

"State of the Art" for Livable Communities

- examples

Streets in livable communities serve all users – vehicles and pedestrians. Planted medians, well-defined crosswalks, and sidewalks ensure that the pedestrian realm is both pleasant and safe.



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The NYS Department of Transportation recently completed this road reconstruction project on NYS Route 9 in Saratoga Springs. The project included the installation of planted medians, new sidewalks and crosswalks, streetlights, and benches at this important gateway to downtown.



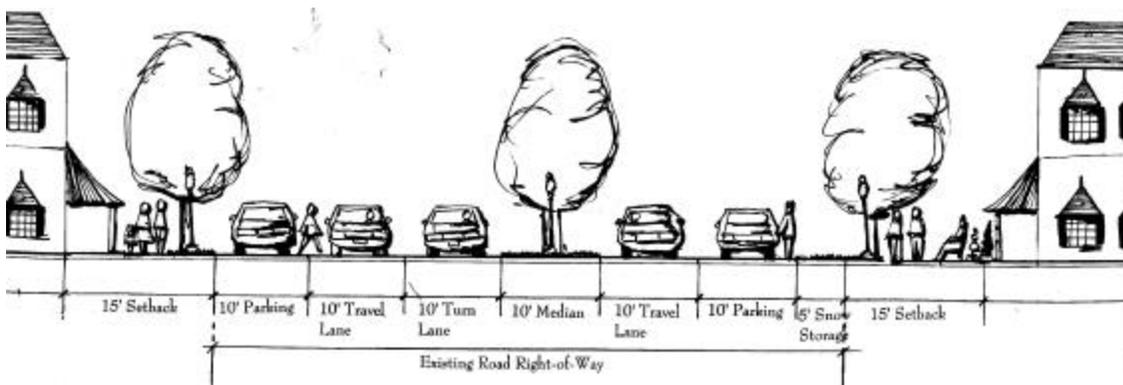
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Community or neighborhood centers contain a moderate to high density of mixed-use buildings. Active uses, such as stores and restaurants, are located at street level, while offices and residences are located on the floors above. Buildings are placed close to the sidewalk creating the feel of an outdoor room, while car storage (parking) is moved to the rear. Automobiles, pedestrians, and public transportation are all well accommodated.



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This section illustrates an appropriate design for a street in a community or neighborhood center. Note the relationship of building to street, the attractive and safe pedestrian realm, and the adequate provisions for thru-traffic, turning traffic, and on-street parking.



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Mashpee Commons, at the western end of Cape Cod (Massachusetts), was constructed on the site of a defunct shopping mall. This project, completed over the last decade, has succeeded by creating an attractive pedestrian realm with a variety of activities including shops, offices, a movie theater, restaurants and cafes, and a post office. Although not yet a “real” community, planned future phases will create several human-scaled, and fully linked residential neighborhoods around this community center.



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The design of Mashpee Commons accommodates vehicles and pedestrians. The streetscape, the location, orientation, and design of buildings, and on-street parking all contribute to this excellent pedestrian space.



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McKenzie Towne, in Calgary, Canada, is a great example of human-scaled community design. Inverness, pictured below, is the first completed “village” in this large, mixed-use project. Several more interconnected villages will be constructed around a higher density, mixed commercial / residential town center. In addition to the town center, which is now under construction, each village will have its own small center with a public space, and a small amount of neighborhood retail and office space as shown below.



Photo by World Idea Networks



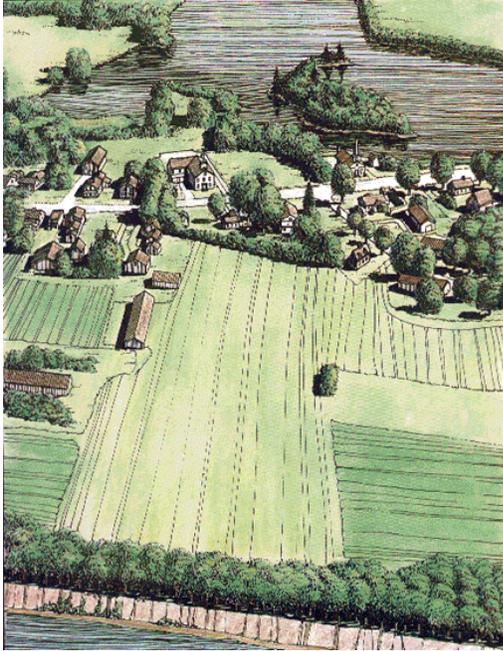
Existing hamlet

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Hamlet after conventional, suburban-style development

