

## *Land Use and Growth Management Profile*

**N**orthampton County is located in eastern Pennsylvania, across the Delaware River from the State of New Jersey. The County is 374 square miles in area, bordered by Bucks, Lehigh, Carbon, and Monroe Counties. The population density is 715 persons per square mile. The City of Easton is the county seat and home to 26,263 residents. Located 60 miles north of Philadelphia and 70 miles west of New York City, Easton is quite accessible to employment centers located throughout the Mid-Atlantic region, and offers a cost of living that is comparatively affordable. The County's largest central city is Bethlehem, which is partly located in neighboring Lehigh County. Bethlehem has a total population of 71,329, 73 percent of which reside in Northampton County.

The cities of Allentown, Bethlehem, and Easton collectively form the A-B-E metropolitan area, a U.S. Census designation that reflects a strong degree of social and economic integration between these central cities. To this day, Lehigh and Northampton Counties are collectively referred to as the "Lehigh Valley." The Lehigh Valley Planning Commission (LVPC) has overseen county planning since 1961.

Over the years, a series of comprehensive plans have been advanced by the Commission to encourage compatible development in these two counties.

The County has 38 municipalities: two cities, 17 townships, and 19 boroughs. From 1960-2000, the County's population increased from 201,412 to 267,066 – an increase of 33 percent. A majority of this growth was concentrated within three primary transportation corridors: (1) U.S. Route 22 (2) State Route 145, and (3) Interstate 78. Immigration from New Jersey is a major factor in Northampton County's population growth.

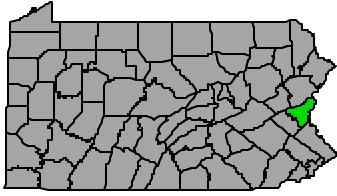
### **Existing Land Use Conditions**

As shown in the table below, over half of the County's total land area is classified as agricultural land or vacant land.

<b>Estimated Existing Land Use — 2001</b>	
Residential	24.6%
Commercial	1.4%
Industrial	2.9%
Wholesale & Warehousing	1.3%
Transp., Comm. & Utilities	7.0%
Public & Quasi-Public	1.5%
Parks & Recreation	6.8%
Agricultural & Vacant	54.4%
<b>Total Land Area in Acres</b>	<b>243,043.8</b>

Source: Assessment Department of Northampton County, excerpted from "Lehigh Valley Profile & Trends" (2003 edition)

At 24.6 percent of the County's total land area, residential development represents the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest land cover classification. Indeed, new housing activity has been brisk in Northampton County, which increased its housing stock nearly 12 percent from 1990 -



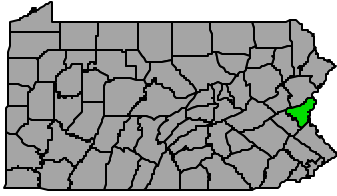
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2000. Three municipalities – Bethlehem Township, Forks Township, and Lower Saucon Township – comprise nearly one third of all new housing units built in the 1990s. As in Lehigh County, the predominant housing type being constructed is the single-family detached unit. Population forecasts prepared by the LVPC show these townships to be among the fastest growing in the County. The availability of land, highway access, and proximity to New Jersey make these townships attractive for development.

In contrast, the County’s boroughs and cities show few signs of future population growth due to the limited availability of land for new residential development.

### **Key Land Use Issues**

- ☑ **Completion of the Route 33 extension project has increased development pressures at major interchanges.** This PennDOT project extended Route 33 from its current intersection with U.S. Route 22 three miles south to Interstate 78. With the completion of this project, Northampton County has an improved north-south connector that links to northern Monroe County, one of the fastest-growing counties in the Pocono Mountain Region. Development pressures have increased along Route 33, particularly in the vicinity of the S.R. 248 interchange in Lower Nazareth Township, which has already attracted several big-box retail developments such as Wal-Mart and Wegmans. In addition to these regional growth opportunities, the Route 33 corridor is also attracting interest from New Jersey companies seeking to relocate operations in a lower cost labor market.
- ☑ **The Lehigh Valley has seen a tremendous increase in industrial park development.** The region’s economic development agencies have aggressively marketed the Lehigh Valley to businesses within New York and New Jersey that are seeking to expand operations. The availability of business park property has attracted a growing number of companies to the area.
- ☑ **The County is encouraging reinvestment in former commercial and industrial properties.** The Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation (LVEDC) administers the Lehigh Valley Land Recycling Initiative (LVLRI), a program that facilitates the redevelopment of abandoned or underutilized properties.
- ☑ **Low-density development patterns contribute to increasing commuting times and traffic congestion.** Although major employment centers are concentrated within the Route 22 corridor, most housing is located in the County’s suburban townships. As housing continues to move into rural areas, congestion can be expected to increase.
- ☑ **Northampton County lacks a strong central city.** While the County’s population has increased steadily over



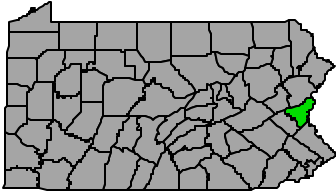
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the decades, Easton's population continues to decline. In 1980, it represented 16 percent of the County's population. Today it represents less than 10 percent of the County's population. If current trends continue, the central city will continue to lose population as municipalities on the urban fringe gain population through net migration. Northampton County's population continues to increase in suburban townships, but declines in its older cities and boroughs.

- ☑ **A growing number of County residents commute to jobs in New Jersey.** Attracted to the comparatively low real estate values, many New Jersey residents are relocating to the Lehigh Valley but keeping their city jobs. In turn, a number of Lehigh Valley natives are commuting outside Pennsylvania to employment centers in western New Jersey.
- ☑ **Due to its proximity to Interstate 80, Upper Mount Bethel Township is experiencing growth pressures similar to Monroe County.** Monroe County is becoming a bedroom community for the New York-New Jersey metropolitan area, which continues to grow westward as commuters choose Pennsylvania as their place of residence. Eastern Northampton County is experiencing similar development pressures because of its access to Hunterdon County, one of the fastest-growing employment centers in western New Jersey.

### **Land Use Planning Activities**

- ☑ **Amendments to the Municipalities Planning Code (Act 247) have encouraged a handful of municipalities to undertake multi-municipal planning.** Plainfield Township has joined forces with Pen Argyl Borough and Wind Gap Borough to develop a multi-municipal comprehensive plan. The County offers a wide array of excellent technical planning assistance to its local governments through its professional planning staff. It has successfully worked with several multi-municipal areas and intends to expand into other areas if adequate funding resources and staffing permit.
- ☑ **Northampton County actively promotes multi-municipal planning initiatives.** Lehigh and Northampton Counties adopted their first regional comprehensive plan in 1964. The two counties are currently preparing the 4<sup>th</sup> major update to the plan, which should be complete by the end of 2004. The joint county comprehensive plan will further support multi-municipal planning through the existing network of active council of government (COG) organizations. Cities have not been involved in any extent with new multi-municipal initiatives because of the few incentives to participate provided in the current enabling legislation. Watershed and water resource planning will be a key component to the new joint comprehensive plan



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- ☑ **In 2002, voters approved the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Open Space Initiative.** By a nearly 2 to 1 margin, voters supported a \$40 million bond issue to pay for farmland conservation easements, protection of environmentally sensitive land, and public parks. County budgetary constraints have slowed implementation of the bond issue. However, through the County's existing agricultural land preservation program an estimated 174 farms have been protected from future development. As of December 2002, easements had been secured on over 4,500 acres of land, which represents less than 2 percent of the County's total land area.