

Be Careful What You Wish



“People think that current development is the result of the free market, which is absolutely wrong. Everything that happens is because of a regulation that exists ... Through our codes we are telling people what to build, and we are getting exactly what we asked for, even if it’s not what we really want.”

Tim Keane, City of Charleston Planning Director

Ed Meese's Definition of "Expert"



- **More than 50 miles from home.**
- **Not responsible for implementing any of his recommendations.**
- **Has slides.**

THE COLLINS COMPANY LLC



CREATING VALUE THROUGH PLACE-MAKING

**A Few Thoughts Regarding
Conservation Communities
Signal Mountain, Tennessee
October 8, 2009**

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The Road Less Traveled



Them



Them



Them



Them



Them



Me

The Collins Company LLC



35 years of service to homebuilders and developers by:

- Accurately targeting the market.
- Creating one-of-a-kind development and housing strategies.
- Designing innovative land plans that also respect the environment.
- Designing fresh, exciting house plans that create buyer enthusiasm and cream the competition.
- Assisting with the marketing launch, as needed.

As a city planner, I am available to consult with towns to create a vision, as well as draft regulations that implement that specific vision – avoiding the one-size-fits-all approach that creates the Anywhere USA syndrome.

Background & Experience



After getting my BS from Augusta (GA) College; serving as an Army Lieutenant (decorated for valor and performance in Vietnam); and completing coursework in Georgia Tech's Graduate City Planning program; I have been fortunate in my breadth of experiences:

- Intern, then Planner, then Director of Planning for the developer of Peachtree City, a 15,000-acre new town south of Atlanta. 90-mile pathway system serves as secondary transportation network.
- Principal Planner for Community Sciences Corporation, a prominent planning and engineering firm serving clients in the New Mexico and Texas.
- Vice President of Clark Parker Associates – working with Charlie Clark and David Parker to provide market research, planning, and marketing services to clients in the Southeast.
- Director of Planning & Development for Sivage Thomas Homes, an Albuquerque NM family business that led the market every year (250-500 homes), beating all the national builders.
- As a consultant, serving as Project Director for Highland Lake, a unique Traditional Neighborhood Development in Flat Rock NC.
- As a consultant, helping Locke Homes greatly expand its business in Shreveport LA.
- As a consultant, helping two major communities in Western North Carolina.

I have participated in the planning and engineering of communities containing tens of thousands of residential lots. I have directly managed the planning, engineering, and development of communities containing well over 2000 lots.

National & Regional Awards



- 2001 Platinum Award, ***Best in American Living Awards*** (NAHB/Professional Builder), for “Best Smart Growth Community 151+ Units” (Highland Lake, Flat Rock NC)
- 2001 Gold Award, ***The Nationals*** (NAHB National Sales & Marketing Council), for “Best Home Priced \$250K to \$400K” (Highland Lake)
- Highland Lake named “**One of America’s 10 Most Walkable Communities**” by www.walkable.org.
- 1999 Gold Award, ***Best in American Living Awards***, for “Best Home 1801-2400 SF”
- 2002 & 1998 ***Aurora Awards*** (SE Builders Conference), for “Best Home in State” (NC -- Straus Park and Champion Hills)
- 1976 Grand Award, ***Sensible Growth Design & Planning Award*** (NAHB/Better Homes & Gardens), for “Best Large-Scale Planned Community (Peachtree City GA)

Highland Lake

A Very Special Traditional Neighborhood Without the TND Formula



Sample Highland Lake Homes



Using styles in the local Arts & Crafts vernacular, as well as rich authentic colors, we were able to create homes that look as if they've been here for generations.



35 Years Fighting City Hall ...



... for the right reasons:

- To allow more flexibility and creativity in land planning and housing design.
- To avoid the Anywhere USA syndrome.
- To reduce the cost of developing while improving the quality of development.
- To recognize changes in market demographics and demand.

