



## MILLENNIUM MOMENT

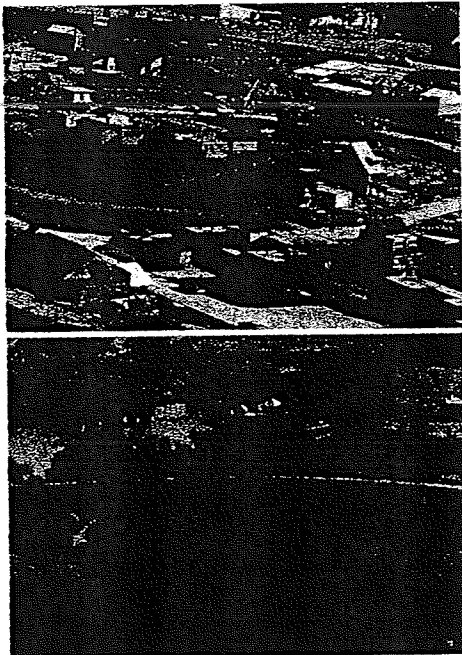
by William Swanson

# Green Dreams

Before there was the "new urbanism," there was the "new town" of Jonathan.



To the many who shared the glittering vision of a carefully planned and meticulously integrated "new town" built quite literally from the ground up on rolling farmland twenty-five miles southwest of downtown Minneapolis, the idea known as Jonathan (after Jonathan Carver, an eighteenth-century Englishman who explored the region) must have looked like a verdant slice of heaven.



Greater Jonathan, 1971: Bird's-eye views of the "new town" as a work in progress—looking northeast over Village One (top) and south over Lake Jonathan.

When Henry McKnight unveiled plans for Jonathan during the summer of 1967, he told the *Minneapolis Star* that he hoped to make it "the most secure and safe city in this part of the world." He promised that "not even a tree will be disturbed if we can help it" and intimated that God himself had a hand in the development. A wealthy state senator, rancher, and developer who believed "the highest and best use

of land is people," McKnight conjured a cluster of industrial parks, shopping and play areas, and five complementary "villages" that eventually would be home to 50,000 persons on several thousand acres in a corner of the city of Chaska. Motor traffic would be minimized, walking and biking would be encouraged, and Jonathanians of all ages would be able to relate to the land in ways all but forgotten in polluted cities and sprawling 'burbs.

"If we can get a little boy into a ravine on his way to school—if we can get him to find a snail or a rabbit and never have to cross a road on his way to school—if we can do this twenty years from now, we'll have accomplished one of the things we're trying to do," McKnight, with typical effusiveness, told the press.

Jonathan was in fact one of more than a dozen quasi-utopian new towns—including Cedar-Riverside in south Minneapolis—that sprang up around the country in the 1960s. Unlike their government-built counterparts in Europe, the North American new towns were privately developed with the help of federally guaranteed loans.

By the early seventies, Jonathan included several businesses, a market, and more than 2,000 residents happily ensconced in the pretty countryside near Hazeltine National Golf Course. Unfortunately, by that time, the Jonathan Development Corporation was foundering in a nationwide recession and the real-estate market had become a quagmire. Then, in 1972, McKnight died unexpectedly, of a brain tumor. Four years later the feds foreclosed on both Jonathan and Cedar-Riverside. New-town development slowed to a crawl.

Jonathan today comprises about 6,000 residents in a mix of privately owned single-family homes, townhouses, and apartments. Most of the original land for Village One has been developed close to the original plan for residential, school, and recreational use, says Jonathan Association executive director James Main, and its sixteen-plus miles of walkways remain the community's backbone. Main acknowledges, however, that, all things considered, today's Jonathan doesn't look a great deal different from other metro developments of the past thirty years.

"The new-town concepts are still here," says Main, "but hardly anyone refers to this as a new town anymore." ■

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