



THOMAS COMITTA ASSOCIATES, INC.
Town Planners & Landscape Architects

**DENSITY METRICS IN ZONING ORDINANCES
AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR EASTTOWN TOWNSHIP**

February 24, 2020

i. Introduction

This Narrative focuses on several important considerations pertaining to specifying density thresholds in Devon Center.

Please note the background information described in this Narrative relative to 8 topics, including:

1. Overview;
2. Alternatives to Prescribing Density;
3. Reasons to Prescribe Density;
4. Examples of Graduated Scale Density Provisions;
5. Berwyn Village Example and its Relationship to Devon Center;
6. Development Strategy Plan Technique;
7. A Continuum of Densities in Easttown Township and Beyond; and
8. An 80 Year Density Trend in Southeast Pennsylvania (1940 to 2020).

Hopefully, this information will assist Easttown Township with the creation of sub-districts for Devon Center, and the prescription of maximum gross densities for each sub-district.

Please let us know if there are any questions.



THOMAS COMITTA ASSOCIATES, INC.
Town Planners & Landscape Architects

DENSITY METRICS IN ZONING ORDINANCES AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR EASTTOWN TOWNSHIP

February 24, 2020

1. Overview

Most Zoning Ordinances of Pennsylvania Municipalities, especially suburban Townships, include metrics pertaining to Density. Most Ordinances recite a maximum gross density, and some ordinances recite a maximum net density. This has been the typical practice since the 1940s.

Many suburban Boroughs and small Cities also prescribe Density limits. However, some more urban municipalities use other standards to determine development thresholds.

Examples of recited Densities range from 6 to 8 dwelling units per acre in perimeter neighborhoods of Boroughs and unincorporated Villages, 8 to 18 dwelling units per acre in neighborhoods adjoining small downtowns, 18 to 24 dwelling units per acre in small downtowns, and up to 40 dwelling units per acre in the redevelopment of places such as office parks, shopping malls, and industrial sites.

When deck parking structures are included, residential densities typically range from 40 to 100 dwelling units per acre more in urbanized areas. For example, in Pittsburgh, the Carson Street Commons Apartments has 40 dwelling units per acre in 3 and 4 story buildings with deck parking. At the Village at Valley Forge in King of Prussia, there are 100 dwelling units per acre in 5 and 6 story buildings with deck parking.

2. Alternatives to Prescribing Density

Some medium to large size cities use FAR: Floor Area Ratio, instead of Density because development projects are often vertical mixed use buildings, all office buildings, or all apartment buildings. The FAR method relies upon limits to building height and lot coverage/impervious surface coverage.

Some more urban Boroughs, and small to large size Cities use a combination of: maximum building height; maximum impervious surface coverage; and required parking spaces, in order to govern the ultimate density of dwelling units, without prescribing an FAR.

We believe that problems could occur by not explicitly prescribing density, because these alternative techniques could result in much higher densities than what is normative in a particular place or neighborhood. One specific problem pertains to Variance requests as described below.

3. Reasons to Prescribe Density

Often, a Density metric provides a level of certainty and predictability. Relative to certainty, Developers like to know “upfront” what their possible yield of dwelling units might be. With this certainty, Developers can more effectively evaluate the estimated costs and revenues associated with a particular project. Further, when Density metrics are recited in the Ordinances, Municipalities gain certainty of potential outcomes.

Relative to predictability, Municipalities often want to know about Density, in order to evaluate trip generation (traffic), parking requirements, land use compatibility with adjoining neighborhoods, and overall impact on streets, infrastructure, and neighborhood character. The character of a suburban neighborhood could be adversely impacted if there is an abnormal “spike” in density.



THOMAS COMITTA ASSOCIATES, INC.
Town Planners & Landscape Architects

DENSITY METRICS IN ZONING ORDINANCES AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR EASTTOWN TOWNSHIP

February 24, 2020

4. Examples of Graduated Scale Density Provisions

Some Municipalities use a Base Density, and include opportunities to increase Density based upon provisions for value-added features. Some municipalities are considering a Base Density of 20 dwelling units per acre, and several “Green Point” options to achieve 35 dwelling units per acre, with required deck parking.

Upper Dublin Township, Montgomery County, adopted the GFW-Greater Fort Washington (GFW) District Ordinance Amendment in 2019. The GFW District permits 40 dwelling units per acre for multi-family development. Upper Dublin also allows an increase in density up to 50 dwelling units per acre, based on the achievement of certain value-added outcomes, with required deck parking. However, in a recent “test” of density yield on a tract in the GFW District in Upper Dublin Township, with a maximum height limit of 4 stories, only 9 du/ac to 18 du/ac could be achieved using surface parking due to site constraints.

5. Berwyn Village Example and Its Relationship to Devon Center

The maximum gross residential density for multi-family dwellings in Berwyn Village was previously eight (8) dwelling units per acre. That provision was replaced in favor of utilizing building height, impervious coverage, and parking metrics to govern the maximum density.

However, the 4-story Berwyn Village project was originally proposed to include 120 apartment units on 2.3 gross acres. This resulted in 52 dwelling units per acre (or 6.5 times the previously recited density). The 52 dwelling units per acre was shocking to many, since the base density was previously 8 dwelling units per acre.

In order to avoid the same shocking effect that occurred in Berwyn Village, we believe that the Zoning Ordinance Amendments for Devon Center should provide clarity and certainty. Otherwise, when an Applicant applies for a Variance, the Zoning Hearing Board has no idea of the net affect of the Variance. In other words, it is relatively straightforward to think about a Variance that involves adding one (1) story of height. However, in contrast, what is not clear if there is no density metric is the “spike” in density from 34 dwelling units per acre to 52 dwelling units per acre in Berwyn when adding one (1) story of height.

