



## II. Creating a Community Vision

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When discussing sound land use, one compares what is existing to what should or could exist. This is the beginning of the process of planning. This important exercise of visioning is the cornerstone of good, effective planning. To that end, there are a number of practices that enable communities to visualize their future form and function. Planning practices, such as community goals and objectives, and comprehensive community planning, have existed for a long time and are deemed to be traditional planning tools. Tools and new practices, such as visioning and build-out maps, help identify alternatives for future residential, commercial, industrial, recreational and conservation uses. Identifying individual visual preferences is a tool recently being integrated into creative community planning. The key to these visioning and early planning practices is an effective, open public dialogue that considers the full diversity of opinions about future land use alternatives. An effective community visioning process will lead to the development of a comprehensive plan that sets forth the best vision of the community. ■



## A. Community Visioning

### DESCRIPTION:

Community visioning is a facilitated process by which residents of a community develop and articulate their preferences for the future of their community. Identifying a community vision is a vital exercise not only in the development of goals and objectives but in the comprehensive land use planning process. A community vision should reflect the aspirations of the residents regarding environmental, social, and economic values, as well as consider prospective or future land uses, residents, and the corresponding wants and needs of each. The visioning process should include some means of providing input for prospective or future residents or occupants of the land in the community. Broad public involvement is essential to provide guidance to municipal officials as they identify and articulate community visions and preferences. Methods of community participation include information distribution, surveys, committees and public meetings. A build-out analysis or build-out map can help visualize a range of future outcomes for the community.

A visual preference study is a tool that can be used to aid the visioning process. Basically, graphics or images, primarily of the subject municipality and some other comparable places, are used to represent landscapes and development forms which either exist in a municipality, or which may be appropriate for a municipality in the future. The images depict a variety of approaches to planning and development issues that a municipality may face.

The graphics or images are evaluated by participants in a public forum. The evaluations are then calculated and a rating for the entire group of participants is assigned to each image. The results are presented back to participants during a vision planning workshop.

In the workshop, participants are divided into workshop groups according to types of community settings (e.g., rural, suburban, urban) to conduct an in-depth analysis and discussion of the graphics. The images that are selected by the workshop participants are included in a final document, along with the evaluations from the initial public input session.

### BENEFITS:

The community visioning process provides opportunity for citizen input into county or municipal planning policy. This provides a sense of ownership in the development of a plan and, thus, a willingness to follow its recommendations. An on-going process of communication among the citizens can lead to reconciling of conflicting views and agreement on preferred courses of action. It also helps to facilitate inter-governmental cooperation and regional partnerships to resolve problems and address issues that cross municipal boundaries.

### IMPLEMENTATION:

Broad-based, public input is necessary to identify the representative range of public preferences. Surveys and opinion polls should use good scientific

*(Community Visioning, Cont'd)*

methods to get valid and defensible data, otherwise specific interest groups or highly vocal groups can dominate the process. Professional input and guidance may be necessary to develop and implement a community visioning process.

**EXAMPLES IN PENNSYLVANIA:**

**Doylestown Township, Bucks County** –

The Township conducted a survey by mail of residents when preparing their 1992 Park and Recreation Plan. The results of the survey were used to develop the plan's goals and objectives and recommendations.

**Keswick Commercial District, Abington Township, Montgomery County** –

The revitalization of the Keswick Business District is an example of a cooperative planning effort resulting in an improved downtown commercial area. The proactive, visionary process that was employed involved public and private stakeholders identifying concerns and goals for economic development. This became the Vision Plan. The results were streetscape improvements, traffic-calming techniques, pedestrian enhancements, and a cohesive street tree program.

**Pike County** – Approximately 130 residents of Pike County assembled within five task forces: Economic Development, Environment, Government/Infrastructure, Land Use, and Quality of Life, and defined the "vision" for the County in 2020.

**Windber, Paint, Scalp Level Boroughs and Ogle and Paint Townships, Somerset and Cambria Counties** – Known collectively as the "Windber

Area", Windber, Paint, Scalp Level Boroughs and Ogle and Paint Townships are included within the designated State Heritage Parks. In an effort to address conservation of unique cultural and scenic landscapes while maintaining the quality of life, a pilot visioning process was developed to tap into the voices of a selected volunteer regional community to enable a process that achieved a common vision. The formalized visioning program culminated in a Landscape Policy Plan for the communities' use in future land use decisions.

