



Planning for Permanence: the Speeches of J.C. Nichols
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Suburban Sub-divisions With Community Features

Washington, D.C., June, 1924.

Developing suburban sub-divisions with community features is a very broad subject and of constantly increasing importance in our profession. Community features may be the attractions largely instrumental in first attracting the attention of the buying public to your subdivision. They may be the factors that largely create sales in the beginning. Community features can and should be the means of giving character and distinction to your property; the things that create enthusiasm and a liking for the property by its residents; the things that cause your clients and your owners in your property to enjoy living there.

Community features may be the cause of your owners becoming permanent residents – a most desirable object of every sub-divider. These features may be the inspiration that causes a better and more intensive development of every private lawn; an inspiration for better architecture; for better interior decoration – and the cause of the development of a greater interest and love for ones home. They become, if properly handled, the cause for closer friendships, and a greater neighborhood and community spirit. They directly improve life in its noblest sense and lead to higher aspirations to obtain the things worthwhile in life – and in the end, from it all comes a greater love and respect for one's city, a greater civic interest and pride, a better public spirit, and a greater patriotism for city and nation in the hearts of both young and old. Successfully handled in your sub-division, they become the example for other sections of your city. Other developers quickly grasp their significance and hasten to embody more community features in their operations. As a result, the whole city takes on a character of development better adapted to its particular purpose, and expresses a greater pride and civic interest in all its various units throughout all its parts, and a greater spirit of co-operation, cohesion and relation of all its parts, finally weaving into a powerful respect for one's city, a greater ambition for its future, and a greater responsibility in one's citizenship itself.

Community features, as I said in the beginning, is of broad meaning. It includes activities that bring the residents of your subdivision together in any united purpose of pleasant or serious effort. On the other hand, it includes the character of the physical development of your property, its adornment, its characteristics – the very creation of an individual and an appealing personality in all or various parts of your property.

Let us first consider activities – beginning with the things which appeal to the children – the best approach to every family. In order to make what I say practical, rather than theoretical, I am going to speak of things which we have been doing for several years in the Country Club District of Kansas City, Missouri merely as suggestions to you.

Some of these features would apply in smaller properties, some in larger properties, Some could be too ambitious, perhaps, for a small sub-division. Others may be suggestions to you for similar, but modified activities:

1. An annual community field day – bringing together all the school children in your District – can be made inexpensive and very effective. For several years we have held such events, largely underwriting the expenses of the meet. In May of this year we had approximately 3000 school children on the campus of one of our private schools. Eleven schools, public and private, some of which simply partly reached into our District, joined in the meet. An executive committee was composed of a representative of each school. All the events were carefully worked out in advance – each school having its own individual feature event, and also entering representatives in the general events.

We open the meet with a parade, the children coming down the hillside – each school grouped by itself, following its banner, an effort being made that all the children in each group dress in their own particular color – many schools adopting a unique cap, flag staff or some distinctive feature. The parade is headed by a band, which we furnish. The meet generally starts by all the children joining in some spectacular event. Then we have all kinds of athletic events, both to test their athletic progress, as well as to present, the laughable and picturesque features. Relay-races, three-legged races, sack races, potato races, handicap races, dashes, pole vaults, Kiddie Kar races for the little ones, broad jump, tug of war, etc. The competition between the schools is remarkable. This year we had more than 5000 spectators. All the newspapers featured the events, ribbons were given as first and second awards, each school vying with the others to win the greatest number of events. Cups may be given, if desired. No admission is charged, although chairs and programs are sold, and concession rights for refreshments yield some revenue to help defray the expense. It costs us around \$200 or \$250 a year for this activity. Mothers, fathers, friends and relatives attend. We invite all the people on our prospect list. And don't you realize that people living in other parts of the city cannot help but stop and think how nice it would be if their children lived in the Country Club District and had that opportunity, or better still, it may stimulate such activities in other sections of the city, thereby helping your own as a whole.

