

FUTURE LAND USE PLAN

The Future Land Use Plan emphasizes land use planning that accommodates projected community and economic growth, directs growth to areas of existing or planned infrastructure, and protects sensitive resources from development and its impacts. The core purpose of the Future Land Use Plan is to manage the amount, intensity, character and timing of development.

Future Land Use Plan Recommendations

The following describes land use categories, as shown on the Future Land Use Plan Maps. In most cases, these categories are intended to generally relate to zoning districts. The Future Land Use Plan is primarily intended to:

- a) protect existing residential neighborhoods,
- b) moderate the rate of housing construction to avoid overloading the public school system, roads, utilities and groundwater supplies,
- c) coordinate development across municipal borders, including municipalities that are not part of the Suburban Berks West Regional Comprehensive Plan,
- d) avoid serious traffic congestion and safety problems, particularly by avoiding new commercial strip development along major roads,
- e) promote new business development in appropriate locations, including the strengthening of older business areas, with careful attention towards the types of businesses allowed in areas near homes, and
- f) make sure development properly relates to the natural features of the land, particularly to protect steeply sloped areas, major water supplies and creek valleys.



100 Park at Wyomissing Square

Future Land Use Analysis

Methodology

The Future Land Use Plan was created digitally using a geographic information system (GIS). The existing land use and zoning GIS data was used as the foundation to create the Future Land Use Maps. Additional GIS data such as public water and sewer areas, slopes, floodplains, tax parcels, and preservation easements were overlaid onto the existing land use. The combination of all the different GIS data allowed an analysis to be performed which determined areas that are currently developed, areas where growth should occur at different densities, conservation areas, recreation, as well as areas where industrial and commercial development should occur.

The Future Land Use Plan depicts the pattern of projected land use, targeting areas that are appropriate for urban growth and reinvestment, as well as areas that should be preserved/conserved for their agricultural, recreational or natural resource assets.

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The Future Land Use Plan is divided into twelve (10) categories:

1. Low Density Residential
2. Medium Density Residential
3. High Density Residential
4. Mixed Residential / Commercial
5. Rural Conservation
6. Commercial
7. Industrial
8. Public / Institutional
9. Recreation
10. Transportation Network

The table below shows the acreage for each Future Land Use category for the Region.

LANDUSE	Joint Planning Area		Spring		Sinking Spring		West Reading		Wyomissing	
	# Acres	% of Area	# Acres	% of Area	# Acres	% of Area	# Acres	% of Area	# Acres	% of Area
Low Density Residential	1,540	9.7%	641	5.4%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	899	30.9%
Medium Density Residential	1,216	7.6%	831	7.0%	293	36.7%	16	4.2%	76	2.6%
High Density Residential	882	5.5%	606	5.1%	66	8.3%	49	12.9%	161	5.5%
Mixed Residential / Commercial	1,330	8.3%	1,083	9.1%	72	9.0%	72	18.9%	103	3.5%
Rural Conservation	5,383	33.8%	5,360	45.2%	0	0.0%	23	6.0%	0	0.0%
Commercial	747	4.7%	245	2.1%	20	2.5%	0	0.0%	482	16.6%
Industrial	480	3.0%	230	1.9%	169	21.2%	26	6.8%	55	1.9%
Public / Institutional	903	5.7%	618	5.2%	24	3.0%	72	18.9%	189	6.5%
Recreation	1,424	8.9%	1,076	9.1%	49	6.1%	17	4.5%	282	9.7%
Transportation Network	2,044	12.8%	1,169	9.9%	105	13.2%	106	27.8%	664	22.8%
Total	15,949	100.0%	11,859	100.0%	798	100.0%	381	100.0%	2,911	100.0%

Source: Berks County Planning Commission

The following describes the ten (10) land use categories portrayed in the Future Land Use Plan.

1. Low Density Residential

This category is primarily intended to provide for single family detached development. With on-lot well and septic systems, a one or one-and-a-half acre minimum should be required depending on the municipality. With central water and sewage services, a lot size of approximately ½ acre to 1/3 acre would be appropriate in most areas.

The Low Density Residential designation accounts for approximately 9.7% or 1,540 acres of the planning area making this designation the third most abundant land use behind the Rural Conservation and Transportation Network designations.

2. Medium Density Residential

This category is primarily intended to provide for single family detached homes and twin houses. With central water and sewage services, an average of approximately 4 to 5 homes per acre would be appropriate without open space preservation. The Open Space Development option could provide for approximately 1/4 or 1/6 acre average lot sizes with 30 percent of the tract preserved as open space.

The Medium Density Residential category encompasses approximately 7.6% of the land use within the region. Over 36% of the land area in Sinking Spring Borough is designated as Medium Density Residential, making it the most abundant land use category in the Borough.

3. High Density Residential

This category is intended to provide for a mix of housing types at densities at over 6 homes per acre. Higher densities (such as 8 to 12 homes per acre) could be appropriate if the housing was limited to persons age 55 and older or through transfer of development rights. These areas should allow for all housing types. These areas are particularly important to meet obligations under State law to offer opportunities for all types of housing. It also is important to provide opportunities for various housing types in order to meet the needs of different types of households, such as empty nesters, singles, low income and senior citizens. All apartment and townhouse developments (except the smallest) should be required to include some recreation or open space area for residents.

High Density Residential can be found mostly within the borders of the Boroughs and in Spring Township along the boundary with Wyomissing. Although the majority of this land is already built up it is only appropriate to locate this type of development in areas already served by existing or proposed infrastructure.

4. Mixed Residential / Commercial

This category is intended to provide for a mix of light businesses and a mix of housing types. These areas should provide for retail stores, offices, personal services, day care centers, banks, exercise clubs and similar uses. The intent is to prohibit the heaviest commercial uses that are most likely to spur demolition or create nuisances for neighbors, such as 24 hour convenience stores, gas stations, vehicle repair, adult bookstores, restaurants with drive-through service and vehicle sales.

In the downtowns and older villages, development should be encouraged that complements, rather than detracts from, the existing character of historic areas. In older areas, new buildings should be placed with setbacks from the road/street that are similar to nearby older buildings. To the maximum extent feasible, parking should be located to the rear or side of buildings. If desired, the Traditional Neighborhood provisions of the State Planning Code could be used to require that new construction be consistent with existing buildings (such as requiring parking to be to the side or rear of buildings and requiring front porches for new homes).

