MAPPING ECONOMIC PROGRESS
in Upper Darby Township

March 2019

Thomas N. Micozzi, Mayor
Upper Darby Township
100 Garrett Road
Upper Darby, PA 19082
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Upper Darby Township’s Vision and Goals

Letter from the Mayor

“\textit{It is my honor to serve the Upper Darby community. One of the major priorities of my administration is the encouragement of economic growth in Upper Darby's retail and commercial establishments. I have met with numerous retail and commercial developers, and the message we want them to hear is that Upper Darby Township is a great, diverse community with a business friendly approach to new development. The focus is to find a way to accomplish positive development for the Upper Darby community. This is only the next step to encourage investment and reinvestment in Upper Darby. Our comprehensive plan is our guide, but our commitment and resolve is our compass.}”

Sincerely,
Thomas Micozzie

\textit{"Downtown Upper Darby is a 20th Century success reimagined into a 21st Century legacy as the vibrant and diverse hub for the regional economy."}

\textbf{– Upper Darby Vision Plan}

Downtown Upper Darby’s Vision Plan examines the current state of Upper Darby and explores the potential of supporting and further developing its downtown area. Upper Darby’s strengths inform the visions developed for the township’s future. As suggested in the vision plan, the vibrant and diverse atmosphere of the downtown area should be supported as a way to amplify business activity and to encourage further investment from developers. Upper Darby’s existing commercial corridors offer a unique stock of buildings that could be transformed to answer the needs and interests of a changing economy.

The Mayor has encouraged the development of ambitious planning projects for Upper Darby, which include the recently published Comprehensive Plan. The plan identifies public perspectives on what Upper Darby government could do to create a better future. These include:

- Capitalizing on Upper Darby’s proximity to Philadelphia
- Enhancing code enforcement
- Reducing tax burdens
- Encouraging homeownership
- Improving roads and walkability
- Supporting local businesses
The Economic Development Landscape

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS:

- Since 2009, Upper Darby has become more diverse and highly educated
- Over the last 10 years, the unemployment rate has decreased significantly, from 8% to 4%
- Home values are successfully recovering from the negative impacts of the Great Recession, brought back in part by increased new construction and reinvestment in the existing housing stock

Introduction

The Township of Upper Darby is a thriving and diverse bedroom community outside of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The township has a strong residential base, walkable neighborhoods, dense commercial corridors, and superior transportation access. Its population is a diverse melting pot of various income levels, ethnicities, and immigrants. In addition, it boasts the most diverse school district in the state. Combined, these assets and attributes create a desirable place to live.

In fact, the larger real estate community has recognized Upper Darby’s growth. In Q4 2018, the Philadelphia Real Estate Council surveyed industry professionals about the development advantages of major satellite communities such as Camden, Wilmington, Chester, and Upper Darby. Sixty-five percent of respondents mentioned a place with good access to transit as the biggest advantage a place could have. Other benefits include unique older building stock with adaptive reuse potential and large population centers in close proximity.

Upper Darby like many inner-ring suburbs has undergone a period of dynamic change, and in response, the township is actively planning for its future. The township recently completed a 2018 Comprehensive Plan and, in conjunction with Delaware County, a Downtown Upper Darby Plan to outline a vision and action plan for their core business district.

The following report builds upon previous planning efforts and provides a deeper exploration of economic development over the past 10 years. The report begins with the Township’s economic snapshot, providing key demographic data to analyze the recent growth. Subsequent chapters drill down into the specific development projects and business relocations that have been recently completed, are in progress, or planned for the near future. In addition, the report describes the various initiatives to help streamline government processes to be responsive to residents, developers, and business needs. The report concludes with the importance of placemaking and details the events and initiatives in Upper Darby that help create a strong sense of place.
Upper Darby by the numbers

