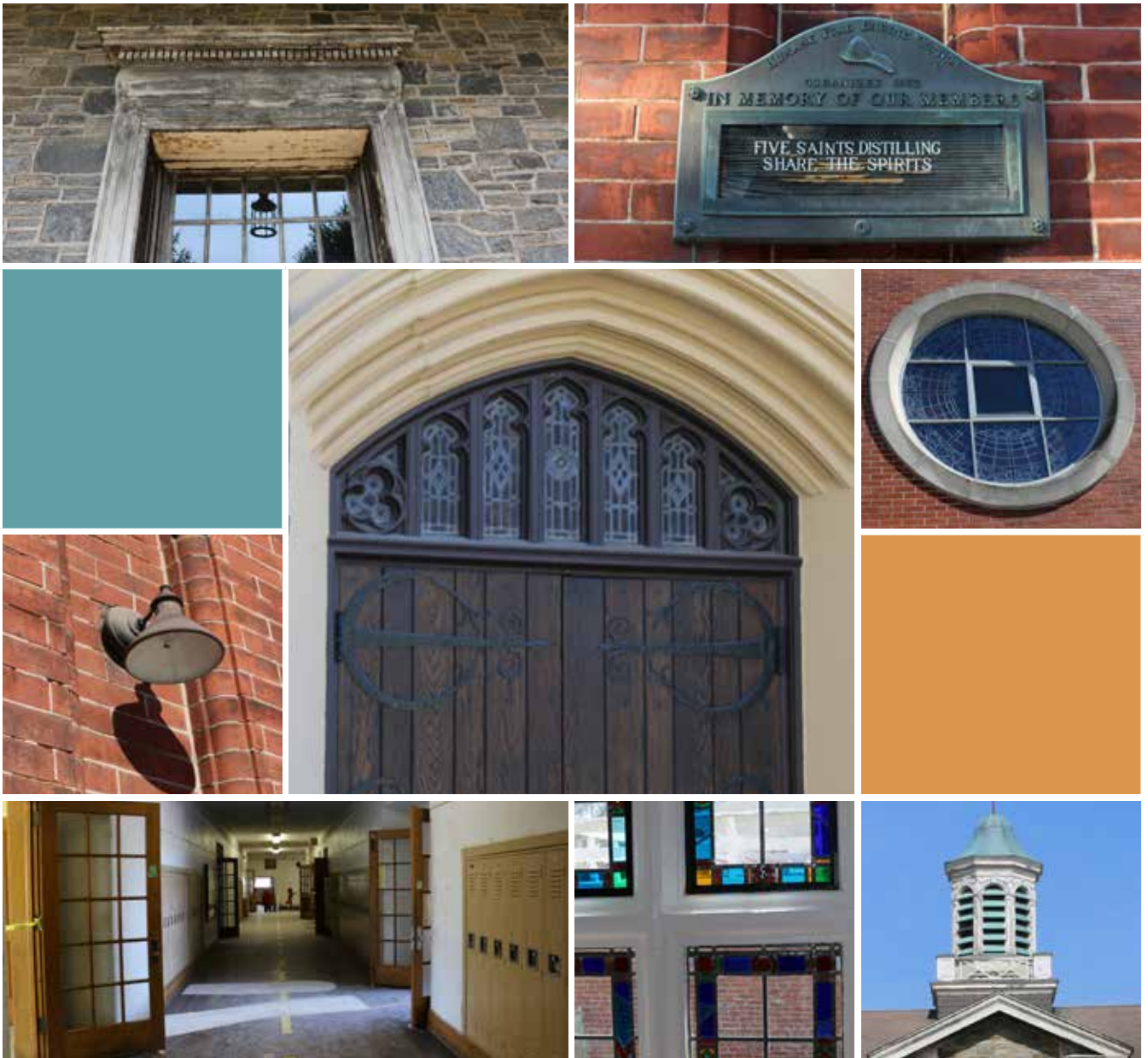


# Rethinking Institutional Properties

## Embracing Our Past and Investing in Our Future



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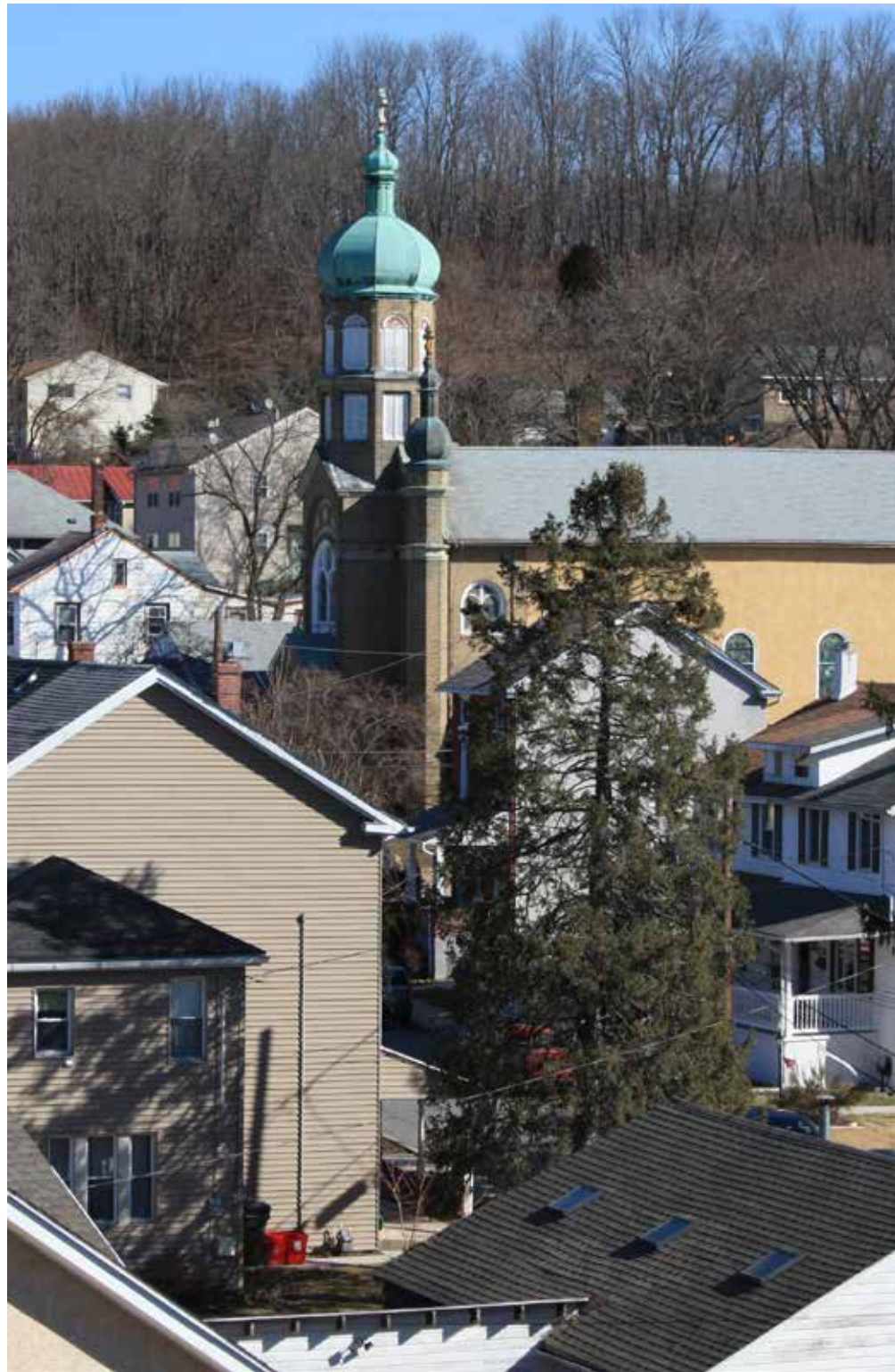
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# Rethinking Institutional Properties

Institutions provide social, economic, and cultural benefits to our communities and are an essential component of our neighborhoods. The buildings that house these institutions are usually architecturally prominent gathering places or employment centers that contribute to our sense of place. Just as communities evolve and transform over time, so must our institutions adapt to changing economic and demographic trends and social preferences. To survive, institutions are often faced with the choice of consolidating, moving, or when all else fails, closing. When that happens, they often leave behind vacant, underutilized buildings located in the heart of our communities. Through adaptive reuse, these buildings can be given a new life and continue to contribute to society.

This guidebook focuses on schools, places of worship, hospitals, and government buildings because they are the most common types of institutions in Montgomery County. There are more

than 2,100 institutional buildings in the county, many of which are and will remain active centers of the community. This guidebook provides guidance to municipalities for the adaptive reuse of those institutional properties which have closed. It explores the benefits and challenges of adaptive reuse, contains case studies of successful institutional adaptive reuse in the county, and provides best practices in planning and design to community leaders; developers; architectural, planning, and design professionals; and citizens.

This guidebook supports the goals of *Montco 2040: A Shared Vision*, the county's comprehensive plan, by encouraging collaboration and partnerships among stakeholders, supporting strong downtowns, and promoting the preservation of historic architecture to enhance community character.

*Institutional buildings, like St. Michael's Catholic Church in Mont Clare, are located in the heart of our communities.*



## WHAT IS ADAPTIVE REUSE?

Adaptive reuse is the creative and dynamic process of repurposing buildings while maintaining many of their original architectural features. Transforming a building through adaptive reuse secures its physical structure, extends its usefulness, and preserves its heritage for the public benefit.

Many examples of successful adaptive reuse can be found throughout the county, and a number of these have been recognized through the Montgomery County Planning Commission’s

Montgomery Awards program. These include former residences and farmhouses converted to retail and office space (Upper Dublin School Administration Building and Beaumont House), former factories converted to residential lofts (Hatboro Lofts and Turbo Lofts), and an 1890s boiler house converted to sustainable, transit-oriented office space (Ambler Boiler House). In the same way these buildings have met modern needs and standards, the underutilized institutions in our county can support many new functions within distinctive and irreplaceable structures.



Old ideas can sometimes use new buildings. New ideas must use old buildings. – Jane Jacobs



*Public Library, Royersford.*



*Ambler Boiler House, Ambler*



*Interior Ambler Boiler House, Ambler*



*Moulton Builders office, Lansdale.*

# INSTITUTIONAL PROPERTIES IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY

Many institutions are situated in park-like settings that contribute to a community's character and open spaces. In Montgomery County, institutional land amounts to more than 13,000 acres, or 4 percent, of total land area. In some of our municipalities, institutional land can make up 13 percent or more of overall land area.

The county has 2,100 institutional buildings, which were designed for a specific purpose, vary in size, and frequently display architectural details not commonly seen in other building types. They are traditionally located in residential and downtown neighborhoods and, due to their function, distinctive design, and settings, have become centers of community life. In a survey of Montgomery County municipal managers, many reported that closing institutions are a current issue, or will become an issue, in their communities. Some municipalities have begun to plan for their transformation by enacting ordinances to allow for compatible new uses.

