

AICP STUDY GUIDE

Episode 26: Growing a Garden City

And welcome to the 26th episode of The VERY UNofficial AICP Study Guide Podcast. I'm Jonathan Miller and thank you so much for joining.

Well, we have this episode and then one next week and then some of you will be taking the exam. I know I preach it a lot, but try and relax, and I know that's probably going to be difficult. Anyways, April 30th is still your deadline for registering for the exam, followed by the beginning of the exam window and that is like 3 days away now. I'm sure study fatigue has to be setting in around now because it is for me, but whatever. Let's go.

Last episode we covered some miscellaneous firsts of planning in a neatly packaged Book of Firsts; kind of. We hit the first comprehensive city-wide survey in Pittsburgh in 1907, then we went to Hartford for the first permanent planning commission; also in 1907.

Then we looked back on the first citizen planning organization in Ohio that started as a conference in 1919 and capped it all off with the first comprehensive plan in Cincinnati circa 1925. This week, we're taking a bit of a deeper dive into the Garden City Movement and subsequently, the New Town Movement and Greenbelt Cities.

In Episode 15, we covered the book that kicked it all off, 'Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Reform' by Ebenezer Howard. So if you need a little primer for that, feel free to rewind. And with that, let's pick up where we left off.

But first, before we dive in too much; a disclaimer.

Garden Cities, New Towns, this is confusing as shit really. New Towns are the evolved version of Garden Cities, but anything considered to be one is also considered to be the other. So they're different, but basically the same. Point is, if you're confused by this, you aren't alone.

Anyways, back to it.

(2:23)

So, 1898, Ebenezer Howard. An idealist looking for a way to combine the benefits of both urban and rural areas develops this concept of the Three Magnets with the three being: Town, Country, and Town-Country. Basically, this concept of the three magnets has each of the magnets arranged around a circle with people in the middle and the question, 'Where will they go?'

The Town magnet and the Country magnet read like a list of pros and cons while Town-Country basically just combines the pros of both like a Venn diagram where the cons are left out of the middle. Anyways, this concept was basically the cornerstone of Howard's 1898 Book, 'Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Reform.'

Now Howard gained a pretty good support base for this concept. He formed the Garden City Association in 1899 and he reissued the book in 1902 as, 'The Garden Cities of Tomorrow,' and he began collecting money from his supporters to get this concept to turn from a concept to a reality.

And in 1903 it payed off.

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First though, what exactly IS a garden city? I mean, we know it's a combination of all the best aspects of urban and rural life, but what the hell does that even mean? Well, looking back at the three magnets diagram, we see that towns - i.e. cities/urban/whatever - has the following characteristics:

- Closing out of nature
- Social opportunity
- Isolation of crowds
- Places of amusement
- Distance from work
- High money wages
- High rents & prices
- Chances of employment
- Excessive hours
- Army of unemployed
- Fogs and droughts (as if weather is a uniquely town thing)
- Costly drainage
- Foul air (that's sort of fair)
- Murky sky
- Well-lit streets
- Slums and gin palaces (really?), and
- Palatial edifices (okay?)

Country on the other hand, according to the three magnets is characterized by:

- Lack of society
- Beauty of nature
- Hands out of work
- Land lying idle (still true)
- Trespassers beware? (that's legit in there)
- Wood
- Meadow
- Forest
- Low hours-low wages
- Fresh air
- Low rents
- Lack of drainage
- Abundance of water
- Lack of amusement (for sure)
- Bright sunshine
- No public spirit
- Need for reform
- Crowded dwellings, and
- Deserted villages.

Now these, according to the three magnets now, combine to create the Town-Country. And what does that list look like?

- Beauty of nature
- Social opportunity
- Fields and parks of easy access
- Low rents
- High wages
- Low rates
- Plenty to do
- Low prices
- No sweating (of course)

- Field for enterprise
- Flow of capital
- Pure air and water
- Good drainage
- Bright homes and gardens
- No smoke
- No slums
- Freedom, and of course
- Cooperation ...

