

2.2 How the Suburbs Got the Way They Are

New Jersey is a suburban state. The suburban landscape is virtually dictated by traditional zoning ordinances. This zoning, based on the notions of separating incompatible land uses and maximizing the size of residential and nonresidential building lots, has become a prescription for community incoherence and immobility.

The Migration to the Suburbs

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most New Jerseyans lived in industrial cities. Many aspects of urban and even small town life were not at all pleasant. Overcrowding in tenements resulted in stress and disease. Factories spewed forth noxious fumes and noise. Such conditions precipitated the migration, first of families, then of businesses, to the new suburbs. This movement began in force in the 1920s, and accelerated in the years after World War II.

By the early 1980s, the New Jersey population overwhelmingly resided and worked in the suburbs. In 1984, 80% of the state's "urbanized" population (those within areas defined by the Bureau of the Census as metropolitan) resided in the suburbs. Almost 84% of the state's labor force was employed there. The corresponding national figures were 48% and 45%. Measured against the span of New Jersey history, this transformation occurred in a very short period of time.

Most recently, new development has occurred in "growth corridors." These corridors have tended to follow the major state and interstate highways. Development, particularly of new office parks, is especially strong where these highways intersect. A recent report from the Rutgers Center for Urban Policy Research found that employment (chiefly office) in the nine principal New Jersey growth corridors has grown at rates well over the state's overall rate, and three times the state's overall rate during the period from 1972 to 1980.

Mobility in the Suburbs

The automobile has been a critical factor in suburban history. Metropolitan growth, particularly the suburbanization of

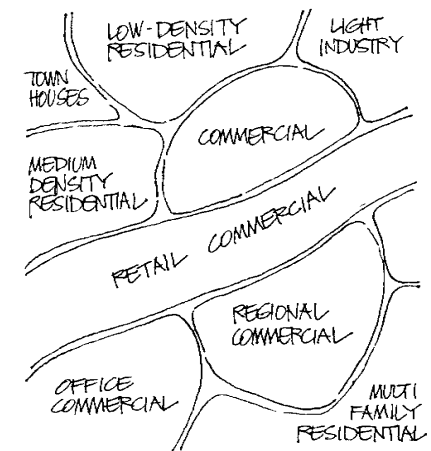
people and jobs, has been largely facilitated by construction of interstate highways, first radially from the urban cores, then circumferentially around them. The inherent forces of suburbanization were greatly accelerated by this lavish government investment in private transportation.

The suburbanization of people and of jobs has been accompanied by a radical transformation in movement patterns. The most conspicuous changes are in work trips. The rapid growth of jobs has created all sorts of commutation patterns. Suburb-to-suburb commuter trips have become the predominant flow pattern. The traditional "radial" commuter trips from the suburbs to the city center, while still growing in number, have become of secondary importance.

The automobile has greatly increased the number of all commuting trips. We are a nation virtually dependent on cars for mobility. We have built our lives around our use of the automobile, a dependency not likely to lessen in the near future. Indeed, a combined result of the worker boom and the suburbanization of jobs is the increase of automobiles used by each household, from 1.03 per household in 1960 to 1.61 per household in 1980. Given the decline in the number of persons per household, the number of vehicles per capita actually almost doubled in this period.

The Role of Land Use Regulations

Suburban zoning began in the 1920s. It evolved primarily to protect the developing suburbs from urban blight. Zoning was based on two principles. First, the "uses" of land were to be separate. Noisome factories were to be isolated from residential areas; less expensive homes were to be kept away



REFERENCES

- Bebout, John E., and Ronald J. Grele, *Where Cities Meet: The Urbanization of New Jersey*. Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1964.
- Gottmann, Jean, *Megalopolis. The Urbanized Northeastern Seaboard of the United States*. Prepared for the Twentieth Century Fund. Norwood, MA: The Plimpton Press, 1961.
- Jackson, Kenneth T., *Crabgrass Frontier, The Suburbanization of the United States*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Sternlieb, George, and Alex Schwartz, *New Jersey Growth Corridors*. New Brunswick, NJ: Center for Urban Policy Research, Rutgers University, 1986.
- Toll, Seymour, *Zoned America*. New York: Grossman Publishers, 1969.

from higher-income neighborhoods. Second, "densities," particularly of housing areas, but also of factories, offices, and shopping centers, were to be kept as low as possible.

