

**Section 9**

**NEIGHBORHOOD DESIGN**

**City of Lancaster Comprehensive Plan**

# NEIGHBORHOOD DESIGN

## INTRODUCTION

There are many ways in which a neighborhood can be defined, and questions have been raised regarding whether the neighborhood concept is still viable in our highly mobile society. For the purposes of urban planning, a neighborhood unit is considered to be a geographic area of the community that is predominantly residential in nature, and which is bounded by thoroughfares or collector streets, or by other natural or manmade features, such as railroads, industrial areas or topographic features. The area encompassed by a neighborhood may vary between approximately 300 to about 900 acres, with 600 acres considered average. A neighborhood unit should contain some park and playground features, and should be served by schools. Elementary schools often serve areas larger than a single neighborhood and can be designed to accommodate 700 students or more. Elementary school sites are usually located on about 10 acres. Some convenient shopping areas and various other facilities, such as churches, are also appropriate as part of a typical neighborhood unit. Changes in school service concepts do not recognize the neighborhood as an urban unit. Despite such concepts, the neighborhood unit still provides the most logical basis for detailed planning and for studying the housing needs of the community.

Often thought of as the basic geographic unit by which urban residential areas are defined, a *neighborhood* is much more than simply the sum of all physical structures (e.g., homes), public facilities and infrastructure elements within a certain area. It is also defined in more abstract terms by the sense of *community* and the quality of life enjoyed by the people who live and recreate there. Well designed neighborhoods provide a setting for residents to develop a strong sense of belonging, which is promoted by their interactions with one another. The form and quality of development in neighborhoods can create a distinctive image and identity for Lancaster and for each of its unique neighborhood areas.

The quality and livability of Lancaster's neighborhoods are integral components of the community's overall character. The key to a successful neighborhood is creating a sustainable environment where the ongoing investment in property is supported by public investment in schools, parks and greenbelt areas; opportunities for social interaction; accessibility for pedestrians, bicyclists and vehicles; and distinctive characteristics that give an area a unique identity. Upkeep and maintenance of both private and public property is critical to neighborhood viability and sustainability. Programs that encourage owner-occupied housing and continued efforts to revitalize aging housing units are also important to the long-

term viability of neighborhoods. In summary, neighborhood viability may be quantified in terms of the following characteristics:

- ◆ Physical condition of housing units;
- ◆ Opportunities for social interaction;
- ◆ Careful and strategic placement of retail uses and other appropriate non-residential uses within the neighborhood area;
- ◆ Continued investment in public and private property to stabilize property values;
- ◆ High level of owner-occupancy of dwelling units;
- ◆ Condition of public facilities and infrastructure serving the area;
- ◆ A sense of *community* and *belonging* among residents; and
- ◆ Access to public open space areas.

There are valid reasons for dividing an urban area into smaller geographic units for evaluation, for functional planning, and for organizational purposes. The delineation of neighborhood areas provides a basis for the planning of logical units in a city in an orderly, step-by-step process as the city grows and matures over time.

## EXISTING NEIGHBORHOODS

Several areas of Lancaster have developed, possibly by coincidence, in a manner that conforms to a neighborhood unit concept. The areas that follow the neighborhood concept in Lancaster have easy access to retail land uses that satisfy residents' daily needs. They are also closer to schools and other public amenities (such as parks), and the hierarchy of roadways provides easy access to arterial streets while keeping higher traffic volumes outside of the neighborhoods. It is important that all neighborhoods in the City reflect this concept, in essence, while maintaining their separate identities. Also important is to recognize that the different neighborhoods in Lancaster will together create an identity for the community, both for its residents and visitors. As such, all neighborhoods should reflect the true image of the residents' desires.



**Illustration 9-1**  
**An Area Neighborhood**

Lancaster at present has a small town/rural atmosphere in close proximity to Dallas, and this environment is much appreciated and treasured by its citizens. This environment can be maintained while positive development in the City is encouraged by concentrating on protecting and enhancing existing neighborhoods, and on developing new neighborhoods with appropriate design standards that reflect rural character of the City, to the extent possible.

