

## **THE PENNSYLVANIA TOWN 40 YEARS LATER: PRESERVATION AND PLANNING IN A CHANGING TOWNSCAPE**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Taking Wilbur Zelinsky's 1977 article "The Pennsylvania Town" as a point of departure, this article explores how preservation in three Pennsylvania towns—Lancaster, York, and Reading—has proceeded in the context of challenging socio-economic trends and changing demographics. Our assessment of the current status of Zelinsky's urban-morphological traits identifies a townscape that exhibits both historical continuity and new paths of urban form. Overall, robust preservation regimes have been established resulting in relatively intact townscapes. Many recent redevelopment projects exhibit a significant degree of compatibility with the historic built environment. Some success has also been achieved in preserving shade trees and mixed land uses. But there are also two-tiered preservation regimes producing different urban landscapes: the colonial town (now partly gentrified and revitalized) and the industrial rowhouse town (now Latinized). Both closely resemble ideal urban design as envisioned by the contemporary planning profession (i.e., new urbanism). The latter is also affected by disinvestment in the built environment due to deindustrialization and the immigration of a low income population, resulting in Latino aesthetics grafted onto older working class residential districts. These class and ethnic aesthetics are encouraged and legally formalized, but also resisted, by preservation regulations. Other distinct traits—bricked sidewalks and alleys—exist in a grey zone with regards to ownership and are therefore harder to preserve.*

**Keywords:** *Pennsylvania Town, historic preservation, built environment, Wilbur Zelinsky, Latino urbanization*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In 1977, geographer Wilbur Zelinsky published the article "The Pennsylvania Town: An Overdue Account" in which he identified a set of morphological traits in the towns of eastern Pennsylvania. The traits include a high degree of compactness with population densities that exceed those of other similarly sized cities elsewhere in the United States; wall-to-wall rowhouses<sup>1</sup> with no setbacks and usually only small stoops that connect the public and private realm; red brick façades that at times have been painted; a streetscape with red brick sidewalks, multi-purpose alleyways that contain residences and occasionally businesses; an abundance of shade trees; and mixed land uses from a history of small-scale industrialization. These characteristics are not uniquely associated with the Pennsylvania Town; instead, it is in combination that they create a particular townscape, which Oxford Dictionaries (2016) defines as "the visual appearance of a town or urban area; an urban landscape" (see also Reeve et al. 2007; Orillard 2009).

Almost forty years after Zelinsky's research, the Pennsylvania Towns continue to exhibit distinct historic cores worthy of preservation efforts. This article explores how historic preservation and planning have proceeded in the context of challenging socio-economic trends and changing demographics. Zelinsky identified an extensive region where places exhibit these traits; however, we selected three case study cities—Lancaster, York, and Reading—to investigate local planning and preservation practices (Figure 1). We interviewed local planners (one planner in each city) and preservation professionals (two preservation specialists employed by Lancaster and Reading respectively; York does not have such a position), using a semi-structured format so that each interview addressed approximately the same issues. The analysis in the paper also draws from planning documents and field observations. Except for Harrisburg and Allentown-Bethlehem, which followed urbanization paths based on heavy industry, the three selected places are the largest and most centrally located cities within the Pennsylvania Town region, have the most extensive historical cores, and are arguably the most quintessential Pennsylvania Towns. Our focus is not just on preservation from a narrow built environment perspective; instead, we also apply a social and critical perspective. Moreover, by planning we do not just consider regulatory measures—such as zoning and preservation codes—aimed at protecting the historic built environment, but also encompassing political, social, and economic forces in which planning

operates. As will be evident later, it is also striking how the historic urbanism in the Pennsylvania Town corresponds closely to the prevailing paradigm in urban planning—the design principles outlined by new urbanism (e.g., Duany et al. 2010; Talen 1995)—which makes this an even more interesting case study. How do you plan and preserve this presumably desirable urban form? The article is organized along four themes that capture some of Zelinsky’s most salient morphological traits: the continuity of rowhouses, the unique character of façades, the presence of mixed land uses, and the properties associated with the Pennsylvania Town streetscape. For each theme, we discuss how different planning mechanisms address the challenges of preservation, with an emphasis on the most important elements of the built environment in each particular case.

