

Land Use

Local Land Use Patterns

As Penn Township enters the 21st Century, it's important to note that agriculture remains a mainstay of the local economy.

Farming and residential development have enjoyed an unusual symbiotic relationship in the Township. Small, older village centers and new residential developments have benefited from a visually striking rural landscape of rolling hills and fertile valleys. By naturally varying crops and field grasses, farmers have created rich colors and textures in fields that change dramatically with the seasons.

Hedgerows and trees frame verdant fields and lend their own unique shapes and colors to these scenic vistas, while low mountain ridges etched by Middle Creek and Penns Creek add a sense of grandeur that sustains labor and the peace that comes when day is done. It is this same agricultural landscape that has sustained generations of farmers whose sons and daughters have often succeeded their parents, confident in the productivity of their farms and the rural lifestyle they afford.

The best and most productive farmland is concentrated in the central and southern areas of the Township and is interspersed with older historic villages and newer residential developments. Fortunately, few

new developments have encroached on one of the most productive agricultural landscapes in the Central Susquehanna Valley. In fact, over eleven percent of the prime farmland in Snyder County is located in Penn Township, the highest percentage of any township in the County.

Most notable about the pattern of residential growth is a tendency to cluster housing in a neighborhood setting and not to disturb roadway frontage, thus preserving a remarkably pristine agricultural landscape. Higher ridges and Wooded ridges interspersed with undulating farm fields and woodland mark the northern part of the Township. These relatively steep ridges afford opportunities for scenic vistas overlooking crescent-like fields and lower ridges to the south.

Every community has a variety of land uses and the table shows the proportion of uses in Penn Township. It is extraordinary that 87.1% of the Township's land mass is open space, principally comprised of farmland and woodlands.

Local Land Use Patterns	
Land Use	% of Township
Ag Conservation	68
Highway-Commercial	1
Industrial	1
Institutional	1
Neighborhood-Commercial	1
Residential	5
Right of Way	0
Rural Residential	3
Wooded-Conservation	19

Source: SEDA-COG GIS Services, 2002

Land For Economic Development

Penn Township has determined that agriculture is its primary industry and that the Township should work proactively with local farmers to retain farming as a productive enterprise. However, the Township's strategic location along several major highways makes it a logical site for commercial and warehouse operations. This activity is concentrated along Old Routes 11/15, which provides immediate access to the Route 11/15 interchange south of Selinsgrove, and along Route 522, a major east-west highway which cuts through the center of Penn Township.

In recent years, light industrial development has been proposed along Route 522. One site near Route 522 was designated as a potential industrial site in a 1996 SEDA-COG Regional Economic Development Study due to the availability of public sewer and water and rail and highway access.

As noted in the Transportation Chapter, Route 522 is already encumbered with heavy traffic and bottlenecks which reduce its effectiveness as a truck/freight corridor. Southbound truck traffic, for example, tends to use either Clifford Road or University Avenue to link up with the Routes 11/15 interchange south of Selinsgrove. In either case, trucks must traverse relatively narrow secondary roads that go through residential areas.

PennDOT has been reluctant to address the overall problem of access to and from Route 522, even though traffic volumes

along this highway, including truck traffic, continue to increase.

For direct regional and national access, the area south of Selinsgrove along Old Routes 11/15 is advantageous and affords an opportunity for a number of commercial infill sites. Indeed, the Township's Future Land Use Plan has designated this area as Highway Commercial. Light industrial uses could be a special exception in this zone.

The primary advantage for multi-use commercial and highway-oriented businesses south of Selinsgrove Borough is the Routes 11/15 interchange and its immediate access for trucks. By contrast, heavy truck traffic has a detrimental effect upon Township and Borough residential areas, and tends to impede local vehicular circulation.

Selinsgrove Center

As the Selinsgrove Center continues to downsize, the future use of this property becomes an important concern.

Of the total 1,485 acres, presently the Department of Public Welfare (DPW) has set aside 400 "core acres" which contains the buildings currently used by the Center as well as approximately 300 acres which are used as a protective buffer.

