

## 4. PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

In the Neighborhood Model, parks and open space are considered part of the public realm. Because parks and open space fulfill such important functions, their quality, character, and location must be considered.

Seen in this light, parks and open space should be understood on a civic and environmental scale. At one end of the scale are the large environmental preserves and natural features identified early in the Master Planning process. These features include significant woodlands, stream valleys and floodplains, springs, wetlands, and other systems of steep slopes. At the other end of the scale are the small civic plazas, village squares, playgrounds, pocket parks and neighborhood greens. These spaces are within neighborhoods. In between these ends of the spectrum are areas like School yards, Commons, Meadows, and stream valley parks.

The parks and open space options in this section are not mutually exclusive. In fact, a mixture of types may be appropriate to serve different functions within the Neighborhood and the Development Area. These options are presented

in order, from the most natural to the most formal, from large to small, from active to passive. All can play a role in establishing the public realm of a neighborhood.

Regarding ownership, the Neighborhood Model suggests that some parks and open space will be publicly owned and others will be privately owned. While the County may take ownership of many of these public spaces, it is doubtful that the County will wish to own all of them. It is also likely that individual neighborhood associations will wish to own and maintain small neighborhood spaces as well as environmentally sensitive land. While all of the parks and open space options are meant to “appear” public, many will remain in private hands. The larger, regional park needs, established during the Master Planning process will likely be met through County acquisition, development, and maintenance.



*Figure 6:32 At Celebration, Florida, the requirement to provide a stormwater management facility becomes an opportunity to provide an open space amenity within a boulevard median.*

## The Greenway

**Definition:** A greenway is a corridor of open space that follows a natural feature such as a stream valley, floodplain, or swale. It may also follow the path of an abandoned road or railroad bed. It usually contains a path for pedestrians and/or bicyclists.

### Features:

- It can extend between villages and neighborhoods as well as through them, connecting the countryside to urban parks and squares.
- It is desirable that greenways lead to destinations.
- At narrower areas, buildings should front the greenway which may be framed by thoroughfares. At wider areas, buildings may back onto it. Where privacy is desired, screening should be provided at rear yards.
- Landscaping for greenways should be appropriate to the location. More formal landscaping would be expected within neighborhoods; more natural landscaping would be expected between neighborhoods.
- Greenways generally follow natural features but can begin and end at Centers in the urban area.

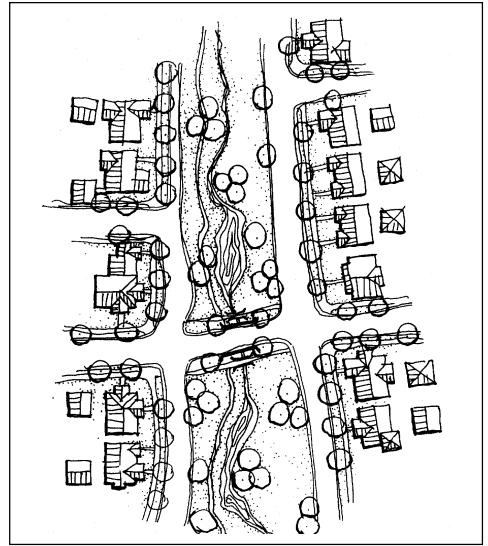


Figure 6:34 Example of a central greenway.

## The Greenbelt

**Definition:** A greenbelt is a continuous area of open space at the edge of Development Areas, communities, villages, or towns. It is used to separate Development Areas from Rural Areas by providing a “hard green edge.”

### Features:

- Greenbelts may contain environmental and agricultural preserves.
- Greenbelts may also be recreational areas, such as golf courses, regional parks, and playing fields.