Another basis for our traditional land use regulations was to facilitate the subdivision and ultimate development of real

property. A premise of land use regulations was that all the land would eventually be developed, a condition referred to as *buildout*. But in reality, growth will only extend so far from metropolitan centers. Beyond a certain truly rural boundary, there is far more land than demand for its use.

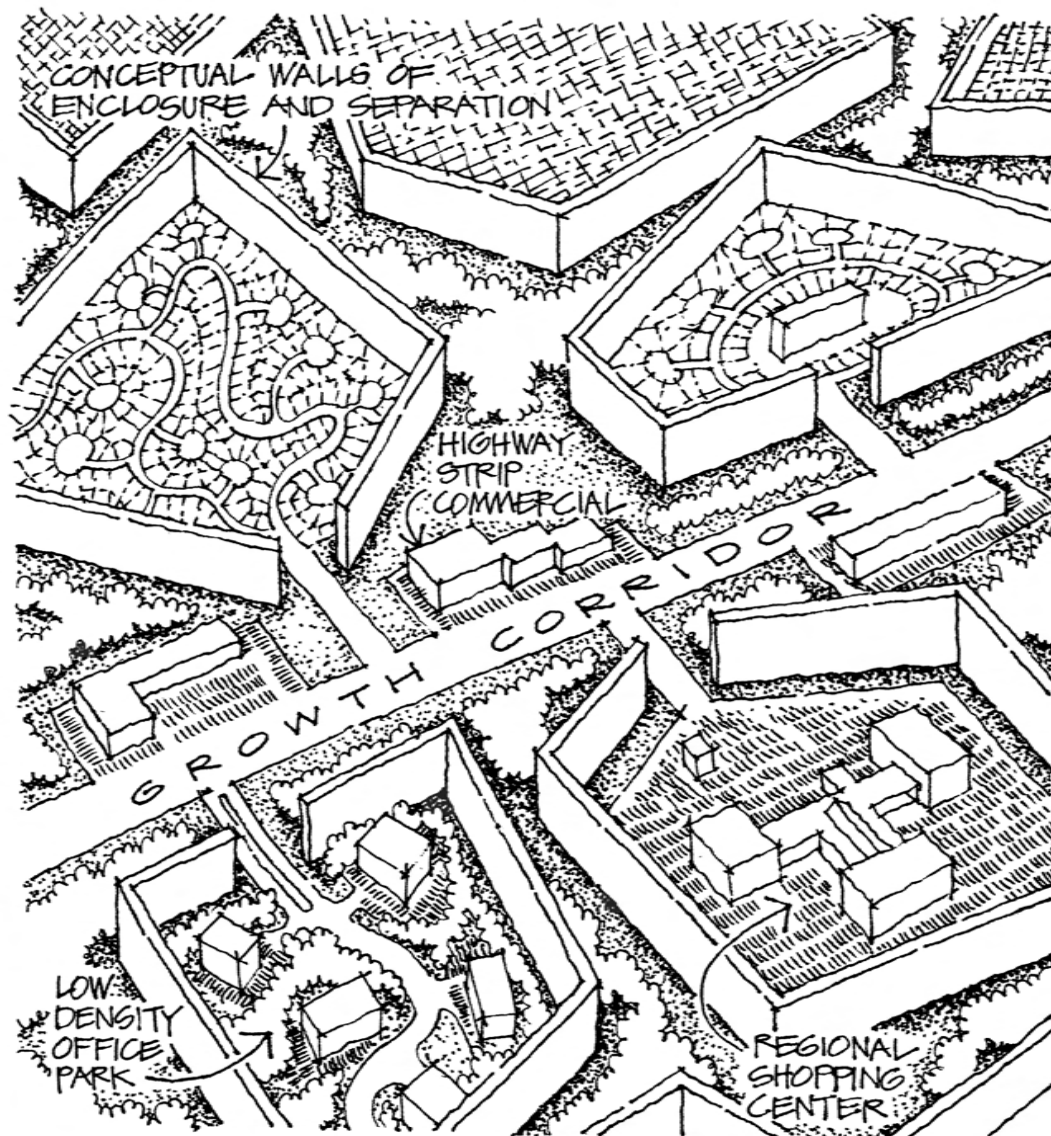
The Effect of Land Use Regulations

The interaction of metropolitan economic forces and a network of local regulations can have devastating effects: a sprawling metropolis where every place looks the same, where the natural world is desecrated, where roadsides are blighted, where cities have deteriorated, and where it is harder and harder simply to get around.