83,000 Residents in Upper Darby
Source: ACS 2017

15.3% Residents who have a BACHELOR’S DEGREE OR HIGHER
Source: ACS 2017

5% POPULATION GROWTH 2009 - 2017
Source: ACS 2017

24% Residents 18-34 Years of Age
Source: ACS 2017

23% Residents 55+ Years of Age
Source: ACS 2017

19,000 JOBS in Upper Darby Census Tracts
Source: ESRI Business Analyst

34,000 HOUSING UNITS
Source: ESRI Business Analyst

2,000 BUSINESSES
Source: ESRI Business Analyst

25,000 Average Weekday Ridership Through 69th STREET TRANSPORTATION CENTER
Source: SEPTA

20% FOREIGN-BORN Residents Share of Population
Source: ACS 2017

54% MINORITY Share of Population
Source: ACS 2017

64 AVERAGE WALK SCORE in Upper Darby Neighborhoods
Source: Walk Score 2019

5% POPULATION GROWTH 2009 - 2017
Source: ACS 2017

19,000 JOBS in Upper Darby Census Tracts
Source: ESRI Business Analyst

4% UNEMPLOYMENT
Source: BLS 2018

15.3% Residents who have a BACHELOR’S DEGREE OR HIGHER
Source: ACS 2017

5% POPULATION GROWTH 2009 - 2017
Source: ACS 2017

24% Residents 18-34 Years of Age
Source: ACS 2017

23% Residents 55+ Years of Age
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19,000 JOBS in Upper Darby Census Tracts
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25,000 Average Weekday Ridership Through 69th STREET TRANSPORTATION CENTER
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20% FOREIGN-BORN Residents Share of Population
Source: ACS 2017

54% MINORITY Share of Population
Source: ACS 2017

64 AVERAGE WALK SCORE in Upper Darby Neighborhoods
Source: Walk Score 2019
Economic Snapshot

Between 2009 and 2017, the overall population of Upper Darby increased five percent, from approximately 79,000 to nearly 83,000. Since 2009, Upper Darby has become more racially diverse, with most racial groups experiencing population growth. Notably, the share of foreign born residents has jumped significantly from 16 percent to 21 percent during this period. The overall median income in Upper Darby has increased modestly by three percent, from $51,300 to nearly $53,000. Additionally, residents over 25 years old with a higher-education degree have increased by about 10 percent, from 15,551 to 17,091 residents (See Table 1). Overall, these demographic changes indicate that Upper Darby is growing, becoming more diverse, and increasing in higher educational attainment.

Table 1: Selected Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>Growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>78,962</td>
<td>82,993</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Households Median Income</td>
<td>$51,325</td>
<td>$52,979</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's degree or higher</td>
<td>15,551</td>
<td>17,091</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign born</td>
<td>12,774</td>
<td>16,902</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ACS (2017)

Population by Race, 2009 & 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>Growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ACS (2017)

Age Distribution of Upper Darby Residents (2017)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>Growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 5 years</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 19 years</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 34 years</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 49 years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 to 64 years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 years and older</td>
<td></td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ACS (2017)
Unemployment Rate in Upper Darby, 2009-2019

2009: 8.4% (↑)
2019: 3.8% (↓)


Home Sale Values in Upper Darby, 2009-2019

2009: $118,000
2012: $84,500
2013: $84,500 (Post-recession, national home prices plunge to lowest values)
2018: $108,000

Source: Zillow (2019)

Rental Prices in Upper Darby, 2009-2019

2009: $1,090
2013: $1,120
2018: $1,200

Source: Zillow (2019)
Consumer Spending in Upper Darby, 2019

- Health care & personal services: 23%
- Groceries: 19%
- Retail: 16%
- Travel & transportation: 12%
- Bars & restaurants: 13%
- Entertainment & recreation: 12%
- Education: 6%

*Source: ESRI (2019)*
New Development in Upper Darby

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS:

- Major retail and commercial establishments have relocated or expanded their presence in Upper Darby over the last 10 years
- Much of this development has occurred in the township’s existing commercial centers, identified as “development nodes”
- Ongoing investment in development nodes points to the potential for larger scale expansion of commercial, mixed use, and residential development

Strong growth and development indicates a healthy market and a thriving community. The addition of new residential and commercial spaces demonstrates the latent demand for a diverse mix of housing and amenities in Upper Darby. The majority of activity is redevelopment, which not only brings new amenities, but serves to repurpose and revitalize previously worn down and dilapidated structures.

