

# **ZONING AMENDMENT APPLICATION NARRATIVE CHARTER HOMES AT LAUREL HILL, INC.**

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Charter Homes & Neighborhoods (“Charter”) is the equitable owner of approximately 23 acres of land located south of Reichert Road, identified as Tax Parcel Identification No. 62-019-032 (the “Property”) in Susquehanna Township (“Township”). As contemplated in both the Township’s and Dauphin County’s comprehensive planning initiatives, both encouraging the creation of sustainable and livable residential neighborhoods, Charter desires to establish an innovative residential neighborhood on the Property, which emphasizes form (i.e., design) with function (i.e., use) by incorporating certain building, site and streetscape features typically not found in residential zoning requirements or related housing developments.

To implement this vision, Charter requests that the Township’s Board of Commissioners (the “Board”) amend the text of Chapter 27 (the “Zoning Ordinance”) of the Township’s Code of Ordinances, so as to define and permit “Neighborhood Design Developments” as an optional form of neighborhood development for single-family detached dwellings and townhouses in the R-2 – Medium Density Residential Districts (“R-2 District”), R-3 – High Density Residential Districts (“R-3 District”) and R-4 – Residential Urban Districts (“R-4 District”). As an incentive and in exchange for incorporating certain building, site and streetscape enhancement elements that will be reviewed by the Township’s Design Review Committee (the “DRC”), the proposed zoning text amendment relaxes certain bulk and area standards than otherwise permitted in the applicable residential zoning districts. Although the proposed text amendment is purely residential in nature, the concept is loosely based on the Township’s mixed-use Traditional Neighborhood Development (the “TND”) standards set forth in Part 19 of the Zoning Ordinance and Chapter 22 (the “Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance”). A summary of the proposed text amendment, along with the planning that underlies it, is set forth in this Narrative. A draft of the proposed text amendment is provided with this Application.

## **II. BACKGROUND**

### **A. THE PROPERTY**

The Property is located in the central portion of the Township, generally south of Linglestown Road and east of Crooked Hill Road. The Property generally is undeveloped with some open and wooded areas. The northern portion of the Property is constrained by a small stream, Black Run and its related floodplain, as well as a major utility right-of-way containing overhead electric transmission lines and poles. Black Run and a sewer easement exist along the southwestern portion of the Property.

The Property is located in the R-2 District, and it is completely surrounded by R-2 District land. The Property is ideally located in an area of the Township that has been planned, zoned and developed predominately as medium-density residential developments served by public water and public sewer. Indeed, much of the adjoining land is developed with single-family detached dwellings. Driftstone Drive and Bradley Drive, both providing

access to the adjoining residential developments, are streets that extend to and terminate at the Property's eastern boundary.

## **B. FORM AND FUNCTION**

Over the past several years, the Township has begun incorporating form related guidelines and standards into its planning documents, and zoning and development ordinances. Recent Zoning Ordinance amendments, including Ord. No. 17-04 (TND) and Ord. No. 18-02 (reusing office buildings for apartments in the Business-Office-Residential District), have incorporated certain building, site or streetscape features to help guide the design along with regulating use and development of land within the Township. As further discussed in Section IV.A of this Narrative, the Township is in the process of planning for its long-term future that relies heavily upon creating a stronger sense of place in various neighborhoods and throughout the Township, by improving community design, character and connections via enhanced streetscape and site design standards in the Township's land use and development ordinances.

## **III. PROPOSED TEXT AMENDMENT**

The proposed text amendment seeks to define and permit "Neighborhood Design Developments," subject to certain use and building, site and streetscape enhancement elements, as an "innovative community" by right in the R-2, R-3 and R-4 Districts. A description of, and explanation for, these changes are as follows:

### **A. DEFINITION OF NEIGHBORHOOD DESIGN DEVELOPMENT (§ 27-204)**

The proposed text amendment seeks to amend Section 27-204 (List of Definitions) of the Zoning Ordinance by adding a new use term for "Neighborhood Design Development," which is defined as "[a]n innovative form of residential development incorporating certain building and streetscape elements so as to provide an attractive, living environment for a variety of persons across all life stages."

### **B. NEIGHBORHOOD DESIGN DEVELOPMENT AS A PERMITTED USE IN THE R-2, R-3 AND R-4 DISTRICTS (§§ 27-702, 27-802 and 27-902)**

The proposed text amendment seeks to amend Sections 27-702, 27-802 and 27-902 of the Zoning Ordinance by adding Neighborhood Design Developments as a new use and form of development that is to be permitted by right in the R-2, R-3 and R-4 Districts.

### **C. NEIGHBORHOOD DESIGN DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS (PART 20)**

The proposed text amendment seeks to amend Part 20 (Use Regulations) of the Zoning Ordinance by adding a new Section 27-2049 that sets forth specific use regulations for Neighborhood Design Developments.

