

3.5 Aesthetic Resources

3.5.1 Existing Conditions

Existing Visual Character of the Site

The project site consists of a mix of upland second growth woods, small shrub-scrub areas, open field areas, and wetlands, in addition to an existing house site. As seen from public roads adjacent to the site, this property appears fully wooded in second growth vegetation with a moderately thick understory.

Site area reconnaissance was conducted on December 17, 2002, from all adjacent area roadways. The view from the east end of Clarke Street, which dead ends at the site property line, reveals a portion of Ramapo Creek and a small open field area rising into the woods. This view extends approximately 500 feet into the site. Views from Spring Street (County Route 105) reveal glimpses of the site through the yards of single family homes fronting on Spring Street as well as through the partially treed Orange County Heritage Trail. These views reveal the wooded nature of the site from a distance of some 200 to over 450 feet. The Ramapo Creek is not visible from these vantage points and these views do not extend into the project site due to the existing tree cover.

The only view of the project site detected from Freeland Street (County Route 40) is the portion of the subject property that fronts on the street, where the driveway enters the property toward the on-site residence. This narrow vista extends approximately 1,000 feet to the woods line within the site. Potential views from other points along Freeland Street are obscured by existing vegetation, buildings and the topography on the house lots that front on Freeland Street. Views from Forshee Street to the south of the subject site reveal portions of the tree line at the southerly property boundary exposed by the house lots on Forshee Street. Intervening vegetation and houses obscure most of the potential view. No views extend appreciably into the project site due to the dense tree cover on-site.

No other locations were identified in the field survey that allow views into the project site. No prominent visual features were noted on the site in the various off-site locations. While the topography of the property rises above surrounding lands to the north and west, existing tree cover on and off the site obscures potential views of this landform.

Views from the Orange County Heritage Trail

Site area reconnaissance was conducted on November 1, 2002, along the Orange County Heritage Trail, which borders the project site on its north side. This trailway follows a former railroad bed and consists of a gravel path that is notably overgrown with herbaceous and shrubby vegetation, indicative of a little used trail. At the present time, this trail is primarily a walking trail due to the rough gravel surface. Views from the Trail include views of the rear of adjacent houses that front on Spring Street. Typical trail views are shown in Figures 3.5-1 and 3.5-2. (Figure 3.5-2 depicts the existing view into the project site from the Trail in the vicinity of the footpath connection proposed from the Hidden Creek project.)

From the Heritage Trail, views into the project site extend approximately 100 to 250 feet, depending on the viewer position. Generally, there is a low earth berm at the edge of the trailway, then a drop in grade toward the flood plain of the Ramapo Creek, a further drop to the Creek itself, then a gradual rise in topography into the wooded project site. Due to the density of the existing understory vegetation, potential views of the Creek are largely obscured. Views deeper into the site than the Creek are obscured by the vegetation.

The Orange County Heritage Trail is the only documented aesthetic resource that was identified in the immediate vicinity of the project site.

3.5.2 Village of Monroe Code Requirements

Section 200-88 of the Village of Monroe Zoning code presents the bases for the functions of the Village Architectural Appearance Review Board (AARB). Section 200-88 cites that excessive uniformity, dissimilarity, or inappropriateness of building design may adversely affect the immediate area and neighboring areas. It is the purpose of Article XVIII of the Code to prevent these and other (unspecified) harmful effects of such exterior appearance of new or altered buildings and thus encourage the most appropriate use of land within the Village of Monroe.

Section 200-92, Criteria for recommendations of the AARB, spells out specific criteria for evaluating excessive similarity, excessive dissimilarity, and inappropriateness of buildings, structures or land development. Those criteria by which the AARB shall base its recommendations, such that a design can be reasonably expected to provoke one or more harmful effects set forth in §200-88, are summarized below:

A. Excessive similarity to any other structure within 500 feet facing upon the same or intersecting street, or to any other structure within the same permit application, with respect to one or more of the following features of exterior design and appearance:

- (1) Apparently identical elevations as relates to form, proportion, texture and color;
- (2) Substantially identical size and arrangement of either doors, windows, porticos or other openings or breaks in the elevation facing the street, including reverse arrangement; or
- (3) Other identical features of design such as, but not limited to, materials, roof line and height or other design elements.

B. Excessive dissimilarity to any other structure within 500 feet facing upon the same or intersecting street with respect to one or more of the following features of exterior design and appearance:

- (1) Cubical contents;
- (2) Gross floor area;
- (3) Height of building or height of roof; or

(4) Other significant design features, such as types of materials, durability of materials, texture, roof structures, chimneys, exposed mechanical equipment, service and storage enclosures, signs, landscaping, retaining walls, fencing, and lighting posts.

C. Inappropriateness in relation to the established character of other structures in the immediate area or neighboring areas with respect to significant design features, such as texture, color, character (style) and form of architectural design.

3.5.3 Potential Impacts to Aesthetic Resources and Proposed Mitigation

The project has been laid out with building clusters centered around the access roadway and separated from each other by intervening landscape features (e.g., contours, preserved existing woods or wetlands, or planted buffers). Seven building clusters are proposed (indicated as "A" through "G" on the site plan) around a central main access road. A central recreation complex is proposed for the residents. The landscape plan, included at the rear of the DEIS shows a variety of indigenous and ornamental plantings proposed to enhance the look of the overall project, median landscaping will be provided as appropriate.

The proposed architectural style and landscape treatment envisioned for this project is illustrated in Figure 3.5-3. Architectural detailing specific to the proposed Hidden Creek Project is illustrated in Figure 3.5-4. The buildings will be designed with varied rooflines and roof peaks, large dormers, a variety of window detailing and will provide uncluttered door treatments, and uniform style chimneys as an architectural accent. Figure 3.5-5 shows sample entryways envisioned for the Hidden Creek Project, Figure 3.5-6 shows the Proposed Community Recreation/Pool Area for the project.

