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Bennington College
January 5, 1966

Report to the Board of Trustees from the Subcommittee on the campus site plan.

Subject: Basic Principles and Next Steps in Site Planning.

This Subcommittee was appointed by the President of the College and the Chairman of the Trustee Buildings and Grounds Committee at the suggestion of the Trustee Buildings and Grounds Committee at their meeting of December 2, 1966. The Subcommittee was empowered to reformulate basic principles of site planning and resolve current outstanding site problems for the purpose of reporting to the full Board at its January meeting. To this end, the Subcommittee met at Bennington on December 28, 1966 and in New York City on January 5, 1967.

The Subcommittee is pleased to report unanimous agreement on the following set of principles and on the following planning decisions. There is every reason to believe that these principles and decisions represent the overwhelming sentiment of all the constituent elements of the College Community.

I. SITE PLANNING PRINCIPLES:

- a. Two principles should govern the siting of the buildings, one functional, the other visual. All decisions must be made with reference to both.

1. Functional

The new buildings are to be conceived as a group which, together with the Barn, will form the academic center of the college. In siting them the emphasis should be on establishing a sense of relationship between them.

2. Visual

The rambling rural quality of the land north of commons should be preserved. This requirement affects both architecture and landscaping:

(a) Architecture

The new buildings should be grouped in a loose and casual composition that will fit quietly into the natural background. The architecture should be unpretentious and simple in tone and small in scale.

(b) Landscaping

The new campus must be planned so as to leave as much of the open land entirely untouched as possible. Inside the perimeter of the new campus, landscape design should be naturalistic rather than formal. Natural contours should be kept, trees should be planted in groups rather than in rows, paths and roads should curve with the contours of the land.

In siting the buildings care should be taken for what will be put in the spaces between them. Spaces should not be created that will tend to acquire a plaza-like character. On the contrary they should be intimate and casual, and should try to avoid symmetrical effects. Open spaces that are too small to be designed and planted in this way should be avoided unless they are brought down to the dimensions of a shared court or an outdoor room -- an "enclosed piece of the landscape" -- such as the Art Program describes.

- b. We should attempt to preserve the large unbroken areas of the campus for future, as yet unplanned, development, as well as for their aesthetic visual values. As a consequence, all building should be done within an area roughly described by drawing a circle with Commons as the center and its radius being the distance between Commons and the end of the Commons lawn. This radius also recommends itself because it represents the distance furthest north of Commons which can be served economically by our steam distribution heating system.
- c. We should attempt to create a front door to the campus at the north end of Commons; that is, the north end of Commons should be the place one would naturally come to in driving on to the campus. This assumes a radical renovation of Commons involving the relocation of some administrative functions and services (e.g., reception and admissions) and possible enlargement. This renovation should also involve the creation of a simple route in the building by which one can proceed from the front door at the north to the door at the south of the building.
- d. The campus should maintain its character as a place for pedestrians rather than for motorists; that is, we should attempt to maintain the present level of automobile traffic on the inner campus and attempt to keep the traffic serving new buildings on the periphery of the campus, insofar as possible.
- e. Although there is no present intention to replace the Barn because, of its construction it can not be regarded as a never-to-be replaced factor of the campus. When and if it is replaced, however, it should be replaced on the same site, although not necessarily on the same axis.
- f. The performing arts building should be so located as to be easily accessible to the public and it should also be so located as to keep as much of the public automobile traffic outside of the central campus.
- g. It would be extremely desirable to locate the art building and gallery in close proximity to the performing arts building since, in the first place, the two buildings may attract the same public and reinforce each others' appeal and since, in the second place, they can thereby share common access roads and parking spaces. (For these reasons, the sub-committee to select an architect for the performing arts and visual arts buildings has decided that one architect will be retained to do both buildings as part of a single complex). Both the visual arts and the

performing arts building should be so designed as to face inward to the campus as well as outward to the public.

II. SITE PLANNING DECISIONS:

- a. The present campus road shall remain the main access road to the campus. Access shall be through the south gate and the north gate shall remain closed except for limited periods of time during the day and evening to serve the convenience of the College Community. Instead of access to the inner campus being on a road which runs from the campus road triangle, north of the Barn and along the edge of the pond, it shall be on a new road which shall come off the main road somewhere between the maintenance road and the triangle, so as to join the present road system at the flagpole south of the Barn. The only other road changes contemplated -- prior to the erection of further student houses on the east side of the campus -- are a service road to the science building and a service road to the performing arts and visual arts complex, the former being an extension of the road which presently runs by to the north end of Commons and the latter being an extension of the main campus road somewhere near the triangle. The present road running from the triangle north of the Barn and along the Pond will be abandoned.
- b. The preferred site of the science building is in the area of the present parking lot just to the north and west of Commons, as close as feasible to Commons considering functional and aesthetic requirements and keeping in mind the retention of an open view toward Jennings. We are assured by the architect that the building can be designed for this site without disturbing the presently contemplated construction schedule, which is construction commencing in late spring of 1967.
- c. Relocation of the road into the central campus to the south below the barn creates a new focus toward the south and provides ample open space to the north of Commons and the Barn. The preferred site for the new visual arts and performing arts complex is to the north of the Barn and almost directly behind it. It is to be conceived in intimate relationship to the north courtyard of the Barn, extending from the area directly behind the Barn to the north and to the east as necessary.
- d. A parking plan consistent with the siting of buildings described above shall be submitted to the Board at its spring meeting.
- e. A complete grounds plan, including landscaping, lighting and security cannot be attempted before the new buildings are sited definitively.

