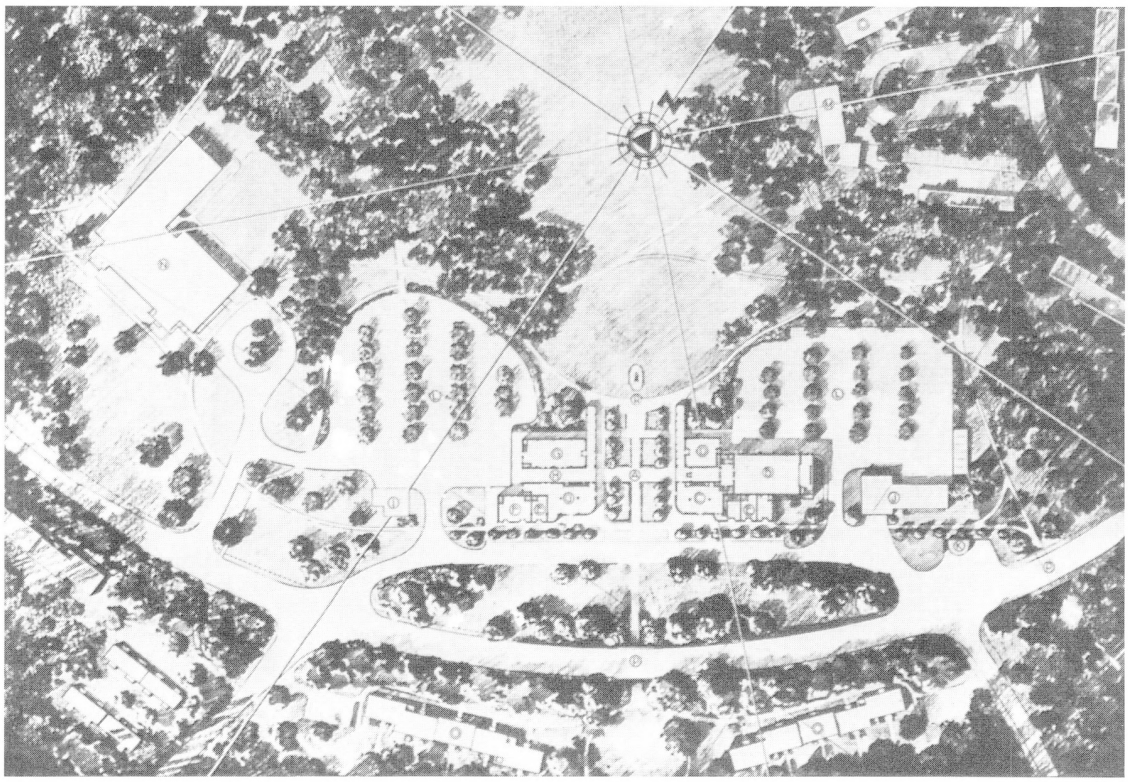
place for families to spend a weekend afternoon and to bring guests from out of town.

Variations on the Farmers Market idea continued to be built in the region and elsewhere in the state through the end of the decade. By that time, the type had gained widespread recognition among Californians and food retailers nationwide.[25] Yet the specialized nature of such places, which necessitated a novel ambience and was mostly targeted to persons of some means, limited their applicability in the retail sphere. Perhaps the greatest impact the type had on broader patterns was in demonstrating that a sizable inward-looking establishment could attract a commensurate trade. It did not have to abut, or be particularly conspicuous from, the street. A lot filled with cars could catch the eye as much as a building and perhaps be an even better adverstisement. The relation of architecture to cars did not yield strong visual results, however. The character of these new complexes seemed to exist in spite of the automobile; the attractions lay in a secluded realm beyond.

