

II. HOMETOWN OVERLAY DISTRICT



2.1 INTRODUCTION

Located on the Delaware River in Northeastern Brandywine Hundred, the unincorporated “town” of Claymont is both a unique and historic community. Claymont sits on the ridge line between the flat, rich coastal floodplain of the Delaware River and the rocky upland piedmont area of northwestern New Castle County, long making it an important transportation corridor area. From its days as a agricultural river town, to a colonial stop over along the King’s Highway, a suburban stop along the trolley line extension, to now being located at the confluence of two major interstates, two local highways and a commuter rail line, Claymont has always been able to provide the key component to successful real estate investment, “location, location, location.”

The area has seen development from the early 19th Century, as primarily an agricultural landscape, to mid 19th and early 20th Centuries when it served as a resort area for wealthy Philadelphia families when substantial “summer estates” dominated the landscape. Finally, from the early 20th Century until present day Claymont became a suburban/industrial working community with growth spurred by the street car and later the automobile.



Source: Wilmington News Journal

Today, Claymont still functions very much like a small town with a very strong underlying community fabric. The area generally considered to be Claymont encompasses the entire 19703 zip code as shown on Map #1. The total land area of the community is 4.2 square miles or 2,690 acres. The 2000 US Census recorded a population of 18,283 comprising 7,735 households within the Claymont area.

Despite the very real problems encountered by the community, a number of opportunities have presented themselves that create potential for revitalization. There are projects, both public and private, such as the Transportation Improvement Plan for the Philadelphia Pike, initiated by the Claymont Renaissance, funded through the Federal government and strongly supported by the Delaware Department of Transportation.

Private investments include improvements to the Waterfall Banquet Center and the Fish-o-Rama building. Redevelopment projects for a Dunkin’ Donuts, Wawa, McDonald’s and Stockdale are also proposed on the Philadelphia Pike. Business owners, residents, and local groups are enthusiastic and optimistic about improving not only the Philadelphia Pike and Claymont Center, but the entire community.

Clearly, one of the reasons for preparing this Community Redevelopment Plan is to encourage the physical rehabilitation of the Philadelphia Pike, Claymont Center and surrounding neighborhoods. The more important purposes of the plan are to address and provide solutions to problems that have deteriorated the spirit of this strong community and to capitalize on the many opportunities and resources that are presented by the community itself.

2.2 CLAYMONT HOMETOWN OVERLAY DISTRICT

The Claymont Hometown Overlay Zoning District is intended to foster redevelopment primarily along the Philadelphia Pike and to enhance and preserve Claymont’s existing historic neighborhoods. It encourages the development of compact, mixed use (both horizontally and vertically) urban buildings that compliment the historic development patterns of surrounding neighborhoods with support by existing and planned transportation networks, both automobile and pedestrian.

As shown on Map #2, Claymont Hometown Overlay Zoning District consists of 396 acres of land zoned for commercial, office and residential zoning designation. The underlying zoning districts include: 45 acres of Commercial Neighborhood, 32 acres of Commercial Regional, 5 acres of Office Neighborhood, 209 acres of various Neighborhood Conservation districts (both single and multi-family) and 108 acres of Suburban land.

The Claymont Hometown Overlay Zoning District is defined by three distinct character zones: Claymont Center, the Neighborhood Transition, and the Edge. (See Map #3.)



Source: Claymont Historical Society

Claymont Center which will serve as the core of district is clearly defined and consists of the most intense urban buildings with respect to both massing and use. Claymont Center will serve as the center of pedestrian activity for the overlay district. Most retail and restaurant uses should be physically concentrated in the Claymont Center to provide a critical mass of shopping and pedestrian activities that identifies it as a destination.

The Neighborhood Transition Area along the Philadelphia Pike, due to its proximity to Claymont Center, is the ideal location for medium to high density (where appropriate) development. Redevelopment of existing residential neighborhood areas within the overlay area will be

consistent with the established land use patterns of those communities. The Neighborhood Transition Area provides the gateways to Claymont Center and serves as a transition from the intensity of Claymont Center to its surroundings. Development in the Neighborhood Transition Area will be supported by Claymont Center and vice-versa along a network of well-connected, pedestrian-scaled streets. The size of the Neighborhood Transition Area is largely a function of its distance from Claymont Center.

