

Housing and Historic Preservation Plan

This chapter has a dual, but inner-related purpose. It examines the township's housing stock and addresses strategies to ensure that it remains viable and meets the needs of an ever increasingly diverse population. In this way it is future oriented. Yet it also looks backward, taking stock of the numerous historic and notable structures throughout the township, visual reminders that the community was first settled in the 17th Century.

Housing Plan

Whitemarsh Township is predominantly a suburban residential community. This development pattern, created during the rapid suburbanization that occurred in the municipalities adjacent to Philadelphia during the 1950s and 1960s, has been acknowledged throughout the planning process of the Comprehensive Plan and selected as the dominant land use for the township's future growth. This decision makes the housing chapter particularly important, especially since the earliest of this development is at the half-century mark. Therefore, the housing plan, along with its goal and objectives, has been formulated to promote the continued stability of the existing housing stock and to address the needs of the township's projected population.

This plan is to fulfill the township's housing goal of, "Encouraging a range of housing types that will meet the needs of residents, promote residential infill development that is compatible with established development patterns and to ensure that the value of the township's existing housing stock is maintained." To implement this the township has developed the following three objectives:

- *Provide a varied housing stock that addresses the needs of all residents.*
- *Ensure that the existing housing stock remains desirable.*
- *Ensure that infill development is compatible with the surrounding, existing housing stocks and its density.*

Whitemarsh Housing: Present Conditions

Before turning to the implementation process for the plan, it is useful to review the housing and relevant demographic data that was used to formulate it.

Demographic Data

Analyzing the demographic data provided in Chapter 4, Demographics, the following population trends applicable to housing were found:

- **The Township's Overall Population Will Grow Nearly 10 Percent by 2020.** This positive growth rate makes Whitemarsh somewhat unique in relation to its adjacent communities. Of them, only Whitpain will experience a positive growth rate.
- **Growth in Its Elderly (Over 55) Population.** This trend is consistent with older (1950-1960) suburban communities and is shared by all of Whitemarsh's adjacent communities.
- **Growth in Nonfamily Households.** This household category grew dramatically in the township during the 1980s (43.6%) and 1990s (17.7%). This trend is expected to continue.

- **Low Population Decline.** Nationally, suburban communities that experienced rapid expansion during the 1950s and 1960s experienced a population decline during the 1970s and 1980s. Whitemarsh’s relatively low decline seems to indicate that the township remains a desirable place to live.

Housing Data

Over one third of the township is devoted to residential use. According to the 2000 Census, this results in 6,372 housing units, of which 73.5 percent were single-family detached dwellings. Figure 11-1 shows the 2000 Census housing data, broken down by type and percentage of total.

Figure 11-1
2000 Census Housing Totals

Units in Structure	Number	Percentage
Single-Family Detached	4,683	73.5
Single-Family Attached	615	9.7
Duplex/Twin	155	2.4
Multifamily:		
3 or 4	85	1.3
5 to 9	156	2.4
10 to 19	158	2.5
20 to 49	341	5.4
50 or more	166	2.6
Mobile Home	13	0.2
TOTAL	6,372	100.0

In the 1990 Census, Whitemarsh’s median year for housing construction was 1959, which corresponded with the county’s median year. While the median year for both has not yet been calculated from the recently released 2000 Census data, the age of the township’s housing stock by recent decades is available. It is shown in Figure 11-2.

As Figure 11-2 indicates, approximately 50 percent of the township’s housing stock was built between 1940 and 1970, making it between 30 and 60 years old. However, given the almost nonexistent housing construction during World War II (1941-1945), its safe to say that few houses exist from the war years and most of these date from the post war building boom of the 1950s and 1960s. It is further interesting to note how housing is distributed by age throughout Whitemarsh. Figure 11-3 shows this distribution by Census tract.

The Census also indicates that while there is a fairly even distribution by decade prior to 1995 for when a resident moved into a house, many of the township’s residents have moved to Whitemarsh after this date. A full 37.3 percent of the township total residents have moved in since 1995 (Figure 11-4).

