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October 1, 2021

**SUBJECT: Draft Chapter 4: Existing Land Use**

**TO: Comp Plan Development Team**

**FROM: Mike Narcowich, AICP, Community Planning Assistant Manager**

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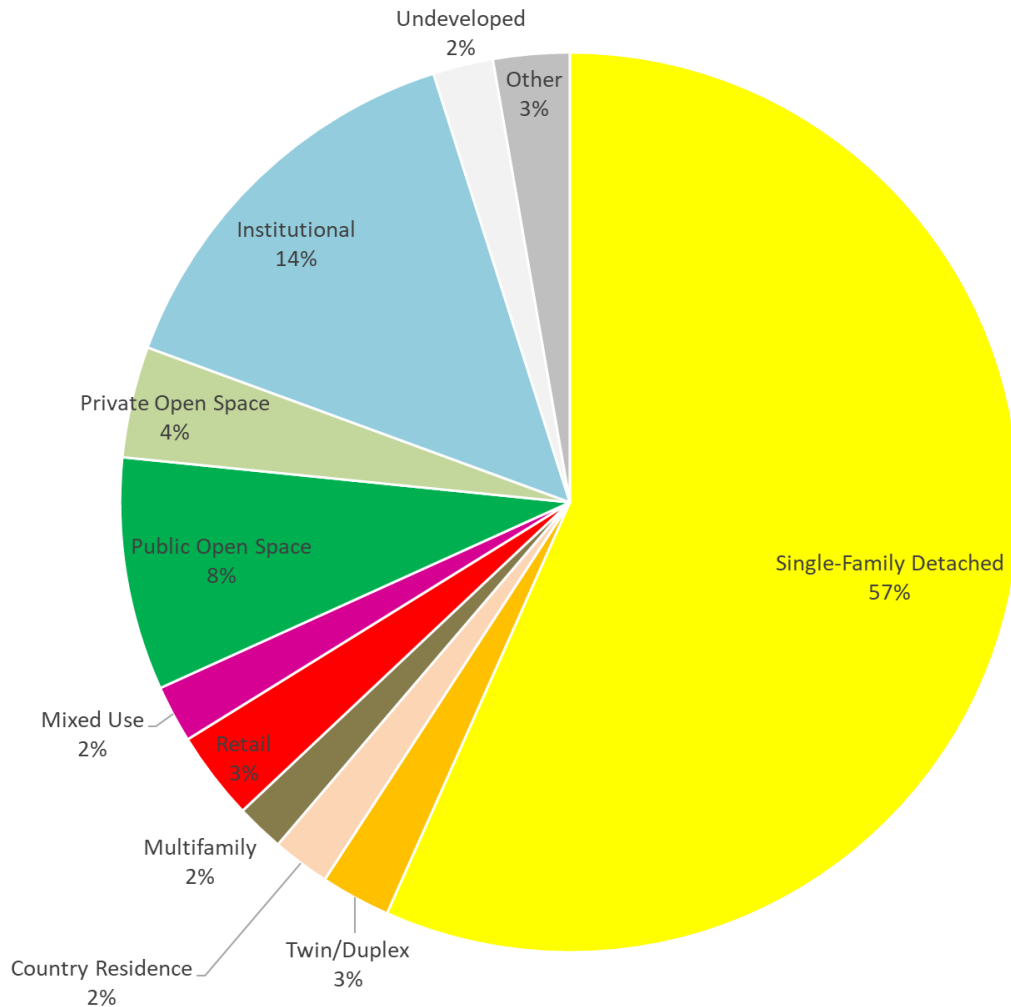
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## Introduction

This chapter examines Abington's existing land use. It reviews characteristics of each major land use type in the township, how land uses are changing and have changed, and how the township's land use allocation compares with that of the county and neighboring municipalities. Policy recommendations for land use are contained in Chapter 13: Future Land Use, using the information in this chapter as part of the foundation for its land use policy recommendations.

## General Characteristics

# Abington Existing Land Use, 2020



Note: "Other" category includes: Office (0.7%), Industrial (0.7%), Utility (0.7%), Agriculture (0.5%), Single-Family Attached (0.2%), and other features (0.8%) such as roads and water bodies.

