

# Rural Landscapes Design Guide

Chester County, PA





Prepared by the Chester County Planning Commission  
February 2024

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# Rural Landscapes Design Guide

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This is the fifth of six design guides the Planning Commission is preparing for Chester County's Landscape categories. The framework for each guide will be the same to support your community's objectives, values, and priorities in regard to the character of new development.

## Purpose

Chester County is committed to quality of design in its built environment.

Quality design of new development is characterized by context sensitivity and the thoughtful arrangement of details that define streets, public spaces, and communities. Ultimately, quality design improves a community's function and appearance by unifying diverse elements.

The purpose of this guide is to:

- Promote the preservation of open space
- Promote interconnected greenways and wildlife and other natural corridors
- Promote development with compatible rural character
- Protect agricultural activity and prime farmland
- Protect and restore the environment

The design elements in this guide are focused on the maintenance of a low density development pattern and conservation of agricultural lands and sensitive environmental resources.



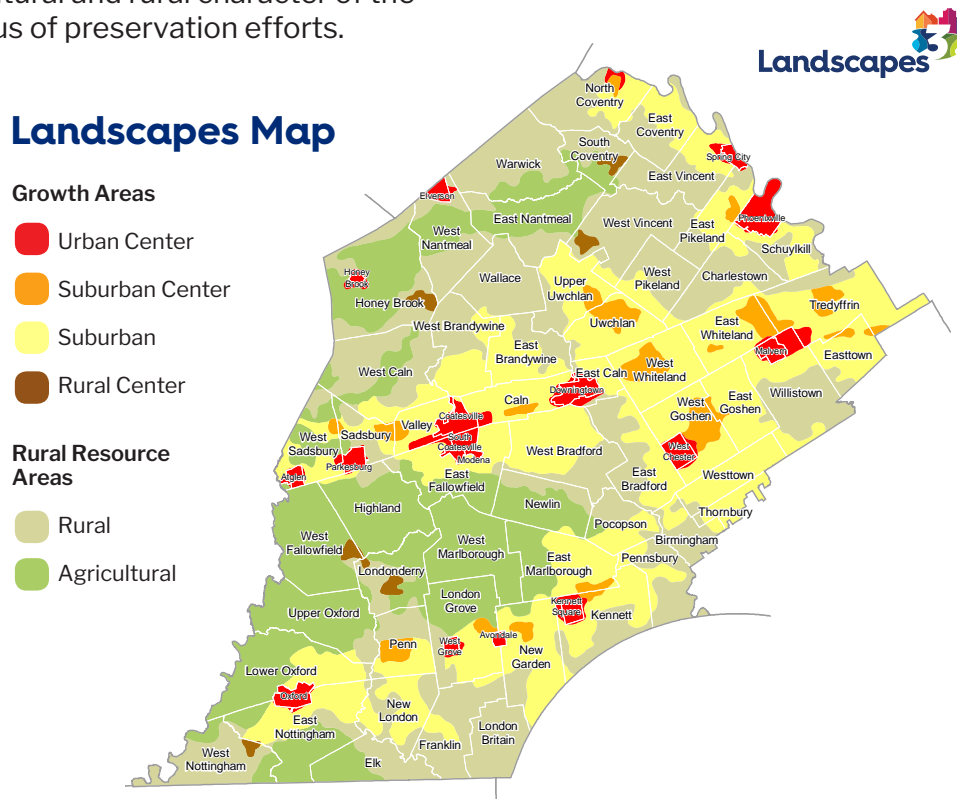
*View of rural road and landscape in Pocopson Township.*

## Audience

This guide is intended for use by developers, design professionals, community members, municipal attorneys, elected officials, administrative staff, engineers, planners, businesses, county planning commission members and staff, and the general public. Each has a role in ensuring that new development fits within its context and contributes to the livability of Rural landscapes.

## Foundation

The foundation for this guide is *Landscapes3*, Chester County's comprehensive plan. The plan, adopted in 2018, establishes a preservation and growth vision for the county and its municipalities. Within the plan, the Landscapes Map identifies six landscape categories where growth and rural resource protection should occur to achieve the vision. The four Growth Area landscape categories best accommodate future growth. These are planned for a full range of infrastructure and are highly suitable for development and redevelopment. The two landscape categories of the Rural Resource Areas, including Rural landscapes, are not appropriate for significant growth, strongly reflect the agricultural and rural character of the county, and serve as a focus of preservation efforts.



# Long-term Vision

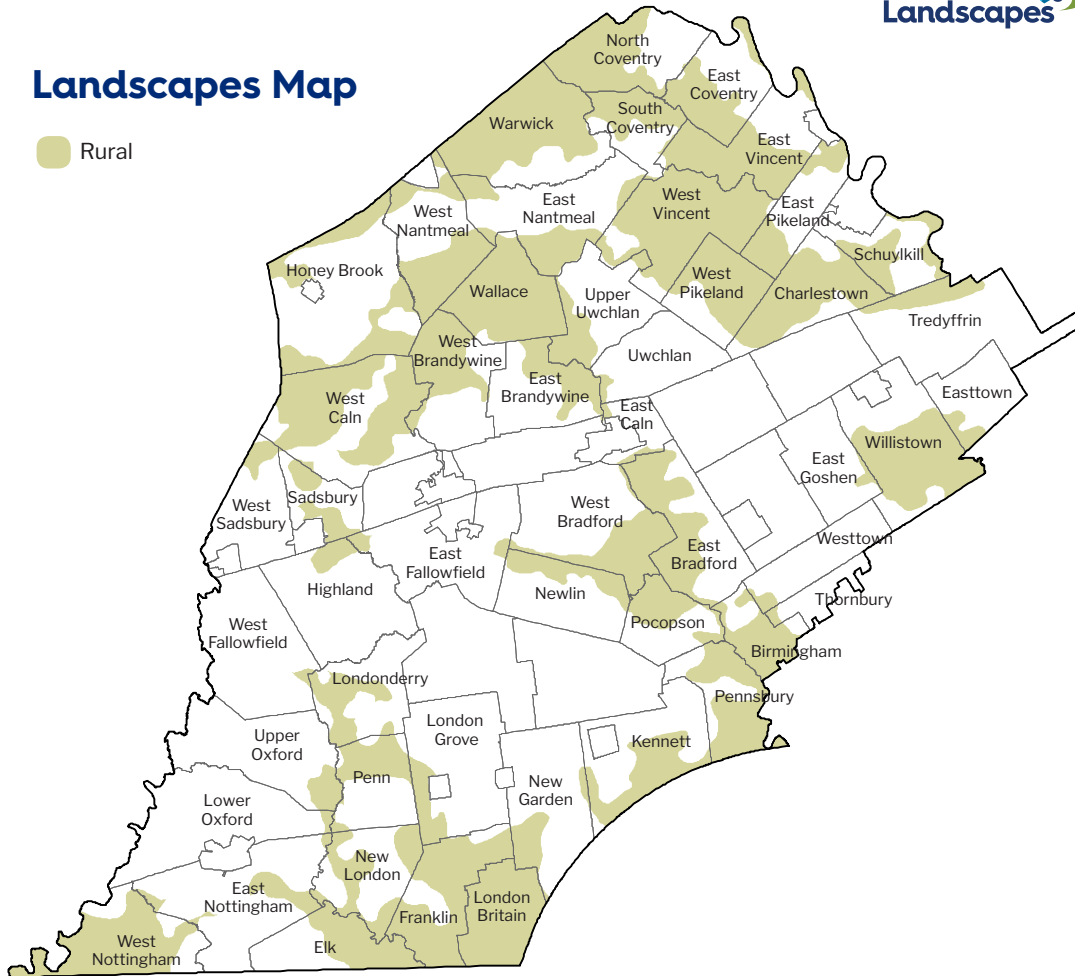
As a rural resource area for Chester County, the vision for the Rural landscape is the preservation of significant areas of open space, critical natural areas, and cultural resources with a limited amount of context sensitive development permitted to accommodate residential and farm needs.

**Rural** landscapes are mostly located between suburban and agricultural landscapes and consist of open and wooded lands with scattered villages, farms, and residential uses.



## Landscapes Map

Rural



# Format

The planning principles and design elements established in the *Landscapes3* vision for the Rural landscapes serve as the basis for the format of this guide.

## Planning Principles

The key objectives, values, and priorities to consider when creating long range plans, investing in infrastructure, or evaluating proposed development.

This section has four themes: **Growth Outlook, Preservation Focus, Land Use Patterns,** and **Infrastructure.** The importance of each principle is discussed along with a list of example supportive policies that guide municipal action and facilitate rural resource protection. For further information, a link to on-line resources is provided.

## Design Elements

The guidelines for the treatment of development and related features based on well-established patterns of building and quality design.

This section has three themes: **Building Character, Site Amenities,** and **Transportation.** Each guideline is introduced with an overview of “why” it is important to the health, safety, and welfare of the county’s Rural landscapes. The overview is followed by an illustration or graphic to express design considerations and best practices to carry out each design element. A regulatory strategy from a local source is found at the bottom of each topic as well as a link to additional on-line resources.

CHAPTER 2 Planning Principles

**PLANNING THEME**


**PRINCIPLE & RATIONALE**

**PRESERVATION FOCUS**

**Preservation of historic buildings in their historic context**

Preserving historic buildings and their surrounding grounds adds character to Rural landscapes and attracts tourists and investment. Rehabilitating and reusing historic buildings uses energy and material resources more efficiently and reduces waste.

**COUNTY EXAMPLE**



The Washington Building in West Pocomoke Township originally served as a colonial inn and tavern when the village of Yellow Springs was a spa destination. Today, the eighteenth-century building holds special events.

**SUPPORTIVE POLICIES**

**Example Policies**

- Identify, preserve and/or revitalize community landmarks, focal points and vistas to support community identity and a 'sense of place'.
- Encourage rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of existing buildings rather than demolition.
- Promote density and use incentives to preserve historic buildings and sites.
- Support efforts to educate residents on the long-term value of historic resources to the community.
- Allow mixed uses consistent with historic context to promote viability of rural villages.

**MUNICIPAL EXAMPLE**

- Identify and protect the Township's historic, cultural and scenic resources that define its heritage and protect these features from the encroachment of incompatible development.

Wallace Township Comprehensive Plan, 2015 p. 46. >

**Toolbox**

- Historic Resource Protection Standards >
- Adaptive Reuse >
- Historic and Cultural Resource Preservation Planning >


**MUNICIPAL PLAN EXAMPLE POLICY**

**ONLINE TOOL**

**PRESERVATION FOCUS**

**Protection of scenic viewsheds**

Scenic viewsheds contribute significantly to quality of life, add to the value of property, and enhance the desirability and livability of a community.



