Green Neighborhoods

Open Space Residential Design

A community choice

GROWTH & SPRAWL ON THE NORTH SHORE

As new residents are drawn to the character and beauty of the North Shore, more homes and subdivisions are being built to accommodate them, and more open space is being lost. Local regulations requiring new homes to be built on lots of one acre or more were originally intended to discourage development, but are now actually contributing to sprawl by consuming large tracts of land with each new subdivision. This development trend contributes to:

- *loss of open space and community character*
- *isolation from neighbors*
- *increased municipal costs*
- *habitat degradation*
- *polluted waterways*

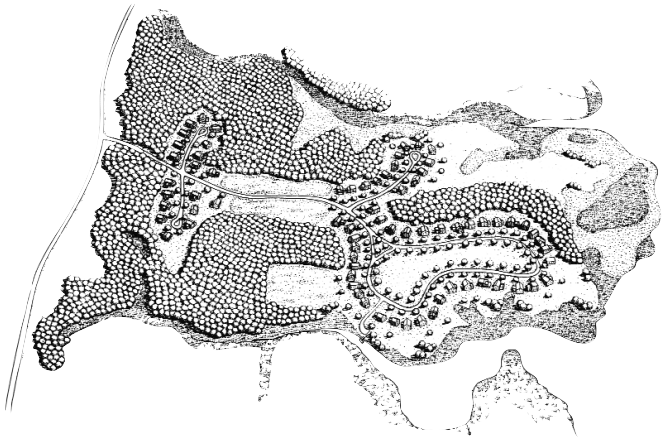
Furthermore, the review and permitting process is currently cumbersome and often a lengthy, costly, and antagonistic process that inhibits compromise and innovation.

Left: Preserved farming paths provide open space enjoyment.

Above: Between 1971 and 1991, the population in eastern Massachusetts increased 15%, yet the area of developed land increased 35%. By 2020, the population is projected to increase by 8%, but another 23% of land is expected to be consumed by development.

CONVENTIONAL SUBDIVISION

CONSERVATION SUBDIVISION



A study in Amherst, Massachusetts showed homes in an open space development appreciated 12.7% faster over 20 years than homes in a conventional subdivision of the same overall density.

BENEFITS OF OPEN SPACE RESIDENTIAL DESIGN

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

FOR THE MUNICIPALITY:

- Reduces infrastructure and maintenance costs.
- Reduces demand to acquire new public parkland.
- Maintains local character.

FOR THE DEVELOPER AND REALTOR:

- Streamlines site plan review process; reduces time and costs.
- Adds valuable amenities that can enhance marketing and sale prices.
- Increases resale value; homes in Open Space Residential
- Developments tend to appreciate faster than those in conventional subdivisions.
- Provides flexibility to encourage developers to create Green Neighborhoods.
- Decreases site development costs by designing with the terrain.

ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

- Protects unique or fragile habitat.
- Reduces the pollution impacts of stormwater runoff.
- Promotes aquifer recharge.
- Provides opportunities to link wildlife habitats.
- Conservation values are part of the planning process.

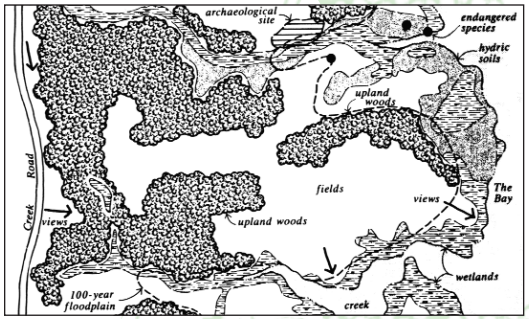
SOCIAL & RECREATIONAL BENEFITS

- Reduces isolation and sprawl.
- Provides a neighborhood gathering place and preserves New England community character.
- Promotes community involvement.
- Provides neighborhood trails within an interconnected

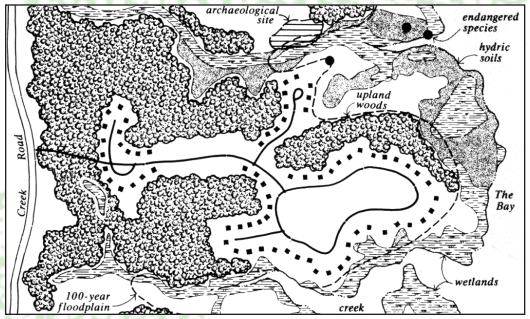
Surveys show that 40%-80% of people living in golf course developments don't golf. They live there because of the open space views from their homes.

