

## VI. CONCLUSIONS AND STANDARDS FOR EVALUATING SUBDIVISIONS

The field work and documentary research that were undertaken for the development of this context provide the basis for three different types of conclusions about the process of suburbanization and the nature of the subdivisions in Wilmington's periphery. First, certain definite conclusions were made regarding the impact of the subthemes discussed in the historic context. Second, during the course of the project, a number of areas of research were identified that could not be pursued; they are discussed here as information needs. Third, the context work reached certain conclusions regarding the process of evaluating historic resources related to suburbanization.

### Conclusions Based on Subthemes

**Transportation and demography.** Transportation and demography were of overwhelming importance in the development of Wilmington's suburbs. Transportation, first public and then private, allowed city dwellers to move out of the city. This movement was in response not only to the pressure of increased population but also to its changing ethnic character. The initial suburbs, dating from the 1880s, were developed along the fixed paths of streetcar lines and followed a radial pattern away from the city. The same radial pattern repeated and extended as transportation shifted to the automobile during the 1920s. As more people acquired cars, previously inaccessible land lying between the radial axes became available for development. Thus from 1880 to 1950, Wilmington subdivisions went through three distinct phases tied to transportation; Streetcar Subdivisions, 1880-1920+/-; Turnpike Subdivisions, 1920-1940+/-; and Automobile Subdivisions, 1940-1950+. Each transportation technology allowed a different portion of the Wilmington periphery to be developed.

**Working class subdivisions.** While scholarly examinations of the suburban developments surrounding other cities asserts that their populations were middle class, the results of this study strongly suggest that the residents of Wilmington's subdivisions were from the working class as well. Both the marketing of the subdivisions and of the dwellings built in them support this conclusion. Developers, particularly those selling building lots during the first three decades of the twentieth century, directed their advertising at people of modest means, addressing the "working man" directly or noting that even people on a "narrow income" could own property. This is further supported by the offer of many developers to refund the five-cent trolley fare an individual had to pay to ride from the city to the subdivision site. This was an acknowledgement by the development companies that even a nickel was a matter of consequence to potential buyers. Many of the dwelling types built in the subdivisions were identified with low construction costs. The bungalow, for example, was considered to be an appropriate house style for frugal property owners. The simple front-gabled cottage was similarly promoted as a dwelling that could

be constructed inexpensively and was therefore within the reach of families with limited income.

**Scale of suburban landscape.** The image of large scale post-World War II suburban development that envelopes entire hillsides and valleys is far from the picture of suburbs dating from the first half of the twentieth century as revealed in this study. Many of Wilmington's subdivisions were small; 44% of those platted between 1900 and 1950 consisted of 10 to 20 building lots along one or two streets. Operating on an equally small scale, builders constructed but two to six houses at a time. After 1932, the possibility of building on a substantially larger scale was created by the enactment of the FHA legislation which made greater sums of money available both to individual property owners and to contractors interested in building large numbers of houses simultaneously. Although these large scale developments have dominated images of suburbanization, in Wilmington, the number of small subdivisions continued to rise largely unchecked through 1950.

In spite of the subdivisions being small scale, their developers had a clear idea of the essential elements of a planned subdivision. Their ideal was a low density residential community of single family detached dwellings each set in the middle of its own lot and surrounded by parklike landscape of lawns and trees uninterrupted by fences or high hedges. Lacking government regulation over the development process, developers provided their own private zoning through deed restrictions to insure that this new residential landscape would be unlike the city.

**Changes in the process of development.** The research for this historic context also found that the way developers organized their efforts went through several stages. The pattern often associated with suburbanization is the mass-produced subdivision and housing exemplified by the Levittowns built after 1945 in which a single developer undertook all of the steps necessary to complete a subdivision. In contrast, the first developers in Wilmington were responsible for only part of the process, that of acquiring land, subdividing it into building lots, and laying out a grading streets at a minimum. These prepared lots were then sold to individuals who intended to built their own dwellings or to small-scale builders who constructed a few dwellings at a time to be sold.

Because these individuals could not always afford to build immediately, construction of dwellings often took place over many years, or even decades, in some subdivisions. As a result, these suburbs exhibit architectural diversity because they incorporate the several housing styles popular during the extended period of construction. While these oldest subdivisions, dating through the mid-1920s, are the most diverse, later suburbs exhibited a more consciously designed diversity as a result of variation in material and ornamentation rather than building form. Using the same basic house, development companies, building entire developments on larger parcels of land in a shorter period of time, showed great ingenuity in creating visual diversity by varying the combination of architectural elements in different decorative motifs. It was only toward the end of the period that the homogeneous suburbs so fixed in the popular imagination began to appear.

