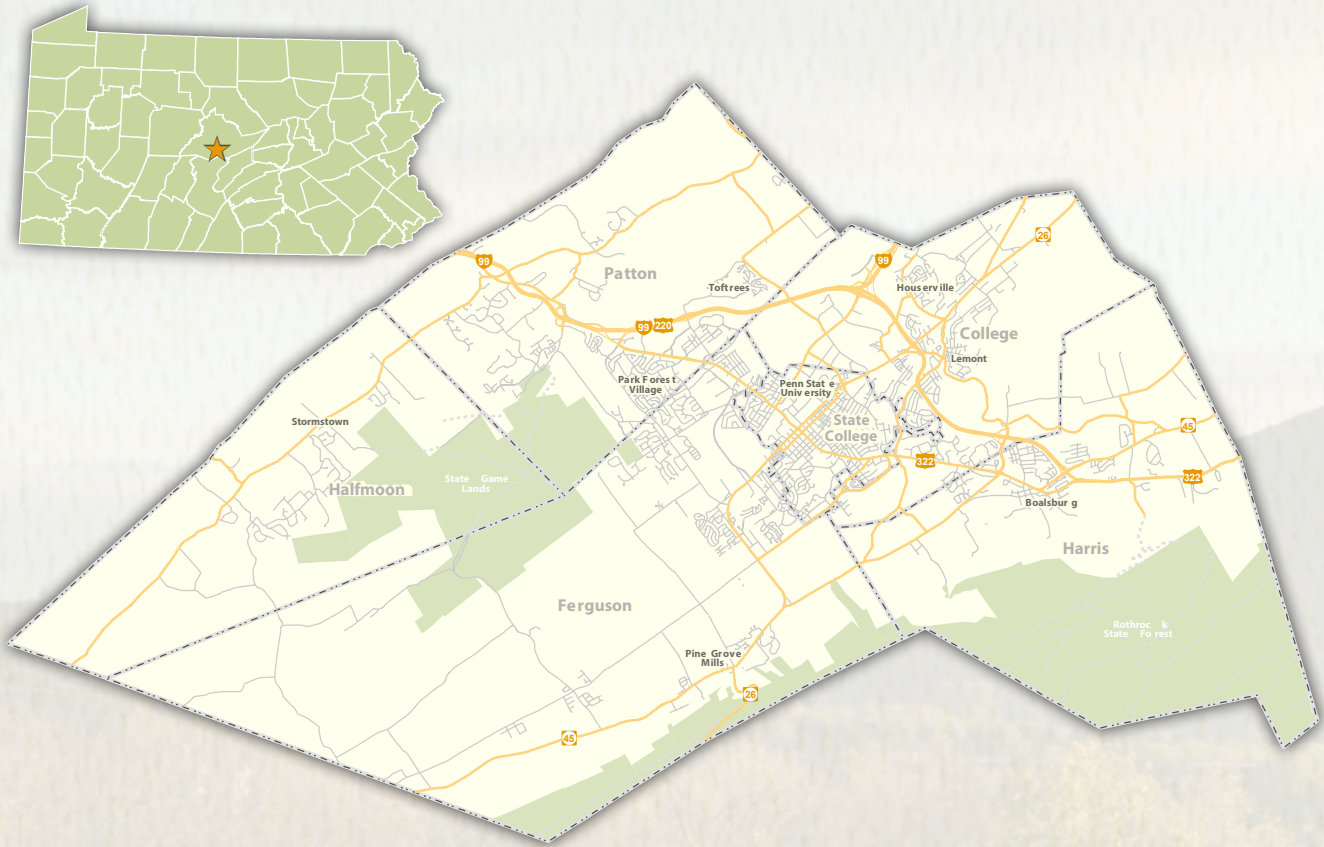


Introduction & Document



INTRODUCTION

The Centre Region has a long history of comprehensive planning that has emerged over the past five decades. Comprehensive planning is a dynamic process, and the plans that result from this ongoing process should be updated to reflect changes over time. The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code recommends updating comprehensive plans every 10 years. The Centre Regional Planning Commission also recognizes that it is good practice to update the plan on a regular basis to ensure that adopted goals, objectives, and policies remain relevant and address issues in the region. The Centre Regional Planning Commission was established in 1960 to assist the Centre Region municipalities with local and regional planning activities. The first Centre Region Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 1976, and the plan has been updated twice since initial adoption, once in 1990 and once in 2000.

