

# Rural Center Landscapes Design Guide

Chester County, PA





Prepared by the Chester County Planning Commission  
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This is the fourth of six design guides the Planning Commission is preparing for Chester County's Landscape categories. The framework for each guide will be the same to support your community's objectives, values, and priorities in regard to the character of new development.

## Purpose

Chester County is committed to quality of design in its built environment.

Quality design of new development is characterized by context sensitivity and the thoughtful arrangement of details that define streets, public spaces, and communities. Ultimately, quality design improves a community's function and appearance by unifying diverse elements.

The purpose of this guide is to:

- Foster new development that is compatible with community and historic character
- Protect residential neighborhoods from adverse impacts
- Encourage walkability and alternative modes of transportation
- Protect and restore the environment
- Guide appropriate development

The design elements in this guide are focused on locations where new development is most likely to occur—underutilized developed land, villages with expansion or rehabilitation potential, infill sites that interconnect business areas, and undeveloped land close to public utilities.



*View of Ludwig's Village, a multi-tenant business site with rural center characteristics.*




# Long-term Vision

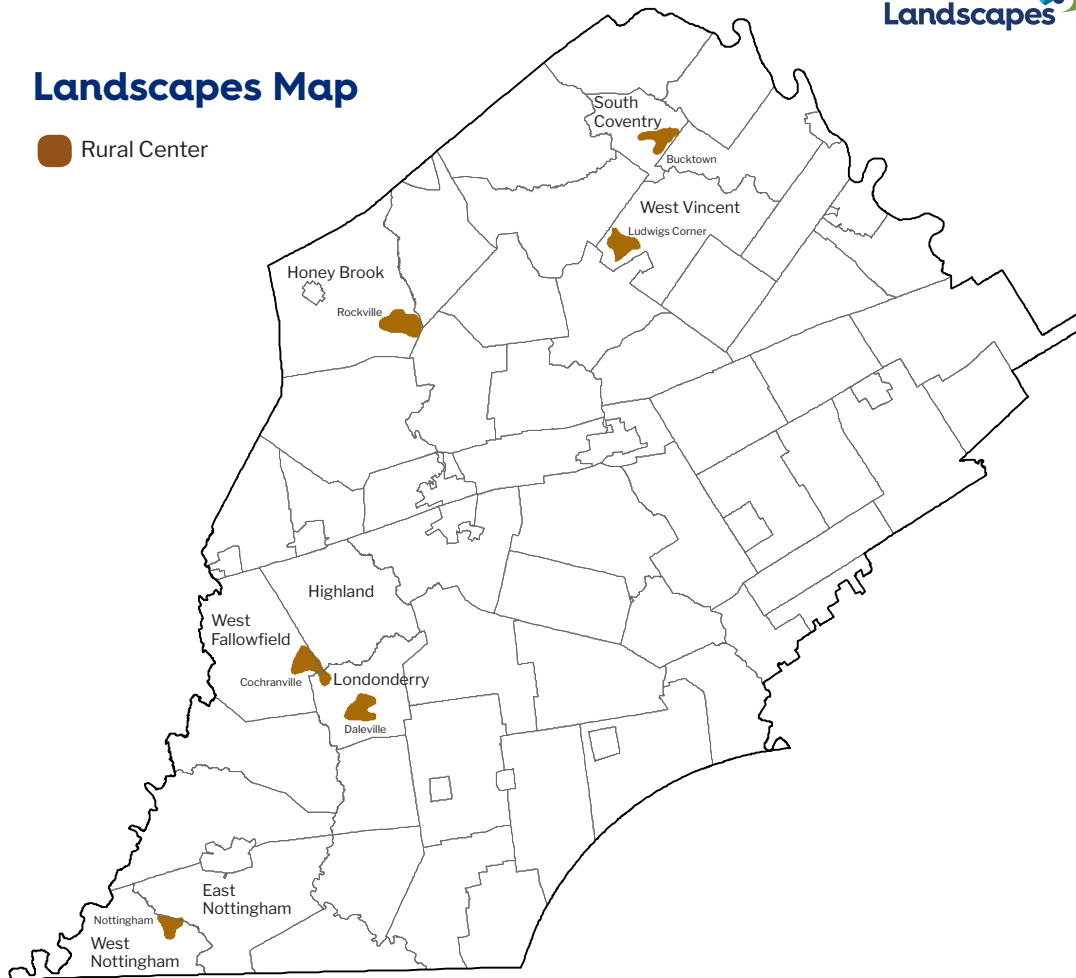
The vision for Rural Center landscapes is a traditional rural village which is allowed to expand over time to contain a mix of housing, local commercial, and institutional uses that serve the surrounding rural and agricultural areas. Acting as community focal points for the surrounding area, Rural Centers will accommodate limited growth. Transportation infrastructure and amenities are provided at a village scale and rural character, with a focus on walkability within the core.

**Rural Center** landscapes are located at historic crossroads and are primarily surrounded by Chester County’s rural resource areas.



## Landscapes Map

 Rural Center



# Format

The planning principles and design elements established in the *Landscapes3* vision for the Rural Center landscapes serve as the basis for the format of this guide.

## Planning Principles

The key objectives, values, and priorities to consider when creating long range plans, investing in infrastructure, or evaluating proposed development.

This section has four themes: **Growth Outlook, Preservation Focus, Land Use Patterns,** and **Infrastructure.** The importance of each principle is discussed and examples of supportive policies that guide municipal action and facilitate private investment are listed. For further information, a link to on-line resources is provided.

## Design Elements

The guidelines for the treatment of development and related features based on well-established patterns of building and quality design.

This section has three themes: **Building Character, Site Amenities,** and **Transportation.** Each guideline is introduced with an overview of “why” it is important to the health, safety, and welfare of the county’s Suburban landscapes. The overview is followed by an illustration or graphic to express design considerations and best practices to carry out each design element. A regulatory strategy from a local or national source is found at the bottom of each topic as well as a link to additional on-line resources.

CHAPTER 2 Planning Principles

**PLANNING THEME** — LAND USE PATTERNS

**PRINCIPLE & RATIONALE** — **Variety of housing types and commercial buildings**  
 Allowing a variety of housing types provides affordable opportunities for diverse populations and the local workforce. Variety in commercial buildings encourages the development of employment opportunities and potential for adaptive reuse of historic buildings.

**COUNTY EXAMPLE** —   
 A variety of housing is available in Cochranville and is located in proximity to commercial services.

**SUPPORTIVE POLICIES** — **Example Policies**  
 • Update residential zoning districts to allow missing middle housing, smaller residential lots, multi-generational homes, and principal and accessory residential dwellings on the same lot.  
 • Accommodate higher-density residential housing through zoning, especially near existing or planned commercial areas and where infrastructure capacity exists or is planned.  
 • Encourage mixed-income developments on the same site, development, or immediate neighborhood.  
 • Encourage housing that provides easy access to public transit and other efficient modes of transportation.

**MUNICIPAL PLAN EXAMPLE POLICY** — **MUNICIPAL EXAMPLE**  
 • Provide for a mix of housing types to accommodate households at various life stages and income levels. [West Cocal Township Comprehensive Plan, 2021, p. 26.](#)

**ONLINE TOOL** — **Toolbox**  
[Housing Diversity](#)  
[Infill Development](#)  
[Residential Conversions](#)

**LAND USE PATTERNS** — **Mix of uses on properties**  
 Concentrating a mix of uses within the core of Rural Centers strengthens community walkability, interaction, and viability.

  
 Weatherstone Town Center in Ludwigs Corner, West Vincent Township, provides traditional first floor commercial space with residential units on second and third floors.

**Example Policies**  
 • Apply mixed-use zoning to create desirable neighborhoods, maintain compatible scale, respect views, and enhance the streetscape and pedestrian environment.  
 • Identify areas and appropriate uses for infill development.  
 • Allow a limited amount of planned, high-quality commercial, light industrial, business, and mixed use development.  
 • Discourage the development of “big-box” stores on the periphery of core areas.

**MUNICIPAL EXAMPLE**  
 • Allow mixed uses consistent with historic context to promote viability. [West Pikealand Comprehensive Plan Update, 2010, p. 4-4.](#)

**Toolbox**  
[Mixed Use Development](#)  
[Brownfield Redevelopment](#)  
[Greyfield Redevelopment](#)  
[Commercial Landscape Series](#)

CHAPTER 3 Design Elements

**TRANSPORTATION** — **Pathways and sidewalks along streets and between buildings**  
 Safe accommodation for pedestrians is an essential part of any site design. Pathways and sidewalks provide safe transportation options between local destinations and provide enjoyable recreational opportunities that encourage healthy lifestyles and enhance the quality of life within a community.

