

Walt Disney's EPCOT: Planning, Control, and A Great Big Beautiful Tomorrow

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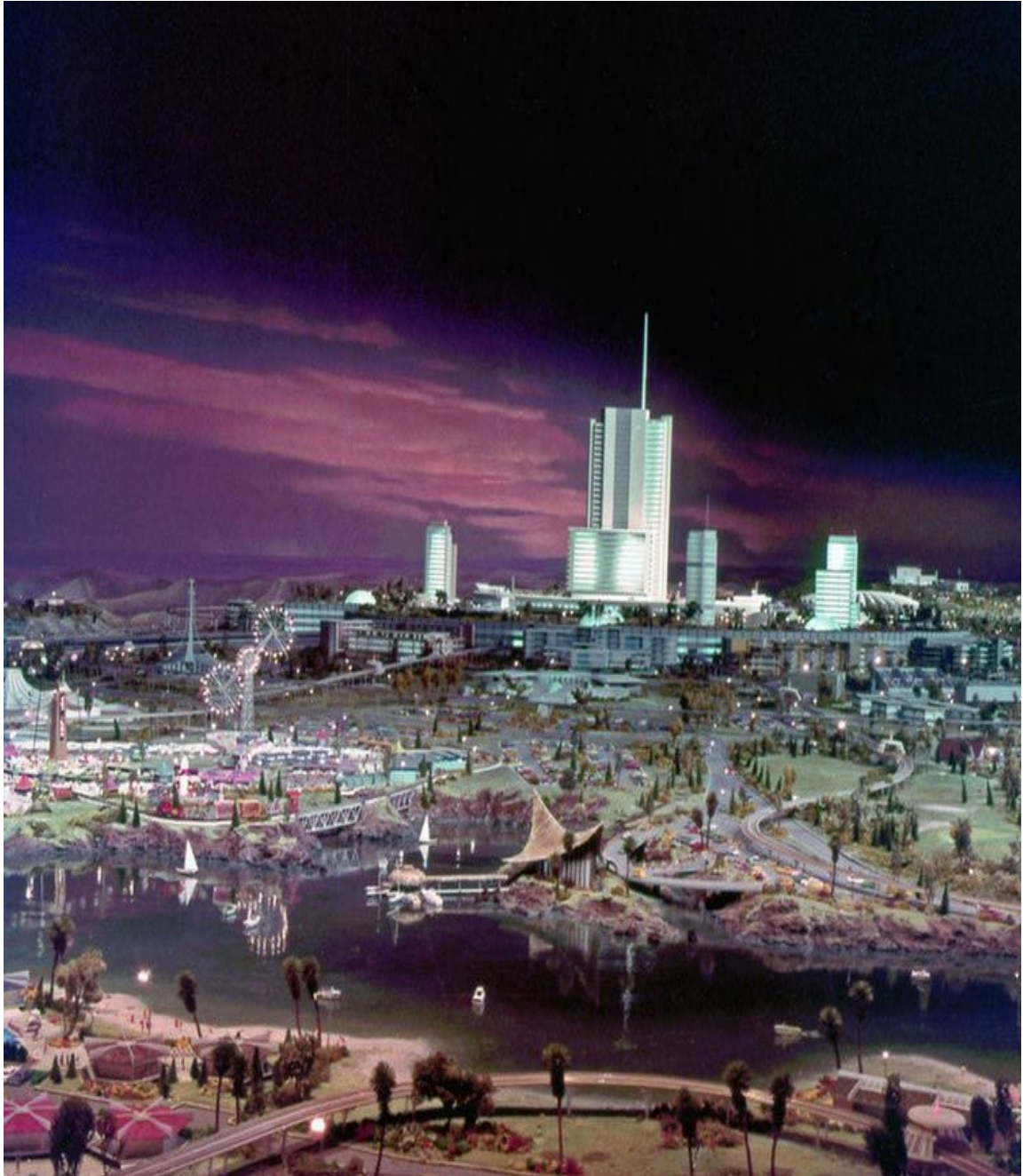
Walt Disney made a career out of revolutionizing animation and filmmaking techniques, continuously pushing the boundaries of the art form while staying true to a vision of a family-friendly finished product. This visionary zeal seemed to reach its zenith in 1955 with the opening of Disneyland, the world's first fully themed amusement park that, in many ways, felt like a livable environment. By the 1960s, however, Disney had begun to once again grow restless, and turned his creative attentions to a much larger scale challenge: attempting to fix what was perceived as the "urban crisis" of the era in the United States. Building off the ideas, model concepts, and failures of previous urban planners, Disney sought to create a foolproof concept: design a futuristic city using technology and architectural techniques his team at WED Enterprises at learned at Disneyland, and build it on enough privately owned land that nobody could build an unwanted and unplanned development immediately beyond the city limits. The city was to be known as EPCOT ("Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow"), and it would be located in Orlando and Kissimmee, Florida. This study seeks to trace the history of EPCOT's development and planning, but also to understand why EPCOT never came to be in the form it was originally designed as, arriving at a conclusion that for as foolproof as Disney's plans seemed, there are some factors that are simply beyond the control of even the biggest dreamers, factors that force compromise and change even in the grandest, boldest ideas.

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A portion of a much larger model of EPCOT, "Progress City", demonstrates the level of detail in Disney's plans for his "city of tomorrow". "A Look at the Progress City Model". Digital Image. Imagineering Disney Blog. Accessed March 25, 2014.
www.imagineeringdisney.com/blog/2010/7/22/a-look-at-the-progress-city-model-then-and-now.html

Many contemporary American cities find themselves in a peculiar cultural place: experiencing a level of growth unknown since the 1960s, but now having to contend more frequently with challenges such as gentrification, new construction, and increased demand for social services.¹ Arguments abound concerning the best ways to handle these matters; some trumpet the benefits of close partnerships between the public and private sectors for urban job creation and large-scale development projects, while others counter with the dangers of overreliance on all-too-transient private capital, profit motives, and a lack of affordable housing and overuse of eminent domain.²

These are serious challenges surrounded by serious debates, but the fact that “growth” has returned to the American urban lexicon seems like a welcome reprieve from the era that saw most Americans of means abandon cities: the 1960s are often, and perhaps aptly, described as the most turbulent decade in American history, and the political focal point of many of the struggles and controversies of the era circled around urban centers. Only a few decades earlier the nation’s population had become primarily urban, but increased contact among so many peoples and cultures was creating new conflicts and contentious spaces. Whether it involved economics, racial strife and segregation, aesthetics, or any number of other factors, it became

¹ Frizell, Sam. "Here's Why Americans Are Fleeing the Suburbs." Time. April 25, 2014. Accessed April 13, 2016. <http://time.com/72281/american-housing/>

² Reitmeyer, John. "More Issues." State Lawmakers Tout Public-Private Partnerships as Way to Revive Cities. November 20, 2015. Accessed April 13, 2016. <http://www.njspotlight.com/stories/15/11/19/state-lawmakers-tout-public-private-partnerships-as-way-to-revive-cities/>

clear as the 1960s progressed that a large portion of the nation had begun to see America's cities minimally as troubled, or in full-on crisis at worst.

This sentiment was clearly put into words in the text of, and discussion around, the 1966 Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act (also referred to as the Model Cities Act), where Congress declared the burgeoning urban crisis to be the greatest domestic policy issue that had to be tackled as part of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society.³ Given that the majority of Americans lived in or immediately around urban areas in the 1960s, the thinking appeared to be that tackling issues of poverty, poor education, health care costs, and crime would take not only treating existing ills in American cities, but actually looking beyond existing cities, and, in a bold move driven perhaps by Space Age optimism, building entirely new urban communities based on the latest thinking, planning, and technological innovations.⁴ The new visions of the future might be built just outside existing cities, or in some cases even spring up, it might seem, out of nowhere. The concepts often smacked of "top-down" architectural Modernism: an attempt to create meticulously planned developments that would optimistically emphasize scientific and economic efficiency, reassuring and unified aesthetics, and allow for future redevelopment projects on much larger scales, generated in response to a sense that contemporary cities had become fractured and chaotic by the mid 1900s.⁵ Planners, architects,

³ Mannheim, Steve, *Walt Disney and the Quest for Community*. Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate, 2002. pg. xiv

⁴ Hunt, D. Bradford. "Model Cities". *Encyclopedia of Chicago*. Accessed March 13, 2014. <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/832.html>

⁵ Guillén, Mauro F. *The Taylorized Beauty of the Mechanical: Scientific Management and the Rise of Modernist Architecture*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006. Pages 1-2. For the purposes of this analysis, Guillén's definition of "Modernist"

politicians, and urbanists the world over would gravitate toward America in this time, pushing forward groundbreaking, often pie-in-the-sky ideas that could potentially not only solve America's urban ills, but fundamentally transform the entire nature of American urbanism. Yet while some of these ideas found levels of success, the grandest visions seemed to waiver or meet great resistance, never achieve full implementation or, in worse cases such as some high rise housing projects, face abject failure.

Not coincidentally, though, 1966 also marked the year that a presentation about one such new, planned city was filmed for broadcast across America's television airwaves, only this project was not derived from Model Cities-inspired federal or state government planning, nor directly from academia, but from an animation studio, albeit the most famous one in the world. In what would be his final filmed appearance, legendary animator and studio owner Walt Disney hosted a sales pitch and explanation of a concept he had almost completely devoted the final years of his life to creating, and its sheer scale had the potential to stand out from almost any other major development concept of the time.

Walt Disney had been known for many years as a cartoonist, a director, and a man who was quick to embrace innovation in movie making technology and presentation, from sound in cartoons (*Steamboat Willie*, 1928), to color animation (*Flowers and Trees*, 1932), to full-length animated features (*Snow White and the*

will be used in reference to the optimistic goal of creating unified designs by utilizing advanced technology with the intent of using the efficiency of these techniques and materials to improve society on a large-scale level. Many, though not all, of these concepts are the product of a "top down" approach driven by their builder/creator, as will become evident.

Seven Dwarfs, 1937). In 1955 Disney and his company had taken perhaps their boldest step forward with the opening of Disneyland, a new type of theme park attraction, constructed in Anaheim, California. What was immediately clear about Disneyland was that it was set apart from its surroundings; while the 160-acre park was built to be easily accessible by car from southern California's Santa Ana Expressway, it was tucked away from plain sight, separated both by a sizeable parking lot as well as a man-made berm that worked like an earthwork barricade, creating for those within the park's confines an illusion of isolation from the surrounding freeway and motels. Eventually "guests" (the Disney Company's term for park patrons) could access Disneyland by parking nearby and then riding to the entrance on an elevated monorail train, and then partake in a self-contained experience within the park.

It wasn't long before the park had attained major cultural significance, and only slightly longer before Disney began eying the possibility of expansion. However, Disney knew he'd be limited in expanding Disneyland itself, given its proximity to the freeway. Instead, Disney turned his attention to acquiring a much larger, much more isolated plot of land, eventually settling on an enormous expanse of forest and swamp land in central Florida, near Orlando and Kissimmee and within both Orange and Osceola counties. Immediately the thinking was that a new Disneyland would be built there; but while Walt did acknowledge that a new park

would be constructed on the land, he was quick to add “there will never be another Disneyland.”⁶

On the one hand, this statement could hardly come as a surprise given Disney’s long history of pursuing innovations in the filmmaking process as well as his aversion to sequels in his studio. On the other, Disney’s vision for his new Florida property was much larger, much grander in scope, and for a time left people unable to quantify exactly what he wished to accomplish in the murky central Floridian swamps. Not surprisingly, his vision almost perfectly aligned with much of the thinking that would come to form the Model Cities Act. The 43 square miles that eventually evolved into the Walt Disney World Resort would not simply include a theme park and Mickey Mouse merchandise; in fact at its very heart, its center, would lay a brand new city, built upon the concept that such a new urban space combined with vision, government cooperation, and help from American free enterprise would create a model community that could become a working laboratory of new technologies and urban planning ideas. This “Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow”, or EPCOT, borrowed numerous ideas from mid-20th century urban planners, was thought up as a solution to the perceived 1960s urban crisis in America, and would act as such a solution by creating a planned city that would seek a higher quality of life for residents through technological innovation and incredibly detailed, aesthetically consistent planning that could be used in similar developments around the nation.

⁶ *Walt Disney’s Florida Press Conference, November 14, 1965.* © 1965 Walt Disney Productions. State of Florida Archives Library. Accessed March 24, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PrGH84BvoNY>

Unlike what befell many other grand design ideas in this era, the groundwork that Walt Disney laid seemed foolproof: if the cities of the 1960s were fractured and in disrepair, he would bypass them and build a new city on a *tabula rasa* in Florida; if middle class families had gravitated toward cookie cutter suburbs in the vein of Levittown, he would lure them back to city-centric life via his unmatched showmanship and access to new technology; if getting federal, state, and local governments to coordinate efforts proved difficult, his bringing development to sleepy central Florida meant he would be granted unmatched influence and oversight over his new property and could efficiently and directly oversee his new city. In the end, though, despite EPCOT's lofty Modernist inspirations and concepts and despite the undeniably favorable circumstances that seemed to ensure its success, Walt Disney's Progress City would, just like the ideas of many of his contemporaries, never be completely fulfilled for reasons beyond the one factor necessary to see the vision all the way through: complete and utter control. In a contemporary era that has seen a rebirth in many American cities and has bred new debates about the course of their futures, EPCOT serves to highlight the limits of "top-down" private sector urban reforms, as corporate shakeups, market forces, and even the simple passage of time can take even the grandest, most ambitious, and seemingly foolproof of projects and halt or alter them before they even begin.

One Little Spark: The Inspirations Behind EPCOT

Tracing the sources of the American urban crisis, both perceived and real, is a daunting task; different American cities operated and evolved under unique

circumstances, with different industries, leaders, and schools of thought dictating the directions they would take. One may point to the beginning of the decline of American manufacturing; to the racial reactionaries taking umbrage to the Great Migration of the 1920s; or to the sheer crowding caused by the mass movement away from rural America and farming and toward the city, followed relatively quickly by the post-World War II white migration toward the suburbs; all were major factors that led to strife, unrest, economic woes, and at times extreme bursts of violence in America's cities.

This is not to say, however, that the very notion of an urban crisis scenario was entirely unique to the middle of the 20th century. Going back to his days as a youth, first as a toddler in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Chicago and then later on in teenaged travels to Kansas City, Walt Disney never quite understood the allure of urban spaces, at least as they existed in those days. The cities of Walt's childhood often lacked effective sanitation, with street layouts and housing expansions driven more by Gilded Age labor practices than by any great vision to improve the living conditions of its people. Walt's befuddlement only grew when he relocated to Los Angeles, today considered the epitome of an American sprawling city, to become a cartoonist in the 1920s. In 1948 while on a train to the Chicago Railroad Fair, Walt sounded off to Ward Kimball, one of his top animators and a fellow railfan, stating "I can't figure out why in the hell everybody lives in the city where they don't have any room and can't do anything"⁷, as Walt, a farm boy in his youth, saw empty spaces as

⁷ Gennaway, Sam. *Walt and the Promise of Progress City*. Pike Road, AL: Ayefour Publishing, 2011. Page 224.

places for greater opportunity and reflection. Just as Disney could not ever leave well enough alone with regards to innovations in animation, he seemed to feel that if cities were not going to be planned and done correctly, then they should not be done at all.

Even before Disney's birth, the crisis of the slums of the Industrial Revolution vexed urban planners and academics the world over. One of the grandfathers of the movement to rethink cities was British urban planner Ebenezer Howard, author of the sort of *ur*-tome of Modernist urban planning, 1898's *Garden Cities of To-morrow* (originally *To-Morrow!: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*).⁸ While certainly sprung from the utopist thinking of the era, Howard's plans were steeped in rigorous research. First, Howard sought to pinpoint the cause of the slum crisis: in this case, the forced influx of country residents who could no longer make their livings as farmers, and thus had no choice but to relocate to the city and leave their old lives behind, creating an enormous need for fast, often slapdash urban expansion. Second, Howard sought to answer what drove people to live in either the country or in cities, analyzing their positive and negative tributes, and concluded that only by combining them in what he referred to as the "Town-Country" could the best of both worlds, so to speak, be achieved.

⁸ Howard, Ebenezer. *Garden Cities of To-morrow, Illustrated Edition*. Gloucester, UK: Dodo Press, 2009. Introduction page iii-page 8.

