

## Rural Character

The Growth Management Act requires Spokane County to define rural character and use that definition as a guide for development of rural goals, policies and associated regulations. Counties are required to include measures in the Comprehensive Plan that protect rural character. Through visioning and other citizen-participation efforts, the following principles for defining and preserving rural character were developed and are included in the County's Comprehensive Plan:

- The rural landscape should reflect a traditional development setting with low population density.
- Interconnected open spaces and natural areas should be provided through clustering and other innovative techniques.
- Rural residents should be self-sufficient and accept a traditional lifestyle with low levels of governmental services.
- Rural towns and centers should provide a community focal point and offer opportunities for shopping and other services.
- Scenic roadways and vistas should be preserved by prohibiting billboards and strip commercial development.
- Agriculture and forestry uses within the Rural category should be accepted as being consistent with rural area lifestyles.



Rural Spokane County



Department of Building and Planning  
1026 W. Broadway Avenue  
Spokane, WA 99260

Spring 2009

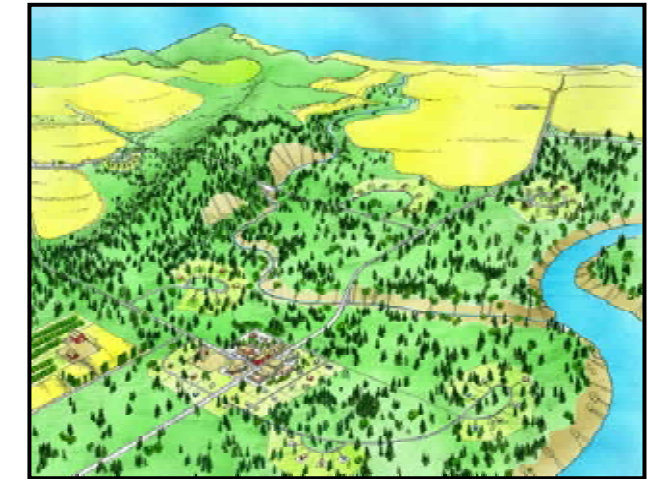


## Rural Cluster Development Options to Revise Development Regulations

### Background

Spokane County is considering revisions to the adopted rural cluster development regulations. In 2002 Spokane County adopted rural residential clustering provisions to provide an alternative to conventional large-lot zoning. Rural clustering encourages the grouping of lots on areas of the site that are best suited for development, while retaining the remainder of the site as an open space/remainder parcel.

The intended open space uses include wildlife habitat preservation, small scale agriculture, forestry, or future urbanization if located in an urban reserve area. In some cases, the open space/remainder parcel may include a single residential use.

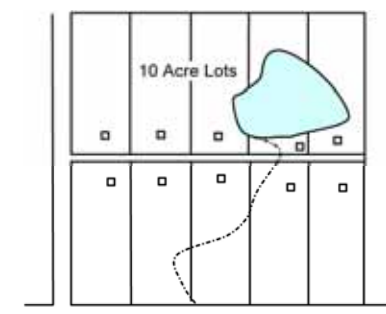


Rural Cluster Development Concept

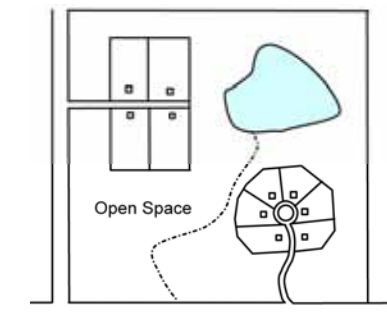
By reviewing development under the current cluster regulations and considering comments from citizen workshops and meetings, a number of issues related to rural cluster development have emerged. This Brochure summarizes the issues and options for change. A more detailed analysis may be found in a staff report to the Planning Commission titled, "Rural Cluster Development, Options to Revise Development Regulations". The report can be found on the Spokane County Building and Planning Department web page at [www.spokanecounty.org/bp](http://www.spokanecounty.org/bp). The web site additionally includes an on-line survey regarding cluster development.