2. And then again we have our hikes into the country. Perhaps a “wienies” roast for the boys of a certain school, letting the boys each contribute ten, fifteen or twenty cents, or letting the expenses be paid by your company, if desired. We may get a lover of birds to lead the boys, a geologist, or someone interested in the early history of the territory, making the trip interesting, going out into the country, and letting the occasion develop as it will, without any particular effort being made in advance, but simply bringing together a large number of boys and girls, as the case may be, into one common community jaunt.
3. Lectures of various kinds. The late Enos Mills delivered many lectures upon bird and other wild life. We had 1200 children attend one of these lectures, and admitting all the children free – opening the meeting with the singing of America, and ending it with a short talk from one of the representatives of our company, urging a greater interest and a greater love for animal life.

4. The encouragement of a Bicycle Club – where certain streets may be outlined for safer riding by the children. Or some father may lead the boys on a ride at some particular appointed time.
5. A directed playground. For several years we had a community organization that hired a supervisor of play for the vacation months for all school children. Certain hours of the morning he devoted himself to the smaller children; other hours to the playing of baseball and other athletic events; and certain prescribed days in giving swimming lessons in the pool on the grounds of one of our public spirited citizens.
6. The Community Christmas Tree is always a splendid method of developing community interest. The various schools, the various Sunday School classes, and certain children's organizations can be prepared in advance and all will take a remarkable interest in this sentimental time of the year. Almost every owner in your entire property will come to a short Christmas ceremony of some interesting and colorful type. It is better to teach the children to have a simple interest in Christmas time of year. You may depict some event related to Christmas time. You may have a little play or pageant, the singing of Christmas carols around the tree, the planting of an evergreen to become a permanent Christmas tree. So many channels are open to you and all the work and effort, and even the expense, may be borne by the children and the people in the neighborhood.
7. The Singing of Christmas Carols, is another splendid community activity for your various children's classes and clubs, and the groups of older people in your neighborhood, who begin meeting a few weeks before Christmas and rehearse the singing of the Christmas Carols. Just the bringing together of these widely scattered groups of the district and getting them all to doing something in the same spirit, creates friendships and develops neighborhood enthusiasm.

For several years we furnished ten or twelve horse drawn hay racks on Christmas Eve and various groups, adorned in sheets and carrying red lanterns, torches, or whatever striking thing may have appealed to this or that group or individual, were placed upon the various hay racks and driven slowly up and down the various streets of the sub-division, pausing and singing Carols in front of the homes that placed a lighted candle in their windows or Christmas Eve. Many families lighted all their street windows with candles. It becomes a beautiful ceremony. It developed a custom of many owners placing lighted Christmas trees on their front lawns, or running out electric wires and hanging colored electric lights on a permanent tree on their lawn. It may be made a very beautiful event throughout your sub-division, hearing these various groups singing in the distance, growing louder as they approach your home, pausing possibly and singing an extra song in front of the home of some family who hasten to carry hot chocolate or other refreshments to the carolers as they pass by. Some groups may use automobiles. It is not necessary, however, to have any kind of vehicle. Some suburban sub-divisions in this country have done it just as well by letting various singing groups stroll together from home to home. You may introduce features such as jester, or a clown making mirth and fun as the carolers pass along. The whole event may end in some home in a small sub-division, or at a community hall, or a church, where hot oyster stew may be served, or wieners be roasted, songs be sung, and various forms of entertainment provided. But of

most importance is the bringing in of the greatest number of individuals, both parents and children, into the ceremony.

8. An organization of boys or grown people may be created, to keep the snow swept from a nearby pond or stream for skating in the winter time.
9. Trails for hikes may be provided, particularly if you have an interesting country around. And the more adventuresome these trails become, the more interest they have for the grown person or child that loves to walk in the woods. These trails may be made equally interesting in the winter as in the summer-time. Foot logs across streams, not too easy in their crossing. Springs along the side of the path are always welcome. We have made reservations in the sale of certain properties for a continued use of a pedestrian way across the corner or the front of the property sold. We encourage various clubs, organizations and schools to go in groups over the trails. We built six picnic ovens at various points along the trail, which are used morning, noon and night by those who love the out-doors and enjoy a meal in the open, cooked over the picnic fire. We meet some difficulty in people leaving the premises untidy, yet this is largely a matter of education and is one of the duties of the sub-divider. We try to inculcate a spirit of not picking tree blossoms or wild flowers, or breaking trees or shrubs, or killing birds or squirrels, or throwing trash or litter to mar the beauty of the landscape for others.
10. Or perhaps you may have an opportunity as we have, in developing interest in horseback riding. We erected a building to be used as a riding academy and leased it to its present operators. Here horses may be stabled on a monthly fee, or one may rent a horse or pony as the need them. Riding lessons are given children. We have built and provided some eighteen miles of horseback trails, which has greatly increased horseback riding, both among the younger people and the parents. We have endeavored to keep these trails as wild as possible.

