

## *Land Use and Growth Management Profile*

**W**ashington County was established in 1781 from part of Westmoreland County. Historic towns, bustling population centers, and a diverse economy enrich this predominantly rural County. Located in southwestern Pennsylvania along the West Virginia border, Washington County is well connected to the Wheeling, West Virginia area via Interstate 70, its primary east-west transportation artery. To its north, the Pittsburgh metropolitan area extends into Washington County along Interstate 79, the County's primary north-south connector. Washington County is experiencing some fairly rapid growth in the vicinity of these two interstates, which converge at the City of Washington – the county seat and largest population center. The Monongahela River parallels the County's eastern border, which is touched by Westmoreland and Fayette Counties. Greene County forms the County's southern border.

At 857 square miles, Washington County is the 19<sup>th</sup> largest in the state of Pennsylvania. It is comprised of 67 municipalities, including two cities, 33 boroughs, and 32 townships. With 202,897 residents, the County ranks 18<sup>th</sup> in the state for population.

Washington County was named in honor of George Washington. Coal mining and steel production flourished with the introduction of railroads in the 1850s. Although the steel industry markedly declined in the 1980s, both remain key industries in the County.

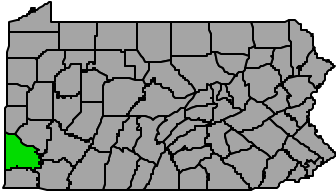
### Existing Land Use Conditions

Development is primarily concentrated along the I-79/SR-19 corridor around Cecil, Chartiers, North Strabane, and Peters Townships, and in the Monongahela River Valley. The Valley consists of many small boroughs with a mixture of industrial, commercial Main Street, and residential areas. The majority of the rest of the County is rural in nature, lacking the infrastructure necessary to support high-density development.

Approximately 40 percent of the County's land area is devoted to agriculture and open space. A relatively equal amount of land is forestland. In fact, Washington County is a significant producer of apples, cattle, alfalfa, and forage crops.

### Key Land Use Issues

- ☑ **Over the last 40 years, the County's population has shifted from established boroughs to suburbanized townships.** The County's population peaked in 1960 at 217,271 persons. Since that time, the County has lost over 14,000 residents. This population loss has been concentrated in the County's boroughs. From 1960-2000, 30 of 33 boroughs experienced a population loss, compared with only 12 of the County's townships. Both Monongahela City and Washington City lost population.
- ☑ **Interstate 79 has become a primary growth corridor in Washington County.** Interstate 79 provides excellent



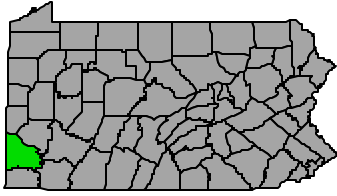
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access to the Pittsburgh region for municipalities bordering Allegheny County. This connection has created an opportunity for new residential, commercial and industrial growth into this corridor. Since the 1980s, when the steel industry began to decline throughout the Mon Valley, the County has been marketing itself as an attractive, low-tax alternative to Allegheny County. The success of Southpointe, a 600+ acre mixed-used development in Cecil Township, emphasizes a regional land use trend. People have been fleeing the congestion of Allegheny County to settle in more rural Washington County. Development pressures in this region have heightened concerns regarding farmland losses and maintaining the County's rural character.

- ☑ **Peters Township is the fastest-growing municipality in Washington County.** Peters Township has been referred to in the media as a “boom town” because of increased development pressure, similar to Cranberry Township in southern Butler County. Situated along U.S. Route 19 within the Pittsburgh metro area, Peters Township has become an attractive location for upper-income families seeking new housing, quality public schools, and good commuting times. From 1960 to 1990, the Township more than *doubled* its population, from 7,126 residents to 17,566 residents. Strong housing starts have mirrored this population trend. According to the U.S.

Census, the County added 1,116 new housing units between 1990 and 2000. This represents a 22 percent increase in new housing starts over the last decade.

- ☑ **The County is concerned about preserving its rural character and managing growth in a sustainable manner.** Washington County has maintained a farmland preservation program since 1994. Since its inception, the program has placed nearly 2,000 acres of farmland under conservation easement.
- ☑ **The County's two cities are steadily losing population to the suburbs.** In 1960, the cities of Monongahela and Washington represented nearly 15 percent of the County's total population. By 2000, the figure had dropped to 10 percent. This trend is expected to continue as more residents settle in outlying townships. The County's population appears to be dispersing along major transportation corridors. The total population has actually declined by 6.6 percent since 1960, however it has remained constant for the last 15 years.
- ☑ **Development is primarily concentrated along highway interchanges and major transportation corridors.** Approximately 20 industrial parks are located along Interstates 70 and 79 in Washington County. A case in point is Southpointe Business Park. The Washington County Redevelopment Authority purchased land for this



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development in the early 1980s. The park did not begin to attract widespread interest, however, until a new interchange was constructed along I-79. The County has witnessed similar development patterns elsewhere within its borders.

- ☑ **The mining industry has impacted large areas of Washington County.** Longwall and underground mining have contributed to subsidence and Acid Mine Drainage (AMD) problems.

### **Land Use Planning Activities**

- ☑ **Washington County adopted its first Comprehensive Plan.** Washington County began developing a countywide comprehensive plan in March 2003 and adopted it in November 2005.
- ☑ **Over half the County's municipalities have comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances.** According to DCED records, 42 out of the County's 67 municipalities have comprehensive plans; 51 municipalities have zoning ordinances.
- ☑ **Several municipalities have engaged in regional planning initiatives.** Within the past few years, several municipalities have initiated multi-municipal comprehensive plans to address resource issues on a regional level.