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September 29, 2022

SUBJECT: Chapter 14: Compatibility with the Development and Plans of Surrounding Areas

TO: Comp Plan Development Team

FROM: Mike Narcowich, AICP, Community Planning Assistant Manager
and Abington Township Planning Consultant

Link to Plan's Vision

This chapter has important linkages with all of the plan themes:

- *"Desirable Residential Areas"*
- *"A Thriving, Equitable Community"*
- *"Vibrant Destinations"*
- *"Healthy People and Environment (think clean, green, and healthy)"*

Outline

Introduction

Cheltenham

Jenkintown

Alverthorpe Park

Lower Moreland

Philadelphia

Rockledge

Springfield

Upper Dublin

Upper Moreland

Municipalities Planning Code (PA Act 247)

Section 301. Preparation of a Comprehensive Plan states, in Subsection (a)(5), that a comprehensive plan shall include:

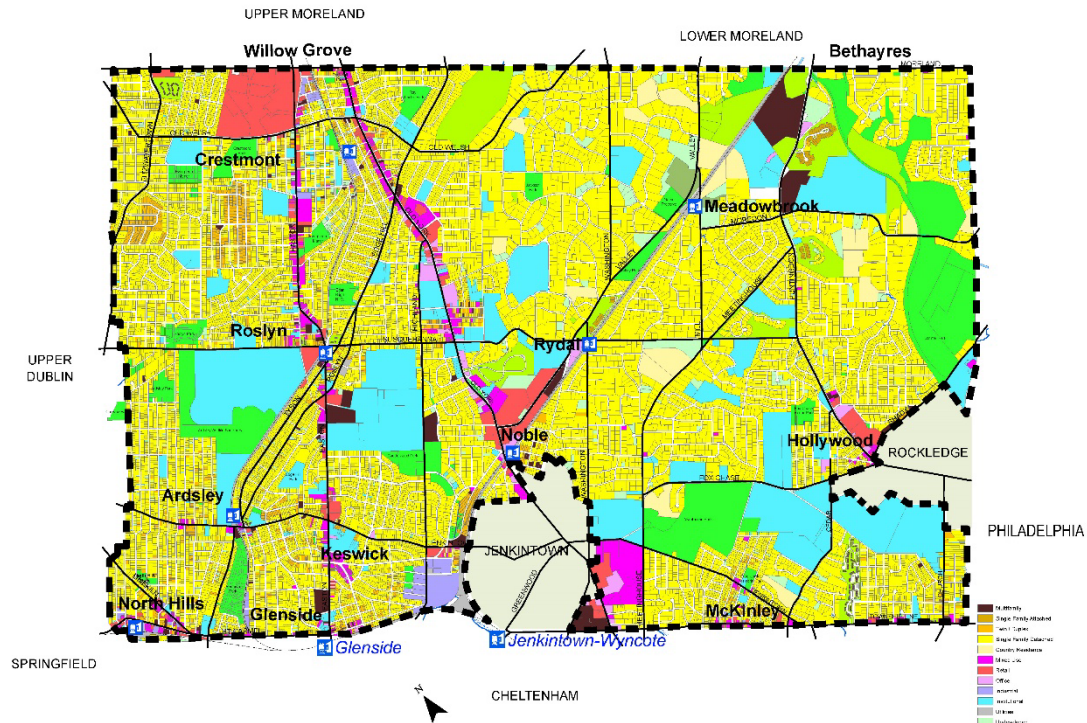
A statement indicating that the existing and proposed development of the municipality is compatible with the existing and proposed development and plans in contiguous portions of neighboring municipalities, or a statement indicating measures which have been taken to provide buffers or other transitional devices between disparate uses, and a statement indicating that the existing and proposed development of the municipality is generally consistent with the objectives and plans of the county comprehensive plan.

Note: This chapter addresses the requirement shown above, from PA Act 247, the Municipalities Planning Code.

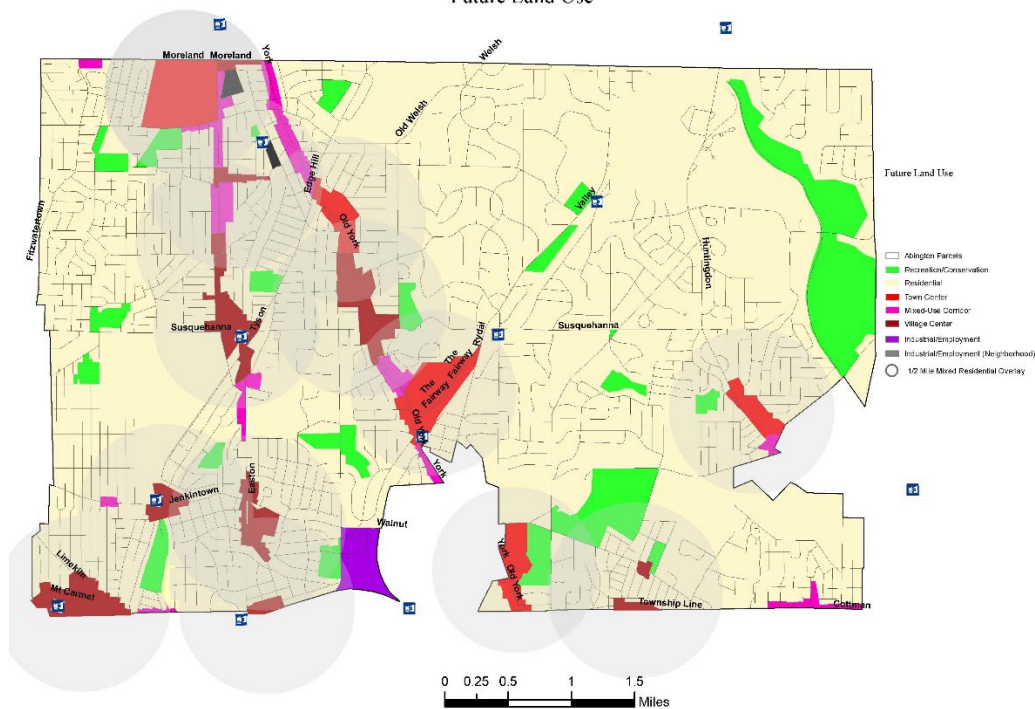
Introduction

This chapter will examine how compatible Abington's land use is with contiguous sections of abutting municipalities. The analysis will include existing development, zoning, and future land use recommendations. It will highlight areas of existing or potential incompatibility, as well as areas of potential cooperation and synergy.

