



Mortonsville's long history tells a story that mirrors many small towns across the United States. Like other rural settlements in the Bluegrass, Mortonsville lost the economic influences that created the center. As times changed, much of the town's historic built environment was abandoned or began crumbling away. Gone now are all but a few of the store buildings; the historic bank building is an empty shell; the school building no longer houses a school. Today Mortonsville is a rural community defined officially by a one-mile radius. In addition to older homes, there are two churches, a fire station, one roadside store, and a stream that crosses through the middle of the settlement. Farms mostly surround the community.

In the nineteenth century, Mortonsville played a significant role in the history and economy of



The historic bank in
Mortonsville



The historic center in
Mortonsville

Kentucky. One of the first banks in the state was located here. Mortonsville was a true center in the region: five stores, a post office, a school, and the bank were all located along Delaney's Ferry Road. The 1870 Census reports a population of 744, although some significant number of those people probably lived beyond the one-mile radius we refer to today as the Mortonsville Small Community. In those days, it took three hours by horse-drawn cart just to travel from Mortonsville to Versailles.

Growth pressure has returned to Mortonsville. Newer homes and non-descript subdivisions have begun to appear at its edges. The newer development is not in keeping with the character of Mortonsville and has been offensive to many in the community. The soft, gentle quality of the older structures is missing in the newer development. Instead of following the rural village pattern of the original settlement, the new subdivisions have a suburban feel. This is reflected in the siting of the buildings on their lots and upon the land, the architectural style and landscape treatment.

Rebirth of the Rural Community

This situation is not unique to Mortonsville. Millsville, Nonesuch, and other communities in rural Woodford County have experienced similar fluctuations in growth and prosperity. Pressure to grow exists throughout most of the Bluegrass, it is often found today in small communities like these that orbit thriving regional, urban centers. Why are these pristine rural lands becoming attractive places for new residents after all these years?

Our motorized freedom of movement is certainly one factor. The decrease in travel times realized by the car allows people to live in and enjoy Mortonsville's quiet, rural character, but still work in Versailles, Lexington, or Frankfort. Mortonsville, and towns

like it, offer an alternative to people who are willing to drive farther to avoid living in the bland, sprawling subdivisions cropping up around the larger cities.

The risk, however, is that if more and more houses following the conventional suburban template are built here, the small towns will be deformed into a facsimile of the same subdivisions from which the newcomers are fleeing. Under this scenario each new homesite takes away from the original allure and sense of place. The solution? Channel growth into authentic traditional neighborhoods, re-establishing patterns in which each new addition makes the whole more complete. The neighborhoods should have an interconnected network of walkable streets; no cul-de-sacs. Houses should front the streets and have porches. Small neighborhood parks should be a short walk from all the houses.

It has proved extraordinarily difficult, legally, politically or practically, for a county government to stop growth, or to prohibit people from moving to certain sectors of the county. It is, however, much more realistic to use codes and standards to control the *character* and *quality* of future growth. Plans for new subdivisions prompted the no-growth camp to get unusual new zoning rules and subdivision regulations passed for development in the rural areas, but, there are flaws in that first generation of laws that are resulting in unintended consequences. It will be necessary to adopt a more refined set of codes and standards to achieve the balanced vision for creating stronger communities in rural Woodford County.

Comparing How to Grow

Mortonville was selected as a Small Community within Woodford County which would be a model for a Master Plan. The planning principals and concepts are intended to apply to all Small Communities in Woodford County.



Existing

After years of urban and suburban expansion, the once-thriving center of Mortonville is little more than shells of old buildings.



Mortonville can become more complete. Adding a few buildings and houses, as well as restoring the historic buildings, can bring back a true center for the residents of Mortonville. Adding a general store and post office are just two of the many ideas that people suggested during the charrette. Stores that support agricultural needs, or a small café and restaurant

An analysis for Mortonsville examines growth under the existing and proposed regulations. Based upon population projections and breakdowns from the Versailles Comprehensive Plan, Mortonsville, (or any other Small Community for that matter), could expect to grow by 200 dwelling units in the next twenty years.

