

2-14-1948

City to Order (reprint from Collier's)

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Recommended Citation

Henderson, Harry; and Shaw, Sam. "City To Order", Collier's, February 14, 1948. Retrieved from http://opus.govst.edu/region_parkforest/4/ .

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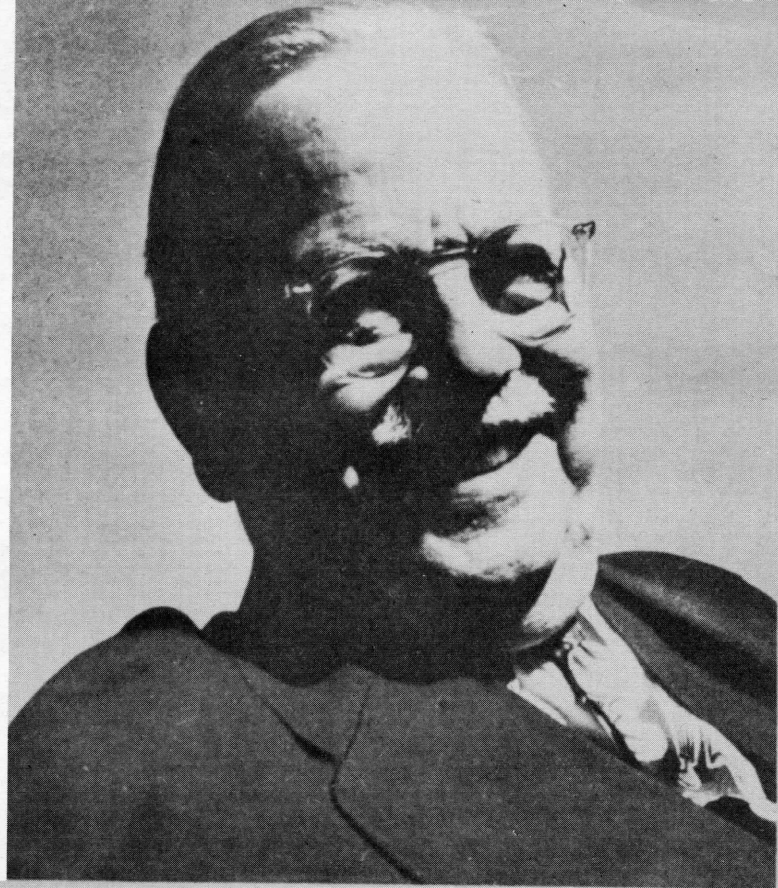
CITY TO ORDER

BY

HARRY HENDERSON AND SAM SHAW

On the rolling hills south of Chicago a city for 30,000 people is being built in one operation. Its creators, the American Community Builders, have taken all the essentials for an ideal community and are piecing them together like a jigsaw puzzle

America's first "planned" postwar city, under construction near Chicago, will look like this when completed. First of its 30,000 people will move in soon. Planners designed for safety, cleanliness, and "a better life"



Carroll F. Sweet, Sr., ex-banker, dreamed of a town for vets, then finagled to get the men who could build the "dream city"





Using models, architects arrange roof colors to harmonize throughout the city. A problem still facing planners is to determine how many saloons are needed



Top architects Schlossman, Bennett and Loebel show Phil Klutznick, head of the American Community Builders (seated), their final doorknob selection

EARLY one gray morning in October a small group of men stood around a bulldozer in a field some thirty miles south of Chicago's noisy Loop. They shivered and waited while the driver got his yellow monster started. Then, voiceless in the roar of the engine, they fell back and watched the tractor's blade nuzzle back the sparse grassland from the clay of Illinois.

In ten thousand ways all this resembled the start of any construction job. In one particular way it differed. For this was the physical beginning of a city that was going to be built to its full growth from scratch. It was the first really planned postwar town, a superhousing project.

The revolutionary thing about it was that the entire job was being designed and built to create not so much a large collection of houses as a comfortable, pleasant life for 30,000 people who would not be beset by any of the major nuisances that attend living in present-day towns. Virtually all the other large-scale projects in the country are repeating the old faults by building residences far from downtown districts, and with little or no regard for maintenance of cleanliness, the growing traffic problem and distances to work, schools and between shops.

