

FOUNDATIONS OF MODERN AMERICAN CITY PLANNING

Most historians agree that modern American city planning began in the late 1800s. Some affix the date to 1893 and the Columbian Exposition in Chicago, though there is less orthodoxy regarding this moment than 15 years ago. In contrast to the earlier Colonial planning period (Philadelphia, Savannah, Williamsburg, etc.) wherein plans preceded development, planning in the 1800s generally responded to the urbanization stimulated by the industrial revolution in existing and haphazardly developing cities. The American Industrial Revolution occurred in two waves, the first in 1820-1870 and the second in 1870-1920. The U.S. grew from 7% urban in 1820 to 25% urban in 1870 and 50% urban in 1920.

Three social movements categorized as precursors to modern American city planning (public health/sanitary reform, settlement house and housing reform, and parks planning) responded to the challenges and consequences of chaotic urbanization prior to modern planning's beginnings. The City Beautiful movement was a fourth response at about the same time that modern planning began. The Garden Cities Movement simultaneously commenced in England and was imported soon after. American planning grew out of and hoped to provide a broader, more comprehensive vision to these movements.

Five interrelated and overlapping movements of the 19th Century have significant effects on the first half of the 20th Century and were precursors to city planning

1. Sanitary Reform Movement
2. Parks Planning/Parks Systems Movement
3. Settlement House/Housing Reform Movement
4. Garden City Movement
5. City Beautiful Movement

Movement

Sanitary Reform (extensive overlap with and sometimes referred to as the Public Health Movement) 1840-1890. Sanitary Reform's focus was infrastructure and Public Health was primarily concerned with preventing and contending with infectious diseases and epidemics.

Attributes

An outgrowth and response to the accelerating urbanization of the U.S. Accompanied by an increasingly scientific understanding of infectious diseases - from filth theory to germ theory.

Primary foci:

1. Potable water supply
2. Water carriage sewerage to supplant private lot waste removal
3. Sanitary survey planning: detailed examination of diseases and associated physical conditions. Memphis/American Public Health Association/ National Board of Health 1878-1880
4. Townsite consciousness – not a systematic doctrine but increased awareness and sensitivity to topography, drainage, water supply, parks, crowding, density, gross land use conflicts (slaughter houses in residential areas, etc.)

Parks Planning/Parks Systems
Movement

Initially focused on a large, romantic pleasure grounds-offered middle and upper class Americans 'the equivalent of a day in the country.' Examples: Central Park (NY), Franklin Park (Boston), Lincoln Park (Chicago). Later evolved into the conception of city-wide, eventually regional interconnected systems of parks and parkways.

Significant events in:

Horace W. S. Cleveland, Minneapolis park system proposal 1883; Minneapolis-St. Paul regional Park system proposal, 1887 (Minneapolis implemented)

George W. Kessler, Kansas City city-wide system of parks and boulevards, 1893 (multiple other players: Augustus Robert Dyer (wealthy business person), James Pendergrast (political boss), Thomas Swope (philanthropist))

Charles Elliot, Sylvester Baxter, Boston – extensive regional park system (1891-1893 and beyond)

Settlement House Movement/Housing
Reform

Sought to contribute to urban reform through living (settling) in poor, frequently immigrant or minority neighborhoods and mobilizing resources for social change. Emphasis on "learning by doing" social action (John Dewey, Jane Addams) 1886-19teens.

Significant personalities/events:

Jane Addams, Hull House, a politically active settlement house in Chicago

Mary K. Simkovitch (professionally active 1900-1949), Settlement housing and social welfare reformer in New York City. Studied and worked at College Settlement, was head resident at Friendly Aid Home and founded Greenwich House (all NYC); Helped organize Cooperative Social Settlement Society and New York Association of Neighborhood Workers.

Settlement House Movement/Housing Reform (continued)

Benjamin Marsh, *An Introduction to City Planning: Democracy's Challenge to the American City* (1909).
Was Secretary of the Committee on Congestion of Population in 1907 in New York City and helped organize the First National Conference on City Planning.

Jacob Riis (*How the Other Half Lives* (1890), *Children of the Poor* (1892))

Garden City Movement in England

The Garden City Movement began with the work of Ebenezer Howard *Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* (1898).

