

SPECIAL HILLSIDES PRESERVATION AND SPECIAL NATURAL AREA DISTRICTS

Preliminary Recommendations

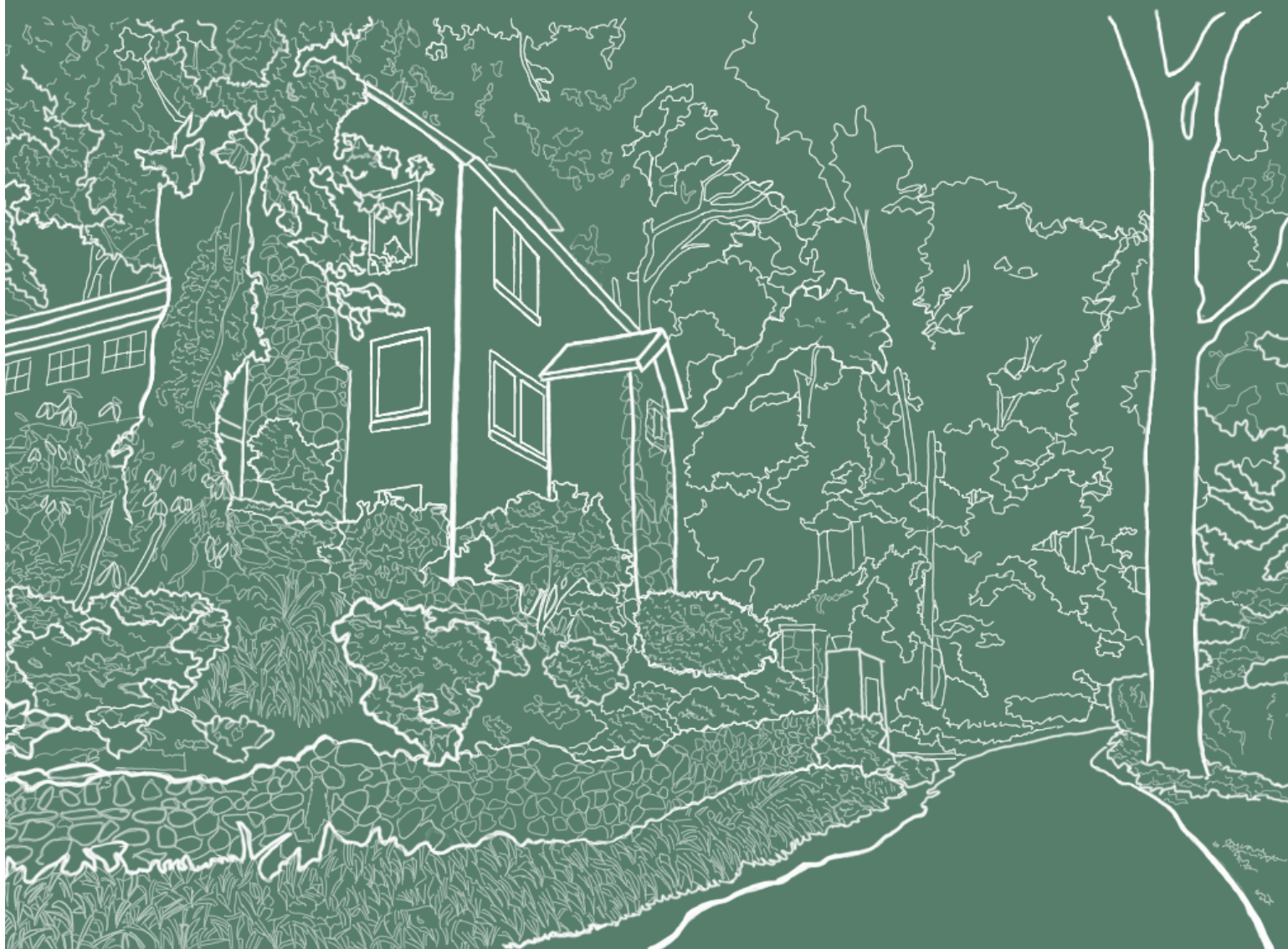


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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past several years, the Department of City Planning (DCP) has been working in close consultation with stakeholders on Staten Island to develop recommendations to update the existing regulations of the Special Hillside Preservation District and Special Natural Area District on Staten Island established approximately 50 years ago. The preliminary recommendations provided within this document build upon the existing goals of these districts which have resulted in tree-lined neighborhoods and preserved wetlands, woodlands, and interconnected hillsides along the Serpentine Ridge. Since the establishment of these rules, DCP has established best practices based on review of hundreds of applications and updated ecological science, and we believe these regulations could be improved to be more streamlined, homeowner friendly, and modernized. The implementation of the proposal would result in improved outcomes for balancing neighborhood development and the preservation of natural features, and an improved process for smaller sites while providing greater community oversight on developments that have a greater impact on the public realm.

The purpose of this document is to share an overview of the zoning proposal and preliminary recommendations, which reflects and responds to comments and feedback provided by the Staten Island Working Group. DCP aims to conduct further outreach to obtain community input prior to the formal public review process in order to inform the proposed zoning text.

Key strategies to improve the existing rules include:

- Creating zoning regulations that are standardized and fairer for homeowners.
- Applying the latest environmental preservation science, technology and best practices to zoning regulations—which will make zoning application decisions more predictable.
- Focusing on preserving the natural features that will have the biggest impact on today's environment.

Please visit our website at
www.nyc.gov/SpecialDistricts
for more information about this project, to
ask questions, and to get involved.

Released: June 2020

Special Purpose Districts

The regulations for special purpose districts are designed to supplement and modify the underlying zoning rules. They address distinctive neighborhoods with particular goals. Special purpose districts are shown on the zoning maps and are in [Articles VIII–XIII](#) of the Zoning Resolution.

Serpentine Ridge

A geologic feature formed by glacial shifts over 400 million years ago, present on the northeastern portion of Staten Island.

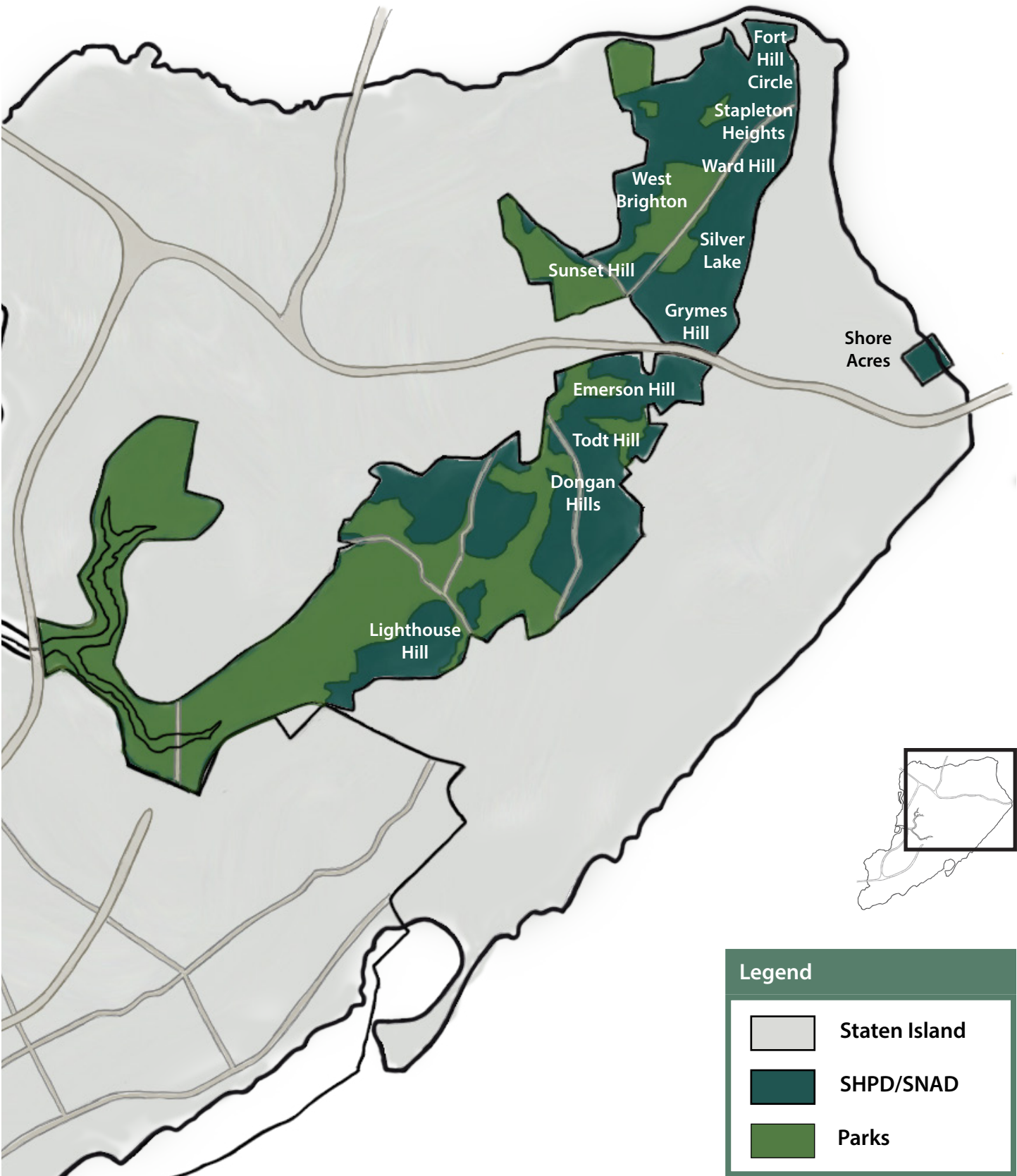
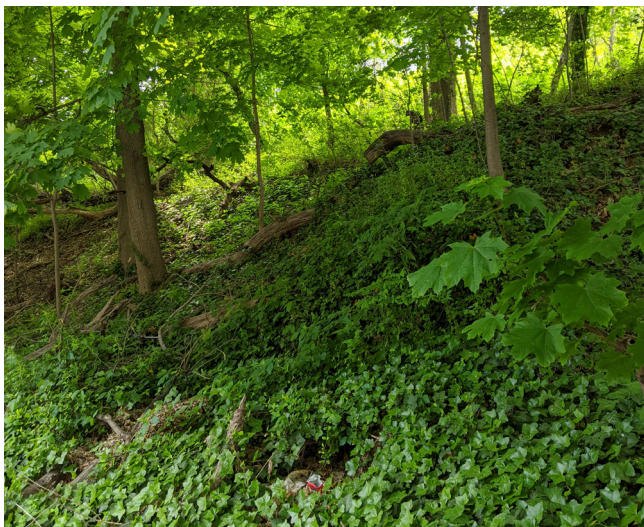
Staten Island contains the only occurrence of serpentine bedrock in New York State.