The primary purpose of any regional comprehensive planning activity is to develop a plan for the physical growth of the region; to prepare goals, objectives, and policies; and to set forth a program to implement those goals, objectives, and policies. Historically, comprehensive plans have been referred to as “blueprints” for the future. Over the past 10 to 20 years, however, planners have increasingly recognized that this characterization can suggest a rigidity and inflexibility to change. The Centre Region Comprehensive Plan needs to express the basic values the community wants to see maintained or achieved in the future, while accommodating unanticipated changes or trends in the economy, energy supply and demand, public policy, housing, demographics, and other variables.

Overview

The Comprehensive Plan update takes a long-range perspective and provides an opportunity for the six Centre Region municipalities to continue a coordinated approach to land use decision making in the region. The Comprehensive Plan is one of the primary tools the Centre Regional Planning Commission and municipal planning commissions will use to guide decisions and make recommendations regarding growth and development to the municipal governing bodies in the region. Municipalities, in turn, are the primary unit of government responsible for implementing the recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan through their regulatory authority.

It is important to recognize that the Comprehensive Plan is a multi-municipal, regionally adopted policy plan that will be used to identify a wide variety of issues important to residents in the region. Actions to address detailed policies and specific issues will be included in the implementation program of the Comprehensive Plan. These actions are expected to be accomplished through many activities, including municipal ordinances and programs developed over a number of years outside the broad framework of the Comprehensive Plan.

The Centre Region Comprehensive Plan is intended to preserve the characteristics that make the region unique, while guiding and shaping future growth and expansion. Simply stated, municipalities in the region are determined to shape their future by embracing a regional approach to frame issues and to implement regional policies through their municipal authority to manage growth. The Centre Region maintains both a friendly urban and rural atmosphere that residents want to protect for the enjoyment of future generations. The Comprehensive Plan embraces a multi-jurisdictional approach that recognizes the interrelationships between regional land use, transportation, open space, and economic development policies, and municipal actions that implement those regional policies. The Comprehensive Plan is:

A Guide for Decision Making

A guiding principle of decision-making in the Centre Region is the consensus-based approach to regional issues. This approach fosters a regional perspective that is primarily implemented at the municipal level. In fact, for more than five decades, region-wide growth and development policy for the Centre Region has been implemented by the six municipal governing bodies and the municipal authorities, boards, and commissions. The Comprehensive Plan has, and should continue to provide, the long-range perspective and general policy framework within which the governing bodies and the municipal authorities, boards, and commissions make growth, development, service delivery, and budgeting decisions that will shape the future of the Centre Region.

A Statement of Regional Policy

The Comprehensive Plan is a statement of what the region wants to achieve and wants to become. Planning policies provide the basis for coordinating the decisions of the governing bodies and authorities, boards, and commissions involved in the growth and development of the Centre Region, and offer opportunities for dialogue to ensure consistency with one another over time. Policies in the Comprehensive Plan will allow decision makers to move from very general statements about what the Region wants to be (goals), to more specific objectives and policies designed to achieve these goals. The regional-level policies that emerge from the Comprehensive Plan are influenced by many factors, including community values, long-range goals, short-range objectives, economic and financial feasibility, political reality, and expected outcomes.

You know you are in Ferguson Township when...“you see waves of corn, soybeans and hay”.

~ Ferguson Township resident, 2012
Centre Region Community Survey

A Map for Detailed Planning & Implementation

One purpose of the Plan is to guide private and public investment and growth decisions; however, the Plan will also provide a framework for the more detailed studies and additional planning activities that serve to implement the Plan's recommendations. Because the Comprehensive Plan will not be able to address every issue in as much detail as everyone might like, many issues will require more detailed follow-up work after the Plan has been adopted.

These issues might include the revision of municipal zoning or subdivision regulations or the preparation of more detailed plans on specific topics, such as sustainability and community/university relations, or specific plans for sensitive areas or redevelopment areas for previously developed and underutilized sites. These follow-up studies can be thought of as part of the ongoing Comprehensive Plan refinement and implementation process—a process that should include metrics, annual monitoring, and periodic reevaluation of the Plan—and which will provide the basis for future Plan updates that are essential if the Comprehensive Plan is to remain relevant and effective over time.

