

*“Planning and action for sustainable development and an improved quality of life”.*

## **Fact Sheet**

### **Conservation/Cluster Development Subdivisions**

#### **What is Conservation/Cluster Development Subdivision?**

Conservation/Cluster Development Subdivision is a subdivision design that preserves important natural features such as open fields, hilltops, forests, and rivers. Conservation/Cluster Development Subdivision locates houses on smaller parcels of land, and the land that would have been allocated to individual lots is preserved in its natural state as open space for the subdivision. This open space is permanently set aside for public or private use and will not be developed. Typically, road frontage, lot size, setbacks, and other traditional subdivision design requirements are redefined to permit the developer to preserve water features, natural areas, historical sites, or other unique characteristics of the land.

#### **Example of a Conventional Subdivision Design**

If a developer owned 36 acres of land and could subdivide the land with a density and minimum lot size of one dwelling unit per two acres, then the developer could divide the land into 18 lots each with a minimum lot size of two acres each, without environmental considerations. This would result in all the land being allocated to each individual parcel. There would be no open space.

#### **Example of an Open Space Conservation/Cluster Development Subdivision Design (Page 4)**

If a developer owned the same 36 acres of land, they could subdivide the land with a density of one dwelling unit per \_\_ acres, with varying lot size based on the suitability of the soil for septic systems and a minimum 50% open space requirement. The developer could still divide the land into 18 lots for 18 dwelling units, but on smaller lot sizes. The protected land would be used for protection of water and wildlife, recreation, walking paths, and other conservation related issues.

#### **Potential Benefits**

1. Provide residents with larger recreation areas creating a sense of openness.
2. Provide a sense of community among residents.
3. Maintain the local rural character included in many Master Land Use Plans.
4. Protect wildlife, trees, and natural plant communities.
5. Link conservation/cluster development of several conservation designed subdivisions.
6. Allow for more flexible site design.
7. Reduce impacts on watersheds.
8. Reduce site design costs for infrastructure.
9. Provide low-maintenance and affordable housing.
10. Promote greater appreciation of homes compared to conventional subdivisions.
11. Create small community water and wastewater systems.
12. Reduce impervious surfaces and provide more natural land for water infiltration.

13. Use natural areas, such as wetlands or native plantings to help manage storm water.
14. Reduce mass grading of the property's soil surface is used.
15. Use grass swales as road ditches instead of curb and gutter.
16. Allow drain fields to be established in the area.

### **Issues and Answers**

**Loss of property tax revenue.** There should be no loss, and in fact, property value may increase. Land in current use will be assessed at the new market rate and land retained as open space will be assessed as part of common area of the development in conjunction with the individual property assessments. Open space land held by a trust or dedicated to the Town will not be taxed. However, surrounding land that benefits from the preserved open space will increase in assessed value and offset the perceived reduction.

**Time delay to project.** If the conservation / cluster development ordinance and regulations are clear and well formulated there will be no time delay. Further it may expedite approval.

**Paying Homeowner Association Fees.** These fees benefit the residents of the conservation/cluster development; maintain their investment and increase value.

**Smaller-sized lots often result in close proximity to neighbor's homes and are considered a disincentive.** If lots and housing layouts are designed carefully, each house has a private unobstructed view that overcomes the disadvantage of the small lot size. Also lot size may vary based on the soil carrying capacity rather than a fixed minimum lot size.

**Local officials, developers, and the community may be predisposed toward conventional development designs because they are familiar and well understood.** An education effort can help these groups understand the advantages of conservation/cluster development.

**Cluster standards are not always desirable to homeowners nor do they maximize the purpose and benefit for open space.** Developers have found a strong market for cluster/cluster development housing units. Further, if the conservation /cluster development ordinance and regulations are clear, full benefits will be achieved. Also, it is important to note that traditional development standards are not always desirable to homeowners as well.

**Some municipalities require developers to prepare a conventional design as a pre-requisite for a cluster design. This increases time and costs.** If the applicable ordinance and regulations are clear and well formulated, and allows flexibility, this step can be prevented.

**Stormwater run-off and septic management can take additional planning in a cluster development.** There is concern over shared septic/water systems. It should not require any more planning and the benefits are tremendous. See benefits 11-16.

**How does a Town give the proper incentives for a developer to design a cluster development instead of a conventional subdivision?** The Town's regulations can make conservation/cluster development designs mandatory. However, if a Town does not want to make cluster development

mandatory, the Town may allow density bonuses or set the maximum density in a conventional subdivision extremely low.

**Whether a new development is a conventional or a conservation /cluster development, there is concern that with more development comes greater Town costs for municipal operations and capital facilities.** This is true. However, an impact fee, or other financing tool, can be established to offset costs for the needs created by the development. This may include the construction or improvement of community facilities or services provided by the municipality. Setting the impact fee would require adopting a Capital Improvement Program.

**For further information contact Senior Planner Gerry Mylroie, AICP,  
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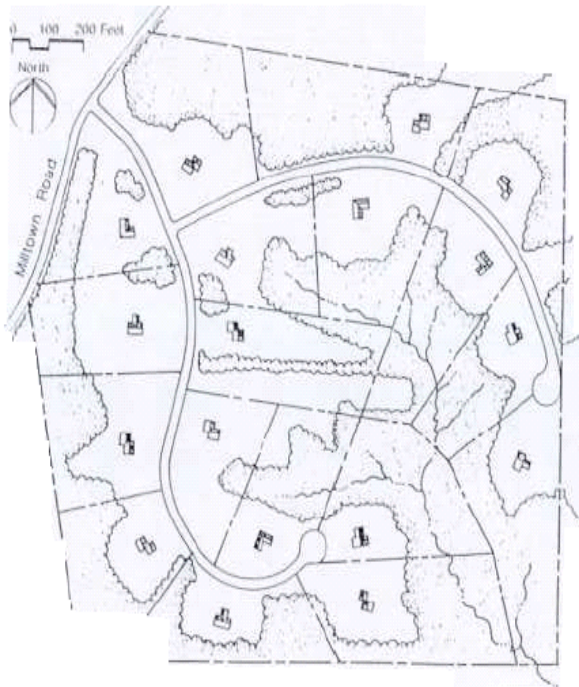
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### Conventional Design



### Open Space Conservation/Cluster Design