Abington Existing Land Use

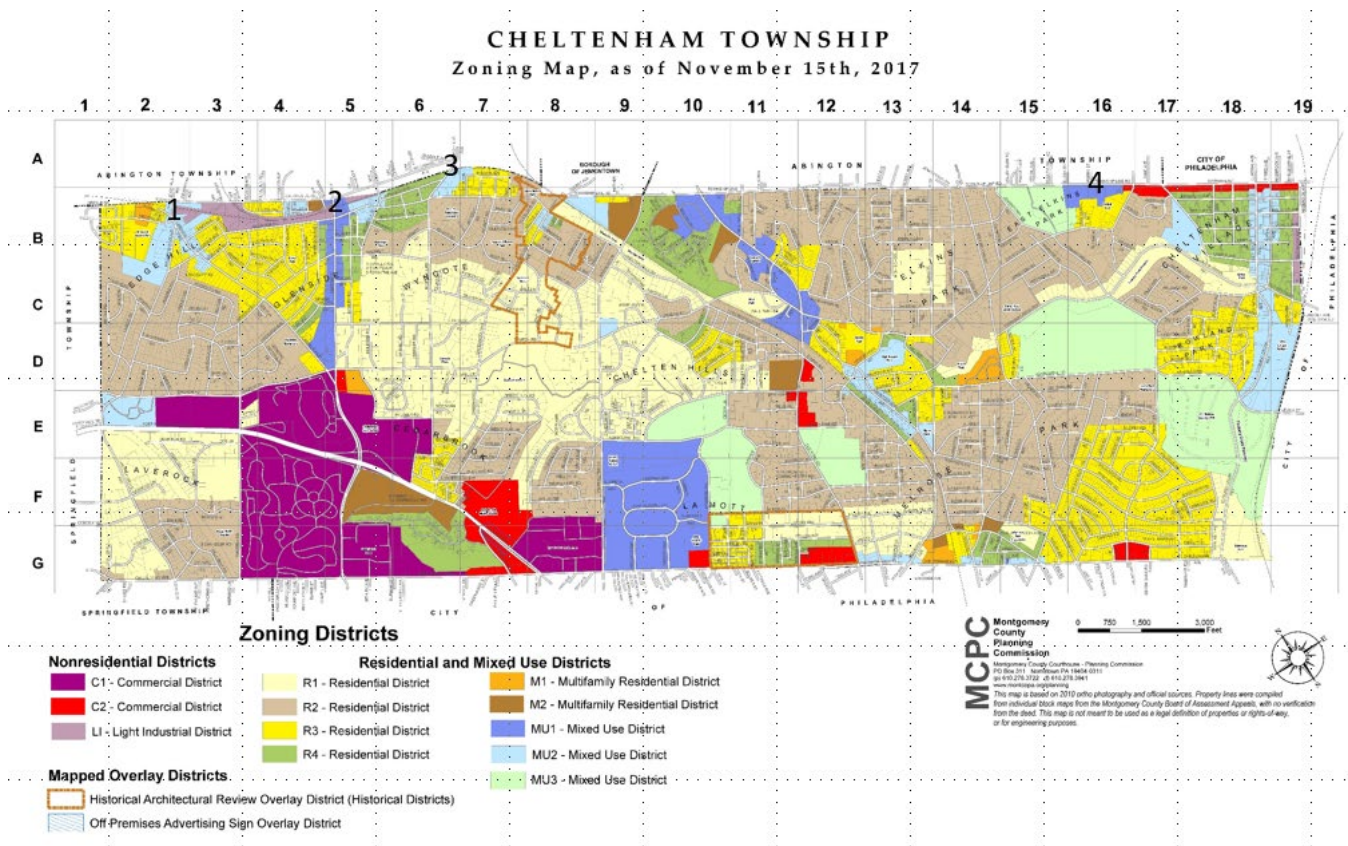


Future Land Use



Note: dark red category “Village Center” will be added to legend.

Cheltenham



Cheltenham's comprehensive plan is fairly dated, so zoning (adopted 2017) is used to analyze land use compatibility. Generally, land use policies are compatible along the Abington-Cheltenham boundary. The following are a few areas where potential conflicts exist:

- Industrial and Residential Land Uses:
 - The Industrial/Employment future land use category in Abington lies adjacent to MU2 Mixed Use and R3 Residential zoning districts in Cheltenham (#3 on map). For this reason, Abington should ensure that any future expansion or new land development on the SPS Industries site include adequate buffering, screening, and performance measures to prevent negative impacts on the MU2 and R3 districts in Cheltenham. The presence of SEPTA's regional rail lines ensures that development and industrial activity on the Abington side is mitigated by the presence of the railroad, which spatially separates the two municipalities.
 - The Limited Industrial zoning district in Cheltenham lies along Mt. Carmel Avenue, opposite land in the Village Center future land use category in Abington. For this reason, Abington should monitor development to ensure that new industrial uses on the Cheltenham side of Mt. Carmel Avenue do not negatively impact land uses on the opposite side of the road in Abington.

However, existing uses on the north side of Mt. Carmel Avenue (Abington) are nonresidential or mixed uses, so impacts would be limited for the foreseeable future (#2 on map).

- **McKinley:** The MU3 Mixed Use zoning district in Cheltenham lies across Township Line Road (PA Route 73) from Abington; the district includes the Einstein Medical Center Elkins Park. Moss Rehabilitation, part of the facility, has been considering expansion. Abington should monitor development proposals at the center by communicating with Cheltenham to ensure that negative impacts (e.g., traffic, lighting, noise) from any expansion are prevented—particularly for the block of Township Line Road between Walker Avenue and Holme Avenue that are occupied by single-family detached homes (#4 on map).

The following are areas of potential synergy along the Abington-Cheltenham boundary where cooperation between the two townships should be considered:

- **Villages of North Hills, Abington and Edge Hill, Cheltenham.** These two villages are located so close to one another that consideration should be given to joint planning initiatives. These might involve creation of a land use vision for the area, coordinated wayfinding signage, and implementation of complete streets measures to improve pedestrian safety, bicycle, and accessibility improvements for the disabled in and between the two villages (#1 on map).
- **Village of Glenside.** There would be benefits in multimunicipal cooperation along the Easton Road corridor in the village. The Keswick Village Business Association and Downtown Glenside Foundations could play key roles in any such effort. The Association hosts the Keswick Fall Festival and other events. The Foundation supports economic development and arts initiatives in the Cheltenham part of Glenside. Abington will support dialogue with business owners in its part of Glenside, and establish dialogue with Cheltenham over potential cross-boundary cooperation on areas of shared interest involving Glenside (#2 on map). These might include:

Downtown Glenside Foundation

“The Downtown Glenside Foundation’s mission is to foster community and local businesses to support a vibrant Downtown Glenside. The Foundation is a nonprofit organization that was formed in 2015, and support initiatives to promote economic vitality and local arts, and education initiatives in Glenside, Cheltenham Township...”
--from Facebook page for Downtown Glenside Foundation, accessed 6/14/2022.

