because we live here too.

Monroe Electric Department 704-282-4511

Figure 27. Welcome home to Monroe. Power company advertisement. Courtesy Union County Chamber of Commerce.



Figure 28. Scenes from Waxhaw, N.C.

landscape remain and town officials rely on the appeal of its idealized rural landscape to attract residential development and to shape planning policy.

The community's location has been attractive due to its rural character and close proximity to Charlotte and other towns for decades. In the past ten years it has increasingly become a low tax haven and bedroom community for upper-income commuters. Town officials emphasize the preservation of its qualities as a traditional rural landscape but, paradoxically, frame land use policies which ultimately exclude working agricultural landscapes and low to moderate income families, while increasing reliance on the automobile.

In 1983, with Charlotte rapidly expanding to the south, fear of inevitable annexation and ensuing higher taxes prompted locals to push for the incorporation of Weddington. The incorporated town encompassed approximately 6 square miles with a population of about 750 and planned for a low tax rate, no services and no further annexation.¹⁵ However, soon after incorporation, with the election of a new town council the Town began an aggressive program of annexation which rapidly changed the its demographics and geography. With an eye on the meager tax base provided by the small population and little developed land, upper-middle

¹⁵Bob Glendy, "Weddington Growing Too Fast, Some Residents Say," The Charlotte Observer, 10 October 1985, 3B.

class subdivisions to the northeast were targeted for annexation. Additional subdivisions also developed rapidly. By 1993 Weddington was the second largest town in the county, encompassing 13 square miles, 4,000 people and 27 subdivisions.¹⁶

With the combination of strategic annexations and the influx of upper income suburbanites, Weddington now has the state's highest average per capita income. The 1990 census indicates an average household income of over \$47,000 within a 3-mile radius of the intersection of NC 16 and NC 84. Over thirteen percent of the population makes over \$75,000 and 24.3 make 50,000-74,000. While the strategic plan for Union County says the county has an "Excellent variety of housing values," the average house value in Weddington is \$200,000.¹⁷ The political base has likewise shifted to reflect the concerns of upper-income suburbanites rather than those of a waning agricultural community.

From a Productive to an Amenity Landscape: Suburban
Development in Weddington.

In contrast to the early settlement pattern which integrated work and domestic life on individual sites with a larger productive landscape, Weddington is now, like Myers

¹⁶Beverly Brock, "Weddington deputy stays out and about," Enquirer Journal, 5 July 1993, 1A.

¹⁷Lynette Blair, "Weddington: Growth Pushed Charter," The Charlotte Observer, August 9 1990, 10B.

Park or Providence Country Club, dominated by suburban sites which stress privacy and leisure and are set within a larger amenity landscape. While some old farm sites and other historic buildings remain (which has prompted the State to consider nominating a portion of Weddington as a National Historic District)¹⁸ the character of most have shifted to suburban rather than agricultural uses.

Increasing average incomes and selective preservation of a few prominent buildings in the town's historic center helps sustain the image of tradition which, in places like Providence Country Club, had to be fabricated from a *tabula rasa*. The Thomas Wrenn House (ca. 1894) was recently purchased by the Town and converted to use as the Town Hall. The Weddington School (ca. 1932 after previous school buildings burned) was purchased by the Weddington United Methodist Church and converted to use as a sanctuary. The William Hemby House (1919), when negotiations are complete will be converted to use as a restaurant (see Figure 29).

New architecture has also been enlisted to support the town's historicist rural theme through postmodern stylistic trends. Grandiose historicist homes signal the rise of a new suburban gentry but display a lavishness and grandeur

¹⁸Suzanne Pickens and James R. Snodgrass, A Historical Architectural Survey Report for Widening NC 16 from NC 84 to Existing Four Lanes, Mecklenburg and Union Counties, North Carolina (Raleigh: The Federal Highway Administration and The North Carolina Department of Transportation, 1993), TIP No. U-2510.



Figure 29. Historic architecture in Weddington, N.C.
Town Hall, top. Hemby House, bottom.

which never existed on the area's modest farms. Likewise, press releases and local officials stress the architectural compatibility of a new local strip mall to nearby historic homes and churches. "It doesn't look like a strip mall," explains Weddington zoning administrator, John Feezor.¹⁹ According to a press release, it offers, "A Turn of the Century Shopping Experience"²⁰(see Figure 30).

In public statements and in planning documents local officials, reflecting the sentiments of many new arrivals to the area, argue the most effective way to retain their quality of life is by preserving the town's rural character through limitations on growth.²¹ Newly arrived residents emphasize the importance of retaining the highly idealized rural landscape and echo themes which have dominated the history of American suburbanization. Joanna Silva moved to Weddington in 1994:

I like driving down Providence Road and seeing all the goats and cows and churches. . . . I would rather not have the growth. . . . We moved here because we thought it was on the edge - not

¹⁹John Feezor, Weddington, North Carolina Land Use Officer, interview by author, 22 March 1995, Weddington, North Carolina, notes.