In the planning area this designation encompasses 1,330 acres or 8.3% of the total land area. The majority of which is located along the 422 Business / Penn Avenue corridor. In West Reading Borough this category is quite prominent. Businesses such as restaurants and boutiques occupy the first floor of a traditional row or semi-detached buildings and residential units occupy the upper floors.

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5. Rural Conservation

This category is intended to emphasize conservation of important natural features, particularly in the southern portion of Spring Township. This area is not proposed to be served by central sewage systems. These lands are characterized by low density development, prominent forest cover, and may contain slopes greater than 15%, as well as fragmented areas of farmland and land eased for agriculture, open space, natural resource or woodland conservation. Development should be subject to flexible siting standards, conservation design standards, and disturbance limitations designed to avoid the most critical environmental constraints, and allow land to be developed efficiently with the least degree of environmental impact.

The Rural Conservation category also contains the region's agricultural land. As described in chapter 4 (Nature Features and Agricultural Preservation) Spring Township has a number of parcels preserved through Act 43, the Agricultural Security Law. Act 43 authorizes townships to create Agricultural Security Areas (ASAs) on a voluntary basis. Landowners are encouraged to enroll farmland in an ASA that offers three benefits: 1) Protection from condemnation or eminent domain; 2) Protection from local nuisance ordinances; and 3) Eligibility for the County's Agricultural Conservation Easement (ACE) Program.

Note - Landowners with 10 acres or more may voluntarily petition their township to form an ASA. A minimum of 250 acres is needed to establish an ASA and a minimum of 500 acres is needed for that land enrolled in the ASA to be eligible for the ACE Program. Most townships in Berks County with an ASA have more than 500 acres enrolled. An ASA may be increased at any time. Landowners simply need to submit an enrollment form to the township office by certified mail, as it is important that the landowners can verify the date the application was submitted. In addition to the township's responsibility to respond to enrollment forms, every seven years townships may review lands enrolled in ASA with the option of adding additional land, at the request of the landowners, or withdrawing land previously enrolled.

The Rural Conservation category is the largest category in the Future Land Use analysis. Rural Conservation accounts for nearly 34% of the region's total acreage.

6. Commercial

This category is intended to provide for a wide range of commercial development, particularly in areas of more "highway" oriented commercial development. As opposed to the Mixed Residential / Commercial areas described earlier in this chapter, these areas should provide opportunities for uses such as gas stations, vehicle sales and auto sales. A careful set of standards are needed to require coordinated traffic access among different uses. In most cases, these areas are not adjacent to residential development.

If an excessive amount of commercial zoning is allowed at one time, it may encourage sprawled development, with businesses simply relocating from one business site to a new site, leaving the old site vacant. If the supply of commercially zoned land is held to a moderate amount, it will encourage rehabilitation and redevelopment of older commercial sites.

This category is proposed to include many existing commercial areas including the Berkshire Mall and the former Vanity Fair Outlet site.

4.7% or a total of 747 acres of the region includes this Commercial designation.

7. Industrial

The Industrial areas are intended to provide for a wide range of industrial uses. These areas are particularly important to meet obligations under State law to provide opportunities for all types of business uses, including some uses that are less desirable. The heaviest industrial uses should need special exception from the zoning hearing board or conditional use approval from the supervisors/borough council.

Because this plan involves multiple municipalities, it will not be necessary for each municipality to provide for all types of industrial uses. It is recommended that the heavier industrial uses be concentrated around the existing petroleum tank farms along Columbia Avenue and Mountain Home Road in Sinking Spring and eastern Spring Township.

A careful set of performance standards should be used to control noise, dust, vibration and other nuisances and hazards, especially from industrial uses. Extensive landscaped buffers should be required next to homes. Where a very intensive use is proposed next to homes, a landscaped earth berm and/or solid fencing should also be required.

A high quality setting will help to attract additional desirable types of business development and higher paying types of jobs. In newer industrial areas, a set of site design regulations should be used to promote light industrial/office parks in a well-landscaped campus-like environment. Truck parking and outdoor storage areas should be required to be screened from view from roads. The majority of the first 30 feet along a road should be landscaped, with truck loading docks and truck parking located to the side or rear of buildings.

Approximately 480 acres of the region's total land area is reserved for Industrial use.

8. Public / Institutional

This category recognizes existing large public, semi-public and institutional uses, such as hospitals, schools and municipal buildings. A total of 903 acres are designated as Public/Institutional within the planning area.

9. Recreation

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. sportsman clubs, and little league organizations) and commercial recreation (i.e. golf courses, miniature golf courses, campgrounds). Recreation lands occupy 1,424 acres or 8.9% of the Region's total land area.

10. Transportation Network

Land in this category contains roads and railroads. While the network of transportation modes that serves Berks County also includes air service, bus and motor freight services, these land uses, as well as parking garages are included in the commercial category.

While many factors can influence growth and development patterns, the existing transportation network has always been prominent in shaping Berks County, as well as the Suburban Berks West planning region. Over time development has historically concentrated near major transportation facilities to take advantage of their accessibility. The amount of land area consumed by such a network is 2,044 acres or almost 13% of the region's total land area. Recent upgrades to the highway network include U.S. 222 South. Plans are underway to completely rehabilitate the Route 422 West Shore Bypass and the Penn Street interchange. This project is still in its engineering phase with work slated to begin sometime in the year 2022.

Further discussion of the transportation network within the Region can be found in the Transportation section of this plan.

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Concepts for Future Development

1. Extend the best features of older development into newer development.

Consideration should be given to strongly encouraging forms of “traditional neighborhood development.” This involves extending the best features of the older areas into new neighborhoods. As discussed later in this Chapter, this concept also involves making sure that development or redevelopment of lots within older neighborhoods occurs in a way that fits within the “urban fabric.” Traditional neighborhood development primarily involves the following:

