



Building Better Homes and Communities

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ACT Solutions

Subdivision Introduces Innovative Lot/Design Concepts That Sell

Nexus Solar Corporation, Guelph, ON

Issue

Conventional subdivision standards can give rise to the following drawbacks: garage-dominated streetscapes; lack of privacy on corner lots; and undervaluation of pie-shaped lots compared to rectangular lots in terms of land and linear infrastructure consumption per home. New development and design solutions are needed to overcome such problems.

Plan

Nexus Solar received an ACT grant i) to continue work, initially undertaken by the City of Guelph, on alternative development standards and ii) to develop innovative lot and housing concepts. The objective was to improve housing choice and quality while keeping housing affordability constant.

The lot and housing concepts would address the lack of privacy of corner lots, provide an alternative to garage-dominated streetscapes, and result in more efficient land use on pie-shaped lots.

Thomasfield Homes provided a 1-hectare (2.59-acre) site, referred to as the “Actarea”, in Guelph’s Pine Ridge East subdivision, making it possible for Nexus Solar to apply the new standards and designs in practice.

Project team

Nexus Solar Corporation
Thomasfield Homes Ltd.
City of Guelph – Public Works;
Planning Department
Guelph’s Round Table on the
Environment and Economy

Results

Zoning Changes

Guelph adopted four specialized residential zones to permit the following features:

- wider frontages, which decrease the prominence of garages, create brighter interiors and offer new and traditional architectural opportunities;
- improved privacy on corner lots;
- introduction of a garden suite on a conventional lot;



The lot with a separate, permanent garden suite in back was among the first to sell.

Source: Nexus Solar Corp.

- lots permitting business units with main floor access, extra parking for employees or clients and a separate entry option;
- longer views to adjacent dwellings from backyard-facing windows; and
- more appealing frontage and an increased lot yield (approx. 20 per cent).

It could work for you!

Program Partners:



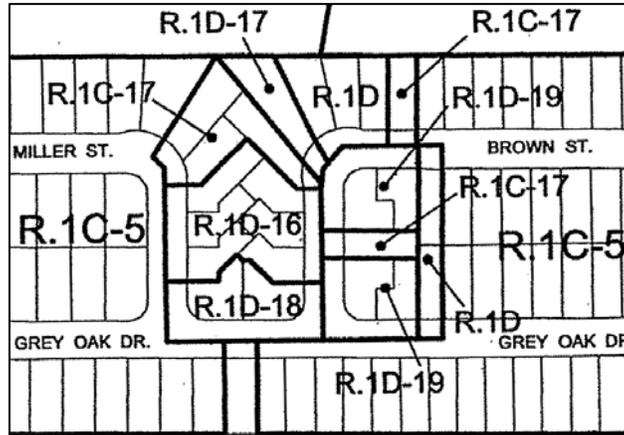
Innovative Lot/Design Concepts

As a by-product of creating innovative lot configurations and design concepts, it was discovered that four additional lots could be included in the Actarea. Using conventional designs, the site would have accommodated only 19 homes. Instead, the site has 24 homes on 23 lots, 13 of which showcase four innovative lot/design solutions and the remaining 10 are conventional lots.

“By improving the density and allowing a greater tax base on the same land base, this development is more affordable at the community level in perpetuity,” says Jeannine Paul of Nexus Solar.

The four new concepts include a lot with a permanent garden suite, private corner lots, live/work housing lots and herringbone lots, which have wide frontages and short yards on an angle to the street (see site plan above).

The lot with a main house and a garden suite proved the most challenging concept. First, it ran into opposition from area residents. However, most residents eventually came around, and there have been no negative opinions expressed since the construction of the first one in 2004. Next, the Building Department insisted on a full levy for the additional unit, treating it as if it were on its own separate lot. After some research by the City and related meetings, the department eventually waived this requirement. Finally, there was some concern about whether services could physically be run from the suite through the side yards to the street. In the end, this was not a difficulty.



Site Plan

- R.1C – conventional lots**
- R.1D-16 – herringbone lots**
- R.1D-17 – garden suite**
- R.1D-18 – home occupation**
- R.1D-19 – private corner lots**
- other R.1D – conventional lots**

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The private corner lots have large backyards, with the distance to neighbours’ windows exceeding that of conventional lots.

The benefits of this concept include much improved architectural potential and lot value due to wide apparent frontage; brighter interiors because of site layout along with lower daytime lighting costs; and a greater sense of privacy.

Streetscapes improve with the conversion of flankage into frontage and with fences or views into private amenity areas now replaced with building façade. Private corner lots can be located anywhere, with no restrictions on neighbouring lots.

The live/work lots were readily accommodated with the allowance of a second driveway. Several iterations, however, were required to create a house design that could take full advantage of the street

frontages, space and entries.

There are essentially two fronts to the house, with the business-use side usually on the busier street (typically the side yard or flankage abutting the roadway) and the home-use on the quieter street.

The final result allows the flexibility to convert a regular single-family home on a corner lot into a live/work arrangement with extra parking and a separate business access. The occupants can have employees or clients without causing over-use of street parking. More important, it lends the home business a sense of professionalism not possible on a regular lot, where it would be difficult to design an office with a separate entry, parking area and direct access to main floor business quarters.

The herringbone lots accounted for most of the increase from 19 to 23 lots. They were straightforward to implement with respect to zoning, but they can be controversial since

they appear unusual in shape. Still, two of these lots were among the first to sell. How well this lot type will do in the market over the long term remains to be seen, as the site needs to be built out more before the full streetscape and occupant experience can be assessed.

All four concepts contribute to more effective land use and reducing per unit development costs. What is critical and different about this project, Paul believes, is that homeowners not only get the bungalow and garage of their dreams, they also have the opportunity to keep their money at home.

"In an ordinary suburban home there is no room for granny, but you include a garden suite and all of a sudden granny is at home, and all the money that would be spent on transportation and nursing stays on the homestead.

"Similarly, in the live-work units where we've taken the flankage and built a house with two fronts, you have the flexibility to accommodate different uses," she continues. "You could separate it in a number of ways to achieve a home and an office that cuts your overall cost."

Good Market Potential

For all of the lots, the land and houses were priced according to market rates. Thomasfield Homes was pleased that Actarea prices were maintained at market value, as many intensified sites necessitate discounted property values. Even with the extra costs and fees associated with this development, a profit was made on the additional lots and homes sold.

Interestingly, the garden suite was among the first to sell, along with other pie-shaped premium lots. With the garden suite proving to be a highly marketable lot type, Thomasfield Homes plans to build more.

From the City's perspective, the revenue generated from additional lot sales offsets extra costs and fees incurred in developing the Actarea, plus a greater tax base was created from the higher density development. Buyers of homes in Guelph's most affordable single-family zone were pleased, as were developers.

At 1 hectare, the development is suitable for many infill projects. As well, any of the four lot concepts can be applied separately to either new construction or redevelopment sites. The project team urges other municipalities, developers and builders to give these concepts serious consideration. The results spell a winning scenario for all, including consumers.

"Putting standards aside momentarily let us discover ingenious solutions," Paul concludes. "Everything came together in a way that makes huge gains towards better quality, more affordable and practical housing for today's families."

Related reports

Alternative Development Standards on Pine Ridge East Subdivision (Nexus Solar Corporation, 2005)

This report is available from the ACT website. See "ACT projects & solutions".

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