²⁰Jeffrey Ball, "Retail Development Hits Weddington," Charlotte Observer, 29 September 1994, 1U and 6U.

²¹"Growth" is narrowly defined as either commercial development or residential development with less than a one acre minimum lot size. Sprawling residential development throughout the town is encouraged while "growth" is discouraged.



Figure 30. Neo-historic architecture in Weddington, N.C.

crowded but near enough to Charlotte for conveniences.²²

Bill Powis moved to Weddington in 1991:

We moved here from the Arboretum area [approximately 5 miles north on NC 16] to get away from the crowds and the potentials of crime . . . We moved here to get away from progress. . . . We like it because it's quiet and people have more regard for each other's property. . . . Progress takes away from the rural atmosphere. . . . We want to keep it the way it is.²³

Maria Burchfield moved to Weddington in July 1994:

Change is good, but not if you are trying to get away from the turmoil of the city. . . . I like Weddington now - it has a touch of the country and a touch of the city, too.

And, in the words of the former mayor, "Keeping our rural atmosphere - that's the key for us."²⁴

The current mayor also evokes history and pastoralism to justify the message, "we need to dig in our heels and maintain our commitment to . . . maintaining our rural environment."²⁵ He portrays himself as a rancher "in the heart of Weddington," returning to his ancestral homeland on Charlotte's suburban fringe. After growing up in Myers Park, Howie explains he was

²²Delbridge, Brenda. "Growth Closing in on Quiet Weddington." The Charlotte Observer, 29 March 1995, 4U.

²³Ibid., 1U.

²⁴Steve Lyttle, "A town at a Crossroads, Weddington hopes to remain rural - as traffic rushes by," The Charlotte Observer, 17 December 1991, 1U.

²⁵Linda Hastings, "Watching over Weddington's flock: Mayor Ed Howie works for his town's future," The Charlotte Observer, 5 March 1995, 1U.

lured [to Weddington] by the rural setting and by a rich heritage. Both his grandparents were born in Union County . . . he bought some horses and cattle for his 20-acre spread and turned his weekends over to riding and ranching. . . . "I wanted to be in the country," Howie said.²⁶

The idealization of a rural landscape and the traditional lifestyle it represents are dominant rhetorical tools used by local officials (see Figure 31). However, actual historic preservation is not a concern. As in Providence Country Club, the appearance of tradition is more appealing than actual historic landscapes or buildings. In Weddington's case, the image is supported by a few prominent historic buildings near the town center, and throughout a larger geographic area by a neo-historic architecture of the suburban gentry.

Because Weddington's planning policies rely heavily on automobile dependence, state mandated preservation of the town's historic center is in direct conflict with the Town's more pressing concern: road construction. With no provision for alternative transportation, minimal commercial development, and explosive low-density residential growth, Weddington relies solely on the automobile for residents commuting to and from Charlotte. Traffic congestion is increasing rapidly and the Town sees the "1994 Thoroughfare

²⁶Linda Hastings, "Watching over Weddington's flock: Mayor Ed Howie works for his town's future," The Charlotte Observer, 5 March 1995, 1U.



Figure 31. Weddington Town Seal. An idealized rural landscape.

Plan," which prioritizes the widening of NC 16 through the town's western area, as critical to the accessibility which has generated its rapid suburban development and a growing tax base.

The romantic images of a home on the range obscure the land use, transportation and socio-economic implication of a zoning ordinance which has resulted from the myopic emphasis on preserving an idealized "rural environment" (see Figure 32). "In order to provide for a healthful, rural environment," it states, "residential development must continue in a large lot, low density fashion." There are provisions for large lot (1 acre minimum) residential development, two small zones for business development and no provision for industrial development or multi-family housing in a town of twelve square miles.

Under the guise of preserving a rural environment, the zoning ordinance reinforces the area's shift from an agricultural community to an exclusive, auto-dependent suburb. Housing is severely restricted with virtually no options for low and middle income families. While agricultural uses are allowed in residential districts, zoning restrictions and rapid development of farmland assure, as current farmers retire, agriculture will no longer be introduced into the town as an occupation. Likewise, rigid restrictions on storage of machinery and materials associated with home occupations allow



Figure 32. Rapid development at NC 16 and NC 84 in Weddington, N.C. Shopping center, top center. William Hemby House to right. Corner store, center, recently replaced. Former school, lower left. Church, middle right. Courtesy Davie Henshaw.

professionals to work in their homes but assure that the town's recently acquired gentility is not marred by obvious signs of labor. The area's "landscape of socially obsolete . . . vernacular"²⁷ traditions such as multi-functional yards, are cleared from the landscape as the ordinance codifies the image of an agricultural community, minus the signs of labor which sustained the early twentieth century agricultural economy. Rather than preserving a rural environment, the zoning ordinance reinforces the town's continuing late twentieth century shift from a waning agricultural area to a exclusive residential community.