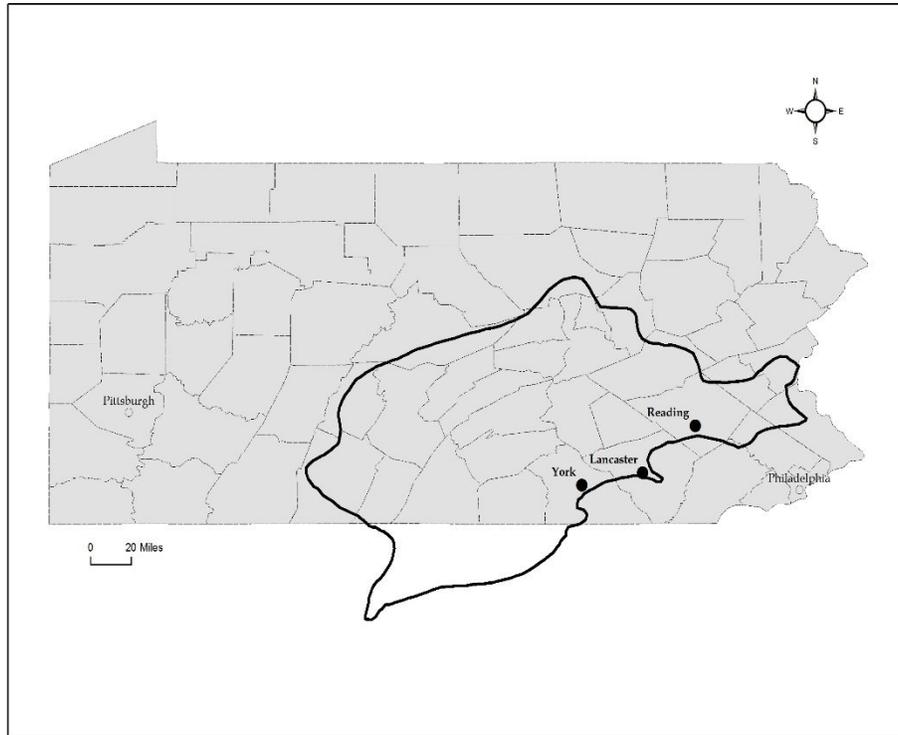


Figure 1. The extent of Zelinsky’s Pennsylvania Town region and the location of the three case study cities.

## THE ROWHOUSE

The place-defining residential form—the rowhouse—is largely intact in all three of the sample Pennsylvania Towns. The continuous presence of rowhouses tells us that the Pennsylvania Town has, in a broad sense, been preserved, although in many instances it shows signs of disinvestment. The population development in the rowhouse districts<sup>2</sup> of the three case study cities has been moderately positive. Since 1980, which is soon after Zelinsky’s article was published, the population of Reading’s rowhouse neighborhoods increased 13 percent, in Lancaster 12 percent, and in York 3 percent (Johansson and Cornebise, forthcoming). The outcome is a robust housing market for many rowhouse dwellings, either for long-term residents, recent Latino migrants, or a small number of gentrifiers.

The imposition of a preservation regime has also played a significant role. The three cities have seven locally established historic preservation districts—four in Reading, two in Lancaster, and one in York. (There are also national historic district designations with less regulatory “teeth,” which are not analyzed further in this article.) Lancaster was the first city among the three to institute a historic district governed by a Historic Architecture Review Board (HARB) in 1967. York and Reading followed shortly thereafter. The basic principle of a HARB is to regulate renovations and new construction so that they are compatible with the existing built environment. Moreover, demolitions must be approved by the HARB, which is a politically appointed board. To further preservation, Lancaster created a Heritage Conservation District (HCD) in 2001. It covers 13,000 structures, and together with the HARB district, encompasses

virtually all of the non-suburban parts of the city. The preservation districts of Reading and York are not as extensive but nevertheless contain significant portions of the city. The Lancaster HCD is not as strict as the HARB district; for example, modern building material and features such as siding, doors, and windows are allowed, although demolition or new construction that alters the footprint of a building must be approved. The HARB district may undergo boundary changes over time as property owners can petition to be added or removed on a block-by-block basis, unlike the HCD which is determined by city ordinance only. This arrangement awards property owners in the typically more affluent HARB district more influence over historic governance compared to property owners in the HCD.

How effective have the preservation efforts been? The consensus among our informants (i.e., the interviewed planning and preservation professionals) is that changes to the rowhouse environment in the HARB districts have been minor and historically sensitive. There are few requests to modify properties beyond what is allowed. The York Economic and Community Development Director Kevin Schreiber (2012) says “I think we could credit [the HARB]...with having fought to preserve our historic architecture, so we were able to save...the bones of our city, which is an asset that people tend to recognize.” The City of Reading’s Historic Preservation Specialist Amy Johnson (2012) concurs: “Our historic district...has helped maintain a decent quality of the building stock.” Lancaster’s HCD has also preserved buildings but in continuously modified shape. The HARB—or in the case of the Lancaster HCD, a separate historical commission—makes regulatory recommendations to the city councils, which ultimately approves or denies requests by property owners to alter their properties. However, the power of the HARB and the historical commission is de facto strong. Lancaster’s chief planner tells us that city council supports the recommendations “95%” of the time (Jackson 2012). In effect, the city councils have been very conservative in allowing demolition.