- Street trees should be planted to eventually provide a canopy of shade over streets. Studies show that mature street trees can increase the value of homes up to 10 percent. If it is not appropriate to have shade trees in the right-of-way, they can be required immediately outside of the right-of-way.
- Requiring that new street lights meet a certain design standard that is similar to older styles of street lights.
- Sidewalks should be provided (or asphalt paths along main roads in rural areas). There should be an orientation to pedestrians, with an ability to walk or bicycle to stores, schools and parks. Overly wide residential streets and intersections should be avoided to discourage speeding and to make it easier for pedestrians to cross the street.
- A modest density should be encouraged that is similar to the typical development that occurred during the 1930s through 1940s. This density (such as 5 to 8 homes per acre) should make best use of available land, while avoiding overly dense development and parking problems.
- Whenever practical, parking should be located to the rear or side of buildings, so that the front yard can be landscaped. At best, parking and garages would be placed to the rear of lots, with access using alleys. This design avoids conflicts between sidewalks and vehicles backing into the street, and allows the entire curbside to be available for on-street parking.
 - If rear access to garages is not practical, then garages should enter onto the side of homes whenever possible, particularly on corner lots. If a front-entrance garage is proposed, it should be designed so that it is not an overly prominent part of the street. For example, a one lane driveway can pass along the side of a house and then widen to enter a two-car garage that is setback from the front of the house. “Snout” houses should be avoided that have a front entrance garage as the home’s most prominent feature.
 - Care is needed to discourage new twin and townhouse development that has numerous driveways entering directly onto a street from the front. Garage doors should not be an overly prominent part of the views of housing from the front. Where garages and parking cannot be avoided in the front yard, larger lot widths should be required to make sure that there is green space in the front yard. Regulations are needed to make sure that the majority of the front yards of housing developments are not covered by paving.
- Buildings should be placed relatively close to the street, with front or side porches, to encourage interaction among neighbors. On a corner lot, a side porch can have the same effect. If residents spend time on their front porch, they can help oversee the neighborhood and report suspicious activity to the police.

This concept can be used to maintain the character of older residential areas. For example, driveways can be required to access onto an alley or side street where it is available, as opposed to having a front garage and driveway. This design avoids conflicts between sidewalks and vehicles backing into the street, and allows the entire curbside to be available for on-street parking. Otherwise, new driveways may remove as many parking spaces as they create.

New buildings can be required to have a maximum setback from the street that is similar to other buildings on the block. New buildings can also be required to include front porches. Front porches encourage interaction among neighbors, which builds more of a community spirit. If residents spend time on their front porch, they can help oversee the neighborhood and report suspicious activity to the proper authorities.

Most new parking can be required to be placed to the rear or side of the main building on the lot, which makes the building and not parked cars the most visible feature along the street.

New street trees can be required by a zoning ordinance as part of the construction of any new principal building, instead of only being required for new subdivisions. Neighborhood character can also be established with older styles of street lights and street name signs.

Under the State Planning Code, a municipality can require some of these features in zoning ordinances. Or, a municipality could offer density incentives for this type of traditional development.

2. Traffic Access Control

If traffic access onto a major road is properly managed, the road will be able to safely handle large volumes of traffic. However, if a road combines a large number of business driveways entering a road at many locations, there will be right-hand turns and left-hand turns at many locations. The constant stopping and starting from these turns greatly affect the smooth flow of vehicles and create safety hazards. This is known as “strip” commercial development.

At best, intense business development should be concentrated in well-planned developments with internal roads that access a major road with a traffic signal and turn lanes. Where a traffic signal is not warranted at the present time, there should still be a plan for where traffic signals are intended to be built in the future. This will allow driveways and street intersections to be directed towards those intersections so that the traffic signal will be well-placed in the future. Where traffic signals are not appropriate, adjacent commercial uses should have shared driveways and interconnected parking lots. The interconnected parking lots are particularly valuable so that a person can visit more than one adjacent business without having to enter and re-enter a major road.

3. Transfer of Development Rights (TDRs)

This concept should be a voluntary option in the Zoning Ordinances of the municipalities. TDRs offer incentives for private developers to pay to preserve land. If a developer of one tract of land pays an owner of another tract to permanently preserve their land, then the developer could receive approval to build at a higher density on the developer’s tract. The tract that receives the higher density would need to be in an area that the township has designated as being suitable for a higher density. The tract that would be permanently preserved would need to be in an area that the township has targeted for preservation. The developer and the owner of the open land would negotiate on their own to determine how much the developer pays to the other landowner for the preservation.

- This method allows development to be shifted from locations where preservation is desired to allow a higher density on other tracts in a municipality that are well suited for development.
- The municipality would then approve the development at a higher density at the same time as a conservation easement went into effect to preserve the other land. The preserved land would remain privately owned but could never be developed. The preserved land could be re-sold and could be used for agriculture or certain open space uses.
- For example, this process might allow preservation of land in the Rural Conservation area, in return for allowing a higher density in a Low Density Residential or Medium Density Residential area. Or, density might be transferred from one part of a Rural Conservation area to another part of the Rural Conservation area.

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- The number of homes that could be transferred from one tract to another would be based upon a “Yield Plan.” This sketch plan would show how many homes would have been permitted on the tract that is to be preserved. Once the township accepts this Yield Plan, that number of homes could be transferred from one tract to another tract. However, there would still be limits on the density of the tract being developed to make sure that it is not excessive.
- TDR can also be used in combination with commercial development. For example, for every housing unit that is transferred from one area of a municipality, an additional amount of building coverage or impervious coverage could be allowed in a business district.

4. Work to Preserve Open Space in New Development

Throughout the nation, there is increased emphasis in permanently preserving important open spaces as part of new development. This concept has been promoted by the Natural Lands Trust and the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources using the term “Conservation Design” development. This Plan uses the term “Open Space Development.”

Attractive incentives are needed so that any development of the large open tracts of land in the Township would be developed with substantial areas of preserved open space (such as 35 to 70 percent), as opposed to standard “cookie-cutter” type lots.

The intent is to design development in a manner that conserves the important natural, scenic and historic features of a site. Large percentages of a tract are permanently preserved in open space. In comparison, “Conventional Subdivisions” typically involve very little or no open space preservation. Conventional Subdivisions are also known as “Cookie Cutter Subdivisions” because every lot is typically the same size and shape, regardless of the features of the land.

Advantages of Open Space Developments - Based upon the work of the Natural Lands Trust, the following are some of the major advantages of Open Space Development:

- *Important natural features can be preserved.* Regulations and incentives should direct buildings away from steep slopes, wetlands, waterways and other important natural features. As a result, homes are placed on portions of the tract that are most environmentally suitable for development - as opposed to being evenly spread across the land. Large contiguous areas can remain in woods and other natural vegetation - which are important as wildlife corridors. Thick natural vegetation can be preserved along creeks - which is essential to filter out eroded soil and other pollutants from runoff before it enters the creek. This vegetation along creeks is also important to maintain high quality fishing habitats.
- In comparison, if an entire tract is divided into lots, it is likely to mostly be in mowed grass - which is a “mono-culture” that does not have the same environmental benefits.
- With open space preservation, stormwater runoff can be managed in a more natural manner that encourages recharge into the groundwater. This may negate the need to build extensive stormwater systems which are costly to build and maintain.
- *Scenic features can be preserved.* Open Space Developments can place homes on less visible portions of a tract, while maintaining scenic views. For example, many Open Space Developments set back homes from main through-roads and limit placement of homes on major ridgelines. As a result, the main angle of vision along major roads involves green space.
- Mature woods can be preserved in locations that hide views of development. The preservation of open space also provides visual relief from seeing continuous development.

