A traveler driving down Glades Road in Boca Raton is immediately confronted with a visual contradiction. Immaculately planned landscapes of green, exotic tropical foliage lined with shopping centers and malls with architectural and signage controls, all the product of planning ordinances and master Planned Unit Developments (PUDS) against a background of relentless bumper to bumper traffic. Frequently the comment is made, "planning obviously doesn't work". The reality is somewhat different. Boca Raton was the battleground between corporately planned sprawl, and the local community in the years immediately preceding state mandated growth management legislation. By in large, most of the land along Glades road was part of a series of master planned projects by Arvida Corporation.

Most people recognize Henry Flagler and Addison Mizner as the individuals that most influenced the patterns of development in Palm Beach County and southeast Florida. Henry Flagler built the FEC railroad and created and stimulated the land development companies that would form the cities on the Florida East Coast. Mizner marketed "Mediterranean" architecture to the elite of Palm Beach County. He is one of several people credited with the creation of "Mediterranean" architecture, which remained an elite mostly local trend of the 1920s, but as "Neo-Mediterranean" rose to prominence in the 1980s, it became the predominant style of Florida suburbs post 1970.

Less is known and discussed about Arvida, whose name was an acronym for Arthur Vinning Davis. Arvida Corporation set the pattern of development for Boca Raton and for southeast Florida over most of the last 40 years. The practice of building prestige gated planned unit developments was introduced to Boca Raton by Arvida. Like Flagler, Davis started his career in land development very late in life as a second
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career. Like Mizner’s Boca Raton Resort and Club, Arvida Corporation’s name would be sullied by criminal conduct and scandal. Yet Arvida’s model of land development would become the dominating feature of post 1980 suburban sprawl in Boca Raton and Palm Beach County. In fact, more of the landscape of Palm Beach County was influenced by Arvida than by either Flagler or Mizner. At the same time, public reaction to the impacts and controls of Arvida over its Boca Raton landholdings pushed the city into the growth management dialog in several areas. These included placing a cap on growth, coastal preservation and conservation, and natural area conservation.

Henry Flagler and the FEC railroad

Early development of the area around Boca Raton was stimulated by the extension in 1895 of Henry Flagler’s Florida East Coast railroad. T.M. Rickards handled land sales for Flagler’s Model Land Company in the Boca Raton area. The most notable development in the early period was the Japanese Yamato farm colony, which would drain the marsh at the upper end of the north fork of the Hillsborough River (Spanish River papers, 1980, Vol. 11). Richards would also sell land that became Pearl City, Boca Raton’s first black community (Evans and Lee, 1990). During this period, development followed a free enterprise model more typical of frontier areas:

In every point the Florida boom of 1925 is at variance with regional planning: it may be taken, in fact, as the extreme type of real estate promotion and speculative activity to which a newly discovered frontier may be subjected. (Vance, 1935)

In 1925 Boca Raton was incorporated during the peak of the Florida land boom (City of Boca Raton web site).
Addison Mizner and the founding of the city of Boca Raton

Addison Mizner became an influence on Palm Beach County architecture when he developed the Everglades Club in 1918 in a style he dubbed “Mediterranean”. Riding on the popularity of Italian Renaissance revival, Mission and Spanish Eclectic, Mizner impressed Palm Beach society with his visions. It was an opportune time. World War I had made fortunes for industrial families, who previously had spent the winter season at Flagler’s resort hotels, now found themselves in a position to buy winter mansions. However there was a need for social life, no longer provided by the Flagler hotels to outside residents. The solution was Paris Singer’s Everglades Club, designed by his friend Addison Mizner. Mizner was available to build other great houses, stages for pageantry, and he was enthusiastically commissioned by Eva Stoutsbury, who sought to become a society leader, and needed a large home for social events. Mizner provided her with a monumental home designed to entertain large numbers, and he was enthusiastically adopted as the society architect of Palm Beach.

After building some 40 homes between 1918 and 1926 in Palm Beach, Mizner was now ready to found his own resort. Purchasing land, he created in Boca Raton the Cloisters, later to become the Boca Raton Resort and Club. Laying out the resort, the town hall, the railroad station and other buildings, he proceeded to build “Old Floresta” as a neighborhood for his resort managers. When the Florida bubble burst in 1926, it was revealed that Mizner had falsified earnings to sell stocks, his name was discredited, and his period of influence was over. Boca at that time was primarily east of Federal Highway. The railroad station, the airport and the Old Floresta subdivision lay west of Federal Highway.