Divorcing the shoppers from both the street and the parking lot proved quite another matter for outlets that were less specialized or exclusive in nature. Beyond the stillborn proposal for Carthay Center, only two others for complexes structured to meet routine shopping needs incorporated a mall as a central feature prior to World War II. Only one of these was realized. That shopping center was at Greenbelt, the prototypical Resettlement Administration town near Washington, D.C.[26]

EXPERIMENTS

The Greenbelt center epitomized what housing reformers considered an essential feature of community development, just as a previous generation



of real estate developers had advocated a retail complex for their guaranteed neighborhoods. The shared aim was to provide basic goods and services for residents in a contained area. Equally important, and unlike private-sector counterparts save at model company towns, the Greenbelt complex was an integral part of the community center, which included the school, library, swimming pool, youth hall, and municipal offices. The underlying objective differed, too, for this ensemble was to be socially regenerative, restoring a sense of civic spirit and intercourse believed to be absent in the modern city. Thus the center's foremost purpose was to provide a setting for residents to congregate. Few existing places were conducive to this aim, Greenbelt's planners believed, because of motor vehicle congestion. Preindustrial settlement patterns were believed more suited to human interaction; the mall was a means of adapting these patterns to contemporary needs. Clarence Stein, who served as an advisor to Greenbelt's planning, emphasized that the shopping center's pedestrian way was a "modern market square."[27]

Greenbelt was, of course, planned for the motorist. Those responsible for its design understood the central role of the car in population dispersal. They realized, too, that many residents would rely on their automobiles for shopping trips. Generous provision was made for off-street parking, and the shopping center was referred to as a "drive-in" facility. Yet the entire community, including its commercial core, was laid out on the assumption that people should walk more than drive. As a result, the two car lots serving the retail center were given peripheral sites at the rear (figure 203). Equally important, these lots were divorced from the

202
Town and Country Market, 350 S. Fairfax Avenue, Los Angeles, 1941–1942, Rowland H. Crawford, architect; demolished 1960. Photo Al Green & Associates, ca. 1946. (Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History.)

203
Greenbelt Shopping Center, Crescent Road, Greenbelt, Maryland, 1936–1937, Douglas D. Ellington and R. J. Wadsworth, architects, Hale Walker, planner. Preliminary site plan showing cross-axial mall (H) and arrangement of buildings (D, G) modified in execution as well as school (N) and firehouse/garage (J). (*Architectural Record,* September 1936, 197.)

204
Greenbelt shopping center, general view looking north. Photo Harris & Ewing, ca. 1937. (District of Columbia Public Library.)

