

Proposed Land Use Plan

The Proposed Land Use Plan is a significant component of the Comprehensive Plan. It is Whitemarsh's land use policy statement. A policy guide for the township, it is oriented toward enhancing and protecting resources while also recommending actions to forestall land use conflicts.

During the planning process, Whitemarsh's existing character as a predominately residential community with smaller, distinct nodes of commercial, office and industrial uses was acknowledged and then chosen for its future growth pattern. Continuing primarily as a residential community, future nonresidential development should be limited to providing commercial uses for the convenience of township neighborhoods, while some office and light industrial use should be developed to ensure a healthy tax base. This development should be directed to the Schuylkill riverfront redevelopment area and the undeveloped land in existing office parks, such as the Whitemarsh Business Campus.

Furthermore, it was found that the township was entering its fourth century as a stable community. Older residential neighborhoods are well maintained and still desirable. New residential growth is compatible with existing density patterns. Existing commercial development is still viable, with the township's largest shopping complex, Whitemarsh Shopping Center, having recently undergone an extensive remodeling. Old, abandoned or underutilized industrial buildings along the riverfront are being converted to office uses.

However, several ominous signs exist. Much of the township's rural landscape is disappearing and throughout the township potential conflicts exist where there are disparities between existing uses and the zoning designations. The township is struggling to maintain the quality of life that makes it so desirable and gives it its sense of place. Therefore, this plan is formulated to build on the township's existing strengths, while containing policies to ensure that these strengths are reinforced.

Land Use Plan

To implement the township's land use goals requires a two-stage process. The initial stage presents a strategy for achieving many of the goals formulated by the township. Referred to as the Strategic Plan, it is comprised of areas throughout Whitemarsh where it would be desirable to change the existing zoning to implement the township's goals and objectives. The second stage, entitled the Schematic Plan, contains the land use policies for the entire township. It is the Official Land Use Plan for Whitemarsh, yet it can only be fully achieved through enacting the changes described in the Strategic Plan.

Strategic Plan

The implementation of the land use/zoning changes listed below is considered particularly important to forestall land use conflicts, to preserve open space or historic resources, to further a well planned community, and to implement the township's goals and objectives contained in Chapter 6. The proposed changes are also delineated in Figure 7-1.

Fort Washington Area

1. **Morris Road** - Across from Germantown Academy. Change the existing commercial zoning to residential. This is consistent with the surrounding area and eliminates the potential for strip commercial along this heavily traveled road.

2. **Hollywood Drive** - Change the existing commercial zoning on this residential street to residential. This change would prevent land use conflicts.
3. **Pennsylvania Avenue** - Between Bethlehem Pike and Route 309. Modify the existing zoning to permit commercial and office uses but to exclude auto-oriented commercial development such as drive-through restaurants and gas stations. With close proximity to the Turnpike, the 309 Expressway and the Fort Washington train station, it is envisioned that this area will develop as a destination area for commercial and office use. Also, given its proximity to the train station a village commercial mix that also permits residential uses is desirable. It was felt that a proliferation of strip commercial development, typically associated with auto-oriented uses, would detract from these efforts. Streetscape enhancements such as sidewalks and street trees should be a part of any development that occurs along this corridor. Traditionally the eastern edge of this corridor has been impacted by flooding by the Sandy Run. Therefore, development activity along this corridor should be concentrated in the non-flooding area toward Bethlehem Pike, while the eastern edge toward the Route 309/Turnpike interchange should be discouraged from development. However, much of this flooding was the result of a small culvert under the SEPTA tracks of the R-5 Line that caused severe ponding. Recently this culvert was replaced by a new bridge which permits greater water flow. Therefore, the severity of flooding may be reduced and a detailed floodplain reassessment of this area should be conducted.
4. **Bethlehem Pike** - Between Pennsylvania Avenue and Skippack Pike. Create a new commercial zoning district for the corridor that preserves and builds on its existing historic fabric. Such a district would prevent strip commercial development and the over development of a site but would allow infill development that is in keeping with the village character of the area.

