

Land Use and Growth Management Profile

The Central Region includes the counties of Centre, Clinton, Columbia, Juniata, Lycoming, Montour, Mifflin, Northumberland, Snyder, and Union, and 265 municipal governments.

The region is largely comprised of small towns, wooded areas, and farmland. Forest and mountains are located in the north and west, crops are harvested on farms in the south, and coals towns are located in the east. Streams, creeks, and tributaries of the Susquehanna and Juniata Rivers are prevalent throughout the Central Region.

Geographically, the region covers 5,784 square miles located in the central portion of Pennsylvania. With the Appalachian Mountain range traversing the region, land uses are greatly impacted by topography. In particular, the location of the region's transportation infrastructure is greatly impacted by topographical constraints. A total of 11,178 miles of roadways, representing 9.3 percent of the State's total highway miles cross the region. The transportation network includes Interstates 80 and 180, and other major highways such as U.S. Routes 322, 22, 11, and 15.

Centre County is included in the State College Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) and Lycoming County is included in the Williamsport MSA. The strength and vitality of these MSAs are essential to the region's growth and development, and therefore, are instrumental in defining the region's land use patterns. The proportion of manufacturing employees (26.7%) is higher in the region than in the State (15.7%), which brings the benefit of a highly

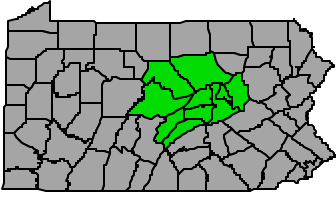
trained and skilled workforce. The region also has a large forest-based industry providing a worker pool skilled in the wood and wood products industry. Seven higher education institutions complement the region's workforce, including the Pennsylvania College of Technology in Williamsport, which serves as a model for technical training.

The region has been steadily gaining population over the last several decades. Regional population has increased by 17 percent since 1960. During the 1990s, all counties, with the exception of Northumberland, had slight population gains (Figure 1).

The Central Region, perhaps due in part to the potential isolation impacts of its mountainous terrain, has a long history of partnerships. The formation of the Susquehanna Economic Development Association (now SEDA Council of Governments) in 1957 led to the establishment of one of the oldest community and economic development regional alliances in Pennsylvania. To position the region for future jobs, in 1989 the region established the Central Pennsylvania Forum For The Future, which "has become a strong force for confronting issues that relate to the future of the region."¹

Key Land Use Trends

Key land use trends for the Central Region were identified during a focus group discussion held with several of the region's county planning directors at Bucknell

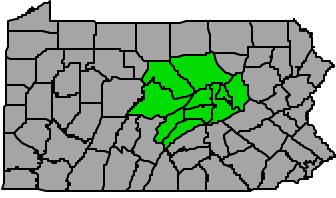


Land Use and Growth Management Profile

University in Lewisburg on February 11, 2004.

The impact of statewide public policy on land uses was a common issue that emerged while identifying the regional trends. It was noted that statewide public policy should not be “one size fits all.” Legislative intent and regional and local impacts should be fully analyzed before legislation is enacted or amended. The planning directors also noted that the trends are highly interrelated with transportation issues at the center.

- ☑ **The State’s transportation planning process creates a fragmented system which impacts transportation and land use region wide.** The region’s highway transportation infrastructure is critical to link communities and move goods. Because transportation infrastructure is a critical issue, the transportation planning process has a tremendous regional impact. However, the prioritization of PennDOT’s transportation projects has become problematic in the region in that it tends to focus on larger projects and is often driven by politics. Therefore, smaller projects with localized, but nonetheless important impacts, are delayed due to these decisions. This creates a system of local competition for funds with several opposing advocate groups – often from the same municipality - vying for funds. With the demand for transportation funding so great, the region cannot even begin to consider the use of alternate modes of transportation.
- ☑ **The region’s transportation infrastructure is inherently linked to its economic vitality.** The lack of a fully developed transportation infrastructure caused, in part, by the fragmented transportation planning process, is directly linked to the economic vitality and growth in the region’s communities. State College is an example. The improvement of transportation corridors, such as U.S. Route 22, and completion of portions of the I-99 corridor are opening the area to new growth opportunities.
- ☑ **Statewide policy designed to preserve open space has resulted in a unique form of regional ‘sprawl.’** The Clean and Green Act (Act 319) signed into law in December 1974, was intended to “protect the landowner from being forced to go out of agriculture or sell part of the land, in order to pay unusually high taxes... the landowner as well as his neighbors benefit by having the land kept in agricultural use rather than developed.”² The act has resulted in several adverse impacts that have been experienced throughout the Central Region. The prime concern is the disparity that results from tax shifting between participating real property owners with lower property tax burdens and non-participating real property owners that are subjected to a higher millage rate to make up for the loss in tax revenues. As equally important is the concern that the Clean and Green program benefits many landowners who do not provide the public benefits intended by the Act. For