Garden City Characteristics:

1. Satellite garden cities surrounding central garden City, each city being essentially self-supporting but relying on the central city for regional facilities
2. Finite population: ultimate population could not be expanded, thus preventing deteriorating sprawl at its edges
3. Surrounded by greenbelts and woods of public land to be used permanently as agriculture and open space
4. Included concept of land rent

Howard carried out two garden city projects in England:

1. Letchworth (1903-1920)
2. Welwyn (1919-1934)

Development of Second City - Welwyn (1919)

1. Designed to have a population of 40,000
2. Far more successful than Letchworth because location allowed workers to travel to London and those living in London to work in Welwyn
3. Designed with superblock street scheme

Garden City Movement in U. S.

Garden City Movement (England) exerted some influence in U.S. in the teens and 1920s:

1. Forest Hills Gardens (160 acres) Russell Sage Foundation (1909) Frederick Law Olmstead, Jr. – a garden suburb not a full fledged "new town"
2. Radburn, NJ (1929) (Henry Wright and Clarence Stein) adopted updated elements of the Garden City approach: residences in superblocks (30-50 acres) penetrated only by cul-de-sacs, separated pedestrian and vehicular traffic, faced homes toward gardens, reserved the interiors of superblocks for parks, connected the superblocks by a system of walks with underpasses under the motorways. Lacked full range of land uses to be a new town.
3. U.S. impact was a more complete vision of suburban residential planning and an aspiration or recognition of the much more complete new-towns or satellite garden cities alternatives.

City Beautiful Movement

Began with the Columbian Exposition (1893), Chicago

Key Actors: Daniel Burnham, Frederick Law Olmsted Sr., Charles F. McKim, Augustus St. Gaudens

First example in U.S. of great group of buildings designed in relation to one another and in relation to open spaces

"White City" team could not agree on color scheme, painted it all white

Daniel Burnham justified subsequent City Beautiful plan on grounds that:

1. The beauty of public works that attract the wealthy makes pleasant the life of the poor, are accessible to all men, and create a unifying civic pride
2. The attraction of those with wealth creates a flow of money that filters down to all citizens
3. Creation of broad tree-lined avenues brings light, air and nature to the slums

City Beautiful Movement (continued)

Contributions of the City Beautiful Movement:

1. Helped revival of city planning from post-colonial planning dormancy. Helped lead to planning's establishment as an integral part of local government.
2. Led to the professional consultant role for "planning experts"

Deficiencies of the Movement:

1. Catered to an upper class constituency
2. Treated issues affecting poor people superficially or not at all
3. Beautification and adornment had limited practical utility in many people's eyes
4. Lack of legitimation of any public control over the private actions that were decisive in setting the quality of urban environment
5. Emphasis on parks and boulevards required public investment rather than controls

Decline of the Movement in the 1920s

1. Big business lost interest as the forces for societal change saw their power decline
2. Muckraking journalism exposed extensive corruption in municipal service delivery
3. Extensive adoption of automobile led to extensive need for roads and highways
4. Necessity of municipal sewer and water supply expanded infrastructure budgets
5. City Efficient replaced City Beautiful as the emphasis of city planning

Although City Beautiful declined, its emphasis on physical site planning was internalized in planning efforts regulating the development of the suburbs.

Planning in Transition

During the 19-teens, U.S. planning focused more on physical/engineering/infrastructure issues and began to adapt zoning from the German model (without

importing the cooperative housing, public land ownership and innovations in municipal finance which were integral to the German urban policy framework).

The U.S. Progressive (political) Movement emphasized professionalization of civil service and (naively) tried to depoliticize elements of local governance through appointed boards and commissions such as planning commissions.

City Efficient

Rise of City Efficient

1. New emphasis of cities and American City Planning Institute on technical details of city planning brought civil engineers, lawyers, and administrators to the forefront replacing architects and landscape architects
2. Housing reformers and settlement house people's roles were diminished, and they continued their work poor communities outside the narrow definition of Planning
3. Advent of the automobile required major public works projects which drew attention and resources away from many civic building projects and social efforts
4. New laws and court cases being developed resulted in land use, zoning, land subdivision control and administrative/regulative devices replacing "civic center" design as the focus of planning activities