Landscapes3 How We APPRECIATE

Village Preservation Guide

CHESTER COUNTY, PA

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Village Preservation Guide CHESTER COUNTY, PA

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About this guide

This guide provides specific guidance for village planning, using many local municipal planning documents and initiatives as examples, and also provides detailed design guidance, using local municipal zoning ordinances as examples. The guide is full of pictures, maps, drawings, and ordinance citations from nearby villages that demonstrate that village preservation can be very successful here in Chester County.

Chapter 2 includes five planning steps.

Chapter 3 defines design standards.

Elverson Borough

Villages help define the character of Chester County

One of the defining characteristics of Chester County is its villages and hamlets, which dot the county's rural landscapes and provide a core historic identity to many suburban areas.

These villages are a key element in the county's sense of place. Villages, along with the county's classic downtowns, farmsteads, historic bridges, stone walls, mills, crossroad inns, and country estates, are part of the county's built environment, which is layered over the county's farmland, open space, woodlands, and stream valleys to create Chester County's enduring sense of place that so many residents and visitors cherish.

Due to changing business needs, evolving living preferences, and ongoing development pressure, many county villages have changed dramatically or even effectively disappeared over time. Because of this, the county planning commission has prepared this guide to help local municipalities preserve their villages, while allowing these villages to change and grow to remain relevant in their communities.

Marshallton, West Bradford Township

St. Peters Village, Warwick Township

The county supports village planning

The county's comprehensive plans have always recognized the critical importance of villages to Chester County's character and sense of place. *Landscapes3*, the county's 2018 comprehensive plan, builds on this tradition by including many of the county's villages in a "Significant Historic Landscapes" map, which is an overlay to the Landscapes Map.

There are six overarching themes in Landscapes3:

How We **PRESERVE**   How We **PROTECT**   How We **PROSPER**

How We **APPRECIATE**   How We **LIVE**   How We **CONNECT**

The **APPRECIATE goal** is very applicable to village preservation:

> Preserve the historic resources and landscapes that define our cultural heritage to inspire the future through tangible connections to our shared past.

Each **APPRECIATE objective** applies to the preservation of the county's villages:

A Preserve historic resources in their context while supporting appropriate reuse as a vital part of our community infrastructure and character.

Village preservation relationship: When villages are not the planned growth area for a community, they should be preserved within their rural context, with rural land and farmland surrounding the village.

B Protect historic town centers and villages for continued prominence in our future growth and sense of place.

Village preservation relationship: Village preservation is key to this objective, particularly for villages in growing areas.

C Identify and foster historic and natural resource connections to advance their protection and maintain quality of life.

Village preservation relationship: This objective is most applicable to villages located along streams, where the village and stream have been intimately connected, often with the village growing up around a mill that used water power.

D Preserve the stories of our cultural heritage and connect them to our residents and our future.

Village preservation relationship: Villages are a key part of the county's story, but they should not be considered museums and should remain vital parts of contemporary places.

E Protect historic viewsheds as a critical component of our sense of place and character.

Village preservation relationship: Villages provide historic viewsheds in many communities and often have the most prominent and clearcut sense of place in the whole community.

Threats to villages

In the past, the county had more villages, but some have ceased to exist because of changing economic forces or the growth of urban and suburban areas. Many of the county's current villages are threatened by a variety of forces, which include:

- Obsolescence of buildings
- Demand for Land
- Traffic

Obsolescence of buildings

Most village buildings were constructed in the nineteenth century and do not automatically meet the needs of contemporary homeowners and businesses; however, they can be retrofitted, expanded, and changed to remain viable buildings. Local municipalities should make this process as easy as possible by allowing adaptive reuse, using building codes that are adaptable for historic buildings, permitting expansions, and ensuring that improvements can be made without going through a cumbersome variance process. The Chester County Planning Commission has a number of adaptive reuse resources and guides.

Historic residential building in Warwick Village, Warwick Township.

Demand for Land

In high-growth areas, the demand for land can significantly raise land prices so it becomes worthwhile for developers to raze village buildings for alternative uses. Local municipalities should limit this possibility as much as possible through zoning that encourages the retention of historic buildings, historic districts that control development, and opportunities for development in more appropriate locations.

Ludwig's Corner, West Vincent Township

Traffic

The county's villages were not built for automobiles, tractor trailers, or high-speed highways. Most villages have been adversely affected by modern transportation. Some have only been moderately affected through higher traffic speeds and a lack of parking while others have been dramatically affected by highway expansions, extremely high traffic speeds through the village, and large trucks creating vibrations and noise. Local municipalities should work to calm traffic in villages, provide alternative access points to properties, regulate off-street parking, support alternative routes around villages, and oppose inappropriate highway widenings.

Hamorton Village, Kennett Township

Through good planning, local municipalities can help their villages not only survive these threats but also thrive in an ever-changing world.

Village types

The term village is not easy to precisely define, but, in Chester County, villages are clusters of historic buildings, typically built in rural settings by a variety of owners over time, with nineteenth century and other pre-automobile buildings dominating the village.

The county's villages will normally have a central focus, smaller lots, buildings close to each other, a variety of land uses, and a distinct edge, although not all of these characteristics will be seen in every village.

Villages are smaller than towns, which usually have more diverse land uses, a much larger number of buildings, a clear downtown area, and a well-defined urban street grid system.

Except for Elverson, all of the county's sixteen urban centers are considered towns rather than villages. In addition, early suburbs of the county's urban centers and early-twentieth century neighborhoods with an extensive street grid system are not considered villages. These include South Pottstown, Pottstown Landing, Hayti, Pomeroy, Westwood, Berwyn, Paoli, Devon, and other areas along the Main Line.

The three main types of villages are hamlet, traditional village, and growth area village.

Charlestown, Charlestown Township

Hamlet
A hamlet is a small grouping of historic buildings, usually five to ten, often without a major non-residential building.

Fairville, Pennsbury Township

Traditional Village
A traditional village has a larger number of buildings, usually more than 10 historic buildings, and includes some retail commercial or institutional uses.

Sadsburyville, Sadsbury Township

Growth Area Village
A growth area village has a core group of at least five historic buildings and is located within extensive new development.

Village locations

Currently, Chester County has 80 villages, which are located across the county. These villages run the gamut from small hamlets of a few buildings to large, mixed-use places with many services and utilities. Overall, the county has 39 hamlets, 26 traditional villages, and 15 growth area villages. Some of these villages are quite vibrant and active, while others are small clusters of homes that are easy to overlook.

Legend:
- Growth Area Village
- Traditional Village
- Hamlet
- Municipalities
- Landscapes3 growth areas

Municipal list of villages

Municipality	Village	Village Type
Birmingham Township	Dilworthtown	Hamlet
Charlestown Township	Charlestown	Hamlet
East Brandywine Township	Guthriesville	Growth Area Village
	Bondsville	Hamlet
	Lyndell	Hamlet
East Coventry Township	Parker Ford	Growth Area Village
	Brownbacks	Hamlet
	Fricks Lock	Hamlet
East Fallowfield Township	Ercildoun	Traditional Village
	Newlinville	Traditional Village
	Youngsburg	Hamlet
East Goshen Township	Goshenville	Growth Area Village
	Rocky Hill	Hamlet
East Marlborough Township	Unionville	Traditional Village
	Willowdale	Growth Area Village
	Marlborough	Hamlet
East Nantmeal Township	Nantmeal	Hamlet
East Nottingham Township	Hopewell	Hamlet
East Pikeland Township	Kimberton	Traditional Village
	Merlin	Hamlet
East Vincent Township	Heistand	Hamlet
Elk Township	Lewisville	Traditional Village
Elverson	Elverson	Growth Area Village
Franklin Township	Kemblesville	Traditional Village
Highland Township	Gum Tree	Hamlet
Kennett Township	Hamorton	Traditional Village
	Mendenhall	Traditional Village
	Rosedale	Hamlet
London Britain Township	Strickersville	Hamlet
London Grove Township	Chatham	Traditional Village
Lower Oxford Township	Lincoln	Traditional Village
New Garden Township	Toughkenamon	Growth Area Village
	Landenberg	Hamlet
New London Township	New London	Traditional Village
Newlin Township	Embreeville	Hamlet
	Mortonville	Hamlet
North Coventry Township	Cedarville	Traditional Village
	Kenilworth	Traditional Village
Penn Township	Jennersville	Growth Area Village
	Kelton	Hamlet

Municipality	Village	Village Type
Pennsbury Township	Fairville	Traditional Village
	Parkersville	Hamlet
Pocopson Township	Northbrook	Hamlet
	Corrine	Hamlet
Sadsbury Township	Sadsburyville	Growth Area Village
Schuylkill Township	Valley Forge	Hamlet
South Coventry Township	Coventryville	Traditional Village
	Pughtown	Traditional Village
	Bucktown	Growth Area Village
Tredyffrin Township	Howellville	Hamlet
Upper Oxford Township	Russellville	Traditional Village
	Homeville	Traditional Village
Upper Uwchlan Township	Eagle	Growth Area Village
	Byers	Growth Area Village
Uwchlan Township	Lionville	Growth Area Village
Valley Township	Rock Run	Hamlet
Wallace Township	Glenmoore	Traditional Village
Warwick Township	Warwick	Traditional Village
	St Peters	Traditional Village
	Knauertown	Traditional Village
	Harmonyville	Hamlet
West Bradford	Marshallton	Traditional Village
	Romansville	Hamlet
West Brandywine Township	Brandywine Manor	Hamlet
West Caln Township	Compassville	Traditional Village
	Wagontown	Traditional Village
West Fallowfield Township	Steelville	Hamlet
	Cochranville	Growth Area Village
West Marlborough Township	Doe Run	Hamlet
	Springdell	Hamlet
	London Grove	Hamlet
West Nantmeal Township	Loag	Hamlet
West Nottingham Township	Nottingham	Growth Area Village
West Pikeland Township	Chester Springs	Hamlet
	Yellow Springs	Traditional Village
West Vincent Township	Ludwigs Corner	Growth Area Village
	Birchrunville	Hamlet
West Whiteland Township	Grove	Hamlet
Willistown Township	Sugartown	Hamlet
	White Horse	Hamlet

St. Peters, Warwick Township

CHAPTER 2

Planning Steps

Village preservation should be built into the planning efforts of every municipality that has a village. This chapter discusses the following steps to take when planning for villages:

STEP 1 | **Identify your villages**

STEP 2 | **Understand your village character**

STEP 3 | **Plan for future land use**

STEP 4 | **Plan for preservation**

STEP 5 | **Plan for village-wide improvements**

Planning for a community's villages might arise in a variety of circumstances. If the municipality is preparing a comprehensive plan, the plan should incorporate recommendations for village areas. Special historic property inventories and analyses might also trigger village studies. Sometimes, particularly when historic buildings are razed or an inappropriate use is built in a village, community members request a special village study. And, finally, municipalities that are updating their zoning ordinances should examine their village areas.

STEP 1

Identify your villages

Consult available inventory resources as part of the planning initiation process.

