

# First Light of New Town Era Is on Horizon

## Housing Bill Would Spur Program of Planned Growth

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

The Congressional hearings that start today on the Administration's housing bill are the first step toward a mammoth building program that may be one of the most significant, in terms of planned growth, that the country has ever seen.

If the new legislation is passed with its provisions for assistance for community development, the United States could enter a period of expansion and change unequaled since the opening of the West. It could also see a sharp rise in one of the most striking phenomena of our time: the completely planned community, or New Town.

This country is on the verge of a New Town boom. About 20 of these planned communities are in the design or construction stage. They are beginning to add up to a coast-to-coast trend of particular importance at a time when soaring population and the flight from cities have created two of the most serious problems of the century—the urban explosion and the rapid consumption of land.

The New Town offers a hopeful solution, because it substitutes planned, orderly expansion for chaotic, uncontrolled sprawl. Until now, the boom in the United States has been in suburban housing. More than 4,000 families a day have moved into new suburban homes since the war. At the present rate of construction, 80 per cent of the population will be concentrated in towns and cities and their suburban "bedrooms" by 1980.

### A Superior Suburb

What the New Town is supposed to provide is what the standard suburb leaves out: good transportation, good timing of community facilities, good public utilities, good open space, and good over-all design. Above all, it is concerned with the better use of land.

Present land use practice—in which 200 square miles of leapfrogging subdivisions may contain fewer than 30 square miles of actual construction—has produced a scattered and uncoordinated development, uneconomic in terms of wasted land resources, expensive and inadequate services and poor communities.

The new housing legislation recognizes this crisis and is designed specifically to promote total community development. It offers Federal assistance for public improvements for the first time, and is bound to spur the construction of New Towns.

The United States is considerably behind the New Town movement abroad, which was a major part of the post World War II building and reconstruction, with the most notable results in Britain and Scandinavia.

About half the United States New Towns are in California, where population has grown at three times the rate of the rest of the country. This increase is spilling over into some of the country's most magnificent remaining open land, the ranches and farms of the valley and coast.

### 3 Communities on Ranch

In Orange County, for the gigantic Irvine Ranch of 93,000 acres between Los Angeles and San Diego, six times the size of Manhattan, master plans have been drawn for three complete communities. Construction is proceeding on the first town of 10,000 acres, centered on a new 1,000-acre campus for the University of California. Population is expected to reach 100,000 in 20 years; the eventual total for the whole ranch area will be 300,000.

Also in Orange County, the New Town of Laguna Niguel, 48 miles south of Los Angeles, covers 7,100 acres, and the first two villages of a community that will house 40,000 people are well along. California City will be an 8,000-acre project. Sun City is planned for 10,000 acres and will combine a new community with retirement housing for the elderly. There will be another, similar Sun City in Arizona.

Catalina Island, 22 miles long, has a master plan, and 11,300 acres of unspoiled high land within the Los Angeles city limits are mapped as a hill-hugging New Town called Mountain Park.

Eleven miles south of San Francisco, the satellite community of Foster City has been begun on 2,605 acres, almost all reclaimed bay land, for a projected population of 40,000. Sunset City, 19 miles northeast of Sacramento, is a 12,035-acre project being built for an expected 150,000 people. Close by is Eldorado Hills, on 9,800 acres, for 75,000 residents.

### Eastern Developments

In the East, Reston, Va., 18 miles west of Washington, is proceeding with the first of seven villages in a 6,800-acre community planned for 75,000. A new city of 14,100 acres between Washington and Baltimore—even larger than the first phase of the Irvine development—has its land assembled and is trembling on the brink of a name.

Peachtree City, near Atlanta, Ga., is an industrially based town planned for slow growth. Clear Lake City, on ranchland near Houston, adjoining the National Aeronautics and Space Administration installation, is a Texas spectacular of 15,000 acres, with another 14,000 reserved for future expansion, for a projected population of about 200,000. Appropriately, it has the largest promotional brochure. There is little between coasts, but Colorado will offer Colorado City, 25 miles south of Pueblo, for 10,000 families.

Sponsors of these towns are the Sunset International Petroleum Corporation, for Sunset



Model of Reston, Va., first of seven villages to be built on 6,800-acre site 18 miles west of Washington. Community, planned for 10,000, will be situated on inlet of artificial lake.

City; Bessemer Properties, Inc. for Peachtree City; Cabot, Cabot & Forbes of Boston for Laguna Niguel; corporate builders like Del Webb, of the Sun Cities; progressive real-estate men like Robert E. Simon Jr., of Reston, and private entrepreneurs like Philip K. Wrigley, owner of Catalina Island.

