

XII. COMMUNITY AND LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

People concerned about unplanned growth often voice concern about loss of community character. In suburbanizing towns, both the residents who stayed in their home town and those who moved to town more recently worry that their communities no longer retain the rural or semi-rural ambience that made them attractive in the first place. Or — in the rush to development, historic buildings and landscapes are destroyed, isolated, or hemmed in by standardized commercial or residential buildings that could be anywhere.



Techniques to protect and enhance community character

Design review. Design guidelines for sensitive areas can help insure the compatibility of new development with an existing context or help upgrade design quality.

Flexible planning and design. Techniques such as Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) and zoning overlay districts provide more flexibility to communities and to developers in reaching mutually satisfactory design solutions for new development.

Incentive and performance zoning. Incentive zoning offers certain advantages to developers who are willing to meet public objectives, such as the provision of amenities. Performance zoning focuses on desired outcomes, leaving more flexibility to project proponents in meeting standards which guarantee those outcomes.

Historical and architectural preservation. Demolition delay ordinances and historic district regulations provide methods to preserve significant structures and landscapes.

Neighborhood conservation and special district revitalization measures. Revitalization and/or protection of neighborhood or special district character can be promoted through traffic calming measures, streetscape improvements, property rehabilitation programs, and other measures.

Landscape ordinances. These ordinances often have the dual purpose of setting minimum landscape standards for new development and requiring landscaped buffers to mitigate the visual impact of development (especially parking lots) on neighbors.

Tree or plant conservation requirements. Regulations can specify the numbers, types, and sizes of plants that must be preserved in the construction of new developments.

Scenic roadway designation. Designation can help ensure the retention of scenic characteristics when road improvements and other roadside changes are proposed.

COMMUNITY CHARACTER ISSUES IN THE NORTHERN MIDDLESEX REGION - CHARRETTE RESULTS

The discussion on community character had particular urgency for ex-urban Dunstable and Pepperell, where new housing and subdivisions are seen as an intrusion on a still rural ambience. The smaller towns are wrestling with the problem of how to accommodate development while preserving their character. Because they lack professional staff, they need help with design standards and management plans. The participants also acknowledged that the most difficult aspect of preserving character is reaching consensus on aesthetic values.