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Cranbury

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Concept Suitability report
a planner-developer's viewpoint

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CONCEPT SUITABILITY REPORT
A PLANNER-DEVELOPER'S VIEWPOINT

Prepared for

Cranbury Land Company

by

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SITE CHARACTERISTICS

From a site planning viewpoint the CLC site is well suited for the development of a large scale moderate density residential project. The size of the site, 137 acres, is sufficiently large to permit the development to establish its own character and to allow a variety of housing types to be developed. Several different types of housing are proposed which makes the project more marketable by tapping several different markets simultaneously. Such a project therefore requires less time to be absorbed by the market and thus saves considerable overhead and interest costs. The significant site size also allows for economies of scale. Utilities and other fixed cost items are spread over a greater number of units and hence are less expensive per unit.

The shapes of both the eastern and westerly portions of the site are roughly rectangular. This shape, along with sufficient road frontage, permits an efficient internal road and building pattern to be established without the design of the project being dictated by the outer boundaries. The shape also minimizes the length of the perimeter around the site and means less disturbance to surrounding uses. It also permits larger buffers to be provided than on sites which are irregularly shaped where a larger percentage of the site would be consumed by similarly sized buffers.

The physical conditions of the site are excellent for this type of moderate density residential development. The soil conditions of the site present no problems for this type of construction, while the slight grades pose no restraint for the type of development intended. Since most of the site has been cleared, vegetation similarly poses no development problems. There are streams and associated floodplains on both parts of the tract which are obviously unsuitable for building but they do not consume a large portion of the site and do not significantly affect the costs of development or the net densities proposed for the various housing types. Indeed, the streams provide a natural open space amenity for the project and fit in well with the overall site development plan. In effect, the homes, roadways, parking lots, utilities and recreational facilities can be provided in a marketable, cost-efficient manner without their design being dictated by site constraints.

INFRASTRUCTURE

As the Route 1 corridor area develops, and as this area of Middlesex-Mercer County grows, there will be a greater emphasis on the use of the existing County Road network for providing the basic intra-regional traffic movement. Evidence of this is the increasing usage and improvement of roads like Route 571 (Princeton-Hightstown Road), Route 522 (Ridge Road in Princeton and Jamesburg Road in South Brunswick), and Route 535 (Old Trenton Road in Cranbury). The latter road on which the project has 2200 feet of frontage is becoming an increasingly important intra-regional connector road, linking Cranbury to South River, East Brunswick and South Brunswick to the north and East Windsor, West Windsor, Hamilton and Trenton to the south. More importantly, at a local level, Old Trenton Road is being used by residents in South Brunswick, Cranbury and East Windsor to get to Route 571 and then across to the major employment centers on the Route 1 corridor. Furthermore, if Old Trenton Road is extended to meet directly with Route 130 (as proposed in Cranbury's Master Plan), it would become a logical route for bypassing Hightstown. Instead of traveling down Route 130 into Hightstown to meet Route 571 in the middle of a congested old downtown street system, traffic would flow down Old Trenton Road to meet up with Route 571 in East Windsor Township.

Old Trenton road therefore is currently a major arterial access in the area and is likely to become more important in the future. It is a more than suitable access for a project such as the CLC development, and indeed the location of the CLC site on Old Trenton will result in a much smaller impact on the Cranbury Village road network than other sites which have been suggested for rezoning for compliance with Mt. Laurel II particularly if Old Trenton road is extended to Route 130.

Water and sewer services can also be provided to the CLC site at a reasonable cost. As can be seen in the engineer's report, water can be provided by means of an on-site well and storage tank system and sewer service can be provided by hooking up the site by means of a force main system to the public sewer mains 1-1/2 miles from the site. (A fuller explanation is provided in the Engineer's report). This system can be built and operating within the next 2 to 3 years when the first units of the project would be constructed at a cost which would not have an adverse impact on the economic feasibility of a project of this size.

AGRICULTURAL PRESERVATION

The development of the site will only consume approximately 100 acres of farmland in Cranbury, no more than would be consumed if other sites were developed in Cranbury to accommodate a similar number of units (such as those shown for compliance with Mt. Laurel II).

The nature of agriculture practiced in the vicinity of the site is extensive rather than intensive. By definition, there is a minimal amount of activity which occurs on extensively farmed land compared to intensive farming methods. There is minimal pesticide spraying, fertilizing and irrigation. Furthermore, the crops have little value to the neighboring residents, unlike horticulture, fruit orchards or vegetable rows where petty theft can be a problem. Due to these two factors, moderate density residential developments and extensive agricultural fields can coexist to the detriment of neither. There are many examples of such long-term relationships both in Cranbury, where the fields extend up to the backyards of Village lots and elsewhere in new developments in the region such as Princeton Meadows in Plainsboro and Twin Rivers in East Windsor.