In Upper Uwchlan Township, the identification of viewsheds that represent unique character, such as Marsh Creek State Park, are part of the required site analysis steps of a development plan.

**Example Policies**

- Encourage the dedication of protective easements for historic or cultural resources.
- Encourage future development to reinforce historic settlement pattern and continued use of land for agricultural purposes.
- Monitor efficacy of regulatory provisions related to scenic quality protection, including, landscaping, buffering and screening standards.
- Promote techniques for creative land planning and design consistent with conservation design principles to preserve scenic resources.
- Conduct a scenic resource inventory and mapping analysis that identifies scenic roads, viewsheds, and viewpoints. Reference the identified scenic resources in the zoning ordinance.
- Include a scenic resource impact assessment for any wireless communication improvement plan that is subject to municipal approval.

**MUNICIPAL EXAMPLE**

- Identify and protect the Township's historic resources and scenic resources, including scenic landscapes, roadways, and viewsheds, that contribute to the character of the community.

Highland Township Comprehensive Plan Update, 2022, p.35 >

CHAPTER 3 Design Elements

**TRANSPORTATION**

**Roads, bridges, fences, signs, and walls that fit rural character**

Man made features within and visible from the public right-of-way are minimized in the Rural landscape which maintains open space characteristics and scenic value. Roads in the Rural landscape are mostly two lanes and have frogfont bends and a shoulder or swale without curbs or sidewalks. Low walls, fences, or a natural, irregular pattern of trees and shrubs typically front the edges of roadway corridors. Signage is not distracting or overwhelming to the user.

**DESIGN THEME**

**DESIGN ELEMENT & RATIONALE**

**DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS**

**Design complementary signage**

The design, scale, and location of signage should complement and contribute to rural characteristics. Any lighting on signage should be minimal.

**Use rural type fencing**

Fencing along roads should not limit the perception of open space and rural character and should be designed to be wildlife friendly. Open rail fencing is the least visually intrusive fencing structure in a Rural landscape. Avoid chain link and solid fencing.

**Consider other modes of travel**

Road design should take into consideration pedestrian, bicycle, freight, farm equipment, and horse and buggies. Travel lane widths should be sized appropriately on designated truck routes and where farm equipment is expected frequently.

**Integrate stone into new bridges and culverts**

Natural stone was used as a primary building material for bridges and culverts up until the early twentieth century and the character of these features reflects the heritage of the county. The design of new bridges and culverts should integrate stone in the structures to blend in with the Rural landscape.

**Scenic protection standards**

Improvements such as buildings, structures, parking areas, and loading areas shall be located to minimize the impact on scenic views, minimize the disturbance of desirable natural vegetation, and maintain open views.

Highland Township, Zoning Ordinance, Section 401.2.A.3. >

**REGULATORY STRATEGY**

**ONLINE TOOL**

Toolbox  
Chester County Multimodal Handbook >







# Planning Principles

Key objectives, values, and priorities to consider when creating long range plans, investing in infrastructure, or evaluating proposed development

**GROWTH OUTLOOK**  
**PRESERVATION FOCUS**  
**LAND USE PATTERNS**  
**INFRASTRUCTURE**

**GROWTH OUTLOOK**

**Very limited future growth**

The county’s Rural landscapes will accommodate very limited growth that is context sensitive to its rural character.



West Pikeland Township, with approximately 72 percent of its land area in the Rural landscape has residential, agricultural, and very limited commercial uses.

**Example Policies**

- Guide development to appropriate areas and protect natural, historic, and cultural resources and open space.
- Protect and enhance unique rural characteristics by setting design standards and ensuring site designs coordinate with surrounding vicinity and adjoining developments.
- Coordinate planning and community development efforts on a regional level to address growth strategies, protect natural and cultural resources, and maximize efficiency and cost effectiveness of services.

**MUNICIPAL EXAMPLE**

- Provide for use of land in a manner that preserves the township’s farmlands, open spaces, and natural and historic resources.

West Caln Township Comprehensive Plan, 2020; p.26. ▶

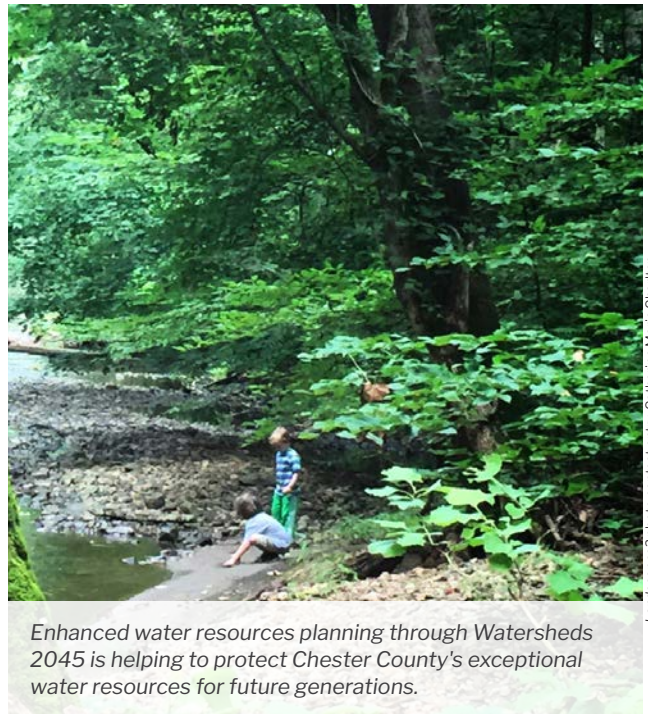
**Toolbox**

Smart Growth ▶

**PRESERVATION FOCUS**

**Preservation of natural areas, including stream corridors, woodlands, steep slopes, and wetlands**

Preservation of natural resources improves water and air quality, reduces stormwater runoff and erosion, and protects wildlife habitat and corridors.



Enhanced water resources planning through Watersheds 2045 is helping to protect Chester County’s exceptional water resources for future generations.

Landscapes3 photo contest entry, Catherine Marie Charlton

**Example Policies**

- Protect and enhance groundwater recharge areas, streams, wetlands, and riparian areas in order to preserve water quality and quantity.
- Minimize disturbance of steep slopes.
- Strive to meet the conservation goals of the county comprehensive plan and water resources plan, *Landscapes3* (2018) and *Watersheds 2045* (2024).
- Maintain riparian buffers to protect water quality.
- Encourage private land stewardship actions designed to minimize negative impacts on surface water.

**MUNICIPAL EXAMPLE**

- Preserve and protect natural resources for the health of the regional ecosystem and as unique amenities for future generations to enjoy.

Wallace Township, Comprehensive Plan, 2015; p.45. ▶

**Toolbox**

Natural Resource Protection Standards ▶

Woodlands Conservation ▶

Official Map ▶

**PRESERVATION FOCUS****Protected agricultural land**

Viable agricultural land preserves the sense of place of Rural landscapes and supports a diversified economic base in the region.



Landscapes-3 photo contest entry, Mark Williams

*At Bryn Coed Farms, in West Vincent Township, much of the permanently protected 1,505 acre property is actively farmed or in pasture.*

**Example Policies**

- Protect prime agricultural soils.
- Ensure new non-agricultural development does not negatively impact the continuation of existing adjacent agricultural uses and activities.
- Support and work cooperatively on farmland preservation efforts by landowners, public entities, and non-profit organizations.
- Encourage landowners to enter their lands into the municipality's Agricultural Security Area program.

**MUNICIPAL EXAMPLE**

- Use the township's dedicated open space funds to help secure conservation and/or agricultural easements on farm properties with prime agricultural soils.

London Britain Township Comprehensive Plan, 2019; p. 24. ▶

**Toolbox**

Agricultural Conservation Easements ▶

Agricultural Zoning ▶

**PRESERVATION FOCUS****Significant open space as a key component of residential development that does occur**

Significant open space in residential development can help protect natural areas and scenic views and provide active and passive recreation opportunities, such as play areas and walking paths.



*The open space within Charlestown Hunt, a residential subdivision in Charlestown Township, consists of meadow and mature forest, which connects with hundreds of acres of contiguous forest around Pickering Creek, much of which is permanently protected.*

**Example Policies**

- Cluster developments in a manner to preserve water quality, farms, unfragmented wildlife corridors, and woodlands.
- Incorporate conservation subdivision method of cluster development into subdivision and land development ordinance.
- Coordinate cluster development with other development and conservation priorities in the region to protect large swaths of open space:
- Require at least 50 percent of a new development site be preserved as open space through conservation development options.

**MUNICIPAL EXAMPLE**

- Preserve the rural character of the township by ensuring that future growth is in harmony with open space protection, agricultural preservation, and natural, cultural, and historic resource protection efforts.

Highland Township Comprehensive Plan, 2022; p. 13. ▶

**Toolbox**

Cluster Development ▶

Conservation Subdivision Guide ▶

**PRESERVATION FOCUS**

**Preservation of historic buildings in their historic context**

Preserving historic buildings and their surrounding grounds adds character to Rural landscapes and attracts tourists and investment. Rehabilitating and reusing historic buildings reduces material consumption, waste, and energy use.



*The Washington Building in West Pikeland Township originally served as a colonial inn and tavern when the village of Yellow Springs was a spa destination. Today, the eighteenth century building holds special events.*

**Example Policies**

- Identify, preserve and/or revitalize community landmarks, focal points and vistas to support community identity and a ‘sense of place’.
- Encourage rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of existing buildings rather than demolition.
- Promote density and use incentives to preserve historic buildings and sites.
- Support efforts to educate residents on the long-term value of historic resources to the community.
- Allow mixed uses consistent with historic context to promote viability of rural villages.

**MUNICIPAL EXAMPLE**

- Identify and protect the township’s historic, cultural and scenic resources that define its heritage and protect these features from the encroachment of incompatible development.

Wallace Township Comprehensive Plan, 2015 p. 46. ▶

**Toolbox**

Historic Resource Protection Standards ▶

Adaptive Reuse ▶

Historic and Cultural Resource Preservation Planning ▶

**PRESERVATION FOCUS**

**Protection of scenic viewsheds**

Scenic viewsheds contribute significantly to quality of life, add to the value of property, and enhance the desirability and livability of a community.



