

Commercial Landscapes Series

Transforming Greyfields into Dynamic Destinations





Table of Contents

Purpose	4
Introduction	5
Where We Are Now	7
The Importance of Greyfield Redevelopment in Chester County	7
Overall Challenges/Issues with Redevelopment of Greyfields	9
Analysis of Planning Practices	10
Overview of Countywide Retail Market & Submarkets	11
The Vision for Greyfields in Chester County	14
How Do We Get There?	15
Organization	16
Regulatory Guidance	18
Physical Improvements	20
Conclusion	22

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Purpose

This document is one of four in a planning series known as “Commercial Landscapes” (Office Parks, Transit Oriented Development (TOD), Brownfields, and Greyfields). The series serves as a collaborative effort between county agencies and county stakeholders focused on improving critical commercial areas located throughout the county. These reports provide a planning tool that offers guidance to municipal officials and professional planners, developers, and property owners about how to maximize the value of these commercial areas today and in the future to better implement the goals in municipal and county policy documents (Landscapes2, the County’s Comprehensive Plan and VISTA 2025, the County’s Economic Development Strategy). This series will also play a major role as a planning tool for Landscapes3, the County Comprehensive Plan update.

This document presents a set of guidelines and strategies to assist in the potential redevelopment and revitalization of ‘greyfields’ or aging retail centers in Chester County. The purpose is to highlight the importance of these retail centers and to provide guidance and techniques on how to redevelop or revitalize these facilities.



What is a Greyfield?

“Greyfields are former retail stores with large parking lots that are now economically challenged.”

– Environmental Protection Agency

A relatively new term in the planning field, greyfields have emerged as an issue in the commercial landscape of the United States as activity at suburban shopping malls, commercial strip centers, and big box shopping centers has declined in recent years. The increasing popularity of e-commerce, along with the rise of other evolving shopping preferences such as the ‘buy local’ movement has made it more difficult for retail centers to compete. By converting these aging greyfields into walkable and more attractive places, they can retain their viability and resume their role as major centers of community activity.

These underutilized commercial centers come in all shapes and sizes. Some are simply



outdated while others have been converted to non-traditional retail uses or remain vacant. Fortunately, greyfields offer an opportunity for a municipality to rethink and repurpose these areas to become strong financial assets and centers of their community. Adaptive reuse and redevelopment of struggling properties is not a new concept, but as properties age and demand for brick and mortar retail stores declines it becomes more important to consider these options. Introducing a mixture of uses and experience-based retail in greyfields can begin to revitalize these centers. Much of

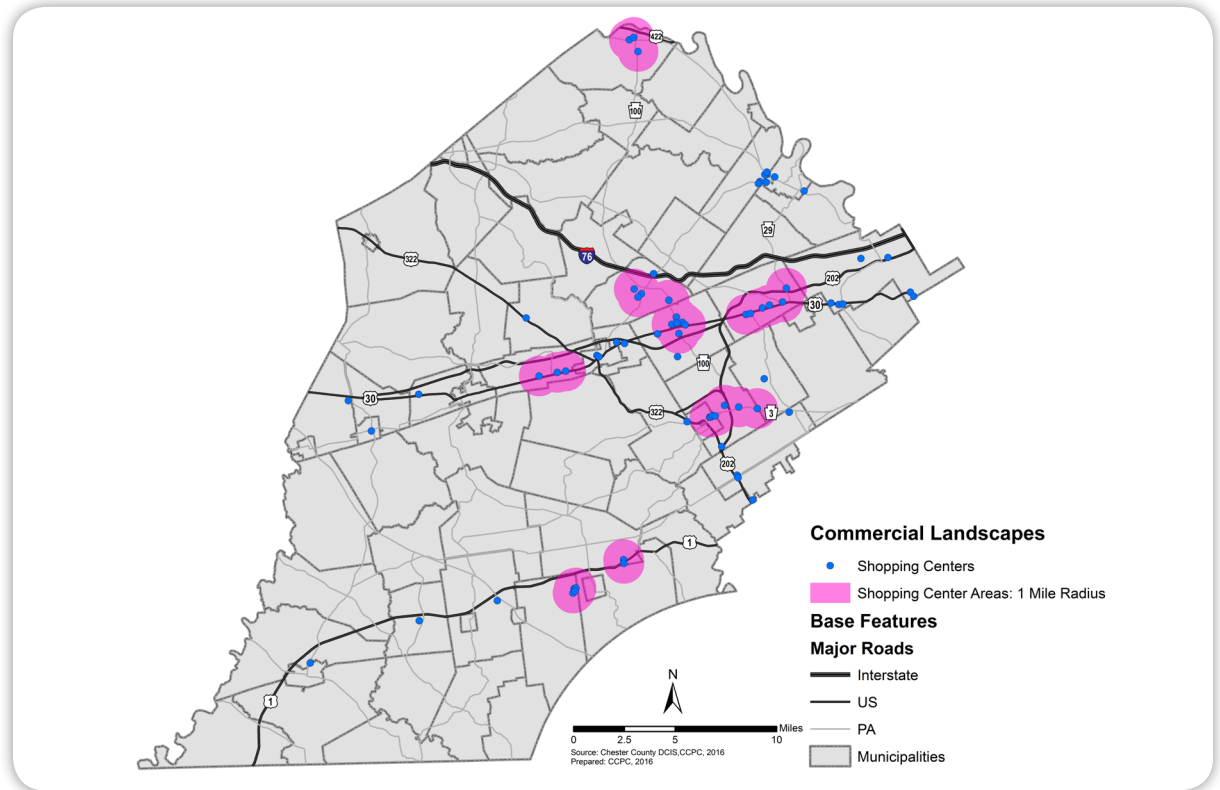
Chester County’s retail use is suburban and single use with large parking lots and could be subject to this type of decline, therefore it is imperative to plan ahead and create strategies so they can remain viable. By becoming more sustainable, these properties can continue to be assets for their communities in the future.