Most residential areas in the City are platted according to typical subdivision designs; land is subdivided into a grid of uniform rectangular lots, with widely paved roads and lack of open space. The intent of developers while subdividing is to construct the maximum possible number of lots allowed by the City's regulations. While this situation is to be expected, it does not encourage the preservation of open spaces or the pedestrian-oriented character in neighborhoods that is required to maintain the rural, small-town, community environment that has been Lancaster's identity in the past. The residents' strong desire to maintain this environment makes it important to not only require standards that encourage preservation of such qualities in new developments, but also to enhance existing neighborhoods such that they reflect the desired environment, to the extent possible. Some ways to enhance existing neighborhoods are as follows:

- ♦ Creation of pedestrian-oriented streets by:
  - Requiring the existing sidewalk widths to be increased, which will reduce the width of streets,
  - Creating design patterns in existing streets using different materials such as bricks, cobbled stones, etc.
- ♦ Creating a small town environment by:
  - Lining streets with rows of trees in the street rights-of-way,
  - Introducing streetscape elements, such as planters, decorative street lighting, benches, etc. on sidewalks or street rights-of-way,
  - Adding bike lanes and trails through the neighborhoods, adjacent to the streets or in the rights-of-way.
- ♦ Enforcing strict code compliance of regulations pertaining to open storage, parking, landscaping, and other maintenance in neighborhoods throughout the City.



**Illustration 9-2**  
**Example of Small Town Environment**



**Illustration 9-3**  
**Pedestrian-Oriented Neighborhoods**

## NEIGHBORHOOD DESIGN FOR NEW AREAS

Although existing areas in the City may not adjust to the generalized neighborhood layout concepts discussed within this element of the Comprehensive Plan, new areas within Lancaster will benefit from these types of neighborhood designs. There are generally three different types of neighborhood designs being utilized by developers and planners in the United States today. These are:

- ◆ Typical Subdivision Design,
- ◆ Traditional Neighborhood Design (TND), and
- ◆ Cluster Design.

Each of these designs has their own merits and should be applied where appropriate, depending upon both the type of environment that is desired in a certain area and on development constraints in that area.

### TYPICAL SUBDIVISION DESIGN

The most important aspects of a typical subdivision design are that major thoroughfares bound the residential neighborhood area and residential lots are not allowed to front directly onto these roadways. Many lots back to the major thoroughfares, and cul-de-sacs are used to open up the neighborhood and to provide access to residences from interior streets rather than directly from the major roadways. Collector streets are not continuous, but are instead offset within the interior of the neighborhood, which discourages cut-through traffic. **Illustration 9-4** also shows the placement of an elementary school within a neighborhood design. Elementary schools often do not serve just one but several neighborhoods, as well as some neighborhoods from surrounding communities, and hence can produce higher volumes of traffic within the neighborhood. This creates the need to place schools closer to the major thoroughfares surrounding the neighborhood, while keeping the entrance to the school off of a collector street for safety purposes.

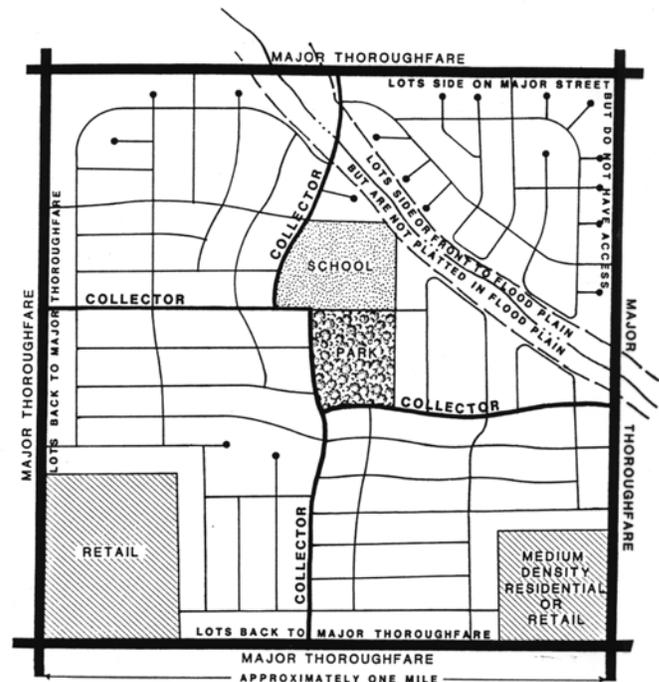
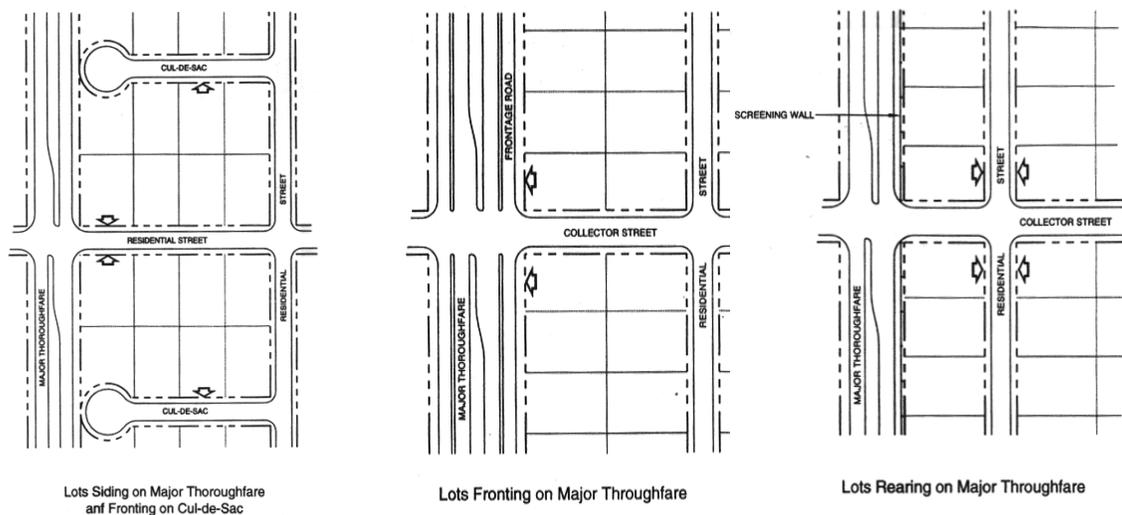