The proposed concept site plan also permits generous buffers between the proposed new homes and the farm fields which helps to minimize disturbances between the two activities. Other design elements, such as the road network, the pedestrian walkway system and recreational open space, also ensure that future activity on the site is focused away from the area.

MARKETING

As already alluded to, one of the strongest attributes of the CLC site due to its location and the variety of housing proposed, is its potential marketability. Located in a strong housing market with a wide range of prices and designs to meet the full range of the housing market from luxury to moderately priced homes, this project is likely to be built and sold out in a shorter time period than most residential projects of a similar size which are usually focused on a narrower segment of the market in a less attractive region. Greater absorbability in a shorter time period helps to reduce the overall costs of the project and ensures that the lower income housing, which is phased according to the rate of conventional housing consumption, will be available within the immediate future.

CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The proposed conceptual development plan is attractive from a developer's viewpoint, in regard to the densities, type and size of housing proposed and actual layout. Both the gross density of 5 units per acre, and the net densities of the conventional housing, ranging from 1 acre single family development to the townhouses at 8.5 units per acre, are well suited to the housing types proposed. The low/moderate income housing, designed as apartments at a net density of 17 units/acre, can be constructed in a very cost-efficient manner.

The wide variety of housing types, sizes and prices can be marketed to a wide range of consumers and thus has a high degree of absorbability. In a Mt. Laurel II project, the pace of lower income housing construction is dependent upon the rate at which the conventional housing can be built and sold. Thus, the prospect of a fast rate of absorption of the conventional housing ensures that the low and moderate income housing will be provided in a timely manner.

While there is a wide variety of housing types within the proposed plan, their size, location and design ensures that they will be compatible with one another and also with adjacent developments. The 8,000 square foot single family homes (Cranbury Fields I) are adjacent to the larger lot single family homes in the Shadow Oaks project. Not only are these homes compatible with Shadow Oaks but they also provide a transition between the large lot single family homes and the moderate density townhouses in the CLC development as well. Cranbury Fields V, the 16 rural single family homes, are located in the 18 acre portion of the site which falls into the "limited growth area" designation of the State Development Guide Plan. With a considerable buffer and such a low intensity of use, it provides little conflict with the farm fields of Cranbury west of the site. In fact, this density of development is no greater than that of the Shadow Oaks project which has a similar relationship to Cranbury's western agricultural area, and which the Township has permitted to be developed over the last 8 years.

The remainder of the housing, townhouses and apartments, are located in such a way as to decrease in density as one moves from Cranbury Village towards the agricultural area. Their separation by means of an open space corridor as well as Ancil Davision Road and through the layout of the internal circulation network, allows each to establish its own identity and at the same time complement one another. The location of the low and moderate income housing in two areas allows for their integration in the overall project but creates enough separation to insure they will not hurt the marketability of the adjacent conventional development.

LAND USE TRENDS IN THE REGION

Cranbury of course is not a small rural town located beyond the outer reaches of a developing region. Rather it is in the heart of one of the most rapidly developing areas of the State. There is a tremendous amount of development occurring in the surrounding towns of South Brunswick to the north, in that portion of Monroe adjacent to Cranbury and the Turnpike to Cranbury's east, in East Windsor to the south and Plainsboro to the west. A few miles further in these directions, particularly towards New Brunswick and Princeton and West Windsor, very large scale, intensive residential office and commercial development is occurring. It is evident when examining land use trends in the region over the past 10 to 15 years that Cranbury has been the "hole in the donut" possibly because of previous zoning practices. Instead of the development in Cranbury radiating outward from the center, development pressures are occurring at the outer edges of the region towards the inside, where Cranbury is located, constricting the "hole". From a regional development point of view, therefore, the CLC site is really an infill parcel, rather than one located in the midst of an agricultural area. In these terms it is a logical extension of existing development, and from a developer's point of view, a strong candidate for development.

CONCLUSION

The CLC site, from a planner-developer's perspective, provides an appropriate location for a moderate density residential development. First, it is located along a major intra-regional arterial road with very good accessibility to employment, shopping and recreation in the region. Second, the nature of development in southern Cranbury has already been influenced by the development of single family homes (in Shadow Oaks) and is on the periphery of the location for agricultural preservation. Third, there has been considerable development to the south of CLC site in East Windsor Township which, despite the presence of the Millstone River, has influenced the character of development along Old Trenton Road. Between Shadow Oaks to the north and the development in East Windsor to the south, the CLC parcel can really be considered an infill development parcel, a logical extension of development from Shadow Oaks south through East Windsor.