Identification and Brief History in U.S. and Chester County

The term 'greyfield' was coined as a description of the large asphalt parking lots associated with large commercial sites. Greyfield sites include underused or aging strip malls, big box stores, regional shopping malls and shopping centers. In Chester County, many of the shopping centers date back to the 1980s and 1990s when on-site retail demand was high. Since the 1990s, many shopping centers have remained basically the same and some have become underutilized with high vacancy rates. These changes, along with the change in demand for on-site retail and the rise of e-commerce, has led to broad scale discussion on the future of these retail destinations.

In 2016 at the Urban Land Institute's fall meeting, 'the mall of the future' was explored by a panel of design, development and placemaking experts. The panel concluded that quickly evolving retail trends indicate that developers must address retail sites in a more dynamic way in the future. [View web link.](#) ▶

Commercial Landscapes



The map depicts shopping centers in Chester County, highlighting the clusters of larger shopping centers with one mile buffer areas to indicate greater concentrations of retail.

There are many opportunities for redevelopment and retrofits and each community must determine the best strategy for their locale. Chester County has seen

transformations of these commercial centers ranging from mall reconfiguration, to new façade treatments, and complete redevelopment of older sites.

The Importance of Greyfield Redevelopment in Chester County

Retail centers

Retail centers often serve as the ‘front doors’ in suburban municipalities serving as a ‘main street’ or community gathering place. Repurposing shopping malls through placemaking initiatives provides a municipality with a prime opportunity to create these coveted ‘third places’ in their community. A ‘third place’ is where private places, such as home, and public places, such as the workplace, are combined and offer a social gathering place where private and public spaces coexist.

In the suburban fabric, the most common third places are indoor shopping malls; however, these have come under criticism as too homogenous due to chain stores and the limited diversity of the goods they offer for sale. Additionally, e-commerce has contributed greatly to the stagnation of the conventional shopping mall or strip mall as more and more consumers shop online. By incorporating a mixture of uses beyond retail with well thought out third places, a municipality can “turn around” these underutilized spaces making them once again a vibrant and unique part of the community.



Connectivity of commercial corridors

For decades, most suburban retail has been concentrated in a linear pattern with businesses developing independently along major roadways characterized by large parking lots, big signs, boxlike buildings, and a total dependence on the private automobile for access and circulation. [To view source.](#) ▶ The typical commercial strip offers few transit options, has exacerbated traffic congestion, has too many curb cuts, and a totally auto-oriented design. There is often no defined third place or neighborhood amenity, and nothing distinct from one anchor tenant to another, let alone from a strip center in Chester County

to a strip center anywhere else in the country. Better connected retail areas that provide a more pedestrian friendly environment can help create the “sense of place” that many customers desire.

Economic value of property and surrounding area

According to a March 2015 article in The Atlantic Magazine titled *America's Dying Malls*, "The U.S. has twice as much square footage in shopping centers per capita than the rest of the world, and six times as much as countries in Europe." Since the inception of the indoor shopping mall, it is clear that these types of retail destinations have been very successful in the suburban setting. With their success came high demand, but now that e-commerce and other trends have led to a decline in that demand, vacancy rates have begun to creep up as major national retailers such as The Limited, Macys and Kmart close more stores nationwide every year.

These retail centers and their large stores provide jobs and a significant portion of the tax base for many communities. Vacant retail space has negative effects on the surrounding businesses in general and represents an ineffective use of developed land. Reimagining commercial uses to incorporate walkable design, a mixture of uses, experience-based shopping, transit options, and recreational facilities can help to keep these sites exciting and viable.

