

# Chapter 1

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## Comprehensive Site-Planning

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### Overview

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#### 1.1 Introduction

Properly planned and conceptualized large-scale developments are benefits to communities, developers, and end users. The essence of planning large-scale developments consists of an entrepreneurial focus on multiple land uses that complement the vision and financial commitment of the developer. The developer must rely on a talented design team and the willingness of the local government to review and approve large-scale developments. With technical and political insight, a successful large-scale development will succeed in even modest market conditions. Flexibility in both land use and land planning will also provide a developer a framework with which to create a point of destination and sense of community. This results in consistent land absorption and the creation of its own market. The technical aspects of large-scale developments will be addressed in subsequent chapters. Large-scale developments may be considered green developments, since both have the potential to provide sustainable and environmentally sensitive community designs, which would enhance the value and characteristics of the land form.

#### 1.2 Role of Government

The traditional planning and zoning measures instituted in many communities have not embraced sustainable growth patterns and have only served to promote sprawl. The development of outlying areas is a direct function of land prices and the government's land-use and zoning approach. Developers seek land on the fringes for easy to develop properties that have existing zoning in place. Many communities establish zoning districts that require land to be used for houses contained in stand-alone subdivisions that are only connected by roads and traffic corridors. Governments establish the rules, and developers must create designs consistent with

these rules. Otherwise, the onus falls on the developer to seek changes in the conceivable zoning or land uses permitted by governments. Flexibility and creativity are hindered and muted by the narrowly focused prudence of development and growth patterns by local governing bodies.

Governments have created a scenario in which land is consumed by new construction in outlying areas because properly planned densities are not being considered. In such a scenario, development sprawl will continue, and NIMBY (Not in My Backyard) and CAVE (Citizens Against Virtually Everything) attitudes will thrive. However, only local government can assess future growth patterns and determine the course of action best suited for future generations. The answer may be clear, but many communities will ignore it. Growth can be managed, allowing land to be used properly and effectively. The government needs to evaluate density's effect on its populace and existing infrastructure. Implementing higher densities within existing urban areas would provide developers with flexibility in design and creativity. Density is the controlling factor in achieving a balance between the common good and the protection of the health, safety, and profit motive of a private entity.

Answers include the creation of large-scale development approaches that would provide market segmentation, sustainability, and a point of destination. Large-scale projects can achieve sustainability outside urban cores with the proper use of land through local government partnerships. Well-planned and conceptualized large-scale projects should not be viewed as a continuation of sprawl but as HOPE, meaning Housing Opportunities Please Everyone. Developers and industry professionals must cooperate with local government entities to achieve large-scale projects that provide HOPE.

### 1.3 Public Perceptions

For many years, national home-building companies have been the only ones with the foresight and financial means to design and construct large-scale projects. The general support of government and public in their vision has made this possible. It takes time, effort, and financial resources to hold land while the design approach is dissected. In return, the small- and medium-sized developers have been forced farther out from the core infrastructure. The public perceives builders and developers as profit-motivated disturbers of land and community values. Most builders and developers are reluctant to attempt something innovative on account of the regulatory acceptance hurdles and market reaction. Thus, the "same ol' thing" causes the "same ol' response" from the public. Furthermore, the public believes that builder-developers make significant financial returns, when in reality the returns on their investments are insignificant compared to higher risk industries. Also, since developing lots or building homes is their main enterprise, a portion of all profits are invested back into land for the next project.

Changing public perception of large-scale developments is a must for sustainable communities to thrive. Developers should seek a common ground to achieve a partnership of creativity, as flexibility and vision will allow large-scale developments to become integral parts of a community's growth pattern. The development industry

is a fragmented compilation of visionaries striving to meet market demands. The government's entitlement process and land restrictions create an atmosphere in which well-planned projects create a sense of compliance with the perception of government. This, in turn, will change public perception.

However, many NIMBY and CAVE advocates are results of a migration of the populace to warmer climates and less populated areas. Most advocates of curtailing development are people new to the area, since the community landowners continue to believe their land and their savings account are one and the same. The government must maintain a balance between conflicting interests. Large-scale developments molding land uses, density, architectural appeal and, as well, creative pedestrian and vehicle relationships will be essential components of thriving communities.

#### **1.4 Builder and Developer Vision**

Undoubtedly, not all developers are suited to create, design, and construct a realistic community project based on an idealistic visualization. However, large-scale development approaches provide a flexibility and forum at which master developers can excel at meeting the needs of the marketplace. Creating practical land-use relationships on large parcels of land is beneficial to local government. Large-scale projects combine the highest and best land-use approach, resulting in a comprehensive infrastructure design that complements the vision of the project. Large-scale projects are consequences of developers filling a market need.

As housing projects increase in land area, number of residential dwelling units, and nonresidential uses, the political and economic viability is elevated in importance, and the risk associated with the project is magnified. Large-scale projects require substantial finances and time commitments to complete. These resources, however, do not always guarantee a successful project. A large-scale land-use project requires purchasing large parcels of land and holding on to the land for a long period of time. To be successful, the master developer must properly manage the political influences throughout the entire process. Developing a large-scale land-use plan has substantial risks and rewards. Developers may minimize their long term risks by purchasing land below the market value. Developers must seek land-use flexibility to allow reaction to market changes. Absorbing the land at a reasonable rate while creating a sense of community and a point of destination will further enhance the profitability of the project.

