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RESIDENTIAL
KENTLANDS

GAITHERSBURG, MARYLAND

PROJECT TYPE

A 352-acre planned community that uses traditional neighborhood and community design principles to create a small town feeling. The design relies on a hierarchy of streets built in a modified grid, with most homes close to the street on small lots ranging from 2,500 to 9,000 square feet. The community incorporates a variety of housing types—including detached, attached, apartments, and condominiums—as well as a school, a shopping center, a child care center, and a recreation center.

SPECIAL FEATURES

- Neotraditional planning
- Alleys
- Detached garages with second-level apartments

DEVELOPER

Great Seneca Development Corporation
8401 Connecticut Avenue
Chevy Chase, Maryland 20815
301-986-6000

DEVELOPER/CONSULTANT

Joseph Alfandre & Co., Inc.
1355 Piccard Drive, Suite 380
Rockville, Maryland 20855
301-670-0343

TOWN PLANNER

Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, Architects
1023 SW 25th Avenue
Miami, Florida 33135
305-644-1023



Single-family homes are located close to the street on 4,400- to 6,600-square-foot lots.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Kentlands is a 352-acre neotraditional planned community with 1,655 residential units and up to 2 million square feet of retail and office space planned. Referred to by its planners as a traditional neighborhood development (TND), the community has been designed and planned to function like a small town. Streets are narrow and are organized in a modified grid pattern. Large and small single-family homes and townhomes are built close together on relatively small lots—ranging from 2,500 to 9,000 square feet—to promote neighborliness as well as to allow individuals of all generations and various income levels to live in the same neighborhood.

Public open spaces, traditional architecture, and strict design guidelines are hallmarks of the project, and the community has become one of the best-known examples of neotraditional planning in the country. The project was started by Joseph Alfandre & Co., which worked with the planning firm Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, Architects, to develop the overall planning principles. The project was taken back by the lender—Chevy Chase Federal Savings Bank (CCFSB)—in 1991 in a friendly foreclosure and is now being developed by the Great Seneca Development Corporation, a subsidiary of the bank. The community is divided into five neighborhoods and includes single-family detached homes, townhouses, condominiums, apartments, a community shopping center, a clubhouse and recreation center, an elementary school, a child care facility, and a church.

THE SITE AND DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Kentlands is located 23 miles northwest of downtown Washington, D.C., near the Interstate 270 corridor, in the city of Gaithersburg, Maryland. In 1987, when Alfandre obtained a one-year option on the property, the site was the last available large tract of land in the city of Gaithersburg. Alfandre has been building homes in Gaithersburg and other areas of Montgomery County since 1983. At the time of the option, the land was not zoned, and the only buildings on the property consisted of the Kent family farm buildings, including the Kent Mansion, a barn, a firehouse, a guesthouse, and several other outbuildings, all arranged in a sort of minivillage. The property also consisted of numerous lakes, ponds, and even a quarry that remain to this day.

Alfandre first went to several respected land planning firms in the Washington area, but he found their proposed master plans too typically standard and suburban; he wanted to develop something a little different. A short time later he met Andres Duany. In 1988, Alfandre hired Duany's firm to organize and conduct a seven-day charrette to develop design and planning principles for the site. Citizens and politicians were invited to participate in the charrette. Surprisingly, density issues were not a controversial part of the planning process, although the city's professional planning staff did have some reservations, which were eventually overcome, primarily related to traditional zoning and code requirements. Alfandre and Duany then developed a detailed plan that was refined and adopted by the city in 1988.

PLANNING AND DESIGN

The site plan includes five neighborhoods that are shaped in part by a series of lakes and wetlands that run through the middle of the project, essentially dividing it into two sections. The large section to the west is where most development has occurred thus far, and a smaller section to the east is less developed. The street system design includes seven entrances—three major and four minor—from the three major roads that surround the property and uses a modified grid system. The system is made up of main streets, which are boulevards with parking as well as trees on both sides; primary streets, with parking and trees on both sides; and secondary streets, with parking on one side and trees on the other. There are no culs-de-sac. Public parking consists largely of street parking, which is allowed nearly everywhere in the community. Parking lots are generally allowed only near multifamily properties, and head-in parking is used in mixed-use areas.

