

## Village Residential

### VR.1 Modest Front Setbacks

These two delightful examples of village homes from upstate New York exemplify the concept that — at least on local streets with minimal traffic — modest front setbacks that probably violate current zoning requirements are preferable to deeper setbacks which needlessly consume valuable serviced land and which unintentionally introduce an incongruous suburban character amidst the community's more traditional pattern. Residents in one of the communities represented here discovered the discrepancies between its regulations and the established neighborhoods which they liked much better when they took a tape measure into new subdivisions and compared the dimensions there with those found

along the older streets where they lived. This led to a revision of the codes to bring them — and future housing development — into line with the village's essential character.



Courtesy American Planning Association (both)<sup>2</sup>

## VR.2 Shade Tree Planting

The same community mentioned above recognized long ago the critical importance of planting, maintaining, and replacing shade trees. In an imaginative and highly successful arrangement they devised decades ago, the purchase and planting expenses are shared equally between a service club, the village government, and the property owners. This approach keeps costs to a reasonable level for all parties. Numerous real estate studies confirm that trees add measurable value to homes, and that a street full of such trees boosts the resale value for everyone along it. Even the streets in Levittown, PA (bottom right) look great today because the developer had the foresight to plant shade trees between sidewalks and curbs in front of each house. Subdivisions with far larger homes where coordinated shade tree planting never occurred actually do not look as good, such is the huge importance of this frequently neglected element of neighborhood design. In another planned community, from the 1920s (below left), where trees were planted after streets were graded but before they were paved and

before homes were built, the oaks and maples have attained a stateliness that rivals the best residential streets in Cattaraugus County. Significantly, the plantings along those streets hardly occurred by accident or through entirely individual efforts, for the consistency of the trees in location, species, and age strongly suggests an overall vision by local officials or a village improvement association.



### VR.3 Neighborhood Greens

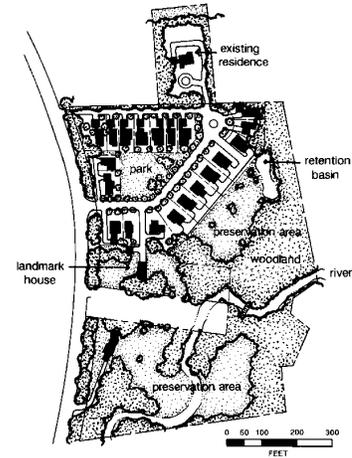
Although they might occupy as little as a half-acre of flat dry land, neighborhood greens within subdivisions built within the last 75 years are virtually nonexistent across the state. Although they add so much livability to new developments, reflected in property value appreciation over the ensuing years, the thought of providing them rarely crosses developers' minds — because such basic amenities are almost never mentioned in local land-use regulations. Maintenance costs are absolutely minimal, especially when shared among the subdivision residents through homeowner associations. Such groups function well when lot purchases are linked to association membership, and when association bylaws authorize the group to place liens on properties of members who fail to pay their annual dues. The two photos show an older green in Schoharie County — which is maintained by the local government — and a newer example where the homes have rear garages accessed via back lanes.



Courtesy American Planning Association (top)<sup>3</sup>

### VR.4 Homes Directly Bordering Greens

To reduce private development costs and public maintenance expenses, streets can sometimes be eliminated between certain houselots and neighborhood greens. However, such designs require back lanes providing vehicular access to homes from the rear. These homes are typically rated as the most desirable in their development.



Courtesy American Planning Association (top, center)<sup>3, 4</sup>

### VR.5 Off-Center Siting

Side yards can be designed to be quite usable even on narrow village lots through the simple technique of shifting buildings to one side of their lots, effectively replacing two string-bean side yards with a single double-yard. This example shows a large veranda facing onto the double yard and the virtually windowless wall of the house on the adjoining lot, an arrangement that minimizes privacy intrusion. (More windows could have been provided in the “clerestory” style for greater daylighting and ventilation, with sills set a few inches above normal eye level for privacy reasons.)



Courtesy American Planning Association (both)<sup>3</sup>

### VR.6 Back Lanes and Granny Flats

When offered the option of adding living space above rear garages along back lanes in “neo-traditional” developments, many buyers select it, as ideal space for a quiet study, a teenager bedroom, an in-law apartment, or place for “boomerang” kids to return to temporarily. This is another example of more efficient space utilization that enhances livability and reduces land consumption (sprawl). Code restrictions impeding such provision should be re-examined and any remaining issues should be resolved.



