

Background and Introduction

In 1999, Pennsylvania embarked on a significant land use initiative that over the past three years has picked up momentum and support from the Governor, the Legislature and municipal officials responsible for managing land use in the Commonwealth.

With the issuance of the Governor's Executive Order 1999-1, the Commonwealth's land was recognized as a finite resource, and land use was identified as Pennsylvania's most pressing environmental priority. The executive order, which clearly stated that local government plays an important role in successfully protecting this valued resource through sound land use, designated the Governor's Center for Local Government Services as the principal state entity for land use monitoring and technical assistance.


Sound Land Use Foundation

This Annual Report on Land Use, the third one prepared by the Governor's Center for Local Government Services, continues a tradition begun in 2000 when a series of reports was released, setting the stage for the promotion of sound land use in Pennsylvania. Following on the heels of the Governor's Land Use Executive Order, these three original reports formed the foundation for the Center and its many partners to promote sound land use:

- **Pennsylvanians Speak: The Sound Land Use Forums** reported on the 53 Sound Land Use Forums held throughout the Commonwealth in the summer of 1999. At the forums, nearly 4,000 Pennsylvanians spoke about their concerns for their communities, addressing such topics as the need for multimunicipal planning, the cost of development, the loss of farmland, the need for efficient transportation, and the threat of development on the state's water, historical, and natural resources.
- **Land Use in Pennsylvania: Practices and Tools** provided an inventory of more than 100 approaches to land use planning, practices, and tools that are being used in Pennsylvania to promote sound land use. It was produced with the assistance of the Governor's Sound Land Use Advisory Committee.
- **The first Annual Report on Land Use**, issued in January 2000, described the Center's efforts to promote sound land use and focused on recommendations that were to become known as Pennsylvania's Growing Smarter Initiative. These recommendations centered on the need for specific changes to the Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) that would provide



A farm in Lancaster County



more flexibility for municipalities to plan for smart growth, more financial and technical assistance to help implement these options, increased training opportunities for municipal and state officials on sound land use, and better coordination of state agency actions affecting land use in Pennsylvania.

Because land use trends reveal that the Commonwealth is consuming land at a rapid rate, far surpassing its population growth and exceeding the nation's average rate of development, Pennsylvania has placed a tremendous priority on sound land use and the planning tools necessary to accomplish smart growth. In 2000, the state's new budget included significant increases in funding for land use planning and technical assistance. Then, in June, the General Assembly validated the concepts of Growing Smarter by approving sweeping changes to the Municipalities Planning Code.

These amendments, Acts 67 and 68, reaffirmed local government's primary responsibility for land use decisions and strongly supported general consistency in planning efforts through intergovernmental cooperation. State agencies were given new responsibilities to consider local plans and ordinances in their decision-making.

In the fall of 2000, the Center conducted a second round of forums, the Growing Smarter Forums, to report on the recent changes to the MPC and hear again from the citizens of Pennsylvania.

In January of 2001, roughly six months after significant new funds for land use planning and technical assistance were approved and the Growing Smarter amendments to the Municipalities Planning Code (Acts 67 and 68) were adopted, the second Annual Report on Land Use was presented to the governor and the citizens of Pennsylvania. In it, the Center presented a plan to help local officials make use of the planning tools now offered to them by the Growing Smarter legislation.


The plan included \$3.6 million for education and training, technical assistance, and planning grants through the Land Use Planning and Technical Assistance Program (LUPTAP). Last year's land use report also described implementation plans designed to enhance and improve state agency coordination.

Following the format of the two previous reports, this third Annual Report on Land Use looks back on the achievements of the past year and then forward to the Center's efforts to promote the Commonwealth's Growing Smarter agenda in the coming year.

In the year and a half since the LUPTAP grants were created and the MPC was amended, Pennsylvania can point to a number of successes for achieving sound land use. The Governor's Center for Local Government Services has expanded its outreach to local government

"Across Pennsylvania, sound land use and economic growth now go hand-in-hand. Thanks to our "Growing Smarter" land-use reforms, the Commonwealth is reaching new milestones in open space protection, growth management and land-use planning."

