

Land Use and Growth Management Profile

Dauphin County is located in south central Pennsylvania and is bordered by the counties of Northumberland, Schuylkill, Lebanon, Lancaster, York, Cumberland, and Perry. The County contains a mixture of urban and suburban development surrounded by farmland and forests. Located within the County borders are 16 boroughs, 23 townships, and one city, Harrisburg, for a total of 40 municipalities. Harrisburg is also the county seat, and more importantly, the state capitol and economic hub of the region.

Dauphin County added 13,985 people during the 1990s, resulting in a 2000 Census population of 251,798. This rate of increase was 5.9 percent, almost twice the state's rate but about half the national rate. Dauphin County's land area is 525 square miles and its density in 2000 was 479 persons per square mile, ranking it the 10th most densely populated county in the state.

Existing Land Use Conditions

Dauphin County has two very different settings. The upper portion of the County has a quiet country setting with small towns within rolling mountain valleys. The lower portion is quite urbanized. This area is part of the Metropolitan Statistical Area of Harrisburg-Lebanon-Carlisle and is the 15th most populous county in the state.

Approximately 85.6 percent of the County's total land area is undeveloped with 79.9 percent of this total devoted forest and agricultural uses. Developed land comprises approximately 13.5 percent of the

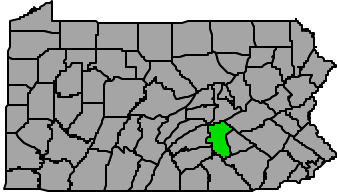
total land within the County. A significant amount of this land is in the Harrisburg metropolitan area.

Dauphin County's topographic features have largely shaped its land uses. The County occupies parts of two geomorphic provinces, the Appalachian Plateau Province and the Valley and Ridge Province, resulting in a varied and scenic landscape. Separating these two provinces is the Allegheny Front, which is a striking escarpment trending east-west across the middle of the County. These natural features have caused major concentrations of urban and suburban development to be located along the Susquehanna River Valley. Beyond the river and creek valleys, development is sparse and coexists with extensive public land holdings consisting of both state and federal lands.

Key Land Use Issues

Dauphin County is one of three counties that comprise the Tri-County Region. The other two counties are Cumberland and Perry. These counties share geographic, cultural, and economic bonds. The "heart" of the Tri-County Region is the City of Harrisburg – Pennsylvania's State Capitol. A significant amount of *economic* integration exists among these three counties as described below.

- ☑ **Dauphin County has the enviable dilemma of being a regional employment center.** The County employs over 77 percent of its resident workforce, or 94,000 people, plus it attracts another 70,000 workers from



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outside the County. While the companies employing these workers enrich the County's tax base, they also add a tremendous amount of traffic to local and regional roads. Workers are commuting from Cumberland, Lebanon, York, Lancaster, Perry, Schuylkill, Northumberland, and Juniata Counties (in numbers greater than 1,000). Traffic congestion is becoming a major headache in the region and adding minutes to commuters' travels (these minutes add up to hours and days over the course of a year). Increased traffic is also burdening the transportation infrastructure, resulting in increased construction and maintenance costs.

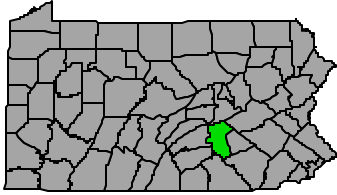
☑ **Dauphin County is losing its farmland.**

According to the Census of Agriculture, over 15,000 acres of farmland were lost between 1987 and 1997. This amounted to 15 percent of the agricultural land in the County. A South Central Assembly for Effective Governance study has found that farms located east of Harrisburg, in the Interstate 81 and Routes 22 and 322 corridors, are under tremendous pressure for development. To reverse this trend, Dauphin County has established an agricultural preservation program and has purchased agricultural easements on 7,000 acres of 68 farms.

☑ **Not surprisingly, Dauphin County is consuming new land rather than attracting people to already developed areas.** This trend seems to be true for most of the state. As evidence, the City of Harrisburg lost over 38 percent of its

population between 1960 and 2000, regressing from about 80,000 (1960) to 49,000 (2000). For the same time period, several townships increased their population over 100 percent. These included the townships of Conewago, East Hanover (246%), Lower Paxton, South Hanover, Washington, Wayne, and West Hanover. On the other hand, most boroughs lost population. Steelton, for example, declined from approximately 11,200 residents to 5,800 (48% lost). This trend of sprawling development is also demonstrated by the growth in housing units during the 1990s outpacing the growth in population. In Dauphin County, population grew by 5.9 percent while housing units increased by 8.2 percent.

☑ **Dauphin County's waterways have been significantly impacted by development.** For example, the Paxton Creek watershed, which drains much of the area surrounding Harrisburg, has experienced substantial change in land uses during the past several decades. Development is encroaching on some of Paxton Creek's headwaters. This has affected water levels and flow patterns, and caused significant erosion, sedimentation, and flooding. This 27-square-mile watershed now produces over twice the nutrients and 10 times the yields of suspended sediments that are released by typical forested basins, according to the Paxton Creek Watershed and Education Association.



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Land Use Planning Activities

Tri-County Regional Growth Management Plan.

- Twenty-six of Dauphin County's 40 municipalities have adopted comprehensive plans and the same is true for the adoption of zoning ordinances.** This is just under two-thirds of the municipalities in the County. It is somewhat surprising that a third of the municipalities are without these planning tools, given the phenomenal growth in some areas of the County and given the County is the tenth most densely populated in the state.
- Tri-County Regional Growth Management Plan.** Dauphin County is a participant in the Regional Growth Management Plan (RGMP) adopted by the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission. The growth management plan is an effort to promote land use policies and strategies that will be implemented by the three counties forming the Tri-County Region. The plan establishes Planned Growth Areas, for the purpose of directing future development to those area that have the greatest investment in public infrastructure and preventing continuation of the dispersed development patterns established over the past 50 years.
- Dauphin County Comprehensive Plan.** The Dauphin County Planning Commission has prepared a draft County Comprehensive Plan (2005). The plan incorporates growth management strategies promoted in the