Within the community itself, we see individual properties developed as if they were surrounded by walls. No relationship to surrounding properties or to the larger community is contemplated by either the developer or the community planner. This attitude is in part a legacy of the traditional purposes of our zoning and subdivision regulations, as noted above. But it also results from the deficiency of our two-dimensional community plans, which typically do not specify the interconnections essential to a coherent community.

All too frequently, two-dimensional plans such as the one on page 16 become the "walled" communities illustrated in the adjacent cartoon. Section 7.5 discusses the need for new concepts of community design that will address the critical interrelationships among projects, and Section 2.3 presents traditional community models which are meeting contemporary needs.

Though there are signs of change, these conditions continue to be abetted by land use regulations that still embody the two original principles: *separation of uses* and *low densities*. But these principles are less and less relevant. Suburban workplaces are unlikely to spout fumes. They are more likely to be handsome, well landscaped and quiet. Nor are the densities of our residential areas likely to create public health hazards, as they might have in former times. And, property values are no longer so closely related to the size of a lot. They are more likely to be determined by the quality of the man-made and the natural environs. □



2.3 Traditional Models For Contemporary Needs

Though metropolitan sprawl has swept across the landscape, it has not completely engulfed the small towns and cities that predated it. Not so many years ago, these were New Jersey's predominant types of development. Now they are worth looking at as settings for contemporary life and as models for contemporary development.

The Qualities of Village Life

Certainly we cannot abandon suburbia and retreat into the past. The mobility brought by the automobile has changed both our society and our patterns of settlement too decisively for that to happen in the short term.

Nevertheless, the traditional "centers" – cities, villages, crossroads, hamlets – have important qualities that are worth a second look. Cities and towns, at least initially, were compact; people walked. Often, residential areas were not segregated from shops or even from factories. There were apartments over shops. There was a wide variety of housing, from dense tenements to row houses to expansive, wooded neighborhoods.

Community life was important. Public places were provided for community events. There were churches, schools, and libraries. There were also public squares and parks. These provided a setting for community life and contributed to a *sense of place*. Traditional centers had discernible edges; at a certain point, one was suddenly in the "country."

One need not look far, in most metropolitan areas, to find traditional communities that are successfully meeting contemporary needs. These cities, villages, and towns have main streets that lend them a sense of place. Pharmacies, hardware stores, markets, libraries, playgrounds, and schools are near at hand, often within walking distance. The small town environment enhances interaction with neighbors and friends, the basis of community life.

The Contemporary Mixed Use Center

The real estate industry has coined a term for new development projects that emulate some of the qualities of traditional

downtowns: mixed use centers. According to the Urban Land Institute (ULI), the nation's leading development research group, a "mixed use" project has three major characteristics: first, three or more significant revenue-producing uses that are mutually supporting; second, significant functional and physical integration of project components (and thus an intensive use of land); and third, development in conformance with a comprehensive plan.

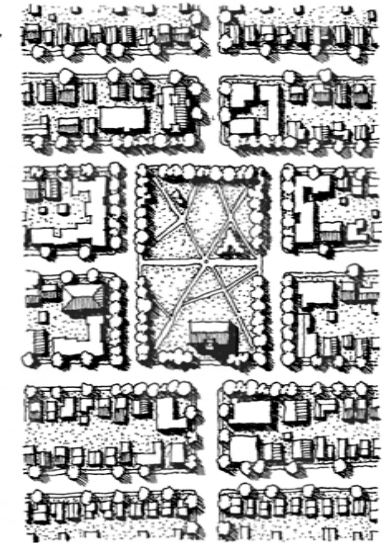
Mixed use developments should not be confused with "multi-use" developments. The latter may meet the above criteria, but not be *integrated*. That is, a multi-use project may have several uses on site, but not allow pedestrian or even convenient vehicular movement within its bounds.

In New Jersey, some forward-thinking real estate developers are building mixed use projects, recognizing their compatibility with contemporary social needs and popular expectations. But often developers are constrained by archaic land use regulations that still dictate the separation of uses and low densities of conventional suburbia.

