

**COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

**for the**

**CITY OF FOREST HILLS, TENNESSEE**

**Adopted**

**December 12, 1991**

**by the**

**Planning and Zoning Commission**

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### INTRODUCTION

The City of Forest Hills (herein the "City" and sometimes "Forest Hills") is located on the southern border of Metropolitan Nashville, Davidson County (herein "Metro") generally centered on either side of Hillsboro Pike within six (6) miles of downtown Nashville. In addition to this advantageous location, the dramatic topography, wooded hillsides, streams and picturesque valleys have made the City very attractive for low density residential living. Since the City's formal incorporation in 1957, the primary concern of its government has been the protection of its residential character. Forest Hills is one of six (6) satellite cities in Metro that retained its own zoning powers when Metro was formed in 1963.

The City is a residential community. About 40 percent of the residential areas predate the 1957 incorporation. In 1990, 75 percent of the land area in the City was developed. Over the years the City has been able to protect its character, in spite of the fact that it has not had a comprehensive plan. Because its land has become increasingly developed, the City believes it critical to prepare a plan to enable it to deal with future development pressures in a predictable and positive manner.

The plan seeks to preserve the character of the City and its residential land uses and to provide a clear statement of the policies that will enable the City to accomplish the goals established by this Plan. The plan addresses the central theme of the City, preserving the City's character from two standpoints. The first is the overall community character of the City, focusing on density, landscaping and the design of developments. The second is the protection and conservation of natural features that provide the City with its name.

Most of the elements of the plan relate to these two major issues, however a third element of the plan addresses certain problems encountered over the years in dealing with individual landowners, parcel size and shape and the constraints on development. These range from rules governing the use of flag lots to non-conforming uses.

#### THE CHALLENGES

The first major problem that confronts the City as it matures is the pressure to rezone lands to permit higher densities and

intensities of land use. Two forces are at work: scarcity of undeveloped land and appreciation in values.

The second major problem with which the City must contend is the influence of development on the natural environment. Initially much development in the City took place on flat or moderately sloping lands. The natural vegetation on the hilltops and hillsides minimized rain water run-off. As development continued, more and more difficult sites were utilized creating in some instances unstable soil problems for both the homes placed on those soils and the homes downhill. In a few instances, destruction of the vegetative cover and the development of new impervious surfaces have created flooding and erosion problems on downstream properties.

Many of the City's original property owners own properties that are several times larger than the minimum lot sizes permitted in the zoning districts in which they are located. Development of these properties often create problems, the most common of which is a lack of adequate lot frontage. Some lots that have frontages meeting minimum ordinance standards have much larger lot areas. Many lots are much deeper than a normal minimum sized lot. It is often difficult to install a public street to serve such a development. There are serious concerns about private streets and flag lots which are often proposed for such properties.

Nonconforming lots, buildings and uses pose another challenge for the City. There are a number of such lots and structures that predate the City's incorporation and its zoning regulations. One of the nonconforming lots is a nonconforming commercial use. Zoning and land use controls must be enacted to address the land use and lot size concerns of the City and its citizens as those concerns relate to the preservation of the City's residential character.

## Chapter 2

### NATURAL RESOURCES

#### INTRODUCTION

The preservation of natural resources in the City is important for a variety of reasons. Some preservation issues are of a local nature and others are of an ecological nature. Flooding and unstable soils can threaten property and the health, safety, and welfare of the City's residents. Cutting and removal of trees and natural vegetation can increase water run off during rainstorms. Water quality and air quality are important to the ecological health of the City. Natural forest areas provide habitat for large and diverse animal and plant populations. The protection of the City's natural resources assists in preserving the residential character of the community.

#### NATURAL RESOURCE PRESERVATION GOALS

The following are the City's goals for the preservation of the City's natural resources:

- Goal: Protect and preserve the natural resources.
- Goal: Where resources cannot be totally protected, require mitigation to ensure that adverse impacts are minimized and that the impacts are contained on the property being developed.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING

Environmental planning recognizes that the first objective is to avoid, if possible, destroying natural resources.

Over fifty percent of the land in the City is located on fairly steep hills with extensive tree cover. A review of the soil maps prepared by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service indicates that the combination of soils and steep terrain could cause severe construction problems in most areas of the City. Some portions of the City have been developed on unstable soils. Slippage and drainage have occurred in some of those areas. In the past, the problems were manageable because many lots were big enough to accommodate the houses that were built on them and surrounding land remained undeveloped.

Landowner expectations about development and land values must take environmental concerns into account. There are a number of larger land areas and currently existing undeveloped lots in the City where future development is likely to be in conflict with the goal

of preserving the natural resources. The type of zoning adopted by the City should take into account natural resource features. Mitigation techniques should be available to avoid unfairly impacting land uses.

## RESOURCE CONSIDERATIONS

There are two basic resource problems in Forest Hills: those associated with storm water runoff and those associated with the hills. The combination of rainfall patterns and the topography in the City is such that there is very rapid runoff of storm water and very rapid rises of flood waters. The floodplains and floodways are two natural resource areas that need protection. The second set of resource values involve the hills. These include the hilltops, steep slopes, forests, and colluvial soils. Many of these areas pose problems of stability due to their fragile natures.

### Surface Water

The surface water system-related resource areas are floodplains, floodways, wetlands, stream buffer areas, slopes and forest cover. These natural resources are all important to two aspects of the water system: the conveyance of storm water and the quality of the surface water. Floodplains are those areas associated with streams that are inundated by storm water during a 100-year storm event. The floodway is that portion of the floodplain where water velocities are high and where the majority of the moving water flows. No development should be permitted in the flood way. Damage can occur to structures and, in severe storms, there is a threat to life as well. Development in the flood plain should be very limited.

