

CHAPTER K

LAND USE AND HOUSING PLAN

1. Introduction

The land use and housing plan can be defined as a graphic document that is used to implement the township's policies for physical development during the next several decades. The creation of this plan is based on the analysis of existing conditions and statement of objectives presented in the previous sections of this report. These background studies revealed that Lower Merion has a unique selection of single family and multi-family housing types for a wide range of income groups, and that the community has reached a stabilizing point in its growth cycle. Future population increases are expected to be minimal, while the proportion of elderly residents in the community will continue to expand. Therefore, the focus of planning efforts in the area of housing is best directed towards programs that retain the usefulness of residential dwellings, and prevent deterioration of the housing stock. Rehabilitation of housing where necessary is a feature that should be a cornerstone of the housing plan so that an increased housing supply can be provided for low and moderate income families as well as for senior citizens.

Another major situation facing the township is that the central business districts of Ardmore and Bryn Mawr are not compact and are congested with traffic at certain times. These areas, as well as the other shopping areas along Montgomery Avenue, need to be enhanced through public action and private cooperation.

To help find solutions to these problems, and to provide for the future quality of life in the township, the following plans have been formulated as guidelines. Their main emphasis is to preserve the high quality of living already prevailing in the township, while expanding opportunities for the elderly and for low income families. The plan shows what could be accomplished under ideal circumstances, rather than mandating specific actions.

2. Housing Densities

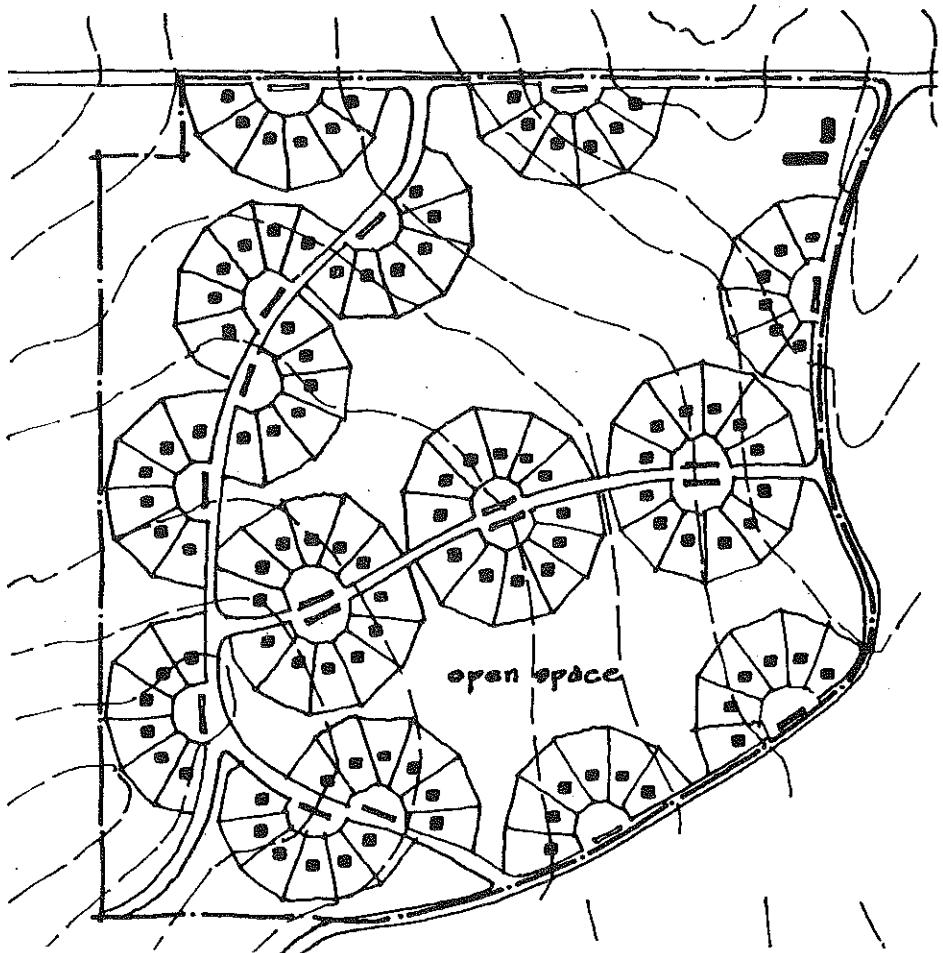
In the existing land use report the present residential zoning densities of the township were identified. For convenience these zones were grouped into the following four density categories: low, medium, medium high, and high. The exact zones and densities which are permitted by the zoning ordinance are as follows:

