



# CHARACTER AREAS



**PLANNER'S PORTFOLIO**  
ISSUE 1

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delaware county  
planning department



# PLANNER'S PORTFOLIO CHARACTER AREAS

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## Planner's Portfolio Series

The Planner's Portfolio Series is an outreach effort developed by Delaware County Council in order to explore the planning concepts available for communities to take advantage of the unique opportunities across Delaware County.

The pattern on the cover page, and found throughout this series, represents the importance of each individual component in the larger network. The Planner's Portfolio Series explores several of these components and how they can support community character in Delaware County.

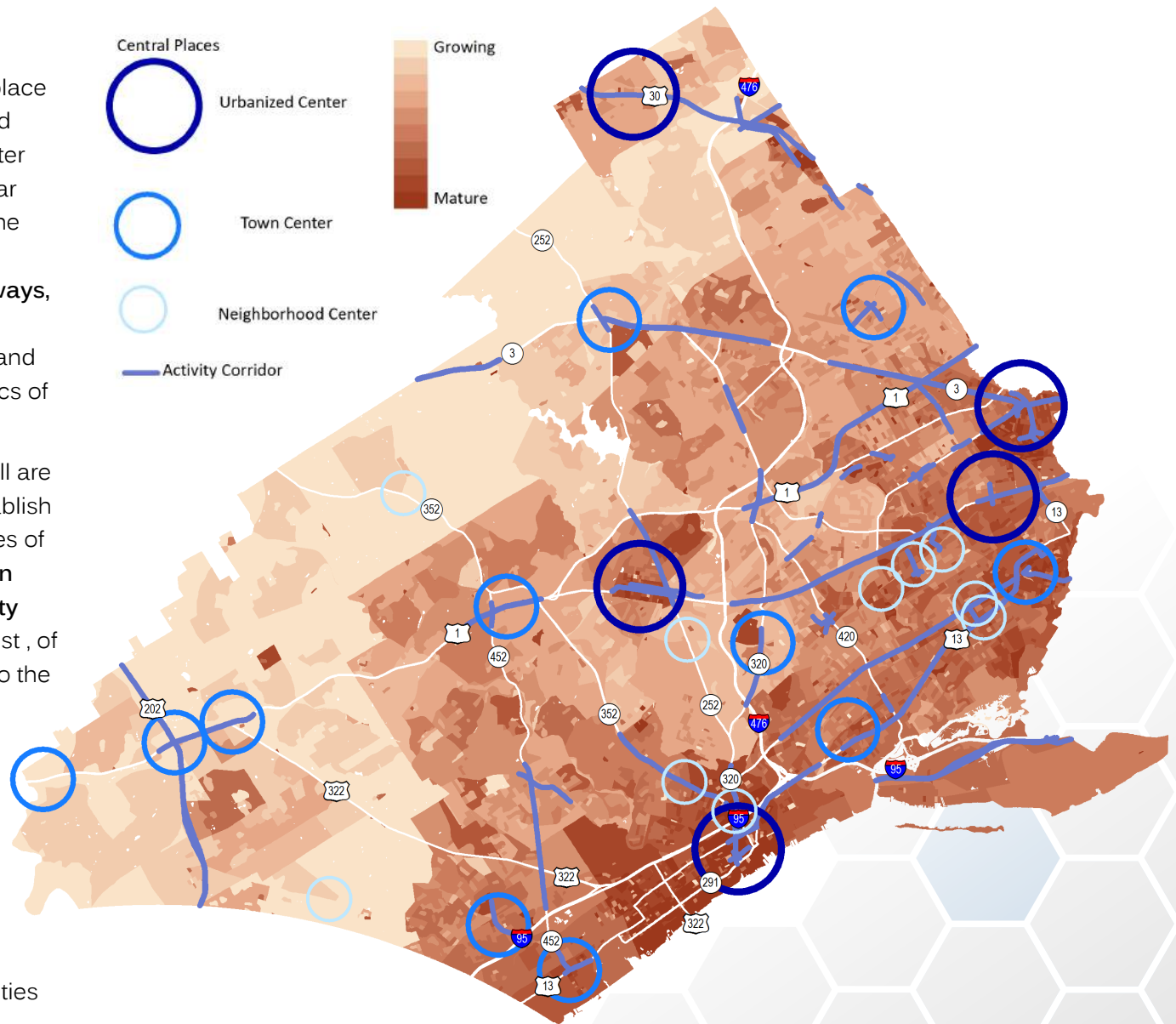
For more information, contact the Delaware County Planning Department at 610-891-5200 or visit [www.co.delaware.pa.us/planning](http://www.co.delaware.pa.us/planning) to see the complete Planner's Portfolio series.

