

# Can We Plan A New Town That Doesn't Sprawl?

By TIM RICHARD

"The way suburbs are built today, the first thing that goes in is housing."

"Second is schools. There are a lot of problems with school financing in a district dominated by single-family homes. Even \$50,000 houses don't provide enough taxes to educate four kids."

"Third comes commercial development. Fourth is industrial parks and communities are fighting each other to get industry."

THE SPEAKER is Dr. Roger Marz, by rank associate professor of political science at Oakland University, and on the side a consultant for the Metropolitan Fund on the subject of "new towns." Marz continues:

"The TALUS report shows we're going to build every single thing you need for a new town five times over. So why can't we coordinate that development?"

"That's what the topic of 'new towns' is about. Building a complete, small city with many types of housing—not just upper middle class, according to a range of life styles—not just families with kids; having a full complement of community services; providing a relatively complete shopping area; and having jobs for most of the people who live in the town. A new town is planned; it

doesn't just grow. It has a definite ultimate size; it doesn't just accumulate people endlessly until it runs into an artificial boundary."

TALUS—the Transportation and Land Use Study of the six-county southeastern Michigan area—proposes nine such new towns with populations ranging from 50,000 to 100,000, including one in western Wayne County and four in Oakland (see box).

METROPOLITAN FUND, the foundation that promotes many regional projects, is interested in new towns and is planning a pair of conferences to bring experts on the subject into the region.

"We're sending our offices to bring people together to look at the thing," says MF President Kent Mathewson. "It may be that no spark will be kindled. It may be that a spark will be kindled."

MF itself has no desire to be a builder or operator of a new town, says Mathewson, but intends to act as a "catalyst" to get others thinking and working on it.

Before you jump to the conclusion that planning a new town is too visionary an idea to become a reality, consider MF's attitude toward regional projects — TALUS, the Council of Governments, the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority, New Detroit Inc. MF

comes up with an idea, gets others to step in and take over, and then MF glides out.

THAT'S HOW Roger Marz sees the picture of new towns in southeastern Michigan — as MF's consultant in the first phase.

It's strange that a political scientist should be academically interested in this field. One would guess that a new towns expert would be a sociologist, city planner or architect.

"I did my undergraduate work in an engineering school — Illinois Tech — and I roomed with architecture students. My specialties in political science have been political parties and local government, and the relation of technological change to society."

Marz graduated school at Michigan State, Marz did a study of the effect of moving to the suburbs on people's politics. Using 400 Livonia residents, he debunked the notion that Detroit Democrats turn Republican when they move to suburbia, although some attitudes change. Rather, he said, the people who move out of Detroit tend to be more Republican in the first place, and don't really switch party loyalties.

But about new towns...

NEW TOWNS have been built with much attention in Sweden, Finland, Great Britain, Reston, Va., and Columbia, Md.

"The classic planners" said Marz, "would love to have a situation like Britain's, where the central government controlled land use, where it controlled industrial location, and where all the housing was public housing. That would have total control over every single lumpy."

"Well, I don't really think you can plan things out to the last detail. Take Britain's garden cities: They planned lovely towns, but there was nothing for the farmers to do."

For the United States, Marz visualizes something "more on the order of partially planned communities. There are a few persistent problems in development that could be overcome with coordination."

WHEN THERE is no planning, Marz says, a new development can mean "terrible impacts on education, terrible impacts on the transportation system."

The merchants are all making money, and the city out there is collecting taxes. But an expanding city had to be built to accommodate the traffic. That hits all the taxpayers in the state."

While a new town is supposed to be a well planned community, it isn't a "model" community where people flee from social ills and leave a central city ghetto or rural slum behind to pick up the pieces. Unlike some Overland suburbs, which have zoned in only

## What TALUS Is Proposing...

"Wayne County will include one 'new town' in the Van Buren/Sumpter Township area just south of the City of Belleville. This new community should attract an ultimate population of 100,000."

"Located between two major regional airports and their supporting industrial functions, together with the Ford Rawsonville installation and the commercial/industrial developments oriented to I-275, a substantial employment base will be established in the immediate area..."

"Four 'new town' developments are proposed in Oakland County: Paint Creek Valley (Oakland Township); Scripps Estate-Keatington area (Orion Township); White Lake-Highland area (White Lake Township); Walled Lake-Novri area (Novi and Commerce Townships)."

"These 'metro-centers' are projected to attract populations of around 50,000 in the Paint Creek and White Lake Developments, and from 75,000 to 100,000 persons in the Scripps-Keatington and Walled Lake concentrations."

"Employment opportunities are planned or presently exist within reasonable distance of each 'new town'..."

—TALUS, Preliminary 1990 Plan

state authority. New York State has a state development authority — it assembles and sells land. It's just now starting. It has, I think, 3,000 acres outside Schenectady and 9,000 outside Poughkeepsie."

A third possibility is the federal government, which during the depression started several towns with names like Greenbelt and Green Acres. Marz considers it unlikely that the federal government would do it now—and not even desirable.

A fourth possibility, Marz says, is a special-purpose nonprofit corporation. Such an organization could assemble the great chunk of land and vast amounts of capital needed to finance a project."

There are, in addition, vast problems above and beyond land and capital — legal and social problems.

The new town developers in Maryland and Virginia could deal with county governments, which would be large enough to think big. But in Michigan, a developer would have to deal with a township, most likely.

One possible solution, Marz suggests, is that the state, which gives townships their zoning powers, could transfer some power to regional agencies which could deal with the developer.

"THERE'S ONE other nasty problem politically," he said. "At what point in time do the people who move into a new town take over control of their own land? When they do, it means they can disrupt the development plan, if they wish. This would be tough on a private developer."

A further problem new towns face is providing such services as a hospital, medical care, dental care, welfare organizations, religious institutions and culture.

"One of the things new towns

have tried to do to get instant culture is get a college."

AMERICANS' URBAN development has been criticized by the experts as ugly, haphazard, wasteful of land, uncoordinated to serve the consumer, unbalanced in its tax base, unbalanced in its social character, insufficient in its provisions for recreation land, short-sighted in planning for its water and sewer

needs, careless in its planning for traffic, unnecessarily geared toward excessive automobile travel.

The houses, schools, stores, churches, offices, factories, theaters — these are going to be built anyway.

And so the new town visionaries are only suggesting. Why can't some of it, at least, be coordinated to make urban living as pleasant as possible?

vice chairman); Russ Gilbert, Town & Country Dodge, Inc., Farmington (publicity); Homer Hargrove of LeBaron Motor Sales, Inc., Wayne (ticket sales); and Lawrence Falvey, Falvey Sales and Service, Farmdale (auto show dinner).

The 1970 Detroit Auto Show, first major show in the nation this year, opens at Cobo Hall for a nine-day run on Nov. 15. More than 300 domestic, foreign and recreational vehicles will be exhibited.

Doug Dalgleish, vice president of Charles Dalgleish Cadillac, Detroit, and chairman for the 5th Detroit Auto Show, has named a committee of six to be responsible for various show activities.

Members of the 1970 Auto Show committee and assignments include:

Jerry Bliefeld of Jerry Bliefeld Ford, Inc., Detroit (entertainment); Ed Schmidt, Ed Schmidt Fordland, Farmdale (show

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