In the early 1970s, New York City created special zoning regulations on Staten Island to balance development with natural resource preservation. These regulations responded to increased development resulting from the recently completed Verrazano-Narrows Bridge, as well as the growing environmentalism movement.

The Special Natural Area District (SNAD) was established in 1974 as the first special purpose zoning district aimed at protecting natural features such as aquatic, biologic, botanic, geologic, and topographic features within the mid-island neighborhoods of Staten Island. In 1977, SNAD was expanded to include the northeastern Shore Acres neighborhood.

Building on the goals of and lessons learned from SNAD, the Special Hillside Preservation District (SHPD) was established in 1987 to guide development in the sensitive slopes of the Serpentine Ridge in northeastern Staten Island.

SNAD regulations were updated once again in 2005 to create consistency with the SHPD regulations. Since then, no comprehensive changes have been made to these districts.



Low Density

Areas with a lower maximum number of dwelling units permitted on a zoning lot, usually characterized by detached homes.

Steep Slope

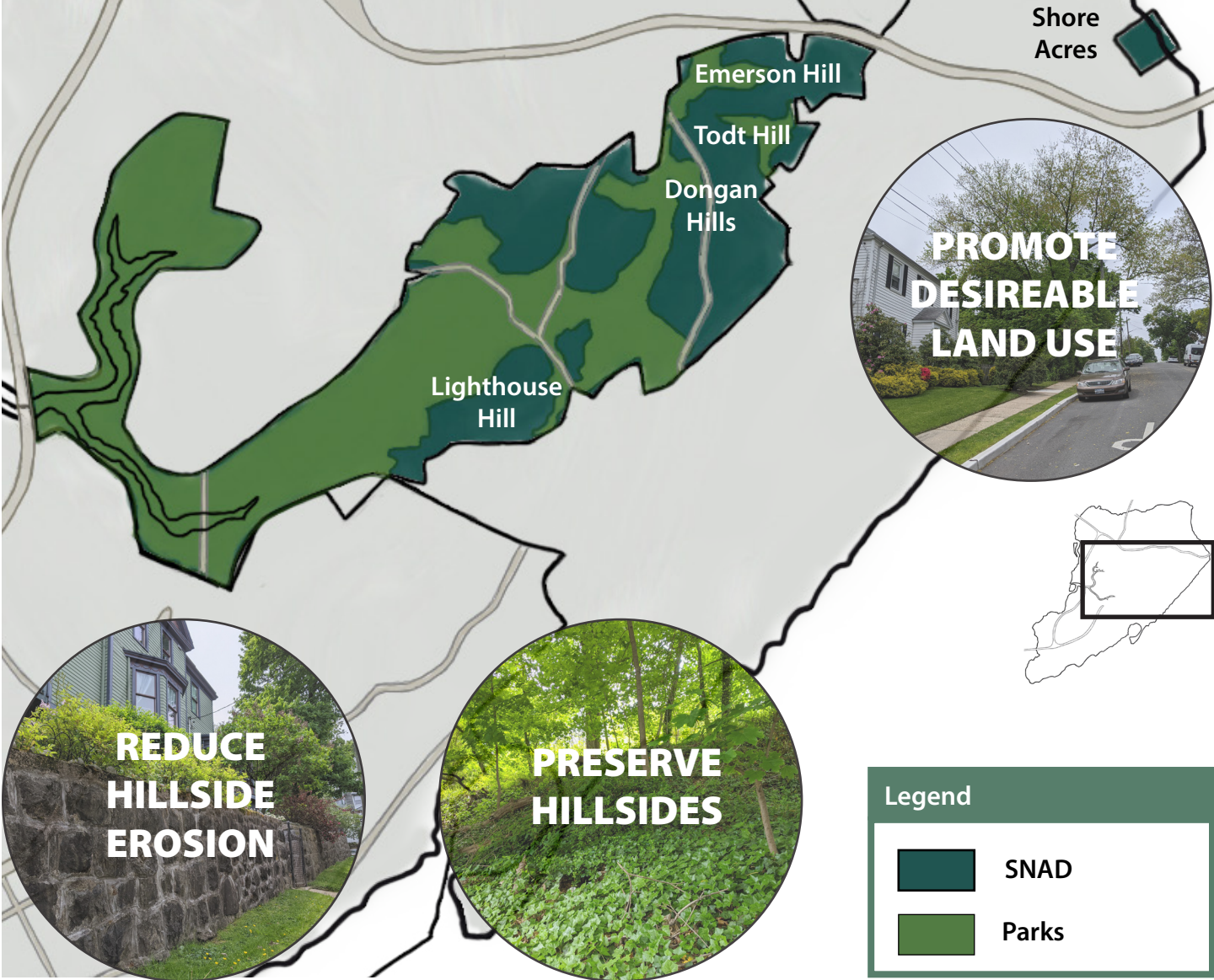
Ground that has an incline of 25 percent or greater.

SPECIAL NATURAL AREA DISTRICT

SNAD is comprised of neighborhoods with significant natural features, including steep slopes, rock outcroppings, forests, wetlands, ponds, and stream corridors. It includes the neighborhoods of Emerson Hill, Dongan Hills, Todt Hill, Lighthouse Hill, an area known as the Greenbelt of Staten Island within Community District 2, and the Shore Acres neighborhood in Community District 1.

SNAD consists of primarily low-density residential zoning districts, which are characterized by detached single- and two-family homes; community facilities such as hospitals, senior care, educational and religious institutions; parkland and open space; and limited storefronts. Over 90 percent of lots in SNAD contain one or two-family homes and over four percent are used by institutions.

SNAD regulations require property owners to obtain approval from the City Planning Commission (CPC) for most developments, enlargements or site alterations. In granting an approval, the CPC reviews how the proposed changes would preserve existing slopes, trees, or wetlands to the greatest extent possible.



Mixed Use

A building in a commercial district used partly for residential use and partly for community facility or commercial use.

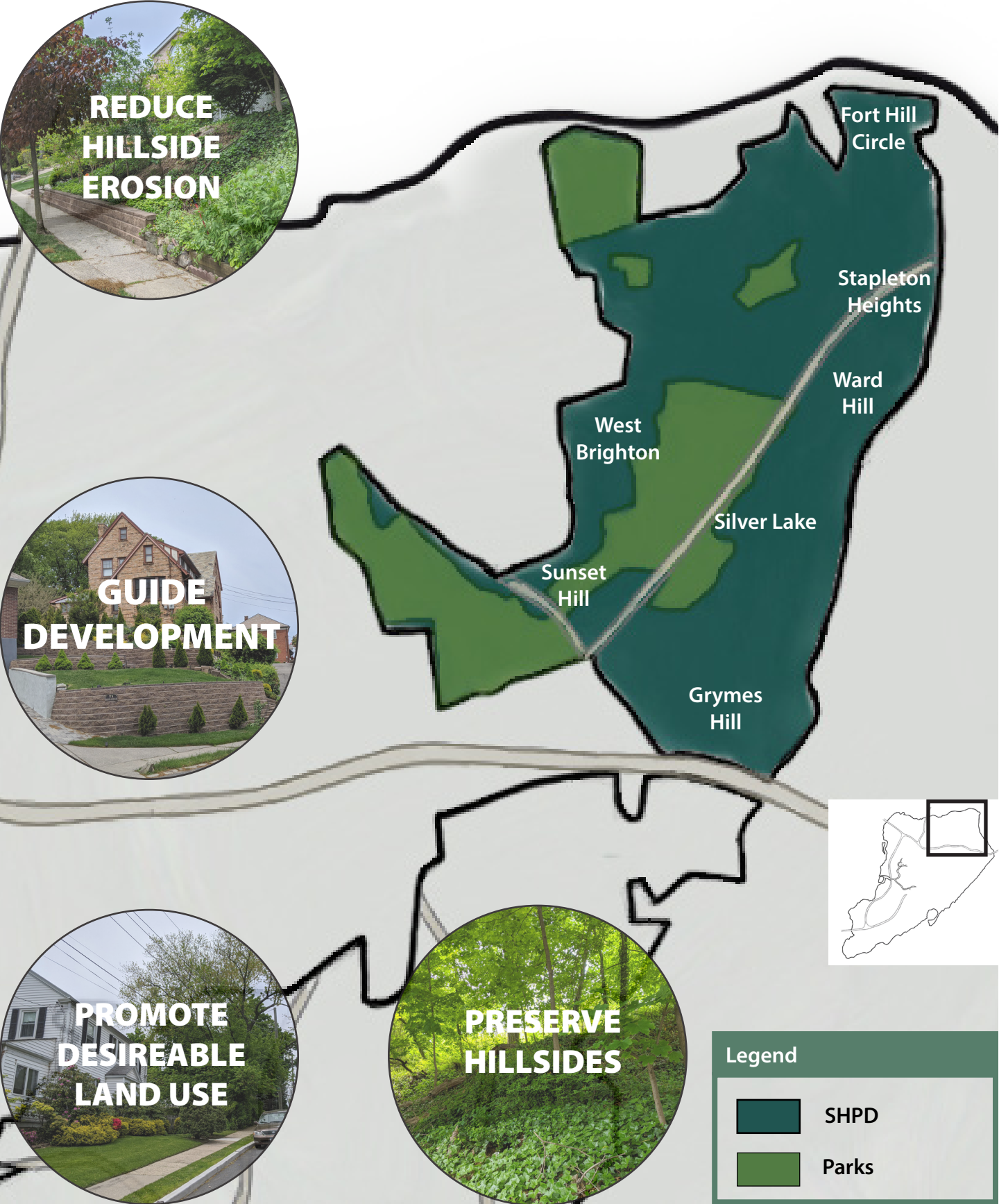
SPECIAL HILLSIDES PRESERVATION DISTRICT

SHPD protects a 1,900-acre area surrounding the Serpentine Ridge, a geologic feature formed by glacial shifts over 400 million years ago, which is connected to the steep slopes in the SNAD. The ridge provides unique scenic views of the surrounding area and is an important feature of the landscape and neighborhood character.