<u>Category</u>	<u>Zone</u>	<u>Density/Acre</u>
Low	RAA	0.4
	RA	0.8
Medium	R1	1.2
	R2	2.0
Medium High	R3	3.7
	R4	6.1
High	R5	7.4
	R6	12.3
	R6A	14.8
	R7	14.8

Single family homes are permitted in all zones, and two family detached and single family semi-detached units are allowed in the last three zones. Two family semi-detached houses and apartments are permitted in the R-6A and R7 zones. Townhouses are permitted in the last four zones.

As noted previously these uses and densities are extensive and diverse. However, all of the housing densities are set at levels that utilize all of the land in a given development tract, so that open space areas can not be created. In order to remedy this situation, it is recommended that consideration be given to utilizing the cluster development concept, which is now permitted only in the Planned Residential Development District. This technique permits the same number of houses to be built on smaller lots, thus creating green belt or open space areas. The advantage is that cluster development reduces lot and housing costs while creating an attractive setting for the residents. The following picture illustrates the cluster design principle for single family homes.

CLUSTER DEVELOPMENT



The provisions for cluster design could be written into the township's zoning ordinance in such a way that it would be put into effect only if an applicant requested it. The feasibility of cluster design is dependent on market forces prevailing at the time. It would be an option that would foster better land use planning and design, but the option should be permitted only where community water and sewer systems are available.

Since the cluster provision option is designed for large lot developments, it should be allowed only in the following single family zoning districts; RAA, RA, R-1, and R-2. In each of these districts the same number of homes would still be built on any given tract of land, except that individual lot sizes might be reduced to perhaps 10,000 square feet each. In order for this concept to generate workable amounts of open space it would be necessary to establish a minimum tract size of eight acres per development. This is based on the mathematical relationship between minimum lot size and overall project sizes, and should not be interpreted as a policy to develop all the small parcels of land remaining in the township.

3. General Land Use and Housing Patterns

The Land Use and Housing Map illustrates the basic land patterns recommended for the township. This map can be compared to the General Residential Zoning Pattern Map in the existing land use report to identify the modifications in land use that are being recommended.

A. Low Density

The low density category is being maintained throughout the Gladwyne area in the northern part of the township. However, a few major tracts have been shifted to higher density categories as discussed below. The low density category would consist of the present RAA and RA zones so that single family lots would continue to predominate here. This area is now unsewered, and the possibility of constructing sewers rests with authorities other than the township. The township should not become involved in providing sewerage systems, nor should it encourage such systems where the cost per lot would be prohibitive, or where increased densities would be necessary to obtain a larger user base. If the regional sewerage authorities make sewerage systems available in selected portions of Gladwyne, then it would be possible to implement the cluster concept discussed above.

B. Medium Density

The medium density zones consist of single family uses allowed on 30,000 and 18,000 square foot lots. The medium zone covers a significant portion of the township located north of Montgomery Avenue, from Belmont Hills to the Upper Merion Township line. Several existing pockets of medium density land are recommended for conversion to the low density category. These occur in the vicinity of Conshohocken State Road and Spring Mill Road. These three small tracts conflict with the basic densities in the area, and should be revised to low densities to preserve the integrity of the land use patterns in this corner of the township.

All other medium density areas in the township would remain in their present categories, even if the cluster concept were implemented.

