

## *Land Use and Growth Management Profile*

**B**utler County is located in western Pennsylvania and adjoins Armstrong, Allegheny, Beaver, Clarion, Lawrence, Mercer, Venango, and Westmoreland Counties. Butler County's 789 square miles is comprised of 57 municipalities, which include 33 townships, 23 boroughs, and one city. The City of Butler is the county seat and the third most populated municipality with 15,121 persons (2000 Census).

Also according to the 2000 Census, Butler County is the Commonwealth's 20<sup>th</sup> most populated county (174,083) and at 220.7 persons per square mile, ranks 25<sup>th</sup> in terms of population density. In comparison, Pennsylvania's population density is 274 persons per square mile. The Census classifies the County's population as being 53.8 percent urban.

Butler County's wealth of natural resources provided significant contributions to the Northeastern United States' dominance of the Industrial Revolution. By the late 1800s, the County became a world-renowned supplier of oil by hosting over 1,000 oil wells that supplied the world with 75 percent of its oil. Following the Civil War, a network of rail lines linked the County's natural resources to what would become the world's largest industrial corridor.

### **Existing Land Use Conditions**

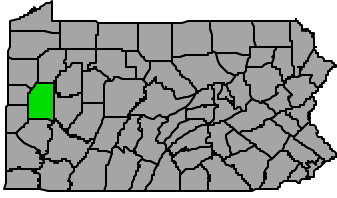
Located within the Allegheny Plateau physiographic region, many steep stream valleys cut Butler County's rolling landscape, which causes it to be predominantly undeveloped. According to

the Butler County Comprehensive Plan (2002), forestland constitutes 49 percent of the County's total land area, followed by agricultural and open space uses, which cover nearly 42 percent of the total land area.

The Butler County Comprehensive Plan (2002) provides a more detailed analysis of the County's existing land use conditions. Developed lands represent only 5.1 percent (25,843 acres) of Butler County's total land area. Nearly half of this total (2.4 percent, or 11,924 acres) exists as mixed-use development, which is concentrated in the City of Butler and the County's 23 boroughs. A significant concentration of mixed-use development is located in Cranberry Township at the juncture of I-76 and I-79.

Residential development constitutes the balance of Butler County's development lands. While the highest concentration of residential development has historically existed within City of Butler and the County's 23 boroughs, an increasing amount of this development is occurring in the suburban and rural townships. Cranberry Township has the highest number of housing units (over 8,700) followed by Butler Township with 7,500 housing units.

The County's 69,868 housing units place Butler in 20<sup>th</sup> position among Pennsylvania's 67 counties. From 1990 to 2000, the number of housing units in Butler County grew by 18.3 percent, the third highest growth rate among the 67 counties.



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The number of households grew by 10,807 percent, placing the County in 9<sup>th</sup> position.

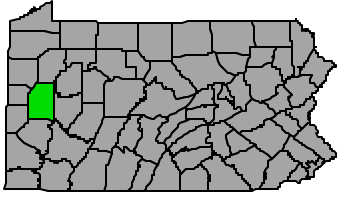
### **Key Land Use Issues**

- ☑ **As part of the Greater Pittsburgh Region, Butler County is striving to preserve the overall rural integrity of its southwestern municipalities** while also encouraging positive economic and physical development, particularly along the I-79 corridor.
- ☑ **The interface between transportation and residential and commercial / industrial land uses is becoming an increasingly important issue, especially in the County's southeastern municipalities.** I-76 and I-79 have made southwestern Butler County highly accessible to the City of Pittsburgh, which has fueled the County's growth in housing. According to the 2000 Census, nearly 21,500 of Butler County's residents work in Allegheny County.
- ☑ **While southeastern Butler County is trying to manage and sustain its growth, the County's northeastern municipalities are experiencing slow to no growth.** This is especially true for the boroughs in this region, as many of them are depopulating. From 1990 to 2000, the greatest losses in population and housing units occurred in West Sunbury (-41.2% and -35.6%, respectively), Petrolia (-25.3% and -25.6%, respectively), Cherry Valley (-25% and -20.5%, respectively), and Bruin (-17.3% and -13%, respectively) Boroughs.

- ☑ **Butler County's agricultural lands are decreasing, in part, to land development pressures.** The U.S. Department of Agriculture reported that from 1987 to 1997, Butler County experienced the 7<sup>th</sup> highest decrease in the number of farmland acres (25,270) lost among Pennsylvania's 67 counties. Also during this period, the County recorded the 6<sup>th</sup> highest loss in the number of farm operations, with 227.
- ☑ **Butler County's Agricultural Land Preservation Program has had a limited effect in preserving the County's loss of farmland.** This trend, however, is largely due to the limited funds appropriated to support the acquisition of easements.
- ☑ **Less than half of the County's 57 municipalities have adopted comprehensive plans,** which are the foundation for implementing zoning and subdivision/land development ordinances.

### **Land Use Planning Activities**

- ☑ **The Butler County Planning Commission prepared a new countywide comprehensive plan,** which was adopted by the County Board of Commissioners in 2003. This plan is in compliance with the Municipalities Planning Code.
- ☑ **A significant amount of multi-municipal planning has occurred in Butler County** as joint comprehensive plans have recently been prepared for Muddy Creek and Lancaster Townships,



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Clinton and Buffalo Townships,  
Middlesex and Richland Townships,  
and Clinton and Buffalo Townships.

- ☑ **The Butler County Planning Commission has developed a strong working relationship with the County's southwestern municipalities,** which are facing immense growth pressures from the City of Pittsburgh and the I-76 and I-79 corridors.