The district encompasses the neighborhoods of Ward Hill, Grymes Hill, Stapleton Heights, Fort Hill Circle, Sunset Hill, Pavillion Hill, West Brighton, and Silver Lake. Clove Lake, Silver Lake, and the Snug Harbor Cultural Center and Botanical Garden are also included within the district boundaries.

SHPD consists of primarily low-density residential zoning districts characterized by detached single- and two-family homes. There are also mixed-use buildings, and a small number of commercial and institutional sites.

In SHPD, development, enlargement or site alteration that occurs on steep slopes is subject to review by the CPC—although some development that does not disturb natural features can proceed without CPC approval . In granting an approval, the CPC reviews how the proposed changes would preserve existing slopes, trees, or wetlands to the greatest extent possible.



As-of-Right

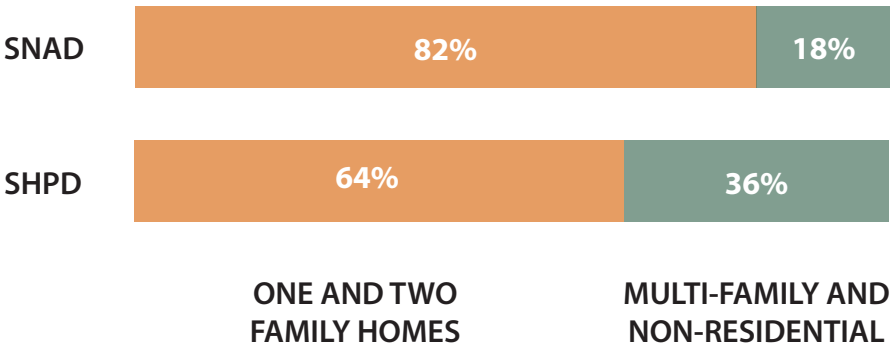
Development that complies with all applicable zoning regulations and does not require any action by the City Planning Commission.

Applications

A formal request to the Department of City Planning for zoning and land use actions which require review and/or approval by the City Planning Commission

DCP, local communities and the CPC have been reviewing applications in these special districts for nearly 50 years, learning where the existing rules work well and where they can be improved. During this time, **ecological science and mapping technology** have evolved, giving us more precision on the location of significant natural resources, and allowing us to prioritize the preservation of our last remaining natural areas. The goal of these proposed zoning updates is to create a more predictable process for homeowners, and strengthen oversight and community input for larger and more ecologically sensitive sites.

A majority of the applications reviewed in the special districts are one and two family homes.



Who Is Asking for These Changes?

Homeowners in the Special Districts have asked:

- Why do homeowners need CPC approvals for simple or minor alterations?
- Why can't the City focus its review on larger or more sensitive sites?

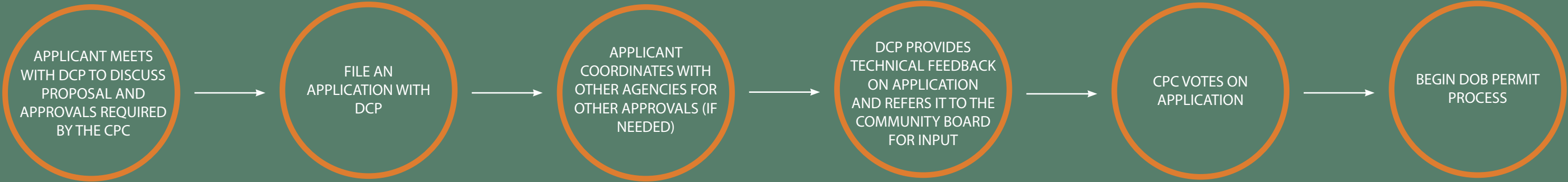
We've heard from homeowners, and agree, that the current regulations create an unnecessarily expensive, unpredictable and long process for City approval of home improvement projects.

For example, the current approval process can last a year and often costs homeowners more than the project itself. These planning approvals are needed before a homeowner can even apply for a permit from the DOB.

Because projects are currently reviewed and heard by the CPC over time and on a case by case basis, we've seen unpredictable development outcomes. By codifying five decades of best practices, we build predictability and fairness into the process.



CURRENT APPROVAL PROCESS FOR DEVELOPMENT IN SHPD OR SNAD



SI Working Group Members

- SI Community Board 1
- SI Community Board 2
- SI Community Board 3
- SI Borough President’s Office
- Serpentine Art and Nature Commons Inc.
- SI Chapter-American Institute of Architects
- SI Building Industry Association
- SI Taxpayers Association
- NYC Parks –Natural Resources Group
- Protectors of Pine Oak Woods
- Westervelt Civic Association
- NYC Department of Buildings
- Professional Landscape Architects and Planners

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

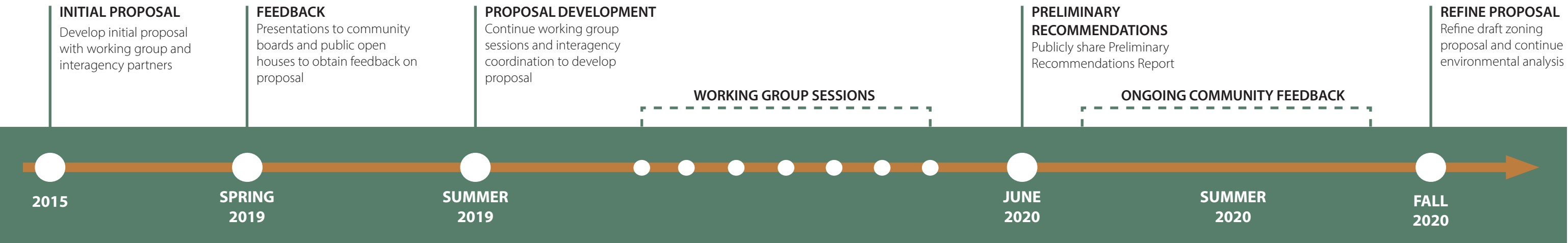
DCP and the Staten Island Working Group established the following **principles** to guide the proposal to update SHPD and SNAD:

- Create **home-owner friendly** zoning regulations by **streamlining** the CPC approvals process and removing red-tape for small properties and individual homeowners.
- Provide **greater predictability** for the protection of natural resources and neighborhood character, with clearer rules based on nearly 50 years of **best practices and updated ecological science**.
- **Improve regulations** to give the CPC and community **greater oversight of and input on large and sensitive sites** that have a significant impact on the public realm

UPDATING THE REVIEW PROCESS

The goal of this proposal is to streamline and improve the review process in SHPD and SNAD, focusing CPC and public review on sites where predictable outcomes are less likely and where development has a greater impact on the neighborhood character and natural areas. This will be done by:

- Removing CPC approvals for most small sites (less than 1 acre) altogether
- Focusing CPC and community oversight where development is proposed on:
 - all sites 1 acre or greater
 - the more sensitive hillsides along the Serpentine Ridge the creation of 4 or more lots, developments of 4 or more buildings or 8 or more dwelling units (even if less than 1 acre)
 - new private roads



Escarpment

Land that contains steep slopes located through the Serpentine Ridge of the central and northern portions of Staten Island.

Average Percent Slope

A measurement that indicates how steep the incline is across a zoning lot.

Tier I

Refers to sites with an Average Percent Slope of less than 10%.

Tier II

Refers to sites with an Average Percent Slope of 10% or more.

ESCARPMENT VS. NON-ESCARPMENT AREAS

Goal: Steep slope (defined as ground that has an incline of 15 percent or more) contains portions of the Serpentine Ridge, and is required to be preserved in SNAD and SHPD. Any alteration to steep slope requires CPC approval and must not cause hillside erosion and should preserve neighborhood character.

Currently, both districts regulate steep slope and hillsides using two categories of sites, or Tiers, based on the amount of steep slope they contain. Regulations for Tier II sites – those with the most steep slope area – have stricter grading and lot coverage regulations.

Issues: All steep slope in SHPD and SNAD is regulated uniformly regardless of size of the development, site conditions and context (e.g., Is this site part of larger steep slope? What is its connectivity to the Serpentine Ridge? How steep is the slope? How much steep slope is being disturbed?). There is no distinction between a man-made slope or a geologic resource that has existed for over 400 years

There are also inconsistent regulations between these districts on what triggers CPC review and how to protect these resources. For example, in SNAD, all Tiers of sites require CPC review regardless of steepness of slope. However, in SHPD, only Tier II sites or where steep slope is altered, requires CPC review.

PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS:

To address site specific topography and context of a site within the broader hillsides, the proposal seeks to map an ‘Escarpment Area’ along the Serpentine Ridge to prioritize stricter grading controls and lot coverage for developments in this area with the goal of preserving this historic geologic resource. Development outside of the ‘Escarpment Area’ would follow more relaxed regulations, but still meet the overall goals of hillside and natural feature preservation of the districts.

To streamline the process for smaller properties, the proposal would eliminate CPC review from most small sites in SNAD and SHPD, and focus CPC review and community input on developments that result in four or more lots or buildings, or eight or more dwelling units within the Escarpment Area.

In addition, the proposal would provide a more holistic framework to preserve steep slope on all sites in both non-Escarpment and Escarpment Areas without the need for CPC approval. This would be achieved by clarifying parameters for lot coverage, hard surfaces, grading, retaining walls, and planting, and allowing for minor changes to yards to better preserve these natural features.



Yard

A required open area along the boundaries of a zoning lot. Yard regulations ensure light and air between structures. There are three types of yards: a front yard, a rear yard, and a side yard.

YARD AND HEIGHT MODIFICATIONS

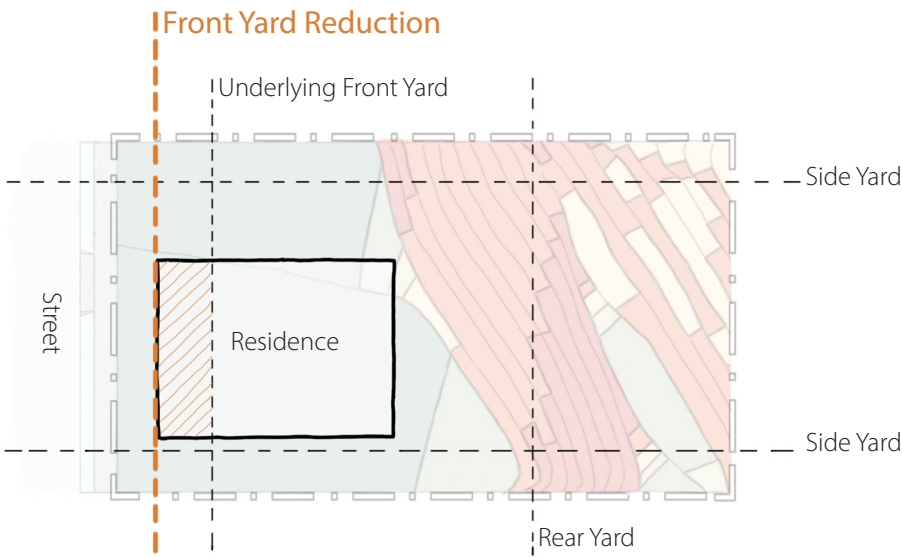
Goal: The purpose of allowing yard and height modifications by CPC approval is to locate development away from steep slope and other natural features, where possible, on an ecologically sensitive site.

