

Existing Land Use

A description of existing land use in Cumberland County is fundamental to understanding the character of the County and its development related issues. Economic factors, development trends, cultural attitudes, and physical features have resulted in land use patterns that express the community's past as well as its present form. Future development will, for the most part, take place within the framework already established. Information gathered through the land use inventory provides the basis for recommendations regarding future land use.

General Land Use Characteristics

Cumberland County's general land use pattern can be described as high density development in the east and becoming less dense to the west. The lowest densities are in the townships west of Carlisle Borough.

Typical densities for single-family detached residential development in Cumberland County:¹

Density Level	Lot Area
Low Density	> 20,000 sq. ft.
Medium Density	10,000 – 20,000 sq. ft.
High Density	< 10,000 sq. ft.

The residential growth in the eastern region adjacent to the Susquehanna River, referred to as the West Shore, is characterized by urban development. The region's high residential density is attributed to several factors including the extension of the Harrisburg Urbanized Area, availability of public services, and proximity to employment centers. High density mixed-use development is common in boroughs; and six of the County's 11 boroughs are located in the east region.

Medium-density residential development occurs throughout the County but is most prevalent in the central region. These developments are generally suburban in character and are located on the more developable land, particularly where public sewer and water services are available. The concentration of this type of density is evident around the boroughs of Mechanicsburg, Carlisle, and Mt. Holly Springs. There is limited medium-density residential development west of Carlisle. That which does exist, occurs near the Boroughs of Newville, Newburg, and Shippensburg.

Low density residential development is most common in the central and west regions of the County. This type of residential development is predominant in the western section of the County where public sewer and water service is less available.

Most commercial development is located in the eastern and central regions. The greatest concentrations of commercial uses occur as shopping centers and strip development along major

¹ Cumberland County municipal zoning ordinances.

roadways. Much of the commercial strip development occurs between Camp Hill and Carlisle Boroughs, adjacent to U.S. Routes 11 and 15. Other concentrations of strip development occur along Pennsylvania Route 641 and Simpson Ferry Road, east of Mechanicsburg.

Numerous industrial parks have developed within the County and are generally located near the interchanges of I-81 and along U.S. Route 15. The transportation industry is represented by truck terminals and warehouses along the I-81 corridor. Most are concentrated in close proximity to the interchanges near Carlisle.

The central and western parts of the County, lying in the heart of the Cumberland Valley, contain a vast amount of agricultural activity. The highest concentration of prime agricultural soils is located between the Conodoguinet and Yellow Breeches Creeks. The majority of the forested and steeply sloped areas in the County are located in the mountainous areas along the northern and southern county boundaries, with very limited development activity.

Existing Land Use Map **Link to: [Existing Land Use Map](#)**

The Existing Land Use (ELU) map is updated on a regular basis using the Tax Assessment office parcel data and the County's Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping department. The methodology used to develop the ELU map includes the following:

1. Tax Assessment office's land use code was used as a basis to classify land use types.
2. The Tax Assessment land use codes were reclassified under the general land use categories established by the Planning office.
3. Parcel data was verified using aerial imagery and field inspection.

The ELU map is parcel based. Each parcel is assigned a single land use. In cases where a parcel contained multiple land uses, a hierarchy was established to assign the use with the greatest impact. No parcels were split. In addition, the land use acreage includes parcels that cross County boundaries if the parcel is taxed in Cumberland County. This process allows the County ELU map to be regularly updated and reflect current land use data.

Existing Land Use categories established by the Cumberland County Planning Office in 2006:

- Agricultural
- Residential
- Large Lot Residential
- Commercial Retail
- Commercial Service
- Commercial Open Space / Recreation
- Industrial
- Public / Semi Public
- Vacant

Land Use Descriptions

Residential

This category includes all housing types including: single-family detached, semi-detached, townhouse, and multi-family dwellings. It also includes mobile homes, mobile home parks and retirement facilities. It does not include single family dwellings on lots greater than 5 acres. Those uses are provided for under the Large Lot Residential category.