It is respectfully urged that the Board of Trustees adopt the foregoing principles and decisions as their own.

The Subcommittee for Site Planning
Mrs. Ralph Brown, Jr.
Mr. John Muma
Mr. Harold Kaplan

Mr. Charles Dollard)
Mr. Edward Bloustein) ex officio

Site Planning

Memo to the ad hoc Subcommittee on the Campus Plan: Messrs. Bloustein, Dollard, Kaplan, and Muma.

From Betty Brown

December 12, 1966

Because there is so little time for meetings between now and January 10 when we are to make a recommendation about the campus plan to the Trustees, I am taking this way of giving you a brief summary of our planning efforts to date: ~~As some of you are new to the problem~~ I thought it would be helpful if we could all start with the same background. I have also tried to analyze the underlying problems, as I see them, hoping that, although this is a personal interpretation, it would help us all to see more clearly why, after three years' work, it has been impossible to arrive at a plan that both trustees and faculty could accept; hoping also that it would help us see what must be done to resolve the difficulties. At the end I have made six proposals that I hope you will wish to consider.

We have been working on the campus plan for a little over three years without success. The immediate trouble is one that you may not be aware of. We have no program. Most of our difficulties with Barnes' many submissions grow out of this. The Trustees and the Administration and the Faculty never jointly decided what kind of a plan they wanted for Bennington, and consequently whenever one group has tried to tell the architect what to do, another group has been likely to tell him something else a few months later.

We once thought we had a program, when the building project first got under way in 1963 under Bill Fels. The Trustees' Campus Planning Committee was created that summer. Taking the Taylor-Lieberfeld study of the college's space needs as its point of departure, the Committee held a series of conferences at college with members of the faculty, administration, and staff and with student organizations--I find from the old appointment schedule which is still in my drawer that we talked to 28 faculty and staff and a dozen students. Beforehand we circulated an outline of the main factors involved in the creation of a campus plan and a list of questions that we wanted the community to think about and give us their opinion on. Later we held an open meeting which was attended by about 100 people, mostly students.

The results of all this were extraordinarily fruitful, and on the basis of what seemed to be a consensus, the Campus Planning Committee produced a preliminary program--a statement of objectives followed by a framework to be filled in later as the faculty should develop the programs of the separate buildings and make the necessary decisions about future space allocations on the campus: decisions about the use of Commons, of vacated space in the Barn, about the relocation of the infirmary and the store, and so forth. I will append the opening pages of the program (Appendix #1). As you will see, the main premises on which it rests are: an interrelated complex of buildings which would isolate the divisions from one another as little as possible; short distances between buildings which would preserve as much as possible of the free intercommunication that now characterizes the educational life of Bennington; a compact area of construction that would perpetuate the pedestrian campus and that would consume as little as possible of the fields and woods and reserve space for future expansion; a continuation of the casual architectural quality of the present campus, and architectural harmony between new buildings and old. These premises became the basis of all the Committee's subsequent recommendations.

I will also append an intra-committee memo (Appendix #2) written about this time which will show you what kind of problems were involved in the framework that was still to be filled in.

The program was presented to the Board of Trustees in a preliminary way in January of '64. It was favorably received, and all indications were that the building program was off to a smooth start. But this was all happening just as Bill was becoming inactive, and from the time of our conferences at college he never really took any further part in the planning. We didn't know it then, but the program never came before the faculty--as a matter of fact at that time the faculty committee was not set up to deal with this kind of thing, and in the absence of regular channels the program simply got lost. Two years later I learned with shock from Bill Sherman that the faculty never knew it existed.

From this time on, as you know, the situation at college got more and more confused, but it was nevertheless felt both by the Administration and the Board that we had to push ahead with the planning of the new buildings, and as we were all agreed that we couldn't plan buildings without having an overall plan to fit them into, Ed Barnes, who had been retained to do the student houses and was under consideration for the Science Building, was engaged to do a master plan. We gave him the program knowing that it was not yet complete but still believing that it was only waiting to be filled in by the faculty and the administration. It didn't occur to us then that they knew nothing about it.

Unfortunately, with the selection of the architect, which took place in the early months of 1964, a controversy erupted between the trustees and the faculty committee. I'm not going to go back over this old sad story now, it's

all water over the dam and it no longer matters who said what and who was wrong and who was right. What does matter, and matters very much, is the breach it made between the faculty and the trustee committees.

