

Chapter 9

Riverside in the Continuum of Community Design _____

Riverside, Illinois has survived as a classic example of suburban development since its inception in 1868. It was designated as a National Historic Landmark in 1970 and continues to exhibit some of its original design. The implications of Riverside's survival are important. Why has it survived virtually in tact for 130 years and what has contributed to its storied history as a successful community? As landscape architects it is important to analyze these implications along with the challenges and opportunities presented at Riverside, then extrapolate clear and usable examples that may be used in the creation of new communities.

To achieve a clear perspective of how Riverside has influenced community development throughout the twentieth century, it is important to compare and contrast Riverside with other significant movements in the area of community and suburban design. The following section will present an overview and comparison of suburban development that begins with the creation of the romantic suburb in the United States and progresses to the development of the twenty-first century suburb. The following questions reference suburban and community development and are used as the criteria for comparing significant movements in community design:

- What were the **Key Principles** used in the development of the community?
- What were the **Organizing Elements** of the design?
- What was the organization and **Treatment of Open Space**? *
- How was **Automobile and Pedestrian Movement** addressed?
- What was the importance of **Public Transportation** in the design?
- What role did **Existing Topography** serve in the overall layout?
- Is the community **Self-sufficient** in respect to the provision of various land uses?

* For the purposes of this comparison, open space is defined as all elements of the landscape on the exterior of the private residence. This includes private gardens, walkways, roads, parks, and scenic amenities.

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The presented research is intended to help present and future residents of Riverside, Illinois understand the historical context and significance of their community in the continuum of community design. The information can serve as an educational resource for the community in addition to fostering a deeper understanding of why their community is a special place in which to live. In addition, viewing Riverside in the context of the entire suburban development continuum will allow for a clearer understanding of its significance as a designated National Historic Landmark.

The following timeline outlines the movements in community design and serves as the framework for the comparison:

Romantically designed suburbs: 1850 - 1920

Llewellyn Haskell and Andrew Jackson Davis' plan for **Llewellyn Park, New Jersey**

Olmsted and Vaux's plan for **Riverside, Illinois**

Garden cities: 1920s

Clarence Stein and Henry Wright's plan for **Radburn, New Jersey**

Greenbelt towns: 1930s

Elbert Peets's plan for **Greendale, Wisconsin**

The New Towns of the early 1960s – 1970s

Robert E. Stein's plan for **Reston, Virginia**

Ecologically and culturally sensitive models: 1970s to present

Peter Walker William Johnson and Partners' vision for **Prairie Crossing, Illinois**

An explanation of suburbs

In the late fourteenth century the word suburb first appeared in the English language. The word referred to the residential areas outside, but adjacent to, the bounds or wall of the city, occupying what was then a narrow band between city and countryside. The suburb was dependent on the urban center, "like the earth is to the sun for life sustaining energy" (Girling and Helphand 7). Initially suburbs were homes for the elite members of society, aristocrats and the like, but in recent times they have become available to the middle class, making them virtually

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universal (Girling and Helphand 8). One of the reasons that people move to the suburbs is the desire for more personal space. Expansive lots, detached single-family housing, and a homogeneous population characterize the stereotypical suburb.

The communities discussed in this report all exhibit-varying forms of the suburban ideal. Some were intended to cater to an upper class population (Llewellyn Park, Radburn, and Riverside), while others sought socioeconomic diversity (Reston and Prairie Crossing). Some are a response to overcrowding in urban areas (Riverside) while others are sociological and ecological experiments designed to battle urban sprawl and promote ecologically sustainable development (Prairie Crossing). Regardless of their intent, they all share a key element. They are all planned communities. Their goals were to build upon previous successes in community design while correcting their shortcomings.

Romantically designed suburbs: pre 1900 – 1920

An exploding population in the cities, crowded and unsanitary conditions, and new innovation in commuting technologies served as the impetus for the planning of the suburb as a unit toward the end of the 1840s (Jackson 73). The Romantically designed suburb, influenced by the writings of Downing, effectively addressed the overcrowding and harsh living conditions in the city. Two forms of settlement preceded the romantic suburb: dense units located in the city, and individual units located in the country. The densely packed city units were located very close to the street and lacked a necessary provision for open space. The individual units in the country were usually characterized by expansive allotments of property and picturesque grounds, but were not part of a preconceived development plan. The romantically planned suburb was the first comprehensively planned unit in the United States that responded to a person's desire for a better and more comfortable way of life, a way of life that promoted good health

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and a safe environment in which to raise children. The romantic suburb exhibited foresight and changed residential development patterns. Its influence continues today.

The key element that served as the framework for romantically planned suburbs was the attention to the physical design of the road. Up until the 1850s, the gridiron dominated urban development because of its ease of reproduction and the ease with which it is understood conceptually. Roads were inadequately designed and typically were just wide enough to accommodate two passing carts (Jackson 73). The design of romantic suburbs responded to these conditions by providing interesting, picturesque, and well-constructed roads that adhered to the existing topography on the development site.