*Refer to pages 13-15 to see Chester County locations containing **village character.***

When planning for villages, the first step is to identify if a municipality has any villages. On the face of it, this process should be fairly straightforward using historical documents and local knowledge of the community, and it usually is; however, it should be noted that villages can cease to exist. In addition, the definition of a village can be difficult to pin down.

The most common way that villages cease to exist as an intact, historic unit and community focal point is that they get swallowed up by suburban and strip commercial development and highways. Exton in Chester County is an example of this type of village. Although the township has done an excellent job of encouraging the preservation of individual historic buildings, there no longer is a cohesive village in Exton. King of Prussia in Montgomery County is a more extreme example of this type of development and its impact on a village.

Villages and hamlets can also cease to exist because of long term neglect, obsolescence, and demolition. There are places in the county that once had full villages surrounding a mill or other prominent use that, through the slow process of economic obsolescence, no longer really function as a village, with only a few buildings remaining.

Determining when a village ends and something else begins can also be difficult. At what point does a village become a town? Generally, towns are larger in scale, have some larger buildings and attached buildings, and have streetscapes and street views that are more urban in character. For Chester County, all of the county's boroughs, except for Elverson, and the City of Coatesville are considered towns, as well as a few parts of the Main Line, such as Paoli and Berwyn. Most of these locations have portions of their community that have a village character that would benefit from the planning and design guidance for villages.

When determining if a community has a village, the following resources, in addition to this guide, could be helpful as a starting place:

County inventory resources

Landscapes3
The county's 2018 comprehensive plan.

Village Planning Handbook, A Guide for Community Planning
This excellent 1993 handbook focuses on the history of villages, issues to consider when planning for villages, and processes for conducting a village planning program. Municipalities that are just getting started on their village preservation efforts should consult this Handbook.

Historical Atlas of Chester County, Pennsylvania
This 1998 publication, prepared by the Chester County Planning Commission, shows reprints of municipal maps from the 1883 Breous Farm Atlas, which shows villages and hamlets that existed at that time.
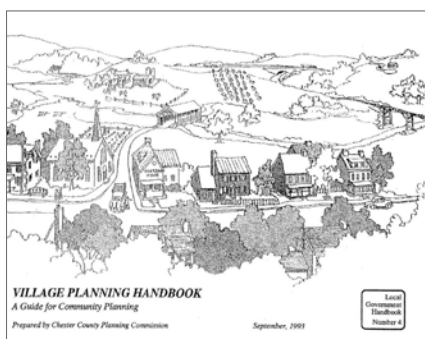
Local level inventory resources

Comprehensive Plans
Most municipalities in the county have one or more comprehensive plans, and most of these plans identify village areas, with some plans providing detailed historic background information. These plans are a critical resource for identifying villages.

Historic Studies and Inventories
Chester County is blessed with many historic commissions that produced historic studies and inventories. Concentrations of historic buildings may indicate a village.

National Register Properties
National Register eligible and listed historic resources and districts can also provide useful information for understanding potential village locations and characteristics.

Local Knowledge
Most importantly, local knowledge, supplemented by windshield surveys and walking tours, is a critical source of information about a community's villages.

Understand your village character

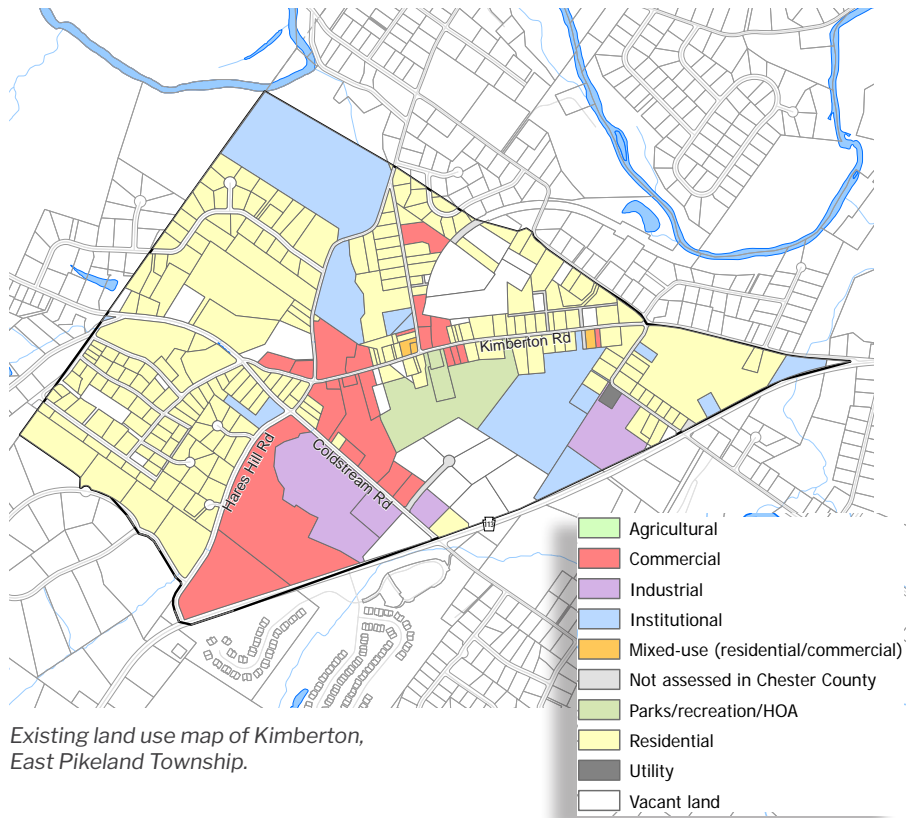Inventory and analyze the village setting, type, buildings, land use, road system, and infrastructure.

Buildings and land use

As a first step, it is critical to know how many buildings are in a village and how these buildings are used, whether they are residential, commercial, or institutional. Additionally, a full understanding of the historic significance (see p. 28) and parking for these buildings is necessary. Are there large parking lots located in front of the buildings? Is parking handled in barns and garages behind the buildings?

Outbuildings, such as barns and large garages, can have a strong impact on village character. Their general size and location should be inventoried as part of the village inventory process. The outbuildings in London Grove village, for example, are very prominent when the village is approached from northbound Newark Road.

Outbuildings in London Grove, West Marlborough Township.

Existing land use map of Kimberton, East Pikeland Township.

Legend:
- Agricultural
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Institutional
- Mixed-use (residential/commercial)
- Not assessed in Chester County
- Parks/recreation/HOA
- Residential
- Utility
- Vacant land

Village setting

Traditionally, villages have been in rural settings; however, over time, as suburbanization has spread, many villages have found themselves surrounded by suburban development. Understanding the context of the village's location, including whether or not it is in a national register district, is important for planning purposes.

Rural

Many of the county's villages still exist in rural settings, surrounded by farms, preserved open space, woodlands, and limited new development. Marshallton and Unionville are examples of a rural village, although development is creeping up to both of these villages.

Marshallton, West Bradford Township

Suburban with Distinct Edges

Although some villages are in the midst of suburban development, this development is low density enough or different enough in character that the village has kept a distinct identity. Byers and Cedarville villages are examples of this type of village.

Byers, Upper Uwchlan Township

Suburban or Urban Core

Other villages have become the focus of growth and new development in a community yet have maintained enough of a core to be identified as a village. Sadsburyville and Eagle are examples of a village within a core of development.

Sadsburyville, Sadsbury Township

Village type

For planning purposes in Chester County, there are three main types of villages: hamlet; traditional village; and growth area village.

Hamlet
A hamlet is a small grouping of historic buildings, usually five to ten, with most of these buildings residential, although there may be a church, retail store, or other non-residential building anchoring the hamlet. Usually, hamlets are clustered around street intersections, such as Sugartown or Birchrunville. Others are linear in character along a major road, such as Youngsburg or Chester Springs. Still others are associated with a past employer, such as Bondsville or Rock Run.

Charlestown, Charlestown Township
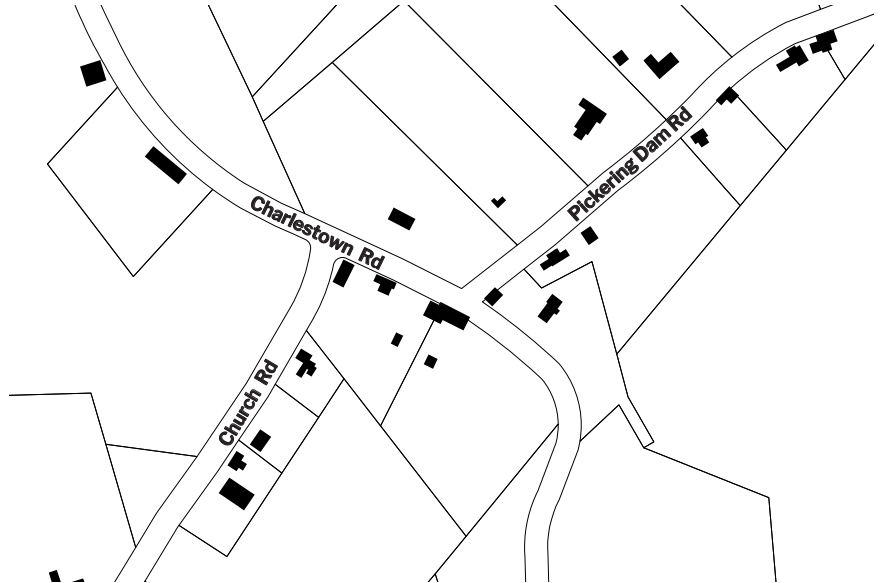
Traditional Village

A traditional village usually has more than 10 historic buildings. Most traditional villages contain some retail commercial or institutional uses, but not all have these uses. For example, Cedarville, Warwick, and Homeville are almost exclusively residential. At the other end of the spectrum, there are many traditional villages with a fully mixed-use character, with retail businesses and institutions that attract visitors from beyond the village itself. Kimberton, St. Peters, Marshallton, Unionville, New London, and Fairville are a few examples of this type of village. Most villages fall somewhere between these two extremes.

Growth Area Village

A growth area village has a core group of at least five historic buildings and is located within extensive new development that has affected the character of the village. Generally, the historic buildings in the village are clustered together and have maintained their integrity as a historic place. In most cases, the new development is located to one side of the historic village, such as in Parker Ford, Cochranville, or Guthriesville. In other cases, however, the new development has come to dominate the historic village, such as in Eagle, Jennersville, or Bucktown.

Fairville, Pennsbury Township

Toughkenamon, New Garden Township
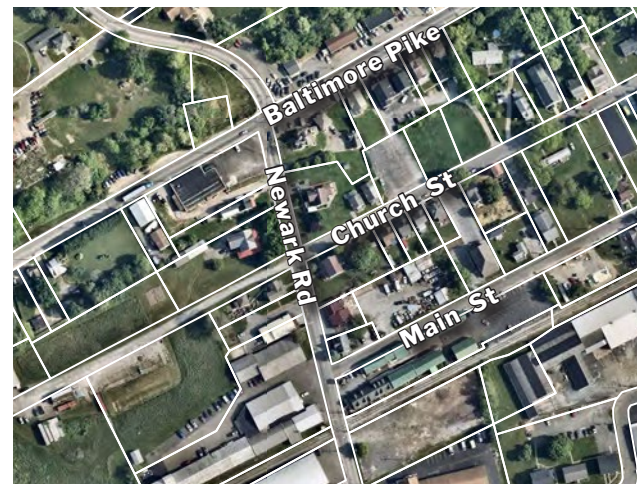
Road system and access

Many of the county's villages, especially larger linear ones, were built on major roads in a time when people moved about by walking, horse, carriage, or wagon. The advent of motorized vehicles has had a strong effect on the county's villages, particularly where these roads have remained major routes. Understanding the road system is important for understanding potential planning solutions for a village.