Imagine you came back in 30 years, what would you hope to see be the same?
"Small town feel."

~ College Township resident, 2012 Centre Region Community Survey

A Reflection of the Values and Public Interests of the Region

It is important that the planning process encourage and recognize the active participation of individuals, businesses, institutions, and special-interest groups within the community. The Comprehensive Plan must balance the interests of many different individuals and groups, and be a reasonable reflection of the shared goals and values of the entire region.

A Tool to Communicate with Citizens, Businesses, and Institutions

The Plan can serve as an informational and educational tool for those involved in making decisions that affect the future of the community. It should help guide public and private sector investment decisions, and add predictability to the decision-making process for development projects that should be consistent with the Plan's recommendations.

Consistency in Making Growth and Development Decisions

The Comprehensive Plan has legal standing as defined in the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code and will be a policy document used by the The Centre Regional Planning Commission and municipal planning commissions in making recommendations to municipal governing bodies. Through the regional adoption process, the Plan offers opportunities for dialogue and consensus to ensure consistency when the policies articulated in the Plan are implemented at the municipal level. In the Centre Region, certain proposed actions by a governing body of a municipality or school district relating to physical development or ordinance changes are reviewed by the The Centre Regional Planning Commission to ensure consistency with the Comprehensive Plan.

When asked what do you hope to see changed by the Plan? "Redevelopment of existing commercial properties".

~ State College Borough resident, 2012 Centre Region Community Survey

A Document that will be Flexible and Realistic

The Plan should articulate a picture of what the region wants to be in 25 to 30 years, and should include recommended policies, strategies, and an implementation strategy. The Plan should be realistic in the sense that it reflects the values of the community, the region's long-range goals, municipal financial capability, and political realities. The Plan must balance adaptability and specificity. While the Plan includes background information regarding development and socio-economic trends and projections for the future, planners and decision makers recognize that 30-year projections and forecasts often need to be monitored and adjusted over time for a variety of reasons. Rather than providing specific direction for each and every decision, the Plan should provide general guidance and flexibility to respond to unanticipated changes that may occur in the future.

DOCUMENT OVERVIEW

The remainder of this introduction summarizes the following components:

- Comprehensive Plan Themes
- Comprehensive Plan Background Documents
- Comprehensive Plan Organization
- Comprehensive Plan Implementation
- Relationship to other Planning Documents
- Interrelationship among Plan Elements

Comprehensive Plan Themes

Themes are fundamental ideas that represent the Centre Region's beliefs about future growth, development, and sustainability. These themes represent broad ideas that guide the Region throughout its decisions about the formation and implementation of the Comprehensive Plan. All Comprehensive Plan goals, objectives, policies, and implementation programs should be generally consistent with, and support, the themes. The themes primarily came from feedback provided by participants in the Comprehensive Plan update process.

A series of preliminary policy decisions were also identified during the Comprehensive Plan update. The preliminary policy decisions were generated by the Centre Regional Planning Agency staff as a means to identify major issues, in conjunction with the Centre Regional Planning Commission and the COG Transportation and Land Use Committee. Collectively, how these policy decisions are addressed influences the content of the Comprehensive Plan.

How Themes are Formulated and Used

Themes are based on the results of the community outreach efforts conducted as part of the Comprehensive Plan update. The effort included stakeholder meetings, community meetings, a region-wide random sample community survey, meetings with the Centre Regional Planning Commission, meetings with the COG Transportation and Land Use Committee, and reviews with municipal planning commissions and governing bodies. The seven preliminary themes below represent a general consensus about the basis for Comprehensive Plan goals, objectives, and policies. The Comprehensive Plan contains a variety of issues; however, the following seven themes capture the core issues that should remain in the forefront as the Plan is implemented.

