

Visualizing Future Land Uses



A Design Guide for Mercer County's Land Use Plan
Prepared as part of the 2005 Mercer County Comprehensive Plan Update

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Introduction

This design guide has been prepared to assist municipal officials and county residents to visualize the land use recommendations in the 2005 Mercer County Comprehensive Plan. Sketches and photographs are used to illustrate a variety of alternatives to the typical sprawl development that is becoming so prevalent throughout the United States. The guide is organized around the eight Future Land Use categories listed below.

- Economic Revitalization Areas
- Neighborhood Revitalization Areas
- Mixed Use Growth Areas
- Economic Growth Areas
- Urban/Suburban Preservation Areas
- Community Gateways
- Natural Resource Production Areas
- Natural Resource Protection Areas

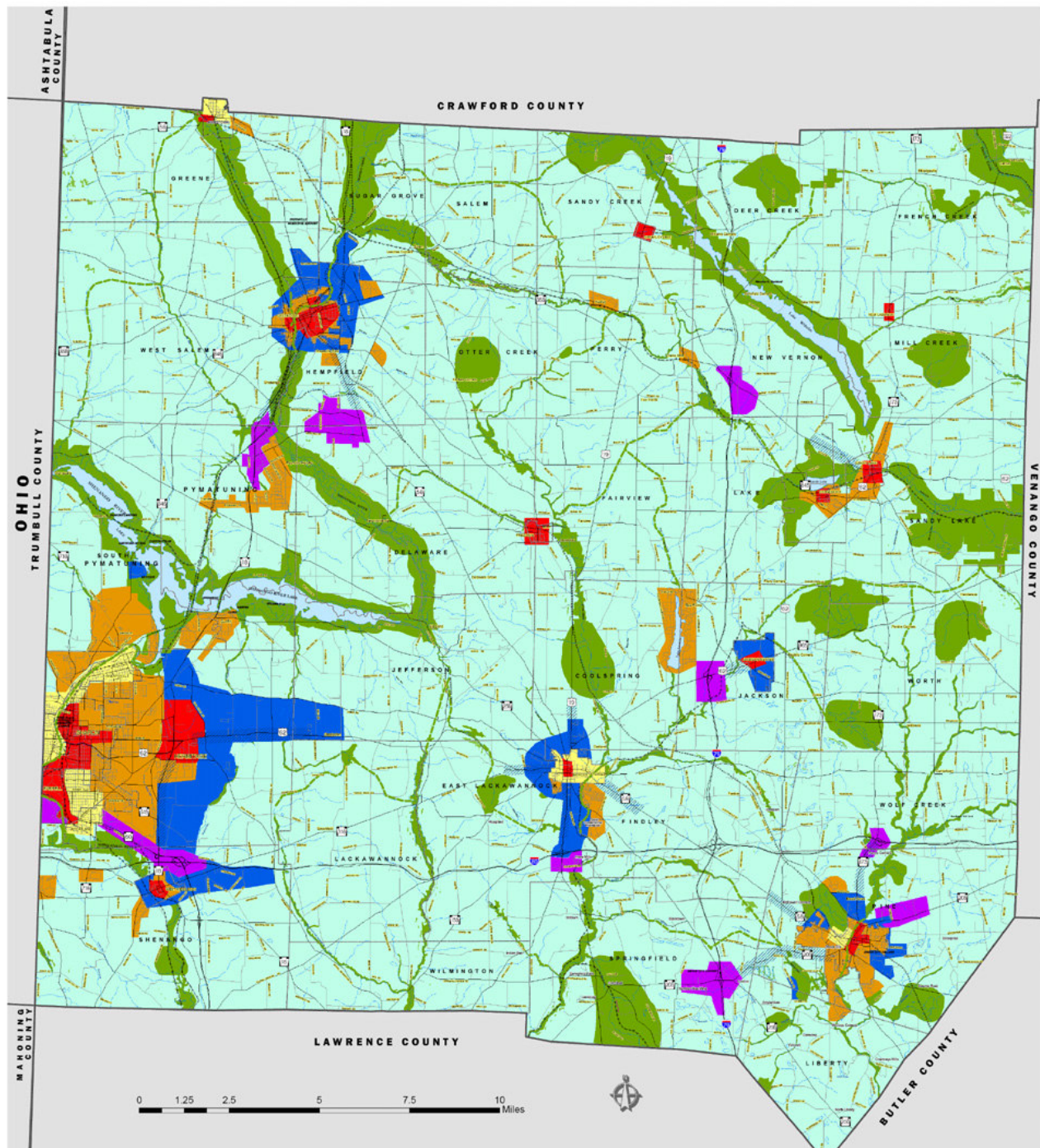
A vision for the future of Mercer County was developed during the planning process, which helped guide the development of the Land Use Plan. The county's revised Growth and Development Policy Statement was also instrumental in this effort. Both are referenced throughout the document as they pertain to each of the Future Land Use Categories.

