

EDITORIAL COMMENTS

Your comparisons of Reston and Columbia with Irvine reminded me of the mid-sixties and debates we “community planners/builders” had critiquing each other’s “new town.” However, when comparing our efforts with how others were approaching their “towns” I often had to remind myself that the size and location of the Irvine Ranch presented a significantly different challenge than any of them had to deal with. Our charge was to plan the 93,000-acre Irvine Ranch. The proposed “new town” was to become an integral part of that effort but by no means the only one.

And, as far as Columbia and Reston were concerned the physical size of their towns were limited to the parcels they had recently acquired. We had the flexibility and therefore the luxury of allowing decisions of size and relationships to regional and local conditions to flow from the planning we were to conduct on our 93,000 acres. Pereira’s 1960 phase II plan was put together in less than four months for the sole purpose of establishing the feasibility and desirability of building a new town around the proposed new campus. Reacting to the limited scope he was allowed at that time Pereira recommended the size of the new town to be 10,000 acres and have a maximum population of 100,000. A size that was identical to Sir Ebenezer Howard’s prototype English new town.

As we began planning the entire ranch we began to search for more natural borders for the new town. We also were exploring how best to provide the all important water and sewer service for both the new town and the portion of the ranch not served by one of the existing cities or districts. Ultimately the different studies that the different school districts were conducting in their mandate to unify played a huge role in expanding the new towns size. During those early years expanding the boundaries of Pereira’s first plan was only a planning and corporate decision for us. For Reston and Columbia it would have been a prohibitively expensive one.

But the difference in scale and scope between our planning efforts and either Reston or Columbia wasn’t the only difference between us. The backgrounds between Bob Simon, Jim Rouse and The Irvine Company couldn’t have been more different. Both Bob Simon and Jim Rouse were experienced real estate developers. The Irvine Ranch’s managers were ranchers. Other than selling or leasing off parcels of land on the edges of the ranch to developers from time to time the Company had no experience in either land development or real estate. But what the Company lacked in experience it more than made up for it in the fact it owned its’ land free and clear of any debt. Neither Rouse nor Simon had such a luxury. A fact that ultimately cost both of their towns to be foreclosed on by their lender/partners.

On the other hand, the gigantic size of the Irvine Ranch demanded a planning effort well beyond anything they faced. In turn that effort took time beyond anything they could have afforded but the lack of mortgage payments allowed us.

So when I arrived in 1960 the only portion of the Ranch that had any plan for it’s urbanization was the 10,000 acres surrounding the proposed new 1000 acre University of California Campus. A size that by its’ self was challenge enough and, incidentally, larger than most of the proposed new towns emerging in the United States. The first obvious question was if the new town was to be 10,000 acres what were we to do with the remaining 83,000 acres. An area three times that of San Francisco. Not only did the Company want to know but also each of the bordering five cities (Anaheim, Tustin, Santa Ana, Newport Beach and Laguna Beach.) and the county of Orange wanted to know. Most of those cities, in fact, had their own ideas of how the Ranch should be carved up. And, since significant portions of the ranch were within their planning spheres of influence we needed to address their ambitions as well as our own.

Santa Ana was for years the most politically dominant city in the County. However, by 1960 it found itself boxed in by other relatively new cities on all of its sides with the exception of the Irvine Ranch. For years city officials had secretly coveted expanding into the central valley of the Ranch and ultimately to the ocean. Since the eastern border of the new town proposed by Pereira barely protruded into that area they apparently decided to block any idea of expanding the town’s boundaries into territory they thought should be theirs.

Although Pereira had secured support for our new town through resolutions of non-annexation from each of these cities, early in 1962 Santa Ana launched a surprise grab across the ranch. Leisure World, a new retirement community, was developing on the Company’s southern border. In a deal struck behind closed doors the developer of Leisure World agreed to annex his property to the city in exchange for more favorable zoning than the County was allowing him.

However, there was one serious obstacle to their deal. Nine and one-half miles of the Ranch separated Santa Ana from Leisure World and cities can only annex land contiguous to their boundaries.

But that didn't deter the city. We woke up one morning to discover that Santa Ana had seemingly solved that obstacle by linking Leisure World to the city via a 300-foot wide, nine and one-half mile strip across the ranch. What that strip immediately indicated is that Santa Ana wished to contain the new town to the 10,000 size since it was bounded by Newport Beach on its western edge and the proposed strip on its eastern edge.

We immediately objected to what we described as a "dumb-bell annexation" but it appeared we had no means of stopping it until the State of California stepped in and blocked it. It had long been a policy of the State to not interfere with local annexation wars but their commitment to the new town and University was enough to convince them to enter the fray. After six months of non-stop political and legal skirmishes the "dumbbell annexation" war came to a peaceful end. The city dropped their support and the Company agreed to annex a portion of our northern boundary to the city.