The design sought to achieve higher densities than more typical suburban planned unit developments (PUDs), and thus many fairly large single-family homes are built on small lots,

creating a more urban feel. Typical lots for single-family homes are 4,400 to 6,600 square feet and homes are 12 to 20 feet apart on average, with some smaller homes as little as four feet apart. Alfandre emphasizes that neotraditional communities need not be built at such high densities; he is building another project in Loudoun County, Virginia—Belmont Forest—that will have half the overall density of Kentlands.

Shared open space is an important element in Kentlands that complements the small lots. Numerous small parks and squares throughout the project serve purposes ranging from providing room for pickup football games to offering simple visual amenities for residents. Public spaces are essential for defining the character of the community as a whole. Some of the parks are open squares surrounded by streets, others are wooded, and still others include houses that face directly onto the park with no intervening street, just a walkway.

Another important concept used in the project is the mixture of home types and designs often on the same street. This mix includes attached and detached housing, as well as houses of varying sizes and costs. Some streets have homes by as many as five different builders, unlike many subdivisions and PUDs, which contain sections built largely by one builder, resulting in houses that are often very similar.

Townhomes are designed to be very different from typical suburban models. For example, several townhomes near the mansion face onto a narrow street, with on-street parking and a square across the street; garages are located behind the houses and are accessible from a rear alley. The homes themselves in this area are all located close to the street—the same six-foot setback for each house—and the homes are generally dark brick and have steeply pitched roofs. Perhaps what is most unusual about the townhouses, in both this area and other areas of the project, is that architectural variety is achieved not by substantially changing the architectural style and setbacks, but by varying the width and height of each townhouse within each grouping. Thus some of the homes are two stories and some are three, while widths vary from 16 to 24 feet.

The design code specifies the placement of the home on the lot and requires the use of brick, stone, or wood on the exterior. A hedge, fence, or wall is required along the sidewalk. Detached residences include a variety of traditional styles, including Georgian, Victorian, and Shingle. Homes often have numerous customization options, such as finished third floors and garages with apartments above. Some of the homes are also designed to look like they have had additions.

Amenities built thus far include a one-mile jogging and bike trail (with two additional miles planned), three lakes for fishing and bird watching, three tot lots (with two more planned), and several squares, parks, pocket parks, and picnic areas. The 3.9-acre Kentlands Recreation Center is available to all homeowners at no extra charge and includes a 25-meter lap pool, a separate social pool, a tot pool, four tennis courts, basketball and volleyball courts, and a two-story clubhouse with fitness room, lounge, and kitchen facilities.

Commercial and institutional uses include the 350,000-square-foot Kentlands Square Shopping Center, located at the northeast corner of the site, whose tenants include Giant Food, Kmart, Lowes Hardware, and Super Crown Books. The community also contains the 800-student Rachel Carson Elementary School, the Kentlands Children's Center, and a church. The Main Street phase of the project, the last phase planned, will be a mixed-use town center, which is conceived to include for-sale live/work units along a main street, with a mix of retail, office, and residential uses. Live/work units will be sold with flexible zoning to allow any combination of uses in typically two or three stories.

MANAGEMENT AND MARKETING

Management of the project's development has changed hands once during the development process. Kentlands began as a project of Joseph Alfandre & Co., with Chevy Chase Federal Savings Bank (CCFSB) providing a \$64 million three-year loan to finance land acquisition and development. With a long-term program, a savings and loan bank as the primary lender, and a real estate recession looming, it is easy to see in hindsight that the project was headed for

trouble. When recession hit the real estate industry and then the S&L industry, a crisis developed for the project. The first problem was that a key component of the financial plan—the sale of a 100-acre parcel for \$25 million for a proposed mall—fell through in 1989 because of problems in the department store industry. Next, the recession hit and slowed home sales—especially for homes in the \$300,000 to \$500,000 range where most of the Kentlands homes were priced. These initial problems in turn were followed by new standards set by the Financial Institutions Recovery, Reform, and Enforcement Act that forced CCFSB to scrutinize the project more carefully. CCFSB slowly began turning off the tap for financing new construction, and with sales slowing, cash flow drying up, and lenders calling loans on Alfandre's other projects, Chevy Chase decided in 1991 to undertake a friendly foreclosure on the property. The bank maintained that Alfandre's financial statement was not big enough to continue funding the loans in the current environment, and it took back the deed in lieu of foreclosure.

