

***TO-MORROW* IN AMERICA:**
EBENEZER HOWARD'S IMPRESSION ON HOUSING AND LAND USE
IN THE UNITED STATES

Theo Mackey Pollack, Esq., M.C.R.P.

The influence of Ebenezer Howard's Garden City concept on American housing patterns can be found in commercial, cooperative, and government-sponsored settings. In the 1920s, the Regional Planning Association of America, which embraced Howard's vision, collaborated with the City Housing Corporation to plan and construct two new communities in Greater New York.¹ These self-contained communities—Sunnyside Gardens and Radburn—represented methodical applications of many of Howard's principles, as described in his 1898 book, *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*.² Meanwhile, beginning at about the same time and continuing through the 1970s, the union-sponsored cooperative housing movement in New York City applied Howard's ideas in its own ways.³ Often remaining truer than Clarence Stein and Henry Wright to the author's financial proposals, the coops built under the direction of Abraham Kazan diverged from the physical plans of Howard by adopting designs that increasingly resembled the imagery of Le Corbusier.⁴ Finally, the ill-fated Greenbelt towns of the New Deal employed many of the basic principles that Howard advocated in his book, but they did so in the new context of significant government intervention.⁵ To examine the progress of Howard's ideas in the United States, and to assess their ongoing impact on American housing patterns, it is important to consider their application in each of these areas.

The Historical Context of *To-morrow*

To view the Garden City concept with a degree of historical accuracy, it is necessary to recall the urban economics to which Howard was responding. In the last years of the Victorian era, the major cities of Europe and America were choking on the accumulated blight of more than five decades of heavy industry. The excesses of mass production and classical economics had

accrued in a sprawling landscape that Sir Patrick Geddes named *conurbations*—clusters of crowded tenements, freight yards, and factories, laced together by an apparently endless network of railroad tracks and telegraph lines.⁶ Beyond the city limits, the dwindling small towns and fallow countryside stood as further testaments to the impact of industry on traditional living patterns.⁷ Worse, this blighted landscape contained a world of human lives, many of which shared its desolation and turbulence.

By the 1890s, the traditional social order that had once existed in Europe (and, to a lesser extent, in North America) had crumbled. City dwellers were frequently more than two generations removed from pre-industrial society⁸, while those who started out in the countryside were often displaced to strange, crowded cities in search of employment. In what could be seen as the ultimate irony of a time whose fortunes seemed hopelessly stacked against people of modest means, those few who managed to remain on familiar land were often perpetually isolated from the changes in culture and technology that were constantly redefining modern life. Apparently, while the newfound faith in science and markets led to striking innovations, conveniences, and comforts, it lacked its own inherent devices for social cohesion. It soon became clear that rational self-interest could not fill the void of a lost society, nor could technical know-how overcome, on behalf of an individual, the great structural inequalities that had emerged in the wake of industrial wealth. And as ordinary people were exposed, *en masse*, to the chaotic, Darwinian survival game of *laissez-faire* economics, the moral dissonance of the new order struck an especially harsh note in a Western culture that claimed to have its basis in Christian ideals and Enlightenment optimism.⁹

In response to the growing specter of Victorian reality, people began to challenge the extremely individualistic, legally conservative ideas that had dominated during this promising, terrifying time. While Marxism had been dominant on the left for a generation, a separate strand had also emerged (traceable, maybe, to the English Chartist movement and the Rochdale Weavers' cooperative) that sought to enact practical reforms within the existing legal and economic systems.¹⁰ Toward the end of the 19th century, a handful of these voices were becoming widely acknowledged. In 1888, Edward Bellamy published *Looking Backward*, which envisioned a Victorian contemporary falling into a deep sleep and waking up in a future world. In the year 2000, society had transcended the rabid selfishness of 1880s America to embrace the values of science, technology, and cooperation.¹¹ Similarly, the leading Zionist author, Theodor Herzl, in his 1901 novel, *Old New Land*, sent his misanthropic protagonists to a desert island for a shorter term of years. Upon their return to civilization in the 1920s, they found that a modern, pluralistic, social democracy had sprung up in the desert of the Middle East.¹² Howard's 1898 *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* did not employ the literary devices of Bellamy or Herzl, but in a way it fits neatly with these two contemporary books: It envisions a future world, freed from the shackles of entrenched 19th century power politics, drawing on the *tabula rasa* of a new time and place, to approach a sort of scientific social perfection.

Ebenezer Howard's Garden City Solution

Specifically, in *To-morrow*, Howard proposed the purchase of depressed, rural land to house the overflow population of London. The land would be developed according to a new, idealized plan. Housing, commercial, and industrial uses would be arranged in a pattern that was both convenient and aesthetically pleasing. Nature and open space would be thoroughly intertwined with human development. Agriculture, parkland, and asylums would be scattered along the outskirts, and a modern railroad would encircle the entire urban core, and connect to a broader, interurban

rail system.¹³ Finally, the population of a single city would be limited to 30,000 people. Once this capacity had been reached, a new city would be started, at a sufficient distance to ensure that each city maintained its distinct identity. Howard envisioned this process continuing until wide swaths of the depressed English countryside were redeveloped into an extensive network of flourishing garden cities.¹⁴ He included a number of colorful, hand-drawn diagrams to illustrate the various land use principles.¹⁵

Howard proposed that land be purchased by a newly-established cooperative, which would finance the Garden City's construction costs through debt. Howard's financial and legal language sometimes reflects the lexicon of another time, but in contemporary terms, his proposal was to raise the initial capital by selling four percent bonds to investors. In return for a safe financial instrument, investors would accept the lower payment potential of coupon bonds, and the cooperative would distribute any and all profits back to its own general fund. As property values rose, maintenance fees would be increased to sink the mortgage debt ahead of schedule. In relatively short order, then, the mortgage liens could be shaken off, and all maintenance receipts could be dedicated to providing community services. In theory, this arrangement would allow people with modest incomes to leave behind the crowded, expensive slums of London, and transplant themselves to the spacious, healthy, and affordable lifestyle of the Garden City. Employers would flock to the development because its workers would be more productive, and their wages would be more affordable, because they would not have to pay London's high cost of living. As an additional benefit, the cooperative structure of land use would create a new city of stakeholders, allowing individuals to build equity in their homes, while conferring both the financial and civic benefits of resident ownership on the community.¹⁶

