

EXISTING LAND USE PLAN

Land use is only one aspect of planning; however it is an extremely important one. Land use is the alteration of the natural environment into man-made or built environment and includes lands which are undisturbed by man. Development regulations, physical restraints and highway networks all contribute to the land use patterns within a region. Land use is used as a tool for evaluating current zoning and subdivision and land development policies as well as provides guidance for future development. Land use helps evaluate public needs, potential environmental impacts as well as prevents potential conflicts. Municipalities utilize land use planning to balance development and preserve natural resources. It serves to guide official decisions regarding the distribution and intensity of private development, reinvestment in urban centers and capital improvement programs.



Old Village Inn Restaurant and Tavern

For a land use plan to be practical, it must accurately inventory existing land uses and development characteristics. Then, with proper analysis, future land use schemes can reflect reality, and avoid the creation of nonconforming uses when implemented through zoning regulations. To determine existing land uses, two sources were consulted. First, the Berks County Planning Commission has prepared a land use GIS map coverage which combines tax parcel records with land cover features from aerial photography. Specifically, tax parcel data is used within “developed” areas while land cover data is used in outlying rural areas. This land cover data can “split” larger properties into several uses. For example, a farm with a house will depict the house as one use, and the farmland as another; this gives a truer picture of uses in outlying rural areas. Conversely, within the Borough of Birdsboro and more populated portions of Caernarvon Township the County’s tax parcel information was used to determine land use. Here, the tax records list one predominant land use on the entire property, which is also more accurate than aerial photo interpretation when analyzing a “built” environment. Second, the GIS data was reviewed by the Southern Berks Joint Planning Committee during this update with corrections noted. Regionally, the existing land use pattern includes a very wide range of uses and settings which are depicted on the Existing Land Use Maps, found following this section.

Existing Land Use Analysis

1. Methodology

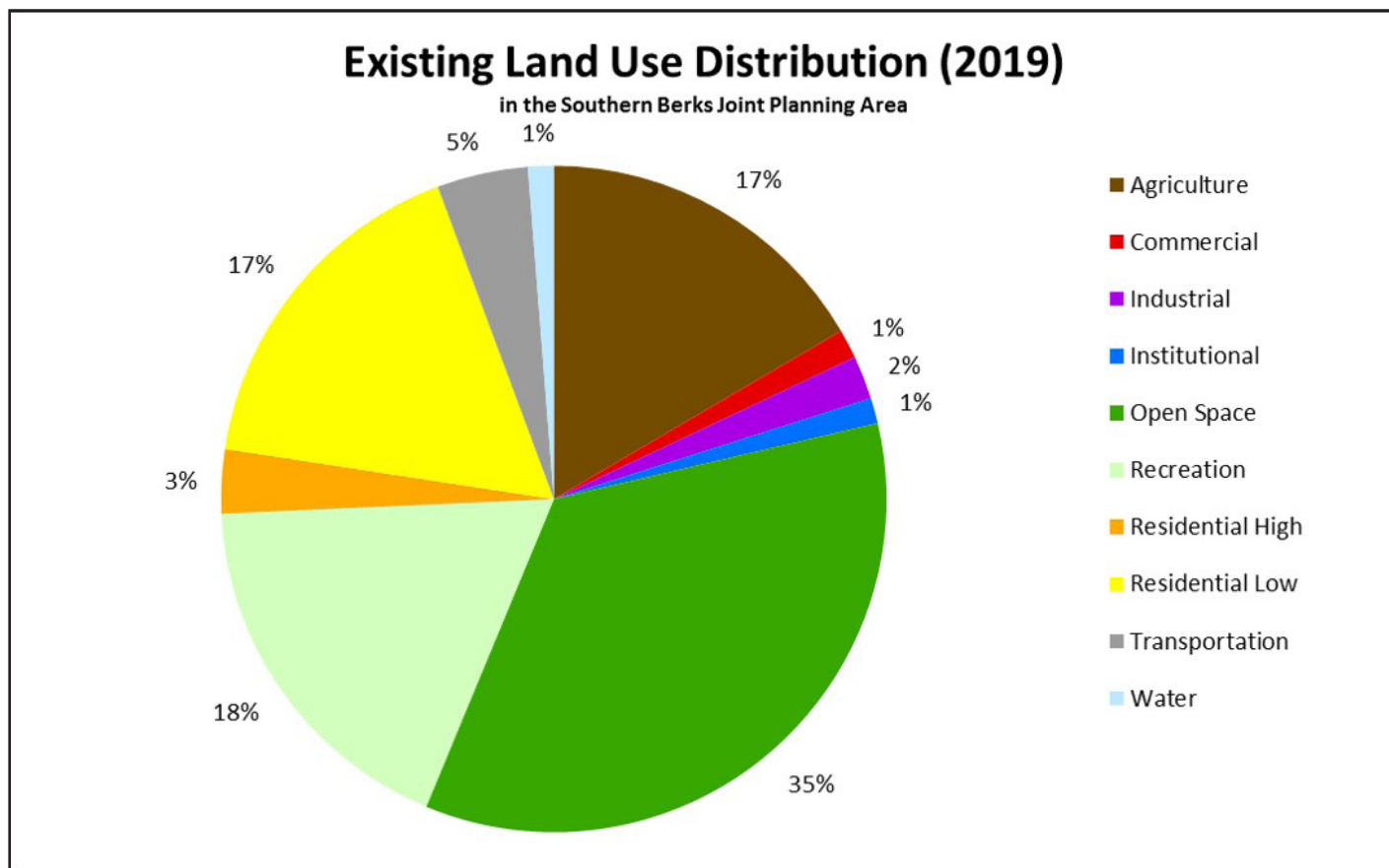
The Existing Land Use Map was created digitally using a geographic information system (GIS). The Berks County GIS tax parcel data was modified to include a specific existing land use designation for each parcel. Land use assessment codes, aerial imagery, information from Act 537 sewer plans, and other GIS data related to land use was also used in the analysis.

