From Sea to Shining Sea: 
Planning the American Landscape as if Place Matters

by

Sage Emily Elizabeth Trombulak 
Class of 2008

A thesis submitted to the 
faculty of Wesleyan University 
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the 
Degree of Bachelor of Arts 
with Departmental Honors from the College of Social Studies 

Middletown, Connecticut

April, 2008
To Vermont,
For teaching me what it is to love a place.
When they come to chronicle the decline of this civilization, they’re going to wonder why we were debating flag burning, abortion, and broccoli eating instead of the fundamental issues of how we live and use the environment.

- Bob Yaro in *The Geography of Nowhere*, 1993
Table of Contents

List of Figures ................................................................. i

Acknowledgements .......................................................... ii

Chapter One: A Prelude to Planning ........................................ 1
  Introduction to Land Use Planning ...................................... 4
  The American Landscape and the Emergence of Planning ...... 10
  Conclusion ........................................................................ 22

Chapter Two: The City Beautiful ............................................ 28
  The Columbian Exposition ............................................... 31
  The Origins of the City Beautiful ...................................... 34
  The City Beautiful Comes of Age ...................................... 45
  The McMillan Plan for Washington, D.C. ...................... 54
  The Significance of the City Made Beautiful ..................... 61

Chapter Three: The Suburban Boom ....................................... 67
  Planning the Suburbs: From Riverside to Radburn ............ 69
  The Expropriation of the Suburban Form ......................... 82
  Levitt and Sons .............................................................. 91
  From Decentralization to Decay: The Meaning of Suburbia .... 97

Chapter Four: The New Urbanism ........................................... 102
  The Post-War American Landscape ................................. 104
  The New Urbanist Reaction ............................................ 106
  The Principles of New Urbanism ..................................... 119
  The Compass Blueprint .................................................. 129
  The Implications of a New Urbanism ............................... 133

Conclusion: Closing the Gap Between Theory and Practice ........ 139

Appendix: Charter of the New Urbanism ............................... 145

Works Cited ........................................................................ 149
List of Figures

Figure 1.1 Llewellyn Park ............................................................... 19

Figure 2.1 The Court of Honor at the Columbian Exposition, 1893 ..... 33

Figure 2.2 The Washington D.C. Mall, 1900 ................................. 56

Figure 2.3 The proposed Washington D.C. Monumental Core, 1901 ... 59

Figure 2.4 Senate Park Commission rendering of the McMillan Plan, 1902 ................................................................. 60

Figure 3.1 Levittown, New York, 1948 ............................................. 92
Acknowledgements

The writing of this thesis has been an exceedingly rewarding, challenging, and eye-opening experience, for which I have many people to thank.

Thank you first and foremost to Professor Richard Adelstein, my thesis advisor over the last year and my academic advisor for the past three years. From the moment I first began to consider writing this thesis more than a year ago, Professor Adelstein provided me with a tireless mix of critical advice and unfailing support, both of which I have relied upon throughout all phases of this process. His self-proclaimed “laissez-faire” guidance over the past three years has been a fundamental part of my academic experience at Wesleyan. As he often told me, the thesis-writing process usually leads students to discover more about themselves than about their topic. While I have not always agreed with him about everything, and although I believe strongly that I have learned a great deal about the topic of urban land use planning, there is no doubt in my mind about the veracity of his claim.

To my family in Vermont: Mom, Dad, Ian, Fred, and Joss. Their support – academic, emotional, and material – over the past decades, and especially the past year, has been integral to my success on this thesis and at Wesleyan in general. Thank you especially to Fred, for giving me the job opportunity that first sparked my interest in planning, and since then for answering my questions and supporting my passion for the topic. The devotion and hard work he puts into his job is an inspiration for me, although he is too humble to ever accept such an accolade. And thank you to Mom and Dad for teaching me to never stop asking how to make myself and the places around me better, and for helping guide me to the answers when I am lost.

To my family here at Wesleyan: they know who they are. The camaraderie we shared during this thesis-writing adventure helped me find the resolve and perseverance to see it through, as did their unrelenting support in the form of impromptu dance parties, potlucks, Bravo channel reality show marathons, and near-incessant gchatting. Without them I would never have made it through February, with them I have managed to find happiness every day despite the trials of the past year. Thank you especially to Lish, Katie, and Zoe: by some miracle we found each other, by an even greater miracle we managed to live together for four years and not kill one another.

Finally, to my professors and classmates in the CSS. Without their guidance, support, and companionship, I am confident that I never would have produced this thesis, nor would I have worked, laughed, or cried as hard as I have these past three years. My experience at Wesleyan has been profoundly shaped by the hundreds of hours I spent on the fourth floor of PAC, and the people with whom I spent them. Despite the fact that I will forever be plagued with trying to come up with an adequate response when asked “what was your major in college?” I will always hold dear my CSS education.
CHAPTER ONE: A Prelude to Planning

What matters is not whether we plan but whether we plan intelligently.
- Thomas Adams, Outline of Town and City Planning, 1935

Imagine standing on a street corner in New York City in 1855. The surrounding scene is one of chaos and confusion – people rush past, heads down, sharing the narrow roads with horse-drawn carriages and merchants hawking their wares in voices raised above the din. Water flows in open rivulets down the streets, carrying runoff rainwater, garbage, and occasionally waste that has escaped from the private privies that serve each individual property. This area is primarily composed of industrial buildings, which means that although it is noon, the surrounding air is dark with the smoke and fumes discharged by coal-burning factories. The main building type in this neighborhood is the industrial loft, a structure meant to maximize the number of people and machines that can be squeezed into a small building footprint by expanding vertically rather than horizontally. This form is a reaction to skyrocketing property values in the core of the city, a trend that is rapidly spreading across the nation’s burgeoning urban centers.

The central impetus for urban concentration across the continent is the process of industrialization. Advances in transportation technology, specifically the railroad, have fueled the accumulation of commercial activities in city centers. Many of the largest urban centers, including New York City, are places that originally arose to take advantage of access to water transportation. The railroad is now accelerating the
process of concentration – unlike coaches, trains require concentrated sites for their stops and thus encourage entrepreneurs who wish to utilize this faster, cheaper transportation method to cluster their businesses around rail lines.\(^2\) Industrialization is also affecting production technology. While agriculture remains a central feature of the economy in most regions, mechanization of agricultural processes has made farming faster and more efficient, resulting in the loss of jobs for many farmers. Many of these unemployed farmers have migrated to cities like New York, where mechanization is also changing the nature of industry. Unlike pre-industrial cottage industries, which could be practiced across dispersed rural populations, mechanized factory production requires the concentration of labor in specific places.\(^3\) Industrialization has thus created both a push from the countryside in the form of declining agrarian opportunities and a pull to the city in the form of new industrial employment.\(^4\)

The population of the city now stands at the cusp of one million. This represents a dramatic demographic change – just five decades ago the population stood below 100,000 and New York City was one of only ten cities in the United States with populations above 10,000 people.\(^5\) The ethnic composition of the city is also changing rapidly, as European immigrants flock to American cities in search of the same employment opportunities that are attracting Americans to city life. During this decade, 2.6 million immigrants will arrive in the United States, most of them English, Irish, and German.\(^6\) In just five years time, almost one quarter of the population of New York City will be composed of Irish immigrants alone.\(^7\) Ethnic tensions have led to a good deal of street violence, often revolving around issues of
religion. Such tensions are also expressing themselves in the political life of the city – just last year Fernando Wood was elected mayor of New York, marking the most influential victory to date for the Tammany Hall political machine, an organization widely recognized as providing special favors for immigrant communities in exchange for votes. Tammany will continue to dominate New York City politics until the 1950s.

The rapid growth in the city’s population has not only affected politics, but also the physical condition of the city. Although rail transit in and out of the city is fairly reliable, bringing floods of goods and people into New York every day, transportation within the city is limited. Horse-drawn streetcars have recently begun to appear in the city, but as of 1855 their service remains relatively limited, meaning that most people walk to work and must therefore live close to the industrial factories they operate. Just several blocks from this industrial neighborhood are residential areas where tenement houses – multi-storied buildings that, like the commercial loft, pack the most people possible into small building footprints – are the dominant dwelling type. Living conditions in these tenements are already horrific, and as population increases in the next decades they will only worsen. By 1890, there will be tenement districts in New York City housing more than 1,000 people per acre, at the time the most crowded urban neighborhoods in the world. The crowded living conditions, unsanitary waste treatment, unmitigated pollution, and growing poverty in the city have led to terrible consequences in terms of crime, disease, filth, and catastrophic events such as fire. Just six years ago, a deadly cholera epidemic swept the city, killing thousands. Typhus, typhoid fever, diphtheria, rickets, tuberculosis
and scarlet fever have also plagued the city, yet medical science is only now starting to suggest a connection between the squalid conditions of urban life and the contraction of these lethal diseases.

Despite the smell, noise, and pollution that permeate the air, a sense of excitement overcomes you as you stand in the urban melee. It is a feeling that has affected thousands of newcomers to the city – the perception that this is the center of all commercial, social, and political activity, the notion that just by standing here you might be able to partake in the pulsing dynamism of the city, “the unknown, perhaps unknowable, sum of so many lives, jostling, colliding, disrupting, adjusting, recognising, settling, moving again to new spaces,” so unlike the slow pace of life in the surrounding countryside. This undeniable energy has convinced many that although American cities are dirty, dangerous, and ugly places, they are also necessary to the life of the nation, representing economic and social progress and providing the “civilized” opportunities that do not exist in the countryside. Moreover, recent newcomers to the city recognize that although the fresh air, open space, and bucolic vistas of the countryside are a pleasing contrast to the filth and congestion of the city, life in the rural countryside is not idyllic – farming is a grueling and demanding lifestyle.

INTRODUCTION TO LAND USE PLANNING

This picture of New York City in 1855 reveals much about the physical effects of American urbanization during the nineteenth century. What it does not portray as clearly, however, is the way in which Americans reacted to these rapid
alterations in their physical environment and the lifestyle changes that accompanied them. In the year 1800, only 6 percent of Americans lived in cities – by 1900, this figure had grown to 40 percent.¹² This radical demographic shift had a tremendous impact on the ways Americans conceived of the places in which they lived.

Nineteenth century political theory, literature, art, and economic theory are replete with attempts to explain American society in terms of the environments its people inhabited, from the agrarian ethic proposed by Thomas Jefferson to the environmental transcendentalism of Henry David Thoreau and the urban boosterism of Jesup W. Scott and William Gilpin. This thesis attempts to explore the obverse phenomenon, examining not the ways in which human communities have been influenced by the physical environments in which they live, but the ways in which the built landscape has been affected by the people that inhabit it. This thesis does not endeavor to explore the full range of factors that have contributed to the development of the American landscape, but rather seeks to examine the evolution of the profession actually dedicated to studying and shaping the form of the American landscape between 1850 and the present, land use planning, and the role that planning theory played in the physical development of the United States over the past 150 years.

While land use planning did not emerge as a distinct profession until 1909, attempts to guide and control the nature of physical development in the built environment proliferated throughout American cities as early as the mid-nineteenth century. Urban historians generally assert that land use planning arose as an explicit reaction to the squalid conditions of the nineteenth-century city, so that, as Lewis Mumford writes, “in the end the disease simulated the antibodies needed to overcome
Before embarking on the essential task of this thesis – namely to investigate the role that land use planning theory played in the development of the American landscape – it is necessary to define the term *land use planning* more precisely. Thomas Adams, lead planner of the 1929 Regional Plan of New York, offers the following useful definition: “Planning is a science, an art, and a movement of policy concerned with the shaping and guiding of the physical growth and arrangement of [settlements] in harmony with their social and economic needs.” This thesis will use the term *planning* to refer to the general theory of using plans to guide the development and design of a built environment, regardless of whether this environment is conceived as rural, urban, or somewhere in between. Thus while other manifestations of the term *planning*, such as *economic planning* and *political planning*, may be equally important to the development of human communities, this thesis will be using the term to apply specifically to land use planning in the built environment.

Planning in this sense consists of both a positive and a normative dimension: scholars of planning have not only created a system to classify and describe the built environment as it currently exists, but have consistently made claims about the value of different types of human environments. This thesis asserts that the fundamental premise of all planning theories is the notion that the form of the built environment has a vital impact on the lives of the people that inhabit it, and thus that the activity of shaping the human landscape is an important and worthwhile one. It also assumes that all planning theories in the last 150 years have had as their essential aim to facilitate human welfare and quality of life, but that they have arrived at different
conclusions about how best to achieve this end. It is beyond the realm of the current investigation to offer a firm theory of why different ideologies have proposed such varied conceptions of how to improve quality of life, although factors such as diverse beliefs about what contributes to human welfare and differing historical contexts will be discussed in the course of the analysis. The core of this thesis will focus on the development of planning theory during the twentieth century, since it was not until then that planning became a recognized and distinct profession. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that planning in the twentieth century was founded on advances made during the second half of the nineteenth century. The remainder of this chapter will thus be spent exploring the antecedents to twentieth century professional planning, with particular focus on the ways in which planning in its early years affected the form of the American landscape between 1850 and 1890.

In order to do so, it will first be necessary to define one last set of terms: city and country, or urban and rural. In investigating the evolution of planning in the United States, this thesis will at times utilize these terms to distinguish the different types of environments that planning theory attempted to regulate and reshape, thus a basic understanding of what is meant by them will be helpful in comprehending the contours of the argument. Broadly speaking, the two terms denote distinct forms of human settlements that rely on population density as their defining characteristic.* However, given the historical scope of this thesis, it would be impossible to provide

*While features such as governmental structure are also useful in differentiating city and country, population density is the significant factor in determining the types of planning tools that can be applied most effectively in the given environment, which is the central focus of this thesis. The form of government – such as a City Council or a Town Select Board – will influence the procedural aspects of planning, such as how building permits are issued and who is responsible for reviewing development applications.
hard statistics that would adequately define city and country according to a numerical standard. Rather, the city-country distinction seems to be a relative one. At the end of the seventeenth century, the growing urban seaports of Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Charleston, and Newport ranged in population from 2,000 to 7,000 inhabitants, figures that would be used to classify small towns by modern census metrics. Yet by contemporary standards, these settlements were considered urban in relation to the rural landscape they punctuated.

Based on this relative relationship, it may be useful to define city and country with reference to a spectrum of human settlement types. Urban settlements lie at one extreme of this spectrum, corresponding to the densest human populations. At the other extreme lies wilderness, which this thesis will define simply as an environment in which no humans permanently reside. The country, then, is an environment that lies between these two extremes. Here it might be constructive to utilize the notion, suggested by Leo Marx, of the rural environment as the “middle landscape,” the midpoint between the unsettled, uncultivated wilderness and densely settled, civilized city. Rural environments include both the sparsely settled countryside, as well as low-density, low population towns that act as the economic, cultural, and social loci of the rural population. The history of the town and the countryside are inextricably linked, with population fluctuations in either affecting the condition of the other.

While there is no standard definition of “small town,” modern planners use the figure

---

† The definition of wilderness and the relationship between human communities and this environment type have long formed substantial fodder for American literature, art, and, more recently, environmental theory. Such a topic is far beyond the scope of this thesis; for a brief introduction to the complexities surrounding the concept of wilderness, see Cronon, William. "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature." Uncommon Ground: Rethinking The Human Place in Nature. Ed. William Cronon. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1995. 69-90.
of 10,000 people as the maximum population of a settlement qualifying as a small town.\(^\text{18}\) Like the term cities, however, small town is a term with an historically-dependent definition.

Ultimately, however, it is important to note that land use planners, especially in the early years of the profession’s development, relied heavily on perception, not statistics, to evaluate the environment around them. In this sense, it makes little difference how a settlement is classified in technical terms – what matters is how planners perceive the settlement, and what cultural, social, economic, and political associations they make based on this perception. This chapter will argue that in the second half of the nineteenth century, American planners relied on a conception of city and country that presented the city as a locus of progress and achievement but also a filthy, dangerous, and disease-ridden artificial environment, entirely distinct from the beautiful, healthful, and virtue-inspiring – albeit mundane and socially isolating – countryside. Based on this vision of the city, early planners concentrated their efforts to improve human welfare on the task of altering the urban landscape, believing that by making America’s cities less congested, filthy, and unhealthy through various projects of physical restructuring, the potential for social progress in these urban centers would be greatly increased. This chapter concludes that while the projects undertaken by these planners sought to reshape the physical form of the city in a piecemeal way, in reality generating very little change in the city landscape, these first efforts in land use planning were revolutionary given their historical context, and essential to creating a solid foundation of theory and technique on which twentieth century planning would draw.
THE AMERICAN LANDSCAPE AND THE EMERGENCE OF PLANNING

Prior to the development of land use planning during the second half of the nineteenth century, the concept of governmental control over the growth of the built environment was nonexistent. As Jon A. Peterson explains, “the idea of generalized control over city development had little or no public standing…The prevailing views of the role of government in society sanctioned only limited use of public authority.” Instead, the order of the nineteenth century industrial city was determined solely by economic enterprise, the result of thousands of private decisions made individually and incrementally to further personal business interests. Industrial centers grew where transportation was cheapest and power sources most abundant, and residential neighborhoods formed in response to employment opportunities. By the mid-nineteenth century, the American continent was littered with what Donald Kreuckeberg has termed “seas of unplanning” – the urban agglomerations that arose as a result of industrialization to resemble the tableau presented at the outset of this chapter. As previously discussed, these cities suffered from unprecedented levels of crime, disease, and poverty, the result of intense population and industrial concentration. The first advances in city planning arose as a direct reaction to these urban conditions, one of the first manifestations of the growing sense that municipal government had a responsibility to address these issues that so flagrantly impacted the welfare of city residents.

This thesis will use the term “special purpose planning,” suggested by Peterson in his work The Birth of City Planning in the United States, to describe the
type of planning that originated during the nineteenth century. As its name suggests, special purpose planning focused on controlling and designing specific aspects of the built environment, rather than on shaping the entire structure of a settlement as twentieth century planning eventually evolved to do. Due to the narrow aims of special purpose planners, the physical changes produced under the precepts of planning theory during this period were relatively limited as compared to the transformations that would occur in the next century. Yet this initial phase of planning was instrumental in producing the body of knowledge, both technical and theoretical, that would enable planning theory to so drastically alter physical environments in the twentieth century. In describing the transition from the special purpose planning of the nineteenth century to the comprehensive city planning of the twentieth, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., uses the simile of a river system, at first consisting of “a number of streams of varied origin and character still running side by side without quite losing their identity,” then eventually converging into a great river that is composed of all these individual streams.23

While special purpose planners experimented with many specific projects after 1850, including efforts to control fringe development, regulate housing, plan for public transportation, and control harbor development, only three types of special purpose planning proliferated nationwide to contribute formatively to the eventual development of comprehensive city planning: planning for sewerage, water supply, and urban parks.24 This chapter will examine these three manifestations of planning, as well as picturesque suburban planning, which, although not practiced on the same scale as the other three, contributed significantly to the twentieth century planning
theory that will be discussed throughout the remainder of this thesis.

Because city structure was a result of thousands of private decisions made with economic efficiency in mind, most cities lacked even rudimentary municipal infrastructure until the mid-nineteenth century. During the 1840s and 50s, many major cities began to experiment with citywide water supply systems, thus eliminating the usage of private wells. This development had important sanitary consequences, decreasing the average citizen’s probability of exposure to contaminated water, a leading cause of infectious disease. However, the removal of wastewater remained a private matter for decades; every lot had individual privies to serve residents or employees, causing substantial runoff in streets and yards. As advances in medical knowledge affirmed conclusively the causal relationship between exposure to human waste and many of the epidemic diseases plaguing American cities, engineers and technicians began to consider the possibility of using the same concepts that contributed to the development of comprehensive water supply systems to design water sewerage systems that would carry away waste water from building lots. Such a system had been invented in England in the 1840s, and by the 1870s, city governments in the United States initiated the process of installing “water carriage sewerage” in their cities. The utilization of comprehensive water supply and sewage systems represents the first instances of special purpose planning in the United States.

It is important to note that the professionals responsible for designing and constructing these sanitation systems were engineers and technicians, not planners in any sense of the word. They advised city governments on the technical details of how
to install water supply and sewage systems in specified places, but did not participate in the selection of these sites. It was the individuals who designed the methods used to identify the necessary places for sanitation systems who were truly acting as special purpose planners. By promoting a technique known as “sanitary survey planning,” a process by which specialists employed by the municipal government studied “every street, lot, and building in a city to determine the precise location of any prevalent diseases and all suspect environmental conditions,” these individuals pioneered technical planning methods that contributed to the body of knowledge that served as a platform for twentieth century city planning.

In their attempt to promote healthful reform, sanitary planners also promoted a concept of “townsite consciousness,” the principle of looking comprehensively at the characteristics of an entire urban setting and their bearing on public health. In addition to encouraging the installation of water and sewer lines, sanitary planners argued that healthfulness could best be achieved by promoting lower density urban settlement, advocating that cities be arranged as “airy, verdant places free from excessive crowding and physical congestion.” All elements of the city should be designed to facilitate healthy living, from the provision of ample public space for outdoor recreation and exercise to the abundance of parks, trees, fresh air, and sunlight to recreate the healthy conditions of the lightly populated countryside. Most sanitary planners recognized, however, that such radical transformation of the urban environment was unlikely, and confined themselves to advocating for sanitation systems and the avoidance of building on wet, stagnant land whenever possible. While recognizing that contemporary cities engendered a variety of serious
problems, including poor health and disease, sanitation planners demonstrated their conviction that such problems could be alleviated through the improvement of municipal infrastructure, careful site planning that targeted the elimination of environmental conditions causing disease, and emulation of rural beauty when possible.

The third type of special purpose planning to be discussed in this chapter, urban park design, similarly arose out of the notion that the ills of the city could be lessened through piecemeal planning projects. The urban parks movement began during the 1850s, like sanitation planning a direct response to the congestion and filth of the nineteenth century city. Throughout the next several decades, men such as Frederick Law Olmsted, Calvert Vaux, Andrew Jackson Downing, W.S. Cleveland, and Charles Eliot popularized the art of landscape architecture and park design, promoting the idea that by providing urbanites with direct access to natural beauty in the form of urban parks, a variety of problems endemic to city life could potentially be ameliorated. Park planners tended to emphasize three problems associated with urban life that parks could help combat: physical unhealthiness, psychological stress, and social disunity. Beginning with the creation of Central Park in 1857 – an 843-acre park built at a time when few public parks exceeded 10 acres – the urban park movement swept the nation, resulting in the construction of major parks in cities such as Philadelphia, Hartford, Washington, D.C., Baltimore, Newark, Chicago, Buffalo, Cleveland, Cincinnati, St. Louis, and San Francisco.34

In its early years, the city park movement was mainly motivated by concerns for the physical health of urbanites, and landscape designers such as Olmsted
proposed that parks could act as “the lungs of the city,” flushing out the bad air that caused sickness and replacing it with clean, healthy air. Large city parks could also provide places for physical exercise and recreation, thus further promoting healthful living. As the movement progressed, however, park planners began to suggest a fundamental connection between parks and the psychological health of urbanites. In writing about the potential effects of city parks, Olmsted claimed that people had a particular taste for the natural beauty of the countryside, especially given that many urbanites at the time had been raised in the country and recently arrived in urban centers. In writing on the transition of a hypothetical country-dweller to city life, Olmsted asserts, “Trees and grass are…wrought into the very texture and fibre of his constitution and without being aware of it he feels day by day that his life needs a suggestion of the old country flavor to make it palatable as well as profitable.”

