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When Shelly Rayback and her husband, Herve Mahe, were looking to move out of their condo and buy a house last year, they wanted to stay close to Burlington yet be part of a community where they felt comfortable letting their seven-year-old son go out the door in the afternoon and play with kids his age. Shelly, a UVM biogeography professor, and Herve, a professional chef, also longed to live somewhere they and their son could maintain an easy connection to nature. What they really wanted, she says, was “an early 1900s kind of idyllic community.” In the end, they had to go only as far as Spear Street in South Burlington to South Village, a so-called traditional neighborhood development, and the first of its kind in the state. ▶

A working organic farm is the central feature of South Village.

South Village

**A TRADITIONAL
NEIGHBORHOOD
IN THE HEART OF
SPEAR STREET**





Clockwise from top left: Farm-to-table communities, or agri-hoods, are a viable resource for local food. Residents of South Village can participate in the on-site CSA or pick-your-own options. Current greenhouse expansion allows for bountiful seasonal harvests. Three preferred builders at South Village offer custom design/build options with a continuity of traditional rooflines and New England style architecture. One hundred and fifty acres of preserved land allows for agricultural space and for wildlife to move through a natural habitat.

A traditional neighborhood development (TND) is a planned community within a defined area that includes a variety of residences and land uses, with an emphasis on pedestrian accessibility. South Village is sited on what was once the 220-acre Calkins dairy farm, though the last cows left some 30 years ago. When the Calkins family decided to sell, they were determined that the land not be turned over to a developer who would then build a series of huge homes on five-acre plots. Will Raap, founder of Gardener's Supply, suggested instead the idea of an ecologically sensitive site that would welcome residents in all stages of life.

Creating Community

"The question was how does an old dairy farm reinvent itself to become a new and better suburbia, with food and energy production as part of the whole development," says Will. "Because what we've done with suburban development for the last 70 years isn't going to be what we can do in the future." When South Village is complete, that will translate to 334 residences in 159 buildings, a mix of single-family houses, townhomes, condominiums, and rental buildings with no more than 12 units in each.

"It flies in the face of normal suburban thinking," says Will, "which is that everyone gets their half-acre and a lawn." Instead, in South Village each single-family home lot is limited to approximately an eighth of an acre, with the bulk of the acreage freed up for common and protected land.

Of the 220 acres, construction will be limited to 72, with the remainder maintained as wetlands, a preserve, trails, a farm, and a solar array. "You begin to encourage thinking about nature within a suburban development," says Will. ▶



In addition to the environmental benefits, that approach has allowed for a very real sense of community; Shelly says that neighbors routinely report on activity in the marshes and woodlands behind their houses, noting turkey flocks, bobcat sightings, and the arrival of a variety of birds. “These seem like small things,” she says, “but they connect people.”

On-site there’s also a 13-acre farm, which is run by Reese Baker and a small staff. It produces enough fruits, vegetables, eggs, and honey for a 70-person CSA (community supported agriculture, in which members pay a flat fee and receive weekly shares of whatever’s in season). South Village residents are invited to take advantage of it, but nonresidents also participate—in fact, says Will, roughly two-thirds of the CSA’s customers live outside South Village.

Benefits for Residents and Others

The farm has also served as a resource for the South Burlington school district, whose Common Roots program brings students out to plant seedlings and harvest produce that they then cook and serve to their schoolmates. Finally, there are raised beds for use by homeowners with more ambitious gardening plans, and a pick-your-own garden whose flowers and herbs are available for CSA members.

And there are bees and chickens. Although helping to raise the chickens has always been an option for residents—Herve and his son were part of a crew of seven households that rotated chicken-care duties last summer, bringing home the eggs on the days they were in charge—soon there will be an even bigger flock, with 300 to 400 laying chickens arriving this year. They’ll live within the confines of the fence that surrounds the solar array, on an acre that’s so wet, jokes Will, it could otherwise be used only for growing rice.

The solar array currently feeds back into the Green Mountain Power grid but someday might create enough energy to power up to 75 homes as the technology evolves. With the addition of the chickens to that

acre, says Will, there’s a second beneficial use for a plot that otherwise wouldn’t have been productive.

Such environmental sensitivity is further reflected in developers’ efforts to retain storm water on-site, rather than having it flow to Lake Champlain, through the careful contouring of lots and narrowing of streets—in fact, runoff today is decreased from the property’s days as a farm.

Those narrower streets also serve a traffic-calming purpose and keep the community pedestrian and child friendly. Garages are built behind residences and are accessed

through alleys, which reinforces the safety aspect but also emphasizes that “the person is more important than the car,” says realtor Kelly Fiske.

Research shows that, in general in the United States, people like to come home from work and take a five- or ten-minute walk, says Kelly; with walking trails, in addition to winding sidewalks, South Village offers its residents plenty of opportunities to stretch their legs.