The first map illustrates the existing development. The second map illustrates the continuation of the recent pattern of growth, following the rules that say no new roads can be added. This scenario shows how, under the current regulations, Mortonsville will devolve into an ordinary subdivision, with little regard for maintaining the rural character or the landscape.

The third map illustrates a greater number of projected future homesites but the homes are configured in a more traditional, compact way of settling the land. This scenario emulates the time-honored settlement pattern used for the original homes and buildings along Delaney's Ferry Road. In this scenario, new development is intentionally designed in a way that preserves open space while creating a strong sense of place: buildings are close to the street on varied, moderately sized lots. As a result, the views to the rural landscape would be preserved.

Main Objectives for Mortonsville and other Small Communities

These planning principals and concepts are intended to apply to all Small Communities in Woodford County.

In the long term, just limiting the number of roads does not necessarily preserve the rural landscape or the views to it. Also,

Existing



Diagram 1 shows existing development in Mortonsville. Note the historic growth at the center and more recent homesites added at the edges. The black "dots" represent many of the existing buildings.

Current Regulation Build-



Diagram 2 shows a total buildout scenario according to the current regulations, which allow for 1-acre lots on existing roads (no new roads are permitted). By 2014, all of the expected 200 units will probably have been added. This scenario maximizes burden on the road network and consumes large amounts of land.

Proposed Build-



Diagram 3 illustrates a greater number of dwellings, but using improved codes and a traditional settlement pattern. More compact development concentrates growth in the center, allowing for stronger identity and for larger, contiguous areas of land to be preserved.



current regulations do not prevent the development of large tracts of land. Therefore a more comprehensive look at long-term growth and the values and desires of the community formed the basis for the Mortonsville Plan in this report.

The overall principle for the Plan is to focus growth into compact, walkable neighborhoods that include a mix of uses. The purpose of this type of neighborhood is twofold. First, keeping the neighborhoods small means that larger tracts of rural land can be preserved and/or used for agriculture. Second, a mix of uses can provide goods and services that residents need on a daily basis. It should be possible, again, to access at least some daily needs without having to drive to another town! When the neighborhoods are compact and interconnected, people can walk to the store, visit friends, or church; many automobile trips on the road network can be shortened or eliminated in this way. Beyond those practical advantages, this development pattern will be respectful to the historic character of the town and extend its charm.

This plan shows one hypothetical buildout for Mortonsville. Variations to street and building location can occur and still meet the main objectives of this plan, which include:

- The old buildings in the Historic Center should be renovated or restored and inhabited.
- Commercial and business uses should be encouraged in the Historic Center and adjacent to the existing convenience store.
- New streets should be interconnected to provide multiple accesses to both the new and old neighborhoods. The new streets should form blocks for new lots.
- Houses should face the new streets with front porches.
- Each neighborhood or ward should have a small neighborhood park or green.
- Future growth within Mortonsville should be contiguous, it should be regulated to start at the historic center first and grow outward.
- Mortonsville is separated into two halves by the creek and the adjacent embankment. The creek and the

embankment should be preserved as a greenway. Bike and walking paths should cross the greenway where possible to further connect the two halves of the village. These paths will provide safe routes for children, away from moving vehicles, to walk or bike to their friends' houses, to the convenience store, or to the much-needed future neighborhood school.

- The water tower next to the old school should have "Mortonsville" painted on the water tank, to enhance the sense of place.
- To stay in character with existing houses, all new houses along Delaney's Ferry and Carpenter Pike should be sited 50 to 75 feet from the road, except for those within the Historic Center which should be closer to the road to enhance the sense of place.
- Control light pollution by choosing lighting that is in scale with surrounding houses and roads.

Keeping the Rural Character - the Strategy

1. Revitalize the Center. Make the center of the community even more useful and meaningful for the community. The center of Mortonsville should be a place of greater activity where a civic presence as well as daily needs and services are found. The historic character should also be preserved. It is critical to rehabilitate the remaining historic buildings before they lose their structural integrity. Combining private investment with grant funding and tax credits for restoration can be used to save historic buildings. Work with preservation trusts or set up a special not-for-profit organization if necessary.