"Ebenezer Howard's Vision of Social Cities, 1898". Digital image. CITY. March 30, 2011. Accessed October 1, 2015. <http://www.city-analysis.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/ebenezer-howard-social-cities.jpg>

Lastly, Howard outlines his plan for what he calls the “Garden City”, an urban space of 32,000 citizens with all of the magnetic qualities of the countryside worked in: a circular city with a grand, green park in its center, with avenues radiating outward into larger circles first containing shops, then a larger circle with a glass-covered public arcade, and then even larger circles containing houses and gardens. Beyond that would be factories, cemeteries, rock quarries, and necessary areas of resource cultivation (timber, coal, etc.), and even further beyond a wide expanse of natural greenery, until at last one happened upon the next town over, a slightly smaller satellite of the original. Importantly, all of these circles, resource areas, and satellite communities would be connected by rail, so that residents may have their choice of journeying into the city, or taking a day trip out into the countryside. In an era of industrial pollution and overcrowded slums, the Garden City model no doubt held a great deal of allure. Even if the cause of his era’s cities ills were different, Howard’s influence on mid-twentieth century urban thinkers, Disney included, would become highly evident.

Still, the 1960s were an era of unique circumstances, and while pinpointing the exact cause or moment that triggered the apparent 1960s urban crisis proves a formidable challenge, a clearer pattern seems to emerge when one analyzes some of the proposed solutions that evolved over the course of the mid-20th century. Of all the planners, politicians, architects, and theorists who formulated plans and blueprints to “fix” this crisis, two that stand apart as clear contemporary influences on what Walt Disney would eventually dream up are former New York City Park Commissioner Robert Moses, head of the Park Commission from 1934 through

1960, and Austrian architect Victor Gruen, considered to be the father of the modern day shopping mall. While ample studies and analyses of the lives, work, and influence of both men abound, for the purposes of this analysis they will be looked at in terms of their direct influence on Disney's plans for EPCOT.

Robert Moses vision for New York City served as a veritable advertisement for the ideals of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal for America. Upon his appointment to the Parks Commission by Mayor Fiorello La Guardia, Moses immediately set about making ample use of the federal funding provided to New York for public parks and recreation areas, and seemed to take note of the only project that was granted more federal money than parks: highway construction.⁹ Overviews of Moses' work indicate a clear focus on not just what he wished to accomplish, but where he wished to do it; Moses clearly saw increased green space, recreational areas, car-friendly infrastructure, and local attractions such as aquariums and renovated beaches as beneficial to the overall image of New York and the well-being of its residents, but a quick glance at the location of many of his most famous projects clearly demonstrate that, while he didn't necessarily ignore Manhattan, his focus was very much on the outer boroughs, especially those located on Long Island.

⁹ "Robert Moses and the Modern Park System (1929-1965)." Online Historic Tour: NYC Parks. Accessed April 7, 2014.
<http://www.nycgovparks.org/about/history/timeline/robert-moses-modern-parks>
 This timeline from the New York City Parks website provides some numbers to illustrate the scale of the undertaking; 70,000 Parks Department relief workers in 1934, dozens of recreational buildings and hundreds of new public parks by 1936, and a near tripling of acreage put aside as park land in New York City by the time of Moses' retirement from the Commission in 1960.

The reasons for Moses' focusing away from the city center seem to revolve around his belief that American life was shifting fully toward what he called "a motorized civilization"¹⁰; even his *New York Times* obituary spills a good deal of ink pointing out Moses' direct hand in the building of many of the highways that now criss-cross the island, leading toward and ringing around New York City and Manhattan, working to create a clear distinction between a residential island, that is Long Island, to the east and a "destination" and work island to the west, in this case Manhattan and its immediate surroundings. While this may indicate Moses simply planning along with postwar trends that led many veterans toward suburbs such as Levittown, his continued building and eventual focus on hitherto undeveloped areas such as Flushing Meadows illustrated a desire to build a new, idealized community away from what may have been viewed as overdeveloped areas in and around Manhattan and parts of Brooklyn or the Bronx. This issue will be touched upon later.

Similarly, the Austrian architect and Third Reich refugee Victor Gruen held a vision that he hoped would transform the layout, usage, and benefits of urban spaces in mid-20th century America. Before fleeing his homeland for the United States in 1938, Gruen had grown up with and taken note of the layout of his native Vienna, which in 1848 had been physically transformed to reflect a rising tide of and desire for democracy within the nation. Government buildings had been altered to face toward public streets, physical walls that had once separated the urban elite from the common throng circling the city were removed, and perhaps most

¹⁰ Goldberger, Paul. "Robert Moses, Master Builder, is Dead at 92." *New York Times*, July 30, 1981.

importantly of all to Gruen's life's work, a large, ringed public mall called the Ringstrasse was built that granted free and open access, wide sidewalks, and sweeping urban views to all Viennese, rich and poor alike.¹¹

Within just a few years of his arrival in the United States, Gruen worked his way into a position to bring a bit of Vienna to a space that he felt needed a major overhaul and a taste of urbanization, and by the 1950s he had his own firm and the chance to bring his vision to what he dubbed "the Anti-City": America's suburbs.¹²

Gruen saw the suburbs as an unfortunate side effect of the deterioration of American cities; unplanned areas of sprawl, increasingly swelling up with those who wished to escape declining cities, leading to "unplanned" expansion and chaos as well as the destruction of "natural beauty".¹³

What Gruen wound up designing in 1954 was an attempt to transform what he saw as the ugliness of suburbia into a planned, orderly, multi-purpose and decidedly democratic new urbanist vision: Northland shopping mall, outside Minneapolis, Minnesota, which was to be a "two-million square foot center [that] included outdoor space...auditoriums, a bank, a post office, local retailers and a supermarket."¹⁴ Rather than destroy or ignore downtown Minneapolis, Gruen instead saw a chance to design an alternative that could bring urbanism into the

¹¹ Gladwell, Malcolm. "The Terrazzo Jungle." *The New Yorker*, March 15, 2004.

¹² Mannheim, Steve, *Walt Disney and the Quest for Community*, Introduction pg. xiv

¹³ *Fresno: A City Reborn*. © Victor Gruen Associates. Los Angeles, 1968. YouTube. Accessed March 30, 2014.

¹⁴ Byrnes, Mark. "Victor Gruen Wanted to Make Our Suburbs More Urban. Instead, He Invented the Mall." *The Atlantic Cities*, July 18, 2013.

suburbs, as well as create a mold which pre-existing cities such as Minneapolis could follow as a means of rehabilitating their usage and image.

In this vision, customers would get to enter a complex designed with their comfort and convenience in mind, which Gruen saw as well aligned with the interests of vendors who would populate the complex. Everything was to be meticulously planned to optimize the customer's experience, as well as the earning potential of the shops, markets, and other places of business that would reside within. The concept would be further developed and refined with time; in explaining the merits of the approach, Gruen contemporary and Short Hills Mall (Short Hills, New Jersey) designer Alfred Taubman provides an example of just how thorough the planning could be. Concerning building materials used to lay down floors and its relationship with customer comfort:

People used to use monolithic terrazzo in centers, but it cracked easily and was difficult to repair. Women, especially, tend to have thin soles. We found that they are very sensitive to the surface, and when they get on one of those terrazzo floors it's like a skating rink. They like to walk on the joints. The only direct contact you have with the building is through the floor. How you feel about it is very important.

And even on the topic of using transparent handrails for the sake of vendors:

We didn't want anything to disrupt the view (what Taubman refers to as "threshold resistance")...You buy something because it is available and attractive...You can't have any obstacles. The goods have to be all there.¹⁵

¹⁵ Gladwell. "The Terrazzo Jungle" – Taubman's quotes and the look back at Gruen's early malls make plain the emphasis placed on aesthetic beauty, using such design elements as glass atriums, "soft lighting", even aviaries to create this new environment, as well as an emphasis on the practical, from the use of climate control technology to the sequential placement of particular stores in order to stimulate more purchasing by consumers.

Gruen's ideas and concepts would continue squaring firmly on what he saw as a crystal clear vision for convenience in urban life; the article cited previously from *The New Yorker* includes quotes from Gruen where he details his dream for Manhattan, a highly Modernist vision that included 150-story high residential towers, with surrounding saved areas converted into gardens, parks, and cultural spaces, and a clear emphasis on walking as the chief means of transportation, with cars and other vehicles left to drive in underground tunnels while in the city and on highways when immediately outside of it.

Those ideas, particularly the last one concerning a de-emphasis on the automobile and active catering to the pedestrian in the urban setting, truly reached out and grabbed the imagination of Walt Disney. In fact, Walt was so taken with Gruen's work that, according to long time Disney Chief Archivist Dave Smith, in the mid 1960s while in the middle of planning his experimental city the only book he had in his immediate office inventory on the topic of urban planning was a copy of Gruen's famed 1964 work *The Heart of Our Cities*.¹⁶

Shortcomings and Criticisms: Who's in Charge, Here?

Unfortunately for him, Gruen's glorious vision of a "one stop shop" for all a customer's urban center needs would not come to full fruition for a number of reasons; economic realities, tax code laws, and available local government funds

¹⁶ Gennaway, Sam. "Walt Disney's E.P.C.O.T. and the Heart of Our Cities." 2014. The Original E.P.C.O.T. Project. Accessed September 10, 2015. <https://sites.google.com/site/theoriginalepcot/epcot-and-the-heart-of-our-cities>.

meant piecemeal construction and an unforeseen consequence of the “Anti-City” spreading even further, this time in and around his shopping malls. Indeed, so jaded was Gruen by this turn of events that by 1978 he would disown his creation, stating flatly “I refuse to pay alimony for those bastard developments.”¹⁷

In fact, despite the seeming public hunger for new developments in American cities, it became clear quite quickly that utopian visions and large-scale projects would not often prove realistic, nor satisfy the very people they were often designed, at least nominally, to help. While Gruen ran into economic and local political situations that limited what he could do, Robert Moses often faced resistance from local communities within New York City. The now late, great urbanist Marshall Berman speaks critically of Moses’ outlook in his lecture “Emerging From the Ruins”, pointing out Moses’ lack of consideration for people he considered to be “small” or parochial in their thinking, standing athwart of social progress as Moses’ highways and redevelopment projects cut through their

¹⁷ Byrnes. “Victor Gruen Wanted to Make Our Suburbs More Urban...” – Between this and the Gladwell piece is an overview of legal taxation policies that made investment in shopping centers more lucrative, but harmed investment in non-commercial aspects of Gruen’s planned communities. Federal tax law granted tax breaks to compensate for depreciation in capital investments; meant to spurn on manufacturing, it wound up inadvertently granting the most lucrative deals to shopping centers. This triggered a mall-construction craze that led to multiple shopping centers springing up in towns regardless of their population growth/decline trends, which de-incentivized the construction of those other aspects of Gruen’s vision, such as apartments, schools, banks, etc. being included.



Federal tax laws would inadvertently reduce Victor Gruen's vision for a grand, "one-stop-shop" new downtown core into the modern shopping mall. Though surrounded by fields, Gruen's dreaded "Anti-City" would soon encroach on its borders. "Northland Center, Detroit (1954)". Digital image. Reurbanist. May 13, 2013. Accessed April 20, 2014.

<http://reurbanist.com/2013/05/the-gruen-effect-victor-gruen-and-the-shopping-mall/>



Interchanges such as the Van Wyck were brought into being in and around New York City under the direction of Robert Moses, often cutting through older, established neighborhoods, which stirred resentment among residents. Such projects highlighted the inherent tension in placing large, Modernist projects in pre-existing communities. "Kew Gardens Interchange, Queens, NY, I-678, Grand Central & Jackie Robinson Parkway". Digital Image. Empire State Roads. May 7, 2001. Accessed April 20, 2014.

<http://www.empirestateroads.com/week/week32.html>

neighborhoods and altered the economics of their homes seemingly overnight.¹⁸

Elsewhere, he notes not only his personal sense of loss when the Cross-Bronx Expressway cut through his childhood neighborhood, but also how Moses had “his ability to convince a mass public that he was the vehicle of impersonal world-historical forces, the moving spirit of modernity”, a one-man source of power who could undo and rebuild anything in the blink of an eye, while most people were stuck working for years just to barely slow him down if his visions cut through their homes.¹⁹

The problem, it seemed, was that men like Moses and Gruen, for all of their bombast and vision, could not hope to implement such far-reaching concepts in spaces already densely populated, established and lived in for centuries, areas that at any given time could be reshaped not by singular visionaries and planners, but by the very people living in it, or economic and political forces altering the citizenry’s relationship with the city. Thomas Dolan presents an excellent case study of such a project by analyzing the Gateway Complex in Newark, NJ. Billed for years as a key feature of the “New Newark” meant to rise up out of the ashes of the 1968 riots, Gateway was designed to clear an enormous number of federal hurdles that would allow it to be funded, and was at heart a response to federal programs that had encouraged postwar white flight from cities such as Newark.²⁰ It would create a very

¹⁸ Berman, Marshall. *Emerging From the Ruins*. 9th Annual Lewis Mumford Lecture on Urbanism. City College of New York. May 2nd 2013. YouTube. Accessed April 2, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NPiiJdrH-c>

¹⁹ Berman, Marshall, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity*. New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 1988. Page 294.

²⁰ Dolan, Thomas. “Newark and Its Gateway Complex”. *The Newark Metro*. Accessed March 15, 2014. <http://www.newarkmetro.rutgers.edu/reports/display.php?id=17>

new, modern, and seemingly welcoming complex for mostly white commuters who would not even have to set foot on a Newark sidewalk after arriving by train; would house vendors, shops, and restaurants; and would be situated near McCarter Highway and just off of newly constructed Route 78. Both the Complex and the highway offered Newark a chance to collect tax revenue lost thanks to postwar white flight, yet in the process enormous tracts of housing would be demolished; housing that, postwar, would largely have gone to African-American families, ineligible to receive loans for suburban purchases thanks to federal policy influenced by Congressmen representing the Jim Crow South. In effect, Gateway would soon prove itself to be the proverbial square peg in the round hole; a new, Modernist attempt at recasting the image of a centuries old city that, for its part, did not have the means nor necessarily the desire to adapt to that vision.

Thus, while someone like Gruen might visualize a new, modern urban space that could replace the pre-existing and chaotic suburban sprawl of postwar America, and while leaders like Moses might have authority to tear down and rebuild acreage stretching to all corners of one of the richest states in the nation, their visions faced a stark, halting reality. The facts prove inescapable: in a representative democracy, and in communities established long before the visionary's arrival, there will be resistance to change, varied economic considerations, racial or ethnic tensions, and willful choices by people and politicians that will not allow for one singular vision to

Dolan's account thoroughly details how human agency and political choices shaped the shifting demographics of older cities like Newark from the 1940s through the 1960s and beyond, and how project such as Gateway never seemed to be able to balance appealing for federal loans with protecting the interests of current residents, now largely minority.

dominate an entire metropolitan area, because no one plan can account for such variance, disruption, and human agency creating an unstable landscape on which to build such large-scale and transformative projects.

Yet all of these factors, from the ideas to the attempted execution to the conflicts that either prevented or limited them from reaching their full potential, bring the topic back to one Walter Elias Disney. Taking inspiration from figures like Gruen and Moses, but also taking note of the factors that would limit them, Disney sought to put to use resources that would grant him the freedom to act however he saw fit in order to create what he saw as the ideal, modern city. Fortunately, he already had a very useful template to build off of.

The Happiest Place on Earth

As stated previously, Walt Disney and the Disney Company had built what would become a cultural touchstone in 1955 when they opened Disneyland in Anaheim, California. Disneyland was unique; rather than a midway filled with basic, unrelated rides, games, and attractions, Disney instead created a park filled with themed attractions and areas, with self-explanatory descriptors for the areas such as Frontierland, Main Street USA, Adventureland, Fantasyland, and Tomorrowland. The basic idea for the park had been born from Disney's experiences taking his young daughters out on weekends, where the children would ride a carousel or Ferris wheel while Disney, in his words, "[would] sit on the bench eating peanuts

while they rode. And sitting there, alone, I felt that there should be something built, some kind of family park where parents and children could have fun together.”²¹

From a financial standpoint, despite a fairly bumpy opening Disneyland became a success very quickly, surpassing the ten million visitor mark by 1957 and drawing over forty percent of its “guests” from outside of California, families driving in on the new federally funded highway systems to reach Anaheim.²² However, a small scratch beneath the surface revealed that Disneyland was meant as much more than just a family park and marketing mechanism for Disney’s movie studio.

