

**RURAL  
DESIGN  
GUIDELINES**

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## FOREWORD

The goals of these Rural Design Guidelines are to (1) identify and document the area's rural characteristics, and (2) establish the guidelines, for any future development, which will (3) serve to preserve and protect the unique rural qualities of the area for future generations.

These Design Guidelines will be implemented during the review and approval process for residential subdivisions (over 4 lots) where the zoning is typically one acre minimum or greater, and/or located in a predominantly rural area. Application of these Rural Design Guidelines (primarily for rural residential uses), in addition to the Placer County Design Guidelines and Landscape Guidelines (primarily for commercial, office, and multi-family residential uses), and Planned Residential Development Guidelines will advance the County's objectives through the creation of a consistent, high quality character of development without compromising the integrity of the Community's pastoral and scenic character.

Much of what follows is based on the American Planning Association's report entitled, *Preserving Rural Character*, (report #429) by Fred Heyer, AICP (available at the Planning Department).

As noted in the Report from the California Senate Urban Growth Policy Project (Senate Resolution 39 of 1988), the State Statutes on planning and zoning enact a number of policies to govern development decisions. Among them are the following:

- o Discouragement of urban sprawl and encouragement of efficient development patterns;
- o Use of land as an exhaustible resource, not just a commodity, . . . essential to the economy, environment and general well-being of the people of California;
- o Preservation of agriculture and open-space lands.

One of the values of life in a "rural" area is that there are generally fewer restrictions than there are in more urbanized areas. While rural design guidelines admittedly recommend that some limits be placed on what can be done with one's property, guidelines are crucial for maintaining the rural character of the area. Guidelines serve to document rural values and features so they can be protected and preserved.

Pressures for development can be hard to resist, and as more people move in, the ideals and benefits of rural life become threatened. There are pressures to change, to become more urban. Rural design guidelines provide a template with which development proposals can be measured. Rural design guidelines can also be a resource for developers to become accustomed to the qualities and characteristics consistent with rural lifestyles.

We must understand that we are both owners and caretakers of our property. Some folks seem to be able to place a house in the middle of a forest without touching the surrounding trees, soil and water. Others have to force their housing project onto the land without consideration of the long term damage. Trees, wetlands, stream beds and the like are part of the natural resources that must be saved to the maximum extent possible.

# RURAL

## Definition and Local Interpretation

From Webster's Dictionary, "Rural is derived from the Latin word *ruralis* for open land, more of room; of or relating to country, country people. . ." Webster also provides many synonyms and contrasts rural to urban features.

Rural is also a state of mind, a feeling. Rural is natural, not structured. Rural is open space, trees, orchards, farms and ranches on a small to large scale. This compares to an urban area where homes are relatively close together, orderly, carefully manicured and there is little open space or room to roam before encroaching on your neighbor. Rural could be a hobby farm including the raising and keeping of a variety of animals. Rural is being able to see the Milky Way without interference of street lights or your neighbor's porch light. Rural is wild animals on your property as compared to dogs and cats in the back yard of an urban home. Rural is being able to hear the birds, geese, frogs and crickets over the sounds of highways and modern life.

Living in a rural environment means taking more risks. In a rural area, you are farther away from the police, medical and fire services of a larger city. Stores, the library and other conveniences are also farther away. Rural roads may be more dangerous because they may be narrower and animals may unexpectedly cross the road; but for those same reasons, rural roads are more attractive and scenic than a highway. Rural may include other risks such as a dry well or backed-up septic tank, but this is part of the rural experience.

Part of the decision to live in a rural area is to weigh the benefits against the risks. Many people have made the decision and prefer to live in a rural area and want to preserve those rural values.

Those who desire a more manicured and ordered environment may seek a suburban or even urban existence. Those who have chosen the rural existence have the responsibility of maintaining its character and beauty.

