



Chapter 9

Economic Assets

The process of evaluating a community's economic development potential includes taking account of its existing strengths and identifying opportunities for business growth and expansion potential. As highlighted in previous chapters, Springfield has many assets that have made it a strong and stable community for many decades. Some of those strengths are attributable to its geographic location in the Philadelphia metropolitan region with good access to major highways and public transportation, community services, and proximity to colleges and universities offering a wide variety of educational opportunities.

In Springfield, residents enjoy a high-quality of life; a range of well-built housing; safe neighborhoods; a variety of public, private, parochial schools; active civic organizations; nearby recreation amenities, regional parks and trails; and proximity to large retail hubs and employment centers. The municipality maintains fiscally sound practices and management. Its skilled labor force has above average educational attainment and income levels. It also has strong institutions that provide a variety of services and local employment.



Flourtown Shopping Center

Economic Development

Economic development is primarily a function of the private sector to provide services, produce goods and retail commodities, or conducts activities for financial gain. The public sector promotes and encourages business growth through its decision making process and by developing programs that impact positively on the local and regional economy. A municipality's role in Economic Development can be wide-ranging and include a variety of initiatives. Beyond being welcoming to private business, the Township can encourage private business development that provides needed services and employment to the residents.

Among the economic development tools employed by Springfield is improvement in the design of the streetscape in its established business districts. The Township has been successful at attracting both federal and state funding to support physical improvements in the business districts that include period lighting, street trees, sidewalk replacement,

