

Analysis

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Rural Special Districts

Related Policy: *Intentionally cultivate, retain, and expand industry*

Why Focus on This Topic?

“Special District” is a term that planners use to identify certain places where the scale, land pattern, and building forms differ significantly from the areas around them. In urban areas, they form their own character zone. In rural areas, they’re more like “natural intrusions” in our agricultural and natural character zones. Quarries are another example – they’re different from what surrounds them, but they’re still an important part of the rural landscape and economy.

During the places2040 planning process, staff of the Lancaster County Planning Department identified Special Districts in Urban Growth Areas, but did not identify them in rural areas – in part because we hadn’t come up with a definition for them, or a methodology for identifying them.

In Urban Growth Areas, we defined Special Districts as “typically [containing] a single large-scale commercial, industrial, or institutional use, often in a campus-like setting. Uses may include (but are not limited to) business parks, airports, school campuses, [and] municipal facilities.”

In rural areas, we applied a more limited set of criteria to identify potential candidates for designation as Rural Special Districts. We looked for existing industrial/commercial nodes – business clusters of 10 acres or more, located outside of *places2040* Growth Areas, composed of commercial businesses, industrial operations, or both.

These nodes are significant economic drivers in rural areas. However, in order to limit development in rural areas and preserve high-quality agricultural and natural lands, it’s important that municipalities carefully consider which of these nodes they might designate as Rural Special Districts, and what uses are permitted within them.

As it relates to the Future Land Use & Transportation Map in *places2040*, we’re not proposing to identify Rural Special Districts as a character zone, but rather to add them as one of the “Other Elements” shown on that map – similar to how we’re showing Rural Villages and Quarries.

The purpose of this analysis is to show us 1) where these nodes exist, 2) what their characteristics are, and 3) where it may be appropriate to create new nodes. This information can help us to direct future

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commercial and industrial development to locations that are appropriate for these types of uses, and away from agricultural and natural preservation priority areas.

Purpose of Discussion

- Consider criteria for Rural Special Districts;
- Show where potential candidates exist and where they COULD exist;
- Recommend how *places2040* catalytic tools can be implemented to achieve the results we want to see.

Desired Outcomes

Places2040 provides some ways to measure our progress in achieving this policy:

Economy and Opportunity

| | | |
|-------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| Business establishments | ▲ | Increase # of business establishments |
| Industry mix | ▲ | Increase Industry mix |

Map

A more detailed discussion of the analysis undertaken for this topic appears in a separate “Methodology” handout. In general terms, Map 1 illustrates the following:

Map 1 – Existing Industrial/Commercial Nodes

- Existing business clusters of 10 acres or more, located outside of *places2040* Growth Areas, composed of commercial businesses, industrial operations, or both.
- Commercial or industrial zoning districts totaling 10+ acres and located outside of *places2040* Growth Areas where Rural Special Districts could be located in the future.
- Preserved & priority ag / natural land identified in the Winter 2020 Implementation Workshops.

Results of the Analysis

Looking at the countywide data, these factors stand out to us:

- Countywide, 8,331 acres of land located outside of *places2040* Growth Areas is zoned for commercial or industrial uses.
- Many of the existing commercial/industrial nodes and potential future locations of Rural Special Districts are located along or within the vicinity of majority and/or priority corridors and *places2040* Growth Areas.
- Dependent on permitted uses, potential locations of Rural Special Districts exist in a wide variety of municipal zones, ranging from industrial and highway commercial to village center and crossroads community.

Applying the Catalytic Tools in *places2040*

Here's how our partners can use these tools to manage Rural Special Districts:

Municipalities / Regional Entities

- Place-Based Planning – Use the results of this analysis to prioritize and direct new non-residential development to growth areas, work with neighboring municipalities to identify opportunities for redevelopment and infill.
- Simplify Zoning
 - Rezone (if necessary) land in appropriate areas to accommodate commercial and industrial land uses, especially within existing industrial/commercial nodes.
 - In nodes and zones outside of *places2040* Growth Areas where commercial and/or industrial uses are permitted by special exception or conditional use, consider permitting these uses by right to streamline the land development process.
- Infrastructure – Identify necessary repairs and/or replacement of rural roads and bridges that serve existing commercial/industrial nodes, or could serve new districts and address potential limitations of rural fire companies to respond to industrial emergencies.

Partners for Place

- Align Resources – Work with municipalities and property owners to ground-truth these analyses and identify and ready the lands most suitable for economic development [Economic Development Co. (EDC) of Lancaster County].
- Collaborate – Establish regional task forces to address establishment and regulation of rural businesses, with membership comprised of representatives from the rural business community, regional chambers of commerce, EDC, and municipal staff and officials.

Authorities

- Infrastructure – Work to close any deficits in public sewer systems for *places2040* Growth Areas. Ensure that sewer is readily available for potential rural special district locations within, or possibly adjacent to, these growth areas.

County

- When the Future Land Use & Transportation Map in *places2040* is next updated, add Rural Special Districts.

Questions for Workshop Discussion

1. What do you notice about the data on the map? What stands out to you?
2. How might you use this analysis to inform local and regional decision making, especially in terms of where future Rural Special Districts could be permitted?
3. Do you see any conflicts between areas that have been identified as preserved & priority ag / natural land and potential locations of Rural Special Districts?
4. Our analysis is simply a data-driven “baseline” review. More study is needed at the local level. What can you – as one of our partners – do to follow up with this analysis?
5. Has there been any discussion in your region about where these clusters of commercial and industrial uses might be permitted, how much of a need there is for them, and where they should not be allowed to locate?
6. Do you see any infill and reinvestment opportunities in currently developed but underutilized areas where future Rural Special Districts might be able to locate?
7. Do you think that these Rural Special Districts could provide an opportunity to accommodate on-farm businesses that have outgrown their current locations?