Residential uses represent the largest major land use category in the township; they comprise 62% of the township's land. Single-family detached homes represent nearly all land used for residential purposes--57%. Residential land comprises more than four times the size of the second highest major category--land used for institutional purposes. Residential uses are well-distributed around the township. However, multifamily uses tend to be clustered along arterial roads. Single-family attached uses are more scattered, but several blocks of such homes exist in neighborhoods in Crestmont, Glenside, and Meadowbrook.

Institutional uses, such as hospitals, schools, and cemeteries, account for 15% of township land area. As with residential uses, generally, they are also well-distributed around the township. The largest areas of institutional land include:

- The land that hosts three public schools, the public works facility, and the public safety training center, bounded by Highland, Susquehanna, and Easton Roads;
- The area around the two hospitals;
- The area including cemeteries and parochial educational institutions adjacent to Rockledge Borough.

Open space makes up 12.4% of the township's land, and is the third largest major land use category. Public open space makes up the two-thirds of the open space (8.4% of the township's land). The largest areas of open space in Abington include Lorimer Park and other open space along the Pennypack Creek, Alverthorpe Park, and the Ardsley Wildlife Sanctuary,

Commercial uses make up the next highest major land use category (3.9%, most of which consists of retail uses (3.2%), with office accounting for only 0.7%. The largest single retail use area is the Willow Grove Park Mall. Otherwise, retail, office, and mixed uses are located in shopping centers, along major roads, and in the township's traditional village areas.

Industrial uses make up only 0.7% of the township's land area. The only significant industrial area in the township is the land that is the site of SPS Technologies in Glenside. Scattered small industrial uses exist in Willow Grove, Crestmont, North Hills, and Roslyn.

## **Putting Land Use in Context: Comparison with Selected Reference Areas**

This land use analysis compares existing land use in Abington with that of two neighboring townships, Cheltenham and Upper Dublin, and Montgomery County. The following similarities and variations were observed:

- Abington has a higher share of land in residential use (63%) than the three reference areas.