### Public Hearing

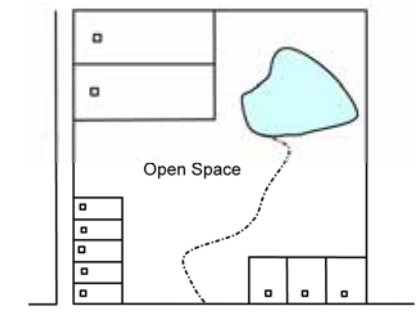
A public hearing will be held by the Spokane County Planning Commission on May 14, 2009 in the Board of County Commissioner's Hearing Room at the Public Works Building, 1026 West Broadway Avenue, Spokane, WA. The hearing will begin at 9:00 AM or as soon as possible thereafter and will conclude with the last speaker. Testimony may be limited to three (3) minutes per speaker. The hearing will consider amendments to the zoning code including revisions to Chapter 14.820, Rural Cluster Development and Chapter 14.616, Resource Lands. The proposal also considers amendment to the Spokane County Comprehensive Plan, Chapter 4, Natural Resource Lands, Policy NR.3.15.



Traditional development



Clusters set back from road

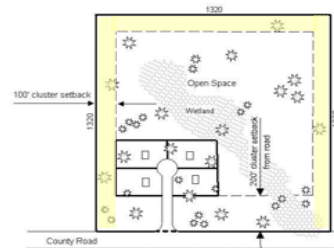


Clusters adjacent to road

# Issues for Rural Residential Cluster Development

## Perimeter Setbacks

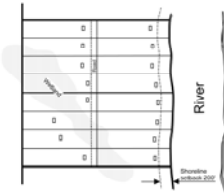
Currently cluster lots can abut the outer property boundary of the development. A setback for cluster lots or a setback for buildings along the outer boundary has been suggested.



The above diagram shows a 100' setback for cluster lots along the outer boundary perimeter.

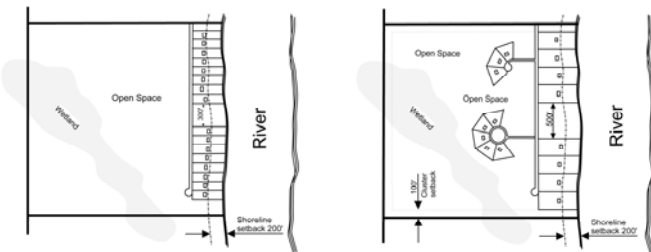
## Shoreline Development

In shoreline areas the cluster provisions could be utilized to allow more dense development along a shoreline than would be allowed under the traditional subdivision.



Traditional Subdivision

Increasing the required frontage and lot size of cluster lots along shoreline areas would decrease the number of lots along the shoreline to a similar amount that would be allowed under a traditional 10 acre lot subdivision.



Existing Cluster Regulations

Proposed Revised Standards

## Protection of Open Space

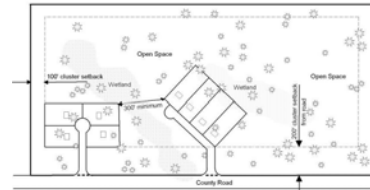
The Zoning Code references permanent protection of the open space and states that, "...in no case shall perpetually dedicated open space be revoked."



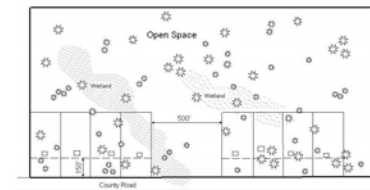
A recent decision in Superior Court found that open space may be developed in the future if the zoning on the property is changed. The decision determined that zoning alone can not provide permanent protection of open space. The proposed regulations contemplate the use of conservation easements. Conservation easements permanently remove development rights from the ownership of the property and have been used by many communities to permanently protect sensitive lands. Conservation easements can provide permanent protection where zoning may be ineffective.

