In 1934 the federal government built the town of Greenbelt, Maryland, a bold experiment in town planning and cooperative living. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, millions of people were unemployed and thousands were crowding into the nation’s cities, looking for work. They were also seeking homes for their families at the same time that the country faced a serious shortage of affordable housing. In response, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the National Resources Administration (NRA) and the Community Reorganization Project, known as the “Greenbelt Project,” was approved. A Washington D.C. government professor, to head the agency, Tugwell had the untapped dream of building communities throughout the country that would create construction jobs for unemployed workers, provide well-designed homes for lower-income people, and demonstrate to developers how to build housing for the growing city planning principles he advocated. In addition to Greenbelt, the government built two other New Deal “greenbelt towns.” Greenbelt, Ohio, near Cincinnati, and Greenbrier, Wisconsin, near Milwaukee. When first visited Greenbelt, President Roosevelt was so impressed that he declared the town “an experiment that ought to be copied by every community in the United States.” In 1949, Greenbelt became a National Historic Landmark.

Originally, all the town’s businesses were owned cooperatively by the residents. The cooperative businesses in Greenbelt included a grocery store, drug store, movie theater, gas station, newspaper, and soda shop. The residents shared in the businesses profits, and helped decide upon the products offered, the prices, and the movies shown in the theater. When the government said it was due in the 1952, the residents formed a cooperative in order to buy the houses. These original homes are still owned cooperatively by the residents. The Co-op Supermarket and the local newspaper, the News Review, remains as cooperatives, while the other businesses are now privately owned.

Parking:
Free public parking is located in designated parking lots. Buses can unload in the parking lot behind the Library. Please observe that some parking spaces have time lines.

Restrooms:
Public restrooms are located in the Community Center, the Public Library, the Youth Center, the Aquatic and Fitness Center, and at “Buddy” Attick Park near the playground.

Suggested Walking Routes
The Heart of Historic Greenbelt
Greenbelt’s historic past is easily appreciated by taking a self-guided walking tour along the pedestrian paths that surround the public buildings and original houses in Greenbelt’s center. This walk highlights seven interpretive panels in the historic district beginning at the Community Center. (Approximately 15 minutes.)

1. Community Center
15 Crescent Road. This building is open to the public Monday – Saturday from 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. Sunday 9:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., and the halls are lined with historic photographs illustrating Greenbelt’s development. The Greenbelt Museum presents exhibitions and other events throughout the year. The museum entrance is located on the corner of Crescent Road and Southway. (See #1, #2, and #3.)

2. Greenbelt Library
11 Crescent Road. The Greenbelt Library is run by the Prince George’s County Memorial Library System. The Greenbelt Library began as a guarantors partnership between residents and the City and was housed in what is now the Community Center. In 1955, the Prince George’s County Memorial Library System took over the operation of the Library. The current facility opened in 1970 in this central, pedestrian-accessible location. The Library contains the Taggart Room, a special collection of books and archival materials relating to the history of the Greenbelt towns, city planning, and the cooperative movement. Rebound Taggart ran the Rebound Administration and was responsible for the creation of the Greenbelt towns. You can access the Taggart collection online at http://www.pgc.lib.md.us taggart.

3. Pedestrian Underpasses and Parkway Overpass
Greenbelt was designed with pedestrian underpasses that run below Crescent Road so that residents could cross the major thoroughfare without risk. These underpasses included in the town’s original designs, but only four were built because of budget constraints. A pedestrian overpass was built in 1983 in order for Eleanor Roosevelt High School students to walk from Greenbelt Center to their school on Greenbelt Road. It is located at the end of Gardner Road and passes over the Baltimore/Washington Parkway.

4. Greenbelt Museum
Located in 1987, the Greenbelt Museum includes a historical house and an exhibit room in the Community Center. The Greenbelt Museum invites visitors to experience the lives of ordinary Americans during two momentous events of the twentieth century, the Great Depression and World War II. Greenbelt reflects the extraordinary response to these times and the planned community’s evolving legacy. You can access the museum online at www.greenbeltmuseum.org.

5. House at 10-B Crescent Road
This house was originally an original house near the center of the town that is restored and furnished with objects from the period 1952 to 1946. The furniture on display was designed and built to fit these homes by the New Deal’s Special Skills Division. The house is open on Sundays, from 1 to 5 p.m. on other days you can visit the interpretive panel along the garden-side path behind the house. For special group tours, please call 301-507-4582.

6. Parks and Playgrounds
Greenbelt was planned with children in mind. The town contained 13 playgrounds originally located in the green space between the houses. Today there are over 20 playgrounds in the area of historic Greenbelt. All are located in the green space between the homes. The Lincoln Park is located on the interior of Greenbelt’s “superblocks” so that children can access them without having to cross any roads. The houses all face the shared green space with a “garden side” door connecting the house to the system of pedestrian pathways. Greenbelt originally included extensive woodlands surrounding the town. Hiking and camping parties were regular activities for Greenbelt’s early residents.