Large Lot Residential

This category identifies single-family detached dwellings on more than five acres. The large Lot Residential category was created to acknowledge the fact that the primary use of the lot is residential but that the use does not impact the majority of the tract.

Commercial Retail

The Commercial Retail category is used to describe businesses involved in the sale of goods to consumers. This also includes eating and drinking establishments.

Commercial Service

The Commercial Service category encompasses business that does not offer material merchandise in exchange for payment. Commercial Service uses include health, business and personal services such as advertising, data processing, insurance, consulting, accounting, research, management, hotel/motels, and financial institutions.

Commercial Open Space / Recreation

This category identifies commercial enterprises that occupy large tracts of land, primarily for outdoor recreation purposes, such as golf courses, campgrounds, hunting clubs, speedways, etc. Land use inventories before 2006 generally placed these uses in the Public/Semi-Public category. But, because of their commercial nature, they were classified as a separate commercial category in 2006.

Industrial Land Use

The Industrial Land Use category includes manufacturing, mining, industrial parks, and commercial warehousing and distribution facilities. It also includes light industrial uses such as research and development facilities, printing, electronics, small parts assembly and packaging.

Agricultural

The Agricultural category includes operations that are actively engaged in the commercial production and preparation for market of crops, livestock and livestock products. It includes agricultural, agronomic, horticultural, silvicultural and aquacultural enterprises. This category

was combined with the Vacant category in land use inventories prior to 2006. Since the 2006 inventory, the Agricultural and Vacant categories have been separated, acknowledging that agriculture is a distinct use of the land.

Public / Semi-Public

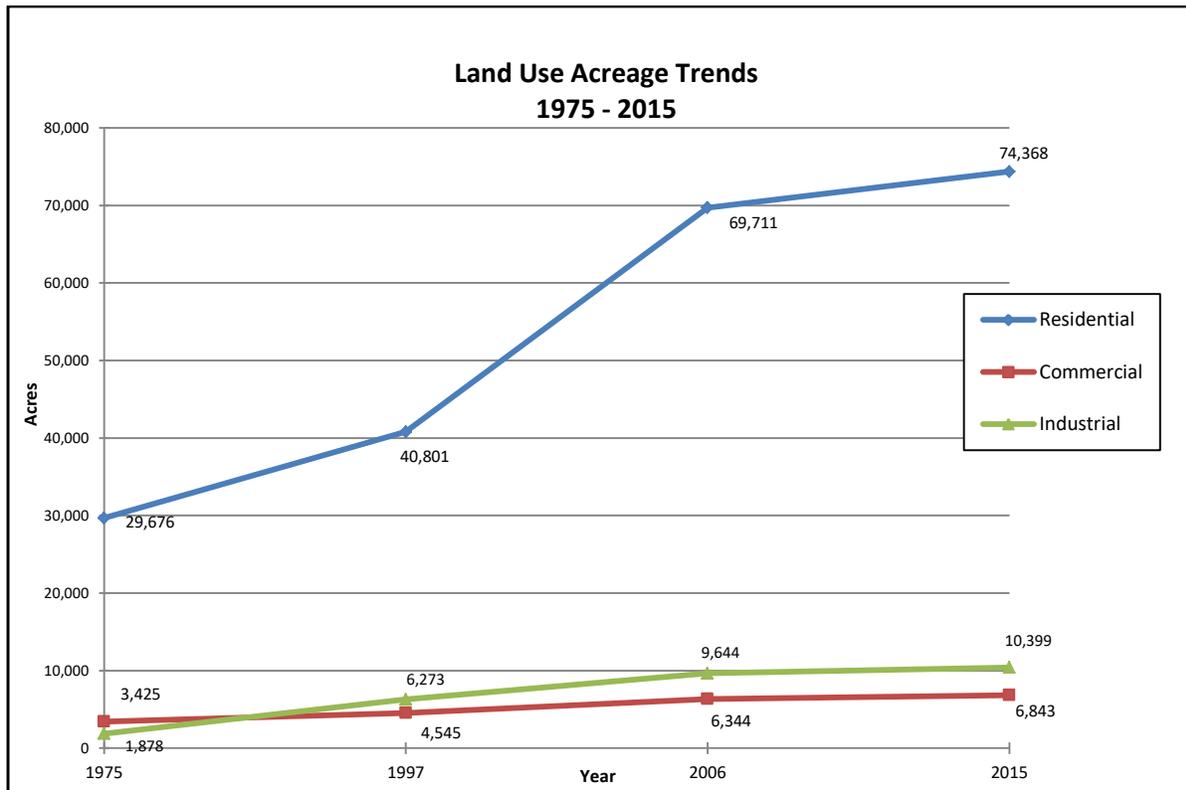
The Public / Semi-Public category includes utilities, government and military facilities, State forests, game lands, Fish and Boat Commission lands, State and municipal parks, hospitals, schools, libraries, firehouses, police stations, cemeteries, and churches.