The table and chart below illustrate the existing land uses by acreage in the region:

Chapter 9 - Existing Land Use Plan

Existing Land Use in the Southern Berks Joint Planning Area, 2019										
LANDUSE	Joint Planning Area		Birdsboro		Caernarvon		Robeson		Union	
	# Acres	% of Area	# Acres	% of Area	# Acres	% of Area	# Acres	% of Area	# Acres	% of Area
Agriculture	7,227	16.6%	0	0.0%	1,649	29.0%	3,361	15.3%	2,217	14.7%
Commercial	622	1.4%	50	5.8%	330	5.8%	191	0.9%	51	0.3%
Industrial	1,019	2.3%	101	11.7%	143	2.5%	555	2.5%	220	1.5%
Institutional	535	1.2%	26	3.0%	162	2.9%	181	0.8%	166	1.1%
Open Space	15,119	34.7%	127	14.7%	1,347	23.7%	10,371	47.3%	3,274	21.7%
Recreation	7,859	18.0%	11	1.3%	146	2.6%	1,103	5.0%	6,599	43.7%
Residential High	1,353	3.1%	330	38.2%	328	5.8%	332	1.5%	363	2.4%
Residential Low	7,375	16.9%	44	5.1%	1,003	17.7%	4,718	21.5%	1,610	10.7%
Transportation	1,931	4.4%	146	16.9%	539	9.5%	916	4.2%	330	2.2%
Water	542	1.2%	28	3.2%	34	0.6%	201	0.9%	279	1.8%
Total	43,582	100.0%	863	100.0%	5,681	100.0%	21,929	100.0%	15,109	100.0%

Source: Berks County Planning Commission



2. Residential Lands

Residential Low

The Residential Low category consists of primarily single-family detached dwelling units on one to five acre lots. A lot size larger than five acres was subject to more than one existing land use designation, as the residue land was typically designated as Open Space.

- Comprising 16.9% of the region's land area or 7,375 acres, Residential Low land is the third largest land use category. Robeson Township (4,718 acres) contains the most acreage of this type of residential development when compared to the other three municipalities.

Residential High

The Residential High category is characterized by a variety of dwelling unit types, including single-family detached, semi-detached, townhouses, apartments, and mobile homes within parks, at densities that exceed one unit per acre.

- At 3.1% of the planning area, this designation is ranked sixth out of all the other land uses in terms of acreage within the region. Not surprisingly, Birdsboro Borough contains the majority of the high density development within the area.

3. Commercial Lands

The Commercial lands category contains such uses as, retail, offices, utilities (electric and phone companies) as well as personal, professional and business services.

- Commercial uses comprise 1.4% of the region's total land area or 622 acres.
- The majority of the commercial uses are located within Caernarvon Township and account for 330 acres or almost 53% of commercial land use within the Southern Berks Region.

4. Industrial Lands

Industrial land uses include processing, fabrication or assembly of raw materials or component parts, wholesale trade and warehousing. Landfills, junk yards, and quarries are also included within this designation.