Preliminary Comprehensive Plan Update Themes

1. **Neighborhood Quality** – Diverse, well-planned neighborhoods are essential to a strong region. Protect established neighborhoods and build new neighborhoods that support community.
2. **Environmental Quality** – Protect natural resources, including air, water, energy, wildlife, and wetlands, in the Centre Region.
3. **Multi-municipal and Agency Cooperation** – Continue to maintain and improve multi-municipal solutions to issues that transcend municipal boundaries.
4. **Sustainable Region** – Plan for social, environmental, and economic sustainability at a regional level.
5. **Mobility and Connectivity** – Provide multiple options for residents to travel and connect neighborhoods, businesses, schools, and parks.
6. **Agriculture** – Agriculture is an important part of the economy and the heritage of the region. Protect and support this way of life to ensure the viability of agriculture in the region.
7. **Economic Development** – Expand and diversify the local economy to provide jobs for existing and future residents.



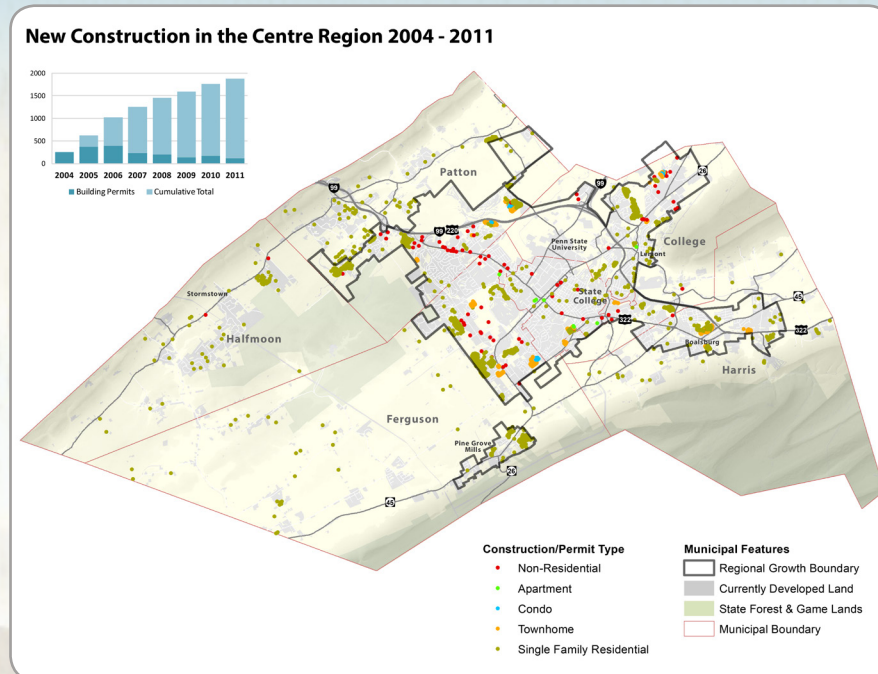
Comprehensive Plan Survey respondents overwhelmingly support strong coordination between land development activities and the transportation system. This example of automobile, bus, pedestrian, and bicycle integration in the busy Colonnade Shopping Center in Patton Township is a good example of this practice.

How Key Policy Decisions are Formulated and Used

The key policy decisions identify the policies that most influence the content of the Comprehensive Plan. The 2010 Comprehensive Plan update contains dozens of goals, objectives, and policies that address a multitude of issues and topics relevant to conservation, transportation, housing, land use, growth, and development in the region over the next 20 to 30 years. Each policy in the Comprehensive Plan has a particular purpose and addresses a specific, important subject. A few of these policies address pivotal issues that collectively define how the region approaches and implements the Comprehensive Plan. These policy decisions were used by the Centre Regional Planning Commission and the COG Transportation and Land Use Committee to shape the direction of future growth.

Comprehensive Plan Update Policy Decisions

1. **Regional Growth Boundary and Sewer Service Area** – The Regional Growth Boundary and Sewer Service Area is the one tool that may have the most influence upon where growth occurs in the Region. Although the location of the Regional Growth Boundary appears as a boundary on a map, it is more. It informs a growth management strategy designed to direct growth that requires urban services to those areas currently served by infrastructure, and to use existing infrastructure in a fiscally sound manner. Growth may currently occur outside the Regional Growth Boundary, but public sewer will not be provided unless unanimously approved by the General Forum. Currently, any property owner outside the Regional Growth Boundary and Sewer Service Area can request an expansion of the boundary. Policy issues for the Centre Regional Planning Commission and the COG Transportation and Land Use Committee to consider are (1) if and when the Regional Growth Boundary and Sewer Service Area should be expanded and (2) how to balance proposed expansions of the Regional Growth Boundary and Sewer Service Area with agricultural preservation, natural resource preservation, energy efficiency, workforce housing, redevelopment, residential density, and neighborhood protection.