- Stormwater runoff can also be managed in a more attractive manner - as opposed to within deep man-made channels and detention basins.
- *Recreational opportunities can be increased.* Open Space Developments typically include attractive areas for walking, jogging, cross-country skiing and nature study. In some cases, active recreation facilities can be included. These open spaces can also increase interaction among neighbors.
- *Developers can achieve lower costs* for grading, lengths of roads, lengths of utilities and other improvements.
- Developers may also be able to save time and money by avoiding wetland alterations and waterway crossings.
- Open Space Developments can provide the flexibility in layout to move homes off of steep slopes, which are more expensive to build upon. Avoiding steep slopes can also reduce the need for blasting.
- By allowing flexibility in placement of buildings, it is easier to find suitable sites for septic systems.
- *Municipalities can save on maintenance costs.* Shorter lengths of roads, utilities and other improvements mean there is less to maintain. It is expensive to maintain and plow snow from steeply sloped roads. Open Space Developments can result in roads being placed at more modest slopes.
- *Developers can often achieve higher sales prices.* More and more developments are stressing in their advertising that homes are adjacent to preserved open spaces. Developers can often receive a premium price for lots that are adjacent to or overlook preserved open space. The presence of trails and other open space amenities can also spur sales.
- Studies have also shown that homes near preserved open space are likely to increase in value faster than other homes.
- *Reliable central water and sewage services* can be extended. It is usually uneconomical to provide central water and sewage services with lot sizes of 2 acres or larger. However, if homes are clustered on a tract, then it is often possible and/or necessary to provide central water and sewage services. Public water and sewage services typically are more reliable than individual wells and septic systems.
- Central sewage service avoids the threat of groundwater contamination from failing malfunctioning septic systems. Central water service avoids the risks of well water contamination from various sources.

Open Space Development can also occur with a design that allows homes to be “hidden in the woods” and in clusters that resemble a rural village, while allowing most of the farmland to be preserved.

The following major policies should be emphasized to encourage Open Space Developments:

1. *Strong incentives and disincentives* are needed to encourage open space preservation in new development. It typically is not sufficient to allow the same density for an Open Space Development as for a conventional subdivision. This is because developers prefer to build what has been successful in the past, as opposed to trying new concepts. Also, developers may feel (often inaccurately) that the homes on larger lots may have a higher market value than homes on smaller lots with open space. Therefore, density bonuses are needed for open space preservation. A community needs to trade-off a modestly increased number of dwelling units in return for substantial open space preservation.

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2. The process for approval of an Open Space Development should not be much more burdensome or time-consuming than the process for a Conventional Subdivision. Where practical, the process to gain approval for a desirable type of development should be easier than the process for a Conventional Subdivision. Discipline is needed in writing Open Space Development standards to make sure that they are not overly restrictive. If Open Space Development standards are too detailed or too extensive, they may not allow enough flexibility for a good design. If the standards get in the way of a developer's marketing plans or cause excessive costs, a developer may choose to do a Conventional Subdivision.
3. Proper standards are needed to make sure that the preserved open space is well-located and improved so that it serves important public functions. In many cases, mature woods, steep slopes and creek valleys should simply be preserved in their natural state. In other cases, the open spaces may be intended for active recreation. In still other cases, trees should be planted in the open spaces and trails should be installed. The key is to avoid a process in which the "open space" is simply the land that is left over after the most economical set of lots and roads are laid out. Narrow strips of open space should be avoided, unless they would preserve a scenic tree line or provide an important trail link.

5. Strengthen Older Residential Areas

It is extremely important that the older areas of the Suburban Berks West region remain strong and viable business and residential areas. This includes the older areas of Spring Township, West Reading, Wyomissing and Sinking Spring Boroughs. The best way to control sprawl is to make sure that older areas remain healthy and desirable places in which to live and conduct business.

This section recommends actions to stabilize and improve older residential neighborhoods. Stable neighborhoods are not only important to provide desirable places to live, but also to protect the health of nearby business areas. If the residential areas deteriorate, they will cause crime and vandalism problems that will discourage business activity. If the surrounding residential areas are strengthened, they will provide a strong base of customers who will hopefully find the downtowns a convenient place to serve their shopping and service needs.

To maintain its economic health, it is important to continually work to attract and retain middle-income households in older areas. This is particularly true because there will always be existing residents moving into newer and more expensive houses, and because there will always be older residents who will be moving to nursing homes, personal care centers or retirement communities. To maintain the same owner-occupancy rate, there needs to be a continual stream of new home-buyers.

Promoting Home Ownership - Many households could afford the monthly costs of owning a home, but do not have sufficient savings for the closing costs and down payment. These households need to be linked with available programs to help them achieve home ownership.

However, care is needed to avoid placing very low-income households in subsidized home-ownership. In too many cases, these households do not have the funds to pay for repairs that are periodically needed in an older home. If they have no equity in the home, they may be tempted to walk away from the mortgage. As a result, a property can stand vacant for months until foreclosure occurs and the property is resold. During this time, the property can deteriorate and/or be vandalized.

The availability of housing designed for senior citizens is an important part of the mix. This type of housing relieves older persons of maintenance and repair responsibilities and expenses. If older persons decide to move from large homes to senior housing, it then frees up that housing for families, and often puts those homes in the hands of people who can better maintain the homes. However, if there is insufficient demand by homebuyers for those homes, this trend of older homeowners moving out can reduce owner-occupancy rates.

Maintaining Housing Conditions - It is important to prevent blight and deterioration before it occurs. A single problem property can encourage responsible residents of nearby properties to move out of the neighborhood and

can discourage new home-buyers from investing in the neighborhood. A problem property can also discourage homeowners from investing in improvements to their home because they do not believe they will be able to see any return on their investment if they sell.