As of 2016, the owners of Exton Square Mall in West Whiteland Township in Chester County have been rethinking the shopping experience. The former J.C. Penney department store has reopened after major renovations as an entertainment complex that offers bowling, arcade games, billiards, and more. Additionally, Mainline Health opened a care center in a large portion of the mall, and other small retailers are attempting to add new experiences such as an indoor, glow-in-the-dark golf course. The mall is also the site of a new Whole Foods grocery store scheduled to open late 2017.



Exton Square Mall has been reinventing itself by adding entertainment, restaurants, and health care offices.

Underutilized parking

Many municipalities are considering a decrease in their minimum parking requirements as a result of the frequently vacant 'seas of asphalt' that characterizes many parking lots. For older shopping centers that have yet to see major renovations, the decline can be more apparent when vacant parking surrounds the retail. Older parking standards were often created to accommodate the influx of people on days like Black Friday or during the holiday season. This excess of parking has been seen as a problem for many municipalities and it is being tracked by the "Strong Towns" organization, which has begun to implement municipal codes with lower parking minimums or no parking minimums.

Overall Challenges/ Issues with Redevelopment of Greyfields

While greyfield sites present many opportunities, they also pose reciprocal challenges and issues. Generally greyfield sites are environmentally clean but the cost to 'go green', updates to modernize buildings with tech advancements, and adding community amenities such as parks and pedestrian improvements can potentially increase the budget when redeveloping these sites. Costs (demolition and/or renovations) are not the only hurdle when considering greyfield redevelopment; others include but are not limited to:

Challenges/Issues

- Developer and land owner's willingness to retrofit/redevelop property
- Slow overall redevelopment process (zoning, approvals, etc.)
- Evolving market forces
- Completion from overbuilt and aging retail
- Decline in overall image of the area
- Heavily travelled roads with traffic congestion make access difficult
- Limited access via other modes of transit and limited shared infrastructure
- Remote look and feel is not inviting to pedestrians
- Small property sizes, often with multiple owners, and limited depth along highways



Magnolia Place in Kennett Square - before



Magnolia Place in Kennett Square - after

Analysis of Planning Practices

To understand the existing planning practices of municipalities, the planning team performed an analysis of both the comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances of the following municipalities: North Coventry, Downingtown, East Goshen, East Whiteland, Malvern, Tredyffrin, Uwchlan, West Goshen, West Caln, West Chester, Kennett, New Garden, Kennett Square, and West Whiteland. These municipalities were identified because they have significant shopping center corridors. All of these municipalities included recommendations for commercial uses and some identified commercial corridors as future mixed use growth areas. Four townships did not recommend commercial or retail growth. The zoning analysis showed that only nine commercial districts permitted both residential and commercial uses. Allowing greater flexibility of uses in commercial districts can encourage redevelopment by providing options for reinventing commercial centers. In many cases commercial zones are not very flexible and greatly restrict what a property owner can do on their property, such as only allowing specific types of retail uses and nothing else.



