



Boulder goes for greenbelts

*How to
finance a \$400,000
acquisition program—
every year*

Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. was a chip off the old block. He liked to think big. Where the father had had the foresight to reserve 600 acres of Manhattan for a Central Park, the son looked west and saw a greenbelt in the Rockies. "In the great tract of unspoiled foot-hill scenery," he wrote in 1910 in his commissioned report to the Boulder, Colo., City Improvement Assn., "Boulder has a priceless possession."

But no one listened—until a few years ago. Today, Boulder is making up for all the lost years by taxing itself to claim possession of its mountain backdrop.

In Olmsted's day, Boulder was a town of 10,000 residents, a "city of homes" in which he could not imagine the presence of manufacturing interests other than those that would make the city a self-sufficient community. If Olmsted could see Boulder today, he would call it quits as an industrial prognosticator. How, for example, would he reconcile the new multi-million dollar IBM plant with the brickmaking and swill collection operations he envisioned as the last word in Boulder industry? And IBM wasn't first on the scene; it was partly attracted to the area by the presence of such new scientific establishments as the National Center for Atmospheric Research and the Environmental Science Services Administration.

As more and more employees and their families began to settle in Boulder, boosting the census to 60,000 by 1967, more land was bulldozed for development. The choice sites were nestled in the foothills. But Boulder citizens weren't about to stand by with folded arms while their city's green backdrop was gradually, but surely, turning into a cluttered backyard.

One more penny

Last year, these same citizens did something that had never before been done in this country. They voted to tax themselves to acquire open space—

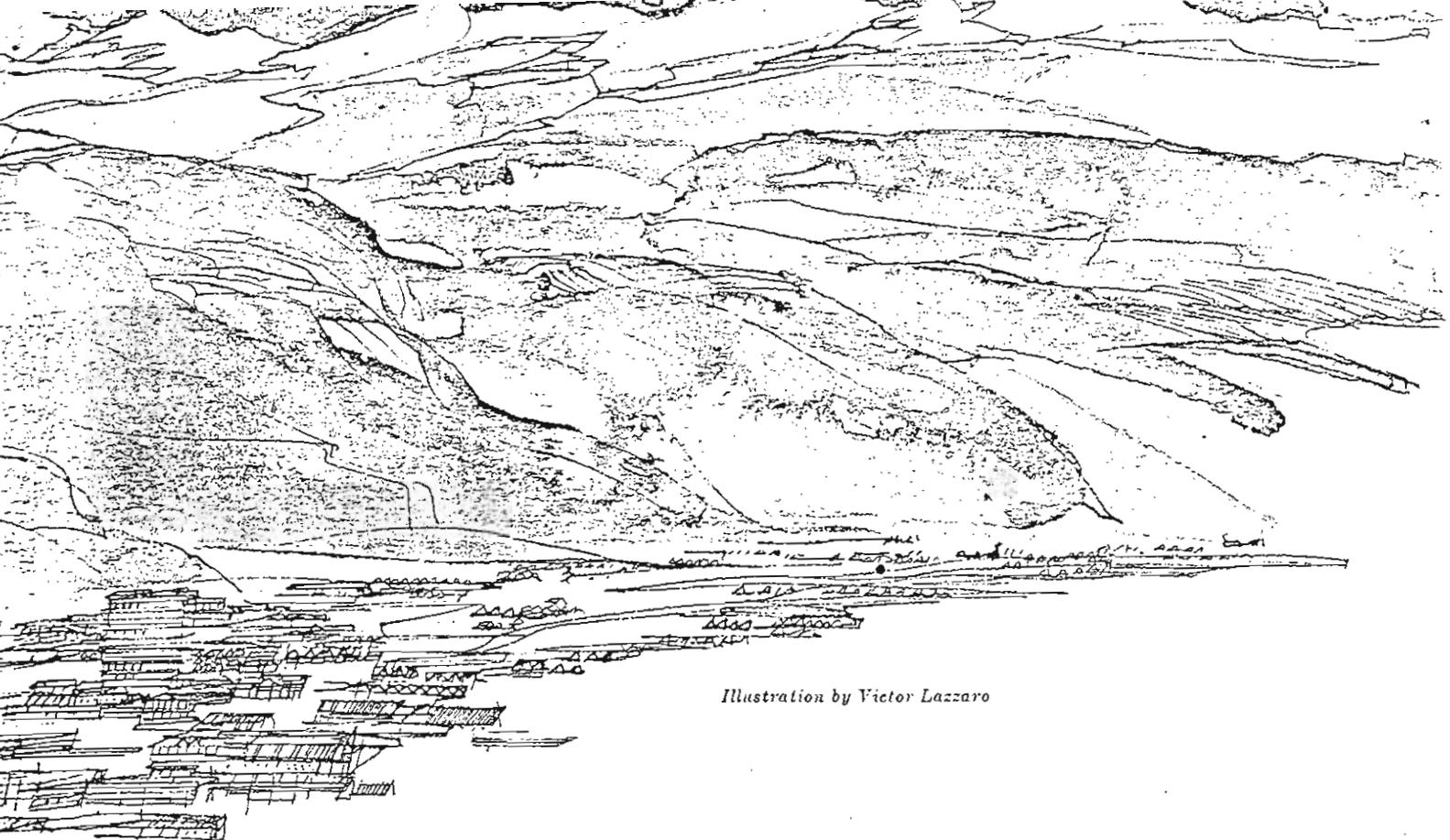


Illustration by Victor Lazzaro

and not necessarily for park purposes. What the voters did, in effect, was to approve the imposition of an additional one percent sales tax over a levy already four cents to the dollar. The new one-cent tax is expected to generate upwards of \$1 million a year. Forty percent of these revenues, or about \$400,000, will go toward the acquisition of "greenbelt" property. The rest is earmarked for highways.

