SAVING FARMLAND WITH DEVELOPMENT

Create farm conservation and development plans that allow future home sites to co-exist with active farmland, conserve the best agricultural soils, and discourage roadside sprawl.

Many farmers rely on the occasional sale of home sites to supplement farm income. The result can be piecemeal or strip residential development that undermines a town's rural qualities. Farm conservation plans offer an alternative strategy that protects equity, farmland, and views. Land owners subdivide home sites as needed over time according to a pre-approved plan based on conservation design principles.

The primary goal is the conservation of productive farmland for the long-range continuation of farm operations. Maintenance of open land is not an issue when conserved farm acreage continues to be part of the working landscape.

When farm conservation and development plans work, agricultural operations and views will still look like this.

Because every farm is different, each farm conservation plan will be unique. The location of acreage that is most appropriate for residential development will depend on the natural features of the landscape and on the density that the farm owner considers most compatible with the long-term operation of the farm. Plans may also identify potential acreage for a farm-related business or cottage industry.

A simple example:

On a 100-acre farm in a five-acre zoning district, the total potential density, excluding farmstead, roads, steep slopes, wetlands and water, may be 15 five-acre lots.

Locate development pocket on 25 acres of marginal land, hiding the houses and roads within woodlands and along the far edges of open fields.

Approve incremental subdivision plan for up to12 lots within the 25-acre development pocket, reducing minimum lot size.

Negotiate a **density easement** allowing 3 additional lots on the remaining 75 acres. Full density (15 lots) may be reached over time at the discretion of the farm owner. Even at full density, more than 50 percent of the farm is protected.

Conservation and Gradual Development on a Working Farm

Limited Development Option

Reduce density by subdividing large tracts of land on which development is restricted by conservation easements.

The Dutchess Land Conservancy created a limited development plan for a 340-acre farm in the Town of Amenia, allowing only one home site on each of three subdivided parcels, and protecting the remainder of the subdivided acreage with easements. The farm owners were able to capitalize on the residential value of home sites on scenic but marginal farmland and continue to cultivate a significant portion of subdivided cropland through lease-back arrangements with their new neighbors.

- *Shared access via existing farm road*
- *Leased farmland under easement*
- *Homes located off farmland*

Dutchess Land Conservancy

Flexible Farm Incentives

1. Use conservation design guidelines to locate residential development, reserving the best farmland. (See "Fitting into the Landscape," A-1.)
2. Determine density option that best meets farm owner's goals, securing easement appropriate for concentrated density.
3. Locate home sites within identified development pocket; waive road frontage requirements and road standards to allow access via shared driveways or reduced-width local roads.
4. Review and approve conservation plan, waiving time limits and fees for incremental subdivision.
5. Incorporate approved plan as an addition to a municipal Farm Conservation Map.
6. Assure fast-track approval for future subdivisions based on pre-approved plan, maintaining agricultural assessment until subdivision occurs.

Help is available *from planning staff and land conservancies for farm owners who wish to prepare farm conservation plans and for municipalities that encourage farm planning.*

Who Benefits?

Farm conservation planning offers **the farm owner**...

- capital for reinvestment or expansion
- a broader range of density options
- more flexibility in locating home sites
- control over the pace of subdivision
- incremental extension of shared access roads
- reduced costs when planned lots are actually subdivided

Farm conservation planning helps **the community**...

- prevent repeated, uncoordinated subdivision
- move home sites away from scenic roads
- keep farmland on its tax rolls
- protect important farm soils
- support the agricultural economy
- retain the defining character of our countryside

Sources:
Regional Plan Association, *Tools and Strategies: Protecting the Landscape and Shaping Growth*, 1990