

BUILDING A UNIVERSITY CENTERED CITY

The idea of The Irvine Company building a new town around a new University of California campus on the famous Irvine Ranch was first suggested by planner/architect William Pereira in an October 1959 study jointly authorized by Company and University. Six years later, in the spring of 1965, the nascent town named Irvine became home to its' first residents and the newly opened campus of the University of California system named Irvine welcomed its first freshman class. On December 21, 1971, in what was described as one of heaviest turnouts in Orange County incorporation election history, the residents of Irvine overwhelmingly approved becoming Orange County's 26th incorporated city. It is the twelve-year journey from idea to incorporation that I chronicle here.

A trip that saw the Company fight off a 1962 attempt by the City of Santa Ana to grab off a strategic portion of Company land designated for the future city. Followed in 1970 by the successful grab of a portion of the new towns industrial lands by the adjacent city of Newport Beach. And while the Company was unsuccessfully holding off Newport Beach's intrusion into lands the Company was reserving for the future new town the County's planning commission was refusing to set a public hearing for the Company's proposed central sector master plan. And finally in the wake of Newport Beach's annexation and the County's refusal to set hearings for the Company's central sector master plan both Company and Irvine citizens began the process of incorporation, a process that soon was opposed by an important Regent of the University and the County's largest and oldest city, Santa Ana.

THE CASE FOR CITYHOOD CAME EARLY

Imbedded in Pereira's 1959-University/Town study was the recommendation that the future town ultimately become self-governing by incorporating itself. In that report Pereira addressed the issue of future city-hood by putting forth three alternatives: (1) Remaining unincorporated under the jurisdiction of the County of Orange, (2) Annexing to an adjacent existing city, (3) Establishing its' independence as a legal city through the process of incorporation.

Having identified the three choices Pereira made the case for the incorporation option by citing the disadvantages of the other two. His argument against them was they would perpetually leave the new nascent community vulnerable to be: ***"totally or in part annexed by an adjoining city before having an opportunity to decide its (own) ultimate status."*** An option he considered undesirable because: ***"The natural desires, needs, goals and aspirations of the surrounding cities do not, in our opinion, appear to be the same as those of the proposed university town. Older, well-established interests within these existing cities might make progress and identity slow and difficult in the newer, annexed portion of the city."*** And to demonstrate local support for idea of ultimate cityhood for the proposed new town Pereira submitted copies of agreements he had secured from the cities surrounding the Ranch declaring their support and their pledge **not** to annex any of the Company's lands within the 10,000-acres identified for the new city.

Addressing the crucial issue of annexation or incorporation, Pereira asked a question that might have been posed by our nation's founding fathers: ***"By what means can the new community secure the governmental and legislative representation, the required services and the sense of identity necessary to establish and perpetuate its ideals?"*** It is the sort of question that goes to the heart of what it means to live not just in a community, but also in a democratic society.

WHEN AND HOW BIG A CITY

By the opening of the new campus in 1965 we still were working within the 33,000-acre 1964 southern sector general plan approved by the County. However, with the opening of University Park, Irvine's first residential village, we began expanding our planning into the central sector of the ranch requiring us to resolve the latent question of either another new town or expand Irvine.

We explored all the issues of planning, infrastructure, flood control and drainage, school district boundaries and governance. The central valley of the ranch geographically had the shape of a large saucer. The eastern slope of the San Joaquin hills and the western slope of the Lomas de Santiago hills both drained into the flat planes of the central ranch valley. By extending the city's boundaries to the rims of the eastern and western hills we provide a strong visual edge while also containing the natural drainage from hills to flat lands within one city. Fortunately the case for one versus two cities was materially strengthened by the fact the existing elementary school district, Rancho San Joaquin, encompassed the entire central sector. A district that we were advocating become a kindergarten through high school unified district. Our conclusion was: One town. That meant Pereira's 10,000-acre, 100,000-population town would be expanded five fold to a city of 50,000-acres.

As we were preparing to file the Ranch's central sector master plan with the county and with that the proposed expansion of the future city's boundaries I sought support from the University. Therefore, before filing it I met with UCI's Chancellor, Dan Aldrich, seeking his support of the enlarged city. After our meeting Chancellor Aldrich said he had no objections but wanted to bring it before the University Regents. Prior to presenting the revised plan to the Regents Dr. Aldrich invited Regent Norton Simon to the campus and asked me to present the plan to him. Regent Simon had originally opposed the Irvine Ranch location for the campus and Aldrich was hoping to avoid it becoming an issue.

My meeting with Regent Simon did not go well. He paid little heed to any of my planning points. He asked no questions nor offered any specific objections. He ended the meeting, however, by inferring that the Company must have some ulterior self-interest motifs in proposing the changes and he was opposed to enlarging the city.

After Regent Simon left I told Chancellor Aldrich of my disappointment but that I heard nothing from Simon that dissuaded me from seeking approval of the central sector plan and in so doing we would make it clear of our advocacy for the enlarged city.

So on March 19, 1970, with encouragement of the County's planning staff we submitted our central sector General Plan to the Orange County Planning Department. Although what we were actually seeking was General Plan approval of the central sector of the Ranch as with our submittal in 1963 of the southern sector General Plan **we made it clear that a major premise of the plan was the enlarged city.** And that both the County and Company understood that ultimately that was a decision to be decided by the future residents.