Cold Point Area

5. **Radio Tower Site** - Near the intersection of Flourtown Road and Joshua Road. With the recent rezoning of the adjacent quarries to the EX Extraction District, this site is the only parcel in this area zoned Heavy Industrial. It is entirely surrounded by zoning that permits residential uses at a density of one dwelling unit to the acre. Therefore, it is appropriate to rezone this site to a similar designation.
6. **Cold Point Village** - This historic village is currently suffering from the deleterious effects of traffic congestion. However, as more fully described in Chapter 8, Transportation Plan, efforts are underway to relocate Butler Pike west of the village and to realign Flourtown Road with Plymouth Road. If these are accomplished, it is envisioned that Cold Point could once again be a quiet, pleasant residential community. However, if these actions do not occur or undergo a lengthy delay, a zoning designation that would preserve the houses but allow their conversion to office or limited commercial uses should be considered. This area should be periodically monitored and a dialogue should begin between residents and the township to discuss what future land use changes, if any, are warranted.

Plymouth Meeting Area

7. **Butler Pike - At the Conrail Tracks.** Along Butler Pike, between the Conrail tracks and the historic Plymouth Meeting village are two disparate zoning districts. Adjacent to the tracks is an industrial district that primarily contains offices, while next to this is a large underdeveloped tract, which is zoned for single-family houses. Recent development along this busy corridor has been for office campuses. To encourage this trend, the area should be rezoned to an office park designation. A large parcel, between this area and the historic houses in the village is zoned for townhouses. It would buffer office development from the village.

8. **Plymouth Meeting Village** - Because of their location on Germantown Pike many of the old houses are no longer desirable as residential properties. To help maintain their viability, a new zoning district should be created that would allow the houses to convert to offices provided the historic facades and front yards are preserved. Additions and parking would be required to be in the rear yard areas.

Lafayette Hill Area

9. **Germantown Pike** - Between Joshua Road and Church Lane. In the area between the two shopping centers, properties fronting Germantown Pike should be rezoned to a commercial district that promotes the historic character of the area, but precludes strip commercial and assists in creating a traditional Main Street appearance for the corridor. This is similar to what is proposed for Bethlehem Pike between Pennsylvania Avenue and Skippack Pike and for Harmonville on Butler Pike near Ridge.

Hector Street/North Lane Area

10. **Hector Street/North Lane Area** - This area is proposed to be designated the riverfront redevelopment area. In particular, along the river, the zoning will be amended to not only continue the trend toward office conversion in the old industrial buildings, but to also allow for a variety of residential dwellings and accessory commercial uses. The creation of a mixed-use urban village is envisioned. Such a district would be oriented around the Spring Mill train station and would contain regulations to allow public riverfront access, an idea proposed in the township's 1996 Open Space Plan.

Cedar Heights Area

11. **Either Side of Roberts Avenue** - Between Hallowell and Durant Streets is zoned commercial. Not only is this inconsistent with its existing residential character but also makes all of the properties, except one, non-conforming. The area should be rezoned similar to the surrounding residential zoning.

Harmonville Area

12. **Butler Pike, North of Ridge Pike** - Between Ridge Pike and Colonial Road. Along this corridor are a series of old houses and small buildings that contain commercial uses. Similar to what is proposed for parts of Germantown and Bethlehem Pikes, commercial zoning that is more reflective of its historic character and would preclude strip commercial development should be considered.

Schematic Plan

The Schematic Plan is the township's official land use plan. While largely achieved through enacting the changes proposed in the Strategic Plan, it is also reflective of existing land uses and zoning, given that much of Whitemarsh's development pattern is well established. Formulated from the township's goals and objectives, it is the township's statement regarding land use policy and the guide for future development.

The Plan divides the township into the following land use categories:

Residential

This category is divided into two groups: the areas that would develop under traditional zoning and those that would develop under the growing greener program. Current residential densities in Whitemarsh will

remain the same regardless of the type of development allowed. Low Density (LD) is development at one dwelling unit or less per acre. It is located primarily in the Miquon and Broad Axe areas of Whitemarsh. Medium Density (MD), the largest single land use category in the township, allows a density of 1.4 to 4.3 dwelling units to the acre. It covers extensive sections of the township including most of the developed sections of Lafayette Hill, Fort Washington and Cedar Heights and much of the undeveloped land in the Broad Axe area. In both the low and medium density areas single-family detached dwellings are the only type of residential development permitted.

