

## Residential Development

### Housing Composition

In 2000, East Rockhill Township had a total of 1,883 housing units, which is an increase of 819 units (77 percent) since 1980. In the past two decades, housing unit increases in the township have increased from 295 units (28 percent gain) from 1980 to 1990 and 524 units (37 percent gain) between 1990 and 2000. Table 6 shows changes in East Rockhill housing from 1980 through 2000.

**Table 6. Housing Units, East Rockhill Township, 1980–2000**

	1980	1990	1980–1990	2000	1990–2000	1980–2000
<b>Total Units</b>	1,064	1,359	295	1,883	524	819

Source: U.S. Census, 1980-2000

Most housing in East Rockhill consists of single-family detached homes. Of a total 1,883 units in 2000, 1,396 units, or nearly three-quarters, were single-family detached. Nevertheless, the township's housing stock within the past decade has grown to encompass a mix of housing types.

The next most numerous housing type is single-family attached housing.<sup>1</sup> There were 252 units of this housing type in 2000. The share of single-family attached housing grew the most from 1990 to 2000, climbing from 1 percent to more than 13 percent of the housing stock.

The share of multifamily housing<sup>2</sup> held steady in the range of 8 percent from 1990 to 2000, while the share of mobile homes dropped by nearly 2 percent, from 5.4 percent to 3.6 percent. Housing units by type are shown in Table 7 below:

**Table 7. Housing Units by Type, 1990–2000**

Housing Type	1990		2000	
	Number of Units	Percentage of Total	Number of Units	Percentage of Total
Single-Family Detached	1,147	84.3	1,396	74.1
Single-Family Attached	13	1.0	252	13.4
Multifamily	118	8.7	153	8.1
Mobile Homes	74	5.4	67	3.6
Boats, RVs, Vans, etc.	7	0.6	15	0.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,359</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>1,883</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: U.S. Census, 2000

The distribution of housing types in East Rockhill most closely resembles the adjacent communities of Bedminster and Hilltown townships that have seen a significant increase in their housing stock in recent years. In each of the three townships, single-family

<sup>1</sup> Units attached by walls that extend from the ground to the ceiling (e.g., townhouses).

<sup>2</sup> Units in one structure that are attached below and/or above other units (e.g., apartment building).

detached housing accounts for about three-quarters of all dwelling units, while the share of attached single-family and apartment housing ranges from about 20 percent to 25 percent. This distribution differs significantly from the housing profile in adjacent Richland Township, which has been actively seeking to boost the proportion of single-family detached housing within its borders.

The share of attached single-family housing in East Rockhill is similar to the countywide share. But the countywide housing type distribution is tilted more heavily toward multifamily (apartment) housing, which was built in greater numbers in the years before East Rockhill experienced a wave of growth. Table 8 shows the distribution of housing types in East Rockhill, its neighboring townships, and Bucks County.

**Table 8. Housing Types by Locality, 2000**

Housing Type	East Rockhill	Bedminster	Hilltown	Richland	West Rockhill	Bucks County
Single-Family Detached	74.1%	75.6%	73.6%	45.8%	66.0%	64.1%
Single-Family Attached	13.4%	10.1%	13.0%	21.9%	4.7%	13.9%
Multifamily	8.1%	10.3%	10.7%	11.9%	20.5%	19.4%
Mobile Homes	3.6%	3.7%	2.7%	20.3%	8.8%	2.5%
Boats, RVs, Vans, etc.	0.8%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.03%
<b>TOTAL =</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: U.S. Census, 2000

The vast majority of East Rockhill homes, 83 percent as of 2000, are owner-occupied. The corresponding figure for Bucks County is 77.4 percent. About one-third of the housing stock, numbering 628 units, has been added since 1990. Before that, the number of homes grew at a relatively even pace, with new construction ranging from about 10 percent to 13 percent each decade between 1960 and 1990. The age of housing in East Rockhill is shown in Table 9.

