

Module 2: Introduction to the Comprehensive Plan

In many communities throughout Pennsylvania, the vision for future growth and development is outlined in a Comprehensive Plan. Comprehensive Plans are the backbone of any community planning effort. They outline challenges facing the community, identify solutions, and provide guidance to appointed and elected officials on planning-related decisions. The best Comprehensive Plans are those that have the support of the broader community. They are a living document that grows and changes with the community. The purpose of this handout is to provide course participants with supplemental information on Comprehensive Plans and detailed information on the Centre Region's most recent planning endeavors.

What is a Comprehensive Plan?

Community planning, according to the American Planning Association, is “a process that seeks to engage all members of the community to create a more prosperous, convenient, equitable, healthy, and attractive place for present and future generations.” One of the fundamental responsibilities of local government is to plan for future growth and development of the community. The guidance document that results from this planning process is the comprehensive plan.

In Pennsylvania, municipalities are enabled by the Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) to create comprehensive plans to guide growth and development for their jurisdictions. The term “comprehensive plan” is not defined in the MPC. Comprehensive plans are defined by their contents, which are intended to proactively and comprehensively address future growth and development. Proactive planning is important for local governments because without it, the ability to plan is given to others who may not have the best interests of the municipality in mind. A comprehensive plan provides a vision for the future of the community along with the steps that are needed to make that vision a reality. It is the basis for land use regulations and provides a nexus between the community's future vision and the regulation of private property. This framework helps guide growth and change but without it, the development process would be reactive, resulting in development that is uncoordinated and costly.

The comprehensive plan is a recommendatory document, providing guidance and is often written abstractly so that appointed and elected officials can utilize a variety of means to implement it. While only recommendatory in nature, the value of a comprehensive plan is indicated by the community's desire to see to its implementation.

It is important to remember that a comprehensive plan and a zoning ordinance are two separate tools that are used in conjunction with one another. A comprehensive plan acts in a guiding role and provides recommendations on how land should be utilized to meet the needs and desires of the community, whereas a zoning ordinance regulates land uses as recommended by the plan.

Enabling Legislation

Article III of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code outlines the requirements for preparing, adopting, and implementing a municipal, multi-municipal, or county comprehensive plan. Although the MPC does not provide an actual definition for what a comprehensive plan is, this section of the MPC clearly outlines what a plan should contain and its legal status. The MPC also includes references to comprehensive plans throughout its other articles. In recent decades, the MPC was modified to permit greater collaboration amongst municipalities that are contiguous or located within the same school district boundaries. These improvements have encouraged and allowed for greater cooperation in multi-municipal planning.

Comprehensive Plan Types

The MPC outlines four different types of comprehensive plans including municipal, multi-municipal, county, and specific plans. These plan types are defined as follows:

- Municipal – A plan that is limited to a single municipality.
- Multi-municipal – A plan developed and adopted by any number of contiguous municipalities, including a joint municipal plan as authorized by this act, except that all of the municipalities participating in the plan need not be contiguous if all of them are within the same school district.
- County – A land use and growth management plan prepared by the county planning commission and adopted by the county commissioners which establishes broad goals and criteria for municipalities to use in preparation of their comprehensive plan and land use regulation.
- Specific - a detailed plan for nonresidential development of an area covered by a municipal or multi-municipal comprehensive plan, which when approved and adopted by the participating municipalities through ordinances and agreements, supersedes all other applications.

All comprehensive plans must meet the same four criteria. Those criteria include:

1. Contain basic plan elements set forth in Section 301(a) of the MPC.
2. Contain a plan for reliable supply of water, considering current and future water resources availability.
3. Be reviewed every 10 years.
4. Identify those areas where growth and development will occur so that a full range of public infrastructure, including sewer, water, highways, police and fire protection, public schools, parks, open space, and other services can be adequately planned and provided as needed to accommodate growth.

Because this document is focused on comprehensive planning in the Centre Region, the majority of the information shared in this handout will focus on municipal and multi-municipal comprehensive plans.

Components of a Comprehensive Plan

Article III, Section 301 (a) of the MPC defines minimum requirements for what a municipal, multi-municipal, or county comprehensive plan must contain. These minimum requirements can be exceeded based upon the desire of the community for which it is being prepared. The following requirements are listed in Section 301 (a) of the MPC:

(a) The municipal, multi-municipal, or county comprehensive plan, consisting of maps, charts, and textual matter, shall include, but need not be limited to the following related basic elements:

(1) A statement of objectives of the municipality concerning its future development, including but not limited to, the location, character, and timing of future development that may also serve as a statement of community development objectives as provided in section 606.

(2) A plan for land use, which may include provisions for the amount, intensity, character, and timing of land use proposed for residence, industry, business, agriculture, major traffic and transit facilities, utilities, community facilities, public grounds, parks and recreation, preservation of prime agricultural lands, flood plains, and other areas of special hazards and other similar uses.

