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SECTION



# In Seven Days, Designing a New Traditional Town

By PATRICIA LEIGH BROWN

Special to The New York Times

**G**AITHERSBURG, Md., June 6 — In the beginning, the rolling countryside here, about 18 miles northwest of the United States Capitol, did not contain Red Barn Econolodges, 12-screen Cineplex Odeons or seamless subdivisions with "Village" in their titles.

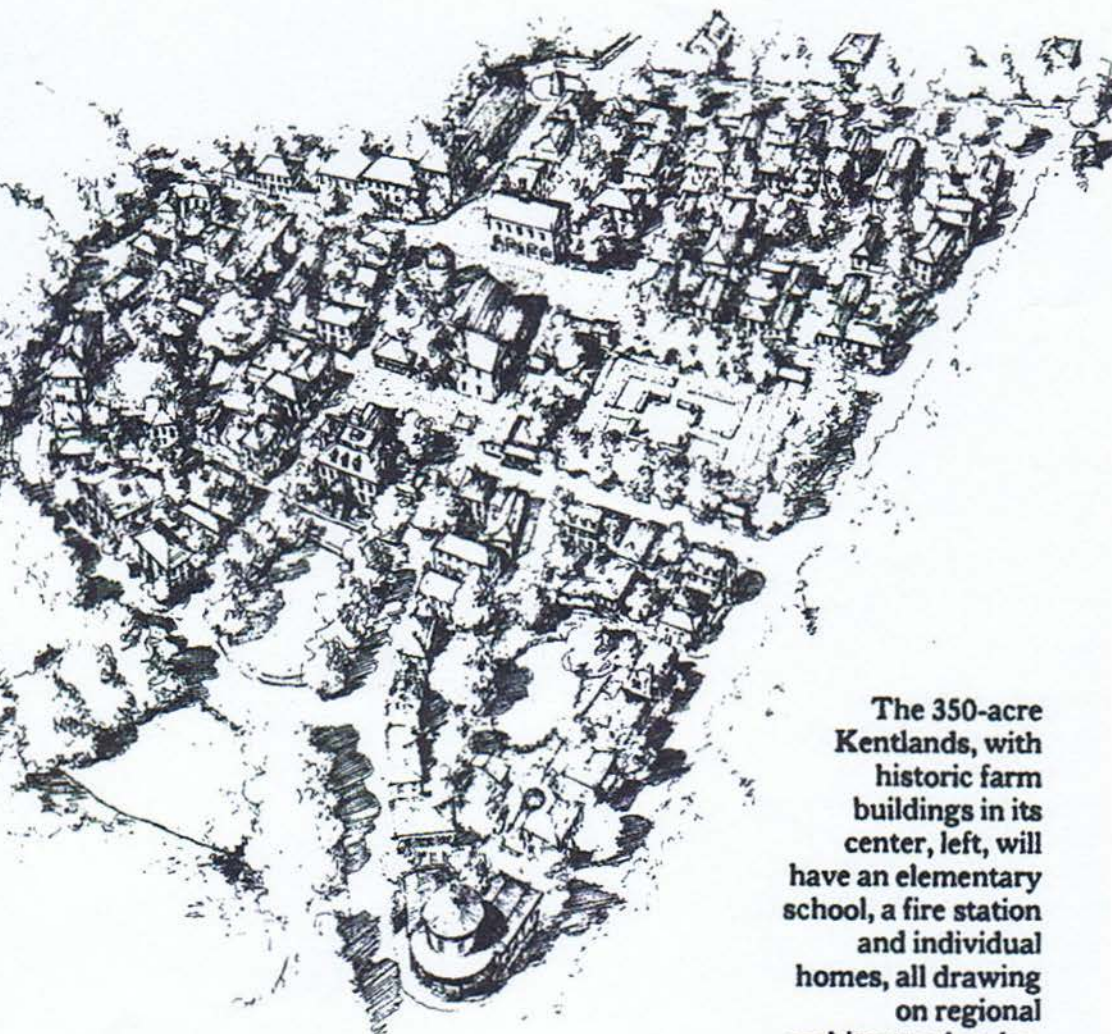
To combat these fixtures of contemporary suburbia, a novel seven-day experiment in suburban planning was held here: an experiment that ultimately may influence the look of suburban developments.

Based on traditional forms of town planning that recall slower, easier times when town centers, not shopping malls, formed the basis of community, the concept is being propelled by Andres Duany, 38 years old, and his wife, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, 37, architects from Miami.

The success of their firm's recent 80-acre development at Seaside, Fla., has furthered their cause of designing traditional neighborhoods. At Seaside, the couple eloquently addressed how to create a new town with a "grown up over time" feeling by writing zoning and building codes that would guarantee the look and feel of a traditional town.

"Rather than accepting standard development practice, these two are saying, 'Let's go back and look at how the best towns were planned 60 to 70 years ago,' with a defined town center and streets as the main organizing principle, rather than clusters of buildings," said Jonathan Barnett, a New York urban designer and the director of the graduate program in urban design at City College.

So-called traditional developments are proliferating, though there may be drawbacks in the future.



The 350-acre Kentlands, with historic farm buildings in its center, left, will have an elementary school, a fire station and individual homes, all drawing on regional architectural styles.



"If not applied intelligently," said Mr. Barnett, "they run the risk of becoming their own formula."

In Gaithersburg (population 30,000), Mr. Duany and Ms. Plater-Zybeck have been hired by Joseph Alfandre, a 36-year-old Maryland developer, to design a town on a 352-acre farm known as the Kentlands, which has a core of historic farm buildings.

Since it will be a large, mixed-use development, the town will also have such public buildings as an elementary school, a fire station and perhaps a post office. Essentially, the Kentlands will function as a planned village within the city of Gaithersburg.

The property was purchased by the developer for \$40 million. The initial plans, the subject of public hearings and a year of study, will draw on regional architectural character, as well as try to balance the needs of pedestrians and motorists. The plans call for up to 1,600 homes, 900,000 square feet of office space and a 1.2 million-square-foot shopping center.

The design process was streamlined into a weeklong planning and brainstorming session called a charrette, in which information from local officials and professional consultants could be immediately considered.

A process that often takes years was compressed, providing a window onto how a large-scale development (what the developer calls "romantic capitalism") takes shape.

In addition to an eight-person architectural team and the developer and his representatives, the players included local engineers, traffic consultants, builders, utility officials, surveyors, a shopping-mall developer and a computer expert.

There was also a market researcher and an institutional planner, a professor of architecture from Harvard University, and members of the Gaithersburg City Planning Commission, the Montgomery County School Board, the City Council and the Mayor.

In the Thorton Wilder tradition, there was plenty of drama, including the potential thwarting of the revival of 19th-century town planning by broken computer and copying machine. This is a chronicle of what transpired, based on three days in Gaithersburg and telephone interviews with the design team.

