

# Historic Greenbelt Walking Tour Trail Guide



## Take a Walk in Historic Greenbelt

In 1936 the federal government built the entire town of Greenbelt, Maryland, a bold experiment in town planning and cooperative living. During the Great Depression of the 1930s millions of people were unemployed and thousands were crowding into the nation's cities, looking for work. They were also seeking homes for their families at the same time that the country faced a serious shortage of affordable housing. In response President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Resettlement Administration in 1935 and named Rexford Guy Tugwell, a Columbia University economics professor, to head the agency. Tugwell had the utopian dream of building communities throughout the country that would create construction jobs for unemployed workers, provide well-designed homes for low-income people, and demonstrate to developers how to build housing following the garden city planning principles he admired. In addition to Greenbelt the government built two other New Deal "greenbelt towns": Greenhills, Ohio, near Cincinnati, and Greendale, Wisconsin, near Milwaukee. When he first visited Greenbelt President Roosevelt was so impressed that he declared the town "an experiment that ought to be copied by every community in the United States." In 1997 Greenbelt became a National Historic Landmark.

Originally all the town's businesses were owned cooperatively by the residents. The cooperative businesses in Greenbelt included a grocery store, drug store, movie theater, gas station, newspaper, and valet shop. The residents shared in the businesses' profits, and helped decide upon the products offered, the prices, and the movies shown in the theater. When the government sold the town in 1952, the residents formed a cooperative in order to buy the houses. These original houses are still owned cooperatively by the residents. The Co-op Supermarket and the local paper, the News Review, remain as cooperatives, while the other businesses are now privately owned.

### Parking

Free public parking is located in designated parking lots. Buses can unload in the parking lot behind the library. Please observe that some parking spaces have time limits.

### Restrooms

Public restrooms are located in the Community Center, the Public Library, the Youth Center, the Aquatic and Fitness Center, and at "Buddy" Attick Park near the playground.

### Leash laws

Dogs must be on leashes at all times in Greenbelt. Owners must remove their pet's droppings.

### Places to eat

Affordable restaurants are located in Roosevelt Center in the heart of historic Greenbelt. There are also public tables with umbrellas for outdoor dining. Picnic tables are also located at "Buddy" Attick park.

## Suggested Walking Routes

### The Heart of Historic Greenbelt

Greenbelt's historic past is easily appreciated by taking a self-guided walking tour along the pedestrian paths that surround the public buildings and original houses in Greenbelt's center. This walk highlights seven interpretive panels in the historic district beginning at the Community Center. (Approximately 15 minutes.)

- ▲ Community Center (Point of Interest #1). The interpretive panel about this building is located on Crescent Road near the library (Point of Interest # 2).
- ▲ Greenbelt Museum (#4): Walk along Crescent Road past the Library, cross the access road behind the Library and follow the walking path through the underpass under Crescent Road, (#3) then up to the right, to the interpretive panel on the path facing the Museum House on the right.
- ▲ Inner walkways and original homes: Follow the path to the left toward Southway, with the Community Center on your left, behind the apartment buildings. At the end of the apartments, circle around the small playground and continue straight on the path until it leads to the road. (See #5, #6, and #7.)
- ▲ Roosevelt Center (#8): Cross the road at the intersection of Southway and Crescent, and continue on the paths to the underpass leading to Roosevelt Center, on the left, where you will find another panel facing the center.
- ▲ Gas Station: From the Roosevelt Center panle turn right toward the gas station. Another panel is located up Crescent Road facing the gas station. Return to the Roosevelt Center.
- ▲ Aquatic and Fitness Center (#9): Walk toward the Mother and Child statue. Turn left between the stores and the office building. Follow the path to the right and cross the parking lot access road to the Aquatic Center.
- ▲ Follow the path toward the Community Center and you will find another interpretive panel facing the outdoor pool.

### Playground Crawl

There are over 20 playgrounds within the historic section of Greenbelt. How many can you and your children visit in one day? (Hint: The playground at "Buddy" Attick Park has the most imaginative play structures.)

