

3.10 Community Character

An assessment was conducted of the character of existing residential neighborhoods in the vicinity of the project site. The scope of this in-field analysis extended to the immediate vicinity of the site, encompassing all properties within 500 feet of the subject property boundary as outlined in §200-92 of the Village of Monroe Code (Criteria for recommendations of the Architectural Appearance Review Board). In addition, three multi-family development projects in the Village were also assessed.

Particular attention was paid to *streetscape design* (road widths, sidewalks, street trees, street lighting, pedestrian amenities, build-to line, roadway interconnections, on-street parking), *site layout* (orientation of residences to the street, front yard setbacks, location of garages, location of off-street parking), and *architecture* (architectural details, pedestrian or automobile orientation, uniformity or variety of design between buildings on the street). These items are as outlined in the adopted scope for this DEIS contained as Appendix A. Additional relevant items were also noted in the in-field analysis conducted on December 17, 2002.

3.10.1 Neighboring Single-Family Streetscapes

Clarke Street Character

Clarke Street is a dead end local road located immediately west of the project site. Its cul-de-sac ends at the western property line of the subject site. Clarke Street is a narrow two-lane road with no shoulders or painted pavement markings (i.e., center line). It is paved and in moderately good condition. The entryway to Clarke Street, off of Maple Avenue, includes a narrow bridge crossing over a stream, which would provide an attractive entrance experience were it not for the views of the adjacent land use, the Village Highway Garage property. The Highway Garage site is fenced with chain link fence and contains views to a large garage building, sand and salt stockpiles, and equipment storage. On-street parking associated with the Highway Department exists at the west end of Clarke Street.

There are no sidewalks on Clarke Street. No formal pattern of street trees exists, however there are numerous trees located in the front yards of residential lots at the eastern end of Clarke Street that frame the street to some extent. There are street lights (conventional municipal-style overhanging lamps) collocated with overhead wires on utility poles. No pedestrian amenities were observed on Clarke Street.

No uniform build-to line is evident on Clarke Street. There are no provisions for on-street parking (other than as mentioned above at the Highway Garage) and the residential portion of the street is generally too narrow to accommodate on-street parking without obstructing traffic flow.

The site layouts for all of the house lots orient the houses toward Clarke Street. Houses on the south side of the street are located closer to the street than houses on the north side. Overall, front yard building setbacks are estimated to range from 15 feet to 50 feet. Houses on the south side of the street are notably older than houses on the north side. Only the newer houses have garages, which face the street. Off-street parking is located in individual

driveways directly adjacent to the street. Some driveways are located in front of the houses and some pass to the side of the houses.

The architecture of the residences varies significantly. The south side includes architecture of the 1940's and '50's, including bungalow, cape, and traditional styles, and a church, with little uniformity in architectural styles. The north side consists of four newer and nearly identical raised ranches. Most of the residences on Clarke Street are painted white. As a whole the residential end of Clarke Street provides a variety of designs, due mostly to the vintage of the houses.

There is no definitive orientation of the architecture toward pedestrians versus automobiles. As the individual lots are small and narrow with little front yard space, automobile functions generally dominate the streetscape.

Spring Street Character

Spring Street (County Route 105) is a heavily traveled collector road located north of the project site. The portion of Spring Street between Prospect Street and Kings Street was assessed for this document. Spring Street is a two-lane road with paved shoulders and painted pavement markings (i.e., center line and shoulders). It is paved and in good condition. Uses along this portion of Spring Street are predominantly single family residential. No on-street parking is provided for on this portion of Spring Street.

There are no sidewalks on Spring Street. No pattern of street trees exists, however there are numerous large trees along with shrub hedges, fences and stone walls located along the roadway that frame the street to some extent. There are street lights (conventional municipal-style overhanging lamps) collocated with overhead wires on utility poles. No pedestrian amenities were observed on Spring Street.

