

Streamlining the Process

There are two primary ways to create opportunities for better choices in development decisions. A local board can ask a developer to provide more acceptable alternatives to the original proposal, as for instance is required in an environmental impact statement. While this method sometimes offers an expanded range of choices, it is still reactive, time-consuming, expensive for the applicant, and often merely results in several variations of the same proposal. It also leads to confrontational attitudes and more likely a compromise or watered-down solution rather than a creative alternative. The “best we can get” is not the same as what board members and the public would clearly prefer.

The second, preferred method is for the community to provide design guidelines up front, before developers submit a proposal and invest in expensive engineering. Using the Greenway Guides, towns illustrate the types of development and neighborhoods they are looking for, what generally fits into their community character. Applicants know what site plans and subdivision layouts are more acceptable and are likely to submit proposals the first time that are in line with the Guides. Developers make their investment choices based on a more predictable process.

If flexible guidelines are put in place with broad community support and input from builders and other interest groups, constructive negotiations will replace major confrontations. Boards can then accelerate reviews for project proposals that are consistent with locally approved guidelines. During the Greenway public workshops, two suggestions that provoked considerable agreement were the need to provide more educational programs for local officials and the benefits of having illustrated guidelines. The towns of East Fishkill and Rhinebeck have already produced illustrated design guideline booklets to aid in the preparation of development plans appropriate for their communities.

The Greenway Guides are designed to allow communities to make essential choices, not as an after-the-fact reaction to each outside proposal, but as preventive tools for healthier communities.