## Greenbelts, Open Spaces, Native Vegetation, Habitat and Wildlife Protection

### A. Goals:

1. To set aside interconnected greenbelts and open spaces as a resource to be maintained in a natural state for the protection of native vegetation and wildlife, as well as for community enjoyment.
2. To retain in their natural condition all stream influence areas, including flood plains and riparian vegetation areas, while allowing for limited stream crossings for public roads, trails and utilities.
3. Identify a series of corridors for the free movement and habitat of wildlife.

4. Conserve the natural water purification capabilities of watersheds and wetlands in order to protect the quality of both the natural and domestic water resources.
5. Conservation of the natural landscape, including minimizing disturbance to natural terrain and vegetation, should be an overriding consideration in the design of any project, paying particular attention to its protection and the preservation of existing native vegetation. (Granite Bay Community Plan, Conservation, Policy 3)

**B. Implementation Techniques:**

1. Open space should be maintained a minimum of 100 feet from the center line of any permanent streams, and a minimum of 50 feet from intermittent streams to (a) reduce, by natural filtering, the possibility of contamination of the stream from fertilizers and other manmade compounds, and (b) to provide a corridor for wildlife to live and move in relative safety.
2. Those areas rich in wildlife or of a fragile ecological nature, e.g. areas of rare or endangered species of plants, riparian areas, etc., should be avoided in land development. Where necessary, in order to preserve these areas, they should be publicly acquired (or given via an irrevocable offer of Trust) to ensure protection. (Granite Bay Community Plan, Conservation, Policy 6)
3. For all projects, the purpose of the open space should be determined and specified on maps and/or project conditions as to its purpose.
4. A natural preserve should not be focused on one parcel, but should be an integral part of adjacent parcels to form a connected corridor of open space.
5. Open space land used to preserve a natural feature should be deeded to the County, a homeowners' association, or to a suitable non-profit land trust to ensure the original intent of open space is preserved for future generations.
6. If the land is designated as a natural preserve or similar protective easement, then no substantial disturbance is allowed, except for the benefit of fish, wildlife, water quality and regeneration of trees, fire protection and the like. Maintenance in a stream zone should be to remove material only if a hazard may result. Removing standing or down dead trees and vegetation is often unnecessary as it forms part of the natural food chain and may damage the natural habitat. Maintenance of paths is restricted to the path itself.
7. Pedestrian and equestrian trails and pathways may be established in natural preserves when appropriate. Trails should be constructed and maintained as naturally as possible. At least two public access points from a public roadway should be included in open space design.
8. Although it is recognized that this is difficult, the onversion of agricultural land back to native trees and plants should be encouraged when agricultural activities are discontinued and the opportunity arises to do so.

9. Every effort should be made by the use of deed restrictions, CC&R's, and educational materials to notify landowners of the purpose of the open spaces and easements and the responsibilities which they have to protect and preserve these areas for the purposes set forth in the conditions of project approval.
10. Where sensitive natural resources are to be protected, management plans should be required. The sensitive features should be identified in the management plan. The management plan should outline the measures to be implemented for the protection and enhancement of the sensitive area, and should also identify areas on adjacent properties which could be linked or connected to result in open space corridors and greenbelts such as those described in the following section related to trees (the management plan may be the same as a Mitigation Monitoring Program).
11. The presence of native and other trees on rural residential lots can add significantly to property values as well as provide benefits for wildlife, create natural cooling, and add to the attractiveness of an area. The retention of trees should be encouraged for aesthetic, economic, and environmental reasons.
12. During the review of new development projects, the County's Tree Preservation Policies should be consulted for additional guidance (See Appendix A).

**C. Discussion:**

One predominant factor that differentiates an urban area from a rural area is open space. Open Space is often set aside for the protection and preservation of the following natural features:

1. Meandering drainage or stream bed areas;
2. Riparian/wetland areas;
3. Watersheds;
4. Common lot areas;
5. Oak woodlands, Savanna and Chaparral zones;
6. Historical, agricultural, cultural, and archeological resources;
7. Endangered/threatened plant/wildlife habitat.