A variety of facade treatments including brick and clapboard facing will be incorporated into the design of the exteriors of the sixplex structures to provide for additional variation. Figure 3.5-7 provides a representation of the brick treatment to be used on the facing of the buildings. The mass of the buildings will be de-emphasized in a variety of ways, such as divisions or breaks in materials, window bays, separate entrances and entry treatments, variation in roof lines, and the use of sections that may project or be recessed up to five feet. Such variations in shapes and materials shall be within the overall theme of traditional village dwellings in the Village of Monroe. Belgian block will be used for the curbing to enhance the overall look of the project.

The building colors shown in DEIS Figure 3.5-3 are representative of the proposed colors for this project. The builder will use a single color vinyl siding, and roofing shingle to unify the project. Figure 3.5-8 provides samples of the type, style and color of vinyl siding and roofing shingles anticipated to be used. The earth tone colors being considered for the buildings in this project are as follows:

"Natural Clay" Wolverine Millennium vinyl clapboard siding

"White" or "Snow" aluminum soffits

"Independence" weathered wood shingles

"Natural" pressure treated wood steps and railings

The proposed design for Hidden Creek development is intended to provide a variety of residential settings by use of a curvilinear roadway pattern and building layout, clustered buildings to create small neighborhoods, and preservation of significant natural areas. The landscape setting envisioned for the buildings, as shown in Figures 3.5-3 and 3.5-6, will be consistent throughout, including the proposed recreation area facilities and the main entrance area, to provide continuity in project design and character. Ornamental Landscape plantings have been included around the unit entrances to enhance the streetscape. Sidewalks have been included as part of the project design to enhance the pedestrian nature of the Hidden Creek Community. To minimize the potential for a garage-scape, as site design allows, end units could be turned such that the driveways are located in the side yards,

A buffer of existing woods vegetation has been retained around the entire perimeter of the project. This buffer will serve the existing residences neighboring the project site, the proposed residences, as well as preserve sensitive natural resources along Ramapo Creek and the on-site wetlands.

A landscape planting plan has been developed for this project that provides a formal street tree pattern, provides landscaped separations between the building clusters, and augments the natural woods vegetation to be preserved in the project. A hierarchy of planting is planned for this project to enhance the pedestrian scale of the project and provide variety to each building cluster. A full sized Landscape Plan, as discussed earlier, accompanies this document.

A Lighting plan has also been included in the rear of the DEIS, including specifications from Orange & Rockland Utilities detailing the proposed lighting fixtures.

Orange County Heritage Trail

The proposed project preserves the Ramapo Creek corridor and significant natural wooded buffer adjacent to it. As the Trail is located on the opposite side of the Creek from the project development, the natural buffer will be nearly 200 feet at its narrowest point (at Building Cluster G). With the exception of a proposed pedestrian footpath connection from the project to the Heritage Trail, no tree or understory vegetation is proposed to be removed in this buffer, thus preserving existing views from this aesthetic resource. Figure 3.5-9 demonstrates the low potential for views from the Trail into the proposed project in the vicinity of the footpath connection proposed from the Hidden Creek project, as depicted in a sight line profile drawing.

No significant change in the visual character of the Trail corridor is anticipated to result from implementation of the proposed project. The rear of units and parking areas facing the Orange County Trailway have been screened with a mixture of evergreen trees, deciduous trees suitable for the edge of the woods, and masses of tall shrubs. These materials will work together to form a dense vegetative mass that will screen most views of the new development.

Potential wintertime glimpses of the proposed project from the Trail may include portions of the rear facades of the buildings, which will be designed with attractive architectural details on all sides. New landscape planting in combination with the preservation of natural woods vegetation and preservation of existing topography between the development area and the Trail will mitigate any change in views from this resource. The Landscape Plan identifies the

location of proposed buffer plantings between the project and the Orange County Heritage Trail.

Compliance with Village Code

As relates to identified aesthetic resources, the foregoing description of buffers from the Heritage Trail demonstrates that the proposed project will not result in excessive similarity, excessive dissimilarity, or inappropriateness of buildings or land development (the criteria for AARB review) as viewed from that resource.

The base buildings are modular in nature which supports the overall affordability of the final product. They are therefore similar in architectural style, color, materials, and architectural details. Whether such similarity rises to a level of "excessive" similarity will be up to the AARB. In the applicant's view, excessive similarity will not occur with the measures outlined below.

The buildings will be a single earth tone color with simple architectural detail, and uniform roof shingling. Brick Facing will be incorporated into the design of the exteriors of the sixplex structures to provide breaks in materials used. Variety in rooflines, entry treatments and section setbacks will provide for additional variety. Belgian block will be used the curbing to enhance the overall look of the project.

Facades as viewed from within the parking loop will appear similar, with individual units distinguished by the combination of brick and siding, different front door color and minor differences in architectural details. Notable variations in architectural appearance *between* clusters will be achieved, by alterations in the position of the buildings from cluster to cluster. This sensitivity to exterior appearance through building and road siting and preservation of natural vegetation is expected to make the Hidden Creek development an interesting streetscape experience. It is noted, that this streetscape view will largely be experienced within the development, by people who have made an investment in the aesthetics through the purchase of a unit.

The applicant is required to make a submission to the AARB and will do so as the project progresses through the planning process. The Village Code acknowledges that any site plan approval that does not have AARB approval may be conditioned on same.

Refer to DEIS Section 3.10 for further discussion of potential effects on community character related to the AARB review criteria.