Route 1 in Hamorton, Kennett Township

Multi-Lane Highway or Other Major High-Traffic Highway
Villages that are next to a multi-lane highway or other highway with significant traffic volumes can be very negatively impacted by these roads. The most clearcut example of this type of village is Hamorton, which is at the intersection of Route 52 and four-lane Route 1; however, other villages can also be heavily influenced by the road system. Bucktown at the intersection of Routes 100 and 23 has major car and truck traffic going through it that has adversely affected the village.

Route 41 in Chatham,
London GroveTownship

Significant Two-Lane Highway
Many of the county's villages are on significant two-lane highways that affect the village, but not as dramatically as those on the very highest-traffic roads. Guthriesville and Chatham are examples of villages where the traffic volumes are significant and must be taken into account in planning efforts.

Flowering Springs Road in Birchrunville,
West Vincent Township

Other Highways and Local Roads
Some villages are blessed to be located on more local roads that do not have significant pass-through traffic. These villages are still adversely affected by vehicles, but the impact is minimal. Kimberton, Birchrunville, and St. Peters are examples of this type of village.

Village utilities

It is important to understand the utilities serving a village, particularly the sewage, water, stormwater, and broadband utilities.

Many village lots are relatively small and have traditionally been served by on-lot sewage and water wells. Over time, these sewage systems can fail, leading to pressure to provide public sewers, which is very expensive. At times, municipalities have subsidized the cost of extending public sewers to villages by allowing significant new development around the village.

Like public sewer, public water can be expensive but has more manageable costs.

With a few notable exceptions, most villages are on relatively high land and have limited stormwater problems; nevertheless, these villages may impact downstream properties since most villages don't have stormwater control. As opportunities arise, villages should incorporate contemporary stormwater best management practices, particularly low impact development stormwater facilities.

Cellular and broadband service is another important utility for villages, particularly if a village has commercial or institutional properties. If a village does not have adequate service, local municipalities may want to help foster the provision of this service.

Plan for Future Land Use

Upon understanding village character, communities must make two critical land use decisions.

Inside the village

Communities must decide if they want the village to fully retain its current land uses or to change. Usually, the major question is whether to allow the village to become more commercial in character through the conversion of existing homes to other uses or the construction of new buildings. Allowing a village to become more commercial provides alternative uses for historic buildings that might not be marketable as homes. On the other hand, the commercialization of a village will change its character and, if solid zoning and historic preservation regulations are not in place, could lead to the complete change or disappearance of the village.

If a community wants to see land uses change in a village, it should consider conducting a market analysis to determine the demand for retail, office, and institutional uses, as well as the suitability of properties within the village to meet this demand.

Residential uses in Russellville, Upper Oxford Township.

*Residential uses in Cedarville, North Coventry Township.*

Commercial uses in St. Peters, Warwick Township.

Surrounding the village

The second critical land use decision relates to the village's context. There are a few different approaches to take with this decision. From a historic preservation perspective, the best approach is to keep the historic village within its historic open space and agricultural context as much as possible. With this approach, the land around the village would, ideally, be zoned for agricultural zoning, with very low densities and much preserved land. Alternatively, the area around the village might be zoned for low density residential, with, once again, as much preserved land as possible.

The second common approach is to make the village the focus of future growth in a community, with land near the village designated for higher density residential development and commercial uses. This approach is most appropriate in more suburbanizing communities that do not have another natural location for required development, particularly if the village will be or already is served by public sewers and water. A risk of this approach is that the village can get overwhelmed. To avoid this, the village itself should have strong protection and design standards while new development next to the village is required to have a village character.
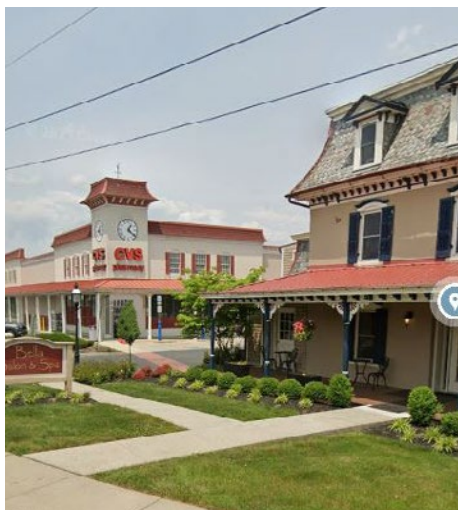
Eagle Village, Upper Uwchlan Township.

Aerial view of Sadsburyville, Sadsbury Township showing growth concentrated around village.

Birdseye view of New London, New London Township showing village core and open land designated for village-style new development.

Plan for Preservation

The most critical aspect of village preservation is doing as much as possible to preserve the historic buildings that exist in the village. The following techniques will support historic building preservation:

**PRESERVATION TOOL**

Historic properties inventory

An important first step in preserving historic buildings in a village is identifying these buildings. Certainly, buildings that are listed on the National Register or that are eligible for listing should be included in a municipal inventory. After an inventory is completed, some property owners may want to add their properties to the National Register.

In Chester County, a municipal inventory might include the following aspects:

- Atlas (or List)
- Inventory
- Survey
- Community Participation

Atlas (or list)

An atlas is a preliminary or "windshield" catalogue of all structures 50 years and older that provides an overview of the extent and location of resources. The 50-year mark is the established federal benchmark for historic resources planning, but it is not meant to exclude consideration of newer resources, if appropriate. Most historic buildings in villages will be more than 100 years old and predate the advent of the automobile.
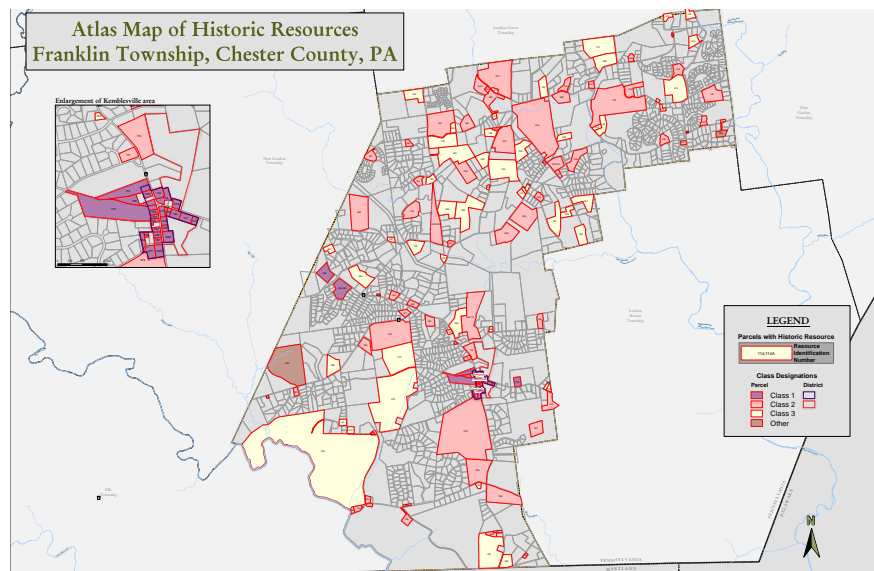
The Franklin Township atlas map was completed in 2021.

Inventory

An inventory considers Atlas information to determine which resources to protect by regulations and other methods. As with other regulations, resource designation criteria are used, which provide clarity and objectivity. The Inventory table and/or map is incorporated into the regulations.
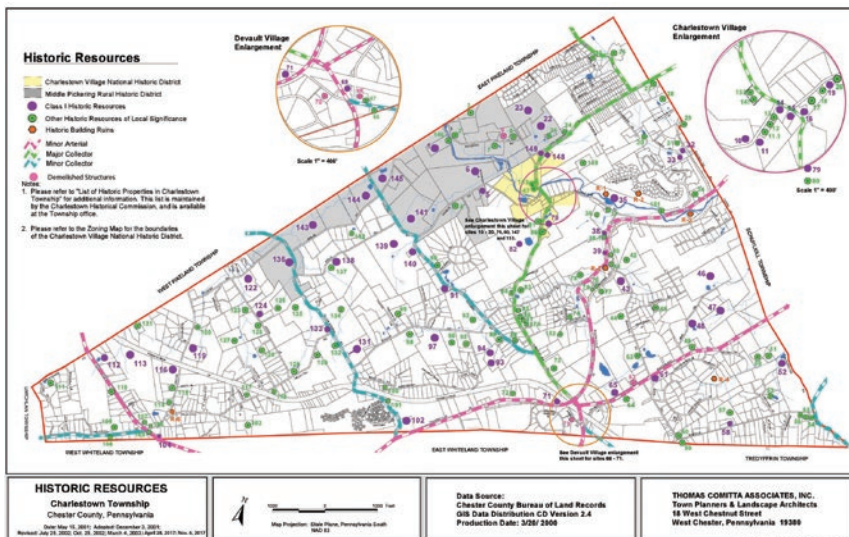
A list of historic properties in Charlestown Township is maintained by the Charlestown Historical Commission.

Historic property in Sugartown, Willistown Township.

Survey

A survey is a more detailed analysis of the resources in an Atlas. A survey can provide architectural, site, history, and other information useful for building alteration reviews. In Chester County, a Survey often takes the form of an exterior architectural, site, and historic context analysis with property level history (e.g. deed research), occurring on a limited basis. Using PHMC (Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission) digital survey forms provides consistency of core information. PHMC has specific forms and guides for different types of surveys and should be contacted to ensure the correct forms are being used for the survey in question.

Community participation

A community outreach process helps gather input on the appropriate type and extent of historic resource protection measures, as well as their application and implementation. It also creates a forum in which the community can continue to be involved in historic resource planning efforts. Municipal historic commissions or other similar entities can serve as community liaisons.

Historic districts

The most powerful tool municipalities have for the preservation of buildings in a village is the creation of a formal historic district through Act 167 of 1961, the Historic District Act. Act 167 regulations focus primarily on preserving the physical aspects of the historic built environment in a defined area, such as a village.

In Chester County, Act 167 historic districts have often been used to preserve the character, context, and architecture of concentrated historic areas in villages, including existing structures and new construction. In popular culture, these districts can be associated with overly strict architectural and aesthetic design standards for existing buildings and new construction; however, the enabling law is written broadly and allows flexibility and latitude and does not require stringent standards.

Although used infrequently, Act 167 historic districts can prohibit demolition, unless a certification of appropriateness is received demonstrating that no other option is available for a property. Municipalities can list specific standards that must be met to qualify for a certificate.