The site layouts for all of the house lots orient the houses toward Spring Street. No uniform build-to line is evident on the studied portion of Spring Street and most house lots have usable front yard space. Front yard building setbacks are estimated to range from 30 feet to well over 100 feet. Most of the houses have garages, which vary in orientation; some face the street, some face the side, some are detached in the rear of the site, and some are attached to the houses. Off-street parking is located in individual driveways generally set off from the street. Some driveways are located in front of the houses while some pass to the side of the houses.

The architecture of the residences on this section of Spring Street varies significantly. Generally, the architecture reflects styles of the 1960's and '70's, including modern and traditional styles, with little uniformity in architectural styles, colors or materials. As a whole, the residences on this portion of Spring Street provide a variety of architectural designs that suit the variety of site settings and varied topography of the area.

There is no definitive orientation of the architecture toward pedestrians versus automobiles. As the individual lots vary considerably in size, most all with usable front yard space, pedestrian functions generally dominate the house sites and automobile functions generally dominate the streetscape.

Freeland Street Character

Freeland Street (County Route 40) is a heavily traveled collector road located east of the project site. The portion of Freeland Street between Forshee Street and the Village Line at the County Heritage Trail was assessed for this document. Freeland Street is a two-lane road with paved shoulders and painted pavement markings (i.e., center line and shoulders). It is paved and in good condition. Uses along this portion of Freeland Street are single family residential. No on-street parking is provided for on this portion of Freeland Street.

There are no sidewalks on Freeland Street. No pattern of street trees exists, however there are numerous large trees along the roadway that frame the street to some extent. There are street lights (conventional municipal-style overhanging lamps) collocated with overhead wires on utility poles. No pedestrian amenities were observed on Freeland Street.

The site layouts of the house lots orient some of the houses toward Freeland Street, and others are oriented with the rear of the houses toward Freeland Street (fronting on Pearsall Drive). No uniform build-to line is evident on the studied portion of Freeland Street and most house lots have usable front or rear yard space adjacent to the road. Front yard building setbacks are estimated to range from 30 feet to well over 100 feet. Some of the homes are screened from Freeland Street by vegetation or stockade screen fencing. Many of the houses have garages, which vary in orientation; some face the Freeland Street, some face the side; some are detached, and some are attached to the houses. Off-street parking is located in individual driveways generally set far off from the street.

The architecture of the residences on this section of Freeland Street varies. Generally, the architecture reflects styles of the past four decades, including modern and traditional styles, with little uniformity in architectural styles, colors or materials. As a whole, the residences that face the street on this portion of Freeland Street provide a variety of architectural designs that suit the variety of site settings and varied topography of the area. The houses that back onto Freeland Street have less variety of architectural style, color and materials and are noticeably placed uniformly on smaller, same-sized lots without benefit of the spatial relationship to the natural environment that is evident on other larger lots.

There is no definitive orientation of the architecture toward pedestrians versus automobiles. As the individual lots vary considerably in size, most all with usable yard space, pedestrian functions generally dominate the house sites and automobile functions dominate the streetscape.

Forshee Street Character

Forshee Street is a dead end local road located immediately south of the project site. Forshee Street is a narrow two-lane road with no shoulders or painted pavement markings (i.e., center line). It is paved and in moderately good condition. Uses along Forshee Street are single family residential. No on-street parking is provided for on Forshee Street.

There are no sidewalks on Forshee Street. No formal pattern of street trees exists, however there are numerous large trees along with shrub hedges and fences located along the roadway that frame the street to some extent. There are street lights (conventional

municipal-style overhanging lamps) collocated with overhead wires on utility poles. No pedestrian amenities were observed on Forshee Street.

The site layouts for all of the house lots orient the houses toward Forshee Street. Overall, front yard building setbacks are estimated to range from 40 feet to 50 feet in a generally uniform built-to line. The house lots have small front yard space adjacent to the road, many of them with notable landscape treatment and a few are fenced. The lots are narrow so that side separations between houses are generally uniform and set close to each other. All houses have detached garages set to the rear of the lots. Off-street parking is located in individual driveways directly adjacent to the houses.