**Changes in subdivision design.** There were also trends in design of the subdivisions

themselves. As housing became more uniform, the layout of the subdivisions became more intricate and self contained. As the automobile became more common toward the end of the period, subdivisions showed a greater tendency to be self-contained with only a single access road connecting the interior street network of the subdivision to the nearest highway. There are a number of factors that support the conclusion that the increase in limited access was related to the increase in reliance on the automobile.

In the case of the streetcar suburban developers provided multiple access streets from the primary transportation route into the subdivision because residents walked from the trolley stop to their houses and needed as direct a walking route as the subdivision's grid pattern would allow. As the automobile replaced the trolley and commuters drove directly to their houses another set of values came into play and developers opted for limited in response. A single road into and out of a subdivision removed the subdivision from the urban grid, limited the volume of vehicular traffic along with the noise and dangers of congestions. Limited access was also a means of creating privacy and forming an unbroken buffer around the subdivision. The developers' design fostered a sense of community by its small scale, buffered residents from outsiders, and presented a visual and social contrast to the high density, impersonal, and sometimes dangerous grid of the city.

#### **Information Needs**

One of the elements required of a fully-developed historic context is the identification of information needs. These are areas of research that may contribute to the context but, given the limitations of the current project, could not be pursued. Work on the historic context for suburbanization revealed certain research questions that should be undertaken in future projects.

#### **Develop an Historic Context for the Non-residential Aspects of the Suburbs.**

This historic context has dealt with only the residential suburban landscape. Other important aspects of the suburban landscape around Wilmington should be examined as part of a comprehensive context for suburbanization. Early suburbs were bedroom communities to an adjacent central city initially dependent on that central city not only for employment but for almost all of their needs. The evolution of the suburbs has been the evolution of an area increasingly providing for its own needs--schools and other community institutions; retailing and service to its resident population; and finally jobs and autonomous economic development. A comprehensive historic context for suburbanization should chronicle that development as reflected in a changing built environment, manifested, for example, in the expansion of transportation and the progression of retailing from shops clustered at a streetcar stop to automobile strip malls to regional shopping centers.

#### **Determination of the Socio-economic Character of the Subdivisions.**

The classification of several subdivisions as working class needs to be verified through an examination of the socio-economic status of their residents in terms of income, occupation, and education within the context

of the larger Wilmington population. A form of social area analysis appropriate to the historic circumstances should be undertaken to establish the socio-economic continuum of subdivisions in the Wilmington vicinity during the study period.

**Determination of the Range of Physical Attributes of Subdivisions and Dwellings.** Although the research for the historic context examined 176 subdivisions, it was not intended to be a comprehensive survey. The identification activities should survey subdivisions in regard to their size in terms of numbers of lots, average lot size, value of land, number of dwellings, and other variables that will help place the findings of this research in a broader context.

**Acreage Consumed by Suburban Development.** Few of the subdivision maps indicate the total number of acres that were included in the plan being proposed. The field work maps indicate the extent of development and the directions in which it spread over time, but they provide only a rough sense of the rate at which agricultural land was turned over to residential use. Counting the number of subdivisions by decade also gives only a vague idea of the pace of development. A far more telling assessment would be provided if acreage were calculated as a measure. This would also provide a means of calculating changes in population density that occurred as suburbanization proceeded.

**Landscaping.** It is clear from observations made in the field, that the residents of various subdivisions had extremely different ideas about landscaping. The planting of trees and shrubs apparently varied with both the age of the subdivision and the socio-economic class of the residents. It is possible to speculate that differences in ethnic group also entered into landscaping practices and how the external space surrounding the dwelling was used and decorated. Further research into the attitudes toward as well as the physical manifestations of landscaping would provide insight into the connection between suburbanization and ideas of home. In addition, the role of the developer played in landscaping needs to be identified and acknowledged if a fuller understanding of the suburban landscape is to be achieved.

### **Process for Evaluating Subdivisions and Suburban Dwellings**

For a resource to be eligible for the National Register an historic resource must meet one of the National Register Criteria for Evaluation by being associated with an important historic context and retaining historic integrity of those features considered necessary to convey its significance. As cited in the introduction, the criteria for evaluation are described as:

The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering and culture is present in sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and:

Criterion A. That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or

Criterion B. That are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or

Criterion C. That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or

Criterion D. That have yielded, or may be likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

There are four steps in determining whether a subdivision and/or its dwellings are eligible for the National Register: categorizing the resource as a district, site, building, structure or object; determining which historic context the resource represents; determining whether the resource is eligible under National Register Criteria A, B, C, or D; and, determining whether the resource retains integrity.

