

**Step One:
Identifying Conservation Areas**

The first step, which involves the identification of open space worthy of preservation, is divided into two parts: Primary Conservation Areas (Figure 6) limited to regulatory wetlands, floodplains and steep slopes, and Secondary Conservation Areas (Figure 7) including those unprotected elements of the natural and cultural landscape that deserve to be spared from clearing, grading, and development.

The act of delineating conservation areas also defines "Potential Development Areas," which occupy the balance of the site (Figure 8). This completes the first step and virtually ensures that the site's fundamental integrity will be protected, regardless of the actual configuration of house-lots and streets that will follow. In other words, once the "big picture" of conservation has been brought into focus, the rest of the design process essentially involves only lesser details. Those details, which are of critical importance to progressive developers, knowledgeable realtors, and future residents, are addressed during the last three steps. In Figure 7, those features include the mature woodlands, hedgerows, wildflower meadows, stream valley, and views into the property from the existing road.

**Step Two:
Locating House Sites**

The second step involves locating the approximate sites of individual houses, which for marketing and quality-of-life reasons should be placed at a respectful proximity to the conservation areas, with homes backing up to woodlands or hedgerows for privacy, fronting onto a central common or wildflower meadow, or enjoying long views across open fields or boggy areas (Figure 9). In a full-density plan, the number of house