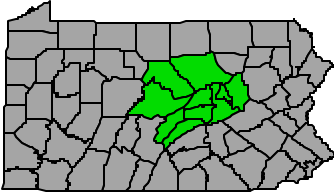
Land Use and Growth Management Profile

example, some program participants are wealthy suburbanites building large homes causing a form of large-lot sprawl throughout many communities in the region. Amending the legislation to increase lot size from 10 to 20 or even 50 acres could potentially resolve this issue. Additionally, homeowners who establish residence expect municipal services comparable to suburban areas; however, sufficient tax base is not always available to pay for the anticipated services. The Pennsylvania General Assembly's Joint State Government Commission evaluated the impact of Clean and Green legislation in 1997. The policy issues identified in the analysis were consistent with those identified in the Central Region, including program eligibility, administration of the Act, and tax impact on landowners and other citizens. Amending the legislation would preserve its original intent and reduce fiscal burdens placed upon rural communities in the Central Region.

- ☑ **Municipal fragmentation and an antiquated tax system hinder community and economic growth.** A total of 256 municipal governments, each with a dependence on the real estate tax, results in a disparity that leaves many older core municipalities in the region with either stagnant or declining population and the fiscal inability to improve deteriorating conditions. This causes core municipalities to raise tax rates for the remaining citizens who are not always able to cover the costs. Conversely,

outer municipalities receive growth in development and tax revenues. Municipal competition driven by revenues forces municipalities to compete against each other for investment, as opposed to pooling resources, in order to remain competitive. Cumulatively, the competition for revenues is impeding economic growth. Creative solutions, such as revenue-based sharing and revising the annexation law, should be explored.

- ☑ **Many of the region's first generation communities are losing population and supporting tax base.** Between 1990 and 2000, the population within the region's first generation communities *decreased* by an average of 2.5 percent, but *increased* by an average of 9.9 percent within the second-generation communities (Figure 1).
- ☑ **Higher education and health care facilities have had a positive impact on the region.** The presence of the region's seven higher education institutions and regional health care facilities, such as the Geisinger Medical Center, have diversified the region's population and employment opportunities.
- ☑ **The loss of agricultural land has been significant over the past several decades as growth in the region's second-class townships is accelerating.** Funding levels for county agricultural land preservation programs are not sufficient to purchase the available development easements, which do not



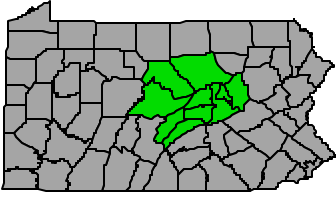
Land Use and Growth Management Profile

allow such programs to reach a greater level of efficiency in curbing sprawling land development. Agricultural preservation laws should be reviewed for legislative intent and impact. Additionally, the industrial farming operations and the impacts on neighboring communities is also becoming a concern throughout the region. Municipalities are often motivated to implement land use regulations as conflicts between industrial farming operators and adjacent property owners arise.

- ☑ **Housing construction has increased in both first-generation and second-generation communities.** With the exception of Northumberland County, the number of housing units has increased in first-generation and second-generation communities (Figure 2). During the 1990s, the number of housing units in the first-generation communities increased by 2,689, or 2.6 percent, while the second-generation communities increased by 18,679, or 11.82 percent. This trend mirrors the gradual population increase that the Central Region has been experiencing throughout the last several decades. What is contrary to this trend is that the *population* in first-generation communities, with the exception of Juniata County, has been decreasing.
- ☑ **Transportation improvements have fueled the region’s rural development.** The development of the region’s transportation infrastructure has enabled employees to live further away

from employment centers such as State College and Harrisburg. This has created bedroom communities throughout the region, particularly in Snyder and Juniata Counties. The development of comprehensive planning and zoning in communities is critical to prevent the region from developing wasteful land use patterns.

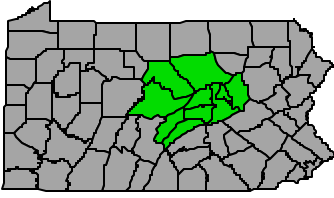
- ☑ **Economic development efforts throughout the region often induce competition between counties for jobs and growth.** As economic development prospects consider the region for location, the opportunities often result in competition between counties. A more productive approach might be to look at the benefits of economic development projects on the region as a whole.
- ☑ **Communities need to assess the true cost-benefits of the Keystone Opportunity Zone (KOZ) program.** The KOZ program has brought economic benefits to many areas of the State. The program should be re-evaluated, however, particularly with respect to its impact on Pennsylvania’s more rural areas, such as the Central Region. In particular, the long-term impacts of the loss of tax revenues in rural communities should be evaluated. Due to limited population and businesses, rural communities rely heavily on local taxation to fuel community needs. An analysis of the KOZ program’s economic benefits, beyond job creation, as well as economic detriments should be conducted.