The remaining acreage is controlled by the General Services Administration (GSA). Part of this acreage, 80 acres, has been sold to a private landowner and another 10 acres was sold to Snyder County as the site of the Snyder County Prison. Some of the remaining land is adjacent to existing residential developments.

The County Conservation District has a lease agreement with the GSA to utilize 300 acres as a permanent natural area including a 30-acre parcel that is now being used by the Middlecreek Valley Antique Association.

Snyder County has expressed interest in leasing space in one of four unused buildings on the upper campus of the Center for the County Conservation District and the Agricultural Extension Service. Some ongoing maintenance of these old brick buildings, which are being allowed to deteriorate, is most important if the Center property is to be adaptively reused for other purposes, however.

The Township should approach the future use of both the GSA owned property and the core DPW property in a most proactive and flexible manner. Township Supervisors should maintain a dialogue with both the State and Snyder County to assure that the land as it becomes available is used most productively. It is not too early to consider some type of master plan for the GSA owned property and the Township should advocate such a course of action.

At the same time, the Township should promote the continued use of the Center which employs over 1,000 persons and is an important economic asset in the entire central Susquehanna Valley region. Maintaining these jobs is a high priority.

Growth and Development

In determining the value of open space, the Township should consider that it may

be cheaper in the long run to acquire land for green space than to have it developed for housing.

Studies conducted at the state and national levels have demonstrated that the cost of providing services to residents: water and sewer, roads, and schools, are greater than the tax revenues they generate. Open space, by contrast, pays for itself many times over according to Penn State University Associate Professor of Agricultural Economics Tim Kelsey who studied the economic impact of various land uses on eleven townships across Pennsylvania. Residential development was the poorest financial investment, while open space preservation was the best.

For example, in Bethel Township, Lebanon County, \$1.08 was spent in services for every dollar in revenue from residential land, while only six cents was spent in services for every dollar in revenue from farms and open land.

In some cases the public has shown it will support open space and farmland preservation on the local level as well. Halfmoon Township in Centre County has recognized the importance of open space. In 1999, residents voted for a 2-mill real-estate tax to generate an additional \$100,000 per year for open space preservation. Annually, that comes to about \$117 per household for the Township's 2,200 residents.

Halfmoon Township hopes to preserve 3,000 acres in the program's first year, primarily by leasing, rather than buying, development rights. By leasing the rights through a 99-year contract, the township can afford to preserve more land more quickly and might entice landowners who

are not ready to permanently forego their development rights.

Smart Growth and Sprawl

In Pennsylvania and across America, new ideas in community design are emerging. Known as "smart growth," these "growing greener" concepts emphasize community character, the environment and a sense of place. Attention is focused on conserving existing towns and encouraging growth in compact patterns in order to preserve identified open space and prime farmland that is threatened by sprawl.

Sprawl refers to patterns of land development that have emerged since World War II. It begins with development spreading out from traditional towns and cities. "Sprawl" is characterized by:

- Low density houses built along road frontage
- New developments which leapfrog over open space or prime farmland and require infrastructure that is not linked to existing residential clusters
- Commercial strips strung out along arterial and collector roads
- Inadequate pedestrian corridors

- which are often dangerous and sidewalks are rare

Penn Township is naturally interested in smart growth concepts since they can resolve such problems as:

- Loss of open space and farmland
- Absence of sense of place
- Growing traffic congestion
- Growing demand for expensive municipal services

Snyder County residents recently participated in a countywide survey pertaining to a vision for the future. Fifty-six percent of survey respondents listed "smalltown rural atmosphere" as the reason for living here. Further, 87% of all respondents would support regulations protecting agriculture land from development. This plan addresses these specific issues.

For example, in the following visual example, two ways to subdivide a rural parcel are described: one uses "growing greener" concepts to preserve natural areas as open space for recreation and woodland; the other simply fills up the entire tract with house lots and sacrifices all the natural features.

