

Regional Setting & Influences

Introduction & Purpose

Although the jurisdiction of the Township government ends at the municipal line, the surrounding communities unavoidably affect the daily lives of the residents. Wise planning for the Township requires us to identify and to evaluate the effect of various features beyond the Township line. This chapter will place Upper Providence Township within the context of the larger community and will identify those regional features that have the most direct impact upon Township residents. Since Upper Providence is almost entirely residential in character, facilities outside of the Township are a critical element of the quality of life enjoyed by its residents. This chapter also includes an analysis of the Comprehensive Plans and Zoning Ordinances for those portions of the surrounding municipalities that adjoin Upper Providence.

Geographic Setting and Influences

Upper Providence Township is located near the geographic center of Delaware County, Pennsylvania, approximately twelve miles due west of central Philadelphia. Delaware County is part of the Philadelphia Metropolitan Area, which is defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as a fourteen-county area that includes parts of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, and the State of Delaware. The Township is characterized by a gently rolling topography with steeper areas found along the Crum and Ridley Creek corridors. There are no navigable waterways in the Township; the only significant body of water is the Springton Lake (also known as Springton Reservoir or Geist Reservoir), which was created in 1932 by damming the Crum Creek.

The earliest European settlement of Upper Providence was strongly influenced by the proximity of Philadelphia - arguably the most important city in Britain's American colonies - and the access provided by the Providence Great Road. The city of Philadelphia and the ready access to transit that resulted in the earliest settlement continue to exert a powerful influence on the Township to this day.

Transit

The European settlement of Upper Providence began when William Penn established the Providence Great Road in the 1680's. Now called simply Providence Road, this route remains the principal north-south road through the Township. Other major roads through the Township include Palmers Mill Rd (PA Route 252), Baltimore Pike, State Road, and the Media By-Pass (U.S. Route 1), which is the only limited-access highway in the Township. Road functions and conditions are discussed in greater detail in the Transportation Network chapter. These roads connect to major routes in the Philadelphia region: Interstate 476 (the "Blue Route") lies just to the east of the Township, providing quick access to the King of Prussia area, the Pennsylvania Turnpike, and - in conjunction with Interstate 95 just to the south - to Philadelphia, Philadelphia International Airport, Wilmington, Baltimore, and Washington, DC. New Jersey and the New Jersey Turnpike are readily accessible via the Commodore Barry Bridge across the Delaware River. The New York metropolitan area is readily

accessible by both Interstate 95 or the Turnpike.

Philadelphia was an important center of passenger rail travel in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and was the headquarters for the Pennsylvania Railroad. Although rail is much less significant today for long-distance travel, it remains important for local service within the densely developed areas between New York City and Washington, DC and for commuting to the major cities within this corridor. SEPTA, the public transit agency serving the Pennsylvania portion of metropolitan Philadelphia, provides passenger rail service to Upper Providence residents. The Media station of the R-3 regional rail line is in Upper Providence just south of the Borough line. The R-3 provides frequent service to Philadelphia, connecting to Amtrak's national passenger network at Thirtieth Street Station. SEPTA Trolley #101 connects central Media with Philadelphia via Sixty-Ninth Street Station in Upper Darby. Since heavy industry in Upper Providence was virtually obliterated by the flood of 1843, there was never any need to establish freight rail service to the Township; no such service exists in the Township to this day.

The Township is about ten miles from Philadelphia International Airport (PHL), one of the busiest airports in the United States, providing ready access to major cities throughout the country and all over the world. The closest general aviation airports (no commercial passenger service) are in West Chester and Wilmington.

Commercial Areas and Employment Centers

Commercial areas in Upper Providence are limited to a couple dozen locally oriented businesses along Providence and State Roads just outside the Borough of Media. Media itself has a wide variety of smaller specialty shops in its downtown area. The nearest major shopping areas are along Baltimore Pike with Springfield Mall and numerous smaller strip malls to the east of the Township and Granite Run Mall to the west. The King of Prussia malls are less than half an hour away via Route I-476, and the Media trolley provides quick access to the Sixty-Ninth Street Terminal area, and the train provides convenient access to downtown Philadelphia.

Upper Providence was never a major industrial area; today, there are a few small industrial operations near Baltimore Pike, but they account for only a small number of employees. Principal employers within the Township are in the public sector: the school district and the Township itself. The nearest major employment centers are Media, the Baltimore Pike corridor, central Philadelphia, the West Chester Pike corridor, the King of Prussia/Route 202 corridor, and the Wilmington area. It is likely that the ease of access to so many areas has contributed to the popularity of the Township as a residential area.