We have made reservations along certain home sites, which provided fords over streams and reserved easements across the fronts of certain tracts as we sold them. We have endeavored to make the trails offer three or four routes, giving variety to the riders. We have experienced some difficulty through riders getting off the trails.

Here again this is one of the opportunities for service on the part of the realtor to develop greater respect for property rights – and recognizing the thoughtlessness of many riders, in the long run it is worthwhile and gives another opportunity for greater enjoyment of life for those who live in your sub-division. If you are more ambitious you may have horse shows for both children and older people. Large parties may be arranged where groups of riders go into the country for picnics. In our case we feel it is better to keep the trails away from the boulevards and street crossings, which are always dangerous, follow the banks of the stream, wherever possible, arrange to use the boundary line of a golf club, adding charm to the ever pleasing scene of an open sweep of golf land. Or you may provide temporary bridle paths over your unsold acreage, with the understanding that you may reclaim the rights of way whenever your development demands, or you may arrange with the farmers beyond to give certain rights for riding. Or you might arrange hurdles in cross country runs, fox hunts, etc. Although such

activities really belong in the field of a regularly recognized riding club or hunt club, rather than adaptable to the simple community needs of the sub-divider.

11. We have four golf clubs in our properties. Three of them we have built as an adjunct to our real estate development, organizing, financing and developing the club from the beginning. In two of these organizations it is stipulated that no one can become a member unless they are an owner of property in our subdivisions. We generally provide a site for the course without any charge, on our unsold acreage in the beginning. We start the dues at say \$30 or \$40 a year, with no initiation; provide no club house, simply a little room for golf headquarters, and start out with nine holes, adding others as the club grows, not even providing showers or a place to keep the clubs, the first year. We may only have fifty or sixty members to start on, but as interest grows and the membership increases, we have found from experience that within three or four years we will have 300 or 400 members in our club.

By the second year they start social activities, such as club dances; and they may have a picnic once or twice a year. When a club has grown to a strong membership, they generally begin establishing a sinking fund for the purchasing of their own real estate – and within a few years you see them purchasing and developing a permanent course. These organizations have been able to reimburse us for the amount of money we advanced during the early period, and we have found that its value to us was worth the giving of the ground to them without rent during the formation years.

Nothing adds more tone to a neighborhood, nothing adds more protection and beauty to your surroundings. A golf club always is a great buffer to protect you from the encroachment of property of injurious uses around your holdings. Great friendships are formed on these community courses. People think more of their property and their homes and the neighborhood and would not for anything sell or move away. It may make them wish to continue to live in that city, and will certainly cause them to urge their friends to move into your sub-division where they can enjoy these privileges. The ordinary social golf club in cities, where a large club house is maintained, becomes quite expensive for many of your buyers. Such golf organizations are desirable, – and we have two of them in our properties; but I doubt they are as much value in the upbuilding of a sub-division as a simple community organization such as I describe.

12. Then there is also the possibility of your neighborhood Flower Show, where particularly the woman in the district will take great interest in displaying flowers. You may divide your subdivisions into districts, where the captain of each district will personally urge her neighbors to exhibit her better flowers. Many would hesitate to exhibit in the large flower show of the city, fearing their flowers would not merit such exhibition – but will gladly join their neighbors and get great joy in such a community flower show. You would be surprised at the men who will attend, and you will find that many a man is just as interested and just as great a lover of flowers as his wife. And then again it becomes a stimulus for the greater growing of flowers, better arrangement, better continuous bloom and better landscape treatment – and call adding joy to the owners and value to your property.

