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"Designing with Nature for People"

Some Economic Benefits of Conservation Design

Conservation design clearly benefits developers as well. When members of planning boards and commissions need to persuade developers to adopt this different design approach, convincing data speaking to their economic interests is essential. In this regard, it is very useful to know the following:

1. Greater flexibility in lot sizes allows developers to create lots smaller than one acre, for empty-nesters who wish to minimize their routine outdoor maintenance work (mowing lawns, raking leaves, etc.). It also enables developers to take far greater advantage of special places on the property (such as those offering views of ponds, meadows, etc.) by siting a larger number of less-wide lots there than would ordinarily be possible.
 2. The ability to divide and sell parts of the protected open space as "conservancy lots" enables them to tap into the higher-end "country property" market, boosting their profit margin and also adding value to all lots in their vicinity.
 3. Reduced site grading costs are another "hidden incentive". A client in Nacogdoches TX reports that my redesign dropped the grading costs on his 60-acre development from \$300,000 to \$50,000. In addition, it saved 24 of 25 large trees in the otherwise open landscape, retaining the value they added to the neighborhood.
 4. Reduced street costs are sometimes another benefit. In Pleasant View TN, my redesign of an 86-lot subdivision saved the developer \$212,000 (by his own calculations), through wiser street layouts involving less street length.
 5. Greater attractiveness, provided by the open space, is a further benefit having direct economic value. An Indiana client reports that my design enabled him to charge \$20,000 to \$25,000 more per lot, compared with houselots without open space, such as those he had developed the previous year in the same community, for the same upscale market, at the same overall density. On his 40-lot conservation subdivision, the added value totaled between \$800,000 and \$1,000,000.
 5. Faster absorption rates are another economic advantage created with very significant amount of open space are preserved. My Centerville project in the Tallahassee area surprised even the client, who reported that 86 of the first 87 lots in Phase One had sold out in seven hours flat. At the Sugar Creek Preserve with 70% open space in Lafayette (Walworth Co.) WI, fully 15 of the 52 lots were pre-sold prior to advertising, double the developer's original projection.
 6. Research Results: One researcher, who recently studied 184 lots in conservation subdivisions and in conventional subdivisions in South Kingstown RI, reported the following results:
 - developers' costs were 28% lower (\$7400 less, per lot), compared with conventional subdivisions
 - lots in conservation subdivisions carried a 14% premium (about \$15,000 more per lot), compared with conventional developments
 - lots sold 47% more quickly, compared with those in conventional subdivisions.
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