



Planning for Permanence: the Speeches of J.C. Nichols
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What To Do and What Not To Do in Planning a Subdivision

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1. Create neighborhood values in your subdivision to compensate for home sites offered at lower prices farther out or elsewhere.

Do this by restrictions, approval of plans and homes associations, giving character to subdivisions through careful planning, and by being “community conscious” in every detail of your activity.

2. Protect these neighborhood values by projecting a large area, or getting options on adjoining tracts.

By getting options on adjoining property extending over ten years or more, you will be able to get adjoining property owners to join in some kind of restriction before you develop. The finer you make your subdivision, the more likely it is that adjoining property owners will try to make a nuisance of their property to influence you to buy them out, or the more valuable their property becomes for unrestricted commercial use.

3. Buy your land on long-term payments if you can't afford cash.

A fifteen-year payment plan is about the minimum term. Don't have required annual payments on principal except as you release lots for sale. Arrange if possible to have the interest cumulative and only paid as the lots are sold.

4. Avoid tracts of land requiring large expense in grading, unless the price per acre is considerably less.

5. Make contour maps before determining street and block layouts.

Flat, barren areas call for extra investment in curving streets, winding roads, abundant tree planting, parks, ornaments, and striking lot locations. Even a small park, perhaps with a pool, or an object of art, may influence the value of an entire neighborhood. Often it is advisable to select a few typical lots on a barren section for complete planting, to show the possibilities.

6. Be cautious about building extreme or exotic houses in the early stages of development.

An occasional such house, suiting the desires of some particular owner, may blend in later, but extreme designs are dangerous as starters.

7. Get good bellwethers.

An unfortunate sale to a person of questionable character – especially in the early part of the development – may ruin the whole subdivision in the minds of the general public.

8. Don't estimate your future profits on the basis of the profits of your early sales.

You may have many lots left at the end of twenty or twenty-five years. Your real objective is to handle your subdivision so that values increase enough through the years to keep you ahead of the carrying cost on the unsold lots. Tax authorities tend to penalize you if your development is a success – with increasing taxes on your unsold lots.

9. Don't install street improvements and utilities on all of your tract in advance (unless it, is small.)

You want flexibility, even as to lot sizes, so as to meet changing demands and markets. Biting off too big a chunk not only loads up carrying costs, but gives the appearance of shop worn property. If you have a large subdivision, give new and pleasing names to new sections as you open them.

10. Initiate Home Associations to develop morale and confidence in the permanence of your neighborhood.

There are now eighteen non-profit state chartered associations in Country Club District actively carrying out the homeowners' share of the task of protecting values and supplying neighborhood needs through a small annual assessment of about 10 cents per front foot. Some of these associations are more than 25 years old.

11. Discourage neighborhood clubhouses.

Clubhouses start out well attended, but as families become acquainted attendance dwindles. Picnic ovens in vacant lots sometimes create interest, but they, too, usually become nuisances when they are no longer remote from homes.

12. Install parks, objects of art, capitalize on natural beauty spots.

Small parks give an atmosphere of refinement and character to street intersections, and help to slow down high-speed traffic. (The Nichols organization has placed more than a half million dollars worth of garden objects of art in its various parks.) Have appropriate markings or historical sites. Preserve the natural beauty of streams, but do not make parkways near them large enough to become playgrounds.

13. In building playgrounds, place them so they are bounded by streets, not in the interior of blocks.

Playgrounds adjacent to homes encourage neighborhood quarrels, are difficult to police, and are noisy. It is better to develop several playgrounds with complete equipment where there are streets on all sides.

14. Make a careful tree-planting program.

In the Country Club District, elm trees were first used, later oaks, lindens, hard maples and evergreens and others to give autumn color. One row, uniform, not staggered, on each side of the roadway is preferable to two. Keep trees well pruned to create an arching effect.

15. Consider conservative gateways.

Flamboyant gateways detract from the dignity of a subdivision. In Country Club District gateways are modest in size, neutral in color, and subordinated to the architecture of surrounding homes. Keep all electroliers, fireplugs, mailboxes, and other street furnishings harmonious.

16. The Curvilinear pattern is preferable.

Curving streets are more pleasing than the grid patterns. Each new scene comes before your eyes as an allurements to see what is beyond. Curved streets also help avoid blowing clouds of dust, relieve monotony, give more individuality to home sites, and discourage speeding. The curvilinear pattern implies proper placement of expressways and schools, churches, and shopping centers.

17. 26- or 27-foot paving widths and 4- or 4 1/2-foot sidewalks are satisfactory, especially in minor streets.

18. Make parking-strips not less than ten feet wide.

Parking strips between sidewalk and curb of six or seven feet were found to allow insufficient space for growing trees. The roots bulged sidewalks or curbs. Perhaps sidewalks should be placed adjoining curbs and trees planted on the lawns.

19. Omitting sidewalks on both sides of a street is questionable.

Families object because it gives no place for children to ride tricycles or roller skate. In many subdivisions in Country Club District, however, it was found desirable to have a sidewalk on only one side. In areas for larger homes – sidewalks may be omitted where driveways offer areas for children to ride bicycles, etc.

20. Consider the omission of alleys.

Alleys in the Nichols subdivision were discontinued because they are a source of disorder and uncleanness. Pole lines are all on rear lines.

21. Rename a street which may have industries situated on it farther downtown.

The connotation is bad. A street name should have a ring of dignity and a certain exclusiveness, flavored with residential meaning.

22. Over-deep lots do not usually pay.

In the Country Club District homes costing from \$5-10,000 are on lots 120 to 135-feet deep where possible; homes from \$12,500-25,000 on lots 125 to 150-feet deep. For much larger homes greater depths are provided. No developer should over-develop his land. (Extra depths for vegetable gardening has not proved desirable.)

23. Consider uniform lot building lines.

Both uniform and staggered lines were tried by the Nichols organization – having slight variations – and they favor a fairly uniform building line and believe both front and side street building lines are advisable.

24. Create buffers between residential sections and neighborhood shops.

This may be done by parks, playgrounds, churches; schools; duplexes or even apartments.

25. Work toward increasing your standards year by year.

Don't be too extreme, too far in advance of public acceptance. Try to gradually lead your buyers into the acceptance of higher standards each year, more rigid architectural control, better landscaping designs, wider lots, etc. Always remember those straggling, unsold lots which through the years may eat up all profits from early sales.

26. Avoid staggered skylines of building heights.

27. Avoid placement of detached garages too close to side streets.

28. When incorporating a garage into the design try to treat it so its front will blend into architecture of the house – soften it as much as possible.

29. Avoid fences beyond front and side building lines.

30. If a kitchen front house, be sure to put entrance on side of house and camouflage kitchen appearance from street.

31. Front lawn sidewalks may be omitted and private driveways serve as walk approach from the street.

32. More and more attention should be given to the garden side of the home; porches; windows, etc., related to the rear living lawns.

33. Avoid too much monotony of house designs on any one street. This can be done in many ways. Variation can frequently be obtained by decided color contrast.

34. Hold house structures close to ground – to intimately relating floor levels – to living-lawn – and thus avoid views of ugly basement windows.

35. Use liberal planting of trees and shrubs, greatly adding to later general appearance of subdivision.

36. Carefully guard transition from smaller homes to larger homes.

37. Endeavor to create purely quiet residential streets, cul-de-sacs, courts, etc., well related to general main highways or boulevards – make your areas safe for children.

The J.C. Nichols Company Records (KC106) – Speech JCN085

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.