It wasn't until Ed Barnes submitted his first plan, in the summer of 1964, that we all discovered what a division had developed between us. The faculty's reaction to the plan was cool on many points, but the issue that they became really aroused about was the relocation of the main road into the college. The argument was endlessly tangled and so prolonged--as Harry Pearson who sat in the middle of it for months will well remember--that finally it became impossible to move ahead with the plan at all. In the end everybody became so exhausted by the question of the road that by tacit consent the subject was quietly dropped. The road remains to this day one of the basic policy decisions still before us.

But behind the question of the road lay other problems, and it gradually became apparent that the faculty were developing a different vision of the campus from the one the trustees had. If you will look at the memo I mentioned earlier (p. 1 of Appendix 2) you will see that it mentions three basic types of planning: the closely integrated pedestrian type, the rural car-borne type, and the non-committal suburban type. For the sake of convenience, let's call them A, B, and C, because we shall have occasion to talk about them quite a bit in what follows. The trustees were already committed to type A and were under the impression that the college was with them. But it now began to appear that the faculty favored type B. In place of an interrelated grouping, they proposed to locate the buildings on three separate sites, widely dispersed, with distances between them which varied from one quarter to half a mile.

Another disagreement arose about this time over the concept of architectural unity, not just among the faculty but among the trustees too. In the winter of '65 this flared into a bitter and destructive controversy because it unfortunately came to mean one architect for all the buildings. As the faculty were actively championing Ben Thompson (who had not yet been retained for the Science Building) in opposition to Ed Barnes, the idea of unity fell victim to this conflict. This I'm afraid was my fault, and it's sad that it happened. Probably all of us were, and are, in favor of architectural harmony: it didn't have to be the design of one man if that was going to be a stumbling block. But as things turned out the one-man controversy became a storm center, and nothing was ever the same after that. It not only estranged the faculty and trustees, but it swept a whole lot of substantive issues that really had nothing to do with it into its orbit, and it became hard for people to consider the campus plan clearly from that time on.

After this, the program simply dropped out of sight. I think even the trustees forgot they had it. Ed Barnes continued to work on the master plan, but only in a piecemeal way, mostly concerned with siting specific buildings. Having no program, he just bounced from committee to committee, trying to

design whatever the latest group to meet with him told him to. There was little talk any more about what objectives the plan should be designed to serve. Instead it all seemed to settle down to a tug of war over the Science Building. As each new plan was produced, the faculty picked up the building and moved it out into the meadow to the west, and the trustees then picked it up and moved it back in to the center.

In the summer of 1965 I made a serious effort to break through the barrier that separated us and I wrote a long memo to the college in the form of a letter to Harry, in which I tried to bring us back to an awareness of the simple basic facts of what we were trying to do--of what's at stake in planning a campus. This memo, I believe, got no farther than Harry's desk.

It did circulate some outside of the college however. It went to a few people involved in architecture and planning whose opinions I respect, and to a few alumnae whom I chose either because they were professional women whom I knew the faculty admired and kept in touch with or because they held key positions in the Alumnae Association. I wanted to touch base with some people outside of our own small circle, just to make sure we had not become so ingrown that we had lost our sense of what Bennington's real objectives were. The response was vehement and astonishing. One alumna was so moved that she drove right out to the house and gave me a bunch of roses. Mostly the reaction was one of incredulity that there should even be any argument. By an ironic twist, quotations from this memo are now being published as part of a discussion of principles of form in a book on Harte Crane by an American critic, along with implied praise of Bennington.

I'm not going to enclose a copy of this memo because it's very long and the whole first half of it, which deals with questions of architectural unity and the design process, is no longer germane to our problem. But I am going to quote the second part here, because it is the only place in which the objectives that the Trustees' Campus Planning Committee have been trying to realize have ever been set forth:

One of the special strengths of Bennington is that it has always made relationships between disciplines possible. It has also always believed in the education of the whole intellect, rather than of the compartmentalized mind. It has been a dissolver of boundaries, stressing communication rather than separation, stressing the fluid rather than the completed and the self-sufficient.

This idea can be easily misunderstood, as is evident from the recent controversy among the students and certain faculty about the site plan. People rushed at once to extremes and saw the thing only in either-or terms: interrelationship OR independence; communication OR concentration; hybridization and exposure OR privacy and individuality. Both sides failed to see that what Bennington actually does is both and neither. It does not formalize, it makes possible: interrelationships are not forced, but the possibility of their occurring is actively a part of the fabric of the college. It is this

active possibility that has in the past been one of the most characteristic things about Bennington and that to many people is one of its greatest values.

Such a quality is of course primarily a matter of intellectual climate, but it can be helped or hindered by its physical environment. Where-things-are has something to do with what-things-happen. To me all this suggests that if we want to preserve the fluidity of communication--the possiblens--that characterizes the college at present, the problem of our building program is not just one of buildings, it's one of relationships. It further suggests that these relationships must be as active and integral as we can make them, not inert and formal. The air between two buildings should be as real as the buildings themselves, and it should belong to both. It should be charged with energy, a place of currents and penetrations, not just a residue--not just a no-man's-land designed to free the eye of one architect's style before exposing it to another's.

