

FUTURE LAND USE PLAN

Land use planning recommends an overall future land use pattern for the Township for the next 10 to 20 years and provides suggestions for how best to achieve that pattern. This Future Land Use Plan and the associated Future Land Use Map is a policy guide and is not the same as the Zoning Map. Township policy goals in Chapter XX and the other Plan chapters provide guidance in directing land use planning and are factored into recommendations.

The Future Land Use Plan and Map serves as a guide for future decisions about zoning, development, and infrastructure investments. It describes intended use and character attributes for future development throughout the Township and is related to zoning but serves a different purpose. It does not replace or supersede the Township Zoning Map. It is not a mandate for development or redevelopment, and it does NOT change property rights allowed by zoning currently in place.

Section 301.a.2 of the Pennsylvania Municipal Planning Code requires that the land use component of the Comprehensive Plan provide:

“A plan for land use, which may include provisions for the amount, intensity, character and timing of land use proposed for residence, industry, business, agriculture, major traffic and transit facilities, utilities, community facilities, public grounds, parks and recreation, preservation of prime agricultural lands, floodplains and other areas of special hazards and other similar uses.”

Future land use categories were developed based on relevant issues that emerged during the Comprehensive Plan update process. The following outline these primary considerations:

- Existing land use patterns.
- Location and functioning of local and regional transportation network.
- Location of existing and proposed community facilities and services.
- Location and types of businesses/industries and economic need for these uses.
- Accommodating housing for estimated population growth and addressing fair share housing needs.
- Implementing Township policy goals and objectives for land use and related topics.
- Consistency with the LVPC Comprehensive Plan, Future LV and adjacent municipal comprehensive plans.

The primary purpose of implementing a Land Use Plan is growth management. North Whitehall Township is a fairly well-balanced community in terms of land uses. However, there are several factors which could potentially threaten the rural/suburban character of the Township.

1. The availability of agricultural and vacant lands which are prime for development.
2. The Township’s location in the “fastest-growing corridor for warehousing and logistics”¹ and its relative proximity to major roadways accessing this corridor.

¹ Lehigh Valley Planning Commission. *Future LV: The Regional Plan*. November 2019

3. The potential for redevelopment of underdeveloped properties.

North Whitehall Township has been divided into eight future land use categories: Agricultural/Rural Residential, Industrial Agriculture, Mid Density Residential, Mixed Use, Commercial, Institutional, Industrial, and Open Space as shown in Figure XX.

Agricultural/Rural Residential

The Agricultural/Rural Residential land use category consists primarily of agricultural lands, larger lot single-family detached dwellings, and areas of environmental resources that potentially limit development such as steep slopes. A large portion of the Agricultural/Rural Residential land use category is located within the current Agricultural-Rural Residential (AR) and the Conservation Residential (CR) zoning districts. These districts require a larger minimum lot size – approximately 25,000 square feet (when served by central sewer and public water) to two acre minimum lot for single-family detached development. This is consistent with the intent of the Agricultural/Rural Residential land use category.

Smaller areas of the Agricultural/Rural Residential land use category can be found in the current Agricultural-Rural Residential-Livestock (AR-L) District, Village Residential (VR) District and the Suburban Residential (SR) District. The Agricultural/Rural Residential land use category is generally consistent with the intent of these districts.

Industrial Agriculture

Industrial Agriculture is a category which includes areas of more intensive agriculture which may include, but is not limited to, feedlots, confinement livestock, or poultry operations taking place in structures or closed pens. The Industrial Agriculture land use category is within the current Agricultural-Rural Residential-Livestock zoning district. As per the current North Whitehall Zoning Ordinance the intent of this district is to “...provide appropriate locations for substantial concentrations of intense livestock uses.”

Mid Density Residential

The Mid Density Residential future land use category comprises a variety of housing types including single-family detached dwellings and attached dwellings such as twin or duplex. The density of this land use category is typically 1 to 8 units per acre.

Those areas identified as Mid Density Residential are predominantly within the current Agricultural-Rural Residential (AR) District, the Suburban Residential (SR) District, and the Village Residential (VR) District. The minimum lot area/density requirements for these districts are generally consistent with the recommended density for the Mid Density Residential land use category.