- Marketing, economic development, and business retention/attraction,
- Wayfinding signage and banners (coordinated),
- Transportation and pedestrian safety improvements, including Implementation of transportation improvements on Easton Road recommended by “Montco Pikes: A Vision Plan for 6 County Roads” (2022),
- Streetscaping (e.g., decorative lighting, decorative paving, street trees, street furniture, kiosks),
- Community events,
- Public art, and
- Exploration of the feasibility of a Business Improvement District (BID)) or Main Street organization (which could coordinate the activities listed above).

Through these initiatives, more people might be drawn to Glenside to patronize its dining, specialty shops, entertainment, services, and other businesses. As a result, the Glenside brand and sense of place could be strengthened. Subsequent implementation measures could include joint applications for public funding (multimunicipal applications generally have a greater likelihood of being funded).

Land Use Plan

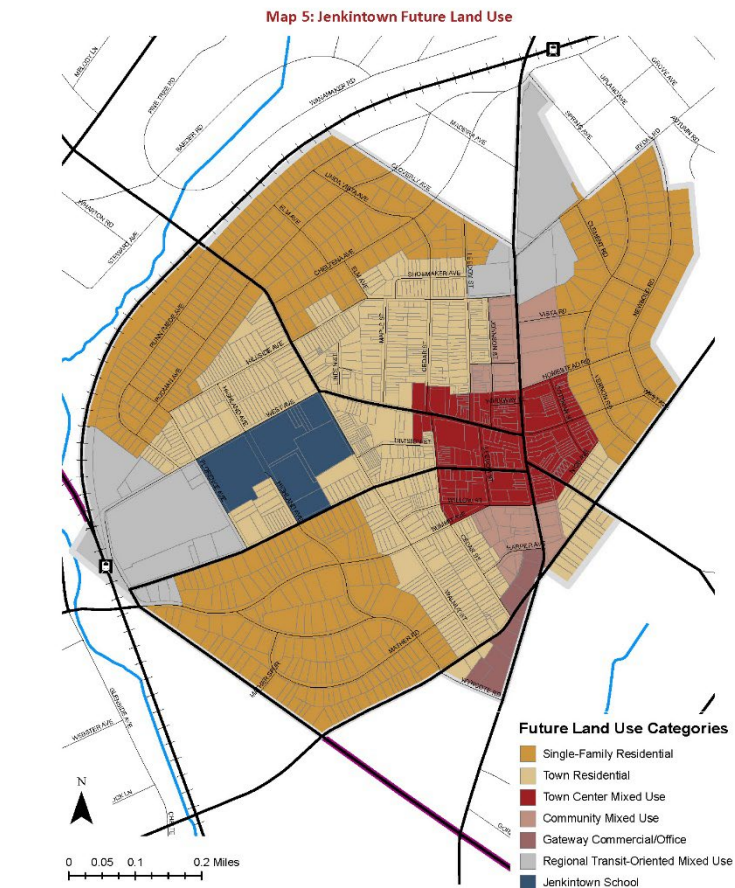
Jenkintown

The future land use plans for Abington and Jenkintown are mostly consistent: residential areas tend to abut one another. Abington's "Town Center" future land use areas on Old York Road abut Jenkintown's "Regional Transit-Oriented Mixed Use" area and "Gateway Commercial/Office" area near Noble and the Pavilion, respectively.

One potential land use issue is where an industrial use in the Glenside neighborhood of Abington lies just upwind from the "Single-Family Residential" future land use category in Jenkintown.

Residents of the borough have complained about odors coming from the area.

Abington will closely monitor complaints regarding the facility, ensure that it conforms with zoning and other township regulations, and communicate as appropriate with federal and state regulatory bodies and neighboring jurisdictions to ensure public health. Industry in this area has long been important to Abington's fiscal and employment base; ensuring compliance with regulations preventing nuisance or harm to public health can ensure that this will remain a valuable location for industry and employment in the future and that the concerns of area residents are addressed.



22 Jenkintown2035 Comprehensive Plan

Jenkintown Future Land Use Map, from *Jenkintown 2035*

Abington and Jenkintown will consider creating joint vision plans for Old York Road at the two “gateway” locations where the township meets the borough. Vision plans could address the following:

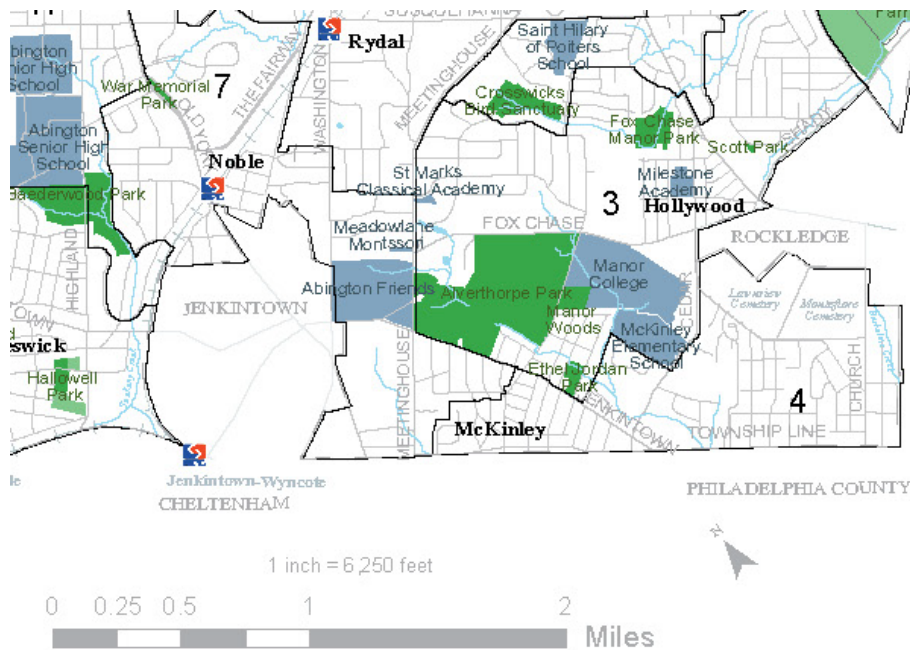
- Building height and scale—to create an appealing, harmonious look.
- Coordinated streetscape design—including two blocks where land uses in Jenkintown lie across Old York Road from land uses in Abington.
- Transportation improvements—these could include those related to PA Route 611, multimodal connectivity, and transit-oriented development (TOD). They might address upgrades to accessibility, and pedestrian and bicycling facilities (local residents have expressed interest in the two municipalities planning together for bicycle and pedestrian improvements).
- Communication and planning between the two municipalities could address business retention, development, marketing, and organization for the combined Route 611 commercial corridor. This might involve discussions about a multimunicipal Business Improvement District (BID) or Main Street District.

