

I. INTRODUCTION



Source: Center for Historic Architecture & Design

1.1 OVERVIEW

The 2002 New Castle County Comprehensive Development Plan Update identified the need for redevelopment of existing properties, particularly in the many unique unincorporated communities in New Castle County. In response to this identified issue, New Castle County has adopted both a redevelopment ordinance and most recently a Hometown Overlay District enabling ordinance. Both ordinances establish a process in which the redevelopment of existing properties can be more easily achieved by altering land development requirements and the approval process. Hometown Overlay designation allows UDC requirements to be modified to adjust density, landscaping buffers or open space area, parking, building and paving setbacks, building heights and sign standards to ensure that proposed development/redevelopment will conform to the goals and objectives of the Community Redevelopment Plan and/or Design Guidelines manual. The standards established by this Community Redevelopment Plan/Design Guidelines manual that conflict or contradict those of the UDC shall supersede those identified and determined by the Department during plan review.

The Claymont Community Redevelopment Plan and Manual of Design Guidelines have been prepared by Thomas Comitta Associates, Inc., Town Planners and Landscape Architects and the New Castle County Department of Land Use in cooperation with the Claymont Renaissance, a cooperative effort between the Claymont Coalition, Claymont Business Owners Association and the Claymont Historical Society. The Community Redevelopment Plan presents existing conditions, analysis, maps, land use, transportation, public services, urban design and marketing. It introduces a series of goals for revitalizing the Claymont Community.

The *Claymont Community Redevelopment Plan* was developed with significant community involvement and citizen input. Numerous public workshops were held with the Claymont Renaissance. This Plan is the response to that visioning and planning process. The Plan represents a consensus of ideas and opinions from the participants for the future of Claymont.

1.2 VISION

The Claymont community aspires to create a viable town center, as well as overall streetscape improvements along the Philadelphia Pike.

A pedestrian-oriented place is envisioned, where people can live, work, shop, learn, recreate and worship in a small town environment.

A compact, mixed-use, walkable town center is viewed as a critical component to the enhanced connection and enjoyment of civic assets (a post office, 4 schools, 3 churches, a library, a community center and a train station).

By 2013, the Claymont community sees itself as having an attractive and desirable downtown where you can take your family in a traditional neighborhood setting.

1.3 GOALS

- **Revitalize Claymont Center and create a destination with restaurants, cafes, specialty shops and stores. Promote an ambiance that is conducive to dining, shopping, and strolling.**
- **Beautify the Philadelphia Pike to create an attractive and pedestrian-friendly streetscape with sidewalks, street trees, street lamps, street art, benches and planters.**
- **Induce revitalization through economic development. Promote business recruitment and retention. Improve the marketing of Claymont as New Castle County's newest downtown.**
- **Maintain and enhance interconnected transportation networks with: public transportation; attractive bus shelters; a new community circulator; enhanced vehicular greenways; bike lanes and pedestrian linkages.**
- **Maintain and improve pedestrian circulation with existing and expanded/improved sidewalk system, safe crosswalks, and adequate lighting.**
- **Enhance the neighborhood character of Claymont; focus on property maintenance; upgraded appearance of historic areas; the addition of attractive signage to promote neighborhood pride.**
- **Coordinate efficient and effective use of governmental and non-governmental resources at all levels to stimulate economic activity.**

- **Provide attractive, affordable and diverse housing to complement the revitalization of Claymont while promoting an increase in homeownership opportunities.**
- **Protect, preserve, rehabilitate and enhance historic resources and promote the history of Claymont as a revitalization tool.**

1.4 PURPOSE AND DEFINITION

The Hometown Overlay District and Community Redevelopment Plan are intended to perpetuate and enhance the character of early settlement areas, hamlets, villages, and pre-World War II subdivisions. Many of these communities have unique characteristics that do not conform to modern zoning standards, but still possess qualities making them viable and attractive places to live and work. The purpose of the overlay district is to ensure that infill, redevelopment, and changes to the zoning pattern are compatible with the existing community. Each district will require its own community redevelopment plan that may address such issues as land use, dimensional characteristics, protected resources, and amenities, and other features, as appropriate. Future development will conform to the established character of the community as defined in the redevelopment plan instead of adhering strictly to modern zoning standards.