After individual visioning exercises were completed, a community meeting was held to present the different "communities" developed in the visioning exercise. Important places and community values common to all groups were identified. Community goals were identified and prioritized by the regional community as well. The Landscape Policy Plan reflects the community goals and provides a working base for the communities to continue their planning efforts to implement their vision.

**Crawford County** – The Crawford County Planning Commission undertook an extensive visioning program to act as the foundation for the preparation of its county comprehensive plan update. The visioning program involved over 100 persons representing the key components of the county. The results were incorporated into the statement of Goals and Objectives of the county comprehensive plan.

*(Community Visioning, Cont'd)*

**CONTACT INFORMATION:**

Doylestown Township, Bucks County  
(215) 348-9915

Montgomery County Planning  
Commission  
(610) 278-3730

Pike County Community Planning and  
Human Development  
(570) 296-3400

Somerset County Planning Commission  
(814) 443-1431

Cambria County Planning Commission  
(814) 472-2106

Crawford County Planning Commission  
(814) 336-1151

**FUNDING SOURCE(S):**

The State Planning Assistance Program (SPAG) provides funds on a 50-50 match basis for visioning and comprehensive planning projects involving multi-municipal efforts.

The World Class Communities Program (WCCP) also provides funds up to 50 percent for multi-municipal planning and visioning efforts.

Contact the Governor's Center for Local Government Services at 1-888-2CENTER (223-6837). ■



## B. Community Goals and Objectives Statement

### DESCRIPTION:

A community goals and objectives statement is a written statement of goals and desired actions for the future of a community. It is a tool used as part of the process of planning to develop a comprehensive plan. Goals provide a basic direction to guide the treatment of an issue while objectives are a statement of commitment to achieve a desired end result in the community. There are many tools and techniques which can be used to develop the goals and objectives statement. Some examples include public meetings or forums, and community opinion surveys.

A goals and objectives statement can include a strategic plan for implementation with priorities and progression of steps to be taken. The MPC requires a "statement of community development objectives" as part of a zoning ordinance.

### BENEFITS:

A goals and objectives statement provides elected officials and planning staff with a framework for making decisions on policies and activities to implement the goals. It is the basic starting point or foundation of a comprehensive plan.

### IMPLEMENTATION:

A goals and objectives statement alone will have little effect on land use patterns without a comprehensive plan and the tools to implement the plan. The goals and objectives

statement is not binding on decision-makers; municipal officials are not required to abide by the goals of the plan. To be valuable, the goals and objectives statement must be based on public input from a true cross-section of the community. Land development regulations that are exclusionary, unduly restrictive or unconstitutional have been struck down by the courts when challenged.

### EXAMPLES IN PENNSYLVANIA:

**Landscapes – A Comprehensive Plan Policy Element, Chester County** – A public opinion survey was conducted in March 1995. Over 5,000 responses were received, and by a 10 to 1 margin, citizens preferred changing to a development pattern that consumes less land rather than a continuation of suburban sprawl. Thus, goals and objectives were outlined and measures recommended creating livable landscapes as an alternative to unmanaged growth.

Recent examples of goals and objectives statements can be found throughout Pennsylvania. In **Bucks County, Bedminster Township, Middletown Township, Warrington Township and Sellersville Borough** have goals and objectives statements that can be modeled.

**Myersdale Borough, Somerset County** conducted an extensive perception survey of Borough residents to act as a foundation for development of goals and objectives statements and a comprehensive plan.

*(Community Goals and Objectives Statement,  
Cont'd)*

### **CONTACT INFORMATION:**

Chester County Planning Commission  
(610) 344-6285

Bedminster Township, Bucks County  
(215) 795-2190

Middletown Township, Bucks County  
(215) 943-0300

Warrington Township, Bucks County  
(215) 343-9350

Sellersville Borough, Bucks County  
(215) 257-5075

Myersdale Borough, Somerset County  
(814) 634-5110

### **FUNDING SOURCE(S):**

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