

THE PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

This part of the comprehensive plan begins with the goals and objectives that describe how the five municipalities in the Western Berks area view the future of their region. Next, recommendations in each of the following subject areas are described:

- Future Land Use and Housing
- Environmental Conservation
- Agricultural Conservation
- Historic Preservation
- Community Services and Facilities
- Transportation
- Economic Development

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Land Use Goal: Permit only selected, well planned growth, primarily in areas near existing development.

Objectives:

- a. Encourage residential developers to use neo-traditional neighborhood design and permanently preserve open space within their development tracts.
- b. Direct new homes towards existing residential areas to minimize sprawl.
- c. Encourage business development within existing downtowns and in industrially zoned areas.

Housing Goal: Continue providing opportunities for a variety of housing types and affordable homes.

Objectives:

- a. Provide for a variety of detached and attached housing types using environmentally sensitive layouts and designs.
- b. Concentrate housing in those areas most suitable from a physical perspective.
- c. Encourage preservation and rehabilitation of housing in and around the area's downtowns and other historic areas.
- d. Discourage high rates of residential development to avoid overwhelming local schools and other municipal services.

Environmental Conservation Goal: Maintain as much of the area's natural environment as possible, particularly fragile ecological regions.

Objectives:

- a. Direct growth away from areas with sensitive ecological resources.
- b. Strengthen zoning and subdivision regulations that conserve steep slopes, wooded areas, stream buffers and floodprone lands.
- c. Strive to maximize preservation of permanent natural areas within residential developments.
- d. Look for opportunities to initiate a linked network of greenways and open spaces.

Agricultural Preservation Goal: Maintain the vitality of the area's agriculture and agricultural lands.

Objectives:

- a. Preserve farming by continuing to strengthen and extend agricultural zoning, agricultural security areas, purchase of agricultural easements and preferential assessments.
- b. Minimize non-farm activities near agricultural areas to reduce the potential for conflicts with normal farming operations.
- c. Keep public water and sewer line extensions out of prime agricultural areas.
- d. Provide for a range of appropriate supplemental income opportunities in agricultural areas.

Historic Preservation Goal: Preserve and enhance the area's historic resources.

Objectives:

- a. Protect the character of the Village of Stouchsburg, the town centers in Robesonia and Womelsdorf and the area's other historic areas with appropriate zoning strategies.
- b. Encourage voluntary use of design guidelines to preserve historic architecture and village design patterns.
- c. Support the efforts of local and county historic preservation groups to continue identifying and protecting historic resources.

Community Facilities and Services Goal: Continue to provide adequate municipal services within available municipal budgets.

Objectives:

- a. Work with the Conrad Weiser School District to ensure adequate facilities exist to meet current and projected enrollments.
- b. Continue working to ensure appropriate solutions are devised for areas with a high concentration of failing septic systems.
- c. Look for more opportunities to cooperate with neighboring municipalities on police protection, road maintenance and other public works.

- d. Periodically review the adequacy of municipal contributions to private community service providers including fire and rescue groups and recreation organizations, among others.

Transportation Goal: To provide for the safe, efficient movement of people and goods on area roadways.

Objectives:

- a. Work with PennDOT and local developers to ensure local roads and intersections remain safe and able to accommodate current and projected traffic volumes.
- b. Encourage business developments to share controlled ingress and egress to adjacent major roads such as Route 422 and others.
- c. Promote future development of greenways and trails that will further walking, bicycling and other alternative transportation modes.

Economic Development Goal: To retain and attract responsible businesses in designated business areas.

Objectives:

- a. Provide for the adaptive reuse of vacant and underutilized business properties.
- b. Make sure local ordinances and codes do not discourage responsible business from locating in designated business areas.
- c. Encourage mixed use development in downtown areas zoned for business to maintain the economic viability of commercial structures.

PLAN INTERRELATIONSHIPS

The comprehensive plan addresses the following major topics:

- Future Land Use and Housing
- Environmental Conservation
- Agricultural Preservation
- Historic Preservation
- Community Services and Facilities
- Transportation
- Economic Development

Each of these topics are interrelated. Planning and capital programming actions taken in any one of these areas are likely to affect one or more of the other areas. For instance, land use decisions often affect circulation patterns and community services, such as public utilities and recreation needs.

