

Analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

Introduction

The analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats is typically known by its acronym: SWOT. SWOT analysis is one of the first steps in the strategic planning process and has many applications in addition to municipal planning. For our purposes, we will consider how the Township's own strengths and weaknesses as well as the opportunities and threats posed by external forces affect the Township's ability to achieve the vision described in the preceding chapter. This will help us to develop a realistic action plan for implementation of this Comprehensive Plan.

While these four terms are hardly specialized vocabulary, it is always helpful to be specific about definitions. As alluded to in the preceding paragraph, it is important to realize that strengths and weaknesses both represent characteristics of the Township within its own borders. In contrast, opportunities and threats come from outside the Township.

- **Strengths** are Township assets, whether something physical, such as the scenic quality of the area, or something less tangible, such as the high degree of satisfaction with police and fire protection services.
- Conversely, **weaknesses** are things that the Township lacks, things that the Township does not do well administratively, or things, including physical aspects, that detract from the overall quality of life.
- **Opportunities** are positive qualities or assets that exist in the region beyond the Township line - things that benefit (or could benefit) the Township but are not controlled by the Township.
- **Threats** are external forces that are or may soon become detrimental to the Township in some way. Township residents seemed particularly sensitive to threats, which is only to be expected given the high level of satisfaction they expressed with their quality of life. There is particular concern about the level of new, large-scale residential developments in surrounding communities. New housing in Marple and Newtown Townships is expected to worsen the already congested conditions along Route 252. New residents in Middletown and Edgmont Townships will contribute to the Rose Tree Media School District, perhaps making it necessary to raise taxes in order to maintain the current quality of public education.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats for Upper Providence

Based upon the input received from the public during the outreach process as well as empirical research, we have identified the following as the principal strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for Upper Providence Township. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list, but simply to show the topics of greatest concern.

Strengths: Much of the Township has a rural character, despite the high level of development and proximity to the City of Philadelphia.

The Township is a highly desirable residential area.

There is quick access to central Philadelphia, the Philadelphia Airport, and other major centers within the region, such as King of Prussia.

Public water supply is available in most of the Township.

Public sanitary sewerage is available in the most densely developed part of the Township.

The public schools are recognized for providing high-quality education.

There is a relatively large supply of permanent open space within and immediately adjacent to the Township.

Municipal services - police and fire protection in particular - are well-regarded by residents.

Weaknesses: The transportation infrastructure needs improvement, as roads are congested, but there are few - if any - alternatives. Even walking is hazardous in some locations due to a lack of safe accommodation for pedestrians.

Limited non-residential development limits the fiscal capacity of the Township.

Lack of developable land limits opportunities to provide for new development that could generate significant tax revenue and places the Township at a disadvantage within the region.

Housing development is absorbing the few remaining open spaces and is burdening municipal services.

There is increasing inappropriate development of environmentally sensitive lands: steep slope areas and lands containing or immediately adjacent to floodplain areas are of particular concern.

There are limited opportunities for active recreation; the County and the school district own most the few that are within the Township.

The few Township parks and playgrounds appear shabby, which is most likely due to a combination of heavy use and inadequate maintenance.

There is little support for youth sports leagues.

There is little concerted effort in historic preservation: most preservation work within the Township has been executed by Delaware County.

The approval process for building permits is perceived as cumbersome, inconvenient, and time-consuming.

Opportunities: There is excellent passenger rail service to Philadelphia.

The Township is easily accessible to major retail and employment centers as well as Philadelphia International Airport.

There are several institutions of higher education in the immediate vicinity.

The Delaware County government, and the County Planning Commission in particular, has resources and expertise that are useful to local governments.

The County has successfully preserved key historic structures and features within the Township.

The boundaries of the Rose Tree Media School District create a multi-municipal association that could be a foundation for future cooperative efforts, particularly in the area of planning for recreational facilities and opportunities.

Surrounding municipalities face similar issues, suggesting the possibility of inter-municipal cooperation on the issues traffic management, recreation facilities, and trail development.