The Growth of Boca Raton from 1930 to 1970

In the decade after the Florida bubble burst, Boca Raton experienced little growth (Fig. 1). However with America’s entry into World War II, Boca’s grassy airstrip became the Boca Raton Army Air Base. Population boomed, and after the war, returning veterans who had been
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Figure 1: Boca Raton in 1940.

Source: USDA Aerial Photograph, C14-53, 05/05/1940

Stationed at the base came back to stay. Growth was slow in the 1940s to the 1960s. Between 1960 and 1970, rapid growth began (Table 1). Note that the city annexed territory in each date, but the majority of the population was east of I-95 until the expansion of West Boca (Fig. 2 Urbanized Land in 1973).
Table 1: Population of the City of Boca Raton.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>City Population</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>3395</td>
<td>Table 26, 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>28,560</td>
<td>Table 45, 1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>49,447</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>61,492</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>74,746</td>
<td>Table P1, 2000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: US Census

Figure 2: Urbanized Land in 1973. The white polygons represent urbanized areas in 1973, while the darker image underneath is the urbanized area of 1995, showing West Boca after it was developed by Arvida.

Source: USDA Aerial Photograph, CJF 14-53, 05/05/1940
Arthur Vinning Davis and Arvida

In the 1940s Arthur Vinning Davis, much like Flagler before him, embarked on a second career in Florida land development (Francalancia, Angie, 1998). His land development company, formed in 1958 took its name from the first two initials of its owner’s name, Arvida. Arvida would have its way with development in Boca Raton for the next three decades. Davis purchased the Boca Raton Hotel in 1956, and soon afterwards Arvida purchased the Butt bean farm, the Lyons family farms and the 1500 acre Weaver dairy tract (Simon, 1999). The Wall Street Journal reports in 1959 that Arvida and Centex, a home builder, had formed Centar to develop 3,000 acres with 10,000 homes. The homes would be marketed as part of a master planned development. Schools, community buildings and an industrial park would also be built. The same article reported that Davis had acquired some 110,000 acres of land in Florida. This included half of all the undeveloped land within the city limits of Boca Raton (City of Boca Raton, Site History memo).

In the 1950s ARVIDA concentrated on the properties near downtown Boca, including the Boca Raton Hotel. By 1960 Arvida expansion would occur along the beach across the Intracoastal Waterway from the hotel. Later, the expansion would be in the bean fields into undeveloped West Boca.

Royal Palm Yacht and Country Club

The Royal Palm Yacht and Country Club was the first major new project and it introduced to Boca the gated community. Started in 1959, the Arvida approach was to build a planned, exclusive gated development on a large tract of land adjacent to the Boca Raton Resort and Hotel (Simon, 1999). It has been suggested that the Royal Palm Club was the first gated community in Florida (City of Boca Raton website). It was certainly the first gated community in Boca Raton. Nationally, it would have been early as the trend of master planned gated communities really began in the 1960s and the explosion of gated PUD’s would not come until the 1970s. Precisely at the time that ARVIDA’s West Boca project would take off (Blackley and Snyder, 1999).
Downtown Redevelopment

The first downtown project would be Boca Raton's first automobile oriented shopping plaza. The Royal Palm Plaza was finished and sold in 1961 (Wall Street Journal, 1961). The plaza would continue the theme of Mediterranean style buildings, with pink stucco and red barrel tile roofs started by Mizner in 1918.

