

AFFORDABILITY AND CHOICE TODAY

ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS ON PINE RIDGE EAST SUBDIVISION

FINAL REPORT

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PREFACE

The project documented in this report received a grant under the Affordability and Choice Today (ACT) program. ACT is a housing regulatory reform initiative sponsored by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and jointly managed with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (program administrator), the Canadian Home Builders' Association and the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association.

ACT, launched in 1990, encourages housing affordability and choice through regulatory reform. The United Nations Centre for Human Settlements recognized ACT in 1998 as one of the top global best practices for improving the living environment.

Over the years, ACT has created an impressive body of knowledge others can use to facilitate regulatory change in their communities. Projects range from innovative housing forms, secondary suites and streamlined approval procedures to NIMBY, alternative development and renovation standards, and more. ACT projects contribute in many ways to sustainable development. They have also served to enhance working relationships between local governments, the building industry and non-profit organizations.

In summary, ACT promotes regulatory reform through

- its database of solutions, which others may borrow from and adapt freely to meet their needs (see Web site address below).
- grants to local governments, builders, developers, architects, non-profit organizations and others across Canada to help facilitate the development of innovative solutions;
- other means of promoting regulatory solutions, such as workshops that highlight ACT solutions and address specific regulatory barriers.

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DISCLAIMER

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1. Alternative Development Standards

The 1.09 hectare (2.59 acre) parcel in question, hereafter called the Actarea, had originally been subdivided into 19 conventional single family lots. It was, through this ACT Program, re-subdivided into 23 lots, increasing the number of fully-serviced, singled detached homes on the same land area and linear infrastructure. This was achieved by the creation and integration of new lot types that make better use of side yards, front yards, views and infrastructure.

The objective of this project was to address three problems associated with urban land development that we felt could be improved. These were:

1. problems associated with narrowing lot frontages, due to escalating infrastructure costs,
2. lack of privacy on corner lots, affecting both occupant privacy and streetscape appeal, and
3. disproportionate consumption of land in pie-shaped lots creating undervalue.

Higher yields were obtained in addition to improvements in quality and choice, exceeding the project objectives. New zoning was created to enable these lots, in general with houses and backyards of similar areas to the conventional plan. In most cases, the frontages are wider and the views between backyard windows longer, so that the lived-in impression both from the inside and out should be of lower density and higher property value relative to a typical R.1D zone.

The four new lots are located on land acquired in three places: (i) reducing pie-shaped lot area, (ii) reducing the length of side yards (lots are wider and shallower overall, yielding lots also with wider frontages and brighter interiors, both marketable features), and (iii) reducing front yard setbacks on wider-frontage lots to 4.5 metres from 6 metres (except in front of the garage).

Four new lot types were created. Thirteen of these were included along with ten conventional lot types. The four new zones are shown in Defined Map 75 of the City of Guelph By-law, Attachment 1 (City of Guelph By-law (1995) – 14864 As last amended by By-law (2003) 17187). They are:

R.1D-16 Herringbone (Zipper) Lot “Wide Frontage”

R.1D-17 Garden Suite

R.1D-18 Live/Work Lot

R.1D-19 Private Corner Lots

Descriptions of the lots and their features and benefits can be found in Section 2, below.

In general, compared to conventional Regulations Governing R.1 Zones (Attachment 2), the following changes were necessary:

· Minimum Lot Frontages were widened from the conventional 9.0 metres up to 11.0 (for six lots in the R.1D-16 category and one R.1D-17 lot) and 12.0 metres for four lots in the R.1D-19 zone. Some of these would have been zoned R.1C which requires 12.0 metres of frontage, so not all of

the Actarea new lot types can be credited with creating wider frontage R.1D zoned lots, however at least three of the -16 (lots 8, 9 and 10) and all four of the -19 lots have in fact generated new frontage because these lots are actually shorter and wider.

Interestingly, on the private corner lots (R.1D-19), the actual and the apparent frontage differ. Frontage is defined as the narrower dimension, whereas the site is designed for the house to front onto what was formerly long flankage (now wide frontage). More traditional architecture is now possible. The streetscape will present a lot with 19 and 20 metres of frontage, along with a welcome absence of flankage (with fences and messy views into backyards.) Wide frontages improve property value, natural interior daylight, and streetscape aesthetic.

- Minimum Front and Exterior Side Yard from 6.0 metres to 4.5 metres, except in front of the garage. This brings homes closer to the street, improving land use and buried infrastructure efficiency and new urbanism streetscape objectives. With less land consumed by front yard, the land can be used more effectively, e.g., in home or backyard amenity areas. Ultimately less land in dead side and front yards can be instead devoted to building area, ultimately translating into better built form and yield.

Note that reduced front yard setbacks can only be achieved on wider frontage lots. Hence, land can be found in reduced front yard area that could, theoretically, be used to widen a lot. Sufficient area should be addressed so that subtle improvements can be accommodated.

- Window Locations are specified in some case, to a height above 1.8 metres above finished floor level, to protect backyard privacy where windows might otherwise overlook a neighbours' yard.