"We aren't interested in houses alone," Philip M. Klutznick, head of the American Community Builders, Inc., told us. "We are trying to create a better life for people. In our view, we will have failed if all we do is produce houses."

The American Community Builders is the team that is bringing a whole city into being in the one operation. It expects to produce, in this town, a kind of life that has been enjoyed chiefly by families in the upper income brackets. Rents will be from \$62 to \$90 a month, and children will be welcome. The more the merrier.

The first houses will be ready for occupancy this spring. There will be enough to accommodate around 250 families. Others of the new population will follow as more homes are completed, until the first 3,000 units are

finished. All will be for rent, and all will constitute the first of two phases in the construction. The second phase—the building of 5,000 homes for sale—will begin soon.

The builders hope the city's population will not be permitted to exceed the planned 30,000. They feel that if it should get to be any bigger than that, it might begin to develop all the defects of the average suburb. Any further similar construction should be put into new communities separate from Chicago like this one, and like this one, a satellite to the Illinois metropolis. The whole idea behind the initial project is to plan for every exigency of living, every comfort, and then to remain within those planned limits indefinitely. Any extension of the original base would throw the whole program out of balance. But there can be any number of satellites, each remaining permanently within the orbit prescribed by its own blueprints.

The 2,500-acre site for the ACB project lies in a green-belt area bounded on the north by the New York Central and Belt Line railroads, and the Lincoln Highway; on the east by the Cook County Forest Preserve; on the south by rich farmland, and on the west by the Illinois Central Railroad, which will furnish fast commuting service into Chicago proper.

Construction of a project like this had been heretofore considered too gigantic and too complex for anyone but the federal government, with its right of eminent domain and taxpayers' dollars. The experiment in social planning is being conducted without government subsidy and for profits. When it is finished it is expected to be one of the biggest housing feathers in the cap of private enterprise.

The new city has been financed by three insurance companies—the New York Life, the Northwestern Mutual and the Sun Life Assurance Company of Canada—to the tune of \$27,500,000, the largest single set of mortgages ever insured by the Federal Housing Authority.

Klutznick and his associates like to



Foreman points out site for new building to Nathan Manilow, Chicago builder, who gambled \$1,000,000 bank-rolling the project originally

think of themselves as armored knights doing battle with an enormous dragon called Waste. They are trying to lay down the industrial, shopping, residential and social patterns of the new city so that there will be a minimum of waste in time and money for the people who will soon live there. They are campaigning too, against noise, smoke, traffic jams and the slums that breed crime, bad health and poor citizens.

"Park Forest," as the town will temporarily be called, is going to be both clean and safe. The rolling green countryside upon which it is being built lies to the windward of South Chicago's towering pall of smoke. Prevailing southwest winds will continually sweep the new town's atmosphere clean. Its own industries will be confined to the northern end of the building site, and it is mandatory that all factories be of the nonnuisance, odorless and smokeless variety.

A Model Street-Traffic System

Safety has followed cleanliness in the planners' book of principles. There will be no dangerous intersections. All will have wide visibility. The thoroughfares and byways will be so laid out that no child will need to cross a major street in going to and from school, and only a few will need to brave the light traffic of secondary lanes. The entire town will be constructed around five community centers, with a school located directly in the midst of each.

For each cluster of houses within a community center there is to be a tot pen, equipped with sandboxes. There the two-and-three-year-olds can play outdoors all day. Mother need only take an occasional look at them from her kitchen window. Regular playgrounds will be provided for older children.

Spaciousness will dominate the town's out-of-doors. If you can imagine life in a park you will get the idea. There are to be no blocks, in the conventional sense. The streets are being laid out to curve easily with the rolling contour of the land. All houses will be set back a minimum of 120 feet from the street. Instead of the ordinary gridiron system of streets, there will be eleven curving, irregular superblocs. These will contain large areas, some as big as 54 acres. There will be woods and open spaces and landscaping everywhere. The houses are to be arranged around cul-de-sacs formed by the curving streets. In the center of each cluster of houses, there will be a parking area.

The houses will be staggered so that the residents of one will not be able to look out a window into the home of a neighbor. The landscaping will be informal, taking its cue from the rough naturalness of the near-by forest preserve. The idea is not only to give Park Forest people something nice to look at, but to invite them outdoors. While many very modern housing projects have a density of from 20 to 50 families per acre, Park Forest is planned for ten, a figure regarded as economically impossible by most builders. Eighty-nine per cent of the land will have no buildings. There will be no tall structures to dwarf the scene and the people.