To promote home ownership and neighborhood stability, and to avoid parking problems, the conversions of existing one family homes into additional numbers of housing units should be prohibited. Owner-occupied housing typically has a much higher level of property maintenance than older renter housing. Types of new housing should be promoted that are most likely to be owner-occupied, such as singles, side-by-side twin homes and townhouses, as opposed to apartments or one unit above another unit.

The municipalities must continue to emphasize enforcement of the basic property maintenance codes to require property-owners to: a) properly maintain their buildings or b) sell the buildings to another party who will make the needed improvements. The goal in code enforcement must be to intervene before buildings deteriorate to the point where it is no longer cost effective to repair them. If property-owners are forced to complete basic maintenance and repairs in a timely manner, severe deterioration can be avoided.

Many older communities have adopted programs for the periodic inspection of rental properties to make sure they meet basic safety standards. To target an inspection program to the properties that are most likely to involve fire and safety hazards, inspections could be limited to buildings that were constructed prior to the enforcement of any comprehensive building codes. This would avoid the need for regular inspection of apartment buildings built during the last few decades, because those buildings typically have fire-resistant construction and safe means of access.

One option would be to require inspections when there is a change in tenants. This would make the program less intrusive to tenants. This option would also target the program to the housing units with the most turnover, which often are the units that need the most improvements. The cost of inspections can be covered by an annual license fee.

Emphasize housing rehabilitation - Most housing efforts primarily involve low-interest loans to rehabilitate homes owned by households with low or moderate incomes. Expanded marketing efforts are needed to make sure that eligible owners of properties in need of rehabilitation are aware of the financing programs that are available. Particular attention needs to be paid to low-income resident owners of property who need to make improvements to comply with municipal codes.

The Berks County Area Agency on Aging also offers a "Home Modification" program for minor household repairs and safety modifications. In most cases, the homeowner only pays for the cost of materials. The program is mainly aimed towards older persons with limited incomes and persons with disabilities.

Buyers of older homes should be encouraged to take advantage of the Federal Housing Administration's 203(k) program. This allows a homebuyer to receive a single loan to purchase a home and to complete a major rehabilitation of it.

It would be desirable to combine job training funding with County housing rehabilitation programs. The Federal Government has provided greater flexibility to use Federal job training dollars in ways that address local needs. Local non-profit housing organizations should work with job training agencies to design programs to meet mutual needs. Residents can learn useful job skills, while the job training programs help provide funding for needed housing rehabilitation.

Densities - Higher densities should only be considered for: a) housing developments that are limited to senior citizens and the physically handicapped, and b) the conversions of older non-residential buildings (such as old mills) into apartments.

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Density bonuses should be considered for developments limited to persons age 55 and older and their spouses, with no children under age 18. These density bonuses are logical because the typical household of older persons generates less traffic, less need for parking and less water and sewage usage compared to other types of housing. Housing for older persons also does not generate additional public school students, thereby avoiding negative impacts upon school finances.

Compatibility in Uses - It is important to protect older residential areas from incompatible development. This is a particularly a concern in older areas where there is typically a relatively dense mix of commercial, industrial and residential uses, with small setbacks.

In commercial areas near neighborhoods, the types of commercial uses should be carefully controlled. Most commercial areas near neighborhoods should not allow for heavy commercial uses, such as gas stations, 24 hour convenience stores, nightclubs and auto repair. Where practical, the hours of operation and hours of trucking activities should be controlled (such as conditions upon any zoning hearing board approval that is needed). Other problem uses should be very carefully controlled or prohibited, such as after-hours clubs that are open after 2 a.m. In areas closest to neighborhoods, it may be appropriate to prohibit or require zoning hearing board approval for a use to be open to the public or patrons between Midnight and 5 a.m. The zoning hearing boards should carefully review changes to existing business uses in residential zoning districts (which are called “nonconforming uses”) to make sure they will not harm the neighborhood.

In industrial areas near neighborhoods, great care is needed about the types of uses that are allowed. The heavier types of industrial uses should be prohibited from these areas or need special exception or conditional use approval.

Neighborhood Character - Zoning provisions can be put into place to require that new buildings in older neighborhoods be compatible to nearby buildings. This concept is described earlier in this chapter.

6. Continue to Carry Out the West Reading Main Street Program, and Use Similar Measures in Other Older Commercial Areas.

Many of these same policies being used in West Reading might be applied to strengthen other older commercial areas, including Penn Avenue in Sinking Spring, Wyomissing and Spring Township. The West Reading Program is modeled upon the nationwide “Main Street Program.”

The corridor extends along Penn Avenue from the railroad bridge west of the West Shore Bypass interchange westward to the Wyomissing border at 8th Avenue.

The West Reading program stresses four major approaches:

- Organization and Cooperation - To have a strong organization of all interested parties working cooperatively in partnerships to carry out needed actions.
- Design and Renewal - To improve the physical environment including the “streetscape” and the attractiveness of the fronts of buildings (particularly through rehabilitation of historic features), and providing adequate parking.
- Economic Development - To recruit and retain businesses and investors to expand job opportunities and generate additional local tax revenue. To provide information to support new business development. To maintain regular contacts with existing businesses to help them remain and grow in West Reading.
- Promotion - To market West Reading with a unified identify. To use special events to attract new customers and businesses. To emphasize high-quality distinctive products and services, including businesses serving a special market niche that is not served by mass-market discount retailers.

The West Reading Main Street Program works through a Foundation, an Authority and a set of volunteer committees. A key to the success of the program has been the active involvement of officials of the Borough government and local business-persons.

7. Continue the Work of the Borough of Sinking Spring Revitalization Committee (BOSS 2020).

Formed in 2008, the Borough of Sinking Spring Revitalization Committee (BOSS 2020) is an independent, Federal 501(c)(3) charitable, non-profit, community development organization created by elected and non-elected leaders of the municipality. Its mission is to develop and manage the mechanisms for improving the prosperity of its citizens and businesses and for improving the overall quality of life within the borough. BOSS 2020 acts broadly to 1) promote a sense of community and unified purpose, 2) assure the historic continuity of the borough's architectural heritage, 3) improve the image and perception of the borough to residents and visitors and 4) strengthen economic revitalization of property and commerce for the benefit of all.

In 2008 Borough Council asked BOSS 2020 "to develop a revitalization plan for the Borough's central business district and improve the quality of life for all." BOSS 2020 determined that the chief impediment to economic growth in the business district was heavy vehicle traffic congestion caused by two major misaligned crossroad intersections in the borough's core.

