



# Urban Research & Development Corporation

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## SUMMARY OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

### **What is the Comprehensive Plan?**

This Comprehensive Plan provides an overall set of policies and recommendations for the future development, redevelopment and conservation of Lower Paxton Township over the next 10 to 15 years.

This Plan helps to ensure that Lower Paxton Township retains the qualities that make people want to live, work and enjoy recreational activities within the Township. This Plan is not a regulation, but instead provides the basis for suggested changes and associated strategies related to the Township's development regulations.

### **How Was This Plan Prepared?**

This Plan was developed in draft form during monthly meetings of the Township Planning Commission with participation by the Township Staff and individual Township Supervisors. First, maps showing existing conditions were prepared, as well as summaries of previous plans and reports. Information was collected on existing conditions.

A set of Goals were then prepared to provide overall direction for the Plan. The Plan document was then prepared. A Planning Commission public meeting is being held. Next, a public hearing will be held by the Board of Supervisors, and then the Plan can be considered for adoption.

### **Major Benefits of the Comprehensive Plan**

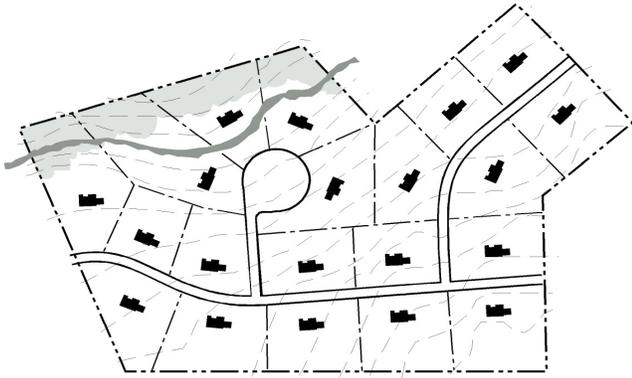
The Comprehensive Plan offers many benefits, including the following:

- Addressing land uses in coordination with transportation issues, to avoid future traffic problems;
- Avoiding conflicts between different types of development, such as not allowing intense business uses adjacent to a residential neighborhood;
- Considering development policies in a comprehensive and coordinated manner for an entire area, as opposed to piecemeal review of individual parcels or lots;
- Recommending ways that natural features should be preserved and conserved, and so that storm water management may be turned into a resource, and
- Encouraging the setting aside and preservation of open spaces in the Township and along the streams.

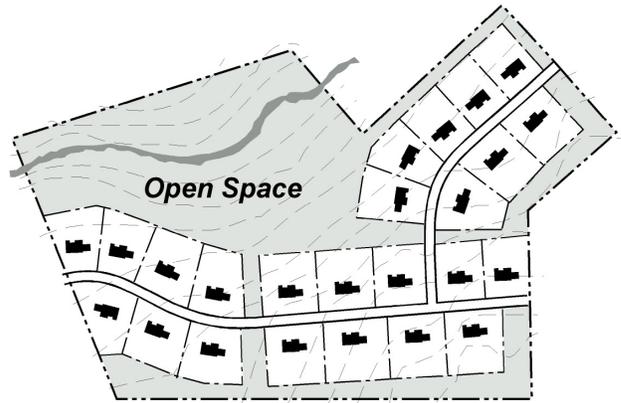
## Major Recommendations of the Land Use and Housing Plan

The Land Use and Housing Plan includes recommendations for land development and conservation policies in various areas.

- Update the Township’s development regulations to carry out the Future Land Use and Housing Plan (as described below).
- Improve the economic vitality and appearance of the Route 22 corridor through the addition of landscaping and decorative street lighting.
  - The Township should consider allowing a complementary mix of commercial and residential development on larger sites, such as portions of the Colonial Park Mall and former K-Mart sites. For example, the front of the K-Mart site could be redeveloped with new commercial uses, while the northern portion could be redeveloped with new housing near the Friendship Center, with a coordinated site plan.
  - Pedestrian access should be improved, including working with PennDOT to have carefully designed pedestrian crossing improvements installed. Improvements are needed to improve pedestrian safety. In particular, there is a need to improve the safety of north-south pedestrian crossings. These crossings are not only needed so that residents can walk to businesses, but also so that residents can travel to schools and parks on the other side of the Route 22 corridor, and so that bus riders can access buses traveling in each direction. While it is difficult to improve pedestrian access at the busiest and widest intersections, improved pedestrian crossings could be added at some of the less busy signalized intersections. These improvements should include button-activated pedestrian crossing signals, highly visible crosswalks, and places of refuge in the median where a pedestrian, bicyclist or person in a wheelchair can wait to safely cross. It is much easier to cross one direction of traffic at a time along Route 22, which requires a safe median area.
  - A more detailed corridor plan should be prepared, in cooperation with PennDOT.
- Development regulations, guidelines and plan reviews should be implemented to strongly encourage a higher level of design in new residential development. The intent is to promote:
  - decorative pedestrian scale street lights,
  - boulevard-style entrances to developments with landscaped medians,
  - homes that face onto prominent well-landscaped central greens,
  - incorporation of traffic calming devices (such as speed tables or narrowing of portions of streets where on-street parking is not needed),
  - substantial numbers of street trees, and
  - intensive landscaping of preserved open spaces and around stormwater facilities.
- Allow the use of an Open Space Development option in selected areas in new residential development, after updating standards to make sure that the open spaces serve valuable purposes. “Open Space Development” is also known as “cluster development” or “conservation development.” The goal is to have substantial areas of open space permanently preserved within any new development. New homes have to be located on the most suitable portions of a tract, in a manner that protects important natural features, including maintaining natural stream corridors. In comparison, conventional subdivisions usually result in little or no preserved open space because the entire tract is subdivided into building lots. This involves permanent preservation of open space that serves a valuable public purpose, in return for flexibility in lot dimensions.



