

An aerial photograph of Whitpain Township, Pennsylvania, showing a mix of residential neighborhoods, commercial centers, and green spaces. The image is used as a background for the title page of the Comprehensive Plan Update. The title is overlaid on a semi-transparent blue band across the middle of the image.

Whitpain Township COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

JUNE 2024

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Chapter 1



Background

The Whitpain Township Comprehensive Plan was last revised and adopted by the municipality in 2014. Since that time, a number of market and social conditions have changed considerably. These changes include the dramatic growth of e-commerce with exponentially increasing numbers of everyday purchases being made via the web. This growth of e-commerce is expected to continue to expand. The 2020 Pandemic exacerbated this growth. New warehouses are being built in many locations with good road access including “last-mile” distribution centers (smaller +-50,000SF) in suburban areas like Whitpain. An Amazon last-mile warehouse is currently being discussed in nearby King of Prussia (Upper Merion Township).

The growth of e-commerce has also been a catalyst to increased truck traffic everywhere. This takes the form of both large tractor-trailers that bring products to the warehouse and smaller and more numerous vans that make the final delivery to the consumer’s home or office. An additional effect of e-commerce has been a sharp decline in brick-and-mortar stores. Several major retail chains have either contracted dramatically or gone out of business, and there are few places where new retail stores are being built.

The Pandemic also rapidly increased work at home opportunities for white collared employees and it appears that in large part, the remote work trend will continue. Recent data indicates that many employers are adopting a hybrid model of remote work, allowing employees to work from home at least a few days during the work week. As a result, office vacancies have generally risen dramatically in many locations. As we enter 2024, office leases that were made in 2018-2020 are coming to an end and many office users are downsizing and/or renegotiating lease rates if they continue to lease office space at all. While the eventual overall office vacancy rates are still in transition, it is common wisdom to say that there will be less office space needed in 2028 than there was in 2018. In the last several months, the Township has received several inquiries about converting office land uses to residential uses, and it is one of the reasons that the municipality has undertaken this update.

In Whitpain, the long-planned improvements to Route 202 are nearing completion. These roadway improvements will change lot configurations and have the potential to create other land use and functional changes in this corridor.

The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation’s (PennDOT) US 202 Expansion Project will bring much-needed congestion relief to US 202 Section 61N, which bisects Whitpain Township from the intersection of Swede Road and US 202 to the intersection of Morris Road and US 202. A small portion of Section 61S is within Township boundaries from Township Line Rd. South to the intersection of Swede Rd. and US 202 and Section 65S begins at the Morris Road intersection and continues north. While additional traffic lanes, sidewalks, and bike lanes, along with upgraded traffic signalization and stormwater management facilities, will significantly improve the traffic flow and connectivity of Section 61N, further opportunities to bolster these improvements still remain.

Several businesses and other sites lost parking spaces and/or adequate street access to accommodate the widening project. In addition, a road improvement project at this scale provides a valuable opportunity for aesthetic streetscape improvements with appropriate landscaping, street trees, lighting, and signage that conveys Township identity.

Based on these national trends and local interest in possible land use changes, the Whitpain Board of Supervisors has authorized a limited update to the 2014 Comprehensive Plan to examine how these market, social and physical changes might affect land use and infrastructure planning in the Township.



The Comprehensive Plan

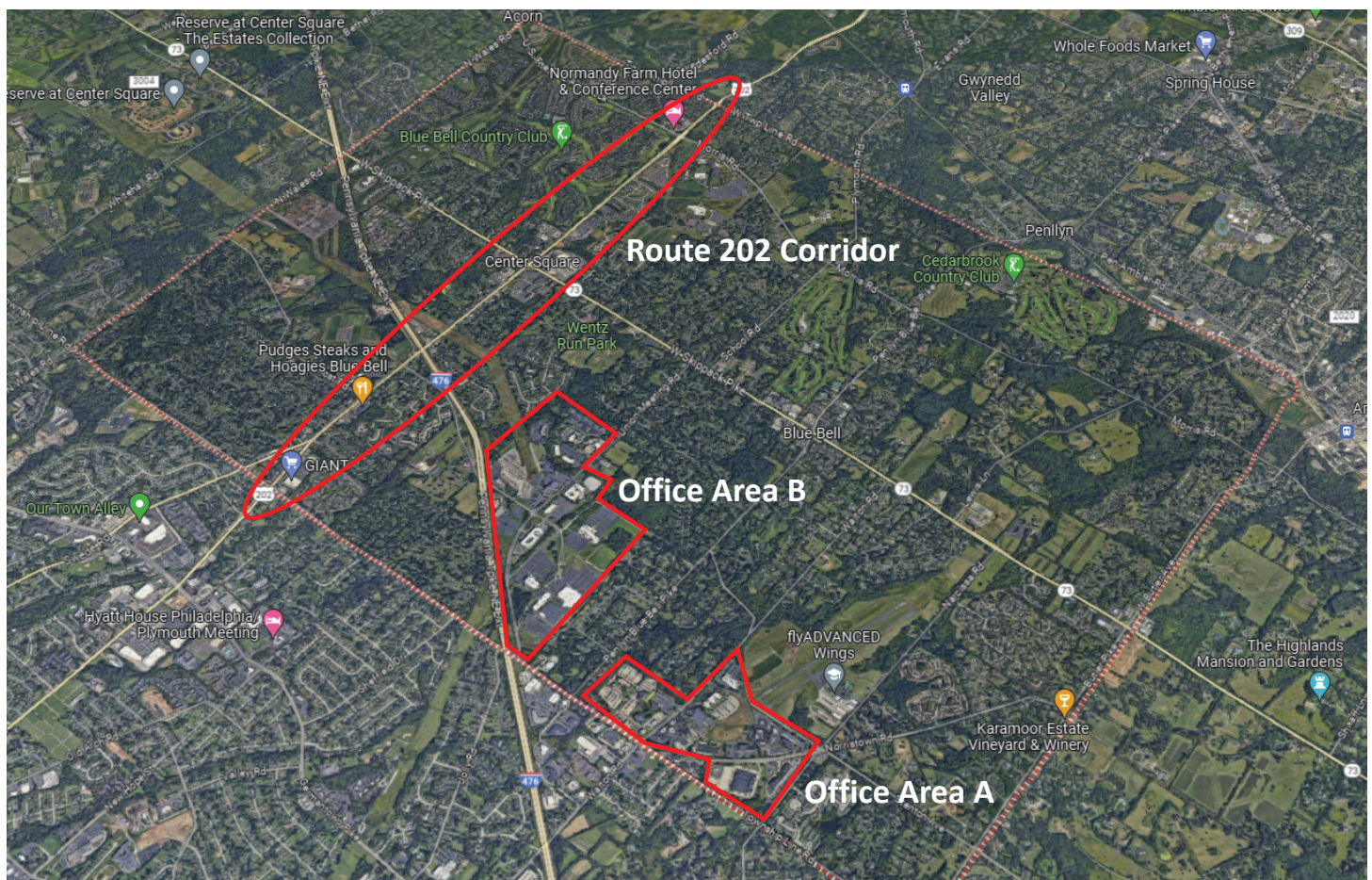
The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) (Act 47, as amended) provides the authorization for local governments to plan comprehensively for land uses, infrastructure, transportation, community facilities, conservation of natural resources, energy, housing, and other community features as determined by each municipal entity.

This limited update to the 2014 Whitpain Township Comprehensive Plan is intended to examine the changes mentioned above, specifically trends in office use & vacancy, options for buildings and sites utilized primarily for offices, and how the roadway changes along the Route 202 corridor may provide other opportunities for land use changes and/or aesthetic improvements.

This Comprehensive Plan Update will provide options for action by the Township ranging from no action to possible revisions to the Zoning Ordinance and the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance (SALDO).

Project Area

There are 3 specific areas that are the focus of this Comprehensive Plan Update. They are the Route 202 Corridor, the office/industrial park south of the Wings Airfield (Office "Area A" - approx. 160 acres), and the office/industrial park adjacent to the Pennsylvania Turnpike (Office "Area B" - approx. 290 acres). Area A has a total building footprint of 755,873 square feet while Area B has a total building footprint of 1,157,718 square feet. (Note – this square footage is for the one-story building footprint only.)



Priority Study Areas

Demographic Data

The 2020 Whitpain Township population was approximately 20,333 persons.

Age Distribution

- 34.2% of the population is aged 29 and under
- 37.2% of the population is aged 30 to 59.
- 28.7% of the population is aged 60+
- The three largest age brackets are 65-69 (7.4%), 15-19 (7.4%), and 40-44 (6.9%)

Largest share increases from 2011 to 2021:

- 65-69 bracket grew from 5.2% to 7.4% (+2.2%)
- 15-19 bracket grew from 5.6% to 7.4% (+1.8%)

Largest share declines from 2011 to 2021:

- 45-49 fell from 8.2% to 6.2% (-2%)
- 55-59 fell from 8.6% to 6.8% (-1.8%)
- 50-54 fell from 8.2% to 6.7% (-1.5%)

Racial and Ethnic Diversity

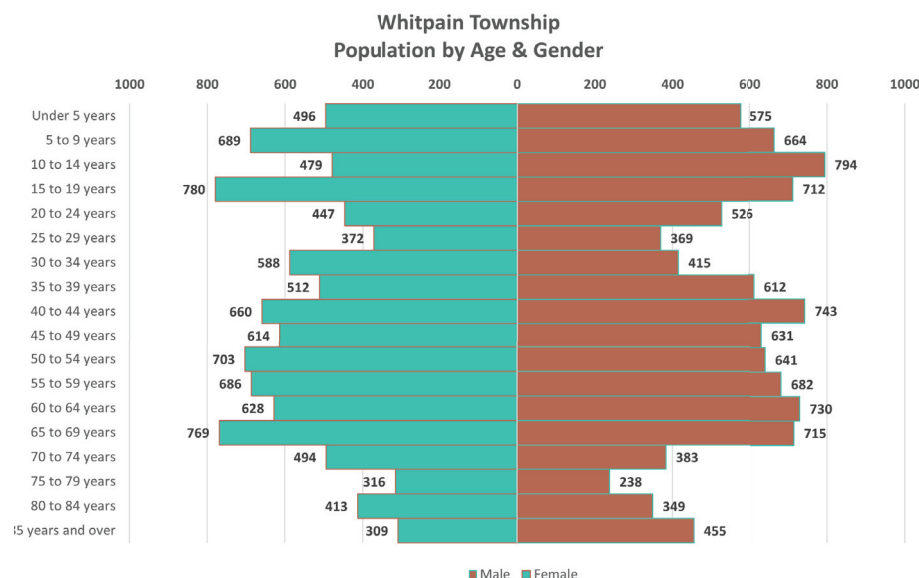
2020 Census reported a White population of 74.1%, Asian population of 13.3%, African American population of 5.7%, Hispanic/Latino population of 3.7%, and Two or More Races population of 2.9%.

Regional Comparison

Whitpain Township (20,333) is similar in size to the neighboring municipalities of Plymouth Township (18,256), Whitmarsh Township (19,707), and Upper Gwynedd Township (17,072). Worcester Township (10,317) and Lower Gwynedd Township (12,076) are approximately half the size.

Population Forecasts

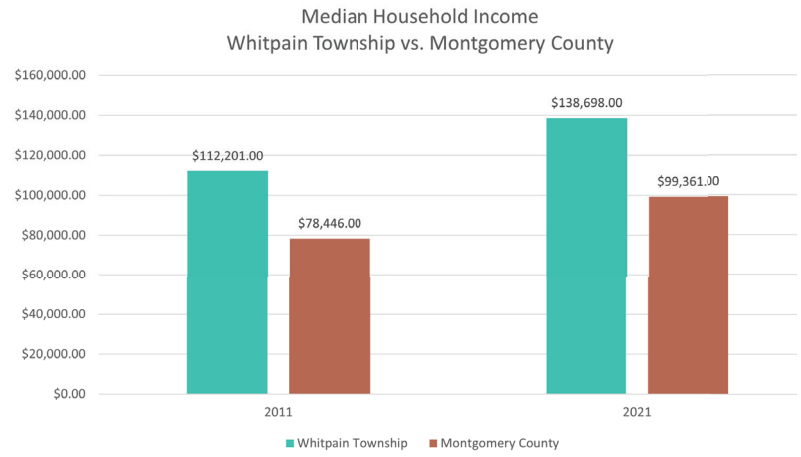
Municipal population forecasts released by Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission indicate that Whitpain Township will increase to 20,770 people (an increase of 437 people) in the year 2050. However, these projections are outdated, and the 2050 population number will likely be higher as the population had already reached 20,333 as of the 2020 Census.



Local Economy

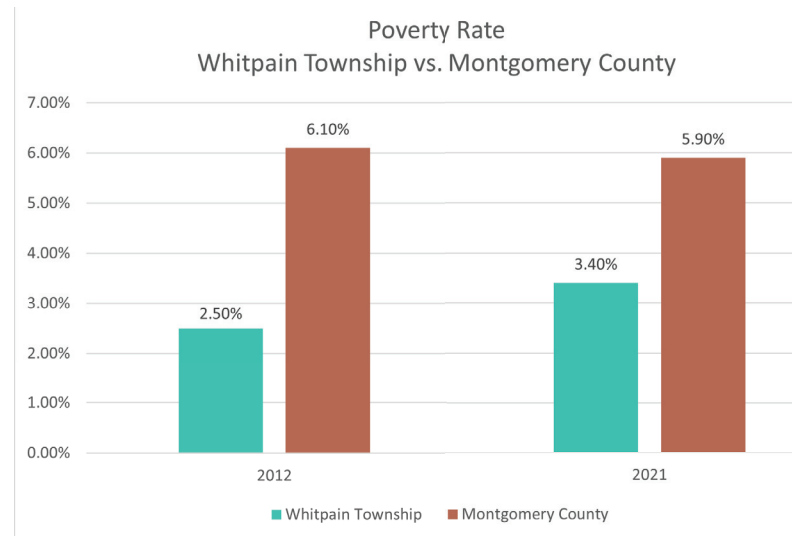
Median Household Income

The median household income in Whitpain Township has grown 19.1% between 2011 and 2021, from \$112,201 to \$138,698. This level of growth is similar to neighboring municipalities, as the average across Plymouth, Whitmarsh, Worcester, Whitpain, Lower/Upper Gwynedd is 19.4%. The County median household income grew 21% over the same 10-year period. The average median household income in 2021 across these municipalities was \$120,865.



Poverty Rate

The Whitpain Township poverty rate rose from 2.5% in 2012 to 3.4% in 2021. There is no congruent trend when compared to neighboring municipalities, as some have risen (Plymouth, Worcester, Upper Gwynedd) and some have fallen (Whitmarsh, Lower Gwynedd). This figure is much lower than the 2021 County poverty rate of 5.9%.



Taxes

The Township Millage Rate has remained at 3.2.

Wissahickon School District Millage Rate

- 2021 = 21.72
- 2022 = 22.45
- 2023 = 23.19

Library Millage Rate

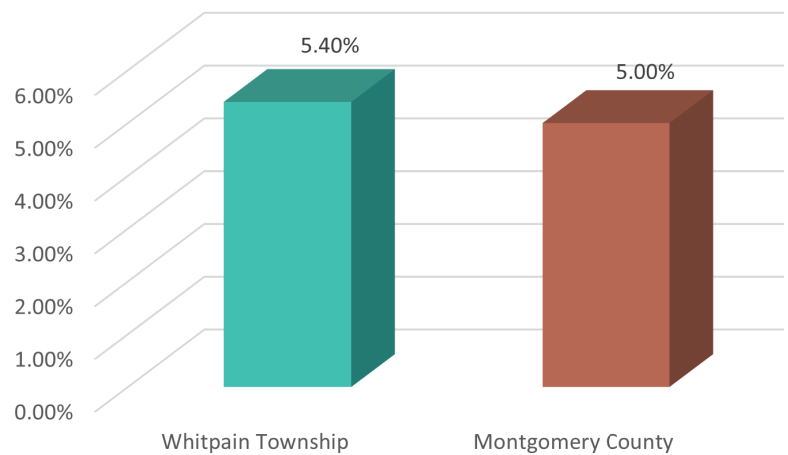
- 2021 = .319
- 2022 = .33
- 2023 = .342

Industry Breakdown

The top 5 industry categories in Whitpain Township are as follows:

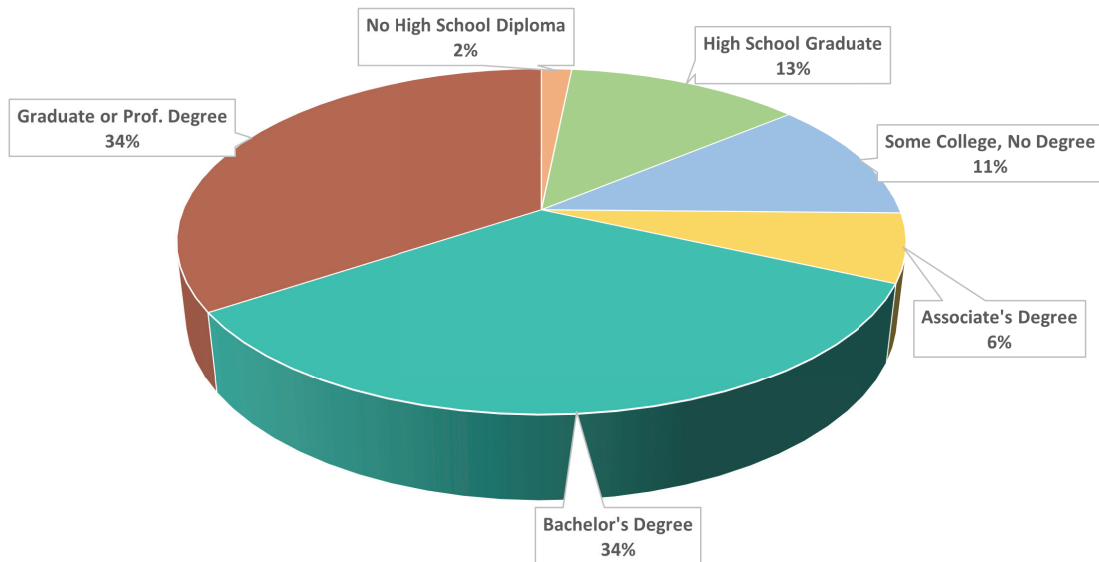
1. Professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management (20%)
2. Educational services, and health care and social assistance (20%)
3. Manufacturing (17%)
4. Finance and insurance, and real estate/rental/leasing (15%)
5. Retail trade (8%)

Unemployment Rates



2021 Industry Breakdown - Whitpain Township		
Industry	Employed Population 16 years and over	Percentage
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	0	0%
Construction	217	3%
Manufacturing	1,259	17%
Wholesale trade	228	3%
Retail trade	555	8%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	154	2%
Information	264	4%
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	1074	15%
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	1,494	20%
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	1,469	20%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	259	4%
Other services, except public administration	188	3%
Public administration	178	2%
Total	7,339	

Whitpain Township Educational Attainment
Residents over 25 Years of Age



Unemployment

The 2021 unemployment rate for the civilian labor force in Whitpain Township was 5.4%, slightly higher than the County rate of 5%.

Educational Attainment

Educational Attainment in Whitpain Township outpaces County, State, and National Levels, as 98.4% of residents over 25 years of age have at least a high school diploma, and 68.2% have at least a Bachelor's Degree. The same measures for Montgomery County are 95% and 60.8%, for Pennsylvania are 91.9% and 34.5%, and for the United States are 89.4% and 35%.

Commuting

On The Map

The Township as a whole sees 19,034 workers that live outside of the Township commute in to Whitpain, while 676 both live and work in Whitpain, and 8,326 live in Whitpain but commute elsewhere.

The majority of the jobs within the Township are found within census tracts 2032.07 and 2032.08, which each hold one of the office/industry hubs that have been identified as study areas for this comprehensive plan update.

Tract 2032.07 sees 7,611 workers from outside the census tract commute in, 57 who both live and work in the census tract, and 1,422 who live in the census tract and commute elsewhere. Tract 2032.08 has similar numbers of 6,913 commuting in, 50 both living and working in the tract, and 1,343 living in the tract and commuting elsewhere.

Of the 19,710 people working in the Township, 15% live in Philadelphia (2,948), 1.6% live in Norristown (310), 1% live in Blue Bell (200), 1% live in Lansdale (195), and 0.8% live in King of Prussia (165).

Transportation Modes

In 2021, 71.2% of workers drove to work alone, 3.9% carpooled, 2.6% took public transportation, 19.9% worked from home, and 1.3% walked. The work-from-home statistics should be monitored closely as new data is released, as it will give substantial indication of the long-term impacts upon office space vacancies.

Travel Time

Workers commute for an average travel time of 31.5 minutes, only slightly higher than the County average of 28.8 minutes.

Vehicles Available by Household

Of the 9,474 workers 16 years and over in households, only .6% do not have access to a vehicle. 13.6% have only 1 vehicle, while 48.4% have 2 vehicles, and 37.4% have 3 or more vehicles.

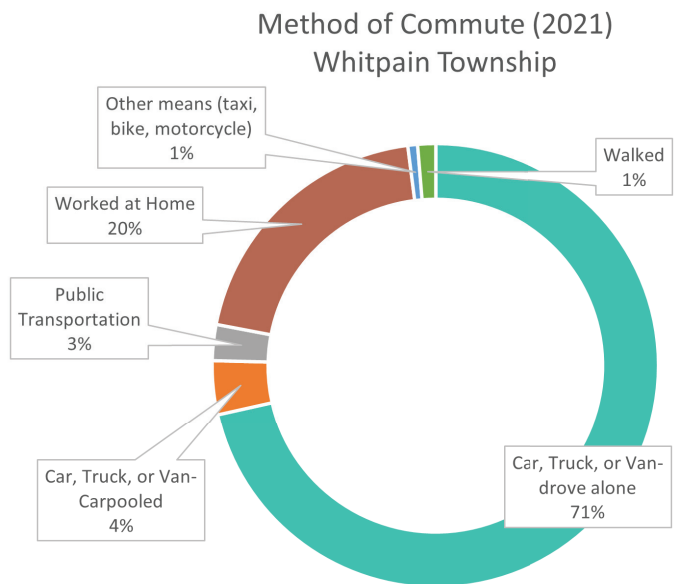


OnTheMap Inflow/Outflow

Places (Cities, CDPs, etc.) as Home Destination Area	2020	
	Count	Share
All Places (Cities, CDPs, etc.)	19,710	100.0
Philadelphia city, PA	2,948	15.0
Norristown borough, PA	310	1.6
Blue Bell CDP, PA	200	1.0
Lansdale borough, PA	195	1.0
King of Prussia CDP, PA	165	0.8
Montgomeryville CDP, PA	158	0.8
Horsham CDP, PA	153	0.8
Conshohocken borough, PA	137	0.7
Plymouth Meeting CDP, PA	135	0.7
Ambler borough, PA	134	0.7
All Other Locations	15,175	77.0

OnTheMap Destination

Please note "All Other Locations" also includes areas outside Whitpain Township.





