

History

The history of the University Hill Farms neighborhood dates back to 1846, when New York native Harmon Hill and his wife Clarissa moved to the farm site in 1857. The Hills retired to the city in 1893, and sold the farm to Benjamin Lewis, who in turn sold it to the University of Wisconsin College of Agriculture in 1897. The University Hill Farms neighborhood that exists today is the result of a successful state venture that sought to create an all-inclusive, middle class community.

In 1953, the Wisconsin state legislature authorized the University of Wisconsin to sell Hill Farms and to use the proceeds to purchase new research lands in Arlington. Pressured by the city to open the site for housing, the University appointed a special Committee on Agricultural Lands, with former governor Oscar Rennebohm as chair, to develop the 600-acre property as a multi-use planning community. The conversion from an agricultural station to a major commercial and residential area was said to have been worth at least \$25,000,000 to the University.

Plan

The influences on the final University Hill Farms plan date back to planner Ladislav Segoe's 1939 comprehensive plan for Madison. Among his recommendations, Segoe directed that all new subdivisions conform to the comprehensive plan and incorporate any thoroughfare, boulevard, or parkway designated in the plan. Additionally, Segoe stressed the importance of planning for schools, playgrounds, and parks within neighborhoods. Consistent with Segoe's recommendations, the city purchased areas within the site to reserve for the neighborhood's existing schools and parks.

The city of Madison's Plan Commission prepared a plan that incorporated clusterings of residential lots around cul-de-sacs. In 1955, the University Committee hired planning consultant Carl L. Gardener and Associates to create a final master plan. Gardener's plan largely excluded the city's recommended cul-de-sacs, and instead incorporated "long blocks and curvilinear streets that mimicked the rolling topography of the site." After a series of reviews, the original plat was recorded on October 7, 1955 and included all existing areas of the neighborhood excluding the southeast portion. To commemorate the fact that the plan was a state venture, the University decided the neighborhood streets would be named after Wisconsin counties.

Sales

The first of the Hill Farms lots were sold to the public in 1955, eighty-one of which were sold to builders participating in the annual Parade of Homes. Although large-scale buyers typically bought adjacent lots, buyers of Hill Farms properties scattered their purchases throughout the neighborhood, which resulted in the neighborhood's diverse styles of homes.

Architecture

In 1955, the Regents appointed the Hill Farms Architectural Control Committee. The Committee's role was to "evaluate and maintain architectural standards by ensuring minimum standards for improvements." At the Committee's inception, the proposed buildings (which were limited to single-family homes) were reviewed on the basis of exterior design, building materials, and location on the lot. In its current role, the Architectural Review Committee oversees any proposed changes or additions to existing homes and the construction of new homes. Additional regulation is conducted through a Declaration of Covenants, Restrictions and Easements, which is applied to neighborhood parcels and homes.

The neighborhood's architectural style includes variations of the ranch and some Colonial Revival-influenced designs. Most notably is the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed prefabricated house built by Marshall Erdman and Associates, one of the 1959 Parade of Homes. Due to its unique architectural character, the neighborhood hosted four Parades of homes in 1957, 1958, 1959, 1960, and 1962 in areas including Richard Lane and Segoe Road, Juneau Road, Pepin Place and Marinette Trail, Door Drive, Varsity Hill, Stadium Drive, and Carillon Drive.

In addition to the neighborhood's single-family homes, the plan included the development of the Karen Arms, an early garden apartment complex consisting of 11 buildings on 11 acres. Although deviating from Gardener's original plan, the strip along Sheboygan Avenue became the site of the city's first high-rise apartment building, the Park Tower, which opened in 1961.

Commercial

Ninety-four acres of the original plan were designated as commercial and included, among other businesses, the State Department of Transportation office and a combination bowling alley/nursery. Serving as the neighborhood's commercial anchor, the Hilldale Shopping Center opened in 1961 and was located in an ideal site due to the higher than average incomes and burgeoning population within its vicinity. Built on a 34-acre parcel, the \$12 million shopping center was anchored by the department store, Gimbels-Schusters, and included 26 specialty stores. Although originally planned to serve the immediate community, the Hilldale Shopping Center served as a regional attraction, exemplified in a newspaper publicizing its opening, announcing, "All Roads Lead to Hilldale."

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