Development in Upper Darby is clustered in several nodes throughout the township. These nodes include the area around 69th Street and downtown Upper Darby, the Drexeline Town Center redevelopment, the Ferne Blvd and Aronomink business districts, the Primos transit oriented development, the Pilgrim Garden Shopping Center, and the Lansdowne Ave commercial area.

Development Nodes

Source: ArcGIS
69th Street and Downtown Upper Darby

69th Street and the surrounding Downtown area of Upper Darby have been hubs of commercial activity in Delaware County since the early 20th Century. Septa’s 69th Station was constructed in 1907 and provided Philadelphians with convenient access to Upper Darby and surrounding Delaware County. With high demand for commercial and residential spaces located close to public transportation, 69th Street Transit Center spurred Upper Darby’s downtown development. During the 1920’s, 69th Street was home to major retailers such as Gimbels and Sears. Additionally, the area established an arts and theater component in the opening of the famous Tower Theatre. These buildings, many of which still exist today, are notable for their unique art deco aesthetic.

Today, the 69th Street area offers a mix of small businesses, restaurants, and residential units. While its reputation as a major retail center has changed, Upper Darby’s downtown has recently transformed in unique and exciting ways. Significant increases in immigrant populations over the past two decades have transformed the 69th Street area into a tapestry of economic activity, including a diverse spread of ethnic restaurants and shops. The area is once again attracting visitors from Philadelphia and surrounding counties as its reputation as a culturally diverse destination becomes better known.

Drexeline

The redevelopment of the Drexeline Shopping Center is currently underway. The existing shopping center, located at the intersection of State and Township Line Roads, was built in the 1950’s and boasts only retail. The proposed $100 million project would transform the Shopping Center into a Town Center which would meet the needs of a changing community. Drexeline Town Center will be a mixed-use development, comprised of a 142-unit apartment building, a larger Shop Rite supermarket, a Wawa, a parking garage, and a self-storage building. The Town Center will also provide access to a walking trail along Darby Creek.

Mixed-use developments have become popular over the past decade as many residents, particularly young professionals and families, trend towards living in higher-density areas. A development like Drexeline serves as a hub of commercial activity, drawing lots of people into a concentrated, centrally-located area that offers a diverse mix of retail and residential spaces. Drexeline will serve as a “placemaking” tool by establishing itself as a Town Center accessible by all residents of Upper Darby and surrounding communities.

Ferne Boulevard and Aronimink Business Districts

The Ferne Boulevard and Aronimink area is a stretch of blocks located along Septa’s 101 Trolley tracks and is home to a number of small, vibrant businesses. This area is a prime example of the commercial infrastructure seen throughout Upper Darby: small and independent retail strips constructed in the 1930’s and 1940’s that were built to suit the needs of communities more dependent on public transportation and small-order commercial needs, such as butcher shops and laundry mats. Without
redevelopment, some of these commercial corridors cannot adequately provide amenities for the modern customer, including substantial parking and diversified retail options.

This area has transformed over the past few years into a more modern retail area that still maintains its quaint charm. Community staples, like a hair salon and dry cleaners, are now complemented by a gastropub, a yoga studio, and an Irish pub located in a retrofitted movie theater. Businesses located here established the Ferne Boulevard Business District as well as the Aronimink Business District, which support the further development of commercial presence in the area and hosts events for local residents. Metered parking along the boulevard makes the businesses more accessible for suburban customers. The efforts made by the business districts demonstrate how Upper Darby’s existing infrastructure can be updated to meet the needs and interest of modern consumers.

**Primos Development Area**

Upper Darby has a small industrial area in the Primos section of the township. The buildings existing in this area include a large warehouse, a storage center, and a waste management building. The site is located directly next to the Primos train station and across the street from a large shopping center, which includes a Giant grocery store, a bank, some retail options, a pub, a Wawa, a beverage distributor, and ample parking. The industrial site is also situated close to an elementary school. The rest of the area is mostly comprised of single family suburban housing. This is an ideal area for transit-oriented redevelopment, considering its existing infrastructure and proximity to important amenities.