**Table 9. Age of Housing Units, East Rockhill Township**

Year Built	Number of Units	Percent
1990 to March 2000	628	33.4%
1980 to 1989	243	12.9%
1970 to 1979	249	13.2%
1960 to 1969	193	10.2%
1940 to 1959	233	12.4%
1939 or earlier	337	17.9%

Source: U.S. Census, 2000

## Housing Affordability

As is the case in Bucks County as a whole, housing affordability in East Rockhill remains an issue. Lower interest rates coupled with higher than usual demand has resulted in increased housing prices throughout the Delaware Valley. Low interest rates and high demand have combined to raise housing prices dramatically throughout the Delaware Valley. The Housing Price Index<sup>3</sup> indicates a 47 percent rise in housing prices in the Philadelphia-New Jersey Primary Metropolitan Statistical Area<sup>4</sup> over the previous five years and much of this has been driven by a rise in prices in the outlying suburbs. According to the 2000 Census, the median value<sup>5</sup> of a home in East Rockhill is \$170,600 which is slightly higher than that of Bucks County valued at \$163,200. As a comparison, the median home value of the entire Philadelphia-New Jersey Metropolitan Statistical Area is only \$119,400.

Housing sales prices within Bucks County and the Pennridge Area have also been rising steadily since the late 1990s. Housing sales prices for the period 1999 through 2003 as compiled by the area wide multiple listing service are in Table 10.

**Table 10. Median Housing Prices, East Rockhill and Surrounding Communities, 1999–2003**

Municipality	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
East Rockhill Township	\$168,500	\$144,995	\$178,000	\$185,000	\$225,000
Bedminster Township	\$166,450	\$195,000	\$187,500	\$287,500	\$239,900
Hilltown Township	\$167,000	\$169,700	\$167,500	\$223,400	\$272,450
Dublin Borough	\$154,900	\$153,000	\$140,000	\$197,500	\$185,000
Perkasie Borough	\$130,212	\$145,000	\$150,000	\$167,440	\$189,900
Richland Township	\$95,900	\$108,000	\$112,250	\$128,500	\$159,950
Sellersville Borough	\$99,900	\$108,000	\$107,450	\$114,900	\$142,700
Silverdale Borough	\$165,200	\$136,000	\$155,000	\$157,000	\$180,000
Telford Borough	\$124,900	\$126,950	\$129,250	\$157,000	\$157,400
West Rockhill Township	\$128,500	\$190,000	\$162,700	\$199,900	\$230,000
Bucks County	\$156,000	\$165,000	\$174,895	\$200,000	\$229,500

Source: TreND Multiple Listing Service

Housing prices appreciated by about one-third in East Rockhill between 1999 and 2003, while median housing sales prices in the township in 2003 ranked fourth among the 10 upper Bucks communities listed in Table 10. In 2003, East Rockhill had the second lowest median housing price of the four adjacent townships, and the \$225,000 median housing value in the township remained below the countywide median of \$229,500.

<sup>3</sup> Office of Federal Housing Enterprise Oversight

<sup>4</sup> Includes Chester, Delaware, Philadelphia, Montgomery, and Bucks counties in Pennsylvania; includes Burlington, Camden, Gloucester, and Salem counties in New Jersey.

<sup>5</sup> The U.S. Census defines median home value as the respondent's estimate of how much the property (house and lot, mobile home and lot, or condominium unit) would sell for if it were sale.

Consequently, as long as the demand for housing remains high and interest rates remain low, housing affordability will likely remain an issue in East Rockhill and other areas of Bucks County.

## **Residential Zoning**

While the township's housing stock is composed mostly of single-family detached homes, the township's zoning ordinance does permit a reasonable range of housing types in a reasonable range of districts, as mandated by the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC). Section 604(4) of the code requires that the provisions of the zoning ordinance be designed:

To provide for the use of land within the municipality for residential housing of various dwelling types encompassing all basic forms of housing, including single-family and two-family dwellings, and a reasonable range of multifamily dwellings in various arrangements, mobile homes, and mobile home parks, provided, however, that no zoning ordinance shall be deemed invalid for the failure to provide for any other specific dwelling types.