The architecture of the residences on Forshee Street varies little. Most of the houses are small, one-story buildings of 1950's to '60's vintage, while a few have been remodeled. The houses generally reflect uniformity in size and architectural style, with a variety of colors, materials, and architectural details.

While much of the streetscape accommodates vehicular circulation needs, the uniformity of the individual lots in layout and architecture, and variety of landscape treatments provide a distinct pedestrian-scale setting that dominates the streetscape. As a whole, Forshee Street presents a unique street atmosphere.

Summary of Neighborhood Character

In summary, the neighborhood that immediately surrounds the project site displays a variety of housing styles and settings that is considered typical of suburban single family development in the region. This is particularly noticeable as relates to the variety of ages of homes in the site vicinity, where in-fill of newer houses contrasts significantly with the older house sites. None of the surrounding neighborhood is indicative of a streetscape experience that provides a sense of uniformity in style and character, along with a variety of architectural and landscape details, thereby providing a prototype for new development on the subject site.

3.10.2 Multi-family Streetscapes

In addition to assessing the single-family development immediately surrounding the project site, three multi-family development projects located in the Village were also assessed using the same criteria as outlined above. These projects are located in the southeastern section of the Village of Monroe.

Fitzgerald Court Development

The Fitzgerald Court project is an older multi-family development laid out around a central loop roadway with a single point of access from Route 17M. The six buildings are situated around the perimeter of a rectangular loop road that surrounds a central parking court.

Fitzgerald Court is a two-lane curbed road. It is paved and in moderately good condition. There are no provisions for on-street parking although it is wide enough to accommodate some on-street parking. There is a sidewalk system that follows the perimeter of Fitzgerald

Court in front of the buildings. A pattern of street trees exists around the central parking court area. There are street lights (conventional municipal-style overhanging lamps) located on individual wood poles. Other utilities are placed underground. No pedestrian amenities were observed in the Fitzgerald Court development other than the looped sidewalk system.

A uniform build-to line is evident on Fitzgerald Court of approximately 40 feet from the curb line. The site layout for all of the residential buildings is very uniform, with all buildings oriented toward Fitzgerald Court and the central parking court in a rectangular layout. Front yards of the units are generally landscaped with shrubs. Each unit has a short driveway and garage facing the street. Given the proximity of the buildings to the street and the areas occupied by the driveways, there is no usable front yard space provided. Off-street parking is located in individual unit driveways directly adjacent to the street, as well as in the central parking court.

The architecture of the six buildings varies little. The buildings are nearly identical in architectural style with some variation in roof heights between units, and minor variation in facade colors and materials among the buildings. The building facades are straight without horizontal variation between the units. The buildings are generally painted off-white with dark wood accent trim. As a whole, the Fitzgerald Court development provides an uninteresting streetscape experience due to the rigid uniformity of the buildings and their landscape setting.

The streetscape in this development is oriented toward automobiles. Automobile functions generally dominate this streetscape.

Pine Ridge Development

The Pine Ridge project is a relatively new multi-family development laid out along a central roadway, Lois Lane, with access from Still Road (County Route 19) and from Reed Road, a Village road. The buildings are situated on both sides of the central through road and along the perimeter of a loop road that surrounds a common recreation facility.

Lois Lane is a two-lane curbed road of ample width to accommodate some on-street parking. It is paved and in good condition, with a painted center line. On-street parking is provided for in defined parking areas off of the roads in several locations about the development. There is a sidewalk system that follows the internal roads in front of the buildings. No street trees exist. A variety of landscaping exists in front yards of the units, including shade trees, evergreen trees and shrubs. There are street lights (conventional municipal-style overhanging lamps) located on individual wood poles. Other utilities are placed underground. Pedestrian amenities observed in the Pine Ridge development consisted of the looped sidewalk system and the central recreation facility.

