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Historic Residential Suburbs in the National Register

The body of literature on America's suburbanization is vast and growing, covering many disciplines and reflecting diverse opinions. The National Register will soon be publishing the bulletin, *Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Historic Residential Suburbs*, which brings together information about current scholarship and preservation practice relating to the history of suburban neighborhoods in the United States. The bulletin has been developed in tandem with a national multiple property listing entitled, *Historic Residential Suburbs in the United States, 1830-1960*, under which related properties may be listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Because the context contained in the multiple property form brings together information nowhere else compiled in a single source, a condensed version has been included to enhance the bulletin's usefulness. Together, they are intended to encourage the expansion of existing historic resources surveys, foster the development of local and metropolitan suburbanization contexts, and facilitate the nomination of residential historic districts and other suburban places to the National Register.

The National Park Service is greatly indebted to Professor David L. Ames of the Center for Historic Architecture and Design, University of Delaware, for documenting the rich

history of America's suburbs in *A Context and Guidelines for Evaluating America's Historic Suburbs for the National Register of Historic Places*, which was circulated widely for review and comment in the fall of 1998. In response to the many comments received, we broadened the bulletin's scope to include related areas, such as: the highly influential FHA principles of housing and subdivision design of the 1930s; trends in African-American suburbanization; prefabricated methods of house construction; and the landscape design of home grounds and suburban yards. The sources for recommended reading and for researching local suburban history and historic neighborhoods have been substantially expanded. The conceptual framework of chronological periods based on developments in transportation technology and subdivision planning and the contextually-based survey methodology introduced by Dr. Ames, however, remain at the core of the current bulletin and multiple property form. We believe they represent a sound and useful approach for evaluating the nation's rich legacy of suburban properties.

Suburbs are of growing interest to preservation advocates who see them as important parts of our heritage. Scholars of the American landscape and built environment recognize in suburbs the synthesis of several aspects of design, including community planning and development,

Guilford Historic District, Baltimore, Maryland. Photo by Greg Pease, courtesy Maryland Historical Trust.



architecture, and landscape architecture. Suburban neighborhoods were generally platted, subdivided, and developed according to a plan, often following the professional principles of design practiced by planners and landscape architects. For these reasons, this bulletin puts forth a landscape approach consistent with that presented in an earlier National Register Bulletin on designed and rural historic districts, but adapted to the special characteristics of suburban neighborhoods. The landscape approach presented is based on an understanding that suburban neighborhoods possess important landscape characteristics and typically took form in a three layered process: selection of location; platting and layout; and design of the house and yard.

Documenting Historic Neighborhoods as Cultural Landscapes

Many of America's residential suburbs resulted from the collaboration of developers, planners, civil engineers, architects, and landscape architects. The contributions of these professional groups, individually and collectively, give American suburbs their characteristic identity as historic neighborhoods, collections of residential architecture, and designed landscapes. In addition to the professionally-designed plans and landscaped settings of many historic subdivisions, countless vernacular landscapes have been shaped by homebuilders, seeking conformity with local zoning regulations and national policy, and homeowners, following popular trends in home design and gardening. Historic residential suburbs reflect land-use decisions and landscape design in three layers:

Location. A number of factors typically influenced the selection of a location for residential development, the foremost being the presence of a transportation system that made daily commuting to the city or other places of employment possible. For this reason, the bulletin sets forth a conceptual framework of chronological periods based on advances in transportation which extend from the use of railroads, horse-drawn cars, and electric streetcars in the 19th century to expansive rise of automobile ownership and introduction of express highways by the mid-20th century. Other factors include demographic trends, local demand for housing, opportunities for employment, local zoning regulations, availability of water and other utilities, proximity to commercial or recreational facilities, and the cost of purchasing and developing a particular parcel

of land. National Register evaluation requires that the history of a suburban neighborhood be viewed in relationship to broad patterns, such as transportation and industry, which shaped the larger metropolitan area of which it is a part.