Single-family detached homes are permitted in all districts other than the Cultural-Educational, Commercial-Office, Extraction, and I-1 and I-2 Industrial districts. Single-family detached cluster housing is permitted in the Resource Protection, Rural Residential, Suburban, and Residential zoning districts. Those districts in which single-family detached housing is a permitted use cover much of the township.

Multifamily units are permitted in the R-1, Residential District and Village Residential District as part of a Performance Standard Development. In the R-1 district, all types of housing are permitted (i.e., townhouses, weak-link townhouse, village townhouse, apartments, twins and duplexes); however, the only multifamily unit types permitted in the Village Residential district are twins and duplexes. Performance Standard Developments are permitted by special exception in the Suburban district but excludes multifamily uses. These zoning districts are located near the Perkasie border or in or adjacent to the township's villages.

Mobile home parks are permitted by special exception in the R-1 district and as a conditional use in the Extraction District. Life care and full care facilities are permitted in the R-1 and Cultural-Educational districts, and are permitted by conditional use in the suburban district. Rooming houses are permitted by special exception in the Village Commercial District. Group homes are permitted by special exception in the Resource Protection, Rural Residential, Village Residential and Suburban districts.

While it appears that the township's zoning ordinance satisfies the requirements of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC), the possibility of providing additional areas for single-family and multifamily residential uses may need to be explored (see Future Land Use and Growth Management section).

Table 11 provides a summary of the major housing types as permitted in the various zoning districts.

**Table 11. Permitted Housing, East Rockhill Township**

Housing Type	Zoning District								
	AP	RP	RR	VR	VC	S	R-1	CE	E
Single-Family Detached	P	P	P	P	P	P	P		
Single-Family Detached, Cluster		P	P			P	P		
Village House				P		S	P		
Twin				P			P		
Duplex				P			P		
Multiplex							P		
Townhouse							P		
Apartment							P		
Mobile Home Park							S		C
Group Home		C	C	C		C			
Life Care or Full Care Facility						C	P	P	
Rooming House					S				
Residential Conversion	C	C	C	C	C		C	C	
Residential Accessory Building	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	
Accessory Home Occupation**	P,S,C	P,S,C	P,S,C	P,S,C	P,S,C	P,S,C	P,S,C	P,S,C	P,S,C

\* Not inclusive of all housing uses permitted by the zoning ordinance, only those that fit into a "house type."

\*\* Type of authorization required depends on nature of home occupation. Certain Accessory Home Occupation uses are also permitted by right in the I-1 and I-2 Industrial districts.

**Key**

- AP Agriculture Protection District
  - RP Resource Protection District
  - RR Rural Residential District
  - S Suburban District
  - R-1 Residential District
  - VR Village Residential District
  - VC Village Commercial District
  - CE Cultural-Educational District
  - E Extraction District
- P Permitted By-right
  - C Permitted by Conditional Use
  - S Permitted by Special Exception

**Housing Development Patterns**

Although the township is composed mostly of single-family homes on large lots, the housing stock has grown more diversified in recent years, with the addition of multifamily units in the form of twins and townhouses located at The Pines of Penridge and Cedarbrook developments. The housing mix reflects the makeup of the township and the consumer preferences of buyers looking to move into the area.

**Large-Lot Development and Resource Protection**

East Rockhill Township is a semirural area that has a limited variety of goods and services within its municipal boundaries. People living in the township like it because of

its open spaces and relatively isolated lifestyle. Since single-family homes on large- to medium-sized lots are readily marketable and fit this lifestyle choice of most residents, it is the predominant form of housing in the township.

In the survey given to residents to shape the direction of this plan, respondents ranked natural resources, open space, and growth management as the most important planning issues for the future of the township. Despite good market demand for large-lot development, it can destroy rural character if not adequately controlled. Large-lot development threatens the township's character because in many instances the yards become manicured lawns instead of meadows and woods. Moreover, as development of large lots spreads across the township, the landscape becomes dotted with homes that can effectively ruin the rural character of the area.