The Land Use Plan

The Land Use Plan component of the Mercer County Comprehensive Plan is a combination of relevant action strategies and the future land use map. It constitutes the most important component of the comprehensive plan. The Land Use Plan emphasizes local planning that expresses and fosters community values and protects valuable resources from potentially harmful development impacts. It acknowledges that most land use decisions in Mercer County are made at the local level; therefore, the County's role is primarily advisory.

The Future Land Use Map

The Future Land Use Map builds on the 1995-96 Future Land Use Map; however, it introduces several new categories designed to provide greater detail regarding the purpose of each designation.



Future Land Use Map

Mercer County Comprehensive Plan

Mercer County, Pennsylvania

Legend

- Urban / Suburban Preservation
- Economic Revitalization Areas
- Neighborhood Revitalization Areas
- Mixed Use Growth Areas
- Economic Growth Areas
- Natural Resource Protection Areas (Greenways)
- Natural Resource Production Areas (Open Spaces)
- Community Gateway Overlay

 **Gannett Fleming**

 **DELTA DEVELOPMENT**
GROUP, LLC

Data Source: Mercer County Regional Planning Commission, PennDOT, FEMA, PSU, USFWS, USGS, NHI, NRCS

Data Projection: Pennsylvania State Plane, South Zone, Datum NAD83

Economic Revitalization Areas

The purpose of the Economic Revitalization designation is to encourage local officials to prioritize and focus limited economic development dollars in the county's traditional town centers. By doing so, past investments in existing infrastructure, including sewer, water, and transportation are better utilized. It also is designed to encourage redevelopment of brownfield sites in the county.

In Year 2025...

... existing towns continue to invest in their core districts and continue to grow in areas that are suitable for development.

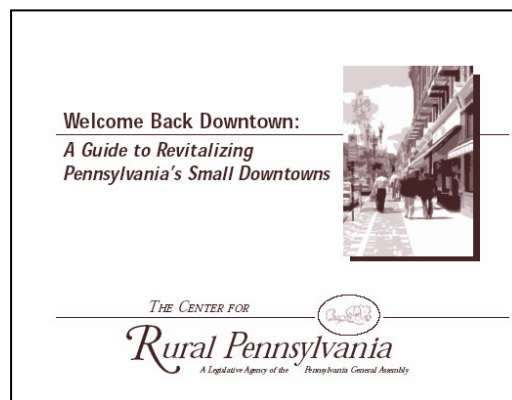
Mercer County's Vision Statement

Identified areas include the traditional town centers in the Shenango Valley, Mercer Borough, Greenville Borough, and Grove City, as well as other boroughs and traditional population centers. Primary uses within these areas would include mixed commercial establishments, public offices and institutions, light industry, and high density residential, particularly living quarters above ground floor office and commercial spaces. Secondary uses would include medium density residential and recreation.

According to the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, downtown revitalization helps to “improve the image of downtown, make use of existing buildings, offers residents a more concrete sense of place, provide residents with more retail options and services, provide more employment opportunities, expand the local tax base, prevent blight and abandonment, increase safety in the community, and keep money circulating within the community”¹. The Center's “Welcome Back Downtown” publication is a great starting point for communities that are considering improvements downtown and can be obtained online at www.ruralpa.org.

