

Plan for Land Use & Housing

Introduction

Land use is the most obvious element of community planning: the pattern of land uses and the density and type of development create the appearance of the community, an aspect that is immediately apparent to even the most transient visitor. In a community as extensively developed as Upper Providence is, the challenge is to preserve - or enhance - the existing quality of life. There is little vacant land available for new development, so planning must address the issue of redevelopment: how the existing uses may change over time and, more importantly, how the Township can influence that change in a manner consistent with public policy.

During the public outreach portion of our process, Township residents were nearly unanimous in their desire to preserve the current character and quality of life of the Township. There was little desire to accommodate any new housing, strong aversion to non-residential development, and frequently cited concerns that the relatively few remaining open spaces be preserved, especially where there were issues of environmentally sensitive areas, such as steep slopes and floodplains.

While the desire to keep the Township the way it is is understandable, change is inevitable. Furthermore, without some increase in the proportion of non-residential development, the Township is likely to face serious fiscal difficulties in the coming years. The challenge before us is to preserve the quiet, suburban character of the residential areas, to protect environmentally sensitive open spaces, to accommodate safe pedestrian facilities, to preserve the aesthetic quality, and still accommodate sufficient commercial and industrial space to enable the Township to remain fiscally solvent *without* adding to the traffic and congestion problems that have been most cited by residents as the least appealing aspect of the community. The challenge is difficult indeed.

The Future Land Use Map included with this chapter illustrates the official Township policy on land use and has been developed with the intent of promoting the preservation of the aspects of the Township's character most treasured by the residents with the need (not to mention the legal requirement) to accommodate a full range of land uses. Note that the policy here, like all of the policies expressed in this document, is not enforceable as a municipal ordinance, but it provides the basis for such regulations.

Notes on Allocation of Land Use Types

Due to both the current extent of development and the desire to maintain the character of the community, the future land use policy will consider not merely the uses to be accommodated, but the desired character as well. The use types are similar, but not identical, to those used in Chapter 15, "Existing Land Use." This is due to our desire to focus on the character of the neighborhoods - and the preservation of that character - rather than to develop a policy for each parcel in the municipality.

RESIDENTIAL - Chapter 15 notes that Upper Providence is overwhelmingly residential in character. That chapter refines this category by introducing a density factor: three different residential categories are established based upon the size of the lot where the homes are sited. This chapter will define the residential areas more by their character, as described more fully below, recognizing that density is an element of character.

“Rural Residential” areas are *generally* characterized by larger lots and are mostly found north of the Route 1 by-pass. The great majority of the homes here are single-family residences. While multi-unit structures are not necessarily prohibited, they are provided with landscaping and other amenities consistent with the more rural qualities of the neighborhood. “Suburban Residential” areas are south of the by-pass and are characterized by higher densities as well as by the presence of multi-unit structures like town-house units and apartment buildings. Given that we wish to preserve the existing quality of the Township’s residential areas, the following chart illustrates the principal differences between the two types, suggesting the nature of land use and design controls that may be appropriate in each area.

LOW-DENSITY RESIDENTIAL	MODERATE-DENSITY RESIDENTIAL
mostly single-family detached homes at the lowest gross density in the Township	a range of housing types, including both single-family and multi-dwelling houses, at relatively higher gross density
curvilinear streets with culs-de-sacs	straight streets that may be arranged in a “grid” pattern or otherwise have multiple connection points to other streets; relatively few culs-de-sacs
pedestrians are accommodated on trails and paths (which may or may not be paved) that are not necessarily aligned with streets	pedestrians are accommodated on sidewalks that generally follow street alignments
street lights are few and are sited principally for the benefit of motorists: at road intersections or high-accident areas	street lights are prevalent, benefitting both motorists and pedestrians on the sidewalks
homes are set well back on lots	homes are set relatively close to the streets
larger lot sizes allow accommodation of environmentally sensitive areas with little or no deleterious effect	more appropriate in areas with fewer environmental constraints

VILLAGE CORRIDOR - Rose Tree village has a long history, but its form has changed drastically over the years. Beginning as a cluster of homes and other buildings around the Rose Tree Tavern, the “village” now exists as the strip of homes and businesses along Providence Road between the Media Borough line and Rose Tree Park. A similar mix of uses is found along State Road between the Media Borough line and (approximately) the intersection of Bobbin Mill Road. As noted in Chapter 15, these are the only areas of the Township that are zoned for retail commercial use, but there are numerous properties within both of these districts that

are being used for residential use. The Township intends to maintain the current zoning in these areas in order to accommodate small-scale retail, office, and professional service activities in a manner consistent with the existing character of the community. This is an opportunity to build up the Township's tax base with minimal impact upon existing residential areas.