Nearly 72 percent of the Comprehensive Plan Survey respondents indicated the Centre Region should continue to direct the majority of growth into the Regional Growth Boundary and Sewer Service Area. This exhibit shows that 90 percent of the building permits issued for new construction between 2004 and 2011 were located within the Regional Growth Boundary.

- 2. Preservation of Agricultural Industry** – Long-term effective protection of the agricultural industry is an important policy issue in the Comprehensive Plan update. Agricultural land protection has a direct influence on the regional economy, job and economic growth, the location of future development, and the overall quality of life. Protection of agricultural land is a central policy focus in the existing Comprehensive Plan and previous plans. Some agricultural lands in the region are very well protected by zoning regulations or conservation easements, while other agricultural lands are not well protected. It may be appropriate to consider additional policies that go beyond land protection to encourage and support the agricultural industry. A key policy issue will be how to effectively preserve prime agricultural lands and to what extent regional policy can keep the agricultural industry viable in the long term.



Agricultural heritage provides the ties that bind many people to the Centre Region. Over 80 percent of Comprehensive Plan Survey respondents support preservation of prime farmland for agricultural use.

- 3. Economic Development** – The recently completed Centre Region Economic Development Assessment includes a number of recommendations to help support and further a vibrant local economy. These recommendations should be an obvious part of the Comprehensive Plan update. Not so obvious are the questions of where and what type of economic growth should occur, and what the Region can realistically do to influence that growth. Key policy decisions include how to stimulate effective long-term growth in sectors that are good “fits” with the region, and the extent to which the region wants to work toward the retention and expansion of existing businesses.

- 4. Protection of Natural Resources** – Air, water, wildlife habitat, soil, forest, and mineral resources represent important natural elements of the environment that may be affected by human activity. Protection of natural resources continues to be a high priority of residents in the region. How development and agricultural practices are balanced with natural resource protection is an important focus of the Comprehensive Plan update. Regional Comprehensive Plan policies and implementation programs have significant influence on the protection of natural resources. A challenge in the Comprehensive Plan will be to find a workable balance among resource protection, agricultural production, economic growth, and community growth.
- 5. Transportation** – A number of important transportation-related issues were identified during outreach efforts for the Comprehensive Plan update, including traffic congestion, bike and pedestrian pathways, and access to other cities in the state. The existing Comprehensive Plan contains many transportation-related policies; however, a broader range of policies to address the most pressing issues was presented to the Centre Regional Planning Commission and COG Transportation and Land Use Committee for consideration. These included multiple and interrelated policies regarding implementation of a “Complete Streets” approach, where vehicles, pedestrians, and bicyclists are all accommodated in roadway corridors; safety and operational improvements is the focus instead of widening roads; and the public transportation system expands to give residents of all ages more options.
- 6. Protection of Established Neighborhoods** – A fundamental building block of any community is quality neighborhoods. The region contains many mature, diverse, and unique neighborhoods that vary in size, character, and composition. Many mature neighborhoods reflect the more traditional neighborhood model, wherein some commercial, educational, and recreational services are either integrated into residential areas or located in convenient proximity to those uses. Many of these single family neighborhoods are threatened by nearby or adjacent incompatible uses, lack of investment, encroachment of student housing, and the condition of aging housing stock. One policy issue the Centre Regional Planning Commission and the COG Transportation and Land Use Committee considered is the extent to which the region should conserve, revitalize, redevelop, and reinvest in mature neighborhoods. Another consideration was how to best protect established neighborhoods from the adverse impacts of more intensive or higher-density projects near or adjacent to these neighborhoods.
- 7. Location of Residential Development** – Another consideration was the impact that suburban and large-lot residential subdivisions have on development patterns in the region. This issue is also related to and may influence transportation, housing, energy efficiency, and land use issues (like other policy issues). The ability to have a rural lifestyle within a few minutes of Penn State University and other amenities is highly valued by many residents in the region. Others believe that residential lots of an acre or more disrupt the traditional rural development pattern and diminish the viability of the agricultural heritage of the region. The Centre Regional Planning Commission and the COG Transportation and Land Use Committee considered policies that continue this pattern as well as those that direct growth into the existing Regional Growth Boundary, reducing impacts on prime agricultural areas and natural areas.
- 8. Housing** – Home ownership and rental housing in the region are becoming increasingly expensive for existing and new residents. Some municipalities have developed local ordinances to assist with the development of new affordable housing in the region. At this time, however, a regional approach has not been formulated. The Centre Regional Planning Commission and the COG Transportation and Land Use Committee considered the merits of a regional approach to affordable housing versus a municipal approach and considered voluntary versus mandatory approaches.

