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NEW TOWNS AND SOCIAL WELFARE
PROSPECTS: 1975 - 2000 A.D.

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America's 15 HUD-aided new towns are mired in such serious financial problems as to make likely the emphatic close of the 1968-1974 Golden Age of modern new town development. Contrary, however, to present-day indications there is reason to expect a revival of new town prospects in the late 1970's, and social welfare components may be center stage in the matter.

There is no gainsaying the seriousness of the 1975 collapse of the American new towns movement: HUD, for example, from a prior commitment to approving at least ten projects a year between 1968 and 2000 A.D. is now refusing to even accept applications from would-be developers. Jonathan, Minnesota, is reputedly up for sale; Riverton, New York moves in and out of default on its financial obligations; and even the Glamour Child of them all, Columbia, Maryland, has been compelled to arrange financial reorganization. UDC's much-heralded Roosevelt Island project has lost both its educational innovation edge, and its access to LMIH subsidization monies, while elsewhere in the nation's 100 or so new towns plans for social welfare advances are quietly folded away in deep drawers.

As recently as 1970 the picture was quite a different one, with developers seeking Title VII loan guarantees to initiate 200 new town projects in that year alone. Enthusiastically responding to the first legislative program in our history to mandate community planning as well as housing construction, new town developers soon produced an honor-roll of substantial contributions:

The Woodlands New Town appears to be the first and only large-scale land-development project to use the McHarg method of ecological siting and preservation.

Roosevelt Island New Town claims to be the only auto-free community in America, and the only one to rely heavily on an aerial tramway mass transit system.

Cedar-Riverside New Town claims to have the nation's only high-rise structure of a non-public housing variety that adjusts rentals to ability-to-pay.

Soul City New Town claims to be the only planned rural community in America seeking to use On-the-Job Training (O-J-T) in "incubator" workplaces to help break the hold of rural poverty.

Montchartrain New Town claims to be the only "New

Town-in-Town" in America modeled along the lines of Venice; i.e., heavily reliant on waterway traffic.

Harbison New Town in South Carolina is the nation's only New Town being developed by a non-profit eleemosynary corporation. This organization, formed by the United Presbyterian Church, is presently recruiting progressive-minded businesses amenable to cooperative management for its industrial park.

Audubon, Raddisson, and Roosevelt Island are all New Town projects of a unique state agency, New York's Urban Development Corporation: "In short, the ability of this new agency to utilize its powers has been impressive. It is one of the rare occasions in which governmental performance has approached theoretical capacity. For the private sector, this is not only desirable but a necessary expectation; for the public sector it is, in a word, unprecedented."²

All of this notwithstanding, the picture today is as bleak as a depression in the housing industry can make it. But there is still more to the collapse than real estate economics alone.

When, as part of a HUD 1974 research project, I joined other consultants in interviewing the developers of 25 new towns across the country I was told by many builders that a collapse was likely at any time, and had been impending for many months. The three major explanations offered by embittered developers and key social planners revealed much about new town sub-rosa realities. To begin with, while irritatingly pressured by HUD "menials" for never-ending proof of wide-ranging innovation (a requirement of the imaginative Title VII loan guarantee process) the developers never received any of the millions of dollars in supplemental grants for innovation research, staff, etc., promised in the Title VII "small print". Second, when particularly progressive developers managed to achieve a proud modicum of race or class integration, they soon found themselves victimized by institutional forces with local clout, e.g., their projects were³ "red-lined" by disinvesting local banks and racist real estate agents, etc. Finally, when the developers took great financial risks in backing such social innovations as pre-paid group medical insurance, dial-a-bus systems to discourage auto dependency, and high ratios of permanent green space to built-up land, they found no public or private group (foundation, etc.)⁴ willing to help, and little firm commitment from potential users.

A Pandora's box of related problems took their considerable toll: New town industrial parks, for example, never really earned high activity, or provided the kind of income range vital to under-writing class heterogeneity in the project itself. New town creditors insisted on exorbitant rates of return on their long-term investments, even as some home-buyers lobbied inside the projects against innovations of any stripe lest their home values be threatened. Old city mayors remained aloof, when not hostile, and local area politicians guilefully undermined the projects, fearing that these embryonic cities would soon grow so large as to dominate the entire host region. Add to

this both the refusal of the Office of _____ to authorize indispensable supplemental grants to the projects, and a very uncertain White House record of support: The outcome, in a sweeping collapse, becomes quite unsensational.

How then, can one remain optimistic about the prospects of new towns in the late 1970's? And why is it that their social welfare component might "show the way"? For one thing, despite the welcomed arrival of ZPG levels of present-day population growth, nearly 75 new million Americans (25 million household formations) will have to be accommodated between now and 2000 A.D. (to say nothing of millions of others who will join the net migration from the country and small towns to the cities). Second, these home-seekers will be compelled by the growing energy crisis to shrink their journey-to-work commute, and seek relatively self-contained communities (home + mass transit + industrial park). Third, both the pressure to newly house by 2000 A.D. as many people as lived west of the Mississippi in 1970, and to house them with unprecedented economy of access to their employ, necessitates a remarkable boost in the fortunes of land, habitat, and community planning.