C. Medium High Density

The medium high density category consists of the R3, R4 and R5 zones, which allow single family units on lot sizes of 10,000, 6,000, and 5,000 square feet respectively. As the land use map indicates, most of the southern portion of the township is designated for this category.

Throughout this medium high density category there are few major undeveloped tracts of land, and therefore there are no recommendations for large scale modifications except for those noted under the medium density classification.

D. High Density

The high density zone permits single family units on 5,000 square foot lots, townhouses, and apartment houses. The locations of most of the tracts which contain just apartment buildings or townhouses are along Montgomery Avenue. Additional locations for these types of units are on Wynnewood Road, on Hagy's Ford Road and along portions of Lancaster Avenue and City Line Avenue. The two high density zones which contain mostly single family homes comprise the communities of Belmont Hills and South Ardmore.

Specific vacant sites available for multi-family projects are explained in section 4.

E. Commercial

The last category identified on the land use map is commercial, which includes all four categories now found in the zoning ordinance. The commercial locations contain most of the existing areas zoned or used for commercial purposes, with the exception of the Bala Cynwyd Center on St. Asaphs Road. The area between Belmont Avenue and Monument Road now contains a commercial zone and several single family zones. It is proposed that the entire area be zoned commercial so that all future uses within the site are compatible. All other commercial zones in the township should remain in that category, including those areas too small to show on the map, such as the village of Gladwyne.

4. Multi-Family Housing

The housing analysis indicated that the total number of existing dwelling units is apportioned two-thirds single family homes and one-third multi-family units. Clearly the township's

past development and regulation policies have permitted a variety of housing types to be built at a wide range of densities. These development policies need to be continued so that additional multi-family units can be built to meet the needs of all segments of the population, such as senior citizens, singles, couples, families, and unrelated individuals.

Therefore an effort has been made to identify appropriately located vacant tracts of land that might be used for multi-family projects. Seven sites have been located, and seven of these sites already have the proper zoning to implement these recommendations. Almost all of the sites are also located near commercial and other service facilities, and more than half of the sites are within walking distance of shopping areas. The development of these projects would enhance the opportunities for providing the type of housing needed in the future.

Site A is a vacant tract at the corner of Cynwyd Road and Montgomery Avenue. The site is presently zoned R7, which would permit the construction of a small apartment complex. A residential use for this property is appropriate because most of the neighborhood is apartments, and it is within walking distance of the train station and shopping facilities.

Site B is near the intersection of Bala Avenue and City Line Avenue and consists of several properties on both sides of Bala Avenue. There are several old houses on these sites which could be removed for new apartment developments. The location is ideal, because it is near both public transportation and shopping.

Site C is along Montgomery Avenue by Bryn Mawr Avenue in Bala Cynwyd. This vacant tract of land is zoned for high rise apartments and townhouses. It is also within walking distance of the train station.

Site D is adjacent to the Wynnewood railroad station between N. Wynnewood Road and Penn Road. There is already an existing apartment complex on part of the site. The remainder of the site along the railroad might be developed in the same manner.

Site E is on Montgomery Avenue near School House Lane and the Lower Merion High School. With the removal of an old single family dwelling, a site could be created for a small apartment project. It is also within walking distance of the Ardmore shopping complex and public transportation.

Site F is on Montgomery Avenue next to Fishers Road, and would extend apartment uses already existing on the adjacent tract.

Site G contains an old house, near Roberts Road on Montgomery Avenue. The parcel would be better utilized for apartments consistent with those developed on both sides of the street.