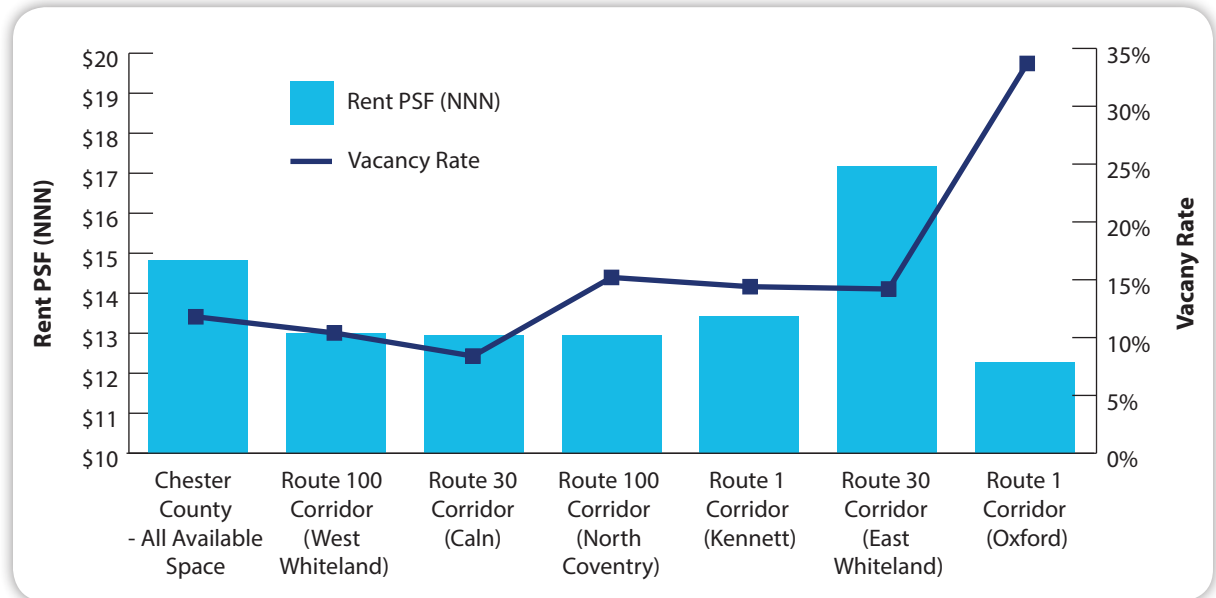
Main Street Exton

Overview of Countywide Retail Market & Submarkets

CoStar ▶ (a provider of information, analytics and marketing services to the commercial real estate industry) was used to gather commercial real estate data for Chester County retail markets during the research phase of this study. An analysis was done for six of the primary retail corridors in Chester County. For each corridor area, the number of existing buildings, total square footage, rent per square foot, and vacancy are summarized in the graphs to the right.

In terms of shopping center space per person, Chester County has approximately 20.8 square feet per person countywide when shopping centers are defined as retail centers over 30,000 square feet. This is slightly lower than the national average of just over 23 square feet per person according to the International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC). However, given the growth in regional retail centers just outside of the county such as King of Prussia, Glen Mills, northern Delaware and the Pottstown area it is understandable that Chester County's square footage per person would be slightly lower than average.

Rent per square foot & vacancy rate of select retail corridors in Chester County



This graph represents CoStar retail space data for square footage and number of retail buildings in different commercial corridors around the county. The graph shows that the Route 100 Corridor, centered in West Whiteland Township around Exton, has the largest amount of retail space in the county. The West Route 30 Corridor, centered in Caln Township, has the greatest number of retail buildings, but much less space overall due to the smaller size of those buildings. In contrast, the Route 1 Corridor in both in the Kennett area and in the Oxford area has far fewer buildings and less space.

Summary of Business Analyst

ESRI's Business Analyst is a GIS-based subscription service providing economic data, customer profiling, and market analysis. This tool was used to show the demographics and household lifestyles or **Tapestry Segmentations** for Chester County as well as seven of the top retail destinations in Chester County. Although retail destinations often pull their customers from a wide area, these areas were identified using a 1 mile drive-time radius from a central point in each of the locations in order to get a better picture of what the people living in that immediate area are like.

By using the data shown in the chart as well as the tapestry segment reports that are linked in the chart, both municipalities and businesses can get a better sense of the variety of groups that live in each of these markets. Table 1 shows basic demographics, and a summary of existing conditions for retail in each of the seven commercial areas.

