

Township Vision

Introduction

One of the principal purposes of the public outreach efforts was to identify a vision for the Township. The meaning of “vision” within the context of this plan is intended - at least in part - to express the visual aspect of our community. What mental image do we get when we think of Upper Providence Township? What do we expect Upper Providence Township to look like in the coming years? What do we *want* Upper Providence Township to look like in the coming years? Beyond the purely visual, the concept of “vision” also includes the more inchoate concept of character. What do we want the Township to *be* like? How do we want people - residents and visitors alike - to feel when they drive through our community or read our name in a newspaper? Once we have established this vision, we can craft policies that will enable us to achieve it.

Public Responses

Participants in the public outreach process (described in detail in Chapter 19) were rarely asked point-blank, “What is your vision for the Township.” Instead, we approached the question more obliquely, asking people what they liked about the Township and what they hoped it would be like in the years to come. When the questions were asked in interviews or focus groups, the participants had the opportunity to express their visions at length and in a conversational setting that allowed us to explore their visions in some depth. For the written surveys, respondents were asked to rank aspects of the Township that were both appealing and unappealing. Another part of the survey asked respondents to describe the things that they considered the “treasures” of the Township.

This is what they told us.

- A quiet, green, rural community.

To anyone whose exposure to Upper Providence Township is limited to Providence Road, this seems like an incongruous response. Nevertheless, references to the Township’s quiet neighborhoods, its rural character, and its wooded areas were the most frequent responses to questions about what people liked about their community. Despite the fact that the Township is almost entirely built-out and that there is not a single working farm in the municipality, much of the Township *does* have a rural feel. Several factors contribute to this perception.

The Township includes several **large, prominently located areas of permanent open space**, including County-owned Rose Tree Park and the nearby campus of the Springfield Lake Middle School. Located near the geographic center of the Township along heavily traveled PA Route 252, these two open areas make strong contributions to the perceived character of the community. The proximity of Ridley Creek State Park undoubtedly contributes to this perception as well, along with smaller green spaces, such as the cemeteries along Kirk Lane, the grounds surrounding the Rose Tree Elementary School, the Ridley Creek Road corridor,

the miscellaneous small parks and green areas, and even the green spaces surrounding the Township's cluster-type residential developments.

Although most of the Township is developed for residential use, many of the residential lots are **heavily wooded**, such that a drive through a well-established neighborhood may seem like passing through woodlands rather than a residential area. Areas left undeveloped due to steep slopes and the presence of floodplains associated with streams contribute further to this impression, along with the relatively **narrow roads** that encourage slower vehicle speeds and also support the rural feel.

- **It's a nice place to raise a family.**

While there may not be universal agreement upon what makes a family-friendly community, residents commonly cited factors such as the **quality of the schools**, **feeling safe and secure** (which is consistent with the high marks residents gave to the police and fire departments), and the overall perception that Upper Providence is a **quiet community**.

Several residents noted that Upper Providence differed from many nearby municipalities in that it had a wider **range of housing types and costs**. Modestly-priced housing is available in apartment complexes along Providence and Old State Roads and near the Media train station, small single-family homes characterize the mature neighborhoods immediately adjacent to Media Borough, and larger, more expensive housing is typical of the Township's northwest.

- **It's a nice residential community.**

Residents were clear that they did NOT want to see their Township developed with shopping malls or office parks: the fact that the Township is overwhelmingly residential was seen as an asset by most. Even though many residents realized that the **lack of non-residential development** created a fiscal challenge for the Township government, there was clear opposition to any such development other than the small-scale, locally oriented businesses similar to those found along Providence and State Roads. Rose Tree Corporate Center - which seems like a perfect example of what is *not* wanted - was not mentioned as a concern or a problem. The combination of topography, landscaping, and proximity to the Route 1 interchange (thereby minimizing traffic impact upon the rest of the Township) apparently minimize the perceived intrusion upon the aesthetic of the community. Although residents acknowledged that the tax revenue produced by more such uses would be beneficial, the additional traffic that would result was deemed unacceptable.

- **I like it just the way it is.**

Residents' expressions of how much they liked their community were often accompanied by fears that it would change. Even though most admitted that there were things that they *would* like to change (reducing traffic was mentioned most often), change was more usually seen as negative. For many, "change" seemed to imply more houses, more development, more traffic, more crowds, and a general decline in quality of life.

Variations on the Vision

The points noted in the preceding section were consistently mentioned by residents from all parts of the Township. However, there are smaller neighborhoods within the larger community

that is Upper Providence Township, and residents from some of these areas have concerns that are not necessarily shared by all Township residents. The most significant variations in the vision were between the residents of the more rural areas and the denser suburban areas. It should be stressed that these were merely *variations* on the statements noted above and were fully consistent with the desire by nearly everyone to maintain the status quo insofar as quality of life and the character of their community were concerned. For example, a number of residents expressed support for better accommodation of pedestrians. However, those in the more rural areas favored trails for this purpose, while residents of the more suburban neighborhoods preferred sidewalks. The key appears to be to assure that any changes will support the existing character of their context.

The Vision for Upper Providence Township

The following vision statements are based upon the input of Township residents and are intended to guide the policies of the Township.

- Upper Providence Township will be a place with a high quality of life. It will be a predominately residential community with peaceful neighborhoods, whether they are located in the outlying parts of the Township with their woods and rural character or in the more suburban areas adjacent to Media Borough that feature the amenities of a small town.
- Upper Providence Township will be a family-oriented community with safe neighborhoods, high-quality schools, a variety of housing choices, and readily accessible green spaces.
- Upper Providence Township will have safe, well-designed roads that facilitate traffic flow through the Township on the major designated routes while discouraging all but local traffic on local roads.
- Upper Providence Township will have contextually appropriate facilities for bicycle and pedestrian traffic designed to give Township residents an alternative to motor travel for short trips.
- Commercial and industrial uses in Upper Providence Township will be small scale, emphasizing service to the needs of Township residents and those who pass through on a regular basis rather than aspiring to be a retail or industrial destination in its own right. Commercial and industrial areas will have a smaller scale “village” atmosphere that will be distinct from both the large malls and office parks found in surrounding Townships and the more urban feel of Media’s commercial core.
- Upper Providence Township will recognize its role as part of a larger region, actively seeking out alliances with other municipalities, levels of government, and public or private agencies in the interest of successfully addressing shared concerns that require more than just the Township’s resources in order to be successfully resolved.