The Committee developed an 'Official Map' that realigns these intersections into traditional right-angle configuration. Additionally, the Official Map creates a new through street parallel to and south of the main east-west corridor, U.S. Route 422, Penn Avenue. This new through street will serve two purposes, 1) to connect the eastern and western north-south routes on either side of the central business district and 2) act as the Borough's new downtown 'Main Street' that allows access to over 20 acres of under-developed commercial land in the district.

In 2009, BOSS 2020 conducted a professional traffic study which confirmed that the Official Map infrastructure plan would significantly reduce traffic congestion. In 2010, the Committee contracted with a professional architectural firm to envision a preliminary plan for the redevelopment of the 20 acres into a New Town Center development using the principles of 'new urbanism' and 'smart growth'.

The four-phased plan for revitalization is well underway. Phase 1 on the eastern edge of the central business district (CBD) was redeveloped in 2010 as a 10-acre modern shopping destination known as Spring Market Center which now serves the community and generates tens of thousands of dollars in business tax revenue for the Borough. In the near future, the center will expand to include new and popular businesses.

Phase 2 of the Revitalization Plan will realign the western CBD intersection of Penn, Columbia and Cacoosing Avenues allowing for improvements in semi and tanker truck traffic maneuverability from nearby refineries while relieving much of the business district's traffic congestion. This Phase is fully funded and is scheduled for construction in 2017-2018.

Phase 3, constructing the new downtown Main Street and through street connector is in engineering. This new thoroughfare is the lynch pin of the BOSS 2020 revitalization plan and will create economic sustainability for the Borough. Phase 3 will be constructed beginning in 2017 using two awarded grants from the State's Multimodal Transportation Fund Program; \$784,000 from PennDOT and \$1.1 million from Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED). Additional funding will come from the Borough, the Berks County Redevelopment Authority and private developers. This phase is expected to be completed by 2019.

Finally, Phase 4 of the infrastructure plan realigns the eastern CBD intersection of Penn, Shillington and Mull Avenues thereby completing the traffic circulation and alleviating the remaining cause of congestion.

Chapter 11 - Future Land Use Plan

BOSS 2020 is working with private enterprise and other County and State agencies in a cooperative effort to begin engineering and design as soon as possible. The current estimate is to complete Phase 4 by 2020. More on this revitalization effort can be found on the BOSS 2020 website at: <http://boss2020.org/>.

8. Continue Implementing the Recommendations of the Spring Township Penn Avenue Revitalization Plan.

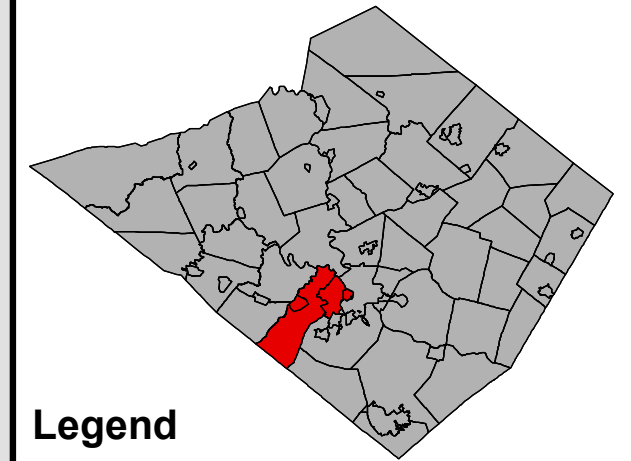
In 2011, Spring Township adopted the Penn Avenue Revitalization Plan, which provides guidelines for improvements to the portion of the Penn Avenue corridor located within the Township. The Plan includes recommendations intended to increase economic activity, improve pedestrian safety, enhance attractiveness and livability, and better manage parking along the corridor. The Township has undertaken the following activities in accordance with the recommendations in the Plan:

- Modifications to the Zoning regulations have been enacted, including the creation of new districts for the Penn Avenue corridor, revised use regulations, design guidelines and compliance standards, and increased flexibility in the parking standards.
- The Township has worked with property owners as their properties have been developed to complete the installation of sidewalks along the corridor.
- The sale of the Township's property along Penn Avenue to a commercial business should provide an anchor along the corridor.














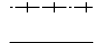
The Township intends to continue the process of implementing recommendations in the Plan, such as:

- Encourage façade and sign improvements to make the corridor more visually inviting.
- Promote street trees, landscaping and attractive pedestrian-level street lighting.
- Pursue funding for traffic improvements and streetscape enhancements to increase safety, improve traffic flow, manage on-street parking, and make Penn Avenue more pedestrian and bicycle friendly.
- Encourage business retention and expansion by focusing on business needs.

Future Land Use



Legend

-  Low Density Residential
-  Medium Density Residential
-  High Density Residential
-  Mixed Residential / Commercial
-  Agriculture*
-  Rural Conservation
-  Commercial
-  Industrial
-  Public / Institutional
-  Recreation
-  Transportation Network
-  Water Bodies
-  Railroads
-  Municipal Boundaries

* The Agriculture future land use designation is only shown in areas adjacent to the Suburban Berks West Joint Comprehensive Plan boundary.

