

COMMUNITY PROFILE

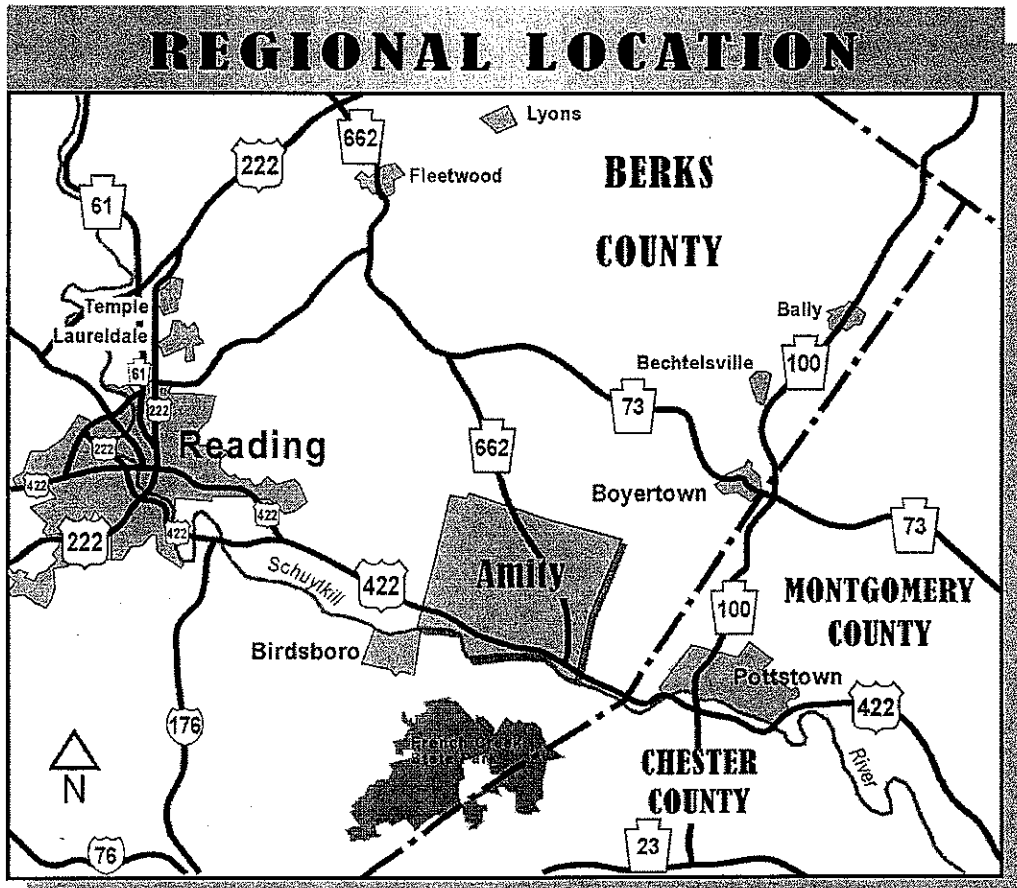
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COMMUNITY PROFILE

Regional Location

Amity Township consists of 18.4 square miles on the Schuylkill River in southeastern Berks County. The Township is traversed by U.S. 422, which connects Amity with Pottstown Borough approximately three miles to the east and the City of Reading approximately nine miles to the west. PA 662, which connects U.S. 422 with PA 73, is the main north-south artery in Amity.

Amity is at the western end of the Route 422 Expressway. Since the Expressway was completed in the 1980's, the Township has been under increasing development pressure because of suburban growth spreading westward through Chester County and Montgomery County along the Schuylkill River corridor.



Geology

The Geologic Formations map shows that six major geologic areas underlie Amity. Most of the Township's bedrock is part of the Brunswick Formation and consists primarily of reddish brown shale, mudstone and siltstone. The Monocacy Hill vicinity has a distinct geologic origin. Its core is mainly Triassic Diabase, which has intruded into the surrounding Brunswick Formation. Four smaller formations are found in the northern part of Amity near the municipal border with Oley Township: Fanglomerates, the Leithsville Formation, Conococheque and the Beekmantown Group. These formations are associated with limestone or dolomite, which are carbonate in nature and potentially prone to sinkholes. Soils formed from carbonate bedrock can pose a groundwater pollution hazard because they often percolate too quickly for pollutants to be sufficiently absorbed before reaching the groundwater table.

