

Traditional Neighborhood Development



Traditional Neighborhood Development creates compact, mixed-use, non-automobile-dependent neighborhoods and communities. It serves the needs of people and accommodates growth with minimal waste of land.

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Introduction

Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND) is a development strategy designed to create complete neighborhoods and communities that mimic those built in pre-1950s America before the shift to low-density, automobile-dependent suburban developments. Several features characterize TNDs: concentrated density, mixed housing types, interconnected street grids, a discernable center (like a town square or plaza), and a variety of commercial establishments to meet the needs of residents. With sidewalks, traffic calming measures, hidden parking, and access to public transportation, TNDs reduce dependence on cars and create safer streets for pedestrians and cyclists. TNDs also emphasize access to schools, parks, churches, civic buildings, and other community spaces.

TNDs can involve development of a previously undeveloped area (*greenfield development*) or construction on vacant or underdeveloped parcels within an already developed community (*infill development*). Adaptive reuse of existing buildings is common in the latter case. Unlike [New Urbanism](#), the broader movement that includes all scales of planning and development, TND is limited to the neighborhood or town scale.

Though often developer-driven, TNDs are regulated by the zoning, subdivision, and land development ordinances of local governments. In conjunction with sound comprehensive planning and zoning, a TND can accommodate development in planned growth areas, relieving farmland and other open space from development pressure (especially compared to sprawling single-unit, low-density developments which use space far less efficiently). Municipalities can also craft specific TND ordinance provisions to ensure that developments meet other conservation-related objectives like ensuring proper stormwater management, protecting natural features, and providing opportunities for outdoor recreation.

Zoning ordinance provisions have helped foster successful TNDs in many locations across Pennsylvania and the United States. See the “Examples” section below for a list of notable TNDs.

Overlay or Stand-Alone Zoning District

A municipal zoning ordinance can incorporate TND as an overlay district, offering landowners who own tracts so zoned *the option* of establishing land uses subject to the TND overlay provisions. Alternatively, municipalities can establish TND as a stand-alone zoning district, in which all permitted uses are subject to the TND provisions. See “Enacting a TND Zoning Ordinance” for more information.

Transfer of Development Rights

Adding the incentive of [Transferable Development Rights¹](#) (TDRs) to TND ordinance provisions can enhance the conservation benefits of a TND by encouraging the developer to purchase TDRs from priority conservation areas and use them to enhance the development potential of a planned TND project.

For example, municipalities can construct TND ordinance provisions so developers are required to use TDRs to build at the upper ranges of allowed residential density or commercial square footage. The TND ordinance provisions addressing development design can help ensure that development in the TDR receiving area is consistent with the community development objectives.

LEED Certification Category

In 2009, the U.S. Green Building Council added the Neighborhood Development category to its LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification program. The most widely used third-party verification for environmentally friendly buildings, LEED rates projects based on a set of criteria including energy efficiency, water use, emissions, and building materials.

The Neighborhood Development category covers new or redevelopment projects containing residential, non-residential, or mixed uses. TNDs, with their focus on efficient land use and non-motorized transportation, are well-positioned to meet the LEED standards for this category. LEED-certified status can supplement marketing efforts, helping promote a TND to potential residents, business owners, and customers. The certification criteria can also offer guidance for developers, planners, and municipal officials seeking to plan an environmentally friendly development.

As of 2017, nearly 500 projects around the world, including five in Pennsylvania, have received or are awaiting Neighborhood Development certification. See the Council's [Neighborhood Development Guide](#) for more information.

Challenges

Opposition to TND

Incorporating TND provisions into a municipality's zoning ordinance requires political and community support. The most frequent obstacle in this process is opposition from residents or local leaders who are uncomfortable with the relatively dense development of TNDs. Careful planning, combined with extensive

community outreach and education efforts, may be able to prevent, mitigate, or overcome this opposition. Public and political support for TND is also crucial to forming working relationships with developers committed to the TND model, who are less likely to pursue a project in an area where TND faces fierce opposition.

Poorly Crafted Provisions

Poorly crafted TND ordinance provisions can lead to developments that are inconsistent with the community's vision and goals or allow developments that are incompatible with surrounding land uses. Municipalities can avoid these pitfalls by engaging the public and identifying valued resources in order to determine the most suitable areas for TND proposals. Hiring a professional planning consultant with both community visioning and TND ordinance writing experience, while not essential, can be very helpful. This is especially true for proactive municipalities that want to develop a master plan and TND ordinance provisions in advance of receiving an actual TND proposal.

Cost to Developers

Developers generally don't consider building TNDs for several reasons:

- Assembling a large quantity of land is costly.
- Lender avoidance of risk in untested markets makes financing innovative development difficult.
- The process of amending a municipal zoning ordinance to accommodate a TND can be costly, time-consuming, and filled with unknowns; plus, there is a real risk that the municipality will fail to enact the necessary provisions.

Development Patterns and Critical Mass

In many—but not all—cases, development of a complete TND will require large tracts of vacant or underdeveloped land, ideally with immediate or planned access to roads, public transit, and public water and sewer systems. Development of smaller individual

tracts rarely provides the critical mass of development needed to support a market for community amenities or commercial uses on their own, regardless of what zoning may permit.

Because land ownership patterns are fragmented and the real estate market seldom supports town-scale development all at once, a master plan for the entire area zoned for TND is critical in order to designate appropriate locations for the various components that will comprise the TND. As individual parcels are developed in alignment with the master plan, the overall development pattern of the TND will gradually take shape. Incentive zoning provisions, which promote the right TND components in the right places, are just as important as the master plan. They may be accompanied by concurrent disincentives in the base zoning provisions so that properties are held available until the real estate market is ripe for the desired TND components.

