



Transit Revitalization Investment District Study

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Executive Summary

The Transit Revitalization Investment District Act (Pennsylvania House Bill 994) is a mechanism to fund public improvements through future commercial development tax increment financing (TIF) for up to twenty years. It enables municipalities to create TRID districts to promote transit-oriented development (TOD) through public/private partnerships that can assure potential developers of municipal commitment to upgrading public realm infrastructure and to transit.

Ultimately, the use of TOD in a community should create a more livable, more pedestrian-friendly community. This is achieved by increasing mobility choices for residents and employees, stimulating economy development, and stabilizing the tax base. A TOD can provide a greater range of housing choices and maximize current infrastructure. By creating distinctive development around the transit stop, it reinforces the community and neighborhood identity.

Ambler Borough undertook this study to determine if the TRID mechanism was appropriate for encouraging development around the Ambler Train Station, to create a destination for SEPTA riders and increased shopping opportunities and amenities for local residents.

Goals of the TRID process in Ambler include:

- Re-use abandoned and under-developed properties to revitalize the heart of the Borough.
- Enhance the area immediately surrounding the Ambler SEPTA Lansdale/Doylestown rail line station.
- Provide the amenities that promote transit use and support local neighborhoods.
- Provide adequate parking for the SEPTA station and any new development generated by redevelopment.
- Ensure that any new development fits into the character of Ambler and strengthens community identity.
- Provide a variety of housing options and housing costs to current and future Ambler residents.
- Provide a stable tax base for the Borough by increasing the amount of mixed-use development and sustainable residential, retail, office, and commercial uses.
- Enlist the support of all stakeholders, including SEPTA and the School Board, in ensuring the success of the TRID

Moving forward

With the adoption of a non-binding resolution by Borough Council in November 2009 in support of participation in the proposed Ambler TRID, Ambler has completed 10 of the 16 steps outlined in the TRID process. To successfully complete the process, Montgomery County, the Wissahickon School District, and SEPTA will all have to accept the terms of the TRID.

The merits of the TRID process are not affected by the current economic situation. Because this is a working document that outlines a process, it can be adapted where necessary to respond to

changing needs and new development opportunities. It can serve as a guide for the community to move forward and take advantage of the renewed interest in pedestrian-oriented living.

In addition, recent population forecasts by the DVRPC for 2040 also point to the likelihood that Ambler will be increasingly attractive for people who have smaller housing needs—empty-nesters and young people delaying marriage—and those who desire the amenities that established older towns offer.

The only major costs that will be incurred to move the plan forward will be involved in writing the enabling ordinances that will support the TRID. Adopting the TRID plan will not increase taxes. Revenue derived from TRIDs often goes towards new transit stations. However, since reconstruction of the Ambler SEPTA station has already been completed, possible uses for funds might include streetscape improvements and public amenities such as bus shelters.

A significant portion of this report focuses on providing adequate high-quality parking for the Ambler's businesses, residents, and train riders. at the same time as capitalizing on the redevelopment of some of the under-utilized and abandoned parcels in the Borough. Also included in the report are recommendations on how to maintain the characteristics that “make Ambler Ambler” with design guidelines and potential site-specific strategies.

Introduction

Ambler Borough has undertaken a *Transit Revitalization Investment District (TRID) Study* to determine whether the Borough should use this new funding mechanism to enhance the possibilities for redevelopment centered around the Ambler train station. As part of the planning process, the Borough will be working toward a comprehensive and sustainable community vision that will continue the trend of reinvestment and revitalization that is already occurring within Ambler. Of equal importance with the study of new redevelopment and mixed-use possibilities are the real issues of retaining the character of the existing neighborhoods and strengthening Ambler's position as a cultural and commercial center, while providing opportunities for new housing and creating new jobs in the community.

This report will describe the TRID planning process, existing conditions in the study area, potential areas for redevelopment and the types of possible projects, and implementation and future actions. Because the TRID designation is a relatively new one with few examples in place yet, a collaborative planning process and public participation are critical to making informed decisions. This Study has been guided by the Stakeholder Advisory Committee, the public, and SEPTA; details of meetings, as well as other pertinent material will be found in the Appendix to this report.

In Ambler the rail corridor, around the train station in the center of the commercial core, is underdeveloped. While the area is ideally suited to take advantage of transit and Ambler's vibrant Main Street, developers have been cautious about implementing plans here. During the course of the

TRID study, renewed interest in the Borough from developers makes it clear that Ambler possesses a tremendous potential for both the residential and commercial growth needed to create a "critical mass" that will strengthen transit usage as well. By offering incentives to form public/pri-



vate partnerships, the TRID process offers the Borough a means of facilitating growth near the train station in a controlled and negotiated manner, ensuring that the Borough gets the kind of development it needs, and of providing funds for infrastructure improvements that will benefit the existing community. This report will provide conceptual designs that show the capacity of specific sites for redevelopment. The final plans could, and probably will, change as developers and designers delve further into the process and specific needs and goals.

Why go through this process?

What is a TRID?

The Transit Revitalization Investment District Act (Pennsylvania House Bill 994) is a mechanism to fund public improvements through future commercial development tax increment financing (TIF) for up to twenty years. It enables municipalities to create TRID districts to promote transit-oriented development (TOD) through public/private partnerships. Each community that undertakes the TRID process may come up with very different needs and solutions: the common denominator will be the focus on increasing transit ridership and strengthening the community's economic base and identity.

In Pennsylvania, taxes are generally collected by the municipality, the school district, and the county; establishing a TRID means that each of these entities will agree to give up a specific portion (above a pre-deter-

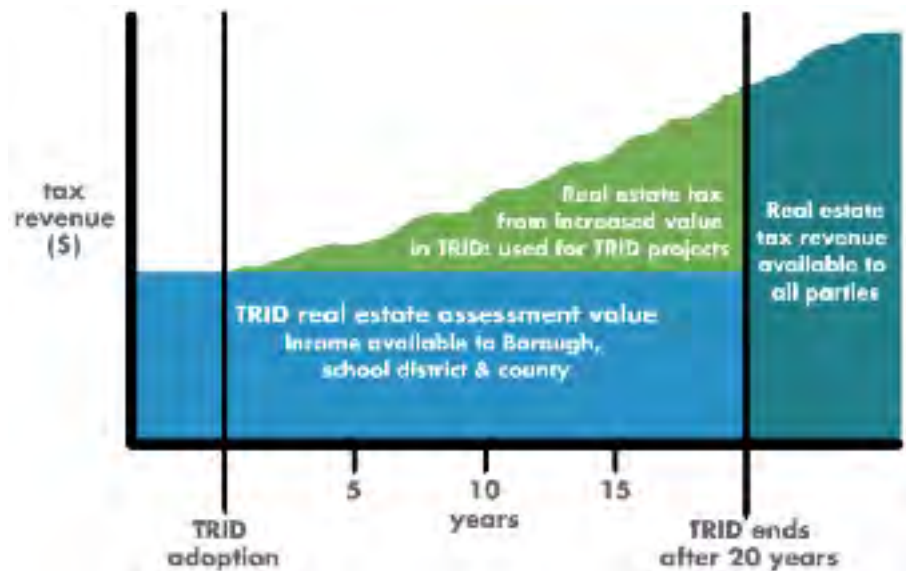
mined base level) of the tax *increases* generated by public investment for a period of twenty years. A percentage of taxes from all new development and redevelopment in the TRID area for the next 20 years could be allocated to improving public infrastructure, such as sidewalks, street trees, plazas, crosswalks, and other items like stormwater controls or utilities, for example. The creation of a TRID will not increase tax *rates*, nor will it create new taxes; it simply means that tax *revenue* above the pre-determined base level will be used for TRID projects as decided by the municipality.

Why would a taxing entity agree to accept only a portion of its potential increased revenue? In many municipalities, development on the underutilized parcels that comprise potential TRID areas would not be likely to occur without an incentive mechanism such as a TRID. If those

Value capture

The success of a TRID depends upon a type of public financing called value capture. When adjacent land values increase because of public investments, part of that increase can be "captured" through a special tax that can pay for the public improvements or other related public projects.

For example, when a new highway interchange is built, surrounding private lands often increase dramatically in value, not through actions of the private landowner, but because of the public investment. Using a tool like value capture can "reimburse" the public agency for the costs incurred in generating the economic value and make further public investments possible.



parcels were never redeveloped, there would be no increase in land value; in some municipalities, there could even be a decrease in value and, thus, tax revenue. Creating a TRID can strengthen public/private partnerships by assuring potential developers of municipal commitment to upgrading public realm infrastructure and to transit. Direct reinvestment into public infrastructure benefits both developers and the community, and ultimately the taxing entities.

A TRID, through the guidance of a single agency, can organize under-utilized parcels and market infill development opportunities much more efficiently than a community responding piecemeal to individual development projects. This more organized structure will expedite development in areas where it is most needed and where it makes the most sense—around a transit station—to help improve the economic outlook and financial health of a municipality.

Transit-oriented development (TOD)

Transit-oriented development is a transportation-related land use strategy that helps to link transportation systems and the communities they serve by providing for development within easy walking distance of public transit stops; the development will generally consist of a mix of uses such as housing, commercial, and offices. Because TOD is focused on compact growth adjacent to transit, it can

encourage walking and biking. While one of the goals of TOD is to increase transit ridership and increase access to transit, the role of the auto for everyday use is not ignored; the fact that Ambler is a regional rail center means that parking must be an essential component of any TOD plan.

TOD can involve new or infill construction or the redevelopment of existing structures to help promote transit. The idea of TOD is not new; many of Philadelphia's suburbs, including Ambler, developed incrementally around the old Reading and Pennsylvania Railroad lines, and some areas—parts of Chestnut Hill for example—were built specifically to increase train travel. What is common to old and new TOD, however, is walkability and often, mixed-use development.

Ultimately, the use of TOD in a community should create a more livable, more pedestrian-friendly community by increasing mobility choices for residents and employees, stimulating economy development and stabilizing the tax base, providing a greater range of housing choices, maximizing current infrastructure, and by creating distinctive development around the transit stop that reinforces community and neighborhood identity. TOD emphasizes those uses that support transit, such as personal or retail services for residents, workers, and transit users, while minimizing uses that do not encourage transit use or that discourage walking.

The general TRID planning process

A DVRPC presentation (www.10000friends.org/downloads/TRIDAct.ppt) outlines the TRID planning process, dividing the process into three phases:

Planning Phase

Step 1: Municipality and Transit Agency agree to work cooperatively to create TRID

Step 2: Municipality undertakes TRID Planning Study to determine location, boundaries and rationale

Step 3: Municipality and Transit Agency conduct community public meeting(s) on planning study

Step 4: Planning Study is revised and completed

Step 5: Municipality and Transit Agency accept Planning Study's findings and recommendations

Program Management Phase

Step 6: Municipality forms Management Entity (e.g., an Authority) to administer TRID implementation

Step 7: Municipality and Transit Agency prepare project lists of Public Sector Infrastructure Improvements, including costs, phasing and maintenance

Step 8: Municipality and Transit Agency coordinate with School District and County on Value Capture shares, schedule and TRID Financial Plan

Step 9: Municipality and Transit Agency hold public meeting on TRID Implementation Program improvements

Step 10: Municipality and Transit Agency execute Agreement on roles, responsibilities, financial commitments, management entity and defined improvements

Implementation Phase

Step 11: TRID Management Entity solicits Developer interest

Step 12: Development proposal accepted by TRID Management Entity and municipality

Step 13: TRID Management Entity executes Development Agreement with successful Developer, including Public Sector Improvements and Private Sector Financial or Project Commitments

Step 14: Project construction and completion

Step 15: TRID Management Entity administers Value Capture revenues and expenditures in accordance with approved Implementation Program

Step 16: Amendments to Agreement or TRID Plan, as required

This planning report for Ambler represents the Planning Phase of the TRID process, steps 1 through 4. Step 5 will be completed with acceptance of the report by Ambler Borough Council and SEPTA.

The TRID in Ambler

TRID benefits in Ambler

There are many direct benefits to Ambler Borough for implementing the TRID:

- The TRID will generate substantial tax revenue. In one possible scenario, 35% of this amount could be used to fund the public improvements for the TRID, and the remaining 65% of the taxes could go to the three entities: the Borough, School District, and the County. After 20 years, the entire amount would go to the three entities.
- The TRID process offers financial incentives for the private sector to develop key underutilized parcels within the Borough, the development of which otherwise might not be financially feasible under conventional methods.
- Reinvestment in key development sites, which are currently blighted or underutilized, will increase the value of the surrounding real estate and in turn, will increase the overall tax base of the Borough.
- Part of the TRID program described in this study would increase the amount of parking available to serve the current businesses in the core commercial area of the Borough. This would greatly benefit the Borough by allowing further expansion and intensification of businesses within the core commercial area. It is recommended that parking be shared. For example; spaces that are used by SEPTA riders during the day could also be used by patrons of restaurants in the evening. The sharing of parking increases the economic feasibility of a decked parking facility.
- The TRID program enhances the quality of life for Borough residents by including public streetscape improvements to increase the walkability of the Borough, creating a gateway plaza, and encouraging bicycling by providing bike lanes and bike racks.
- By partnering with SEPTA to create an exciting mixed-use transit station with increased parking, the TRID program would attract more riders to patronize existing and future commercial enterprises in the core commercial area of the Borough.
- One of the possible program elements for a mixed-use transit station is the opportunity for a mix of commercial uses to support transit riders and the community. This could help attract ridership because SEPTA riders could easily shop for convenience goods before they went home.
- The boundaries of the TRID were determined partly by which sites had the least industrial contamination. This allows for the immediate development of TRID sites and maximizes the opportunities for the success of the TRID program.

The TRID Process in Ambler

The TRID process allows communities to capitalize on their already existing strengths. In Ambler, a walkable community with a major station on a regional rail line, a commercial core that has seen recent reinvestment, and a strong residential base are all positive qualities. But the presence in the center of the Borough of a number of abandoned and underutilized properties, some of which are remnants of the town's industrial past, has meant that

the full potential of the Borough has been difficult to achieve. While a number of new residential and commercial developments have been proposed in Ambler, and some have begun to be implemented, there is still a need to address how best to guide growth in the critical area around the train station. The TRID process, and the new mechanisms of funding it offers, enables Ambler to coordinate its land use planning with transportation infrastructure and private development, and to apply the increase in tax revenue the TRID district generates back into public improvements in that area.

Since the introduction of TRID legislation in 2004, a number of Pennsylvania communities have begun looking at its potential; in the Philadelphia area, these include Bryn Mawr, Cheltenham, Croydon, Marcus Hook, and two areas in Philadelphia.

In mid-2007 Ambler Borough was awarded planning funds by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (with administration by the DVRPC) to study the prospect of a TRID district in the Borough along the SEPTA Lansdale/ Doylestown Regional Rail line and to help Borough Council determine whether to continue to advance the TRID approach. The study was to determine future funding options, and generate new ideas to ensure efficient community growth while retaining neighborhood integrity, providing new housing opportunities, and creating transit-oriented development (TOD). This report represents the outcome of that study.

The Borough established a Steering Committee with representatives from Borough Council, the Planning Board, Borough professionals, and the Montgomery County Planning Commission, which met with the consultant team beginning in early 2008. Two public meetings were held, with

attendees including the Steering Committee, stakeholders, developers, and members of the general public. Other discussions were held with representatives of SEPTA, the Wissahickon School District, and various landowners.

The planning study consisted of several phases. Guided by the Steering Committee, the assessment phase included looking at existing environmental, circulation, and market conditions, and an initial public meeting to generate community goals and objectives for the TRID study area. A second phase provided a future land use vision; based upon the results of the assessment, a series of land use and development alternatives were presented and discussed at a public charrette. Using feedback from this meeting and input from other meetings and stakeholder comments, the alternatives were refined into a series of potential projects that created an overall strategy for making a TRID district and TOD in Ambler a reality. Finally, each of the projects was assessed for its financial feasibility and fiscal impact.

