

DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The city of Elk River's Open Space Preservation plat is a permitted use in its agricultural and rural residential districts. This means that clustering is not required, but neither does it need a special permit. Five such plats have been approved in the past year and a half. The city offers density bonuses for: providing additional open space beyond the 50% buildable area required; reusing existing buildings or historic features; providing covenants to create an architectural theme; creating an endowment to cover the costs of maintaining



The developer protected the trees along the perimeter of Windsor Park to protect viewsheds from Elk Lake Road.

the easement on the open space; and providing public access to recreational facilities and trails. Using four of these bonuses, the developer of Windsor Park was able to increase the number of homes from 26 to 31. According to the developer, the density bonus makes it affordable to put in the

community sewage system, trails and other community amenities, and to set up the homeowners association. Both open space areas have permanent conservation easements held by the Minnesota Land Trust.

This site represents one of the common struggles with conservation developments: should the homes be located in the fields or in the wooded areas? On this parcel, locating homes in the woodlands would fragment much of the forest; meanwhile, locating homes in the fields would compromise the objectives of viewshed protection and creating community gardens. These issues point out the need for communities to help pre-identify areas for conservation when drafting an open space development ordinance if they desire the projects to have significant conservation results. Fortunately, Windsor Park makes the most of this difficult situation by addressing both objectives: preserve the interior woodland park as well as an open space buffer.

This project demonstrates that the open space in the development can have different ownership patterns. Some developers and communities are resistant to open space projects because they do not want to create expensive homeowners associations (HOAs). In Windsor Park, the city is assured that the entire public will have access to the park it owns, while the homeowners are not entirely responsible for the costs and maintenance of all the open space.



“You have to have a good person designing the plat, and a good ordinance in order to get a good result.”

– Jim Brown,
Dynamics Design and Land Co.

PROJECT STATUS

The lots went on sale in the fall of 2000. As of April 2001, eight lots had been sold and four were on hold.

PROJECT PARTNERS

Christian Builders
Dynamics Design and Land Company
Minnesota Land Trust
Sherburne Soil and Water Conservation District

WINDSOR PARK

WINDSOR PARK represents a creative response to suburban development at the fringe of a growing community. The open space serves two primary functions: providing a visual buffer for the well-traveled Elk Lake Road and establishing a new city park for all residents of Elk River to enjoy. This conservation development was the first test of Elk River's ordinance encouraging “open space preservation plats.”

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Located 50 miles northwest of Minneapolis and 30 miles southeast of St. Cloud, Windsor Park is in a high-growth corridor that still retains a rural sensibility. The land lies a few miles south of the 48-square mile Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge, and is easily accessible from both Highway 169 and Highway 10. While Elk River has a compact older town center, residents want to preserve the rural character of the outlying land and do not intend to provide sewer services to the area where Windsor Park is located. The clustering of homes in this development allows for a common sewage system and reserves land to be preserved as permanent open space. Another open space subdivision has been approved just south of Windsor Park, and parts of the open spaces in the two plats will connect, forming a larger whole.

The developer and city worked together to achieve the following objectives:

- Preserve at least 50% of the tract in common open space
- Dedicate some of the open space as a public park and buffer to the adjacent road



- Preserve as much of the oak forest as possible, both in open space and on lots
- Infiltrate stormwater when possible to maintain pre-existing hydrology
- Provide residents with a community garden plot

The 31 houses are arranged in a loop surrounding a 12-acre wooded park. The open area around the entrance will remain a meadow and will have community gardens and a stormwater retention pond. Through the open space preservation plats, the city hopes that more attractive developments will be built and that a larger connected open space network will be created as a result.

SPECIFICATIONS

SITE SIZE:

57 acres

NUMBER OF UNITS:

31 single family homes

LOT SIZES:

.5 – 1 acre

OPEN SPACE:

35 acres (61%):

WASTE TREATMENT:

Common septic system

WATER:

Individual wells

TRAILS:

Extensive trails through the meadow and park

NATURAL FEATURES:

Oak woodland preserved in central park; prairie grasses in meadow



ARCHITECTURE

All of the houses will have front porches and garages that do not face the street. This configuration will allow the residents to view the woodland park and will provide a neighborly atmosphere for those walking around the park.



TREE PRESERVATION

In addition to the preserved central park, builders on each lot are encouraged to preserve trees surrounding the homes, thereby maintaining sales value for each lot and providing other ecological and aesthetic benefits to the community.



TRAILS

An extensive public trail system weaves throughout the public park. Eventually, it is hoped that residents will be able to walk or bike to downtown Elk River.

