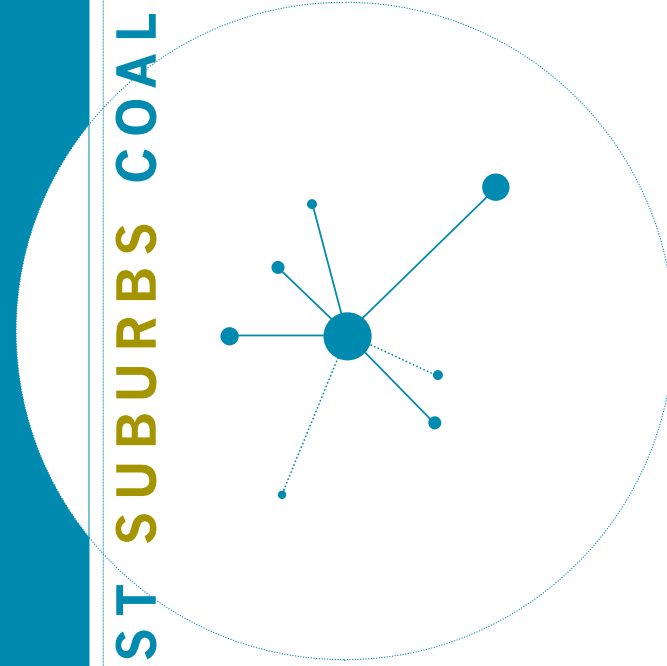


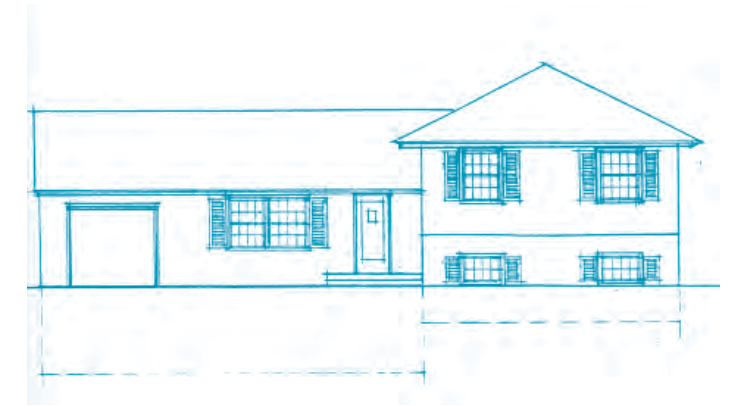
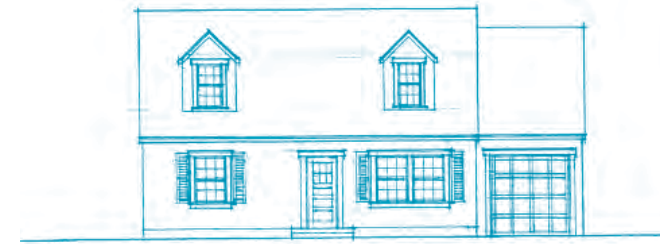
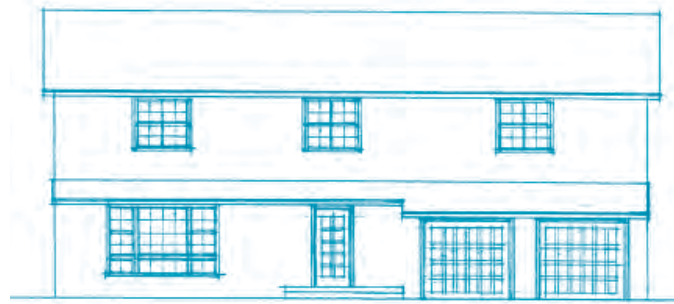
FIRST SUBURBS COALITION



IDEA BOOK

2005

Updating Post-World War II Homes



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ISSUE Nº 01 | FIRST SUBURBS COALITION | *Piper-Wind Architects, Inc.* | IDEA BOOK

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- Overland Park (part)
- Prairie Village
- Roeland Park
- Westwood
- Westwood Hills

OUR ARCHITECT

PIPER-WIND ARCHITECTS, INC.

Piper-Wind Architects, Inc. is a downtown Kansas City architectural firm which specializes in the planning and design of livable communities, traditional neighborhood development and commercial districts — creating quality places for people to live, work, and play through thoughtful renovations, new residential and commercial infill projects, and the careful planning of public open space.