Housing

Age/Quantity of Housing Stock/Occupancy

U.S. Census American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates data reports that the Township added 100 total housing units between 2011 and 2021, growing from 7,876 to 7,976. Of those units the vacancy rate fell 2% from 438 units to 291 units. The proportion of owners to renters remained relatively unchanged over that 10-year period, as ownership rose from 79.9% to 80.7% and rentals fell from 20.1% to 19.3%.

Only 9.5% of the total housing stock was built after the year 2000. The most prolific construction period occurred between 1980 and 1999, when 47.8% of the housing stock was built. 22.7% of homes were built between 1979 and 1960, and 20% were built before 1960.

Time of Residency

64.6% of all householders moved into their home after the year 2000. 28.6% have lived in their homes for less than 10 years, and 5.9% moved in after 2019. 35.4% have lived in their homes since before 1999.

Median Housing Rent

The median rent (2021) in Whitpain Township was \$1,856, which is 25% greater than the County median rent of \$1,393. Rent in Whitpain is the same as the average median rent of

the adjacent municipalities (\$1,851) of Plymouth, Whitmarsh, Worcester, and Upper/Lower Gwynedd Townships.

Median Housing Price

Of the 6 comparison municipalities, Whitpain Township’s median housing price (2021) of \$482,400 is second only to Lower Gwynedd’s \$511,800. It is much higher than the County median of \$338,800.

Median Housing Rent (2021)	
Municipality	Rent
Plymouth Township	\$1,464.00
Whitmarsh Township	\$1,910.00
Whitpain Township	\$1,856.00
Montgomery County	\$1,393.00

Median Housing Price (Owner-Occupied Estimates, 2021)	
Municipality	Median Price
Plymouth Township	\$364,100.00
Whitmarsh Township	\$435,400.00
Whitpain Township	\$482,400.00
Montgomery County	\$338,800.00

Whitpain Township				
Housing Units	2011	Percent	2021	Percent
Total Units	7,876		7,976	
Occupied Units	7,438	94.4%	7,685	96.4%
Vacant Units	438	5.6%	291	3.6%
Owner-Occupied Units	5,944	79.9%	6,198	80.7%
Renter-Occupied Units	1,494	20.1%	1,487	19.3%

Occupancy Statistics

Units per Structure

The majority of structures are 1 unit, 61.1% being detached, and 26.2% being attached. Structures containing between 2 and 9 units account for 4.6% of the housing stock, 10 to 19 units are 1.7%, and larger structures with 20+ units are 5.7% of all housing units. Additionally, 42 (.5%) units are mobile homes.

Persons Per Household

Average Persons Per Household in Whitpain Township are similar to County averages. Whitpain averages 2.68 people in owner-occupied units, and 2.29 in renter-occupied units (2.71 and 2.09 respectively for the County).

Disability

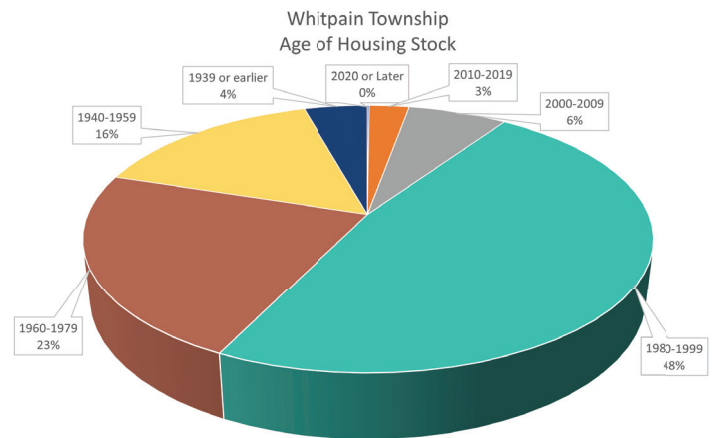
8% of the non-institutionalized Whitpain population has a disability. The largest share of the population with a disability are older residents, as 686 people above the age of 75 are disabled. Comparably, 119 people between the age of 5 and 17 are disabled. The most common disability type is ambulatory difficulty, especially in people aged 65+.

School District Enrollment and Enrollment Projections

Whitpain is a part of the Wissahickon School District that is comprised of Whitpain and Lower Gwynedd Townships and Ambler Borough.

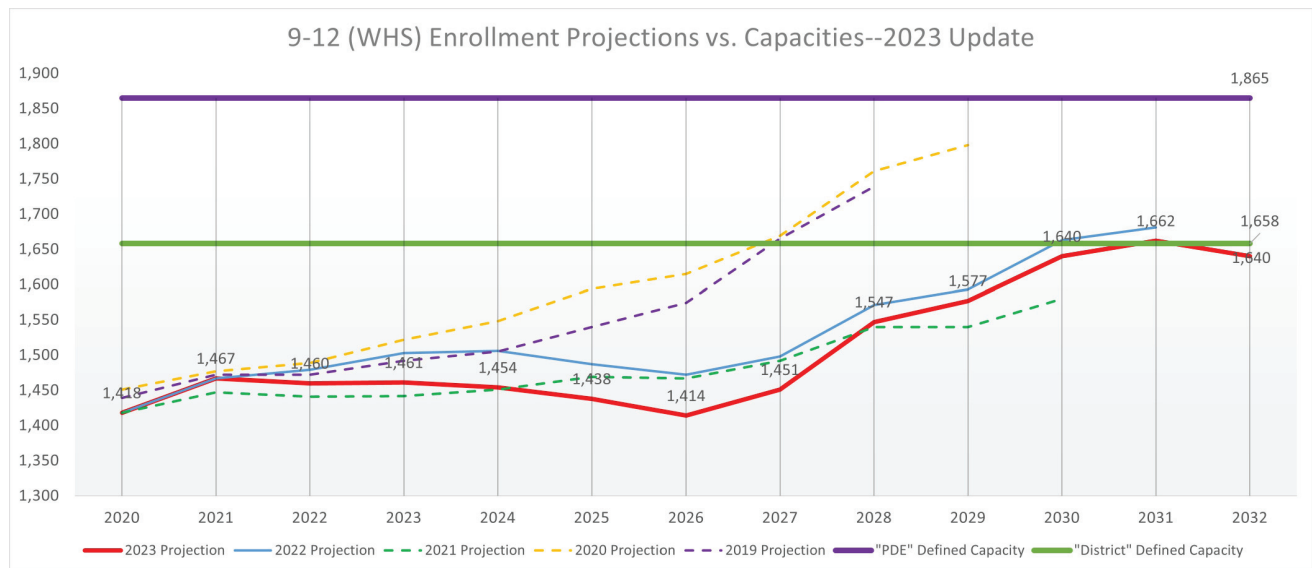
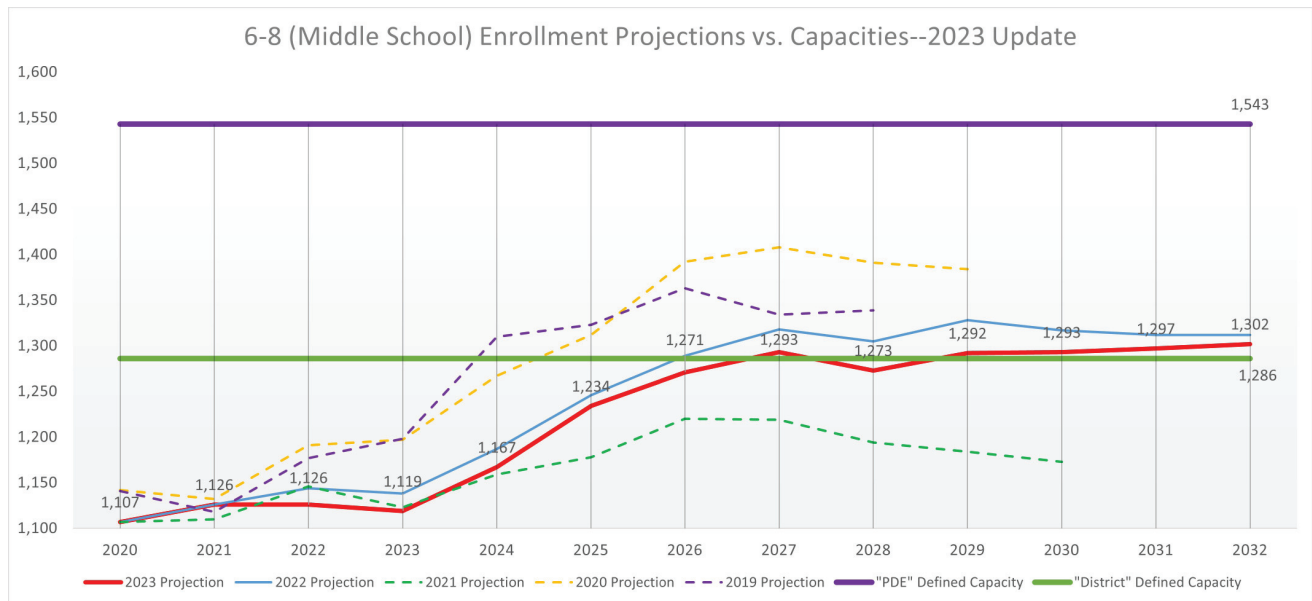
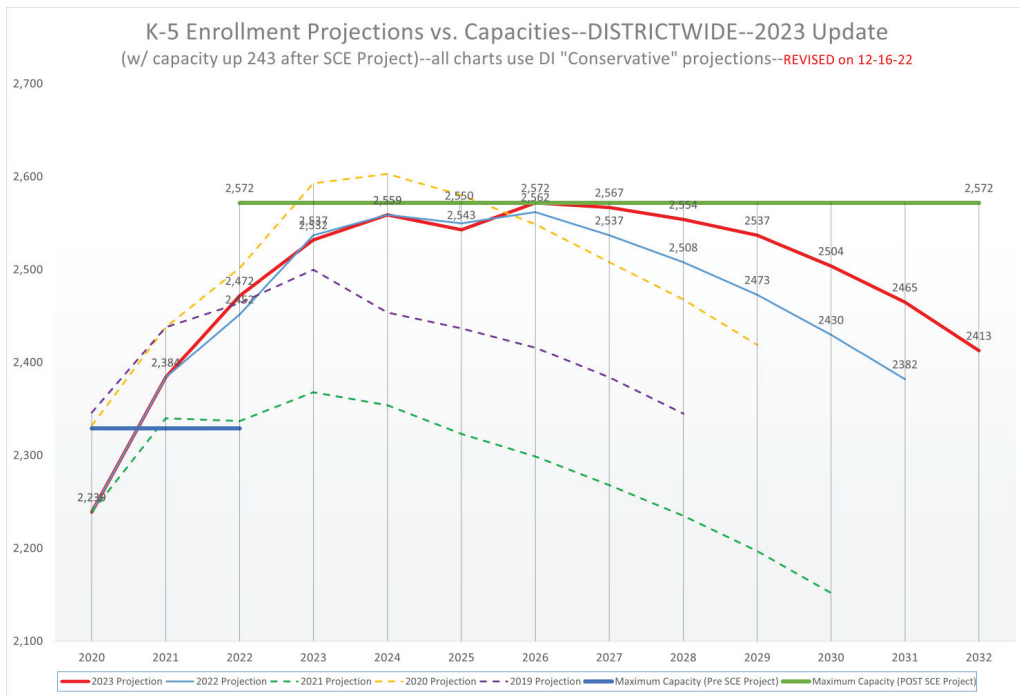
Based on an interview with the School District (September, 2023), enrollment projections are updated every year based on the best available data from multiple sources. Data (12-16-22) from the Wissahickon School District indicates that current total K-5 enrollment is approximately 2,532. Projections indicate that K-5 enrollment peaks in 2026 at 2,572 students then begins to slowly decline with a projected enrollment of 2,413 students in 2032. Overall K-5 capacity in 2032 is estimated at 2,572 students.

2023 Wissahickon Middle School projections anticipate there being 16 students above enrollment capacity in 2032. Wissahickon High School (WHS) enrollment is projected to be 18 students below capacity in 2032. Earlier projections show significantly higher numbers, which the 2023 projections moderate significantly. However, these figures do not necessarily address class distributions that can vary. It should be noted that these estimates are likely to change every year and are approximate only. Please note that the data shown was provided by the School District.



There are valid concerns about residential growth and the potential effects on school district population. Page 19 of the draft report recommends a way to mitigate the generation of school age children who may impact school district enrollment. If the idea to allow office to residential conversions goes forward, new zoning could require the bulk of or even all of the apartment units be either studio, 1 bedroom or two bedroom units. Data shows that these types of units will generate a very low number of school age children, especially at the likely rents that these units will demand in Whitpain.

As the Township considers actions that may increase population above what is currently projected by DVRPC and others, it is recommended that the municipality confer regularly with the School District.



Chapter 2 & 2A



Inventory & Analysis

Site Reconnaissance

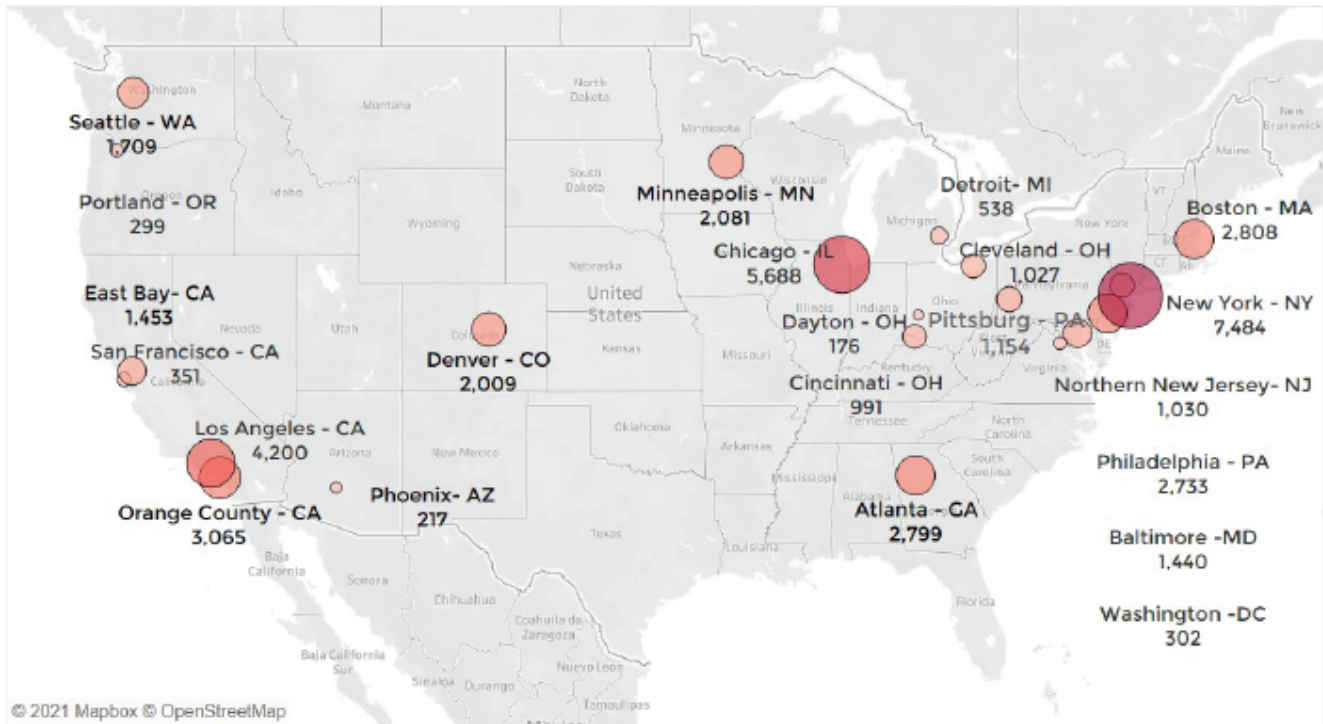
The consultant team conducted multiple site visits to observe, document and evaluate existing conditions of the Route 202 corridor and both office areas. The Route 202 widening project construction was still underway at the time of the site visits.

Public Participation and Stakeholder Meetings

Two public meetings were held in September 2023, one with Township residents and one with representatives from the business community. The goals of these meetings were to gather public input about the Comprehensive Plan update specifically for the possible office-to-residential conversions and supplemental improvements to the Route 202 widening project.

Additional meetings were held with Township staff, the Planning Commission, The Board of Supervisors, and area developers throughout the Comprehensive Plan update process.

Estimated Housing Units from Office-to-Housing Conversions in Metro Areas or Submarkets with the Largest Declines in Office Occupancy Since 2020 Q2



Source: NAR analysis using CoStar® market data.

No metro area in Alaska and Hawaii are in the list of markets with the largest loss in office occupancy.

NAR map of U.S. office-to-housing conversions

General Office Conversion Trends & Information

Review of Office Conversion Literature

The past several years have seen significant research and analysis into office conversion from leading real estate, planning, and development organizations, spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic and its dramatic effect on office use. Case studies and research and analysis reports from the National Association of Realtors Research Group (NAR), National Multifamily Housing Council (NMHC), Urban Land Institute Center for Real Estate Economics and Capital Markets (ULI), and Coldwell Banker Richard Ellis (CBRE) were reviewed to understand current office conversion trends and best practices.

The NAR reports on Office-to-Housing Conversions that as office occupancy has been declining, the absorption of multi-family units and rent growth are at decade-high levels. A Deloitte survey of 300 companies is cited that states that only 7% of companies are planning on requiring their employees to return to the office once health concerns about work locations have dissipated, and that 69% of companies are capable of

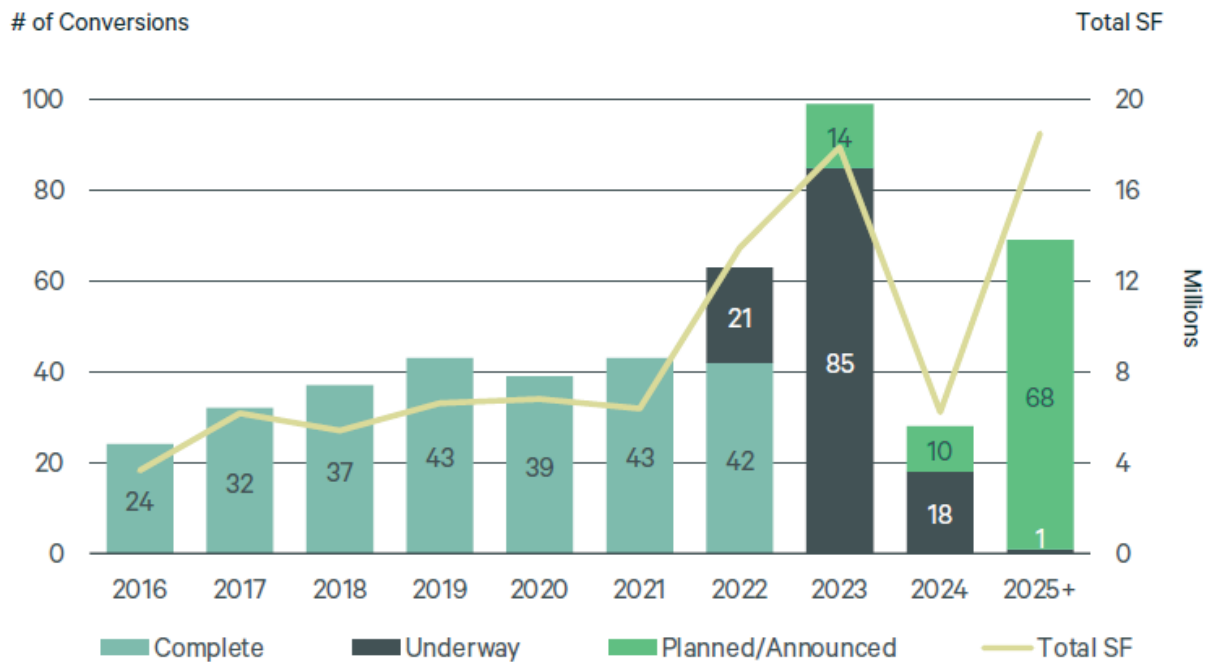
supporting and managing a remote workforce (Analysis and Case Studies on Office-to-Housing Conversions). An important factor in determining whether office-to-residential conversion is feasible is the differential between office and apartment rent. When apartment rents exceed office rents, conversions will soon be seen as a viable alternative. These can take the form of either an adaptive reuse of an existing office structure or a tear-down and reconstruction on the same site. In terms of energy-efficiency and the effect on the environment, both of these options are “greener” than building on an undeveloped site.

As of Q3 of 2021 in the Philadelphia metro market, the office rent per square foot for Class A/B/C was \$32, \$24, and \$22, respectively, and Class A Apartments were \$27/SF, making Class B/C office buildings the most likely candidates for conversion.

In a 2023 report on the feasibility of office conversions, NMHC and ULI report that older class B/C office buildings are becoming obsolete as demand for office space cools, and the demand that does exist is focused on newer buildings. ULI also confirms in their 2023 Emerging Trends in Real Estate that office conversions to residential units are a mainstream development option, and that institutional and private capital are actively finding investment opportunities within the sector.

In a 2022 analysis of office conversions, CBRE writes that “record-low apartment vacancies and sustained, elevated rent growth has made OTM (Office to Multifamily) conversions attractive to opportunistic developers (Office Conversions: A Second Chance for Underutilized Space)”. CBRE also identified the applicability of local zoning regulations as a key determinant of conversion feasibility.

Figure 1: Office Conversions by Construction Status and Estimated Year of Completion



Source: CBRE Research, Q4 2022.

CBRE office conversion trends research

TABLE 2

Multifamily Adaptive Reuse Projects, 2010–2021

Property Type	Number of Buildings	Percent of Buildings	Number of Units	Percent of Units
Office Building	222	25.1%	35,667	31.6%
Factory	196	22.1%	22,128	19.6%
Hotel	127	14.4%	15,491	13.7%
Warehouse	77	8.7%	9,943	8.8%
School	83	9.4%	6,661	5.9%
Other	180	20.3%	23,157	20.5%
TOTALS	885	100.0%	113,047	100.0%

Source: RENTCafé & Yardi Matrix

Multi-family adaptive reuse projects

Whitpain Township Office Area Analysis

The two office areas under scrutiny in this plan combine for approximately 450 acres, with Office Area A accounting for 160 acres and Office Area B for 290 acres.

Existing Zoning / Permitted Uses

The office areas contain several zoning districts as shown on the aerial map. These districts and permitted uses are summarized as follows:

AR / AR-1 – Administrative and Research District

- Offices
- Banks / Financial Institutions
- Laboratories (AR only)

Uses by Special Exception (AR only):

- Educational, Religious,

Philanthropic Use

- Hospital
- Municipal Use, excluding Dump.