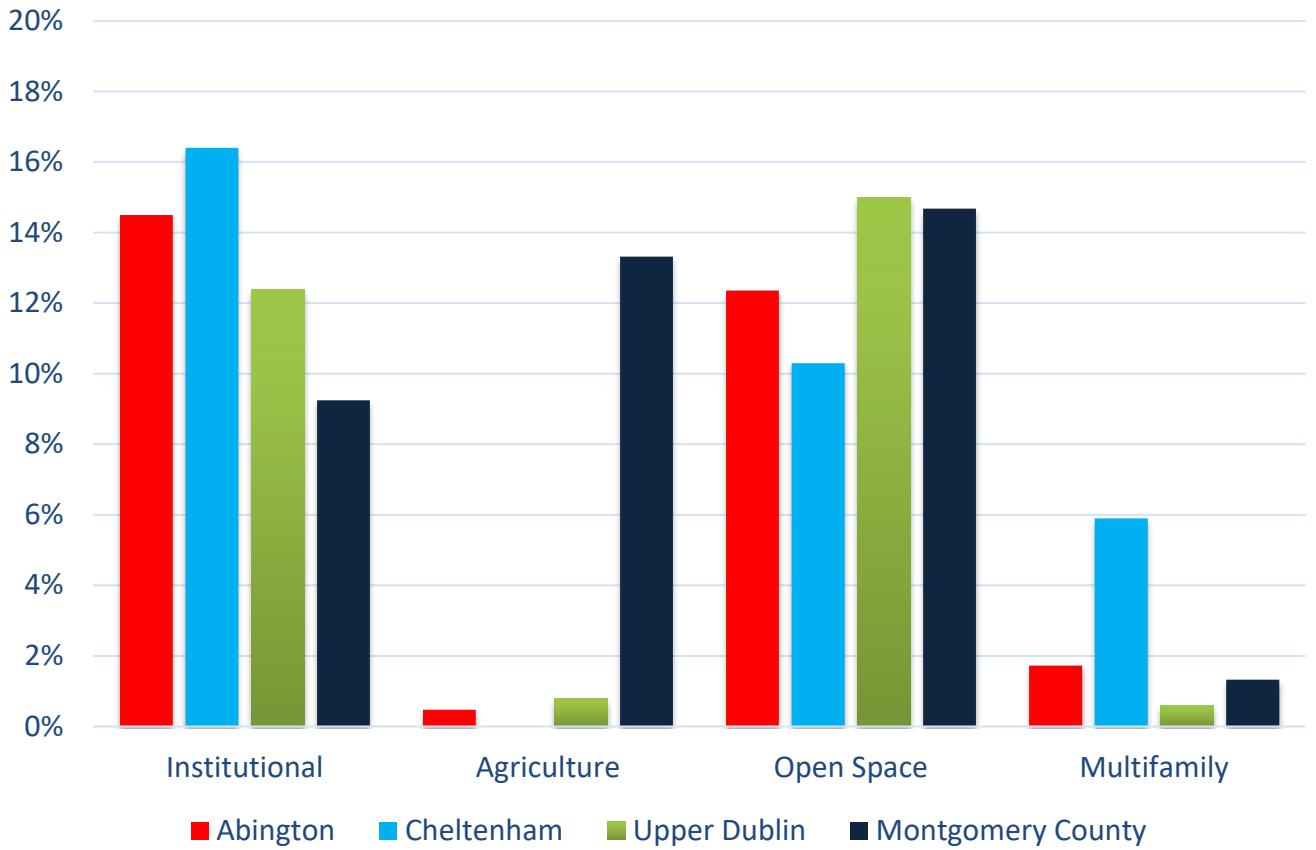
### **Municipal and County Comparison**

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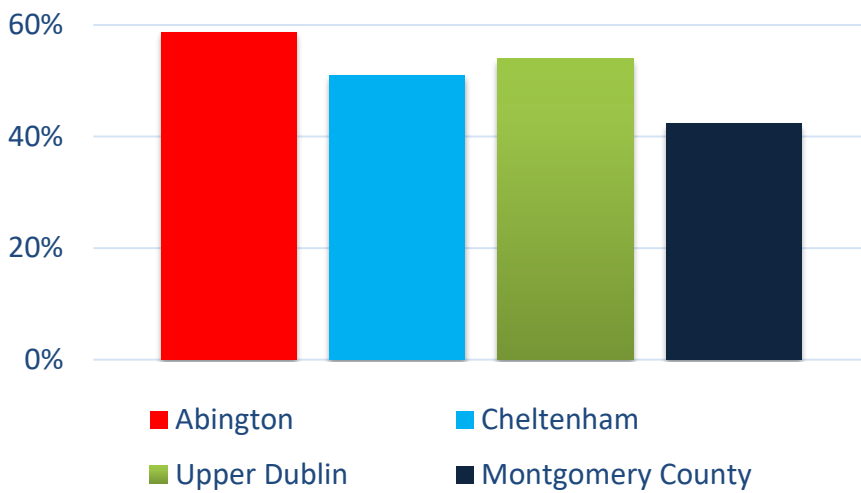
<b>Municipal and County Comparison</b>	<b>Abington</b>	<b>Montgomery County</b>	<b>Cheltenham</b>	<b>Upper Dublin</b>
Agriculture	0.5%	13.3%	0.0%	0.8%
Country Residence	2.1%	6.6%	0.5%	1.3%
Industrial	0.7%	4.0%	1.0%	1.5%
Institutional	14.5%	9.3%	16.4%	12.4%
Mixed Use	2.1%	1.2%	1.6%	0.8%
Mobile Home (Park)	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Multifamily	1.7%	1.3%	5.9%	0.6%
Office	0.7%	1.9%	0.2%	4.5%
Private Open Space	4.0%	6.5%	3.6%	8.2%
Public Open Space	8.4%	8.2%	6.7%	6.8%
Retail	3.2%	2.7%	4.1%	2.7%
Single-Family Attached	0.2%	0.8%	0.3%	1.1%
Single-Family Detached	56.7%	35.8%	50.6%	52.7%
Twin/Duplex	2.5%	1.3%	3.8%	0.7%
Undeveloped	2.2%	4.2%	4.0%	3.8%
Utilities	0.8%	2.9%	1.3%	2.1%

