

# LIVING AT DEERPATH FARM

May 2005

Deerpath Farm is a *conservation community* — a neighborhood in which the preservation of Nature is of primary importance. Nearly five years of planning has gone into its layout and design. Its 200 acres of woods, wetlands, and meadows have been cared for and restored over the last 20 years.

This paper briefly explains to you the landscape goals of Deerpath Farm.

## **What is a conservation community?**

Conservation or “green” development has gained national attention in the last decade as builders, realtors, and local officials seek both to provide development opportunities and ensure the local environment is preserved. Thus a residential conservation development such as Deerpath Farm will integrate roads, housing (including home grounds), and the natural landscape as much as possible. It is this close interdependence that makes living in a conservation community a special responsibility and challenge.

## **What benefits do you receive from living at Deerpath Farm?**

Conservation development allows you to live in harmony with Nature. Whereas in other communities Nature may be relegated to an unused portion of the property — or banished from the site entirely — in a conservation development Nature comes literally up to your front door. Nature is as near as a relaxing stroll along the streets or paths of Deerpath Farm as you wander through its wetlands, woodlands and prairies. You are able to both participate in and take enjoyment from the preservation of the landscape.

## **How is Deerpath Farm preserved?**

The Deerpath Farm conservation development has gone to great lengths to restore the structure and functions of its local natural areas. Their continuing health and flourishing will depend greatly on the care you give this land, including your own home grounds. Here are descriptions of the various types of land preservation techniques used at Deerpath Farm:

### *Conservation Easements and Rights-of-Way*

About 140 acres of the 200-acre farm are under a permanent *conservation easement*. This means that these lands can never be developed but must instead be maintained in their natural state. The Lake Forest Open Lands Association is the holder of this conservation easement, while the Deerpath Farm Homeowners’ Association owns the land itself.

There are also conservation easements on portions of the residential lots themselves in order to protect local views and landscape resources. Open Lands holds these easements as well, while the land itself is owned by the individual homeowners on the affected lots. These easements are effectively part of the larger nature preserve at Deerpath Farm.

The Lake Forest Open Lands Association, as the holder of all these easements and the preserve manager, is responsible for their protection and care, with funding coming from a transfer tax.

There are also *landscape buffer easements*. These are to be found on all lots along the main roadway, and extend 30' into the lots from the road right-of-way itself. They are indicated on each lot and are created to help the homeowner maintain a private, natural screen between the house and the public street. The homeowner is responsible for the maintenance and improvement of these areas as outlined in the Deerpath Farm covenants.

Lastly, the *roadway right-of-way* — 15' on either side of the paved street — is to be restored and maintained in a natural condition once home building is complete. Currently it is being maintained in mowed grass due to the effects of continuing construction. The homeowners' association will fund this work, which will be done at the appropriate time under the direction of Lake Forest Open Lands.

### **Additional Preservation Efforts**

The design of Deerpath Farm has also placed restrictions on certain activities on the homesites as well, again to help preserve and foster the environment. The house sizes are controlled to minimize impacts on surrounding woodlands and meadows. Lawn areas are somewhat restricted, as are the uses of lawn chemicals and fertilizers. Underground sprinkler systems are also prohibited.

### **What part do you play in preserving and improving the conservation character of my community?**

The greatest threats to the natural areas of Deerpath Farm come from what seem like the most innocuous sources — the everyday activities we each engage in around our house and yard. It is important that you understand the effects your actions can have on the Deerpath Farm environment.

The *FOUR* greatest potential disruptions to the forests and natural areas in your community are:

- excessive amounts of water runoff and saturated soils
- excessive use of lawn chemicals and fertilizers

- excessive use of auto-related materials, such as de-icers and car-washing detergents
- the introduction or encouragement of weedy and non-native plants

Let's take a look at each of these four cornerstones to your knowledge of living at Deerpath Farm.

*Excessive Amounts of Water:*

Many of the plant species living at Deerpath Farm are extremely sensitive to moisture changes in the soil. This is particularly true of many of the oaks that make up the backbone of the community's forest. When a house is built in the forest, there is always the challenge of increased water runoff from roofs, driveways, and other impervious surfaces. This runoff is channeled and managed as best as possible during the design process.

However, traditional lawn irrigation systems can cause water overload over large areas. This saturation is difficult to notice and, unlike natural weather events such as rain or thunderstorms, goes on continuously during the entire growing season. Over time this saturation can lead to tree decline and death. Therefore the use of irrigation systems is not allowed at Deerpath Farm.

Other runoff will be routed into "rain gardens." Rain gardens are small areas on each lot where water runoff is concentrated to allow it to percolate back into the ground. The garden is planted with native wetland and prairie followers and grasses. Rain gardens provide food and shelter for many birds, butterflies and other helpful insects — such as those that eat mosquitoes!