Olmsted contrasted the beauty of natural environments to the ugliness of the urban landscape, claiming that “A man’s eyes cannot be as much occupied as they are in large cities by artificial things…without a harmful effect, first on his mental and nervous system and ultimately on his entire constitutional organization.” By providing access to natural beauty, as opposed to the artificial urban cityscape, parks could “refresh and delight the eye and through the eye, the mind and the spirit.” This preference for the natural beauty characteristic of the rural countryside over the artificial creations of the city typified the work of nineteenth century park planners.

Lastly, park planners believed that urban parks could aid in combating the anti-community and undemocratic tendencies of city life. These planners deplored what they saw as the “‘heart-hardening’ effects of city life,” caused by the
segregation of people by social class, the relative anonymity of city life, and the fast-paced nature of urban existence. In an extension of the Jeffersonian agrarian ethic—which more than half a century earlier had proposed that the rural, agricultural lifestyle in America was the root of its thriving democratic tradition because of the values the rural environment instilled in its inhabitants—park planners saw urban parks, in their imitation of the rural landscape, as “an educating and civilizing agency, standing in winning competition against the sordid and corrupting temptations of the town.”

By providing a place for people of all classes to intermingle, interact, and partake in outdoor recreation, parks would promote the qualities of equality and freedom so inherent in successful democracy, counteracting the “poisonous excitement of city life” that threatened to overcome most urbanites. Other public spaces in the city, such as business districts, did not promote such interclass mixing and meaningful interaction, for it was only “spaciousness and naturalness [that] fostered the caring gregariousness of the village community.”

While park planners saw their work as an important means of alleviating certain urban ills and thereby improving the city environment, it is important to note that they did not believe that urban parks made the artificial cityscape any more beautiful. Despite the planning projects—such as the introduction of sewerage and water supply systems—that had helped to improve the aesthetic appearance of the city environment in recent years, as late as the 1890s urban park planners still adhered to a concept of beauty that embraced the natural landscape of the rural countryside and excluded the human creations of the city. Such an aesthetic ethic was often justified by invoking, as Olmsted did, the concept of an instinctive attraction to the
rural landscape, “an innate homage to the natural in contradistinction to the artificial – a preference for the works of God to the works of man” present in every American.\textsuperscript{44} City parks served merely as a means of escape from the ugly urban environment, not as a method of beautifying the city, which was inherently unattractive by virtue of its artificiality. Nevertheless, like special purpose sanitation planners, park planners believed fervently in the value and necessity of cities, whatever their deficiencies might be. While the countryside possessed an aesthetic appeal the city never could, urban America was the center of technological, cultural, and economic progress. Olmsted lauded the educational facilities, libraries, fine arts, technological innovations, and multitude of services produced by an efficient division of labor that he believed could only be found in places of dense population concentration.\textsuperscript{45} Thus the creation of parks was essential insofar as it made city life more tolerable through the injection of natural beauty into the artificial, unattractive, and frenetic urban environment.

The final type of special purpose planning to be explored in this chapter is the design of picturesque suburban communities. While technological innovation in production during the first half of the nineteenth century had caused massive population centralization in urban centers, technological development in transportation at the end of the century began to favor decentralization as light rail and cable cars expanded the potential radius of cities and led to the development of residential settlements on the periphery of city cores known as “suburbs.”\textsuperscript{46} Even before the invention of the electric streetcar in 1887, horse-drawn omnibuses were making it possible for workers to live outside urban centers and commute into the city
to work on a daily basis. Many of these suburbs were designed and planned by economic entrepreneurs who recognized the potential value of constructing residential communities outside the urban core but within commuting distance of the employment and entertainment opportunities that remained concentrated in cities.

While most suburbs were designed using a traditional grid layout and only provided utilities such as water and sewer as bonuses to families who chose to pay extra, a few notable suburban communities were planned utilizing the principles of townsite consciousness to comprehensively conceive of the entire settlement and its connection to the nearby urban center. In thinking critically about the complete layout of a suburban community rather than focusing on the development of individual house lots, the planners who designed these few select suburbs were acting as special purpose planners in the same way sanitation and parks planners were. This chapter will use the term *picturesque suburbs* to refer to such settlements, differentiating these communities from those that were planned using conventional standards and little regard for overall aesthetic appeal. Although the extent of these planners’ work was relatively limited during the nineteenth century, it had a tremendous impact on the direction of planning theory during the twentieth century and the evolving structure of the American environment during this period.

The first suburban community to be designed using principles of comprehensive site planning was Llewellyn Park, constructed during the 1850s in New Jersey’s Orange Mountains and designed by Alexander Jackson Davis. In designing the community, Davis hoped to create a settlement that satisfied “the wants of citizens doing business in the city of New York, and yet wishing accessible,
To achieve a vision of bucolic peacefulness a mere thirteen miles outside of New York City, Davis pioneered two design elements that would become staples of picturesque suburban plans during the next fifty years: curvilinear roads and public open space at the center of the settlement. Davis claimed that such features helped “preserve the rural character of the grounds,” solidifying the community as an escape from the congestion, poverty, and grime of the city. The suburb, marketed as the combination of the best of both country and city living, achieved immediate popularity, attracting wealthy urbanites who wished to leave behind the living conditions of the central city but similarly avoid the social isolation and boredom associated with the countryside.

Fig. 1.1 The original plan of the northwestern part of Llewellyn Park, showing curvilinear road system and extensive landscaping.
The picturesque suburb flourished across the nation in the following decades, propelled primarily by the efforts of landscape architects such as Olmsted and Vaux. Just as the conviction that the city was a valuable yet flawed place had led them to promote urban parks that would introduce pockets of natural beauty into the artificial cityscape, many landscape architects were impelled to design suburban communities that would combine “the conditions of health and of ruralist beauty of a loosely built New England village with a certain degree of the material and social advantages of a Town.” 51 By providing beautiful, healthful living spaces for urban workers, suburbs would serve the same function as urban parks but on a larger scale, providing places of respite where urbanites could recharge and relax, allowing them to “make full use of the opportunities of the city” during their daily trips to the city center. 52 Between 1850 and 1900, dozens of picturesque suburbs were planned and constructed nationwide, many, such as Olmsted’s 1600-acre Riverside, drawing on the design principles first utilized in Llewellyn Park. Planners advocated the usage of curvilinear road systems, claiming that “gracefully-curved lines, generous spaces, and the absence of sharp corners…suggest[s] and implies leisure, contemplativeness, and happy tranquility.” 53 Public open spaces, large housing setbacks, irregularly planted trees, and personal gardens similarly helped promote the feeling of openness and rustic beauty. 54

Despite the many projects on which special purpose planners worked during the second half of the nineteenth century, the overall impact of planning theory on the structure of the American built landscape remained relatively limited. This was due in large part to the fact that special purpose planners did not view themselves as land
use planners in the way in which this thesis has defined the concept, although this was the task they were in fact undertaking. Rather, they still identified themselves as members of a diverse set of other professions, including architecture, landscape architecture, engineering, and city governance. In undertaking the various projects they did, these planners did not seek to create substantial change in the American landscape, but rather to simply promote small-scale changes to city environments in the form of providing fresh water and removing waste through sanitation systems, creating open spaces for recreation and the appreciation of fresh air in the form of city parks, and designing residential communities completely removed from the ugliness and disease of the urban core. Yet in pursuing these four types of projects, special purpose planners inadvertently generated a body of technical and theoretical knowledge that would serve as the foundation for professional land use planning in the following century.

In addition to failing to generate substantial change in the structure of the American environment due to their own limited goals, special purpose planners also failed to produce such change because their efforts were focused so myopically in the urban environment. By concentrating their efforts on improving the urban environment alone, these planners neglected the increasing interconnectedness between city and country environments. As this chapter has revealed, the shape of the American landscape prior to 1850 was determined largely by a confluence of economic, political, and social factors, forces that crossed the boundaries between urban and rural environments and in doing so drew the two landscape types into an intertwined and interdependent relationship with one another. By neglecting to
understand how the shape of the urban environment was as much a product of events happening in the surrounding countryside as in the urban core, special purpose planners never could have exercised any substantial control over the structure of the city landscape even if that had been their goal. This criticism is not meant to impugn the importance of the work done by these planners – this thesis is predicated upon the belief that land use planning evolved slowly, with each succeeding step increasing the ability of planning theory to exert actual influence over the form of the physical environment. Given the historical context in which special purpose planning first emerged, even the basic reforms attempted by sewer, water, parks, and suburban planners were revolutionary in their assertion that the solution to social, economic, and political ills of the city might lie in the physical structure of the urban environment.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored nineteenth century forays into the field of land use planning, examining what impact the theories developed by special purpose planners had on the shape of the American landscape during the second half of the nineteenth century. The next three chapters will investigate three similarly pivotal movements in the evolution of land use planning theory in the United States: The City Beautiful movement, the 1950s suburban housing boom, and New Urbanism. In considering these three movements, I do not purport to touch upon all of American planning history, although chronologically my examination will cover the full twentieth century. Rather, these movements have been selected because each made essential
contributions to the development of planning theory and the ability of planning theory to influence the form of the American landscape. Just as the nineteenth century industrial city was plagued by a variety of social, economic, and political problems, so too is the modern United States rife with issues. As someone who believes fervently in the importance of place and environment in shaping the beliefs and behavior of human communities, it is my assertion that some of these modern problems – such as growing income inequality, rising crime rates, degradation of the natural environment, and social isolation and fragmentation – may be addressed at least partially through the reorganization of the American landscape. Only by understanding the role of planning theory in the creation of the modern landscape will it be possible to envision the capacity of land use planning to help overcome the problems that stem from the physical environment that Americans inhabit.

Each of the following three chapters will include an historical overview of the movement to be discussed, an exploration of the movement’s fundamental contribution to the evolution of planning theory and the development of the American landscape, and a detailed example of one particular project exemplifying the principles of the movement. Chapter Two will focus on the City Beautiful movement, investigating the emergence of comprehensive urban planning and the ways in which this new perception of land use planning influenced the direction of physical growth in American cities. Chapter Three will examine suburban planning in the United States, probing the ways in which land use planners contributed to the development of the suburban model that proliferated across the nation during the 1950s and is now a defining feature of the American landscape. Finally, Chapter
Four will explore New Urbanism, a contemporary planning movement that criticizes the structure of the built environment in the United States and seeks to reshape it by attempting to understand the influence of past planning theories in creating the modern American landscape and drawing upon these theories to create a new vision for the role of land use planning in the United States. The purpose in analyzing these three particular movements is that doing so will allow a full exploration of both the evolution of planning theory in the United States and the physical development produced by such theory, since all three contributed fundamentally to the advancement of land use theory as well as to the formation of the physical structure of the United States.

This chapter concludes, then, with a vision of the American city at the end of the nineteenth century. By the 1890s, American cities were even larger and more congested than they had been at mid-century. In the previous one hundred years, the population of the United States had increased sixteenfold, but the urban population had grown 139 times larger. At the same time, rural destitution and depopulation continued at alarming rates, as farming languished in the shadow of urban industrialism. Yet just as in the mid-century city, a feeling of hope pervaded the urban environment. It was no longer a sensation based merely on the dizzying momentum of city life, but an optimism based on the palpable progress of the past fifty years. While the city remained crowded, dirty, and squalid for many, a growing awareness of the causes of urban ills and the potential antidote provided by the emerging practice of land use planning suggested that the American city need not be so flawed. Physical changes in the form of sanitation, city parks, and planned
residential communities promised to lessen the problems associated with urban living, just as the technical knowledge developed to implement these changes promised to give rise to continued innovation in the field of city planning. The remainder of this thesis explores development of the American landscape during the next one hundred years and the role of the flourishing planning profession in producing the radical changes that occurred.
Notes:

2 Levy 10.
3 Levy 9.
4 Levy 9.
12 Levy 7.
15 Mohl 3.
19 Peterson, The Birth of City Planning 29.
22 Hall 7.
24 Peterson, The Birth of City Planning 22-3.
25 Peterson, The Birth of City Planning 35.
27 Peterson, The Birth of City Planning 35.
29 Peterson, “The Impact of Sanitary Reform” 23.
30 Peterson, The Birth of City Planning 36.
31 Peterson, The Birth of City Planning 33.
32 Peterson, The Birth of City Planning 33.
34 Peterson, The Birth of City Planning 40, 42.
35 Mumford, The City in History 475.
38 Olmsted quoted in Beveridge 31.
39 Beveridge 46.
40 Olmsted quoted in Beveridge 46.
41 Bender 179-80.
44 Calvert Vaux, Villages and Cottages (New York, 1857) 27.
45 Beveridge 42.
46 Levy 13.
47 Peterson, The Birth of City Planning 24.
48 Kenneth T. Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) 76-7
49 Alexander Jackson Davis quoted in Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier 77.
50 Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier 78.
52 Beveridge 43.
53 Olmsted quoted in Beveridge 104.
54 Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier 80.
55 Mohl 1.
CHAPTER TWO: The City Beautiful

Beauty came even before food in Eden. And while we cannot restore man to the garden, we can...make the city garden-like.

- E.L. Shuey, “Commercial Bodies and Civic Improvement,” 1901

In 1909, the planning profession at last completed its long gestation. That year, the First National Conference on City Planning and the Problems of Congestion was hosted in Washington, D.C. The Wisconsin state legislature adopted the first state law granting broad authority to cities to create planning commissions and prepare city plans. Harvard offered the first university course in city planning, entitled “The Principles of City Planning.” On the Fourth of July, Daniel Burnham released his comprehensive Plan of Chicago, a report detailing proposed future development for the entire Chicago urban region of 4,000 square miles. In conjunction, these achievements represented the birth of the planning profession as a specialized field dedicated to understanding and shaping the complex urban environment in its totality, distinct from the special purpose planning that had evolved during the nineteenth century. As a result, the movement that precipitated these events, the City Beautiful, has been labeled the first urban planning movement in the United States. Remembered for its neoclassical architectural program and monumental plans for urban redevelopment, the City Beautiful brought attention to the condition of the urban landscape nationwide and suggested that creating a beautiful environment was the first step in remedying the social and political ills plaguing American cities.
Despite the tremendous impact of the City Beautiful on the development of planning in the United States, by the second decade of the twentieth century the movement had been almost fully extinguished by fierce criticism. This chapter seeks to explore the development of the City Beautiful movement, with particular attention to how the technical, ideological, and organizational foundations of the movement eventually gave rise to a profession dedicated specifically to the comprehensive management of the physical growth of the urban environment. Although the movement’s neoclassical architecture and monumentalism was as fleeting as the movement itself, the City Beautiful’s emphasis on comprehensive planning became an enduring legacy, influencing the most basic methods with which planners throughout the remainder of the twentieth century attempted to initiate change in the environments in which they worked. While special purpose planners had been limited in the amount of change they could produce in the city landscape by their own narrow goals, by advocating the usage of comprehensive land use planning – now a mainstay of American planning – City Beautiful advocates endowed planning theory with the ability to produce substantial physical alterations in the structure of the built environment.

Since the decline of the City Beautiful movement after the first decade of the twentieth century, accounts of the movement have tended to emphasize two central conclusions: first, that the City Beautiful was a direct result of the principles publicized by the World’s Columbian Exposition in 1893, and second, that the movement was little more than a short-lived failure, soon to be overtaken by more effective and advanced theories of planning. Recent planning literature, however, has
refuted both these claims, tracing the roots of the movement back to the 1850s and asserting its continuing influence and importance throughout the twentieth century. The core of this chapter will consider these two issues – the origins and significance of the City Beautiful movement – as they relate to the development of planning theory in the twentieth century and the impact of this theory on the structure of the American landscape. The chapter will conclude with a detailed example of one of the projects completed during the movement, the McMillan Plan of Washington, D.C., in order to explore more fully the ways in which the City Beautiful’s emphasis on comprehensive planning was translated into physical reality.

In order to understand the origins of the City Beautiful in the United States, it is necessary to examine the functional origins, the ideological origins, and the organizational origins of the movement. The first describes what specific tasks City Beautiful planners sought to undertake, the second the formation of the coherent underlying ideology of the movement, and the third how this ideology came to be articulated and executed across the nation. Since scholarly debates on the movement have contested the relative importance of the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition, this chapter will begin with a brief analysis of this event. It will then investigate the roots of the movement prior to the Exposition, and its full articulation as a nationally unified force in the years following the Exposition. It is my contention that the functional, ideological, and organizational foundations of the City Beautiful predated the Columbian Exposition, and that this event was simply one expression of the coalescing City Beautiful ideology, rather than its inspiration or its first achievement. Nevertheless, the Exposition exposed the concept of land use planning to most
Americans for the first time, and as such marks an iconic moment in both the development the City Beautiful movement and the history of planning in the United States more generally.

**THE COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION**

The Exposition opened in 1893 as a celebration of the 400-year anniversary of Columbus’s arrival in the Americas. Located in Jackson Park, Chicago, the Fair encompassed 700 acres, every inch of which was carefully planned by a team of architects, landscape architects, and engineers. Indeed, the project represented the first collaborative efforts between architects and landscape architects, with Daniel Burnham, a prominent Chicagian architect, acting as Director of Works, and Frederick Law Olmsted appointed as head of landscaping. Reflecting the growing national interest in planning in the city environment, Burnham and his colleagues designed the fairgrounds to resemble a prototype for an ideal city center. Built following Beaux Arts principles, the Exhibition relied on a neoclassical architectural program that drew heavily on Greco-Roman inspiration. This neoclassical style would become the foundation of the City Beautiful’s aesthetic program, a design choice that will be probed in greater depth later in the chapter. During the six months the Exposition was open, over 27 million people visited the site.

---

* Beaux Arts architecture is a style that is rooted in European architectural traditions and was developed over centuries under the rule of the French Académie royale d'architecture and later the Académie des Beaux-Arts. Despite its European origins, the Beaux Arts program was influential in American architecture between roughly 1885 and 1920, and the Columbian Exposition was one of its most triumphant showcases. The influence of the style on the City Beautiful movement will be explored further in Chapter Two of this thesis. See James Philip Noffsinger, *The Influence of the École des Beaux-arts on the Architects of the United States* (Washington DC., Catholic University of America Press, 1955) for a treatment of the Beaux Arts style in the United States.
Dubbed the “White City,” the Fair was hailed as a “vision of urban life at its noblest and most civilized.” While many Americans had accepted that cities were dirty, congested, ugly places by necessity, the Exposition suggested that comprehensive planning and collaboration between city professionals could not simply alleviate the aesthetic flaws of the city, but in fact create beautiful, inspirational urban landscapes. As William H. Wilson asserts of the event, “as the scale was urban, so was its beauty. The Exposition affirmed the possibility of making cities beautiful.” The Exposition also suggested that transforming the physical appearance of cities could have a tremendous impact on the social conditions of those living in the urban environment. The 27 million people who visited the Exposition represented Americans from across many professions, social classes, and ethnic groups, yet all were able to partake in the wonder and excitement of the Fair equally. While real urban existence was rife with poverty, squalor, and inequality, “within the White City every person was sovereign. Therein all could experience the rights and privileges that belonged to citizens but which they were denied by the facts of urban life.” This essential connection between urban beautification and social reform formed a key component of City Beautiful ideology as it was eventually articulated in the next decade.
The Exposition was thus clearly a crucial moment in the development of the City Beautiful movement. Yet while the Fair was useful in convincing the American public that it was possible to remake the appearance of the urban landscape through the collaborative efforts of architects, landscape architects, and engineers, the event
was primarily a means of making public ideas that had been developing in private circles since the 1850s. The Exposition was also frequently cited by City Beautiful advocates at the turn of the century as the official beginning of the movement, a means of supplying the movement with “a unified, vivid, and highly regarded origin” as opposed to the long, complex, and highly fragmented history that had actually produced it. The following section will scrutinize these complex origins during the second half of the nineteenth century.

THE ORIGINS OF THE CITY BEAUTIFUL

Simply understood, the comprehensive planning that emerged during the City Beautiful was a functional convergence of the special purpose planning efforts that had evolved during the nineteenth century. In other words, in constructing a vision for the future development and growth of a given urban environment, City Beautiful comprehensive planning sought to address all the disparate elements looked at individually by special purpose planners, from sewerage and water supply to city parks, road systems, and residential development. The importance of this unification for the future of land use planning cannot be overstated, as the ability to produce substantial change in the physical structure of the built environment was increased manifold times by the creation of a single profession dedicated to the control of all aspects of the physical environment. However, the ideological and organizational foundations of the City Beautiful were primarily inherited from three nineteenth century movements, only one of which was a special purpose planning movement discussed in the previous chapter: outdoor art, or the city parks movement. The other
two, civic improvement and municipal art, were distinctly not planning movements, as they cared little for trying to control or regulate growth and development. Nevertheless, all three contributed important and unique elements to both the organizational structure and ideological foundations of the City Beautiful, and therefore this chapter will examine the impact of each on the City Beautiful theory that finally swept across the nation in the first decade of the twentieth century.

The civic improvement movement grew out of the village improvement movement, which began to flourish in rural New England in the 1850s. The phenomenon drew its inspiration from the works of Andrew Jackson Downing, a prominent American landscaper who throughout the 1840s published several influential books on country houses and landscaping. In his 1848 work *On the Improvement of Country Villages*, Downing encouraged the establishment of rural improvement societies that would undertake projects to promote the aesthetic improvement of rural life. The first such society was formed in 1853 in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. The Laurel Hill Association, as it was called, oversaw the transformation of Stockbridge from “a neglected Berkshire mountain town with rutted streets, treeless roadsides, a tumble-down cemetery, and unkempt commons” to a picturesque country village with manicured lawns, tree-lined walkways, and paved and graded roads. The Laurel Hill Association served as a prototype for most improvement societies that followed, and by 1880 Massachusetts had twenty-eight societies and Connecticut between fifty and sixty. These associations flourished particularly in towns anxious to capture the summer tourist trade, promoting “cleanliness, order, [and] cultural activity as well as picturesque landscape amenities”
in their improvement efforts in order to attract the urbanites who flocked to the countryside for respite.\textsuperscript{14}

By the 1890s, the village improvement movement had spread beyond New England, due in large part to the attention paid to it in magazines such as \textit{The Atlantic Monthly Forum} and \textit{Home and Flowers}. As the movement spread – first south along the eastern seaboard and then west to California – the size of the towns forming such societies expanded as well. While the initial associations had flourished in small rural villages, by the 1890s improvement societies were being formed in small and medium-sized urban areas as well.\textsuperscript{15} Despite the local variations, the movement consistently emphasized sanitation, general cleanliness, and pastoral beautification, and commonly resulted in projects such as refurbishing main streets, resuscitating town greens, tree-planting, and road-paving.\textsuperscript{16} In 1900, a group of improvement proponents gathered in Springfield, Ohio to create the National League of Improvement Associations as an attempt to unify the thousands of improvement societies operating across the nation. The Association approached improvement as a crusade, claiming to promote “the gospel of Beauty and the cult of the god of sanitation.”\textsuperscript{17}

However, the Association struggled to maintain contacts with both the small village improvement societies and their larger metropolitan counterparts thriving in such cities as Chicago, St. Louis, and San Francisco.\textsuperscript{18} By 1902 the Association needed a new strategy, which it found by moving its headquarters to Chicago and changing its name to the American League for Civic Improvement (ALCI). By changing location to a booming urban center, the organization embraced the new
metropolitan side of the movement, and by invoking the idea of “civic improvement” in its title the League hoped to link itself to the Progressive movement that was rapidly gaining political and social support nationwide. Proponents believed that the term “civic improvement” more accurately conveyed the social reform element of the movement, bringing it more in line with the reform ethos of Progressivism. Charles Zueblin, the second president of the League, emphasized the concept of “the new civic spirit” that would drive the improvement movement as well as all positive social reform.  

