

CHAPTER 2

TOWNSHIP OVERVIEW

"What would the world be, once bereft of wet and wildness? Let them be left, O let them be left, wildness and wet; Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet."

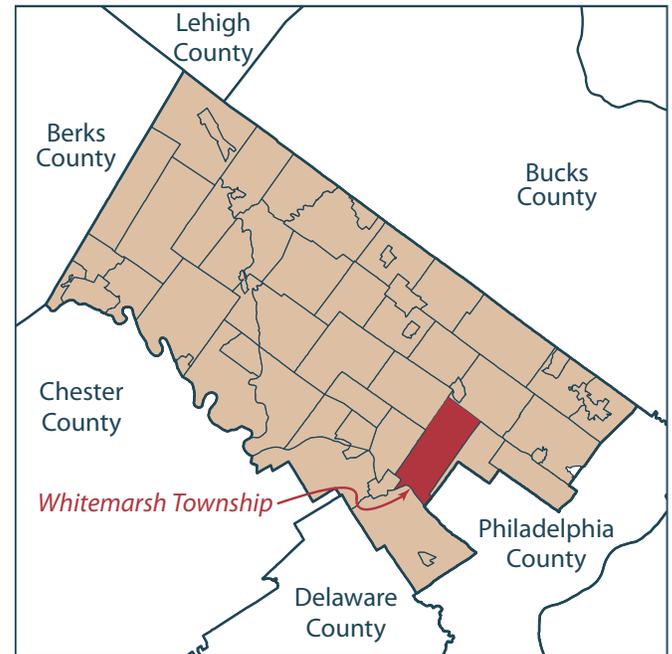
—Gerard Manley Hopkins from "Inversnald"

Regional Setting

Whitemarsh Township is located in the southeastern portion of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania abutting the Philadelphia City line. The Township is 14.53 square miles in land area and is bordered by Springfield Township, Upper Dublin Township, Whitpain Township, Plymouth Township and Conshohocken Borough. To the southwest it is bordered by both the Schuylkill River and the Andorra section of Philadelphia. The Pennsylvania Turnpike (Interstate Route 276) and the Fort Washington Expressway (State Route 309) run through Whitemarsh Township, however neither have an interchange located within the Township. The Turnpike has three interchanges located nearby; an interchange in Plymouth Meeting, the slip ramps in Fort Washington, and the Route 309 - Fort Washington interchange. Skip-pack Pike (Route 73), Flourtown and Joshua Roads, as well as Germantown, Ridge and Bethlehem Pikes, provide the major arterial routes through the Township. And the SEPTA R5 and R6 regional rail lines connect the Township to Center City Philadelphia and Amtrak

The Township has seen steady development pressure primarily due to its location within the region and its high quality of life. To the west of the Township, pharmaceutical and other corporate entities

Map 1 Regional Context



have located in high concentrations, bringing with them new residents and employees. The relocation of large corporations to central Montgomery County has helped make the county an employment hub, with regional employment centers springing up in areas once largely rural and agricultural. This outward movement of jobs from the urban core has brought with it the outward migration of people, and increased levels of residential development. The Township is well located, especially for residential neighborhoods, since jobs in Center City Philadelphia and central Montgomery County are easily accessible.

Municipal Setting

Though once a very rural community, the Township has experienced significant growth, starting with the post-war growth explosion of the 1950s.

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Map 2 Regional Undeveloped Lands



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During this time, development to the south of Flourtown Road expanded, creating a continuous suburban community between Flourtown and Ridge Pike. Despite the increase in development pressure, the Township continues to maintain areas, mostly north of Flourtown Road, that have a distinctly rural feel. The steep slopes of the Barren Hill and Miquon areas have limited development in the Southeast. In the northern and central sections, Erdenheim Farm, Highway Materials, Inc., Fort Washington State Park and several other farms and country estates have inhibited large-scale development.