Accessory Uses:

- Cafeteria
- Recreation Facilities
- Barbershop / Beauty Shop
- Transportation Ticket Office
- Newsstand, Pharmacy
- Restaurants (without drive-thru)
- Limited Storage and Service of Electrical, Pharmaceutical, Optical and Mechanical Components (by Special Exception)

R-E – Research and Engineering District

- Offices
- Laboratories

- Facilities for Research, Engineering, Designing and Related Manufacturing

Accessory Use:

- Cafeteria and Similar Services for Employees

By Special Exception:

- Limited Storage and Service of Electrical, Pharmaceutical, Optical and Mechanical Components

Conditional Use:

- Corporate Rental Suites - This provision was added to the R-E District in 2015 and provides for rental suites on tracts between 10 and 15 developable acres with at least 1000 linear feet of road frontage. This must consist of developments of at least 100 suites but no more than 300 suites with a net density not to exceed 25 DUs / acre. It is important to note this change to the R-E District since it begins to address the private sector interest in converting lands zoned for office / light industrial to residential units. To date, one project (AVE Apartments located at 1600 Union Meeting Road), with a total of 270 units, has been constructed.

I – Limited Industrial District

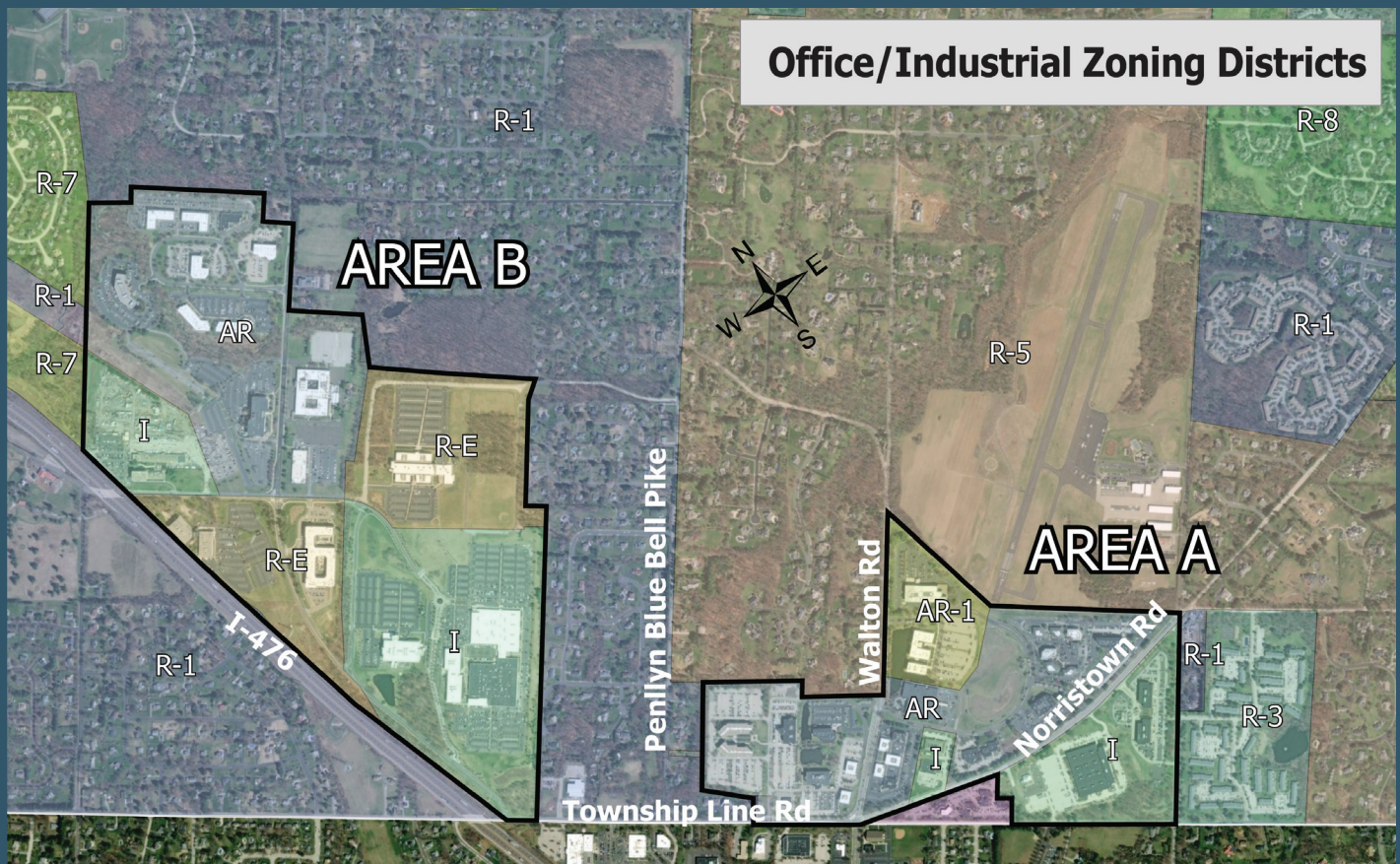
- Light Industrial Use
- Agriculture
- Uses in the R-1 District (Single-Family Detached Dwelling, Farms, Municipal Recreation Use, Municipal Building)
- Dwelling for Watchmen/Caretakers
- Medical Facilities
- Banking Facilities

Uses by Special Exception

- Warehousing, retail and wholesale sales of plumbing, lumber and building materials and supplies.



Example of existing commercial stock in township



Areas currently zoned for office or industrial use

- Truck terminals, bulk cargo facilities, truck or bus storage, garages/repair, or contractor storage of equipment
- Contracting uses
- Newspaper and book publishing and printing
- Mining
- Offices
- Adult-oriented Establishments (by Conditional Use)
- Medical Marijuana Grower / Processor

Given the excellent road access in this area, some of the above uses, including uses permitted by special exception, may be considered by property owners, especially if the office market continues to decline. However, it should be noted that during the Comprehensive Plan meetings, there was no interest expressed to develop any of these uses

Existing Structure Analysis

There are 53 existing buildings in the study area that have a total building footprint of 1.91 million square feet (SF). The 19 buildings within Office Area A have a total building footprint (site coverage – one story) of 755,873 SF, and the 34 within Office Area B total to 1,157,718 SF.

Two of the potential effects from any kind of additional residential unit development in any community are the traffic generation and also the generation of school age children and the impacts on the local school system.

To understand the potential effects of possible land use or structure conversion from office use to residential use, three hypothetical scenarios were developed that illustrate traffic generation based on these imagined situations.

ITE (Institute of Transportation Engineers) trip generation formulas were used for these hypothetical scenarios. It is important to note that these scenarios make assumptions that are unlikely, such as maximum office occupancy and a future population level in the Township that far exceed any realistic

projections. These hypothetical scenarios are explored to illustrate the traffic generation differences between a relatively higher density residential conversion scenario, and an unchanged office scenario.

While the ITE formulas are accurate, the traffic generation numbers should not be taken as definitive, since the exact level of residential growth in Whitpain Township cannot be definitively predicted. This traffic analysis compares AM and PM peak trips for each scenario, where peak hours are measured as “one hour of adjacent street traffic” between 7AM-9AM and 4PM-6PM.

Traffic Generation Scenario 1: Offices Remain

The first scenario assumes that all buildings within the study areas will continue to be used as office and remain at their maximum occupancy, which ITE normalizes at 88% occupancy. This scenario also assumes an average height of 3 stories for all buildings, resulting in 5.74 million square feet of office space.

This was likely similar to the actual amount of office space in the study area prior to the Pandemic, say in 2018, which would have generated peak hour trips similar to those calculated below. The ITE formula for general office use returns values of 5,451 AM peak trips and 4,788 PM peak trips, for a total of 10,239 daily trips during peak hours.

Please note that the On The Map Census commuting data for the entire Township (presented in chapter 1) shows that there are approximately 27,000 commuting trips daily into and out of the Township.

For the two census tracts (#2032.08 and # 2032.07) being considered by this plan, On The Map data shows approximately 17,000 community trips over the course of the day. The 10,000 community trips generated under scenario #1 is about 60% of the On The Map numbers, lower than the On The Map

data, giving a high level of confidence to the peak hour traffic projections for office use traffic generation presented under scenario #1. They may even be conservative (low).

It should be noted that while traffic congestion in the AM and PM peak hours has always been a topic of conversation in Whitpain, there is no hard or anecdotal data that past traffic conditions at these levels resulted in gridlock or unmanageable conditions on area roadways.

Scenario 2: Residential Development at 20 Units/Acre

The second scenario considers office to residential land/building conversions. It assumes that all offices and non-residential buildings within both study areas are converted to multifamily residential buildings.

A 20 unit/acre density over the 450 acres of land would total 9,000 dwelling units (DUs) across both study areas. Clearly this far exceeds any realistic housing demand that could occur in the Township over the next several decades. This residential density would generate 3,936 AM peak trips and 3,510 PM peak trips for a total of 7,446 daily peak trips. This number of total daily peak trips is approximately 25% less than what is generated by an unchanged office scenario and what was likely generated in the project area a few years ago, as supported by Census commuting data.

Office Units (avg. 3 story building)	AM Peak Trips	PM Peak Trips
5,740,773 total square feet	5,451	4,788
	Total Peak Hour Trips (AM/PM) 10,239	

Peak vehicular trip by time of day

AREA A

# of Units	Density (160 acres in Office/Industrial Districts)	AM Peak Trips	PM Peak Trips	Total Daily Peak Trips
3200	20 units/acre	1,396	1,248	2,644

AREA B

# of Units	Density (290 acres in Office/Industrial Districts)	AM Peak Trips	PM Peak Trips	Total Daily Peak Trips
5,800	20 units/acre	2,540	2,262	4,802

Scenario 3: Traffic Generation Based on Population Projections

This scenario illustrates a traffic generation estimate based on Delaware Vally Planning Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) population projections for Whitpain Township by the year 2050. The population is projected to grow by 1,202 between 2020 and 2050. To account for possible inaccuracies in this projection, we have increased the projection by a factor of 3. This would result in a population increase of approximately 3,600 people by 2050.

Currently, Whitpain Township has an average of 2.29 people per renter-occupied household (2021 ACS). An increase of 3,600 people at 2.29 people per household would result in approximately 1,572 additional DUs. This number of households would equate to 680 AM peak trips and 613 PM peak trips, for a total of 1,293 daily peak trips. This number of peak hour trips is approximately eight (8) times fewer than the “all office” #1 scenario.

Projected Traffic Generation Summary

The three scenarios using ITE trip generation formulas illustrate that even high-density residential use for all of the 450 acres in the study area generates less traffic during peak hours than “existing” office use with full occupancy (88% occupancy), a condition that likely existed before the pandemic.

Additionally, using current population projections increased by a factor of 3, traffic generation is even far less than that generated by all office use.

If we assume that some office to residential conversions do occur, the actual traffic generation numbers will be a blending of exiting (continued) office use, new residential and some limited convenience commercial (personal service, restaurant, eatery) uses.

Population is projected to grow by 1,202 between 2020 and 2050.

If DVRPC population projections underestimated population growth by a factor of 3, this would result in population increase of approx. 3,600 people by 2050.

Currently, Whitpain Township has an average of 2.29 people per renter-occupied household.

An increase of 3,600 people at 2.29 people per household would result in 1,572 additional households.

1,572 additional housing units would result in the following AM / PM Peak Trips:

AM Peak = 680 trips

PM Peak = 613 trips

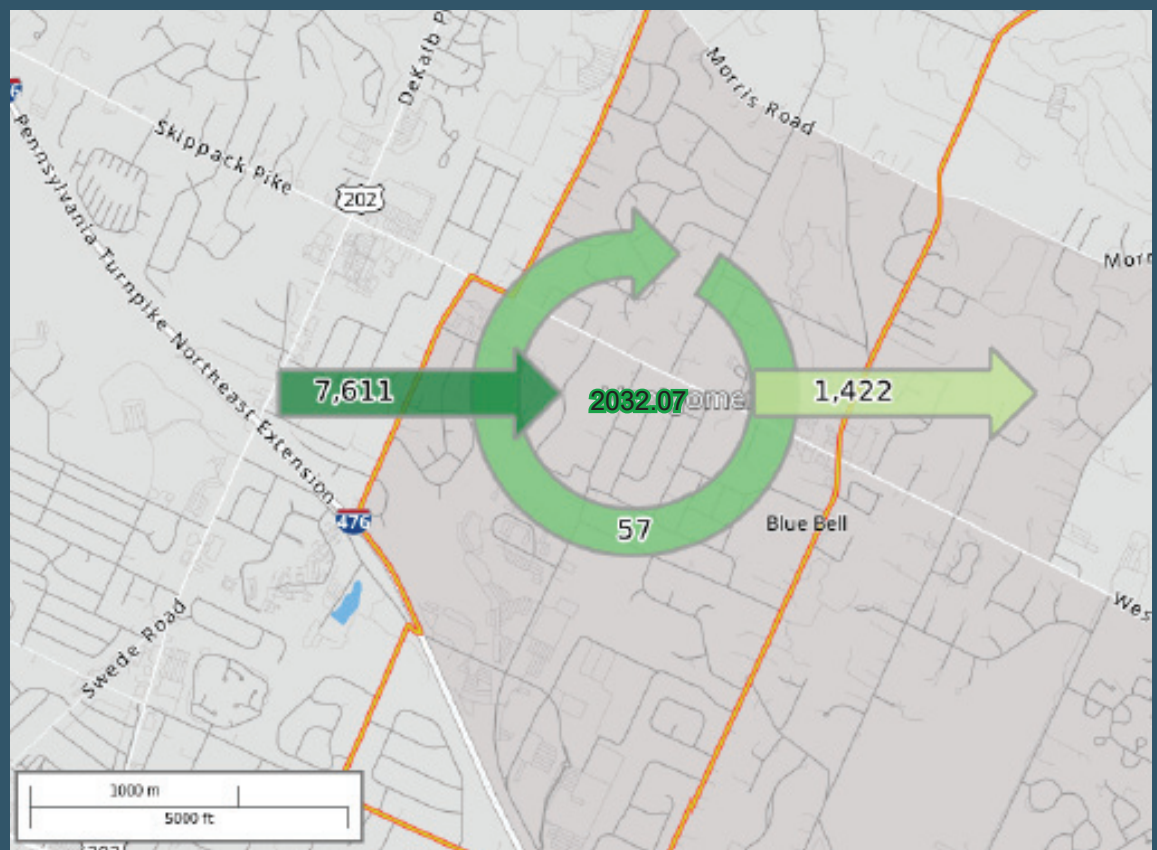
Total Peak Trips = 1,293

Density	Total Daily Peak Trips
20 units/acre	7,446
IF OFFICES REMAIN	10,239
DVRPC Projection X 3	1,293

Peak Hours are measured as One Hour of Adjacent Street Traffic between 7AM - 9AM, and 4PM - 6PM.



On The Map Commuting Data: Daily commuters to census tracts containing office areas



School District Enrollment Impacts based on Residential Development

New residential development in any community creates concerns among some residents about the impacts of new DUs on the generation of school age children. However, the number of school age children can be generally controlled by zoning ordinances specifying the percentage of units that must be studio, 1 bedroom or 2-bedroom units. These constraints can severely limit the generation of school age children since most young families will typically seek out 3 bedroom or more units. This approach does not guarantee that there will be zero school age children generated, but it can severely limit the numbers.

Residential Unit Maximums per Area or per Zoning District

Another zoning tool that has been utilized successfully in other locations are residential unit maximums per area or zoning district. Once a unit “cap” has been established by ordinance by a municipality, that number of dwelling units cannot be exceeded except through a revised ordinance. This device can be utilized as a safety device by a municipality when future residential demand is not certain and there are concerns about both traffic generation and the effects on a school district.



Rendering of planned Blue Bell Elementary renovation project
by Breslin Architects

Residential Housing Absorption Analysis

An important factor in determining both the advisability and the scale of office-to-residential conversions will be the demand for rental housing units in Whitpain Township.

As mentioned previously in this plan, the Township has in recent months received several inquiries from owners of office properties in this area about possible conversions of buildings and/or sites to residential uses. Post-Pandemic remote work trends are continuing, and it appears that office vacancy rates will continue to rise in coming years. This is a threat to the continued viability of these office uses. A high-level residential unit absorption analysis over the next 5-10 years for possible office-to-residential conversions in the area of study was prepared as a part of this Comprehensive Plan Update.

Key Market Findings

A very desirable community, but relatively few new housing units developed.

With just 638 Township workers also living in the Township, and 3,508 Township workers commuting more than 25 miles to work, there is likely pent-up housing demand, as some workers may trade a long commute if quality housing were available in Whitpain Township. According to feedback from local real estate professionals, while the Township is a very desirable community and there is strong demand for multi-family development targeted to millennials and empty nesters, housing supply is lagging housing demand due to developer barriers to entry and relatively high land costs.

Please note employee numbers from the Absorption Study may vary from elsewhere in the report, depending on the data source used.

The Township could accommodate between 970 and 1,210 housing units by 2033.

Based on the housing supply/demand analysis conducted for the primary market area, the Township could accommodate between 850 and 1,060 units by 2028 or between 970 and 1,210 units by 2033. These estimates are conservative based on feedback from local real estate professionals who suggested the Township could support 300 to 500 units annually in the coming years. It should be noted that some of the real estate professionals interviewed indicated a slight uptick in rental unit vacancies - a regional and national trend likely to increase in the coming two years due to overdevelopment of multi-family rental units over the past two-years. In some markets, rising rental vacancies will depress absorption rates.

25 to 30 apartment units per month can be absorbed.

According to feedback from local real estate professionals, the average monthly absorption rate in the area has been between 20 and 30 rental units per month for several years and can be up to 40 rental units per month in attractive housing markets like Whitpain Township. Assuming a conservative average monthly absorption of between 25 and 30 rental units per month and a natural four percent unit vacancy rate to allow for natural housing turnover, it is estimated the a 180-unit apartment project in the Township would take six to seven months to fully lease up.

36 townhome units per year can be absorbed.

An area developer estimates full absorption of 90 unit townhouse project would take 2.5 years, with approximately 36 units absorbed annually.

New multi-family is targeting households earning \$76,000 to \$180,000.

Based on the two new apartment projects preparing to be leased in the PMA (Madison West Elm and Ember at Berwyn), new multi-family projects are likely targeting households with annual household incomes ranging from \$76,000 to \$180,000 (assuming monthly asking rent ranges represent 30 percent of a household's income).

Methodology: Residential Absorption Analysis

Since near-term housing demand is often driven by new household formation and pent-up demand from commuting workers, Esri (a proprietary socio-economic analysis application) was used to project population, household, and housing estimates for 2023 and projections for 2028. Projections were extended through 2033, applying 2023 to 2028 annualized rates provided by Esri for population, household, and housing. Population projections provided by Esri (which are based on 2020 U.S. Census population counts and pipeline development projects) were compared to those previously provided by the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (which are based on 2015 Census population estimates). Data on primary job workers was based on 2020 data provided by U.S. Census Bureau (the last year provided at this geography level) and projected through 2033, based on average 2020 to 2030 industry employment growth rate projections provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry for Montgomery County.

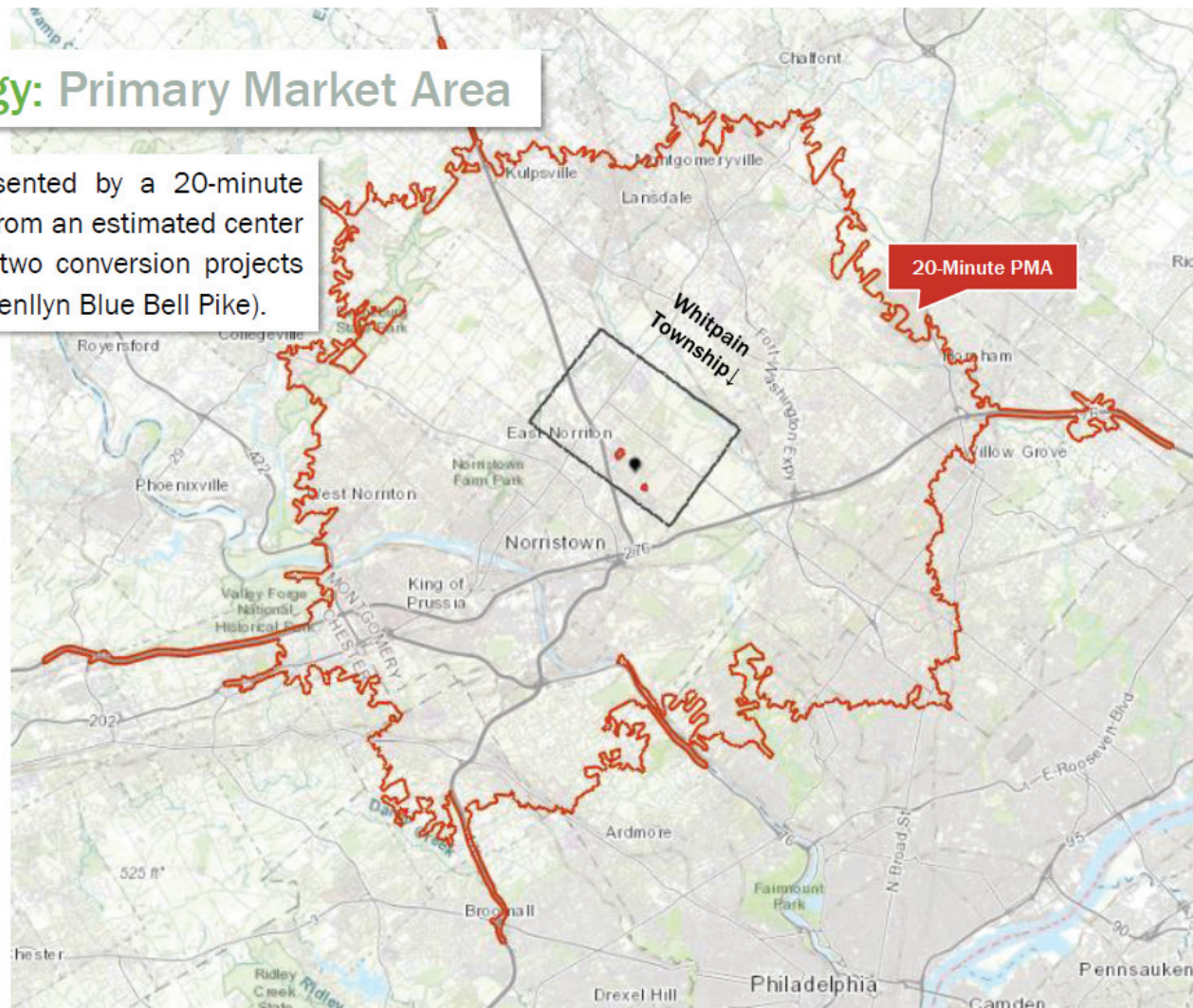
To better understand new multi-family housing being developed in the primary market area (PMA), new construction and proposed multi-family projects in the Philadelphia Metro market were identified based on second-quarter 2023 data provided by Berkadia, a commercial real estate firm. Data for the two prospective office-to-residential projects in the Township was added to pipeline data since it wasn't included in the Berkadia data. Based on starting rents for new multi-family projects in the PMA, likely household income ranges associated with new multi-family development in the Township were identified. Based on feedback from local multi-family developers, a reasonable average annual absorption rate (for multi-family and townhouse units per month) associated with proposed conversion projects in the Township were identified. To help ground-truth data analysis findings, quantitative analysis was supplemented by interviews with real estate professionals knowledgeable with the local residential market. Projected unmet housing demand was projected for the PMA through 2033 based on the assumptions provided in the next section.