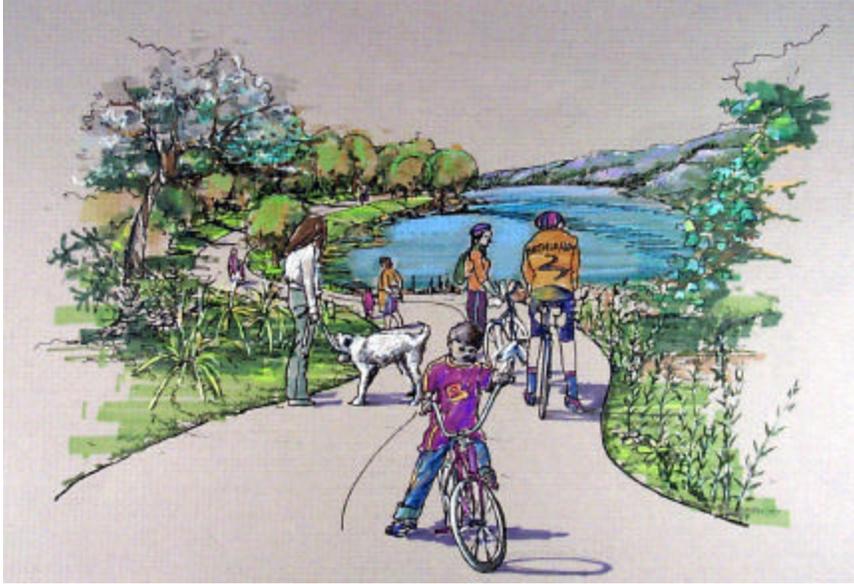
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Hamlet with appropriately scaled development (same number of units)

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Recreational resources can add tremendous value to a community. Multi-use trails and on-street bicycle systems, as envisioned by the Guilderland Pathways recommendation, provide for an alternate means of transportation and opportunities for residents of all ages to enjoy outdoor recreation.



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This struggling shopping mall outside of Chattanooga, Tennessee will be incrementally retrofitted to create a human-scaled town center in its place.



Used with permission from Dover, Kohl & Partners

As it is currently designed, the shopping mall is typical of suburban commercial development in recent decades. The large, box-like buildings surrounded by parking are oriented for automobile access only.



Used with permission from Dover, Kohl & Partners

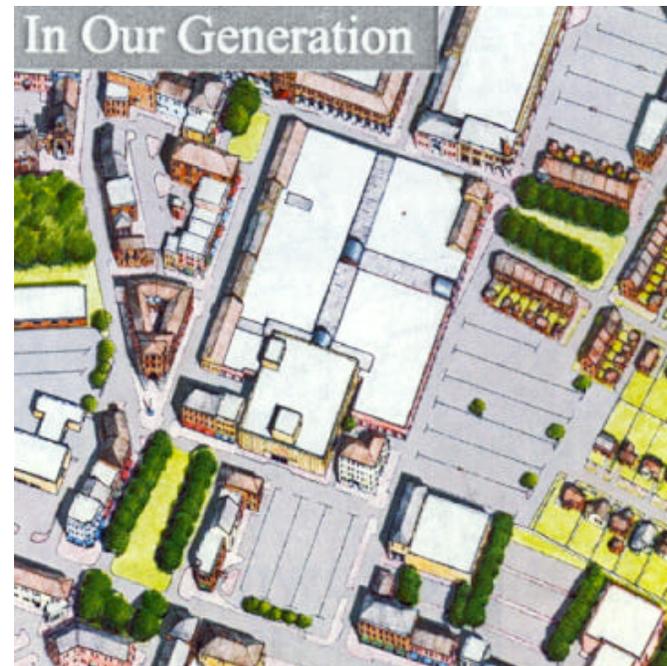
The series of three (3) sketches below illustrate the incremental redevelopment of this area from an automobile-oriented shopping center to a mixed-use, human-scaled neighborhood center. The new center will be structured around walkable blocks and will be woven together with the surrounding neighborhoods. Smaller scaled buildings oriented to the street and the pedestrian, pocket parks, and an attractive pedestrian realm will help to transform this eyesore into a community asset. The vision for this redevelopment project was arrived at through an open, participatory process that included property owners, business leaders, neighborhood residents, community officials and all other interested parties. This participatory process - a week-long public charrette - resulted in a redevelopment master plan that is now being implemented. Completion of this project will probably take several decades, but initial projects have already been started.

