



Urban Design + Planning

Bucks County Waterfront Revitalization Plan

Draft Concept Plan

To: Bob White, Director
Redevelopment Authority of the County of Bucks
From: Jane Dembner, HNTB

Date: August 2, 2004 draft

Subject: Preliminary Regulatory Analysis – Draft Concept Plan

Overview

This memo outlines some recommended enhancements to the zoning regulations of the Bucks County Waterfront Revitalization Plan study area jurisdictions. The enhancements are needed to encourage and enable the redevelopment of the key Opportunity Areas within the study area. A map of these Opportunity Areas is appended to this memo. The purpose of the study is to provide for improved access to the riverfront and to promote targeted economic development in the study area. The study area includes portions of the following municipalities: Bensalem Township, Bristol Borough, Bristol Township, Falls Township, Morrisville Borough, and Tullytown Borough.

Implementing the ultimate plan will require local zoning districts that permit the mixing of uses at a scale appropriate to the location. Determining how to encourage redevelopment of the Bucks County Waterfront Study Opportunity Areas means first taking a look at the existing local regulations. It is necessary to determine whether: 1) a compatible district exists; 2) an existing district can be made compatible; or 3) a new district, overlay, or process will need to be created.

With the changes in development patterns that have emerged recently – including smart growth, neo-traditional/new urbanist development, and sustainability – many communities find themselves in category two: there is an existing district that may be applicable but it needs changes and updates to be made compatible with proposed development. This may include expanding or reconfiguring use lists, changing allowed layouts/lot sizes/densities, or incorporating design guidelines. In some cases this may require the creation of a mixed-use zoning district or enhancements to an existing mixed-use district.

It may also be necessary to incorporate a new section or an enhancement of the existing Statement of Community Goals and Objectives of the regulations and to update the purpose statement of each zoning district to reflect the plan recommendations.

Specific Recommendations for Bensalem

The Opportunity Area in Bensalem is currently zoned industrial and low-density residential. The Bensalem Zoning Ordinance currently provides for R-55 Planned Residential Community District that is intended to:

[e]ncourage the innovative design and the development of a planned residential community as an area where multiple yet distinct land uses are combined into a single planned residential development; to encourage a mixture of residential development; to encourage a mixture of residential dwelling units; to preserve and to enhance the existing natural features and amenities of Bensalem Township in general and the Delaware River in particular....

This district appears to permit a mix of residential uses and densities. It also permits “clubs, clubhouses, marinas, dining and lodging facilities . . . parking and security facilities, and such other conditional uses as may be necessary to promote the overall purpose of the R-55 district.”

This district may be a good starting place for Bensalem Township to implement the draft concept for the Opportunity Area, but it will need modifications. The Township might consider:

- Specifying other uses, including neighborhood commercial, that will be allowed as part of a mixed-use development;
- Including greater detail about the preferred mix and location of uses (single family along the waterfront, mixed use around the marina);
- Creating an approach to mixing uses and densities/units that works without single-site, planned district approval so that this development can happen in stages without a single overall developer;
- Reducing or eliminating the minimum site area of 30 acres and instead placing geographic limitations on the district (e.g., adjacent to the Delaware River);
- Enhancing the design standards and purpose statements; and
- Exploring opportunities to assist redevelopment to meet regulatory requirements, such as waivers for standards when amenities are provided (such as open space requirement reduction for connection the trail system), or public/private partnerships to provide development needs such as parking.

Some of these changes were suggested in a proposed ordinance amendment to add a mixed-use waterfront overlay. The proposal incorporates a useful statement of purpose and objectives, and a functional use list, but may not meet Township needs with respect to many of the design standards, or criteria against which to measure proposed development.

Specific Recommendations for Bristol Township

The Opportunity Area is owned by Rohm and Haas. This site is currently zoned for heavy commercial and single family residential development.

Mixed use office and commercial is permitted through all four of the Township's existing commercial districts – C Commercial, CN Neighborhood Commercial, CS Shopping Center, and TC Town Center (Overlay) (which is limited to use along Route 413). As the planning process refines the mix of uses for the Rohm & Hass area, the Township can select the appropriate district to encourage the preferred intensity and scale of development.