TIMING

The timing of development in the Western Berks area will largely depend upon the private real estate market. This comprehensive plan addresses major development and conservation patterns for the next 10 to 15 years. After that time, the plan should be revised. Every three to five years, the comprehensive plan should be reviewed to determine if changes are needed. Major zoning changes in the five Western Berks area municipalities should be made only after assessing how the proposed changes conform with the spirit of this comprehensive plan.

FUTURE LAND USE AND HOUSING

The Future Land Use and Housing section of the comprehensive plan describes the most appropriate types and densities of land uses that should be accommodated in the Western Berks area. Included is both a map and descriptive text which should be the rationale for future zoning changes. The Future Land Use and Housing section is based on the following principles:

- Agricultural areas should remain in farming.
- Growth should be steered away from steep slopes, woodlands and floodprone areas.
- Open space should be maximized within new developments.
- New development should be near existing concentrations of development and reflect traditional development patterns.
- Public water and sewer extensions should serve existing and planned growth, not encourage undesired growth.
- The area's agrarian heritage and historic areas must be preserved.

The Western Berks area is a leader in agricultural preservation. However, the Western Berks area is connected to other rapidly developing suburban areas via major commercial arteries. Land use planning is needed to avoid strip commercial growth and residential sprawl. The following future land use areas are recommended:

Agricultural Preservation - Expands the area's agricultural preservation area to include more land with existing farms, agricultural easements and/or prime agricultural soils.

Conservation Residential - Protects natural features and other undeveloped land by accommodating only very low density single-family development with significant open space in areas least suited for development due to woodlands and steep slopes.

Low Density Residential - Provides for denser single-family development than the Conservation Residential area but does not encourage any other housing types or include any public sewer service area.

Medium Density Residential - Provides for single-family and twin development within and adjacent to existing boroughs and villages. These areas are within or adjacent to areas now served by public sewers. Neo-traditional development patterns are encouraged.

Town Residential - Reflects existing traditional small town and village development patterns by providing for twins, townhouses and denser single-family home development. All of these areas are currently served by public sewers or recommended for future service.

Town Center - A pedestrian-friendly mixed use area for the full range of housing types, small offices, small service uses and selected, appropriate retail uses (excluding gas stations, fast food, etc.). Traditional setbacks and rhythm of buildings along the streetscape should be preserved and enhanced.

Highway Commercial - A general commercial area that accommodates planned retail centers, new office buildings and highway-oriented retail and service uses.

Industrial - Designed to accommodate future growth and/or expansion of industrial uses along primary transportation corridors.

Community Facilities - Refers to public/semi-public locations such as municipal buildings, churches, schools, fire companies, cemeteries, sewage treatment plants and the Bethany Children's Home.

Public Recreation/Open Space - Denotes parks and other recreation areas available to the public, including local municipal parks, watershed lands and Blue Marsh Lake.

**TABLE 16
SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDED FUTURE LAND USE PLANNING AREAS**

WESTERN BERKS AREA			
FUTURE LAND USE PLANNING AREA	MAJOR PERMITTED USES (In addition to agriculture)	MAXIMUM DENSITY/ MINIMUM LOT SIZE	PUBLIC SEWERS & WATER
Agricultural Preservation	Single-Family Homes	Large Lot Agricultural Zoning	No
Conservation Residential	Single-Family Homes	5-ac. lot averaging 2-ac. min.	No
Low Density Residential	Single-Family Homes	1-1½-ac. min. lot	No
Medium Density Residential	Single-Family Homes, Twins	2-4 units per acre with public sewer and water (Neo-traditional Development encouraged)	Yes
	Note: Maximum density without sewers should be 1 unit per acre.		
Town Residential	Single-Family Homes, Twins, Townhouses, Apartments	4-8 units per acre with public sewer and water ((Neo-Traditional Development encouraged)	Yes
	Note: Maximum density without sewers should be 1 unit per acre.		
Town Center	Single-Family Homes Twins, Townhouses Apartments Selected Retail (no drive- throughs, gas stations, convenience stores, car washes, etc.) Mixed-Use Structures Office	6-8 units per acre with sewer and water	Yes
	Note: Maximum density without sewers should be 1 unit per acre.		
Highway Commercial	Retail, Office, Planned Commercial Centers, Other Commercial	1 acre*	Yes
I - Industrial	Industrial	1 to 10 acres*	In Portions