Imaginative play structures and a basketball court are located at “Buddy” Attick Park near the parking lot. The park behind 73 Northway Road is also noteworthy in addition to a playground, Park includes beautiful views of the Baltimore Agricultural Research Farm, a basketball half-court and a small picnic pavilion with a grill.

7. Original Houses
Greenbelt’s designer used two housing styles; those made with cedar blinds and flat roofs and those with brick exterior and peaked slate roofs. Both housing types originally had small curtain windows. There were 887 units built initially, which included units in apartment buildings near the town’s center. At first, the homes were painted off-white with bright green, brown, or red trim. In 1941, the federal government built 1600 more units in Greenbelt in order to house people coming to Washington to help with the effort during World War II. These homes featured frame construction, peaked roofs and such with chimneys.

In 1952, Greenbelt residents formed a cooperative in order to buy the houses. All three original houses are still owned cooperatively. (See information on G.H.I., Parkes, and Wonson on the wayside panel near the G.H.I. offices on Hamilton Place.)

8. Roosevelt Center
The town’s center includes the original movie theater, now owned by the City of Greenbelt, the Co-op grocery store, restaurants and small businesses. With its 80-foot clock tower, the Greenbelt Theater is one of the last large-screen movie theaters in the Washington D.C. area. The Mother and Child statue in the center mall was created for this space by New Deal sculptor Lorraine Thomas Strauss. Please visit the interpretive panel in the Roosevelt Center for more information about the Center’s history.

9. Aquatic and Fitness Center
The center provides indoor and outdoor pools, exercise equipment and classes at this facility. Please observe that some pool areas have time lines. Also, the panel describing this site located on the path between the Community and outdoor pool.

10. Youth/Recreation Center
The Youth Center, run by the City’s Recreation Department, is a drop-in facility that is open daily. It includes a gymnasium, game room, free-weight room, locker rooms, multi-purpose room and classrooms. The Youth Center opened in 1961, replacing a smaller facility called the “Drop Inn.” The city expanded this building in 1971. Directly behind this building is Braden Field, an athletic field named after Roy S. Braden. Braden aided in the selection of Greenbelt’s first residents and was the Greenbelt’s first town manager.

11. Greenbelt Homes Inc. (GHI) Housing Cooperative
Greenbelt Homes Inc. is a not-for-profit housing cooperative encompassing 1600 homes, including all of Greenbelt’s original town homes. A housing organization formed in 1949 when Greenbelt’s residents pooled their resources in order to purchase the town from the federal government. It was later called Greenbelt Workers Housing Corporation (GWHC). The city expected that GWHC would sell the town to a developer and that town would be dismantled. GHI homes are now owner-occupied. Owners have the right to purchase a portion of their dwellings. Owners may sell their homes and receive any equity that has accrued. For more information, visit the wayside panel near the G.H.I. offices on Hamilton Place.

12. Community Gardens
Greenbelt has included all gardens on the city’s tax chart from the early days when the Greenbelt Garden Club formed to encourage people to plant flowers and vegetables. Club members still use the garden plots in front and behind the G.H.I. building and to the right of the path on Gardenoak that leads to the Parkway overpass.

13. Rosary Center
A Rosary Center containing grapes commemorates the site of the Rosary Center. In 1768, John Hamilton purchased 240 acres that extended from this area to much of Greenbelt East. At least seven Hamilton family members were buried in this graveyard during the 1800s.

14. Fire Station
15 Crescent Road. Greenbelt’s volunteer fire department has operated since 1938. It originally shared a building next to the gas station on Crescent Road with the police department. Please see the wayside panel on Crescent Road near the gas station to view a picture of the building as a fire station. The current fire station, located between Parkway and St. Hugh’s Catholic Church, opened in 1961.

15. Parkside Homes
(Homes located on Forest Way.) In 1938 a company called General Houses of Chicago built ten experimental prefabricated homes and set up a program for the residents to own these homes cooperatively after ten years of payments. A home at the end of Forest Way was given a unique name in its original appearance.

16. Police Station
550 Crescent Road, Greenbelt’s police force, founded in 1937, originally patrolled the lake and wooded areas of Greenbelt on horseback. The police first shared a station with the fire department, and later were located in the Roosevelt Center and then in the Municipal Building with the city offices. In 1989, the City of Greenbelt constructed a dedicated building for the police on Crescent Road near Kenilworth Avenue.

17. Albert S. “Buddy” Attick Park
Greenbelt’s lake park is named after Albert S. “Buddy” Attick. Attick served Greenbelt in many capacities. He was among the construction workers who built Greenbelt, and then was the town’s first mounted police officer. He later rose through the ranks of the city government until he retired as the much admired Director of Public Works. The park features an exceptional playground, a basketball court, picnic areas, a band stand, and beautiful Greenbelt Lake, with a 1.25 mile loop trail for walking and biking.

18. Greenbelt Park
The Greenbelt Park Service offers hiking and camping in wooded Greenbelt Park, located on Greenbelt Road (Route 193) between Kenilworth Avenue and the Capital Beltway. The land was originally part of the City’s “green belt” and has been under the control of the National Park Service since 1950.

Credits
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