

## Hidden Springs

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Ada County, Idaho

Project Type:  
Residential

Case No:  
C032018

Year:  
2002



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### SUMMARY

Hidden Springs is a 1,844-acre (746-hectare) master-planned community nestled in the foothills of the Boise Front, ten miles (16 kilometers) northwest of Boise, Idaho's largest city and state capital. The project's environmentally sensitive plan includes up to 1,034 acres (418 hectares) of potentially developable land and 810 acres (328 hectares) of protected conservation land. Two phases of residential development are currently under construction; upon completion, the community will consist of up to 1,035 homes divided into several neighborhoods. Currently, the Town Center features 8,500 square feet (790 square meters) of retail space located near the entrance to the community and includes a café, a general store, a post office, a library, a preschool, an apartment, and professional offices. Hidden Springs has won several awards, including "Best Smart Growth Community" for the year 2000 by *Professional Builder* magazine and the National Association of Home Builders.

### FEATURES

- Environmentally sensitive land design
  - Energy-efficient homes
  - Unique wastewater reclamation system
  - Several hundred acres of conservation land
  - Comprehensive design guidelines
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### SPECIAL FEATURES

- Environmentally sensitive land design
- Energy-efficient homes
- Unique wastewater reclamation system
- Several hundred acres of conservation land
- Comprehensive design guidelines

### PROJECT ADDRESS

5892 West Hidden Springs Drive  
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[www.hiddensprings.com](http://www.hiddensprings.com)

### DEVELOPER

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## GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Hidden Springs is a 1,844-acre (746-hectare) master-planned community located in the Dry Creek Valley section of Ada County, 20 minutes northwest of Boise, Idaho, at the foothills of the Boise Front. The environmentally sensitive development is similar in many respects to Prairie Crossing, a conservation community near Chicago, Illinois, and comprises up to 1,034 acres (418 hectares) of potentially developable land and a minimum of 810 acres (328 hectares) of protected conservation land. Two phases of residential development are currently under construction; upon completion, the community could consist of up to 1,035 homes divided into several neighborhoods. The Town Center features 8,500 square feet (790 square meters) of retail space located near the entrance to the community and includes a café, a general store, a post office, a library, a preschool, an apartment, and professional offices. Additional commercial space is planned.

Located in scenic Treasure Valley, Hidden Springs allows residents to take full advantage of the area's natural surroundings with several miles of hiking and biking trails while remaining convenient to shopping, employment, and downtown Boise. Major employers in the Boise region include Hewlett-Packard, Micron, and the headquarters for Albertson's grocery stores.

## THE SITE AND ITS HISTORY

Hidden Springs has a rich rural tradition that dates back to the days of the western gold rush. Farmers originally settled there to supply livestock and produce to the growing number of gold prospectors living in and traveling through the area. In the 1930s, "gentleman farmers" from Boise began purchasing land there, beginning a tradition of wealthy rural living. In order to protect the area's rural character, more than 800 acres (324 hectares) have been designated as protected conservation areas. Conservation areas at Hidden Springs include agricultural lands, jurisdictional wetlands, environmentally sensitive areas, and wildlife refuge areas.

## DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

The lack of similar master-planned developments in the area set the stage for Hidden Springs to be a cutting-edge community. However, the rural location presented several development challenges, such as a lack of infrastructure and paved roads to the development site.

The residential design guidelines for Hidden Springs are fashioned to promote sustainable treatment of the natural hilly and dry landscape. They include a list of principles that guided formulation of the development plan (e.g., "traditional neighborhood design will be the foundation for the small-town lifestyle"); a description of the site plan and its rationale, site development, landscape, and architectural guidelines; the design review and approvals process; and construction regulations. The guidelines' goals for the development plan include "(a) preserving and protecting large tracts of land in open space as farmland and (b) clustering appropriately scaled development in areas that are less visually or environmentally sensitive." This plan establishes the preservation of the more visually sensitive foothill slopes as open space and clusters homes in a "traditional" village on the valley floor or within hidden side valleys where they will not dominate the landscape.

Homes in Hidden Springs must adhere to strict architectural, landscaping, and siting guidelines set by the developers. All architectural, landscaping, and siting plans and exterior colors must be approved by the architectural review committee. The guidelines regulate the appearance of four sides of the home rather than just its facade. The committee is mostly concerned with architectural quality, landscaping, and exterior colors of each home rather than the individual architectural style. These standards are meant to ensure consistency as the community expands.