Phase 1



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Phase 2



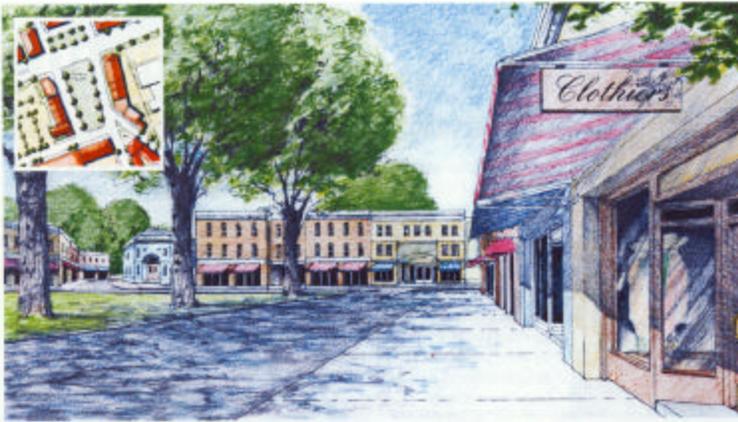
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Phase 3



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The sketch below illustrates the intended character of the new neighborhood center once redevelopment of the former shopping mall is complete.



Brainerd Town Square

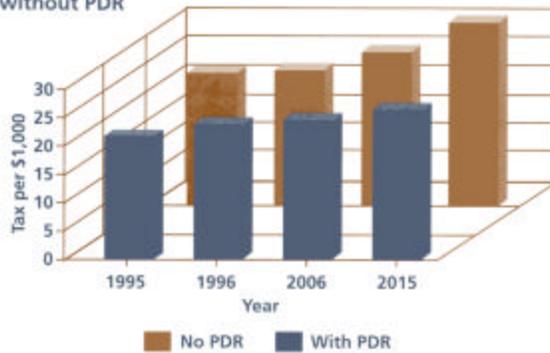
Design for Change Over Time

- A network of interconnected streets and blocks
- Buildings front streets & public spaces, with parking in the rear
- Special sites for civic buildings
- Special public spaces
- Mixed-use buildings
- Pedestrian-friendly connections to adjacent neighborhood areas
- Greenway extends to major trail
- Adaptable to future transit opportunities

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It is well established that, in general, new residential development does not pay for itself in terms of a community's revenues and expenditures. That is, most new homes require more in services than they contribute in taxes. Open spaces, and most commercial development are revenue positive for a community's finances. In Pittsford, New York, a fiscal model determined that a program by the town to Purchase Development Rights (PDR) from several farms would actually cost the average taxpayer less in the long-term than doing nothing and allowing that farmland to be built-out as housing. This information was instrumental in passing a local bond for \$10 million to fund the PDR program.

Tax Rate Projections
with and without PDR



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The *Pittsford Greenprint*, like a blueprint for a house, is a detailed, parcel-by-parcel analysis of the town's open space, agricultural, natural, and recreational resources. Specific strategies for each identified parcel, ranging from zoning and subdivision recommendations to Purchase or Transfer of Development Rights, are provided in this implementation item from the town's comprehensive plan. A similar implementation project for Western Guilderland could be initiated following the completion of Guilderland's comprehensive plan.



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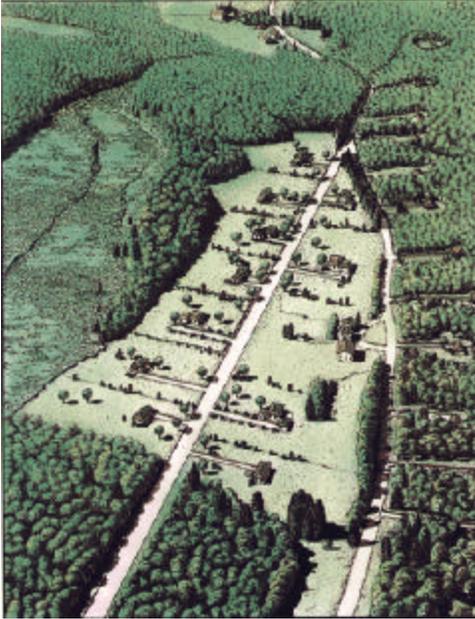
The three sketches below illustrate how creative subdivision design can protect important natural resources and/or features of the landscape that give a community its unique character. The first shows an existing rural area before development.