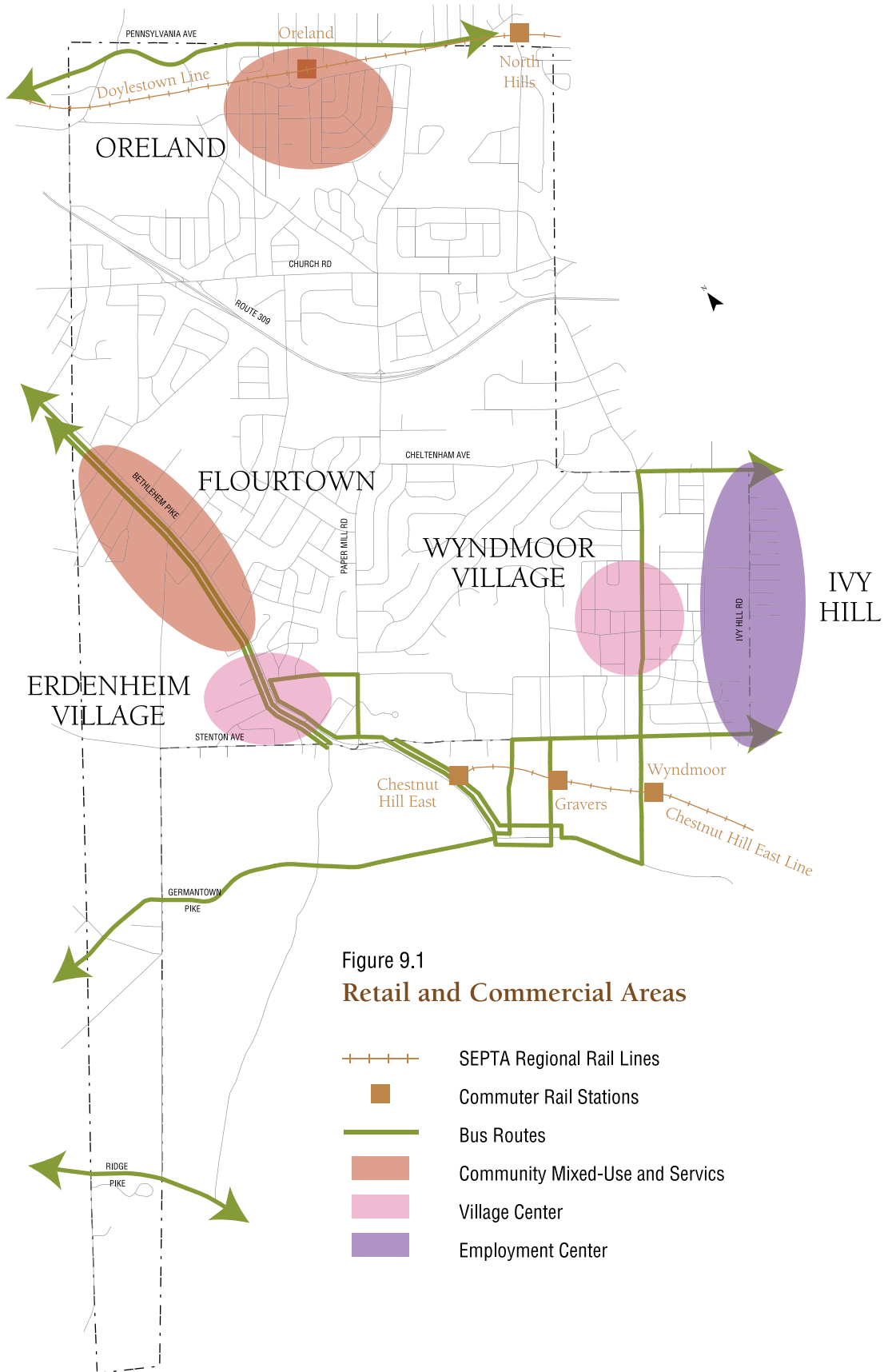


Figure 9.1
Retail and Commercial Areas

- SEPTA Regional Rail Lines
- Commuter Rail Stations
- Bus Routes
- Community Mixed-Use and Services
- Village Center
- Employment Center

decorative crosswalks, and pedestrian benches near transit stops. This effort needs to be expanded to include promotion of consolidated parking opportunities as well as changes to zoning codes that encourages pedestrian accessibility within business districts.

Early in Springfield Township's development mixed use commercial and retail centers grew organically adjacent to neighborhoods that serve local residents. Many of the local districts have redeveloped over time to accommodate automobile access rather than pedestrian access. This often results in uncoordinated lot development accommodating curb cuts and removing sidewalks, limiting pedestrian access, reducing walkability and preventing traffic flow. Rather than encouraging business development, excessive traffic and poor pedestrian access has changed consumer shopping patterns.

Most of the land in Springfield is fully developed leaving little room for new development without lot consolidation and redevelopment. This presents both challenges and opportunities to the Township. Because of limited availability and the cost of land acquisition it may be difficult to attract developers with the resources to revitalize older retail establishments. Encouraging economic development through zoning code revisions will enable retail access and mixed-use development, with both shared driveways and parking.

Flourtown-Erdenheim

The historic Bethlehem Pike corridor was the focus of the Flourtown-Erdenheim Vision Plan, adopted by Springfield Township in 2006. The plan envisioned physical improvements to the business district streetscape and proposed

architectural design concepts to visually unify existing and future commercial properties. The plan also proposed economic development strategies and transportation improvements including enhancements for pedestrian safety, traffic calming and parking improvements. A follow-up study, the "Bethlehem Pike Corridor Study," dealt with the operation and flow of traffic, but did not address land use or economic development incentives. In addition to these studies, a Village Center Zoning District concept was introduced. The proposed Village Center



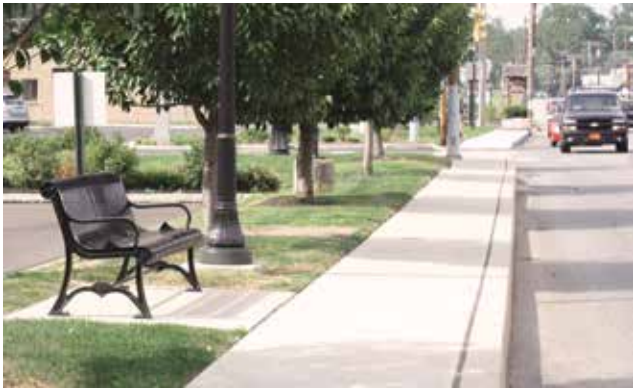
District could contain provisions that encourage economic development through flexible standards. Such zoning provisions would provide density bonuses for historic preservation, shared parking, transit amenities, as well as reduce curb cuts and provide for architectural and design standards.

The 2008 Bethlehem Pike Streetscape Master Plan advanced the ideas of the Vision Plan by proposing a “blueprint” of consistent elements, materials, colors, and design features to “help create a pedestrian oriented main street atmosphere, improve pedestrian safety, and enhance commercial activities.” Subsequently, sidewalk reconstruction, enhanced crosswalks, pedestrian oriented street lighting, ornamental signal poles and street trees were installed in the Flourtown and Erdenheim Village areas. Some of the same strategies are being tried at a in the Oreland and Wyndmoor Village business districts.

