

Yale Urban Design Workshop

CENTER FOR URBAN DESIGN RESEARCH

School of Architecture

Yale University

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Memorandum

October 25, 2004

To: Christine Nelson, AICP
Old Saybrook

From: Alan Plattus
Yale Urban Design Workshop

Re: The Preserve – Conceptual Standard Subdivision Review

Considering the Conceptual Standard Subdivision submission for the The Preserve with respect to the Subdivision Regulations of the Town of Old Saybrook leads to the following observations:

With respect to Section 5.8 Open Space:

- C. call for the “establishment of coherent urban form to break up undifferentiated sprawl patterns,” however the plan submitted exemplifies the classic condition of suburban sprawl in its complete lack of hierarchy, lack of any “focal points and centers” that provide differentiated or memorable places, reliance on a tee-like system of feeder street and cul-de-sacs, and thoroughly monolithic use and building typology.
- D. calls for the “provision of passive and active recreation,” neither of which is indicated anywhere in the plan submitted.

With respect to Section 27 Residence C Conservation District of the Town of Old Saybrook Zoning Regulations:

- 27.1 mandates clustering development to preserve open space, which is not done in the Standard Subdivision plan, but leads directly to the Open Space Subdivision application as specified in 27.11.

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To: Christine Nelson, AICP
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Re: The Preserve – Open Space Subdivision Review

Considering the Open Space Subdivision submission for the The Preserve with respect to Section 56 (Open Space Subdivisions) of the Town of Old Saybrook Zoning Regulations, with particular reference to F 11-14, and reference more broadly to current best practices in developments of this kind, leads to the following observations:

- There are two major areas of clustered housing designated in the submission as the Central Village and the East Village (as well as a smaller cluster just to the west of the Central Village). The general lack of relationship and, at a more literal level, connections between these two areas is a cause for concern with respect to overall goals to create a pedestrian-friendly development that in fact functions something like a traditional village or neighborhood. An earlier version of this proposal seems to show all clustered development on the single site of the Central Village, creating a level of focus and density that is more conducive to village-style life than either cluster alone, or the two together as they are currently laid out.
- Additionally the layout of the clusters seems problematic in several respects. The Central Village is, for the most part, only one block deep, with most streets, therefore, one-sided, so that the sort of traditional two-sided residential streets that function best for neighborhood life (and are featured in the renderings submitted) will be the exception, rather than the rule. The Eastern Village is more like a conventional grid, but with extremely short streets so that there is little hierarchy or clarity in the layout and probably not a critical mass of units to really sustain neighborhood character. While the Central Village has a small public space in front of the Clubhouse, the Eastern Village appears to have dedicated open space

of its own. Usable open space related directly to houses and residential streets is minimal in the entire plan as submitted.

- The clusters have exactly the same relationship to the main road (Road A) of the development as the more conventional cul-de-sac residential streets. That is to say, the main road is basically a feeder and all residential development occurs on side streets. Traditional villages and neighborhoods generally have a direct and immediate relationship to “main streets,” with some houses along public buildings and commercial uses facing that street. The only place that occurs, quite appropriately and successfully – but minimally, is in the small cluster west of the Central Village and with a few units in the Central Village that face Road A. If the development in general, and the clusters in particular, were more strongly related to Road A, along with “public” uses such as the Clubhouse and Fire Station, the central section of Road A could function more like a pedestrian-friendly village main street and the clusters, and their residents, could be more effectively connected to each other.
- Complicating the issue of tenuous connections between residential areas and between those areas and the open space is the lack of a clearly articulated *network* of roads, sidewalks, and paths for walking, biking and golf carts. The whole layout functions like a tree, always requiring a return to the main trunk in order to access any other branch of the system. Networks, like grids, have proven to be better not only for distributing and facilitating traffic, but for encouraging sociability and interaction of uses.
- Following from this point is the fact that apart from the clusters and the provision of significant areas of open space, this plan still functions like a fairly conventional subdivision, with most non-clustered housing located along cul-de-sac-side street connected to Road A at a single point.
- In addition to the issue of limited “public” space in direct relation to the clusters and to other residential areas, there seems to be an overall lack of space for programmed use, especially active recreation of the sort that needs level fields. There may also be an issue with respect to the ease of access for the larger areas of unprogrammed open space, particularly with respect to their lack of contiguity, as well as their relationship to the golf course.
- There may also be an issue with respect to the proximity of golf course holes number 10 and 18 on the west, and the driving range on the east, to the *fronts* of houses in the Central Village, as well as to the on-street parking proposed for Roads H and I.
- With respect to Section 65.6.6 F.11, it is difficult to tell from the submission what sort of landscape – not to mention streetscape elements – might be provided in critical areas.