

Chapter 3

Existing Land Use

Introduction

One of the most important elements of a Comprehensive Plan is the existing land use and future land use chapters of the Plan. A Comprehensive Plan is the blueprint for future growth and development of an area.

An examination and inventory of existing land use is vital to the preparation of a Comprehensive Plan. Reviewing the past and present land use of an area provides basic information and a foundation by which future residential, commercial, industrial and agricultural land use decisions can be made. It is impossible to plan for future land use without first understanding what patterns exist today.

Existing land uses are presented in this chapter by category and acreage. The approximate acreage of each category is provided for a comprehensive overview of land use. Existing land use patterns not only have a significant impact on the development of the future land use plan, but they affect circulation within the area and the demand for community facilities and services as well. A review of existing land use patterns is necessary to plan for uses that may be desired or that are currently lacking in the Region.

The Berks County Planning Commission and SSM GIS created Figure 3.1, the Existing Land Use Map for the Region. This data was based on the Berks County tax assessment of each parcel in the Townships.

Land Uses are classified into the following types for mapping purposes.

- Agriculture
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Institutional
- Mobile Home
- Multi-family
- Residential
- Road

TABLE 3.1: EXISTING LAND USE CATEGORIES

	Alsace	Oley	Ruscombmanor	Total
Agriculture	3155.47	9541.51	3347.99	16044.97
Commercial	323.83	1303.03	528.16	2155.02
Industrial	38.82	159.54	89.47	287.83
Institutional	376.91	238.46	240.93	856.3
Mixed Use	0	4.87	2.34	7.21
Mobile Home	45.74	14.08	44.60	104.42
Multi-Family	17.95	36.36	15.67	69.98
Residential	3537.08	3787.91	4210.65	11535.64
Road	312.59	418.31	364.28	1095.18
Total	7808.39	15504.07	8844.09	32156.55

The Existing Land Use Map should be used in conjunction with other maps in this document. The Agricultural Resources Map (Figure 10.2) shows prime agricultural soils and Agricultural Security Areas in the Region while the Natural Resource Map (Figure 10.1) shows where floodplains, forested lands, steep slopes, and wetlands are located.

LAND USE PATTERNS

The Region has experienced modest population growth and expansion over the past 20 years. Ruscombmanor Township has experienced the most growth in the Region. The development pattern consists of developments and clusters of suburban type development in Ruscombmanor Township. The land use categories and approximate acreage of each are described in detail in Table 3.2 and Table 3.3.

TABLE 3.2: EXISTING LAND USE

Existing Land Use	Alsace		Oley		Ruscombmanor	
	No. of Parcels	Acres	No. of Parcels	Acres	No. of Parcels	Acres
Agriculture	199	3155.47	289	9541.51	240	3347.99
Commercial	47	323.83	79	1303.03	45	528.16
Industrial	10	38.82	13	159.54	17	89.47
Institutional	46	376.91	44	238.46	24	240.93
Mixed Use	0	0.00	3	4.87	1	2.34
Mobile Home	28	45.74	6	14.08	10	44.60
Multi-family	12	17.95	23	36.36	11	15.67
Residential	1621	3537.08	1436	3787.91	1666	4210.65
Road	4	312.59	4	418.31	5	364.28
Total	1967	7808.39	1897	15504.07	2019	8844.09

TABLE 3.3: EXISTING LAND USE ALLOCATION

Existing Land Use	Alsace		Oley		Ruscombmanor	
	Acreage	%	Acreage	%	Acreage	%
Agriculture	3155.47	40%	9541.51	62%	3347.99	38%
Commercial	323.83	4%	1303.03	8%	528.16	6%
Industrial	38.82	0%	159.54	1%	89.47	1%
Institutional	376.91	5%	238.46	2%	240.93	3%
Mixed Use	0.00	0%	4.87	0%	2.34	0%
Mobile Home	45.74	1%	14.08	0%	44.60	1%
Multi-family	17.95	0%	36.36	0%	15.67	0%
Residential	3537.08	45%	3787.91	24%	4210.65	48%
Road	312.59	4%	418.31	3%	364.28	4%
Total	7808.39		15504.07		8844.09	

Figures in acres; Percentages may not sum to 100.0 due to rounding error.

SOURCE: Berks County Planning Commission, SSM GIS, 2007

Agriculture

The Agriculture category consists of areas currently or typically in agricultural use (cropland, pastureland, dairy facilities, barns, and stables), along with agriculturally based businesses.

Commercial

Commercial uses consist of all properties where goods and services are sold, ranging from restaurants, convenience stores, gas stations, and markets, to professional offices and golf courses. Commercial development is concentrated mostly along the PA Route 12 Corridor and PA Route 73.

Industrial

The industrial land use category includes all properties being used for manufacturing and processing facilities, quarries, research and development facilities, metal- and woodworking shops, truck terminals, airports, and office/warehouse uses. The Region's industrial development includes industries located along PA Route 662 in Oley Township, PA Route 73 in Ruscombmanor and off of Kutz Road in Alsace.

Institutional

Institutional lands include buildings and lands owned by the municipal, county, state, or federal governments; churches; recreational, cultural, and park facilities; libraries; schools; churches and adjacent properties; fire stations. Specific descriptions and examples of this use are provided in Chapter 9, Community Facilities & Services.

Mobile Home Park

This category includes the mobile home parks in the Region that are located in Alsace, Oley and Ruscombmanor Townships.

Multi-Family Residential

Multi-family residential uses are scattered throughout the Region and cover substantially less total acreage than single-family residential housing. This category consists of the following specific development types: three-family residences, condominiums, apartments (including those over garages), and residential conversions.

Residential

This is the second largest land use in the Region, after Agriculture. Specific development types included in this category are single-family dwellings and two-family dwellings (when constructed as semi-detached or “twin” houses). Significant concentrations of single-family residential development are located throughout the Region, with the highest concentrations located in Ruscombmanor and Alsace Townships.

UNDERSTANDING THE TRENDS

Analysis of the Existing Land Use Map reveals several land use trends in the Region.

Agricultural and Rural uses are predominate throughout the Region however; there has been a trend of increased residential uses. A relative lack of larger scale commercial and industrial uses coupled with increased residential uses could lead to future problems for the Townships. A balance of industrial and commercial uses is important to the tax base of the Region, since the cost of providing services to residential uses is much higher than any other land use. In addition to a high tax burden on residents, this discrepancy could also indicate a potential deficiency of commercial and retail opportunities for the growing population, as well as a deficiency of job opportunities in the Region.

Continued preservation of open space and agricultural land is another way to lessen the tax burden on the residents of the Region. The Existing Land Use Map (Figure 3.1) shows that the Region still contains a large amount of open space and farmland, however, recent trends have shown a growing rate of residential development which threatens to encroach upon the Region's natural resource base. The pattern of residential strips along rural roads should be discouraged. While this is convenient for the developer, it results in a "built-up" feeling, regardless of the extent of farm property that may be behind the homes

Figure 3.2, the composite existing zoning map, provides a visual summary of all the zoning districts throughout the Region. The following chapters of this Plan will provide recommendations for future land use planning to base zoning changes upon, as well as future economic development, resource preservation, and transportation improvements that address the goals and objectives discussed in Chapter 5.