Recreational Areas and Open Spaces

Major recreational areas and facilities are reviewed in greater detail in the Community Facilities section of this document. The only regionally significant recreational resource entirely within Upper Providence is Rose Tree Park, which is part of the Delaware County park system. The Township contains a small portion of Ridley Creek State Park, which accommodates a wide variety of passive recreation activities along with unique cultural and historic attractions on its 2,600 acres. This park adjoins the Tyler Arboretum, a privately owned open space area of 650 acres in Middletown Township that is open to the public. The

Arboretum property was the grounds of a private home for more than 250 years. Beginning in 1825, the owners began the systematic planting of more than one thousand varieties of trees and shrubs. While not all of these have survived to the present, the land remains an important local resource and naturalistic (if not strictly “natural”) area. In combination, these two permanent open space areas provide 3,250 acres - over five square miles - of contiguous green space in one of the most densely developed parts of the State. Of the few other significant recreational open spaces in the immediately surrounding areas, most are golf courses and country clubs. The nearest ones are Paxon Hollow in Marple Township, Springfield in Springfield Township, and Springhaven in Nether Providence Township.

Institutions

The proximity of the Township to both the Delaware County seat and the City of Philadelphia gives residents easy access to a wide variety of educational, governmental, medical, and cultural institutions.

- **EDUCATION** - The Township is in the Rose Tree Media School District along with Media Borough, Edgmont Township, and Middletown Township. Rose Tree Elementary School and Springton Lake Middle School are both within Upper Providence; Penncrest High School is nearby in Middletown Township. In addition to the public school system, there are a number of readily accessible private schools. The private schools in Upper Providence are significant from a regional perspective in that they typically draw students from a wider area than the public schools and thereby constitute an attraction for traffic from outside the Township. Within Upper Providence, private alternatives to the public schools consist of St. Mary Magdalen, a Roman Catholic school for grades one through eight; The Walden School, a Montessori school for ages 3 through 14; and Benchmark School, for children aged 6 through 14 who have reading difficulties. These are all day schools. These facilities are described in greater detail in the chapter on community facilities and services.

There is a wide variety of post-secondary institutions in the region. The only one actually within the Township is the Pennsylvania Institute of Technology, which offers certificate programs and two-year associate degrees at its campus on Manchester Avenue just south of Media Borough. The next closest schools include Delaware County Community College in Marple Township and Swarthmore College, a well-known, four-year, private liberal arts college in Swarthmore Borough. Beyond these, there are dozens of schools in the greater Philadelphia area that are close enough to the Township to allow residents to be commuting students. The most prominent of these include Drexel University, Temple University, the University of Pennsylvania, and many smaller schools in Philadelphia; Widener University in Chester; and the collection of relatively small, private colleges along the Main Line. Penn State maintains its Delaware County campus nearby in Middletown Township; Cheyney and West Chester Universities are the closest members of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education. In addition to these facilities, the Williamson Free School of Mechanical Trades is a highly regarded trade school in Middletown Township. Finally, Elwyn, also in Middletown Township, provides education, vocational training, and employment services for the mentally challenged.

- **GOVERNMENT** - County government offices and courts are all located nearby in Media Borough.

- **HOSPITALS** - There are no hospitals within the Township. The nearest is Riddle Memorial Hospital along Baltimore Pike in Middletown Township. Riddle is a 252-bed fully accredited, not-for-profit, acute-care community hospital associated with the Thomas Jefferson University hospital cancer network.

East of Upper Providence, along Route 320 in Springfield Township, is the much smaller Springfield Hospital. Springfield is a 32-bed not-for profit community hospital associated with the Crozer-Keystone Health System that provides comprehensive acute care services and wellness care.

These are only the closest of a large number of care facilities throughout the Philadelphia region that are readily accessible to Township residents.

- **CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS** - As a result of being within the Philadelphia metropolitan area, Upper Providence residents have ready access to a wide variety of world-class museums, musical organizations, and live theatre available in and around the City. Local institutions of this type are reviewed in the “Community Facilities and Services” chapter.

Adjacent Communities

Upper Providence Township shares a border with six other municipalities in Delaware County. Each of these communities has its own Comprehensive Plan and regulatory ordinances. We have reviewed the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance for each of these municipalities to identify how they have planned for the development of the portion of their jurisdiction adjoining Upper Providence. Our review will start with Edgmont Township - at the northern end of Upper Providence - and continue clockwise around the Township. Please note that a “use by right” is a land use permitted by a zoning ordinance outright, with no additional permissions required other than the normal land development review process. A “conditional use” and a “special exception use” are still permitted uses, but they require an additional hearing before either the governing body (for a conditional use) or the Zoning Hearing Board (for a special exception). In addition, it is important to realize that the naming convention for zoning districts results in many communities having zoning districts with similar names; however, every community defines its own zoning districts. For example, “R-1” is a typical name for a low-density residential district, and many municipalities (including Upper Providence Township) have an “R-1” district. However, specific lot size requirements, minimum yards, and even permitted uses vary greatly across municipalities such that what is permitted in one “R-1” district is not necessarily permitted in other “R-1” districts.