The township has a high rate of home ownership. Of the 6,174 units surveyed, 5,121 or 82% of the total housing units were owner occupied. Similarly, the existing housing stock had a high value. Of the 4,797 units surveyed, less than 2% of the total housing units were worth less than \$100,000, with the majority being in the

Figure 11-2
**Whitemarsh: Age of Housing
 2000 Census**

Decade Built	Percentage of Total Whitemarsh Township
1999 to March 2000	4.0%
1995 to 1998	5.5%
1990 to 1994	3.6%
1980 to 1989	10.8%
1970 to 1979	15.0%
1960 to 1969	17.5%
1940 to 1959	32.3%
1939 or Earlier	11.4%

Figure 11-3
Housing Age by Census Tract

Census Tract *	Age/Percentage
2030	75% of the houses were built prior to 1969
2031.03	75% of the houses were built prior to 1979
2031.04	75% of the houses were built prior to 1969
2031.05	75% of the houses were built after 1979
2031.06	75% of the houses were built prior to 1969

* See Chapter 4, Figure 4-1 for the location of these tracts in Whitemarsh

Figure 11-4
**Year Householder Moved Into Dwelling
 2000 Census**

Year/Decade Moved In	# of Housing Units Affected	Percent of Total
1999 to March 2000	814	13.2
1995 to 1998	1,491	24.1
1990 to 1994	939	15.2
1980 to 1989	1,199	19.4
1970 to 1979	827	13.4
1969 or Earlier	909	14.7
TOTAL	6,179 ⁽¹⁾	100.0

(1) Occupied units at time of survey.

\$100,000 to \$250,000 range. Also, a full 13% of the township’s housing was valued at \$300,000 to \$500,000 or more. For the 2000 Census, it was found that the median sale price for Montgomery County was \$158,600, while for Whitemarsh’s region, which includes Plymouth and Conshohocken, it was \$161,000.

An analysis of the above demographic trends and housing data reveals the following:

- The township remains a desirable place for families, and has attracted almost 40% of its total population since 1995.
- The growth of elderly and non-family households present new housing challenges for the township.
- Existing housing stock is aging but is still well maintained, giving the appearance of a mature but well cared for community.
- Housing values remain high and are generally above county and local levels.

Housing Plan Objectives

The housing plan contains numerous policies and recommendations designed to implement the three objectives described below. Through these, the township’s goal of addressing its housing needs for future growth and ensuing neighborhood stability can be realized.

Objective One

Provide a varied housing stock that addresses the needs of all residents.

- Policy 1.1 **Elderly Housing.** The township should consider drafting an Elderly Housing District for adoption into the Zoning Ordinance. This district would be permitted as an overlay district, similar to the township’s institutional district, in most of the township’s residential districts. It would permit a wide range of housing types ranging from single-family detached manufactured dwellings to multifamily apartment buildings to provide for all of the township older residents and their individual lifestyles. All facets of elder care would be allowed: Independent Living, Assisted Living, Skilled Care, and Congregate Facilities.
- Policy 1.2 **Allowing Apartments in the VC and R-O Districts.** To increase the supply of apartment units in the township, two new zoning districts recommended in the Proposed Land Use Plan would permit apartments. In the R-O Residential Office District, proposed for Plymouth Meeting and Cold Point, owners would be able to convert an old house into apartments, provided that the existing facades and residential character of the houses were retained. In the VC Village Commercial District, which is proposed for parts of the commercial areas along Germantown Pike and Bethlehem Pike, apartments would be allowed above commercial or office uses.
- Policy 1.3 **Update the Residential Conversion Standards.** The existing residential conversion standards in the Zoning Ordinance are antiquated and make this process difficult. Without loosening up the standards and permitting undesirable conversions, the current standards could be updated and modernized. Similar to Policy 1.2, this could increase the supply of apartments in Whitemarsh.
- Policy 1.4 **Allow Different Housing Types in Some of the Districts Impacted by Growing Greener.** In several of the Growing Greener districts proposed in the Land Use Plan, the township should consider allowing a variety of housing types besides only single-family detached dwellings. In

particular, at the Green Valley Country Club site, where only single-family dwellings are permitted on small lots (15,000 square feet), there is not a lot of flexibility for preserving open space. The inclusion of some townhouses, twins, or garden apartments for this district could increase the township's housing diversity and provide for suitably designed open space.

Objective Two

Ensure that the existing housing stock remains desirable.

