

Building Scene

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Marilyn Fitchett editor/591-2300



Monday, May 14, 1990 O&E

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Developers plan on subdivision diversity

Winding roads, rolling terrain appeal to buyers

By Doug Funke
staff writer

Attractive residential subdivisions usually start with a good plat or site plan design — the physical layout of roads and individual lots.

Cookie-cutter neighborhoods with straight, parallel streets, one house behind another on relatively small lots have faded into development history.

The trend now is for lots of different shapes at least 60 feet wide on winding roads, and, where possible, various grades of topography.

"The overall goal . . . in recent years has been to maintain light and air . . . to preserve open space, green areas," said Dale Countegan, director of planning and community development for Farmington Hills.

That's what buyers crave, too, developers maintain. "They want creativity, privacy, as much as you can give them, a statement when you come into the development either through landscaping or an entrance," said David V. Johnson, chairman and president of Victor International in Southfield.

"WE LOOK for things that attract the general public — rolling terrain, streams, whether we can create some ponds," said Bob Paciocco, vice president of PAMA Investment and Contracting Co. of Plymouth.

"Rather than a straight entrance from A to B, we put in curves. It gives more character to the sub," he said. "Rectangular lots of the '50s and '60s are pretty much gone."

Community planners and political officials have established stricter density, setback and landscaping requirements to help promote that open look.

But perhaps the biggest impact on platting and site plan development has been the emergence of the state Department of Natural Resources to protect wetlands.

Some municipalities like Rochester Hills and West Bloomfield also have adopted local wetlands ordinances.

DEVELOPERS have responded with more creative plans for traditional subdivisions and site plans for condominium projects. Planned residential or planned unit developments have become popular.

In those situations, some setback and density requirements are relaxed in exchange for saving unusual land features. Tree preservation has impacted subdivision layouts, too.

Since last year, developers in Farmington Hills have contended with a tree protection ordinance.

"That's a common element to a community," Countegan said. "You just can't cut them without some sort of oversight."

Actually, all lots aren't created equal, even within the same subdivision. Lots with many trees or parcels that back up to woods often sell at a premium.

"A premium lot is a lot that maybe backs to a park area, stream, open space," Paciocco said. "Corner lots aren't too desirable. People don't want to be exposed on two sides."

"CUL-DE-SACS are very popular. The only traffic is people who live there."

"We try to come up with as many (cul-de-sacs) as we can. Those are the kind of lots that get a premium. You end up with fewer houses, but they bring more money with a premium and the end result is the same," Paciocco said.

Lot prices can vary by more than \$30,000 within the same subdivision.

"If you develop on a lake and sites are close or contiguous (to water), they would be more of a premium," said John Shekerjian, a partner in the John Richards Development Corp. of Bloomfield Hills.

"Others further away from a major street might be more valuable," he said. "Some lots may open up to an out-lot or large common area."

"A lot is not premium because it's nicer, but costs more to develop," Shekerjian said.

LOTS ALONE can account for more than half of the total cost of building a new house, especially on lakelot property, Johnson said.

But there's no accounting for specific tastes. That's why Johnson includes plenty of options when he plans a subdivision. "Some like a corner lot, some a pie-shaped lot for kids to play on, while the guy next door might want the pie reversed for a big frontage to show off," Johnson said.

He and other developers just don't slap a land-use plan together when they acquire property. "We spend time looking at a piece of ground from helicopters," Johnson said.

Plat or site plans originally submitted for review generally don't come through the approval process unchanged.

"DENSITY, that's one of the first things I look at," said George Wilhelm, Westland's planning director. "Usually, you cut out a number of lots to create livable space. We've got some cases of triangular lots where actual utilization of the lot would not really make it livable," he said.

"We like at least two entrances. If there's only one, we ask them to make it as short as possible then put in a perimeter road or loop road," Wilhelm added.

"We're always looking at landscaping, protection of trees, layout, how it flows, traffic implications," said Countegan.

Shirley Barney, community development director in Plymouth Township, said traffic circulation in regular subdivisions in residential unit developments are her biggest concern when reviewing plat or site plan proposals.

A community's multi-step plat or site plan review process usually consists of administrative review, planning commission review, at least one public hearing and ultimate approval by a city council or township board.



BILL BRESLER/staff photographer

Subdivision plat plans which feature changes in grade, winding streets and a choice in lot configuration turn out like Woodlore North in Plymouth Township.

Evictions vs. foreclosures

I am considering a co-op as opposed to a condominium. I have been told that the cooperative association can evict me if I do not pay the monthly assessment. Is that true?



condo queries
Robert M. Melsner

Unlike a condominium, when you buy a cooperative you are a renter of the cooperative unit, having signed a proprietary lease for that unit. If you default in your obligations to the cooperative association of which you are a member, the cooperative association can institute eviction procedures against you in landlord/tenant court to evict you from the premises. You may also be deemed to have defaulted in your obligations as a member of the corporation and your interest in the cooperative association can be terminated. In a condominium, if you do not pay your assessments, the condominium association must foreclose against your unit in the same manner as a mortgage company would foreclose if you defaulted in your mortgage payments.

I am a broker and have a listing with a client who has turned down at least two offers concerning the sale of his recreational condominium. In both instances, the offer was close to what was being asked and the terms and conditions were reason-

able. My listing agreement is about to expire, and the seller has indicated that he would verbally guarantee me any future sale should I come up with it. What do you suggest I do? It seems to me from your question that you do not accept the credibility of the seller's desire to sell the property in a timely fashion. If your seller is playing games or if he is refusing to sell the property to persons on the basis of race, color, creed, national origin, sex, marital status or other prohibitive category, you may be well advised to terminate your listing agreement with him as soon as possible and disassociate yourself from him in all respects. Also, as you should know, contracts for commissions in this state must be in writing to be enforceable.

Lighted 'goop' marks 25 years

(AP) — The Lava Lite, a fixture in hippie crash pads of the 1960s, is celebrating its 25th birthday.

Retailers across the country say demand for the lamp, filled with a secret solution of oil, wax and other chemicals, has steadily grown since sales dropped to their lowest point in 1983.

"We carried it as a Christmas item, and it did very well," said Alan Freeman, a buyer for the Sharper Image in San Francisco.

When introduced in 1965, the lamp became popular among a group that was known for its recreational drug use.

But Christopher Baldwin, marketing director for Chicago-based Haggerty Enterprises, the lamp's manufacturer, points out that sales have rebounded during a national war on drugs, an indication past sales were not dependent on drug users buying them.

The lamp's new-found popularity centers among 18- to 24-year-olds, in addition to former hippies, according to retailers, and now sells for about \$50.

SPENCER GIFTS, a 450-store nationwide retailer that targets the young-adult market, carries the item in every store, all year long.

"It's what we call a basic item — we sell them day in, day out," said Spencer GIFTS' official Beth Schlansky in a telephone interview from the company's New York offices.

Although they have been the butt of humor, they also have been praised by the American Institute of Architects.

A lantern-like glass chamber lit from the bottom, the lava — a goop of 11 non-toxic substances discovered by accident by English inventor Craven Walker — gurgles slowly to the top, then settles gently back at the bottom, where the cycle begins again.

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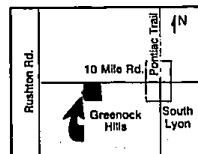
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