Example of Conventional Development



Example of Open Space Development

- Promote open space to be provided as an intensively-planted buffer between homes and I-81 and between homes and intensive business.
  - Stronger zoning standards are needed to make sure that the open space serves a public purpose, as opposed to simply being fragments of "leftover" lands with little development or recreation value. The areas of the tract that are to be preserved as open space should be determined very early in the site design process, and not as an afterthought. Narrow and unusable lands should not count towards the required open space.
  - Greater attention needs to be focused on intensive landscaping of the preserved open spaces, and selecting open space locations that are more visible to the public and to residents. Portions of the required open spaces should be located in central "greens" with houses that surround and face onto the open space, as opposed to open space that is entirely located at less visible locations.
  - Wherever feasible, open space should be provided in locations that can connect to existing public or semi-public open spaces or preserve land along creeks and the Blue Mountain. Open spaces should include trails that will connect with neighborhoods and public lands.
- Continue to strengthen Linglestown as a mixed use village, including promoting village-style residential development to the north, and seeking to extend the streetscape improvements to the south along Mountain Road, as funding allows.
  - Promote additional investment in underused business areas, including through streamlining of development regulations and procedures and through well-targeted tax incentives. In particular, the area of Route 22 west of I-83 has received little investment in recent years, and includes uncoordinated driveways and is less attractive.

### **Proposed Land Use and Housing Plan Categories**

The following sections describe the Land Use and Housing Plan categories, as are shown on the Land Use and Housing Plan Map. The Comprehensive Plan is not a regulation. However, the Township's development regulations are anticipated to be updated to carry out this Plan. Zoning is the most valuable tool available to the Township to carry out land use and housing policies. In most cases, the land use and housing categories in this Plan relate to an existing or proposed zoning district.

The Zoning Ordinance primarily regulates: a) the uses of land and buildings, and b) the densities of development. Different types of land uses and different densities are allowed in various zoning districts that are shown on the Zoning Map. Some districts are primarily residential, some are primarily commercial and some are primarily industrial. Other districts promote a mix of uses.

Zoning is primarily intended to protect existing residential neighborhoods from incompatible development. However, it also can be used to avoid traffic problems, improve the appearance of new development, preserve historic buildings, and protect important natural features.

Lower Paxton Township has conventional zoning districts, in addition to overlay zoning districts. The overlay districts provide provisions that are more permissive or more restrictive than the regular zoning districts in various land areas.

Conservation (Relates to the CO District) – There are sections of the Blue Mountain in Lower Paxton that are not in public ownership, while most of the Blue Mountain in other municipalities is in public ownership. The Township should cooperate with nature conservancy organizations, sportsmens groups and State agencies to seek to preserve all of the Blue Mountain in public ownership that allows public recreation. Where acquisition is not practical, then conservation easements should be sought, so that the land remains preserved, even though it is privately owned.

These areas should only allow development of very low intensity. The lot size and intensity should continue to vary with the slopes of the land. Currently a 2 acre minimum lot size applies on slopes of less than 15 percent, which increases to 5 acres if the building area includes slopes of 15 to 25 percent. The Township prohibits the construction of a new principal building on very steep slopes of over 25 percent slopes.

Selected portions of these lands may be suitable for an Open Space Development Option, as described below. For example, some one acre minimum lots may be suitable if a minimum of 60% of the tract is preserved in open space. The number of allowed homes need to be carefully limited, with a slight bonus above the number of homes that would be allowed under conventional development.

Agricultural Residential (Relates to the AR District) – This district includes many undeveloped or very low density residential areas in the northeastern, northwestern and eastern part of the Township. Most of these areas are not planned for public sewage service. These areas should continue to require a 1.5 acre minimum lot size for conventional development. In selected portions of these areas (such as along I-81 or where useful recreation land could be provided), an Open Space Development Option should allow 1/2 acre minimum lots if a minimum of 40% of the tract is preserved in open space.

Low Density Residential (Relates to the R-1 District) – These areas should mainly provide for single family detached houses at an average of two homes per acre. Selected portions of these areas should allow an Open Space Development Option. Then the lot sizes could be reduced to 1/4 acre with 40% of the tract preserved in open space.

Medium Density Residential (Relates to the R-2 District) – These areas should mainly provide for single family detached houses, twins and townhouses. These areas are intended to provide for an average of four to five homes per acre.