The principles of *To-morrow* were first applied in the planning and development of the English town of Letchworth, Hertfordshire, beginning in 1904.¹⁷ Endorsement of the plan by a

number of powerful British industrialists (including George Cadbury and William Lever, of chocolate and soap fame, respectively) lifted both Howard and his ideas from obscurity.¹⁸ Over the course of a decade, Letchworth was successfully developed into a well-functioning new town. However, during development, its cooperative suffered from an ongoing lack of capital investment. Furthermore—in what could be seen as a harbinger of things to come—the project failed to deliver a housing stock that was affordable to much the region’s working class.¹⁹

The impact of Howard’s ideas on housing patterns in the United Kingdom would require more than a brief summary to describe. For the purposes of this paper, it should suffice to say that Howard was personally involved with administrating the development of Letchworth, and that a second town nearer to London, named Welwyn, was begun in 1920 under Howard’s direct guidance.²⁰ During the interim years, and in the generations since World War II, the Garden City concept played a prominent role in British town planning policies. Specifically, the development of government-sponsored new towns in the years after World War II was strongly influenced by Howard’s principles.²¹ On the other hand, it is important to note that even in the post-war British context—which might seem likely to have been a friendlier climate than the United States for Howard’s socialist and cooperative impulses—many of the basic aspects that Howard considered central to the vision of *To-morrow* were put aside. In a way, the *a la carte* reception of the Garden City concept in the United Kingdom became a prototype for its treatment around the world. While the car culture of the 20th century did much to justify the town-country concept of mass suburbia—to which the modern landscape owes Howard a great debt—the social and economic reforms that Howard advocated as its basis seem to have consistently resonated with much less force.²²

The American Garden City Movement

It is fitting that *To-morrow* was published in 1898—the same year that the five boroughs of Greater New York were unified under a single city

government. The principles that Howard had outlined in his book would exert a powerful influence on the development patterns of the city’s newly annexed neighborhoods. In New York, the *tabula rasa* that Howard had sought as far from London as Hertfordshire seemed to exist in deceptive proximity to Manhattan. The East River had limited the urbanization of Brooklyn and Queens until it was finally spanned by the Brooklyn Bridge in 1883. In the first decade of the twentieth century, large tracts of land in these boroughs remained undeveloped or sparsely developed, despite the intense conurbations that existed along their respective waterfronts.²³ Not surprisingly, at least three of the earliest American developments to draw on Garden City principles were located in undeveloped parts of Queens. But while land was still available, it was already expensive²⁴—a factor that would limit its usefulness in providing *both* moderate-density and affordable housing.²⁵

The first project began in 1908 when Edward MacDougal started to develop a 350-acre parcel of land along Jackson Avenue—now Northern Boulevard—in the north-central part of Queens. The new neighborhood, Jackson Heights, was heavily landscaped and included private parks and gardens that were secluded within planned blocks of coordinated apartment buildings. The new community also included the still-rare phenomenon of cooperative apartments, and it capitalized on its access to the new I.R.T. line that ran along elevated tracks above Roosevelt Avenue.²⁶ The second Queens development to draw inspiration from Howard was Forest Hills Gardens. In 1912, the Russell Sage Foundation retained the services of Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., and Grosvenor Atterbury to design a garden community that would occupy a large parcel of un-built land across the Union Turnpike from Forest Park. The architects designed a leafy, Tudor-style neighborhood, with a focal point of retail stores and garden apartments around the Long Island Railroad stop at Continental Avenue. From there, they laid out streets that radiated toward Forest Park, incorporating a number of Howard’s land use principles into these blocks. The separation of uses

and the intertwining of nature with human development were foremost among these elements. But, in what was already becoming a tired refrain of the commercial Garden City phenomenon, the Russell Sage Foundation had announced plans to build affordable housing at Forest Hills Gardens, only to select a development strategy that resulted in a housing stock too costly to achieve this goal.²⁷

While Jackson Heights and Forest Hills Gardens drew inspiration from *To-morrow*, it was a later group of developers—steeped in the academic discussions of the nascent urban planning movement—that would go further, and take more methodical steps, to implement more specific aspects of Howard’s strategy. The Regional Planning Association of America grew out of a series of discussions among a group of reformist architects, engineers, and planners in the years following World War I. Charles Whitaker, editor of the *Journal of the American Institute of Architects*, encouraged the use his publication as a forum for the urban and regional planning discussions that would eventually coalesce, in 1923, into the R.P.A.A. The ideas of Howard and Geddes served as organizing principles for much of the analysis that was published in the *J.A.I.A.* Among those whose contributions had the most influence on the nascent R.P.A.A. were Alexander Bing, a commercial real estate developer; Lewis Mumford, the renowned planner and disciple of Geddes; and Clarence Stein and Henry Wright, both architects. Highlighting the group’s institutional closeness to Howard, the R.P.A.A. was chartered as the American chapter of his International Garden Cities and Town Planning Federation.²⁸

Sunnyside Gardens

In 1923, the R.P.A.A. considered purchasing a square mile of cheap, vacant land in the salt marshes of coastal Brooklyn. Bing, Stein, and Wright drew up some preliminary proposals for a parcel along Ocean Avenue in Sheepshead Bay. The plans envisioned the development of a new, Howard-style garden city, with the capacity to house up to 25,000 people at a cost that was eminently reasonable in 1920s New York. However, before the R.P.A.A. could submit a bid,

the parcel was sold to another developer.²⁹ Instead, in February 1924, Bing settled on a second site, much closer to Manhattan. The City Housing Corporation—a commercial endeavor that was largely backed by Bing—bought 76 acres of disused Pennsylvania Railroad property in the Long Island City section of Queens. This land would become the site of the first C.H.C. development in Greater New York: Sunnyside Gardens.³⁰

Restrictive zoning ordinances had already mapped out the city’s designs for the land. The C.H.C. requested a blanket variance, but its proposal was rejected by the Queens Borough Engineer. As a result, the architects were forced to find creative ways to incorporate Garden City principles into the predetermined street grid.³¹ The degree of their success remains evident today, in the patch of green that appears around the intersection of Skillman Avenue and 46th Street, amid the sea of gray satellite images that characterize much of western Queens. On a small scale, the C.H.C. managed to stay true to Howard’s town-country principles in Sunnyside Gardens. This was achieved, primarily, through a design that favored a low density of building coverage: 72 percent of the land was open space.³²

In his 1982 book, *Garden Cities for America*, Daniel Schaffer discussed some of the planning devices that architects Stein and Wright employed:

