

## Small Town America

M: You know, in designing this new town, we're trying to look forward at small-town America and take the best of those planning elements: house close together; sidewalks, front porches, three-line streets, easy, non-automobile dependent access to the town centre and your neighbors and to the school and the other institutions that are vital. And we'll try to take some of those ideas and update them and come up with a livable, workable place where people can go and rekindle the sense of community that seems to be missing from suburbs all across the country.

F: So give us a sense of how this new town was designed?

M: Houses are all very close together. We were just ten feet apart from our neighbors on either side of us, and that's pretty much the standard for the town. So you have houses that are close together, houses that surround open areas. They have a lot of big parks, a lot of common areas. The theory is that you're willing to sacrifice your private yard space -- you don't need a quarter of an acre or half an acre -- if you have a public area where you can go and enjoy the facilities there and, most importantly, you can interact with your neighbors. That helps to create this sense of community that's so important to many of these "new town" developments.

F: Now, I see this whole sense of community: "It's going to be a new town, but we're going to do it with a sense of nostalgia for the past." Like, a lot of the houses had porches.

M: Yes, it would create a "front porch culture" — that people would be out on their porches talking to their neighbors next door and to people walking down the street or people riding their bikes, and there would be this culture that existed 40, 50, or 60 years ago. But that really has been one of the failures that we observed during our two years in this new town, and the people don't spend very much time at all on their front porches. There are a couple of things going on. One is it's central Florida, and it's hotter than hell a good part of the year, and sitting on your front porch, even if you have a fan going, can be a very uncomfortable thing. People prefer to be inside in the air-conditioning.

F: What were some of the rules you had to live by in the new project? And did any of those rules bother you?

M: Well, the developer and I have different feelings about rules. His feeling is -- now. If I can summarize his feelings for him -- that you move in there knowing the rules, and if you don't like them, you shouldn't move in. I have some problems with rules. I just sometimes like to break them. And they just bother me because they're in existence. But the rules sometimes were silly and sometimes weren't. They dictated what color your curtains could be facing the street and actually asked a woman with red curtains to remove them.

F: Really? Is that true?

M: And they dictated where you could park your car and for how long. They dictated any sort of thing you could attach to your house. You couldn't attach a satellite dish to your house. They dictated forever the color of your house. And they dictate how often you have to repaint your house. They've tried to go a step further and remove plastic flowers and plastic furniture from those all-important front porches. Some rules seem to go a little too far.

**Question:**

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