(2.1) A plan to meet the housing needs of present residents and of those individuals and families anticipated to reside in the municipality, which may include conservation of presently sound housing, rehabilitation of housing in declining neighborhoods, and the accommodation of expected new housing in different dwelling types and at appropriate densities for households of all income levels.

Comprehensive plans should provide guidance on the types and densities of housing that will be needed to support future population growth. The 2013 Centre Region Comprehensive Plan emphasizes that a variety of housing types and prices will be needed to support future growth in the region. The plan also provides guidance on where higher-density residential housing should be located as well as ways to protect the character of existing single-family residential neighborhoods.



(3) A plan for movement of people and goods, which may include expressways, highways, local street systems, parking facilities, pedestrian and bikeway systems, public transit routes, terminals, airfields, port facilities, railroad facilities, and other similar facilities or uses.

(4) A plan for community facilities and utilities, which may include public and private education, recreation, municipal buildings, fire and police stations, libraries, hospitals, water supply and distribution, sewage and waste treatment, solid waste management, storm drainage, flood plain management, utility corridors and associated facilities, and other similar facilities or uses.

(4.1) A statement of the interrelationships among the various plan components, which may include an estimate of the environmental, energy conservation, fiscal, economic development, and social consequences of the municipality.

(4.2) A discussion of short and long-range plan implementation strategies, which may include implications for capital improvements programming, new or updated development regulations, and identification of public funds potentially available.

(5) A statement indicating that the existing and proposed development of the municipality is compatible with the existing and proposed development and plans in contiguous portions of neighboring municipalities, or a statement indicating measures which have been taken to provide buffers or other transitional devices between disparate uses, and a statement indicating that the existing and proposed development of the municipality is generally consistent with the objectives and plans of the county comprehensive plan.

(6) A plan for the protection of natural and historic resources to the extent not preempted by federal or state law. This clause includes, but is not limited to, wetlands and aquifer recharge zones, woodlands, steep slopes, prime agricultural land, flood plains, unique natural areas, and historic sites. The plan shall be consistent with and may not exceed those requirements imposed under the following:

(i) Act of June 22, 1937 (P.L.1987, No.394), known as “The Clean Streams Law”

(ii) Act of May 31, 1945 (P.L.1198, No.418), known as the “Surface Mining Conservation and Reclamation Act”

(iii) Act of April 27, 1966 (1st SP.SESS., P.L.31, No.1), known as “The Bituminous Mine Subsidence and Land Conservation Act”

(iv) Act of September 24, 1968 (P.L.1040, No.318), known as the “Coal Refuse Disposal Control Act”

(v) Act of December 19, 1984 (P.L.1140, No.223), known as the “Oil and Gas Act”

(vi) Act of December 19, 1984 (P.L.1093, No.219), known as the “Noncoal Surface Mining Conservation and Reclamation Act”

(vii) Act of June 30, 1981 (P.L.128, No.43), known as the “Agricultural Area Security Law”

(viii) Act of June 10, 1982 (P.L.454, No.133), entitled “An Act Protecting Agricultural Operations from Nuisance Suits and Ordinances Under Certain Circumstances”

(ix) Act of May 20, 1993 (P.L.12, No.6), known as the “Nutrient Management Act,” regardless of whether any agricultural operation within the area to be affected by the plan is a concentrated animal operation as defined under the act.



The 2013 Centre Region Comprehensive Plan includes policies that relate to the protection of the region’s natural and environmental resources. One such policy encourages the ongoing implementation of riparian buffer ordinances that seek to protect surface and groundwater resources from pollutants and also provide wildlife habitat.

(b) The comprehensive plan shall include a plan for a reliable supply of water, considering current and future water resources availability, uses and limitations, including provisions adequate to protect water supply sources. Any such plan shall be generally consistent with the State Water Plan and any applicable water resources plan adopted by a river basin commission. It shall also contain a statement recognizing that:

(1) Lawful activities such as extraction of minerals impact water supply sources and such activities are governed by statutes regulating mineral extraction that specify replacement and restoration of water supplies affected by such activities.

(2) Commercial agriculture production impact water supply sources.

Optional Elements/Features Listed in the MPC



The 2013 Centre Region Comprehensive Plan includes a chapter that specifically addresses sustainability throughout the Region. While not listed specifically within the MPC, comprehensive plans can include additional elements that are necessary to address the specific needs of the planning area.

Growth Areas

The MPC also permits municipal, multi-municipal, and county comprehensive plans to identify areas where growth and development will occur. These growth areas can be used to identify where public infrastructure and services such as water, sewer, fire and police protection, schools, parks, and open space can be planned for and provided. The Centre Region Comprehensive Plan utilizes a Regional Growth Boundary (RGB) to identify when the majority of future growth should be directed.

Energy Conservation Plan

A comprehensive plan may include an energy conservation plan to promote energy conservation and effective utilization of renewable energy sources. This element should analyze the impact of each component and element of the comprehensive plan on the present and future use of energy in the municipality. It should also detail measures designed to reduce energy consumption.