Many people have been worried that the expansion of the college would drastically change it, and we've all been assuring them that it would not, telling them that everything would be done to keep the same patterns, the same flexibility, the same approachability and communicability, the same scale in teaching and in human relations. As the programs for the individual buildings take shape this effort is evident. But so far we seem to have failed to see that success or failure will begin with the overall plan. Instead of giving this our best thought, we've shot off in three separate directions, everybody's eyes shining at the idea of producing something terribly original and exciting in the building in which he's particularly interested and hardly anybody thinking about producing anything at all original or exciting in the way of a campus. In fact the contrast between the imaginative thinking that's going into the buildings and the conventionality that's going into the campus is pathetic. We've simply accepted the traditional American stereotype that's been around for generations: the same old academic suburbia, with a Science Building here, surrounded by a sea of green lawn, and an Art Building there, surrounded by a sea of green lawn, and a Theater out there, surrounded by a sea of green lawn, and everything connected up with diagonal paths and juniper bushes.

It doesn't seem to me that this is the way to try to preserve the flexible structure of the present college. I don't want to get soupy about this: I'm quite aware that a college of 600 is not going to be the same as a college of 300. But there are

ways of making it more so or less so, and I think there's no question that moving the divisions out into self-sufficient walled enclosures, each surrounded by its own breathing space, is going to make communication a different thing from what it has been before at Bennington.

I don't know why we're doing it. I have a feeling we don't really want to, we're just rushing ahead because we haven't stopped to realize there's anything else to do. But we don't have to be this rigid. Why don't we listen to some of the new ideas that are stirring today among the more sensitive planners? There are many possibilities waiting to be explored. For example, why not think in terms of a continuous whole, something that would be neither one big building nor forty small ones, but both--something supple and wandering--partly indoors and partly outdoors, a weaving of rooms and courts and walks--jumping a space here to form an island, flinging out a wing there, two stories somewhere and one story somewhere else--its interior organization moving through a kind of spectrum, grading from the most specialized functions of one division, to interdivisional functions (lecture rooms, projection equipment), to non-divisional functions (snack bars, class rooms, utilities), then again to the specialized functions of the next division, then fading off toward the more shared and public spaces (the gallery and theater with their lobbies and entrances),--all this not exactly one building, not exactly many, not exactly a building at all, simply a stream of energy rising and falling with areas of concentration and areas of expansion, each piece capable of having its own architectural identity (a studio and a lab after all don't make the same shape), able to push its way up through the roof or out through the walls or down into the ground if it wants to, and yet all these separate identities able to speak to one another--each division, able to be complete in itself and yet able to open out in many directions. A structure like this doesn't need to have any particular beginning or end--certainly no monumental center. It can be expanded almost indefinitely, and at almost any point. Its interior spaces can be reassigned in almost any way as points of pressure shift.

Well it's just a possibility. There are others. Ideas like this are beginning to appear all over the country. I don't know why Bennington is missing the boat. It's especially strangewhen, by an extraordinary piece of luck, this kind of thing is almost exactly what the college has now. I'm thinking of the Barn.

Not of the way it looks, just of what it does : its way of being simultaneously one and many and of encompassing many needs while giving each its identity; also its pliancy as the needs of one department grow and those of another shrink. I've been trying not to use the word "flexibility" because it has become such a phony in academic planning, but I really can't avoid it. The Barn is a miracle of flexibility. It is also a triumph of Bennington's particular brand of intermingling and independence.

The art faculty has realized the situation very clearly in terms of their own building. At the first meeting they had with Ed I remember their telling him that the basic problem was one of relationships: how to unify the division enough to make communication possible and operation efficient while at the same time keeping it separated enough to make independence possible. In their program the solution they suggest is very similar to the kind of thing I've been talking about, and we've both even used some of the same words: "In terms of a complex... this suggests the prototype of the local 'continuous farm', with the farmhouse, sheds, areaways and barns interconnected by covered links and enclosing a piece of the landscape into a yard or outdoor room.... The variations in size of spaces, if well and successively related, could serve the important requirement of extreme flexibility." I don't think it's at all a coincidence that Ed also used some of these words to describe what he was trying to do with the student houses, because I think the problem of the student houses is fundamentally the same thing: a search for the right balance between a way of being alone and a way of coming together.

Isn't this fundamentally the problem of the whole program? And isn't the solution only to be found in looking at it as a unified whole consisting of strongly independent parts that are strongly related to one another--a campus in which the buildings will be vigorous and the spaces between them will be as positive a part of the total experience as the buildings themselves? What I'm implying is different from the approach we're now assuming, because the kind of whole I'm talking about isn't additive or residual, it has to be the starting point.

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In the summer of 1965 when Ed Bloustein became president, planning had come to a standstill. He immediately set to work both with the architect and with the faculty to get it moving again. He can speak for himself a lot

better than I can, but observing it from the outside it has seemed to me that under his administration the faculty committee has been gradually changing its position, moving from a B type of plan closer to a C. But in a curious way I feel that they have done this without abandoning the premises on which their choice of B had been based.

