

RADBURN, NEW JERSEY PLANNING PRECEDENT

Established 1929
Planned by Clarence Stein and Henry Wright

Established in 1929, Radburn was marketed as a “Town for the Motor Age.” However, its roots were in the English garden city movement, and it brought together many important and innovative planning concepts: the superblock, the clustering of individual houses around cul-de-sacs, the separation of vehicular and pedestrian traffic (system of pedestrian pathways behind homes making it possible to walk without crossing a vehicular street), and the abundance of common outdoor spaces within walking distance of every unit. Only partially finished because of the Stock Market Crash, the town was declared a National Historic Landmark in 2005.



Photo: @Dnadeso, Wikimedia Commons
The cul-de-sacs at Radburn provide automobile access to the units



Photo: WTTW
Paths at the backs of the houses lead to the larger common space.



Photo: David Altarini
Houses back up to the common space at Radburn.



Photo: WTTW
An underpass allows pedestrian access between the superblocks.

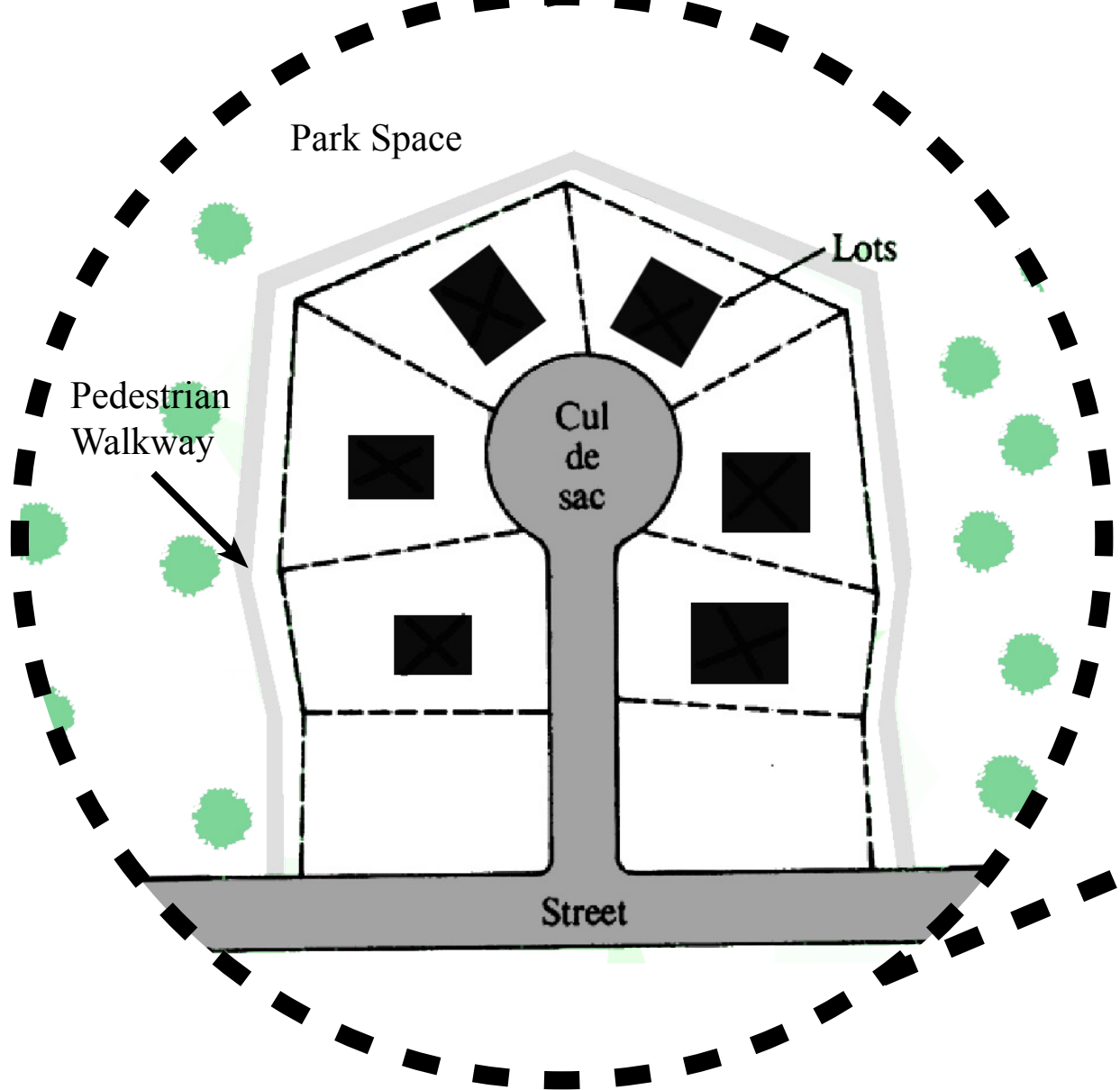
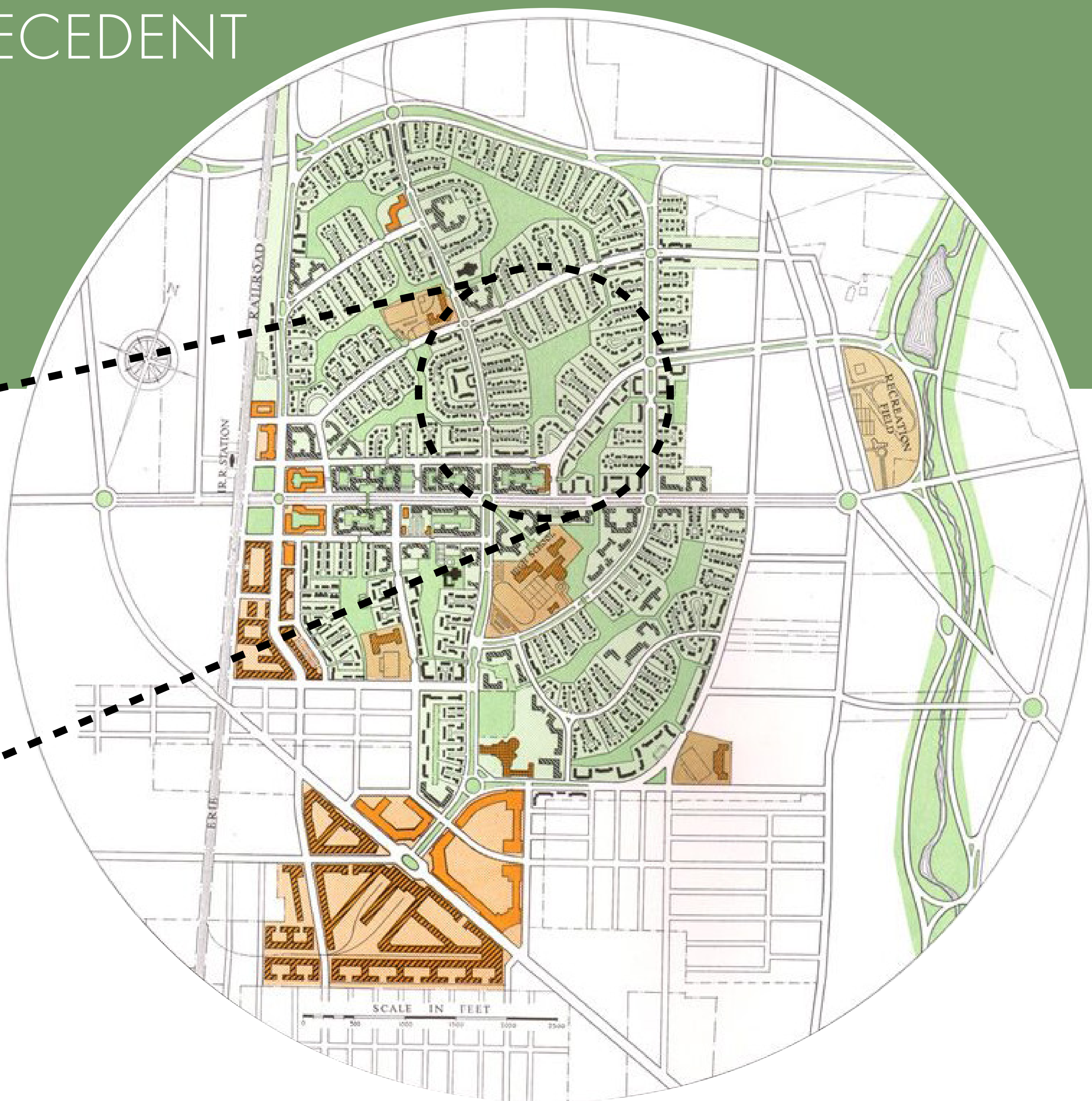