The Legal Status of a Comprehensive Plan

A common criticism of comprehensive plans in Pennsylvania is that they have no teeth, or in other words, can't be enforced. This criticism stems from the fact that a comprehensive plan as outlined by the MPC is an advisory document and therefore, cannot force municipalities to complete tasks or actions outlined within them. While comprehensive plans are essentially a compilation of recommendations on how the community should grow, they do have legal standing that should not be overlooked.

Although the MPC does not mandate that municipalities follow the recommendations within the

Comprehensive Plan to the letter of the law, it does require general consistency with the plan. Section 303 (4) (d) states that “municipal zoning, subdivision and land development regulations, and capital improvement programs shall generally implement the municipal and multi-municipal comprehensive plan or, where none exists, the municipal statement of community development objectives.” Section 603 (j) further states that “Zoning ordinances adopted by municipalities shall be generally consistent with the municipal or multi-municipal comprehensive plan or, where none exists, with the municipal statement of community development objectives and the county comprehensive plan. If a municipality amends its zoning ordinance in a manner not generally consistent with its comprehensive plan, it shall concurrently amend its comprehensive plan in accordance with Article III.” These two sections state that municipalities are expected to follow the general intent of their comprehensive plans.

Municipal, multi-municipal, and county comprehensive plans also create legal requirements for state agencies as well as municipal departments and appointed authorities. State agencies are required to consider and rely upon comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances to ensure generally consistency. This ensures that any decision making process at the state level is consistent with the communities’ desires for its future. Municipal governing bodies, departments, and authorities must also submit any future plans following the adoption of a comprehensive plan to the planning agency for recommendation if it involves:

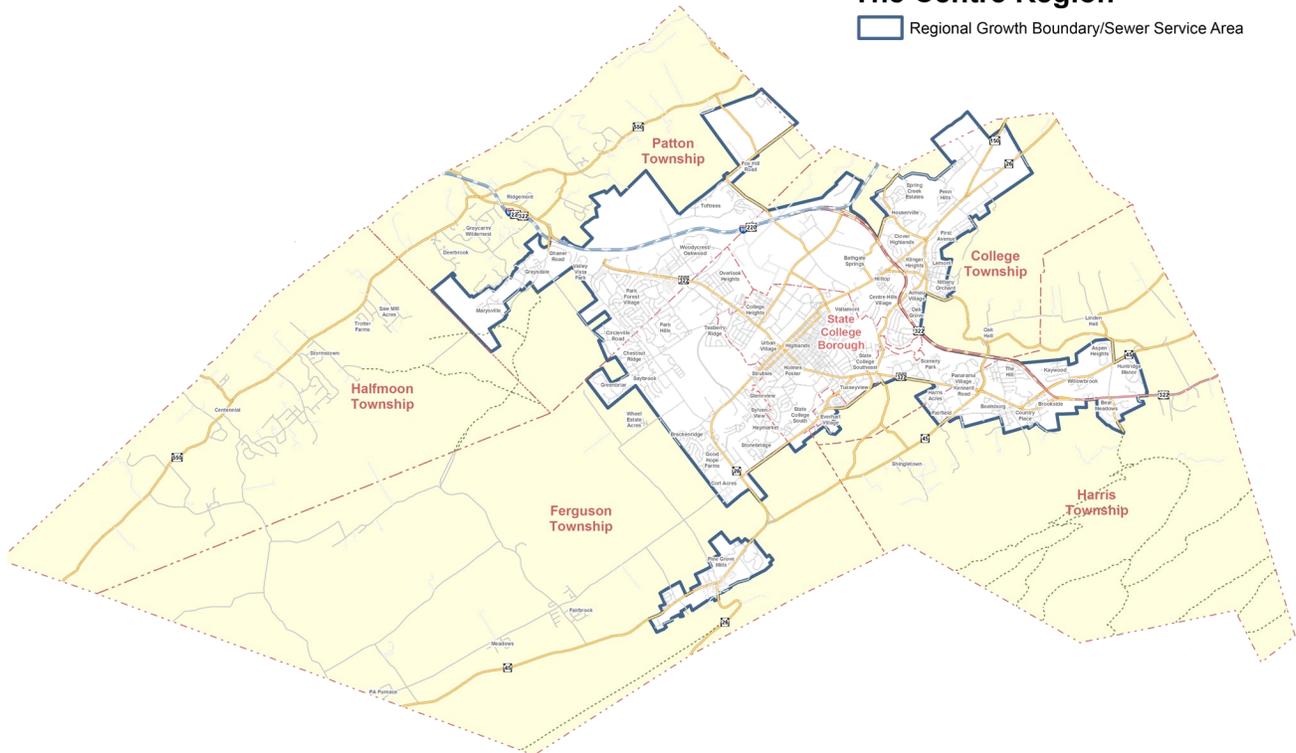
1. the location, opening, vacation, extension, widening, narrowing, or enlargement of any street, public ground, pierhead, or watercourse;
2. the location, erection, demolition, removal, or sale of any public structure located within the municipality; adoption, amendment, or repeal of an official map, subdivision and land development ordinance, zoning ordinance or provisions for planned residential development, or capital improvements program; or
3. the adoption, amendment, or repeal of an official map, subdivision and land development ordinance, zoning ordinance or provisions for planned residential development, or capital improvements program; or
4. the construction, extension, or abandonment of any water line, sewer line, or sewage treatment facility.