Things I Believe



- The old neighborhoods of the Olmsteds, Nolen, etc. have yet to be improved upon, remaining the most revered places in their cities.
- Great streets create great neighborhoods.
- A great street can be comprised of modest homes. Conversely, grand homes do not necessarily create a great street.
- House and lot sizes can be mixed on the same street so long as the quality of exterior specifications remains consistent.
- It is unconscionable for TND architects to dictate design standards that are unrealistic for builders and overly expensive for customers.
- The most dangerous streets and intersections are the ones that are engineered to modern standards.
- The safest streets and intersections are the ones that have been intentionally planned so as to force drivers to slow down and think.

No-Brainers



Filling flood plain is dumb.

Developing on too-steep terrain is dumb.

There is no excuse for allowing development runoff into streams.

Two Audiences



The Town and its citizens.

Land owners and developers.

Without a Vision, Regulations Are Meaningless



The “D” Word



DENSITY: It's usually associated with examples of bad density. Meanwhile, many of the places we pay good money to visit are examples of good density – Charleston, Savannah, Nantucket, San Francisco.

Instead of thinking of density in terms of DU/AC, we should perhaps think in terms of the number of acres consumed by a fixed number of dwellings.

Zoning classifications should be based upon density rather than lot size. To the extent feasible, the market should determine lot size. This will encourage subdivisions that combine smaller lots with usable open space.

But wait...

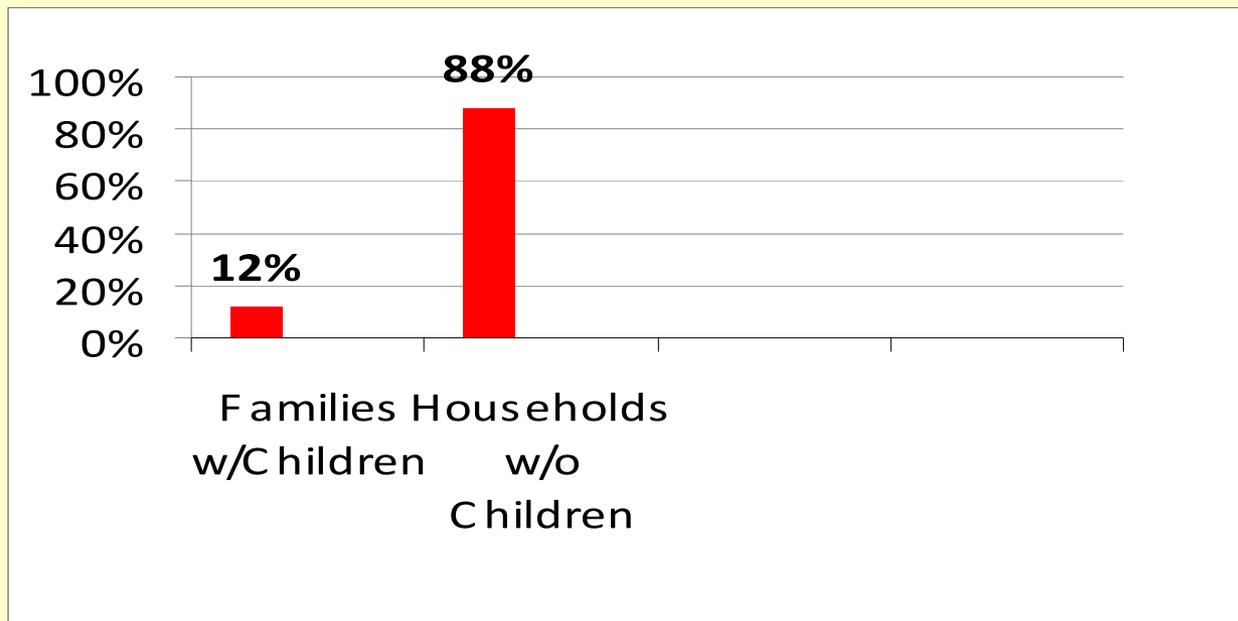


Who would want to live on small lots? Wouldn't most people prefer to live on large lots or homesites?