## Day 1

The charrette begins in a Ford Econoline van. In an effort to draw on the best architecture and planning in the region, the architects tour the Georgetown neighborhood of Washington and Annapolis, Md.

## The Key Players



The architects Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk were hired to design a new old town.



The Mayor:  
W. Edward Bohrer, Jr.



The developer:  
Joseph Alfandre

The New York Times/Marty Katz

Richard Chellman, an engineer from New Hampshire, wears a digital compass that he uses to measure street widths, circumferences of street corners, tree plantings and other details that make the feeling of historic streets so different from curvilinear subdivisions.

Members of the team admire the intimate urban spaces, midblock alleys, parked cars that serve as psychological "buffers" between sidewalk and street and street vistas that terminate in monuments framed by graceful traffic circles. The idea, explains Bill Lennertz, an architect who

has coordinated the charrette, is to "share images, so when we refer to the feeling of a particular street we all know what we're talking about."

Over the next six days, the design of the new town will be worked on sequentially by three teams, each modifying the others' design, to create the kind of overlay of ideas that normally evolves over generations. Lots in the town will be sold individually, to encourage architectural diversity.

In the evening, team members attend a town meeting and are introduced by Gaithersburg's mayor, W. Edward Bohrer Jr. Mr. Duany and



Mr. Alfandre explain their fledgling concept to the audience, which includes representatives of the Chamber of Commerce, the City Planning Commission and the local historic preservation organization.

Mr. Duany then lectures on American suburban development, criticizing towns like Reston, Va., which is based on clusters of buildings and a curvilinear grid in which "the automobile fragments the public experience."

There are chuckles of recognition as Mr. Duany tells tales of suburban life, including trying to find addresses in subdivisions and of not being able to walk to a mall. But in a public hearing this spring, community members expressed concern over the density and potential traffic problems of the development. Mr. Duany encourages members of the public to drop by the charrette site at the Kentlands. "If you think something is not going to fly, for God's sake, tell us," he says.

Later, the architects take a tour of the property by moonlight. The men in the group then take off their ties, before plugging in the espresso machine and gearing up for a late-night design session.

## Day 2

The architects have decided to let the 19th-century Federal-style mansion and farm buildings on Kentlands form a campuslike core from which neighborhoods will emanate. After

according to Mayor Bohrer.

The shopping center, tied into a master plan for the city, is therefore a given. Although lukewarm to the idea of a mall, Mr. Duany and Ms. Plater-Zyberk strive for a center mixing retail, office and perhaps residential space and integrated into the community. The problem is parking. The goal is to avoid that quintessentially suburban phenomenon, the shopping mall as island cut off by a sea of parking spaces.

The meeting is a face-off, with Mr. Garvey representing the interests of department stores while Ms. Plater-Zyberk wrestles with the overall plan. Old ideas die hard.

"Here's the killer question: Can you imagine housing on top of a mall, as in an old city center?" Ms. Plater-Zyberk asks Mr. Garvey.

"The truth is, I'm an adventure-some guy, but that's tough," Mr. Garvey replies.

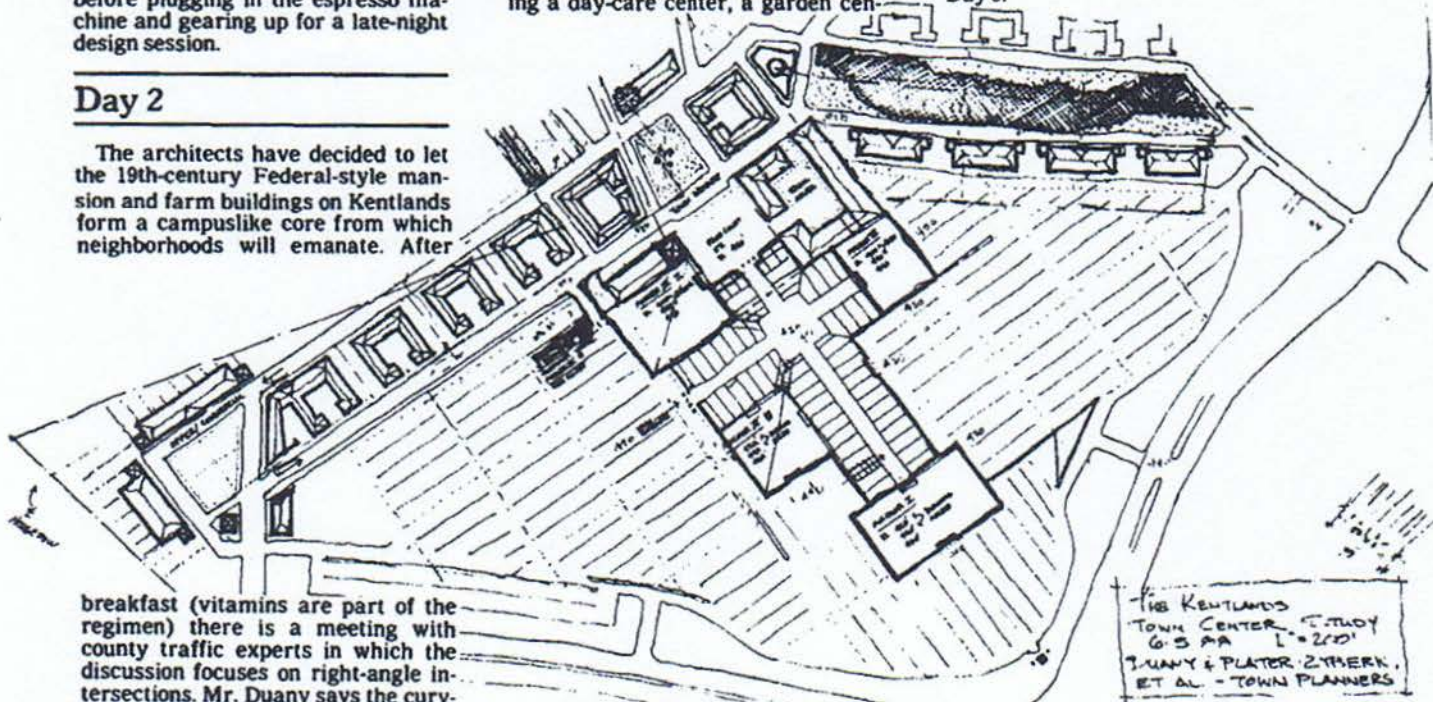
Ms. Plater-Zyberk says she feels keenly that residents should be able to walk to the shopping center. She also offers ideas for new uses, including a day-care center, a garden cen-

teams assigned to various aspects of the town — the historic core, landscaping, streets and engineering. By midmorning, a preliminary plan has emerged for the shopping center. The tentative plan, a hybrid between an old town center and a suburban mall, is predicated on a large percentage of the parking being underground. It is a day for small victories; the designers get the initial okay from the city Public Works Department to try on-street parking and alleys.

