

Community Setting and Regional Position

Whitemarsh Township is a 14.53-square mile municipality located in southeastern Montgomery County. First settled by Europeans in the late 1600s, Whitemarsh was incorporated in 1704 and was one of the 28 original communities that comprised Montgomery County upon its founding in 1784. Adjacent to the Andorra section of Philadelphia, it is surrounded in Montgomery County by Springfield, Upper Dublin, Whitpain, and Plymouth Townships and Conshohocken Borough. It is also bordered by the Schuylkill River, which separates it from Lower Merion Township.

Originally a nearly perfect rectangle, Whitemarsh underwent two boundary changes during the 19th century which altered this appearance. In 1850, with the incorporation of Conshohocken Borough, it lost 320 acres. Conversely, in 1876 it annexed 120 acres from Springfield Township in the Miquon area. This has given the present township a staggered, asymmetrical appearance in its lower portion.

Regionally, Whitemarsh is best known as the home of the historic Erdenheim Farm, Fort Washington State Park, Germantown Academy and McNeil Consumer Products, the 20th largest private employer in Montgomery County. The township is also the site of several golf courses: Whitemarsh Valley, Sunnybrook and Green Valley Country Clubs; Ace Golf Club; and the Philadelphia Cricket Club. It also contains several villages, such as Plymouth Meeting, and many homes and inns date back hundreds of years.

Access to the township is provided by numerous major Montgomery County roads, including Ridge, Germantown, Butler, Skippack, and Bethlehem Pikes, Stenton and Pennsylvania Avenues, and Joshua and Morris Roads. These roads have traditionally provided convenient access to and from Whitemarsh and have been instrumental in its growth.

Recently, however, given the intensive development in surrounding communities, these roads now carry a great deal of pass-through traffic that has created unprecedented congestion in many areas of Whitemarsh—especially along Ridge, Butler and Germantown Pikes. The Pennsylvania Turnpike (Interstate Route 276) and the Fort Washington Expressway (State Route 309) also run through the township. Neither, however, have an interchange in Whitemarsh, although the turnpike has two nearby ones in Plymouth Meeting and in the Upper Dublin portion of Fort Washington. The expressway also has a Fort Washington interchange.

Whitemarsh also has regional transportation opportunities via public transportation. The most prominent of these are the R5 and R6 Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) rail lines, both of which have stations in the township. The R5 line, which connects Bucks, Chester, Montgomery, and Philadelphia Counties, has a station in the Fort Washington section of the township. In addition, nearby stations in Ambler Borough and the Fellwick area of Springfield Township also provide convenient access to the line for township residents living in the upper portion of Whitemarsh. The R6 line, which runs along the Schuylkill River, has two stations in the township. Located in Miquon and Spring Mill, these stations serve the more populous lower portion of Whitemarsh. The R6 provides a direct connection for the township with Philadelphia's Center City and the Norristown Transportation Center. Through both of the rail lines, connections to AMTRAK and the Philadelphia International Airport are possible. In addition to these existing lines, the county is studying the feasibility of a commuter rail line along the Old Trenton cutoff route, known as the Cross County Metro line. This route bisects Whitemarsh at an angle, running through the Cold Point and Fort Washington areas, both of which are proposed as station stops. Whitemarsh also has bus service. Running primarily along the township's major arterial roadways, such as Germantown, Ridge, and Bethlehem Pikes, the buses provide links to the regional rail lines and connections to other bus lines throughout the region.

The township has several significant regional recreational amenities. Presently the most prominent are Fort Washington State Park, a 483-acre site located in the middle of the township's upper portion, and the

Schuylkill River Trail, a biking and pedestrian trail that currently extends from Center City to Valley Forge National Park. Fort Washington Park primarily contains passive open space, full of woodlands and the Wissahickon Creek. It also contains a regionally popular Hawk Watch, a recently completed playground, and a segment of Green Ribbon Preserve Trail, a regional biking/pedestrian trail being developed by the Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association. Presently, the trail runs through Whitemarsh, then, following the creek upstream, it continues to Upper Gwynedd Township. Eventually the Association would like to continue it downstream into Philadelphia and link it with trails in Fairmount Park. The Schuylkill River Trail was developed by the county as the first trail in an envisioned trail system that would connect much of the Philadelphia region. In Whitemarsh this trail extends along the river and has numerous connections to township roads. The county also plans to implement the Cross County Trail, which generally follows the proposed similarly named rail line in Whitemarsh. This trail would link the township with Bucks County. Future linkages to Chester and Berks Counties would be available to township residents through the proposed trail system.

Whitemarsh is one of Philadelphia's inner ring suburbs, albeit one that has escaped the negative connotations of that much maligned term. Its principle image is of a post World War II bedroom community that grew up between older settlements. Well kept residential neighborhoods with tree-lined streets indicate that this is a community that cares about its appearance. Yet it is also a township that contains more farmland and estates than any of its surrounding municipalities. It is startling to drive out of the City on Stenton Avenue and to be presented with images of farm buildings and pastureland. Together, this combination of suburban and rural creates a unique character for a township so close to the city. It gives the township a special charm, one that differentiates it from any other inner ring suburb in the area.