

Communities Update Zoning Codes to Enhance Stream Protection

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This project, in Butler County, was divided into two parts. The first part focused on providing local officials a set of recommendations for improving open space conservation and enhancing stream protection through innovative zoning tools. The project's second part focused on planning and building a conservation housing development that would enhance water quality protection using innovative Low Impact Development (LID) practices.

Project Details

Part One—Zoning Education

Located in Southwest Ohio, The Three Valley Conservation Trust (TVCT) works to conserve the natural environment and cultural heritage in the Four Mile/Seven Mile, Indian Creek and Twin Creek watersheds which are major tributaries to the Great Miami River.

TVCT worked with key zoning officials to develop zoning code standards that encourage open space conservation during development. Forty-five area public officials and citizens examined and learned about conservation development concepts in workshops designed to encourage adoption of open space policies in local zoning codes.

The TVCT also helped form a Project Advisory Board to examine innovative zoning tools. This group had diverse representation and key players in the development process: a county commissioner, the county director of development, the county engineer, a soil and water conservation district office administrator, two township trustees, a zoning administrator, two city council members, a planning commission member, a developer,

an extension agent, private citizens, and the Butler County environmental services manager.

The advisory board developed a set of recommendations to enhance conservation of natural resources within Butler County. Conservation development and open space standards were included in the County's rewrite of its Zoning Code, adopted in March of 2006, and published in June of 2006. These standards included 35 percent open space for major subdivisions (five or more houses) and 50 percent for Conservation Subdivisions (CPUD). Liberty Township adopted a CPUD standard of 40 percent open space.

The TVCT also acquired and used—with several communities—a software tool known as Community Viz. The software is a 3D, 360-degree visualization tool that permits onsite alteration of zoning models in graphic, powerful images based on complex GIS modeling.

Part Two—Conservation Development

Originally, a 95-acre conservation housing development was planned along the Gregory Creek in Butler County. Forty-four acres of land (more than 45 percent of the site) as well as portions of most individual lots would be placed into a permanent conservation easement with a local land trust (TVCT). The conservation area encompassed four high quality streams, three ponds, a wetland, 20 acres of streamside forest, cultural resources and an expansive riparian floodplain along Gregory Creek. Although uniquely designed and locally supported, the conservation development had to be cancelled by the developer due to a declining housing market.



Left: Adopting open space standards preserves streams and wetlands, and benefits the entire watershed that is under pressure from development.

Below: Requiring developers to preserve natural areas within commercial, industrial and residential developments can be cost-effective and more attractive to prospective tenants.

Benefits

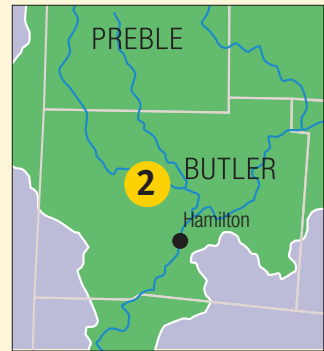
Butler County successfully adopted new conservation development and open-space standards in its zoning code, and Liberty Township adopted a new open space standard for planned developments. These changes will benefit the watershed by encouraging conservation development during new construction.

Lessons Learned

The computer model bogged down the project and required far more staff investment than anticipated. The zoning tools notebook and the dissemination of the Conservation Design workbook were more valuable as outreach tools.

Costs

Since the Conservation Development was cancelled, the costs were low for this project—funding only the staff time for the TVCT.



Below: An aerial view of the housing development shows the location of streams and creeks in the area. The Conservation Trust Project guidelines required that the developer keep such natural features intact.

