Rise And Fall Of Suburbia

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Lafayette is following the trend toward apartment living, which began much earlier in the more heavily populated cities around the country.

There are a number of reasons why people are discovering that a home doesn't necessarily have to be a suburban house with a lawn to mow, leaves to rake and leaky faucets to fix. One of the pressures for multiple family dwelling units is the rapidly decreasing availability and increasing cost of good land. This is due in part to the post World War II rush toward suburban living. Also, our nation's population increases by three million per year and by 1970 is expected to be four million. The growth rate for Lafayette has well exceeded the National average and thus has created an unusually big demand for housing units as well as for land.

Multi-story apartments have the advantage of spreading the resulting high land cost among several family dwellings. On a one-acre plot, a single-family subdivision may take care of five families, whereas a high-rise apartment building may have a hundred families on one acre.

As Lafayette expands, many people are finding that homes in the distant suburbs are not convenient to work, shopping, schools, hospitals, church and entertainment. The need for being close to things is reflected by the two groups who are making the most use of apartments. They are the young marrieds and the elderly, both of whom have time on their hands and desire the convenience of the leisure-time opportunities in the city.

The young couples with limited income and small families shy away from long term mortgage responsibilities that would tie them down and reduce the job opportunities that mobility affords. And modern furnished apartments make it possible for these young people to set up housekeeping with very little capital.

Except for the need for mobility, the elderly find themselves in much the same situation as the young marrieds. They seek social contact, easy access to shopping and other urban conveniences, and want to be relieved of the many home maintenance chores of suburban living.

Others are also welcoming the chance to return to the city. Because of the great industrial expansion in Lafayette, we have a large group of skilled workers who follow construction. They find that apartment living is a good answer to their need for easy mobility.

The day has not yet arrived which indicates that we can expect the return from Suburbia, of middle-income families in great numbers. Unfortunately, many of the new urban apartment complexes are still too expensive and are not designed for families with three or more children. Good architectural design and new experimental projects now promise solutions to these problems.

A recent study for the American Institute of Architects suggests a solid block of one and two-story town houses, shops and commercial buildings. The solid roofs of these structures could be planted and developed as a Park. Rising out of the center of the Park would be a high-rise apartment house.

New experiments are seeking better and more ingenious arrangement of spaces as well as better building methods to increase density of occupancy, provide privacy for the individual family and lower building costs.

In Lafayette, many of the new apartment houses were obviously designed by other than qualified architects and lean heavily on clever appearance and low cost construction. They are facade architecture and little more. Those that are architecturally planned and intended to endure the tests of time and real human needs are quite often more aesthetically appealing and functionally efficient than a majority of the monotonous, unimaginative "developer's" houses. Another obvious attraction to apartment living is their swimming pools, recreation areas, club houses and other luxuries.

Urban renewal programs in many cities have provided downtown sections of land large enough to permit architects to design whole new apartment-communities with carefully planned Park Areas, Shopping Centers and Parking alongside tall office buildings.

Similar planned community ideas have been considered by developers in Shreveport, Baton Rouge and New Orleans. Recently, according to the A.I.A. building industry economists and sociologists predicted that within a few years, half of the total new housing units constructed will be multiple dwellings, rather than single family homes.

Baton Rouge and New Orleans, just to name two, are already seeing the results of architects and builders working to meet the needs for new forms of housing. Lafayette is following suit, and we will see dramatic changes in the years just ahead.