For an inner-ring suburb, Whitemarsh enjoys an unusually large amount of public and private open space (see Map 2 Regional Undeveloped Lands). In addition to Township and State-owned land, almost 300 acres of land in the Township is protected by the collective efforts of the Natural Lands Trust, the Montgomery County Lands Trust and the Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association. Much of this land, located along the banks of the Wissahickon Creek or in the Broad Axe section of the Township, was acquired in the form of bequests by generous Township residents.

An important part of the Township's open space resources are its parks. Whitemarsh enjoys a well developed municipal park system which includes two major Township-owned parks - Miles Park and Cedar Grove Park - and non-Township-owned open spaces including Montgomery County's Wissahickon Valley Park, Spring Mill Park, and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Fort Washington State Park.

Several neighborhood parks are located within residential developments. In response to the 1996 Open Space Plan, the Township, in partnership with the School District, acquired 17 acres of the former

WFIL radio tower property in order to create Victory Fields and McCarthy Park.

Open space areas within developments are typically smaller and mainly used by residents living within the immediate neighborhood. Examples of common open spaces can be found within the Reserve and Whitemarsh Meadows subdivisions.

The Township

One Township - Five Distinct Districts

The 14.53 miles of Whitemarsh Township encompass a significant diversity of landscapes and development conditions, which present a range of open space needs and opportunities. For this reason, this Open Space Plan has divided the Township into five distinct planning districts so as to better target strategies to the exact conditions in each area of the Township.

The boundaries of each district were predominantly defined by its distinctive physical features, including topography, major transportation corridors and land use/development patterns. These features, influencing and interacting with each other over time, produced the distinctive characteristics that now define each district. For example, each area's topography, as well as its proximity to roads, water supply, sewers, etc., determined the type and density of development that was possible. In turn, the magnitude and pattern of development influenced the kind of quality-of-life amenities that became available, such as parks, open space, schools and community facilities. The amount of development also directly correlates with the presence of other conditions that affect quality of life, such as flooding and traffic congestion.

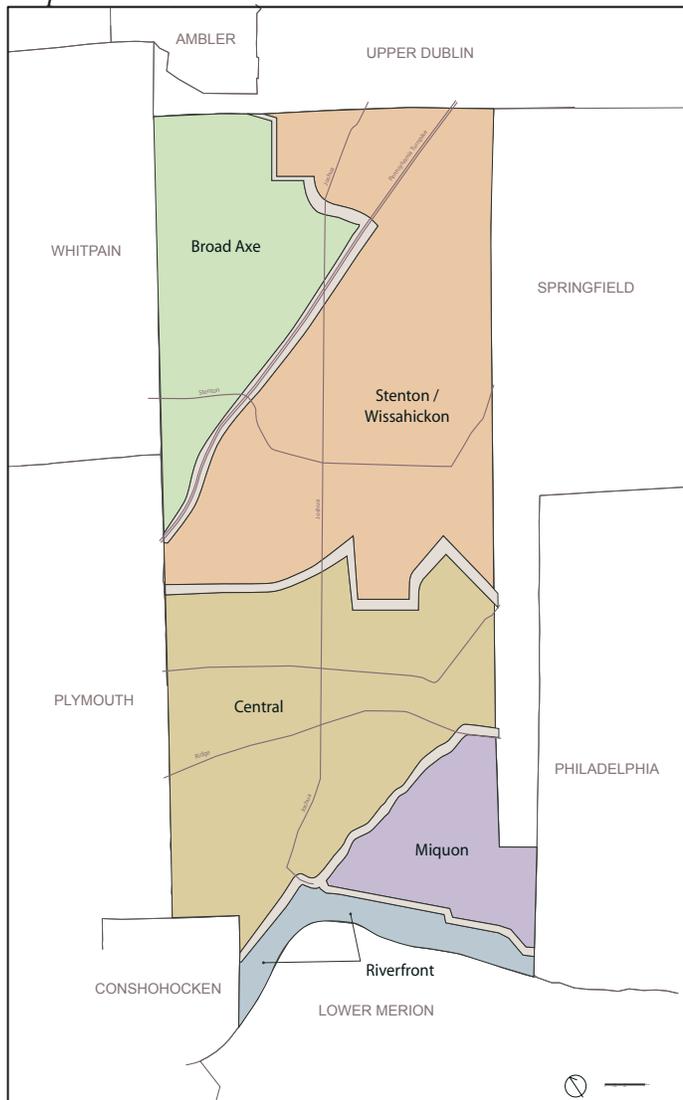
The district framework has provided a useful structure for understanding the open space challenges and opportunities in the different areas of the Township