The Claymont Hometown Overlay Zoning District Edge Area is comprised of predominately low to medium density development. It is connected to Claymont Center via the Neighborhood Transition Area by vehicular transportation systems. The progression from Claymont Center to the Edge is accomplished through the design of the public realm of the street as well as through appropriate massing, scale, and architectural design of the buildings. The Edge Area will be designated for mostly medium to low density development in commercial areas and traditional suburban development in residential areas.

2.3 CLAYMONT CENTER

The primary purpose of identifying a “town center” in Claymont is to encourage development and redevelopment that is typical of traditional downtown development. A traditional downtown has the following characteristics:

- *contiguous street wall with buildings placed adjacent to the street & sidewalk;*
- *building facades with large display windows;*
- *on-street parking or off-street parking to the rear of buildings;*
- *mixed use development, such as residences or offices over businesses;*
- *a multi-modal transportation system;*
- *compatibility or consistency of the architecture in the area;*
- *public seating areas with amenities; and,*
- *public gathering areas.*

Some of the current issues of existing commercial developments in Claymont Center are:

- *no continuity of building facades due to regulations (building setbacks from side property lines)*
- *existing parking located in front of building that disturbs the street wall and conflicts with the sidewalk/pedestrian;*
- *lack of identity to the area (no common theme)*
- *limited opportunities for around-the-clock activity*

- *minimal pedestrian activity*
- *limited public areas*

This plan will provide the basis for modifying the existing requirements for building density, setbacks, off-street parking location, landscaping and architectural compatibility. In traditional “town centers”, buildings located along main streets are typically two-story and are permitted within one-foot setback from the front property line, bringing them closer to the street and establishing a comfortable pedestrian realm. Parking requirements are generally one-half the number required by development codes as additional parking spaces (both on street and off-street) are typically located within walking distance of each business. Traditional “town centers” also contain a mix of uses such as residences situated adjacent to businesses, and special uses such as bed and breakfast establishments. These activities would encourage more street activity during evening hours and would support restaurant and entertainment establishments.

The Idealized Build-out Plan for Philadelphia Pike within Claymont Center as shown on Map #4 identifies how these issues will be addressed and details a total of 54,400 square feet of new building program shown in red

These properties are also intended to comply with the Manual of Written and Graphic Design Guidelines, a companion document to this Plan.

The Idealized Buildout Plan for Claymont Center depicts a careful redesign of the area along Philadelphia Pike from the Route 495 right-of-way to Governor Printz Boulevard. The Plan depicts:

- *a proposed roadway with bike lane;*
- *curb bulb-outs and sidewalks;*
- *new context sensitive infill buildings;*
- *new street trees; and*
- *two new alleys – Claymont Alley and Adams Alley.*

The Idealized Build-out Plan for Claymont Center includes a detail entitled “Typical Streetscape Dimensions”. The inset detail depicts the enlargement of the Manor Avenue intersection with Philadelphia Pike and indicates where crosswalks are proposed, along with the proposed re-pavement/re-line striping of Philadelphia Pike for 11 foot wide travel lanes, 4 foot wide bike lanes, and 7 foot wide on-street parking bays.



Source: Thomas Comitta

Another notable aspect of the Claymont Center plan relates to off-street parking for the new buildings, located to their sides or rears. The concept is to place the buildings close to the sidewalks to restore the hometown fabric to Claymont Center, and to better invite store and shop use by pedestrians. These concepts are presented in detail in the Manual of Written and Graphic Design Guidelines, a separate companion document to this Plan.

2.4 NEIGHBORHOOD TRANSITION

In most traditional towns, building densities and heights are typically greatest in central business districts or along main streets and transition to lower densities and heights outward to the boundary of the district. In general, densities will be highest within Claymont Center, transitioning to lower densities moving outwards from Claymont Center to the Edge along a transect.