This battle, however, underscored our need to deal with the central portion of the Ranch. Was it ultimately to be annexed to one of the existing cities? Was it to become another new town? Or should we expand Pereira's 10,000-acre town to include it. Ultimately, that's what we did but not without some resistance from some members of the Board of Regents. But that's a story for another time. The point here is that our announced desire for the new town to ultimately become an incorporated city and not remain a child of the county or a postal zone in an existing one was no longer an academic planning concept. Both the Irvine Company and the State showed we were willing to pull out all stops to protect that goal. And, though we already had more on our planning plate than we seemingly had time we immediately began addressing the subject of the new town's ultimate physical size. The fact that it's size increased from the original 10,000 acres to almost 50,000 acres was primarily motivated by the Ranch's topography and the fact that its' boundaries would nearly coincide with one unified school district. The fact that its city and school governance pertained to the same boundaries was compelling.

Even without the distraction of the annexation battle the size and prominent location of the ranch within our fast growing County forced us to address issues our new town peers didn't have to face. Issues, in hindsight that ultimately had as much impact on our new town as internal concepts of sense of place, densities, mixed uses and relationship to the new campus.

In 1960 significant regional infrastructures and institutions either existed or were designated to be located on the Ranch. I-5, a federal freeway that now goes from Mexico to Canada, crossed the Ranch. Three other freeways were in various phases of planning and design. The ranch was within a dozen local school districts each jealous of their respective territories. Two large military air bases existed on the Ranch. The Orange County airport was also located on the Ranch and would soon become Orange County's major commercial airport. And, although the proposed new University of California campus was the motivation for building the new town, as with its other branches, it would ultimately identify with and draw students from throughout the country and both they and the faculty would live in all the surrounding cities. And, the Ranch's location within one of the largest metropolitan mega-urban growth areas in the world made it highly unlikely that images of college towns such as Ann Arbor and Princeton were realistic models for our new town.

Our primary job, therefore, quickly became one of creating an urbanization plan for the entire 93,000 acres of which the new town was but a part. As a consequence our planning had to incorporate regional and adjacent cities issues, goals and realities to a far greater extent than either Reston or Columbia whose primary goal was to differentiate themselves from their suburban neighbors.

Pereira submitted his phase II plan in May of 1960. The Irvine Company officially made their offer of the 1000-acre gift to the University and an agreement to build a new town around the new campus. The University finally officially accepted the offer in December. For all of us there was no time to spare. The company's offer was contingent on the University opening its doors to students by September of 1965. We wanted our first residents by then also.

In 1960 our future town and campus was still farmland. Valencia orange groves, tomato and asparagus fields and in the hills cowboys and cattle still roamed. Other than three lightly traveled two lane county roads there were no other infrastructures. Nor was there an approved master plan, which the county required, and we needed to determine the size of a major water trunk line needed to serve not only the new campus and our barely defined new town but also much of the ranch. With campus opening scheduled for 1965 we needed an approved county master plan by 1963. The question we first faced was how much of the ranch did we need to include in our master plan. After discussions with the County planning staff and our own engineers we agreed to submit plans in three steps. Step one included the new town, campus and the land between it and the ocean, some 33,000 acres. Following that would be the central parts of the

Ranch and later the top third. When the 33,000 acre southern sector master plan was submitted to the County in 1963 it was the largest general plan ever reviewed by them in the County's history.

The new campus and town wasn't, however, the Company's only interest. We were eager to start development on other parts of the ranch and we immediately began planning two 500 acre parcels that were within the city limits of Newport Beach. One overlooked the upper Newport Bay and became the prototype of our residential village concepts. Because of its location it was named Eastbluff with its first residents moving in 1964. The other became the prototype of our mixed-use commercial, business, hotel and residential village. It was named Newport Center and within it we built a regional shopping center, Fashion Island, which opened in 1966.

The early planning efforts for both EastBluff and Newport Center were instrumental in both ours and the city and county planning organizations community planning learning curve. The basic premises of our future village concepts were hatched during the planning of Eastbluff. We sought a mixture of housing types including single family, town homes and apartments hoping to cater to different incomes, age groups, family composition and taste. Entrances to Eastbluff are contained to two main portals to encourage all residents regards of house type, age, family status or personal taste that all lived in the same village.

The local High School was designated for a site in Eastbluff so we grouped it with two churches near one of the entrances so as to deal with the anticipated heavy traffic and allowing shared parking. In order to provide a center to the village we grouped the local public park (a gift of land), the elementary school, a preschool, boys and girls club and neighborhood shopping center in the center of Eastbluff.