Key techniques for downtown revitalization include

- Create and maintain a clean appearance
- Improve store windows and building facades, even if vacant.
- Improve signage and directional assistance
- Improve parking and traffic flow



¹ Center for Rural Pennsylvania, “Welcome Back Downtown: A Guide to Revitalizing Pennsylvania’s Small Towns”, 2002.

What does it look like?



The New Broad Street Concept Sketch is part of Grove City's Thinking Beyond Today Revitalization Project. (Source: Grove City Chamber of Commerce @ www.grovecity-pa.com)



The City of Lebanon's Main Street program has helped property owners implement a variety of façade improvements. Source: Gannett Fleming, Inc.



The Borough of Towanda in Bradford County has encouraged new development that blends well with traditional architectural styles. Source: Gannett Fleming, Inc.



The City of Williamsport has used brick crosswalks, planter boxes, and banners to enhance their downtown. *Source: Gannett Fleming, Inc.*



In Hagerstown, MD, downtown revitalization has included the creation of public open spaces that are inviting and green. *Source: Maryland Office of Smart Growth Online www.smartgrowth.state.md.us.*

Neighborhood Revitalization Areas

The purpose of the neighborhood revitalization areas is to assist local officials prioritize and focus limited funds for housing rehabilitation and/or the removal of dilapidated buildings, as well as construction of new buildings within existing residential neighborhoods adjacent to downtown centers in the Shenango Valley, Mercer Borough, and Grove City.

Primary uses within these areas would be high, medium and low density residential uses, including both single-family and multi-family units. Secondary uses would include recreation facilities and smaller scale "neighborhood" commercial uses that serve the needs of the residents.

In Year 2025...

....Mercer County maintains a diverse array of urban, suburban and rural community types...and provides a high quality of life for all residents.

Mercer County Vision Statement

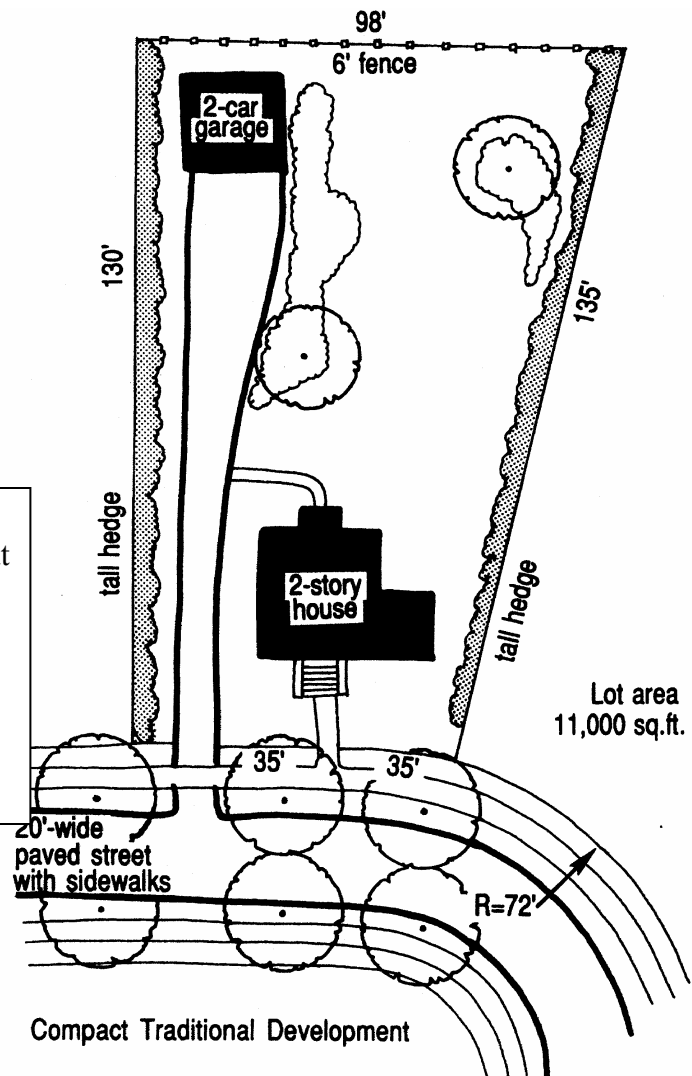
What does it look like?