Unlike other FEC oriented cities such as Delray, Boca Raton did not exist as a municipality in the pre-automobile era. There was little in the way of a pedestrian oriented business district as is typically found in cities along the FEC. No planning department existed. Low income neighborhoods consisted primarily of the black communities of Pearl City and Dixie Manor, lands sold to blacks from the days of T. M. Rickards, who had acquired the land from Flagler's Model Land Development Company (Evans and Lee, 1990, Spanish River Papers, 1973). By the 1950s, the commercial district of Boca Raton had expanded north to this area. The approach to redevelopment was either direct investment or else the purchase of land from low income residents:

"Arthur Vinning Davis thought he was going to buy us out one time: he was over at the Boca Raton Hotel and Club. We had another person that wanted to buy this area and move us out by the "chicken farm" (that's what they called it) which was on fifty first street about where IBM is." (Lee and Evans, p.90)

The redevelopment of downtown would have to wait. In 1962 Davis dies, and Penn Central purchases 59% of Arvida. The next big project would move a corporate giant to Boca Raton. In 1966, Arvida sold 550 acres to IBM (City of Boca Raton site history memo).
In 1964, the Boca Army Air Base was closed and the lands given to the state for the creation of Florida Atlantic University. Two years later, Arvida owned lands west of FAU were sold to IBM.

In the late 1950s, IBM joined other corporations in emulating the university as a model for basic research, and research campuses were created across the nation (Knowles and Leslie, 2001). The first wave of suburbanization would be to move staff from its headquarters on Madison Avenue to the suburbs in Armonk, Westchester County, New York (Wall Street Journal, 1961). Later other divisions would be moved. Facilities that engaged in basic research were thought to do better in campus environments removed from the pressures of business and management (Knowles and Leslie, 2001). Major modern architects were brought in to develop these research centers: Eero Saarinen developed the Armonk campus, while Marcel Breuer developed the Boca campus, modeled on his Development Engineering Laboratory built for IBM in France (Dixon, J.M., 1966). During this period, IBM would build facilities across the nation, sometimes adjacent to university campuses. This corporate move to Boca Raton would be to the far west portion of the city at that time, surrounded by former bean fields owned by Arvida.

Coastal High-Rise Condos

At the same time, Arvida was expanding its beachfront holdings in Boca to include a series of high-rise beachfront condominiums. Sabal Ridge and Sabal Palms were already completed by 1967 while a third 16 story building was announced (New York Times, 1967). Usurpation of natural areas along the coastline stimulated a preservation and conservation movement for coastal areas. In February of 1966 a beach bond issue “received the largest vote of confidence in recent Florida history” (Boca Raton News, 1967). This was the first effort made to preserve the coastline of Boca Raton from development and in subsequent years the development of a series of ocean front and intracoastal waterway parks and nature centers has made Boca Raton a model of what can be achieved.
Two years later, the Wall Street Journal reports that Arvida, a subsidiary of Penn Central, would build a $500,000 development in West Boca around four 18 hole golf courses (Wall Street Journal, 1968). The first land-use, land-cover map of Boca Raton, derived from the first Landsat satellite imagery of the area and other sources, shows no Interstate 95, and the lands on either side of Glades road as primarily agricultural (Fig. 3). These bean fields, still mostly in agriculture in 1973, would be completely developed by Arvida by 1988.

In 1974, Penn Central Railroad went through bankruptcy court and the reorganized company mobilized Arvida to move rapidly with its south Florida developments (Sedore, 1989). West Boca was zoned for development when the public reaction to Arvida’s plans for the growth of the city interrupted the process of rapid urbanization.

Community Resistance and Reaction

The public began to respond to Arvida and to rapid, uncontrolled growth in the mid 1960s. The turnaround was abrupt. The city council in 1964 rejected the idea of a planning department but in 1966 a new council was elected that approved the planning and zoning board to commission a master plan. In November of 1966, funding for work on Glades Road was voted down by residents, and the state took the road into the state highway system (Boca Raton News, 1966 and 1967).

By April of 1973, I-95 construction had reached the city’s main east-west road, Palmetto Park, but had not reached farther north to Glades Road, which remained a narrow, lightly used road that connected Boca west to the rest of the city (PD 1281-7-04).

The undeveloped land around Glades road made it an obvious candidate for an I-95 intersection near the FAU campus, but also adjacent to Arvida’s Boca West lands.

As Boca residents began to see the construction of high rise hotels along the coast, they pressured the city to purchase the remaining undeveloped lands along the city’s coast. A bond issue to purchase north
beach park (Spanish River) and to purchase other coastal lands resulted in a model beachfront park system, interspersed between high rise condominium complexes. The citizens went further than preserving the coastline for residents, they promoted a growth cap for the city.