The present zoning and the potential number of units that could be accommodated on all eight sites under multi-family zoning is as follows:

<u>Site</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Present Zoning</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>No. of Units</u>
A	Cynwyd Rd.-Montgomery Ave.	R-7	1.2	17
B	Bala Ave.-City Line Ave.	R-6A	3.0	44
C	Montgomery Ave.-Bryn Mawr Ave.	R-7	1.3	19
D	Penn Rd.-Wynnewood RR Station	R-7	14.0	207
E	Montgomery Ave.-School House Lane	R-7	1.0	14
F	Montgomery Ave.-Fishers Road	R-7	0.6	8
G	Montgomery Ave.-Roberts Road	R-7	1.5	22
Total				331

5. Housing Rehabilitation and Maintenance

The need to maintain the quality of existing housing and to provide housing opportunities for low-moderate income families and senior citizens is one of the goals of the housing plan. The recommendations to provide sites for new multi-family housing will help implement this objective. The second major method of providing this type of housing is through rehabilitation of the present housing inventory. This will provide housing units that should be less expensive than new construction, and consequently major township efforts should be directed to rehabilitation.

There are two areas in the township where housing rehabilitation programs should be implemented on a large neighborhood-wide scale. However, these efforts can also be used on a house by house basis for any other section of the township. The first area for consideration is Bryn Mawr, which includes a proposed urban center and the medium-high density neighborhoods located to the west and south. The second area includes the Ardmore urban center and the South Ardmore community, which is now zoned for high density residential uses. Both of these areas are within walking distances of a full range of retail and supporting community facilities.

At the present time the township is using federal funds for loans and grants to rehabilitate houses, and the county is also using federal funds to subsidize housing rental payments for qualified families. This approach is the keystone to the housing preservation program in the township, and it is strongly recommended that continued support be given to these efforts. Individual unit surveys should be accomplished in target neighborhoods, and units that could be rehabilitated could then be ranked according to priority of need. This could be followed with basic cost estimates so that budgets could be developed covering several years. By identifying the quantity of housing and the dollars needed, the township could then devise detailed plans for allocating financial resources to the areas that would yield the most benefits. At the present time the Community Development Program is the source of funding to accomplish rehabilitation of housing. The township should continue this practice, and urge the federal government to continue funding the loan and grant program for rehabilitation so that long range plans can be more thoroughly developed and implemented.

This rehabilitation effort might be extended to the upper floors of the buildings within the urban centers, particularly in Ardmore. These upper floors could be made habitable for apartment living, which would be ideally suited for elderly and low income residents. Proximity to public transportation and retail services is a major attribute for units in these locations.

6. Urban Centers

The township currently has several major focal points of retail activities along Montgomery and Lancaster Avenues. These centers are located in Merion, Penn Valley, Wynnewood, Ardmore and Bryn Mawr. Most of the township's population lives near these areas, and consequently these service centers enjoy strong consumer support. These retail areas are oriented toward automobile usage, which will continue to be the case in the near future. In all probability the energy crisis will make the township's retail centers more viable since consumers may no longer travel great distances to shop in suburban malls. Therefore, the existing retail areas could be strengthened so that they are in a position to take advantage of opportunities created by energy limitations.

The major concept to achieve this objective is to transform some of the retail areas into unified urban centers. High density mixed uses could be developed in some core areas so as to provide a total living environment which at the same time would supplement the financial base of the retail centers. People would be able to live and shop in the same area without using automobiles. At the same time, the urban centers would continue to serve the automobile-oriented shopper from other parts of the township.

The urban centers would also give a certain identity to these neighborhoods and provide for attractive settings where social activities could blend with retail functions.

In the Ardmore and Bryn Mawr areas on-street parking is now permitted in specific locations. An examination of the parking and traffic flow patterns has been undertaken by the township to determine if revised parking patterns could be created. Minor adjustments in timing of parking meters was suggested as a means of reducing the conflict between shopping, business and commuter parking. The position of the Comprehensive Plan is that the elimination of parking along Lancaster Avenue or the rerouting of traffic flows through a series of new one-way street patterns would accomplish very little to alleviate traffic bottlenecks and would seriously affect the business vitality of the urban centers. Consequently, the plan recommends that no changes take place in existing on-street parking.

