ARNEAL R. ALANEN
Department of Landscape Architecture
University of Wisconsin, Madison

ABSTRACT

Most company towns in the United States, because of their paternalistic overtones and rather minimal design standards, receive scant attention in reviews of previous new town and new community development efforts. At the same time, however, it has been noted that certain similarities exist between these previous corporate-sponsored entities and many contemporary planned communities. In an effort to consider the processes that one of these older developments has experienced over a span of sixty years, this paper traces the evolution of Morgan Park, Minnesota, one of the few company towns which has received favorable attention for certain design and planning-related criteria. The partial results of a recent resident survey are also discussed so as to determine the extent to which some of these initial inputs are still recognized and appreciated by present day inhabitants.

1. INTRODUCTION

Imperfect though they may be, new towns and planned communities continue to attract attention as one, albeit partial, alternative to contemporary urban development patterns. Until recently, however, relatively little empirical evidence has been available which provides insight to actual levels of resident satisfaction within such environments. It is only during this decade that several research efforts have begun to explore a host of issues ranging from evaluations of specific design components to analyses of community planning and governance mechanisms (e.g., Lansing, et al., 1970; Zehner, 1971; Godschalk, 1973; Keller, 1973; Marans & Rodgers, 1973; Burby, 1974).

A major factor underlying many of these research endeavors involves the amount of control a developer can or should exert in the process of creating a new community. Proponents of strong developer rights contend that centralized controls are necessary if certain innovations are to be realized and standards maintained; on the other hand, opponents of this view argue that new communities should truly be democratic and serve as vehicles for the engendering of greater public participation and involvement (Burby, 1974). In essence, the questions are somewhat similar to those posed decades ago when various industrial enterprises were establishing company towns in the United States. Certainly the degree of paternalism within America's former company towns was much greater than in today's planned communities; but yet, parallels exist between the two situations, even as evidenced by the use of the term "company town" to describe certain contemporary suburban developments (Brooks, 1971; Godschalk, 1973). Given this evidence, it would appear that the actions, procedures and results relating to the transition from corporate to individual ownership might provide some insights to design, planning and management decisions for today's planned community situations. For example, did the character of the socioeconomic and physical environment in these company towns change noticeably after corporate (i.e. developer) controls were terminated; and was the transition period a traumatic one, or did it occur with relatively little difficulty? Of even greater interest are questions relating to perceptions and evaluations of the current community milieu. In other words, are the features of a planned environment still evident and/or appreciated by residents after such a community has existed for many decades and has already achieved maturity?

1.1. Approach and Procedure

The following discussion and analysis will seek to address the above questions by focusing upon the planned company town of Morgan Park, Minnesota. During its initial quarter century of existence as a U.S. Steel Corporation company town and subsequent three decades as a non-corporate entity, the community has undergone several transitional phases which range from changes in management and ownership practices to problems of local economic stability. Although a study which deals with a single community may appear overly idiographic, Morgan Park is one of the few company towns in the United States which has received positive evaluations from several observers (e.g., Magnusson, 1918; Reps, 1965; Glaab & Brown, 1967). Since Radburn, the...
Greenbelt towns, Columbia, Reston and a few other similar examples often serve as case studies for the analysis of different planned community eras in the United States, it can be argued that Morgan Park stands out as a company town model which merits further inquiry.

The ensuing study begins with a description of the community through its company and post-company town phases, and follows with a brief discussion of events which recently led to the closing of the adjacent steel manufacturing complex. (Ironically, this same industrial facility was responsible for the initial development of the community during the early part of the century.) The latter portion of the paper is devoted to an analysis of community evaluations and perceptions as expressed by Morgan Park's current residents; these results, in turn, are compared to findings derived from studies of more recently built communities.