The second key element contributing to the design of the romantic suburb was the attention to shared public open space. The open space systems contained in these suburbs possess a picturesque and natural quality. Downing's, *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening*, and the paintings of the Hudson River School had a profound effect on the eventual appearance of the communities (Jackson 73). Jackson's techniques for achieving a picturesque landscape were utilized successfully and therefore promoted a naturalistic and scenic quality to the developments.

Llewellyn Park in West Orange, New Jersey, and Riverside are both classified as romantically designed suburbs. Their designers are known as the innovators in the field of landscape architecture and community planning.

Llewellyn Park

Llewellyn Park is considered the first romantically planned suburb in the United States. It was conceived in 1850 through the vision of pharmaceutical tycoon Llewellyn Haskell and world-renowned architect Alexander Jackson Davis. The location was heavily wooded, with rolling hills, and clear streams, and provided a spectacular view of

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Manhattan. Haskel's vision was to create a picturesque community, "a retreat for a man to exercise his own rights and privileges" (Wilson 79). The major contributions to community design at Llewellyn Park are the curvilinear road and the natural open space at the center (Jackson 78). "Clearly, Llewellyn Park was the precedent for Olmsted and Vaux... [Davis, its principle designer,] was an early influence on Olmsted. Davis was also a close friend of Andrew Jackson Downing. Since Calvert Vaux had been Downing's assistant at the time Llewellyn Park was being developed, Olmsted had a rich resource to draw upon for the plan of Riverside" (Fein 33).

Philosophical reasoning for Llewellyn Park

Llewellyn Park, like other romantically designed suburbs, was a response to horrible urban conditions. "Llewellyn Park was not simply a speculative venture but an alternative community, a curative haven from the pernicious influences of the city-from its bad air, disease, and moral corruption-and a fount of physical and mental rejuvenation" (Henderson 221). Like Olmsted in Riverside, Haskel believed that a contained unit proximate to the city could provide for the best advantages in society. Haskel's creation differed from Riverside in that it was to be a complete departure from city life. Llewellyn Park was designed with special reference to the wants of citizens doing business in New York City who desired accessible, retired, and healthful homes in the country (Jackson 77). Olmsted and Vaux envisioned Riverside as having "the more agreeable rural characteristics of a New England Village, while introducing all the street conveniences of a crowded town" (Girling and Helphand 50).

Llewellyn Park is similar to Riverside in that its original design was intended for the middle to upper class citizen. Davis eventually moved to Llewellyn Park, as did other well-known people, including Thomas Alva Edison. Llewellyn Park was designed in the picturesque style, inspired by Downing's, *A Treatise on the Theory of Landscape Planning* (1841). According to Downing, the ideal rural landscapes can be divided into four categories: the sublime, the grand, the beautiful, and the picturesque. The sublime, the grand, and the beautiful

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were considered beyond the reach of lower and middle class citizens. The picturesque offered a rustic quality that was more attainable by ordinary people (Downing 1841). Olmsted and Vaux designed Riverside primarily in the beautiful style, with areas along the river exhibiting characteristics of a picturesque landscape.

A second underlying philosophy for the creation of Llewellyn Park is Haskel's fascination with the *theory of association*, a philosophy developed by utopian theorist, Charles Fourier (Henderson 239). Haskel, along with Downing, Davis, and the members of the Hudson River School believed strongly in Fourier's theory that the capitalism and individualism of the nineteenth-century could eventually become subordinate to a more communal and co-operative social order (Henderson 239). This is a more extreme point of view than that taken by Olmsted when he envisioned Riverside. Simply put, Olmsted wanted to create a community that was a departure from the harsh conditions found in Chicago around the late 1860s.

Organizing elements of the design

The road system and the mountainous terrain were the organizing elements at Llewellyn Park. Haskel's goal was to adhere to the natural topography of the site, while enhancing existing views as one moved through the space. In addition, the system of curvilinear roads and natural open spaces were unprecedented in the modern residential experience (Jackson 78). The roads, or carriageways, at Llewellyn Park meandered for more than ten miles. Their design was intended to reveal the extent of the property while providing pleasurable views at exemplary natural scenes (Henderson 235).

Treatment of open space

One of goals of Llewellyn Park was to create a picturesque environment that provided a multitude of visual, auditory, and olfactory experiences. This was accomplished through the creation of expansive areas of open space. The organizing elements, the roads and terrain, compliment and create the key open spaces at Llewellyn Park.