- Policy 2.1 **Implement the Strategic Plan Described in the Proposed Land Use Plan.** This plan is designed to eliminate undesirable development and land use conflicts through making a series of recommended changes to the township zoning map and adopting several new zoning districts. In particular, this plan was designed to eliminate intensive non-residential development adjacent to existing residential neighborhoods.
- Policy 2.2 **Continue to Enforce the Township's Codes.** The township should continue to enforce its building and property maintenance codes to guarantee that problem properties do not create a blight that negatively affects adjacent properties or areas.
- Policy 2.3 **Promote Flexibility for Houses in Historic Areas or in Certain Locations.** By adopting innovative zoning such as the R-O Residential Office District proposed for Plymouth Meeting and Cold Point, old dwellings that are no longer desirable as single-family houses could be converted to offices or apartments. It could encourage their retention and rehabilitation. Additionally, for old houses of a certain size and in appropriate areas (e.g. along a major roadway) provisions allowing them to become Bed and Breakfasts could ensure these properties continued viability.

Objective Three

While generally not popular with residents, demand for infill development exists in the township. Given that many older houses, especially those from the 1950s are on lots that exceed the lot regulations of their zoning district and may be in a style that does not appeal to modern tastes, infill is inevitable and occurring. While the Growing Greener regulations may stop the worst examples of it, it is also recommended that the township adopt standards to mitigate its impact when it does occur.

- Policy 3.1 **Prevent Over Development on Lots.** To ensure that infill development is appropriate, the township should amend its residential districts to include impervious surface coverage standards (which currently exist only in the AD Attached Dwelling District) and develop building and impervious coverage standards for its C Residential District.
- Policy 3.2 **Landscape Buffers.** The township should amend the landscape buffer requirements in the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance to permit the township to require buffering for infill housing in residential areas. As part of the Subdivision Ordinance, these standards could be waived when it is determined that they are not necessary.
- Policy 3.3 **House Orientation.** The township should develop design standards for the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance to encourage infill housing to be properly oriented to existing dwellings. For example, requiring that a proposed rear yard be oriented to an existing rear yard

rather than a front or side yard. This could prevent conflicts between existing and proposed housing. Similar to Policy 3.2, these standards could be waived by the township when they are not deemed appropriate.

Historic Preservation Plan

Whitemarsh Township is blessed with a wealth of historic buildings, some of national importance, all of community importance. As much as open space defines the township, it is these old structures that give it a sense of continuance, a sense of place. Therefore, an aspect of this chapter is devoted to their preservation, either through legislative mandate or by allowing flexibility for their adaptive reuse.

Background Information

To assist in preparing a strategy for historic preservation, it is important to review the following information.

Figure 11-5

Whitemarsh Structures on the National Register of Historic Places (as of 8/1/02)

Map Location	Historic Name	Address	Date Listed
(1)	Alan Corson House	5130 Butler Pike	1973
(2)	County Bridge No. 54	Morris Road L.R. 565	1988
(3)	Farmer Mill	Skippack & Bethlehem Pikes	1972
(4)	The Highlands	Skippack Pike & Sheaf Lane	1976
(5)	Hope Lodge	553 Bethlehem Pike	1972
(6)	Hovenden House, Barn & Abolition Hall	1 East Germantown pike	1971
(7)	Lee Tire & Rubber Company	1100 East Hector Street	1984
(8)	Miller's House at Spring Mill	North Lane & Hector Street	1990
(9)	Mount Joy	North Lane & Hector Street	1971
(10)	Union School	516-18 Bethlehem Pike	1980

The township also has two National Register Districts. They are Plymouth Meeting, listed in 1971 and Cold Point, which was listed in 1983. They are both located in Whitemarsh and Plymouth Townships. The Plymouth Meeting district is also governed by a local review board, which oversees modifications and demolitions to existing structures and provides guidelines for new construction. Currently Cold Point is considering such a board.

The township also has numerous properties that have been surveyed and deemed eligible for listing on the National Register, but have never been officially listed. They are as follows:

Figure 11-6
**Properties Eligible for the
National Register**

Map Location	Historic Name	Address	Date Deemed Eligible
A	Acuff Property	7051 East Valley Green Road ⁽¹⁾	1995
B	Camp Hill Estate	709 Pennsylvania Avenue	1997
C	Lillian Elliot Property	6108 Butler Pike	1992
D	Fort Washington Historic District		1995
E	Joseph Lukens Property	7161 Camp Hill Road ⁽²⁾	1995
F	Sandy Run Farm	7051 East Valley Green Road ⁽¹⁾	1995
G	E.V. Toland Estate	650 Church Road	1995
H	Wentz Property	7050 Camp Hill Road ⁽¹⁾	1995

⁽¹⁾ Owned by McNeil Laboratories

⁽²⁾ Owned by SEPTA

Also, the following sites were determined to have local significance in the township’s Open Space Plan.