**Pilgrim’s Gardens**

The Pilgrim’s Gardens Shopping Center is situated at the intersection of Township Line and Burmont Roads. Pilgrim’s Gardens is a popular shopping destination for local residents, boasting various retail and food options. The shopping center has experienced redevelopment in recent years, notably the openings of a Chickie’s and Pete’s restaurant and a Ross clothing store. The area surrounding the shopping center is notable for its highly valued real estate. Current market rate values of homes surrounding the shopping center range from $230,000 to $350,000, while values of homes situated farther south and east generally range from $100,000 to $180,000.

**Lansdowne Ave**

The commercial area along Lansdowne Avenue between Cedar Lane and Garrett Road accommodates a concentration of businesses and local attractions. The area around Cedar Lane and State Road boasts a large retail shopping center and several eating establishments. Located a few blocks south of the shopping center are Delaware County Memorial Hospital, Upper Darby High School, and Monsignor Bonner & Archbishop Prendergast High School. These are integral institutions for the Upper Darby community and play an important role in generating local economic impact. Notably, Upper Darby High School’s Summer Stage Program is one of the biggest economic tourism drivers in the Township, employing over 100 people and drawing 36,000 audience members to its programs every year.
The concentration of economic activity in this area makes the neighborhood prime for more residential and commercial development. Market values for homes around this area are higher than the Township’s average, with some recent family home sales ranging from $350,000 to $375,000. There is also the potential for ambitious residential or mixed-use development in the neighborhood. Because of the recent integration of Bonner and Prendergast high schools into one school building, there is now an expansive amount of real estate and property available for redevelopment on campus.

Home Property Values near Pilgrim Gardens Shopping Center

Source: Zillow (2018)
Development Projects in Detail

*Major Development Projects in Upper Darby 2009-2018*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Type of Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>69th Street Transportation Center Parking Garage</td>
<td>60 N Chatham Rd</td>
<td>Proposed</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Drexeline Town Center Redevelopment</td>
<td>4990-5100 State Rd</td>
<td>Proposed</td>
<td>Mixed-Use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>St. Dorothy Parish Pre-School</td>
<td>1201 Burmont Rd</td>
<td>Proposed</td>
<td>Institutional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Super Wawa Food Market</td>
<td>418 Baltimore Pike</td>
<td>Proposed</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>103 Victory Ave Redevelopment</td>
<td>103 Victory Ave</td>
<td>Complete</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>5050 Fairway Rd</td>
<td>5050 Fairway Rd</td>
<td>Complete</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>69th St TC West Terminal Rehab</td>
<td>6901 West Chester Pike</td>
<td>Complete</td>
<td>Institutional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>73 S 69th St</td>
<td>73 S 69th St</td>
<td>Complete</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Advanced Auto Parts</td>
<td>131 Baltimore Ave</td>
<td>Complete</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Alician Senior Apartments</td>
<td>140 Hampden Rd</td>
<td>Complete</td>
<td>Residential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Crossroads Community Church addition</td>
<td>104 Heather Rd</td>
<td>Complete</td>
<td>Institutional</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Cube Self Storage</td>
<td>500 Mildred Ave</td>
<td>Complete</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>CVS Drexel Hill</td>
<td>5001 Township Line Rd</td>
<td>Complete</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Drexelbrook Holiday Inn &amp; Suites</td>
<td>5400 Ferne Blvd</td>
<td>Complete</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Cornell Homes</td>
<td>8400 Lansdowne Ave</td>
<td>Complete</td>
<td>Residential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>McDonald’s</td>
<td>201 Baltimore Ave</td>
<td>Complete</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Taco Bell</td>
<td>7500 West Chester Pike</td>
<td>Complete</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Upper Darby Library</td>
<td>501 Bywood Ave</td>
<td>Complete</td>
<td>Institutional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Wawa Food Market</td>
<td>8240 West Chester Pike</td>
<td>Complete</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Map of Major Development Projects in Upper Darby 2009-2018

Source: ArcGIS
69th Street Transportation Center Parking Garage

SEPTA, in partnership with Upper Darby, recently announced the development of a state-of-the-art parking facility near the 69th Street Transportation Center. This multi-story concrete garage will be built over existing bus and taxi stands and will include 431 parking spaces with 11 ADA-accessible spaces. Alongside the garage, the development also includes an additional parking lot which will contain 89 parking spaces.