Many of the older urban neighborhoods in Mercer County include lot plats that look similar to this example. When revitalizing neighborhoods, maintaining the scale and style of the surrounding properties will ensure that the traditional character is not destroyed.

Compact Traditional Development

This typical early 20th Century lot layout in Cranford, New Jersey is found throughout the country. Key elements include placing the house close to the street, hedges along the side lots, and street trees.

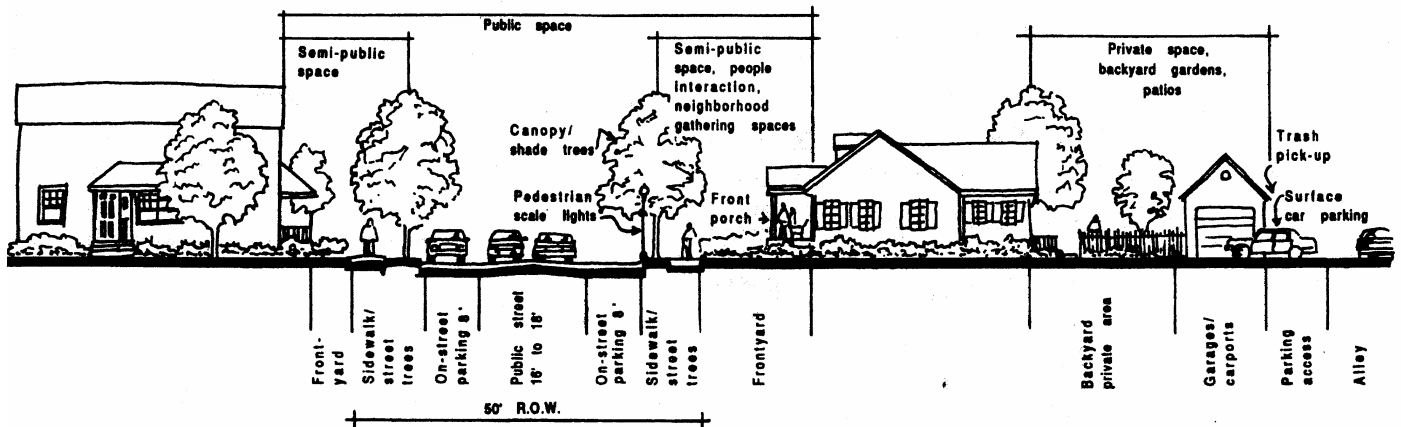
(Source: Rural by Design, 1994)



Compact Traditional Development



A neighborhood revitalization project in Farrell.
Source: Gannett Fleming, Inc.



When planning infill development or even new neighborhoods, incorporating these traditional neighborhood concepts can address the county's vision of safe and affordable neighborhoods.
(Source: Rural by Design, 1994.)

Mixed Use Growth Areas

The purpose of the Mixed Use Growth area is to provide for targeted growth surrounding existing boroughs throughout the county that takes advantage of existing or planned infrastructure. These are key smart growth concepts, which have identified as being desirable in Mercer County.

Primary Uses within these areas would include high to medium density residential, neighborhood commercial, and public facilities including schools and churches. Parks, trails and other recreation facilities along with public utilities would be secondary uses.

As shown on the Future Land Use Map, these areas include the areas adjacent to many of the county's developed communities, including Mercer Borough, the Shenango Valley, Greenville, Grove City, and others.

In Year 2025...

....the County has embraced the concept of "smart growth," as evidenced through guiding policies, strong leadership, and citizen feedback.