Currently: Developments on an ecologically sensitive site, such as one with significant steep slope, in SHPD or SNAD are permitted to seek a reduction in the required yard, or may slightly increase height, by CPC approval. In granting this approval, the CPC considers whether the modification to yards or height regulations result in greater preservation of natural features and is aligned with surrounding neighborhood context.

Issues: Often, the CPC approves the modification to the yard and height rules as they result in a better outcome for natural feature preservation, but the current rules result in lengthy review by the CPC and can result in unequal outcomes for property owners as there are no parameters in zoning on how much yards can be modified.

PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS:

This proposal aims to provide flexibility of design without requiring CPC approval in order to preserve natural features to the greatest extent possible and would allow minor reductions to yard or height. The proposed zoning would include clearer parameters on the extent to which these modifications are appropriate thus providing greater predictability to homeowners.

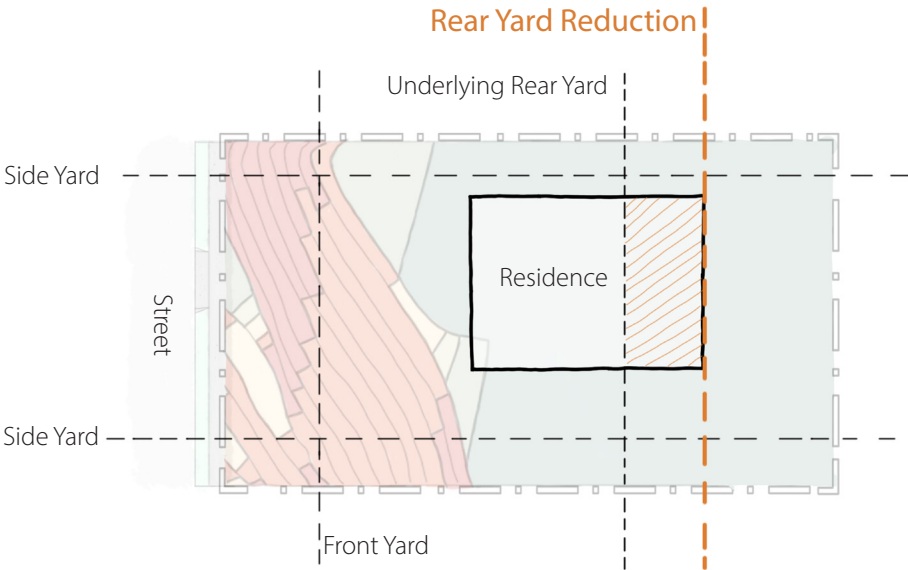


Front Yard Reduction

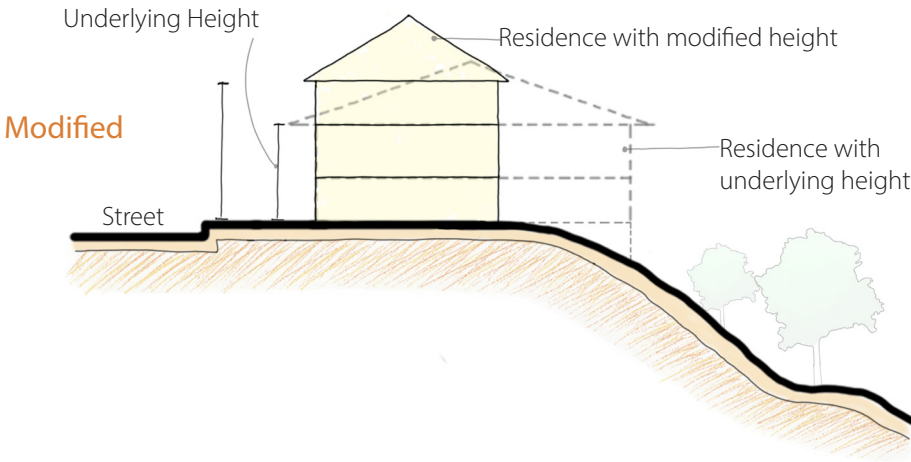
If steep slope is in the rear yard you can take advantage of the front yard reduction to maximize your footprint and avoid steep slope disturbance

Rear Yard Reduction

If steep slope is in the front yard you can take advantage of the rear yard reduction to maximize your footprint and avoid steep slope disturbance



Slope Steepness
Low → High



Height Modification

Steep slope is in the rear yard. In order to maximize your footprint, you take advantage of the height modification for a taller building and avoid steep slope disturbance

Lot Coverage

The portion of a zoning lot which, when viewed from above, is covered by a building.

Steep Slope Buffer

A 15-foot-wide area having a slope of less than 25% that adjoins the entire length of the protected crest of a steep slope.

LOT COVERAGE

Goal: Lot coverage is a zoning tool used in SNAD and SHPD on Tier II sites aimed to guide development away from significant natural features and it affects the level of slope, planting, and open space preserved on a site.

Currently: The maximum permitted lot coverage for a residence becomes stricter whenever steep slope is impacted. For example, on most residential sites in SNAD and SHPD where steep slope is altered, or where a Tier II site is developed, the maximum lot coverage is reduced to 12.5 percent without regard to the degree or amount of slope being altered.

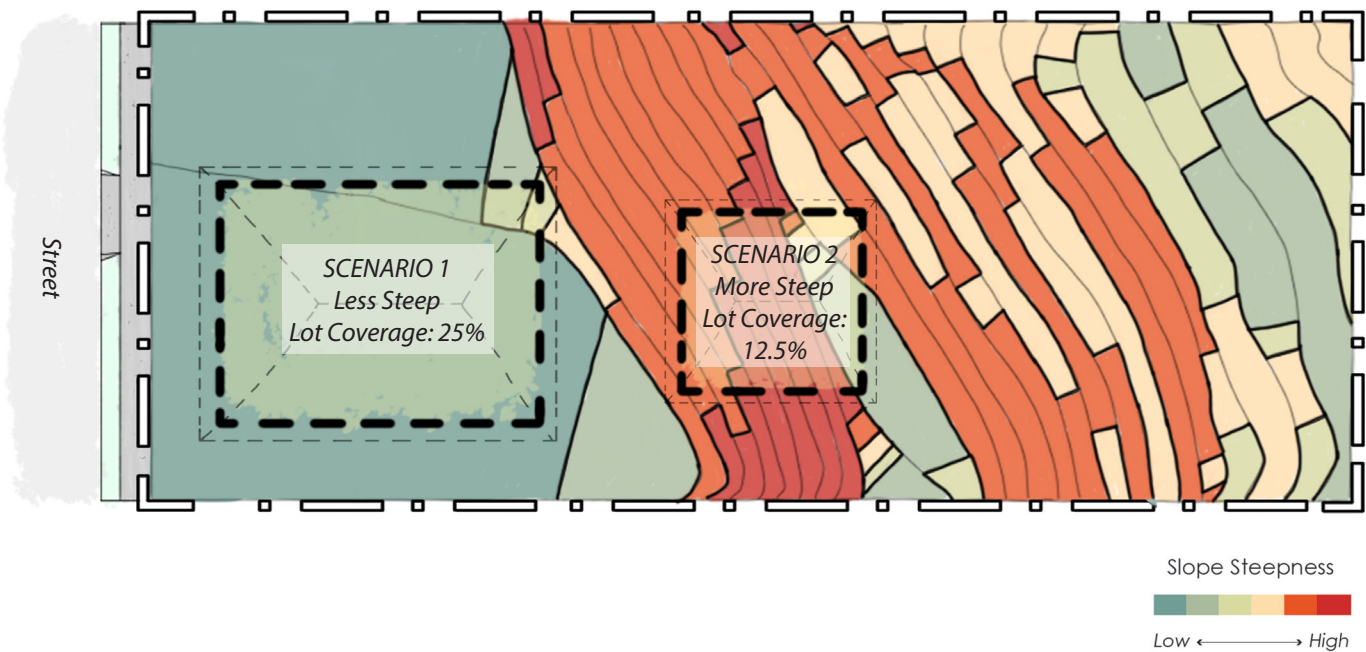
Issues: Lot coverage rules, though intended to preserve steep slope, are applied uniformly today without consideration of the overall site or surrounding context, the amount of slope disturbed, or the significance of the slope.

Current rules require property owners to seek modifications and waivers to these strict and uniform requirements even where they may not be impacting a large amount of steep slope area. For example, the CPC often reviews applications to modify lot coverage maximums so that homeowners can add an enlargement on a flat portion of their property. Additionally, there are no clear guidelines in current zoning on the appropriate lot coverage when modification is sought by applicants and it is negotiated on a case by case basis by CPC approval, with no predictability for homeowners or communities.