Montgomery County, the Wissahickon School District, Ambler Borough, and SEPTA all have to accept the terms of the TRID. On November 19, 2009, the Borough Council adopted a resolution (2009-14) in support of participation in the proposed Ambler TRID (in the Appendix of this report). With this adoption, Ambler has entered the final step of the first phase (Planning) of the TRID process.

The conceptual planning process provides an understanding of the amount of potential income from the value capture and a decision about the types of public improvement projects needed. In the next phases, the municipality will determine whether to bond the projected amount of the capture share, or wait for the value capture share to start to accrue. Generally, the type of project

will direct which funding method is used. In the case of Ambler, there will be real upfront public costs, so it would be in the best interest of the development of a TRID to bond the value capture amount and start construction as soon as the TRID becomes official.

Ambler's TRID boundaries

The TRID legislation states that eligible locations include vacant, underutilized, or potentially developable land within an area with a minimum radius of one-eighth mile and a maximum radius of one-half mile from a transit stop or station. As specific projects and goals were identified during the planning process, the size of the TRID area was reduced. However, many of the reports cited herein and included within the Appendix, as well as some of the mapping included in this document, reference the wider original study area, because delineation of the boundaries was a process parallel with the assessment phase. The smaller number of parcels included in the new delineation enabled greater predictability in forecasting the fiscal impacts of development on the community and School District. Economic forecasts are essential to the process, because decision makers must take into account the 20-year lifespan of a TRID.

The major changes in the boundaries occurred on the east side of Ambler. In early modeling of the TRID boundary, the closed Acme and the block bordered by Lindenwold, Race and Butler had been included in the study. Developers, however, have reopened the acme as a pharmacy and are looking at the Lindenwold block for a new grocery store. The final TRID boundary is all within ¼ mile of the Ambler Lansdale/Doylestown line train station.



■ Ambler's TRID boundary



Existing Conditions

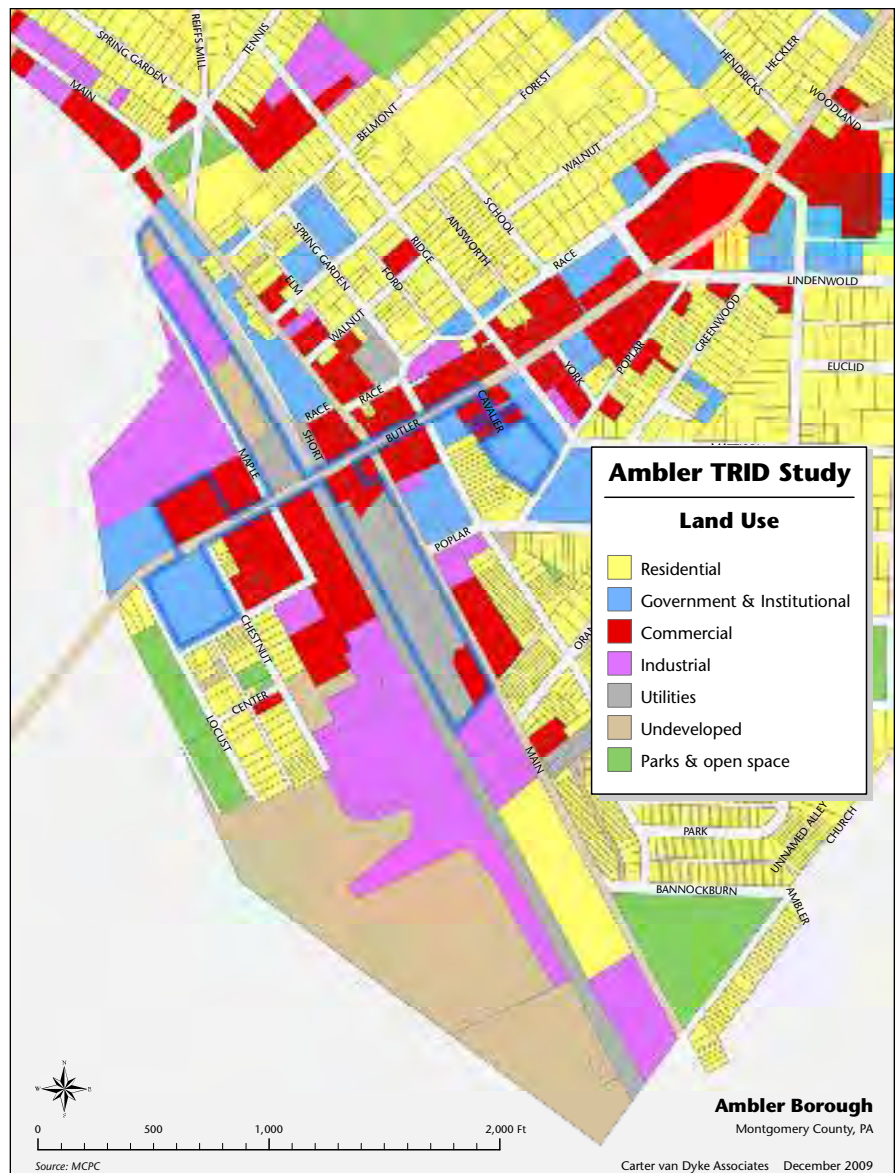
Site description and history

The TRID planning area consists of a number of parcels located along the SEPTA Lansdale/Doylestown line commuter railway and Butler Avenue. Ambler, originally known as the Village of Wissahickon, was renamed in 1869 in honor of the heroic actions of Mary Johnson Ambler during The Great Train Wreck of 1856. Nineteenth century Ambler was primarily characterized by agricultural uses; eight flour gristmills, one fulling mill used for wool fabric production, and a sawmill used for lumber were formerly operated in Ambler. However, by the 1880's with the introduction of steam technology and railroads, Ambler's mills became obsolete, and the last mill closed in 1887. The Wissahickon Railroad and station were built in 1855.

With the turn of the century came the relocation of the Keasbey & Mattison Company, a producer of pharmaceuticals and asbestos products, from Philadelphia to Ambler. Henry Keasbey and Richard Mattison constructed factories and warehouses and numerous residential properties utilized by factory workers. It was during the twentieth century that Ambler experienced its highest growth rate. The Keasbey & Mattison Company operated as one of the leading manufacturers of asbestos-containing materials until 1934, when the manufacturing facilities on South Maple Avenue were sold to Turner & Newhall. Operations continued on-site until 1962 when the facilities and property were purchased by CertainTeed Corporation and Nicolet Industries.

Most of the industrial uses centered around the former Keasbey & Mattison Company have ceased operation, and much of the Borough of Ambler is now a center for commercial, transportation,

and residential uses. Based on the location of the railroad, these abandoned factories and underutilized properties are prime candidates for redevelopment.



Regulatory issues

Community facilities & infrastructure

The many community cultural and recreation facilities in Ambler, as well as in nearby communities, are well documented in a variety of planning documents, including the Borough's *Open Space Plan and Comprehensive Plan*.

Existing land use

Land use consists of industrial and commercial interspersed with residential along local roadways adjacent to Butler Pike. Current land uses within the redevelopment area include abandoned industrial facilities, automotive repair facilities, offices, and restaurants. The majority of the redevelopment area is improved, with limited open space. Open space areas exist on the eastern and western extents of the site and are characterized by historic asbestos disposal piles. These areas have been subject to Federal and State environmental review.

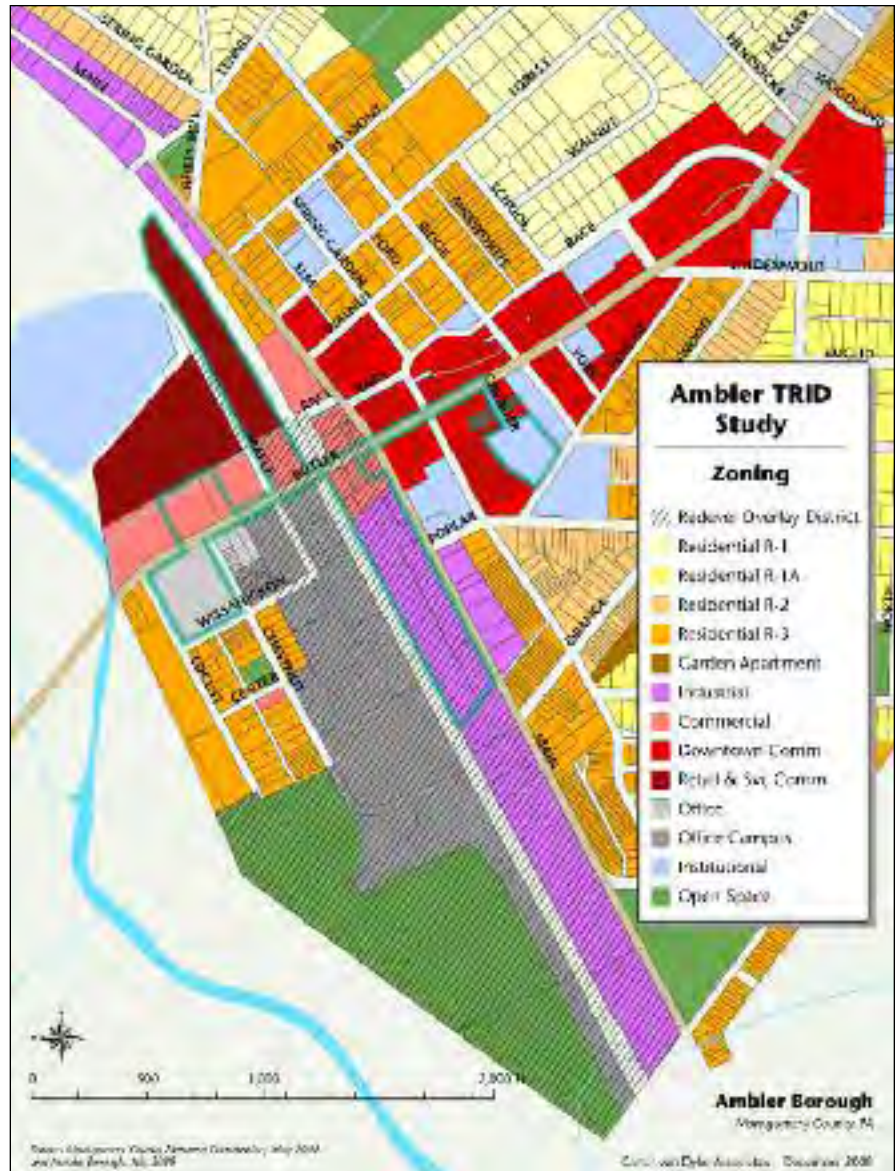
Zoning

The value capture area of the Ambler TRID is located in six different zoning districts within Ambler Borough:

- Commercial*
- Downtown Commercial
- Office
- Industrial*
- Retail and Service Commercial*
- Institutional

This analysis will outline the physical development regulations of each zoning district.

** Indicates that the capture area is also within the Redevelopment Overlay District and has zoning with potential increases of density.*



Redevelopment Overlay District

A Redevelopment Overlay District (RO) ordinance was proposed in January 2002, with pedestrian design standards, building design standards and guidelines, and bonuses for public amenities. Borough Council unanimously approved the ordinance, as well as five others, in March 2003 (*Ambler Gazette*, March 21, 2003). The new ordinance retains the underlying Industrial or Office Campus (OC) zoning, while adding provisions for transit-oriented development as a conditional use in the OC zone.

The intent of the overlay is to encourage new development that will stimulate economic revitalization within the borough by allowing larger, more intensive uses along the rail corridor than would be permitted in the base underlying districts. The ordinance created the Retail and Service Commercial District in an effort to promote the most intensive area for redevelopment in the Borough.

Parking structures are allowed in any area of the overlay district. The maximum height of a garage is 4 garage levels above ground; setbacks are 15

feet from the street ROW. The first floor of garages on Main Street or Butler Avenue are required to have commercial or office uses and entrances onto these streets.

The zoning also added flexible setback requirements and development bonus of up to an additional 5% of impervious coverage is possible in the overlay zone. Provisions include additional review procedures at the initial stage of conceptual development to ensure proposals meet the intent and purpose of the RO district and integrate the overall Redevelopment Plan, and a Revitalization/Redevelopment Review Board to review the conceptual design, layout and other features of the proposed developments.

Downtown Commercial District

The Commercial District was further refined by introducing the Downtown Commercial (DC) District—commercial areas outside of the Redevelopment Overlay—which retains the same base regulations as the Commercial District. Residential is permitted as a special exception.

Retail and Service Commercial District

The Retail and Service Commercial (RSC) District was created to allow the most intensive commercial development use in the Borough:

- To provide primarily for retail commercial uses and other selected uses to support and stimulate the Rail Corridor Redevelopment and that

require accessibility to main roadways.

- To encourage redevelopment of existing brown-field sites into productive employment center.

[Ordinance 1053

In January 2011, a new section of Part 4, “General Provisions”, entitled Design Standards for Non-Residential Buildings, was added to the Borough zoning ordinance. It addresses building orientation and entrances, walls and windows, roofs, building character, architectural rhythm, and massing. Many of the new criteria reflect recommendations made later in this report. A copy of the ordinance has been included in the Appendix.]

Dimensional Requirements per Ambler Borough Zoning Ordinance

Downtown Commercial (DC):

Minimum Lot Area	1,500 sf
Building Coverage	80%
Building height	Maximum 40 feet, with a possible 70 feet if approved by the Zoning Hearing Board. For every foot over 40 feet there shall be an additional one foot of setback for the structure.
Parking	Off-street parking for commercial uses allowed on the periphery of the district. Parking garages shall be in the rear yard.

Office (O):

Minimum lot size	5,000 sf or 10,000 sf depending on use
Minimum lot width	50 feet at building setback line or 100 feet depending on use
Yard Setbacks:	Front: 15 feet Side: 8/20 overall Rear: From abutting district 30 feet
Building coverage	max. 60%
Floor Area Ratio	max. 60%
Impervious coverage	max. 60%

Industrial (I):

Minimum lot area	2,500 sf or 5,000 sf depending on use
Minimum lot width	25 feet or 50 feet depending on use
Building coverage	60% max.
Floor Area Ratio	40% max.
Minimum yards	Front: 20 feet Side: 10 or 25 feet depending on use Rear: 20 feet
Building Height	40 feet primary use 70 feet for ancillary structures with increasing setback for height

Office Campus (OC):

Minimum lot area	1 acre
Minimum lot width	200 feet
Building coverage	max. 50% except where development bonus is allowed
Impervious coverage	max. 75% except where development bonus is allowed
Building height	max. 50 feet
Setbacks	Front: 20 feet Side: 10 feet / 25 feet total Rear: 20 feet

Environmental issues

Taylor Wiseman and Taylor (TWT) performed an environmental assessment (EA) of the initial TRID area. The Keasbey & Mattison Company and its successors left a painful environmental legacy in the Borough. The asbestos manufacturing process generated a great deal of solid and liquid toxic waste that was dumped in piles or allowed to settle in slurry lagoons. The cleanup approach, once undertaken, was such a textbook case that in its Superfund 20th Anniversary publication, the EPA used the Ambler asbestos piles as the example of how the process should occur.