Land Use Patterns: Suburban vs Rural

SUBURBAN

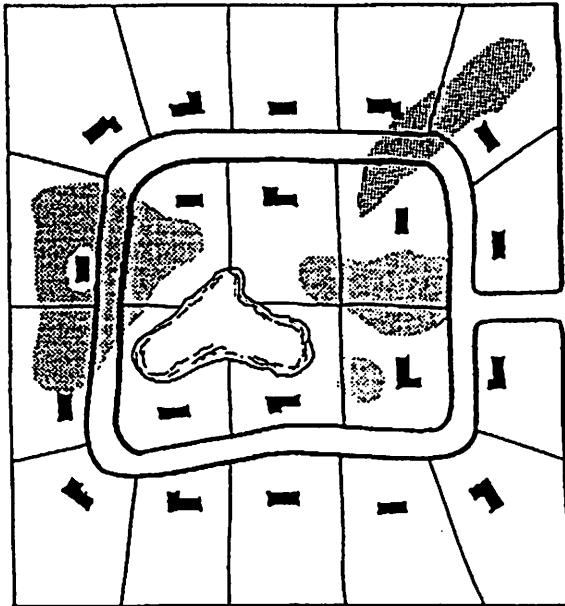


Figure A (rated by 25% as "rural")

44 acre parcel
20 lots (2 acres each)
No open space
No pond access except from four lots

RURAL

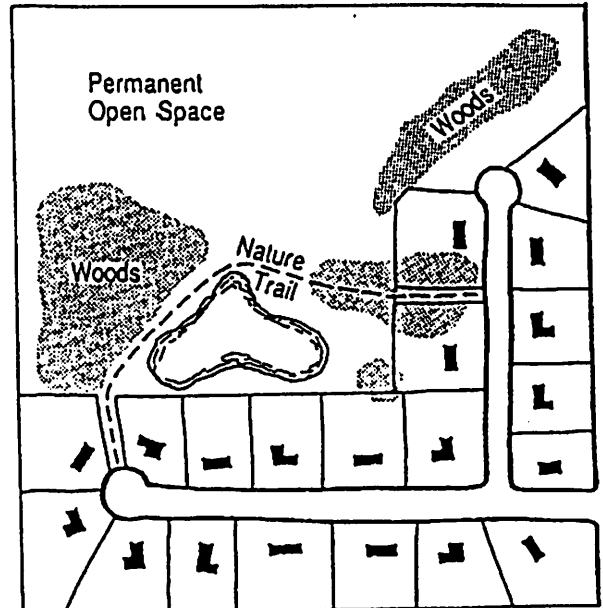


Figure B (rated by 75% as "rural")

44 acre parcel
20 lots (3/4 acre each)
25 acres of open space
Pond access for all residents

The same 44-acre parcel is shown using two housing patterns. The comparison shows how "rural character" is perceived. Both examples contain 20 lots on the same acreage, but the development at the right is perceived as rural due to the clustering of homes and allowing open space/woodlands to remain intact.

What can be expected by applying smart growth thinking to Penn Township? A good Comprehensive Plan should include the following:

- Revitalization of existing neighborhoods and villages
- Infill development where infrastructure is in place
- Strategic planning of water and sewer extensions
- Possible "growth boundaries"
- A new awareness of regional possibilities

Conservation Design

Protecting sensitive lands can take many forms. One approach is called "Open Space Zoning/Conservation Design." In this approach, developers would show natural features with early sketch plan alternatives, and then design their subdivisions "around" them. The process would have the following sequence:

Step 1

Identify the land that should be permanently protected. In this step the developer identifies "constrained" land including steep slopes, flood or wetland areas, woodlands, river and stream corridors, prime farmland, or historic sites. After separating out these elements, the rest of the property becomes the potential development area.

Step 2

Locate housing sites within the development area so as to maximize views and

afford adequate open space.

Step 3

"Connect the dots," or housing sites, with streets and informal trails and draw in the lot lines.

Present Trend

The typical subdivision pattern in the Township does not follow this conservation pattern. An exception is land which has been set aside for detention ponds in the Harris and Breezewood developments.

In new developments, lots tend to be subdivided first and existing natural features are left to fall where they may.

Penn Township has no requirements to identify constrained land or to preserve features such as woodlands, greenways, stream corridors, or farmland outside of the Agricultural District. Not surprisingly, developers have chosen a suburban residential model that utilizes all available land within the tract.

Greenways: A Plan for Conservation

Pennsylvania has prepared a Greenways Plan that calls for a statewide greenways system by the year 2020 that will compare favorably to the Interstate Highway System.

