

One of the fundamental goals of Living Well Community is Sustainability. Living Well Community blends a variety of uses on this 124 acres of land, including residential neighborhoods, food production/gardening/farming, land and environmental conservation, Green Businesses, and a Conference Center among other uses. Living Well Community is within the Town of Franklinville city limits, with town water and sewer.

Prior to Walk Softly, LLC buying the property in 2007, the whole property was zoned as a “Traditional Neighborhood Overlay District,” which requires a mixture of uses. Rising Sun Way was already built and paved, and water and sewer lines had been installed along Rising Sun Way. A good portion of the central part of the property had been recently logged. Additionally, the area around where the Conference Center Building is now located had been used in the past as an area for local residents to come dump their trash, especially metal and glass that would not burn. The property had disturbance, but also had beauty, energy, and potential.

Basic Principles Used in the Development of Living Well Community:

- Preserve the most important and vulnerable ecological areas, especially the River and Creek corridors (53 acre conservation area set up buffering the river and creek)
- Do the intensive development (residential, business, etc.) primarily in the areas already disturbed and at the higher elevations.
- Where feasible, have the most desirable areas set aside as common areas or areas where the whole community has access (e.g. hilltop park area, access to the river and creek).
- Minimize mass grading and fit buildings and infrastructure to the existing topography where possible. (e.g. roads are laid out to minimize grading)
- Develop the project slowly over time so that the amount of disturbed area at any given time is kept to a small percentage of the whole property and these areas have time to recover and revegetate.
- Require rainwater catchment off buildings in order to preserve an important resource, and to mitigate the storm water impacts of rooftops and roads.
- Increase the capacity of the landscape to slow down, retain, and hold moisture and nutrients (e.g. earth berms, swales, organic matter, barriers in ditch areas, etc.)
- In areas that have already been disturbed or are being developed more intensely encourage the replacement of single use plants and trees with multi-use plants and trees.

What happens in a traditional development:

- Usually, the whole property is developed.
- The maximum area allowed is covered in rooftops, parking lots, and roads.

- Park spaces, common spaces, shared spaces, and preserved spaces, etc. are a small part of the whole project
- Mass grading of the property is normal including removing all the tree cover, often removing all the topsoil, and regrading the whole project, or a good portion of it.
- Storm water is concentrated, collected, and piped off the property.
- Once houses are built, yards are replanted usually in single use plants (grass, and landscaping for beauty, but little attention to multi-use species or purposes).
- Architecture of the neighborhood is similar throughout with minimum diversity or uniqueness.
- Large parts of the project are built all at once.

A few additional thoughts:

- Native Americans intervened and manipulated the environment dramatically . They made extensive use of fire, pruning, herding of deer, fish weirs in the rivers, etc.
- Permaculture encourages us to look at ways to intensify the capacity of areas around our homesteads to be more productive related to human habitation, and encourages us to leave areas farther away from our homes wild. Permaculture also encourages the use of modest earthwork and land sculpturing and other strategies to enhance natural patterns and capture available natural resources or minimize impacts of possible negative natural elements (some examples are swales, ponds, check dams, chinampas, sun traps, windbreaks, fire barriers, etc.).
- Gardens and fields are a manipulation of natural patterns (builds on the pattern of natural succession to fill all available exposed ground area with something growing to maximize capture of sunlight). We are looking for the best balance of increased capacity and minimum intervention. Different people might see this balance point differently and the mix or strategies that best achieves this goal differently.
- Forests are ecosystems, just as a garden is an ecosystem. We prune, weed, remove, mulch, and plant in a garden. We can have a forest that we leave with no intervention to remain wild, and we can have forests that we treat more like a garden. And we can have places that we choose to have trees, but not a forest because we want more sunlight and space for other uses.
- In Piedmont North Carolina, where we now limit natural fire patterns from happening, land left alone will convert to forest over time, although complete forest cover is not the traditional pattern. And where we have houses and buildings we generally want trees but we also want available sunlight for a greater diversity of plant communities and uses. We also may choose to change the species of trees and location of trees we keep long term in our more intensively developed areas.