



COMMUNITY PLACEMAKING



PLANNER'S PORTFOLIO
ISSUE 2

MARCH 2016



delaware county
planning department



PLANNER'S PORTFOLIO **COMMUNITY PLACEMAKING**

- 1 OVERVIEW
- 2 MATURE NEIGHBORHOODS
- 4 GROWING SUBURBS
- 6 CENTRAL PLACES
- 8 ACTIVITY CORRIDORS

Planner's Portfolio Series

The Planner's Portfolio Series is an outreach effort developed by Delaware County Council in order to explore the planning concepts available for communities to take advantage of the unique opportunities across Delaware County.

The pattern on the cover page, and found throughout this series, represents the importance of each individual component in the larger network. The Planner's Portfolio Series explores several of these components and how they can support community character in Delaware County.

For more information, contact the Delaware County Planning Department at 610-891-5200 or visit www.co.delaware.pa.us/planning to see the complete Planner's Portfolio series.

OVERVIEW

Community Placemaking is an approach to community planning and redevelopment that emphasizes local community strengths and characteristics. This includes both physical characteristics, such as parks, housing styles, and transportation, as well as less concrete elements such as special event programming. While often taken for granted, these are the features that comprise the very fabric of our communities. It is important that they are all considered together to promote a positive relationship between them.

Simply put, community placemaking is a focus on what makes a town, street, or park special. This issue of the Planner's Portfolio series focuses on the different types of elements that contribute to placemaking and how to maintain and/or create them.



Marcus Hook Transit Oriented Development Plan

MATURE NEIGHBORHOODS

Placemaking in Mature Neighborhoods is primarily focused on preserving and enhancing the character of communities. It is particularly important that placemaking is coordinated with redevelopment efforts or other infrastructure improvements, such as infill development or better transit access. Many Mature Neighborhoods were built before zoning existed, and their current zoning would not allow the development that creates their character. Modern zoning has come around to allow these classic designs. Communities can encourage smart redevelopment by adopting zoning and subdivision and land development ordinances that require designs that are consistent with the desired characteristics. In Mature Neighborhoods, this often means small front setbacks with parking, when appropriate, located in the rear of the building. Density and height restrictions are also important considerations when developing an ordinance.



Ridley Park Borough



Upper Darby Township



Media Borough

Residential land use accounts for approximately 46% of the land in Delaware County. As such, it plays a big part in creating the places and character of the County. Mature neighborhoods have a tremendous mix of housing types that create unique neighborhoods (left). When infill development occurs, it is important to build houses and structures that fit within the contextual aesthetic of a community to build on that community character (below).



Media Borough

MATURE NEIGHBORHOODS

Many structures in Mature Neighborhoods were built with long-lasting materials, such as brick and stone, and an attention to detail that creates landmark buildings. As redevelopment occurs, these buildings can be repurposed to meet current needs while still preserving the character. The Wharf at Rivertown, for example, was a former power generating station that was converted to modern office space in Chester City.



The Wharf at Rivertown, Chester City



Lindbergh Bridge over Kent County Park, Upper Darby Township

Design of infrastructure, which is often intimately interwoven with Mature Neighborhoods, provides an opportunity to build on the community character of these areas. The iconic Lindbergh Bridge over Kent County Park in Upper Darby Township is a great example of this. It was designed and built in the early 20th century and creates a unique atmosphere within the park.

GROWING SUBURBS

In Growing Suburbs, placemaking is affected greatly by the new development patterns found throughout, which require different approaches than in Mature Neighborhoods. Often, a developer adds many amenities that contribute to a unique sense of place, such as entry signage, unique architecture styles for the houses, and special features. There are times, however, where these elements are not included in the design. Growing communities can create updated zoning and subdivision and land development ordinances that require or encourage design of common infrastructure, such as pedestrian scale streetlights that match the architectural style of the development. Landscaped buffers can also be required along adjoining roadways to preserve the rural character of the larger community.



Newtown Township

Using different building materials, colors, and footprints for buildings along a street creates a more visually interesting and unique neighborhood (left).