The impetus of preservation has come from many directions. The political power of local elites has been especially strong in Lancaster. “We had a very strong philanthropic group. The elites in the 1960s, who lived in town, wanted to protect the historic character,” says the long-time Lancaster planner (Jackson 2012). The earliest example of renovation-oriented preservation in the three cities is probably the 1970s Old Town residential development project in central Lancaster. Sixty-six dilapidated structures were restored and the street network was reorganized to create a secluded feel. The preservation ethic is also the product of a backlash against urban renewal in Lancaster, which was arguably more extensive than in York or Reading (Schlyer 2002). The prominent private Franklin and Marshall College, with strong ties to the local elite in Lancaster, has also renovated older rowhouses for off-campus student housing. Broad-based planning processes such as the comprehensive plan have also been employed to encourage historic preservation. Most notably, in the 1993 Lancaster Comprehensive Plan, historic architecture ranked second on a top-ten list of the most valuable community features, which was used as justification for further preservation through the creation of the HCD. The list was derived from a citizens’ survey, so the preference for preservation purportedly came from a broader segment of the population via the comprehensive plan, although those surveyed may not have been a true cross-section of the citizenry. Residents who volunteer to participate in planning processes tend to be well educated and relatively affluent.

The actual demographic make-up of the Pennsylvania Town is increasingly Latino. Many of the Latinos have migrated from larger cities in the northeast, especially New York City, in search of more affordable small town environments (Reisinger 2005a; 2005b). Reading is 58 percent Latino, Lancaster 39 percent, and York 28.5 percent, according to the 2010 census. (In 1980, the Latino population was 10 percent in Reading, 12 percent in Lancaster, and 3 percent in York.) The Latino population is mostly low income; Reading was even the poorest city in the United States recently, according to census data (see Tavernise 2011). In fact, a perspective on class and ethnic aesthetics is needed when we further consider historic preservation. For example, the issue of porches is illustrative. As Zelinsky noted, many of the buildings in the historic core of the Pennsylvania Town do not have front porches, although later rowhouses further out from the city center do. A growing number of requests to add porches have reached the planning commission in Lancaster, but they are regularly denied in the historic core as they are considered out of character. A growing desire for porches is related to the aforementioned demographic shift. “We’re seeing another porch boom due to the Latino porch culture,” says Suzanne Stallings (2012), the Historic Preservation Specialist with the City of Lancaster.

The need to establish a preservation dialogue with the Latino community is recognized by city planners. The City of Lancaster has aired preservation messages on local Spanish-language radio, but acknowledges that few Latinos seek out preservation advice (Stallings 2012). Amy Johnson (2012) says that more Latinos make improvements in the Reading historic district than has been the case in the past, but also distinguishes between Latinos (often Puerto Ricans) who are long-term residents and start to play at least a modest role in preservation efforts, and recent and often transient migrants (e.g., Nicaraguans and Dominicans) who are harder to reach.

While we noted above that most rowhouses are still intact, occasionally one encounter “disruptions;” empty lots or recently added non-compatible land uses. Our informants agree that demolition of older rowhouses have been few; they have been limited to occasional properties in the CBD to accommodate commercial uses, along major roads

where residential land uses are no longer optimal, or under special circumstances such as fire damage. From a planning perspective, in-fills should architecturally fit the existing built environment. In fact, there are a number of such developments. A Lancaster non-profit, the Spanish American Civic Association, used federal funding to construct two new housing projects that replaced a series of condemned and substandard rowhouses (Figure 2). Located in the HCD, the projects had to meet design standards and fit into the streetscape by incorporating brick façades, dormers, gabled roofs, back alley parking, and porches. The primary market for these units are Latinos who want to live in the city but in contemporary dwellings with modern amenities. Another example is the Penn's Common Court, an affordable housing complex for seniors in Reading. Local historic district activists worked with the developer to replicate the architectural details in a Victorian Italianate style using of modern materials. The Reading Housing Authority has also completed residential in-fill in north Reading that replicates the houses that were replaced. These recent projects are different from urban renewal-era developments in modernist style, which exist in the Pennsylvania Town much like elsewhere in the United States. Lancaster was especially affected by urban renewal, both in the central business district and in African-American rowhouse neighborhoods in the southeastern part of the city (Schuler 2002). Since then, Lancaster has been proactive in revising zoning regulations so that new construction better fits the historic townscape. In 1996, the minimum width requirement for rowhouses was downsized from 20 to 18 feet, based on Sanborn maps that showed historic lots were of that narrower size. To achieve higher density in contemporary developments, the city returned to the older standard (Jackson 2012). Setback requirements were modified at the same time, from 20 feet, which was the 1973-1996 standard in most residential zones, to five feet. Occasionally, houses built during the 1970s and 1980s are set back deep from the street while adjacent older houses are close to the street. That can no longer occur. During the mid-1990s, traditional urban form was back in style in American planning, and Lancaster was an early adopter.