A climax was reached at the first formal meeting of the Trustees' Campus Planning Committee during Ed's administration, in January a year ago. Trying to gather up the conflicting mandates of the past two years and precipitate a decision, Barnes had brought three alternate plans: Plan A--an integrated plan in which the buildings were almost a single flow, closely related to the Barn; Plan B--a dispersed plan in which each building was placed on the edge of the campus in a field of its own surrounded by a hedge; Plan C--a compromise that I can't even remember. The trustees favored Plan A. Ed Bloustein said the faculty were opposed to it because it closed up the view of the pond from Commons. A foot by foot discussion ensued as to how far the plan could be opened up to allow a view of the pond while still remaining the same plan. It seemed to be heading for another impasse when Oscar made one of his great felicitous interventions. "There are times," he said, "when it is appropriate to blur an issue." The crisis passed, everyone was relieved, and we parted with the understanding that Plan A would be modified in order to permit a sight of the pond. How much of a sight was the issue that was blurred. In the language of the minutes of the Trustee's meeting the next day, "the opening...should be as large as is consistent with the desired educational and architectural integration of the new academic buildings."

With hindsight I now think we were wrong. This was not an issue to be blurred. We should have realized it at the time: blurring is only another word for compromise, and in this particular situation a compromise--a Plan C--is the one thing we can't have. It destroys the rationale that underlies B and it destroys the rationale that underlies A, and in their place it puts exactly what nobody wants: the suburban rationale.

In the year that has passed since that meeting, the trustees heard no more about work in progress until last week. In fact their committee went out of existence. In line with everybody's awareness of the urgent need to get all lines of authority concentrated once more in the hands of the President, we avoided communication with the architect and waited to be told what was happening.

I'm giving you these details because I think that unless you realize that the trustees had had no contact with the situation since the meeting a year ago, you will not understand their reaction to the plan that was produced last week. They were presented with something that had little resemblance to what they thought their last agreement on the subject had been; in fact it looked more like a racecourse than a college. Instead of being a modification

of Plan A, it was a new Plan C. Instead of starting with the idea of the "educational and architectural integration of the buildings" and opening up a view consistent with this, it started with the idea of a 400 foot opening and then put the buildings along it behind a dense row of trees. As Ed Barnes said in his opening remarks, "It's a divided campus." He added, in effect (these are not his exact words): you wanted a view from Commons-- this is what you've got.

As you know, the trustees didn't accept it. A subcommittee of five was created to try to settle the problem before the January Trustees' meeting, and this is where the matter now rests.

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Looking back over all this, one curious fact emerges which should be emphasized because I think it offers hope of a solution. From the time of the controversy over the architect, there has been no communication between the faculty and the trustees. In other words, all during the period in which the faculty's point of view was becoming articulate, we have been out of touch with each other. How much we didn't realize. Things that the Campus Planning Committee assumed the faculty knew I now know seldom got through, and consequently I now realize that in spite of the great flow of words that has gone on among ourselves, it's possible that many of the faculty at this point have little idea why the Trustees think an integrated plan is of crucial importance. Conversely, the trustees probably have equally little idea why the faculty want a spread-out plan. This is no doubt why their attitude has seemed so negative to us and why we have never tried to explore it seriously. On the one hand we know that our own program--whether one favors it or not--is at least a plan: a comprehensive scheme based first of all on an educational policy then moving outward to include a land conservation policy and an architectural policy. In contrast to this, all we know about the faculty's position is two things: they want to see the pond from the back of Commons, and each academic division wants its building to be independent of the others. Obviously there must be more to it than we have realized, and my hope is that if we can now explore these ideas as we should have done two years ago, we will find that our objectives are not as mutually exclusive as we had thought.

Take the idea of independence first. Many of the trustees have found it hard to be patient with this attitude and have felt the way Ben Thompson did when he told the Faculty Art and Architecture Committee they were just a bunch of isolationists. But on reflection I think one can see at least how such an attitude might arise.

In the first place there must surely be the frustration that the makeshift arrangements of the present campus breed. The faculty have had more than enough of togetherness with the wrong people and separation from the right

people, and it's not surprising if they are over-reacting. In the second place, they've been overwhelmingly involved in programming their own buildings. This is an intense and introspective experience, as anyone who has ever tried it knows, and again it is not surprising if it drains energy away from the larger picture and tends to produce a series of separate utopias, each of these utopias carefully keeping itself clear of involvement in other people's problems. In the taxing, committee-dominated life of Bennington, I imagine there quickly comes a point where you can't stand any more involvement. You work out the problems of your own division painfully and laboriously, and then you can't go any farther. I remember Paul talking about this. He cared about his own building above all and he gave himself intensely to it, and when the program was finally right he simply didn't have the will or the time for a whole new round. "Why should I run the risk of having those scientists louse it up?" he said.

