

## *Land Use and Growth Management Profile*

**L**awrence County, which is located 60 miles north of Pittsburgh, occupies 360.5 square miles and is centrally located along Pennsylvania's western border with Ohio. It is bordered by Mercer County to the north, by Butler County to the east, and Beaver County to the south. Lawrence County includes 27 municipalities, which includes one city, 17 townships, and nine boroughs. The City of New Castle is the county seat. Lawrence County is the "Fireworks Capital of the World," with Zambelli Fireworks International located there. It is also home to McConnell's Mill State Park showcasing 2,529 acres of the spectacular Slippery Rock Creek Gorge.

Located within the Allegheny Plateau physiographic region, the topography of Lawrence County's 360.5 square miles varies from fairly level, rolling land in the northwest rural sections, to gently rolling hills and broad level flood plains in the west, to steep slopes and rugged terrains with gorges cut by glaciation along the foothills of the Allegheny Mountains.

According to the 2000 Census, Lawrence County is the Commonwealth's 20<sup>th</sup> most populated county (94,643) and at 262.5 persons per square mile, ranks 20<sup>th</sup> in terms of population density. In comparison, Pennsylvania's population density is 274 persons per square mile.

From 1990 to 2000, Lawrence County's population declined by 1,603, or 1.7 percent. However, the general population shift in the County has been to leave New Castle. Except for the city's population loss, the

County experiences a population gain during the 1990 to 2000 Census period.

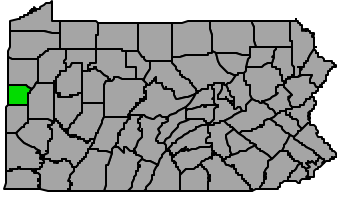
Population loss has been a persistent, although slowing, trend for many western Pennsylvania counties since the beginning of the steel industry's decline in the early 1980s. The direct impact from this trend has largely affected the City of New Castle and many of the boroughs.

The 2000 Census enumerated that almost 60 percent (55,960) of the County's population is urban; a 27 percent increase over 1990's urban population enumeration of 44,137 persons. The median age among Lawrence County residents in 2000 was 40.5 years, making the County's population the 13<sup>th</sup> oldest in the state. Statewide, the median age is 38.0. To this end, the aging population is one of the County's major concerns coupled with the fact that the County's death rate has passed its birth rate.

The County's 39,635 housing units place Lawrence in 33<sup>rd</sup> position among Pennsylvania counties. From 1990 to 2000, the number of housing units in Lawrence County grew by a nominal 2.0 percent, tying it with Armstrong and Schuylkill Counties.

### **Existing Land Use Conditions**

Over 85 percent of the County's total land area is classified as undeveloped. As previously described, the County's topography has limited the development opportunities through a variety of natural constraints and limitations.



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The County's primary urban areas are focused in the City of New Castle and Ellwood City Borough, with small clusters of semi-urban/village development intermingled throughout the County's rural communities.

Much of Lawrence County's population land development activity is occurring in close proximity to the major transportation routes, especially near the confluence of PA Route 60 (Beaver Valley Expressway) and U.S. Route 422 in Union Township. These highways provide residents and businesses with direct access to I-80, I-79, the Pennsylvania Turnpike, and the Pittsburgh and Cleveland International Airports. As such, the County's growth areas are focused on these major transportation routes, specifically, Routes 60 and 422 (both east and west), with minor areas located along 209 (near I-79) and along Route 18 near the Beaver County border. Associated land use and growth management issues are addressed in the County's new Comprehensive Plan.

### **Key Land Use Issues**

- ☑ **The need for public infrastructure into developed areas is increasing.** Due to changes in federal and state regulations, existing developed areas are experiencing property degradation issues because of the lack of utilities.
- ☑ **The relationship between the transportation network and land use continues to be a major issue.** Development throughout the County, be it residential or non-residential,

impacts the transportation network. A continuing maintenance program and the continued support of the PennDOT District is more important than ever, especially with the move by the County to become a member of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission (SPC).

- ☑ **The preservation of existing farms has generated an ever-increasing backing within the County.** Interest by farm owners in the Agricultural Security Area program is increasing. So to, the interest in selling the farmland's development rights.
- ☑ **The preservation of existing natural spaces and the development of "interconnections" to these areas.**
- ☑ **The regulation of the type of development, both residential and non-residential, at the local level is becoming more prevalent.** Many local municipalities are beginning to see the need for some type of developmental regulation, be it subdivision and land development ordinances, building codes, and even zoning.

### **Land Use Planning Activities**

- ☑ **The Lawrence County Planning Commission has a new countywide comprehensive plan,** which was adopted by the County Board of Commissioners in 2003. This plan will include growth management measures and will comply with the Municipalities Planning Code.