Figure 6
Primary Conservation Areas

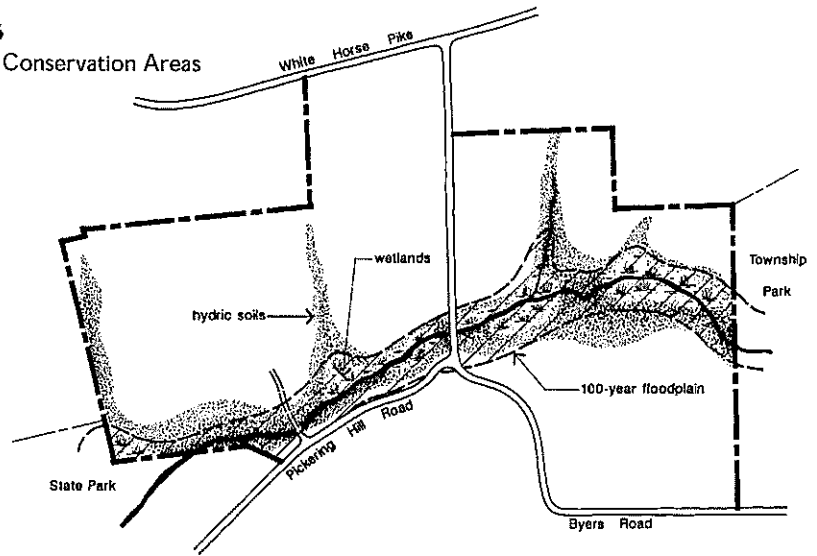


Figure 7
Secondary Conservation Areas

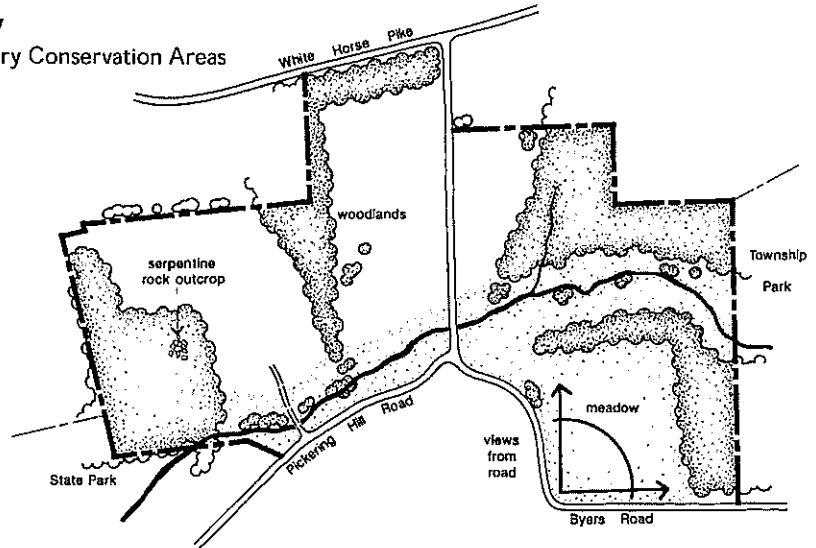
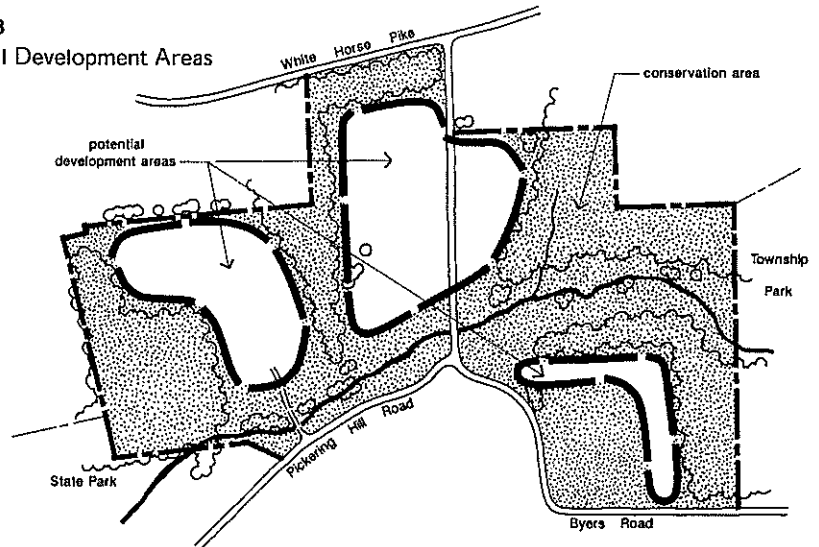


Figure 8
Potential Development Areas



sites will be the same as that shown on the "Yield Plan" (21 in this example). Other options would include voluntarily reducing that density to create a "limited development" plan, which under certain circumstances might produce the same economic payoff for the landowner.

**Step Three:
Aligning Streets and Trails**

The third step consists of tracing a logical alignment for local streets to access the 21 homes and for informal footpaths to connect various parts of the neighborhood, making it easier for residents to enjoy walking through the open space, observing seasonal changes in the landscape and possibly meeting other folks who live at the other end of the subdivision (Figure 10).

**Step Four:
Drawing in the Lot Lines**

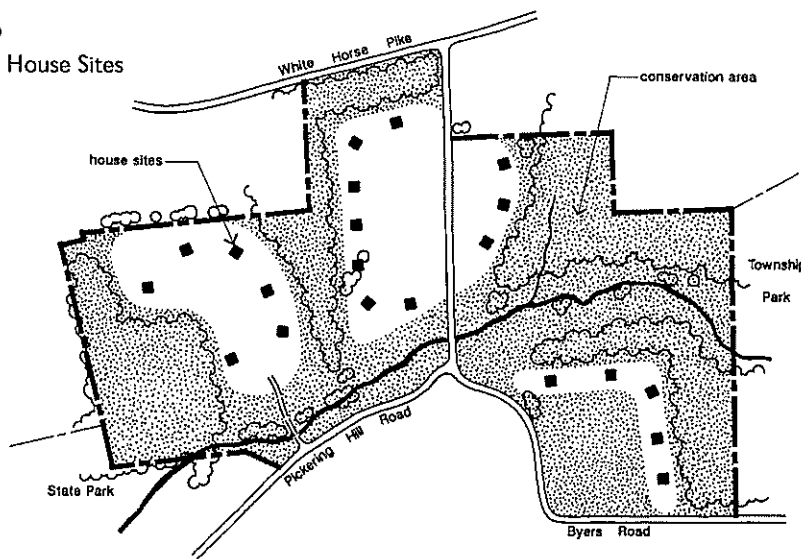
The final step is simply a matter of drawing in the lot lines, perhaps the least important part of the process. Successful developers of open space subdivisions know that most buyers prefer homes in attractive park-like settings, and that views of protected open space enable them to sell lots or houses faster and at premium prices (Figures 11 and 12). Such homes also tend to appreciate more in value, compared with those on lots in standard "cookie-cutter" developments offering no views or nearby open space.