1.2. An American Company Town Context

Whereas relatively few company towns are built in the United States today, their development was a relatively commonplace occurrence during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Such communities generally emerged in remote, resource oriented areas of the country where normal housing supply channels could or would not satisfy local needs and requirements. Unfortunately, however, the company town story in the United States is hardly an attractive one. As Porteous (1974) has stated: "Physical planning in company towns has often been conspicuous by its absence; entrepreneurs are characteristically oriented toward production and profit, rather than the onerous task of housing their employees." Although there have been any number of such developments in the United States, one of the classic negative examples is provided by Gary, Indiana, a city once characterized as "...a complete example of what not to do in future developments" (Comey & Wehrly, 1939). In other cases where planning was tightly structured, as at Pullman, Illinois, the resulting social controls were so strict that dissension and conflict eventually erupted (Buder, 1971).

Between these two poles, characterized by Pullman's highly regulated situation on the one hand and Gary's haphazardly planned environment on the other, were some company towns which appeared to provide a relatively humane milieu for resident-worker existence. To determine if this indeed was or is the case, the following discussion will focus upon the sixty year evolution of one such community.

2. MORGAN PARK: PAST TO PRESENT

2.1. Community Origins

Unlike many company town endeavors where the rapid exploitation of a resource meant that housing for laborers was built quickly (and often poorly), Morgan Park's development took place quite slowly. The major reason behind this languor was the hesitancy of U.S. Steel even to become involved with steel production operations in Northeastern Minnesota. In fact, it was not until the State of Minnesota, during 1907, threatened to impose a tonnage tax on U.S. Steel's vast iron ore holdings that the corporation reluctantly agreed to establish a steel production unit proximate to the city of Duluth (White & Primmer, 1937). Various manifestations of this arrangement, entered into by America's first billion dollar corporation and a state with enormous, but nonetheless finite mineral wealth, would continue to mark the course of events that affected the community during ensuing decades.

When U.S. Steel officials first announced their plans to construct a steel production unit in Minnesota, it also was stated that the corporation would not build homes for employees, but would leave this task "to others" (Duluth News Tribune, 1907). By 1910, however, plans were being made to develop a company town which would "...include strictly modern homes, beautiful as to architecture and commodious of arrangement, business houses, paved streets, a perfect sewer and lighting system, and halls for public meetings and places of amusement" (Duluth News Tribune, 1910). Apparently the major thrust behind this change in plans was the corporation's perception of Northeastern Minnesota's labor situation. Since most employment opportunities in the region were highly seasonal, a large portion of the labor force was quite footloose; hence, it was surmised that a dependable work force could be provided only if certain inducements were used. In the case of Morgan Park the major inducement was the provision of housing and services qualitatively better than that offered in the surrounding area (Iron Age, 1913).

By 1918, a national architectural journal was reporting that Morgan Park's planning and development "...had been along systematic and orderly lines, correct principles of town planning have been followed and the educational and recreational elements necessary in a development of this character have been provided in a most modern and satisfactory manner" (American Architect, 1918). When compared to the monotonous grid pattern of most company towns, Morgan...
Parks does stand out as a rather positive con-
trast. A curvilinear street pattern was util-
ized, not so much for novelty's sake, but
evertheless to enhance the relationship with the
adjacent wooded terrain, lake shore and ravines.
All wires were placed underground and efforts
made to preserve as many trees as possible. The
housing, largely constructed during the 1915-18
interim, provided accommodations for about 20
percent of the local work force (Magnusson,
1918). Since the residences were built of con-
crete, the units proved to be durable but some-
what drab; however, the "bomb shelter" appear-
ance of the exteriors was mitigated by various
architectural features such as gables, eaves
and pitched roofs. The interiors of the resi-
dences were likewise designed to provide each
house with a simple but unified appearance.
"Family areas flowed into each other, elimi-
ating dark, wasteful hallways and small isolated
rooms" (Scott, 1974).