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Llewellyn Park is characterized by large lot sizes (one to thirteen acres), and a common open space known as the Ramble (fifty acres). Like Riverside, the typical lot contained a suburban villa, a large home containing one or two outbuildings and was presented in a rustic setting. Residents were restricted from constructing fences on their property to prevent interference with the scenic quality of the entire park. Olmsted and Vaux adopted this restriction in Riverside also. Llewellyn Park's residents were permitted to landscape their lawns according to their individual preference, but were encouraged to preserve the natural topography and character of the land (Jackson 78). The Ramble consisted of a series of forests interspersed with meadows each with a distinctive character, creating a series of natural setpieces (Henderson 231). These "setpieces" are like the sequence of experiences, views and rooms within the landscape that Olmsted and Vaux designed in Riverside and are typical of the romantic design style. Portions of the Ramble can be characterized by the *beautiful*, as described by Downing, while others adhere to the typical *picturesque* setting found in the remainder of Llewellyn Park (Henderson 231). Like Riverside, the plantings here utilize both native and exotic species. To enhance the picturesque style, dead trees, and trees with a messy appearance were customary preserved in the landscape and often highlighted by supplemental plantings to create a dramatic effect (Henderson 239). Overall the treatment of open space at Riverside utilizes similar principles as those used at Llewellyn Park. In each development, the designers used native and exotic materials to produce a desired effect and emphasized the minimization of obtrusive elements in the landscape.

The automobile and pedestrian movement

Special attention was paid to the design of the road system and its associated pedestrian path system at Llewellyn Park. The original layout utilized principles that can be found in Birkenhead Park (1844) and many of Olmsted's designs (1857 and later). The principle of separating modes of traffic to ensure safety was evident throughout the site. Rustic paths were constructed that meandered through parkland while the roads

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served as the conduit for the carriages to the residences. Like Riverside, Haskel and Davis' design created a pastoral feel. Some of the parkland had very informal paths that lead to special scenic elements in the landscape such as waterfalls and vistas with constructed lookouts. Unlike Riverside, little is known about the actual construction of Llewellyn Park's roads and paths with regard to dimensions and materials.

Public transportation

The Delaware/Lackawanna/Western Railroad served the function of public transportation for Llewellyn Park. Businessmen would travel the thirteen-mile rail line into Manhattan while their wives and children remained behind in the refuge of the park. Llewellyn Park attracted a wealthier sector of the population with its railroad station: only the wealthier businessmen of the city were able to afford the train fare on a daily basis. The design for Llewellyn Park differs from Riverside in that there was no intention of installing a parkway or promenade to connect the central city with the outlying suburb.

The role of topography

Perhaps the most intriguing and attractive feature of Llewellyn Park is its strict adherence to existing topographic conditions. The steep topography of the mountainous site initially fostered lower real estate prices because the land was deemed unsuitable for agricultural activities (Henderson 230). In addition, a steep ravine ran through the center of the site. It was slightly modified to enhance the park experience. Overall, the community contained numerous vistas that were not only left in tact, but were accentuated using Downing's principles of landscape design.

Provision of land uses

Llewellyn Park differs from Riverside in that it is solely a residential community. In a model of utopian middle-class life the household was separated from the workplace, the well to do from the working class and poor, and the women and children from the outside world (Henderson 232). Llewellyn Park was intended to be an isolationist's refuge, to be separated from the mundane activities of everyday life. It is sometimes referred to as a social experiment

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that strictly followed the perfectionist theories of Charles Fourier. As a result, commercial and industrial land uses were excluded from Llewellyn Park. In Haskell and Davis' view, these uses were to remain in the city, far away from their private paradise. Today, as in its beginning, Llewellyn Park is a gated community that restricts access to anyone but its residents. Over one hundred and fifty years later it still reflects the original attitudes held by its founders.

The Garden City Movement

A significant initiative in community design referred to as The Garden City Movement began in the 1920s. The transportation revolution, the communications revolution, the invention of the telephone, and access to electricity changed the historic basis for settlement forever (Mumford 10). These significant advances in technology spawned the creation of the Regional Plan Association of America (RPPA) (Helphand 54). Headed by the prominent planning theorist, Lewis Mumford, it was directly influenced by *Britain's Garden City Experiments* and the ideas of Ebenezer Howard (Helphand 55). The Garden City was intended to merge both town and country as a cohesive, autonomous unit. It is evident that the garden city directly influenced the development of the New Town in Great Britain (Girling and Helphand 67). The garden city most responsible for this movement is Radburn, New Jersey. Radburn' design built upon the basic design principles found at Llewellyn Park and Riverside. This is evident in the dedication of large amounts of public open space and the attention to the safety of the pedestrian.