Commercial Landscapes

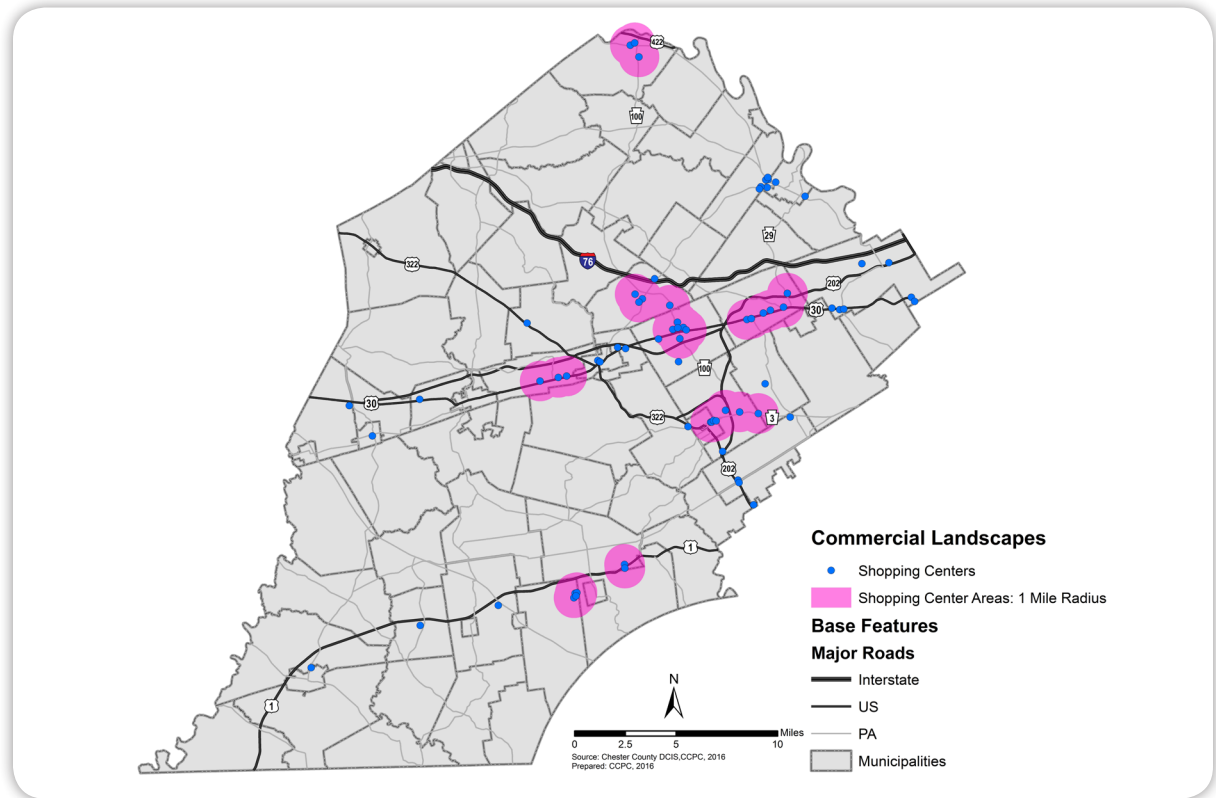


Table 1: Chester County commercial areas: demographics and market analysis

Commercial Area (1 mile radius)	Total Shopping Centers	Total Retail Businesses	Population	Households	Median Disposable Income
Caln	3	97	11,480	4,434	\$55,993
Coventry	3	119	4,890	2,107	\$44,597
Eagleview	3	102	6,354	2,378	\$80,586
East Whiteland	6	232	10,725	3,910	\$70,145
Exton	7	305	16,343	6,773	\$68,729
Kennett	6	167	10,506	3,494	\$57,082
Route 3*	6	411	35,027	13,080	\$48,238
Chester County	71	2,767	514,558	188,842	\$68,525

* Includes the majority of West Chester Borough

Source: ESRI Business Analyst; Tapestry Segmentation Data, 2016

Table 2 shows the most common ESRI Tapestry Segment in each commercial area with corresponding information about each segment along with a link to the full report. ESRI's Tapestry classifies U.S. residential neighborhoods into **67 unique segments**. ▶ These segments represent accurate detailed descriptions of America's neighborhoods based on their socio-economic and demographic composition.

The data shows that the median household income in most of these commercial areas (within a 1 mile radius) is well below the Chester County average, with the exception of the Eagleview area. The lifemode segments in these areas also differ from most of Chester County, with lower home values and median household net worth as well as more renters and different spending habits. For example, the Parks & Rec lifemode segment (the most common in the Caln and Coventry areas) has a 71% homeownership rate with a median home value of \$180,000. Meanwhile, the Professional Pride lifemode segment (the most common in Eagleview) has a 92% homeownership rate with a median home value of \$387,000. These differences, described in much more detail in the reports, represent different opportunities for retail areas depending on the spending habits of the customer base in those areas.

Table 2: Chester County commercial areas: Tapestry Segmentation lifestyle groups

Commercial Area (1 mile radius)	Lifemode Segment #1 (% of households)	Lifemode Segment References			Report Links
		Median Age	Homeownership Rate	Median Household Income*	
Caln	Parks & Rec ▶ (27.6)	40.3	Own SF Homes	\$55,000	Report ▶
Coventry	Parks & Rec ▶ (40.2)	40.3	Own SF Homes	\$55,000	Report ▶
Eagleview	Professional Pride ▶ (45.6)	40.5	Prefer New SF Homes	\$127,000	Report ▶
East Whiteland	City Lights ▶ (32.2)	38.8	Own or Rent MF or SF	\$60,000	Report ▶
Exton	Enterprising Professionals ▶ (66.9)	34.8	Own or Rent MF or SF	\$77,000	Report ▶
Kennett	Urban Villages ▶ (32.5)	33.3	Own SF Homes	\$58,000	Report ▶
Route 3*	Emerald City ▶ (19.4)	36.6	Own or Rent MF or SF	\$52,000	Report ▶

* Includes the majority of West Chester Borough

** Median Household Income is the U.S. median income for the corresponding lifestyle group.

Source: ESRI Business Analyst: Tapestry Segmentation Data, 2016



The Vision for Revitalization

Chester County retail areas will maintain their place as centers of commercial activity in our communities while adjusting to changes and new realities in the commercial real estate market. Underutilized or aging retail areas will revitalize by including a greater mixture of uses, creating more green space, and creating a 'third place' for residents to gather outside of the home or office environment.