- Approximately 1,019 acres or 2.3% of industrial land uses encompass the land in the Southern Berks Region.
- Two large quarry operations exist in the region. Together they make up 495 acres.

5. Institutional Lands

Institutional lands are used for public services such as governmental and public safety facilities, educational facilities (including athletic fields owned by educational institutions), cemeteries and religious institutions.

- Institutional lands occupy 535 acres or approximately 1.2% of the region's land area.

6. Agricultural Land

The rich soil, aided by a favorable climate and centralized Mid-Atlantic location, has contributed to a strong agricultural tradition in Berks County. Agriculture lands are used for crops, pasture, the raising of livestock, farmsteads, barns, silos, mushroom farms, and the fields where trees and plants are harvested for nurseries.

- Agricultural lands occupy 7,227 acres or approximately 16.6% of the region's land area.

Chapter 9 - Existing Land Use Plan

- Out of those 7,227 acres, Robeson Township has the majority of land area occupied by agricultural uses. Robeson has 3,361 acres or approximately 47% of the region's agricultural production.
- Birdsboro contains no agricultural uses because of their dense residential and commercial development.

7. Recreation Lands

Recreation land provides space and facilities for people to engage in active and passive recreation activities. These include playgrounds, parkland, state gamelands/forests, as well as recreation land owned by non-profit recreational groups (i.e. homeowners associations, sportsman clubs, little league) and commercial recreation (i.e. golf courses, miniature golf courses, campgrounds).

- Recreation lands occupy 7,859 acres or 18% of the region's total land area.
- Nearly 84% of the total land designated as recreation in the region is located within Union Township.

8. Open Space Lands

Open Space is land that is predominantly wooded or open land that does not include a structure such as meadows and fields (not farmland). Residue land associated with large residential lots over 5 acres, as well as forested land on farmland is also included in the category. The majority of this land is private except for municipal watershed lands.

- Open Space is the largest use of land at 15,119 acres or approximately 35% of the region's total land area.
- 68.1% of the total open space in the region is found in Robeson Township.

9. Transportation Lands

Transportation lands are used for roads and railroads. While the network of transportation modes that serves the region also includes bus and motor freight services, these land uses, as well as parking garages are included in the commercial category.

- The amount of land area consumed by such a network is somewhat significant (1,931 acres or approximately 4.4% of the total region's land area), due to the varying widths of rights-of-way associated with the highway and railroad modes of transportation.
- Robeson Township has the most land area covered by transportation at 916 acres or 47% of the region's total transportation land area.
- The transportation category is the fifth largest land use designation by area in the joint planning region.

10. Water

The water category is comprised of rivers, streams, ponds, and lakes.

- Water occupies 542 acres or approximately 1.2 % of the region's total land area.

Existing Land Use Patterns

The map accompanying this section illustrates the existing land uses of different areas in the region, as of 2019. The Southern Berks region encompasses a total area of 43,582 acres. Commercial development is concentrated sporadically throughout the region with higher concentrations located along Route 724 in Birdsboro Borough and the Morgantown area of Caernarvon Township. There is also some commercial development located in northwestern Robeson Township along the Route 10 corridor. The commercial uses in these areas range from office complexes to local and regional shopping centers.

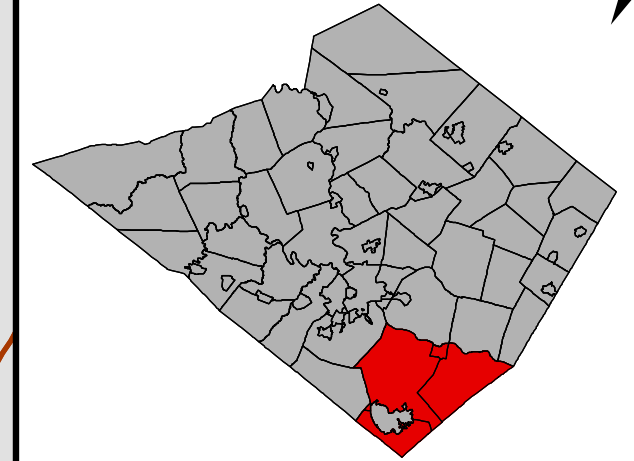
The area has some industrial properties. The bulk of these industrial uses are located in Birdsboro Borough. There are two quarry operations within the region, one in Robeson Township and the other straddles the border between Robeson and Union Townships.

