

Case Study

Developing Homes around Habitat NASHVILLE, TN

It all depends upon your point of view. What some might have viewed as a stumbling block, others saw as a unique feature – something to be maximized for the benefit of everyone involved.

When work began on Lenox Village, no one could have imagined that a small freshwater crustacean would present such an interesting challenge for Regent Development, Inc. Nestled among wooded hills south of Nashville, Tennessee, the 208-acre development bills itself as the area's first fill-scale "traditional neighborhood development" – an approach based on the long-established concept of a small southern town. It features a village commons, a variety of housing types and a mixed-use commercial area.

Before development could proceed, a former occupant had to be dealt with; the endangered Nashville crayfish. A five-acre farm pond on the site turned out to be home to a remnant population of endangered Nashville crayfish, isolated decades earlier when a dam was built on the Mill Creek tributary.

To the developer's credit, a potential environmental constraint was turned into a focal point for the property. Regent Development, Inc. worked with the Tennessee

Wildlife Resources Agency, the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to develop a Habitat Conservation Plan for 101 acres, including restoration of an intermittent stream that the company calls "an amenity for the community." Their efforts to restore the pond into its natural stream and riparian habitat for the crayfish, created a unique nexus between the built and natural environments.

"The Habitat Conservation Plan gave us a means to make our concept a reality," said Rick Blackburn of Regent Development. "We will improve the stream that runs through the site to benefit the environment and the community. At the same time, we'll keep the Nashville crayfish as part of Lenox Village."

The Conservation Plan requires the company to restore the stream to its meandering status with pools and riffles near a forested hillside and establish a stream side buffer as a common area that the home owners' association will protect in perpetuity, in keeping with a conservation easement. Signs along the stream will let people know the needs of the crayfish. Biologists expect downstream crayfish to re-colonize the restored habitat.

Lenox Village has garnered regional praise for its efforts, receiving awards from the Home Builders Association of Middle Tennessee and the Middle Tennessee Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. In the first year and a half, over 200 homes have sold, and construction of the retail center is just beginning. Lenox Village is quickly earning a well-deserved reputation for facilitating an innovative and distinctive blend of habitat and homes.



Photo of Nashville crayfish

10 STEPS TO MORE VALUABLE COMMUNITIES

1. Identify environmentally sensitive areas in your community (i.e. habitat, reservoirs, groundwater recharge areas, wetlands and streams). Limit land use within these areas to preserve their significant functions.
2. Adopt a tree preservation ordinance in your community and provide incentives for developers to minimize clearance and maintain mature trees on land earmarked for new residential and commercial developments.
3. Encourage low impact development that incorporates such best management practices as smaller lot sizes, narrower streets, shared parking and preservation of trees and open space.
4. Provide ordinances for erosion control, establish an educational program for construction related professions, and ensure that best management practices are followed throughout construction.
5. Maintain a variable width, naturally vegetated buffer system along all perennial streams. This buffer system should include critical environmental features such as the 100 year floodplain, steep slopes and freshwater wetlands.
6. Identify your community's sense of place, and the natural characteristics that contribute to it: native forests, wildlife, rivers, and distinctive trees. Encourage planning that includes aspects of these distinctive community characteristics.
7. Support conservation strategies (including tax incentives and credits) that encourage private landowners to preserve land and waterways.
8. Work with land trusts and conservation related organizations to develop specific ballot measures that can help fund land, water, habitat, wetlands, agricultural lands and open space protection.
9. Participate in public meetings that are held concerning planned developments in your area. You can be an advocate for preservation simply because you appreciate these special places and want to see them still there for your grandchildren to enjoy.
10. Incorporate all the above steps into your community's comprehensive plan and support their implementation with appropriate codes and ordinances.



Photo of Unnamed Tributary of Mill Creek