

Proposal for a Nittany Gateway District in Ferguson Township

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Executive Summary

The proposed Nittany Gateway District represents a transformative approach to zoning in Ferguson Township. This mixed-use district is designed to modernize land use along North Atherton by integrating residential and commercial functions, enhancing sustainability, and improving transportation connectivity. The district aims to create a vibrant, walkable, and transit-friendly urban environment that supports efficient stormwater management and economic growth.

Key Features

- **Mixed-Use Development:**

The Nittany Gateway District permits a full spectrum of commercial activities while expanding residential opportunities beyond the current limitations. This integration fosters a dynamic urban setting where residents can live, work, and access services within the same neighborhood.

- **Incentives for Higher-Density Development:**

To encourage the transition from low-rise, automobile-oriented development, the proposal offers incentives such as increased building coverage up to 80%, reduced setback requirements, and height bonuses for projects that include public amenities. These measures are designed to optimize land use and promote a more pedestrian-friendly streetscape.

- **Sustainability and Modern Infrastructure:**

The district emphasizes green infrastructure through innovative stormwater management practices—such as green roofs, underground storage, and permeable surfaces—which enable higher impervious surface limits while mitigating environmental impacts. Reduced parking requirements and the promotion of alternative transportation options further support sustainability objectives.

- **Economic and Community Benefits:**

By attracting a mix of new businesses and residential developments, the Nittany Gateway District is expected to stimulate local economic activity, enhance job creation, and boost the township's overall competitiveness. The improved urban design and increased density will contribute to a higher quality of life for both residents and business owners.

Comparing Current General Commercial to the Proposed District

The following assumptions were used in the comparison: 1-acre lot size, first floor commercial, 4 parking spaces per 1,000 square feet of commercial area, 2 parking spaces per 3-bedroom apartment unit, parking spaces with a lane buffer are 450 square feet for each parking space.

Regulation	Current General Commercial	Proposed Nittany Gateway District
Housing Units per Acre	Limited to group/personal care homes (not fully quantified)	84 units (on a 1-acre lot)
Residents per Acre	Not computed	Approximately 168 residents (assuming 2 per unit)
Maximum Building Coverage	45% of lot (approximately 19,602 ft ²)	Setback-limited footprint of about 25,200 ft ² (~57.8% of lot)
Maximum Building Height	2 stories (approximately 35 feet)	5 stories (55 feet)
Parking Requirement	Commercial only: approximately 78 spaces	Combined requirement: 269 spaces (101 commercial; 168 residential)

Executive Summary Conclusion

The Nittany Gateway District is a forward-thinking proposal that aligns with Ferguson Township’s vision for sustainable and smart growth. By modernizing zoning policies and encouraging a balanced mix of commercial and residential uses, the district will drive economic development, foster community engagement, and position the township for long-term success in an evolving urban landscape.

Nittany Gateway District in Ferguson Township

U.S. Route 322 Business (commonly known as North Atherton Street) is a major transportation corridor in Centre County, Pennsylvania, serving as the primary east-west thoroughfare through State College Borough and surrounding townships. The section of 322 that passes through Ferguson Township plays a vital role in the local economy, connecting State College Borough, Ferguson Township, and Patton Township while serving as a key commercial hub.

- State College Borough, home to Penn State University’s University Park Campus (Main Campus), has a high-density downtown core featuring mixed-use residential and commercial developments.
- Patton Township, located to the northwest, is a suburban township with significant commercial activity, including retailers such as Walmart, Wegmans, and Trader Joe’s.
- Ferguson Township, by contrast, has historically been an agricultural township, with some of the best farmland in Pennsylvania. The section of 322 in Ferguson Township is currently zoned General Commercial, containing a mix of hotels, motels, restaurants, drive-through food establishments, grocery stores, and banks.

While the General Commercial zoning has supported business growth, it limits residential development, preventing the area from evolving into a walkable, mixed-use district that better serves the needs of both businesses and residents.

The Vision for the Nittany Gateway District

The Nittany Gateway District is a proposed zoning district aimed at modernizing and transforming Ferguson Township’s 322 commercial corridor into a vibrant, mixed-use hub that supports both residential and commercial development. The district’s key goals include:

- Building Up Instead of Out – Increasing building heights to allow for denser, multi-story mixed-use developments, maximizing land use efficiency while reducing urban sprawl.
- Expanding Housing Options – Allowing all forms of residential use, addressing the housing shortage in Centre County while supporting workforce housing needs.
- Enhancing Walkability & Transit Access – Encouraging pedestrian-friendly, transit-oriented development, reducing car dependency while integrating bike infrastructure, e-scooter stations, and public transit hubs.