[E]ach house was given broad [street] frontage and constructed only two rooms deep. Instead of pushing the design into the interior of the block, the designers turned the frame of the house ninety degrees and stretched it along the perimeter of the street. That “shallow construction” not only enabled each resident to enjoy ample fresh air and light but also left a large interior space at the center of each block.³³

The architects methodically dedicated this common space to several common benefits. Garages, gardens, playgrounds, and lawns were arranged in a practical fashion on the shared land. The result was that, rather than each house having a small,

private yard, the entire block enjoyed the free use of more generous accommodations.³⁴

While Stein and Wright remained faithful to the Garden City ideals of green space and shared uses, some of Howard's other principles had to be compromised. In his book, Schaffer described how Sunnyside's location on the edge of Long Island City made it impossible to purchase and preserve the surrounding acres of countryside that Howard had envisioned in *To-morrow*. By 1924, the land costs in the area were simply too high for large-scale, nonproductive uses. On a more basic level, much of the adjacent land was already developed. From the outset, it was clear that Sunnyside Gardens would not enjoy the independence that Howard had envisioned as part of the Garden City ideal. Rather, it would inevitably, and quickly, become woven into the emerging fabric of Greater New York. Bing, Stein, and Wright also accepted that the location of Sunnyside Gardens would preclude the kind of economic independence that Howard had envisioned—its residents would earn and spend their money in the broader economy of the city. Similarly, the single, modest development would have no chance of defusing the region's soaring housing costs amid the white-hot real estate market of the 1920s. While the architects insisted on a physical plan that was true to Garden City principles, they accepted that Sunnyside's economic position would be subject to the larger forces of the regional economy.³⁵

In spite of this, the C.H.C. was not inclined to accept that Sunnyside Gardens would share the same degree of expense that characterized most new residential construction. In keeping with the basic premise of Howard's concept, Sunnyside Gardens was meant to be an innovative community where the standard of living was above average, but the costs remained affordable to the middle class.³⁶ In light of this, Bing intentionally chose a parcel of depressed, former industrial land, in order to limit upfront acquisition costs, and Sunnyside's planners made additional efforts during the construction phase of the project to contain the costs that would be passed along to eventual residents. In one sense, the C.H.C. was

successful: Units in Sunnyside Gardens proved significantly more affordable than comparable housing units that were coming onto the market in the mid-1920s.³⁷ But, as in Letchworth, the builders' efforts ultimately missed an important mark. While achieving a high level of cost efficiency, the average price of a unit still remained too high for 60% of the city's population, a number which undoubtedly included the vast majority of the working class. By 1927, fully 49 percent of Sunnyside Gardens' households were headed by either businessmen or professionals. Another 44 percent were headed by tradespersons, mechanics, or white-collar employees.³⁸ These demographics showed an unusual diversity of both education and income levels. However, this diversity was overwhelmingly drawn from the broad spectrum of the city's middle class. For those who could afford to live there, Sunnyside was, by most accounts, a nice place to live. But it was also clear that it would not become a model for addressing the housing issues that plagued the city's poverty-stricken neighborhoods.

Howard, of course, had foreseen this dilemma. It was why he had advocated the large-scale purchase of rural land as the first step of his proposal. But the C.H.C. experience at Sunnyside Gardens served as an important object lesson in the challenges that faced developers who sought to adapt Garden City land use concepts to urban America. It also signaled a significant turning point in the story of Howard's influence on American housing patterns, because it illustrated a fault line that would lead to the divergence of the land use and social equity priorities that he had advocated. Sunnyside Gardens had included a handful of co-op apartments which had proven to be the least popular type of unit.³⁹ But as the C.H.C. neared the completion of Sunnyside, a consortium of unions and social activists was aggressively lobbying the New York legislature for tax exemptions that would promote affordable housing co-ops. Foremost among the activist groups was the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, whose limited-equity housing cooperative was the forerunner to the prolific United Housing Federation.⁴⁰ While the C.H.C. carried the banner

of Howard's land use proposals to suburban Radburn, it was actually the union-sponsored co-op movement that adhered most closely to the set of economic and political principles that Howard had advocated in *To-morrow*.

Radburn

The C.H.C. had purchased 76 acres of railroad property at the Sunnyside Gardens site in 1923, but 21 of these it would not develop. Instead, in keeping with the strategy that Howard had outlined in *To-morrow*, the C.H.C. sold that acreage at a profit, and distributed the difference to its capital fund for future developments. In 1927, the company settled on a site in Bergen County for its next endeavor: Radburn. While planners have already written extensively about Radburn, it remains an essential part of any discussion about Howard's influence on American housing patterns. Much more than Sunnyside Gardens, Radburn allowed the land use principles of *To-morrow* to be put into practice. Yet, some of the same factors that made facilitated its freedom of design also presented new challenges for Bing, Stein, and Wright. For instance, unlike the parcel that the C.H.C. had purchased in Long Island City, which benefited from subway and highway connections to Manhattan, the Fair Lawn site was located in a genuinely rural setting. Spinach farms and fruit orchards comprised much of the town, which had a small, agrarian population and an absence of urban zoning ordinances. The Erie Railroad made a stop there, on a branch that ran between Jersey City and Suffern, New York, but it was just a country crossroads—hardly a commuter's destination.⁴¹

In rural New Jersey, the C.H.C. came closer to finding the blank slate that it had first sought in the vacant lots of Brooklyn and Queens. With its purchase, it was able to set and control the land use policies of its site with a minimal amount of interference.⁴² In the aftermath of the 1926 *Euclid* decision, a free hand in land development was becoming increasingly difficult to obtain.⁴³ Towns and cities throughout the United States began exercising their newfound right to enact restrictive zoning ordinances, and, in most cases, private

property owners found that they had little choice but to comply with the law. The prevailing legal climate made Fair Lawn an especially attractive location, and its proximity to New York City motivated the C.H.C. to assemble the purchase of about one square mile of contiguous property there.⁴⁴ Over the next few years, in the surrounding area, it obtained the same amount again.⁴⁵

In Radburn, Stein and Wright had the freedom to experiment with creative land use concepts on a larger scale than they had enjoyed in Sunnyside Gardens. Here, the architects designed superblocs and corresponding, internal green spaces that were much larger than what could be squeezed into a standard block.⁴⁶ More importantly, the absence of a predetermined grid allowed the C.H.C. to be more powerfully influenced by the value that Geddes and Mumford had placed on surveying the natural environment. Here, they could consider the contours of the land itself in laying out its development pattern. Hills were used to give prominence to certain buildings; buildings were arranged to complement the shape and the light of the land; gloomy depressions could create spaces for quiet and privacy; the Erie Railroad stop at Fair Lawn Avenue was a natural location for the town's planned commercial district.

