

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Why This Comprehensive Plan?

Northern Berks is a special and unique place. It has beautiful, unspoiled rural areas affording scenic views; interesting main streets in downtowns; traditional neighborhoods; recreational opportunities in and along its parks, game lands, woodlands, trails, streams, and river; attractive, historic rural churches; a vivid history and interesting historic resources; a rich agricultural heritage; all against the Blue Mountain as a backdrop. In Northern Berks there is still an opportunity to really plan and make a difference. The purpose of this Comprehensive Plan is to proactively work to assure that the future of the Northern Berks area will be shaped by the municipalities' own vision, rather than by reactions to forces acting upon the Boroughs and the Townships. This plan will manage rather than react to growth, work to retain the vitality of its existing settlements, and protect its many assets and resources.

The Boroughs and the Townships have prepared individual comprehensive plans in the past. This Comprehensive Plan is the first joint planning effort by all municipalities, and was initiated because of the recognized need to examine overall planning for the area in light of development trends and pressures in the Region; determine common goals and objectives for land use, circulation, community facilities, housing, open space and recreation, natural resources, municipal services, and resource preservation; analyze interconnections with and connections to surrounding municipalities; coordinate land use, housing, transportation, community facility and utility, economic development, and resource preservation planning; and recognize the Comprehensive Plan for Berks County. Shoemakersville and Perry Township have been included in other individual or joint planning efforts, so they were not a part of this Comprehensive Plan.

Planning jointly allows allocation of land uses, housing types, densities, and development patterns over the entire region, rather than trying to fit all types of uses and densities into each municipality. It also allows for coordinated land use planning along municipal boundaries; coordinated planning for trails, recreation and open space, and transit throughout the Region; and coordinated planning along the common road corridors in the Region. Coordinated input can be provided to County and State agencies. An overall approach to economic development can be provided, addressing retention of the major component of the economy, agriculture, and allowing for appropriate commercial and industrial development which complements rather than detracts from existing downtowns at appropriate locations.

What does a Comprehensive Plan Accomplish?

The Comprehensive Plan contains a vision of what the Boroughs and the Townships want to be and includes goals and objectives for realizing that vision. Through accomplishing those goals and objectives and realizing the vision, the quality of life for the Region's residents will be enhanced.

The Comprehensive Plan is also an educational document, providing discussion of conditions, strengths, issues, concerns, and opportunities, and identifying resources that are worthy of protection and preservation.

The Comprehensive Plan contains policies for land use, circulation and community facilities which will serve as a guide for public and private decision-making to accomplish the goals and objectives, and thus the vision, for the Boroughs and the Townships. The appropriate location, amount, and pattern of development is established. Standards for developers to meet are identified.

The Comprehensive Plan provides a basis for implementation techniques, such as land use ordinances, administrative actions, official maps and capital improvements programs, which will implement the policies contained in this plan.

This Comprehensive Plan is a Living Document

This Comprehensive Plan is just a start. It is the foundation for the attainment of the goals and objectives established within the plan, which can be accomplished only with the support of the municipal governments, municipal commissions, boards and committees, area businesses, area residents, and surrounding municipalities and regional planning groups.

The objective has been to prepare a plan which will not sit on a shelf and gather dust, but a plan that will be implemented and used by municipal governing bodies, planning commissions and other groups within the municipalities to guide their actions in attaining the goals of this Plan.

This Plan presents a strategy to guide municipal officials and other agencies in making decisions that will assure that the Northern Berks area will continue to be attractive places in which to live and work. This Comprehensive Plan is not an ordinance or regulation, but is a basis for proposing regulations and undertaking specific functional plans designed to implement the policies established within this plan. Implementation of the action plan is critical.

Need for Continuing Planning

Planning is an ongoing process and this Comprehensive Plan must be continually reviewed in light of development trends, the state of the economy, unforeseen influences, availability of public infrastructure, changes in community goals, and the appropriateness of the Plan's objectives, policies, and implementation program.