In addition to proactively guiding future growth and development, multi-municipal comprehensive plans provide additional legal benefits and planning opportunities to participating municipalities. Some of these benefits and opportunities include the ability to:

- **Designate Growth Areas:** Multi-municipal plans are permitted to include the designation of growth areas. Growth areas are locations where “orderly and efficient development to accommodate the projected growth of the area within the next 20 years is planned for residential and mixed use densities of one unit or more per acre. Designated growth areas are also where commercial, industrial, and institutional uses to provide for the economic and employment needs of the area and to ensure that the area has an adequate tax base are planned for. The Centre Region Comprehensive Plan designates a regional growth boundary which identifies where the majority of the Centre Region’s growth should be directed.

The Centre Region

Regional Growth Boundary/Sewer Service Area



The 2013 Centre Region Comprehensive Plan includes a designated regional growth boundary that indicates where the majority of future growth is to be directed. Growth boundaries/areas have been utilized by the Centre Region municipalities since the first multi-municipal comprehensive plan was adopted in 1976.

- **Designate Future Growth Areas:** In addition to growth areas, multi-municipal plans are also permitted to designate future growth areas. These areas are where future development is planned for at densities that will accompany the orderly extension of services.
- **Designate Rural Resource Areas:** Rural resource areas are where rural resource uses are planned for. Development within rural resource areas would be limited to densities that support rural resource uses. Infrastructure extensions or improvements are not intended for these areas with the exception of villages or in areas where participating municipalities agree that extension of such services is vital for health or safety reasons.
- **Plan for Developments of Area Wide Significance and Impact.** The Centre Region Comprehensive Plan does not have a specific plan for developments that are considered of “area-wide significance and impact”. The Centre Region municipalities did enter into an implementation agreement in 2006 (updated in 2013) which identifies how developments that propose the expansion of the Regional Growth Boundary and Sewer Service Area are to be evaluated and acted upon.
- **Plan for the Conservation and Enhancement of the Natural, Scenic, Historical and Aesthetic Resources within the Plan Area.** The Centre Region Comprehensive Plan provides goals and policies related to the preservation and protection of natural, environmental, and historic resources.

- **Plan for All Categories of Uses:** Municipalities are required by the MPC to provide for all land uses within their corporate boundaries. This includes all housing, commercial, and industrial uses. Municipalities cannot exclude particular land uses from their community. All land uses must be accommodated somewhere in a municipality (e.g. industrial, landfills, cell phone towers, adult uses, and correctional institutions). Not providing for a particular land use can result in a zoning validity challenge, such as a claim that the zoning ordinance is exclusionary. Municipalities are not required to provide for all land uses within their corporate boundaries if they participate in a multi-municipal plan. This exemption is provided in Section 1103 (4) of the PaMPC, which reads as follows:



Municipalities that participate in a multi-municipal comprehensive plan can share land uses across municipal boundaries. Less desirable uses can be accommodated within the larger planning area rather than in each individual municipality.

Plan for the accommodation of all categories of uses within the area of the plan provided, however, that all uses need not be provided in every municipality, but shall be planned and provided for within a reasonable geographic area of the plan.

Based upon this section of the MPC, municipalities that participate in a multi-municipal comprehensive plan can rely upon land uses being provided within other municipalities that also participate in the same plan.

How it is Implemented

Creating a comprehensive plan is a monumental undertaking that is both costly and time consuming. To create a comprehensive plan that provides value to the municipality, the planning commission and technical staff must spend countless hours studying the issues, formulating solutions, vetting proposals with the public, and meeting with elected officials. A common criticism of comprehensive planning efforts is that once adopted, these documents are placed on the bookshelves of municipalities only to be dusted off when it's time to complete the next ten year update.

In order for a Comprehensive Plan to provide value, it must be implemented. The MPC requires that all Comprehensive Plans discuss short and long-term implementation strategies to emphasize that the planning process does not end with adoption of the comprehensive plan. However, the MPC doesn't provide any explicit direction on how to best utilize a comprehensive plan. Implementation is, much like the plan's development, an incremental process that can involve elected and appointed officials, municipal or regional authorities, and community stakeholders.

