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Subject: Conservation Subdivision Amendments

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Hello,

I hope this message finds you all well. Prior to your meeting next week, I wanted to provide an update on the Conservation Subdivision amendments that will be on your upcoming agenda.

For the most part, the final recommendations passed by the planning board are in line with the original proposed amendments that previously went to public hearing.

There was some discussion about allowing a certain percentage of unbuildable stream buffers to be counted as conservation space, but ultimately the board stayed with the recommendation to disallow developers from including stream buffers in their conservation space calculations. This was seen as an important change because the current regulations would allow for parcels with many wetlands and creeks to get a density bonus for 'preserving' land that they would be unable to develop in the first place. I think this issue should be something for the UDO consultants to look into and figure out if there is a good model or models that will encourage the usage of the conservation subdivision without providing the opportunity for an exploitative windfall for developers.

The most significant change that came out of our last meeting was removing the changes that would have disallowed off-site septic. The process was originally going to be barred in a conservation subdivision because we wanted to protect streams from having utility easements crossing them to access remote septic fields.

With further thought, several members believed that precluding developers from using off-site septic systems in their planning would in fact prove detrimental. One reason for this was that disallowing the practice for conservation subdivisions, while allowing it in conventional subdivisions would simply dissuade developers from using the conservation model altogether. If the practice were banned in all subdivisions, that could be a different story, but that was outside the scope of the changes we were considering.

Another reason for hesitance on disallowing off-site septic in conservation subdivisions was that developers have already started to plan around it. We are now getting plans that include long, winding flag lots that technically include a septic field on each parcel, but will cause major headaches for future buyers that have to understand where their property lines are and what they will need to do to maintain their septic fields. Members felt that having several compact lots piping their effluent to a remote field complex would end up being a better design than a tangle of oddly shaped lots.

While we removed the ban on off-site septic, we want to assure that designated 'natural space' is kept in its most natural form and not utilized for septic fields.

I still think the issue needs to be better addressed through the UDO. I think having the newly impaneled wastewater advisory committee look at the options and make recommendations would be a good move. I do not like seeing plans that have pipes criss-crossing through wetlands to access off-site septic fields, but the currently available alternatives could end up being worse. If there were a way to limit off-site septic through sensitive areas while maintaining compact and simple lot designs, that would be ideal. However, designing the particulars of bringing that to fruition was too much for this amendment process.

I am planning to attend the meeting next week and will be available along with Jason to answer any questions.

Thank you,
Jon Spoon