This history has made the environmental assessment an important part of TRID planning. The objective of the EA was to review the potential impact to future redevelopment in the TRID planning area from environmentally sensitive areas including:

- Known environmental contamination
- Historic resources
- Natural features

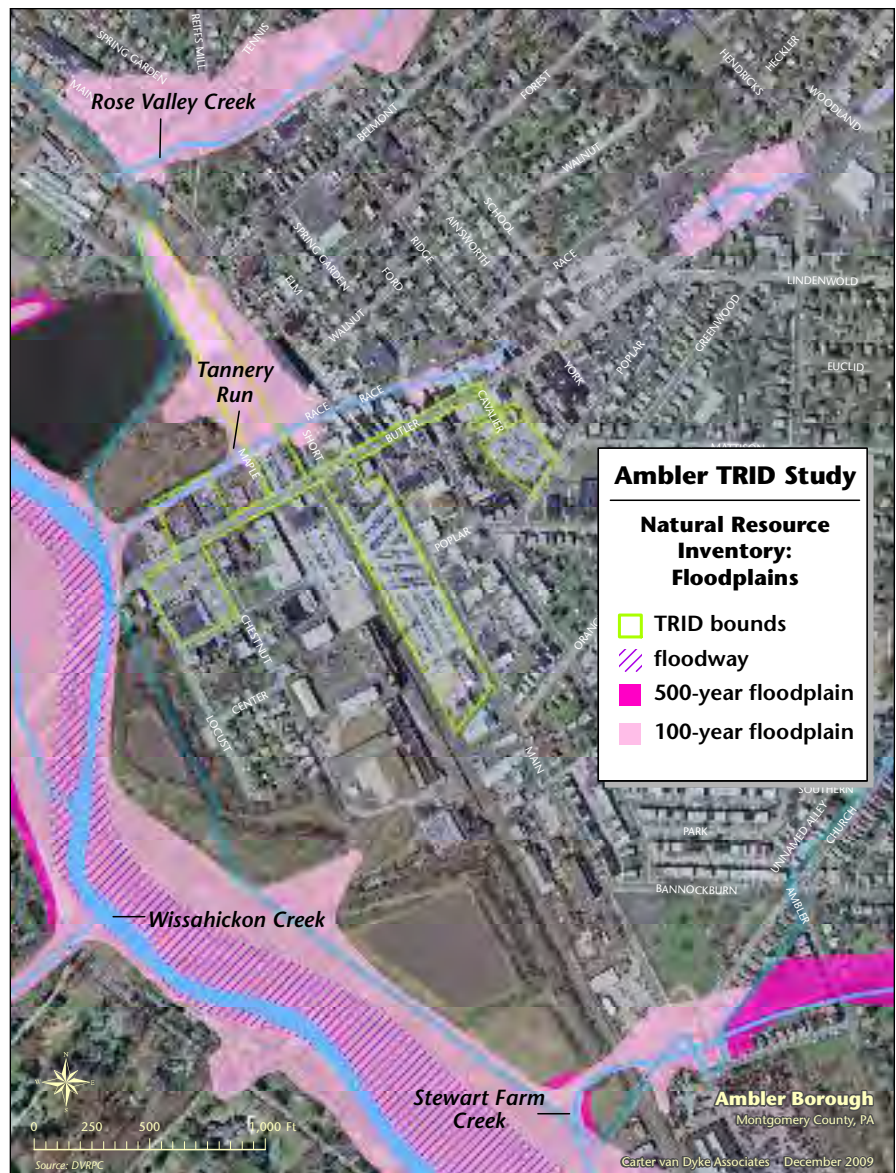
TWT reviewed available historic information, environmental databases, and existing mapping resources to assist in understanding how current property conditions could impact the redevelopment of underutilized properties in the Ambler TRID planning area.

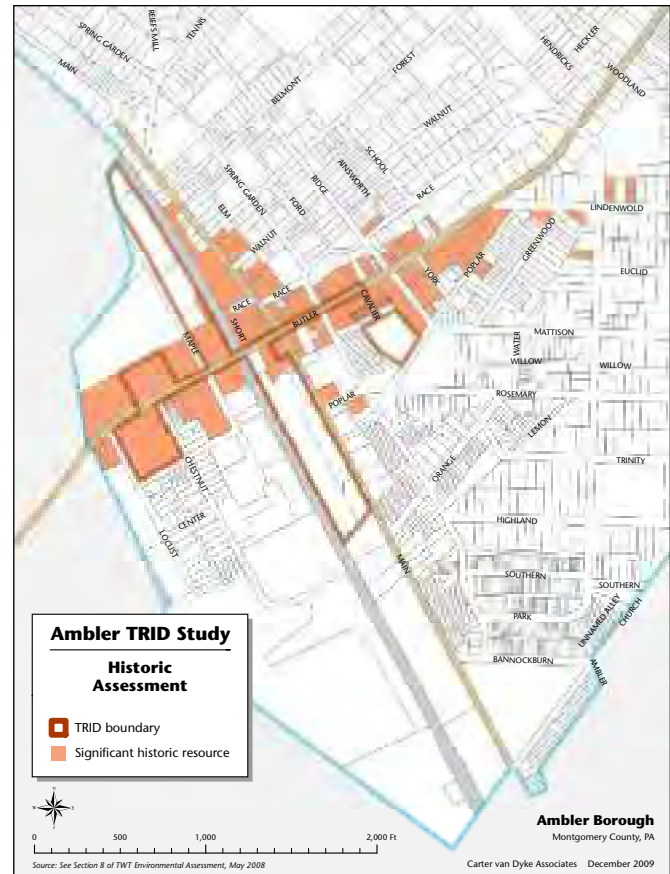
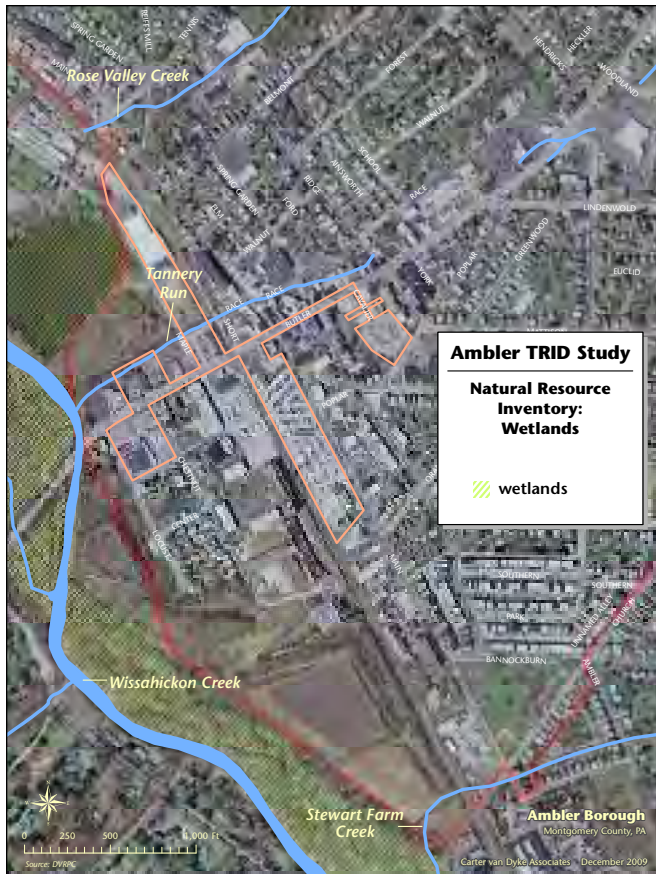
TWT's environmental assessment was limited to publicly available information on properties within the TRID planning area. Database reports and historic aerial photographs were reviewed and limited interviews were conducted to aid in identifying potential environmentally sensitive areas. The scope of the environmental assessment was developed to satisfy

the objectives of the TRID planning study, but is not intended to satisfy the requirements of ASTM Phase I Environmental Site Assessment (ESA) standards or the requirements of United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) All Appropriate Inquiry (AAI) rule. TWT recommends conducting Phase I ESAs of properties proposed for redevelopment.

Natural resources

Three streams within the planning area are federally regulated water bodies: Stuart Farm Creek, Tannery Run, and Rose Valley Creek. Each stream drains to Wissahickon Creek to the southwest of the TRID and is designated as Trout Stocking (TSF) in *PA Chapter 93, Water Quality Standards* and on *eMapPA*. The streams are not designated as State or Federal Scenic





Rivers or listed as Class A Wild Trout Waters by the PA Fish and Boat Commission. Freshwater wetlands were not observed during the site reconnaissance within the study area.

The tributaries flow southwest parallel to Butler Avenue adjacent to Church Street, Tennis Avenue, and Race Street:

- Stuart Farm Creek was observed along southern property boundary at Church Street. The tributary begins at an off-site point east of the study area and meanders through the Caddick Construction property (Block 28, Lot 7) prior to running beneath the SEPTA Lansdale/Doylestown rail line onto the Ambler Asbestos Piles property.
- Tannery Run is located adjacent to the southern parcel line of the BoRit property between the McDonalds and

the open space area. The canopy is almost completely covered by deciduous vegetation with a sparse understory. Tannery Run was characterized by natural bed and banks with slow moving waters. No adjacent wetlands were observed along the stream bank.

- Rose Valley Creek is located along the northern property boundary at Tennis Avenue and Maple Avenue. Engineered channelization of the stream bank characterized by concrete walls was observed on-site to minimize erosion in the urban setting.

State and Federal authorization will be needed for proposed disturbances and based on the trout stocking designation of the streams, construction activities are not allowed during March 1 to June 15.

Wetlands were not observed on-site but fringe wetlands may be present

along Stuart Farm Creek as documented by the EPA. A wetland assessment should be completed by a wetland professional in any areas proposed for redevelopment prior to construction.

The TRID planning area is located in the Piedmont Physiographic Province of southeastern Pennsylvania. The depth to bedrock within the TRID is anticipated to be less than ten feet. According to NRCS, depth to seasonal high water table is reported at approximately 12 to 48 inches below ground surface (bgs) and is expected to be closer to the surface in areas of observed surface water. Based on the aerial photograph review, open space areas associated with the former Keasbey & Mattison facility and adjacent to the pond have been significantly disturbed with manufacturing waste. Topography in these

areas has been modified to approximately 20 to near 90 feet above original grade and naturally occurring soils are not expected to be present immediately beneath the ground surface. Due to extensive development and disturbance in the study area, TWT recommends conducting on-site soil evaluations to evaluate soils for geotechnical integrity, permeability, and seasonal high water table prior to redevelopment.

Threatened and endangered species

A survey for threatened and endangered species has not been conducted of the study area. However, based on a review of threatened and endangered species information available from the *Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program PNDI Environmental Review* (<http://www.naturalheritage.state.pa.us/>), federally listed or proposed threatened or endangered species are not located within the study area.

An adjacent off-site reservoir owned by the Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association along North Maple Street was named an *Important Bird Area* in 2005 by the National Audubon Society. Any proposed disturbances to areas adjacent to this pond should be surveyed for visual evidence of habitat or endangered and threatened species prior to disturbance as the presence of habitat may affect redevelopment of the adjacent properties.

Historic resources

A review of state, county and local files for existing historic resource surveys, historic designations, and other historic documentation of project area was completed in April 2008 at the following repositories:

- Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission (PHMC), Harrisburg
- Montgomery County Historical Society, Norristown
- Wissahickon Valley Public Library, Ambler Branch.

Review of files at PHMC revealed there are no historic resources in Ambler listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In 2002, PHMC determined the Ambler Commercial Historic District, specifically 1–12 W. Butler Avenue and 1–70 E. Butler Avenue, was eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. A National Register nomination for the Ambler Commercial Historic District was submitted to PHMC in 2003 by Powers & Co. PHMC issued its comments and request for additional materials later that year, but no additional updated material was found in the file. While the Ambler Commercial Historic District remains eligible for the National Register, the file for this resource includes a note stating: “Re-evaluation of National Register eligibility may be necessary due to the date of the initial evaluation” (CRGIS 2008).

Several buildings directly associated with the Keasbey & Mattison Company were documented as part of the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS). However, not all of these buildings have been evaluated to determine their eligibility for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. These buildings include:

- Company Garage: 125 – 127 W. Butler Avenue
- Row Houses: 5- 15, 100 – 114, & 214 – 228 South Chestnut Street

- Worker’s Houses: 5-15 Spring Garden Street
- Ambler Boiler House: 201 South Maple Way [Note: This building was determined ineligible for the National Register of Historic Places by PHMC in 2005.].

The Ambler Railroad Station, located on W. Butler Avenue, was also documented by HABS. It is unclear whether or not it has been evaluated for the National Register. In addition, a comprehensive Historic Resource Survey was completed for Ambler Borough in 1999 by the Conservancy of Montgomery County. As a result, nearly all buildings in the borough over 50 years of age at that time were surveyed.

As a result of the 1999 Comprehensive Historic Resource Survey, there were no additional resources within the project area to identify.

If any of the entities undertaking redevelopment within the Borough wish to use the 20% Federal Rehabilitation Investment Tax Credit in the rehabilitation of historic buildings, the building must be listed on the National Register, either individually or as a contributing building within a National Register Historic District, or be a contributing building to a Certified Local District (a locally designated historic district that has been certified by the National Park Service). Since a nomination for the Ambler Commercial Historic District has already been submitted and reviewed, the finalization and approval of this nomination should be a priority. The Borough will have to pursue historic designation to do so. Further recommendations relating to historic properties are included in the TWT Appendix document.

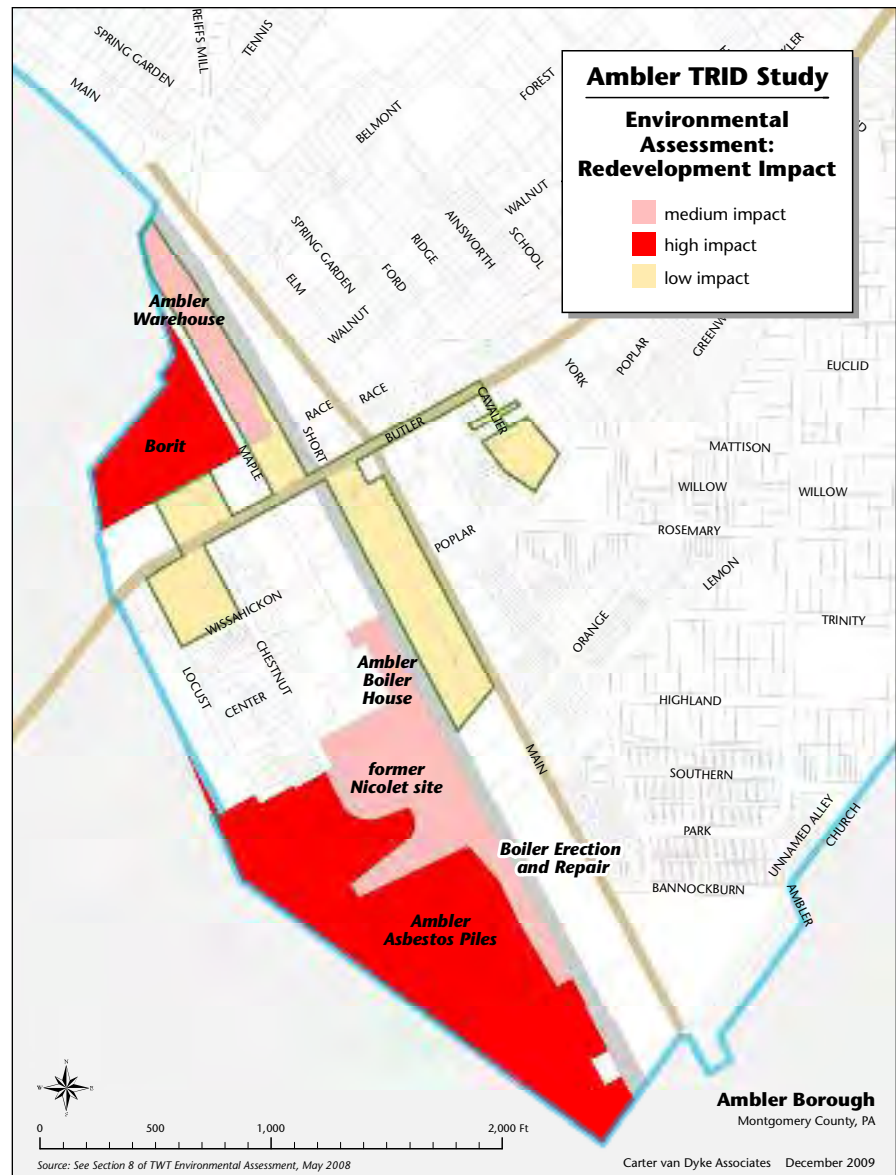
Environmental impacts and land use suitabilities

The following discussion includes properties that are not included in the final TRID boundary, but that were studied in the earliest phases of the planning process. This information has been included because any development of the properties in question will have an impact upon the TRID.