Existing farm on a town road.

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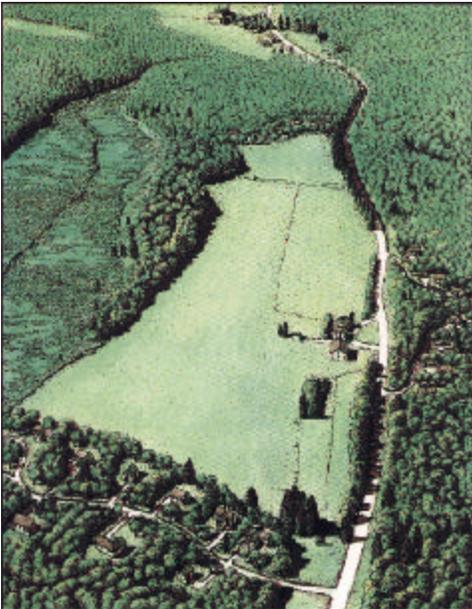
The second image shows how this area might look after development under typical "rural-residential" (large lot) zoning. Almost all of the land is divided into residential lots.



After conventional development.

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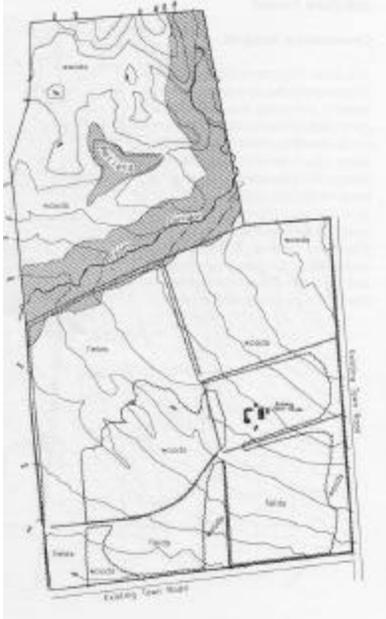
The last image shows how the same number of new residential units could be developed in a manner sensitive to the landscape. Open spaces in this subdivision are permanently protected using a conservation easement. To accomplish this type of creative development, a "conservation subdivision" approach must be incorporated into the town's land use regulations.



After creative development (same number of units).

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The three images below illustrate how creative subdivision design might be used to protect open space resources and lead to development that is consistent with a traditional rural settlement pattern. The first image shows a large farm parcel before development.



Existing 200 acre farm parcel.

From *Rural Development Guidelines* (October 1994), published by the New York Planning Federation.

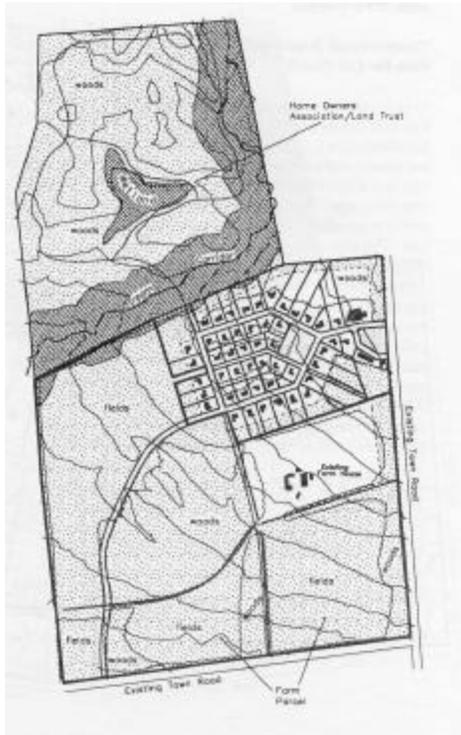
The second image shows how this parcel might be subdivided under conventional large-lot zoning.



Conventional 3-acre subdivision.

From *Rural Development Guidelines* (October 1994), published by the New York Planning Federation.

The final illustration shows how the same number of residential units could be designed into a pedestrian-scaled hamlet while protecting a significant portion of the working farm and important natural resources. The compact hamlet surrounded by agricultural and other open lands is consistent with traditional development patterns in rural areas.



Flexible - lot subdivision to create a rural hamlet and maintain the farm.

From *Rural Development Guidelines* (October 1994), published by the New York Planning Federation.