

# The Garden Valley: Remembering Visions and Values in 1950s Cleveland with Allan Jacobs

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## Abstract

In the summer of 1954 a young graduate from the University of Pennsylvania's city planning program was asked to design a public housing complex in the heart of Cleveland, Ohio. Ambitions were high; the Garden Valley, as the project was christened, was to be a modern, clean, mixed-use, racially and economically integrated community that would be a "model neighborhood for all of Cleveland." The ambitions belied the setting, for the project was planned for a decidedly inauspicious location: Kingsbury Run, a dangerous, disreputable, polluted gully that had been the site of the dirtiest industrial facilities, Depression-era shantytowns, and an infamous series of murders. The young planner was Allan Jacobs, now a figure of great renown in city planning for his public, academic, writing, and consulting careers. Jacobs is currently professor emeritus in the Department of City and Regional Planning at the University of California, Berkeley. Based on his work developing an overall plan for the Kingsbury Run site, hundreds of new publicly and privately owned apartment units would be constructed in a garden-like setting, providing housing for thousands of low- and middle-income Clevelanders. Yet within just two years of the first units' construction the Garden Valley was already considered run-down and undesirable, a reputation that would grow and deepen with time, a reputation the area has struggled with ever since. How is it that an auspicious combination of good intentions, significant resources, and uncommon talent was not enough to ensure the success of the project? Did the original conceptual design and the dominant values that influenced it play a role in setting the stage for the difficulties to come? This article, based largely on a series of conversations with Allan Jacobs, explores these questions by telling the story of his first summer of professional design work in his hometown of Cleveland, Ohio.

## "... from a useless wasteland"<sup>1</sup>

In the early 1950s planners in Cleveland, Ohio set their minds to the task of turning a dangerous, polluted half mile-long gully in the middle of the city into a beautiful new community of homes, apartments, schools, churches, and stores. Kingsbury Run, an effluent-filled stream, ran down the middle of a small depression and emptied into the Cuyahoga River, itself grossly polluted from use as an industrial sewer for nearly one hundred years. It had been the site of a brickyard, Depression-era shantytowns, and the never-solved "Torso Murders," an infamous series of decapitations in the 1930s. Some of Cleveland's heaviest industries, including a crude oil refinery and asphalt plants, had been located just to the south and used the gully as a dumping ground for decades (see Figure 1 below).

It was hardly an auspicious location for a major urban redevelopment project, but it held the potential to provide an elegant solution to a difficult problem. Urban renewal projects planned in other parts of the city could displace thousands of people. Without adequate replacement housing, most of the evicted residents would have to find places to stay in an already overcrowded city of nearly a million people. Worse, the impact was exacerbated by the residential segregation of the city's African Americans, who made up the vast majority of the displaced, in a few central neighborhoods.<sup>2</sup> If Kingsbury Run could be culverted and the small valley filled in, the reclaimed land could be used to construct hundreds, or even thousands, of new housing units just outside of the center of one of the country's biggest cities.

The idea, unlikely as it seemed, became a reality before the end of the decade. Anthony Celebrezze, the city's mayor from 1953 to 1962 (who would go on to serve as John F. Kennedy's Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare from 1962 to 1965), committed city resources and agencies to the project's planning, design, financing, construction, and management. In 1957, the first residents began moving into 222 newly constructed, privately owned and managed, middle-income garden apartments. Two years later, several hundred more units opened — these ones publicly owned and targeted at low-income families on

<sup>1</sup> This phrase and the photograph that is Figure 1 are from the brochure (circa 1956) issued by Cleveland's Urban Renewal Agency entitled "Garden Valley: Community of the Future."

<sup>2</sup> As in many other cities of the northeast, the African American population had boomed during the 1940s and 1950s as World War II and post-World War II jobs lured them from southern states. Cleveland's African American population nearly tripled from 1940 to 1960 from about 85,000 to over 250,000. At the same time, large numbers of white Clevelanders were moving to the suburbs, so that the African American population rose to nearly a third of the city's total population (see the article on African Americans in Van Tassel and Grabowski 1987).

public assistance. By 1970, 650 housing units, as well as a new school, playgrounds, and playing fields had been built on 130 acres of what was christened "The Garden Valley."<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 1: The Polluted Kingsbury Run prior to 1954**



Kingsbury Run prior to 1954 was polluted, dangerous, and disreputable. Hardly a garden spot, but just three years later, the land would be culverted, filled in with slag, used to construct hundreds of public and private housing units, and rechristened the "Garden Valley." Source: Cleveland Urban Renewal Agency, circa 1955.