When asked what distinctive features of the Township matter most? “The natural beauty of the setting”.

~ Harris Township resident, 2012 Centre Region Community Survey

Comprehensive Plan Background Documents

Inventory and Assessment of Existing Conditions

The *Inventory and Assessment of Existing Conditions* provides a generalized summary of existing conditions in the region. This information serves as the baseline conditions for long-range planning and is used to frame the context for planning in the Centre Region.

Comprehensive Plan Resident Survey

The Centre Regional Planning Agency conducted this survey in the summer of 2011. The Resident Survey provides an understanding of citizen attitudes toward growth and development, and provides a strong foundation upon which to build regional policy for the Centre Region Comprehensive Plan. The survey serves as a key public participation component of the Comprehensive Plan update. Elected officials and staff chose the resident survey as a cost-effective method to ask for resident opinions regarding a number of issues in the Centre Region to inform the preparation of the Comprehensive Plan update. The survey contained 43 questions regarding land use and development, housing, community services and facilities, transportation, the environment, economic development, and government and resident communication.

Centre Region Economic Development Assessment

The Centre Region Economic Development Assessment contains a series of recommendations and implementation actions that help define a cohesive regional economic development policy for the Centre Region. The report provides a series of recommendations to implement over a number of years.

Comprehensive Plan Organization

The Centre Region Comprehensive Plan includes the following sections:

Comprehensive Plan Elements

Each of the Comprehensive Plan Elements contains a summary of key issues and findings, and the goals, objectives, and policies that the Centre Region will use to guide future growth and development decisions.

The following Plan Elements are included:

- 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
- Implementation

Summary of Key Issues and Findings

This section includes issues that emerged as part of the public participation process, resident survey, and reviews with the Centre Regional Planning Commission, municipal planning commissions, governing bodies, and the COG Transportation and Land Use Committee.

Centre Region Comprehensive Plan

Goals, Objectives, and Policies

The goals, objectives and policies form the heart of the Comprehensive Plan. Goals, objectives, and policies are defined as:

Goal: *A goal is a target or end to which planning activity is directed. Goals are not quantifiable or time dependent.*

The terms “goals” and “objectives” are used interchangeably in some comprehensive plans. Goals in the context of the Centre Region Comprehensive Plan will generally be broad, unquantifiable statements. Goals should be expressed as ends, not actions.

Objective: *A specific statement or method of action that addresses a goal and if pursued and accomplished will ultimately result in achievement of the goal to which it is related. An objective should be achievable and, when possible, measurable and time specific.*

An objective may pertain to one particular aspect of a goal or it may be one of several successive steps toward goal achievement. As a result, each goal may have more than one objective.

Policy: *A specific statement that guides decision making to achieve Plan implementation.*

Policies are specific statements that guide decision making and are carried out by implementation programs. They indicate a commitment of the governing body (as identified in the Implementation Strategy) to a particular course of action. Policies are based on and help implement the Comprehensive Plan objectives. A policy must be clear and unambiguous to be useful as a guide to action.