In many communities, large tracts of land or consolidate properties to create a large tract of land can only be found in outlying areas. In highly regulated communities, a developer would be identified with perpetuating sprawl. This could be circumvented by forging an alliance with a local government that sees the benefits of a master-planned project. Developers would only approach market areas where the government appreciates the importance and value of a large-scale project. The risk is too substantial otherwise. Developers with a sound design, sufficient land, and government support can succeed at large-scale developments. Developers must orchestrate the fundamental components of a project plan for it to be delivered on time and within budget.

### 1.5 Design Professional Leadership

Large-scale development concepts are molded by a team of design professionals into a marketable plan. Designing program parameters and selecting design team members are the responsibilities of the developer. After all, the land-use-planning and development approaches established at the very initial phases of a project will cast a high level of commitment and risk. The importance of selecting appropriate design team members for the project can be neither overlooked nor minimized. Its importance has made it commonplace for developers to retain national experts with current industry knowledge and creative skills unmatched by local consultants.

Design teams should consist of members with various professional backgrounds, but it is the dynamic between the personalities that achieves an optimal land-use plan. It is all too easy for a strong developer personality to neutralize the creative approaches by the design team. Consultants must remain focused on the best interests of the property. In most cases, the land form's location and market segmentation are the only ingredients to define creative alternatives. A balance between ingenuity and practicality must be achieved in order to make the project a success.

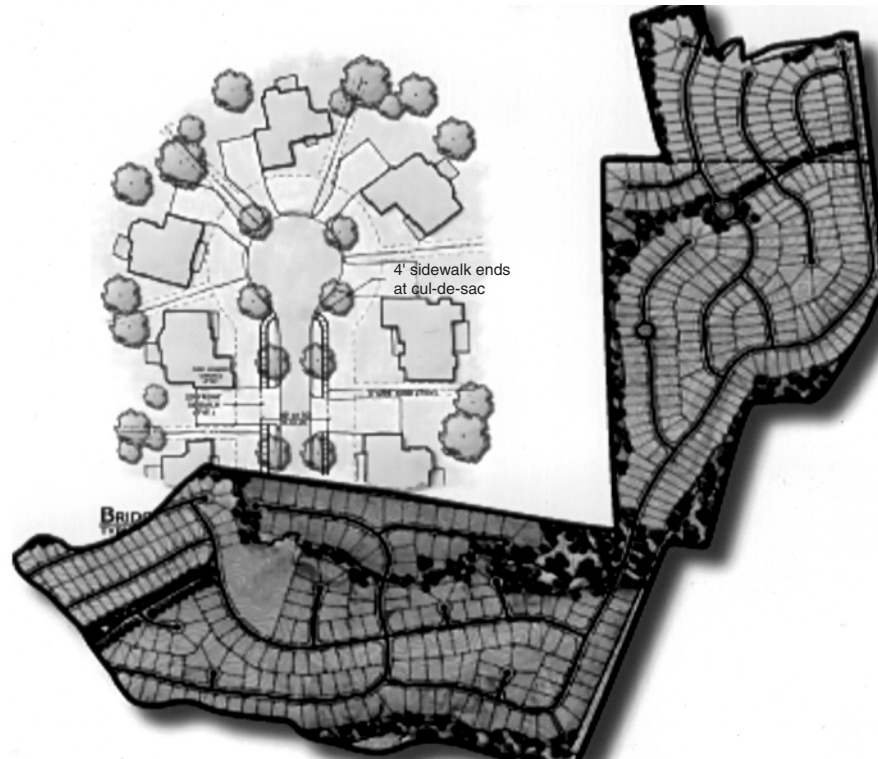
### 1.6 Land-Planning Concepts

No successful pattern or mold guarantees success in the design of a large-scale development. In many cases, new land-planning concepts are a revitalization of previous ideas. Other concepts are proven ideas with new, innovative spins. Also, not all creative land-planning techniques apply to every community. Creating a land plan or land-use plan starts with a developer's vision for the property. The willingness and understanding of local government to consider a large-scale land-use plan would encourage developers to master-plan projects. The ingenuity of the design team members will create a plan having wide market appeal. These project components are a reflection of the land characteristics and attributes. If the physical, technical, and environmental elements of a site are ignored, the project potential will be negatively impacted. For large-scale projects, the marketplace is captivated by a sense of belonging created by complimentary land plans and land-use relationships (Fig 1.1).

### 1.7 Summary

Mixed-use developments, higher housing densities, and a sense of community are essential components to creative and cost-effective, large-scale land-development projects. In the future, home buyers will be attracted to communities that provide for employment opportunities and affordable alternative housing options. Large-scale master-planned communities have and will continue to offer a centralized place to live and work.

Large-scale projects will be the norm rather than the traditional hopscotch development patterns dotting our landscape. To achieve a profitable large-scale project,



**Figure 1.1 Land-Planning Creativity. Multiuse, large-scale projects with wide market appeal are products of a developer's vision and design team creativity. The design program is the base from which successful projects evolve.**

government agencies, the general public, and private developers must seek common objectives that serve the existing community as a whole and offer viable opportunities for those seeking to balance work and family demands. Existing municipalities that are progressive and that forge compromises will attract builders, developers, and buyers to successfully create sustainable large-scale projects.

#### **DISCUSSION TOPICS**

1. Should government regulate the way land is used for development purposes?
2. How should design professionals interface with government to influence design standards?

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3. What changes can government implement to ensure a balance is maintained between public and private interest toward developing land?
4. Are higher density projects a benefit or a detriment to the overall impact a project may have on a municipality?
5. Does this quote hold true for the building industry: “If you build it, they will come?”