

Compact Development: An interim report and funding request. (dated April 6, 2007)

The CDC and CPAC were charged by the Council to evaluate whether the town should move forward with considering compact development patterns as an option for development in Falmouth. In addition, we were asked to consider whether the Compact Development Study provides tools that help us in that effort. In a series of joint meetings we have reviewed the Compact Development Study and the Falmouth Corners Report and looked at the recommendations in both. We found common themes but also realized that we needed to acquaint ourselves more thoroughly with the concept of compact development and see and discuss examples. We asked Terry Dewan and Beth DellaValle, land use planning consultants who are familiar with this development pattern, to help us understand the concept and show us pictures of various examples from across the country.

With that insight in mind we developed a list of values and goals we believe compact development should deliver and started a list of policy decisions we think need to be considered.

Identified Values/Goals: These are the key values and goals we think compact development should achieve.

- Community focus that encourages social interaction and walking through useable sidewalks and public gathering spaces such as pocket parks, esplanades and green spaces
- Provide a sense of place that includes mixed uses and destinations such as residences of various types, small business, retail stores, education, cultural and natural attractions especially trees.
- Open to social diversity in age, economics, education and life work
- Be of a human scale that is both sustainable and sensitive to the natural and historic environment
- Promotes harmony and safety between different modes of transportation and interconnectivity with each other and destinations
- Preservation of open space within the development area and other areas of town through the use of tools such as transfer of development rights, density transfer fees, etc
- Variability of lot size, setbacks, frontage requirements, street orientation, building size and style

Policy Decisions: Below is a sampling of the policy decisions that need to be considered and recommendations developed.

Where?

We have sketched a preliminary plan for of where compact development may be appropriate. We plan to obtain feedback from our consultants and continue to develop and refine this plan as we proceed.

1. In-fill compact development: identify areas, mostly on the eastern side of Town, where the compact pattern already exists, and develop an ordinance scheme where in-fill parcels will be required to be developed roughly at the same density of the surrounding neighborhoods. Such a zoning change will address the problem of non-conforming lots on the eastern side of Town.
2. Master planned compact development: using the Compact Development Study as one of the tools, identify areas of the Town, located possibly in the central part of Town, where the compact pattern of development may become the required development option. To best knit projects together as they are built, a schematic road and open space network would need to be developed.
3. Contract-zone compact development: identify parts of Town, again located possibly in the central part of Town, where conservation zoning will continue to be the base zoning, but where compact development would be permitted if approved by the Council through contract zoning.
4. Prohibit compact development in those parts of the Town where inappropriate.

There are still many questions we have concerning the location of compact development in Town, which include the following:

- Where do compact patterns exist today in Falmouth and are adjacent areas appropriate for additional compact development?
- Can/should in-fill compact development be encouraged in existing areas of higher density at similar density rates?
- How can we use the filters proposed in the Compact Development Study to help decide where this pattern is appropriate?
- What are the criteria that would indicate areas of town that would be inappropriate for compact development?
- Are there areas of town where compact development should be encouraged or even required and what incentives should be offered, if any?
- Are there situations where public funding should be involved such as providing infrastructure, linkages etc?
- In areas with existing higher density, can compact development policy be used to change non-conforming lots into conforming lots to allow owners more flexibility in the use of their property?
- Should compact development be initially confined to a small area to measure its implementation and impact?

What?

- What role will design guidelines play in compact development and what structure and approach should be used?
- What will be the specifics regarding minimum lot size, setbacks, frontage, etc.

- What percent of the land must be set aside for open space?
- What will be the transition requirements in relation to surrounding parcels, buildings and density?
- What is the maximum density allowed and does that vary by zone or other consideration? Is density neutrality a factor?
- What requirements for public spaces, esplanades, village greens, trails and sidewalks will be included?
- What consideration should be giving to managing the pace of compact development to control the impact to schools and other town services?
- What processes should be in place for planning roads and their connectivity?

How?

- Should developers be required to have pre-application conferences with town staff? What land use experts if any should attend the conference with the developer? What are the goals of such a meeting?
- How should developers interact with abutters and other stakeholders before, during and after the construction?
- How will the approval process work? Can a structure be put in place that limits the number of situations where the Council needs to be involved in contract zoning?
- How should the public be informed/educated about compact development should we decide to move in this direction?
- How will compact development relate to current zoning and overlay district ordinances? How will these work together in an understandable and enforceable manner?

Summary

We believe that Falmouth should move forward in considering the role of compact development in our town. While the devil is in the details, we see significant benefits from allowing and implementing well thought out and well planned compact development. We believe that the Compact Development Study will play a role in our consideration as will other tools.

We propose the following project plan to move forward.

1. Use a consultant to help educate ourselves more thoroughly in the compact development patterns by studying the Smart Code, using tools like Visual Preference and field trips.
2. With the help of the consultant develop a comprehensive list of the policy decisions and the possible spectrum of answers for each.
3. Considering all of the policy decisions, develop recommendations at a strategic level to be presented to the Council for discussion and direction.
4. Finalize the policy decisions in more detail and have the consultant draft proposed implementation ordinance language for CDC/CPAC's review.

5. Present the draft language to the Council for review and direction.
6. Finalize the language for adoption consideration.