A uniform build-to line is evident in Pine Ridge of approximately 40 feet from the curb line. The site layout for all of the residential buildings is very uniform, with all buildings oriented toward the street. Each unit has a short driveway and garage facing the street. Off-street parking is located in individual unit driveways directly adjacent to the street. Given the proximity of the buildings to the street and the areas occupied by the driveways, there is little front yard space provided.

Usable yard space occurs at the sides and rear of most buildings. The street and building layout follows the contour across a hillside that has been cleared of all indigenous vegetation. Modest landscaping has been planted in front of the buildings in a uniform manner.

The position of this site in the landscape creates a prominent visual feature overlooking a portion of the Village of Monroe. Public views from locations below the site reveal large expanses of this development without benefit of visual buffering from natural vegetation or new landscape treatment.

The architecture of the buildings does not vary. The buildings are identical in architectural style, color, materials, and architectural details, with minor variation in roof heights between units on some buildings. All of the front building facades have identical variations by the use of projecting garages. The buildings are all painted off-white with reddish shutters. As a whole, the Pine Ridge development provides an uninteresting streetscape experience due to the rigid uniformity of the buildings and their landscape setting.

With the exception of the pedestrian walkway system in this development, automobile functions dominate this streetscape.

Timber Hills Development

The Timber Hills project is a relatively new multi-family development laid out along a central roadway, Reed Road, with access from Route 17M and from Winchester Drive, a Village road. The buildings are situated in clusters on short dead end access driveways with parking for each cluster centralized off of the driveway. Reed Road is a Village road that provides access to pre-existing single family residences north and south of the project development.

Reed Road and an internal access roadway are two-lane curbed roads that climb the topography in a winding configuration. These roads are paved and in good condition. No on-street parking is provided for on these roads. There is a sidewalk system that follows the internal roads and connects to sidewalks that circulate around each parking pod in front of the buildings. No pattern of street trees exists in this development except in the vicinity of the community recreation facility located on Reed Road. A variety of new landscaping exists in the yards between the units and the streets, including shade trees, evergreen trees and shrubs. Additionally, groves of indigenous woods cover has been retained between building clusters in several locations. There are street lights (conventional municipal-style overhanging lamps) located on individual wood poles along the main streets. Contemporary pole lamps are located within the parking pods. Other utilities are placed underground. Pedestrian amenities observed in the Timber Hills development consisted of a continuous sidewalk system, community bulletin boards, tot lots, and a common recreation facility.

The site layout for the residential buildings varies significantly from cluster to cluster, largely in response to the hilly topography. While all buildings are oriented toward the central parking area within each cluster, the orientation of front facades of units varies from building to building. No uniform build-to line is evident. Off-street parking for each unit is provided in the exterior parking pod, along with visitor parking. No garages exist in this development. Usable yard space occurs at the sides and rear of most buildings.

While the street layout climbs the contours on this hillside, the building clusters are generally placed on the contour, providing limited vistas out from the hillside. The landscape position of portions of this development potentially creates a prominent visual feature overlooking a portion of the Village of Monroe. However, due to the sensitive placement of building clusters and preservation of significant natural woods cover, public views from locations below the site reveal only small portions of buildings in this development.

The architecture of the buildings does not vary significantly in facade treatment. The buildings are very similar in architectural style, color, materials, and architectural details. The buildings are all painted medium gray with little architectural detail. Facades viewed from within the parking pod appear similar. Notable variations in architectural appearance *between* clusters are achieved, however, 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 makes the Timber Hills development an interesting streetscape experience.

While much of the streetscape accommodates vehicular circulation needs, the variety of architectural settings and landscape treatments provide a distinct pedestrian-scale setting in this development that dominates the streetscape. As a whole, Timber Hills presents an optimal blend of a built environment and the natural landscape.

Summary of Multi-Family Character

In summary, the three existing multi-family developments assessed in the Village of Monroe display housing styles and settings that demonstrate a range of development types possible. Given the general size of multi-family buildings, extensive land clearing and reconfiguration of the land is often necessary to accommodate such development. The position of the project within the natural landscape therefore plays a large role in the visual appearance of the built project, both from within and from off-site locations.