A natural corridor is one preferred method to provide open space for both regeneration of trees and shrubs, and for wildlife habitat. Preservation of natural vegetation in riparian and wetland areas prevents erosion.

One of the major qualities that exemplify a rural setting is a grove of majestic oak trees. Native oaks have been part of the area long before the first European settlers arrived. The connection of oak woodlands and riparian areas as natural corridors are important in order to provide safe migration paths for wild animals. Corridors and open spaces are used to protect whole wooded areas which provide a habitat for regeneration of new trees and protection of existing trees.

## Planned Residential Developments (PDs)

### A. Goals:

1. To preserve natural resources such as riparian habitats, natural waterways and other environmentally sensitive areas.
2. To preserve cultural or historically sensitive areas.
3. To provide on-site public and/or private recreational opportunities.

### B. Implementation Techniques:

1. Varied lot sizes within Planned Residential Developments (PDs) allow flexibility to create site sensitive projects in order to meet or exceed the goals and policies of a community plan.
2. The layout of the lots, roadways and open space is site specific and must be based on constraint mapping that depicts geologic, hydraulic, topographic vegetative and other natural, cultural or historic features.
3. It must be recognized that the maximum density permitted by the zoning may not be achieved due to the above constraints. The size and number of parcels within the remaining developable area is dependent upon compatibility with surrounding properties and the goals and policies of the community plan, including the intent of the land use district(s) in which the project is located.
4. PDs are allowable only where they benefit the local community, for example, where they protect a stream bed, wildlife corridor or grove of oak trees. Any protected areas should be held under common ownership of the homeowners association or deeded to the County or a suitable non-profit trust and not as easements within individual residential lots. The overriding benefit of a PD would not be to add more home sites to a parcel of land.
5. PDs also provide a buffer between sensitive environmental areas such as groves of trees and steep slopes.
6. Common open space areas should maintain and complement the natural environment by utilizing native drought-tolerant plant species in landscape design and minimize extensive use of planted turf areas.
7. Recreational improvements, consistent with the Zoning Ordinance and the specific community plan and community needs, must be included within PDs.

**C. Discussion:**

PD designs that result in clustered lots which give a conventional, uniform appearance (i.e. tract homes, urban subdivisions) are not considered to be consistent with a rural environment. Protection of site sensitive areas and adherence to the community plan will take precedence over the maximum number of lots allowed by the zoning.

**Lighting**

**A. Goal:**

1. To provide a minimum of artificial lighting on residences, other structures, and along roadways to limit the amount of light pollution.

**B. Implementation Techniques:**

1. While street lights may be useful at particularly busy intersections and streets, their use should be discouraged on other more rural streets and lanes.
2. Street lights should be minimized along county roads and within subdivisions while following Placer County road standards. Street lights may be appropriate for large subdivisions entering on roads with a high posted speed limit.
3. If a street light or an area light is required, it should be of the type specified below to protect neighbors from direct rays. Area lighting should be shielded such that direct rays do not pass property lines. Low pressure sodium lamps are encouraged while halogen type lights are discouraged.
4. Where required, the street lamp should be:
  - a. Of the high pressure sodium type and of a "cobra head with flat bottom" style or fully shielded such that light is directed only downward.
  - b. Mounted on a wood pole at a height and wattage recommended by PG&E and appropriate for a rural area.
5. Parking lot lamps should be mounted such that they point downward without direct rays extending past the parking lot, building entrance, walkway, or area intended to be illuminated.
6. Lights on billboards should be mounted on the top of the sign and point downward without direct rays extending past the sign.

**C. Discussion:**

The proliferation of outdoor lights is considered "light pollution." There are instances, in urban development, that street lights are desirable, but generally not so in a rural community. In the day, one gets a feeling of rural by being able to see open space. In the evening, the rural



feeling is created by the absence of outdoor lights which allows for the enjoyment of the night sky without interference.