I've heard alumnae express indignation about thinking of this sort and say, "But it's the last thing you'd expect of Bennington, of all places." But on second thought maybe it's just what you would expect of Bennington, maybe it is in fact the logical result of Bennington's peculiar strength. The strength of Bennington is its faculty, and its faculty is what it is because it is dominated by people whose commitment is primarily to the idea of being a productive member in a field of thought or art rather than to the idea of being a member of a college. This is the source of Bennington's perpetually renewed vitality. But it does bring certain limitations. The vitality of the divisions sometimes makes them division-centered. In this sense the point of view of the faculty and the point of view of the student, or of the alumna, are not always the same. I've been constantly surprised in the last few years to find how unaware many of the faculty are of what the student's total experience of Bennington is. They see her as a participant in various divisional programs, she sees herself as a member of the college. The no-man's land between divisions is where she spends a good deal of her time and where a surprising amount of her intellectual growth takes place. In many colleges this no-man's land is a vacuum, but at Bennington it has a fantastic charge of energy, overflowing from the super-abundant vitality of the divisions and combining into an experience that affects most of its graduates for the rest of their lives, long after they've stopped thinking of themselves as Drama Majors or Social Studies Majors. To many alumnae indeed this is what Bennington is all about and this is the reason why they react so strongly against the island type of plan. It implies a state of mind that is oblivious to something they know is terribly important: the sense of the whole.

In case you are thinking "this is an old grad talking who is out of touch with what students think today," let me quote from a student Galley written in May 1965 after a meeting in which the campus plan had been violently attacked, principally by Mr. Carini:

Mr. Pearson noted that it has always been the faculty that has perpetuated the Bennington 'idea'...and that's reasonable. But during the discussion with the architect, Edward Barnes, up jumped that word "isolation" they keep telling us we want. It's a good word, in line with the old Bennington belief in the...individual. However, the idea of 'isolation' is inappropriate as the formative concept for the layout of the new campus.

The "privacy motif..." is a psychological dimension that gets twisted out of proportion in physical terms. Things don't grow right in a vacuum; healthy perspective does not come from being set apart. The tensions we've seen living here have grown in proportion to the amount of isolation.

Privacy we want; but it isn't determined by the distance between people and their activities. We're here because we believe that being in an educational environment can be edifying...Education is a continuing process--a thing of communication that goes on in and outside the classroom. To be "educated" is a side effect of community. Development comes with extended awareness of ideas, activities, even people.

WE WANT TO CREATE OUR OWN LIVING-LEARNING RELATIONSHIPS, to open out, and that can't happen without the element of CHOICE (as opposed to enclosure)...

...Everyone here has much to communicate, that only begins to show in Commons conversation. We become aware of things we might not learn about in other kinds of colleges, just by knowing those involved in Drama, or Dance, or Art, etc.; and those categories now represent too much of an ingrown sociology, that could be balanced by a more hybrid living situation...

We don't think the meadow location would be "more aesthetically pleasing...", because it would no longer be a meadow. The open spaces are used as they should be: for private, peaceful walks or Botany trips. Besides, it's just nice to know the open spaces are there.

Looking at all these ideas together--faculty, student, alumna--suddenly one begins to wonder why we thought the controversy was so irreconcilable. It's not an either-or thing after all. Independence is not the same as distance. Proximity doesn't have to destroy privacy. Can't our program aim to supply both a means of independence and a means of communication? Of course it can.

This is what the students had in mind when they spoke of "CHOICE": if the buildings are close together they can be built in such a way as to provide both separation and contact, if they are far apart there is nothing but separation. Surely we can all see this. Surely we can see that as far as educational values are concerned an integrated plan can be designed in such a way that the faculty stand to lose not one single thing they value.

The problem of the pond is harder. This is not an educational value, it is an emotional-aesthetic one. Moreover it is certainly a symbol of something terribly important to the college community, and it should be thought about seriously.

The main thing you notice when you think over the things that have been said about the pond is the contradictions. First people make a plea to keep the view of the pond open, then they laugh apologetically and say but of course there isn't any view of the pond now. Then they say the hill should be levelled and a view of the pond should be made, and in almost the same breath they say the new campus should preserve the natural contours of the land. After this they say it isn't really the pond anyway--the pond is just a man-made puddle in the swamp--it's really the meadow. When objection is made that the view across the meadow to the front of Jennings isn't very important, the emphasis shifts to the birch trees, or the maple trees. And finally it gives up the idea of a view altogether. This last point I learned in a moment of illumination at a community meeting a year ago in which Ed Barnes presented to the students and faculty his current version of the campus plan. Explaining the westward position of the Science Building he said, "I've put it out here because I understand that you all want a view of the pond and the trees," and suddenly there were angry cries of "NO" "NO" from all over the room: "It isn't the view. We want to be able to go there. We want it to be."