# OVERVIEW

*Delaware County 2035*, the County's comprehensive plan, organizes the diverse place types of the County into **Character Areas** and **Central Places**. The County has four Character Area types, which are broad areas with similar development patterns and characteristics. The four types of Character Areas are: **Mature Neighborhoods, Growing Suburbs, Greenways, and Open Space**. Most communities have a spectrum including all four Character Areas and any individual location includes characteristics of multiple Character Areas.

There are also four types of Central Places; all are community focal points that reinforce or establish a sense of place and character. The four types of Central Places are: **Urbanized Centers, Town Centers, Neighborhood Centers, and Activity Corridors**. Examples, but not an exhaustive list, of Character Areas are highlighted in the map to the right.

The Planner's Portfolio series will focus on Mature Neighborhoods, Growing Suburbs, Central Places (Urbanized Centers, Town Centers, and Neighborhood Centers), and Activity Corridors. These areas have unique underlying characteristics and different challenges and opportunities. This series will outline the strategies that can help communities realize the potential of these areas.



## CHARACTER AREAS

# MATURE NEIGHBORHOODS

The Mature Neighborhoods of Delaware County are those that are essentially built-out. They are the developed suburbs. While housing styles vary greatly from neighborhood to neighborhood, they are typically single-family homes, both attached and detached, on small lots (less than ½ acre). They were often developed along transit lines or within close proximity to a transit station. Ease of access into Center City Philadelphia was, and still is today, a major strength of many of these neighborhoods. Many of these neighborhoods have a strong community identity, with unique housing styles and amenities, such as community parks. Still yet, others are experiencing population loss and deteriorating infrastructure systems. Revitalization opportunities exist in a variety of scales and locations. They can often exist alongside the other Character Areas and Central Places described here.



Media Borough





Glenolden Borough



Upper Darby Township

Housing in Mature Neighborhoods is classically built with a relatively small setback from the street. The front of these houses typically have a combination of a front porch and small yard oriented towards the street, as opposed to a garage or driveway. These neighborhoods usually have complete sidewalk networks.

Often times, there are access drives, or alleys, behind these houses which provide residents with attached or detached garages and off-street parking.