Methodology: Primary Market Area

The PMA is represented by a 20-minute drive-time contour from an estimated center point in the area being considered for office to residential conversions.

Methodology: Primary Market Area

The PMA is represented by a 20-minute drive-time contour from an estimated center point between the two conversion projects (Deaver Drive and Penllyn Blue Bell Pike).



Methodology: Supply & Demand Analysis Assumptions

Households expected to grow by 7,670 units by 2033

Esri projects that total households within the PMA will increase by 3,790 units from 2023 to 2028 (by 0.34 percent per year). Assuming a constant annualized households growth rate, the number of total households within the PMA will increase by another 3,880 households from 2028 to 2033.

Housing inventory expected to grow by 7,710 units by 2033

Esri projects that total housing units within the PMA will increase by 3,860 units from 2023 to 2028 (by 0.33 percent per year). Assuming a constant annualized housing growth rate, the number of total housing units within the PMA will increase by another 3,850 units from 2028 to 2033.

PMA will Maintain a Natural Average Annual Housing Vacancy Rate of Four Percent

These units represent the supply of units in a given market that are not leased or occupied, allowing for housing turnover.

Remaining Vacant Housing within the PMA is Physically Obsolescent or Unmarketable

The PMA’s current vacancy rate of 5.6 percent, given an assumed naturally occurring rate of 4.0 percent, suggests 1.6 of the 5.6 rate represents housing units which are vacant due to need for major repairs, foreclosure, or other personal reasons.

Employment Growth Based on Average Annual Growth Rate of 1.0 Percent over 2020 Base Employment

Based on 2020 primary worker data provided by the U.S. Census Bureau and average 2020 to 2030 industry employment growth rate projections provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry for Montgomery County, primary workers within the PMA are expected to increase by 36,230 from 2023 to 2033 (by 1.0 percent per year).

Five of Every 100 PMA Workers Would Trade Commute for Adequate Housing Choice

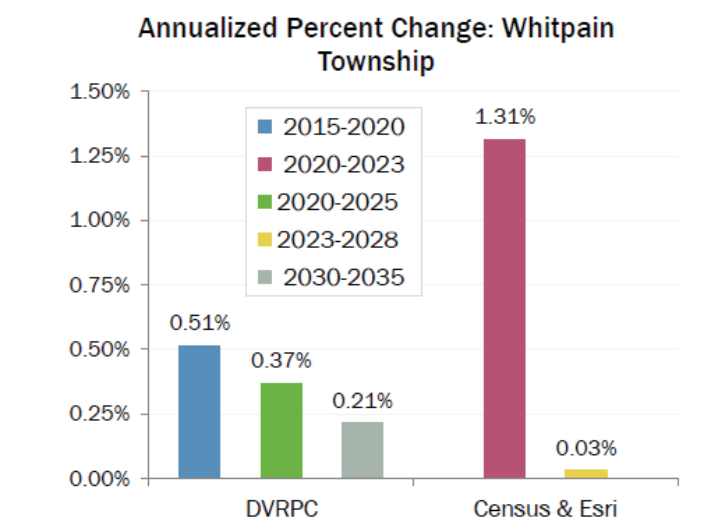
Currently, approximately 22 out of every 100 primary workers commute from outside the PMA. It is assumed that five out of every 100 of these workers would trade their commutes if adequate housing choice was available.

1.0 Percent of the PMA’s Remaining Housing Stock Becomes Obsolete Annually

All housing stock gradually wears out over time, and, on average, one out of every 100 units becomes obsolete annually.

Population Estimates & Forecasts

The table below compares five-year increment population projections estimates according to those provided by the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (which are based on 2015 Census population estimates) with those provided by Esri (which are based on 2020 U.S. Census population counts and pipeline development projects). As illustrated below, population counts from the 2020 U.S. Census were higher than estimates projected by DVRPC in 2016.



Total Population

According to 2023 estimates provided by Esri, there are 21,210 people living in Whitpain Township and 560,686 people living in the 20-minute PMA. Although the Township experienced recent modest population growth from 2020 to 2023 (growing by 1.0 percent per year or by 877 persons), Esri projects that population growth in the Township will be relatively flat through 2028 (growing by just 0.03 percent per year or by 34 people), absent significant investment (other than what is already in the pipeline). Esri projects the rate of annualized population growth will be slightly stronger in the PMA and Montgomery County, but relatively flat as well.

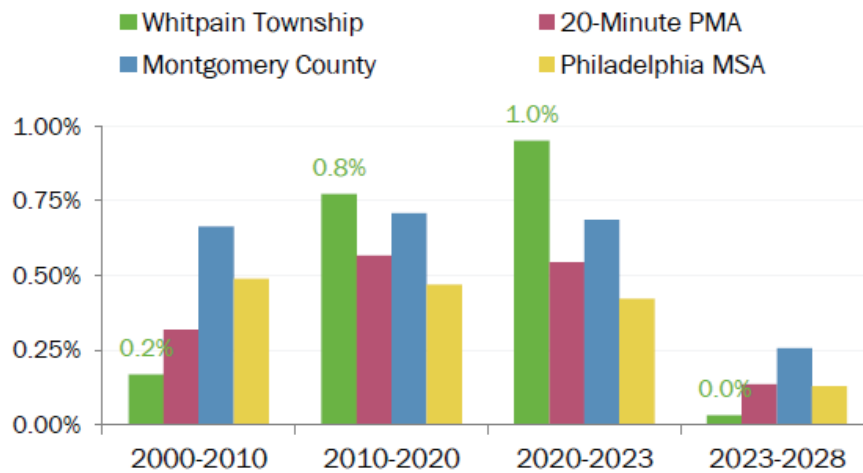
Population Estimates & Projections: Whitpain Township



Source: U.S. Census Bureau; Esri; 4ward Planning Inc., 2023

Strong Positive Growth	Greater than	1.50%	annually
Modest Positive Growth	Between	1.50% and 0.75%	annually
Flat Growth	Between	0.75% and -0.75%	annually
Modest Negative Growth	Between	-0.75% and -1.50%	annually
Strong Negative Growth	Less than	-1.50%	annually

Annualized Percentage Total Change



Total Population Estimates & Projections

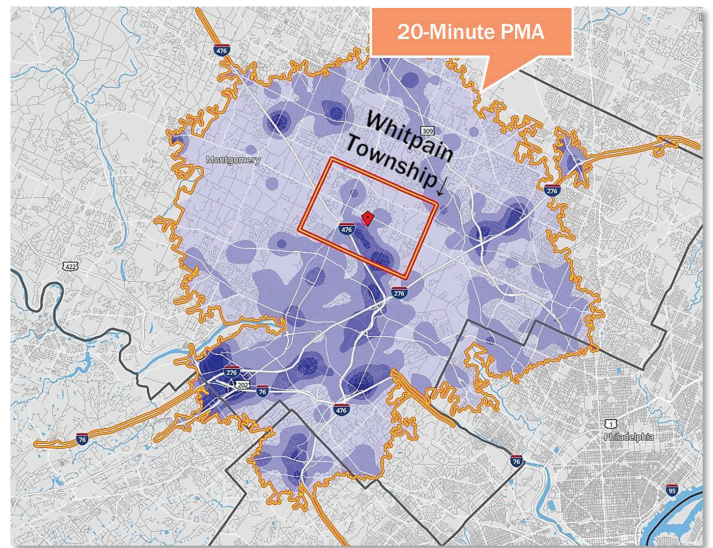
	Total Population			Population Change		Annualized Population Growth Rate
	2023	2028	2033	2023-2028	2028-2033*	
Whitpain Township	21,210	21,244	21,276	34	32	0.03%
20-Minute PMA	560,686	564,494	568,457	3,808	3,963	0.14%
Montgomery County	871,229	882,409	893,940	11,180	11,531	0.26%
Philadelphia MSA	6,292,945	6,333,683	6,374,959	40,738	41,276	0.13%

*Estimates for 2033 are based on Esri's projections for 2028 and assumes a continued constant annualized growth rate through 2028.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; Esri; 4ward Planning Inc., 2023

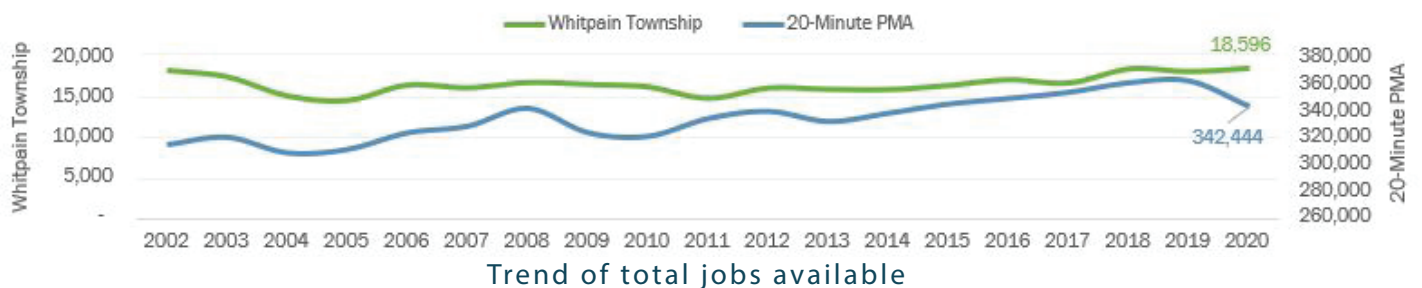
Primary Jobs

A primary job represents the highest paying job (if more than one job is held) for an individual worker for the year, and its count is equivalent to the total number of workers. According to primary job estimates provided by the U.S. Census Bureau for 2020 (the latest year available), there are approximately 18,600 primary jobs in Whitpain Township and 342,440 primary jobs in the PMA. As illustrated, primary jobs are largely clustered in the southern portion of the Township, along Interstate 476 (I-476) close to the possible office-to-residential conversion area, making this general area attractive locations for commuting workers preferring to live near work.



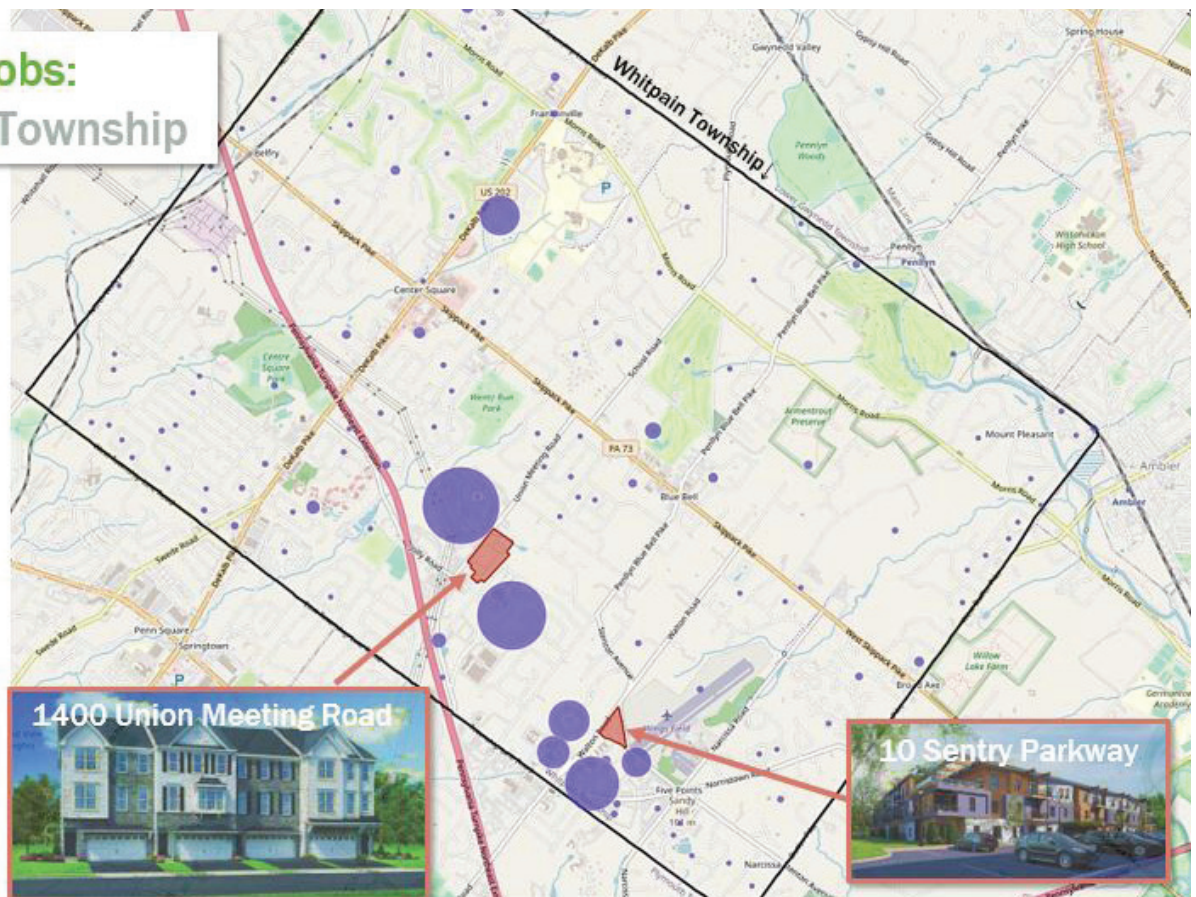
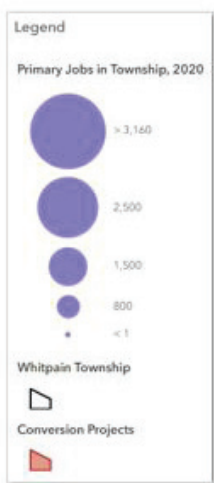
Jobs within 20-minute drive of township

Primary Job Trends



Trend of total jobs available

Primary Jobs: Whitpain Township



Location of jobs

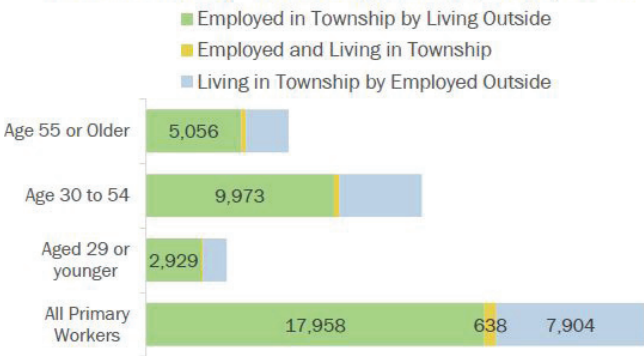
Worker Travel Patterns

Some portion of primary job workers commuting into an area represent pent-up housing demand, as some may trade a long commute for housing closer to work. In 2020, 17,958 workers commuted into the Township for work (56 percent between ages 30 and 54), and 7,904 residents commuted outside the Township for work (an overall net inflow of workers). With just 638 Township workers also living in the Township, and 3,508 persons employed within the Township and commuting more than 25 miles to work, there is likely some percentage of these workers representing pent-up housing demand. Accommodating new, multi-family development and townhouse units in the Township could appeal to both younger and older workers looking to live closer to their places of employment.

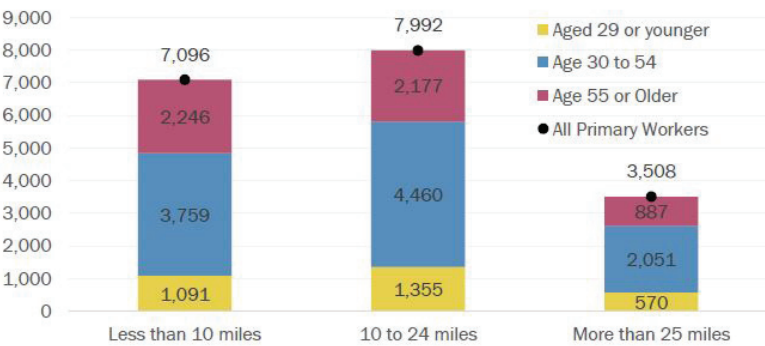


Traffic on Dekalb Pike

Workers Inflow/Outflow by Primary Jobs, 2020



Commuting Distance to Work in Township, 2020



Commuter numbers and distances

Please note employee numbers from the Absorption Study may vary from elsewhere in the report, depending on the data source used.

Multi-Family Project Pipeline

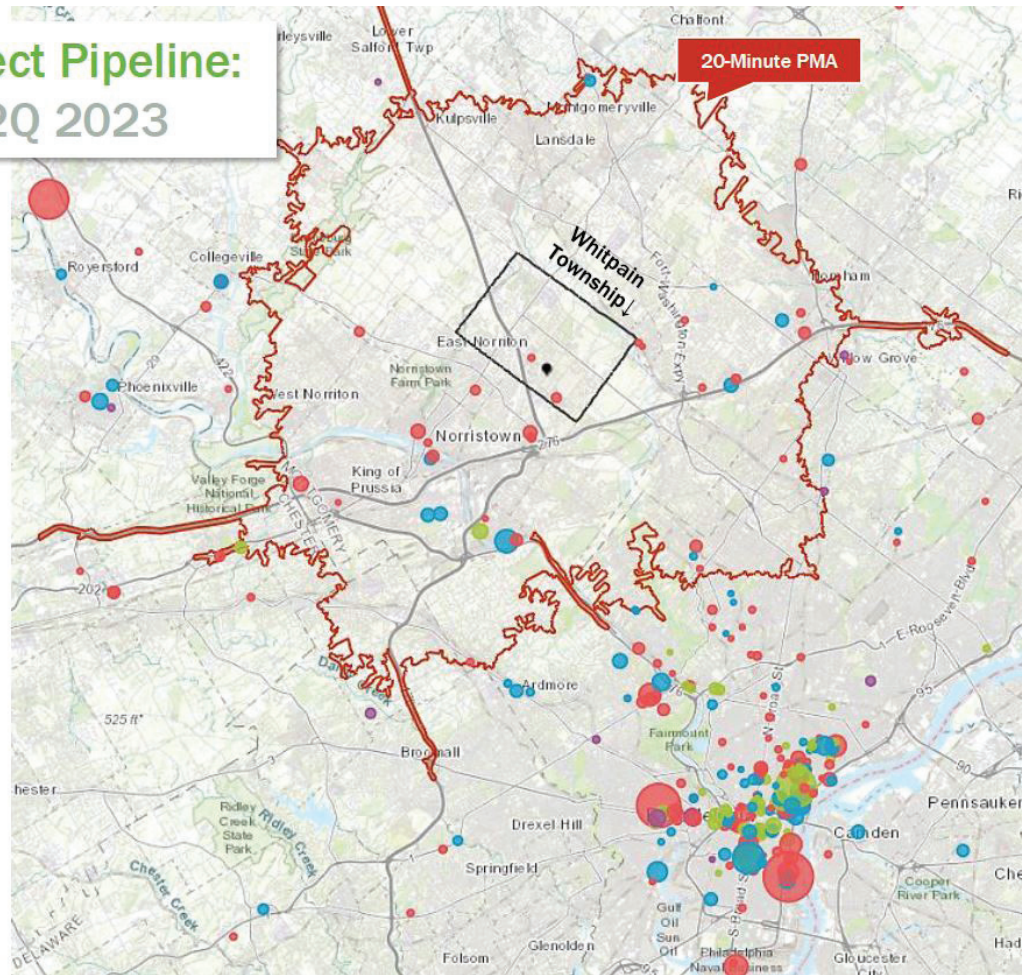
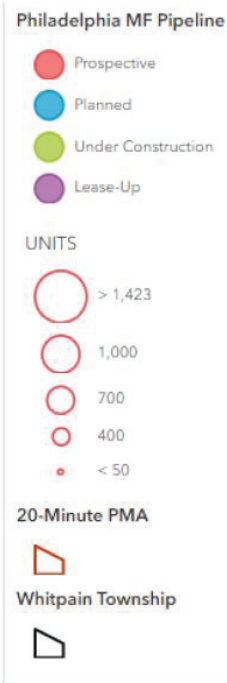
According to second-quarter 2023 new construction and proposed multi-family project data provided by Berkadia (a commercial real estate firm) and prospective office-to-residential conversion projects for Whitpain Township, there are approximately 7,330 units in the development pipeline in the 20-minute PMA, representing 8.6 percent of those in the Philadelphia Metro market (84,760 units). Approximately 5,280 of these units in the PMA are classified as being within

the suburban market (those most comparable to proposed conversion projects in the Township). Based on current phases, approximately 600 units are under construction (with forecasted completion expected in early 2024), 2,600 are planned units, and 4,130 are prospective units. It should be noted that not all planned or prospective units will ultimately be built. The two office-to-residential conversion projects that have been informally discussed in the Township (although not originally included in the Berkadia inventory data) were added to the table and charts.