What is the difference between a National Register Historic District and a locally regulated Act 167 district?
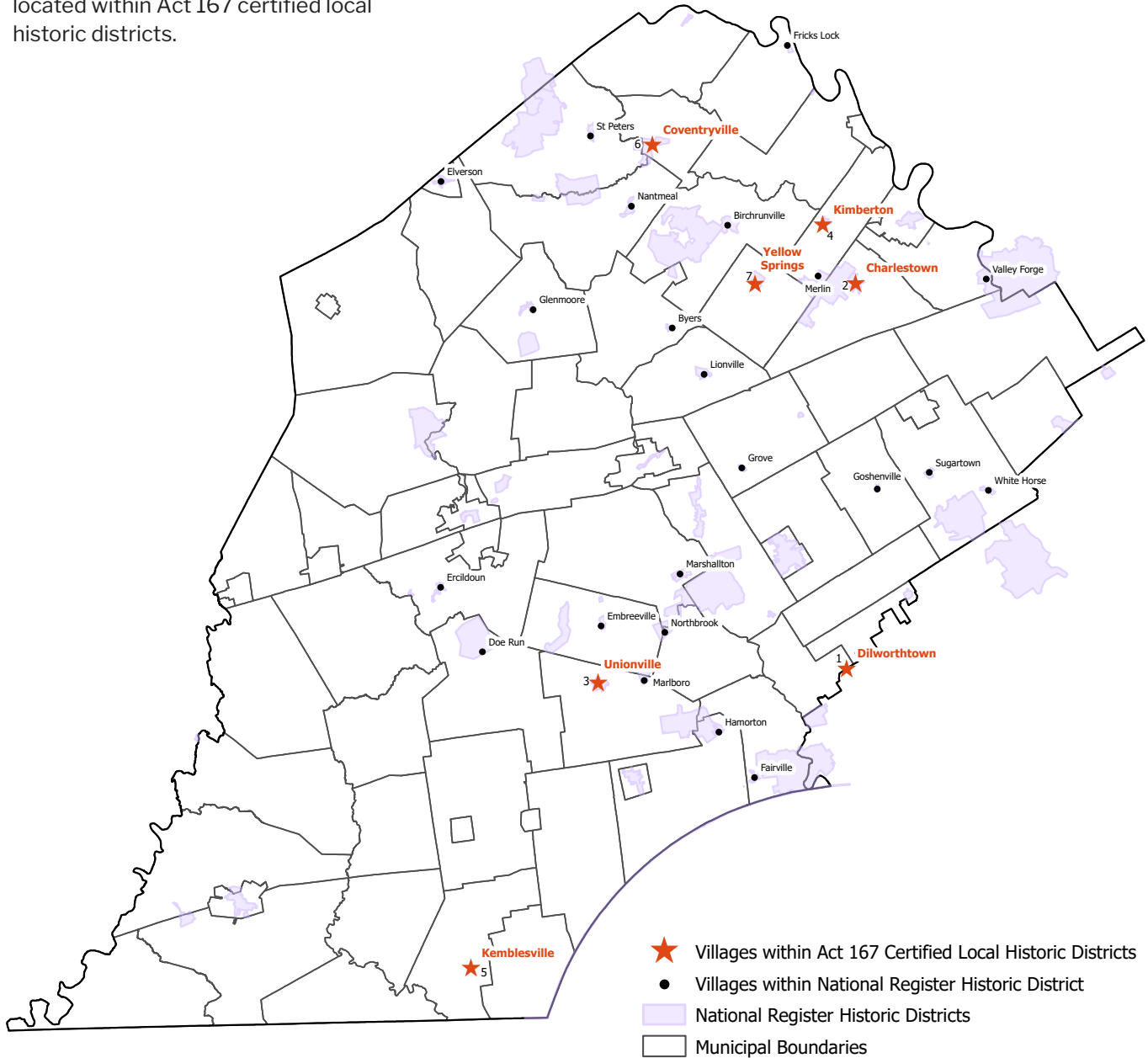
A National Register Historic District is a district designated by the National Park Service as worthy of preservation and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. National Register districts may or may not be locally regulated but are afforded some protection by municipal oversight when federal funds are used in a project that can have a negative effect on historic resources. Listing in the National Register of Historic Places does not necessarily protect buildings within a historic district from being altered or demolished whereas the historical integrity of structures located within an Act 167 historic district are provided protection through the Historic District Ordinance.

The Glenmoore National Register Historic District encompasses approximately 50 buildings in Wallace Township.

Chester County villages within Act 167 certified local historic districts

Seven Chester County villages are located within Act 167 certified local historic districts.

★ Villages within Act 167 Certified Local Historic Districts

● Villages within National Register Historic District

National Register Historic Districts

Municipal Boundaries

Act 167 Certified Local Historic Districts

1 Birmingham Township Historic District
2 Charlestown Village Historic District
3 Village of Unionville Historic District
4 Kimberton Historic District
5 Kemblesville Historic District
6 Coventryville Historic District
7 Chester Springs Historic District

Historic preservation zoning

The state Municipalities Planning Code (MPC), which governs municipal planning and zoning, notes in its purpose section that one of its intents is to "…promote the preservation of this Commonwealth's natural and historic resources …" Under the zoning section, the MPC states that "Zoning ordinances …may permit, prohibit, regulate, restrict, and determine: …. (5) Protection and preservation of natural and historic resources and prime agricultural land and activities."

There are two main zoning approaches to historic preservation:

The first zoning approach is a municipal-wide overlay ordinance for historic properties, based on an inventory of the community. This approach could be used for a concentrated village area, although it would only apply to buildings on the inventory, which might leave out important contributing buildings and would not address new buildings at all. This approach might be most appropriate for hamlets or smaller villages.

Traditional neighborhood development (TND) zoning can ensure redevelopment is compatible with historic villages.

The more common zoning approach for villages is to create a distinct, mapped district that is tailored to the village's specific characteristics. Village districts can simply be created as one of many zoning districts in a municipality. In many cases, municipalities may want to use Article VII-A, Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND), of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code, as the basis of their village zoning district. The state's TND provisions allow zoning regulations to reflect design found in traditional places, like villages.

Ordinance EXAMPLES

West Nottingham Township

Nottingham village and open land near this village have a Traditional Neighborhood Development option
Zoning Ordinance, Part 6. ▶

East Brandywine Township

Traditional Neighborhood Development zoning, supported by a design guide, applies to Guthriesville village.
Zoning Ordinance, Article VIII. ▶

New London Township

A Traditional Neighborhood Development Overlay District applies to New London Village.
Zoning Ordinance, Part 9. ▶

Village districts can contain specific zoning standards that encourage the preservation of historic buildings, including:

Adaptive reuse

Many historic buildings are no longer viable for the original use, such as an old mill building or a single-family home on a busy highway without modern amenities. In these cases, allowing adaptive reuse for alternative uses encourages the buildings to remain, just not for their original purpose.

Old Stone Cider barn in Lewisville, Elk Township.

Harry's Hot Dogs in Sadsburyville, Sadsbury Township

Ordinance EXAMPLES

North Coventry Township
In Cedarville village, the zoning ordinance specifically allows the adaptive reuse of existing buildings.
Zoning Ordinance, Article VI, Section 370-17. ▶

Kennett Township
Historic preservation standards in the zoning ordinance have specific standards for allowing the adaptive reuse of historic properties.
Zoning Ordinance, Article XIX, Section 244-1902. ▶

Newlin Township
The Village Overlay District allows the adaptive reuse of historic structures for various uses, such as antique stores and artist studios.
Zoning Ordinance, Article VI, Section 240-66. ▶

Prohibition on razing of buildings

Within their zoning, municipalities could prohibit the demolition of buildings unless a property owner gets special approval, such as a special exception or conditional use, and demonstrates that there is no other alternative for the building.

Trappe Borough, Montgomery County

The village commercial district requires the retention and use of existing principal buildings. The ordinance allows razing of these buildings when a conditional use is received, specific conditions are met, and the property meets certain criteria.

Zoning Ordinance, Article VII, Section 340-54, B. ▶

Older home reused for retail in Trappe Borough, Montgomery County.

Willistown Township

The zoning ordinance has specific provisions covering the demolition of historic buildings that discourages demolition and requires a special permit.

Zoning Ordinance, Article XXIX, Section 139-164. ▶

Historic property in Sugartown, Willistown Township

Allowance of more intense uses in historic buildings

One way of encouraging the preservation of historic buildings is to only allow more intense uses within existing historic buildings. This ensures that new uses in a village, such as an office or small store, will remain in character with the village and will have an appropriate village scale.

Ordinance EXAMPLES

Lower Providence Township, Montgomery County
In Evansburg village, small-scale commercial uses are only permitted in existing buildings.
Zoning Ordinance, Article XXXV, Section 143-275. ▶

Osteria Evansburg building in Evansburg, Montgomery County

Newlin Township
The Village Overlay District for Mortonville Village only permits certain more intensive uses, such as restaurants and retail services, in historic structures.
Zoning Ordinance, Article VI, Section 240-66, C. ▶

Brandywine Outfitters in Mortonville, Newlin Township

North Coventry Township
In Cedarville village, offices, bed and breakfast uses, and residential conversions in identified historic resources, are allowed as a special exception.
Zoning Ordinance, Article VI, Section 370-17. ▶

Bonus for historic building preservation

Another way of encouraging the preservation of historic buildings is putting a bonus in the ordinance. These could be bonuses for more commercial development, more residences, higher building or impervious coverages, reduced setbacks, more height, or additional uses.

**Ordinance
EXAMPLES**

Lower Salford Township, Montgomery County
The Village Commercial District has a residential density and non-residential floor area bonus for reuse of historic buildings, which applies to the villages of Harleysville, Lederach, Mainland, and Vernfield.
Zoning Ordinance, Article XIIIA, Section 164-70.4, C, 2. ▶

Chantilly Floral Boutique in Harleysville, Lower Salford Township, Montgomery County

West Caln Township
The Village District provides a 15% bonus on the permitted size of retail, restaurant, and office uses when they are built in an existing historic resource.
Zoning Ordinance, Article VII, Section 701, A, 3, f. ▶

Compass Notary Service in historic building in Compass village, West Caln Township

West Brandywine Township
The Rural Mixed Use District allows historic buildings to exceed the district's limit of 4,000 square feet of leasable floor area.
Zoning Ordinance, Article IX, Section 200-37, C, 2. ▶

Requirement for façade easement or continuation of historic appearance

As part of the development review process and often in relationship to bonus provisions, municipalities might require that a façade easement is recorded for the property, ensuring that it maintains an appropriate historic character, or that the building keeps the integrity of a building's historic exterior.

Ordinance EXAMPLES

West Pikeland Township

For the Village Preservation District, the Board of Supervisors can require properties receiving conditional uses, special exceptions, or variances to have an appropriate means of guaranteeing adherence to village design standards. This requirement could be met through a façade easement.

Zoning Ordinance, Article VI, Section 605, A. ▶

Yellow Springs, West Pikeland Township.

West Caln Township

For uses taking advantage of bonus provisions, the Village District requires alterations to historic resources retain the general exterior integrity of the building.

Zoning Ordinance, Article XII, Section 701 ▶

Compass Property Management in historic building in Compass village, West Caln Township.

