

History of Garden Cities

In the late 1800's and early 1900's, England was experiencing repercussions of its industrial revolution, which included unhealthy living conditions, poor sanitation and pollution of both air and water. There was a shortage of affordable housing resulting from so many workers migrating into the city. A socialist movement evolved with architects and planners trying to create a more healthful environment and increased housing options for the quickly growing urban areas.

Ebenezer Howard had ideas of improving living conditions via the Garden City. Its premise, often called the three magnets, is to merge elements of town and country to form town-country, which uses the best of both ideas.

The Garden City idea involved creating a smaller city in an area just outside of an urban area. The Garden City would have a limited population and when reached, another Garden City would be created. This limits the unhealthy aspects of such high population density often found in urban areas at that time.

The first Garden City, Letchworth, England, was created by Howard in 1903. The designs of Garden Cities share certain elements:

- Relatively narrow, curving streets follow the topography of the land,
- Green spaces and open spaces with access for many classes,
- Clearly defined boundaries of the garden city,
- Mixed use which may include residential, commercial and educational areas,
- Democratic ideas of affordable housing options for all,
- Integration of architecture and landscape.

The Garden City evolved into garden suburbs, of which Washington Highlands is an excellent example. A garden suburb is smaller than a Garden City and commerce is less important. Yet many of the elements of a Garden City mentioned above are carried out in the garden suburb.

History of Washington Highlands

Frederick Pabst, usually called Captain, was one of the Milwaukee beer barons who highly valued nature and believed in conservation. His farm, located on the present-day Washington Highlands, grew hops for his breweries and raised percherons to pull the beer wagons. Schoonmaker Creek meandered through the rolling hills of the farm.

After Captain Pabst's death in 1904, his children chose to develop the property using the developer Richter, Dick & Reutermann. At that time, the suburbs were expanding more rapidly than the city of Milwaukee itself. Wauwatosa was known for its friendly

community, artesian wells, and location on transportation lines, which at time was the street car. Pabst helped to create a power plant in Wauwatosa that generated power for the street cars. The city was known for its good schools and also its government, which had the foresight to create a residential city with careful zoning laws. (The Wauwatosa Story, 1961) Wauwatosa zoning laws were the first to be implemented in the state of Wisconsin.

Hegemann & Peets

The plan for the Washington Highlands was designed by landscape architects Werner Hegemann with input by Elbert Peets. Hegemann was “viewed as an international authority on the garden city movement in Europe.” (Wi Architect, 1990) Much like the ideas used by Howard at Letchfield, Hegemann merged the best qualities of the city with the best qualities of the country to create the design for Washington Highlands. He also sought to create an area where people of various income levels could all live. (Milwaukee Journal, 1990) At the height of the Garden City movement, Washington Highlands was being designed by one of the premier landscape architects of that movement.

Hegemann had more realistic ideas about uniting people of various socioeconomic levels. (Journal Sentinel, 1990) Housing for the workers and artisans is located on the edges of the suburb, especially along 60th Street and Lloyd Street. This more affordable housing does not face towards the park-like environment, but instead faces the grid plan of the surrounding area.

Hegemann and Peets are well-known in Wisconsin for designing the planned company town of Kohler.

Washington Highlands Design

The topography of Pabst’s farm was preserved as Washington Highlands was developed. Hills, trees and the stream were incorporated in the design. The hilly terrain varies as much as 150 feet in elevation. Curving streets follow across the hilly slopes. In some cases, boulevards were split to allow for better placement of homes with least destruction to the terrain. Examples of streets with split boulevards include Washington Circle, Mountain Ave., Alta Vista Ave. and Upper Parkway. In some cases, there is up to ten feet of elevation difference between the two boulevard lanes.

The layout of the streets is believed to form the shape of a Prussian helmet, which is visible when examining a map or aerial photo of Washington Highlands. Supposedly, Hegemann, a staunch German, wanted to name the area “Kaiser Wilhelm Platz” which would honor the German leader at the time. Meanwhile, Pabst, an American German, was opposed to that name. The story continues with Hegemann laying out the streets in

the design of a Prussian helmet since he lost the naming issue with Pabst. The designer got the last laugh.

Regardless of whether this story is true or not, the street layout of Washington Highlands is part of what makes it interesting. Views are created, topography respected and it is dramatically different from the monotonous grid layout of the streets surrounding it.