13. If your sub-division is sufficiently large you should have your own community hall, where neighborhood dancing lessons, lectures, and all community events may be held. Such a hall will become self-sustaining as the population grows.
14. The Publication of a Community Bulletin is an exceedingly valuable aid in fostering community interest. We publish a Bulletin which goes to all our residents, and a large mailing list of prospects and various persons throughout the country. Information is given relative to Gardening, Bird Life, Plants, architecture, lawn development and furniture, social, church and school activities, prize contests, names of new residents, historical information, personal mention of honors to various residents, everything of a community nature that will be of interest to the residents and prospective residents of our sub-divisions. This Bulletin is sent free and no advertising is accepted.
15. And then again there is another class of community feature which might be better termed “community service”, which is more directly responsible for the better development of your properties and the success of your operations, than those I have mentioned above. In every sub-division we have developed for many years, we have placed a stipulation in the contract and recorded along with the restrictions the organization of a community homes association, obligating the owner of each lot to pay not to exceed a mill per square foot per annum to this neighborhood organization, for community maintenance and purposes. This tax rests upon all unsold as well as sold sites. It is a tax on land, and not on improvements. Only residents can serve as directors, and without salary. It is an honor to be elected. An annual meeting is held of all the owners and the policy is prescribed, which the directors carry out.

Snows are cheaply plowed from the streets and walks, at a cost of only a few cents to every fifty foot lot. Street trees are sprayed and trimmed at a far less cost than the individual could do it, even if he would; and we know from experience, that if left to the individual owner, his street trees are generally neglected. Vacant property is kept cleaned and mowed as a community expense; shrubbery, flowers and ornaments in all public places are maintained; street trees replaced when necessary; trash is hauled away at community expense once a month from each home – the resident being required to place his trash in some receptacle in the parking in front of his place, and on regular trash clean-up day, you will find the trash placed in front of each home, consisting of tin cans, ashes, rubbish, grass cuttings, and all forms of debris, ready to be removed. This service alone would otherwise cost the individual owner more than his entire expense of the community homes company assessment.

This homes association is also charged with the responsibility of enforcing restrictions – and has the funds to go to court, if necessary. They take over the control of any playgrounds, fountains, picnic ovens, or other community features. They become a united, powerful organization to present any cause to municipal authorities, or to any public utility. They develop a strong community feeling, a neighborhood pride and a betterment of the physical condition as well as the community spirit of the entire neighborhood.

16. Then again the character of the architecture and location of the stores and shops provided in your properties is really a community feature. These should be of good architecture, not offensive to the surrounding homeowners. All loading and unloading of trucks should be confined to courts in the rear. No overhanging signs, or big lettered posters should be permitted. No ugly rear ends or filthy rear ends should be tolerated. As much care and thought should be given to their character and surroundings as is given to the home nearby. The filling station can be made unobjectionable, if proper control of design, color and maintenance is retained.

Our Company was probably the first to develop the better appearance of a filling station in this country. I think we were the first to encourage the planting of shrubs, flowers and grass, the elimination of signs and loud clashing colors – and as a result, there has been almost a revolution in filling stations throughout the country.

We were the first company in Kansas City to give continuous thought and consideration to better architecture and surroundings in our neighborhood shops. Today this is being reflected throughout all of Kansas City – and let me add, that no subdividers should overlook the business values they create – and where the subdivision is large, they should profit from these values produced – and it is far better, if possible, to design and control your own buildings than to sell to others for commercial purposes. But in any event, you have an obligation to your residents to retain the control of your entire layout of your business center.

The design and location of the fire and police station is important and should be made inoffensive. Of course the location of schools, with ample playgrounds, the distribution of churches and structures needed to meet community needs, is an important factor in community development.

17. And now I wish to come to another factor of community development which we feel is of growing importance, and believe we are demonstrating its value in Kansas City. That is, the giving of character and distinction to certain neighborhoods and certain streets by a particular type of development. This may be done by the grouping of buildings of harmonious architecture, by a pleasing blending of the colors of the roofs in nearby houses, in the careful graduating of grade and floor elevation of one house with another; in the avoiding of the tall house overshadowing a low bungalow type, in the giving of a certain order, out of which comes great beauty in a residence street.

Much charm in a residence neighborhood may come from the placing of interesting gateways at street entrances but this is frequently abused in making the gateways the predominant thing, rather than incidental and subordinate to the streets and lawns themselves.

The curving of the streets, the placing of the trees, the planting of the shrubs, the walk design, and the various street furnishings may all be so arranged as to give a variety of character to various parts of your sub-division. The provision of frequent triangular parks at street intersections give a cozy, domestic character to a residential street. They relieve monotony, they break the sweep of winds, they relieve the hot glare of a straight

stretch of paving, they give ever changing color and create a street scene of value to the entire neighborhood.