The zoning ordinance for the Town of Weddington exhibits many of the practices which have encouraged daunting contemporary urban problems: exclusive zoning, economic segregation, rapid development of farmland, and auto dependence. Much of the rhetoric and policies utilized in Weddington to create an exclusive suburb have been prominent since Americans first began suburbanizing in the late nineteenth century in subdivisions like Myers Park: Bringing together the best of the town and country, excluding those considered undesirable, increasing length of commutes, etc. And, like postwar suburbs, Weddington depends solely on extensive road construction and exclusive zoning. However, unlike postwar suburbanization, which stressed modernism and new architecture, Weddington markets

²⁷Zukin, 215.

itself with its image as a traditional rural town. Restoration and reuse of historic buildings by the Town and the church, postmodern residential and commercial architecture with historicist themes, all show a stronger emphasis on the broad appeal of the past over that of the future in marketing suburbia.

Lake Park Village: Yesterday's Village, Today!

Wordsworth saw that when we become uncertain in a world of apparent strangers who yet, decisively, have a common effect on us, and when forces that will alter our lives are moving all around us in apparently external and unrecognizable forms, we can retreat, for security, into a deep subjectivity, or we can look around us for social pictures, social signs, social messages, to which, characteristically, we try to relate as individuals but so as to discover, in some form, community.²⁸

Raymond Williams

Just the whole concept of community turned us on. . . . Most of the people we've met here have the same type of desires, objectives, interests. You really want to have like-minded people.²⁹

Bob Saks, New Jersey
native and resident of
Lake Park since 1993.

Whereas the Town of Weddington emphasizes an idealized rural landscape to justify planning policy, Lake Park Village idealizes small town life. The small town, as

²⁸Williams, 295.

²⁹Jeffrey Ball, "Craving Community? Worried About Crime? Retreat to Lake Park -- and step back in time," Charlotte Observer, 26 February 1995, 1.

Williams argued, has come to hold similar power over our imagination as the idealized countryside³⁰(see Figure 33). Lake Park Village is marketed as a neo-traditional community but relies more on a blend of replication and typical postwar suburban design to make the development appealing (see Figure 34). Emphasized, above all, are community, safety and nostalgia.

Mathisen Properties, the developer of Lake Park, stresses the need to re-establish a sense of community, which marked small town America. As Chris Mathisen explains, "we started thinking about it [an alternative to suburban design] in mid-80s, We felt like there was a need for subdivisions to be done with more community atmosphere. . . . "³¹

Other concerns associated with neotraditionalism - increased density, less auto-dependence, increasing mixed-use - are secondary to this primary concern. These alternative design techniques are aimed at creating a vessel within which stronger community ties can be fostered and

³⁰Williams, 297.

The old urban working-class community; the delights of corner-shops, gas-lamps, horsecabs, trams, piestalls: all gone it seems, in successive generations. These urban ways and objects seem to have, in the literature, the same real emotional substance as the brooks, commons, hedges, cottages, festivals of the rural scene.

³¹Chris Mathisen, Owner, Mathisen Company, interview by author, 4 August 1995, Indian Trail, North Carolina, tape recording.

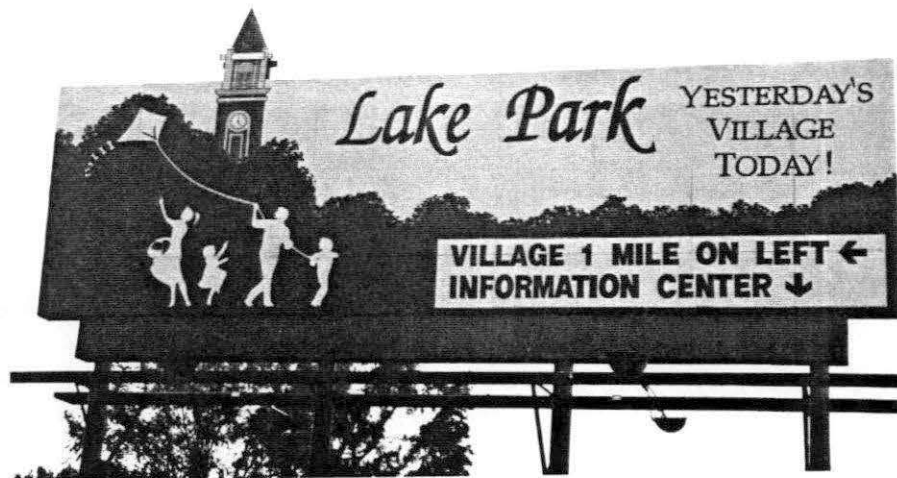


Figure 33. Sign for Lake Park Village, heading south on NC 74. View of the development's trademark clock tower.