The fact that a major redevelopment project was completed on the site was the outcome of a sustained and well coordinated effort by a pro-growth coalition of politicians, bureaucrats, and businessmen that was similar to other American metropolitan pro-growth coalitions of the 1950s. With the near unanimous support of local politicians and civil servants, the public funds they committed to the work, and the additional financial support of corporate leaders, the city was able to take advantage of federal government programs to fund the project. The mayor's office, the city planning department, the local urban redevelopment agency, and the Cleveland Metropolitan Housing Authority worked together to match city funds with large federal grants to condemn, purchase, clear, and assemble urban lands for new development, not just in Garden Valley, but also in seven large sites covering

<sup>3</sup> The origin of the name "Garden Valley" is unclear. Allan Jacobs doesn't believe the area had ever had such a name and that picking it to describe the project must have been a "reimagining effort" to give the reclaimed land and the new housing units a positive image.

over 6,000 acres throughout the city (Miller and Wheeler 1990).

The design of the Garden Valley project — the general plan for streets, building locations, playing fields, and parks — was equally a product of the times and the values and traditions of 1950s America. The principal supporter and planner of the project, Ernest Bohn, director of the Cleveland Metropolitan Housing Authority (CMHA), was a longtime admirer of the new town and garden city models espoused by Clarence Stein, Lewis Mumford, and other members of the influential Regional Planning Association of America (RPAA). Cleveland mayor Anthony Celebrezze and the city's planning director, James Lister, embraced Bohn's vision and his faith in government action, rational planning, experts' analyses, and the positive role of business. Lister, in turn, found a talented, confident, young planner, Allan Jacobs, to develop a conceptual plan for the Garden Valley that would help turn the vision into reality.

This essay focuses on that original design of the Garden Valley — what it came to be, how it was developed, and what role it may have played in subsequent challenges the area has faced. It draws on a series of conversations with Allan Jacobs that revisit the Cleveland of the 1950s through his memories and recollections. While this is not a complete history and analysis of the Garden Valley project, much less of urban redevelopment in Cleveland, this dialogue with Jacobs sheds light on an important moment in US and planning history and suggests lessons for the future of our profession.<sup>4</sup> It provides a rare, focused reflection from one of the planning field's premier design scholars.

## Setting the Stage

Politicians, planners, and designers in 1950s Cleveland put a high priority on solving the problems of densely populated slums that existed on the city's near east side. Conditions in these neighborhoods — overcrowded housing units, extreme racial segregation, high crime rates, preventable diseases, and births among unmarried women — prompted religious and civic leaders to declare them “a social and moral menace to the community” (Navin 1934, 1). In place of these

<sup>4</sup> All quotations in this essay are from the conversations with Allan Jacobs, unless otherwise noted. Other important sources of information include annual reports from the Cleveland Metropolitan Housing Authority and the Cleveland Urban Redevelopment Agency (see Cleveland Metropolitan Housing Authority 1956, 1957, 1958, and 1965), brochures and historic newspaper articles obtained from Cleveland State University, and a recording of an early 1960s newscast on the history of redevelopment in Cleveland, entitled “Cleveland: City on Schedule” narrated by Chet Huntley (original source unknown).

slums, public officials envisioned economically and racially mixed populations living in safe, comfortable, well-constructed, and well-main-

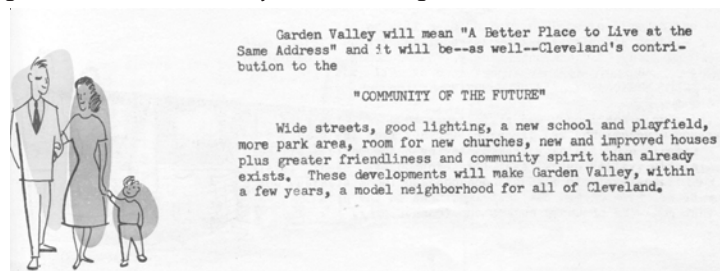
tained apartments and homes in walkable, green neighborhoods, easily accessible to jobs, services, schools, stores, and places of worship. Gone would be the most decrepit 15 percent of the city's 275,000 dwelling units (Cleveland Division of Slum Clearance and Blight Control 1959, 13) and in their place would be the most modern publicly and privately owned housing developments in the city, a “model neighborhood for all of Cleveland” (see Figure 2).<sup>5</sup>