There are more than 300 TND communities in the United States, but South Village is one of only 30 that include an



Above: The walkable streetscape is bordered by front porches—a celebrated haven to relax and connect with neighbors. Right: The South Village CSA is a resource for the South Burlington school district’s Common Roots program.





agricultural component. Kelly says new residents tend to come in from rural outlying communities, ready for a break from the commute and the demands of property care—South Village residents enjoy snow removal, lawn care, and trash services—or are downsizing or, like Shelly Rayback and her family, are looking for a sense of community. At South Village, neighborhood potlucks are routine; a block party is also in the works for this summer. As in an old-fashioned village, says Kelly, it's being independent yet connected that's most satisfying to residents. ▶

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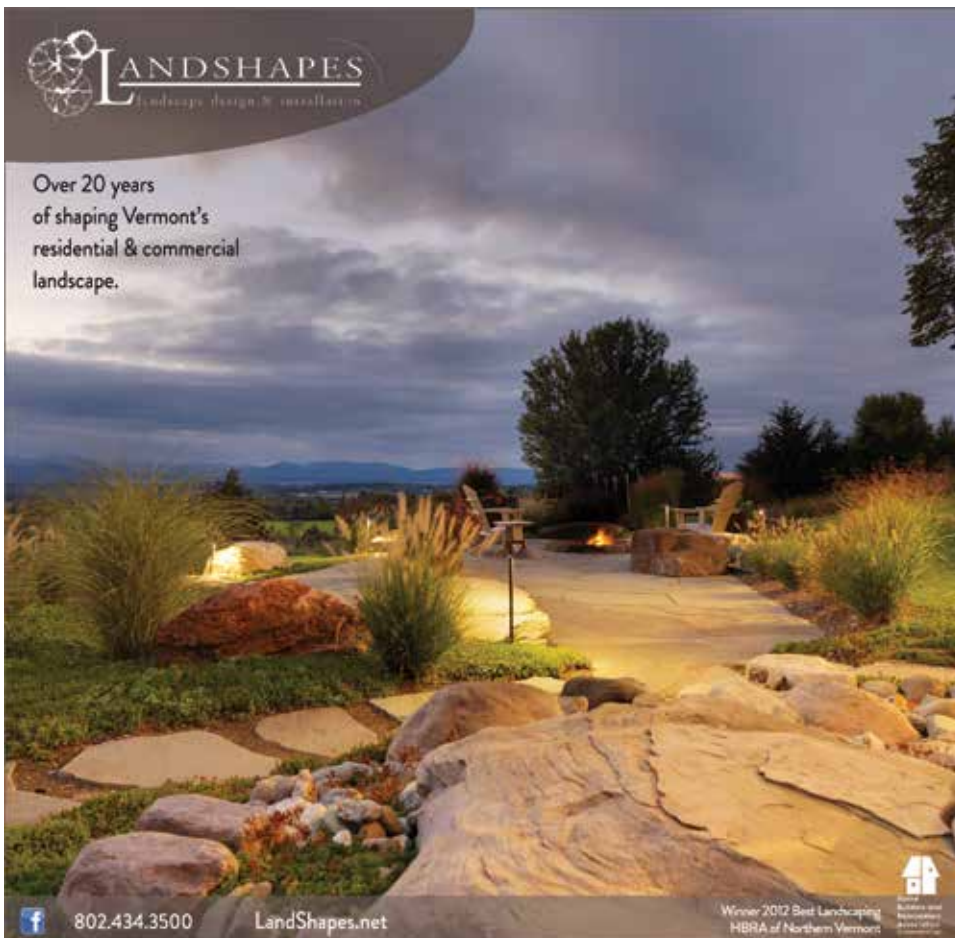
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The Place Is Humming

That also translates to the structures themselves. The commonality of the houses is a New England style of architecture, with traditional rooflines, window styles, and design details, but beyond that, virtually anything goes. The heterogeneity is made possible through three preferred builders: Gristmill Builders, Sheppard Custom Homes, and Sterling Construction were assigned lots, with S.D. Ireland overseeing development.

Potential residents may choose a lot and work with the designated builder, or choose a builder and find an appropriate lot. The firms all offer standard plans but are equally amenable to creating whatever meets a potential homeowner's needs, taking into consideration a given lot size and its location within the development. Almost all are Green certified to some standard.

Although the project's 2008 groundbreaking—just as the housing market collapsed—was ill timed, it has rebounded, and now, says Sterling Construction President Bart Frisbie, “the place is humming.” Sterling has built some 30 residences to date and is currently working on a half-dozen more, including duplexes and triplexes.

“The diversity makes for a wonderful streetscape,” says Bart. “It also allows for a variety of price points, so the neighborhood works for people who are looking for different things.” Will echoes that, noting that residents come from all different ages, incomes, and stages of life, and Shelly agrees.

“It's a community where parents look out for other kids. You get a warm day, and everybody's out there,” she says, adding that it's not just families with kids, but retirees, single people, and residents walking by with dogs—everyone stops to chat. “Within two or three months of moving in, we were absorbed into the neighborhood,” says Shelly. “I feel very grateful every day that I've had the opportunity to live in this wonderful community.” ❁

For more information, contact Kelly Fiske at (802) 861-7600, or email her at Kelly@KellyFiske.com.

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Gristmill Builders of Waterbury Center, Vermont, is a building company specializing in custom new construction since 1992 and has been featured in *Fine Homebuilding* and *Vermont Magazine*, and was selected to build HGTV's 2011 *Dream Home* at Spruce Peak in Stowe. Gristmill's mission at South Village is to continue its foundation of quality and design within this unique community.



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