Both the roads and lot sizes in Washington Highlands are in sharp contrast to those surrounding the area. For example, north of Lloyd Street, house density is six to nine homes per acre, depending on lot size. Within Washington Highlands, house density is approximately three homes per acre. The grid street layout is evident surrounding Washington Highlands, even in areas with hilly terrain that may have been better served using curving streets. While grid layout was common in the early 1900's, today it is more common to see curving streets in developments.

House placement on the lots varies in Washington Highlands with the terrain. Often, in flatter, more open areas, like parts of Washington Circle, the homes are set further back on wide lawns. In contrast, some hilly areas show the homes are closer to the street and often have a narrower lawn.

The central axis of the Washington Highlands is Washington Boulevard, which was designed to connect the suburb to Washington Park, while providing a view for homes on Alta Vista Ave. with a view to downtown Milwaukee. The bridge on Washington Boulevard, allows the central axis view to continue unobstructed by traffic along Martha Washington Drive. The view in to the Washington Highlands from 60th and Washington Boulevard terminates in Applecroft Park and the grand home at 1651 Alta Vista Ave.

Schoonmaker Creek continues to meander through Washington Highlands, much like it did when Captain Pabst had his original farm on the site. Today, it forms the backbone for the North, Central and South Parks. Houses whose fronts or backs face the creek tend to sit on larger, sloping lots. There is a sense of openness in the Central and South Parks, which are used for recreation, while North Park has more sloping terrain and trees. Applecroft Park was once the site of an apple orchard and is now private open space. Elm Plaza is a very small, neighborhood park named for the stately elm tree, which graced its presence until recently.

Boundaries at the eight entries to Washington Highlands were carefully designed, although the plans were not fully implemented. Designs include use of stone columns, hedges and gardens to carefully delineate the garden suburb from its city neighbors. Elbert Peets' careful attention to details such as entries, are just one of the elements that adds richness to the Washington Highlands experience. Today, the entries have signs and a movement is underway to develop more of the stone entries and plantings in the style of the original design.

Garden cities typically involved democratic principles of integrating people of different classes and incomes. Washington Highlands set out with that goal; however, the

integration was not as idealistic. The more affordable housing is often located along the edges like 60th, 68th and Lloyd Streets. While this housing tends to face away from the park-like atmosphere created by the Washington Highlands, the architectural character of the homes and access to the parks within allowed the workingman to experience the same environment as industry leaders. Multifamily housing was planned for areas along the edges. Commercial areas were planned for areas along transportation lines. This remains evident as seen along Milwaukee Avenue and 60th Street. A school was planned for the area of Hillcrest and Washington Circle, but was never built. The Catholic Charities, a social agency at Lloyd and 60th Street, is included in the Washington Highlands and has plans for additional landscaping to maintain the garden suburb character of the neighborhood.

The democratic principles were limited by the covenants of the Washington Highlands, which forbade people who were non-white from owning or occupying property. Fortunately, this regulation was never enforced, and non-white homeownership in Washington Highlands today is approaching the population diversity of Wauwatosa itself.

Clustering is a design technique often used in laying out cities and suburbs. Washington Highlands has examples of open space clusters with the North, Central and South Parks, which together make the space seem even larger than it is by providing distant open space views. Even the borrowed space of the larger lawns opening up to the parks gives the sense of larger park space. There are clusters of housing types: some areas cluster bungalow and arts and craft homes; some cluster the larger, opulent homes. Undulating clusters of open space contrasted against enclosed tree-covered space give some streets charm. Revere Avenue uses this technique of open space followed by a sense of enclosure very successfully.

Details are what makes any area memorable and Elbert Peets took the time to ensure certain things like notable vegetation would remain intact. This is evidenced by streets that curved to avoid certain trees. (Two Tree Lane, Elm Park) Peets also worked on ensuring the homes created in this environment would reflect the care given to preserving the landscape. Covenants specified housing materials to be used, which would help to integrate the architecture with the landscape. Natural materials, such as stone, brick and wood tend to blend better in a natural environment. Garages located behind the house emphasize the homes' architecture and adds to the feel of living in a garden. It's easy to spot "newer" houses in Washington Highlands: they are the ones with garages near the street.

Interestingly, the original home of Captain Pabst, which was near Mountain Ave., is believed to be located on 68th Street today.

