

GREENBELT, MARYLAND PLANNING PRECEDENT

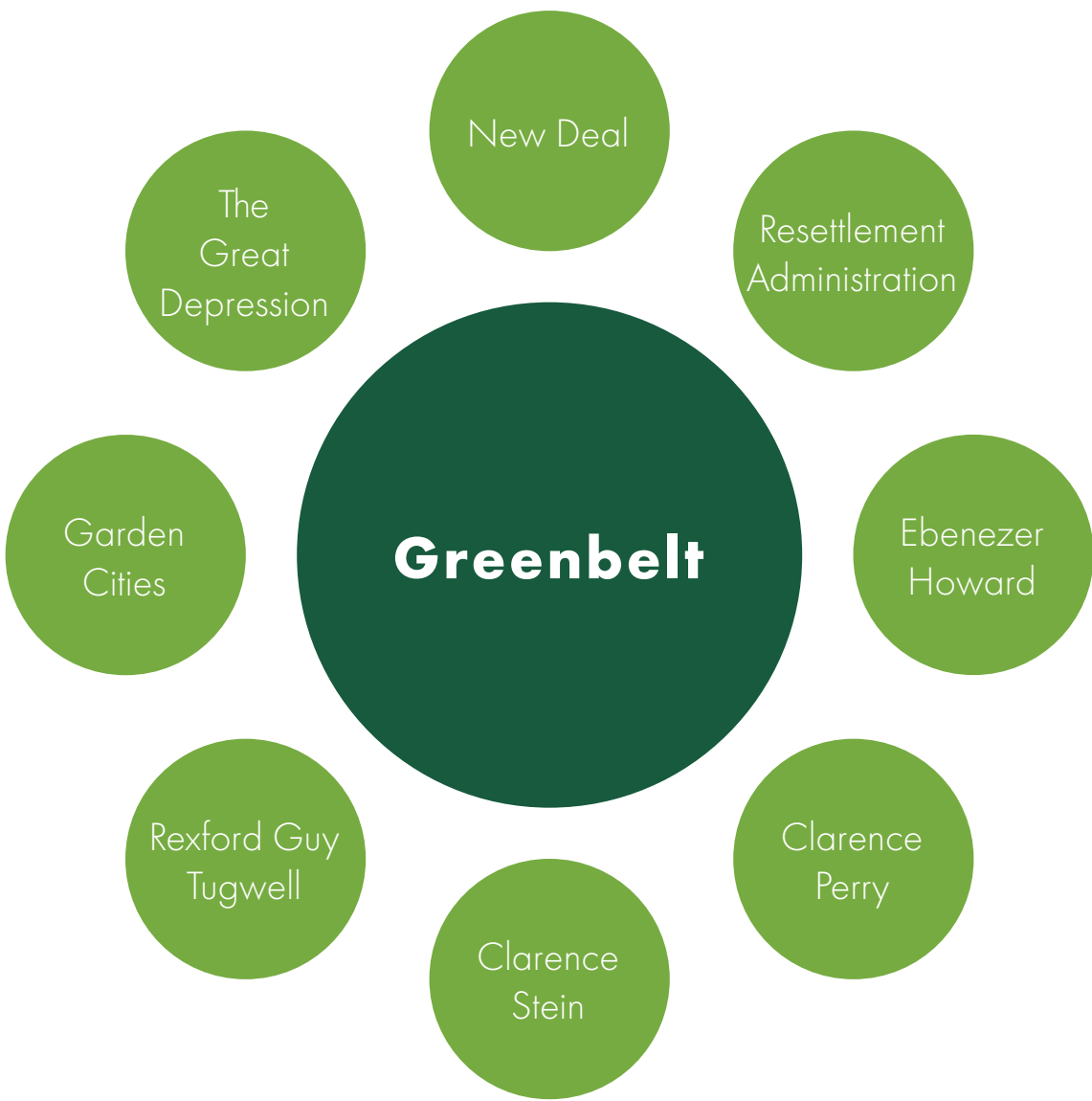


“The first community in the United States built as a federal venture in housing.”

(City of Greenbelt website: History of Greenbelt. 1.)