Subsequent implementation measures could include joint applications for public funding (multimunicipal applications generally have a greater likelihood of being funded).

Alverthorpe Park

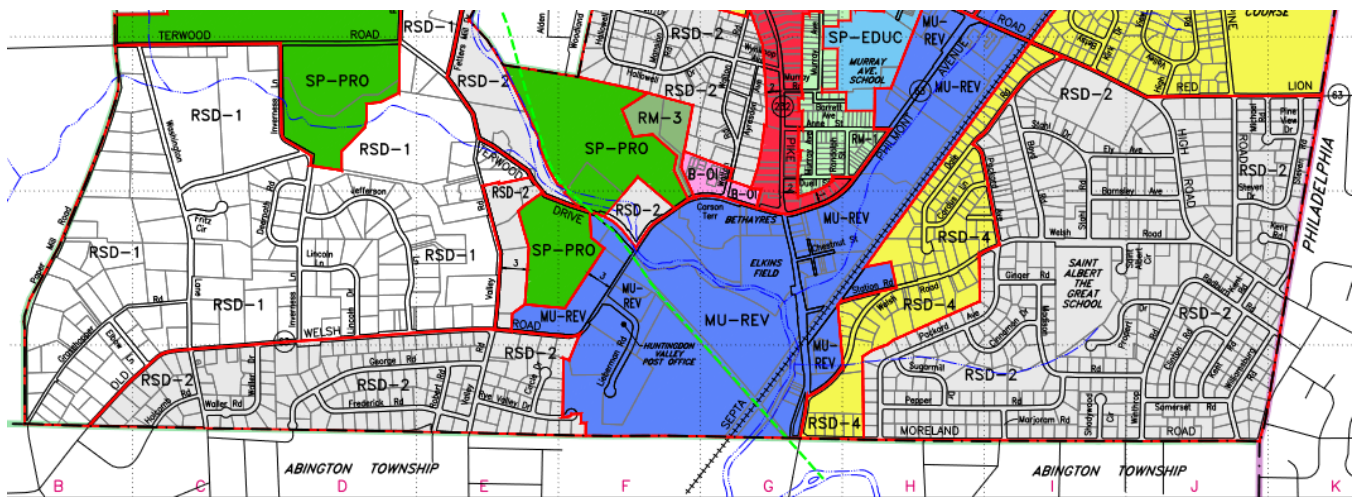
The comprehensive plan for Jenkintown, “Jenkintown 2035,” notes that Alverthorpe Park is within easy walking distance of the borough (1/2 mile). It is also within a short walk or bicycle ride from Rockledge and Cheltenham. Residents of these three communities have expressed frustration at not being allowed to enter the park. Abington will review admission policies for Alverthorpe Park in the new Comprehensive Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan, in the interest of promoting public health, recreation, and equity in the region.¹ In its assessment, the township will balance the benefits of a less restrictive admissions policy with any potentially negative impacts on park usage and maintenance needs.

¹ Review of the deed for the park shows that the township has the ability to open admission to all, regardless of place of residence..



Lower Moreland

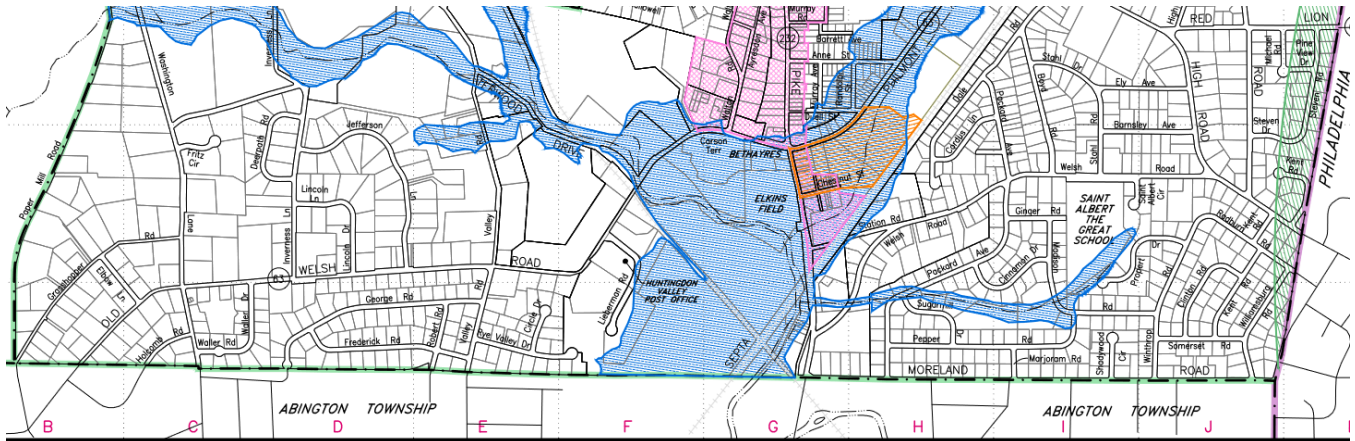
Alverthorpe Park lies directly between Jenkintown and Rockledge. Lower Moreland does not have a current comprehensive plan (its last such plan was adopted in 1966). The zoning map shows that the land along the Abington boundary is generally zoned for residential uses. The blue area on the map below is the “Mixed-Use Redevelopment” zoning district. However, nearly all



Lower Moreland Zoning Map. The only district bordering Abington that is not a district with a residential emphasis is the Mixed-Use—Redevelopment zone (blue).

of the land in that district along the Abington boundary is restricted from construction of buildings by the floodplain. Only a small portion near the cul-de-sac at the end of Rye Valley Drive lies outside the Floodplain Conservation Overlay (zoning) district, and includes part of the Bethayres Swamp, which is designated as a high priority for conservation by Montgomery County’s Natural Areas Inventory. The Floodplain Conservation District (see light blue color

on map) does, however, allow for construction of roads, parking lots, stormwater basins, and the like by conditional use. It is important for any development in this area to use buffers and screening to limit any impact of construction on the adjacent part of Abington (which is zoned for low-density residential use and lies in the “Residential” future land use category of this plan).



