The New Towns

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The New Jersey Turnpike at 8 a.m. — an accident at one of the exits turns the usual bumper-to-bumper traffic into a snarled mass of frantic commuters, and a normally hectic 45 minute drive takes 2½ hours.

Families in an Alabama city combat a continual onslaught of industrial air pollution, noise, and dirt; a housewife in a sprawling California suburb plans an entire day around the family shopping, including a long drive on a heavily traveled highway and once there, fighting congested traffic and parking conditions.

Unusual problems? Not really. Lafayette may not have to face these aggravated conditions, but most cities today have enough of their own special drawbacks to force many people to search for an escape. The New Towns just may have the answer.

Community Planning

The New Town is based on an idea of overall, self-contained community planning. Its developers consider everyone in their plans: the homeowner, the apartment dweller, industrial worker, commuter, housewife, parent, and child. These communities will hopefully escape both urban congestion and the many problems connected with suburbia.

The United States has just begun planning and building these communities within the last few years. About 12 New Towns are now in various stages of development, notably Reston, Virginia; Columbia, Maryland; and Jonathan, Minnesota.

Although each is different, their goals are the same: to produce order out of chaos, and to provide a refuge for people seeking individuality and a comfortable lifestyle at the same time.

All the land in a New Town is owned by a single corporation; ideally, it can maintain the "utopian atmosphere" by limiting the town's size, encouraging good architecture, setting aside land for permanent forests, and providing housing for all economic groups.

Residential Clusters

The town center is the "heart" from which all radiates in the New Town. Villages are clusters of residential areas grouped around a school, churches, and large multipurpose center, providing shops and services. The villages (and there may be several) are arranged around the town center, and connected by a circular collector road which also provides access to the center. A nearby expressway and interstate radial lead to a large city not too far away.

The town's industry is located away from residential areas, in its own "cluster." The center of this arrangement contains a multi-use complex, and the industry has access to a railroad and trunk highway.

Life in each surrounding village will resemble life in a suburban neighborhood, hopefully without many of the ensuing problems, such as long distances to work, lack of shopping centers, identical houses, etc. To eliminate some of these problems, each village center will be comprised of a supermarket, doctor in general practice, barber shop, drugstore, and other shops and offices. The town center, one step up, will feature large department stores, medical specialists, other professionals, hotels, theaters, and a public transportation facility.

Traffic Pattern

Walking is a key factor in the New Town. Its planners believe that Americans have become overdependent on the automobile, so all of the residential streets will form looped "cul-de-sacs" to reduce through traffic. This should make such a town a much safer place for children to play.

Neighborhood Sharing

The outdoors is another major feature of the New Town. The planners want to encourage neighborhood sharing of the woodlands and open spaces; in order to do this, the size of individual lots are reduced, giving each family a smaller back yard but a bigger neighborhood wooded area.

Many critics of the New Town scoff at this Utopian pastoral feature, but its developers try to combine practicality with vision. They will attempt to bring in new businesses and industries, while at the same time looking for funds to finance the initial costs. The New Communities Act, passed in 1968, provided for loans to qualified community developers, and this is a help. But it's hard to attract businesses with so few people settled there and hard to attract more people with few shops and services readily available.

The New Town's planners are quick to emphasize that it will not be planned down to the last blade of grass. They are striving for a good solution to America's housing needs, but with no overtones of 1984's planned society. Will the idea catch on? While surely not the only answer to our housing problems, the New Town has a lot of potential to demonstrate. Whether or not it can succeed is a matter for the