Image 1: Dunkin Donuts located at 1311 S Atherton St, State College, PA 16801, in State College Borough. This building is an example of what the Nittany Gateway District could look like. This building has commercial use on the bottom and has three floors of residential use above. The lot has a high amount of impervious coverage and provides for on-site parking.



Image 2: A rendering of what two lots could look like on North Atherton in Ferguson Township in the Nittany Gateway District. The lots allow for residential use.

Why Ferguson Township Needs the Nittany Gateway District

Addressing the Need for Housing & Mixed-Use Development

Ferguson Township and the greater Centre Region are experiencing a housing crisis, with rising rents and limited availability. Currently, the General Commercial zoning along North Atherton Street in Ferguson Township only permits limited residential use (group homes and small personal care homes).

- The Nittany Gateway District would allow residential units above commercial spaces, increasing housing supply while maintaining a strong business presence.
- Mixed-use zoning ensures that residents can live near where they work and shop, reducing traffic congestion and improving walkability.

Creating a More Walkable, Transit-Friendly Community

The current auto-oriented design of General Commercial zoning prioritizes parking and road access over pedestrian and transit infrastructure. The Nittany Gateway District will reduce parking requirements for developments that support alternative transportation options such as:

- Bike racks and e-scooter stations
- Ride-share and Taxi drop-off and pick-up
- Bus transit hubs
- Pedestrian-friendly sidewalks and streetscapes

Supporting Business Growth & Economic Development

By allowing mixed-use development, the Nittany Gateway District will:

- Attract new businesses by increasing the resident population base.
- Support commercial growth by ensuring a steady customer base within walking distance.
- Encourage investment in modern, multi-story developments, making Ferguson Township a competitive destination for economic growth.

A Forward-Thinking Approach for Ferguson Township

The Nittany Gateway District offers a visionary approach to land use planning in Ferguson Township, ensuring that economic growth, housing expansion, and sustainability go hand in hand.

By transitioning from auto-centric General Commercial zoning to a modern, mixed-use district, Ferguson Township can:

- Increase housing supply while supporting commercial activity.
- Create a pedestrian-friendly, transit-oriented environment.
- Ensure smart, sustainable growth without losing its agricultural character.

The Nittany Gateway District will serve as the entry point to Ferguson Township's future—a walkable, livable, and economically vibrant community that benefits residents, businesses, and the township as a whole.

About the Proposed Nittany Gateway District in Ferguson Township

The Nittany Gateway District is a proposed mixed-use zoning district in Ferguson Township, designed to replace the current General Commercial zoning along North Atherton. This district will combine residential and commercial uses, modernize land use policies, and increase sustainability while ensuring efficient stormwater management and improved transportation options. By encouraging mixed-use development, the Nittany Gateway District will create a walkable, transit-friendly urban environment that supports both businesses and residents.

Commercial Development and Building Design in the Nittany Gateway District

As Ferguson Township considers the proposed Nittany Gateway District, it is important to acknowledge the existing commercial landscape and how businesses may respond to zoning changes. Many businesses currently located in the General Commercial zone may prefer to maintain their low-rise, automobile-oriented development patterns, while others may see value in adapting to a mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly district. The Township must balance these perspectives while encouraging efficient land use and sustainable growth.

Commercial Building Design: Theories and Real-World Application

The idea that commercial buildings tend to either be ornate, eye-catching structures or simple, functional boxes was explored in the 1972 book *Learning from Las Vegas* by Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour. Their research categorized commercial buildings into two main types:

1. **"Ducks"** – Buildings where the architecture itself communicates the business's function. These are often unique, sculptural structures designed to attract attention. Examples include novelty-shaped buildings or highly stylized storefronts that serve as branding elements.
2. **"Decorated Sheds"** – Simple, box-like buildings that rely on signage and ornamentation to indicate their purpose. This is the dominant form of strip malls, fast-food chains, and most suburban commercial buildings.

Many businesses along North Atherton Street in Ferguson Township currently fit the "decorated shed" model, prioritizing visibility from passing vehicles, ample surface parking, and ease of access over architectural complexity. As the Township transitions toward a denser, mixed-use district, businesses may initially be hesitant to depart from these familiar development patterns.

Encouraging Higher-Density Development in the Nittany Gateway District

To facilitate a transition from low-density, automobile-oriented commercial development to higher-density, pedestrian-friendly mixed-use spaces, the Township can implement targeted incentives for developers who choose to build higher structures.

