

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Horsham Township has prepared a Comprehensive Plan Update, which includes both a long-range plan to guide land use, transportation, community facility development, economic development, housing, preservation of natural resources and open space and development of parks and recreation, as well as reporting on past trends and development history of the Township. Horsham's last Comprehensive Plan was prepared in 1989 and was considered an update to previous Comprehensive Plans prepared in 1978 and 1969.

When Horsham's land use was last calculated in 1973, 34.7% of the Township's land was either vacant or agricultural, and the population was estimated at 16,550. Since that time, the Township's population has increased by 58% to 26,147, and more importantly only 5.3% of the Township land is currently classified as undeveloped.<sup>1</sup>

One of the most significant changes in recent years in land use is the opportunity for redevelopment of the Willow Grove Naval Air Station property, which has largely been declared as surplus property by the BRAC Commission. Horsham will appoint a Land Reuse Committee and develop a specific plan for the reuse of the approximately 900 acres of now vacant land associated with the lands previously used by the Naval Air Station (200 additional acres are to be retained by the Air Force National Guard).

The Comprehensive Plan is a broad policy guide for the future physical development of the municipality. It is not intended to be a legal document and thus contains no specific rules or regulations. However, there are recommendations dealing with redevelopment and new land use that can be considered by municipal government as it examines the existing development characteristics and future potential for the Township.

Subsequent to the 1989 Township Comprehensive Plan, additional special purpose planning documents were prepared. These include: the *2003 Horsham Township Park and Recreation Plan Update*, and the *2005 Horsham Township Open Space Plan Update* which updated the *1995 Horsham Township Open Space Plan*.

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<sup>1</sup> This does not include the surplus lands of the Willow Grove Naval Air Base which will undergo replanning in the future.

## **The Planning Process**

The basic elements of the municipal comprehensive plan are outlined in Article III of the *Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code*. These basic elements are briefly summarized below:

- (1) Statement of objectives concerning its' future development, including, but not limited to the location, character and timing of future development . . .
- (2) A plan for land use which may include provisions for the amount, intensity, character and timing of land use proposed for various categories, as well as the provision of parks and recreation and preservation of prime agricultural lands, floodplains . . .
- (3) A plan to meet the housing needs of present residents and of those individuals and families anticipated to reside in the municipality.
- (4) A plan for movement of people and goods, which may include new roadways, pedestrian and bikeway systems, public transit routes.
- (5) A plan for community facilities and utilities, which may include public and private education, recreation, municipal buildings, fire and police stations, libraries, hospitals, water supply and distribution, sewerage and waste treatment, etc.
- (6) A statement of the interrelationships among the various plan components.
- (7) A discussion of short and long range plan implementation strategies.
- (8) A statement indicating that the existing and proposed development of the municipality is compatible with the existing and proposed development and plans in contiguous portions of neighboring municipalities, or a statement indicating measures which have been taken to provide buffers or other transitional devices between disparate uses.
- (9) A plan for the protection of natural and historic resources to the extent not preempted by federal or state law.
- (10) The Comprehensive Plan may identify those areas where growth and development will occur so that a full range of public infrastructure services can be adequately planned and provided.

The contents outlined above are modified and/or combined in order to reflect the specific findings and recommendations subsequent to the 1989 Plan.

## **Brief History and Regional Position**

Horsham Township is among the largest municipalities in Montgomery County, consisting of 17.33 square miles which ranks it sixth largest within the County. Horsham Township was established in 1717 and was one of the original townships delineated but not named on the Map of the Area published by Penn's London office in the late 1600s. By 1880 the Township had three villages.<sup>2</sup> Horshamville (now Horsham) located at the intersection of Easton Road and Horsham Road was the largest and the first settlers had made their homes there. Soon after they moved into Horsham, Samuel Carpenter presented 50 acres for the Horsham Friends Meeting. Areas around Horshamville continue to be among the most densely populated part of the Township.

Davis Grove, situated at the intersection of Governor and Privet Roads, was much smaller than Horshamville. It consisted of an early store, an inn, and a post office. The expansion of the Willow Grove Naval Air Station caused the demise of Davis Grove and most of its original structures.