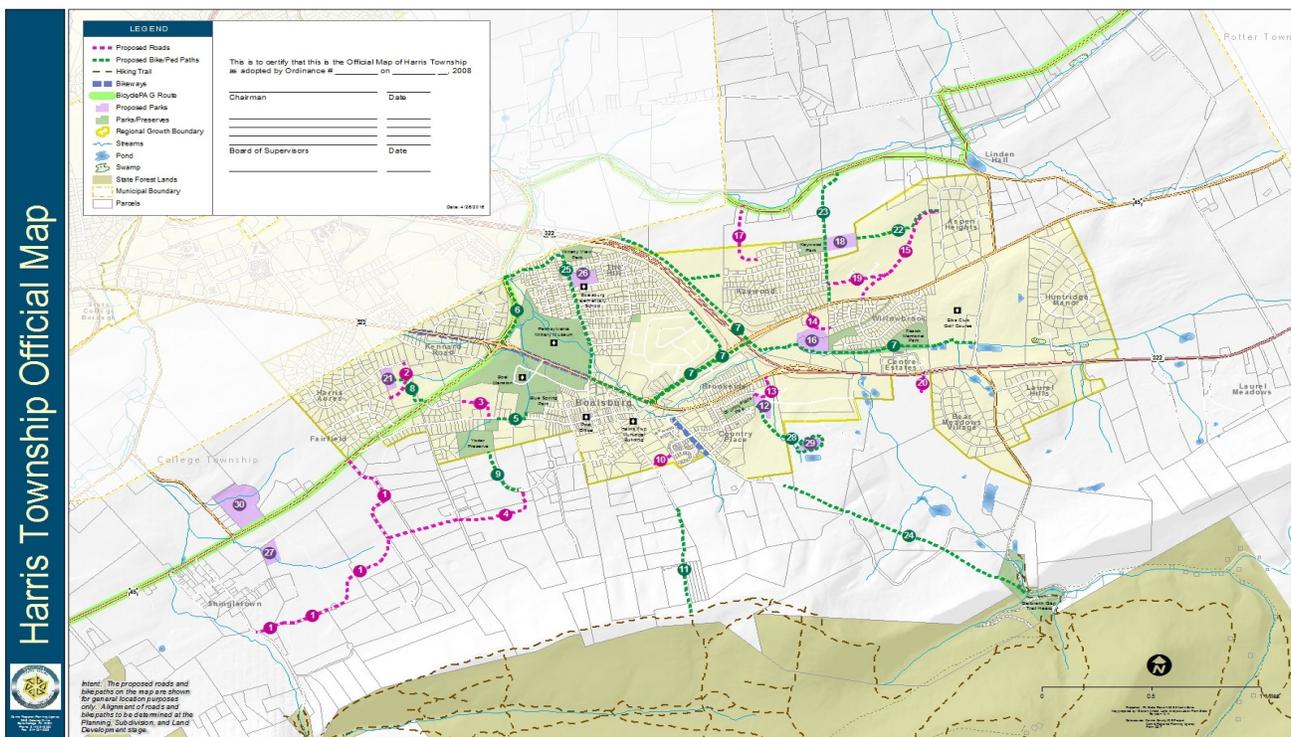
Land Use Regulations

The primary tools used by most municipalities to implement the comprehensive plan are the subdivision and land development ordinance and zoning ordinance. While comprehensive plans rarely provide specific requirements that should be included within these two documents, the guidance provided by the plan should result in ordinances that meet the intent of the plan. In some cases, the comprehensive plan may specifically identify issues that should be addressed within land use regulations, such as encouraging more of a particular type of use or regulating land uses which

may have long-term impacts on the community. Relying on the comprehensive plan while creating or modifying land use regulations is essential to ensuring that such regulations are consistent with the plan.

The Official Map

Municipalities are able to utilize an official map, as permitted in Article IV of the MPC, to identify areas of the community that will be needed for public purposes at some time in the future. These public purposes can include, but are not limited to, transportation improvements such as roads and trails, public services infrastructure such as utility stations, and parks and recreation areas. Since the comprehensive plan will often identify future needs of the community, utilizing an official map to declare where these needs will be addressed is a method of comprehensive plan implementation. Several Centre Region municipalities have adopted official maps for their jurisdictions.



An Official Map can be utilized to implement portions of a comprehensive plan. Official maps can be utilized to identify future improvements including but not limited to roadways, bicycle facilities, pedestrian facilities, and parklands.

Capital Improvement Programs

Much like the use of an official map to designate where future community needs will be addressed, municipalities can utilize their capital improvement program, also known as a CIP, to provide improvements identified in their comprehensive plan.

Other Actions

Comprehensive plans often transcend land use issues alone, resulting in implementation actions that take place outside of municipal codes. A good example in the Centre Region Comprehensive Plan is the encouraged cooperation between the Centre Region and the Pennsylvania State University on a variety of issues. While some of these policies would require changes in municipal

regulations, many require actions outside of municipal land use ordinances. Similarly, other recommendations of the plan require actions within other municipal, regional, or countywide plans, such as the regional Act 537 Plan and Long Range Transportation Plan.

The Planning Process

Creating a comprehensive plan can be a daunting task that requires adequate research, discussion, and public input. Plan development requires research on existing planning issues within the community; background studies to compile data on existing conditions; projection of future conditions; development of plan goals and objectives; public input through meetings, surveys, and open houses; and implementation plans. Ultimately, the most effective comprehensive plans are those that were developed following this planning process and have the support of citizens in the community.

Despite the fact that new editions of the Centre Region Comprehensive Plans are considered “updates” by the MPC, these updates essentially require all of the same steps and processes that would be conducted if a new plan were being created.