Figure 2. New housing development in Lancaster that replicates the design of older rowhouses.

The new developments cited above were publicly funded; private investment is another matter. Consider the following: the cost of new construction or rowhouse renovation in the Pennsylvania Town is very similar to what it would be in Baltimore or Philadelphia, but the market value is much lower. As of 2012, the ceiling for selling a rowhouse in York is approximately \$175,000-200,000, says York official Kevin Schreiber. Moreover, the physical state of many rowhouses is “poor to fair,” according to Reading planner Andrew Miller. In other words, the current market will rarely bear the cost of high quality renovation of individual rowhouses. When there is an interest in restoring older rowhouses, such as in the Victorian-era Centre Park neighborhood of Reading, it is a “labor of love” where people put more money and effort into rowhouses than the realistic rate of return would be. Renovations for lower income properties is technically more feasible. Some small-scale contractors buy derelict houses for as little as \$5,000 to \$10,000 in Reading and make improvements so that they are at least structurally sound rental properties (Johnson 2012). Similarly in York, affordable housing exists in “over-abundance” (Schreiber 2012). The vacancy rate in Reading and York is over 12 percent, according to the 2010 census<sup>3</sup>, which is above the U.S. average. With a vacancy rate of 6.8 percent, the housing market is significantly better in Lancaster.

## THE FAÇADE

Zelinsky noted, as any observer would, that brick is the main building material in the Pennsylvania Town. This has not changed much over time—a 1933 study concluded that 86 percent of dwellings in the City of Lancaster were brick (Herman et al. 2011). When the Pennsylvania Town emerged, nearby clay deposits were used by brick manufacturers who sold their products on the regional market, which resulted in brick-dominated townscapes (Winpenny 1982). However, differences in the quality of brick also had a tremendous impact on the appearance of the Pennsylvania Town. According to the Preservations Specialist in Reading, “hard bricks” do not need much maintenance whereas “soft bricks” deteriorate over time (Johnson 2012). Many bricks produced in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century were not “hard fired,” resulting in a softer and porous center, which increases the risk of deterioration (U.S. General Services Administration 2016). Over time, harder and smooth surfaced machine-made bricks became more common, especially among the wealthier (Hayward and Belfoure 2001). There are two maintenance solutions to deteriorating brick: applying manufactured siding over the façade or painting the brick. To Zelinsky, the latter stood as a prominent feature of the Pennsylvania Town. It is also possible that the painted brick tradition is not just due to maintenance but also a cultural phenomenon under Pennsylvania German influence (Stallings 2012). Zelinsky seemed to favor a cultural explanation for the general use of bricks. He noted that “neither environmental nor economic conditions can be invoked in explanation” (133) for the prevalence of brick. In doing so, Zelinsky failed to recognize the overwhelming early use of localized material, nor did he address the class distinction associated with the physical properties of brick.

The visual impression across the three case studies is that upscale neighborhoods retain the original brick look more than working class neighborhoods. There are several reasons for that. With regards to remodeling or new construction, HARB regulations do not stipulate that red brick must be used, but it is, in practice, the easiest way to achieve compatibility with the existing built environment. If a historic structure had at some point been painted, a renovating resident sometimes wants to restore the natural brick look, which is a common aesthetic preference of gentrifiers. However, the restoration process, especially with soft brick, is difficult and costly to achieve with aesthetically pleasing results (Miller 2012). Therefore, only affluent property owners may be willing to finance the re-conversion; in moderate income neighborhoods, once a building has been painted, it typically remains that way. It is also reasonable to assume, although we found no verifiable data, that wealthier homes used costlier but better quality bricks in the first place, which would be harder bricks that do not require paint. At the same time, buildings in the Pennsylvania Town are older than elsewhere in the United States, and therefore more exposed to deterioration over time and at some point more likely to need paint maintenance. Finally, it is also possible that the prevalence of painted brick is a form of local learning—if one property owner paints his or her façade, others will adopt that style. This explanation may have some merit, but is most likely limited to working class neighborhoods.