Proposed Incentives for Higher Buildings

- **Increased Building Coverage:**
 - Currently, General Commercial zoning limits building coverage to 45%. In the Nittany Gateway District, this could be increased to 80% for buildings exceeding three stories, allowing for more efficient land use.
- **Reduced Setback Requirements:**
 - Standard side yard setbacks could be reduced down to 25 feet or less for multi-story buildings, encouraging a more urban-style streetscape that promotes walkability and active commercial frontages.
- **Height Bonuses for Public Amenities:**
 - Projects that include public plazas, transit hubs, or structured parking could receive additional height allowances or reduced parking requirements beyond the standard five-story limit.

These incentives align with regional planning goals to increase density, support sustainable growth, and create a more pedestrian-friendly environment while still accommodating existing businesses that prefer a more traditional commercial format.

By implementing a flexible incentive structure, Ferguson Township can encourage new forms of development in the Nittany Gateway District while allowing businesses to transition at their own pace, ensuring a gradual and sustainable evolution of the area.

Building Height, Lot Coverage, and Sustainability in Nittany Gateway District

- **Maximum Building Coverage:** Same as impervious coverage, allowing buildings to fully utilize impervious surface limits, optimizing land use efficiency.
- **Maximum Impervious Surface:** 80%, with the option to increase to 100% if modern stormwater technologies (green roofs, underground storage tanks, permeable surfaces) are used.
- **Sustainability and Stormwater Management:** The district will require innovative stormwater solutions to balance high impervious coverage, ensuring flood prevention and sustainable water management.

Expanded Land Use: Mixed-Use Development

- The Nittany Gateway District will allow all current General Commercial uses while also permitting all forms of residential housing, unlike the current zoning that limits residential use to group homes and small personal care homes.
- Mixed-use development will allow buildings to have a mix of retail, offices, or services with residential units, creating a more dynamic and efficient urban space.

Minimum Setback Requirements

- **Front Yard Setback:** 50 feet for all lot sizes, maintaining consistency with the current General Commercial zoning.
- **Side Yard Setbacks:** 25 feet for all lot sizes, ensuring proper spacing between developments while maximizing usable space.

Parking and Transportation Integration

- **Reduced Parking Requirements:**
 - Developments that provide alternative transportation infrastructure (such as bike racks, e-scooter charging stations, bus transit station, ride share drop-off and pick-up, and other transit-friendly features) will be eligible for reduced parking requirements.
 - Encourages walkability and transit use, reducing reliance on personal vehicles.
 - Amenities for residents in the building that reduce the need for personal vehicles (such as grocery store pick-up, co-working space, entertainment space, lounge, wellness center, and other accessory use amenities)
- **Public Transit Support:**
 - The district will incentivize bus transit stations and multi-modal transport hubs, supporting better connectivity to surrounding areas.

Modernized Accessory and Primary Uses

The Nittany Gateway District will allow a variety of new accessory uses that enhance livability and sustainability, creating a self-sufficient community where people can live, work, and shop in the same area. Allowing for more accessory uses ensure the district is flexible to future commercial and residential needs.

New Accessory and Primary Uses Include (but not limited to):

Rooftop Greenhouses – Encouraging urban agriculture and sustainability.

Grocery Pick-Up Centers – Supporting modern e-commerce and delivery logistics.

Bike & E-Scooter Stations – Reducing traffic congestion and promoting alternative transit.

Low Impact Manufacturing – Allowing for items to be sold and made on site. This could include: 3-d Printing, Bioreactors, laser cutters, and CNC machines.

Benefits of the Nittany Gateway District

More Housing & Commercial Opportunities – Supports residential growth while retaining and enhancing commercial development.

Sustainable & Smart Growth – Uses green infrastructure to mitigate stormwater impacts and encourages transit-oriented development.

More Walkability & Transit Access – Reduces parking dependency and promotes public transportation and alternative mobility options.

Boosts Local Economy – Encourages business development and job creation while attracting a growing population of residents and workers.

Future-Proofing Ferguson Township

The Nittany Gateway District represents a vision for the future of Ferguson Township—one that integrates modern urban planning strategies, encourages sustainable development, and supports economic growth. By expanding mixed-use opportunities, allowing more residential housing, and promoting alternative transportation, the district will help Ferguson Township adapt to changing economic and social demands while maintaining a high quality of life for residents and businesses.

Comparing the Proposed District to Current Commercial

Calculator for Commercial Square Feet and Residential Units

A calculator for the commercial space, number of housing units, and rent prices based on zoning regulations is available on elliottkillian.com.