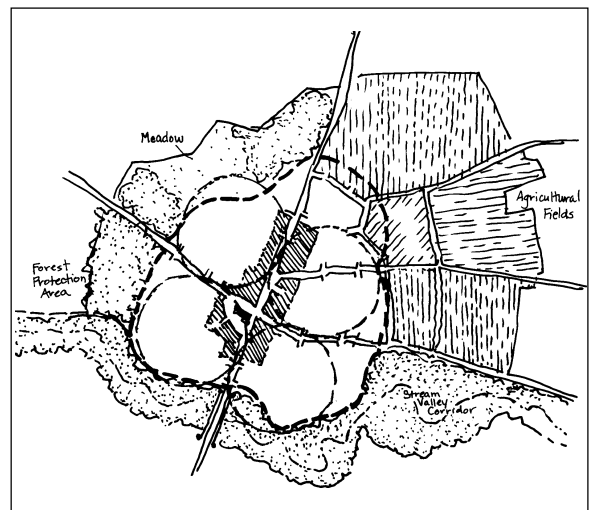


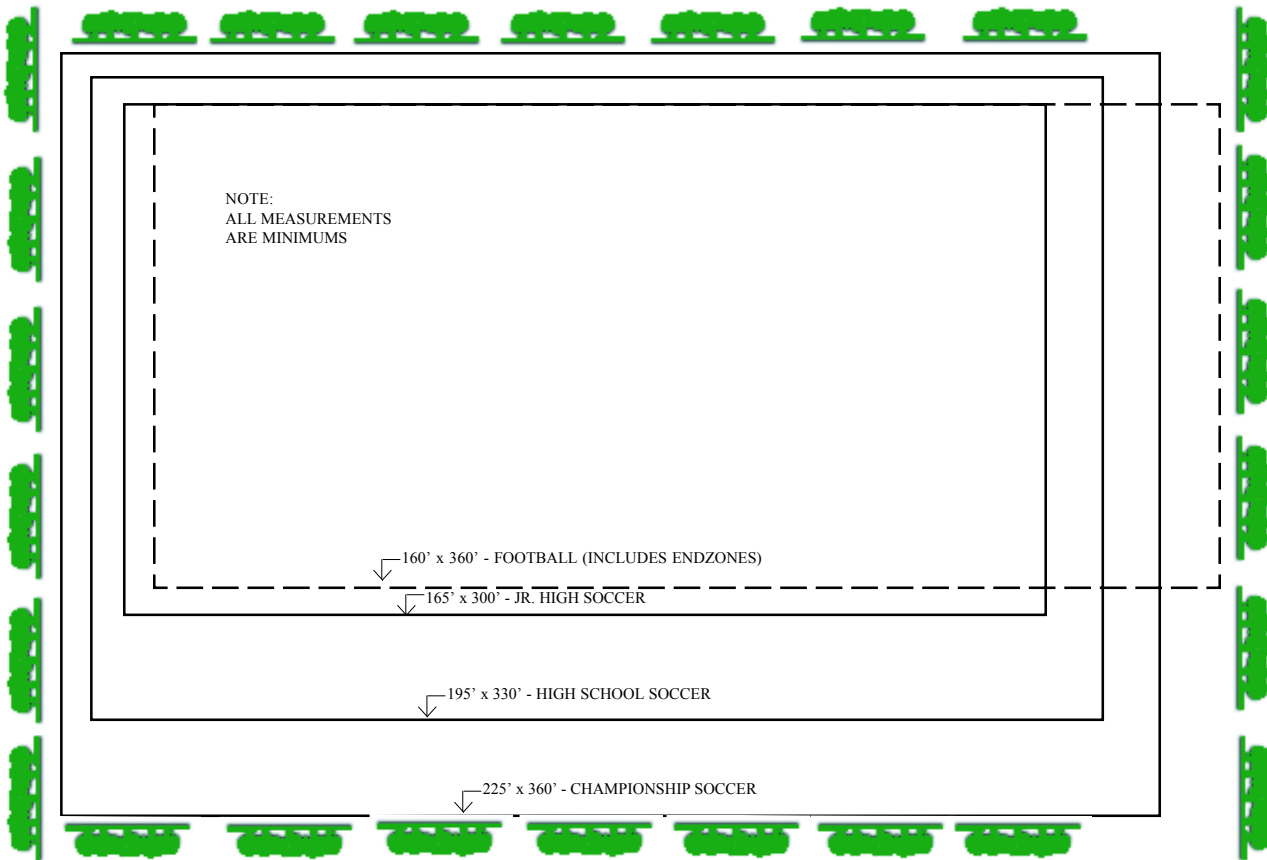
Figure 6:35 Example of a greenbelt surrounding a community.