This section highlights key steps, strategies, provisions, and improvements to consider when redeveloping and/or revitalizing 'greyfields' in three separate planning areas. These planning areas provide realistic and tangible recommendations to achieve the overall vision from organizational, regulatory, and physical perspectives.

Organization

- **Steps to redevelopment**
- **Tools, guides, and programs to use**
- **Stakeholders role**

Regulatory Guidance

- **Master planning**
- **Update zoning and subdivision land development ordinances**
- **Parking requirements for commercial uses**

Physical Improvements (Placemaking & Connectivity)

- **Experience-based retail**
- **Designing at the pedestrian scale**
- **Improved transportation options in and around the commercial corridors**

Organization

■ Steps to redevelopment

Inventory the supply and demand (of the current retail in the area)

Data collection should include information about the commercial retail places in a community, the tenants and real estate, the performance of the retail, and demographic information about the neighborhoods. Major elements to examine should be: current trade area, retail supply and demand, physical space, and overall land uses in the community.

[To view source.](#) ▶

Perform a market analysis

As part of the supply and demand analysis, the market analysis will provide the ‘demand’ element for an area. The overall trade demand for an area will indicate the amount of retail space and additional uses can be supported by the community. The market analysis is critical because it will provide the details of the type of retail as well as the amount of other uses that can be currently supported, especially once comparing results from the analysis with projected growth for an area.



Develop a vision

Coordinate with property owners of the commercial centers to determine the makeup of the stores that are occupied versus those that are vacant, and note the age, size or surrounding land uses of the retail centers in your community. Creating a big picture strategy for an area helps communities make connections along linear commercial corridors, focuses efforts on gaining support for desired new uses and tenants, and allows for collaborative approaches to issues, such as using bioswales to help with stormwater and provides green space.

Partnerships (public/private partnerships where possible)

Working with local business groups, chambers of commerce, business improvement districts, and entities with in depth knowledge of the local commercial market will help to bring together stakeholders and identify a realistic vision. Creating public consensus in the community is also pivotal in determining a project’s viability and to express the benefits that a new development can bring to a local community.

Maintain motivation and identify management and maintenance

There is no perfect formula for producing the next generations of shopping malls, retail centers, or mixed-use centers. Market demands shift, shopping patterns change, and communities evolve over time. When undertaking a conversion, retrofit, or redevelopment the market and community vision at the time will drive the overall project. Marketing is an essential element from the beginning of the retrofit or redevelopment, through the project, and long after the physical improvements have been built. Owners and investors should keep in mind the need for dynamic, sustainable design with consistent monitoring and maintenance, to make the management and evolution of retail centers easier over time.

■ Tools, guides, and programs to use

• Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance

This tax incentive program encourages economic development in targeted areas with tax abatements of up to 100 percent on improvements to a property for up to 10 years. Chester County LERTA examples include: [Phoenixville Borough](#) ▶ and [Caln Township](#). ▶

• Local government incentives, such as, Tax Increment Financing (TIF), bonds, condemnation, land assemblage or land acquisition, and infrastructure enhancements.

These financing program assists in the development, redevelopment, and revitalization of sites. For more information about the programs contact the [Chester County Economic Development Council](#) ▶ or visit the [PADCED website](#). ▶

• Repurposing the Mall (ULI) – Ten Principles for Rethinking the Mall

This guide explores lessons learned from three mall sites that can be applied wherever communities and developers are facing the challenge of revitalizing obsolete malls into greater community assets. [Link to guide](#). ▶

• Keystone Opportunity Zones (KOZ)

This program provides state and local tax abatements to businesses and residents locating in designated areas over a selected period of time. For more information about the program please contact the [Chester County Economic Development Council](#) ▶ or visit the [PADCED website](#). ▶

• Retrofitting Suburbia

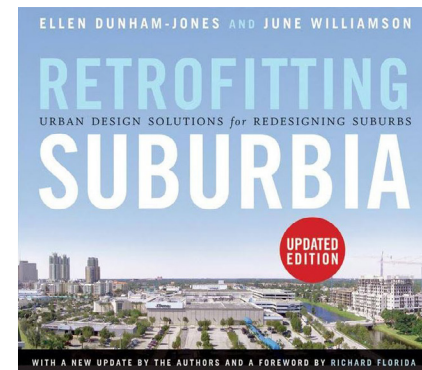
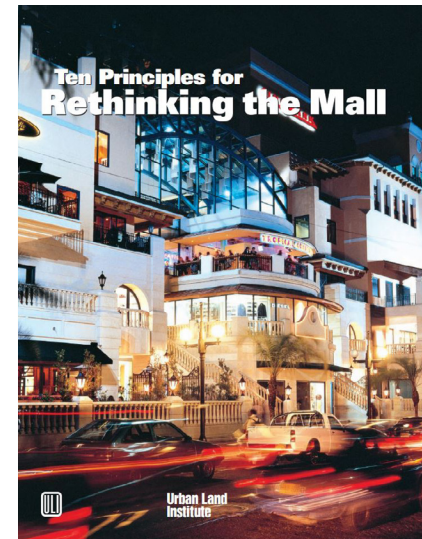
A resource written by Planner Ellen Dunham-Jones, for urban designers, planners, architects, developers, and community leaders illustrating how suburban developments, primarily commercial, can be redesigned into more urban, sustainable places. [Link to resource](#). ▶