Low impact properties are suspected to contain little to no contamination. If contamination exists, it is anticipated to be minimal and would not significantly hinder redevelopment of the property. Complete remediation should be feasible without significant capital expense or imposition of institutional or engineering controls. It would include properties with historic contamination which has been remediated to State or Federal standards without institutional controls.

Low impact properties pose minimal potential for restrictions on future land use. These properties are expected to be suitable for all potential land uses and any contamination is expected to be readily cleaned up under local, State, and Federal regulations to the most stringent criteria without the use of institutional or engineering controls. Based on the age of the buildings and the historic characteristics of an industrial Ambler during the early to mid-1900's, asbestos-containing building materials are suspected to be present in most of the buildings. However, these ACMs are safe and do not pose a hazard to human or ecological health as long as they are properly maintained and their use remains appropriate. The majority of properties in the TRID redevelopment area appear to be low impact.

Low impact properties include residential, office facilities, and retail



properties along Butler Avenue and connecting local roadways.

Medium impact properties are known or suspected to be contaminated from historic or current land uses. Remediation should be feasible with low to moderate capital expense and possibly with institutional or engineering controls. These properties are best suited for non-residential land uses. However, if consistent with zoning requirements and local regulations, they are likely suitable for residential land uses provided that institutional controls are established.

TWT identified three properties within the original TRID planning area which appear to be medium impact properties.

Former Nicolet Industries Site (Westrum)

TWT recommends that all proposed improvements on-site be subject to PADEP approval and the completion of remediation on-site. Therefore, based on the current status of the property, proposed land development, and historic land use, TWT has identified this property as a medium

impact. Residential land uses are currently proposed at the former Nicolet Industries site. These residential uses are anticipated to be the most suitable use to promote a rail oriented community. A high degree of impervious cover and deed restrictions on subsurface disturbances to open space areas are proposed on the former Nicolet Industries property to limit the risk of on-site exposure to contamination.

Ambler Boiler House

Commercial land use is anticipated to be the most suitable redevelopment use for the Boiler House. The Boiler House currently has Final Land Development Approval from the Borough of Ambler for the renovation of the former facility into Class A offices. This use is considered to be the most suitable based the necessity to cap in place impacted soil and deed-restrict future subsurface disturbances.

Ambler Warehouse

Aerial photographs and Sanborn® maps for the Ambler Warehouse indicate the property was historically used for manufacturing asbestos-containing materials (ACMs) by the Asbestos, Shingle, Slate, & Sheathing Company owned by Keasbey & Mattison. A reservoir, utilized during manufacturing, was formerly located north of the warehouse facility on portions of the TRID study area. Part of this area is covered with concrete paving and used as a parking lot and staging area by warehouse employees. The western portion of this parking area is not paved and soil is exposed.

The property is suspected to be medium risk to the TRID planning area since there is a lack of environmental information on-site and the property

is currently in use. No evidence of disposal was noted during the site reconnaissance. Therefore, ACMs in soil could likely be addressed similar to remediation efforts on the former Nicolet Industries site. Non-residential uses are suspected to be the most suitable redevelopment uses for this property since an environmental assessment and potentially remediation may be conducted on-site, especially in the area of the former reservoir. Deed restrictions may be necessary if contamination is on-site and cannot be remediated to current State and Federal regulations.

High impact properties are suspected to contain extensive contamination from historic or current land use. Remediation may be feasible, however high capital expenditure and institutional and/or engineering controls are required to facilitate reuse. Typically, high impact properties have not been remediated and there is potential for human and/or ecological exposure to contaminants if the property is disturbed.

High impact properties pose the highest amount of restrictions on future land use. These properties restrict development potential based on current environmental impacts and financial requirements to remediate. Institutional and engineering environmental controls including deed restrictions are probable due to the extent and degree of contamination. Two properties appear to be a high impact properties.

Ambler Asbestos Piles

TWT has concluded, based on historic data, the Ambler Asbestos Piles pose a high impact to the TRID redevelopment project. Due to the

engineering controls placed on-site and the desire of the EPA to place institutional controls on the waste piles, limited redevelopment uses are anticipated on-site.

Based on the existing topography, extent of contamination, and proposed institutional controls, development potential is low. Additional studies will be required to assess suitability for any proposed land use.

BoRit Property

The BoRit property currently owned by Kane Core, which is not located within the proposed TRID district, consists of six acres of asbestos-containing waste. Though the EPA does not believe there is an immediate risk to human health based on NESHAP regulations requiring fencing, signage and no visual emissions, the EPA is moving forward to remediate it through capping or other controls. Based on the above information provided by both the PADEP and EPA, impact to future development appears to be high due to necessary remediation and probable development of institutional or engineering controls on-site. These controls limit land use on-site and therefore impact the redevelopment potential of the property. Any land use is suitable for a property such as BoRit so long as proper funding is obtained and State and Federal regulations are followed. However, the best suited land use for this property is non-residential. This would enable capping of the waste piles and allow for additional parking facilities within the Borough.

The complete environmental review is included in the TWT portion of the Appendix document.

Transportation and circulation

A study of circulation, transit, and traffic conditions within the Borough was conducted by Orth-Rodgers & Associates. The complete assessment is included in the Appendix.

Public transportation

The SEPTA Lansdale/Doylestown rail line, running northwest to southeast through Ambler, links Philadelphia to Lansdale and beyond. The line, served in the Borough by a newly constructed train station south

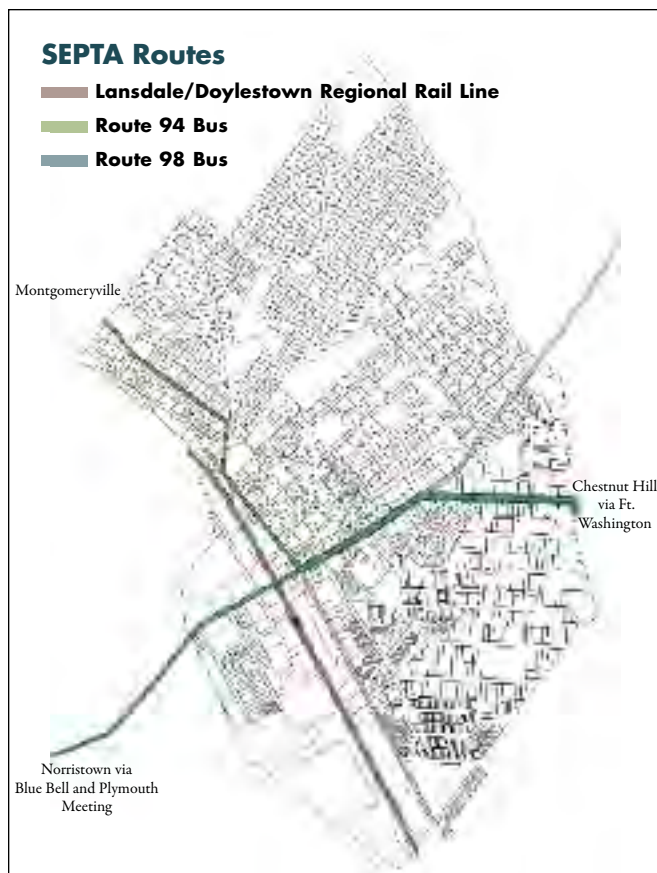
of Butler Avenue, provides relatively frequent service to its riders; the Center City ride is approximately one half hour in length. Two SEPTA bus routes serve the Borough:

- Route 94: Chestnut Hill–Ambler–Montgomeryville
- Route 98: Norristown–Plymouth Meeting–Ambler–Willow Grove

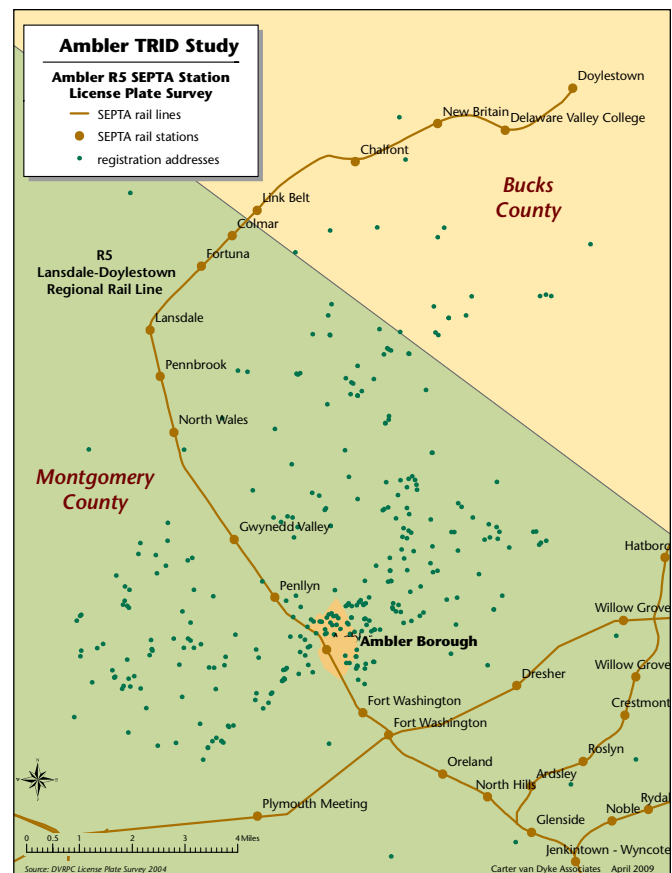
A shuttle service run by Temple University connects the train station to the Temple/Ambler campus.

Traffic and roadways

Butler Avenue, which extends in a southwest to northeast direction, is the most important street within the TRID. Classified by PennDOT as a principal arterial, it is the only arterial roadway within the Borough. The only other higher-order roadway within the TRID is Main Street, a collector roadway. (For the purpose of this study, Butler Pike/Avenue will be referred to as an east-west roadway, and Main Street as a north-south roadway.) Like all streets within the



Three SEPTA routes serve the Borough and the TRID site.



License plate survey at the Ambler Lansdale/Doylestown rail line station parking lot (2004) indicates that the majority of riders seem to come from outside the Borough.

TRID, Butler Pike is primarily a two-lane roadway, although left turn-lanes are provided at the intersections with all prominent secondary roads. The following intersections are signalized:

- Butler Avenue and Main Street
- Butler Avenue and Spring Garden Street
- Butler Avenue and Ridge Avenue
- Butler Avenue and Lindenwold Avenue

These intersections are synchronized with one another to abet efficient traffic flow on Butler Pike through the Borough.

The street layout in Ambler provides patterns that allow traffic to parallel the commercial main streets of Butler Avenue and Main Street. However, the SEPTA track crossing on Butler Avenue—the only crossing point for east-west traffic—is a major bottleneck to efficient traffic flow in the Borough. Almost every vehicle traveling east to west must use the intersection of Main and Butler. Currently there are approximately 1,500 vehicle trips at the intersection of Butler and Main during the evening peak hour. Closing this grade crossing when trains pass through or stop at the Ambler train station (as do most Lansdale/Doylestown trains) clearly impacts traffic; currently, there are

three inbound and four outbound trains during the evening peak hour. Train station reconstruction south of Butler Avenue means that crossing gates will open after inbound trains pass, but they must remain closed for outbound trains.

The existing level of service (LOS) for vehicles at the intersection of Butler Avenue and Main Street is good in all directions except northbound on Main Street, which operates at a level of service “E”. Overall, the intersection is at LOS C, with an average vehicle delay of 22 seconds. The SEPTA parking lot on South Main Street (see below) is a major contributor to the low LOS on Main Street.

Parking

Finding Spaces: A Parking Action Plan for the Borough of Ambler (March 2008) analyzed the parking situation in the Borough, especially as it is impacted by the residential, commercial, and entertainment revitalization. One of the main themes of the report was the potential for conflict generated by competing uses, as well as the qualitative and quantitative differences in parking in small towns versus malls. The report found that there were enough spaces for existing uses, but that as uses and demand change over time, especially in light of any development on the TRID site, the

need for an effective management system will increase. A number of strategies for strengthening the Borough’s parking system, including the use of shared parking immediate and long-term actions, and administration and enforcement policies, are included.

There are 496 parking spaces for SEPTA that are accessed from South Main Street and 92 parking spaces for SEPTA located at the corner of Maple and Butler. Parking activity for SEPTA differs somewhat from that of the commercial core of the Borough. The highest demand for parking for SEPTA users is during the week, Monday through Friday from 6:00 am to 6:00 pm, while the commercial core with its cultural, arts and restaurant uses comes alive at 6:00 pm on weekdays and is active during the weekend also.

Recently some restaurants that have opened in Ambler have requested that they have parking spaces reserved for valet parking drop-off locations. As more restaurants open in the Borough, the valet option could become more popular. Additional parking in the core may be required, or shared parking in the core may need to be formalized, to facilitate this current and possibly growing trend.

Pedestrians and Bicyclists

The current walkability of the proposed TRID area (as opposed to many other areas in the Borough) is less than ideal for several reasons. While there are crosswalks across Butler Avenue at Main Street, the train tracks, and at Maple Street, only the intersection of Main Street and Butler Avenue has a signalized crossing. When the train is crossing Butler Avenue, gates stop foot, as well as vehicular, traffic. On weekdays the train gates are down 64 times a day with the current train schedule.

Intersections within the proposed TRID area do not meet new ADA standards for pedestrian ramps. Sidewalks vary in quality, appearance, and width, and would benefit from a more uniform treatment and compliance with newer design standards.. Provisions for bicycle riding or commuting are quite limited. There are no bicycle lanes and no significant formalized bicycle parking areas.

Previous Studies

The Borough has undertaken a number of planning studies to help clarify approaches to solve the problems posed by underutilized properties in Ambler, as well as defining an overall vision for revitalizing the Borough.

The Ambler Borough Comprehensive Plan Update (1995)

The Comprehensive Plan Update included a Revitalization Plan that stressed the need to improve the image of the asbestos piles, and Ambler itself, by working with potential investors and developers. It also suggested that the addition of substantial new office space in Ambler was not warranted by market conditions, but that any demand would be from small users and businesses needing flexible space. The Plan encouraged that more intensive uses be located on the Keasbey & Mattison sites. That area was also earmarked for possible residential uses such as condominiums or loft apartments, or a marketplace.

Industrial Revitalization: A Guide to Potential Opportunities in Ambler Borough (1998)

This study, produced by the Montgomery County Planning Commission, was an inventory of land parcels adjacent to the SEPTA Rail Corridor. The document was to serve as an adjunct to the Comprehensive Plan, guiding officials in decisions regarding future zoning and proposed uses. Data for each site included owner, lot size, zoning, tax parcel, assessment, site plan, and use or development potential. The Boiler House was commended for both redevelopment and reuse potential, citing its solid condition and ample interior space. The lack of on-site parking was noted. The possibility of combining this site with others on Maple Avenue, closer to Butler Pike, was addressed.

Ambler Vision Plan (2000)

Carter van Dyke Associates, Urban Partners, Brown & Keener, and Carroll Engineers prepared the Ambler Vision Plan, in cooperation with the Ambler Vision Steering Committee that had been formed in 1998. The Plan called for a commitment to strengthening the Borough by reinventing the Rail Corridor as an employment center and rejuvenating the downtown by emphasizing its cultural and commercial uniqueness. The area along the Rail Corridor was seen as a location for offices, some of which would have ground floor retail. An important point of the Vision Plan was the need to control property speculation that could inhibit a coordinated redevelopment plan.