A review of original documents from the 1950s (see list of references) suggests that this vision was based on three key values. First, was a belief that the physical environment contributes in an important way to individuals' behaviors. Razing buildings and constructing new homes and apartments was seen as *the answer*, not just to overcrowded living conditions, but to the crime, delinquency, and “immoral” behavior that occurred there. Second, was a faith in the expertise of the rational public planning model and the benefits of business leadership. The 1950s were a heyday of scientific, rational planning in which logic and analysis in the hands of experts gave policy-makers and elected officials enormous confidence to define problems, set goals, and identify solutions that would ensure success. Finally, there was a stated commitment to the creation of socio-economically and racially diverse housing complexes, “precisely the kind of new environment that those who initiated the US Housing Act of 1937 had in mind” (Cleveland Metropolitan Housing Authority 1957). However, this commitment ran counter to the ongoing pattern of white flight from Cleveland to the suburbs. CMHA officials envisioned a racial mix of families “living side by side and moving from one development into the other as their economic conditions require it” (Cleveland Metropolitan Housing Authority 1957). Three key city officials championed the vision and the project: Ernest Bohn, Anthony Celebrezze, and James Lister.

Ernest Bohn, the 35-year director (1933 to 1968) of the Cleveland Municipal Housing Authority (CMHA), was the most important personality in Cleveland urban redevelopment and public housing at the time. He had been a Republican state legislator, a Cleveland City Councilman, and the president and organizer of the National Association for Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO) before taking responsibility for the CMHA. His interest in public housing and its role as a replacement for dwelling units that would be destroyed in “slum clearance” projects dated back to the 1920s and 1930s.

<sup>5</sup> This phrase and Figure 2 are from the brochure (circa 1956) issued by Cleveland's Urban Renewal Agency entitled “Garden Valley: Community of the Future.”

**Figure 2: The Garden Valley , A Model Neighborhood**



The Garden Valley was to be more than just decent housing for low- and middle-income city residents; it was to be a "model neighborhood for all of Cleveland." Source: Cleveland Urban Renewal Agency, circa 1955.

Bohn played a key role in advocating national legislation to construct public housing projects. One of his more influential acts was to commission the report, "An Analysis of a Slum Area in Cleveland," by the president of a Cleveland diocesan college, Fr. Robert Navin (1934). This study was the source of the aforementioned conclusion that slum areas were "a social and moral menace to the community." The report went beyond simple condemnation of slum neighborhoods to estimating the monetary cost to the city of responding to slum conditions (\$51.10 per year per resident). This analysis was duplicated in many other American cities in the following decade and the Cleveland report was cited as a supporting document in the passage of the first US Housing Act of 1937.

The funds made available through the US Housing Act and subsequent legislation permitted Cleveland to construct some of the earliest US public housing units. They were housing units of high quality. Jacobs remembers that Cedar-Central, Lakeview Terrace, and Valleyview, all funded and built during the Depression by the Public Works Administration and the US Housing Authority, were sites that Clevelanders would take out-of-town visitors to see. "They were anything but good architecture — they wouldn't give him [Ernest Bohn] money for that — but they were constructed of brick, spectacularly well kept, with flowers planted and ivy growing on the walls, and people out talking in the public areas."

From 1953 to 1962, Bohn had a powerful ally in the mayor's office, Anthony Celebrezze, a longtime Clevelander who knew from personal childhood experience what life for an immigrant (he was born in Anzi, Italy) was like in the city's slums. He was a strong advocate of urban renewal projects that would eliminate overcrowded, run-down housing and create modern homes and apartments for the poor. However, he knew that moving too quickly created problems of its own, and so he

advocated a policy of building new public housing units *before* displacing residents from condemned buildings. In part a practical response to a pressing problem, Bohn wanted to avoid additional crowding in nearby neighborhoods. Bohn's thoughts also reflected the belief that "safe, sanitary, and decent" physical environments were the answer to both the problems of slum residents and the costs to the city of responding to those problems.

Bohn and Celebrezze knew that Cleveland's Planning Commission Director, James Lister, shared their goals and belief in the potential of the Garden Valley site. Lister had worked for the commission since 1938, with the exception of a three-year stint as head of Cleveland's Freeway Planning Bureau, a position which also required condemning and razing homes and businesses. He was a skilled landscape architect in his own right (he won the *Prix de Rome* award in 1935) and brought those skills and sensibilities to his work as a planner and, after 1956, as first director of the city's Urban Renewal Agency.

