

TOWNSHIP OF LOWER MERION

Building & Planning Committee

Issue Briefing

Topic: Subdivision and Land Development Code Update

Prepared by: Christopher Leswing, Director, Building & Planning
Carissa Hazelton, Planner

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I. Action To Be Considered By The Board:

This topic is for discussion only. Staff will present an update to the Building & Planning Committee on the status of the development of the new Subdivision & Land Development Code. Staff is seeking policy direction from the Board on elements that are recommended to be included in the new Subdivision and Land Development Code and on the planning process/project schedule.

II. Why This Issue Requires Board Consideration:

An amendment to the Subdivision and Land Development Code is subject to the approval of the Board of Commissioners.

III. Current Policy Or Practice (If Applicable):

The Subdivision and Land Development Code, Chapter 135 of the Township Code was adopted in 1978, repealing and replacing the former Code.

IV. Other Relevant Background Information:

The Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance (SALDO), Chapter 135 of the Lower Merion Township Code, provides standards for processing land development plans, plan content, and general standards for land development, including the layout and design of roadways and improvements in the right-of-way as authorized by Section 503 of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code.

A key recommendation of the 2016 Lower Merion Township Comprehensive Plan was to update the Zoning Code and the Subdivision & Land Development Code to provide standards to address infill and redevelopment, current best practices, and to better reflect the community's goals.

The Township adopted a new Zoning Code in February 2020 to align the standards with the community development objectives outlined in the new Comprehensive Plan. Following the

adoption of the new Zoning Code, the Board directed staff complete the update to the Subdivision and Land Development Code.

An internal project kick-off meeting was held in November 2020 with planning staff from Lower Merion Township and the Montgomery County Planning Commission. The update to the Subdivision and Land Development Code was divided into the four following phases:

- Phase 1 – Assessment and Analysis;
- Phase 2 – Drafting the Subdivision & Land Development Code;
- Phase 3 – Adoption Process; and
- Phase 4 – Implementation

Over the past few months, the team has completed the Assessment and Analysis (Phase 1) and has begun drafting the Subdivision and Land Development Code (Phase 2).

The purpose of this meeting is for staff to report out on the work performed to date, share key findings of the Assessment and Analysis Report and obtain policy direction from the Board on elements that are recommended to be included in the new Subdivision and Land Development Code. A copy of the Assessment and Analysis Report is attached for your convenience. The assessment and analysis involved:

1. **Review of Base Documents:** Township Codes, Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code, and the 2016 Lower Merion Township Comprehensive Plan as well as related planning studies were reviewed.
2. **Analysis of the Current Provisions:** This step involved a review of best practices employed by other communities, a review of recent land development case studies, an audit of the Subdivision and Land Development Code by the Pennsylvania Environmental Council to identify impediments to green stormwater infrastructure, and a review of survey results taken by local practitioners familiar with the standards of the Subdivision & Land Development Code.

As a result of the findings, staff recommends incorporating the following elements into the new Subdivision and Land Development Code and seeks the Board's direction on the highlighted policy issues:

1. **Organization of new Subdivision & Land Development Code:** The Code will be organized in a logical manner following the [Montgomery County Model Subdivision and Land Development Code Ordinance](#).
2. **Transportation**
 - i. **Complete Streets:** The new Subdivision and Land Development Code will incorporate "complete streets" standards for the Township's streets based on the most up-to-date engineering standards, as well as the Functional Classification of Roads Map (Map C7: Comprehensive Plan).

- ii. **Context Sensitive Streetscape Design Standards:** Additional context-sensitive standards for Main Street and Pedestrian-Oriented Focus Areas will be incorporated into the new Code.
- iii. **Street Trees: Add Soil Volume/Structural Soil Standards:** It is recommended that the new Subdivision and Land Development Code incorporate standards such as soil volume, soil composition, and structural soil standards to ensure the long-term health and viability of street trees.
- iv. **Transportation Demand Management (TDM):** It is recommended that TDM standards be incorporated into the new SALDO to advance the Township’s TDM policy adopted in 2020 and several recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan. Policy Question: Should the TDM Plan be a requirement for large land development projects, or should an incentive be provided (i.e. reduced parking)?
- v. **Bus Stop Design Guidelines:** The new SALDO will incorporate Bus Stop Design Guidelines to include availability of amenities at shelters, such as benches and trash cans; wayfinding information.
- vi. **Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Station Standards:** It is recommended that standards be incorporated into the SALDO to address the emerging EV industry.