*In Upper Uwchlan Township, the identification of viewsheds that represent unique character, such as Marsh Creek State Park, are part of the required site analysis steps of a development plan.*

**Example Policies**

- Encourage the dedication of protective easements for historic or cultural resources.
- Encourage future development to reinforce historic settlement patterns and continued use of land for agricultural purposes.
- Monitor effectiveness of regulatory provisions related to scenic quality protection, including, landscaping, buffering and screening standards.
- Promote techniques for creative land planning and design consistent with conservation design principles to preserve scenic resources.
- Ensure development is strategically placed on properties away from roads to protect scenic viewsheds.
- Conduct a scenic resources inventory and mapping analysis that identifies scenic roads, viewsheds, and viewpoints. Reference the identified scenic resources in the zoning ordinance.

**MUNICIPAL EXAMPLE**

- Identify and protect the township’s historic resources and scenic resources, including scenic landscapes, roadways, and viewsheds, that contribute to the character of the community.

Highland Township Comprehensive Plan Update, 2022; p. 35 ▶

## LAND USE PATTERNS

### Low-density and clustered residential development

The existing character of Rural landscapes is partly defined by low-density development. Clustered residential development can be used as a mechanism to prevent sprawl because it creates a more compact development that can reduce expenses on infrastructure and service delivery, conserve natural areas, and provide social benefits.



*At Parke Farm in East Bradford Township, 34 single-family homes on 2-acre lots are surrounded by 200 acres of protected open space. The topography, existing woodland, preserved hedgerows, and thoughtful layout of this development provide an effective screen to adjacent uses.*

#### Example Policies

- Encourage creative and innovative site planning using conservation design principles that maximize the protection of key land and environmental resources.
- Preserve the sense of small-scale, residential communities surrounded by rural open space.
- Encourage a harmonious development pattern that respects and responds to the character of the surrounding built and natural environments.
- Keep housing densities low (i.e., a maximum of 1 dwelling unit per 2 acres) in rural zoning districts.
- Participate in Transferable Development Rights (TDR) programs to direct development to areas that can absorb growth.

#### MUNICIPAL EXAMPLE

- Ensure flexibility in development design to meet community needs for complementary and aesthetically pleasing development.  
Willistown Township Comprehensive Plan Update, 2023; p. 4. ▶

#### Toolbox

- Cluster Development ▶
- Conservation Subdivision Guide ▶
- Transferable Development Rights (TDR) ▶

## LAND USE PATTERNS

### Agricultural uses

Working lands, farms, and forests are central to the heritage of the county. Protecting agricultural uses and jobs supports agriculture related economic development that is sustainable over the long term.



*The agricultural industry is a leading employer and tax generator throughout the county. It provides open working lands, which can help keep costs of local services low, such as police and fire protection, as opposed to when the land is developed.*

#### Example Policies

- Retain existing farms and direct non-farm residential and other uses away from these areas.
- Implement effective agricultural zoning to encourage farming where it is a primary land use and discourage uses that are incompatible with agricultural operations.
- Amend ordinances to reduce potential regulatory barriers to agricultural related businesses and respond to evolving agricultural industry trends, such as accessory farm businesses and agritainment.
- Coordinate with the agriculture industry to develop a cooperative and coordinated agritourism effort.
- Encourage the incorporation of agriculture into new residential development, where appropriate, and buffer residences from agricultural uses with setbacks, open spaces, and landscaping.

#### MUNICIPAL EXAMPLE

- Support agriculture to continue to be a viable primary industry and an enhanced or expanded industry in the township.  
Franklin Township Comprehensive Plan, 2022; p. 2-3. ▶

#### Toolbox

- Agricultural Zoning ▶
- Secondary Farm Business ▶

**LAND USE PATTERNS**

**Low intensity institutional uses**

Institutional uses are a secondary use in Rural landscapes and provide places of worship, parks, and other public facilities.



*Springton Manor Farm, a 306 acre county park within Wallace Township, includes a venue for weddings and events that complements its scenic farmland setting.*

**Example Policies**

- Allow institutional uses when such uses contribute to the permanent conservation of open space and are congruent with agricultural activities.
- Target institutional uses to those areas with adequate infrastructure to serve the use.
- Set low building and impervious coverage ratios for institutional uses to reflect rural development patterns.
- Promote, encourage and incentivize green building technologies, and green stormwater infrastructure.

**MUNICIPAL EXAMPLE**

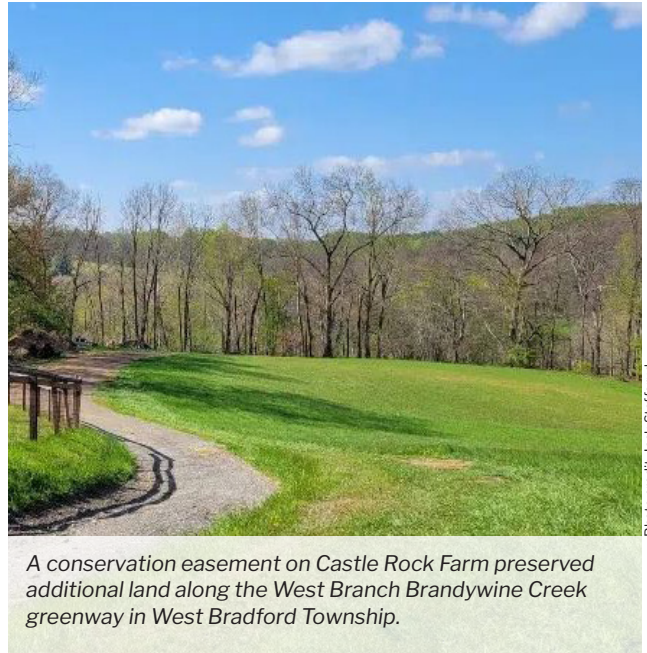
- Due to the potential for greater impact associated with institutional uses, and the variety of activities that fit this category, the township intends to scrutinize such uses more carefully than it does residential uses.

*Willistown Township Comprehensive Plan, 2023; p. 6. ▶*

**LAND USE PATTERNS**

**Significant amounts of preserved open space**

Preserved natural and cultivated open space protects rural character, jobs, natural beauty, and critical environmental resources. Preserved open space can also act as a buffer separating development from undeveloped areas.



*A conservation easement on Castle Rock Farm preserved additional land along the West Branch Brandywine Creek greenway in West Bradford Township.*

Photo credit: Jack Steffert

**Example Policies**

- Look for opportunities to expand and interconnect open spaces through public and private land conservation means.
- Support and collaborate with local land trusts and environmental organizations to support the sound stewardship of public and private lands.
- Support landowner applications to enroll eligible farm parcels in the Agricultural Security Area, as enabled under state and county farmland preservation programs.
- Consider a dedicated open space tax to generate revenue for future agricultural and/or conservation easements.

**MUNICIPAL EXAMPLE**

- Continue to partner with area land trusts to cultivate and secure easements and other forms of restrictive covenants on the township’s unprotected agricultural and other high-resource value lands.

*Highland Township Comprehensive Plan, 2022; p. 50. ▶*

**Toolbox**

- Conservation Easements ▶
- Greenways ▶

## LAND USE PATTERNS

### Supplemental farm businesses and farm stands

Supplemental farm businesses help expand a farmers' income, diversify risk, and bring the next generation into the current operation. Allowing these uses enables farm operations to contribute even more to the local economy directly and through pass-through spending.



Sugartown Strawberries, a working farm located in Willistown Township, has a farm stand that offers fresh vegetables, autumn hayrides, pick-your-own pumpkins, and a country store.

#### Example Policies

- Permit accessory activities that support agriculture.
- Permit farm stands as a "by-right" use.
- Permit light or cottage industry type uses to support agricultural and farm related businesses.
- Encourage location of new farm businesses on existing farm parcels.
- Ensure on-farm businesses that do not relate to the agricultural use of the land are controlled as an accessory use that it is subordinate to the primary agricultural use.
- Advocate innovation in practices to sustain the viability of agriculture in the region.

#### MUNICIPAL EXAMPLE

- In the zoning ordinance, define agritourism and agritainment, examples of which include corn mazes, farm tours, wine tastings, hayrides, public horse riding stables, or 'pick-your-own' pumpkins.

Franklin Township Comprehensive Plan Update, 2022; p. 3-4. ►

#### Toolbox

Secondary Farm Business ►

## INFRASTRUCTURE

### Roads are conducive to use by bicyclists but not widened to suburban or urban standards

Rural roads are typically narrower than suburban or urban roads. Where a road is intended to be used by bicyclists, paved shoulders can provide a safe space.



Photo simulation: Southern Chester County Circuit Trail Feasibility Study

The Baltimore Pike Bikeway concept would provide a continuous safe route for cyclists between Kennett Square Borough and Nottingham with some buffered bike lanes, as shown in this photo simulation.

#### Example Policies

- Maintain a roadway network that safely and effectively accommodates vehicular traffic supporting other community objectives for pedestrian and bicycle mobility as well as agricultural needs.
- Provide a safe path for pedestrians, bicyclists, and equestrians by providing separated trails within or adjacent to new road right-of-ways.
- Place new road systems with adequate setbacks from main roads and structures to preserve existing scenic values.
- Enhance paved shoulders on the edge of roadways to serve as a functional space for bicyclists and pedestrians to travel in the absence of other facilities with more separation.

#### MUNICIPAL EXAMPLE

- Consider traffic calming strategies as appropriate, in both new development and existing road projects, to ensure safety and promote better circulation.

Wallace Township Comprehensive Plan, 2015; p. 48. ►

#### Toolbox

Chester County Transportation Policies ►

Complete Streets Policy ►

Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities: Policy ►

Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities: Design ►

Multimodal Circulation Handbook for Chester County, PA ►

**INFRASTRUCTURE**

**Expanded access to natural areas, parks, and trails**

Natural areas, parks, and trails are places that connect people to nature, support economies, and are essential to the public's health and well-being. Expanding access to these places improves conservation and recreation opportunities, further protects the natural environment, and bolsters local economies.



*West Bradford Township's open spaces, recreational facilities, and environmental resources are recognized as a critical quality of life assets for its residents. The township's efforts in expanding access to these resources are guided by its Open Space, Recreation, and Environmental Resource Plan.*

**Example Policies**

- Provide adequate access/parking at trail heads.
- Connect publicly accessible open spaces with bike paths and multi-use trails and pathways.
- Provide opportunities to connect municipal facilities, schools, and other community uses with pedestrian pathways.
- Provide a balance of passive and active recreational areas and facilities.
- Consider incorporating equestrian trails in areas where horseback riding is common.

**MUNICIPAL EXAMPLE**

- Ensure that new developments include trails, sidewalks, and bikeways that connect residents to destinations in West Bradford and regional trail networks where appropriate.