Prospectville (formerly Cashtown) developed at the intersection of Limekiln Pike and Horsham Road. This small village also had a post office, a general store, and an inn in 1877. This area has evolved into an area having small businesses along both sides of Horsham Road for a short distance east from Limekiln Pike.

In 1924 and 1925 several large properties at the vicinity of Easton Road next to the Horsham Friends Meeting were sold to Harold F. Pitcairn. Pitcairn, the aviation pioneer, built a hangar on the property and opened his airfield in March 1926.

In 1942, the Navy purchased Pitcairn Field and developed it from its original 130 acres to the present size of 1,100 acres (see further discussion in the section on the Willow Grove Naval Air Station in Chapter 9, Recommendations). During World War II several firms moved into the Township to take advantage of the work necessitated by the Air Station.

Following World War II, population began to steadily rise. From 1950 to 1960 the population increased by 5,270. In the 1960s, the number of dwelling units in the Township more than doubled. Almost all of the increase was attributable to single-family housing units constructed to satisfy the pent-up demand after the War. In that time period, Horsham was one of the fastest-growing municipalities within the County. By the early 1960s Horsham began to expand for commerce and industry including the industrial parks such as: Horsham Ridge and Babylon Industrial Campus. In 1971 the Prudential Business Campus began, which by 1982 was home to 75 companies on the 204 acre site. The park has continued to expand west of Dresher Road and today is among the largest corporate/office parks in the Philadelphia suburbs.

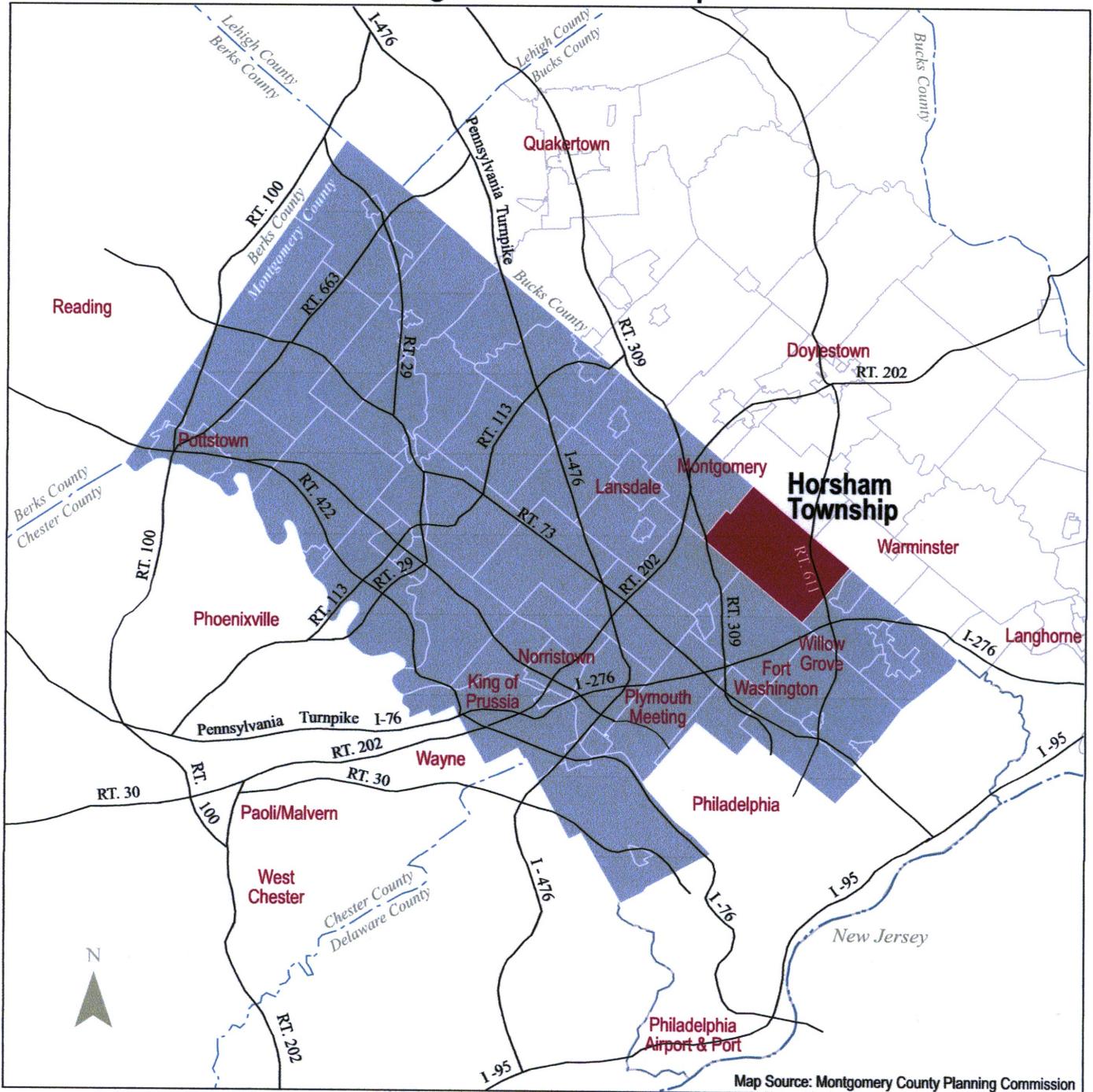
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<sup>2</sup> *Montgomery County The Second Hundred Years, Volume 1*, 1983, published by the Montgomery County Federation of Historic Societies.

