

## *Land Use and Growth Management Profile*

**U**nion County is located in north central Pennsylvania and is bordered by the counties of Lycoming, Northumberland, Snyder, Mifflin, Centre, and Clinton. Over the past several decades, Union County has begun the transformation from a primarily rural/agricultural area to a more suburban character. The County is located 60 miles north of Harrisburg in the Central Susquehanna Valley. It consists of 14 municipalities, including 10 townships and four boroughs. Lewisburg, the county seat, is the major center of business in the County and its downtown maintains charm and accessibility.

Of Pennsylvania's 67 counties, Union is one of the smallest in land area with 317.1 square miles. Also, it ranked 54<sup>th</sup> in population according to the 2000 Census, with 41,624 residents. In 2000, the County had a population density of 131.4 persons per square mile. Union County's statistics have been affected by the past decade's opening of the Allenwood Federal Correctional Complex; it had an inmate population of 3,679 in 2000. The U.S. Penitentiary at Lewisburg, which has a population of approximately 1,800 inmates, also affects the County's population.

### **Existing Land Use Conditions**

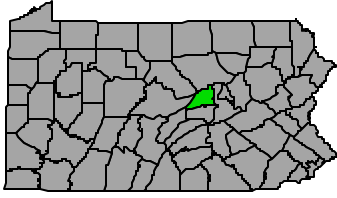
Approximately 95 percent of Union County's total land area is undeveloped with a majority of this total devoted forest and agricultural uses. Interstate 80, passing east to west through the County, intersects

with Route 15, a major north-south route from Harrisburg, and greatly influences the location of development in the County.

Union County is part of the Appalachian Region and is located just west of the once popular coal mining areas of Northumberland. In the western part of the County are immense areas of state forest and parks. The major physical features of the Buffalo Valley and adjacent smaller valleys influence the County's shape. The Buffalo, Penns, and White Deer Creeks drain the County and flow eastward to the Susquehanna River, eventually emptying into the Chesapeake Bay.

### **Key Land Use Issues**

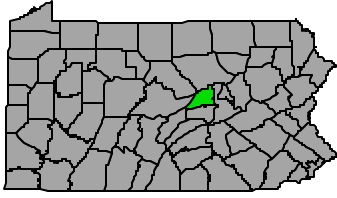
- ☑ **Union County has lost thousands of acres of farmland to nonagricultural uses.** According to the Census of Agriculture data in 1959, the County had 92,781 acres of farmland and 757 farms. The 1992 Census of Agriculture tabulated 63,159 acres of farmland (451 farms), resulting in a loss of 29,622 acres of farmland to permanent urban, transportation, and other non-farm uses in the 33-year period.
- ☑ **Union County's economy is diversifying.** Manufacturing used to be the largest employment sector in the Central Susquehanna Valley that includes Union County. Manufacturing jobs declined sharply during the recession of the early 1990s. This is evident in Union County. A review of the broad picture shows that, in 1990, 62 percent of County residents were



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employed in service or knowledge professions, while the remaining 38 percent of residents were employed in manufacturing, agriculture, and construction trades. By 2000, the proportions of these employment groups had shifted. Service and knowledge-based employment increased to almost 68 percent of the work force while manufacturing, agriculture, and construction trades fell to 32 percent. A further look at employing industries in 2000 shows that the two largest were education, health and social services at 28 percent and manufacturing at 22 percent.

- ☑ **Union County's housing is becoming less affordable.** Fundamentally, housing costs are consuming a greater proportion of median household incomes. In 1989, homeowners with a mortgage were devoting 26 percent of their income to selected monthly owner costs. In 1999 this percentage had increased to 27 percent. Additionally, the median housing value in the period between 1990 and 2000 increased by 14 percent while the median household income rose by only 11.9 percent.
- ☑ **Union County recognizes its need to preserve, conserve, and protect its natural resources.** A 1994 study found that the County is losing valuable woodland at a rate 15 percent higher than the state average. Development pressures are impacting vegetation, wildlife, scenic vistas, recreational areas, and geological formations.
- ☑ **Union County needs a diversity of passive and active recreational opportunities.** These opportunities would not only enhance the quality of life for County residents, but also expand the County's economic base through tourism. The Susquehanna Greenway that is under development will impact Union County's tourism in a positive way. This is important because tourism can create jobs and bring revenue to the County, and it can place emphasis on the cultural identity and the environmental quality of the region.
- ☑ **Improvements are needed to Routes 15, 45, and 192 that pass through Union County.** Route 15 needs improvements to its capacity and safety, especially due to the demands resulting from the Allenwood Correctional Complex and the Union County Business Park, as well as the increased emphasis placed on Route 15 as a major north-south corridor. Several improvements have already been made to these major routes, but their safety and capacity should be monitored.
- ☑ **Union County must protect its water sources and supplies.** Current and potential impacts on water quality can be attributed to the following causes: waste disposal, resource extraction, agricultural practices, and urbanization. Contamination of private water wells from nitrates and coliform bacteria is widespread. Water quality is critical to the County's health, biodiversity, tourism, and economy.



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### **Land Use Planning Activities**

- ☑ **At least 34 percent of Union County's land area is beyond the scope of local land use planning.** This land area is classified as either state forest land or federal holdings (prison complexes). These land ownership situations have their own land use regulations and controls. While cooperation exists between these government owners and the local governments charged with overseeing planning and land use, some impacts of this dispersed control are widely experienced.
- ☑ **The Borough of Lewisburg is using two progressive planning tools, a Visual Interactive Code and Traditional Neighborhood Guidelines.** The Visual Interactive Code uses illustrated commentary in the form of a mini-slide show to help explain its ordinance principles. Traditional Neighborhood Guidelines have been incorporated into Lewisburg's zoning ordinance. The intent of these guidelines is to encourage innovative mixed-use development as an alternative to conventional, use-segregated development, and to connect people to places by providing pedestrian-friendly walkable clusters. The Guidelines include illustrations and standards that are intended to be used for planning, architectural design, streets and streetscapes, open space and landscaping, as well as the location of utilities and drainage.