Redevelopment Area Plan for the Ambler Borough Rail Corridor (2001)

This plan, by Gilmore & Associates and Keystone Heritage Group, evaluated statutory and legislative steps that could assist the redevelopment of the Rail Corridor area. In March 2001, resolutions of the Ambler Borough Planning Commission and the Montgomery County Planning Commission certified the area as blighted. The objectives of the Redevelopment Area Plan include all those enumerated in the Ambler Vision Plan, and called for a Revitalization/Redevelopment Committee, appointed by Council, to guide and oversee the Plan and any future redevelopment proposals.

Ambler Borough Comprehensive Plan (2001)

The new Comprehensive Plan by the Montgomery County Planning Commission included sections on both commercial and industrial revitalization, encouraging the uses that are regional draws, and calling for better design integration of all of the commercial section of Butler Avenue through streetscape improvements. It called for improvements to pedestrian and vehicular access and circulation. The area addressed in the strategic plan for Central Business District and Industrial Area revitalization is roughly similar to the area proposed for the TRID. Additionally, it was noted that the development of a Community Development Corporation (CDC) or Business District Authority had potential for the Borough.

Ambler Borough Open Space Plan (2005).

Ambler Vision Plan Update (2005)

Prepared by the Ambler Revitalization Committee with support from the Montgomery County Planning Commission, Ambler Borough Planning Commission, Gilmore & Associates, and Ambler Main Street, this report was an adaptation and update of the Vision Plan of 2000. It detailed specific projects and probable costs by year in a Priority, Phasing and Cost Summary. It recommended that the Borough incentivize redevelopment in the Rail Corridor area to provide for transit-oriented uses.

Finding Spaces: A Parking Action Plan for the Borough of Ambler (2008)

This report by TownShapes LLC examined the parking issues that have grown out of the increased economic activity in the downtown area, including concerns of both residents and business-owners. Existing parking analysis, parking management, immediate actions and management strategies, and long-term actions and management strategies were presented. The plan recommended a comprehensive, GIS-based inventory of land uses and parking facilities, coordinated with TRID plans and studies, to provide the Borough with a usable database for on-going parking management plans and actions.

Market Analysis

Economic profile

Urban Partners completed a market analysis to understand current dynamics for housing, office, retail, and other relevant markets within the potential Transit Revitalization Investment District Planning Study area.

Community profile

Located in the southeast portion of Montgomery County and approximately 16 miles from Center City Philadelphia, the TRID study area in Ambler consists of the SEPTA Regional Rail Station and associated surface parking lots, a retail shopping district on Butler Avenue, several small office buildings, a few light industrial/warehouse facilities, and a small residential neighborhood on the southwest.

There are significant development and redevelopment opportunities in the Ambler TRID study area, including the environmentally impacted parcels (the property adjacent to the lake and the “Ambler Asbestos Piles” property) and the reuse of the underutilized surface parking lots. In addition, there may be infill and redevelopment opportunities on Butler with shopping, dining, and entertainment establishments. Competing modern department store-anchored enclosed malls (especially in Montgomeryville) have contributed to the gradual decline along Butler Avenue, but several factors have positioned the study

area for successful revitalization efforts. Among the most important of these factors are:

- The major regional transportation corridors pass through Ambler. The SEPTA Regional Rail line easily links riders to Philadelphia and the rest of the region, and Butler Avenue serves as a major artery for automobile traffic.
- SEPTA has modernized the train station with raised platforms to facilitate boarding and to attract a growing number of train commuters.
- There are two sizeable residential developments being planned. The Crossings by Westrum Development Company is anticipated to have 288 units. Station Square by WB Homes is under construction and will have 58 units. These developments will provide the area with new customers for the commercial district.
- Momentum is gathering for new shops and services along Butler Avenue. Many new restaurants and personal service businesses have opened in the last few years.
- The Boiler House is under renovation to become a 36,400 sf office complex, adding jobs to the study area.

The revitalization of the Ambler TRID study area must build on the

synergy created by recently opened businesses and capture new and different market opportunities. This report presents a market assessment of housing, retail, commercial, and entertainment uses that may be appropriate for the study area.

Depending on the market being analyzed, trends that occurred both in the area immediately surrounding the redevelopment area, such as housing and retail, which are affected by local supply and demand, and also up to 13 miles from the site for such categories as movie theaters, which generate demand from a greater distance, were analyzed.

Demographics & income

This synopsis of demographic and housing data is more fully detailed in the Urban Partners section in the *Appendix* of this report.

The total population in the Borough of Ambler was 6,609 when the U.S. Census was taken in 1990. It is one of the smaller municipalities within Montgomery County, comprising less than one percent of the total population of the County. In the 2000 Census, the total population in Ambler showed a decrease by 184 people, which marked a 2.8 percent drop during that period. In contrast, the surrounding townships all experienced population growth during the 1990's.

The Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission forecasts a significant change in Ambler’s demographic trend. DVRPC estimates that in 2005, Ambler’s population was 6,450, which indicates a slight increase from 2000. Between 2005 and 2015, Ambler is forecasted to start outpacing the population growth of the County and the surrounding townships, eventually adding 1,222 individuals by the year 2035.

Within the Ambler TRID study area, the per capita income increased by 37% between 1990 and 2000, without adjusting for inflation. The pace of growth was slower than the County and the surrounding townships, with the exception of Lower Gwynedd Township.

Housing conditions

According to the U.S. Census, the number of housing units in the Ambler TRID study area dropped during the 1990’s, losing 24 units during that time. The vacancy rate for Ambler in 2000 (3.6 percent) was in keeping with the rest of Montgomery County as well as the surrounding townships, but the percentage of owner occupied units was far smaller. Only 58.2 percent of all housing units in Ambler were occupied by owners. As reported by Win2Data, which is a comprehensive real estate database service that was utilized for this study, there were 53 single family residential homes sold in Ambler Borough and another 814 in adjacent townships between April 2007 and May 2008.

Within the Borough of Ambler, the prices of homes sold ranged from \$80,000 to \$400,000, with the median sales price of \$243,000. The median sales prices in surrounding townships were significantly higher.

The average size of the homes being sold was also significantly smaller in Ambler than in surrounding townships. Homes sold in Ambler had about 1,500 sf of living space whereas the homes being sold in surrounding townships had about 2,400 sf of living space. A disproportionate percentage of single family homes for sale in Ambler were smaller than 1,400 sf (44 percent), whereas the percentage of smaller single family homes in adjacent townships comprised a much smaller number.

The U.S. Census Bureau’s data on the number of authorized residential building permits indicates significant new construction activity near the Borough of Ambler within the last six years but very little activity inside the Borough. Since 2002, a total of 1,345 permits have been issued in the area, but only 12 permits were issued for new home building in Ambler.

New housing development within the Borough

Ambler is currently showing signs of reinvestment in the housing market that will change this trend. Prior to the recent economic recession two developments were in the pre-development phase before the Borough. The first was the Westrum Development Company’s The Crossings at Ambler—a 288-unit vil-

lage style development on an abandoned industrial site. Earlier in the production of this TRID study a Westrum representative had indicated that the recent economic downturn had prompted a slight modification of the project. Initially, The Crossings planned for larger units of 1,700 sf selling for more than \$400,000, or about \$235 per sf. As of May, 2008, Westrum reduced the size of the units: larger units of 1,450 sf are projected to sell in the high \$300,000’s (or \$259 per sf); smaller units of 750 sf are projected to sell for \$250,000 (or \$333 per sf). Despite a regional market for rental housing, this project is now on hold. The other major development was Station Square proposed by WB Homes. This development initially included 58 townhouses of between 1,900 and 2,200 sf, with starting sale prices of \$360,000 (or \$189 per sf). Development began in 2008.

Both developers reported that Ambler’s strengths, and thus the major selling points for their respective development projects, remain the convenience of public transit and the “Main Street” amenities located along Butler Avenue. Many new home buyers are looking at quality of life issues, as related to their daily commutes to work and the availability of shops and restaurants within walking distance to their homes. The addition of 316 new families in these two developments would significantly add to the retail purchasing power of Ambler residents. As far as new developments in adjacent townships, our research shows that homes being marketed are generally bigger and more expensive.

Summary of development potential

New home development potential

After the overall national economy rebounds, the Ambler study area could absorb 30 to 50 units of new sales housing per year. Appropriate housing types for this area are townhouses, condominiums, and age-restricted condominiums of 1,300 sf to 1,800 sf and priced in the \$190 per sf to \$260 per sf range.

Rental housing market potential

Rental housing represented 42 percent of the housing market in Ambler in 2000. This housing stock is relatively old, with 95 percent of the units being built prior to 1979. Furthermore, renter occupied structures are relatively small. A majority of the renter occupied units (71.4 percent) are located in structures that have less than 10 units, with only 16.4 percent of the units being in structures larger than 20 units. The research shows a strong market for higher quality apartment complexes that feature a full range of amenities. Urban Partners estimates that newly built apartment complexes with one and two-bedroom units (750 sf to 1,050 sf) can be rented at \$1.45 to \$1.60 per sf per month.

Office development potential

To analyze the potential for office property development within the Ambler TRID study area, Urban Partners inventoried all non-retail commercial users in the study area and assessed market conditions in an area-wide office trade area that includes Fort Washington.

Inventory of commercial uses (excluding retail uses)

As of April 2008, there were a total of 84 commercial businesses located in the study area. Of these, 16 were financial services, nine were auto related businesses, eight were construction or building services, eight were health related, and eight were light industrial/other. The remaining users in the study area include a beauty school, two theaters, a social club, and other miscellaneous professional offices.

Multi-tenant office space

Urban Partners assessed multi-tenant office market conditions in an office trade area that includes Fort Washington. In 2006, multi-tenant office space within the study area and surrounding communities totaled 2,630,000 sf (Black's Guide, 2006). The total vacancy rate for the area was 17.3 percent with rents ranging from \$17.50 to \$23.00 per sf plus utilities. Nearly all of the multi-tenant office spaces, or 94 percent, were located in Fort Washington, with Ambler's office space totaling 167,000 sf. Recently plans were announced to renovate the Boiler House into Class-A office space. Once completed, this complex would add another 36,000 sf to Ambler's office market.

Because of the close proximity to Fort Washington that offers close to 2.5 million sf of office space and the plans to add another 36,000 sf in Ambler at the Boiler House, we estimate that a limited number of smaller professional offices can be supported in the study area.

Entertainment development potential

While our research indicates that the area is underserved for movie theaters, development of an additional theater in the Ambler TRID study area is not advised at this time. Current successful movie theater developments consist of 12 to 24 screens requiring 50,000 to 95,000 sf of space, which would be very difficult to develop in Ambler.

The area is also underserved for bowling centers and opportunities for development of additional centers in the Ambler TRID area could be pursued at this time. In the past few years, bowling centers have reemerged as state-of-the-art entertainment facilities that include not only bowling lanes, but also full-bars, full-service restaurants, and a chic design. New bowling alley developments typically require 2 to 3 acres of land and occupy about 20,000 to 35,000 sf. In addition to space requirements, a bowling center will most likely need a liquor license in order to be a successful center.

Retail development opportunities

A retail market analysis was conducted to describe the current performance of the Ambler TRID study area retailers and to identify opportunities for the further development of retailing in the area based on the capture of area residents' retail purchases. The retail trade area for Ambler retailers is a 1.5 mile radius from the SEPTA train station at Butler and Main. It consists mostly of businesses located along Butler

Avenue and a few on the side streets such as Lindenwold.

The 82 operating retail businesses located in the Ambler TRID study area provide products and services in 15 different retail categories and chiefly serve customers from the immediate area as well as vehicles passing through the area on Butler Avenue. As of April 2008, the 82 stores occupied over 176,800 square feet of store space and generated over \$30.3 million in sales. Almost 60% of these stores provide a full array of community-serving goods and services to meet the needs of the residents of the surrounding communities. The community-serving store mix included: the recently-closed Acme supermarket; a convenience store; 11 limited-service restaurants; 2 jewelry stores; 15 hair salons/barber shops; and 5 dry cleaners or laundromats. Some retailers, such as Denney Electric Supply Company, KC's Alley, Shanachie, and Bridget's 8 West, may attract a customer base from beyond the surrounding community of Ambler.

In estimating the potential for expansion of retail businesses within the Ambler TRID study area, we are especially concerned with understanding the purchasing characteristics of resi-

dents living within this broader retail trading area. Since most businesses along the Ambler TRID study area are successfully attracting customers from this trade area, one key development strategy focuses on encouraging these customers to make additional purchases in Ambler. The retail market analysis undertaken in this report identifies the purchases being made outside Ambler and targets some of these purchases for capture by Ambler businesses (see *Appendix*).

Based on our research data, shops located within the Ambler TRID study area are capturing 19% of the retail purchases made by the trade area's estimated 17,850 residents. Supportable new retail opportunities in the Ambler TRID Study Area by square footage are shown in Table 19 (*Estimated Retail Sales Capture Ambler TRID Trade Area – 2008*) in the Urban Partners section of the Appendix. It is estimated that up to a total of 464,000 sf of new retail are compatible with the characteristics of the TRID study area. The Ambler TRID area could reasonably capture key portions of this potential, including a replacement for Acme at 55,000 to 65,000 sf, a drug store of 12,000 to 16,000 sf, and another 100,000 sf of infill retail stores.

Recommendations

Planning goals

The public meetings that were held to introduce the TRID idea and to elicit comments from residents and property owners raised questions about a number of issues in Ambler. Common to both meetings was a concern about what makes Ambler “Ambler.” There are clear differences in the “fabric”—the way the street looks—between the commercial core and the more residential neighborhoods of the Borough. But the commercial core, although it has a wide range of architectural periods, still has a very identifiable “Ambler” style, with pedestrian-oriented storefronts and one-, two-, and three-story buildings that are built directly on the street.

The importance of an active street life, not just at night, was discussed, citing the bandshell that had once been located on the site of the current McDonald’s. Other concerns were raised about what would happen if some of the larger parcels, such as that occupied by the Acme Market, were abandoned. In the course of this study, the Acme closed, leaving the Borough without a supermarket. The lack of medical facilities in Ambler was also mentioned.

Recognizing and responding to community concerns as well as incorporating the objectives of the enabling legislation, the basic goals of the TRID process in Ambler, as identified in the public participation process, are as follow:

- **Re-use abandoned and under-developed properties to revitalize the heart of the Borough.**
Identify the best strategic opportunities for public-private partnerships.
- **Enhance the area immediately surrounding the Ambler SEPTA Lansdale/Doylestown rail line station.**
TRID-generated funds could be used to provide easier and safer pedestrian access on Butler Avenue; new central public/community spaces in the vicinity of the station; new gateways into the community; streetscape improvements.
- **Provide the amenities that promote transit use and support local neighborhoods.**
The presence of a variety of stores near the Station can help reduce the need for auto use. Work with stakeholders to replace the closed Acme with a new larger supermarket that meets the highest quality standards.
- **Provide adequate parking for the SEPTA station and any new development generated by redevelopment.**
Work with SEPTA and individual property owners to maximize parking availability without compromising traffic circulation, transit use, or walkability. Provide adequate parking to support regional users of Ambler’s retail and cultural establishments. Develop a parking strategy to resolve residential and commercial parking conflicts.
- **Ensure that any new development fits into the character of Ambler and strengthens community identity.**
Provide design guidelines for both larger and infill development to maintain the “feel” of the Borough, while allowing for new types of structures. Take advantage of the historic character of the commercial core and consider establishment of a historic district (with listing on the National Register if possible).
- **Provide a variety of housing options and housing costs to current and future Ambler residents.**
The area near the train station could offer opportunities for residents of different ages, for example, young renters or down-sizing empty-nesters who wish to move to or remain in the Borough.
- **Provide a stable tax base for the Borough by increasing the amount of mixed-use development and sustainable residential, retail, office, and commercial uses.**
Use existing infrastructure for new development to decrease costs and increase sustainability. Focus commercial development in the core area to create a “critical mass.” Provide amenities that support residents and visitors of all ages.
- **Enlist the support of all stakeholders, including SEPTA and the School Board, in ensuring the success of the TRID**

General recommendations for TRID study area

Streetscape amenities and pedestrian and bicycle access

Walkability is about having someplace to walk to, as well as the ease and safety of walking. Ambler is lucky in this regard: its sidewalks link its residential areas directly to its commercial and entertainment center. The streetscape improvements that are found in the commercial core of Ambler should be extended to create a continuous experience along Butler Avenue and North and South Main Street. Street furnishings (benches, pedestrian-scale lighting, etc.) add comfortable functionality for pedestrians and create visual interest and a sense of place. TRID value capture can be a source for the funds needed to develop the pedestrian and bicycle amenities that will increase the quality of the Borough's streets.

