



Whitpain Township

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

JUNE 2024

Overview and Discussion of Draft Zoning Revisions to Permit Limited Office to Residential Conversions

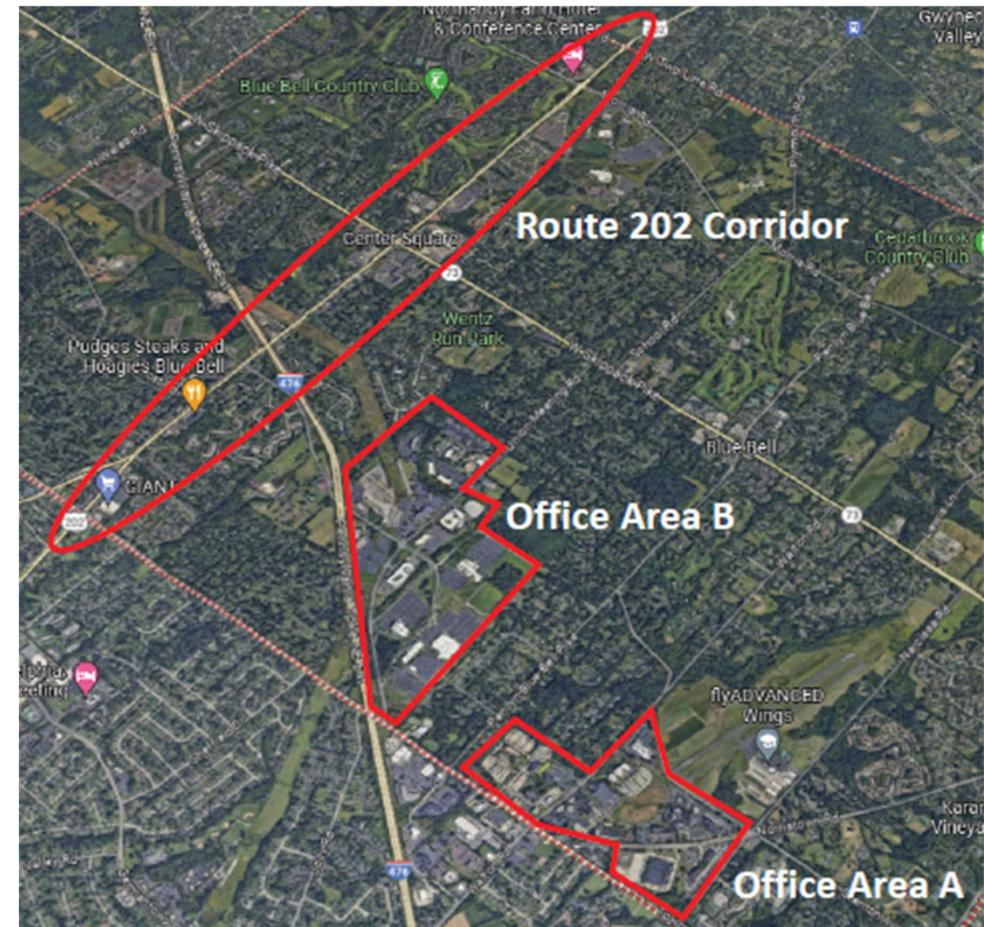
Board of Supervisors
February 4, 2025





Comprehensive Plan Update - Recap

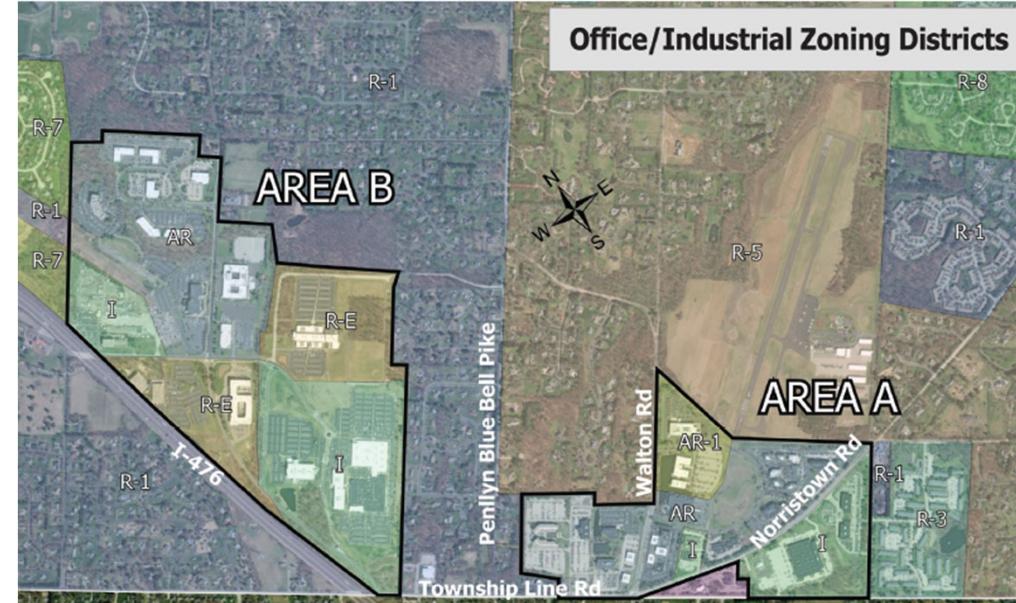
- The Township's Comprehensive Plan Update was adopted by the Board in March 2024
- The updated plan contained various background information and analysis regarding the future of two office areas and the US 202 corridor
- The recommendations included potential zoning revisions to allow office to residential conversions
- This overview is aimed to provide background to the Board and to discuss the main points of a draft zoning ordinance staff and the Township Solicitor have been working on that may be considered moving forward