Mark Schweiker, Governor



and increased its educational and technical assistance efforts. Local government officials across the Commonwealth have responded to these efforts and demonstrated their willingness to assume responsibility for land use planning as outlined in the amendments to the MPC. Local government officials' welcome response to the Center's outreach efforts and its financial and technical assistance has clearly indicated that Pennsylvania is indeed "Growing Smarter."

Attitudes about the Environment and Land Use

In recent years, local officials and the public have developed a greater interest in land use planning. Fueled in part by concerns about the rate at which Pennsylvania is developing, this heightened awareness of planning can also be traced to a concern about just how the state is developing. Pennsylvania's 21st Century Environment Commission found that low-density, automobile-dependent development patterns waste land needlessly and create a negative impact on the environment, the economy and society overall.

Growth is necessary and vital to maintaining our standard of living, but how we grow is also important. Planned growth improves the quality of life, preserves our quality of place and is good for the economy and the environment. More and more, businesses and talented labor are choosing to locate in areas where quality, affordable housing is available, traffic congestion is minimized and a range of recreational and social opportunities abound — all assets of communities that have planned for their future.

As a follow-up to the work of the state's 21st Century Environment Commission, the Pennsylvania Center for Environmental Education recently completed a first-of-its-kind random survey of 1,000 Pennsylvanians regarding their knowledge about, attitudes toward and behaviors related to the environment. The Pennsylvania Environmental Readiness for the 21st Century Survey Report provides several findings on land use and the environment:

- More than 60 percent of those responding to the survey believe that environmental protection and economic development can go hand in hand. This finding supports a key premise of Executive Order 1999-1 and the Growing Smarter Initiative.
- Pennsylvanians favor a balance between private property rights and the environmental impacts of land use, with relatively little support for either extreme. This finding is another key premise of Growing Smarter.
- Pennsylvanians overwhelmingly support farmland preservation. This attitude is demonstrated in the popularity of the Commonwealth's farmland preservation program.



Another new home being built



- Quality-of-life issues — including personal safety, green space, quality schools, reasonable property taxes, and proximity to work — were important factors in deciding where to live. Improving the quality of life in older communities that are experiencing a decline in their populations will enhance the lives of current residents and help to make these areas more attractive to new residents, thereby relieving some of the pressures being felt in the fastest growing suburbs.

In the New Economy of our nation, quality of life is becoming a key, if not the primary, component of economic competitiveness. To remain competitive, the Commonwealth must maintain a safe and healthy environment and enhance the assets that make Pennsylvania special: its forests, rivers, and farmland, its municipalities, and its history and culture.

Land Use Trends

Pennsylvania's focus on sound land use could not come at a better time as the Commonwealth continues to experience development that exceeds the national average and far outpaces the state's population growth. This developed land trend is occurring at the expense of precious farmland.

In looking at three other land use management trends – municipal planning, zoning and joint planning and zoning – the Center found the following:

- The number of municipalities that have addressed planning by adopting comprehensive plans has increased slightly in recent years, mostly in counties in the southeast, northeast, and west.
- Municipalities that have recently adopted zoning ordinances are mostly found in those counties experiencing the most intense growth.
- Municipalities are expressing interest in joint planning, thanks to encouragement by the state.

Developed Land Trend

Development in Pennsylvania is occurring at a faster rate than the state's population growth, resulting in an increased pace of land consumption in the state. Furthermore, Pennsylvania's share of developed land exceeds the national average by a significant margin, according to data from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Updating the Original 38 Land Use Trends

In its first Land Use Annual Report, the Governor's Center for Local Government Services collected and analyzed data on 38 different land use trends. Because it was unlikely that any indicator had changed dramatically in one year, the Center's second annual report did not update the 38 trends. However, the Center presented a new trend in that report — rent affordability. The Center also included an addendum to the report that revised the land cover trend from the first annual report using corrected data from the Natural Resources Conservation Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

For this third annual report, the Center revised the developed land trend and updated three land use management trends – municipal planning, zoning and joint planning and zoning – from the first annual report. The raw data used for all the charts is available at the Center's Growing Smarter web site at www.landuseinpa.com.