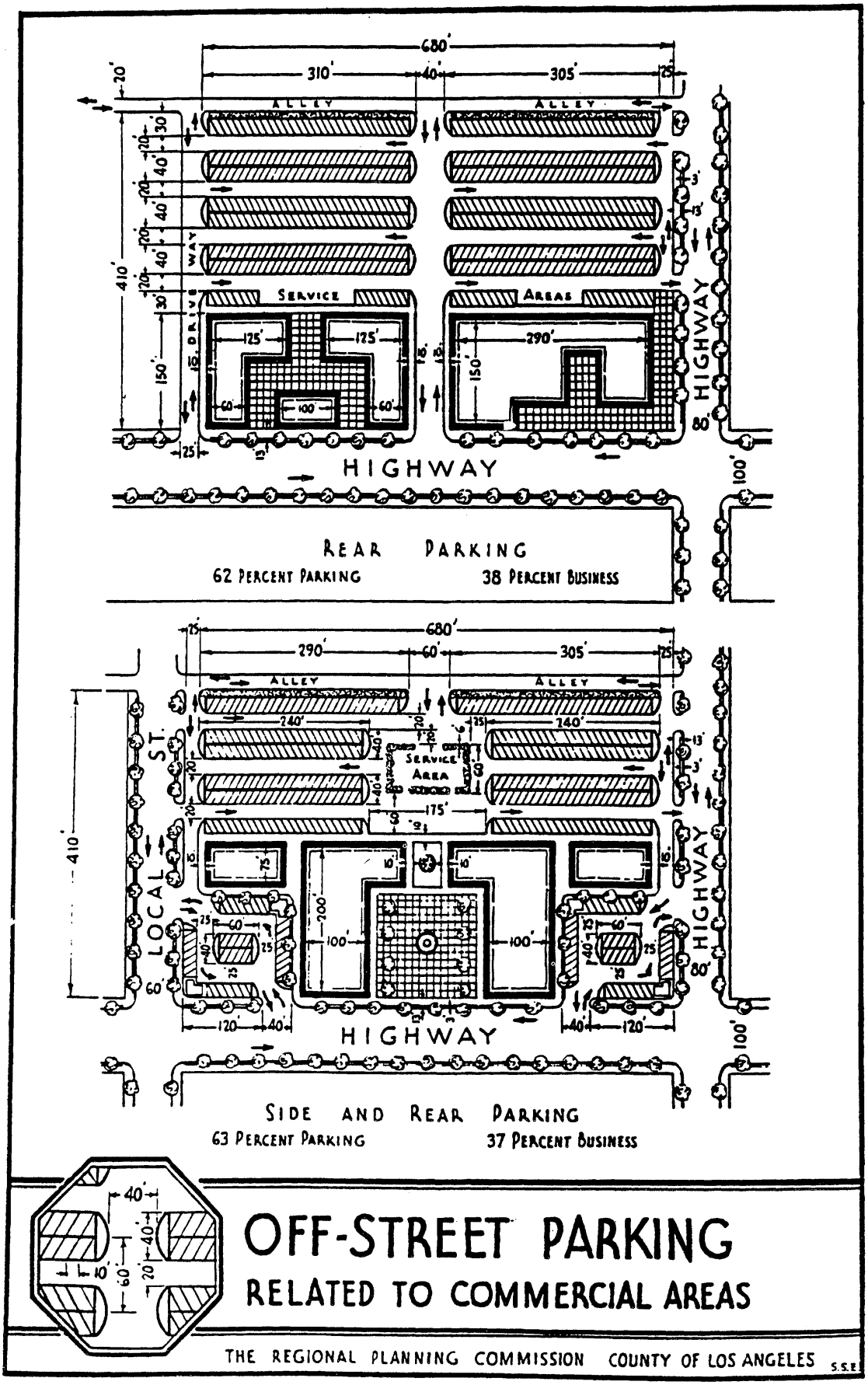
mall that served as the focus; the car could not be ignored, but neither should it be celebrated, in this schema. Stein later wrote that one of the design's most significant accomplishments was the "complete segregation" of pedestrians from automobiles. Revealing an idealized view of the distant past shared by many reformers of the period, he added that "even more than in the characteristic European medieval marketplaces, there is a definite exclusion of active flow of traffic from the area of peaceful shopping."[28] Allusions to a preindustrial heritage in southern California shopping courts were used primarily as scenographic devices for simple commercial ends. Stein's interest in that past, on the other hand, was spurred by a concern for human interaction.

The Greenbelt shopping center also embodied the primacy of open space as a means of improving community life. Providing a maximum amount of light, air, and room for movement was deemed essential not just to stimulate outdoor recreation, socializing, and civic endeavors, but to foster ties between rural and town inhabitants. Greenbelt would create a local market for farm products raised nearby and serve as a community center for farmers, just as it allowed residents to partake of the pleasures of the countryside. The model for this relationship was, once again, based on a cleansed perspective of the past. Greenbelt was to function much like an idealized view of a traditional New England town center. In physical terms, the shopping complex and other community buildings stood as islands, united by the open space that was to function as a latter-day common. This model may well have been one reason why the mall was designed as if to suggest a place developed before the buildings on either side. The shopping center was centrally located, yet it stood at the edge of the populated area (figure 204). The mall afforded a visual link between the space amid the dwelling units and a more open area that was to serve as a park, leading to the greenbelt beyond.

No clear evidence has been found documenting who introduced the mall in the Greenbelt design; however, Stein was the most likely figure. Greenbelt's planner was Hale Walker, who had worked for architect Jacques Gréber in France, then John Nolen in Boston before joining the Maryland State Planning Commission in 1930. One of the town's two architects, Douglas Ellington, had enjoyed a substantial practice in Asheville, North Carolina, before the depression. The other, Reginald Wadsworth, had worked for some of Philadelphia's leading designers of residences. In none of these cases does the record reveal much defiance of convention.[29] On the other hand, Stein had been a maverick for over a decade. As a consultant to the Resettlement Administration he had a formative influence on the Greenbelt towns program and a significant impact upon the design of Greenbelt itself, which was the least orthodox of the three realized communities.[30] Stein composed the guidelines for shopping center development in the greenbelt towns, and was highly respected among housing reformers as the authority on the subject. After Greenbelt, he was an even more vigorous champion of the mall, arguing that it should be a key component of a shopping center's plan. During the late 1940s, he worked on the design of several such complexes, most of them in southern California.[31]