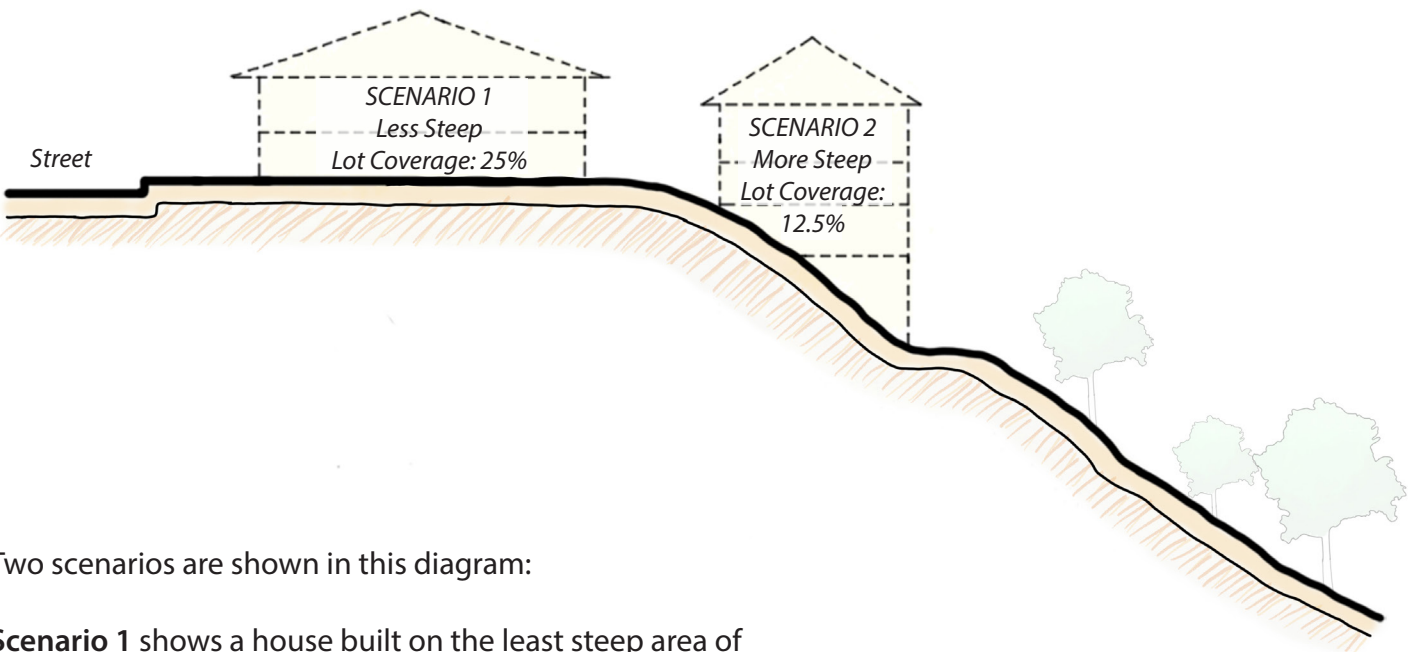
PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS:

The proposal aims to implement CPC best practices for lot coverage by incentivizing locating development on the flatter part of a site by establishing a sliding scale for lot coverage rules based on the steepness of the slope being impacted by development or site alteration. For example, developments on flat sites could have a larger lot coverage than developments that alter hillsides in an area with significant slopes. This proposal aims to incentivize good site design that minimizes encroachment, while providing flexibility to the homeowner.

Site Plan



Site Section



Two scenarios are shown in this diagram:

Scenario 1 shows a house built on the least steep area of the site, therefore it would be allowed 25% lot coverage.

Scenario 2 shows a house built on the most steep area of the site, therefore it would be allowed 12.5% lot coverage.

Hard Surface Area
The area of the site covered by a building and any hard surfaces.

Pervious Area
An area that allows water to flow through to the underlying soil.

HARD SURFACE AREA

Goal: The goals for SNAD and SHPD include preserving existing vegetation and the bucolic neighborhood character of these special districts.

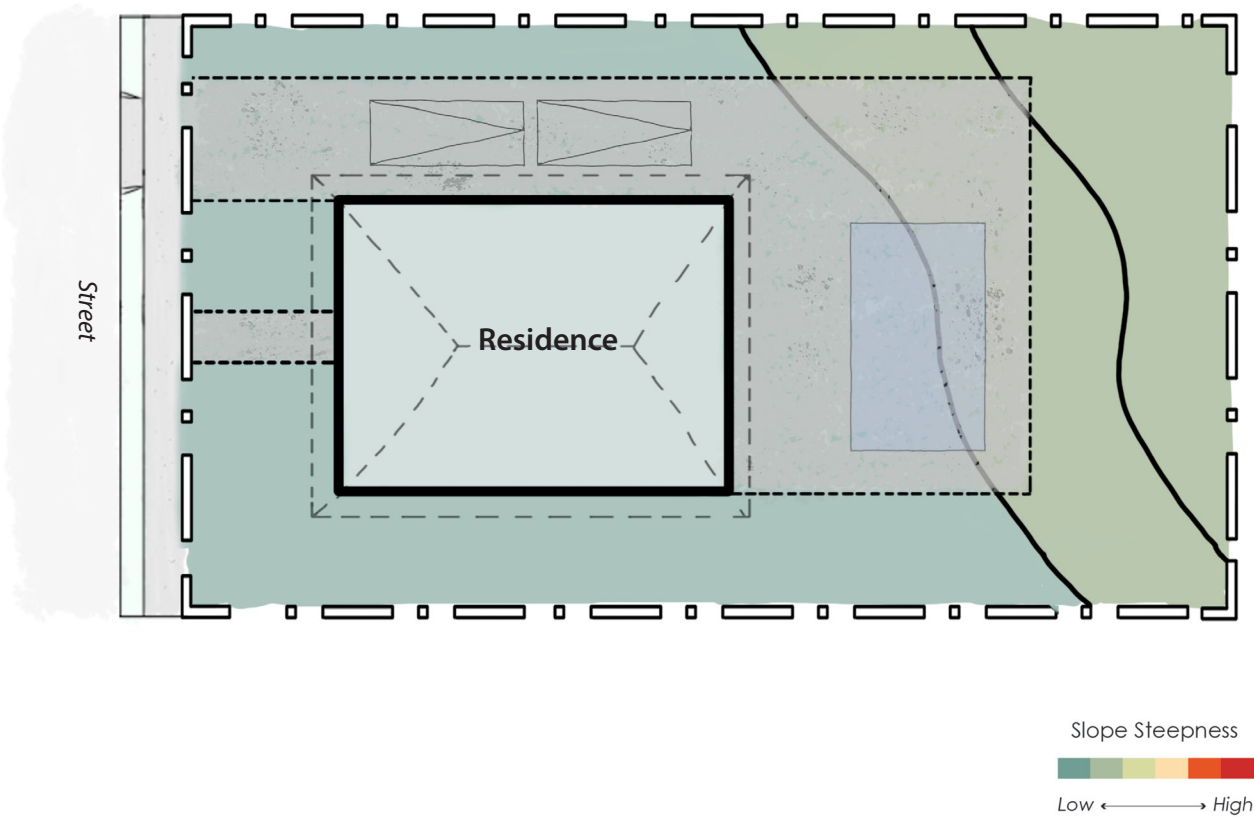
Currently: In SNAD, there is a strict requirement that every square foot of vegetation must be replaced, and in both SNAD and SHPD no vegetation may be removed beyond 15 feet of a building. Zoning rules do not directly regulate hard surface area, but these areas contribute to increased storm water runoff and can disturb natural features, including slopes and planted areas. When granting approvals, the CPC requires a certain amount of on-site planted or natural area to remain undeveloped and limits hard surfaces to preserve the aesthetics of the hillsides, enhance neighborhood character, and promote permeability; this is decided on a case-by-case basis.

Issues: There is a very strict requirement for removing vegetation that can only be modified by CPC approval. Some sites that have more sensitive steep slopes require a larger area to remain pervious, but typically a minimum of 50 percent. This best practice is not codified in the zoning.

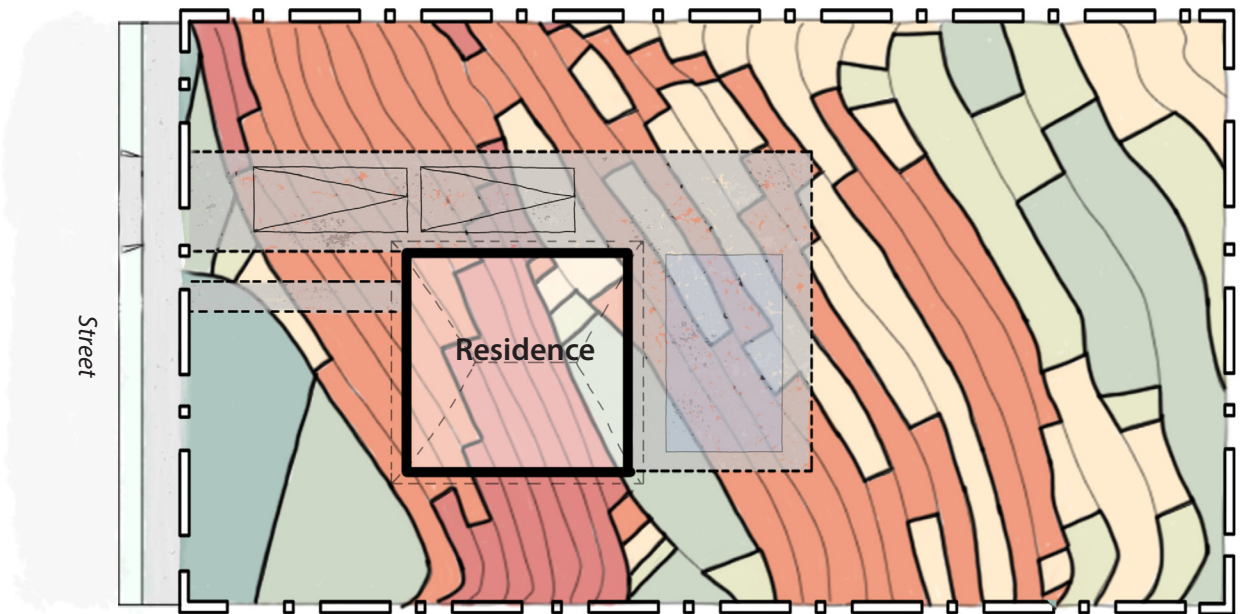
PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Proposed regulations aim to establish clear hard surface area regulations by codifying CPC best practices. Requirements would depend upon the steepness of the slope being disturbed, the type of use, and the zoning district. These clearer parameters would provide greater predictability to homeowners and the community without requiring CPC review. They would also allow for open space and planting to support better storm-water management and limit erosion of steep slopes.

SCENARIO 1, shows a house built on the least steep area of the site, therefore it would be allowed to provide more hard surface area



SCENARIO 2, shows a house built on the more steep area of the site, therefore it would be allowed to provide less hard surface area



Retaining Wall
A structure that holds back any material, usually earth, and prevents it from sliding away or eroding.