This calculator can be used to consider the proposed district.

Comparing the Proposed District to Current Commercial

The comparison between the existing General Commercial zoning and the proposed Nittany Gateway District, has the following assumptions:

- Lot size (1-acre lot): 43,560 ft² per acre
- Building configured as a multi-story structure with the first floor as commercial uses
- Commercial parking is required at 4 spaces per 1,000 ft² of first-floor commercial area, with each parking space (including a lane buffer) occupying 450 ft²
- In the proposed zone, all residential uses are permitted. The model assumes residential floors are built as three-bedroom units of 1,200 ft² each, requiring 2 parking spaces per unit.

Current General Commercial

1. Building Footprint & Coverage

– Maximum building coverage is capped at 45% of the lot, equating to approximately 19,602 ft² ($0.45 \times 43,560$ ft²).

– Assumed configuration is a two-story building, resulting in a total building space of about 39,204 ft² (19,602 ft² per floor).

- Commercial (first floor): 19,602 ft²
- Residential (second floor): 19,602 ft²

2. Parking Requirement (Commercial Only)

– With a requirement of 4 spaces per 1,000 ft², the commercial space requires roughly 78 spaces ($19,602 \div 1,000 \times 4$).

– The total parking area required is approximately 35,100 ft² (78 spaces \times 450 ft²).

– Residential parking is not detailed, given the limited residential use permitted in this zone.

Proposed Nittany Gateway District

1. Buildable Envelope & Coverage
 - Setbacks include a 50-ft front setback and 25-ft side setbacks on a roughly square lot. For a lot with sides of approximately 208.7 ft, the effective buildable area is limited to around 25,200 ft².
 - Although zoning permits building coverage up to 80% of the lot (approximately 34,848 ft²), the setbacks reduce the maximum practical footprint to about 25,200 ft².
2. Building Configuration
 - The proposed development is modeled as a 5-story building with the first floor dedicated to commercial uses and four additional floors for residential housing.
 - Total building space is estimated at 126,000 ft² (25,200 ft² per floor).
 - Commercial (first floor): 25,200 ft²
 - Residential (upper 4 floors): 100,800 ft²
3. Residential Units and Parking
 - With 100,800 ft² available for housing and each three-bedroom unit occupying 1,200 ft², approximately 84 residential units can be accommodated.
 - At 2 parking spaces per unit, the residential component requires about 168 spaces, equating to roughly 75,600 ft² of parking area (168 × 450 ft²).
4. Commercial Parking
 - For the 25,200 ft² of commercial space at 4 spaces per 1,000 ft², approximately 101 parking spaces are required.
 - This corresponds to a parking area of about 45,450 ft² (101 × 450 ft²).
5. Combined Parking for the Proposed District
 - Total parking spaces for the mixed-use development amount to 269 (101 commercial + 168 residential).
 - The total parking area required is approximately 121,050 ft² (45,450 ft² + 75,600 ft²).

Topic	Current General Commercial	Proposed Nittany Gateway District
Building Footprint	~19,602 ft ² (45% of 1 acre)	~25,200 ft ² (setback-limited)
Building Stories	2 (assumed)	5 (assumed)
Total Building Space	~39,204 ft ²	~126,000 ft ²
Commercial Space (1st Floor)	~19,602 ft ²	~25,200 ft ²
Residential Space	Limited to group homes/personal care homes; assumed N/A	~100,800 ft ²
Residential Units	N/A	84 three-bedroom units
Commercial Parking	~78 spaces (≈35,100 ft ² area)	~101 spaces (≈45,450 ft ² area)
Residential Parking	Not detailed	168 spaces (≈75,600 ft ² area)
Total Parking	~78 spaces	269 spaces (≈121,050 ft ² area)

Summary of Comparing the Proposed District to Current Commercial

Under the current General Commercial zoning, a 1-acre lot with a maximum building coverage of 45% supports a relatively low-intensity development. This is modeled as a two-story building with roughly equal distribution between commercial and limited residential space, and a commercial parking requirement of approximately 78 spaces.

In contrast, the proposed Nittany Gateway District significantly expands the buildable envelope to about 25,200 ft² and allows for a 5-story mixed-use development. This configuration more than triples the total building space from approximately 39,200 ft² to 126,000 ft², while increasing the commercial area from about 19,600 ft² to 25,200 ft². The proposal also introduces substantial residential development by adding four floors of housing, which supports roughly 84 three-bedroom units. The combined parking requirement for this mixed-use development increases to 269 spaces, reflecting the higher intensity of both commercial and residential uses.

