

CHAPTER 5: REGIONAL PLANNING

Regional planning is not unique to the Centre Region; however, it is often “off of the radar” of most residents and officials until they become involved in regional planning efforts. This chapter provides information on purposes and benefits of regional planning within the Centre Region and how municipalities play a crucial role in its success.

What is Regional Planning?

Just as municipalities are authorized to conduct land use planning within their jurisdictions, the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) also permits adjacent municipalities to plan cooperatively at the multi-municipal level.

Regional planning deals with the efficient placement of land use activities, infrastructure, and growth across a larger area of land than an individual municipality. For the Centre Region, such regional planning takes place in the context of the participating Townships and the Borough of State College. Authority to conduct multi-municipal and regional planning in the State of Pennsylvania is provided by the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) Act 247. The MPC recognizes multi-municipal and regional comprehensive plans as legitimate land use and growth management tools that can be implemented by any number of contiguous municipalities, as well as non-contiguous municipalities within the same school district. The MPC also grants the same legal status to multi-municipal and regional comprehensive plans as to municipal-level plans, requiring zoning, subdivision, and land development regulations as well as capital improvement programs to further the goals and policies of the regional comprehensive plan. The MPC permits local governments to enter into cooperative agreements in order to implement a multi-municipal or regional comprehensive plan.

The Benefits of Regional Planning

One thing that makes regional planning unique is that it is a voluntary endeavor, where municipalities choose, based on their view of the benefits of regional planning, whether to participate. By not participating in a regional planning effort, municipalities are required to independently fulfill their land use obligations. Through cooperative regional planning, municipalities are able to benefit from increased communication on issues as small as ordinance amendments or as large as a major development that will have impacts throughout the region.

Creating and maintaining a Regional Comprehensive Plan can have many benefits for the communities involved. Such benefits include the creation of Regional Growth Boundaries, which help control sprawl and allow the region to more easily target areas for revitalization; economic development; historic preservation; and neighborhood enhancement. In addition, Regional Growth Boundaries can have benefits in sewage facility planning. Municipalities that conduct sewer planning in a proactive manner can avoid sprawling systems through low-density areas that are more costly to construct and maintain than systems that serve smaller geographic areas. Allowing new development in the most appropriate areas of a region helps avoid the creation of unnecessary sewer extensions, reducing the amount of sewer infrastructure that has to be maintained.

Regional planning has created numerous and immeasurable benefits to the six Centre Region municipalities. When looking at an aerial photograph of the Centre Region, one would find it difficult to illustrate municipal boundaries based upon development patterns. While the Centre Region consists of six independent municipalities, land-use patterns and public services have all but dissolved these boundaries from a physical perspective. Through their participation in the Centre Region Council of Governments (COG), the regional municipalities cooperatively share a variety of services including parks and recreation facilities, building code administration, emergency management, regional planning, transportation planning, public transit, and a public library. The municipalities also rely on one wastewater treatment provider, the University Area Joint Authority, to treat and discharge wastewater created by residences and businesses. Other services, such as public water, police, and fire protection is limited to a handful of providers which often provide services in adjacent municipalities.

Due to the growth pressures experienced by the Centre Region along with its shared public services, planning for land use at a regional scale helps to reinforce efficient land consumption along with cost effective public services. By cooperatively planning for growth, the six Centre Region municipalities have avoided costly extensions of public services and have helped preserve open space and farmland. This approach to planning has and has resulted in a community that is regarded for its high quality of life.



Since the mid-1960s, the six Centre Region municipalities have cooperatively planned for growth and development in the region. Planning for land uses and public services at a regional scale has helped to reinforce efficient land use consumption along with cost effective public services.

How We Plan Regionally

While the six Centre Region municipalities have cooperatively planned at a regional scale for over 50 years, implementation of regional initiatives happen at the municipal level. Due to this plan regionally-implement locally approach, it is important that municipal planning commission members keep informed on regional issues and policies. Most regional planning is done in conjunction with the Centre Region Planning Commission, an appointed body that is discussed later in this chapter. Elected officials from each of the Centre Region municipalities are also involved in regional planning as no regional initiative can have any effect in a municipality without it's governing body's approval.