PRAIRIE PLANTINGS

The Sherburne Soil and Water Conservation District planted 10 acres with prairie grasses and forbs in the spring of 2001, and will continue to work with the developer and the homeowners association to properly maintain the plantings.

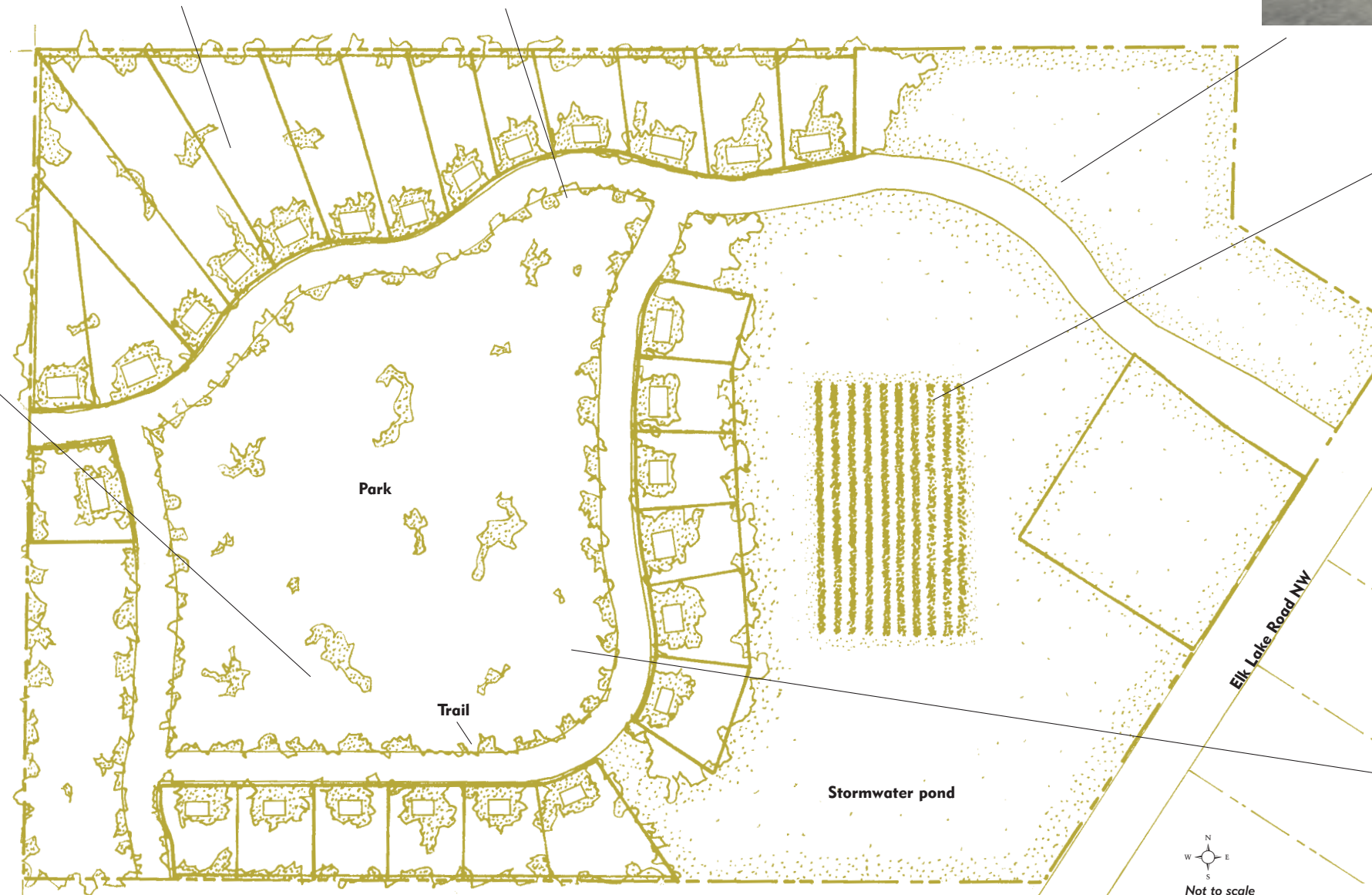


COMMUNITY GARDENS

The community gardens will be located in the sunny, open area of the development and will have their own well for irrigation. The provision of community gardens may make residents on wooded lots less likely to want large clearings for gardens.

STORMWATER INFILTRATION

Although much of the stormwater management system is conventionally engineered, a unique stormwater infiltration area is located in the city's wooded park area, taking advantage of the infiltration capacity of forested soils.



WOODLAND PARK

In order to provide the greater Elk River public with additional benefits, the large open space woodland in the center of the project was dedicated as a city park, intended for passive recreation suitable to a woodland.