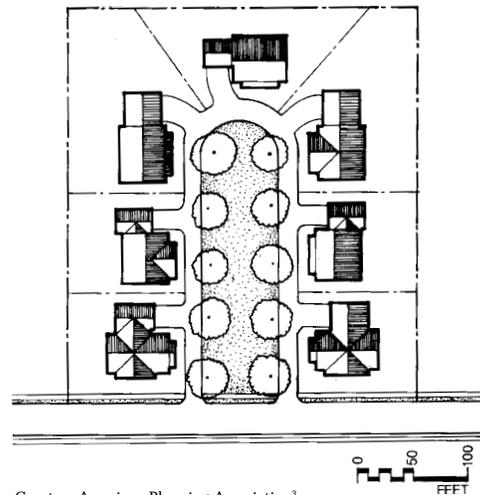
### VR.7 Accessory Dwelling Units

These two principal residences with virtually invisible accessory dwelling units would be illegal to build in most towns and villages today, under existing regulations. However, they represent perhaps the most effective way for communities to provide for rental housing that blends right into established neighborhoods, meeting needs of people in transitional periods of their lives, such as those who are recently separated or widowed, or those who have recently moved into the area or have just got married, graduated from college, or completed military service. They also provide a supplemental income to the unit owners, helping them with mortgage payments, tuition costs, or medical expenses. Why some communities prohibit such a socially and economically beneficial type of land use is difficult to understand.



### VR.8 Boulevardled Streets and Cul-de-Sacs

When land is tight and it is not possible to create even a small neighborhood green, a great alternative is to widen the street right-of-way a bit and plant a central median with shade trees. Such a simple action immediately imparts a park-like atmosphere, guaranteeing that the area will always be admired as a special kind of place, with a distinctive quality all its own. When the street is a cul-de-sac this approach produces something called a "loop lane," which can be designed as a one-way loop road when the length is not greater than 600 feet.



Courtesy American Planning Association<sup>3</sup>

**VR.9 Sidewalks**

An essential component of village streets is the sidewalk, serving residents in every age group who take evening strolls, push baby carriages, ride their scooters, and pull their wagons. Sidewalks should be installed on both sides of every street and be located behind tree-lawns where shade trees are planted in continuous rows.



**VR.11 Greenway Paths**

The next level of informality in a village's pedestrian network is represented by greenway footpaths. These delightful linkages improve residents' quality of life by adding a greener dimension to their walking experiences, away from traffic noise and closer to nature.



**VR.10 Mid-Block Connections**

When blocks are longer than 400 or 500 feet, pedestrian connections in mid-block locations are highly desirable, and are a sign of civilized neighborhoods where people are considered as important as vehicles.



Courtesy American Planning Association<sup>3</sup>

**VR.12 Maintaining Traditional Street Patterns**

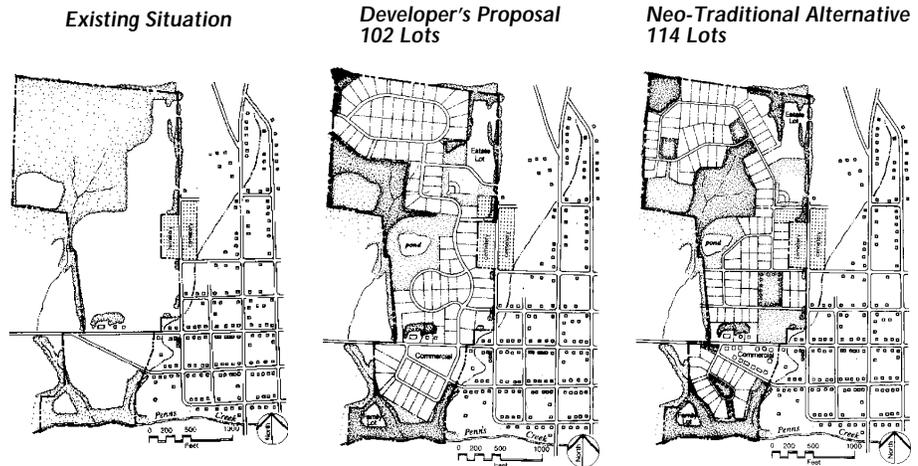
As villages grow incrementally around their edges, they should resist developer's inclinations to adopt inappropriate suburban street layouts with curving cul-de-sacs that essentially unravel the traditional village fabric into a ragged edge of frayed ends impossible to connect with subsequent subdivisions in future years.



Courtesy American Planning Association<sup>2</sup>

**VR.13 Extending the Grid**

These three panels depict an existing situation and two responses to the challenge of grafting new development onto the original nineteenth century village. While the streets connect functionally in both cases, one is far more sympathetic to the form and feel of the older settlement, while the other inadvertently transforms the community into an awkward hodge-podge with no overall design integrity or consistency.



