

ENVIRONMENTAL ENERGY, HEALTH & GREEN BUILDINGS

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When common ground becomes “Green” in the development process

Pick any municipality and developer – they will both tell you that finding “common ground” in the development process can be a daunting task, particularly with “anti-sprawl” fervor at a fever pitch. Finding common ground that is also “green” may be harder yet, but presents a unique opportunity to make people feel better about development.

Cooperative environmental planning by a developer and municipality can take time and money—but the investment will pay for itself in a better quality of life, savings in infrastructure and liability costs, and payback from increased property values for existing and future residents. Mounting environmental regulations and increasing costs force developers to look at the more efficient alternatives that minimize costs and negative effects on the site and the surrounding area. Multiple benefits for both local government and the developer can result from a “green” site planning approach.

Benefits for Local Government

1. “Free” Open Space. Open space can be acquired and maintained at no non-



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etary cost to the taxpayers. Community green space is an important part of the “view sheds” that make a community attractive. Natural ecosystems provide a range of services (e.g., water and air purification, mosquito and pest control, etc.) that would otherwise be paid for by taxpayers.

2. Lower Costs – Enhanced Revenue. Streams, wetlands and riparian vegetation can dramatically reduce the need for expensive storm sewer infrastructure. “Cluster” development results in fewer roads and therefore lower long-term costs of maintaining these roads. Enhanced property values resulting from more open space often translates to

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greater tax revenues.

3. Economic Development. Some businesses can locate anywhere and therefore are often attracted to communities that offer a high quality of life for their employees. Open spaces, environmental protection and recreational opportunities are often an important part of that choice. With economic development often comes increased tax revenues.

Benefits for Developers

1. Greater Certainty. Developers benefit from greater certainty if they know in advance that part of a site is deemed to be an environmentally sensitive area and therefore avoid wasted time and expense in disputes.

2. Lower Costs. “Cluster” development often results in potential cost savings resulting from less clearing and grading and less infrastructure such as

roads and utilities.

3. Enhance Values and Marketability. Property values are higher for homes built adjacent to common open space. Incorporating environmental features into the community plans creates unique neighborhoods around local features. This translates into an enhanced quality of life for its residents.

4. Faster Approvals. Where new developments fit into the community environmental plan, the development is likely to move more quickly through the approvals process and encounter less community resistance. The public becomes involved at an earlier stage and becomes vested in the process.

The “Environment” for Success

“Green Planning” is a cooperative process between public and private interests and is more readily

accepted by the development community through the use of public incentives rather than mandates. Tax benefits, discounted permit fees, expedited approvals and public recognition are all techniques that encourage developers to embrace green planning. Conversely, a developer and its consultants must be prepared to think creatively and exhibit flexibility in the planning process. While initially such a process may be more time consuming and costly, the overall process should be smoother, faster and more cost efficient.

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