The concept of mixed use centers needs time to evolve. We should not expect to achieve in a few years the qualities that have taken centuries to evolve in our cities and small towns. For this reason, a realistic time frame must be incorporated into the community development process.

Four Types of Centers

Four types of centers are described below. Many more variations are possible. In reviewing development applications, communities will want to be aware of the type of center to be created by the proposed project.



REFERENCES

- Houstoun, Lawrence O., Jr., "Living Villages: Thoughts on the Future of Village Form." *Small Town*, November-December, 1988.
- MSM Regional Council, *An Action Agenda for Managing Regional Growth: Final Report of the Regional Forum*. West Windsor, NJ: The MSM Regional Council, 1988.
- Mumford, Lewis, *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects*. New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1961.
- N.J. State Planning Commission, *Communities of Place: The Preliminary State Development and Redevelopment Plan for the State of New Jersey*, Volumes I, II, and III. Trenton, NJ: N.J. State Planning Commission, November, 1988.

1. Neighborhoods

These are predominantly residential areas that may also include schools, convenience shopping, and local recreation. Densities are relatively low, but not so low as to preclude walking. The neighborhoods are near larger centers and accessible to them by public transportation. The neighborhoods border areas designated as permanent open space.

2. Town Centers

Town centers provide shopping, professional services, recreation, and community facilities such as churches,



Preference of New Jerseyans for Different Community Types

	Very Desirable	Somewhat Desirable	Not Very Desirable
Living in a city	10%	22%	67%
Living in a new suburb	22	44	33
Living in an old suburb	38	45	17
Living in a small town	50	33	16
Living in a rural area	34	33	30

Source: Eagleton Institute, *Housing Preferences of New Jerseyans*. Prepared for the New Jersey Builders Association, 1987, Table 3.

libraries, and schools. They are a focus for community life. A variety of housing, single-family and apartments, is integrated into or immediately accessible to the town centers. Town centers are intended to serve adjoining neighborhoods.

3. Regional Centers

These are the region's principal new employment centers. They have a mix of uses: employment, retail, hotels, housing. They require densities supporting bus, pedestrian, and paratransit service. They should be located near rail stations and major highway intersections. Regional centers must be limited in number because of their possible adverse impact on other regional centers and on nearby cities.

4. Urban Centers

These are the historic focus of industry, commerce, and culture. They should retain the largest share of the region's jobs, but also support regional retail and cultural facilities. Housing should be available within walking distance. Dependable and efficient public transportation is indispensable to the vitality of cities, particularly their downtowns. □

4.4 Understanding Housing Densities

"Residential density" is a commonly used measure of development intensity. Residential densities are generally increasing, for good reason. Real estate market factors such as smaller households and the desire for "maintenance-free living" are one cause. The lower costs of public facilities and services are another. The quality of the design often outweighs the traditionally perceived disadvantages of higher density housing.

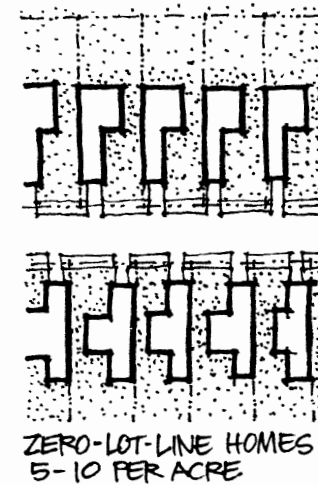
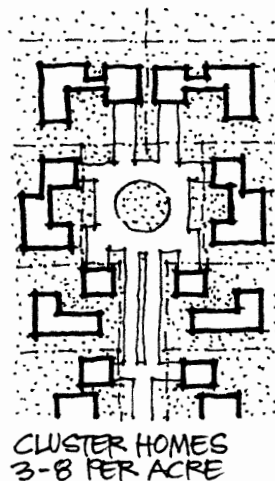
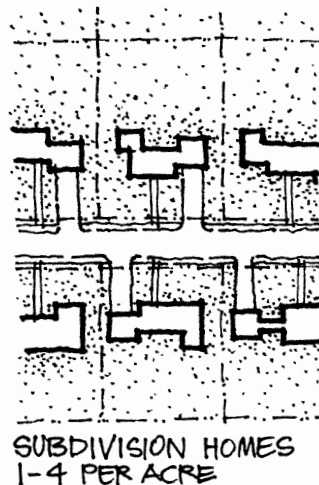
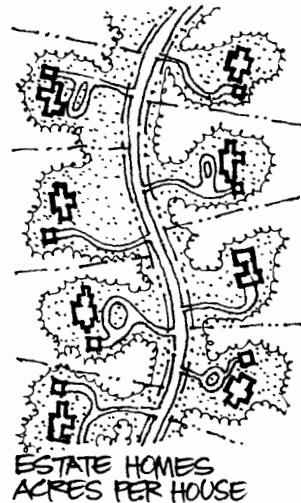
Gross and Net Density Defined

