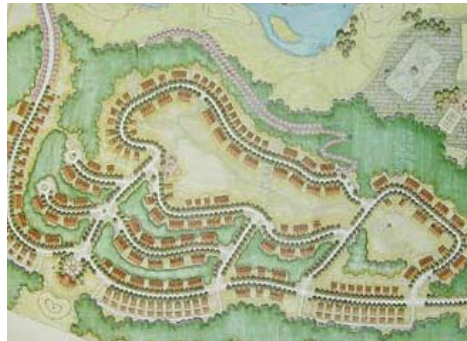


## **Executive Summary**

### **Project Overview**

Farmland across the country is being disassembled as residential and commercial development pressures encourage the premature conversion of prime agricultural land. Cluster development is one valuable tool being used by many rural and suburban municipalities to help deal with the build-out of agricultural land.

Residential clustering projects can protect farmland, maintain open space, and maximize the use of existing infrastructure while creating new housing opportunities throughout a region. One drawback however, is that often major landowners do not have the knowledge or resources needed to plan for large subdivision developments and therefore do not take advantage of the clustering tool. As a result, landowners sell one parcel of land at a time (usually frontage lots), which eats up road frontage, creates multiple curb cuts in close proximity to each other, and often makes farming functions more difficult. It also has a negative visual impact on what was once a picturesque landscape.



High upfront costs can make clustering prohibitive to many landowners. However, the concept remains extremely valuable and valid, particularly in the Genesee-Finger Lakes Region, where many large farm properties are experiencing development pressure. By identifying a viable solution, involving municipalities in the process of a cluster subdivision of the land and possibly providing up front financial assistance this concept may increase the use of cluster subdivision.

The purpose of the Cluster Development Enhancement Project Feasibility Study is to create a framework and evaluate the feasibility of theoretical residential cluster subdivision projects where a town, county, and developer cost-share the upfront planning, design, engineering and/or infrastructure investments for the project. The Town and County would share in these costs in the form of a loan, which would be repaid upon the sale of the new residential lots. Several theoretical clusters were created and analyzed to evaluate the feasibility of such a program, and to identify the criteria under which a program would operate successfully. Three towns within Wayne County, Macedon, Walworth and Ontario, were used as test cases for how a program could work to support cluster development.

Funding for this project was provided through the Genesee Transportation Council (GTC) Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP Task #5375). The UPWP is an annual program of federally funded transportation planning activities undertaken by GTC and other agencies throughout the Genesee-Finger Lakes Region. The project has been assisted by the guidance of a Project Advisory Committee (PAC) which includes representatives from the Genesee Transportation Council, Wayne County Planning Department, the supervisors from the towns of Walworth, Macedon, and Ontario and other municipal representatives.

**Theoretical Cluster Developments**

One large parcel in each municipality was chosen to create theoretical development scenarios. In creating these hypothetical clusters, issues such as parcel size, soil-type, location, zoning and infrastructure were considered to determine criteria under which a project like this would work most effectively.

Three scenarios were analyzed for each of the parcels: a traditional residential scenario, a small cluster scenario, and a large cluster scenario. The existing scenario is a theoretical development scheme with no new regulations in place, and with development continuing as it currently is.



**Feasibility Analysis**

The examples demonstrate that the use of clustering can preserve large areas of land for active agricultural use while also minimizing the need for new roadways and curb cuts onto main roads. Unfortunately,

what the examples also show is the high upfront cost to landowners. Costs such as access road installation, utilities, and getting the sites subdivided, engineered and permitted, often run upwards of \$30,000 which makes cluster development prohibitive to many.