PRESERVATION TOOL

Design guides

Often, property owners, businesses, and developers recognize that a village's character should be maintained, but they are unsure how to do so. Design guides help them understand what changes to a property are most conducive to maintaining a village character. These changes might include maintenance and repair of an existing building, additions to an existing building, or even new construction. Design guides typically contain illustrations and photographs identifying architectural elements that are most appropriate for a specific village. These might include roof slope, style, and materials; overall building bulk, shape, and rhythm; window and door placement, shape, style, and frequency; and overall building materials and character.

Municipal EXAMPLES

West Bradford Township

A *Manual of Design Guidelines* is available for Marshallton Village.

Zoning Ordinance, Manual of Design Guidelines, Village of Marshallton, TND-2 District, 2009. ▶

Manual of Design Guidelines

West Bradford Township, Chester County, Pennsylvania

Village of Marshallton: TND-2 District

East Pikeland Township

Design standards for Kimberton Village cover a wide range of design topics, from streetscape improvements to building character.

Design Guidelines for Kimberton Village, 2007. ▶

New London Township

Village regulations include a *Manual of Written and Graphic Design Guidelines* which provide guidance on a wide range of village characteristics, such as village form, relationship of buildings to the street, and building design.

Manual of Written and Graphic Design Guidelines, New London Village, TND Overlay District, 2007. ▶

Page from Manual of Written and Graphic Design Guidelines, New London Village, New London Township

PRESERVATION TOOL

Structured development review process

The development review process can have a big impact on the preservation of historic structures. Communities that have staff pre-development meetings, that use sketch plans, and that have their historic commissions review land development proposals early in the process are more likely to successfully preserve historic buildings by working with property owners and developers to find alternatives to razing or heavily altering historic buildings.

A sketch plan provides a municipality the opportunity to guide development prior to formal preliminary and final plan phases.

Municipal EXAMPLES

West Nottingham Township

The Township strongly encourages applicants to submit a sketch plan.
Zoning Ordinance, Part 6, Section 606, B. ▶

West Whiteland Township

A structured development review process encourages staff pre-development meetings and sketch plans while also emphasizing the importance of historic preservation and review by the township historical commission.
Township Development Process, 2023. ▶

PRESERVATION TOOL

Ownership of historic buildings

One way to guarantee historic preservation of important buildings is for the local municipality or a non-profit to own the buildings and properties. This is particularly important for landmark buildings that have particular historic significance or that define a place. Penn Township, for example, successfully restored the Red Rose Inn, a building at the intersection of Baltimore Pike and Route 796, that helps define the village of Jennersville. A nonprofit, Historic Sugartown, owns key buildings in the village of Sugartown, which are now a museum and education center.

The Red Rose Inn was purchased and rehabilitated by Penn Township.

The Saddler's Shop and House in Sugartown, Willistown Township is owned by Historic Sugartown, a non-profit dedicated to preserving and interpreting the historic village.

Community support

Village preservation is most effective when there is clear support for the village within the broader community. This support can be bolstered with special events, educational programs, newsletters, preservation initiatives, interpretive signage, walking tours, advocacy, and public outreach. In most cases, these efforts will be led by the local municipality, but local nonprofits might also take the lead, such as the Marshallton Conservation Trust, which is focused on Marshallton village. Larger organizations can also help strengthen local community support of villages. The county, for example, runs a Town Tours and Village Walks program that frequently focuses on historic villages.

Main Street Program

Larger and more commercialized villages could potentially benefit from formalized support through the state Main Street Program, which is administered by the PA Downtown Center. This program focuses on economic vitality, design, organization, and promotion. For design, the Main Street program encourages historic preservation and construction of new buildings that are compatible with the historic character of a community.

Motivated property owners

Many buildings in the county's villages have been preserved because individual property owners are interested in the unique historic character of their property and buildings, as well as the history of the village, wanting to maintain the village's historic character. Often, preservation-minded property owners attract other preservation-minded people to purchase homes in a village. Local municipalities can support these property owners by making it as easy as possible for them to maintain their properties and make appropriate upgrades.

Hosts along a Town Tours and Village Walks event in Warwick Village, Warwick Township.

Participants at a Town Tours and Village Walks event in Marshallton, West Bradford Township.

Plan for Improvements

To function properly, villages, like any other place, need appropriate infrastructure and improvements. Local municipalities play a key role in providing these improvements.

Traffic calming

A critical tool for slowing and managing traffic in villages is traffic calming, which involves a variety of physical improvements to streets and street edges. Within streets, these improvements might involve narrower road cartways, landscaped medians, speed bumps and speed tables, prominent crosswalks, bulb-outs at pedestrian crossings, on-street parking, roundabouts, and painted markings on the pavement. Next to streets, traffic calming elements might involve decorative street lamps, speed limit signs, stop signs, gateway signage, street trees, and other vertical elements that naturally cause drivers to slow down.
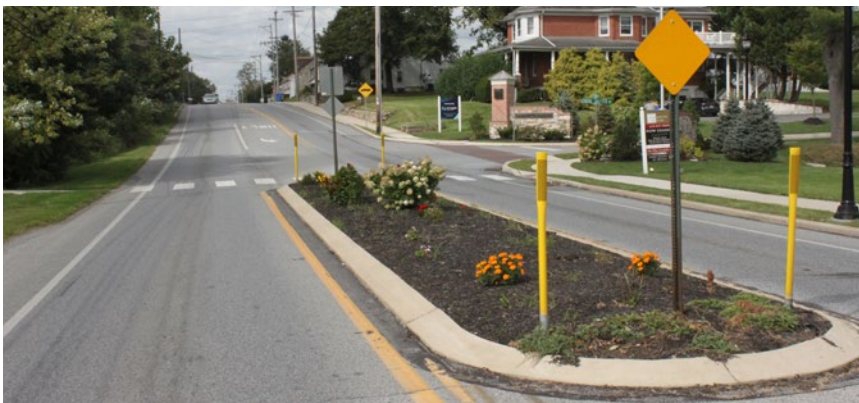
A curbed median in Sadsburyville, Sadsbury Township.

The Centreville, Delaware gateway median on Route 52.

Roads and intersections

The public roads in local villages, whether they are state owned or municipally-owned, have a huge impact on a village's quality of place. Traffic volumes, speeds, noise, and vibration can all create problems for villages, making them less livable and more difficult to navigate by foot or car.

As much traffic as possible should be diverted from the village through the use of alternative truck routes, bypasses, and an interconnected system of nearby roads. Local municipalities can plan for these alternatives with their comprehensive plans, the use of official maps to reserve rights-of-way, Act 209 transportation impact fees to help fund improvements, and appropriate subdivision and land development ordinance provisions. Municipalities can implement recommended improvements by working with PennDOT and other partners to acquire funding, build roads, and install signage. Upper Uwchlan Township, for example, worked with many partners to build a bypass for the village of Eagle. In the past, PennDOT built roads that bypassed historic villages, including Russellville, Chester Springs, Parker Ford, Coventryville, and Warwick.

Graphite Mine Road is a bypass road around Eagle Village, Upper Uwchlan Township.

Traffic that is not diverted from the village should move at steady, slow, and safe speeds. In certain cases, this may involve the redesign of intersections in villages, which should be done in a context sensitive way. There may be situations where roundabouts are the best solution; other situations may lead to the closing of roads or changes in the flow of traffic. In all cases, any improvements must be designed for village users first, whether it involves pedestrians or vehicles turning into a property within the village.

Village Avenue in Lionville, Uwchlan Township no longer connects to Route 113, thereby reducing the amount of cut-through traffic.

Route 10 in Upper Oxford Township bypasses Russellville.

Alleys and common driveways

On busier roads with higher traffic speeds, it is preferable to have vehicular access to properties via alleys or common driveways. Local municipalities can encourage these facilities in a variety of ways.

In certain cases, the community might be able to work with property owners to construct an alley, common driveway, or public street behind village buildings. Hamorton Village in Kennett Township, for example, has a street behind the village buildings that provides vehicular access, which allows much safer access than from Route 1 and its very high speeds.

In cases where a municipality wants to see an alley or common driveway where none currently exists, the community can show this alley or common driveway on their official map. East Brandywine Township's official map includes a Guthriesville Village Road System area that, once built, would provide alternative access for village buildings since access from Route 322 is challenging.

Buttonwood Drive is an alley in Hamorton, Kennett Township.

Jackson Street in Unionville, East Marlborough Township.

Bridges

Some villages incorporate historic bridges that will need to be repaired or replaced. In either case, any changes to the bridge should be context sensitive, reflecting the historic character of the village. When bridges are locally owned, this is a fairly straightforward process of letting the design engineer know at the beginning of the project that historic preservation and conformity is important.

The county has an internal procedure to ensure that historic county-owned bridges are retained whenever feasible and, when they must be replaced, that the new bridge is designed to reflect historic character; nevertheless, local municipalities should make their preference known to the county whenever a county bridge is scheduled for repair or replacement.

PennDOT has a specific process, called PennDOT Connects, for getting municipal input on PennDOT projects early in the process, before critical decisions have been made and expensive engineering has commenced. Municipalities should participate in this process for historic PennDOT bridges.

The Landenberg Bridge is an 1899 truss bridge carrying Landenberg Road across White Clay Creek in Landenberg, New Garden Township.

Park Lane Bridge over East Branch of Brandywine Creek in Glenmoore, Wallace Township.

Sidewalks and pathways

In most villages, especially larger ones, pedestrians cannot safely walk in the street, given the amount and speed of vehicular traffic. These pedestrians need an off-road alternative, which might consist of sidewalks or pathways, depending on the character of the village and its surrounding area.

These sidewalks and pathways should form a complete network that connects destinations and provides safe street crossings. Missing pieces of the network should be filled in, often with local municipalities taking the lead. Funding will always be a challenge, but the state and region have special programs to support pedestrian projects.

St. Peters in Warwick Township has sidewalks with brick pavers to complement the village's historic character.

Brick sidewalk in Unionville, East Marlborough Township.

Common parking

In commercial villages or villages with parking limitations, local municipalities may want to develop a common parking area. These can be designed to safely accommodate cars and pedestrians so they do not conflict with vehicles moving through the village, while also supporting more intense uses, such as restaurants, institutions, and festivals.

A common parking lot in St. Peter's, Warwick Township.

The parking lot behind the library in Yellow Springs, West Pikeland Township.

Streetscaping

Streetscaping can support walkability, commercial revitalization, and traffic calming. It often includes sidewalks, decorative verges, ornamental street lights, benches, crosswalks, street trees, signage, and trash cans. These streetscape elements are most common in more urban downtowns but can greatly improve the public realm of villages.

Marshallton village has interesting streetscaping designed for a more rural character, including signage and mailboxes that are installed on wooden posts rather than metal ones.

Streetscaping in Centreville, New Castle County, Delaware includes landscaped medians, street trees, brick sidewalks, and pedestrian scaled lighting.

Gateways

Gateways at the edge of villages announce that visitors have arrived in a historic village. When visitors see a gateway, they intuitively know they should slow down, look around, and visit local businesses. Gateways usually consist of a sign with the village name and landscaping around the sign. More intricate gateways might include a small sitting area, an informational kiosk, and a decorative paved area. Usually, gateways are located along busy highways leading into a village, and they are often installed at the same time as streetscaping.