INTRODUCTION

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First suburbs are communities where a majority of the housing was built between 1940 and 1970. These communities are inner-ring suburban communities which are generally fully developed. The First Suburbs Coalition is a coalition of these cities working together to find common solutions to their common problems.

The principal issue facing first suburbs is the age of public and private infrastructure — the homes, businesses and utilities that make up the physical base of the community. Not only does aging infrastructure present maintenance problems, but even well-maintained buildings are often obsolete in terms of modern standards.

In order to continue to attract and retain families and businesses, first suburbs need to find ways to maintain their housing, business structures, and utilities, and to renew and revitalize these facilities. The First Suburbs Coalition has identified three key issues as the basis of the organization’s agenda:

- Modernizing housing stock, which was principally built in the years following World War II. This housing stock is often smaller than current practice, does not contain amenities expected in a modern home, may have been built with lower quality materials and may be on a lot that allows little room for expansion.

- Attracting and retaining businesses that serve the communities. Retail businesses have moved to more modern suburban locations, stripping first suburbs of services and revenue.

- Maintaining and upgrading an aging public infrastructure. This task is especially difficult when revenue is stagnant or declining.

The First Suburbs Coalition is focusing initially on modernizing and revitalizing its housing stock. Since the housing stock of first suburbs is principally post-WW II housing built between 1940 and 1970, modernizing this housing stock is a major priority for the First Suburbs Coalition. This idea book is one tool to encourage such remodeling.

The First Suburbs Coalition Idea Book is intended for owners or prospective buyers of homes generally built between 1940 and 1970. The book contains ideas for making improvements for each home type to modernize the most important elements of the homes.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TC

- History of Homes and Designs 2
- Pictures of Post-WWII Area Homes 3
- What People Like and Dislike in Post-WWII Homes 4
- General Design Considerations
 - Taking Cues From Your Neighborhood 5
 - Massing, Proportion and Scale 6
 - Exterior Appearance 8
 - Windows and Doors 10
 - Garages 11
 - Curb Appeal 12
- Interior Livability
 - Ranch 14
 - Two Story 18
 - Cape Cod 22
 - Split Level 26
 - Full Concept Plans 30
- Remodeling Primer 32
 - Financing Your Project 33
 - Universal Design 34
 - Energy Efficiency 35
- Contact Information and Resources 36

2005

HISTORY OF POST-WWII HOMES

The post-WWII suburbanization period in Kansas City, as elsewhere in the country, is well captured in the following passage from the Grandview, Missouri, Survey prepared by Historic Preservation Services in 2003 for the city of Grandview.

Although the suburbanization of the Kansas City metropolitan area and Jackson County began during the 1920s and 1930s, the most dramatic stage of this development trend occurred after World War II. Following the end of the war, there was a real and psychological need for all kinds of new, clear symbols of progress. The pent-up need for new construction created a building boom. Increased automobile ownership; advances in building technology; low-cost, long-term mortgages favorable to veterans; and the Baby Boom fed the housing boom, which resulted in the transformation of outlying towns into “Bedroom” communities. Massive state and federal highway projects, such as the mid-1950s expansion of U.S. Highway 71, accelerated the process and drastically affected the landscape of small communities like Grandview.

This post-WWII residential boom was the driving force behind the growth of the first suburbs and the large stock of homes built between 1940 and 1970 in the metropolitan area. About a third of all housing in the Kansas City metro area — and a majority of the housing in first suburbs — was built during this period.

The four homes described below are typical of the type of home built after World War II. A number of residential developers, such as the JC Nichols Company, developed large numbers of subdivisions containing these and similar types of homes.

The Ranch:

This was one of the most common styles constructed. The ranch style is a one-story house with a low-pitched roof and modest details. The home featured in this book had three bedrooms, a single bath, an attached one-car garage, and possibly a basement. There are a number of variations of this typical plan including ranch houses with fewer bedrooms or without garages. The Parade of Homes listing for this home stated, “The delightfully clean lines of this home’s exterior accent its simple yet well-planned interior. Note the bedroom area separated by a hall from the living portion of the home; the functional kitchen-dinette arrangement.”

Two-Story Plan:

The two-story plan is less common than the single-story ranch. It is characterized by a living area and a two-car garage on the ground level and sleeping and bath areas on the second level. This arrangement allows more bedrooms, sometimes up to five, than the single-story ranch. The two-story often combined a lower-level open floor plan with the traditional separation between the living areas and the sleeping areas. Variations included one-car garages and second-story balcony areas.

