

Cluster Subdivisions

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INTRODUCTION

Cluster subdivisions, sometimes known as conservation subdivisions, are a means of preserving open space and allowing development to be directed away from natural and agricultural resources.

The uses are regulated in the zoning ordinance that allow for a decrease in lot size and bulk requirements of a subdivision in exchange for the preservation of open space.

Typically, cluster subdivisions are used for residential or mixed use projects as well as Planned Residential Development (MPC Article VII-A) and Traditional Neighborhood Development (MPC Article VII-A).

Most times, cluster subdivisions are allowed as a conditional use and maintain the density of the tract as a whole by focusing all the allowed development in smaller areas.

Cluster subdivisions allow residential developments in rural and urban areas while retaining the natural character and significant wildlife habitat in the newly developed area.

Cluster subdivision design follows a four-step process:

1. Identify resources or features to be preserved.
2. Identify zoning districts where cluster subdivisions should apply.
3. Consider transportation connections for both motorized and non-motorized travel (connections to a network).
4. Define conditions for cluster subdivisions (conditional use or special exception criteria).

BENEFITS

- The conservation areas can be used for a variety of purposes. They can be preserved in their pristine state as important ecological infrastructure, or can become active or passive recreation space. Some cluster subdivisions might include community facilities such as trails, community gardens, parks or buffers along water features.
- Open Space can be donated to the municipality for parks or other projects, but many times it is kept and maintained through a third party organization such as a homeowners association. Easements or covenants are recommended to preserve the open space in perpetuity.



DRAWBACKS

- Requires buy-in from development community.
- May have to provide incentives such as density bonuses to see option exercised.
- Future maintenance.
- Can decrease hard infrastructure costs.
- Promotes smart design.
- Encourages neighborhood development.

RESOURCES

- [Chester County Cluster/Open Space Development Guidance](#)
- [APA Cluster Subdivision Guidance](#)
- [Derry Township Zoning Ordinance](#)

RELATED FACT SHEETS ON PLANNINGTOOLKIT.ORG

- Agricultural and Natural Resource Protection
- Community Gardens
- Conservation Easements
- Stormwater Management



TIPS TO CONSIDER

- IDENTIFY AREAS THAT WOULD BENEFIT FROM CONSERVATION SUBDIVISIONS.
- COORDINATE WITH DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY ABOUT INCENTIVES NECESSARY TO MAKE CLUSTER SUBDIVISIONS VIABLE WHILE PRESERVING IMPORTANT FEATURES.
- MAP ENVIRONMENTAL, HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES WORTH PRESERVING IN AREAS WITH GROWTH POTENTIAL.
- ENCOURAGE SKETCH PLANS.



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