

Preface

My interest in municipal incorporation as a field of study began not as an academic in search of a deeper understanding of the political and urban geography of the USA, but rather as a practicing AICP urban planner charged with the mundane task of discussing basic planning legislation for a newly established municipality within the Piedmont Triad Region of North Carolina. I was working as a Community Development Planner (aka traveling planner for the state) for the North Carolina Department of Commerce in the Division of Community Assistance and was sent to brief the newly elected town council of a new city recently incorporated. During my presentation in this semirural/semi-suburban town of a couple of hundred people, I kept wondering why these people wanted to create another town, what public services will they provide, how often new cities like this one are created. Little did I know that this event would occupy my thoughts for several decades and become the focus of my first decade of scholarly research in the academy.

This event was one of many experiences I had for a variety of local governments, council of governments, and the State of North Carolina during my tenure as an urban planning professional. During the late 1990s and early 2000s, I worked my way up from the first City Planner in a small town in North Carolina to the Assistant Director of Planning for a community of more than 50,000 residents. During this journey, I was constantly involved in the development of annexation studies, creating comprehensive and land use plans for new communities, supporting and sometimes battling consolidation/mergers and negotiating with special purpose districts. As the Assistant Planning Director of a medium-sized city in North Carolina, I had the unfortunate experience of being “shouted out of a meeting” in which I was presenting the results of an annexation study. The study was acted upon, and more than 1000 acres of previously unincorporated territory was added to the municipality I was working for, against the vehement opposition of those property owners affected. Interestingly, in several cases, annexation studies ended up spurring the incorporation of new cities—something that Rigos and Spindler (1991) coined “defensive incorporations” which will be discussed in this book. These experiences formed the foundation of my interests in local government boundary change and specifically municipal incorporation for years.

When I was a practicing urban planner, North Carolina was at the epicenter of local government boundary change activity, being a national leader in incorporation activity during the 1990s and consistently ranked in the top 5 nationally in terms of the frequency of municipal annexation activity. I was constantly inundated with projects that had to deal with these complex spatial and political events that affected neighboring communities or those where I worked. These early career events provided me with the spark to return to school and receive my Ph.D. in Geography. Specifically, municipal incorporation became the focus of my dissertation research, my early career focus with the publication of numerous scholarly articles on the topic and presentations on the topic as far away as Cape Town, South Africa

The Spiritual City?

As this book will highlight, new cities can be found in a variety of settings across the nation and have been established for a wide range of reasons. However, one of the most interesting newly incorporated municipalities (NIMs) created over the last several decades is located in a southeast corner of Iowa, two hours from Davenport, Iowa, and right in the middle of prime farming country. This new city is known as the “Capital of the Global Country of World Peace, a borderless, global country” (WHO-TV Des Moines 2002). When it was incorporated it became the 950th city established in Iowa and the first new city created in Iowa since 1982.... it’s name Maharishi Vedic City! Neighboring places are known as Fairfield, Libertyville, and Packwood....as you can tell by the name Maharishi Vedic City is not your typical Iowa municipality, but rather a city devoted to the principles of Transcendental Meditation.

Maharishi Vedic City was incorporated on July 25, 2001, and derives its name from a pretty unusual combination of terms. First, “Vedic” comes from the Sanskrit word “Veda” and means knowledge. Maharishi is used to honor Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the Beatles meditation guru, a spiritual leader who founded Transcendental Meditation and a school in nearby Fairfield, IA during the 1970s (Lee 2001; Maharishi Vedic City, Iowa 2017).

The city was established in an effort to create a “national center for perfect health and world peace” by following the Vedic way of life. The planned urban oasis consists of more than 3000 acres and is expected to host a population of 10,000 residents upon completion. According to the US Census Bureau’s population estimates the city had 259 residents in 2010.

Some of the more distinguishing characteristics of the construction of buildings within the city include the eastern-facing orientation of all the building facades, gold-colored kalashes or spires that can be found on the roofs of community buildings and Brahmadhan or centers of silence found in each home within the city (Egenes 2005). These building principles are mandated in order to promote environmental and spiritual health for residents. Other unique components to the city include the banning of nonorganic foods, community greenhouse, city-wide

composting, and use of solar and wind power (Lydersen 2004). This is not your traditional suburban style development.

New cities are not just White, suburban enclaves on the outskirts of metropolitan areas. Rather, as this book will show, new municipalities come in all shapes, sizes, and reasons for existing. Some new municipalities are composed of only a few residents, while others incorporate with tens of thousands of citizens. New municipalities also cluster together in a few counties and states, while other states have not seen any municipal incorporation activity for decades as a result of state laws, and unique urban and political geographies. Finally, the rationale behind incorporation events varies greatly. These rationales include “defensive incorporations,” which seek to block the annexation from a nearby existing municipality, to the provision of public services, to unique local conditions, which includes the need to be able to sell alcohol!

It is with this background information I delve into this book which explores newly incorporated municipalities in the USA. This book is an attempt to explore the spatial manifestation of new municipalities, patterns of new cities, and the people who reside in them. Hopefully this attempt will be a success and leads to additional exploration and discovery related to this interesting, yet understudied arena of research. The theory of local government boundary change needs more voices, who can ask new and interesting questions about this critical topic.

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<http://www.springer.com/978-3-319-72187-3>

Municipal Incorporation Activity in the United States
Patterns, People and Procedures

Smith, R.M.

2018, XX, 184 p. 30 illus., 25 illus. in color., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-72187-3