These three assessments demonstrate that each project has a unique character with numerous contributing factors that each affect its overall visual character. Each of the evaluated projects provides clues of a streetscape experience that could provide a sense of uniformity in style and character, along with variety in architectural and landscape details, thereby providing a prototype for new development.

3.10.3 Potential Impacts on Community Character and Proposed Mitigation

Analysis of the Character of the Proposed Project

The Hidden Creek project is proposed as a multi-family development laid out along a central roadway with access from County Route 40. The buildings are proposed to be situated in clusters on narrow parking loops with off-street parking for each unit provided in individual driveways and garages. Accessory parking is provided in small areas taken off of the parking loops. The main access road has been designed to provide vehicular access with no on-street parking as well as wide enough to provide safe pedestrian circulation between the building clusters.

The internal roadways in this project will be two-lane curbed roads that follow the topography in a gentle looping configuration. All roads will be paved. Sidewalks are proposed around the interior loop of Hidden Creek Road. A pattern of street trees is proposed to provide shade and uniformity to the landscape setting. A hierarchy of landscaping is envisioned in the yards between the units and the streets, including shade trees, evergreen trees and ornamental shrubs. Additionally, groves of indigenous woods cover will be retained between building clusters in several locations. Utilities are proposed to be placed underground. The recreation center that will include a clubhouse and swimming pool, playground area, and area for court games has been designed for a central location in the development that will provide a pedestrian amenity for all residents to use.

The site layout for the residential buildings will vary from cluster to cluster, largely in response to the sloping topography of the project site. While all buildings are oriented toward the loop road within each cluster, the orientation of front facades of units is designed to vary as viewed from the main access roadway. Utilizing a generally uniform build-to line of 25 to 30 feet, each unit facade will be stepped from its neighbor to provide architectural interest to the buildings.

While the street layout gently follows the slope of this site, the buildings have generally been placed at similar elevations within each cluster, with areas between clusters largely undisturbed to distinguish the clusters and limit wide views of adjoining clusters of buildings within the project. There is no landscape position within this development that would potentially create a prominent visual feature from any off-site view point. Due to the placement of building clusters and preservation of significant natural woods cover, public views of this project from locations off-site can be expected to reveal only small portions of buildings in this development.

Overall, the architecture of the buildings will not vary significantly in facade treatment. The buildings are designed to be similar in architectural style, color, materials, and architectural details. The buildings will be painted a natural earthen color with simple architectural detail. Facades as viewed from within the parking loop will appear similar, with individual units distinguished by different front door color and minor differences in architectural details. Brick Facing will be incorporated into the design of the exteriors of the sixplex structures to provide for additional variety. Belgian block will be used the curbing to enhance the overall look of the project.

Notable variations in architectural appearance *between* clusters will be achieved, however, 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.

The streetscape has been designed to accommodate both vehicular and pedestrian circulation needs in a variety of architectural settings and landscape treatments to provide an optimal blend of a built environment and the natural landscape. The building design, site layout, and streetscape design considerations described above comprise an integral design without need for mitigating measures. It is expected that this project will display similar attributes to many of the positive aspects of architectural and streetscape treatment described above for the Timber Hills development.

Similar to other multi-family developments studied in the Village, the Hidden Creek development will include sidewalks. Usable yard space will occur at the sides and rear of most buildings, and the layout of the building clusters is designed in response to topography with groves of existing trees preserved between clusters.

It has been the applicant's experience that the use of front yards in multi-family projects such as this is quite limited. Generally, people will limit their activities to garage/driveway/entrance areas and common open areas and since most outside areas will be maintained by the homeowner's association, there is not a sufficient sense of personal "ownership" to promote significant activities in the front yard areas, even when they are sized larger than this project.

Also similar to other developments (single-family or multi-family), Hidden Creek will involve regrading of the property and removal of trees, a necessary action to prepare a site for buildings and roads. Unlike typical single family development, a community recreation facility is proposed to serve the recreational needs of this project's residents.