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and for planning strategies to address the specific needs in each area. As a public education tool, the districts should also be useful in helping residents better understand the factors that have contributed to the character of their own communities as well as the diverse and complex nature of the Township as a whole. These two perspectives, in turn, should help build appreciation for the need to think both globally and locally in devising strategies to preserve open space.

Following are brief descriptions of each of the five districts.

Map 3 *Whitemarsh Districts*



Broad Axe District

The boundaries of this district extend from the Pennsylvania Turnpike, north to the Upper Dublin Township Line and from the Wissahickon Creek, west to the Whitpain Township border.

The character of this district is much the same as it has been for decades; rural and largely undeveloped, with homes located on large lots, and only few non-residential uses. The majority of this area is currently zoned AAA Residential. There are numerous large and mid-sized (under 50 acres) parcels in this district, which when combined constitute the majority of the land area within. Much of the undeveloped land in this district exhibits characteristics that make it very supportive of land development activities, i.e. gently rolling and well-drained soils.

This area has as strong a functional relationship with nearby Ambler Borough and Whitpain and Upper Dublin Townships, as it does with Lafayette Hill, the “psychological center” of Whitemarsh Township. Therefore, the abundant open space serves an important role for both the Township and these adjacent municipalities.

Central District

This district includes the area from Stenton Avenue, south of Erdenheim Farm, to approximately Barren Hill Road and Conshohocken Borough. It extends from Springfield Township line to the Plymouth Township line.

The Central District is the core area of the Township with more land development and greater density than any other district. This development is mainly south of Flourtown Road near Germantown Pike and Ridge Pike. Several areas with higher residential densities, comprising multi-family and mixed-use units,

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are located along Germantown and Ridge Pikes. Historically, the development in this area was formed around key nodes at the intersections of primary road corridors, such as Ridge and Germantown Pikes. In the last 50 years, the district has expanded to exhibit many of the characteristics of traditional 20th Century inner-ring suburban communities. These characteristics include numerous residential subdivisions consisting of lots of one-half acre or less in size, and a free-form road network with cul-de-sacs and limited vehicular or pedestrian connectivity between subdivisions.

Although there are several substantial park and open space areas in this part of the Township, the district's large population is still underserved by parks and open spaces. Furthermore, the amount of remaining undeveloped open space is very limited and privately owned. This remaining open space, although in some cases informally used by the public as passive recreation land, exists solely due to the fact that landowners have chosen not to exercise their right to develop. Should this condition change, the physical character and psychological perception of this district could change dramatically.

Miquon District

This district is roughly bordered by Springfield Township, the Philadelphia City line, Barren Hill Road, and the area just north of, but not including, the PECO utility right-of-way.

The physical features of this area are primarily a function of the underlying geology consisting of Wissahickon Schist. This material forms a landscape

of steep valleys and large areas of woodland. There is a limited amount of residential development located in this area, mostly on the higher elevations and plateaus. As a result of the topography, development is clustered or hidden in pockets, further creating a sense of low density development, especially when compared to the Central District, with its gently rolling lands and more visible expanses of residential development.

Riverfront District

This district includes a narrow band of land located between the Schuylkill River to and including the PECO utility right-of-way, and from the Philadelphia City line to Conshohocken Borough line.

The Riverfront District is mostly composed of the low, flat flood plain area of the Schuylkill River, along with some areas of higher ground. The district is mostly defined by a series of linear infrastructure elements, including the Schuylkill River Trail, the SEPTA R6 Regional Rail line, and the PECO overhead power lines. There is a limited amount of residential development, and several non-residential uses located in the district. The area adjacent to Conshohocken Borough has an urban character and includes dense development very close to the river's edge.

