



A Guide for Conservation and Growth

As one of the fastest growing counties in Pennsylvania, balancing growth and conservation is important in Chester County. Fortunately, conservation subdivisions can serve as a powerful tool to strike this balance. The Chester County Planning Commission published a Conservation Subdivision Design Guide to help municipalities develop effective conservation subdivision ordinances. The guide includes background information about existing conservation subdivisions, example design elements, sample ordinance language, and tips on getting started with adopting or amending a conservation subdivision ordinance.

What is a Conservation Subdivision?

Conservation subdivisions preserve at least 50 percent of a development tract as open space and direct development away from natural, scenic, historic, and agricultural areas. The design of conservation subdivisions focuses on harmonizing with the surrounding landscape, preserving natural and historic features, minimizing environmental and visual impacts, and providing continuity with off-site open spaces and greenways.

Conservation subdivisions can provide many benefits for residents, municipalities, developers, and the public, including:

- Significant open space preservation
- Reduced environmental impacts
- Greater recreational opportunities
- Flexible designs
- Reduced development costs due to less infrastructure needed like roads and stormwater management facilities
- Reduced energy consumption
- Lower maintenance costs
- A greater sense of community

Get Started

Check to see if conservation subdivision regulations can help implement your municipal plans for natural resource protection, open space preservation, and trail and sidewalk systems. Contact the Chester County Planning Commission for assistance. Our professional planners are always happy to discuss potential solutions with municipalities and offer advice on planning matters.

Pre-development Site Condition



An existing 120-acre farmstead set back from the road with frontage on three local roads.

Conservation Subdivision Plan



This plan keeps most of the land in agriculture, conserves valuable natural resources, and provides public amenities, such as a trail system.

Conventional Subdivision Plan



This plan, with one-acre lots, develops most of the open space of conservation value, lacks public spaces, and spoils the rural character of the site.

Conservation Subdivision Design Guide

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Design Elements

Good design is essential for the creation of successful conservation subdivision developments. To aid municipalities in assessing the design of proposed subdivisions and in crafting their ordinances to promote good design, the guide identifies a number of design elements that are important in ensuring development proposals meet the spirit of the ordinance and result in a high-quality and livable community. Each element includes ordinance considerations, sample ordinance language, and examples of local conservation subdivisions where the design element was used successfully.

Landscaping

- Screening ►
- Street trees ►
- Lawn alternatives ►

Stormwater & Sewage Management

- Green stormwater infrastructure ►
- Low-impact design: stormwater facility design and placement ►
- Impervious surface reduction ►
- Sewage facilities ►



Open Space Design

- Maintain existing character and context ►
- Community facilities and recreation areas ►
- Conservation subdivisions as agrihoods ►
- Habitat ►

Vehicular facilities

- Street width ►
- Boulevards ►
- Planted cul-de-sacs and bump-outs ►
- Street lighting ►

Scenic View Protection

- Setbacks and screening from existing roads ►
- Views of open space from house lots ►
- Preserve historic resources and their context ►

Natural Resource Protection

- Preserve natural resources ►
- Link open space on adjacent parcels ►

Pedestrian Facilities

- Sidewalks ►
- Verge areas/tree lawn ►
- Trails ►

Parking Design

- On-lot parking for wide or larger lots ►
- On-lot parking for narrow or small lots ►
- Parking for multi-family buildings, visitors, overflow ►
- On-street parking ►

Housing Variety

- Vary lot types ►
- Orienting homes in distinct “neighborhoods” ►
- Density bonuses and other incentives ►



Questions?

Contact one of our knowledgeable planners at ccplanning@chesco.org or call 610-344-6285.