**DESIGN THEME** — **DESIGN ELEMENT & RATIONALE**

**DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS** — **Promote a pedestrian-friendly environment**  
 Create pedestrian gathering areas with shade trees, plantings, and benches on public or private land.

**DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS** — **Connect buildings to the pedestrian network**  
 Where buildings are required to be set back far from the street, a strong pedestrian element should be developed to connect pedestrians to the local businesses and other uses in the surrounding area.

**DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS** — **Establish safe pedestrian crossings**  
 Where pedestrian circulation paths cross vehicular routes, provide a change in paving materials, textures or colors to emphasize the conflict point, improve visibility, enhance safety and add aesthetic appeal. Install and maintain continental crosswalk striping to promote driver compliance.

**DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS** — **Create a continuous pedestrian network**  
 Establish clearly visible and direct pedestrian paths between neighboring buildings, between buildings and outlying parking areas, and between buildings and transit facilities.

**REGULATORY STRATEGY** — **Pedestrian design standards**  
 Sidewalks at least five feet in width are required along all road frontages. Sidewalks are required to connect the road frontage sidewalks to all front building entrances, parking areas, primary park areas, walking trails located in Red Hill Borough, open space, and any other destination that generates pedestrian traffic. Sidewalks shall connect to existing sidewalks on abutting tracts and other nearby pedestrian destination points. [Borough of Red Hill, PA, Zoning Ordinance, Section 27.319, 6, B, 1.3-4.](#)

**ONLINE TOOL** — **Toolbox**  
[Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities Design](#)  
[Chester County Multimodal Handbook](#)









# Planning Principles

Key objectives, values, and priorities to consider when creating long range plans, investing in infrastructure, or evaluating proposed development

**GROWTH OUTLOOK**  
**PRESERVATION FOCUS**  
**LAND USE PATTERNS**  
**INFRASTRUCTURE**

**GROWTH OUTLOOK**

**Limited future growth**

The county’s Rural Center landscapes will accommodate limited growth that contains a mix of housing, commercial, and institutional uses at a village scale and is highly walkable at its core.



*Cochranville in West Fallowfield Township has residential, commercial, and industrial zoning districts to accommodate limited growth.*

**Example Policies**

- Promote infill in appropriate locations, and consider providing incentives to encourage redevelopment of key properties.
- Protect and enhance unique rural characteristics by enforcing design standards and ensuring site designs coordinate with surrounding vicinity and adjoining developments.
- Coordinate planning and community development efforts on a regional level to address needs and issues and maximize efficiency and cost effectiveness of services.

**MUNICIPAL EXAMPLE**

- Require that developments provide for the needed infrastructure improvements to support their impacts, consistent with the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC).

Unionville Area Regional Comprehensive Plan, 2011; p.2-5. ▶

**Toolbox**

- Official Map ▶
- Growth Boundaries ▶

**GROWTH OUTLOOK**

**Growth maintains economic viability and meets fair share housing requirements**

Planning for regional household growth forecasts and providing housing opportunities that support local employment and community needs fosters economic competitiveness.



*Zoning for duplexes, like this one in West Nottingham Township, and other housing types that provide multiple units in a scale and form compatible with single-family homes can help meet a municipality’s full array of housing needs.*

**Example Policies**

- Promote adaptive reuse of vacant or underutilized commercial buildings for multi-family housing.
- Support efforts by developers to build or rehabilitate quality affordable housing of various housing types.
- Promote a variety of lot sizes and housing types in residential developments to establish a range in dwellings and, in turn, create housing choices for residents.
- Maintain a healthy mix of residential housing ownership and rental choices to help address both local and regional housing needs.

**MUNICIPAL EXAMPLE**

- Ensure equal access to housing for those classes protected under the federal Fair Housing Act.

Kennett Square Borough, Comprehensive Plan, 2013; p.2-4. ▶

**Toolbox**

- Smart Growth ▶
- Affordably-priced Homes ▶

**GROWTH OUTLOOK****Growth serves surrounding rural and agricultural landscapes**

Creating an economic strategy that enhances the viability of surrounding agricultural lands and conserves natural landscapes and scenic vistas helps preserve the sense of place of Rural Center communities.



*A local farm service and product store in South Coventry Township helps promote the resource economy in the region and brings rural products to the market.*

**Example Policies**

- Support transfer of development rights areas to protect undeveloped land and promote growth in existing neighborhoods and commercial cores.
- Cluster developments in a manner to preserve water quality, farms, unfragmented wildlife corridors, and woodlands.
- Discourage expansion of non-conforming uses on lands designated Rural or Agricultural.
- Allow appropriately scaled commercial and institutional uses that serve the needs of the local community.

**MUNICIPAL EXAMPLE**

- Maintain our Township's rural character, with particular emphasis on agriculture as a viable way of life, and protect our Borough's small-town appeal, neighborhood character, and walkable scale as important assets.

Honey Brook Township and Borough Comprehensive Plan, 2015; p. 10. ▶

**Toolbox**

Transferable Development Rights (TDR) ▶

**PRESERVATION FOCUS****Preservation and reuse of historic buildings in their historic context**

Preserving historic buildings is essential to connect with a community's past, provide a sense of continuity and permanence, and maintain character. Reuse of historic buildings helps support sustainability by reducing the need to obtain additional resources for new building construction.



*Kimberton in East Pikeland Township is an example of a village with historic characteristics.*

**Example Policies**

- Identify, preserve and/ or revitalize community landmarks, focal points and vistas to support community identity and a 'sense of place'.
- Encourage rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of existing buildings rather than demolition.
- Encourage restoration and maintenance of historic properties through code flexibility, fee reductions, and other regulatory and financial incentives.
- Support efforts to educate residents on the long-term value of historic resources to the community.

**MUNICIPAL EXAMPLE**

- Look for opportunities to enhance the identity of historic Glenmoore Village through adaptive reuse incentives, and pathways connecting the village to surrounding parks, school and neighborhoods.

Wallace Township Comprehensive Plan, 2015; p. 46. ▶

**Toolbox**

Adaptive Reuse ▶

Historic Resource Protection Standards ▶

LAND USE PATTERNS

**Variety of housing types and commercial buildings**

Allowing a variety of housing types provides affordable opportunities for diverse populations and the local workforce. Variety in commercial buildings encourages the development of employment opportunities and potential for adaptive reuse of historic buildings.



A variety of housing is available in Cochranville and is located in proximity to commercial services.

**Example Policies**

- Update residential zoning districts to allow missing middle housing, smaller residential lots, multi-generational homes, and principal and accessory residential dwellings on the same lot.
- Accommodate higher-density residential housing through zoning, especially near existing or planned commercial areas and where infrastructure capacity exists or is planned.
- Encourage mixed-income developments on the same site, development, or immediate neighborhood.
- Encourage housing that provides easy access to public transit and other efficient modes of transportation.

**MUNICIPAL EXAMPLE**

- Provide for a mix of housing types to accommodate households at various life stages and income levels.  
West Caln Township Comprehensive Plan, 2020; p. 26. ▶

**Toolbox**

- Housing Diversity ▶
- Infill Development ▶
- Residential Conversions ▶

LAND USE PATTERNS

**Mix of uses on properties**

Concentrating a mix of uses within the core of Rural Centers strengthens community walkability, interaction, and viability.



Weatherstone Town Center in Ludwigs Corner, West Vincent Township, provides traditional first floor commercial space with residential units on second and third floors.

**Example Policies**

- Apply mixed-use zoning to create desirable neighborhoods, maintain compatible scale, respect views, and enhance the streetscape and pedestrian environment.
- Identify areas and appropriate uses for infill development.
- Allow a limited amount of planned, high-quality commercial, light industrial, business, and mixed use development.
- Discourage the development of “big-box” stores on the periphery of core areas.

**MUNICIPAL EXAMPLE**

- Allow mixed uses consistent with historic context to promote viability.  
West Pikeland Comprehensive Plan Update, 2010; p. 4-4. ▶

**Toolbox**

- Mixed-use Development ▶
- Brownfield Redevelopment ▶
- Greyfield Redevelopment ▶
- Commercial Landscape Series ▶

## LAND USE PATTERNS

### Institutional focal points, such as schools, municipal buildings, and places of worship

Institutional focal points compatible in scale and form with existing Rural Center settings provide convenience and a sense of community.



The Henrietta Hankin Branch Library serves as a community center for the northern region of Chester County, providing work space, meeting rooms, and a variety of educational and cultural programs.