Planning for the Past

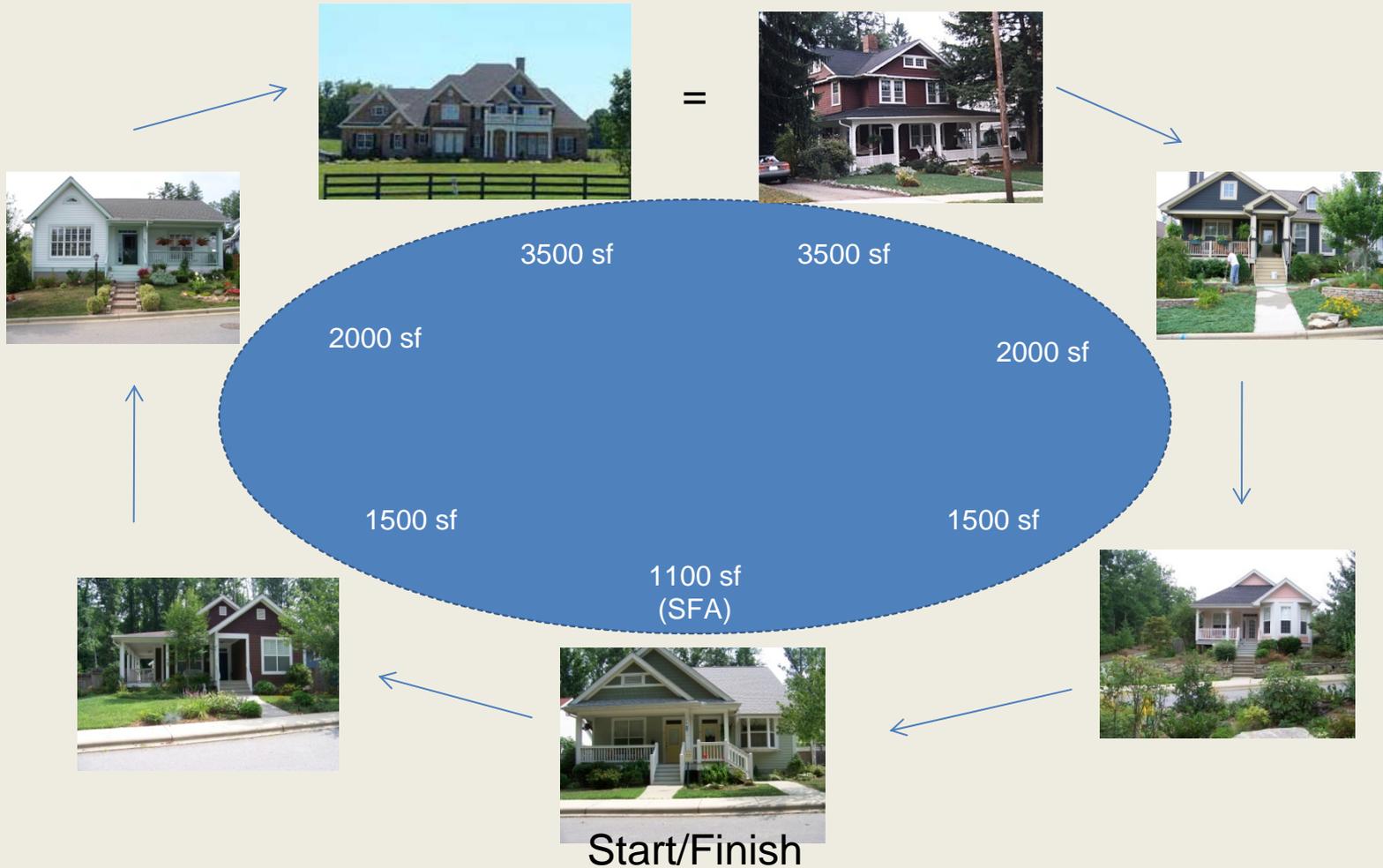


% Growth in Households Through 2025



Many future households will be 1-2 persons. These households do not need – nor want – large houses on large lots.

Home Purchasing Cycle



Rude Awakening



There already exist enough large homes on large lots to meet the projected demand through 2025.