There are a variety of effective growth management tools and techniques that can concentrate development on smaller lots in appropriate areas of the township while preserving natural resources on a regional and on an individual lot basis. These techniques, including transfer of development rights, low impact grading, and site analysis and resource conservation plans that are discussed in the Future Land Use and Growth Management section.

### **Diversified Housing Alternatives**

While large-lot subdivisions are the primary form of housing in the township, there are households composed of singles or small families who are drawn to the area but prefer the greater affordability and lessened maintenance responsibilities of townhouses or other types of communities featuring attached housing. The construction of an appropriate mix of dwelling unit types and prices is a complex process. Private interests such as financiers, developers, and builders play an active role in this process. Numerous factors such as change in population make-up or in consumer preferences may increase the interest of a particular housing type. However, East Rockhill Township has taken several steps to foster a balanced mix of housing types while preserving the natural resources. For instance, the township has attempted to encourage denser development in its development district, located near its border with neighboring Perkasio Borough, so that housing demand might be guided to areas already served by public water and sewer. Townhouses, single-family attached and detached houses, duplexes, village houses, and apartments are among the housing types permitted by-right or by special exception around Perkasio. In this way, the township seeks to make use of existing public infrastructure by promoting future development (with a mix of housing unit types) to areas that are intended to accommodate higher densities and away from sensitive natural resources and farmland.

The township's zoning ordinance requires a minimum amount of open space for performance subdivisions, detached dwelling cluster subdivisions, and senior housing developments. Such uses allow a greater intensity of development while preserving valuable natural resources and open space. A discussion on the provision of additional multifamily housing opportunities is discussed in the Future Land Use and Growth Management section.

### **Senior Housing Opportunities**

According to the 2004 Residential Survey, nearly half of the respondents indicated that senior citizen housing opportunities should be a medium priority when planning for the future of the township. Senior housing falls into four general categories: independent living (also known as “active adult” or “age-restricted” housing), assisted living, continuing care retirement communities (CCRC), and nursing homes. Independent living housing has been a popular development type over the past few years. Mainly targeted at wealthy, active, and aging baby boomers, age-restricted housing accounted for over 20 percent of all units proposed in Bucks County in 2003. Age-restricted units provide few or no supports services to help residents carry out normal tasks of daily living. Residents live in their own households and are responsible for maintaining them. Assisted living is a long-term living situation for seniors who need more help than is available in an independent living community, but do not require the degree of medical and nursing care provided in a nursing home. Continuing care retirement communities package independent living with assisted living, nursing care, or both.

The township’s zoning ordinance permits nursing home, life care facility, and full care facility uses. Nursing homes are a permitted use in the C-E, Cultural Educational District. Life care facility and full care facility are permitted by right in the R-1, Residential District and by conditional use in the Suburban District. The life care facility or “assisted living” use is intended for individuals requiring certain support facilities, including personal care boarding homes in excess of eight residents. Full care facilities are intended to be used exclusively for individuals requiring skilled full time care. Currently, there are no nursing homes or full care facilities in East Rockhill Township; however, there is an existing life care facility (i.e., Success Rehabilitation) and a proposal for a new life care facility. Independent living units, assisted living facilities, and continuing care retirement communities are located nearby in Perkasio Borough and West Rockhill Township.

While some municipalities choose to regulate independent living or “age-restricted” housing as a separate use in their zoning ordinances, case studies have shown that they function the same as a typical household and should not be regulated any differently than any other residential use. For instance, the parking requirements for active adult housing are generally the same as typical housing unit. There is no need to provide a reduction in the required number of parking spaces per unit since active adults are just as mobile as their younger counterparts and often own multiple motor vehicles. Any residential use can be designated “age-restricted” through a legal covenant.

