

FITTING INTO THE LANDSCAPE

Rural development as it is proposed and constructed, should fit into its natural or rural surroundings, rather than be superimposed as a dominant element in the countryside. Rural landscape characteristics should be addressed as part of the review and approval process.

**Why should development fit?**

People decide to settle in particular areas for many compelling reasons. They do so with a reasonable expectation to enjoy and appreciate those surroundings, even after development occurs. This enjoyment can continue if we identify and maintain the essential qualities that attracted the residents, business owners, and visitors to the area in the first place.

Preferably, most new construction should be encouraged in and around Villages or in hamlet style groups, but low density development will still occur in rural areas. Local planning boards can ensure that developers blend new buildings into the landscape by requiring that they identify the natural conditions, open space system, or other existing assets prior to submitting any plan for subdivision or site plan approval.

**Open Space System Components:**

- √ Agricultural Lands
- √ Streams, Rivers, Lakes, Wetlands, Floodplains
- √ Steep or gentle slopes
- √ Mature Tree Stands - forests
- √ Views from the Road or other vantage points
- √ Aquifer Recharge Areas
- √ Significant Plant and Wildlife Habitats
- √ Cultural Features, such as stone walls, barns, and historic buildings

Some sites are more challenging than others, but identifying the existing open space system or assets is a necessary first step for a project to fit into the landscape or area. Once the site characteristics are understood, then suitable areas for development can be delineated or mapped. Within these areas, house lots, roads, or commercial sites can be located. Only as a last step are the lot lines for suitable placement of homes or commercial sites drawn in.

**RURAL DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES**

- Minimize the clearing of vegetation and preserve important natural or open space features.
- Retain stone walls, hedgerows, and other rural landscape elements.
- Place buildings and access roads in or near tree lines, on mildly sloping ground, or along the edges of fields; avoid construction in open fields or on ridgelines.
- Locate structures and septic systems more than 100 feet from streams or ponds to protect water quality.
- Re-use farm roads or country lanes whenever possible, rather than constructing new wide roads.
- Maintain or enhance scenic views. Protecting the character of the landscape also protects the property's most valuable assets.

*"Development should enhance and build upon community character. For example, open space, natural resource areas, and agricultural character should be preserved to maintain the sense of place, uniqueness, and quality of life of our rural communities."*

*Growth and Development Guidelines, Jefferson County Planning Board - 2005*



## Rural Character Defined

While rural areas have many things in common, often each Town has character that makes it unique. Rural communities identify a diversity of characteristics and experiences to capture their sense of what is important about their rural environment. The predominance of the natural over the cultural with uncluttered open spaces is often a theme. Scenic shorelines with views of riverfront or lakefront water views can be another. Farm fields lined with forests is often another landscape type that is considered unique and important to many rural communities. Forested areas and wetlands are other common types of natural/cultural landscape prevalent in rural communities. Other landforms such as valleys, rolling hills, ridges, or mountains often are what an area may be known for. State or local parks, wildlife management areas, or other public spaces serve the communities in various ways. Historic or distinctive local buildings and building styles, landmarks or districts often make areas unique or cherished.

### COMMON USES FOR A PROTECTED OPEN SPACE SYSTEM

- Agriculture
- Community Gardens
- Forest Management
- Trails
- Visual or Sound Barriers
- Meadows
- Pastures or Paddocks
- Recreational Fields
- View Protection
- Wildlife Habitat

**Rural Friendly Development steps** - how to address rural character:

### Step 1

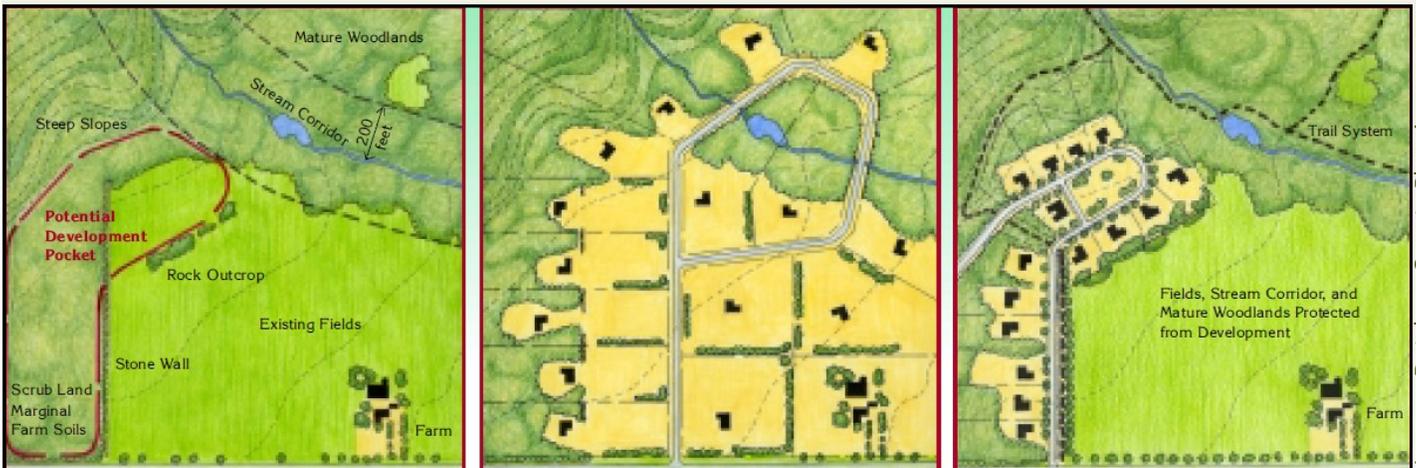
Require a map of the Open Space areas for the parcel and surrounding area.

### Step 2

Conventional sketch layout determines maximum lot count under existing zoning.

### Step 3

The same number of houses can often fit on the landscape while preserving valuable open spaces.



Images: Dutchess County Planning

### Locate Development pockets or areas:

A sketch analysis of the area provides all the basic information to determine how a development can fit into the landscape - what land should be protected and potential development pockets or areas.

### Typical Subdivision disadvantages:

- ✓ Productive farmland lost forever
- ✓ Pleasant view from road eradicated
- ✓ Stream corridor cut off by backyards
- ✓ Large lots divide up and dominate the landscape
- ✓ Individual road for each subdivision
- ✓ Costly road and bridge construction
- ✓ Residents can't enjoy site features

### Conservation Subdivision advantages:

- ✓ Large farm field protected
- ✓ Rural view from road retained
- ✓ Trail system allows access to creek
- ✓ Small lots, but substantial individual lot sizes with central green
- ✓ Less expensive construction costs
- ✓ Enhanced resident views/trail use