



CONSERVATION SUBDIVISIONS

WHAT ARE CONSERVATION SUBDIVISIONS?

Conservation subdivisions are an optional part of the HCP. They are residential or mixed-use developments in which a significant portion of the parcel is set aside as permanently protected open space while development is clustered on the remainder of the property. Conservation subdivisions are usually "density neutral," meaning that the development contains the same number of lots as it would have if developed as a conventional subdivision. However, instead of designing the development so that all, or nearly all, of the land in the development is subdivided into house lots and streets, conservation subdivisions cluster the lots onto a portion of the

land while preserving the remaining acreage, usually the most sensitive and ecologically significant portions of the property, as permanently protected greenspace. The greenspace is permanently protected by a conservation easement so that homeowners are assured that these areas will never be developed. In many respects conservation subdivisions are similar to golf course communities, but they feature natural areas, gardens, or farmland amenities rather than golf courses.

BENEFITS FOR THE IMPERILED SPECIES OF THE ETOWAH WATERSHED

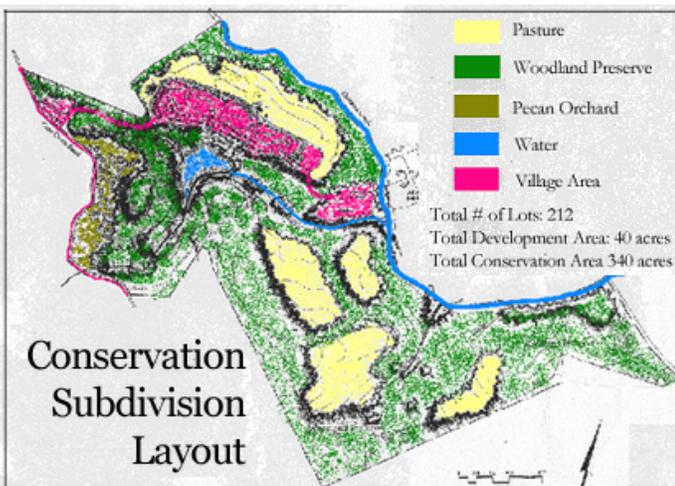
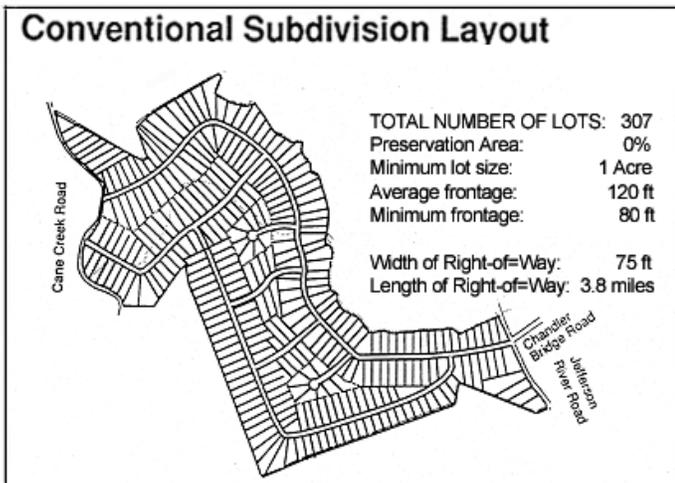
Conservation subdivisions are a valuable tool for protecting water quality and aquatic habitat in the Etowah watershed because they protect riparian habitat, groundwater recharge areas, wetlands, natural drainage areas and floodplains and require less impervious surface than conventional subdivisions, resulting in the creation of less stormwater runoff and associated impacts.

BENEFITS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

In addition to the ecological benefits provided by conservation subdivisions they also provide benefits to landowners, developers and local governments. Because conservation subdivisions allow houses to be clustered more closely than conventional subdivisions they often require less infrastructure. This means fewer roads and sidewalks, and fewer power, phone, sewer and cable lines. Reductions in these services save developers money and that savings is passed to homebuyers. Fewer roads and utilities also mean reduced maintenance costs, which translates into lower taxes for local residents.

BENEFITS FOR DEVELOPERS

Developers are not required to build conservation subdivisions. It is an option, and in many cases offers incentives that make building conservation friendly developments economically worthwhile. In many cases, building conservation subdivisions can enhance a property's development potential. For example, the development potential of properties limited by stream buffer laws, slopes too steep for construction or floodplains can



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be enhanced by building a conservation subdivision. For example, if zoning allows 110 homes to be built on a 55 acre site, but 30 acres of the site lie in floodplain and are subsequently removed from the site's buildable area, it would seem that only 70 homes could be built. However, by clustering houses closely together on the site's buildable area, a conservation design may allow all 110 homes to be built while protecting the sensitive floodplain.

BENEFITS FOR HOMEOWNERS AND COMMUNITIES

Development trends show an increasing popularity of residential subdivisions that include recreational amenities such as walking and biking trails, ball fields and community open space. Studies have shown that homes located in developments with easy and open access for homeowners to these types of amenities fetch higher prices than do those located within conventional subdivisions. Homeowners gain assurance that their homes will always be located near or adjacent to greenspace that is permanently protected.

Studies have also shown that property values in neighborhoods adjacent to conservation subdivisions often increase as a result of conservation development. The amenities conservation friendly developments create—trails, protected areas and connectivity among neighborhoods, for example—often

enhance neighboring property values, rather than lower them. Additionally, residents in neighboring subdivisions enjoy the assurance that the protected areas of a conservation subdivision will never be developed. Many conservation subdivision ordinances contain provisions that encourage connectivity of trails systems and green space among neighboring developments, so that residents of neighboring developments can share the benefits of conservation subdivisions. Finally, communities benefit from the clean water and air that these greenspaces provide to their neighborhoods.



CONSERVATION SUBDIVISIONS AND THE ETOWAH AQUATIC HCP

A conservation subdivision is an optional part of the HCP. In jurisdictions that have not adopted a conservation subdivision ordinance, developers who want to design developments in conservation-friendly ways are often prevented from doing so because of other development regulations such as lot-size and dimension requirements and density restrictions. Conservation subdivision ordinances provide local building professionals the option to build conservation-friendly developments that

follow the local government's clearly stated guidelines.

The HCP model conservation subdivision ordinance has nine key components:

- Conservation subdivisions are allowed by-right in all residential zones.
- Approved methods must be used for determining the number of lots allowed on a particular site. The model ordinance provides two common methods of determining lot yield.
- The four step process and a site analysis plan map must be used to identify appropriate areas for conservation and development.
- Conservation areas must be prioritized for protection based on their ecological and historical values.
- 40% of the site must be set aside as permanently protected open space.
- Allowable and prohibited uses for the open space must be outlined.
- Open space must be permanently protected with a legal tool such as conservation easement that is held by a land trust, local government, or similar responsible party.
- Open space must be owned in fee simple by a responsible agency such as local government or homeowners' association.
- Fee simple owners of the open space must adopt an open space management plan setting out guidelines and schedules for maintenance and care of the open space lands.

Helpful links:

Etowah Aquatic HCP: www.etowahhcp.org

Tools for Quality Growth: Conservation Subdivisions www.rivercenter.uga.edu/service/tools/cons_subdivisions.htm

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