Prime Agricultural Soils

The U. S. Natural Resources Conservation Service maintains soil capability classes based on agricultural productivity. Capability classes range from Class I, soils with few limitations for farming, to Class VIII, soils generally unsuitable for farming. Class I, and Class II are considered prime agricultural soils and Class III soils are considered of Statewide importance for agriculture. When evaluating farmland soils for potential purchase of development rights, Berks County considers Class III and Class IV soils although more value is assigned to Class I and Class II soils.

Except for the Monocacy Hill area, prime agricultural soils (Class I and Class II) are abundant in Amity, as shown on the Agriculture map. Most of these soils are Class II rather than Class I. Oley Township, which borders Amity to the north has the highest concentration of Class I soils in Berks County. Class I soils are relatively rare in Berks County outside of Oley.

The Agriculture map also shows properties within Amity Township that are part of Agricultural Security Districts under State Act 453 of 1981. Farms within Agricultural Security Districts are protected against certain regulations that constrain normal farm operations. Being part of an Agricultural Security District is also a prerequisite for having your development rights acquired through the Berks County Purchase of Agricultural Easements (PACE) program.

In Amity, 1,140 acres of land are enrolled in Agricultural Security Districts. Development rights to only one farm have been sold to Berks County, a 72-acre tract that is partly in Amity and partly in Oley. In general, the price being paid by Berks County for agricultural easements does not compare with the much higher price that farmers in Amity can receive for selling their land to residential developers. In Amity, this has reportedly been a strong disincentive for preserving farmland through conservation easements.

Soil Suitability For On-Site Septic Systems

Soil suitability for on-lot septic systems is based primarily on a soil's depth to bedrock, depth to groundwater, permeability and the presence of slopes. Septic systems in soils that percolate too rapidly can degrade groundwater because impurities are not adequately absorbed before reaching the water table. Conversely, soils that do not drain fast enough can cause the unhealthy surface ponding of wastewater. These soil characteristics are important to consider in Amity because significant areas of the Township rely on private wells and private septic systems rather than public water and public sewer service.

Most of Amity Township on the south side of Weavertown Road has soils with severe limitations on the safe use of septic systems. The accompanying map shows where these limitations are caused by floodplains and high water tables, and where they are mainly due to steep slopes and insufficient depth to bedrock. As shown on the map, much of the northern third of Amity has soils that present only moderate or slight limitations on the use of on-site septic systems. Outside of floodplains, land in this sector of Amity tends to be better drained and more moderately sloped than in the lower two-thirds of the Township.

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Historic Development

The following summary of Amity's historic development is condensed from the 1990 Amity Township Comprehensive Plan, which featured a historic narrative that was, in turn, extracted directly from the Amity Township 250th Anniversary publication.

The history of Amity Township is distinctive in several respects. It is the oldest incorporated Township in Berks County. The oldest structure, the Mouns Jones House, is located in Amity Township, as well as St. Gabriel's Church which was the first congregation to be organized in Berks County.

Amity Township, bordering the northern bank of the Schuylkill River, is located in southeastern Berks County about 55 miles northwest of Philadelphia. The location of the Township influenced its history and development in various respects. Its location along the Schuylkill River made access possible to the eastern portion of William Penn's new colony, both by water and roads that were developed down the valley of the Schuylkill. The accessibility to a great extent explains the presence of various nationalities in Amity Township.

The Swedes were the first people to settle within the present boundaries of Amity Township. Land was granted for the settlement by William Penn in the year 1701. The grant was known as the Swedes Tract. This settlement at Douglassville was called Morlatton by the early inhabitants of the region.

By 1719, the settlement had progressed to the point that a need was felt for a local government. Accordingly, an application was presented to the court in Philadelphia to form a Township from the Swedes Tract which had an area of 10,500 acres. The Township was to be called "Amity". There was an actively functioning government in Amity Township during the period between its incorporation in 1719 and the validation of this action by the Court of Philadelphia in 1744. It should be noted that at this time Amity Township was a part of Philadelphia County, as Berks County was not erected until 1752. Furthermore, the new municipality of Amity was recognized by the inhabitants of surrounding areas and by the officials of Philadelphia County.

In addition to the Swedes, the English, Irish and Germans have migrated into Amity Township. The fertility of the soil made Amity an attractive place for settlement. The valley of the Schuylkill offered easy access by land and water for travel.

The population of Amity Township increased steadily during the eighteenth century. (Today) Amity Township still holds an attraction for people, just as it did for the little band of Swedish pioneers who settled along the Schuylkill River in 1701.