Elements of traditional rural living are combined with modern amenities in Hidden Springs to create a community with 21st-century attributes, such as energy-efficient construction and high-speed Internet access. Therefore, all wiring and cables are underground to preserve the pristine beauty of the natural surroundings. The homes, which range in price from \$170,000 to over \$1 million, are designed with an emphasis on large front porches to promote community interaction, traditional four-sided architecture, thoughtful home siting, and completed landscaping to enhance the livability and the streetscapes of the neighborhoods within the project. Lots are configured into several neighborhoods and each has its own distinct architectural and community characteristics.

Modeled after Boise city neighborhoods, the Village neighborhood, located nearest to the Town Center, is intended to create the feel of a traditional, walkable neighborhood, despite the rural location and character of the area. Home styles range from Craftsman and farmhouse to Victorian and Prairie and are on smaller lots 50 to 80 feet (15 to 24 meters) wide and 110 to 130 feet (33.5 to 40 meters) deep. The garages on about one-half of the Village lots are accessed from an alley.

The Valley neighborhood lies just outside the Town Center. Typically built in a farmhouse style, the homes are set amid a more rural backdrop with larger lots of one-third to one acre (0.13 to 0.40 hectare).

Located furthest from the Town Center, the Foothills neighborhood comprises homes that are designed to blend with the landscape, taking advantage of the mountain views. Careful attention is paid to the massing and color of the houses so as to minimize their visual impact. Lot sizes range from one-quarter acre to one acre (0.10 to 0.40 hectare). Designed to fit their lots, these homes tend to be asymmetrical. To date, all of the houses are single-family residences, as attached housing is not prevalent in the Boise area.

Home types are currently segmented into four basic collections on lots ranging in size from 5,800 to 54,000 square feet (538 to 5,016 square meters). The Cottage collection features 1,600-square-foot (149-square-meter) condominium units near the pool and clubhouse, with prices starting in the \$170,000s. The Foothills collection offers 2,400- to 3,000-square-foot (223- to 278-square-meter) homes with prices ranging from \$265,000 to \$300,000. The Village collection comprises 2,200- to 2,600-square-foot (204- to 241.5-square-meter) homes with prices ranging from \$240,000 to \$270,000. The School Ridge collection includes 1,800- to 2,200-square-foot (167- to 204-square-meter) homes with prices ranging from \$170,000 to \$220,000 on smaller lots. Custom homes have larger lots and range in size from 3,000 to 6,000 square feet (279 to 557 square meters) with better views and prices ranging from \$400,000 to over \$1 million.

Retail at the Town Center, located next to the project's entrance, is the heart of the community. Because the Town Center was viewed as such an integral part of the community, it was constructed right from the start, even though the developer was not required to complete it until the 50th residential occupancy permit was issued. The Town Center features a general store called the Dry Creek Mercantile, a café, a preschool, an apartment, business offices, a post office, a library, a sheriff's office, and a fire station. Set around a traditional village green, the Town Center serves as a community gathering place, hosting events such as Friday night dinners, summer concerts, and the annual harvest festival. By design, Hidden Springs does not have personal postal delivery in an effort to facilitate community interaction through residents' daily trips to the post office. Land next to the fire station has been set aside for a future mixed-use development; however, the community is not yet large enough to support it.

A network of trails winds through the development, connecting important community amenities and neighborhoods and linking with the trails into the foothills. Amenities include parks, a pool and clubhouse, common open space, a new barn designed to look like a historically authentic Idaho barn, a village green, and four pocket parks interspersed throughout the community. The Dry Creek Mercantile, the clubhouse, and the new barn all host various community events throughout the year.

The Hidden Springs Charter School, at the center of the community, is a public charter school governed by a board of trustees and founded by community members. The school opened in fall 2001 and currently serves 300 students in kindergarten through eighth grade.

## ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING

Hidden Springs has garnered attention for its combination of carefully integrated development planning and value placed on environmental sensitivity and energy-saving homes, incorporating innovative building techniques and infrastructure systems into its design.

Wastewater is recycled through a two-step reclamation process that treats it in 37 days. It can then be used to irrigate the common areas and agricultural land. Its designers developed a system to carry wastewater from each neighborhood to a series of ponds (or "cells"), where it undergoes intensive aeration and natural filtration before it is pumped out to irrigate farm fields and common areas and returned to the aquifer. The designers intended the ponds to function as a visual amenity for surrounding homes. The local regulators, however, required an eight-foot-high (2.4-meter-high) fence, black plastic liners, and extensive setbacks around the ponds, thus negating their amenity value.