#### Example Policies

- Identify appropriate sites for new or future expansion and development of institutions and community service facilities.
- Include institutional and community services as part of large developments and make them focal points.
- Connect new or expanded institutions and community services with other uses via universally accessible sidewalks, trails, and other transportation modes.
- Use an official map to identify sites for public and quasi-public purposes that are of sufficient size to meet current and future needs.

#### MUNICIPAL EXAMPLE

- Pursue joint public/private recreation initiatives, and support private and institutional entities that provide community recreation opportunities such as organized team sports, community events, active recreation areas, and school related play and athletics.

South Coventry Township Comprehensive Plan Update, 2016; p. 2-8. ▶

## LAND USE PATTERNS

### Farmers' markets and other direct to consumer sales

Encouraging and facilitating farmers' markets and other appropriate agricultural activities in Rural Center landscapes provides greater access to health, social, and economic benefits, such as healthier eating habits, educational opportunities, and lower food distribution costs.



Farmers with land surrounding Rural Centers can increase revenue by directly marketing their farm and its products to consumers.

#### Example Policies

- Promote rural products and support other opportunities connecting Rural Centers to the rural resource economy.
- Amend ordinances to reduce potential regulatory barriers to agricultural related businesses and respond to evolving agricultural industry trends, such as accessory farm businesses and agritainment.
- Update municipal branding to promote agritourism.
- Help support "buy local" campaigns.

#### MUNICIPAL EXAMPLE

- Encourage agricultural related businesses such as community supported agriculture (CSAs), and farm markets.

Unionville Area Regional Comprehensive Plan, 2011; p. 2-6. ▶

#### Toolbox

- Farmers' Markets ▶
- Secondary Farm Business ▶

**INFRASTRUCTURE**

**Small parks or a town square for community gatherings**

Small parks, like pocket parks, and other public spaces provide places to connect to nature, improve community identity, support human fitness and health, enhance property values, and foster civic bonds.



*Weatherstone Town Center provides a public square for events and small gatherings adjacent to its mixed uses.*

**Example Policies**

- Integrate public squares and art into proposed development and use a design that reflects local cultural and historical themes.
- Maximize public use places where several different uses (residential, retail, office) are clustered.
- Adhere to Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CEPTED) standards of safety.
- Maintain and enhance existing small parks and public greens.

**MUNICIPAL EXAMPLE**

- Keep abreast of potential land sales which are suitable for park land. Design a method of tracking properties of high interest of acquisition for park land. Be proactive in taking steps to ensure the Township will have the first option of acquisition.

Honey Brook Township Comprehensive Recreation, Parks, Open Space and Greenway Plan, 2020; p. 66. ▶

**Toolbox**

Urban Green Spaces ▶

**INFRASTRUCTURE**

**Pathways between surrounding residential areas and the core**

Bicycle and pedestrian facility connections between residential areas and core areas of communities with multiple activities creates safer communities, healthier people, and more economically viable places.



*The core of Elverson Borough is surrounded by residences and is accessible by sidewalks. A recently completed Active Transportation Plan serves as a guide to further multimodal connections within and around the community.*

**Example Policies**

- Create a bike and pedestrian plan.
- Establish connectivity requirements for all development and redevelopment projects.
- Provide opportunities to connect municipal facilities, schools and other community uses with pedestrian pathways, available for use by students, employees, and residents.
- Provide direct pedestrian connections between adjacent uses within villages to ensure safe and convenient pedestrian movement.

**MUNICIPAL EXAMPLE**

- Maximize pedestrian access and connections into and within Guthriesville Village, and create an interconnected network of accessways, trails, and sidewalks.

East Brandywine Township Comprehensive Plan, 2022; p. 3.1. ▶

**Toolbox**

Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities: Policy ▶

Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities: Design ▶

## INFRASTRUCTURE

### Limited public or community sewer and water service

Encouraging infill and development in areas planned for village center growth before extending sewer and water infrastructure to areas beyond saves on unnecessary expansion and maintenance costs.



*The Court at Chester Springs in West Vincent Township is a recent townhouse and single-family home development that connects to public water infrastructure and has community sewer service.*

#### Example Policies

- Focus on the complete development of identified growth areas before further extending public water and sewer.
- Support and participate in multi-municipal planning initiatives to encourage compatible land use patterns in adjoining areas, coordination of infrastructure development, and continuation of natural resource protection.
- Coordinate the Act 537 Sewage Facilities Plan with the Future Land Use Plan.
- Ensure the availability or feasibility of environmentally sound sewage treatment systems and disposal techniques to serve existing development and appropriate residential and business growth.

#### MUNICIPAL EXAMPLE

- Provide efficient and environmentally sound sewer and water services that support regional land use and development purposes.

Phoenixville Regional Comprehensive Plan Update, 2021; p. 8.1. ▶

#### Toolbox

Compact Development Design ▶

## INFRASTRUCTURE

### Appropriately scaled roadways

Appropriately scaled roadways are context sensitive, limit the use of excess materials, and provide for non-vehicular travel.



*In Marshallton, streetscape improvements included context sensitive treatments that respect the scale of the village's historic main street.*

#### Example Policies

- Maintain a roadway network that safely and effectively accommodates vehicular traffic supporting other community objectives for pedestrian and bicycle mobility as well as agricultural needs.
- Consider complete streets strategies as appropriate in both new development and existing road projects to ensure safety and promote better circulation.
- Build a cohesive streetscape with street trees and other landscaping, street lights, sidewalks, and other pedestrian amenities.
- Initiate and evaluate a variety of traffic calming techniques for local roads.

#### MUNICIPAL EXAMPLE

- Develop and establish a traffic calming policy and procedures that outline how requests for traffic calming measures are reviewed, evaluated, and recommended for implementation.

London Britain Township Comprehensive Plan Update, 2019; p. 46. ▶

#### Toolbox

Chester County Transportation Policies ▶

Complete Streets Policy ▶

Multimodal Circulation Handbook for Chester County, PA ▶

**INFRASTRUCTURE****Broadband access and modern communications infrastructure**

Modern high quality communication infrastructure (wireless networks, fiber optics, and broadband telecommunications) is important to residents and businesses, and is vital to economic development.



*As the population ages, remote work and school is more prevalent, and the need to connect people and communities increases, access to high speed, reliable internet service in rural places is more important than ever.*

**Example Policies**

- Promote digital infrastructure that provides broadband data communications to residents.
- Simplify and shorten the process for obtaining necessary permits for communication facilities while protecting the visual character of the community.
- Support the expansion and development of sophisticated communication facilities and networks required by businesses that use advanced technology.
- Establish provisions to place cables and wires underground, wherever feasible.

**MUNICIPAL EXAMPLE**

- Support the provision of communication infrastructure that meets residential, business, and institutional needs in a manner that protects residents' interests.

**South Coventry Township Comprehensive Plan Update, 2016; p. 2-4. ►**





# Design Elements

Guidelines for the treatment of development and related features based on well-established patterns of building and quality design