Figure 34. Aerial of Lake Park looking west. Row houses, clock tower, park, upper right. Areas north and east to be retail. Entry from the south, terminates at clock tower. Courtesy Davie Henshaw.

therefore, according to Mathisen, ameliorate our most pressing social concerns.

If we want to do something for American life today, we need to make sure that our architecture . . . is focusing on that over-arching purpose, and that is, community. That's where your safety is, [that is where] your security is gonna be. That's where you are going to have a settlement of the social ills that we have. It's gonna be through people becoming community again. . . . [and] get[ting] out of their houses, holding hands with one another. . . . That's what's gratifying to me [about building Lake Park]. To see those kids out there. To see people walking, riding, jogging.

Like Mathisen's argument, the marketing for Lake Park corresponds to national trends which see historic precedent as an alternative to contemporary architectural, urban and social problems. The development's promotional material emphasizes the role of suburbanization in eroding American communities. A promotional film for Lake Park presents still shots and film footage of extreme examples of suburban sprawl and highway congestion. The narrator summarizes increasingly popular sentiment regarding automobile suburbs.

For many years America's suburbs have grown so fast, with little thought to quality of life. After World War II we mostly built plain streets and row upon row of houses. They all seemed to look alike. When the newness wore off and the landscape became endless miles of housing sprawl, we found that quality of life was soon lost to congestion, strip shopping centers and high costs. One reason has been that most planning simply focused upon zoning, with larger areas set aside for housing but separated from our work and convenient shopping. Communities became splintered. For years people have been forced to get in their cars and drive almost everywhere.

Sprawl, congestion, exclusive zoning and fragmented

community life are dominant themes in the introduction and the images recall the "depressing, brutal, ugly, unhealthy and spiritually degrading" environments berated by Kunstler. In contrast, Lake Park is offered as an alternative which allows one to relive the "grand days" of small town America.

Lake Park consists of approximately 500 acres of land, approximately 250 acres have thus far been developed. It is about one mile from NC 74, a major arterial which extends southeast from Charlotte's downtown for about fifteen miles before reaching the turn off for Lake Park (see Figure 10). The area thus far developed consists of Lake Park's trademark clocktower plaza which is on axis with the entry to the south and with a colonial revival community center and a park gazebo to the east and west. Two retail shopping areas, one east of the clock tower and the other south of the park are under construction and will establish a mixed use center. Five row houses have been constructed along a two-block strip which will eventually form a higher density two block-long row meant to recall the urban setting of Charleston, South Carolina. This area is surrounded by a larger segment of more standard suburban homes (see Figure 35 and Figure 36).

The row house concept, with varied designs and sizes, densely placed houses close to the street, with alley access, and front porches creates a pleasant pedestrian environment which will improve as the three-block infill

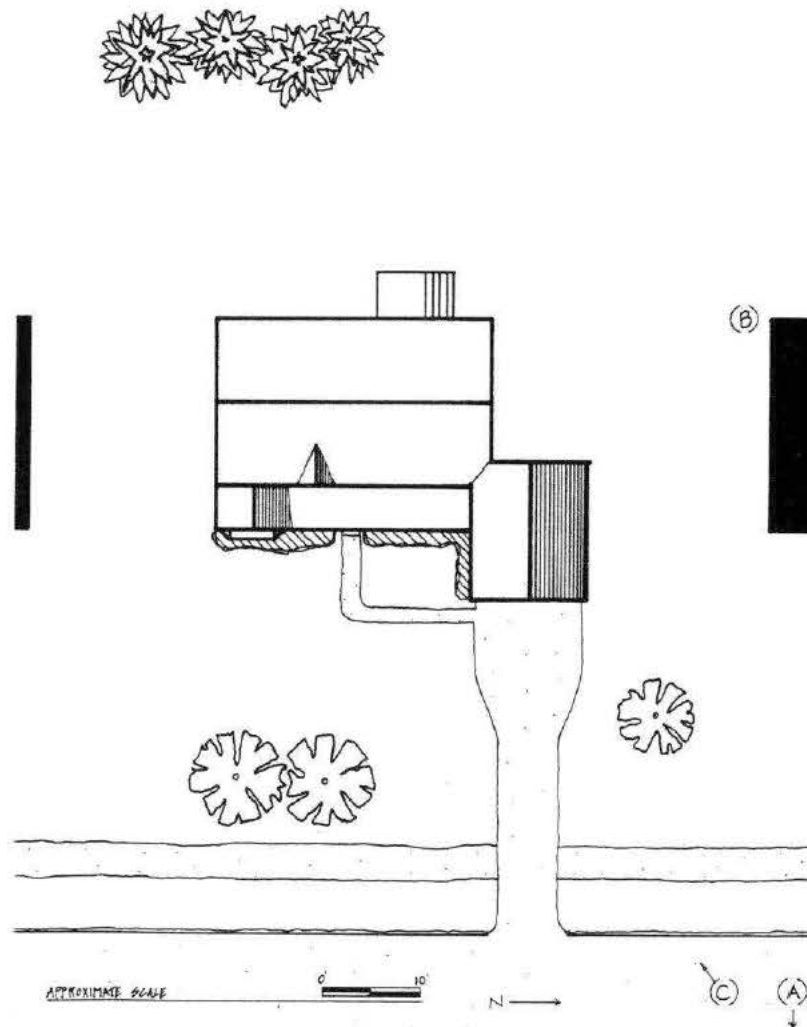


Figure 35. Lake Park site showing little emphasis on new urbanism. (A) park, (B) neighboring house, (C) camera angle for following photo.

