

GEOGRAPHY

SPOTLIGHT

The Road to Suburbia

“Come out to Park Forest where small-town friendships grow—and you still live so close to a big city.” Advertisements like this one for a scientifically planned Chicago suburb captured the lure of the suburbs for thousands of growing families in the 1950s. The publicity promised affordable housing, congenial neighbors, fresh air and open spaces, good schools, and easy access to urban jobs and culture. Good transportation was the lifeline of suburban growth a half century ago, and it continues to spur expansion today.

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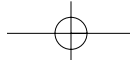
SHARED PRIVACY ►

By 1952, development in Park Forest, Illinois had expanded to include both low-cost rental units and single-family homes. All the streets were curved to slow traffic, present a pleasing sweep of space, and give residents maximum privacy and space for yards.

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WHERE THE 'BURBS ARE

Park Forest was planned from its conception in 1945 to be a “complete community for middle-income families with children.” The setting was rural—amidst cornfields and forest preserves about 30 miles south of Chicago. But it was convenient to commuter lines, like the Illinois Central (IC) Railroad, and to major roads, such as Western Avenue.



2 THE COMMUTER CRUSH

Men commuted to work on the IC railroad, while their wives usually stayed home to take care of the children, who thrived in Park Forest's safe, wholesome family environment.

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3 SHOPPING CENTERS

Consumerism became a driving force in the 1950s, and Park Forest kept up with the trend. The central shopping center served the community well until the late 1960s. When Interstate 57 was built, a mammoth mall, built just off the highway, caused the original shopping area to decline. Park Forest is still struggling to revive its central shopping area.

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THINKING CRITICALLY

- Analyzing Patterns** How did the availability of transportation influence the creation and ongoing development of Park Forest?
- Creating a Database** Pose a historical question about a suburb near you. Collect statistics about changes in population, living patterns, income, and economic development in that suburb. Use those statistics to create a database that will help answer your questions.



SEE SKILLBUILDER HANDBOOK, PAGE R33.



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