But the spreading out of Howard's vision was not Radburn's most striking innovation—that had already been done with a good deal of success in Letchworth. More notable was how Stein and Wright attempted to accommodate the growing American car culture of the 1920s, while relegating the actual cars to a less prominent position in the suburban landscape. Unlike the cartways and sidewalks that traditionally characterized city streets, Radburn's thoroughfares were designed to separate pedestrians and bicycles from motor vehicle traffic. The main facings of the houses opened onto a web of sprawling greenways that ran through the community—these were reserved for foot and bicycle traffic. Meanwhile, low-key service roads were designed for motor vehicles that approached the buildings from behind—and these connected to the highways and streets of

neighboring towns.⁴⁷ Ironically, one drawback of this feature is that while Radburn remains one of the most famous planned communities in the world, some of its blocks are surprisingly unattractive when viewed from a car: The narrow service roads and their mismatched back entrances are often all that is visible.

From the beginning, almost half the buildings in Radburn were multi-family residences. Most of these were two-family houses, but there were also a number of apartments. Stein and Wright achieved this mixture by designing the building layout first, and then proceeding to subdivide the land parcels pursuant to the design. This process reversed the traditional order of subdividing the land first, then designing houses to fill in the identical plats. It also brought an atypical degree of economic diversity to the community.⁴⁸ But even though most of the resident households there were not the owners of single-family homes, the cost of living in Radburn presented an even greater departure from Howard's equitable ideal than Sunnyside's had. In *Garden Cities for America*, Schaffer quotes Clarence Stein:

[I]f the poorly paid workers were admitted into the garden city, the industry that used them would have to subsidize the workers' houses, or advance their wages; there was no other way of providing them with the barest minimum of good houses unless the garden city duplicated the very conditions that it existed to escape from.⁴⁹

As Abraham Kazan and the New York City labor unions would soon demonstrate, this statement was far from true. However, it appears from the plans that a decision was made at Radburn to prioritize Howard's land use concepts above his concern for social equity. This choice may have made Stein's statement accurate within the context of his and Wright's own designs.

Through Radburn, a path can be drawn directly from *To-morrow* to the many of the qualities that characterized twentieth century

American suburbia. Some of these qualities, like intense class and race segregation⁵⁰ and continuous, sprawling development, Howard would almost certainly have resented. Others, which modern planners tend to lament, Howard might actually have embraced. The post-*Euclid* orthodoxy that strictly separated residential, commercial, and industrial land uses can be traced back to the idealist impulse of Howard's diagrams—though many now blame this method of development for the car-dependence and unsightly commercial strips that came to characterize many suburbs. Not coincidentally, a retail district with off-street parking—arguably America's first strip mall—was built at the intersection of Fair Lawn Avenue and Plaza Road, across from the Erie Railroad stop in Radburn.⁵¹

More complicated than their impact on suburbia was the effect of Howard's land use ideas—more or less emphasized in Radburn—on American cities. The suburbs of the late nineteenth century were a privileged phenomenon that posed little threat to the mass mechanism of urban life. But Howard was one of the first writers to endorse the essential, twentieth century suburban ideal that ordinary people, too, should be free to enjoy the idyllic qualities of the countryside while retaining the social and economic benefits of city life.⁵² By itself, this was a laudable and equitable goal, but Howard embraced it along with a much more questionable corollary. In his writings, he enthusiastically advocated the mass desertion and divestment of private property interests in the world's great cities. In an eerie, yet prophetic vision of what would eventually become of the urban landscape in America, the last chapter of *To-morrow* gleefully envisions the tenements, row houses, and Victorian mansions of London sitting vacant; the once-crowded high streets turned desolate; and the total collapse of property values driving investors out of urban real estate. In his vision, the bulk of the urban population has moved away, having seized the higher standard of living that is available in the Garden City.⁵³

Union-Sponsored Coops in New York City

As Radburn and its contemporaries were laying down the embryonic phases of American mass suburbia, another housing tradition was getting under way that carried forward a number of the social principles that Howard had endorsed, but which the emerging suburban ethos would mostly reject. In 1927, the New York legislature enacted the Limited Dividend Housing Companies Law to provide tax abatements to affordable housing cooperatives. At the forefront of the lobbying effort—and the subsequent organizing efforts, pursuant to the law—were a collection New York City labor unions that advocated radical (or at least socialist) political reforms to address the chronic poverty that plagued their working-class membership. The unions were largely based among the Jewish immigrants who lived in the crowded tenements of the Lower East Side. The lives of their members represented the tail end of the Victorian city at its worst. Many worked in the textile industry, infamous for its poverty wages and appalling working conditions. One of the unions, the International Ladies' Garment Workers, had represented the 141 girls and women who were killed in the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist fire. Another leading union, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, placed a former I.L.G.W.U. organizer, Abraham E. Kazan, in charge of obtaining housing solutions for its membership.

The evidence of Howard's influence on Kazan is implicit, but compelling. A single article in the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, published in May 1937, seems to be Kazan's only extant scholarly work. But in it, he both lauded and criticized the limited-dividend strategy of affordable housing development. While admiring the good intentions and innovation of Howard's model (though he never actually mentioned Howard by name), Kazan lamented:

The limited dividend company, deliberately restricting the return on its capital, cannot be expected to make much progress. The large outlay of capital, plus the responsibility attached to the operation of housing projects, can hardly attract a large number of benefactors.⁵⁴

To some degree, Kazan's contention was semantic. While Howard proposed a company that would seek a direct relationship with investors who shared his Garden City principles, Kazan's A.C.W. simply went to the bank and applied for a mortgage.⁵⁵ By either arrangement, the community's annual interest payment would be limited, and the annual distribution of profits back to its general fund would probably, over time, be about the same. But Kazan would do more than simply tweak the financial terminology for funding a cooperative community. He would also give real and immediate political authority to its residents.

