


## CASE STUDY

## LENOX VILLAGE

CATEGORY	Green Development Traditional Neighborhood Design	
LOCATION	Nashville, Tennessee	
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SYNOPSIS	<p>Lenox Village is a 208-acre New Urbanist community situated in south Nashville, Tennessee. The traditional neighborhood development includes a village common area, a preserved hillside, a variety of housing types, a mixed-use commercial area, and planned open space. A tributary of Mill Creek dissects the entire area. With assistance from city planners, the developer created a form-based code called the Lenox Village Urban Design Overlay (UDO), which outlines all aspects of the plan. The UDO includes opportunities and constraints to village concepts, the physical design plan and design review, and the codification of the specific regulating plan. It was adopted by ordinance in May 2001 and amended in July 2003. Project construction began in fall 2001 and model homes opened in October 2002.</p>	
SITUATION	<p>Like other urban areas in the United States, the Nashville metropolitan region is rapidly growing in an uncontrolled, sprawling manner, negatively impacting air and water quality, human health, and traditional neighborhood communities. Although the state of Tennessee has created smart growth legislation, reversing the existing “sprawl” paradigm and developing successful traditional neighborhoods remains a huge challenge. Economics and existing zoning are two of the most difficult obstacles. Tennessee state planning law mandates that cities and counties set 20-year coordinated urban growth boundaries. Additionally, the Nashville Planning Department aims to restructure regional planning policy by emphasizing design and community participation in new development. The existing codes do not allow for the construction of neotraditional design, which includes mixed-use zones, forcing designers to perform the costly task of developing new codes. Lenox Village is one successful example of a mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented project that has overcome some of the barriers.</p>	
PROJECT APPROACH	<p>The Nashville firm Looney Ricks Kiss created the Lenox Village Urban Design Overlay (UDO). The UDO explains that “the wooded hillsides create a backdrop for the village to the east, form a buffer between the village and future development to the east, and provide habitat for wildlife. Existing rock outcroppings and large boulders provide opportunities for discovery within this natural sanctuary.” It continues: “The stream bed acts as a natural focal point from all sides of the site. A tributary to Mill Creek, the stream provides a continuous public amenity with the potential to connect to the planned Mill Creek Greenway.”</p> <p>The developer was required to create a Habitat Conservation Plan to describe the mitigation and minimization measures addressing the effects of the development on the Nashville crayfish. The endangered crayfish are limited to the Mill Creek watershed, hiding under flattened slabs and rocks of the gravel and limestone bedrock substrate of Mill Creek and its tributaries. After the completion of the plan and the close of the public participation period, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued a federal incidental take permit, in accordance with the Endangered Species Act.</p>	

## RESULTS/ IMPACTS

The Habitat Conservation Plan allowed the developer to transform a human-made farm pond with a state-declared unsafe dam, into an opportunity for watershed protection through the creation of habitat for the endangered Nashville crayfish. The mitigation measures included erosion control, native plant revegetation, greenspace designation, retention basins, and public education. The developer removed the unsafe dam and restored the pond back to its natural stream and riparian habitat, creating a buffer zone that is a common area protected in perpetuity by the home owners' association, in keeping with a conservation easement. The plan successfully connected the built and natural environments, and biologists believe that crayfish from downstream will once again inhabit the restored habitat.

The Lenox Village plan requires a minimum of one acre of open space per 30 residences, including the village green and other formal parks, 15 acres of open space with the rehabilitated stream, undisturbed wooded hillsides, and a system of side walks, parks, walking trails and squares for common use. The greenway and stream now serve as the main natural focal point of the community.

## PARTNERS

Developer: Regent Development, LLC

Designer: Looney Ricks Kiss, Inc

Habitat Conservation Plan: Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, National Fish and Wildlife Service, Nashville Metro

## FUNDING

Securing financing was an obstacle to the implementation of the land use plan. Banks were hesitant to assist, but eventually AmSouth Bank agreed, followed by SouthTrust, First Bank and The Community Bank. Homes have sold quickly due to the affordability of both the attached and detached units, and the alternative neighborhood that the development offers. The approximately 1,400 housing units range from \$90,000 to more than \$300,000. Although the planning process cost 10-15 % more than a standard subdivision, the higher density and higher absorption rate justify these higher costs. Developer David McGowan reports that over 400 homes have sold since Lenox Village opened, ranking it as the 4<sup>th</sup> fastest growing community in the middle Tennessee region.

## KEYS TO SUCCESS

The experience of the developer of Lenox Village will serve as a model for other communities to create traditional neighborhoods and assist with defining a new zoning district. Lenox Village achieved success largely due to the diversity of quality, affordable housing, attracting residents of various income levels and ages groups. The planners and developers learned that in order to provide choices to meet diverse needs and desires, zoning regulations need to change to allow mixed-use developments to be constructed as easily as conventional, single-use subdivisions. The creation of a traditional zoning category, perhaps called Traditional Neighborhood Design, would help to overcome some of the challenges, lower costs, and relieve time constraints. The Habitat Conservation Plan was crucial to the protection of the natural resources in the area, while the Urban Design Overlay provided a code for the neighborhood, a model for the region, and a vision for the community "unsprawl".

## SOURCES

- Lenox Village website, <http://www.lenoxvillage.com/>
- Terrain.org- A Journal of the Built and Natural, <http://www.terrain.org/unsprawl/15/>
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, [www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov), Habitat Conservation Plans, March 2005, *Lenox Village Habitat Conservation Plan Green Space, People, and Nashville Crayfish*