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

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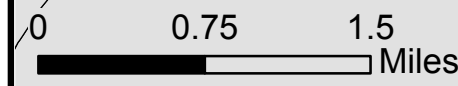
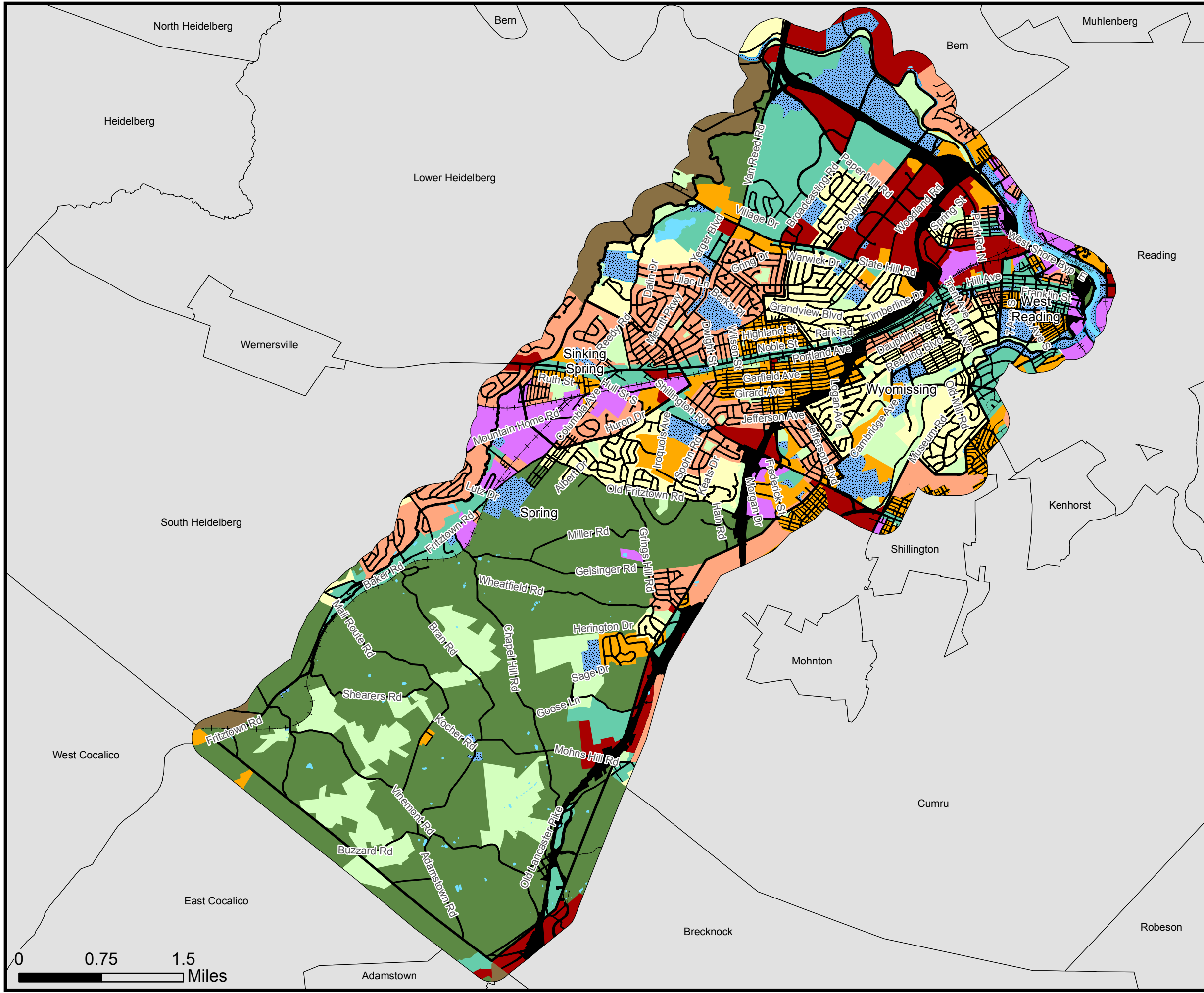
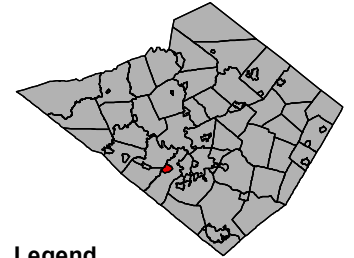


FIGURE 36

Sinking Spring, Spring, West Reading, Wyomissing Joint Comprehensive Plan Update September 2018

Sinking Spring Borough Future Land Use



Legend

- Low Density Residential
- Medium Density Residential
- High Density Residential
- Mixed Residential / Commercial
- Agriculture*
- Rural Conservation
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Public / Institutional
- Recreation
- Transportation Network
- Water Bodies
- Railroads
- Municipal Boundaries

* The Agriculture future land use designation is only shown in areas adjacent to the Suburban Berks West Joint Comprehensive Plan boundary.

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

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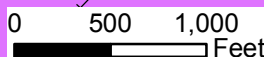
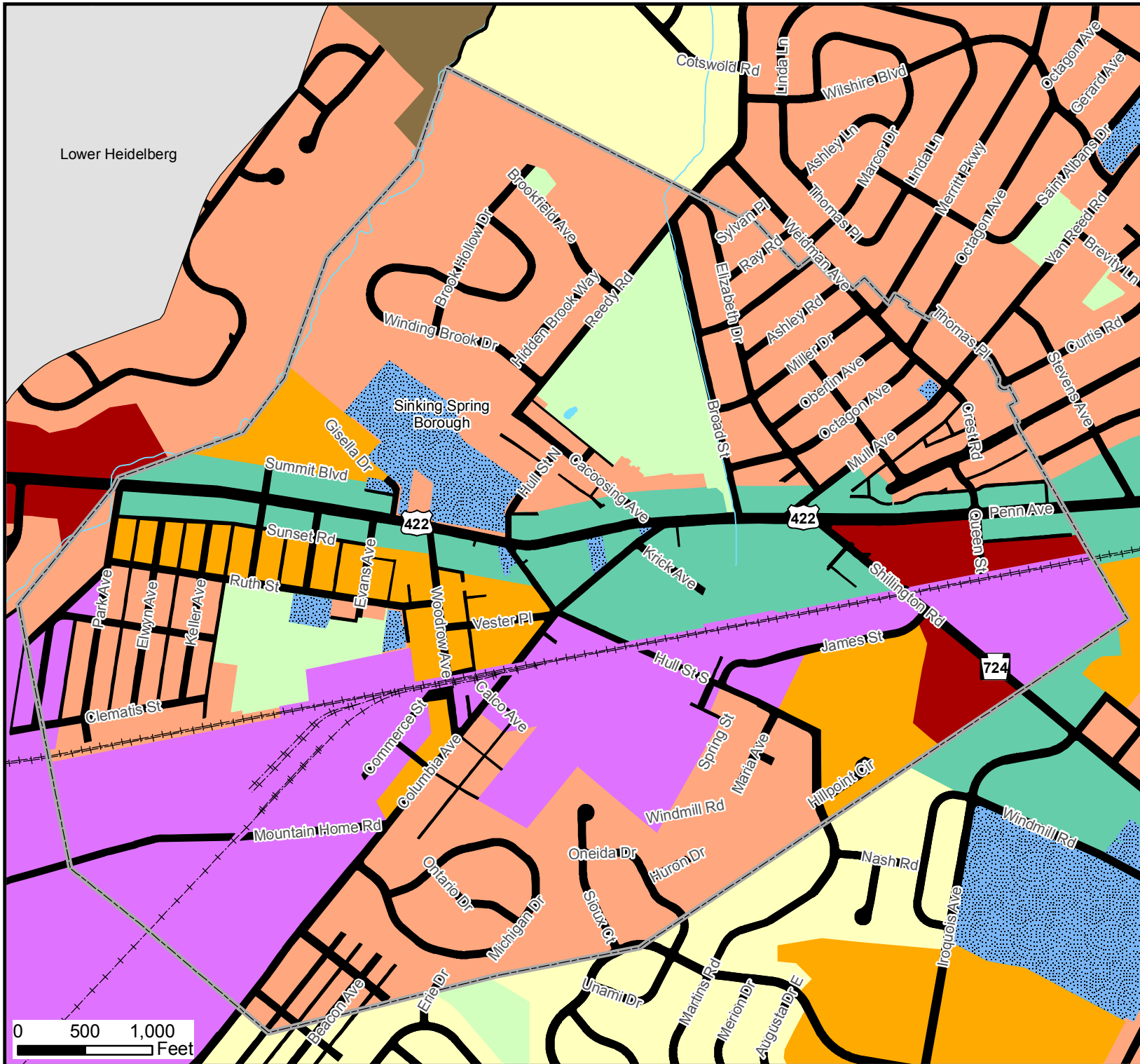
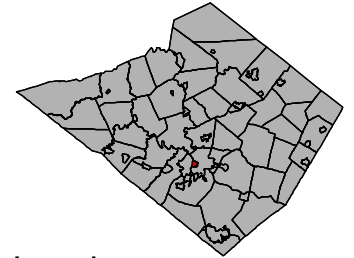