## Cluster Lots Fronting on Rural Roads

Residential clusters can currently be located along an existing rural road with narrow frontage requirements. This can create the appearance of an urban type subdivision in a rural area which may be contrary to maintaining rural character. Options include requiring residential clusters to setback 200 feet from the road or requiring clusters that site on the County Road to have a larger frontage and lot size so that they more resemble traditional rural development.



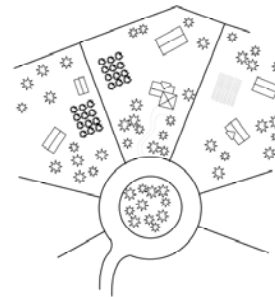
Clusters set back from road



Increased frontage/lot size development

## Minimum Lot Size

To maintain rural character, the minimum lot size should be consistent with rural lifestyles and include enough property to allow traditional rural uses such as large animal keeping and small scale agricultural activities. Options being considered include retaining the current 1 acre minimum lot size or increasing the minimum lot size to 2 acres.



## Land with Limited Development Potential

In certain areas land can't be developed or can only be developed with a limited number of lots due to swamps, wetlands, land covered with wa-



Under these circumstances clustering may be less desirable in terms of protecting the environment and providing viable open space because it allows a significantly greater density of development. A higher level of development in these areas can significantly impact sensitive ecological areas by increasing the number of people, dogs, cars, etc. This effect is intensified in the Rural Conservation zone where significant bonus densities are allowed.

To address this issue, the application of bonus density could be limited by deducting unbuildable lands, or a portion of unbuildable lands, from the density calculation. When considering cluster developments, unbuildable land would be defined as land permanently covered by water, wetlands, slopes over 30% and conservation easements or other title restrictions the limit site development.

## Design Guidelines

The Zoning Code provides general guidance for cluster development by stating, "Residential clusters shall be sited to retain rural character and minimize conflicts between dwelling units, adjacent agricultural/forest lands, shorelines, and critical areas."



While the above statement provides a general guideline, more specific design guidelines would provide clear direction in the design phase of the proposal. As proposed, design guidelines would address the:

- visual impact of a proposal from roadways and other public spaces.
- impact to resource lands.
- impact to environmentally sensitive land.
- impact to adjacent landowners.

Design review can be implemented as advisory only or as a mandatory review with a requirement that proposals be consistent with the design guidelines.

## Wildfire Protection



Wildfire protection should be a consideration in the design of rural cluster subdivisions. Rural clusters can offer some advantage in a wildfire situation in that it may be easier to protect a small cluster of homes compared to homes that are widely separated. Proposed regulations include a requirement for a fire protection plan and requirements for establishing defensible spaces around the perimeter of residential clusters and individual homesites consistent with the International Wildland-Urban Interface Code or other nationally recognized standards.

## Open Space

The existing regulations allow more than one tract to be identified as the open space/remainder parcel which in some cases can lead to fragmented open space areas.



There is also the possibility that numerous open space tracts can be owned by different property owners which could allow de-facto large lots. In most cases the open space can be configured as a single contiguous parcel but there may some rare exceptions where multiple parcels provide a better function of the open space. Proposed changes consider the design and ownership of the open space.

## Prime Farmland Soils

Rural cluster developments should be designed to preserve the viability of agricultural uses and should consider the current or potential use of the site for agriculture. Including a standard to restrict the location of



residential clusters on prime farmland soils may help ensure that this resource will be protected and available to future generations.

## Appropriate Zones for Cluster Developments



Rural residential cluster development is allowed in the following zones:

**Rural Traditional**  
Includes large-lot residential uses

**Rural-5**  
5-acre lots in areas that have existing 5-acre lot pattern.

**Rural Conservation**  
The Rural Conservation zone applies to environmentally sensitive areas.

**Urban Reserve**  
Lands that are preserved for expansion of urban development in the long term.

**Small Tract Agricultural**  
Agricultural resource land.

Property owners have expressed concerns about conflicts between clustering and small scale resource based uses such as animal keeping (hogs) and crop production.

Options include eliminating clustering in the Small Tract Agricultural and/or Rural Traditional zones.