One problem all of the urban centers have in common is the need to improve pedestrian movement facilities. Studies should be done in each area to assess the degree of need, and to suggest physical solutions that are tailored to the specific needs of each area. Obviously, well defined street crossing points are needed in all retail areas, this could be accomplished by the usual method of painted stripes. However, studies should also explore the feasibility of using colored pavers or ridged concrete to define pedestrian crossing points. Bollards could also be used to prevent pedestrian crossings outside the intended channels. The pedestrian study could also explore the feasibility of using pedestrian safety islands in streets where physical space is available.

A. Ardmore

The Ardmore retail area could become the central urban complex in the township. Currently it has the best distribution of facilities, parking lots and public transportation. However, because the railroad line acts as a barrier, the Lancaster Avenue shops have to be treated separately from the Suburban Square complex.

Suburban Square is well diversified between small stores and major chain retailers. However, the physical layout of the center is dated and does not respond to current parking and service needs. As a result the owners of the center are proceeding with plans to modify the street and parking arrangements. A new street is going to be added from Coulter Avenue to Montgomery Avenue through the existing easterly parking lot. St. James Place and all of the internal streets will be closed and converted to a pedestrian mall. The supermarket will be removed and replaced with parking, and a new food store will be built near Sibley Avenue. The plans also make provision for

a deck over the parking lot at the corner of Anderson and Montgomery Avenues, with a possible pedestrian bridge connecting the second story parking level with the nearest retail stores. These alterations will improve the image of Suburban Square, and provide better shopping facilities for the residents of Lower Merion.

The retail area along Lancaster Avenue in Ardmore is also in need of attention as part of the Ardmore urban center concept. However, most of the recommendations for this center are architectural in nature, and therefore discussion of these elements can be found in section seven. Parking does not now appear to be a problem, but it may be in the future at which time the township should consider decking the parking lot on Cricket Avenue. This is the largest parking lot on the south side of the railroad and a multi-level parking garage, above and below grade, might be feasible in the future. If this need is perceived, the township should evaluate the costs of decked parking, and the cost-benefits that would ensue. The other solution for expanding parking facilities is removing housing units. This is unacceptable in a neighborhood where housing must receive the highest priority.

B. Bryn Mawr

The Bryn Mawr urban center is elongated and does not contain a sufficient number of off-street parking lots to serve all retail stores. Consequently, on-street parking is heavily used on both Lancaster Avenue and the adjacent residential streets. The addition of new parking lots can only be developed at the expense of deleting some existing housing. This position is rejected in the plan since housing must be given a higher priority, especially in Bryn Mawr, which contains a substantial amount of moderate income housing.

Therefore, the Bryn Mawr urban center could be improved by vertically expanding existing parking lots and by strengthening community facilities. The parking lot at the corner of Lancaster Avenue and Bryn Mawr Avenue could be converted into a decked parking garage, including underground parking if feasible. Highly visible pedestrian crossing points could be built across Bryn Mawr and Lancaster Avenues, while above or below grade accesses could be connected to the railroad station.

Another major addition to the Bryn Mawr urban center could be the conversion of the Summit Grove Avenue parking lot into a multi-decked parking structure. An opportunity also exists at this location for creating a major multi-purpose facility. Architecturally, the structure could be linked to the existing stores with a series of new mini-shops on different levels. It would be possible to park in the decked garage, and walk through

a series of small shops before coming out onto Lancaster Avenue.

The Bryn Mawr Community Building behind Ludington Library is now being renovated, and long range plans call for the possible construction of tennis courts on the site. It is recommended that consideration be given to adding an urban plaza where people could sit during pleasant weather. The area could be designed with earth mounds, flower beds, trees, park benches, and a combination of architectural pavers and materials to create an appealing focal point. Since this site is surrounded by retail uses, offices, the hospital and the library, it would be an aesthetic addition for all the people who congregate in the area.

As with the other urban centers, pedestrian movements have not been made a part of the overall retail activities. Locations across Lancaster Avenue could be identified every several hundred feet, and pedestrian crossing could be designed as noted previously.