Radburn

Radburn is located within the Borough of Fair Lawn, Bergen County, New Jersey, twelve miles from New York City and is known as the first garden city in America. Clarence Stein and Henry Wright designed Radburn in 1929. Radburn has made a significant contribution to community design in the twentieth century. It is self-named *The Town for the Motor Age* because of the interesting and innovative ways that the automobile was addressed. In addition, it was the first community that planned for the automobile while also addressing a pedestrian's need for a

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safe and walkable environment. Radburn's concept fell victim to financial realities of the period and the stock market crash of 1929: its industrial zone was never developed and only one neighborhood unit was put in place. "Although Radburn itself was not a financial success, it inspired a series of government funded... towns during the Depression era, remained a site-planning ideal, and continues to influence contemporary landscape planning" (Pregill and Volkman 555).

Philosophical reasoning for Radburn

The plan of Radburn was intended to create a community that made provisions for the complexities of modern life, while providing the amenities of open space, community service, and economic viability. Moreover, it was intended to be a commuter suburb for the middle-class. Initial house prices were about double the national average (Helphand 66). In addition, eighty-seven percent of Radburn men went to college and seventy-four percent of women also attended, compared to the national average of six percent. These facts contributed to a campus-like feel in the community, one that lacked any real socioeconomic diversity (Helphand 66).

Radburn also was designed to cater to the safety and good health of children. Many of the design elements found in this community reflect this intent.

Organizing elements of the design

Radburn is known for the creation and use of the superblock. The superblock is a large block of land surrounded by main roads. The superblock is 1,200 to 1,800 feet long versus the typical length of 200 to 600 feet (Girling and Helphand 63). The houses are grouped around small cul-de-sacs, each of which has an access road coming into its center from the main roads (Gatti 1). The remaining land inside the superblock is park area that serves as the backbone of the neighborhood (Gatti 2). Radburn had a profound effect on suburban development well into the 1950s. Many attempts to replicate the design occurred in Europe but without the same level of success.

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Treatment of open space

Radburn was developed during a time when active recreation was the main motivation for park planners. The original design contained twenty acres of park, two pools, four tennis courts, four ball fields, three playgrounds, an archery plaza, and two summer houses (Girling and Helphand 64). Average lot sizes were forty-five hundred square feet (one-tenth of an acre) and fronted on shared park space. The house along with front and back yards served as private open space for family gatherings, while pathways and expansive corridors of green space were part of the public domain. In essence, each house was turned around with the front facing public park space and the back serving as an entrance and service alley for automobiles. In addition, the two large parks were landscaped in the traditional English style with expansive portions of lawn containing trees and pathways.

Radburn is very similar to Riverside in that the provision for public open space was key to the design. However, the open space at both Riverside and Radburn is different than that found in newer communities. The intent at Radburn was to design private open space for the exclusive use of residents. Riverside's open space is public, but its use by non-residents is not openly encouraged. Today's designs are more considerate of linkages at the regional level, incorporating greenway systems and regional parks. Opportunities exist in both communities for this linkage to occur. To this day, the private park experience at Radburn and Riverside is one that is deeply cherished, but it is unknown how interested each community is in becoming connected with outside communities.

The automobile and pedestrian movement

Radburn is unique because it was envisioned as a town for better living and it was the first example of city planning, which recognized the importance of the automobile in modern life without permitting it to dominate the environment (Gatti 3). Key to the Radburn's design is the separation of the pedestrian and the automobile. Like Olmsted and Vaux's Central Park, Radburn incorporates miles of pedestrian footpaths that traverse the interior of the community. One of the

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goals of the design was to allow the pedestrian to move throughout the community without ever having to cross a road used by an automobile. This is achieved by an interior path system containing bridges and underpasses that meanders through an extensive park system.

Riverside addresses the pedestrian much differently than Radburn. Olmsted designed in a time without the automobile. He was concerned with providing well-constructed roads for horses and carriages. Moreover, the pedestrian was sufficiently addressed by providing ample sidewalks with vegetated strips serving as buffers. Radburn's plan is more effective strictly due to the time in which it was designed. It obviously built upon Olmsted's notion of providing safe and well-constructed pedestrian systems.

Public transportation

Radburn was intended to accommodate the automobile during the 1920s. The car was still becoming popularized and its eventual growth in popularity was never predicted. However, a train station does exist in the community. There is no evidence that it has served as major means of transportation for Radburn's residents.

The role of topography

Radburn differs from Riverside in that it was not designed to adapt to existing topography. The only topographic element located near Radburn is the Saddle River, which is not included in the Radburn plan. No attention is directed toward the river or any other natural feature.

Provision of land uses

Radburn contains one hundred forty-nine acres consisting of: 430 single-family homes, 90 row houses, 54 semi-attached houses, 93 unit apartment, a shopping center, parks, and other amenities. It was intended to be a fully self-sufficient neighborhood but hard economic times and surrounding developments made it impossible (Helphand 60). A 1970 study showed that forty-seven percent of Radburn residents shopped for groceries on foot, versus twenty-three percent at the new town of Reston and eight percent in an unplanned community (Schaffer 175). This is

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strong evidence that planned communities containing services for their residents do de-emphasize the dependence on the automobile found in today's society. The foresight to accommodate the needs of citizens is certainly a lesson that ought to be repeated in future development.