* Minimum lot size of ½ acre in Womelsdorf Borough

Land Use Planning and Zoning Techniques

The following four planning and zoning techniques, among others, will be particularly effective in helping to carry out this joint comprehensive plan:

- Large Lot Agricultural Zoning
- Lot Averaging
- Neo-Traditional Development
- Town Center Zoning

Each of these techniques is explained below. Table 16, Summary of Recommended Future Land Use Areas, identifies the specific techniques best suited for specific future land use areas in the two municipalities.

Effective Agricultural Zoning

Large lot agricultural zoning is a very effective way to preserve farmland and help maintain the local agricultural economy. It strictly minimizes the potential for farmland to be developed for anything but agriculture.

Marion, Heidelberg and North Heidelberg townships each have large lot agricultural zoning in place. Heidelberg Township requires that residential lots in the Agricultural Preservation zoning district be a minimum area of 50 acres. Minimum lot size in Marion Township's Agricultural Rural district is 40 acres. North Heidelberg Township requires minimum 40-acre lots in its Agricultural Preservation district. The three townships fully intend to continue this effective method of maintaining their agricultural environment.

An alternative to large lot agricultural zoning is sliding scale agricultural zoning where the number of residential lots permitted on a property is related to the size of the property but *not directly proportional* to it as in large lot agricultural zoning. The Berks County Comprehensive Plan includes the following example to illustrate the sliding scale concept:

<u>Size of Original Tract of Land</u>	<u>Maximum Number of Non-Farm Single-Family Dwellings</u>
0 - 19 acres	1
20 - 49 acres	2
50 - 99 acres	3
100 - 149 acres	4
150 - 199 acres	5
200 - 349 acres	6
>350 acres	7

The three townships should consider the relative merits of both large lot zoning and sliding scale zoning as they continue to refine their agricultural zoning regulations in the future.

Lot Averaging

Lot averaging is used to preserve open space within residential subdivisions. Like cluster zoning, lot averaging allows developers to build homes on somewhat smaller lots than might be permitted under traditional zoning. In exchange, the developer agrees to permanently preserve a significant portion of the tract in open space - e.g. 30-50%. However, lot averaging differs from clustering in two important ways:

1. Under lot averaging, lots within a subdivision *average* a certain minimum size rather than each lot having to be equal to, or larger than, that minimum size.
2. All permanent preserved open space needed to achieve the designated average is on *private* property, not part of any common open space. Common open space can become a

maintenance problem for homeowners associations and municipalities. Deed restrictions are used to prevent further subdivision of the privately held open space.

The flexibility of lot averaging helps developers "work with the land" to site homes on the suitable portions of a tract instead of on areas with sensitive natural features, such as steep slopes and woodlands. Much of the three townships in the Western Berks area is rural land where single-family homes are permitted. Single-family development in these areas should be governed by lot averaging or similar zoning.

Neo-Traditional Development

Neo-traditional development is an alternative to modern residential subdivisions that are overly dependent on cars and foster suburban sprawl. The neo-traditional alternative brings back the best features of older style, pedestrian-oriented neighborhoods. In neo-traditional neighborhoods, homes occupy smaller lots on streets with trees and sidewalks. Homes have front porches, garages are in the rear off an alley and housing types may vary in style and price. A grid street pattern is used instead of dead end cul-de-sacs to heighten the neighborhood's ties with the community and make commercial areas more accessible by foot. Neo-traditional neighborhoods would be very appropriate where future residential development is permitted along the outskirts of Robesonia Borough and Womelsdorf Borough, including in the adjacent townships.

Town Center Zoning

Town Center zoning encourages mixed use development designed to maintain the vitality of small "Main Street" and village areas. Compact development, mixed uses and appropriate signs are encouraged instead of large front yard setbacks, wide lots and extensive parking requirements.

