

Plan for Resource Preservation

Introduction

The Municipalities Planning Code requires that municipal Comprehensive Plans address the issue of resource preservation, specifically identifying natural and historic resources. Natural resource preservation may seem incongruous in the context of a heavily developed community such as Upper Providence, particularly since we have already noted that the historic development of the Township has been a function of its location within the Philadelphia region rather than any natural asset. Nevertheless, these resources have value, perhaps all the more so due to their rarity.

Historic Resources

Chapter 2 of this document includes a brief history of Upper Providence Township. Although Upper Providence has a longer history of settlement by Europeans than most of the nation, little remains from the earliest days. While the very earliest settlers of necessity farmed the land, Upper Providence was a popular location for country homes owned by wealthy Philadelphians even before the Revolution. So from almost its beginning as a municipality, this has been a residential area, with little industry or commercial development.

What are arguably the most significant surviving historic sites in the Township have already been protected.

- There are records of a tavern at the northeast corner of Rose Tree and Providence Roads dating from 1740. The oldest portion of the current **Rose Tree Tavern**, still standing but long vacant, dates from 1809. The building is not merely old, but is truly significant in that it was the center of community life in Upper Providence for nearly two hundred years. The structure is now on County-owned land at the edge of Rose Tree Park. The building was moved to its current position - a hundred yards or so from its original location - in August 2004 in order to accommodate the expansion of the nearby intersection.
- The principal buildings associated with the **Rose Tree Hunt**, along with much of the surrounding property, are the focal point of Rose Tree Park. This park is part of the Delaware County parks system.
- The **Sandy Bank School**(1905) and the old **Notre Dame High School**(1927) are still in use as the Walden School and the Pennsylvania Institute of Technology, respectively. **Providence Public School No. 1** is currently a private residence on South Orange Street.
- Despite all of the development that Township has experienced, there are still a number of **private homes** in use that date from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, although the sweeping acreage that surrounded most of them is, with few exceptions, long gone. Many of these homes are listed and pictured in the 1999 publication by the Upper Providence Tricentennial Commission, “A Land of Providence and Its People.”

Without a standing historic commission or committee of some kind, there is no one with any

kind of official standing to act as an advocate at the Township level for the protection of historic resources. Establishing such a committee - or even a single individual with sufficient interest - is a critical first step. This person or group could be directed to prepare an inventory of historic resources and, perhaps with assistance from the County and the Delaware County Historical Society, develop a plan to encourage the protection of these resources, including those that are privately owned. Other municipalities have had success in this area by requiring a higher level of scrutiny for subdivisions and land developments involving or adjacent to identified historic resources and by allowing for adaptive re-use of historic structures, including uses that are not otherwise permitted by local zoning.

GOAL: Preserve and enhance the remaining historic resources in the Township to be a legacy for our children and a record for new residents and visitors.

Objective 1: Identify Township residents with interest in local history who would be willing to act as official or quasi-official Township Historian or to serve on a Historic Preservation Committee.

Objective 2: Develop roster of historic sites and structures, starting with an update of the information contained in “A Land of Providence and Its People.”

Objective 3: Identify appropriate options for protection of historic assets that are at risk.

Objective 4: Amend Township ordinances to encourage preservation and restoration of historic resources.

Objective 5: Establish a program to recognize historic and other significant buildings as “Upper Providence Treasures.” Such recognition should be in the form of a plaque on the structure or some other permanent indication.

Natural Resources

The natural resources noted by the Municipalities Planning Code are wetlands and other aquifer recharge zones, woodlands, steep slope areas, prime agricultural land, floodplains, and “unique natural areas.” The MPC adds that municipalities are not limited by this list, but may provide for the protection of other resources of local importance. To its credit, Upper Providence already has regulations in place to protect wetlands, steep slopes, and floodplains. There are no active farms in the Township, so the protection of prime agricultural soils is a moot concern and need not be addressed. Similarly, there are no commercially valuable mineral resources that require special consideration.

Our resident survey shows that residents place a high value upon the visual quality of the Township. This suggests that the protection and preservation of natural resources should continue to be a municipal policy. For those elements that are already protected in some fashion, we should evaluate the effectiveness of the methods being used, improving them as may be required. The elements that are not protected should be reviewed to identify an appropriate level and method(s) of protection. The concept of “conservation zoning” is a newer method of land use control that accommodates the development of property while giving the municipality the power to preserve natural, environmental, and aesthetic resources that are not protected by existing environmental regulations. The Township favors this concept, but the current level of development suggests that it may be of limited usefulness

unless large areas were to be re-zoned for much higher density development - which is *not* being proposed by this plan.

The wooded areas that characterize much of the residential area of the Township are prized by most residents, many of whom pay a premium for a home on a wooded lot. These woods are in relatively little danger of being eliminated in a wholesale fashion. More vulnerable are the woods on lots that are large enough for subdivision and further development, as construction activity inevitably leads to loss of some wooded area. Extensive loss of wooded area could lead to serious problems for the Township: woods are not only scenic, but provide tangible benefits by controlling stormwater runoff and the effects of erosion (critical in steep areas), modulating extreme temperatures, controlling wind-borne dust, and converting carbon dioxide into oxygen. Effective woodland protection should be a two-part strategy: assistance and encouragement for property owners who wish to preserve their woods and controls against the elimination of wooded areas where such removal will be clearly detrimental to surrounding properties or the community generally.

Aquifer protection may appear to be of minimal concern in a community where few residents rely upon their own wells for water supply. However, even the water company needs to get its supply from somewhere: the quality of the aquifer (which has an eventual effect upon surface waters like Springton Lake, which is actually a reservoir) affects both the supplier and the ultimate consumer. If the aquifer is degraded by either reduced recharge (thereby reducing the quantity of flow) or by contamination (impacting quality), higher costs will result as suppliers will be required to bring in water from farther afield and/or spend more on treatment.

The simplest way to protect groundwater supply may be to implement the most current “best management practices” for stormwater management. Frequently referred to as “BMP’s,” these measures allow communities to address both the quantity and quality of groundwater recharge. Upper Providence is fortunate in that it is not characterized by the carbonate geology that is most susceptible to contamination, but contaminants can still travel along fissures in even the least porous rock. The Township recognizes that it has a responsibility to maintain open communication with water providers and to cooperate in efforts - such as a groundwater protection study - that protect the Township water supply and Township interests generally.

GOAL: Retain current provisions for natural resource protection, enhancing them where necessary.

Objective 1: Conduct a comprehensive review of Township regulations to identify their effect upon natural resources; enhance protective measures where warranted.

GOAL: Protect and preserve wooded areas.

Objective 1: Make information available to residents regarding benefits of wooded areas and how to care properly for their wooded lots.

Objective 2: Identify critical woodland areas, such as woods within floodplains or on steep slope areas.

Objective 3: Develop and implement regulations and ordinances that protect and preserve the

function of the critical woodlands identified under Objective 2.

GOAL: Protect groundwater resources.

Objective 1: Review and amend as necessary the Township Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance to require current best management practices for stormwater management.

Objective 2: Maintain communication through the Township Authority with water providers in order to co-ordinate groundwater protection measures and to assure adequate supply for residents and businesses.

Objective 3: Develop and implement a program to inspect stormwater management structures on an annual basis to assure that they function as intended and are properly maintained.