GROWING SUBURBS

Protecting historic elements, such as a farm house (bottom left), is a common method of preserving character in Growing Suburbs. These buildings can be rehabilitated, such as the Rose Tree Tavern (left), and used as office space, residential space, or a community space. Growing Suburbs also use parks and open space as focal points in a neighborhood – such as the lake and loop trail in Adkinson Park (below).



Rose Tree Tavern, Upper Providence Township



Adkinson Park, Bethel Township



Smedley Tract, Middletown Township

CENTRAL PLACES

Placemaking concepts are perhaps most common in the Central Places of the County, even if they are not always obvious. Many of these areas have developed naturally, over long periods of time, but some have been developed more recently as part of a larger development. In either case, Central Places are great examples of how small design and development choices can add up to bigger change: the sidewalks here are slightly wider, inviting more pedestrians; the streets are slightly narrower, slowing down traffic and increasing safety; stores fill the first floor of multi-story buildings, providing interest to the building façade; unique wayfinding orients visitors and provides a visual identity. Together, these elements help to differentiate the 'downtown' area from the rest of the community.



Sellers Avenue, Ridley Park Borough



Plum Street Mall, Media Borough

In Central Places, the safety and comfort of pedestrians is crucial to creating a place where people want to be. Enhanced pedestrian amenities, such as a mid-block crossing or pedestrian bump-out at a corner, can contribute to more activity.



Delaware County Courthouse, Media Borough

Promoting and preserving existing icons are important, but new elements can also be added to the mix, such as the 69th Street pedestrian bridge and corresponding sign (right). When adding new amenities, care should be taken to design the elements to fit within the context of the area. A vision study or master plan often provides the best method for communities to identify where and what is necessary or desired.



Upper Darby Township



Lansdowne Farmers' Market, Lansdowne Borough

Though the built environment is vital, it is also important to consider special events and programming. Events, such as a farmer's market or festival, help to contribute to the social activity of a place. Programming can be completed as part of a downtown revitalization strategy or by a business association, such as a Business Improvement District (BID) or Main Street organization.

ACTIVITY CORRIDORS

Implementing common placemaking principles along Activity Corridors presents several different challenges than other areas. They often cross multiple municipal boundaries, and the right-of-way is often shared between various state and local agencies. Many Activity Corridors are also car-oriented, which needs to be taken into consideration in designing amenities. Signage, for example, may need to be slightly larger and sidewalks may be buffered more from the roadway. Many of these corridors were designed before innovations in traffic engineering and pose issues for drivers of today. Long-range strategies can be used to create more pleasant Activity Corridors for both drivers and pedestrians. Many communities join together to develop long-range plans to formalize a vision for the Corridor. These plans often include streetscape enhancements, such as street trees, benches, and crosswalks; better access management; and wayfinding and gateway signage.



Concord Township

Locating buildings closer to the street edge and making them unique can help to create activity corridors that have a better sense of place. The new Children's Hospital of Philadelphia facility in Concord Township (left) is a good example of unique architecture for a building with parking located to the side of the building and the rear, not in front.



Concord Township



Chadds Ford Township

It is also important to consider the pedestrian environment along Activity Corridors. Adjacent to high-volume roadways, pedestrians should be buffered from the roadway when possible. Enhanced landscape plantings, fences, and lighting (above) create a more distinctive and comfortable environment for pedestrians.

Preserving and reusing historic structures is a great opportunity to maintain a connection to the Corridor's history. Older houses are often reused for office space (left) or restaurants.

OTHER PLANNER'S PORTFOLIOS:



CHARACTER AREAS
March 2016



COMPLETE STREETS
April 2016



FUNDING SOURCES
April 2016



Court House and Government Center
201 West Front Street
Media, Pennsylvania 19063

Delaware County Council

Mario Civera, Jr., Chairman
Colleen P. Morrone, Vice Chairman
John P. McBlain
David J. White
Michael F. Culp

County Executive

Marianne Grace

Planning Department

Linda F. Hill, Director
Ryan T. Judge, Senior Planner

For more information, contact the Delaware County Planning Department at 610-891-5200 or visit www.co.delaware.pa.us/planning to see the complete Planner's Portfolio series.