While the vistas, broad streets and rather domi-
ant public and commercial buildings provided
Morgan Park with some modest properties of the
City Beautiful, it was the attempt to promote
social policies through physical design which
brought most attention to the community. Morgan
Park, as noted by one U.S. Department of Labor
analyst, was both a physical and social planning
experiment (Magnusson, 1918). Although some of
these efforts displayed evidence of social en-
lightenment, others were no more than paternal-
istic gestures couched in seemingly altruistic
terms.

Much of the corporation's social planning was
referred to as "welfare work." As noted by one
local observer, the corporation was interested
in its employees "...not only during their hours
of labor, but (also) during their hours of rest," and was likewise concerned with "...questions of
how the employees live; how they obtain their
recreation; how they spend their money; and how
their children are educated" (McCarthy, 1916).
The same observer, however, pointed out that
such practices were related to sound business
principles; and another spokesman claimed that
the corporation's welfare work was not "socio-
logical meddling," but only an attempt to
increase worker efficiency through better living
conditions (Stowell, 1918).

Within the community some homes were provided
for all socioeconomic levels, ranging in scope
from multiple and row houses for lower income
laborers to large substantial residences for
managers. Whereas managers generally were
selected in order of application, other consider-
ations also were used: the character of the
applicants' services, his general desirability
as a tenant and the likelihood of his becoming a
permanent employee (Magnusson, 1918). Neverthe-
less, a certain amount of "weeding" apparently
occurred in the process of selecting applicants.
One observer stated that while housing was avail-
able in adjoining, less attractive townsites, it
was "the skilled workmen and the families of
their high grade, permanent class (who) have the
privilege of Morgan Park homes" (The Zenith,
1915).

Although there never have been large numbers of
blacks living in the Duluth region, those
employed in steel plant operations were excluded
from the Morgan Park residential community.
Likewise, certain facilities and events based
within Morgan Park but which had a constituency
larger than the community itself, were limited
to white participants alone. Such practices
were defended by stating that separate events
could be held for non-whites at some later date;
or that the large number of general community
events simply utilized all available facility
time and could not be used by smaller (i.e.,
majority) groups (Good Fellowship Club, 1920 and
1923). Perhaps these were isolated examples,
but they do nonetheless point to the ease with
which social, economic and racial homogeneity
could be maintained within most company towns.

The employment-residence relationship, which
often made employee completely subservient to
employer, always has been a consistent criticism
of company town life. When coupled with their
usual monotony and lack of services and amen-
ities, it is no wonder that company towns came
to be regarded as no more than utilitarian
living environments at best. On the other hand,
In towns such as Morgan Park, where the full
force of corporate planning and sponsorship was
applied to the community setting, a myriad of
local organizations and activities were de-
veloped for and by workers and their families.
By 1919, for example, some 36 organizations,
most of them housed in a central facility donated
to the community by the corporation, had emerged
in Morgan Park. The amount of direct company
involvement in Morgan Park never even approached
that of Pullman, but it is quite obvious that
with this provision of so many free-time oppor-
tunities in the community, outside (and perhaps
antagonistic) influences could be held at a
minimum.

Finally, it would be remiss if one very specific
regulation were not mentioned: the complete ban
on the sale of any alcoholic beverages within
Morgan Park. This form of prohibition, which
only served to move the dispensing establishments
outside the town limits, was practiced in several
company towns throughout the country. Hence,
not only were there company stores and company
housing in towns such as Morgan Park--there also
were "company morals."

2.2. From Company to Private Ownership

During the 1920's and most of the 1930's, Morgan
Park's status as a company town remained un-
changed. Interestingly enough, however, it was
the corporation and not the residents that initi-
ated action to bring company ownership to an end.
During 1938, the company announced that the
residents could buy their homes if they were
interested (MacDonald, 1942). This action at the
local level reflected a broader U.S. Steel decision to sell much of its property throughout the country. The reasons behind this plan were listed as increasing taxes, plant relocations, and selling charges, unused land and depleted mining properties (Iron Age, 1938). Other reports, however, stated that the company actually was concerned with the relationship between corporate paternalism and labor conflicts (Architectural Forum, 1951).