Stenton/Wissahickon District

This district spans from the northeast boundary with Upper Dublin Township, west to Germantown Academy and the Wissahickon Creek. The district extends along the southern boarder of the Pennsylvania Turnpike, to approximately Flourtown Road. The

"What is the use of a house if you haven't got a tolerable planet to put it on?"

—Henry David Thoreau

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district's eastern boundary follows the Springfield Township line and includes all of Erdenheim Farm.

The character of the district is defined by substantial numbers of privately owned large undeveloped parcels, several large quarries, and four golf courses. In addition, the district includes a substantial amount of public lands, including Fort Washington State Park, the Wissahickon Valley, and land owned by Montgomery County. There is limited residential development, occurring mostly west of Joshua Road and along Church Road.

Existing Zoning Districts

Land use within the Township is driven mainly by the zoning districts that regulate the uses permitted on any particular parcel of land. Whitemarsh Township's Zoning Ordinance currently provides for many different types of residential and non-residential development through nineteen zoning districts.

A summary of the existing zoning districts in Whitemarsh Township is provided in Appendix C.

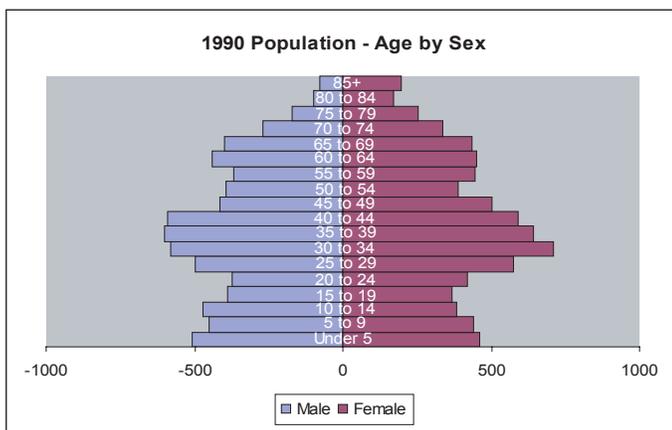
Township Demographics

Population

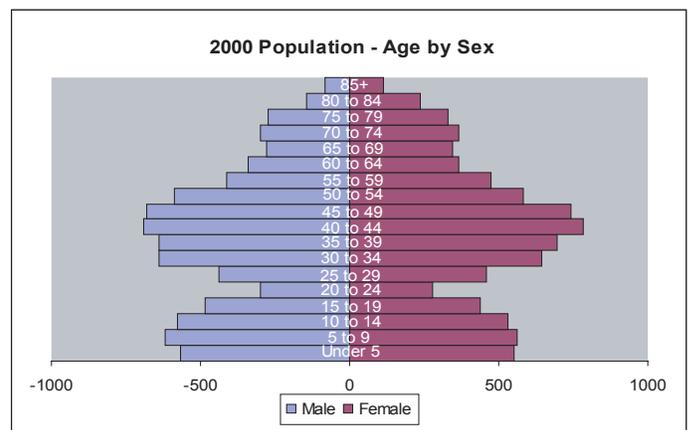
According to the U.S. Census, Whitemarsh Township had a population of 14,863 in 1990. By 2000, the population had grown by 12% or 1,839 people to 16,702.

POPULATION			
Municipality	1990 Census	2000 Census	% Change 1990 - 2000
Whitemarsh Township	14,863	16,702	12.37%
Montgomery County	678,111	750,097	10.62%

The breakdown of the population by age is shown in the accompanying population pyramids. The population pyramids show the male and female population within the Township, as recorded by the U.S. Census in the years 1990 and 2000. The largest population represented in these population pyramids is the baby-boomers, shown as the 25 to 44 age group for 1990 and as the 30 to 50 age group for 2000. This substantial increase shows the first signs of the aging of the baby boom generation. Equally important is the second largest segment of the population, shown by the 5 to 17 age group. This age group represents the children of the baby-boomers. These children are at the end of the baby boom children's "bubble." Many more are within the 18 – 24 age group(s).