In *To-morrow*, Howard proposed that a group of four trustees be selected from the Garden City community at large to manage common funds and oversee the maintenance of shared property.⁵⁶ In both Sunnyside Gardens and Radburn, the C.H.C. had basically appointed itself as that trustee, and proceeded to assume a paternalistic legal role over the community, its money, and its land. But Kazan believed that a true cooperative, cast in the Rochdale mold, where all residents had an equal voice and an equity stake, would foster a more vibrant and participatory community.⁵⁷ Reflecting on the experience of the first Amalgamated Coop, which had been founded in the Bronx a decade prior to his writing, Kazan said:

It is interesting to learn with what ease the community has learned to take care of its needs. Thus, in the absence of a public library in the vicinity, the community has established and maintained one of its own. The problem of what to do with the children during the summer vacation months was solved through the creation of a day camp.... Other activities, such as the distribution of milk, the operation of food shops, transportation to the rapid transit station, and so forth, are similarly handled. All these activities are directed by members of the community.⁵⁸

Kazan's description of spontaneous civic life in the Amalgamated sounds strikingly reminiscent of the

“pro-municipal work” that Howard had envisioned in *To-morrow*.⁵⁹ At the same time, Kazan managed to create a more stable business model by seeking capital—and only capital—from traditional financing sources. Shifting the management burden from a company with investors to a true, democratic cooperative made this possible.

It is not clear how directly Kazan was influenced by *To-morrow* or to what degree he was simply modifying ideas that were common knowledge among affordable housing advocates by the late 1920s. It is also noteworthy that in *Old New Land*—published only a few years after *To-morrow*—Theodor Herzl had envisioned the use of a limited-dividend, cooperative business model to finance his vision of new towns for Jewish settlers in the Middle East.⁶⁰ In any case, it is apparent that the financial, legal, and civic principles of Howard’s Garden City were familiar to Kazan and his union colleagues. In fact, in some ways, the A.C.W. developments that they built—as well as the later, larger projects of the United Housing Federation—were truer to Howard’s vision than those built by the C.H.C. under the official Garden City banner.*

Like Sunnyside Gardens and Radburn, the A.C.W. / U.H.F. projects capitalized on the lower acquisition prices of depressed or remote land. But unlike Stein and Wright, Kazan and his chief architect, Herman Jessor, never hesitated to build housing units at a very high density. This approach, though less aesthetically pleasing than the Garden City land use patterns adopted by the C.H.C., distributed high urban land prices over a much greater number of units. In turn, this allowed the price of individual units to remain affordable to a larger percentage of working people. Also, like the C.H.C., Kazan and Jessor made use of the superblock in most of their developments,

* Because I addressed the specifics of Kazan’s and Jessor’s legacy in a previous paper, I will refrain here from going into any detail about their individual development projects.

but they built higher—in a style reminiscent of Corbusier’s Radiant City—in order to preserve the pattern of self-contained, landscaped grounds around a much greater number of units. And, like Howard, Kazan sought to create equity-building, progressive communities of innovative, economical housing that would replace the old law tenements and chopped-up row houses that still lingered on from the slum heyday of the Victorian era.⁶¹

But while the C.H.C. demonstrated an impressive loyalty to Howard’s land use principles, it fell short of creating a workable model for affordable housing production. In Radburn, the company proceeded with plans that would illuminate certain aspects of Howard’s land use vision at the direct expense of affordable housing and community. Furthermore, the C.H.C.’s paternalistic management of both developments, though benevolent in its intent, demonstrated a somewhat disingenuous lack of faith in the viability of the cooperative principles that the group espoused. Kazan and Jessor corrected these shortfalls in their own developments, and they provided working people with an affordable, democratic alternative to the status quo of urban housing. Finally, from a purely quantitative perspective, it is important to note that, today, more than 100,000 people are living in A.C.W. / U.H.F. limited-equity, cooperative apartments throughout New York City.⁶² Arguably, the combined work of these companies represents the most successful American application to date of the economic and social principles that Howard advocated in *To-morrow*.

Roosevelt, Tugwell, and the Greenbelt Towns

With the onset of the Depression after 1929, privately-funded development ground to a halt. The C.H.C. faced mounting financial troubles and never began a third project. In fact, in 1934, it filed for bankruptcy.⁶³ The cooperative housing that the A.C.W. had developed fared somewhat better, as demonstrated by the Amalgamated Coops, which weathered the Depression surprisingly well,⁶⁴ but development of new apartments was stagnant.⁶⁵ In the end, the striking absence of private money may have made

Howard's vision seem more imperative. And with Roosevelt's victory in 1932, the progressive wing of American politics received a resounding mandate to address the economic crisis that had continued for almost three years.

In land development, the new administration saw an opportunity to address more than one pressing issue.⁶⁶ First, the onset of the Depression had coincided with the worst years of the Dust Bowl in the Great Plains. As Peter Hall noted in *Cities of Tomorrow*, American cities in the 1930s faced a version of what London had been facing when Howard wrote *To-morrow*: Large numbers of rural people were fleeing the depressed land and streaming into major cities, hoping to find work.⁶⁷ Second, this added pressure from the countryside coincided with already-struggling city economies, and unemployment became rampant in urban areas. Third, the growing urban population, combined with the lack of new development, had led to untenable housing costs and more homelessness. The new administration saw a chance to address all of these issues simultaneously with the development of the Greenbelt towns.

In 1935, the president appointed Rexford Guy Tugwell to head the Resettlement Administration, a new agency that was formed to address the challenges of displaced workers. Tugwell, a Columbia economics professor, shared Howard's interest in cooperatives as an enriching force for both civic and financial life.⁶⁸ Tugwell also understood that development projects could help to address both housing and employment problems.⁶⁹ In the mid-1930s, the nation's housing stock was weighed down by shoddy and deteriorating buildings, with 36 percent of all units failing to meet minimum standards of habitability.⁷⁰ At the same time, the government estimated that 63 percent of American households were living in poverty.⁷¹ Tugwell envisioned the development of more than 3,000 Greenbelt towns across the United States, a project that would have created millions of jobs and as many new, high-quality homes.⁷²

Ultimately, only three Greenbelt towns would ever be built: Greenbelt, Maryland; Greenhills, Ohio; and Greendale, Wisconsin.⁷³ It would take the post-war boom in private development to create both suburban housing and construction employment on the scale that Tugwell had imagined. But, in spite of their limited trajectory, the Greenbelt towns remain significant to the Garden City narrative because of the totality with which they adopted Howard's principles: In Maryland, Tugwell combined the land use concepts that the C.H.C. had pioneered in Radburn with the economic and social principles that were being pursued by union-sponsored housing coops in New York City.⁷⁴ And yet, ironically, he was able to achieve this faithful combination of Howard's principles only with the power of government, a factor which—at least in *To-morrow*—Howard had opposed.⁷⁵

