

KENTON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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Kenton Residential Development Dialogue

A grant from the Kentucky Soil and Water Quality Cost Share Program provided the catalyst for a series of discussions about residential development in Kenton County. The Kenton County Conservation District received the grant to print copies of Practicing Conservation on Developing Areas, a series of fact sheets and technical notes. Workshops to discuss these conservation practices during construction were planned as a part of the grant. Although sediment and erosion control on-site is a critical part of protecting our resources, the district wanted to look at ways to prevent problems before they occur.

Part of the impetus for the work was the Kenton County Comprehensive Plan 5-Year Update, which was scheduled for completion in December 2001. The Conservation District board felt that if meaningful changes were to be made in the way that development occurs and resources are protected in Kenton County, they must be supported by the Comprehensive Plan and subsequently by the Subdivision Regulations. The District approached the Kenton County Fiscal Court for comments, approval and support in this effort.

Forty people attended the first Roundtable in Dec. 2000. The participants included builders, planners, government and agency personnel, environmental groups and others with an interest in development. When addressing the first Roundtable Discussion, Kenton County Judge Executive Richard Murgatroyd noted, "Clearly, balancing the rights of landowners to generate a profit from their land versus the rights of the community to be protected from overgrowth or over-development, will take careful planning, compromise, and an understanding of the rights and responsibilities of all parties involved."

The Roundtable posed these main questions, concerning the residential development review process and current regulations:

- How can the residential development process be streamlined to provide more efficient service to the development community and reduce administrative burden and post-development maintenance for local government?
- How can the review process be designed to lead to better coordination of infrastructure needs while improving protection of the natural resource base?

For a copy of
Practicing Conservation
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- What regulations are currently in place that help or hinder creativity in development that would lead to better protection of our natural resources while meeting the needs of the community: including businesses, government, and private individuals?
- The discussion resulted in a summary of comments in three major areas: education, the resource base, and the comprehensive plan and review process. The inset at right includes some of the comments from the group.

A second Roundtable in March was attended by 25 people who reviewed the *Consensus Agreement on Model Development Principles to Protect Our Streams, Lakes, and Wetlands* from the Center for Watershed Protection. The consensus agreement outlines 22 model development principles that have been identified to help foster more environmentally sensitive, economically viable and locally appropriate development.

Nine best practices for our area were identified, and evaluated by the group to fit the following criteria:

- “doable”
- cost-effective
- easy
- allowable under current regulations.

Those nine practices are listed on page three. It was agreed that the practices recommended were supported by the current comprehensive plan and no changes would be needed in that document.

A third meeting in June developed a plan of action:

- Send a summary of the work of the Roundtable to the planning commissions and decision-makers in each city in Kenton County.
- A model development should be used to showcase as many of these principles as possible.
- A workshop or program similar to this Roundtable should be presented to the planning commissions.

The Roundtable also evaluated if the group had answered all of the original questions, and if these were the right questions. There was general agreement that we had answered the main questions posed.

There was some disagreement as to whether or not we had asked the right questions at the beginning since there are broader issues involved in the realm of residential development and those need to be addressed from a broader perspective.

Participant Comments

Education:
Education is the key, for the public, planning commission members and other decision-makers. Let's educate the public so they can respond more wisely. Make sure our elected officials are informed.

Resource Protection:
Look at natural resources and infrastructure using a watershed approach. Understand the role of watershed groups in planning.

Streamside buffers are currently not emphasized much in Northern Kentucky, and should be.

It is important to get stormwater devices in place and functional on construction sites.

Phased grading of sites is becoming the norm.

Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) are becoming the norm in some regions of the country.

Developers should have better access to resources and technical assistance for protecting natural resources.

The Planning Process:
Ensure that the comprehensive plan is developed more cooperatively and inclusively.

There is sometimes a “disconnect” between the comprehensive plan and regulations.

Incorporate flexibility in zoning to promote innovation. Inflexible zoning and subdivision regulations inhibit creativity.

Regulations should be developed that promote designing of the home for the land, rather than vice versa.

Establish a predevelopment process to ensure that actual site development proceeds more smoothly. More time is needed to review plans - 21 days is not enough.

To help facilitate the action plan, John Toebben, a local developer who had attended the Roundtables, offered to work with the district and the group on a model development. The model development would be open for tours for planning commissions, city decision-makers and the public to see the model development principles at work.

In August, Conservation District Coordinator Mary Kathryn Dickerson received a scholarship to attend a Train-the-Trainer workshop conducted by the Center for Watershed Protection. This workshop dealt specifically with the *Model Development Principles, Better Site Design, and Stormwater Control*. As a part of the training, participants received a \$1500 stipend to conduct local workshops.

The first workshop is scheduled for **Thurs., Feb. 28, 2002** at the Northern Kentucky Area Planning Commission conference room, from noon to 4:00 p.m. Pre-registration is requested **by Feb. 21**. Lunch will be provided. For more information or to register, contact Mary Kathryn Dickerson at 859-586-7903 or mdickers@ky.usda.gov.

The workshop is funded in part by a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency under §319(h) of the Clean Water Act through the Kentucky Division of Water to the Kentucky Institute for the Environment and Sustainable Development at the University of Louisville.

The District wishes to extend its gratitude to all of the participants, and especially to the Kenton County Fiscal Court, Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments, Northern Kentucky Area Planning Commission, and Tetra-Tech for their assistance with the Roundtables.

Top nine most beneficial practices:

Street Width: Design residential streets for the minimum required pavement width needed to support travel lanes; on-street parking; and emergency, maintenance, and service vehicle access. Widths should be based on traffic volume.

Parking Ratios: The required parking ratio governing a particular land use or activity should be enforced as both a maximum and a minimum to curb excess parking space construction. Existing parking ratios should be reviewed to see if lower ratios are warranted and feasible.

Parking Lot Runoff: Wherever possible, provide stormwater treatment for parking lot runoff using bioretention areas, filter strips, and/or other practices that can be integrated into required landscaping areas and traffic islands.

Rooftop Runoff: Direct rooftop runoff to pervious areas such as yards, open channels, or vegetated areas. Avoid routing rooftop runoff to roadways and stormwater conveyance systems.

Vegetated Open Channels: Where density, topography, soils and slope permit, use vegetated open channels in the street right-of-way to convey and treat stormwater runoff.

Yard Setbacks: Relax side yard setbacks and allow narrower frontages to reduce total road length in the community and overall site imperviousness. Relax front setback requirements to minimize driveway lengths and reduce overall lot imperviousness.

Buffers: The riparian stream buffer should be preserved or restored with native vegetation that can be maintained throughout the plan review, delineations, construction, and occupancy stages of development.

Conservation of Trees: Conserve trees and other vegetation at each site by planting additional vegetation, clustering tree areas, and promoting the use of native plants. Wherever practical, manage community open space, street rights-of-way, parking lot islands, and other landscaped areas to promote natural vegetation.

Conservation Incentives: Incentives and flexibility in the form of density compensation, buffer averaging, property tax reduction, stormwater credits, and by-right open space development should be encouraged to promote conservation of stream buffers, forests, meadows, and other areas of environmental value.