**West Bradford Township Open Space, Recreation, and Environmental Resources Plan Update, 2022; p. 9. ▶**

**Toolbox**

- Greenways ▶
- Universal Design for Public Spaces ▶

**INFRASTRUCTURE**

**Streambank stabilization, reforested riparian corridors, and other methods to protect stream water quality and soil health**

Clean water and productive soils are dependent on natural processes. To maintain the quality of these natural processes policies and land management practices must be in place to protect and enhance riparian buffers, woodlands, and open space.



*The innovative use of native vegetation and planting techniques provides working examples for efforts to enhance streambank stabilization and improve water quality and stream base flows.*

**Example Policies**

- Preserve existing woodlands and promote reforestation where disturbance occurs.
- Enhance riparian buffer requirements, particularly the restoration of any impacted riparian buffer when any new land development is proposed.
- Partner with non-profits and/or governmental entities to ensure property owners have access to information about the benefits of riparian buffer and woodland restoration.

**MUNICIPAL EXAMPLE**

- Adopt the Natural Resource Map as part of the Zoning Ordinance and require all land development projects to include all resources in Subdivision and Land Development Plans.

**East Vincent Township Comprehensive Plan, 2018; p. 29. ▶**

**Toolbox**

- Woodlands Conservation ▶
- Riparian Buffers ▶



## INFRASTRUCTURE

### Very limited public or community sewer and water service to serve cluster development or concentrations of failing on-lot sewage systems; otherwise, on-lot sewage systems and individual wells

The location of a community's water and wastewater infrastructure can affect its future development patterns, natural and agricultural areas, and health of watersheds. Plans, policies, and regulations can direct development to areas based on infrastructure availability and open space preservation goals.



West Caln Township, where Chambers Lake is located, enacted an ordinance in 2021 establishing a sewer management program for individual and community on-lot disposal systems.

#### Example Policies

- Coordinate future development with existing public sewer and water infrastructure so that extension of such infrastructure into rural areas is minimized.
- Encourage the installation of public sewer service to targeted areas that have a concentration of septic system failures.
- Encourage the installation of public water service to targeted areas that have a concentration of substandard well water quality.
- Coordinate land use planning with sewage facilities (Act 537) planning.

#### MUNICIPAL EXAMPLE

- Strongly encourage the sustainable use of on-lot water and wastewater disposal systems with any change in land use.

London Britain Comprehensive Plan, 2019; p. 53. ▶

## INFRASTRUCTURE

### Broadband access and modern communications infrastructure

Reliable and affordable high-speed internet improves quality of life, such as access to telemedicine service and education opportunities. Reliable communication connections are also vital to the prosperity of rural industries, such as agriculture.



Modern information and communications technology, including 5G, can enable multiple services that were previously lacking in Rural landscapes.

#### Example Policies

- Promote digital infrastructure that provides broadband data communications to residents.
- Simplify and shorten the process for obtaining necessary permits for communication facilities while protecting the visual character of the community.
- Support the expansion and development of sophisticated communication facilities and networks required by businesses that use advanced technology.
- Establish provisions to place cables and wires underground, wherever feasible.

#### MUNICIPAL EXAMPLE

- Support the provision of communication infrastructure that meets residential, business, and institutional needs in a manner that protects residents' interests.

South Coventry Township Comprehensive Plan Update, 2016; p. 2-4. ▶

#### Toolbox

Cellular Communications Facilities ▶





# Design Elements

Guidelines for the treatment of development and related features based on well-established patterns of building and quality design

**BUILDING CHARACTER**

**SITE AMENITIES**

**TRANSPORTATION**

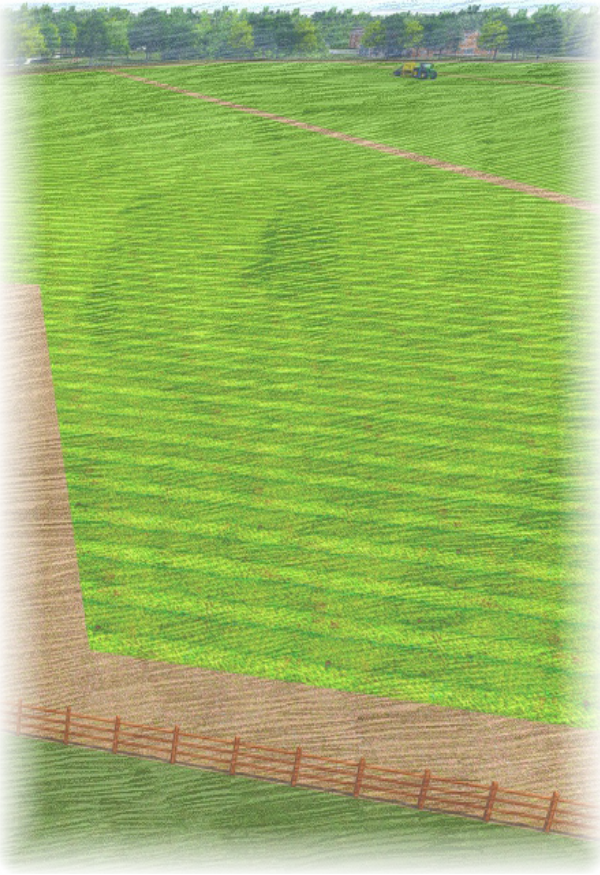
■ **Clustered residential development screened by open space**

■ **Retention and reuse of existing historic buildings, hedgerows, tree lines, stone walls, and fences**



# BUILDING CHARACTER

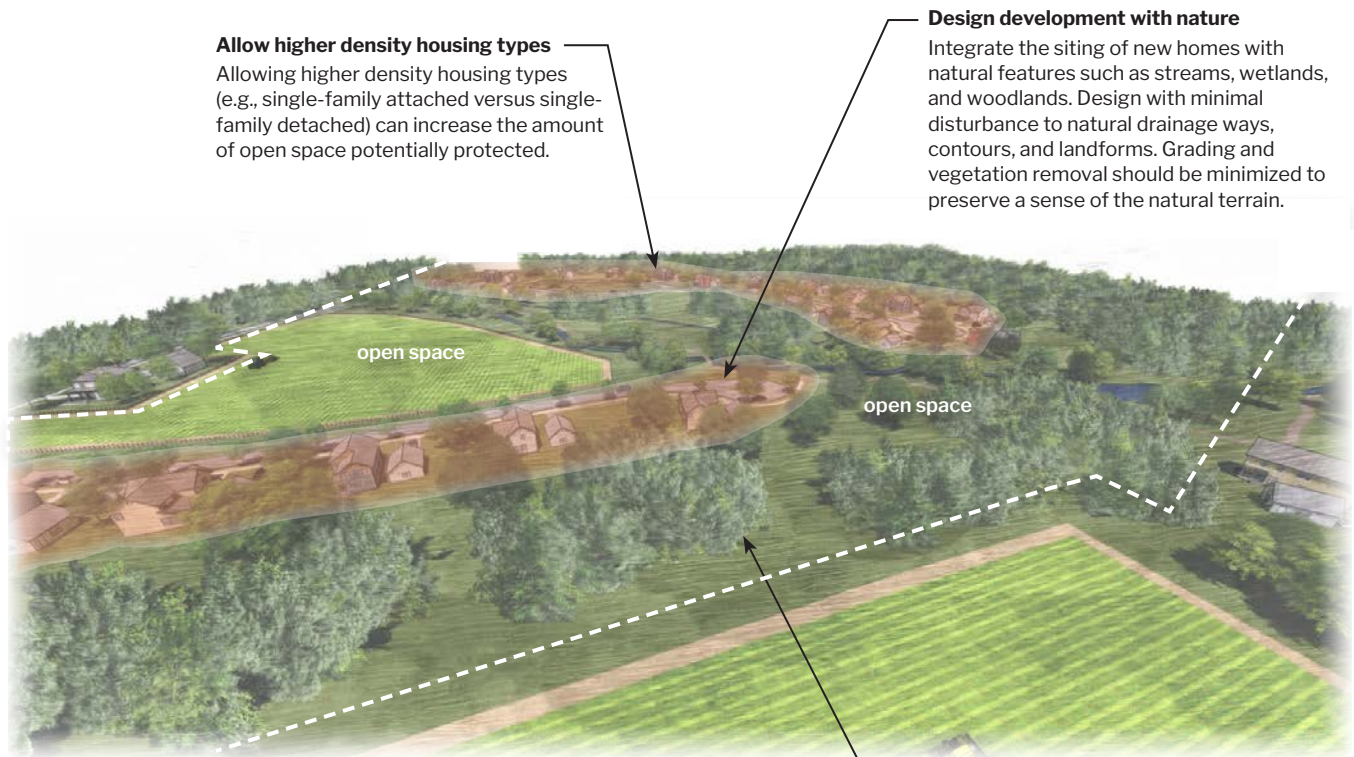
Architecture should respect and respond to the environment and local built heritage. This section provides guidance on how the design of new buildings should relate to their surrounding context and contribute to rural characteristics.



**BUILDING CHARACTER**

**Clustered residential development screened by open space, woodlands and natural land form**

Clustered development is an effective method of protecting natural habitat and the scenic quality of Rural landscapes. The design approach concentrates development in one particular area or in groupings so over 50 percent of the site is protected from development. Ideally, clustering should occur in visually inconspicuous locations, such as where buildings, roads, and parking might be screened by existing vegetation or topography. The screening of residential development by open space, woodlands, and land form can enhance scenic views or screen unwanted views.



**Cluster Design**

To provide for single-family attached housing in a cluster design enabling the protection of significant natural features, including but not limited to the stream valley of an exceptional value stream, at least 75 percent of the gross tract area shall be preserved as open space.

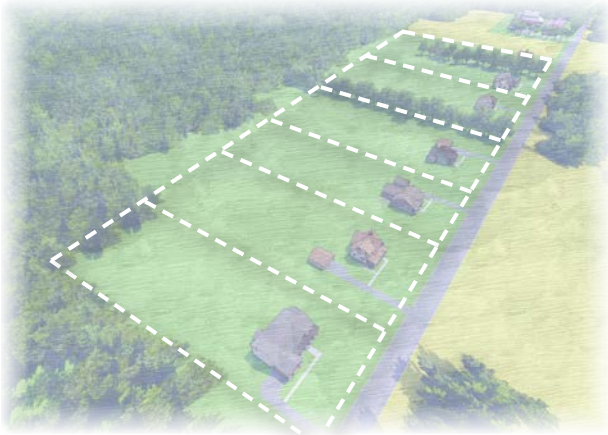
West Bradford Township, Zoning Ordinance, Section 450-37, E. ►

**Toolbox**

Cluster Development ►

Conservation Subdivision Guide ►

⊘ NOT RECOMMENDED



**Avoid roadside sprawl**

A conventional subdivision with lots along road frontage disrupts views of open space and woodland with houses and driveways. When subdividing lots with long stretches of roadside frontage, tuck building sites into woodlands or hedgerows to maintain rural corridor characteristics. Locating homes back from the road with individual or shared driveways also creates more private lots.

