

ISSUES REPORT

TO THE LOWER MERION TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION
RELATING TO THE PREPARATION OF A COMPREHENSIVE,
PRESERVATION, INFILL AND REDEVELOPMENT PLAN



TOWNSHIP OF LOWER MERION
MONTGOMERY COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

2010

Lower Merion Township has long been recognized as one of the most attractive suburban residential sections of the country. With extraordinary accessibility to a great city, it combines the charms of beautiful open country, fine houses, good roads, quiet woods and valleys. Its services, public and private, are well and efficiently managed. It is a good place to live in.

All of these advantages have naturally attracted people to the Township. The same factors will undoubtedly insure a continued growth.

This growth, viewed in retrospect, is startling. Yet so gradually has it taken place from day to day, and year to year, and over so wide an expanse of territory, that it has been scarcely perceptible to the casual observer.

Growth is not an unmixed blessing. It creates problems. Significant changes necessarily take place. The great estates of years ago move farther out and their places are taken by smaller and more numerous holdings. More homes are built. More homes demand roads, utility and fire services, schools, parks, playgrounds, sewers and the many other services and facilities which are rightfully expected by the citizens. Unless, through wise foresight and planning, the extension of these services and facilities is kept ahead of the growing demand, critical conditions are created. They take the form of traffic congestion, inadequate housing, insufficiency of open spaces and the like.



These critical conditions, like the growth which produces them, are frequently as imperceptible, in the making, as the growth itself. Once they become acute, they are apparent to all,

and call loudly for correction. But almost always the correction is costly to the Township and to the citizens, and often the cost is well nigh prohibitive.

If fifty years ago it had been possible to foresee the requirements of the Township, as they exist today, most of the critical conditions which are now so evident, could have been avoided with little effort or cost. Where now there is serious traffic congestion, ample space could have been provided. Where open spaces, parks and playgrounds are now so clearly needed, land could have been had at the price of open fields. Buildings, which now obstruct the opening of clearly needed relief roads, could easily have been located a few feet to one side.

The failure to anticipate such conditions is a mistake of the past. The results are stern facts which now have to be faced, and it is no use to think of what might have been. But surely in the light of what has happened in the past, it should be possible to see clear evidence of what is likely to happen again in the future. It therefore seems simple wisdom to look as best we may into the future, to try to see its problems, and to anticipate them before they in turn arise to plague us or our successors.

This is the true function and purpose of planning. It is not to set up a picture of how the things which now exist may be replaced by an ideal, which is either impossible or impracticable, but to devise a way to avoid the cost of future mistakes. Your Commission has not tried to envision a grandiose scheme of parkways, monumental civic centres, and great public structures, requiring huge outlays of capital, and for that reason only faintly possible of accomplishment. It has rather tried to present a picture of the problems, which will arise as growth continues, and to suggest orderly ways to meet them at the least cost and inconvenience to the citizens.

**General Considerations, Which Justify the Formulation of a Plan for The Township
– Introductory remarks presenting the Township's Comprehensive Plan
to Board of Commissioners by the Planning Commission, April 13th 1937.**

TOWNSHIP OF LOWER MERION

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About the cover

The cover photograph of a well-landscaped, single-family home in Merion illustrates the early 20th century planning ideal of the Garden Suburb that prevailed when many neighborhoods of Lower Merion Township were established. As the Township prepares a new Comprehensive Plan for the 21st century, many of the social and environmental principles that define Garden Suburb are more relevant than ever.

Comprehensive Planning is a process by which a community develops a vision to define its identity and then develops strategies to realize the vision and to reinforce the identity. While one picture can hardly define a place as rich in natural and architectural history and diverse in social character as Lower Merion Township, the cover photograph effectively captures the shared vision of a good place to live exemplified by high quality architecture nestled in lush landscapes that residents, business owners and leaders of Lower Merion Township have expressed at public meetings and in stakeholder interviews. A shared vision is crucial to developing the policies, programs and projects to implement the Comprehensive Plan because easily recognizable images provide a qualitative means to evaluate quantitative legal terminology contained in zoning ordinances and in increasingly complex engineering projects.

The cover photograph effectively illustrates the central planning assumption of this report that Lower Merion Township is primarily a mature, high quality residential suburb and that comprehensive planning strategies should be directed towards sustaining this identity and ensuring that the Township remains a good place to live. The challenge facing the community is to balance the social, physical, economic, and environmental qualities that constitute to a primarily residential suburb. The photographs contained throughout this report are designed to assist the reader in qualitatively evaluating the numerous complex and subtle issues that define a high quality suburb so that a proper and effective plan can be developed to carry the community into the future.

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TOWNSHIP OF LOWER MERION MONTGOMERY COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

THIS PLAN WAS PREPARED FOR THE PLANNING COMMISSION WITH
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT FUNDING
ADMINISTERED THROUGH THE
DEPARTMENT OF BUILDING AND PLANNING
UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF

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Real and perceived externalities resulting from new development . . .	1
Need to coordinate planning activities to avoid unintended consequences	2
Making Choices between Competing Community Goals and Policies – the need for a coordinated Comprehensive Plan.	2

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A WHITE PAPER FOR LOWER MERION TOWNSHIP**

**APPENDIX D: ISSUES AND THEMES
IDENTIFIED BY STAKEHOLDERS**