### Major Historic Greenbelt Festivals

Greenbelt Day	First weekend in June
Fourth of July	Fireworks at Greenbelt Lake
Labor Day Festival	Labor Day Weekend, Parade on Monday
Festival of Lights	First full weekend in December, Community Center

## Points of Interest

### 1. Community Center

15 Crescent Road. This building is open to the public Monday - Saturday from 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., Sunday 9:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., and the halls are lined with historic photographs illustrating Greenbelt's development. The Greenbelt Museum presents exhibitions in the room next to the main office where you can learn more about the Greenbelt experience. Visit on the first Sunday of each month for an Artful Afternoon where there are performances, art gallery shows, and resident artists open their studios to visitors. The sculptures on the side of the building were created by Works Progress Administration artist Lenore Thomas Strauss. To learn more, visit the interpretive panel describing the building located on Crescent Road, facing the building next to and the Library. Read about Eleanor Roosevelt's visits to Greenbelt in the wayside panel located on the Community Center's main lawn near the parking lot.

### 2. Greenbelt Library

11 Crescent Road. The Greenbelt Library is run by the Prince George's County Memorial Library System. The Greenbelt Library began as a grassroots partnership between residents and the City and was housed in what is now the Community Center. In 1955 the Prince George's County Memorial Library System took over the operation of the Library. The current facility opened in 1970 in this central, pedestrian-accessible location. The Library contains the Tugwell Room, a special collection of books and archival materials relating to the history of the Greenbelt towns, city planning, and the cooperative movement. Rexford Tugwell ran the Resettlement Administration and was responsible for the creation of the Greenbelt towns. You can access the Tugwell collection online at [www.prge.lib.md.us/lib/tugwell.html](http://www.prge.lib.md.us/lib/tugwell.html).

### 3. Pedestrian Underpasses and Parkway Overpass

Greenbelt was designed with pedestrian underpasses that run below Crescent Road so that children and others on foot would not have to risk crossing traffic. There were many underpasses included in the town's original designs, but only four were built because of budget constraints. A pedestrian overpass was built in 1983 in order for Eleanor Roosevelt High School students to walk from Greenbelt's center to their school on Greenbelt Road. It is located at the end of Gardenway Road and passes over the Baltimore/Washington Parkway.

### 4. Greenbelt Museum

Founded in 1987, the Greenbelt Museum includes a historical house and an exhibit room in the Community Center. The Greenbelt Museum invites visitors to experience the lives of ordinary Americans during two momentous events of the twentieth century, the Great Depression and World War II. Greenbelt reflects the extraordinary response to those times and the planned community's evolving legacy. You can access the museum online at [www.greenbeltmuseum.org](http://www.greenbeltmuseum.org).

### House at 10-B Crescent Road

The Greenbelt Museum includes an original house near the town's center that is restored and furnished with objects from the period 1936 to 1946. The furniture on display was designed and built to fit these homes by the New Deal's Special Skills Division. The house is open on Sundays, from 1 to 5 p.m. On other days you can visit the interpretive panel located on the garden-side path behind the house. For special group tours please call 301-507-6582.

### 5. Parks and Playgrounds

Greenbelt was planned with children in mind. The town contained 13 playgrounds originally located in the green space between the houses. Today there are over 20 playgrounds in the area of historic Greenbelt. All are located in the green space between the homes in the interior of Greenbelt's "superblocks" so that children can access them without having to cross any roads. The houses all face the shared green space with a "garden side" door connecting the house to the system of pedestrian paths. Greenbelt originally included extensive woodlands surrounding the town. Hiking and campfire parties were regular activities for Greenbelt's early residents.

Imaginative play structures and a basketball court are located at "Buddy" Attick Park near the parking lot. The park behind 73 Court Ridge Road is also noteworthy; in addition to a playground, the park includes beautiful views of the Beltsville Agricultural Research farm, a basketball half-court and a small picnic pavilion with a grill.

### 6. Original Houses

Greenbelt's designers used two housing styles: those made with cinder blocks with flat roofs and those with brick exteriors and peaked slate roofs. Both housing types originally had steel casement windows. There were 887 units built initially, which included units in apartment buildings near the town's center. At first the homes were painted off-white with bright pastel colored trim. In 1941, the federal government built 1000 more units in Greenbelt in order to house people coming to Washington to help with the defense effort during World War II. These homes featured frame construction, peaked roofs and sash windows. In 1952 Greenbelt residents formed a cooperative in order to buy the houses from the government. All these original houses are still owned cooperatively. (See information on G.H.I., Point of Interest #11.)

### 7. Municipal Building

25 Crescent Road. The Municipal building was built in 1963 and houses the city offices. The Edgar L. Smith wing was added in 1978. Greenbelt was the first municipality in the state of Maryland to adopt the Council/Manager form of government.