Comprehensive Plan Update - Recap

- The Comprehensive Plan Update stated that 970 to 1,210 residential units could be added over the next decade
- The additional units could be added through the conversion or addition of residential units to existing office areas
- Office areas have continued to struggle and are expected to experience declines moving forward which have an impact on the Township
- The Township has seen consistent interest from current and prospective property owners looking to transition current office properties into residential uses



Zoning revisions to allow office to residential conversions

If revisions to the existing zoning ordinances were made to allow multi-family residential uses in the areas currently zoned AR/AR-1 (Administrative and Research), R-E (Research and Engineering) and I (Industrial), based on property owner interest expressed to date and the lack of residential units currently available in the Township, it is reasonable to assume that new residential units will be absorbed relatively quickly, as projected in the residential unit absorption analysis. The projected 970 to 1,210 residential units projected by 2033 by the absorption analysis would have little significant effect on traffic, as outlined in Chapter 2.



Comprehensive Plan Update - Recap

- The Comprehensive Plan Update included information on using a new zoning ordinance to incentivize or mandate the creation of attainable housing for workers such as teachers, healthcare workers and others who provide essential services in our community
- Attainable units could be included within the new residential developments that are generated from the conversion of existing office areas

**Hurricane Ida destroyed affordable rental units.
Hundreds of families still can't find new ones.**

In a fierce competition for housing, lower income residents, especially renters, may face fewer options.

**Report: First-time homebuyers in Philly area
need to make more to afford a starter home**

High mortgage rates, overvalued homes, and low inventory continue to hurt renters looking to enter the housing market.



Housing Pressures

Who is being priced out?

EMT/Medics: \$46,500 – \$53,500

Montgomery County Govt: \$67,000 avg. employee pay

Healthcare Support: \$35,870

Food Prep & Serving: \$33,850

Personal Care & Service: \$36,590

Office & Administrative Support: \$50,620

Construction & Extraction: \$71,320

Newly hired teacher (Wissahickon SD) \$58,525





Housing Pressures

Douglass Twp.

Poverty Rate: 4.2%

Survival Budget: 24.9%





Draft Zoning Ordinance

- A working group including the Township Manager, Assistant Township Manager, Township Planner and Township Solicitor have been working on a draft zoning ordinance for several months
- The goal of the working group is to create an ordinance that is in accordance with the Comprehensive Plan Update
 - This discussion is an initial step in the process to see if the draft ordinance is on the right track and is something the Board would like to pursue further
 - Future meetings would include a vote to advertise the draft ordinance and additional opportunities for public comment
- This is a policy matter for the Board to discuss and get feedback from the public/stakeholders prior to making a final decision. As stated in the Comprehensive Plan Update there is an option to make no changes to existing zoning



Draft Zoning Ordinance Details

- The draft ordinance would create an overlay district to allow for the conversion of office properties for multifamily use
- The overlay district would be approximate to the office areas that were part of the Comprehensive Plan Update
- A project would require conditional use approval by the Board of Supervisors for a conversion to residential use, demolition and rebuild as residential use, mixed use or single-family dwellings that are part of currently unimproved areas
 - Would be limited to areas abutting existing residential zoning districts
 - Would be limited to properties with at least eight gross acres
 - Maximum density provisions including no more than 250 units in any one multifamily development



Draft Zoning Ordinance Details

- The draft ordinance would create a cap of no more than 1,000 new dwelling units on properties within the overlay district
 - This is at the lower end of the 970 - 1,210 unit range
- The overlay district would limit the number of active adult housing developments within the overlay district to no more than 200 total units in order to maintain a diversity of residential uses
- All projects within the overlay district would need to meet the Township's requirements related to
 - Parking
 - Green area
 - Buffering, screening and landscape
 - Outdoor recreation and other features



Draft Zoning Ordinance Details

- All projects within the overlay district would be subject to an attainable housing requirement that would mandate 10% of total dwelling units (no fewer than 5) be set aside for those making between 80%-120% of the **household median income** in Montgomery County which would equate to \$75,000 - \$112,000*
 - Attainable units would be rental units maintained by the property owner. Staff believes this is the most efficient way to add attainable units to the Township's housing inventory
 - Other approaches such as a payment in lieu to a housing fund may be considered but would add additional challenges
 - Unit mix of attainable units would match the unit mix of the overall development
 - An annual report would need to be filed to demonstrate compliance with the attainable housing requirements



Draft Zoning Ordinance - Next Steps

- If the Board is interested in pursuing an ordinance to allow for the limited conversion of office to residential use, Township staff will come back to the Board next month with the full text of the ordinance and seek authorization to advertise
- The Board could authorize advertisement in March and the ordinance would go to the Planning Commission in April
 - Planning Commission would review and recommend adoption or denial by the Board of Supervisors
 - Montgomery County Planning Commission would also review the proposed zoning ordinance
- The Board of Supervisors would then schedule a public hearing on the zoning ordinance at a future Board of Supervisors meeting
- Each step in the process would allow for public comment from residents and property owners on the proposed changes



Draft Zoning Ordinance - Next Steps

- As stated in the Comprehensive Plan Update there is the option to make no changes to zoning. However, this would likely continue the decline in the Township's office areas in terms of vacancy rates, reduced tax assessments among other factors
 - Several office buildings are currently challenging their tax assessments
- Staff recognizes that this is a complex topic, and the working group understands there will be strong and varied opinions on how the Township should proceed. This presentation hopefully provides a starting point for a community discussion regarding if the limited transition of office to residential use is something the Township wants to pursue further
- Questions and comments