While professional staff play a role in coordinating and drafting the contents of the comprehensive plan, municipal planning commissioners play an important role in identifying planning issues relevant to their municipality or the region as a whole. They also play a crucial role in reviewing and providing feedback on the contents of the plan and by providing a public forum for citizens to provide input. Municipal planning commissions also help to define future land uses patterns through the comprehensive plan’s future land use maps. Identifying future land uses requires looking ahead to the needs of the municipality and region and identifying where future growth should occur.

This section provides background on the process used to create a comprehensive plan and the role that planning commissions play in the process.

Defining the Question/Issues

When first undertaking a comprehensive plan, it is not uncommon for residents to say that they “like the community just the way it is.” Despite the fact that many residents might value the status quo, communities are not static environments but are constantly subjected to change. And because change is always occurring, planning for the future of the community is always needed.

A common misconception about planning is that it’s only purpose is to address problems within a community. While plans can provide solutions to existing issues, they should provide guidance on how to affect what is wanted and avoid what is not. To do this, the first step in the planning process is to identify what issues the community would like to address in the plan. Municipal planning commissioners, as a peer group of volunteer citizens, plays a natural role in advising their governing body on which issues they feel should be addressed in the comprehensive plan.

The types of issues that are addressed in a comprehensive plan are community specific. Communities with declining populations face different issues than communities that have stagnant or growing populations. Defining these issues, whether they are problems to overcome or traits and characteristics that the community would like to maintain, is key and an important first step in creating a comprehensive plan.

Population growth in the Centre Region has remained steady, increasing at approximately 1% per year over the past several decades. The Centre Region Comprehensive Plan addresses how this population growth should be accommodated in terms of housing, recreation, transportation, and public services.

Background Studies

In order to understand the current status of the community, background studies should be performed. Section 301.2 of the MPC states the following regarding surveys that should be conducted by planning agencies during the preparation of a comprehensive plan:

“In preparing the comprehensive plan, the planning agency shall make careful surveys, studies, and analyses of housing, demographic, and economic characteristics and trends; amount, type, and general location and interrelationships of different categories of land use; general location and extent of transportation and community facilities; natural features affecting development; natural, historic, and cultural resources; and the prospects for future growth in the municipality.”

By preparing these studies and analyses, it allows for further refinement of the issues that will be addressed in the comprehensive plan and may provide indications on policies that will be effective in addressing them.

Identifying Goals and Objectives

Once issues have been identified and background studies have been completed, community development goals and objectives should be identified. These goals and objectives should seek to address the issues that were previously identified and studied. Goals and objectives are usually stated abstractly and may be considered by some in the community to be too idealistic. The statement of these goals and objectives, however difficult to achieve, is an important step in identifying the environment the community will be working towards. These goals and objectives should be organized into plan components, or chapters, that organize similar goals and objectives together under larger subjects such as land use, housing, open space, etc.

This portion of the comprehensive planning process can be the most time consuming and requires adequate study and analysis. Determining the best course of action to address community issues requires support from appointed and elected officials as well as from the community at large. While a solution might address a problem, proposing solutions for which little political support exists will often result in an unimplemented plan. Municipal planning commissions can provide input on how community issues should be addressed moving forward.

Community Input

Throughout the comprehensive plan’s development, soliciting community feedback and support is essential. Failure to do so can create distrust of appointed and elected officials and staff. The best plans are those that have community support and approval. While it is not possible to satisfy the wishes of every resident, having general consensus amongst residents should be sought.

Prior to adopting a comprehensive plan, the MPC requires that at least one public meeting is

held. This meeting must be held prior to the plan being forwarded to the governing body for adoption. Once received by the governing body, another public hearing must be held where citizens can provide input on the plan.

While the MPC has minimum public meeting requirements, planning agencies should consider involving community members in plan creation and review whenever possible. Allowing the community to take ownership of the document can help ensure its support in years to come.

Implementation

Once a plan is adopted, it is time for implementation to begin. While implementation is covered earlier in this document, it is important that a comprehensive plan provide strategies on how implementation will occur. The MPC requires that all plans provide implementation strategies, but leaves the questions of how, who, and when up to the municipalities. The Centre Region Comprehensive Plan includes guidelines for implementation which are reviewed annually. Municipal planning commissions can also review the comprehensive plan while creating annual work programs in order to select policies that they would like to implement in the coming year.