The senior housing use regulations in the zoning ordinance should be revised to updated standards and classifications that are more useful. For instance, existing life care facility requirements do not specify the type of housing units that are permitted. Area and dimensional requirements for housing unit types (e.g., building and yard setbacks) should be included or existing standards such as those established for the performance standard development should be referenced in the senior housing regulations.

Another issue needing to be evaluated is that full care facility appears to be similar in purpose and intent to the nursing home use. Full care facilities are required to have skilled full time care and nursing homes is described as a licensed nursing or

convalescent home. It may be possible to eliminate redundancies by combining these two uses and providing appropriate regulations.

Finally, the township's zoning ordinance does not include use regulations for CRCCs that may be appropriate to complete the senior housing continuum. The Bucks County Planning Commission publication, *Fifty-five plus, A Guide to Age-Restricted Housing for Bucks County Municipalities* (2002) may provide guidance in drafting appropriate regulation and design standards for senior housing uses in East Rockhill.

## Housing Forecasts

The amount of future development in the township is dependent on: the desirability of the area, the availability of local goods and services, the land availability for future development, proximity of transportation networks, and the accessibility to regional employment. But housing development is mostly dependent on the perceived supply and demand of housing in the township. The demand for single-family detached housing must also be taken into account. This type of housing composes a good amount of the overall housing stock of the township and will continue to be a large component of its future housing composition.

The following housing forecasts are based on the population projections (using an age cohort survival model) developed in the Demographics and Socioeconomic Trends section. The age cohort survival model simulates the process by which population actually changes by applying birth (fertility), death, and migration rates to a starting population (2000 Census).

Under the process, the starting population was broken down into five-year increments (called cohorts) according to the age structure and sex of the population. Fertility, death, and migration rates based on past trends were applied to the cohorts of the starting population to produce a 2015 projected population.

To develop forecasts for future housing growth, a tenure-by-age-of-householder rate was applied to the cohorts of the projections. The resulting housing units for each cohort were then added to produce a total projected number of units as shown in Table 12.

**Table 12. Housing Forecasts, 2015**

2000 Housing Units	2015 Projected Housing Units					
	Low	Amount Change 2000–2015	Medium	Amount Change 2000–2015	High	Amount Change 2000–2015
1,883	2,657	774	2,968	1,085	3,176	1,293

Source: Bucks County Planning Commission

The above low, medium, and high forecasts produce three possible growth scenarios for the township. (See below.) These scenarios will play a major role in subsequent chapters on development districts, future land use, and growth management strategies.

**Low-growth**—The low-growth scenario proposes a modest amount of housing growth consisting of 774 dwelling units. This type of growth is typical of the growth that has occurred in the past decade—primarily large-lot single-family detached subdivisions (with 10 or less lots) scattered across the township. Because of the limited amount of development, environmental and scenic impacts will be minimal, though many previously open lots will be lost for the foreseeable future.

**Medium-growth**—The medium-growth scenario proposes the development of 1,085 dwelling units. Growth may be a mix of mostly single-family homes on large lots with a few cluster subdivisions. The amount of land consumed in this scenario may be similar to the low-growth scenario, depending on the mix of development types.

**High-growth**—The fast-growth scenario proposes the development of 1,293 units. In this scenario, housing construction reaches levels seen in many central Bucks communities during the 1990s. Growth will consist primarily of single-family detached homes, located in large subdivisions. Some residential growth includes higher density residential detached or attached units. The locations of these possible subdivisions will determine the scenic and environmental impacts to the township. However, potential growth impacts may be limited if development is concentrated in specific areas of the township.

Once more, any forecast of future growth is tentative and subject to a given set of assumptions holding true for a defined period of time and constraints of the projection model employed. Nevertheless, these projections should provide a fairly good picture of housing growth to the year 2015. The nature of that growth will be dependent on future housing markets as well as the growth management policies and programs of the township. One of these policies is the “Development District Concept.” This concept is discussed in the Future Land Use and Growth Management section.

