



# Cluster Development

Cluster developments or subdivisions locate housing around green space or other amenities, allowing houses to be closer on one portion of a site to preserve natural features elsewhere. This can increase land use efficiency, lower infrastructure development and maintenance costs, lower site grading and drainage costs, and help preserve open space and natural features. Clustering is often used when a portion of a building site is constrained by sensitive or critical areas, or as a rural development technique.

## BACKGROUND

Cluster development can relieve development pressure on environmentally sensitive areas, greenbelts, and rural and resource lands by focusing development in one location while preserving open space. In addition to land conservation, the smaller, denser home sites can introduce different housing types into areas dominated by large-lot single-family development. In areas with high land values, a smaller lot or home with open space owned in common can reduce housing costs. Additionally, cluster development can reduce developer costs. Clustered homes are often grouped around a common space instead of placed in rows along roadways, saving on infrastructure costs. Developer savings can be passed on to residents, increasing the affordability of these units.

## TOOL PROFILE

### Objectives

[Housing Options in Expensive Markets](#)

[Missing Middle Density](#)

### Type of Tool

**Development types**

### Project Type

**Single family**

**Rental**

### Affordability Level

**Market-rate incentives and tools**



Cluster development requires relaxing development standards for setbacks, lot sizes and densities to permit compact development. In a cluster development, the total number of units is established independently of minimum lot standards. The portion of the site held out of development is counted towards the gross density of the parcel.

Cluster ordinances incorporate design standards, along with minimum open space and density standards. Design standards can be either voluntary or mandatory. Voluntary provisions are often paired with incentives like density bonuses, which are awarded based on established performance standards.

Review and permitting of cluster developments is usually similar to that of a regular subdivision. Communities permit cluster development by adopting an ordinance specifying standards for cluster subdivision review or permitting the development type in certain zones. This technique may require considerable outreach to developers and building staff for both promoting and understanding cluster development.