• Redfields to Greenfields

This program is a nationwide initiative where real estate ‘in the red’ is acquired by a foundation and converted into public parks or land ‘banked’ for future sustainable development. [View more on the program](#). ▶

• Keystone Innovation Zones (KIZ)

This program provides tax credits to non-profit companies less than eight years old operating in specific industries within the designated zones. For more information visit the [PADCED website](#). ▶



■ Stakeholders role

Property owners and retailers of a commercial retail strip, a mall, or shopping center, are subject to the changing preferences of consumers and the impact of e-commerce which demands that they keep current with the evolving times. Big-box retailers and national retailers have time-tested formulas that often do not take into account periodic investments in properties to keep up with the changing times, but rather build on new sites as the market shifts as a method to keep current retail in the market. Lastly, retail leases are often longer and allow for limited to no adaptability in the property over time, which can often impact infrastructure investments or cause property values to decline, which in turn harms the local market.

Commercial developers and real estate professionals are most often the main ‘investors’ in the redevelopment of greyfields. They often have many redevelopment strategies to pull from to revitalize commercial places, but could benefit greatly from collaborative approaches to greyfields through innovative partnerships that would incorporate a range of elements from residential to civic spaces, depending upon what the market and community support.

Local government participation in greyfield redevelopment can take many forms, but put simply their main role is to “commit to clearly stated goals and give designers and developers guidance on what sort of project the community wants.”(Sobel, Greyfields to Goldfields, 2002) Local government sets the regulation by which a developer must comply, through zoning and land use ordinances. Whether funded directly by the municipality or through a grant that a municipality acquires, infrastructure improvements and maintenance, as well as safety and public welfare, are typically the responsibility of the local governing agency. Additionally, greyfield redevelopment offers a variety of long and short term benefits to a local government. In the short term, they benefit from the reuse of existing infrastructure and job creation for construction. In the long term, property tax revenue improves, additional sales tax is collected, and new housing and other investment may come to the community.

Local community, such as local business owners or local residents serve a significant role in reducing the risk of local permitting hold-ups and can help address a communities specific needs, like housing shortages or food access.



Regulatory Guidance

■ Master planning

A community-based planning process involves the local government bringing together all of the stakeholders interested in creating a master plan for a neighborhood, site or community. The intent of the master plan is to determine the needs of all the different parties in a community, and to find the most efficient approach to solving the issues while establishing a general consensus for a project. A master plan often serves as a detailed road map for the design and development of a site. There is more potential for a master plan to achieve large scale change successfully, because many of the constituencies have been involved in the project from the onset. Lastly, a master plan for a site or community generally means a smoother approval process for developers and establishes easy short-term implementation steps that get the development underway more quickly.

■ Update zoning and subdivision land development ordinances

The strip zoning that originated the commercial strip centers of the suburbs created scattered, low-density development of a single use that is not connected to the surrounding community. If zoning created the commercial strip, then zoning remediation may help improve the viability of the commercial strip in the future through the following regulatory implementations:

- Allow for a mixtures of uses, ranging from residential homes, apartments, offices, mixed-uses, institutional, or recreation to distinctive uses that encourage placemaking such as entertainment, parks, plazas, open space, theaters, galleries and museums, convention centers, indoor sports facilities, or schools and training centers.
- Increase density. When residential uses are added to commercial centers then retail spaces often gain around the clock presence.
- Differentiate zoning area and bulk regulations for different types of commercial development.
- Modifying zoning in these districts to create more flexibility such as raising height restrictions, lowering parking ratios, reducing setback and building placement requirements, adding sidewalk standards, and other modifications that can encourage more walkable, bikeable, and transit accessible designs.

- Encourage amenities like libraries, public plazas, trails, etc. The inclusion of community or public-realm amenities could be encouraged through an incentive based system.



■ Parking requirements for commercial uses

While commercial parking areas are a requirement and essential to the economic vitality of a community, they are rarely used to their capacity. They can also have a negative impact on the environment, character and quality of life in a community whether it is stormwater runoff, heat island effect, lighting, aesthetics or pedestrian and driver safety.