*Source: Montgomery County Board of Assessment, 2020*

### Land Use Comparison, by Place



### Single-Family Land Use Comparison, by Place



- A majority of Abington's land is used for single-family detached residential development (57%), a figure that is also higher than the three reference areas, and much higher than the county average of 37%.
- The percentage of land used for multifamily uses, although small (1.7%), is higher than the county average. It is three times higher than in Upper Dublin (0.6%), but less than one-third that of Cheltenham (5.9%).
- Abington's share of single-family attached development is only 0.2%; this is much lower than Upper Dublin, in particular, where single-family attached development makes up 1.1% of total land use.
- The share of institutional land (14.5%) in Abington, which includes hospitals and educational uses, is well above the county average of 9.3%, but is comparable to that of the two other townships.
- Commercial (retail and office) uses comprise a lower share of land in the township (3.9%) than in all three reference areas. This contrasts most with Upper Dublin, which has 7.2% of its land in commercial use—much of which is located in Fort Washington. It is possible, however, that the land used for retail uses is underrepresented since some of it is grouped within the "mixed use" land use category. Abington has the highest share of land used for mixed use development (2.1%) of the reference areas. Much of this land is located in villages such as Glenside, Keswick, and Roslyn and along its major roadways, such as Old York Road.
- Abington has less land used for industrial uses (0.7%) than any of the other three areas. Abington and the two other townships are communities that became built-out before sprawling industrial parks became common; each township has a share of industrial land that is much less than the county average of 4.0%. SPS Technologies in Glenside represents the most significant portion of this land use category in the township.
- Abington has the highest share of public open space of the four areas examined. The township's open space network is extensive, comprised of numerous areas for athletics, passive recreation and nature preserves, the most significant which is Alverthorpe Park.
- Agriculture makes up a significant portion of land in the county (13%), but it barely exists in the township (0.5% of land) and the two other townships.

## Land Use Trends in the Township

Abington's last comprehensive plan (2007), referencing the 1961 report entitled "*Physical Characteristics and Utilization of the Land in Abington Township*," (by Abington Township Planning Commission and the University of Pennsylvania's Government Consulting Service) described development trends in the 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards as follows:

*In the early 1900s, population (and hence - development) was concentrated among a mere handful of centers (at Weldon, Abington, and various railroad stations). Remaining land was predominantly undeveloped or part of large estate holdings of mostly wooded land. By 1930, the Township was still largely undeveloped - approximately...26.2%...was developed. The picture changed enormously by 1960 when approximately [78%] of the Township became developed. Moreover, the type of development changed from solely residential in nature to a more complex mixture of uses including commercial, industrial, and institutional. Though there was some variety in the mix of land uses, land use was still predominantly residential... During the next thirty years, land use continued to diversify such that by 1990, greater and greater proportions of land were brought into commercial, industrial, or institutional use.*

The township's land use trends are illustrated by the table, below. It should be noted that this table was created using data from four planning initiatives and studies, conducted by different authors over 60 years. Therefore, methodologies and accuracy of data likely varied, and data for years prior to 2020 may not be strictly comparable.

Land Use Over Time	1960	1990	2005	2020
Residential	71%	57%	62%	72%
Commercial	3%	7%	9%	4%
Office		1%		0.8%
Retail/ Wholesale		6%		4%
Industrial/ Utilities	6%	2%		2%
Industrial		0.5%		0.8%
Utilities		1%		0.9%
Public & Semi-Public	20%			
Institutional		8%	10%	17%
Parks/Recreation		16%	19%	
Public Open Space				10%

Private Open Space				5%
Vacant or Undeveloped	22%	7%	4%	2%

*Sources: Montgomery County Board of Assessment (2020), Comprehensive Plan Update for Abington Township (2007), Land Use Study, based on data from Montgomery County Board of Assessment (1991), Physical Characteristics and Utilization of Land in Abington Township (1961, by Abington Planning Commission and Government Consulting Service of University of Pennsylvania)*

The table shows commercial land uses increasing from 3 percent in 1960 to 9 percent in 2005, before declining to 4 percent in 2020. The effects of the Great Recession and a glut in the office and retail markets in the past decade may well have contributed to such a decline. Industrial/Utilities land showed a steady decline from 6% in 1960 to 2% in 2020. This is similar to trends around the county and nation over time.