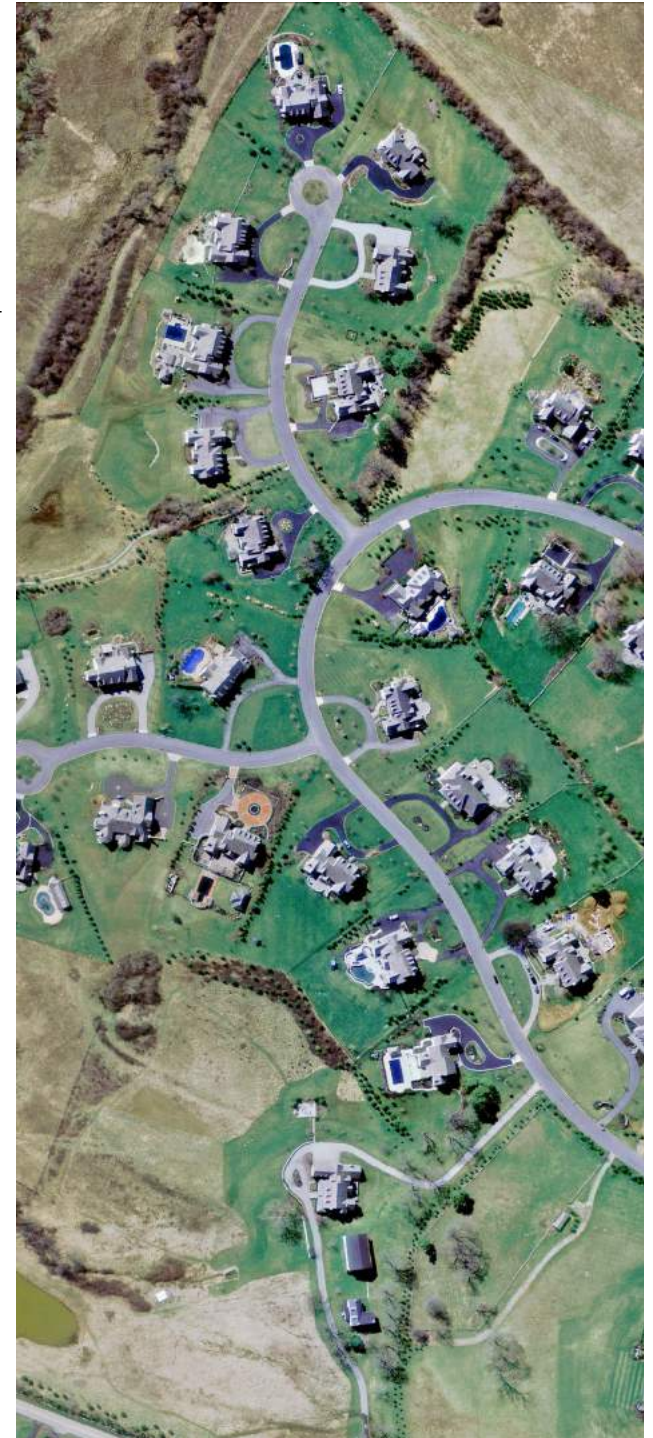
## CHARACTER AREAS

# GROWING SUBURBS

The Growing Suburbs of Delaware County still have undeveloped or agricultural land remaining and are experiencing or are forecasted to experience population growth. They are still being developed. The typical Growing Suburb is mostly residential with single-family detached housing on relatively large lots (1 acre or more). Growing Suburbs are particularly prominent in the western portion of the County, which grew rapidly as highway access to the area increased and after zoning laws began segregating uses. The neighborhoods are relatively disconnected from others due to the high number of cul-de-sacs and limited number of sidewalks. A significant increase in environmental protection ordinances at the local and state level influenced the design of these neighborhoods. They typically have areas of protected open space, particularly along stream valleys and steep slopes, but do not often have public open space. They are often heavily influenced by surrounding Activity Corridors.



Concord Township



## GROWING SUBURBS

As these neighborhoods continue to grow, demand for different types of housing has increased. The County has seen a rise in the number of single-family attached housing, or townhomes, proposed for Growing Suburbs in recent years. Rather than typical single-family detached homes on large lots, these attached homes are generally on smaller lots in developments with sidewalks and a more traditional neighborhood design. In addition to townhomes, there are often smaller detached homes on small lots.

Other developments, such as the Verandas in Newtown Square (below left), include apartment buildings while many other areas remain undeveloped.



Middletown Township



Newtown Township



Middletown Township

## CHARACTER AREAS

# CENTRAL PLACES

Central Places are the community focal points in Delaware County. They are the “Downtown” and “Main Street” areas of the County, where streets are lined with storefronts and restaurants. They are often walkable destinations integrated into the surrounding neighborhoods, including both Mature Neighborhoods and Growing Suburbs. Streets typically have improved pedestrian amenities, such as wider sidewalks, benches, and enhanced crosswalks. Mixed land uses, with a range of building sizes and density, lead to unique character and identity for each Central Place. Apartments or offices can often be found above first floor retail in buildings along the primary streets. The surrounding streets are typically comprised of apartments and single-family homes. While many Central Places grew historically around mass transit hubs or intersections of roadways, others have been recently developed, or redeveloped, as part of one large project.



Media Borough







Swarthmore Borough



Ridley Park Borough

**Urbanized Center:** Largest, with well-connected street grid network and enhanced mass transit access

**Town Center:** Main street, typically one main street surrounded by neighborhoods

**Neighborhood Center:** Smallest, often the intersection of two streets

Though they are different in scale, Central Places often have similar characteristics and strategies. The age also varies greatly; Swarthmore Borough is an historical center while Concordville Town Centre is an example of a more recently developed Central Place.