In 1972 a citizen inspired referendum pushed the city government to place a growth cap on the city. The City of Boca Raton amended its City Charter to limit the number of residents to 40,000. By this time city planning had advanced to a state that could accommodate the growth in all areas except road construction. The city master plan and zoning plan was already in place. Since the city population was, by 1970 nearly 30,000 this would require a rollback in allowable density categories on zoning categories for undeveloped land. To do this, all multi-family developments were reduced by 50% and no increase in single family homes would be allowed.

Two landowners sued the city over the population cap. Boca Villas went to trial first, followed by Arvida (Boca Raton v. Boca Villas Corporation, Fla.App.,371 So.2d 154, Case No. 76-2322).

In the trial, the city planners and engineers testified that they had never been consulted about the growth cap, and that the city comprehensive plan and zoning maps in existence at the time of the passing of the growth cap were quite adequate for the future. The provision of water and sewer services, school funding, and air quality for the future led the judges to conclude that the growth cap “bears no rational relationship to a valid municipal purpose”. It was in fact, a community choice through referendum that the city limit growth. Curiously there was no discussion of transportation planning or road capacity. This case and the subsequent case filed by Arvida were appealed all the way to the Supreme Court, but each court upheld the findings of the previous court, and the growth cap was struck down. The way was clear for the development of West Boca. Arvida would need to move rapidly because the state’s first efforts at growth management would be implemented in 1979, and discussions leading to the second round of growth management legislation were already underway.
Growth Management at the State Level

In 1975 the State Legislature passed a series of acts that is considered the first effort at growth management (Degrove, 1991). The Environmental Land and Water Management Act (Chapter 380) defined Developments of Regional Impact (DRI), and would force developers to get approval from local governments. The Water Resources Act (Chapter 373) would restrict developments that did not have water planning and management in place. The State Comprehensive Planning Act (Chapter 23) would put pressure on local governments to develop comprehensive plans, and the Land Conservation Act (Chapter 259) would limit impacts of developments on natural ecosystems. The acts were slated to impact development starting in 1979. Arvida had to push its Boca Raton developments through the permitting process before that date.

The second round of growth management acts addressed some of the problems of the first acts; mainly that they attacked the problem piecemeal and left a lot of decisions to local communities, and they assumed that growth would pay for itself (Winters, 1991). The new legislation would move Florida forward with the concept of concurrency. This was the idea that in six areas (water, sewer, transportation, storm water, solid waste, and parks and recreation), provision for services would have to be in place before permits could be issued.

Arvida's Push for Master Planned Sprawl

The political and legal pressure falling on Arvida as a result of local and state level growth management legislation, combined with Penn Central's need for profits after emerging from bankruptcy forced the rapid development of Boca West. By 1975, West Boca was fully developed on paper (Winters, 1991). All permitting would need to be approved before the impact of the Local Government Comprehensive Planning Act of 1975 took effect in 1979. The result was the rapid development and expansion of PUDs in West Boca, with the development of a mall and office park.
A series of five Landsat satellite image classifications captures the rapid growth of Boca in the period 1973-2004. The data source was the Landsat sensor. These were classified and the result was a series of growth period maps. Figure 3 shows the urbanized area in 1973 and the urbanized area by 1995.

Figure 3: Urbanized area in 1973 and 1995, with Natural Areas. The white polygons to the right are urbanized by 1973, the dark grey polygons are urban sprawl from 1973 to 1995, with small amounts of infilling shown to 2004. A grey scale DOQQ from 1995 shows small remaining agricultural areas.

Source: USDA Aerial Photograph, CJF 14-53, 05/05/1940

Elements of Sprawl: Implementation of West Boca

Most of West Boca was built between 1973 and 1988 (Fig. 3). In 1983, Arvida was sold to a group of Arvida executives, and in 1984 was sold to the Disney Corporation. Sales from West Boca Arvida properties in 1985 topped one hundred million: "Boca West, Arvida’s flagship resort and residential community on Glades Road in Boca Raton, posted more than $89 million in new home and resales in 1985, and at the
"same time Town Place, a 205 acre community near Town Center Mall posted more than $11.5 million in sales" in 1985 (Hoffer, 1986). Profits in 1985 and 1986 were $65.7 million and $41.8 million. With growth management legislation coming that would force concurrency on developers, Arvida and Mission Bay Development Company, began funding infrastructure improvements in West Boca (Finklestien, 1985). In 1986 Arvida was sold again to JMB Realty for four hundred million (Francalancia, 1998).