By the 1890s, the movement had shed its rural origins, with the majority of civic improvement activity occurring in urban areas where the main projects were similar to those advocated by the special purpose planners who were concurrently working on reshaping American cities. Projects such as organizing “keep our city clean” campaigns, encouraging tree planting and children’s gardens, and pressing for water supply systems reflected the convictions that the dirtiness and ugliness of the city could be ameliorated through the initiation of hundreds of piecemeal beautification projects.

Despite the new urban focus that emerged during the 1890s, from its beginnings the improvement movement generated an ideology that contributed heavily to the City Beautiful as it was fully articulated during the twentieth century. First, the improvement movement emphasized a belief in the potential beauty of the whole community, not just new or favored portions. The movement proposed the idea that an entire landscape, including both built and natural aspects, could be beautiful, not just a particular building or a breathtaking vista. Secondly, the use of the term “improvement” connoted both aesthetic and utilitarian principles. From its
very beginnings, village beautification was never done simply for aesthetic reasons, but because advocates believed that there was a fundamental connection between the appearance of a place and its social and economic vitality. Paved roads and manicured lawns were not simply pleasing to look at, but served some utilitarian function as well, such as attracting summer tourists. Improvement societies valued beauty because they equated it with moral and industrial progress, a theme that featured prominently in City Beautiful theory and, more generally, in the Progressive values of the era.  

Although the village improvement movement provided an ideological and organizational foundation for the first nationwide planning movement in the nation, it was by no means a planning movement itself, either organizationally or ideologically. Organizationally, the movement was driven by thousands of disparate local societies, all run by laymen with no formal training or interest in theories of land use planning, infant as they were at the time. In fact, many societies were run solely by women, with men admitted only on an honorary basis. While I do not mean to suggest that women could not have been among the first American planners, the fact that village improvement was organized more like a social pastime than a professional activity suggests that it cannot be considered a planning movement. The theory underlying the movement supports this claim. While the combination of many piecemeal projects often resulted in the makeover of an entire community, village improvement was conceived of on a project-by-project basis as a way to arrest rural decline, rather than as a comprehensive means for controlling and shaping community development.
Like the civic improvement movement, the municipal art movement was not a planning movement. While societies of professional artists had worked to promote their trade for decades, municipal art as a coherent movement did not emerge until the 1890s in New York City. Also called collaborative or allied art because of its emphasis on cooperation between architects, sculptors, painters, and other craftsmen, the movement promoted the installation of decorative art in public places to enhance the beauty of the urban environment. Of the three movements that gave rise to the City Beautiful, the municipal art movement is the one whose origins most closely relate to the Columbian Exposition of 1893. While the Exposition did not initiate the zeal for municipal art, it certainly gave it recognition and also served as a forum for many artists working with diverse media to meet and develop professional relationships. In 1893, the Municipal Art Society of New York was founded by artists who had worked together at the Exposition. Defining its goal as providing “adequate sculptural and pictorial decorations for the public buildings and parks in the city of New York,” the Society worked to promote the types of decorative art that had been displayed at the Exposition, emphasizing that such elements as sculpture, murals, and stained glass should be installed in prominent city spaces where urbanites could view them in the course of their daily activities.

Although the movement faltered in its initial years due to the economic depression that afflicted the nation between 1893-1897 and precluded the types of costly projects the Society hoped to promote, when the depression finally lifted the movement regained strength. By the end of the decade there were municipal art societies in cities such as Cincinnati, San Francisco, and Chicago, all of which were
active in promoting plans for public art projects. In 1899 the Architectural League of America was founded in Cleveland, with a special Committee on Municipal Improvements and Civic Embellishments dedicated to encouraging plans for the adornment and decoration of public buildings. Later that same year, the first municipal art conference was sponsored by the Municipal Art Society of Baltimore, bringing together advocates from across the nation.²⁷ Attendees discussed strategy for disseminating their message nationwide, and shared artistic inspiration to encourage future projects. While they referred to the decorative art of the Columbian Exposition, they drew mainly on European examples of artful civic scenes – from individual works of sculpture and painting to more elaborate creations such as ornate building facades – disparaging the current “artless American cityscape” that they were trying to beautify.²⁸ Proponents of the movement sought to create urban beauty through hundreds of piecemeal projects, seeking to remake the city landscape one art project at a time. While some of these projects were large – such as the arch constructed in Manhattan to honor Admiral George Dewey for his victory in the Battle of Manila Bay – they were still far from the monumental urbanism that would develop in the next decade.²⁹

The municipal art movement’s emphasis on beautification of the urban environment was extremely influential for City Beautiful ideology. Like civic improvement proponents, municipal art advocates lamented the ugly urban environment surrounding them, drawing a substantial connection between the physical ugliness of the city and the political and social corruption that they believed resulted from such degradation. Adopting the motto “to make us love our city, we
must make our city lovely,” proponents asserted that social and political reform could come only when citizens could be proud of their city. While seemingly similar to the civic improvement and outdoor art movements’ emphasis on beautification and its connection to the social and economic life of the city, the municipal art movement’s perspective on beautification in fact differed quite importantly from that held by the other two movements. While the civic improvement and outdoor art movements both deplored the ugliness of the city and suggested that this unappealing appearance could be improved through the introduction of natural beauty into the urban environment, municipal art advocates suggested for the first time that the city could be beautified through the installation of human creations. Despite their artificiality, sculptures, murals, and ornate building facades could actually create a cityscape that was not simply less ugly, but was actually beautiful. This concept of artificial beauty, and the capacity for cities to be made beautiful through the strategic placement of human creations throughout the city, was an important departure from the civic improvement and outdoor art’s attachment to natural beauty. This image of the city as a potentially beautiful and aesthetically appealing environment in its own right would form an essential ideological foundation of the City Beautiful’s aesthetic program.

Nevertheless, had the City Beautiful emerged from the convergence of the civic improvement and municipal art movements alone, it would never have developed into the first modern planning movement in the United States. These two movements proposed an aesthetic ideology that called for beautification of the urban environment as a means to social reform, but suggested nothing about land use planning in the way that the special purpose planning of the nineteenth century did.
The outdoor art movement did just that, bringing to City Beautiful ideology the decades of planning activity that had been developed by the landscape architects designing city parks since mid-century. I will not go into detail about the development of this movement, since it has already been examined in the previous chapter, but will instead focus on the organizational and ideological contributions the outdoor art movement made to the City Beautiful. As already discussed, the city park movement had begun gaining favor and enthusiasm in the 1850s, popularized by such iconic landscape architects as Frederick Law Olmsted, Calvert Vaux, Andrew Jackson Downing, W.S. Cleveland, and Charles Eliot. This movement was fueled by the idea that urbanites needed access to natural beauty to recover from the taxing urban atmosphere. Landscape architects practicing during this time adhered to the idea that while it would be impossible to recreate the wilderness, humans were capable of reproducing the picturesque middle landscape in the form of accessible city parks.³¹ Parks planners believed that the creation of individual parks could help remedy a number of the problems plaguing nineteenth century cities.

As will be shown later in this chapter, the City Beautiful ideology did not retain the outdoor art movement’s emphasis on rural beauty versus urban ugliness. However, it did draw heavily on the more general environmental ethic proposed by the outdoor art movement, namely that a beautiful environment could influence human thought and behavior.³² Here the word “environmental” is not used to refer to the nonhuman, “natural” world, but simply to describe an ethic that emphasizes the influence of surroundings on human inhabitants. In promoting this environmental ethic, the outdoor art movement contributed to the social reform theory suggested by
the village improvement and municipal art movements. Just as the proponents of both these movements envisioned a link between beautiful places and social progress, city park advocates emphasized the link between beautiful parks and harmonious social interaction. Men such as Olmsted ardently asserted that beautiful outdoor spaces could bring people of all classes together, promoting class intermingling and reconciliation, and thus cultivating the values of equality and freedom essential to the success of American democracy. The foundation of this claim was an emphasis on beauty, and the ability of beautiful landscapes to promote moral and virtuous behavior.

A second contribution of the outdoor art movement to City Beautiful theory was the essential component that caused the City Beautiful to develop into a planning movement, rather than simply an aesthetic one. While the early years of the city parks movement were devoted to planning single parks, by the 1870s landscape architects were designing comprehensive multi-park and boulevard systems. In considering how to plan large systems that influenced many aspects of the urban landscape – such as roads that linked residential neighborhoods to commercial districts or parks that served a multiplicity of recreational functions – landscape architects were fundamentally playing the role of urban planners. This differed from the intentions and actions of village improvement and municipal art enthusiasts, who strove to create beautiful landscapes but achieved this goal by undertaking a progression of piecemeal, individually-conceived projects. The City Beautiful, lauded by planning scholars as the first theory to promote comprehensive city planning across the nation, derived its focus on comprehensive planning from its
roots in the outdoor art movement, basing such an emphasis on the belief that only comprehensive planning could generate a truly beautiful urban environment.

Finally, the outdoor art movement contributed to the organizational development of the City Beautiful movement. Unlike the civic improvement movement, outdoor art was dominated by professionals. Even at its beginnings, the city park movement was driven by trained landscape architects and parks commissioners who prided themselves on their specialized expert knowledge and believed strongly in the preeminence of professionals over laymen. Landscape architects pioneered the position of the expert consultant, a professional who could serve as a consultant on single jobs without having to initiate all their own projects. Without such a position, landscape architecture would never have persisted as a viable profession, nor would city planning. In the decades before cities hired full-time planners, planning was done by expert consultants who were hired on a project-by-project basis. This was true of the sanitation planners and landscape planners that were discussed in the previous chapter, as well as the professionals who drafted the comprehensive city plans grounded in the City Beautiful ideology during the first decade of the twentieth century. In 1897, the professionals involved in the outdoor art movement formed the American Park and Outdoor Art Association (APOAA), which worked to promote park development and landscaping nationwide, using the environmental ethic already discussed to justify such efforts.

The term “City Beautiful” had first appeared in the United States in 1898 when, in an article in Municipal Affairs, Charles R. Lamb, a New York City activist, enjoined the city to realize “the dream of the idealist, ‘THE CITY BEAUTIFUL.’”
Borrowed from its original usage in the introductory talk of a lecture series sponsored by the Arts and Crafts Exhibition of London in 1896, the term was again used in 1899 on the front cover of Municipal Affairs magazine. It was Charles Mulford Robinson, a journalist and writer, who first applied the term to describe the common efforts of the civic improvement, municipal art, and outdoor art movements, which by the late 1890s and early 1900s had begun to merge organizationally as well as ideologically. Proponents of each movement began referring to one another’s causes, uniting around their common interest in the American urban environment. As Clinton Rogers Woodruff, president of the APOAA and founding member of the National Municipal League, stated in a speech to the APOAA, “Cities have become the centers of influence. They are determining our destinies. As they rise or fall, so will our country rise or fall.” Across the nation, local improvement societies merged with municipal art societies, and at the national level the APOAA and American League for Civic Improvement combined to form the American Civic Association, all turning their attention to the common cause of city beautification.

**THE CITY BEAUTIFUL COMES OF AGE**

In his 1901 book *The Improvement of Towns and Cities, or the Practical Basis of Civic Aesthetics*, Robinson presented the City Beautiful movement as a coherent and united effort that he termed a “battle for urban beauty.” In its infancy, the movement remained focused on promoting the types of individualized projects that its three source movements had advocated. However, as proponents began to identify more strongly with the City Beautiful cause and relinquish their attachments to their
more specific previous efforts, a distinct City Beautiful ideology emerged that had three components: a technical component, and aesthetic component, and a social component. These three dimensions will be explored below, first looking at the national level and then using the McMillan Plan for Washington, D.C. as a means to examine some specific physical consequences of such theory.

As I hope is already clear from this chapter, the single most influential technical element of City Beautiful theory on the future of planning in the United States was its emphasis on comprehensive planning, much of which it derived from its roots in the outdoor art movement. While the nineteenth century antecedents to the City Beautiful – including both those discussed in this chapter and the special purpose planning discussed in the first chapter – tended to rely on a fairly piecemeal approach to reshaping the city environment, the City Beautiful movement embraced the concept of comprehensive planning, in which many aspects of the urban landscape were considered when planning for physical growth and change. The need for comprehensive planning became immediately apparent in the first years of the City Beautiful. The successful and highly publicized McMillan Plan of Washington, D.C., which will be discussed in detail later in this chapter, served as a contrast to the mediocre outcomes resulting from the piecemeal beautification efforts taking place in most cities. Again acting as the spokesman for the City Beautiful, Robinson proclaimed in his 1904 work, *Modern Civic Art*,

the great need – the need too little realised – of obtaining one underlying plan, which may touch lightly on the public architecture, but which shall weld together in a harmonious system the street plotting of the different districts, shall mark the course of present and future improvements with entire
assurance, and shall put before the people a tangible goal to work toward – the picture of what their own city may be, and should be, made.\textsuperscript{44}

This focus on \textit{systems} was a direct inheritance from the outdoor art movement, many practitioners of which were now actively involved in City Beautiful projects nationwide. Comprehensive planning was considered especially important because City Beautiful advocates believed that the key contributor to urban beauty was the complementary, harmonious relationship of built structures to one another.\textsuperscript{45}

Piecemeal development lessened the ability to fabricate continuity and coordination in the built environment, and thus precluded the creation of true beauty in the city environment. It was this emphasis on comprehensive planning that is the true legacy of the City Beautiful movement, equipping the emerging planning profession with the tools it needed to generate, for the first time, considerable physical change in the physical layout of American cities.

Between 1905 and 1909, comprehensive plans were prepared for thirty-eight American cities. These plans were typically produced by individuals who identified themselves as architects or landscape architects, and were in many cases commissioned by private organizations rather than municipal or state governments.\textsuperscript{46} This situation illuminates two serious obstacles still blocking the unfettered development of planning theory and practice: first, there was still no conception of a city planner or other type of professional whose sole job it was to understand the complex workings of the entire urban system and plan for its future development; and second, there was very little legal or legislative support for comprehensive planning activity. Municipal charters did not allow money in their budgets to pay for the
preparation of plans, and more importantly, most municipalities lacked the legal authority to draft development plans that would have any binding authority. In order for planning to truly make an impact on the form of the built landscape, both these obstacles would need to be overcome. Unfortunately for the City Beautiful, these changes came too late to save the movement from fatal criticism, most of it grounded, ironically, in the assertion that despite the many impressive city plans, little had been done to achieve the overall objective of remaking urban America and eliminating the social problems plaguing the nation’s cities. This observation highlights a central claim of this chapter: although planning under the City Beautiful movement had only a minor impact on the form of the American landscape due, in large part, to the issues raised above, by introducing the concept of comprehensive planning and illuminating the need to overcome the professional and legal impediments to effective land use planning, the movement endowed land use planning with what it would need to precipitate actual change in the physical environment throughout the rest of the twentieth century.

While comprehensive planning served as the technical component of City Beautiful ideology, meaning that City Beautiful advocates embraced the idea that using comprehensive plans was the most effective method of reshaping the form of the city environment, the aesthetic program of the movement centered around neoclassical architecture and monumental building types. Understanding the movement’s aesthetic component is necessary because although the City Beautiful produced relatively little change in the American environment as a whole, many of the nation’s largest cities still retain vestiges of projects completed under the City
Beautiful, and many contemporary planning theories, such as the one to be explored in Chapter Four of this thesis, still draw heavily on all aspects of the movement’s ideology, including its aesthetic program.

The neoclassical emphasis of the movement meant that the majority of new buildings were designed in the Beaux Arts style, utilizing architectural elements such as classical columns, symmetrical and ornate building facades, and light-colored surface materials, such as marble and plaster. The use of this style in constructing public buildings had gained public attention at the Columbian Exposition, but the style was far from new in American architecture. While the style affected the Fair’s visitors partially because “the brilliant image of symmetrical edifices, colossal statues, and stupendous domes” was so grand and striking, it also evoked a sense of continuity and tradition because the classical style had been used from colonial times to the 1840s to build everything from homes to churches and public buildings. As Mel Scott asserts, the neoclassical style “touched the deep longing of a nation suffering from loss of continuity with history for visual assurance of maturity and success.” The visual impact of the style was also ideologically relevant to the social component of City Beautiful theory – while advocates of the movement believed generally that beauty in the urban landscape would promote improved social conditions, the specific qualities of the neoclassical style, namely the white, elevated, monumental structures it produced, were especially evocative of the cleanliness, order, and moral purity the movement sought to promote.

The neoclassical architectural style was just one facet of the City Beautiful’s aesthetic program. Another important tool for civic beautification was the insertion
of natural beauty into the urban landscape. Like nineteenth century special purpose planners, City Beautiful enthusiasts believed that while wild nature could not be recreated and planned for, the kind of natural beauty found in the rural middle landscape could be. Drawing much of its theory from the traditions of village improvement and outdoor art, the City Beautiful program called for trees, flowers, parks, and vistas to accompany new public buildings. Nevertheless, unlike the special purpose planners of the previous century, City Beautiful planners did not believe that natural forms were the only way to ameliorate the ugliness of the city. Their perception of the city landscape was altogether more hopeful; rather than conceiving of the urban landscape as inherently ugly, they believed that by using comprehensive planning to control the placement of buildings and the neoclassical architectural program to clothe these buildings, the artificial constructions of the city could actually be used to make it a beautiful and inspiring environment in which to live.

In this sense, the City Beautiful was fundamentally an urban movement, recognizing the flaws in the city environment but ultimately finding the potential for beauty in both natural and artificial forms. When City Beautiful proponents spoke of making the city “garden-like,” they were referring not to their desire to replace the artificiality of the urban environment with the natural beauty of the countryside, but rather to the fact that the concept of beauty had originated in the Garden of Eden. They accepted that a modern conception of beauty could embrace both natural and artificial forms; the basis of civic beauty lay in the harmonious relationships between the city’s many parts, whether these parts be flower gardens or grand public
buildings. This emphasis on harmony as the basis of beauty reinforced the use of comprehensive plans as the main land use planning tool, for only through considering the structure of the urban landscape in its totality could harmonious relationships between all elements be ensured.

The final feature of the City Beautiful’s aesthetic ideology was the types of structures to which its standards of artificial and natural beauty were applied. While the details varied at the local level, by 1905 five basic forms were common to most proposed city plans: 1) a civic center, meant to create a sociocultural center to the city to supplement the commercial-retail core that formed the heart of most cities; 2) a gateway railroad station linking the city’s internal transportation systems to the trains that carried commuters and travelers in and out of the city; 3) large processional boulevards, which directly connected places of importance in the city such as civic buildings, patriotic monuments, or park entrances; 4) an outer park system to promote the preservation of natural landscapes outside the city core; and 5) public playgrounds. City Beautiful advocates and planners believed that appropriately sited in harmonious relation to one another, these five elements could help improve the lives of the urbanites who utilized them in the course of their daily lives. Built using the neoclassical architectural style and principles of landscape architecture, these structures would help transform the city from an ugly and uninspiring place into an aesthetically charming place to live. All five quickly became staples of urban planning, and can still be seen in many modern American cities.

The fundamental premise underlying the City Beautiful movement was the notion that the technical and aesthetic components of the movement would help
promote social reform and progress in American cities. Drawing on the environmental ethic proposed by its three source movements, the City Beautiful emphasized the causal connection between the beautification of the urban environment and the improvement of social conditions within the city. City Beautiful advocates maintained strongly that beautiful and harmonious relationships in the physical environment of the city would lead to harmonious social relationships; when this occurred, cities would become the “loc[i] of harmony, mutual responsibility, and interdependence between classes” and cease to be “running sores on the landscape.”

Linking urban beautification to the general progress of American society, enthusiasts of the movement asserted that “the flowering of great cities into beauty is the sure and ultimate phase of a progressive development.” Thus unlike special purpose planners, who had desired to create only limited changes in the urban environment, City Beautiful planners sought to produce radical change in the structure of the city as a means to bettering the lives of American urbanites.

In contrast to the conception of the city held by special purpose planners at the end of the nineteenth century, and even the views held by the civic improvement and outdoor art advocates who had participated directly in the creation of the City Beautiful Movement, this notion of beauty and progress was entirely urban in nature. For the past century, most Americans had accepted that beauty was a characteristic of the rural countryside while progress was an urban phenomenon. While natural beauty could be introduced to the city in order to ameliorate some of its flaws and reap the fullest advantage of its benefits, never before had anyone suggested that the human creations of the city could themselves be beautiful. Not only did the City Beautiful
suggest an entirely new image of the city as a beautiful and inspiring place, it proposed that the source of this beauty was the city’s very artificiality. In embracing this conception of man-made beauty, City Beautiful enthusiasts simultaneously rejected nineteenth century notions of beauty that had praised natural elements such as bucolic vistas and manicured lawns. While these elements could still be beautiful when used as part of a comprehensive, purposeful design, alone they were no more beautiful than a single sculpture or ornate building, failing to contribute to the complementary harmony that City Beautiful planners believed to be the true basis of beauty. This radical ideological shift in the image of the city allowed City Beautiful advocates to predict a hopeful future for urban America, for solving the social ills of the city seemed as simple as adopting comprehensive planning and using neoclassical architecture and complementary landscaping to build magnificent public buildings and infrastructure.

The social component of City Beautiful ideology had one additional facet, which was that every citizen, not just the professionals charged with drafting plans and designing buildings, had a responsibility to work actively towards promoting city beautification. City Beautiful proponents asserted that if urban beauty engendered improved welfare for urbanites, then promoting the City Beautiful aesthetic program was in fact an expression of the public interest, one towards which all citizens had a “democratic moral obligation” to contribute. While American social and political ideology had tended to emphasize the concept of private rights and privileges, City Beautiful advocates spoke of public rights and duties. Taking care of the collective environment was a public responsibility, and the private, profit-oriented decision-
making that had created the current structure of American cities could no longer be tolerated.\textsuperscript{56} Thus while they did not call for the complete reform of the American economic system that had produced the city, City Beautiful proponents did insist that the physical growth of the city be treated as a moral issue insofar as it affected the quality of life of America’s growing urban population.