**Step 1: Suburban Historic Resources as Historic Districts and as Multiple Property Nominations**

There are two categories of historic properties associated with suburbanization: districts and buildings. Subdivisions are considered districts and dwellings are defined as buildings. A subdivision, as defined in this context, is an historic designed landscape and is considered a district because it possesses a significant concentration, linkage, or continuity of sites, buildings, structures or objects united historically or aesthetically by plan or physical development. A district must be a definable geographic area that can be distinguished from surrounding properties by changes such as density, scale, type age, style of sites and buildings, or by documented differences in patterns of historical development or associations. Dwellings, or houses, are considered buildings because they are created principally to shelter human activity. A "building" may also refer to a historically and functionally related unit such as a house and garage in a subdivision. To be eligible for the National Register, a building must include all of its basic structural elements.

Since subdivisions are the basic building blocks of suburbs, most historic resources related to suburbanization will be nominated to the National Register as districts, with the individual dwellings included as integral parts of the district. However, there may be resources that are distributed across several subdivisions and could be placed on the National Register as part of a multiple property nomination.<sup>224</sup> This is a nomination of a group of related resources and is used to nominate and register thematically related historic resources simultaneously. One example of a situation that might call for a multiple property nomination would be a property type related to a particular style of dwelling. Minquadale and Rock Manor, for example, are ineligible for consideration for the National Register. Minquadale has experienced substantial dwelling modification and in-fill building. A large portion of the original plan of

---

<sup>224</sup> For details see, How to Complete the National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form, National Register Bulletin No. 16B, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Interagency Resources Division.

Rock Manor was destroyed by the construction of Interstate 95. Yet both subdivisions have fine examples of shingle-clad bungalows that could be included in a multiple property nomination of early twentieth-century bungalows found in suburban subdivisions. Another example of a potential thematic nomination might be dwellings built in several different subdivisions by the same builder or developer.

**Step 2: Evaluating Historic Resources Related to Suburbanization within the Historic Context**

In Step 2, the evaluation of how an historic property is significant within its own historic context, a candidate subdivision--or group of properties in the case of multiple property nomination--is related to the significant themes within the Suburbanization Historic Context as defined in this report.

**Step 3: Determining Eligibility of Historic Resources Related to Suburbanization**

Once the property has been related to the appropriate theme or themes within the suburbanization historic context, the four National Register Criteria are applied to the resource to determine whether it is significant for its associative value related to events (Criterion A) or persons (Criterion B), or for its design or construction value (Criterion C). (Criterion D, information value, is most commonly applied to archeological sites.) To be considered eligible for the National Register a resource must be significant under at least one of the National Register Criteria and retain the historic integrity of those features necessary to convey its significance.

The historic themes identified in this historic context and their relationship to the National Register Criteria are presented below.

**Criterion A: Event.** Association with event or patterns of events or an historic trend that made an important contribution to the development of a community, a state, or the nation.

**Economic Trends:** Trends in the national, regional, state and local economy that influenced the economic well being reflected in employment and incomes and geographical organization of metropolitan areas such as the Depression of the 1930s and post-World War II economic boom. Specific trends include:

1. *Manufacturing/ Contract construction.* Trends related to ways in which a builder/developer organized and carried out construction of subdivisions from initial acquisition to disposition of property.
2. *Finance.* Trends related to the ways in which subdivisions and housing were financed.
3. *Transportation.* Trends related to the form of transportation that created access to the land for initial development and served residents after occupancy.

**Cultural and Social Trends.**

4. *Settlement Patterns and Demographic Change.* Trends in social values, the demographic attributes of the population, and choices of residential locations reflected in the historic suburban landscape including trends associated with:

\*The deconcentration of American cities through dispersed residential

settlement

\* The socioeconomic character of the suburbs

\*The personal and social values regarding , family, home and the role of women a

5. *Architecture, Engineering and Decorative Arts.* Architectural trends related to the evolution of subdivision design and the style of suburban dwellings.

**Criterion B: Person.** Association with an important individual whose activities are demonstrably important within a local, state, or national context.

1. *Builders/developers.*

2. *Civic Associations*

**Criterion C: Design/ Construction.** Properties significant for their physical design or construction, including such elements as architecture, landscape architecture, engineering, and artwork. To be eligible a property must meet *at least one* of the following requirements:

\*Embody distinctive characteristics of a type , period and method of construction.