## Why Are Institutions Closing?

Institutions close for many different reasons. Parochial schools, public schools, and church congregations are consolidating or closing entirely. In the past five years Montgomery County has seen the closure of five public school buildings, and an estimated 7,000 churches close each year nationally. Schools, hospitals, and government agencies often want buildings with modern spaces or facilities that accommodate the latest technology. Changes in school enrollment—an



*Pottstown Memorial Medical Center, Pottstown.*

increase or decrease—can cause it to move or close, and some institutional communities are not able to support high long-term maintenance costs of large buildings and grounds.

## Some Factors for Why Institutions are Closing

### SCHOOLS:

- Outdated buildings and a need for modern technology and instructional spaces.
- Local fluctuation in number of school-age children entering the school system.

### RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS:

- Decline in parochial school enrollment.
- Changes in dominant religious preferences over time, with growth in nondenominational and other nontraditional religious communities.

- Declining numbers of men and women entering religious life, including leadership and staff positions in religious institutions.

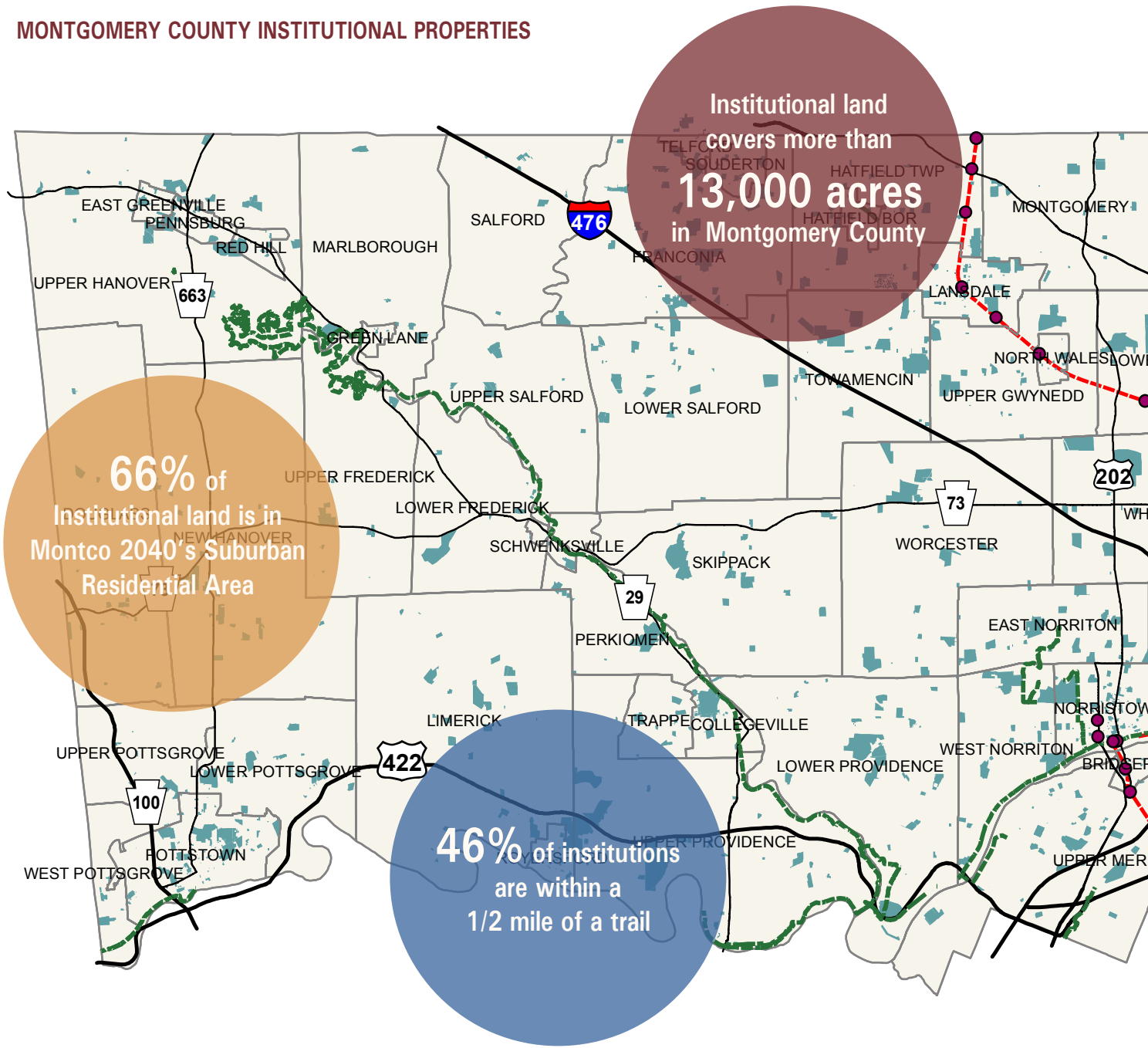
### GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS:

- Need for modern buildings.
- Consolidation of services.
- Large-scale consolidation of U.S. Postal Service retail locations and processing facilities.

### HOSPITALS:

- Need for modern buildings that accommodate today's medical technology and practices.
- Consolidation of healthcare systems in the region.
- Lack of growth and expansion opportunities at original locations.

### MONTGOMERY COUNTY INSTITUTIONAL PROPERTIES



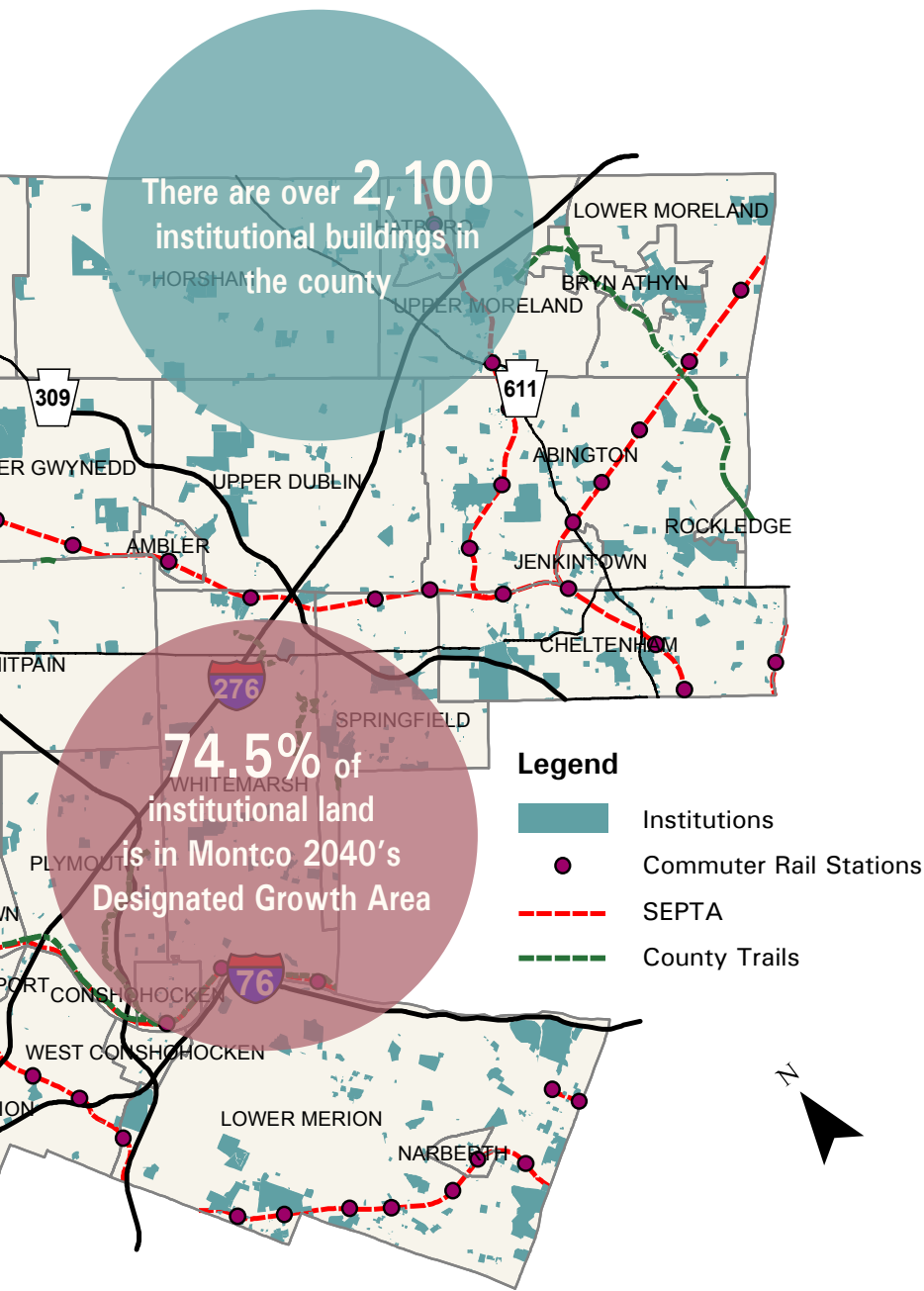
*Post Office, Norristown.*



*Ursinus College, Collegeville.*



*Humane Fire Company, Royersford.*



*Perkiomen School, Pennsburg.*



*St. John the Baptist Byzantine Catholic Church, Pottstown.*



*Borough Hall, Hatboro.*



*Temple Beth Shalom, Cheltenham.*



*Abington Memorial Hospital, Abington.*

## Countywide Trends Supporting Reuse

- Reinvestment in Communities
- Historic Preservation Advocacy
- Increased Infill Development
- Preferences for Denser and Smaller Housing Types
- Designing for Walkability
- Transit-Oriented Development (TOD)
- Small Business Growth

## FORECAST FOR REUSE

Since 2004, over 35 percent of new residential units have been built in existing neighborhoods as infill development. Millennials' preferences for living in walkable neighborhoods convenient to shops and transit, and the aging Baby Boomer population interested in downsizing, should continue to sustain the need for denser housing options. Also, since easily developable land in the county is becoming a scarce commodity, the preservation, adaptation, and infill of underutilized institutional properties will offer economic growth opportunities.



*The former Royersford Post Office is now a restaurant.*



*The former Ambler Post Office became the Ambler Borough Hall, and will be reused again as office space.*



*The former St. Margaret School in Narberth has been converted to condos.*





*The former Rittenhouse Junior High School is now senior apartments, Norristown.*



*The First Baptist Church was converted to condominiums, Lower Merion.*



*The former Upper Merion High School building is now an office building.*



*The former Odd Fellows Hall in Gladwyne was converted to two condominiums, Lower Merion.*



*The Jefferson Elementary School in Pottstown is now senior apartments.*



# Benefits and Challenges

The many positive impacts of adaptive reuse benefit not only the neighborhood, but extend to the entire municipality and region as well. Revitalization brings with it economic and social benefits that enhance the tax base, demonstrate economic vitality, preserve heritage, and promote healthy, walkable communities. Municipalities that proactively plan for adaptive reuse will position themselves to reap its benefits.

Successfully adapting any institutional property for a new use requires an understanding of local context, cooperation among stakeholders, and specialized architectural and regulatory knowledge. The success of an adaptive reuse project is influenced by factors including the real estate market, site constraints, and the proper application of land use regulations and building codes.