Figure 11-7
Sites of Local Cultural Significance

Map Location	Sites of Local Cultural Significance
1	Fort Washington Hotel
2	Masonic Hall
3	Clifton House (Sandy Run Inn)
4	Fort Side Inn
5	Saint Thomas’ Episcopal Church
6	Zion Lutheran Church
7	Cold Point Baptist Church
8	Plymouth Friends Meeting House & School
9	Ye Olde Whitemarsh Inn
10	General Lafayette Inn
11	St. Peter’s Lutheran Church
12	St. Peter’s Lutheran School
13	St. Peter’s Original Parsonage
14	Fountain Inn
15	Buena Vista
16	Simpson Miquon House

While researching historic properties for this plan, it became apparent that the story of Whitemarsh was more than some select properties on a list and that many structures that contributed to the township’s sense of place had been overlooked. For example, on Sheaff Lane, adjacent to The Highlands, is an old barn that has been converted into a residence. Known as the Peace Barn, it was built in 1814, the year the War of 1812 ended. At the northeast corner of Spring Mill Road and Ridge Pike is a circa 1780 dwelling originally known as Linden Grove. It contains Barren Hill blue marble, not available anywhere else in the world. It also

has the remnants of a tunnel in the backyard which was probably used by the Underground Railroad. Sherry Lake, created from a quarry that provided the marble for Independence Hall, was used by the Lubin Film Studios as a location for filming silent pre-WWI westerns.

Even noted properties or areas have stories that are unknown to many residents. Cold Point has two houses built by freed or perhaps fugitive slaves. The Highlands and its' gardens have been nationally recognized since 1844 when Andrew Jackson Downing, the noted landscape designer and 19th Century architectural critic, referred to them in his Treatise (2nd edition).

For these reasons it is important that a comprehensive building survey be done for the township by a recognized preservation consultant. There is too much hidden history, often in plain sight, for the township not to have such a survey done by a certified professional.

The township's buildings and their importance have been recognized by the Planning Commission during their formulation of the Growing Greener zoning amendments. Of the secondary features found on the Map of Conservation Features, preservation of historic buildings and cultural features was prioritized first. While the specifics of this are discussed below, this is an important first step for preservation efforts in Whitemarsh.

Notable buildings in Whitemarsh are not just those built many years ago. Some very important architects, nationally and locally, have designed houses in the township. One, Louis Kahn, has an international reputation. The following list constitutes an initial effort to document some of these architects and their work in Whitemarsh.

Figure 11-8

Houses and Their Architects

- **E.V. Toland House, 650 Church Road:** Built in 1895 this colonial revival house was designed by Cope & Stewardson, a Philadelphia firm best known for popularizing the Collegiate Gothic style. They designed many buildings at the University of Pennsylvania.
- **Miquon Houses, 2088-90-92 Harts Lane:** These three dwellings were designed about 1953 by Kenneth Day (1901-1958), a Philadelphia architect. The houses, including 2092 which was Day's house, were built in the International style. They are significant because few houses, locally or regionally, are such a pure example of this style, which was generally used for nonresidential buildings. All are in good condition and appear to be unaltered.
- **Korman House, Sheaff Lane; Honickman House, Sheaff Lane; and Roche House, Harts Lane:** These houses were designed by Louis Kahn (1901-1974), the famed Philadelphia architect who has an international reputation. All were designed near the end of his career, when he was at the height of his talent.

Preservation Plan

The preservation plan contains policies designed to ensure that the township's historic and important structures are retained.

- As the township implements the Growing Greener development regulations for the A-AAAA Zoning Districts, any proposal in these districts should be required to fully document all structures 50 years or older⁽¹⁾ on a site. Depending upon these structures' significance and condition, the developer may be required to preserve them.
- Develop a local historic district for Cold Point and consider one for Spring Mill and Fort Washington.

(1) To be eligible for the National Register, a property must be 50 years or older.