By proposing such a radical shift in the way Americans viewed the physical development of the places they inhabited, the City Beautiful further bolstered the strength of the emerging planning profession. Under this conception of urban growth, planners were impelled to seek change in the built landscape not merely because governments or private organizations contracted them to do so, but because of a moral obligation to care for the health of the collective environment. This sense of public duty and responsibility became a defining feature of planning theory throughout the next century, encouraging those who saw a fundamental connection between the structure of built environments and the welfare the human communities inhabiting them to work actively towards creating physical change that would serve to enhance quality of life.

**The McMillan Plan for Washington, D.C.**

In order to understand how the City Beautiful’s ideological program contributed to concrete change in the American cityscape, I will briefly examine the process of designing and implementing the first comprehensive plan to be applied to an American city in the twentieth century, the McMillan Plan for Washington, D.C. This plan has been heralded as a “benchmark for modern urbanism,”\textsuperscript{57} and thus is a
fitting example for the exploration of the City Beautiful’s contribution to the
development of planning theory in the United States. The plan, known alternatively
as the McMillan Plan, the Senate Park Commission plan, and the 1901 Plan, was
centered around redesigning the axial corridor known as the Mall, which, in his 1791
plan for the city, Pierre Charles L’Enfant had envisioned as “a partially sunken, axial
corridor lined by museums and theaters and extending about a mile due west from
Capitol Hill…form[ing] the stem of a vast, L-shaped public space, its crossing arm
running due South from the President’s House.” Despite the fact that much of the
city was built to L’Enfant’s specifications – including a street pattern that consisted of
a grid criss-crossed by wide diagonal avenues – the Mall was never built as he had
designed it.

Consistent with the nationwide trend of urban expansion, the population of
Washington, D.C. began to mushroom as the nineteenth century progressed;
concurrent with this population explosion came a gradual encroachment on the land
L’Enfant had reserved for the Mall. In 1848, Robert Mills’s Washington Monument
was begun slightly southeast of the point of axial convergence, where it remained off-
center and unfinished. Three years later, Andrew Jackson Downing began a project
of picturesque landscaping to improve the aesthetic appeal of the area intended to
serve as the Mall, planting trees and dividing the land into a chain of individual
parks. In addition, the passenger shed of the Baltimore and Potomac railroad
extended nearly halfway across the Mall at Sixth Street, with the tracks crossing the
Mall in a dangerous grade crossing at this point (Fig. 2.2). At least three people per
year died in the district as a result of crossings such as this one.
In 1898, the Board of Trade, a powerful civic body in the capital, gathered to discuss how to celebrate the centennial of the federal government’s move to Washington, D.C. They proposed a variety of ideas, all piecemeal projects such as a memorial bridge or hall, and called a meeting for February 21, 1900 to make a final decision. Their plan was derailed, however, by the efforts of Senator James McMillan, of Michigan, who, on February 16, 1900, was appointed to the Senate Centennial Committee and immediately proposed an alternative plan for the centennial celebration. This plan called for a much more extensive remaking of the Mall, and proposed that the B&P railroad depot be replaced by a larger facility and the tracks elevated over the Mall. Although McMillan claimed that this plan represented a fulfillment of L’Enfant’s plan for the Mall as well as an opportunity to
group public buildings in an aesthetically appealing way, he was in fact motivated significantly by his own political ties to two pieces of railroad legislation that required railroads to eliminate grade-level crossings and in turn authorized them to build new terminals. This proposed plan met with much resistance by the Army Corps of Engineers, which had traditionally held authority over construction in the capital region. A political struggle ensued, during which the American Institute of Architects (AIA), under secretary Glenn Brown, allied with McMillan to advocate for a comprehensive plan for the Washington, D.C. Mall.⁶⁴

On March 8, 1901, McMillan obtained last-minute passage of a resolution that authorized him to create a committee that would “report to the Senate plans for the development and improvement of the entire park system of the district of Columbia.”⁶⁵ This resolution resulted in the creation of the Senate Park Commission, to which McMillan immediately appointed the architects John Burnham and Charles McKim, as well as the landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. Augustus Saint-Gaudens, a prominent sculptor, joined the Commission the following summer.⁶⁶ The Commission immediately began work drafting a plan for the redevelopment of the Mall, basing their choices heavily on their experiences with the Columbian Exposition the previous decade. In June they traveled to Europe, spending over a month touring major European cities to refine their proposed plan.⁶⁷ In Europe they observed individual works of architecture and landscape art, but they were also exposed to several examples of comprehensive city planning, such as the modernization of Paris under Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann. Haussman’s work in Paris during the 1850s and 60s had entailed a radical reorganization of the city,
from a new system of wide avenues and roads to the creation of public parks, many new public monuments, modern infrastructure such as sewer and water, and regulations of building facades to create a coherent and complimentary architectural style throughout the city. Observing the dramatic change that could be achieved by such methods of comprehensive planning, the Senate Park Commission returned to the United States with a renewed commitment to the notion that beauty in the urban environment could be achieved through the implementation of a comprehensive plan that emphasized the harmonious relations between all the city’s many elements.

During the next few months, the Commission worked tirelessly to draft a final version of their plan. On January 15, 1902, an exhibit opened in the Corcoran Gallery of Art displaying the Commission’s plan for the Mall; the plan was based on a concept of the Mall as organized around a key central axis, slightly reoriented so that the Washington Monument was no longer off-center. All other design choices stemmed from this basic organizing principle. The Mall would serve as a new ceremonial core for the city, “bounded by the Capitol and its building group to the east, the Lincoln Memorial to the west, the White House and the executive buildings clustered around Lafayette Square to the north, and a complex of recreational buildings to the south.” The new buildings that the plan called for were all to be built in the neoclassical style, thus creating a unified stylistic vocabulary across the two-mile length of the Mall. The plan also proposed a new Union Station north of Capitol Hill to replace the existing B&P terminal in the Mall, and the construction of several memorials dedicated to past presidents such as Lincoln and Jefferson, also to be built in the neoclassical style. In addition, the
drawings laid out the plan for an elaborate outer park system, designed by Olmsted, Jr., that would extend throughout the city. While the individual buildings and landscaping elements planned for the Mall were to be magnificent and inspiring individually, the basis of the Park Commission Plan was the notion that the true beauty of the plan lay in the harmonious relationship between buildings. While piecemeal growth had led to a disorganized, fragmented Mall, the utilization of a comprehensive plan would allow planners to strategically arrange individual elements to create a beautiful and monumental city core.

Fig. 2.3 Drawing by Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., showing the location of the proposed Monumental Core, May 1901.
The plan received nationwide attention in magazines such as *Harper’s Weekly*, *Outlook*, and *Century Magazine*, and quickly became the celebrated example of how the City Beautiful program could truly transform the urban landscape the way the Columbian Exposition had only suggested. While the monumental core was especially important for the renewal of Washington, D.C., a city trying to assert itself as the capital of a proud and powerful nation, City Beautiful advocates saw no reason to limit monumental architecture and planning to the capital city, and the building types suggested in the McMillan Plan – museums, memorials, union stations, and theaters – quickly became the essential core of the City Beautiful program. These monumental structures would replace the dreary architecture of the current cityscape with beautiful public buildings that would serve to inspire city inhabitants.

In its assertion that strategically placed public buildings and complementary landscaping would create a beautiful space, a “representation of [civic]
mightiness...worth the devotion and service of its citizens,”\textsuperscript{72} the Senate Park Commission exemplified the City Beautiful’s emphasis on the potential for urban beautification grounded in the harmonious arrangement of both artificial and natural elements of beauty. Despite the success the plan enjoyed among City Beautiful enthusiasts, however, it met with much political resistance and was only able to progress slowly by passing incremental resolutions for the piecemeal construction of the elements called for in the plan.\textsuperscript{73} As previously discussed in this chapter, this type of political resistance indicated the institutional changes that would need to be made for comprehensive planning to become effective in transforming the urban environment.

**The Significance of the City Made Beautiful**

The City Beautiful movement’s emphasis on urban beauty and progress represented a radical shift from the conception of the city held by nineteenth century special purpose planners. Like the planners who had come before them, City Beautiful advocates conceived of the American city as “the arena of the future,” yet recognized the many flaws of the urban landscape and the lifestyles of those living within it.\textsuperscript{74} Thus they, like special purpose planners, focused their activity on reshaping the physical environment of the city in an effort to address the many social problems that they believed were a result of the structure of the urban landscape. Unlike special purpose planners, however, City Beautiful proponents believed that more sweeping changes to the American city would be necessary to facilitate the social changes they desired. The comprehensive plan and the creation of a profession
dedicated solely to the task of land use planning were the result of the City Beautiful’s dedication to radical reform of the cityscape.

Like special purpose planning, however, City Beautiful theory was devoid of any conception of how city and country environments related to one another. The ways in which this entirely urban approach to planning proved to be problematic will be discussed in greater depth in the following two chapters. For now, it will suffice to mention briefly that the urban theory held by City Beautiful planners conflicted with the reality of the American landscape, which was rapidly becoming an integrated system in which city and country were inextricably linked socially, economically, and politically. Growing concentration in urban centers was partially due to increasing birth and immigration rates, but also to the continued exodus of Americans fleeing deteriorating rural economies for the opportunities of the industrial city. Any successful attempt to improve the social conditions of American urbanites by combating the congestion and ugliness of the city would require a parallel amount of effort in the countryside to address rural depopulation and failing economic activities. As William Cronon explains, “a rural landscape which omits the city and an urban landscape which omits the country are radically incomplete as portraits of their shared world.”

Despite the City Beautiful’s roots in the village improvement movement – which had begun as a means of addressing the issues of rural decline – by the time the movement had become fully and coherently articulated at the turn of the century, this rural perspective had been lost.

While the City Beautiful failed to produce the social change its advocates had promised partly because it met with the legal and professional obstacles previously
discussed in this chapter, it also failed because its proponents had a fundamentally flawed perception of the environment they sought to reshape. Rather than conceiving of the health of the city as inseparably linked to the condition of the surrounding countryside, these urban enthusiasts saw the economic and social dynamism of the city, as well as its many flaws, as an entirely internal condition, owing only to endogenous factors that could be altered by working within the confines of the city environment. Thus although the movement’s conception of artificial beauty allowed it to foresee a hopeful future for America’s cities, its image of the city as autonomous from the surrounding hinterland doomed this very prospect by failing to recognize the fundamental connection between urban and rural environments and the role this relationship played in generating the problems of both the city and the country.

However, although the City Beautiful did not produce the extensive physical change its proponents sought, the movement remains worthy of inclusion in a thesis about the relationship between planning theory and the American landscape because of the tools it provided to future land use planners. Like special purpose planning, the City Beautiful constituted another important step towards creating a planning profession that had the capacity to induce considerable change in the built environment. In addition, the developments that did occur under the auspices of the City Beautiful have many lessons to teach modern planners about the design of public spaces and the capacity of the city to be a beautiful, inspirational environment. This legacy will be explored further in Chapter Four. The next chapter, however, will explore a period of substantial physical change in the United States, and the role that
land use planning theory played in this evolution of the American built environment
given the tools with which the City Beautiful had endowed the field of planning.
Notes:

1 Mel Scott, American City Planning since 1890 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969) 95-101.
6 Wrigley 58.
7 Wilson, The City Beautiful Movement 63.
8 David F. Burg quoted in Wilson, The City Beautiful Movement 59.
9 Wilson, The City Beautiful Movement 71.
10 Wilson, The City Beautiful Movement 40.
13 Peterson, “Forgotten Origins and Lost Meanings” 46.
14 Peterson, “Forgotten Origins and Lost Meanings” 46.
15 Wilson, The City Beautiful Movement 43.
16 Wilson, The City Beautiful Movement 42-3.
18 Wilson, The City Beautiful Movement 44.
20 Wilson, The City Beautiful Movement 50.
22 Peterson, “Forgotten Origins and Lost Meanings” 46.
23 Peterson, “Forgotten Origins and Lost Meanings” 41.
26 Peterson, The Birth of City Planning 104.
27 Peterson, The Birth of City Planning 106.
28 Peterson, “Forgotten Origins and Lost Meanings” 44.
29 Peterson, The Birth of City Planning 105.
31 Wilson, The City Beautiful Movement 16.
32 Wilson, The City Beautiful Movement 29.
33 Wilson, The City Beautiful Movement 31, 16.
34 Wilson, The City Beautiful Movement 14.
35 Wilson, The City Beautiful Movement 10.
36 Wilson, The City Beautiful Movement 32.
37 Wilson, The City Beautiful Movement 10.
38 Peterson, “Forgotten Origins and Lost Meanings” 49.
40 Peterson, The Birth of City Planning 106.
41 Clinton Rogers Woodruff, “Awakening America,” APOAA, 1903. 75-81.
42 Wilson, The City Beautiful Movement 51.
45 Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement* 79.
47 Scott 33.
48 Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement* 89.
49 Scott 33.
50 Peterson, *The Birth of City Planning* 147.
51 Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement* 87.
52 Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement* 80.
54 Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement* 86.
56 Peterson, *The Birth of City Planning* 141-5.
70 Hines, “The Imperial Mall” 92-3.
71 Peterson, *The Birth of City Planning* 94.
72 Robinson, *Civic Modern Civic Art* 82.
73 Hines, “The Imperial Mall” 93-4.
74 Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement* 78.
75 Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis* 51.
CHAPTER THREE: The Suburban Boom

Human society and the beauty of nature are meant to be enjoyed together. The two magnets must be made one. As man and woman by their varied gifts and faculties supplement each other, so should town and country… Town and country must be married, and out of this joyous union will spring a new hope, a new life, a new civilization.

-Ebenezer Howard, Garden Cities of To-morrow, 1902

Imagine standing on a grassy hillock. The tract of the land that stretches before you, once a verdant field, is now a roiling sea of mud, machine, and manpower. Workmen unload pre-fabricated walls and windows from trucks, moving as teams to assemble the pieces. The landscape is spattered with identical structures, rising one by one as the crews complete their tasks and move to repeat their chores on the next house. Already the shape of curving roads is visible, connecting the houses in a twisting maze of asphalt and concrete. Street signs identify each segment of the spiderweb: “Maple Street,” “Forest Lane,” “Meadow Way.” Once all the houses are completed, grass will be sown and trees planted at equal intervals along the curb, masking the dreary brown that currently dominates the vista. Soon families will arrive, eagerly unloading their moving vans and getting to work on adding the personal touches that will differentiate their houses from the hundreds surrounding them. The scene is the same, whether it is 1946 and one is overlooking the heaving shell of Levittown, New York, or 2008 in South Burlington, Vermont, where farmland is finally succumbing to backhoe and crane. This is suburbia, the dominant settlement form in the United States today, and the subject of much analysis and critique over the past fifty years.
No exploration of planning theory in the twentieth century would be complete without an attempt to understand how the suburbs, now mainly the domain of surveyors and developers, originated in the minds and on the drawing boards of the planners who first conceived of the suburban layouts that were reproduced nationwide during the 1950s. This chapter seeks to examine the development of the planning theory that underlay the suburban boom that swept the United States in the decades following the end of World War II. It is my assertion that while the boom itself was not a planning movement, but rather an economic venture propagated by land speculators, developers, and politicians, the theoretical foundations that made suburban proliferation possible were rooted in the minds and pencils of professional planners. Given the dominance of the suburban form on the structure of the modern American landscape, an exploration of the role of planning theory in the post-war suburban boom is therefore integral to this thesis’s attempt to analyze the relationship between planning theory and concrete physical change in the built environment.

The chapter will begin with an examination of the development of suburban planning theory during the first half of the twentieth century, concluding with the suburban boom of the 1950s. It will then investigate in greater detail the works of one notable 1950s building company, Levitt and Sons, and the ways in which this firm’s developments reflected the planning theory that evolved in the previous decades. The chapter will conclude with an analysis of the significance of the post-war suburban movement, especially as it pertains to the maturation of twentieth century planning theory and its ability to produce significant change in the physical structure of the United States. The central claim of this chapter is that although
planners were not involved directly in the diffusion of suburbia across the United States during the mid-twentieth century, in experimenting with theories of suburban form, planners bear much of the responsibility for the particular structure of the suburban model that was popularized and mass produced during the 1950s and 60s. While special purpose and City Beautiful planners played the essential role of pioneers in the field of land use planning, introducing the theoretical and technical tools that would be needed for planning to become effective and influential, suburban planners were able to draw upon this previous work in their efforts to influence considerably the direction of physical development in the United States.

**Planning the Suburbs: From Riverside to Radburn**

As discussed in the first chapter, the suburb had its beginnings in the mid-nineteenth century as a place of retreat for wealthy families who wished to escape the filth, congestion, and crime characteristic of the American city. These communities were largely residential, meaning that inhabitants continued to commute to the city for both work and socializing. Since these communities performed very limited functions, the architects and landscape architects who designed them have been labeled *special purpose planners* – they focused on the particularities of street design, house placement, and landscaping, yet did not have to confront the issue of designing commercial and political spaces. Nevertheless, as the first chapter concludes, even within the limited functions these suburban planners performed, they were influenced heavily by images of city and country and the lifestyles engendered by these two environments. Prominent suburban planners such as Alexander Jackson Davis,
Calvert Vaux, and Frederick Law Olmsted believed strongly that the primary purpose of suburban settlements was to combine the best elements of both country and city, allowing inhabitants to “overcome the chronic effects of civilization while still commanding at will the privileges and benefits of urban society.”¹ To this end they developed and promoted design elements such as the curvilinear street, personal gardens, and housing setbacks to emphasize bucolic tranquility and beauty, and modern amenities such as sewerage and direct roadway access to the nearest city to maintain the sense of urban conveniences.²

This type of residential, picturesque suburb remained extremely popular well into the first two decades of the twentieth century, especially as innovations in transportation technology increased the speed and distances at which urban workers could commute. As the electric streetcar replaced horse-drawn streetcars and omnibuses, transportation to and from the city became faster, cleaner, and cheaper, increasing the feasibility and affordability of commuting to and from the city on a daily basis.³ The result was a new type of suburb, marketed to middle and working class Americans. While these suburbs were not meticulously planned by renowned specialists the way the picturesque settlements for the wealthy were, they were nevertheless based on the notion that by moving outside the congested central city to homes surrounded by open spaces, urbanites could recover the values of family, tranquility, and moral character that had been lost in the tenements of the city.⁴ As one Los Angeles reformer asserted in 1907:
The laying out of subdivisions far out beyond the city limits makes cheap and desirable home sites obtainable for a multitude of working men, where they are able to build their bungalows or California houses...The family unit, the desire of the sociologist, can be recovered, when...the working man can be induced to locate his family far from the noisy city. No work for civic betterment is worth more than this.\(^5\)

Proponents of middle and working class suburbs – mainly developers, politicians, and social reformers – believed that population decentralization would also benefit those who were too poor to relocate to these new suburbs, relieving the congestion of city cores that was viewed as the cause of urban ills.

Suburbanization during this time was promoted primarily by the triad of developers, politicians, and social reformers, rather than by special purpose planners as had been the case in the second half of the nineteenth century. This absence of professional planners in the design of middle and working class suburbs can be attributed to two key factors: first, land developers had an incentive to cut planners out of the development process to reduce costs and increase profits, and were able to do so by simply imitating already-existing suburban communities; and second, planning professionals in the first decade of the twentieth century were primarily absorbed in the monumental urban planning associated with the City Beautiful, rather than thinking about issues of housing. This usurpation of the planner’s role in suburban design and development is a dominant theme in the history of American suburbanization, and the tension between the theories of suburban form proposed by planners and the actual communities constructed by developers was a driving force in the progression of planning theory during the first half of the twentieth century, as this chapter shall demonstrate.
Suburban development remained in the hands of non-planners until the 1920s, when the consecutive distractions of the City Beautiful and World War I had finally passed. It was during this decade that planners once again turned their attention to designs for suburban development. This return to the drawing board was largely a response to the severe housing crisis that followed the Armistice; this housing shortage reminded planners of the many elements of city development the City Beautiful had failed to address, despite City Beautiful planners’ desires to create radical change in the urban environment. The need for increased housing, the continuously deteriorating conditions of American cities, and the persistent growth of urban populations all stimulated planners and architects to look for potential solutions. The consensus among planners, politicians, reformers, and developers alike seemed to be that the only solution to these problems was a massive decentralization of urban populations, facilitated by the accelerated development of suburban communities. Thus unlike City Beautiful advocates, who had believed that the ills of the city could be solved by remaking the city landscape, by 1920 planners had begun to realize that they must look beyond the confines of the city to find potential solutions to problems of declining human welfare.

In looking at the suburban landscape as it had already developed by 1920, planners were encouraged to become involved once more in the design process due to their growing awareness that suburban growth under the direction of land developers was unsatisfactory in many ways; these suburbs may have followed nineteenth-century professional designs to some degree, but were lacking important details and the theory behind them. For example, developers used curvilinear streets where
possible because this had become the norm of suburban design in the nineteenth century, but they made little attempt to harmonize these roads with the natural features of the land, a primary inspiration for curving roads in communities like Llewellyn Park, New Jersey and Riverside, Illinois. In an effort to cut costs, developers also reduced landscaping to a minimum, thus stripping suburban developments of natural beauty and completely undermining the notion that the suburbs could be an ideal middle landscape merging the benefits of both city and country.

One group of planners that paid particular attention to the design of the suburban landscape during the 1920s was the Regional Planning Association of America (RPAA), formed in 1923. Motivated by the desire to alleviate the housing shortage, and in particular to design suburban homes that would be affordable for most urban working families, the RPAA focused on rethinking the American suburb to be more conducive to fostering local community and economic development. This contrasted sharply with the existing suburban condition, which was largely residential and based on the idea that residents would rely on the nearest urban center to provide work, social entertainment, and political governance. This was partially due to the historical roots of the suburban form – early suburbs such as Llewelyn and Riverside were purely residential in nature – and also due to the costs of developing a suburban community, such as providing municipal infrastructure, public services such as police forces and schools, and government structures, which decreased significantly the more amenities the nearby city was relied upon to provide in comparison to the developers. Members of the RPAA, however, asserted the need for self-sufficient
communities that would meet the economic, social, and political requirements of their residents.  

In drafting the design for such a community, the RPAA drew heavily on the ideas of two individuals, Patrick Geddes, a Scottish biologist and planner, and Ebenezer Howard, an English court stenographer turned planner. Geddes, in his works of the 1910s and 1920s, proposed a theory that emphasized the interconnectedness of regional environments and the importance of planning these regions holistically. This differed significantly from both special purpose and City Beautiful planning, which had been focused on reshaping the physical structure of urban environments alone, without thought to parallel land use planning efforts in the rural countryside. His theory has been termed “bio-sociology,” deriving from his assertion that spatial form and social structure are closely interrelated and that by changing spatial form social structure could be changed as well. Geddes criticized the current land use practices that dominated city and country alike, observing a parasitic relationship between the booming industrial metropolises that consumed human and natural resources to produce constant economic growth and the surrounding hinterland from which these resources flowed. Geddes concluded that because of the regional nature of the economic, social, and political forces that affected the physical development of the American environment, in order for planning to have a substantial impact on the structure of the built landscape, it would need to be coordinated across city-country boundaries as well.  