The Township will explore means to increase the viability of these corridors for such a mix of uses. Further study is required in order to identify ways to resolve parking issues, to improve pedestrian accommodation, and generally to improve the visual quality of these corridors in the interest of making them more viable for office and retail uses. One particular concern is to enhance the design of off-street parking areas to eliminate the need for cars to back out onto Providence Road. We do not envision the elimination of residential uses from these areas, as such uses support the "village" feel and promote the creation of a "walkable" community where walking is a viable alternative to the car for short daily trips. Indeed, the provision of a complete range of housing types - from single family units to apartment buildings - will enhance the village quality, provided that the buildings have been appropriately designed.

We recognize that it is both desirable and legally necessary to accommodate a full range of land uses; however, the planning legislation allows us to determine the most appropriate *forms* for development in our community. Based upon the input from Township residents and the business community, as the Township has determined that commercial uses in the Township should be limited to small-scale shops and services. We note that there are a number of large shopping centers immediately surrounding the Township in addition to the retail opportunities in the Borough of Media. The proximity of these resources in combination with the Township's congested road system, hilly topography, lack of large open lots, and overall level of development lead us to conclude that this form of retail is most appropriate. Large, regional-scale stores, including shopping centers, malls, and "big box" retailers, are not suitable and will be discouraged. Implementing this aspect of the land use plan will require the development of specialized language for inclusion in the Township Zoning Ordinance.

PROFESSIONAL OFFICE - Large-scale office buildings and office parks are generally inappropriate in Upper Providence Township. The only area identified for this use is the land currently occupied by Rose Tree Corporate Center. The location at the interchange of the Route 1 by-pass and Providence Road is the most suitable location available, in that it minimizes the impact upon the Township of the traffic that the facility generates; however, it also adds traffic to the most congested roads. The Township will continue to accommodate this use, but will discourage significant expansion as well as the construction of new office parks.

INDUSTRIAL - As with the commercial areas, the area currently set aside for industrial use is small, but is still not fully developed for this use. We note that Upper Providence does not have much of an industrial history, and has therefore not developed the kind of infrastructure that fosters such use. Given that the Township does not particularly desire to attract such development, there are no plans to improve the infrastructure to facilitate further industrial development. We note that the area provided here is most appropriate from the perspective of access to infrastructure and of minimizing impact upon residential areas. It will be necessary to revise some of the existing zoning provisions in order to assure that the indicated lands will be developable for these uses.

INSTITUTIONAL - The future land use plan anticipates the continuation of the existing institutional uses and is amenable to some expansion, as these uses provide a service to the community. As noted in Chapter 15, typical institutional uses in Upper Providence include schools, churches, and municipal functions. Any significant expansion of these uses, as well as the location of new uses of this type, must be carefully considered, as they typically will not contribute any tax revenue to the Township. Among the benefits of these uses is that they are largely compatible with residential areas and are usually attractively designed and maintained.

OPEN SPACE - The open spaces shown here include both protected green spaces and recreational areas. Open space policy embraces the need to accommodate both types of space, as well as the desire to provide for connections among the spaces and with public facilities. Open spaces shown on the map indicate the intent of the Township to support the continued preservation of existing green spaces and to protect environmentally sensitive areas from inappropriate development. Note that many of the prominent green spaces - Rose Tree Park is a significant example - are not controlled by the Township. In such cases, the Township's role will be one of cooperation with the owners of such facilities to assure that they remain available and useful to Township residents. For the protection of environmentally sensitive lands, the Township will rely upon its regulatory power as much as possible. Due to cost, actual acquisition of property or development rights will be implemented sparingly.

Housing

Upper Providence Township already accommodates a wide range of housing types, from apartments suitable for moderate-income individuals and families to estates with market values measured in the millions of dollars.