This farm was preserved as a community asset in this Massachusetts open space subdivision.

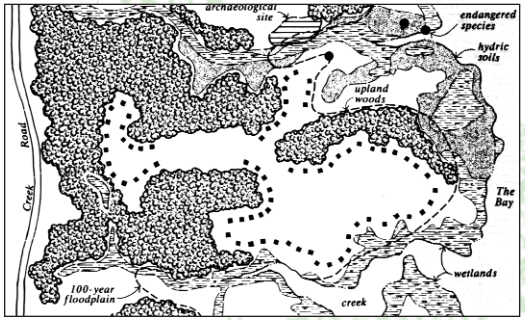
THE FOUR STEPS OF OPEN SPACE RESIDENTIAL DESIGN:



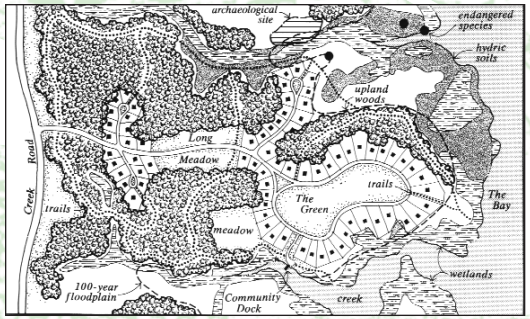
1. Identify areas for open space preservation based on environmental and social priorities.



3. Design roads to minimize their length, width, and cost.



2. Site the houses to maximize the number of lots with great views of the protected open space.



4. Draw the lot lines where they logically fall once the best locations for open space, houses, and roads are all identified.

TOOLS FOR MUNICIPALITIES

While Open Space Residential Design can provide both economic and environmental benefits, many local bylaws and regulations are not set up for developers to easily pursue this option without associated high costs and lengthy reviews. A North Shore Alliance of conservation organizations, developers, realtors, builders, and local and state officials has developed model bylaws, regulations, and incentive ideas for communities that would like to use Open Space Residential Design as an attractive local alternative.

Creatively situated homes maximize open space, views, and sense of community.

AN ALTERNATIVE: OPEN SPACE RESIDENTIAL DESIGN

Through upfront collaboration towns can manage growth in a manner that protects local values while also being equitable to developers. Open Space Residential Design is a technique to maximize the amount of open space preserved in subdivisions without reducing the number of homes built and provide homebuyers with a desirable neighborhood.

With Open Space Residential Design, at least as many houses as a conventional subdivision are located on approximately half of the property, while the remaining land is conserved as open space for the neighborhood to enjoy. Priority areas for open space protection are identified ahead of time based on community and environmental values.

Homes are then carefully situated to maximize their views, protect land and water resources, provide common spaces, and create a strong neighborhood feel. The result is a subdivision that protects and connects the most important conservation interests rather than just setting aside an arbitrary percentage of land.

GREEN NEIGHBORHOODS ALLIANCE: OPEN SPACE RESIDENTIAL DESIGN

Community Investment Associates

Home Builders Association of Massachusetts

Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions

Massachusetts Association of Health Boards

Massachusetts Audubon Society

Massachusetts Bays Program

Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development

Massachusetts Coastal Zone Management

Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs

Merrimack Valley Planning Commission

Metropolitan Area Planning Council

North Shore Association of Realtors

Scott Houseman, Esp.

Spearfields, Ltd.

Symes Associates, Inc.

UMass Extension Citizen Planner Training Collaborative

US Environmental Protection Agency

Left: Designing with open space can protect historic features, such as this farming path, in addition to natural areas.

For Green Neighborhoods, homes are sited to created a neighborhood feel and the most valuable open space is preserved.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

More information is available from:

- Massachusetts Audubon Society: North Shore Advocacy office at (978) 927-1122 x2704
- Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management at (617) 626-1222
- Home Builders Association Green Neighborhoods Coordinator at (781) 334-6789
- Metropolitan Area Planning Council at (617) 451-2770
- *Growing Geener,* a booklet available at www.state.ma.us/czm/czmpub.htm
- *Growing Geener: Putting Conservation into Local Plans and Bylaws.* Randall Arendt. Island Press, 1999.

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