

Green Development **by Bruce G. Boncke, PE, President**

The planning, engineering and development industries, and the public have been trying to define terms like "Smart Growth", "Sustainable", and "Low Impact" for years, with little unified success. Now, we have GREEN. Well, at least it's a color we can recognize and that's a good start. Don't worry, I'm not going to talk about global warming, social engineering, or carbon footprints. I'll leave that to the experts and those that think they are. My focus on green, as you probably know, is on green land development issues. While much of the discussion on green is about buildings, manufacturing operations, energy use, products, etc., not enough emphasis is put on land use. Unfortunately, much discussion regarding green land use is to leave it alone and "forever wild" as the solution. I prefer a more business-like approach of "get it done right!"

The USGBC has long been recognized as the LEED(er) in the green design arena. However, even their program barely recognizes the land development perspectives, as now included in the LEED-ND Pilot program. Their overall program is also considered far too cumbersome and costly to apply to residential applications, where much of land development occurs.

In 2003, when I chaired the NAHB Land Development Committee, the National Association of Home Builders was developing their Green Building Guidelines. We decided it was time to develop site and land development criteria to incorporate into those guidelines. While many building issues are more intrinsic and science based, you can imagine the challenges in preparing land use and development guidelines that can be applied across the country. The criteria were included as an appendix to the NAHB Green Building Guidelines, which has been used by builders and developers for many years.

Through collaborative efforts between the NAHB, ANSI (American National Standards Institute) and ICC (International Codes Council), it was determined that a Green Building Standard for the Residential construction industry should be developed. My reward for the 2003 activity was to be appointed to the 42-person Consensus Committee, by ANSI, to develop the Standard and chair the Land Development Task Group. While it was an honor to do so, I have a word to the wise: Never agree to take on a task when you don't know the full scope, deadlines, meeting dates or time commitment for the task! Without belaboring the committee activities, I can assure you it was a very thorough process, including dealing with a considerable amount of public comments from around the country. Development of the Standards started in April 2007 and they were submitted to ANSI in May 2008. The committee just performed a reaffirmation vote, requested by ANSI. We anticipate the Standard will be approved and available in early 2009.

The most significant achievement of my involvement was to get the land development criteria into the body of the Standards, in two chapters; one for overall site design and one for individual lot design and construction. These chapters cover such issues as: site selection, project team, site design, resource conservation, solar orientation, slope disturbance, stormwater, density, mixed uses, construction activity and innovative practices. That's the short explanation! The process of developing the Standard was an interesting one; including my awakening as to how little the very intelligent people serving on the committee really knew about the issues of land development.

I will be very interested to watch the roll-out of this Standard when it is hopefully approved in 2009 and how communities react to it. Much of the criteria go against communities that profess to want green development, but don't support it in their codes or development attitudes. Quite simply, large lot zoning, "character of the area" rhetoric, wide over designed street widths, lack of high density inclusions and lack of innovative zoning techniques just won't cut it, with these Standards. It will be very interesting to see what communities will just talk Green and which will implement it. As a nexus to this Standard, the NYS Legislature and Governor have passed a Green Building Bill for residential housing that references use of this National Green Building Standard. Starting in 2010, there will be significant financial inducement for home buyers to seriously consider building to these standards. But, it all starts with the land and the community's willingness to truly go Green.

We have a presentation prepared on the land development chapters of this Standard, for use with NAHB, builder and community training. Let us know if we can help you.