



*5 Benefits of a
Master-Planned
Community
eBook*

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MASTER-PLANNED COMMUNITY HISTORY & BENEFITS

“Master-planned community.”

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Perhaps you’ve heard the term but have never really understood the concept. Perhaps you recently started thinking about buying a home and have seen advertisements for master-planned communities. Or perhaps you’re simply curious to know how a master-planned community differs from any other city, town or subdivision.

As the housing market continues to surge following the 2008 recession, prospective home buyers are streaming back into the market. And from the West Coast to the Southeast, more and more buyers are finding themselves considering a home in a master-planned community. In this ebook, you’ll find answers to such questions as:

What is a master-planned community?

How does it differ from other communities?

What are the benefits of living in a master-planned community?

But first, let’s take a quick look at where master-planned communities came from, how they evolved from traditional cities and housing developments, and how developers of today’s master-planned communities have learned from the housing experiments of the past, incorporating the best practices of modern community development.

WHERE DID MASTER-PLANNED COMMUNITIES COME FROM?

As succeeding generations of immigrants made their way to the New World, settlers built their houses and shops wherever they pleased. Roads, in turn, developed around these homes and businesses, with schools, parks and other community services squeezed in as an afterthought wherever an empty parcel of land could be found.

The result of this lack of planning? A confusing jumble of a city where roads wandered in illogical directions, businesses suddenly sprang up in between residential homes and community services were often situated in inconvenient locations. The streets of Boston were so famously tangled, in fact, that an urban legend spray up that the city's streets had been laid out by cows as they meandered to Boston Common for their daily grazing!

As the nation became more industrialized at the turn of the last century, some of these early towns grew into major metropolises, where residential urban neighborhoods shared space with bustling downtown business and industrial districts. And beyond the city limits? Miles and miles of still mainly rural farmland.



The Great Depression

The stock market crash of 1929, however, would have a major impact on the American housing market. With millions of Americans unemployed, a new home was hardly at the top of most families' list of priorities. The U.S. construction industry went into a steep decline until the start of World War II, when builders began constructing temporary housing for millions of soldiers, shipyard workers and others aiding the war effort.

THE FIRST MASTER-PLANNED COMMUNITIES

After World War II, American GIs came marching home and the nation soon found itself facing an unprecedented housing shortage. After more than 15 years in which little new, permanent housing was built due to the Depression and the war, America suddenly had a shortage of available homes.

At the same time, the Baby Boom was creating millions of young families desperately in need of a place to call home. In *The Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*, author Kenneth Jackson notes that by 1947, 6 million families were doubling up with relatives. Another 500,000 were living in Quonset huts or other forms of temporary shelter.

Levittown: the first large-scale planned community

Recognizing the opportunity afforded by millions of GIs and their families in need of housing, New York developers Levitt and Sons came up with a plan to build on several thousand acres of rural property they owned on Long Island. Drawing upon the experience they gleaned during the war building mass-produced housing for shipyard workers, the Levitts set their sights on mass-producing thousands of rental homes.

The Levittown Historical Society reports that on May 7, 1947, Levitt and Sons announced plans to build 2,000 such homes - simple two-bedroom, one-bath Cape Cod-style homes with no basement but room for second-story expansion. Two days later, the *New York Times* reported that 1,000 of the initial 2,000 Levitt homes had already been rented. The demand was so great, in fact, that after deciding to build another 4,000 homes, Levitt and Sons stopped offering rental homes and began selling them to meet the demand created by GIs armed with government-backed VA loans. At the peak of the building boom, the Levitts were building 30 homes a day.

Levittown - as the development came to be known - eventually grew to include more than 17,400 homes and 82,000 residents, making it the largest development ever built by a single builder at that time.

What's more, after completing the Long Island project, the company would go on to build Levittowns in Pennsylvania and New Jersey as well. Thus, the suburbs were born.



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SUBURBAN BACKLASH

The development of Levittown and the other tract housing communities that followed made the American Dream of homeownership a reality for millions of post-war families. For a \$90 down payment and just \$58 a month, a family could own their own home far from the noise, traffic and congestion of the city.

But the first planned communities were not without flaws and lacked basic amenities since the focus was on unprecedented demands.

“When the initial families arrived with their baby strollers and play pens, there were no trees, schools or private telephones,” Jackson writes in Crabgrass Frontier. “Grocery shopping was a planned adventure, and picking up the mail required sloshing through the mud to Hicksville.”

Critics also complained about the almost unnerving uniformity of the tract housing developments, where streets of identical houses stretched as far as the eye could see, unbroken by parks, schools or other traditional community elements.