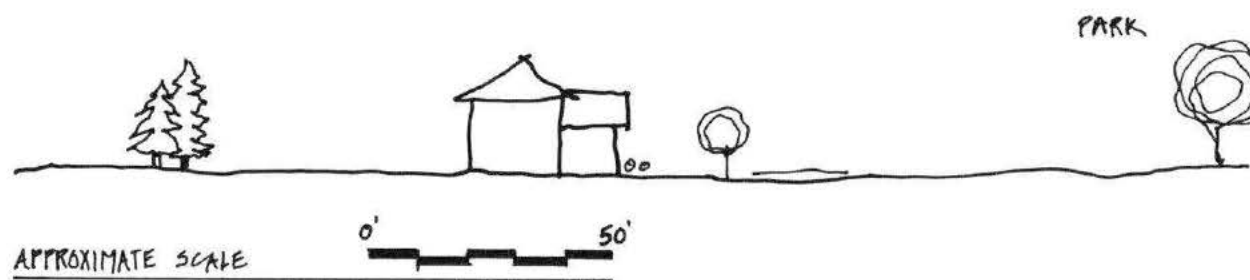


Figure 36. Photo of Lake Park site and diagrammatic section looking north.

continues (see Figure 37). Residences, parks, community center and shopping will all be present within the central core area (see Figure 38). The center of the development is anchored by a spine made up of commercial and retail at its core and green spaces at either end. Pedestrian and bike connections along this spine offer opportunities for alternative modes of transportation. However, access to this corridor, especially on foot, from cul-de-sacs in further reaches of the development is blocked by private lots and requires walking the winding streets of the development. It is common, at least upon the author's visits to the site, for families to drive, rather than walk to parks in the development.

Lake Park's evocation of small town American life is done in several ways; through what Mathisen calls "hard infrastructure," (ie. reproduction architecture, front porches, picket fences, theme lighting, etc) and "soft infrastructure" (carriage rides, street dances, "dessert in the park," an annual "Founder's Day Parade," etc.). However, its implications for regional land use, transportation, environmental and socio-economic conditions define it more as an elite automobile suburb than an American small town or a neo-traditional development.

The implication that Lake Park will help reduce traffic congestion is extremely tenuous. The development of retail and the potential for development of office space may reduce

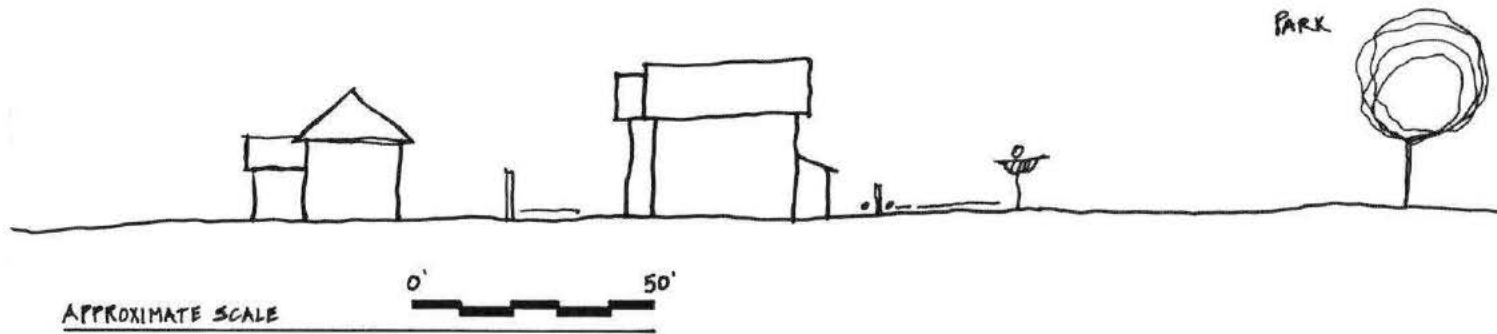


Figure 37. Row houses. Photo and diagrammatic section looking west. Left photo shows rear of row houses and alley access. Right photo shows row house facades.