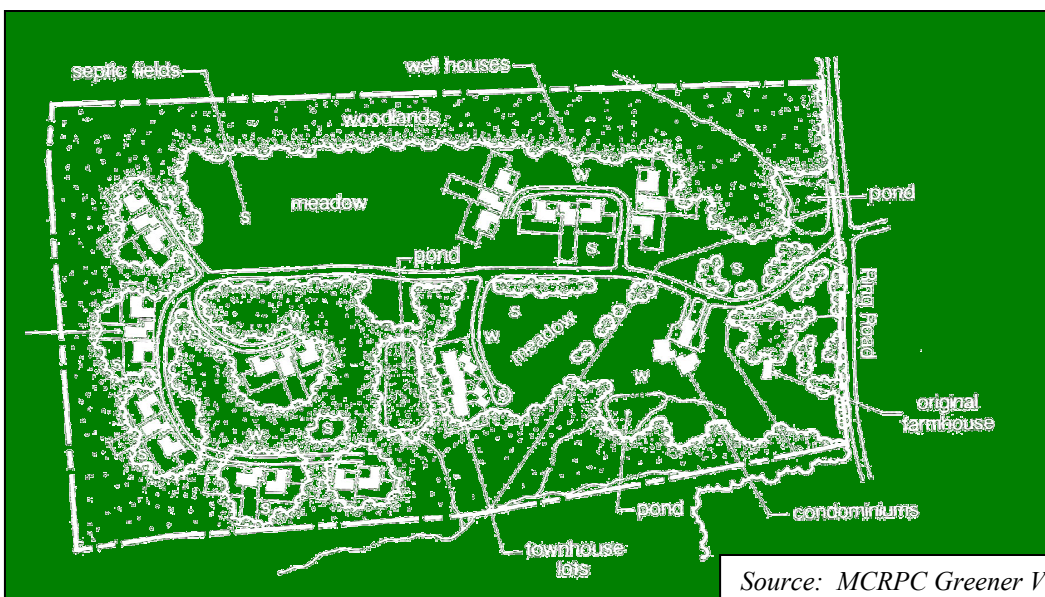
Mercer County Vision Statement

What does it look like?

Ideally, new growth in these areas would incorporate two smart growth development concepts that Mercer County Regional Planning Commission has identified in their Greener Visions Project: Planned Residential Development and Traditional Neighborhood Development. This Technical Guide with Model Ordinances was developed for Municipal Officials to implement conservation subdivision practices.



Planned Residential Development



Source: MCRPC Greener Visions Project

Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND)



Traditional Neighborhood Development allows higher density development in an urban or village setting, while enhancing quality with design standards.

Source: MCRPC Greener Visions Project

TNDs typically include a variety of housing choices, such as these found in Summerset at Frick Park in Pittsburgh.

Source: www.summersetatfrickpark.com



Economic Growth Areas

The purpose of establishing Economic Growth areas is to provide locations to accommodate larger scale industrial uses, including manufacturing, transportation and warehousing. Secondary Uses within these areas would, or already include, regional commercial retail and public facilities and utilities

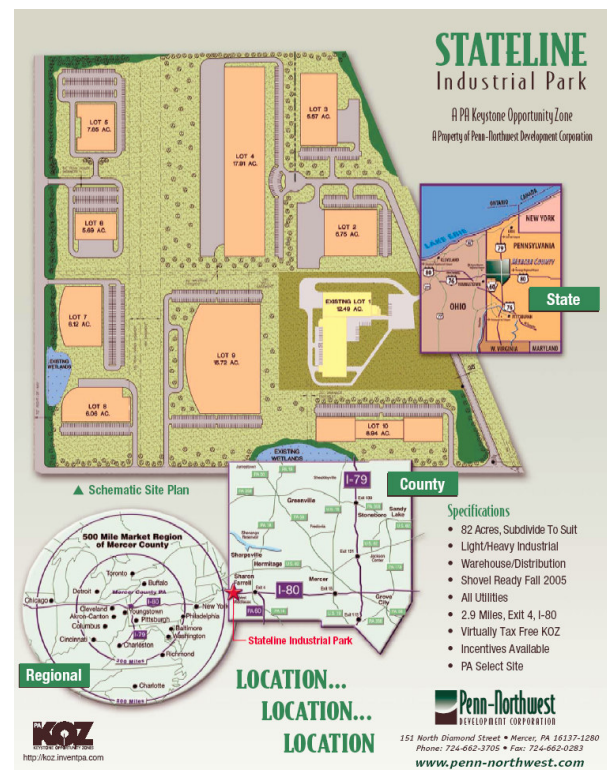
As shown on the future land use map, these areas represent existing KOZ sites, industrial and business parks, locally identified interchange areas, 2004 Target Assessment sites.