	<p>Overall Lot Size: 192.3 Acres Total Lots Created: 114 Largest Parcel: 39,260 Sq. Ft. Smallest Parcel: 17,950 Sq. Ft. Minimum Lot Frontage: 85-95 Ft. Main Road Curb Cuts: 2 Linear Feet of R.O.W: 8,675 Cost for R.O.W. (Design): \$216,875 Cost for R.O.W. (Construction): \$2,602,500 Infrastructure Cost Per Lot: \$24,731</p>	<p><b>Cluster Development Study</b></p> <hr/> <p><b>Macedon Large Cluster Development Scenario</b></p>
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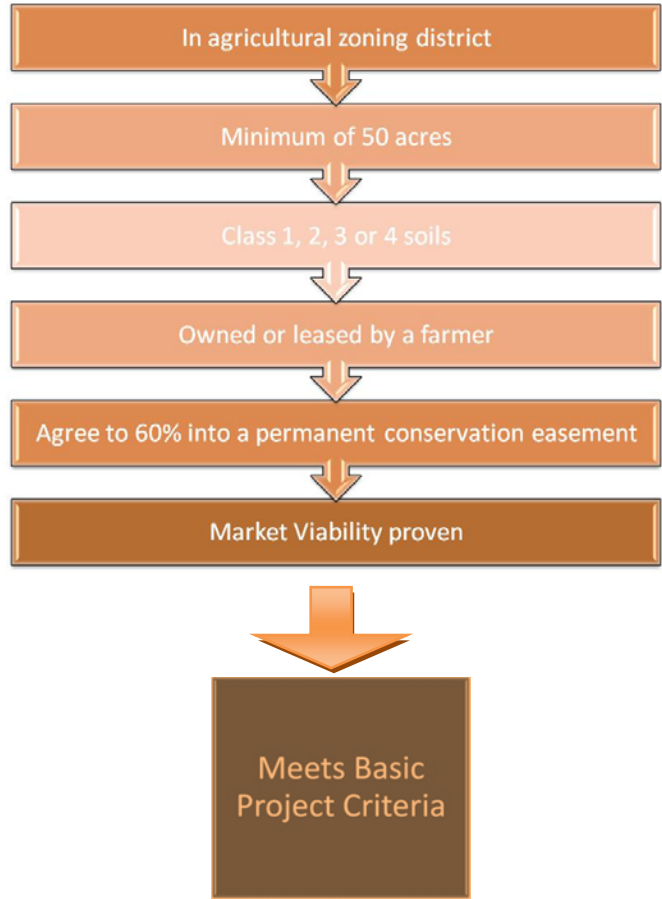
**Establishment of a Residential Cluster Development Agency (RCDA)**

In order to facilitate the use of cluster subdivision as a farmland protection and transportation maintenance (through reduced curb-cuts) program, the first recommendation is to create an organization to implement this program (called the Cluster Enhancement Program). The Agency would be responsible for educating landowners, assisting potential projects in plan development, and administering any revolving loans that are established for the Cluster Enhancement Program. The Agency would be organized in such a way that it would be eligible to apply for implementation grants to establish a revolving loan fund and to hold and monitor easements.

**Criteria for projects to be considered for Cluster Enhancement Program**

Based on these scenarios and with committee feedback, the following criteria are considered to be the types of information upon which a project would qualify for this program:

- Located in agricultural zoning district
- Is a minimum of 50 acres (30 acres minimum preserved)
- Has Class 1, 2, 3 or 4 soils (best for farming)
- Is currently owned or leased by a farmer
- Owner agrees to place at least 60% of the land into a permanent conservation easement for farmland protection
- Has a market analysis/ business plan showing number of lots created are viable at the price point that would be offered



Depending on municipal land use and the number of viable projects being proposed, additional criteria about the project viability may need to be added.

**Summary**

In summary, cluster subdivisions have been demonstrated to improve highway safety in developing areas through the reduction of curb cuts and at the same preserving rural character and farmland. While it is difficult in these economic times to justify significant investment on the sole basis of farmland protection or maintaining rural character, by incorporating highway safety and the improved infrastructure efficiency of cluster subdivision design it may be possible to utilize a broader spectrum of grants to create a “Cluster Revolving Loan Fund.” By adding this innovative tool to their land use planning tool box, involved municipalities may be able to moderate the impact of new development while protecting farmland and preserving their rural character.