City to Order (reprint from Collier's)

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CITY TO ORDER

BY

HARRY HENDERSON AND SAM SHAW

On the rolling hills south of Chicago a city for 30,000 people is being built in one operation. Its creators, the American Community Builders, have taken all the essentials for an ideal community and are piecing them together like a jigsaw puzzle.

America's first "planned" postwar city, under construction near Chicago, will look like this when completed. First of its 30,000 people will move in soon. Planners designed for safety, cleanliness, and "a better life."

Carroll F. Sweet, Sr., ex-banker, dreamed of a town for vets, then finagled to get the men who could build the "dream city."
EARLY one gray morning in October a small group of men stood around a bulldozer in a field some thirty miles south of Chicago's noisy Loop. They shivered and waited while the driver got his yellow monster started. Then, voiceless in the roar of the engine, they fell back and watched the tractor's blade nuzzle back the sparse grassland from the clay of Illinois.

In ten thousand ways all this re-sembled the start of any construction job. In one particular way it differed. For this was the physical beginning of a city that was going to be built to its full growth from scratch. It was the first really planned postwar town, a superhousing project.

The revolutionary thing about it was that the entire job was being designed and built to create not so much a large collection of houses as a comfortable, pleasant life for 30,000 people who would not be beset by any of the major nuisances that attend living in present-day towns. Virtually all the other large-scale projects in the country are repeating the old faults by building residences far from downtown districts, and with little or no regard for maintenance of cleanliness, the growing traffic problem and distances to work, schools and between shops.

"We aren't interested in houses alone," Philip M. Klutznick, head of the American Community Builders, Inc., told us. "We are trying to create a better life for people. In our view, we will have failed if all we do is produce houses."

The American Community Builders is the team that is bringing a whole city into being in the one operation. It expects to produce, in this town, a kind of life that has been enjoyed chiefly by families in the upper income brackets. Rents will be from $62 to $90 a month, and children will be welcome. The more the merrier.

The first houses will be ready for occupancy this spring. There will be enough to accommodate around 250 families. Others of the new population will follow as more homes are completed, until the first 3,000 units are finished. All will be for rent, and all will constitute the first of two phases in the construction. The second phase—the building of 5,000 homes for sale—will begin soon.

The builders hope the city's population will not be permitted to exceed the planned 30,000. They feel that if it should get to be any bigger than that, it might begin to develop all the defects of the average suburb. Any further similar construction should be put into new communities separate from Chicago like this one, and like this one, a satellite to the Illinois metropolis. The whole idea behind the initial project is to plan for every exigency of living, every comfort, and then to remain within those planned limits indefinitely. Any extension of the original base would throw the whole program out of balance. But there can be any number of satellites, each remaining permanently within the orbit prescribed by its own blueprints.

The 2,500-acre site for the ACB project lies in a green-belt area bounded on the north by the New York Central and Belt Line railroads, and the Lincoln Highway; on the east by the Cook County Forest Preserve; on the south by rich farmland, and on the west by the Illinois Central Railroad, which will furnish fast commuting service into Chicago proper.

Construction of a project like this had been heretofore considered too gigantic and too complex for anyone but the federal government, with its right of eminent domain and taxpayers' dollars. The experiment in social planning is being conducted without government subsidy and for profits. When it is finished it is expected to be one of the biggest housing feathers in the cap of private enterprise.

The new city has been financed by three insurance companies—the New York Life, the Northwestern Mutual and the Sun Life Assurance Company of Canada—to the tune of $27,500,000, the largest single set of mortgages ever insured by the Federal Housing Authority.

Klutznick and his associates like to
A Model Street-Traffic System

Safety has followed cleanliness in the planners' book of principles. There will be no dangerous intersections. All will have wide visibility. The thoroughfares and byways will be so laid out that no child or stranger will need to venture beyond the area from parking lots that will be located near the edges. A play space will keep the children safe while another goes about her buying unhindered.

In this layout no store can have a pre- ferred location—everybody has a place. The system has the big chain operators upset. Merchandising has always been built on the store's location. But the new idea in Park Forest will mean that every store in it will be forced into real competition, insuring the utmost service for the American Community Builders to sell and rent houses virtually at cost. With all the advantages of assignment to people in one spot you've got something in which every merchant is interested. Without any contest, hundreds of store depressions will spring up under such circumstances, duplicating services and providing, in many cases, poor-quality merchandise in the struggle to undercut the competition. ACB will channel the demand for selling space and will charge commercial rents that, based on a percentage of gross profits made on everything sold in the city, will help take the burden of rent or pur chase costs from the customers themselves.