## Designing the Garden Valley

Lister hired Allan Jacobs to work on the Garden Valley project in the summer of 1954, just after Jacobs graduated with a Master's in City Planning from the University of Pennsylvania, where he had studied with Lewis Mumford, William Wheaton, later Dean of the University of California, Berkeley's College of Environmental Design, and Martin Meyerson, a future University of California, Berkeley Chancellor and President of CUNY Buffalo and the University of Pennsylvania (Jacobs already had an architecture degree from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio). Cleveland was home for Jacobs. He had worked as an intern with the Cleveland Regional Planning Association the previous summer. Jacobs remembers that the experience had not been as intellectually rewarding as he had hoped, and, as a result, had decided to pursue a more academically-oriented trajectory by accepting a Fulbright scholarship that would take him to London in the coming fall. James Lister, the Director of the City Planning Commission, wanted to hire him full-time to work for the city, but the offer was not what Jacobs was looking for. Still, he had the summer free and was talked into accepting a summer position with the planning department by no less than Ernest Bohn himself.

Within a few days, Jacobs had begun work on the initial designs for Garden Valley. His introduction to the project came via Lister, who took him to see Kingsbury Run and asked if Jacobs could design a housing project for the site. After considering the site with its polluted gully, its

bad reputation, and all the technical problems a designer would face, Jacobs countered, "Is the question *can* I or *should* I?" Lister responded with a friendly, but unambiguous, "Don't get smart!" Important members of Cleveland's political and business communities had made the decision to move ahead, and a young urban designer fresh out of graduate studies was not going to cause them to revisit the question.

Jacobs' first task was simply to describe and define the area. He started by identifying the existing land uses in the neighborhood and areas nearby, then turned to setting project boundaries. Kinsman Avenue seemed to delimit the northern boundary of the project area. Homes and stores, most of which were in good enough condition to merit rehabilitation rather than demolition, lined the street on either side. To the east, East 79<sup>th</sup> Street could serve as the second boundary, but "that was a bit more problematic." Derelict industrial sites and vacant lots predominated, with decrepit houses and a cluster of tiny, temporary public housing structures that were built for returning World War II and later, Korean War veterans.

To the south lies Kingsbury Run and, beyond it, heavy industrial sites and freight railroad lines ("big, old, rusty stuff," as Jacobs remembers it) that made the southern boundary of the project a challenge. Though the entire ravine was to be culverted and filled in, housing and industry would not be the most compatible of neighbors, so Jacobs needed to create a buffer between the two. A separate but related planning effort offered an opportunity to do just that. The Cleveland Transit System had plans to construct a new light rail line to the southeastern suburbs. That line would loop to the south of planned Garden Valley housing units, but just north of the industrial sites and could be used to designate both the western and southern edges of the Garden Valley project. By adding a berm alongside the tracks, a good distance could be kept between the residential units and the heavy industry. In the end, the transit line was never constructed, but its designated alignment lives on today in the shape of the Garden Valley.

Now that he had the site's boundaries defined, the next step was "to do a plan," keeping in mind that Bohn, Lister, and Celebrezze wanted to designate some of the land for private housing construction, schools, churches, and commercial businesses. Jacobs' primary inspiration was the work of Clarence Stein, "particularly the design of Greenbelt, Maryland." Because he was instructed by Lister not to include single family or row houses (the latter, he was told, "had a bad, East Coast connection"). Jacobs planned for multi-story garden apartments surrounding a central green space. His job was not to design the buildings themselves; that would be the task for architects to be hired later in the

planning process. Jacobs concentrated on the general size, shape, and position of the buildings, clustering them into "superblocks." Today, he calls the designs he produced a "concept plan, a typical, illustrative, site plan" that he assumed would be detailed by planners hired later on for that purpose.

Jacobs wanted Garden Valley's central green space to be located in a shallow, linear depression directly above the culverted creek, so that a visual reminder of the stream would remain. He oriented the apartment buildings along either side of the green, which he planned to connect to playing fields on the western edge of the project site. These would provide an additional buffer between residential and industrial land uses. But leaving a modest valley within the Garden Valley created a conflict with Republic Steel, which owned the land that was being culverted and had been filling it with slag.<sup>6</sup> The company flatly stated that, rather than leave a depression, they intended to put enough slag into the gully so that a linear hill would be created. In the end, Jacobs' preference prevailed, greatly helped by the fact that Republic Steel did not have as much slag to dispose of as they had originally expected.