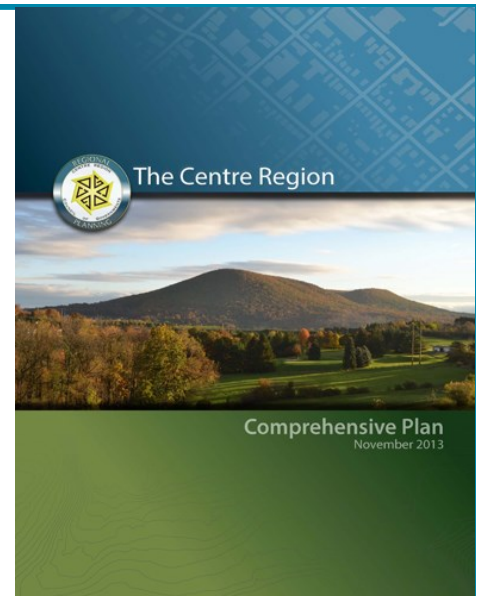
Most regional planning policies are found in the Centre Region Comprehensive Plan, which was first adopted in 1976. This plan has been subsequently updated several times, the most recent update being completed in 2013. One of the most important policies included in the Plan is the establishment of a regional growth boundary, which defines where the majority of future growth in the region should be directed. This document is discussed in greater detail in the Chapter 6.

Another important regional document is the Act 537 Sewage Facilities Plan, which plans for wastewater treatment in all of the six Centre Region municipalities. Public sewer in the region is provided by the University Area Joint Authority (UAJA), which operates the Spring Creek Pollution Control Facility in Benner Township. The Act 537 plan establishes the Sewer Service Area, which encompasses the same geographic area as the Regional Growth Boundary, and defines the location where public sewer service will be provided. The Plan also identifies how wastewater can be treated outside of the Regional Growth Boundary and Sewer Service Area. This document is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7.

In addition to these two regional plans, the CRPA, CRPC, and municipalities are regularly tasked with implementing the recommendations of the Centre Region Comprehensive Plan as well as addressing other regional planning issues as needed.

The Centre Regional Planning Commission

On September 1, 1960, College and Patton Township, along with the Borough of State College, joined together to form the Centre Regional Planning Commission (CRPC), which included a representative from each of the Townships and the Borough, as well as a representative from The Pennsylvania State University. The Commission grew in 1961 to also include the Townships of Ferguson and Harris, and later in 1965 to include Halfmoon Township. For more than 50 years, the residents of the Centre Region have enjoyed a high quality of life, in part due to the willingness of the municipalities in the Centre Region to work cooperatively to achieve common goals with regard to the development of the area.



The Centre Region Comprehensive Plan outlines regional policies in relation to future growth and development. The plan was recently updated in 2013.



A primary responsibility of the CRPC is the preparation and maintenance of a regional comprehensive plan. The CRPC plays a crucial role in ensuring that the plan is implemented through both regional and municipal action.

The CRPC was established to promote the health, safety, and general welfare of the Centre Region, through effective development of the region's municipalities. The CRPC, whether directly or through its designees, has the responsibility to do the following:

- Prepare and maintain a Regional Comprehensive Plan, in accordance with the provisions of the MPC, for guidance of the continuing development of the Centre Region
- Prepare reports and recommendations on regional problems and issues
- Maintain education programs to inform the public on specific planning proposals
- Present the regional point of view to State and Federal Agencies that are considering legislation or public works that would affect the Centre Region
- Aid in the preparation of long term budget programs in accordance with the Regional Comprehensive Plan
- The CRPC must authorize all agreements with PennDOT and federal entities as the contracting body for the Centre County Metropolitan Planning Organization (CCMPO)

The CRPC is also responsible for making a recommendation on any proposed action by a participating municipality relating to:

- The location, opening, vacation, extension, widening, narrowing or enlargement of any street, public ground, or watercourse located within the region
- The location, erection, demolition, or sale of any public structures located within the region
- The adoption, amendment or repeal of any official map, subdivision and land development ordinance, zoning ordinance, or planned residential development ordinance
- Any proposed action by the governing body of a school district within any municipality in the Centre Region relating to the location, demolition, removal or sale of any school district structure or land
- Requests to expand the Regional Growth Boundary and Sewer Service Area

The CRPC is comprised of one representative from each Centre Region municipality and one representative from the Pennsylvania State University. Municipal representation is provided by one member of each municipal planning commission.

The Centre Regional Planning Agency (CRPA)

The Centre Regional Planning Agency (CRPA) is the organization which provides staff support to the CRPC. In addition, the CRPA is responsible for providing staff planning assistance to participating member municipalities, to review and comment on local planning issues which may result in regional impact, and for encouraging cooperative regional planning initiatives among the Region's municipalities. The CRPA is part of the Centre Region Council of Governments (COG).

The Centre County Metropolitan Planning Organization (CCMPO)

MPOs are entities designated by law with the lead responsibility for the development of the area's transportation plans and for coordinating the transportation planning process. All urban areas over 50,000 in population are required to have an MPO if the agencies spend federal money on transportation improvements. The CCMPO provides transportation planning for all of Centre County, including the Centre Region. Technical assistance is provided to the CCMPO by four full-time planners, three of which are employed by the CRPA and one of which is employed by Centre County.