As its name suggests, the RPAA drew heavily on Geddes’s theory of bio-sociology and regional development. In many of their personal and professional
writings, RPAA members such as Lewis Mumford, Clarence Stein, and Benton MacKaye touted their devotion to the cause of regional planning. As they understood the concept:

Regional planning asks not how wide an area can be brought under the aegis of the metropolis, but how the population and civic facilities can be distributed throughout a whole region...The regionalist attempts to plan such an area so that all its sites and resources, from forest to city, from highland to water level, may be soundly developed, and so that the population will be distributed so as to utilize, rather than nullify or destroy its natural advantages.  

This approach to planning exceeded even the comprehensive planning advocated by City Beautiful planners in its potential to effect significant change in the physical environment, given its commitment to transcending the confines of the city and seeking change in both rural and urban landscapes. Indeed, had the Association based its ideology on the work of Geddes alone and channeled its efforts towards promoting a regional agenda in the planning community, this group of progressive thinkers might have experienced more success with their mission of addressing urban housing problems through, which they recognized could not be solved through remaking the urban landscape alone but would require considerable alterations in the physical structure urban, rural, and suburban settlements. Instead, the RPAA supplemented Geddes’s theory with the ideas of Ebenezer Howard, the Englishman who popularized the concept of “garden cities” in his 1898 work To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform.* According to Howard, this work was meant to serve as a solution to the problems of urban congestion that plagued his native England just

* The book was republished in 1902 under the title Garden Cities of To-morrow. The work became famous under this second title.
as they did the United States. In the text he asserted that people are drawn to cities because of all the amenities and attractions of the urban environment, and concluded that the only way to induce people to settle elsewhere was to create equal or greater attractions in non-urban locations. To this end he proposed an alternative to country and city life – what he termed the “third alternative” – that would be the combination of both city and country: “all the advantages of the most energetic and active town life, with all the beauty and delight of the country.”

Howard’s claim that city and country be married into one ideal form was based on his belief that both landscapes had inherent values that they could contribute to the union:

As man and woman by their varied gifts and faculties supplement each other, so should town and country. The town is the symbol of society – of mutual help and friendly cooperation, of fatherhood, motherhood, brotherhood, sisterhood, of wide relations between man and man – of broad, expanding sympathies – of science, art, culture, religion. And the country! The country is the symbol of God’s love and care for man. All that we are and all that we have comes from it. Our bodies are formed of it; to it they return. We are fed by it, clothed by it, and by it we are warmed and sheltered. On its bosom we rest. Its beauty is the inspiration of art, of music, of poetry. Its forces propel all the wheels of industry. It is the source of all health, all wealth, all knowledge. But its fullness of joy and wisdom has not revealed itself to man. Nor can it ever, so long as this unnatural separation of society and nature endures.

In invoking such idealized images of both city and country, Howard was proposing a vision of city and country similar to the one that had been advanced by nineteenth-century special purpose suburban planners; in suggesting that they be joined in one perfect form, he was doing no more than these special purpose planners had done decades previously.
Howard’s unique contribution to the develop of suburban planning theory was the specific design of his proposed middle landscape, which he called the “garden city.” Howard proposed that the ideal garden city consist of 5,000 carefully-planned acres, with a total population of no more than 32,000 inhabitants. All property in the city would be municipally-owned, with land rents going to a City Council to fund municipal maintenance and improvement projects. In the center of the city would be a five acre public park, around which would be located all public buildings, such as government centers, schools, and facilities such as museums and libraries. Surrounding this core would be the Crystal Palace, which Howard envisioned as an enclosed structure housing all the commercial activity for the city. Next would be a ring of residential development, such that every citizen of the city would be within walking distance of the core parkland, public buildings, and Crystal Palace. Six boulevards radiating from the city center would run outwards to the exterior perimeter of the residential zone.\textsuperscript{14} These inner functions would cover approximately 1,000 acres, or 20 percent of the total area. The remaining 4,000 acres would be devoted to industry and agriculture.\textsuperscript{15}

The fundamental concept underlying the Garden City was that the entire community would possess the mix of agricultural, industry, and political life it needed to be self-sufficient. Yet Howard imagined that the design would properly succeed only when a network of Garden Cities was constructed, each linked to others through a mass transit system that would allow residents to travel between communities and contribute to an interconnected, balanced regional economy.\textsuperscript{16} In offering citizens direct access to green open space, agricultural fields, commercial attractions, social
spaces, and the resources of other nearby cities, Howard conceived of the Garden City as the ideal combination of rural beauty and urban conveniences. This underlying notion was so essential to his concept that he chose to represent it directly in the name he gave to this ideal settlement form.

Howard’s ideas gained a following in the United States as early as 1906 with the formation of the Garden Cities Association of America, but this group was composed exclusively of civic leaders, social reformers, and political leaders; planners remained relatively uninterested in Garden City concepts until the following decade.\(^{17}\) It was the fledgling RPAA, fascinated with the general ideas proposed by Geddes and searching for a concrete plan of implementing regional growth, that took up the Garden City concept with the serious intention of exploring the feasibility of such a design in the United States. In doing so, the RPAA inadvertently undermined the true regionalism of their approach, and in doing so lost much of their potential to remain actively involved in shaping the direction of physical growth in the United States; the story of this ideological shift will be investigated briefly below.

While Howard conceived of the Garden City as a relatively self-sufficient, self-encapsulated settlement, in translating the design to the American landscape the RPAA stripped it of much of its self-sufficiency and transformed it from “garden city” to “garden suburb.” The Association’s first efforts began in 1924, when the group secured land and financing for a housing development in Queens, New York. Although the RPAA wanted to adhere more directly to Howard’s original concept of a self-sufficient community, financial concerns forced them to revert to a suburban model, focusing primarily on the residential needs of inhabitants and relying on New
York City to provide employment opportunities, political authority, and infrastructure such as water lines, electricity, and sewerage. Given their choice to locate Sunnyside within New York City limits, the RPAA planners were also forced to comply with New York City zoning ordinances, requiring them to abandon some of their own designs and adhere to municipal statutes.\textsuperscript{18}

Despite the fact that they were required to build using a grid street system – a design they thought detracted from the aesthetics of the development – the planners were able to reserve 72 percent of the land for gardens, lawns, and public open spaces, a percentage much larger than the 35 to 40 percent that was regionally typical and required by the Tenement House Law of New York.\textsuperscript{19} Another unique design element was that houses were built lengthwise along the street, giving them maximum frontage and access to air and light. Rather than serving as private backyards, the land behind each home was owned in common and used as public open space.\textsuperscript{20} The RPAA had hoped that by reducing costs, the homes in Sunnyside could be sold at a price that was affordable for most working urbanites. Although this never eventuated, through a program of home loans the suburb was able to achieve more economic diversity than most planned residential suburbs at the time.\textsuperscript{21}

The RPAA’s efforts in Sunnyside represented the first step in their divergence from Geddes’s regional ideology, a path on which they continued in 1927 when they began plans for a second development, this one in New Jersey. Radburn was to be a fuller articulation of the Garden City than Sunnyside had been, but design compromises from the outset doomed this prospect. Almost immediately the RPAA had to abandon the idea of a protective outer greenbelt due to a shortage of land,
meaning that the settlement would remain unprotected from suburban encroachment from without and expansion from within. Nevertheless, the planners were able to pioneer many design elements meant to increase the natural beauty of the community in order to, in the words of RPAA member Clarence S. Stein, bring “peaceful life in spacious green surroundings to ordinary people in this mechanical age.”

Such features included the “superblock” road pattern, which grouped houses together in large blocks of 30 to 50 acres and allowed vehicle traffic only around the periphery of these blocks. Interior pathways were reserved for pedestrians alone, although every home had a paved cul-de-sac for vehicle deliveries. At the center of every superblock was a landscaped park, meant to serve “as a peaceful escape from the hazards of the motor age,” “provid[ing] residents with a sense of spaciousness and proportion…[and] creat[ing] a serene stage that facilitated a communal spirit.” Homes were built with two entrances, one facing the vehicle access point and the other opening onto pedestrian walkways and the landscaped parklands. Family and sleeping rooms were placed on the parklands side of the house in an attempt to focus attention on the natural beauty of the community. The planners also designed a matrix of commercial establishments and set aside ample land for industrial development in an effort to adhere to Howard’s vision of a self-sufficient garden community. In the true spirit of Howard’s work, the planners “hoped to create a rural-urban environment within one relatively self-contained community.”

Unfortunately, Radburn failed to attract an industrial base, forcing its residents to rely heavily on nearby Newark, New Jersey and New York City, New York for employment and thus reducing it to the status of dependent suburb. Ultimately, the
Great Depression cut short the RPAA’s dream of building a network of garden cities, as the home construction industry slowed to a halt with the onset of economic stagnation. Nevertheless, the Association’s accomplishments in the field of suburban planning theory, limited as they were, reveal much about the role of planning theory in contributing to the design of the suburban model that eventually spread across the American continent, forever altering the structure of the built landscape. The suburban designs developed by RPAA planners in Sunnyside and Radburn, which themselves drew on the theory and techniques originated by special purpose planners during the nineteenth century, were utilized in the following decades by both the United States government and private land developers, under whose control the model was popularized and mass produced nationwide. Ironically, although the suburban theory with which the RPAA experimented eventuated tremendous change in the American landscape, planners themselves were stripped of the power to direct and control such change by the usage of the suburban form by government officials and private developers. Had the RPAA focused its efforts on promoting the agenda of regional planning rather than suburbanization, perhaps planning professionals would have retained more influence over the nature and direction of physical growth in the United States, given the emphasis of regionalism on the importance of planning professionals who wield sweeping power over large areas of land. The following section will examine what happened instead: the appropriation of suburban design and the drastic transformation of the American environment that resulted.
THE EXPROPRIATION OF THE SUBURBAN FORM

The stock market crash of 1929 and the onset of the Great Depression drastically altered the direction of professional planning in the United States. While planning under the direction of private associations had dominated the field until this point, as the Depression set in and unemployment and homelessness became increasingly problematic, the federal government began to look towards national planning programs as potential solutions. Many planners made the transition from private consulting work to government employment during this time. Although rural deprivation and destitution were severe during the 1930s, the concentration of urban populations made the poverty of the city much more visible. As the urban poverty caused by mass unemployment and economic instability worsened, policy-makers became further convinced that population decentralization was the only solution to the nation’s deteriorating urban condition.

In response to the worsening economic situation, Franklin Delano Roosevelt proposed a back-to-the-land program, under which urbanites would be encouraged to move to rural locations “closer to the primary food supply.” Concurrent with this demographic relocation would be the relocation of industry to rural areas, a trend that small towns had been attempting to encourage for decades as rural-urban migration left rural regions vacant of economic opportunity. This program was motivated by the idea that urban unemployment could be ended by providing city-dwellers with “a house and a few acres and money and tools” in the countryside. Although Roosevelt professed to be moved by the regional theory of the RPAA, this relatively idealistic vision of life in the country was entirely antithetical to the Association’s
regional doctrine, which recognized the difficulties associated with the rural lifestyle and emphasized the interconnectedness of city and country. Instead, this proposal drew upon the suburban ideals espoused by the Association that promoted the benefits of population decentralization, thus cementing suburbanism, rather than regionalism, as the main practical legacy of the RPAA for the next five decades. Not until the 1980s was the issue of regionalism critically revisited by the planning profession, a topic that will constitute the chief focus of the next chapter.

Despite his grand plans to solve urban unemployment and poverty through rural relocation, Roosevelt was eventually persuaded by a member of his Brain Trust and later undersecretary of the Department of Agriculture, Rexford G. Tugwell, that relocation of both population and industry was a dead-end plan. Rather, Tugwell advocated a program that became known as Greenbelt towns: new settlements built on the outskirts of cities where urbanites could be relocated residentially but remain economically tied to the city as commuters. In essence, Tugwell’s plan amounted to nothing more than government-sponsored suburban development. To undertake the creation of such development, Roosevelt created the Resettlement Administration (RA) in 1935, which had the power of eminent domain to buy and develop cheap land on the fringes of urban centers. Tugwell was appointed head of the RA, where he worked until criticism of the program in 1937 forced him to resign.

Tugwell hoped to construct 3,000 Greenbelt towns, yet of the first twenty-five proposed only five were approved by Congress. Of these five, only three were ever built due to legal action that blocked two of the developments. Two of the three, Greenbelt, Maryland and Greenhills, Ohio, were built following a Radburn-style
layout, with superblocks and central open spaces. Clarence Stein, a member of the RPAA and one of the planners of Radburn, was hired to consult on these projects. The third, Greendale, Wisconsin, was designed by a separate team to have a conventional grid layout. In line with the motivation to decrease population concentration, all three were built at very low densities of between four and eight units per acre. Just as Howard had envisioned for the Garden City, the towns were based on single ownership of land, with the federal government owning all land and leasing it to residents and businessowners. Unlike the Garden City, however, the Greenbelt towns were never meant to be anything other than suburbs, dependent on nearby cities for their employment needs.

In her book *The American Garden City and the New Towns Movement*, Carol A. Christensen emphasizes the disconnect between the significance the RA attached to the Greenbelt towns and that which their planners attributed to them. For the federal government, the Greenbelt program was both a way to create employment by stimulating the construction industry and a means of addressing the housing needs of the American poor. To the planners hired to design these communities, the Greenbelt program was another opportunity to test the suburban designs they had been developing during the past decades. Moreover, the Greenbelt planners were motivated by their conceptions of what qualities city and country landscapes had to offer to the welfare of their inhabitants, seeking to create an ideal living environment that straddled the line between the two. In writing of his vision for Greendale, Stein asserted that he hoped the design of the town would allow it to “grow and prosper – without losing [its] delightful character as a small neighborly village.”

In a 1944
report, the town manager of Greendale asserted that the planning of Greendale had three primary objectives: first, “to show how better conditions and a full community life could be developed in a suburban town;” second, “to give [its] residents some advantages of both country and city life in a community so protected that it would not produce the usual run-down neighborhood;” and third, “to provide for families of modest income, good housing at low rents in an environment conducive to healthful, wholesome living.”

This attitude concerning the goals and benefits of suburban settlements reflects a sentiment similar to that held by special purpose suburban planners eighty years earlier.

Although the Greenbelt planners proved themselves to be quite valuable in the design of these three towns, the end of the program also ended the planning profession’s short foray into twentieth century suburban development. Just as the suburbs of the period after World War One had been designed and constructed by land developers without the aid of planners, so too were the suburbs of the 1940s and 50s. Nevertheless, the designs with which suburban planners had experimented prior to the 1940s remained influential in determining the form of suburbia, although planners no longer were. Before investigating the nature and form of suburban development during the 1940s and 50s, it is first necessary to examine briefly several government policies adopted during the 1930s and 40s that affected the housing industry and resulted in a substantial change in the way Americans conceived of homeownership. Several of these regulatory changes, such as the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) and the National Housing Act, were part of Roosevelt’s New Deal; like the Greenbelt program they were aimed at stimulating the
construction industry and providing housing outside city centers. A third, the Serviceman’s Readjustment Act of 1944, was a reaction to World War Two and the prospects of soldiers returning to the United States ready to start families in their own homes. All three transformed the financial structures of homeownership and housing construction.

The first of these efforts, the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC), was created in 1933 with the purpose of protecting homeowners against foreclosure. While the concept of the home mortgage had existed for decades, these mortgages were usually only available for a small percentage of the overall price of the house and were of short duration and incorporated high interest rates. This was because lenders assumed a high level of risk when lending large sums of money to individual borrowers – if a homeowner defaulted on the loan, the lender had no choice but to absorb the loss. The purpose of the HOLC was to allow people to refinance their loans over a longer period of time, with payments spread out over the life of the debt. In order to determine who qualified for such a loan, the HOLC devised an appraisal system that evaluated properties based on density, age, and ethnic composition. Between 1933 and 1936, the HOLC made the majority of its loans to homeowners in neighborhoods deemed “declining” and “hazardous,” given its mission to help those most in danger of foreclosure.\(^4\)

The National Housing Act was passed the following year, and led directly to the creation of the Federal Housing Administration (FHA). While the HOLC had specifically aimed to prevent foreclosures on existing properties, the FHA had as its goal the alleviation of unemployment in the construction industry – which had been
hit particularly hard by the Depression – through the stimulation of home
construction.\textsuperscript{41} Unlike the HOLC, the FHA did not make loans directly. Rather, the
Administration acted as a guarantor to private lenders, insuring long-term mortgages
for home construction and sale. By making lending more secure, the FHA enabled
private lending institutions to lend a higher fraction of the applicant’s collateral,
substantially decreasing the amount homeowners or land developers had to pay
upfront as a down payment. Interest rates also fell, and the length of loans was
extended to twenty-five to thirty years. Furthermore, the FHA required that all loans
be amortized, meaning that the loan was paid off in uniform payments made over the
life of the debt.\textsuperscript{42} This policy greatly increased the number of Americans who were
able to purchase homes by reducing upfront costs and spreading the remaining costs
over a period of decades. The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly
known as the GI Bill, worked in conjunction with the FHA, specifically providing
loans for returning veterans to purchase homes.\textsuperscript{43} Between 1934 and 1972, the FHA
helped eleven million families acquire houses and a further twenty-two million
improve their properties. The percentage of American families living in owner-
occupied dwellings increased from 44 percent to 63 percent during the same period.\textsuperscript{44}

In addition to stimulating homeownership, the FHA also hoped to energize the
home construction industry by insuring construction loans just as they insured
homeownership mortgages. During the Depression, the goal of this policy was to
increase employment, but as the 1940s progressed it became increasingly clear that
the new mortgage structure would be irrelevant if the housing stock were not
increased to match demand.\textsuperscript{45} The new demand for homes generated by easily
available home loans combined with an unnaturally high level of population growth during the late 1940s created a severe housing shortage, and it was not uncommon for newlyweds and returning veterans to live with relatives and friends because they were unable to find private housing of their own. Rather than attempting to create housing itself, as it had with the Greenbelt towns, the government relied on private sector developers. As already discussed, private companies had failed to provide sufficient housing during the early decades of the twentieth century, leading to a critical housing shortage following the conclusion of World War One. The introduction of FHA-insured loans greatly altered this situation in the 1940s and 50s, and the housing construction industry flourished as never before in the United States.

Another policy that requires a quick explanation in order to understand the direction of suburban development during the 1940s and 50s is the concept of zoning, a regulatory planning tool that was introduced in New York City during the second decade of the twentieth century and by the 1950s had been popularized nationwide as an instrument to structure and regularize development. Essentially, zoning is a permitting process that identifies what type of development is allowable in different zones or districts, segregating uses that are thought to be incompatible. The first city-wide zoning regulations were developed in 1916 in New York City, where zoning was developed as a tool to protect existing businesses from the negative effects of new construction. One of the biggest problems facing the city was vertical construction – a response to expensive and scarce real estate in the region – that towered above the streetscape and cast undesirable shadows over preexisting buildings. Zoning regulations enabled the city government to restrict the size and use
of new buildings.\textsuperscript{46} In this sense, zoning can be seen as a direct reaction to the realization during the period of the City Beautiful that without a legal framework to sanction and empower land use planning, planners would never be able to significantly alter the nature of physical growth.

By 1921, nearly half the state legislatures in the country had adopted zoning enabling acts, and in 1924 the Standard State Zoning Enabling Act was printed and distributed by the Government Printing Office.\textsuperscript{47} By 1950, zoning ordinances had become the primary tool in the field of planning – that is, the principal way planners evaluated development proposals and drafted plans for future municipal growth. Originating in a time when places of employment largely involved industrial activities that were hazardous to public health, zoning regulations called for separation of home and workplace. Thus the suburban model was propelled forward by a mutually reinforcing combination of planning theory, which called for people to live in the suburbs but work in the city, and planning legislation, which began to legally mandate such a lifestyle. This dual foundation of theory and regulation – both results of efforts undertaken by planners to augment their ability to effect change in the built environment – allowed the suburban form to spread as successfully and rapidly as it did, although by the time it did planners had lost much control over both the theory and laws they had worked so hard to promote.

Planners, politicians, land developers, and social reformers had looked to the suburb as the settlement form of choice for the past one hundred years, and this trend continued in the development patterns of the 1940s and 50s. This is not to say that cities did not continue to grow as they had for centuries – during the 1950s the
population of central cities grew by six million people, or 11.6 percent. Yet during this same decade, the suburban population grew by nineteen million, or 45.9 percent. Most of these new suburbanites were ex-urbanites, finally financially able to leave the city and purchase their own private homes. The motivations of aspiring suburbanites have been studied extensively, and it seems fairly obvious why land developers would pursue suburban development rather than redeveloping urban cores or building isolated homes in the countryside, given the abundant cheap land available on the periphery of cities and the low costs associated with building a large number of homes within close proximity to one another.

The purpose of this chapter, however, is not to analyze the motivations of the homeowners, financiers, surveyors, or advertisers who were involved in the physical construction and settlement of American suburbia during the 1950s—it is to understand the role of planners in the process that eventually culminated in the suburban form that was mass-produced nationwide during this decade. Thus far I have examined the development of suburban planning theory through the Great Depression. In order to explore how this theory was manifested in the suburban development of the next two decades, I will present a detailed example of post-war suburban development by one influential housing development company: Levitt and Sons. Responsible for three suburban communities of the same name—Levittown—and one unbuilt design—Landia—between 1947 and 1960, the suburban model pioneered by the Levitts served as the prototype for suburban development across the continent during the 1950s. No planning professional ever touched the blueprints for the Levittowns or set foot onsite to envision the future design of the communities, yet
the settlements are a clear result of one hundred years of planning theory; that this theory was ultimately hijacked by Abraham Levitt and his sons does not diminish the important role planners played in shaping the form of American suburbia.

LEVITT AND SONS

In 1947, the Levitt and Sons building firm began construction on what would become the largest housing development of its time. While the firm, composed of father Abraham and sons William and Alfred, had constructed small-scale developments on Long Island since the 1930s, it was its work during World War Two building government-contracted homes for war workers that provided the mass-production techniques needed to construct a development the size of the Levittowns.49

The first Levittown, constructed on a piece of land on Long Island, New York previously known as Island Trees, was intended as a New York City suburb for war veterans. Using prefabricated materials and work crews that moved from homesite to homesite carrying out single tasks like a traveling assembly line, the Levitts were able to erect as many 150 houses per week.50 By 1951, the settlement consisted of 17,500 houses with just two different floorplans, homes of the same style distinguished from one another only by color and carport location.51 Despite the development’s eventual size, it was designed without a master plan, using a subdivision style in which the company acquired and developed small parcels of land – known as subdivisions – as demand required, rather than purchasing a large tract of land at one time.52 All design choices were controlled by Levitt and Sons, with no consultation by planning professionals.
In an attempt to provide for the social, recreational, commercial, and educational needs of Levittowners, the Levitts designed the settlement to be composed of homes grouped around “Village Greens” that consisted of neighborhood shops – including grocery stores, drug stores, barber shops, and filling stations – and a playground and swimming pool. Upon its completion, the first Levittown contained seven village greens, nine swimming pools, and a community hall to serve the entire settlement. The Levitts also set aside land for churches, schools, and libraries, but left it to the residents to construct such institutions. Building lots were arranged along curvilinear streets, with through traffic restricted to peripheral thoroughfares, a design clearly inspired by the superblock concept used by the RPAA in Radburn and the federal government in the Greenbelt towns of Greenhills and Greenbelt. Although in its early years Levittown was a dreary, waterlogged mud pit, the Levitts soon planted apple, cherry and evergreen trees on each lot and along sidewalks and in parks.