SUMMING UP

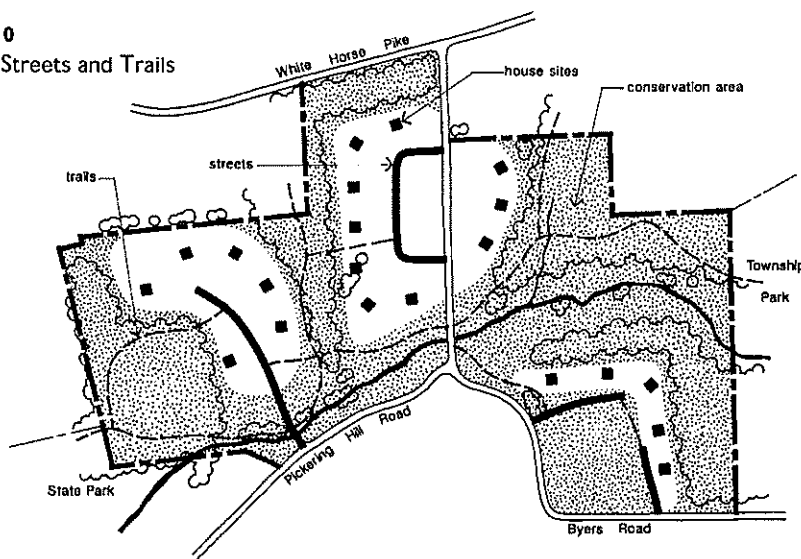
**Advantages for Local Officials,
Developers, and Residents**

Perhaps the most significant aspect of this design process is the way that it can help communities build an interconnected network of conservation areas. As described at the beginning of this publication, county-wide open

**Figure 9
Locating House Sites**



**Figure 10
Aligning Streets and Trails**



space plans, containing "Maps of Potential Conservation and Development," can pre-identify land to be conserved in each new residential subdivision. Of course, such plans must be supplemented by amendments to zoning and subdivision ordinances to ensure that developers design around the natural features on their property and place them into undivided conservation areas rather than allowing them to be converted to suburban lawns and streets.

These kinds of designs are finding a ready market among homebuyers, who are placing greater emphasis on "quality of life" issues when purchasing new houses. In the case examples illustrated in this publication, the developers have recognized the value of open space conservation, using it successfully as a marketing tool. Long vistas across permanently preserved fields, plus acres of protected woodlands, have helped ensure the success of these developments—which are

