

## Land Use by the Numbers

Total acreage of Bloomsburg	3,014
Percentage of land used by intensive land uses	49.7%
Percentage of land used by open space land uses	42.8%
Percentage of other lands (water)	7.5%
Percentage of land used for public and quasi-public uses	15.8%

## Introduction

An analysis of land use, development patterns, and the mix of land use types is a critical component of a comprehensive plan. Even if most of Bloomsburg is essentially fully developed or “built-out”, a review of land use patterns allows decision makers to examine how land has been used, the effectiveness of existing regulations, and factors that influence land use decisions. Such factors may include changes in demographic or household composition or growth of the student population affecting housing, the condition of the transportation, water, and sewer infrastructure, or even less tangible changes in contemporary lifestyles. Understanding these factors can help to guide policy making for future development or redevelopment within the Town. Incentives, zoning and subdivision and land development regulations, and design guidelines all affect the land use patterns, physical design, and “sense of place” in the Town of Bloomsburg.

This profile provides a brief overview and description of the existing land use types and patterns as depicted on **Map 5: 2008 Land Use Map**. It also includes a review of the Town’s current Zoning Ordinance, Zoning Map and Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance. The findings from these reviews provide the basis for proposed revisions to the ordinance and map as outlined in the Future Land Use plan and Map.

## Land Use Characterization

The town was originally laid out in a grid pattern based on the axes of Main and Markets Streets. These streets continue to define the urban mixed-use district area with shops, restaurants, and services that are frequented by both residents and college students. High density residential districts surround Main Street and East Street and institutional land uses are interspersed throughout the community.

Bloomsburg University is located in the northeastern section of the Town along Light Street (Route 487). While the University itself is located east of the Town’s center, its presence is felt throughout the community as the student population is dispersed throughout the Town.

Open space and lower density development is located along the edges, and the density increases the closer one travels to the center of the Town. The northern and western borders of the Town are defined by Fishing Creek and the southern border by the Susquehanna River. Most agricultural and forested land is located in the northern sections of the Town. One large tract of agricultural land is located along the southwestern edge.

# Land Use Profile

## Town of Bloomsburg Comprehensive Plan

### 2008 Land Use Snapshot

Fifteen land use classifications are depicted on the 2008 Land Use Map. They are listed below with corresponding descriptions.

Land Use	Number of Parcels	Average Size of Parcels	Acres	Percent of Total Area
<b>Intensive Land Uses</b>				
High Density Residential	2,077	0.16	439	14.6
Medium Density Residential	511	0.29	200	6.6
Low Density Residential	57	1.03	65	2.2
Mixed-use Urban	280	0.13	54	1.8
Commercial	162	0.93	175	5.8
Industrial	42	2.57	117	3.9
Institutional	87	2.32	221	7.3
Transportation & Utilities	45	2.87	226	7.5
<b>Total</b>			<b>1497</b>	<b>49.7</b>
<b>Open Space Land Uses</b>				
Agriculture	11	19.35	227	7.5
Other Agricultural Land & Open Space	93	3.32	345	11.4
Park/Fairground	29	8.18	256	8.5
Forest	162	0.93	454	15.1
Strip Mines, Quarries, Gravel Pits	1	7.25	8	0.3
<b>Total</b>			<b>1290</b>	<b>42.8</b>
Water	9 (water bodies)	0.51	227	7.5
<b>Total of All Land Use Types</b>	<b>3,510</b>		<b>3,014</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### Intensive Land Uses

The more densely developed area of the town comprises about 1,497 acres, which is 49.7% of the total area.

1. **High Density Residential (bright yellow)** - Small, closely spaced residences, such as apartments, townhomes, and other multi-unit structures, make up approximately 440 acres, the largest residential category. High density residential neighborhoods are found throughout town though concentrated toward the center.
2. **Medium Density Residential (orange)** - Residences that are located on lots averaging one-third of an acre make up approximately 200 acres in the Town. Medium density residential neighborhoods include many single family homes built in the 1940s and 1950s as well as some townhomes and senior living facilities.
3. **Low Density Residential (light yellow)** - Residences that are located on lots of at least one acre make up approximately 65 acres in the Town. Very few lots fit this description.
4. **Mixed Urban (turquoise)** - This classification includes a variety of compatible land uses including but not limited to residential, commercial, business, and institutional. This classification is used for the downtown on Main Street and East Streets where multi-use structures total approximately 54 acres. Mixed-use neighborhoods encourage walkable environments where people often walk from their homes to services they need such as stores, doctor's offices, and restaurants.