Fig. 3.1 Aerial photograph of Levittown, New York taken in 1948 after the construction of the first 6,000 houses. Barbara M. Kelly, Expanding the American Dream: Building and Rebuilding Levittown (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993) 152.
While professional planners criticized the settlement from the outset, condemning the uniform houses and homogenous socioeconomic makeup of the community, it is clear that the Levitts were drawing at least slightly on the suburban ideas proposed by planning professionals in the preceding decades. Utilizing the terminology popularized by Greenbelt planners, Abraham Levitt even went so far as to install a sign at one entrance of the settlement that read: “Levittown, A Garden Community,” and in interviews the Levitts frequently used the term “garden community” to describe the development. Although in the eyes of planners the settlement was far from the ideal they had imagined in their conception of the suburbs as the combination of city amenities and country beauty, it cannot be denied that many of the integral design elements – from street structure to landscaping choices – were influenced strongly by the theories they themselves had developed in recent decades. In invoking the vocabulary of the RPAA’s suburban theory, rather than their regionalism, Levitt and Sons ensured that suburbanism would remain the chief legacy of the RPAA’s work during the 1920s.

If the first Levittown expressed some of the design ideas first proposed by the suburban planners of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the Levitts’ next several ventures borrowed even more heavily on these concepts while still managing to avoid hiring professional planners to consult on the projects. Before turning to the second and third Levittowns, I will examine one of the company’s unbuilt projects, a 675-acre development known as Landia. Intended for construction in Jericho, Long Island, Landia was primarily conceived by Alfred Levitt, who was more convinced of the importance of purposeful comprehensive planning and the shaping of community
than either his brother or father, whose interests lay only in the construction and sale of houses. The plan for Landia bore striking resemblance to the design for Radburn; in a 1951 article in the *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, Alfred acknowledged that he had been strongly influenced by the ideas of the RPAA. In addition to calling for parks, churches, schools, swimming pools, playgrounds, baseball fields, tennis courts, a pond, a town hall, and an area for industrial development to meet the needs of community members, the layout of Landia was reminiscent of the Radburn plan in several other important ways, which Alfred described in his 1951 article:

1. The residential area is divided into seven separate neighborhoods, with no through streets in any neighborhood.
2. The 30-acre industrial area is an integral part of the community, but is separated from the rest of Landia by a wooded shelter belt.
3. Landia only has one through street in its interior; all community facilities are located on it and the seven neighborhoods are connected to it by means of circumferential drives which surround each neighborhood.
4. Parks serve as a part of the separation scheme of the neighborhood.
5. Parks are located at the end of major streets.
6. The sites for the two public schools are so located that children can walk to school, thus eliminating the expense of school buses.\(^56\)

The plan further stipulated that every house be within walking distance of at least one park and playground, and that boundaries be determined by the natural features of the land wherever possible.\(^57\)

While Landia was never built due to the political and economic constraints imposed by the onset of the Korean War, the Levitts incorporated many of the unbuilt development’s design elements into their next project, Levittown, Pennsylvania. The second Levittown was designed to house steel workers, as well as other industrial
workers employed in nearby Philadelphia. Unlike the first, the second Levittown was designed using a master plan and almost all its land was bought in a single purchase at the outset. This meant that the settlement could be much more comprehensively planned, giving the Levitts greater control over the final form and structure of the community. The plan for the settlements utilized the same master block design as did the first Levittown, with a school, swimming pool, and playground at the center of each block. As in Radburn, the purpose of this layout was to reduce vehicular traffic and encourage pedestrian transit. This aspect of the plan ultimately failed because the development straddled four municipalities and the boundaries for school districts did not conform to the neighborhood divisions the Levitts had created; children ended up having to travel long distances to attend schools outside their own neighborhoods. The plan also set aside an area for light industry, separated from the residential area by a greenbelt. In addition to the many community facilities, the plan called for heavy landscaping, including greenbelts between the exterior parkways and master blocks as well as the usual plantings on lawns and along sidewalks. The bill for plantings alone came to five million dollars.

The third Levittown was begun in 1958 in Willingboro, New Jersey. By this time, William Levitt was the principal figure in the firm, and unlike his brother Alfred, William was known for his dislike of the planning profession. The third Levittown drew on many of the same concepts used by the second, including master blocks organized around parks, schools, and swimming pools, an industrial area separated by a greenbelt, and strips of parkland running through each neighborhood. Levittown, New Jersey was also the firm’s first experiment in mixed housing; rather
than segregating different housing types by neighborhood as had been done in the previous Levittowns, the plan for the third called for three different kinds of houses – all meant for families in different income ranges – to be scattered throughout all the neighborhoods. The effect of this was that Levittown, New Jersey was a much more heterogeneous community than the earlier developments of the same name. This choice was made primarily to address the criticism of professional planners, such as Lewis Mumford, who denounced the homogeneity of the first two developments. As one Levitt executive remarked when the idea of mixed housing was proposed: “Now Lewis Mumford can’t criticize us anymore.”

Another unique feature of the third Levittown was its political situation. After the political difficulties of the first two Levittowns – which included the aforementioned school district complications, as well as tensions arising over the fact that community members often belonged to different political districts, thus preventing them from developing community ties based on political activity and also complicating construction in the community because different municipal codes governed different parts of the settlement – the Levitts made a pointed effort to acquire land that belonged to only one township, and in fact ended up buying almost all the land in the municipality of Willingboro, making the third Levittown one of the first American suburbs that was its own polity as well. This meant that although the settlement remained reliant on nearby urban centers for the majority of its employment, retail, and entertainment needs, the community was at least politically autonomous. In this sense, Levittown, New Jersey was closer to Howard’s concept of the semi-self-sufficient garden city than any suburban predecessors had been.
This seemingly strange conclusion highlights a central argument of this chapter: although 1950s suburban housing lacked much of the planning theory that underlay the suburban designs of the preceding one hundred years, it employed many design elements conceived by professional suburban planners simply because these were either cost effective, necessary to ward off criticism, or anticipated to boost home sales by making the community more aesthetically pleasing. The suburbs that proliferated across the nation in the 1950s in no way represented an ideal combination of city and country; in the words of Lewis Mumford, these settlements “destroy[ed] the value of both environments without producing anything but a dreary substitute, devoid of form and even more devoid of the original suburban values.” Yet the irony is that these dreary forms were interpretations of original designs that had been formulated by professional planners over the past one hundred years in a quest to design an ideal living environment for the American masses. Thus although planners themselves had little control over the growth of the American landscape, the suburban planning theory that they had developed between 1850 and 1950 was instrumental in determining the form of the drastic physical change that swept across the nation during the 1940s and 50s.

**FROM DECENTRALIZATION TO DECAY: THE MEANING OF SUBURBIA**

Anyone who has visited a traditional post-war American suburb will likely balk at the idea that these settlements represent the ideals espoused by the planners who designed such communities as Llewellyn and Riverside. What this chapter has sought to demonstrate is that despite the ways in which the suburban form has been
twisted, sanitized, and mass-produced over the last fifty years, many of the key design elements common to most American suburbs are rooted in a planning tradition that envisioned the suburb as an ideal settlement that could combine the best elements of both country and city to create the perfect environment for its human inhabitants. The various motivations that compelled millions of Americans to demand their own small piece of suburban life would be the subject of another fascinating thesis, as would a fuller examination of the political and economic factors that made the post-war suburban boom possible.

The purpose of this chapter, however, has been to understand the origins of the suburban form, and the motivations of the planners who first proposed bridging the gap between city and country. Although nearly one hundred years elapsed between the creation of Llewellyn Park in the 1850s and the construction of the first Levittown in the late 1940s, the design of these suburbs share much in common, from their curvilinear streets and meticulous landscaping to the way in which they were promoted as ideal settlements combining the best elements of both city and country life. Although the regionalism advocated by the RPAA suggested that city and country were highly complex and interrelated environments that could only be improved through the use of comprehensive planning that addressed physical development on a regional, rather than municipal scale, removed from this regional context the suburban model the Association championed was stripped of its complexity. While members of the Association asserted that suburbanization should occur only under a framework of regional planning that recognized the essential and complex connections between all types of environments, the expropriation of the
suburban model by the federal government in the 1930s and private land developers in the 1940s and 50s resulted in the loss of the regional perspective that was meant to accompany suburban growth.

By the 1950s, as suburbia proliferated across the nation, planners such as Mumford began to realize that the mass-production of the suburban form they had once championed was in fact serving to further the deterioration of city and country environments and the link between the two. Although suburban decentralization had been seen as the remedy to urban congestion, by the 1960s it became clear that without effective planning that regulated the direction and nature of decentralization, urban centers would pass the point of healthy decongestion and tend towards decay. Despite being motivated by the desire to improve the quality of life of those living in the suburbs, city, and countryside, by basing their suburban designs on an inaccurate conception of city and country and failing to successfully promote the creation of a regional planning initiative in the United States, suburban planners of the twentieth century in fact contributed to the declining welfare of inhabitants in all three settlement types. The following chapter will explore one reaction to the suburban boom of the mid-twentieth century, with particular focus on how advocates of the New Urbanist movement have suggested that just as planning during the first half of the twentieth century contributed substantially to the creation of the modern American landscape that they find so troubling, so too can planning be used to remake the built environment into a place that fosters the well-being of human communities in all settlement types.
Notes:

4 Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier 117.
8 Schaffer 59.
10 Schaffer 37.
13 Howard 166-7.
14 Howard 167-8.
15 Schaffer 18.
16 Schaffer 18.
17 Schaffer 31-2.
18 Schaffer 122.
19 Schaffer 108.
20 Schaffer 124.
21 Schaffer 127.
24 Christensen 60.
26 Schaffer 161.
27 Schaffer 156-7.
28 Schaffer 172.
29 Christensen 58.
32 Hall 159.
33 Hall 129-30.
34 Hall 130.
35 Christensen 78-9.
36 Christensen 84.
37 Christensen 88.
38 Clarence S. Stein, “Greendale and the Future,” American City 22 (1948).
40 Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier 196-7.
41 Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier 203.
42 Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier 204-5.
43 Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier 233.
44 Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier 205.
45 Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier 232.
47 Wilson, “Moles and Skylarks” 90-95.
48 Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier 294.
49 Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier 234.
51 Christensen 96.
53 Kelly 33.
54 Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier 236.
55 Kelly 35.
57 Levitt 84.
58 Christensen 101.
59 Christensen 100.
60 Gans 6.
61 Christensen 102-3.
62 Quoted in Gans 9.
63 Christensen 102.
64 Mumford, The City in History 42.
CHAPTER FOUR: The New Urbanism

The emerging region is not dominated by one thing – urbanism, nature, culture, or economy – but by all simultaneously. It cannot be a simple return to central city urbanism or Garden City deconcentration.

- Peter Calthorpe and William Fulton, *The Regional City*, 2001

Beginning in 1950, the nationwide trend of urbanization deviated from the path it had been following for the previous 100 years. Between 1950 and 1970, the total population of the United States grew by approximately 35 percent, yet this growth was not concentrated in urban centers as it had been since the 1850s – eighteen of the nation’s twenty-five largest cities actually suffered a net population loss during this twenty-year period. Instead, population expansion accumulated primarily along urban peripheries in the new post-war suburbs; from 1950 to 1970, the suburban population of the United States doubled, accounting for 83 percent of the nation’s total growth. As Kenneth T. Jackson remarks, “in 1970, for the first time in the history of the world, a nation-state counted more suburbanites than city dwellers or farmers.” This tremendous demographic shift had a profound impact on the form of the American landscape, generating many of the physical structures that are now an integral part of the built environment: the interstate freeway, the commercial shopping complex, the colossal parking lot, the office park. These entities, now so essential to the daily lives of most Americans, dominate the twenty-first century landscape so entirely that it is difficult to imagine an environment devoid of their familiar presence.
Despite the rapid speed at which these physical changes occurred and the eagerness with which the American people embraced the suburban lifestyle, even from the early years of the post-war suburban boom there were those who questioned this direction of growth and development. New Urbanism, so named because its founders conceived of it as a direct reaction to the urban theories that sanctioned and enabled this pattern of development, represents one such voice in the debate over the results of American suburbanization. New Urbanists assert that the American quality of life has declined as a direct result of the pattern of growth that has dominated the country since the 1950s, and call for development that promotes community over isolation, pedestrianism over automobile dependence, and local authenticity and originality over national uniformity. While critics of the movement have accused New Urbanists of succumbing to a nostalgic idealization of traditional small town America, the movement’s proponents claim that the principles of New Urbanism can be applied in every type of American settlement and do not require the creation of new towns or the anachronistic recreation of pre-automobile landscapes.

This chapter seeks to examine the basic theoretical principles of New Urbanism, with particular attention to the way in which New Urbanism, like the planning movements that preceded it, has contributed to the capacity of planning theory to create actual physical change in the structure of the built landscape. The chapter begins with a history of the movement’s development, proceeds to an explication of its central tenets, and then offers an example of a current New Urbanist

* In early New Urbanist literature, the movement is often referred to as “the New Urbanism” as a means of qualifying it as a distinct planning movement, not simply synonymous with other theories of urbanism that have also recently emerged and might be referred to as “new urbanism” to distinguish them from older theories of urbanism.
project, the Compass Blueprint regional plan for Southern California. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the significance of the movement as it relates to the development of the American landscape and its relationship to the 150 years of planning theory that preceded it.

**THE POST-WAR AMERICAN LANDSCAPE**

Before turning to a history of New Urbanism movement and the development of its theoretical tenets, it is first necessary to examine briefly the changes in the American landscape in the years between 1960, when the previous chapter ended, and 1980, when the present chapter begins. Just as professional planning emerged in the late nineteenth century as a direct reaction to the conditions of the American city, New Urbanism arose as a response to the evolution of the built environment between 1950 and 1980. Dissatisfied with the form and direction of this growth, New Urbanists frame their key principles in direct opposition to the development patterns of the post-war era. In order to understand New Urbanist theory, therefore, it is essential to understand the changes in the American landscape during this time period. The shift from a system of urban cores servicing peripheral suburbs and rural towns with employment, entertainment, commerce, and municipal infrastructure to one of sprawl and fractured uses where city centers lie vacant of activity is a story told time and again by New Urbanist advocates, and one that will be examined briefly here.

As the previous chapter established, by the 1950s suburban communities were proliferating across the American continent, built on the fringes of cities where they
could retain direct access to urban amenities such as employment, cultural activities, and commercial needs. By the 1960s, however, these suburbs had begun to attract some of their own services: educational and civic facilities, recreational spaces, and even commercial spaces such as shopping complexes. This trend is evident in the prior discussion of Levitt and Sons concerning the evolution of the Levittown prototype and the extent of services that became incorporated in the model by its third iteration. In contrast to the first Levittown, which did not even include schools or churches, the third Levittown had schools, a community center, small retail establishments, and even a larger shopping complex meant to attract people from both inside and outside the community. These increased amenities served as an effective way for suburban developers to market their communities and entice people to choose their suburb instead of one of the numerous others available. The third Levittown is representative of the increasing level of services that became incorporated in suburban developments as post-war suburbanization progressed.

As suburbs continued to grow in number and size, they started to attract not only recreational, civic, and social resources, but employment opportunities as well. By the 1970s, some suburbs on the immediate periphery of cities had attracted so many entertainment, retail, and employment facilities that they had begun to resemble small cities in the number of services they provided. One statistic that demonstrates this profound relocation of services especially clearly is that between 1970 and 1984, the percentage of office space located in the suburbs increased from 25 percent of the national total to 57 percent. As job centers drifted further from the city core, residential communities drifted further from the urban periphery as well,
beginning to form around the fringes of suburban job centers rather than city centers. Rather than living in the suburbs and commuting to the city as they had done during the 1950s and 60s, many Americans now lived in the suburbs and commuted to other suburbs for work and social purposes.

This pattern was facilitated by substantial federal and state highway investments – just as nineteenth century suburbanites had commuted to work in city centers via streetcar and private coach, post-war suburbanites now commuted to nearby job centers via private automobile on a vast network of large, high-speed roads financed by federal and state governments. This form of growth was also enabled by the continued reliance on zoning ordinances as the main instrument in land use planning. As discussed in the previous chapter, by the 1950s zoning regulations required segregation of land uses, mandating that residential neighborhoods be separated from places of employment, retail, and recreation. Zoning regulations that forbade mixed-use development guaranteed that decentralized job centers would promote the growth of detached residential communities, rather than prompting residential development within walkable distances.

**The New Urbanist Reaction**

By 1980, a number of planners and architects had begun to question this pattern of development. The nature of growth seemed problematic wherever one turned to look – to the suburbs, where commuters spent increasing time and money traveling to places of work, entertainment, and shopping, all of which were segregated from their residential communities and accessible only by automobile; and
also to the city, where conditions continued to deteriorate as economic vitality was sapped from the core to nearby suburban job centers. Critics of this type of development have labeled it “sprawl,” referring to the way in which the built environment extends without clear definition of edges, often at very low densities. In order to understand the exact nature of the type of growth against which New Urbanists began reacting in the 1980s, this thesis will rely on the following set of characteristics, provided by Jeremy R. Meredith and extracted from the work of Robert W. Burchell and Naveed A. Shad, to define sprawl more specifically:

First, sprawl has a low relative density. Second, it consists of unlimited and noncontiguous ‘leapfrog’ development. In residential areas, this type of development primarily includes single-family tract housing. Third, under sprawled conditions, different types of land uses tend to be segregated. In these areas, municipal zoning ordinances only permit one use in each district. Fourth, sprawl consumes large quantities of exurban agricultural and other fragile lands. Fifth, in sprawled areas, people must rely on automobiles to access individual land uses. Finally…the lack of integrated land-use planning [is] a component of urban sprawl…sprawl occurs in areas in which the land-use framework has been fragmented among numerous municipalities and developers.⁷

While planners between 1850 and 1950 criticized urban congestion, first seeking to solve the problem through city beautification and then eventually advocating a program of population decentralization facilitated by the creation of suburban settlements, planners in the second half of the twentieth century have witnessed the effects of the opposite extreme: excess population decentralization in the form of sprawl.⁸ Finding a balance between these two extremes constitutes the primary focus of New Urbanist theory.
In its attempt to combat sprawl development, the New Urbanist program responds directly to the six elements of sprawl outlined above, proposing alternative methods of planning that lead away from this type of growth, which New Urbanists hold to be unsustainable and unfulfilling for the inhabitants of the environments it produces. As New Urbanist theorist and practitioner Peter Calthorpe explains, the “sprawling pattern of growth at the edge now produces conditions which frustrate rather than enhance daily life.” According to New Urbanists, hours spent in commuter traffic and time spent shuttling dependent non-drivers from location to location are just two examples of how growth based on fragmented development and a reliance on automobile transportation detracts from quality of life. For those unfortunate enough to be left behind in decaying city centers, declining quality of public services, diminishing employment opportunities, and growing poverty and crime are serious issues that likewise decrease human welfare and are due in large measure to the current pattern of suburban growth and urban contraction.

While New Urbanism did not coalesce into a coherent and united movement until 1993 with the establishment of the Congress for the New Urbanism, during the 1980s the individual work of many planners and architects began to reflect the notion that the United States needed a new philosophy of growth, and many of the independent ideas of these private individuals were eventually joined to form the central principles of New Urbanism. What follows is a history of the movement and its theory from 1980 to the present, although it should be noted that since New Urbanism is contemporary and ongoing, there has yet to be a comprehensive history
written of the movement and the history here has been compiled primarily from the personal accounts of the movement’s founders.

The Charter of the New Urbanism, ratified in 1996 at the fourth meeting of the Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU), asserts twenty-seven principles for the guidance of “public policy, development practice, urban planning, and design.” These principles are divided into three categories, addressing growth at three levels: the region; the neighborhood, district, and corridor; and finally the block, street, and building. This layered, multi-level approach is a reflection of the CNU’s desire for a flexible, broad expression of ideals, but also a manifestation of the Congress’s fractured past, in which ideas developed by individuals in the previous decade were combined and reconciled under a single name in the 1990s. This section will explore briefly the individual works of some of New Urbanism’s founders during the 1980s in order to understand the multi-layered ideology of the consolidated movement.

The work of two architects, Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, can be credited with shaping the guidelines that address development and growth at the neighborhood level. Trained at the Yale School of Architecture, the couple founded the architectural firm Duany Plater-Zyberk and Company (DPZ) in 1980, and the following year received a commission to design an 80-acre settlement on the Florida panhandle that turned out to be a groundbreaking step in the development of New Urbanism. The town, named “Seaside” after its geographical location, was commissioned by Miami developer Robert Davis, who was interested in creating a settlement that would be unlike the suburban forms he saw dominating the Florida landscape. Given the license to explore new approaches to community development
in their work on Seaside, Duany and Plater-Zyberk were provided with an opportunity to experiment with many of the ideas they had been developing in previous years concerning the structure of the neighborhood and its role in fostering ideals of community. In their model for the configuration of neighborhoods, which they subsequently applied to their work on over 300 new and existing communities under the title of *Traditional Neighborhood Design* (TND),\(^\text{12}\) the two emphasize the importance of clearly defined neighborhoods, diversity of uses and population, walkability, and the primacy of public space over private dwellings.\(^\text{13}\)

In order to promote these principles, the TND model lays out thirteen elements that every neighborhood should contain. The thirteen design elements are as follows:

1) The neighborhood has a discernible center. This is often a square or a green and sometimes a busy or memorable street corner. A transit stop would be located at this center.

2) Most of the dwellings are within a five-minute walk of the center, an average of roughly 1/4 mile or 1,320 feet (0.4 km).

3) There are a variety of dwelling types — usually houses, rowhouses, and apartments — so that younger and older people, singles, and families, the poor, and the wealthy may find places to live.

4) At the edge of the neighborhood, there are shops and offices of sufficiently varied types to supply the weekly needs of a household.

5) A small ancillary building or garage apartment is permitted within the backyard of each house. It may be used as a rental unit or place to work (for example, an office or craft workshop).

6) An elementary school is close enough so that most children can walk from their home.

7) There are small playgrounds accessible to every dwelling — not more than a tenth of a mile away.
8) Streets within the neighborhood form a connected network, which disperses traffic by providing a variety of pedestrian and vehicular routes to any destination.

9) The streets are relatively narrow and shaded by rows of trees. This slows traffic, creating an environment suitable for pedestrians and bicycles.

