

Lower Gwynedd Comprehensive Plan

Process, updates,
and public feedback

December 10, 2024

Claire Warner, Senior Community Planner, MCPC



Agenda

- What is a comprehensive plan?
- What topics are covered?
- Where are we in the planning process?
- How has the public been engaged?
- What feedback have we received?
- What's next?



What is a Comprehensive Plan?

- Long-range planning document providing a future growth and development guide
- Identifies a community vision that guides the plan's recommendations
- Recommendations and implementation strategies are proposed to work towards that vision
- Required by the Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) to be reviewed every 10 years
 - Geographically comprehensive
 - Comprehensive in subject matter
 - Long-range time frame
- Focus Area Study

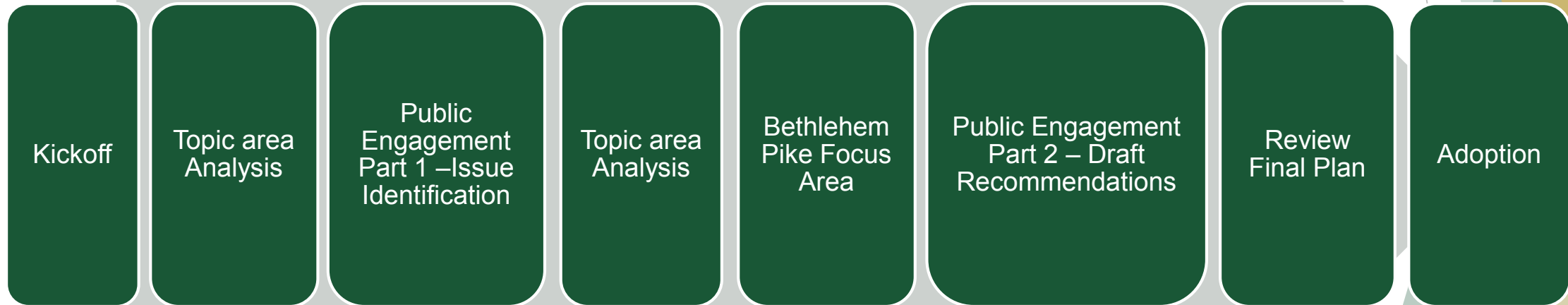


What topics are covered?

- **Demographic Trends** (current and forecasted population, age distribution, educational attainment)
- **Current Land Use*** (current land use, recent development trends)
- **Economy & Employment** (unemployment, average commute, employment sectors)
- **Homes & Housing*** (housing density, affordable housing)
- **Infrastructure*** (water/sewer, energy)
- **Transportation*** (traffic volume, bus and rail service, walkability)
- **Natural Resources* & Open Space, Recreation** (wetlands, tree canopy, stormwater management, parks)
- **Cultural Resources*** (historic districts, arts and culture)
- **Community Facilities* & Health, Safety** (schools, libraries, emergency services, senior services, food access)

*Elements required by the Municipalities Planning Code

Comprehensive Planning Process



Public Engagement

- Attended Fall Fest 2023
- Community survey – Summer-Fall 2023 (533 responses)
- 1st Open House – October 2023
- Draft Vision Statement Survey – Summer 2024 (87 responses)
- 2nd Open House – October 2024
- Draft goals and recommendations survey – October 2024 (24 responses)
- Ongoing social media and newsletter posts, page on the township website for people to see updates



Public Engagement Feedback (1 of 2)

Community Survey and Open House #1

Issue identification

- 94% of respondents are residents of Lower Gwynedd, 5% are business owners, 4.5% are people who work in the township
- Respondents were older and the majority were long-term residents of the township
- Priority issues identified:
 - Maintain parks and recreation, open space (49%)
 - Redevelop underutilized commercial properties (41%)
 - Improve road safety and traffic issues (33%)
 - Preserve historic properties (26%)
 - Beautify existing commercial areas (25%)
- Preserving open space, improving walkability, and creating a more welcoming experience on Bethlehem Pike were identified as key topics for further exploration



Public Engagement Feedback (2 of 2)