The Greenbelt center had no immediate effect on retail development. Even counterparts in the two later greenbelt towns relied on less unusual configurations. Not until the early 1950s, when the mall was emerging as an important component of shopping center design, did the Greenbelt complex get recognition as an important precursor.[32] One reason for its earlier neglect may have been associational. Greenbelt was widely criticized as a government boondoggle, a project more expensive than conditions warranted, and even as a covert instrument of socialism. The shopping center was run as a cooperative enterprise, an aspect that received far more publicity than its plan.[33] Most business interests probably viewed the endeavor as utopian at best and at worst as a threat to the very foundation of their practices.

On the other hand, many young architects and planners alike considered Greenbelt a blueprint for the future. The extent to which the shopping center influenced subsequent thinking is suggested by the Los Angeles County Regional Planning Commission staff's 1941 adaptation, bereft of surrounding green space and regularized for the ubiquitous grid (figure 205). Yet it is doubtful that business interests considered such models more than wishful thinking. The mall concept might never have progressed further were it not for the unusual conditions that shaped the defense housing program during World War II. Much as with the sponsorship of Greenbelt, the pressing needs for shelter among workers at defense plants removed commercial development from its conventional sphere. Wartime housing programs had no social agenda; with few exceptions, projects were of a temporary nature—places that could be quickly built utilizing a minimum of materials required for combat purposes. A number of the architects involved, however, saw the need to create tens of thou-



sands of dwelling units as an unparalleled opportunity to advance the cause of reform in community development. New standards set here could enter the mainstream once peace returned.

Linda Vista, located on the northern edge of San Diego and the first project authorized under the Lanham Defense Housing Act of 1940, became an important point of departure. Designed by the Public Buildings Administration in Washington, with former Los Angeles architect Gilbert Stanley Underwood as the principal in charge, the scheme entailed 3,000 dwelling units for more than 13,000 people, forming "a self-contained community."[34] Linda Vista was developed in great haste, yet unlike most of the wartime housing that followed, it was built for long-term occupancy. The master plan of Greenbelt as well as that of Radburn were clearly important sources of inspiration. Salient features included small clusters of units, many of them on cul-de-sacs, and large blocks that provided abundant open space, kept roads to a minimum, and separated pedestrian from vehicular traffic to a considerable degree. Equally distinctive was the large "commercial and administrative center" designed to address the needs of the community as a whole with two ranges of buildings that opened onto a broad, landscaped mall (figure 206).

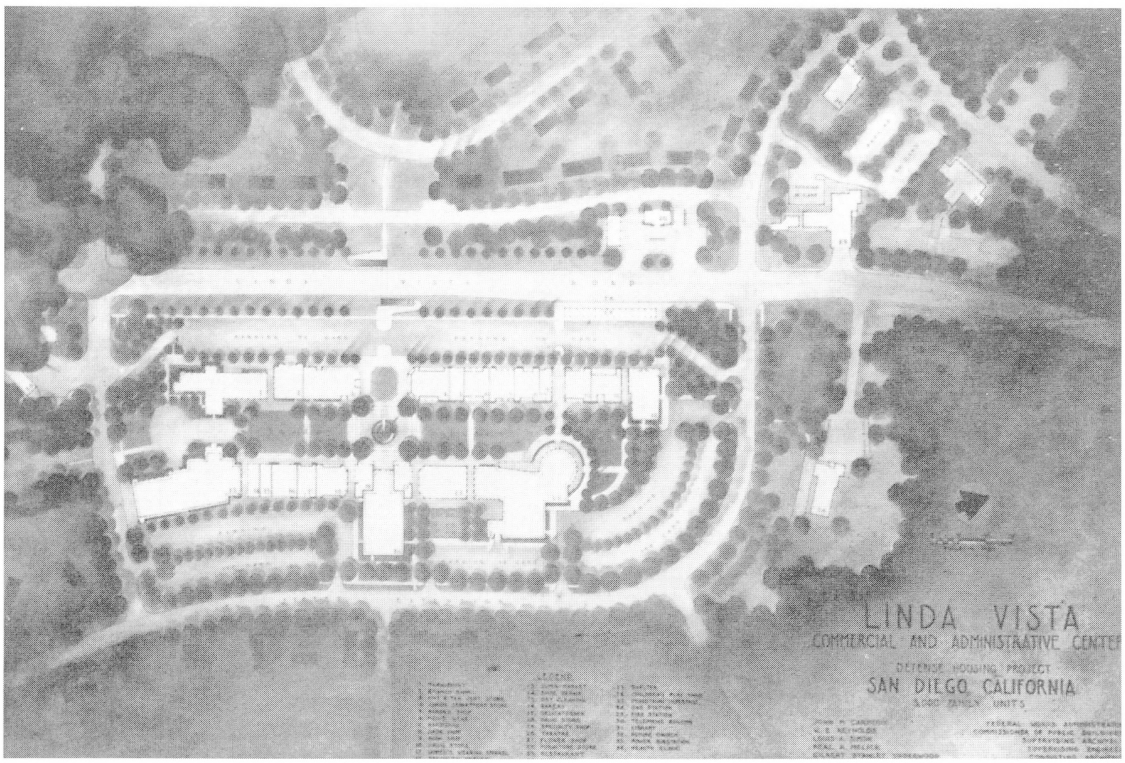
The modest shopping center at Greenbelt provided a springboard for the Linda Vista complex only in broad conceptual terms. A counterpart planned in 1936 for the stillborn sister town of Greenbrook, New Jersey, was a more useful prototype in its scale and arrangement (figure 207). Designed by Albert Mayer (Stein's friend and kindred spirit in community