Local planners and preservationists recognize that painting brick is indeed a historically correct practice, which has implications for contemporary preservation regulations. The HARBS in the three cities do not review façade colors. The “gold standard” in preservation guidelines, the federal Secretary of Interiors’ Standards (which is important to adhere to for grant and tax credit purposes), caution against painting exteriors previously unpainted or the use of historically inappropriate colors (Weeks and Grimmer 1995); nevertheless, local preservation guidelines across the United States do not always regulate façade color. The Lancaster planner says, “when we...updated the ordinance, we spent a lot of time discussing [paint, but concluded] it’s a personal taste issue” (Jackson 2012). Color has a visual impact, but paint does not usually inflict structural harm to a building, which is why preservationists may be hesitant to recommend color regulations. The Lancaster ordinance had to be approved by city council. John Guapero, a Latino on the council, noted the preference among Latinos for other color schemes than those traditionally used in the Pennsylvania Town, which was another reason why color regulations were not adopted. Moreover, the city’s Preservation Specialist says that new “art communities” also prefer unorthodox colors when renovating rowhouses (Stallings 2012). At the same time, the HARBS are governed by boards with members who have served for decades in their position, forming a “preservation oligarchy.” For example, HARBS have traditionalist two- or three-tone Victorian-style hue guides, although they are recommendations rather than binding regulations, while the presence of Latinos has colored the townscape in new ways. The ubiquitous bodegas in Reading are almost all painted orange and buildings in all three cities exhibit Caribbean-style pastel colors, which are examples of an emerging aesthetic cultural hybrid (Figure 3).

Various forms of siding exist throughout the Pennsylvania Towns, especially as one moves away from the city centers into working class neighborhoods. Formstone<sup>4</sup>, a type of durable material that is made to replicate the look of stone in different patterns and colors, is especially common (although ignored by Zelinsky). It dates from the post-WWII era and continues to have a strong visual imprint on the townscape (Figure 4). In addition to being a maintenance free exterior, in a city dominated by red brick, Formstone was often adopted by the homeowner to impart

the appearance of a more prestigious stone house (Hayward and Belfoure 2001). Much of the sales of Formstone were done door-to-door (Johnson 2012). This is still evident on the landscape as one can observe multiple houses on the same block clad in the same pattern.



Figure 3. Brightly painted apartment building in a Latino-dominated area of York.



Figure 4. Streetscape in Reading dominated by Formstone façades.

Adorning rowhouses with Formstone (or any other contemporary siding) is less common in the historically affluent neighborhoods. Today, those areas are usually under the HARB review process which strongly discourages siding due to compatibility requirements. While Formstone is associated with moderate income areas, the geographic pattern of the material is complex. For example, the poor Cabbage Hill neighborhood of southeastern Lancaster was owner-occupied and working class, but without money to invest in the properties (Oliff 1982). Many residents could not afford Formstone and the buildings show off the original brick more so than in other working class neighborhoods. Dealing with Formstone today is, just like removing paint, problematic. Removing this stucco-like material to expose the brick may necessitate re-bricking parts of the façade. The removal process is cumbersome and Formstone rests on a lattice mesh nailed onto the brick, which also leaves numerous holes in the façade.

## MIXED LAND USE

The Pennsylvania Towns developed as mixed manufacturing places with many moderately sized industries interspersed in the urban landscape, which is one factor that explains Zelinsky's observation that "we find nearly total anarchy in the spatial allocation of activities" (132). A 1935 article in the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* states that manufacturing plants in York "give the impressions of being widely scattered over the city" (Murphy 1935, 187) and that manufacturing was in close proximity to homes: "The residential areas crowd against the plant from all sides" (183). But compared to cities dominated by heavy industry, York "is surprisingly free from smoke and dirt" (183). This pattern is fundamentally the same in Lancaster where rail access to multiple points across the city led to dispersed manufacturing sites (Shand and Keller 1998; Loose 1999). Also in Reading, industries were "scattered" near canals and rail lines throughout the city (Patton 1983), although proximity to anthracite coal meant that large-scale manufacturing, and resulting neighborhoods with repetitious rowhousing, is more common there than in Lancaster and York.

How have these mixed land use characteristics been preserved? From the 1950s and onward when municipal regulations in earnest started to accommodate the emerging automobile society, conventional zoning with its insistence on land use separation has been detrimental to traditional urban form. However, Miller (2012) says that zoning hearing boards, at least in Reading, have "given away everything," implying that despite the land use separation mandated in standard zoning ordinances, land uses continued to emerge in a somewhat haphazard way via the use of variances in the planning process.

To reverse the (nominally) strict land use separation of modernist planning, Lancaster implemented the first mixed used zoning district in 1989, and more land in the city has been placed in mixed land use categories over time. In addition, Lancaster allows non-residential uses in rowhouse districts, except in suburban districts (R1 and R2) which mandates detached single-family housing. Using spot zoning, many neighborhood-based industrial buildings

have been converted into mixed use complexes. (Lancaster's current zoning map [City of Lancaster 2013] is a colorful patchwork that is reminiscent of Zelinsky's anarchic land use observation.) This includes the Slaymaker building (formerly a lock making company) that is now home to a variety of businesses and light manufacturing; the Cork Hotel complex (originally a cork factory) that includes apartments, restaurants, and offices; and Liberty Place, a conference facility in north Lancaster, which was originally a flooring company. Much of the mixed used zoning has been established by petition from property owners.