✓ RECOMMENDED



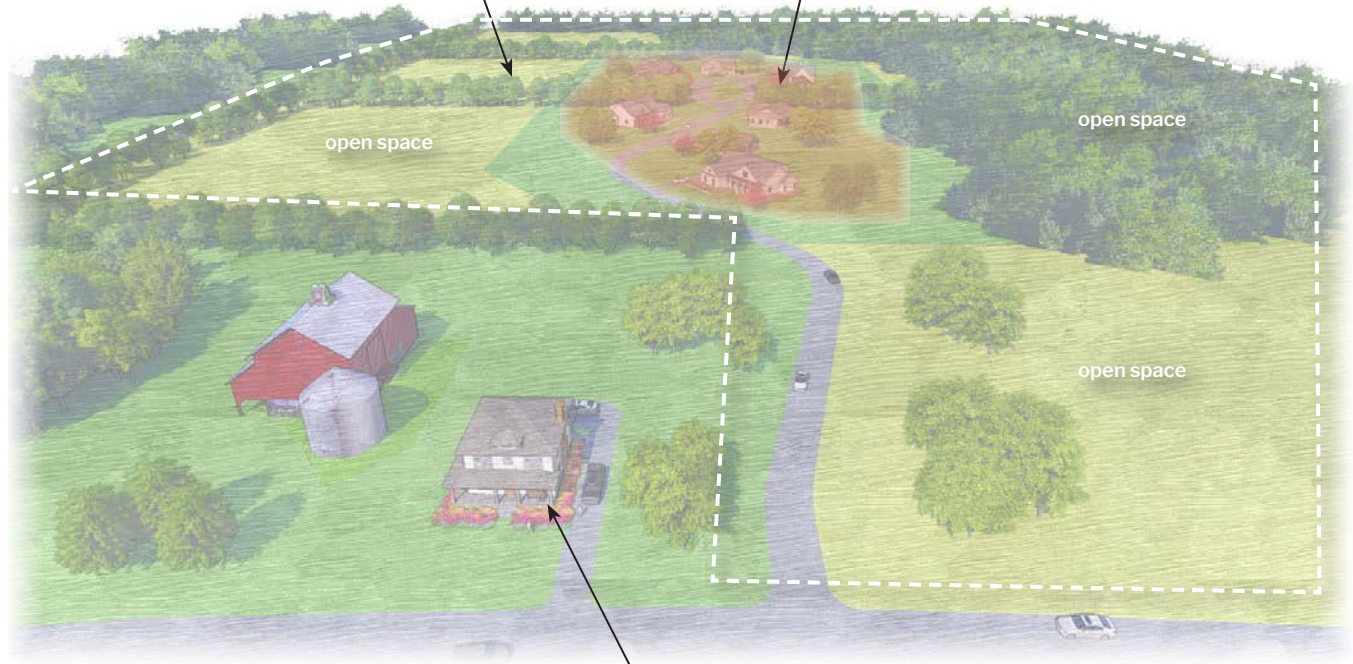
**BUILDING CHARACTER**

**Retention and reuse of existing historic buildings, hedgerows, tree lines, stone walls, and fences**

Historic buildings, structures, and site features are heritage assets that make a significant contribution to the local character and economies of Rural landscapes. Existing hedgerows, tree lines, stone walls, and fences are traditional features that define space in a natural way and create corridors useful for wildlife. Designing around existing historic buildings and site features minimizes their loss and contributes to the distinctiveness and sense of place of new development.

**Use traditional site features as boundaries**  
Save hedgerows, tree lines, and stonewalls and, if appropriate, use them as property lines as long as setback requirements do not result in new buildings in the middle of fields.

**Tuck development into existing features**  
Cluster new homes close together near existing trees and shrubs and at the edges of fields and wooded areas to maintain the sense of openness.



**Retain historic farmhouses and structures**  
Historic farms that are subdivided should retain existing farmhouses and barns on a privately-owned estate lot. Allowing developers to count a portion of the privately owned land toward the overall open space requirement provides an incentive to preserve existing structures.

**Open Space Configuration**

Maximize the conservation of site features identified as having particular environmental, historical, or recreational value, including: steep slopes, floodplains, watercourses, wetlands, mature trees or specimen vegetation, areas included in the Pennsylvania Natural Diversity Inventory, woodlands, hedgerows, historic sites or structures, and other noted landscape features as identified in the Comprehensive Plan, Open Space, Recreation, and Environmental Resources Plan, and other relevant studies.

Sample Ordinance Language for Conservation Subdivisions, Section 6.2.1., Chester County Planning Commission ▶



**Reduce the prominence of buildings**

Site buildings so that they do not protrude above treetops and crest lines of hills as seen from public places and roads. Use vegetation as a backdrop to reduce the prominence of the structure.

⊘ NOT RECOMMENDED



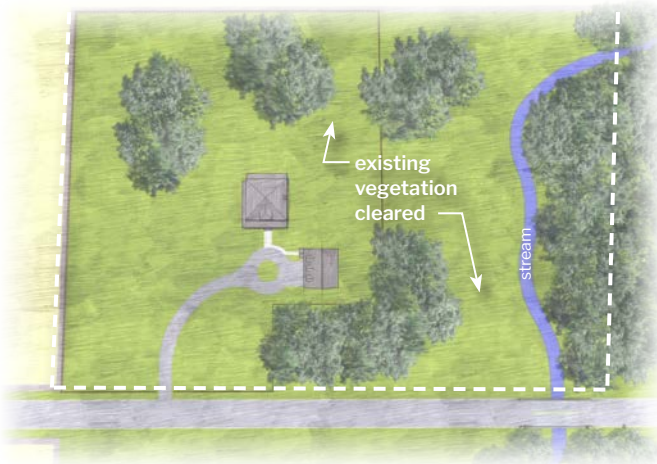
✓ RECOMMENDED



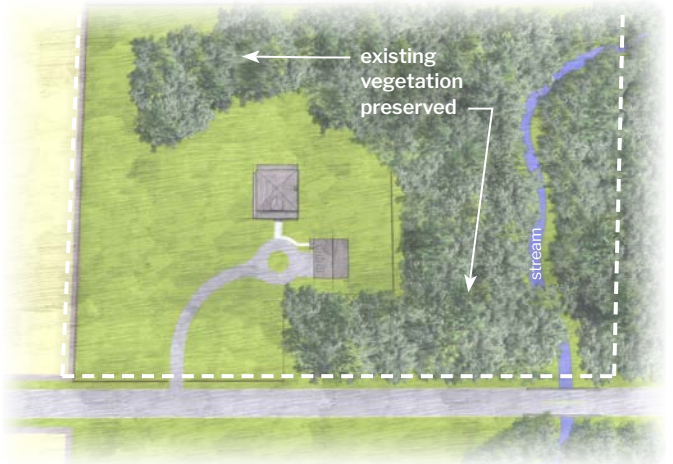
**Minimize clearing of vegetation**

Clear only as much vegetation as necessary to create a driveway entrance with adequate sight distance. Use curves in the driveway to increase the screening of new buildings. Open up views by selectively cutting small trees and lower branches of large trees, rather than by clearing large areas or removing mature trees.

⊘ NOT RECOMMENDED

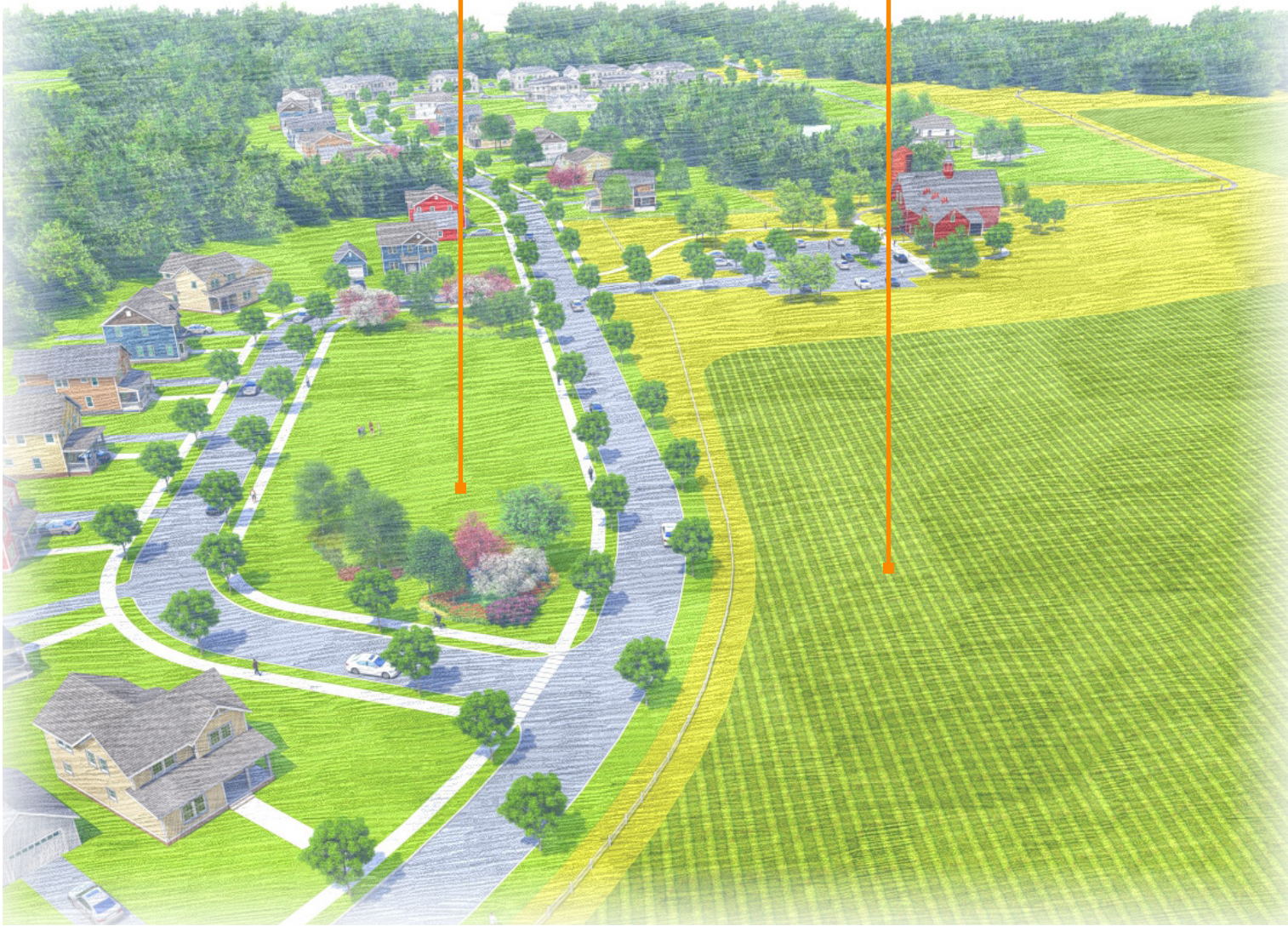


✓ RECOMMENDED



**In larger developments, usable open space with recreational amenities**

**Large areas of open space with stream valleys, woodlands, wetlands, steep slopes, viewsheds, historic landscapes, and agriculture**