## Days 4 and 5

Heavy design days. Tarik El-Nagar, a computer expert, feeds ideas into large-screen computer that can detail the plan down to a hundredth of an inch. Like the original 19th-century plan for the city of Gaithersburg, the plan for the Kentlands is based on a modified grid. There are impassioned meetings with local authorities and several meetings with Mr. Alfandre.

There is little sleep at the end of Day 5.



breakfast (vitamins are part of the regimen) there is a meeting with county traffic experts in which the discussion focuses on right-angle intersections. Mr. Duany says the curving streets in many suburban plans are designed for the convenience of the car, not the pedestrian.

A key event takes place in a meeting with Jerry Garvey, a vice president of Melvin Simon & Associates, a leading developer of malls. According to Mr. Alfandre, the idea for a regional shopping center on a perimeter of the Kentlands was the result of his own evaluations of the project's profitability. It also reflected the city's desire that the Kentlands "provide a financial base for the city," ac-

ter and a library. "Keep going," says Mr. Garvey.

The design is not resolved by the end of the meeting. But Mr. Garvey has praise for the charrette.

"It's a very efficient way of getting things done," he tells the Mayor. "I'm encouraged by the process."

The design team works until 2 A.M.

## Day 3

The architects are divided into

## Day 6

The plan is emerging. An artist is touching up drawings with colored pencils (over 500 drawings are generated during the charrette). In the early afternoon, Mr. Alfandre and Mr. Duany meet with representatives of the Montgomery County School Board to discuss a proposed elementary school within the Kentlands.

The plan calls for the school to be in



a prized spot. The developer offers to pay the architectural bill in exchange for being able to select the architect. His concern is that the school be "architecturally compatible" with his plans. The school board representatives, however, are looking for an architect who can fulfill their specifications, and seem wary of Mr. Alfandre's offer.

"They may not want you involved," one explains. "There's a sense of too many strings."

Mr. Duany offers a compromise, in which two architects — one a specialist in schools, the other approved by Mr. Alfandre — would be hired. The representatives agree to introduce the idea to the entire school board.

In the afternoon, city planning officials from Gaithersburg arrive to informally review the design. Even if they approve it, construction would not start for a year, the developer said.

As conceived by the architects, the Kentlands will consist of three neighborhoods, with the historic Old Farm neighborhood at its heart. Streets will be lined with native trees. It will be possible to walk from the neighborhoods to the town center and the shopping center.

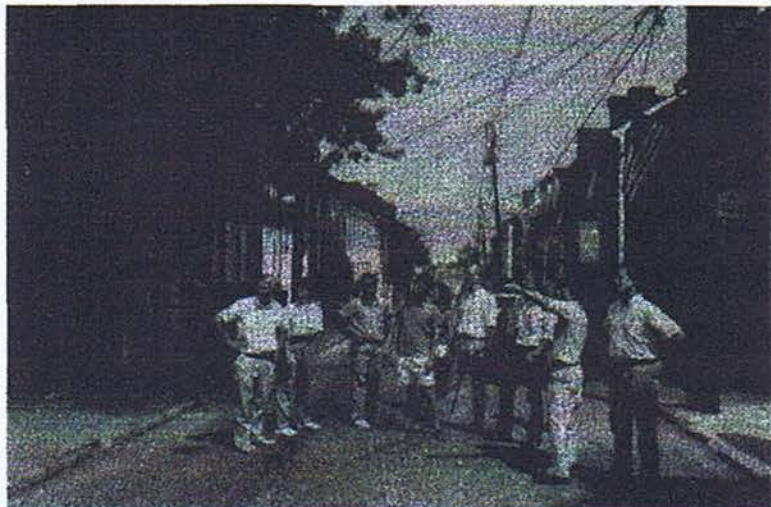
There is a mixture of concepts from three centuries — the 20th-century shopping center at one end, the farmhouse complex in the middle and an essentially 19th-century urban street pattern. Garages will be in the backs of houses. Ecologically sensitive wetlands on the property are preserved as parks, and in the town square there are lots reserved for a library, a fire station, a church, a post office and a town meeting hall.

Codes will set the standards for building heights, roof configurations, yards, porches, balconies and building materials — predominantly brick, clapboard and wood.

The plan must now be approved by the Mayor, the City Council and the City Planning Commission and will be the subject of at least one more public hearing. There are still major hurdles, including the final configuration of the shopping center and what kinds of community services might be available there.

"In the first decades of this century, people designed suburbs that fostered community, but the situation has degenerated," Ms. Plater-Zyberk says at around midnight on the eve of the charrette's close. "But if the private sector had the power to build the problems, it also has the power to build solutions."

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The team began by touring Annapolis, Md., planning to use images of the historic town, with its intimate mid-block alleys, later in their own design of the new town.



Information for the Kentlands is fed into a large-screen computer that can detail plans down to 1/100th of an inch.



Jerry Garvey, above left, and Joseph Alfandre plan shopping center design with Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, foreground. The modern shopping area will be at one end of an essentially 19th-century town.



# The Washington Post

SATURDAY, JUNE 11, 1988

## REAL ESTATE

### When Working by Committee Isn't All Bad

By Roger K. Lewis

What has 20 heads, 40 feet, never enough hands, and can design a new town in a single week?

The answer is the planners, architects and landscape architects who were on "charrette" this past week to shape—on paper—Kentlands estate, a proposed 352-acre development in Gaithersburg being developed by Joseph Alfandre & Co. Inc.

The charrette—a French term that has come to mean working together for a short, intense design period—was conducted in the loft of a barn located on the project site, the Kent farm. Ordinarily, there might be nothing unusual about the process of planning a development of this size. Indeed, most planning efforts are drawn out, tedious and hardly newsworthy.

Tasks are performed and approvals sought in a linear, sequential manner over several years. Developers and planners conduct studies, generate and document design concepts, define marketing strategies, secure financing, meet with multiple government agencies and try to convince local residents and public officials, all of whom can influence the outcome. In the seemingly endless chain of reviews, there's always the risk that the next review will contradict the previous one. And often conventionally produced plans prove less than inspiring.

By contrast, the charrette method seeks to condense this process from months or years into days and, through spontaneous interaction, to yield more satisfactory results.

To architects, the term "charrette," which means "little cart" in French, refers to the final, intense work effort expended to meet a project deadline. This semantic tradition began at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, where proctors circulated with little carts to collect final drawings. Students would jump on the "charrette" to put finishing touches on their presentations minutes before the deadline.