First, the proposed text amendment includes purpose statements and certain eligibility requirements. All Neighborhood Design Developments must be located on tracts of land of at least 20 acres. Also, all Neighborhood Design Developments must be served by public water and public sewer.

Second, similar to the Township's TND provisions, the proposed text amendment incorporates two sets of procedural requirements for Neighborhood Design Developments. In order to help the Township evaluate development proposals' compliance and consistency with the key design elements, the first procedure requires applicants to submit certain documents and information as part of the preliminary and final plans. Additionally, prior to Township Planning Commission review, the DRC must be provided with the opportunity to review and provide applicants with informal comments.

Further, in order to encourage innovation and provide flexibility in the design and layout of buildings, site and streetscapes in Neighborhood Design Developments, the proposed text amendment sets forth a second procedure permitting modifications of the key design elements. Key design element modifications are evaluated based on whether said modifications: (i) are consistent with the purposes of the Neighborhood Design Development provisions and the Zoning Ordinance; (ii) will not result in any danger to the public health and safety, nor adversely impact adjoining properties or future inhabitants of the Neighborhood Design Development; (iii) will not result in a use otherwise not permitted in the applicable zoning district; (iv) will not result in an increase in residential density permitted by the Neighborhood Design Development provisions; and (v) will allow for equal or better results and represent the minimum amount of relief necessary to ensure compliance with the applicable criteria in the Zoning Ordinance. Additionally, prior to the Township Planning Commission and Board of Commissioners review, the DRC must be provided with the opportunity to review and provide applicants with informal comments.

Next, similar to the Township's TND provisions, the proposed text amendment sets forth various key design element standards for buildings, sites and streetscapes in Neighborhood Design Developments. The proposed text amendment helps to create a stronger sense of place by requiring compliance with a series of design and character elements for certain residential developments. The building and site design standards address building facade, roofline and front yard features. The streetscape design standards address street and sidewalk lighting, greening and connection features.

Finally, the proposed text amendment sets forth the permitted dwelling types and related bulk and area regulations for Neighborhood Design Developments. As an incentive and in exchange for complying with the key design elements, when compared to the current R-2, R-3 or R-4 Districts, the proposed text amendment permits single-family detached dwellings (Table III-C.1) and townhouses (Table III-C.2) to be built in accordance with certain less onerous bulk and area regulations than otherwise permitted in the applicable zoning districts.

**TABLE III-C.1  
COMPARISON OF SINGLE-FAMILY  
DETACHED DWELLING STANDARDS**

	<b>Current R-2 District</b>	<b>Current R-3 District</b>	<b>Current R-4 District</b>	<b>Proposed Neighborhood Design Development</b>
Single Family Detached Dwellings	P	P	P	P
Max. Density	4 dwelling units/acre	8 dwelling units/acre	5 dwelling units/acre	8 dwelling units/acre
Min. Lot Area	10,000 sq. ft.	4,000 sq. ft.	8,000 sq. ft.	4,000 sq. ft.
Min. Lot Width	75'	40'	65'	40'
Min. Front Yard	30'	25'	30'	5'
Min. Side Yard	8'	8'	8'	5'
Min. Rear Yard	30'	25'	30'	10'
Max. Building Coverage	N/A	N/A	N/A	55%
Max. Impervious Lot Coverage	40%	45%	40%	75%
Min. Vegetative Coverage	N/A	N/A	60%	25%
Max. Height	30'	30'	30'	35'

**TABLE III-C.2  
COMPARISON OF TOWNHOUSE STANDARDS**

	<b>Current R-2 District</b>	<b>Current R-3 District</b>	<b>Current R-4 District</b>	<b>Proposed Neighborhood Design Development</b>
Townhouses	NP	NP	P	P
Max. Density	N/A	N/A	10 dwelling units/acre	8 dwelling units/acre
Min. Lot Area	N/A	N/A	2,200 sq. ft.	1,200 sq. ft. interior lot or unit; 1,400 sq. ft. corner lot or end unit
Min. Lot Width	N/A	N/A	22' interior units; 32' exterior units	16 interior lot or unit; 20' interior lot or unit
Min. Front Yard	N/A	N/A	25'	5'

	<b>Current R-2 District</b>	<b>Current R-3 District</b>	<b>Current R-4 District</b>	<b>Proposed Neighborhood Design Development</b>
Min. Side Yard	N/A	N/A	10'	0' interior (attached side); 5' end (detached side)
Min. Rear Yard	N/A	N/A	25'	10'
Max. Building Coverage	N/A	N/A	35%	65%
Max. Impervious Lot Coverage	N/A	N/A	50%	75%
Min. Vegetative Coverage	N/A	N/A	50%	25%
Max. Height	N/A	N/A	30'	40'

**IV. CONSISTENCY AND COMPATIBILITY WITH PLANNING**

The requested text amendment is generally consistent with and implements elements of both the Township’s and County’s comprehensive planning initiatives.