## SITE AMENITIES

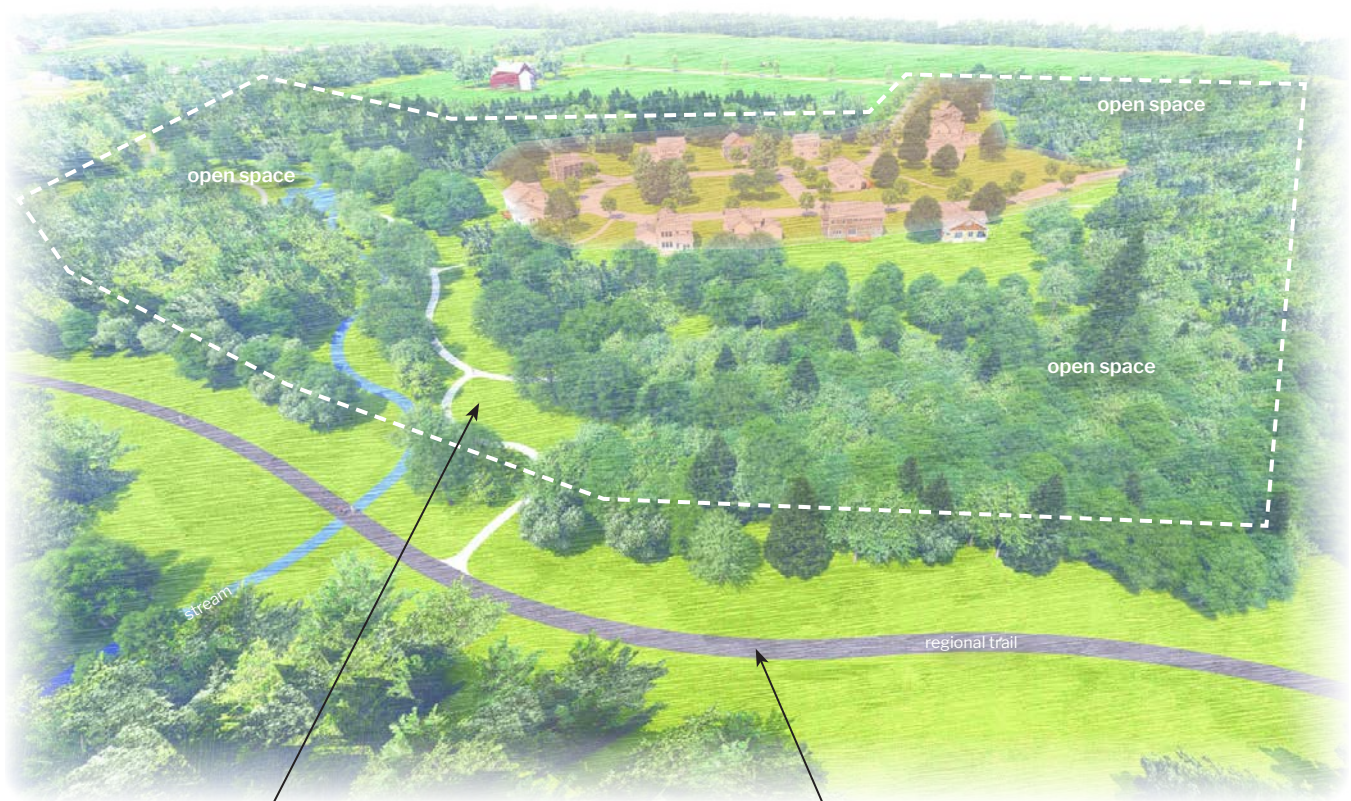
Site amenities enable social interaction, create inviting, equitable, and accessible public spaces, and promote environmental sustainability. This section provides guidance on the site amenities that add to the function and vitality of the human environment.



**SITE AMENITIES**

**Large areas of open space with stream valleys, woodlands, wetlands, steep slopes, viewsheds, historic landscapes, agriculture**

Large areas of open space that are contiguous and account for at least a majority of the land on a development site can help protect sensitive natural features and the integrity of scenic, historic, and cultural resources in the Rural landscape. Designing large areas of open space so they provide interconnections with open space on adjacent tracts helps expand community greenways. Open space positioned strategically can also provide a visual link to the natural environment and become a value added focal point. A range of uses may occur in the large open spaces, such as passive and active recreation, farming, stormwater management, and community sewer systems.



**Design for accessibility**

Greenway land should be directly accessible to the largest practicable number of lots within the development to provide direct views and safe and convenient pedestrian access.

**Seek shared open space areas**

When creating development plans, look for opportunities to maximize open space size by creating shared open areas with adjacent properties.

**Minimum greenway land**

Parcels shall be designed with at least 50% of their gross lot area as permanent greenway: No less than 25% of the greenway land shall be in the form of squares, commons, greens, or low- to medium-intensity recreation areas. Any such land that is privately owned (either individually, jointly or by an organization) shall be permanently protected through conservation easements. The required greenway land shall be located and designed to add to the visual amenities of the village and to the surrounding area, by maximizing the visibility of internal greenway land as terminal vistas at the ends of streets or along the outside edges of street curves and by maximizing the visibility of external greenway land as perimeter greenway land. Perimeter greenway land shall be designated to provide buffers and to protect scenic views as seen from existing roadways and from public parks.

West Vincent Township, Zoning Ordinance, Section 390-60, A-D. ▶

⊘ NOT RECOMMENDED



✓ RECOMMENDED



**Preserve views of open space from roads**

Ensure rural roads are not suburbanized by new housing developments by preserving significant depth of open space along the road frontage. A foreground meadow, as shown below, offers a way to avoid a ribbon of homes along rural roads. This response prevents rear elevations from backing up to rural roads, which can be unsightly and reduce the privacy of residents.

## SITE AMENITIES

## In larger developments, usable open space with recreational amenities

Usable common open spaces are areas set aside for play, recreation, and/or community facilities. These areas, when conveniently accessible, encourage healthy activities for residents of a development. Amenities in usable open space may include community centers, trails, gazebos, picnic tables, benches, playground equipment, play courts, and natural and/or man-made water features.



### A. Centralize usable open space

Provide central open space in residential developments to give residents visual and physical access to open space close to their homes.

### B. Generously landscape

Landscape usable space areas with a variety of trees and shrubs to make them more inviting for residents.

### C. Front open space with building facades

Single-loaded residential streets with fronting buildings provides visual supervision to open space

### D. Encourage flexibility in uses of athletic fields

Encourage field designs and configurations that can accommodate multiple sports rather than one sport alone.

### E. Create pedestrian trails

Ensure easy pedestrian access to amenities and allow for future connections to other areas.

### F. Include informal and formal program elements

Include informal and formal playgrounds, seating areas, hardscape elements, public art, and unstructured green space.

### Minimum open space for recreation

At least 10% of the minimum required open space area, but not less than one acre, shall be usable for active recreational uses, such as play fields, and shall have a finished grade of less than 5% slope.

Franklin Township, Zoning Ordinance, Section 27-1611, 6, B, 11. ►



#### **Position greenspace in visually prominent locations**

Most lots should face some type of open space. In addition, terminal vistas of open space should be incorporated into land development plans whenever possible. Ideally, terminal vistas should occur at the ends of streets where they "T" into another street. The open space can take the form of a neighborhood green, park, or natural feature, such as a meadow or stand of trees.