Sometimes there is a combination of giants, as in Clear Lake City, where Del Webb is co-owner with the Humble Oil and Refining Company. What most of the projects amount to are staggering real-estate investments with an extra dimension of vision.

### Rise of Architect-Planner

All these towns are expertly planned at their inception, which is the difference between just building big and building according to an environmental program. They have put the spotlight on an increasingly important profession, that of the architect-planner.

The largest volume of New Town work is in the office of William Pereira of Los Angeles, who is responsible for the Irvine Ranch, Catalina Island, Mountain Park and other sizable chunks of California.

Victor Gruen Associates of New York and Los Angeles set plans for Laguna Niguel, El Dorado Hills, and an ambitious project for a large part of the San Francisco waterfront called East Bay Shores, which would involve considerable filling of the bay, a subject that arouses heated controversy among San Franciscans. Another Gruen project is a New Town study for Cape Kennedy to cover 2,500 acres and accommodate 45,000 residents.

California City and Colorado City are the work of Whitney Smith and Wayne Williams, architects. There are even computer-designed New Towns; an IBM 1401 assisted Ken F. Mitchell and Associates, planners, with Sunset City.

Although the Coast leads in quantity, the New Town generally considered to be the outstanding example in quality of planning and design is Reston, in the East. From basic layout and architectural style to identifying graphics, Reston is acclaimed as progressive and trend-setting, and has been compared to one of the best European New Towns, Tapiola, in Finland.

### Reston an Acrostic

Its planners are a New York firm, Whittlesey and Conklin. Its builder, Robert E. Simon Jr. (Reston is an acrostic of his name), combines the standards and tastes of a Harvard man with the tenacious maneuvering of a ward politician and the practicality of a successful real-estate operator.

Reston has a beautiful setting of rolling Virginia woodland and pastures, with two operating bourbon stills nestled among its bucolic attractions, which will be part of the projected industrial area. The design of its seven villages, of 10,000 residents each, will preserve and exploit the natural features of the land. Other features are being added, like an artificial lake around which the first village is being built.

The sophisticated modern houses and community center of this village are under construction, the work of the New York architects, and foundations are in for other, equally unconventional housing groups by the Washington architects Charles Goodman and Chloethiel Smith. There will be a town center, churches and five schools already voted by the county.

The characteristics that define a New Town like Reston have been summed up by the Washington Center for Metropolitan Studies, which is recording Reston's progress under a Ford grant and is studying other New Towns in this country and abroad.

### What a New Town Is

According to Frederick Guthelm, president of the center, a New Town must be planned on undeveloped land for a minimum of 20,000 people of varied social, economic and age levels; the land must be held under single ownership or unified development control; its design must be part of a regional master plan, and there must be provision for diversified land use and a full range of community services. It should be a self-contained urban entity, preferably with a strong economic base in business and industry.

Fact sheets on several new communities investigated by the Federal Housing Administration also stress a strong community center, provisions for local self-government and clear physical boundaries for the community.

Used interchangeably with New Town are names like balanced community or satellite city. Balanced community indicates the presence of the necessary services and facilities and a varied population; satellite

city implies the new community's connection with a larger neighboring city, on which it may be dependent.

Two of the most important of these communities—both in the East—are on sites suggested by regional studies concerned with future trends in urban growth.

Reston is in a satellite-city location recommended by the Washington Plan for the Year 2000, prepared by the National Capital Planning Commission and the National Capital Regional Planning Council. The new city between Baltimore and Washington coincides with a town site suggested by the Metro-Town report of the Baltimore County Planning Commission.

### Outdoor Life Stressed

What the New Town offers in its appeal to the public, however, is a recreation-oriented life. The United States New Town is directed at leisure and pleasure, and its sales brochures stress fun-in-the-sun.

The first village of Laguna Niguel is an upper income development with the Monarch Bay beach club. Reston's villages, for lower-middle to upper income families, are being built around a paddock for horse lovers and a lake for water-sports enthusiasts and other recreational themes. The same is true of El Dorado Hills. The golf course is always built first.

Not only is the appeal of the United States New Town typically American, but also the manner in which such towns come into existence here and abroad differs drastically. Creating a whole community out of woods or wilderness has certain godlike implications of "Let there be a New Town." The procedure is actually much more pragmatic.

In Britain, where the New Town has been a fact of life since 1946, they are Government planned, financed and controlled. The Ministry of Housing and Local Government selects a tentative site and makes a draft designation. Hearings are held, and a final designation order follows.