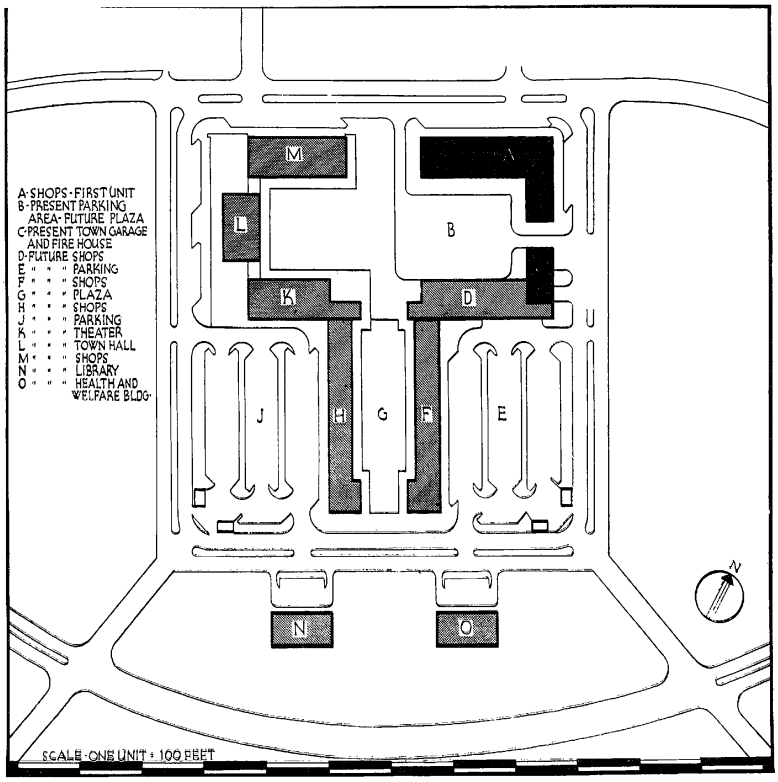
205

Proposed models for development of outlying business districts, Regional Planning Commission, County of Los Angeles, 1941. (*A Comprehensive Report on the Master Plan of Highways . . .* , 54.)