Books, blogs, and magazines have been written about what originally set Disneyland apart from almost every other amusement park that existed before it, but every feature that set it apart revolved around one key concept: the ability to control the sensory and ambulatory experiences of park guests once they passed through the turnstiles. Disneyland was meant to serve primarily as a “show”²³; given the movie-making talents behind its creation, it stood to reason that the guest experience would almost seem guided by a director’s will. This design was immediately reflected in Disneyland’s single gate entrance that funneled all guests into Main Street USA, a feature that immediately set it apart from multi-entranced and grid-like patterned carnival midways.

While this crowd feeding system might create congestion on busy days, a walk down Main Street USA served as a kind of thesis statement for the larger

²¹ Marling, Karal Ann. “Disneyland 1955: Just Take the Santa Ana Freeway to the American Dream.” *American Art*, Vol. 5, No. ½, Winter-Spring 1991. Page 175.

²² Marling. “Disneyland 1955...” page 174

²³ Mannheim, Steve. *Walt Disney and the Quest for Community*. Pages 16-20

Disneyland experience, which could be summarized with the phrase “the architecture of reassurance”.²⁴ By all accounts Walt was always fascinated with the science and art of how and why people moved within a planned space, and his park’s walkable layout, and not just its rides, allowed him to observe and control a lot of that process.

The layout of Main Street worked like an idealized version of an early 20th century small town, perhaps like Walt’s own childhood home of Marceline, Missouri, except here asphalt replaced dirt roads and horse waste was never a concern. The buildings, designed to appear like a general store, a firehouse, a town hall, and other small town standards, were built to 5/8th scale, with larger first floors leading to smaller second stories, a sort of three dimensional form of the filmmaking effect known as forced perspective, making them seem impressive yet accessible. Signage, graphics, and colors all worked off a common template, creating unity of appearance and eliminating visual contradictions, while period appropriate bandstand-style music filled the air, and even artificial aromas like that of baking cookies might waft from the Main Street bakery, released from a Disney creation known as a smellitzer. At the end of Main Street was a circular plaza lined with trees and park benches, a sort of wheel that included numerous spokes leading off into the various themed lands beyond, and all culminating with a view of Sleeping Beauty Castle, a prefabricated structure that served as what Walt called a “wienie”, an

²⁴ Mannheim, Steve. *Walt Disney and the Quest for Community*. Pages 54-58. These pages help paint a picture of Main Street USA. Disney’s take on small town America proved so popular that the company sometimes received requests from towns looking to rehabilitate their downtown shopping districts. What this said about the loss of “authenticity” in American towns is a matter of debate.

attention-grabbing structure meant to allow guests to orient themselves regardless of where they stood in the park. Despite how structured this whole experience was, Walt insisted on leaving enough space and room for development so that new walkways and paths could be built based on how guests decided to navigate areas of the park. John Hench, who helped design Disneyland and other Disney theme parks, made it clear that reassurance was always the key, as “the active clutter that you see in the real world, which creates mixed messages, sets up conflicts, creates tension, and may even feel threatening.”²⁵ By ensuring that theming remained consistent, that spacemen from Tomorrowland were not walking around the same area as the cowboys in Frontierland, contradictions could be smoothed out, and reassurance achieved.

One of the most noticeable, and without a doubt one of the most heavily advertised²⁶ features of Disneyland was its emphasis on transportation. While numerous attractions utilized vehicles ranging from merry-go-round horses to fantastical submarines or space age-styled rockets, many Disney promotional films at the time chose to emphasize the park’s utilization of a steam locomotive that surrounded the park, era-appropriate horse drawn carriages in the idealized turn of

²⁵ Gennaway, Sam. *Walt and the Promise of Progress City*. Page 126

²⁶ *Disneyland USA* © Walt Disney Productions. October 27, 1966 episode. YouTube. Accessed March 2, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sLCHg9mUBag>



Disneyland from the sky. Visible are the “hub” area at the center of the park, the “spoke and wheel” model that guests would follow to enter the different themed areas of the park, and later part of the inspiration for the “Radial Plan” of EPCOT; and the immediate surroundings of the park, which include not just the parking lot, but encroaching businesses that sprung up around it. Disney made it a high priority to buy enough land in Florida to ensure these surroundings wouldn’t follow him east. Boser, Robert J. “Disneyland, Aerial View”. Digital image. Word Press. August, 1963. Accessed April 25, 2014. https://fatherlyadviceandrants.files.wordpress.com/2016/01/1963-disney-land-nw_to_se_view.jpg?w=869

the century small town Main Street USA, and double-decker buses that would take guests from one side of the park to another.

However, three years into Disneyland's life, Walt and his wife Lillian Disney returned from a vacation that had opened Walt's eyes to an exciting new concept. Disney's "Imagineers", the creative engineers, artists, and designers who sketch out, plan, and build creations and attractions at Disney theme parks and who then comprised the arm of the Walt Disney Productions known as WED Enterprises²⁷, were charged with a new project: a ride not built around high speed thrills, nor recreations of classic Disney films, nor of adventures in steamy jungles or the wild western frontier; rather, the Imagineers were charged with designing a modern mode of mass public transportation.

The year was 1957, and Walt Disney had just learned what a monorail was.

Or rather, Walt had known about monorails before his trip, but only one kind of monorail: train cars that hung down freely from a track built upon pylons. Indeed, Walt was so aware of this type of monorail that early sketches of Disneyland's Tomorrowland section had included them near its entrance. During their trip to Germany, Walt and Lilly had visited the small mountain town of Wuppertal, where one such monorail had been in operation for over fifty years. Walt, an avid railfan, wanted to ride, but the swaying of the free-hanging cars made Lilly ill. Just days later, however, while driving near Cologne, Walt watched in awe as a new type of

²⁷ WED Enterprises was technically a separate entity from Walt Disney Productions, albeit one that reported directly to Walt, not stockholders. "WED", after all, stood for "Walter Elias Disney". WED has since been rechristened "Walt Disney Imagineering".

monorail, one that rested *on top* of a track, quietly glided by.²⁸ The concept was simple, yet novel: thin concrete rails would rise into the sky, bearing a single steel-reinforced concrete beam track that would support sleek, relatively lightweight, nearly silent, electrically powered trains that would glide along smoothly. Hearing about the prototype developed by the German company ALWEG, Disney made contact with the company and quickly struck a deal: if ALWEG would provide Disney with the basic design for the monorail, then Disney's Imagineers would construct a ride to showcase the technology to Disneyland's large crowds.²⁹ The results were a near instant-success; originally a track 8/10ths of a mile long was strategically placed in the Tomorrowland section of the park, but within three years the track was extended to 2 ½ miles, capable of actually *leaving* the Disneyland park proper and taking guests to and from the Disneyland Hotel across West Street in Anaheim. The track and monorail were the first of their kinds in North America, and millions flocked to take a spin on this vision of the future.³⁰ While the monorail no doubt provided Disney with an economic advantage by keeping guests on a Disney attraction and on Disney property, it was also a clear indication that Walt's interests and energies were shifting toward a new fascination.

Still, despite the park's remarkable successes, just like Gruen's and Moses's projects that had come before it Disneyland also faced a key problem when it came to completely fulfilling its intended purpose as an escape from the surrounding

²⁸ Gennaway, Sam. *Walt and the Promise of Progress City*. Page 200.

²⁹ Weiss, Werner. "ALWEG Monorail, Presented by Santa Fe Railroad."

Yesterland.com. Accessed April 2, 2014. <http://www.yesterland.com/monorail.html>

³⁰ *Disneyland USA* episode, approximately 4 minutes in

world. No matter how much control Walt could exercise over the experiences inside the berm of Disneyland, he had no control whatsoever over anything that might develop *around* his magic kingdom. Given how much economic activity Disneyland had brought to Anaheim, it was only a matter of time before gaudy motels and cheap souvenir trinket shops began springing up around its parking lot perimeter. Walt often voiced his frustrations over this incursion on his controlled, meticulously planned space, even once stating a bit exasperatedly, though still sporting a wry smile, at the eventual 1965 Florida press conference that “we didn’t create it, but we get blamed for it”.³¹ Even Victor Gruen singled it out in *The Heart of Our Cities* as an example of what happened when urban planning was not done thoroughly. He noted that despite Disneyland’s meticulous planning within its berm, its satellite developments “proceeded without benefit of any planning...dozens of hotels, stores, office buildings, restaurants, bars, banks, night clubs, gas stations, lunch counters, hot-dog stands and billboards clutter it up, creating...disorder and blight.”³² One could imagine Walt Disney reading these words for himself from his own copy of the book and raising an eyebrow, at the very least.³³

³¹ Fogelson, Richard E. *Married to the Mouse: Walt Disney World and Orlando*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001. Page 59.

³² Gruen, Victor. *The Heart of Our Cities - The Urban Crisis: Diagnosis and Cure*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964. Page 295.

³³ There are multiple accounts of Walt that say the only way he’d visibly display anger or frustration would be to raise a single eyebrow. Fogelson cites an anecdotal example of this in *Married to the Mouse*: while at a meeting between Disney executives and St. Louis dignitaries to discuss a possible Disney designed project for the city, Gussie Busch, heir to the Busch beer fortune, drunkenly declared that a theme park could never work if it did not sell alcohol. At that time, Disneyland did not permit alcohol sales. One raised eyebrow and a few hours later, the Disney executives were back in California.

This incursion by the Anti-City did not prevent Disneyland from achieving enormous success, though, and for a time the park began to fully occupy Walt's attention. According to accounts at the time, Disney had begun to tire of the movie industry. While the 1950s and 1960s brought on successes for the studio such as *Mary Poppins*, Disney could not get over the reality that film was finite, with a clear beginning, middle, and end. His interests began to drift toward the types of projects his Imagineers could concoct: three-dimensional, fully realized environments that would continue to exist after a ride ended, always capable of being tinkered with, improved, even reinvented.³⁴ Attractions such as *Pirates of the Caribbean* and *The Haunted Mansion* took shape during this time, existing seamlessly within the themed areas of Adventureland and New Orleans Square, respectively, thus creating fully immersive experiences not to be seen, heard, or even smelled anywhere else. Disneyland was Disney's first large-scale opportunity to indulge in this interest, but he would soon gravitate toward a second avenue to continue to get his fix.

Meet Me at the Fair! New York, 1964-1965

Coincidentally, back east in New York both Victor Gruen and Robert Moses were heavily involved in attempts to bring another World's Fair to the United States. Gruen and his associates were hired to concoct a layout for a model town that would serve as the staging ground for a Fair in Washington, DC, while Moses attempted to stage a second World's Fair for New York City in the span of 25 years.

³⁴ Marling, Karal Ann. "Disneyland 1955..." Page 173.

Gruen's team developed a design that the chief architect hoped could reshape expectations of what a modern city could be: a meticulously planned new development crafted to accommodate pedestrians, to separate living and community centers from various utilitarian functions like electric grids and telephone wires, and built so that after the Fair's conclusion it could easily be converted into a living, working city of 100,000 residents with minimal expense and effort, using the facilities already constructed for the Fair. Gruen referred to his design, no doubt inspired at least partly by Howard's Garden Cities model, as "cellular urban organization"³⁵, wherein a central, raised pedestrian-only core would contain the Fair grounds and pavilions, which in the years after the Fair would be converted into offices, apartments, and other urban necessities; the ground beneath the raised center would contain utilities such as storage facilities, truck loading platforms, and air conditioning plants, hidden from view; a surrounding circle of space would be set aside for transportation facilities and parking lots; and surrounding "nuclei" would spring up as satellite communities, all connected via mass transit. The expanding cells or nodes of activity bore a striking resemblance to Disneyland's radial plan; given Disney's admiration for Gruen's work, this is hardly a coincidence.

Despite this intricate planning, Gruen and the Washington Fair team faced stiff competition from an urban planning titan perched upon his throne just a bit over two hundred miles north of their proposed model community. Robert Moses had previously managed to bring the World's Fair to New York in 1939 while head

³⁵Gruen, Victor. *The Heart of Our Cities...* pages 292-295.

of the Parks Commission, filling in an old swamp and ash dump in Queens to create a more pristine setting outside the city's center, but the Fair had failed to turn a profit; 1964 was his opportunity to rectify that. The Fair had become ubiquitous in the modern Westernized (and, over time, decidedly non-Soviet) world, with expositions ranging from 19th century New York City, to Chicago's famed "White City" Columbian Exposition, to Seattle's Space Needle and monorail-dominated Century 21 Exposition in 1962. Unfortunately for Moses, he could not avoid the rules of the Parisian-based Bureau of International Expositions (BIE), which stipulated that a single member nation could not host more than one World's Fair in the span of a decade, and Fairs could last no longer than six months in total; Seattle's fair had only occurred two years earlier, and Moses had every intention of running his Fair for two separate six month stretches between 1964 and 1965.³⁶

Undeterred, and working around the BIE, Moses went forward with the plans for another Fair at the site of the old one, now known as Flushing Meadows, placing an emphasis on American industry, entertainment, and culture and turning to smaller, lesser known nations to fill the gap³⁷ left by member nations of the BIE, who were prohibited from participating by the organizing body. A billion dollar capital investment, additional surrounding infrastructure such as the new Van Wyck

³⁶ Byrnes, Mark. "New York's 1964 World's Fair Was Actually Something of a Failure." *The Atlantic Cities*, October 17, 2013. Accessed April 3, 2014. <http://www.theatlanticcities.com/arts-and-lifestyle/2013/10/new-yorks-1964-worlds-fair-was-actually-something-failure/7273/>

³⁷ *World's Fair Report, with Lowell Thomas*. ©1963 New York World's Fair 1964-1965 Corporation. YouTube. Accessed April 3, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V41NW5m7Scg> Approximately 7 ½ minutes into the video, Thomas details pavilions at the Fair provided by such "non-traditional" nations as Indonesia, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, etc.

Expressway, the construction of municipally-owned Shea Stadium, and finishing touches to Flushing Meadows-Corona Park³⁸ set the stage for what Moses undoubtedly hoped could be a staging ground for his own take on the idealized future of American cities and communities.

Moses, having retired from the Parks Commission and taken on the position of president of the corporation bringing the Fair to New York, was fond of describing his Fair as a venue that would offer something for everybody, with cultural offerings ranging from “Michelangelo to Walt Disney”.³⁹ Cliché as that might have sounded to the average American in the 1960’s, Moses was not exaggerating; he not only managed an agreement with Pope John XXIII and the Vatican to loan and provide the Fair with the world famous *Pieta* sculpture by Michelangelo, but he had a willing partner in Walt Disney, who would once more charge his Imagineers with using a hefty amount of corporate sponsorship dollars to research, develop, and create cutting edge technology to craft attractions that would wow the enormous crowds that were expected to descend on Queens.

In large part, Disney was deeply curious to learn if the “sophisticated” New York and East Coast crowds at the Fair would gravitate toward his Midwest-influenced Tinsel Town creations. Moses had personally contacted Disney to request that WED Enterprises design a “children’s village” attraction intended to remain permanently after the Fair ended; in effect, Moses was attempting to bring an East Coast Disneyland, or at least a slice of it, to Queens. Although Disney warned

³⁸ “Robert Moses and the Modern Park System” site

³⁹ Tirella, Joseph. “Tomorrow’s America, In Queens.” *New York Times*, April 21, 2014.

that such a permanent project was not tenable without funding from New York State, and although the soft-spoken Missourian may have presented a potential personality clash with the brash Tri-Stater, the pairing of Moses and Disney still seemed a match made in heaven: two workaholics known for their grand visions, as well as “outsized imaginations and egos.”⁴⁰ The two men agreed, and each got something he wanted: Disney would get his corporate sponsorship dollars to research and develop exciting new technology, and while Moses would not get his “children’s village”, no doubt a potentially very deft political move, he would still get Walt Disney, both the man and the highly trusted brand name, for his Fair.