Open House #2 and Draft Vision and Recommendation Surveys

Key Takeaways from each of the topics:

- Future land use and Vision. The majority of 85% of responses agree/strongly agree with the draft vision statement. Important topics: walkability, environmental stewardship, opportunities for small-scale retail and commercial, sustainable growth.
- Community Institutions. Institutions are valued, especially the school district. Desire for more community space and businesses that could serve as "third places"
- Housing. Balance between creating opportunities for growth in specific areas, and the desire to maintain the scale and character of established neighborhoods.
- Transportation. Priority: build sidewalks and trails to improve pedestrian connections to destinations. Also, create safer streets and slow vehicle speeds through neighborhoods.
- Open Space and Environmental Sustainability. Priority: improve and preserve the tree canopy. Also, preserve open spaces and natural resources, reduce waste, reduce flooding and improve water quality.

DRAFT Vision Statement

Lower Gwynedd is a thriving suburban community that blends the preservation of neighborhoods and green open space with an embrace for innovation and responsible growth. While much of the landscape has changed over the years since its rural agricultural past, Lower Gwynedd has become home to multiple educational institutions and medical research campuses that bring jobs, creativity, and vitality to the Township.

Lower Gwynedd respects the natural resources and character of the residential neighborhoods, and understands that land use, the environment, and residents' quality of life are interconnected. Lower Gwynedd strives to unlock the potential to create redevelopment opportunities for the Bethlehem Pike corridor as an extension of Spring House, the commercial anchor of the Township, and strengthen the connections to its neighbor, Ambler Borough. The Township is fortunate to have two train stations located within its boundaries, providing residents with connections to Center City, Philadelphia and to Doylestown.

Lower Gwynedd prioritizes actions that strengthen connections between the township, residents, community organizations, institutions, and the business community. Lower Gwynedd's priorities are to preserve the peaceful neighborhoods while strengthening the existing commercial areas, promoting the continued growth of research and development at institutions and businesses, encouraging sustainable development practices, and protecting the valuable natural resources in the Township.

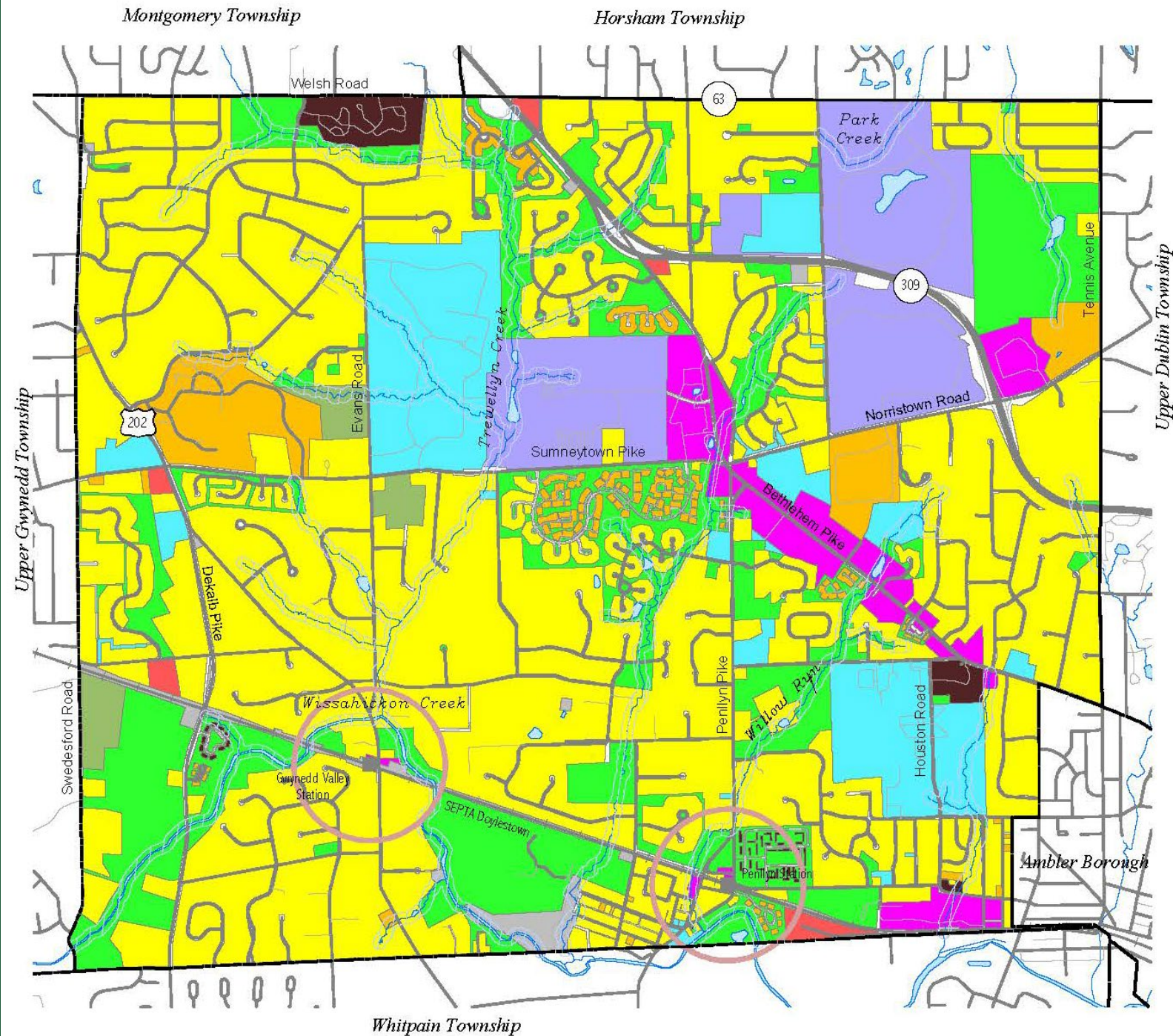
In 2045, Lower Gwynedd will be...

