

PART 4
BACKGROUND STUDIES
CHAPTER 12
EXISTING LAND USE

INTRODUCTION

Existing land use patterns have a great influence on the future land use plan, but also affect circulation within the area and demand for community facilities and services.

The base Existing Land Use Map for Southwestern Berks County was supplied by the Berks County Planning Commission. The existing land use mapping for Lower Heidelberg Township, South Heidelberg Township and Wernersville Borough was updated by use of aerial photography analysis by the County to create a land cover map, County of Berks assessment information and reviews by the municipality representatives.

The categories shown on the Existing Land Use Map include Single Family Residential, Multi-Family Residential, Mobile Home Residential, Commercial, Private Recreation, Industrial, Farm/Rural, Public and Quasi-Public, Institutional and Religious.

The Existing Land Use Map can be used in conjunction with the other background maps found in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Southwestern Berks County.

Overall Land Use Pattern

Even though the Southwestern Berks area has experienced substantial population growth and development of land for residential purposes during the 1980 to 2010 timeframe, much of the area still remains farm/rural, particularly in Lower Heidelberg and South Heidelberg Townships. Much of Wernersville has been developed, mostly for residential purposes, though there are some vacant parcels and vacant buildings which could be developed or re-developed in the future.

In Lower Heidelberg Township, much of the farm/rural land is cultivated, with pasture and wooded land interspersed among the cultivated land. The largest extent of wooded land is found within Blue Marsh. In the northern portion of South Heidelberg Township, east, south and west of Wernersville, farm/rural land is cultivated or in pasture. Due to the location, though, this is one of the areas in the region that has seen large amounts of development. The majority of the farm/rural land, found in the southern two-thirds of the Township, is woodland, though there are scattered areas of cultivated and pasture land, particularly in the southeast and southcentral portions of the Township.

LAND USE CATEGORIES

Single Family Residential

Most residential uses within the area are Single Family Residential. Single family uses are found throughout the Borough of Wernersville. In Lower Heidelberg, single family homes are found north of Wernersville, in the area of Church Road leading from Wernersville to Brownsville Road, along Brownsville Road and roads intersecting Brownsville Road, along Reber's Bridge Road, along State Hill Road, along Faust Road, along Gaul Road and in the developments that have occurred along Green Valley Road. There are scattered farm houses and non-farm dwellings in the remainder of the Township. In South Heidelberg Township, concentrations of single family homes are found south of Wernersville, in Spring Meadows off of 422 near Sinking Spring. South Heidelberg and Lower Heidelberg have experienced development of single family homes along existing roads and along new roads constructed in moderately sized subdivisions scattered through the Townships.

Multi-Family Residential

In Wernersville, Multi-Family Residential is found at Phoebe Berks in the eastern portion of the Borough and in the central portion of the Borough. Due to the economic downturn there has been more interest in the building of new, or conversion of existing buildings to multi-family residential. No substantial multiple family development has occurred in Lower Heidelberg Township, however the Legacy at Papermill is an age-restricted multi-family development planned in the northeastern part of the Township at the mouth of the Cacoosing Creek. In South Heidelberg Township, apartments are located along Lincoln Drive, Laurel Ridge Road and Hill Road. Conversions to apartments have occurred at several locations in the Township, particularly in large historic buildings along Galen Hall Road.

Mobile Home Residential

Four mobile home parks are located in the area. In Lower Heidelberg Township, mobile home parks are found along Wooltown Road and Route 422 in the western portion of the Township. In South Heidelberg Township, mobile home parks are found along Hill Road, south of Wernersville and along Route 422 in the western portion of the Township.

Commercial

Most commercial development in the area has occurred along Route 422. In Lower Heidelberg Township, the commercial uses include such uses as a bank, a veterinarian, auto sales, auto repair, a Sheetz, restaurants, a motel, a gas station, a mini mall, a variety of small retail businesses and two car dealers.

In South Heidelberg Township, uses include a cleaners, the Green Valley shops, Feceras moved into the former Jamesway, Sinking Spring Plaza, Sinking Spring Marketplace, an animal hospital, a garage, a beer distributor, offices, a motorcycle parts business, and a restaurant.

In Wernersville Borough, commercial uses include a battery business, auto service and transmission service, a diner, a florist, a car wash, gas station/mini market, eye care, two body shops, ice cream shop, sandwich shop, a funeral home, laundry, remodeling business, auto reconditioning, doctor's office, two vacant car dealers, upholsterer, restaurants, health care, a vacant bank property was turned into a landscaping business, bakery, leather business, ceramic business, bicycle shop, and two beauty shops.

Limited commercial development has occurred in the Townships and Borough off Route 422. Much of the development in the area has occurred through expansion of existing businesses.

In Wernersville, Caron Foundation acquired the former hardware business/storage units/home along Werner Street, a sporting goods business is found along Werner Street, a building supply business is found off of Elm Street, and a carpet business, photographer, and office are found along Holland Street.

In Lower Heidelberg, some of the commercial uses found are a restaurant and taxidermy in State Hill, a construction firm in Brownsville and a few other scattered commercial uses along Brownsville Road.

In South Heidelberg, some of the commercial uses found away from Route 422 include a greenhouse, laundry and garage along Hill Road, an office and greenhouse along Mountain Home Road, a furniture business, garage, forge, and landscape center in Fritztown, craft and ceramics business, inn, furniture store, restaurant, auto body shop, office and coal business, and trucking business along Galen Hall Roads.