EDGMONT TOWNSHIP - Edgmont has a short border with Upper Providence. The future land use plan shown in the current Comprehensive Plan continues the existing uses along this border for the foreseeable future, including Ridley Creek State Park on the west side of Providence Road and residential uses at a relatively low density on the east side. The Zoning Ordinance places the Ridley Creek parkland in the Outdoor Recreation (“OR”) zoning district and the lands between Providence Road and Springton Lake are zoned Suburban Residential (“R-3”). The “R-3” district allows only single-family detached dwellings by right, specifying a minimum lot size of one acre. Residential developments utilizing special design options are permitted by conditional use, but these options still require a gross density of not less than one acre per dwelling unit. Uses permitted by special exception include structures for cultural or religious use (such as a house of worship), accessory dwelling units, and bed-and-

breakfast operations. These uses are generally considered to be compatible with residential areas.

The portion of Upper Providence that abuts Edgmont is fully developed for residential use; there are no existing or anticipated land use conflicts relative to Edgmont Township.

Edgmont Township

1000 Gradyville Rd.

Gradyville, PA 19039

tel: 610-459-1662

web: www.edgmont.org

NEWTOWN TOWNSHIP - Since the creation of the Springton Lake in 1932, Newtown has not had a land boundary with Upper Providence. However, the distance between the land portions of the Townships is not large, and Bishop Hollow Road connects the shores, so compatibility of land uses along the shores remains an issue. The future land use element of the current Comprehensive Plan reflects existing development, identifying the shoreline area as “open space” and the immediately adjoining inland area as single-family residential. This is consistent with the zoning regulations: the entire area adjoining Upper Providence is in Newtown’s “R-1” zoning district. Permitted uses in this district are single family detached houses, public schools, farming, municipal uses, and typical accessory uses. Private schools, houses of worship, and non-profit clubs are permitted by special exception; where any of these uses is to include residential facilities, those facilities are permitted as a conditional use. The minimum required lot size here is 60,000 square feet (1.38 acre), which is larger than the 1.00 acre required in the portion of Upper Providence that faces Newtown.

Any concerns about incompatible land uses along the Newtown boundary are minimized by the existing level of development, the compatible zoning regulations, and the physical separation by the reservoir. We note that “municipal uses” (permitted by right in Newtown) are not always aesthetically pleasing, but such uses are not likely here due to the high value of the land.

While the future of the lands most nearly adjacent to Upper Providence are not an issue, there is considerable cause for concern due to new residential developments totalling nearly one thousand new units proposed along the Route 252 corridor in both Newtown and Marple Townships.

Newtown Township

209 Bishop Hollow Rd.

Newtown Square, PA 19073

tel: 610-356-0200

web: www.newtowntownship.org

MARPLE TOWNSHIP - Marple is separated from Upper Providence by Springton Lake in the north and Crum Creek in the south. While the reservoir may effectively isolate the shore areas of the Townships from each other, the same cannot be said of the Creek. The future land use element of the Comprehensive Plan shows all areas along the Crum Creek corridor (including the areas adjacent to the reservoir) as either “open space” or “very low density residential,” which is defined as 0-1.5 dwelling units/acre.

There are four different zoning districts in Marple that adjoin Upper Providence: all of them are residential. Three of them, the “RA,” “RB,” and “RC” districts, are nearly identical to each other; the only difference among them is the required minimum lot size. Each of these districts permits only single-family detached homes and municipal uses as uses-by-right. Other permitted uses are limited to agriculture, recreation, open space, and similar uses that are generally compatible with residential areas. The required minimum lot size in the RA district is 80,000 square feet (1.84 acres), in the RB district it is 40,000 square feet (0.92 acre), and in the RC district it is 20,000 square feet (0.46 acre). The remaining district is Planned Residential Development (“PRD”), another type of residential development that allows a builder smaller lot sizes and greater design flexibility in exchange for permanently dedicated open space. The PRD zone adjacent to Upper Providence is already developed as a PRD, with a portion of the permanent open space provided along the Crum Creek. In addition to this “dedicated” PRD zone, PRD’s are permitted in the RA, RB, and RC areas. PRD’s in the latter zones must maintain the same gross density permitted by the base district; the PRD zone allows for gross density up to four dwelling units per acre.