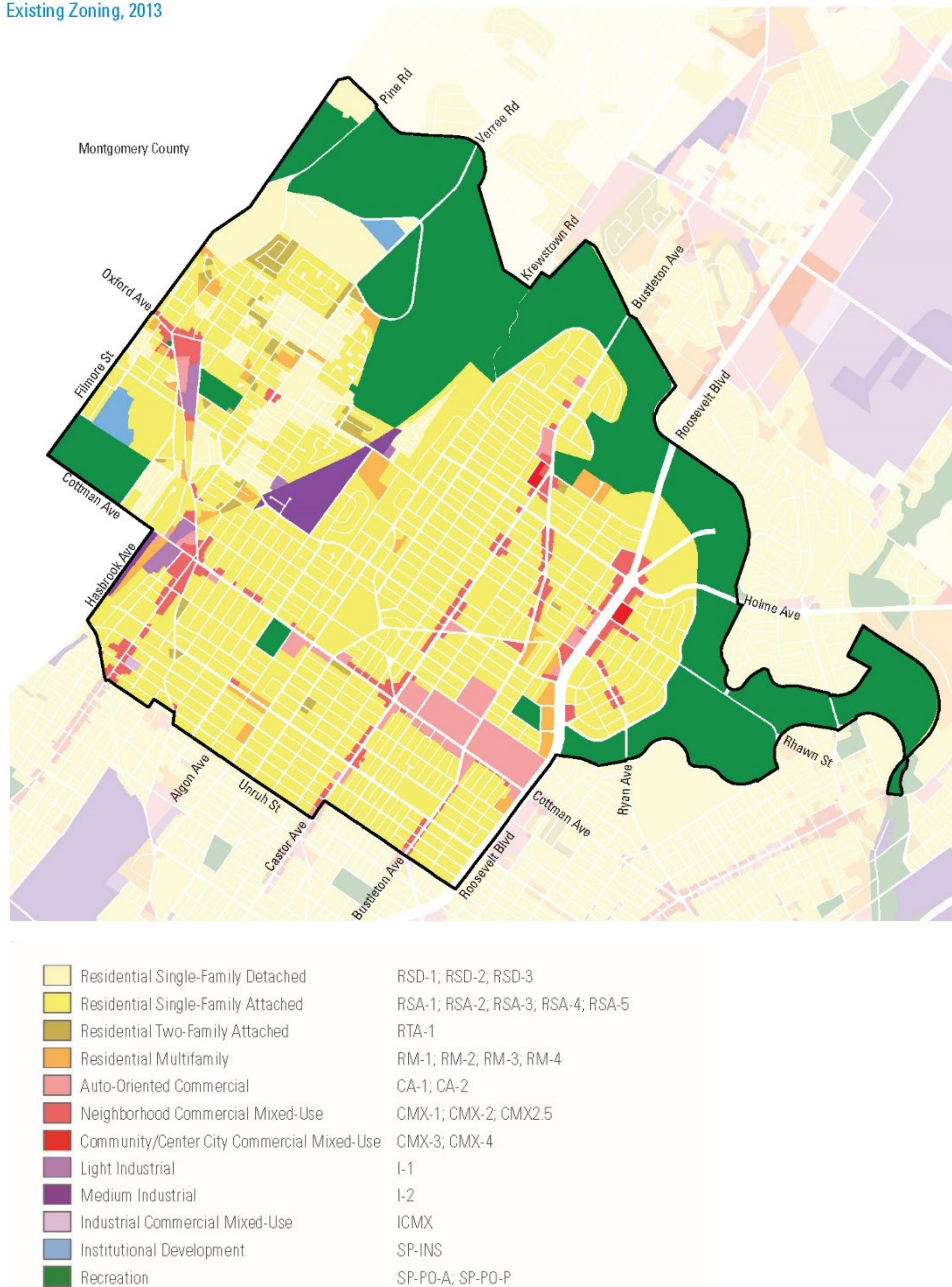
Much of the Mixed-Use Redevelopment Zoning District in Lower Moreland that abuts Abington lies in the Floodplain Conservation District (light blue color).

Philadelphia

Philadelphia and Abington meet where the township's McKinley neighborhood lies adjacent to the Burholme section of the city, and the township's Huntingdon Valley section lies adjacent to the city's Fox Chase and Bustleton neighborhoods).

Existing land uses consist of a mix of residential, institutional, and open space uses; they tend to match one another as they meet at the municipal boundary. These areas will be more interconnected in the next year, when the Pennypack Trail is extended from Abington and Rockledge to the Fox Chase Regional Rail station.

Existing Zoning, 2013



Note: There have been no significant changes to this area's zoning since it was published in 2013.

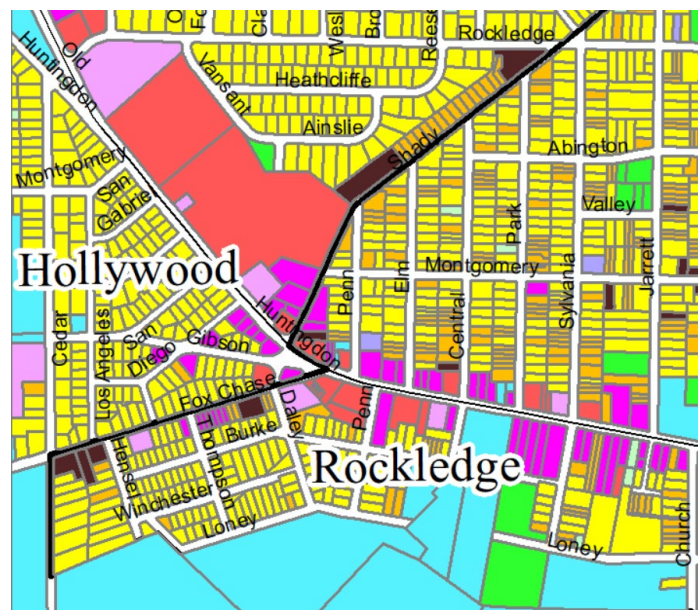
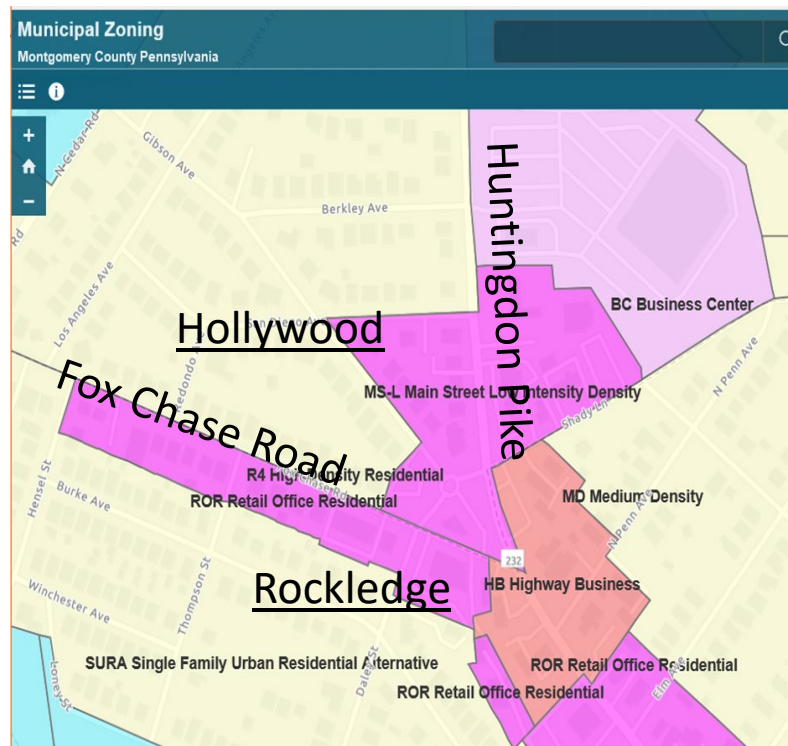
Rockledge