The possible hazards of dark roadways should be balanced with preserving a rural environment. There is concern about street lights and their ability to prevent accidents by warning drivers of an intersection. While this may be true, only a portion of collisions occur at intersections and it is unknown if the lack or presence of a street light would have prevented a collision.

Other collision factors to be considered that are not related to street lighting are: driver attentiveness, alcohol, familiarity with the area, or various roadway hazards. The absence of street lighting allows the motor vehicle operator to maintain night vision, and avoids the false sense of security that a street light will prevent a collision.

Natural wood poles blend into the background much better than a steel pole, thus preserving a rural appearance during the day.

Halogen lights are not desirable because the light is very obtrusive, can be seen from great distances and are difficult to shield.

### **Lot Design**

#### **A. Goals:**

1. To encourage lot designs which are attractive and functional.
2. To assist in designing home locations on lots to preserve the local rural character.
3. The design of lots that depend on its own resources for water supply and sewerage disposal are encouraged to be self-supporting for the life of the structure.

#### **B. Implementation Techniques:**

1. The American Planning Association's report entitled, *Preserving Rural Character*, (report #429) is recommended for use as a guide for designing lots which preserve rural character and help to abate environmental concerns (available at the Planning Department).
2. Orchards or other agricultural type activities are encouraged.
3. The distance between a structure and any road should vary from lot to lot which gives a more random appearance rather than a series of structures in a line.
4. The use of native, or native-appearing drought-tolerant landscaping is preferred over water-intensive ornamentals.
5. Buildable portions of lots should be designed to protect natural resources/features by incorporating trees, wetlands, streams, rock outcroppings, etc. into the overall

project for long term preservation. It is not always necessary to completely avoid these resources, they can often be incorporated into a project design. Residences should be located on the edges of topographical changes and vegetation areas (i.e. wooded areas), or just below ridge lines.

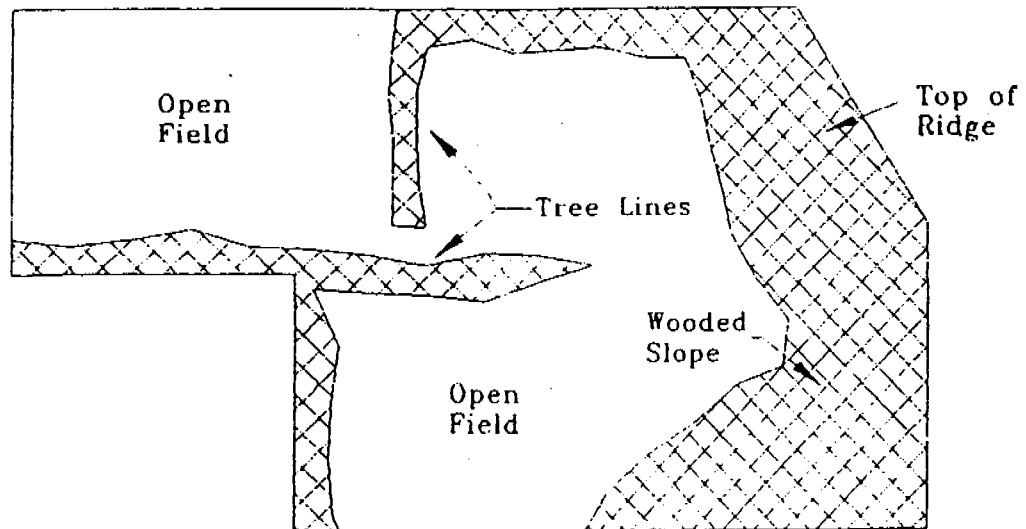
6. Any design with an on-site sewer and water supply must not rely on future improvements in the area to solve any problems with these utilities.

**C. Discussion:**

Lots averaging one acre or larger are encouraged to allow greater buildable areas for such improvements as buildings, decks, pools, and accessory structures. Smaller lots usually take on the appearance of conventional suburban subdivisions with homes located the same distance from the street and from each other, with uniform driveway treatments and building orientation.