Gateway sign on Route 41 in Chatham Village, London Grove Township.

Gateway sign on Route 52 in Centreville, New Castle County, Delaware.

Street trees and landscaping

Street trees have many benefits, and these benefits are magnified in historic villages that have significant traffic volumes or high traffic speeds. Street trees in villages help slow down traffic; buffer buildings from traffic light, noise, and dust; improve property values; and make the village more appealing for visitors and customers. Wherever physically feasible, street trees should be planted in villages.

Street trees along West Doe Run Road, Unionville, East Marlborough Township.

Street trees along Strasburg Road in Marshallton, West Bradford Township.

Sewers and water

Sewage can be a critical issue for villages if there are many failing on-lot sewage systems in a village. In these situations, local municipalities may need to look for alternative sewage solutions, which might include a community system focused on the village itself or the provision of full public sewage to the village. Unfortunately, providing community or public sewage can be very expensive.

The ideal scenario for villages in a more rural setting where on-site sewage is no longer feasible is a community system that uses drip or spray irrigation on fields near the village.

Public water may also be necessary in villages, especially if community or public sewers will be discharging the effluent into nearby streams. Unlike sewers, local municipalities have little control over the provision of public water.

Major underground utility projects should minimize disruption to existing streetscape amenities and/or coordinate with long range streetscape improvements to help achieve a cohesive streetscape design.

Marshallton, West Bradford Township

CHAPTER 3

Design Elements for Ordinances

Villages should have specific zoning regulations written for their unique development patterns that will help preserve historic buildings and the overall village character. This can be done by preparing village district zoning and subdivision regulations that address building character, site amenities, and transportation improvements. Village zoning should have appropriate uses, lot sizes, setbacks, and coverage standards as well as design standards that are compatible with historic character and buildings.

This section addresses three topics:

Building character

Site amenities

Transportation

Under each topic are design elements that include an overview, example photographs, and an illustration to express best practices to carry out each design element. An example regulation from a local source is also provided.

Building Character

Building placement and design is a key unique element of villages, which are primarily composed of individual small-scaled buildings, relatively close to each other and local roads.

Uses appropriate for historic buildings

Village districts should allow uses that naturally fit in historic village buildings and should prohibit those that do not. Generally, residential uses work well in villages, including single-family detached homes, twins, duplexes, and conversion of buildings into apartments. Townhouses and larger apartments usually are not a good fit for villages.

For mixed use villages, smaller scale commercial should be permitted, such as offices, restaurants, specialty retail shops, bed and breakfast inns, and personal service businesses. Institutional uses might also be appropriate, with larger scale ones allowed if they already exist in a village, perhaps as a special exception or conditional use.

Light industrial and maker spaces might also be appropriate in mixed use villages, which often had these uses historically. When a particular existing business needs a larger industrial building, the village district zoning could allow a larger building when it is set back from roads and located behind smaller-scaled village buildings.

There are also uses that should be prohibited in villages because they are car-oriented, require building designs and layout that do not fit into a normal village style building, or require buildings out of scale of villages because of height or overall size. These prohibited uses might include gas stations, car repair shops, car washes, large office buildings, shopping centers, most industrial uses, large retail stores, mini-storage facilities, properties with drive-through facilities, etc.

The Birchrunville Store in Birchrunville, West Vincent Township is an example of a specialty retail shop in an historic building.

The Express Stop gas station in Chatham, London Grove Township, does not reflect the village's historic building characteristics.

Allow a range of uses
Repurposing a historic resource, such as a historic residence in a village, can create an opportunity for a new business as well as a community gathering space.

Ordinance EXAMPLES

Sadsbury Township
In Sadsburyville Village, the township allows a range of smaller-scale residential and commercial uses by right, with institutional uses permitted by special exception and potentially more impactful residential and commercial uses permitted by conditional use.
Building & Zoning Codes - Permits & Inspections ▶

West Bradford Township
For Marshallton Village, a large mixed use village in a rural setting, the township allows a range of residential, commercial, and civic uses in its Traditional Neighborhood Development 2 District.
Article VIII, Traditional Neighborhood Development-2 Section 450-46 Uses and structures ▶

Building design and character

Older buildings in Chester County's villages typically have a number of defining features that differentiate them from newer commercial buildings and often make them residential in appearance.

If a municipality has a historic district created under Act 167 that includes a Historical and Architectural Review Board, they can regulate the appearance of building alterations, building additions, and new buildings much more rigorously than normally allowed, including guidance on building materials, colors, and design. These municipalities should also consider having zoning guidance on top of the Act 167 regulations that reinforces village building character.

Ludwig's Village shopping center in Ludwig's Corner, West Vincent Township

Willowdale Town Center shopping center in Willowdale, East Marlborough Township

Ordinance EXAMPLES

New Garden Township
For Toughkenamon village, the zoning ordinance's R-3 Toughkenamon Residential District includes a variety of design standards for roofs, wall to window ratios, and architectural detailing.

Article VI, Section 200-31, Design standards, guidelines, and bonus provision ▶

West Pikeland Township
The design standards in the Village Preservation Districts require offsets in facades and roof lines, pitched roofs, and traditional building materials. In addition, the township has an official Act 167 historic district that applies to Chester Springs and Yellow Springs.

Article VI, Section 605, Design standards ▶

Establish building form standards

For municipalities that do not have historic districts under Act 167, the zoning ordinance can include standards that address the general form and character of the new building or addition that address roof style, windows, front doors, porches, façade variations, and building scale; however, zoning standards cannot get into architectural style and appearance.

In addition to height and façade length/footprint size, these can include:

A **Pitched roofs**
Pitched roofs, often pitched steeper than current buildings The roof shape of a new building shall respect the type and pitch of roofs for houses of similar architectural style and on neighboring houses. Most residential roofs are traditional gable and hipped roofs; with a few mansard and gambrel roofs.

B **Front porches**
The front porch or covered entrance is a characteristic feature of many styles of historic residential architecture and plays a very important role in these buildings.

C **Varied facades**
Offsets and variations along facades.

D **Sense of entry**
Front doors with a strong sense of entry.

E **Right-sized accessory buildings**
Accessory buildings, like garages, sheds, and barns, are important elements of village character. New accessory buildings should fit in with existing ones and must be located to the rear of the main building.

F **Dormers and gables**
Dormers provide additional use and light for upper levels and can further define and enrich the building architecture. If used, dormers should be modest in size and fit the scale of the house and the roof.

G **Proportioned windows**
Windows that are taller than they are wide.

H **Small windows**
Relatively small windows interspersed uniformly across a façade.

I **Ground floor windows**
Transparent windows at ground-level facades on Main Streets.

Front yard setbacks and build-to lines

In virtually every village in Chester County, the historic buildings are relatively close to the street, creating a unique village character. New buildings that are set further back, particularly if they have parking in front, do not match traditional village character and often stand out like a sore thumb.

Historic buildings close to the street in New London, New London Township

Ordinance EXAMPLES

East Brandywine Township
Guthriesville Village is zoned TND-1, Traditional Neighborhood Development District, which requires front yards to be between 5 feet and 12 feet in depth.

Article VIII, Traditional Neighborhood Development District, Section 399-40. ▶

West Bradford Township
In Marshallton Village's Traditional Neighborhood Development-2 District, front yards are a minimum of 15 feet and a maximum of 22 feet from the curbline. New buildings are required to be close to the sidewalk, in alignment with existing building setbacks.

Article VIII, Traditional Neighborhood Development-2, Section 450-47. ▶

Build-to Line

Establish maximum setbacks or build-to lines
To address this issue, the zoning ordinance can have small front yard setbacks, a requirement that buildings be built close to the road, or a prohibition on parking between buildings and streets.

Lot size, lot width, and side yard setbacks

Village lot sizes and widths can vary from village to village, and municipalities should analyze existing lot sizes and widths when preparing village commercial zoning. Making the zoning match existing lot characteristics will reduce the potential need for variances when a building is expanded or changed and will also encourage new development to more closely adhere to the existing village character.

Lot sizes often vary in villages and are sometimes larger than expected because the lots are narrow and long. Generally, village lots will have a relatively narrow lot width, when compared with typical suburban zoning, and relatively small side yards. This creates the county's classic nineteenth century village appearance, where buildings are close to each other, side to side.

A single-family detached home on a smaller lot in Marshallton Village, West Bradford Township.

New development in New London, New London Township is allowed to match traditional narrow lot widths.

Ordinance EXAMPLES

West Bradford Township
In Marshallton Village, lot dimensions in the Traditional Neighborhood Development-2 district reflect existing character. For single-family detached homes, the minimum lot size is 8,500 square feet, the minimum lot width is 36 feet, and the minimum side yard setback is 8 feet.

Article VIII Traditional Neighborhood Development-2 Section 450-47 Area and bulk requirements, B. ▶

New London Township
The Traditional Neighborhood Development Overlay District, which applies to New London village, has a minimum lot size of 10,000 square feet, a minimum lot width of 65 feet, and a minimum combined side yard width of 15 feet for retail, office, and civic uses.

Part 22, Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND) District, Section 1-2209. ▶

