

FIGURE 15.3: LAND USE DISTRIBUTION

Information in this chart is based upon Figure 17.1, the Existing Land Use Map. Types of use are classified as described in the preceding text. Total percentage exceeds 100 due to rounding error.

LAND USE TYPE	ACRES / SQUARE MILES	PERCENTAGE OF TWP.
Residential	2,543.1 / 3.98	67.0
Commercial	19.2 / 0.03	0.5
Professional Office	20.2 / 0.03	0.5
Industrial	6.4 / 0.01	0.2
Institutional	193.4 / 0.30	5.1
Permanent Open Space (incl. reservoir)	571.4 / 0.89	15.1
Transportation (incl. road rights-of-way)	428.0 / 0.67	11.3
Vacant	13.5 / 0.02	0.4
TOTAL	3,795.2 / 5.93	100.1

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

Observations

Analysis of existing land use patterns is a necessary first step in land use planning. A given arrangement of land uses exists for a reason - or, more correctly, a number of reasons. The existing patterns also create certain expectations among residents and others who have occasion to travel through the Township: putting office space in a disused school is far more palatable to most than erecting a new building in the middle of some cherished scenic vista. Understanding what exists and why it exists helps us to develop realistic plans and policies regarding future land use. The following observations are based upon our analysis of the land use patterns in Upper Providence Township.

- The map clearly illustrates what is already apparent to most residents: the Township is almost entirely built-out, with very little land left for new development.
- Residential use is by far the dominant land use in the Township, with many residential lots at or near the minimum lot size required by zoning.
- The development of increasingly less suitable land with single-family homes is evidence of the strong demand for this type of housing. We note that many newer homes are on lots as small as permitted by the applicable zoning regulations. Steeply sloped locations that would have been passed over in earlier years have been re-graded to accommodate construction and to maximize the yield of the site. Lands developed to this level of intensity often feature extensive retaining walls and steep yard areas.
- Relatively large lots, narrow roads, protected stream corridors, and the prominent location of the parks and open spaces give much of the Township a quiet, almost rural character that is not apparent from the map.
- There are relatively few residences in multi-unit buildings, and all but two of them are south of the Route 1 by-pass. The examples on the north side are both cluster-type developments surrounded by wide buffer areas.
- Commercial areas are limited to the portion of Providence Road between the Media line and the Route 1 by-pass, a short stretch of Old State Road (also adjacent to Media), and a tiny stretch of Baltimore Pike. Demand for commercial space may be hindered by the proximity of the Borough and the shopping malls along Baltimore Pike: although the area

of the Township zoned for commercial use is very small, it is far from being fully developed for commercial use.

- The Township has a limited supply of purpose-built commercial space. Old State Road has several small multi-tenant commercial buildings, and there are a handful of restaurants and gas stations, but much of the commercial activity in the Township is accommodated in converted dwellings. While this has helped the Township escape the visual blight of the typical suburban strip-mall with its large buildings separated from the street by huge parking lots, it has its down side. Many of the small yards that once separated the buildings from the street have been paved to provide customer parking, but the smallness of the lots results in this being a marginally adequate provision. Driveways are poorly defined or non-existent, and there is little or no provision for pedestrians. Furthermore, expansion of any kind is difficult for most of these sites.
- The Rose Tree Corporate Center is a modern office complex comprised of two buildings at the Route 1 / Route 252 interchange. It is by far the largest concentration of office space in the Township. Most of the remaining office space in the Township is in the form of adaptive re-uses of older buildings. There are a few, relatively small purpose-built office buildings along Providence and Old State Roads.
- Industrial areas in the Township are small and poorly located by modern standards: the few that there are tend to be environmentally constrained by floodplains or steep slopes and lack easy access to the highway network. Furthermore, a significant proportion of the land zoned for industrial use is occupied by the sewage treatment plant and therefore makes no contribution to tax revenue.
- Schools are the most prominent institutional uses, with both public and private institutions well represented. St. Mary Magdalene has the largest site of any of the houses of worship in the Township. The large cemeteries along Kirk Lane are shown here as institutional use, but also function as permanent open spaces, reducing the perceived density of development.
- Open space areas are distributed throughout the community. The largest facilities include Ridley Creek State Park at the Township's northwestern edge and two County-owned parks: Rose Tree Park near the center of the Township and Glen Providence Park along the Media Borough line. These parks provide Township residents with ample opportunities for passive recreation endeavors. Nearly all facilities for active recreation - such as improved ball fields, tennis and basketball courts, and playground areas suitable for young children - are owned by the Rose Tree Media School District. Township-owned facilities are limited to a few small playgrounds.

Planning Implications

- The current extent of development in the Township leaves little vacant land for new construction. As a result, new development must be accommodated on lots carved from existing developed parcels, on lands previously deemed unsuitable for development, and on developed property that has been cleared.
- If the demand for housing in the Township remains strong, developers will continue to maximize the yield of available land, erecting new homes wherever physically possible, and expanding the definition of what is considered "developable land." This is likely to result in increasing pressure upon the Township to raise allowable density and to relax restrictions based upon environmental considerations.
- Typically, residential uses do not generate sufficient tax revenue to pay for the

municipal services that they consume. The converse is true for commercial, office, and industrial development, so municipalities rely upon these uses to balance their books. The preponderance of residential property suggests that the Township will find it increasingly difficult to sustain the current level and quality of municipal services.

- Although the Township has zoned only small areas for commercial, office, and industrial use, much of that land is used for other purposes. This is particularly noticeable along Providence Road in Rose Tree village: the entire corridor is zoned “Business,” but about half of the available frontage is occupied by residential uses. This suggests that, to date, demand has failed to absorb even the modest available supply. This may also suggest that this area is not well-suited for this kind of development: although it is readily accessible, lots are small and there is no readily developable land. As manufacturing is in decline nationally, there is little point in trying to attract new development of this type. However, the Township may wish to explore ways to accommodate and to attract office and commercial development.
- The commercial corridors along Providence Road and Old State Road would benefit from a comprehensive design strategy to improve pedestrian accommodation, to clearly define driveways and parking areas, and to provide for more consistent signage, lighting, and landscaping.
- Rose Tree Elementary School, Springfield Lake Middle School, and St. Mary Magdalene School all draw many of their students from the immediately surrounding neighborhoods, but there is little provision for safe pedestrian travel in these areas. Better pedestrian connections to adjacent residential areas could reduce reliance upon motor vehicles, reduce traffic, and provide opportunities for recreation and exercise.
- With the exception of a few small playgrounds, all of the active recreation facilities in the Township are owned by the School District. While this technically makes them public facilities, the reality is that any use by the general public must be worked around the schools’ practice and game schedules. Issues of maintenance and legal liability further impede public use. The Township may wish to explore ways to increase the availability of playing fields and courts to its residents.
- Changes to land use must be done with consideration to the potential impact upon traffic. Wherever possible, land development projects should consider ways to facilitate alternate forms of transportation, mass transit, and generally reduced reliance on cars. Land use regulations should be implemented that will provide incentives for these considerations.