



# TOWN OF OLD SAYBROOK

## Land Use Department

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### INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

#### *Via Hand Delivery*

To: Robert J. McIntyre, Chairman, Planning Commission  
From: Christine Nelson, AICP, Town Planner  
Date: November 17, 2004  
Subject: **“The Preserve” Open Space Plan**  
Ingham Hill and Bokum Roads (Map 55, 56 & 61 / Lots 6, 3, 15, 17, 18)  
*Residence Conservation C District, Aquifer Protection Area*  
Applicant: River Sound Development LLC Agent: Robert A. Landino, P.E.

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This memorandum summarizes a review of the subject Application, specifically with regard for how the clustered design (“layout”) permanently reserves land according to the standards of open space preservation as proposed by the Preliminary Open Space Plan.

### **ADMINISTRATIVE & DESIGN REPORT**

#### **Preliminary Open Space Plan**

With consideration for the natural resources of the northern parts of the town as an endowment treasured by the townspeople of Old Saybrook, the Town prefers the Open Space Subdivision over the conventional subdivision because development of the land can be planned to balance “gray infrastructure” (development) with “green infrastructure” (conservation). The purposes of permanent reservation of land – habitat conservation, cultural preservation, public health and safety, recreation, economics – is matched by the goal of integrating residential neighborhoods with open spaces, enhancing residents’ quality of life through “living with nature”. Section 56.1 of the Zoning Regulations states that no subdivision shall be approved in the Residence Conservation C District other than as an Open Space Subdivision. In reviewing the proposed Preliminary Open Space Plan with regard for the typical functional and geographic considerations of any subdivision of land, the Commission should consider the following modifications to the proposed layout:

#### **CONSERVATION**

The Preliminary Open Space Plan sets aside blocks of open space land in permanent reservation for outdoor recreation areas, which the Town actively advocates for the health of its residents. The Application should anticipate the needs of its incremental increase in residents to the town. The Plan includes a pedestrian circulation system

designed to assure that pedestrians can walk safely and easily on the site, between properties and activities or special features within the neighborhood open space system. The hiking trail system is based around an existing system of historical woods roads and trails to serve the need for passive recreation, as well as for non-motorized circulation connecting to trails on adjacent properties in Old Saybrook and intermunicipally. Residents of the proposed development, as well as the general public, can access via a series of 15 trailheads (parking available at Bokum Road, Ingham Hill Road, the Nature Center near Route 153 in Westbrook, and the Club House in the center of the development). Although there is a seemingly awkward relationship between the proposed golf cart paths and the proposed hiking trails, which overlap in such a way that the cart paths take precedence over the trails either bringing trail hikers into the golf course to continue to other wooded hiking trails or inadvertently dead-ending at the locations where the trails enter the golf course fairways, the advantage to shared facilities is fewer disturbances of wooded areas and a variety of scenes to observe while hiking; the disadvantage is potential inconvenience to golfers or danger to hikers. The proposed relationship may be preferable to a reverse precedence where the cart paths bring golf carts into the woods more often than that already proposed and across property boundaries into what is proposed to become Town-owned open space.

Additionally, the Plan proposes a Nature Center, which is described as an open-air pavilion with wall space for information and displays. The concept of this amenity is in keeping with other open space facilities in Old Saybrook, such as Fort Saybrook Monument Park, where residents and visitors can explore the resources at will with the added benefit of self-education. Although the majority of the development's residents, as well as those who live in the rest of Old Saybrook, will be dependent on automobiles to reach the Nature Center due to its distance from the proposed Villages, the advantage is that its visible location at the development's gateway entrance at Route 153 in Westbrook will be a recognizable landmark, encouraging regular patronage by area residents and visitors to The Preserve. The Nature Center is located at an obvious interface between those public access ways (main entrance at Westbrook, bicycle trail along Road A, and trails from other parts of the development) and the western complex of open spaces.

The Plan does not provide for active recreation via parks or playgrounds, which would be a consideration of a standard subdivision plan or a planned residential development. The Plan proposes a driving range, tennis courts, and pool, but these are associated with the future commercial use of the private country club, which may not be financially attainable by all residents of the development or easily accessible by children or young adult residents. The Plan provides for 4 or 5 "greens" within the three villages, which are primarily aesthetic in nature and could only be construed as opportunities for flexible or unstructured recreation. In determining the need for reservation of open space, the Subdivision Regulations guide by a standard of ten percent (10%) of the land area of the subdivision, and state that a lesser area is sufficient to satisfy the need if adequate existing parks, playgrounds, recreation areas, and open space are available in the neighborhood. It is recommended that a buildable area (approximately 10% of at least that proposed for residential development) be set aside for active recreation; the area could be designated

from either or both of what the Plan currently proposes as open or as residential development. (Additionally, the Open Space Subdivision regulations allow the Commission to permit open space to be located on a parcel that is not contiguous to the Open Space Subdivision if located in the same watershed, if accessible by the same road as the proposed development, or if the recreational opportunities or density reductions balance the increased density within the subdivision.)