- a bucolic residential community, nestled in a green, natural landscape;
- an innovative, energetic, and engaged community that supports the lively mixed-use commercial corridors and the centers of learning and innovation; and
- a socially and environmentally diverse community that welcomes people of all ages and backgrounds.

Future Land Use Map

Future Land Use Categories

-  Agriculture
-  Business/Industrial
-  General Commercial
-  High Density Residential
-  Institutional
-  Low Density Residential
-  Medium Density Residential
-  Recreation and Open Space
-  Town Center Mixed Use
-  Utilities
-  Greenway Overlay
-  Transit Oriented Development



Priority Topic: Walkability

“It might be useful to look at the value of sidewalks in areas around elementary and middle schools and other community focuses.”

“Length of Meetinghouse Road... is a common walking route for residents. No sidewalk or shoulder, and speeds are high/narrow road.”

“Better pedestrian connections between Gwynedd Mercy and the Shopping Center”

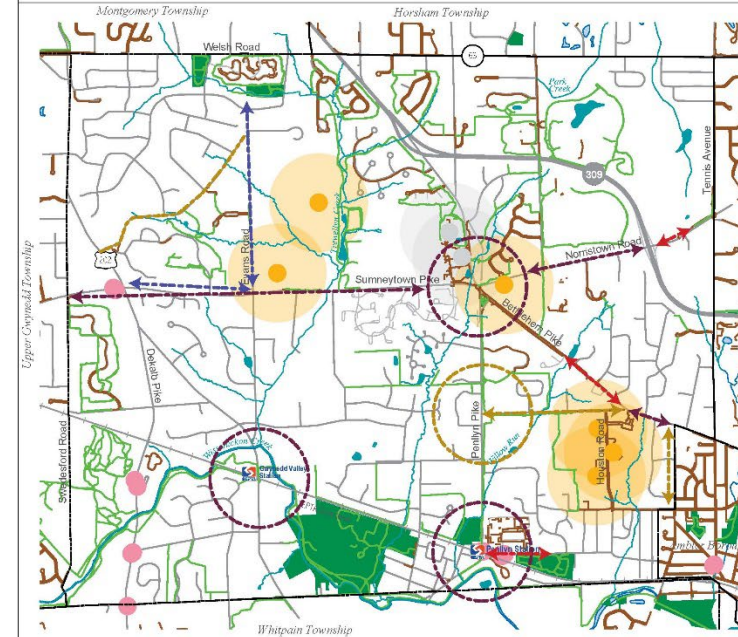
“The Septa train stops should have specific connections which can support walking in biking as this will allow more parking to be transformed into transit-oriented development.”

