

INTRODUCTION

THE IRVINE COMPANY'S CRITICAL ROLE IN CREATING CITYHOOD FOR IRVINE

As I reflect back on the decade long role that the Company played in Irvine's emergence as an incorporated city I'm struck by the fact that few if any of my peers in the new towns movement of the sixties even had cityhood on their radar screens. Early in the 1960's the Company was part of a group engaged in one form or other of planning and building what we each described as a "new town." Among those in what we labeled as The New Community Developers Group were: Newhall Land Company (Valencia), Mission Viejo, Foster City, Rouse Company (Columbia), Reston Virginia, Hawaii Kai, California Land, Leslie Properties, General Electric, Transamerica and Jonathan Development. Each was dedicated to building their respective "new town." We periodically met at each others site, exchanged ideas, traveled to Europe to view its' new towns and debated the merits and differences of our own respective efforts.

As you can imagine we had many healthy debates reflecting our own biases, size, location and market place. In many ways it reminds me of the debates that I read about on the pro and cons of what is now described as new urbanisms. The similarity between then and now is that rarely, if ever, does the subject of political governance (cityhood and school district boundaries) come up. Among our group new town developers we were the only company advocating cityhood and school district boundaries as a major elements in our planning. Some disregarded both because they were already part of some city or district and had little chance of influencing them. Most were opposed, however, fearful of having to compete with resident's ideas of what form and structure their town would become.

In contrast, what Pereira suggested in his brief but prophetic 1959 & 1960 reports was that within the vast and mostly undefined land the city of Irvine was to emerge within we needed both the tools of the urban designer and city planner. And it is because of that advice that from the beginning we said Irvine would be more than a well-designed community. It was our goal that in time it would become an incorporated city and ideally the new unified school district boundaries would coincide with the city's boundaries. And it is because of that I believe the city of Irvine's identity as a place and a community is the benefactor.

What we started with was a ranch three times larger than that of San Francisco. Additionally, it bordered on six existing cities each of which had designs on portions of the ranch. Pereira's suggestion of 10,000-acres for the new town left the Company with the question of what to do with the remaining 83,000-acres. And by the late 1960s the appetites of our adjacent cities to expand and a recent new law requiring all existing elementary and high school districts unify into new K-12 districts I became increasingly concerned that unless we made clear our own plans for school district and city boundaries for the entire ranch we could soon be gobbled up by the adjacent cities and newly proposed school districts.

The following recounts the process we went through to establish what is now the city of Irvine and the Irvine unified school district.