*The Arbors at Athens, Lower Merion.*

## BENEFITS Sustainable Development

Adapting an existing building reduces construction waste and avoids the negative environmental impacts related to demolition because most of the building is saved, and materials set aside during selective demolition may be reused. Adaptive reuse also preserves open space by focusing development within existing neighborhoods rather than on undeveloped land. In some cases, an institutional property includes open space in developed areas, and its reuse can preserve this open space as a community feature. Also, this type of development, which is near existing infrastructure, reduces municipal costs by limiting the extension of public services such as sewer and water.

## Architectural Character

Most institutions are distinctive landmarks in our communities and are worthy of preservation as they foster social, economic, and cultural vitality. An institutional building's structure provides an opportunity to create the idiosyncratic and unique spaces that are difficult or impossible to replicate in new construction. Selectively restored façades appeal to buyers and new users interested in heritage and character. When original materials, such as marble, slate, and leaded glass are saved, these rare and hand-constructed details add invaluable character to an adaptive reuse project. Likewise, an adaptive reuse project can employ those who are keeping alive various local trades and skilled labor.

*Abington Memorial Hospital, Abington.*



*The Schuylkill River Heritage Area office in Pottstown was once a PECO switching station.*



## Infill Development and Walkability

Institutions are often located in walkable neighborhoods. Walkable neighborhoods have been shown to perform better economically as many people prefer to reside and shop in a neighborhood with walkable destinations.

## History and Heritage

Adaptive reuse is a way to preserve unique buildings and landscapes. These properties offer visible evidence of our important cultural heritage for which the Philadelphia region is recognized. Without these places, a connection to the past is lost. Institutional properties should be preserved even if they do not hold a historic designation because they are recognized as significant to the community. For instance, the former United Methodist Church of Narberth, though not historically designated when purchased by Main Line ReBUILD, was a local landmark, and as such was subject to the local Historic Architectural Review Board (HARB). The HARB review ensured the final result was harmonious with its surroundings. Every time a building is reused, it signifies the commitment of a large and dedicated group of individuals.

## Landscape

The landscape surrounding an institutional property often is perceived to be a public amenity, therefore, preserving as much as possible should be the primary goal. Conservation easements with local preservation groups or volunteer interest groups can contribute to the preservation of grounds.



*Downtown Lansdale, a walkable community.*



**We shape our buildings,  
and then our buildings  
shape us.**

**– Winston Churchill**



*Groundbreaking for the adaptive reuse of the Perkiomen Valley Middle School, Trappe.*



*The Royersford Borough Hall occupies the former Royersford Trust Company building.*



## Real Estate Market

Recent residential conversions in Montgomery County have targeted the growing real estate market of downsizing empty-nesters and Millennials who want to live in established, walkable neighborhoods that are close to transit and have access to shopping and restaurants. Demographic forecasting indicates this is more than just a short-term fad and that the demand for redevelopment will continue to grow.

## Special Financing

There are many federal, state, and local incentives that encourage the preservation and reuse of existing or historic structures such as Tax Increment Financing, Community Development Block Grants, and Façade Improvement Grants. Local conservation groups can purchase easements to ensure preservation of certain elements, which can provide an infusion of funds to the developer.

## Property Tax Revenue

The conversion of a tax-exempt institutional property into private property puts it back on the tax rolls. Many of the established boroughs in our county, such as Jenkintown, Narberth, Royersford, and Ambler, have experienced an economic boost in part due to the preservation and adaptation of older, historic buildings and institutions. Both municipalities and school districts see the benefit from the increase in revenues from redevelopment.

## CHALLENGES

### Land Use Regulations

For most municipalities, existing zoning and land development standards do not allow institutional buildings to be converted into a new use. With no clear pathway to reuse, potential developers are confronted with the choice of either demolition or a lengthy rezoning process. Development may be further delayed if a property is within a Historic Preservation Overlay District that adds another level of oversight.

### Community Attitudes

The scale and appearance of institutions, and the community's familiarity with them, lends them an air of permanence. People can be uncomfortable with change and may prefer that the institution remain vacant rather than have it adaptively reused.

### Neighborhood Impacts

Adaptive reuse of an institution will naturally impact the surrounding neighborhood. Depending on the type of use and its intensity, a municipality may wish to control the associated impacts through the selective application of land use regulations. For example, a nonresidential use may require more parking, altering the property's character.



*St. Margaret School during its conversion, Narberth.*



*First Baptist Church undergoing adaptive reuse, Lower Merion.*

## Building Structure and Design

Crucial to a project's feasibility is the building's physical condition. Without strong foundations, structurally sound roofs, or an adequate amount of usable interior space, an adaptive reuse project will be difficult if not impossible to accomplish.

## Landscape

Designed landscape features, such as walls, fences, and gardens and other manicured landscapes, add distinction to a property but require a high level of maintenance that comes at a cost.

## Building Modernization

Depending on the proposed new use, electrical wiring and plumbing will need to be upgraded and air-conditioning, fire suppression, and security systems may need to be added. All municipalities utilize the International Existing Building Code (IEBC) for adaptive reuse projects, but local variation in the interpretation and application of these codes can affect design and construction timelines. Other improvements to the building for access may be required. To meet the requirements of future uses, sometimes expansions of the building or additional doors and windows are required. All of these changes should be done carefully to maintain the overall architectural character of the building with the understanding that their associated costs are often significantly higher than new construction.

*St. Margaret School under construction, Narberth.*



*Gladwyne Methodist Church had an adaptable layout, which allowed for its conversion to condominiums, Lower Merion.*







## Bank Financing

Although there has been growing success in residential and commercial retrofits of institutional buildings, lenders generally still remain reluctant to invest in redevelopment projects, which tend to have unforeseen costs.

## Unique Costs

There are unique costs that are specific to any adaptive reuse project. In general, renovating and rehabilitating existing buildings brings a greater number of unknown elements. Abatement of asbestos and other types of environmental remediation can also add to the costs of an adaptive reuse. Developers of adaptive reuse projects, therefore, must often prepare existing conditions plans and work with experienced consultants to weigh the pros and cons of various development scenarios to ensure the redevelopment project is doable and financially feasible.

*Gladwyne Commons landscape buffer, Lower Merion.*







# Case Studies

The following four case studies describe ways in which institutional properties were reused, redeveloped, and reutilized for a new purpose. The projects include two churches, a school, and a firehouse, each of a different style and size and located within different neighborhoods. Each case study describes the existing institutional property attributes, unique planning and design challenges, and benefits of the adaptive reuse project.



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**To restore a building is not to repair it, nor to do maintenance or to rebuild, it is to reestablish it in an ultimate state that never existed before. – Eugène Viollet-le-Duc**

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*A valued community school is converted from vacant building to unique housing in the heart of a borough.*

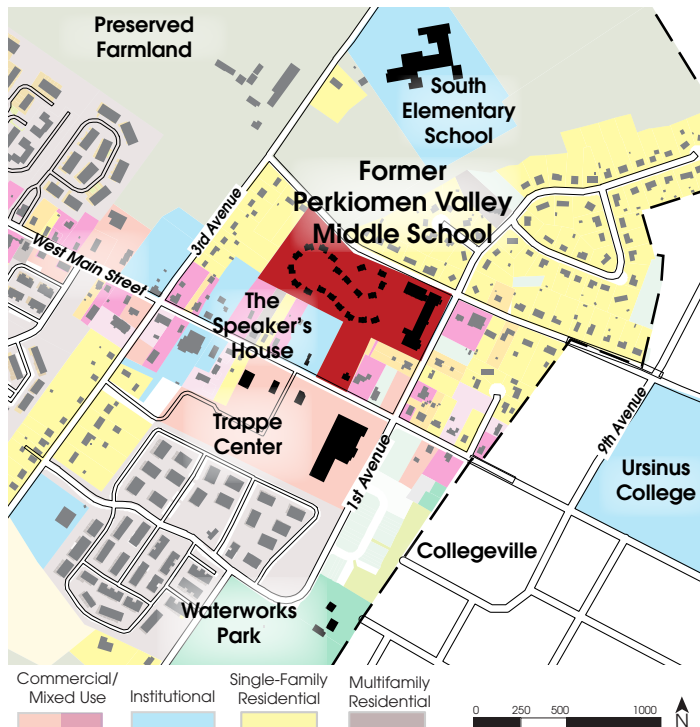
## PERKIOMEN VALLEY MIDDLE SCHOOL

29 East First Avenue, Trappe PA 19426

*A school conversion combined with infill development.*

The preservation of the Perkiomen Valley Middle School building was a goal of the community given the building's historic significance. The approved redevelopment plan calls for the conversion of the original school building into residential condominiums and the development of twenty single-family homes on the surrounding school property. The finished project will fit the character of the surrounding residential neighborhood; increase pedestrian connections to the Main Street commercial district, The Speaker's House, and Ursinus College; and provide unique housing options in the heart of the borough.

### LOCATION



### Existing Site Summary

Year Built:	1939 (additions in 1954 and 1961)
Building Size:	75,000 SF
Parcel Size:	10.78 acres/1 lot and 1.5 acres/1 lot
Zoning:	VC-Village Commercial District and R2-Residential District
Land Use:	Institutional
Historic Designation:	None

### Redevelopment Site Summary

Renovations:	2016–2017
New Building Size:	38,129 SF
New Parcel Size:	12.38 acres/22 Lots
New Zoning:	VC-Village Commercial District
Land Use:	Residential
Condominium Units:	30 2-bedroom condominiums, 1,081–3,541 SF
Density:	6 du/ac
Condominium Unit Cost:	\$270,000–\$550,000 (2016)
Condominium Parking:	60 spaces total, 2 spaces/unit required
Single-Family Residential Units:	20 3-bedroom single-family detached units, 10,000–21,000 SF lots
Density:	2.66 du/ac



**“The former Perkiomen Valley Middle School was accepted in the community as a permanent fixture.”**

– Fred Schuetz  
Former Trappe Borough Council Member

## The Story

The former Perkiomen Valley Middle School—originally the Collegeville-Trappe Senior High School—was built by the Works Progress Administration in 1939. It functioned as a grades 5–8 middle school from 1978–1996 when it was closed by the Perkiomen Valley School District following the school’s relocation and consolidation to a more modern building. Distinctive features remained in the building, including murals and a basement shooting range.

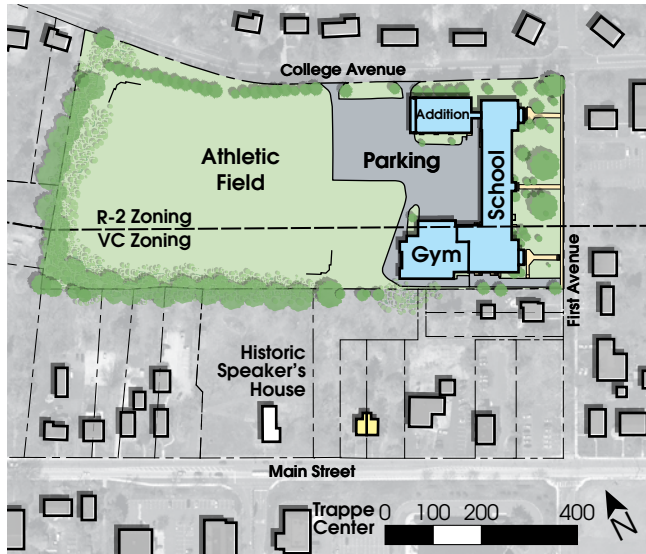
From 1996 until the building was permanently closed in 2006, the school district was able to lease parts of the building and grounds to a variety of users including the Montgomery County Intermediate Unit, the Methacton Community Theater, and the YMCA. After 2006, the building remained vacant, slowly deteriorating. Over the years, developers explored redevelopment options, recommending the demolition of the building for the construction of new townhomes.