Once complete, the development will increase parking capacity from 182 spaces to 520 spaces. This $31 million project is being funded through the state’s Act 89 transportation funding act, allowing SEPTA and Upper Darby to modernize the 69th Street Transportation Center, SEPTA’s busiest transportation center, which links the Market-Frankford line, Trolley routes 101 and 102, the Norristown High Speed Line, and 18 different bus routes.

Drexeline Town Center

The Drexeline Town Center is the proposed $100 million redevelopment of the 60-year-old Drexeline Shopping Center. The mixed-use redevelopment includes a 140 unit residential building, office space, and 140 units of self-storage. Several of the previous commercial tenants including Shoprite, Crozer-Keystone Medical Center, and Anthony’s restaurant will lease out the newly constructed commercial space. A full service Wawa with a gas pump is also slated join the previous tenants.

The redevelopment will also focus on greenspace, including a walking trail made from recycled building material from the demolished buildings along the Darby Creek, a meadow between the new Wawa and the Darby Creek, along with a 1,400 square foot community garden. The buildings will take advantage of energy-efficient windows and organic paints.
Saint Dorothy Parish Pre-School

Saint Dorothy Parish, a Roman Catholic school located at 1201 Burmont, is proposing to renovate part of their Convent building to accommodate the school’s growing pre-k program. This additional space will allow the school to support more three and four year old students.
Super Wawa Food Market

In 2017, Wawa announced that the company was planning to open a Super Wawa, replacing a vacant Pizza Hut and Burlington Coat Factory at 418 Baltimore Pike. The Super Wawa will include eight gas pumps, 177 new parking spaces, and additional retail space for another tenant. This Wawa is part of a larger effort to improve the space in the surrounding few blocks.

103 Victory Avenue

In fall 2018, SEPTA completed a $10.5 million mechanic shop and welfare facility for the building trades employees working on infrastructure maintenance and capital improvements projects for SEPTA’s Suburban Transit Division. The project will include a reconfigured park, meant to improve the working environment for SEPTA employees.
5050 Fairway Road

5050 Fairway Road is a 5,600 square foot class-A office building built in 2011 by Haverford Home Design. The current tenants include a law office, a chiropractor, and a dance and fitness store.

Source: Google Maps

69th Street Transportation Center West Terminal Improvements

Between 2014 and 2016, SEPTA spent nearly $20 million on modernizing the century old West Terminal of the 69th Street Transportation Center. The renovations focused on energy efficiency and included the addition of a green roof and a green wall to reduce storm-water drainage, as well as a light control shelves for natural lighting. The bus and trolley stations were made more accessible through a central loop in the middle of the terminal.

Source: SEPTA
73 South 69th Street

In 2011, Van Potteiger Development converted several small commercial spaces on 69th Street into one large commercial space to attract larger tenants. Currently, a national retailer, Ross Dress for Less, occupies the larger space.

Source: Google Maps

Advanced Auto Parts

In 2013, Primax Properties developed a 6,895 square foot Advanced Auto Parts store located at 131 Baltimore Avenue. The store offers free loaner tools, free battery testing and installation checks, free engine light testing, and free wiper blade installation.

Source: Google Maps
Alician Senior Apartments

The recently completed Alician Senior Apartments transformed the abandoned St. Alice Parish School and Social Center into a vibrant community for senior residents of Upper Darby. The Alician Senior Apartments contain 53 residential apartments each equipped with energy saving features like efficient heating, energy star appliances, water saving plumbing, and extra insulation. Each of the four floors also contains a community room with access to computers.