The land provided additional opportunities for environmentally sensitive planning. Since the community abuts the foothills of the Boise Front, the developers were required to site homes in a manner that preserves slopes with a grade of 25 percent or higher. Hidden Springs planners took this requirement a step further by preserving slopes of 15 percent or greater. The project gets its name from the "hidden springs" found on the land. Jurisdictional wetlands have been preserved and enhanced with native plants and trees.

The developer encourages builders to participate with the U.S. Department of Energy in its Building America Initiative to construct energy-efficient residences. The goal is to use resources efficiently during the construction process and employ guidelines for those that result in energy savings for residents. These homes are constructed using two-by-sixes (0.6 by 1.8 meters) installed 24 inches (61 centimeters) on center for exterior walls, allowing for more insulation while reducing the amount of lumber required. In addition, houses feature foundation insulation, extensive sealing, and high-efficiency gas furnaces and water heaters. These and other energy-saving techniques provide homeowners with approximately 40 percent savings on heating and 35 percent savings on cooling expenses. Currently, only one approved builder out of nine participates in the program, which disappoints the developer.

A traffic management plan was established to reduce potential traffic impacts on the highway's links to the city. The plan set forth a goal of reducing the number of vehicle trips per day from an estimated 12 per household in a conventional suburban development to eight per household. Pedestrian access to all of the project's amenities,

including the charter school and the retail at the Town Center, reduces the number of automobile trips residents may require.

Regulated by the Ada County Independent Highway District, roadway designs are wider than the developer felt was necessary in many areas. The district also rejected surface drainage in favor of piped drainage for stormwater management. Most streets are lined with sidewalks and feature landscaped pathways with large street trees such as maples, ash, and locusts.

Although some neighbors objected to the project, taking the position of "not in my backyard," Ada County's three commissioners as well as conservation groups were supportive of the development of Hidden Springs.

## FINANCING, MARKETING, AND OPERATIONS

Hidden Springs was initially developed as a partnership between an entity of the Carlyle Group of Washington, D.C., that contributed the project's initial equity and an entity of Grossman Properties of Phoenix that contributed the land. Both entities exited the project in 2001. Since 1997, the Hidden Springs development team has been led by Frank Martin, who previously was president of Shaw Homes, Inc., a Chicago-based community developer.

Approximately 185 lots have been sold to date. Current lot pricing ranges from \$35,000 to \$225,000. There are nine approved builders, and each home must be started within six months of the lot closing and completed within 12 months.

Because the Town Center was such an important marketing tool for the community, the developer has subsidized its rents and operations. The developer has further reduced the risk associated with this pioneering project by adding the aforementioned community amenities—including the charter school, the clubhouse, the pool, and the community barn.

Hidden Springs was the first master-planned community in the area and its proximity to Boise, local employers, shopping, and recreation opportunities makes it appealing. The community has received several building and design awards, giving it national exposure. Although Hidden Springs is currently selling homesites at an average rate of six per month, historically the rate has been four homesites per month, which was not financially sustainable and well below the original pro forma.

Most Hidden Springs buyers are couples in their 30s and 40s with children, upgrading to their second or third primary residence. Buyers are drawn by employment in the nearby technology campuses, but there are also a few retirees. Although the majority of residents are middle to high income, the more affordable Cottage and School Ridge collections of homes on smaller lots near the pool and clubhouse will help diversify the product types and buyers. Accessory units were offered on many homes with the idea that they would provide an affordable rental option to lower-income residents. In reality, most accessory units are used for visiting relatives or as home office space.

The Hidden Springs homeowners' association, known as the Town Association, will be turned over to the resident-members in August 2008 or when 83 percent of all potential homesites have been conveyed to resident-members, whichever happens first. A transfer fee equivalent to one-quarter of 1 percent of the purchase price fee is charged on the sale and resale of any home in the community, which is used to enhance and maintain the common open spaces and to provide educational programming for the conservation areas. The Town Association pays 25 percent of the costs for maintaining the playfields at the charter school since these are open for community use.

