



Plan for Ludwigs Corner
Source: The Hankin Group

III. Developing A Plan

For areas of Pennsylvania experiencing population growth and development, changes to the landscape and community structure are inevitable. The choice facing communities in such areas is whether to try to actively shape those internal and external forces that bring change, or to passively accept any development and try to cope with the results in the best way possible.

The future that faces most communities which have not adopted and implemented land use plans is to witness the systematic conversion of every acre of buildable land into a developed use. Without comprehensive planning and land use regulations, communities may find themselves in a position where they are forced to accept one development after another, typically occurring in an unplanned pattern of houselots, streets and commercial strips.

Communities which have adopted land use planning and regulations to manage growth face additional choices. Those choices range from conventional planning, zoning, and subdivision codes, to newer creative planning tools that can effectively protect the community's most valued resources and its most special places – while still accommodating growth.

For communities desiring a future comprised of diverse residential neighborhoods, well-designed commercial development and substantial acreages of open space reserved each time a tract is subdivided, real, practical alternatives exist. These alternatives to unplanned development and inefficient land use can be realized through proactive planning and a variety of land use practices. ■



A. Comprehensive Planning

DESCRIPTION:

A comprehensive plan is a guide to future growth, development, land use, and community character. Comprehensive planning is a key component and basic building block of a sound land use strategy in any community - rural, urban or suburban. It is advisory and not a regulatory ordinance. However, it is a valuable foundation for zoning or official map implementation. A comprehensive plan is also required for enactment of municipal capital improvement ordinances, otherwise known as "transportation impact fees".

The comprehensive planning process facilitates a community's thinking about the land and its future use. This includes residential, commercial, and industrial development as well as agriculture, recreation, and open space. Comprehensive planning can have a positive impact on land use if it is implemented through consistent ordinances and actions. Through the Municipalities Planning Code (MPC), Pennsylvania law requires counties to "prepare and adopt a comprehensive plan." In addition, numerous municipalities, particularly those in high growth areas, also prepare and adopt their own comprehensive plans to guide growth in their communities.

The planning code requires that the plan contain at least a separate element for future land use, housing, transportation and circulation, and community facilities (MPC Section 301). It should also contain a plan for agricultural and rural use area, and protection of identified natural resources.

One of the most critical parts of the comprehensive plan is the section detailing how its policies will be implemented. The implementation strategy section of the plan can serve as a checklist to determine if the county, municipality and other parties are keeping up with the tasks assigned to them in county and municipal comprehensive plans.

BENEFITS:

Comprehensive planning can help facilitate the orderly development or preservation of land. A comprehensive plan provides a process for community dialogue as well as a framework for adoption of an official map, zoning, and subdivision and land development ordinances.

Other benefits of comprehensive planning include allocation of land for development to accommodate population growth, early identification of public facilities and infrastructure needs, and protection of sensitive natural and cultural features.

IMPLEMENTATION:

The MPC contains the procedural requirements for adopting the comprehensive plan. At a minimum, the planning agency must hold at least one public meeting scheduled pursuant to public notice prior to forwarding the proposed plan to the governing body. The governing body of the municipality must hold at least one public hearing after having given public notice of the hearing. The primary tools used by most

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municipalities to implement the comprehensive plan are the zoning ordinance and subdivision and land development ordinance. Most municipalities with comprehensive plans use both zoning and subdivision and land development ordinances as implementation mechanisms.

EXAMPLES IN PENNSYLVANIA:**Mercer County Comprehensive Plan** —

In the county's 1991 strategic plan, elected and citizen leaders called for a county land use and development plan. The land use component of the plan was developed through much public meeting input using a "hands-on planning" process. Community leaders and citizens created land use plan maps for each of their regions. These maps were pieced together to have a land use plan map for the county. The result was a comprehensive plan that looked to create a vision for the county, not only through the eyes of professionals, but through the eyes of its citizens. The Plan was adopted by the County Commissioners in 1996 and has been endorsed by 43 of the 48 municipalities and 10 county-wide community/economic development agencies.

In addition, a partnership between the Mercer County Regional Planning Commission and the Penn-Northwest Development Corporation has developed into Strategy 1000, an effort to achieve 1,000 acres of economic development in the coming ten years with an emphasis on brownfields reuse.