Market	Submarket	Lease-Up	Under Construction	Planned	Prospective	Total
Philadelphia Metro Market	Suburban	2,649	1,568	9,441	24,128	37,786
	Urban	1,447	9,159	14,713	21,659	46,978
	Total Metro	4,096	10,727	24,154	45,787	84,764
20-Minute PMA	Suburban	-	250	1,731	3,302	5,283
	Urban	-	348	869	828	2,045
	Total PMA	-	598	2,600	4,130	7,328

Total number of multi-family projects

Multi-Family Project Pipeline: 20-Minute PMA, 2Q 2023



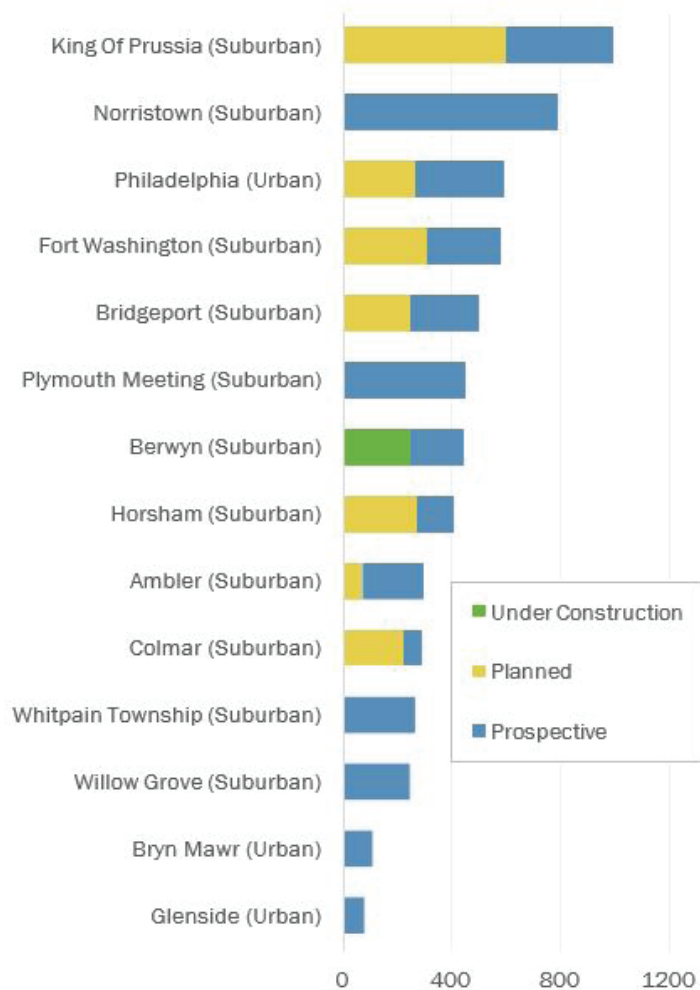
Source: Berkadia, Philadelphia – Urban & Suburban | New Construction & Proposed Multifamily Projects, 2Q 2023; Whitpain Township

Map of multi-family projects

Name	Market	Submarket	Location	Status	Units	Permit Date	Forecasted Completion Date
Madison West Elm	Urban	Conshohocken	Conshohocken	Under Construction	348	3/11/2022	3/31/2024
Ember at Berwyn	Suburban	Delaware	Berwyn	Under Construction	250	5/20/2022	2/29/2024
Madison Fort Washington	Suburban	Ambler	Fort Washington	Planned	310	-	-
401 Washington Street	Urban	Conshohocken	Conshohocken	Planned	598	-	-
723 Dresher Road	Suburban	Horsham	Horsham	Planned	274	-	-
Maple Glen Pointe	Suburban	Horsham	Ambler	Planned	72	-	-
2501 Renaissance Blvd	Suburban	King Of Prussia	King Of Prussia	Planned	300	-	-
2901 Renaissance Blvd	Suburban	King Of Prussia	King Of Prussia	Planned	300	-	-
Bridgeview	Suburban	King Of Prussia	Bridgeport	Planned	250	-	-
Luxor Montgomeryville	Suburban	Lansdale	Colmar	Planned	225	-	-
Germantown Avenue	Urban	Northwest - East	Philadelphia	Planned	114	-	-
Ridge Avenue	Urban	Northwest - West	Philadelphia	Planned	80	-	-
The Royale	Urban	Northwest - West	Philadelphia	Planned	77	-	-
Keswick Commons Phase II	Urban	Abington	Glenside	Prospective	80	-	-
Ambler Station	Suburban	Ambler	Ambler	Prospective	50	-	-
The Ambler	Suburban	Ambler	Ambler	Prospective	92	-	-
The Dublin	Suburban	Ambler	Fort Washington	Prospective	171	-	-
The Woods Phase II	Suburban	Ambler	Ambler	Prospective	88	-	-
Virginia Drive	Suburban	Ambler	Fort Washington	Prospective	100	-	-
Bryn Mawr Square	Urban	Ardmore	Bryn Mawr	Prospective	110	-	-
Conshohocken	Urban	Conshohocken	Conshohocken	Prospective	256	-	-
Dryden Court	Urban	Conshohocken	Conshohocken	Prospective	56	-	-
Luxury Living	Suburban	Delaware	Berwyn	Prospective	196	-	-
104 Witmer	Suburban	Horsham	Horsham	Prospective	133	-	-
Executive Mews	Suburban	Horsham	Willow Grove	Prospective	250	-	-
King of Prussia Mall Renovation	Suburban	King Of Prussia	King Of Prussia	Prospective	50	-	-
River Pointe	Suburban	King Of Prussia	Bridgeport	Prospective	250	-	-
Royale Garden	Suburban	King Of Prussia	King Of Prussia	Prospective	342	-	-
Hatfield Station Senior	Suburban	Lansdale	Colmar	Prospective	70	-	-
410 Markley Street	Suburban	Norristown	Norristown	Prospective	320	-	-
City View	Suburban	Norristown	Norristown	Prospective	180	-	-
DeKalb Pike	Suburban	Norristown	Norristown	Prospective	179	-	-
Midrise	Suburban	Norristown	Plymouth Meeting	Prospective	300	-	-
One Plymouth	Suburban	Norristown	Plymouth Meeting	Prospective	150	-	-
The Grand at Main & DeKalb	Suburban	Norristown	Norristown	Prospective	111	-	-
102 East Mermaid Lane	Urban	Northwest - East	Philadelphia	Prospective	250	-	-
20 - 30 West Aliens Lane	Urban	Northwest - East	Philadelphia	Prospective	76	-	-

List of multi-family projects

Multi-Family Pipeline: 20-Minute PMA, 2Q 2023



Multi-family projects by location



Household Income Ranges

According to Apartments.com, an apartment rental website, and confirmed by interviews with the property managers, the 348-unit Madison West Elm apartment project currently under construction has asking monthly rents ranging from approximately \$1,920 for a studio to \$4,470 for a two-bedroom unit, with move-ins expected for December 2023 through April 2024. Likewise, the 250-unit Ember at Berwyn apartment project currently under construction has asking monthly rents ranging from approximately \$1,910 for a studio to \$4,520 for a three-bedroom unit, with move-ins expected for the end of October 2023 through January 2024. If monthly asking rents represent 30 percent of a household's income (considered an affordable rent), these two new apartment projects in the PMA would likely attract households with annual household incomes ranging from \$76,000 to \$180,000.

Asking Rents and Housing Income Range Estimates: Multi-Family Project Pipeline: 20-Minute PMA

Bedrooms	Price (Low)	Price (High)	Annual HH Income (30% of monthly income)	
Madison West Elm				
Studio	\$1,919	\$2,335	\$76,760	\$93,400
1-Bed	\$2,475	\$2,929	\$99,000	\$117,160
2-Bed	\$3,499	\$4,474	\$139,960	\$178,960
Ember at Berwyn				
Studio	\$1,910	\$1,965	\$76,400	\$78,600
1-Bed	\$2,000	\$2,640	\$80,000	\$105,600
2-Bed	\$2,665	\$3,730	\$106,600	\$149,200
3-Bed	\$4,265	\$4,520	\$170,600	\$180,800

Multi-family rent prices and rental incomes

Source: Apartments.com, 4ward Planning Inc. 2023

Supply/Demand Analysis

Largely due to pent-up demand from primary workers who commute into the PMA and replacement of physically obsolescent housing, by 2028, there will be an estimated net demand for 4,840 residential units in the PMA. Assuming the Township could capture between 20 to 25 percent of the PMA’s net housing demand, the Township could accommodate between 850 and 1,060 units by 2028 or between 970 and 1,210 units by 2033. These estimates are conservative based on feedback from local real estate professionals, who suggested the Township could support 300 to 500 units annually in the coming years.

Projected Unit Absorption

According to feedback from local real estate professionals, Whitpain Township is a very desirable community with excellent schools and there is existing unmet housing demand for Class

A multi-family development targeted to millennials and empty nesters looking for more space. The average apartment absorption rate in the local market area has consistently been between 20 and 30 rental units per month in recent years but, according to one interviewee, can be up to 40 rental units per month in attractive housing markets like Whitpain Township.

Assuming an average absorption of between 25 and 30 rental units per month for apartment units and a natural four percent unit vacancy rate to allow for turnover, it is estimated that an 180-unit apartment project in the Township would take six to seven months to fully lease up. For townhome units, assuming an average absorption of 36 units per year and a natural 0.5 percent unit vacancy rate, a 90-unit townhome development should take two and a half years to become absorbed.

Real Estate Professional Feedback

The following bullet points summarize the opportunities and challenges for office to residential conversion projects in the Township based on interview feedback.

Net Dwelling Unit (DU) Demand and Capture through 2033

	2023	2028	2033
Housing Demand Metrics			
Estimated Households in 20-Minute PMA (0.34% growth rate)	222,390	226,180	230,060
Estimated Primary Workers in 20-Minute PMA (1% growth rate)	352,020	369,410	388,250
Estimated Primary Workers Residing Outside 20-Minute PMA (22%)	78,660	82,540	86,750
Estimated Pent-Up Housing Unit Demand from Commuting Area Workers (5%)	3,930	4,130	4,338
Estimated Number of Naturally Occurring Vacant Housing Units (4%)	9,430	9,580	9,738
Estimated Aggregate Housing Unit Demand in 20-Minute PMA	235,750	239,890	244,136
Housing Supply Metrics			
Estimated Housing Units in 20-Minute PMA (0.32% growth rate)	235,750	239,610	243,460
Physically Obsolescent Units (1.6% of total units, 1% annual obsolescence rate)	3,770	3,960	4,162
New Units Added in PMA	-	3,860	3,850
Estimated Net Marketable Housing Units in 20-Minute PMA	231,980	235,650	239,298
Net Housing Demand/Supply Calculation			
Estimated Aggregate Housing Unit Demand in 20-Minute PMA	235,750	239,890	244,136
Subtract Estimated Net Marketable Housing Units in 20-Minute PMA	231,980	235,650	239,298
Net Housing Unit Demand/(Excess Units)	3,770	4,240	4,838
Township Unit Capture (20%)	754	848	968
Township Unit Capture (25%)	943	1,060	1,209

Projected dwelling unit demand and capture

Proposed Office-to-Residential Conversion Unit Absorption

	10 Sentry Parkway	1400 Union Meeting Road
Type	Apartments	Townhomes
Total Proposed Units	180	90
Natural Vanacy Rate	4.0%	0.5%
Occupied Units	173	89
Average Absorption Rate	25-30/month	36/year
Time to Absorption	6-7 month	2.5 years

Source: 4ward Planning Inc. 2023

Projected multi-family unit absorption

Opportunities:

- Whitpain Township is a very desirable community with excellent schools.
- There is existing housing demand for Class A multi-family development targeted to millennials and empty nesters looking for more space.
- Area average monthly absorption rates for rental units have been 20 and 30 units per month for several years and can even reach 40 units per month in attractive housing markets like Whitpain Township.
- Barring an adjacent community “mega boom,” the Township could easily support a couple thousand rental units over next five years or 300 to 500 units annually.
- Creating a greater mix of housing options, including active adult units, could be beneficial for the Township.

Challenges:

- High land costs due to dwindling inventory, as well as insufficient permissible residential density has challenged developers to deliver all but high-end luxury housing to the market. Amending zoning to permit greater residential density in certain office and industrially zoned areas could help achieve more housing units affordable to middle-income households.
- There may be a slowdown in rental unit demand in the coming years, as the larger region has seen a boom in multi-family rental development.
- Adaptive reuse of office to residential can be cost-prohibitive, making demolition more cost-effective. However, some former office buildings (e.g., those with atriums) are suitable for adaptive reuse.
- Negative community perceptions of housing density should be addressed.

Interviews: Real Estate Professionals

The following real estate professionals were interviewed for their perspectives of the local market, as well as for verification of data, where applicable:

Residential Developers

- Peter Clelland, Vice President of Development, BET Investments, Dresher, PA
- David Della Porta, Partner, Cornerstone Tracy, Villanova, PA
- Brian Thierrin, Senior Vice President, PA-DE, Toll Brothers, Philadelphia, PA

Realtors

- Ryan Godshall, Realtor/Director of Sales, Keller Williams Real Estate, Harleysville, PA
- Michael Maerten, Agent, Keller Williams, Blue Bell, PA

Property Managers

- Ember at Berwyn, Berwyn, PA
- Korman Communities (Blue Bell Villas Townhomes, AVE Blue Bell Apartments)
- Madison West Elm, Conshohocken, PA



Chapter 3



Recommendations

Office to Residential Conversions

Consideration of Options

Several scenarios could occur concerning the use of existing office space in the Township. Commercial real estate market trends are difficult to predict over extended time periods, especially with current and growing work-from-home trends. However, based on these trends, it should be assumed that hybrid work schedules are here to stay, as employers are becoming acutely aware that the flexibility and an enhanced work-life balance enjoyed by employees is resulting in productivity gains and greater worker satisfaction.

To anticipate possibilities and inform this plan's recommendations, two scenarios are considered.

1. No changes to existing zoning in the project area, which would not allow any significant office to residential conversions.
2. Revisions to zoning to allow office to residential conversions.

Scenario 1.

No changes to existing zoning

With no changes to existing zoning that would allow office to residential conversions, it is likely that office vacancy rates will remain at their currently elevated levels and continue to increase. National trends point to Class B/C office buildings becoming increasingly difficult to lease, as companies would prefer newer Class A buildings. Much of the office building stock in Whitpain consists of Class B/C, creating additional concern for continued elevated vacancy rates, as the remaining demand for office buildings will be focused on Class A buildings.

Under this scenario, less utilized alternative permitted uses may become more viable in order to return parcels to more productive use.

While laboratories and research facilities are permitted in both the AR/AR-1 and R-E districts, the regional need for these types of facilities are likely being met at the Discovery Labs (1.5 million square feet) project currently being developed in Upper Merion and West Conshohocken.

In the R-E zoning districts, other uses could include additional Corporate Rental Suites, permitted by conditional use (such as the AVE Apartments) if the site characteristics met the ordinance parameters.

In the I Industrial zoning districts, warehousing, retail and wholesale building supply sales, truck terminals, cargo facilities, (all of which are allowed by special exception) might become more viable, especially since the roadway network is good.

Depending on the types of these light industrial facilities that could be built, truck traffic (tractor-trailers and vans) would likely increase.



Linear Park along First Ave. in King of Prussia

Scenario 2.

Zoning revisions to allow office to residential conversions

If revisions to the existing zoning ordinances were made to allow multi-family residential uses in the areas currently zoned AR/AR-1 (Administrative and Research), R-E (Research and Engineering) and I (Industrial), based on property owner interest expressed to date and the lack of residential units currently available in the Township, it is reasonable to assume that new residential units will be absorbed relatively quickly, as projected in the residential unit absorption analysis. The projected 970 to 1,210 residential units projected by 2033 by the absorption analysis would have little significant effect on traffic, as outlined in Chapter 2.

How many residential units could be developed over a longer period of time, past 2033, over the next 20 years? This is difficult to accurately predict. Fluctuating interest rates and an increasing number of baby boomers selling their single-family homes to move into smaller, more manageable multi-family housing units (such as those likely in the office to residential conversion discussed in this plan) will all have an effect on the number of units that could be developed. Some economists and housing experts believe that the large baby-boomer generation will soon flood the market with single-family residential units as more baby boomers sell single-family residences, eventually depressing values for these homes. (Congrats, Your House Made You Rich. Now Sell It. - Nov. 16, 2023, Wall Street Journal). Current high interest rates may further depress the values of these existing homes.

The office properties most likely to be converted are the older, less desirable Class B and Class C offices. It is possible as inventory of these B & C offices declines, the desirability of Class A office space will only increase. The availability of residential properties in relatively close proximity to these Class A offices may also bolster this Class A market, with the possibility of employees living nearby.

During the Comprehensive Plan meetings, concerns were expressed about uncontrolled residential growth in the study area. One approach to limit the number of residential units that can be built in a particular zoning district is the concept of residential "caps" or a maximum number of units that can be built in an area. This zoning technique has been successfully utilized in other locations and might be considered when and if the Township crafts a zoning ordinance for the study area.

Along with revisions to the Zoning Ordinance to allow multi-family units in the Districts noted above, it is also recommended that the Township revise their existing Airport Overlay District to include the provisions of an Airport Hazard Zoning ordinance as contained in Pennsylvania's Airport Zoning Act, or Act 164 of 1984, using Model Zoning Ordinance Language as established by PennDOT.

This will help to address noise, approach and other concerns related to residential units being in close proximity to Wings Field.

Many suburbanites have negative perceptions about multi-family housing. Some of these negative perceptions can be addressed and other perceptions are often incorrect:

Multifamily units will significantly affect the school district and generate scores of school-age children, overwhelming the system.

Zoning to allow multi-family units can require a certain percentage of units be studio, one-bedroom or two-bedroom units. This will severely reduce (not eliminate) the generation of school age children. This was the approach for the AVE apartments in Whitpain (allowed under the R-E Corporate Rental Suites use) that generated about 14 students from 270 apartments. Also, data from the Wissahickon School District indicate that in a few years, the projected enrollment will be below capacity.

Multifamily units will attract a less affluent residential cohort to the community.

The cost to build new multifamily units today is so expensive, it is impossible to rent these units for low rents. In places like Whitpain, the rental rates are extremely high. These high rents can lead to a different issue, namely pricing out less affluent middle-class households from the community. This can lead to a shortage of resident employees in the service industry or lower-level white collar jobs. Some communities try to make some of these units more affordable (not cheap) via "workforce housing" initiatives, discussed below.

Multifamily units will create a myriad of traffic congestion issues.

Based on the traffic analysis conducted as a part of this plan, the development of multifamily units will not create traffic nightmares.

Multifamily units will create higher crime rates.

The Arizona Multifamily Housing Association (AMHA) concluded that the perception of more crime around multi-family housing comes from the practice of reporting crime statistics based on address. An apartment with 100 units at the same address may be wrongly compared to one single family address. AMHA found that when crime data is analyzed on a per unit basis, police activity in apartment communities is no greater than in single family communities.

Multifamily units will lower other home values.

The U.S. Census Bureau found that the average value of single-family residential homes was highest in working communities with the most multifamily units in comparison to communities with only single-family properties. We have seen that Whitpain has a large surplus of employees commuting into the Township for employment.

Workforce Housing

The Pennsylvania Housing Alliance defines workforce housing as “homes affordable to the typical worker.” These workers can include a wide range, such as teachers, healthcare workers, retail workers, and others who provide essential services in our communities.

The Urban Land Institute defines workforce housing as housing affordable to households earning between 60 and 120 percent of area median income (AMI)."

These workers are an important part of our communities. While there are no legislated guidelines for establishing workforce housing, a general rule of thumb has been to consider incomes within a range of 60% to 120% of the Area Median Income (established by HUD) as able to afford workforce housing. AMI is the amount that divides the income distribution into two equal groups, half having income above that amount and half having income below that amount. 80% of the AMI in 2022 for Montgomery County is \$67,450 for a household of two. Typically, housing costs should not be more than 30% of a household's income. This includes rent payments, utilities, and any HOA fees. Housing available up to this threshold is seen as “affordable housing.” The following is an example to determine the maximum monthly rent for a household of two living in Whitpain earning 80% of the AMI:

- $\$67,450 \times 30\% = \$20,235$
- $\$20,235 / 12 = \$1,686.25 / \text{rent per month}$

Zoning ordinances can incentivize or mandate the creation of a certain percentage of the units on larger projects be rented as workforce housing units. Typically, there needs to be a certain scale of housing development (large number of units) to make this work for the private sector.

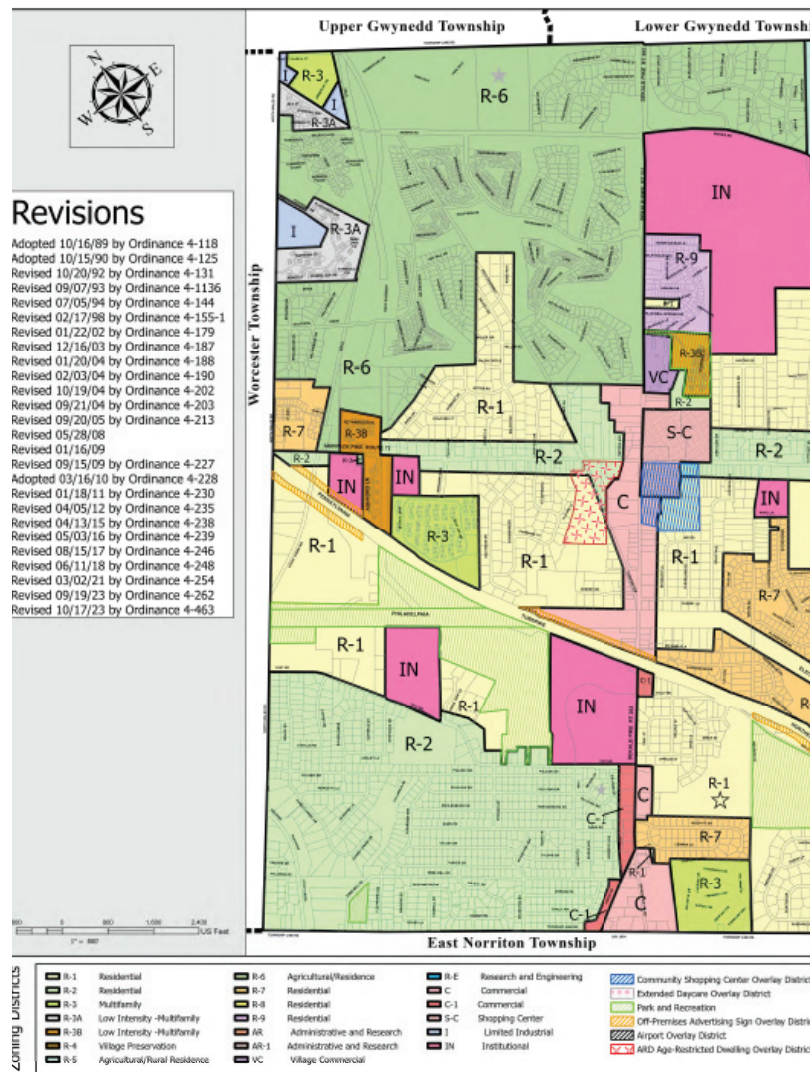
Personal Service Retail / Eateries / Restaurants

Since this area of the Township is in in close proximity to the Plymouth Meeting Mall and other shopping centers with anchor stores and restaurants, it is unlikely that the current office area can support any large-scale commercial uses. If residential units are developed, small personal service shops such as hairdressers, dry cleaners, delicatessens, bars, etc. might be feasible since they will be serving both offices and residences. However, this will likely be a marginal market for some time and any ordinance revisions should allow these uses without requiring these uses.

Traffic Impacts / Roadway Improvements

For any new residential development, applicants will be required to conduct in-depth traffic impact analyses to determine the effects on surrounding road capacity. The existing roadways in this area are extensive and have managed considerable office traffic over the years. However, analysis should be included as a matter of due diligence. There may be the need for access improvements at various sites, turn lanes, etc. that were not needed or anticipated with previous land development applications.

Opportunities for shared access easements and even shared parking arrangements between adjacent sites should be explored in any new ordinances.



Trail and Sidewalk Infrastructure

Any proposals for office to residential conversions should include new sidewalks throughout the project site connecting to existing sidewalks and to area trails, existing or planned. The 2013 Township Trails Plan recommended new trails and sidewalks to connect into Township-wide systems. Bike parking (interior and exterior) should also be required as a part of any new residential construction.