Land Use and Growth Management Profile

Re-evaluating and rewriting the Local Economic Revitalization Tax Act (LERTA) legislation might be the most effective solution for Pennsylvania's rural communities.

- ☑ **School district officials need to become more engaged in local comprehensive planning processes.** Sprawling development patterns throughout the Central Region have increased the distance between schools and the populations they serve. Although school districts are required under the Municipalities Planning Code to participate in municipal comprehensive planning processes, they too often ignore invitations to participate and are unaware of the relationship that exists between local land use and school facility planning policies.



Land Use and Growth Management Profile

FIGURE 1
Central Region
Population Growth Comparison 1990-2000
 Source: U.S. Census, 1990 & 2000

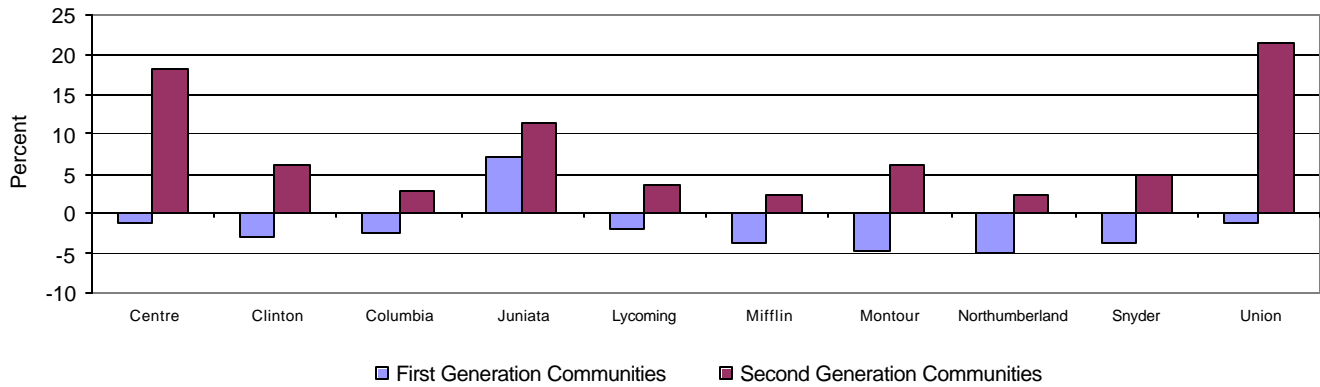
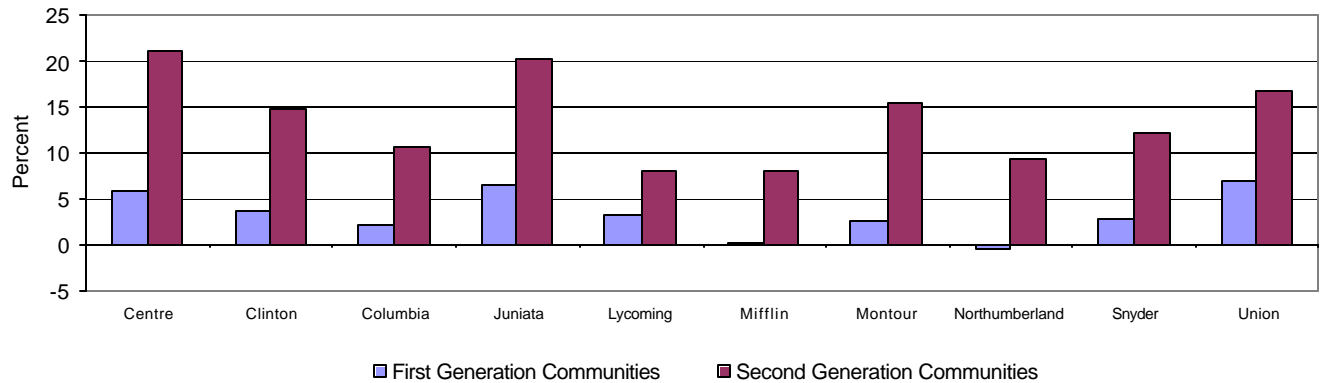


FIGURE 2
Central Region
Housing Growth Comparison 1990-2000
 Source: U.S. Census, 1990 & 2000



¹ SEDA-COG. <http://www.seda-cog.org>.

² General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Joint State Government Commission, "Clean and Green, Staff Analysis of the Pennsylvania Farmland and Forest Land Assessment Act of 1974." April 1997.