The development of Greenbelt towns: 1935-1938

Greenbelt towns appeared during the middle to late 1930s as a result of the Great Depression in the United States. These towns were part of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal relief package addressing the need for affordable housing and an overwhelming job shortage. Twenty-five towns were envisioned, but only three were developed. The three towns created during this time were Greenbelt, Maryland (located between Washington D.C. and Maryland), Greenhills, Ohio, and Greendale, Wisconsin. These towns attempted to build on the foundations of the garden cities found in Europe and the successful commuter suburb of Radburn. In addition, they intended to house urban workers, to demonstrate sound subdivision practices, and to create jobs (Eden and Alanen 40). This shows a departure from previous planned developments in that these towns were not intended for the elite portion of society. Another defining characteristic of the Greenbelt town was the unusual amount of open space contained within them. This green space took on a very different form than that found at Llewellyn Park, Riverside, and Radburn. The name greenbelt comes from the unusually large circuitous green *belt* that surrounded the neighborhoods and protected them from the blighted conditions found in the city (Eden and Alanen 40).

Greendale

Greendale, Wisconsin, a suburb of Milwaukee, was developed in 1938, after Greenbelt and Greenhills. Its site plan, designed by Jacob Crane and Elbert Peets, was more sophisticated than either Greenbelt or Greenhills. The success of Greendale proved that "moderate-cost housing need not be lackluster" (Pregill and Volkman 634).

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Philosophical reasoning for Greendale

"Greendale was to be a working man's town, in actuality and in appearance it must be direct, simple, practical, free of snobbishness, and not afraid of standardization" (Eden and Alanen 45). In addition, it was created to house urban workers and to create jobs as part of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal relief package (Eden and Alanen 40). Greendale was intended to be a departure from the typical exclusive subdivisions from the 1850s to the early 1930s. However, overtime, Greendale has become very homogeneous, similar to the romantic and commuter suburbs.

Organizing elements of the design

The 2,000-acre greenbelt, one-half mile wide, served as the main organizing element of the design. It surrounded the community and served as a buffer to city life. In addition, Dale Creek ran through the middle of the property and acted as the central element in a linear pathway and parkway system (Eden and Alanen 43). This element relates well to the treatment of the Des Plaines River at Riverside. Area around the creek was preserved as natural open space with public access.

Treatment of open space

The original design for Greendale, Wisconsin was intended to contain one thousand acres of working farms, one thousand acres of natural area, and seven hundred and fifty homes on three hundred and thirty-five acres at a density of ten to twelve units per acre (Eden and Alanen 43). In addition, the unique building configurations used provided ample private open space for the residents. This was achieved by placing the garages of ninety percent of the dwellings at the rear of the neighboring units so as to barricade the backyards and there by creating individual domains (Eden and Alanen 44). The use of ivy, fences, and trees anchored the houses to the streets and yards.

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The automobile and pedestrian movement

Like Radburn, Greendale was interested in minimizing the effects of the automobile on everyday life. Garages were set toward the back of most of the residences, and on-street parking was discouraged in the community. Parking in Greendale was not expected to become a problem because the designers assumed that most families would own only one car and some would carpool to employment in Milwaukee (Alanen and Eden 44). An early recommendation for a network of footpaths through the greenbelt area was passed over for financial reasons.

A differentiated street system of three levels of traffic: regional, village, and residential created the framework for the automobile (Eden and Alanen 43). This system was a direct result of the work done at Radburn. This system consisted of main parkway at the boundary of the town, long and relatively straight arterial roads within the development, and small offshoots that usually terminated in cul-de-sacs. An extensive footpath ran parallel to the creek from north to south.

Public transportation

Greendale was intended to become a commuter suburb. Early considerations of public transit by bus or trolley were shelved between Greendale and Milwaukee primarily because many of Milwaukee's industries were scattered throughout such a wide zone of the metropolitan fringe (Eden and Alanen 43). Peet's prediction that all families would own only one car was incorrect.

The role of topography

Peet's original intention was to develop Greendale much like Radburn. The problem however was that the topography on the site was too variable to allow for groupings of homes. This significantly effected Peet's approach thereby effecting the eventual development and overall order of the community. The site selected for development consisted of 3,410 acres in full. The land was characterized by rolling meadows, woodlots, and ponds, with a significant creek running north/south through the site. The design was sensitive to the creek much like Riverside with the Des Plaines River and preserved most of its banks as public open space.