One thing that the center of Ambler does lack is an obvious public focal point of a park or plaza. The walkway with the kiosk and the arts environment along the Cavalier alley could be a good place to begin creating such public spaces. A pedestrian plaza is proposed at the intersection of Short Race Street and Butler Avenue to provide a green, inviting location for users of all transit, and shelter for the SEPTA customers waiting for buses.

One of the goals of both TOD and TRID development is to increase the use of non-auto transportation, including walking and bicycling. Studies show that an optimum width of the pedestrian portion of sidewalk (walking zone) is 8 feet, with a tree/furnishings zone of 5 feet. In the TRID area (and specifically the Redevelopment Overlay and Commercial and RSC zoning districts) sidewalks should be a minimum of 13 feet and 15 feet where possible. Ambler has created very distinctive crosswalks along Butler Avenue; the TRID area should also use these crosswalks. Additionally there should be another signalized crossing for pedestrians at Butler Avenue and Maple Street.

Bicycle facilities should be incorporated into the TRID development and throughout the Borough, including parking facilities for commercial uses and the SEPTA train station.

Additionally Ambler Borough should consider marking Butler Avenue, Main Street, and Maple Street with bicycle symbols called sharrows on the surface of the road (in the 2009 MUTCD update). The goal is to provide SEPTA riders with the ability to safely incorporate bicycle transportation into their daily commuting.

Transit

The TRID process provides a mechanism to create incentives to reclaim underused or vacant parcels near transit stops. Strategic redevelopment of such parcels in Ambler will benefit the Borough by creating new tax ratables where infrastructure is already in place and will benefit SEPTA by creating new markets for increased ridership. In the following section of the report, more specific recommendations related to parking facilities and supportive retail will be discussed.

The Ambler train station has been rebuilt during the planning process for this TRID study; any infrastructure upgrades for the train system (as opposed to scheduling or passenger seat changes) have been completed. Improvements to the bus system that have been identified as needed include a covered waiting area incorporated into a proposed public plaza .

Parking

The SEPTA train station is at the center of the community; parking for SEPTA consumes more than four acres in the heart of the Borough's commercial core, where parking is at a premium. In fact, over 12% of the land area in that core is dedicated to SEPTA parking. For this reason, a significant amount of the parking required for TRID redevelopment should be within structured lots and will serve a variety of uses on the same lot. Although development around the train station emphasizes mixed uses to reduce auto-dependency, the fact remains that Ambler will continue to be a major destination for auto drivers, as they ride the train, shop, and dine within the Borough.

A major parking structure is proposed on the existing SEPTA parking lot on South Main Street. The scale of such a structure has the potential of overwhelming in the context and scale of the Borough. In order for the parking garage to fit the character of South Main Street's residential and non-residential buildings, it is recommended that the structure be fronted with commercial and residential uses so that it is not visible from the street. The net result is a facade that matches the streetscape on the opposite side of South Main Street. For the side of the parking garage that faces the SEPTA rail lines, it is recommended that a green wall created with cables for vines or a planted structure be placed to create an inviting gateway seen from the commuter line. The parking garage would be over 300 feet from Butler Avenue; since the facade would be clad with residences and stores, it would not "read" as a parking garage, however.

When parking occurs on surface lots, it is recommended that these lots be located behind buildings whenever possible, so their presence does not



Artist's concept of development at the SEPTA site.

interfere with the continuous placement of buildings and interrupt streetscape rhythm and diminish the walkability of the street. Where buildings cannot be strategically placed to hide the surface parking, such as along North Maple Avenue, there should be screening requirements, such as a wall or decorative fencing to significantly reduce the visual impact of this parking on the public right-of-way.

As part of the analysis it is recommended that specific quantities of parking within the parking structure be dedicated to individual uses. However, the majority of the parking would be reserved for the use of SEPTA. An important concern for transit riders is finding open parking spaces quickly. This can be easily facilitated by interactive signs along the main streets that would display space availability at the different parking garages and lots.

There are significant opportunities for shared parking within the TRID area because there are different peak hours for different uses—especially important because of Ambler's popularity as a night-time destination. Increasing the amount of shared parking will ultimately reduce the amount of land that is

consumed by parking elsewhere in the Borough and free it for more advantageous uses that will allow for more ratables. The highest demand for SEPTA parking is from Monday to Friday, from 6:00 am to 6:00 pm, while the highest demand for entertainment and restaurant uses occurs after 6 pm on weekdays and during the entire weekend. Some of the parking spaces that are dedicated to SEPTA could become available for commercial uses during off-peak hours.

Finding Spaces: A Parking Action Plan for the Borough of Ambler called for the formal establishment of a parking authority or agency as well as defining a parking management area. Recommendations regarding shared parking and specific management issues should be implemented, especially as the TRID proceeds and parking needs and volume grow. However, to accomplish this there will need to be a formal shared parking arrangement made with SEPTA. Such a mixed use of the parking structure and parking lots will increase the financial viability for developing such structures. This shared parking will benefit not only the developer financially, but the community as well.

Zoning and design guidelines for new development

Because a large amount of new construction is anticipated when the TRID is adopted, it is crucial that the Borough have clear guidelines as to how infill structures, both large and small, integrate into and are sympathetic to the adjacent existing fabric of the community. This can be addressed through several regulatory means, including standard zoning or form-based zoning (a type of zoning that regulates the form—height, mass, shape—a building can take rather than its use.)

[Since the completion of an earlier draft of this report, many of the following recommendations have been incorporated into Zoning Ordinance 1053 (Design Standards for Non-Residential Buildings) adopted in 2011.]

Building form

Building height

The transit-oriented development pattern that is envisioned for the rail corridor of Ambler includes residential development as well as commercial and office uses. Currently the maximum building height in the Borough is 65 feet (the height of the Wyndam Hotel in the center of the Borough). By ordinance, height regulations in the commercial district are limited to 40 feet with the Zoning Hearing Board able to accept an increase of up to 70 feet; the additional height is predicated on one-foot of setback for each foot of increased height.

We suggest that when an infill building in the rail corridor area has internal structured parking, the height of the building be allowed to reach 65 feet by right. However, there should be additional requirements to minimize the impact of such a height at street level.

First, any structured parking of this height must be clad with other uses (for example, housing or stores) on at least 65% percent of the sides of the structure that front onto public roadways. Second, there should be specific step-back requirements; for instance, a building might be limited to 40 feet in height if it is less than 15 feet from a public right-of-way, but parts of that building could be 65 feet high if farther back from the street.

Thus, if a portion of a building is higher than four stories, that portion must be set back at least 15 feet from the build-to line. If a facade is more than 100 feet from a public right-of-way, the facade may be 65 feet in height without the required setbacks.

Buildings without internal structured parking should be limited to four stories in height, provided that each facade does not exceed 115% of the average height of the three closest buildings on the same public right-of-way.

Setbacks

Because the pedestrian experience is so significant to the success of Ambler's core, special care should be taken to promote a streetscape that forms a coherent visual whole to support retail uses and street life. The use of "build-to lines" rather than "setback requirements" will ensure that the streetscape is not broken up by empty spaces in front of structures that disrupt pedestrian sidewalk flow.

All structures should be constructed to a build-to line on at least one street facade.

In the existing Commercial District ordinance, parking structures are to be located at the rear of the properties.

Consideration should be given to allowing parking structures to be within 15 feet of the build-to line provided that the building is clad with commercial or residential uses on the first floor.

Building massing

While some of the structures schematically proposed in the rail corridor could be large, they must nevertheless fit into the streetscape. Facades along public rights-of-way should respect Ambler's eclectic building dimensions, massing, scale, and fenestration. There should be no blank walls nor any single long wall that faces any public right of way without architectural details such as windows and doors.

For example, front facades should be broken into a rhythm of vertical units that reflect existing building widths on the street, with a maximum width of forty feet per unit. Townhouses cladding an internal parking structure could be forty feet wide, with a 12 foot break between units, with the depth of the break (from build-to line to parking structure) of 15 feet.

In cases where there is front yard parking, the building can set back from the roadway but there must be either a green buffer or an architectural element such as a screening wall on the build-to line (see below).



Lot coverage

The lot area coverage of 80% for both the Commercial and Retail and Service Commercial (RSC) Districts is appropriate, but bonuses may be suitable when the developer uses green technologies relating to stormwater issues. These may include green roofs, porous paving, rain gardens, bio-filtration swales or other similar technologies.

Structured parking

Parking structures are allowed in the Redevelopment Overlay (RO) district. Parking structures should also be allowed in the Retail and Service Commercial, the Commercial, and the RO districts. There are defined uses, limits and location definitions that should be considered for inclusion of parking structures within these districts.

For example, any parking structure should be clad with other uses (e.g., residential units or stores) on at least sixty-five percent of each side of the structure that fronts directly onto a public roadway. The existing ordinance allows the proposed SEPTA infill parking structure on South Main Street to be wrapped with office or commercial uses. Along South Main, it would also be appropriate to allow for residential cladding of a parking garage on the ground floor, as long as the development on that specific lot is a mixed-use development. There is a requirement for a green buffer for parking structures; it would be appropriate to add that green walls and vertical trellis systems can be allowed as a green buffer.

Residential use in Commercial District

Currently, no residential uses are permitted in the Commercial District. This should be changed to allow for mixed-use, including residential, to occur.

Bicycle ordinance

A bicycle ordinance to define specific parking requirements should be considered for adoption. For example, for every 20 cars parking spaces required on-lot, one bicycle rack that accommodates six bicycles should be installed. The location of the racks should be prominent, in front of active uses where many eyes will see the bicycles. The style of bicycle rack should be defined by the Borough. Additionally, access drives to the bicycle racks should be marked appropriately.

Parking lots

Buffering requirements in the RO District should be expanded to include an architectural screen and/or a green screen that can include hedging, trees, and groundcover designed to fully screen the view of cars to a minimum height of 3½ feet when installed.

Architectural guidelines

Architectural guidelines should be developed to guide the development that will occur within the TRID area. The guidelines should include the following:

- Facade widths, heights, and break depths
- Massing and scale
- Floor setbacks as described above
- Fenestration patterns, rhythms, scale
- Materials
- Lighting
- Green infrastructure goals

[See Appendix VII: Ordinance 1053 (Design Standards for Non-Residential Properties), *adopted January 2011*]

Parcel rezoning

There are two areas on the west end of Ambler that need to be rezoned to accommodate the uses recommended in this TRID study. The existing post office occupies the entire block at Butler Avenue and Locust and Chestnut Streets. It is recommended that this area be rezoned from office to residential. On the post office site, a mix of residential uses is expected to include quadraplex units known as manor or mansion homes, 2-over-2 townhouses, and apartments on second floors above garages. This mix will fit well into the existing residential fabric of the adjacent blocks, but will require an ordinance that specifically allows these residence types

On the north side of Butler Avenue adjacent to the Cornerstone Presbyterian Church, the Sons of Italy, and McDonalds should also be rezoned to permit residential development to accommodate the proposed three-story multi-family residential uses.

Allow medical uses

In the Retail and Service Commercial (RSC) District, the ordinance should be modified to allow medical office uses by conditional approval, provided that the location will not impact upon adjacent retail establishments. Medical offices are needed in Ambler, and an outpatient use of 45,550 square feet is projected as part of the TRID development parcels on North Maple, within the RSC district.

Site-specific redevelopment strategies

The original version of the TRID area included underutilized parcels in the commercial area as far as ½ mile from the train station that would have benefited from being in the TRID boundary. However, there was a reduction in the TRID study area on the east side of Ambler due to market changes and property availability during the planning process.

Two areas were removed because they were acquired by developers. One of these parcel is at the corner of East Park Avenue and East Butler Avenue, the location of the Acme supermarket. During the course of the study a chain drugstore acquired the property and it is now operating as a drugstore. In the preliminary stages of the TRID planning process, the site was a candidate for redevelopment and for new infill development along Butler Avenue. A second parcel, bounded by Lindenwold Avenue, Race Street, and Butler Avenue, was originally studied primarily because of the closing of an automobile dealership in the block. Commercial and office redevelopment was proposed for the site, but during TRID planning a developer came to Ambler with plans to place a new supermarket at this location.

In the original TRID study area there were two tiers of priorities for development, *core* and *contributing* properties. The core sites are those that were strategic to creating parking for SEPTA users while the existing SEPTA parking lot was under construction; the core properties remain in the TRID study area. Contributing properties included the two removed parcels mentioned above that could be developed independently without affecting the SEPTA parcel.

SEPTA Parking Lot at Main Street and Butler Avenue

One of the core areas for the TRID redevelopment plans is the SEPTA parking lot adjacent to the relocated Train Station. Concerns about parking for current and future activities in the Borough have been a theme in many of the planning studies produced for Ambler. Increased residential and commercial development will generate need for more spaces, above and beyond what may already be required along Butler Avenue.

As transit ridership grows, so will the need for more parking. The limited space in which to expand surface parking, as well as the desire of transit users to park as close as possible to the station, led the planning team to evaluate structured parking on the SEPTA site. Several factors drove the investigation of the kind and location of structures: the height of other buildings in the immediate vicinity, the need to fit into the historic context of the Borough, the potential circulation conflicts with the train line and additional traffic at peak transit use times, where to put SEPTA parking while any structures are being built on the site, construction costs for multi-story parking, and ways to finance the project. The outcome of this redevelopment project must produce more parking for the SEPTA station (which currently has 496 spaces).