6. Development Strategy Plan Technique

The land use characteristics in Devon Center range from higher intensity uses at the Train Station, to lower intensity uses south of Berkley Road. Therefore, if the density metrics in Devon Center were established and calibrated to “place-specific” locations, it would be possible to prescribe density thresholds depending upon the character of the place to be developed or redeveloped. Densities could be the highest at and adjoining the Train Station, then grade down to a greater density north of Route 30, and a medium/lesser density between Route 30 and Berkley Road.

A Development Strategy Plan could depict the preferred outcomes, illustrating building envelopes and related parking areas. These features could be assigned certain densities or intensities. In essence, a Zoning Map Amendment could be prepared to depict sub-districts within the Devon Center District so

**DENSITY METRICS IN ZONING ORDINANCES
AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR EASTTOWN TOWNSHIP**

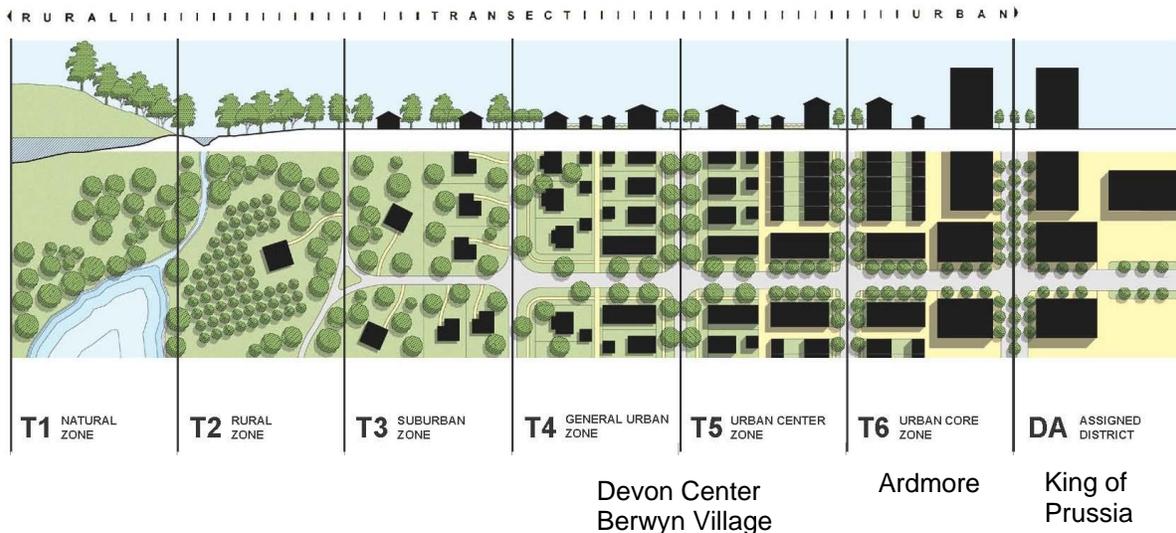
February 24, 2020

that it would not be “one size fits all” outcome. Instead, a maximum gross density of dwelling units per acre could be established for each sub-district.

This technique of prescribing a density would add certainty to the outcomes, and eliminate future surprises. Unlike Cities and Boroughs, Devon Center is in a suburban setting. Even the Chestnut Hill section of Philadelphia where there are two (2) Train Stations, the density does not exceed 18 dwelling units per acre with surface parking.

7. A Continuum of Densities in Easttown Township and Beyond

Imagine a “Density Transect” for Easttown Township and the nearby communities.



In the outlying areas of Easttown Township, imagine a normative average lot size of 4 to 5 acres for one dwelling in the T1 and T2 areas. In contrast, in Devon Center, imagine as part of a density range of up to 8 to 12 dwelling units per acre in the T4 and T5 areas. In between, imagine as part of the Transect shown above, 2 acre lots, 1 acre lots, half acre lots, quarter acre lots, and eighth acre lots in the T3 and T4 areas.

This Transect of densities in the T2, T3, and T4 areas has been embedded in the Zoning Ordinance of Easttown Township for the past 60+ years. More recently, however, it appears that Easttown Township has been focusing on introducing a T5 type area. However, the contemplated changes have been more like a T6 area which is more appropriate in a place like Ardmore.

Thinking about Devon Center as part of the T4 and T5 area could help to create the sub-districts described above under Section 6.



THOMAS COMITTA ASSOCIATES, INC.
Town Planners & Landscape Architects

**DENSITY METRICS IN ZONING ORDINANCES
AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR EASTTOWN TOWNSHIP**

February 24, 2020

**8. An 80-Year Density Trend in Southeast Pennsylvania (1940 to 2020)
(with surface parking)**

As “food for thought”, please consider the location and character of Places and sub-districts when prescribing density metrics.

Up to 6 DU's/Acre

- Typical Density of “First Ring Suburbs”
- Lot Area equivalent of 7,260 SF per dwelling unit

6 to 8 DU's/Acre

- Typical PRD Gross Density in suburban communities
- Greenfield TND Gross Density in range from 6.5 to 8.5 du's/acre
- Lot Area equivalent of 5,445 SF per dwelling unit

8 to 18 DU's/Acre

- Density in “middle” neighborhoods in Boroughs and Unincorporated Villages
- Lot Area equivalent of 2,420 SF per dwelling unit

18 to 24 DU's/Acre

- Townhome and Rowhome Gross Density
- Lot Area equivalent of 1,815 SF per dwelling unit

24 to 40 DU's/Acre

- Multifamily/Apartment Gross Density in urban areas
- Lot Area equivalent of 1,089 SF per dwelling unit