Jacobs remembers four other issues as being particularly important to his sense of professional integrity and to his employers in the design work he did that summer. First was the siting of a new school that was meant to be part of the project. Jacobs did not want it to be associated exclusively with the children who would be living in the new housing nor with the children who already lived in the neighborhood. Placing the school on the edge of the superblock gave a visual cue that it was not of either community, but for both, a place where "kids from the old and the new housing could come together."

Second, he wanted to make a connection between the new street pattern and the old. This proved difficult, as the original streets were in a fine-grained grid pattern, while the very notion of a superblock with garden apartments surrounding a central green space eliminated the grid's replication as an option. In the end, Jacobs settled for making direct connections between the old and the new patterns that joined, without reconciling, the large differences between the two. The differences remained stark. The project's design pattern of broad, curving streets with few intersections was very different from the straight, narrow, and intersecting streets of the older urban area just north of the project boundaries.

Third, a key feature of the area for years had been Cleveland's only suspension bridge. It connected the Kinsman neighborhood with the

<sup>6</sup> Slag is the refuse matter that is separated from a metal in the process of smelting.

Slavic Village neighborhood by crossing over Kingsbury Run. Jacobs, Bohn, and Lister wanted to preserve the bridge because it provided the only possible connection from the Garden Valley to the adjacent neighborhoods to the southwest. Without it, the entire western and southern borders of the large site would be one long barrier to auto and pedestrian circulation. But a councilman in the largely ethnic Polish Slavic Village neighborhood strongly objected. The objecting councilmember was Ralph Perk, who went on to become Mayor of Cleveland between 1971 and 1977. It is possible the Perk's objection was based on an explicit desire to sever a link with a black neighborhood. Large scale white flight from some Cleveland neighborhoods to the suburbs had begun and the fear of white neighborhoods being inundated with blacks displaced from urban renewal sites may have influenced his thinking on the matter. This would be consistent with the attitudes of many white Clevelanders at the time, but we have not found independent confirmation of this recollection. Jacobs was on the losing end of this battle and the suspension bridge, though not actually dismantled, was closed and no longer used to connect the neighborhoods.

Finally, there was the issue of what to do with the existing housing in the neighborhood. Part of Jacobs' work was to designate areas that, along with the reclaimed land, would be used for new housing development, which meant that he was in part responsible for identifying houses and businesses that would be demolished. "Most of the buildings near East 79<sup>th</sup> Street and Kinsman Road were truly decrepit, so it was easy to take out some of that property... but I was going crazy to save housing. I wanted to keep as much of it as possible." Fortunately, other buildings in the area were in decent enough shape to warrant renovation, so he was able to limit his designs to the reclaimed land and areas where the buildings were clearly in very bad condition (see Figure 3).

In comparison to the final project site at build-out in the 1970s, Jacobs had been conservative in identifying buildings to be demolished; many additional parcels eventually were added to the project site and buildings demolished that had not been part of his original proposal. Where Jacobs proposed preserving the existing buildings along Kinsman Road in the four blocks to the west of East 79<sup>th</sup> Street, for example, later designers planned new public housing units (see Figure 4). Still, in the end, more than twice as many dwelling units were constructed as were demolished. This ratio was usually reversed in urban renewal projects of the 1950s and 1960s; the fact that more housing was built than demolished speaks well of the Garden Valley project.

