

CLUSTER SUBDIVISIONS

The wait for the cows to come home is becoming shorter. Since post World War II cities and towns across the United States have been growing into the suburban countryside through the development of subdivisions. As the pressure to develop the "wide open spaces" increases, new tools are developed to balance growth with preservation of environmental and economic resources.



The Conservation of Land

The traditional tools for comprehensive plan implementation include the development of a land use plan and land development regulations. The Planning Commission has used these tools to refine the land use plan, create new land use categories, and develop new zoning districts and subdivision regulations.

As part of the Horizon Plan 5-year Update completed in 1997, a new land use plan was developed which included a refinement of the Potential Conservation Areas Plan. "Potential Conservation Areas" were revised to create linkages along the major river corridors throughout the Parish, and to reflect existing development and subdivisions. The Residential Estate/Agriculture (RE/A) land use category was also adopted to further emphasize the importance of environmentally sensitive areas.

In 1999, several revisions were made to the Unified Development Code (UDC) which modified the Planned Unit Development (PUD) regulations and created regulations for a Small Scale Planned Unit Development (SPUD). Also, the subdivision regulations were amended to include the concept of cluster development. These regulations provide for flexibility in development and require a percentage of common open space and encourage the protection of environmentally sensitive areas while allowing development to occur.

What's the Difference?

Cluster subdivisions provide flexible development options in areas constrained by physical limitations, while promoting creative design to achieve walkable neighborhoods, diverse housing choices, and distinctive, attractive places. Similar to a PUD, cluster subdivisions are designed to maintain the same density of development on a parcel of land while preserving an environmentally sensitive area.

A typical or "conventional subdivision" requires that the lots meet uniform road frontage, street standards and setbacks from the street as well as neighboring properties.

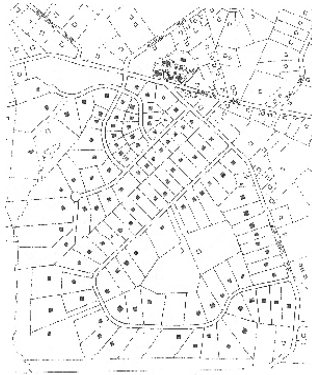
Depending on a community's regulations there *may* be requirements for public facilities such as schools, police/fire stations and/or parks. Nonetheless, all of the land is privately owned.



A cluster subdivision allows homes to be sited on smaller lots so that the remaining property can be preserved as open space. This open space is for the use and enjoyment of the resident's of the subdivision and preserves the community's environmental resources. The manner in which the developer is allowed to design the subdivision can preserve ecologically sensitive areas, historical sites or any other important characteristic of the site.

In addition to the preservation of open space and the reduced cost of infrastructure development, cluster subdivisions can provide the opportunity for the development of neighborhoods. In this sense the common open space and the closer proximity of homes to each other create an opportunity for a greater sense of community.

Imagine a development such as the one at the right, designed for 100 residential lots for houses on 50 acres of land. Applying the conventional subdivision requirements results in a design that is fairly uniform, looks like any other subdivision and uses up almost all of the open space.



Now imagine the same number of lots developed on that same 50 acres utilizing the flexible design available in the cluster subdivision regulations. The design to the left is the same development. However, note the amount of woodlands and lakes available as amenities to the site. Further, the development requires less roadway and public service (ie. power, sewer) miles because the residences are closer together. Also, if there were any distinguishing characteristics on the site (ie. historic, ecological) this design preserves those features.



In the past, many zoning regulations that called for large minimum lot sizes (two to five acres, for example) were put into place primarily to allow adequate room for on-site septic systems. This was especially true in rural area, where central sewers were not available. Advances in technology, however, have given developers the capability of creating small community systems where wastewater is transported and treated in an environmentally safe, economically feasible and aesthetically pleasing manner.

A PUD includes residential developments at higher densities than conventional subdivisions. There is also a mix of residential, commercial or industrial rather than just residential use. A PUD may have similar amenities such as lakes or open space. The difference, however, is the amount of open space. A PUD usually requires 20% open space whereas a cluster development must have a minimum of 25%.

Cluster Subdivisions in the City-Parish

A Cluster Subdivision is defined by the UDC (Section 4.8) as a single family detached residential development that permits lots with dimensions, frontages, and setbacks reduced from conventional lot sizes, provided the density of the tract as a whole shall

not be greater than the density allowed by the underlying zoning district to which the property is subject and the remaining land area is reserved for common open space.

Requirements

- Cluster subdivisions are permitted in the Rural, A1, A2 and A2.7 Single Family Residential zoning districts;
- Cluster subdivisions follow the approval procedures for preliminary and final plats;
- The total number of units for the cluster subdivision can not exceed the density requirement for the underlying zoning district;
- No minimum lot size, area, width or depth;
- Only single family detached residences and the accessory uses are allowed for single family residences within the Rural, A1, A2, and A2.7 zoning districts;
- All building setbacks will be determined by the approved Cluster Subdivision Final Plat. There are additional setback requirements for those lots which abut an existing subdivision;
- All structures are limited to two and one-half stories or thirty-five feet;
- An enforceable maintenance agreement for any common areas must be created, and recorded and approved by the Parish Attorney's Office; and
- The final plat must contain a note indicating that no resubdivision of the reserved common open space will be permitted except as authorized by the Planning Commission.

Application(s) for Cluster Development may be obtained from the Office of the Planning Commission, located at 1755 Florida, Baton Rouge, Louisiana or from the web site.

For more information contact:

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