## Recreational Playing Field

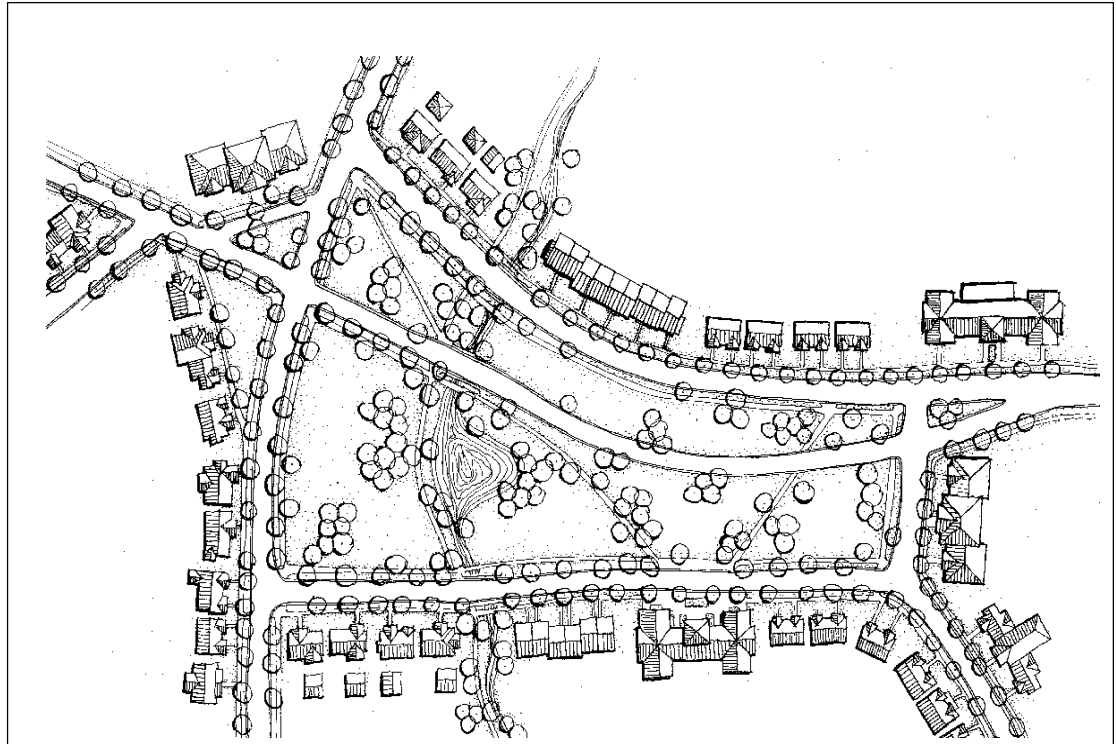
**Definition:** A recreational playing field is a public space dedicated to organized sports in a community such as baseball, softball, soccer, football, and lacrosse. The size of the playing field depends on the sport.

**Features:**

- Recreational playing fields can accommodate a single sport in a neighborhood or they can be grouped together in a regional complex.
- Recreational playing fields can be formally developed or large mowed areas. They can be scheduled formally or generally available.
- Recreational playing fields can be developed in association with schools or separate stand-alone facilities.
- Because of the potential size of a group of playing fields and the difficulty of obtaining large acreages for large complexes in the Development Areas, recreational playing fields need not be considered as only appropriate with school sites.
- Parking needs and restroom facilities for recreational playing fields should be considered with their development.



*Figure 6:36 Example of a recreational playing field.*



*Figure 6:37 Example of a community commons surrounded by homes.*

## The Commons

**Definition:** The Commons is a public park of 2 – 5 acres that is clearly defined, possibly irregular in shape, and available for civic gatherings and unstructured recreation. A mix of residential, commercial, and civic buildings front on all sides.

### Features:

- Its landscape consists primarily of grassy areas, paved or unpaved walks, and informally planted shade trees.
- A Commons may be designed around an existing natural feature such as a wetland or pond, a stand of mature trees or even a knoll or swale. It may sit upon slopes as steep as 20%.
- A Commons may incorporate defined recreation areas such as playing fields or playgrounds. A Commons could incorporate a small outdoor theater.
- Commons are surrounded primarily by retail and civic uses on the ground floor; however, residential uses clustered together also would be appropriate.
- A Commons may incorporate stormwater retention. In such situations, side slopes should be no greater than 5%.



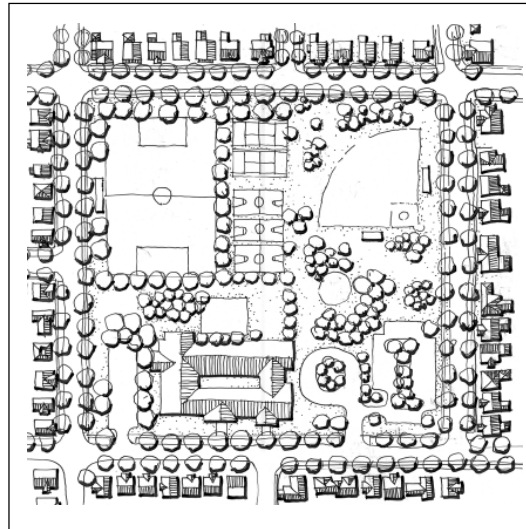
*Figure 6:38*

## The School Yard

**Definition:** A school yard is a public space generally associated with a school and usually under the control of the School Board. It is an open area specifically designed and equipped for larger scale recreation associated with schools such as baseball, soccer, or football.