Density is usually expressed as either *gross* or *net*. Gross density means the total number of dwelling units divided by the total land area of the site or area, excluding nothing. These terms are illustrated on page 42.

Net density means the total number of dwelling units divided by the net area of the lot or site. The net area typically excludes streets, streams, ponds and other water area, easements, and areas with environmental constraints, such as flood plains, wetlands, steep slopes, and shallow depth to seasonal high water. The areas excluded must be defined precisely to avoid confusion and misunderstandings.

Sometimes land use regulations use the concept of net density without actually stating the term, as in a regulation that allows a maximum number of dwelling units on each acre of "developable land," the latter being defined elsewhere in the ordinance.

The difference between gross and net density is critical. Roads and parking, both included in gross density, often require 20% of a site. Some jurisdictions establish both a maximum gross density and a minimum net density for a particular area. This approach requires dwelling units to be concentrated on some parts of a site, while other parts are preserved as open space.



REFERENCES

Dooper-Marcus, Clare, and Wendy Sarkissian, *Housing as if People Mattered: Site Design Guidelines for Medium-Density Family Housing*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986.

Land Design/Research, Inc., *Cost Effective Site Planning: Single Family Development*. Washington, DC: The National Association of Home Builders, 1976.

Real Estate Research Corporation, *The Costs of Sprawl: Environmental and Economic Costs of Alternative Development Patterns at the Urban Fringe*. Washington, DC: U.S. Council on Environmental Quality, 1974.

Smythe, Robert B., and Charles D. Laidlaw, *Residential Growth in Loudon County: Density-Related Public Costs*. Washington, DC: American Farmland Trust, 1984.

Unterman, Richard and Robert Small, *Site Planning for Cluster Housing*. New York, NY: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1977.

Wentling, James W. and Lloyd W. Bookout, eds., *Density by Design*. Washington, DC: ULI-The Urban Land Institute, 1988.

The three major types of housing—detached housing, attached housing, and apartments—may be built at various densities. Whether the density is “low,” “medium,” or “high” is relative to the prevailing pattern of density in a region; no absolute definition exists.

Detached housing means each dwelling unit is in its own structure on its own site, and is normally occupied by a single household or family. Attached housing means that each unit has a separate outdoor entrance, but that two or more units are joined side by side or one above another. Apartments may meet this same definition or they may provide multiple dwellings on numerous floors in one building.

Housing Densities and Public Values

Housing densities are generally increasing, for some very good reasons. Some are related to the housing market, others to public policy.

Affordability is the critical market factor. During the 1980s, housing costs rose more sharply than the consumer price index. At the same time, real per capita incomes declined. Higher densities allow the developer to reduce the unit costs of housing by amortizing the cost of land, infrastructure, and some other factors over a greater number of units.

Consumer surveys show that an increasing number of home buyers prefer other uses for their leisure time than maintaining large lots. Many also want to reduce commutation times. These home buyers are often purchasing a community lifestyle as much as they are purchasing homes.

The design of higher density housing has become far more attractive in recent years. Indeed, many higher density housing projects are more harmonious with the community and the natural landscape than are their large lot counterparts.

Higher density housing can maintain its value as well as detached housing on large lots. While there once may have been a strong relationship between housing density and value, that relationship is less clear today. With residential projects of high or low density, the quality of design is the critical factor.

Government costs entailed in large lot residential development may be far higher than those associated with high density housing. Detached homes on large lots consume land that is highly valuable for its proximity to highways, sewerage and other public facilities. The same applies to farmland and other lands that should be protected from a natural resource standpoint. Factors such as these often add up to a strong argument for higher densities—in the right locations. □