When the 1964 New York World’s Fair opened on April 22 of that year, the public was greeted by corporate-sponsored demonstrations of new products and technologies, ranging from Sinclair’s “Gas Station of the Future”⁴¹ to Space Age-style videophones. Some of the most popular and enduring attractions, however, were the ones developed specifically by Disney’s WED Enterprise staff. Disney, both the man and the company, already had ample contacts within the corporate world stemming from sponsorship deals for attractions at Disneyland. American corporations would burst with pride and anticipation at having Walt Disney, America’s favorite

⁴⁰ Tirella, Joseph. *Tomorrow-Land: The 1964-65 World’s Fair and the Transformation of America*. Guilford, CT: Lyons Press, 2014. Pages 50-51.

⁴¹ *Gas Station of the Future*. Sinclair Oil, 1964. YouTube. Accessed April 4, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-2XG8kplc6A> Perhaps it was a sign of the times, a signal of Disneyland’s “forward looking-yet-nostalgic” touch, and indicative of the 60s World’s Fair style that Sinclair not only wanted to trumpet a sleek, forward looking, more automated gas station experience, but also an exhibit that idealized the past. In Sinclair’s case, that meant going back to the source of many fossil fuels, demonstrated in the company’s family-friendly “Dinoland”, which housed many large Fiberglass dinosaurs.

storyteller, step through their doors for a meeting, and loved the positive associations people developed for them due to their partnership with a company that many considered to be as wholesome and patriotic as baseball and apple pie. Disney, in this case the man, appreciated the meetings because it often meant an opportunity to personally visit and observe the research and development departments of some of the nation's biggest companies, and to relish the chance to observe new technology that was still in its testing phase, a veritable garden of new ideas to bring back to WED. Imagineer Randy Bright saw the corporate relationships that developed as "a kind of symbiotic relationship" between Disney and theme park sponsors like Kodak, Monsanto, TWA, AT&T, and eventually even General Electric, then one of the top five industrial powers on Earth.⁴²

Partnering up with a few of these corporate backers, Disney and his staff not only developed rides and shows that made extensive use of Disney's revolutionary Audio-Animatronic technology, mechanical "actors" that could be designed and programmed to move and even emote in an incredibly lifelike manner, they also put their sponsorship money to good use to produce innovative technologies that might serve a purpose beyond the Fair. The attractions produced by the Imagineers included the *Magic Skyway*, an automobile and highway-promoting ride sponsored by Ford that featured new, fresh off the assembly line Ford cars as ride vehicles on an electric ride track developed by WED called a "PeopleMover", which when combined with the constantly moving, and thus constantly loading ride vehicles

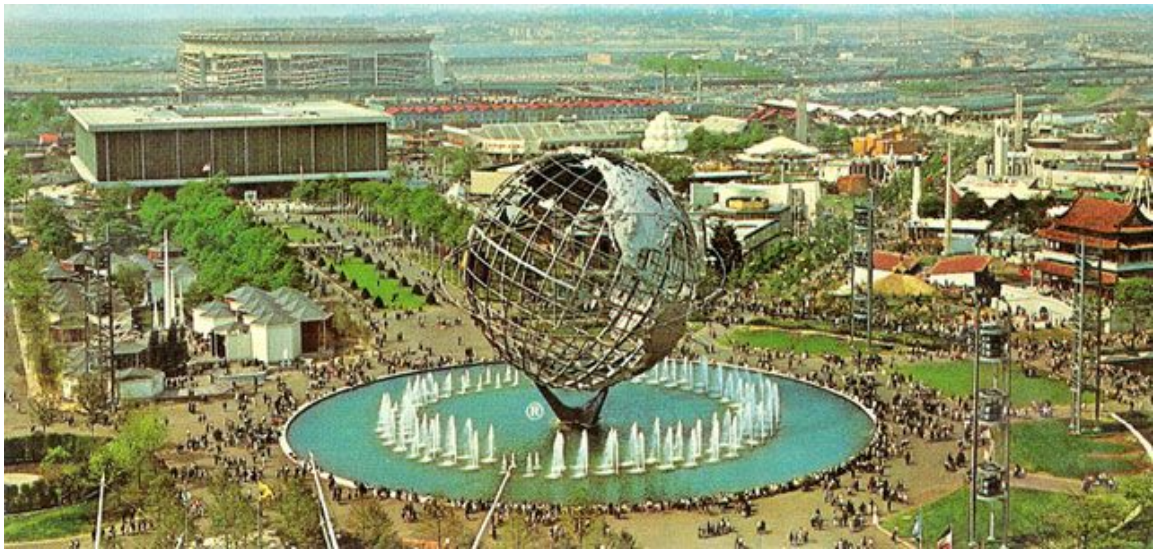
⁴² Mannheim, Steve. *Walt Disney and the Quest...* Pages 92-94.

constituted a system WED dubbed the “Omnimover”⁴³; *Great Moments with Mr. Lincoln*, a patriotic demonstration of Audio-Animatronic technology for the State of Illinois pavilion that reenacted many of the sixteenth president’s greatest speeches; *it’s a small world*, a Pepsi-Cola sponsored tribute to UNICEF that used child-like figures to emphasize world peace and featured a boat ride-loading system and queue specifically researched and made to handle enormous crowds (not to mention a true earworm of a theme song); and, perhaps most significant to this analysis, the *Progressland* pavilion, featuring *Carousel of Progress*, another Audio-Animatronic based show, this time sponsored by General Electric, that took place in a rotating theater.⁴⁴ Of note, each of these attractions would later be transplanted in full or in part to Disney theme parks, where they are still in operation today.

Carousel of Progress, which follows a supposedly typical American family over the course of multiple decades and traces how modern electrical technology has improved their lives, takes on special significance when considering Walt Disney’s urbanist ambitions. The 360-degree venue sat its audience around

⁴³ While we will see the important role the PeopleMover was intended to play in EPCOT, the Omnimover deserves some notice for how it revolutionized people’s expectations at a theme park. Ride vehicles on an Omnimover track are always moving, and thus constantly loading riders, and thus reducing ride waiting times and moving along the track more smoothly and seamlessly. While it would not be able to serve the same urban transit function the PeopleMover was intended to fulfill, it was still driven by the same principle of improving the act of crowd movement. Omnimover attractions such as *The Haunted Mansion* or *Spaceship Earth* are still among the most popular at Disney theme parks.

⁴⁴ Fickley-Baker, Jennifer. “Today in Disney History: 1964 World’s Fair Opened 50 Years Ago Today.” *Disney Parks Blog*, April 22, 2014. Accessed April 25, 2014.



1964-1965 New York World's Fair Grounds. Digital Image. Perpetual Geek Machine. September 12, 2011. Accessed April 23, 2014. <http://www.perpetualgeekmachine.net/2011/09/disney-1964-worlds-fair/> Of note in this image is the view of Flushing Meadows-Corona Park, with newly built Shea Stadium in the background, but no view of the iconic Manhattan skyline. This was Robert Moses' attempt to create a new city in the outer borough of Queens and on Long Island.



Moses' 1964-65 World's Fair provided Walt Disney Productions an opportunity to get corporate sponsorship and a venue to demonstrate new technologies, including the PeopleMover transit system used for the Magic Skyway attraction, and Audio-Animatronic "actors" for shows like *Great Moments with Mr. Lincoln* and *Carousel of Progress*, which used to end with a viewing of the Progress City model pictured earlier. Carousel of Progress, Opening Scene. Digital Image. Orlando Theme Park News. April 18, 2011. Accessed April 23, 2014.

<http://www.orlandoparksnews.com/2011/04/disney-look-to-past-april-16-22.html>

a theater-in-the-round style stage, then actually rotated the audience around the stage between five different show scenes, with scenes two, three, and four set in past decades to highlight how far labor-saving technology had come since the early 1900s, while scene five depicted what was meant to be a very realistic projection of family and technological life in the near future. This meant that the *Carousel* theater was built to accommodate five audiences at once, allowing for greater capacity while showing off yet another innovative entertainment concept to an eager crowd. Between the animatronic actors and rotating seats, the theater itself was to mirror the efficiency of the PeopleMover and Omnimover systems.

While the rotating theater and lifelike Animatronic family were advanced enough for their time, the show's keynote musical number, "There's A Great Big Beautiful Tomorrow", not only encouraged show-goers to continue looking to the future and trusting in technological innovation, but also served as, arguably, a thesis statement for Walt Disney's worldview and ideas. Said longtime and now-venerable Disney Imagineer Marty Sklar in a 2003 interview, "Walt Disney was the eternal optimist, and he really believed that things could be better. And Bob and Dick Sherman [the song's composers] wrote that song as a personal ode to Walt. They really meant it...That was Walt's anthem, and they recognized that."⁴⁵ The song's lyrics drive that message home:

*There's a great, big, beautiful tomorrow,
Shining at the end of every day.
There's a great big, beautiful tomorrow,
And tomorrow is just a dream away.
Man has a dream, and that's the start,*

⁴⁵ "Tomorrowland." *Walt Disney Treasures DVD Collection*. Martin Sklar Interview. Released December 2, 2003

*He follows his dream with mind and heart,
And when it becomes a reality,
It's a dream come true for you and me.*⁴⁶

Optimism for the future certainly stood out as a key theme and driving force for the Fair; said one original attendee on the occasion of the Fair's fiftieth anniversary, "the fair [represented] this last moment of true optimism. We were looking into the future, and the future looked bright. That really struck a chord with a lot of people."⁴⁷ Such a rose-colored remembrance glosses over a plethora of cultural and economic problems that already existed among the more vulnerable and less fortunate in post-World War II America, but with this spirit in the Queens air, *Carousel of Progress* was one of the big hits of the Fair, popular enough that plans were quickly put in place to bring it to the Tomorrowland section of Disneyland. The show would come complete with two features that truly set it apart and left the greatest imprint on Fair-goers: first, the ending scene set in the near-future, where the family now resides in a technological wonderland called "Progress City" and extols its labor-saving conveniences and supreme liveability, and second, a post-show area on the theater's second floor, accessible at the end of the show when the curtains would pull back on scene one, revealing a then crowd wowing moving sidewalk that ascended and carried crowds to *Progressland's* second floor. Housed on that floor and waiting for the audiences was a working, moving, scale model of Progress City itself, complete with narration from the father

⁴⁶ Sherman, Robert B., and Sherman, Richard M. "There's a Great Big Beautiful Tomorrow." *Carousel of Progress*. ©1964 Walt Disney Company.

⁴⁷ Harpaz, Beth J., "Queens Marks 50 Years Since Iconic 1964 World's Fair", Associated Press, April 22, 2014.

and mother from *Carousel of Progress*, with lights shining on whichever area they described to the crowds.⁴⁸

Walt had long held a fascination with miniatures and scale models, dating back to the 1930s when his doctor had recommended he find a hobby to take his mind off the stress of running his animation studio. Disney, of course, managed to turn his hobby into a passion, devoting boundless energy to it, and combined it with his love of trains and railroads to build the Carolwood Pacific Railroad, a scale model working rail line that he and guests could actually ride around Disney's own Burbank backyard. Indeed, some of Walt's earliest ideas for potential Disney theme parks involved building miniature recreations of moments in American history for a traveling show, before realizing he could build much larger than that in Anaheim.⁴⁹ Now, for New York, Walt could really embrace his passion for scale models, as he and the Imagineers brought to life a model of a cityscape with working street lights, moving vehicles, furnished living rooms, and even a working, dynamic amusement park.

As Fair crowds packed *Progressland* and millions had a glimpse at Progress City, the seeds of an idea were being planted. While it may have been a prototype, one very much still open to tinkering and reimagining, hindsight makes it clear what was taking shape: it was a scale model of EPCOT.

⁴⁸ Fritz (author's internet handle). "A Look at the Progress City Model – Then and Now." *Imagineering Disney*, July 22, 2010. Accessed April 25, 2014. <http://www.imagineeringdisney.com/blog/2010/7/22/a-look-at-the-progress-city-model-then-and-now.html>

⁴⁹ Gennaway, Sam. *Walt and the Promise...* Pages 99-102

Reach for New Horizons – The EPCOT “Sales Pitch”

Walt Disney always had a knack for big ideas, but by the mid-1960's he may well have outdone himself. Tired of the encroaching motels, souvenir shops, and liquor stores popping up around Disneyland in Anaheim, wary of getting too complacent just building theme park attractions, and having his imagination sparked and business sense put at ease by his East Coast success at the New York World's Fair, Disney decided to settle on a location across the country where WED could design a “Disneyland East”.⁵⁰ As successful as the original park was, there was no getting around how inaccessible California was for much of the nation's population, the majority of which resided east of the Mississippi. This time around, however, Disney's ambitions were far greater than they had been in Anaheim.

Dating back to 1959, a highly secretive project had begun within the upper echelons of Walt Disney Productions to seek out an eastern location where a new park could be built; locations considered over the years ranged from the US/Canadian border at Niagara Falls and Flushing Meadows in New York, both considered too cold for year-round operations, plus New York City land prices were a turn-off; to St. Louis and Kansas City, considered for a New Orleans-inspired waterfront project; even to Walt's own childhood home of Marceline, Missouri. While all of these locations were turned down for their own reasons, from 1959-1960 Walt did take a keen interest in Florida, having been asked by NBC

⁵⁰ Koenig, David. *Realityland: True-Life Adventures at Walt Disney World*. Irvine, CA: Bonaventure Press, 2007. Pages 20-21.

Network to join them in a possible project in Palm Beach.⁵¹ Although the project, meant to combine residential and amusement spaces on land owned by eccentric billionaire John D. MacArthur, never panned out, the germ of an idea made its way into Walt's mind: the eastern park would happen, but it would happen on one of the large tracts of sparsely inhabited land in Florida. Once an idea like that germinated in Walt's mind, deterring him from pursuing it to the end typically proved impossible.

Fortunately for the Disney Company, pro-growth businessmen and politicians in central Florida were about to make their search for a perfect location much simpler. Through the middle of the twentieth century, the city of Orlando stood as the most populated city in inland Florida, the benefactor of occasional land booms and the arrival of both World War II era US Army bases and eventually a plant established by defense company Martin Marietta (now Lockheed Martin). Nevertheless, Orlando remained a largely sleepy metropolitan area, its population hovering below 55,000, its immediate surroundings comprised of swamps, cattle ranches, and orange groves. When state and federal funding for highway construction opened up in the mid-1950s, pro-growth movers and shakers saw a golden opportunity; through a series of negotiations, backroom deals, newspaper editorials, and other classic statehouse maneuvers, it was eventually decided that two new major roads, the east-west, Tampa-to-Daytona Beach Interstate-4 (I-4) and

⁵¹ Emerson, Chad Denver. *Project Future: The Inside Story Behind the Creation of Walt Disney World*. Ayefour Publishing, 2010. Pages 8-23.

the north-south, Miami-to-Tallahassee Florida's Turnpike, would intersect near Orlando, at the meeting point of Orange and Osceola counties.⁵²

Disney, still actively on the lookout for their would-be East Coast location, took notice; after all, Disneyland's Anaheim location had largely been selected due to the property's proximity to the Santa Ana Freeway, and the lack of entertainment competition around it. On November 22, 1963⁵³ a private plane ride with numerous Disney higher-ups flew high above the intersection, prompting Walt to lean over and say "that's it." The company began a cloak-and-dagger operation worthy of a Cold War era spy movie, involving *nom de guerres*, dummy corporations, rerouted telephone calls to headquarters, and even oversight by a former member of the World War II era Office of Strategy Services, the precursor of the CIA⁵⁴. Secrecy was vital; if word leaked out that a large company, let alone one as famous and highly regarded as Disney, was looking to buy empty land in central Florida, speculators would swoop in and drive up prices before Walt could even raise an eyebrow. It took a great deal of surveying, negotiating, and haggling with landowners, many of whom did not even live on their central Florida properties, but Disney eventually purchased a tract of land in central Florida encompassing southern Orange and northern Osceola counties that made clear just how grand Walt's ambitions were;

⁵² Fogelsong, Richard E. *Married to the Mouse: Walt Disney World and Orlando*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Publishing, 2001. Pages 16-23. It was never the sole intent of Orlando's business community to dive headlong into tourism, as the highway construction was intended to draw in a larger, more diverse economy.

⁵³ Obviously, today November 22, 1963 is infamous for a very different reason. Needless to say, what should have been a celebratory plane ride back to California for the Disney executives turned deadly quiet and somber when the news came through the radio of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in Dallas, Texas.

