



Looking Ahead - Agenda 2002



Looking ahead to its Land Use Agenda in 2002, the Center will continue the outreach, education, technical assistance, financial assistance and agency coordination efforts that are at the heart of Growing Smarter. The Center will focus on improving economic competitiveness and the quality of life in the Commonwealth by supporting the land use initiatives of other state agencies and doing the following:

- Promote Quality of Life Partnerships among local governments and the planning, business and economic development communities.
- Promote the support and revitalization of core communities.
- Expand the Center's planning assistance tools and programs.
- Strengthen the Center's partnership with county planning agencies.



Chambersburg in Franklin County

Quality of Life Partnerships

When businesses, local governments, the planning community and the economic development community work together in partnerships, communities benefit from a strong business climate and a preservation of Pennsylvania's quality of life. To strengthen the communication and cooperation among these groups, the Governor's Center for Local Government Services will hold regional Quality of Life Conferences in the fall of 2002. The purpose of the conferences will be to:

- Bring a region's business, economic development, community development, and planning communities together with local government to address land use and quality-of-life issues.
- Identify and address regional land use issues.
- Identify resources and model land use initiatives in each region.
- Identify weaknesses and needs in each region.
- Make recommendations for further action in each region.

Results from each conference will be presented at the next statewide Growing Smarter Conference, which is expected to be held in 2003.

Core Communities

Core communities are the population centers and the social, economic, commercial and cultural hubs of an area or region. They include Pennsylvania's 56 cities and 962 boroughs, plus the myriad small communities or village centers located in townships, rural areas and older suburbs. Much of the Commonwealth's history and culture can be found in these core communities.

When core communities are kept economically and environmentally healthy, the pressure on farmlands, forests, and other rural resource areas is reduced. Furthermore, because public infrastructure and services already exist in core communities, public expenditures for new roads and water and sewer systems can also be reduced.



Jim Thorpe, Carbon County

In 2002, the Center will make it a priority to strengthen and support core communities through outreach, targeted assistance, a toolkit, and the promotion of smart codes.

Core Communities Outreach

The Center will expand its outreach and training initiatives to promote cooperation between core communities and their suburbs by illustrating the importance of core communities to an area or region and identifying the benefits of working together.

Core Communities Toolkit


The Center will develop a toolkit that identifies all state programs that can be used to strengthen and revitalize core communities. An example of such a program is the Weed and Seed Program, which “weeds out” violent offenders with intensive law enforcement and prosecution and “seeds” neighborhoods with prevention, intervention, treatment and revitalization services.

Other examples of agency programs that can support core communities include the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission’s new Historic Homesite Preservation Grant Program; the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Authority’s Homeownership Choice Program, which supports construction of new single-family homes in urban areas; and the Department of Environmental Protection’s Land Recycling and Brownfields Redevelopment Program.

Smart Codes

Another priority will be to promote and prepare for the “smart,” or rehab, changes to Pennsylvania’s Uniform Construction Code. Many building codes are geared toward new construction and thus unintentionally have prohibitive standards for rehabilitating older structures that result in increased costs.

Pennsylvania’s uniform code, the International Building Code, will eventually include an Existing Structures Code to encourage investment in existing buildings and communities. “Smart Codes” in place in New Jersey have shown dramatic results in a short period of time. For example, rehabilitation spending rose by 60 percent from \$68 million to \$109 million in Newark, by 83 percent in Jersey City, and by 40 percent in Trenton. According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the cost of rehabilitating a single-family home actually decreases by nearly 20 percent when smart codes are adopted.



The Center will begin to prepare communities throughout the Commonwealth for the smart code provisions in 2003 by offering training on smart codes and promoting their benefits in older communities.

Planning Assistance

In the first year and a half of its existence, the Land Use Planning and Technical Assistance Program (LUPTAP) has become one of the Center's most important tools to promote Growing Smarter. Municipalities, multimunicipal groups, and counties have used LUPTAP funding to engage in a variety of planning efforts.

To promote and support countywide comprehensive planning processes as a component of LUPTAP, the Center and several state agencies will advance the Interagency Comprehensive Land Use Planning Assistance pilot program. Several agencies will assist in providing funding for comprehensive planning that addresses greenways, and environmental, open space and transportation needs. The Center will coordinate this program, and the departments of Conservation and Natural Resources, Environmental Protection, and Transportation will review projects.

The primary goal of this program is to improve economic competitiveness and the quality of life in Pennsylvania by creating model planning processes and providing a cohesive and coordinated state agency approach to planning. Other goals include:

- Encouraging soundly planned growth at all levels of government.
- Strengthening the coordination between local land use decisions and state agency programs, policies, and projects.
- Enhancing planning partnerships among the private, nonprofit, and governmental sectors within a county and between and among counties.

County Planning Partnership

Over the past few years, the Center's high priority was to strengthen its partnership with county planning agencies and directors. While most land use decisions are made at the municipal level, the Center has long recognized the important responsibilities assigned to counties by the Municipalities Planning Code and the pivotal role counties can play in the coordination of state and local planning efforts.

Through their own comprehensive planning process, counties promote and support local and multimunicipal planning efforts. County planners provide important technical assistance to municipalities that support multimunicipal cooperation and general consistency, all key components of the Growing Smarter Initiative.



The state capitol





The Center has worked with county planning directors to identify their needs and resources and thus increase their capacity for providing land use outreach, education and assistance. The Center has also been actively encouraging counties to either adopt new comprehensive plans or revise older ones. Only seven counties have not yet adopted a comprehensive plan, and the Center is working with those counties to adopt plans.⁴ Two counties without plans are in the process of developing comprehensive plans, and four are in the early stages of development.

County Capacity

Some of the smaller, more rural counties in the Commonwealth often lack the staff and funding to play a stronger role in planning. LUPTAP guidelines do not support funding for county planning staff, and this lack of capacity in county planning agencies creates a gap in the technical assistance provided to municipalities in the county.

As a result, planning for land use and growth is restricted in counties lacking adequate planning staff, and social and economic vitality, environmental quality and efficient and effective long-term economic growth suffer. The possibility that these counties will comply with the new requirements of the Municipalities Planning Code is also diminished.

To increase the capacity of small, distressed counties and provide for countywide planning there, the Center plans to revise the LUPTAP guidelines to permit funding for staff of smaller, rural county planning agencies. To obtain the funding, the counties must assume the full costs of the position at the end of the three-year grant period.

County Visits

To better understand the opportunities and challenges facing each county, the Governor's Center for Local Government Services has begun one-day visits to each county planning agency in the Commonwealth. Through these visits, the Center hopes to establish a better understanding of the planning process within the Commonwealth.

By interviewing staff in each county planning office, the Center will obtain a comprehensive profile of each county's staff capabilities and planning activities. When completed, this process will enable the Center and other state agencies to designate specific counties in need of financial and technical assistance. The visits also will enable the counties and the Center to have a better understanding of the other's objectives and needs and thus establish a closer working relationship.

⁴ The seven counties are Allegheny, Armstrong, Delaware, Erie, Juniata, Washington and Westmoreland. In addition, although Lackawanna and Philadelphia counties have adopted comprehensive plans in the past, in 2001, both counties reported that they did not have comprehensive plans, because their plans are so old that they are no longer relevant.



Greene County