Historic Sites

There are many visible reminders in Amity of the Township's rich history. Homes of historic vintage, Pennsylvania Dutch bank barns, old churches and other structures are living evidence of Amity's formative social, agricultural and commercial development. The National Register of Historic Places includes five structures located in Amity Township:

1. White Horse Inn
2. Mouns Jones House
3. St. Gabriel's Church and Chapel
4. Griesmer - Brown Mill Complex
5. Weidner Gristmill

The White Horse Inn and Mouns Jones House are part of Old Morlatton Village, which is located between U.S. 422 and the Schuylkill River just west of River Bridge Road. Morlatton was the site of the 10,000-acre Swedes tract granted by William Penn in 1701. It was the first settled area in Amity, which is Berks County's oldest incorporated township. The settlement developed into the center of commerce for the region and later became known as Douglassville.

Old Morlatton Village today includes four prominent 18th century structures owned by the Historic Preservation Trust of Berks County. The Mouns Jones House is the oldest documented dwelling in Berks County. It is a stone home built in 1716 on the site of a 1701 log cabin. The White Horse Inn was a prominent stage coach stop, a center for early community life and a mustering place for the Continental Army during the American Revolution. The Covered-Bridge Keeper's House, located adjacent to the Mouns Jones House, was built around 1780. It was the home of the custodian and toll-keeper for the two lane bridge across the Schuylkill River at this point. The fourth Old Morlatton Village structure is the George Douglass Mansion which was built in 1763 adjacent to the White Horse Inn. In addition to owning the White Horse Inn, George Douglass was an important merchant, a Justice of the Peace and the area's wealthiest citizen.

The Preservation Trust maintains its offices in the White Horse Inn and has restored the Mouns Jones House plus the Covered-Bridge Keepers House. Restoration is underway at the George Douglass Mansion. The Preservation Trust, which is currently preparing a master plan for Old Morlatton Village, hopes to acquire non-contributing structures at Morlatton in the coming years to raze or restore them.

Proposed Historic District and Related Initiatives

The Preservation Trust is also cooperating on other exciting initiatives in the Douglassville area. "Douglassville 2010" is a committee appointed by the Amity Township Supervisors to study the possibility of creating a historic district and historic architectural review board to guide the future development and preservation of Douglassville. At a minimum, the proposed district would encompass Old Morlatton. The boundaries could also possibly stretch east to west from St. Gabriel's Church to the Amity Township/Douglass Township line. The Douglassville 2010 Committee envisions this area being a tourist attraction, possibly with renovated homes, small shops, restaurants and other heritage-based commercial opportunities. To help realize this vision, Amity has requested that PennDOT establish two-way traffic on what is now U.S. 422 west so that U.S. 422 east through Douglassville can return to being a

lower speed, pedestrian-friendly, local road. This project is currently on the first four-year element of the PennDOT Twelve-Year Program.

A Douglassville Station has been proposed at the southwest corner of River Bridge Road and U.S. 422, as part of the proposed Schuylkill Valley Metro light rail line which would extend from the Philadelphia area to Reading. Developing this station would bring many more people to Douglassville on a daily basis and have a major impact on plans for the future of the village. Representatives from Amity Township, including Douglassville 2010 and Preservation Trust personnel, are working with officials from the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, SEPTA and BARTA to provide input on how the light rail line and station can best be coordinated with local planning goals.

The Schuylkill River Greenway is one more initiative that will affect the future of historic Douglassville. This Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan addresses the recreational potential of the proposed greenway in a later section. However, planned activities along the greenway trail, a canoe launching area, and a trail head with parking, all located in Douglassville, present both opportunities and challenges for heritage-based tourism and historic preservation in Amity Township.

Existing Land Use

As shown on the Generalized Existing Land Use map, undeveloped land is still the predominant use of land in Amity. With the exception of the Monocacy Hill vicinity, a major portion of this undeveloped land is in agricultural use. Amity's farming heritage is still very much evident on the local landscape despite recent growth and on-going development pressure in the Township.

Residential uses account for most developed land in Amity Township, in particular single-family homes. The pattern of single-family development in Amity takes two basic forms. Older homes and farmhouses that front on long-established thoroughfares and country roads are found throughout the Township. This older style development has been complemented in recent years by the proliferation of unified residential subdivisions. These suburban style subdivisions are scattered throughout Amity but most prevalent in the eastern half of the Township (east of Geiger Road). Only two residential developments in Amity are not strictly single-family detached housing: a townhouse development on PA 662 and an apartment complex on Lake Drive.

Commercial uses include office, retail and service establishments. Most of the commercial uses in Amity front along U.S. 422, with the heaviest concentration in or near the village of Douglassville. Outside of this commercial strip, there are some businesses situated along PA 662 and elsewhere in the Township but not in a concentrated manner.