Streetscape and Landscape Improvements

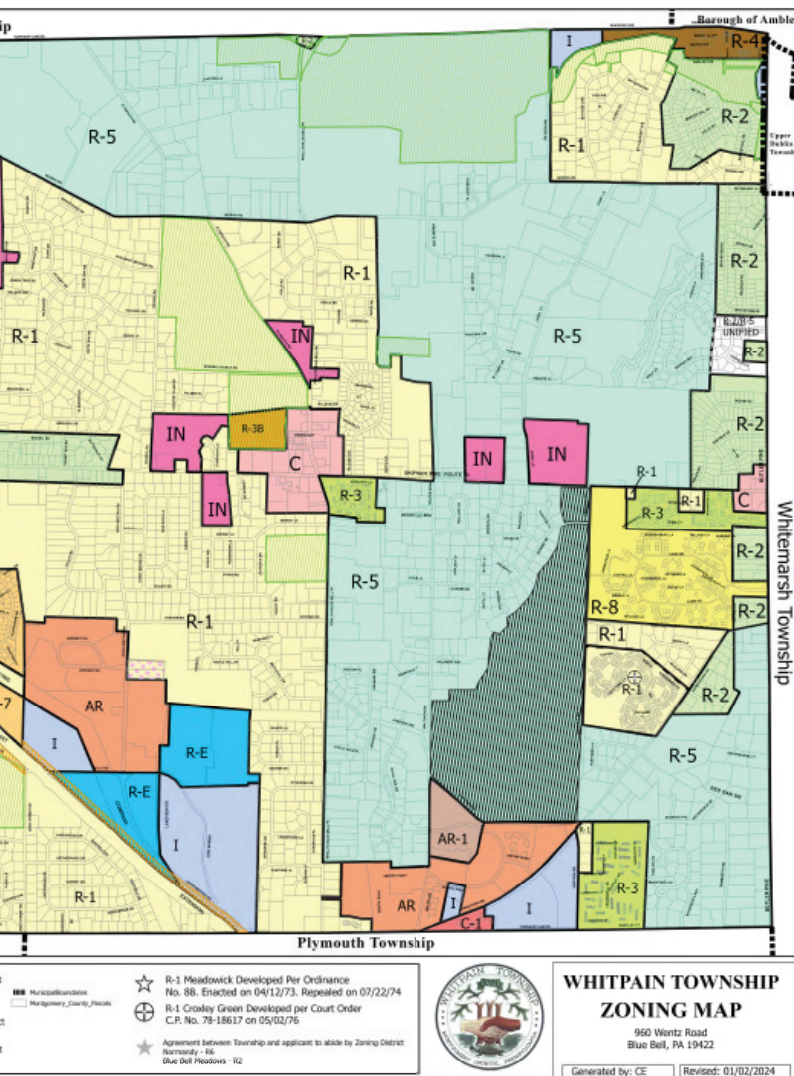
The existing landscape of the two study areas is variable, with some areas being relatively barren and other areas having attractive, mature landscapes. Any office conversion ordinance changes should include extensive landscape

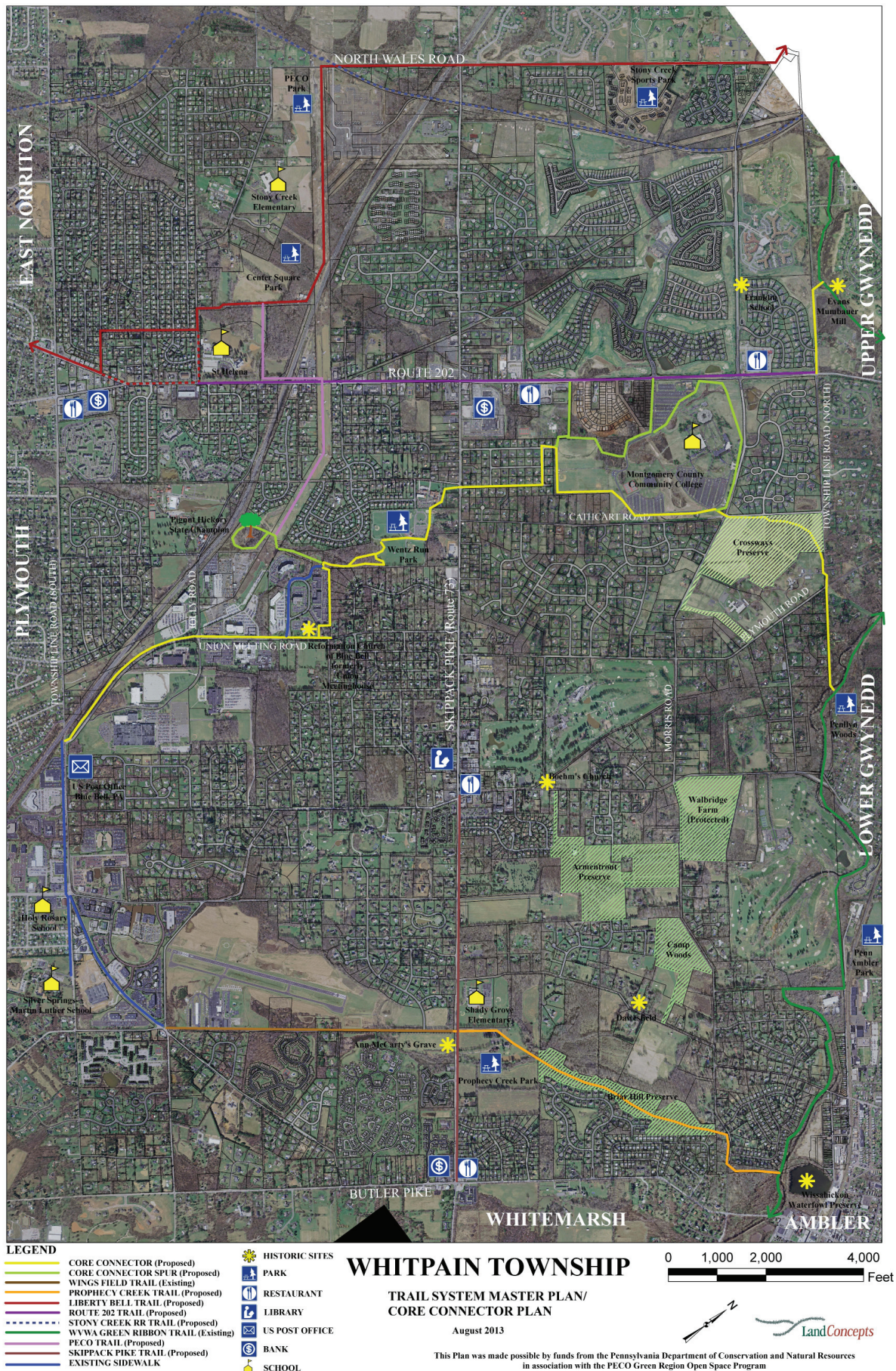
planting requirements that includes retention and preservation of mature trees, tree replacement formulas for trees that must be removed, extensive buffer requirements at side and rear yards, lighting requirements for safety and aesthetics, and standards for a unified signage / site identification approach (apply to both office and residential sites) to create a congruent design vocabulary across the area.

Architectural Design Standards

If new residential uses are permitted in the study areas, this can often be facilitated through the conditional use process by which applications can work directly with the Board of Supervisors for approval, either prior to or at the same time as the Land Development application process. The conditional use process allows the municipality greater flexibility in requiring a higher level of design and Zoning or Subdivision and Land Development Ordinances (SALDO) can include architectural design standards that can ensure an elevated level of design for new buildings. A conditional use approval process is currently utilized in the R-E Zoning District for the “Corporate Rental Suites” provision that were realized in the AVE Apartments at 1600 Union Meeting Road. Some municipalities include design standards in their “by-right” zoning districts. The Township Solicitor should be consulted on the best approach for Whitpain Township. It is usually better to include architectural design standards in SALDO since changes and revisions to the standards suggested by the developer can be accommodated via “waivers” which are discretionary by the governing body, compared to zoning variances which can be changed only based on a “hardship” and must be approved by the Zoning Hearing Board.

An example of a local municipality changing their zoning to allow for additional development is Upper Dublin Township. Recently, Upper Dublin amended their Office Center District to allow certain housing types, mixed-use development and public amenities such as civic spaces and pocket parks. As a result, several multi-family projects are in approval stages or under construction, reflecting demand for this type of housing. Access to near-by retail and proximity to the regional highways are key drivers of this location. The Promenade at Upper Dublin, a mixed-use project of apartments and lifestyle retail located at Dreshertown Road and Welsh Road, was developed under this amendment.





Whitpain Township Trail System Master Plan

Route 202

Recommendations

Given that the Route 202 corridor in Whitpain Township has previously been developed, and that the Route 202 widening project by PennDOT has utilized additional land for roadway and multimodal transportation improvements, the options for any additional changes are somewhat limited. However, there are a number of improvements that can be pursued that will enhance this corridor and “complete” the functional and aesthetic improvements that have been realized by the PennDOT project. These recommendations fall into several categories:

- Shared Access and Parking Easements
- Utilization of “left over” PennDOT land
- Enhancement of the Corridor Streetscape
- Consideration of a new Route 202 Corridor SALDO that includes architectural and streetscape design requirements

Shared Access and Parking Easements

One of the benefits of the Route 202 improvement project is the inclusion of sidewalks and bike lanes along the entire corridor. This is intended to encourage more frequent pedestrian and cyclist activity along the corridor. This may provide some minor reductions in vehicular traffic if pedestrians can be encouraged to walk (rather than drive) to multiple destinations along the corridor as a part of a single trip to this commercial corridor destination. This will result in fewer motor vehicles on the roadway at a time. Another way to minimize the number of motor vehicles on the roadway is to incentivize adjacent property owners – especially those that are commercial /

retail / restaurant uses, to grant both cross-access easements and shared parking easements from one parcel to an adjacent parcel or parcels. The landscape along Route 202 is relatively level, which can facilitate these easements since adjoining parcels are often at the same general elevation.

The granting of these easements can be incentivized.

- For example, A shared driveway between two properties can be incentivized by exempting impervious coverage contained in that driveway easement from the site’s impervious cover limit calculation. This may give property owners some incremental building coverage.
- Another possible incentive is to reduce the parking requirement by the number of parking spaces replaced by the easement (as an example, if a 360SF shared access driveway was constructed between 2 businesses, parking requirements for each business would be reduced by 2 spaces (1 space = 9.5SF x 19SF)). This could be limited to 2 spaces for lots that are less than 3 acres and limited to 4 spaces for lots greater than 3 acres.
- Similarly, landscaping requirements could be reduced by the amount of landscaping (if any) taken up by the easement.

Shared parking easements are another method to minimize the number of motor vehicles going back out onto the Route 202 roadway once they are in the corridor. Similar to shared cross access easements, shared parking could be incentivized by reducing impervious cover requirements by not including shared parking spaces in the total impervious cover, reducing the overall number of spaces that each property / use has to provide and by decreasing the amount of open space required by the granting of these shared parking easements.



Before and after widening of Route 202

Given the fact that much of the retail and commercial uses on the corridor are relatively new, there may be limited opportunities to promote these shared access and parking easements. However, over time, as uses get updated and require land development approvals, these opportunities may have more likelihood of being utilized. Opportunities also exist for Shared Access and Parking Easements as combining stormwater management facilities to reduce both the number and maintenance of stormwater control measures (SCMs).

Utilization of “Left Over” land from the PennDOT project.

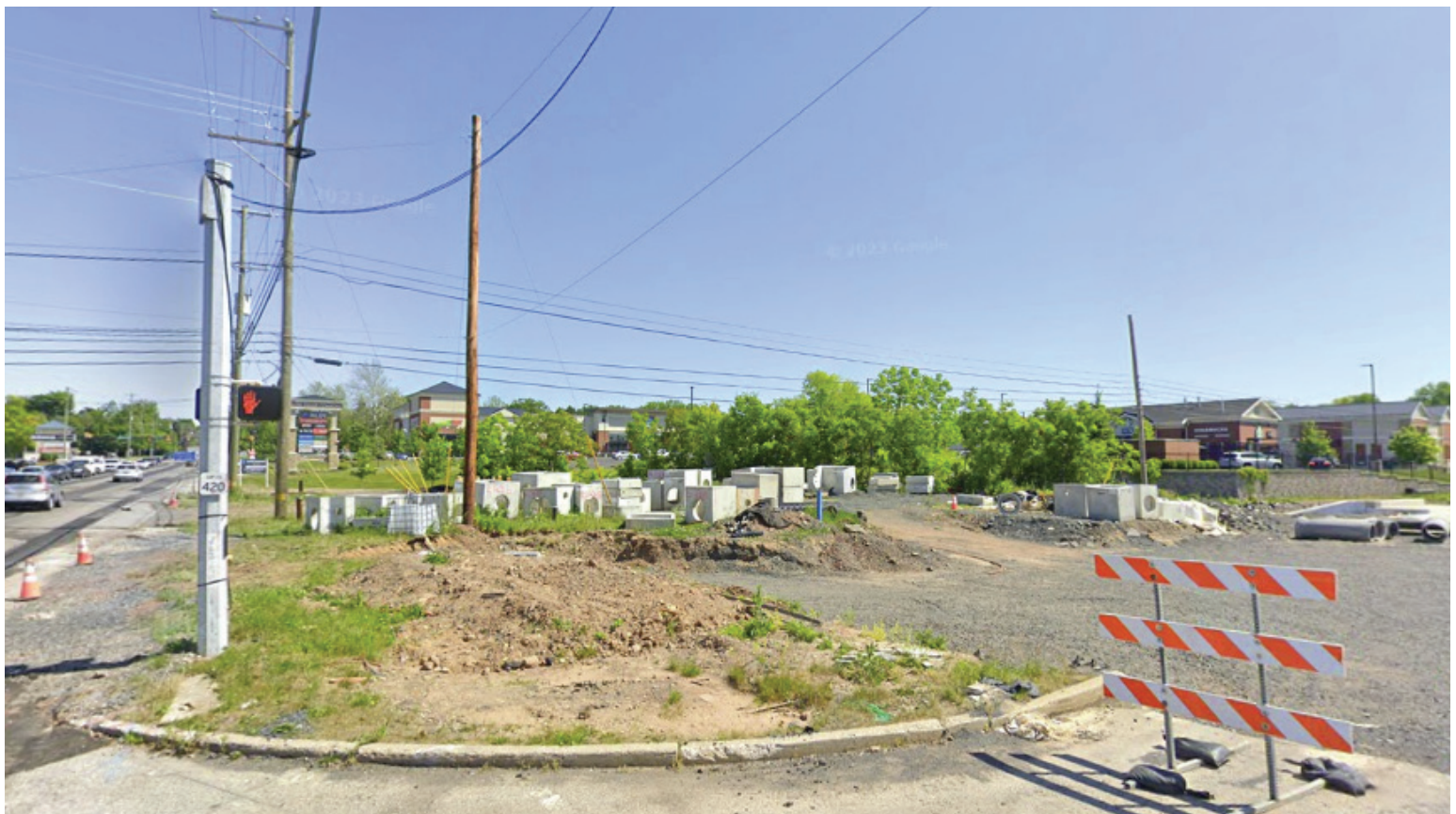
There is a parcel of land located at the southeast corner of Route 202 and Route 73. This parcel measures approximately 200 feet by 100 feet (20,00 SF or ½ acre). Located in front of Centre Square Commons, this space has the potential to become an iconic identity or gateway space that could provide pedestrian amenities, streetscape furniture, lighting, historic or cultural interpretation, and gateway elements that might create a recognizable landmark announcing to motorists that they are in Whitpain Township. According to the Township Engineer, a new state law requires the land to be listed for sale on the open market and if no offers are made, only then may it be offered to the Township for a negotiated price. It is recommended that the Township acquire this land and complete a master plan design for its use and appearance.

Enhancement of the Corridor Streetscape

While some modest tree planting and other landscaping is a part of the Route 202 corridor project, it is recommended that the Township consider a greater commitment to aesthetic improvements in the corridor. There are both functional and aesthetic reasons to consider a greater commitment to an enhanced corridor streetscape.

The Route 202 corridor is the retail heart of Whitpain Township and as such is one of the economic engines of the community. The community needs this corridor to continue to be successful and the private sector can benefit from community support in this goal.

The Route 202 corridor can be thought of as a “linear park” and despite the large lot commercial uses that front on this roadway, the roadway environment itself can be aesthetically enhanced.



Leftover PennDOT parcel at SE corner of Route 202 and Route 73



Before and after streetscape and sidewalk improvements

Improvements that should be considered by the Township include:

- Additional street tree plantings (these can be small stature trees when next to or under powerlines). These plants will not only improve the appearance of the corridor, but they can shade walkways, reduce heat build up and absorb stormwater along the corridor. These trees should be high branched when installed so that motorists can see under the tree canopies to the retail and other establishments located along the corridor.
- Plantings at key locations of durable and colorful ornamental grasses and flowering perennials. These types of plants require little maintenance and do not require irrigation once established.
- Benches at intervals along the corridor. These locations might include street intersections, or other locations that will serve both pedestrians and cyclists. Trash receptacles should also be included.
- Colorful banners on newly installed roadway light standards. These will likely require PennDOT Permission
- Works of three-dimensional art placed in cooperation with property owners.

These types of streetscape improvements will most likely be funded by the Township, matched perhaps with applicable state grants such as Department of Community and Economic Development Local Share Account (DCED LSA), DCED Multi-modal, PennDOT Multi-modal, or other appropriate grants.

Consideration of a new Route 202 Corridor SALDO that includes architectural and streetscape design requirements.

As existing uses along the corridor age, they will be upgraded to reflect commercial or other uses as allowed by zoning. As stated previously, there are no current or anticipated trends that would encourage a change of zoning along the corridor. In order to anticipate future change, the Township should consider architectural and streetscape standards that would be triggered by future land development applications. These design requirements can help to ensure a high-quality retail environment that reflects the affluent Whitpain Township area marketplace.

Appendix



Resolution Adopting Comprehensive Plan Update

**RESOLUTION NO. 1565
WHITPAIN TOWNSHIP
MONTGOMERY COUNTY, PA**

ADOPTION OF WHITPAIN TOWNSHIP LIMITED COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

WHEREAS, Whitpain Township faces many planning challenges such as population growth, new development, traffic congestion, economic sustainability, preservation and revitalization of the newly reconstructed Rt. 202 Corridor, housing needs, and the preservation and enhancement of environmental quality; and

WHEREAS, Whitpain Township held public meetings on September 13 and September 14, 2023; and

WHEREAS, the Whitpain Township Planning Commission held an advertised Public Hearing on January 9, 2024; and

WHEREAS, Whitpain Township submitted the proposed Limited Comprehensive Plan Update to Montgomery County at least 45 days prior to holding an advertised Public Hearing on March 5, 2024, and forwarded copies of the Comprehensive Plan to all contiguous municipalities and to Wissahickon School District for review and comment; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Supervisors has considered the review comments of the County, contiguous municipalities and the School District, as well as the public meeting comments and the recommendations of the Whitpain Township Planning Commission; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Supervisors held a Public Hearing for the Comprehensive Plan on March 5, 2024; and

WHEREAS, the Whitpain Township Limited Comprehensive Plan Update was prepared in accordance with the Municipalities Planning Code, Section 301, and was advertised, presented at public meetings, and distributed to Montgomery County and contiguous municipalities in accordance with the Municipalities Planning Code, Section 302.

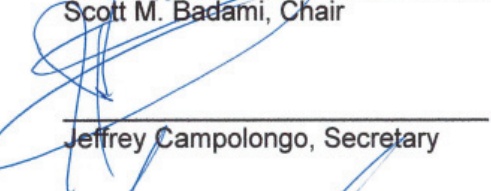
NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Supervisors hereby adopts all narratives, maps, tables, and other graphics of the Whitpain Township Limited Comprehensive Plan Update dated March 2024 in its entirety.

ADOPTED AND ENACTED this 19th day of March 2024.

WHITPAIN TOWNSHIP BOARD OF SUPERVISORS



Scott M. Badami, Chair

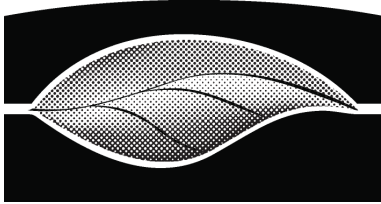
Kimberly J. Koch, Vice Chair

Jeffrey Campolongo, Secretary

Joyce M. Keller, Treasurer

Sara S. Selverian, Asst. Secretary

Public and Committee Meeting Minutes



SIMONE COLLINS
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE
119 EAST LAFAYETTE STREET NORRISTOWN, PA 19401
PHONE: 610.239.7601 FAX: 610.239.7606
WWW.SIMONECOLLINS.COM

MEETING NOTES

Project:	Whitpain Comprehensive Plan Update	Project No.:	23005.10
Location:	Microsoft Teams	Meeting Date/Time:	3.8.23 11:00am – 12:00pm
Re:	Staff Meeting #1	Issue Date:	5.9.23

ATTENDEE LIST:

Whitpain Township:

Roman Pronczak (RP), Whitpain Township Manager
David Mrochko (DM), Whitpain Township Assistant Manager
Jim Blanch (JB), Whitpain Township Engineer

Simone Collins:

Peter Simone (PS)
Pankaj Jobanputra (PJ)
Tim Adams (TA)

GENERAL NOTES:

Route 202 Corridor

- RP said that there are a couple of tricky sections, especially on the southern end of the corridor.
- RP noted that G&S Tire at Rt. 202 and Township Line is looking to replace the parking it lost along the right-of-way in the rear at another location. Could it be integrated into the shopping center?
- RP said that PennDOT acquired some small parcels. They are looking to vacate some ROW and transfer ownership. This ROW area is too small to be a building lot but perhaps it could have some landscaping or be a small park. PennDOT also relocated the entrance to the Mews at Blue Bell to a signalized intersection at the intersection with Swede Rd.
- RP noted, continuing north along the corridor, that Dekalb Produce is outdated. The shopping center to the north (Whitpain Shopping Center) has been upgraded. What to do

just north of this is tricky. There are some residential lots but it's hard to do residential along the highway. There is one property which may submit an application for variance for a pet hospital (north of Spruce). It's an old building and the architectural style looks to be Georgian or Federal. It if could be buffered, the application could go through. Maybe it will be well received by neighbors. Between this lot and Skippack Pike, smaller parcels could be combined for access points.

- RP stated that Liberty Automotive was on the southwest side of Rt. 202 (at Yost). The site lost its parking, but someone is trying to buy and redevelop it.
- RP noted that the biggest challenge is the entire intersection of Rt. 202 and Rt. 73 (Skippack Pike). PennDOT is putting concrete medians on all 4 approaches, there will also be signalized intersections. The Township is not sure what will happen with Reed's Country Store. There has been an application to develop higher density residential, maybe condos. Prior to this, there was an application for an independent/assisted living facility. Across from the site is the site of the old convenience store, a doctor's office and a bank. Someone is planning on acquiring the site north of the Sunoco and is proposing to build a Chase bank.
- PS asked if the Township wanted a sort of overlay district that requires aesthetic improvements. That would be a big help here.
- RP noted that Center Square Shopping Center has an overlay, the Community Shopping Center Overlay District.
- DM said that PennDOT is using land at the southeast corner. It's a remnant of land from the project they don't need, so they will go through a hierarchy to see if other state agencies have use for it. If not, they will then check with the County, then the Township. If the Township were able to acquire it, it could be a pocket park or something similar.
- RP followed up by saying they are getting sidewalks along that entire side, sometimes on both sides, to the signalized intersection. There will be a combination pedestrian/bicycle lane and sidewalks on one side. The hope is to extend sidewalks down to the Township building on Wentz Rd.
- PS asked if the Township has an official map.
- RP responded that they do not.
- PS followed up by noting this PennDOT parcel would be a good use of open space for the community.
- RP said a doctor's office or daycare could also work.
- PS asked that when they did the Center Square overlay, if there were discussions to extend it.
- RP said that the properties were a hodgepodge of zoning; maybe 15 properties were assembled. A large chunk of properties were zoned R1, so the Township implemented an overlay. The Township wanted to avoid fast food, so square footage was limited. Post Covid, fast food establishments are realizing they don't need big dining spaces, so the Township may see fast food introduced. The closest thing is Chipotle.
- RP also said that Cardinal Winery was looking at space on Skippack.