“Create more walking and biking paths especially on the major roads, like Bethlehem Pike. Easier access to crossing that street would be great.”

TRANSPORTATION: PROVIDE FOR SAFE MOBILITY AND CONNECTIONS

Walkability Map

This map shows existing sidewalks and trails, including local trails and identifies parks, community destinations, and other areas that were identified for improved pedestrian connections and traffic calming.



- SEPTA Bus Stops
- Schools and 1/4 mile buffer
- Supermarkets and 1/4 mile buffer
- Sidewalks
- Trails
- Parks
- ↔ Priority Pedestrian Connection
- ↔ Traffic Safety (i.e. speeding) areas of concern
- ↔ Potential Trail Connection
- ↔ Township Pedestrian Improvement Project

Lower Gwynedd Township
Montgomery County, Pennsylvania

0 1,500 3,000 6,000 Feet
Base map prepared May 2022

Traffic calming examples



Lower Gwynedd
Comprehensive Plan



Prepared by:
Montgomery County Planning Commission
www.montcopa.org/planning

Questions or comments please contact:
Claire Wilmer at cwimer@montcopa.org or 610-278-3755

Bethlehem Pike Focus Area Process

BETHLEHEM PIKE CORRIDOR

Bethlehem Pike is an important corridor in Lower Gwynedd, where shops, offices, restaurants, churches, homes, and historic buildings are all located. Planning for the future of the corridor includes identifying how any redevelopment could be designed.

Do you visit the businesses on Bethlehem Pike?

Are there other types of businesses that you would like to see along Bethlehem Pike?

How do you travel to and between the different places on Bethlehem Pike?

11.5% of survey respondents shop at businesses along Bethlehem Pike. 42% shop at Spring House Village.

LOWER GWYNEDD TOWNSHIP
Comprehensive Plan

Lower Gwynedd Township
County Planning Commission
www.montgomeryplanning.com

Graphic Representations of Potential Bethlehem Pike Corridor Concepts

July 2024 Draft

Shopping Center Concept

- Rendering of redevelopment
- Illustrate best possible scenario
- Something that could be replicated elsewhere on Beth Pike?

Development Design

- Top-down plan: improved parking lot and building layout
- 3 parcels

Parking Lot Design

- Minimal Intervention Design

Overall Corridor Layout Design

- All recommendations to be displayed with map of entire corridor

Street/Streetscape Cross-Section

- What is the best way to show mid-block crossings: Example pictures, plan view, cross-section?

Potential mid-block crossing locations

Intersection safety improvements

BETHLEHEM PIKE FOCUS AREA

Potential Focus Area

Existing Conditions

Urban Concept Examples

- Mixed Use Building 3 Stories (Retail/Office)
- Open Space Area
- Apartments 3 Stories (12 units)
- Open Space Area
- Open Space Area

Prepared by:
Montgomery County Planning Commission
www.montgomeryplanning.com
Questions or comments please contact:
Caleb Warner at cwarner@montgomery.org or #6028-8755

Bethlehem Pike Focus Area

- Support for mixed use buildings and more residential.
- Positive feedback on the design concepts (renderings and pictures)
 - Maximum building height maximums of 3 stories, sloped roofs / dormer windows for a more village-like appearance
 - Active store fronts, parking behind buildings
- Support for improved streetscape to create a safer and more pleasant walking experience
 - Street trees, wider sidewalks
 - Signalized pedestrian crossings for better safety and connectivity
- Support for more green space, gathering space