High Density (HD) conversely permits a full range of dwelling types (single-family, townhouse and apartments) at a density of six or more dwelling units to the acre. It is designated for such areas of the township as the residences adjacent to Lee Park, an older area of Fort Washington, and along sections of Ridge and Germantown Pikes.

While the high density and some of the medium density areas will continue to allow development under traditional zoning, all districts that have a density of 1.4 dwelling units to the acre or greater (the A-AAAA zoning districts) will only allow development pursuant to the growing greener program. A modified version of cluster development, known as a conservation subdivision, will provide the framework for future development in these areas. The conservation subdivision allows development at the underlying density permitted by the zoning district, but only after a certain percentage of the constrained lands, identified as the primary features on the Map of Township-Wide Potential Conservation Lands, is factored out. Development would be further regulated by requiring that a certain percent of the buildable land (say 50%) would be preserved as permanent open space. Optionally, most of this open space would contain the secondary features also found on the Map of Township-Wide Potential Conservation Lands. Optimally this open space would also be contiguous to open space on adjacent properties, to assist in the creation of a continuous band of open space. This map is the tool that assists the township in determining which land must or should be preserved. To promote flexibility and recognizing that significant differences can be found between tracts or areas, the conservation subdivision also allows several development options. These can range from density bonuses when additional land is preserved to density disincentives when a more conventional lotting arrangement is proposed. Other options available, depending upon the township's preferences, include country estates on large permanently-preserved parcels or the creation of small villages and hamlets that are surrounded by open space.

Commercial

Commercial and Office uses (CO) are primarily proposed along sections of major roads or at prominent intersections in the township. The range and size of the use would differ in accordance with the development regulations permitted in these areas. For example, Pennsylvania Avenue would promote high density development more urban in character, while the intersection at Ridge and Butler Pikes would contain low density suburban style development. It should be noted that in four areas, specialized commercial/offices uses are proposed. Along Bethlehem Pike from Fort Washington to the historic Whitemarsh area, along Germantown Pike in Lafayette Hill, and along Butler Pike in Harmonville, commercial segments have been designated as Village Commercial (VC), a classification designated to preserve their traditional village character and scale. Similarly in Plymouth Meeting, the historic village has been designated Residential Office (RO) which allows for small-scale office conversions in the old houses.

Industrial/Office

Industrial Office (IO) differs from the (CO) designation in that it would not permit commercial retail uses but does permit some light manufacturing. It is located primarily in the Spring Mill area, along Militia Hill Road between Butler Pike and Stenton Avenue, and at the McNeil Consumer Products property in Fort Washington.

Institutional

The nature of Institutional land use (IN) does not easily lend itself to designation on the map. The need for such uses can arise almost anywhere, depending upon the nature of the specific institutional use. As a result, only large, established existing sites that are likely to remain for the long term, such as schools, the township buildings, long established religious facilities and medical facilities are shown.

Open Space/Park Land

Open Space and Park Land (OP) is designated for all existing public parks such as Fort Washington, Cedar Grove, Miles, etc. Also, it is designated for natural areas near water courses, such as along the privately held sections of the Wissahickon Creek and the Schuylkill River.

EX Extraction District

This area contains the Highway Materials Quarries. Under this designation, the quarries are allowed to operate until the land has been reclaimed. At that time, the area is permitted to develop with single-family houses at one dwelling unit to the acre.

Riverfront District

This area is currently undergoing a shift from Heavy Industrial uses to an office park community. To promote this area as a new community, a mixed-use village, zoning should be developed that permits a variety of residential dwellings, commercial uses and requires a public greenway along the river.

A map delineating the Land Use Plan is shown in Figure 7-2.

Figure 7-2
Schematic Land Use Plan