206

Linda Vista commercial and administrative center, Linda Vista Road and Ulric Street, San Diego, preliminary plan, 1941, Federal Works Agency, Louis A. Simon Supervising Architect, Gilbert Stanley Underwood, consulting architect, S. E. Sanders, planner. (*Pencil Points*, November 1941, 705.)





planning), Allan Kamstra (Stein's former employee), and Henry Wright (Stein's former associate), the layout rendered the mall the primary space, at once inward looking yet easily reached from all directions. The plan was illustrated in a widely read article by Mayer, which both reiterated the methods for shopping center development championed by Stein and provided the most detailed analysis then available in print of the approach used in planning the greenbelt towns. Mayer's piece became an important reference work for practitioners who sought a new course for community development.[35]

The Linda Vista center was more formal in arrangement, embodying Beaux-Arts planning principles of axiality and hierarchy. These attributes are not surprising given the academic proclivities of the Supervising Architect of the Treasury's office, from which Underwood was appointed to oversee the project. Yet the importance of the mall, not just as promenade but as a major organizing element of the plan, and the balance attained between pedestrian space and convenient, accessible parking space bear affinity to the Greenbrook scheme. Having spent most of his career in Los Angeles, Underwood also was well aware of local precedents for the arrangement.[36]

While the housing at Linda Vista was completed in less than a year, the commercial center remained on paper, a fate that would become common with such projects. The configuration may have caused real estate developers to shy away, but, irrespective of layout, developers often considered such ventures too risky once temporary housing became the norm. Thus by the middle of 1942, the federal government reluctantly

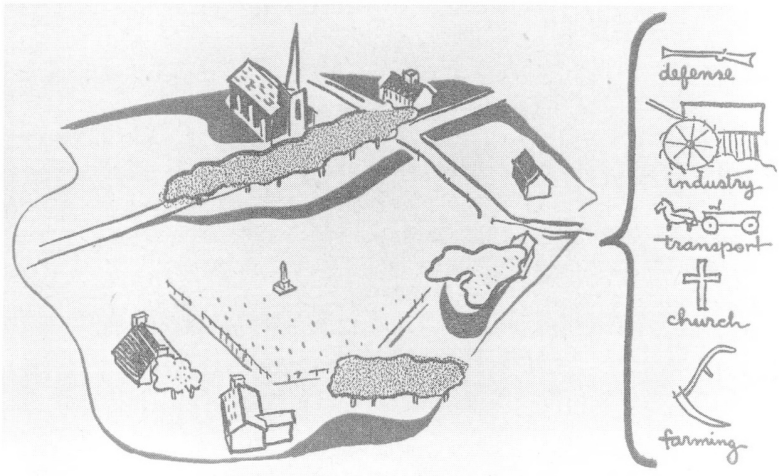
committed itself to sponsor commercial facilities when outside parties could not be secured. Guidelines were prepared by Stein and Samuel Ratensky in June 1942 for the newly formed Federal Public Housing Authority, which had charge of all such federally funded projects aside from those erected by the armed services. An original provision, that stores "should front on project open spaces, reached by pedestrian paths free from traffic hazard," failed to become part of the final document, issued within a few months of the draft, perhaps because officials considered it a hindrance to securing developers.[37] Yet the idea of the mall was now sufficiently accepted among architects that it figured prominently in designs for two projects already in progress: Willow Run, near Detroit, and McLoughlin Heights near Portland, Oregon. Malls were incorporated in several other schemes planned during the months that followed. Pietro Belluschi, architect of the McLoughlin Heights center, recently recalled that "we were given only days to complete projects which would have taken normally months to plan—literally we had no time to ponder, to consult or to exchange ideas."[38]

There was no dispute that the mall was the optimal configuration among young modernist architects, who embraced Stein's community planning principles if not his somewhat more conservative approach to building design. The greenbelt towns and several other demonstration projects such as Baldwin Hills Village in Los Angeles (1938–1942) were revered as models for organizing the site as much as, it not more than, avant-garde examples abroad.[39] The mall thus continued to be part of a broader agenda of reform in development patterns that was propelled by social as well as aesthetic concerns. Wartime conditions allowed architects to employ this new approach to retail development as a matter of course even though no demand existed for it in the marketplace.

An equally important legacy of the greenbelt towns was the concept of the mall as ideal focus for community life. The generic New England common seemed a logical source of inspiration because it embodied the social vision while satisfying the avant-garde's new taste for preindus-

207
Greenbrook shopping center, Somerset County, New Jersey, 1936, Albert Mayer and Henry S. Churchill, architects, Henry Wright and Allan Kamstra, planners; project. Site plan. (*Architectural Forum*, February 1937, 128).