Hometown Overlay Districts will perpetuate and enhance the character of these communities built before the creation of zoning and land development codes. The creation of the overlay districts is intended to foster investment and redevelopment in these communities by preventing the need for variances in order to maintain existing patterns and characteristics, and to prevent the lack of harmony that results from strict adherence to existing zoning standards. Nearly three centuries of development were already in place when the first zoning code was established in 1954. The zoning code and amendments created standards for new development, but failed to recognize the unique qualities of existing communities and how they would evolve. The diversity of our older communities includes settlements that grew around mill seats, ports, railroad stations, crossroads, agricultural trading centers, trolley lines, and adjoining cities. Many are designed with street systems, lot sizes, dimensional relationships, and patterns of use that do not conform to existing zoning districts, yet are viable, attractive communities that offer an alternative to modern development. The urban style density, setbacks, and mixed uses in some older communities are not permitted in the standard zoning districts. A community redevelopment plan for each overlay district will define unique characteristics that infill projects and redevelopment will perpetuate.

1.5 LEGAL BASIS

Delaware's Quality of Life Act (9 Del. C. §2651 et seq.), requires all counties to prepare and adopt a comprehensive development plan and to update it every five years. New Castle County most recently updated its Comprehensive Plan in March 2002, and considers the updates to the overall comprehensive plan a very important tool to use in measuring its accomplishments and re-examining its goals and objectives. In addition to this planning process, the County Administration has realized that a number of older, traditional settlements within the County desired and would greatly benefit from a more specific level of planning. To address this, the County Executive established the Community Planning Program. This initiative assigns community planners to designated communities, to address those planning issues specific to that community – issues that may not be appropriate on a county-wide level, but are critical to the continuing success of that particular community.

Hometown Overlay zoning districts (HT) shall be established by New Castle County Council and encompass the boundaries of communities and neighborhoods that will be subject to a modification of dimensional standards as set forth herein and by an approved community redevelopment plan. Adoption of a Hometown Overlay shall amend the Comprehensive Development Plan to be consistent therewith. Hometown Overlay rezonings shall be processed in accordance with the tri-annual hearing process in Section 40.31.111 of the New Castle County Unified Development Code.

The description and identification of these communities shall be through civic initiative and public input to determine the unique qualities, landscapes, land use, development pattern, amenities, road network and transit facilities, community uses, public spaces and other assets that define and characterize that community. The delineation of a community shall not be comprised of only one land use type. Communities are composed of a variety of uses that include residential, commercial, employment, recreation and institutional uses. While not all communities have each of these categories, all communities do exhibit a variety of land uses that together, contribute to the identity and function of the community.

Only properties with land development applications submitted to the Department shall comply with the Community Redevelopment Plan and Design Guidelines.

1.6 COMMUNITY PLANNING PROCESS

In 2002, the New Castle County Executive initiated a Community Planning Program within the Land Use

Department. One aspect of this program is to work with communities to prepare small area plans that will build on the foundation provided in the County's comprehensive plan. Community redevelopment plans can take the planning process a step farther to identify the unique characteristics of distinct communities within the County.

The purpose of this planning effort was to formulate a community vision for the future of Claymont, and draft a plan that defines the goals and objectives of the community, and identifies the actions necessary to achieve them.

After a successful Visioning Component with the Claymont Community, Design Workshops were held to shape a plan for a revitalized Claymont Center. In addition, a Streetscape Plan for Philadelphia Pike has emerged to focus on the enhancement and beautification of the artery connecting Wilmington to Philadelphia.

The strengths of the community in terms of location, rail access, highway access, and a gateway location, bode well for redevelopment attractiveness. These elements will provide the basis for continued success of beautiful downtown Claymont.

1.7 GENERAL FORMAT

The *Claymont Community Redevelopment Plan* is organized into six chapters covering all required and optional elements. These chapters cover each of the elements in the following manner.

- Chapter I, Introduction
- Chapter II, Claymont Hometown Overlay District
- Chapter III, Land Use & Community Design
- Chapter IV, Sustainable Growth
- Chapter V, Summary