# Land Use Profile

## Town of Bloomsburg Comprehensive Plan

5. **Commercial (red)** - Concentrations of businesses such as retail shops, offices, banks, restaurants and service locations, such as gas stations, make up 175 acres of the Town. These are predominantly located along Route 11. Some are also located along Millville Road and Old Berwick Road.
6. **Industrial (purple)** - Manufacturing buildings and sites, namely Reiter Automotive, Kawneer, Alumax, Bloomsburg Mills, and Milco, make up approximately 117 acres. These sites are primarily located along the North Shoe Rail Line in the southern portion of Town.
7. **Institutional (light blue)** - Government buildings, schools, and other public service facilities make up approximately 221 acres. This land use category includes Bloomsburg Area schools, the Bloomsburg Hospital, the Bloomsburg Library, the Children's Museum, and Bloomsburg University, as well as various public and non-profit agency offices throughout the heart of town.
8. **Transportation/Utilities (Black)** - Lands associated with transportation and utilities facilities and rights-of-way make up approximately 226 acres.

### Open Space Land Uses

The open space and less densely developed area (agriculture, forest, park/fairground, and open space land uses), of the town comprises about 1,290 acres, which is 45.2% of the total area.

1. **Agriculture (dark brown)** - Land used for farming or related agricultural uses makes up 227 acres of the Town. The largest area of agricultural land is located in the southern portion of Town; the Town plans to acquire this property as part of a flood mitigation project and use the land for recreation and open space. Additional farmland is located north of Interstate 80 along Fishing Creek. Both areas are flood prone.
2. **Other Agricultural Land and Open Space (peach)** - Other open space land that is not specifically classified as cropland, pasture, or fields makes up approximately 345 acres.
3. **Forest (dark green)** - Land that is predominantly forested makes up approximately 454 acres in the Town. These areas are predominantly located along the Susquehanna River and Fishing Creek and on the steeply sloping lands in the northeastern portion of Town.
4. **Park/Fairground (light green)** - Land that is designated for active or passive recreation makes up approximately 256 acres. These lands include the Town Park and the Fairgrounds.
5. **Strip Mines, Quarries, and Gravel Pits (gray)** - The sole location used by Bloomsburg sand and gravel for quarrying totals roughly 8 acres.

### Lands covered by Water

The nine water bodies in town - namely the Susquehanna River, Fishing Creek, other smaller streams and the reservoir - cover approximately 228 acres.

## Land Use Regulations

Bloomsburg has been regulating land use through zoning regulations since 1986. Its current zoning ordinance, Chapter 27 of the Code of the Town of Bloomsburg, was last amended in March 2008 with provisions for student housing. The ordinance establishes 12 zoning districts, the uses permitted, by right, by conditional use, or by special exception, in each district and associated supplementary regulations, including those applicable to the historic district. The purpose of each district has been reviewed and suggestions for strengthening land use management are made here. Recommendations for ordinance revisions are presented as part of the Land Use Plan.

### **1. *R-C Residential-Conservation***

The purpose of the Residential Conservation District is to encourage the continued use of the land for agricultural purposes and permit those uses which are compatible and allied with agricultural operations, to promote such open space activities as parks, playgrounds, recreational areas and campgrounds as well as low-density residential development.

### **2. *R-S Residential-Suburban***

The purpose of the Residential Suburban District is to provide for the orderly expansion of low density residential development relative to Bloomsburg, to prevent the overcrowding of the land through the application of maximum housing densities, to provide standards which will encourage the installation of public facilities and the preservation of public open space, to exclude activities of a commercial or industrial nature and any activities not compatible with residential development, to provide an environment for families comprising related individuals and to provide for the public convenience and to avoid undue congestion on the roads.

### **3. *R-U Residential-Urban***

The purpose of the Residential Urban District is to encourage the orderly development and preservation of existing built-up residential sections of the community by providing public facilities necessary for the health, welfare and general convenience of the population, to prevent overcrowding of the land by restricting maximum housing densities, to provide an environment for families comprised of related individuals; to preserve public open space; to limit activities of a commercial nature and exclude activities of an industrial nature and any activities not compatible with the residential environment; to provide for the public convenience; to provide areas for student housing; and to avoid undue congestion on the roads.