The distinctive neo-Colonial stone building was acquired by the developer, Gorski Engineering, in 2014. Prior to that, a series of redevelopment proposals were considered and rejected because they did not reuse the historic school building. Commercial use of the building was also considered, but local officials, in discussion with neighbors, strongly preferred a residential use of the building and school property.



*Casement windows need replacement. Gutter and roof systems were major project costs. Playing fields offer a new development site to enhance the project’s viability.*

**EXISTING**



*The school before redevelopment.*

**REDEVELOPMENT**



## Opportunities

- Adaptability of the school building.
- Architectural features.
- Proximity to Trappe's Main Street and Ursinus College.
- Existing sewer capacity.
- Existing on-site parking.

## Challenges

- Required rezoning.
- Community opposition.
- Environmental remediation of asbestos, underground oil tank, and basement shooting range.
- Retrofitting for modern safety features like HVAC, electrical systems, and fire sprinklers.

## Benefits

- Restoration and repurposing of a community landmark building.
- Blending of new development with the existing community.
- Improved walkability to Main Street through new pedestrian connection.
- Additional residents to support local businesses.
- Added to municipal tax rolls.

## The Process

The property was zoned R2-Residential and VC-Village Commercial, and the developer pursued a rezoning of the entire tract to VC-Village Commercial.

In order to make the overall project economically viable, the developer proposed the construction of twenty new single-family homes on the school property's athletic fields. Though previously used by the community for recreation, the borough was willing to allow the new development of the open space in return for the preservation



*The center hallway will be divided into vestibules for each condo unit, and the original wood trim around doorways was reused.*

of the school building. The developer consolidated a 1.5-acre adjoining parcel with frontage on Main Street to gain the necessary acreage to allow for the construction of 30 luxury two-bedroom residential condominium units in the school building and 20 single-family detached homes on the school's play fields. The consolidated lots provide direct pedestrian access to Trappe's Main Street. The existing school property is rectangular and was easily divisible into distinct parcels for the construction of new residential homes.

The layout, size, and condition of the former school building lent itself to residential redevelopment, despite some disrepair due to deferred maintenance. The gymnasium, a 1954 addition to the rear of the building, does not match the character of the original building and was demolished due to its poor condition. The original school building, configured in an advantageous center-hallway layout, contains assets like a large 2-story auditorium, oversize casement windows, and wooden mill work. The largest building costs were associated with asbestos remediation, selective demolition, and building modernization.



*School furnishings, like this wood chalkboard, were proposed to be saved during the demolition process and will be reused in the new residences.*

## Status

Features of the redevelopment will include three 2-story condominium units in the former auditorium, and two front porches on either end of the school building will become private outdoor space. The unique wood details in the school building's interior and the original chalkboards will be refurbished and reused.



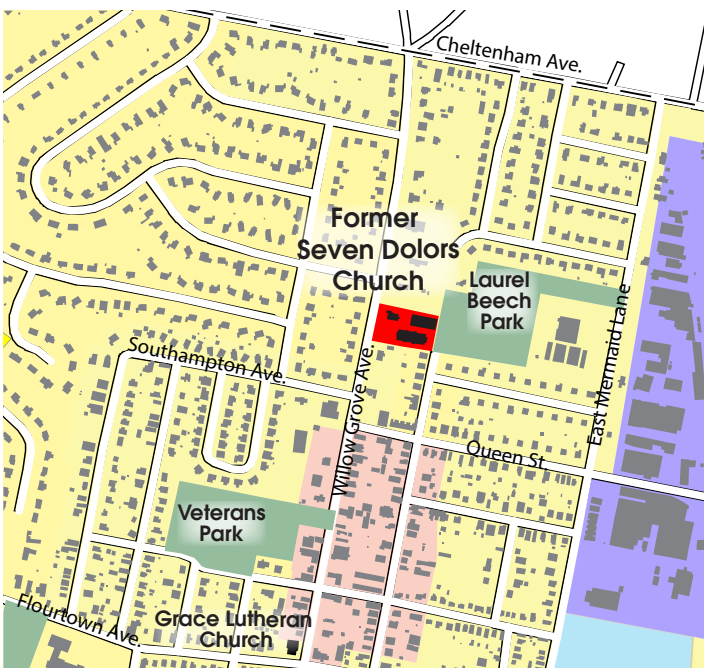
## SEVEN DOLORS CHURCH

1200 East Willow Grove Avenue, Wyndmoor, PA 19038

*A temporary and long-term public use of the sanctuary space as a library and indoor gym.*

The phased conversion of the former Seven Dolors Church has provided the community with continuous access to an existing recreation hall and a temporary home for the Free Library of Springfield Township and will create a new future indoor recreational space for the community. The new recreation space will be provided at a minimal cost compared to the construction of a new building because the size and condition of the church are well suited for the new use. As Springfield Township's new municipal campus on Paper Mill Road takes shape, the township library and administration offices have been temporarily relocated to the former sanctuary and rectory of the Seven Dolors Church while the existing recreation and event hall remains open for public use. When the new municipal campus is completed, the library will move to its permanent location, and the sanctuary will then be converted into an additional indoor recreation space.

### LOCATION



*Springfield Township transitions a former church property into a public recreation asset.*

### Existing Site Summary

Year Built:	1962 (Church)
Building Size:	7,930 SF (Church)
Parcel Size:	1.6 acres/1 lot
Zoning:	B-Residential District
Land Use:	Institutional
Historic Designation:	None

### Phase 1 Redevelopment Site Summary

Renovations:	Nov. 2015–Jan. 2016
New Building Size:	8,835 SF (Library)
New Parcel Size:	1.6 acres/1 Lots
New Zoning:	B-Residential District
Land Use:	Municipal

### Phase 2 Redevelopment Site Summary

Renovations:	2017–ongoing
New Building Size:	8,835 SF (Recreation Hall)
New Parcel Size:	1.6 acres/1 lot
New Zoning:	B-Residential District
Land Use:	Municipal



**“The new property will complement Laurel Beech Park by providing facilities for park users.”**

– Michael Taylor  
Assistant Township Manager

## The Story

The Seven Dolors Catholic Church was built in 1962. The rectory and Lorenz Hall, a recreation and event building, were built in 1958. The 1.6-acre property is located in a residential Wyndmoor neighborhood adjacent to the township’s Laurel Beech Park, which includes a soccer field and playground. Founded in 1916, the Seven Dolors Parish merged with neighboring St. Genevieve’s Parish in 2003 due to declining membership. Though the church building and Lorenz Hall remained in continuous use for more than ten years, it was not possible for the parish to keep up with the increasing costs of maintenance.

For the planned municipal campus, Springfield Township completed a preliminary conditions assessment and spatial analysis of the church, rectory, and recreation hall. The existing buildings met the immediate need to temporarily house the library and administrative buildings during the campus construction project and will meet the township’s long-term need for indoor recreation space through the conversion. Since purchasing the property in 2015, the township has established a temporary library in the church and the township administrative office in the rectory and has continued to allow recreational use of Lorenz Hall by St. Genevieve Catholic Youth Organization teams and other local athletic organizations.



*The temporary library is adjacent to Laurel Beech Park.*



*A handicap entrance was added and religious imagery was removed from the building.*

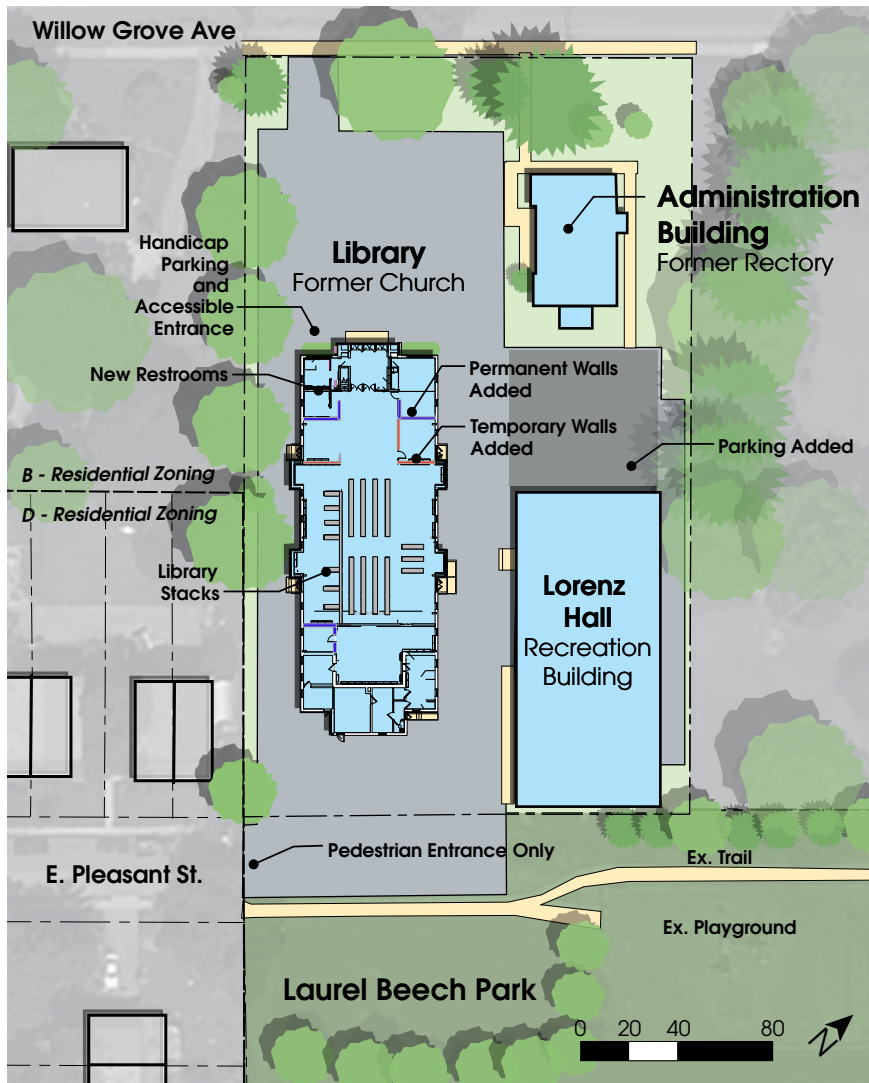
**BEFORE**



**AFTER**



**REDEVELOPMENT**



*The children's area.*



*Lorenz Hall.*

## Opportunities

- Size and condition of existing buildings.
- Existing indoor recreational space.
- Proximity to Laurel Beech Park.
- Walkable neighborhood.

## Challenges

- Timing of bidding and construction.
- Installation of modern lighting, communications, and data infrastructure.
- Accessibility improvements.
- Parking.