208
Diagrammatic sketch of New England common, ca. 1943. (*Architectural Forum*, August 1943, 67.)



trial archetypes. As a model, the common was venerated not for its picturesque attributes or romantic associations, of which eclectic architects were so fond, but because it was purported to have an inherent utilitarian logic manifested in elegantly simple solutions. The New England common also was appreciated because it was seen as an American phenomenon. Three months after publishing the Syracuse plan, the *Architectural Forum*'s editors discussed the common as an exemplar of what community centers should again be:

> Our colonial villages were not arranged like medieval towns, yet they too suited the needs of the people who lived and worked in them. Because many of the early settlers were refugees from religious persecution, the church was their first thought. Life was hard and building was a slow process, and so the church quickly became more than a religious edifice—it also housed the town meetings, the nucleus of our democratic form of government. Near the church the houses were clustered, partly for protection, but chiefly because people in a new and empty land wanted to live close to each other. It made trading, handicraft manufacture and social intercourse easier. The Common around which the shops, houses, church and school were grouped was a social center, a parade ground, a grazing field, and it gave light and air—breathing space—to the community [figure 208].[40]

Assumptions about the past based on functional determinism were not by nature any more accurate than those based on sentiment that young modernists so disparaged; nevertheless, this ahistorical perspective emerged as a driving force behind the common's adaptation as a mall in new commercial development. Belluschi explained:

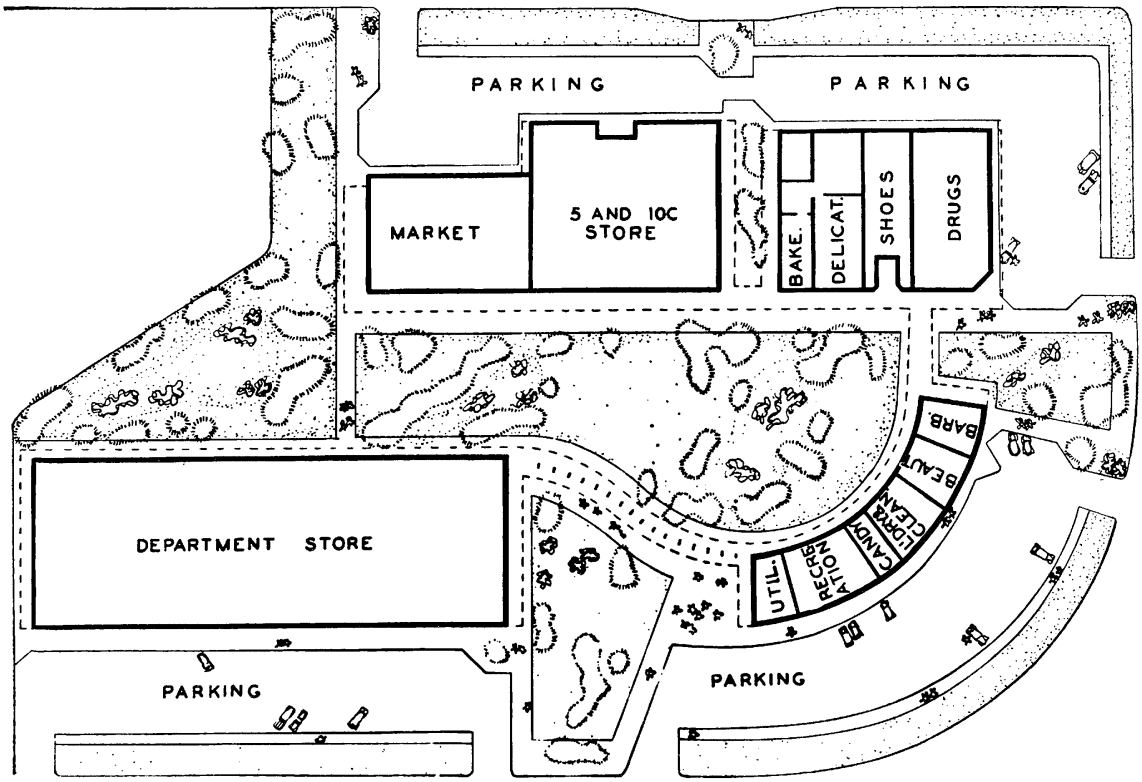
> People learn to think of the shopping center as the focus and symbol of their community life, especially if in addition to the bare shopping requirements there are theaters and tearooms and meeting halls where people may use their leisure time in various social and cultural pursuits. It is by speculating on the far-reaching possibilities of these renewed community ties—akin to those existing in the New England towns of old with all their restraining as well as liberating powers—that we begin to see the appearance of a fully developed community life in contrast to the cruel, amorphous, and disorganized modern city.[41]

