

## Ringfield:

### *Homes Set among Woodlands, Meadows, and Ponds*

by Randall Arendt

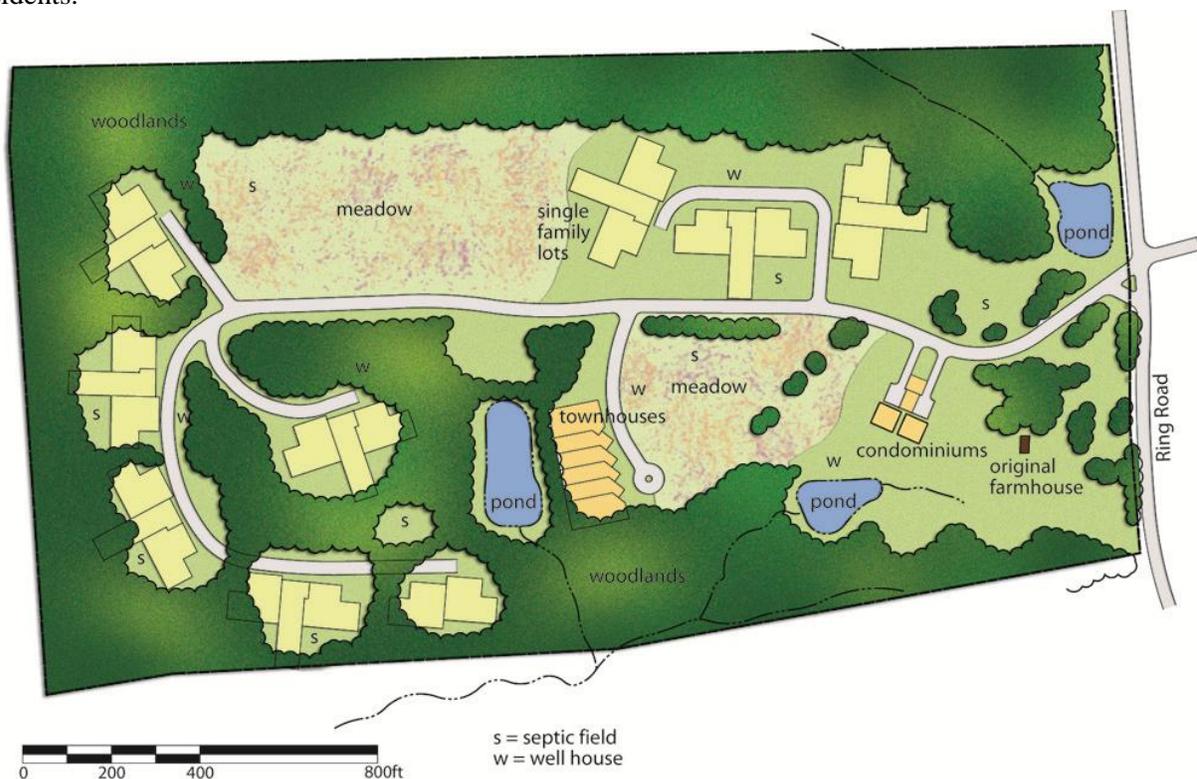
*Location:* Ring Road, Chadds Ford Township, Delaware County, Pennsylvania

*Developer:* Richard Chalfant, Wilmington, Delaware

*Site Designer:* : Richard Chalfant, Wilmington, Delaware

*Development Period:* 1977-86

Approximately 56 acres (or 74 percent) of this 76-acre site have been preserved as open meadows and natural woodlands. An informal network of woodland trails links the various neighborhood areas with three ponds, and consideration is currently being given to supplementing this system with additional trails mown across or around several of the wildflower meadows to offer more diverse walking choices for the residents.



