

New Zoning Overlay Proposed for the Fifth Ave. Corners of Main St.

The intersection of Main Street and Fifth Avenue is a unique transition area between the top of the borough's commercial corridor and Ursinus College's institutional campus. Now with the new—and beautiful--Schellhase Commons open to all of Collegeville's residents as well as students, it was felt that this corner would benefit from special zoning which would encourage additional innovative and creative mixed-use (retail on the first floor, apartments, student housing, or offices above) development.

At the Sept. 27 meeting of the Borough's Business Development Committee, members reviewed a new draft zoning overlay prepared by the borough's Montgomery County Planner, Mike Lowry. The new overlay, named the "College Gateway Overlay District" or CGO, would apply only to two properties each at the four corners of Fifth Ave. and Main Street. See the attached picture for the buildings that would be included in the limited zoning.

A zoning overlay creates a special zoning district placed over existing zoning. The overlay provides incentives for special provisions in addition to those in the underlying base zone. However, with a zoning overlay, the building owners continue to retain the flexibility of following either the old zoning or the new zoning. While the new zoning offers them incentives to change, they are not forced to follow it or change anything.

The borough believes that it is important for the design of the CGO district to respect the character of existing development in the area, to maintain and encourage the existing small scale pedestrian character of our downtown, and to promote high standards of design and construction.

One difference of the proposed new overlay district vs. the borough's Main Street Commercial District is that it includes student housing in areas designated by the Central Perkiomen Regional Comprehensive plan as downtown commercial land use that is in close proximity to Ursinus College.

The new proposed zoning overlay aims to:

- Create a mixed-use, small-town character that complements existing town and village development;
- Encourage lively, human-scaled activity areas and gathering places for the community by encouraging a mix of uses;
- Ensure that any new infill development is compatible with the surrounding commercial area;
- Recognize the importance of window shopping and sidewalk dining, and place a premium on pedestrian accessibility and design;
- Allow a range of commercial and varied residential uses within easy walking distance to the adjoining college campus;
- Accommodate a variety of housing types and discourage one housing type from dominating the streetscape;
- Encourage new development and uses that can stimulate economic revitalization, in accordance with the Collegeville Borough Revitalization Plan (2010-2021);
- Encourage development along Collegeville's Main Street Commercial district at the gateway intersection of Main Street & 5th Avenue, and allow for a mix of uses in order to foster the revitalization of the pedestrian corridor;
- Encourage economic development through the establishment of flexible standards that maintain the traditional Main Street environment and Collegeville Borough's unique identity;

- Provide for expanded uses and flexible standards, recognizing the uniqueness of the corridor area bordering commercial, institutional, and residential districts;
- Ensure that pedestrian connections to the Borough Commercial District, public transportation, naturalized trails and open space areas are included in all development plans;
- Ensure consistency and integration of site improvements, access and parking, landscape and lighting, complimentary land uses and architectural treatments to result in a redevelopment area meeting the intent of this District;
- Establish a walkable streetscape by promoting a pedestrian orientation of streets and buildings and providing a safe and convenient interconnected sidewalk network; and
- Ensure that student housing, multifamily housing, and mixed-use development is consistent in character in both its residential and nonresidential components.

Mike explained to the committee that “the goal of the zoning overlay is to integrate the Ursinus College campus with the business districts along Main Street. This effort, in conjunction with enhanced pedestrian facilities, will help to create connections between Ursinus College and the business districts of Collegeville by allowing for a more diverse mix of uses along Main Street.”

At the BDC meeting, the draft overlay zoning was recommended to be forwarded to the Planning Commission and the Borough Council for their review. Then at their October 6 meeting, Council recommended forwarding the plan to the Planning Commission for review at their Oct. 21 meeting. You can find a copy of the proposed zoning on the Collegeville Borough website [here](#). All residents who have comments on the zoning are invited to attend both the Planning Commission meetings via Zoom and all Council meetings either in person and via Zoom to make their voices heard.

The BDC Committee will be scheduling a series of many meetings, both via Zoom and in person, regarding plans for our Main Street with building owners, business owners, the Ursinus College community and residents throughout this fall and winter. The purpose of the meetings is to get as many individual’s feedback as possible in order to incorporate everyone’s ideas into plans for Collegeville’s Main Street. The Council believes that *the best plans are always a result of all the residents’ and businesses’ input, not just the Council’s.* If you have questions, ideas, comments or concerns, feel free to contact Cathy Kernen at ckernen@council.collegeville-pa.gov or 610 409 0370.