Thus, the opportunities to develop the random look and feel of a rural area is lost. Larger lot designs inherently preserve the area's rural flavor and offer the most flexibility in designing a new home site.

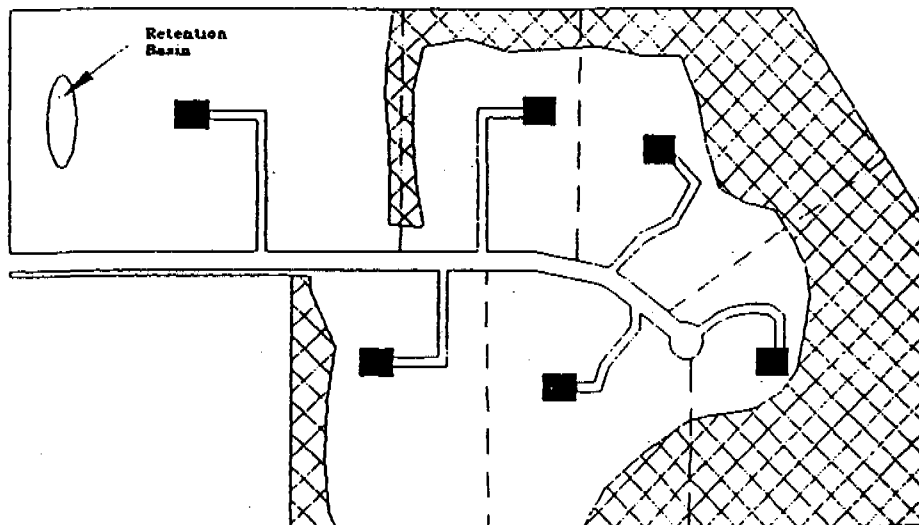
## Existing Site Conditions



### Physical features:

Oak Woodlands	15 Acres
Open Fields	Zoning: 2.3 Acres
Steep Slopes	Lui. 0.44

## Site Plan I - Conventional Development (6-2.3 Acre Lots)



### Advantages:

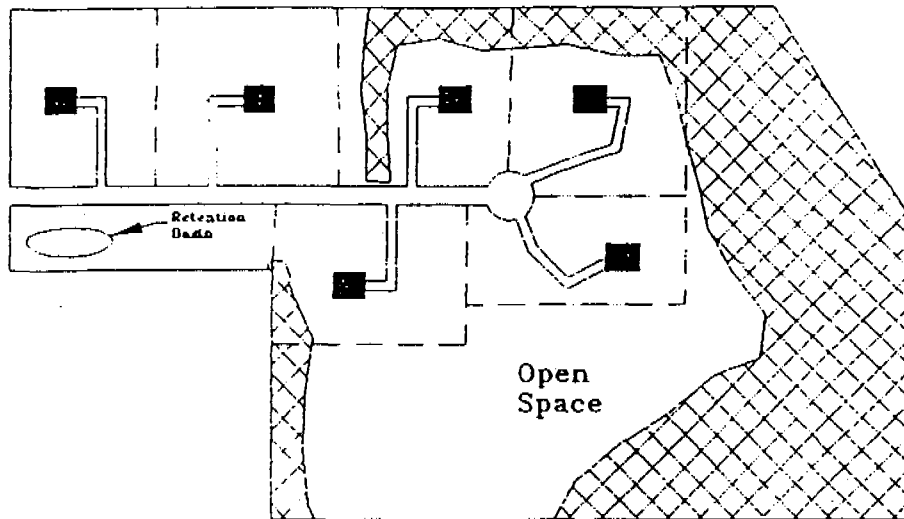
- Large rural estate lots
- Maximum spacing between homes
- Greater compatibility with adjoining land uses (ie. lot size) <sup>9</sup>

### Disadvantages:

- Extensive tree removal
- Grading and disturbance on steeper slopes
- Long single entry road
- Maximum paving