The Kentlands planning charrette was sponsored by the Alfandre company and orchestrated by Miami-based planners Andres



BY ROGER K. LEWIS

"Roger K. Lewis, FAIA, is a practicing architect in Washington, D.C., and a professor of architecture at the University of Maryland. This article first appeared in *The Washington Post*."



# Design Concept Involves Group Of Professionals

Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk. They and a team of 18 other design professionals created a comprehensive plan—25 sheets of drawing, including a design code and illustrations of specific places within the plan—for what they described as a “traditional new town.”

This apparent oxymoron summarizes Duany's and Plater-Zyberk's design philosophy about how to shape new American suburbs. They advocate modeling future development patterns on past architectural and urban traditions, both American and European. Their primary sources are historical 18th and 19th century cities and towns, places where cars are subordinate to pedestrians, where streetscapes are more important than isolated buildings and where a sense of community, of parts adding up to a greater whole, is felt by all residents.

Duany and Plater-Zyberk have adopted the charrette mode as the most effective approach to achieve their and a developer's objectives. Working in advance with clients and local trailblazers, usually like-minded designers who know both the theories and the territory, the planners assemble a squad of design experts along with drafting equipment and supplies, computers, copy machines and telephones to make an instant, on-location design studio.

Armed with essential data—preliminary development programs, topographic and other site information, existing zoning and building regulations—the developer and charrette team invite all concerned parties to participate. Duany sets the stage for the charrette with illustrated lectures and field trips.

The Kentlands charrette included citizen representatives, home builders, a regional shopping mall developer, Gaithersburg's mayor, members of its planning commission and planning staff, and public works officials.

During a charrette, separate tasks and mini-projects are undertaken individually or in small groups of two or three. At other times, larger caucuses occur, and often there are simultaneous meetings. Periodically, everyone gets together for a briefing, lecture, discussion or presentation. Clearly, all of this works only if the charrette is well-managed and coordinated so that participants know what to do and when to do it.

The charrette process gives a plan a kind of mutual authorship shared by all who participate. This is especially important for those who later will officially review the plan. Having contributed to it, they are in a position both to understand and to support its rationale.

The charrette is a forum for ideas with the unique advantage of immediate feedback, but it's not the ideal work environment for the shy and thin-skinned, nor for the prima donna. Emphasis is on collaboration as well as individual initiative. Group dynamics inevitably influence the flow of charrette thinking. Ideas come forth openly, yet are always subject to scrutiny.

Most important, simultaneous brainstorming and negotiation during a charrette can change minds and cultivate unexpected concepts or solutions to problems. This might never occur in conventional, linear planning.

For example, the Kentlands plan advocates design features—street and sidewalk details, pedestrian and vehicular alleys within residential blocks—that, while born of tradition, may be inconsistent with current Montgomery County and municipal standards. But charrette encounters give both public authorities and designers the opportunity at the outset to discuss proposals and regulations

and, with good will, to reach consensus on a common vision and mutually acceptable criteria, even when they involve exceptions or departures from common practice.

The final plan of Kentlands responds to many pressures and opportunities. It protects wetlands and trees, offers park space and a school site and preserves charming old farm structures. It inflects to topography where appropriate, provides for a mixture of residential types and accommodates commercial office and retail uses. It prescribes the alignment and cross-section of streets and establishes parking policies that diminish the perceived presence of cars. And it creates several distinct neighborhoods characterized by diverse housing types.

But one must look further to appreciate the plan's three-dimensional significance. It imparts an episodic, circumstantial but carefully considered spatial order to Kentlands. Streets always connect to other streets—there are no cul-de-sacs—and frame axial vistas toward civic landmarks. High points in the terrain are exploited for views and orientation. Block patterns and contained urban spaces—circular, square, oblong—are mandated to shape the town's streetscape and building fabric. These are reinforced by structures yet to be designed, but whose footprints are generally shown.

Even the giant, 1.2 million-square-foot mall, the northern anchor of the town center, is sited so that no parking lots lie between it and the town. The mall's town-side facade, in fact, fronts directly on Kentlands' main commercial street and forms a pedestrian square through which Kentlands' residents can enter, a wonderfully humane gesture for plugging a mall into a town.

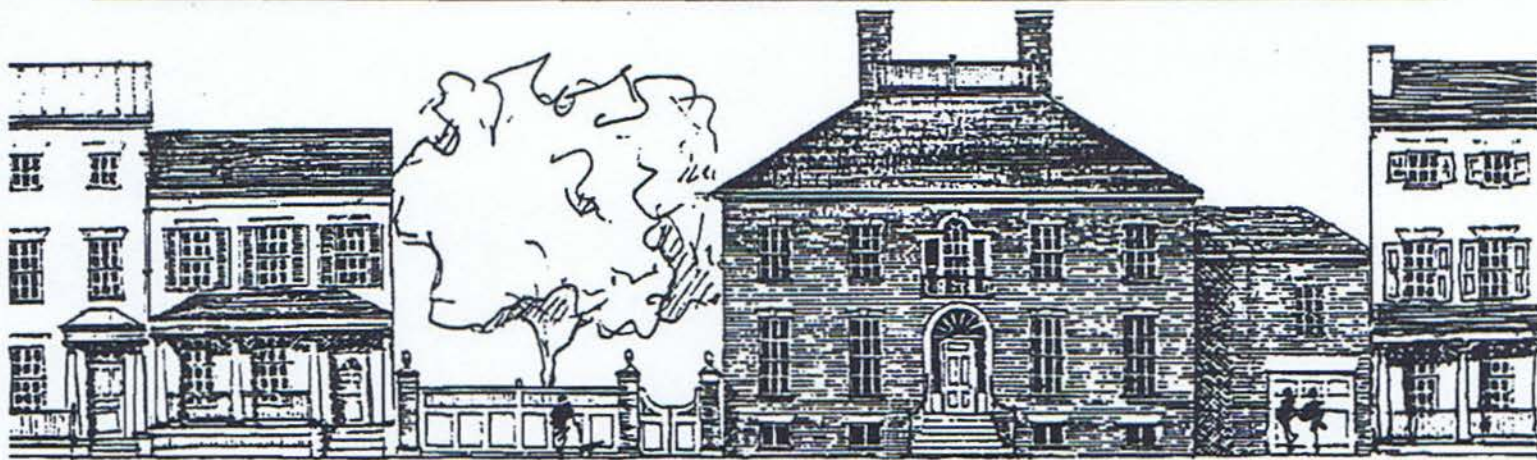
Perhaps the only drawback of planning by charrette is the level of fatigue. At the end, having mapped the future of Kentlands, charrette team members probably thought little about the future. They all needed a day of rest.



# The Washington Post

SATURDAY, JUNE 11, 1988

## REAL ESTATE



A drawing of the proposed Kentlands development in Gaithersburg, which is the product of a "charrette," a short, but intense design session.