Overt paternalism did not appear to be of exceeding concern to Morgan Park residents since only two individuals purchased their homes between 1938 and 1942. The company, during 1942, then announced that because of the hesitancy displayed by residents, a real estate sales approach would be adopted. Acknowledging that the steel corporation was not equipped to engage in such activities, the company proceeded to make plans to sell its residential holdings to a nationally-based realty firm. Although it was stated that the firm would sell or rent the dwelling units to occupants who wished to remain in Morgan Park (MacDonald, 1942), a group of residents responded by protesting that "turning us over to the tender mercies of a real estate outfit doesn't exactly appeal to us" (Morgan Park Community Club, 1942). Nevertheless, the transaction was completed by the end of 1942, and the disposal of individual properties began thereafter.

For several years the relationship between the realty firm and Morgan Park residents was rather strained. Since the operation and maintenance of the community had formerly been undertaken by a subsidiary arm of the steel corporation, the sale brought many services to an immediate end. This transition caused considerable consternation within the community. Several residents, for example, expressed dismay when the realtor discontinued heating and lighting within the large community garages, and some inhabitants were rankled when certain services such as sidewalk snow removal were terminated (Morgan Park Community Club, 1945). It was not until a larger number of residences had been sold to individual owners that such administrative and management problems were finally resolved.

2.3. The Community Today

Because of their solid construction, residences in Morgan Park have consistently ranked higher than neighboring areas relative to value, condition and number of facilities (U.S. Census of Population and Housing, 1940, 1950, 1960, 1970). Apparently because of the community's residential attributes, Morgan Park, during the 1960's, was the only older area of Duluth to display a total population gain and experience very little decline in the number of younger family residents (City of Duluth, 1969).

By the early 1970's, however, the relative tranquility of Morgan Park was once again interrupted. Because of the pollution emissions discharged by an increasingly antiquated manufacturing plant, environmentalists began to focus their attentions upon the steel production unit. Although the State of Minnesota, during 1970, gave U.S. Steel three years to determine its future plans for the plant and two additional years to meet pollution standards, the corporation proceeded to shut down the blast furnaces during late 1971 and early 1972. (The fabrication mill was closed two years later.)

U.S. Steel's actions obviously created a new set of conditions that had to be faced by many community residents. Even though the plant had never been much more than a marginal facility within the U.S. Steel production framework, its relatively minor national role did not reduce the actual local impact of the closing. A number of employees transferred to various U.S. Steel operations in Minnesota and the United States, others were able to retire or qualify for pensions, and the remainder either pursued altogether different employment options or attempted to cope in some alternative manner. Whatever the case, one fact was indisputable: Morgan Park was a steel town no more.

3. RESIDENT SURVEY

Whereas some observers expected that Morgan Park would turn into a ghost town overnight, the community appeared to retain its relative stability. Given this observation, an effort was made to assess resident attitudes and perceptions some three years after the initial plant closing. To undertake the study, a telephone survey was made of 341 Morgan Park households (45 percent of the community) during June 1975. Questions asked related to current perceptions and evaluations of the local community environment, actions following the steel plant closing, attitudes toward U.S. Steel and its procedures, and normal demographic information. Only the results which have greatest relevance for this study are discussed in the following section.

3.1. Resident Turnover Rates

Whereas there were no exact data available which indicated how many residents actually left Morgan Park because of the steel plant closing, it was possible to derive some idea from the resident survey. Just over 12 percent of the respondents had moved into the community during the three and one-half year period following U.S. Steel's phasing-out operations. By way of comparison, the turnover rates during the two three-year periods preceding the steel plant...
As indicated by Table 2, tenure within Morgan favorably perceptions of the local environment. Cross length of residence within Morgan Park maintenance and resident contentment (Lansing, respondent were related to community evaluations.

However, a much larger proportion considered neighborhood maintenance to be at least satisfactory. (Only three percent listed maintenance shortcomings as a major problem.) This is a rather important factor since other studies have noted the strong relationship that exists between neighborhood maintenance and resident contentment (Lansing, et al., 1970; Marans & Rodgers, 1973).