During the time of this study, the existing Acme in Ambler closed, leaving a significant gap in the community services. The team had found that a supermarket would be well suited to the SEPTA site, but because of the

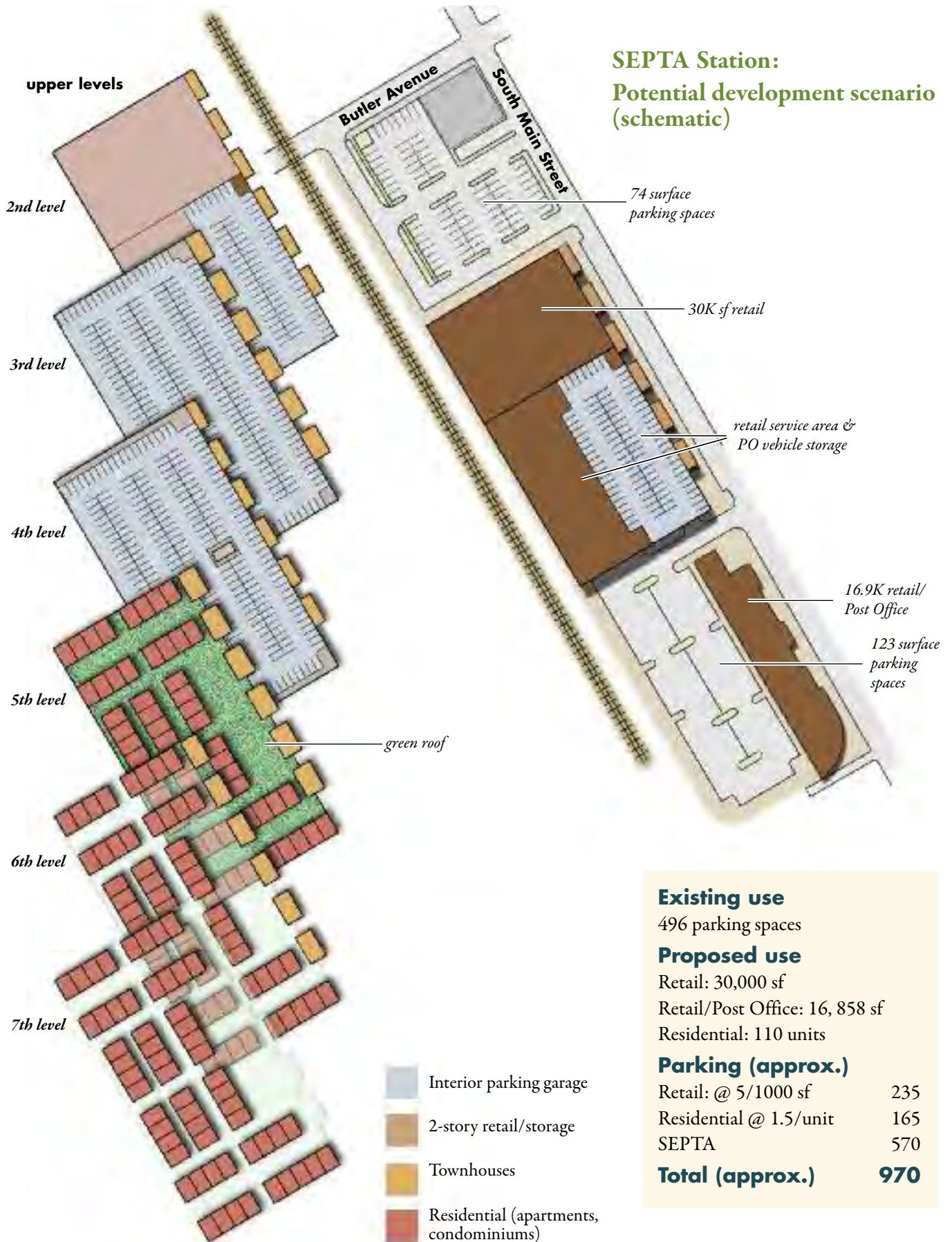
recently proposed supermarket on the eastern side of the Borough mentioned above, a supermarket on the train station property would not be feasible.

The SEPTA site is well situated to support a mix of uses and the TOD concept. Retail space, for single use or subdivided, or leased to smaller business, has been proposed for this site; in addition this site can support additional residential uses, a Post Office relocated from its current West Butler Avenue site, and some parking for SEPTA. There could be a total of 46,858 sf of retail use, 110 residential units, and 970 parking spaces on the site. Approximately 780 of the parking spaces could be within a parking structure.

To support these uses, the entire SEPTA parcel and a few undervalued adjacent uses would need to be developed. The body shop and the oil company on South Main would need to relocate. To stage development and to have continuous service for SEPTA, dedicated SEPTA parking must be created at another location in close proximity to the station prior to any development of the SEPTA parking lot.



**SEPTA Station:
Potential development scenario
(schematic)**



Existing use

496 parking spaces

Proposed use

Retail: 30,000 sf

Retail/Post Office: 16,858 sf

Residential: 110 units

Parking (approx.)

Retail: @ 5/1000 sf 235

Residential @ 1.5/unit 165

SEPTA 570

Total (approx.) 970

**SEPTA Station:
Potential development scenario (schematic)**



The SEPTA site, looking southbound. A surface parking lot near Butler Avenue serves major retail uses in the main structure. A parking garage with a green roof for SEPTA and commercial uses, including a relocated Post Office, is located on the lower levels with townhouses and condominiums and apartments above .



Computer rendering of possible residential and commercial development at the SEPTA site, looking south from Butler Avenue.



Looking south from South Main Street. Townhouses line the street side of the development to reinforce a pedestrian scale.

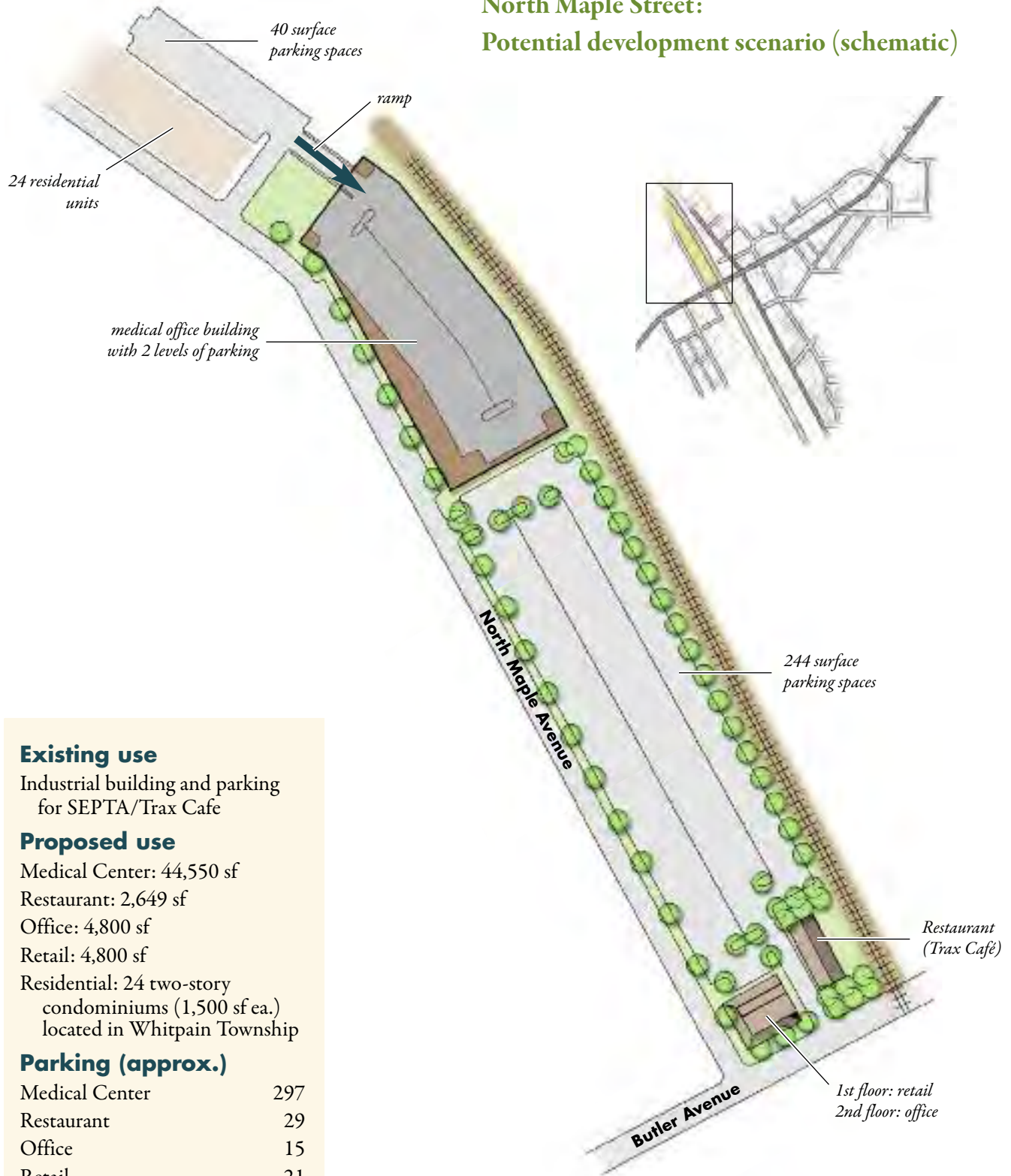
North Maple Street

The study looked at many locations and strategies to create parking for SEPTA. In the end the most efficient location for parking was found to be on the northeast corner of Maple and Butler. In this location Trax Café would remain as a destination-oriented eating establishment. Additional infill development could include a stand-alone building on the corner of Maple and Butler, in scale with the Trax Café, that would include commercial uses with 4,800 square foot of second floor offices and a separate 45,550 square foot medical facility set back from Butler Pike that would be an outpatient outreach facility for a major hospital in the region. Parking spaces for SEPTA (approximately 154) would be on-lot. Parking for the medical facility and the infill development would be located in front, behind, and in two levels on the roof of the medical building. The roof parking is schematically designed to be accessed from the north side of the proposed medical building with a ramp up to the roof. Parking for Trax would be shared with the medical and infill uses.

South Maple adjacent to the Train Station

This site, occupied by LTK and the BP gas station, was studied to determine its potential capacity to accommodate private development and parking for SEPTA. The location is excellent for SEPTA parking, but was found to be complex from a public/private partnership perspective. If the site should become available, it would offer an excellent opportunity for the Borough, the region, and SEPTA to provide parking for the train station as well as private commercial and office infill development .

**North Maple Street:
Potential development scenario (schematic)**



Existing use

Industrial building and parking for SEPTA/Trax Cafe

Proposed use

- Medical Center: 44,550 sf
- Restaurant: 2,649 sf
- Office: 4,800 sf
- Retail: 4,800 sf
- Residential: 24 two-story condominiums (1,500 sf ea.) located in Whitpain Township

Parking (approx.)

Medical Center	297
Restaurant	29
Office	15
Retail	21
Residential	36
SEPTA	154

Total (approx.) 552

Post Office West End Square Site

This location at one of the two primary points of entry into the Borough should present a memorable introduction to the community. The impression at this critical location, however, is currently pedestrian unfriendly and non-town like; the parking lot of the post office contributes to this. A major goal of the redevelopment plan is to relocate the post office onto South Main Street behind the proposed commercial spaces on the SEPTA parking lot site. Replacing the post office building and lot would be 41 infill residences, linking the existing neighborhood south of the site to Butler Pike. In addition to developing a small townhouse neighborhood, this project would create a new gateway into Ambler from Whippany and Upper Dublin Townships' residential communities. (See also Parcel Rezoning above.)



View westward at the Northwest Gateway, with schematic new residential development on the old Post Office site on the left and new residential infill development incorporating the facade of the historic Keasbey & Mattison Garage on the right.

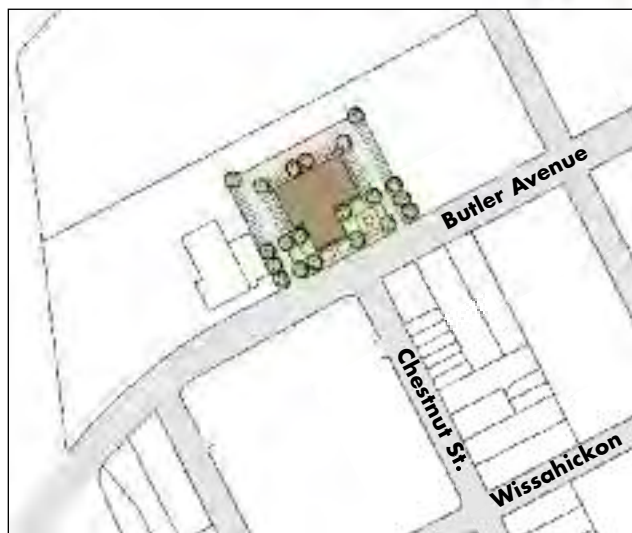
Northwest Gateway

This location incorporates the properties of the auto body shop on Butler Pike. Directly opposite on the south side of Butler Pike is the proposed residential infill development on the existing post office parcel. The planning process determined that the best use of this site was to blend residential uses into the fabric of the western gateway into Ambler. The Cornerstone Presbyterian Church and the Sons of Italy are to be retained in the redevelopment. Shared parking is envisioned with new residential infill development replacing the auto body shop, creating up to 30 residential units in a three-story building. (See also *Parcel Rezoning* above.)

Post Office/West End: Potential development scenario (schematic)



**Northwest Gateway:
Potential development
scenario (schematic)**



Plaza

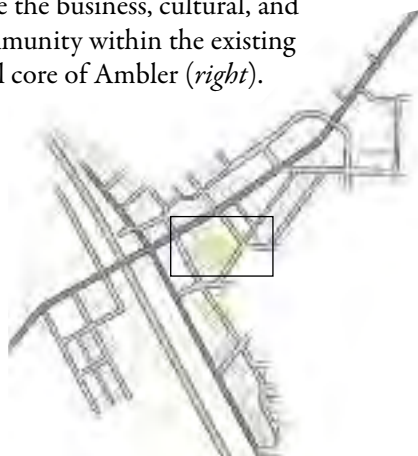
The development of a plaza on the northeast corner of Short Street and Butler Avenue will create a public open space and destination that will serve as a focal point in this heavily-used pedestrian area. Amenities should include shelter and points of interest (a water feature, for example) to serve the community and transit riders as a meeting place in the center of the commercial core of the community.

Streetscape Expansion

The wonderful style of Butler Avenue’s commercial core streetscape should be extended to reach the western gateway at the bridge over the Wissahickon Creek. These improvements would include street lights and street trees. As adjacent parcels are redeveloped, the developer will be responsible for replacing pavement to the specific requirements of the Borough to complement the streetscape design found in the commercial core.

Cavalier Parking Lot

The Cavalier parking lot and its associated alleys and entrance roads could be upgraded to provide additional parking and to become more aesthetically appealing by creating a single additional deck level of parking. This would serve the business, cultural, and transit community within the existing commercial core of Ambler (*right*).



Cavalier lot: Proposed garage



Summary of Findings

Implementation of the TRID will bring redevelopment to Ambler. The proposed development program for the four identified TRID development sites includes the following:

SEPTA Station site:

- 30,000 sf of retail and a 17,000 sf relocated post office
- 110 condominium and townhouse units
- 780 space parking garage and 190 surface parking spaces (approximate)

North Maple Avenue site:

- 44,550 sf of medical service office and 6,850 sf of commercial space
- 270 space parking garage and 284 surface parking spaces

Northwest Gateway site:

- 30 condominium units
- 60 spaces of surface parking

Post Office/West End Square site:

- 41 townhomes and flats

TRID improvement infrastructure phasing

A variety of infrastructure components are required to encourage, facilitate, and provide a foundation for the TRID development program (*Table 2* below). The most important of these is the construction of parking garages on the SEPTA train station and North Maple sites to reclaim the ground of the Station site for productive development. To bring this about, the first thing that needs to happen is preparation of alternate parking for SEPTA users to allow the existing parking lot to be developed. This means that the development on North Maple Avenue would become the first priority in the development process for the TRID.

The mixed-use development on the existing train parking lot must happen to allow the post office to relocate. Once the post office has been relocated, the mixed residential unit development can occur at the West End site on Butler Avenue.

Other TRID improvements could include a parking deck at the Cavalier lot (to accommodate approximately 92 cars), streetscape enhancements, gateway plaza construction, lighting, and other public amenities.

Three stand-alone developments (the three-story residential units next to the Sons of Italy, the pedestrian plaza and the Cavalier parking lot) do not require other developments to occur in a chain of events.