*Excessive Use of Lawn Chemicals and Fertilizer*

Traditional lawn chemicals, particularly broad-leaf weed killers used on dandelions and other plants, can cause damage to native species as well. These chemicals may affect oaks and other native trees, the roots of which feed very close to the ground surface.

Lawn fertilizer can also cause problems. Its powerful concentrations may run off the lawn, upsetting nutrient balances in natural areas. The primary component of these fertilizers is nitrogen and phosphorous. Both of these promote the growth of undesirable and non-native vegetation, particularly in wetlands and streams where the fertilizer dissolves in water.

Fertilizer is also very successful at getting a lawn to grow vigorously. However this lush growth directly competes with native tree roots for water and nutrients.

Deerpath Farm seeks to limit the impacts of these materials by

- Promoting the use of native and non-native grasses adaptable to the existing Deerpath Farm environment and needing little or no fertilizer.
- Limiting the size of lawns to make their management by hand weeding and hand watering more practical.
- Encouraging the use of native wildflowers and shrubs in areas usually converted to lawn.

#### *Excessive Use of Auto-Related Materials*

Washing the car at home may seem harmless enough, but the detergents are usually high in phosphorous, similar to a load of laundry. When the car is rinsed off the waste water — unlike laundry water which goes to a sanitary sewer — runs directly off onto the street and then into local wetlands, again causing problems for proper nutrient balance.

Deerpath Farm recommends washing the car at a car wash, where the runoff water is properly treated.

Road and driveway salts cause similar problems, as they all wash directly into local streams and wetlands and disrupt plant life. Deerpath Farm recommends the use of sand or non-chloride de-icers to minimize disruption in this manner.

#### *Introduction/Encouragement of Weedy and Non-Native Plants*

The Deerpath Farm covenants specifically prohibit the planting of (and also encourage the removal of) certain grasses, flowers, shrubs and trees which can harm the local environment. This harm is caused by the ability of these plants to multiply and spread rapidly, thereby crowding out native species.

Most people today are familiar with European buckthorn and, to a lesser extent, purple loosestrife, two European plants which have over-run our local landscape. Yet traditionally-accepted plants such as the Norway maple also cause problems, as its prolific seeds will easily germinate in the Deerpath Farm forests and cast dense shade which kills desirable native species.

### **How does my landscaping affect Deerpath Farm?**

#### *Working with Plants*

Now that you have an overview of how everyday activities can cause potential problems, you should apply as much thought to the planning of your home grounds as you do to the house itself. You need first to define and tell your landscape architect exactly what you seek on your home grounds.

The first step is to identify the uses and goals for your yard. You may wish to have lots of flowers, or a place to sit and enjoy the larger landscape. If you have a playset, or enjoy lawn sports such as croquet or frisbee, you may wish to have turf areas for these uses.

Features becoming more popular in conservation communities are bird feeding stations, butterfly and wildflower gardens, rock gardens, firewood storage places, and gardening/compost recycling areas.

Think about your landscape uses and goals, and then identify locations to satisfy these needs. Your landscape architect can then help you work out the design and details.

Lastly you should learn how to recognize unwanted plants such as garlic mustard, buckthorn, Japanese rose, etc. and keep your property free of them.

### **Working with Wildlife**

Before the Deerpath Farm community was created, many species of wildlife used it. These animals will still live in Deerpath Farm because of the conservation design, and new ones will come too. The way you landscape your yard will assist desirable native wildlife.

Did you know that a one-acre property dominated by lawn may contain 20-40 different kinds of plants, whereas a native oak savanna/prairie the same size may have up to 300 different plants, mosses, lichen, and ferns? This type of landscape offers much more food and shelter to the wildlife that depend on it.

However, wildlife can be troublesome too. High populations of deer and Canada geese are already a problem in suburban areas. A number of communities in the area already have control systems in place for these animals, and Deerpath Farm will too. Canada geese were rare in the area thirty years ago. Today, thanks to protection programs, they are too prolific. Their huge populations can damage the local environment and also, through their feces, spread contamination into your yard.

Likewise deer were almost absent from this region 50 years ago. However today their populations have exploded and they do serious damage to both natural areas and home grounds.

You can help with the above by following a few simple ideas:

- Do not feed Canada geese. Doing so encourages them to stay and forage in your neighborhood.
- Do not feed deer for the same reasons.

- Do not use landscape plants that deer like: for instance, any species of yew normally used in foundation plantings around houses.

### **Conclusion**

Deerpath Farm has been designed to work with Nature, but it is inevitable that the construction of houses and road will lead to changes in the local environment.

You can make a difference in the design and planting of your home grounds. The Deerpath Farm Pattern Book lays out ideas and principles that will help you design a home and grounds that will have the least impact on the overall community landscape. The Deerpath Farm Covenants further promote this approach in specific legal detail.

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