Enma Ruyser and Gabrielle Icardo | Kent Macdonald | ARCH 352

HISTORY DEPRESSION-ERA GARDEN CITY



Located on the outskirts of Washington DC, Greenbelt, Maryland was the first planned community built as a federal project in the United States. As a part of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal projects attempting to rebuild the American economy after the Great Depression, Greenbelt aimed to help with the housing shortage for low- and middle-income workers and to provide employment for out-of-work and unskilled laborers.

Modeled after the English garden city movement of the 19th and early 20th centuries, Greenbelt took cues from many sources: the planning ideas of Clarence Stein, the communitarian ideas of the “neighborhood unit” by the sociologist Clarence Perry, and the social and economic cooperative ideals of Rexford Guy Tugwell. According Wallace Richards’ book, Greenbelt, Tugwell hoped

the town would “embody his dream of places where people could live and work together cooperatively.” Tasked with creating Greenbelt and three other towns, Tugwell set to work, wanting to make low- and middle-income housing in “a garden city surrounded by a greenbelt of trees and open spaces.” Construction began in 1936; the first families moved in a year later.

From the beginning, residents adapted to their new surroundings and took the cooperative spirit to heart, one that lives on to this day. In the end, however, Tugwell managed to develop only Greenbelt and two other towns in Ohio and Wisconsin. The Resettlement Administration drew political fire, seeming socialistic and anti-American, and in late 1936, Tugwell resigned from the program, and less than a day later, Roosevelt terminated it altogether.

CHARACTERS IMPORTANT PEOPLE & STAKEHOLDERS



Photo: AP Photo

President Franklin D. Roosevelt established the Resettlement Administration shortly after taking office in 1933. It was just one of his many New Deal programs and public works projects intended to restore stability and prosperity to America in the wake of the Great Depression.



Photo: Harris & Ewing

Rexford Guy Tugwell, an economist and member of Roosevelt’s “Brain Trust,” developed the Greenbelt town program as head of the Resettlement Administration. He envisioned tens of the greenbelt towns all over the nation, but Congressional opposition stymied his plans. In the end, only three such towns were built.



Photo: Getty Photos

Eleanor Roosevelt was also a key player as Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s wife and by helping Tugwell lay out the design for Greenbelt. There is also a high school in Greenbelt named after her.



Photo: Eric Zhang

The residents of Greenbelt were strictly regulated, but generally came from the lower-middle class. The town was also centered around a pool, pictured to the right.



Photo: Greenbelt Museum

Civic centers in Greenbelt were grouped together towards the center of the town, along with the pool and park.

