

Conservation Subdivisions

- Why discuss conservation subdivisions now?
 - There is a lot of pressure to subdivide and develop large properties around Wilmington.
 - There are also growing concerns in our community regarding excessive deforestation and overdevelopment.
 - The use of conservation subdivisions represents a helpful middle ground that balances residential development with the preservation of open space.
- Conservation subdivisions are enabled in Wilmington's zoning code, so they can be used immediately.
- Upcoming revisions to Wilmington's comprehensive plan should include information that will guide the use of conservation subdivisions.
 - Identify areas with special attributes that need protection for environmental, historical, or aesthetic reasons.

Unique features and benefits of conservation subdivisions

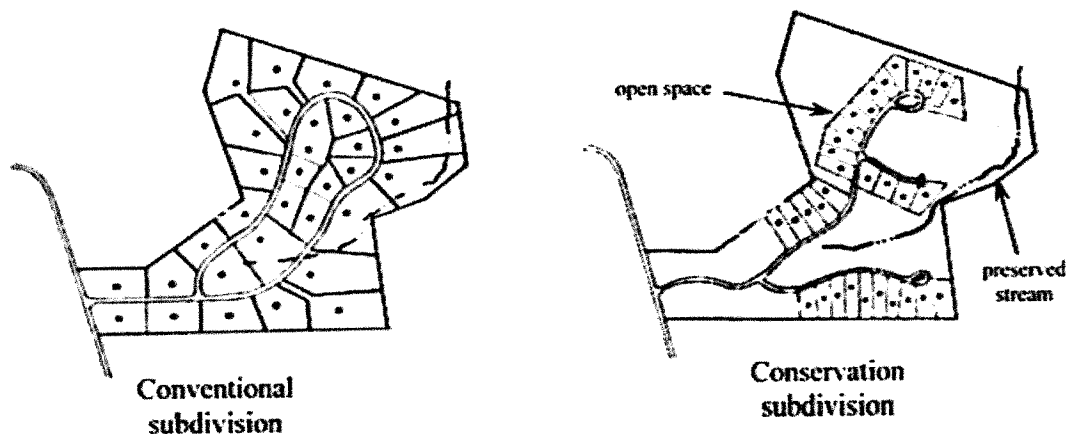


Figure 1: Generic Conventional and Conservation Subdivisions
SOURCE: Reprinted from Arendt et al. (1996).

- conservation subdivisions are designed with the natural features of a parcel in mind
- clustered development with a high proportion of land (usually > 50%) left undisturbed as open space
- the open space has special value (environmental, natural habitat, historical, aesthetic)
- the open space is permanently protected by easements
- can achieve same number of parcels (lot density) as with conventional development
- good market economics—smaller lots adjacent to attractive shared space are popular
 - sometimes compared to living on a golf course without the golf course
- shared recreational space

Pros & Cons of Conservation Subdivisions

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- shared access to open space protected in perpetuity- contiguous open space provides a wildlife corridor- lower overall cost of development- reduced costs for infrastructure (storm water system, septic systems, utilities)- simpler driveway access- less impermeant area decreases load on stormwater system- higher selling price per acre and quicker sales than homes/lots in a conventional subdivision	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- an unfamiliar way to develop properties—can be hard for developers and the public to accept- a conservation easement and a management plan are needed to protect the open space- requires a detailed inventory and mapping of areas to be developed vs preserved before positioning home sites

Responsibilities and opportunities for the Planning Board

- The Planning Board should be vigilant in watching for features of properties proposed for development that should trigger consideration of a conservation subdivision as an alternative to conventional development.
- An applicant should lay out lot lines only after a thorough inventory and mapping of the property has been completed to identify the optimal open space to be preserved.
- A conservation subdivision can be requested by an applicant or, upon concerns raised during the review of a conventional development plan, the Planning Board can require the applicant to switch to a conservation subdivision.

Useful Resources

- *Growing Greener: Conservation by Design*. An excellent overview of the process of implementing conservation subdivisions.
- *Subdivision Review in New York State*. An official NYS document that includes very helpful detail regarding how to implement clustered and conservation subdivisions.
- *The Economics of Conservation Subdivisions*. This is a deep dive into a comparison of price premiums, investment costs and absorption rate for lots in conservation versus conventional subdivisions.