Floodplains are not constant natural resource features. They change and increase as storm water runoff increases. Storm water runoff typically increases when pervious areas are replaced with impervious surfaces. Thus, as development occurs, a watershed's characteristics are altered. Not only does more water run off, but the rate at which it runs off is increased. The amount of rain needed to create runoff is decreased. The result is that the size of floodplain areas required is increasing.

Larger floodplains mean that great care must be taken throughout the watershed in order to manage the surface water runoff and to manage growth so as to reduce the degree to which development adversely affects floodplain levels. This is best done by managing development in the watershed to protect areas that are the most environmentally sensitive. Steep forested hillsides should be protected. The forest is the best land use to retard runoff. Natural forest cover should be preserved to the maximum extent possible.

The City is in the process of completing a drainage study of the Otter Creek watershed. The drainage study will help the City determine the potential degree of flooding, and the effects of development on flooding.

Preserving wooded areas or even open meadows is an excellent strategy for improving or maintaining water quality. These land uses have the lowest runoff rates and lowest pollutant loading rates of any land use types. Leaving portions of lots in a natural state is desirable.

## Hills

The City's name, Forest Hills, derives from its topography. The hills are the dominant visual feature of the City. The hills are also important natural features. Because of their slopes, hillside development can create problems downstream. Clearing vegetation and building impervious surfaces increases runoff. On steep wooded hillsides the water runs off in sheet flow until it is concentrated in streams. Development can divert water runoff away from its natural flow. The result is local flooding. Too much development of slopes or hilltops can alter the area's whole storm water regime.

The alteration of runoff creates problems in areas of Dellrose soils. Dellrose soils are unstable. Dellrose soils occur where various soils and rock have washed down the slope and accumulated over an impervious layer of rock or clay. Changes in moisture levels can lead to destabilization which results in the slippage of the soil. It may be dangerous to place a house on this type of soil since the soils normally cannot sustain the weight of a building without failure.

The area uphill from Dellrose soils is also a sensitive area. Increases in runoff up hill from unstable Dellrose soil areas can be responsible for saturating the soils and create the conditions needed for the soils to creep or slump.

Tree root systems help hold the soil and absorb moisture from the soil; this absorption helps keep the soil from becoming saturated. Disturbance of the trees and the soils causes unstable situations, especially if no mitigation methods are used.

Cutting the trees and moving the soils on steep hillsides can create problems for both the builder who is attempting to build on the property and the people who live downhill from the construction. Increased runoff can cause erosion and stability problems for the downhill resident because soils become saturated faster. A once stable situation may become unstable because of the change in the drainage pattern.

The steeper the slope of the land, the more important preserving the tree cover is. Cleared land erodes rapidly on steep slopes. Shallow soils are difficult to revegetate. Clearing steep areas results in increased runoff and heavier pollutant loads than clearing trees on flat land. The construction of a home on a steep slope may increase runoff.

#### NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION POLICIES

The City zoning ordinance will establish protection policies and standards. The standards shall be set forth in a table indicating the amount of land in any resource on a site that shall be protected as open space. The table will also indicate whether there may be some means of mitigating the resource when the standards would severely restrict a landowner's ability to obtain a beneficial use of his land. The combination of these two approaches--protection and, where essential, balancing the landowner's interest by permitting limited mitigation will help the City achieve its goal of protecting natural resources. The proposed standards are summarized in the table below. The City should also adopt an excavation and grading code to protect residents from soil erosion and storm water drainage problems due to poor construction techniques.

Table for  
RESOURCE PROTECTION STANDARDS

<u>Natural Resource</u>	<u>Required Level of Protection as Open Space</u>	<u>Mitigation Permitted</u>
Floodplain	100%	Y
Slopes over 20%	85%	Y**
Slopes 15-20%	70%	N*
Dellrose Soils		
Depth: greater than 3'	100%	N*
Depth: 0-3'	90%	Y
Wetlands	100%	Y
Forest	60%	Y
Drainageway	50%	Y

\* If located in an existing subdivision and these features exist on the lot, mitigation procedures shall be followed.

\*\* Mitigation procedures shall be followed for all lots with slopes over 20%.

## Chapter 3

### LAND USE AND COMMUNITY CHARACTER

#### COMMUNITY CHARACTER PRESERVATION GOALS

Preserving the character of the City is a critical goal. That character is what makes the City attractive to its residents and ensures that property values are protected.

**Goal:** Preserve the suburban estate and countryside residential character of the City.

In adopting a new zoning ordinance and subdivision regulations the City is attempting to achieve this goal.

#### COMMUNITY CHARACTER

There are three major classes of community character: urban, suburban, and rural. The suburban class is the most important to Forest Hills. There are two community character types in the suburban class: suburban estate and suburban. Some of the suburban estates have a rural character.

#### TYPE OF COMMUNITY

The community character types found in Forest Hills are the suburban class types and several of the rural class types. The urban class types are not representative of Forest Hills and are only briefly referenced here, for illustrative purposes, within the context of the overall community character system framework.

#### Urban Class Types

Urban character class has been divided into three character types: urban core, urban, and auto urban. An urban core would be the high rise area of downtown Nashville, while the old centers of Franklin or Columbia are urban. Urban character types normally require that a site is completely cleared of vegetation. Land coverage of the site by buildings and pavement is very high. None of the urban character types are found in Forest Hills. Further, the City does not desire to have any development of this type.