⁵⁴ Emerson, Chad Denver. *Project Future...* Pages 34-40.

while Disneyland Park totaled 160 acres off the Southern California freeways, this Florida Project would encompass 27,400 acres of land between Orlando and Kissimmee.⁵⁵

The entire operation went about as well as Disney could have hoped, a brilliant exercise in control over covert corporate operations, with only a single hiccup. Despite their control, secrecy, and good fortune, some within central Florida still suspected that Disney might be the mysterious land buyer. By 1965, almost all of the land had been acquired, but a typical corporate invitation to Disneyland extended to the nation's newspapers that year was inadvertently sent to Emily Bavar, a journalist for the *Orlando Sentinel-Star*. As he usually did, Walt played the gregarious host to the journalists, all while hiding his secret "Florida Room" which contained a map of Disney's land acquisitions and was closed off to all but the most essential Disney employees. However, Walt was not prepared for Bavar to ask if he knew anything about the purchase; his stumbling answer, a rarity for the great showman, gave the *Sentinel-Star* all it needed to guess that the secret buyer was, indeed, Disney.⁵⁶ While this did drive some remaining land prices up, Disney nevertheless settled their final deals quickly; no matter, the schedule had simply been moved up by a few months.

While most who heard the news must have assumed that Disney's involvement signaled the arrival of a Disneyland theme park in Florida, questions still abounded; why on Earth would Disney be in the market for over 27,000 acres of

⁵⁵ Foglesong, Richard E., *Married to the Mouse...* Pages 40-42

⁵⁶ Editorial Staff. "We Say: 'Mystery' Industry is Disney." *Orlando Sentinel-Star*. Front page. October 24, 1965.

land, and largely empty land, at that? A November 14, 1965 press conference at Orlando's Cherry Plaza Hotel provided few answers, but set the rumor mill buzzing; Disney, seated next to his brother Roy and Florida governor Haydon Burns, was not forthcoming with direct answers, but did repeatedly emphasize that this new project would not be referred to as "Disneyland" (only once did he refer to the project as "a Disney World"), with hints that the company's work would extend beyond the construction of a Disney theme park and resort and into something larger, which might require special help from the Floridian government even beyond the construction of expanded highway access to the property.⁵⁷

Just one year later, however, the questions began to be answered. On October 27, 1966, Walt Disney filmed himself as host of one of his regular programs, *Disneyland USA*, which emphasized new developments and ideas being conceived by WED Enterprises.⁵⁸ The show began like many before it, but eventually took a turn that few could have expected, as so few had been made aware of the big project to come. The episode begins with various shots of Disneyland in action, with narration detailing the technologies put to use at the park. Chief among the developments

⁵⁷ "Walt Disney's Florida Press Conference..." video. Of note here is that, while Governor Burns voices his full support for Disney's project and even hints at calling a special session of the Florida legislature to deal with its ramifications, Burns does not come off as comprehending the full scope of what Disney has in mind. This hints at the overall secrecy of the EPCOT project just one year before it would be unveiled to the public, and also lays bare just how eager Florida politicians were to reel Disney in at any cost.

⁵⁸ *Disneyland USA*, Recorded October 27, 1966... The following section here is an analysis of the episode, which is 25 minutes in length and is broken into an opening narration centered on the work of WED at Disneyland; Walt Disney showing off the scope of the Florida Project; and finally a lengthy, partly animated demonstration of what EPCOT was, as of 1966, intended to be.

cited, however, is Disneyland's transportation fleet of buses, trains, coaches, boats, monorails, and even submarines. Such developments, the narrator says, are designed with safety, utility, and efficiency in mind for people who use them, and attributes their success to WED Enterprises' willingness to try new ideas, discard whatever does not work, and continually strive to perfect what does. This serves to highlight WED's ability not simply to break any molds, but to create entirely new ones, as no establishment like Disneyland had ever been constructed before, and, to that point, none had been constructed since. In the era of the highway and the personal automobile becoming royalty in American culture, Disneyland could justifiably claim the mantle of America's most notable mass transit advocate.

Near the five-minute mark, the narration trumpets the accolades Disneyland has received not only from the general public, 340 million of whom the buses, boats, monorails, and trains had served since Disneyland's opening in 1955, but also from professional planners and architects. Citing the 1963 Urban Design Conference at Harvard, the narrator recites the words of James W. Rouse, whose planned city of Columbia, Maryland still ranks among the top ten in *CNN/Money Magazine's* top one hundred American small cities to live in.⁵⁹ While acting as keynote speaker at the Conference, Rouse cited Disneyland as "the greatest piece of urban design in America today,"⁶⁰ owing to its ability to usefully and efficiently fulfill its goals, continually develop and refine itself, and to simultaneously realize its role as a

⁵⁹ *CNN Money Magazine*. "Best Places to Live: Money's List of America's Best Small Cities". August 2008 issue. Accessed April 16, 2014.

<http://money.cnn.com/magazines/moneymag/bplive/2008/top100/>

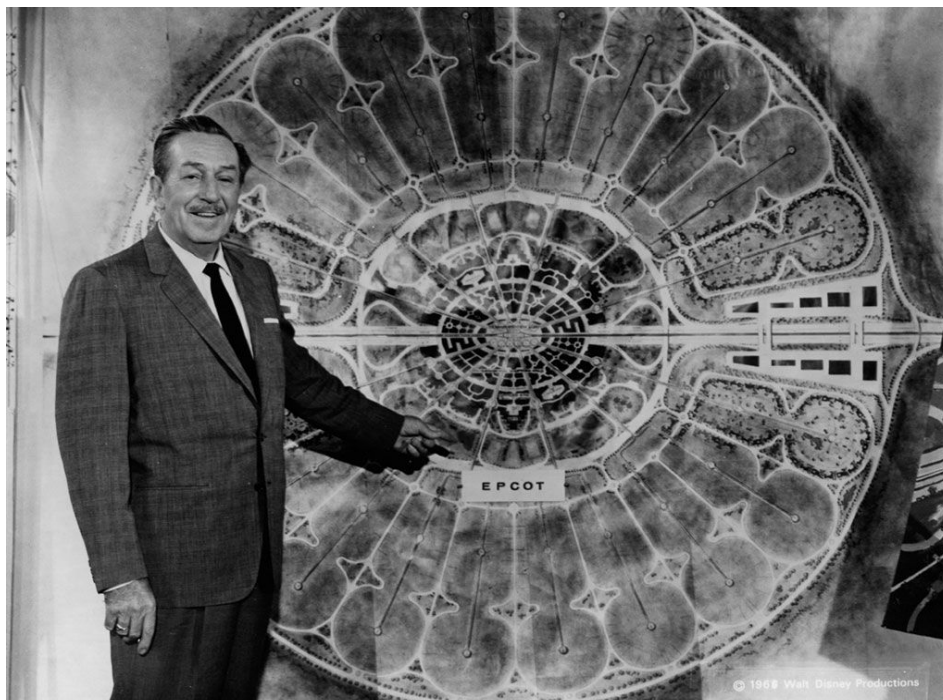
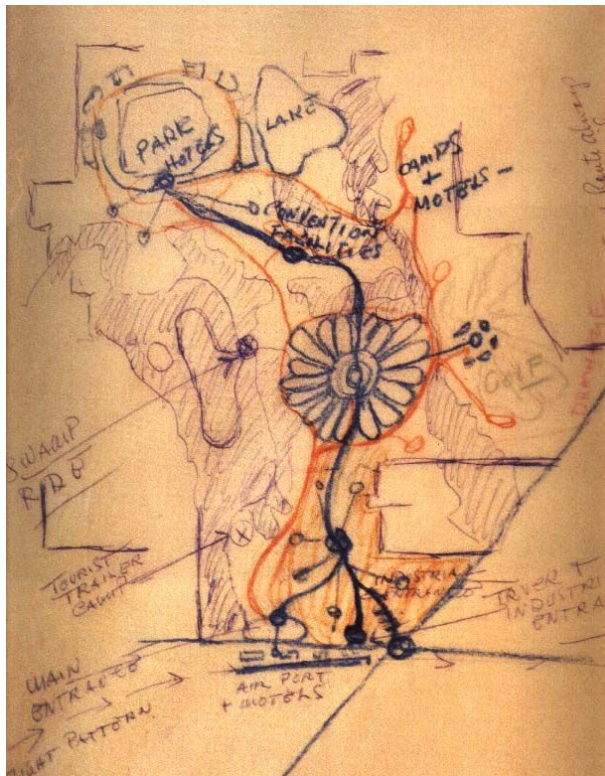
⁶⁰ Koenig, David, *Realityland...*, page 22

capitalistic marketplace of goods and services while still setting an exemplary bar when working to meet the needs and comforts of its millions of guests, most of whom held it in high esteem. Unstated in the episode is that much of this was owed to Walt's guiding, if controlling, hand over the park's proceedings, and his willingness and ability to alter the park to suit guests' wants and needs when such changes became necessary.

Afterward, the narration gives the great reveal before throwing the presentation over to Walt Disney himself: that this mysterious Florida Project will officially take on the name "Disney World", reflecting its size and scope. Disney takes over for the next seven minutes or so, illustrating the size the Florida property, and offering a broad outline of what the company wishes to see built there. Across the 43 square miles of space ("Twice the size of the island of Manhattan!" exclaims a clearly delighted Disney, standing against the giant map on the wall and using himself as a measuring scale) was to be a variety of locations: to the north, a theme park and vacation resort area that by itself would be five times the size of Disneyland; to the south, an "airport of the future" for out of state guests, with a visitors' center nearby that all guests would filter through; an industrial research and development park with space for various American companies to open up labs in, a clear nod to Walt's long held fascination with technological research and development centers; and a monorail system running the length of the property, connecting each. All of these on their own would prove to be the "most exciting and challenging" project undertaken by Walt Disney Productions.

However, Walt continues: "The most exciting, by far the most important part... in fact the heart of everything [at Disney World]...will be our Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow." Walking over to a large illustration of a circular city composed of what appeared to be a radiating pattern of progressively larger wheels beginning with a compact center, with spokes flowing outward from that center, Walt formally introduces EPCOT, a planned city that would be a testing ground and demonstration space for new ideas and inventions by American companies. As if they were not illustrated already, it is here that Disney's influences come into even sharper focus, and his goals for the future of urban America become clear; to Disney, the best way to serve the public need would not be through trying to cure what was wrong with existing cities, not to tear things down and cause or create conflicts or unintended, unplanned consequences, but to "start from scratch on virgin land", like his large expanse of forests, swamps, and groves in Florida, and start entirely anew, which would be done here using the Disneyland "mold making" model to change the very nature of the modern urban space. This vision quickly brings to mind the creative destruction concepts of planners and officials like Robert Moses, but with a crucial distinction. Moses was always willing to tear apart older neighborhoods, build new concepts in their place, and surround them with landscapes and infrastructure that fundamentally altered their nature; when he had the opportunity he struck out to create an entirely new vision of urbanism on the ashes of the Queens landfill that he would see transformed into the 1939 and 1964 World's Fair grounds, Flushing Meadows-Corona Park. Yet even that landfill was not the "virgin land" that Walt Disney was referring to; after all, alterations in Queens

Above: Walt's own original Florida sketches kept petal-shaped EPCOT at the center. Below: Disney before a more formal illustration of EPCOT and its Radial Plan. Walt Disney's Rough Sketch for EPCOT and Disney in Front of Radial Plan Concept Art. Digital images. Designing Disney. Accessed April 20, 2014. <http://www.designingdisney.com/book-review/walt-and-promise-progress-city>



led to disturbances and possible conflicts with nearby Queens residents, with traffic patterns into and out from Manhattan, and even with those living downwind in Brooklyn. In the case of EPCOT, there would be no older neighborhoods, no established cultural spaces to contend over, and no pre-existing city ordinances that could potentially limit his desire to tinker with and perfect his model city: a constant “state of becoming”, Disney says. Plus, just as the enormous size of the Disney World property itself was meant to ward off encroachment by symptoms of the Anti-City, EPCOT’s location near the center of the property further ensured that no unplanned elements would take root around its periphery, and thus would not hamper any planning for further developing the city itself.

Having stated the philosophy behind EPCOT, Disney introduces the longest part of the episode: an animated look at how EPCOT would function upon completion. Not surprisingly, the soundtrack underneath Disney begins intoning a slower version of “Great Big Beautiful Tomorrow”, which inevitably becomes the leitmotif of this would-be real life Progress City. What follows is ten minutes of narrated animation detailing the thorough planning behind the city. The overall design is referred to as the “Radial Plan”, reflective of the aforementioned pattern of circular developments radiating from a central core. The Radial Plan is a concept familiar to anyone who has seen previous Disney construction projects, but here it is designed with urban life in mind; the circular patterns are four “spheres of activity” radiating outward from the concentrated, more traditionally urban, commerce-centric core, surrounded first by a band of high-rise apartments, and then a wide greenbelt of trees, parks, and recreational areas, flowing into the largest

area, the low-density, suburban-style housing neighborhoods. Indeed it was familiar; the overall wheel-and-spoke appearance of the Radial Plan bore a noticeable resemblance to the layout of Disneyland itself, with its castle-dominated central plaza branching off into the walkways leading to its various themed areas.

In the first circle, the city core perhaps best reflects Victor Gruen's cellular developments' influence on Disney, but as with Moses' concepts, Gruen's visions are also taken a step further. The core, a large scale Gruen-esque, 50 acre mall-like community center, would contain office towers, hotels, theaters, nightlife, even themed shopping areas modeled after foreign countries, as well as some some Disneyland-esque attractions, typically shows instead of rides, aimed at visiting tourists. At its center would be a 30-story "cosmopolitan hotel", underneath which would be the city's underground central transit center; the hotel structure would serve as the city's "wienie" orienting structure, just as Sleeping Beauty Castle at Disneyland did. Most shockingly of all, and reflected in the script of the Progress City ending at *Carousel of Progress*, is that the entire core would be enclosed via a clear screen dome and climate controlled. For Walt's vision, "the pedestrian is king", and a large, enclosed downtown district (or, in this case, city center) would ensure that the tropical Florida humidity and bountiful precipitation would never hamper a work day or a pleasure trip to the core's shops and attractions. However, this was designed not just for climate comfort, but also to avoid the pitfalls that had haunted Gruen's dreams when he saw what the American shopping mall had become, as enclosing the area would create one massive pedestrian zone by completely disallowing carbon-emitting motor vehicles, and thus parking lots and other

“Anti-City” features, anywhere near the core’s surface.⁶¹ The only vehicles in the core would be electric vehicles on elevated platforms and tracks, in this case a monorail line and an expanded PeopleMover, converted from a Disneyland ride into a working form of urban mass transportation.

Nevertheless, cars and trucks would still exist in EPCOT. However, they would exist *below* the city, in what may have been a nod to Gruen’s plans for the scrapped Washington, DC World’s Fair bid and his belief in separating pedestrian and living spaces from vital utilities. Disney and his WED employees clearly had motor vehicles in mind when designing EPCOT, and for that matter when choosing Disney World’s location, and why wouldn’t they? As previously mentioned, the civic leaders of Orlando and Orange county had worked overtime and shook every hand necessary to attract federal funding for highways through their region, and as much as Walt clearly preferred mass transit to highways, there was no getting around the fact that through the post-War era the United State was a nation of automobiles and drivers. The EPCOT video makes note of the city’s proximity to Interstate 4 and Sunshine State Parkway/Florida’s Turnpike (now Reagan Turnpike) and predicts a constant flow of cars and trucks through the underground roads which, again according to the video, will never contain a traffic light, as they will run in a circular, not a grid shaped, pattern.⁶² Residents of EPCOT, the vast majority of whom were

⁶¹ The enclosed city hub might also have been reflective of a trend toward climate controlled spaces and domes in city design. Gruen’s malls certainly apply here, but 1965 also saw the construction of the Houston Astrodome, a sports venue that begat many roofed, all-weather imitators around the continent.

⁶² Residents would be able to drive in EPCOT; however, they would be relegated to a one way, circular road that would feed directly into the highway connections, Disney working under the assumption that most residents, as Disney employees, would

expected to be employees on Disney property, would rely on the monorail or the PeopleMover to get around the city itself, both within the core and outward toward the greenbelt, single-family unit neighborhoods, and further for their on-site work commutes, with their cars only expected for “weekend getaways” and only permitted on roads set aside for automobile travel leading into the underground routes.