- Minimum Lot Area for the R.1D-17 Garden Suite zone is 500 m², almost double the size of the typical R.1D lot, ensuring the accessory suite is located only on sites with adequate room for both living areas and setbacks.

- Driveway Access allows for 2 driveways for the two live/work units.

- Minimum Backyard Area for a conventional R.1-D lot is 67.5 square metres (at 9 metres frontage by 7.5 metres depth), and 90 square metres for the conventional R.1-C lot. Of the four new lot types created, only one meets this criterion (67.0 metres for the -18 Live/Work), while the other three all require an area exceeding the minimum conventional standard.

<u>Lot Type</u>	<u>Minimum Backyard Area (m²)</u>
R.1D Conventional	67.5
R.1D-16 Herringbone	90.0
R.1D-17 Garden Suite	82.0
R.1D-18 Live/Work	67.0
R.1D-19 Private Corner	90.0

It is important to recognize that each lot type may be used independently, i.e., does not require presence of the others. No new lot type requires the presence of any other lot type and can be developed separately and individually.

2. House Designs

Attachment 3 contains site plans for lots of each new lot type. Each option could be incorporated into most any existing plan of subdivision. For discussion purposes, they will be covered in the following sequence: private corner lot, garden suite, live/work and herring bone (zippered) lot.

The private corner lots (R.1D-19, lots 21, 22) have large backyards and the views to neighbours' windows exceed that of conventional lots. Frontage is technically on the narrow street frontage, although in reality the front of the house will face what was formerly the side yard, or flankage (side yard abutting roadway). Benefits include much improved architectural potential and lot value due to wide apparent frontage, brighter interiors because of site layout along with lower daytime lighting costs, and a greater sense of privacy, even compared to a regular lot. The streetscape also benefits from the conversion of flankage into frontage, with fences or views into private amenity areas now replaced with building façade. This lot type posed no challenges with respect to re-zoning, and is land-neutral. It can be replicated on most any end set of lots, with only a proviso for window locations to restrict views onto the neighbour's yard.

The garden, or granny suite, (R.1D-17) was the most challenging site to build (lot 12). This lot was the centre of controversy among area residents in the summer of 2002. As reported in Deliverable F, some area residents objected, however no negative opinions have been expressed since then. Two difficulties arose after approval, however. First, the Building Department insisted on a full levy for the additional unit, a matter which took some research on the part of the City and meetings which eventually led to the waiver of this requirement. Next, there was some concern about whether services could physically be run from the suite, through the side yards, and to the street. In the end, this was not a difficulty. As in the lot type above, the garden suite concept could easily be transferred to lots in other municipalities provided they are pie-shaped lots and have sufficient area and grade to allow for construction, the levy issue being merely political.

The benefits of the garden suite are largely economic. For a household with a large pie lot, the ability to house individuals in a separate unit "at home" can mean savings are kept rather than spent, families can remain together in a respectful manner, and practical benefits for daily life related to sitters, transportation, and so on, are facilitated.

The live/work units (R.1D-18, lots 6 and 7) also was not difficult to approve. All this lot required was essentially the allowance of a second driveway. There were several iterations, however, for a house design that could fully take advantage of the street frontages, space, and entries. The lot comes with flexibility to convert a regular, single family home on a corner lot to a home with extra parking and separate business access potential. Thus, occupants can have employees or clients without causing over-use of street parking. More important, it lends the home business a sense of professionalism not possible in a regular lot, where it would be difficult to design an office with a separate entry, parking area, and direct access to main floor business quarters.

The benefits to the home owner are flexibility, affordable professional home and office space, lower commuting time and costs for home based businesses, in effect improving affordability and better meeting the needs of many modern households. From a streetscape, or community

perspective, these lots can be regarded as having two frontages, with architectural and courier potential for each, and again convert usually unattractive flankage into real estate with attractive frontage.

The zipper, or herringbone lots, (R.1D-16, lots 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10) were straightforward to implement from a zoning perspective. These lots account for most of the yield increase of 19 to 23 lots. They are controversial, however, since they appear unusual. There are two types of lots in this zone; one side is different from the other. Lots 8 and 9 were among the first to sell and although unusual in shape, they were easy to design. Lots 3, 4 and 5 on the other side are slightly more different, and although lot 4 sold relatively early, lot 3 is being built on spec. The jury is out on how well this lot type will do in the market, as the site will have to be built out before the full streetscape and occupant experience can be assessed.

There were anticipated difficulties both with backyard drainage and surveying, however in the end no special drainage techniques were required and surveying occurred without a hitch.

3. Cost Savings

The project's intent was to address problems worsening in modern subdivisions, including narrowing lots, lack of privacy and awkward corner lot streetscapes, and disproportionate value and resource allocation on landlocked, pie-shaped parcels. Lack of choice for diverse households like extended families and the home-based business, and exorbitant land consumption, and escalating infrastructure costs are all casualties of current planning dogma. Of the ACT Program's objectives, we aimed to hold the price while tackling choice and quality issues. The resulting efforts to widen frontages, create a live-work option, a granny suite, and corner lots with privacy led to improved choice and quality but, inadvertently, also to a housing yield increase of approximately 20% (23 lots from 19).