## Site Plan II - Cluster Development (PUD)

(6-1 Acre lots plus ± 8 Acres common open space)



### Advantages:

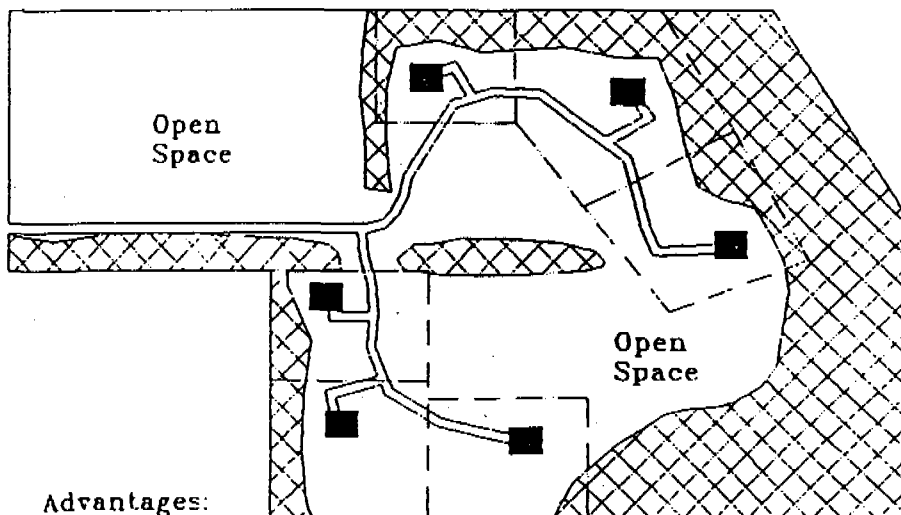
- Expansive open space
- Shorter roadway—less paving
- Preserved wooded slope
- Maximum tree protection

### Disadvantages:

- Limited accessibility for project residents to common open space
- Incompatible with adjoining properties impacted by smaller lots
- Denser residential building area (ie. less spacing between homes)

## Site Plan III - Alternative Cluster Development (PUD)

(6-1 Acre lots plus ± 8 Acres of common open space)



### Advantages:

- All lots provided direct access to common open space
- All homes adjacent to woodlands
- Maximum tree preservation
- Expansive open space
- Preserved wooded slope
- Greater spacing between homes
- Greater likelihood of being compatible

### Disadvantages:

- Longer roadway with more paving
- Shared roadways crossing private lots

## Preservation of Scenic Areas

### A. Goal:

1. To avoid creating predominant landmarks which impose on the landscape and the natural skyline in ways that cause the contiguous rural landscape to be interrupted.
2. To protect the Folsom Lake, and other large bodies of water, view sheds (as viewed from the lake area), and public view corridors along major County roadways and Interstate 80 from actions which degrade their scenic quality.

### B. Implementation Techniques:

1. Homes and accessory structures should blend into the environment.
2. Where possible, structures should be tucked along tree lines or along other topographical changes in contour.
3. On lots located along ridge tops, houses and accessory structures should be built just below the ridge line where there are no existing trees to prevent the structures from becoming the predominant feature on the rural landscape. Otherwise, such development should be screened by new plantings of sufficient height and bulk at maturity to minimize visual encroachment to the greatest extent possible.
4. One method of ensuring that structures do not emerge above the tree tops involves the use of a helium balloon on a string. The helium balloon is allowed to rise until it begins to emerge above the tree tops. The length of string used to elevate the balloon to the level just below the tree tops is used to determine the height of structures in that specific area.
5. Whenever possible, buffers of natural vegetation and wooded areas should be situated between roadways and structures. The affect of this is to tuck structures away, creating the illusion of a continuous rural landscape and to avoid the appearance of imposing structures on the landscape.

### C. Discussion:

Maintenance of the natural landscape as the dominant visual feature is probably one of the most important rural issues. Structures that dominate the landscape interrupt the rural continuity of the area.

