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Putting the 'LID' on development

By [Carol Britton Meyer](#)/ cmeyer@cnc.com

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Low Impact Development protects the environment while reducing construction costs.

"LID is not business as usual," said Scott Horsley, president of Horsley, Witten Group, Inc. He spoke at a recent forum at Hingham Town Hall presented by the Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management and the Weir River Watershed Association. The meeting was attended by a number of Hingham and other South Shore residents, including town planners and other local officials.

"This is not sprawl," he said. "It's a different way of looking at things. There are a number of model bylaws out there, and other communities can implement their own."

In Massachusetts, development patterns based on conventional zoning and subdivision codes often result in "sprawl," involving the clearing and leveling of entire sites without regard for natural features, and the rapid discharge of stormwater from developed areas.

LID is a more sustainable land development approach that combines thoughtful site planning with "best management practices" to create projects that preserve open space, reduce impervious surfaces, increase groundwater recharge, improve stormwater management, lessen flooding, and include site-sensitive landscaping.

This is a more creative approach than conventional development, providing ways to improve site planning by identifying buildable areas and constraints within the natural or developed landscape. "What some would consider 'ugly' developments could be due to developers following existing town regulations," Horsley said.

He gave a slide presentation showing examples of LID developments in a number of Massachusetts towns and provided information about creating LIDs.

On the related point of the value of compact higher density development, Horsley gave the Pine Hills development in Plymouth as an example of a high-density project - eight units to an acre with shared driveways - that works. "These houses are going for \$1 million-plus," said Horsley. He further noted this dispels the common misconception that higher densities necessarily result in lower prices.

Horsley also showed examples of conventional subdivisions that have more pavement than green space.

Such large impervious areas prevent water from infiltrating into the ground, which normally replenishes groundwater supplies and supports nearby wetlands and streams during dry periods.

"Developers will continue to do things the conventional way until towns change their regulations," Horsley said.

LID encourages development in town centers that already have the necessary infrastructure in place in order to preserve existing open space. Incentives can be offered to developers who agree to do this.

LID also offers alternatives to standard manicured lawns, which require less watering but are still attractive.

"LIDs are better performing, look better, and have lower costs," said Horsley. "You can have your cake and eat it, too."

LID can be a tool for balancing development with the natural hydrology of a region and can help maintain stream baseflows, minimize loss of recharge to aquifers, maintain stream and wetland buffers, help address flood concerns, and reduce stormwater pollution from developments.

The Weir River Watershed Association, one of the groups hosting this meeting, is a nonprofit local environmental group committed to promoting awareness and

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stewardship of the Weir River watershed. This watershed, encompassing most of Hingham and part of Cohasset, was recently classified as stressed due to low water flows in the river.

Timothy Reardon, a regional planner at the Metropolitan Area Planning Council and a former Hingham High School student, emphasized the importance of collaboration among stakeholders, including local boards and commissions, departments of public works, police and fire departments, and developers and builders "to make this kind of development happen."

Marilyn McCrory of the Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management said LID is a "commonsense" approach to development which incorporates such features as raingardens to control flooding, grass swales (shallow drainage channels that slow the water flow and partially recharge groundwater and filter runoff), less asphalt, shared driveways, "green" roofs, narrower roadways, and collection of rain water from rooftops. "LIDs work with the natural topography," she said, noting that some grants are available for LID projects.

Michael Clark of the Norfolk Ram Group LLC in Plymouth and chairman of the Scituate Conservation Commission made a presentation about raingarden siting and other design and construction considerations. Raingardens are another word for the more complicated sounding term "bioretention," which uses slightly lower vegetated areas to collect, treat, and infiltrate rainwater. Overall, he said, the goal is to preserve the character of watersheds.

Clark pointed to Cohasset as a "community success story" when it comes to implementing some LID initiatives. These include a raingarden at the Lily Pond water treatment plant on King Street. This was designed to intercept parking lot flows to prevent them from discharging directly into the pond. This raingarden will be used as a tool to educate the community about some of the benefits provided by LID projects.

Additional Cohasset raingardens are planned for Pond Street in front of the high school; the north end of King Street at the entrance to the water department conservation property; at the end of Evergreen Lane; and at the bottom of Arrowwood Road.

For further information about LID, visit www.mapc.org/lid.

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