### 8. Roosevelt Center

The town's center includes the original movie theater, now owned by the City of Greenbelt, the Co-Op grocery store, restaurants and small businesses. With its 40-foot Cinemascope screen, the Greenbelt Theatre is one of the last large-screen movie theaters in the Washington D.C. area. The Mother and Child statue in the center mall was created for this space by New Deal sculptress Lenore Thomas Strauss. Please visit the interpretive panel in the Roosevelt Center for more information about the Center's history.

### 9. Aquatic and Fitness Center

The city provides indoor and outdoor pools, exercise equipment and classes at this facility. Please see the wayside panel describing this site located on the path between the Community Center and the outdoor pool.

### 10. Youth/Recreation Center

The Youth Center, run by the City's Recreation Department, is a drop-in facility that is open daily. It includes a gymnasium, game room, free-weight room, locker rooms, multi-purpose room and classrooms. The Youth Center opened in 1961, replacing a smaller facility called the "Drop Inn." The city expanded this building in 1971. Directly behind this building is Braden Field, an athletic field named after Roy S. Braden. Braden aided in the selection of Greenbelt's first residents and was the Greenbelt's first town manager.

### 11. Greenbelt Homes Inc. (GHI) Housing Cooperative

Greenbelt Homes Inc. is a not-for-profit housing cooperative encompassing 1600 homes, including all of Greenbelt's original historic town homes. A housing organization formed in 1949 when Greenbelt's residents pooled their resources in order to purchase the town from the federal government. It was later called Greenbelt Veterans Housing Corporation (GVHC) because the government could only sell the town to a veteran's group at that time. G.H.I. houses are now owner-occupied. Owners have the right to perpetual use of their dwellings. Owners may sell their homes and receive any equity that has accrued. For more information, visit the wayside panel near the G.H.I. offices on Hamilton Place.

### 12. Community Gardens

Greenbelt included allotment gardens on the town's periphery from the early days when the Greenbelt Garden Club formed to encourage people to plant vegetables and flowers. Club members still use the garden plots in front of and behind the G.H.I. building, and to the right of the path on Gardenway that leads to the Parkway overpass.

### 13. Hamilton Cemetery

A display case containing gravestones commemorates the site of the Hamilton family cemetery. In 1768, John Hamilton purchased 240 acres that extended from this area to much of Greenbelt East. At least seven Hamilton family members were buried in this graveyard during the c1800s.

### 14. Fire Station

125 Crescent Road. Greenbelt's volunteer fire department has operated since 1938. It originally shared a building next to the gas station on Crescent Road with the police department. (Please see the wayside panel on Centerway near the gas station to view a picture of the building as a fire station.) The current fire station, located between Parkway Road and St. Hugh's Catholic Church, opened in 1961.

### 15. Parkbelt Homes

(Homes located on Forest Way.) In 1938 a company called General Houses of Chicago built ten experimental prefabricated homes and set up a program for the residents to own their homes cooperatively after ten years of payments. A home at the end of Forest Way is the only one that bears its original appearance.

### 16. Police Station

550 Crescent Road. Greenbelt's police force, founded in late 1937, originally patrolled the lake and wooded areas of Greenbelt on horseback. The police first shared a station with the fire department, and later were located in the Roosevelt Center and then in the Municipal Building with the city offices. In 1989, the City of Greenbelt constructed a dedicated building for the police on Crescent Road near Kenilworth Avenue.

### 17. Albert S. "Buddy" Attick Park

Greenbelt's lake park is named after Albert S. "Buddy" Attick. Attick served Greenbelt in many capacities. He was among the construction workers who built Greenbelt, and then was the town's first mounted police officer. He later rose through the ranks of city government until he retired as the much admired Director of Public Works. The park features an exceptional playground, a basketball court, picnic areas, a band stand, and beautiful Greenbelt Lake, with a 1.25 mile loop trail for walking and biking.

### 18. Greenbelt National Park

The National Park Service offers hiking and camping in wooded Greenbelt National Park, located on Greenbelt Road (Route 193) between Kenilworth Avenue and the Capital Beltway. The land was originally part of the City's "green belt" and has been under the control of the National Park Service since 1950.

### Credits

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### Contact Information

Greenbelt Museum	301-507-6582	Greenbelt Library	301-345-5800
Community Center	301-397-2208	Greenbelt Homes Inc.	301-474-4161
City Offices	301-474-8000	<a href="http://www.greenbeltmd.gov">www.greenbeltmd.gov</a>	