**BUILDING CHARACTER**

**SITE AMENITIES**

**TRANSPORTATION**

Compact traditional village form

Buildings that typically stand alone, often with landscaping around them

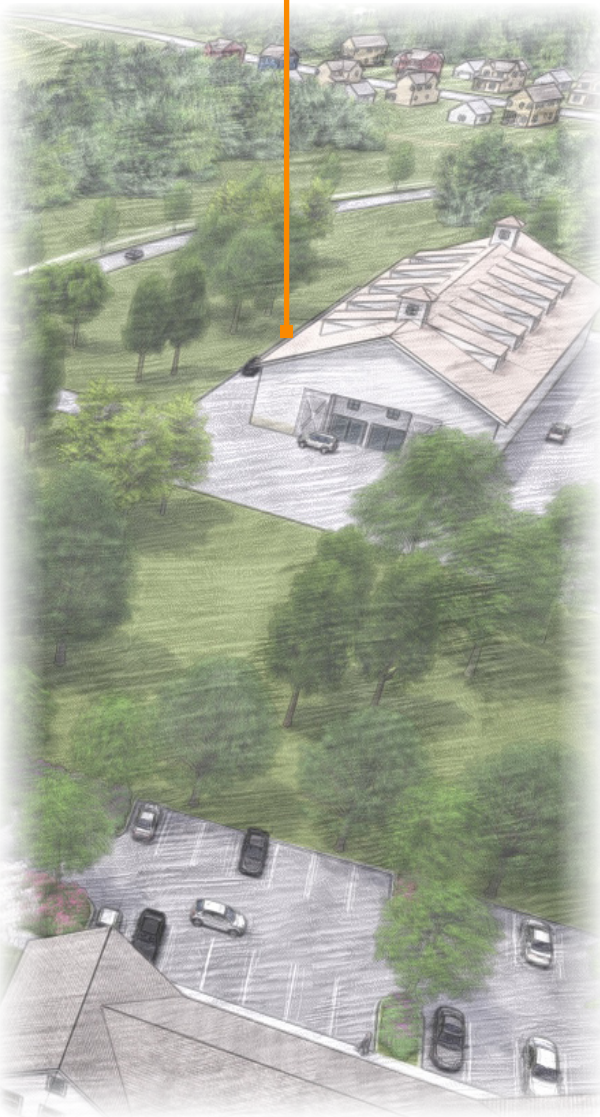


One to three story height for buildings

Small scale, externally illuminated signs

Residential design characteristics for non-residential buildings

**Larger footprint buildings located behind small-scale, village-style buildings**



## BUILDING CHARACTER

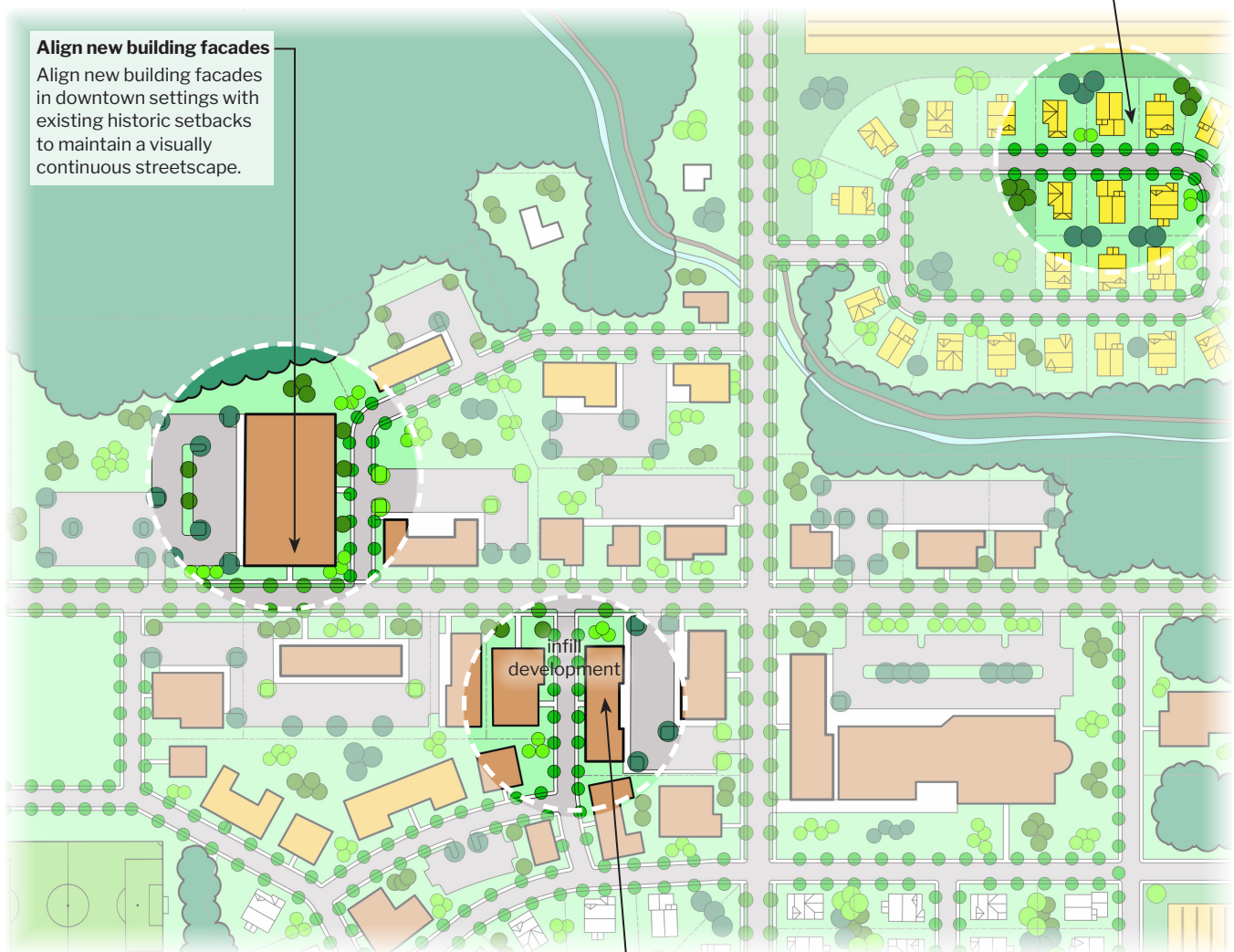
High quality architecture and design contributes to sense of place, supports walkability, and enhances the public realm. This section provides guidance on how the design of new buildings should relate to their surrounding context and engage people in the streetscape.

**BUILDING CHARACTER**

# Compact traditional village form

Mixing uses and forms in a compact area reflects a traditional way of building communities. This development approach helps avoid the problems associated with sprawl development, such as low density, an auto-centric orientation, a single use focus, and a lack of distinctive character.

## Illustrative Plan



**Align new building facades**  
Align new building facades in downtown settings with existing historic setbacks to maintain a visually continuous streetscape.

**Design traditional neighborhoods**  
Design varied residential lot sizes and housing types in traditional village densities and patterns.

infill development

**Protect existing character**  
Use a common scale and massing for new buildings to ensure compatibility with adjacent development.

**Complementary character**  
New development shall be designed to supplement the historic character of the adjacent community (Village of Cochranville), through building placement, style, dimensions, and construction materials, and overall site design.

Highland Township, Zoning Ordinance, Section 303.4, A. ▶

- Toolbox**
- Mixed-use Development ▶
  - Traditional Neighborhood Development ▶

**BUILDING CHARACTER**

## Larger footprint buildings located behind small-scale, village-style buildings

Small-scale, village style buildings contribute to the sense of place of Rural Center streetscapes. Monolithic “big-box” structures surrounded by extensive parking lots are out of place, particularly in central business areas. If larger footprint buildings are allowed, such as schools, churches, or industrial structures, they should be set back from roads and screened with landscaping and/or smaller buildings to reduce the contrast with the scale of traditional village type buildings.

### Create a cohesive development identity

For multiple-building commercial developments, including pad site buildings, use similar building materials and architectural details to create unified and harmonious building compositions.

### Minimize the bulk of buildings

Avoid a boxy appearance of buildings and flat wall planes by articulating building forms and elevations to create interesting roof lines, building shapes, and patterns of shade and shadow.



### Building width

For buildings located within 150 feet of the ultimate right-of-way lines of Main Street, Maple Avenue or Route 113, the maximum dimension of the building shall not exceed 75 feet, measured horizontally, parallel to exterior walls.

[1] An existing building with significant portions built before 1940 may be expanded to exceed the maximum of 75 feet, provided that such expansions are to the rear or side of the building, the expansions are compatible with the historic village character (such as including architectural forms and treatments that are typical in the village), and additions to the side are set back at least 10 feet from the front facade of the building. Architectural drawings shall be provided to the Township to demonstrate compliance. All such expansions, however, may not result in an overall dimension greater than 100 feet.

(b) For buildings located 150 feet or more from the ultimate right-of-way lines of Main Street, Maple Avenue or Route 113, the maximum building dimension may exceed 75 feet, measured horizontally, provided that the following requirements are met:

[1] A building with a residential character that is compatible with the historic village character exists within the one-hundred-fifty-foot area between the street ultimate right-of-way of Main Street, Maple Avenue or Route 113 and the proposed building.

[2] The proposed building has an offset in the facade that is at least 10 feet in depth every 50 horizontal feet of facade length that is visible (i.e., not blocked from view by another building) from Main Street, Maple Avenue or Route 113.

Lower Salford Township, PA, Zoning Ordinance, Section 164.70.5, A, 1-2. ▶

**Toolbox**  
Compact Development Design ▶

**BUILDING CHARACTER**

**Buildings that typically stand alone, often with landscaping around them**

The traditional development pattern of Rural Centers is comprised of buildings and the spaces around them with a human scale. Acknowledging historic context, defining a visual and pedestrian connection to the street, clustering stand alone buildings, and careful landscaping can successfully integrate new development.



**Place buildings close to the street**

When feasible, place buildings close to the street to frame the public realm and encourage pedestrian engagement with the building.

**Orient buildings toward the street**

Buildings should be oriented with primary entrances and windows facing the street. Buildings that face more than one street should provide pedestrian friendly building design features such as windows, doors, and walkways along both streets.

**Build-to-line**

Determined by averaging the setbacks of the adjacent existing buildings provided adjacent buildings are a minimum of 10 feet from the right-of-way line.