In residential neighborhoods, there has been a decline of certain types of retail establishments, which poses a challenge to maintaining a mixed land use pattern. Once prevalent stores (such as butcher shops and candy shops) are mostly gone, while some personal services (such as barber shops, beauty shops, and nail salons) remain (Stallings 2012). The classic example of mixed land use is the corner store. Jackson (2012) says about Lancaster: "In our comprehensive plan and neighborhood meetings, one of the positives was corner grocery stores. People loved them. Now most of them are Latino, but there are still some non-Latino owned traditional stores in white and African-American areas." At the request of the mayor, who has a retail business background, the Lancaster planning department amended the zoning ordinance to prohibit the conversion of corner stores to apartments in order to protect the historic mixed land uses in residential neighborhoods. An example of a conversion heralded as appropriate and successful is an old corner grocery store near Franklin & Marshall College that is currently a coffee shop. The city is eyeing a zoning update on what contemporary land uses are viable and appropriate at old corner store locations (Figure 5).

Nevertheless, mixed land uses are giving way to residential functions. Not surprisingly, adaptive reuse of industrial buildings is a common phenomenon. For example, a former silk mill in a north Reading neighborhood is now moderate income apartments (Figure 6). An old industrial structure in downtown York is now the upscale Codo loft apartments, which have attracted empty nesters. The Reading Hardware building in south Reading is not only loft apartments, but also home to a brew pub. Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster constructed a new mixed-use complex that simulates the scale of the Pennsylvania Town industrial heritage. It replaced a block of older structures with a five-story mixed-use building that now allows for both student housing and light manufacturing, although the most prominent non-residential tenant is yet another brew pub.



Figure 5. Rowhouses in Lancaster. Note the renovated brick façades, the mixing of brick and concrete sidewalks, and a corner lot pub (right).



Figure 6. "Mill-in-the-neighborhood" land use in north Reading. The former silk mill (left) is now apartments.

## THE STREETSCAPE

According to Zelinsky, three elements are especially important for the Pennsylvania Town streetscape: bricked sidewalks, abundant shade trees, and an extensive network of alleys.

Sidewalks: Bricked sidewalks are an early design feature that is evident from images dating from the 1860s, even before streets were paved (see Loose 1978). The red brick visual effect was even enhanced by bricked streets in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but those have almost entirely given way to asphalt. Bricked sidewalks partially exist today, but probably to a lesser extent than at the time of Zelinsky's article for reasons explored below. No records exist to

systematically determine the age of bricked sidewalks, so we cannot assess whether existing bricks are old or if it is a practice that has been continued over time by laying new bricks.

Maintenance and regulations of bricked sidewalks are affected by the peculiar legal arrangement that governs sidewalk space. The sidewalk is a public right-of-way even though the City does not usually hold the title of that land, and therefore a practice has emerged where the property owner is responsible for maintaining the sidewalk. This makes it politically hard to enforce preservation measures. Even in the historic preservation districts, there are no requirements to maintain bricked sidewalks. One exception is a design standard in Lancaster's Central Business Core zoning district that mandates brick banding. (Banding is a design accent where a strip of bricks is added to the sidewalk, usually positioned on the outer few feet.) Overall, the Lancaster central business district has more brick sidewalks than Reading and York. Whether bricked or not, downtown sidewalks have also been widened during the last few decades. It is especially noticeable in downtown York as the city has encouraged pedestrianism and "al fresco" dining (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Widened sidewalks, brick banding, and shade trees in downtown York.

The most common reason brick sidewalks disappear is because residents do not want to maintain them. On a property-by-property basis, bricked segments have been replaced with concrete, which means that sidewalk surfacing can change every few feet. The most likely trigger mechanism for loss of brick sidewalks is underground utility work. This process is not new. Altick (1991) in a memoir of pre-World War Two Lancaster noticed that brick sidewalks were often not replaced after infrastructure work had been completed. Other instances include the rebuilding of curbs and street corners in order to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act, or the impact of shade trees that heave the sidewalk. None of our informants believe there is a concerted effort to increase or even preserve the existing brick paving. "Every once in a while someone wants to keep their brick and they're going to relay it, but that's very few and far between" (Schreiber 2012).