These are not, however, the economies that will make Park Forest economical. The phase of the town's better living will be no blocks, in the conventional sense. The streets are being laid out to curve easily with the rolling contour of the land. All houses will be set back a minimum of 120 feet from the street. Instead of the ordinary gridiron system of streets, there will be eleven curving, irregular superblocks. These will contain large areas, some as big as 54 acres. There will be woods and open spaces and landscaping everywhere. The houses are to be ar ranged around these blocks and to have taken their curving streets. In the center of each cluster of houses, there will be a parking area. The houses will be staggered so that the residents of one will not be able to look out upon the yard of the house of the neighbor. The landscaping will be informal, taking its cue from the rough naturalness of the near-by forest preserve. The idea is not only to give Park Forest people something nice to look at, but to invite them outdoors. While many very modern homes have a density of from 20 to 50 families per acre, Park Forest is planned for ten, a figure regarded as ample by the most builders. Eighty-nine per cent of the land will have no buildings. There will be tall structures to dwarf the scene and the people.

There will be no scattered stores, no corner delicatessens, and no changing through streets for a place to get a drink from a butcher to candlestick maker. The main shopping center will be arranged so that customers may visit usual retail stores on one roof. The same establishment will cover the movies, restaurants and bowling alley. The old-time downtown district, as such, will be nonexistent.

The main shopping location is laid out in a series of arcades. People can see a panorama of greenward, parking lots and covered walkways. All the shopping buildings will be joined by perma-
had been divided into lots and sold twenty years ago. Tracking down the heirs was a long and intricate job. Many parcels were bought with Manilow assuming the risk of clearing the title. Farmers constituted a major problem because, while they were willing to sell, agriculture was their living and they made the finding of another farm a condition of sale. By the time it was over, Manilow's men were operating a resettlement bureau.

The land cost from $300 to $5,000 an acre. Manilow had sunk nearly a million dollars into it without even knowing whether there was water there. He realized he had embarked on a terrific gamble and was ready to look for help.

"Papa" Sweet, as he is called, had anticipated this state of affairs. He had already talked to Klutznick, former commissioner of the Federal Public Housing Authority, challenging him to the building of a dream city. A brilliant Omaha lawyer, Klutznick had won the respect of private builders by his handling of public housing and by the record he made during the war. His uncompromising idealism had attracted leading housing experts in every field to his staff.

Sweet still had quite a bit of juggling to do, though. Manilow, now that he had assembled all this land, was getting offers for the lot that would have given him more than a million dollars in profits. Klutznick was being offered juicy legal partnerships in New York and Washington.

"It took a lot of guts," said Papa, "to tell them to turn them down."

But he had the guts. So did Klutznick and so did Manilow.

Klutznick immediately brought into American Community Builders the architectural firm of Loeb, Schlossman & Bennett in the person of Jerrold Loeb. The firm was entrusted with the problem of designing the city and its life. Loeb, Schlossman & Bennett are among the leading architects of Chicago. They were especially fitted for the designing of a city for a better life. They had, in fact, been working along these lines for some time.

Experienced Men on the Job

To help them, Loeb, Schlossman & Bennett brought in Peets, designer of the famous green-belt towns near Washington, Cincinnati and Milwaukee. Then Klutznick obtained Charlie Waldmann, the utilities engineer for those towns and the man who defeated Wendell Willkie in his fight against TVA. Rafkind and Perry, and Dick Senior and Allan Harrison, well-known construction engineers, came with Waldmann.

When they had completed their first plans and cost estimates, they went to Chicago's mortgage bankers. These gentlemen turned white with fright at the size of the project, at the problems to overcome, at the low family density, at the economic conception of renting or selling houses virtually at cost while making profits from the commercial area.

It will take between eighteen months and two years to complete construction of the first, rental phase of the housing program, and it will take at least two years after people begin moving in this May for the city to lose its "rawness." Five to ten years will be required for residents to settle down and give real character to the city.

Selection of tenants is to be one of the important problems. For, according to the creator team, neither need nor desire for a better life is sufficient qualification.

Veterans will be given preference. Applicants will be asked about their incomes and the size of homes desired. No crowding will be permitted. There will be nothing like six persons to a one-bedroom house. Then, as each tenant is selected, the family's religion will be determined so that churches can go about organizing congregations.

The first 250 families will have to put up with some hardship. Roads will be incomplete, the shopping center unfinished and the landscaping only begun.