Source: Center for Historic Architecture & Design

Within the identified transition areas of the Claymont Hometown Overlay district, commercially zoned properties shall provide an opportunity for mixed-use buildings that are pedestrian-friendly as an appropriate transition along street frontages from Claymont Center to the surrounding neighborhoods. Residential uses shall continue and redevelopment of these properties shall be in conformance with the existing setbacks, size and scale of the neighborhood. Architectural detailing shall look not to replicate those styles and materials that exist, but provide compatibility and compliment them in an effort to perpetuate the established character of the area.

2.5 EDGE

Buildings at the Edge should be comparable in height and massing to the adjacent and nearby properties as well as the surrounding neighborhood. The Edge is typically comprised of predominately low to medium density

development. It is seamlessly connected to Claymont Center via the Neighborhood Transition area by vehicular transportation systems. The progression from Claymont Center to Edge shall be accomplished through the proper design of the public realm of the street as well as through appropriate massing, scale, and architectural design of the buildings.

2.6 PHILADELPHIA PIKE

Most traditional towns typically contain a main corridor area or “main street” on which they developed and grew. This corridor typically provides a transect of the community that helps to define its character zones (i.e. Claymont Center, Neighborhood Transition and Edge) forming the physical setting of place. The Philadelphia Pike serves as Claymont’s “main street” and provides the basis for varying the types of future development along this transect as defined by its character zones.



Source: Thomas Comitta

Philadelphia Pike currently presents a rather “rough” appearance, with asphalt and concrete predominating. In many, cases, vehicles are forced to park in front of businesses, obscuring the display windows and store entrances. Vehicles are often forced to drive over sidewalks to reach parking spaces. There is little sense of human scale or of a comfortable experience for the pedestrian shopper. These conditions have contributed to the shift of retail space from traditional shops and restaurants to gas stations, dollar stores and fast food establishments. As a result, the community and potential outside shoppers have been forced to frequent other commercial areas for casual dining and specialty shopping. To relieve these conditions, a variety of streetscape improvements have been identified by both the community and the Delaware Department of Transportation in an integrated context sensitive design.

The Claymont Transportation Plan consists of the development of the transportation component by the Delaware Department of Transportation (DelDOT) of the Master Plan for the Claymont Community. Through a series of committee meetings and public workshops, and in consultation with Thomas Comitta Associates, Inc., the community has identified improvements to be made along the Philadelphia Pike.

Three areas have been identified for different levels of focus in the Transportation Plan. They have decided to approach the corridor improvements in three steps:

- *From Darley Road to Seminole Avenue - This is planned as the village center and the first area of focus. Plans should focus on roadway and streetscape improvements to support the planned land use changes. The improvements in this section could include roadway, streetscaping and land use changes.*
- *From Seminole Avenue to Commonwealth Avenue - This is the second focus area, intended to be a transition area to the village center. Roadway and streetscaping improvements should be proposed*
- *From Commonwealth Avenue to Perkins Run - This is the third focus area, with planned improvements limited to roadway section changes and streetscaping.*

The Transportation Plan will generally involve transportation planning necessary to support the proposed Master Plan improvements and to identify other transportation system improvements that could enhance the Master Plan vision.

Although separate from this plan, the Philadelphia Pike Transportation Plan as shown on Map #6 along with the Idealized Build-out Plan shown on Map #5 will improve the appearance of the street and help jump-start private investments to revitalize the area. Figure #1 depicts proposed street cross-sections identified in the Claymont Transportation Plan.

The Idealized Build-out Plan for Philadelphia Pike depicts:

- *proposed buildings;*
- *proposed monuments/public art;*
- *benches and trash receptacles;*
- *the enhancement of existing sidewalks;*
- *proposed street trees;*
- *proposed crosswalks;*
- *limited curb cuts and vehicular interconnections along the corridor;*
- *alleys for access to parking, utilities, service and loading areas;; and*
- *transit stops at key nodes with easy access to the surrounding streets.*