Existing development in Rockledge and Abington is generally compatible with one another. One area where development could be more compatible is along Fox Chase Road. Single-family residential uses in the Hollywood village area (certified eligible for the National Register) are located on the Abington side of the road, while multifamily residential, professional offices, and services are located on the Rockledge side of the road.

The emphasis on Fox Chase Road could be on ensuring that there are no negative impacts from nonresidential uses in Rockledge onto residential properties in Hollywood. Rockledge's comprehensive plan recognizes that this area could be more compatible with the Hollywood neighborhood, and recommends that the borough downzone the

area zoned Retail Office Residential on Fox Chase Road, noting that "the areas behind and across the street from it are totally residential, making Fox Chase Road less suitable for intense commercial development than Huntingdon Pike."

There is an opportunity for Abington and Rockledge to plan together to create a cohesive land use vision for the Hollywood-Rockledge main street area along Huntingdon Pike and Fox Chase Road. This could address the following:



- Connectivity (pedestrian, bicycle, access by the disabled)
- Streetscape (design, street trees and landscaping, street furniture, banners and branding)
- Signage (commercial and wayfinding)

Communication and planning between the two municipalities could also address business retention, development, marketing, and organization for the combined Hollywood-Rockledge commercial corridor. Subsequent implementation measures could include joint applications for public funding.

Springfield

Springfield Township's Future Land Use policy and existing zoning are generally compatible with that of Abington. The future land use categories applying to land bordering Abington consist of "Open Space/Natural Resource Protection" and "Medium Density Residential." The latter category lies adjacent to land that is part of the "Residential" future land use category in Abington.

Upper Dublin

The area where Abington and Upper Dublin meet is one where the predominant existing land use and future land use policy calls for suburban residential development; thus, existing land use and land use policy of the two townships is compatible. Pennsylvania Avenue (which becomes Mt. Carmel Avenue in Abington) merits additional attention and a possible study (note that this issue also affects Springfield and Cheltenham Townships, as the road is located on the municipal boundary of Springfield and Upper Dublin, and of Abington and Cheltenham). A study could consider opportunities for access or station improvements at North Hills, Glenside, and Oreland regional rail stations, including considering how access might be improved where the railroad itself serves as a barrier to pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists. The multiple municipalities that lie along this corridor could pool efforts at funding acquisition in multimunicipal grant applications, thus improving chances of success.

Upper Moreland

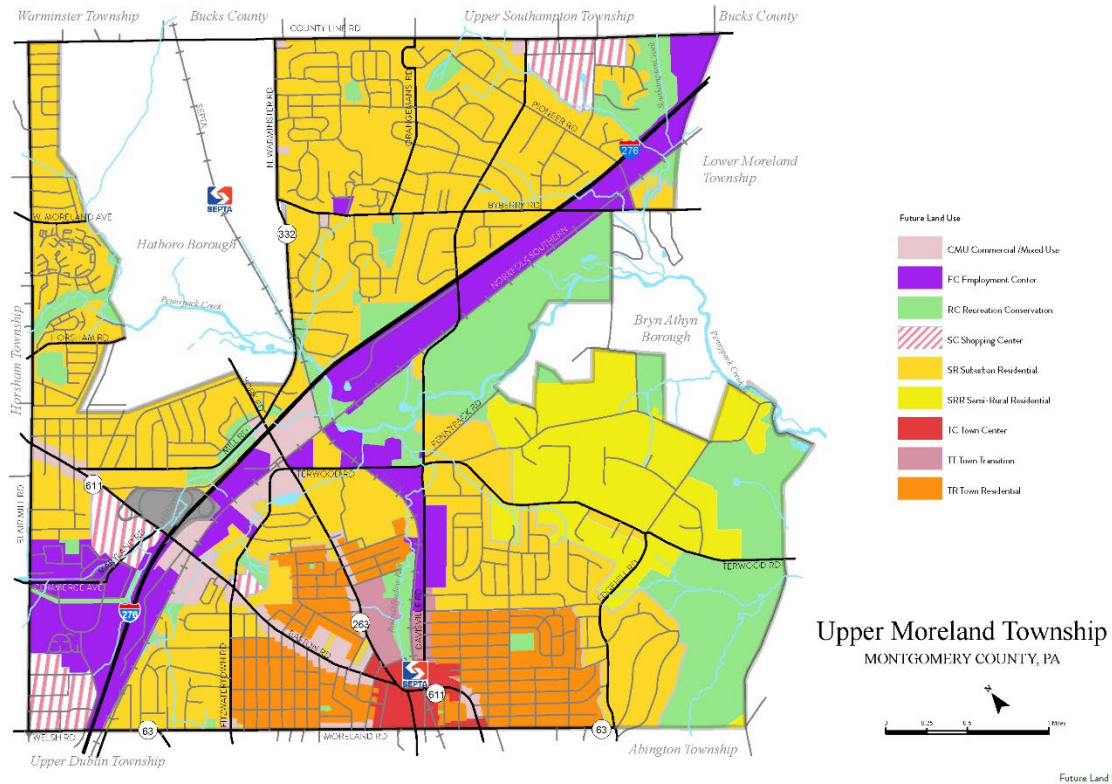
Generally, existing land use in, and the land use policies of, Upper Moreland are compatible with those of Abington's. Future land use maps² in both townships depict "Town Center" future land use areas for both townships in the downtown area that includes the Willow Grove Park Mall, Willow Grove Shopping Center, and the Route 611 and Easton Road corridors. Abington's "Residential" future land use category is aligned with Upper Moreland's "Town Residential"

² Upper Moreland's future land use map is from its comprehensive plan (2020), "UPPERMORELAND 2040."

area closer to downtown Willow Grove, and with Upper Moreland's "Suburban Residential" area farther from the downtown. In the east, the Huntingdon Valley Golf Course spans the municipal boundary; this is part of the "Recreation/Conservation" future land use category in both townships.³

Future Land Use, Upper Moreland

MAP 13.1 FUTURE LAND USE



³ Review note: the draft Abington future land use map does not currently show the golf course as "Recreation/Conservation" but it will be updated to include it.