Smaller land holdings located in the midst of or on the immediate edge of existing urban or suburban neighborhoods are a different case; the surrounding development provides a critical mass of population to warrant mixed-use development. However, even in these situations an overall TND master plan and appropriate zoning incentives are desirable to promote the right developments in the right places.

TND Ordinance Goals

Typical TND ordinances should result in development that:

- Has a discernible center. This is often a square, plaza, green, or park. The center is a good location for a public transit hub or stop.
- Includes a variety of residential dwelling types, so that people of different ages and socioeconomic levels can find places to live, and locates most dwellings within a short walk of the community center.
- Supports shops, offices, and restaurants that meet most of the residents' needs.

- Provides two or three-story commercial buildings with street-level retail space and offices or housing on the upper floors.
- Locates a school close enough so that most children can walk from where they live.
- Uses streets to form a connected network, providing multiple route options and reducing traffic congestion. These streets are relatively narrow and shaded by trees; there are sidewalks and possibly bike lanes to improve safety for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Locates buildings close to the street, creating a sense of place by framing the sidewalk with street trees and building walls.
- Situates parking lots and garage doors at the rear of buildings, accessed by alleys. On-street parking is desirable.
- Reserves prominent sites for community buildings like town halls, theaters, and churches.

(Many sources offer some variation of these components; this list was adapted, in large part, from DPZ Partners, an architecture and town planning firm.)

An integral component of TND ordinance provisions is design criteria, which describes (in narrative and graphic formats) how a proposed TND project must meet the above goals in order to gain approval.

TND ordinance provisions should also address the following components:

- Purpose and necessity of the provisions.
- Applicability and criteria for qualifying uses under the ordinance.
- Actual uses allowed.
- Size, dimension, and location of building structures.
- Supplemental criteria, such as whether modifications are allowed, specific conservation-related goals, and the relationship between the TND provisions and other provisions related to signs, parking, etc.

Steps to Enact a TND Ordinance

Enacting a zoning ordinance amendment to accommodate or encourage TND in a municipality involves these basic steps:

1. Through a comprehensive planning process, determine the community's ability to accommodate TNDs. This includes identifying valued natural and historic resources for protection, projecting population growth and future development pressure, and evaluating existing and future infrastructure for compatibility with TNDs. It also may require outreach to educate citizens, landowners, and officials about the benefits of TND. This education can occur through multiple channels such as workshops, meetings, municipal newsletters, and online resources.
2. Provide opportunities for citizens to participate in the design of the TND ordinance provisions. Before crafting the actual ordinance provisions, participants should collaborate with municipal officials in charrettes or visioning events to develop a conceptual community plan that reflects the vision of residents. This plan will ultimately help shape the TND ordinance provisions and ensure that TND developments align with the community's values.
3. Write and adopt the provisions. This process is usually aided by a land use planner or municipal solicitor, and is directly guided by municipal officials and relevant staff or consultants. This is also the appropriate step at which to develop incentives related to TDRs within the TND ordinance (see "TDRs" section above).
4. Implement the provisions. Often, the municipality's code enforcement officer is responsible for interpreting and implementing the provisions. If this person lacks experience with TND ordinance provisions, the municipality should seek the continued assistance of land use planners or other design professionals to review the actual application of the TND ordinance when projects are proposed.

5. Revise the provisions over time to ensure that the TND ordinance continues to meet land preservation and other community development objectives. Address any conflicts that arise between the TND ordinance and other ordinances.

Examples of TND

Each of the projects listed below is linked to a website that describes the traditional neighborhood development.

Pennsylvania

- [Eagleview](#) (Exton)
- [Florin Hill](#) (Mount Joy)
- [Lantern Hill](#) (Doylestown)
- [Millcreek](#) (West Lampeter Township)
- [New Daleville](#) (Londonderry Township)
- [Summerset at Frick Park](#) (Pittsburgh)
- [The Village at Valley Forge](#) (King of Prussia)

National

- [Daniel Island](#) (Charleston, SC)
- [Encore](#) (Tampa, FL)
- [Glenwood Park](#) (Atlanta, GA)
- [Harbor Town](#) (Memphis, TN)
- [Kentlands](#) (Gaithersburg, MD)
- [Stapleton District 1](#) (Denver, CO)
- [The Glen](#) (Glenview, IL)

Explore more national and international case studies on the Urban Land Institute [website](#).

Pennsylvania Law

In 2000, amendments to the [Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code](#) (MPC) explicitly enabled TND zoning ordinance provisions for the first time. (All local governments in the state, except Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, are subject to the MPC.)

The MPC requires that a comprehensive plan, and the ordinances necessary to implement it, provide for all possible land uses. A benefit of TNDs is that they can accommodate many of these land uses (various residential types, retail, commercial, and even certain

types of light industrial) within a single defined growth area, or portion of a growth area.

While Pennsylvania law permits TNDs, it does not require them. Many zoning and subdivision ordinances ignore the option of TNDs and instead require large lots, wide streets, and separated types and densities of land use across the municipality. This situation is encouraged by decades of practice.

Resources at ConservationTools.org

To find experts and other resources, including TND ordinances used in Pennsylvania, see the right column of the on-line edition at

<http://conservationtools.org/guides/46>.

Submit Comments

Help improve the next edition of this guide. Email your suggestions to the Pennsylvania Land Trust Association at aloza@conserveland.org. Thank you.

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¹ TDR programs employ zoning ordinances that give landowners within valuable agricultural, natural, and cultural resource areas the option to legally sever the development rights from their land and sell these rights to another landowner or a real estate developer for use at a location appropriate for higher densities of development.