The last category shown on the Generalized Existing Land Use map is Community Facilities. This includes public and semi-public properties that serve a community-oriented function, such as schools, parks, churches and municipal uses. The majority of the land in Amity within the Community Facilities category is devoted to recreation, including parks owned by Amity Township and other recreation providers. More detail is provided on parks and other recreational uses in a later section of this plan.

Population and Housing Trends

1990 Population

Amity Township had 6,434 residents according to the 1990 U.S. Census, the most recent official ten-year count. This was an increase of 551 persons (9.4%) since the 1980. As shown on Table 1, the 1980's were actually the slowest growth years in Amity in recent decades. The Township added 2,019 persons during the 1960's (74.8%) and another 1,165 persons during the 1970's (24.7%).

TABLE 1
TOTAL POPULATION
Amity Township
1950 - 1990

YEAR	POPULATION	NUMBER CHANGE	PERCENT CHANGE
1950	2,019	-	-
1960	2,699	680	33.7
1970	4,718	2,019	74.8
1980	5,883	1,165	24.7
1990	6,434	551	9.4

Source: U. S. Census Bureau

Estimated 2000 Population

The best available method of estimating Amity's current population is to use building permit data to estimate how many new residents the Township has acquired since 1990. According to Township records, Amity issued 947 building permits for new residential units from 1990 through October, 2000. At 2.76 persons per household, which was Amity's average household size according to the 1990 Census, this equates to 2,614 new residents since 1990. Thus, the estimated population of Amity in November, 2000 was 8,848: 6,234 persons recorded in the 1990 Census plus 2,614 new residents.

TABLE 2
ESTIMATED TOTAL POPULATION
Amity Township
November 2000

947 Building Permits Issued from 1990 Through October 2000 @ 2.76 Persons Per Household	=	2,614 Persons
2,614 Persons Plus a 1990 Population of 6,234	=	8,848 Persons

Source: Amity Township and URDC

Short Term Population Projection - 2005

In addition to an estimate of current residents, Amity needs to project future population levels to properly plan ahead. An analysis of residential development proposals recently approved and now under review by the Township is the best available method of projecting how many new residents are likely to settle in Amity in the short term future.

As noted on Table 3, Township records as of November, 2000 show 540 homes approved but not constructed and an additional 514 homes in proposed residential subdivisions under review by the Township. At 2.76 persons per household (Amity's average household size according to the 1990 Census), these 1,054 new homes could generate 2,909 new residents to Amity, if each proposed subdivision is constructed and occupied as currently proposed.

For projection purposes, assume the approved and proposed subdivisions described above will be built out and occupied during the next four years — by 2005. The resulting 2005 Amity Township population would be 11,757: an estimated November 2000 population of 8,848 plus 2,909 new residents.

**TABLE 3
SHORT-TERM POPULATION PROJECTION - 2005
Amity Township**

SUBDIVISION NAME	NUMBER OF HOMES	STATUS AS OF JANUARY 2001
Blacksmith Pointe	32	Approved But Not Yet Constructed
Greenbriar	110	Approved But Not Yet Constructed
West Ridge	97	Approved But Not Yet Constructed
Woods Edge	254	Approved But Not Yet Constructed
Pleasant Meadows	22	Approved But Not Yet Constructed
Indian Run	25	Approved But Not Yet Constructed
Subtotal	540	
Rosecliff Pointe	166	Under Review by Amity Township
Sunset Knoll	98	Under Review by Amity Township
High Meadow Farm	192	Under Review by Amity Township
Far Hills	58	Under Review by Amity Township
Subtotal	514	
TOTAL	1,054	
1,054 Building Permits @ 2.76 Persons Per Household		= 2,909 Persons
2,909 Persons Plus an Estimated November 2000 Population of 8,848		= 11,757 Persons

Source: Amity Township and URDC

Longer Term Population Projection - 2010

According to Township records, Amity issued 736 residential building permits during the five-year period from 1995 through November 2000 — an average of 147 per year. One way to project a 2010 population total for Amity would be to assume construction activity in the five-year period from 2005 through 2010 will mirror the most recent five-year period for which we have solid data.

At 2.76 persons per household, 736 homes constructed between 2005 and 2010 would accommodate 2,031 new residents in Amity. Thus, the Township's 2010 population would be 13,788: a projected 2005 population of 11,757 plus 2,031 residents settling in Amity between 2005 and 2010.

**TABLE 4
LONGER-TERM POPULATION PROJECTION - 2010
Amity Township**

Projected Number of Building Permits to be Issued from 2005 Through 2010	=	736
736 Persons @ 2.76 Persons Per Household	=	2,031 Persons
2,031 Persons Plus Projected 2005 Population of 11,757	=	13,788 Persons

Source: Amity Township and URDC