Town Center zoning allows selected, appropriate retail and service uses but does not permit highway-oriented businesses such as gas stations, drive-in restaurants, convenience stores and car washes. Town Center zoning should be encouraged in the downtown areas of Robesonia Borough and Womelsdorf Borough plus in the Village of Stouchsburg.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

Municipal officials and other local residents identify closely with the rural setting of the Western Berks area. The area's open lands, wooded hillsides, creek valleys and scenic country roads are assets worth protecting. As land is lost to extensive development, the character of an area and its way of life are threatened. The following policies will help ensure that future development will have a minimal impact on the natural environment of the Western Berks area.

- **Approve only development that respects the natural features of each site**

Land varies greatly in the amount of development it can physically support. Floodplains and very steep slopes should remain in open space. Other lands are suited for moderate or intense development. The following guidelines should be used when reviewing subdivision and land development applications.

TABLE 17
GUIDELINES FOR PROTECTING IMPORTANT NATURAL FEATURES

NATURAL FEATURES (Type & Description)	POTENTIAL PROBLEMS IF NOT PROTECTED	STRATEGIES FOR PROTECTION
<p>Steep Slopes - Steep slopes of 15% have 15 feet of vertical change for every 100 feet of horizontal distance. Very steep slopes of 25% rise vertically 25 feet for every 100 feet. Steep slopes are sometimes wooded and found along creeks.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty of maintaining and snow-plowing steep roads. • Higher costs of buildings. • High rate of septic system failures. • Increased erosion and runoff. • Winter driving hazards from steep roads and driveways. • Disturbance of scenic areas. • Increased costs to extend public water and sewer lines. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site houses on the most suitable land, while keeping steep slopes in open space. • Keep natural vegetation intact. • Strengthen municipal regulations that protect steep slopes. • Require larger lot sizes in steep areas. • Limit building on steep slopes of 15% to 25% and prohibit building on very steep slopes of 25% and above.
<p>Groundwater - Groundwater is stored underground after entering through the soil or seeping from creeks. Maintaining the quality of this water is important because both private wells and public water systems are dependent upon groundwater.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Polluted groundwater. • Dry wells. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to control the percentage of lots covered by buildings and paving. • Ensure remaining septic systems are designed and operated properly. • Monitor underground storage tanks for leaks. • Avoid polluted storm water runoff. • Avoid high volume withdrawals of groundwater. • Identify areas most feasible for future public water and sewer.
<p>Floodplains - Areas that are prone to flooding include both legally designated floodplains and land along drainage channels.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased flooding in other areas. • Loss of potential public recreation area. • Threats to important wildlife and bird habitats. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prohibit construction of new structures within the 100-year floodway (which is the actual main flood channel) and along the adjacent 100-year flood-fringe. Prohibit construction within 50 to 100 feet of the centerline of a stream (depending on stream size). • Seek to preserve buffers of natural vegetation immediately adjacent to creeks and drainageways. • Seek to preserve more land along local streams and drainageways.
<p>Wooded Areas - Concentrated areas of mature tree growth are found throughout the region's steeply sloped lands noted above and in other scattered locations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased surface temperatures. • Loss of important bird and wildlife habitats. • Loss of hunting areas. • Loss of air purification. • Increased erosion and runoff. • Loss of scenic resources. • Noise and incompatible development may become more noticeable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restrict cutting of trees during building to the building envelope and immediately adjacent areas. • Seek to preserve tree stands in public or private open space. • Seek replanting of trees that must be cut down.
<p>Shallow Depth to Bedrock - Areas with shallow soils and bedrock close to the surface are frequently found in steeply sloped locations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher construction costs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid building in these areas.

