

GREENBELT COMMUNITIES

How to Avoid Maintenance Headaches

Greenbelt neighborhoods, though a boon to residents and to developers, sometimes become maintenance monsters. City and county park officials are seeking a greater voice in design plans in an effort to avert maintenance problems later. Planned communities with strip parks are fast rising in popularity. Landscaped parkways between homes, as shown below and on plat map above, are tremendous selling points to families with children. In this greenbelt development in Orange County, Calif., broad paths shuttle residents through an inter-community of walks that glide past a variety of pleasing landscaped pockets.

By LOU SPEER
El Toro, Calif.

RECENTLY, in Simi Valley, Calif., the park department narrowly escaped the attempts of a subdivision developer to foist the maintenance of his projected greenbelt neighborhood onto the park's already over-crowded general budget.

Further south, in Fountain Valley, the Homeowner's Association of a five-year-old greenbelt neighborhood approached that city's park director asking: Would the city be interested in assuming title to the Association's strip parks? The spiraling maintenance costs were too high for them.

In an unincorporated South Coast section of Orange County, residents of a highly touted "hillside with a view" retreat complained to county maintenance officials that the hillside was just their trouble: Architects of their planned community had given them nothing for their maintenance money but landscaped slopes. Where were their children to play?

"These problems do happen," stated Kenneth Sampson, Orange County park director, who received the South Coast community's complaint. A husky man with a number of year's planning experience as well as park work behind him, he thoughtfully considers these and



other greenbelt problems, and recognizes something needs to be done about them.

Designs Sales-Oriented

"Initially, problems occur because subdividers are not supervised in their planning," he says. "Many developers want to show a good splash for sales purposes, and instead of including areas of slope easements in lots, they plant these into large permanent green tracts. When the sales reach the point where they turn the development over to the community association or service district, in order to maintain it, the tax rate often becomes tremendous.

"A few developers," continues Sampson, "Tend to overplant with high maintenance vegetation without any idea as to cost. We have had the attempts on the part of some people to dedicate parks to us that have 50-60% slopes on them. They are not workable, and this is the reason we now have a planned program of checking every subdivision, every planted area, to make sure the facilities that go in will not be a drain upon the service area."

With the growing popularity of planned communities across the nation, Sampson recommends strongly other park departments adopt a similar check system.

Rebirth of Greenbelt Idea

The first greenbelt plan Director Sampson recalls seeing was in 1926. "It was called the 'Radburn Plan' in New Jersey," he said, "where they took the back yards and made greenbelts so people could walk from one block to the next to visit and so on. It was copied from an English plan. Then the idea was dropped. We got into this big building boom right after the war, particularly here in the West. So it became a case of obtaining as many lots as you could, and getting as many tract houses built as possible."

Times change. People needed a greater incentive to buy. The advent of the cul-de-sac, promising privacy, was the forerunner of the rebirth of the greenbelt community, claims Sampson.

These self-contained units, today, with their honeycomb of arterials, offer residents quiet seclusion, vast expanses of beautiful work-free greenspace, family recreational centers, and schools so convenient children are under their parents' surveillance most of the time.

Design Supervision Needed

But there is always that dark moment that can turn these darlings

of the building industry into service district maintenance monsters.

"Sometimes developers skimp on installation of the sprinkler system because these are costs they have to pay," hints Lester Fant, Management Services Company partner, presently contracting maintenance services to 23 Orange County Homeowner's Associations. "Then the sprinkler system has to be replaced, the cost of which falls into the maintenance budget of the homeowners' association. Also, more preparation materials should be put into the soil. I see no way of controlling this except perhaps education of the developers."

Director Sampson agrees. "This is our responsibility," he says, "to educate the developer and to protect the people. I feel a competent landscape architect should not only prepare the development plans, but that he should be checked and supervised by competent people, so the greenbelt will remain the usable piece of property for which it was intended, and not cause future problems."

The system of checkout, first developed two years ago by Orange County planning officials, whose boundaries of responsibility presently include 15 service areas with five



Orange County Park Director Kenneth Sampson, left, has gained a measure of supervision over greenbelt design. He and Ralph Hudson, chief of development, are studying a greenbelt developer's final landscape design. Their signatures okaying the design are necessary before the developer can get his plans approved by Orange County's Board of Supervisors.



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operating greenbelt neighborhoods, calls for a landscape architect from the park department to sit with the subdivision committee in a three-stage review: First, in the schematic stage of planning to see where the developer is heading; second in the finalized preliminary design for general development; and finally, the finished drawings must be signed off by the park department before the developer can appear before the Board of County Supervisors for final approval of his plan.

"If we don't approve it, he doesn't get his subdivision," Sampson said bluntly. "The subdivider must go back and revise his plans."

Ten-Point Checklist

What points in these plans do Sampson and his staff particularly consider? These can be broken down into the ten following steps with site selection receiving primary attention:

1. See that the terrain is a usable piece of property.
2. Check the site's availability to the people it is going to serve.
3. Note the amount of turf space for playfields.
4. Determine what future maintenance costs the terrain, soil condi-

tion, availability of water, and other variables might produce.

5. Know what vegetation is going in, its upkeep, and replacement costs.

6. Suggest—if necessary, for more economical maintenance — where mow strips should be added, trees placed, ground cover and shrubbery minimized.

7. Decide, if the automatic irrigation system is of good standards and adequate.

8. Ask for details of the lighting plan to avoid dark spots and nuisance lights.

9. Consider the walks for aesthetics as well as maintenance.

10. Look into the maintenance financing plan.

"In other words," Sampson sums it up, "it is the tendency of all of us to get rid of culls. We don't want to accept culls. We want to set our standard high so the whole planned community program will remain as tremendous as it set out to be."

American Sod Producers Gather July 28-30

If you want to know more about "The Sod Industry in the United States," then mark July 28, 29 and 30 on your calendar. This subject will be the theme for the fourth annual session of the American Sod Producers Association.

The conference and field day shapes up this way: On July 28, a bus tour, leaving from the Ramada Inn at Dolton, Ill., will be conducted to Warren's Turf Nurseries and Evergreen Sod Farm. The educational session will begin at 9 a.m., July 29, at the Ramada Inn, followed by the annual meeting and banquet. Field demonstrations of sod equipment will be shown on July 30 at the H & E Sod Farm at Mokence, Ill.

Arthur V. Edwards, editorial director of WEEDS TREES and TURF magazine, will keynote the educational session with an updated survey report on the national sod industry. Complementing his presentation will be reports on the "State of the Michigan Sod Industry" and a Chicago accounting firm's survey of "Sod Production Costs in the United States."

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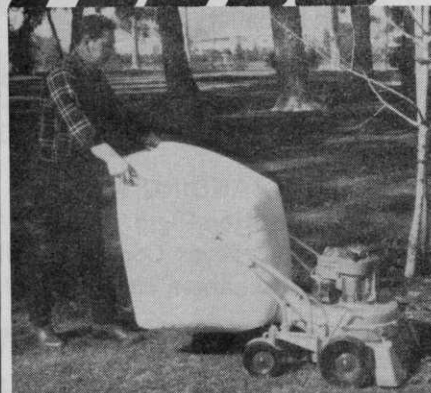
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Beck Manufacturing Co., Auburn, Ala., announces development of a revolutionary new sod harvesting and laying system.

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Sale price of the laying device is expected to be under \$200.

Demonstration of the entire system is planned for the American Sod Producers Association field day in August.

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