

Land Use and Growth Management Profile

Northumberland County is located in the Middle Susquehanna River Valley in north central Pennsylvania and it borders the highest number of counties in the Commonwealth – Columbia, Dauphin, Juniata, Lycoming, Montour, Perry, Schuylkill, Snyder, and Union Counties. Northumberland County’s vastness once extended across approximately one third of the state and because 28 counties were formed from its original territory, Northumberland is often referred to as the “Mother of Counties” or “Mother Northumberland.”

Today, Northumberland County encompasses 460 square miles and is divided into 36 municipalities that include 11 boroughs, two cities, and 23 townships. The City of Sunbury is the county seat and is the most populated municipality with 10,610 persons enumerated by the 2000 Census.

According to the 2000 Census, Northumberland County’s population totaled 94,556, which represents a 2.3 percent decrease from the County’s 1990 population of 96,771. Today, Northumberland County is Pennsylvania’s 32nd (out of 67) most populated municipality.

Existing Land Use Conditions

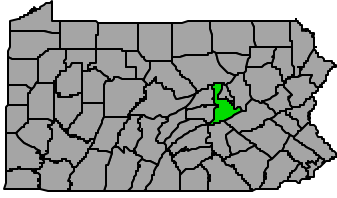
Approximately 92 percent of the County’s total land area is undeveloped with 87.2 percent of this total devoted to crop and pastureland. Northumberland County’s

agricultural industry ranks slightly above the state’s average with dairy and poultry farming comprising the largest market share. Developed areas comprise the balance of the County’s total land area and largely consist of residential development. According to the 2000 Census, Northumberland County had 43,164 total housing units with an average density of 93.9 housing units per square mile.

In regard to its economic composition, Northumberland County boasts a dynamic agricultural industry throughout its northern end and an anthracite coal region in the south. The County is known for its production of Anthracite, as the communities of Shamokin and Mount Carmel were developed around this industry. Today, the County’s largest employer is the manufacturing industry, which employs 17 percent of the County’s workforce, followed closely by the health care (14.6%), and retail trade (13%) industries.

Key Land Use Issues

- ☑ **Northumberland County’s urban areas are depopulating.** From 1990 to 2000, there was a shift in the County’s population from the boroughs and cities to the outlying rural/suburban townships, which experienced a 3.3 percent gain in population overall. This internal migration pattern is supported by the fact that County’s population actually decreased over the 1990 and 2000 Census periods.



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- ☑ **Northumberland County's suburban and rural townships are experiencing the bulk of the County's residential development.** In fact, 88 percent of the total housing units developed between the 1990 and 2000 Censuses were built in the County's northern tier municipalities.
 - ☑ **Northumberland County's agricultural lands are diminishing.** According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the number of acres in agricultural use decreased by 8.5 percent, or nearly 11,000 acres between 1987 and 1997. Likewise, they lost 79 farms during this period. These trends are, in part, attributable to increased development pressures in the County's northern tier municipalities.
 - ☑ **Land use impacts will be generated as the improvements to U.S. Route 11 and PA Route 147 are realized** through the development of the Susquehanna Valley Throughway. Such impacts are likely to affect the County's northern tier municipalities, which contain much of the County's prime developable farmland.
 - ☑ **Northumberland County offers a good mix of employment and residential land uses** as approximately 72 percent (or 23,842 persons) of its resident labor force are employed within the County. Less than 24 percent of the County's resident workforce is employed in adjacent counties.
 - ☑ **Limited funds and resources are available to the County for it to support the development of municipal comprehensive plans and implementing ordinances.**
- ### Land Use Planning Activities
- ☑ **The Northumberland County Planning Commission is preparing an update the County Comprehensive Plan.** Once completed, the Plan will be in compliance with the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code. The Plan takes on a unique form in that it will include an economic development planning element and uses the County's eight major watershed as a basis for its development.
 - ☑ **The Northumberland County Planning Commission is conducting a transportation corridor study through Delaware Township as a growth management strategy.** The goal of the study is to develop a strategic plan for land use, as well as to identify transportation improvements along the corridor.