The town houses were built along an extensive greenbelt leading to the central core described above. During the planning process we visited many greenbelt communities including Radburn, New Jersey built in the early 30's. We were particularly impressed with the layout in Radburn with the exception of placing the front doors of the houses on the greenbelt and the garages on the street. One of the criticisms of Radburn was that despite the placement of the homes front doors on the green belt the street entrances became the defacto front doors. So we backed our town homes onto the greenbelt and treated the street side as the front. A policy we have adhered to in each of our villages.

At the time the idea of building town homes in the suburbs and within the same neighborhood was considered extremely risky but upon there opening in early 1964 our introduction of the village concept and a greenbelt neighborhood into here-to-for plain vanilla suburbia proved to be extremely popular.

However, fearful that advertising them as town homes would discourage conservative buyers we advertised them as "homes on a greenbelt." The slight bit of deception worked. The Bluffs, as they are named, became both an instant sales success and in the sixties won many architectural, planning and industry awards. Most satisfying, however, is that through the years both residents and others have continued to admire the entire village of Eastbluff and the sense of place and community it has established despite the mixture of uses and housing types.

The Eastbluff village plan had to be developed as a planned unit development and required the City of Newport Beach to create new planning instruments to make this possible. Those instruments and the village concept became the starting points for future such developments in our new town. The early market success of Eastbluff gave both The Irvine Company and public bodies the courage to continue with our experiments in village and community planning. The fact that we had to process them through an existing public planning process, which needed to weigh them against their historic concepts of planning and neighborhood ideas, was both a challenge and constructive learning process for myself and the Company.

In 1963, shortly before sales began in Eastbluff, we started planning University Park, the first residential village in the new town. We submitted those plans to the county immediately upon approval of our southern sector master plan. As in Eastbluff we mixed housing types, apartments and commercial in village style. An elementary and middle school became the center of the village and bike trails and paths led from the various residential areas to the schools and local mini-parks.

University Park has a mixture of town houses, zero lot line homes and apartments linked together with an extensive bike and pedestrian trail. An innovation for Orange County but merely an extension of what we had successfully done in Eastbluff. University Park's first units went on sale in mid-1965 and, fortunately for all of us, meet with great sales success. Compared to the many subsequent innovative neighborhood designs that have been built on the Irvine Ranch, University Park doesn't receive the attention it deserves. But in 1965, along with Eastbluff, they were the only residential communities that successfully deviated from the traditional suburban detached single-family subdivisions that dominated Orange County. Prior to University Part, critics said homes in Newport Beach were so sought after anything would sell. But, University Park wasn't in Newport Beach. The truth is, it wasn't anywhere.

It's neighbors were jackrabbits and bulldozers building the new San Diego freeway through the ranch. The new University had just opened its doors but that was a half-mile away. What it had, however, is a great neighborhood plan and the excitement of becoming part of a Irvine's new city someday.

While planning Eastbluff and University Park we began to also plan Newport Center. The 500 acre Newport Center was bounded by three existing major roads, Jamboree (a county arterial), McArthur Blvd. (a designated State Hwy.), Pacific Coast Hwy and a new arterial we were to build, Rancho San Joaquin Road. When I arrived in 1960 there were plans to build a regional shopping center at the intersection of McArthur Blvd. and Pacific Coast Hwy. Adjacent to the proposed center existed a private/public golf course, then named Irvine Coast Country club that had been built by the Company. The remaining 500 acres were designated for single-family housing.

Soon after we began planning for Newport Center we informed the city that we were going to radically change the concept for the area. Building a regional shopping center offered us the opportunity to center it within a much more integrated mixed-use village. Obviously reflective of our historic city centers but also able to accommodate modern shopping modes and the automobile.

We began construction on Newport Center and Fashion Island in 1964. Fashion Island opened in 1966 and the Irvine Company moved into its new headquarters within twin nine story office buildings in 1969. Today Newport Center is a fully integrated mixed-use regional center. It consist of two hotels, multiple high rise and low rise office buildings, a large medical center, movie theatres, two shopping complexes (one regional and one local), Newport Beach's main public library and police station, the Newport Harbor Art Museum, local Chamber of Commerce, dozens of restaurants and a five hundred unit apartment complex.

Had the new town challenge not brought such thinking to the Irvine Company I'm convinced that both Eastbluff and Newport Center would have become another of the suburban models prevalent at the time. But their early successes gave all of us the confidence and credibility to do what we ultimately did in the new town of Irvine.

I may be over emphasizing the importance of the ranch's size and regional impact but I'm convinced it is what distinguishes us from most others. For instance, your piece refers only to Irvine's greenbelts, bicycle paths and play fields. But The Irvine Company has offered for public dedication 21,000 acres which becomes part of a 37,000 regional Nature Reserve. Over 9000 acres of the Reserve will be within the city of Irvine but my point is that by linking it to the larger Reserve it connects Irvine to its neighbors and the Region. For many reasons Irvine is an integral part of a vast regional "city."