High Density Residential (Relates to the R-3 District) – These areas are intended to provide for a range of housing types, including apartments, at an average density of eight homes per acre.

Residential Cluster (Relates to the R-C District) – These areas recognize developments that were previously approved under Residential Cluster zoning. That zoning was designed to allow a mix of housing types on larger tracts of land, provided that open space was preserved.

Village Residential (A proposed new district) - These areas north of Linglestown are intended to provide for residential development that would be designed to serve as an extension of the village. This should include an extension of streets and alleys, so that residents can easily travel to businesses in the village. It should provide for a mix of housing types at up to six homes per acre. A traditional pattern of development should be required, including inclusion of front porches, alleys and placement of most garages to the rear or side of homes.

Residential Retirement (Relates to the RRD District) – These areas provide for a mix of housing types for older persons, plus nursing homes and personal care centers, at densities of approximately 12 homes per acre. These provisions were recently applied to the former Blue Ridge Golf Course property north of Linglestown Road, but with deed restrictions that limit the site to a lower overall density.

Office Neighborhood (Relates to the ON District) – These areas are mainly intended to allow offices and other light business uses in areas between commercial and residential areas.

Village (Relates to the V District) – In these areas, the emphasis is upon preserving the best features of Linglestown and to making sure that new development fits in well within the existing character. These areas mainly provide for less intensive commercial uses (not including auto sales or gas stations), as well as residential and institutional uses.

General Commercial (Relates to the CG District) – These areas include the shopping centers and most of the land along Route 22, and are intended to provide for a wide range of commercial uses.

Residential/Commercial Option (Proposed New Provisions) - Along selected portions of the Route 22 corridor, there should be an option of include some new apartment development into a commercial development tract, provided that the commercial and residential uses are designed to be fully compatible and complementary. This option is envisioned to be applicable as part of potential redevelopment of the former K-Mart site and portions of the Colonial Park Mall tract, as described previously in this chapter.

Neighborhood Commercial (Relates to the CN District) – These areas are not appropriate for the most intensive commercial uses, but instead should provide for commercial uses that are compatible with nearby homes.

General Industrial (Relates to the GI District) – The General Industrial areas should allow a wide range of uses, including uses that are not suitable in most of the Township. These areas are used to meet requirements of State law that a zoning ordinance needs to allow a location for every legitimate land use. These potentially troublesome uses are carefully regulated, including using the conditional or special exception approval process.

Light Industrial (Relates to the LI District) – These areas should provide for most types of industrial uses, but does not allow for the heaviest uses, such as chemical plants, asphalt plants and trash transfer stations. The goal is to promote high-quality light industrial parks in a campus-like setting. This includes making sure that tractor-trailer parking, outdoor storage and loading docks are screened by landscaping.

Business Campus (Relates to the BC District) – These areas mainly provide for office and research uses, and some institutional uses. A limited amount of commercial uses are appropriate, such retail stores, services and restaurants that occupy a maximum of 15% of a building. It is useful to allow some commercial uses within these areas to address everyday needs of the people who work in that area. A few very light types of industrial uses may also be appropriate. Consideration should be given to allowing a few additional uses in recognition of the limited market for new office buildings in the region. This category is particularly important to avoid the over-commercialization of the Linglestown Road corridor.

Institutional (Relates to the IN District) – These areas mainly include the UPMC Pinnacle Community Campus and certain retirement communities. It provides for a mix of institutional uses, medical offices and age-restricted residential developments.

Age-Restricted Housing – It is desirable to continue to allow density bonuses for housing that is limited to persons age 55 and older, with no residents under age 18. Age-restricted housing has a very positive financial impact upon the school district. Age-restricted housing bonuses can also be justified because statistically it generates less traffic, less need for parking, less water use, less sewage use and less crime than other types of housing.

## **Major Recommendations of Other Parts of the Plan**

- Carry out a full set of efforts to improve sustainability, including promoting renewable energy (including solar energy, such as over vehicle parking), seeking additional carpool parking areas in the region, providing zoning incentives for green roofs, improving the quality of stormwater runoff, promoting groundwater recharge, adding and protecting natural plantings along creek corridors, and emphasizing tree planting throughout the Township.
- Consider zoning provisions to require pre-approval by the Township of proposed demolitions of the most important older buildings. Currently, these demolition approval provisions only apply within the village of Linglestown.
- Continue to make needed improvements to Township Parks in phases, including Wolfensberger Park, the proposed new park at Nyes and Conway Roads, and the proposed new park in the Blue Ridge development.
- Continue to work to carry out the Greenways Plan, with new trail connections.
- Make cost-effective road improvements, in cooperation with adjacent property owners and PennDOT, including adding traffic signals and road connections as shown on the Transportation Plan Map.
- Make the Lower Paxton Township area safer and more convenient for bicyclists and pedestrians along with traffic calming where appropriate. Add additional bus passenger shelters and complete missing links of sidewalks along higher traffic streets and new schools and parks.
- Consider adopting an "Official Map" to seek to reserve land that is expected to be needed to improve existing intersections or other public improvements.