“In the mass movement into suburban areas, a new kind of community was produced... a multitude of uniform, unidentifiable houses, lined up inflexibly, at uniform distances, on uniform roads, in a treeless communal waste.”

-Lewis Mumford, *The City In History*, 1961



While schools, churches and parks eventually were added to Levittown and other early planned communities, another form of housing development emerged in the 1960s and 70s: the subdivision or “bedroom community.”

Typically located within commuting distance of a major metropolitan area, bedroom communities featured more variety than the early tract housing developments, offering multiple home styles, larger lots and less density, but little else.

The tract housing and bedroom communities of the mid-20th century inspired modern developers to take the best elements to create the modern master-planned community of today.

WHAT IS A MASTER-PLANNED COMMUNITY?

Building upon the lessons of the past, today's developers have created the modern master-planned community: a place where all of the community's key elements have been carefully planned and considered long before the first shovel hits the ground or the first home is ever built.

Unlike the traditional cities of old with their confusing street patterns, hodgepodge of homes and businesses and lack of green space, master-planned communities are planned to create an optimal mix of residential homes, businesses and parks. Depending upon their size, many schools, churches and other community amenities.

This upfront planning benefits residents in a number of ways. Because master-planned communities have already earmarked locations for future residential neighborhoods, businesses, schools and parks, home buyers enjoy the security of knowing that he community won't one day become overdeveloped and congested like older, established cities. Residents also need never fear that a noisy industrial business will one day crop up in their neighborhood, lowering property values.

As a result, master-planned communities are particularly popular with home buyers who are seeking a stable real estate investment that will maintain or increase in value over time.

In addition to planning, master-planned communities differ from other subdivisions in two key areas: size and infrastructure.

“In this environment of improving consumer confidence, many (master-planned communities) credit their enhanced sales in 2012 and 2013 to their reputation as the best place to invest...”

-Real Estate Advisory Firm RCLCO, 2013



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MANY BENEFITS ASSOCIATED WITH MASTER-PLANNED COMMUNITIES

Size

While some subdivisions may have as few as a dozen homes, master-planned communities tend to be more on the scale of a traditional small town or city.

Some examples of master-planned communities around the nation include:

Cinco Ranch

Located near Houston, Texas, Cinco Ranch is home to some 13,000 families who live in the community's 8,000-plus acres.



Nocatee

Located near the Atlantic Ocean and within commuting distance of both Jacksonville and St. Augustine, Florida, Nocatee is a 13,000-acre master-planned community - 60 percent of which has been set aside as a nature preserve along the Intracoastal Waterway.



Stapleton

Denver, Colorado's Stapleton prides itself on being a walkable community, with 17,000 residents living among its 4,700 acres.

Infrastructure

Master-planned communities enjoy the luxury of being able to lay out their roads, utilities and other infrastructure before homes are built. As a result, shops, schools, parks and other amenities are centrally located, providing easy access for neighborhood residents.

This carefully planned infrastructure enables master-planned communities to offer their residents a number of additional benefits, including:

- Variety
- Accessibility
- Amenities
- Green Space
- Sense of Community

BENEFIT #1: VARIETY

Today's developers recognize that no two families are alike. To serve as many homeowners as possible, master-planned communities have emphasized variety, with each community offering a unique mix of housing, shops and other amenities.

That variety can be seen in master-planned communities:



Home Styles:

Gone are the days when planned communities featured endless rows of identical, cookie-cutter houses. Whereas smaller subdivisions are still typically developed by one builder, today's master-planned communities often feature a dozen or more different home builders. The result is a community featuring a diverse mix of home styles that fosters a feeling of an established neighborhood, not mass-produced tract housing.

Price Points:

Having multiple builders means that buyers considering a master-planned community can choose from a range of home prices - everything from apartments and townhouses to starter homes and luxury abodes.

Diversity:

While the Levittowns of the 1950s were generally populated by young families with children - those to whom the one style of home offered most appealed - master-planned communities today are home to all kinds of residents, from single professionals and families to active retirees.

BENEFIT #2: ACCESSIBILITY

BENEFIT #3: AMENITIES

Accessibility:

Picture getting around just about any major American city today, and one word comes to mind: traffic.

Gridlock has become as much a part of big-city living as crowded streets or taking the subway. Because master-planned communities are able to plan their roadways in advance, however, such developments are typically gridlock-free, offering the latest advancements in transportation planning to ensure good traffic flow throughout the community.