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Provision of land uses

Greendale can be considered a mixed-use community. Peets incorporated themes from colonial townscapes, Midwestern county seats, European Renaissance cities, and the work of Camillo Sitte, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Viennese architect and urban designer (Eden and Alanen 44). With this influence he created an administrative center and small commercial center within the development.

The New Towns: 1960s – 1970s

New planning approaches began to emerge during the 1960s and 1970s that incorporated natural features into communities, not only as an amenity to be used by the local community, but also as a regional network that preserved and protected natural resources. These communities in the United States were influenced significantly by the New Towns of Europe, which in-turn emanated from garden city theories (Girling and Helphand 121)(Campbell 17). New Towns in the United States were a major departure from previous forms of development, although elements present in the plans for romantic suburbs, garden cities and greenbelt towns are evident in most New Town designs. These elements include: location near a major city, site plans adapted to the natural character of the landscape, and the generous allotments of open space. New Towns also exhibit many of the features that are key components of Olmsted's designs, for example, the structuring of the community around a spine of continuous green space. How they differed is that they were designed as a part of a regional system with the protection of natural features as the utmost priority (Campbell 17). New Towns exhibit a higher level of sophistication in the fields of ecology and sociology.

The ecologically friendly communities of the 1960s are also a strong response to the manufactured or *cookie-cutter* neighborhood approaches taken during the 1940s and 1950s. Developers of the post World War II era were interested in creating large communities that were erected quickly and efficiently without much regard for ecological sustainability. The main goal

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was to provide adequate housing for a booming post-war population that accommodated a families desire to own a piece of the American dream. The Levitt Corporation, for example, created three such communities during this time period in New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, that were characterized by homogenous housing types and populations (Girling and Helphand 101).

Reston

Reston, located in the Piedmonts of Virginia, was designed by Robert E. Stein in 1961. Reston was one of the first planned suburbs to successfully integrate a regional greenway system, a diversity of land uses, and a heterogeneous population. The original Reston master plan, now three decades old, has been followed to a remarkable degree. However, traditional homes and townhouses are more numerous than earlier innovative housing and Village Centers have assumed the character of well-designed strip shopping centers. “These changes, though, should not detract from the importance of Reston as the first successful, internationally recognized model for postwar American new towns” (Pregill and Volkman 668).

Philosophical reasoning for Reston

The new town of Reston was founded on seven goals and principles:

1. Create opportunities for the fullest use of leisure time
2. Create a diversity of housing that enables people to remain the community throughout their life
3. Focus on the importance and dignity of the individual
4. Have people live and work in the same community
5. Provide commercial, cultural, and recreational resources from the outset
6. Beauty is a necessity of the good life and should be fostered
7. Reston should be financially successful (Campbell 32-33)

Recent studies of Reston have indicated success in alignment with the mentioned goals and principles. Its greatest pride, however, is its social diversity and high community involvement in local decision-making.

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Organizing elements of the design

The residential village clusters along with hundreds of acres of open space provide the structure and organization found in Reston. In addition, each village cluster has its own character and is designed along a distinctive natural feature in a rural setting.

Treatment of open space

Reston currently contains four lakes, neighborhood pools, tennis and basketball courts, an indoor stage, and two golf courses. The densities created by the village clusters (twelve units per acre and more) allow for the preservation of open space. In addition, the original open space was designed by an environmentalist, showing a sharp departure from previously designed neighborhoods.

Automobile and pedestrian movement

Reston used the principle of separation of modes of transportation throughout the community. Twenty-five miles of walkways are linked throughout the town with bridges and overpasses, allowing safe movement for pedestrians. As of 1975, Reston contained six pedestrian underpasses and one bridge exclusively for pedestrians (Campbell 30). Automobiles use large loops that circulate through the five villages.

Public transportation

Reston was designed to be a self-sufficient community, thereby eliminating the need for public transportation into an adjacent city. Currently, there is a plan for a rail system connecting Reston with Northern Virginia and Washington D.C.

Topography

The original plan for Reston was very sensitive to existing topographic conditions. Village clusters were strategically located within the landscape to maximize existing conditions. In the early construction phase special attention was paid to the preservation of trees. Moreover, man made elements such as lakes and ponds were created to enhance the natural beauty of the

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area. This activity is similar to Olmsted's act of damming the Des Plaines River in order to provide for a more pleasurable boating experience near Swan Pond.

Provision of land uses

Reston differs from the preceding development types in that it provides a large variety of land uses. It is truly a mixed-use, self-sufficient community. By 1988, 1,400 companies were located in Reston employing 31,000 jobs. The land uses are broken down as follows: 222,000 square feet retail space; 290,000 professional and office space; 514 room Hyatt Regency hotel; 11 screen movie theatre; hospitals; schools (kindergarten through post-secondary); recreation space (active and passive); and industrial facilities. In 1990 Reston completed phase one of *Reston Town Center*. The Town Center totals twenty acres and provides additional open space opportunities (Reston Association).