Vacant

The Vacant category includes land that is unimproved or that is no longer in productive agricultural use. The Vacant category was also applied to wooded, mountainous areas. This category was combined with the Agricultural category in land use inventories before 2006.

County Land Use Trends

Cumberland County has conducted inventories on 3 major land use categories since 1975. The year the inventory took place and land use trends are identified in the following graph and table.



Existing Land Use Trends 1975 - 2015				
Land Use Category	Acres 1975	Acres 1997	Acres 2006	Acres 2015
Residential	29,676	40,801	69,711	74,368
Commercial	3,425	4,545	6,344	6,843
Industrial	1,878	6,273	9,644	10,399

SOURCE: Cumberland County Planning Department; Cumberland County GIS

1975 – 2015 Trends

Residential – Increase of 44,692 acres or 151% increase. The largest Residential increase in acreage occurred between 1997 and 2006, with an increase of 28,910 acres. The County continued a moderate increase in residential acreage between 2006 and 2015 even with the national recession in the housing market in 2008.

Commercial – Increase of 3,418 acres or almost 100% increase. The largest Commercial increase in acreage occurred between 1997 and 2006, with an increase of 1,799 acres. This large increase is the result of the strong economy during that period. The Commercial category in the table and graph above includes Commercial Retail and Commercial Service uses. Commercial Open Space uses are described below in the 2006-2015 trends. Commercial retail and service acreage has steadily increased from 1975 to 2015.

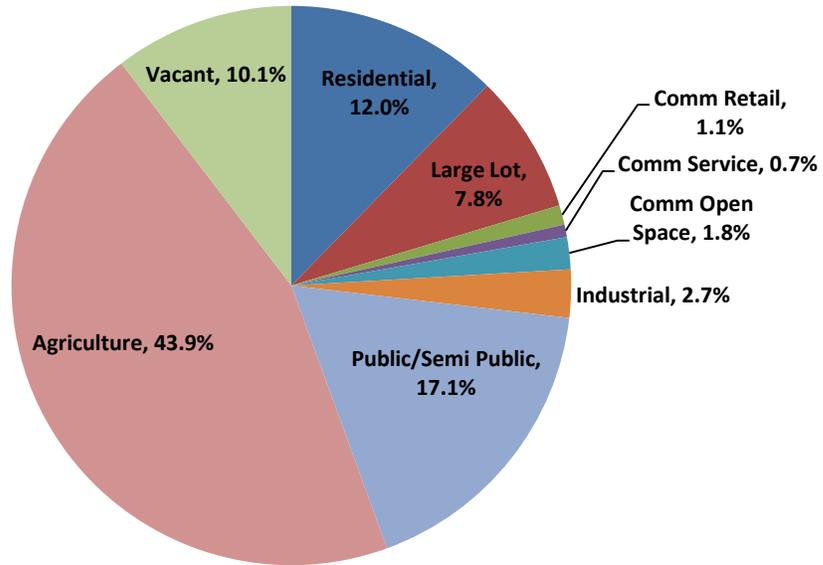
Industrial – Increase of 8,521 acres or 454% increase. The largest Industrial increase in acreage occurred between 1975 and 1997, with an increase of 4,395 acres. The large percentage increase reflects the rapid expansion of the distribution industry in the county.