Although Alfandre lost control of the project and his equity, he was retained as a development consultant, and he also continued to build homes in the project. CCFSB has taken back several other large planned communities in the Washington area in recent years and has used a similar strategy in each case, continuing to work with the original developers rather than simply foreclosing on the property and selling off assets. Alfandre is not bitter about losing the project and believes that CCFSB was extremely fair in its dealings with him, given the tough situation they were both in.

CCFSB was able to see the project through the tough times. The bank created the Great Seneca Development Corporation to continue developing the project, and it continued to fund homebuilding in the project, including Alfandre's homebuilding business. Great Seneca largely stuck with the plan and did not seek new entitlements.

Alfandre believes the project was taken back because of the real estate recession, not because of any fundamental flaw in the planning concept. The fact that sales have been strong following the recession is evidence that he is correct. Single-family home sales totaled roughly 100 in 1991, 200 in 1992, 300 in 1993, and 200 in 1994; sales as of the end of 1994 totaled 800. During 1993, Kentlands achieved the highest sales of any project in Montgomery County, but the market in 1994 shifted toward more affordable products, slowing sales a bit. The project is currently more than 50 percent built out, and the presence of a town has definitely been achieved.

The recession forced the developer and builders to emphasize less expensive products, including 1,300- to 1,500-square-foot cottages priced around \$220,000 that sold well. For the most part, however, the project has maintained the product mix set forth in the original plan, which relies heavily on fairly large detached homes in the \$300,000 and up range. Most of the homes have been built on a contract basis, allowing customization of the home products and reducing risk for homebuilders. There are few model homes, as most of the builders are small companies that prefer not to absorb the cost of building and furnishing a model. For custom homes, a 5,500-square-foot lot typically sells for around \$100,000.

Marketing for the project has been blessed by plenty of free publicity. Since the project was first begun, numerous articles have appeared in both the local and national press, including a 1992 piece in Time magazine, which cited Kentlands as one of the best designs of 1991. Full page ads run regularly in the Washington Post.

Alfandre believes neotraditional communities need to be marketed differently from typical new developments; the developer needs to visually show the homebuyer at the outset how life is different in the community. That is why the information center for Kentlands is located in the historic barn next to the mansion, well inside the project, not at a prominent location near one of the main entrances. By bringing the buyer to the historic center of the community, where a model of the overall plan is located, the developer is able to show the kind of community character that is being created.

All property owners in Kentlands are members of the Kentlands Citizens Assembly. The assembly provides for the maintenance of commonly owned properties and facilities, including

private alleys and parking areas, green areas, landscaping along public rights-of-way, recreation facilities, tot lots, and equipment. In addition, the assembly runs the Kentlands Clubhouse and assures the architectural integrity and appropriate maintenance of the homes and lots within the community through the years. The town planners are charged with enforcing the design code during the development process. The Kent Mansion has been deeded to the city of Gaithersburg and is now the home of the Gaithersburg Council for the Arts. Public events at the mansion include musical concerts by the National Chamber Orchestra, monthly art exhibits, lectures, play readings, business conferences, and receptions.