All portions of Upper Providence adjacent to Marple are zoned for residential use. The permitted densities are also similar: Upper Providence allows smaller lots - 1.00 acre in contrast to 1.84 acres - for its lowest density residential district, which is principally adjacent to the RA zones in Marple. The RB and RC areas occupy only a small portion along the border at the southern corner of the Township, where it abuts the R-3 district in Upper Providence. Upper Providence, like Marple, provides for a preserved stream corridor along the Crum Creek, so that the minor differences in density are even less noticeable. In conclusion, the land use plans in Marple and Upper Providence are compatible along their shared boundary.

Marple Township

227 S. Sproul Rd.

Broomall , PA 19008

tel: 610-356-4040

web: www.marpletwp.com

NETHER PROVIDENCE TOWNSHIP - The boundary with Nether Providence is not defined by any natural feature. The Township initiated work in late 2003 on a new comprehensive plan that will be a joint effort with the three other municipalities in its school district. The current comprehensive plan was developed in 1970; we have not considered it here due to its age, but are relying upon current zoning as the most valid statement of Township development policy. All portions of Nether Providence adjacent to Upper Providence are zoned for residential use, but at various densities. The “R-1” district - found along the eastern and western edges of the

Township, abutting the creeks - requires a minimum lot size of 20,000 square feet (0.46 acre). The “R-2” district, which also abuts the eastern edge of Media Borough, has a minimum lot size of 14,000 square feet (0.32 acre). The South Media area is zoned R-3, which has a minimum lot size requirement of 9,000 square feet (0.21 acre). Permitted uses are the same in all three districts: single family homes, golf courses, farms, and typical accessory uses are all permitted by right; houses of worship are permitted by special exception.

Permitted uses along the township line are compatible: the Upper Providence side of the line is zoned for residential use as well. The permitted densities are also compatible, but not exactly the same. Most of the land along the Township line is currently developed.

Nether Providence Township

214 Sykes La.

Wallingford , PA 19086

tel: 610-566-4516

web: n/a

BOROUGH OF MEDIA - Upper Providence almost entirely engulfs the Borough, resulting in a lengthy shared border. The future land use element in the Borough’s Comprehensive Plan is nearly identical to the zoning map, so this analysis is limited to the latter to avoid redundancy.

The Borough has identified three residential zones, with minimum lot sizes of 6,600 square feet (0.15 acre), 4,950 square feet (0.11 acre), and 4,000 square feet (0.09 acre). While this is significantly more dense than all but the R-5 district in Upper Providence, we note that a change in density of compatible uses is actually a good way to define the edge of a community, making it distinct while minimizing conflict. In general, the zoning along the municipal boundary is remarkable for the degree to which the uses in the two municipalities are compatible. Residential uses are generally adjacent to other residential areas, the “B” district along State Road in Upper Providence nicely matches the Media equivalent (the “HBO” district), and the industrial zone in Upper Providence abuts Media’s industrial area. The only conflict of any significance is along Baltimore Pike, at the southwestern corner of the Borough where Media’s “I” Industrial district abuts an R-3 residential area in Upper Providence.

Borough of Media

Third and Jackson Sts.

Media , PA 19063

tel: 610-566-5210

web: www.mediaborough.com

MIDDLETOWN TOWNSHIP - Ridley Creek is the western boundary of Upper Providence, and Middletown is the only other municipality with which it shares this border. The current Middletown Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 2001. The future land use element of this plan calls for preservation of the Ridley Creek corridor, with the lands of the Tyler Arboretum and

Ridley Creek State Park given special prominence. The lands belonging to the Elwyn facility - which very nearly abut Upper Providence in the vicinity of Baltimore Pike - are identified as a "possible TDR sending area," suggesting that Middletown has an official policy to facilitate the preservation the large open areas that characterize the Elwyn grounds.

Zoning provisions for the areas abutting Upper Providence are consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and largely indicate the existing land use. The arboretum and Ridley Creek Park are both zoned "OR-1," which permits only passive recreation, conservation, and agricultural uses by right. Developed areas are zoned to reflect their current level of development: in this case "R-1" districts, which permit only single family dwellings and agriculture by right and have a required minimum lot size of one acre. The remaining areas along the creek have been zoned "OR-2," which is similar to the OR-1 district but allows active recreational facilities by right.