Illustrative village plan

infill development
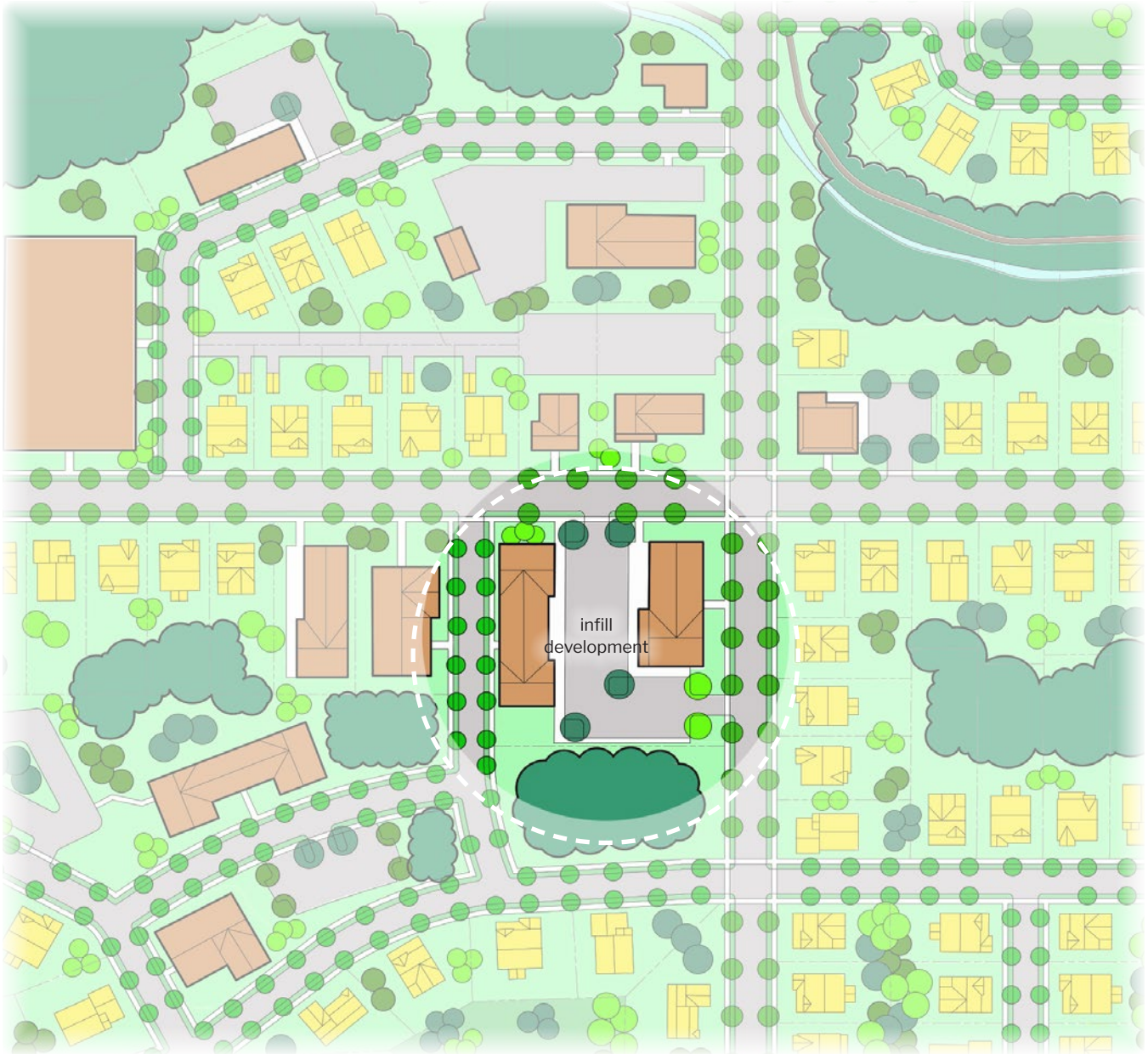
Protect historic settlement patterns
Mixing uses and forms in a compact area reflects a traditional way of building communities. This development approach helps avoid the problems associated with sprawl development, such as low density, an auto-centric orientation, a single use focus, and a lack of distinctive character.

Maximum building footprint size

Another common characteristic of villages is that residential and commercial buildings have a relatively small scale. Village zoning ordinances often encourage smaller-scale buildings by having maximum heights that are more common in suburban and rural communities, such as 35 or 45 feet, and having maximum façade lengths. Another technique to control building scale is to have a maximum building footprint size, which regulates the square footage of a building on the ground floor.

Industrial uses can also have larger building footprints, although newer industrial uses can often seem out of character with villages because of their large expanses of blank walls. One method for allowing industrial uses and making sure existing ones can expand without running into variance issues, is to allow them to have a larger building footprint when they are behind smaller-scale village buildings.

Institutional uses, even historic ones, will frequently have a larger building footprint, and this should be allowed in the zoning ordinance by having a different building footprint for these uses, which are often the focal points of villages.

East Marlborough Township has standards for maximum building footprints in Unionville to ensure new development is compatible in scale with its historic development pattern.

Industrial use (warehouse)

Institutional use (church)

Accommodate institutional and industrial uses
In zoning ordinances, allow flexibility with institutional building footprint sizes and allow industrial uses to have larger building footprints when the buildings are located behind smaller-scale village buildings.

Ordinance EXAMPLES

West Pikeland Township
The township has three village zoning districts. Yellow Springs is zoned V-3 Village Preservation District while Chester Springs is V-2 Village Preservation District. Both districts have a maximum building size of 3,000 square feet, with the ability to have additional building square footage on upper floors.
Article VI, Village Preservation Districts ▶

East Marlborough Township
The C-1 Village Commercial District, which applies to Unionville, limits retail and office uses to 2,000 square feet of floor area, with increases to 5,000 square feet permitted by conditional use.
Article VII, Village Commercial District, Section 702, Use Regulations ▶

Location of building additions

Additions to historic buildings should not be to the front and should preferably be to the rear, although side additions that complement the building character and are set back slightly from the front façade may be appropriate in certain situations.

Building addition to the rear of the Pillars of Light and Love property in Trappe Borough, Montgomery County.
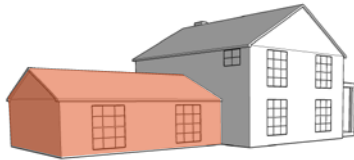

Building addition to the rear of the Sojourner Executive Suites in Harleysville, Lower Salford, Montgomery County.
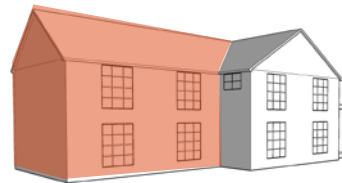
Scale building additions appropriately

Additions should relate to the size and scale of the existing historic building. An addition should not be greater in scale than the existing building.
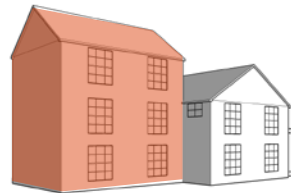
✔ **RECOMMENDED**   🚫 **NOT RECOMMENDED**

Rear addition with compatible design and scale

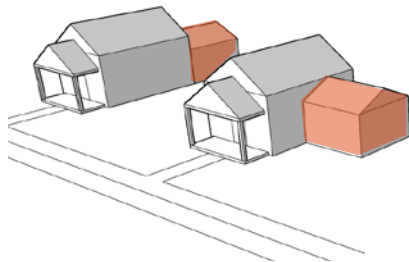*Rear addition with compatible design but scale is large*

Rear addition out of scale with original building
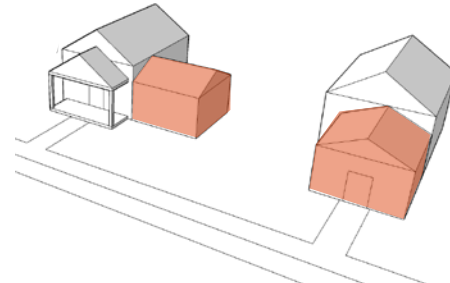
Attach building additions discreetly

Attach building additions to historic buildings at the rear. Additions to the side should be significantly set back from the existing facade.

✔ **RECOMMENDED**   🚫 **NOT RECOMMENDED**

Ordinance EXAMPLES

Lower Salford Township, Montgomery County
The VC Village Commercial District requires building additions that will be greater than 75 feet in length to be to the side or rear of an existing building constructed in 1940 or earlier.
Article XIIIA VC Village Commercial District, Section 164-70.5, Additional Regulations, A, 2, 1. ▶

Trappe Borough, Montgomery County
The VC Village Commercial District requires building expansions of conditional uses, which include most of the permitted nonresidential uses, to be to the side or rear of an existing principal building.
Article VII VC Village Commercial District, Section 340-33, Conditional use standards and criteria ▶

Open porches

Generally, enclosing porches will detract from the current historic character. If municipalities want to allow porches to be enclosed, they should incorporate design standards for these enclosures to make them as compatible with the village as possible.

St. Peter's Bakery front porch in St. Peters village

Maintain the presence of front porches

A front porch provides a graceful transition from the public realm of the streetscape to the private realm of the building. Porches should be wide enough for furniture so they can be used as an outdoor room. Accessibility issues should be handled in an architecturally sensitive manner. Consider placing conditions upon the design of a replacement porch to maintain consistency with other buildings on a block.

Ordinance EXAMPLES

Trappe Borough, Montgomery County
The VC Village Commercial District requires the character of existing front and side porches to be maintained for conditional uses, which include most of the permitted nonresidential uses.

Article VII VC Village Commercial District, Section 340-33, Conditional use standards and criteria ▶

West Bradford Township
In Marshallton Village, the enclosure of existing porches is prohibited.

Article VIII Traditional Neighborhood Development-2, Section 450-48 General design guidelines, B, 10. ▶

Site Amenities

Most village properties are relatively small and will not contain significant site amenities, except for ones between the buildings and the street, such as streetscaping and signs.

Streetscaping

Streetscaping can include a wide range of improvements, including sidewalks, decorative street lights, curbs, trash receptacles, seating, wayfinding signs, and decorative verges. Most villages in the county emphasize their historic rural setting and have limited streetscaping elements, unlike the county's urban towns, which will often have very extensive streetscaping; however, some villages, like Marshallton, have effectively used streetscaping that has a more rural feel through the use of brick sidewalks, wooden posts for traffic signs, and curbing.

Street lights with banners in Skippack Village, Montgomery County.

Streetscaping at the corner of Kennett Pike and Owls Nest Road in Centreville, Delaware.

street lighting

wayfinding signage

benches

trash receptacles

brick sidewalk

Require streetscaping

When municipalities have specific streetscaping requirements they want future developments to use, they should put these standards into their subdivision and land development ordinance.

Ordinance EXAMPLES

West Bradford Township
The township requires new development to install street lights in Marshallton Village that are "…the "Washington" model, post and luminaire, by Spring City Electrical Manufacturing, or alternate …"
Article VIII, Section 450-48. ▶

West Pikeland Township
The township's village zoning allows the township to require streetscape landscaping and pedestrian amenities, including trash receptacles, benches, and bicycle racks.
Article VI, Section 605, C, 1. ▶

Street trees

Although space in front of village buildings can be tight, street trees should be required in the municipality's subdivision and land development ordinance, with the option to waive when they are not feasible. Large specimen trees have historically been landmarks of villages.

Street trees along Kennett Pike in Mendenhall, Kennett Township.

Street trees in Fairville, Pennsbury Township.

Carefully select tree species

Plant large shade trees, where space allows, to create a more dense canopy. Consider how a mature tree canopy may affect street lighting, overhead utilities, or views of signage and building fronts. Also, carefully select and group a diversity of trees to avoid monocultures.

Ordinance EXAMPLES

Franklin Township
For Kemblesville Village, the zoning ordinance's V Village District includes special standards for protecting trees of significant size.
Part 8, Section 27-805, 1, J. ▶

West Pikeland Township
The Village Preservation Districts require five foot planting strips with shade trees between sidewalks and streets.
Article VI, Section 605, C, 3. ▶

Semi-Private space in front yards

Although not as common in Chester County as some other places, many village properties create semi-private space in the front yard. This is most often achieved with a low decorative fence or wall, combined with a raised front porch, although hedges and raised front yards can also serve in this role. If a village has a well-established pattern of semi-private front yard areas, the municipality may want to require new developments to mimic this pattern.

Low stone wall in frontage area of a building in Yellow Springs

Ordinance EXAMPLES

New London Township
New London Village's design guide requires low walls and other architectural elements to form a street wall when buildings do not directly abut the sidewalk.
Part 8, Section 27-805, 1, J. ▶

West Bradford Township
The Traditional Neighborhood Development-2 district in Marshallton Village requires new development to construct structures such as picket fences, walls, arbors, trellises, and pergolas.
Article VIII, Traditional Neighborhood Development-2, Section 450-47, A, 3 . ▶

**Ensure new buildings enhance the existing
streetscape**
Develop transition standards from the public realm
of the street and sidewalk to the private front yard
of a new building. Transition elements may include
fences, walls, hedges, porches, and stoops.