Retail parking lots can be transformed with:

- Landscaped islands with shade trees to combat heat island effect and assist with stormwater management.
- Installation of walkways (trails/sidewalks) for pedestrian circulation and safety.
- Gateways to large commercial establishments with landscaping, transit stops, and wayfinding signage.
- Repurposing of peripheral or underutilized parking areas into community areas like parks or event space for seasonal events such as concerts, farmers markets, or carnivals.

Parking requirements

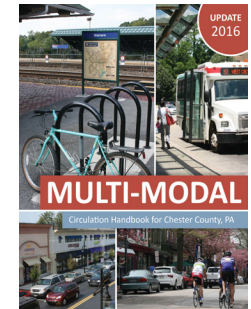
Updating parking requirements and other regulatory options should be considered to assist with parking retrofits and new commercial development in commercial corridors and districts.

- Establish shared parking lot agreements with property owners and tenants, as part of retrofits and/or new development. Shared parking would also including common driveways and entrances to with interconnected parking.
- Interconnect parking lots and encourage common driveways.
- Screen parking or place to the side or back of buildings.
- Reduce parking requirements with flexible parking ratios for new developments depending on proposed uses and surrounding demands.
- Create a “fee-in-lieu” parking program that gives an option for developers to opt out by making payments in lieu of providing off-street parking, freeing up valuable land for development instead of surfaced parking lots.
- Allow some required parking to be put in reserve.

Sources for parking design options

The Chester County Multi-modal Circulation Handbook, 2016 ▶

discusses basic design principles to consider when updating ordinances, and designing or redesigning parking facilities, which includes, but is not limited to the following: recommended parking ratios, pedestrian circulation, landscaping, lighting, ADA requirements and parking types.



The Montgomery County Planning Commission recently published a guidebook called: **Sustainable Green Parking Lots.** ▶ This document goes into great detail on the impacts of surfaced parking areas and design elements to use to assist in transforming parking areas into more aesthetically pleasing and safe areas within a community.

The book, **“Parking Management Best Practices”** ▶ by Todd Litman, 2006, also goes into great detail on strategies for increased parking facility efficiency, reduced parking demand and strategies for support and enforcement.



Physical Improvements

As more commercial corridors try to reinvent themselves due to vacancies, there are market trends or public demands for certain physical improvements that need to be considered in order to bring about community character and placemaking. These amenities should be considered to bring new life, sense of place and maintain economic vitality back into these commercial centers across Chester County. The following lists a number of physical improvements communities should consider when reinventing commercial centers.

■ Experience based retail

- Redesign and retrofit commercial centers such as malls and/or shopping centers into ‘experience based’ retail, wellness centers, and lifestyle centers with innovative approaches to ‘mixed-use’ development. These options combine many elements beyond retail and residential, offering active recreation or service industry options that transform places into successful live, work, and play communities.

- Incorporate façade improvements to demonstrate public investment, which in turn often attracts private investment.
- Provide space and accommodations in underutilized areas such as parking lots for temporary events, pop-up businesses, food trucks, and more.

■ Designing at the pedestrian scale

- Create pedestrian scale community gathering places within the commercial center for local residents and surrounding community.
- Increase beautification, connectivity, and pedestrian friendly amenities along commercial corridors and within retail centers similar to what Caln Township has done by undertaking sidewalk and lighting improvements along the Route 30 Corridor.
- Design to better connect surrounding communities with pedestrian improvements, trails, interconnected driveways, and the road grid.
- Install wayfinding and signage for pedestrians and automobiles within center parking areas.

Exton Square Mall



Pedestrian friendly amenities



Wayfinding signage at Exton Square Mall



■ Improved design

- Design landscaping to buffer the center from the heavily travelled roads, integrate trees and greenery for shade, stormwater management, and to create attractive shopping environments.
- Install traffic calming and gateways to indicate a transition in a community to the retail area with pedestrian travel.
- Provide bus shelters and support transit facilities.

Food trucks



Bus shelters



Stormwater management



Conclusion

Chester County retail centers have been important parts of the commercial landscape for decades as not only areas for retail shopping and other services, but also as places that sometimes act as the “front door” of our communities. Some of these locations even act as a “third place” for locals to gather outside of their home or work environments.

As the e-commerce industry and other commercial market forces impact the strength of our local retail markets, the owners of these sites need to consider how to adapt to this changing environment. The recommendations in this document including creative re-use strategies, zoning changes, redevelopment options, renovations, “green” design options and other ideas to help local communities and property owners prepare for changes to the real estate market, while allowing these community resources to remain strong and viable into the future.



The Creamery, a pop-up beer garden in Kennett Square Borough, is an example of a successful community gathering place.