Renovating the former school and bank can help maintain the

The Big Ideas

These fundamental principles for the Mortonsville Plan came from the community:

1. Build and restore real neighborhoods.
2. Revive, yet protect, the rural community.
3. Protect farms and scenic heritage.



An aerial perspective of Mortonville, showing how neighborhoods can fit into the rural landscape. Also, farm land is preserved by clustering neighborhoods

original character of the town while providing practical uses for the neighbors. An ideal scenario would be to convert the old school back into a school, for example. Many Mortonville citizens expressed dismay at the loss of the school. Whether the revived school is located in the old building or built anew, this particular opportunity reflects the national reconsideration of mega-schools; there is a growing consensus that larger schools are not necessarily better ones, and a small school at Mortonville could be both a state-of-the-art example for educators and part of rebuilding the bonds of community.

2. Grow out from the center, but very carefully. New development should connect and relate to the existing settlement. Each new increment of growth should follow a traditional neighborhood pattern; new neighborhoods should have discernable center and edge, a mix of dwelling types, and interconnected streets. Concentrate growth in certain areas to allow for larger, significant tracts of farmland to be preserved (see diagrams on page 5.5).

3. Preserve historic and rural character. New development should complement the existing settlement. It should be very similar to the traditional character of the settlement pattern. The architecture of new buildings should repeat the scale of existing buildings, using simple proportions and roof pitches. New development should maintain existing hedgerows, preserve stands of trees, and respect the topography. Fences should be similar to those seen throughout Woodford County. The historic stone walls seen throughout should be emulated where possible. New development should be in keeping with the scale, siting and architectural character of the existing community

4. Conserve the natural features as part of the community. Natural features within and next to a Small Community are an integral part of defining the character of a rural community. Careful attention to topography, long vistas, and environmental

features can help to determine the areas that should be conserved or maintained as open space for the well-being and enjoyment of the community's residents. For example, the creeks and the hills that define the creek can be preserved as a greenway or linear park. This land is not suitable for development in any event, but should be carefully incorporated into the design of the community to ensure the integrity of the features as well as their role in enhancing the sense of place. Several tools should be considered to accomplish the preservation of special lands and green spaces:

- The County can establish a riparian zone as part of the Zoning Ordinance.
- The County can purchase lands as County parks or open space.
- The landowner can volunteer to maintain the area, perhaps with the help of a volunteer corps from the community.
- The landowner can sell or donate the land to a civic organization as a conservation easement, thereby realizing a substantial tax break.

5. Encourage and allow diverse agricultural uses. Rural lands can only remain countryside if they have economically viable uses or they are bought and preserved as open space. The farming and thoroughbred-raising trades are essential for maintaining the character of the rural community. Agricultural uses must be a realistic financial choice for the property owner. New agriculture-related uses and eco-tourism must be encouraged and allowed, including hunting or birding lodges. Bed-and-breakfast inns located on farms should be allowed to provide for and accommodate more than the current, unworkable limit of four guest rooms.

6. Allow neighborhood uses. Regulations should allow for small community businesses and services to help to meet daily needs of local residents. This can make the center of Mortonsville useful for the community and also reduce or shorten car trips. Stores and services that meet the needs of the residents within walking distance are part of the basic appeal of small town life. As the centermost neighborhood grows back

Keeping the Rural Character

Traditional houses in a rural landscape behave differently than recently built homes found in rural subdivisions. New homes, if thoughtfully designed, can be a pleasing neighbor in a rural community. The difference is in the details. As a comparison these two homes can



Traditional homes:

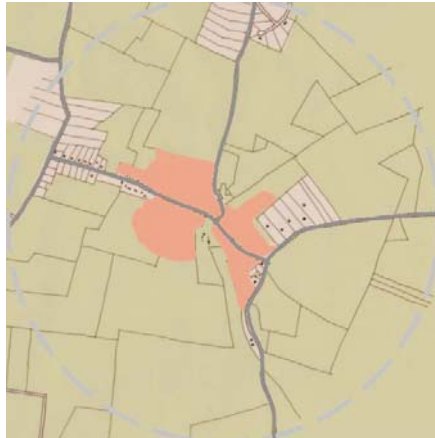
- are located close to the street, creating an interesting experience;
- often have deep, usable porches;
- have simple volumes and proportions;
- have an architectural style and details in keeping with the Bluegrass building tradition;
- and typically define their property with fences and knee walls.