There will be no scattered stores, no corner delicatessens, and no chasing through streams of traffic to get from butcher to candlestick maker. The main shopping center will be arranged so that customers can do their buying under the one roof. The same establishment will cover the movies, restaurants and bowling alleys. The old-time downtown district, as such, will be nonexistent.

The main shopping location is laid out in a series of crescent-shaped buildings set in a panorama of greensward, parking lots and covered walkways. All the shopping buildings will be joined by perma-

nent canopies for the protection of shoppers against the elements in every season. Pedestrians will enter the area from parking lots that will be located near the edges. A play space will keep the children safe while Mother goes about her buying unhampered.

In this layout no store can have a preferred location—a busy street corner. The system has the big chain operators upset. Merchandising has always been built on the superiority of the street corner. The new idea in Park Forest will mean that every store in it will be forced into real competition, insuring quality and low prices, and making it possible for the American Community Builders to sell and rent houses virtually at cost.

When you assemble 30,000 people in one spot you've got something in which every merchant is interested. Without any control, hundreds of stores are likely to spring up under such circumstances, duplicating services and providing, in many cases, poor-quality merchandise in the struggle to undercut the competition. ACB will channel the demand for selling space and will charge commercial rents that, based on a percentage of gross profits made on everything sold in the city, will help take the burden of rent or purchase costs from the customers themselves.

These are not, however, the economics of the quick buck, and this kind of thinking confused some bankers and builders. But the directors of New York Life, Northwestern Mutual and Sun Life caught on immediately.

The schools will be another major element in the good life ACB hopes to provide. They will be for adults as well as for children—the real community centers, operating night and day. The social and political life of the city will be built around them. There will be courses for adults, in city government, literature, foreign languages, cooking, and metal and woodworking. There will be town-hall forums, card parties, dances and sports. This phase of the town's better living will depend for its success almost entirely upon the new citizens.

No Monotony of Design in Homes

Architecturally, the homes will fall into no easy classification. The builders have tried to design dwellings in which people will feel the most comfortable. They have taken the best features for livability from many different styles, including colonial, ranch and modern. The people who live in them will see whatever type of house they want to see. For those who like colonial, there will be the pitched roofs; and for those who like modern, the picture windows.

All structures will be low, two-story jobs with roofs of varying colors. Each will have its own private basement. They are being built with one-, two- and three-bedroom variations. And, to provide a complete house at what it costs to rent an apartment, they are being built in rows.

This is not so ominous as it sounds, since they will be in staggered clusters around a cul-de-sac. A typical cluster would consist, in curved sequence, of one eight-house unit, a four-house unit, a six-house unit, a two-house unit, another six, another four and another eight. Because they follow the contour of the land and because of variations in colors, materials, roof ends, stoops and sizes, there can be none of the monotony that typifies usual row housing.

Nearly everything has been designed to help the housewife. The city will have its own water-softening plant. Each house will have its individual gas furnace to supply forced-air heat. In the summer the system can be reversed to circulate cooled, though not refrigerated, air.

Instead of a centered ceiling fixture in dining rooms, ACB is equipping its

homes with a movable *torchère* providing indirect lighting. ACB's experts consider center-of-ceiling lights useless and ugly in the bedroom, too. Instead there will be a wall fixture which can be swung up to provide an over-all, indirect light, or down for reading in bed. The kitchen will have indirect lighting as well as a work light at the sink.

These are small examples of the kind of thinking that is going into the project. But these details are really the least of ACB's problems. Theirs is the sort of job that students, architects, sociologists and bankers are going to be studying for years to come. They have had to face social, religious and cultural questions that never before have arisen in the slow growth of ordinary communities. It was necessary, for instance, to bring together the leaders of all religious faiths and win their co-operation in picking church sites.

Afterward the churchmen told Jerrold Loebl, one of the founders of ACB, they would not have believed it possible to get such a meeting to work. It did work, and to the extent that, in two cases, congregations ruled themselves out of sites they felt were desirable but not so necessary to themselves as to other churches.