Highland Township, Zoning Ordinance, Section 303.3, B, 6, a. ▶

**Toolbox**  
Traditional Neighborhood Development ▶

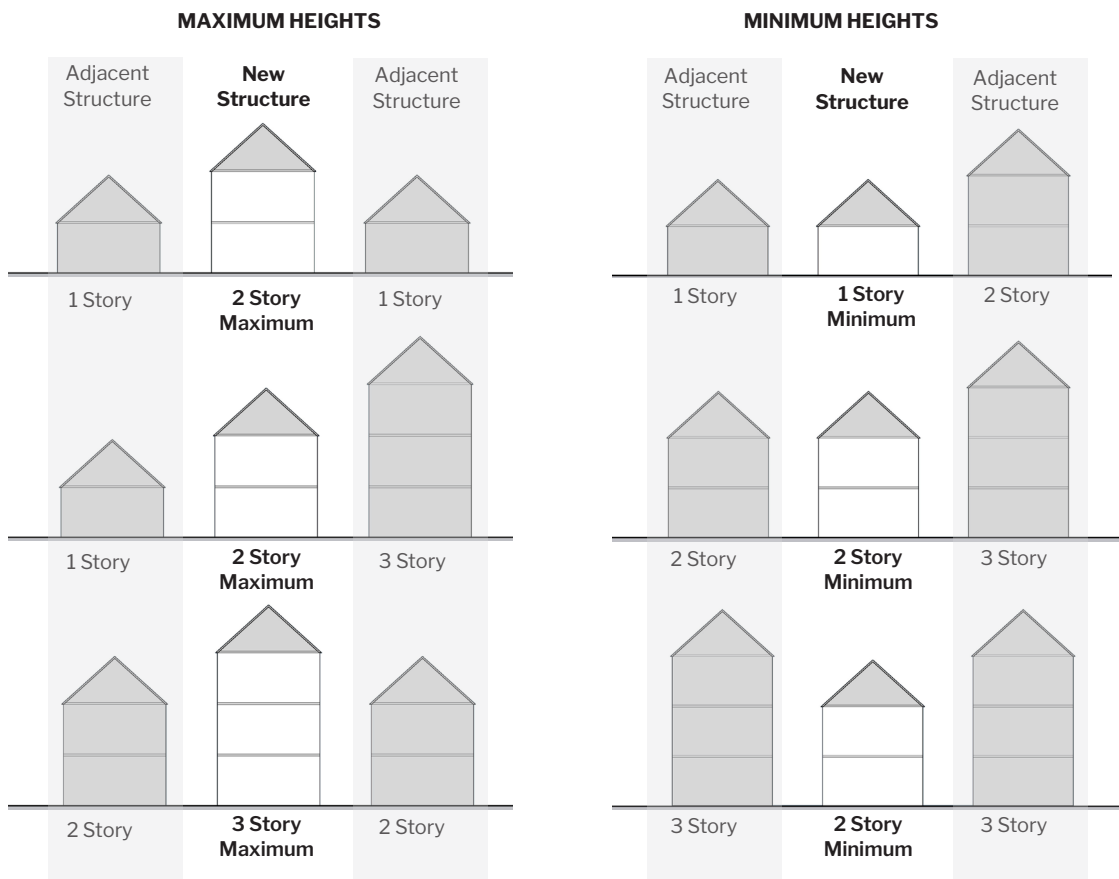
## BUILDING CHARACTER

# One to three story height for buildings

New buildings, with a height of one to three stories tall, reinforce and enhance the existing character and scale of Rural Center streetscapes and neighborhoods.

## Minimize height discrepancies

Infill buildings should not be significantly shorter or taller than adjacent buildings to minimize awkward height discrepancies and transitions.



## Use variable roof forms

Avoid a boxy appearance of buildings by incorporating pitched roofs, changes in roof heights, offsets, change in direction of roof slope and dormers.

## Minimum height at facade

New buildings with a ground floor less than 5,000 square feet shall require a visual presentation of a second story facade.

West Nottingham Township, Zoning Ordinance, Section 606, J, 2, b. ▶

## Toolbox

Form Based Codes and Zoning Ordinances ▶

## BUILDING CHARACTER

## Residential design characteristics for non-residential buildings

Non-residential building design should reflect the unique qualities and the dominant character of the surrounding area and provide a pleasant, inviting, and safe experience for pedestrians. Consistency of building scale, roof lines, materials, and window patterns ensures new development has an attractive street appearance.



- A. **Residential scale**  
Buildings should exhibit massing and height similar to nearby residences.
- B. **Pitched roofs**  
Pitched roofs are a dominant residential characteristic.
- C. **Easily identifiable building entries**  
Building entries should be recessed within the overall facade or have canopy elements. Use building entries as a major focal point of a building.
- D. **Architectural detailing**  
Provide architectural interest with residentially scaled windows and other openings along ground floor pedestrian areas. Other appropriate details include roof edges, window surrounds, and dormers.

### Building replacement

The applicant shall prove, through the submittal of architectural drawings and site plans, that the replacement building meets the following criteria:

- [1] The replacement building has a residential character that is compatible with the historic character of the village in which the building is located.
- [2] The replacement building is located in approximately the same location as the razed building or is located closer to the street of highest classification on which the property fronts.
- [3] The replacement building has at least two full stories.
- [4] The replacement building has a bulk and scale that is similar to those commonly found in residences in the village in which the property is located. In no case shall the footprint of the replacement building exceed 2,000 square feet.
- [5] The replacement building uses residential building materials that are similar to those commonly used in residences in the village in which the property is located.
- [6] The replacement building has residentially scaled windows and doors, with a proportion of windows and doors to solid wall that is similar to proportions commonly found on residential structures in the village in which the property is located.
- [7] The replacement building has a pitched roof that covers at least 80% of the building, with a pitch of at least six vertical inches to every 12 horizontal inches;

Lower Salford Township, PA, Zoning Ordinance, Section 164.70.3, B, 2. ►



## BUILDING CHARACTER

## Small scale, externally illuminated signs

Signs help convey an image and communicate a message for businesses. They also contribute to the character and visual harmony of communities. Pedestrian-scaled signs with artistic qualities are appropriate in Rural Centers. Internally-illuminated box signs transmit a great degree of glare and are inconsistent with traditional sign characteristics. The appropriate location, scale, height, and style of signs should be considered early in the design process of new development.



### A. Avoid plastic signs

Acceptable primary signage materials include wood, metal, stone and solid plastic/composite. Translucent plastic is not an acceptable sign material. Three-dimensional and relief signage is encouraged.



### B. Use dark backgrounds

Dark backgrounds, such as black, or forest green, provide good contrast to lighter color lettering and symbols and make it easier to read signs, such as this hanging sign.



### C. Use a size and shape complementary to associated buildings

Signs should enhance the design of the associated building. Hanging signs and monument signs are preferred over signs mounted on single poles.