Source: Legacy USA (2019)

Crossroads Community Church Renovations

The Crossroads Community Presbyterian Church completed a new 3,170 square foot section of the church in 2011 to accommodate its growing congregation. The new section includes a narthex (the porch opposite of the main altar), nursery offices, and new classrooms.

Source: Google Maps
**CubeSmart Self Storage**

In 2017, Primos Self Storage converted a vacant commercial and distribution center into a self-storage facility. Along with the conversion of the existing building, two new buildings were added to the facility, creating a total of 21,550 square feet of self-storage. CubeSmart currently owns the facility.

*Source: Google Map*

**CVS Drexel Hill**

In 2015, Westport Holdings demolished 29,000 square feet of outdated commercial space, constructing a 12,900 square foot CVS Pharmacy and drive-through and an additional pad site for future retail. The redevelopment included improvements to driveways and landscaping.

*Source: Google Maps*
Drexelbrook Holiday Inn & Suites

In March of 2019, the Drexelbrook Associates will open a newly constructed Holiday Inn & Suites adjacent to the Drexelbrook Catering & Special Events Center. This hotel is the first name brand hotel to open in Upper Darby. The new IHG Green designed hotel will feature 84 guest rooms, 12 suites, and two “executive suites.” Each room will include complimentary wireless internet, an in-room refrigerator, microwave, and coffee maker, and smart TVs with complimentary access to HBO.

Source: Drexelbrook (2018)

Creekside at Llanerch

In 2011, 24 single-family detached homes were built near the Har Jehuda Cemetery. The total square footage of the development was about 25,000 square feet.

Source: Bright MLS (2019)
McDonald’s at 201 Baltimore Avenue

In 2014, 4,388 square foot drive-through McDonald’s was constructed adjacent to an existing Goodwill. The restaurant seats 73 people.

Source: Google Maps

Taco Bell at 7500 West Chester Pike

In 2012, a 2,487 square foot KFC was replaced by a 1,525 square foot Taco Bell. This redevelopment included site improvements.

Source: Google Maps
Upper Darby Public Library

The Upper Darby Free Library Municipal Branch, located at 501 Bywood Ave, was previously the location of a Synagogue before being renovated in 2011. The library is over 4,000 square feet and hosts numerous public events throughout the year.

![Image of Upper Darby Public Library](image1)

Source: Delaware County

Wawa Food Market

Completed in 2015, this 4,700 square foot Wawa replaced 15,000 square feet of outdated commercial and residential space. This Wawa also added six gas pump stations and improved the sidewalks surrounding the store, making the area more walkable.

![Image of Wawa Food Market](image2)

Source: Google Maps
New Businesses in Upper Darby

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS:

- New national retailers like H&M, Gap, and Old Navy have helped revitalize the 69th Street commercial corridor
- At least 30 new commercial and retail establishments have located to the township since 2009
- Smaller and local retail establishments continue to thrive throughout Upper Darby

Since 2009, Upper Darby has welcomed nearly 30 new commercial establishments to the township. Along with this influx of new businesses, Upper Darby has also seen a number of prominent national retailers moved into the township on 69th Street, including H&M in 2013, Old Navy in 2016, and the GAP in 2018, among others. Along with these popular clothing stores, a Studio Movie Grill, a movie theater that serves food to guests while the movie is playing, opened in 2014 and attracts guests to the 69th Street commercial corridor throughout the region.

In addition to attracting new businesses, Upper Darby’s current businesses are working hard to maintain and modernize their buildings. In fact, nearly 200 tenant fit out, façade, improvements, and renovations have occurred in the past ten years.

source: Delco Times (2015)  
National retail chains are not the only form of commercial activity that has seen success in recent years. Many notable small and local businesses continue to start and thrive in Upper Darby. Small retailers, ethnic restaurants, bars and niche service providers continue to open shop near 69th Street and along the township’s various commercial corridors, striving to meet the needs of Upper Darby’s diversifying community.

