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CLUSTER ZONING / CONSERVATION-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

Description:

Cluster zoning is a zoning method in which development density is determined for an entire specified area, rather than on a lot-by-lot basis. Within the specified cluster zone, a developer can exercise greater flexibility in designing and placing structures, as long as the total density requirement is met.

Cluster zoning, which is also called conservation-oriented development, allows for the total number of homes in a given piece of land to be clustered or concentrated more densely onto one or more portions of the land; typically, double the density is concentrated on half the acreage. Such a strategy allows for the development of smaller (less expensive) homes on smaller (less expensive) lots, thus providing alternative housing choices for multiple community population groups and providing the opportunity to preserve remaining land for public and neighborhood use.

Developments in cluster-zoned areas often incorporate open, common areas for use by community members and/or the wider public. The landowner and the community decide the use of the preserved open space during the subdivision review process; and uses can include parks, nature/jogging/walking trails, active recreation, and community gardens, among others.

Benefits:

For all residents, including older people and younger people with disabilities:

- Cluster zoning provides two primary benefits for residents:
 - Walkable/bikeable residential neighborhoods; and
 - Access within the neighborhood to green space, trails, parks, gardens, and other amenities in which to walk, exercise, relax, recreate, and socialize.

For the community:

- The protected open space can be designated to provide significant green buffers between neighborhoods.
- Higher density allows smaller, lower-cost housing units to be included within a neighborhood—providing greater housing choices, which is a "livable community" response for the diversity of residents that typically comprise a community.
- Greater protected open spaces protect the environment, habitats, natural resources, and ecosystems.

Impediments or barriers to development or implementation:

- NIMBY ("not in my backyard" reactions):

- Neighbors closest to the cluster development may object to density, fearing overcrowding and infringements on their familiar low-density, large-lot community character.
- Education is often needed to counter NIMBY objections and to raise general community awareness of the benefit of cluster zoning for retaining various community members, such as single adults, childless couples, older individuals and couples, and others.

Resource—examples and ordinances:

- Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (December, 1996), *Rural Cluster Development Guide* (Planning Guide #7). Extensive information and detailed discussion of the cluster zoning process, including extensive information on ordinances and the Southeastern Wisconsin Model Zoning Ordinance for Rural Cluster Development. Waukesha, WI: Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission: http://www.sewrpc.org/SEWRPCFiles/Publications/pg/pg-07_rural_cluster_development.pdf
- Cluster Housing, Seattle, WA:
 - (June, 2001), *Cottage Housing in Your Community: A guide to drafting a cottage housing ordinance*. Seattle, WA: The Housing Partnership. <http://www.mrsc.org/govdocs/S42CottageHousOrdGuide.pdf>.
 - City of Seattle, WA: *Cluster Housing Planned Developments Ordinance--* The Clustered Housing Planned Developments ordinance permits CHPDs to encourage the construction of affordable housing in single-family zones. The ordinance establishes site requirements, including what should be done with yards and landscaping, and restrictions on the type and quantity of units: <http://landuse.law.pace.edu/landuse/documents/laws/reg10/SeattleWA.23.44.024.doc>.
Seattle Municipal Code (Clustered Housing Planned Developments)—Title 23, Subtitle III, Division 2, Chapter 23.44, Subchapter II: <http://www.clerk.ci.seattle.wa.us/~scripts/nph-brs.exe?d=CODE&s1=23.44.024.snum.&Sect5=CODE1&Sect6=HITOFF&l=20&p=1&u=/~public/code1.htm&r=1&f=G>.
- New Designs for Growth, Northwest Michigan, Council of Governments: www.newdesignsforgrowth.com.
- Morgan Woods Development, Edgartown, MA, on Martha's Vineyard—a community-driven affordable housing project, this cluster-developed site utilizes a "disguised density" concept, with structures that resemble large single-family homes, but contain multifamily units; a 60-unit, 21-building community built on 12 acres of land assembled and donated by the Town, providing housing that is affordable to the island's permanent residents. Washington, DC: Urban Land Institute, *Terwillinger Models of Excellence, Creating Workforce Housing*: www.uli.org/~media/Documents/AwardsandCompetitions/Terwilliger/Profiles/Morgan_Woods.ashx. Also, The Community Builders, Inc., "Our Projects—

Morgan Woods":

http://www.tcbinc.org/what_we_do/projects/morgan_woods.htm.

- Leonard Gilroy (2002), "Conservation Subdivision Design: A Market-Friendly Approach to Local Environmental Protection," *Reason Foundation*: <http://reason.org/news/printer/conservation-subdivision-desig>. Article also includes ten links to ordinances, case examples, and conservation-orientation strategies and resources.
- Randall Arendt (1999), *Growing Greener: Putting Conservation Into Local Plans And Ordinances*. Washington, DC: Island Press. Provides a three-pronged strategy for shaping growth around a community's special natural and cultural features, demonstrating ways of establishing or modifying the comprehensive plan, zoning ordinance, and subdivision ordinance to include a strong conservation focus; includes detailed information on how to conduct a community resource inventory, a four-step approach to designing conservation subdivisions, extensive model language for comprehensive plans, subdivision ordinances, and zoning ordinances, and illustrated design principles for hamlets, villages, and traditional small town neighborhoods; includes eleven case studies of actual conservation developments in nine states, and two exercises suitable for group participation.

Resource—written and web:

- Randall Arendt (1996), *Conservation Design for Subdivisions: A Practical Guide to Creating Open Space Networks*. Washington, DC: Island Press. A practical handbook for residential developers, site designers, local officials, and landowners; explains how to implement new ideas about land-use planning and environmental protection; many illustrations, with site plans, floor plans, photographs, and renditions of houses and landscapes; describes a series of simple and straightforward techniques that allow for land-conserving development.
- (Winter, 2006), "New Towns in Rural Areas: Saving Rural Space with Smart Growth," *On Common Ground*, National Association of Realtors, Chicago, IL.
- (December, 2004), "Saving Our Villages," *A Guidebook Published for Cattaraugus County's Smart Development for Quality Communities Series—Volume 3*. Cattaraugus County, NY: Department of Economic Development, Planning and Tourism.
http://www.cattco.org/planning/planning_info.asp?Parent=12303.