### **4. *H-D High-Density Residential***

The purpose of the High Density Residential District is to provide an area where related and unrelated individuals can reside in facilities designed for large groups of people.

### **5. *C-R Commercial Residential***

The purpose of the Commercial Residential District is to encourage the development of a district that provides goods and services in a predominantly residential neighborhood. The facilities shall be designed to minimize traffic congestion on the streets, to provide for the public convenience and to harmonize adjoining commercial and residential uses.

### **6. *H-C Highway Commercial***

The purpose of the Highway Commercial District is to provide reasonable standards for the development of roadside commercial uses in areas where such uses exist and where, due to the character of undeveloped land, the development of highway commercial uses is feasible. The standards of this district are designed to separate access roads from thoroughfares, to minimize traffic congestion, and to provide buffer yards and screen plantings where such adjoin residential districts.

## **7. C Commercial**

The purpose of the Commercial District is to encourage the orderly development of commercial uses typically associated with a Central Business District. Standards are designed to encourage the provision of a wide variety of goods and services, to reduce congestion on the streets and to reduce fire and safety hazards.

## **8. C-W Commercial Warehouse**

The purpose of the Commercial Warehouse District is to facilitate the receipt of raw material and the distribution of finished products through the establishment of warehouses, storage areas, loading and unloading facilities.

## **9. I-P Industrial Park**

The purpose of the Industrial Park District is to permit and encourage industrial development and growth, to constitute a harmonious and appropriate part of the physical development of the Town, to contribute to a sound economic base of the Town and to promote the appropriate development of the district by minimizing air and water pollution, noise, glare, heat, vibration and fire and safety hazards.

## **10. U - University**

The purpose of the University District is to recognize and protect the original university (lower campus) as a unique use in Town, a use consisting of a variety of activities, including instructional, residential, health, cultural, recreational, and commercial, as well as maintenance associated with the educational institution.

## **11. He-C Health Care**

The purpose of the Health Care District is to provide adequate maintenance of existing hospital facilities and guide development in a manner compatible with surrounding residential neighborhoods. Further, the Health Care District limits permitted uses to those which are accessory, subordinate and supportive to hospital facilities and services. The district requires that all hospital and related uses be designed in a manner that will preserve the residential character of the surrounding neighborhoods through the use of such zoning tools as landscape buffers, design features and required yard areas.

## **12. U-EP University Education Park District**

The purpose of the University Educational Park District is to permit and encourage the continued growth and development of the existing university facilities in appropriate developing and new areas of the Town and to encourage the design and development of these areas as an integrated campus. Further, the U-EP District limits permitted uses to student housing, instructional facilities and uses, which are accessory, subordinate and supportive to the university facilities and services. Special attention is given to the design of the campus, including the spacing of buildings and interior yards, pedestrian and non-motorized vehicular access to and from buildings and parking lots, lighting of walkways and parking lots, landscaping, screening and buffering, directional signage for increasing mobility and accessibility and street layout and accessibility.

## **Unique Uses and Regulations**

The presence and operation of the Bloomsburg Municipal Airport requires special regulations and restrictions to preserve the safe operation of the airport and reduce hazards to safe navigation. These provisions are located in Section 703B of the Zoning Ordinance. A cursory review of these provisions indicated that regulations of the height of structures and vegetation and the use of property in the vicinity of the airport are generally consistent with requirements of the Federal Aviation Administration and PennDOT's Bureau of Aviation. Upon future update to the Zoning Ordinance, these provisions should be reviewed in detail to maintain consistency with state and federal requirements.

## Recent Zoning Ordinance Amendments

In 2007, the Town initiated a year long effort to address concerns regarding student housing in the Town. The intent of this planning effort was to:

- Address student housing concerns
- Preserve residential neighborhoods
- Manage the proliferation of multiple student housing and disposable buildings
- Maintain the amount of impervious coverage in the Town
- Provide for a more rigorous process for the construction of student housing
- Provide separation distances between student housing
- Reduce densities in student housing

In December 2007, these amendments governing student housing in the Town were adopted by Town Council. The major considerations of these amendments included:

- Provide improved standards and definitions
- Amend the Zoning map to include the Reservoir Hills area from R-S to R-U.
- Eliminate the R-U-1 districts and combine with the R-U district
- Amend most districts Occupancy Requirements
- Allow student housing in the R-U district only as a special exception and subject to the standards provided for student housing.