Illustration 9-4  
Typical Residential Neighborhood Layout

In a typical subdivision design, the residential lot arrangement is designed to protect not only the residences, but the capacity and function of the adjacent thoroughfares. A common method of accomplishing a desirable thoroughfare/residential relationship is by designing residential lots fronting onto a parallel residential street and backing onto the major thoroughfare (see **Illustration 9-5**). By restricting access and by providing a screened alley or suitable landscape treatment along the rear of the lots backing onto the major thoroughfare, it is possible to avoid problems that would be created if all abutting lots had direct access onto the major thoroughfare. Intersections of collector streets or other subordinate roadways are spaced so as to result in an interior subdivision design permitting access to the neighborhood, but discouraging the movement of through traffic within a residential area.

A second method of arranging lots in relation to a major thoroughfare is also shown in **Illustration 9-5**. In this example, a frontage road has been added, providing access to lots that front or side onto the major thoroughfare. This technique, however, requires additional right-of-way and the installation of more curb and street pavement than the first method. The cost of developing land using this technique is obviously higher than others, but frontage roads allow access points to be more widely spaced and they provide excellent buffers to heavy traffic movements along the major thoroughfare. This technique is also desirable in areas where business or industrial developments are located adjacent to high capacity thoroughfares.



**Illustration 9-5**  
Single-Family Residential Lot Layouts Adjacent to Major Thoroughfares

**Illustration 9-5** also shows how short, *open-ended* cul-de-sac streets may be used to create lots that do not have direct access onto a major thoroughfare. This technique offers a practical and economical way to protect the capacity of the major thoroughfare, as well as to preserve the integrity of the residential neighborhood. This method of *siding* residential lots generally does not require screening walls;

therefore, it is one of the more desirable options utilized by developers. Cul-de-sac streets can be desirable streets on which to reside due to minimal traffic flows. The use of cul-de-sac streets, alternated with through collector streets that intersect with a major thoroughfare tends to yield an efficient subdivision design, while maximizing thoroughfare capacity and efficiency.

Though this design allows for safe, easily accessible subdivisions with proper setbacks and desired density levels for single-family development in the City, it typically does not allow for common open spaces or pedestrian-oriented streets, which, as previously stated, are the main characteristics of a small town, rural environment. Therefore, it is essential that the City of Lancaster develop additional design criteria for typical subdivision developments, such as:

- ◆ Require trees to be planted at a distance of 30 to 40 feet along both sides of residential subdivision streets. (Refer to the Lancaster Tree Ordinance for specific requirements.)
- ◆ Require all units to have a two-car garage with off-street parking provisions in driveways.
- ◆ Create more pedestrian friendly streets with street grading designs using different materials, such as brick and cobbled stones, so as to create interesting patterns to the extent possible.
- ◆ Encourage usable, common open space in and subdivision in accordance with the Parks Master Plan (contained in a separate document).
- ◆ Require sidewalks enhanced with streetscape elements, such as decorative lamps, benches, planters', etc., to be incorporated into all new developments.
- ◆ Require the formation of neighborhood associations that will be responsible for the maintenance each neighborhood for all new residential developments in the City.