The word "greenway" has been used to describe a variety of linear corridors, all of which involve woodland or open space. Greenways vary greatly in scale, from narrow ribbons of green that run through

urban, suburban, and rural areas to wider corridors that incorporate natural, cultural and scenic features. They can incorporate both public and private property, and can be land- or water-based. They may follow old railways or other existing features.

Greenways contribute significantly to the quality of life and can be seen as a focal point for community design and land use strategies. Greenways provide a sense of place in a community or region.

Greenways are built around a system of "hubs and spokes." The "hubs" consist of parks, forests, game lands, lakes and other destination areas, including towns. The "spokes" of the network consist of greenways which connect natural areas and recreational and cultural destinations with places where people live.

The wetland, as currently defined, on the northern boundary of the Selinsgrove Center property could be considered such a hub, as could the Township's proposed recreation area.

Common "spokes" of a greenways network can include:

- Greenways that are conservation oriented, such as riparian buffers
- Greenways that provide non-motorized recreation and physical fitness opportunities close to home
- Greenways that have a strong interpretative element showcasing historic or cultural events
- Greenways that are water trails and serve recreational users

- Greenways that accommodate motorized recreational vehicles such as snowmobiles or ATVs

Benefits of Greenways

- **Preservation of Natural Resources:** Greenways present opportunities to protect and manage wildlife, forests and ecological systems and to add to scenic quality.
- **Protection of Water Resources:** Non-point source pollution from farms and stormwater runoff is a primary contributor to poor water quality in Pennsylvania's streams. Greenways provide a vegetative buffer between streams and development which can help curb this problem. Greenways and open spaces also provide recharge areas for groundwater aquifers, which are critical to drinking water supplies, especially in times of drought.
- **Support of Tourism:** Pennsylvania's second-largest industry, tourism, provides thousands of jobs and attracts visitors of all types -- among them hikers, canoeists, hunters, fishermen, bicyclists, and history buffs. Outdoor recreation accounts for one-fifth of all visitors to Pennsylvania.

Greenways are a priority for other reasons as well. From 1992 to 1997, Pennsylvania lost more than a million acres of cropland, forest, and open space even though during the same period the state's population growth was slowing. Each year, more land is used to accommodate the same number of people.

According to the 21st Century Environment Commission Report, land use will be Pennsylvania's most critical issue in the new millennium. By preserving open space in suburban and developing rural areas, greenways can become a key land use strategy to control sprawl and limit the scale and inappropriate siting of development.

Penns Creek and Middle Creek

In Penn Township, the greenway concept can be appropriately applied to Penn's Creek, which forms the eastern boundary of the Township, and Middle Creek, which forms the southern boundary. Both are major tributaries of the Susquehanna River and include smaller streams and unnamed tributaries.

Penns Creek and Middle Creek are prized for their recreational uses, particularly Penns Creek, which is considered a prime fishing stream.

The removal of a levee type dam along Middle Creek in the southeastern corner of the Township eliminated a small coveted lake that afforded boating and fishing opportunities. However, its removal has created a natural conservation area that is home to many species of wildlife.

For the most part these two streams are bordered by farms on which fields and woodland afford a natural buffer that protects these important resources. More needs to be done to create a wider riparian buffer along these streams.

Since stormwater runoff has become an increasing problem in the Township,

attention also should be directed to the tributaries of Penns Creek and Middle Creek and a small stream south of Selinsgrove which flows directly to the Susquehanna River.

In the northern part of the Township which is characterized by a series of semi-steep ridges, more than 20 stream ways provide natural drainage and in the spring freshet become active streams that feed into Tributary #6 which in turn drains into Penns Creek.

Another greenway area that consists of a deep vegetative swale extends south from Route 522 where it intersects Clifford Road, in a southeasterly direction to the boundary of Selinsgrove. This natural greenway, identified on the map as Tributary #3, forms a natural buffer separating the Breezewood subdivision from the new Grayson View development. Given the problems of stormwater runoff, the protection of this greenway should be a priority.