Presently there are five golf courses located in the central and westerly portion of the Township. The first of these, Oak Terrace, was constructed in the 1930s and was later converted (circa 1994) to Talamore, the first residential and golf course community in Montgomery County.

The second golf course to be constructed was Hidden Springs, which opened for play in 1968 and later was converted and redesigned into Commonwealth National Country Club and Corporate Park.

# Regional Position Map



Land use boundaries, topography, and new land development patterns continue to be influenced by the three major stream valleys of which Horsham is a part. The lower one-third of the Township is within the Pennypack Creek Watershed and is traversed by three major branches of the Pennypack Creek. The middle and northerly two-thirds of the Township are contained within the Neshaminy Watershed, which provides the expansive main branch and numerous tributaries of the Park Creek and a section of the Little Neshaminy Creek which traverses the very northerly tip of the Township. There is a significant presence of floodplain and wetland areas along the stream valley corridors which traverse Horsham Township. Previously, open space planning and preservation has included vast areas of the stream valleys for temporary and permanent preservation. Township parks, private open space, and agricultural security areas are situated along important stretches of both the Little Neshaminy Creek and the northerly tributary of the Park Creek. It should be noted that the Center for Sustainable Communities completed the Pennypack Creek Watershed Study, 2006 which includes comments and recommendations to help improve the quality of the stream valley and associated riparian corridor.

Horsham is positioned in the second tier of municipalities around Philadelphia. It is bordered by municipalities to the south and east which had been largely developed and experienced their greatest growth spurts between the 1940s and the 1960s. On the other hand, Horsham's early growth was largely contained east of Route 611 and south of Horsham Road, generally concentrated in the southeasterly third of the Township. In the early 1950s the growth and expansion of the Willow Grove Naval Air Station cut off the logical extension of many roads in an east/west direction. Presently, the most important north-south corridor consists of Easton Road (Route 611) which links to the Pennsylvania Turnpike a short distance south of the Township at the Willow Grove interchange in adjacent Upper Moreland Township.

Route 309 nips the very northwesterly edge of the Township and provides high speed arterial link to points south (including Philadelphia).

The principal east-west roadways follow the geometric boundaries of or bisect the Township, such as County Line Road along the northerly edge of Horsham and Welsh Roads (said to be the oldest road in Horsham) along the southerly edge. All of the Township is virtually bisected from east to west by Horsham Road. The southeasterly boundary of the Township is formed along its entire length by Blair Mill Road, which forms the boundary adjacent to Upper Moreland Township.