**A. Consistency with the Township’s Plan (Draft)**

An overriding theme set forth in the draft of *Sustainable Susquehanna 2030 Comprehensive Plan* (the “Township’s Plan”) includes creating a stronger sense of place in various neighborhoods and throughout the Township, by improving community design, character and connections via enhanced streetscape and site design standards in the Township’s land use and development ordinances. Specifically, the Township’s Plan suggests considering a more form-based approach to guiding and regulating design and development.

The Township’s Plan further discusses other concepts supporting the proposed text amendment, including strengthening, promoting and protecting desirable neighborhoods; encouraging compatible infill, reuse and redevelopment via sustainable policies and practices; and encouraging bicycle and pedestrian facilities. The Township’s Plan also highlights the importance of the DRC’s role in reviewing or development design standards.

As discussed above, Charter seeks to revise the Zoning Ordinance with a new and innovative form of residential development that balances form and function via use regulations and building, site and streetscape design standards. Since there is a limited amount of “undeveloped” land remaining in areas planned and able to accommodate future growth development, and most new development within the R-2, R-3 and R-4 Districts will be via infill, reuse and redevelopment of land, it is essential for new development to be sustainable and attractive. The proposed text amendment is intended to create attractive and desirable neighborhoods. The proposed text amendment also requires the DRC to be provided with the opportunity to review and comment on Neighborhood Design Developments.

Given that the proposed text amendment is consistent with and implements elements of the Township's Plan, the requested text amendment is justified.

## **B. CONSISTENCY WITH AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COUNTY'S PLAN**

As discussed below, the proposed text amendment is generally consistent with and implements elements of the Dauphin County Comprehensive Plan "Growing Together" (the "County's Plan"), including the community development and economic development initiatives, which was adopted in 2017.

The requested zoning amendment is consistent with and implements the County Plan's Community Service Plan ("CSA") concept for managing growth through infill and reasonable expansion adjacent to existing developed areas. The County Plan suggests that the majority of development take place within the CSA boundaries as a means of reducing the cost and complexity of providing public facilities and services and reducing the burdens on public infrastructure. (Growing Our Economy - Water & Wastewater Infrastructure) The proposed text amendment affects the R-2, R-3 and R-4 Districts, the majority of which are located in the CSA as well as the Urban Core of the Planned Growth Area (see Figure IV-1 below). As discussed above, a full complement of public utilities, infrastructure and services, including public water and public sewer, currently serve or are planned to serve the Property and the majority of the R-2, R-3 and R-4 Districts. Indeed, the requested text amendment requires the proposed new housing developments to be served with both public water and public sewer.

The proposed text amendment is consistent with and implements elements of the Growing Our Communities element of the County Plan. First, the County desires a sustainable development pattern for future generations. Three (3) primary goals for sustainable development set forth in the County Plan include: (i) managing growth toward areas with existing or planned public facilities and services; (ii) promoting the creation of livable, sustainable communities; and (iii) integrating land use with transportation and other public infrastructure. (Growing Our Communities – Sustainable Development)

Second, the County identifies attractive housing and well-maintained residential neighborhoods as two of the most important assets of any community. These assets help assure a sound residential tax base that will continue to appreciate in value, and that residents are living in an environment that is conducive to a healthful and enjoyable quality of life. Two primary goals for housing set forth in the County Plan include: (i) expanding fair housing choice and access to opportunity; and (ii) improving regulations and zoning ordinances to address key housing challenges. (Growing Our Communities – Housing)

As discussed above, the proposed text amendment will support new infill housing opportunities within neighborhood developments where a full complement of public utilities, infrastructure and services exist or are planned to serve. Indeed, the proposed neighborhood developments must be located in the R-2, R-3 or R-4 District and served with both public water and public sewer. Additionally, the proposed text amendment promotes a more sustainable and livable approach for new housing in neighborhood developments, by requiring certain building and site design elements, in exchange for greater densities not otherwise permitted in the R-2, R-3 or R-4 Districts. Finally, as part of the streetscape elements, the proposed text amendment seeks to improve the quality of neighborhoods by

better linking land use and transportation elements than otherwise required in the R-2, R-3 or R-4 Districts.

Finally, given that the proposed text amendment is consistent with and implements elements of the County's Plan, the requested text amendment is justified.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

For the foregoing reasons, Charter respectfully requests that the Board adopt the proposed text amendment.