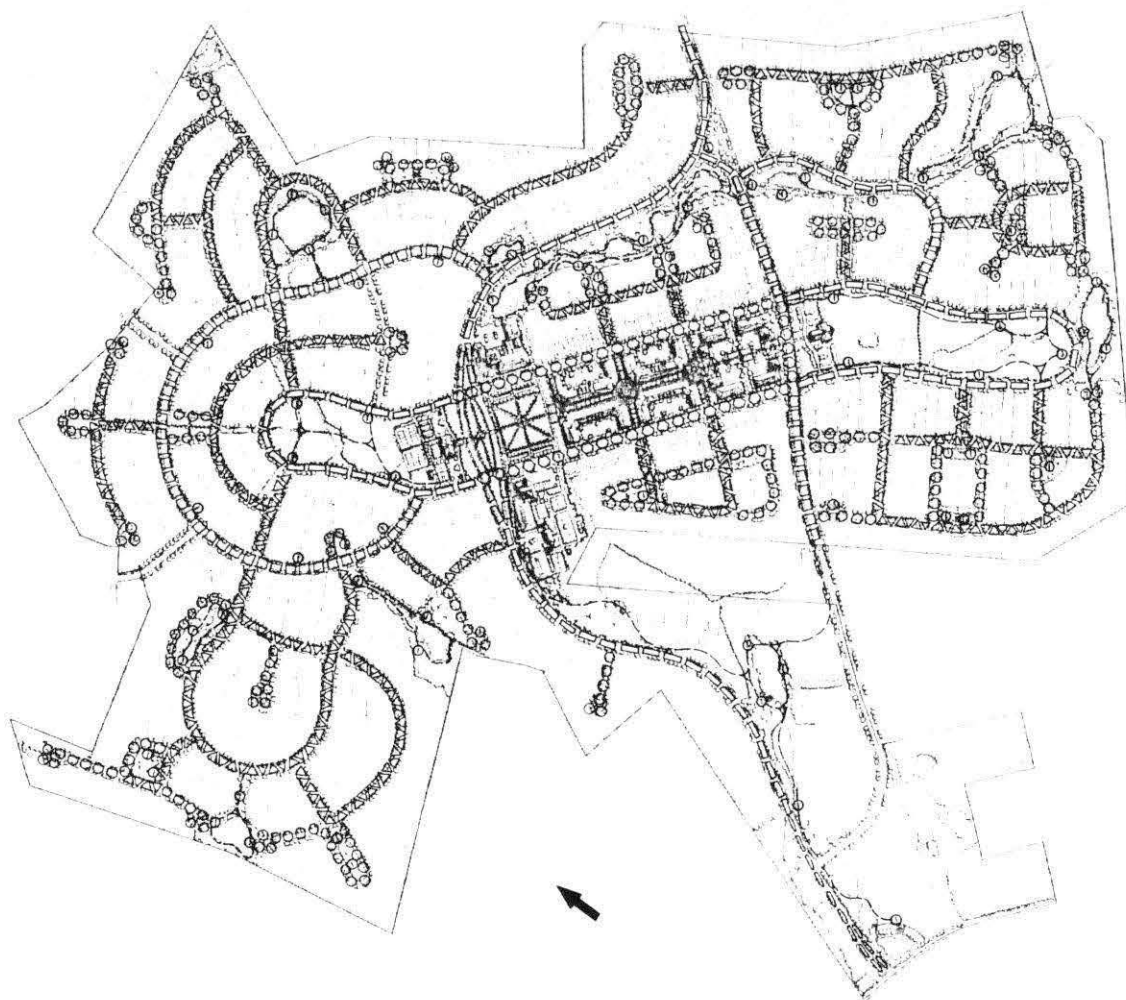


Figure 38. Lake Park master plan. North arrow inserted by author. Reprinted, with permission, from EDI Architecture.

the number of single occupancy vehicle trips within the development. However, Charlotte's biggest traffic problem, peak hour commuter traffic, will be increased by Lake Park because it has the potential for so few jobs. Beyond the revivalist architecture and developing mixed use area, which establishes Lake Park's small town image, it is difficult to define the development as an actual alternative to more common suburban models.

Lake Park's neo-traditionalism, appears, above all, as a decontextualized version of a historic small town, which stresses historicist spectacle and suburban amenities rather than offering workable alternatives to postwar suburbanization. The weekly carriage rides are a prime example. A horse and reproduction carriage are brought from off site to provide weekly rides. As car loads of families from nearby Lake Park homes arrive, the carriage provides novelty recreation and entertainment which supports the theme of revived American traditions. While the discomfort of relying on horse and buggy for primary transportation has long been superseded by the automobile's convenience, its contemporary value for recreation has increased. As the automobile (and the pollution, congestion and urban decline it has come to symbolize) becomes increasingly problematic, the horse and buggy's value as a tranquilizing spectacle is compounded (see Figure 39).

