

livable and inventive. This new community would draw on the most up-to-date knowledge in ecological science and ideas from ecological planning. The developer would possess the business acumen and stamina of George Mitchell. The new community would be linked to the world by rail and internally through bike and pedestrian trails. All new buildings would be built to platinum LEED standards and schools would have windows. The community would also be dedicated to achieving social equity and racial diversity.

George Mitchell helped change planning, design, and development practice in Texas. As he reflects, "When we started planning The Woodlands, there wasn't the architecture or land planning talent to design and build a new town in Houston. That's why I hired ten people from Columbia, plus some of their consultants and talent from all over the nation, like McHarg. Now there's the talent in Houston, but it would be impossible to assemble the land for a new community like The Woodlands."²⁵

Mitchell and his wife Cynthia continue to live in The Woodlands. He has used much of the wealth generated from the sale of The Woodlands and his energy interests to advance sustainable development, historic preservation, and environmental research. Mitchell's ten children inherited his idealism and have pursued studies and careers as environ-

mentalists and architects, as developers and scientists.

We can also be inspired by George Mitchell's idealism. A success in the oil and gas business, he did not need to venture into the risky business of building a new community. But he did, largely because of his belief that we can do a better job designing our built environment. Now that we have entered the first urban century, with more than half the world's population living in city-regions for the first time in history, we need to pursue this ideal with a renewed commitment. As we have become a more urban planet, many more people have joined us with more on the way. As our numbers have increased, we face a future with finite or declining land, water, and energy resources. The Woodlands is not perfect, but George Mitchell's vision illustrates the practical reality of dreaming big. ■

Notes

1. See, for example, George T. Morgan, Jr., and John O. King, *The Woodlands: New Community Development, 1964-1983* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1987); Cynthia L. Girling and Kenneth I. Helphand, *Yard-Street-Park* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1994); and Roger Galatas with Jim Barlow, *The Woodlands: The Inside Story of Creating a Better Hometown* (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Land Institute, 2004). As well over a decade ago in this journal, see Richard Ingersoll, "Utopia Limited: Houston's Ring Around the Beltway," *Cite* 31 (Winter-Spring, 1994):10-16 and Peter Wood, "37,000 Woodlanders Can't Be Wrong," *Cite* 31 (Winter-Spring, 1994):17.
2. Ann Forsyth, "Evolution of an Ecoburb," *Landscape Architecture* 95 (7, July 2005): 60, 62, 64, 65, 66-67. See also Ann Forsyth, "Ian McHarg's Woodlands: A Second Look," *Planning* (August, 2003):10-13 and Ann Forsyth, "Planning Lessons from Three U.S. New Towns of the 1960s and 1970s: Irvine, Columbia, and The Woodlands," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 68(4, 2002):387-417.
3. Ann Forsyth, *Reforming Suburbia: The Planned Communities of Irvine, Columbia, and The Woodlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), pp. 161-163.
4. Galatas, *The Woodlands*.
5. Forsyth, *Reforming Suburbia*, p. 164.
6. McHarg, *A Quest for Life*, pp. 256 and 260.
7. Interview with George Mitchell, August 24, 2005.
8. McHarg, *A Quest for Life*, p. 264.
9. Morgan and King, *The Woodlands*, p. 52.
10. Galatas, *The Woodlands*, p. xiv.
11. *Ibid.*, p. xvi.
12. Mitchell interview.
13. Russell Clive Claus, "The Woodlands, Texas: A Retrospective Critique of the Principles and Implementation of An Ecological Planned Development" (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Department of Urban Studies and Planning, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Master of City Planning thesis, 1994).
14. Mitchell interview.
15. Forsyth, *Reforming Suburbia*, p. 182.
16. Galatas, *The Woodlands*.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 155.
18. Galatas, *The Woodlands*, p. 156. Galatas reports that Mitchell would have preferred to sell his energy interests but they were entangled in litigation. He sold the energy company about three years after liquidating The Woodlands.
19. Mitchell interview.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*
22. Galatas, *The Woodlands*, p. 179.
23. Mitchell interview.
24. Wallace, McHarg, Roberts and Todd, Amelia Island, Florida, *A Report on the Master Planning Process for a Recreational New Community* (Hilton Head Island, South Carolina: The Sea Pines Company, 1971) and Wallace, McHarg, Roberts and Todd, *Lake Austin Growth Management Plan* (Austin, Texas: City of Austin, Department of Planning, 1976).
25. Mitchell interview.

