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There's no easy answer at hand, but here are broad suggestions

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Local developers increasingly are proposing plans that emphasize preservation of open space by increasing housing density.

This is a commendable approach, but the catch is that it often requires changes to existing zoning ordinances to allow more housing units. Understandably, that doesn't sit well with existing property owners.

Two examples have played out on the West Shore in recent months.

In Lower Allen Twp., the owners of Liberty Forge Golf Course want their property re-zoned from single-family housing, of one unit per acre, to a designation that would allow them to build 582 high-rise condominium units, or seven units per acre.

Liberty Forge owners contend this use will preserve ample open space, while providing an estimated \$5 million in tax benefits for residents of the township, the West Shore School District and Cumberland County.

But nearby residents -- both those who have lived in the vicinity for years and those who have recently bought or built on the basis of existing zoning -- point to increased traffic volume on two-lane Lisburn Road and other demands on infrastructure and schools.

Similar concerns have been raised in Hampden Twp., where developers sought a change allowing more homes to be built on a tract west of Interstate 81 off Lamb's Gap Road. The developers were promising more open space preservation, but the change also would have resulted in greater housing densities in "country residential" zones throughout the township.

The commissioners rejected the change on a 3-2 vote, but officials say this and similar issues are unlikely to go away.

That applies to townships throughout the region and the state. The greater environmental consciousness overall is starting to collide with a financial and housing crisis that has developers looking at alternatives.

Hindsight is 20-20, but better planning in previous decades that took into account future environment, infrastructure and school issues would have prevented the burgeoning and disorderly sprawl that has put current municipal officials between a rock and a hard place.

On that note, while we don't have specific solutions to offer, some broad suggestions we've previously raised still apply.

Although improvements have been made, planning continues to need a more comprehensive look on a regional basis. Second, the push should continue at the state, county and local levels for public policies that encourage revitalization of small towns.

That includes refurbishing old buildings for commercial and residential use, business district upgrades, incentives for fixing up old homes, and school districts forgoing the urge to build large campuses miles out of town.

This approach in and of itself is a great example of high-density development that preserves open space and doesn't unduly disrupt the landscape of existing property owners.