Cape Cod:

The Cape Cod is the equivalent of today’s story and a half with one bedroom downstairs and two up. The Cape Cod often had a single-car garage and two small dormers as shown in this example. It was advertised as having expansion possibilities by adding a second bath and converting the dining room into a fourth bedroom. The Parade of Homes listing states that this Cape Cod is “the latest contribution to low-cost luxury living.” Variations of the Cape Cod include extra living/storage space above the attached garage or even a detached garage.

Split Level:

The final plan featured in this book is the Split Level. The Split Level was characterized by three half-story levels. The plan featured here has the living, kitchen and garage on one level with three bedrooms and a bath and a half up. The lower level, under the sleeping area, could be either additional bedrooms or a family room. This plan features a single-car garage. American Builder magazine said about this particular plan that “seldom has a split-level design combined the appearance of honest tradition with a plan that can expand as family needs grow.” There are a number of variations of the split-level including an upper story located above the garage, split entry, and a two-car garage.

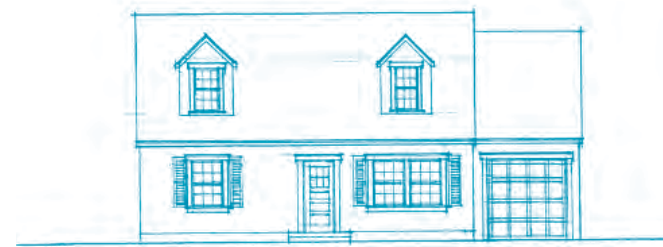
AREA POST-WWII HOMES

Ranch HOME

Two-Story HOME

Cape Cod HOME

Split-Level HOME



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LIKES AND DISLIKES

As a part of the idea book project the First Suburbs Coalition conducted an online survey of first suburbs homeowners to determine what they liked and disliked about their post-WWII home and what they would change. Forty-eight owners of post-WWII homes, mostly ranches, responded to this survey.

The Kansas City Regional Association of Realtors, one of the coalition's partners in this project, also conducted a survey of its members about the likes and dislikes of post-WWII homes. Thirty-nine realtors responded to the survey. The results of both of these surveys were used to help define the kinds of changes this book describes.

Likes:

In the homeowner survey, the quality of construction, wood floors, layout, lot size, location, neighborhood, and architectural details were most often cited as qualities liked about the homes. Here are a couple of comments from the survey:

“It has charm that you cannot find in the new houses, and it is built very well. I also like the history of the house. It was a Sears Deluxe 4-room model and most of the original appliances are still working just perfect. We even have a suds saver for the washer.”

“Not press board but real plywood.”

“Mature trees, an established neighborhood, hardwood floors, solid construction, size of the yard, mail box is on the front porch, remodeled/updated kitchen, fenced yard, partially finished basement includes a second bathroom, aluminum siding has been installed — no painting!”

Realtors mentioned location and the neighborhood as the most important elements for post-WWII homes.

Dislikes:

Homeowners mentioned the following as the principal dislikes about their post-WWII homes: small bathrooms and too few of them; lacking a garage or only having space for one car; condition of home; energy efficiency; and floor plans that are not open. Here are some comments from the survey:

“The kitchen is too small; there is no storage space for much of the kitchen. There's no place to put a dishwasher or pantry. There is not a place to have a private conversation because you can hear everyone talking in every room because of the thin walls. We have no dining room.”

“I dislike the asbestos siding, the fact that the master bathroom is only a 1/2 bath, no garage, kitchen that needs updating, floors that need to be refinished, small size of bedrooms, carpet in the kitchen.”

“I don't like the fact that the laundry room is in the basement and that the only way to get to the basement is through the garage. I also don't like the fact that it is only a one-car garage. And last but not least, the master bedroom is too small.”

Realtors mentioned the size of the post-WWII homes, neighborhood amenities, and new home competition as the biggest problems with post-WWII homes.

We also asked homeowners and realtors what they would like to see changed in post-WWII homes. As expected, these responses mirrored to a great extent their dislikes. Homeowners included in their most desired changes updating or adding bedrooms, finishing the basement, adding or enlarging a garage, remodeling the kitchen, and adding an addition to the house. Other items mentioned included adding storage space, improving energy efficiency, and adding a front porch. The changes most frequently mentioned by realtors included improved bathrooms, larger kitchens and more storage.