“Public” and “semi-public” land is roughly analagous to “institutional, “public open space,” and “private open space.” Over time, these land uses (combined) showed a steady increase, from 20 percent in 1960 to 31% in 2020. Institutional land has increased (from 8% in 1990 to 17% in 2020) as the township’s two hospitals have expanded (what is now Abington-Jefferson Hospital purchased and demolished apartments that used to exist on the northern end of the hospital site to accommodate its expansion). It also purchased retail uses to construct a parking garage. Schools opened or expanded (such as Copper Beech Elementary, St. Basil Academy, St. Hilary of Poitiers School, and Penn State University-Abington’s Lion’s Gate Dormitory), the Penn State University-Meadowbrook Farm was opened, St. Michael the Archangel Ukrainian Church was built, and Redeemer Sisters Chapel was added to the total. Private open space was also added when new residential developments, such as Twinbrook Condominiums and Redeemer Village were created with open space under common ownership. Open space increased with additional land preserved as natural conservation areas (public and private) added along the Pennypack Creek and its tributaries, and with the addition of Jackson and War Memorial Parks.

<b>Parks/Open Space/Institutional/Public/Semi-Public Land Uses Over Time</b>				
	<b>1960</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2020</b>
Public & Semi-Public	20%			
Institutional		8%	10%	17%
Parks/Recreation		16%	19%	
Public Open Space				10%



Private Open Space				5%
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>31%</b>

Sources: Same as Land Use Trends Table

Industrial or utility land has declined over time, from 6 percent in 1960 to 2 percent in 2020. Industrial land has declined over time in the county and nationally, as well, as industrial operations have relocated to other countries with lower labor costs.

Some of the most noticeable changes to the township’s existing land use map from the 1964 comprehensive plan were several areas designated as “planned development” in 1964. Areas having that designation in 1964 have since been developed as:

- Willow Grove Park Mall
- Pavilion Shopping Center + Foxcroft Square + Plaza apartments
- Meadowbrook Apartments
- Penn State-Abington Lion’s Gate Dormitory
- Copper Beech Elementary School
- Rydal Park Continuing Care Community, Apartments, Auto Sales and Service
- Giant
- Auto sales and service, Roslyn

Industrial areas were converted into commercial areas, including:

- Switchville Crossing (Retail-Office)
- Retail, Davisville and Moreland Roads

Other noticeable changes involved schools, such as:

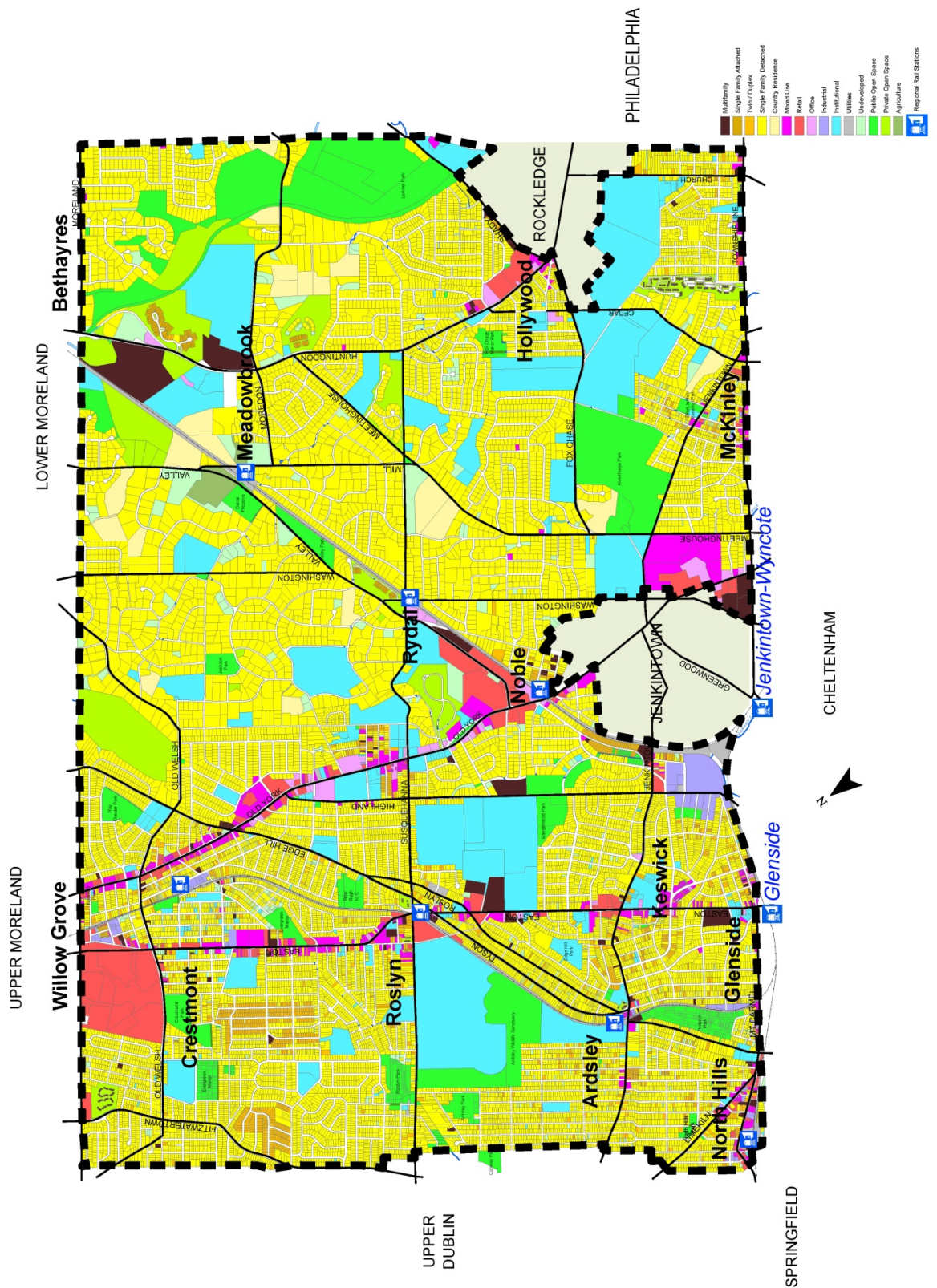
- North Hills Elementary School → Dennis P. Dougherty Memorial Park and ballfields
- Glenside Weldon Elementary School → Vacant
- Undeveloped → St. Basil Academy

Low-density residential or undeveloped areas were developed:

- “Medium to Low Density Suburban” → Tall Trees single-family attached and Redeemer Village Age-Restricted Apartments
- Undeveloped land (east of Lorimer Park) → Single-family neighborhoods and streets
- “Township Park” (along Philadelphia boundary, connecting Rockledge to Cheltenham) → Single-Family Residential
- Undeveloped land north of game preserve → Single-family neighborhoods and Meadowbrook Farm

And commercial development crept onward, extending into low-density residential areas, including:

- Welsh & Fitzwatertown Roads → Commercial uses, condominiums
- Along Old York Road (on the northern end of Jenkintown, near Abington-Jefferson Hospital, and various other places).



Existing Land Use Map, 2020 (Source: Montgomery County Board of Assessment)

## Land Development Activity (2010 to present)

### *Nonresidential Land Developments*

There was 558,000 square feet of nonresidential development approved in the township since 2010. The largest nonresidential land developments since 2010 have primarily been institutional (educational and medical) and medical office land uses. The developments over 100,000 square feet were the Abington High School building additions (183,000 square feet) and the construction of Lion’s Gate Dormitory (141,000 square feet) by Penn State University-Abington. This is significant investment in the education sector. In fact, the high-quality education system in the township is something that Abingtonians greatly value in the community—they feel that it is one of the reasons that it is such a great place to live in and raise children in, as expressed by the public at outreach events for Vision2035.