Diagram: Elisabeth Frizzell and Victor Hoyos

The diagram above shows the cul-de-sac module at Radburn. Really just a long driveway, the cul-de-sac was meant to be a back door entry, providing vehicular access to the garages and service access to/from the kitchens. The public face of the house – with the front door and living room – was on the opposite side, adjoining either a pedestrian mews or the larger common outdoor spaces. Repeating the module, as shown in the large-scale plan on the right, created the superblock: vehicular traffic was kept to the perimeter and common outdoor spaces connected all of the houses.



TOWN PLAN RADBURN, N.J.

| | | | | | | | |
|--|---------|--|-------------|--------|--|----------|--|
| | SCHOOLS | | APARTMENTS | HOUSES | | THEATRE | |
| | STORES | | PLAYGROUNDS | PARKS | | INDUSTRY | |

FIG. 15
RADBURN, NEW JERSEY—PLAN OF MODEL COMMUNITY
[134]
Courtesy of the City Housing Corporation

Plan: Clarence Stein and Henry Wright

The common outdoor space in the middle of the superblock became the backbone of the community. The footpaths within it connected not only all the houses but several community facilities as well: an elementary school at one end, a commercial center at the other, and a community pool and recreation center in the middle. A simple but compelling principle was that a child could walk from home to school without ever crossing a street. The image at bottom left shows a pedestrian underpass connecting the two superblocks that were built.

The original design for Radburn, begun in 1928, envisioned a town of some 25,000 people on over 1,200 acres. By May of 1929 the first residents had already moved in, but shortly after the stock market crash in October of that year, construction ceased altogether. By 1934, the enterprise was bankrupt with less than 15% of the original development having been realized. The aerial image on the right shows Radburn in the first phase of its development, perhaps a third of its eventual size.



Photo: The International Garden Cities Institute
This early aerial view of Radburn shows the first cul-de-sacs, houses, and some of the footpaths in the common spaces.