The New England common probably held appeal for more abstract aesthetic reasons as well. Besides encompassing low-density settlement around a sizable open space, this archetype was conducive to the decomposition of parts that had long been a central characteristic of avant-garde design. Major components could be expressed separately as free-standing pavilions, connected by canopies over walks, the ensemble unified by the mall itself. Such a relationship need not be achieved through Beaux-Arts conventions, but rather in a more informal, relaxed vein, ostensibly guided by use, topography, and orientation but also reflecting compositional devices that emanated from early twentieth-century abstract art. The mall thus enabled the avant-garde to design commercial facilities in much the same way its members had already established for schools and other types harboring a number of related components.[42]

Wartime conditions proved beneficial to realization of mall plans for several reasons. Few members of the avant-garde had had the opportunity to put their ideas about community design into practice during the 1930s, when responsibility for most public housing projects was delegated

to local authorities who, in turn, tended to hire large, established firms with a more conservative approach to design.[43] Now many thousands of dwelling units were needed quickly, increasing the demand for architectural services, while the draft was fast diminishing the available pool. A number of housing administrators in Washington had become partial to, or at least accepting of, the modernists' call for change in patterns of community development. Although they remained in a minority, a substantial portion of the avant-garde architects in the United States participated in the housing program.[44] When a shopping mall was included in these plans, there was little time for local groups to argue over the configuration. Retailers, so bound to streetfront orientation, were in no position to quibble either, since the projects promised a lucrative trade. The pedestrian focus also seemed more acceptable since most of the target audience lived nearby and since gas rationing meant that most consumers would be arriving on foot or by bus. Unlike Greenbelt, these wartime projects did not seem to pose much of a threat to conventional business practices. But for the architects who created them, the designs were considered of vital importance in defining priorities for the postwar era.[45] Federal sponsorship, the chaotic conditions wrought by exigency, and the idealism of the designers combined to propagate the shopping mall in a nation that might never have accepted it otherwise. Few examples were actually realized, but they had a significant impact on postwar practices. No scheme was more influential than that finally erected at Linda Vista in 1943.

209
Linda Vista Shopping Center, 1943–1944, Earl F. Gilbertson and Whitney R. Smith, associated architects, Harold Dankworth, landscape architect; altered. Site plan. (Talbot Hamlin, *Forms and Functions of Twentieth-Century Architecture,* IV: 118.)



MODELS

Built according to a new design, the Linda Vista shopping center provided the most coherent resolution to date of the mall as the central component of a commercial facility. Unlike the initial scheme, this one had no defined front or main entrance in any traditional sense (figure 209). The perimeter was occupied almost entirely by parking. Street elevations were treated in a matter-of-fact way to accommodate deliveries and other utilitarian functions. Perceptually, the dominant image was not a facade but a three-dimensional play of mass and void: a broad green defined by four buildings, each different in size and shape, and a canopied walk connecting them (figure 210). Wide separations between the buildings extended as walkways to the street, establishing clear ties from the approaches to the core. But the mall that occupied that core was the paramount feature, creating the sensation of a neighborhood park around which retail services were grouped. Grass, trees, and benches invited relaxation and play (figure 211). Here, wrote Whitney Smith, the Pasadena architect who designed the complex, "instead of garish store fronts and a raucous discord of signs there are the order and peace of an early village green." Here, cooed the *Forum*'s editors, was "the full-dress presentation" of the idea they had advanced for planting grass on Main Street.[46]

At the same time, the stores were unmistakably commercial in character, employing a minimalist vocabulary and curvilinear forms, dramatically lit at night (figure 212). The design also capitalized on wartime building materials restrictions to exude some of the studied casualness of the Farmers Market and its progeny.[47] Like the Farmers Market, too, and like Olvera Street and shopping courts in the region, the mall was a world in itself that seemed quite removed from the twentieth-century metropolis.