- PS said that the team will review the Community Shopping Center Overlay and asked if the Township has separate SALDOs in place for the Overlay.
- JB noted that there are specific references for landscaping and parking but there is one consistent SALDO.

Commercial-to-Residential Conversion

- RP noted the Township received 5 inquiries for commercial-to-residential conversion. The site along Union Meeting Rd. is tucked back in the office park.
- PS said that any significant vertical mixing of uses is difficult to finance. In King of Prussia, SC helped to develop a Mixed-Use District. We've also written ordinances that incentivize cross-access easements and other site amenities.
- RP noted that the new AVE complex was well received. It's not a traditional apartment building. It's in the R-E (Research and Engineering) District and the use is as corporate rental suites (this was a text amendment to the R-E District). It was a conditional use. There are no restrictions on how long leases could be. There are approximately 14-15 students that are picked up by buses and earlier testimony noted that there would be no impact on the School District. We don't know the density, but it contains studios and 1- and 2-bedroom units.
- PS noted that you can control school district impacts through the types of residential units that are built. There are also traffic impacts so it might be worth doing a study on this building. As we look at the whole conversion aspect, what is the future of office buildings. If we made a change that allows conversion, where would it end? How much do we plan for?
- RP said that the traffic impact would be the biggest unknown. Many people are still not back at the office. Do we know if ITE has been looking at numbers or have they done studies? We've heard that if you convert to residential, there will be less traffic.
- JB said that we have a traffic impact statement from the engineer for the AVE project that shows 100 trips during the AM/PM peaks.
- PS asked if we could compare volumes when offices were fully occupied and more operational. Also, the point arises of how do we limit conversion vs. do we limit it.
- DM asked how many people have cars now.
- JB said that AVE has 270 units and that we will determine the density.
- RP responded by saying that the original density was 25 units/acre and that studios and 1 bedrooms would comprise 50% of the units. 3 bedrooms would not be permitted.
- DM said that there are 405 parking spaces - 1.5 spaces/unit.
- PS asked if the Township has an Earned Income Tax (EIT).
- RP said the Township has one and it's adjusted to allow for open space – 0.06% of the EIT will generate income for open space. People living or working in the Township pay the EIT.
- PS asked what happened when people were working at home.
- RP said that, during Covid, the Township saw a spike in revenue. People who worked in Philadelphia were working from home and the Township received their taxes.

- RP said the School District recently expanded Stony Creek Elementary. They are also planning to expand Blue Bell Elementary.
- DM said that there was controversy with overcrowding in schools. We saw a turnover in young families moving in.
- RP said that the Township communicates regularly with the School District.
- RP said we don't see any issue with the Police or Fire Departments. The Fire Department has gone from mostly volunteer to a paid staff. They're not recovering everything from insurance.
- PS asked what the height limit is for Fire Department equipment.
- RP said they do have a 100-foot ladder. The bigger issue in terms of conversion will be the Wings airport; we have a zone of height restriction.
- JB said that we can ask Wings what the height restrictions are.
- RP said that, in terms of the office buildings, we don't have occupancy details available. It may be worthwhile to have conversations with employers.
- PS replied that it would be helpful to talk to them informally.
- RP said that we think the property on Harvest Dr. that received interest is 960. It looks like it could easily be converted.
- RP confirmed that both VEVA 11 and 12 would be demolished to make way for new development.

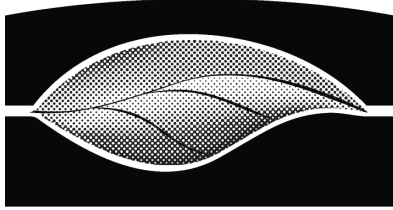
Next Steps

- PS said that we will look at priority transportation routes to get to highways – we will talk to McMahon.
- RP said the Township had no problem with the meeting schedule.
- RP said the Township will send the SC team proposed plans and contact information for businesses that have contacted the Township about conversion, land development plans for AVE and PennDOT plans.

This report represents the Professional's summation of the proceedings and is not a transcript. Unless written notice of any correction or clarification is received by the Professional within ten days of issue, the report shall be considered factually correct and shall become part of the official project record.

Sincerely,

SIMONE COLLINS, INC.
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE



SIMONE COLLINS
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE
119 EAST LAFAYETTE STREET NORRISTOWN, PA 19401
PHONE: 610.239.7601 FAX: 610.239.7606
WWW.SIMONECOLLINS.COM

MEETING NOTES

Project:	Whitpain Township Comprehensive Plan Update	Project No.:	23005.10
Location:	Whitpain Township Building	Meeting Date/ Time:	9.13.23 7:00 – 9:00pm
Re:	Public Meeting #1 (Residents)	Issue Date:	9.19.23

ATTENDEE LIST:

Township: Roman Pronczak, Jim Blanch, Dave Mrochko

Simone Collins: Pete Simone (PS), Pankaj Jobanputra (PJ), Tim Adams (TA)

McMahon: Brian Jones

GENERAL NOTES:

Presentation

PS began project overview and introduction.

TA reviewed updated demographics.

PS stated that these demographics reflect an affluent community and that apartments here would likely be higher value, the market would not support low-income apartments.

PJ reviewed regional and national conversion trends.

PJ reviewed Township zoning map and SALDO

- Established which zoning districts are within office areas.
- Reiterated that zoning must account for all uses within a municipality.
- Reviewed how SALDO governs what is built and clarified that land development equates to improvements.
- Reviewed building footprint values.

PJ began review of Permitted Uses within AR AR1, RE, I

- Clarified “Special Exception”
- Clarified “Accessory Uses”

- Clarified “Conditional Uses”
- Reviewed considerations for additional permitted uses

PJ began review of Traffic Analysis

- Office
 - PS clarified that this exercise is hypothetical, and is meant to visualize what the “worst case” scenario is, and how these values compare to OnTheMap data.
 - PJ began review of OnTheMap data and how ITE trips were 60% of OnTheMap total trips.
 - PJ began discussion about “Unchanged Office” Scenario
 - PJ reviewed examples of some similarly scaled Office-to-Residential conversions completed elsewhere.
 - PJ reviewed drawbacks of adaptive reuse projects in context of office-to-residential.
 - PS clarified that the developer interest in Whitpain is currently 1 reuse and 2 teardowns.
 - PJ began review of population projections and estimated housing unit demand.
 - PS clarified that this does not necessarily need to be into new units.
 - PJ reviewed DVRPC X 3 traffic exercise
 - PJ reiterated the stark comparison between residential and office “worst case” traffic scenarios and emphasized that the road capacity is already there.
 - PJ reviewed 20 unit/acre density scenario.
 - Emphasized that this is an extreme scenario and is purely a hypothetical exercise and that this will never happen.
 - It is purely to visualize traffic generation under different scenarios.
 - Compared trip generation values for all 3 scenarios.
 - PS took a pause for discussion.
 - Clarified that traffic is usually the largest concern.
 - Clarified that the purpose of exercise is that we are trying to illustrate how even at extreme densities, traffic generation is much lower than office generation.

Citizen: On the forecast, does that projection assume that land would open up to absorb those people?

- We don’t know the algorithm that DVRPC uses, but one would assume that they do

Citizen: Why are you using 2020 and 2021 data?

- It is the most recently available data.

- Its 19 months behind?
 - Yes it is just an unfortunate planning fact

Citizen: With regards to traffic, there is a difference between residential and office workers, residential people are taking multiple trips per day.

- RP clarified the difference between total daily trips and peak hours.
 - SC agreed with the concern but emphasized that this exercise looks at peak hour, which is when the roadway is under the most traffic stress.
 - PS one thing we can do with the zoning to limit the number of school aged children is that you can write into the zoning that x% of units need to studio/1BR/2BR. This won't completely eliminate school aged children but will limit it significantly. This way you don't create the environment for families etc.
 - Emphasized that everyone is using the same data, and it's best that we have. It isn't perfect.
 - PS alternative (for citizen/board decision) if it's not office to residential, then what is it? Office to warehouse? Each use comes with an upside and a downside, and we are trying to explore what is best for everyone, and that is up to the board to decide.
 - Eg. The Township has been aggressive in creating open space like buying mermaid lake which could have been single family homes.

PJ began review of Zoning/SALDO initial thoughts.

- Defined an "overlay district".
- Reviewed developer bonuses
 - PS stated that everyone would love biomedical research and it's the "hot" thing in development, but it's likely not going to happen due to the tendency for these uses to aggregate together locally.
- Reviewed potential design standards that could be included in SALDO.
- Reviewed potential buffering standards and setbacks.
- PS clarified that reason we like to do overlays is that nobody likes existing rights taken away. With overlay, we are giving the private sector more flexibility without taking anything away from the community. By choosing conditional use, it goes right to the board of supervisors.

PJ reviewed the current Township Trails Map.

Citizen: Area B is also the office park on harvest drive? And across the street of union meeting road?

- RP yes
 - And AVE is in Area B?
 - Yes

Citizen: What is the benefit of going to overlay instead of changing zoning?

- **PS** if I'm a property owner and I have an industrial property, if township changes zoning, then my property becomes an existing non-conforming use, which gives property and different set of rules. Overlay prevents a facility from becoming an existing non-conforming use.
 - o **PS** We also find that it's best to not take existing rights away. Development is cyclical and we can make predictions based on the past only so well. The only thing we know is that change is inevitable.
 - o **PS** There are some really healthy businesses here that likely won't go away. We don't know how many properties would take advantage of a conversion overlay based on market conditions etc. Overlay simply gives the private sector more options with what to do with a building.

Citizen: with traffic, how often do you involve adjacent municipalities in these discussions?

- **BJ** yes, we do look at adjacent municipalities thru background analysis.
- **PS** developer will have to do more precise traffic studies if township goes forward with this.
- **RP** we really have no say in what other townships do, but MCPC and DVRPC do encourage it. Unfortunately, traffic will come through our township, that is just the reality.

PJ began review of 202 Widening Project

- Discussed potential opportunities, such as shared parking/access, interconnectivity, leftover PennDOT parcel, separate SALDO?
- Reviewed parcel analysis: abutting land uses, building breakdown by zoning.
- Reviewed permitted uses along route 202 corridor.

PJ began review of initial thoughts on Route 202 Zoning

- Discussed shared access easements.
 - o Potential incentives eg. Easements exempt from impervious coverage, parking requirement reductions, landscaping requirement reductions.
- Discussed shared parking between adjacent properties to reduce the number of spaces each property would individually need to provide.

PJ began review of initial thoughts on Route 202 SALDO

- Discussed green and open space provisions eg. Linear parks along commercial corridor
- Discussed streetscaping and site design standards.
- Discussed potential of leftover PennDOT parcel to become a placemaking/village identity location.
 - o **PS** stated that once the widening project is done, township will likely see a lot more bikers due to the bike lanes. Think of the street as a park.

Citizen: one thing about KOP Village is that there is not enough parking.

- **PS** one thing about KOP is that their office occupancy rates are great, which is an anomaly, as is the KOP mall. One of the reasons there is not enough parking is because of these “synergies” between these popular destinations of office/residential.

Citizen: I like the whole idea but I’m worried that people will not embrace walking. They simply will not turn in their keys, have to give people a place to park.

- **PS** were not getting rid of any parking.

Citizen: with shared easements how does that work?

- **RP** the shopping center where McCaffrey’s and Kohls is a good example of a successful shared easement works.
- **RP** you can’t force properties to do this, but you can encourage it with incentives

Citizen: at Reeds store, what is going to be in the Sunoco gas station lot?

- **RP** that will be a bank. Chase bank has an application in. But we don’t know what is going to happen with the Reeds store. Franklin Realty is in discussion.
- **RP** were hopeful that someone will acquire the 3 leftover properties of the wawa/Dunkin, bank, medical office
 - o Jolly Rd intersection, casseli family, hoping there can be a shared access opportunity there.

Citizen: the linear park, who would own it?

- **PS** We could make this happen thru streetscaping standards and fund it through various grants.

Citizen: referenced the Business Improvement Districts

- **PS** that could be an option here

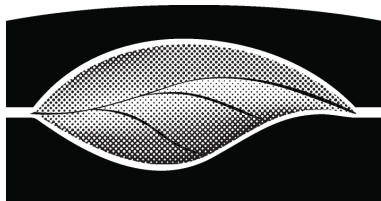
Next Steps

Public Meeting 2 tomorrow (9.14.23)

This report represents the Professional’s summation of the proceedings and is not a transcript. Unless written notice of any correction or clarification is received by the Professional within ten days of issue, the report shall be considered factually correct and shall become part of the official project record.

Sincerely,

SIMONE COLLINS, INC.
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE



SIMONE COLLINS
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE
119 EAST LAFAYETTE STREET NORRISTOWN, PA 19401
PHONE: 610.239.7601 FAX: 610.239.7606
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MEETING NOTES

Project:	Whitpain Township Comprehensive Plan Update	Project No.:	23005.10
Location:	Whitpain Township Building	Meeting Date/ Time:	9.14.23 2:00 – 4:00pm
Re:	Public Meeting 2 (Businesses)	Issue Date:	9.19.23

ATTENDEE LIST:

Township: Roman Pronczak, Scott Badami, Dave Mrochko

Simone Collins: Pete Simone (PS), Pankaj Jobanputra (PJ), Tim Adams (TA)

GENERAL NOTES:

Presentation

RP gave introductions and reviewed meeting purpose.

PS reviewed meeting agenda, project overview, and schedule.

TA reviewed updated demographics.

PS traffic and school aged children are usually the biggest concerns when looking at zoning changes

PJ reviewed national trends and best practices.

PJ reviewed zoning and SALDO definitions.

PJ reviewed Permitted Uses of Study Area Zoning Districts.

PJ reviewed what other permitted uses could be considered

PJ began Traffic Analysis review

Citizen: does the 2.3 PPH and 522 units account for 3Br units?

PJ yes it's the average

PJ reviewed initial thoughts for Zoning/SALDO considerations for office conversions

PS for the residential caps, it is sort of safety valve for the township to give them some more control in the situation. It is something that can be changed

Citizen: you would require 2.5 parking spaces even for 1 Br units?

PS we want to keep parking as is in the Township. Developers could apply for a change if they have a case and suggest a lower ratio.

Citizen: in Upper Dublin, they limited it to 900 units as a cap. 0 have been developed and around 600 planned and 300 under construction

RP were really looking for suggestions here and to gather input

Citizen: we have 4000 apartments and have studied them all, and generally go 1 parking space per bedroom, which ends up being around 1.5 to 1.6 spaces per unit

PS as this goes forward we can look into other bonuses and incentives for developers

PJ reviewed Current Township Trails map

PJ began Route 202 widening project review

PJ reviewed benefits and challenges

PJ reviewed Opportunities for improvement

PJ reviewed parcel analysis of parcels abutting 202 corridor

Reviewed Permitted Uses along 202 corridor

PJ reviewed initial thoughts on route 202 zoning/SALDO

Shared Access easements or shared parking

Streetscaping/linear park

Site Design standards

Leftover PennDOT parcel

PS some of these 202 projects would be public projects, and could be an opportunity for the Township to going after grant funding. Something that came up last night was a business improvement district along this corridor. There could be interest in this considering the “firepower” in the area

Citizen: they did this in Jenkintown and upper Dublin, and it usually is a miniscule amount imposed upon business owners. It’s a great idea

Next Steps

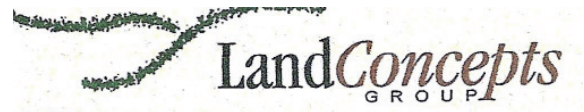
Board of Supervisors Meeting 1 (9.19.23)

This report represents the Professional’s summation of the proceedings and is not a transcript. Unless written notice of any correction or clarification is received by the Professional within ten days of issue, the report shall be considered factually correct and shall become part of the official project record.

Sincerely,

SIMONE COLLINS, INC.
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

Draft Plan Comments and Responses



Comprehensive Plan Update January 2024 DRAFT

The following are my comments shared at the PC meeting 1-9-24

R. Collier,

LandConcepts Group

1-19-24

Simone Collins

responses / comments

3/1/24

- Support some areas now zoned for office to be amended to allow suitable multi-family (m-f) uses to include both rental and & ownership **Agreed**
- Changes in zoning to allow residential is a good one but in selected areas and not all.
- Encourage or require some support retail on ground floor (convenience, cafe, deli, etc.) given the distance to basic services & traffic generation **Agreed. Market may support limited uses but zoning should allow flexibility here.**
- Provide some affordable housing (maybe workforce idea per plan). A greater variety of housing supports a more diverse community and larger pool of local workers. ***We are advocates for a workforce housing approach with incentives.**
- The table showing the trend toward multi-family and rental units is useful. The recent trend in Upper Dublin should be added. Where the office district was amended to allow certain housing types. As a result, there are several m-f projects in approval stages and in construction for hundreds of apartments reflecting demand. Access to near-by retail and the regional highways are key drivers of this location. **Agreed.**
- Provide public amenity along the frontage (e.g., pocket park) of redeveloped or repurposed properties with a required% set aside area and design guidelines. This is true in the Upper Dublin example above. **Agreed.**

- Some level of economic analysis with impact estimates on the tax base is an important deficiency and should include comparisons for office vs rental/owner occupied homes. While not in the study scope (per prior consultant comment), the scope should be amended to add it, or key questions of this study are not answered. **Economic impact analysis could be a requirement of applicants as a part of the Conditional Use process.**
- Ordinance Revision Recommendations section (page 37). This should be dropped and done as part of the implementation phase. What is offered in the table is arbitrary and hypothetical with no source(s) and basis for changes. There are many considerations that should go into changed bulk requirements. **These were already removed from the most recent copy of the draft Comp. Plan. Agreed.**
- Using an overlay district is a good idea and of value as the underlying zoning remains (e.g., Wings Field, Center Square).
- Requiring Conditional Use approval is also a good tool to consider as it adds more specific criteria which may help direct the change wanted. This was used for AVE in the R-E District and might be expanded to AR/AR-1 (or a portion).
- Statement in Recommendations (p.38) that Rt. 202 "built out" is questioned as to meaning. Better wording might be "has been previously developed". There has been regular redevelopment (e.g., Center Square) which has continued with reuse and repurposing (e.g., new vet facility, Lightbridge Academy). In that regard, the statement that follows "any additional changes are somewhat limited" is not accurate. There are applications submitted or pending for several reuse in addition to the PADOT "left over" land. Rt. 202 continues to have redevelopment and upgraded opportunities to enhance this corridor. **This wording will be revised.**
- Use of shared parking & shared access is a great benefit to limit the curb cuts and pavement that can be shared based on staggered peak use times (e.g., professional office or day car near restaurant, breakfast/lunch place near evening use/facility, church near weekday shops).
- At the end of this section (p. 39), noting the retail and commercial uses on the corridor are relatively new is not accurate despite some recent major reuse. Many and maybe the majority of the businesses or the buildings have been on Rt. 202 for many years (e.g, Shoppes at Village Square, PJ

Whelihan's, Whitpain Tavern, The Shops at Blue Bell, etc.). Shared access and parking can be worked into new development perhaps more easily, but with existing development too, and at least as a goal for each development review where suitable. **This wording will be revised.**

-
- Corridor enhancements as suggested are useful additions beyond the current **SALDO** which allows limited improvements (street trees and shrub buffers). Enhancements can change the perception, character, and shopping experience for locals and visitors who may be drawn in. An overlay for these improvements is an idea worth exploring further. **Will be considered.**
- MCPC will be asked for review and their comments should be integrated where appropriate given their Comprehensive Plan 2040 and the updated Comprehensive Plan 2050 (in process). **We have received the MCPC review comments.**
- <https://www.montgomerycountypa.gov/4213/Montco-2050>
- Many of the graphics are hard to read on a screen. Can they be upgraded? Maybe enlarged and on opposing pages? **Will review**

Planning Commission Member Review Comments- February 14, 2024

of the Draft Township Comprehensive Plan Update

Prepared by Simone-Collins last revised Jan. 2024

Simone Collins responses / comments 2-28-24

Review Comments on Conversion of Office Space to Residential Through Redevelopment:

1. The Wissahickon School district (WSD) enrollment figures on page 9 are I believe for just Whitpain residents and not the whole district. This needs to be clarified. **Additional enrollment figures will be added.**
2. The WSD has been impacted by a relatively significant increases in student enrollment in the past few years, which was not predicted 10 years ago, resulting in expansions of Stony Creek, Blue Bell and the Middle schools. Additional enrollments could be difficult to handle. **WSD projections show numbers stabilizing with reductions.**
3. The Plan does not make mention of several significant projects that are in the works; approved or soon to be approved (and their impact on the community): Federation housing on PBB Pike, Reeds on Skippack Pike and Parcel D in the Unisys office complex. **Will be mentioned if applicable.**
4. A challenge not mentioned with possible conversion of office space to residential is the lack of mass transit near any of them (bus/train) and thus the impact of additional vehicular traffic. **The Comprehensive Plan compares historical office traffic numbers at full occupancy vs. residential at “full occupancy” (a circumstance that will never occur) and project traffic generation of likely residential is much less than office at full occupancy.**
5. There is an inconsistency in this report of the proposed density of units per developable acre (related to office to residential): Pg 37 mentions 25 units while Pg 16 mentions 20 units. **This is not an inconsistency this is examining different densities, i.e. different development scenarios.**
6. Need a better understanding of the meaning/impact of the “absorption rate” of new housing mentioned on page 29. **Absorption rate is the rate at which new dwelling units are occupied / rented – over a period of time.**
7. The comparison of the existing AVE project to proposed new development is not totally fair. When AVE obtained a variance approval, it was pre-pandemic, it was proposed to be furnished short term rental housing for people moving to the area for short term assignments, those whose home were getting rebuilt (Voluntary/involuntary reasons). It was not supposed to have any impact on the WSD. In fact, it has turned into primarily apartments, for which there are about 15 students attending the WSD. **Understood. If the concern is the number of school age students generated by an apartment, this can be mitigated by the numbers of bedrooms permitted in each unit. Studio and one and two bedroom units generally generate very few (not zero) school age children. While the AVE project promised zero generation of school age children, 15 children based on the total number of units is still very low.**
8. As mentioned in the plan, Whitpain currently has about 80% owner occupied housing. Conversions of several commercial properties to residential, would reduce this % with a variety of subtle impacts on Whitpain. **Comment noted.**
9. In general, spell out acronyms used the first time in Whitpain Township Comprehensive Plan update. **Agreed.**
10. Page 3 – typo on line 2 under Demographics & Socioeconomic Data and first line of 4th under Age Distribution (should be 60-65, not 65-60). **Thank you.**
11. Page 33 – Provide a more detailed explanation/justification on how & why development of

multifamily units will not create traffic nightmares (Please refrain from using these non-descriptive adjectives and provide objective explanations). **Detailed objective analysis is provided on pages 15-18.**