Tugwell's first and largest town was Greenbelt, Maryland. The site was chosen for its proximity to both Washington and a large area of permanent, rural land.⁷⁶ In 1935, the R.A. acquired more than 11,000 acres at a cost of about \$1M.⁷⁷ Facing political pressure to show results, Roosevelt ordered construction to begin immediately.⁷⁸ Unemployed men from Washington shelters were bussed in to prepare the land, and the R.A. seemed to value their continued employment more than it did project efficiency. A record of events states:

The [men] could work 88 hours a month and were paid \$.50/hour with a deduction of \$15 per month for room, board, laundry, and transportation. Wherever a man could be put to work in place of a machine, he was put to work. Trees were cleared with picks and shovels.⁷⁹

But as word of such inefficiencies got out, bad press ensued. Critics framed the Greenbelt towns as classic examples of bureaucratic waste and government overreach. Adding injury to insult, a 1936 legal challenge ended plans to begin a fourth town in suburban New Jersey.⁸⁰ Following that year's election, Roosevelt requested Tugwell's resignation in an attempt to minimize the ongoing

political consequences of the program's high-profile embarrassment.⁸¹

But while the Greenbelt towns may have been built on precarious legal and political ground, they rested on a solid foundation of urban planning principles. Greenbelt, Maryland remains an integral part of the Washington suburbs, and its R.A.-designed core remains the heart of the community.⁸² Later towns in the region were built on the principles laid out in Greenbelt, including nearby Columbia, and Reston, Virginia. Meanwhile, Greenhills, Ohio, and Greendale, Wisconsin were much smaller, but they presented a similar mix of Howard's elements.⁸³ Today, as a group, the Greenbelt towns continue to represent some of the most comprehensive and thorough applications of the Garden City vision of *To-morrow*.

Howard's American Legacy

Howard's vision of an idyllic, town-country community that would unpack the crowded slums had a profound impact on American development patterns in the 20th century. While the number of projects whose principles were consciously inspired by his vision is small, a line can be drawn from the qualities of those projects to the broader trends that have characterized American land

development policy since 1900. The separated uses of the post-*Euclid* planning, the town-country aesthetic of modern suburbia, the strip malls, the abandoned cities, and the rise of cooperative housing all represent broad strokes of Howard's vision, brushed over an American political landscape that was often resistant to his ambitious proposals for social reform.

Today, the impact of Howard's legacy on the American landscape is mixed. In the park-like suburbs of the middle class and the limited-equity coops of New York City, evidence of Howard's influence appears to give life to the spirit of *To-morrow*. And for most Americans, suburbanization has led to a dramatic improvement in housing conditions since 1900. Yet in the continuing segregation and sprawling strip malls of modern suburbia, and in the widespread poverty and desolation that have plagued U.S. cities since 1965, *To-morrow's* legacy resides in an uncomfortable symbiosis with socioeconomic factors that Howard almost certainly would have rejected. In the end, any fair assessment of *To-morrow's* impact must examine each of these factors, in order to assess how Howard's priorities might be recalibrated to incorporate both the striking progress that they fostered and the wisdom of a century's more experience.

Exhibits

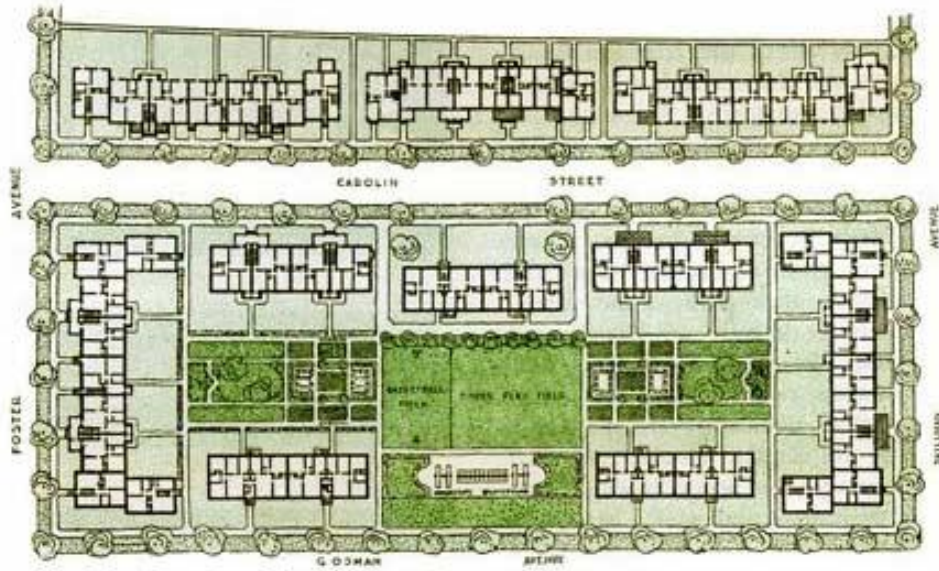


Fig. 5—The first unit of Sunnyside, built in 1924



TOWN PLAN RADBURN, N.J.

 SCHOOLS	 APARTMENTS	 HOUSES	 THEATRE	 INDUSTRY
 STORES	 PLAYGROUNDS	 PARKS		

FIG. 10
RADBURN, NEW JERSEY—PLAN OF MODEL COMMUNITY
Courtesy of the City Housing Corporation