GRADING CONTROLS

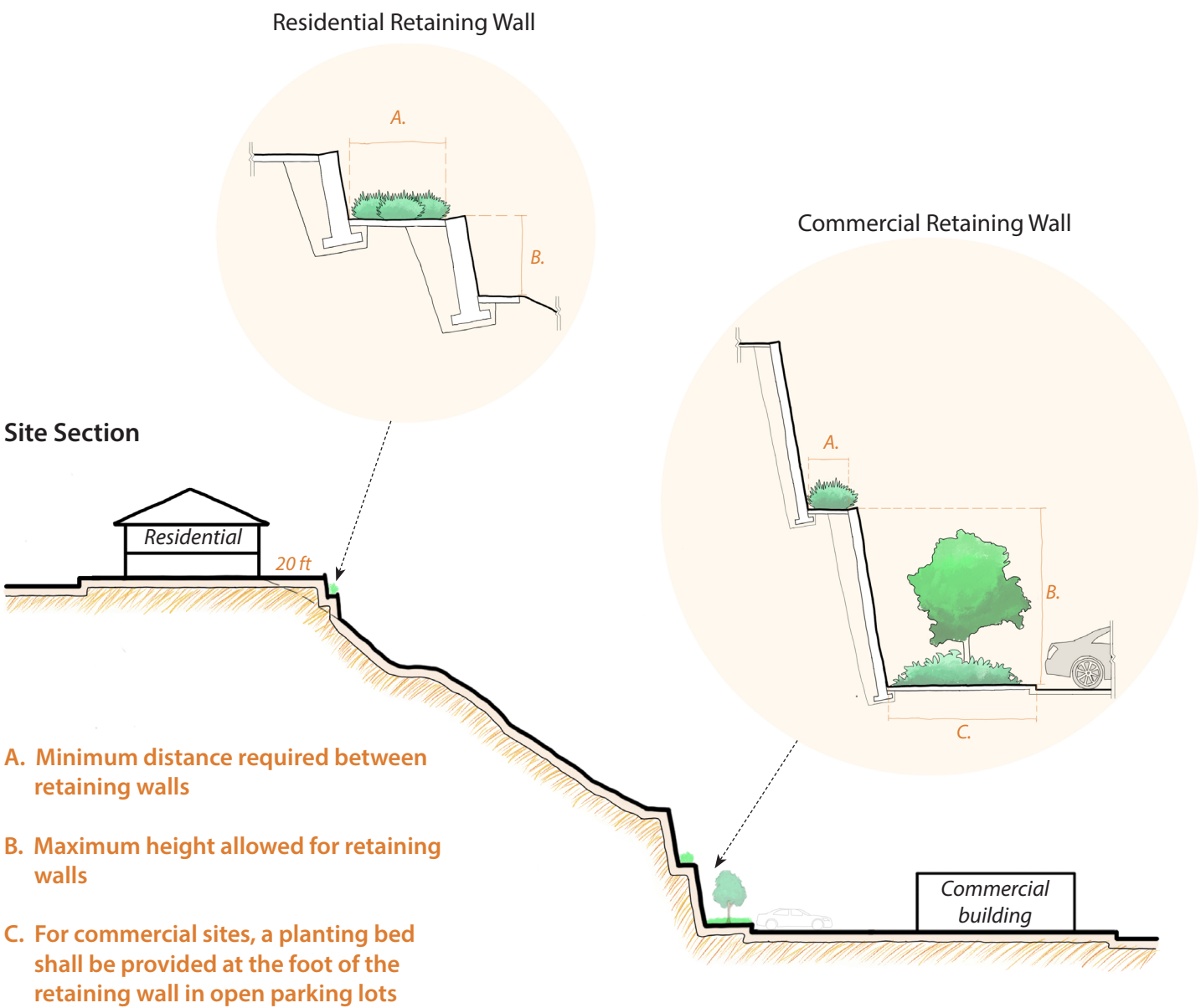
Goal: Grading controls are zoning rules that protect steep slopes by setting limits on ground disturbance. When extensive grading is proposed, property owners must obtain approval from the CPC.

Currently: Grading controls apply only to sites with an Average Percent Slope of 10% or more (Tier II sites). These controls limit grading to no more than 15 feet from a building, the amount of grading for driveways and private roads, and limit the amount of ground disturbance for retaining walls in order to preserve steep slope. Modifications to these requirements are permitted only by CPC approval.

Issues: Grading regulations are applied uniformly to Tier II sites, with no regard to overall site context and topography, or how much of the steep slope is being altered. Property owners often seek to modify the 15-foot grading and construction limits to provide design flexibility and build decks, patios or pools. There are no clear parameters regarding the extent to which grading controls may be modified, although decades of CPC review has resulted in best practices that are not codified in zoning.

PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS:

In order to address site specific topography and context, and prioritize where rules for steep slope preservation are applicable, the proposal would focus grading controls on sites within the Escarpment Area (the most sensitive topography along the Serpentine Ridge). The proposal would increase the current 15 -foot grading limit to 20 feet to more easily accommodate space for construction area, decks and pools. Clearer parameters for retaining walls would provide greater clarity on height and planting to support slope stability and preserve the neighborhood character of these districts. Existing grading controls for driveways and private roads would remain, because they are needed to accommodate emergency access requirements.



Tree Credit

A credit applied to a property owner’s tree preservation or planting requirements, earned by preserving an existing tree depending on its caliper.

Caliper

The diameter of a tree trunk measured four feet, six inches from the ground.

TREE CREDIT CALCULATION SYSTEM

Goal: The SNAD and SHPD districts require each site to have a minimum number of trees planted or preserved which has resulted in tree-lined neighborhoods that characterize the beautiful streetscape of these districts, foster storm water retention, and improve air quality.

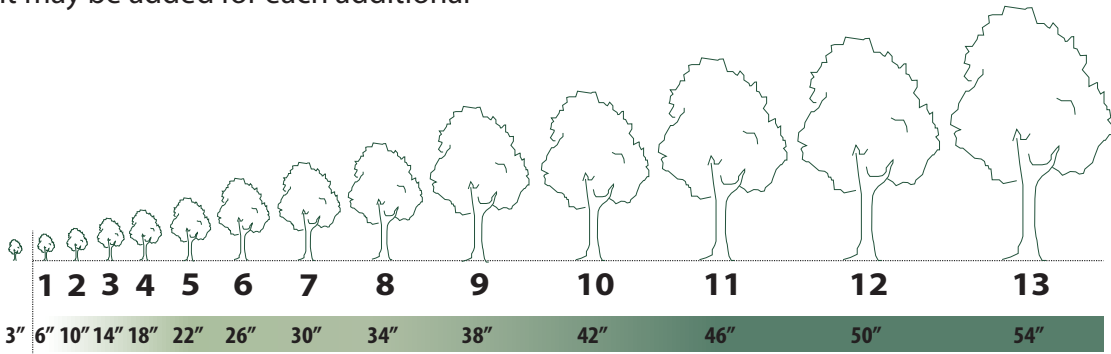
Currently: The minimum tree planting requirement is determined using a credit system and the lot area or number of trees existing on the site, one tree credit per 1,000 square feet of lot area or 51% of tree credits originally on-site, whichever is greater. The tree credit system uses a linear relationship based on the caliper size of the tree; credit for one tree is given for the first six inches of caliper, with an additional credit given for every additional four inches of caliper, which means mature trees gain a greater credit.

Issues: As a CPC best practice, mature trees or trees in the front yard are encouraged to be preserved. The current tree-credit values do not provide sufficient incentive to preserve more mature trees. Also, there are no incentives in zoning to preserve trees in the front yard which adds to the tree-lined character within the districts.

TREE CREDIT VALUE

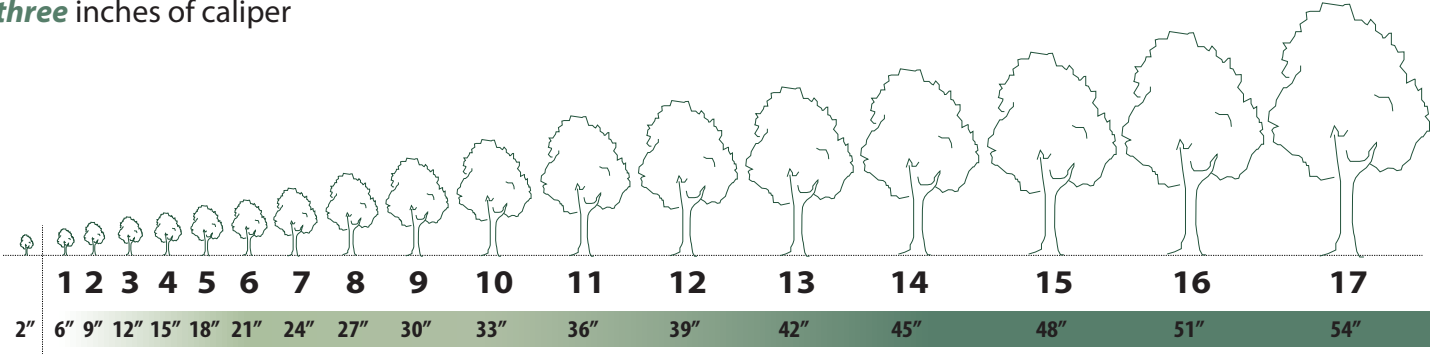
Existing Tree Credit Requirement

A tree of at least a six-inch caliper is equal to one tree credit
One additional tree credit may be added for each additional **four** inches of caliper



Proposed Tree Credit Requirement

A tree of at least a six-inch caliper is equal to one tree credit
One additional tree credit may be added for each additional **three** inches of caliper



PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS:

The proposal aims to modernize the tree credit system by changing how credits are valued. It would assign a greater value, or more credits, to mature/larger trees. This updated system would incentivize tree preservation without CPC review. This proposal aims to incentivize the preservation of trees especially in the front yard, to encourage an increased tree canopy, with bonus tree credits.

TREE CREDIT CALCULATION SYSTEM

Tree credit requirements are determined two different ways within the existing Special Hillside and Natural Area Districts. The greater of the two methods is used to determine a sites requirement:

Method 1

One tree credit per 1,000 square feet of lot area

Method 2

51% of total existing tree credits originally on a site

Bonus Credits

Additional tree credits for existing trees preserved in the front yard

Invasive Tree

A tree that is non-native to the ecosystem and cause environmental harm to surrounding trees and ecology; NYS regulates which trees are invasive and prohibited to be planted.