## Fences

### A. Goals:

1. To maintain the continuity of an open rural environment by encouraging fencing designs that are as visually permeable as possible.
2. Where appropriate, fencing should be installed to identify land which has been designated as environmentally sensitive and provide a permanent reminder for property owners that a sensitive area exists; and be designed to allow for the free movement of wildlife in the area.
3. Discourage walled developments which create subcommunities that do not identify with the larger surrounding communities.

### B. Implementation Techniques:

The implementation techniques are organized in the following categories:

#### PROJECT BOUNDARIES/BOUNDARIES OF PRIVATE LOTS:

1. When open iron fencing is proposed, encourage the use of top caps rather than spikes and spires that could potentially harm migrating wildlife.
2. Fencing should not exceed a six foot height.
3. The following fencing types are recommended:
  - a. Solid wood, untreated and unpainted cedar or redwood (natural stain is acceptable)
  - b. Dark colored chain link
  - c. Stone or masonry walls less than 3 feet high
4. Barbed wire is discouraged, except where necessary for agricultural operations.

#### ALONG ROADWAYS:

5. The use of hedges, trellised vines, or berry bushes are encouraged to satisfy privacy needs.
6. Fencing along roadways should not significantly restrict the visual landscape or inhibit the perception of rural open space.
7. Sound walls and solid fencing along roadways are to be discouraged due to their detracting to the rural nature of the area. Options other than sound walls are to

be considered where noise is a problem. These include earthen berms with trees or increasing the distance between a structure and the noise source.

8. Fences should be set back from roadways a distance sufficient to abate traffic safety concerns (usually adequately addressed in planning setback ordinances), and to avoid creating the appearance of a "tunnel" effect.
9. Plans for fencing along roadways should be carefully reviewed to ensure that they do not create a physical or visual hazard.

#### ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE AND OPEN SPACE AREAS:

10. An open rail type fence around any area designated as environmentally sensitive is recommended. As an alternative, three wire fencing on wood or "T" bar posts is acceptable if the bottom two wires are not barbed. Areas to be fenced include riparian/wetlands, tree preservation areas and the like. The above type fences are specified in order to allow the free movement of wildlife in the area, and are less visually obtrusive and are in keeping with a rural setting. Fencing need not be required along property lines where a similar environmentally sensitive feature exists.

#### OTHERS:

11. Fences around or along canals, ponds and lakes may be necessary to prevent the dumping of materials in the water and to prevent children from falling into the canals or ponds.

#### C. Discussion:

Open rail fencing is encouraged as it is most conducive to the free passage of wildlife. Open rail fencing is also considered to be the least visually invasive fencing structure in a rural landscape.

Iron fences with spikes on the top can be a safety hazard because leaping deer and other wildlife may be impaled on the spikes.

It may be necessary to restrict access of children to canals, landscape ponds, detention ponds and lakes. However, fences should be used only after other alternatives have been considered (i.e. shoreline treatment, thorny vegetation). The guidelines noted above should be used wherever fencing in these areas is necessary.