## Review of Zoning Districts

There are several opportunities to strengthen the Town's Zoning Ordinance.

1. East Street is Commercial Residential. This is a mixed use zoning district that allows a mix of low impact commercial uses as well as residential uses. This area has received much attention as Walgreens proposed the demolition and redevelopment of a sizeable corner parcel in this district. The zoning ordinance for this district should consider 1) allowing larger commercial uses that will sustain the vitality of the district and 2) strengthening the design parameters in this district through performance regulations. The intent of this suggestion is to maintain the integrity of this mixed use district and not allow it to become an extension of the Highway Commercial District to the east on US Route 11.
2. The Residential Urban District received the most significant revisions in the student housing related amendments of 2007. The district was enlarged to include the former Residential Urban-1 district and was expanded to the north to include the area generally bounded by Glen Avenue, Reservoir Street, Wirt Street and Penn Avenue. In addition, Town Council was also provided with Design Guidelines for new structures in this district that would govern architectural style, style and height of buildings, scale, texture and pattern of materials, additions, porches, and walls and fences. While not regulatory, use of these guidelines would ensure compatibility throughout the district and preserve the residential and historic character of the district.
3. The land adjacent to Fishing Creek and the Susquehanna River is zoned Residential Conservation. The river could provide a scenic focus for limited economic development on the riverfront following appropriate environmental standards - e.g. amphitheater along the river, trails, canoeing, environmental centers, scenic restaurant, etc. Such provision may only be applicable to certain areas along the river and/or creek, especially considering the proposed flood protection system.

4. The visual appearance to the Town's entrances is not consistent with the Town's historic character. Gateways designations, e.g. to the downtown and/or at the PA 42 interchange, and associated regulations could strengthen development standards at the gateways, perhaps through a gateway overlay district

## Review of the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance

The Town's Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance, Chapter 22 of the Code of the Town of Bloomsburg, was not reviewed in detail; however, provisions that foster community vitality, such as the one below, were noted as a tool for redevelopment.

1. Bloomsburg does allow for "the improvement of one lot or two or more contiguous lots, tracts or parcels of land for any purpose involving:
  - (a) A group of two or more residential or nonresidential buildings, whether proposed initially or cumulatively or a nonresidential building on a lot or lots regardless of the number of occupants or tenure.
  - (b) The division or allocation of land or space, whether initially or cumulatively, between or among two or more existing or prospective occupants by means of or for the purpose of streets, common areas, leaseholds, condominiums, building groups or other features."

This provision has been used widely by residential developers.

## Findings and Preliminary Recommendations

- Bloomsburg is approaching a built-out condition at ground level. Of the intensively developed portion of Bloomsburg, the largest portion is devoted to high density residential development. Land zoned for relatively low density residential development remains north of downtown. The University also has undeveloped land zoned for its use.
- The areas' rural character is expressed in the Town through 1200 acres of forest, farmland, parkland or other open space.
- The Town has essential zoning provision for unique features, such as the historic district, and hazard areas, such as the airport and floodplain.
- The physical pattern of dense development connected by streets and sidewalks in a gridded fashion is what visually distinguishes Bloomsburg from its municipal neighbors. Maintaining this "historic fabric" while encouraging redevelopment is essential to the Town's identity. While the historic district regulations are intensive to administer, requiring special expertise, they are the primary tool to sustain the integrity of the highly visible, high quality architectural building stock of the community. Regulations that sustain the small town and historic character of the Town - minimal setbacks, - could be strengthened without attempting to inappropriately regulate aesthetics.
- As in many college towns, there is concern about the amount and location of off-campus student housing, particularly as more student housing is anticipated as the University continues to grow. Recent revisions to the zoning ordinance have attempted to provide greater specificity to the permitted locations of off-campus student housing without restricting such use to a single district. This resulted in the including of student housing as a permitted use in areas where it fits well with the community dynamics and enhances the atmosphere, such as in the downtown and the exclusion of student housing as a permitted use in some districts to preserve these neighborhoods for family living.
- Limited availability of single parcels and property larger than 7,500 square feet and zoned commercial may be a constraint to economic growth and vitality, particularly in the downtown. Assembly of land is permitted, but may be an obstacle to "shovel-ready" investors. At the same time, if not appropriately designed, the introduction of these larger uses could erode the existing character of the Town.

# Land Use Profile

---

Town of Bloomsburg Comprehensive Plan

Intentionally blank for two-sided printing