FIGURE 37

Sinking Spring, Spring,
West Reading, Wyomissing
Joint Comprehensive Plan Update
September 2018

West Reading Borough Future Land Use

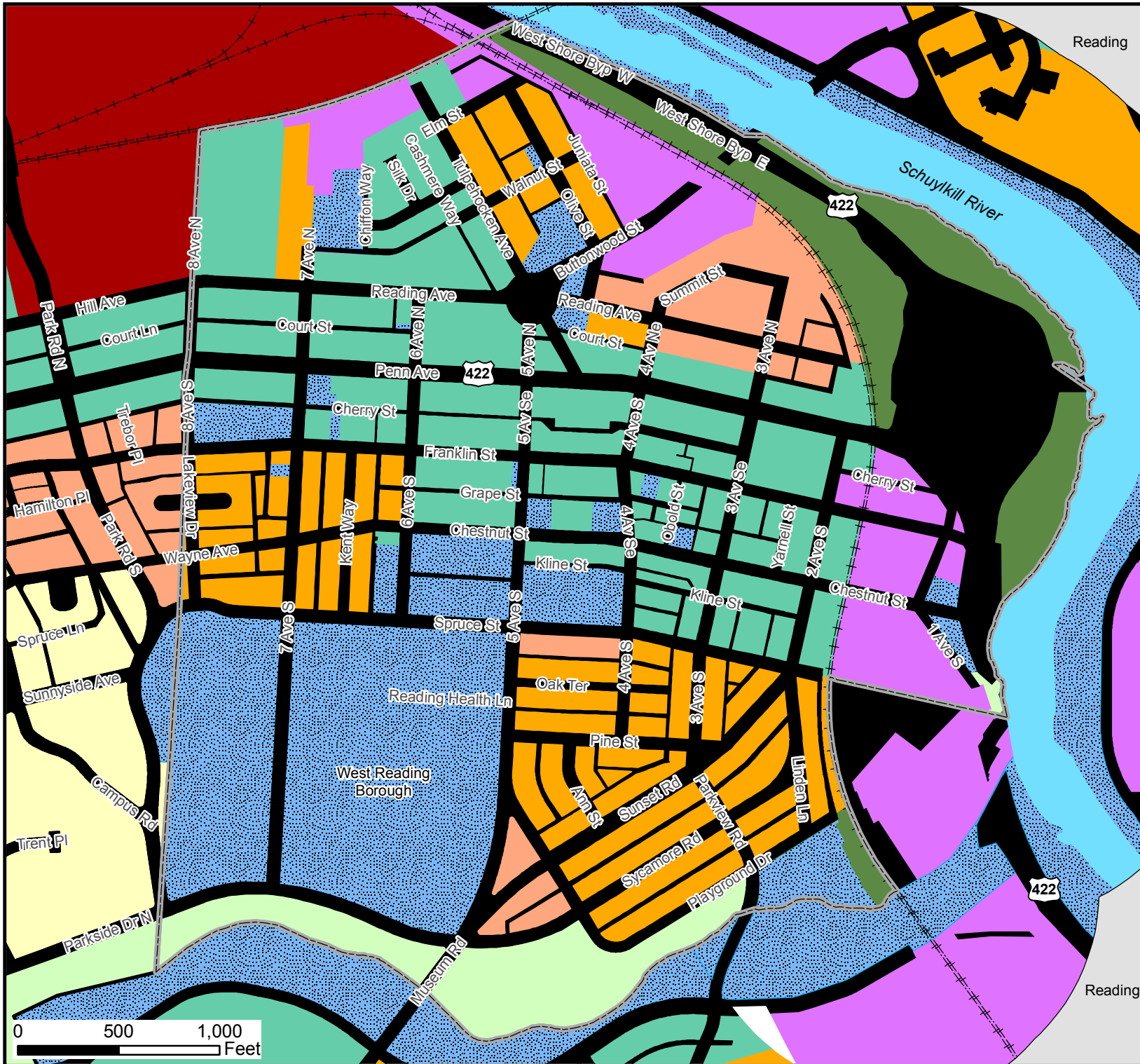


Legend

- Low Density Residential
- Medium Density Residential
- High Density Residential
- Mixed Residential / Commercial
- Rural Conservation
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Public / Institutional
- Recreation
- Transportation Network
- Water Bodies
- Railroads
- Municipal Boundaries

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

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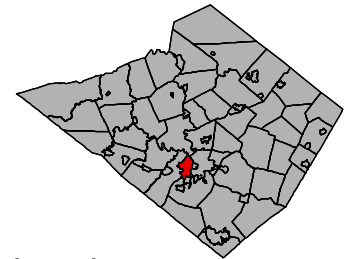


Reading

Reading

Sinking Spring, Spring, West Reading, Wyomissing Joint Comprehensive Plan Update September 2018

Wyomissing Borough Future Land Use



Legend

- Low Density Residential
- Medium Density Residential
- High Density Residential
- Mixed Residential / Commercial
- Rural Conservation
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Public / Institutional
- Recreation
- Transportation Network
- Water Bodies
- Railroads
- Municipal Boundaries

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

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