\*Represent the work of a master

\* Possess high artistic value

\*Represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction

Subdivisions considered under this criterion must possess a high degree of integrity in each of the following element: ground plan, road system, architectural character, landscape character, and other attributes as defined in Chapter II. They must also possess integrity as defined for one of the three major property types related to transportation: Streetcar Subdivisions, Turnpike Subdivisions, or Automobile Subdivisions.

Dwellings considered under this criterion must be excellent examples of the property types related to architectural style as defined in Chapter III and must meet the standards of integrity listed therein.

#### **Step 4: Integrity of Historic Resources Related to Suburbanization**

Integrity is the ability of a resource to convey its significance. To be listed on the National Register of Historic Places, a resource must not only be shown to be significant under the National Register criteria, but also must retain integrity. Integrity is not a relative measurement--resources either retain integrity or they do not. The National Register recognizes seven aspects or qualities that, in various combinations, define integrity: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. The definitions of these qualities of integrity and how they apply to subdivisions are as follows:

1. **Location.** Location is the place where the historic property was constructed or the place

where the historic event occurred.

Subdivisions are by definition located in the periphery of a central city with individual subdivisions usually separated from the city by intervening vacant land in early years and later by intervening older subdivisions. They are located in close proximity to the transportation networks connecting the suburbs to the central city.

**2. Design.** Design is the combination of elements that create the form, plan, space, structure, and style of a resource. It results from conscious decisions made during the original conception and planning of a property and applies to activities as diverse as community planning, engineering architecture and landscape architecture. Design includes such elements as organization of space, proportion, technology, ornamentation and materials. For districts it also applies to the way in which buildings, sites, or structures are related. A subdivision is a designed landscape because it is planned to as a whole to attain specific objectives. Essential characteristics are:

- \* A large parcel of land subdivided at one time with the goal of building low density residential development.
- \* Dwelling units consist of single-family detached house on individual lots.
- \* House required to be sited in middle of lot through restrictive covenants.
- \* Variation in range and diversity of architectural design usually planned.
- \* Subdivision should be self contained with limited access to exterior streets and should have an interior road system for vehicular traffic.
- \* Parklike landscaping reflected in open space in lawns, shrubs and other ornamental planting, and planting of trees by developer as part of overall landscape plan.

**3. Setting.** Setting is the physical environment of a historic resource. Setting refers to the character of the place in which the resource played its historic role. It involves how, not just where, the resource is situated and its relationship to surrounding features and open space.

The essential characteristic for a subdivision to retain integrity of setting is an open low density parklike appearance. Often the subdivision is surrounded by a buffer of trees or built between local streams.

**4. Materials.** Materials are the physical elements that were combined or deposited during a particular period of time and in a particular pattern or configuration to form a historic resource.

Materials should be appropriate to the period of the subdivision development, especially those of the dwellings. The great majority of dwellings in a subdivision must retain the key exterior materials dating from the period of its historic significance.

**5. Workmanship.** Workmanship is the physical evidence of the crafts of a particular culture or people during any given period in history or prehistory.

Workmanship is reflected in the design of the subdivision and the attention to detail in infrastructure, landscape features, and the construction of the dwellings.

**6. Feeling.** Feeling is a resource's expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular

period of time. Feeling results from the presence of physical features that, that together, convey the property's historic character.

**In a streetcar subdivision, for example, retaining original design, materials, workmanship, and setting will relate the feeling of suburban life in the early twentieth century whereas later automobile suburbs will be lower density and have more features reflecting the automobile.**

**7. Association.** Association is the direct link between an important historic event or person and a historic resource.

See discussion under Criterion A: Events.

### **Some Things to Consider in Evaluating Integrity**

For a district, such as a subdivision, to maintain integrity as a whole, the majority of the components that make up the districts character--site plan, street system, diversity and placement of houses, to mention a few--must possess integrity even if they are individually undistinguished. Moreover, the relationships between the subdivisions components must be substantially unchanged since the period of significance. A subdivision nominated under Criterion C: Design/Construction must have a very high level of integrity since its significance lies in its completeness as a representative of a property type. A subdivision being nominated under Criterion A: Events, under one of the associative property types can possess less integrity if the features related to the historic theme are intact. When a number of subdivisions manifest important aspects of the historic context but lack overall integrity, then a thematic multiple property nomination might be in order. Finally, one of the purposes of the identification and evaluation activities is to refine the criteria of integrity.