The zoning in Upper Providence provides an open space zoning district for Ridley Creek State Park, which is similar to Middletown. Upper Providence has taken a different approach for protecting the creek corridor where it crosses private property. Instead of establishing a special zoning district, Upper Providence has a floodplain overlay district, based upon floodplain mapping by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The overlay applies to the entire creek corridor from the park to the Nether Providence border. For most of this distance, the base zoning is some type of residential district, and is therefore generally compatible with the Middletown zoning. The exception is the stretch between Baltimore Pike and Media Station Road, which is zoned for industrial use in Upper Providence and residential use in Middletown. While this conflict could be a cause for concern, the impact of the industrial zoning is diminished by the floodplain overlay.

Middletown Township

27 N. Pennell Rd.

P.O. Box 157

Lima , PA 19037

tel: 610-565-2700

web: www.middletowntownship.org

Summary & Planning Implications

The Township's location within the Philadelphia metropolitan area combined with the high degree of access provided by the transportation network has had a powerful influence upon development. These factors continue to shape the Township today, indicating that our planning efforts must account for their influence as policies, goals, and objectives are established.

There is little commercial, industrial, or office development in Upper Providence, although major examples of each of these uses may be found within a few minutes' travel time of the Township line. This fact alone has several significant planning implications for the Township.

- The lack of major non-residential uses enhances the Township's character as a quiet and desirable residential area. However, tax revenues generated by residential properties rarely cover the cost of municipal services that they consume, and these services are critical to the residents' quality of life. The dearth of non-residential uses suggests that it will be increasingly difficult to fund the level of municipal services that Township residents have come to expect.
- The ready availability of commercial, office, and industrial space in the surrounding municipalities suggests that the large-scale development of such uses within Upper Providence would not necessarily resolve the issue: even if appropriate building sites could be provided (a major impediment in itself), there may not be a market for this type of space. Uses of this sort are better accommodated where they can be inserted compatibly into or around existing neighborhoods and there is reasonable expectation of their long-term viability. Even if this can be achieved, it is not clear if it would be sufficient to resolve the fiscal issues described above.
- The lack of neighborhood commercial areas and local industry makes it necessary for most residents to travel outside the Township for work and shopping. While mass transit is an option for some, the majority relies on private cars, resulting in a high volume of traffic on Township roads. This suggests a number of planning issues: the need to facilitate the smooth flow of vehicular traffic, pedestrian safety, the role of transportation alternatives (walking, bicycles, mass transit), and the feasibility of developing sufficient non-residential uses to generally reduce the need for so many trips.
- Traffic concerns are not limited to what is generated by Township residents. Route 252 and Providence Road are already heavily used by residents of the surrounding communities for access to Route 1 and I-476. In addition, land developments currently proposed along the Route 252 corridor in Marple and Newtown Townships are a critical concern, as they have the potential to increase significantly the already high volume of traffic within Upper Providence. Planning issues suggested by this observation include all of those in the preceding paragraph as well as others: the need for inter-municipal communication and cooperation, the need for enhanced communication with PennDOT, and the need to evaluate more aggressive transportation management strategies, such as the implementation of a traffic impact fee.
- Currently, there are no significant land use conflicts with the surrounding municipalities, either on the ground or in the regulations. This suggests that inter-municipal cooperation on land use issues can proceed without "baggage" from past conflicts, laying a foundation for cooperation on other issues of regional concern.

Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia Counties in Pennsylvania; Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester, and Salem Counties in New Jersey; Cecil County, Maryland; and New Castle County, Delaware. According to the 2000 Census, this was the sixth-largest metropolitan area in the country, with a total population of 6.2 million. Philadelphia proper is the fifth largest city in the United States, with a population of 1.5 million.

For students who wish to continue in the Roman Catholic school system, the nearest Catholic high school is Cardinal O'Hara, located on Sproul Rd. in Springfield Township.

Source: Riddle Memorial Hospital website.

Source: Springfield Hospital website.

In addition to the six municipalities described here, Upper Providence touches corners with Springfield Township and Rose Valley Borough. Since there is no shared border with these communities, they have not been considered in the analysis of future land use plans and Zoning Ordinances.

TDR, or transferable development rights, is an open space preservation strategy pioneered in Montgomery County, Maryland in the early 1980's and permitted in Pennsylvania pursuant to §619.1 of the MPC. TDR allows the right to develop a property to be legally separated from that property and subsequently applied to another property. The MPC requires that TDR provisions identify "sending areas" (the lands from which development rights may be separated) and "receiving areas" (lands where purchased development rights may be applied). The identification of the Elwyn property as a "potential sending area" indicates the Township's desire to retain the open character of the neighborhood. As of this writing, TDR provisions have not been incorporated into the Zoning Ordinance. The inclusion of TDR in the Comprehensive Plan is a policy expression and does not (yet) indicate a development option available to property owners.