EXPERIENCE GAINED

- It is crucial to develop a signature defining space—such as a square, intersection, core, or village center—early in the development process to set the tone and illustrate clearly how the neotraditional project is different from other suburban community designs.
- While architectural control is important to the success of neotraditional communities, too much control can be bad. Alfandre believes that control was a little too tight at Kentlands, placing too many restrictions on builders, who generally know better what the market wants than do the designers or land developers.
- While the use of alleys helps to define a more interesting overall community design, alleys should not be overused. On hilly or otherwise difficult topography, alleys are not the best choice, and Alfandre believes that attractively designed front-loaded garages might have worked better in some neighborhoods.
- While some have suggested that neotraditional communities are inherently more expensive to build, resulting in a smaller lot or house for the money, this is not necessarily so. Nearly all modern community designs include open space and significant landscaping budgets, and these costs need be no higher in a neotraditional community than in a more typical PUD design. In fact, the smaller lots that often characterize such communities can actually result in lower-cost housing products for buyers. It is not the amount of public open space and landscaping that sets these communities apart, but rather how this space is shaped or formed and how it is used.

PROJECT DATA

LAND USE INFORMATION

Site Area: 352 acres

Total Dwelling Units Planned: 1,655

Total Dwelling Units Completed: 1,040

Gross Density: 4.7 units per acre

Average Net Density: 7.0 units per acre

LAND USE PLAN

	Acres	Percent of Site
Single-family residential	109	31%
Multifamily residential	28	8
Roads	48	14
Common open space	56	16
Kentlands Square Shopping Center	37	11
Other commercial/mixed-use	54	15
Civic uses	<u>20</u>	<u>6</u>
Total	352	100%

RESIDENTIAL UNIT INFORMATION

Unit Type	Unit Size (Square Feet)	Number of Units Planned/ Built	Range of Current Sales Prices/Rents
Detached single-family	1,200-6,000 ¹	477/325 ¹	\$275,000-500,000
Townhomes	1,200-3,000	378/242	\$215,400-319,900
Condominiums	1,000-1,400	560/233	\$126,990
Apartments ²	650-1,200	240/240	\$815-1,385

DEVELOPMENT COST INFORMATION

(At Buildout)

Site Acquisition Cost	\$40,000,000
Site Improvement Costs	20,000,000
Construction Cost ³	2,000,000
Soft Costs ⁴	<u>5,000,000</u>
Total Development Cost Expected at Buildout ⁵	\$67,000,000

Notes

¹Includes 68 cottages-1,300 to 1,500 square feet-all of which have been sold.

²Thirty accessory apartments have also been built but are not included in totals.

³Includes construction costs for the recreation center and the child care center and for modifications to the school and renovation of the existing Kent Farm buildings.

⁴Soft costs are unusually low because CCFSB is both developer and lender; as a result, interest charges are unusually low.

⁵Excludes all homebuilding costs.

BUILDERS ACTIVE IN THE COMMUNITY

Bozzuto

Churchill Group

C-I/Mitchell & Best

D.R. Horton Custom

Joseph Alfandre Homes

Newport Classic Homes

Pillar Home Builders

Ricklin Homes

Rocky Gorge Communities

Stonewall Homes

Trinity Custom Homes

Victorian Homes by Stinson

DEVELOPMENT SCHEDULE

Property Option Acquired: 1987

Site Purchased: June 1988

Planning Started: 1987

Construction Started: June 1990

Sales Started: June 1990

Expected Project Completion: 1998

DIRECTIONS

From Washington National Airport: Take the George Washington Parkway north to I-495 (Capitol Beltway). Follow 495 north to I-270 north. Take exit 6B for Route 28 west, and proceed west four miles to project entrance on the right.

Driving Time: Approximately 40 minutes in nonpeak traffic.

The Project Reference File is intended as a resource tool for use by the subscribers in improving the quality of future projects. Data contained herein were made available by the Development team and constitute a report on, not an endorsement of, the project by ULI - The Urban Land Institute.

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DOCUMENT IMAGES



Single-family homes are located close to the street on 4,400- to 6,600-square-foot lots.



Many homes include garages served by alleys; some garages also have apartments above.



Townhouses vary in height and width—ranging from 16 to 24 feet wide—and many have garages in the back.



Porches are a common feature throughout Kentlands.



Brick sidewalks, narrow boulevards, and street trees on at least one side of the street all help create a small town-style streetscape.



Architectural styles are traditional, and include Georgian, Victorian, and Shingle motifs; exteriors must be of either brick, stone, or wood.