What does it look like?

Two examples of how these many sites could be developed are shown. Stateline Industrial Park is designed to handle light and heavy industrial or warehouse distribution. LindenPointe is a planned technical park that has been developed through a public-private partnership. A Technology Center that will ideally enhance emerging industrial clusters in the region is proposed for the park in addition to two semi-conductor companies already in place.



Source: LindenPointe Photo Album Online
www.lindenpointe.com



Community Gateways

The community gateway is an overlay concept designed to promote limited, high quality development that provides a sense of place as one travels from the county's interstate interchange areas to the established town centers, as well as to prevent undermining revitalization efforts in those centers.

Ideally, primary uses would include agriculture, offices, recreation facilities, and local commercial services. Secondary uses would include public facilities and residential uses. However, design standards for any uses would be more stringent so as to prevent the corridors from developing as "strip centers" that ultimately interfere with the performance of the main roadway. Key design concepts for new development include proper access management, adequate buffering, and distinctive signage.

US 19 from I-80 to Mercer Borough and PA 208 from I-79 to Grove City are just two of the identified corridors.

Mercer County Growth & Development Policy Statement

Mercer County and its communities should plan for continued development and should work to enhance the sense of place in each of the urban, suburban, and rural areas.

What does it look like?

Community Gateways can be as elaborate as that shown below, with special lighting and other streetscape elements. It can also be a clean corridor that is representative of the community at large, with open space and agricultural uses. In either case, signs are important for both introducing the community and providing visitors with directions.