Shade trees: A similar "power sharing" arrangement between city and property owners exist for shade trees, except here the city can at least partially enforce proper long-term maintenance. (Strictly speaking this may not amount to historic preservation as shade trees are living things rather than cultural artifacts and usually have a shorter life span than, for example, buildings.) Lancaster and Reading have shade tree commissions and a policy where the removal of trees must be approved by the commission. Lancaster has a more stringent approach to the replacement philosophy, as well as a subdivision ordinance that requires shade trees to be planted every 25 feet when sidewalk work is conducted. Lancaster also requires deciduous trees in parking lots (one tree for every 15 parking spaces) which is another urban design element from the 1993 comprehensive plan as shade trees were ranked in the top ten of Lancaster community defining features (Jackson 2012). In Reading, the replacement rules are "not necessarily enforced consistently," but even so, some residents are "bitter" about the regulatory arrangement—"they want to cut the trees down" (Miller 2012). So does the police department because the tree canopy's block surveillance cameras in public spaces. York has also made efforts to maintain the arboreality that Zelinsky noted, but the City has de facto "outsourced" tree maintenance to the Rotary Club, which plants 50-100 new trees every year augmented by a state tree revitalization grant. Just like in Reading, though, trees at the end of their life span are not necessarily replaced (Schreiber 2012).

Lancaster is currently planning to promote greater tree canopy by increasing tree density via ordinance policies. The objective is not only the general greening of the city, but also a water quality issue. Much like other communities in Pennsylvania, Lancaster's sewer system overflows during high rainfall events and drains into the stormwater system. The city is under EPA mandate to address polluted runoff but rather than only embarking on expensive infrastructure work, the idea is to utilize "green infrastructure," which means that increased vegetative land cover will reduce runoff.

In absence of comparative tree canopy data, the visual impression of the three Pennsylvania Towns is that they remain relatively green. One limiting factor is the narrow streets and sidewalks in some of the oldest neighborhoods where there is virtually no room for trees to be planted. Most information suggests that more shade trees have been removed than planted since the 1970s, but Reading planner Andrew Miller (2012) dates some of the current trees to the urban renewal period: "there are pictures in the archives of central city streets that had no trees until the late 1970s and now it's totally covered in canopy." Such an observation calls into question how unique the Pennsylvania Towns may be with regards to shade trees. The City Beautiful Movement in the early 1900s was an early proponent of shade trees (Solotaroff 1911) and while the life span of shade trees varies, species often planted at that time (e.g., elm and oak) can easily reach 100 years if not affected by diseases (see Preservation Tree Service 2015). Thus, the rhythm of maturation, removal, and replanting, is likely to vary from place to place, even among Pennsylvania Towns.

Alleys: From the time when the cities were first built to the 1930s, alleys were constructed to provide rear access. Lancaster, unlike Reading and York, has systematically mapped and classified its network of alleys (there are approximately 500 in total) with regards to surfacing and auto accessibility. Zelinsky's observation that alleys were important in the Pennsylvania Town is related to the design of the original properties as unusually deep in order to provide urban-agricultural space, which meant that when the towns grew, back lots were large enough to be subdivided from the main property and alley structures were added (Herman et al. 2011). Today one can still find narrow rowhomes on alleys in the Reading Prince Historic District and in the West End of Lancaster. These small alley houses are now among the more fashionable because of the location on secluded streets (Stallings 2012).

Just like with sidewalks and trees, the legalities of alleys are problematic. For example, there are common alleys that are shared properties of the residents, where the public has no domain or immediate jurisdiction. Common alleys are often the narrowest and may be grass covered rather than paved. This is different from public alleys where the City asserts its right-of-way (and therefore has enhanced regulatory powers). The distinction comes from the ordinance in place at the time of land subdivision. Moreover, there is a blurry line between an alley and very narrow streets which are alley-like in appearance. One difference is that very narrow streets consistently have rowhouses on both sides of the street with front façades oriented towards the street.

As a rule of thumb, if alleys are approximately ten feet wide, and if graveled or paved, people use them for parking access in the rear. With at least one car per household,<sup>5</sup> there is a need to park on the street as well as in alleys, if they are passable and sufficiently wide. The maintenance level of alleys are mixed: some are overgrown while others are well maintained. The better kept alleys are used for parking or as a thruway. In these narrow spaces, neighbors sometimes partner with the city to maintain them. But in other cases, alleys have effectively been discontinued and blocked by debris or have otherwise been encroached upon, which is a common enforcement problem for codes officers. For example, if an alley structure was built out to the property line, there is not a sufficient turning radius needed for cars to maneuver many alleyways.

## CONCLUSIONS

An assessment of the historical urban environment of three Pennsylvania Towns reveals that robust preservation regimes have been established, resulting in relatively intact townscapes. Few rowhouses have disappeared since Zelinsky's article was written, although a significant number of them need improvement or rehabilitation. Among the three towns, Lancaster's preservation regime has been the most effective and thorough. With its HARB and HCD, most of the city is under protection, and regulations and preservation practice are more far-reaching there.