Private Recreation

There are a number of private recreation uses within the area, including Green Valley Country Club along Green Valley Road in Lower Heidelberg Township and Hain's Church recreation facilities along Church Road. In South Heidelberg Township, private recreation uses include Western Berks Hockey Center along Krick Lane, YMCA of Reading and Berks County along Route 422, Pagoda Golf along Mountain Home Road, Galen Hall Country Club along Laurel Ridge and Galen Hall Roads, Cushion Peak Rod and Gun Club along Vinemont Road, the South Mountain YMCA along Galen Hall Roads, the Lebanon Valley Sportsmen's Association along Sportsman Road and the Robesonia Fish and Game along Mountain Road.

Industrial

Industrial development has been limited. Industrial uses in Lower Heidelberg Township include Glen Gery extractive operations along Sweitzer Road, Strunk Block business along Green Valley Road, Aluminum Alloys along Route 422, and Ebersole Electric along Route 422.

In Wernersville, industrial businesses include Admixtures along Furnace Road, Bertolet Construction along South Church Street, a plumber along Holland Street, and Escort Lighting along Elm Street.

In South Heidelberg Township, industrial uses include Reading Alloys along Old Penn Avenue near Heidelberg Township, and the developing South Heidelberg Industrial Park along Krick Lane.

Farm/Rural

The Farm/Rural areas include lands that are cultivated, pasture, wooded, and open. On the background maps land that is part of an Agricultural Security Area, Agricultural Easement, contains productive soils, and wooded areas are specifically shown. Wernersville has some parcels available for development, but not many. Most of the open land which could accommodate future development is located in Lower Heidelberg and South Heidelberg Townships. Much of the land in the Townships is either cultivated, pasture or woodland, and development of those lands would result in the loss of these resources within the Townships.

Public and Quasi-Public

Public and Quasi-public uses are found throughout the three municipalities. In Wernersville, Heidelberg Heritage Society, the Borough Park along Fairview Street, the Borough garage and Wernersville Borough Authority along Elm Street, the Borough playlot, post office along Church Street and fire company along North Stitzer, the Borough Hall and Library are located on land which was owned by the fire company along Washington Avenue and North Reber Street, a substation along South Beckley Street, and the elementary school along Lincoln Drive.

In South Heidelberg Township, public uses include part of the elementary school along Lincoln Drive, the substation along Hill Road, the South Mountain Park and Township building along Galen Hall Road, the Wernersville Municipal Authority watershed along Furnace and Point Roads, the Township garage along Galen Hall Road, Authority property along Galen Hall Road, Community Fire Company of Fritztown in Fritztown, Spring Meadows Park and Belle Alto Park, and public open space and recreational facilities within Heidelberg Run East and West.

Public facilities in Lower Heidelberg Township include the water tower off of Church Road, the elementary school, Township building and fire company along Brownsville Road, the new elementary and middle schools along Faust Road, Cacoosing Meadows Park along State Hill Road, a portion of the Sinking Spring Borough treatment plant site location along the Cacoosing Creek, and the Blue Marsh Recreation Area in the northern portion of the Township.

Institutional

Institutional uses include the Wernersville State Hospital lands in Lower Heidelberg and South Heidelberg Townships west of Wernersville, the Caron Foundation along Galen Hall Road and Werner Street, and a personal care facility along Galen Hall Road.

Religious

Religious uses include the Jesuit Center and Hain's Church along Church Road in Lower Heidelberg Township, the Maranatha Baptist Church along Gaul Road, the Calvary Bible

Fellowship Church off of Route 422, the Trinity Lutheran Church along Hill Road in Wernersville, the First United Church of Christ along Route 422 in Wernersville, the Hillside Church of Christ along Galen Hall Road near Fritztown, the Green Terrace Mennonite Church along Galen Hall Road near Preston Road, and open land along Route 422 near Sinking Spring. The Vinemont Community Lutheran Church is located just outside South Heidelberg Township on the east side of Fritztown Road.

Trends

Two particular trends in land use are noticeable. The first is accelerating residential development within the area. This was the trend until 2006, since then there has been a significant drop in new residential and other types of development, both in this region and the County overall. The Berks County Planning Commission data shows that the year 2010 had the least amount of new residential growth since 1980 when the data first started being tracked. In Lower Heidelberg Township, the residential development has occurred at the expense of farmland. In South Heidelberg Township, it has occurred typically at the expense of farmland and wooded areas. While the largest developments are served by public sewer and water, such as Green Valley Estates in Lower Heidelberg and Heidelberg Run in South Heidelberg, development of smaller subdivisions in rural areas utilizing on-site water supply and sewage disposal continues. Wernersville has seen some of its remaining larger parcels developed, such as the townhouse development at Lincoln and Werner Streets.

The other trend which is noticeable is the lack of development of larger commercial and industrial development that typically occurred in the past. Most of the commercial and industrial development that recently occurred is either re-development of existing facilities or expansion of existing facilities. A plan for the 422 Shopping Center in Lower Heidelberg Township across the street from the Sinking Spring Marketplace was submitted to Lower Heidelberg Township, but has not seen any activity. Commercial development is occurring along Mountain Home Road in South Heidelberg Township and the South Heidelberg Industrial Park is developing along Krick Lane in South Heidelberg Township. These developments add to the tax base and employment in the area, however, the impact of commercial development in the Townships, particularly the shopping centers, can affect commercial activity in Wernersville if the businesses are relocating from the town center.

A general trend which has occurred, and some towns are trying to reverse, is the relocation of businesses which serve the day-to-day needs of Township residents to shopping centers and larger nationwide chains locating in the areas where once local small businesses served residents. In many cases it is difficult for the small local businesses to compete. Small towns, such as Wernersville, can be left with uses such as restaurants, specialty shops, and those that typically do not locate in shopping centers, such as automotive businesses. It is important for the Borough and Townships to maintain existing small commercial areas and promote their accessibility and work with the existing businesses to determine what their needs are.