Reduction of the usage of automobiles ties in directly to the greenbelt circle beyond the city’s core. While the dense urban core would be ringed with high capacity luxury apartments, the greenbelt would act as both a sort of public commons as well as a measure to preserve some of the natural green space within the city’s confines, a slum-prevention tactic no doubt born from the theories of Ebenezer Howard and his Garden Cities. While the narration voiceover does not emphasize the potential ecological benefits of reduced automobile use, it does make clear that the green space will serve both a practical and psychological purpose in EPCOT, as it will be the location of the city’s schools, athletic centers, churches, and other similar civic institutions, along with public parks and hiking trails so that city residents would never feel far away from the natural world.⁶³ It is difficult to predict if the greenbelt might have led to more problems in the future than first believed, for example possible conflicts over encroachment of the dense core area should the

likely only be using their cars for weekend getaways. The traffic plan seems directly inspired by Gruen’s eventual design for the downtown hub of Fresno, CA, from the film referenced earlier.

⁶³ It is fair to say that Walt Disney, despite his urbanist dreams, had a great interest in preserving natural spaces, which was reflected in his love of skiing and his commitment to producing a series of nature documentaries known as *True-Life Adventures* throughout the 1950s.

city grow over time, but greenbelts were nonetheless a widely accepted feature of many of Disney's city-planning contemporaries.

Beyond the greenbelt lay the single family unit residential neighborhoods, a nod to the type of homes so in vogue since the construction of the original Levittown, but arranged in separate neighborhoods like flower petals ringing the city center, ending in what might be described as enormous *cul de sacs* rather than branching off into a narrow grid system or into winding, meandering patterns found in older suburbs. This design would create an intriguing living arrangement: the residential homes would line the "flower petals" and ring the *cul de sacs*, but rather than follow the standard layout of front-facing garages leading to narrow sidewalks and wide streets to accommodate car-using commuters, families in EPCOT's suburban zone would have their garages located in the *rear* of the home. Their driveways would feed out into EPCOT's curved periphery road system and thus leave the front of the properties car and traffic free, making for an enormous amount of space that could be used for multiple purposes: wider sidewalks, additional green spaces and small parks, safe space for children to walk and play, and additional commons areas for neighborhood events and gatherings. If the automobile-centric suburb had isolated the American family, then EPCOT would seek to make it social once more. To that end, each neighborhood node would have its own PeopleMover station, ensuring a mass transit connection to the entire city. The potential impact of PeopleMovers being near to homes was enormous: Kenneth T. Jackson's seminal *Crabgrass Frontier* argues that a key reason for the popular rise of the automobile was that, unlike typical city rail lines, cars could handle

“perpendicular” street travel, while trains and trolleys could only manage parallel lines outward from the city core, thus limiting viable spaces and necessitating car travel between station stops. While the monorail would be EPCOT’s parallel track for longer travel, the constant-loading PeopleMover held the key to solving this problem of the perpendicular, and perhaps the key to reducing automobile overreliance.⁶⁴

What’s made perfectly clear in EPCOT’s planning is that everything is intended to have its distinct place: business, commerce, and culture in the center, immediately surrounded by high-rise apartments; churches, schools, parks, trails, lakes, and community and recreation centers on the greenway; and walkways, smaller parks, and suburban style housing in the residential sphere, with PeopleMover stations never far away and carrying the projected 20,000 residents, all renters so as to avoid any threats to Disney’s direct ownership of the land, to work, home, and to points beyond. Even employment would have its distinct space: while some residents would commute on foot or on the PeopleMover and work within the city itself, the bulk of the population would commute by monorail to either the theme park and resort area in the north, or to the industrial research and development park to the south. In this way Disney could, he theorized, eliminate unemployment: every adult resident of EPCOT would be an employee at one of the locales on Disney World property.

⁶⁴ Jackson, Kenneth T. *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985. Page 183.

One final aspect would set EPCOT apart, both as a planned community and as a location that lived up to the “Experimental” part of its title. Part of a resident’s agreement when living in EPCOT would involve a pact to allow the city government, largely operated by Disney, to regularly update the furnishings and technology in their home, to keep up to date with the latest innovations. While this aspect better lines up with the “Tomorrow” part of the EPCOT acronym, it served more than one purpose. Every guest to the Disney World vacation resort would, according to Walt’s original plan, have to enter the property in its southern portion, either by car or arriving in the “airport of the future”, and then travel by monorail through EPCOT, as well as the industrial park, to reach the theme park and hotels, and travel back through it on their way out. This meant that the residents of EPCOT would, in effect, be on display for resort guests to observe in their places of work, play, and living spaces; a sort of larger, amplified version of the consumerist future on display that was available at the 1964 World’s Fair for patrons to interact with firsthand. Disney’s ultimate hope was that these guests would observe, mentally take notes, and bring the EPCOT concept home with them when their vacation ended, ready to experiment with and apply some of what they had seen in their own communities. As if to drive this notion home, the episode ends on a vision of a future EPCOT surrounded by near-replicas a few miles apart, creating not just a vision for a new city, but an entire metropolis system of near-identical concept city units. Just how “on stage” a typical EPCOT resident would be for the tourist audience is never specified; this is not surprising, as such matters would undoubtedly be a source of contention before the city could be completed as planned.

In EPCOT, Walt Disney had seemingly set the blueprint of his dreams. He had married what must have seemed like the best ideas of men like Howard, Moses, and Gruen, such as building anew, planning every detail of a new urban community, embracing commerce and residential comfort and convenience, and simultaneously situated himself to avoid the problems that had plagued those earlier planners. By building on unused land, he would not be bulldozing pre-existing communities; by having a property as large as Disney World, he would have a buffer to keep away the dreaded “Anti-City”; by creating proprietary transit technology, he could control the flow of traffic in all its forms; by making EPCOT a company town, he would ensure full employment and would have a high level of control over all aspects of the city’s operations. Additionally, despite concerns voiced by older brother Roy Disney, the more financial-minded of the two, Walt held firm to the idea that Walt Disney Productions would have sole ownership and control of the project, rejecting ideas such as potential business mergers with companies like General Electric and Westinghouse to ease the financial burden.⁶⁵ These Modernist visions thrived on control over disparate, sometimes chaotically divided factions within communities, and all Disney needed to see his own vision through was the permission and cooperation of the Floridian government to grant him as much direct control over the Disney World property as possible, to entrust Disney, a private entity, with the type of public benefits and responsibilities needed to exercise the power necessary to see EPCOT become a reality.

⁶⁵ Mannheim. *Walt Disney and the Quest...* Pages 94-95. Although mergers were out of the question for Walt, he certainly did call on his corporate relationships to seek out sponsorships to help pay the freight for EPCOT.

Shortly after this episode's completion, Walt Disney Productions would be granted that control.

Walt Disney would not live to see nor wield it.

And When It Becomes a Reality...Walt Disney World Resort, Reedy Creek, EPCOT Center, and the post-Walt Years

Walt Disney, a long time smoker, succumbed to lung cancer in December of 1966. Unofficial accounts speak of Walt lying in his hospital bed shortly before his death, staring at the ceiling, still tracing the outlines of his City of Tomorrow by using the dots in the tiles to picture the radial patterns and spoke-like transit connections.⁶⁶ Older brother Roy, despite his usual role as the levelheaded financier, nonetheless wished to honor Walt's hopes and wishes following his death to whatever degree he felt was financially feasible. Putting off his planned retirement and taking over as chairman of Walt Disney Productions, Roy first officially changed the name of the Florida property to "Walt Disney World", a clear message not only made in tribute to his younger brother, but also as an emphatic public statement that the entire Florida Project and EPCOT were Walt's babies, and that they would be developed while adhering to Walt's vision as closely as possible. Roy then set about ensuring and financing the construction of Phase I of the property: the theme park and resort area at the northernmost corner, with creative ideas stemming almost exclusively from the backlog of projects Walt left behind. A successful resort could ensure a steady stream of visitors and revenue, and thus create a potential

⁶⁶ Koenig, David. *Realityland...* Page 38



Above: a view of a fragment of the Progress City model, currently located in the PeopleMover ride in the Magic Kingdom in Orlando, which shows the dense central hub surrounded by a green belt. Remaining Fragment of Original "Progress City" Model. Digital image. Yesterland. Accessed September 22, 2015. http://www.yesterland.com/images-tomorrowland/progress_citywdw.jpg

Below: an aerial view of the finished EPCOT Center Future World area highlights the park's use of radial lines, the exterior pavilions acting like satellite developments, and the importance of the monorail line as a mass transit option. Aerial View of EPCOT Center's Future World. Digital Image. MickeyXtreme. Accessed September 22, 2015. <http://mickeyxtreme.com/images1/News2012/06122012Epcot.jpg>



market to attract private companies for sponsorships and showcases when EPCOT was finally realized.

This would primarily be accomplished thanks to a major Disney victory in the Florida legislature. Following months of lobbying and negotiations, plus public showings of the EPCOT pitch film to resident Floridians and government, including federal Housing and Urban Development (HUD)⁶⁷, officials, by spring of 1967 Disney Productions reached an agreement with the Florida legislature to form a “public-private” enterprise known as the Reedy Creek Improvement District, a governing jurisdiction that would give the company control over fire protection, environmental regulations, building codes, utilities, and road construction on the Walt Disney World property in exchange for a full tax freight paid to local and state Floridian governments.⁶⁸ Though Reedy Creek was technically independent of Walt Disney Productions, Disney, as the largest (and only) landowner within the District was able to appoint the committee members who would oversee operations, and even vet and choose the few dozen permanent residents who were required to live there, thus allowing Disney to switch between private (Disney Productions) and public (Reedy Creek) entities depending on the situation and which arm would better benefit the company. Such powers would allow Disney to avoid state and local oversight on matters pertaining to park, hotel, city, and general on-property construction, water drainage, sewage treatment, and numerous other utilities; though rather than using this power to cut corners in these fields, Disney seemed

⁶⁷ Mannheim, Steve. *Quest for Community...* Pages 95-96

⁶⁸ Foglesong, Richard E. *Married to the Mouse...* Pages 138-145.

much more concerned with being able to develop Walt Disney World with high construction standards, just without going through any state or local bureaucracies. With regards to EPCOT, however, it also meant that Disney could keep residents from having too strong a say in the future city's governance; despite toying with the idea of allowing open democracy in EPCOT, Walt, working off commissioned feasibility reports, wound up editing company memos to refer to residents as "tenants", emphasizing their non-permanent status and lack of voting power in the special purpose district, a flaw that seemed to drift by the eager Florida legislature unnoticed. Disney did plan on a possible second community for retirees who wished to purchase land rather than rent, but given the timing of this planning in fall of 1966, Walt's failing health slammed the brakes on exploring it any further.⁶⁹

Special purpose districts were certainly nothing new in American city planning by the late 1960s, but if the arrangement created with Reedy Creek seemed lopsided in the favor of Disney, it was due to the incredible leverage "The Mouse" held over Orange and Osceola counties, as well as the city of Orlando. As of 1967 Disney was still at leisure to sell their Florida land and move on if they did not receive terms they felt were favorable enough; Orlando and the surrounding counties, meanwhile, were still desperate for the huge private investment and future tourism dollars Disney represented for the then-sleepy central Florida region, a situation all too familiar even in modern day American communities.

Phase I of construction was completed in October of 1971 and encompassed the vacation resort area of Walt Disney World, comprised of the Magic Kingdom

⁶⁹ Mannheim, Steve. *Walt Disney and the Quest...* Page 113.

theme park (an expanded version of Disneyland in Anaheim, nearly double the original's acreage), a man-made lake called the Seven Seas Lagoon made from a large scale project to partially drain and clean out the murky waters of Bay Lake, and a ring of hotel properties and golf courses around the lagoon, all connected by monorail so that resort guests would not feel compelled to use their cars while on Disney property. It was clear early on that Disney was interested in guests looking beyond the theme park; the entire resort area was built like a planned community, complete with waste management and mass transportation. The company even wound up constructing the Lake Buena Vista Shopping Village⁷⁰ in 1975, an open air shopping space at the southern end of the property intended to eventually include residential units and townhouses connected to the Village by PeopleMovers. Said Marty Sklar approximately ten years into the resort's operating life:

*There was now the whole Walt Disney World infrastructure that had been built (including) forty-three miles of winding drainage canals...nine acres of underground corridors called "utilidors" (that) serve as an urban basement, providing...sewers, pipes, cables, workshops, garbage disposal...technical innovations such as the modular construction of hotel rooms, which are built on the ground and hoisted into place by crane*⁷¹

⁷⁰ Lake Buena Vista, FL, and Bay Lake, FL, are the two "municipalities" that comprise the Reedy Creek Improvement District. The Lake Buena Vista Shopping Village, later known as Disney Village, would for a time become a hub for gourmet restaurants, jazz music, craft beer and quality wine stores, and a mix of shops that included high-end boutiques; all these things were revelations to many Orlando residents, as pre-Disney the town had never been much of a cultural hub.

⁷¹ This is a reference to the Contemporary Resort next to the Magic Kingdom; this process of room making is called "modular construction", meant to be a revolutionary means of producing cheaper, well-insulated rooms, pre-wired so that new rooms can be inserted and "clicked in" like jigsaw puzzle pieces, a sort of mass production of hotel rooms. The Contemporary Resort was designed with an A-frame shape so that the rooms could easily be placed in with a forklift, and so that Monorail lines could pass through its lobby atrium. It also allowed for rooms to be easily removed if Disney felt they had to be updated. Given that Disney had no

Above: Contemporary Resort, with Monorail Line and Mary Blair Designed Mural. EverythingMouse.com. <http://www.everythingmouse.com/walt-disney-world-contemporary-resort-which-are-the-best-rooms>
Below: Pasant, Matt. *Spaceship Earth* and EPCOT Center Monorail. Flickr.com. Digital Images. Both accessed April 20, 2014. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/pasant/3012383475/>.



hotelier experience before the opening of the original Walt Disney World hotels, the risks and creativity involved in the Contemporary are especially impressive.

*...America's first all-electronic telephone system; the introduction in the United States of the Swedish AVAC trash disposal system... and many more forward-looking systems that will move urban technology into the twenty-first century.*⁷²

In other words: while the city of EPCOT was not in the immediate offing, Walt Disney World, as it existed, and as it was planned going forward, in spirit already *was* EPCOT. Mainstream attention came quickly; even David Brinkley gave a special report soon after the resort's opening suggesting that Disney be turned to as one of America's greatest outlets for new urban ideas and systems ("don't laugh", Brinkley advises) thanks to their ability to get things done quickly, efficiently, and to the liking of the public, his words carrying echoes of James Rouse's when discussing the original Disneyland, and once more not at all unfounded at a time when too many American cities faced economic and social neglect.⁷³ The company's emphasis was clear: despite simply existing as a self-described "Vacation Kingdom" resort getaway, Walt Disney World was still a model for the future of urban living in the United States, and would draw on and implement many of the ideas that had been developed with EPCOT in mind.

By the mid-1970's, E. Cardon ("Card") Walker, Walt's heir apparent on the creative side of the company, had taken over operating Walt Disney Productions. He wasn't long into his tenure when he began feeling public pressure concerning

⁷² Beard, Richard R. *Walt Disney's EPCOT: Creating the New World of Tomorrow*. New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1982. Page 15

⁷³ *David Brinkley Talks about Disney World*. NBC. YouTube. Accessed March 30, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Aj7fYJocyE> - With the Contemporary Resort and a moving monorail as a backdrop, Brinkley cites Peter Blake's suggestion that Disney take over future planning in New York City.