The Preliminary Open Space Plan sets aside blocks of open space land in permanent reservation for preservation of sites or areas of scenic beauty or historic interest. The Town habitually advocates for the design around and preservation of sites of historic, archaeological, or cultural value, and their environs to safeguard the character of the features. The Plan protects an area for the Ingham Homestead, consisting of such foundation of the original structure and the stone fence for the adjacent garden or animal pen, beside the Old Ingham Hill Road. Although driveways to house lots in the Road J Cluster, the principal thoroughfare of Road A, and Fairway 13 cross or coincide with Old Ingham Hill Road, the Plan minimizes interruptions to the historical travel way. The Plan pays homage to the historically rural nature of this unimproved right-of-way and its inherent ability to continue to serve as an intermunicipal trail, and preservation of this resource relies upon adequate buffering from incompatible physical, visual or auditory encroachments of adjacent lots and associated improvements. Although proposed roads and other improvements will raze particular stonewalls and portions of others that demarcate the boundaries of early settlement of Old Saybrook, the Plan encompasses most of the existing stone walls within the boundaries of proposed open space or preservation easements. Although little of the subject property is visible from existing public thoroughfares, the Plan incorporates scenic views and vistas of the surrounding open space from its spine road, encases the historic Old Ingham Hill Road within the existing forest, and locates a scenic overlook at the bluff overlooking Pequot Swamp Pond.

The Preliminary Open Space Plan sets aside blocks of open space land in permanent reservation for conservation of forest, wildlife, and other natural resources. The Town maintains a criterion in its Open Space Subdivision regulations that the Plan should provide open space that is reasonably contiguous, as well as minimizes impacts on large woodlands, especially those containing mature trees or significant wildlife habitat. The Plan locates residential development and infrastructure in clusters along the northern edges and a central corridor of the property. Although most of the clusters of new construction are set on the prominent hilltops and ridges, the sharp relief of topography on the site limits the suitability of the lower topographic features available for development. Therefore, the Plan protects and preserves wetlands and steep slopes from clearing, grading, filling associated with construction of the residential development, except as may be approved by the Commission in conjunction with essential infrastructure and recreation amenities. Although the intertwining of the private country club lot with the open space lot fragments the remaining open space located in the southern portions of the property, the combined undisturbed area within the golf course lot and the preservation areas (proposed to be town-owned open space or easements over private land) provide connectivity to the large, adjacent tracts of town-

owned open space (Town Park, Great Cedars Conservation Area and the remainder of the former Gleason Property). The Plan does not maintain upland buffer of natural native species vegetation adjacent to wetlands and watercourses due to the proximity of the golf course fairways to the natural streams and ponds.

- The Applicant should show where proposed hiking trails and cart paths occur along existing travel ways, as well as where they will be considered new activity in the proposed open space.
- The Applicant should find opportunities to loop the hiking trails back to the development at or near overlaps with cart paths to allow hikers to avoid the golf course (e.g. from Road G southerly, to Wild Apple Lane; from Road A near the railroad tracks).
- The Applicant should provide signage for golfers driving carts and pedestrians hiking shared paths/trails to instruct each on the etiquette of sharing facilities.
- The Applicant should provide cross-access easements and an agreement for maintenance of the cart paths where they coincide with the hiking trails whether on the property of Town-owned open space or the private country club.
- The Applicant should provide a park or playground for the residents of the development or set land aside for active recreation in suitable locations on or near the development that offer convenient access by residents and adequate screening from nearby house lots.
- The Applicant should eliminate the one house located within the block that contains the East Village green and relocate the East Village Green to a more central or focal location within or beside the cluster of homes
- The Applicant should locate the entirety of Old Ingham Hill Road right-of-way within an easement or fee simple strip of land at least 50' in width with additional conservation easements on the adjacent lots that provide at least 50' of distance from any residential or golf course improvements, except where cart paths coincide with hiking trails.
- The Applicant should relocate stonewalls that must be destroyed in the course of development along new boundaries proposed by the Open Space Subdivision.
- The Applicant should relocate fairways of the private country club lot to better meet the purpose of protection of natural streams, ponds, or water supply.