## Benefits

- Continuous use of valued recreation space and library facilities.
- Compatibility with existing neighborhood.
- Neighborhood walkability.
- Phased adaptive reuse cost lower than new construction cost.

## The Process

Phase one involved Springfield Township using the church and rectory buildings to temporarily house its library and administrative offices while its new municipal campus is being built. Phase two of the project will permanently convert the church building into a recreational facility.

Prior to renovation and adaptation of the former church building, all of the religious artifacts from the interior and exterior of the church, including a concrete cross on the building façade and religious imagery in the stained glass windows, were removed. Except for these elements, the building's exterior will remain as is.

The existing church and rectory buildings have been maintained well and are structurally sound. The size of the church sanctuary and rectory nearly matched that of the existing township library and administration buildings and were ideally suited for the temporary relocation of both uses. In particular, the open, vaulted ceiling of the church sanctuary lends itself to becoming a future gymnasium.

In the interior of the library, the open layout of the former sanctuary was minimally partitioned by both permanent and temporary walls in order to create private and semiprivate use areas. Library furniture and bookshelves divide the remainder of the library space and have been used to separate the adult area from the children's area. Permanent interior walls were built to create new ADA-accessible restrooms and a meeting room off of the lobby. Temporary half walls, which do not extend to the vaulted ceiling, created a computer room and an administrative office and will be removed during phase two.

The interior of the sanctuary has been fully renovated and repainted. Pendant lighting has been replaced with LED fixtures, designed for its future use as a gym. The greatest building costs were associated with installing a new roof to increase energy efficiency.

Minimal changes to parking and circulation were made as part of the adaptive reuse project. The township closed the East Pleasant Avenue entrance to add additional parking spaces behind the church building and to reduce conflicts arising from a slight increase in vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Additional parking spaces were added between the rectory and Lorenz Hall.

## Status

The temporary reuse of the church sanctuary and rectory into the library and administrative space is complete. When the new municipal campus is finished, phase two will convert the library into an indoor recreation space including a gym. Other than the removal of the temporary walls, the library will require minimal changes to convert it to a permanent recreational facility. Lorenz Hall will remain a recreation facility and event space.



## United Methodist Church of Narberth

200–206 Price Avenue, Narberth, PA 19072

*A church and parsonage converted to unique residential buildings with three new townhouses.*

The thoughtful reuse of the United Methodist Church of Narberth and its neighboring parsonage is one of the first projects completed using Narberth’s newly adopted conversion ordinance aimed to preserve some of its oldest buildings as the community continues to grow and change. This project creates housing which blends into the character of the neighborhood through the preservation of unique architectural details that have distinguished this property for more than a century.

### LOCATION



*A thoughtful rehab of an historic church and parsonage attracts new residents while retaining architectural elements.*

### Existing Site Summary

Year Built:	1929 (Church) 1881 (Parsonage)
Building Size:	25,000 SF (Church) 7,500 SF (Parsonage)
Parcel Size:	1.05 acre/2 lots
Zoning:	R-2 and R-3 Residential Districts
Land Use:	Institutional
Historic Designation:	None
Existing Density:	1 du/ac

### Redevelopment Site Summary

Renovations:	2015–2016
New Building Size:	25,000 SF (Elm Hall) 7,500 SF (Barrie House)
New Construction Size:	Vauclain Manor 7,200 SF (3) 3-bedroom townhouses 1,821 SF–2,243 SF
New Parcel Size:	1.05 acre /1 lot
Zoning:	R-2 and R-3 Residential Districts with zoning conditional use
Land Use:	Residential
Parking:	24 spaces/2 per unit required
Elm Hall Condominium Units:	(6) 2- and 3-bedroom condominiums, 1,900–3,408 SF
Unit Cost:	\$875,000–\$1,100,000 (2016)
Barrie House Units:	(3) 2-bedroom condominiums, 2,045 SF–2,754 SF
Unit Cost:	\$495,000–\$875,000 (2016)
New Density:	12 du/ac



**“[Our buyers are] downsizing... and they want to be in... town centers. They want to walk to things, be near the train.”**

– Scott Brehman  
Main Line ReBUILD

## The Story

Located in a residential neighborhood, the Gothic Revival United Methodist Church of Narberth was built in 1929 by Philadelphia architect Alexander Mackie Adams. It replaced the original church across the street, which is now a private home. The neighboring stone and wood-shingle parsonage, Barrie House, was built prior to the church in 1881. In 2013, the congregation merged with St. Luke Methodist Church in Bryn Mawr due to a decrease in membership and difficulty maintaining the large building. For more than five years prior to the church building’s closure, the congregation shared its space with community groups such as the Narberth Community Food Bank and New Horizons Senior Center, both of which relocated to the former Narberth School, now a borough-owned building. Five of six bidders proposed demolishing the buildings and replacing them with townhomes, but Main Line ReBUILD’s proposal aligned with the community’s vision for the property to preserve the buildings. The adaptive reuse project, Narberth Place, consists of Elm Hall (the former church), Barrie House (the former parsonage), and Vauclain Manor (a newly constructed 3-unit townhouse building).

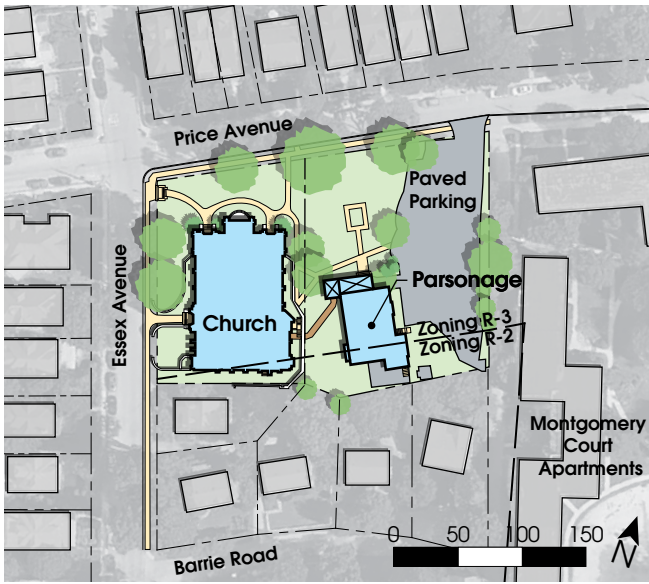


*Previously the parsonage, Barrie House required extensive renovations.*



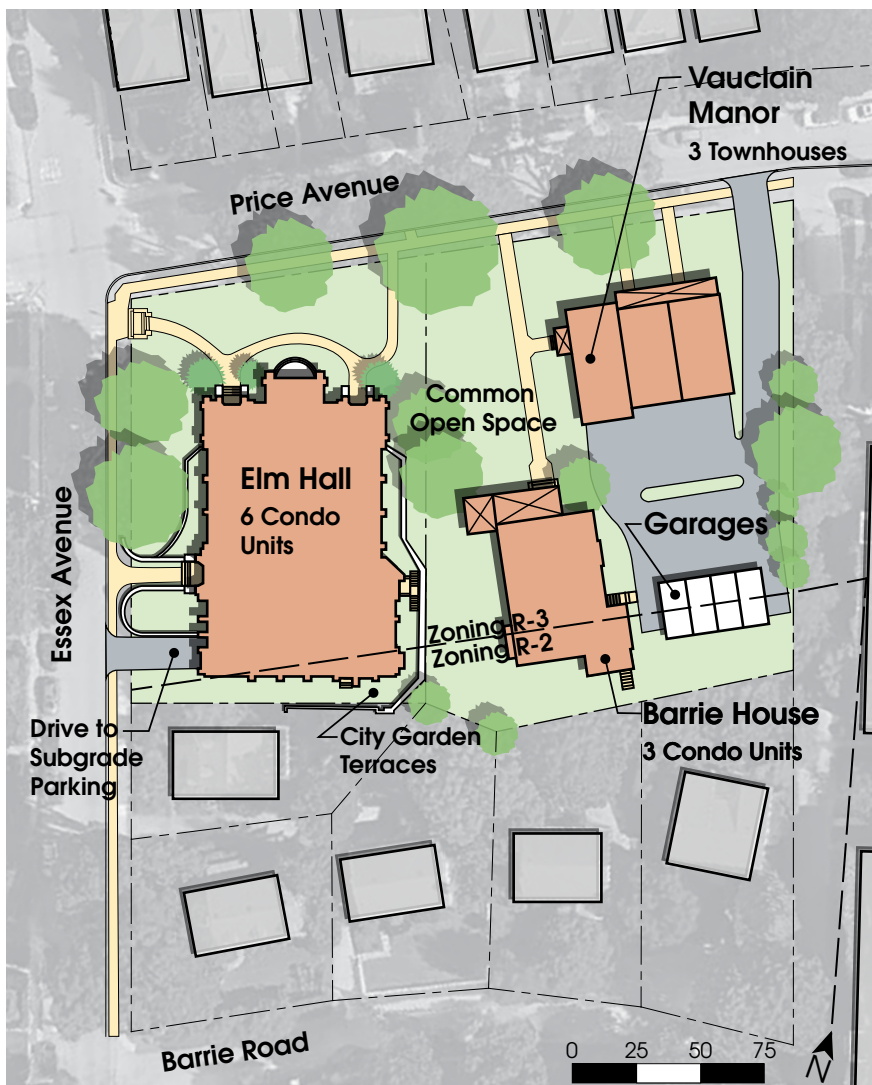
*Newly constructed Vauclain Manor was designed to fit into the neighborhood.*

**EXISTING**

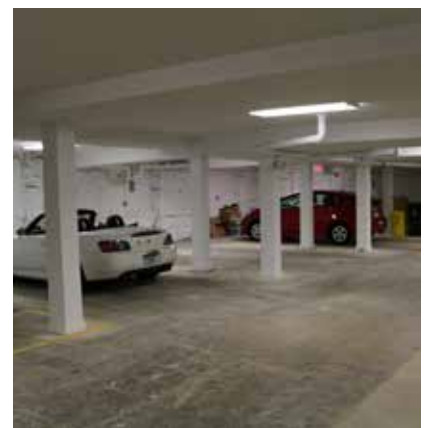


*The striking stained-glass windows were restored by local craftsmen.*

**REDEVELOPMENT**



*The wood beams and stained glass remain defining features of the new residences.*



*Parking below the church building.*

## Opportunities

- Architectural features.
- Proximity to downtown Narberth and walkability to Narberth Train Station.
- Desirable housing location.
- Existing sewer capacity.

## Challenges

- Amendment to borough zoning code.
- Removal of religious imagery and artifacts.
- Installation of modern safety features like HVAC, electrical, and fire sprinklers.
- Soundproofing between new condos.
- Parking.

## Benefits

- Preservation and restoration of a significant building.
- Repurposing an underutilized building.
- New development matches community scale and character.
- Additional residents to support businesses.
- Added to municipal tax rolls.

## The Process

Prior to the developer's 2014 land development and subdivision plan submittal, the borough amended its zoning text to alter the administrative process to allow for the conversion of an existing nonconforming use to a higher density residential development than permitted in R-3 and to allow conditional use. In return, a façade easement was placed on both the church and parsonage buildings in order to permanently protect exterior details and surface materials, which today look much like they did 87 years ago. Building additions to the existing structure and alterations of existing window and door openings, including building entrances and exits, are prohibited.