2006 – 2015 Trends

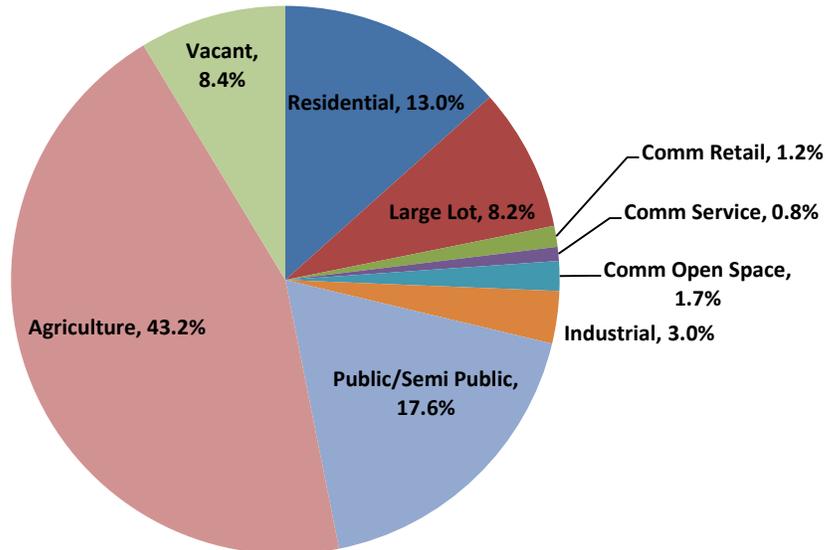
Several land use categories were added in the 2006 and 2015 inventories to provide more accurate representation of existing uses. Also, the same methodology was used in both inventories, which allows for a more direct comparison of trends.

- A new Residential category was added: Large Lot Residential, which includes residential lots larger than 5 acres.
- Commercial category was further defined as: Commercial Retail, Commercial Service, and Commercial Open Space/Recreation.
- Separate Agricultural and Vacant categories were established. Previous inventories combined the two categories.

2006 Land Use Percentage



2015 Land Use Percentage



Existing Land Use Acres and Percent 2006 and 2015				
Land Use Category	2006 Acres	2006 Percent	2015 Acres	2015 Percent
Residential	42,278	12.0%	45,628	13.0%
Large Lot Residential	27,433	7.8%	28,740	8.2%
Commercial Retail	3,967	1.1%	4,118	1.2%
Commercial Service	2,377	0.7%	2,725	0.8%
Commercial Open Space	6,206	1.8%	5,953	1.7%
Industrial	9,644	2.7%	10,399	3.0%
Public/Semi-Public	60,146	17.1%	61,792	17.6%
Agricultural	154,779	43.9%	151,684	43.2%
Vacant	35,587	10.1%	29,423	8.4%
Total Land Use Categories	342,417	97.1%	340,462	96.9%
Transportation*	10,262	2.9%	10,936	3.1%
Total	352,679	100.0%	351,398	100.0%

*Not land use category. It represents right-of-way area of roads and railroads.

