

C ARCHITECTURAL STYLE AND COMMUNITY DESIGN IN THE SUBURBS

This part of the historic context traces changes in architectural style and community design in the suburbs through the three relevant Chronological/ Developmental Periods defined by the Maryland Historical Trust (MHT). Suburbanization had its roots in the Agricultural-Industrial Transition Period (1815-1870), became common during the Industrial/Urban Dominance Period (1870-1930), and became the prevailing form of development during the Modern Period (1930-1960). During these time periods, the suburbs changed from being rural vacation havens for the elite to permanent homes for the middle and working classes. The styles of architecture and arrangement of streets selected for suburbs over the years reflected these changes.

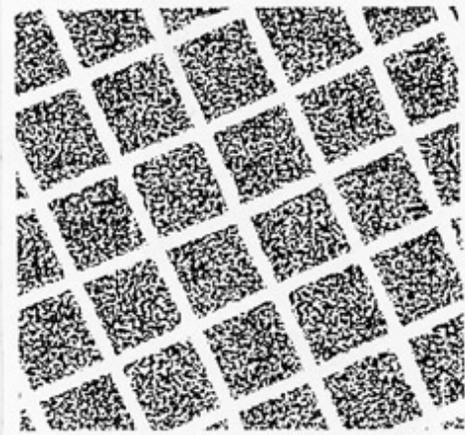
C.1 Development Patterns in the Suburbs

This section explores the role of community and city planning in the evolution of the suburb, following the three MHT chronological periods encompassed by this study. During the first period, suburban design was the interest of an elite group of landscape architects and other designers. The resulting suburbs tended to be accessible only to the wealthy. During the second period, from the late-nineteenth century to the early 1930s, the suburb became increasingly popular with the middle classes and was the subject of many national and regional planning studies. The suburb gained Federal endorsement during the third period beginning with the creation of the Federal Housing Administration in 1934 and has since become increasingly institutionalized.

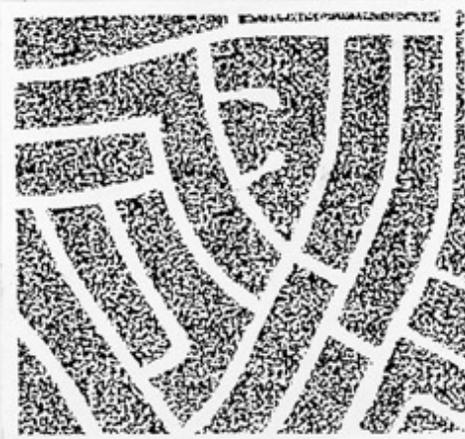
C.1.1 Agricultural-Industrial Transition Period (1815-1870)

The trend toward suburbanization that eventually changed the form of American cities began in early-nineteenth-century England. Inspired by the Picturesque Movement in art and literature, the bourgeoisie of London began seeking an alternative to their busy, urban environment. In 1810, John Nash completed his design for the predecessor of modern suburbs, Blaise Hamlet. This estate village for the retired servants of a banker had cottages arranged along winding roads in a rural setting. In the same year, Nash designed the Park Village suburb in London for an admirer of his work, the Prince Regent (who later became King George IV) (Southworth and Ben-Joseph 1997, 21-24).

In the United States, the opening of railroad lines in the 1830s led to the creation of many new towns. Often surveyed quickly and laid out according to standard plat maps, these tiny towns almost invariably followed the gridiron plan found in major urban areas (Figure 8). In response to what they saw as the rigidity of the grid and the unpleasant urban environment brought about by increasing industrialization, writers and designers such as Andrew Jackson Downing, Catharine Beecher, Calvert Vaux and Frederick Law Olmsted advocated a return to rural life as a way to protect the young United States from the corruption they saw in Europe. Said Downing: "It is the solitude and freedom of the family home in the country which constantly preserves the purity of . . . the nation, and invigorates its intellectual powers." (Southworth and Ben-Joseph 1997, 25-30).



Interconnected rectilinear grid of the turn-of-the-century



Fragmented grid and warped parallel streets of the 1930s and 1940s



Discontinuous, insular patterns of cul-de-sacs and loops since the 1950s

**I-495/I-95 Capital Beltway Corridor
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Montgomery and Prince George's Counties
Suburbanization Historic Context
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KCI Technologies, Inc.

November 1, 2005

Figure 8: Street Patterns Through Time

Source: Southworth, Michael, and Eran Ben-Joseph.
Streets and the Shaping of Towns and Cities, page 2

Although homes in the country would not be possible for everyone, many saw newly forming suburbs as an adequate alternative. Following a visit to the new suburbs of England, Olmsted wrote:

[T]here are to be found among them the most attractive, the most refined and the most soundly wholesome forms of domestic life, and the best application of the arts of civilization to which mankind has yet attained. It would appear then, that the demands of suburban life, with reference to civilized refinement, are not to be a retrogression from, but an advance upon, those which are characteristic of town life, and that no great town can long exist without great suburbs (Southworth and Ben-Joseph 1997, 30).

Rejecting row houses and rectangular blocks, Olmsted designed suburbs that followed the natural (or naturalistic) terrain. Dwellings were arranged to ensure the privacy of the owners while providing them with pleasant views of the landscape. Construction began in 1868 on the suburb Olmsted designed with Calvert Vaux, Riverside, Illinois (Figure 9). Riverside and its contemporaries became the prototype for the mid-nineteenth-century suburbs. These suburbs were typically located in rural areas along new rail lines leading to major cities. They had winding, interconnected roads lined with trees and large houses on large lots. Because houses were built individually as lots were sold, mid-nineteenth century suburbs displayed a variety of architectural styles. Although the suburbs might contain landscaped parks and paths, no commercial enterprises, schools, or other services were present. These suburbs served as both weekend retreats and year-round homes for their residents. However, these suburbs were only affordable to the wealthy, as the suburbs were often designed by a prestigious architect, were only accessible by rail or carriage, and contained only large and luxurious houses. Middle and lower-income people remained in the cities (Southworth and Ben-Joseph 1997, 30-33).