The issues at work which appear to make the horse and



Figure 39. Friday night carriage rides at Lake Park Village.

buggy a popular attraction at Lake Park are replayed throughout the development. As contemporary urban problems intensify, Lake Park becomes both contemporary suburb and historicist refuge which embodies those "social pictures, social signs, [and] social messages" of community described by Williams. In Lake Park, the harsh realities and contradictions of nineteenth and twentieth century life are replaced with a more soothing construct. History "seems to be purged of political tension; it becomes a unifying spectacle, the settling of all disputes;"³² in many ways, the residential equivalent of Disney's "Pocahontas."

Small town America has become an iconic image contrasted to social and economic problems of the United States. And, as small towns throughout the country decline in economic viability (due to interstate by-passes, losses in retail activity to malls and chain stores, etc) they accumulate amenity value for a different incoming socio-economic class, like the carriage ride, for their metaphorical significance. Contrasted to falling incomes, rising crime rates and a purported decline in "family values," small town America appears as a cure-all, a simple design concept which can instantly create genuine human relationships which ultimately will solve our most vexing social and economic problems.

³²Patrick Wright, 69.

Lake Park, reflects its residents' values and socio-economic conditions, but definitely not those of a nineteenth century small town. Because the development's value is not based on its productive and distributive capacity, transportation and location have shifted. Whereas in traditional towns, the dominant intersection formed a hub of regional transportation and generated the town's social, economic and physical development, in Lake Park it is, above all, the nucleus of small town image. The shift reflects the values of a more affluent and mobile class which appreciates the nostalgic appeal of small town life but relies on a decentered automobile based transportation system rather than a centrally located transportation hub. Row houses, reproduction street lights, community center, and clocktower are concentrated at this intersection which establishes the development's historic community theme.

Similarly, Lake Park's location and relationship to the larger transportation network discourages chance encounters with outsiders. Its location within the larger metropolitan region recalls the arguments put forth by Hillier and Hanson: "The ordering of space in buildings [and buildings in the landscape] is really about the ordering of relations between people."³³ Without the gates and walls which mark similar developments around the country, physical isolation

³³Bill Hillier and Julianne Hanson, The Social Logic of Space (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 1.

(and a private security force) supports the air of exclusivity and safety that Lake Park's marketing emphasizes. Lake Park's continued success may well depend on the maintenance of its status as a spatially isolated microcosm providing safety from perceived external threats, and its image as a temporally isolated microcosm, which provides a nostalgic vision of small town U.S.A.

As in developments such as Providence Country Club the local vernacular traditions do not provide the type of architectural precedent on which the development relies. Vernacular traditions are therefore disregarded for the construction and maintenance of an alternative tradition; one which integrates decontextualized images from the past into a contemporary automobile suburb with "all the modern conveniences." The goal is to provide, as suburbs have always promised, "the best of both worlds;" town and country, past and future but with a definite emphasis on the past.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

A review of suburban development discussed above reveals that many contemporary cultural and design trends discussed in Chapter II are evident in the Charlotte metropolitan area. Postmodernism, new urbanism and historic preservation are increasingly common design and planning techniques within these exclusive suburban landscapes which attempt, as always, the integration of the best of town and country. However, unlike postwar suburbs which stressed the virtues of change, progress and modernity, these contemporary suburbs deemphasize modernist stylistic and marketing conventions. They offer instead decontextualized traditions to provide an image of stability, safety and exclusivity. As a result, they reflect the larger themes of pessimism and nostalgia which contemporary planners, designers, theorists and artists all confront.

While these landscapes stress a link to or revival of past traditions, all are inherently different from prewar small towns and agricultural communities in regard to social make-up, architecture, site design and use, transportation and land use patterns. For all, the image of tradition as expressed in architectural details, replica homes, or in the

case of Lake Park, as a whole way of life, is more appealing than actual traditions that once dominated the area. All rely heavily on the land use and transportation practices of the postwar era, especially large scale highway construction and auto-dependence. And, they are even more isolationist. With high housing costs, no mass transit and private security guards, residents are assured little contact with lower and middle-income people.

Therefore, the central conflict that arises in all of these examples of suburbanization is the vast gulf between a rhetoric and architectural imagery which idealizes the past and/or rural life and the environments which actually result. They go beyond modernism in a superficial stylistic sense but perpetuate the settlement pattern of postwar suburbanization with, in most cases, no attempt to improve its design. Even Lake Park recreates, in the words of its developer, "the bad model" of historic town center surrounded by acres of tract houses on cul-de-sacs.¹ While the dominant development trends are often criticized by local planners and designers they are largely accepted by the public as positive. Voters and homebuyers continue to see large-scale road construction and low density development as the best model to secure a positive living environment. Likewise, they respond positively to the current stylistic trends in architecture. Housing

¹Mathisen interview.

construction and sales throughout the study area are booming. However, residents in the Charlotte metropolitan area are yet to experience the range of problems that will result from the perpetuation of their current preferences.