### External illumination

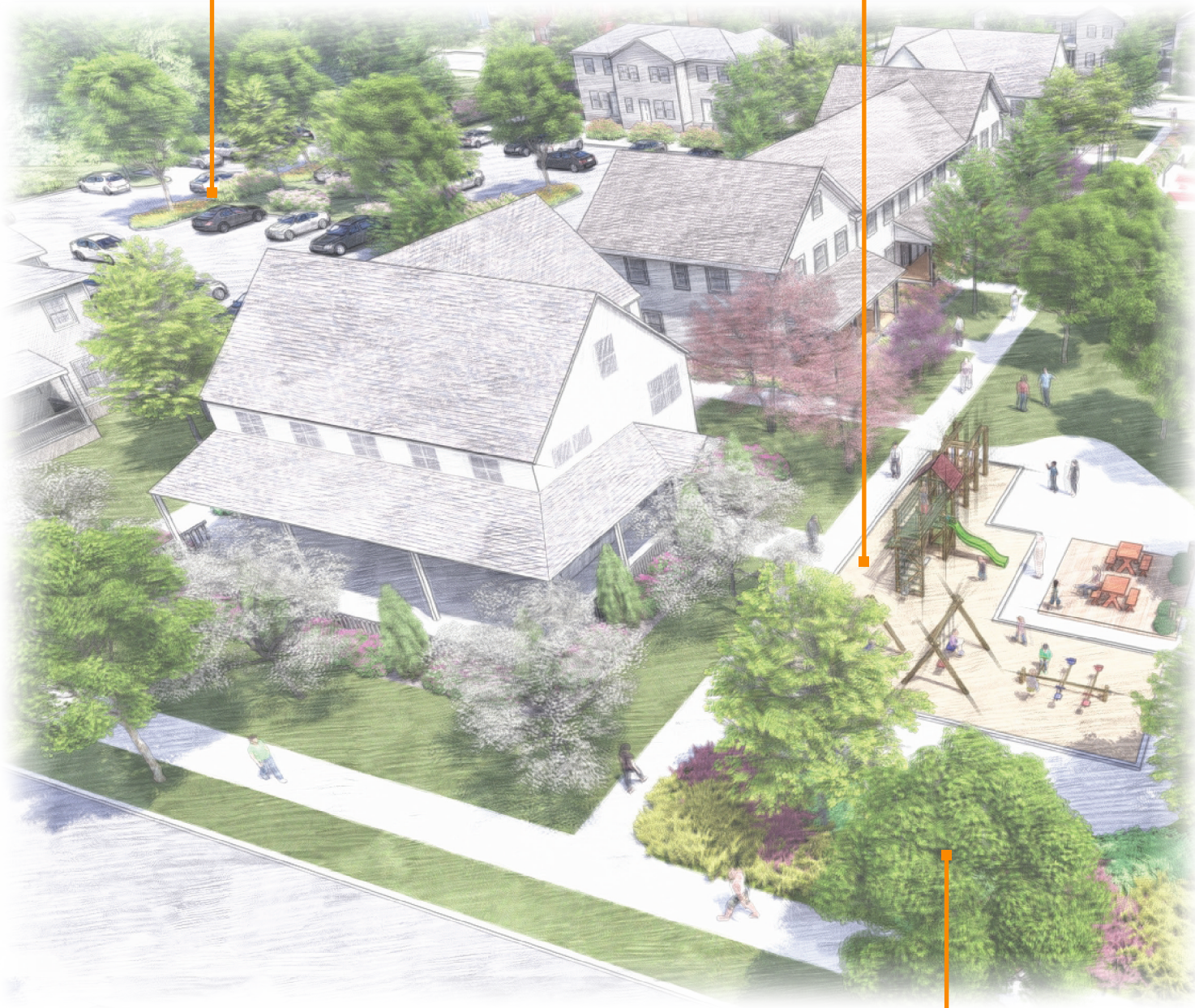
For externally illuminated signs, the source of light must be concealed by translucent covers and the external illumination shall be by a steady, stationary light source, shielded and directed solely at the sign. The light source must be static in color.

Montgomery County, PA, Model Sign Ordinance, Section 6, F, 2, a. ▶

**Toolbox**  
Signs ▶

Extensive landscaping on properties and in parking lots

Active recreation facilities and central greens



Green infrastructure, including innovative stormwater management



## SITE AMENITIES

Site amenities enable social interaction, create inviting, equitable, and accessible public spaces, and promote environmental sustainability. This section provides guidance on the site amenities that add to the function and vitality of the human environment.

**SITE AMENITIES**

# Active recreation facilities and central greens

Active recreation facilities on open land may include a playground, multi-purpose court, and/or play field. Elements of central greens may include seating areas, walkways, lighting, shade structures, landscaping, floral displays, or public art. Central greens can contribute to the beautification of a community and supplement recreation-only facilities. Maintaining a mix of passive and active open spaces is important to the function and aesthetics of local parks.



**Carefully master plan common open spaces**

Design and program new or rehabilitated parks appropriate to specific conditions and context, maximize access and visibility, and provide for multiple activities.

**Design for gatherings**

Include flexible spaces that can be programmed for community gatherings and facilitate community interaction.

**Minimum greenway land**

Parcels shall be designed with at least 50% of their gross lot area as permanent greenway: No less than 25% of the greenway land shall be in the form of squares, commons, greens, or low- to medium-intensity recreation areas. Any such land that is privately owned (either individually, jointly or by an organization) shall be permanently protected through conservation easements. The required greenway land shall be located and designed to add to the visual amenities of the Village and to the surrounding area, by maximizing the visibility of internal greenway land as terminal vistas at the ends of streets or along the outside edges of street curves and by maximizing the visibility of external greenway land as perimeter greenway land. Perimeter greenway land shall be designated to provide buffers and to protect scenic views as seen from existing roadways and from public parks.

West Vincent Township, Zoning Ordinance, Section 390-60, A-D. ▶

**Toolbox**  
Community Gardens ▶

## SITE AMENITIES

## Extensive landscaping on properties and in parking lots

In addition to stormwater management benefits, extensive landscaping throughout properties and in parking lots can soften the appearance of large structures, assist in energy conservation by reducing heat gain by buildings adjacent to large asphalt areas, and make walking around the site a more pleasant experience for pedestrians.



- A. Landscape islands at ends of rows**  
Terminate parking rows with a parking lot island or landscaped area.
- B. Landscape islands within long rows**  
Provide a parking island between at least every 10 parking spaces.
- C. Landscape islands with generous width**  
Provide parking lot islands that are the same dimension or greater than the parking stalls to support sufficient growing space.
- D. Strategically located shade trees**  
Provide a minimum of one shade tree for every parking lot island or landscaped area. Plant large canopy trees to provide maximum shade. In addition, plant shrubs, ground cover, perennials, or ornamental grasses on a minimum of 60% of every parking lot island.
- E. Use native landscape material**  
To reduce watering and maintenance needs, use native plants for all new ornamental landscape trees, shrubs and perennial plants.

### Parking lot landscaping

Landscaped areas at least 10 feet wide shall be provided around the periphery of parking areas. Such areas shall, at a minimum, extend the full length and width of the parking areas, except for necessary accessways, to prevent the encroachment of moving vehicles into parking areas. Landscaped islands between every 10 parking spaces or at the end of each parking row, whichever is less, shall be provided and shall be the length of the parking spaces in the row and at least 10 feet in width. There shall be a planting strip incorporated for every four rows of parking spaces. Such planting strip shall run parallel to parking rows and shall have a minimum width of 10 feet if double-loaded or seven feet if single-loaded.

West Vincent Township, Zoning Ordinance, Section 390-139, A, 4, C, 1-3. ►

#### Toolbox

Parking Facilities: Design ►

Landscaping with Native Plants ►

SITE AMENITIES

# Green infrastructure, including innovative stormwater management

Green infrastructure design mimics nature and uses vegetation to help mitigate the stormwater management impacts of impervious surfaces. Integrating green infrastructure into the built environment helps preserve ecological function, manage stormwater, provide wildlife habitat, create a more beautiful landscape, and act as an amenity for users.

## Green infrastructure tools



**Bioswales**  
Drainage swales with gently sloped sides filled with vegetation to allow infiltration and filtration. Used as an alternative to storm sewers, bioswales also require less maintenance than turf grass swales because they need less water and no fertilizer.



**Green roofs**  
Vegetated roofs that help detain, filter, and absorb rainfall. They protect the underlying roof, reduce solar gain during the summer months, and provide habitat for wildlife. If located on a lower roof of the building, they can also be a visual amenity to higher floors or adjacent developments.



**Naturalized basins**  
Depressions planted with native vegetation to collect and store stormwater runoff. The shape of these basins are natural looking and avoid a rigid geometric appearance.



**Permeable pavement**  
Paved surfaces specially designed to allow water to soak through the surface and into the ground. This replenishes aquifers, filters out pollutants, and helps keep street trees healthy.



**Rain gardens**  
A shallow depression filled with a soil bed and planting materials to absorb and filter runoff. These gardens are suitable for many types of developments.



**Rain barrels and cisterns**  
Containers that capture and store stormwater for non-potable uses, such as irrigation. Rain barrels are typically located adjacent to buildings at single downspout locations. Cisterns may be located above or below ground and usually receive stormwater runoff from multiple downspout systems.



**Riparian buffer**  
A vegetative zone that serves as a buffer to pollutants, controls erosion, and provides habitat along waterways. Enhancement of the riparian buffer by replanting native grasses, shrubs, and trees is the first step to restoring the natural conditions of streams.



**Stormwater trees**  
Street trees planted in specially designed stone pits to hold excess water during intense rainstorms or as snow melts. Trees also reduce stormwater runoff through evapotranspiration.