**Figure 3: Kinsman Road in the 1950s**

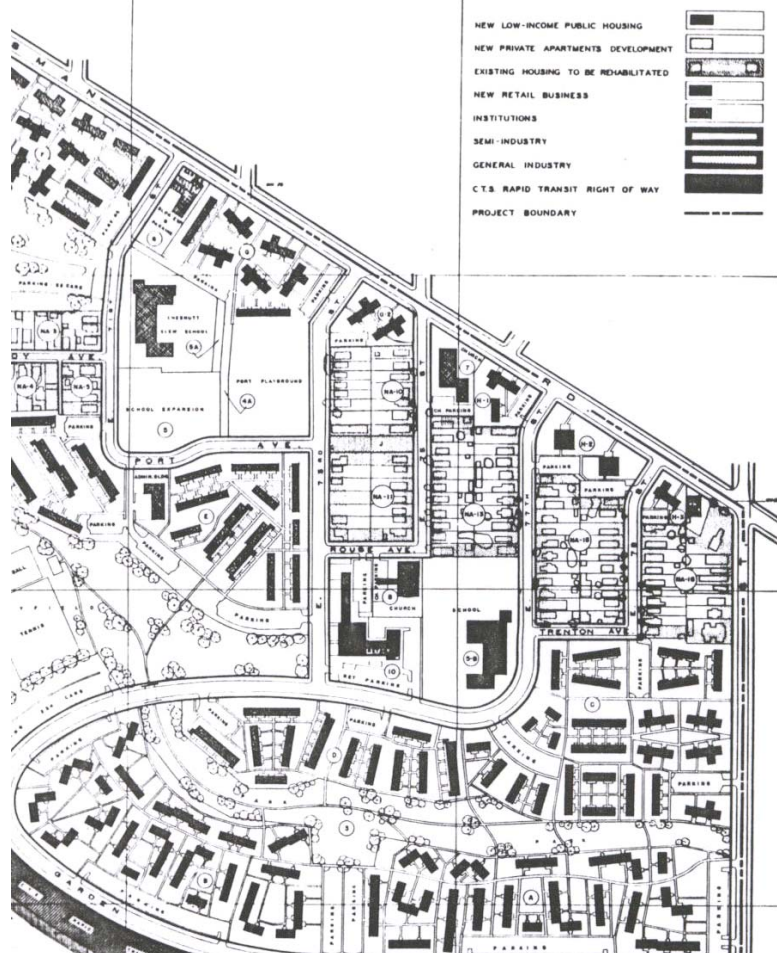


Kinsman Road was a dense mix of single-family homes and small businesses in the 1950s. Some buildings in the neighborhood would be rehabilitated as part of the Garden Valley project and others would be condemned and destroyed. Source: Allan Jacobs.

That summer, Jacobs worked largely by himself and enjoyed a significant degree of autonomy. "I worked night and day, alone." A new graduate's first professional planning job is rarely easy and this project was not an exception. He remembers, for example, that "I'd never done a grading plan and I hadn't learned it at Harvard or Penn. I was furious with my professors!" In the end, he concluded, "I was given more *carte blanche* than I deserved." Nevertheless, his proposals were readily approved and elicited no major criticisms from Bohn, Lister, Celebrezze, or the business community. Jacobs does not know precisely why his work was accepted so readily. It is clear that both Bohn and Lister shared Jacobs' interest in the garden city concept and had envisioned similar designs to what Jacobs produced. Bohn certainly must have approved, for Jacobs' plans reflected the designs and values of planners that Bohn saw as geniuses in the field: Clarence Stein and the other members of the influential RPAA.

At the end of the summer, as Jacobs was finishing up his part of the project, he met with Bohn at the project site to review his work. They toured the area and when they were on the pedestrian suspension bridge that spanned Kingsbury Run, Bohn asked Jacobs for the plan. Bohn held it up and said "Let it never be said we had our feet on the ground when we made these decisions!"

**Figure 4: Composite Site Plan for Garden Valley 1957**



This detail from the 1957 Composite Site Plan for Garden Valley shows that later planners would maintain the basic shapes of the original 1954 conceptual design, with two important exceptions. First, they included new construction along Kinsman Road that would require the demolition of more existing buildings than Jacobs proposed. And second, they eliminated an entire road that would have connected the northern and southern sections of the looping Garden Valley Avenue. Source: Cleveland Metropolitan Housing Authority 1957.

## Hopes Unrealized

Had Ernest Bohn known what was in store for the Garden Valley, he would have wanted his feet to be more firmly planted on the ground that summer day 50 years ago. The high hopes and ambitions of Garden Valley’s planning may have carried over into the early years of construction and occupancy, but they did not last long. Less than two

years after the first Garden Valley residents had moved in, the Garden Valley was already developing a reputation as “an out-and-out eyesore, with all the appearance of any Scovill Avenue tenement street.” According to a July 8, 1959 *Cleveland Press* article entitled “Once-Proud Garden Valley Is Eyesore,” “Dust blows endlessly across the dry ‘lawns,’ ...broken beer and soft drink bottles litter the ground. Playgrounds are littered with trash.... Windows are shattered here and there.”

The completion of subsequent phases of the project did little to improve the situation and the Garden Valley, as well as most of the other public housing projects in Cleveland, began a precipitous, long-lived decline. By 1990, CMHA<sup>7</sup> had a horrendous reputation, both locally and nationally. Miller and Wheeler (1990, 188) report that one federal housing official described CMHA property as “the second-worst public housing in the nation,” plagued by “crime, inadequate maintenance, and mismanagement.” Though the 1990s would see the beginnings of a turnaround — many public housing units have been rehabilitated or completely rebuilt in the past decade — the Garden Valley is still far from being “a model neighborhood for all of Cleveland,” and mismanagement is a word only recently considered part of the CMHA’s past.