## CHARACTER AREAS

# ACTIVITY CORRIDORS

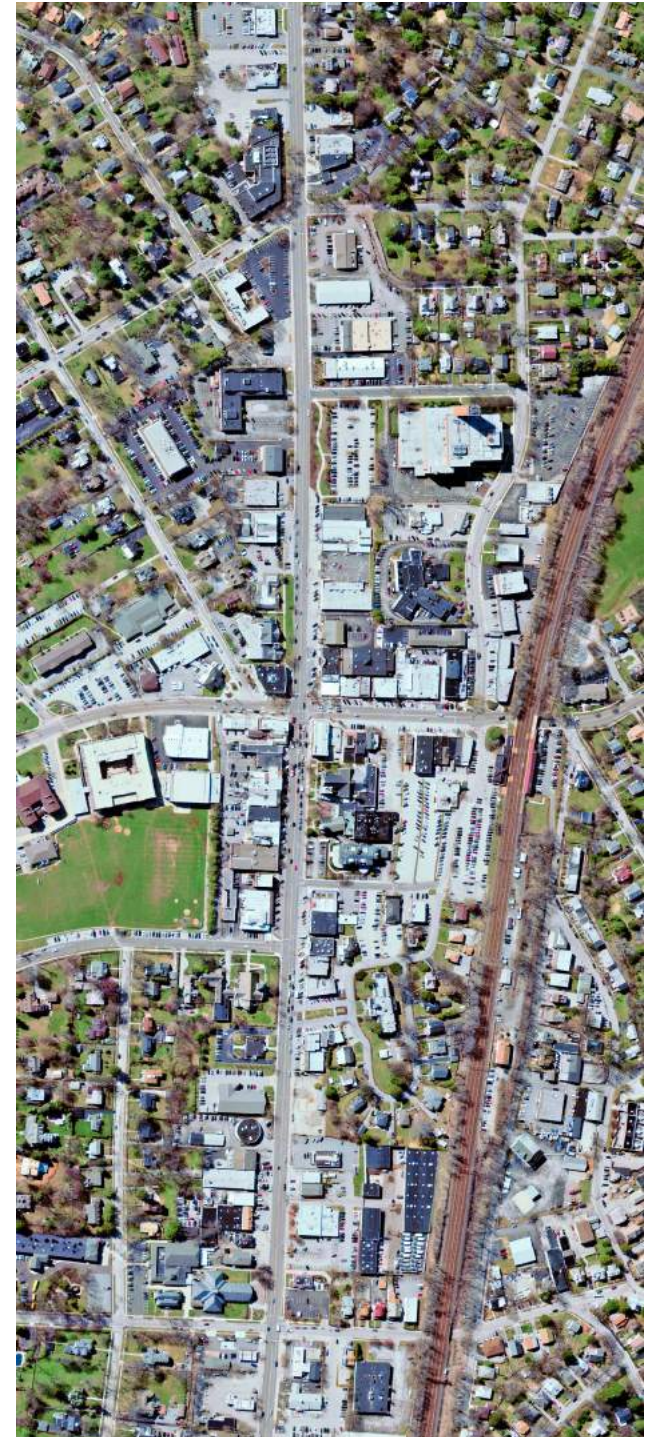
Activity Corridors are linear-shaped places that flank major transportation corridors or highway interchanges with intense development. They typically contain a variety of retail, office, and service oriented uses, such as restaurants, and vary in width, density, and design depending on the local context and underlying character. While many Corridors are auto-centric, they have the potential to become more walkable, connect to surrounding neighborhoods, and include more attractive streetscapes. Activity Corridors can be found throughout the County, including along transit lines, often intersecting with one or more Central Place. While the primary use along these Corridors is characteristically commercial and civic uses, residential areas are typically found surrounding them. Activity Corridors that are located in Growing Suburbs were developed after zoning and often feature shared parking and limited entrances to parking lots.



Concord Township

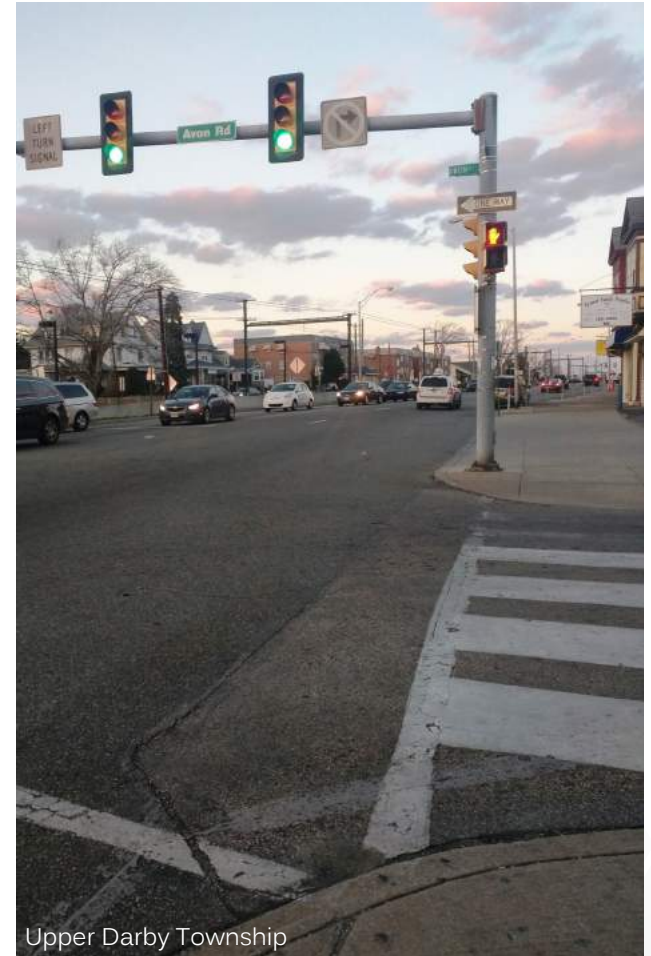


Newtown Township





Springfield Township



Upper Darby Township



Springfield Township

While many Activity Corridors are rather large, there are several smaller corridors spread throughout the County (above left and above right). These can be as short as a one or two blocks with a handful of destinations or follow along a transit line.

## OTHER PLANNER'S PORTFOLIOS:



**COMMUNITY PLACEMAKING**  
March 2016



**COMPLETE STREETS**  
April 2016



**FUNDING SOURCES**  
April 2016



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Media, Pennsylvania 19063

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