

## *Land Use and Growth Management Profile*

**E**rie County is located in northwest Pennsylvania within a 100-mile radius of Cleveland, Buffalo, and Pittsburgh. It is bordered by Lake Erie to the north, Crawford County to the south, Warren County and Chautauqua County, New York to the east, and Ashtabula County, Ohio to the west. With a diverse mix of urban, suburban, and rural communities, Erie County has 38 municipalities, including 2 cities, 14 boroughs, and 18 townships. The City of Erie, the county seat, is the major metropolitan center for northwestern Pennsylvania.

Of Pennsylvania's 67 counties, Erie ranks 13<sup>th</sup> in population with 280,843 citizens. The County includes 802 square miles with a population density of 350.2 persons per square mile.

### **Existing Land Use Conditions**

Approximately 14.3 percent of the County's total land area is developed, while the remaining 85.7 percent of the County's undeveloped land consists of agricultural, open space, and wetland areas.

Bordered to the north by Lake Erie, Erie County is one of three Pennsylvania counties that maintain a port and one of two that are part of the United States coastal zone. The Port of Erie is in a strategic location within 500 miles of 85 million people and is at the hub of the U.S./Canadian industrial center.

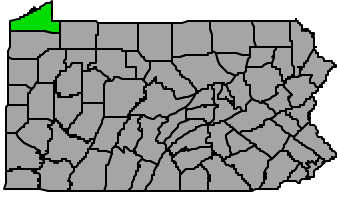
Erie County's bedrock is sedimentary with shale of the Devonian age underlying most

of the soils. The time-elapse between the early and late stages of the Wisconsin glaciation caused distinct differences in drainage, which have ultimately impacted County land use. Well-developed drainage patterns are associated with the early Wisconsin stage, while poorly drained areas are associated with the late Wisconsin stage. Lake Erie greatly influences the County's climate and ultimately impacts agricultural land uses. The lake causes variations in the amount of annual precipitation and growing season length. Due to these variations, early maturing crops, such as grapes, are grown on the lake plain, while production of later maturing crops occurs on the better-drained soils in the interior portion of the County. Dairy farming, and potato and corn crops predominate on the poorly drained soils of the upland.

Erie County's transportation system is well defined and influences existing land use conditions. Interstates 79, 86, and 90 traverse the County and provide interstate commerce opportunities. Rail access also provides an effective means for interstate commerce, and the Erie International Airport provides air transportation. The Port of Erie provides world access through the St. Lawrence Seaway system and is being connected to the Interstate system via the Eastside Access Highway.

### **Key Land Use Issues**

- ☑ Erie County's population has remained relatively constant over the last 20 years. The County's population declined by 1.2 percent during the 1980s and increased by 1.9 percent in the 1990s. Between



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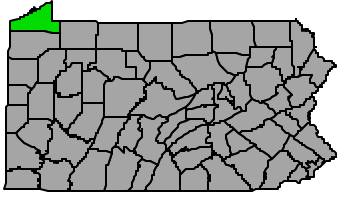
1990 and 1999, 11,540 more people moved out of Erie County than moved into Erie County. Although 29 percent of these out migrants stayed in Pennsylvania, a larger number, 31 percent, moved to the south and 8 percent to the western United States.

- ☑ Although Erie County's population is relatively stable, the amount of land area considered urbanized has been rising. The population of the urbanized portion of Erie County increased by only one percent between 1970 and 1990. At the same time, the land area considered urbanized rose by 32 percent.
- ☑ Erie County's population is shifting from more densely populated boroughs into more rural township locations. For example, North East Borough's population declined by 0.3 percent while North East Township's grew by 5.3 percent during the 1990s. Boroughs grew by less than one-half of one percent during the 1990s, while townships grew by nearly 9 percent.
- ☑ Erie County has seen a large amount of land converted to retail uses over the past decade. Retail development along Route 19 in Summit Township south of the Millcreek Mall, a major regional shopping center, was relatively dormant until the 1990s. During the 1990s, large tracts of retail development were constructed along the Route 19 corridor. Since 1990, Summit Township has issued nearly 100 building permits in

conjunction with development along Route 19.

### **Land Use Planning Activities**

- ☑ Erie County participates in a number of land use and comprehensive planning projects at both the County and municipal level.
- ☑ The Erie County Comprehensive Plan was completed in 2003, and consists of seven elements in four documents. The Department of Planning and the Erie County Planning Commission are responsible for implementing the Comprehensive Plan across the County.
- ☑ Nearly half of Erie County's municipalities have participated in multi-municipal planning efforts. Fifteen of the County's 38 municipalities have participated in joint/multi-municipal comprehensive plans, and 7 additional municipalities had multi-municipal plans under development in 2003.
- ☑ Recent social and economic development studies have helped establish a blueprint for future community and economic development activities in Erie County. Studies prepared by the Metropolitan Area Research Corporation for the County of Erie Planning Department (October 2001) and The FutureWorks Company and Regional Technology Strategies, Inc. (June 2002) identify strategies to improve planning, government organization, financing local services,



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telecommunications, and technical and occupational skill development.

- ☑ Tracking prime farmland assists Erie County in tracking land use. Concerned about the continued loss of prime farmland to development, the County tracks land use using GIS. New GIS maps of existing agricultural use provide a baseline for tracking the loss of prime farmland.
- ☑ Erie County government has linked planning and economic development. The Erie County Executive announced in February 2003 that the County of Erie Department of Planning will be under the direction of the County Executive's economic development specialist, providing synergy between local planning and regional economic development.