**Figure 1:** Ringfield's site plan clearly shows the location of homes in relation to meadows, woodlands, and ponds, as well as the off-lot community wells and shared septic drainfields. (Source: Natural Lands Trust)

The township's Planned Residential District allowed the developer to achieve full density (38 dwellings, at the two-acre standard) and wisely did not impose any restrictions on lot size, width, or street frontage. This flexibility permitted the site designer wide latitude in fitting six condominium units, six attached townhouses, and 26 detached homes into the landscape and the topography to take full advantage of views and sunlight. The homes in Ringfield occupy quarter-acre lots, all of which both face and back up to permanent open space. Lots for the detached homes, which are designed in groups of three and are

separated by open space, are large enough to suit the owners' needs partly because most of them were developed without suburban front lawns (see Figure 1). Because homes back up to preserved open space, lot depth as seen from rear window appears greater than it actually is. Homes are situated at modest setbacks from the street, with dooryard gardens or informally landscaped areas instead of grassy yards. Homes in Ringfield range in floorspace from 2,700 to 3,600 square feet. The two three-unit townhouses, situated on 12 acres toward the front of the property, are fairly commodious at 2,000 square feet, with two full baths. (They date from Ringfield's first phase, and were an experiment in condominium living, a new concept for the area at that time, and have their own owners' association.)

With meadowland, dogwood trees, and a pond occupying the public viewshed along Ring Road, the layout of the neighborhood helps to preserve the township's rural character. Also facing Ring Road is the original stone farmhouse, situated on a separate multi-acre lot. Of the 64 acres occupied by Ringfield's second phase, 34 remain in woodland and 12.5 acres are occupied by meadow.



**Figure \_\_:** One of the everyday delights of living in Ringfield is the enjoyment of rural views consisting of woodlands, ponds, and meadows. (Photo courtesy of Holly Harper).

Homes are served by six deep wells, each supplying three to nine dwellings. Only minimal treatment is needed for softening, controlling pH, and iron filtering, and annual testing is performed by an independent lab. The six wells and 17 septic drainage fields (each serving one to six homes) are located in the common open space. To ensure longer life and smoother operations, accumulated solids are removed from the septic tanks by the homeowner association on a regular schedule consistent with state requirements, a practice that should be followed in all subdivisions where septic systems are used. Effluent from most of the septic tanks flows by gravity to the drainfields, but in several cases pumping is required, with twin pumps running sequentially, an approach that extends their lives and provides an emergency pump in the event one should require repair. Recently the HOA has begun installing filters to screen all solids from flowing into the drainfields, extending their useful lives.. (These filters are cleaned quarterly.)

In addition to providing wildlife habitat, the three excavated ponds provide areas for quiet contemplation. As they are located mainly within the common open space, they are accessible to all neighborhood residents and are also protected from woodland clearing, lawn extensions, and other typical suburban encroachments that would diminish their water quality.

Resident volunteers have created meandering trails across meadows and through those parts of the woodlands not encumbered by invasive vines. The meadow sections are mown regularly in the growing season by crews hired to cut the lawns, and trails on adjacent properties lead to publicly-accessible paths along the Brandywine River. Because traffic volume is very low, and travel speeds are only moderate, Ringfield's private streets offer another popular place for strolling or walking dogs.

Maintaining the open space has become an increasing challenge, due to the explosion of invasive plants and vines in the region over the past four decades, and the rising deer population. The HOA has striven to raise awareness of the need to actively manage the conservation land, and to allocate a greater proportion of the annual dues to that task.



**Figure** : The public viewshed, as seen from Ring Road, has been carefully preserved, and enhanced with a small pond alongside the entry drive (left). Streets within Ringfield are bordered by meadows, hedgerows, or woodlands (right and below). (Photo below courtesy of Holly Harper).





**Figure :** The conservation meadows at Ringfield, which are covered with russet-colored broomsedge (*Andropogon virginicus*) in the autumn, require minimal maintenance, offer habitat variety, and provide convenient areas for subsurface sewage disposal in off-lot systems.



**Figure :** All homes back up to open space, some of them overlooking the ponds, which are surrounded by protected common land that buffers their water quality, and allows access by all residents. Views into one of the two meadows contribute to the neighborhood's distinctive rural character. (Top photo courtesy of Holly Harper)



Figure \_\_: Open space views at Ringfield vary with the time of day, season, and weather conditions, and the beauty inherent in the changing landscape scene benefits both residents and visitors many subtle ways. (Photos courtesy of Holly Harper, RLA).