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From one developer's point of view, open space opens up new possibilities

In James M. Paul's subdivisions, smaller lots don't mean less space for homeowners.

The president of Alps Development Inc. near Monee is one of a handful of Chicago-area developers designing subdivisions with land conservation in mind. In his Canterbury Lakes project in Will County's Green Garden Township, lots have been scaled down by as much as two-thirds from the previous one acre, and the typical 31-foot-wide residential street has been narrowed to 22 feet.



But rather than building more homes on the excess land, 55 acres of the 160-acre development are designated as an open space preserve owned and maintained by the subdivision's homeowners association.

"If you put the open space behind the lots, it gives people the perception that they have a big lot, but they don't have to pay taxes on it and there's nobody's house in back of them," says Mr. Paul, 47, an electrical engineer who began developing subdivisions in the mid-1990s.

In Mr. Paul's designs, the landscape features that are typically bulldozed or isolated in more standard subdivision layouts are the focal points of the open space.

"When we see flood plain on a property, that doesn't scare us away," he says. "We see that as an amenity." Mr. Paul estimates the open space has added 11% to 15% to the value of homes in Canterbury Lakes, compared with similar homes in more traditionally arranged subdivisions. Canterbury homes start at \$400,000, and about 80% of the 119 lots have been sold.

Next year, Mr. Paul plans to launch a 210-acre subdivision nearby known as The Preserve at Lake Charlevoix. Tyson Warner, Will County planning director, calls Mr. Paul's subdivisions the best examples of the open-space conservation requirements outlined in the county's latest land management plan for unincorporated areas.

"People who have gone out and seen what he's done have come back enthusiastic," Mr. Warner says. "The developer is able to maximize the cost of the lots and we're able to achieve our open-space objectives."