The Center is working with a group of county planning directors to update more trends for its fourth annual report once more data is available from the Census Bureau.



The Original Land Use Trends

In its first Annual Report on Land Use, the Center examined the following 38 land use trends – grouped within four categories across the commonwealth and by county – where appropriate:

Land Use Indicators

Changing distribution of land cover in Pennsylvania – including forested land, developed land, farmland, water area, and other land.

- An increase in developed land.
- The growing market value of land, especially residential and agricultural land.
- The decline in urban population growth and the increase in rural population growth.
- The growth in urban and suburban land development, which outpaces the state's population growth.
- The loss of farmland.
- The growth of farmland preservation.
- The rate of historic preservation.
- The acquisition of forestland.
- The acquisition of state game lands.
- The acquisition of parkland.
- The acquisition of greenways and rails-to-trails.
- The restoration of wetlands.
- The restoration of brownfields.
- The assessment of streams for water quality.
- The reclamation of abandoned mine land.

Demographic, Economic and Housing Trends

- Population growth.
- The increase in single-family and multifamily housing stock and the decrease in the average size of households.

- The growth in single-family housing.
- The affordability of housing.
- Income growth.
- The declining poverty rate.
- Employment growth.

Indirect Factors of Land Use

- The increase in vehicle travel.
- The increase in motor vehicle registration.
- The rate of new public road mileage.
- Support of public transit.
- Domestic water supply and usage.
- Expansion of sewage systems.

Land Use Management Techniques

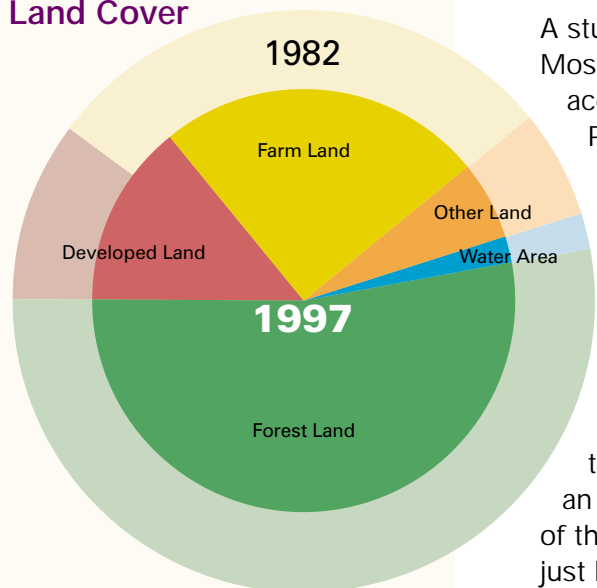
- The number and size of municipalities.
- The rate of municipal mergers and consolidations.
- The increase in regional police.
- The increase in municipal planning.
- Revisions and updates to county planning.
- The rate of municipal zoning ordinances.
- The rate of municipal subdivision and land development ordinances.
- The rate of joint planning and zoning.
- The adoption of designated growth areas as a technique to manage growth.



Jim Thorpe, Carbon County

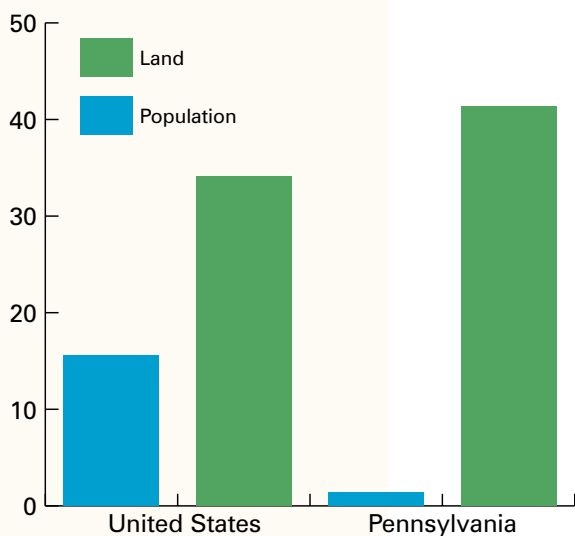
The Center's second annual report added rent affordability as the 39th trend affecting land use in Pennsylvania.