Should the ultimate concept for this area include residential uses, mixed residential is permitted through the R-4 Multi-Family Residential District, and there are three potential districts to address the single family development (R-1, R-2, and R-3). Bristol Township appears to allow mixed uses in the C Commercial District, but only along the Neshaminy Creek when permitted in conjunction with a marina (Section 903). To further enhance the possibility of mixed residential, commercial and office, the Township could consider:

- Expanding the mix of uses allowed in the C Commercial district and eliminate the geographic requirement along Neshaminy Creek so it can be used to encompass redevelopment on the Opportunity Area;
- If the commercial use list is too extensive for development in other locations, consider amending the CN Neighborhood Commercial district to permit combinations of residential and commercial uses;
- Creating a mixed-use overlay (similar to the Neshaminy Creek provisions of the C Commercial District, or the TC Town Center overlay) that allows a residential mix in certain locations that are zoned C Commercial or CN Neighborhood Commercial provided specified design guidelines are met. This will allow the Township to target areas where mixed use is appropriate without creating an entirely new base district;

- Enhancing the existing Statement of Community Goals and Objectives provisions (Section 108) to incorporate goals and objectives for the Opportunity Area; and
- Expanding the Purpose section of any amended zoning district to describe in more detail how to achieve a desired mix of uses.

Initial Regulatory Concepts for Bristol Borough

The Bristol Borough Opportunity Area encourages mixed use infill sites in portions of downtown and along the Delaware Canal; commercial along US-13, with light industrial (warehouse/flex) located between the rail line and US-13 Commercial. The site is currently zoned primarily industrial, with some commercial and a small amount of residential.

The Borough currently has an MX Mixed Use District which is intended to:

[p]rovide areas which are suitable for a series of water-related facilities, all potentially located on one (1) or more sites, including: gaming facilities, marina, office and professional buildings, amusement park, museum, restaurant, hotel, conference center, so as to prevent conflicts between these uses and other land uses. . . .

The use list does not indicate that residential uses can be included in the mix, and it appears that the MX district was created to meet a specific need, such as a gaming facility. In comparison, the Opportunity Area concept describes adaptive reuse areas that include residential, office, and retail uses. This is the most traditional type of downtown/town center mixed use, for which the NC Neighborhood Commercial District may be more appropriate. This district incorporates the mix of all three uses while ensuring that they “are compatible with the existing uses in the area.” To ensure that the regulations encompass the entire potential redevelopment, Bristol Borough may want to:

- Add a Statement of Goals and Objectives to the ordinance to detail the vision of the Opportunity Area; and
- Enhance the purpose statements of the zoning district and add detailed design guidelines/criteria to provide more information about design, layout, and fit of development within the district and the district within the plan and the community.

Specific Recommendations for Tullytown Borough

The Tullytown Opportunity Area draft concept plan includes mixed use along Main Street with low-density residential behind the mixed use; moderate density residential to the east of Martins Creek; and single family residential on the northeast portion of Main Street. The area is currently zoned a mixture of industrial and BC Borough Center.

The Borough appears to have sufficient residential districts available. The BC Borough Center designation may also remain appropriate along Main Street. The purpose of the district is:

[t]o maintain the character of the borough core by preventing overcrowding, encouraging coordinated efforts to meet circulation and parking needs, to provide for public convenience, and to fulfill the other broad purposes of this ordinance. This district provides for a variety of housing types and few neighborhood type commercial and professional services.

The BC district allows almost all categories of residential use along with less-intense commercial uses either by conditional use permit or special exception, depending upon the use.