However, the townscape exhibits both historical continuity *and* new paths of urban form. Many rehabilitation and redevelopment projects exhibit a significant degree of compatibility with the historic built environment, but there are exceptions in the shape of past urban renewal and zoning mandated developments. The preservation regulatory regime also intersects with aesthetics, ethnicity, and class in new ways. The different "look" between wealthier and poorer neighborhood is not just a matter of aesthetics but also regulation; class is visualized. These two-tiered preservation regimes produce different urban landscapes: the colonial town (now partly gentrified) and the (larger)

industrial rowhouse town (now Latinized), although the latter is affected by disinvestment due to deindustrialization and the immigration of a low income population.

These class and ethnic aesthetics are sometimes encouraged and legally formalized, but also resisted, by preservation regulations. For example, Latino porch culture fits into some parts of the Pennsylvania Town, but not in others. Coincidentally, there is also historical continuity with painted facades, although new forms of Latino aesthetics are grafted onto existing working class residential districts. Latino immigration is a relatively new phenomenon; the resulting contestation played out in the urban landscape was not evident to Zelinsky. The use of Formstone and the class dimension of painted brick façades was undoubtedly manifest during the 1970s, but not addressed by Zelinsky.

The Pennsylvania Towns have a dense rowhouse housing stock, but the advantages of urban living with walkable amenities is not as strong in these smaller cities compared to, let's say, nearby Philadelphia, which limits middle-class rehabilitation. On the other hand, the Pennsylvania Towns are logical destinations for Latino migration mainly coming from the New York City area; they are affordable and appropriately dense for a semi-carless population accustomed to urban living. While not reporting on ethnicity, the American Community Survey tells us that Reading has a lower car ownership rate than any U.S. city its size (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2013). The high density is also one of the new urbanist elements that we have identified here. The Pennsylvania Town resembles the ideal urban design as envisioned by the contemporary planning profession in other ways too: traditional architecture; mixed land uses; and a streetscape characterized by sidewalks, shade trees, and alleys. However, the street as public space has suffered in no small part because of the peculiar legal arrangement of space where the property owners share responsibility and power with city authorities. This leads to great variation in preservation and a general decline of bricked sidewalks and usable alleyways. Shade trees and mixed land uses have been somewhat more protected than bricked sidewalks and alleys, partly because it is easier for the City to assert regulatory authority over those features, but also because shade trees and some elements of mixed land use are considered compatible with contemporary urbanization. An emergent sustainable planning ideology—after urban renewal and new urbanism—may play a role in the future. Lancaster asserts that green infrastructure is needed, which fits seamlessly into one element of the Pennsylvania Town heritage, as do low energy consuming cities based on high density.

As noted above, the “good” urban form of the Pennsylvania Town comes with its own set of advantages but also distinct processes and problems. While the largest concern is arguably disinvestment in the built environment, it is not a recent phenomenon. In a 1933 Lancaster survey, only 35 percent of the structures at the time were considered to be in good condition (Herman et al. 2011). In one sense that bodes well for the future of the Pennsylvania Town; if less than perfectly maintained buildings have survived more than 80 years, these robust rowhouses will survive, and hopefully even thrive, well into the twenty-first century.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The Pennsylvania Town is characterized by a core of buildings in a Federal (Johnson 2012) or Late Georgian architectural style (Morgan 2004) from the colonial or early U.S. period. Only a moderate number actual colonial-era buildings remain today but their architectural styles have lingered. These include a flat roof line, slender chimneys, a square building footprint, and window shutters. This is the townscape that Zelinsky described. These (to simplify the terminology) colonial-style rowhouses are encircled by late 19th century working-class rowhouses. In the early 20th century, a Georgian Revival inspired by colonial architecture also means that further out from the city center, one finds rowhouses than are reminiscent of the historic city center.

<sup>2</sup> We calculated rowhouse population by census block groups. The city was canvassed in person, and augmented by Google Map images, to determine which block groups are dominated by rowhouses. Rowhouses still make up most of the housing stock—in Reading 88 percent (based on the 2010 census population by block group), in Lancaster 76 percent, and in York 66 percent. See Johansson and Corneise (forthcoming) for methodology. Compare this to a 1933 Lancaster study, which calculated that 80 percent of dwellings in the city were rowhouses or duplexes (Herman et al. 2011). In other words, continuity is quite pronounced.

<sup>3</sup> Updated (2016) vacancy numbers from the census are only available by metropolitan area, which we decided not to use because they are too spatially extensive for our purposes and would not provide meaningful data.

<sup>4</sup> Formstone was the brand name of a Baltimore company and particularly common there. A similar product, Permastone, was manufactured in Columbus, Ohio. Based on proximity to Baltimore, Formstone was most likely the preferred siding in the Pennsylvania Town.

<sup>5</sup> Car usage in America has increased over time and there are now 0.81 cars per capita (Oak Ridge National Laboratory 2014). However, the dense and walkable Pennsylvania Town actually ranks lower than most cities: 0.65 cars per capita in Lancaster and 0.53 in Reading (York not reported) (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2013).

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