In fact, a *Metropolitan Institute at Virginia Tech* study predicts that by 2025, there will be a surplus of 22 million large homes on large lots (1/6 acre or more). That's 40% of large-lot homes in existence now.

Who will buy these homes in 2025, anyway? This guy?



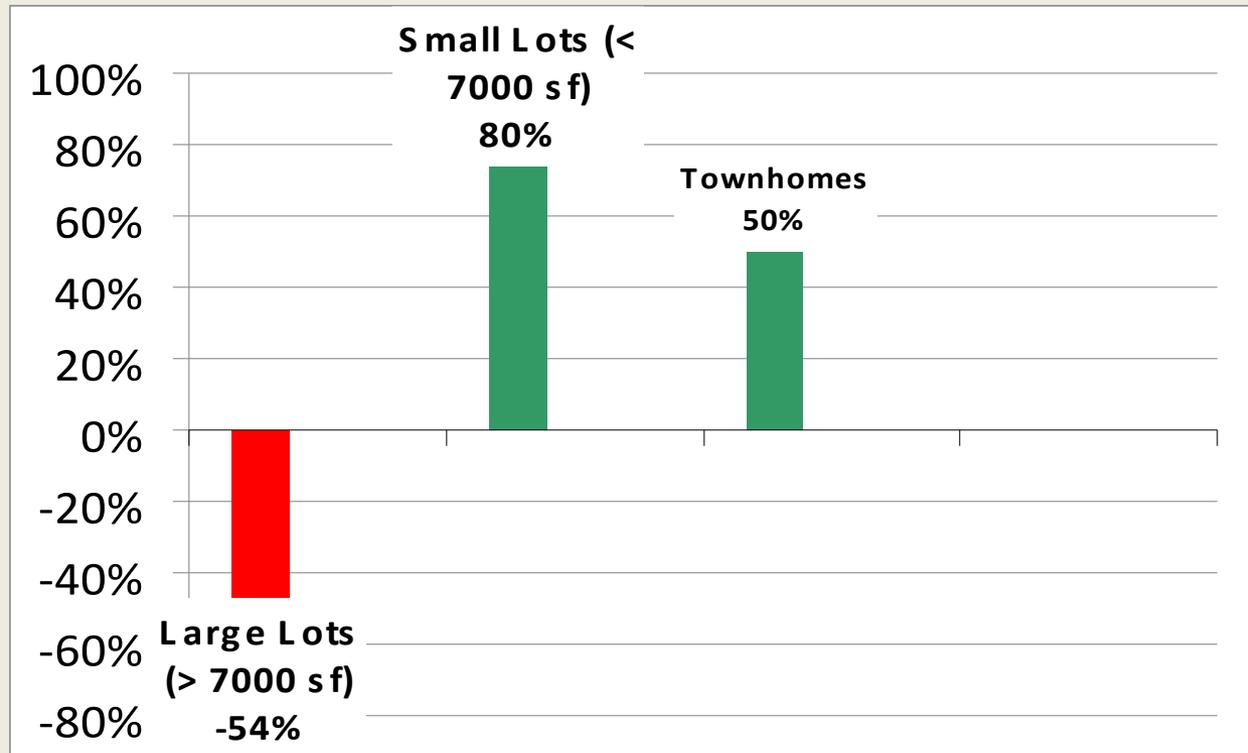
Market Research



So ...

**What do future buyers
say they want?**

Survey Preferences for Buyers through 2025



Even today, 40% would trade large lots for small lots, in return for open space and a sense of place.

This Is Toast



Waiting for the Market to Come Back?



Ain't Gonna Happen



First Law of City Planning



The Law of Unintended Consequences

Malcolm Little, former Director
Georgia Tech City Planning Program

Hoping for the Best



“It’s not enough to change the zoning. Cities have to move to a new system. They should look at the streets ... and places they like and then write the rules to get more of what they like and less of what they don’t. Conventional zoning doesn’t do that. It just gives a use and a density and then you hope for the best.”