And then you may go further and introduce certain ornamental features of good design and taste, appropriate to public sites. Whether it may be an interesting piece of statuary of real antique value and character, or a good reproduction obtainable in terra cotta and other factories. It may be a beautiful vase placed in an open park. It may be an interesting iron gate at an appropriate place, or it may be a fountain of either local manufactured design or gathered from the markets of the Old World where such an abundant offering is obtainable.

We are placing seven marble fountains each of original sculptured design purchased in various cities throughout Europe, for certain parks and public squares in our properties. It is true, your subdivision should be quite large to justify this expense – but I don't believe there is anything we have done that is adding more to the individual character and creating more distinct environment than the placing of these ornaments, benches, pavilions, columns, balustrades or well heads, both marble and iron, – rustic bridges, statuary, all being placed with careful study.

Much failure can come from the thoughtless or careless placing of such ornaments. Each ornament and site should be as carefully studied, as the architect works out the detail of the most particular parts of his design. Grades, surroundings, light, shadow, approach, scale, and almost the very atmosphere itself enters into the successful placing of such ornaments. But in what manner can you more successfully create distinctive character of a particular neighborhood than by this means? In no way can you encourage art and sculpture in the surrounding homes and throughout the city more effectively. And the inspiring thing of it is that these ornaments, properly selected, properly placed, will pass down through the generations, becoming an inspiration for beauty for ages in our cities.

This is the opportunity of the realtor. He is the man who creates and fixes the appearance of a city. It would be foolish for idealism to carry beyond the things that could pay. But as you develop your properties and as the public appreciation will justify it, more and more, and better and better community features may be successfully added. It will reflect itself in every architectural design of every home, in the garden side as well as the street side of the lawn, in the interior arrangement, hangings, paintings, and furniture of your owners, and in the mental attitude and spiritual attitude of your residents themselves.

Children will become interested. They will develop an art appreciation in the broad sense. They will become observant of the beauty of this great world around us. They will see greater beauties in the sunset, in the distant haze-covered hills. They will get a greater joy in the budding of the forest trees in the spring. They will be more thrilled by the singing of the birds in the early morn in the trees around their homes. They will gain an understanding of the miracle of the opening flower in the joyous springtime. They will learn to abhor ugliness and prize beauty. They will learn the value of good design in every physical object that exists. They will appreciate color harmony in our schools and homes, the streets and the public buildings.

They will gain a respect for good order of things, and they will be inspired to plan and diagram a great and glowing future for the city. Their eyes will be lifted beyond the more sordid things in everyday existence, and they will begin to dream dreams for the future achievement and beauty of their city. They will grasp the wonderful meaning of the late Daniel Burnham's statement, "Make no little plans for your city. Small plans die and are soon forgotten. Big plans grip the souls of men, stir the blood of the people, and once diagrammed for the future of a city, recur again and again throughout the city's growth and guide its future destiny and become the beacon light for beauty and order throughout every part of the city."

The J.C. Nichols Company Records (KC106) – Speech JCN014

Arguably Jesse Clyde Nichols (1880-1950) was the single most influential individual to the development of metropolitan Kansas City. Moreover his work, ideas, and philosophy of city planning and development had far-reaching impact nationally – so much so that the Urban Land Institute has established the J.C. Nichols Prize for Visionary Urban Development to recognize a person or a person representing an institution whose career demonstrates a commitment to the highest standards of responsible development.

Nichols' objective was to "develop whole residential neighborhoods that would attract an element of people who desired a better way of life, a nicer place to live and would be willing to work in order to keep it better." The Company under Nichols and his son, Miller Nichols (1911-), undertook such ventures as rental housing, industrial parks, hotels, and shopping centers. Perhaps the most widely recognized Nichols Company developments are the Country Club District and the Country Club Plaza Shopping Center, reportedly the first shopping area in the United States planned to serve those arriving by automobile rather than trolley car.

The J.C. Nichols Company Records (KC106) contains both personal and business files concerning J.C. Nichols' private and business life. Included are personal correspondence, family related material, and speeches and articles written by him. Business and financial files pertain to actions of the Company, including information about different developments and the securing of art objects; and printed materials produced by and about the Company.