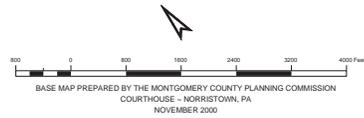
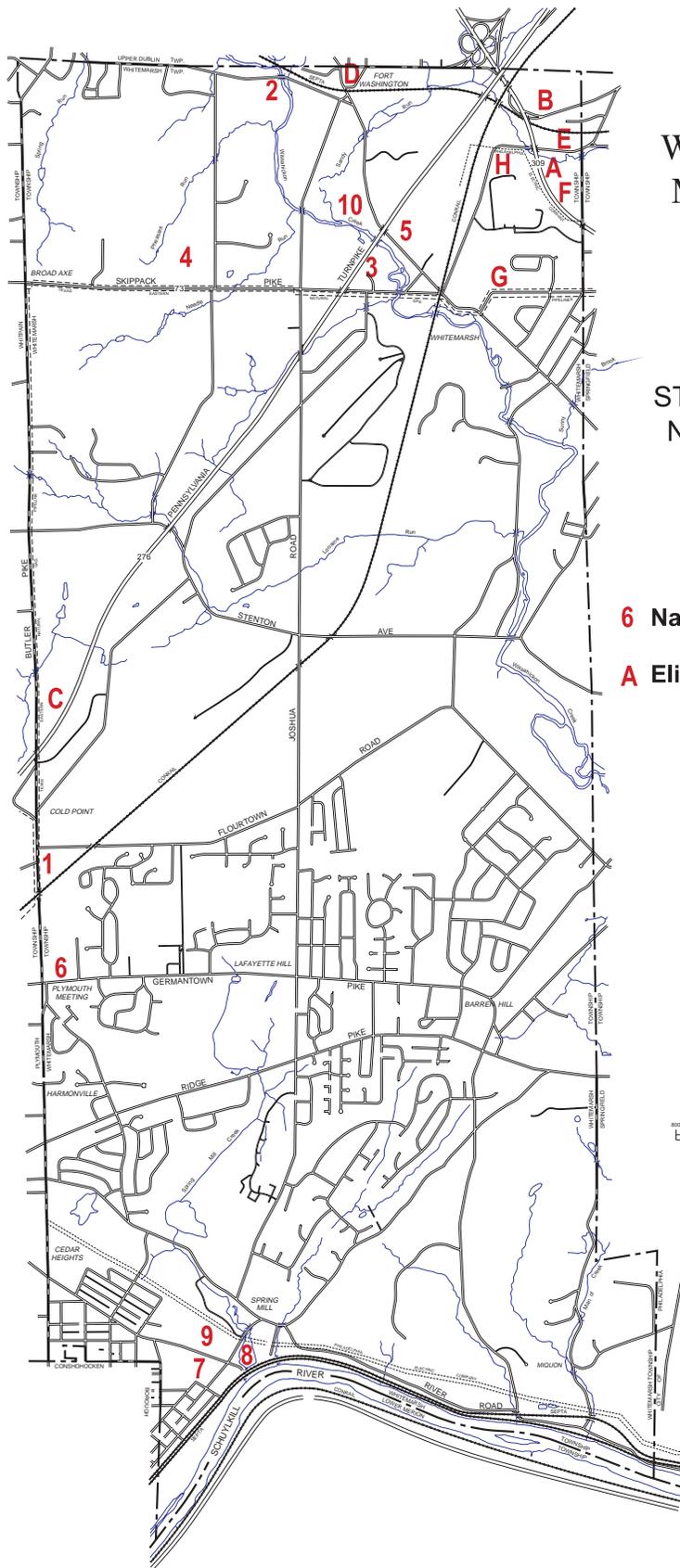
- Develop transitional buffer zones surrounding the historic villages to prevent them from the encroachment of new development.
- Consider adding those structures less than 50 years old but having significance (e.g.: Kahn designed properties) to the Growing Greener regulations.
- Provide regulations for the sensitive adaptive reuse of old houses that are no longer desirable as residential dwellings either through creating new zoning districts, such as the RO District, or by allowing conversions to such uses as bed and breakfasts, etc.
- Hire a certified preservation consultant to survey structures in the township.

Whitemarsh Township Montgomery County Pennsylvania

Location Map for
Figures 11-5 & 11-6
STRUCTURES ON THE
NATIONAL HISTORIC
REGISTER
OR ARE ELIGIBLE
FOR LISTING

6 National Register

A Eligible for National Register



Whitemarsh Township Montgomery County Pennsylvania

Location Map for Figure 11-7 SITES OF LOCAL SIGNIFICANCE