A development corporation is appointed by the ministry for each town, and it carries out the construction and administration of the community. Money to build the town is advanced to the corporation by the Treasury; planners and architects are engaged by the corporation, which is responsible to the ministry.

### Tendency to Blandness

The British have built 18 New Towns this way, some of which are now entering an interim stage. There have been initial "New Town blues," which stemmed from lack of recreational facilities, and the kind of pedestrian blandness that is a danger in any community built all at one time, but is a particularly British design characteristic. On the plus side, they seem to be working toward the orderly population decentralization of cities like London and Liverpool.

United States New Towns are completely a product of private enterprise. The Government had a brief fling in the nineteenth century with the depression-built "Greenbelt" towns—Greenhills, Ohio, Greenbrook, N.J., Greendale, Wis., Greenbelt, Md.—which were small and lacked economic bases, but were encircled with parkland.

Today, the private investor in the United States assembles the land, hires planners and architects, acquires builders if he is not one himself, arranges for financing from banks and lending institutions and conducts his project through masses of red tape. Generally, the investor avails himself of Federal Housing Administration aid, which applies only to houses.

This is why suburban houses in this country are built virtually in a vacuum. Until now, the developer who wanted to provide community facilities or utilities did so at his own expense. Many settled for wells and cesspools and poor, temporary roads, for which later, costly replacements were necessary.

### New Legislation's Purpose

The new housing and community development legislation proposes grants and loans to states and local governments and loan insurance to private developers specifically to provide utilities like water and sewer systems, and to aid in assembling land for what is referred to as public improvements, which could mean anything from schools to parks. This important extension of housing aid is meant to help builders and communities to plan ahead of growth.

The obstacles that confront the private builder of New Towns are formidable. The legal, political, technical and financial hurdles can defeat all but the most determined de-

veloper. Reston could have avoided many delays since its inception in 1961 if its builder, Robert Simon, had abandoned the more progressive elements of his plan.

The New Town builder must work his way through a maze of local laws and politicians. Zoning frequently does not permit his innovations; planning commissions often prefer the status quo; departments will not allow nonconforming layouts for utilities and roads; conflicting municipalities within the area, which is usually splintered with local governments, all have conflicting codes.

The Reston plan was completely illegal in terms of Fairfax County requirements. Zoning laws were changed, as they were for Laguna Niguel. Planning commissions may be reshuffled as pressures rise. Requirements may be modified to reduce technical difficulties in filing street and sewer plans.

### Costs Are High

Financially, the New Town is in a bind. As an indication of the costs involved, Reston's completed value will be close to \$700 million. The startup cost alone, for the first phase of the first village, is \$15 million. Most of the money must come from the commercial community, which prefers conventional investments.

Whether urban renewal can assist or not is a matter of current legal debate. Under Title I of the 1949 Housing Act, "open space" is eligible for aid, but in an attempt to promote essential city slum clearance, this provision has been tacitly bypassed. The Government machinery may exist, unused.

In addition to obstacles, there are dangers. Unless boundaries are firm and local administration established, the New Town runs the risk of annexation by neighboring communities.

The tax structure, which favors capital gains, encourages the "selloff" of land to other builders rather than maintenance under single control for long-range development. A fine New Town can go down the financial drain this way. Laguna Niguel has followed this procedure and shows signs of erosion of its master plan. Another serious hazard is that private financing often rules out low income housing, which destroys the community balance.

The name, New Town, is already in danger of becoming a catchphrase exploited by commercial developers of huge subdivisions. Some show signs of being merely speculative construction on a kingsize scale with the usual suburban deficiencies and a few vague indications on a map of future sites for community services.

### Need for Design Controls

There is also the possibility that the new community may be no visual improvement on what already exists. To avoid this, the better towns attempt to build in design controls.

The landscaping program is one over-all control; architectural approval is another. Some towns insist on the right of architectural review for all construction.

Reston has set top standards with the selection of its designers for each phase of its program, although it will give wide leeway to builders on privately purchased lots, except for house orientation. Foster City has established a design board to pass on everything from houses to fire hydrants, which are specially designed, and has been flirting with big architectural names like Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier.

The difference between just a lot more of the same old suburbia, as at Sun City, and a totally new concept, as at Reston, is in design quality and control. The challenge of the New Towns, with all of their pitfalls, is the chance they provide to make better use of land and to create a better environment. Only time can measure their success, for towns, like wines, develop character with age.