THE CAMPAIGN FOR CITYHOOD BEGINS

In April 1970 we met with a group of Irvine residents exploring the idea and timing of officially incorporating Irvine. On June 24, 1970 that group officially formed a group, called council of the Communities of Irvine (CCI) to study the idea if the city was now ready to incorporate.

As that group began their exhaustive study I became concerned that I had not heard by from Regent Simon or officially from the University. I was soon to hear from Regent Simon thru the press. On Oct. 5th Simon holds a press conference and states he “believes he is raising questions which properly should be asked about the relationship between the Irvine Company and the University.” He then charged that the proposed five fold enlargement of Irvine from that originally proposed would result in “unjust enrichment” of the Company which he estimated at “\$450-million” and stated that at their next Regents meeting he would ask his fellow regents to “begin a suit for compensatory and punitive damages against the Irvine Company for proceeding with the development of the City of Irvine in a manner which violates the agreement with the university.” He concluded by stating “the public will be shocked” when the “full story” is told at the Oct. 15th Regents’ meeting. As the local press reported, Simon “said he has information which will impel the regents to file a law suit to recover all or part of that amount” and called the matter “the largest cookie jar that can be recalled without going back to the Teapot Dome scandal” but refused to “divulge details of his accusation.”

At the Regent’s November, 1970 meeting Irvine’s prospective incorporation became the basis for further discussion and debate. UC assistant vice president Robert J. Evans reviewed events of recent months which compelled, he said, the Council of Communities of Irvine (CCI) to “act with haste” in seeking protection of the future city’s industrial tax base. Evans said the “CCI” was “forced to act swiftly when the city of Newport Beach moved to embrace a sizeable portion of Irvine Industrial Complex.” He then went on to say, “the Regents were now faced with three choices: To move forward and support incorporation, which could create a viable new city; or to move backward by opposing incorporation and thus kill hopes for a new city; or to take no position, which would be irresponsible.”

Regent Simon countered with a motion calling for ***“a delay in Regents’ endorsement of the new city until the issue received more thorough study.”*** Governor Reagan, who sat beside Simon, said, ***“the real question facing the board is whether Irvine will be one planned community or a number of communities dividing up our tax base.”***

After further discussions the Regents voted on two motions. The first was Simons's asking for a delay. It lost 7-12 with one abstention. The final vote was on UC President Hitch's motion to ***"approve in principle the incorporation of an appropriate and viable city of not less than 10,000 acres, including the UCI campus."*** ***His motion won by a vote of 18 to 2.***

On December 21, 1971 the polls had barely closed before it was clear that Irvine's residents overwhelmingly supported incorporation. Then the final vote was tallied. Incorporation had won by more than a 2-1 margin.

Two days later, George Leidal writing for the Daily Pilot had this to say: ***"It isn't every day a reporter gets a chance to observe the birth of a new city. Somehow the past few weeks have led me to feel like I've just been assigned to cover, via time capsule, the sailing of the Mayflower. People I've met in Irvine, thus far, exude an infectious spirit of hope for their new city. The seas the new city government and the city's 18,000 residents will sail in the next few months are smoothed by the thought that this city, unlike any other in history, may become something other than a pretty, suburbia-perfect new Town. It may indeed set the standard for a new city.***

The difference between Irvine and any other new town is that while others are truly company towns, dominated by the master-planning of the developers, Irvine is the lone experiment in residential land use now controlled by a citizen selected city government."

A RETROSPECTIVE

As I reflect on more than thirty-four years of Irvine's cityhood I personally believe George Leidal got it right. Incorporating Irvine in its infancy may indeed have ***"set the standard for a new city."*** City councils and mayors have come and gone. Irvine Company management and ownership have changed. Its fifth chancellor now oversees UCI. But during each step and change along the way the new players have had to accommodate their respective interest to the others and most particularly to what is best for the city of Irvine.

During the early years of the city's formation I likened the city council, company and the university to a three-legged stool. We each played an essential and unique role in the city's development. What is essential, however, is that no leg of that stool become larger than the others. From time to time events and circumstances may have caused one leg to become larger or smaller than the others, but before long the resulting instability of the stool signaled a need to bring it back into balance.

Today Irvine is home to well over 175,000 men, women and children. Thousands of companies now put Irvine on their stationery. Irvine children attend one of the finest public school systems in the state. The city can boasts that it has more parks, open-space and bicycle paths then any other city in the county. And with The Irvine Company's establishment of the 50,000-acre nature preserve, a giant open space will forever define its boundary.

Planners, governmental officials and private developers from around the world seek information about what has been described as the "most successful new town built in the 20th century." UCI is now rated as one of the finest public universities in the country.

I've been privileged to be associated with the creation of the city of Irvine even before its birth. Like all cities Irvine has its warts as well as virtues. I wish there was more affordable housing and less dependence on the automobile. But all in all, we members of the three-legged stool have reason to be proud of what Irvine, the city and Irvine, the university have become. George Leidal's prophecy has in most respects become realty. Irvine has ***"indeed set the standard for a new City."*** ***And the University of Irvine has indeed set the standard for building a new 21st century campus.***