**Chart 1
Pennsylvania
Land Cover**



Sources: National Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economy.com

**Chart 2
Relative Growth Rates
(%) 1982-1997**



Sources: National Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economy.com

In 1982, Pennsylvania's share of developed land topped that of the nation. Almost 10 percent of the state was categorized as developed land, as opposed to only 3.8 percent nationally. Since then, the disparity between the two measures has increased substantially as roughly 13.7 percent of Pennsylvania is now developed, compared to 5.1 percent nationwide.

A study commissioned by the Brookings Institute titled "Who Sprawls Most? How Growth Patterns Differ Across the U.S." confirms this accelerated pace of development. Both Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania's two largest metropolitan areas, are included in the Brookings list of the 25 metropolitan areas with the greatest amount of land development between 1982 and 1997. Both metropolitan areas lost more than 100,000 acres of land each to urban development during that time period.

Much of the land development in Pennsylvania is resulting in the loss of farmland, which decreased by 14 percent during this 15-year period. (See Chart 1.) This development considerably altered the state's allocation of land resources as Pennsylvania maintained an above-average amount of farmland in 1982 compared to the rest of the nation. By 1997, the state's share of agricultural land dropped just below the national average, with 25 percent of state land devoted to farming.¹ The distribution among other types of state land, including water areas and forestland, remained unchanged.

Although development across the nation has been increasing at a faster rate than the population rate overall, Pennsylvania's rate of development is even faster and its population growth even slower than the rest of the United States. Between 1982 and 1997, Pennsylvania ranked 12th in the nation for its increase in developed land (41.3 percent compared to 34.1 percent for the nation) and 45th for population growth (1.4 percent compared to 16 percent for the nation).

This trend appears to be getting worse. For the five-year period between 1992 and 1997, Pennsylvania still ranked 12th in the nation for its increase in developed land but had dropped to 47th for its population growth. Chart 2 depicts the difference between developed land growth and population growth for the years 1982 through 1997 for Pennsylvania and the nation.

¹ In 1997, Pennsylvania's share of land devoted to agriculture was 25.23%, compared to 25.56% for the nation. In 1992, Pennsylvania's share (27.2%) had exceeded the national average (26.12%).



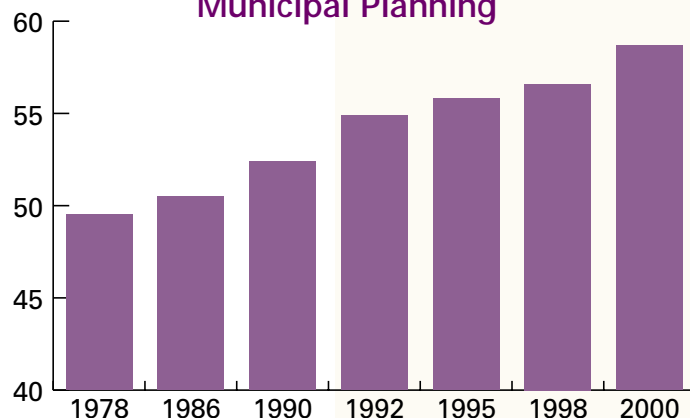
Municipal Planning

The number of Pennsylvania municipalities with comprehensive plans increased from 1,453 in 1998 to 1,514 in 2000. Sixty-one municipalities adopted comprehensive plans during that time. At the same time, 58 percent of the municipalities in the Commonwealth had such plans, compared to 57 percent two years earlier. (See Chart 3.)

Map 1 shows that the counties in the southeast part of the state still have the highest share of municipalities with comprehensive plans. However, the rate of comprehensive plan adoption is increasing in the western and northeastern regions of the state.