The Centre Region Comprehensive Plan

For over 50 years, the six Centre Region municipalities have cooperatively planned for future growth and development within the region. The first Centre Region Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 1976 and subsequently updated in 1990, 2000, and 2013. The Centre Region Comprehensive Plan qualifies as a multi-municipal plan as identified in the MPC. Multi-municipal plans provide additional benefits to municipalities beyond those that can be achieved through a single municipal plan, including legal protections against zoning challenges, cost savings by planning for infrastructure at a multi-municipal scale, orderly growth and development that transcends municipal boundaries, etc. As required by the MPC, this plan will need to be updated again in 2020. The 2013 Centre Region Comprehensive Plan is broken into nine different chapters, referred to as elements, which focus on the following topics:

- Land Use
- Transportation
- Open Space, Conservation, and Recreation
- Housing
- Community Services and Facilities
- Sustainability
- Natural, Environmental, Cultural and Historic resources
- Community and University Relations
- Economic Development

Key recommendations in the 2013 Comprehensive Plan included:

Regional Growth Boundary/Growth Management Policies

The Centre Region Comprehensive Plan includes numerous long-term growth management policies and strategies that will impact how the region grows and develops over the next 20 to 30 years. The

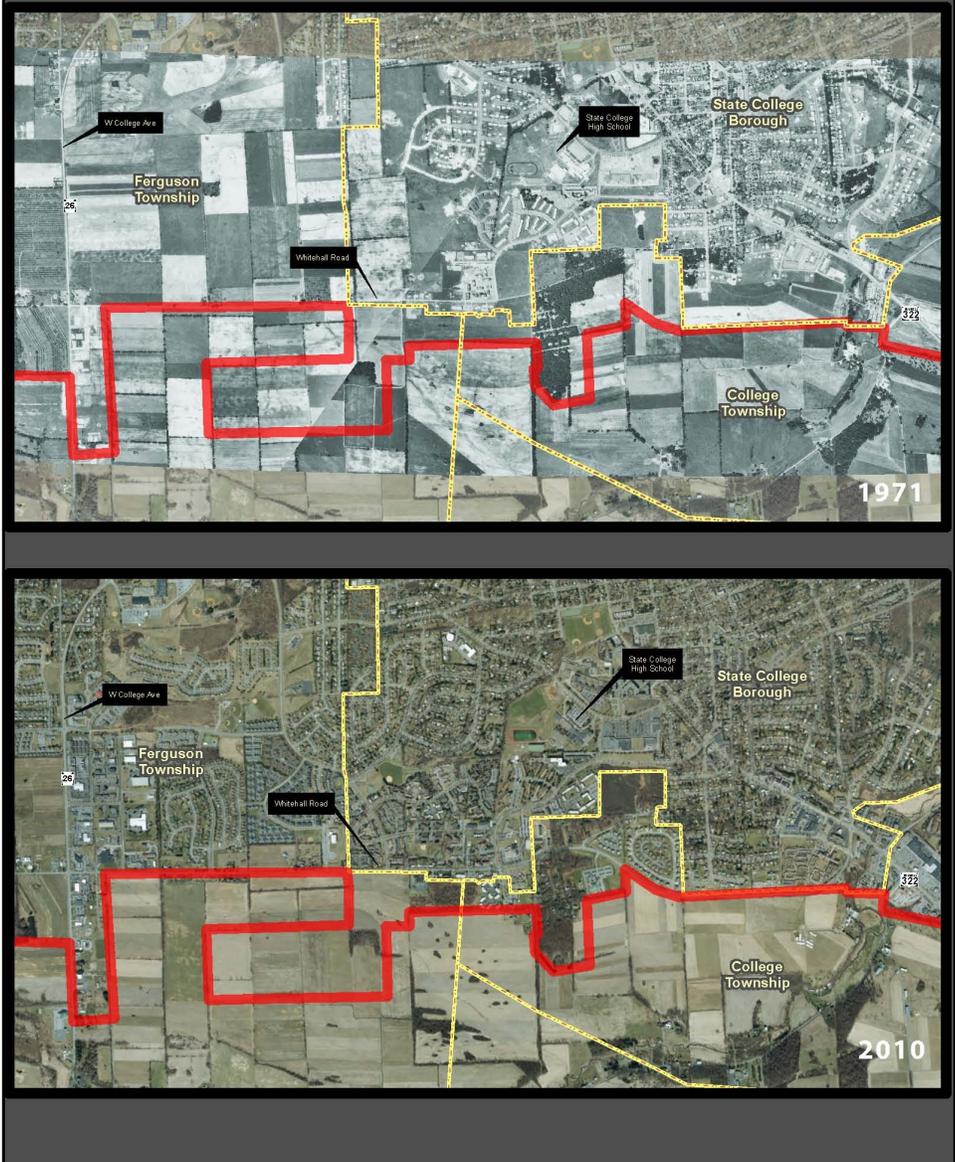
tool that will have the greatest influence on where growth occurs is the Regional Growth Boundary. This boundary is coterminous with the Sewer Service Area, which identifies where public sewer is planned for. The Regional Growth Boundary, as identified in the plan, is a growth area where the majority of future development will be directed. Growth is directed into the boundary through municipal zoning ordinances, which should be generally consistent with the growth management policies outlined in the plan. The boundary can be expanded at the request of a municipality or the public, but only if five of the six Centre Region municipalities agree to the expansion. Growth is permitted outside of the Regional Growth Boundary, but public sewer service will not be provided which generally limits development densities.