### Features:

- School yards can provide recreational areas for neighborhoods when school is not in session.
- School yards and large recreational playing fields, where appropriate, should be separate. School yards are not expected to provide the only playing fields for recreational needs of the surrounding neighborhoods.
- Because of the predominance of developable sites in the Development Area that are too small to accommodate larger school yards, small school yards can help increase school site availability.
- Development of small school yards in association with schools can help reduce the amount of grading associated with large sites, and promote walking to school.



**Figure 6:39**  
*Illustration of a schoolyard.*

## The Meadow

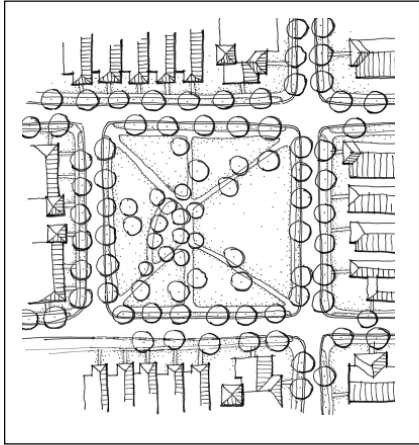
**Definition:** A meadow is a public space for unstructured recreation. Meadows and heaths were once under cultivation prior to becoming part of a Development Area.

### Features:

- Meadows can be preserved on a developed site by clustering development in one portion of the site and leaving a portion of the land undeveloped.
- Landscaping is usually informal and consists of native plants and grasses that require minimal maintenance.
- Meadows may be linked to Greenways, Greens, or be placed adjacent to School yards.



**Figure 6:40**  
*A Meadow adjoining a residential area*



**Figure 6:41** Example of a block which functions largely as public open space.

## The Square

**Definition:** The Square is a public space usually no larger than a block at the intersection of significant thoroughfares used primarily for civic purposes. Buildings front it on all sides.

### Features:

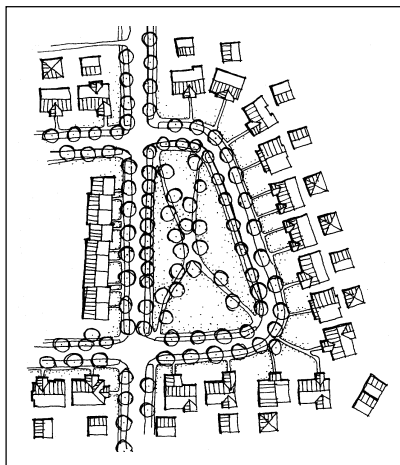
- Its landscape consists of lawns, paved walks, trees, and civic buildings. All of these features are formally disposed and require regular maintenance.
- Generally, squares are relatively flat with slopes no greater than 6%.
- On occasion, a square may abut Greens or a Greenway. It may provide a civic terminus to a natural feature.
- Squares may be surrounded by buildings with commercial or residential uses on the ground floor.

## The Green

**Definition:** The Green is a defined open space within a neighborhood or block for unstructured recreation. Building facades surround it.

### Features:

- Its landscape consists primarily of grassy areas and paved or unpaved walks and informally planted shade trees. It requires minimal maintenance.
- A Green may be designed around an existing natural feature such as a wetland or pond, a stand of mature trees, or even a knoll or swale and it may sit upon slopes as steep as 20%.
- A Green may also provide the terminus for a Greenway or provide an edge to a Meadow.
- Greens are surrounded primarily by buildings with residential uses on the ground floor; however, buildings with retail and civic uses clustered together are also appropriate.
- Like a Commons, a Green may incorporate stormwater management techniques.



**Figure 6:42** Example of a neighborhood green surrounded by streets.

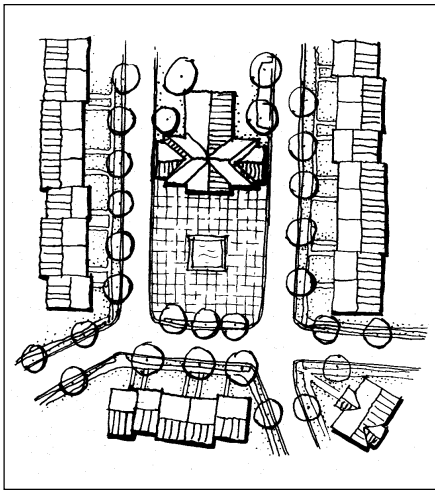


Figure 6:43 Illustration of a plaza adjacent to a commercial area.