EPCOT; after all, the promise of the would-be City of Tomorrow was the key that had opened up the unprecedented levels of power and autonomy that the Floridian government had granted to Disney and the Reedy Creek Improvement District. Walker felt the political winds blowing, and began to get the ball rolling on EPCOT.⁷⁴ However, for reasons never fully stated but likely having to do with flagging finances in a company that had become far more conservative than it had been under the risk-embracing Walt Disney, EPCOT the city would not come to be, even though much of their private-public power was contingent on its creation. Rather, the company exercised their authority within Reedy Creek to “redefine” EPCOT into a theme park that would serve as a “permanent World’s Fair”, drawing inspiration from the 1964-1965 affair in Queens.⁷⁵

The shift caused confusion; after all, EPCOT, Progress City, had been the focal selling point of Walt Disney World when the now-famous episode of *Disneyland USA* had been filmed, and was the key component in getting Florida’s legislature to grant Disney the level of autonomy it received in Reedy Creek. Unable to fully or deftly articulate the retreat away from making the city, Walker and many Imagineers fell

⁷⁴ Koenig, David, *Realityland...* Pages 156-158. The pressure not only came from repeated press questioning about when EPCOT would become a reality (the city’s construction was a key component in Disney Productions and Reedy Creek being given so much oversight of the property’s utilities), but, interestingly, it sprang forward due to an expose by a writer for *Playboy* magazine in 1974, who questioned the creativity and integrity of a Disney company that had seemingly become complacent and far less creative without Walt around, as the company hadn’t had many original or non-sequel ideas since Disney’s death in 1966.

⁷⁵ Foglesong, *Married to the Mouse...*, page 103 – The official reason for the shift from EPCOT, the city, to EPCOT Center is not fully known, but most speculation points to financial concerns and an internal belief that residents would not take well to being “on display” for tourists visiting the resort, as previously posited.

back on emphasizing the fluid, “never finished” and “state of becoming” nature of EPCOT, leaving some journalists rightly skeptical of their claim that their new direction was one Walt would have wanted.⁷⁶ Yet the eventual park, christened EPCOT Center, was a rousing success in multiple ways when it opened in October of 1982. Its name was a clever way around having to build the city, as “Center” shifted EPCOT from a physical to a philosophical and branding concept, the park simply serving as the larger concept’s base of operations.

Accessible via an extension to the monorail system, which brought its total track length to nearly 15 miles, from the Walt Disney World Transportation Center, EPCOT Center wound up an hourglass-shaped park of 300 acres, more than double the acreage of the Magic Kingdom. EPCOT Center would contain two themed areas: Future World would be at the bottom of the hourglass and feature enormous Modernist architecture pavilions focused on specific issues like communications (*Spaceship Earth*), energy sources and usage (*Universe of Energy*), conservation (*The Land*), ocean life and technology (*The Living Seas*), transportation (*World of Motion*), human creativity (*Journey Into Imagination*), human wellness (*Wonders of Life*), and futurism (*Horizons*), all backed by corporate sponsors who would be granted show space to demonstrate new products for potential consumers visiting the park. At the top of the hourglass would be the World Showcase, a carry-over from Walt’s original EPCOT city center, where different countries would sponsor pavilions featuring films, attractions, restaurants, and shops with goods from the sponsoring nation. Each section would contain consistent signage, giving it a sleek, unified appearance,

⁷⁶ *Married to the Mouse...* page 103

and Future World in particular was designed with a radiating, circular pattern not unlike the original EPCOT Radial Plan. This form had most of the attractions ringing a central area anchored by a two-building pavilion called *CommuniCore* (short for “Community Core”), structures with ample showcase and demonstration space for new technology and guest outreach that allowed early-1980s guests a chance to interact with personal computers and touch screens, modern news and communications, robotics, and even included an educator resource center that offered school lesson plans based on the other pavilions found in the park. While the park idea may still seem a bit of a cop out by the post-Walt company, the emphasis on guests bringing the ideas and technology of EPCOT home with them did seem an earnest attempt to honor their old boss.

Thus while the city did not come to pass, there was still support for the permanent World’s Fair concept, even in the editorial pages of the *Orlando Sentinel*⁷⁷ and on the floor of the Florida legislature.⁷⁸ There was no denying that enormous effort had gone into crafting the park both physically and ideologically; the original EPCOT vision was visible in the authentic artistic and cultural offerings of World Showcase, as well as the engineering and architectural feats in Future World that created a sense that a grand future had arrived. The park contained marvels like

⁷⁷ Editorial Board. “Supercali”(editorial). *Orlando Sentinel Star*, October 3, 1978. The board of the paper still viewed EPCOT Center as an extension and indirect fulfillment of Walt Disney’s dream city, though it remains to be seen how much of that support came from visions of larger crowds and more regional revenue.

⁷⁸ *Married to the Mouse...* page 104- Tallahassee seemed thrilled at the prospective tourism boom of a second theme park, and included some conservatives trumpeting its showcase of American free enterprise during the Cold War, and more liberally-inclined members enjoying its mission statement of building understanding and education between cultures.

Spaceship Earth, the communications pavilion and the “wienie” of EPCOT Center, a completely round geodesic sphere standing 180 feet high and not dissimilar to the globes found at the center of both the 1939 and 1964 World’s Fairs, or the Montreal Biosphere from Expo 67; a pavilion roof coated entirely with solar cells at the *Universe of Energy*, partially powering the ride vehicles within; and *The Living Seas* pavilion held what was, at the time, the world’s largest aquarium. These engineering accomplishments and many others seemed to indicate a commitment to the principles, at least, that had shaped Walt’s dream city. Much like the proposed city, the park was meticulously planned with no minor detail spared, from the windows and roofs of the provincial architecture emulated in the western half of the France pavilion all the way down to the authentic geometric ornamentation tilework on tucked away fountains in the back alley of the eventual Morocco pavilion. Still, while the public response was largely positive, it would be fair to call Disney out for swerving expectations and utilizing their private-public powers to facilitate the “redefinition” of EPCOT, all while its promotional materials disingenuously drove home the notion that EPCOT Center was the fulfillment of Walt’s “final” or “greatest dream”⁷⁹, as if the park, and not the city, had been the goal all along.

Despite the apparent internal fears over the cost of constructing the city of EPCOT, the theme park version nonetheless bore a staggering price tag; a preliminary \$600 million budget in the mid-1970’s had ballooned to \$1.4 billion as

⁷⁹ The Walt Disney Company. *EPCOT Center: A Souvenir Program*. YouTube. Accessed July 14, 2015.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P27_KzJ4Zil&index=6&list=PLbqKcf-2xpShCtTjyis3b9kfql5qJSAT-



The signage on the pavilions at EPCOT Center was significant for its use in creating a unified whole out of different parts. The logos and signage signified order and control in the park, and attempting to link together seemingly unrelated topics (e.g. the *World of Motion* transportation/automobile pavilion and the agriculture/conservation-based *The Land*). Interestingly, the logos and unified theming and font was done away with during the middle years of the Michael Eisner era at Disney, but with the recent 30th anniversary of the park they have seen a small comeback, hinting that the park may shift its focus once again. EPCOT Center Future World Pavilion Signage. Digital Image. Mice Chat. October 2, 2010. Accessed April 10, 2015.

<http://micechat.com/forums/walt-disney-world-resort/144456-horizons-what-you-never-saw-2.html>

opening day approached in 1982, making EPCOT Center the largest private construction project undertaken up to that point in time.⁸⁰ While the public, both the local Floridian⁸¹ and national, wound up taking to the park quite well, its construction costs, along with continued losses in Disney's still-struggling film division that still could not get out of its post-Walt funk in the 1980s, set the stage for a monumental change in Disney management, as Walt's old guard found itself surrounded by corporate raiders⁸² eager to buy pieces of the company that could eventually be leveraged into full control and a hostile takeover. To avoid this outcome and to ensure a level of order and cohesion over their relinquishing of power, by 1984 Walt's hand picked heirs eventually elected to sell control of the company to a dynamic entertainment consortium headed by ex-Paramount Pictures executive Michael Eisner and former Warner Brothers vice president Frank Wells.

Upon the sale's completion Eisner instantly became the CEO of the company and initiated a wholesale change in direction that would forever alter the course of not only Walt Disney World or even just the entire company, but one that would reshape the entire American media landscape for the next three decades. Michael Eisner wasn't entirely uncreative, but his most obvious skills resided in his entertainment business acumen. Upon his September 1984 takeover he took note of the growing home video distribution market, leading to Disney becoming a major

⁸⁰ "EPCOT". *Disney By the Numbers*, 2007. Accessed April 27, 2014.
<http://www.disneybythenumbers.com/wdw/page20.html>

⁸¹ Allen, Jean. "EPCOT Center's Got More Life, Pizzazz." *Orlando Sun Sentinel*, October 13, 1985.

⁸² Author unknown. "Highlights of Struggle for Disney". *New York Times*, June, 12, 1984.

presence on the young and soon to be lucrative VHS format; recommitted the company's energies toward its animation department, leading to successful forays into syndicated animated television series on *The Disney Afternoon* network block and a veritable renaissance in its animated feature films beginning with *The Little Mermaid* in 1989; he later set about acquiring Capital Cities/ABC Network and all its properties, including cable stations such as ESPN; and, by the time his tenure with Disney was over in 2004, the company's revenues, cash flow, and market value had all grown between 2,000-3,000% from their 1984 levels.⁸³ Eisner made Disney a media mammoth.

However, this shift in direction toward home video, animation, and network and cable television and all the properties involved therein was accomplished in part by moving the company away from the kind of investments and creative risks that had less to do with mass media and more to with urbanism and other future technologies, such as the monorail, EPCOT Center, or even the whole of Walt Disney World. This did not mean Eisner engaged in wholesale neglect of the Florida property, nor of Disney-run theme parks; far from it, in fact. Over his twenty years in charge of the company, Eisner's regime would oversee the construction two new theme parks in Florida along with two new water parks, a nightclub-centric entertainment complex, and an enormous expansion in on-site hotels. Away from Florida, the Eisner era brought about the Disneyland Paris resort in Europe, a second theme park for Tokyo Disneyland (Tokyo DisneySea, albeit funded by the

⁸³ Epstein, Edward Jay. "How Did Michael Eisner Make Disney Profitable?" *Slate Magazine*, September 27, 2005.

Tokyo Land Company like the original 1983 Tokyo Disneyland), an announced park in Hong Kong, and a long-anticipated second theme park next to Disneyland in Anaheim. This was a marked and clear step up in activity for a company that had been accused of becoming pallid and stale at times in the generation following Walt's death.

Paradoxically, however, all of this theme-park expansion and activity also signified that neither Eisner nor Frank Wells ever knew what, exactly, they had in central Florida. That isn't to say they didn't see the profit potential Walt Disney World possessed, however. One peculiar anecdote has Eisner and Wells, on a tour of the underground utilidors⁸⁴ of the Magic Kingdom park, seeing firsthand that Walt Disney World was, as of 1984, the company's chief source of revenue by tripping over an actual, physical bag of money in a hallway, gained on a particularly profitable day in the park.⁸⁵ The lesson learned, Eisner and company quickly set about making changes to further amplify revenues. Under pressure from major stockholders, Eisner threw Disney whole-heartedly into the hotel business, overseeing a veritable boom in on-property lodgings including many budget priced resorts that would encourage more guests and families to remain within the confines of Walt Disney World and away from Orlando and its many other

⁸⁴ The famed utilidors are used to hide the Magic Kingdom's "behind the scenes" areas from guests. For example, the underground hallways not only hold the costume department for park characters and a hidden space where a Mickey actor can take his head off, but it also contains the park's less sightly utilities. Thus, it serves the purpose of "reducing contradictions", like the possibility of seeing a science fiction costumed character walking through Frontierland, and fits into the EPCOT plan of keeping utilities underground and away from pedestrians.

⁸⁵ *Realityland...*, page 250

entertainment and dining options during their entire vacation stays, a clear step away from the relationship Orlando and Disney had under the old regime.

Disney and Orlando had, at least through the mid-1980s, unofficially operated under what some referred to as a “good neighbor” policy, with Disney building enough for its property to thrive, but not to directly compete with Orlando itself as a destination; for a time, Disney even offered shuttle buses that would allow resort guests to go off-site, and would run to nearby destinations such as Sea World and Cape Kennedy.⁸⁶ This laid-back approach to competition would vanish completely during the Eisner era. When word got out in 1989 that Universal Studios was expanding to Orlando with a theme park revolving around film properties; that Wet n’ Wild waterpark was set to be built along I-4 and Orlando’s tourist-hotbed International Drive; and that the downtown Orlando Church Street Station clubs and bars were drawing in a large number of adult Disney resort guests, the Eisner regime did not take it lying down. Disney quickly announced, and quickly built, thanks to their ability to duck red tape under the Reedy Creek charter, the film property-based Disney-MGM Studios theme park, the thrill ride-centric waterpark Typhoon Lagoon, and a new themed-nightclub area next to Lake Buena Vista Shopping Village known as Pleasure Island. Keeping money within the property was now the name of the game.

⁸⁶ “FoxxFur” (author’s online handle). “The Contemporary Resort Through the 1990s”. Passport to Dreams Old and New blog, September 28, 2015. Accessed October 7, 2015.
<http://passport2dreams.blogspot.com/2015/09/the-contemporary-resort-through-1990s.html>

Within the theme parks themselves, various attractions were updated to include gift shops near their exits, lower-revenue specialty item shops were replaced with more generic Walt Disney World souvenir merchandise stands, and ticket prices were raised. Meanwhile on the creative side, Eisner encouraged the Imagineers, whose work he had developed a fascination for, to embrace larger-scale, more “Hollywood”-esque storytelling ideas for their rides, like the special effects-laden *Splash Mountain* log flume ride, and took that concept even further when he struck a deal to bring in the rights to George Lucas’ *Star Wars* property for a flight simulator ride, the first of its kind in a theme park.⁸⁷ At parks like EPCOT Center, attractions that had at one point faced criticism for being too slow-paced or educational were often updated to either become thrill rides or to include recognizable Disney characters, affiliated celebrities, or other properties, going against the original 1982 WED Enterprises mandate to give the park its own identity by not even including Mickey Mouse himself in the park!⁸⁸

Thus there is no arguing that Eisner, despite not being a theme park expert, still saw the profit potential in Walt Disney World. The issue was not so much neglect, though, as it was the shift in creative energy. The above-mentioned *Star Wars* ride, known as *Star Tours*, was a keystone ride at the first theme park designed and constructed under the Eisner regime, Disney-MGM Studios, a theme park meant to highlight movie properties and an idealized 1930’s “Hollywood that never was”. The park, though by and large successful since its 1989 opening, primarily serves to

⁸⁷ *Realityland...*, page 252

⁸⁸ Fisher, David. “The Secrets of Walt Disney World: Mickey, Mickey Everywhere.” *Disney News*, Vol. 27, No. 1, December 1991 edition.

showcase Disney film properties, and today includes rides featuring *Star Wars*, Jim Henson's Muppets, and Pixar films, each of which happen to be properties owned entirely by Disney as of 2016, along with recent Disney animated features. While viewed by many as a cynical swipe at the new Universal Studios theme park down the road from Walt Disney World, the park served more as a visible reminder that Eisner's focus was not on city-building technology and culture, but on intellectual properties that could turn Disney into a financial and media juggernaut. Parks like EPCOT Center, meanwhile, experienced a dearth of new ideas; for example, as of this writing the World Showcase still has not had a new nation added since the Morocco pavilion in 1988, an idea already in development before Eisner and Wells took over. Pleasure Island, the nightclub destination, brought about the end of the serene Lake Buena Vista Shopping Village; rechristened the Disney Village Marketplace, it lost most of its high-end boutiques, restaurants, and cultural offerings that had once wowed sleepy central Florida, and was updated to include a bevy of child-friendly stores and restaurants to draw in the out of town family crowd, as tourists trumped potential future residents. Perhaps more symbolically than anything else, Disney-MGM Studios (today Disney Hollywood Studios) also opened without an extension to the Monorail track system to allow for easier access, despite being built within very close proximity of the Monorail-accessible EPCOT Center; it became the first theme park on the property designed for access primarily by bus and automobile.

It could be argued that this drive away from the concepts that shaped the original EPCOT city vision was ironically cemented by the opening of a town meant,

at least according to the company's public statements⁸⁹, to reflect its original purpose. 1994 saw the establishment of the town of Celebration, Florida, a municipality carved out of the southern tip of the Reedy Creek Improvement District, and designed, planned, and brought to reality by Disney. In truth, Celebration, though seen through with great commitment by Disney, was created as a sort of favor toward Osceola county, as all of Walt Disney World's development up to that point had occurred solely in its Orange county northern half, above I-4 and U.S. 192, leaving Ocala with far less tax revenue.⁹⁰

Visitors or would-be residents expecting EPCOT-reborn were in for something very different, however. Celebration was not the company town that EPCOT would have been, nor was it even a city in the literal sense of the word. Buoyed by enthusiastic backing from Eisner, to the tune of a \$2.5 billion investment for planning and construction and a call to build something that was worthy of the EPCOT legacy⁹¹, Celebration nevertheless took on the form of a small, quiet, idealized all-American suburb of approximately 8,000 residents. Anyone "expecting some kind of EPCOT-style tram ride" to take them into the town's core would instead see a downtown with small shops, cafes, and buildings rarely exceeding a few stories in height, hardly the glass-enclosed and climate-controlled metropolitan urban center Disney had envisioned for his Progress City, and more akin to the

⁸⁹ The Walt Disney Company. *Celebration* (clip). YouTube. Accessed August 10, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J1DCg6zDPIM>

⁹⁰ Foglesong, Richard E. *Married to the Mouse...* Pages 150-153.