There are a number of Institutional uses in the region. Institutional land use designations include municipal buildings, schools, churches and hospitals. The school districts provide the bulk of the Institutional land within the region.

The denser areas of residential development have been limited to areas where central sewage service has been available and where it was allowed by zoning. These areas include within and around Birdsboro Borough, as well as the village of Morgantown.

For the most part, the region remains relatively rural. Scattered throughout the Townships are a mix of open space, agriculture and low density housing. Approximately half of the land use in Union Township is occupied by French Creek State Park.

Existing Land Use



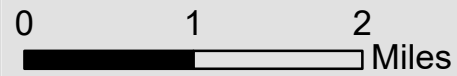
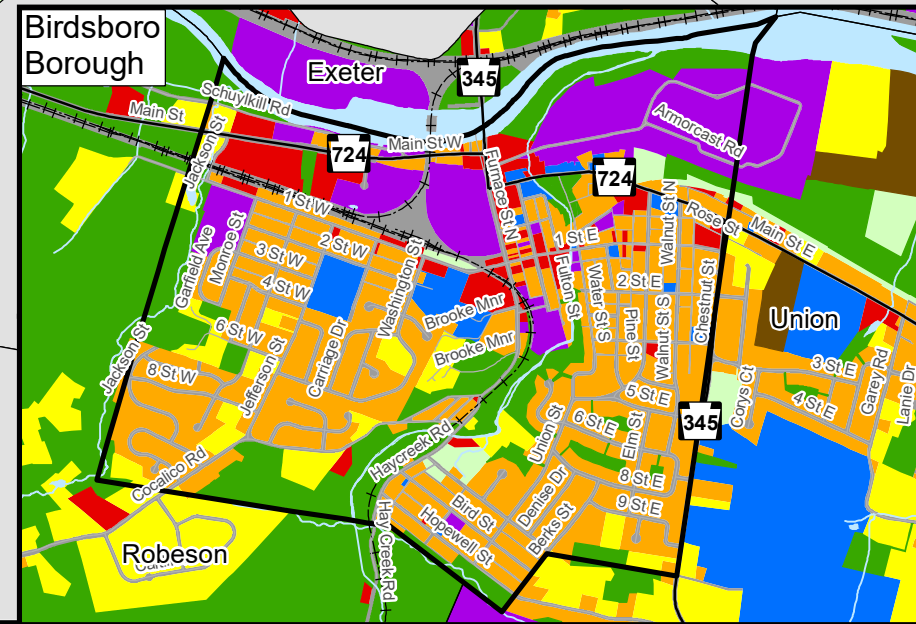
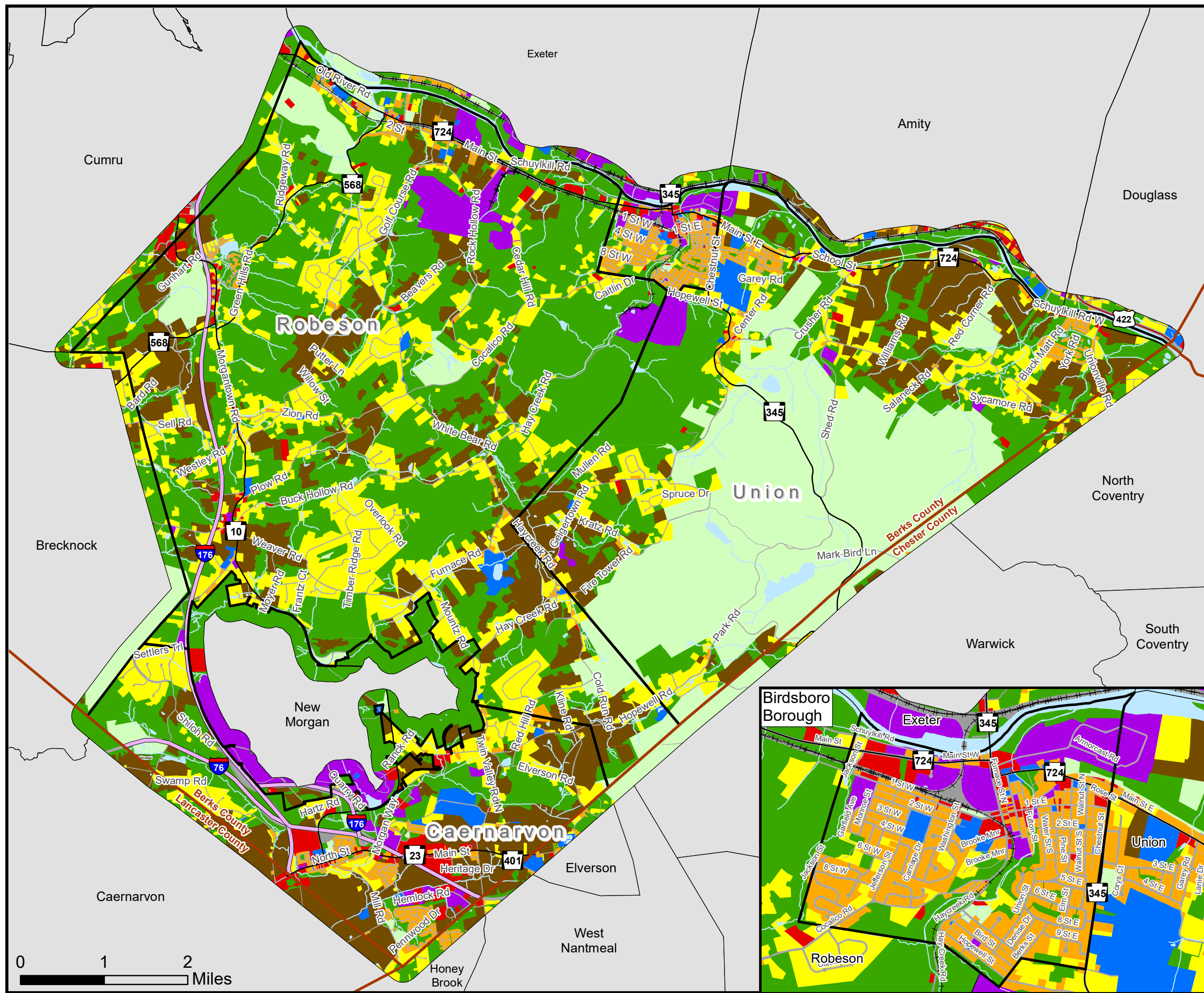
Legend