In the west, Lawrence County, bordering Ohio, and Fayette County, bordering Maryland, have seen an increase in the number of municipalities with comprehensive plans. In the northeast, Pike and Monroe counties, both of which have experienced large population increases, have seen an increase in the number of municipalities with comprehensive plans. Other counties that have experienced an increase in municipal comprehensive plans since 1998 are Bucks, Cumberland and Northumberland.

Chart 3
Municipal Planning



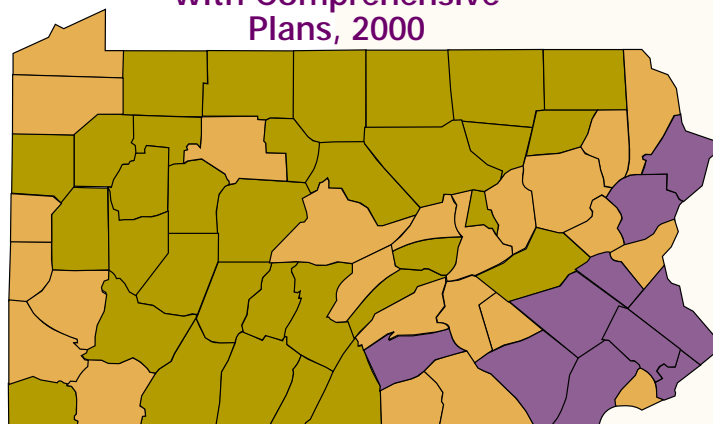
Sources: Governor's Center for Local Government Services, Municipal Statistics

Zoning

Zoning ordinances describe what land uses are permissible on a plot of land and to what density the land may be developed. If a municipality has no local zoning ordinance, a county zoning ordinance may apply in that municipality. Thirteen counties in Pennsylvania have adopted zoning ordinances covering all or a portion of the county.

Chart 4 (page 14) reveals that 1,672 municipalities in Pennsylvania, or about 65 percent, are covered by a zoning ordinance. Most of these municipalities — 1,537 — use their own zoning ordinance.

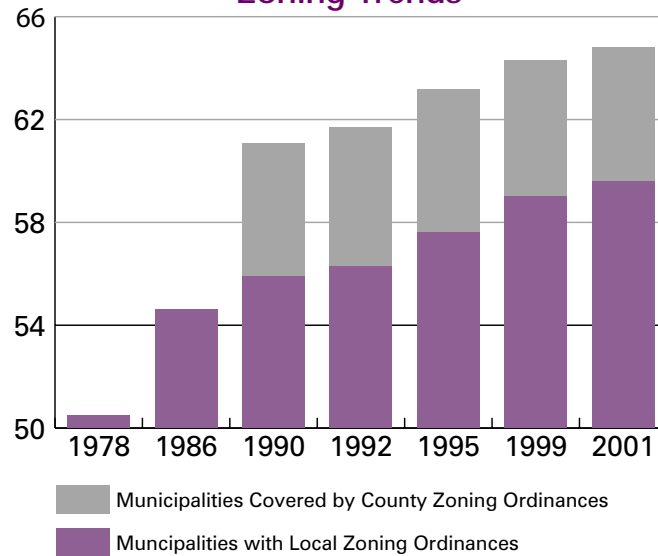
Map 1
Share of Municipalities with Comprehensive Plans, 2000



- 90% to 100% of Municipalities within County have Comprehensive Plans
- 50% to 90% of Municipalities within County have Comprehensive Plans
- Less than 50% of Municipalities within County have Comprehensive Plans

Source: Governor's Center for Local Government Services, Municipal Statistics

**Chart 4
Zoning Trends²**



Source: Governor's Center for Local Government Services, PA Land Use Electronic Resource Library 2001, County Surveys 1978-1999.

The number of municipalities covered by zoning ordinances has increased by 22, from 1,650 in 1999. These new municipal zoning ordinances were adopted in Erie, Franklin, Schuylkill and York counties, increasing to more than 90 percent the number of municipalities covered by zoning ordinances in these counties. (See Map 2, page 15.)

In recent years, Berks, Butler, Greene, Northumberland and Washington counties have also recorded some of the largest number gains in municipal zoning ordinances. Most of the counties with the largest share of local zoning ordinances are found in the eastern part of the state, where growth pressures are most intense.