Figure 11
Drawing in the Lot Lines

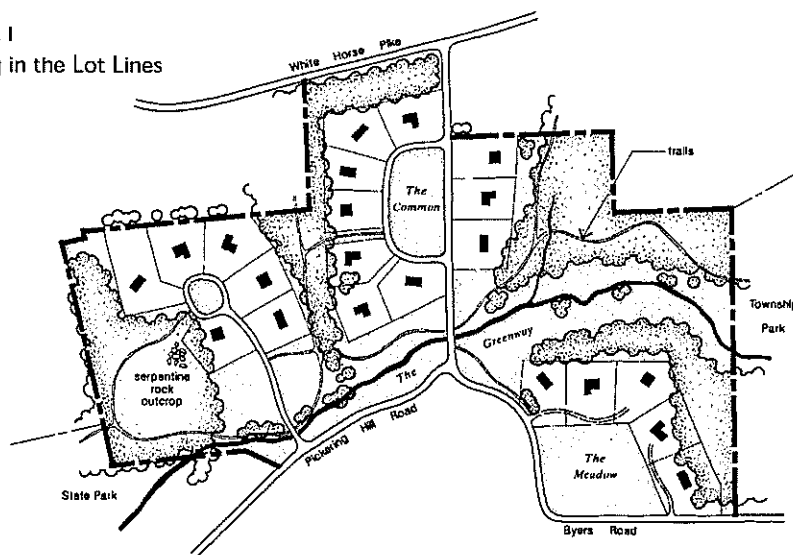
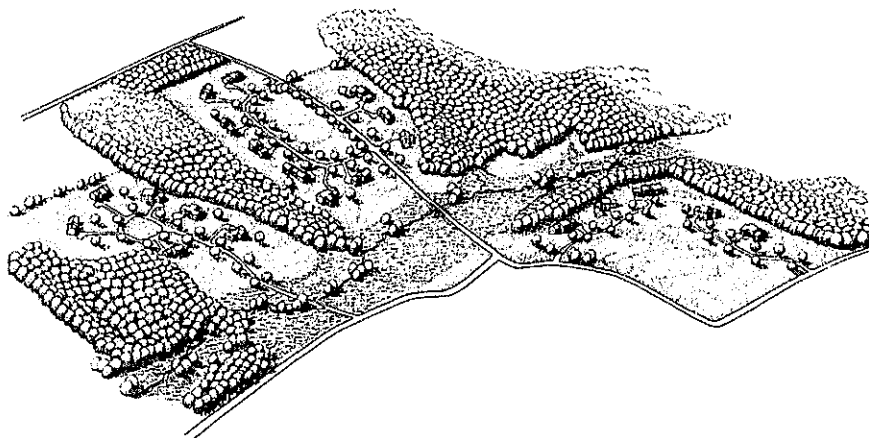


Figure 12
Conservation Subdivision Aerial Sketch



“twice green” both ecologically and economically.

Various surveys have confirmed that between one- and two-thirds of house buyers in golf course developments have little or no interest in playing golf. They have chosen homes there primarily because they prefer to dwell in park-like settings, ones that offer attractive views from their windows and pleasant places in which to stroll. Developers find that lots abutting or looking onto open space sell faster—

and at premium prices—compared with lots that are surrounded by more of the same. The good news for everyone is that huge sums need no longer be spent clearing natural land to create artificial open space in the form of golf courses. Developers who leave Nature alone can reap the same benefits at minimal cost—and with minimal disturbance to woodlands, meadows and fields.

TOWARD A NEW LAND ETHIC

The idea of a “land ethic” represents an evolution from the ancient Judeo-Christian ethics that govern relations among individuals and between individuals and society. Sixty years ago, Aldo Leopold suggested a third kind of ethic to deal with man’s relation to the land.

As Leopold, who founded the discipline of game management at the University of Wisconsin, observed in 1933, “There is yet no ethic dealing with man’s relation with the land and the animals and plants which grow upon it... The land-relation is still strictly economic, entailing privileges but not obligations.”

The idea of a land ethic is probably very much alive in the minds and hearts of many rural residents, including many landowners. What farmer, for example, would truly prefer the noise of traffic or the hum of air conditioners over the sound of bird-song or the rustle of wind through the leaves? Who would prefer to see rooftops defining the horizon line instead of treetops, or parking lots instead of fields and meadows?

In Leopold’s time there were few financial alternatives for those who depended upon the value of their land to ease their retirement years, or to pay for health care costs. Today a variety of options exist, allowing landowners to realize the economic value of their farms and woodlands without destroying the wildlife and ecological values of their properties. The conservation design approach described in this publication illustrates one of these options, one that could be used along with others to strike a better balance between development and natural areas conservation.