Critical Root Zone

The area containing the roots of a tree that must be maintained and protected to ensure the tree’s survival. It is measured as one radial foot for every caliper inch of the tree, with a required minimum of four radial feet and maximum of 22 radial feet, measured from the surface of the tree trunk at grade.

TREE PLANTING

Currently: Any tree of six-inch caliper or more, even if it is invasive per State law, cannot be removed unless the property owner obtains CPC approval. A tree’s critical root zone cannot be disturbed and must be protected.

There is a tree planting list in the Zoning Resolution which prescribes what species of plants are permitted to be planted.

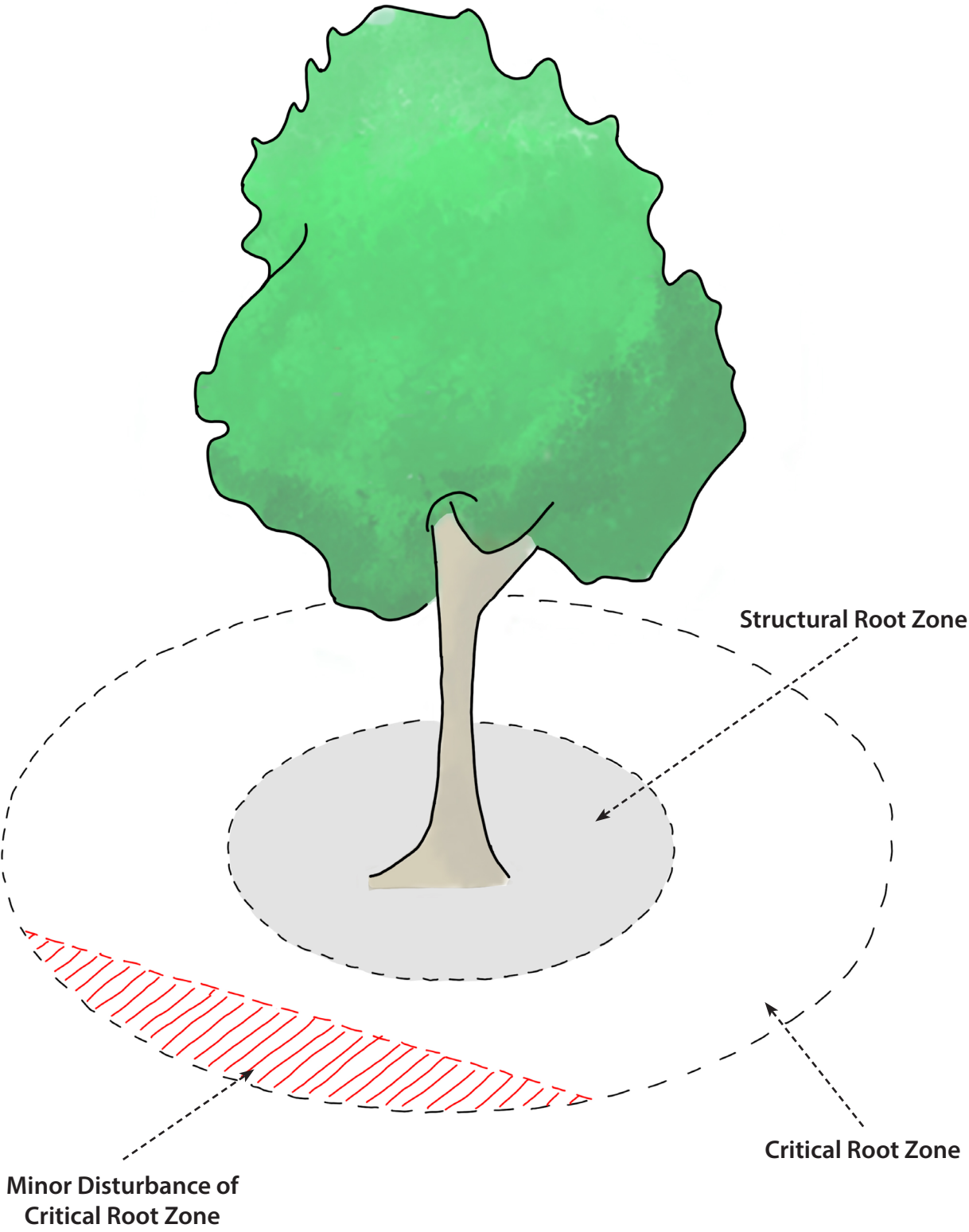
Issues: Current rules require CPC discretionary review if trees are proposed for removal, even to add common amenities such as a pool, deck or small kitchen. Tree preservation is achieved through a CPC discretionary process and site-by-site negotiation with a property owner. This results in unpredictable outcomes and adds significant time and cost burdens for homeowners.

Updated environmental science and best practices have indicated that minor disturbances to a tree’s critical root zone will not hinder its health. However, the current regulations do not allow any alterations to this area. As a best practice, the CPC accepts a letter from a certified arborist and tree protection plan to demonstrate the tree would be preserved even if a portion of the critical root zone area is altered; this practice isn’t indicated in zoning.

The planting list established in the 1970s includes trees which have since become invasive trees, ones which are also prohibited from being planted per State law. The current rules, which haven’t been refreshed for decades does not reflect the State’s more appropriate list.

PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS:

All sites would have greater flexibility to preserve or plant trees to meet the required minimum tree credits. To ease review process for smaller properties, the proposal would remove the required CPC review of tree removals so long as they meet a minimum number of credits, as already required today. The proposed rules would codify CPC best practice by allowing minor disturbance to Critical Root Zones based on updated environmental science. The proposal would modernize the tree planting list to ensure homeowner-friendly rules that aren’t at odds with State regulations.



Freshwater Wetland

Land or areas such as marshes or swamps that are covered, often intermittently, with shallow water or have soil saturated with moisture.

NYSDEC

A state agency created in 1970. Its purpose is to conserve, improve and protect New York’s natural resources and environment, and to prevent, abate and control pollution, to enhance the health and well-being of people in the state.

WETLAND REGULATIONS

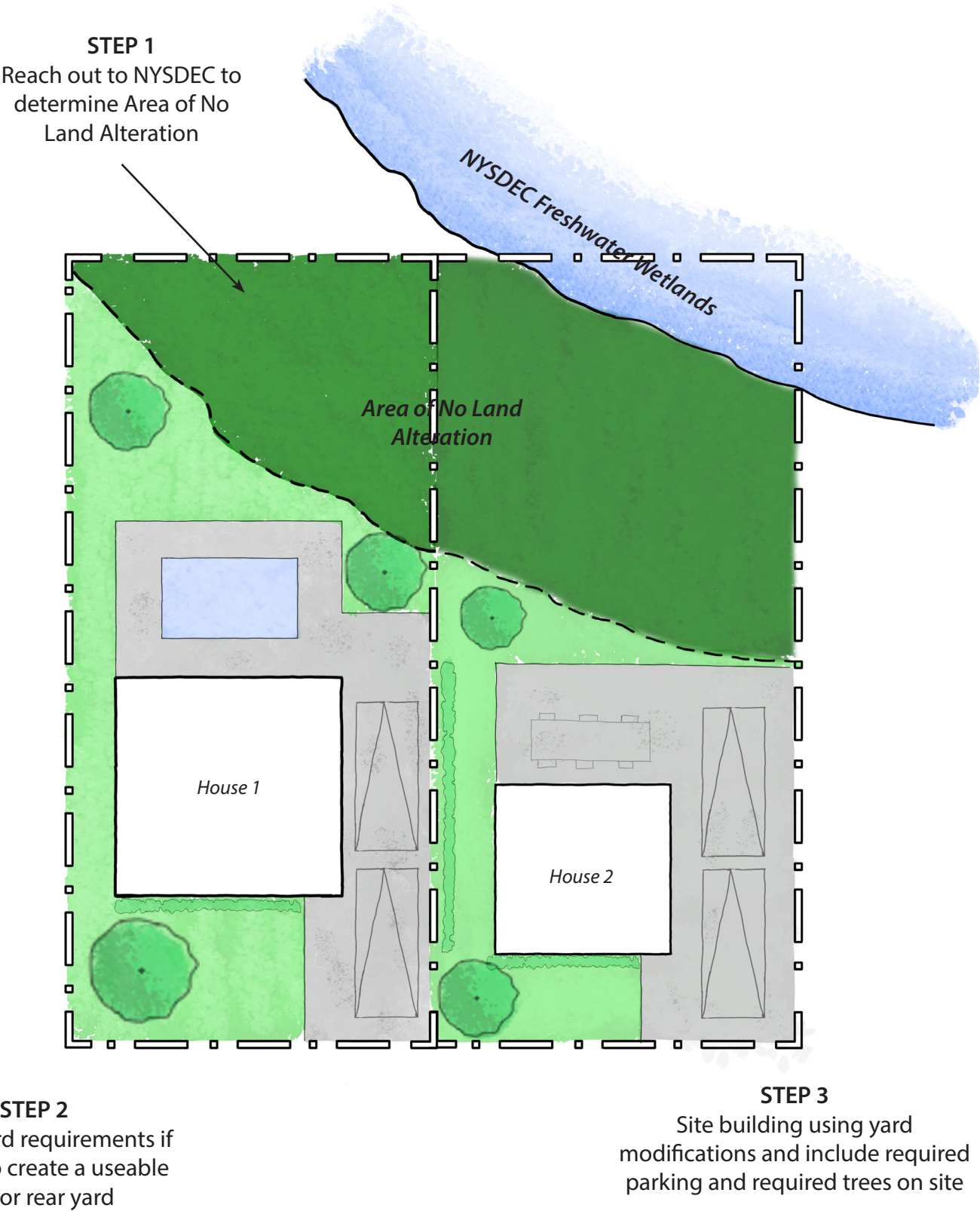
Goal: SNAD and SHPD rules aim to preserve aquatic features to the greatest extent possible. There are regulations to minimize the modification of these features in these districts. The prevalence of freshwater wetlands is mostly within the SNAD.

Currently: Preservation of freshwater wetlands are reviewed on a site-by-site basis through the CPC’s review process and in coordination with NYSDEC. Past CPC decision-making has resulted in larger zoning lots with usable yard areas near State-protected wetlands to ensure there is sufficient buildable area and preservation of the wetland.