### Designing Tomorrow's Community in a Week

*After High-Speed Planning Session, a Town Takes Shape*

By Cornelius F. Foote Jr.  
Washington Post Staff Writer

Developer Joseph Alfandre, his eyes bloodshot from fatigue, hunched over a table and pored over the intricate renderings of a street in his proposed Kentlands project in Gaithersburg.

It was Monday afternoon, the sixth day of a seven-day "charrette" that ended Tuesday night. A team, made up mostly of architects, brainstormed with developers, the Gaithersburg mayor, City Council members, school board officials and residents to design a new community. Each night, Alfandre and the group of 19 other members of the team worked until 1 or 2 a.m. They returned by 8 a.m.

In the early stages of the grueling process, Alfandre was not sure if the concept of a charrette—a short, but intense design session—would prove productive. But pushing aside his misgivings, he had hired Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, a husband and wife architectural team from Miami known for their success in conducting char-

rettes and designing traditional towns filled with squares, parks and a mixture of different kinds of houses on the same block.

By week's end, Alfandre said he had no regrets.

"It really turned out a lot better than I had ever imagined," said Alfandre, after watching the 90-minute slide presentation Duany made Tuesday night under a huge tent on the grounds of the Montgomery County estate. "They've left a lot of flexibility for the town to get its own character as it grows."

From the outset, Alfandre said he knew he wanted to do something different with the 352-acre Kent Farms tract at Quince Orchard and Darnestown roads, just west of the National Geographic Society offices and near the soon-to-be completed Great Seneca Highway.

The plans for the "Town of Kentlands" must now be approved by Gaithersburg officials who are expected to begin scheduling hearings within the next nine months. If the plans are approved, Alfandre hopes to develop the project over the next 10 years. And if

the planned \$200 million product of this week's charrette materializes, it would include nearly 1,600 homes with about 5,000 residents, a shopping mall with more than 100 stores and 900,000 square feet of office space.

Such huge developments are usually designed over a period of months, even years, in the offices of architects and developers. The concept behind a charrette is something akin to a group of students cramming for a final exam. The theory is that by gathering developers, architects, public officials and others at one location to design a project in a short period of time, the participants and their intelligence, energy, ideas and skills will play off each other to produce an accomplished design. Duany and Plater-Zyberk believe that all the participants then can voice their concerns about their specialties in a compact setting and resolve design and technical questions on the spot.

Whether the resulting product at Kentlands will be more livable than a traditional suburb designed over a long period of time won't be known for years. What is known is that those who participated in the Kentlands charrette went away firmly convinced that they had witnessed



# Project Takes Shape in Seven Days

the creation of a community that some day they would be proud to say they had helped spawn.

"This has been the most engrossing week of my life," said Gaithersburg Mayor W. Edward Bohrer Jr. "I came over here every day at lunch hour to see what was going on, to feel the professionalism and vigor."

There was a great deal of anxiety, creativity and debate to get to the Tuesday night presentation. The days were long, tiring and intense, charrette participants said. The final slides for the presentation were not completed until 30 minutes before it started.

There were arguments along the way. At one point, Duany, Plater-Zyberk and several architects gathered around the makeshift bulletin board set up in the old barn. Alfandre, Billy Winburn, Alfandre's vice president, and Steve Wilcox, Alfandre's senior vice president, sat around the table and listened. At issue was whether it was too soon to draft a specific plan for the mall.

"There are some definite givens," Alfandre said. "The anchors [the major department stores], for one. That's a question of who [Indianapolis mall developer Melvin Simon & Associates] wants. As it gets closer and closer to reality, the design will become more of an issue."

Duany, reaching for another sketch of the mall and attaching it to the board, retorted, "But we have to look at the points we're working with. How is it going to be attached to the town? We're starting to have gateways and squares. How do they fit? Will Simon go for them? We need to address these points."

Alfandre stood up, ran his hand

through his hair, and pointed to the sketches on the board.

"If I were Melvin Simon & Associates, I'd say it's so early in the game—that you don't know what's going to happen," he said. "Let's not plan for the 10th-biggest [shopping] day here. It's just too early. Let's not blow it for ourselves."

Several minutes later, the debate ended. Duany and the team of architects went back to work redesigning the mall. By the end of the charrette, Alfandre accepted Duany's concept of the mall.

Alfandre brought Duany and his team of architects from around the country to the Kent Barn, on the grounds of the proposed project. Alfandre, Duany and Plater-Zyberk transformed the dusty, unfurnished barn into an office and architect's studio. They converted eight-foot-long wooden folding tables into drafting tables, each with a high-intensity lamp.

From Miami, Duany and Plater-Zyberk brought their sophisticated computer design system and printers, a Fax machine, a copier and two telephones. The computer, operated by Tarik El Nagar, an architect and computer specialist, created images that were accurate to within 0.01 of an inch.

For entertainment, they had a cloth bag filled with cassette tapes. From time to time during the charrette, someone would put a new tape in the portable cassette player, and the selections included Beethoven, Vivaldi, Duke Ellington and Ella Fitzgerald. One table was covered with pens, pencils, rubber bands and correction fluid. A local caterer provided breakfast, lunch and dinner, coffee, tea and soft drinks throughout the session.

There was little time for socializing, but the charrette participants dressed informally in khaki pants, oxford shirts and T-shirts. Others wore jeans and dress shirts, or sun dress-

es. The guests stood out—they were the ones in the business suits. Team members only left the barn to walk around the grounds and, during the first day, they toured Annapolis and Georgetown to get a firsthand look at traditional town planning. At night, they slept at nearby hotels.

Architects hovered over their drafting boards. Duany, Alfandre and Plater-Zyberk animatedly discussed design and development issues with each other and the other architects or answered questions from guests.

Each architect had an assignment. One designed the houses and streetscapes; another worked on the type of trees to be planted. They meticulously pored over virtually every facet of the development. They sketched and resketched everything from the proposed 1.2 million-square-foot mall to the way roads would be laid out. Architects traded renderings and asked each other to design them the way they envisioned it. "The mall has to fit into the town center," Duany declared at one point.

"That's the importance of working on a team in this kind of setting," Duany said at Tuesday's presentation. "At the same time, someone is designing a street, someone is designing a tree and an engineer is making sure that type of street and tree won't disrupt the way water drains. If you ever run into a problem or had a question, you could ask the engineer or the architect to answer it and solve the problem right then and there."

During the first two days, there was a steady parade of outside guests who listened to Alfandre and Duany discuss Kentlands and the type of community they wanted to create. At one afternoon discussion, Duany and Alfandre met with a group of six local home builders. Seated in the barn around one of the wooden tables, Duany talked about designing new towns with traditional characteristics.

Alfandre explained that there would be a



mixture of small, medium-size and large homes in any given block. Builders would have to adhere to a series of architectural design standards so that every home would blend into each of the five proposed neighborhoods that, when completed, would have nearly 1,600 homes and 900,000 square feet of office space.