This project proposes garages, in large part, because market demand for this type of unit warrants the provision of garages. Garages attached to the unit allows residents convenient areas for storage (reducing unsightly storage outside), a place to park and maintain cars and protect them from the elements, and a potential work area for hobbies or home maintenance.

Overall, this development project is not envisioned to cause significant adverse impact to the existing character of the community and surrounding neighborhoods. The residential nature of this project will be compatible with the surrounding residential development. This expectation is not unreasonable for a number of reasons, the foremost being the future buildings' orientation toward an interior private road network and their setback from other existing residences.

The site development will not be visible to passersby on Freeland Street, nor to passersby on Forshee Street, and will not contrast sharply with any adjacent residential development as none is close enough to make such a contrasting experience likely.

Excessive Similarity

Given the variety of building settings proposed in this project, there is not expected to be an excess of identical architectural or landscape features from any viewpoint either within the project or from off-site. The buildings are intended to display a uniform character for the project as a whole while providing a variety of architectural details between the buildings as viewed from any particular location. Proposed landscape treatment will further distinguish one portion of the project from another.

The proposed development will not have excessive similarity to any other structure within 500 feet of the project site, or to any other structure within the same permit application, so as to be detrimental to the desirability, property values or development of the surrounding area, as cited in Village Code §200-92.

Excessive Dissimilarity

By the nature of a multi-family development project, building styles and sizes, and site layout needs can vary considerably from typical single family residential development. Given the varied ages of existing developed properties in the site vicinity, these differences can be even more pronounced when compared to a modern development project.

The architecture proposed for the Hidden Creek development is intended to display a uniform character for the project as a whole. Some contrast to the surrounding development in this area is inevitable. However, design features such as unit size, height of building, and other features such as building materials and architectural details are expected to be similar to many of the existing residences in the immediate site vicinity. Thus, the proposed development will not have excessive dissimilarity to any other structure within 500 feet of the project site so as to be detrimental to the desirability, property values or development of the surrounding area, as cited in Village Code §200-92.

Inappropriateness

As described above, the neighborhood that immediately surrounds the project site displays a variety of housing styles and settings that particularly relates to the variety of ages of homes in the site vicinity, where in-fill of newer houses contrasts significantly with the older house sites. With the possible exception of Forshee Street, none of the surrounding neighborhood is indicative of a streetscape experience that provides a sense of uniformity in style and character, along with a variety of architectural and landscape details. Forshee Street might provide a prototype for new multifamily development, were it not for being a development of single family homes on individual lots.

As described above for existing multifamily developments in the Village, the housing style is denser building arrangements, where parking is provided either in parking lots or in driveways to attached, front facing garages. There are no known examples of multifamily projects with detached rear alley garages in the Village.

A pedestrian scale environment naturally occurs in these developments by virtue of the proximity of residences to each other, parking, and recreation facilities.

Multi-family developments typically provide usable yard space to the side and rear of buildings as opposed to front yards that exist in single-family developments. Thus, the inherent differences in the housing style of multi-family developments to single family house lots thereby differentiate the proposed development from its surrounding neighborhoods.

These comparisons, however, do not mean that a new multi-family development such as Hidden Creek would be inappropriate within its site setting. The Hidden Creek development is envisioned to be a unique addition to the Village that will address significant housing needs in the region and will complement the other pre-existing uses in the area. This project is not expected to have an adverse effect on the established character of the immediate area or neighboring areas of the community as a result of its design features, character (style), or form of architecture, as cited in Village Code §200-92. This expectation is not unreasonable for a number of reasons, the foremost being the future buildings' orientation toward an interior private road network and their setback from existing residences. In this regard, the site will

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not be visible to passersby on Freeland Street, will not be apparent to passersby on Forshee Street and will not contrast sharply with any adjacent resident development as none are close enough to make such a contrasting experience likely.