Original plans called for the three units of Vauclain Manor to be housed in the basement of Elm Hall, with parking accommodated by a surface lot. After discussion with the community, the developer considered building three new townhouses along Price Avenue and using the former church basement for parking. The final element of the zoning text amendment reduced the required size of an off-street parking space from 200 square feet to 9 feet x 18 feet, which allowed the twelve off-street parking spaces for the six Elm Hall residences to be provided under the church building. A garage entrance was created on the Essex Avenue side of the church building.

Many of Elm Hall's prominent features were reused and refurbished, including its arched wood beams and original stained-glass windows. Custom interior storm screens were constructed for the single-paned windows, and religious imagery was replaced with imported clear glass panels. The building's stone façade, vaulted sanctuary, and large

staircases remain distinguishing features of the building. An existing side alley was partially filled to create private outdoor terrace gardens for three units.

Barrie House was divided into three new condominium units, one on each floor. Its historical architectural details, including seven original fireplaces, a stone porch, and a Juliet balcony, were maintained. While Barrie House was already a residence, it had to accommodate kitchens and bathrooms for the new units.

Vauclain Manor complements the scale and character of the church and parsonage while fitting into the existing character of the neighborhood. Designed to look like a manor house with an addition, its exterior materials are similar to those used in Barrie House. During the design process, the developer worked with the borough to ensure the new townhomes look like they were always in the neighborhood. The building placement is consistent with the surrounding neighborhood, and the porches give each unit a distinctive look.

## Status

Construction is complete on the twelve new units at Narberth Place, and most of the units have sold. All twelve units will be part of a condominium association. This adaptive reuse project and its preservation of important details appeal to its new residents, who are ensuring the character of these buildings endures.

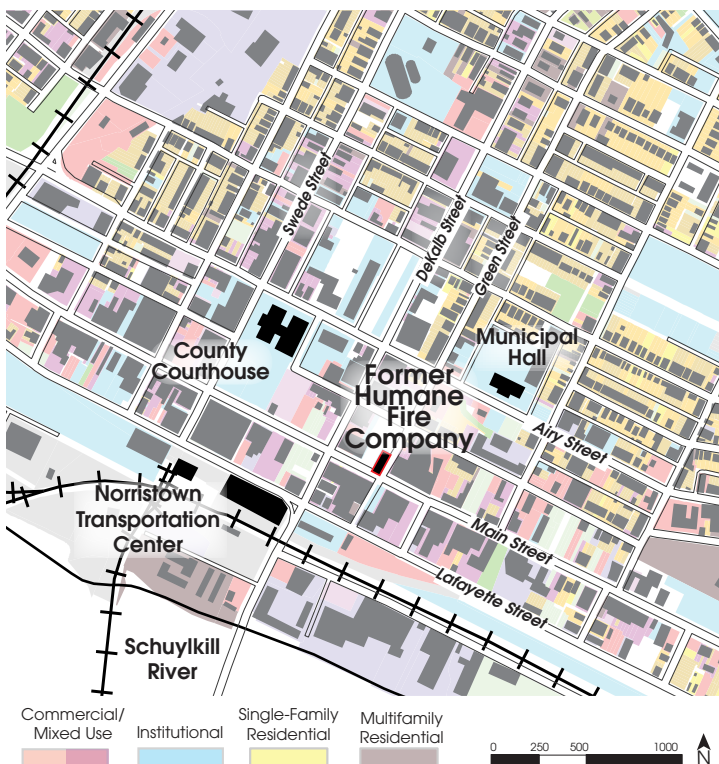


## Humane Fire Engine Company No. 1 129 East Main Street, Norristown, PA 19403

*A firehouse converted to retail in a village commercial district.*

The innovative transformation of the Humane Fire Engine Company No. 1 into a micro-distillery preserves a key building along Norristown's East Main Street. Reuse of the former fire station was facilitated by Norristown's desire to revitalize the East Main Street corridor. Situated at the northwest corner of East Main Street and Green Street, the 3-story brick building is blocks away from historic St. John's Episcopal Church and the Montgomery County Courthouse and is within walking distance to the Norristown Transportation Center and Schuylkill River Trail.

### LOCATION



*A beloved firehouse  
continues to serve  
Norristown as a distillery  
and tasting room.*

### Existing Site Summary

Year Built:	1887
Building Size:	9,000 SF
Parcel Size:	3,400 SF/1 lot
Zoning:	TC-Town Center District
Land Use:	Institutional
Parking:	Street
Historic Designation:	Central Norristown Historic District – National Register of Historic Places

### Redevelopment Site Summary

Renovations:	2014–ongoing
New Building Size:	9,000 SF (basement and ground floor)
Parcel Size:	3,400 SF/1 lot
Current Zoning:	TC-Town Center District
Land Use:	Commercial
Parking:	13 spaces
Incentives:	Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), Historic Façade Improvement Grant





**“We did have to do some construction... but we’re building on the heritage. Fire stations are proud community centers. They serve the community and we’re here to serve the community”**

– John George  
Founder, Five Saints Distilling



## The Story

The Humane Fire Engine Company No. 1 of Norristown was founded in 1852, a date commemorated in the cornice of the 1887 building’s façade. A prominent institution from its establishment, Norristown celebrated the fire company’s first acquisition of a fire truck with a parade down Main Street. Comprised of volunteers from the community, the fire company actively served Norristown for over 160 years and merged with the Norristown Hose Company in 2012 due to decreasing membership. Norristown had long identified the building as worthy of preservation and began marketing it for a potential commercial reuse. In 2014, local micro-distiller, John George, purchased the building for his newly established company, Five Saints Distilling.



*Photo Credit: Historical Society of  
Montgomery County.*

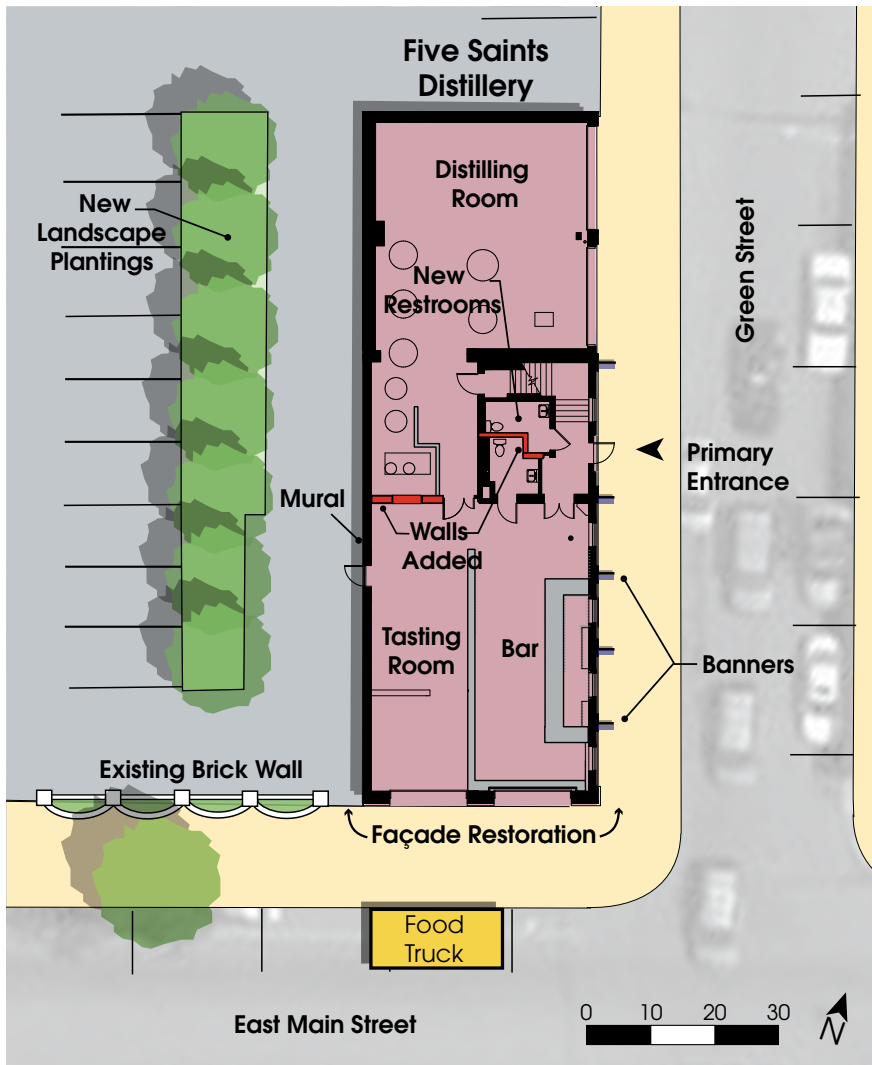


Restored mural in the tasting room.



The adaptive reuse of the firehouse maintained an important building on East Main Street.

### REDEVELOPMENT



Colorful banners display the Five Saints logo along the Green Street façade.



The distillery's located on East Main Street, preserves Norristown's historic fabric.

## Opportunities

- Located in the Central Norristown Historic District
- Adaptable building layout.
- Interior and exterior architectural features.
- Community landmark.

## Challenges

- Installation of safety features like HVAC, electrical, and fire stairwell.
- Parking and loading.

## Benefits

- Preserves a significant building within a designated historic corridor.
- Enhances the pedestrian environment and encourages walking.
- Successful community collaboration.
- Increases visits to Norristown and municipal revenue.
- Achieves sustainable development.



*Firefighters' helmets and historic photographs line the tasting room wall.*

## The Process

The adaptive reuse of the fire station into a distillery is a direct result of Norristown's Main Street Economic Development Initiative. The conversion relied on a partnership with the Municipality of Norristown to secure two important grants: a \$100,000 Community Development Block Grant and a \$7,212 Historic Façade Improvement Grant. While off-street parking is not required in the TC-Town Center District, Norristown agreed to dedicate thirteen parking spaces to Five Saints customers in the adjacent municipal parking lot, which allowed for increased landscaping and a loading area.

The first stage of the building adaptation reconfigured the first floor's interior; modernized electrical, plumbing, heating, and fire suppression systems; and restored the exterior façade. ADA-accessible bathrooms were installed on the first floor in the center of the building beneath the

hose tower. The spacious engine room was renovated to accommodate the distilling equipment, which is separated from the tasting room by a new wall. Firefighters' helmets and portraits and photographs donated by members of the fire company and a restored mural decorate the wall opposite the new bar. The original fire pole and tin ceiling were restored and remain in the tasting room. Original light fixtures found on the second floor were refurbished and installed in the tasting room.

## Status

Currently, food trucks and live music enliven the tasting room and sidewalk, drawing visitors to the historic East Main Street Corridor. As the Five Saints Distilling business grows, the building will continue to be improved. In a future phase, the second floor, previously offices and a locker room, will become a restaurant and the third floor, the former bunk room, will become an event space.