- Residential Low
- Residential High
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Institutional
- Recreation
- Open Space
- Agriculture
- Water
- Transportation
- Railroads
- Municipal Boundaries

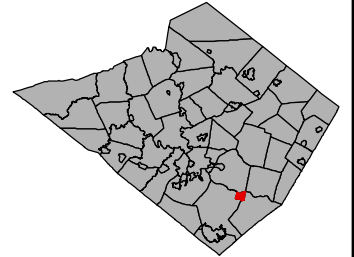
Source data: Berks County Planning Commission GIS, Berks County GIS/IS, Berks County Mapping, Berks DES

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Existing Land Use Birdsboro Borough



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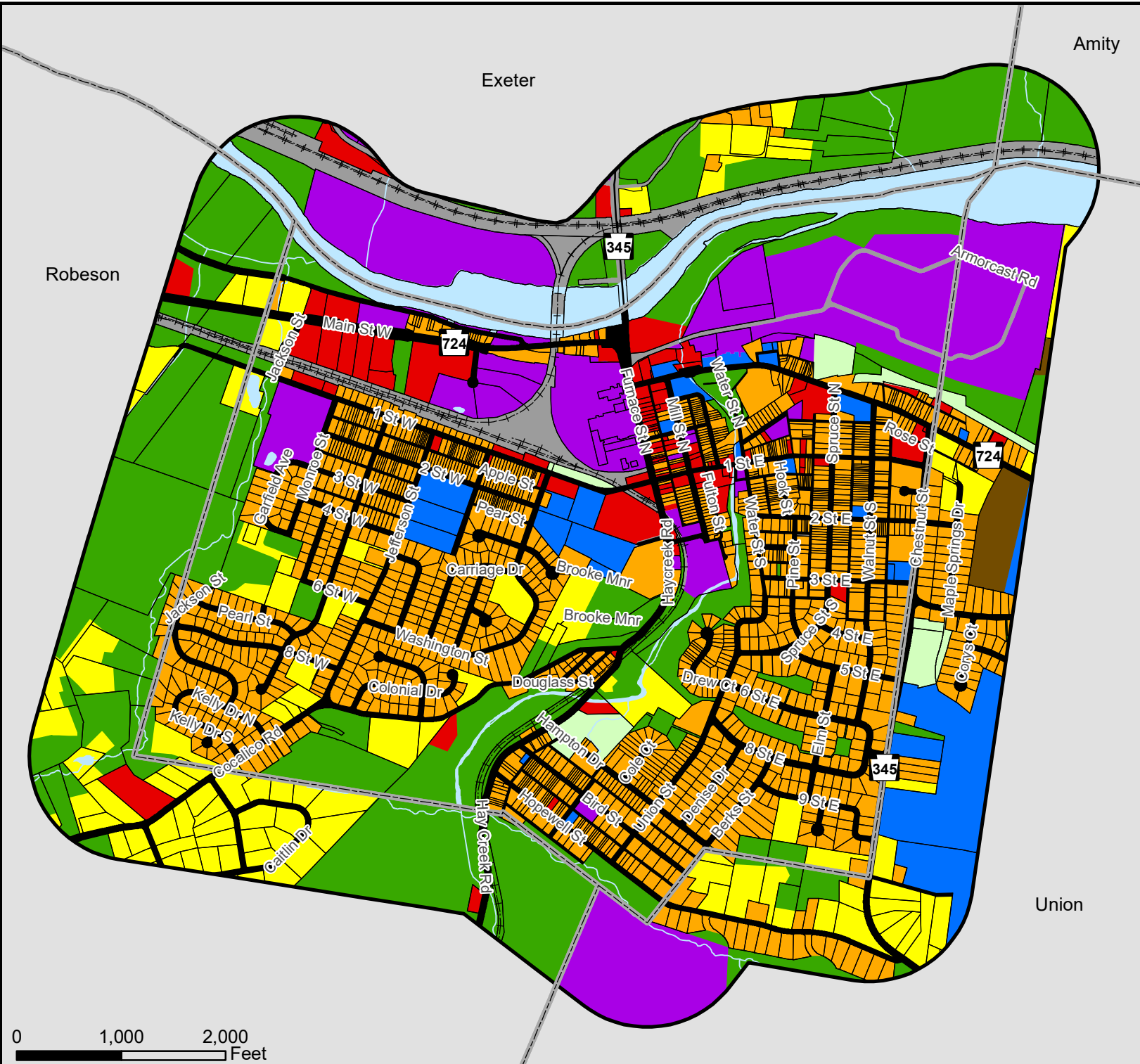
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GIS/IS, Berks County Mapping, Berks DES

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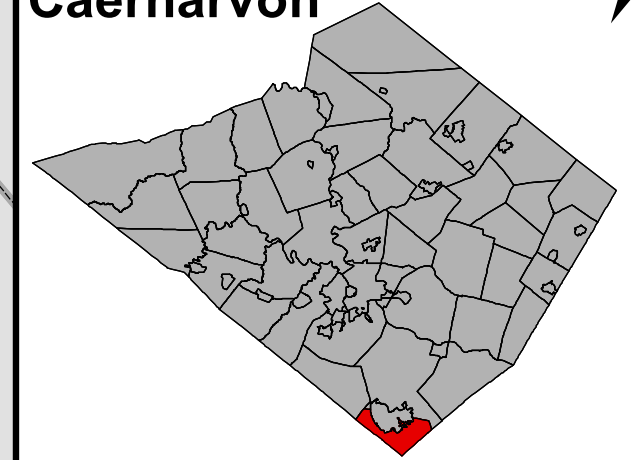


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Existing Land Use Caernarvon