1990 U.S. Census



2000 U.S. Census

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Looking into the future, the population of the Delaware Valley Region is predicted to grow slowly. The Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission forecasts that the population of Whitemarsh Township will increase by 8% from the year 2000 to the year 2025 (DVRPC Regional Data Bulletin #73, March 2002). Compared to the percentage increase in the decade 1990 - 2000, the DVRPC forecasted growth rate is significantly lower, but may be an understatement given regional changes over the last five years.

Families and Household Size

The trend in family composition and household size has been changing nationally from the “typical” family consisting of parents and children, to more single homeowners and un-related individuals living together. This has caused the average household size to decrease in the United States. Whitemarsh Township’s household size remained constant between 1990 and 2000 at 2.62 persons per household. Most likely this was due to the number of young families with children moving into the Township. Families comprise approximately 74% (4,597) of the households within the Township. Approximately 34% are families with children under 18 years of age. Non-family households make up approximately 26% of the households in the Township and of these, 7.3% are residents over 65 years of age who live alone.

Employment

In 1990, there were 11,282 jobs within the Township. The DVRPC forecasted that this number would grow by 34 (0.3%) to 11,316 by the year 2000. From 2000 to 2010, the number of jobs in Whitemarsh Township is predicted to be static. From 2010 to

2020, job growth is predicted to occur at a rate of 1.8%, adding an additional 200 jobs.

Employment by Occupation

Management, professional and related occupations are the most prevalent among working individuals living within the Township. This category is followed by sales/office occupations, then production/transportation/material moving, and service occupations. Occupations in the service sector provide the bulk of employment for Township residents. This is consistent with the trend over the past few decades in the United States of increasing employment in the service sector(s) and decreasing employment in the industrial sector(s).

EMPLOYMENT BY OCCUPATION (2000)		
Occupation	Statistics	
	Number	Percent
Management, professional, and related occupations	4,615	53.9 %
Service occupations	589	6.9 %
Sales and office occupations	2,583	30.2 %
Farming, fishing, and forestry occupations	-	0 %
Construction, extraction, and maintenance occupations	332	3.9 %
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	436	5.1 %

Employment by Industry

Employment in the educational, health and social services fields are the most prevalent for Township residents. Though this information appears to be consistent with the employment by occupation, the information indicates that there are a large number of management and professional level positions held in the scientific, administrative, educational, health and social service sectors by residents of Whitemarsh. The next highest employment industry category is finance, insurance, real estate and rental and leasing, with both manufacturing and retail trade categories close behind.

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EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY (2000)		
Industry	Statistics	
	Number	Percent
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	28	0.3
Construction	304	3.6
Manufacturing	935	10.9
Wholesale trade	433	5.1
Retail trade	964	11.3
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	190	2.2
Information	293	3.4
Finance, insurance, real estate, and rental and leasing	989	11.6
Professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services	1349	15.8
Educational, health and social services	1996	23.3
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services	417	4.9
Other services (except public administration)	451	5.3
Public administration	206	2.4

There are several large employers within Whitemarsh Township. The top 5, according to Earned Income Tax information for 2005:

- 1) Johnson & Johnson Service
- 2) Colonial School District
- 3) Reimbursements Technologies
- 4) Emergency Care Research, Inc.
- 5) Germantown Academy

Income

The income characteristics of Whitemarsh Township provide a snapshot of the wealth in the community. There are several measures of income used by the U.S. Census Bureau, but per capita income and household median income are the two most common. The per capita income of Whitemarsh Township was \$39,785 in the year 2000, compared to \$26,919 in 1990.

The median household income of Whitemarsh Township in the year 2000 was \$78,630 compared to \$57,075 in 1990.

Housing

The median price of housing units in Montgomery County has increased substantially over the past ten years. According to the 1990 U.S. Census, the median price of housing within Whitemarsh Township was \$169,700. From the year 1990 to 2000, the median housing price of a new home increased by more than \$26,400.

The median housing price of homes throughout eastern Montgomery County has increased as well, in some instances, at a double-digit rate since 2000. Therefore, it is likely that the median housing price of homes in the year 2005 was significantly higher than it was in the year 2000 when this Census was taken.