# Best Practices

The adaptive reuse of former institutional properties can be a rewarding process that revitalizes our communities and furthers sustainable development. Successfully adapting a building or property involves the coordination of planning efforts, effective and practical regulations, and sensitive design. Communities should plan for institutional reuse long before an institution closes its doors and a “For Sale” sign appears. When the planning process for institutional reuse produces predictable, consistent, and desirable results, neighbors, municipal officials, and developers will know their concerns have been addressed long before the first proposal is submitted.

“

It has been said that, at its best, preservation engages the past in a conversation with the present over a mutual concern for the future.

- William Murtagh



*St. Charles Borromeo Seminary, Lower Merion.*

### Municipal Inventories

Quakertown Borough in Bucks County maintains an inventory of commercial and industrial buildings that are a high priority for reuse. The inventory also identifies potential new uses and is available to developers interested in adaptive reuse.

### Institutions in Comprehensive Plans

Lower Merion Township recognizes that institutional growth and closure has a significant impact on surrounding land uses and communities, and the Institutional Land Use chapter of the township's comprehensive plan encourages adaptive reuse and recommends that the character of residential neighborhoods be preserved as institutions expand, relocate, or close.

## I. PLANNING

### A. Inventory of Institutional Buildings and Properties

The first step in planning for reuse is to know where institutions are located in a community. Maintaining an institutional inventory not only aids the municipality in planning for potential reuse of buildings but can also act as a marketing tool, providing prospective developers with key information to identify desirable, adaptable properties. The inventory can be completed separately or can be part of a larger planning effort, such as a comprehensive plan update. Municipalities can make use of a Geographic Information System (GIS) to map and analyze institutional properties. GIS is an effective tool to understand and visualize the interrelationship between land use and planning and to help guide policy decisions.

### B. Comprehensive Plans

The comprehensive planning process is an opportunity for municipalities to be proactive in identifying and prioritizing institutional properties for reuse and proposing new uses for them. Many comprehensive plans include an inventory of existing institutional uses and a statement of planning priorities for these properties, including desirable types of reuse.

### C. Open Space Plans

Significant landscapes associated with institutions should be identified and placed within the context of the municipality's larger planning objectives. These plans take an inventory of a municipality's open space and natural resources and can be expanded to include open space areas that are part of a large institutional use.

### D. Official Maps

Municipalities can identify an institutional property on an Official Map if it is a planned location for a future public use such as a municipal facility, park, or trail. When a property becomes available for development, the municipality is given a limited opportunity to decide whether to negotiate with a landowner to acquire or otherwise preserve the key features of the property.

### E. Redevelopment and Revitalization Plans

Redevelopment and revitalization plans can identify eligible institutional properties and priorities for their adaptive reuse. In these plans, reinvigorating closed institutional properties can be integral to larger economic development strategies for the community.

## II. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Municipalities can identify and plan for institutional closures before they occur by establishing a task force to focus on the issue and work closely with developers and the community. A task force can be a standing committee of a governing body or it can be an ad hoc committee of elected officials, municipal staff, and volunteers. These volunteers can include professionals in architecture, engineering, and real estate fields who have specialized knowledge on the topic.

An adaptive reuse task force may be charged with a number of responsibilities and could include any or all of the following activities:

**A. Engage Communities in Exploring New Uses**

A task force can be the primary vehicle for completing an inventory of institutional properties and engaging the public in exploring appropriate new uses. Ideas for rethinking existing institutional buildings and grounds may be solicited and discussed in a public forum or through a design charrette, creating consensus in the community for a specific project.

**B. Market Properties for Reuse**

A task force may want to market properties to developers by hosting economic development events, publishing available property inventories, and providing guidance and instruction on development regulations. Marketing could be targeted to a small number of properties or expanded to include multiple planning regions.

**C. Evaluate Municipal and School District Facilities**

A task force can assist in evaluating the physical condition of former municipal or school district facilities to determine the potential for reuse prior to sale. A formal scoring system can be used in conjunction with community feedback to help determine a compatible new use prior to the sale of the property and may prevent premature demolition of the building.

### III. FUNDING AND FINANCING

**A. Funding Options for Acquisition and Environmental Remediation**

Municipalities and developers can utilize the expertise and funding resources provided by federal, state, and county authorities. The Montgomery County Commerce Department, for example, provides aid to municipalities and developers by applying to state and federal funding sources on their behalf. Some of those sources include asbestos remediation funding from the EPA and Keystone Communities Program funding through the Commonwealth. One aspect of the Keystone Communities Program especially applicable to adaptive reuse projects is funding for the acquisition and improvement of anchor buildings at or near downtowns for commercial purposes.

**B. Innovative Financing**

There are a few innovative financing strategies that local taxing authorities can use to incentivize investment in an institutional property when it relates to the overall economic development plan of a community. These strategies include Tax Increment Financing (TIF) and Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance (LERTA) exemptions. Both of these programs can bridge a gap in financing and are part of a larger redevelopment or revitalization planning effort on the part of the municipality, school district, and county.

**C. Conservation and Façade Easements**

Local historic and community conservation nonprofits can offer opportunities for purchasing a conservation easement from a developer or property owner. A façade or conservation easement is a legal agreement that places limitations on how a property can be altered or developed in the future and includes a deed restriction which stays with the property in perpetuity.

### Community Engagement

During the physical evaluation of the former Montgomery Hospital in Norristown, Albert Einstein Healthcare Network, the owner of the hospital, hired a consultant to work with the Norristown community to determine a new use for the site. Although the adaptive reuse of the hospital itself was determined to be infeasible, the public process was a success. This process helped the community understand the development process and the limitations of the site and determined the future use of the property, which will be new senior housing.

### Facility Assessment

A formal method to assess and score the physical condition of facilities is to use a Facility Condition Index (FCI), as the Philadelphia School Reform Commission does. This index is used to prioritize which properties might be more expensive to repair or maintain than to replace. An FCI is calculated by dividing the cost of repair, replacement, and maintenance deficiencies of a facility by the cost of replacing the facility in full. An FCI above 1.0 signifies that the facility might be a good candidate for adaptive reuse.

## IV. LAND USE REGULATIONS

Existing and new institutions are permitted in a variety of ways, such as dedicated zoning districts for institutions, or by special exception or conditional use in districts where they are not the primary use, such as single-family residential or commercial. No matter how a community's zoning permits institutions, a different zoning approach is needed to address an institution's reuse. Provisions can easily be added within a municipality's existing regulatory framework to permit the adaptive reuse of institutional buildings and grounds without significantly changing the structure of a zoning ordinance.

Municipalities will need to create tailored and flexible regulations using one of the following three methods. The first two methods involve permitting adaptive reuse by special exception or by conditional use as a provision within the base zoning district (residential, commercial, institutional, etc.). The third method permits adaptive reuse conditionally within the general regulations and applies to every institutional building or every property listed on a municipal inventory.

### A. Special Exception

An applicant applies for special exception approval from a municipality's zoning hearing board through a legal proceeding that provides public notice and holds a public hearing. To grant approval, the zoning hearing board will judge whether the applicant's proposal meets the express standards and criteria written into the zoning ordinance for the intended use. As part of the approval process, the zoning hearing board can add reasonable safeguards and conditions that address specific impacts associated with a project such as noise level, lighting, screening, and hours of operation.

### B. Conditional Use

Conditional use is an administrative process conducted by the governing body rather than the zoning hearing board, which grants approval. A conditional use must meet express standards and criteria in the ordinance upon which to judge an applicant's proposal, but the governing body can attach additional reasonable safeguards and conditions. Municipalities may feel more comfortable leaving approvals to elected officials, rather than the appointed members of a zoning hearing board, for uses which may have a greater impact on the community.

### C. General Regulations

Adding adaptive reuse provisions in a zoning code's general regulations section allows a municipality to permit adaptive reuse within all zoning districts on a property-by-property basis. Designating specific buildings or properties through an inventory will help prioritize only those institutional properties a community is interested in seeing reused. Special exception or conditional use approval should also be a component of this method to ensure proper review of development proposals is maintained.

## V. INCENTIVES

### A. New Uses

It is very likely that in order to make a project economically feasible, a use other than what the underlying zoning allows will have to be considered. More often than not this will mean allowing for different types of residential uses,

### Mapping Institutions in the Zoning Code

As a part of its new form-based zoning code, Narberth Borough identified and mapped all civic and institutional buildings permitted to be adaptively reused in the borough. These buildings are permitted to be converted to a number of residential and nonresidential uses by conditional use and are subject to architectural preservation requirements.



such as attached or multifamily housing, or nonresidential uses, such as small-scale office or hospitality. It is understandable why such a change would first be met by resistance since it will transform what is familiar and accepted to something new and different. What the municipality controls is the exact mix of uses and, of course, this will differ for every municipality depending on the characteristics of the institutional properties and community preferences.

- **Residential.** Attached or multifamily residential is often the most economically viable option for the reuse of institutional buildings. Municipalities may consider allowing multifamily residential in the existing buildings and new attached housing in existing open space.
- **Nonresidential.** Nonresidential uses in residential areas fall into two categories for the purpose of adaptive reuse. The first category is small-scale professional office and includes uses such as doctors or insurance offices. The second is hospitality and includes banquet facilities and meeting or conference facilities. Office should be considered the first option because parking demand is more predictable and traffic is limited to regular hours. Also, older buildings are more readily adaptable to office conversion and require little alteration to the exterior.
- **Shared and Temporary Uses.** Shared and temporary uses may prevent or delay institutional closure or bridge the gap between vacancy and reuse by keeping a building in continuous or partial operation before there are plans for redevelopment. It is not uncommon for an institution such as a church or school, to have more space than it can fully utilize. A municipality can support the institutional use by allowing additional uses within the same building, such as childcare, adult daycare, or community theater.

#### B. Residential Density

In addition to allowing new uses, it is often necessary to increase residential density to encourage adaptive reuse. Typically, residential zoning standards place a cap on density to ensure consistency across a large area. For adaptive reuse projects, municipalities should instead determine density caps on a case-by-case basis based on the proposed new use. For example, the adaptive reuse of the former Perkiomen Valley Middle School into condominiums required a density greater than the 3.5 units per acre allowed by the existing zoning. To permit redevelopment, Trappe Borough allowed a density of 6 units per acre and mitigated the impact of the 20 condominiums by capping the development to 2-bedroom units. Other visual impacts associated with higher density, such as parking and lighting, can be further mitigated by screening and landscape buffers.

#### C. Flexible Building and Impervious Coverage Standards

Municipalities can provide incentive for adaptive reuse projects by establishing flexible standards for building and impervious coverage. For example, when developing the former Perkiomen Valley Middle School, meeting the maximum building and impervious coverage of 20% and 35%, respectively, would have been difficult to impossible because much of the original lot needed to be subdivided, for economic reasons, to accommodate new single-family dwellings. Trappe Borough prioritized the preservation of the historic building



*Childcare is provided at the Holy Trinity Church in Narberth.*



*Borough Hall, East Greenville.*



*Parking was provided in the basement of the church building.*

and permitted greater building and impervious coverage limits, which allowed for the preservation of the school.

#### D. Parking Demand

Municipalities can reduce the total amount of parking required by the zoning code and mitigate neighborhood impact by providing flexible parking standards. There is no reason to provide more parking than is needed, and municipalities should look beyond existing standards to meet the minimum needs of the project. Parking requirements can be tied to the actual proposed use rather than a more general standard that is more appropriate for new construction.