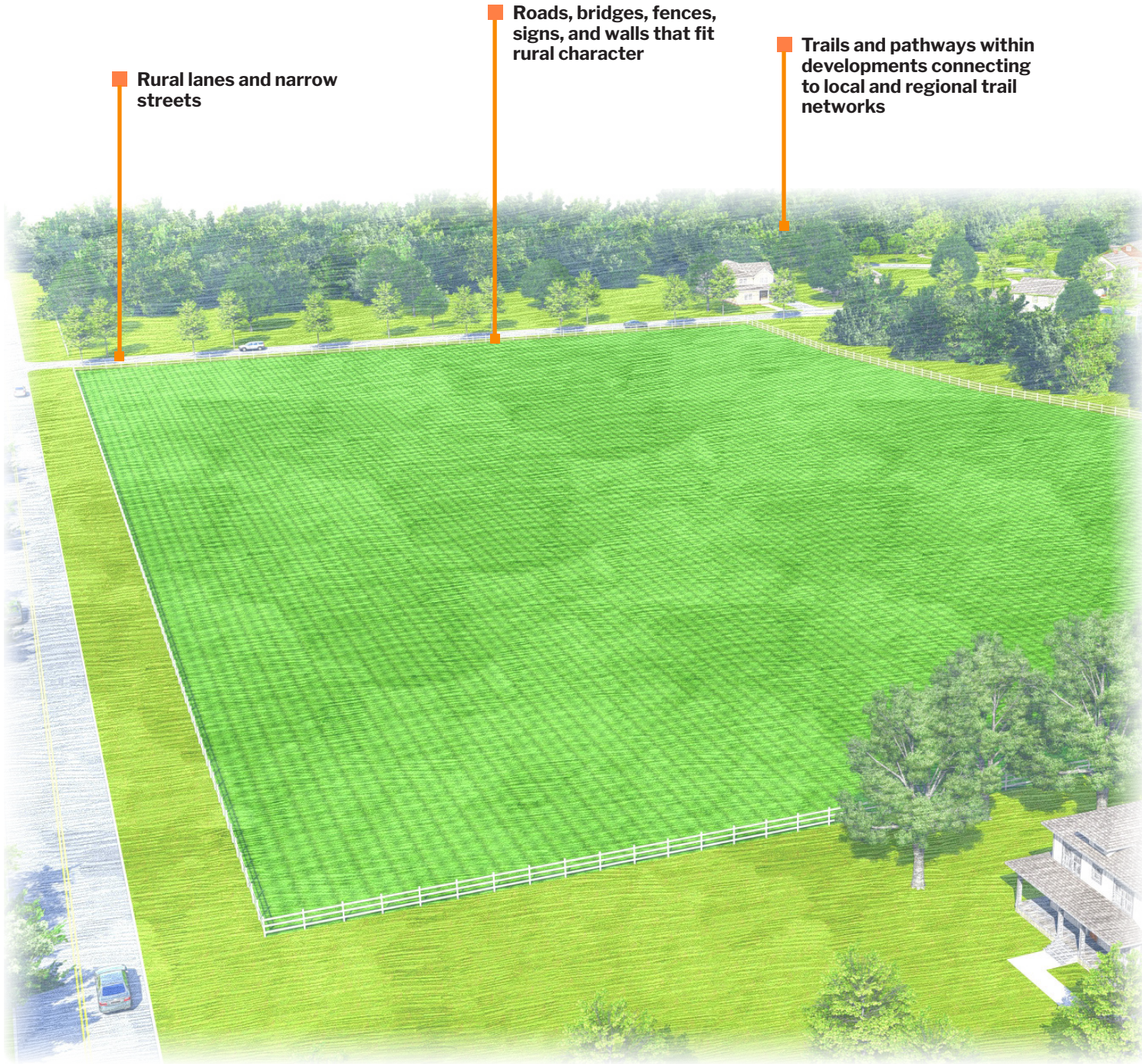
#### **Usable common open space**

Areas designated as common open space shall be configured so as to provide a place that could be utilized by people in the form of a small park, green, garden, or other civic amenity.

Franklin Township, Zoning Ordinance, Section 27-1611, 6, A, 1, d. ►

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**Toolbox**  
Parkland Dedication and Fee-In-Lieu Ordinances ►



Rural lanes and narrow streets

Roads, bridges, fences, signs, and walls that fit rural character

Trails and pathways within developments connecting to local and regional trail networks



# TRANSPORTATION

A safe, comfortable, and efficient transportation network incorporates design that reinforces walkability, enhances connectivity, and improves the quality of life for users. This section provides guidance on the design of elements supporting pedestrian safety and multimodal accessibility.



TRANSPORTATION

# Rural lanes and narrow streets

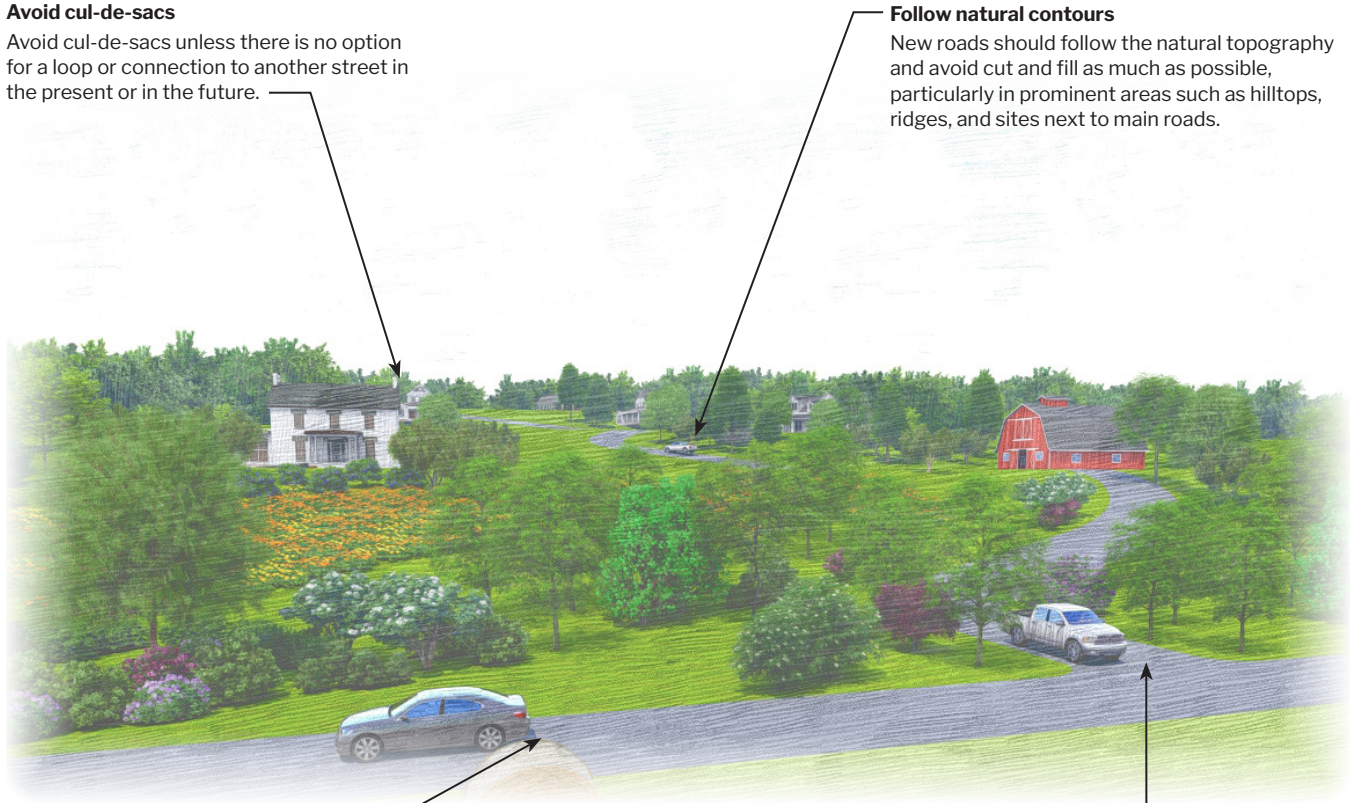
In the Rural landscape, driveway lanes and streets internal to subdivisions have rural character when they are narrow, follow the natural topography of the land, and drain to open swales. Long, straight, and wide streets with raised curbs do not fit rural character and can promote excessive speeds.

**Avoid cul-de-sacs**

Avoid cul-de-sacs unless there is no option for a loop or connection to another street in the present or in the future.

**Follow natural contours**

New roads should follow the natural topography and avoid cut and fill as much as possible, particularly in prominent areas such as hilltops, ridges, and sites next to main roads.



**Reuse farm roads and rural lanes**

Where feasible, reuse farm roads and rural lanes instead of disrupting the landscape with new driveways and streets. These travel routes are attractive resources that are often lined with trees and align naturally over existing topography.

**Design narrow roads for residential developments**

Narrow road widths and uncurbed road edges maintains the character of the Rural landscape. In addition, narrow roads are less costly to build and maintain and minimize stormwater runoff.

**General street standards**

Proposed street improvements shall also be designed to minimize negative impacts on the township's natural, historic, and scenic resources consistent with its adopted Open Space, Recreation, and Environmental Resources Plan, or other community values consistent with its adopted Comprehensive Plan, while also providing reasonable roadway widths, grades, sight distances, adequate drainage, and usable lots.

East Vincent Township, Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance, Section 22-405, 2. ▶

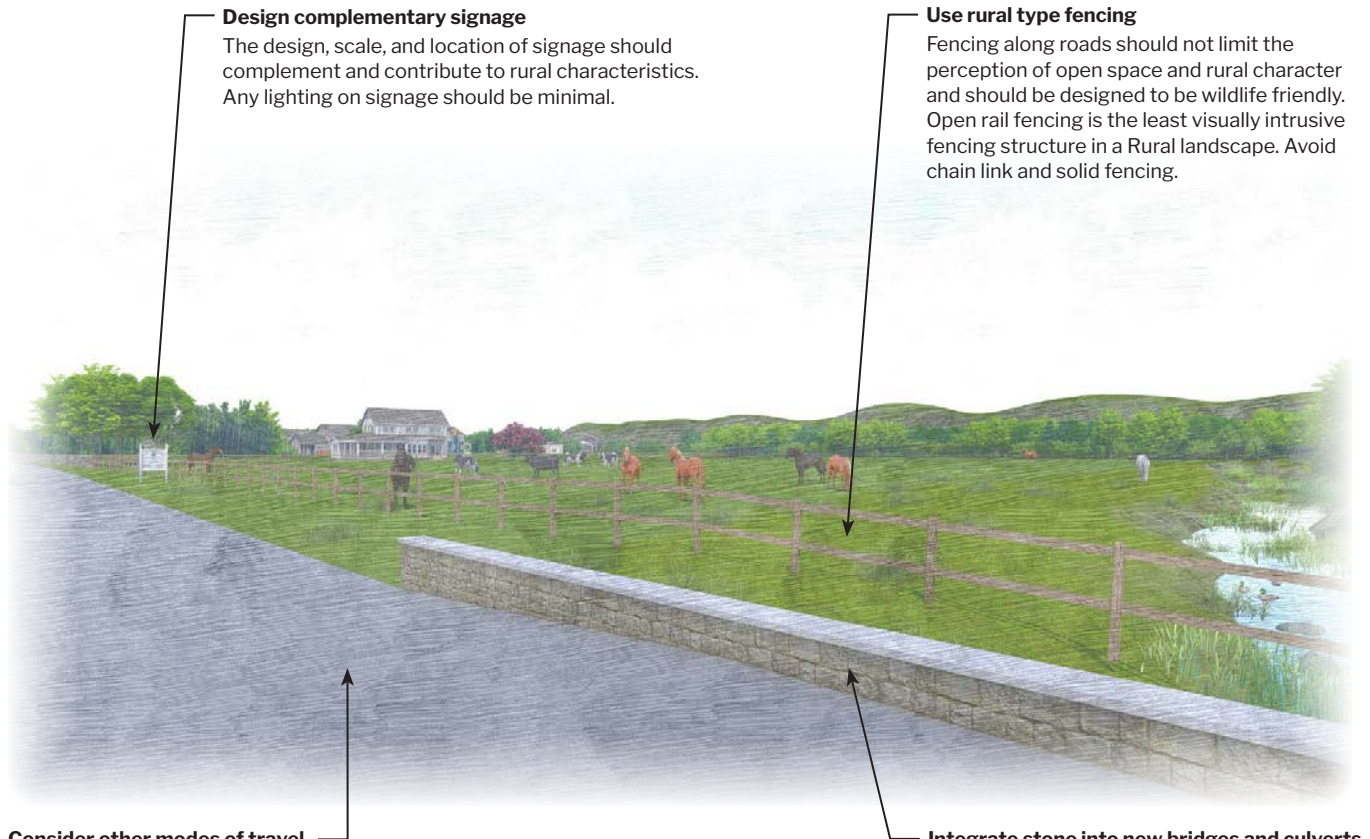
**Toolbox**

- Chester County Transportation Policies ▶
- Complete Streets Policy ▶
- Multimodal Circulation Handbook for Chester County, PA ▶

## TRANSPORTATION

## Roads, bridges, fences, signs, and walls that fit rural character

Man made features within and visible from the public right-of-way are minimized in the Rural landscape which maintains open space characteristics and scenic value. Roads in the Rural landscape are mostly two lanes and have frequent bends and a shoulder or swale without curbs or sidewalks. Low walls, fences, or a natural, irregular pattern of trees and shrubs typically front the edges of roadway corridors. Signage is not distracting or overwhelming to the use.



