a PLAN for U.N.M. . . . a critical appraisal

JOSE LUIS YGUADO,

Education has been front page news in these recent days of special legislative sessions in New Mexico. The clamor for admission to college is mounting and every state and city is giving thought to expanding the capacity of existing colleges or to founding new ones. The critical needs of education emphasize as never before the importance of thorough and complete planning. This condition has been further evidenced by the tremendous amounts of work done over these recent years in the area of campus master planning.

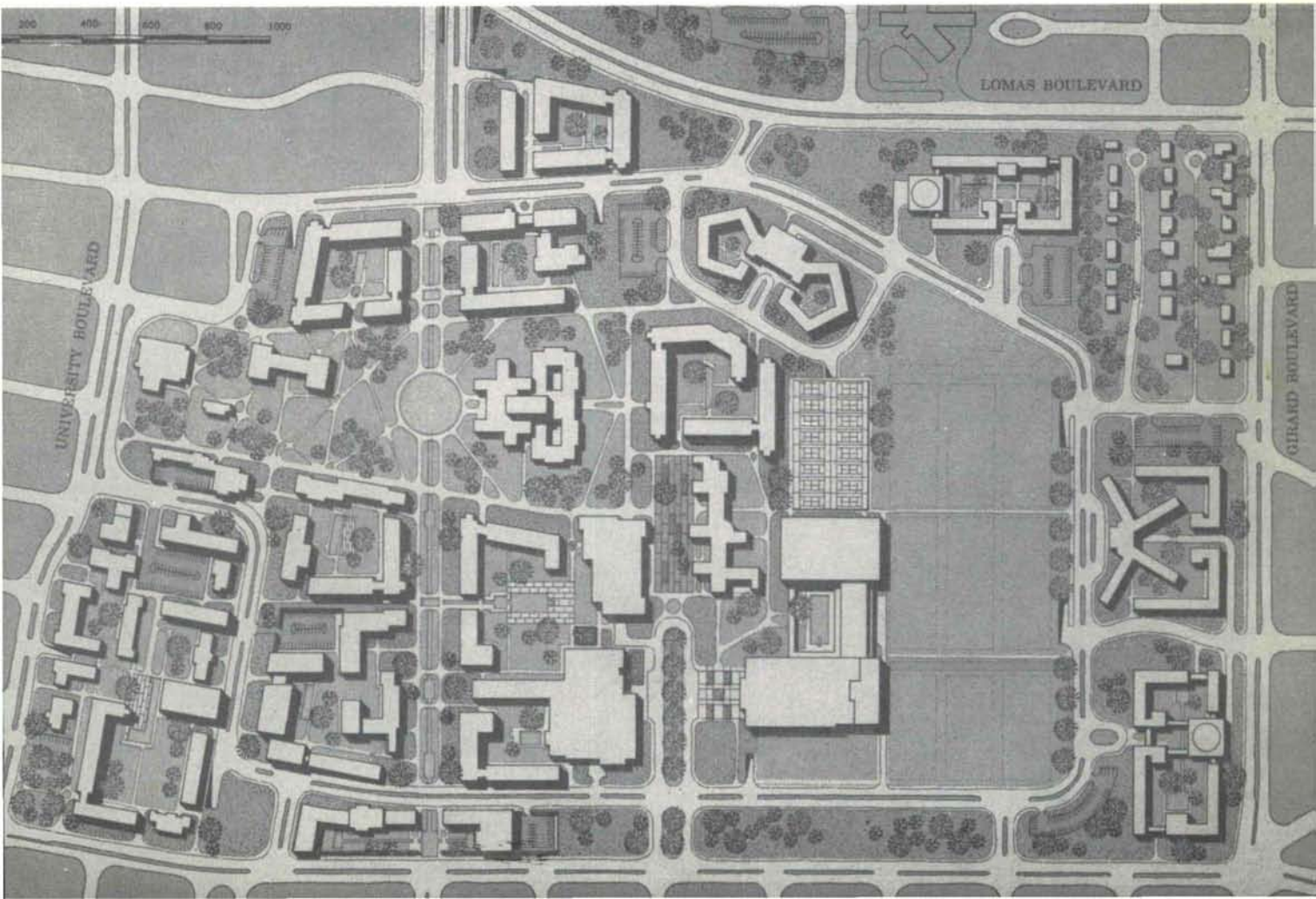
The basic questions are two: how can architectural and landscape design serve the purpose and aspirations of higher education most effectively in this time of feverish expansion; and, specifically, whether or not the General Development Plan for the University of New Mexico best meets the needs of this particular institution? For there are as many different forms of general plans as there are separate institutions, each with its special mission, history, traditions and geography.