One notable example of innovative entrepreneurship in Upper Darby is the Girls Auto Clinic; a female owned and operated car mechanic shop, which opened at the intersection of West Chester Pike and State Road in 2016. Its unique business model combines both vehicle and personal maintenance services, with a beauty salon located within the garage. Additionally, customers interested in learning more about vehicle maintenance and repair can participate in educational workshops provided onsite. Over the last two years, Girl’s Auto Clinic has made national headlines and is looking to expand into other cities and will be the inspiration for a new sitcom pilot on Fox.

The existence of novel establishments and commercial retailers can help attract additional visitors to the area, which will increase ancillary spending and overall economic activity in Upper Darby.
Efficient and Business Friendly Government

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS:

- New online and digitized permit applications
- New one or five day expedited review of applications
- Over 300 streets repaved since 2009

It is important to remember that development financing is often agnostic to its final location. Thus, it is particularly important for municipal government to ensure its processes are business friendly so as to attract its share of development that would otherwise materialize in an adjacent town. It is therefore advantageous for a government to demonstrate its willingness to be a good partner rather than a bureaucratic obstacle.

Over the last decade, Upper Darby has undertaken several initiatives to transform itself into an efficient government organization – and it continues to do so through streamlining the development review process and funding infrastructure enhancements that support commercial development.

Streamlining the Permitting and Development Review Process

In the past 10 years, Upper Darby has strived to make the township more accessible to businesses looking to move to or expand within the township. Permit applications for development and rehabilitation are now easily accessible online through the Township’s website. In addition to digitizing permit applications, Upper Darby has implemented an expedited permit review process where business owners can pay a nominal fee for a one or five-day review of their application.

The ability to streamline permit approvals and offer expedited reviews stems from the Township’s investment in a fully qualified internal staff that eliminates the delays and logistical issues that come with relying on third party agencies to perform partial plan reviews and inspections. In addition, such a staff provides redundancies so that the loss of any member to sick or vacation time will not cause undue delays in projects.

Zoning and development ordinances have also been updated, allowing for more retail and restaurants to enter the township and operate in commercial districts. In 2017, Upper Darby approved Resolution 2017-11, approving the expansion of the Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance Act (LERTA), to areas zoned as neighborhood commercial, general commercial, downtown commercial, and commercial-industrial. The expansion of LERTA provides a robust tax incentive, which will further support business attraction efforts.
The improvements to the zoning code extend beyond the relaxation of permitted uses in the commercial district, but looks to logically address the issues with off-street parking challenges that many urban areas face. The new code allows prospective business owners to utilize existing infrastructure unique to the area, such as SEPTA transportation hubs or municipally owned parking, in lieu of traditional off street parking requirements. It also encourages existing sites with ample traditional off-street parking requirements to engage in agreements to share their parking with prospective businesses.

**Streetscape Enhancements**

Improvements to the streetscape make Upper Darby more accessible to residents and visitors alike, allowing them to take greater advantage of the various amenities the township has to offer. Higher quality roads also improve the likelihood that businesses will continue to look to move into Upper Darby since their locations are more easily accessible to a larger number of people.

Since 2009, Upper Darby has resurfaced over 300 streets and roads, including those around the 69th Street commercial corridor, allowing the corridor and the businesses that call it home to be more accessible. Along with street improvements, Upper Darby has invested in modernizing its streetlights. Starting in 2017, Upper Darby has replaced 60 halide streetlights with LED lights, each with an internal control system. Along with allowing the township to save money on electricity and maintenance costs, these lights improve the visibility of the roads and sidewalks, making Upper Darby a safer place for pedestrians and drivers.

**Garrett Road Repavement Before and After, 2018**

*Source: Traffic Planning and Design (2018)*
A Vibrant and Active Township

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

- Upper Darby prides itself in leveraging its environmental assets with quality cultural attractions and special events to attract residents and visitors alike
- Upper Darby has several notable cultural institutions that attract visitors and promote placemaking
- The township hosts special events that center and celebrate the diverse cultures and ethnicities that make up its population

The Importance of Placemaking

Placemaking is a multidisciplinary approach to managing public spaces – and its importance to economic development should not be understated. Having a strong sense of place is key for communities attempting to attract new residents and visitors. These additional residents and guests to the community in turn further support small businesses and larger commercial corridors alike.

