**Growing Greener**

**Melding Conservation and Development**

When Denise and Greg Bayley sit in their backyard, they are surrounded with quiet and a 50-acre apple orchard. The view from their lawn chairs is row upon row of gnarly trees set into gentle rolling hills. "You can breathe here," Denise says. "We both love it because of the open space." The Bayleys do not own an estate. Nor do they own an apple orchard. They are a typical couple, living in an not-so-typical suburb.

"I have half an acre, here," said Greg. "I feel like we live on fifty acres." As concerns about open space increase, developments similar to the Bayleys’ reflect a growing trend. They live in the Ponds at Woodward—a development that actually has a pond and woods—a good example of Conservation Design.

John Snook, a senior advisor with the Brandywine Conservancy’s Environmental Management Center—a charitable land trust—helped plan the development.

"Southeastern Pennsylvania needed other tools besides the traditional zoning and land acquisition approaches. We are losing land too quickly," said Snook. "Development is going to happen. The question is how."

**Conservation Design**

In this example, Conservation Design achieves conservation while allowing the developer to build on 50 acres. Conservation Design sets aside a portion of the land as open space. This portion is then conveyed to a land trust to ensure it will remain open. Conservation Design incorporates conservation considerations into the development process and municipal ordinances to create great places to live like the Ponds at Woodward.

Limited Development

Limited development is another approach to coupling conservation and development. Conservation Design achieves conservation while allowing the developer to build on 50 acres. But with limited development, the developer voluntarily reduces the number of houses and conserves a portion of the land, often selling charitable conservation easements to be held by a conservation organization. Limited development is a voluntary approach to saving land in a development. It provides the developer with a financial incentive to set aside the land for open space, which would not be done under traditional zoning and land acquisition approaches.

"The more developed a community is, the less open space it has," Snook said. "It’s like a tax on open space. Our approach is to create a market for open space."

Most municipalities have open space ordinances that allow the top design but make impossible the bottom design. They can change this by adopting Conservation Design or other open space design codes.

"There are municipalities that are just starting to think about Conservation Design," said Snook. "Conservation Design is a way to change the development process to one that maximizes the open space in a community."

Several Pennsylvania land trusts do limited development work. In two recent cases, Heritage Conservancy partnered with Zaveta Construction to acquire land. In each case, the Conservancy conveyed a portion of the property to a developer, Zaveta Construction. Richard Zaveta of Zaveta Construction cited numerous benefits to this approach:

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- **Limited Development**
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Simply put, Conservation Design attempts the development of a parcel so that half or more of the buildable land is permanently set aside as open space. The same number of homes can be built—just on smaller lots—to landowners and developers are not financially penalized.

First, designers identify the natural and cultural features of the land to be developed. The most significant of these features are set aside for conservation—as are lands to be developed—area by area like trees and streams, wetlands, etc. The idea is that if such areas are preserved, the overall value of the property will be enhanced.

Conservation Design differs from traditional cluster developments in that it establishes higher standards for both the quantity and quality of open space. It places conservation planning at the beginning of the development process rather than at the end.

Sensible development

The Ponds at Woodward is the first step on a rotation of well-designed developments sponsored by the Natural Lands Trust, another Pennsylvania land trust.

A big yellow bus picked up township supervisor, county officials and others concerned with land use, pulled into the development. They pass an original stone farmhouse, a row of apple and peach trees and park near a field with ponds nearby in the distance.

A village arrangement of town houses is set on the street between the ponds and the orchard. Back yards face the ponds; front windows open to the orchards. Further up the road, single-family homes dot a roadside until the last one—the Bayley’s—comes into view.

For obvious reasons, you never see names like these on new subdivisions. But wouldn’t it be nice to see not only more really well-designed developments after the land-use law is implemented, but more of these named after the particular project?

Conservation Design presents the opportunity to develop while retaining substantial portions of the landscape in its historical conditions. 

Natural Lands Trust (NLT) planting professionals—Randall Arendt, Anna Hutchinson, and Monica Drewniany—lead the tour. One of the first points they make is that the Woodward design is unusual.

“It’s had to build this kind of development, if the right people are not involved,” Arendt told the crowd. At most developments, it’s illegal. Nothing but narrow lots are permitted in the two-acre district and two-acre lots in the one-acre district. No open space and nothing special powered.”

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Small investment, big payoff

NLT’s Growing Greener program broadens options available to developers and homeowners by helping municipalities create better land-use ordinances. Eleven Pennsylvania townships have adopted Growing Greener standards. Their approved preliminary plans using Conservation Design put aside 1,350 acres of open space out of 2,202 total project acres. The townships are saving an average 40% of buildable land in a process that one county has conserved all land with housing lots and roads.

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Developers’ perspectives

Developers can be story, but many find Conservation Design a plus.

“Use of the conservation design approach definitely increases value,” said developer John Locke of Trilogy Investments, LLC. “Significant resources can be preserved without sacrificing the value of the underlying property asset…[]property actually increased in value each time I embraced the conservation design approach.”

“West Vincent Township also uses Conservation Design. We had 20 subdivisions coming at us at the same time. We listened to NLT’s ideas and saw that they had relevance.”

Under the Growing Greener ordinances derived with help from NLT, Wallace has approved 240 acres of developments, with 10% of those acres put aside as open space.

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For more information, visit www.conserveland.org