Among the other options are the purchase of development rights, the

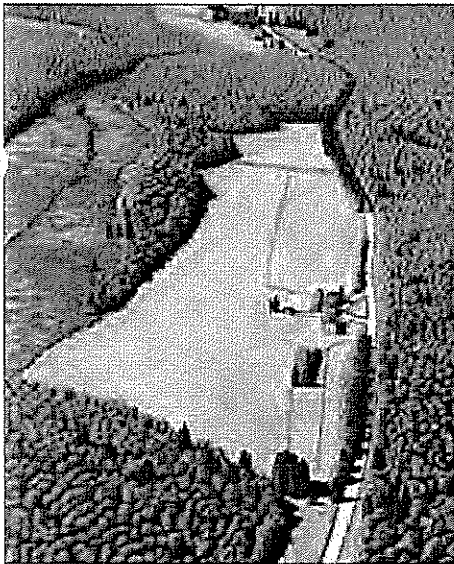
Introduction

Purpose of the Design Guidelines

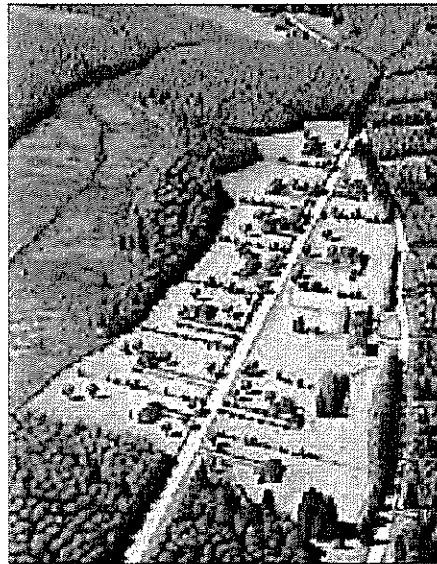
The purpose of these design guidelines is to direct the planning and design of future residential developments within the Town of Wallkill in a manner that respects the natural and cultural resources of the land and preserves the character, and even function, of the rural landscape. This document is intended to act as an illustrated guide to the Conservation Subdivision process, covered in section §249-80 of the Town Zoning Code.

What is a Conservation Subdivision?

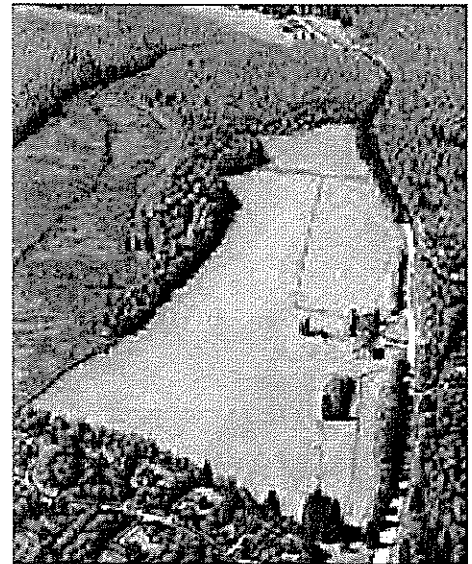
A conservation subdivision is an alternative method of subdividing properties which allows natural areas of land to be preserved by constructing the same project in a smaller area. This allows more natural or undeveloped areas to remain undisturbed, reinforcing the surrounding beauty and acting as buffers to continued development. It also encourages the preservation of certain areas of land or features to be conserved and showcased as part of a richer landscape design. A conservation subdivision must benefit the town by advancing local conservation goals in addition to benefitting the developer and future lot owners.



Example of a farm on a town road. The existing meadow is a very attractive asset to the road and provides natural views.



Undesirable - Development of the farm using conventional zoning undermines the natural setting of the meadow.



Desirable - Alternative development protects the farm by clustering the homes in discrete areas away from the meadow, protecting the natural setting and views.

The examples above illustrate the basic concept of conservation design. The most important natural feature of the site – the old farm meadow – is identified as a visual and cultural resource which defines the character of the road and offers potential for continued agricultural use. Instead of altering the character of the meadow and building atop of prime agricultural soils with a new housing development, it can be protected by placing the houses in smaller clusters within the wooded areas around the perimeter. This examples also recognizes that some resources must be impacted. Here, the woodlands were determined to be best suited to accommodate the development, allowing the farmland to be preserved.

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