Although the recommended land uses for downtown Willow Grove are similar in the two townships, Upper Moreland's TC-1 Town Center zoning district allows much taller buildings (65 feet) than Abington's Main Street-Low Intensity/Density (MS-L) District does (35 feet) on its side of the boundary. Developers have proposed, and in one case, built, significant land developments in this area in recent years. These include mixed-use development; mid-rise multifamily residential buildings; suburban-style, one -story retail development; and a relocated train station with a parking garage.

The two communities should communicate when a development proposed along the municipal boundary is more intense or dense than that on the other side of the boundary. In the past, there has been interest among elected and appointed officials in both townships about communicating and planning for downtown Willow Grove.



New development at Willow Grove Shopping Center, Upper Moreland.

There are limited instances along the PA Route 63 corridor where single-family detached residential uses in one township lie across the street from commercial uses in the other township, but the width of Moreland and Welsh Road separates the two different types by nearly 200 feet.

UPPERMORELAND2040: Comprehensive Plan (2020) recommends that the two townships cooperate on land use planning issues where shared interests exist. It lists the following potential examples:

1. Land Use Vision. Creation of a broad conceptual vision for downtown Willow Grove.
2. BID. Discussions about forming a Business Improvement District.
3. Moreland Road Corridor. Streetscape, pedestrian safety, and other improvements to Moreland Road (similar in some ways with Philadelphia and Lower Merion's creation of a Special Services District for City Avenue).

Additional areas for collaboration exist. These include:

1. **Wayfinding Signage System.** Abington has a gateway sign at Route 611 and Moreland Road. Upper Moreland created a wayfinding plan and has obtained funding for implementation. A combined and coherent wayfinding signage system in downtown Willow Grove could function efficiently while strengthening Willow Grove's sense of place—all the while emphasizing the unique character of each township.
2. **Pedestrian Connectivity and Accessibility.** Investments in pedestrian safety and accessibility improvements, along with the level of comfort that sidewalks and crosswalks provide could strengthen the appeal of living, working, or spending leisure time in Willow Grove while enhancing the transit-oriented-development potential of the area.
3. **Improvements to the Intersection of Park Avenue and Moreland Road.** As redevelopment of the area including the Willow Grove Shopping Center in Upper Moreland and the Willow Grove Park Mall area occurs, the townships would benefit by jointly planning for improvements to the intersection. Improvements here should accommodate land use and transportation goals of both townships. This intersection could serve as a major downtown crossroads in Willow Grove while recreating a more traditional urban design, anchored by walkable, transit-oriented development with prominent buildings located on the corners.

Montgomery County

Abington's future land use plan is generally consistent with Montgomery County's comprehensive plan ("MONTCO 2040: A Shared Vision"). There is a minor update that could be made to MONTCO 2040's future land use map to reflect the new future land use map in Vision2035. Township Line Road in McKinley Village is a small mixed-use corridor, which includes existing small-scale retail, restaurant, and service uses. It falls in the "Village Center" future land use area in Vision 2035 but is located in the "Suburban Residential" future land use area in MONTCO 2040.

Regional Cooperation

Communication Forum

Abington will explore initiating regular communication meetings with representatives of neighboring municipalities—particularly those where land development impacts could spill over municipal lines and where the potential benefits of collaborative planning are greater. Such meetings can help ensure that all affected municipalities receive early notification about, and get adequate time to react to significant proposed land developments and their potential impacts.

Regular communication meetings could also identify areas where municipalities might decide to plan together on specific projects. This might include, but is not limited to, small area plans for shared:

- Villages
- Redeveloping commercial areas
- Highway corridors
- Open space areas

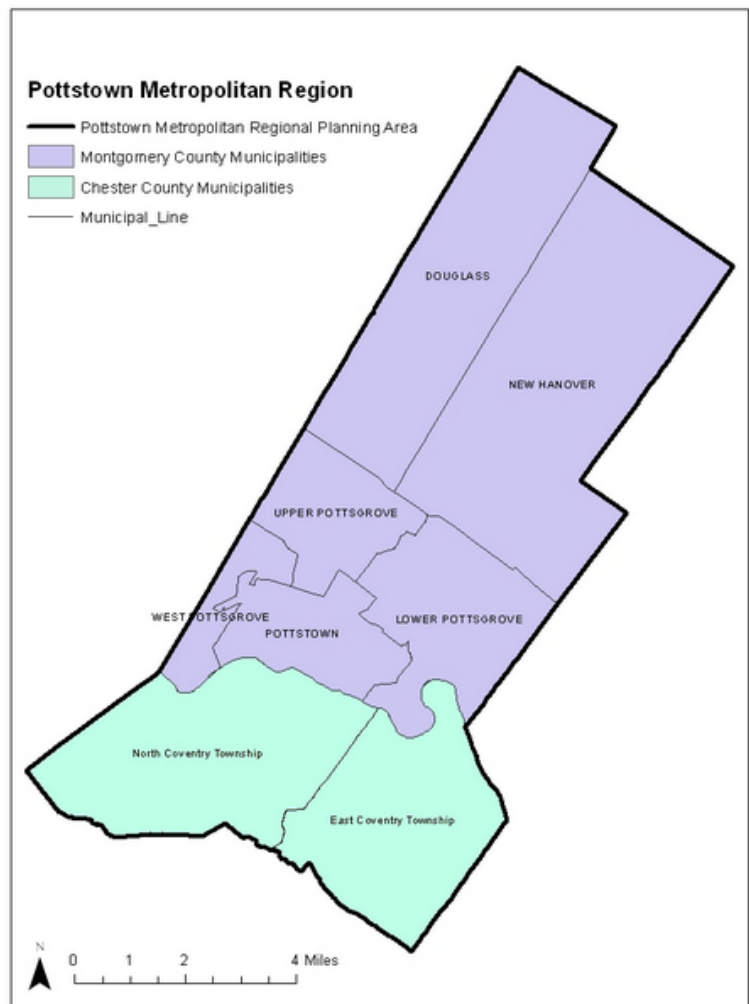
Regional Planning

Over the past decade, there have been informal conversations between Abington and some of its neighbors about regional planning. Regional planning could provide many benefits to the township. The Municipalities Planning Code (PA Act 247)⁴ allows municipalities to create a regional comprehensive plan. Four such plans, along with accompanying regional planning commissions, have been created in Montgomery County since 2005, for the following regions:

- Pottstown Metropolitan
- Indian Valley
- Central Perkiomen Valley
- Upper Perkiomen Valley

Another regional plan operates in the Phoenixville Area.