### Design complementary signage

The design, scale, and location of signage should complement and contribute to rural characteristics. Any lighting on signage should be minimal.

### Use rural type fencing

Fencing along roads should not limit the perception of open space and rural character and should be designed to be wildlife friendly. Open rail fencing is the least visually intrusive fencing structure in a Rural landscape. Avoid chain link and solid fencing.

### Consider other modes of travel

Road design should take into consideration pedestrian, bicycle, freight, farm equipment, and horse and buggies. Travel lane widths should be sized appropriately on designated truck routes and where farm equipment is expected frequently.

### Integrate stone into new bridges and culverts

Natural stone was used as a primary building material for bridges and culverts up until the early twentieth century and the character of these features reflects the heritage of the county. The design of new bridges and culverts should integrate stone in the structures to blend in with the Rural landscape.

### Scenic protection standards

Improvements such as buildings, structures, parking areas, and loading areas shall be located to minimize the impact on scenic views, minimize the disturbance of desirable natural vegetation, and maintain open views.

Highland Township, Zoning Ordinance, Section 401.2.A.3. ►

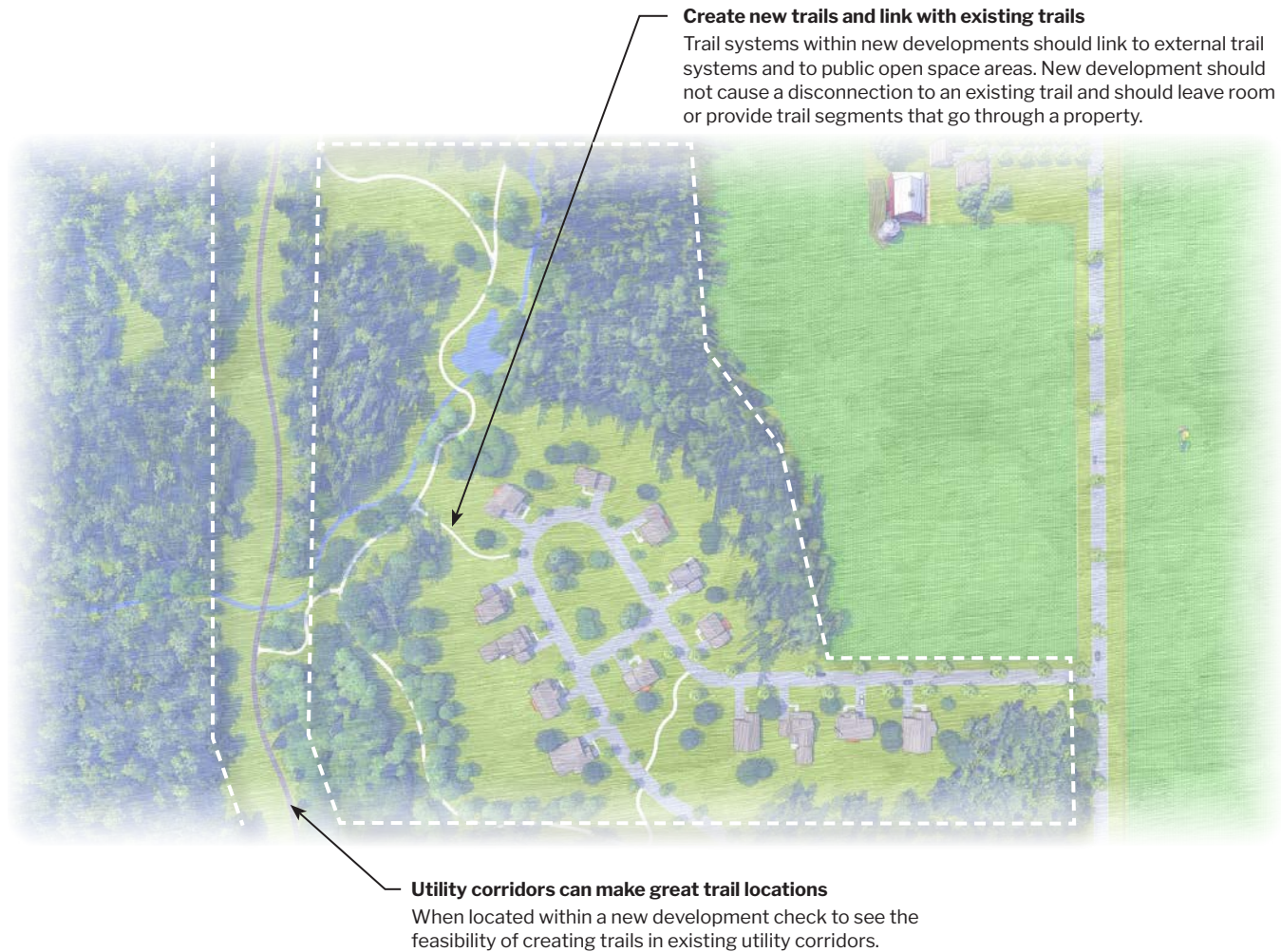
### Toolbox

Chester County Multimodal Handbook ►

TRANSPORTATION

# Trails and pathways within developments connecting to local and regional trail networks

Trails and pathways provide public health, economic, environmental, and transportation benefits. Trails and pathways encourage physical activity for people of all ages, create attractive communities, help protect water and wildlife corridors, and provide a transportation option. Connecting new development to local and regional trail systems supports the county's multimodal transportation network and improves access to natural areas and parks.



### Creation of new trails and trail links

Where the tract proposed for subdivision or land development does not contain an existing trail, new local/collector and, as applicable, multi-use arterial trails shall be created that enable pedestrian, bicycle, and/or equestrian connections to existing or potential trail corridors off the site and provide internal circulation and/or recreation opportunities. Trail routes and functions shall be established in consultation with the township Parks and Recreation Board, shall be consistent with trail locations designated in the township's Comprehensive Trail System Map, and shall be coordinated with trails, or recorded plans for trails, on adjacent tracts.

East Vincent Township, Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance, Section 22-434, 3, A. ▶

- ▶ **Toolbox**
- ▶ Greenways ▶
- ▶ Official Map ▶



#### Design for multimodal uses

Multimodal trails allow for walkers and bicyclists, and even equestrians where appropriate.

#### Promote a pedestrian-friendly environment

Create pedestrian gathering areas with shade trees, plantings, and benches on public or private land.

#### Use appropriate trail surfaces

Crushed aggregate or packed gravel surfaces are appropriate in Rural landscapes. Asphalt surfaces are appropriate in more populated areas.

### Trail design criteria

Thoughtful and imaginative design of trails and their relationship to the arrangement and shape of lots and open space areas is required. Trails shall be logically related to environmental features so as to minimize disturbance to such features while permitting observation of such features. Trails shall be curvilinear in design, constructed on reasonable grades, and have proper drainage. Use of existing or new landscaping, berming, and fencing to provide future lot owners adjoining proposed trails with privacy, or to prevent trespass, may also be required by the Board of Supervisors.

East Vincent Township, Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance, Section 22-434, 3, D. ►

#### Toolbox

Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities: Design ►

Chester County Multimodal Handbook ►

**Adaptive Reuse**

The process of repurposing existing buildings for viable new uses and modern day functions, rather than demolishing them. Reuse allows for a building's continued use and helps it remain a viable community asset. For more information: [Chesco Planning, Adaptive Reuse](#) ►

**Complete Streets**

A transportation approach where the design enables safe access for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit riders of all ages and abilities. For more information: [National Complete Streets Coalition](#) ►

**Growth Area, Designated Growth Area**

A region described in a comprehensive plan that includes and surrounds a city, borough or village, and within which: residential and mixed use development is permitted or planned for at densities of one unit to the acre or more; commercial, industrial, and institutional uses are permitted or planned for; and public infrastructure services are provided or planned. In *Landscapes3*, this area is comprised of the Urban Center, Suburban Center, Suburban, and Rural Center landscapes. For more information: [Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code](#) ►

**Multimodal**

Involving several modes of transportation, including vehicular, pedestrian, bicyclist, public transit, and ride hailing services. For more information: [Chesco Planning, Transportation Planning](#) ►

**Multi-use Trail**

Facilities commonly used by bicyclists, pedestrians, and other non-motorized modes of travel such as equestrians, cross country skiers, rollerbladers, baby strollers, and those utilizing wheelchairs. Multi-use trails are primarily found within state parks, county or municipal parks, or as regional trails such as Chester County's Chester Valley and Struble Trails. For more information: [Chesco Planning, Transportation Planning](#) ►

**Smart Growth**

An approach to development that encourages a mix of building types and uses, diverse housing and transportation options, development within existing neighborhoods, and community engagement. For more information: [Smart Growth America](#) ►

**Universal Design**

Process and associated features that remove barriers to access and seek to create buildings and public spaces that are inherently accessible to all people, including the elderly and people with disabilities. For more information: [Government Services Administration](#) ►

**Walkability**

A measure of how friendly a place or area is to walking. Walkability is an important concept in sustainable urban design. For more information: [Smart Growth America](#) ►

**Essential Smart Growth Fixes  
for Rural Planning, Zoning, and Development Codes**

Nelson, Kevin. 2012. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

**Growing Greener: Putting Conservation into Local Plans and Ordinances**

Arendt, Randall. 1999. Washington, D.C., Island Press.

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Historic Preservation Planning Manual for Chester County Communities**

Chester County Planning Commission. 1998.

**The Roadscape Guide: Tools to Preserve Scenic Road Corridors**

Champlain Valley Greenbelt Alliance. 2006.

**Rural By Design: A Handbook for Maintaining Small Town Character**

Arendt, Randall et al 1994. Chicago: Planners' Press, American Planning Association.



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**Chester County Board  
of Commissioners**

Josh Maxwell  
Marian Moskowitz  
Eric Roe