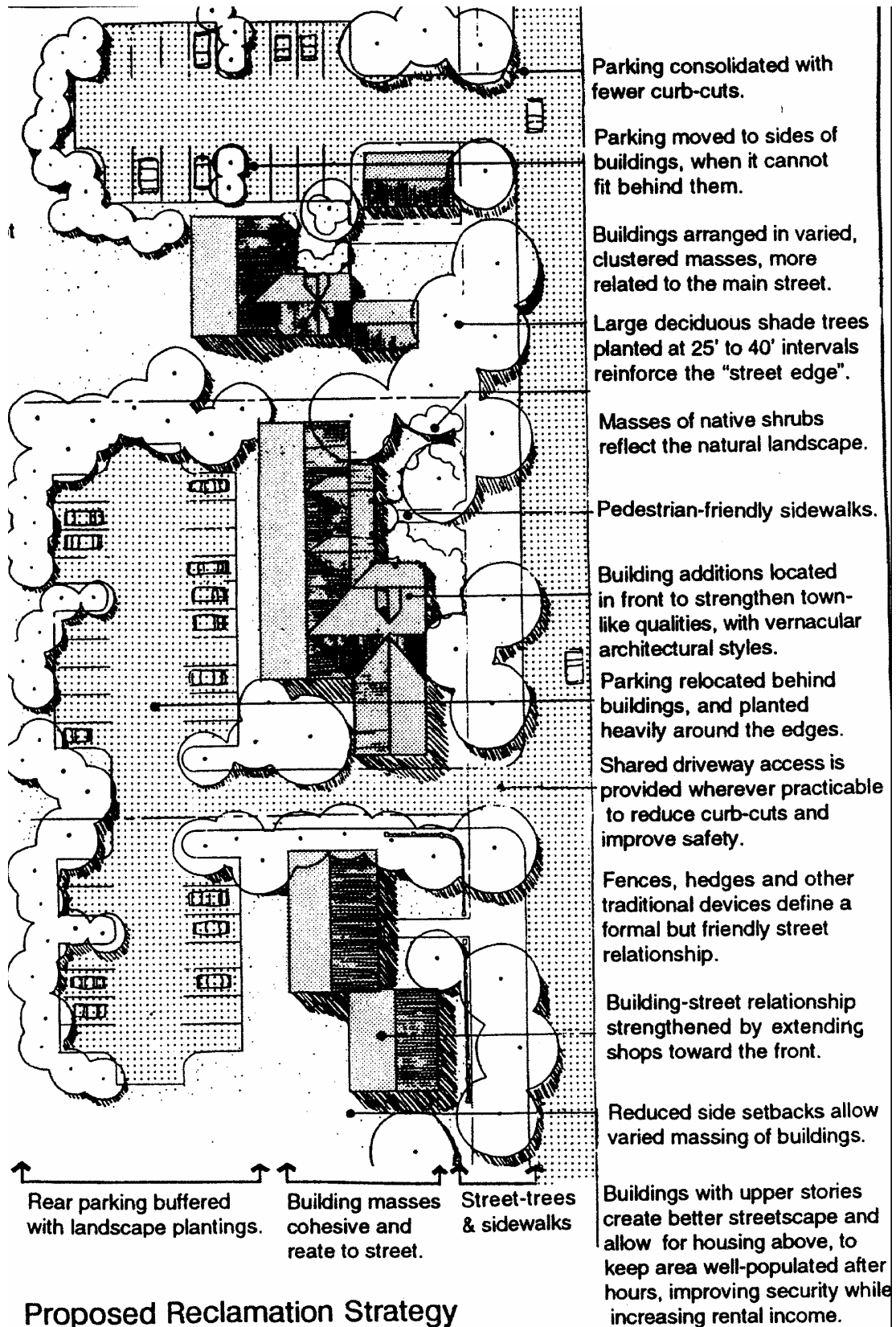


Source – KZF Design Website



Source – Gannett Fleming, Inc.

This innovative Commercial Development incorporates design elements that eliminate the typical "strip-style" development and can be tailored to create a greater sense of place. *Source: Arendt, 1994*



Urban/Suburban Preservation Areas

This category was designed to recognize the importance of the county's existing neighborhoods and encourage new uses within these areas that are compatible with the existing development patterns. Residential, public facilities, local commercial, and recreation uses are found in these areas, which are located throughout the county. The following illustrates just a few of the diverse communities in Mercer County that fit into this category.



Natural Resource Protection Areas

These areas are identified in order to assist local officials with protecting the county's most sensitive natural resources. They include steep slopes, floodplains, State Parks and Gamelands. Primary uses within these areas would be limited public recreation and, in the case of floodplains, temporary uses and agriculture.



Natural Resource Production Areas

The vast majority of Mercer County falls within this category, which is designed to protect the viability of the county's agricultural, forestry, mining, and other natural resource-based businesses. Primary uses reflect current uses: farming, timbering, mining, and related businesses and operations. Low density residential, limited recreation, and low impact, home-based businesses would also be allowed. In addition to existing low density development scattered throughout the county, existing Agricultural Security Areas (ASAs), areas with Prime Agricultural Soils and Soils of Statewide Importance, privately held woodland, and existing quarries are included in the production areas.

In Year 2025...

...economic opportunities are flourishing within the County, creating new jobs and attracting new residents. Sustainable forestry and agriculture are strong economic components of the rural landscape and economy.

Mercer County Vision Statement

What does it look like?



Working farms and forestland in Mercer County

Source: Gannett Fleming, Inc.



Rural Conservation Subdivision Design -

Also identified in the Greener Visions project, this concept allows for flexibility in housing types with a strong focus on land conservation.

Benefits of Rural Conservation Subdivisions

- ◆ Developments are sensitive to the rural character
- ◆ Less infrastructure means developers and municipalities save on construction and maintenance costs
- ◆ 50% or more open space is permanently preserved
- ◆ Housing values appreciate more rapidly than conventional subdivisions



Features of the Ponds at Woodward, a conservation subdivision in Kennett Township, PA, include –

- 70% of site preserved as open space
- Single family homes and townhouses situated around several ponds.
- A working orchard was included as part of the permanently preserved open space.



Source: MCRPC Greener Visions Project