Peter Katz, Planner & Author

The Crux of the Matter



The best neighborhoods are those where the builder/developer plans and builds

(1) To the market, and

(2) With the land.

The builder's current product lines may or may not work on a particular site. If not, so be it. The product line should be adapted to work with the site – not vice versa.

The result will be “Twice Green.”

The Developer Will Take the Easiest Path



**If you want more of something,
you should make it easier to do
... and vice versa.**

Conservation Subdivisions



- Cost less to develop.
- Delay the cost of engineering, reducing uncertainty.
- Generate higher revenue.
- Generate higher profit.
- Sell faster.
- Are better for the environment.
- Create a sense of place.

DUH!

Another Name for Conservation Subdivision



**GOOD
SITE
PLANNING**

Prescriptive Design Standards



- Create cookie-cutter effect.
- Often use a one-size-fits-all scenario that is not appropriate for most sites.
- Set minimum standards that become the norm.
- Stifle design creativity.
- If not kept up to date, they fail to account for demographic changes and changing market preferences.

Performance Design Standards



- Set design goals, but leave specific solutions to design professionals.
- Public review should address public welfare and safety issues, not whether someone likes the ideas.
- Result in innovative community concepts that address market needs in new and interesting ways.
- Result in a variety of design solutions that provide more choices for consumers.
- Require professional and impartial review.

Hybrid Approach to Design Standards



Use prescriptive standards, but ...

- Create a more complete matrix of possibilities. (For example, there might be a dozen types of residential streets and a myriad of housing types.)
- Always be open to new ideas that can be added to the matrix. Invite them.
- Allow the creation of design matrices that are specific to individual sites.

Conservation Subdivision Standards



**THIS
SPACE
LEFT
BLANK**
(intentionally)

The “Density Bonus” Dilemma: An Example



- If the base density is 2 DU/AC, a 100-acre site would accommodate 200 DU.
- If 50% of this site were conserved, 200 DU (in several product types) could easily be placed on the remaining 50 acres, albeit on small lots – probably averaging 7000 square feet or so. This could be a scenario that is both attractive and marketable.
- As currently zoned, an engineer-platted subdivision of minimum ½-acre lots might achieve a yield of 150-170 conventional lots on a “normal” site, assuming a 75%-85% yield after deducting rights-of-way, odd lot shapes, etc.
- There are already two problems: (1) no site is normal, so (2) the “benchmark density” is a moving target that varies from site to site because the zoning does not set it.
- In the above comparison, the additional 30-50 DU in the conservation subdivision can be viewed from two perspectives. On the one hand, some see it as an unwarranted increase in density – and after all, density is bad by default. On the other hand, others see it as the carrot to encourage landowners to do the right thing.
- One solution is to base zoning classifications upon density rather than minimum lot size. The planning profession generally favors this approach.
- However, if minimum lot size remains the criteria for conventional zoning, determining the “density neutral” yield for a given conservation subdivision requires the extra step of laying out a hypothetical “straw man” conventional subdivision. Although I routinely do this, I believe that we should not create an extra burden upon those who want to do the right thing. Otherwise, Mark Twain was right: “No good deed goes unpunished.”

Economic Meltdown Focuses the Mind



What's less important:

- McMansions
- Trophy architecture
- Two-story foyers
- Master-planned communities
- Granite countertops
- Large front lawns
- Wide streets and front garages
- Seclusion and isolation
- Big homesites

What's more important:

- Smaller, smarter, comfortable homes.
- Neighborhood-friendly architecture
- Simple, direct entry from porch
- Intimate neighborhoods
- Functional, open kitchens
- Private outdoor living
- Narrow streets and alley-fed garages
- Cooperation and collaboration
- Usable open space

Relevant Websites



- www.landchoices.org
- www.greenerprospects.com
- www.walkable.org
- www.prairiecrossing.com
- www.cottagecompany.com
- www.chatthillcountry.org
- www.serenbe.com
- www.highlandlake.net
- www.highlandlake.com

If there's time ...



**Let's discuss your
town center.**