## **TRADITIONAL NEIGHBORHOOD DESIGN (TND)**

This type of subdivision design is considered to be an approach toward reviving a sense of community and social interaction in today's cities. The main characteristics of a traditional neighborhood design (TND) are grid layouts, tree-lined streets, alleys, public squares, mixed-use neighborhood centers, mixed residential densities and pedestrian-friendly streets. In other words, a TND strives to resurrect the early twentieth century American towns and is characterized by the following elements:

- ◆ Limited in size (approximately 40 to 250 acres) to approximately 1/4<sup>th</sup> or 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of a mile from the center to the edge, a size that is considered to be optimal for a



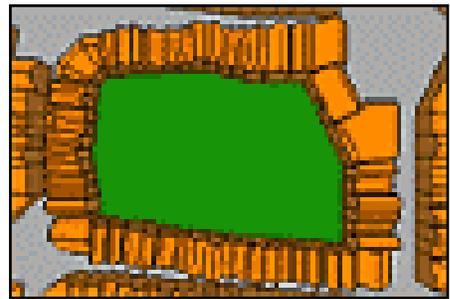
**Illustration 9-6**  
**Typical Elements of a Traditional**  
**Neighborhood Environment**

neighborhood that can be walked within 5 to 10 minutes at an easy pace.

- ♦ Pedestrian-oriented environment with typical architecture and landscape elements used in early twentieth-century towns;
- ♦ Higher densities than conventional developments, with structures that have lesser street setbacks so as to create a more distinctive street edge and a more definitive border between public and private spaces;
- ♦ A variety of housing types, jobs, shopping, services, and public facilities inter-mixed within the neighborhood, all within close proximity;
- ♦ A network of interconnecting streets and alleys that are smaller than conventional streets, and are varied in size and form to control traffic and add character to the neighborhood;
- ♦ A neighborhood center area that serves as a focal point of the neighborhood and contains retail, commercial, civic and public services that are arranged around a central element (i.e. public square);
- ♦ A mixed residential area that includes a variety of residential housing types such as single-family homes, townhouses, duplexes and multi-family units, along with open spaces such as small squares, pocket parks, greenbelts, etc., that also promote a higher level of pedestrian activity.



**Illustration 9-7**  
Example of a Traditional  
Neighborhood Street



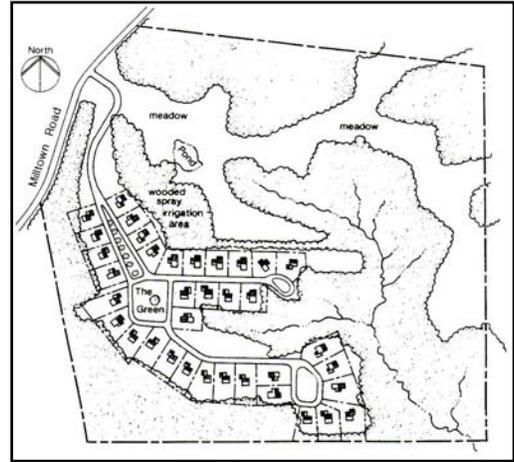
**Illustration 9-8**  
Example of a Plan with Common  
Open Space

TND is oriented toward reducing urban sprawl while facilitating efficient use of existing and future services. While this type of subdivision design is more likely to promote the desired small town environment in Lancaster, it is important to stress that the purpose of this neighborhood design is to create a rural, small town environment and should not be exploited to create higher density small-lot subdivisions. One way for Lancaster to ensure that the purpose of TND is upheld in the City is by enforcing strict and careful regulations through the Zoning, Subdivision Regulations, and other City ordinances.

The residential areas in the vicinity of Lancaster's Town Square (specifically, to the east of Dallas Avenue and the north of Beltline Road) are most suitable for TND development. The presence of the traditional Town Square area, a junior college, and the existing and proposed mixture of residential, retail, commercial and industrial land uses in close proximity to one another makes TND development suitable in these areas. The areas along Pleasant Run Road are also suitable for this type of development.