### Innovative stormwater management systems incentives

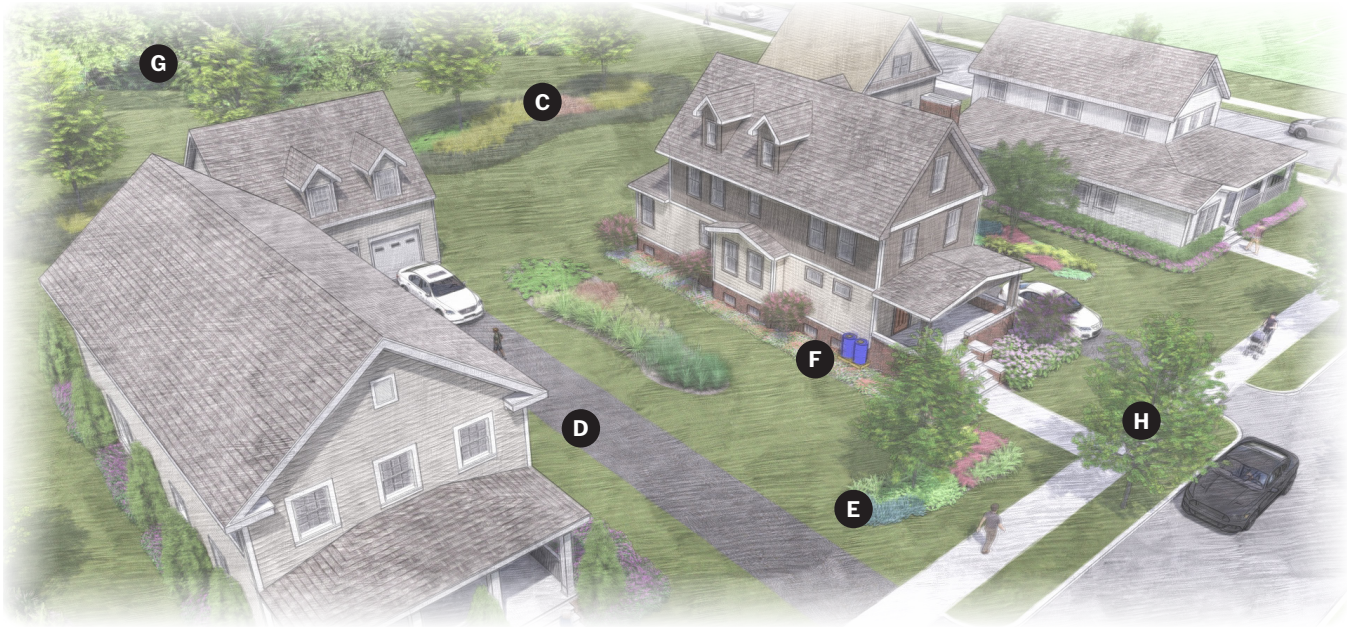
Allow building footprint or building height bonuses if installing innovative stormwater best management practices, such as green roof buildings capable of managing small storm events through rooftop landscaping or bioretention facilities and rain gardens as complementary landscape features.

Tredyffrin Township, Zoning Ordinance, Section 208-71, C. ▶

- Toolbox**
- Stormwater Management: Best Management Practices ▶
- Green Roofs ▶
- Street Trees ▶

## Residential Applications

A few simple considerations will help maximize the benefits of green infrastructure on residential properties. It is important to consider the natural topography of a property to see where water naturally pools. The type and quality of soil will also impact the type of green infrastructure that is possible. It is also important to pay attention to sun and shade on any property to ensure appropriate planting takes place, and consider the orientation of any trees with respect to the building to maximize cooling potential by planting along the west side.



## Commercial and Institutional Applications

In parking lots, green infrastructure should be designed to enhance pedestrian-friendly walkways to main entrances, increase safety, and provide shade. Building specifications will define the opportunities for green roofs.







Pathways and  
sidewalks along  
streets and between  
buildings



## TRANSPORTATION

A safe, comfortable, and efficient transportation network incorporates design that reinforces walkability, enhances connectivity, and improves the quality of life for users. This section provides guidance on the design of elements supporting pedestrian safety, multimodal accessibility, and the use of public transportation.

TRANSPORTATION

# Parking to side or rear of buildings and limited in front

Locating parking areas at the side or rear of residential, commercial, industrial, or institutional uses improves the pedestrian experience along public frontages, fits with historic and residential characteristics better, and improves the appearance of a development viewed from the public right-of-way. When site constraints prevent positioning parking at the side or rear, parking lots in the front should have attractive landscaping to screen views of parked vehicles from the public right-of-way.

## Non-residential Parking



**Side or rear yard parking**

Parked vehicles should not dominate the view of a building from the street. Parking areas placed to the side or rear of the building create space for additional front yard landscaping and a more attractive appearance. A combination of landscaping and fencing or low walls should be used to effectively screen parked vehicles and service areas from public view.

**Side or rear yard parking**

All off-street parking shall be located at the rear of the lot, or if necessary, to the side of the lot, accessed by alleys or driveways, and shall be screened from view from any public street, non-motorized accessway, or neighboring residence.

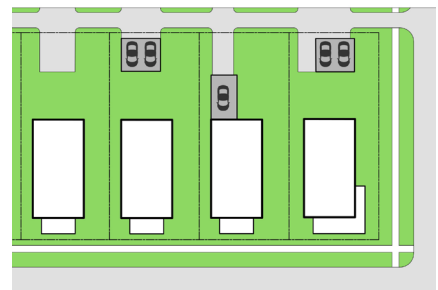
West Nottingham Township, Zoning Ordinance, Section 606, H, 3, d. ▶

**Parking setback**

The front edge of required parking areas shall be set back at least as far as the nearest facade of the principal building facing the front property line (porticos, open colonnades, and open porches excluded).

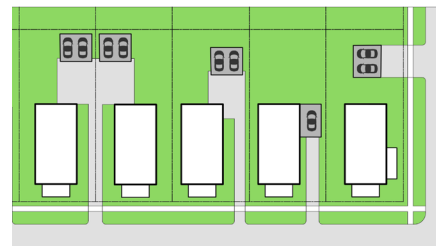
West Vincent Township, Zoning Ordinance, Section 390-61, A. ▶

## Residential Parking



**Use alleys, where possible**

Rear alley access eliminates the need for driveway entrances from the street, which creates greater walkability. Attached and detached rear-loaded garages allow more usable home interior living space.



**Minimize impacts of front-loaded garages**

Garages that are set back from the front facade, accessed by single-width driveways, or side-loaded consume less front yard space, which allows more space for street trees and landscaping and greater walkability.

