



LOW IMPACT DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES FOR MANAGING STORMWATER RUNOFF

Natural hydrologic conditions may be altered radically by poorly planned development practices, such as introducing unneeded impervious surfaces, destroying existing drainage swales, constructing unnecessary storm sewers, and changing local topography. A traditional drainage approach of development has been to remove runoff from a site as quickly as possible and capture it in a detention basin. This approach leads ultimately to the degradation of water quality, as well as expenditure of additional resources for detaining and managing concentrated runoff at some downstream location.

The recommended alternative approach is to promote practices that will minimize post-development runoff rates and volumes, which will minimize needs for artificial conveyance and storage facilities. To simulate pre-development hydrologic conditions, forced infiltration is often necessary to offset the loss of infiltration by creation of impervious surfaces. The ability of the ground to infiltrate runoff depends upon the soil types and its conditions.

Preserving natural hydrologic conditions requires careful alternative site design considerations. Site design practices include preserving natural drainage features, minimizing impervious surface area, reducing the hydraulic connectivity of impervious surfaces, and protecting natural depression storage. A well-designed site will contain a mix of all those features. The following describes various techniques to achieve the alternative approaches:

- ◆ **Preserving Natural Drainage Features.** Protecting natural drainage features, particularly vegetated drainage swales and channels, is desirable because of their ability to infiltrate and attenuate flows and to filter pollutants. However, this objective is often not accomplished in land development. In fact, commonly held drainage philosophy encourages just the opposite pattern - streets and adjacent storm sewers typically are located in the natural headwater valleys and swales, thereby replacing natural drainage functions with a completely impervious system. As a result, runoff and pollutants generated from impervious surfaces flow directly into storm sewers with no opportunity for attenuation, infiltration, or filtration. Developments designed to fit site topography also minimize the amount of grading on site.
- ◆ **Protecting Natural Depression Storage Areas.** Depressional storage areas have no surface outlet, or drain very slowly following a storm event. They can be commonly seen as ponded areas in farm fields during the wet season or after large runoff events. Traditional development practices eliminate these depressions by filling or draining, thereby obliterating their ability to reduce surface runoff volumes and trap pollutants. The volume and release-rate characteristics of depressions should be protected in the design of the development site. The depressions can be protected by simply avoiding the depression or by incorporating its storage as additional capacity in required detention facilities.
- ◆ **Avoiding Introduction of Impervious Areas.** Careful site planning should consider reducing impervious coverage to the maximum extent possible. Building footprints, sidewalks, driveways, and other features producing impervious surfaces should be evaluated to minimize impacts on runoff.
- ◆ **Reducing the Hydraulic Connectivity of Impervious Surfaces.** Impervious surfaces are significantly less of a problem if they are not directly connected to an impervious

conveyance system (such as storm sewer). Two basic ways to reduce hydraulic connectivity are: routing of roof runoff over lawns; and reducing the use of storm sewers. Site grading should promote increasing travel time of stormwater runoff and should help reduce concentration of runoff to a single point in the development.

- ◆ **Routing Roof Runoff Over Lawns.** Roof runoff can be easily routed over lawns in most site designs. The practice discourages direct connections of downspouts to storm sewers or parking lots. The practice also discourages sloping driveways and parking lots to the street. The routing of roof drains and crowning the driveway to allow runoff to discharge to pervious areas is desirable as the pervious area essentially acts as a filter strip.
- ◆ **Reducing the Use of Storm Sewers.** By reducing the use of storm sewers for draining streets, parking lots, and back yards, the potential for accelerating runoff from the development can be greatly reduced. The practice requires greater use of swales and may not be practical for some development sites, especially if there are concerns for areas that do not drain in a “reasonable” time. The practice requires educating local citizens and public works officials, who expect runoff to disappear shortly after a rainfall event.
- ◆ **Reducing Street Widths.** Street widths can be reduced by either eliminating on-street parking or by reducing cartway widths. Municipal planners and traffic designers should encourage narrower neighborhood streets, which ultimately could lower maintenance and maintenance related costs.
- ◆ **Limiting Sidewalks to One Side of the Street.** A sidewalk on one side of the street may suffice in low-traffic neighborhoods. The lost sidewalk could be replaced with bicycle/recreational trails that follow back-of-lot lines. Where appropriate, backyard trails should be constructed using pervious materials.
- ◆ **Using Permeable Paving Materials.** These materials include permeable interlocking concrete paving blocks or porous bituminous concrete. Such materials should be considered as alternatives to conventional pavement surfaces, especially for low use surfaces such as driveways, overflow parking lots, and emergency access roads.
- ◆ **Reducing Building Setbacks.** Reducing building setbacks reduces driveway and entry walks and is most readily accomplished along low-traffic streets where traffic noise is not a problem.
- ◆ **Constructing Cluster Developments.** Cluster developments can also reduce the amount of impervious area for a given number of lots. The biggest savings is in street length, which also will reduce costs of the development. Cluster development “clusters” the construction activity onto less-sensitive areas without substantially affecting the gross density of development.

In summary, careful consideration of the existing topography and implementation of a combination of the above mentioned techniques may avoid construction of costly stormwater control measures. Other benefits include: reduced potential of downstream flooding, reduced water quality degradation of receiving streams and water bodies, enhancement of aesthetics, and reduction of development costs. Beneficial results include: more stable baseflows in receiving streams, improved groundwater recharge, reduced flood flows, reduced pollutant loads, and reduced costs for conveyance and storage.