

# New York Area Homes Scored in Report

## Conservation Group Proposes Clusters for Developments

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

Developer-built housing in the New York area is strongly indicted in a report to be issued later this month by the American Conservation Association.

The report, covering new patterns in development-home building in the United States, is contained in a 90-page publication called "Cluster Development." It states that New York City and its surrounding communities lag far behind the rest of the country in the adoption of new housing trends. Of the 46 developments listed from coast to coast, all of which represent progress in housing through better planned use of land, only one is near New York.

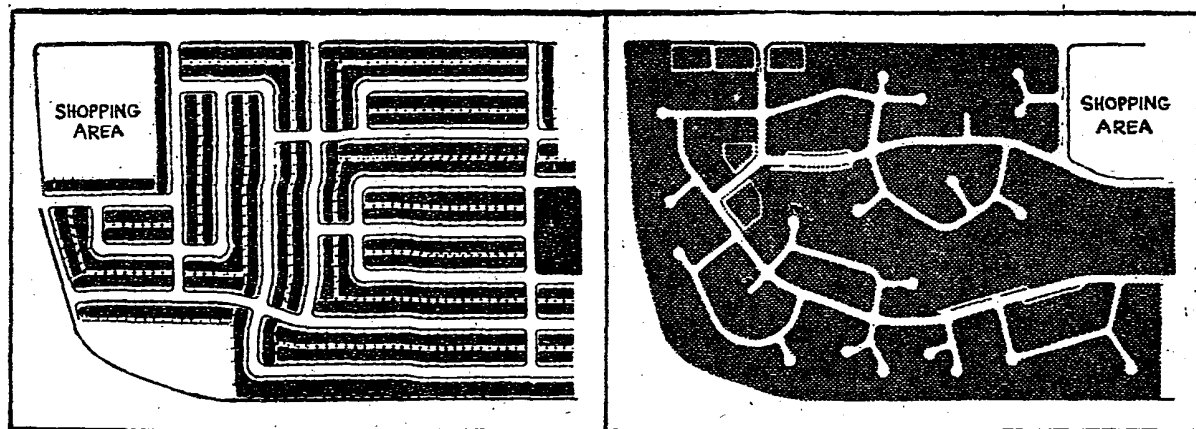
That one is a development called Village Green, in Hillsborough, N. J., a town that subsequently revoked the zoning ordinance that made it possible. The results were so attractive to buyers and builders that Hillsborough was afraid of overdevelopment and the expensive burden of providing necessary community services for the new dwellings.

"Cluster Development" describes a way of building that is just becoming popular in the United States. Houses are grouped more tightly together and the land saved is used for common greens and squares.

Without increasing densities or even the number of houses—frequently it means merely regrouping them—more open space is preserved. Houses may be separate or attached, or "town houses" or "garden apartments," as well as the more conventional one-family homes.

The American Conservation Association study makes a strong case for the cluster development as one of the best answers to the continuing, large-scale need for housing and the growing threat to open land.

The association, whose office is at 30 Rockefeller Plaza, is a nonprofit organization devoted to the preservation of nature and its public enjoyment. It



Diagrams show two types of housing developments cited in American Conservation Association report. Cluster development at right is recommended over row-house type at left.

is headed by Laurance S. Rockefeller, who has had a long-standing interest in conservation. The study was commissioned a year ago as the result of mounting concern over dwindling land as the national building boom continued.

### Threat to Resources Seen

The problem was seen as endangering America's natural topography and resources. Suburban housing practice until now has been to build single homes on single plots spread over the countryside, not only covering, but usually bulldozing the landscape as they advance.

Conservationists have been interested traditionally in non-development of land, Mr. Rockefeller says in a foreword. But since development must take place, he adds, the most positive conservation action is to guide it into proper channels.

Other organizations backing better land use through cluster planning are the Urban Land Institute and the National Association of Home Builders.

The report was written and edited by William H. Whyte, who also edited the 1958 collection of Fortune articles called "The Exploding Metropolis," which defined current critical problems of urban growth. This book brought the crises of the cities to general attention, as the new one is meant to do for the crisis of the land.

The book scores New York heavily on two counts. First, there is the fact that the New York area yielded only one of these progressive cluster communities. Long Island, which has been built up into a vir-

tually solid subdivision since the war, is not represented in the selective listing.

The second indictment concerns the design and planning of the city's urban renewal effort within its metropolitan limits. The pattern in New York for the last 30 years, Mr. Whyte says, has been the erection of predictably similar apartment towers separated by the same "off limits" grass, whether it is publicly or privately sponsored low or middle-income housing.

"Why a city with such great resources of design talent should be so reactionary is a puzzle," Mr. Whyte writes, "but with few exceptions the new projects continue to be the most hackneyed and brutal in the country." Their unused green space is bad design, he says, and "atrocious economics."

Washington and Philadelphia are given as examples of cities where redevelopment has used the new housing and open land patterns for more successful renewal results. Both mix apartment towers and clustered town houses.

### New Town in Reston, Va.

Mr. Whyte declares that New York has many good architects who are capable of designing trend-setting housing. He cites two false starts, both exemplary projects that never got off the ground. One was a cluster development by Victor Gruen for the Whitney estate in Old Westbury, L. I.; the other was a design by Ulrich Franzen for Tenafly, N. J. Both were the stillborn efforts of Norman Blankman, a builder, who was

defeated by local fears of the unfamiliar.

A cluster development now under way frequently referred to as one of the best in the country is outside of Washington in the new town of Reston, Va. It is by the New York firm of Whittlesey and Conklin. They are doing no similar projects here.

Some of the successful precedents for today's cluster designs are also in the New York area—Sunnyside Gardens, Queens, and Radburn, N. J., built in the nineteen-twenties and thirties. But both seem to have borne fruit elsewhere, as New York fell behind.

According to the report, the value of cluster design goes far beyond the advantages of the single development. "Linkage" of green or open areas set aside as the result of clustering residences, the report says, can give an entire region a permanent, related network of open land for the future.

The study concludes that people like to live in cluster developments, and that the "town house" is catching on in suburbs, across the country. The report also supplies data about zoning, legislation and the administration of open spaces.

It also warns against "hack site planning," the misuse of clusters for unreasonable densities or as a cut-rate substitute for buying park land, and the possibility that "clusters could be frozen into a format as stereotyped as the conventional layout it is replacing." As for New York, the author says, "the danger is academic at the moment."