I'm not listing these contradictions to ridicule them, on the contrary I think they're immensely important. But I think they mean something else-- that's why they're so unclear. I don't think it's really the pond, or the meadow, or the birch trees, I think it's an image of Bennington--the free, earthy side of Bennington in contrast to its organized side. To some this is probably a love of the country and an affirmation of the human values that are denied by the mass-produced mechanical forms of modern buildings. To some it may be something honest and unpretentious and unconventional, a protest against the artificial formality of other colleges. To others it may be more personal: a great serene unstructured background against which one can create one's own work with an enormous sense of freedom, without being tagged by a strongly defined style belonging to a particular period or a particular person--a setting in which one can create oneself. This feeling, which so strongly permeates the program for the art building, I'm now sure is also involved in feelings about the campus as a whole. It's a fear of the "fixed image," as George Holt once said. It is a desire to keep Bennington free,

fluid, spontaneous, un-voguish, un-styled. It is a fear of plans: a fear that the precious illusion of a campus that just happened by accident will be lost. It is a fear that the original spark will be lost and Bennington will become "just like any other college."

I don't know whether I've guessed it right, but anyway I am convinced that in some such way as this the land behind Commons stands for something very important to most of the community and this something is in contrast to the formal layout of the land in front of Commons. If this is so, then what can one say to it? All I can reply, and I'm speaking very personally now, is: Yes, how well I know. I only wish I could tell the faculty committee that I care about these things so much that this is precisely one of the reasons why I am opposed to the Plan C that we now have before us. I think it and all other Plan C's would accomplish exactly the wrong result. By trying to save the view of the pond in the literal sense, they would destroy it in the figurative sense. Instead of conserving as much of the land as possible by holding the invasion down to one tract, they would make two or three separate tracts and these tracts would swallow up the land between them and turn it into an all-over man-made mall, a place of lawns and roads and benches. Instead of making each building seem smaller by relating it to something its own size, they would make each one seem bigger and more conspicuous, standing up vividly in its own open space. Instead of preserving a small rural campus, they would create a large suburban one.

I have to say it: as it is presently interpreted, the view of the pond is a delusion. As Ben Thompson observantly remarked, we can't build three big new buildings and pretend they aren't there; we can't build three big new buildings and imagine that we can keep the landscape unchanged. But this doesn't mean that a lot of the things that the view of the pond stands for can't still be preserved, if we will only try to separate them out and stop thinking in terms of packages that are mutually exclusive. Let's try to find out what things people really think are important.

I am going to append the comments made by the faculty committee about the siting of the buildings in the first plan Barnes presented (Appendix #3), because I think you will find them as illuminating as I have. What is suddenly apparent is that most of them (Bob Woodworth is the exception) really have less to do with the location of the buildings than with the formal scheme that Barnes has set them in. Some of them object to the "urban" or "village" grouping and seem to associate this with the grouping of the student houses and to fear that the new buildings, like the houses, are going to come in a matching set. Some object to the formality. Some are concerned about so much grading and moving of roads, all for the sake of making straighter lines. Some are concerned about cutting trees. Some don't like the artificiality, the stiffness. In sum it comes down to a concerted feeling that the quality--the atmosphere--of the world behind Commons should be

different from the world in front of Commons. And here at last may be the source of the trouble. In visualizing an "interrelated" grouping behind Commons, the writers' minds have leaped to the only image readily at hand, the student houses, and have imagined that along with interrelationship must come all the rest of it: matching architecture, formality, stiffness. It isn't the interrelationships they are objecting to, it's the other things they've unconsciously put in the package.

I feel convinced that the vision that many of the faculty have been trying to formulate, in contrast to this one, is one that is more natural, more free and supple, less pretentious, more uniquely growing out of their own land instead of being a flat campus "just like any other college." Plan B is their way of saying this. But what they haven't realized is that Plan A can do almost the same thing. One has only to forget the misleading image of the student houses and think instead of the Art faculty's image of the continuous farm (see p. 7) to realize this.

So once again it turns out not to be an either-or thing. Granted always the changes that any plan will work in the landscape, the faculty doesn't stand to lose anything more of value in an integrated campus than in a dispersed or semi-dispersed one. The problem is one of style, not of substance. This is where we should be concentrating all our powers of understanding and communication, ~~to the architect instead of trying to design the campus ourselves.~~

I would like to close this report by suggesting to the Subcommittee on the Site Plan six things:

1. That we drop the race course and that we drop the requirements that brought the race course into being; in other words that we drop the concept of a void as the generative, form-giving principle of the campus plan.
2. That we return to "the educational and architectural integration of the academic buildings" as the generative principle.
3. That we look for a compromise of our differences in a plan that will combine the affirmative values of the faculty's point of view (the vitality of the divisions, the esthetic-emotional image of the campus) with the affirmative values of the trustees' point of view (the relationships between divisions, the vitality of the whole).