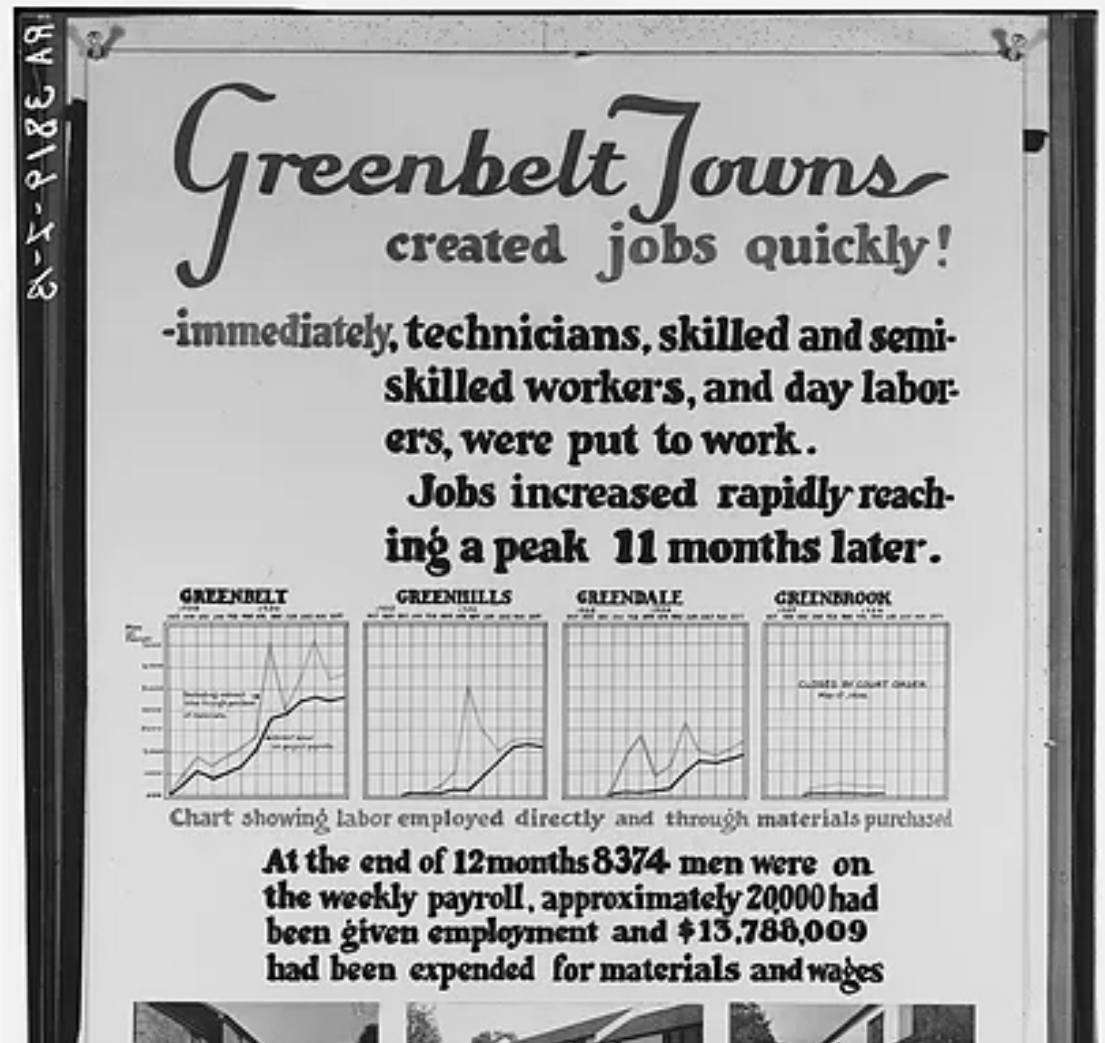


Photo: Library of Congress



Photo: Arthur Rothstein

Advertising campaigns promoted Greenbelt towns as places both to live and work—strong appeals in a time of high unemployment and “Hoovervilles,” the shantytowns of homeless people that appeared across the U.S. in the wake of the Depression. The campaigns also encouraged people to move away from what were portrayed as the corrupting influences of big cities.



Photo: Raylan Chung



Photo: Jack E. Boucher



Photo: Elliot Carter

Greenbelt’s public buildings were built in the Art Deco style; they had elongated lines, rounded corners, and were adorned with bas-reliefs. The townhouses and apartments were boxier; the only décor was a kind of brick ribbing around some of the windows.

LAYOUT PLANNING PRINCIPLES & EXECUTION



Photo: Old Greenbelt Theater

The town is organized radially around a shopping and community center with a ring of housing superblocks around it. Parking is relegated to small dead-end parking courts on the periphery of each superblock, leaving the center car-free. See also aerial photo at lower right.



Photo: Greenbelt Museum

A variety of uses, both commercial and civic, were grouped in the town center. These included shops, a supermarket, movie theater, library, city hall, elementary school, and a recreational center with an outdoor pool.



Photo: John William Repp

An extensive system of pathways within the superblocks allowed for the separation of vehicular and pedestrian traffic. All of the residents in the original town were within a five- to ten-minute minute walk from the center.



Photo: Lisa P. Davidson

Communal open space was prioritized over private yards, which were relatively smaller and could only be enclosed with hedges, not fences, in order to encourage openness and social interaction.



Photo: Marion Ross Wolcott

None of the original Greenbelt homes faced a street. On the front, they had small yards adjoining communal open space; on the back, they had private service yards leading to small parking courts.



Photo: Library of Congress

Homes are grouped into “superblocks” with a system of interior walkways allowing residents to walk from home to the town center without crossing a major street. Pedestrian and vehicular traffic are clearly separated through the underpasses for pedestrians to use.