12. Page 38 – Recommendations, first paragraph Route 202 corridor is built up not built out. The corridor recommendations should state that “opportunities” exist for Shared Access and Parking Easements as combining stormwater management facilities to reduce number of stormwater control measures (SCMs) and reduce maintenance of said SCMs. **Wording will be revised.**
13. Page 39 – fix spelling on photo caption. **Thank you.**
14. 68% of the residents have either a bachelor’s degree or higher. Will these conversions be targeted to them? **While the private sector may target certain demographic groups, we cannot state exactly who this will be. Since none of these units will be priced low, we envision that persons earning higher incomes will be able to afford these units. The exception may be if the zoning ordinances (yet to be written) including workforce housing incentives (see report) that may allow units to be rented or sold at a lower price. These units tend to target teacher, police and firefighters, and other “lower’ wage white color workers.**
15. How will the price of the new units compare with the \$482,400 median price for houses currently? **We believe that for units for sale they will be at or above this median price. Exceptions might be workforce housing. See above and report.**
16. With 291 vacant houses, would it be prudent to start looking at them first? **Private sector is likely already looking. This is not a township function. These are private properties.**
17. I always feel the traffic studies are suspect. (Remember the Whitpain Hills traffic study) How do we get a better assessment of what the real impact will be? **The information in the report was developed with the assistance of the Township Traffic Engineer. This is the best data we have. Our experienced is that members of the public never believe traffic projections, no matter who develops them.**
18. Definitely need the school district growth projections. Although there is discussion of size of units to curb school enrollment, do people who make enough to buy a \$485k+ house really want only two bedrooms? I work out of my house and need my own office. I need three bedrooms. And I am the perfect target for these conversions. **Comment noted.**
19. Who are we attracting? Will there be competition from neighboring communities who are doing conversions as well? **We assume so. These units cannot be built inexpensively and will need to realize rents or sale prices reflecting those costs.**
20. Based on my experience working in Downtown Philadelphia, I am seeing changes in the work-from-home policies in several companies, especially the companies that have suburban offices. Here are some of my observations:
 - o Most of the companies in Philadelphia are enforcing at least 3 days of working in the office.
 - o Most employees in the suburban offices are either fully in the office or go in at least 3 days of the week.
 - o Most government agencies are not paying mileage, as well as tolls, based on working from home. Basically, if you are working on a project in PA and commuting from NJ, but your office is in PA, they are not paying for your commute time or tolls from NJ.
 - o The CCD (Center City District) and the Center City Business Association are urging the larger corporations to bring employees back to the office full time through meetings with the company's high-ranking officers.
 - o I also feel that with the slowing in the economy, work-from-home could eventually be something of the past. Most employees are coming to the office voluntarily because of the workload and limited work that they can do from home. **Thank you for these observations and predictions.**

21. In the last few years, we are seeing large health institutions opening offices in the suburbs such as Jefferson, Main Line Health, etc. All these health institutions need suburban satellite medical offices and facilities in which they must see patients in-person, especially for medical imaging. Agree with this general trend. We know of no interest presently from these types of institutions in the project area. Also, Hospital is a use currently allowed by Special Exception in the AR District. Medical Facilities are currently allowed by right in the Industrial District.
22. I believe converting these two office areas to a residential area will have a negative impact on the township residents. In my opinion, these two office areas are easy to access with plenty of parking if utilized for medical facilities or other facilities that could serve residents of all ages. We are not currently seeing this demand for this area of Whitpain. See #21 above.
23. In my opinion, if the Township has concerns about vacant office buildings, the rezoning of the office buildings should be populated to all office buildings within the Township, especially those are owned by local residents. The economical impact on the owners of these multi-billion corporations within those two areas, could be much less than the impact on the owners of small office buildings. Comment noted.
24. As mentioned in last month's meeting, the report comes off as very biased towards making the zoning change. Many of the numbers and assumptions cited in the report appear slanted to pro-residential development. It just seemed like it should be more factual and impartial. Comment noted
25. Communication: I know the 'Comprehensive Plan update' was recently posted in the Whitpain township newsletter but I believe it needs to be over-communicated and the change fully explained to township residents. I have not talked to anyone aside from the Planning Commissions members that are aware of the update. A summary of the change should be included as not many people are going to read the full report. And the impact of the change needs to be summarized. Comment noted.
26. Reiterating the previous recommendation that a Financial section should be included to address the impact to the township budget/school taxes with the change from office to residential. This should also consider the school district enrollment and the costs of expansion. There are 50 different scenarios that could be modeled. Which one should be chosen? Another approach could be that the applicant prepare a fiscal impact analysis for what is actually proposed.
27. The existing office vacancy should be verified per the leases. Not based on occupancy. The update seems to indicate it's a dire situation when in fact it mostly likely is not. I just left the commercial real estate world – Office foreclosures are 5.8% overall with most of these occurring in CBD's. There are plenty of year-end reports that predict office will fare well in 2024 once interest rates decrease, especially for suburban markets. Comment noted.
28. Page 12 states that 7% of companies are planning on requiring their employees to return to the office. I just went through a year of requiring employees to return to the office and this % is nowhere close to what is being circulated within major corporations. I believe this 7% could represent the # of companies requiring employees to return full-time. The Plan should be clarified to state this and include some of the Deloitte's findings below. (Link to 2022 survey below).
 - a. Our 2022 survey [[Connectivity & Mobile Trends Survey | Deloitte Insights](#)] found that in 2023, as many companies ask employees to return to the office, they're offering hybrid schedules to help soften the blow. Our survey revealed that 56% of employed adults work from home at least some of the time: 22% work fully from home and 34% keep a hybrid schedule. The remaining 44% work fully in office. Thank you for the new data.
29. The traffic study was done just for peak periods and it doesn't appear realistic – I think the assumptions used for this analysis should be better described. If most of our current office buildings are vacant as is implied in the report, it would seem that any new residential development will increase the traffic flow as these people will be traveling elsewhere for work (and will only increase once current, reportedly vacant office space is replaced with multi-level residential buildings). The traffic analysis was done to compare offices at full occupancy (that MAY have occurred several years ago) to a scenario where all or most of the existing office

buildings would be occupied by residences (which is almost impossible). This comparison showed less traffic with residential use. A substantial residential influx would likely create more traffic than exists today, since many office sites are vacant or partially vacant. But this would still be much less traffic compared with full office occupancy.

30. In addition, with traffic being one of the main concerns for township residents, I believe a full traffic study should be done as part of the update. A traffic study can be required by each applicant as a part of the conditional use.

Residential use can add many more trips per day as well as adding auxiliary traffic – e.g. Amazon deliveries, Uber eats, residential services like dog walking, dry cleaning pick-up, etc. This is especially true as the ‘overlays’ are in areas with very limited retail to support new residential development. Is a height limit to be considered. And if so, shouldn’t it be included in the Recommendation area - Pgs 34 & 37. It is not customary for the Comp Plan to get into specific zoning recommendations. However, based on discussion with the public, staff and township boards and officials, it appears that a height increase is unlikely.

31. Should alternatives be considered – i.e. one ‘overlay’ area or decreasing the size of the two overlays. We are not sure of the advantage of this approach. Certainly could be considered.

Review Comments on Potential Planning Recommendations to Address 202 Widening Project :

1. I agree with shared access and parking on the 202 corridor. Might want to hire a commercial Realtor to catalogue the prospects and make suggestions. Comment noted.
2. Additional street tree planting: where are these street trees going to be planted? As we all know, PennDOT maximized the cross section of SR 202 by adding a turning lane, bike lane, and sidewalks. If there is no room in the ROW, the township could seek easements or agreements from private property owners to plant trees.
3. Is planting the trees next to or under power lines feasible and acceptable by the power companies? The planting of small / low stature trees under power lines is a long-standing and acceptable practice. Who will be responsible to maintain them, especially on a state highway? TBD
4. Regarding the benches: where will these benches be installed based on the roadway cross section? Locations TBD in detailed design. Also, based on the current speed limits along Route 202 section, how safe will it be for people and the motorist to have benches adjacent to a state highway? A person sitting on a bench will have the same degree of safety as a pedestrian or cyclist.
5. Have we considered allowing for a mix use (residential and commercial)? Other townships such as Lower Providence Township, and I believe Upper Merion Township are encouraging such use. The new mix use in Lower Providence Township on Ridge Pike is a good example. Our analysis judged current permitted uses as appropriate.
6. Are we planning to reduce the frontage setback along Route 202 within our Township? Not currently contemplated. Is this a suggestion?
7. Are we planning to discuss with PennDOT to reduce the speed limits on SR 202 within our township section? This will improve safety and encourage walkability and bike use. This was not contemplated. We think speed reductions would be a good change. However, we are not sure if PennDOT will be receptive to this idea.
8. I suggest this section on Route 202 corridor be reviewed by PennDOT and the designer for Route 202 which I believe is SEC 65S and 61N. I am not sure what PennDOT would review at this point. They generally do not review planning documents of this type that make general suggestions. They will need to review any specific suggestions that are intended to be constructed.

From: [Joey Fay](#)
To: [Ken Corti](#); [Jim Blanch](#)
Subject: FAY comments on Plan
Date: Wednesday, February 14, 2024 1:29:44 PM
Attachments: [image001.png](#)

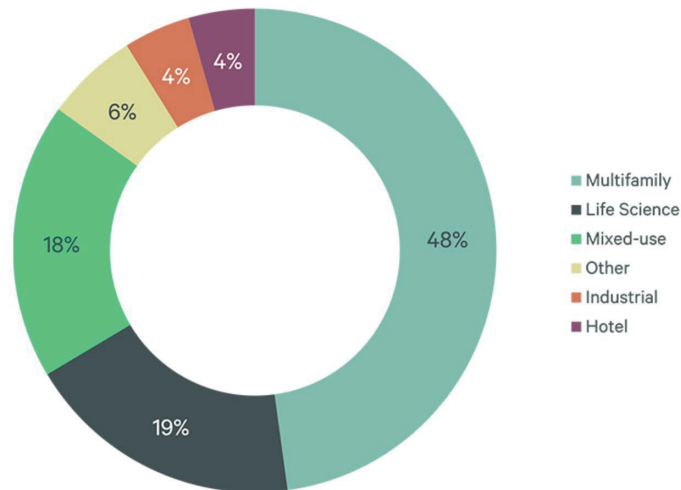
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BACKGROUND – [Simone Collins comments on this memorandum 2/28/24](#)

- In the background section, or more clearly in the introduction to this package, the report should underline that this is not a Comprehensive Plan Update, but a LIMITED UPDATE FOCUSED ON CONSIDERING THE CONVERSION OF OFFICE PROPERTIES TO RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES BASED ON MARKET CHANGES AND SEVERAL DEVELOPER INQUIRIES TO THE TOWNSHIP BOS. We should be very clear to the residents, that the township is feeling pressure from developers to consider variances to utilize vacant office properties for residential units.

[Comment noted.](#)

- The plan might want to consider conducting a similar analysis on the same property changes for other uses:
 - Office to Retail Conversions
 - Office to Restaurant Conversions
 - A combination of the above two concepts – Office to a “Blue Bell City Center” conversion, possibly redeveloping these locations to create a “micro-downtown” in the same sense that Ambler, Skippack and other towns have an actual walkable “Town”.
 - Office to Open Space Conversion
 - Office to Public Park Conversion
 - Office to Public Private Partnership Opportunities (Or other concepts that generate actual revenue for the township)
 - Office to Industrial (Amazon) Conversion
 - It seems that the scope of this Limited Analysis was limited to this one idea, and without comparing it to other concepts it seems to fail any scientific level of evaluation.
 - THE SAME CBRE REPORT (ONLY MORE CURRENT) THAT IS CITED IN THIS STUDY SHOWS THAT MOST OF THE OFFICE CONVERSIONS UNDERWAY AND PLANNED ARE NOT RESIDENTIAL BUT OTHER THINGS: [Correct. However, the market analysis completed for this project did not show demand for most of those other things.](#)



Source: CBRE Research, Q3 2023.

DEMOGRAPHICS SECTION –

- No Comment

LOCAL ECONOMY SECTION –

- This report doesn't seem to indicate how the conversion of some office to residential will affect local economics:
 - Would it limit future business interest in the township when/if there is a return to corporate collaborative environments like these?
 - Would it affect individual taxes positively or negatively?
 - Would it affect Township revenue?
 - Would any of the other conversions noted above affect these things in different ways?

There are 50 different scenarios that could be modeled. Which one should be chosen? Another approach could be that the applicant prepare a fiscal impact analysis for what is actually proposed.

COMMUTING SECTION –

- It is difficult to digest the data seemingly suggesting that there will be no additional congestion if we remove offices and add residential. Here is why:
 - Right now we are at quite possibly the lowest office use we've seen in our township in modern history...and if you ask the residents of this township how they feel about traffic, Township Line Road and Walton/PBB Pike, Skippack Pike and 202 create a box that is clogged with traffic regularly, making commutes painful for residents at a "human level" data aside. And this is while people are going to the office "LESS THAN EVER".
 - According to Q3 and Q4 2024 studies - 90% of companies are going to implement return to office plans in 2024, they may be hybrid plans and they may not return us to 2018 levels of commuting, but they will be higher than they are today, by quite a bit. How has the commuting study accounted for these Return to Work plans, and the return of quite possibly 50% or more of the commutes that are not happening right now?
 - I think the commuting data needs to include the return-to-work increases with the residential conversion data to fully explore what that means to the "human level" experience in the box described above.

There is no new traffic / commuting data available. There is no reliable data on the numbers and frequency of employees returning to work, either totally or in a hybrid situation. The

analysis in the draft plan speaks for itself.

HOUSING SECTION –

- I found one seemingly contradictory note. This report suggests that Whitpain is saturated, but the Pennsylvania Vacancy Rate as a state is at 1.3% and an average in the vacancy rate in the country is around 1.5%. Whitpain at 3.6% vacancy is more than double these rates? Wouldn't that suggest that we are not saturated? If by saturated you mean fully occupied? Then either of those numbers is a very low vacancy rate. The report's market study opined as to how many new DUs could be absorbed in the Township over a specific time period.

SITE RECON / GENERAL OFFICE TRENDS –

- One point of concern and consideration is that the MAP showing Office to Housing conversion highlights cities that are in some of the WORST socio-economic stress in the country. I don't know how to determine if these conversions are a variable in the failure of these cities, but using Seattle, Portland, San Fran, Chicago, Dayton, NY, Atlanta, and Philadelphia as examples is a bad idea, these are probably examples of what WHITPAIN DOES NOT WANT TO BE. Comment noted.
- I know studies take time, but it seems like the data being used is from Late 2022 and Early 2023....Data and the market are changing rapidly right now and it is very volatile, I think it would be wise to update the studies in the report before this is finalized as the trends are not stable. New data is not available.

TRAFFIC GENERATION

- The traffic inbound and outbound scenarios don't seem to account for the Return to Office Trips that would also be generated even in the event of additional residential trips. This is the most recent data available.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION –

• We need to be clear to the public that this study looks at ONLY ONE POSSIBLE USE OF CURRENTLY VACANT OFFICE SPACE. Other allowed used under current zoning are not happening. The market study indicates there is a need for additional DUs. Interest by the private sector confirms this interest. Final zoning can include other ancillary uses such as restaurant, brewpub, personal service, dry cleaners, etc.

REAL ESTATE PROFESSIONAL FEEDBACK –

- I don't see any additional Master or City Planners interviewed? Brokers and Residential developers are going to be biased towards what they think they can make some money on. Comment noted.

OFFICE TO RESIDENTIAL

CONVERSIONS –

ORDINANCE REVISION

RECOMMENDATIONS –

- I think it is EXTREMELY early to be recommending an ordinance without first evaluating other possible uses of these spaces in the same manner. Comment noted.

ROUTE 202 –

- No comment.

Very respectfully,

Joseph Fay, President – Diversified Markets

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SCOTT FRANCE, AICP
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

February 22, 2024

Roman Pronczak
Whitpain Township
960 Wentz Road
Blue Bell, PA 19422

Re: MCPC # 24-0014-001
Whitpain Comprehensive Plan Update (2024)

Dear Mr. Pronczak:

We have reviewed the above-referenced comprehensive plan update in accordance with Section 302 of Act 247, "The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code," as you requested on January 12, 2024. We forward this letter as a report of our review.

BACKGROUND

Whitpain Township has, in collaboration with Simone Collins, drafted an update to its 2014 comprehensive plan. This is an update that is limited in scope, meant to focus on the changing economic forces that have been, or could soon be, affecting three key areas in the township: the Route 202 Corridor (owned by PennDOT, and under construction), the office/industrial park south of Wings Airfield (referred to as Office Area A and approximately 160 acres), and the office/industrial park adjacent to the Pennsylvania Turnpike (Office Area B and approximately 290 acres). The plan update focuses on potential aesthetic and regulatory improvements that could take place along Route 202 as well as the potential for land use and zoning changes that could open up new uses (particularly residential) in these office/industrial park areas.

RECOMMENDATION

The Montgomery County Planning Commission (MCPC) supports the adoption of the *Whitpain Township Comprehensive Plan Update*, as we have found it to be generally consistent with the county comprehensive plan and the future planning goals of the township. MCPC encourages the township to use this document to guide its land use and zoning decisions in these three focus areas. The township is already a desirable place to live and work, but focused regulatory changes and strategic investments will surely enhance the township in the future. Our comments are as follows:



REVIEW COMMENTS**PROXIMITY TO OFFICE AREA A AND B TO WINGS FIELD AIRPORT**

The Montgomery County Planning Commission is in the process of assembling a new aviation plan for the agency and as such, has been taking a closer look at all of the county's airports. While the following comments are specific to airport hazard zoning, it bears direct relevance to allowing residential development in the township's office areas.

A. Noise nuisance from potential conversion of office to residential use in Office Area A

1. The boundary of Office Area A is approximately 120-feet from the end of the Wings Field runway. The closest buildings in both the AR and AR-1 zoning districts are approximately 500-feet from the end of the runway. The noise nuisance impact of the airport's daily operations on any proposed residential development within its proximity is far greater than the existing impact on Administrative and Research office space. Any decision about the conversion or development of residential uses in Area A should consider the impacts that the existing airport will have on future residents and whether this is a compatible land use in such close proximity to airport.

B. Adoption of Pennsylvania's Airport Zoning Act 164

1. Pennsylvania's Airport Zoning Act or Act 164 of 1984 presents the framework and guidelines for establishing height limitations of local development near airports at the municipal level. Act 164 is a mandatory requirement for municipalities affected by an airport hazard. Although Whitpain Township has an Airport Overlay District, it has not adopted an Airport Hazard Zoning ordinance, which includes identifying an airport hazard area based on the Federal Aviation Regulation (FAR), Part 77. Although commendable in its own right, the township's current Article XXVA Airport Overlay District focuses more on guiding development within the confines of the airport itself rather than identifying potential conflicting land uses or hazards that may affect the operation at Wings Field Airport.
2. Notwithstanding this, it appears that both Office Areas A and B are located within Wings Field Airport Hazard Zone, as set out in FAR, Part 77.19: Civil airport imaginary surfaces. These imaginary surfaces are delineated on neighboring East Norriton Township's Airport Overlay Zoning District's Figure 205-179.1: Wings Field Airport Surface Area. This can be found at <https://ecode360.com/attachment/EA1154/EA1154-205b%20Figure%20205-179.1.pdf>. A model airport zoning ordinance is listed on [PennDOT Bureau of Aviation](#)'s website that specifies an airport's hazard zones, which includes an approach surface zone, a conical surface zone, a horizontal surface zone, a primary surface zone, and a transitional surface zone, and their specific dimensions in relation to the existing runway. The model ordinance also includes information on permit applications, variances, use restrictions, pre-existing non-conforming uses, obstruction marking and lighting, and the procedures for non-compliance. These are all important considerations when making a proposed zoning change within an airport hazard zone.
3. Furthermore, the importance that all municipalities affected by an airport hazard area adopt an Airport Hazard Zoning Ordinance is noted in Table 1-2: Objectives and Benchmarks of the [Pennsylvania Statewide Airport System Plan Update 2012](#), where it states that all communities should adopt airport zoning and land use controls to support an airport's development. The [2040 Regional Airport System Plan](#), published 2014, also recommends that Whitpain should adopt Act 164 airport zoning.

4. We recommend that the township proceed with adopting Pennsylvania's Airport Zoning Act 164 using the Model Zoning Ordinance Language as set out on PennDOT's [website](#) prior to or in tandem with adopting this comprehensive plan update due to Office Area A and B's proximity to Wings Field Airport and their location within the airport's hazard zone. With an established Airport Hazard Zone, full consideration can then be given to the potential land development and SALDO requirements of converting Office Area A and B into residential development.

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

The draft comprehensive plan forwarded for review makes it clear that the township has the capacity to absorb new housing units over the next ten years, due to unmet demand from those who work within the township but live and commute from elsewhere. While MCPC agrees with this assertion, and believes that the township has to find creative ways to grow to house its anticipated population growth, we do hope these changes are approached in a way that create benefits for the community at-large. If and when these zoning changes move forward, we strongly encourage the township to consider adopting a companion density bonus to allow for the construction of affordable units alongside any newly constructed market rate units. Between 2018 and 2022, median housing sale prices went up 44 percent (to \$599,000 in 2022). Our initial analysis for 2023 home sales puts the median housing sale price at \$604,000. Density bonuses work best when there's demand for construction, and this is an opportunity for Whitpain to seize upon.

CONCLUSION

We wish to reiterate that MCPC generally supports this new comprehensive plan addendum, and we support the township's desire to proactively address the decline in office use that many municipalities have seen occur since the Covid-19 pandemic.

Please note that the review comments and recommendations contained in this report are advisory to the municipality and final disposition for the approval of any proposal is made by Whitpain Township.

Should the governing body adopt this plan, please supply an official copy of this comprehensive plan document for our files.

Sincerely,



Anne Leavitt-Gruberger, County Planning Manager

anne.leavitt-gruberger@montgomerycountypa.gov – 610-278-3727



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February 5, 2024

Roman M. Pronczak, P.E.
Township Manager
Whitpain Township
960 Wentz Road
Blue Bell, PA 19422-1835

Re: Draft Comprehensive Plan Update

Dear Roman:

Thank you for sharing Whitpain Township's '*Draft Comprehensive Plan Update*'.

We have reviewed the *Plan* and have no specific comments to offer at this time concerning its content. However, we do find some of its findings and analysis concerning office to residential conversions quite interesting, and perhaps similarly applicable in Whitemarsh as in Whitpain. While we don't have as much office space as Whitpain does, the trends discussed are just beginning to show up here as well.

We commend the Township for undertaking this project and we are impressed with the *Plan's* thoroughness and presentation. We wish the Township continued success with this project and look forward to hearing of the *Plan's* adoption in the near future.

Very truly yours,

Craig T. McAnally
Township Manager

cc: Fran McCusker, Chair Board of Supervisors
Charles L. Guttenplan, AICP, Director of Planning and Zoning