During the past 10 months, Duany, Plater-Zyberk and a team of architects have conducted charrettes for such new developments as Crab Creek in Annapolis, which is the only one in the Washington area; Friday Mountain in Austin, Tex.; Seaside in Walton County, Fla.; Bedford Three Corners in New Hampshire and Deerfield in Merrillville, Ind.

But Duany could not complete his historical presentation without a series of interruptions.

"A builder is not interested in developing a new product line for such a small number of lots," one developer remarked.

"What's the price range of these homes?" asked another.

"Do people in single-family detached homes want to live across from town homes and quadrangles?" still another asked.

Duany listened carefully, then responded. He said that builders in the other towns he has helped plan went along with the architectural standards and built small numbers of homes. "It's been tested and it works," he said.

To maintain a traditional "town" theme, Duany said Kentlands would have single-family homes next to mansions that in turn would be adjacent to apartment buildings. Duany said the Kentlands would include a wide range of housing prices.

"We don't want another boring subdivision," he said. "We want the neighborhoods to connect. You all have to make this a town and not just a collection of pods" referring to subdivisions in some of the newer developments in the Washington area.

Many of the builders still seemed unconvinced. Alfandre, who sat back in his chair listening during most of the discussion, leaned forward. "In this location, I think this kind of com-

munity can work," he said. "If it was in Stafford County or someplace else, it wouldn't."

Several minutes later the meeting ended, the builders left and another meeting started, this time with transportation and public works officials. The topics: How wide and curvy would the roads be? Where can the electric transformers be placed? What type of street coverings will be used: brick, asphalt, gravel, cobblestone? Where will people park?

By Monday, there were specific renderings of the homes, which included town houses, mansions and small cottage-style homes. There was the rendering of the so-called Old Farm Neighborhood, with such details as the location and size of trees, streets (a combination of cobblestone, red brick and asphalt) and public squares. This neighborhood will include the existing Kent Farms estate house and barn that will be used as public facilities, such as a post office or a place to pay telephone or electric bills.

Late that morning, Alfandre met with two of his key executives in the old section of the barn. Meanwhile, Sandy Dickson, Alfandre's personnel administrator who served as an office manager during the charrette, made arrangements for Tuesday night's presentation, getting the tent erected, ordering United States, Maryland and Gaithersburg flags, renting tables and chairs.

At one point in the discussion, Alfandre rose from the table and wandered around the newer part of the barn where the architects worked. "Hey, have you seen these streetscapes?" he called out across the room. "It's amazing."

Alfandre, Duany and several others gathered around the rendering by Charles Barrett, an architect with Duany and Plater-Zyberk in Miami. Duany explained the drawing, pointing to it as he talked, while several others prepared other renderings to be taken to a nearby copying store.

"The craziness is just beginning," said Bill Lennert, who heads Duany's Boston office.

There was a frenzied pace to complete drawings to get slides developed in time for Tuesday night's "performance."

Inside a muggy tent, Duany showed nearly 100 slides of the overall geography of the area, the neighborhoods, how streetscapes would look, the kinds of trees that would look best and the type of sidewalks, roofs, housing styles, garages.

"We want to change the way American suburbia looks," Duany said.

"This is not a traditional pod where everybody is the same age, has the same number of children and lives in the same type of house. This mixes societies. Right now, there's too many communities where the developer has decided that, 'This is an elderly neighborhood' or 'This is a Yuppie neighborhood.'"

"Kentlands is a mixed neighborhood. There are big houses next to small houses. If people come here and say, 'I don't want to live next to someone who lives in a house that cost \$10,000 less than mine,' then it's no fault of mine or Joe's [Alfandre]. It's the fault of society—and that would be a shame."

Duany said later that he had never been involved in a charrette that had received such media attention and such cooperation from city and county officials. His brow covered with sweat, Duany talked to people after the presentation.

As a ragtime band played "When the Saints Come Marching In," and other tunes, people milled around outdoors with bottles of soda or beer, glasses of wine or sat at tables eating roast beef, ham, muffins and corn.

Duany smiled. "This is an event," he said.

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MONTGOMERY  
**THE Journal**  
*Montgomery County's daily newspaper*

JUNE 13, 1988

## BIRTH OF AN AMERICAN TOWN



Jeff Taylor/Journal

Planners use a makeshift office in a barn on Kentland Farms to brainstorm a design for their new town, which will use a traditional grid layout.

## Group moves town planning step backward

### Builders seek to return to the traditional

By **MATT HAMBLÉN**  
*Journal staff writer*

As a fierce thunderstorm ripped through western Gaithersburg, a sudden bolt of lightning blew to bits the trunk of an old oak tree in the heart of the Kentlands farm.

The next day, a small team of unusual town planners arrived at the farm to turn the 352-acre site into a traditional American town in just one week.

The planners worked in an old barn behind the 1852 manor house, only steps from where the struck tree lay split and dying.

Before they had finished, they heeded the omen of the lightning strike, and placed the tree's undamaged brother prominently in their plans.

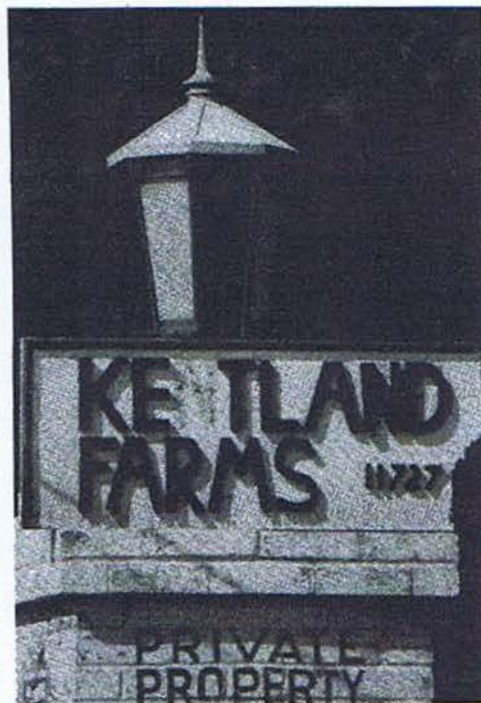
On detailed, color renderings finished



Jeff Taylor/Journal

Above, weary Kentlands architect Andres Duany rubs his eyes during the marathon brainstorming session. His wife and partner, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, sits beside him.

Right, the dilapidated sign at the entrance of Kentland Farms will give way to The Kentlands planned community.



Bill Wood/Journal





Kentlands planners tour downtown Annapolis to pick up ideas for their design of their new town.

Matt Hamblen/Journal

last week, the beautifully shaped brother oak is set in a small, tear-shaped park surrounded on three sides by narrow streets and elegant homes, styled in a 19th century, Georgian theme.