Washington Highlands as a Precedent for Today's Suburbs

Captain Pabst owned several parcels of land in southeastern Wisconsin. On his farm in the Oconomowoc area, percherons and hackneys were raised. It also became known for its holstein cattle breeding program. Pabst Farms, consisting of 1500 acres, is currently under development. This development includes residential and commerce areas, a town center and a technology park. Residential lot sizes vary, but lots of similar sizes are clustered. This differs from Washington Highlands where clusters exist, but they are more frequently interspersed throughout the suburb.

The layout has a central axis, much like Washington Highlands, and has curving roads surrounding it. This development currently lacks mature trees, but planting guidelines require homeowners to have specified quantities of trees installed. Some of the roads are being lined with trees.

Pabst Farms has a planned town center and is designed to be a walkable community, which are characteristics of New Urbanism. New Urbanism is a movement started in 1980s that promotes houses being closer together, walkable neighborhoods, and commerce within the area. This is in response to the rapid sprawl occurring throughout the U.S. New Urbanism borrows some ideas from Garden Cities such as setbacks, spacing of homes and walkable neighborhoods.

While the intention of Pabst Farms is to be walkable, sidewalks are not installed in residential areas, and children must cross a fairly busy road to reach the local elementary school and YMCA. Paths are planned for the edges of the residential areas. It was designed near a transportation hub, with close freeway access and bus access. Washington Highlands has sidewalks throughout and remains on a bus line. In this sense, Washington Highlands continues to be one of the examples that New Urbanism tries to emulate.

The topography of Pabst Farm is very flat, but the layout has curving roads and many trees are being installed. Existing environmental features, such as wetlands and Indian mounds are being respectfully preserved. This also emulates the fine planning of Washington Highlands, where even certain trees were preserved throughout the development.

Pabst Farms has covenants that dictate many elements of each residence, much like Washington Highlands. Garages are not to face the street; there are 25' setbacks for the houses; exterior materials are limited to more natural items like brick, stone, stucco or wood; architectural guidelines for home design minimize the chance of similar houses being located near each other; minimum landscape requirements are specified; a homeowners association is established. Many of the Pabst Farms covenants are similar to the Washington Highlands covenants. Good design ideas are truly timeless.

Conclusion

Washington Highlands is an excellent example of a garden suburb that continues to influence the design of modern suburbs. Walkable neighborhoods, houses with natural materials and unique architectural charm are all desirable characteristics even today. The design of Hegemann and Peets to create a garden city in Wauwatosa has stood the test of time.

“No more complex and no more satisfactory work of art can be conceived than a beautiful garden city.”

-Elbert Peets, *Wyomissing Park: The Modern Garden Suburb of Reading, PA*

Sources

Alanen, Arnold. "Elbert Peets: History as Precedent in Midwestern Landscape Design." Midwestern Landscape Architecture. Tischler, William, ed. Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press: 2000

City of Wauwatosa 100th Anniversary 1835 – 1935

Congress for New Urbanism FAQ. Internet. Article URL:
www.cnu.org/about/disp_faq.html. (11 Sept. 2003)

Gould, Whitney. "Evolution of Pabst Farms should teach us a few things." Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. Internet. Article URL:
www.jsonline.com/news/metro/jan03/112007.asp?format=print (11 Sept. 2003)

Hall, Peter. Cities of Tomorrow: An Intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design in the Twentieth Century. London: Blackwell Publishers, 2002

Knuth, Judith. "Captain's retreat: Tosa's Highlands built on beer baron's farm." *Milwaukee Journal*. (5 Jan. 1985)

"Letchworth: The First Garden City." Internet. Article URL:
www.leitchworthgardencity.net/heritage/index-3.htm. (11 Aug. 2003)

Lynch, Bruce & Cynthia. Washington Highlands National Register of Historic Places application, 1989

Martin, Jonathan. "New Urbanism for Rural Communities." Internet. Article URL:
www.cardi.cornell.edu/cd_toolbox_2/tools/new_urbanism.cfm. (11 Sept. 2003)

Norris, Tim. "Washington Highlands." *Milwaukee Journal*. (22 Mar. 1990)

Pabst Farms Project Fact Sheet. Pabst Farms PR: Heidi Fendos, Fendos PR Consulting

Pabst Farms web site. Internet. Article URL:
<http://www.pabstfarms.com/flash/communityOverview/>

Peets, Elbert. *Wyomissing Park: The Modern Garden Suburb of Reading, PA*. 1919

Wauwatosa City Hall: City Planning Department and Assessor's Office.

The Wauwatosa Story by Wauwatosa Public Schools Board of Education, 1961

Wisconsin Architect June 1990