Threats: Development and traffic congestion in surrounding municipalities results in additional traffic and congestion problems in Upper Providence, particularly on Route 252.

The volume of traffic on U.S. Route 1 overburdens interchanges at Providence and State Roads.

There is heavy reliance upon private cars: while public transportation between the Township and central Philadelphia is readily available, it is nearly non-existent on other routes.

Housing demand within the region may have a negative effect upon the supply of affordable housing within Upper Providence.

Large-scale residential development in surrounding municipalities will burden services and public schools in addition to worsening traffic conditions.

The greater Philadelphia area is home to a number of major chemical production facilities. For purposes of emergency preparedness, various zones of influence have been established for each facility based upon the potential effect of a major mishap. The Township is within the "affected zone" for several of these facilities, indicating that an incident at any of these facilities would have a direct, nearly immediate, negative impact upon Upper Providence.

The current regional economy/job market does not provide enough opportunities to attract highly skilled/educated workers or to retain recent high-school and college graduates.

Since there are few job opportunities within the Township, the strength of the municipal economy (including housing demand) is dependent upon the jobs available in surrounding regions, including Philadelphia, King of Prussia, and the greater Wilmington area.

The current reliance upon property taxes by the Township, School District, and County in combination with rapidly rising housing values creates a hardship for residents who are on a fixed income.

The relatively high tax rate for the School District makes it politically difficult for the Township to raise the municipal tax millage.

One of the challenges facing the Township is how to translate these observations into appropriate actions. One mechanism that can assist in this effort is the "SWOT Matrix," which is reproduced below.

STRENGTHS

WEAKNESSES

OPPORTUNITIES	Evaluate ways to use strengths to take advantage of opportunities .	Consider how opportunities can be used to compensate for or overcome weaknesses .
THREATS	Create strategies that will use strengths to avoid or to mitigate threats .	Develop defensive policies that will minimize weaknesses and avoid threats .

While this matrix may not include every possible action available to the Township, it is an excellent tool for developing effective and appropriate strategy. The details of this strategy will be described in subsequent chapters. For now, we observe that such analysis suggests the following potential strategies.

STRENGTHS - OPPORTUNITIES

- Determine the potential for providing other municipalities with public services. The high quality of these services (as indicated by the public survey) suggests that this may be a way to build relationships with surrounding communities. For example, the Township could enter into an agreement to provide police protection service to all or part of surrounding municipalities. This would provide additional financial support for the Police Department while giving another community a level of protection that they could not afford on their own.

STRENGTHS - THREATS

- Explore means to better utilize the existing public transportation network to mitigate traffic congestion.
- Facilitate access to the public transportation network to encourage recent high-school and college graduates to stay in the Township by providing quick access to employment centers.
- Identify potential trail corridors through the open space network to give local residents a reasonable alternative to using their cars for short trips.
- Take advantage of the available public water supply and sewage disposal systems to encourage affordable housing.

OPPORTUNITIES - WEAKNESSES

- Engage in cooperative arrangements with nearby municipalities to share costs of providing municipal services, thereby mitigating the effects of the rising costs of these services.
- Contact surrounding and nearby municipalities (as well as Rose Tree Media and Marple Newtown School Districts) regarding a cooperative effort to address regional traffic and transportation infrastructure deficiencies.
- Contact Delaware County for information about funding that may be available to offset the rising cost of municipal services.
- Maintain dialogue with Rose Tree Media School District to identify optimal utilization of District-owned recreational facilities.
- Establish contact with the appropriate County offices to secure assistance with historic preservation efforts.

WEAKNESSES - THREATS

- Require builders of new developments to provide highway improvements to mitigate the effect of additional traffic upon the public roads.
- Develop and implement a strategy of public education regarding the rate and distribution of school taxes in contrast to municipal taxes.

Adapted from Long-Range Planning, April 1992, H. Weihrich, "The TOWS Matrix: A Tool for Situational Analysis."