Wow, sign me up. So, now that we know how exactly a garden city is characterized, what does it look like? How does it do all this? Because it sounds a bit like snake oil city planning.

Well, in theory at least, it does all this basically through organized and orderly development. Each Garden City is designed for a population of 32,000 people on 9,000 acres, or 3.55 people per acre. That's like about 1 household per acre, hmm.

Anyways, the actual layout of the actual garden city doesn't really get explained too much. But, this 32,000 population garden city - sort of - with other garden cities encircles a central city, and once one garden city reaches its population maximum, a new garden city is started up.

Now all of these Garden Cities are connected to the central city through boulevards! 6 to be exact since we're being symmetrical, and the garden cities themselves are connected through an intermunicipal railway. Open spaces and parks - obviously - keep all of these elements separate. Oh, and the center city houses 58,000 people on 12,000 acres. So, back to 1903 when this vision of a garden city became a reality.

(7:43)

Enter Letchworth.

First though, let's clarify, we all know cities aren't built in a day. I think there's some saying about that. Anyways, The official year that Letchworth was built is 1903 because it was in 1903 that the Garden City Association created the company: the First Garden City Limited.

It wasn't until 1904 that they had a competition to see who the architects would be, and that was won by two guys named Raymond Unwin and Barry Parker. Ultimately, they planned the town using Garden City principles (of course) and even included an agricultural belt around the town. The one thing they did scrap though, was the symmetrical circular design. Instead, they opted for something a little more natural, but nonetheless.

In 1920 they followed it up with the encore Garden City: Welwyn. And, this idea, this Garden City idea, had started to catch on, and examples of it starting popping up in the US too.

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The first example we get on this side of the pond is the neighborhood of Forest Hills in Queens, New York.

The Russell Sage Foundation (remember them?) bought up 142 acres to build the neighborhood in the Garden City style. We didn't fully get an example of a Garden City - a whole garden city - until 1923 though when Mariemont, Ohio began construction.

Mariemont, just east/northeast-ish of Cincinnati, was planned with the goal of having mixed economic backgrounds, making it sort of a precursor to the new urbanism, but we'll hit on that at a later date. But that ultimately failed anyways. Apparently construction costs drove up rents making it unaffordable to the lower income levels (sound familiar?). It's almost like we have that exact issue going on right now. Isn't there something about history repeating itself?

Anyways, the next example we get of a Garden City is Radburn, New Jersey in 1928 and that needs an

explanation in and of itself.

So, Radburn, New Jersey - built in 1928 - is it a Garden City or isn't it?

The answer is - by all accounts - yes, yes it is. However (and this is a crazy however by the way) if you were to go on the APA's website and download the Chapter President's Council free resource (which I do recommend you do), you'll see in 1928 it says - ahem - 1928 – The first “New Town” is built in Radburn, New Jersey.

Now, as students of planning, you should be aware of something called the New Town Movement, and that is what Radburn, New Jersey is not because the New Town Movement didn't really occur until after World War 2 and this is the late 20's.

I think the confusion here is that the tagline for Radburn before it was developed was, “A new town for the motor age”. But that's more like, ‘new’ as opposed to old, not ‘new’ like the movement. We, as planners, need to get a little bit better at naming things apparently.

Anyways, we'll wrap up by touching on the New Town Movement, but for now; Radburn New Jersey in 1928 was a garden city. It was in 1935 though that we got our big three - for lack of a better phrase - of the Garden Cities.

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The big three that I'm talking about here if you don't remember from our planning history classes are Greenbelt, Maryland, Greenhills, Ohio, and Greendale, Wisconsin.

Now these three sort of stand out from the rest because they were New Deal communities (or government funded communities) under the other Roosevelt: President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

You see, Roosevelt had the unenviable position of being President during the fallout of the Great Depression, and the ensuing Dust Bowl. If you don't know, that's a series of some pretty crazy dust storms that basically decimated agricultural properties in the west.