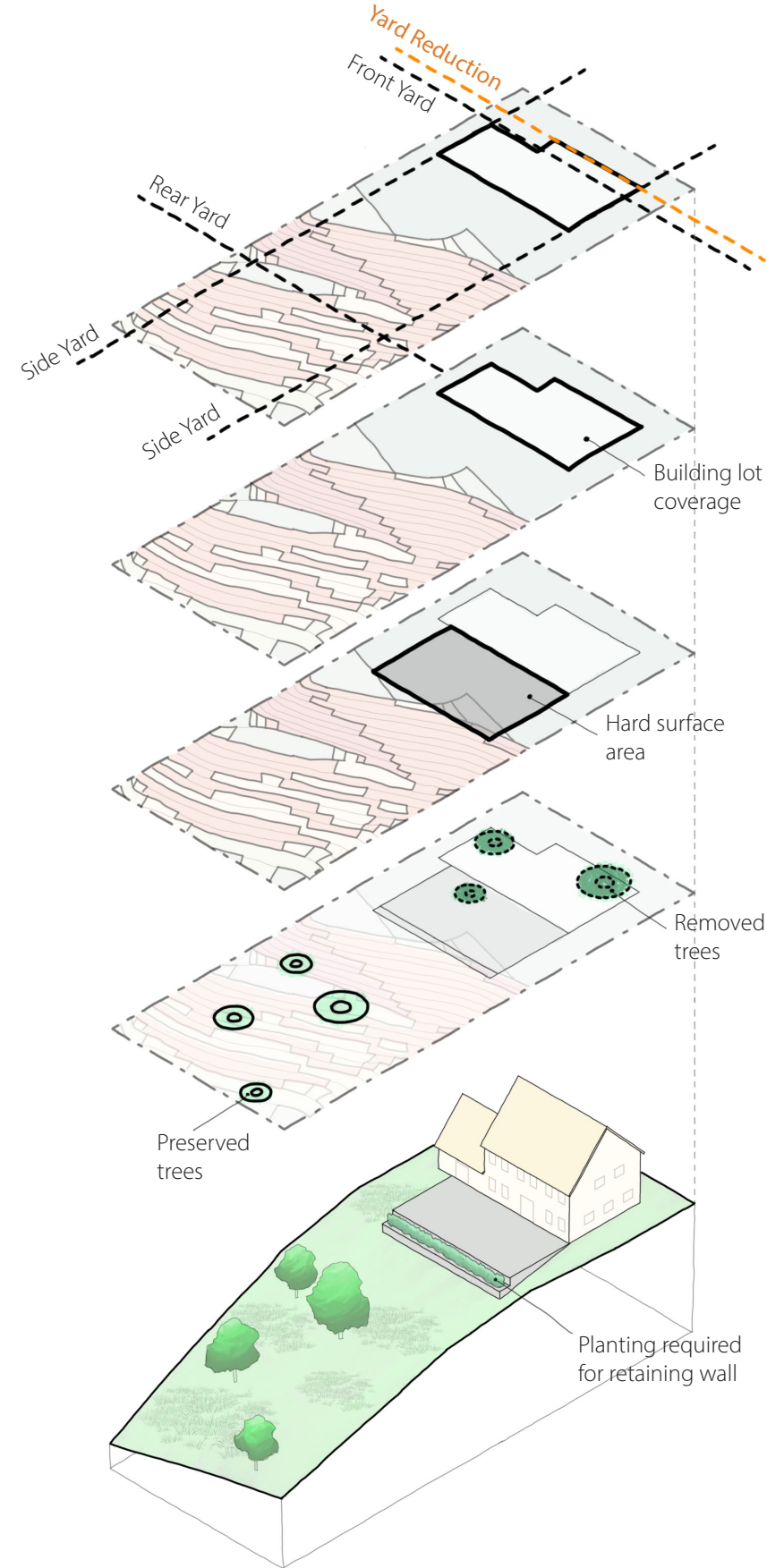
Issues: There are inconsistent regulations between DEC and local special district rules regarding aquatic features, which results in inconsistent outcomes for development and preservation. There is a lack of clear rules within zoning regarding CPC and DEC best practices for development on lots with freshwater wetlands.

PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS:

The proposal seeks to ensure that there is enough developable area on a zoning lot to meet the goals of the special district, create consistency with DEC regulations, and allow for greater predictability of development outcomes. This proposal aims to provide flexibility of design to preserve wetlands to the greatest extent possible by allowing minor reductions to yard or height without requiring CPC approval.



ESCARPMENT SITES



1. Yard Modifications

Front yard reduction is used to avoid building on the steep slope area of the site.

2. Lot Coverage

The maximum lot coverage for the residence is 25% since it is built on the least steep part of the site.

3. Hard Surface Area

The hard surface area is limited to 50% since the residence avoids the steep part of the site.

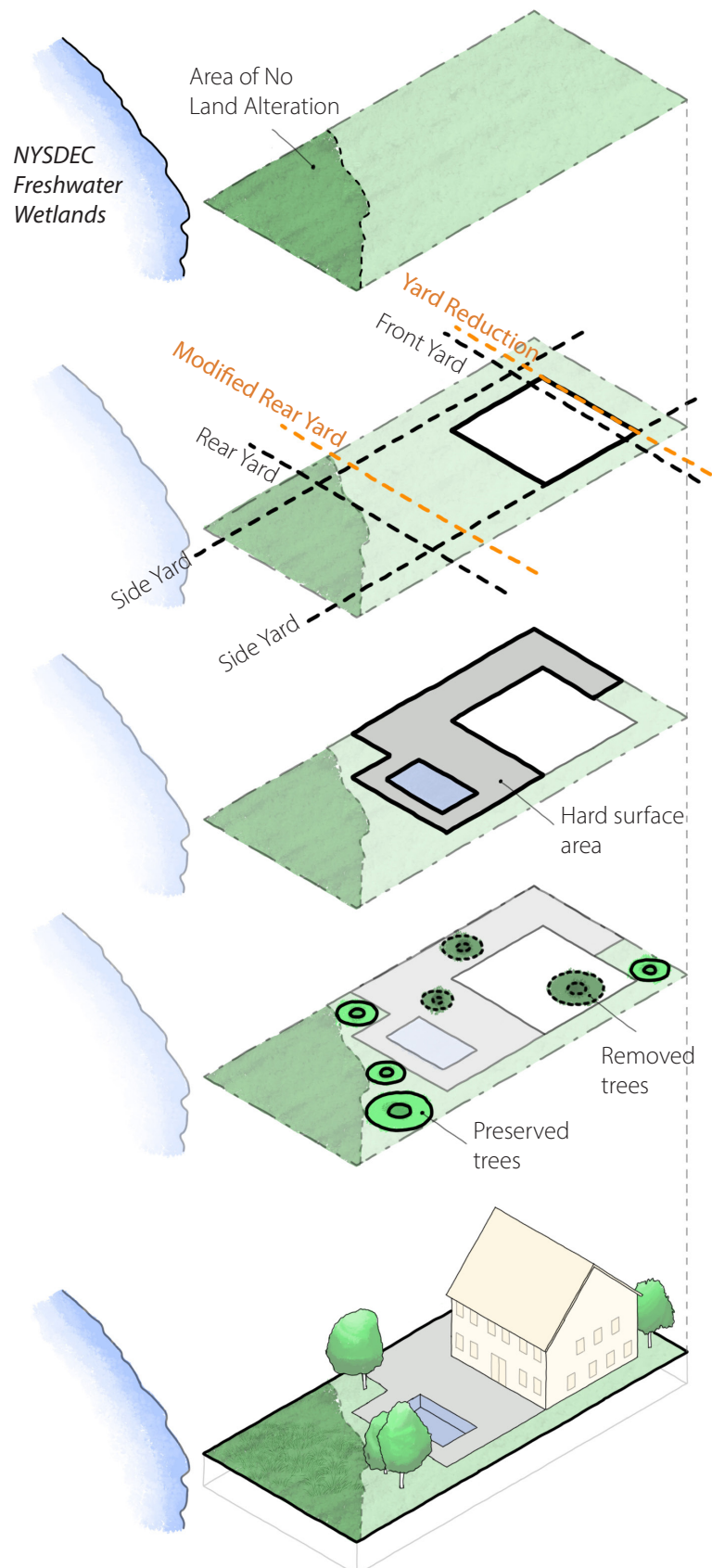
4. Tree Preservation

Three trees are removed in the front of the site and four trees are preserved in the rear of the site.

5. Grading Controls

Retaining wall standards are met for the wall in the back of the patio.

WETLAND SITES



1. DEC Area of No Land Alteration

DEC determines an area adjacent to the wetland where no land alteration can take place.

2. Yard Modifications

Front yard reduction is used to ensure a useable rear yard.

3. Hard Surface Area

The hard surface area is provided.

4. Tree Preservation

Three trees are removed in the front of the site and three trees are preserved in the rear of the site.

ECOLOGICALLY SENSITIVE AREAS

Goal: The special districts were established when there was an abundance of vacant property with significant natural features. The goals of these districts are to preserve existing hillsides and steep slope, plant and preserve trees, and preserve existing wetlands and woodlands to the greatest extent possible.

Issues: Since these districts were established, there are fewer remaining vacant sites with sensitive natural features. However today’s zoning rules treat every site in SNAD or SHPD the same, irrespective of size or adjacency to/prevalence of sensitive ecological features, and requires the same level of CPC review for proposed changes. For example, development of a home on a relatively flat site disconnected from the Serpentine Ridge follows the same rules and CPC review process as development of a one-acre site with a large residential subdivision and steep slope.

While today’s rules are very strict for small sites and individual homeowners, they don’t provide strong parameters to guide development or prioritize preservation on larger or more sensitive sites where there are significant natural features, such as hillsides, steep slopes, forests and wetlands. In many instances, these large developments have the greatest impact on natural features and neighborhood character, yet they don’t require CPC review or input from the community.

PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS:

The proposal seeks to correct this imbalance by prioritizing the review of sites one acre or greater, and those with sensitive natural features.

Thanks to today’s mapping technology and data, we have an enhanced understanding of our last remaining natural areas. The proposal seeks to focus CPC review and community input on larger sites of one acre or greater, and those with the presence of sensitive natural features such as the hillsides contiguous to the Serpentine Ridge or DEC freshwater wetlands.

These larger developments or more ecologically sensitive sites would benefit from CPC and community review because they tend to have unique design needs and are more likely to impact sensitive natural features or neighborhood character.

The CPC process for these larger or more sensitive sites would require an amount of habitat or escarpment to remain preserved, allow flexibility in site design and permit modifications to special district requirements to meet the goals of preservation and address site specific constraints (i.e. access, overlapping resources, inter-agency review).