The planners took a whack at snobbery. Nearly every American town has its rich man's row, an exclusive district for the well-to-do. But there won't be one in Park Forest. Sites for homes that are to be sold will be scattered throughout the city and mixed in freely with the rental units. There will be expensive homes, but the caste system that characterizes so many suburban towns will not be expressed here, in locations at least.

"We do not want anyone—especially any kid—to feel that he comes from the wrong side of the tracks," said Loebl.

Right now one of the most baffling jobs is that of setting a quota of saloons. Nearly every town of similar size has far more than it needs, in the opinion of the ACB. Having too many taverns wastes space, a cardinal sin in the land of Park Forest. Statistics on liquor consumption in ordinary places give little help, for ACB expects the people of their town to lead pleasant and happy lives that will not be greatly attracted to indoor types of entertainment.

Many Plans Were Discarded

Because the whole intricate life of a city is being mapped out at once, almost every major step is an important part in the jigsaw-puzzle planning. For more than eighteen months the project has been one vast, swirling, fluid mass of ideas, blueprints, specifications, budgets, dreams, utility problems, transportation schemes and economic principles. Plan after plan was discarded before the architects and Elbert Peets, one of the nation's top city planners, finally evolved the one they desired.

ACB brought its chief construction men, Allan Harrison and Dick Senior, onto the job a year before they were ready to build anything so they could participate in, advise on and help coordinate the work from the start.

"This increased our immediate costs," said Klutznick, "but I think it has saved us at least a million dollars."

The tax situation is being attacked at the outset. Working with the architects, engineers and construction men are two experts on municipal government, Israel Rafkind and Hart Perry. Everything that will cut down the expense of running a city has been gone over. Street maintenance equipment, for instance, will be located next to the city hall because studies have proved this to be economical.

In order to keep their good looks and general outdoor cleanliness, many suburban communities of Park Forest's size bar industry and consequently are subject to a high levy. The 500-acre industrial

plot being established at the northern end of the new city will serve to spread the tax base. Nearly fifty firms are asking for space because they know their employees will be happier if they have pleasant places in which to live.

The person responsible for Park Forest in the sense that he dreamed of it and then assembled the men who could actually build it is an old man named Carroll F. Sweet, Sr., a former Grand Rapids, Michigan, banker. He is a sort of "Foxy Grandpa" who wisecracks about his jowls and bounces his seventy years around ACB's offices as if he had only twenty.

Mr. Sweet has one great sorrow. He lived through three U.S. wars and never served in one of them. He was still at Yale when the Spanish-American War was fought. By World War I he was too old for active service, and they couldn't use him in any capacity in World War II. This bothered him. Every night when he went to his lonely hotel room he brooded until the thing became an obsession.

"Here I am, an old man," he told himself, "who has never done anything for anyone but me—nothing at all for the boys of those three wars whose victories have made my whole life possible."

Traveling about the country he often noticed the estates of wealthy people—beautiful places planted with trees and gardens and covered with great lawns.

"I kept thinking," he said, "can't anything be done to give those veterans something approximating that kind of living on a scale they can afford? Gradually I evolved a scheme for a town, a G.I. town, which would have the spaciousness and greenery of a park."

Trying to Make Dream a Reality

The old man had spent many years as an officer of the Home Owners' Loan Corporation. During the war he had been in charge of priorities for housing in Chicago. He had come to know and later gone to work for Nathan Manilow, one of Chicago's largest home builders and president of that city's Metropolitan Home Builders' Association. Sweet went to work on him, trying to sell him his idea for a "G.I. Town."

It wasn't long before he had Manilow looking at sites. After a year of hunting for an ideal spot, they decided on the green-belt area thirty miles south of Chicago, not far from the Olympia Fields Country Club, yet easily accessible via the Illinois Central Railroad.

Manilow is a sharp-eyed, soft-spoken man with a big cigar and a George Raft polo coat that makes him look like anything but a builder. Actually, he has gone broke every time he has tried to do anything else. He likes to think of himself as a cold and calculating realist. But he has the gambling instincts of a born promoter and is also something of a softie in the heart region. With Sweet egging him on, he began acquiring the 7,500-acre site. The feat of assembling the land into a single parcel has flabbergasted every builder or housing expert who has seen it.