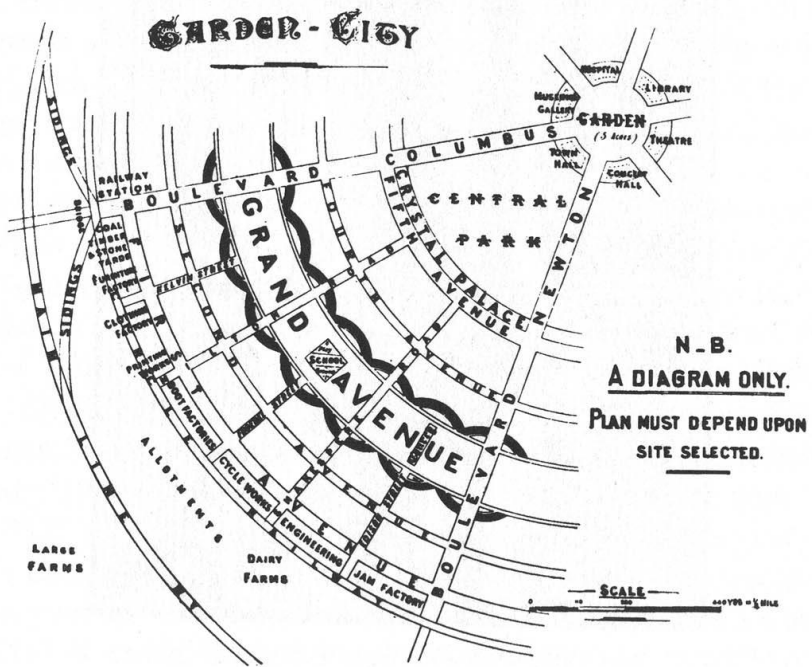
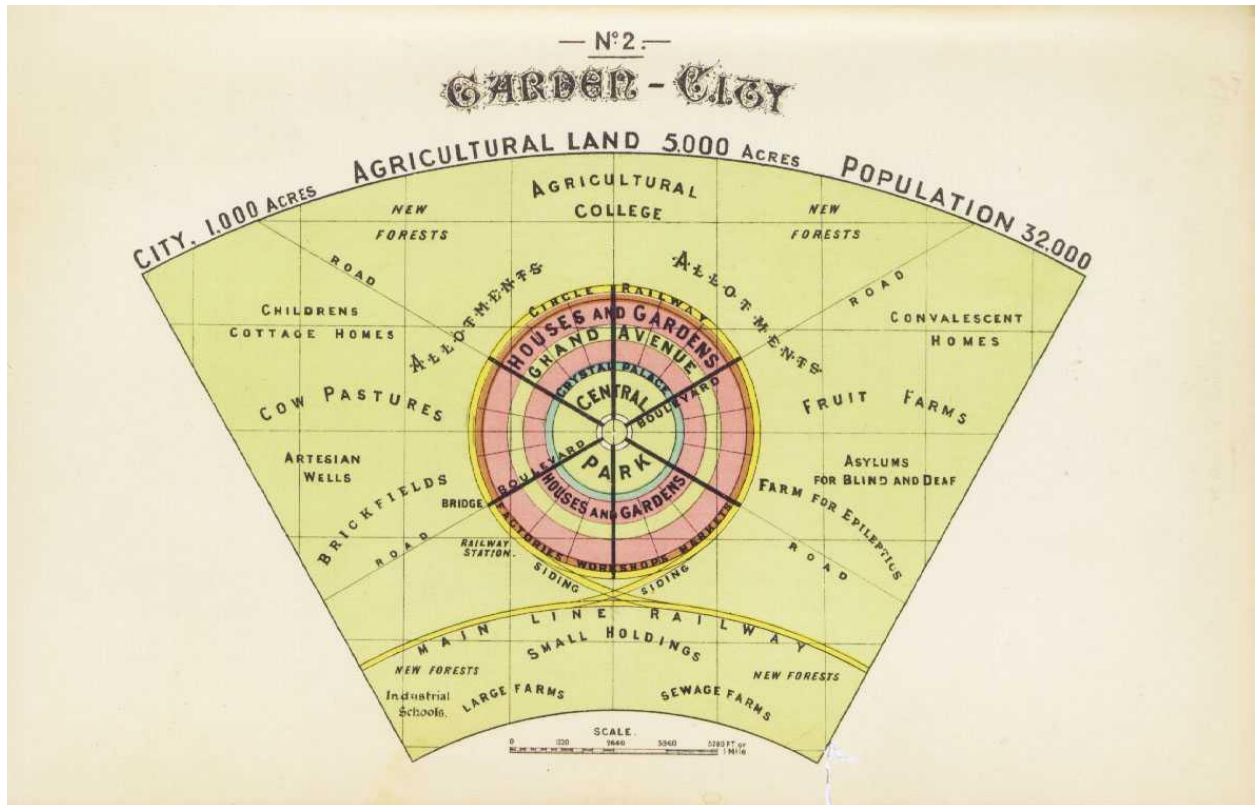


Fig. 3. Ebenezer Howard, *Garden-City. Grand Avenue*, 1902, in *Garden Cities of To-morrow*.



Notes

¹ Daniel Schaffer, *Garden Cities for America: The Radburn Experience* (1982: Philadelphia: Temple University Press): pp. 119-65.

² *Ibid*: passim, and Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of To-morrow* (1902: London: Swan, Sonnenschein & Co.): passim. Orig. published in 1898 under the title, *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*.

³ Joshua Freeman, *Working-Class New York* (2000: New York: W.W. Norton & Co.): pp. 110-24.

⁴ *Ibid*.

⁵ *National Historic Landmark Nomination: Greenbelt, Maryland* (1996: Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of the Interior.)

⁶ Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow* (2002, Malden, Mass.: Blackwell): p. 153, quoting Patrick Geddes, *Cities in Evolution* (1915: London: Williams & Norgate): p. 34.

⁷ Robert Fishman, *Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century* (1977: New York: Basic Books): p. 30.

⁸ This follows from the assumption that the dramatic effects of the Industrial Revolution began to affect social patterns, in earnest, in the mid-19th century.

⁹ The characterization of life in the late Victorian period here is partly based on common knowledge of the time as it has been described in literature and historical accounts, but this paragraph was also partly inspired by Peter Hall's description of the time in *Cities of Tomorrow*, in the chapter titled "The City of Dreadful Night", pp. 13-47.

¹⁰ Richard Siegler and Herbert Levy, *A Brief History of Cooperastive Housing* (1986: New York: National Association of Housing Cooperatives), discussing the origins of the cooperative movement in Rochdale, England.

¹¹ Fishman: pp. 32-39. Fishman discusses Bellamy's influence on Howard's Garden City concept.

¹² Theodor Herzl, *Old New Land*. (1997: Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers): passim. Orig. published in 1901, under the title *Altneuland*, and translated from German in 1941 by Lotta Levensohn. Interestingly, Sir Patrick Geddes would one day be retained as the chief planner of the new city of Tel Aviv.

¹³ Howard: pp. 20-27.

¹⁴ *Ibid*: at 128-36.

¹⁵ See attached figures.

¹⁶ Howard: The preceding paragraph broadly summarizes the main points that Howard presented in Chapters II-IV, at pp. 28-67, and which he further elucidated throughout the text.

