

PLANNED UNIT DEVELOPMENT



Echo Hill, Amherst

What are the objectives of Planned Unit Development?

The Planned Unit Development (PUD) is a form of development that usually includes a mix of housing units and nonresidential uses in one unified site or subdivision. Communities can minimize sprawling growth by replacing it with alternative development patterns such as Planned Unit Development projects which combine residential, retail, office, and public institutional uses in compact, pedestrian-friendly villages or clusters. PUDs create opportunities to live and work close to shopping, and services; and placing housing and jobs in close proximity reduces the number of vehicle trips to work, home, or shopping, limiting air pollution.

Why are Planned Unit Developments needed?

The adoption of a Planned Unit Development bylaw promotes development projects to develop a tract of land (relatively large scale, but not always) in a unified manner. Through PUDs, a municipality can achieve greater design flexibility in the development of particular land areas, and guide commercial and mixed-use projects to reflect the needs and character identified by the community. PUDs also provide the opportunity to achieve flexibility in architectural design, a mix of compatible land uses as well as the preservation of key natural or historic features, that are otherwise difficult to achieve using traditional, lot-by-lot zoning.

How does the zoning for Planned Unit Developments work?

Communities can adopt zoning provisions that establish incentives to promote Planned Unit Developments and performance standards to ensure that such projects have a positive effect on a community's environment and quality of life. The incentives could allow for reduced lot sizes, increases in the allowed percentage of a lot that can be built upon, and reduced parking space requirements provided that the development is clustered and planned as an integral unit.

DID YOU KNOW...

In a 1990 study comparing market appreciation of homes in a cluster development versus a conventional subdivision, the cluster/open space Echo Hill development exceeded its conventional counterpart, Orchard Valley, in open-market, sale-price appreciation during the period of 1968 to 1989. (*"An Examination of Market Appreciation for Clustered Housing With Permanent Open Space"*, Jeff Lacy, Center for Rural Massachusetts)

EXAMPLES FROM THE PIONEER VALLEY



Source: Echo Hill South (EHS) Community webpage

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Located off of Route 9 in Amherst, Echo Hill South was conceived and built in the 1960s, becoming the first "open-space" development built under zoning in Massachusetts. Utilizing the flexible provisions of the planned unit development zoning bylaw, the developer and landscape architect designed and built the subdivision while preserving over 36 acres of commonly-held, open-space – nearly half the total area of the original tract.

Echo Hill South houses six sets of condominiums, 102 single family homes, protected open space, marsh, walking trails, a health club and small commercial center. To accomplish this without affecting the overall housing density, individual house lots were reduced from the required one-half acre lots in the underlying zoning, to one-quarter acre. The remaining lands are now held in common ownership, with each individual homeowner possessing an undivided, but equal, interest in the property.

One major collector street serves the development. This roadway was built "over-standard," having a paved width of 31 to 32 feet, 3 feet of which, on either side, is marked for pedestrian travel. It is a through-street, linking Echo Hill South to three entries and exits onto major roads. None of the 102 house lots have their road frontage on this collector street. Rather, 13 cul-de sacs and "eyebrow" streets form the core of distinct neighborhoods where the houses are grouped. These roads, designed for local-access traffic only, were built "under-standard," with paved widths ranging from 21 to 28 feet. Each of the 13 access streets serves from 3 to 14 units, creating distinct groupings of houses.

The removal of trees and low-growing vegetation from the house lots was kept to a minimum. Open space, in the form of woods and fields, threads between adjoining neighborhoods, providing privacy while creating a rural atmosphere. Most of the open land remains in its natural, wooded state with an inter-connecting network of trails, providing every resident to direct access to the open space. A large, open field has been maintained as a "town green" which provides space for ball sports and community events. Nearby, a pond with park benches is available to residents for fishing, birdwatching and skating.

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