10) Buildings in the neighborhood center are placed close to the street, creating a well-defined outdoor room.

11) Parking lots and garage doors rarely front the street. Parking is relegated to the rear of buildings, usually accessed by alleys.

12) Certain prominent sites at the termination of street vistas or in the neighborhood center are reserved for civic buildings. These provide sites for community meetings, education, and religious or cultural activities.

13) The neighborhood is organized to be self-governing. A formal association debates and decides matters of maintenance, security, and physical change. Taxation is the responsibility of the larger community.

As the chapter will reveal, many of these elements became integral parts of the CNUs Charter of the New Urbanism, as well as remaining at the core of DPZ’s individual program of design and planning.

Although these thirteen features are to be found in all neighborhoods planned by Duany and Plater-Zyberk, the pair also underscores the necessity of place-specific design, meaning that the exact form of the neighborhood and style of its buildings are influenced primarily by the unique cultural, historical, and geographical context of the location. Such specificity is a reaction against “the monoculture, anonymity, and placelessness of sprawl.”

To promote local uniqueness, Duany and Plater-Zyberk use site-specific characteristics – such as topography, natural features, and existing built elements – to guide the planning of neighborhoods. In the case of Seaside, the entire settlement is arranged “to optimize waterfront views and access for
all of the town’s residents, not just those with beachfront homesites." This is a prime example of the couple’s commitment to prioritizing public over private space – access to beaches in Florida is notoriously restricted by private development along the shore, a condition the two sought to address by designing the settlement so that all streets and walkways lead eventually either to the beach or town center. The town center faces out to the water, giving residents stellar oceanfront views as they go about their daily business and allowing them benefit from the remarkable natural environment in which their town is located.

While Duany and Plater-Zyberk spent much of the 1980s developing the principles of TND and implementing them in both new planned communities and urban redevelopment projects, other individuals were proposing solutions to sprawl at different scales of the built environment. Architects Elizabeth Moule and Stefanos Polyzoides focused their attack on sprawl at a smaller scale, looking at principles of design at the level of the block, street, and building. Just as Duany and Plater-Zyberk assert the importance of place-specific design in their work with neighborhood structure, so too do Moule and Polyzoides emphasize the importance of local and regional specificity in the architectural choices for individual buildings. In 1990, the two founded Moule & Polyzoides, Architects and Urbanists. As its website explains, the firm focuses on projects that “are informed by [an] understanding of architectural history and regional building traditions, consideration of existing urban settings, respect for the functional and spiritual purposes of architecture, and sensitivity to place and fragility of natural ecosystems.” In basing architectural choices on physical, regional, and historical context, Moule and Polyzoides seek to promote the
creation of “authentic regional building differences” that provide variation and local uniqueness across the American landscape, rather than perpetuating the proliferation of uniform building types characteristic of sprawl.

Like Duany and Plater-Zyberk, the two also emphasize the priority of public spaces over private developments, examining the ways in which the design of individual buildings, blocks, and streets can promote the creation of well-defined, usable public spaces. In this conception of the built environment, public spaces are not only constituted by explicitly public areas like parks, civic facilities, and commercial spaces, but also by places where people interact more informally, such as streets. Such elements as uniform building setbacks, building heights determined in proportion to street widths, and strategic landscaping that screens pedestrians from vehicle traffic can help create a public environment that is clearly defined and comfortable to occupy, thereby encouraging inhabitants to utilize these public spaces rather than remaining isolated in the privacy of their own dwellings and automobiles. In addition, Moule and Polyzoides assert that buildings help define the public realm simply by virtue of their permanence in the surrounding environment, serving as “instruments for constructing time and place, not items to be consumed and discarded.” Building designs should not reflect the temporary whims of their private owners, but should be constructed with the knowledge that they will permanently alter the environment in which they are placed for all who inhabit and occupy it.

Before turning to the coalescence of New Urbanist principles during the early 1990s and the creation of the CNU, I will consider briefly the work of one other
individual, whose work during the 1980s introduced development ideals on an entirely different scale than those examined by Duany, Plater-Zyberk, Moule, or Polyzoides. While addressing development on the level of individual buildings and the neighborhoods that they comprise is essential to remaking the American landscape and accommodating growth in a manner different from the suburban sprawl of the post-war decades, the regional emphasis in the works of Peter Calthorpe adds a third layer of analysis that illuminates the true power of New Urbanist theory in rethinking planning in the United States.

Calthorpe began his exploration of regionalism during the 1980s while working on a “pedestrian pocket” initiative in California that explored the feasibility of creating small, walkable communities connected to one another by transit systems such as buses, subways, and trains, thus enabling residents to go about their daily lives with relatively little reliance on the automobile.23 The motivation for Calthorpe’s work is his belief that human communities satisfy their social, economic, and cultural needs at a regional, not municipal level. As he explains,

We no longer live in isolated villages, neighborhoods, or even singular cities. Your job opportunities, the quality of the environment, the air you breathe, the water that’s flowing through your neighborhood, the traffic congestion that constrains your life – all these things are regional in scale. Your economic opportunity, your cultural outlets – all of it is regional.24

During the 1980s, Calthorpe observed that the structure of suburban sprawl forced individuals to use automobiles to travel between places of work, commerce, entertainment, and residence; to decrease dependence on the automobile and increase mobility for those who do not have access to them, Calthorpe’s model of the
pedestrian pocket emphasized the creation of regions that were composed of small walkable areas linked by public transit. Calthorpe labeled such growth *Transit Oriented Development* (TOD).\(^{25}\)

In articulating his theory of regionalism, Calthorpe frequently cites the influence of the RPAA. Just as Mumford and Stein realized the error of City Beautiful planners in trying to solve problems of urban decay without addressing the interrelationship between urban and rural settlements, Calthorpe maintains that sprawl can only be combated through regional policies that seek to plan growth on the level of the metropolis, not just the city or town:

> We must leave behind our notion of the metropolis as a series of disconnected places. We must cease viewing problems of suburban sprawl and urban decay as individual problems with no relationship to one another. We must instead think of the metropolitan region as a series of interconnected places – a Regional City – that will not function effectively unless it is consciously designed. And we must recognize the need to deal with problems at the appropriate scale, whether that scale is a thousand-square-mile metropolitan region or a one-square-block neighborhood.\(^{26}\)

Calthorpe’s recent work has centered on helping metropolitan regions create plans that seek to address the accommodation of growth at the regional, not municipal level. This proactive approach exceeds what was accomplished by the RPAA; although the Association based its theory in the regional ideology of Geddes, as the previous chapter explains, most of its actual work was directed towards creating planned suburban communities, rather than promoting regional planning that could facilitate the physical change needed to facilitate increased welfare and quality of life for Americans.
A more extensive analysis of the relationship of New Urbanism to earlier planning movements, especially those discussed in this thesis, will follow later in the chapter. First, however, it is important to examine briefly the emergence of New Urbanism as a unified movement in the 1990s, and the ways in which the multi-layered approaches of its founders coalesced into one coherent ideology. By the end of the 1980s, Moule, Polyzoides, Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Calthorpe had all encountered one another professionally and worked collaboratively on a number of projects. Despite their interests in different aspects of planning and design, the five recognized their common passion for promoting alternatives to the current pattern of growth, and began discussing the possibility of forming a group “that would explore and advocate alternatives to suburbanization.” In 1991, the Local Government Commission, a California-based non-profit, asked a small group of individuals, including Moule, Polyzoides, Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Calthorpe, to draft a set of community planning principles that the Commission could use as guidelines in their work to promote communities that foster increased quality of life for their inhabitants. Over the course of several days, the group produced a document known as the Ahwahnee Principles, a short text proposing nineteen planning principles meant to encourage the creation of communities that “more successfully serve the needs of those who live and work within them.”

The group continued to meet following this initial collaboration, and by 1993 decided that the issues they had been discussing needed to be opened up to a larger audience. They thus decided to host a series of conferences, which they named the Congress for the New Urbanism, that would serve as forums for architects, planners,
policy-makers, environmentalists, social advocates, land developers, and financiers to gather and discuss the future of the American landscape. To address their divergent interests relating to the scope and scale of reform, the group decided that each of the three conferences held between 1993 and 1995 would concentrate on one of the three levels of development. The first, organized by Duany and Plater-Zyberk, focused on neighborhood design; the second, organized by Polyzoides and Moule, concentrated on the building, block, and street; the third, organized by Calthorpe and Daniel Solomon, addressed development at the regional level. Attendance at the meetings increased steadily over the course of the three years, as did the diversity of professions represented by the attendees.29

By 1995, the CNU had a board of directors and an executive director, and was ready to communicate its ideas to an even broader audience. In order to do so, the six founding members worked with the board to develop a manifesto of ideas, which they ultimately titled the Charter of the New Urbanism (“the Charter”) [Appendix]. Consisting of a preamble and twenty-seven related principles, the document reflects the CNU’s desire to bridge many of the ideological differences of its founding members. One such division concerned the level of development planners should target in their attempt to remake the American landscape, a difference of opinion that has already been addressed in this chapter. The principles of the Charter are organized to reflect this tripartite scalar division. While this difference might not seem serious enough to qualify as an ideological division, it in fact concerns the most basic beliefs these planners had about where and how change in the built landscape engenders meaningful social change. In the early years of the movement, planners
such as Moule and Polyzoides maintained that specific kinds of architecture and street planning could have a tremendous impact on ending sprawl patterns of development, while others, like Calthorpe, asserted that only through a broad regional perspective could sprawl truly be combated.

Another point of dispute was whether growth could most effectively be channeled into vibrant, healthy communities by focusing on urban infill and redevelopment projects or by developing entirely new towns on existing greenfields.† Polyzoides, Moule, and Calthorpe have tended to emphasize the former in their respective works, while Duany and Plater-Zyberk have worked more extensively with the planning of entirely new communities, as exemplified by their design for Seaside.

The principles of the Charter may seem overly vague or simplistic, but the founders of the Congress felt that this was the only way to unite all of their disparate beliefs. In sacrificing a rigid or more focused set of ideological principles, New Urbanists gained the support of a great number of planners, social advocates, politicians, and architects that might otherwise be divided. The CNU operates under the assumption that it is better to build a large support base of individuals all interested in changing the course of physical development in the United States than alienate potential allies because of overly restrictive or focused guiding principles.³⁰ Rather than seek change through adherence to a fixed set of aesthetic principles as did City Beautiful

† A greenfield is “a parcel of land not previously developed, and is characterized by: rural or extremely low-density lands; significant natural, cultural, or agricultural resources; and locations outside recognized urban limits.” (Heid, 9) The term is often used in contrast with the term brownfield, which is defined as an “abandoned or underused industrial or commercial property where redevelopment is complicated by actual or perceived environmental contamination.” (“Brownfields – Definition”) Brownfields are often the sites of urban infill and redevelopment projects.
advocates, New Urbanists believe that planning has a greater potential to create real and effective change the more flexible and wide-reaching it is made to be.

Despite the multi-layered, multi-perspective approach of the movement, New Urbanism is by no means fractured or incoherent in its theoretical foundations. Rather than proposing a separate set of criteria for development at each of the three scalar levels as well as urban infill versus greenfield communities, New Urbanists claim that their simple set of design principles are applicable at all scales and in all locations. It is worth noting that this approach is not much different from the organizational structure of the City Beautiful movement, which was driven forward by thousands of local projects undertaken by a coalition of professionals and laypeople under the guidance of certain overarching principles. The following section will explore the basic tenets of New Urbanist theory and how these manifest themselves at all levels and locations of New Urbanist development.

THE PRINCIPLES OF NEW URBANISM

Just like advocates of the City Beautiful movement and the early suburban planners, New Urbanists adhere strongly to an environmental ethic that proposes a direct connection between the form of the landscape and the social, economic, and political habits and behaviors of the communities that inhabit these environments. As the preamble to the Charter asserts, New Urbanism “recognize[s] that physical solutions by themselves will not solve social and economic problems, but neither can economic vitality, community stability, and environmental health be sustained without a coherent and supportive physical framework.” Much as City Beautiful
planners attempted to alleviate problems of urban corruption, poverty, and social stratification by creating beauty and harmony in the physical construction of the city, and suburban planners hoped to address the same urban issues by promoting population decentralization and the creation of settlements that were removed from the negative effects of both the country and the city, New Urbanist planners believe that their principles can help structure a built environment that promotes community, equality, and increased quality of life. All of their design principles stem from this fundamental premise that the physical form of the environment affects the lives of the people living within it.

Based on this conviction of the relationship between physical structure and quality of life, New Urbanists propose the following key tenets, each of which will be discussed in detail: 1) denser communities, 2) diversity of use and population, 3) availability of many transportation options, 4) primacy of public over private spaces, 5) awareness of local ecology and promotion of environmental sustainability, 6) sense of place founded on local uniqueness, and 7) collective and integrated land use planning. These elements are meant to be applicable at all levels of development, from the individual building to the metropolitan region, as well as in all locations, from urban infill projects to new planned communities. New Urbanist theory emphasizes the essential connections between development at all scales – healthy regions are composed of robust neighborhoods, which in turn consist of well-planned buildings, blocks, and streets. Rather than tearing down existing communities and reshaping them to conform to these seven principles, New Urbanists believe that these
objectives can be achieved more organically as continued population and economic growth leads to growth in the built environment. It is important to note here that New Urbanists do not oppose growth – they see it not only as necessary in some cases but also as positive because physical growth is an opportunity to reshape the built environment and thereby improve the quality of life for those living within it.

As a discussion of the seven elements listed above will reveal, New Urbanists believe strongly that in order for planning theory to induce beneficial change in the American landscape, land use planners must be given a more central role in political decision-making processes, rather than being pushed aside as suburban planners were in the mid-twentieth century.

*High-density development*

The first of these tenets is a direct reaction against the low-density suburban sprawl of the post-war decades. On a neighborhood level, increased density manifests itself in the form of multi-family housing in residential areas, neighborhood centers that provide for all the daily needs of local residents in one compact location, and clearly-defined neighborhood boundaries that are no more than ¼ mile from the neighborhood center. On the regional level, increased density also requires well-delineated borders, both for the region itself and for the population centers within these regions. The region should be defined by geographic features, and within this region should exist a number of clearly demarcated cities, towns, and villages. Rather than spilling across the open countryside, populations should be concentrated within
the boundaries of these centers. Growth within a region should be focused in already-developed areas in the form of infill and redevelopment before it is allowed to spill into previously uninhabited or low-density open spaces. When growth can only be accommodated by the creation of new settlements, these should be organized as well-defined towns and villages, not simply dependent suburbs. This view differs substantially from the ideals espoused by RPAA regionalists and suburban planners, who criticized dense population concentration and viewed decentralization as the only means to improving quality of life for urbanites and country dwellers alike.

Diversity

Within these compacted population centers, planners should strive to promote diversity of both use and population. At the neighborhood level, mixed-use centers should provide for social, commercial, and governmental needs within one compact location. Residential areas should provide a number of different housing options, from single-family dwellings to multi-family units, thus allowing people of diverse ages, incomes, and races to live within the same neighborhoods. New Urbanists claim that such heterogeneous interaction on a daily basis is a key element in “strengthening the personal and civic bonds essential to…[a] community.” On a regional level, all population centers should include the diversity of uses that their inhabitants need for daily living, rather than segregating uses across the region so that people must travel long distances in order to satisfy their basic daily needs. In addition, regions should be composed of a diverse mix of small villages, larger towns,
and even larger urban centers in order to fulfill varied desires concerning place of residence. In 1989, Gallup poll respondents answering the question “If you could live anywhere in the United States that you wanted to, would you prefer a city, suburban area, small town or farm?”, replied in the following proportions: city 19 percent, suburban area 24 percent, small town 34 percent, and farm 22 percent. New Urbanist writers frequently cite this poll as evidence that the regional landscape needs to offer a more diverse array of settlement types, rather than the suburban form that currently dominates in most places.

*Mixed transit options*

Although New Urbanists criticize the American reliance on automobiles and seek to encourage walkability and pedestrianism, they also realize that automobiles cannot be eliminated entirely. Rather, New Urbanism promotes built environments that are accessible for pedestrians, cars, and public transit systems. On the block and neighborhood level, this means designing a variety of corridor types, from large boulevards that connect neighborhoods to small roads that discourage through-traffic and promote walking. On the regional level, New Urbanists assert that although people should be able to satisfy their *basic* needs locally, they will still need and want to travel throughout the region at frequent intervals to engage in activities that improve their quality of life still further, from enjoying cultural amenities such as theater and museums to satisfying commercial desires such as shopping at stores that are not available locally. New Urbanists do not seek to change this regional lifestyle – they recognize the fundamental economic, social, and cultural connections between

123
city, country, and suburban environments, and that having access to all the resources an entire region has to offer can greatly enhance Americans’ quality of life. Rather, these planners seek to change the way in which people move throughout the region. To this end, they assert that population centers should be connected by public transit systems, reducing reliance on congested highways and private automobiles. This type of transit-connected region is exemplified by Calthorpe’s model of Transit Oriented Development.

*Primacy of public over private*

At all levels of development, public needs and spaces should be given priority over private spaces. Just as City Beautiful advocates asserted that centuries of private decision-making had led to the formation of the problematic nineteenth century city landscape, New Urbanists contend that in order for physical reconstruction to be effective, public needs must be put before private desires. From informal public space such as sidewalks and roads to formal places of gathering such as civic buildings and meeting spaces, places of public interaction are essential to reinforcing community ties. Streets and blocks should be constructed such that people feel safe and comfortable on sidewalks, and neighborhoods should include civic buildings and public open spaces such as parks and ballfields. At the regional level, public infrastructure, such as transit stops and lines, should receive priority over private development desires so that it is located in the best possible places rather than being relegated to where land values are low and private development is undesirable.
Environmental awareness and sustainability

In explaining the above planning principles, New Urbanists emphasize that all design should be undertaken with an awareness of local ecology and the goal of promoting environmental sustainability. Individual buildings should employ energy efficient methods of construction, cooling, and heating. Public transit at the neighborhood and regional levels should rely on energy efficient technologies in addition to simply reducing dependence on energy-consuming private automobiles. Regional growth should be accommodated with an awareness of the environment, protecting lands with high ecological importance and focusing growth in already developed areas. In contrast to special purpose planners’ perceptions of the city as a dirty stain on the pristine countryside, New Urbanists recognize the great environmental value of cities. As Calthorpe explains, cities symbolize “a compact alternative to the constant invasion of open space (wilderness) represented by modern sprawl…in this sense, they are the model of conservation and material frugality.”

Rather than seeing population concentration as problematic, as nineteenth and early-to mid-twentieth century planners did, New Urbanists view population intensification as desirable, partially because it serves as an environmentally-sustainable alternative to sprawl. However, they also emphasize that another aspect of sustainability is that the use of energy and materials in any urban area should not exceed what the region can supply.
Unique sense of place

In addition to approaching the above design principles with a commitment to sustainability, New Urbanists emphasize the importance of place-specificity. As the discussions of Duany, Plater-Zyberk, Moule, and Polyzoides highlighted, New Urbanism is devoted to fostering a strong sense of place in the built environment, meaning that physical form should be a reflection of the local and regional context. From the architecture of specific buildings to the choice of public transportation types, planning choices should be based on a deep understanding of local history, ecology, geography, and climate, rather than on national prototypes. This means drawing on historical, pre-sprawl architectural styles. Not only does such specificity produce a built environment that is aesthetically varied and regionally authentic, it helps foster a sense of connection to the landscape, prompting inhabitants to feel affinity and responsibility for the specific environment in which they live.46

Integrated land use planning

Finally, New Urbanists assert that none of the above principles can be achieved except through integrated land use planning in which issues relating to the design of the built environment are conceived of as interrelated and addressed accordingly. This means two things: planning should be both place-based and regional. In calling for place-based planning, New Urbanists claim that issues such as housing, transportation, crime, environmental sustainability, education, health, and economic development should not be addressed by separate agencies and programs as
they are now, but by offices that consider all these elements together at the level of the neighborhood. As Doug Kelbaugh explains, “we have neither the time nor the money to solve these problems one at a time.” In addition, planning must be regional, meaning that policy decisions concerning the structure of the built environment should no longer occur at the municipal level. In his call for regional policy-making, Calthorpe asserts:

Regional cooperation and coordination is now essential to the success of every town and city. Without a diverse regional transportation network, our neighborhoods and towns easily become isolated pockets surrounded by congestion. Without regional greenbelts, habitat reserves, and farmlands, towns and cities lose their connection to the natural world. Without regional economic strategies, stressed inner suburbs can fall prey to the economic stagnation experienced in many inner-city areas. Without regional access, the truly disadvantaged are cut off from the models and opportunities they need to transform their lives. Without a healthy regional structure and affordable housing, it is increasingly difficult for an area to compete for jobs in a fluid global economy.

According to New Urbanists, planning that is fragmented between issue areas and municipal authorities is responsible for the disorganized sprawl development of the post-war decades. Although they recognize that reorganization on a regional level is largely a political task, they assert that it is one that planners must actively support and promote.

The above principles serve to unite a diverse consortium of planners, architects, policy makers, social advocates, land developers, and environmentalists under the name of New Urbanism, yet the New Urbanist movement progresses as a
series of unconnected projects at the neighborhood, municipal, and regional level, reflecting the New Urbanist notion that remaking the built environment should occur only as growth demands and that projects should be specifically tailored to address local needs and circumstances. In proposing this set of ideological principles for growth, New Urbanists conceive of their movement as a natural continuation of planning theory in the United States, rather than a radical break with tradition or past movements. As Emily Talen explains in her comparison of New Urbanism and historical planning movements in the United States, New Urbanism:

seeks to promote qualities that urban reformers have always sought: vital, beautiful, just, environmentally benign human settlements. The significance of New Urbanism is that it is a combination of these past efforts: a culmination of a long, multi-faceted attempt to define what urbanism in America should be.49

Although New Urbanists criticize the current structure of the American landscape, and the part land use planners have played in creating it, they nevertheless recognize that the past 150 years of planning theory, by explaining how the built environment came to be as it is now, can be valuable in finding new ways to plan for growth. This concept will be probed further in the following paragraphs.

This chapter makes a similar assertion to Talen’s, albeit a more specific one, asserting that New Urbanist theory can be understood as an explicit combination of City Beautiful central city urbanism and the regionalism proposed by the RPAA. Like City Beautiful proponents, New Urbanists conceive of the city as a potentially beautiful and positive place. Unlike the regionalists of the 1920s, they realize the
value of dense human settlements, and see population decentralization as the problem rather than the solution to improving human welfare. This is mainly a function of historical context – unlike RPAA regionalists, New Urbanists have the benefit of having observed the results of extreme decentralization and inattention to city centers. However, like 1920s regionalists, New Urbanists recognize the fundamental connections between all settlement types, conceiving of city and country as deeply interconnected as City Beautiful enthusiasts failed to do. A fuller exploration of the relationship of New Urbanism to the City Beautiful movement and the RPAA will be discussed in the final section of this chapter, with particular attention to how New Urbanist theory has the potential to generate profound change in the American landscape. Before turning to this final analysis, however, the following section will examine one specific New Urbanist project, the Compass Blueprint, in order to understand how the unifying principles of New Urbanism are manifested in concrete physical development. The Compass Blueprint is a regional growth plan for Southern California, and the example will illustrate how New Urbanist principles are being used to guide development at the regional, municipal, neighborhood, and street level to accommodate anticipated growth in the region.