SOURCE: Cumberland County Planning Department; Cumberland County GIS

2006 – 2015 Land Use Trends

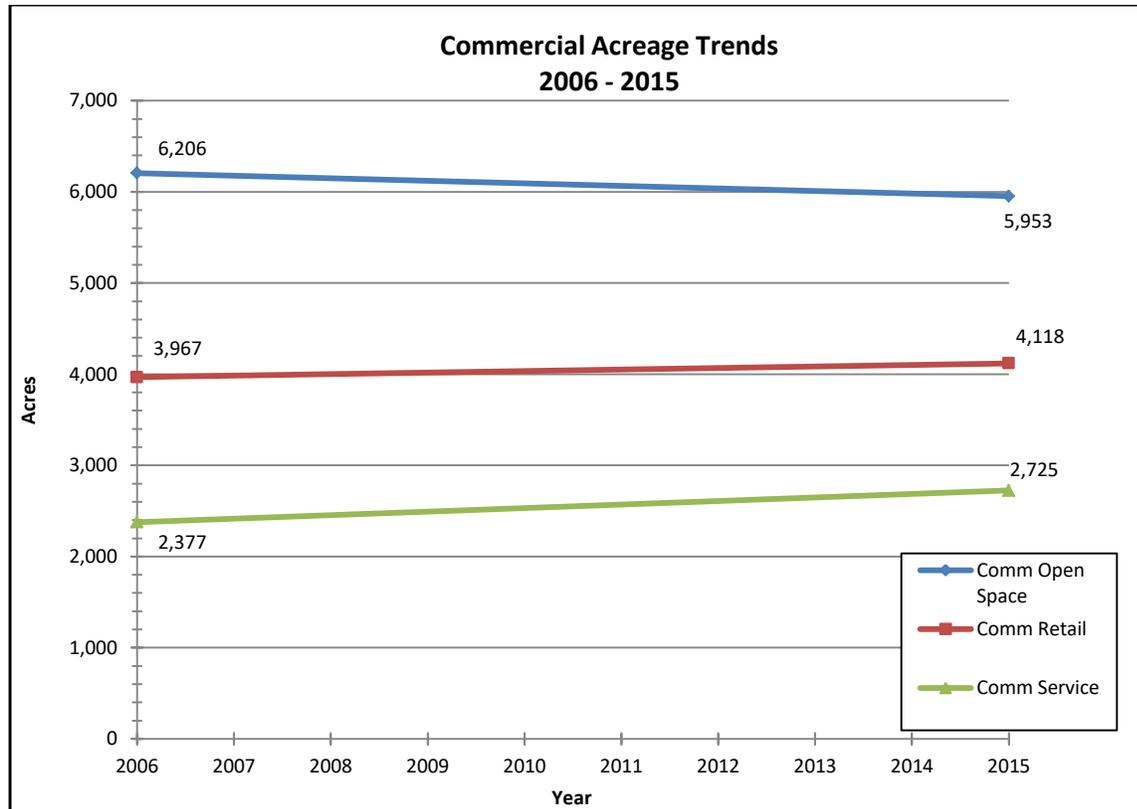
Residential

Residential land uses had the greatest increase in acreage during this time period. More than 3,300 acres were developed for residential use. Most of this growth occurred in the eastern portion of the County in the townships of Silver Spring, Hampden, Lower Allen and Upper Allen, according to building permit records. Suburban growth has also occurred in the townships around Carlisle Borough and Shippensburg Borough. The housing market remained strong during a major recession in this period.

Large Lot Residential uses had a substantial increase of more than 1,300 acres. This acknowledges that low density residential development is expanding in certain areas of the County. This is generally occurring in municipalities experiencing increased growth pressure and do not have extensive public sewerage coverage. Most of these lots are in the central and western portions of the County. This also includes residences in mountain land where large lot sizes may be necessary or mandated.

Commercial

Among the Commercial land use categories, only Commercial Open Space experienced a decrease in acreage during this period. This was the result of the closing of three golf courses. The Commercial Retail and Commercial Service categories had moderate increases in acreage.



The Commercial Service acreage increased at a faster rate than the Commercial Retail during this time period. Although the Commercial Service category consumes the smallest amount of area of the three commercial categories, the service industry is a major employer in the County. The growth of the industry appears to continue that employment trend.

Most of the area devoted to Commercial Service occurs in the east region of the County and the least in the west region. Major business parks in the east include the Rossmoyne Business Park along U.S. Route 15, the Senate Ave. office complex in East Pennsboro Township, and the Cumberland Technology Park at I-81 Interchange 61.