The Township, in concert with the County Conservation Service, should conduct an inventory and assess the condition of stream banks and adjoining land along smaller streams to determine the width and adequacy of vegetative cover needed to absorb rainfall and avoid harmful erosion.

Landowner Relationships

The Township should consider establishing active relationships with landowners bordering these waterways to make them familiar with available public programs. Though the land is privately owned, these tributaries constitute an important public resource that should be included in

an overall land management plan if better retention of stormwater and groundwater is to be achieved.

An important resource to help promote conservation of Township waterways is the local school system. For example, West Snyder High School has obtained funding to develop a watershed management plan for a six-mile stretch of Middle Creek.

Developing interest at the local school level should be a priority of the Township Planning Commission. Both Susquehanna University and the Selinsgrove School District expressed interest in this concept at a public workshop conducted by the Planning Commission.

Municipal Policies and Ordinances

The responsibility for managing local growth falls squarely upon the shoulders of the township supervisors, and the role of the planning commission is to advise them in this task.

Municipal officials need not feel timid about this important responsibility. They can point to the Municipalities Planning Code which strongly encourages them to literally plan for future growth.

Judging from recent legal proceedings and concern about the high rate of growth in the Township, it is apparent that local residents want municipal officials to be proactive in guiding future growth. In particular, they want to preserve the rural way of life in Penn Township.

How can local officials achieve this challenging goal? There are a number of effective tools available for use, if the decision is made to use them.

The Growth Boundary

The boundary concept has been implemented in locales across the country, including Lancaster County, where growth conflicts with agriculture. But for Penn Township, a formal boundary may not be needed. Rather, three factors already in place locally could suffice:

- Existing housing developments
- The zoning ordinance
- The subdivision ordinance

Existing housing developments and those now under construction represent the Township's prime growth areas. Their edges are a type of boundary for residential growth.

The anticipated residential build-out rate for Penn Township is documented in the Housing Study chapter; it describes the pace of new home construction over the last 10 years and, based on this level of activity, identifies the number of new lots needed to handle anticipated demand. Available lots in existing developments actually constitute a ten-year "housing supply" based on previous demand.

It is important to distinguish between population growth and housing growth. Establishing growth boundaries through appropriate land use techniques does not mean the Township is promoting zero population growth. Indeed, there are advantages to the Township in having

population growth, but only if the growth and developments are guided strategically.

Furthermore, housing growth always outpaces population growth. It is Penn Township's 32% increase in new housing starts that makes the discussion of growth boundaries vital. Specifically, it is the location of such new housing that is crucial.

Growth boundaries, if used as an underlying strategy of land management, could be defined in a revised zoning ordinance.

Buffer Yards/Zones/Yards

In conventional zoning, municipalities often create "transitional zones" between disparate land uses. For example, a rural residential zone might be used as a "buffer" between agriculture and high-density housing.

Penn Township could create a buffer, or boundary, around its prime agriculture areas by reviewing its existing zoning ordinance, tightening transitional uses where appropriate, and applying a requirement for buffer yards.

Landscape buffers are a common method for softening otherwise jarring land uses. In rural areas, however, buffers should be widened beyond a single row of evergreens and have a different rural flavor. Here, buffers can be given length and breadth and become a "buffer yard."

Buffer yards can take the form of existing woodlots or any forested areas. An existing hedgerow could be preserved and widened with additional native trees.

Requirements for a buffer yard would be spelled out in the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance and often are referenced in the Zoning Ordinance as an overlay district.

Overlay Districts and the Rural Landscape

Overlay districts are not mapped on the zoning map. Rather, the overlay district is a concept to be applied where desired characteristics are to be preserved.

In this case, an overlay zone would be applied at the periphery of the agricultural conservation zone whenever an incompatible land use is proposed. A buffer yard would be required in such situations.

The overlay district would spell out the types of buffering that are permitted, the depth of the buffer based on the size of the development and its proximity to adjoining farmland, and the long-term maintenance of the buffer. The overlay district, or boundary, would apply only to those locations where the agricultural landscape is at issue. Where eventually implemented, such an attractive boundary would be visible for all to see.

If the Township is committed to the preservation of prime agricultural areas, it would be best to tighten transitional land uses and use the growth boundary approach. At the periphery of selected prime agriculture areas, the zoning overlay district would combine with the required buffer yards.