Joint Planning and Zoning

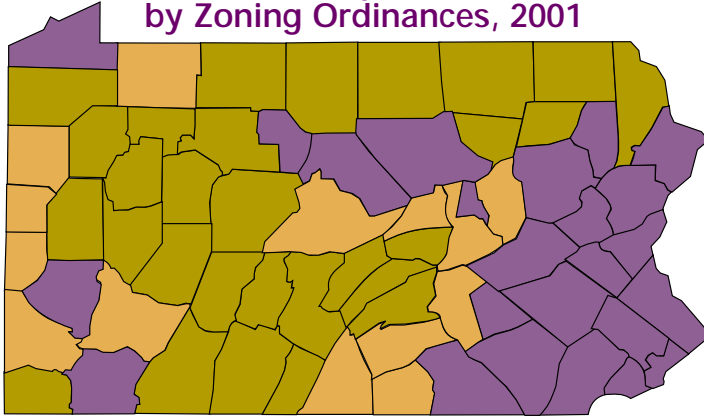
With the passage of Act 67 of 2000, which encourages multimunicipal planning and zoning, the Commonwealth and its municipalities have turned more attention and interest to multimunicipal planning. In 2001, 49 joint comprehensive plans were identified in the initial survey for the Land Use Electronic Resource Library.³ These 49 joint plans cover 141 municipalities in 19 different counties. (See Map 3, page 15.)

² In the 1978 and 1986 surveys, there was no distinction between local and county zoning.

³ In 1999, the Center identified 48 counties in which municipalities were involved in any type of joint planning effort (including public safety, emergency, Main Street, housing, open space, watershed, tourism, economic development, transportation, water and sewer, heritage park, or conservation planning). In 2001, the Center focused only on joint comprehensive planning.



Map 2
Share of Municipalities Covered
by Zoning Ordinances, 2001



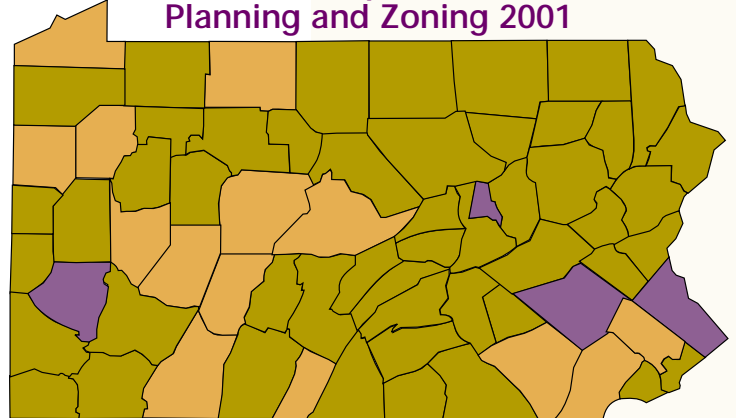
- 90% to 100% of Municipalities within County covered by Zoning Ordinances
- 50% to 90% of Municipalities within County covered by Zoning Ordinances
- Less than 50% of Municipalities within County covered by Zoning Ordinances

Source: Governor's Center for Local Government Services, PA Land Use Electronic Resource Library 2001, County Surveys 1978-1999

The number of joint zoning ordinances in the Commonwealth has not changed since 1999. There are four joint zoning ordinances covering a total of 11 municipalities in:

- Allegheny County – Rosslyn Farms, Crafton and Thornburg boroughs.
- Berks County – Centre Township and Centerport Borough.
- Bucks County – Newtown, Upper Makefield and Wrightstown townships.
- Montour County – West Hemlock, Derry and Limestone townships.

Map 3
Joint Comprehensive
Planning and Zoning 2001



- County with at least one municipality participating in Joint Municipal Planning and Joint Zoning Ordinance
- County with at least one municipality participating in Joint Municipal Planning
- County with no municipalities participating in Joint Municipal Planning

Source: Governor's Center for Local Government Services, PA Land Use Electronic Resource Library 2001