In 2012, the Centre Regional Planning Agency (CRPA) completed a study on the amount of vacant land remaining within the Regional Growth Boundary. This study analyzed the development capacity of the remaining properties in conjunction with growth forecasts completed by the CRPA in 2009. Based upon these two studies, vacant land within the Regional Growth Boundary and Sewer Service Area should be able to meet both residential and non-residential growth demands in the Centre Region for the next several decades.

Preservation of the Agricultural Industry

Long-term effective protection of the agricultural industry is an important policy issue in the 2013 Centre Region Comprehensive Plan. Agricultural land protection has a direct influence on the regional economy, job and economic growth, the location of future development, and overall quality of life. Preservation of agricultural lands has been an ongoing policy in both the current and previous comprehensive plans.

**Exhibit D - Development within the Regional Growth Boundary
Whitehall Road 1971 & 2010**



Protection of Natural Resources

Air, water, wildlife habitats, soil, forests, and mineral resources are important natural elements that the comprehensive plan seeks to protect. The plan includes various policies that seek to protect vulnerable environmental resources that provide natural habitats such as wetlands, forests, and waterways. Numerous policies seek to balance development patterns with the protection of prime agricultural and other important soil types. The plan recommends the responsible management and preservation of natural resources that play a key role in the health, safety, and welfare of Centre Region residents.

Transportation

The 2013 Centre Region Comprehensive Plan includes a variety of goals, objectives, and policies that focus on transportation-related issues including traffic congestion, bike and pedestrian pathways, and access to other communities throughout the state. The plan provides recommendations such as balancing transportation projects and programs with the Centre Region's future land use plans and adopting a complete streets policy that would encourage use of all modes of travel.

Protection of Established Neighborhoods

The region contains many mature, diverse, and unique neighborhoods that vary in size, character, and composition. The plan promotes the preservation of existing neighborhoods and provides policies that focus on buffering them from negative impacts from incompatible uses.

Housing

The 2013 Centre Region Comprehensive Plan provides a number of goals, objectives, and policies related to housing variety, supply, and affordability. The plan encourages a variety of housing types that will meet the changing demographics within the region and also stresses the need for affordable housing options for all income levels.



The 2013 Centre Region Comprehensive plan includes several policies that emphasize the need to provide more affordable housing in the region.

Economic Development

The 2013 Centre Region Comprehensive Plan stresses implementation of the results of the Centre Region Economic Development Assessment which provided recommendations that would help support and further a vibrant local economy. Additional policies focus on assisting in the recruitment of businesses to the area by partnering with the Chamber of Business and Industry for Centre County (CBICC), the Centre County Industrial Development Corporation (CDICC), and the Pennsylvania State University.

The Comprehensive Plan Implementation Program (CHIP)

The 2013 Centre Region Comprehensive Plan includes several short and long-term implementation strategies as required by the MPC. Policies in the plan may require implementation at the regional level (COG), municipal level, or both.

Every year, the Centre Regional Planning Agency prepares a list of Comprehensive Plan Implementation Priorities (CHIP) for review and approval by the COG General Forum. This is a key strategy in ensuring that the comprehensive plan remains fresh in the minds of appointed and elected officials and that its recommendations are not “placed on a shelf.” The CHIP provides an opportunity for the region to come together and identify which policies in the plan should be implemented, beginning at the regional level. Municipal Planning Commissions should feel free to forward items that they feel should be implemented at the regional level in the short term. Ultimately, the elected officials of the Centre Region will prioritize which items should be completed first, but this collaborative process ensures that the most important projects and issues are addressed in a timely manner.

Much of the comprehensive plan’s implementation also takes place at the local level. Any time an ordinance is proposed or amended, a zoning designation is changed, or a study is undertaken, the municipality should ensure that it implements or is at least consistent with the recommendations of the comprehensive plan.

The 2013 Centre Region Comprehensive Plan also recommends the use of implementation metrics as a way of ensuring that regional and municipal actions are having the desired impacts and are achieving the goals identified. These metrics, along with general reports on comprehensive plan implementation, are included in the Centre Region Planning Commission (CRPC) Annual Report.

Planning for a Portion of the Community

Comprehensive plans provide an overarching vision for the future of the community but rarely provide details beyond the macro level. This form of planning is important and provides general guidance on how a community should change over time. While comprehensive planning looks at the big picture for a large geographic area, municipalities may wish to conduct additional planning for portions of their community that they feel require more intense study and specificity. Such plans could be created for specific neighborhoods, districts, or areas with similar characteristics. In the Centre Region, where community development goals and policies are started at the multi-municipal level through a regional comprehensive plan, area plans can be useful tools in providing guidance and policies that are specific to small geographic areas.

The process for developing an area plan is identical to that of creating a comprehensive plan. Issues are discussed, studies are performed, solutions are identified, and citizens are engaged. Due to the smaller area that these plans address, local residents should be consulted and involved as directly as possible in the planning process. Over the past several decades, Centre Region municipalities have undertaken several planning efforts that focused on growth and development at a variety of scales. Municipalities in the Centre Region should continue to utilize the Centre Region Comprehensive Plan as an overall guidance document as area plans are envisioned and created.