Kentlands developer Joseph Alfandre, his wife and six children might live in one of those homes bordering the park and its important tree. Surrounding his neighborhood will be the manor house, barn and other existing buildings converted into a cultural village.

Alfandre's company bought the farm last month for \$41 million from Helene Kent. Her father, Otis Beal Kent, bought the land in 1942 from the Tschiffely family, who built the original manor house that will stay as a landmark in the proposed village.

On the remaining land, bordered by Routes 28 and 124 and the future Great Seneca Highway, Alfandre proposes a \$200 million development that will be built over a decade — up to 1,600 homes, an elementary school, a cultural center, parks and lakes, shops, a major four-department-store shopping center, and nearly 1 million square feet of offices occupied by perhaps 4,000 workers.

But it is the intimacy of that special oak tree with its park, and the way the homes will be set at the edge of the street that typify the

philosophy of "people-oriented places" sought by the Kentlands design team, headed by Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, a husband-and-wife team from Miami.

Duany lectures zealously of towns small enough in scale to care for pedestrians, and that create a "sense of place" with beautiful homes, trees and pocket parks lining streets that have vistas of church spires, monuments and building towers in the distance. An ideal community is one in which a resident can walk 10 minutes to a job, market, park or nearly any other thing needed in daily life.

The lightning strike that preceded their arrival at Kentlands may symbolize the impact Duany and Plater-Zyberk hope to make on the face of modern planned communities.

"We have two missions here at Kentlands — to create a new town and to change the way the world is planning," Duany said.

#### Lessons of Seaside

One of their earlier town plans, for the commercially successful Seaside, Fla., has attracted international attention from designers and architectural critics for recognizing the architectural values of communities built before World War II.

In those pre-war communities, streets are

arranged in grids, not "like bowls of spaghetti" as in typical modern suburban pods, Duany said. The curving streets of suburban neighborhoods often end up dumping traffic in one or two points on an arterial road, creating traffic jams. A grid system can provide more entry and exit points to help overcome traffic, Duany said.

And streets are laid out to create vistas of important buildings in the distance, such as schools and churches. "This is not something new; it is observed from example after example," Duany said.

Attention is paid to people first and foremost — how they will cross streets most safely and pleasantly and how their homes will appear most inviting and still retain private gardens and spaces. Cars and trucks are forced to make compromises for people, slowing down for narrower streets and sharper angles at turns.

The team's goals turn typical suburban planning on its head.

"Traffic engineering has screwed up roads," he said. "Zoning has ruined towns. The things that once made for beautiful towns cannot now be built because of the law."

#### The Kentlands charrette

The design team started its seven-day design process, which they called a "char-



rette," by touring Georgetown and old town Annapolis on June 1.

(Charrette is French for "little cart" and refers to an intense design period. Duany said the term originated at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, where a charrette dropped student artists off at a spot to create drawings. When the charrette returned, the students scurried aboard, trying to complete their work before the deadline.)

The planners studied the way rowhouses and shops are built close to the sidewalk to create a street wall, capturing the pedestrian-friendly qualities of a Main Street U.S.A.

"People pay money to have that kind of experience at Disney World," Duany said.

In Annapolis, they noted how streets radiate from two traffic circles with St. Anne's Church and the Statehouse in their centers, providing continual vistas from far away.

Weeks before the charrette, developer Alfandre and part of Duany's design team visited London, stopping to visit with Duany's mentor, Leon Krier, a theorist who advocates a return to small cities built to human scale. They also brought back photographs of the 1926 Welwyn Garden City, an example of offices built over street-level retail stores, and the 1906 Hampstead Garden Suburb of homes. Both became examples to test at Kentlands.

The design team took the tour examples and years of collective training back to the Kentlands barn, where drawing tables, graphic computers, telephones and other office equipment comprised a makeshift headquarters on the second floor.

At a conspicuous central spot, a small library of prized architectural and planning references was set up. Several German and English titles refer to planning trends now lost, including R. Onion's "Town Planning and Practice," dated 1909.

"This history is the most important part of this whole process," Duany said.

During the week the books were consulted often for models and guidance, as literally hundreds of drawings of street grids and building designs were made on tracing paper laid over the existing outline of the Kentlands lakes, hills and wetlands. By week's end, the tracing paper littered the floors and the tables.

### Espresso and classical music

Steamy hot days gave way to cold nights, as the team worked nearly around the clock, contending at one point with a power surge that wiped out precious computer memory.

Almost the entire group of 20 people was under age 38 and casually dressed — wearing Topsiders, jeans or sundresses. Little plastic vials of espresso coffee were handed around to fight fatigue while a portable stereo system piped in classical music. Meals and bottles of Perrier water were brought in to accommodate the impromptu consultations between team members as ideas would appear quickly on a drawing and then, just as quickly, be thrown aside like a passing thought.

The casual atmosphere lent itself to honest give and take where artist's egos were put aside, the architects said. The team included architects from Miami, Boston and Indiana, as well as Patrick Pinnell and Dhru Thadani of Washington — brought in to provide insight on mid-Atlantic architectural traditions.

A constant stream of visitors appeared for daytime and evening meetings with the team — reporters, photographers, Alfandre, builders, engineers, traffic experts, county School Board members, nearby neighbors and civic leaders, Gaithersburg Mayor W. Edward Bohrer Jr. and other city and county officials.

Seeing the charrette unfold was like watching a movie being made. Duany, 38, the main showman, moved from group to

group, giving directions and making decisions that in any other work environment might take weeks.

Plater-Zyberk, 37, moved about more quietly, pushing members to reach deadlines.

Alfandre, 36, sat through almost the entire process, ever-optimistic when problems developed. At one meeting when his preference on a series of key design issues was asked, Alfandre said, "I feel like a kid in a candy store."

### The unveiling

When the final Kentlands design was unveiled under a big-top tent erected on the grounds for hundreds of visitors June 7, the street wall feature of the model towns became a prominent feature.

Among various neighborhoods there will be room for about 1,400 houses, apartments and townhouses — a number that could go as high as 1,600 depending on the mix of types of housing.

Vistas were created in several areas, including along a street on the west of the site in the Hill district of homes that ends at a traffic circle, which an elementary school will border.

Duany and Alfandre had argued for architectural control over the school's exterior shell. The county's School Board representatives agreed to present to the board the option of having an architect who has designed public schools work with the developer's choice.

From the existing entrance at the south of the farm, a pedestrian or driver will be able to glimpse through parallel rows of trees the Kent manor house across an existing lake.

Another vista from the farm buildings, now called the Old Farm district, runs north through a midtown area to the Town Center. At one part of the Main Street, a series of low-rise office buildings will sit on one side of a wetlands park area opposite garden apartments.