Village signs

Signage is an extremely important element of village character. Signs should reflect the historic character of the village by being smaller in scale, less brightly lit, and, preferably, made of traditional materials. Large, auto-oriented, internally lit monopole signs do not fit in the county's villages.

In hamlets and traditional villages, the local municipality may be able to simply apply its residential sign standards to the village.

In traditional villages and growth area villages, municipalities should have a village sign section in their sign ordinance. For free standing signs, heights are frequently very limited, often no more than 8 feet; internally lit signs are prohibited; and hanging signs are encouraged. Hanging signs can be designed to hang from a crossbeam between two posts or from a brace coming from a single post. Some municipalities require the posts to be made of wood and regulate the external lights designed to illuminate the sign.

In growth area villages with significant commercial, institutional, or industrial uses, the municipality may want to allow larger signs that are internally lit. To help maintain historic community character, any larger freestanding signs could be required to be a monument sign, where no pole is used, provided there is adequate room for monument signs in front of historic buildings.

The Four Dogs Tavern in Marshallton, West Bradford Township has a projecting sign hung from a bracket.

The Kimberton Wellness Connection business in Kimberton, East Pikeland Township has a post sign and wall signs.

The Old Stone Cider business in Lewisville, Elk Township has a wall sign.

A. Avoid plastic signs
Acceptable primary signage materials include wood, metal, stone and solid plastic/composite. Translucent plastic is not an acceptable sign material. Three-dimensional and relief signage is encouraged.

B. Use dark backgrounds
Dark backgrounds, such as black, or forest green, provide good contrast to lighter color lettering and symbols and make it easier to read signs, such as this hanging sign.

C. Use a size and shape complementary to associated buildings
Signs should enhance the design of the associated building. Hanging signs and monument signs are preferred over signs mounted on single poles.

Ordinance EXAMPLES

West Vincent Township
Special sign regulations for Birchrunville Village limit the size of signs to 16 square feet, prohibit backlit illuminated signs, and limit sign poles to a maximum height of 9 feet for the pole and 7 feet for the sign.
Article XXI, Section 390-130, B. ▶

West Bradford Township
The Traditional Neighborhood Development-2 District limits the size of signs in Marshallton Village to 8 square feet and requires signs to emulate existing signs found in the village.
Article VIII, Section 450-48, I. ▶

Transportation

Automobiles and other modern vehicles do not easily fit into the historic character of villages, which were not designed to accommodate these vehicles from a design, safety, use, or appearance perspective. As much as possible, the impact of cars on villages should be minimized.

Parking to side or rear of buildings

Although commercial village buildings historically had the "parking" of horses and buggies in the front of the building, this does not work in the modern transportation era. There are still some villages where cars pull directly into parking spaces in front of a commercial establishment, which means they have to back onto the abutting roads, which often have high traffic speeds. Because of safety issues, this design should be prohibited in all new land developments.

In some cases, a regular parking lot can be built between the building and street, where vehicles that are parking do not interfere with vehicles on public roads; however, this also is not ideal since it often means the vehicles conflict with pedestrians or vehicles turning into a driveway. In addition, parked cars and large paved areas do not fit into the village's historic character.

Rear side parking in Marshallton, West Bradford Township

Ordinance EXAMPLES

New Garden Township
In the R-3 Toughkenamon Residential District, new residences are required to have garages to the side or rear of the building. When they are located to the side, they must be set back at least 15 feet from the front façade.
Article VI, Section 200-31, O, 8. ▶

North Coventry Township
The V-1 Village District for Cedarville requires non-residential buildings to have off-street parking to the side or rear of the building. Garages and off-street parking for residential buildings must be located to the rear of the building with access off an alley or driveway, unless an applicant can demonstrate this is not physically feasible.
Article V, Section 370-17, D, 5. ▶

Side and rear yard parking
minimizes negative
impacts on historic building
frontage character

Require side or rear yard parking

In most cases, municipalities should require parking to be behind or to the side of buildings facing streets, while prohibiting parking in front yards and between the front of buildings and the street. If multiple buildings are on a property, there may be parking between some of the buildings and the street with another building between the parking and the street.

Interconnected and common parking lots

Because of the odd shape of village lots, which are often long and narrow, and because of the location of outbuildings, specimen trees, and historic buildings, providing on-site parking in an efficient and easily navigated manner can be challenging. Another problem is that visitors often have difficulty identifying where to turn into properties from local roads and easily end up in the wrong driveway! One way to address these problems is to encourage interconnected and common parking lots.

Interconnected parking lots in the rear yards of businesses in Lederach Village, Lower Salford Township, Montgomery County.

PARCEL LINE

Parking and pedestrian connection between two adjacent parcels and uses

Incentivize parking interconnections

One way to address these problems is to encourage interconnected and common parking lots. This can be done by requiring interconnections for certain uses, such as commercial ones, or by giving bonuses for providing interconnected or common parking. These bonuses might include additional permitted uses, reduced parking requirements, more permitted density, or increased building or impervious coverage requirements.

Ordinance EXAMPLES

West Pikeland Township
The Village Preservation Districts require coordination of vehicular access to parking areas and shared parking wherever practicable.
Article VI, Section 605, B. ▶

Lower Salford Township, Montgomery County
The VC Village Commercial District provides a density bonus to properties that have shared parking and driveways.
Article XIIIA, Section 164.70.4. ▶

Sidewalks and pathways

Sidewalks or pathways should be required in all mixed use and growth areas villages, as well as villages surrounded by denser development or walkable destinations, such as schools. Smaller villages in rural settings do not need sidewalks or pathways.

Some communities may find that typical concrete sidewalks do not fit their villages' character. In these cases, the community may want to have pathways. Pathways might be made of different materials, such as macadam, brick, stone, or cinder; they might be narrower than a typical sidewalk; and they might meander.

Brick paved sidewalks are located on both sides of Strasburg Road in Marshallton, West Bradford Township.

Ordinance EXAMPLES

West Nottingham Township
The V-Village (Traditional Neighborhood Development) District requires sidewalks and pathways to be built in Nottingham Village.
Part 6, Section 606, H. ▶

Pennsbury Township
The VC Village Commercial zoning district requires a pedestrian orientation in villages, with sidewalks and walking paths required. It also encourages the provision of seating areas and benches.
Article XI, Sections 162-1104 and 162-1106. ▶

Labels in image: trail, sidewalk, sidewalk

**Create a continuous pedestrian network**
Establish clearly visible and direct pedestrian paths between neighboring buildings, between buildings and outlying parking areas, and between buildings and public open space.

Common alleys and driveways

Village building are frequently close to each other, with limited room for driveways, yet, to be viable, these buildings need to be able to accommodate cars and trucks. In addition, many villages are located on high volume and/or high-speed roads, which can make turning into a narrow village driveway very hazardous.

A great way to address this problem is to have an alley in the back of the village that connects all the properties. Municipalities that have these alleys or that are developing these alleys should build standards for the alleys into their subdivision and land development ordinance to make sure the alleys remain open for general use and are built to appropriate standards.

In some cases, the common driveway might straddle the property line, while in others it may be fully in one property, with an easement allowing the abutting property to use the common driveway. Municipal ordinances can encourage common driveways through bonus provisions.
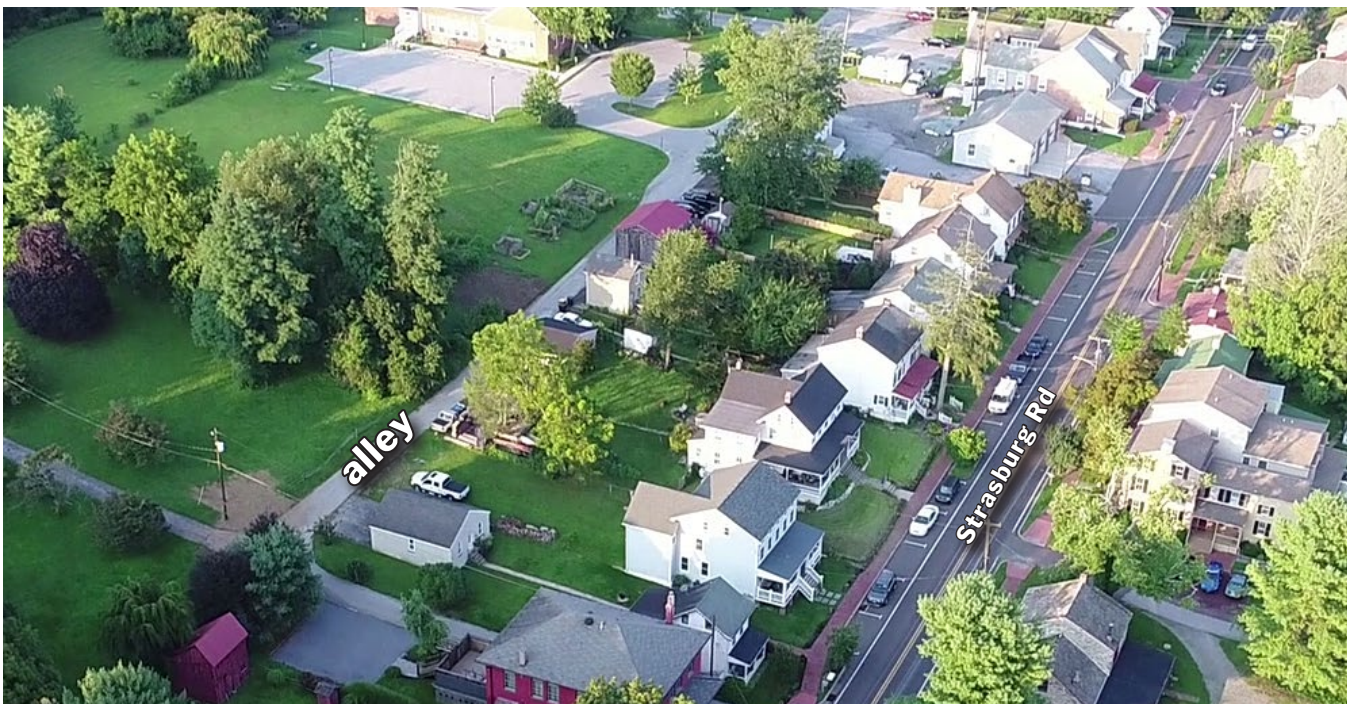
An alley provides access to parking for residences and businesses fronting Strasburg Road in Marshallton, West Bradford Township.

alley for
residences

Consider the potential for alleys in new development

When a new principle building is proposed, if a rear alley exists adjacent to the lot, or an existing alley can feasibly be extended, it should be used to access any new vehicle garage, driveway or parking spaces.

Ordinance EXAMPLES

Pennsbury Township
The VC Village Commercial District requires residential uses to have vehicular access off a private driveway or an alley, although the ordinance provides an exception when site constraints make this access infeasible.
Article XI, Section 162-1106, D, 2. ▶

West Bradford Township
The Traditional Neighborhood Development-2 District requires alleys to the rear of village lots in Marshallton Village.
Article VIII, Section 450-49, A, 3. ▶

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