Successful placemaking involves capitalizing on a community’s physical assets and improving existing infrastructure. While infrastructure may be the baseline, ultimately, people make places. Upper Darby placemaking actualizes when people completing everyday tasks activate the streets through daily life. Finally, placemaking can be enhanced by adding quality public events and activities that serve to enrich resident and attract visitors from across the region.

Parks and Green Space

Upper Darby is home to over 30 different parks and recreational areas that make Upper Darby an enjoyable place to for visitors looking to escape the urban environment surrounding Philadelphia.

The Pilgrim Trail Park is one of the larger examples of Upper Darby utilizing placemaking to enhance the quality of life in the township. The proposed trail takes advantage of Upper Darby's environmental assets and green spaces, offering visitors a serene and accessible way to enjoy the natural beauty of the area.

Source: Upper Darby Township
Darby’s vast natural physical assets by connecting numerous trails around the Darby Creek to each and different commercial areas.

When complete, the Pilgrim Park Trail will be a four section, multi-use trail along the Darby Creek, connecting a variety of different outdoor recreation activities into an accessible continuous outdoor space. The first section of the trail will connect the Darby Creek Trail to a new entrance to the Drexelbrook community, from Drexelbrook, the trail will then pass through the 101 SEPTA trolley route, the third section of the trail will connect the new Drexeline Town Center to the Township Line Plaza. Finally, the trail will connect the Township Line Plaza to Pilgrim Park.

Cultural Attractions

Upper Darby is home to several prominent cultural attractions, including the Tower Theater and the Upper Darby Preforming Arts Center.

The Tower Theater is one of the premier destinations for music entertainment in the Philadelphia area. Since opening in 1927, the Tower Theater has hosted world-renowned music artists like Bruce Springsteen and David Bowie with consistently sold-out shows, attracting a wide variety of visitors to area. The theater has capacity for over 3,000.

The Upper Darby Performing Arts Center is a major economic driver in Upper Darby. Each year, the Center’s Summer Stage program employs 110 people, engages 700 young people, and hosts over 36,000 audience members in a 1,650 seat arena theater. Tickets are kept affordable so that families from any socioeconomic background can enjoy the productions at Upper Darby Performing Arts Center.

Special Events

Upper Darby is the host for numerous cultural events throughout the year. Several of these events include:

- The Gala Concert, which highlights more than 80 different cultures that are a part of the Upper Darby School District and is one of the most successful concerts to benefit public school education in PA.
- The Brad Schoener Festival of Upper Darby Arts, which commemorates the life of Brad Schoener (who was a musician and a music teacher for thousands of kids in the UD school district) through diverse music in a family friendly environment.
• Ferne Boulevard Octoberfest, a fall festival in a family friendly environment, which includes various types of beer, food, and music for everyone to enjoy.

• The Upper Darby International Festival, hosted annually by Upper Darby Twp. and the Upper Darby Multicultural Commission, celebrates the town’s cultural diversity through various foods, music, and shops.

• Upper Darby Community Day, which celebrates the many diverse cultures that make up the community of Upper Darby through games, contests, all for free.

Source: Facebook (2018) and Delco Times (2018)
Looking Forward

Over the last decade, Upper Darby has experienced commercial development, infrastructure improvements, and community growth. These achievements are celebrated by the township’s administration and are used to inform their approach to cultivating further economic growth in Upper Darby. Efforts to ensure this promising future will continue to focus on:

- Fostering the sustainability and growth of local business
- Strategically identifying development projects to enhance the economic foundation, and
- Curating a unique and exciting experience of commerce.

This story of successful economic development over the past decade is an excellent precursor to the vision for Upper Darby Township moving forward. By embracing the heritage of its diverse community, highlighting its strengths, and capitalizing on its existing assets, Upper Darby will position itself for growth in ways that benefit existing and future residents alike.

“Upper Darby can tell a captivating story of diverse growth and development over the past decade. My administration will remain focused on the growth and development of our economic foundation while also making the experience of the Upper Darby resident and business owner unique and welcoming.”

- Mayor Thomas Micozzie