- ▶ SPLIT RAIL - PREFERRED FOR SENSITIVE AREAS



- ▶ RAIL FENCES: GOOD EXAMPLES OF RURAL FENCING





▶ SPIKE TIPPED WROUGHT IRON - DANGEROUS TO WILDLIFE



▶ SOLID WALL - URBAN TYPE

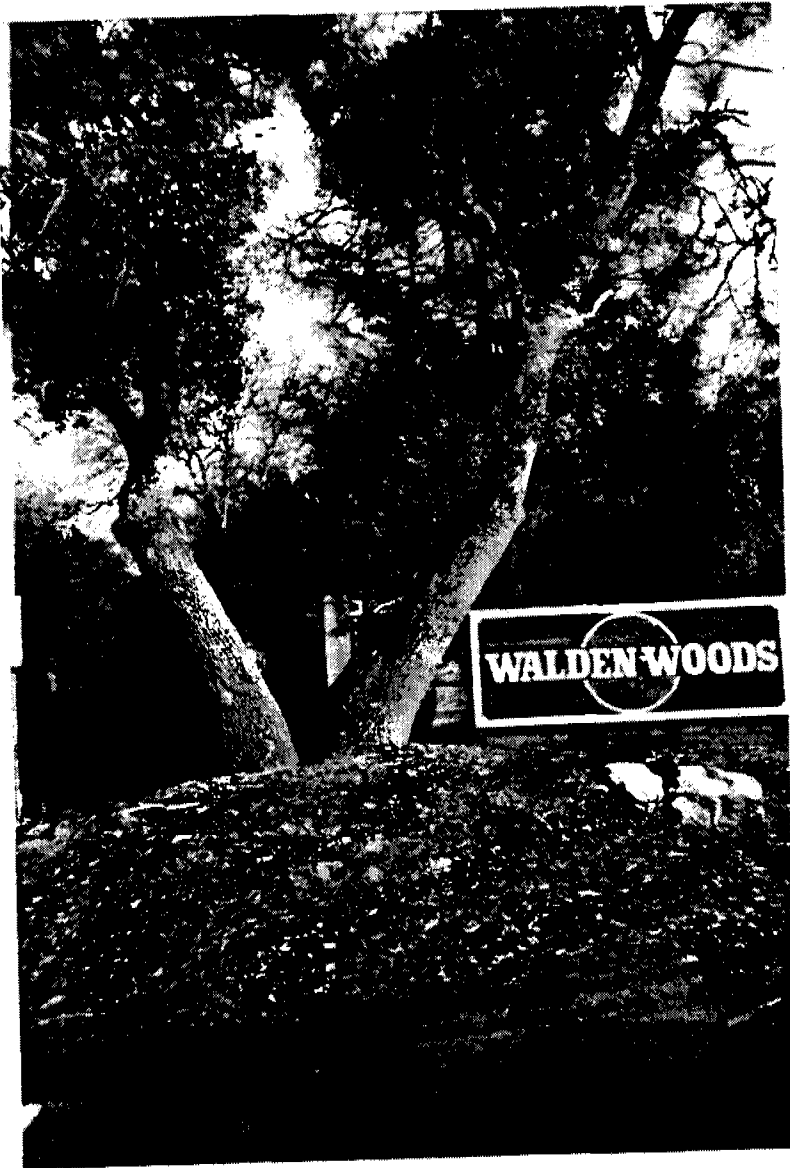
## Subdivision Entrance Features

### A. Goal:

1. To minimize the visual impact of man-made structures on a rural landscape, and to ensure the community-wide continuity of a rural appearance.

### B. Implementation Techniques:

1. Permanent advertising or sales signs are not appropriate and should not be allowed. Signs should include the subdivision's name only
2. Where signs/marques are deemed appropriate, a building envelope should be designated for such purpose.
3. Where signs/marques are deemed appropriate, they shall not be greater than a maximum of 50 square feet.
4. Structural entrance features should satisfy zoning ordinance setback requirements and DPW sight-clearance standards.
5. The use of indigenous natural materials are encouraged.
6. Existing natural vegetation and wooded areas should be incorporated into the entrance design.
7. The entrance may be further enhanced with the use of imported native vegetation.
8. Non-native and "formal" type landscape design and vegetation are discouraged.
9. Lighting of entrances should be restricted to the parameters set forth under the rural lighting standards.
10. If the subdivision intersections are illuminated, further entrance lighting is not necessary and should be discouraged.
11. The use of entrance lighting should be limited, but if allowed for safety reasons, entrance feature lighting should be restricted to identification purposes with only directed and shielded lighting on the identifying portion of the entrance feature.
12. Extensive use of lawn is discouraged due to its urban/suburban ornamental appearance which is contrary to the rural landscape.



- ▶ APPROPRIATE ENTRANCE FEATURES. GOOD USE OF NATURAL VEGETATION, AND MATERIALS