To some extent, the conflicts between rhetoric and reality arise from the direction that planners hope to pursue as opposed to what developers and the local business community have found is marketable in the area. Planners in Charlotte/Mecklenburg recommend increased density, less auto dependence, more transit options and more mixed use; ideas which spring largely from the new urbanist movement. Developers, however, have found while packaging architecture in historicism is effective marketing, in an area which has developed with such low density for so long it is not prudent to deemphasize the automobile. Their judgement is born out in the South District where residents have been particularly hostile to increased density, multi-family housing and mixed uses.

Conflicts also arise from the simultaneous desire for the aesthetic qualities of landscapes and architecture which preceded modernism and for the land use and transportation patterns of automobile suburbs which are two of the most significant products of the postwar era. The aesthetic emphasis on the old, overlaid upon the land use and transportation patterns of the new, masks the long term socio-economic and environmental implications of this rapid

suburbanization and generates the contradictory, often times ironic, landscape of the Charlotte Metropolitan area.

All of the areas discussed above are dominated by upper middle class individuals who isolate themselves from the larger community but contribute to traffic congestion and low density development.² Their landscape reflects national tendencies in regard to increasing fear of urban areas, idealization of the past, and the rejection of modernist architecture and liberal politics which fuelled the postwar era. While the town of Weddington emphasizes historicist architecture, life in the country and freedom from governmental restrictions,³ Lake Park relies on the image of a tight knit traditional community. Despite national conservative agendas calling for "less government," residents in towns like Lake Park, hailing "community" as the panacea for national problems, contribute generously to amenities within their isolated microcosms and submit to rigid design review restrictions. However, they isolate themselves and their tax resources from the larger metropolitan region on which they rely. Their exclusive "community," like exclusive suburbs in the past, are built at the expense of the larger metropolitan community.

²Clay, Charlotte, 47.

³Feezor interview. According to the local zoning administrator zoning and ex-mayor, "For our land use plan to continue working we hope people that come to Weddington will like low density development and don't want government involved in their lives."

The lesson from the suburban landscapes discussed above is that the image of history and the rhetoric of alternative planning trends - such as neo-traditionalism, historic preservation and postmodernism - in a rapidly growing city like Charlotte, can serve auto-dependent suburbanization and its attendant complications just as effectively as postwar modernist rhetoric. While our popular images and ideas have shifted from the metallic Futurama to the pastels of Lake Park, the negative aspects of our suburban landscapes have not yet been seriously addressed and changed for the better.

However, because contemporary planning trends and the increased popular interest in history have not yet improved development patterns in the region, does not mean they hold no potential. An understanding of the character of agriculture communities makes it clear that low density development and dispersed farms were integral parts of a very different socio-economic context. A review of shifts in settlement morphology between agricultural communities, mill towns, early streetcar suburbs and postwar suburbanization helps explain the origin of current development patterns. While this tradition of "urbanization without cities" is appealing in our suburban culture, an understanding of historical settlement patterns and recent development illustrates that the area cannot support both.

In this sense, a critical look at local landscape history can improve and direct our understanding of

contemporary issues. However, outlying historical and agricultural areas will not be well served by using the past as a model for contemporary development. Likewise, historic preservation, in the form of "protecting neighborhoods from inappropriate intensification," is simply a tool to resist change in existing suburban areas. And, while the preservation of outlying vernacular architecture may be a noble cause, rather than addressing pressing planning issues, it tends to support the very image which is fuelling the area's rapid suburbanization.

With Duaney and Plater-Zyberk planning to open a new office in Charlotte, and local outspoken designers critical of current development, there will likely be more small-scale attempts at integrating new urbanists' ideas. Some minor rail links have been developed to serve revitalizing streetcar suburbs near Uptown and the market for neo-traditionalism's image is certainly present. Hopefully in future projects, more emphasis will be placed on the land use and transportation changes recommended by new urbanists to balance the current vacuous emphasis on tradition and revivalism. Historic towns north of Charlotte, such as Davidson, have begun planning according to new urbanist models, with more attention to land use and transportation issues, under the direction of UNCC urban design and architecture professor, David Walters. However, with the completion of the thoroughfare plan over the next 15-20

years, the potential for a gradual region-wide shift toward higher residential densities and alternative modes of transportation is a tremendous challenge. If Charlotte-Mecklenburg does not take the advice of Walters ("First step: scrap the beltway.") and begin coordinated region wide alterations in land use and transportation patterns, small scale projects will proceed in a piecemeal fashion with much less potential for success. In this scenario, the metropolitan region will likely continue the trend of dressing its postwar land use and transportation pattern in contemporary historicist packages until a new stylistic fad emerges.

⁴David Walters, "Charlotte in the 21st Century: The Antidote to Charlotte's Suburban Virus," Creative Loafing, 24 September 1994, 13.

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