Being There: Living in The Woodlands

Long before The Woodlands welcomed its first homeowners, George P. Mitchell had gathered a team of environmentalists, hydrologists, land planners, and engineers to help him plan an environmentally sustainable community. The Woodlands goes beyond such typical environmental measures as shared parking for parks, churches, and schools, limiting impervious surfaces and planning for storm water management. As an example of the proactive environmental ethos that has been a part of The Woodlands plan from the beginning, protected areas have been allocated for endangered species like the bald eagle and the red cockaded woodpecker. The planned development has grown to include 27,000 acres, but it still maintains its commitment to sustainability.

Over its 30-year history The Woodlands has been recognized with 38 environmental awards, including a 2003 gold award in the prestigious Nations in Bloom competition, the world's only competition that rewards local communities for achievements in environmental management and the creation of livable communities. Endorsed by the United Nations, Nations in Bloom encourages best practices, innovation, and leadership in providing a vibrant, environmentally sustainable community that improves quality of life.

The Woodland's environmental office

conducts educational outreach programs including the annual Arbor Day Tree Giveaway each January, when 30,000 tree seedlings are distributed to residents. Earth Day in April provides opportunities to learn about composting, xeriscaping, and other earth-friendly programs. Each fall, the Wildflower Festival brings together local businesses to sponsor a wildflower seed giveaway—thousands of wildflowers bloom in the spring in neighborhoods and along roadways as a result.

As an unincorporated area outside of any city jurisdiction, The Woodlands had to create its own governance structure, and the one it came up with fosters a sense of community and commitment to the environment. The community is divided into villages, with each village composed of several neighborhoods. Each village has its own elected, unpaid association officers including a Residential Design Review Committee (RDRC). The RDRC reviews all exterior changes requested by homeowners to ensure that standards are enforced. Regular public meetings give village residents an opportunity to express their views about issues within the community and to learn about new initiatives.

As the community grows, environmental quality continues to be important. A high performance, green building team at the Houston Advanced Research Center (HARC) is called upon for advice on commercial, public, and residential

projects and to offer outreach programs. HARC also maintains a vigorous research agenda designed to explore advanced concepts for building within a sustainable frontier. The successful Cultivate Green initiative is an example of the team's work. With funding provided by the Texas State Energy Conservation Office, this program educates the public in using sustainable materials and practices for residential construction and remodeling.

Over the next ten years the community is expected to grow to a population of 125,000. It will have 22 public schools; eight private schools; 60 religious congregations; 1,000 miles of roadway; 300 miles of pathways; 150 parks; 2,750 employers; 72,700 employees; 32,000 homes; 7,000 apartments and assisted living facilities; and 4,000 town homes and condominiums. Even as it grows, 8,000 of the community's 27,000 acres will remain green space in the form of parks, golf courses, bike paths, and forest preserves.

One of the areas of the The Woodlands that will experience the greatest and most concentrated growth is the Town Center, a mixed-use urban core of homes, offices, shops, restaurants, entertainment, and specialty stores. The Center is a catalyst in building a richer social environment and facilitating economic growth. The Center's newest addition, the mile long Woodlands Waterway, links Town Center establishments by

water taxis, trolleys, and pedestrian walkways.

My wife and I truly enjoy living in The Woodlands. Being empty nesters, three years ago we selected a small, two-street neighborhood where approximately 75 percent of the 47 households are in a similar stage of life. Our neighbors have become our extended family; we can walk the streets and name the people who live in every single house. Rarely do we travel outside of The Woodlands as we find all of the amenities we need right here. We enjoy free concerts in the parks, the entertainment offered at the pavilion, and a wide variety of restaurants and shopping opportunities. A particular favorite is the new Market Street area where we can walk and explore the many small boutiques. Environmentally focused events are also a must on our calendar, especially "Landscaping Solutions," where we learn about native plants and how we can personally protect the environment.

The emphasis on living in harmony with nature is a true blessing for us, providing a very full and rewarding quality of life experience. In The Woodlands we have found a satisfying lifestyle: a vibrant local economy, high standards for the maintenance and protection of the natural and built environment, opportunities for continuing education, and rich social interaction. — *Richard C. Haut, Ph.D.*