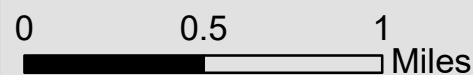
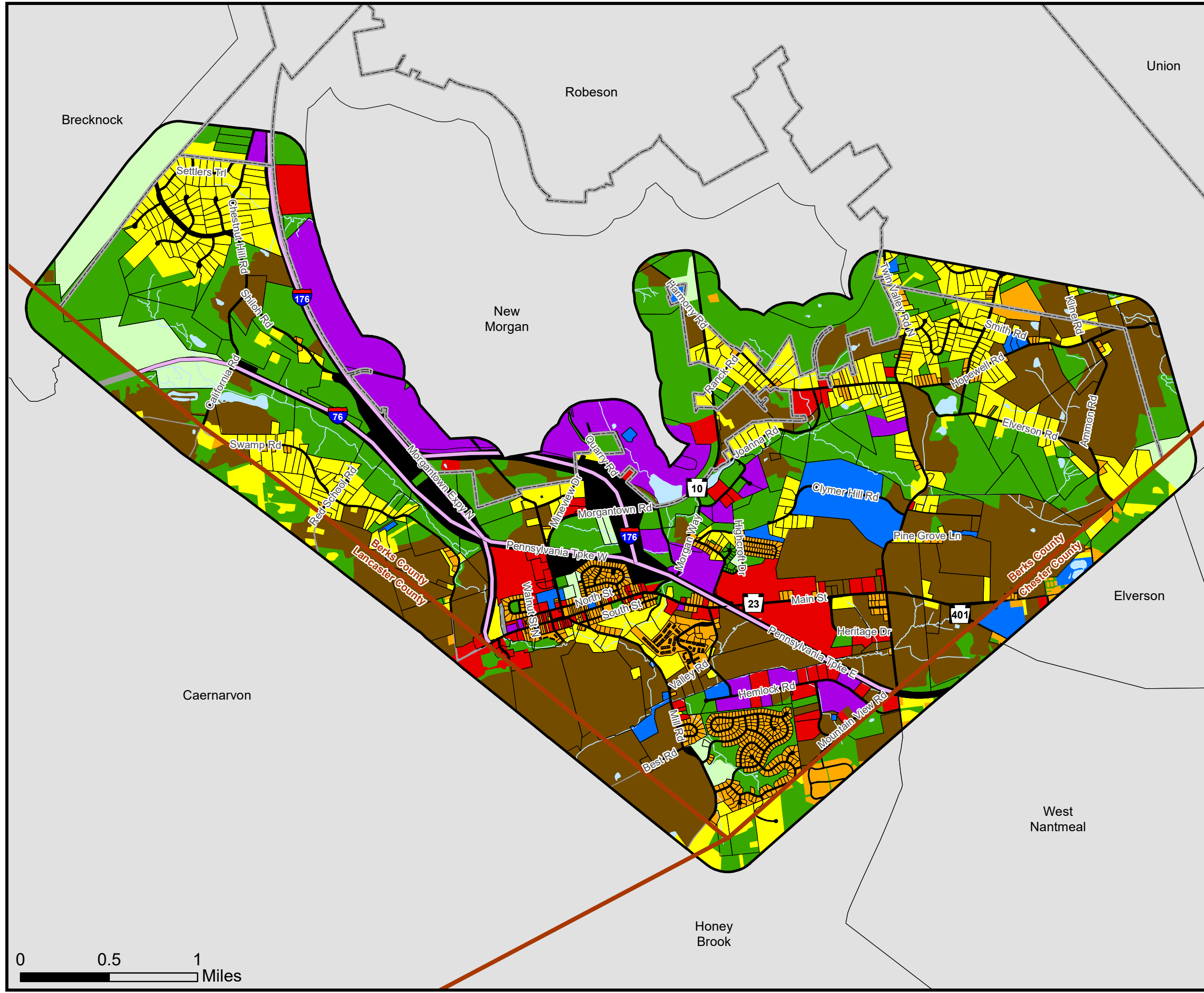
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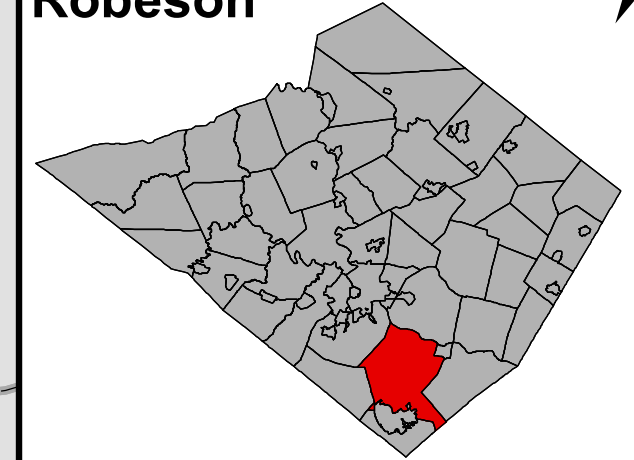
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Existing Land Use Robeson