Table 1 depicts the evaluations of certain community features made by Morgan Park residents when asked to compare their community to other nearby neighborhoods. The only feature considered to be roughly equivalent in both Morgan Park and adjoining areas was the amount of usable outdoor space. (The somewhat higher housing densities in Morgan Park probably contributed to these perceptions.) More than one-half of the residents considered Morgan Park's community facilities to be superior to adjacent areas, but 12 percent of the respondents, when asked to name the community's most serious shortcoming, listed the inadequacy of such facilities. (Over the 60 year period, few facilities had been added to the initial array provided by U.S. Steel: a community building, two churches, a school and a small commercial center.) Finally, local community maintenance was perceived as being superior to other neighborhoods by 57 percent of the respondents. However, a much larger proportion considered maintenance to be at least satisfactory.

3.4. Community Evaluations By Length of Residence and Age of Respondent

Cross tabulations were made to determine if length of residence within Morgan Park or age of respondent were related to community evaluations. As indicated by Table 2, tenure within Morgan Park was accompanied by progressive increases in favorable perceptions of the local environment.

Similar findings were also revealed when the age of respondent was considered. Although the table with the cross tabulations has not been included here, over 76 percent of the 18 to 25 year old residents preferred Morgan Park to any other area of Duluth, while 94 percent of the group over 64 years of age evaluated the community in a similar manner. These findings are similar to those of Marans & Rodgers (1973), who determined that younger persons are generally least satisfied with their local environment, while older, retired individuals are the most contented.

Table 1: Comparison of Selected Morgan Park Characteristics with Nearby Neighborhoods, as Evaluated by Morgan Park Residents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Better in M.P.</th>
<th>Same in M.P.</th>
<th>Worse in M.P.</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>n*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of Housing</td>
<td>74.5</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>.3</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence of Landscaping</td>
<td>70.4</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Facilities</td>
<td>58.5</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Maintenance</td>
<td>57.4</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Useable Outdoor Space</td>
<td>46.2</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>351</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Total figures vary since all responses were not usable.

Chi-Sq. = 47.14 with 3 DF; Prob. = .001

3.5. Housing Quality by Socioeconomic Background

Table 1 indicated that a sizeable proportion of local residents considered Morgan Park's housing to be of higher quality than that found in adjacent neighborhoods. In an effort to offer further insight to such findings, a cross tabulation (Table 3) was made between the socioeconomic backgrounds of respondents and evaluations of housing quality. As with the community environment, the retired persons (86 percent) were most likely to consider Morgan Park housing to be of superior quality.
whose outlook might have been expected to be

Over 70 percent of the blue and white collar residents also expressed the belief that the housing was of a higher standard, but only 58 percent of the "other" group (comprised primarily of students and women not working outside the home) held similar opinions. Since the socioeconomic breakdown was derived by considering the occupation of the major wage earner in each household, financial constraints might have relegated many members of this group to the community's poorest housing. While these responses likely were conditioned by personal involvement with the lower end of the community's housing continuum, it is important to note that none of these respondents expressed the belief that Morgan Park's housing was of poorer quality than that found in other neighborhoods.

3.6. Residential Desirability and Former U.S. Steel Employees

The final tabulation was limited to former U.S. Steel employees who had decided to stay in Morgan Park even after the steel plant closed. The members of this group were asked if the desirability of Morgan Park as a place to live had influenced their decision to remain in the community. Although the cell sizes in Table 4 are somewhat small, it is interesting to note that 87 percent of the respondents indicated that Morgan Park's positive attributes had influenced their decision to stay either very much or somewhat. Even the blue collar workers, whose outlook might have been expected to be conditioned more strongly by job-related criteria, displayed a rather decided affinity for the community.