Subdivision layout and design. Generally recorded in the form of a plat or a general development or master plan, the layout of a subdivision is characterized by the organization of space providing an internal circulation network, a system of utilities, blocks of buildable house lots, and, sometimes, community facilities, such as parks, playgrounds, and schools. A number of factors historically influenced subdivision design, including natural topography, site drainage, availability of utilities, picturesque qualities, and relationship to nearby roads or transportation systems. Subdivision design often reflected principles and practices drawn from the profession of landscape architecture and legal tools, such as deed restrictions, to ensure that a developer's vision and homeowners' expectations were fulfilled.

Suburban design in the United States evolved in several stages beginning with the picturesque suburbs in the naturalistic landscape gardening tradition of the mid-19th century. Influenced by the City Beautiful movement, Progressive-era reforms, and American garden-city planning, planned garden communities emerged in a variety of forms in the early 20th century. In the 1930s, Federal Housing Administration (FHA) standards and an approval process for mortgage insurance institutionalized established principles and practices of landscape architecture and community planning for the design of neighborhoods of small, affordable houses. The public and private partnership encouraging home ownership for most Americans gained unprecedented momentum after World War II, resulting in large-scale suburban growth of homogeneous neighborhoods and the creation of what is often disparagingly called "tract" housing.

Documenting this layer requires a knowledge of the principal trends in subdivision design; roles of real estate developers, site planners, homebuilders, architects, and landscape architects at various periods of history; contributions of well-known theorists and practitioners to American landscape design; and influential examples that established precedents or served as models locally, regionally, or nationally.

Design of house and yard, or home grounds. This layer represents the spatial arrangement of each home with its dwelling, garage, lawns, walks, driveway, walls and fences, plantings, and activity areas. This layer typically reflects information about the economic status, lifestyle, and social and cultural attitudes of a neighborhood's residents. The design of the house and yard may be influenced by deed restrictions, subdivision regulations, prevailing trends in building construction, changing transportation technologies, and, beginning in the 1930s, FHA standards. Documenting this layer

requires a knowledge of the chronological periods of suburban development and the popular house styles and gardening practices associated with each period; the evolution of house design theory and practice in the United States; and a familiarity with the pattern books, landscape guides, and popular magazines that historically influenced house construction, yard design, and regional gardening practices.

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Recent National Register Listings

Through National Register listings, scholars and preservationists are helping to document the nation's rich legacy of residential suburbs and have contributed substantially to our understanding of America's suburbanization. Research for the bulletin, *Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Historic Residential Suburbs*, relied on National Register documentation to illustrate and verify the broad national patterns documented by academic studies and other secondary sources.

More than 7,000 residential districts have been listed in the National Register of Historic Places since 1966. This impressive record attests to the wealth of professional expertise in state historic preservation programs and elsewhere in the preservation field, and to the great interest nationwide in recognizing historic neighborhoods as livable places worthy of preservation.

Recent listings include:

Woodland Place (1910-1925), Des Moines, Polk County, Iowa, (Des Moines Residential Growth and Development, 1900-1942: The Bungalow and Square House, MPS). (NR—11/21/00)

Guilford (1912-1950), Baltimore, Maryland. (NR—7/19/01)

Shaker Village (Boundary Increase) (1919-1950), Cleveland, Cuyahoga County, Ohio. (NR—Shaker Square, 7/1/76, boundary increased 12/9/83; Shaker Village, 5/31/84, boundary increased 1/5/01)

Crestwood (1920-1947), Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri. (NR—10/8/98)

Chatham Village (c. 1929-1956), Pittsburgh, Allegheny County, Pennsylvania. (NR—11/25/98)

Monte Vista and College View (1926-1957), Albuquerque, Bernalillo County, New Mexico. (Twentieth Century Suburban Growth of Albuquerque, MPS). (NR—8/3/01)

Parkfairfax (1941-1943), Alexandria, Virginia. (NR—2/2/99)

East Alvarado (1929-1948), Maricopa County, Arizona. (Residential Subdivisions and Architecture in Phoenix, 1912-1950, MPS). (NR—2/18/00)

Park Hill (1922-1950), North Little Rock, Pulaski County, Arkansas. (NR-8/16/00)

Arapahoe Acres (1949-1957), Englewood, Arapahoe County, Colorado. (NR—11/3/98)

Glenview (1908-1968), Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee. (Residential Resources of Memphis, MPS). (NR—10/7/99)

See *CRM Online* for additional information about these properties.