The organizations use intergovernmental cooperative implementation agreements to clarify the municipalities' roles and responsibilities, and use regional planning commissions to conduct business. The commissions often consist of two members appointed by each municipality, at least one of whom must serve on the municipal



⁴ Municipalities Planning Code (PA Act 247): <https://dced.pa.gov/download/pennsylvania-municipalities-planning-code-act-247-of-1968/>

governing body. When a regional comprehensive plan is created, each municipality keeps its own zoning ordinance. Zoning and land developments must be “generally consistent” with the regional comprehensive plan (or the plan must be amended).

The main goal of creating a regional comprehensive plan is to designate areas for growth and preservation. Eastern Montgomery County is effectively built-out, so a regional plan in the Abington area might designate areas that are appropriate for varying levels of growth (e.g., high, medium, low), along with areas to be preserved for open space and the natural environment.

Benefits

1. Shared provision of land uses. One of the main benefits of regional planning is to share land uses. The Municipalities Planning Code requires that a municipality must provide for all land uses within its boundaries. However, a regional planning group with an adopted regional comprehensive plan can defend from zoning validity challenges by referencing the land uses permitted throughout the region, which many municipalities find to be beneficial.
2. Preference for state and federal funding. A second benefit of a regional planning organization is that applications for state and federal funding may be given preference to applications from individual municipalities.
3. Since 2005, regional planning organizations in Montgomery County have found it beneficial to plan collectively on a variety of topics. Below are a few examples of some of the projects they have worked on:
 - a. Transportation and Community Character Study
 - b. Traffic Study
 - c. Wayfinding Signage Program
 - d. Recreation Mini-Grant Program
 - e. Parks, Recreation, and Culture Map
 - f. Economic Development, Fiscal Impact, and Regional Market Study
 - g. Industrial Marketing Plan
4. Transfer of Development Rights (TDR). TDR programs⁵ may extend over municipal boundaries, promoting growth and development in appropriate areas throughout a wider region. When a developer spends money for the right to develop more intensely in an appropriate area, the developer contributes money toward the preservation of land in an area designated as high value for preservation by the region.

⁵ “Transfer of Development Rights,” by WeConservePA: <https://conservationtools.org/guides/12-transfer-of-development-rights>

Over the longer-term, Abington will review the potential benefits of regional planning⁶ to consider and collectively address shared land use opportunities or concerns in the municipalities along the Route 611 corridor in Montgomery County and develop proactive regional initiatives in one of the following areas:

- Land use. Example: a regional approach to providing for all land uses and meeting “fair share”

⁶ Another more substantial level of cooperation is provided for under the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code: creation of a joint municipal comprehensive plan allows for two or more

Regional Planning

All authority for planning in townships and boroughs, including regional planning, is provided by the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC), Act 247 of 1968, as reenacted and amended. The MPC recognizes regional comprehensive plans as a legitimate land use and growth management tool that can be implemented by any number of contiguous municipalities or non-contiguous municipalities... The MPC also grants regional comprehensive plans the same legal status as municipal comprehensive plans, requiring zoning, subdivision and land development regulations and capital improvement programs to generally further the goals and policies of the plan. In order to implement a regional comprehensive plan, the MPC specifically permits local governments to enter into cooperative agreements that lay out specific roles and responsibilities for participants.

- *From Regional Planning Handbook, by Montgomery County Planning Commission (2010)*

Role of Montgomery County Planning Commission (MCPC)

MCPC provides community planning assistance services on a contractual basis to the regional planning commissions in the county. MCPC effectively serves as the staff planner to the regional commissions, preparing intergovernmental cooperative implementation agreements, regional comprehensive plans, regional studies, and facilitating regular planning commission meetings.

housing obligations.

- **Transportation.** Example (1) Implementation of Montco Pikes: A Vision Plan for 6 County Roads (2022)⁷. The Easton Road recommendations apply to Abington, Cheltenham, and Upper Moreland, and (2) Planning for Pennsylvania Turnpike interchanges. Discussions are currently being held about this with Abington and multiple other municipalities in eastern Montgomery County.
- **Environment.** Example: including watershed management plans and responses to water contamination from the former Willow Grove air base.
- **Sustainability.** Example: having a greater impact on carbon emission reduction by acting collectively.
- **Parks and recreation.** Example: planning together to maximize the utility of the regional parks and recreation system.

A nascent regional planning movement can be helped along by one municipality that willingly takes the lead on initiating conversations and helping facilitate meetings. Existing planning efforts involving multiple municipalities in the region could serve as the beginning of routine multimunicipal communication groups and any subsequent regional planning initiatives.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Initiation of regular communication meetings with neighboring municipalities.

Creation of small area plan with adjacent municipality for selected area on municipal boundary.

Goals

1. Maintain communication with neighboring municipalities to give and receive information about land development activity that has impacts that cross municipal boundaries.
2. Pursue regional solutions to planning issues that cross municipal boundaries.

Issues for Consideration

The following issues' perceived importance may influence the Compatibility with the Development and Plans of Surrounding Areas chapter's recommendations:

municipalities to prepare a joint zoning ordinance. This technique is popular in Berks County and has also been used in Delaware County.

⁷ Montco Pikes: A Vision Plan for 6 County Roads (2022):

<https://www.montcopa.org/DocumentCenter/View/36045/Montco-Pikes-Web-Version-7-29-22>

- Regular communication with neighboring municipalities about land development activities.
- Submission of multimunicipal grant applications for planning implementation projects (multimunicipal applications are often given favorable treatment by funding sources).
- Identification of a specific area for development of a small-area plan, in collaboration with an adjacent municipality or municipalities.
- Identification of additional opportunities for multimunicipal cooperation and their pursuit. Examples include:
 - Economic development, including support for a business association, special services district, or Business Improvement District (BID).
 - Open Space Acquisition.
- Formation or participation in a regional planning organization.

Local Examples of Multimunicipal Planning

- City Avenue Special Services District (Lower Merion and Philadelphia). This projects works on capital projects, marketing, public safety, and revitalization.
- Wissahickon Clean Water Partnership. Abington and 12 other municipalities and four wastewater treatment plants are working together to prepare a comprehensive Water Quality Improvement Plan.
- Regional Planning:
 - Pottstown Metropolitan Region (eight municipalities in two counties)
 - Phoenixville Region (six municipalities)
 - Central Perkiomen Valley Region (six municipalities)
 - Upper Perkiomen Valley Region (six municipalities)
 - Indian Valley Region (six municipalities)
- Springfield Township and Clifton Heights Borough Joint Comprehensive Plan.
- Keystone Employment and Economic Plan (by Pottstown and West Pottsgrove). This plan addresses the Keystone Boulevard corridor and includes implementation commitments.