4. That we spell out clearly for the architect the visual quality that we want in the new campus. For example: spaces that will be intimate and informal rather than stately; masses scaled down, casually grouped in order to give an effect of movement rather than of symmetry, broken up in order to give an effect of variety rather than of monumentality; natural contours to remain wherever possible; as much meadow and as little lawn as possible; trees in clumps instead of in rows--and so forth.
5. That we meet at once with both architects together and have them show us how our objectives can be realized. Both are ready and eager to do this. They are aware of the pressure of time and the need to have something settled before the Trustees' meeting on January 10th and have said they will be available on January 5th or 6th if we want them.
6. That because time is short we handle the process of planning in two parts: one, the siting of the three academic buildings, which is the urgent problem that must be settled at once; and two, the overall Grounds Plan of the college, including landscaping and roads and parking. The latter may not be an easy problem to solve, as the disagreements of two years ago suggest. Moreover, as Johnny Muma has told us, it needs a far broader study of the entire property and of future growth patterns than we have yet given it. It also needs some basic policy decisions about such things as security, and the role of the car on campus. It needs a rationale for a plan of circulation. These things can't possibly be done properly in a week or two. But there's no need for them to hold up the whole program. If a subcommittee could bring in a set of recommendations by March I should think that would be time enough for the architects. Anyway we can ask them.

I know that some of you are afraid it may not be practical to drop Plan C at this stage--that it may cause delays, or that the fact that the Science Building is already designed means we can no longer change its site or any of the layout around it. I assure you I wouldn't be sending you this memo if this were true. I talked to both architects before writing it. Both say we still have all the freedom we want. No time will be lost by changing, because nothing definite has been done anyway. Both Ed Barnes and Ben Thompson want to see Bennington have a plan that will make more sense from the point of view of living and working in it, and both are willing to work together to accomplish it. Ed said that as far as the two Arts buildings

are concerned everything is still wide open. His only question was whether Ben still had enough flexibility with the Science Building. Ben said he had. In fact Ben exploded into an urgent plea to us all to stop and reconsider what we're doing before we build a campus that is irrevocably fragmented.

From "Outline for a Program for Bennington College." November 1963

General Character of the Program

We would like the Bennington campus to remain a pedestrian campus. This means that the new buildings should be closely related to those that already exist and that they should be as accessible to the three main centers of daily life--Commons, the Barn, and the Library--as the needs of each building will reasonably allow.

Distances not only should not be too great, they should not seem too great. Ease of circulation and visual unity will probably both be needed to contribute to this end. By visual unity we do not mean imitation of the existing architecture, which is itself varied, but we do mean a continuation of patterns already laid down, a harmony of scale and color and texture and weight, and a sensitivity to the quality of the present campus.

This quality is not easy to define. It is unpretentious in scale, simple in materials, casual in its assimilation of a miscellany of farm buildings into the general scheme. Although there is a certain formality in the architectural style, the touch is light, and one never loses the sense of being in the country. One also has a sense of buildings that exist more for the sake of the life that is lived in them than for the sake of being picturesque or monumental. The tone on the whole is domestic, which means not only that it is small in scale but that it is individualistic and graceful and varied--not institutional, not regimented. At the same time there is a strong sense of order. An informal and creative kind of life is lived in a formal pattern, variety is controlled by an over-all design.

All this we feel is very close to the life of the College. We would like to preserve it and enhance it.

We realize that by favoring a pedestrian campus and a close grouping of buildings we may be committing ourselves to an architectural style in which relationships will be more important than individual architectural expression. The kind of building that is a powerful personal statement may have no place in such a scheme. This may be a mistake. If it seems so, we are open to persuasion.

Zoning for Now and the Future

In planning for today's needs we want to be careful not to hamper the future. We have no way of knowing what projects another generation may want to undertake, but we would like to try to leave the way open for them. We think this can best be done by conceiving of the whole property in terms of a few

large zones: academic, social, student residential, and faculty residential. The scheme that we have adopted, as can be seen on the attached plan, allows each zone ample room to expand outward from the center, which is Commons. This zone alone is ringed in, perhaps too tightly. Here is the place where the dining rooms and the infirmary and all the students' social life are concentrated. If the student body were to be considerably enlarged someday, everything in this area would have to be expanded. We would like to make sure that the land we have allowed will support this.

There is another zone that has not yet been mentioned: empty land. We have particularly wanted to keep certain big, self-contained pieces--such as the Jennings meadow, Longmeadow, and the field and woods to the west--intact, so that if a whole new complex of buildings is someday required, every section of the property will not have already been dotted with an isolated building or road.

We think of zoning as a safeguard for the future, not as an end in itself. It is an idea that can be overdone. All we are aiming for now is a grouping together of certain very generalized functions: areas that need privacy or quiet should be separated from public areas, buildings that are on the big routes of daily life should be related to one another. But we want to be careful that this kind of thinking is not carried to the point of compartmentalizing the life of the College. As colleges grow, there is a temptation for departments to draw together into separate clusters of buildings and to become worlds in themselves. We would like to discourage this and are therefore not much interested in reserving land around each new building for its future satellites. Communication between disciplines is fundamental to education at Bennington, and rather than stress a separate and efficient Arts Area or a separate and efficient Science Area or a separate and efficient Administrative Area, we would like to stress the contacts between them.

[The rest of the program lays out in great detail the multitude of interlocking decisions that must be made about both new and old buildings. I am not including it here because it's very long and little of it ever got done, but if anyone is interested I'll be glad to send them a copy.]