Some areas designated Mid Density Residential located along Route 309 at the southern end of the Township are within the current Light Industrial (LI) District and the Planned Commercial (PC) Districts. As per the Zoning Ordinance, those uses permitted in the Village Residential (VR) District

are also permitted in the Planned Commercial (PC) District. However, residential uses are not permitted in the Light Industrial (LI) District. This plan recommends rezoning the area to be consistent with the residential use designations.

Mixed Use

North Whitehall Township is a community of several small village/mixed use areas located at prominent crossroads and/or along major roadways. The Future Land Use Map identifies approximately nine areas that have been designated Mixed Use. The intent of the Mixed Use category is to promote infill development, encourage redevelopment, and provide more flexibility in design regulations.

The Mixed Use category would permit a mix of residential and non-residential uses, including retail, service businesses, office and institutional (either horizontally or vertically), promote walkability and serve as a community gathering destination. The Mixed Use category is located in the current Village Center (VC) District, Commercial (C and C-2) District, Village Residential (VR) District, Suburban Residential (SR) District, Light Industrial (LI) District, and Planned Commercial (PC) District. A mix of uses could be provided throughout the Mixed Use area in a variety of ways. For instance, individual parcels could contain a mix of uses or an individual use. Mixed Use could also pertain to a mix of buildings on a property with different uses or to a mix of uses within one building, similar to the way in which the original villages developed over time. This plan recommends amending the Zoning Ordinance to include a new “mixed-use building” use which would permit residential and non-residential uses within a single structure, such as retail or personal services on the first floor with apartment(s) above.

Commercial

The Commercial future land use category is concentrated along Route 309 and the area around the intersection of Mauch Chunk Road and Cedar Crest Boulevard. The land use composition of this area includes a wide variety of commercial uses, office and institutional uses, residential uses, some light industrial uses and agricultural and/or vacant parcels.

The overall purpose of this future land use category is to provide for a variety of retail and personal service business uses. While the designated Mixed Use future land use category may be geared toward more local neighborhood shopping and service experiences, the Commercial future land use category should be attractive as a “community” destination.

The areas specified for Commercial are generally consistent with the Township’s zoning. The Commercial future land use category is within the current C Commercial District, the PC Planned Commercial District, and a portion of the LI Light Industrial District.

Institutional

North Whitehall Township is home to many institutional buildings and uses scattered throughout the Township. Such uses include municipal buildings and facilities, hospitals and similar health facilities, libraries, community centers and clubs, and religious and educational facilities.

It is the Township's policy to maintain the established institutional land use patterns in areas where they currently exist. Such institutional uses are currently permitted in multiple zoning districts.

Industrial

The Industrial future land use category is predominantly located in the southern portion of the Township with access to major arterial roadways such as Route 309 and major collector roadways such as Levans Road. Current uses in this area include industrial, commercial, agricultural and vacant properties. The Industrial future land use category corresponds to the current Agricultural-Rural Residential-Livestock (AR-L), Light Industrial (LI) and Mineral Extraction/Industrial (ME/I) Districts.

Future development and/or redevelopment of the Industrial area should consist of high-quality, well-planned, appropriately sized, well-landscaped industrial/business facilities while minimizing land use impacts on surrounding areas. Future development and/or redevelopment of the Industrial area should strive to satisfy regional market preferences, minimize the generation of through traffic, and be required to include substantial setbacks and buffers to mitigate the impact on existing residential uses.

Open Space

Areas designated as Open Space include existing recreational areas, both private and public. The intent of the future land use plan is to preserve existing open space areas within the Township.

Future Land Use Implementation Strategies and Recommendations:

- Maintain the commercial and industrial corridors within the Township.
- Encourage appropriate economic development on undeveloped parcels.
- Encourage appropriate economic development/redevelopment and adaptive reuse of existing buildings and lots.
- Review and amend the current Zoning Ordinance to be consistent with the Future Land Use Plan.
- Coordinate with the surrounding municipalities to ensure consistency with land use patterns across municipal borders.
- Conduct a windshield survey to identify areas suitable for redevelopment and/or infill development and create incentives for brownfields versus greenfields development.