How did such grand ambitions fail so quickly? Instead of the clean, safe, healthy, modern, racially and economically diverse communities envisioned, the Garden Valley seemed to be none of these things. City officials blamed too-rigid state and federal policies for creating concentrations of poor families where they had wanted an economically diverse community of tenants. Residents blamed CMHA and the owners and managers of the privately owned Garden Valley units for mismanagement while they, in turn, were blamed for vandalism, complacency, and neglect. Meanwhile, civil rights groups accused the CMHA of a de facto policy of segregating black families in an attempt to stem the white flight that saw thousands of long-time Clevelanders move to the suburbs every year.<sup>8</sup> As the accusations flew, Cleveland’s economy bottomed out with the loss of thousands of manufacturing jobs, the Cuyahoga River caught on fire, the city was forced into bankruptcy, riots occurred in Hough and other central city neighborhoods, and the term “Rust Belt” appeared tailor-made for the city derided nationally as the “mistake on the lake.”

<sup>7</sup> By then the agency had been renamed the *Cuyahoga* Metropolitan Housing Authority after the county in which Cleveland is located.

<sup>8</sup> Jacobs remembers that Ernest Bohn’s unofficial policy was for achieving a 70/30 or 65/35 racial balance — “50/50 created too many tensions between groups, he’d argue” — but Garden Valley, as did most CMHA public housing developments, quickly became home to primarily African-American Clevelanders. Many of them, including the Garden Valley, experienced high vacancy rates, which may have represented the “missing” 30% of white tenants.

## Lessons Learned

Garden Valley never became the model community planners in the 1950s hoped it would be, and today Allan Jacobs considers his role in it a personal failure. Why did Bohn, Lister, and Celebrezze's ambitions come to naught? It is easy to identify larger problems that contributed to Garden Valley's troubles: a regional economy on the skids; rising poverty rates; social and racial tensions; growing segregation; and state and federal policies that constrained Cleveland policy-makers' choices. It is much harder, however, to determine the extent to which the physical design contributed to, or exacerbated, those troubles. In comparison to Cleveland's daunting social and economic conditions of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, the physical design would seem to pale in significance. Yet the effort to draw in broad brush the basic shapes of the development — the boundaries, the locations and widths of streets, the general sizes, shapes, and placement of apartment buildings, playing fields, parking lots, and other structures — was not inconsequential. Those early design decisions and suggestions did not ordain all that followed — this is not an argument for environmental determinism — but they must have had some impact. The question is, how much of an impact?

Over the years Jacobs has concluded that the design of Garden Valley did contribute, at least in a small way, to the subsequent problems the neighborhood faced. He faults the Garden Valley's initial design on two major points. First, he feels that the street design was inappropriate and that the placement of buildings and roads fostered neither a sense of publicness nor a feeling of ownership and responsibility. Second, he critiques the overall process of developing the design.

"An overall street and block pattern is the beginning of a community, and most of the rest follows," Jacobs says today. The public housing project's long looping roads and large blocks unbroken by streets or alleys were at odds with both the existing street patterns in neighboring blocks and higher urban densities. "But there was no way then to design with the notion of single family homes and a street pattern like the existing neighborhoods. The mindset of decision-makers was so different. They had in mind places like Radburn and Greenbelt."<sup>9</sup> Yet those communities were developed under a radically different set of design conditions that did not apply in a central city location. They

<sup>9</sup> Radburn, New Jersey, designed by Clarence Stein and Henry Wright in the late 1920s, was modeled after British "New Towns" and incorporated the "superblock" design feature of multi-story buildings surrounding large green areas protected from car traffic. Greenbelt, Maryland, built by the Federal Resettlement Administration during the depths of the Great Depression, was similar in layout and features.

were planned for greenfield sites in rural settings, surrounded by open fields and forested lands, and intended for white, middle-class residents who would commute by car to jobs in nearby cities.

Jacobs feels the design also failed to create an environment that encouraged responsibility, participation, and community pride. The design of the long central greenspace, for example, discouraged the general public from using it. Apartment buildings surrounded it on either side, so that "you had to go through other people's turf to get to it. It didn't make the public space 'public.'" At the same time, residents did not perceive a clear sense of ownership of the open areas, which projected neither a sense of public accessibility nor benefited from a notion of private responsibility. "People should have responsibilities and control, but our design didn't encourage that because one entity managed it all. The design should have invited residents to participate physically in the area."