Wyoming County's Comprehensive Plan stresses future development areas and future water and sewer service area boundaries. The plan recommends

defined future development areas reinforced by defined water and sewer service areas to bring about a "Centers" or "Village" concept for future land use development throughout the county. A model zoning ordinance was drafted, which is specifically tailored for the boroughs of the county, as well as one specifically tailored for the townships of the county. The intent of these two model ordinances is to bring about the proposed land use development patterns as recommended in the comprehensive plan.

Crawford County's Comprehensive Plan aides development through infill development and utility extension service areas.

Orbisonia Borough, Huntingdon County, has a comprehensive plan and zoning ordinance that provides for community conservation and infill development to accommodate anticipated increases in heritage tourism due to the East Broad Top Narrow Gauge Railroad.

Examples of recent comprehensive plans in **Bucks County** include **Bedminster Township, Middletown Township, Warrington Township and Sellersville Borough.**

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Information on Mercer County's Comprehensive Plan can be found at www.mcrpc.com or by contacting the Mercer County Regional Planning Commission at (724) 962-5787.

Information on Wyoming County's Comprehensive Plan can be obtained by contacting the Wyoming County Planning Commission at (570) 836-3200.

Information on Crawford County's Comprehensive Plan can be obtained by

(Comprehensive Planning, Cont'd)

contacting the Crawford County Planning Commission at (814) 336-1151.

Information on Orbisonia Borough's Comprehensive Plan can be obtained by contacting Orbisonia Borough at (814) 447-3255.

Information on comprehensive planning in Bucks County communities can be obtained by contacting Bedminster Township at (215) 795-2190, Middletown Township at (215) 943-0300, Warrington Township at (215) 343-9350, and Sellersville Borough at (215) 257-5075.

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.

Small Communities Planning Assistance Program (SCPAP) provides up to 100 percent of the cost to prepare multi-municipal comprehensive plans and implementing ordinances. Program guidelines emphasize compliance with Community Development Block Grant Program requirements.

For more information, please contact the Governor's Center for Local Government Services at 1-888-2CENTER (223-6837). ■

B. Elements of Comprehensive Plans (Functional Plans)

DESCRIPTION:

Individual plans for one component of a comprehensive plan are sometimes prepared because the comprehensive plan may not address the issue in adequate detail or appropriate time frame. These elements are commonly called functional plans. These comprehensive plan elements are yet another part of the process of comprehensive planning.

These plans may be prepared at any time to address an issue of particular concern or an area of the municipality with special problems. The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) mandates that comprehensive plans contain certain basic elements (see MPC Section 301). Examples of plan components include:

- A plan for land use;
- A plan to meet the housing needs of the community;
- A plan for movement of people and goods;
- A plan for community facilities and utilities;
- A plan for the reliable supply of water;
- A plan for energy conservation; and
- A plan to locate schools.

The comprehensive plan would contain a referenced summary of the functional plans, thereby keeping it concise and manageable. Any topics not covered by a functional plan would be detailed in the comprehensive plan as required by the MPC.

A functional plan is often developed in anticipation of adopting regulations

focused on a particular problem or issue. If the functional plan is adopted by the municipality, it provides support for the regulation.

BENEFITS:

Functional plans focus full attention on a specific issue or geographic area, providing a detailed, targeted plan and implementation strategy. These plans can allow a community to focus more effort on a specific planning issue. This allows a specific element to be updated or addressed to an appropriate level of detail. Other elements of the comprehensive plan may be up to date and not require attention at the same time.

IMPLEMENTATION:

A municipality can start by adopting a basic framework of goals and actions, and then proceed to update and supplement the comprehensive plan with more in-depth information.

On its own, a functional plan has little impact. It is not binding on decision-makers; municipal actions are not required to abide by the directions of the plan. However, as part of a comprehensive plan, it becomes effective when implemented through zoning or subdivision and land development ordinances.

EXAMPLES IN PENNSYLVANIA:

1994 Quakertown Area Linked Open Space Plan, prepared by the Quakertown Area Planning Committee

(Elements of Comprehensive Plans , Cont'd)

for Haycock, Milford, and Richland townships, and Trumbauersville Borough, and the Quakertown Community School District in Bucks County.

1994 Doylestown Community Joint Comprehensive Pedestrian/Bicycle Transportation Plan, prepared by the Bike and Hike Committee for Doylestown Borough and Township in Bucks County.