Town Center Mall

The mall, a partnership between Arvida and JMB/Federated Reality (Santaniello, 1986) was completed in 1980 (Wall Street Journal, 1985), and was often referred to as the new town center of Boca (Capuzzo, 1982). It was cited as the reason for the decline of downtown (Loftis, 1982). By 1980, Boca Raton was the second largest city in Palm Beach County, and the years of rapid development of the coast and West Boca had created a situation of stagnation at the center of Boca. The city responded by commissioning studies, forming a Community Redevelopment Authority (CRA) and they brought in a former Arvida developer, Bill Shubin, who would work on developing Sanborn Square, and the renovation of Mizner's city hall and train station (Kolody, Tracy South Florida Business Journal vol.8 Iss. 14 Sec.1 pg.8 "Downtown Boca Growth fills Shubin's Dreams"). Ultimately it would be Shubin and the CRA who would promote and develop a new urbanist town center for Boca called Mizner Park (Kolody, 1988B). This project would give the sprawling auto oriented downtown a cohesive center and pedestrian oriented landscape.

Arvida Park of Commerce

The former bean fields around the IBM campus would become the next development that Arvida would undertake in Boca. This would be the Arvida Park of Commerce, which received final approval from the city in 1978. It would consist of a golf course, light industry and distribution warehouses (site hist.). It would be one of the first multi-use
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office parks in the nation. Planned on lands adjacent to the IBM campus, IBM acted like a magnet, attracting Sensormatic Electronics Corp, Siemens Communication Systems Corporation and Mitel Corporation (Daniel, 1985).

Conclusion

In Automobile Nation (Duany, Plater-Zyberk and Speck, 2000), the New Urbanists authors define five elements of sprawl. Three elements are the suburbs themselves, the mall, and the office park. The PUD (Planned Unit Development) that requires an automobile trip to get the simplest item such as a carton of milk, the Office Park that requires automobile trips to lunch and other destinations daily, the automobile oriented mall, christened “Town Center” while the little pedestrian oriented downtown declined are textbook examples of planning for the automobile.

Arvida’s aesthetic and pretentious upscale gated developments set the standard and the tone for the suburban sprawl of Boca Raton, and emulators carried the tradition to the rest of Palm Beach County in subsequent decades. Unlike Ian McCarg’s Woodlands, which considered the environment, or the Rouse Company’s Columbia, which considered the need for various income levels, the ARVIDA automobile oriented and non-native green space defined the character of subsequent suburban sprawl in Palm Beach County. In Boca Raton, the planned, articulated landscapes of non-native, tropical vegetation that lay along traffic choked Glades Road seem strangely out of character, demonstrating to drivers daily the failure of privately planned PUDs that articulate with corporate financial goals rather than regional, community or environmental planning goals.

Aftermath

The political impact of Arvida on the citizens of Boca is significant. Initially, in 1966 they banded together to put through referendums that resulted in preserving miles of Atlantic coastline, in many cases from ocean to lagoon. The rapid turnaround from voting
down planning issues to undertaking city planning was very rapid, two years. The planners were quick to develop a master plan, which worked against the grass roots promotion of the growth cap, and for that reason, all courts struck down the city’s growth moratorium ordinance of 1970. In 1980, the new Town Center Mall highlighted the fact that the old downtown was in decay, and citizens responded with a CRA, and a mixture of developers and former Arvida talent to create one of America’s most successful new urbanist town centers. The sprawl of West Boca down Glades Road continued unabated until stopped by the boundary of the everglades levees.

As discussed above, Penn Central sold Arvida to Arvida managers, then it was resold to the Disney Corporation, and in two years, it was resold again. After hurricane Andrew devastated Arvida’s Country Walk development in Miami, shoddy building and inspection practices were revealed, and the development became a major lawsuit and liability for both Disney and Arvida (Van Drake, 2002). Subsequent owners changed the name of the company to St. Joe Company.

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