TRID economic/fiscal analysis

Three of these four sites currently yield approximately \$58,900 in taxes for the Borough, School District, and Montgomery County. Property records for the North Maple site require further research, but the tax yield is recognized as very modest. The proposed development program for these four sites will yield a total tax revenue of \$1.482 million for the three jurisdictions based on current

Table 1: Ambler TRID Development Program Summary

SEPTA Station (Parcel 1)	North Maple Avenue (Parcel 2)	Northwest Gateway (Parcel 3)	West End (Parcel 4)
Retail 30,000 sf	Medical Center 44,550 sf	Residential: 30 units	20 townhomes
Retail/Post Office 17,000 sf	Commercial/Office 9,600 sf	60 parking spaces	16 stacked townhomes
190 surface parking spaces	284 surface parking spaces		5 flats
780 garage parking spaces	270 garage parking spaces		Landscaped square
110 townhomes & condominiums			

Table 2: Schedule of Potential TRID Tax Increment Financed Improvements

<p>SEPTA Station site improvements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Acquisition ● Demolition and fill ● Sidewalks, utility mains ● Pedestrian lighting ● Parking areas and garages 	<p>North Maple Avenue</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Acquisition ● Demolition and fill ● Sidewalks, utility mains ● Pedestrian lighting ● Parking areas <p>West End Square</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Plaza construction ● Pedestrian lighting 	<p>Cavalier Parking Lot</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Parking deck construction ● Sidewalks and curbs; street trees <p>Other streetscape enhancements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Butler railside plaza ● Maple Avenue traffic signal ● Streetscape enhancements along and near Butler Avenue <p>Design and contingency related to above improvements</p>
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Table 3: Ambler TRID Development Program Job Creation & Income Impacts

	SEPTA Station	North Maple Avenue	Northwest Gateway	West End	Total
Employment					
Current estimated employment	50	48	14	43**	155
Estimated post-development employment	124**	224	4	1	353
Net employment gains	74	176	-10	-42	198
** Includes relocation of Post Office from West End site to SEPTA Station site					
Income					
Net incremental income of residents	\$8,900,000		\$4,100,000	\$4,600,000	\$17,600,000
Net incremental income of employees**	\$700,000	\$19,900,000	(\$400,000)		\$20,200,000
Net Incremental Income	\$9,600,000	\$19,900,000	\$3,700,000	\$4,600,000	\$37,800,000

** Excludes relocated Post Office employees
 Job creation and economic impact figures provided by Urban Partners.

Table 4: Estimated Pre- and Post-Development Tax Summary

	SEPTA Station	North Maple Avenue	Northwest Gateway	West End	Total
Estimated current taxes*					
Total	\$34,000	??	\$15,100	\$9,800	\$58,900
• Borough of Ambler	\$7,900		\$2,800	\$5,700	\$16,400
• Wissahickon School District	\$22,700		\$10,700	\$3,800	\$37,200
• Montgomery County	\$3,400		\$1,600	\$300	\$5,300
Est. post-devel. taxes					
Real Estate Tax	\$633,000	\$292,000	\$100,000	\$247,000	\$1,272,000
• Borough of Ambler	\$102,000	\$47,000	\$16,000	\$40,000	\$205,000
• Wissahickon School District	\$460,000	\$212,000	\$73,000	\$179,000	\$924,000
• Montgomery County	\$71,000	\$33,000	\$11,000	\$28,000	\$143,001
Earned Income Tax	\$95,000	\$32,000	\$19,000	\$46,000	\$192,000
• Borough of Ambler	\$47,500	\$16,000	\$9,500	\$23,000	\$96,000
• Wissahickon School District	\$47,500	\$16,000	\$9,500	\$23,000	\$96,000
Emergency Municipal Services	\$6,400	\$11,600	\$200		\$18,200
• Borough of Ambler	\$6,400	\$11,600	\$200		\$18,200
Total	\$734,400	\$335,600	\$119,200	\$293,000	\$1,482,200
• Borough of Ambler	\$155,900	\$74,600	\$25,700	\$63,000	\$319,200
• Wissahickon School District	\$507,500	\$228,000	\$82,500	\$202,000	\$1,020,000
• Montgomery County	\$71,000	\$33,000	\$11,000	\$28,000	\$143,001

** figures based on 2009 estimates*

tax rates and assessment procedures. This will also include revenue from the new commercial and residential development on the SEPTA lot.

The tax increment is \$1.423 million annually, including \$303,000 for the Borough of Ambler, \$983,000 for the Wissahickon School District; and \$137,000 for Montgomery County.

Impact of new housing on schools

As noted in the development programs (Table 1), there are a total of 181 new housing units proposed for the TRID Area. To determine the potential impact of school-age children on the Wissahickon School District, we developed two alternative school enrollment impact forecasts: the first based on the widely-utilized publication, *Who Lives in New Jersey Housing?* prepared by Rutgers University; the second derived

from analysis of local attendance conditions within the Wissahickon School District.

Applying the models from these sources to the TRID Area development program, we arrived at an estimated population of 359 in these 181 new housing units, with a projected increased public school enrollment of 21 children on the low side and 27 on the high side. At current local costs per student for the Wissahickon

Table 5: Ambler TRID improvements finance

Estimated TRID improvements cost	\$10,615,000
Target grant contributions: -40%	\$4,245,000
Estimated TRID contribution	\$6,370,000
Annual debt service cost	\$487,000
Estimated tax increment	\$1,423,300
TRID tax increment @ 35%	\$498,155

School District, this increased enrollment would be expected to raise school costs by \$378,000 to \$486,000 annually. These increased costs represent between 38% and 49% of the expected increase in school district revenues resulting from this proposed TRID development.

Proposed TRID improvements financing program

As noted above, the potential combined tax increment from TRID Area development is approximately \$1,423,000. The cost of required TRID improvements is estimated at \$10,615,000. The financial model for this analysis assumes that 40% of required investment is provided through state and federal grant sources and 60% is funded from TRID sources. At this 60% level, funds to support \$6.37 million of public investment for the TRID Area would need to be reserved from the tax increment. Combined with costs of issuance (closing and legal costs, etc.), this level of investment would require debt service of about \$487,000 annually for 20 years—an amount equal to approximately 35% of the anticipated tax increment, or value capture, from the development program of the TRID Area (Table 5).

There are two potential issues associated with this public investment—the

timing of the tax amortization period for the value capture, and the upfront gap in financing the public infrastructure necessary to attract desired private development. According to Tax Increment Financing (TIF) legislation, on which TRID legislation is based, a 20-year amortization period begins once construction of the project is completed. It is not clear, however, if the TRID legislation allows a local government to amend the TRID to add newly development property to the TRID over time so that the 20-year period would restart each time new development is added. This is important because construction is likely to be completed at different times for different properties in the TRID over several years.

The other public investment issue is the need for bridge financing for the local government. The collection of the value capture from the TRID will not begin until the development is complete, which could take several years. In the case of Ambler, several million dollars worth of infrastructure improvements, especially for garage construction, need to be completed prior to the generation of any tax revenues in the TRID.

Therefore, there is a need for an interim financing tool to bridge the gap between the time that the local government invests in the necessary TRID infrastructure and the point

when the local government is collecting sufficient value capture to float a bond that will pay for the infrastructure.

Value capture phasing

Having determined an approximate value capture rate of 35% for the TRID district, we can estimate the tax revenue generated over the entire TRID development period. As mentioned above, an issue critical to TRID financing is the timing of the tax amortization period for the value captured. While TRID legislation calls for a 20-year amortization period that begins once construction of the development is completed, we suggest that this period will be much longer due to the necessity of phasing the development process because of market conditions. A more likely amortization period is 25 to 30 years by the time all sites are developed. Therefore, we have estimated the TRID value capture over a period of 26 years, when we estimate the TRID tax increment will have successfully financed the development infrastructure in its entirety.

As the figure “Total estimated tax potential over life of Ambler TRID” shows, there are three primary tax yields that will be generated within the TRID as a result of the new development: current taxes being generated on all properties being developed in the TRID; the 35% value capture of the tax increment being generated by the new development to finance the public infrastructure of the project; and the remaining taxes being generated by the development that go to the Borough, school district, and County as they normally would.

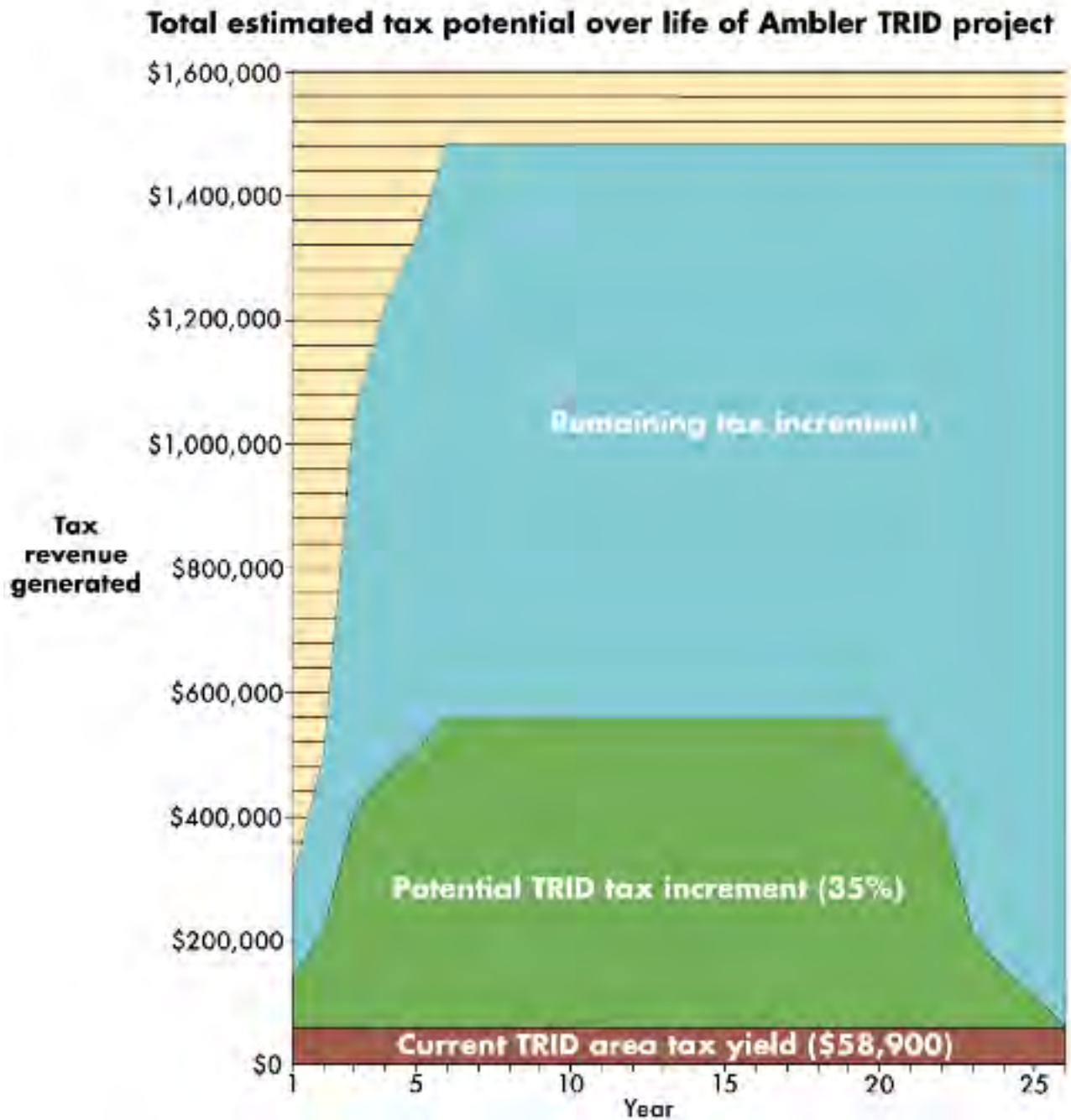
We estimate that TRID area taxes currently being generated amount to approximately \$58,900 annually (in 2009 dollars). This will continue over the 26 year amortization period. The potential tax increment and value cap-

ture from the TRID development will begin as a modest amount once phased construction commences. By about year 6, we anticipate full build-out of the TRID, causing the total tax revenue generated to cap. At the same time, the value capture from the development will peak. We estimate this peak will continue for 14 more years to about year 20, when the value cap-

ture will begin to decline. This decline will occur because increased value capture will no longer be necessary as the completed public infrastructure will continue to be paid off.

Simultaneously, the Borough, school district, and County will begin to recover more of the tax increment as the value capture decreases until

approximately year 26 when the value capture amortization period ends. At that time, the three taxing bodies will start recovering all of the taxes generated by the TRID development on an annual basis.



Next Steps

The Ambler TRID Planning Study provides an excellent opportunity for the borough to realize an even more vibrant downtown, with mixed-use transit-oriented development and a highly profitable main street commercial district. The study process to date has defined areas of underutilized and

undervalued lands that are contiguous to the commercial core and railroad station, and developed schematic designs to determine the potential for development on these parcels.

As described above, there are three phases in the process of bringing a TRID to completion. The *Planning*

Phase has been completed in Ambler. The second *Program Management Phase* has been completed in part with this report. The final *Implementation Phase* will depend on completion of required governmental actions as outlined in Phase Two.

TRID Planning Steps

Planning Phase

- Step 1 Municipality and Transit Agency agree to work cooperatively to create TRID
- Step 2 Municipality undertakes TRID Planning Study to determine location, boundaries and rationale: *Process begun July 2007 with issuance of RFP for planning study*
- Step 3 Municipality and Transit Agency conduct community public meeting(s) on planning study: *Public meetings on June 10, 2008 and July 24, 2008*
- Step 4 Planning Study is revised and completed: *January 2010*
- Step 5 Municipality and Transit Agency accept Planning Study's findings and recommendations: *October 2009*
- Step 6 Municipality forms Management Entity (e.g., an Authority) to administer TRID implementation *To be determined between Montgomery County and Ambler Borough*
- Step 7 Municipality and Transit Agency prepare project lists of Public Sector Infrastructure Improvements, including costs, phasing and maintenance: *Spring 2008*

Program Management

- Step 8 Municipality and Transit Agency coordinate with School District and County on Value Capture shares, schedule and TRID Financial Plan: *2009*
- Step 9 Municipality holds public meeting on TRID Implementation Program improvements: *October 22, 2009*
- Step 10 Municipality and Transit Agency execute Agreement on roles, responsibilities, financial commitments, management entity and defined improvements: *Non-binding resolution signed by Ambler Borough Council December 2009*
- Step 11 TRID Management Entity solicits Developer interest: *to be determined*
- Step 12 Development proposal accepted by TRID Management Entity and municipality: *to be determined*
- Step 13 TRID Management Entity executes Development Agreement with successful Developer, including Public Sector Improvements and Private Sector Financial or Project Commitments: *to be determined*

Implementation Phase

- Step 14 Project construction and completion: *to be determined*
- Step 15 TRID Management Entity administers Value Capture revenues and expenditures in accordance with approved Implementation Program: *to be determined*
- Step 16 Amendments to Agreement or TRID Plan, as required: *to be determined*

This planning process has completed steps 1 through 10 with a non-binding resolution agreeing in principle to a value capture percentage signed by Ambler Borough. This resolution is pending approval by the Wissahickon School District.

Where do we go from here?

Community involvement

Key to the success of Ambler's TRID is ongoing community interaction and involvement in the process through public meetings to increase awareness about the TRID and the potential development options. The public and Borough Council meetings specifically on the TRID have offered an opportunity for members of the community to be part of the process as it moves forward; this practice should continue.

Advocacy

Municipal leaders, community members, SEPTA, state legislators and Montgomery County need to work together to shape a more detailed vision of the future for Ambler as new ordinances and development plans are formalized.

Tasks to be completed

- The Borough and the School District need to accept the plan as complete and forward it off to Montgomery County as a Final Report with the recommendation that both the County and ultimately SEPTA accept the report. *On-going.*
- Continue public meetings concerning the TRID enabling ordinance to define the types of future development that are proposed: *On-going.*
- Write the TRID ordinance and modify the existing planning documents that must support the TRID ordinance: *Fall/Winter 2012.*
- Define the public entity that will become responsible for coordinating the land and development arrangements: *2013.*
- Define what public entity will be responsible for ongoing financial oversight and physical improvement oversight prior to the TRID management agency executing a development agreement: *2013.*
- Seek developer interest: *Ongoing.*
- Community interaction with developer/s: *Schedule to be determined.*
- Ambler Borough Council accepts the land development program submitted by the developer, including all required public commitments and agreements/easements.
- Development completion.
- Value capture oversight.

With a sustained effort by all parties, Ambler's TRID could become a reality in three years.