## CLUSTER DESIGN (CONSERVATION DEVELOPMENT)

The most important aspect of cluster design in subdivisions is the conservation of open space. This concept is used to provide open space or to preserve environmentally sensitive areas, and it helps to create rural character in neighborhoods. A cluster design creates large pockets of planned open space by requiring mandatory clustering of development in certain areas. This method of neighborhood development utilizes increased development densities in some areas of the subdivision by decreasing development densities in other areas. Permanent open space is thereby set aside, and the overall density of the subdivision remains the same.



**Illustration 9-9**  
Example of a Clustered Residential Subdivision

This type of development can be encouraged in areas where the base density is relatively low. In such cases, the City may provide a developer incentive known as a density bonus, whereby a developer is allowed higher density levels in exchange for utilizing cluster design and providing open space. For example, in rural areas land may be divided into 20-acre parcels, which is small for farmland use. In such cases more compact developments may be encouraged by allowing 100 acres of land to be subdivided into 20 one-acre lots instead of five lots, provided that the remaining 80 acres of land are designated as permanent open space.

Several important criteria should be established for the use of the clustering technique within the City of Lancaster. First, it should not be permitted on development tracts of less than 20 acres. Tracts that are 20 acres or less do not provide the City with enough open space to warrant the reduction in lot size. In addition, clustered developments of 20 acres or less would not result in a neighborhood with a rural, small-town character and design. When the clustering technique is used, it should be buffered from adjacent major roadways and existing or proposed large-lot development. The areas designated for residential land use that are located south of Beltline Road are considered most suitable for cluster development. Clustering in this area will help preserve the sensitive floodplain areas, will help maintain and enhance the existing rural character of Lancaster, and will add to local amenities, such as the Lancaster Golf Club area and the Ten Mile Creek Preserve area. Clustering is recommended for all developments within 1000 feet of Ten Mile Creek.



**Illustration 9-10**  
Example of Open Space in a Clustered Residential Development

A *conservation easement* may be used to help create a clustered type neighborhood; this type of easement is created by a landowner placing a restriction on his property voluntarily to protect natural, productive or cultural features. It is recorded as a written legal agreement between the landowner and the *holder* of the easement, which may be either a non-profit organization or a governmental entity such as a municipality. A landowner using a conservation easement retains legal title to the property, and determines the types of land uses to permit and restrict. Every conservation easement document is individually created, and reflects the special qualities of the land protected and the needs of the landowner. Other creative zoning regulations that the City may use to encourage cluster type developments are:

- ◆ Transfer of development rights (TDR);
- ◆ Selective purchase of development rights (PDR); and
- ◆ Subdividing land with fewer lots (referred to commonly as *limited development*).

Clustering density can be based on the City's existing zoning standards; however, the overall objective is to achieve the density guidelines described on **Plate 8-1**.

## **NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT POLICIES**

The following are the recommended neighborhood development policies for the City of Lancaster:

- ◆ The Comprehensive Plan's Future Land Use Plan (**Plate 7-1**) must designate sufficient land for each type of neighborhood design in order to achieve a well-balanced mix of neighborhood identities and to ensure sufficient market flexibility.
- ◆ The City must identify existing neighborhoods that do not enhance the City's rural character and must develop a framework for a volunteer neighborhood enhancement and maintenance program for the identified areas.
- ◆ The City must recognize the unique characteristics of residential areas designated on the Future Land Use Plan (**Plate 7-1**) and must encourage provision of neighborhoods designed to maintain these characteristics. The specific needs of various segments of the population in the City must also be considered.
- ◆ The City must encourage provisions in neighborhood design for physically challenged residents and for residents with other special needs.
- ◆ The City must plan locations that are appropriate for conventional subdivision neighborhoods, traditional neighborhood design (TND), and cluster design for current and future residents.

- ♦ The City's Zoning Ordinance must be revised to include appropriate regulations to implement mandated clustering of lots in neighborhoods and the open space provisions suggested herein.
- ♦ The City's development regulations must provide mechanisms to permit flexibility and innovation in neighborhood designs in order to promote land use efficiency and environmental protection (e.g. clustering in areas around the floodplain).
- ♦ The City must ensure that development (and redevelopment) within existing neighborhoods is similar in density to and compatible with the character of the existing neighborhood in terms of general housing types and densities.
- ♦ The City must promote and encourage the use of design techniques and the provision of planned open spaces to minimize the impact between different neighborhood areas in the City.