In addition, careful siting of homes in relation to schools, shops and parks ensures that residents can easily access these nearby locations without sitting for hours in traffic.



In 2012, Americans wasted 42 hours and more than \$10 billion in fuel sitting in gridlock.

While each master-planned community will have its own unique combination of amenities, some typical offerings include:

- Resort-like pools
- Fitness centers
- Athletic Courts
- Clubhouses

Amenities:

Unlike the bedroom communities of old, master-planned communities offer a wide range of resort-like amenities that together create a particularly attractive lifestyle for today's homeowner.

Master-planned communities are known for incorporating nature and recreation into their planning phase, providing residents without a verdant landscape that bears little resemblance to the treeless tract housing developments of the past.

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BENEFIT #4: NATURAL SURROUNDINGS

With all of the high-end amenities offered by today's master-planned communities, you might be surprised to learn that a 2008 study by the National Association of Realtors found that the #1 amenity prospective home buyers desired most in a community was nature trails.

Whereas many older, established communities have seen their open space gobbled up for schools, fire stations and other needed services, master-planned communities make green space an integral component of the community's design.



Recreation

In addition to featuring copious amounts of trees, master-planned communities have found a variety of ways in which to incorporate green space for residents' recreational use, including:

Neighborhood parks
Dog parks
Soccer/sport fields
...and of course, nature trails!

Conservation

Today's master-planned communities also recognize the importance of conservation and preservation. At a time when open space is rapidly disappearing across the nation and around the world, residents of master-planned communities often have access to thousands of acres of: Protected rivers, streams and estuaries.

By 2050, 7 out of 10 people on the planet will live in an urban area.

-World Health Organization

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BENEFIT #5: SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Community by design:

While the first planned communities made it possible for millions of American families to achieve their dream of homeownership, some of their planning elements are believed to have inadvertently contributed to a declining sense of community among residents.

Some quickly built housing communities, for example, were initially built without sidewalks, making it difficult at best and unsafe at worst for residents to venture out and get to know their neighbors. And with few amenities located within the community itself, Americans took to their automobiles in record numbers.

Building a sense of community:

Not surprisingly, many home buyers today say they seek a community where they can rekindle close friendships with their neighbors. In response, master-planned communities incorporate numerous design features that foster such interactions. Homes with front porches, well-lit streets with wide sidewalks, community parks and other centrally located gathering places encourage residents to connect with their neighbors and form strong social and community bonds.

Americans today seem to feel that a sense of community is exactly what needs to be revived in this country, and many apparently want exactly that for their families...it is therefore no great wonder that they are choosing to live in the kind of architectural groupings ...about which they have always dreamed.



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A commuting culture



The report *Commuting in America III* notes that with the development of the suburbs in the mid-20th century, Americans began having longer commutes to and from work. And when women began entering the workforce in large numbers in the 1970s, many families now had two family members making a long commute to and from work each day.

That left Americans with less time to participate in the potluck suppers, bowling leagues and other community activities that had been such an important part of previous generations' lives.

Master-planned communities are working hard to reverse this trend.

A place to belong



Improved traffic flow within a community and close proximity to major metropolitan areas decreases commuting times, affording residents more free time to participate in community activities.

What's more, many master-planned communities take an active role in organizing community get-togethers. Many communities provide a clubhouse or function hall for resident events; full-time event coordinators, meanwhile, ensure that residents have a wide variety of activities from which to choose, including such offerings as community picnics, holiday celebrations, children's activities, farmer's markets, book clubs, fitness classes and interest groups.

Conclusion

The lives of Americans have changed dramatically over the past 50 or 60 years. Millions of Americans moved to the suburbs and lengthier commutes, combined with less-than-ideal community planning, have left many Americans feeling disconnected from their communities.

Today's master-planned communities have responded to these changes by creating vibrant, green communities that offer modern families the variety of home styles, five-star amenities, access to green space and sense of community they desire.



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ABOUT NOCATEE

Nocatee is a new master-planned community in Northeast Florida that blends a variety of neighborhoods with schools, parks, recreation, offices, shopping, restaurants and so much more. Located in Ponte Vedra, Florida, Nocatee is just a few minutes away from pristine beaches, prestigious golf courses, business parks and major airports in downtown Jacksonville and St. Augustine.

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Ranked as the third best-selling master-planned community in America by RCLCO and “Master-planned Community of the Year” by the Southeast Building Conference (SEBC), Nocatee offers several neighborhoods with homes priced from the 200’s to more than \$1 million.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE NOCATEE LIFESTYLE, CALL 1-800-NOCATEE OR VISIT NOCATEE.COM.

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