Medical and medical office uses accounted for two of the developments: Mediplex and Patient First. Investment in this sector in Abington is not surprising, given the strong presence of the health care industry in the township. National trends also show an increasing role of health care in an aging America. The hospitals and related medical services and offices play a strong role in the township. The convenience and amenity that medical services represent is also highly valued by township residents.

There were several retail developments in this time period as well. The largest of these was at Switchville Crossing (45,000 square feet), most of which consisted of a fitness center. Other developments included eating and drinking establishments (restaurants, a brewpub and fast food), convenience retail with gas, automobile sales and service, a pharmacy, and a bank.

<b>Nonresidential Land Developments (since 2010)</b>				
<b>Name</b>	<b>County Stamp &amp; Seal</b>	<b>Retail</b>	<b>Office</b>	<b>Institutional</b>
		Switchville Crossing	2010	44,948
Hyundai	2011	5,964		
Jenkintown Nissan	2011	1,451		
Huntingdon Valley Shopping Center <sup>1</sup>	2013	25,009	8,068	

St. Michael Archangel Ukrainian Catholic Church	2015			14,573	
Wawa, Bank	2015	8,191			
Patient First	2015		7,151		
Penn State Housing	2016			140,850	
Abington High School Building Additions	2018			183,337	
Abington Friends School	2018			17,225	
Mediplex	2019		19,982		
Sussman KIA	2019	5,600			
Sussman MAZDA	2019	1,199			
Burger King	2019	744			
CHOP Abington	2020			37,063	
<b>Subtotal</b>		<b>93,106</b>	<b>71,920</b>	<b>393,048</b>	
<b>Total</b>					<b>558,074</b>

Note: <sup>1</sup> Pharmacy moved within shopping center

### *Residential Land Developments*

There were 218 residential units approved for development since 2010. This included two large residential developments (with 146 total units). Both were age-restricted developments undertaken by existing institutions in the township: Rydal Waters (part of Rydal Park) consisted of 85 units and Mission Green (on the Medical Mission Sisters property) consisted of 61 units. The other notable development was the redevelopment of public housing (16 units) in Crestmont as Crest Manor.

Other residential development generally took the form of scattered-site, single-family detached, infill development of 2, 3 and 4 units (the Penn State–Abington Lion’s Gate Dormitory was a significant residential proposal—it can house 400 students—but it was counted as part of nonresidential institutional development).

Residential Land Developments (since 2010)				
Development Name	Location	Year <sup>1</sup>	Number of Units	Dwelling Type <sup>2</sup>

	1231 Susquehanna Rd	2010	4	SFD
	3032 Raymond Ave	2012	4	SFD
Mission Green	8400 Pine Rd	2013	61	MF, AR
	1647 North Hills Ave	2015	4	SFD
	364 Shel mire St	2015	4	SFD
	72 Rhoads Ave	2015	8	SFD
Crest Manor	2231 Hamilton Ave	2016	16	MF (14), Single-Family Attached (2)
	1043 Easton Rd	2018	4	MF
Rydal Waters	Old York & Brook Rds	2019	85	SFA, AR (50); SFD, AR (35)
<b>Subtotal</b>			<b>190</b>	
<b>Total (adding recorded plans of fewer than 3 units)</b>			<b>218</b>	

<sup>1</sup> Year plan recorded stamp-and-seal at Montgomery County Recorder of Deeds

<sup>2</sup> SFD = Single-Family Detached, SFA = Single-Family Attached, MF = Multifamily, AR = Age-Restricted

## Conclusion

Abington Township is generally a suburban residential community. As one would expect, the township's land uses are predominantly residential--specifically, single-family detached. Two other major categories occupy a significant (albeit much smaller) proportion of the township's land; they are institutional and open space land uses. These three land uses represent a higher share of land than is typical in the county, and they represent some of the things that Abingtonians say they like most about the township: pleasant residential neighborhoods, excellent schools and health care services, and an ample parks and open space system with extensive green space.

Major trends over time include the growth in the share of land used for institutional or open space purposes and the decline in share of land used for industrial or utility uses, and the expansion but then contraction of land used for commercial purposes. Over the past decade, nonresidential development has primarily consisted of institutional development, and residential development has primarily consisted of multifamily age-restricted development.