The greenbelt concept had been evolving in Boulder for a number of years while citizens sought a long-range solution to isolated crises that arose as the landscape was pressed into service for development. As far back as 1958, residents moved to restrict subdivision of Boulder's foothills by passing a "Blue Line Amendment" to the City Charter. This established an elevation above which the City would not furnish water.

Far from securing Boulder's foothills forever, the Blue Line Amendment was a time-buying device. Those citizens who had proposed the bill decided to organize an action group known as PLAN-Boulder to use that time to best advantage. They induced the city to set up a park and recreation department and soon expanded their interests to the county level.

But the group's strength wasn't really tested until several years ago when Enchanted Mesa, a 160-acre tract of beautiful foothill country, was threatened with development. Mrs. Ruth Wright, now chairman of PLAN-Boulder, helped rally the group's forces and campaigned successfully for the

passage of a \$120,000 bond issue so the city could acquire the land. Citizen support was clearly aligned behind the issue.

"Citizens for Greenbelts"

A significant feature of the plan to save Enchanted Mesa was that the land was not to be developed as a park, but preserved purely for its aesthetic value as part of Boulder's scenic backdrop. James Bowers, city planning director, and Dwain Miller, parks and recreation director in Boulder, began to explore the possibility of a comprehensive plan for maintaining the town's landscape for its own sake. What they had in mind was a greenbelt, semi-circular in shape, roughly three and a half to six miles wide, that would adjoin the present city limits on the south, east and north. The city council gave the plan tentative approval, but raised the point that Boulder citizens would have to endorse a tax increase at the November, 1967, election to finance the project.

Mrs. Wright and her co-workers initiated a public education campaign to insure approval of the tax. First, they conducted a Greenbelt Conference at which state representatives, park commissioners and others explained what acquisition priorities should be established, what kinds of land were involved and what kind of financial help was available. Before long a volunteer unit known as the "Citizens for Greenbelts Committee" began bombarding city residents with leaflets, posters, radio advertising, a telephone campaign and even car



In the greenbelt: Leaving it natural.

Open space taxes take many forms. While Boulder residents are acquiring greenbelts for their community, Floridians have devised another unique way to increase outdoor recreation resources. Last January, the Florida legislature approved a surtax on real estate transfers to bring new revenues to the State's Land Acquisition Trust Fund. Administered by the Outdoor Recreational Development Council, the Fund is to be used for the acquisition and development of State parks and recreation facilities.

The tax is levied on real estate

sales at the rate of 55 cents on each \$500. During its first eight months of existence, revenues amounting to \$2,382,247 were added to the Fund. Noy Landrum, director of the development council, reports that potential annual revenue is between three and three-and-a-half million dollars.

Champions of the surtax encountered little opposition as they sailed it through the legislature. And for good reason: the surtax replaces an unpopular five percent State sales tax that was levied on the wholesale value of outdoor recreation equipment.

bumper stickers bearing the slogan "GREENBELTS—YES."

One key question haunted PLAN-Boulder. How did the new city manager, Ted Tedesco (who had arrived in Boulder just three weeks before the Conference), feel about open space? As it turned out, Tedesco didn't need convincing. He already realized that something had to be done to protect Boulder's unique environment. But he was faced with what at first seemed to be two conflicting interests. Though the time was indeed ripe to implement the greenbelt concept, the city also needed a total transportation system and street improvements.

After analyzing the two projects, Tedesco concluded that a one-cent increase in the sales tax could possibly finance both projects. Putting his political nose to the wind, he figured that if the revenue was split so that 60 percent went to public works and 40 percent was used for open space, the tax might pick up votes from those practical citizens who might not have approved the greenbelt on its own merits.

His intuition proved right. The city council approved the plan and appointed a three-man steering committee to lead the administration's campaign. During the next two months, committeemen presented 75 slide-lectures to civic groups. When election day rolled around, 60 percent of the voters approved the new tax.

Meanwhile, the city began beating developers to the punch. It obtained options from private landowners on 1,000 acres of foothill country. Over the next 10 years, Tedesco hopes to acquire outright some 13,000 acres (worth about \$15 million at today's prices), to add to the 5,000 acres of land the city has already preserved. The long-range plan is to acquire the foothill property first, then move to preserve all watercourse land, including streambeds and seven lakes.

But the concept underlying Boulder's greenbelt is that none of the land will be developed for intensive recreation. It will be left in its natural state except for trails for hikers and occasional picnic areas. The point, Tedesco explains, "is to provide an environmental quality of openness." The citizens of Boulder, apparently, are willing to settle for nothing less.