THE INTERNATIONAL ECOLOGICAL CITY CONFERENCE

Beasley — Imagine what environment- 
tal activists would say about this: in the mi-
dle of a national forest, next to a pri-
sate mountain lake, a new town with 
homes and jobs for 2,500 people is being 
built on what used to be a 
1,600-acre ranch.

"Turns out they like it. In fact, the 
project (Cerro Gordo, outside Eugene, 
Oregon) was praised last March at the 
International Ecological City Confer-
ence as an example of how cities 
should be built. The Conference was a 
gathering of activists, designers, plan-
ners and public officials interested in 
buiding "ecocities," or cities that 
strive to get a better balance with nature.

The ecocity movement stems from the 
promise that cities are "out of sync 
with healthy life systems on earth, and 
[are] functioning in nearly complete 
disregard of [their] long-term sources 
of sustenance," writes Richard Regis-
ter, president of Berkeley-based Urban 
Ecology, a conference sponsor.

But this is no back-to-nature ideal; 
cities are recognized as essential to hu-
man culture. "Something is very right 
about our life in cities," writes Regis-
ter. "We are putting together amazing 
projects and creations, big institutions 
and small inventions, exploring arts 
and sciences, ourselves and our uni-
verse, together. Cities serve this socia-
Banners in downtown Berkeley 
are one of the few reminders of 
the city's creeks, most of which 
have been buried in culverts.

"nity and may well be "natural" to us."

Cities may be natural, but the con-
ference made clear that the ecocity 
would demand a fundamental restruc-
turing of the way we arrange our 
homes, work places, shopping and 
leisure activities over space. This 
would be necessary if we curtailed the 
use of automobiles, which, ecocity sup-
porters rightly pointed out, give us 
remarkable mobility but exact an enor-
mous toll in wasted time and energy.

Such a restructuring would also be 
necessary if our hypermobile society 
were to respect local natural character 
and ecological constraints. We would 
need to forge closer connections to 
the sources of energy, food and water 
that sustain us and to the flora and 
fauna that surround us — connections 
that would demand new approaches to 
arhitecture and landscape design.

The difficulty has been translating 
this vision into real places. Cerro 
Gordo is an idealistic attempt. Cars, 
the scourge of any ecocity, are banned. 
A thousand acres of the site will be 
left undeveloped. The town center is 
situated to avoid wildlife migration
ty design into a concrete vision of how familiar neighborhoods and streets could be transformed — visions residents could embrace and act upon.

The ecocity conference suggested relationships among nature, resources, the economy and people that would be the foundation of new communities, and a new sense of place. But to engage people in its ultimate vision, the ecocity movement must speak the language of place in the most specific terms possible, and in communities that already exist today.

— Todd W. Bresi

WILL “LE MICKEY” PLAY IN PARIS?

Paris—At first the idea of a Disneyland located in France seems unlikely, if not downright unpatriotic. In a country whose cultural pride and self-assurance are unequalled, Mickey and Minnie’s $2.9 billion invasion spread across nearly 3,000 acres appears too fantastic. Why import a surrogate American Main Street, a reproduction Mississippi riverboat, or animated version of Grimm’s fairy tales to Europe? Isn’t such fantasy the stuff of Hollywood? Don’t people travel to Europe because it’s real?

Euro Disneyland, planned to open in 1992 (coincident with further development of the European Common Market and the connection of Great Britain to mainland Europe by high-speed rail), is France’s opening bid to become the recreation capital of Europe. An open expanse of country-side is being converted to support a new cash crop: tourists. Through clever financing and adroit operation, Disney, an entertainment giant made wealthy by theme parks, movies and allied product sales, stands to enhance profits greatly while teaching new generations of Europeans to sing: “M-I-C-K-E-Y M-O-U-S-E…”

The numbers are incredible.

Projected attendance for the first year is 11 million. But this is for only the first theme park, a 500-room hotel and 595-visitor camping ground. When complete, Euro Disneyland will have two theme parks, a total of 18,200 hotel rooms, 2,100 camp sites, a 15-acre “entertainment center,” 173 acres

Painted curb markers show the original routes of Berkeley’s creeks. Each creek is assigned a unique logo (above). Curves and speed bumps in the Mickey “slow street” discourage auto use.