So, part of his job was to get the country back up and running, and part of that was this big campaign called the New Deal. The New Deal - among a shit ton of other things - created an agency called the Resettlement Administration in 1935, and what did they do? Well, the resettlement administration was charged with relocating struggling families,

So, in short - and we'll touch more on this in future episodes - the Resettlement Administration built three suburban towns and they would use these towns to relocate rural farmers and workers since - you know - their agricultural land was basically garbage now.

So headed up by a planner friend of ours, Rexford Tugwell, (and you will need to know him by the way) the Resettlement Administration took on planning and building these three towns. And they didn't want this golden opportunity to pass them up either. So of course they used that opportunity to try out Garden City theories.

They were very aptly named for the open swatch of land that surrounded each of the communities, though they aren't really visible anymore except for Greenhills, Ohio. Aside from Jane Jacobs' open criticism of the communities in her 1961 book, “The Death and Life of Great American Cities”, the communities actually fared really well. They were considered innovative at the time, that is until the privatized real estate industry got involved.

They opposed them so much that - well - that was it; just those three were built. And eventually, the whole program was deemed unconstitutional in Franklin Township v Tugwell in 1936. Why you ask? The Resettlement Administration's program of building communities was found unconstitutional because:

1. Housing construction was a state thing, and
2. It was an illegal use of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration's powers.

As such, our friend Rex was pegged as a communist (of course). Rex the Red they apparently called him (assholes). And we wonder why government has a hard time finding top talent.

Anyways, how does the New Town Movement play into all of this, because we already talked about how it's confusing as shit.

(15:15)

Well, the New Town Movement is sort of the next evolution of the Garden City movement. Remember, Ebenezer Howard started up this whole Garden City thing, and post WWI he was in England. Remember, Howard and some of his Garden City peeps - FJ Osborn, SB Purdom, and WG Taylor (just initials and last names I guess), they created a group called the New Townsmen, and they wanted the government to build one hundred new cities.

Eventually - like way eventually, like post WW2 eventually - they finally got what they were after and England built 27 new towns.

Over in the U.S. though, we didn't get our "New Towns" until the 60's and these new towns were not government funded by the way. Remember that went by the wayside. These New Towns were wholly planned communities. Wholly like 'entirely', not like 'jesus' holy. For the most part, you'll need to know the first two: Columbia, Maryland where construction began in 1963 (officially opened in 1967) and Reston, Virginia which was founded in 1964.

There's also Jonathan, Minnesota (nice name) and Peachtree, Georgia.

(16:47)

Well, that was quite the trip. Wrapping up, we started back in 1898 with a recap of Ebenezer Howard and his book, "Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Reform" and how that book kicked off the whole Garden City movement, and how that led to the town of Letchworth in 1903 and a brief discussion on Garden Cities in general.

Then we jumped over to the US to talk our garden cities in Radburn and how that turned into some greenbelt communities created in the New Deal, and how that all ended up evolving into the New Town Movement post WW2.

(17:35)

Well, thanks again for joining me! If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to me at theveryunofficialAICPGUIDE@gmail.com, and I'll do my best to help out if I can.

For those who tuned in last week, our question was, "In what year and where was the first permanent planning commission formed?"

And that would be 1907 in Hartford, Connecticut.

If you want to play along this week, our question is, "Who headed up the Resettlement Administration, and what are the three greenbelt communities that he helped plan?"

You know the drill, don't forget to subscribe to this podcast on whatever platform you use for podcasts, and feel free to sign up on the show's website so you can follow along with future episodes, help prepare for the exam and supplement all of your other study regimens. And share this out with any planners you know and don't forget to leave a review either.

Next week, we're doubling back one more time to expand on our Beaux Arts experience and the impact of Daniel Burnham.

Thanks again everyone, 'till next time.

Links:

Ebenezer Howard:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ebenezer_Howard

Letchworth:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Letchworth>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Garden_city_movement

Garden Cities in the U.S.:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mariemont,_Ohio

Greenbelt Towns:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rexford_Tugwell

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/greenbelt-communities>

<https://livingnewdeal.org/tag/greenbelt-towns/>

New Towns:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_towns_movement

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reston,_Virginia

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Columbia,_Maryland