NATURAL FEATURES (Type & Description)	POTENTIAL PROBLEMS IF NOT PROTECTED	STRATEGIES FOR PROTECTION
<p>Waterways - Protecting waterways from pollutants involves controlling direct discharges and maintaining vegetative stream buffers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of potential public recreation areas. • Threats to important bird, fish and wildlife habitats. • Increased erosion and flooding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevent soil erosion to avoid sedimentation of creeks and drainageways. • Work with soil conservation authorities and farmers to keep animals out of streams. • Consider areas along creeks and drainageways for public greenways. • Minimize runoff of pesticides, grease and industrial wastes. • Minimize direct runoff from parking lots. • Require buildings and paving to be setback from creek banks and significant drainageways. • Control the peak rates of storm water runoff from development to avoid increased flooding.
<p>Natural Drainage Channels - Smaller natural channels that carry storm water to local creeks during heavy storms exist throughout the region.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased flooding. • Erosion of soil. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preserve adequate width along channels in open space. • Prevent erosion.
<p>Hydric Soils - Hydric soils, often located in wetland areas, have a shallow depth to the seasonally high water table.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flooded basements. • Disturbance of natural drainage and groundwater recharge. • Poor foundation stability. • Failed on-lot septic systems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to enforce local, state and federal wetland regulations. • Place on-lot septic systems and buildings outside these areas. • Waterproof basements of existing buildings. • Carefully design all facilities.

- **Strengthen steep slope protection.**

While some of the five municipalities regulate some development on steep slopes, none has strict steep slope protection that extends community-wide. Each municipality in the Western Berks area should amend its zoning ordinance to:

1. Prohibit new structures on slopes above 25%.
2. Increase minimum lot size by 50% where principal buildings are proposed on slopes between 15% and 25%.

- **Establish wetland buffer zone.**

State and Federal regulations provide extensive protection for wetlands. No additional municipal zoning regulations exist among the townships and boroughs of the Western Berks area. Some municipalities prohibit paving or other ground disturbance within a 50-foot buffer of delineated wetlands. In addition, wetlands do not count towards the calculation of total lot size. Each of the Western Berks municipalities should consider adopting similar protective measures for wetlands.

- **Establish stream corridor buffer regulations.**

Floodplain zoning that exists in the Western Berks area is designed to limit property damage from flooding. However, floodplain ordinances typically regulate construction, not paving and other soil disturbances. Each municipality should adopt zoning amendments to prohibit construction, soil disturbance or removal of natural vegetation within 50 feet of all waterways except as part of crop farming. It is now widely recognized that streamside vegetation serves the following valuable functions:

1. Reduces water pollution from surface runoff.
2. Controls the volume of sediment that reaches streams.
3. Provides shade to help moderate water temperatures.
4. Protects wildlife habitats.

In addition to regulations that require the maintenance of existing vegetation, the planting of vegetative buffers along local waterways where none exist now should be encouraged. The County Conservation District and the Penn State Cooperative Extension Service are two sources of information on how to properly plant and maintain these buffers.

- **Where appropriate, encourage fencing that keeps livestock out of local waterways.**

Dirt and waste from livestock and stream banks eroded from constant trampling by animals contribute to stream pollution. Trout Unlimited, the Berks County Conservancy, the PA Game Commission and others have assisted farmers with the cost of establishing fencing to keep livestock out of local streams. The Penn State Cooperative Extension Service endorses stream side fencing provided it is planned and implemented on a case-by-case basis rather than mandated across the board by regulation. Specific site conditions, the size of the stream, the varying requirements of individual landowners, the ability to maintain the fencing, the need for permanent vs. portable fencing and other factors should all influence site by site decisions about where fencing is desirable and where it is not.

- **Encourage preparation of nutrient management plans and use of best management practices in farming.**

State law requires farmers with 2 or more animal units per acre to prepare nutrient management plans that describe how animal manure is to be safely collected, stored, distributed or otherwise disposed of. (An animal unit equals 1,000 lbs. of animal regardless of species.) Since this requirement went into effect in 1997, the Berks County Conservation District has received and reviewed 8 nutrient management plans from farmers in the Western Berks area. According to the District, more plans are due but not yet submitted. In addition to being out of compliance with State law, failure to submit a nutrient management plan can endanger bank financing for farm-related improvements.

Best management practices are conservation measures farmers can use voluntarily to help protect the natural environment. Some of these techniques relate to manure management. A sampling of others include contour farming to reduce soil erosion and stream fencing to protect stream banks and stream waters from animals.

Grants and loans are available to help prepare nutrient management plans and implement a range of best management practices. Municipal officials should work in coordination with conservation agencies to ensure farmers are fully aware of the need for such conservation practices.