Allegheny County Sidewalk and Bikeways Plan - The Community Development Department sought to fully study a network of sidewalks that would foster the concept of community and also increase the safety of transportation within the service area. The goals of the plan are to locate sidewalks and bikeways with the needs of residents in mind. The guiding principles are to give students an opportunity to walk safely to school, pedestrians the ability to travel to points of interest, senior citizens the convenience to walk outdoors, and bicyclists the freedom to ride separate from motorized vehicles.

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

Small Communities Planning Assistance Program (SCPAP) provides up to 100 percent of the cost to prepare multi-municipal Comprehensive Plans and implementing ordinances. Program guidelines emphasize compliance with Community Development Block Grant Program requirements.

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CONTACT INFORMATION:

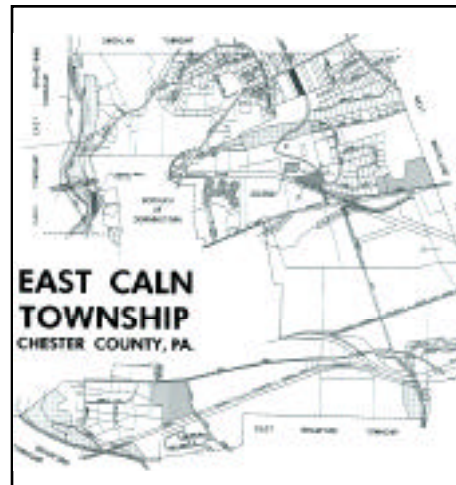
Bucks County Planning Commission
(215) 345-3400

Allegheny County Department of
Economic Development
(412) 350-1000

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.

C. Official Map



Official Map
Source: Chester County Planning Commission

DESCRIPTION:

An official map, under the MPC, is a land use ordinance and is adopted like any other land use ordinance. This land use technique allows a municipality to reserve private land for future public use. An official map may focus on one type of improvement, such as streets or parkland, but usually includes a variety of public facilities or lands.

The official map is both a map and a land use ordinance. It is an implementation tool that identifies public lands and allows a municipality to identify and reserve private land for future public use. It legally establishes the location of existing and proposed streets, waterways, parks and other facilities within a municipality.

The official map is not required to cover an entire municipality. Instead, an official map may cover a growth area. It may focus specifically on one type of improvement, such as streets or

parklands, but usually is comprehensive in its inclusion of a variety of public facilities or lands.

The official map also notifies land owners and developers about the location of future improvements. It also may establish a fixed time that land is reserved for public use. However, the reservation of private property identified on the map for future public uses lapses one year after the date that the owner of the land files written notice of an intention to develop. At that time, the municipality must acquire the land to preclude its development.

BENEFITS:

The official map lets developers know the community's long-range goals for roads, public facilities and open space and implements elements of the municipality's comprehensive plan. Incorporating references to the official map in local zoning, subdivision and land-use ordinances ensures that the official map will be taken into consideration by developers. The official map reserves important lands without immediate purchase. Improvements identified on the map also provide positive support for grant applications by illustrating a historical commitment to specific projects.

IMPLEMENTATION:

The governing body must adopt the official map by municipal ordinance, following public notice and a public hearing. The Municipal Planning Organization – as well as adjacent

(Official Map, Cont'd)

municipalities where planned roads continue into their jurisdiction – must also review the map. After adoption, a copy of the official map must be recorded at the County Recorder of Deeds.

The official map may be amended if necessary. Additionally, subdivision plats containing streets, parks, or other land to be dedicated as public are considered amendments to the official map.

EXAMPLES IN PENNSYLVANIA:

Lower Makefield Township, Bucks County, uses an official map to delineate intersection and other roadway improvements, parks, public grounds and open space reservation, flood control basins, floodways, flood-plains, farmland preservation, and bikeways.

Other communities that use an official map include:

Millcreek Township, Erie County

West Bradford Township and East Caln Township, Chester County

CONTACT INFORMATION:

East Caln Township, Chester County
(610) 269-1989

West Bradford Township, Chester County
(610) 269-4174

Lower Makefield Township, Bucks County
(215) 493-3646

Millcreek Township, Erie County
(814) 833-1111

FUNDING SOURCE(S):

The State Planning Assistance Program (SPAG) provides 50-50 matching funds 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.

The Small Communities Planning Assistance Program (SCPAP) provides up to 100 percent of the cost to prepare multi-municipal Comprehensive Plans and implementing ordinances. Program guidelines emphasize compliance with CDBG Program requirements.

For more information, please contact the Governor's Center for Local Government Services at 1-888-2CENTER (223-6837). ■