

TOWN OF WESTON PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION

Cluster Housing for Seniors – A Discussion

The Commission has prepared, in question and answer form, an overview of the issue of whether cluster “open space residential” housing for seniors is advisable and appropriate for the Town of Weston.

**Q1: Why would we consider cluster housing for seniors?** We believe that many seniors in Weston would like to “age in place” in Town, but face serious challenges in terms of their current larger houses and lots, which require significant maintenance and expense, both taxes and otherwise. Living in cluster housing, explained below, could significantly reduce these burdens.

**Q2: What exactly is cluster housing?** Cluster housing means a series of houses erected in a relatively small area. However, the concentration of houses in a small area would result in considerable open space becoming available. Let’s look at an example. Today in Weston, we have two-acre zoning, meaning we only permit one residence to be built on a two-acre plot of land. Let’s say that a ten-acre lot was dedicated to cluster housing. If we wanted to maintain the same overall density of houses per acre, we could permit, for example, five homes to be built together on one acre, but require the builder to dedicate the remaining nine acres of the parcel to open space. This same analysis would apply to condos or “row” housing.

**Q3: What does “open space residential housing” mean?** Appendix A, attached to these Q&As, describes what is meant by open space residential development, and explains its general purposes. Permissible uses of “open space” would be up to the Commission to regulate. For example, maybe it would resemble a park, with walking trails. Maybe it would be completely undeveloped. Maybe there would be a recreational area (e.g. a picnic area, benches, etc.). This would be up to the Commission to determine in its Regulations.

**Q4: Why limit cluster housing to seniors?** Under Federal and State law it is permissible to dedicate housing primarily to seniors without violating applicable anti-discrimination laws. In addition, we feel that cluster housing meets a perceived need of our citizens while giving the community an opportunity to judge the benefits and detriments of cluster housing on a relatively small scale.

**Q5: What is senior housing for this purpose?** Federal law defines senior housing for this purpose as including housing designed for and occupied solely by people who are age 62 or older or in which at least one person who is age 55 or older occupies at least 80% of the occupied units and that adheres to a policy that demonstrates intent to house people 55 years and older. Theoretically, our

amendment to the current Regulations and conduct a public hearing on the proposed amendment. After receiving public comment the Commission would publish final regulations permitting cluster housing for seniors.

## Appendix A – Explanation and Purposes of Open Space Residential Development.

### OPEN SPACE RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

*The term "Open Space Residential Development" (OSRD), describes a cluster-type development that enables land to be developed while simultaneously preserving community character, reducing environmental impacts, protecting the rights of property owners, and enabling a developer to benefit from a high-quality project. OSRD accomplishes these goals through a creative design process that identifies primary and secondary conservation areas. Wetlands, floodplains, and steep slopes, in addition to a large portion of the flat, dry, and otherwise buildable land are set aside within those conservation areas from clearing, grading, and construction. Instead, lot sizes are reduced and the allowed development is arranged to "fit" onto the unconstrained land.*

*OSRD differs from traditional "clustering" in three important ways. First, it sets much higher standards for the quantity, quality and configuration of the resulting open space and developable area. Second, communities can exercise greater influence on the design of new conservation subdivisions and benefit from much more than just dense pockets of housing. Rather than leaving the outcome purely to chance, this flexible design approach can be strongly encouraged or even required, particularly where a community has a comprehensive Plan of Conservation and Development. Thirdly, the protected land is also configured so that it will, wherever practicable, contribute to creating an interconnected network of open space throughout the community, linking resource areas in adjoining subdivisions and/or providing buffers between new development and preexisting parklands or forest.*

## *Purposes*

- To allow for greater flexibility and creativity in the design of residential developments, provided that the overall density of the development is no greater than what is normally allowed in the district;*
- To encourage the permanent preservation of open space, agricultural lands, forest lands and other natural resources including aquifers, water bodies and wetlands, and historical and archaeological resources;*
- To encourage a less sprawling and more efficient form of development that consumes less open land and conforms to existing topography and natural features;*
- To maintain the traditional New England rural character and land use pattern in which small villages contrast with open space and farmlands;*
- To facilitate the construction of streets, utilities and public services in a more economical and efficient manner;*
- To ensure that residential developments are designed to minimize impacts to the natural features of the land, including wetlands, watercourses, forests, prime agricultural land, steep slopes, plants, wildlife, historic sites, scenic views, and rural character;*
- To encourage development out of view from the road, and promote alternatives to strip residential development lining roadsides in the town;*