7. Architectural Studies

A. Elements

The details of implementation of the urban center recommendations need to be clarified. Since that is beyond the scope of this plan, it is recommended that supplemental work be undertaken to identify the architectural elements which need to be studied.

In each instance the architectural studies would define the boundaries of the study areas and determine the factors that influence each site. Studies could also identify the size of each structure, its use, and the need for service and delivery facilities. The studies should concentrate on making the areas aesthetically attractive, improving parking and pedestrian movement, and in improving property values.

Innovative elements that might be considered in all the urban center architectural studies are:

1. Buildings - the size, shape, location and function.
2. Parking - locations, number of spaces, and the ideal turning movements.
3. Driveways - at locations which will provide ease of access and minimal disruption of traffic patterns.
4. Traffic Movements - how the on-site vehicular movements will coincide with existing street traffic.

5. Pedestrian Lanes and Crossing Points - where they should be provided for ease of access to and from parking and between various facilities.
6. Sidewalks - where they should be provided and the degree of necessary separation from vehicular traffic.
7. Landscaping - the appropriate street tree and other plantings that can be designed into each project.
8. Streetscape - how each pedestrian area can be designed for visual and physical effect, including street furniture, paving, and directional signage.
9. Lighting - the appropriate lighting for each type of urban setting.
10. Facade Treatment - how to blend all building facades into harmonious motifs.
11. Signs - the use of appropriate sign graphics to reduce visual pollution.

B. Facade Treatments

While all of the above elements are appropriate study subjects for all of the sites listed, there is an important architectural study that should be given additional emphasis. This element was noted above, but is expanded here because of its importance. A special architectural study should be performed for all the retail areas, analyzing the existing architectural design of the store fronts. Within each retail area a single architectural theme (colonial, modern, etc.) should be selected and architectural drawings should be created to illustrate how the facades could be renovated to conform to the common theme. One innovative idea to consider in this study is the extension of the facade treatment to include the sidewalk areas by means of a physical feature that would afford pedestrians some protection from adverse weather conditions. The appropriate design and selection of materials could be a key feature in providing a unified design for each business area. This needs the cooperation of private storeowners, but the result would be an aesthetic appearance appealing to shoppers, and helpful to civic pride.

8. Construction Improvements

The architectural studies and urban center recommendations cover many construction elements which should be considered as part of upgrading areas. There are also several physical construction features appropriate for areas within the urban centers

and elsewhere. The items noted below could be explored in depth and worked into the urban center studies or applied separately to other areas of the township as needed.

A. Sidewalks

In many areas street widenings have reduced sidewalks to narrow paths unprotected from adjacent vehicular traffic. In other cases, sidewalks are deteriorated or used by commercial businesses to the detriment of pedestrian movement. The township could undertake a complete survey of sidewalks to locate areas where improvements are needed. Plans could be developed for reconstructing sidewalks where necessary, protecting pedestrians from traffic movement, locating and designing street crossing points, and for including handicapped ramps. Some of the more important areas where this sidewalk upgrading could take place are enumerated in the circulation element of this comprehensive plan.

B. Commercial Signs

At the present time, many of the existing commercial signs in the township are haphazard, poorly located, obtrusive, conflicting, and graphically uncoordinated. A special graphic study might be undertaken to devise a new graphic system of signs for different areas of the township. This study should concentrate on reducing the number of signs and providing for better aesthetics. In the urban centers this study could be coordinated with the other recommended architectural studies. It could also include pedestrian walk signs. The upgrading of the sign situation in the township is of major importance because it creates a lasting positive impression on residents and visitors alike.

C. Bus Slots and Shelter

At the present time the township is well served by bus transportation in both the number of routes and the frequency of trips. However, in almost all cases buses stop at curb side to pick up and discharge passengers, blocking traffic temporarily. All embarking passengers wait outdoors for bus arrivals regardless of weather conditions.