#### E. Stall Size

The accepted standard for parking stall size has shrunk from 10' x 20' to 9' x 18'. Many municipalities still use the old standard, resulting in more paving than is necessary. For example, Narberth Borough reduced the required parking space size to 9' x 18' in its adaptive reuse ordinance. Using this standard, the adaptive reuse of the former United Methodist Church of Narberth accommodated all off-street parking on the 1.05-acre lot and reduced impervious cover.

#### F. Credits

Other methods for reducing on-site parking include giving a credit for projects located near public transit or allowing shared parking between two dissimilar uses.

#### G. On-Street parking

Where parking requirements are not met on the site, parking should not be shifted to the street without completing a street parking impact study. In circumstances where on-street parking exists, a street parking impact study can determine how much on-street parking is available and how much is currently being used in order to estimate the number of on-street parking spaces that would reasonably be available for the project.

#### H. Location

If additional parking is needed, it should be located to the side or rear of the building to maintain the existing streetscape. If parking cannot be located in the side or rear yard due to existing site conditions, new parking may then need to be located in the front yard. If so, it should be visually screened from the street.

## VI. DESIGN STANDARDS

An institutional building and property should not look significantly different after adaptive reuse. Adaptive reuse maintains an institutional building's place in the neighborhood but does not necessarily guarantee preservation of all features. Municipalities have control over the selection and prioritization of the features and qualities most important to them and can regulate the visual impact of a building's change in function so that the building is perceived in much the same way as it was originally.

Building and site design can be regulated as part of the zoning code or in a separate document that can be referenced by the zoning ordinance. They can include elements of the building façade and entrances but may also include historic landscaping, fences, and walls.

#### A. Design

Institutional buildings have an established form and character, and any changes to the building's style should complement the existing building and not detract from it. In most cases, building additions and new construction should maintain existing building height, setbacks, and scale to minimize the visual and physical impact of redevelopment.

#### B. Architecture

Municipalities can choose which types of architectural alterations to accommodate and which ones to restrict. These alterations can include window and door openings, rooflines, exterior façade, building materials, and color. Façade and conservation easements ensure that distinctive architectural details will remain even if the property changes use or ownership in the future. Façade and conservation easements are legal agreements which place limitations on building alteration through a deed restriction that is attached to the property in perpetuity rather than the property owner. The owner of the easement is either a nonprofit organization or a government agency, which enforces the terms of the easement.

#### C. Site Features

To ensure that no historic or sensitive features are destroyed, such as walls, gardens, playgrounds, and cemeteries, developers should document all such features and invite community comment during the proposal process. A perpetual maintenance fund may be established by the owner to ensure these features are preserved and maintained. The creation and application of such funds requires communication and collaboration among the building's owner and the community.

#### D. Viewsheds

Maintaining existing views of a significant building, landscape feature, or site element, such as a decorative iron fence, is often an important consideration with adaptive reuse. The community should determine which views are most important to save and specify their preservation as a condition of approval. Additional deed restrictions may be placed on the property to ensure on-going maintenance of the feature.

#### E. Accessibility

Handicapped access compliance is an issue that frequently arises in adaptive reuse. Creative design and engineering can usually address these issues. Code officials can ensure that ADA and building code upgrades meet the community's vision by working closely with designers and engineers.

#### F. Sustainable Building Design

An adaptively reused building is a "green" building by nature because it maximizes the use of existing materials and infrastructure and minimizes construction waste. Municipalities may go even further and provide bonuses for buildings that can be retrofitted to conserve energy. For instance, large windows should be maintained and made operable to capture daylight and provide ventilation, and high ceilings provide ample space for insulation and modern and efficient heating and cooling systems. In turn, modern HVAC systems and similar improvements will likely result in lower heating and cooling costs for the new occupants.



*An accessible entrance (above) and second story dormers (below) were added to the former First Baptist Church, Lower Merion.*



*An addition with parking garage was added to the former Upper Merion High School.*



*Parking lot screening at the Ambler Borough Hall.*

#### G. Additions and New buildings

Generally, the existing building should retain its historic form, and any new addition should not detract from it. To limit building expansion, municipalities may want to create a cap on the size of a building addition, which can be set at a certain percentage of the existing building's size. For example, Lower Merion Township permits a 10% expansion of an existing building's footprint over 5,000 sq. ft. (20% under 5,000 sq. ft.), while Horsham Township's Historic Overlay permits a 25% expansion regardless of the original size.

- **Setbacks.** Building additions should use the setback of existing buildings. Deeper setbacks for new buildings might also be warranted, or even preferred, but in no instance should they be less than those already existing on the property.
- **Placement.** Building additions should be limited to the side and rear of the building so as not to impact the appearance of the front façade or obstruct the public's view from the street. Porches and stairways should be located behind the existing building.
- **Height.** Any building addition should not be taller than the original building to maintain the primary form and roofline of the existing building.
- **Design and Architectural Details.** New additions should complement the historic character and materials of the existing building but should not duplicate the design so as to be indistinguishable. Windows and doors in an addition should relate to the original openings in the existing building, and additions should conform to the floor-to-floor heights of the original. Any new material should be aesthetically consistent with the character of the existing building. The design, color, texture, and other aesthetic qualities should also be in character with the existing building.

#### H. Parking Lot Screening

- **Landscape Plantings.** A layered planting of deciduous and evergreen trees, shrubs, and perennials may be used to screen the edge of parking lots from adjacent properties and from the sidewalk. A greater selection of evergreen species could be included to ensure there is adequate screening through the winter months.
- **Streetscape Plantings.** The landscape between the parking lot edge and the street can be a visual amenity. This area can improve the existing streetscape and act as a buffer between the street and parking lot. Plantings should match the character of the existing streetscape and can include a mix of trees, shrubs, grasses, and perennials. For safety and aesthetic reasons, streetscape plantings should not obstruct views.
- **Fences and Walls.** Short walls and ornamental fencing are most effective when combined with plantings of trees, shrubs, and perennials and should relate to the character and materials of the property. Ornamental fences and walls are especially appropriate for screening parking in the front yard. Fences may also be used alone where desired or where landscaping may not be practical, such as in a narrow side yard or heavily shaded area.

### I. Open Space

The large size of an institutional property might also make it worthy of preservation. If an institution's open space is identified on the institutional inventory, the municipality can attach open space preservation provisions. Alternatively, municipalities can limit redevelopment to a smaller portion of the property by requiring that at least 50% of the gross tract be preserved.

### J. Established Landscapes

Because the existing landscape may be as contextually important as the building, regardless of the size of the property, a municipality might want to encourage its protection. Designed features of the landscape, such as specimen trees, walls, fences, and ornamental gardens, contribute to the property's character and should be inventoried prior to redevelopment. Features identified as most important to the community should then be preserved, enhanced, and incorporated into new development.

- **Preserve Existing Trees.** Preserving large, mature trees protects the character of the property and maintains a significant neighborhood attribute. Formal tree protection can be provided by shade tree ordinances or heritage tree provisions. Tree removal should be avoided. Additions to the building or property should respect existing trees.
- **Incorporate Existing Site Features into New Development.** When new landscape plantings and features are being added, their placement, scale, quality, color, and material should be in keeping with the existing landscape. Existing features should be identified and incorporated into the final site plan and landscape plan.
- **Require Landscape Screening and Buffers.** Given the unique nature of redevelopment, municipalities can consider basing the applicable buffer requirements on the specific land use in the zoning ordinance rather than the current subdivision ordinance, which may be geared toward new development. The greater the intensity of land uses, the more substantial a landscape buffer should be. For instance, if an adaptive reuse project proposes a multifamily or nonresidential development adjacent to a single-family neighborhood, it should consider using a planted buffer that matches the character of the surrounding properties. A layered planting of deciduous and evergreen trees, shrubs, and perennials should be required no matter the intensity of the development and can include a decorative fence. Accessory and utility uses, including storage areas and electrical and mechanical equipment, should also be screened with plantings or fencing.

### Campus and Large Lot Preservation

Many of today's large institutions were adapted from former estates. The historic Haas family estate, Stoneleigh, in Lower Merion Township was preserved through an Estate Lot Preservation Ordinance. Under this ordinance, two lots were created. The mansion is located on one lot, and the second lot contains the gardens and natural landscape, which were donated to the Natural Lands Trust for public use.

### Heritage Tree Protection Standards

Whitemarsh, in its township code under "Tree Protection Standards," defines a "heritage tree" as "A tree located on public or private property:

- A. Which is specifically identified and considered worthy of preservation by the Township because of the species, size, rarity or historical importance; or
- B. Having a [diameter at breast height] greater than 40 inches or an age greater than 75 years."

# Achieving Your Community's Vision



Good planning can lay the groundwork for the smooth transition and exciting transformation of an institutional use to a new use in a refurbished building. This guidebook shows how this has been done successfully in the county and suggests ordinances and funding to bring adaptive reuse projects to fruition. Successful adaptive reuse requires a proactive approach. Instead of waiting and hoping for a developer to come and envision a reuse for an empty or declining institution in your community, you can accelerate the redevelopment process by providing guidance to developers by inventorying and prioritizing institutional properties, allowing for new uses, and setting clear but flexible design standards.

When the county was writing its new comprehensive plan, *Montco 2040: A Shared Vision*, many people commented on Montgomery County's rich heritage and the importance of historic buildings in our neighborhoods. It is part of what is loved about the county. Adaptive reuse lends an air of excitement and vitality to an area and can help achieve community goals. When this collaborative, visionary process involves the community, meets the needs of the developer, and preserves and enhances the best a property has to offer, your community will have a landmark to enjoy for future generations to come.

*Rittenhouse Apartments, Norristown.*

## Resources

### Adaptive Reuse and Historic Preservation

Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia  
[www.preservationalliance.com](http://www.preservationalliance.com)

Historic Society of Montgomery County  
[www.hsmcpa.org/index.php](http://www.hsmcpa.org/index.php)

National Trust for Historic Preservation  
[www.preservation.org](http://www.preservation.org)

Partnership for Building Reuse  
<http://forum.savingplaces.org/act/pgl/pbr>

Technical Preservation Services - National Park Service (NPS)  
[www.nps.gov/tps/about.htm](http://www.nps.gov/tps/about.htm)

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Illustrated Guidelines on Sustainability for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings  
[www.nps.gov/tps/standards/rehabilitation/sustainability-guidelines.pdf](http://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/rehabilitation/sustainability-guidelines.pdf)

Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC)  
[www.phmc.pa.gov/Preservation/About/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.phmc.pa.gov/Preservation/About/Pages/default.aspx)

PHMC Funding Programs  
<http://www.phmc.pa.gov/Preservation/Grants-Funding/Pages/default.aspx>

### STATE AND COUNTY AGENCIES

Montgomery County Commerce Department  
[www.montcopa.org/779/Commerce](http://www.montcopa.org/779/Commerce)

Redevelopment Authority of the County of Montgomery  
[www.montcopa.org/1014/Redevelopment-Authority](http://www.montcopa.org/1014/Redevelopment-Authority)

Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED)  
[www.dced.pa.gov/](http://www.dced.pa.gov/)

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