Consistency among Individual Goals, Objectives, and Policies

The Comprehensive Plan sets forth a number goals and policies that address a broad range of topics over a long period. The Centre Regional Planning Commission, the COG Transportation and Land Use Committee, municipal planning commissions, governing bodies, and in some instances the COG General Forum and Centre Regional Planning Agency staff have strived to prepare goals, objectives, and policies that are consistent with each other. No project or decision can satisfy every Comprehensive Plan policy. The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code requires that municipal actions be “generally consistent” with Comprehensive Plan goals, objectives, and policies. Actions by a municipality should generally further, or not contradict, the goals, objectives, and policies contained in the Comprehensive Plan. The municipal planning commissions and governing bodies decide which goals, objectives, or policies would best implement the Comprehensive Plan, based on the concept of “general consistency.”

Relationship to Other Planning Documents

Article III of the Municipalities Planning Code requires that comprehensive plans provide a statement indicating that the existing and proposed development in the comprehensive plan area is compatible with the existing and proposed development and plans in contiguous portions of neighboring municipalities. Comprehensive planning efforts in municipalities surrounding the Centre Region include the Centre County Comprehensive Plan and the Huntingdon County Comprehensive Plan.

Relationship to Centre County Comprehensive Planning and Planning Efforts

The Centre Region will continue to maintain a close and long-term cooperative planning effort with Centre County. Centre County has designated seven geographic planning areas within the County, some of which have adopted

regional comprehensive plans. These adopted plans include the Nittany Valley Comprehensive Regional Plan and the Penns Valley Comprehensive Regional Plans. Both planning areas are located east of the Centre Region. The Centre Region is also bordered by the Upper Bald Eagle Planning Area, which does not have an adopted Comprehensive Regional Plan.

The Nittany Valley Comprehensive Regional Plan borders the northeastern portion of the Centre Region Planning Area. This portion of the Centre Region Planning Area is characterized by a variety of existing and future land uses, including farms, mixed-use development and single-family neighborhoods.

The Penns Valley Comprehensive Regional Plan borders the southeastern portion of the Centre Region Planning Area. This area is largely rural, composed of farms with scattered residential land uses. The border also includes portions of Rothrock State Park. Compatibility between the Centre Region Comprehensive Plan and the Penns Valley Comprehensive Regional Plan is achieved primarily through compatibility in existing and future land uses.

The Upper Bald Eagle Valley Regional Planning Area borders the northern portion of the Centre Region Planning Area. The Bald Eagle Valley and the Centre Region are physically separated by the Bald Eagle Ridge. The ridgeline is a distinct geographic feature that provides compatibility in this area through the conservation of Bald Eagle Ridge.

Relationship to the Huntingdon County Comprehensive Plan and Planning Efforts

The border between the Centre Region Planning Area and Huntingdon County are separated, to a great extent, by the Rothrock State Forest lands. Coordination between the two planning agencies is minimal because land bordering each planning area is preserved as a state forest on respective planning documents. The Centre Region will continue a long-term cooperative planning effort with Huntingdon County.

Interrelationship among Plan Elements

Article III of the Municipalities Planning Code requires that comprehensive plans provide a statement of interrelationship among the various plan components. This requirement is intended to ensure that the components of the plan are integrated and do not present conflicting goals, objectives, or policies. The Comprehensive Plan themes and policy decisions are the broad statements upon which goals, objectives, and policies in the Comprehensive Plan Elements rest. During the preparation of the Plan, each draft Element was reviewed several times by professional planning staff from the CRPA, Ferguson Township, and the Borough of State College. Additional reviews were completed throughout the planning process by the Centre Regional Planning Commission and the COG Transportation and Land Use Committee. During these reviews, inconsistencies among individual Plan Elements were noted and corrected with the intent of providing decision makers, the residents of the Region and others clear direction regarding the future physical development of the Centre Region.

Comprehensive Plan Implementation

If the Centre Region Comprehensive Plan is to serve its purpose effectively, it must be reviewed, maintained, and implemented in a systematic and consistent manner. The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code states that Comprehensive Plans must include a discussion of short- and long-range plan implementation strategies. To address this requirement, the Implementation Element of the Plan will outline the framework that will allow the Centre Region to implement the plan's policies, while measuring their success at achieving goals and objectives. The implementation program will identify necessary actions that must take place to implement the plan, the timeframe in which those actions should be completed, and those entities that will be responsible or best suited to complete the action. The Implementation Element of the plan does not seek to answer these questions, but to provide the framework for an implementation program that can be created and considered for approval either concurrently with the Comprehensive Plan or after the plan is approved.