These combined tools would go a long way in preserving agriculture and the rural landscape.

Growth Boundaries and Route 522

The Transportation Chapter describes the strip-like character of the eastern part of Route 522. In order to accommodate current land uses and mitigate the strip impact, deeper commercial parcels have been recommended. Growth boundaries also could be used.

Growth boundaries can alleviate a number of land use conflicts. A prime example is the appearance of land along the roadside which establishes people's perception of a place. Nothing is more disturbing to an attractive rural landscape than random and unplanned roadside development.

Traveling west on Route 522, along lands occupied by the Selinsgrove Center, one sees strip development end and a verdant rolling agricultural landscape begins. This abrupt change in land use also brings a corresponding improvement in traffic flow and safety.

A growth boundary at this location extending to within several hundred yards of Clifford Road would be desirable. Development past that point would occur only if permitted by zoning and if the developer installed a wide buffer yard between the proposed development and the agriculture area. To have transitional or conventional zoning here is to encourage strip development.

Land Use Recommendations

Agriculture occupies two-thirds of the Township's land. Separate Agriculture Recommendations are presented in the Agriculture chapter, reflecting the local importance given to Ag preservation. Considerable overlap exists between land use issues and agriculture. For this reason, the following objectives have been identified for land use, where it abuts or relates to the preservation of agriculture.

Natural Features

- Consider and encourage "smart growth" goals in all land development occurring in the Township.
- Communicate effectively and early with developers regarding preservation of sensitive areas (e.g. periphery of Ag Security Area and stream corridors) and refer them to the Comprehensive Plan.
- Promote sound stormwater management practices.
- Require the protection of stream corridors by maintaining natural vegetation along streams as riparian forest buffers and prohibit development from encroaching upon the stream bank.
- Preserve and enhance existing hedgerows as an element of the rural landscape.
- Maintain or establish a riparian forest buffer along streambank lands owned by the Township.

- Participate in the State's Greenway Initiative by identifying local river-related problems and projects.
- Support the clean up of degraded local streams when requested and encourage the work of local watershed groups.
- Encourage the connectedness of forested areas as natural corridors for wildlife. Identify such interconnections during subdivision reviews.

Growth and Development

- Direct development away from sensitive areas and toward locations where infrastructure is or will be available.
- Encourage residential growth in existing housing developments, promoting infill development.
- Identify needed changes along Route 522 to improve traffic flow, safety and appearance.
- Promote the village of Salem as a mixed use, higher-density center and protect its village scale.
- Promote recreational usage of Middle Creek, Penns Creek and the Susquehanna River.
- Consider local ordinances that can maintain wetland standard and

protect against inappropriate development.

Municipal Policies and Ordinances

- Require developers to identify and protect all sensitive environmental areas in designing a subdivision, including steep slopes, wetlands, flood plains, greenways, stream corridors, historic sites and woodlands.
- In reviewing Subdivision and Land Development applications, use the Comprehensive Plan and environmental maps as a guide.
- Review the municipal Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance and strengthen provisions which protect sensitive natural features.
- Review and change the Municipal Zoning Ordinance to achieve local land use goals, especially agriculture preservation.
- Consider using the Growth Boundary concept to protect the periphery of Ag Areas and to avoid conflicting land uses.
- Enforce the Municipal Floodplain Ordinance in order to continue flood insurance availability and to

ease stormwater problems.

Public Relations and Education

- Contact representatives of Susquehanna University and the Selinsgrove Area School system to invite participation in conservation activities along Penns Creek and Middle Creek.
- Conduct periodic workshops for property owners along Penns Creek and Middle Creek and other natural areas to alert and educate them to State and Federal programs of assistance.
- Conduct, in concert with the County Conservation Service an inventory of all major streambanks to determine degree of erosion and presence or absence of a protective vegetative cover.
- Consider placing a local referendum on the ballot which would create a modest tax to buy development rights on prime farmland; conduct a campaign to educate voters to the issue.
- Encourage periodic presentations by the Fish Commission to review the status and water quality of Penns Creek and Middle Creek and the emerging fish population.