It is the intent of this plan to maintain this diversity of housing types, and thereby continue to accommodate residents with a wide range of incomes. However, the Township is not a direct provider of housing (nor does it intend to be), and we are therefore not in a position to dictate housing prices to consumers. The Township role in assuring a supply of affordable housing is necessarily limited to smooth administration of the development approval process (thereby minimizing the time required for approval) and the accommodation of higher density housing in appropriate locations. As the land cost is a major element of housing price, more units-per-acre translates into a lower land cost per unit, thereby enabling a lower total cost per unit. But land cost is only a portion of the final price, which is more strongly influenced by the market: developers are not normally *required* to provide lower-cost housing, unless public funding is used. Home builders will build to meet the market, so even allowing very high density development will not guarantee the construction of lower priced homes.

FIGURE 7.2: ANTICIPATED LAND USE DISTRIBUTION

Information in this chart is based upon Figure 7.1, the Future Land Use Map and Figure 17.1, the Existing Land Use Map. Types of use are classified as described in the preceding text. Any total percentages in excess of 100.0 are due to rounding error.

LAND USE TYPE	CURRENT ACRES / % of TWP.	Planned ACRES / % of TWP.
Residential, Low-Density	1,338.6 / 35.3%	1,637.1 / 43.1%

Residential, Moderate-Density	1,204.4 / 31.7%	904.8 / 23.8%
Village Corridor	19.2 / 0.5 %	52.2 / 1.4%
Professional Office	20.2 / 0.5 %	20.2 / 0.5 %
Industrial	6.4 / 0.2 %	16.3 / 0.4%
Institutional	193.4 / 5.1 %	193.4 / 5.1 %
Open Space*	571.4 / 15.1 %	543.2 / 14.3%
Transportation (incl. road rights-of-way)	428.0 / 11.3 %	428.0 / 11.3%
Vacant	13.5 / 0.4 %	0 / 0.0 %
TOTAL	3,795.2 / 100.0 %	3,795.2 / 100.0 %

SOURCE: Spotts, Stevens & McCoy, Inc., 2004.

* Includes surface area of Springton Lake

Chapter 16 of this plan provides population projections indicating that by the year 2020 Upper Providence will have 11,500 residents: approximately 1,000 more than are currently living here. Based upon an average household size of 2.56 persons, this indicates a need for 390 additional housing units within the next fifteen years, or an average annual increase of twenty-six housing units per year over that time. Given the lack of land available for new development, it will be necessary to accommodate most of this increase in the form of re-development or infill development. Generically, “re-development” is just tearing down old structures and building new ones on the same site. In the specific case of Upper Providence, most of the existing structures are already residential. The impact of residential re-development will therefore often be a case of tearing down existing housing in order to build new housing at a higher density. In contrast, “infill development” is the concept of developing small lots, vacant lots that have been “overlooked” in the overall development of the community or breaking lots off from existing properties in such a way that the new development fits the character of the neighborhood. Both approaches result in a net increase of housing. During the public participation stage, many residents expressed their objection to subdivision of existing residential lots, even when that subdivision was clearly permitted by the zoning. This is a potentially contentious issue, as residents indicated that - even when such infill development was well-designed - they objected to the increase in density. Clearly, the Township must be sure that the effects of new development are addressed as part of the review process.

The highest density of housing will be permitted within the “moderate-density” areas, including townhouses and other types of multi-unit structures.

GOAL: Provide for the development and re-development of land within the Township in a manner that respects, preserves, and enhances the residential character of the various neighborhoods.

Objective 1: Review and amend the Township’s development regulations (Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance most importantly) to implement the land use allocation described in this chapter and the policies stated in Chapter 4.

Objective 2: Continue to accommodate a comprehensive range of housing forms that will encourage the availability of housing to households over a wide income range.

Objective 3: Accommodate higher density development and higher intensity of uses where mass transit is readily accessible.

Objective 4: Accommodate “village” type development, including a mix of residential and non-residential uses, within the Township’s existing retail areas.

Objective 5: Assure that land use regulations continue to accommodate a comprehensive variety of uses that will promote the fiscal health of the Township, particularly as land is developed or re-zoned.