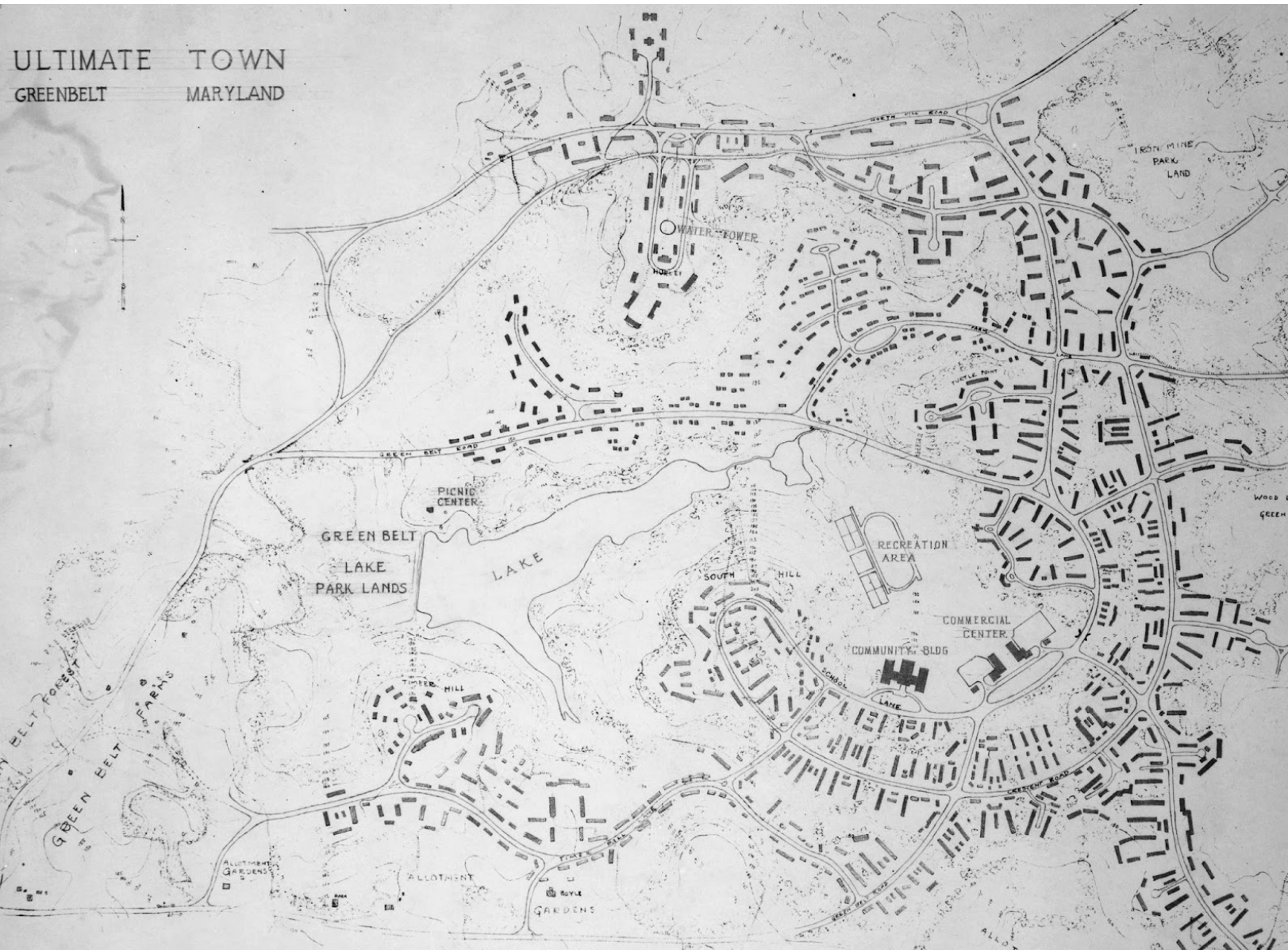


Photo: Library of Congress

Two main streets curve below a crescent-shaped natural ridge, with shops, schools, fields, and community buildings in the center of the crescent. Most of the green “belts” lead to the center, giving people a safe way to walk directly to the center of town, where their childrens school is, and where they most likely work.



Photo: Library of Congress

This early aerial view shows the simplicity of the planning principles that guided Greenbelt’s layout. Between a pair of concentric streets, the homes are grouped into “superblocks,” divided by radiating streets leading from the town center, where the shops, community buildings, and playfields are all clustered. A system of pedestrian pathways and underpasses allows residents to walk to the center without crossing major streets.