Typical subdivisions:

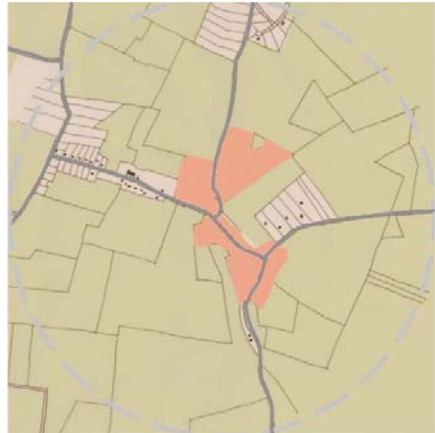
- are generally set far back, the street is not defined, Creating an unwelcoming appearance;
- often do not have porches;
- have a convoluted volume and proportion;
- often have no architectural style that is part of the Bluegrass building tradition;
- and typically do not define their property.

One Pattern of Concentrated Growth



Neighborhoods are at the center. Resources are used efficiently.

Another Pattern of Concentrated Growth



Similar in concept - neighborhoods at the center - but pattern could be flexible dependent on private development and investment.

A Pattern of Random Growth



Concentrated neighborhoods, but separated from one another. This pattern increases long term infrastructure costs. There will also be more congestion and traffic.

together and perhaps a new neighborhood is added, the settlement will reach the stage where it can again support a small amount of retail, particularly if Mortonsville is promoted to visitors (and to local proprietors of eating places or antique stores that nurture a good regional reputation).

7. Consider tightening the one-mile radius to 1/2-mile while protecting the rights of the individuals within the one-mile radius. It is important to note that the City of Versailles fits within a one-mile radius. The intent has been to keep Small Communities— *small*. In light of the growth comparison exercise on page 5.4, which indicates the predicted 20-year growth, it is important to rethink the size of the radius that delineates Mortonsville as a Small Community.

8. Allow growth only when infrastructure is feasible. Rethink how infrastructure works in Small Communities and rural areas. Ensure that the burden of new infrastructure, such as roads, utilities, water, sewer, schools, and other community needs are not born by the existing residents alone. New growth must help pay for the costs of new infrastructure.

9. Establish a County Sewer District. The Woodford County Fiscal Court should establish a county sewer district for that area outside the Urban Service Boundary of Versailles and Midway. The county sewer district should operate according to State regulations and guidelines including required maintenance of septic tanks every three years. The individual tanks and lines from each building should be on a public easement.

10. Establish a Development Rights Program. For all rural zoning districts, the property owner has certain development (density) rights vested under the current Zoning Ordinance. This Code assumes that those rights would remain intact. The use of these rights, however, can be more flexible than just building houses on the land where the rights reside. Under a type of free-market buying and selling program, property owners could sell rights for

what the market will bear, or combine these rights in joint partnership developments. The County's role is to record the buying and selling so as to determine post-transaction zoning.

existing State law.

Property owners within the ½ to one-mile radius of Mortonsville or Nonesuch, and within the one-mile to 1½-mile radius of Millville shall have the option of:

1. Developing a Rural Residential Cluster with the density (development) rights vested under the current Zoning Ordinance;
- or
2. Transferring development rights into the one-half mile radius area of Mortonsville or Nonesuch or the one mile radius area of Millville through voluntary sale to a public or private buyer (rights transferred within each locality). These rights are allocated according to the existing zoning districts. An incentive is given for the one acre lot density (development) rights along currently existing public roads: two additional density bonus rights per property can be transferred if the rest of the rights are all transferred. Rights are transferred in perpetuity.

11. Make other legislative strategies.

The Task Force recommends that the A-2 Ordinance be amended to strike residences as a permitted principal or accessory use.

With respect to the goal of encouraging rural and agricultural uses in the County, the Task Force recommends that the County adopt a Right-to-Farm ordinance modeled after the