The University of New Mexico with its particular traditions and architectural character has placed a severe limitation on planners of any type. On the other hand, the unique conditions posed by the University present the planner with a challenge and the opportunity for a unique solution.

Campus design, if it is to be anything more than a utilitarian crash program must have as its roots an understanding of the people who live and work in a college environment. Since the UNM is a residential college, it is a true community with all the needs and desires of the people who live and work in this particular environment. The surroundings should offer every inducement to reading, inquiry, meditation and to stimulating intellectual intercourse. To this end, a college should seize every opportunity to set before the student inspiring examples of the finest and best in every worthy interest that the college program nurtures.

To the complex of teaching functions the campus environment can make both direct and indirect contributributions of great significance. The direct contribution relates to the fact that in college classrooms the student encounters, among other subjects, design, aesthetics and the sciences of growth and the dynamics of life. The campus design can both illustrate principles of design and aesthetic and provide a laboratory for research in the fields of plant development, architectural design and the various biological disciplines.

The campus environment also teaches by providing an atmosphere which appeals simultaneously to all the senses. Campus planning must consider "all the arts in one." Not only does it help the student to see nature with his eyes, it appeals also to the senses of smell, touch, hearing and taste. To the attentive, the cycle of the seasons and the successive phases of growth, decay and rebirth engenders an understanding of the movement and continuity of life. The campus environ-



ment should accent the unfolding joys and enlivening perceptions that the changing season bring.

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My comments on the General Development Plan for the UNM, prepared by Warnecke and Associates and discussed in the pages of this magazine in the July 1961 and January 1962 issues, are based on resultant rather than causative factors. The Planning Consultants in cooperation with the University staff and through much study and analysis have outlined the institution's general requirements. And unless I had equal opportunity to study the basic facts, I could not intelligently evaluate the consultants basic conclusions. I am, therefore, accepting the fact that in this particular plan the basic premises and assumptions are valid. For example, the separation of the three campuses is accepted as an absolute requirement.

One of the major difficulties of any general plan for a university is that it is necessarily large and extensive. The fact that the planning consultant is working with very general requirements and with vague projections related to anticipated development results necessarily in a vague initial approach. This plan should at first be a diagrammatic representation of the facilities needed to fulfill adequately the various programs of anticipated development. Such a general plan can not be detailed nor should it be represented as such. The difficulties with the various representations in the General Development Plan brochure of the UNM is that they have not indicated a plan in a purely diaggrammatic sense nor have they gone sufficiently into the problem to prepare a "detail site plan." Rather they have presented an "in-between" plan which is neither.

Because the consultants could not go into the site plan in sufficient detail to resolve the various design considerations, they have been compelled to establish various "restrictions" on future development. There are several examples of this: the restriction on the average height of buildings to 2.5 stories and secondly the 5 to 1 ratio of building space to open space. It seems that these restrictions are necessarily arbitrary until detail design solutions can be resolved. Without thorough study, design determinations of this type simply cannot be made. The consultant has imposed these restrictions possibly at the expense of keeping the three campuses in a more closely knit group.

With reference to the 5 to 1 ratio of building coverage to open land, the consultant has devoted only four sentences to the 80% of the campus not in buildings (under "LANDSCAPE" p. 17 of brochure). They discuss the arid climate and imply that planting is difficult to grow and maintain. I question why they have devoted 4/5 of the campus to open space if they feel that planting is so difficult to maintain. Also relative to this, are the comments of many of the university people who state that extensive planting is unfeasible in this area. If this is truly the case, how can they accept a plan with 80% of the campus in open space?