### DEVELOPMENT

The Open Space Subdivision Plan should encourage energy efficient patterns of development and land use, particularly with regard to solar aspect of the site.

The Open Space Subdivision Plan proposes several types of roads or streets within the development itself that consider the Town's policy to encourage the use of design standards for public improvements that provide for the safe and efficient movement of traffic, maintain and enhance the character of the Town, minimize potential impacts to the environment, and reduce the operation and maintenance costs of the Department of Public Works. The Plan proposes multiple points of access to the development in keeping with the "golden rule" to disperse traffic in every direction possible, and a hierarchy of primary access to the site via Route 153 in Westbrook, secondary access via Bokum Road near the Essex town line, and tertiary limited access via Ingham Hill Road in Old Saybrook. The proposed ranking of access roads does not accommodate the incoming residents' need for efficient movement to the town center within Old Saybrook, where commercial and civic amenities are located; nor does the proposed ranking of roads equitably distribute traffic bound for the center of town among existing roads, which may incongruously burdens adjacent existing local roads, such as Schoolhouse Road and Bokum Road, with traffic prohibited from Ingham Hill Road. Each of the local roads, whether designated as "scenic" or not, contain the same special rural characteristics to varying degrees, that the Town must endeavor to protect while accommodating safety and efficiency.

The Plan proposes a design for the east-west spine road, crossing the development from Route 153 in Westbrook to Bokum Road near the Essex town line, which emulates the characteristics of a local scenic road. Although the slopes on either side of the proposed road (needed to match the contrast between the ridges and the valleys the roads cross) will require clearing of mature trees and stone walls extensive enough that, in places, the proposed roads will not blend naturally into the surrounding terrain, the spine road achieves many of the Town's desired "alternate road standards", including reduction in the width of the traveled way, incorporation of grassed structural section shoulders; provision of bicycle lanes and paths, reduction in the amount of curbing installed, use of roadway shoulder and slope grading for sheet flow of stormwater runoff, reduction in the construction of drainage structure inlets and storm sewers, and use of low gradient vegetated swales and filter strips to convey stormwater and to promote infiltration. The spine road creates a rural roadside character and improves public safety and vehicular carrying capacity by avoiding development fronting directly onto the public road.

The Plan proposes a typical "cul-de-sac" for each cluster of single-family lots with landscaped islands designed to catch stormwater in a "rain garden" effect. These dead-end streets become the common area for clustered developments, and as such, should not be so long or so steep as to not be walkable by residents. Due to the rural nature of the northern half of Old Saybrook, the Town does not usually seek installation of sidewalks on side streets, and encourages bicycle paths along main roads. The Plan proposes rear lots, which contributes to a more efficient and less environmentally detrimental subdivision layout than would result without the use of rear lots. The Plan

proposes shared driveways where there is some distance from the road to the proposed building envelope, which generally reduces traffic conflicts or preserve significant natural features consistent with the concept of clustering development amid open spaces.

The Plan proposes streets, lanes and alleys in grid-like fashion in each of the villages of planned residential development. The dwellings face each other or look across open vistas of the proposed golf course fairways consistent with the tenet of open space subdivision planning that people are willing to live on small lots in a rural setting in exchange for large expanses of open space, especially if it offers vistas across that open space. The plan shows sidewalks throughout, which is appropriate for traditional neighborhood designs, which tie in to the trail system and the bicycle path along the spine road.

- The Applicant should encourage solar orientation of the proposed buildings by orienting the “footprint” of each proposed building so that the longest side of the building is within 30 degrees of true east, and consider the energy impacts of other buildings, vegetation and natural features by planting evergreen trees and hedges on the north side of each structure.
- The Applicant should create a full access at Ingham Hill Road.
- The Applicant should landscape both sides of new roads, as well as cul-de-sac islands, with native species shade trees and flowering shrubs with high wildlife conservation value where existing vegetation cannot be maintained outside of the paved travel way.
- The applicant should indicate the location of any existing and proposed street lighting.

The modifications recommended in this report and in the reports of the other consulting and municipal experts and agencies are intended to bring into compliance the lots, roadways and infrastructure improvements of the proposed Open Space Plan pursuant to Section 56 Open Space Subdivisions of the Zoning Regulations.

**END OF MEMORANDUM**