### The Plaza

**Definition:** A Plaza is a public space that is generally less than half the size of a block located at the intersection of important thoroughfares. It is devoted to civic uses and commercial activity and is surrounded by buildings on all sides.

**Features:**

- Its landscape is composed primarily of durable pavement and trees formally planted within the paving, such as in grates. Little maintenance is required.
- Plazas are flat, except in rare circumstances.
- On occasion, Plazas may be open on one end towards a view.
- Plazas are dominated by commercial and civic activity on the ground floor.

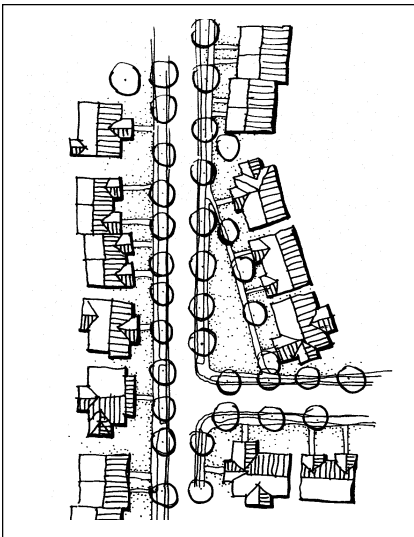


Figure 6:45 Example of a neighborhood green surrounded by streets.

### The Pocket Park

**Definition:** A pocket park is a small park that often is a piece of leftover space that a conventional suburban development would have privatized or placed into someone’s backyard.

**Features:**

- A Pocket Park’s shape varies, but it is always less than 1/2 block in length.
- Landscape features of a Pocket Park will vary.
- Pocket parks can contain tot lots or be passive park areas.
- Maintenance is performed privately if owned by a Homeowners Association. If the space fronts on a major thoroughfare, it is maintained publicly.



Figure 6:44 A small pocket park in Kentlands, Maryland

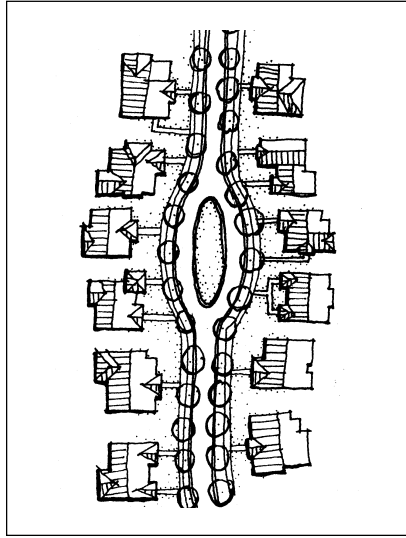


Figure 6:46 Illustration of an eyebrow park splitting a street.

### The Eyebrow

**Definition:** An Eyebrow is a green space created by the splitting of a street. The space becomes an occupiable area with one-way traffic on each side.

**Features:**

- The Eyebrow often accommodates a natural feature such as steep terrain or a significant tree.
- It may require special approval by VDOT.
- Landscape features may vary.

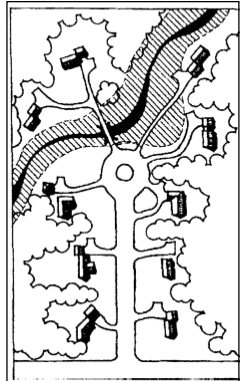
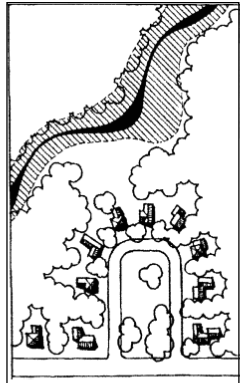


Figure 6:47 Illustration of a Close above and a cul-de-sac below to show how a Close can be used as a public space.

### The Close

**Definition:** A Close is a Green surrounded by a driveway or a narrow street. Like a cul-de-sac, it provides vehicular access to several buildings; however, it also provides a socially useful green space that is visually accessible to the neighborhood.

**Features:**

- Length of a Close can vary, but it should not exceed the standards for the lengths of cul-de-sacs. Width is determined by standard turning radius requirements.
- Landscape features may vary.