Both of these detrimental factors can be corrected by having the regional transportation authorities provide new bus slots and bus shelters. Bus slots can not be provided in all areas because of physical limitations, but where room is available consideration should be given to constructing these facilities. In some instances bus stop locations could be moved to points where bus slots can be developed. Most of the added bus slots will cut across sidewalk areas. This should not be

a disadvantage since a bus stops for less than one minute, and ramps can be built at the new curb lines to provide for the continuous flow of pedestrians through the bus slots when they are not being used.

The other major addition that could be considered is the use of bus shelters at every bus stop. A well designed system of bus shelters protects people from adverse weather and makes using the bus system a more pleasant experience.

9. City Line Avenue

A major concern to the township is the condition of structures, the physical transition between commercial and residential properties, and the current land use patterns along City Line Avenue. On the Lower Merion side this street contains offices, retail commercial facilities, schools, and residential homes. Almost all of the commercial facilities are clustered in the east, while the western end contains mostly residences and schools. This diverse area is creating transition problems because some of the retail areas are not being well maintained, and there is inadequate buffer protection between commercial activities and residential units.

In order to improve the appearance of this area, consideration should be given to authorizing architectural studies for upgrading the commercial segments along City Line Avenue. Items that could be improved include facades, signs, sidewalks, landscaping, parking lot screening, and direction of vehicular movements. The upgrading of the visual appearance of these stores is important in order to prevent deterioration and blight, and to provide for an aesthetic setting that will enhance the character of the neighborhood along City Line Avenue.

Also, it is important that existing commercial uses are not allowed to extend into residential properties. This would cause residential deterioration. The existing residential uses should be further protected by providing for intense buffer screening along commercial property lines. In some cases this might be accomplished by buffer planting, but walls and fences should also be considered as a more permanent, satisfactory solution.

10. Bala Cynwyd Center

The commercial complex bounded by City Line Avenue, Presidential Boulevard and Belmont Avenue is well designed with new office buildings and stores. At this time, there are still large vacant tracts of land remaining in the area, principally along Monument and Righters Ferry Road. Portions of the site are zoned commercial, and other parts are zoned for various categories of medium high density housing.

Because of the mixture and quality of developments nearby, it is recommended that the remaining vacant land be developed for a combination of apartments and office buildings. This concept might also allow mixed use projects to be developed where apartments are placed over the top of offices in the same structure. These types of uses will complement the apartment-office-commercial uses existing in the neighborhood, and provide an opportunity for residential living in an area well provided with retail and employment facilities.

11. Coordination and Financial Implementation of Commercial Improvement Programs

The improvements suggested in this plan for the commercial centers of the township constitute upgrading of private property in most instances. Therefore, this endeavor must include private initiative and funding sources, although public funds can be made available under certain conditions. Local business associations are the prime catalyst for these types of renovation activities, and they can provide the leadership necessary to achieve implementation of plans. Loans from private lending institutions are the usual source of funds for store front renovation programs.

The remaining elements of the improvement programs cover features that are within the public domain - sidewalks, curbs, lighting, street signs, pedestrian crossings, landscaping, utilities, benches, trash receptacles, etc. These can be funded through township budgets and the capital improvement program. Another source of funding for plan development is the federal community development program. Because of the overlap between public facilities and private businesses a significant amount of cooperation and coordination is necessary to implement a unified remodeling program. The results, however, can be beneficial to everyone -- increased sales for businesses, increased revenue for the township, and better services and environment for the public.

NEW MULTI-FAMILY HOUSING PLAN

A CYNWYD ROAD

B BALA AVE.