Commercial Retail is generally located along major roadways and is most prevalent in the eastern part of the County, along U.S. Route 11, Pa. Route 641, and Simpson Ferry Road. There are also several large shopping centers between Mechanicsburg and the Susquehanna River. The steady growth in Commercial Retail acreage reflects infill development, redevelopment and expansions of these retail areas.

Industrial

The Industrial acreage increased by more than 750 acres during this time period. This increase is mostly due to expanding quarry operations and the continued growth of the distribution and warehousing industry. Most of the distribution facilities have located in the central region of the County, near the intersection of Interstate 81 and the Pennsylvania Turnpike. Other clusters of warehousing and distribution are located around the intersection of Rt. 15 and the Pennsylvania Turnpike in Lower and Upper Allen Townships and near the Naval Supply Depot in Hampden Township. During this time period, most distribution industry growth was concentrated along the I-81 corridor near Exits 44 and 37.

Mining and quarrying also contributed to the increase in industrial acreage. This increase is the result of expansions to existing quarry operations, mostly in Dickinson and Southampton Townships.

Other unique uses are classified as “Industrial” on the Existing Land Use map since they are similar in character to more traditional industrial uses. These include:

- Enola Rail Yard in East Pennsboro Township which occupies approximately 400 acres.
- Cumberland County Landfill includes approximately 200 acres on the border of Hopewell and North Newton Townships.

Agricultural

The Agricultural land use category had the second greatest decrease in acreage during this time period, with a loss of over 3,000 acres. This agricultural land has mostly been converted to residential, commercial, and industrial uses. Most of this loss occurred in the central region and near the interchanges of I-81, where the growth pressure is the greatest.

The Agricultural category accounts for the greatest percentage of total acreage in the county with approximately 43%. The greatest percentage of this use is in the western region of the County. The eastern portion of the County, east of Mechanicsburg, has very little agricultural activity accounting for only 1% of the agriculture in the county.

The Census of Agriculture, developed every 5 years by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, provides another statistically reliable measurement of farmland acreage. The Agricultural Census of 2007 and 2012 verifies the loss of farmland shown through County GIS calculations.

Agricultural Census - Cumberland County			
2007 and 2012			
Agriculture Use	2007	2012	Change
Acres in Farmland	157,388	154,879	-2,509
Number of Farms	1,550	1,415	-135
Average size of Farm (acres)	102	109	7
Amount in Cropland	78.2%	77.3%	-0.9%

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Agriculture

Cumberland County Agricultural Trends (Census of Agriculture)

- Loss of over 2,500 acres of agricultural land between 2007 and 2012.
- The number of farms operating in the County decreased by 135 during that period.
- The average size of a farm in Cumberland County remained nearly the same.
- Majority of farm acreage is cropland.

Public / Semi-Public

The Public / Semi-Public category grew by approximately 1,600 acres between 2006 and 2015. Much of this increase reflects the expansion of lands owned by state agencies and non-profit organizations, located near Kings Gap and White Rocks on South Mountain; and Waggoner's Gap and Doubling Gap on North Mountain.

The largest single areas in this land use category are contained in the State owned forest lands, game lands, parks and Fish & Boat Commission Lands. The majority of state owned lands are located in the west and a smaller proportion in the center of the county.

A few other large tracts of public lands account for a significant amount of acreage in the municipalities in which they are located. In Lower Allen Township the State Correctional Institution is approximately 700 acres. The Carlisle Barracks and Army Heritage Center near Carlisle account for more than 400 acres.

Vacant

The Vacant land use category had the greatest decrease with a loss of over 6,100 acres. This reflects the development and conversion of vacant land to other uses during this period. The loss of vacant land is at a much greater rate than the loss of agricultural land. This appears to indicate that a significant portion of new development is not utilizing land in agricultural production.

A substantial portion of the Vacant acreage includes the wooded slopes of North and South Mountains that are not permanently protected as State Forest or Game Lands.