4. CONCLUSION

Keller (1973) has stated that meaningful advances in residential design will be possible only if "post-mortem" studies are done on planned communities and other similar environments. Such studies, he argues, are necessary before the success and actual outcome of initial planning and design proposals--especially in the eyes of residents and users--can be determined. Likewise, the national surveys of planned environments conducted by Marans and Rodgers (1973) and others provide a broad data base to which findings in specific communities can be compared. This study of Morgan Park, a planned company town in Northeastern Minnesota, was undertaken so as to trace the temporal evolution of one such community, and to determine resident evaluations of the local environment some 60 years after initial planning and design proposals had been initiated.

In looking at Morgan Park's early history, the reviewer is struck by an immediate dichotomy: the praiseworthy qualities of the physical plan and related facilities on the one hand, and the paternalistic character of the community on the other. Perhaps it might be argued that corporate ownership and guidance ensured the perpetuation of many attractive features within the community; but such paternalism, benevolent though it might have been, undoubtedly influenced the lives and actions of residents in both direct and subtle manners. Social and racial homogeneity were ensured, and the close linkage between home and steel hearth was a constant reminder to any worker who might have questioned or challenged certain corporate practices.

Nevertheless, when company ownership of the community did come to an end in 1942, it was the residents and employees who expressed greatest dismay. Of special concern to the community's inhabitants were: 1) the procedures that were followed in selling all residential properties to an intermediate agent who then resold the dwelling units to individual buyers, and 2) the ensuing actions of the agent in phasing out and downgrading many community services. This period of instability and difficulty, however, is indicative of the problems faced by many past and present communitarian ventures: i.e., the question of how to make the transition from singular ownership and management "...to a thriving and democratic polity" (Brooks, 1971).
while the issue of paternalism is a matter of past history in Morgan Park\(^5\), a more immediate question involves the community evaluations made by residents currently living in such a "mature" planned development. The findings of the resident survey described in the previous section indicated that most inhabitants still appreciated the legacy of physical features, structures and facilities originally provided by the U.S. Steel Corporation. Overall satisfaction with the community was quite high, with most residents placing greatest stress upon Morgan Park's housing qualities. While such evaluations of housing and related maintenance attributes conform to studies undertaken elsewhere in the United States, it also has been pointed out that the local social setting is an additional and important factor in determining overall levels of satisfaction with one's immediate environment (Morgan & Roggen, 1973). Once again, Morgan Park's citizenry appeared to be quite satisfied: When asked to name the single most attractive feature of the community, the greatest number of respondents (30 percent of the total) listed the positive qualities of their neighbors and fellow residents. Only two percent indicated that the presence of "undesirable" residents constituted a major community problem.

The above findings are more interesting when it is recognized that Morgan Park consists of an almost equal proportion of blue collar, white collar and retired residents (see Table 3). Although the older residents gave Morgan Park the highest overall ratings, a majority of members in the other groups were also quite satisfied with their community. Hence, it would appear that not only can many of the physical qualities of a planned environment be perpetuated over a span of several decades; but that such communities, at least at a limited scale, can also provide a framework which nurtures social heterogeneity and diversity. Granted Morgan Park is but a small example, but it might offer some indication of what today's emerging developments can be like a half century from now. If this is the case, perhaps we should not render final judgments on planned communities until they have achieved maturity.

references


Architectural Forum, 95, November 1951, pp. 136-143.


Duluth (Minn.) News Tribune, April 2, 1907, pp. 1 & 5; and March 24, 1910, p. 10.


Good Fellowship Club (Morgan Park). Minute Book, August 6, 1920 and November 13, 1923.

Iron Age, 92, September 18, 1913, pp. 603-605; and 142, November 3, 1938, pp. 162 & 163.


\(^5\) It might be argued that Morgan Park's single industry orientation, which continued until the 1970's, constituted a form of economic paternalism. Discussion of such a point, however, is beyond the scope of this paper.


Zenith, The (Duluth, Minn.), November 1915, pp. 25-63 & 113-143.