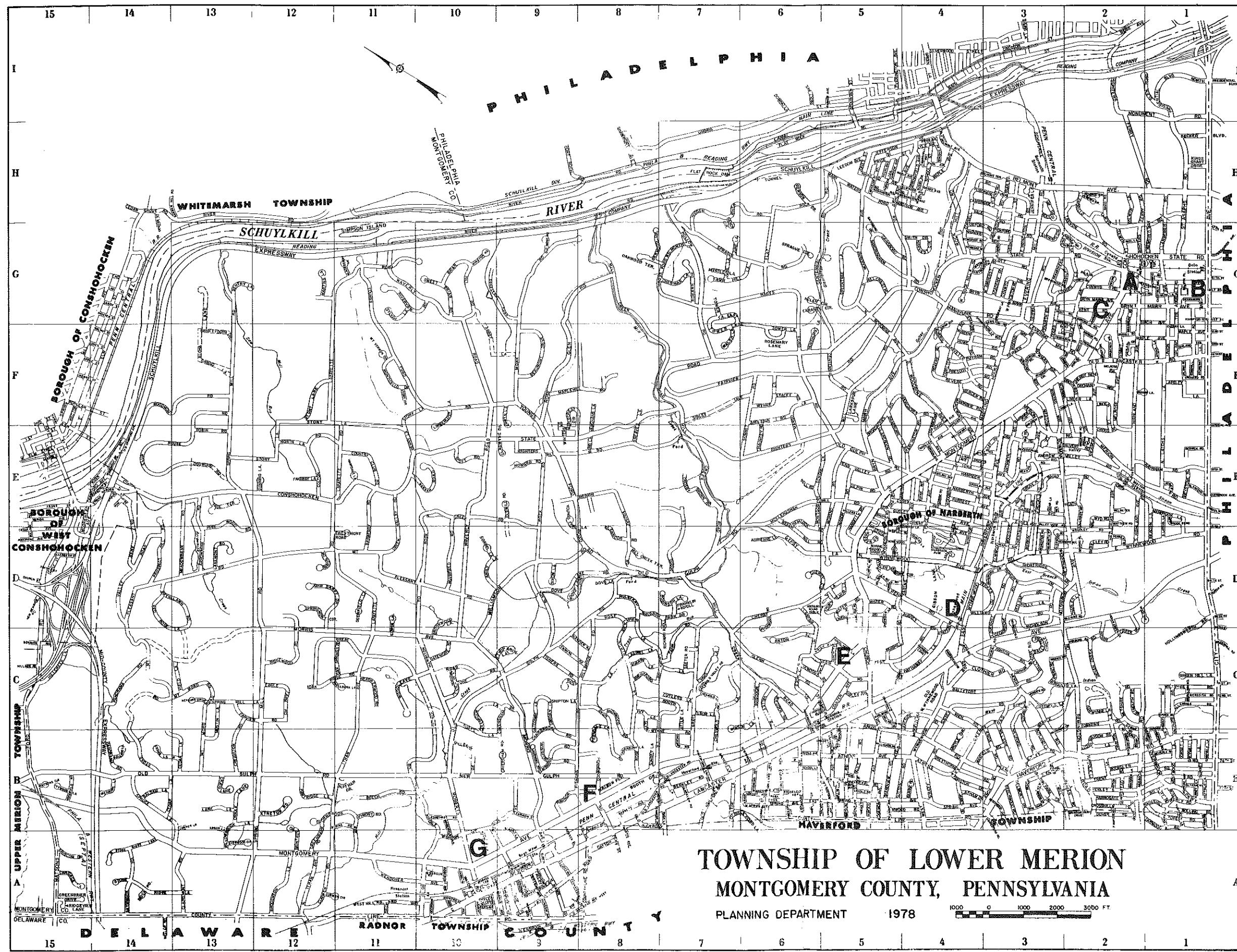
C BRYN MAWR AVE.

D PENN ROAD

E SCHOOL HOUSE LA.

FISHERS ROAD

G ROBERTS ROAD



**TOWNSHIP OF LOWER MERION
MONTGOMERY COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA**

PLANNING DEPARTMENT

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K-2

LAND USE AND HOUSING PLAN

L LOW DENSITY
M MEDIUM DENSITY
MH MED. HIGH DENSITY
H HIGH DENSITY
C COMMERCIAL