Indeed, the next 25 years are likely to be marked by more high-quality planning than at any time before in American history, as the major lesson of our post-1975 national economic and societal recovery is likely to be that of the indispensability of a highly calibrated, highly-rationalized America. Planning in community growth matters will draw strength from a steadily-emerging anti-growth ethos in the shrinking countryside, along with a slow-growth ethos in the post-industrial society at large. Both to protect our remaining open land, and to effectively equilibrate a steady-growth GNP, we will have to increasingly rely on the far-sighted, computer-modeled, cybernetic-based format in habitat construction known as the "new town". Strategic here also will be a far-reaching rationalization of governance jurisdictions, with the siting and nurturance of new towns receiving a substantial boost from post-'76 resort to TVA-like regional governing bodies (as foreshadowed in the EPA stimulation of air basin control mechanisms, etc.)

My crystal-ball, very much like that of Alvin Toffler's (see his 1975 book, Eco-Spasm), anticipates a once-and-for-all resolve in favor of new macro and micro planning mechanisms, including a host of social welfare reforms of awesome character (subsidization of job transfers to the service economy; national health insurance plans; national day care programs; subsidized sabbaticals and early retirement plans; massive income redistribution efforts, etc.)⁵ As a natural part of such progressive scenarios, the nation's new towns will be rehabilitated and championed as unquestionably superior to one-class suburbs and non-innovating planned urban developments.

At present some 15 ailing new towns, with little of their projected 870,000 residents settled in, flounder near financial collapse. Put almost alone on the American urban scene these projects stand ready to overnight explore the technological frontiers, like the "wired cities" possibilities of 21st-century urban electronics. Almost alone they presently house, cheek by jowl, the social class, life-style, and inter-racial types that stuffy "know-nothings" have long insisted cannot be harmoniously mingled. And almost alone these projects are freely sought out by a small, but influential cadre

of new town enthusiasts, Americans in whom the appetite for urban innovation is consistently strong. These pioneer types remain poised to finally prove their towns can generate transferable lessons of immense value to the revitalization of older cities - if only given themselves a fighting chance to prosper.

For all these reasons - their technological daring, their zesty heterogeneity, and the eagerness of their cadre to prove the project's worthiness - I expect a heady revival soon in new town prospects.⁶ Once again, as in 1968 and 1970, they will appear to be the right idea at the right time, but the difference here will have the nation more firmly than ever committed to the kind of professional, inspired, and daring planning always exemplified in superior new town projects.

Which is not to say that the social welfare challenge will readily be solved. On the contrary, I see a host of new storm clouds on the horizon. I see our 1975 perplexity over race, class, and life-style issues giving way instead to frontier dilemmas: How do we protect a democratic ethos inside a culture increasingly given over to planning and control mechanisms? How do we promote gemeinschaft strengths in a new town growing evermore gesellschaft in character with each year's population increment? How do we keep alive elan and morale as the project ages, sobers up, and veers toward protective conservatism? And, overall, how do we keep alive an open dialogue on the nature of the Good Life when the lure of new town materialism tempts many residents into an affluent stupor?⁷

Getting there from here appears quite distant, what with new towns now on the ropes, and our old agenda of social welfare issues - racism, sexism, poverty, unemployment, etc. - capturing all our attention, energy, and concern. But the distance is shorter than it appears, the situation of the 30-year old Mark I British new towns underlining the rapidity of change in such planned communities. While the lion's share of our agenda today appropriately goes into 1975's array of social welfare woes, it is not too soon to at least reflect ahead on a 25-year scenario of new town recovery, leadership, and travail anew by the year 2000 A.D.

FOOTNOTES

1. On the considerable thought already given to social welfare issues in America's new towns, see Massy, Patricia, "Planners on Planning;" Genovese, Rosalie P., "Social Factors in Planning New Suburbs;" and Kelley, John R., "Living Realities in Reston," in Sociological Symposium, Spring 1975.
2. Kristoff, Frank S. "Housing", in Governing New York State, edited by R.H. Connery and G. Geryamin. New York: Academy of Political Science, May 1974 (Proceedings). p. 195.
3. See in this connection, Fava, Sylvia F., "Blacks in American New Towns: Problems and Prospects," Sociological Symposium, Fall 1974. pp. 111-129.

4. Invaluable here is Allen, Irving Lewis, "New Towns and Suburban Ideology: Selling the American Dream," Sociological Symposium, Fall 1974. pp. 17-40.
5. See in this connection, Shostak, Arthur B. Modern Social Reforms. New York: Macmillan, 1974. See also Shostak, Arthur B., and Jon and Sally Van Til. Privilege in America: An End to Inequality? Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 1974.
6. Helpful here is League of New Community Developers, "An Imaginary Trip through Title VII New Communities," Sociological Symposium, Fall 1974, pp. 41-54.
7. Relevant here is Hornum, Finn and Barbara, "Problems and Prospects of New Town Development," Huttman, John and Elizabeth, "New Towns Grow Old," in Sociological Symposium, Spring 1975.
8. See in this connection Shostak, Arthur B. "Social Life in America's New Towns: 2000 A.D." in Gohan, Gideon, ed., Social Planning and America's New Communities. (Title tentative: Book in preparation.)

An annotated bibliography of New Towns literature is available on request from Art Shostak, Drexel University, Department of Psychology and Sociology, Philadelphia, Pa., 19104.