The first time anything is built, there are additional costs. Extra staff time was spent to seek special approvals (e.g., research and liaison related to waiving of the granny flat's development charge fee) and development of new house plans, extended time lines for approvals, and so on. However, given that four new lots are present on similar linear infrastructure, the larger tax base will benefit the municipality. From the developer's perspective, the land and houses were priced according to market rates, and the developer/builder is pleased to report that whereas many intensified sites necessitate discounted property values, Actarea prices were maintained. The net effect was that even with the extra costs and fees, a small profit was made on the additional lots and homes sold, and aspects of the plan are obviously marketable and will be repeated. The streets are relatively comfortable, attractive, and traditional, and should yield good value to the neighbourhood.

It is worth noting that in Guelph, four single detached zones exist: R.1A through R.1D, with lot areas ranging from 555m² to 275m², respectively. All four new lot types created in this demonstration project are R.1D variations, increasing the net number of units as well as the choice available for buyers of homes of the most affordable single family zone available in the City of Guelph.

4. Promotional Activities

Prior to activities related to the project grand opening on July 26, 2004, the information was taken to a number of venues like the Saskatoon Housing Initiatives Partnership events related to promotion of affordable housing in both October 2002 and May 2004.

Subsequent to activities related to the July 26 event, the results in part have been included in presentations to the following events:

- Aboriginal Forum, Toronto Nov. 15, 2004
- Building Saskatchewan Green, Saskatoon, November 18, 2004
- Construct Canada, Home Builder and Renovator Expo, Dec. 2, 2004
- Design charettes for CMHC in Fredericton, NB and Yorkon, SK, and Edmonton, AB.

The Actarea grand opening that was held on July 26, 2004 occupied most of the time and effort related to marketing and promotion activities. For the event, we undertook the following:

A) Development of visuals to express the new lot and home concepts. This included artwork with photos and text expressing features and benefits. This material was used on the web site, in the press materials sent out prior to the grand opening, and on posters and the main event.

B) Web site development. From the home page on www.nexussolar.com, selecting the Actarea tab provides the ACT Solution Sheet prepared for the opening, a map to the site, background material on the project partners, commonly asked questions and answers, and graphics outlining the features and benefits of each new lot type (see Attachment 4).

C) Press kits with most of the contents of the web page were sent to approximately twenty media in the region. These were followed up with phone calls. The local newspaper, the Guelph Mercury, did a front page spread in their business section on July 27, and the Toronto Star visited the site on a subsequent date and published a full page plus cover item for the New in Homes section on September 25, 2004.

D) Posters were also made for the July 26 event. These were printed in large format and put on site for visitors to the opening. This majority of the material displayed is currently contained on the web site.

5. Consumer, Media and Public Response

Consumer response has varied according to lot type. Overall, the builder reports not having “had a chance to build a model home” since sales have been steady. However, lot 3 (probably the most difficult lot on the site) is being built on spec.

The garden suite was among the first to sell, along with other pie-shaped premium lots. After the garden suite, the 10 conventional lots were the next to sell. This reveals two things. First, there was some reticence to the new lot types. Second, the easy acceptance of the garden suite may in part be due to the concept being both familiar and the buildings and lot involved also already in

existence and therefore easy to visualize. It is felt that garden suites are a highly marketable lot type, and Thomasfield Homes plans to build more as the occasion arises.

The herringbone, or zipper lots, have two distinct configurations, depending on the side. One series (lots 8 and 9) sold very quickly, attracting buyers as a result of “handsome frontage” and a bright, wide-open interior. Lots 3, 4 and 5 however, were a little later catching on, and while lot 4 was issued a building permit on Nov. 1, 2004 lot 3 is being built on spec.

The private corner lots are also comprised of two distinct lot configurations. As with the herringbone lots, the private corner lots 18 and 22 sold almost immediately, largely because of their significant frontage. Lots 19 and 21, however, have not sold as of January 2005, for no evident reason. These lots enjoy huge frontage with larger than usual backyard area, an option for a workshop extension off of the garage that conventional lots cannot permit. These would be ideal locations for a model home to demonstrate the benefits of wide frontage and more deliberate use of land. Overall, the project is almost built out within one year.

One thing that the media did not pick up on is that at 2.59 acres, the design is suitable for many infill projects. Having increased yield while dramatically improving housing choice with four new individual concepts that can be applied separately to new construction or re-development sites suggests that these results should be broadcast to municipalities, developers and builders without delay.

As indicated previously, the results of this demonstration project are being delivered by Nexus Solar and Thomasfield Homes to audiences as opportunities arise. With municipal infrastructure and housing costs growing, and the sensitive nature of the solutions discovered for sustainable housing and communities that we found, we hope these project results will well serve the project partners and the constituencies represented by the Program, including municipalities, builders and developers, and housing organizations.