The consultant suggests "desert planting" for the large open expanse of the campus. I feel, that we should have planting, and that it should be of a type that is of fairly low maintenance. However, the campus is not a desert. It is in the center of the Albuquerque Metropolitan Area. (70th largest in the nation.) It is the 10th fastest growing city in the country. It is a city which may some day dominate the entire Southwest. Even now, a distant view of the city is dominated by the abundance of trees which already exist in the city—for it is in a river valley and not a desert—since this is the case I question whether "desert planting" is necessarily the most appropriate.

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I feel that no one can seriously question most of the principles stated or implied in the plan. They are well stated and they are accepted planning principles. The separation of academic and administrative uses and proximity of related disciplines to each other is certainly valid. However, relative to the detail placement of buildings, I am not sure that the Administration Building needs to be as completely separated as the plan has indicated. In a university of the size anticipated for the University of New Mexico, students and faculty have many occasions to visit the Administration Building and the building should therefore be sited conveniently to these people as well as the general public.

Another principle, which is well taken, is the separation of vehicular and pedestrian traffic. This is presently one of the major problems on the existing campus. Along with this the concept of a large "central open area" and the smaller closed in areas fulfill a present need for an outdoor area for large aggregations of people as well as closed in and more intimate areas for smaller groups or every day activity.

The "buffer planting" which Mr. Udy suggests in his recent article would be an excellent separation between the campus and adjoining but unrelated activities. I feel, however, that any such "buffer planting" should be a part of an overall "Landscape Plan" where such things as arboretums, botanical gardens and nature study areas, could be a part of this "buffer planting." In addition, I feel that more extensive study by the consultants, could have been made of adjoining properties and suggestions made regarding the most desirable kind of development for those areas.

Perhaps, the major short coming, in this particular plan is a complete disregard for any "three dimensional" planning which is necessarily an essential and integral part of any kind of planned development. This may not be the fault of the consultant since they were probably not commissioned to prepare a "three dimensional study." On the other hand, the importance of such a study should have been emphasized by the consultant, either in their proposal or as part of the General Development Plan. The successful campus design, as I have previously stated, is not only functional in the utilitarian sense, but enhances and supports the intellectual and creative work which the campus exists to promote. Unless a more detailed plan of "three dimensional" relationships is prepared, implementation of portions of the plan by various people will be subjective and unrelated to other portions. The end result might well be a campus of unrelated forms and spaces.

Certainly this university cannot be sure of escaping the vicissitudes that have plagued the development of higher education in the past. However, a well developed master plan, coupled with recognition on the part of the university community that imaginative campus' design and thoughtful resolution of the various problems not only enhance the joy of college life but

the process of learning as well, is the best assurance of the sound development of a college environment. The fact that the university has underetaken the preparation of this plan is certainly laudable. However, if the university stops here and does not procede to carry the plan further than a General Development Plan is generally carried, or if they interpret the General Development Plan as detailed site plan, which it is not, the advantages that are to be derived from what they have done will be negated. It is hoped that steps will be taken properly to implement the intent of the plan, and to prepare more detailed studies of anticipated developemnt.

—Jose Luis Yguado

Dear Dr. Bunting:

I have read with interest the article by Mr. John Udy in the January-February 1962 issue of NEW MEXICO ARCHITECT.

While I am not an architect, and surely I am not a professional landscaper, I do have some feelings in regard to the arrangement of structures at the University of New Mexico.

It should be remembered that the type of architectural design used here is referred to by Mr. John Gaw Meem and others as the "modified pueblo" type. Under this design the elevations have many different levels, and there is a serious attempt to depict massive wall structures. Several of the buildings are three stories high, and the library structure, as you know, has nine floors.

With this architectural design in mind, it seems to me that it is essential that there should be greater distances between the buildings than would be found if they were used as surrounding structures of a plaza.

It should also be pointed out that the campus plan anticipates a maximum enrollment of 25,000 students. Pedestrian and automobile traffic for this number of students creates problems of ground use, which indicates that the buildings should occupy between twenty-five and thirty per cent of the ground space.

It is my opinion that we do not have sufficient money to rearrange our existing structures to fit the recommendations which Mr. Udy has made. Additionally, I am not certain that it would be the best plan to pursue in the light of the type of architecture and student traffic demands which we will face.

Sincerely yours,
Tom L. Popejoy
President