BETHLEHEM PIKE FOCUS AREA



Design Concept Examples

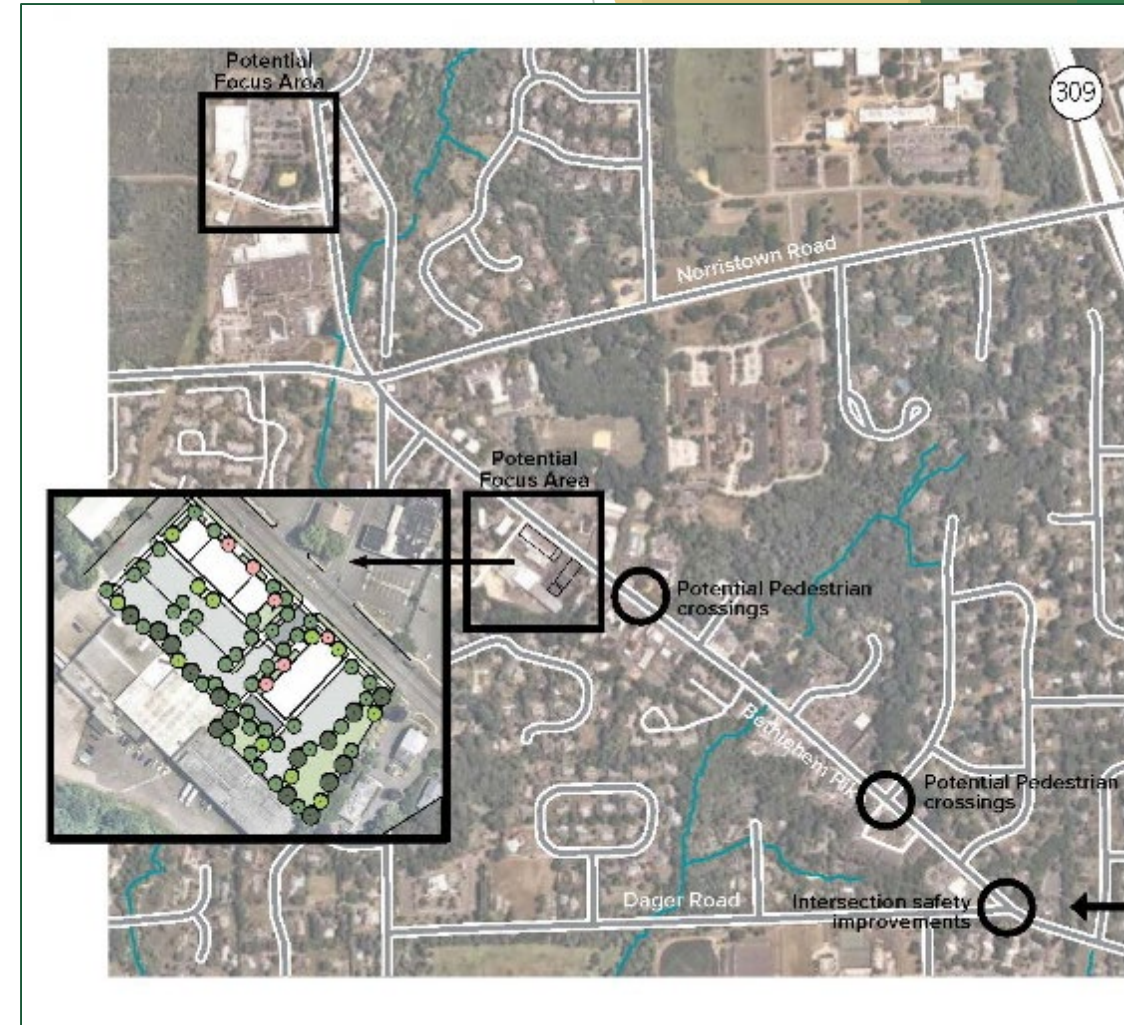


Bethlehem Pike Focus Area

- Support for improved streetscape to create a safer and more pleasant walking experience
 - Street trees, wider sidewalks
 - Signalized pedestrian crossings for better safety and connectivity



Example of mid-block crossing and green median, King of Prussia



What's next?

- Complete and review the draft comprehensive plan
- Adoption
- Implementation

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