Berks County Conservancy

Smart Growth Principles

The purpose of this document is to provide a set of generalized "Smart Growth" principles that can be used by a developer or builder in Berks County, Pennsylvania.

The Berks County Conservancy recognizes the realities of both geography and economy as it impacts the environment. We offer these guiding principles to direct development in a Smart Growth manner, recognizing that in the real world, not all development will address all aspects of the principles but may still be considered Smart Growth. These principles will evolve as our understanding of market forces, the natural environment and transportation systems change. Over time we will fine-tune the principles to suit the particular circumstances we face in Berks County.

An endorsement of a development as Smart Growth may be granted when a committee of the Board of the Conservancy finds that the development is essentially consistent with the principles.

Location Characteristics

The development is located in an area that is designated as Developed or Planned Growth area in the Berks County Comprehensive Plan.

- The development is located within or adjacent to an existing developed area.
- The development is located to make use of existing infrastructure.
- Existing public facilities, churches, libraries, schools, recreation, retail, and offices are located adjacent or in close proximity to the development.
- The development offers convenient access to transportation choices.
- Residences, green space, commercial buildings, and retail establishments are concentrated around a planned or existing transit stop.

Site Planning Characteristics

- The project includes an appropriate mix of land uses, including but not limited to, residential, large site development, commercial, retail, recreational, and civic (dependent upon development size).
- The streets are designed with curbs, sidewalks, crosswalks, and ground floor uses (commercial sites only, retail/civic core) to support pedestrian-oriented places.
- Public places are designed to encourage people to participate in commercial, civic, or recreational uses.
- The design and scale of the buildings and site are compatible with that of existing adjacent structures.
- The front façades are designed to promote the continuity of a street wall and creates an "outdoor room."

- Local streets with sidewalks and curbs are organized in an interconnected pattern extending existing street patterns, offering direct access to collector and arterial streets and/or other developments.
- Local streets offer a safe and appealing environment for pedestrians through continuous sidewalks, street trees and plantings, pedestrian-level lighting fixtures, and clearly marked pedestrian crossings.
- The development incorporates or provides access to a network of pedestrian and bicycle paths through green spaces, where appropriate.
- Intersections are designed to facilitate pedestrian crossing.
- Traffic calming elements and the design of local streets encourage slower speeds.
- Parking is permitted on streets.
- Rear alleys provide additional parking and secure access behind commercial and residential structures.
- Structures and amenities within the development are situated to maximize recreational and natural open space.

Building Design

Existing Buildings

- Where feasible, existing structures are adaptively reused to preserve and reinforce the traditional fabric of the community.
- Historic buildings and structures are preserved and reused.

Residential Buildings

- Residents can choose from a range of housing types, including single-family homes, townhouses, condominiums, or apartments.
- The development offers homes in a range of price levels.
- Residential buildings are situated in clusters.
- Residential offerings include housing priced to be affordable to low and moderate-income families.
- The development offers high-density residential units.
- Homes provide front porches or balconies to connect residents to sidewalk activities.
- Homes include rear alley garages to reduce their visual impact on the street.
- Residential units are adjacent to or within reasonable walking distance to retail, transit, and/or offices and other civic amenities.
- Residential buildings are oriented and set close to the street.

Commercial/Retail Buildings

- The front facades of commercial buildings use visual elements such as street-level windows, canopies, arcades, overhangs, watercourses, recessed wall planes, or other architectural features to vary the pedestrian-level view.
- Primary building entrances are oriented visually to the street.
- Multi-story commercial buildings include residences or offices on the upper floors.
- Commercial areas provide landscaped public plazas with seating for employees and visitors.
- Parking lots are landscaped, and located away from the street, for example, at the rear of a building.
- Retail and commercial structures are located adjacent to or within walking distance of residential areas.

Building Environmental Impact

Special consideration will be given to project submissions which have either achieved U.S. Green Building Council's LEED (Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design) Certification (Certified, Silver, Gold, or Platinum) or which clearly demonstrate effective use of principles of sustainable design as outlined in USGBC LEED or similar green building rating systems. In addition to site and landscape considerations, use of renewable resources and specific building design strategies could include:

- The building exceeds standard energy performance (ASHRAE/IESNA 90.1-1999) for walls, roof, windows, and HVAC systems and maximizes the use of renewable energy.
- The building incorporates energy-efficient lighting and makes use of diffuse indirect daylight.
- The building provides better than minimum indoor air quality (use of low-VOC building materials), ventilation, thermal, and acoustic comfort.
- New structures are built using environmentally friendly construction materials, such as recycled concrete, certified wood, renewable or salvaged materials.

Site and Landscape Design

- The site is landscaped with indigenous and/or water-efficient plants.
- Maintenance of the site's landscaping limits the use of fertilizer and/or pesticides.
- Landscaping minimizes impacts on indigenous vegetation, topography, and other natural systems.
- The development preserves and protects wetlands, meadows, forests, water bodies, and other natural resources and site features, or restores damaged sites or removes environmental contamination.
- New green spaces are created or existing ones are maintained within the development.
- The project incorporates devices to reduce environmental impacts and conserve energy, such as rainwater collection, pervious pavement, wind or solar energy, etc. The site design reduces stormwater runoff and implements on-site use.
- The project uses lighting mechanisms that do not pollute the night sky or negatively affect the surrounding area.