The Tullytown Borough Zoning Ordinance is more performance-based than some of the other local regulations -- we have previously categorized it as a hybrid regulation. This means that while the ordinance contains districts, a use table, and bulk measurements, it tends to allow greater mixing of uses and flexibility of layout depending upon how the specifics of the development interact. Typically,

performance zoning incorporates flexibility; the question here will be how best to direct development. Tullytown may want to consider:

- Creating a Redevelopment section in the Statement of Community Goals and Objectives; and
- Adding a redevelopment overlay district to the BC zoning district that incorporates some of the more specific requirements of the site design (this could be similar to Appendix A: Special Zoning Provisions for Areas Adjoining the Delaware Canal);

Specific Recommendations for Morrisville Borough

The draft concept plan for the Opportunity Area for Morrisville Borough-Falls Township envisions the following development in the Morrisville portion of the area: new mixed use development and a marina adjacent to the riverfront complemented with additional open space; and new mixed use development around a proposed new SEPTA station near the US 1 / Pennsylvania Avenue intersection as well as mixed use at the northwest and southwest quadrants of the intersection of Bridge Street and Pennsylvania Avenue. These areas are currently zoned predominately industrial, with some commercial, residential, and open space.

Morrisville has multiple single family and commercial districts. Not available, however, is a mixed use district. The Opportunity Area includes a mixed-use area as a town center-style development with a 50% residential and 50% commercial mix. Around the envisioned new SEPTA station, this will probably be transit-oriented development (TOD), while around the new marina there might be more of an emphasis on recreation and entertainment opportunities. Similar to the other study area communities, Morrisville should consider the following options:

- Maintain its existing districts but allow moderate commercial (such as C-3 Neighborhood Commercial) and residential uses to be jointly located without significant buffers between the uses and with pedestrian connections that create a mixed use feeling;
- Create a mixed use district that includes both residential and commercial uses with some features of newer development types such as lot size mix, vertical use mix, walkability, and architectural design controls;
- Explore opportunities to assist redevelopment to meet regulatory requirements, such as waivers for standards when amenities are provided (such as open space requirement reduction for connection the trail system), or public/private partnerships to provide development needs such as parking.
- Update the Community Development Objectives and Classifications of Districts to detail the vision of the Opportunity Site; and
- Enhance the purpose statements of the zoning districts to provide more information about design, layout, and fit of the district within the plan and the community.

The Morrisville Borough Zoning Ordinance is reaching what is generally considered the end of its functional years, and shows some signs of inability to direct new types of development and attendant design requirements. The Borough may want to consider drafting a new mixed use district as one of its first options.

Specific Recommendations for Falls Township

The concept plan for the Opportunity Area in Morrisville Borough – Falls Township envisions the following development in the Falls Township portion of the area: moderate density residential with a small amount of mixed use, complemented by open space along the river's edge south of Post Road.

There are many residential districts available in the Township, including LMR Low-Medium Density Residential, and MR Medium-Density Residential. Falls also has a mixed use district -- CR

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Commercial Recreation District – but it is more oriented toward recreational and activity uses. Falls Township may want to consider:

- Creating a mixed use district that is compatible with more residentially-oriented uses and which incorporates site layout and design standards;
- Amending the NC Neighborhood Commercial district to allow residential uses either as conditional uses or as-of-right;
- Adding a Statement of Goals and Objectives to the ordinance to detail the vision of the Opportunity Site; and
- Enhancing the purpose statement of the zoning district and add detailed design guidelines/criteria to provide more information about design, layout, and fit of development within the district and the district within the plan and the community.

Summary

Based on our preliminary analysis of the Opportunity Areas, we have presented ideas for the enhancement of the study area jurisdictions’ zoning regulations. These zoning enhancements are recommended to enable and foster the envisioned redevelopment in the study area. The table below summarizes the regulatory changes recommended by jurisdiction.

Jurisdiction	Rezoning Needed?	Existing District Available?	Enhancements Needed?	Mixed Use District /Overlay Needed?	Updated Community Goals / Purpose Needed?
Bensalem Twp.	Y	Y (R-55)	Y	Y	Y
Bristol Twp.	Y	Y - several	Y	Y	Y
Bristol Borough	Y in part	Y (MX, NC)	Y	N	Y
Tullytown	Y in part	Y (BC, others)	Y	N	Y
Morrisville	Y	Y (NC, others)	Y	Y	Y
Falls Twp.	Y	Y for residential	Y	Y	Y

Opportunity Areas Location Map