Ecologically and culturally sensitive models: 1970s to present

In the realm of modern-day development there is an increased need for cultural and ecological awareness. Designers respond to the many creative, community-based designs from the past by extrapolating the successful elements of the designs. Moreover, they utilize the failures of these designs as the motivation to create more ecologically and culturally sensitive communities.

There is a positive movement in community design that places a high value on the environment and people, especially their interaction. These ecologically and culturally sensitive communities look to incorporate such principles as: planned transportation systems; on-site recycling; reuse of water and organic materials; on-site water purification; alternative energy production; and the elimination of many or all chemical pesticides (Girling and Helphand 154). They look to provide alternative lifestyles for their residents. Typically, people living in these communities take an active

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role in the preservation of their environment and support innovative methods of promoting ecological sustainability.

In 1975 Village Homes, in Davis, California, was constructed utilizing sustainable building and design practices. The plan of Village Homes was based on the concept of limiting human impact on natural processes. The design emphasized the preservation of open space, energy-efficient site planning, and on-site management of stormwater. Village Homes was one of the communities that innovated the cluster lot plan. It is considered the best-known cluster lot community. In the cluster approach, “lots are kept small so that the land between lots or tiers of lots could be retained as community open spaces. Cluster lots were also generally more efficient in terms of infrastructure costs. Often the common areas were preserved in natural plant cover, so that they provided natural screening between units, places for wildlife [to find] food and cover, as well as passive recreation areas” (Pregill and Volkman 664). Although the previously discussed community designs emphasized the preservation of open space, with Village Homes the preservation of open space is intended to serve ecological functions as well as meeting the recreational and aesthetic needs of the residents.

Prairie Crossing is a community, designed more recently, which utilizes these same themes to produce its unique take on ecologically sensitive design. The first residents moved into Prairie Crossing in December 1994.

Prairie Crossing

Prairie Crossing is located forty miles north of Chicago in Grayslake, Illinois. It is an ecologically sensitive community focusing on the preservation of open spaces including wetlands, prairie, and farmland. The design for Prairie Crossing was a response to the high-density development that was taking place during the late 1980s (Weathersby 120). Local farmers and landowners joined forces in an effort to protect

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the valuable open space and created a development firm called *Prairie Holdings* to manage it. The goal community's design was to integrate environmental conservation with traditional neighborhood design. Cluster lot design was utilized to maximize and preserve open space. The design provided for 317 home sites, although zoning regulations would have allowed 1500 home sites. Landscape historian, Victoria Ranney, stated, "Prairie Crossing looks back to Frederick Law Olmsted's Riverside, we borrowed Olmsted's approach to a project which was to figure out the central character of the place, then have all the design details contribute to that main theme" (Weathersby 120).

The design of Prairie Crossing addressed many ecological and environmental concerns. Prairie Crossing is one of several communities built as part of the US Department of Energy's Building America Project. Building America emphasizes energy-efficient construction and affordable housing. The design of Prairie Crossing also included a stormwater management system that relies on natural filtration of the stormwater into the ground, rather than channeling water into sewers via curbs and gutters. The narrower streets of Prairie Crossing were intended to reduce the amount of impervious surfaces and therefore reduce the amount of stormwater runoff.

Philosophical reasoning for Prairie Crossing

The driving force behind Prairie crossing is the protection of open space and the preservation of rural character. Prairie Holdings Corporation responded to dense development practices by creating a livable community that values not only the land, but also the people that enrich the community atmosphere. When local farmers and landholders banded together to protect the six hundred and seventy seven acre parcel north of Chicago, they expressed a clear vision. They accepted that development in the area was inevitable but felt that there was a way to make it a special place characterized by strong community interaction and the preservation of natural resources. Due to their vision, Prairie Holdings Corporation along with landscape architect William Johnson and

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many other consultants, created ten guiding principles for the community of Prairie Crossing. Below are the ten principles used today as the foundation upon which decisions are made at Prairie Crossing. These principles look to guide the community toward an ecologically sustainable community (Guiding Principles).

1. *Environmental Protection and Enhancement*
Includes the safeguarding of open space through conservation easements, land management plan and environmental guidelines for farming and landscape management, and an environmentally-based stormwater treatment system
2. *A healthy lifestyle*
Provisions for recreation and community gardening
3. *A sense of place*
Landscape and architecture inspired by the prairie
4. *A sense of community*
Stewardship programs encourage community interaction
5. *Economic and racial diversity*
Some houses are “within the range of families needing affordable housing in Lake County” (Guiding Principles). However, the cost of living in Lake County is high: homes in Prairie Crossing range from \$269,900 to \$427,900. Prairie Crossing has marketing and lending program that encourages minority home ownership.
6. *Convenient and efficient transportation*
Walking paths, convenient highway connections, and two train stations
7. *Energy conservation*
Homes are designed to consume 50% less energy than other homes in the area.
8. *Lifelong learning and education*
Schools and community environmental education programs
9. *Aesthetic design and high quality construction*
Land planning and architectural design is provided by recognized professionals
10. *Economic viability*
Stakeholders strive to “ensure the project is economically feasible and have carefully budgeted for long-term success” (Guiding Principles). They want to see the concepts of prairie Crossing replicated elsewhere. The goal of the Farms at Prairie Crossing is to become a major grower of organic food sold in Illinois.