⁹¹ Frantz, Douglas. *Celebration, U.S.A.: Living in Disney's Brave New Town*. New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company Publishing, September 9, 1999. Page 23.

Magic Kingdom's nostalgic theme park recreation of early 20th-century America, Main Street USA.⁹²

In fairness, Walt's original musings to the press concerning the Florida property often included references not only to a prototype City of Tomorrow, but also a desire to build a "City of Yesterday", perhaps modeled after places like Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia, that could possibly house residents.⁹³ Additionally, in many ways Celebration actually did seem to follow some of the EPCOT blueprint: its streets embraced radial plan design, it emphasized a pedestrian-friendly town core, and it was made to be filled up with greenways, public parks, narrow streets with wide sidewalks, houses with front porches located near the curb to heighten social interaction, and other design and comfort elements meant to reflect the modern city planning of 1990s New Urbanism.

Yet its departure from embracing the "City of Tomorrow" moniker so sought by Walt Disney in the 1960s can be summed up very succinctly: unlike Walt's company town, with 20,000 residents commuting via monorail and PeopleMover to their place of work, 91% of employed Celebration residents currently commute, mostly off Disney property, by car.⁹⁴ In addition, contrary to the EPCOT plan, Celebration was a town of homeowners; by making their deal with Osceola county, Disney had for the first time opened up part of its property to the everyday and

⁹² Davis, Brandy. "New Urbanism: Cause for Celebration?" *Impact Press*. April/May 1997 issue. Accessed April 24, 2014.

<http://www.impactpress.com/articles/aprmay97/celebrat.htm>

⁹³ Gennaway, Sam. *Walt and the Promise...* Page 240.

⁹⁴ Glaeser, Edward. *Triumph of the City*. New York, NY: Penguin Press,. 2011. Page 215



Aerial view of Celebration, Florida – Images on previous pages feature the Contemporary Resort, a hotel built using an A-frame design and modularly constructed rooms with a monorail line running through its lobby, and the centerpiece of EPCOT Center, the geodesic sphere *Spaceship Earth*, again with the monorail line in front of it. The images showcase the early attempts by WED Enterprises to preserve, if not realize, the EPCOT vision for new urban technologies, with the Disney theme parks and hotels as showcase spaces. Meanwhile, the Disney-designed town of Celebration, realized in 1994, did feature aspects of the EPCOT model such as green space and the Radial Plan, but was never designed to reach a population much beyond 8,000 residents, and never featured the mass public transportation so vital to the EPCOT plan. Disney would sell its controlling interest in Celebration in 2004. Aerial View of Celebration, Florida. Digital image. Word Press (From Eden to Zion). January 13, 2008. Accessed April 23, 2014.

<http://jeremyprior.wordpress.com/2008/01/13/new-urbanism-an-experience-inside-the-town-of-celebration/>

often messy politics of democracy, and had surrendered much of the control the company had historically treasured in the process. Even more damning in this regard: by 2004 Disney followed through on its original plans for the town and sold its controlling interest in Celebration upon reaching an unspecified number of residential lots sold.⁹⁵ Just two years later, Disney management drove the point home in a much deeper, clearer way: it began the practice of de-annexing and selling off small, individual chunks of Walt Disney World, once hailed as the realization of the EPCOT dream itself, to private businesses and vacation home developers.⁹⁶ By all accounts such a practice would have been unthinkable to Walt given his desire to keep unplanned construction away from Disney World, but the move seems all the more egregious when one considers the enormous revenue boom of the Eisner years, an expansion that made the original Walt Disney Productions look like a mom and pop studio by comparison.

Now It's Time to Say Goodbye... The Limits of Control

Walt Disney World was founded with a futuristic experimental city in mind; the resort's creation was made possible by the conferring of unprecedented public-private powers and privileges granted to Walt Disney Productions in the form of the Reedy Creek Improvement District charter. While early resort construction reflected Walt Disney's desire to build and develop technological

⁹⁵ Goodnough, Abby. "Disney Is Selling a Town Built to Reflect the Past." *New York Times*, January 16, 2004.

⁹⁶ Powers, Scott. "Disney Sells Some of Its World." *Orlando Sentinel*, March 28, 2006. The sales have included pieces of land in sizes ranging from 30-100 acres; not significant given the scope of the property, but clearly counter to the original plan.

concepts meant to improve future city living, a corporate restructuring would see a change in creative direction that sought to use the powers granted by Reedy Creek primarily to expand Disney's hotel holdings and entertainment options. Put more succinctly: while Eisner and Wells enjoyed the powers granted to Disney by the state of Florida, the planning, vision, will, and the control needed to build the future in Florida which had been pursued so fervently by Walt Disney Productions during its founder's life proved nowhere near as valuable to a more modern, corporate-minded Disney.

Perhaps it should not come as much of a surprise that the EPCOT city vision was never fully realized. Analysis shows that many of Walt Disney's contemporaries in the mid-20th century quest for urban renewal, so sure and confident in their plans to cure what ailed American cities, inevitably ran into obstacles of varying types and sizes that either compromised or outright denied their visions. Victor Gruen's new one-stop-shop downtown community centers of the 1950s did not have the legal nor financial controls to keep the "Anti-City" from their doorsteps, nor the political clout to avoid the consequences of shifting federal tax codes that would limit them to the shape of the modern shopping mall so ubiquitous in modern times. Even Robert Moses, that titan of mid-20th century New York, could not create an entirely unified vision without facing incredibly vocal resistance from older communities within New York City, or avoid the financial shortcomings of his World's Fair ventures of 1939 and 1964-1965 when he went about his attempt to mold Queens and Long Island into his ideal urban space.

Yet Walt Disney seemed to have an answer to all of these issues when he purchased his Disney World. The “Anti-City” was never a fear: the property was simply too big for unwanted tenants to make inroads near the parks, resorts, or recreation areas. Older, entrenched factions were no concern: EPCOT was to be “built from scratch on virgin land” and filled with Disney employees, an entire community brought together by a large common factor, and politically limited due to the city only allowing residents to rent, not own, their homes or apartments. Even tax codes, mass transportation, trash cleanup and collection, all the concerns of large cities, areas of potential conflict with Florida’s state government, were brushed aside and set for great innovations with the establishment of the Reedy Creek Improvement District. Floridian government officials, some of whom might have been frightened by the potential of being taken advantage of by such a large media company, were placated by Disney’s honest insistence on not asking for nor taking any tax breaks or loopholes. And while contemporary onlookers may see the project as unfeasible, a fantasy meant for a fantasy theme park, it is difficult to deny that Walt Disney, perhaps through sheer force of will or work, had a knack for making the unfeasible become tangible. It seemed that no threat existed to prevent the shaping of EPCOT, not external political nor business forces, nor from a bottom-up resistance of permanent resident-citizens. Disney was well aware of what he could do, and was fully confident in his abilities on this front; asked by friend and novelist Ray Bradbury if he would ever bring his ideas to the public

sphere and run for mayor of Los Angeles, Walt is said to have responded “Ray, why should I be mayor when I’m already king?”⁹⁷

Nonetheless, these seemingly unstoppable factors were waylaid by an entirely different, not to mention uncontrollable force: Walt Disney’s death, an event which eventually triggered a top-down shift in corporate philosophy and a move away from Walt’s urbanist dream.

This serves to reinforce the central theme and very core of what it took to see these grand urban visions through: control. As an architect, Gruen only had so much control in the face of external political-economic forces; Moses, despite his power, could not control the will of large groups of people in a representative democracy. Despite avoiding these hurdles, Walt Disney could not ensure the full exercise of the control he sought when he faced his inevitable mortality, as control of his company shifted from his brother, to his hand-picked successor, to a movie executive who had to trip over a bag of money to realize the potential under his feet near Orlando. Grand, unified, Modernist, and top-down privately funded ideas cannot be realized without a clear vision and control over an enormous amount of potentially destabilizing factors, factors that might even exist at the top of the company where the vision had first been conceived; such a stark reality is the factor that makes them seem unfeasible in the modern day, as well.

To this day, Disney’s corporate structure and focus is clearly on media, most noticeably on pre-existing properties. While Michael Eisner was ousted from his CEO position in 2004 after a contentious internal battle that left heir apparent Bob

⁹⁷ *Walt and the Promise...* Page 240.

Iger in charge, the post-Eisner years have still led to a period of increased media presence for Disney, as it set about acquiring known properties and franchises like *Star Wars*, the Muppets, Pixar Animation, and Marvel Comics.⁹⁸ On the theme park front, the clearest focus has continued to rest squarely on film and character properties, with Disney hyping up a recent expansion of the Fantasyland section of the Magic Kingdom, including rides and attractions centered around *Snow White*, *The Little Mermaid*, and *Beauty and the Beast*, as the largest in the park's history. The expansion is part of an even larger recent multi-billion dollar investment at the resort, leaving many to assume that Disney is reacting to, rather than innovating in the face of, increased competition from movie property-focused theme parks, most notably the incredibly popular *Harry Potter*-themed section of Universal Studios Orlando.⁹⁹ Such a continued focus on pre-existing properties and theme park arms races might have baffled Walt Disney, given how quickly he had already grown restless for new challenges after the success of Disneyland, but the locus of control has clearly shifted, and with it the direction of his Florida Project.

Still, some contestation persists: even as recently as April of 2014, Disney announced the appointment of a new creative head of EPCOT Center, now simply referred to as Epcot (notably lower-cased): Tom Fitzgerald, an Imagineer who helped construct the park in 1982, who is reportedly tasked with “[restoring] the

⁹⁸ Patten, Dominic. “Disney-Lucasfilm Deal Cleared by Feds.” *Deadline Hollywood*, December 4, 2012.

⁹⁹ Garcia, Jason. “Walt Disney World Makeover: Magic Kingdom Getting New Fantasyland with Little Mermaid Ride.” *Orlando Sentinel*, September 12, 2009.

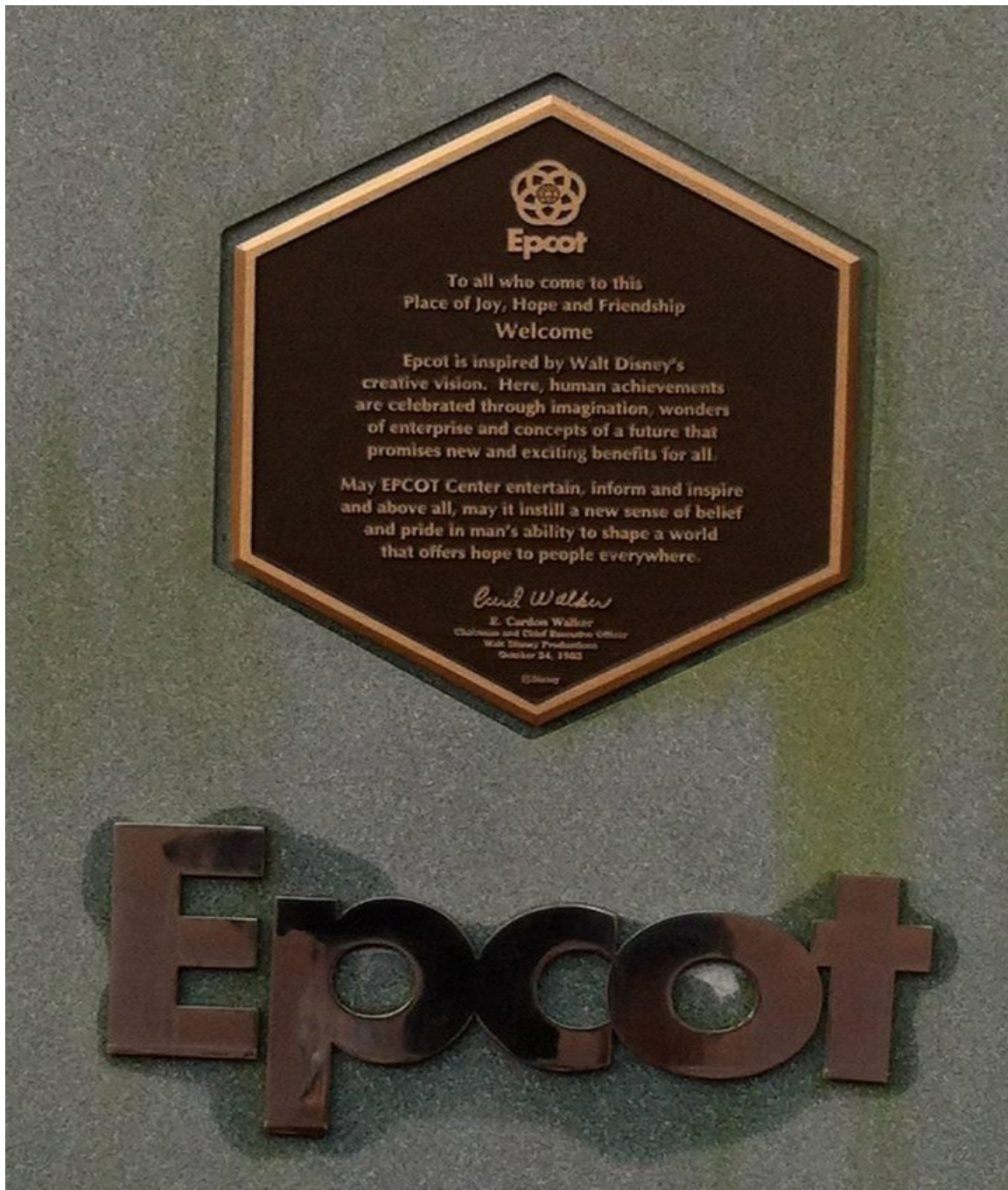
original intent of the park” from a creative standpoint.¹⁰⁰ Yet whatever the outcome of these continued shifts and internal contestations over the nature of Walt Disney World, of the EPCOT concept, of the Disney company itself, the point remains: control, in frequently unrealistic amounts, is the key magical ingredient needed to see through even the grandest, most thorough, and seemingly foolproof Great, Big, Beautiful Tomorrows a man can dream.

Perhaps magic is all it may remain in the modern debates over reborn American cities. After all, Walt Disney’s plan was big; his plan seemed to have every contingency covered; his plan had one of the most powerful media and marketing forces in American history behind it; his plan seemed driven by an earnest, genuine desire to improve city living in a time when voices from all levels of society cried out for practicable solutions; in short, one would have to search long and hard for a more workable grand design plan for urban American in the mid 1960s.

Despite its armor of seeming inevitability, it contained a fatal flaw: it was *Walt Disney’s* plan, and Walt Disney could not live forever to exert its needed control. One corporate shakeup after his death put the dream of EPCOT, even from a creative and not just physical standpoint, onto the shelves of the Disney archives. This is not to say that public development ideas are free from chaos within a democratic system, but such a system at least gives voice to the public such projects should strive to serve. In a modern world where private companies are often sought to play a significant role in the revival of America’s urban spaces, from Disney itself

¹⁰⁰ “Imagineer Tom Fitzgerald Takes Over the Creative Direction of Epcot.” *Walt Disney Company News*. WDWMagic.com, April 25, 2014 (accessed same date).

in Times Square to Silicon Valley offshoots in the Bay Area, the public is well served to remember the lessons of EPCOT, that even the most exciting private development plans are subject to a level of corporate instability and upheaval that harm their tenability, and that even the most well-intentioned private sector Imagineer can have his plans go up like so much pixie dust.



Plaque located outside the entrance to EPCOT Center theme park, engraved with the dedication given by Card Walker on October 1, 1982 at the park's opening ceremony. Photo by author, Neglia, Joseph M. "EPCOT Center Dedication Plaque". August 2013.

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