Our 500 acre Newport Center is a highly urbanized regional entertainment, commercial, business and residential center located in the city of Newport Beach but less than one mile from the city of Irvine. Residents of Irvine as well as Laguna Beach, Santa Ana, Costa Mesa and Newport Beach frequent and identify with it. The same is now true of Irvine's Spectrum whose entertainment and shopping venues attract as many from south Orange County as from Irvine. And during week days provides dozens of lunch and meeting spots for the thousands of men and women who work in Spectrum.

My point is that because of the size of the Irvine Ranch and its location within a highly developed metropolitan region I believed that each development, including the city of Irvine, needed to establish their own identity but not to the exclusion of its neighbors. Many of the English models you've sighted were deliberately built outside an existing metropolitan growth area with the purpose of discouraging commuting. Others, including Vallingby and Farsta outside Stockholm were satellites of the central city. The former tend to be measured as complete self-contained towns while the later as part of what Deyan Sudjic describes as the 100-mile city.

In our case we had no strong metropolitan central city to be a satellite of nor was it realistic that Irvine would become self sufficient in all aspects of urban life. You are correct. I was influenced by Kevin Lynch. But I also identify with Sudjic's image of the 100 mile city. In reflecting back on the Our first residential villages of Irvine, Newport Beach, Tustin, etc. that we've developed have most of the characteristics now identified as new urbanism. But the commercial, recreational, business and open space nodes (Lynch's term) hopefully also become part of the fabric of the regional city.

Our Master Plan for the 93,000 acre ranch sought to find its place in the 100 mile regional city while simultaneously providing sufficient identity to each of its parts, including the villages and cities, that those who live and/or work there have a strong sense of place. The latter is where one can make comparisons to Columbia and Reston. The former primarily applies to the Irvine Ranch because of its size and where it is located.

THE FACTUAL CORRECTIONS:

Pg. 109:

The Irvine Ranch originally covered 120,000 acres not 90,000.

Pg. 110:

The proposal for the Company to build a new town was made in June of 1960 before either Bill Mason or I became Presidents. Pereira's phase II plan was the basis for that idea and was submitted to the Company in May 1960. That document also included agreements from surrounding cities that they would not annex the area designated for the new town.

Add 1960's to the string of years. Indeed the University opened in Irvine in 1965 and the first residents moved in the same year. The idea of Irvine becoming an incorporated city was there from the start and differentiated us from all our peers at the time. But actual incorporation had to wait until there was sufficient population and tax base before it was practical.

Pereira was no longer with the firm of Pereira and Luckman in 1957 and was not part of that firm's job of searching for a site for the University. Pereira was hired by the University and Company in Dec. 1959 to prepare what he called the Phase II plan (the first plan for the city).

Officially the University did not accept the Company's offer of land until Dec. 1960.

Pg. 111:

I'm unclear what you mean by "pedestrian oriented".

Pereira's phase II plan suggested a town of 10,000 acres with a population of 100,000 not 20,000.

As part of our work on planing the central part of the Ranch we expanded its size to 50,000 acres to cover the entire central valley rather than plan another new town or annex it to one of our neighboring cities.

As for the three zones they were selected merely to allow us time to submit the plans in phases. 93,000 acres was thought to be too large a bite to attempt to secure approval at one submittal.

Pg. 113:

The announcement in 1970 was to let the world know (particularly the surrounding cities) that our plans for the new town had changed. It was now to be 50,000 not 10,000 acres.

The idea of incorporation had nothing to do with external criticism. We had announced that from the beginning and had filed our intent with the County Local Agency Commission in the 60's.

Pg. 114:

The comment that we welcomed "a city manager form of government" sounds like there was another possibility. Theoretically there was, of course, but all 26 of the existing cities in the County were formed that way and it was never discussed otherwise to my knowledge.

The comment that the city has "profoundly changed the Company's plan" is an overstatement. Actually the plan they adopted was the County Plan which is the one we submitted originally. If you were to compare the current master land use plan to our original plan it is remarkable in its likeness. The difference is that densities have been reduced thus reducing the ultimate population in half. But as with most early master plans developers show higher densities then they even intend to use since they are prepared early in the process.

Pg. 118:

Many of our villages have schools in the center. Others don't. It entirely depended on how we approached each village and the input of the school district.

Pg. 127:

For a number of years, particularly during early planning of Spectrum and redesign of Fashion Island Rouse manage both centers. That arrangement ceased a number of years ago.

Pg. 133:

The comment that "the company For selfish reasons led the drive for an independent incorporated city" is false. As I've stated earlier that was our stated promise from day one. Infact, in the early 60's in discussions with other community developers I was criticized for advocating the benefits of those living in the communities governing themselves. My peers worried about losing control. My response was that was both the risk and beauty of democracy. I believed that once the concept of villages and our plan became established those who had moved there because of it would defend it best. That has proved to be the case whenever any group has lobbied to change the concept.