

Philosophy

Imagine for a moment that you just inherited the family farm from dear Aunt Ethel and you're thinking about developing it. All around the farm there are neighborhoods springing up. You aren't the kind of guy who likes to follow the crowd. "Me too" is for the other guys. You want something different. So what do you do? Where do you start?

The conventional wisdom is to start with an engineering firm who lays out streets, sewers, sidewalks, storm-water detention and building sites based on the requirements documented in the township or city zoning ordinances. The land plan quantifies how many lots you have to sell, allows you to gather estimates for the required earthmoving and infrastructure costs, ultimately driving the financial pro forma for your project. So it's a pretty important role for the viability of your project.

But too often the art of neighborhood design is lost in the science of engineering efficiency. Streets are laid out in monotonous grid patterns with uniform lot dimensions resulting in undifferentiated building sites. One lot is just like the next. Building fronts are perfectly aligned a prescribed distance from the street and sidewalk. One home is identical to three others on the same block. In a word - boring.

But we already established that you're not looking for boring, me too plans, didn't we? You're looking for new, fresh, different.

And so you retain Rick Harrison and the team from Rick Harrison Site Design Studio to create a land plan. Rick has a philosophy that makes the neighborhoods he designs interesting, unique, and fresh. It begins with an understanding that land is precious and valuable and scarce. The efficient utilization of land in community planning is a paramount concern.

Rick's land planning philosophy is much more comprehensive than a few bullet points can summarize, so with apologies to Rick, we offer these few concepts for consideration:



1. Curve the streets. This creates visual interest and drama for visitors as they make their way through the development. Curved roads lessen the prevalence of four-way intersections which are much more dangerous for vehicular traffic and pedestrians than three-way intersections.

2. Vary the setbacks. Setting some homes farther away from the road than others creates an interesting "coving" pattern for a street. Large front yards create a park-like landscaping opportunity for adjacent homes.

3. Make lots narrower. Side lots are the least utilized portion of a yard. Homes rarely have direct access to the side yard. Side yards increase the length of streets, extend the amount of utility infrastructure required, increase the amount of right-of-

way required for city services, and consume more land for a given number of sites. Narrow lots trump wide lots on all counts.

4. Create walking trails that connect people to a destination. Too often sidewalks are installed within the roadway right-of-way because it is convenient and they are mandated. But if a sidewalk is never used because it leads nowhere that people want to go, what purpose does it serve? Rick Harrison often designs sidewalks and walking trails that cut through the neighborhood - traversing behind the back yards rather than in front of

the front yards. Kids can safely ride bikes far removed from the threat of automotive traffic.

5. Isolate cars and the places that we store them. Automobiles are an inevitable part of suburban American existence in the 21st century. It is naive to suggest that families will forsake their two or three-car lifestyle in favor of mass transit, particularly in areas that aren't served by mass transit. But that doesn't mean that our homes have to be dominated by garage doors. Rick's land plans allow for creative positioning of garage stalls far away from the most visible facade of the home.

6. Create views for every home. In a relatively dense land plan, the outward views from a home are typically not even considered by the land planner.

Not so with Rick Harrison. Rick integrates floor plan designs into his land planning to ensure that every homeowner has the best possible views from the most frequently used areas of the home. Homescape Design Group is proud to have developed a library of house plans that embrace this philosophy of view framing.