The continuing strength of the township’s economy will depend on retaining existing businesses, helping these businesses to prosper and expand, and by attracting new businesses. Enhanced communications among business, government and the public; supporting business expansion opportunities; and sustaining a balanced tax environment all creates a good business environment which in turn provide jobs, income and tax revenue for the municipality.

Any actions that local, county or state entities can make to invigorate a weak or languishing business district or corridor is important but without private investments growth and improvement can be slow. While the township has benefited from new public investment in recent years for streetscape and pedestrian amenities, private investment has also contributed through new construction of retail shops, redeveloped shopping centers and expanded financial services. To maintain and grow the benefit of these public and private investments, the township should consider focusing on four important approaches:

1. Revise zoning and building codes to be flexible enough to support new private investment, include built-in density incentives to encourage adaptive reuse of existing buildings, and require good community design that supports the existing character and vision plan for the district.
2. A coordinated parking and wayfinding signage program that encourages pedestrian access.



Streetscape Enhancements in Flourtown and Oreland

3. Coordinated local events and promotions that promote businesses, services and retailers as well as the business districts.
4. Work with county and state government officials to improve economic development opportunities that benefit the Township.

All of these actions could be achieved through coordinated efforts of municipal staff, local officials and boards, businesses, residents, and the public with the assistance of a skilled and capable business development coordinator. This staff person would work with both landlords and tenants to help identify appropriate uses and encourage the right mix of retail and commercial in each district. In addition, someone skilled in retail recruitment could assist in bringing appropriate retailers and service providers to the attention of the landlords.

Commercial/Retail Goal

Encourage economic vitality while meeting the current and future commercial and retail needs of the residents of the township. Preserve, protect and enhance existing commercial areas in the township. Limit the amount of new commercial and retail development outside of established areas.

Office Goal

Encourage office development in appropriately zoned districts which would enhance the tax base supporting the township. By targeting expanding industries and focusing on existing regional trends such as health care, senior services, financial services and education, the Township can benefit from an increased tax base and provide employment opportunities for residents of the township. Providing high-quality office space that meets the needs of a variety of users and is located in close proximity to existing infrastructure will provide needed modern facilities.

Industrial/Light Manufacturing Goal

Encourage industrial development in established and appropriately zoned districts that enhances the Township's tax base and provides additional employment opportunities for residents of the township. Encourage new light industrial, light manufacturing and research lab uses in designated areas and promote clean and environmentally friendly industrial/light manufacturing uses.

Commercial District Revitalization and Economic Development Goals

Providing for a strong, diverse commercial base within the established development pattern of the commercial districts in the township will help to conserve, maintain and strengthen the streetscape character of the Bethlehem Pike corridor in Flourtown-Erdenheim, the Willow Grove Avenue business corridor in Wyndmoor and the Oreland Commercial Village. Promoting and enhancing a vibrant small town/village identity

will be of long term benefit to all residents and business owners in the Township.

1. Create a position for a main street manager/business development coordinator to expand upon the current township staff's efforts to work with the business community, governmental agencies, and the public to retain existing businesses and attract new businesses and services. In this role, the coordinator will promote Springfield Township as a great place to work, live and play and develop strategies to implement the proposed Village Center Overlay District.
2. Create an attractive hub including public gathering spaces within each commercial district that is pedestrian and bicycle friendly.
3. Improve signage to make the districts more attractive and easier to navigate.
4. Add street trees, benches, bike racks and landscaping throughout the business districts.
5. Encourage and support storefront facade upgrades and seek funding opportunities to assist small businesses with façade and landscaping improvements.
6. Encourage the development of new restaurants along Bethlehem Pike to revitalize and enhance Springfield's image as a destination, and provide expanded services to the residents, businesses and visitors alike.
7. Encourage development of small shops and cafes close to the core area around the train station.
8. Promote the use of appropriate period lighting in locations that support the historical character of the township.
9. Foster positive communications between local government and the business community.
10. Promote new business development and expansion in areas with existing transportation infrastructure. Promote and advance the success of the Flourtown Business Association.