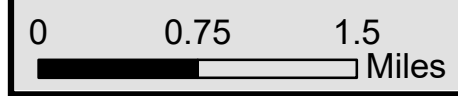
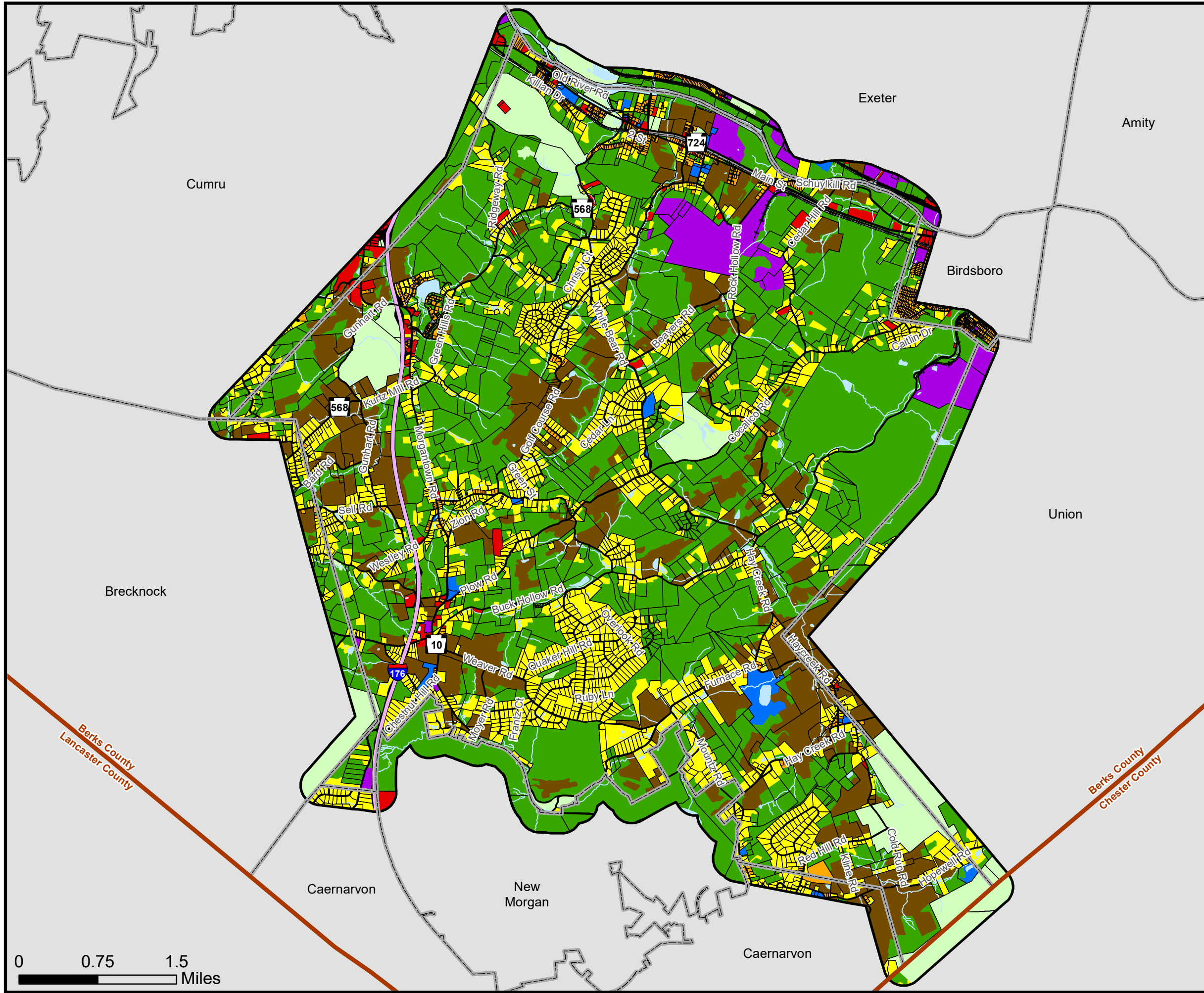
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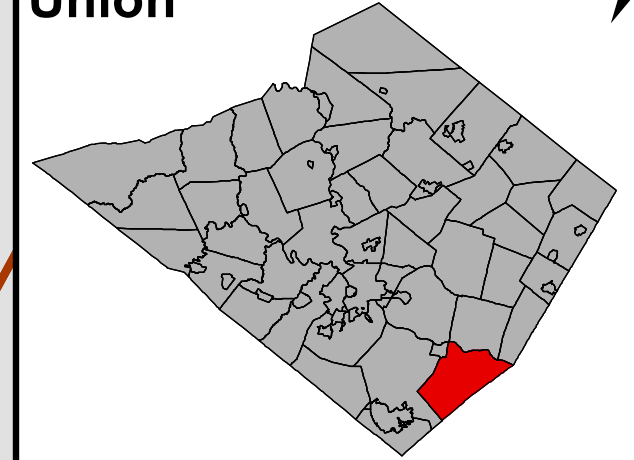
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Existing Land Use Union



Legend

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