The wetlands park set between rows of buildings is akin to the Fens in Boston, said William Lennertz of the team. In general, lakes and wetlands on the site will be held in common property for use by the public, rather than allowing homes to be built on its shores.

A five-minute walk north from the farm buildings, planned to house cultural programs for the city of Gaithersburg someday, takes a visitor or resident to the shopping center off Main Street.

On the way, an adult community is proposed, placed in the middle of town activity where seniors like to live, rather than in an isolated spot so common elsewhere, said David Wolfe, an Annapolis consultant on the project.

Housing types will be mixed freely, with a mansion possibly sharing a street with rowhouses to help ensure integration of income groups. Another way to enhance affordable housing throughout neighborhoods calls for allowing homeowners to build small out-buildings off service roads or alleys to serve as "mother-in-law" apartments.

To help tie the community together, Wolfe



Jeff Taylor/Journal

Some of the principal players in the Kentlands development meet. They are (from left): mall developer Jerry Garvey, town architect Andres Duany, developer Joseph Alfandre and Gaithersburg Mayor W. Edward Bohrer Jr.



developed a model set of bylaws for a town-owners association, cousin to the typical homeowners association. Duany insisted that the bylaws give Alfandre near-complete land use control until about 80 percent of the community is built, when most of the control will be given to the community.

Alfandre may need the control in early years to see his and the design team's ideas fully implemented and to adjust when land-use problems develop, Duany said.

In the shopping center, at first three — and eventually four — department stores are planned with dozens of other shops to total 1.2 million square feet on about 75 acres with outdoor parking.

### Designing the shopping center

The shopping center caused the design team the most consternation throughout the intensive week. After a dozen other charrettes to design communities in states from Texas to Indiana, this was the first to contain a mall.

The designers wondered, aloud and cynically at times, how could a typical mall with space for up to four department stores in the midst of acres of parking fit in with an old-fashioned town?

Typical mall designs are usually interior spaces, pulling customers from the department stores along corridors of smaller shops. This well-established convention — a product of post-World War II marketing — is widely accepted as a way to increase sales and profits in an industry that operates on relatively small profit margins, Plater-Zyberk said. Large department store chains insist on it.

"The marketing influences are very conservative," she said. "But that's to be understood when you think of the investment with a low profit margin."

Duany's team had to meet several criteria set down by Melvin Simon & Associates Inc. of Indianapolis, who will be the controlling partner in the mall development with Alfandre. In order to entice the department stores to come to Kentlands, three of the department stores had to be visible from Great Seneca Highway, parking had to be close to the stores and extend about 400 feet from the buildings, and all the department stores had to be visible from each other inside the mall.

The key mall planning session lasted much of the second day when Alex Krieger, professor at Harvard University's Graduate School of Design, and Plater-Zyberk met with Alfandre and Jerry Garvey, a vice president of Simon.

Garvey made it clear that parking should be outside, thwarting one goal of hiding cars from pedestrians. At one point, Plater-Zyberk asked, "Here's the killer question: Can you imagine housing on top of a mall?"

Garvey responded, "I'm an adventure-some guy, but that's tough." Then, Plater-Zyberk again offered ideas for new mall uses, such as a day-care center, a library or offices. But Garvey said, "Keep going."

Krieger later tried the ideas again and, afterward in an interview, admitted he was disappointed with the rejections.

Later that day, the entire team met without Alfandre, hearing Plater-Zyberk's recapitulation of the mall discussions. Duany decided to shift Krieger and Plater-Zyberk away from the mall questions and put a group of younger architects on it.

The ultimate design was a mall on a north-south axis, not east-west as once proposed by Simon's architect. The north-south axis allows the mall corridor to continue in a straight line directly connecting to the town center, providing pedestrians a smooth path without having to tramp through a parking lot.

A row of low-rise offices will be built next to the mall at right angles, "to tell people driving by that there's a town in there," Duany said. The offices started as "almost a cynical reaction to the mall, but came out looking quite nice," Duany told Alfandre.

Alfandre's reaction was that the Simon group and the department stores eventually will appreciate fully how important the town design is and will want to modify the mall to become the true town center.

"I'm completely committed to having the mall a complete part of the town," he said.

Neighbors in subdivisions surrounding the Kentlands project said in interviews they were somewhat worried about the mall's lack of covered parking and its size. But they were easily more excited about the way the overall Kentlands looked, and some were relieved that detached homes, instead of apartments, will border the existing Orchards townhouses southwest of the site.

### Trust, but verify

Many questions still must be aired about the mall, as well as traffic generated by the overall Kentlands project that could compete for limited road capacity with county biotechnology developments in the Shady Grove West planning area. There will be public hearings and city actions on several matters, including creating a new mixed use zone for the property, that could last beyond this year, city officials said.

Gaithersburg Mayor W. Edward Bohrer Jr., an enthusiastic supporter of Kentlands' potential value to the city, used President Reagan's words, "Trust, but verify. We will be watching."

But the prevailing attitude toward Kentlands is one of hope. Things can be different from the accepted ways of planning and living, observers said.

"People are ready for something different like this," said Robert Mitchell, a prominent county home builder who said he was "extremely interested" in building at Kentlands.

Mitchell said he was impressed with the town's emphasis on mixing uses and putting homes close to services to help cut down on the use of the automobile.

In his lectures, Duany calls on returning urban standards to traditional ways, all the way from the treatment of the pedestrian to



The 19th century Kentlands mansion will remain as a centerpiece in the Kentlands design.

Bill Wood/Journal

using conventional materials such as brick and clapboard that age more beautifully than modern materials such as concrete and aluminum.

Building smaller communities with jobs and shopping nearby also can reduce traveling time, freeing young parents from becoming chauffeurs and putting life and activity within reach of the elderly, he has said.

One time over lunch at the charrette, Duany and his brother, Douglas Duany, a landscape architect who principally designed the parks on the site, talked about their motivations for building new towns traditionally.

"My father and my grandfather were developers in Cuba," Andres Duany said. "My grandfather, can you believe it, actually burned acres of mahogany trees there to make room for buildings."

Douglas Duany added, "I guess you could say we're the new generation trying to make up for the old."

Plater-Zyberk, whose father was an architect, sees her buildings and towns almost as people.

She and Duany have no children, since it would be "tough" to do the kind of work they do and raise a family, she said.

"So many people have so much to do these days and having children is hard. Andres and I joke that we have buildings and not babies. We have towns of multiple buildings."

Alfandre is entering the Kentlands enterprise with his father, Jack Alfandre, as a silent financial partner. His father's backing and long success as a county developer are a part of the force that gives Alfandre the confidence to try something different, Alfandre said.

At the end of the charrette, Duany said of Alfandre, "Joe is the developer I would like to take with me to all my town charrettes . . . He really believes it's important to do things this way, and if it works, you have a new model."

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