**Toolbox**

Parking Facilities: Policy ▶

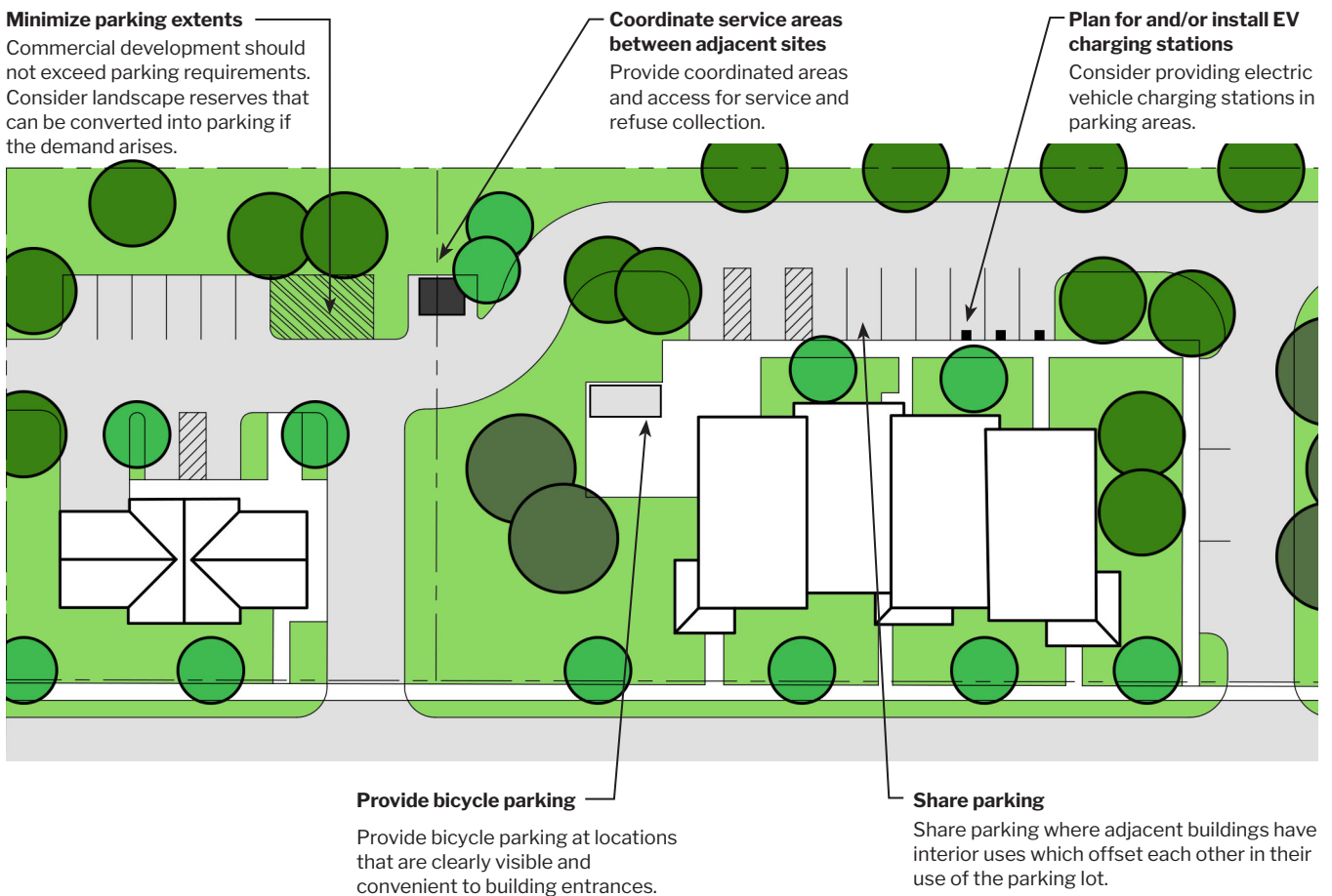
Parking Facilities: Design ▶

## TRANSPORTATION

## Small parking lots and parking areas

Off-street parking lots should be designed and located so they are safe, efficient, and do not disrupt the traditional scale and character of the Rural Center landscape. Parking that serves retail and mixed-use buildings should be on the rear side of properties and be organized into smaller interconnected lots. Flexible off-street parking requirements can help promote a pedestrian-oriented environment.

### Illustrative Plan



#### Parking area proportion

Parking areas shall be designed and landscaped so as to appear broken in mass, in proportion to the scale of structural development.

West Nottingham Township, Zoning Ordinance, Section 606, H, 3, a. ►

#### Toolbox

Chester County Multimodal Handbook ►

TRANSPORTATION

# Rectilinear street pattern with lanes and common driveways

A rectilinear, or grid, street pattern increases multimodal connectivity. For pedestrians, the grid creates a walkable environment and lessens conflicts with vehicles which move slower due to frequent intersections. For drivers of motor vehicles, the grid makes navigation easy and disperses traffic. It also provides efficiency for deliveries and services like snow plowing, street cleaning, and trash collection. Lanes and alleys provide a place for utilities and waste and recycling pickup and offer opportunities for green stormwater infrastructure. Common driveways reduce curb cuts and offer the ability to share maintenance.

NOT RECOMMENDED

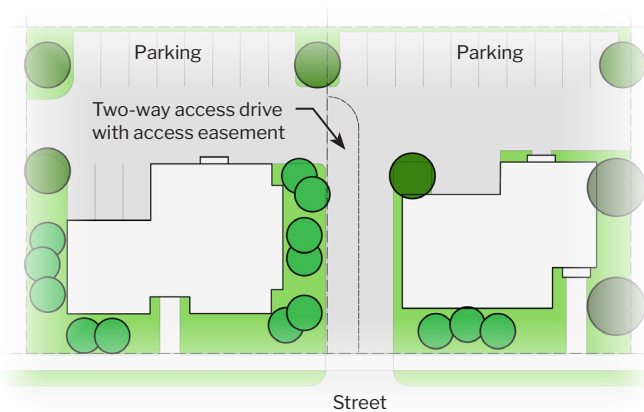


RECOMMENDED



**Develop interconnected streets**

Create new streets that link to existing streets to increase capacity and help retain the cohesiveness of the community.



**Share access**

Share access points and circulation patterns to adjacent parking lots to minimize curb cuts and increase land-use efficiency.

**Gridded street pattern**

Streets shall follow a gridded pattern of street blocks and interconnecting streets and alleys, pedestrian ways, and sidewalks, to facilitate both vehicular and pedestrian circulation.

West Nottingham Township, Zoning Ordinance, Section 606, C, 1. ▶

**Toolbox**  
 Roadway Connectivity ▶  
 Official Map ▶

## TRANSPORTATION

## Pathways and sidewalks along streets and between buildings

Safe accommodation for pedestrians is an essential part of any site design. Pathways and sidewalks provide safe transportation options between local destinations and provide enjoyable recreational opportunities that encourage healthy lifestyles and enhance the quality of life within a community.

### Connect buildings to the pedestrian network

Where buildings are required to be set back far from the street, a strong pedestrian element should be developed to connect pedestrians to the local businesses and other uses in the surrounding area.

### Promote a pedestrian-friendly environment

Create pedestrian gathering areas with shade trees, plantings, and benches on public or private land.



### Establish safe pedestrian crossings

Where pedestrian circulation paths cross vehicular routes, provide a change in paving materials, textures or colors to emphasize the conflict point, improve visibility, enhance safety and add aesthetic appeal. Install and maintain continental crosswalk striping to promote driver compliance.

### Create a continuous pedestrian network

Establish clearly visible and direct pedestrian paths between neighboring buildings, between buildings and outlying parking areas, and between buildings and transit facilities.

### Pedestrian design standards

Sidewalks at least five feet in width are required along all road frontages. Sidewalks are required to connect the road frontage sidewalks to all front building entrances, parking areas, primary park areas, walking trails located in Red Hill Borough, open space, and any other destination that generates pedestrian traffic. Sidewalks shall connect to existing sidewalks on abutting tracts and other nearby pedestrian destination points.

Borough of Red Hill, PA, Zoning Ordinance, Section 27-319, 6, B, 1,3-4. ▶

### Toolbox

Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities: Design ▶

Chester County Multimodal Handbook ▶

**Adaptive Reuse**

The process of repurposing existing buildings for viable new uses and modern day functions, rather than demolishing them. Reuse allows for a building's continued use and helps it remain a viable community asset. For more information: [Chesco Planning, Adaptive Reuse](#) ▶

**Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**

A federal Act that prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in regard to employment, transportation, public accommodations, communications, and access to state and local government programs and services. For more information: [U.S. Department of Labor](#) ▶

**Best Management Practice**

A technique to most appropriately manage natural resources on a site, based on unique site conditions, planning, and engineering requirements. A BMP involves site development design that incorporates the most suitable technique, or combination of techniques, to best manage the resource.

For more information: [StormwaterPA](#) ▶

**Brownfields**

Abandoned or underutilized industrial and commercial sites that have, or may potentially have, some environmental contamination. Brownfields are most often located in developed areas with existing utilities and transportation facilities. Because of environmental problems and costs associated with clean up, brownfields are often passed over for development while large investments are made to convert greenfields into industrial and commercial uses. (See also Greyfields) For more information: [Chesco Planning, Redevelopment](#) ▶

**Complete Streets**

A transportation approach where the design enables safe access for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit riders of all ages and abilities. For more information: [National Complete Streets Coalition](#) ▶

**Greyfields**

Economically obsolescent, outdated, or underutilized retail commercial lands such as older retail malls or strip centers that no longer attract adequate investment or tenants. Greyfields typically are not environmentally contaminated, but may contain older types of infrastructure that needs to be replaced or significantly updated. (See also Brownfields) For more information: [Chesco Planning, Redevelopment](#) ▶

**Growth Area, Designated Growth Area**

A region described in a comprehensive plan that includes and surrounds a city, borough or village, and within which: residential and mixed use development is permitted or planned for at densities of one unit to the acre or more; commercial, industrial, and institutional uses are permitted or planned for; and public infrastructure services are provided or planned. In *Landscapes3*, this area is comprised of the Urban Center, Suburban Center, Suburban, and Rural Center landscapes. For more information: [Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code](#) ▶

**Multimodal**

Involving several modes of transportation, including vehicular, pedestrian, bicyclist, public transit, and ride hailing services. For more information: [Chesco Planning, Transportation Planning](#) ▶

**Multi-use Trail**

Facilities commonly used by bicyclists, pedestrians, and other non-motorized modes of travel such as equestrians, cross country skiers, rollerbladers, baby strollers, and those utilizing wheelchairs. Multi-use trails are primarily found within state parks, county or municipal parks, or as regional trails such as Chester County's Chester Valley and Struble trails. For more information: [Chesco Planning, Transportation Planning](#) ▶

**Smart Growth**

An approach to development that encourages a mix of building types and uses, diverse housing and transportation options, development within existing neighborhoods, and community engagement. For more information: [Smart Growth America](#) ▶

**Universal Design**

Process and associated features that remove barriers to access and seek to create buildings and public spaces that are inherently accessible to all people, including the elderly and people with disabilities. For more information: [Government Services Administration](#) ▶

**Walkability**

A measure of how friendly a place or area is to walking. Walkability is an important concept in sustainable urban design. For more information: [Smart Growth America](#) ▶



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