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LAND AND COMMUNITY DESIGN CASE STUDY SERIES

VILLAGE HOMES

A COMMUNITY BY DESIGN

MARK FRANCIS

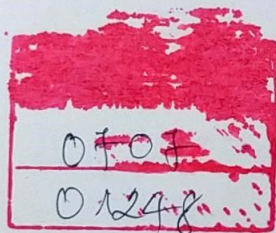
CASE STUDY IN LAND AND COMMUNITY DESIGN

VILLAGE HOMES

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MARK FRANCIS



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CONTENTS



Foreword by L. Susan Everett, Landscape Architecture Foundation ix

VILLAGE HOMES: CASE STUDY IN LAND & COMMUNITY DESIGN xi



INTRODUCTION: A COMMUNITY BY DESIGN 1

LAF CASE STUDY METHOD AND VILLAGE HOMES 5



DESIGN, DEVELOPMENT, AND DECISION-MAKING 27

DESIGN AND PLANNING CONCEPTS 33



THE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM AND DESIGNER'S ROLE 47

AN INFLUENTIAL COMMUNITY DESIGN 51

CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM, PRACTICAL PROBLEMS 63



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 77

Bibliography 85

Photo Credits 87



Sources of Information 88

Index 89

About the Author 92



Author Acknowledgments 92

Landscape Architecture Foundation Acknowledgments 93

FOREWORD

The magnitude of social and environmental problems has increased dramatically during the post-World War II decades. The economic engine that has driven uncontrolled development has often not been balanced by social, historical, aesthetic, or environmental concerns. Suburban development and new communities have replaced the rural landscape with retail boxes; six-lane roads are lined with parking lots and billboards; and fast-food restaurants sit next to historic buildings.

Design and planning can make a difference. In fact the body of evidence in both the natural and built environments suggests that inspired design can make a significant improvement in the lives of people and the life of our planet. From the transformation of the grittiest urban centers to the conservation of the grandest expanse of public lands, Americans have accumulated an unparalleled record of achievement in the creation of landscapes that enrich the human spirit.

The power of planning and design to connect seemingly unrelated systems and resources lies at the heart of our ability to leave a sustainable imprint on the planet. This is a lasting legacy for future generations. From urban centers to national parks, from intercity greenways to neighborhood playgrounds, landscape planning and design is one of the most effective, economical, and valuable methods of holistically addressing such topical issues as clean water, transportation patterns, open space protection, and community planning.

In order to solve these increasingly complex challenges, professionals and their clients need timely information on emerging issues and on innovative projects that show how and why certain approaches and schemes have been successful, as well as offer helpful criticism about their more problematic aspects. Information of this type is vital to the goals of protecting natural resources and landscapes, reclaiming disturbed lands, and creating sustainable communities that foster health and safety.

Such critical and multifaceted analysis and design, taking into account the land, history, society, economics, and land use regulations, can prevent many environmental, social, and health problems. It can also restore or improve degraded land and communities. Yet this requires planning and design of the highest quality. At the same time, high-quality design has become more difficult to achieve. Forces such as population migration and growth, and rapid urbanization, require landscape planners to assess each situation anew and bring fresh thinking, rather than old formulas, to the design of our living landscapes.

The Landscape Architecture Foundation is developing the *Land and Community Design Case Study Series* to meet this critical need. The series will enhance the skills and knowledge base of the landscape planning professions, inform public policy and land development decisions, and provide material for public education. The result will be the creation of environments with the capacity to restore and promote public welfare and health, as well as to protect and enhance the built and natural environments.

L. Susan Everett
Executive Director
Landscape Architecture Foundation
Washington, DC

VILLAGE HOMES:

CASE STUDY IN LAND AND COMMUNITY DESIGN

Can a community be designed? For some designers, the answer may seem obvious. But for others, including sociologists, community developers, and urbanists, community does not simply result from design and planning. There are many built examples of community design, including New Urbanist designs, that fall short of creating community as the goal. While aesthetically and economically successful, they do not work as a true community society that brings people together and creates a deeper sense of place. Yet other designed communities are more successful in creating a strong sense of attachment and social interaction. The purpose of this case study is to document and critically evaluate Village Homes as one development that successfully creates community and sustainability by design. A second goal is to develop a prototype of the project-based case study for the Landscape Architecture Foundation (LAF) to advance the development of future case studies.

Village Homes is a planned community in Davis, California, and one of the most important built examples of sustainable community design in the United States. Delegations of mayors, architects, and environmentalists from around the world have visited: First Lady Rosalynn Carter came to visit in 1979, French President Francois Mitterrand arrived in a fleet of helicopters in 1984, environmental gurus such as E. F. Schumacher and entertainers such as Jane Fonda and Pete Seeger have all visited. The success of Village Homes has been widely studied and well documented. Today it is considered to be a leading model of sustainable community design.

OPPOSITE Village Homes site plan.

Village Homes, designed and developed by Michael and Judy Corbett in the 1970s, consists of 244 single- and multi-family residences on 60 acres. The community is now fully built out. Houses are planned as energy-conserving buildings around common open spaces with play areas and shared gardens. A sizable part of the development is devoted to community open space, including orchards, vineyards, and play areas. Most of the landscape is designed as an edible landscape and is owned and actively managed by its residents.

Seen early on by local planners and bankers as a high-risk development, Village Homes today is one of the most desirable and economically successful developments in California. It offers many design and planning lessons useful for community development and landscape architecture. For example, Village Homes has developed and tested innovative site design features such as open channel drainage, edible planting, and sustainable open space, and researchers have found them to be socially, ecologically and economically effective. The purpose of this case study is to make this knowledge available to practitioners and researchers as well as to provide a critical review of the project's successes and limitations as a community by design.