3. Greening

- i. **Green Parking Lot Standards:** It is recommended that green parking lot design standards be established in-line with the [Montgomery County Sustainable Green Parking Lots Guide](#).
- ii. **Buffer Planting Design Guidelines:** Staff recommends that the buffer area standards be synthesized and that enhanced landscape and screening buffer design guidelines be provided as the SALDO is updated.
- iii. **Update Greening Standards:** It is recommended that the greening standards be updated to provide additional information to include guidelines for the design and placement of streetscape elements to create a safe, attractive, and functional public realm within the Township’s commercial areas.

4. Recreation and Community Amenities

- i. **Public Gathering Space Design Guidelines:** The Subdivision and Land Development Code (SALDO) should establish public gathering space design guidelines. This would involve moving the public gathering space design standards in the City Avenue District and Bryn Mawr Village zoning districts to the SALDO and adding additional dimensional standards, requirements for how the gathering space connects to/relates to the street frontage, etc.

ii. **Dedication of Land for Recreation; Fees in Lieu:** The new SALDO should establish clearer guidance on what must be included in the 15% set side area for the dedicated open space based upon the intensity of the development and other Code provisions. Staff seeks the Board's direction on the following policy questions: (1) Expand Applicability: Staff seeks the Board's direction on whether to expand the application of these provisions to commercial and institutional development. (2) Consider an option to increase the current fee-in-lieu on an annual basis with the annual fee schedule as opposed to the current intermittent increase.

iii. **Official Map:** It is recommended that the new Subdivision and Land Development Code includes plan submittal standards for civic amenities provided on the Official Map. Policy Direction: Consider expanding the use of the official map to show desired locations of public improvements and civic amenities in other locations in the township.

5. **Impact Study Requirements:** It is recommended that the SALDO enhance the traffic impact study standards to better reflect current best practices. Policy Direction: Staff seeks the Board's direction on whether to amend the SALDO to require an Economic or Community Facilities Impact Study.

6. **Process: De Minimus Plan:** In order to streamline the approval process for small projects with a minimal impact a de minimus plan process could be established to allow an administrative review process for projects under a certain size. Policy Direction: Staff seeks the Board's direction on whether to incorporate a de Minimus Plan Process be considered with the new Subdivision and Land Development Code.

Staff also seeks the direction from the Board of Commissioners on the SALDO adoption process. It is anticipated that a draft SALDO will be presented to the B&P this fall. The Montgomery County Planning Commission provided the attached memo outlining a process to test the new SALDO before it is adoption. The testing will occur over an eight-week period and result in changes to the Code before its adoption. Staff recommends providing the time to undertake the necessary testing. A similar process was used prior to the adoption of the Zoning Code and yielded significant amendments to the Code that improved the standards.

We look forward to a productive discussion next Wednesday.

V. Impact on Township Finances:

There will be no impact on Township finances.

VI. Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends the Board provide policy direction on the recommendations listed above.

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**MONTGOMERY COUNTY
PLANNING COMMISSION**

MONTGOMERY COUNTY COURTHOUSE • PO Box 311
NORRISTOWN, PA 19404-0311
610-278-3722
FAX: 610-278-3941 • TDD: 610-631-1211
WWW.MONTCOPA.ORG

SCOTT FRANCE, AICP
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**Lower Merion Township SALDO
Participatory Testing Process/Design Charrette**

The testing process will focus on evaluating the proposed streetscape, landscaping, parking lot layout, and buffer standards in the township's draft Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance (once completed). The testing process will help identify areas for improvement and evaluate whether criteria such as parking lot layout and buffer width can be reasonably accommodated on actual, potential development sites within the township.

Potential Testing Process

Phase 1 – Site Selection: *to be completed before the first SALDO draft is completed*

LMT and MCPC will prepare a list of 8-10 sites in the township for testing. Selection criteria may include:

- a. Sites with recent land development proposals under the new zoning code.
- b. Sites from the land development audits.
- c. Sites from different zoning districts with a focus on the open space preservation overlay, commercial districts, and residential districts.

Phase 2 – MCPC Testing: *3 weeks*

MCPC will conduct internal testing of 3-5 sites of different characteristics, refine the recommended testing procedure, and summarize interim results.

Phase 3 – External Testing: *3 weeks*

Outside professionals (e.g., engineers, architects, planners) will conduct testing of additional sites of different characteristics.

- a. LMT will reach out to professionals to seek their voluntary participation in this review process. 4-5 professionals (more, if possible).
- b. MCPC will prepare a package to email to participants that explains the process, method and work products of the testing.
- c. LMT will send the package and collect the results.

Phase 4 – Wrap-up: *2 weeks*

- a. LMT and MCPC will host a meeting (online/in-person) for presentation and discussion of results. *This meeting will be scheduled immediately after Phase 3 is completed.*
- b. MCPC will summarize the results in a memo.