As for the process of developing the site plans, Jacobs feels that they suffered from a glaring omission — there was simply no significant citizen participation at any point in the design phase. The process was strictly top-down. "I didn't really know what the residents wanted," Jacobs recalls. Nor did his supervisors encourage him to find out. The role of the public was "just about nonexistent. In those times it was just about zero. I didn't really know what the residents wanted. Shamefully, that's true."

The Garden Valley was no anomaly in this respect; few public projects at the time included effective public involvement. It was not until 1957, three years later that the Cleveland City Council established an Urban Renewal Advisory Board and project area committees of "community leaders." The role of the board and the local committees was circumscribed from the start by the attitude that the "understanding and support of the neighborhood people is indispensable to success of the program" (Cleveland Division of Slum Clearance and Blight Control 1959, 35). In other words, citizens had a right to be informed and from that information would naturally come support. So even years after Jacobs had completed his design work and over half of the Garden Valley's housing units had been constructed, the prevailing concept of "citizen participation" was a passive one, at best.<sup>10</sup>

Therein lies the most important lesson he learned from his role in the project, "designers and planners need to understand the needs and desires of the people they're working for." Planners did not have a

<sup>10</sup> For example, Sherry Arnstein's classic influential article in the *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, "A Ladder of Citizen Participation" was not published until 1969.

direct understanding of what future public housing residents, or their neighbors in the existing community, wanted or needed. The garden city concept had captured their imaginations and the fact that they were principally greenfield suburban designs for middle-class families did not dissuade them from applying them to reclaimed industrial land in a central city neighborhood. “Beware of large projects with single designers,” Jacobs learned.

It is a lesson Jacobs has drawn on since that summer of 1954, both in his projects and his writing. In “Toward an Urban Design Manifesto,” an article he and Donald Appleyard wrote for the *Journal of the American Planning Association* in 1987, he made an argument that seems to reflect his Garden Valley experiences. He and Appleyard wrote that the pervasive influence of the new town and garden city movement,

was an overly strong design reaction to the physical decay and social inequities of industrial cities. In responding so strongly, albeit understandingly, to crowded, lightless, airless, ‘utilitiless,’ congested buildings and cities that housed so many people, the utopians did not inquire what was good about those places, either socially or physically. Did not those physical environments reflect (and maybe even foster) values that were likely to be meaningful to people individually and collectively, such as publicness and community? Without knowing it, maybe these strong reactions to urban ills ended up throwing the baby out with the bath water.

(Jacobs and Appleyard 1987, 114)

## Conclusion

Ernest Bohn, Anthony Celebrezze, and James Lister saw a clean, healthy, and racially and economically mixed community rising from the site of a polluted, dangerous, and infamous gully. A rational, scientific planning process, the expert analysis and designs of trained public servants, and the financial and political support of the business community would turn an eyesore into a garden, they believed. Clevelanders who had been living in overcrowded, crime-ridden, and dangerous slums would thrive in their new homes in an entirely new neighborhood.

However, circumstances challenged that vision, almost from the very start. Some were entirely avoidable, such as the slipshod management of the lawns, playgrounds, and other public areas of the Garden Valley that made its name unintentionally ironic. But other challenges were not so easily sidestepped; larger economic and social trends

contributed to the racial and economic segregation of the Garden Valley’s residents that planners and designers had hoped to avert.

Given this context, it is unlikely that *any* physical design for the site by Allan Jacobs, or any other urban designer, could have significantly mitigated these larger forces. A different design that incorporated the lessons that time and experience have taught Jacobs — one with a dense, grid-pattern street network, that was more inclusive in its placement of public spaces, that created conditions of participation and a greater sense of responsibility, and that relied on a more participatory planning process — probably would not have radically changed the storyline. It would not have avoided all of the subsequent problems that the residents of the Garden Valley still struggle with today.

Nonetheless, a better concept plan for the site may have set the stage differently, softening the impacts of economic, social, racial, and political conditions, making the Garden Valley better for it. A more participatory design process, a physical design that encouraged responsibility and welcomed the public, a visual and perhaps emotional continuity with the neighborhoods that had previously been home to the new residents all may have made a difference; it is impossible to know for sure, one way or the other. But having “thrown the baby out with the bath water” once, Jacobs has incorporated the lessons into his teaching and practice to stress the necessity that planners and designers must ensure that their work accurately reflects individual and community desire for, inclusion, responsibility, community connection, and sense of place.

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