## EXPERIENCE GAINED

- Development in smaller phases is prudent in an area that is as fragmented as the Boise market.
- Priority should be placed on environmental sensitivity and conservation in order to develop land in harmony with the surroundings and affect the nature of the area to a minimal degree.
- Use more market segmentation to offer a range of products to a variety of income levels in order to improve overall absorption rates.
- Creation of "community" adds value to individual properties and allows smaller lots to be marketable.
- The developer would have preferred narrower roads but was forbidden by local regulations to build them.
- Achieving a critical mass of development takes longer when doing a project that is different from the marketplace standard.
- The achievement of annual absorption goals is critical to the financial sustainability of a project.
- Buyers have perceived the project's location as too remote, a perception that has been hard to overcome. However, the developer feels that this issue will dissipate once there is a larger critical mass of residents.
- There is a high cost of doing business in the Boise residential real estate market. Customers are very price sensitive, more so than anticipated, which has affected absorption and margins.
- Embracing and nurturing Realtor/builder relationships is critically important in order to reach sales goals.

**PROJECT DATA****LAND USE INFORMATION**

Site area (acres/hectares): 1,844/746  
 Total dwelling units planned/platted: 1,035/296  
 Gross density (per acre/per hectare): 0.56/1.4  
 Average net density (per acre/per hectare): 1.0/2.5

**LAND USE PLAN**

Use	Acres/Hectares	Percentage of Site
Detached residential	890/360	48.3
Roads	75/30	4.1
Common open space	850/344	46.1
Agricultural commercial	5/2	0.3
School	12/5	0.6
Sewer and power facilities	12/5	0.6

**RESIDENTIAL INFORMATION**

Unit Type	Lot Size (Square Feet/ Square Meters)	Unit Size (Square Feet/ Square Meters)	Range of Prices
Cottage collection	4,000/372	1,600/49	\$170,000s
School Ridge collection	6,000/557	1,800–2,200/167–204	\$170,000–220,000
Village collection	8,000/743	2,200–2,600/204–241	\$240,000–270,000
Foothills collection	10,000/929	2,400–3,000/223–279	\$265,000–300,000
Custom	120,000/11,148	3,000–6,000/279–557	\$400,000–1,000,000

**RETAIL INFORMATION**

Tenant	Square Feet/ Square Meters	Rent per Month
Mercantile and café	5,000/464.5	Owned by developer
Preschool	500/46.5	\$400
Home builder office	400/37	\$225
Individual apartment	1,200/111.5	\$550
Martin Community Development/ Developers of Hidden Springs	1,000/93	Owned by developer
Ada Community Library*	200/18.5	0
Post office*	200/18.5	0
Total	8,500/789	

\*The library and post office do not pay rent because of their community services.

**DEVELOPMENT COST INFORMATION (TO DATE)**

Site Acquisition Cost: \$2,400,000

## Site Improvement Costs

Excavation/grading: 3,300,000  
 Sewer/water/drainage: 5,000,000  
 Paving/curbs/sidewalks: 1,300,000  
 Landscaping/irrigation: 1,500,000  
 Telecom/power: 900,000  
 Total: \$12,000,000

## Construction Costs

Office and retail: 1,400,000  
 Amenities: 2,400,000  
 Fire station: 600,000  
 Total: \$4,400,000

## Soft Costs

Architecture/engineering: 2,500,000  
 Administrative and project management: 3,000,000  
 Marketing and sales: 2,600,000  
 Legal/accounting: 800,000  
 Taxes/insurance: 900,000  
 Town Association/sewer connections: 500,000  
 Construction interest and fees: 3,000,000  
 Other licenses/bonds/permits: 200,000  
 Total: \$13,500,000

## DEVELOPMENT SCHEDULE

Planning started: January 1995  
Site purchased: February 1997  
Construction started: November 1997  
Sales started: September 1998  
First closing: November 1998  
Phase I completed: December 1999  
Project completed: 2012 (estimated)

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## DIRECTIONS

*Directions from Boise Airport:* Take I-84 west to Cole Road. Go north to Glenwood, and then north to Gary Lane. Take Gary Lane north to Hill Road Parkway, then west to Seamand's Gulch Road, and then north four miles (6.4 kilometers) to Hidden Springs Drive on the right.

*Driving time:* 30 minutes in nonpeak traffic.

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This Development Case Study is intended as a resource for subscribers in improving the quality of future projects. Data contained herein were made available by the project's development team and constitute a report on, not an endorsement of, the project by ULI—the Urban Land Institute.

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Site plan.