This comparison demonstrates that the proposed district not only leverages a greater buildable envelope and vertical development but also supports a more intensive mixed-use environment. Such a configuration is expected to enhance the economic viability of the district while providing a balanced mix of commercial and residential opportunities for the community.

Benefits of the Proposed Nittany Gateway District

The proposed Nittany Gateway District in Ferguson Township offers a transformative approach to land use by combining commercial and residential functions into a cohesive, mixed-use environment. The district is designed to modernize existing zoning along North Atherton, promote sustainable growth, and improve transportation options while maintaining efficient stormwater management. Key benefits include:

- The district permits a full range of current General Commercial uses and expands allowable residential housing beyond group homes and small personal care facilities.
- This mixed-use approach encourages dynamic developments that combine retail, office, and housing, creating a vibrant urban environment where people can live, work, and shop in close proximity.
- The proposal introduces incentives for developers to build taller, more efficient structures. Increased building coverage (up to 80% and potentially higher with modern stormwater technologies) and reduced setback requirements support a more compact and walkable streetscape.
- Height bonuses for projects that integrate public amenities—such as plazas, transit hubs, or structured parking—encourage a design that promotes both functionality and community engagement.
- The district mandates innovative stormwater management solutions, including green roofs, underground storage, and permeable surfaces, which balance high impervious surface limits while ensuring flood prevention and sustainable water use.
- Reduced parking requirements and incentives for alternative transportation options, such as bike stations, e-scooter charging points, and designated ride-share zones, contribute to lower automobile dependency and a smaller environmental footprint.
- By supporting transit-friendly features such as bus transit stations and multi-modal transport hubs, the district enhances connectivity to surrounding areas and encourages public transportation.
- The design promotes walkability and provides modern amenities—including grocery pick-up centers, co-working spaces, and entertainment areas—that contribute to a high-quality urban experience.
- Economic Growth and Future-Proofing Ferguson Township

- The Nittany Gateway District is expected to attract a mix of new businesses and residents, thereby boosting local economic activity and job creation.
- By aligning with regional planning goals and incorporating modern urban design principles, the district positions Ferguson Township to adapt to evolving economic and social needs, ensuring long-term vitality and competitiveness.

Overall, the proposed district represents a forward-thinking approach that modernizes land use, enhances sustainability, and supports economic development. Through its focus on mixed-use development, efficient transportation, and innovative infrastructure, the Nittany Gateway District will help Ferguson Township meet future challenges while creating a more attractive, functional, and livable community.

What Needs to Be Decided by Ferguson Township

As Ferguson Township considers the proposed Nittany Gateway District, several important decisions will need to be made. The following questions highlight the important areas for discussion:

1. Should Ferguson Township increase the maximum building height to 5 floors (55 feet)?
2. Should Ferguson Township incentivize taller buildings in the proposed district?
 - If so how should taller buildings be incentivized? Increased building coverage? Reduced parking? Reduced setbacks? Something else?
3. Should Ferguson Township allow for most residential use in the proposed district?
 - Should any residential use not be allowed?
4. Should Ferguson Township incentivize alternative transportation options and walkability by reducing the parking requirement?
 - If so, should the incentives have tiers?
5. Should Ferguson Township allow for more uses in the proposed district?
 - If so, what agricultural uses should be allowed?
 - If so, what industrial uses should be allowed?
6. What areas on North Atherton in Ferguson Township should be rezoned to the proposed district?

Conclusion

The proposed Nittany Gateway District represents a forward-thinking approach to zoning in Ferguson Township, poised to modernize and transform the current General Commercial corridor along North Atherton. By integrating residential and commercial uses within a mixed-use framework, the district offers significant advantages in terms of increased development density, efficient land use, and enhanced urban amenities.

Key improvements include an expanded building envelope that supports a five-story structure—substantially increasing both commercial and residential space compared to the current two-story model. The district’s design not only boosts the number of housing units and potential residents per acre but also introduces modernized parking and transportation solutions that encourage alternative mobility options and reduce reliance on automobiles.

Furthermore, the proposed district aligns with regional goals for sustainable growth through innovative stormwater management and green infrastructure practices. By incentivizing higher-density, pedestrian-friendly development and creating a more vibrant urban environment, the Nittany Gateway District will drive economic growth, attract new businesses, and improve the overall quality of life for both residents and visitors.

In summary, the Nittany Gateway District offers Ferguson Township a unique opportunity to reimagine its urban landscape and ensure a resilient, economically dynamic future that meets evolving community needs.