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Organizing elements of the design

Prairie Crossing is set within a large triangle created by three major roads: routes 45,137, and 120. Where the development is wholly residential, it relies heavily on this framework for commuting needs. The natural framework consists of open farmland, prairies, wetlands, lakes and community supported gardens. Like Radburn, Prairie Crossing utilizes the cul-de-sac or loop road layout. This layout allows for more preservation of open space than typical development models.

Johnson used existing hedgerows and existing agricultural land to inform the location of building sites. Houses were placed to protect natural vegetation and wildlife. This subtle attention to detail has enhanced the natural setting at Prairie Crossing and provides an example of the preservation of natural resources.

Treatment of Open Space

Prairie Crossing is characterized by its vast amount of open space. Sixty-nine percent of the property is preserved as community supported gardens, farms, a Village Green, parks, pastures, wetlands, lakes, and prairies. These open spaces are protected by conservation easements. The site plan allows four types of lots, including *Village* home sites located near a central village green and *Prairie* home sites arranged in groups of eight. Larger *Meadow* sites face planted common areas with open views of restored prairies and wetland areas. The fifty-four *Field* home sites are the largest and offer views of garden plots and the organic farm (Martin 1).

The automobile and pedestrian movement

Prairie Crossing exhibits a complete separation of transportation modes within the interior sections of the site. An extensive trail system winds throughout the site providing key linkages to all areas of the development. The trail system includes linkages to regional trail and greenway systems. In addition, the overall configuration of the roads is similar to the methods used in Radburn's design. The home sites are either clustered within a loop with the homes surrounding a large, green area; or the home sites are clustered around a cul-de-sac. All home

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sites are adjacent to preserved open space. The cul-de-sac arrangement prevents through traffic and provides a safer environment for children and all residents. Moreover, it was intended that each home site would only have one car, further reducing traffic and safety issues within the community.

Public transportation

Prairie Crossing can be considered a commuter suburb. Residents can commute to Chicago via a train station just outside the community. A second station on a different commuter line is being constructed within Prairie Crossing. Eventually, all paths will lead to a convenient and safe transit station.

The role of topography

Like Riverside, there is very little variation in topography at Prairie Crossing. Early in the design process Johnson pointed out the subtleties in the topography to the clients and the importance these subtleties would play in the overall design (Martin 1). He adhered to existing hedgerows and created various ponds and lakes throughout the site. Degraded areas were restored to their predevelopment form, although limited by their location in a developed setting. In addition, swales were incorporated into the design, working with natural topography and vegetation, to as part of the storm water management system.

Provision for land uses

Prairie Crossing is primarily a residential community. Commercial uses exist at the periphery supplying services to the entire community. Below is the breakdown of land uses at Prairie Crossing.

- Residential land = 132 acres (20%)
- Open space = 463 acres (69%)
- Commercial / Industrial 73 acres (11%)

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Summary

Imagine you lived in a community that exhibited the picturesque beauty found at *Riverside* and *Llewellyn Park* and the ecological sustainability found at *Prairie Crossing* (the best features of the countryside), while providing affordable housing, like *Greendale*, seeking socioeconomic diversity like *Reston* and *Prairie Crossing*, and including employment opportunities like *Reston* (the best features of a city), that also accommodated the automobile and pedestrian (like many of the models). The study of these community design models presents exciting prospects for design professionals. As landscape architects, we have the opportunity to collaborate with other professionals to make a positive contribution to the continuum of community design.

It is clear that the design of Riverside, Illinois has made a significant contribution to community development. But its contributions, as well as those of the garden cities, greenbelt towns, new towns, and the current ecologically and culturally sensitive models, are not understood by a majority of people. In order to provide healthier and more sustainable places to live in the future, we must extrapolate innovative ideas found in the examples set by these communities. We need to continue to examine their successes and failures in order to produce more complete environments. This completeness refers to the inclusion of all socioeconomic groups in addition to providing an aesthetically pleasing and environmentally sound landscape. Unfortunately one of the great failures of most of these planned communities is their lack of social diversity. It is and will continue to be a challenge to integrate all levels of society into cohesive, civic-minded entities.

The following table summarizes the key elements of the above suburban designs. The table is a useful tool for analyzing Riverside's influence on twentieth-century design.