Manilow did not dare, of course, come out and start buying openly. He worked through countless intermediaries. Only twice was he known to be the buyer. Most of his intermediaries were people who had sold their property, had received a fair price and were ready to convince their neighbors they should sell. But despite the secrecy, resistance developed as more and more land was acquired. Prices went higher. All kinds of devices were used to get people to sell.

The one most frequently used was the hiring of a lawyer of one landowner to buy the property of another. Invariably, the attorney would then rush to his original client, obtain his consent and sell that piece too. One section of the area

had been divided into lots and sold twenty years ago. Tracking down the heirs was a long and intricate job. Many parcels were bought with Manilow assuming the risk of clearing the title. Farmers constituted a major problem because, while they were willing to sell, agriculture was their living and they made the finding of another farm a condition of sale. By the time it was over, Manilow's men were operating a resettlement bureau.

The land cost from \$300 to \$5,000 an acre. Manilow had sunk nearly a million dollars into it without even knowing whether there was water there. He realized he had embarked on a terrific gamble and was ready to look for help.

"Papa" Sweet, as he is called, had anticipated this state of affairs. He had already talked to Klutznick, former commissioner of the Federal Public Housing Authority, challenging him to the building of a dream city. A brilliant Omaha lawyer, Klutznick had won the respect of private builders by his handling of public housing and by the record he made during the war. His uncompromising idealism had attracted leading housing experts in every field to his staff.

Sweet still had quite a bit of juggling to do, though. Manilow, now that he had assembled all this land, was getting offers for the lot that would have given him

more than a million dollars in profits. Klutznick was being offered juicy legal partnerships in New York and Washington.

"It took a lot of guts," said Papa, "to tell them to turn them down."

But he had the guts. So did Klutznick and so did Manilow.

Klutznick immediately brought into American Community Builders the architectural firm of Loeb, Schlossman & Bennett in the person of Jerrold Loeb. The firm was entrusted with the problem of designing the city and its life. Loeb, Schlossman & Bennett are among the leading architects of Chicago. They were especially fitted for the designing of a city for a better life. They had, in fact, been working along these lines for some time.

Experienced Men on the Job

To help them, Loeb, Schlossman & Bennett brought in Peets, designer of the famous green-belt towns near Washington, Cincinnati and Milwaukee. Then Klutznick obtained Charlie Waldmann, the utilities engineer for those towns and the man who defeated Wendell Willkie in his fight against TVA. Raffkind and Perry, and Dick Senior and Allan Harrison, well-known construction engineers, came with Waldmann.

When they had completed their first

plans and cost estimates, they went to Chicago's mortgage bankers. These gentlemen turned white with fright at the size of the project, at the problems to overcome, at the low family density, at the economic conception of renting or selling houses virtually at cost while making profits from the commercial area.

It will take between eighteen months and two years to complete construction of the first, rental phase of the housing program, and it will take at least two years after people begin moving in this May for the city to lose its "rawness." Five to ten years will be required for residents to settle down and give real character to the city.

Selection of tenants is to be one of the important problems. For, according to the creator team, neither need nor desire for a better life is sufficient qualification. Veterans will be given preference. Applicants will be asked about their incomes and the size of homes desired. No crowding will be permitted. There will be nothing like six persons to a one-bedroom house. Then, as each tenant is selected, the family's religion will be determined so that churches can go about organizing congregations.

The first 250 families will have to put up with some hardship. Roads will be incomplete, the shopping center unfinished and the landscaping only begun.

There will be noise from construction. But these first families will be the incorporators of the city. They will elect governing bodies, make laws, elect a school board and pick the name of the town.

"We have realized two things from the start," said Klutznick seriously. "One is that no matter how much planning goes into a project like this, it will only be judged by the results. The other is that no matter how much work and time we have spent, the people who live there can form the spirit and character we have sought for it. We all feel that unless the town-hall spirit in which Park Forest was created is captured and held by the people we will have failed. This is our gamble. We're betting on the people."

The new town will not go far in alleviating Chicago's housing misery. It would take a dozen like it to produce any drastic change for the better. But this is the kind of idea that can be utilized in every section of the nation. Both Milwaukee and Kansas City already have approached American Community Builders and indicated their interest in the formula for communities that provide better living. There is little question that this is one of the most important experiments in housing and in living to be attempted in many years.

THE END

Reprinted from
Collier's for February 14, 1948

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