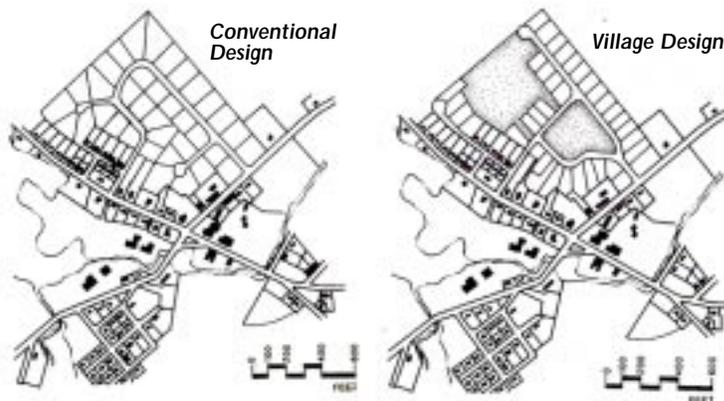
Courtesy American Planning Association<sup>3</sup>

**VR.14 Infilling with an Open Space Design – 1**

This pair of drawings illustrates how a conventional suburban extension to a 19th-century mill village could be creatively redesigned to include amenities which had never before been provided — such as a ballfield and a village green. The developer also gained an additional house-lot in the process, rewarding him for his sensitivity in proposing a layout that harmonizes much better with the original neighborhood — reinforcing the traditional feel of the village rather than in-

roducing a very discordant element. This positive result was achieved simply by adjusting lot sizes to more accurately reflect those in the 19th century village, rather than diluting the traditional character by aping the wider lot dimensions and deeper building setbacks which characterize suburban sprawl developments.

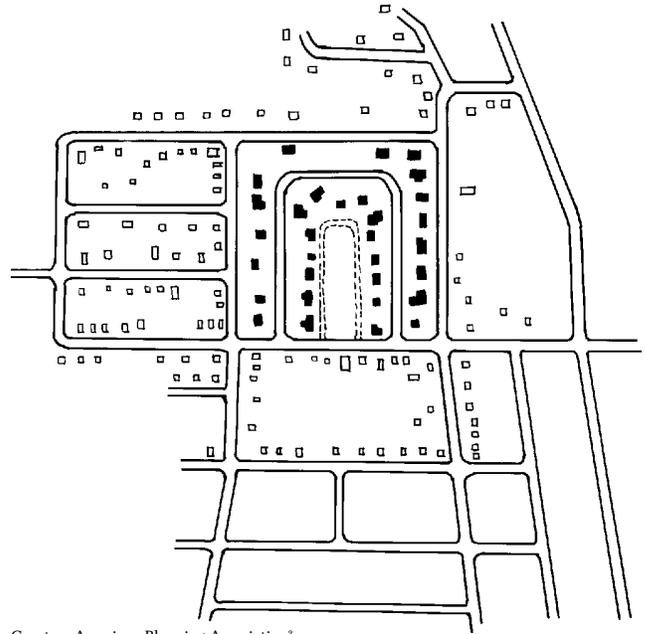
Many times zoning requirements are out-of-step with historic precedent, and unintentionally produce inappropriate results that seem very much out-of-place.



Courtesy American Planning Association<sup>3</sup>

**VR.15 Infilling with an Open Space Design – 2**

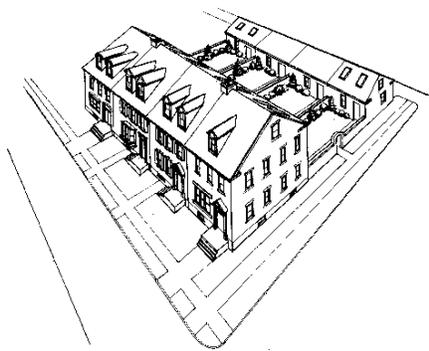
A vacant block of land in this small town provided the opportunity for an innovative approach by a pair of local developers who wanted to do something different, but still fit into the surrounding context. Their solution was to create a central neighborhood green (an amenity previously lacking in the community) and to locate it directly across the street from an historic church, enhancing its landmark status and using it to frame the fourth side of their new open space. In a twist to conventional thinking, the homes that were grouped around the perimeter of the green were situated with their front facades facing onto the “park,” giving this area a greater visual presence. At the same time, their rear elevations featured garages and enclosed patios designed to be presentable to the street behind them, providing residents with the convenience of driving right up to their homes in their cars — while fronting onto the classic village green.



Courtesy American Planning Association<sup>2</sup>

**VR.16 Attached Housing in the Traditional Streetscape**

The secret of integrating townhouses into established communities vanished during the prolonged gap in residential development that began with the stock market



Courtesy American Planning Association<sup>2,3</sup>

crash of 1929 and ended with V-J Day in 1945. During that period the key to integrating this important component of “complete communities” was lost in what has been called a “national amnesia,” when the know-how of building traditional towns disappeared. Instead of locating the attached dwellings around a central parking area (as has been commonplace in suburbia), this hous-



ing type can and should be designed as an integral part of the village streetscape, as shown in this photograph of a community planned during the 1920s. The birdseye sketch shows exactly how this building form relates to the street in front, and to the rear access lane in the back, with private, enclosed back yards situated between the dwellings and the garages.