¹⁷ Schaffer: p. 20.

¹⁸ *Ibid*: at 19-20.

¹⁹ *Ibid*.

²⁰ *Ibid*.

²¹ Fishman, pp. 82-96. The chapter titled "Beyond the Grave" discusses the influence of Garden City principles on later British developments.

²² Schaffer, pp. 31-32. The passage discusses the cherry-picking of Howard's plan by some of its most ardent proponents in the United States.

²³ *Hammond's 8x11 Map of New York City and Vicinity* (1909: New York: C.S. Hammond & Co.), showing the extent of urbanization in the New York region at the end of the first decade of the 20th century.

²⁴ Schaffer: p. 121. Schaffer explains that in 1924, land for Sunnyside Gardens was purchased for about \$17K per acre, which was about seven times the price that the C.D.C. would pay for acreage in Fair Lawn, three years later, in 1927. Based on this, one could infer that property values for adjacent residential land in Long Island City were probably even higher at the time, since the Sunnyside Gardens site was a parcel of disused industrial land, purchased as a single piece.

²⁵ *Ibid*: at 126. Schaffer discusses the costs and demographics of Sunnyside Gardens.

²⁶ Claudia Gryvatz Copquin and Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Neighborhoods of Queens* (2007, New Haven: Yale University Press): pp. 94-95.

²⁷ *Ibid*: at 69-71.

²⁸ Schaffer: pp. 34-47. Schaffer describes the early period of R.P.A.A. coalescence.

²⁹ *Ibid*: at 51.

³⁰ *Ibid*: at 121.

³¹ *Ibid*: at 122.

³² *Ibid.*: at 124.

³³ *Ibid.*: at 124-25.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.* at 122. Schaffer describes a number of the issues summarized in the preceding paragraph, including forced deviations from the principles of *To-morrow*.

³⁶ *Ibid.*: at 125-26.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*: at 126.

³⁹ *Ibid.*: at 129.

⁴⁰ Freeman: p. 110.

⁴¹ Schaffer: 147-49. Schaffer describes the Fair Lawn site, and its selection. Also, *Hammond's 8x11 Map* shows a layout that appears to conform to Schaffer's description of the location as of 1927, at 147.

⁴² Schaffer: p. 147.

⁴³ *Village of Euclid, Ohio v. Ambler Realty Co.*, 272 U.S. 365 (1926), United States Supreme Court, holding that municipalities may exercise the police power to enact restrictive land use zoning regulations.

⁴⁴ Schaffer: p. 148.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*: at 152.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*: at 152-53.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*: at 154. Schaffer describes the relationship in Radburn between land use and economics.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*: at 150.

⁵⁰ Hall: p. 133. In the 1920s, African-Americans and Jews were actively discriminated against by Radburn's real estate agents. Ironically, this policy was carried out in spite of the fact that one of Radburn's chief planners, Clarence Stein, was Jewish; and the fact that the entire R.P.A.A. vision was explicitly guided by progressive social principles.

⁵¹ Schaffer: p. 160. Attached map, "Radburn, N.J., Plan of Northwest and Southwest Residential Districts," by Clarence S. Stein and Henry Wright, architects, shows location.

⁵² Howard: *passim*.

⁵³ *Ibid.*: at 141-160. Chapter 13, "The Future of London", describes Howard's vision.

⁵⁴ Abraham E. Kazan, *Cooperative Housing in the United States*, (May 1937, Philadelphia: *The Annals of the American Academy of Social and Political Science*): p. 138.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*: at 141.

⁵⁶ Howard: p. 21.

⁵⁷ Kazan: at 142.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Howard: p. 88-93. Chapter 8: "Pro-Municipal Work". The chapter describes the self-starting members of the Garden City community whose innovative ideas, not yet being officially sanctioned by the municipal enterprise, are nevertheless promoted and carried out for both the improvement of the community and the demonstrative purpose of their hopeful success. Eventually, the more successful of these ideas will theoretically be absorbed by the cooperative and regularized in their application.

⁶⁰ Herzl: p. 196-97. This might offer an alternate route by which these ideas became popular among the heavily Jewish labor unions of the Lower East Side. Herzl envisioned the use of a limited-dividend stock corporation to raise the initial funds for colonization; this corporation, upon sinking its debt, would transfer its ownership interests in the land to a cooperative, called the New Society, which would proceed to represent all of the colonists who wished to participate. Participation would be open to all residents of Palestine, regardless of religion, gender, race, or background. The story is told to the protagonists as something that has already been achieved. It is strongly reminiscent of Bellamy's approach in *Looking Backward*.

⁶¹ Freeman: pp. 110-124. This paragraph summarizes some of the main points in Freeman's description of union-sponsored housing in New York City, and compares them to the goals of the C.H.C.

⁶² Freeman: p. 123. Freeman notes that as of the mid-1970s, when the union-sponsored, limited-equity cooperative housing model fell out of favor as a model for new housing construction in New York City, about 120,000 people lived in these kinds of apartments. Given that no significant additions have since been made to the stock of these units, and also that none of the major coops have since withdrawn from the basic financing structure of the limited-equity model, it is reasonable to conclude that the number of people living in this type of apartment today remains similar to the mid-1970s figure that Freeman cited.

⁶³ Dept. of the Interior: p. 38.

⁶⁴ Alexandra Hans, *Amalgamated Housing: The History of a Pioneer Co-Operative* (2007, New York: self-published article).

⁶⁵ Freeman: p. 111. “The Depression halted the construction of co-op apartments.”

⁶⁶ Hall: p. 135.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Dept. of the Interior: p. 35.

⁶⁹ Hall: p. 135.

⁷⁰ Dept. of the Interior: p. 36

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Hall: p. 136.

⁷⁴ Dept. of the Interior: passim.

⁷⁵ Howard: p. 109. Howard agreed with Herbert Spencer that nothing higher than municipal-level governments should be deeply involved in developing new towns. However, foreseeing the impact of success on rural land prices, he expresses support for the eventual governmental use of eminent domain to purchase rural land at a cost that would facilitate the continued solvency of the program.

⁷⁶ Dept. of the Interior: p. 28. The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s “Government Farm” is nearby.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*: at 29.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Hall: p. 136.

⁸¹ Dept. of the Interior: p. 39.

⁸² *Ibid.*: passim.

⁸³ *Ibid.*: passim.