THE COMPASS BLUEPRINT

In 2000, the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), a regional planning organization representing the interests of six counties in Southern California, launched an initiative entitled “Compass” as a reaction to rapid growth in
the region. The Southern California region, which consists of the counties of Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino, Riverside, Ventura, and Imperial and encompasses a population of 18 million in an area of 38,000 square miles, is expected to grow by six million people by 2035. Recognizing that continued development could potentially lead to increased congestion and heavy pollution, thereby negatively affecting the economic strength and general livability of the region, SCAG began the Compass program as a way to develop a “preferred growth strategy” that would ensure that growth occurs in a manner that promotes, rather than frustrates, economic prosperity and quality of life in the region. The project is overseen by the Growth Visioning Subcommittee of the SCAG Regional Council, with professional consulting provided by planners John Fregonese and Peter Calthorpe.

True to New Urbanist principles, the program is premised upon the idea that accommodating and controlling growth in a constructive and positive way is a task that can only be undertaken at the regional level. As the informational website on the Compass program explains, resolving growth-related concerns “will be impossible working purely at the local government level, prioritizing purely local interests and concerns. [Southern California] need[s] a regional framework in which to view these problems – air quality, open space, transportation, housing, and jobs – that reach across political boundaries.” The Compass Blueprint is meant to serve as such a framework, identifying areas where future growth should be concentrated and transit lines should be constructed. The project is driven by four key principles, each of which SCAG seeks to promote in planning for regional growth: mobility (“Getting where we want to go”), livability (“Creating positive communities”), prosperity
(“Long-term health for the region”), and sustainability (“Preserving natural surroundings”). To advance such objectives, the Compass plan encourages growth that is concentrated in existing centers along major transportation corridors, is mixed-use in nature and encourages pedestrianism, and preserves existing open spaces and healthy residential areas. These principles are the embodiment of New Urbanism.

In application, these principles must be specifically adapted and tailored to the physical, economic, and social structure of the region. Based on extensive analysis of land use, existing infrastructure such as transportation lines, and economic structure, the Compass Blueprint proposes the “2% Strategy.” This policy asserts that all projected growth in the Southern California region can be accommodated by “modest changes to current land use and transportation trends on only 2% of the land area of the region.” This means that planning for growth need not involve remaking the entire 38,000 square miles of the region – changes must be made only on 2 percent of the total land of the region. The plan labels such areas “2% Strategy Opportunity Areas,” and proposes to focus energy and resources into promoting the four principles of mobility, livability, prosperity, and sustainability in these areas. Operationally, the plan must be pursued at every level, from the region as a whole to the thousands of individual neighborhoods that comprise the region. As the regional planning organization, SCAG has the authority to plan construct the regional transportation networks that connect the cities and towns that make up Southern California. Thus the Compass Blueprint includes a comprehensive plan detailing existing transit lines, planned transportation projects, and potential transportation projects.
Yet most planning decisions remain within the purview of municipal governments, and SCAG recognizes that most physical change will take place under the control and direction of municipal planning authorities at the neighborhood level. To encourage such change in 2% Strategy Opportunity Areas, SCAG is offering free planning services to local governments that propose projects that help promote the principles outlined in the Compass Blueprint. Because planning departments often lack the financial, technical, and personnel support they need to carry out projects beyond the scope of everyday necessities, free planning services represent a tremendous incentive to participate in the Compass program. Thus far SCAG has supported a number of planning projects in 2% Areas, including the drafting of local growth plans, plans for transit development, and economic development strategies. These local projects promote New Urbanist principles of mixed-use, pedestrianism, alternative transit, concentrated and bounded development, and environmental sustainability, and moreover are tailored specifically to the local needs of neighborhoods and municipalities while still fitting into a regional framework of growth.

It is still too soon to predict how successfully the Compass Blueprint program will address the issue of growth in Southern California, but thus far, the project appears to be promoting innovative developments at the neighborhood, municipal, and regional level that epitomize the values of New Urbanism. It is essential to remember, however, that any success this program achieves is due to the fact that it is being executed and financed by a regional planning authority, one that has been

\[\text{For a more detailed description of projects that have been funded by SCAG under the Compass Blueprint program, see http://www.compassblueprint.org/tools/existingprojects}\]
existence for over four decades. One common critique of New Urbanism’s emphasis on regional planning is that New Urbanists have offered very little guidance for how to create effective regional organizations – the Compass project demonstrates what can be achieved within an existing regional framework, but not how to create such regional entities in the first place. In addition, even regional agencies that do exist are severely weakened by the lack of federal support and recognition for their authority. The creation of regional organizations is a political task, yet New Urbanists must actively work to promote such a political agenda if they hope to see effective planning at the regional level.

**The Implications of a New Urbanism**

Without the benefit of historical hindsight, it is difficult to know how effective New Urbanism will be in achieving the goals its advocates have set. Nevertheless, as this thesis has shown, the past 150 years have brought significant and rapid change in the structure of the American landscape. Such a history should suggest that it is not a question of whether the built environment of the United States will change in the coming decades, but how it will change. New Urbanists offer one perspective of how the physical structure of the United States should evolve in response to national economic and population growth. Since its emergence in the 1990s, New Urbanism has received much attention, both positive and critical. Some of the criticisms have been touched upon in this chapter: the generality and vagueness of New Urbanist principles, the failure to provide the policy proposals needed to facilitate regional planning, and the perhaps overly-idealistic expectation that American society will
relinquish its attachment to low-density suburban development and private automobiles. The purpose of this chapter is not to provide a critical evaluation of New Urbanism and its prospects for success, although the number of people who have begun to question the lifestyle produced by the current pattern of sprawl suggests that the American population may be more amenable to change than some critics expect. The purpose here, however, has been to comprehend the ways in which New Urbanism has sought to exert control over the structure of the American landscape in the same way that the efforts of special purpose, City Beautiful, and suburban planners to exact change in the built environment were examined in previous chapters.

The central conclusion of this chapter is that rather than representing a radical shift in the way planning theory attempts to generate physical change in the structure of the American environment, New Urbanism is a direct combination of City Beautiful urbanism and RPAA regionalism. New Urbanists draw directly on the work of regionalists such as Mumford and Geddes, asserting that since rural, urban, and suburban landscapes are all deeply connected to one another socially, economically, and politically, physical growth must be viewed in a similar way. As Calthorpe explains, “the city, its suburbs and their natural environment should be treated as a whole – socially, economically and ecologically. Treating them separately is endemic to many of the problems we now face.” Like the RPAA, New Urbanists insist that just as people, services, goods, and ideas cross fluidly between city and country, planning functions too should cease to be fragmented by municipal lines. As previous chapters intimated, past planning efforts have been limited in their ability to
produce effective change because of their failure to approach planning on a regional level.

However, New Urbanism is not a simple extension of RPAA regionalism. It should be remembered that although the RPAA’s advances in suburban planning contributed directly to the proliferation of sprawl across the United States, its regional theories too advocated population decentralization as the solution to the problems of the twentieth-century city. Unlike these regionalists, New Urbanists do not see decentralization as the ultimate means for promoting human welfare, but rather see decentralization of people and resources as the primary cause for the ills of the modern American landscape. Thus they assert that while the focus of planning should be on creating balanced, harmonious regions, these regions should consist of a variety of carefully planned landscape types, from unpopulated wilderness to low-density countryside, higher density small cities, and even more dense central cities. New Urbanists even believe that through the application of their design principles, the modern suburban model can be adapted to better address the needs of its inhabitants. Rather than conceiving of cities as problematic and undesirable, as the regionalism and suburbanism of RPAA planners implicitly suggested, New Urbanists see densely-populated cities as essential to maintaining balanced and healthy regions. Like City Beautiful proponents, New Urbanists believe in the potential for urban beauty through the use of regionally specific architecture, accessible public spaces, and well-designed transportation networks that allow pedestrians, automobiles, and public transit to coexist.
Through combining elements of planning theory developed over the past 150 years, New Urbanists have arrived at a theory that has the potential to generate more effective and beneficial change in the physical environment than any past movement, due to its emphasis on regional action and the need to incorporate as broad a support base as possible across a wide range of professions. This does not mean that New Urbanists will necessarily be successful in promoting the change they desire, because the influential role they propose for land use planners will require a host of political and economic changes to be successful. Nevertheless, New Urbanism has an inherent potentiality to create effective and positive change that none of the other movements considered in this thesis possessed. This is not meant to challenge the intelligence or dedication of special purpose, City Beautiful, and RPAA planners, all of whom worked with noble intentions to push planning theory forward in order to improve the physical world around them. These particular movements were chosen specifically because they represented such revolutionary steps in the development of land use planning and the relationship of planning theory to the changing structure of the American landscape. Rather, this analysis is meant to show that as planning theory has evolved over the past 150 years, so too has its ability to translate theory into actual physical change.
Notes:


3 Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier 283-4.


9 Calthorpe, “The Region” xii.


15 Meredith 482.


18 Katz, Toward an Architecture of Community 3.


21 Moule and Polyzoides, “The Street, the Block and the Building” xxii-xxiv.

22 Moule and Polyzoides, “The Street, the Block and the Building” xxiv.


25 Calthorpe, The Next American Metropolis 45.

26 Calthorpe and Fulton, The Regional City 30.


31 CNU Board, “The Charter of the New Urbanism”


   nType=1&SearchDateADa=1&SearchDateAft=True&SearchDateAMo=12&SearchDateAYe=198
   8&SearchDateBDa=4&SearchDateBef=True&SearchDateBMo=2&SearchDateBYe=1990&Searc
   hOpenNew=False&SearchResuNum=10&SearchResuOrd=dated&SearchTypeAll=live>.
39 Todd W. Bressi, “Planning the American Dream,” The New Urbanism: Toward an Architecture of
44 Sim Van der Ryn, and Peter Calthorpe, Sustainable Communities: A New Design Synthesis for Cities,
45 Van der Ryn and Calthorpe, Sustainable Communities ix.
46 Calthorpe and Fulton, The Regional City 38.
48 Calthorpe and Fulton, The Regional City 5.
49 Emily Talen, New Urbanism and American Planning: the Conflict of Cultures (New York:
   Routledge, 2005) 1.
50 Southern California Assoc., “Who We Are,” Southern California Association of Governments,
51 Southern California Assoc., “Compass Blueprint: The Southern California Challenge,” SCAG, 4
   2008 <http://www.compassblueprint.org/about/team>.
54 Southern California Assoc., “Compass Blueprint: The Southern California Challenge”
   2008 <http://www.compassblueprint.org/about/team>.
   <http://www.compassblueprint.org/2percent>.
57 Calthorpe, “The Region” xi.
58 Calthorpe, “The Region” xi.
As with many professions, in land use planning there has often been a disconnect between theory and practice; those studying the philosophies and principles meant to guide the profession are often not the same people who work on the ground doing the basic work of planning on a daily basis. Reflecting my own conflicting interests between planning theory and practice, this thesis has sought to explore the intersection between the two, investigating how the ideologies and designs developed by planning theorists have been translated into actual physical change in the structure of built environments. While there are many events, ideas, and people that could have been examined in pursuit of this goal, the four movements that have just been analyzed were selected because it is my belief that the story of the relationship between planning theory and the physical evolution of the American environment could not have been told without reference to these four moments in planning history.

Chapter One explored the emergence of the land use planning profession in the United States, a revolutionary development given the nation’s long history of allowing thousands of private, uncoordinated decisions to determine the shape of the built landscape. Although the efforts undertaken by the first planners were relatively limited and contributed little to the direction and nature of development in American cities, the mere fact that people were thinking about the potential relationship between the physical structure of places and the welfare of the people that live there
represented a tremendous ideological shift. This concept would become the defining – and indeed justifying – principle of the planning profession in the twentieth century, and as such constitutes a pivotal moment in the history of land use planning. In addition, special purpose planners developed many of the techniques and theories that formed a foundation for twentieth century planning, from the usage of sanitary site surveying and townsite planning to the experimentation with suburban settlements and city park systems. The methodology and ideology pioneered by these first planners, while themselves not significantly influential on the form of the American landscape, would be utilized by future planners to effect considerable and enduring change in the built environment of the United States.

Chapter Two examined the formal beginnings of the planning profession during the City Beautiful movement of the early twentieth century. Drawing on the technical, ideological, and organizational of both special purpose planning and several other nineteenth century movements, the City Beautiful was based upon the notion of a fundamental connection between the structure and appearance of the city landscape and the social conditions of those living within in. In order to expand the capacity of planners to exert meaningful change on the form of the city environment, City Beautiful advocates established the concept of comprehensive planning, suggesting that all the elements of a given environment be considered in planning for the future growth of a place. This differed substantially from the piecemeal approach advocated by the movement’s predecessors. Although the City Beautiful itself was quite short lived, its incorporation of comprehensive planning into the canon of American planning endowed the profession with the potentiality to exercise
considerable influence over the nation’s physical development in the coming decades. The movement also suggested a vision of the American city that, while forgotten for over fifty years, would form an essential component of New Urbanism’s attempt to enact drastic reform in the American landscape.

Chapter Three investigated the connection between suburban planning theory and the post-World War Two suburban housing boom, analyzing to what extent the theories and designs developed by planners during the 1920s and 30s influenced the proliferation of suburbia across the United States during the 1940s and 50s. The chapter concluded that although planners were not responsible for the mass production of the suburban model after World War Two, and thus were not directly responsible for the way in which the structure of the American landscape was drastically altered by the introduction of suburban settlements to the fabric of the built environment, by developing the designs that were eventually expropriated by government officials and private developers as well as the zoning codes that made suburban growth legally possible, suburban planners were implicitly part of the drastic restructuring of the United States during the mid-twentieth century. However, the chapter also suggested that planners during this period in fact undermined their own ability to contribute to shaping the American environment by failing to pursue more strongly their own theory of regionalism, which proposed a vital and influential role for planners in helping to coordinate land use planning across municipal divides. Nevertheless, just like the central city urbanism proposed by City Beautiful enthusiasts, the regionalism advocated by 1920s suburban planners would be revisited.
by New Urbanism, eventually contributing substantially to this modern movement’s ability to exert control on the direction of physical growth in the United States.

The final chapter analyzed New Urbanism, and the ways in which this modern movement draws upon the past 150 years of planning to develop a theory that has the true potential to generate change in the built environment. Proposing a multi-layered approach that incorporates both RPAA regionalism and City Beautiful central city urbanism, New Urbanism seeks to effect change in the American landscape by creating a broad constituency across many professions and advocating that issues of place and land use occupy a more central position in political decision-making processes. Although it is much too soon to see how effective New Urbanism will be in translating theory into effective physical change, New Urbanists have already completed over 210 projects nationwide.¹ These range from redesigning neighborhood centers in existing urban areas to creating entirely new settlements on privately-owned greenfields and drafting comprehensive plans to regulate growth at the regional level. In adopting such a layered and inclusive approach, New Urbanism has the potential to produce more physical change in the American environment than the planning movements that preceded it.

This thesis concludes, then, with the assertion that although the form of the built environment is determined by many factors, land use planning theory over the past 150 years has had an increasing role in shaping the nature and direction of physical growth. Those who lament that private interests and partisanship based on financial power control physical development in the United States – and there are many who make such claims – are only partially correct, in the sense that private,
economic interests have *always* determined the structure of the American landscape. This thesis has sought to demonstrate a more hopeful conclusion, which is that land use planning has in fact been gaining in power over the past 150 years. In 1858, most Americans would have balked at the idea that government agents should have any control over physical growth. In 1908, land use planning was still being practiced by architects and landscape architects, outside the protection of any legal or regulatory framework that recognized the authority of planners to advocate changes in the built environment. In 1958, the suburban model proliferating across the United States had visible and theoretical roots in the designs of suburban planners, yet the physical development of suburbia was occurring with very little input from planners themselves. In 2008, growth in many places remains dominated by private developers and politicians unconcerned with the nuances of land use planning theory. Yet in many American cities, towns, and suburbs, there have been successful efforts to combat sprawl development, often through the use of the types of growth principles advocated by New Urbanists. Thus this thesis suggests that the gap between theory and practice is growing narrower, as land use planners learn to translate their theories of physical development into actual changes that have the power to improve quality of life for all Americans.
Notes:

Appendix

Charter of the New Urbanism:

The Congress for the New Urbanism views disinvestment in central cities, the spread of placeless sprawl, increasing separation by race and income, environmental deterioration, loss of agricultural lands and wilderness, and the erosion of society’s built heritage as one interrelated community-building challenge.

We stand for the restoration of existing urban centers and towns within coherent metropolitan regions, the reconfiguration of sprawling suburbs into communities of real neighborhoods and diverse districts, the conservation of natural environments, and the preservation of our built legacy.

We recognize that physical solutions by themselves will not solve social and economic problems, but neither can economic vitality, community stability, and environmental health be sustained without a coherent and supportive physical framework.

We advocate the restructuring of public policy and development practices to support the following principles: neighborhoods should be diverse in use and population; communities should be designed for the pedestrian and transit as well as the car; cities and towns should be shaped by physically defined and universally accessible public spaces and community institutions; urban places should be framed by architecture and landscape design that celebrate local history, climate, ecology, and building practice.

We represent a broad-based citizenry, composed of public and private sector leaders, community activists, and multidisciplinary professionals. We are committed to reestablishing the relationship between the art of building and the making of community, through citizen-based participatory planning and design.

We dedicate ourselves to reclaiming our homes, blocks, streets, parks, neighborhoods, districts, towns, cities, regions, and environment.

We assert the following principles to guide public policy, development practice, urban planning, and design:

The region: Metropolis, city, and town
1. Metropolitan regions are finite places with geographic boundaries derived from topography, watersheds, coastlines, farmlands, regional parks, and river basins. The metropolis is made of multiple centers that are cities, towns, and villages, each with its own identifiable center and edges.

2. The metropolitan region is a fundamental economic unit of the contemporary world. Governmental cooperation, public policy, physical planning, and economic strategies must reflect this new reality.
3. The metropolis has a necessary and fragile relationship to its agrarian hinterland and natural landscapes. The relationship is environmental, economic, and cultural. Farmland and nature are as important to the metropolis as the garden is to the house.

4. Development patterns should not blur or eradicate the edges of the metropolis. Infill development within existing urban areas conserves environmental resources, economic investment, and social fabric, while reclaiming marginal and abandoned areas. Metropolitan regions should develop strategies to encourage such infill development over peripheral expansion.

5. Where appropriate, new development contiguous to urban boundaries should be organized as neighborhoods and districts, and be integrated with the existing urban pattern. Noncontiguous development should be organized as towns and villages with their own urban edges, and planned for a jobs/housing balance, not as bedroom suburbs.

6. The development and redevelopment of towns and cities should respect historical patterns, precedents, and boundaries.

7. Cities and towns should bring into proximity a broad spectrum of public and private uses to support a regional economy that benefits people of all incomes. Affordable housing should be distributed throughout the region to match job opportunities and to avoid concentrations of poverty.

8. The physical organization of the region should be supported by a framework of transportation alternatives. Transit, pedestrian, and bicycle systems should maximize access and mobility throughout the region while reducing dependence upon the automobile.

9. Revenues and resources can be shared more cooperatively among the municipalities and centers within regions to avoid destructive competition for tax base and to promote rational coordination of transportation, recreation, public services, housing, and community institutions.

The neighborhood, the district, and the corridor

10. The neighborhood, the district, and the corridor are the essential elements of development and redevelopment in the metropolis. They form identifiable areas that encourage citizens to take responsibility for their maintenance and evolution.

11. Neighborhoods should be compact, pedestrian-friendly, and mixed-use. Districts generally emphasize a special single use, and should follow the principles of neighborhood design when possible. Corridors are regional connectors of neighborhoods and districts; they range from boulevards and rail lines to rivers and parkways.

12. Many activities of daily living should occur within walking distance, allowing in dependence to those who do not drive, especially the elderly and the young. Interconnected networks of streets should be designed to encourage walking, reduce the
number and length of automobile trips, and conserve energy.

13. Within neighborhoods, a broad range of housing types and price levels can bring people of diverse ages, races, and incomes into daily interaction, strengthening the personal and civic bonds essential to an authentic community.

14. Transit corridors, when properly planned and coordinated, can help organize metropolitan structure and revitalize urban centers. In contrast, highway corridors should not displace investment from existing centers.

15. Appropriate building densities and land uses should be within walking distance of transit stops, permitting public transit to be come a viable alternative to the automobile.

16. Concentrations of civic, institutional, and commercial activity should be embedded in neighborhoods and districts, not isolated in remote, single-use complexes. Schools should be sized and located to enable children to walk or bicycle to them.

17. The economic health and harmonious evolution of neighborhoods, districts, and corridors can be improved through graphic urban design codes that serve as predictable guides for change.

18. A range of parks, from tot-lots and village greens to ballfields and community gardens, should be distributed within neighborhoods. Conservation areas and open lands should be used to define and connect different neighborhoods and districts.

**The block, the street, and the building**

19. A primary task of all urban architecture and landscape design is the physical definition of streets and public spaces as places of shared use.

20. Individual architectural projects should be seamlessly linked to their surroundings. This issue transcends style.

21. The revitalization of urban places depends on safety and security. The design of streets and buildings should reinforce safe environments, but not at the expense of accessibility and openness.

22. In the contemporary metropolis, development must adequately accommodate automobiles. It should do so in ways that respect the pedestrian and the form of public space.

23. Streets and squares should be safe, comfortable, and interesting to the pedestrian. Properly configured, they encourage walking and enable neighbors to know each other and protect their communities.

24. Architecture and landscape design should grow from local climate, topography, history, and building practice.
25. Civic buildings and public gathering places require important sites to reinforce community identity and the culture of democracy. They deserve distinctive form, because their role is different from that of other buildings and places that constitute the fabric of the city.

26. All buildings should provide their inhabitants with a clear sense of location, weather and time. Natural methods of heating and cooling can be more resource-efficient than mechanical systems.

27. Preservation and renewal of historic buildings, districts, and landscapes affirm the continuity and evolution of urban society.
Works Cited

<http://institution.gallup.com/documents/question.aspx?qquestion=34040&Advanced=1&SearchConType=1&SearchDateADa=1&SearchDateAft=True&SearchDateAMo=12&SearchDateAYe=1988&SearchDateBDa=4&SearchDateBEf=True&SearchDateBMo=2&SearchDateBYe=1990&SearchOpenNew=False&SearchResuNum=10&SearchResuOrd=dated&SearchTypeAll=live>.


<http://www.cnu.org/history>.

“DPZ: Company Description.” DPZ. 1 Mar. 2008


---. The Improvement of Towns and Cities, or the Practical Basis of Civic Aesthetics. New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1901.


Stein, Clarence S. “Greendale and the Future.” *American City* 22 (1948).


