

City of Lakeland Land Development Regulations and Design Guidelines

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This is the fourth installment of the regular series of articles for CityWatch, regarding the Land Development Regulations and Design Guidelines project.

Activities in December, 2007 and January, 2008

The consultants and/or subcontractors hired to write new development codes for Lakeland visited us twice in December, 2007. Conservation Design Forum visited us again to do additional survey work regarding natural resources (e.g., trees, streams, etc.), for the purpose of developing coding methods to protect them.

The main contractor, Farr & Assoc., brought conceptual maps and development sketches to the Citizen Advisory Committee for discussion, which revolved around a subdivision type map, corresponding generally to our Comprehensive Plan Land Use Map and Goals and Objectives, which indicate preliminarily the types of development that would be acceptable in Lakeland, targeting types to each area of the City. The map suggested six subdivision types, and was complemented by tables showing how residential and/or commercial land uses and lot types could be mixed with other types, how open space could be conserved or developed, what types of street connections are acceptable, zoning districts associated with each, and more.

A basic methodology was suggested about classifying existing resources on sites where development is proposed. This would incorporate as closely as possible assessments made by Lakeland's Natural Resources Department, classifying "very high value", "high value", through "low value" natural resource areas. There could be requirements specifying how to conserve some of the natural resources as development occurs. Some of the conserved land area likely would be required to be restored over time as well, increasing value. There could be additional "developed" open spaces required, such as parks, playgrounds, or greens. Design requirements could make much of this conservation and other open space land visible and accessible to the residents of Lakeland, rather than pushing most of it to subdivision perimeters, where it cannot be seen or used by many residents.

Finally, some provisions for administration of the development process, as regulated in the zoning ordinance, subdivision regulations, and other regulations, were discussed. The recommendations suggest that we could simplify administrative provisions by removing them to their own section of the new codes for all types of development applications, and better illustrating them.

Issues to be discussed later in 2008 include building types permitted in each subdivision type, permitted street types, integration of specimen tree protection into the code, integration of stormwater provisions into the code, details of zoning districts and permitted land uses in those districts, landscape regulations, parking regulations, and more. As these additional layers of recommendations are developed, staff will write future Citywatch articles and/or publicize them by various means, including additional public meetings to garner feedback. Staff will be publicizing project status and public meetings by notifying community groups, using the City Website, sending press releases, this newsletter, etc.

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Subdivision Example

The accompanying figure is an example of one subdivision type. This could be characterized as a walkable neighborhood, with medium to small single-family residential lots mixed. Only a very small commercial area could occur in this subdivision type, although it would not be required. If a preponderance of high value natural resources exists where this development type would be permitted, some conservation area would be included and saved within the development. In addition, developed open space (greens, playgrounds, etc.) would be added. In this figure, one can see the open spaces as the darker areas with the fronts of many lots facing open spaces. The mixing of lot types allows for a variety of housing choices. Residents can walk or bicycle from block to block, to open spaces, and to a small corner store, if provided. The optional commercial node is marked "C" in the figure. Further information about the preliminary recommendations for this and other subdivision types is on file at City Hall for public viewing.

Future steps

Thus far, there have been several Advisory Committee meetings, and two meetings for the general public. Information has and will continue to be posted on the City website regarding these meetings and other events.

At this early stage, the project has accomplished a basic inventory and review of existing development codes and development approvals, survey work in Lakeland, and the first phase preliminary recommendations as described above. The first phase recommendations are still under review.

Additional recommendations will come in over the next few months. While public meetings will occur from time to time prior to reaching the Planning Commission or Board of Commissioners, recommendations for a phase will not proceed to the boards until they have been sufficiently refined in the eyes of the Advisory Committee. There may, however, be one or more open work sessions held with some of the boards prior to that.