- **Restrict tree cutting during construction.**

Very little protection for woodlands is now offered by Western Berks area municipalities. All five municipalities can save more trees by adopting zoning amendments that require developers to replant a tree each time a mature tree is cut down or severely damaged during construction. Tree cutting can also be minimized by restricting the cutting of trees during construction to those that are:

1. Within 25 feet of an approved structure.
2. Within 10 feet of a vehicular cartway.
3. Within 10 feet of an approved storm water detention basin, paved area, driveway or on-lot sewage system.
4. Within a utility right-of-way.
5. Dead or posing a clear danger to a structure, utility or public improvement.
6. An obstruction to vehicular site distance.

None of these regulations would apply to forestry operations.

- **Encourage developers to use neighborhood design standards.**

Western Berks area municipalities should encourage developers to use the following guidelines on how best to design and locate residential structures, adjacent open space and complementary landscaping. The guidelines are divided into four topics: site planning, architecture, landscape architecture and signage. All four sections should be used together when planning and reviewing new development proposals.

Site Planning

- Orient uses to minimize objectionable views, such as service areas and the backs of buildings, from roadways and from scenic overlooks,
- Match scale and character of buildings and other uses to the scale and character of the site and the surrounding environs,
- Maximize joint use driveways,
- Minimize impervious cover,
- Provide scenic overlooks whenever possible,
- Provide landscaping along the perimeter of parking areas,
- Place utilities underground,
- Minimize the grading by the use of retaining walls, building orientation and running with contours,
- Avoid placing buildings on cleared ridgelines to protect views, and
- Use curved driveways when developing in wooded areas to obscure the view of the house from the road.

Architecture

- Minimize the height of the proposed structure, especially on ridgelines and in very visible locations,
- Reduce the building mass by breaking up the building into smaller components,
- Use indigenous building materials, such as stone,
- Use compatible, earth tone colors that blend with the existing environment,
- Design structures to fit the topography rather than excessively grading the site, and
- Use pitched roof design features.

Landscape Architecture

- Minimize removal of existing trees, especially on ridgelines,
- Establish vegetative buffers adjacent to roadways,
- Screen objectionable views,
- Maximize parking lot landscaping, and
- Use indigenous plant materials.

Signage

- Use materials that are compatible with the proposed or existing buildings and landscape elements,
- Locate signs on the building in consistent sign bands,
- Group signs on one sign structure,
- Avoid bright colors and internally illuminated signs,
- Minimize temporary signs, and
- Use consistent typography on signs.

- **Encourage developers to use the following four steps towards better subdivision design.**

Although steep slopes, floodplains and wetlands are usually noted on the site plans, little consideration is sometimes given to other elements like a grand oak tree, a wildflower meadow or an old apple orchard, features that can be preserved to symbolize the rural character of an area. By conducting a more intensive analysis of the site, developers should be able to achieve adequate densities without sacrificing rural character.

The following four steps are a sequential approach towards more conservation-oriented design based on the recommendations of Mr. Randall Arendt of The Natural Lands Trust.

1. *Identify Primary and Secondary Conservation Areas* - First, identify primary conservation areas such as sensitive natural areas: steep slopes over 25%, 100-year floodplains, streams and their buffers, and habitats of rare, threatened and endangered species. Other conservation areas may include scenic views, locally important vegetation, unique geologic features and wet soils among other areas.
2. *Identify Locations for Development* - Next, locate potential development areas which include the remaining land left over after the primary and secondary conservation areas are identified. Carefully consider siting new homes with views of the open space areas. Reduce the lot sizes to accommodate for the number of homes that would have been originally provided under conventional development.

3. *Layout Roads and Trails* - Show a road alignment that would most efficiently access all new homes. Also consider developing trails that could link residents with each other and with the open space areas.
4. *Delineate Lot Lines* - The final step involves delineating the boundaries of each lot, a step often done first in traditional design.

AGRICULTURAL PRESERVATION

Agriculture is a critical part of the landscape, economy, heritage and community identity of the Western Berks area. Strong agricultural zoning exists in the region, as described above. The following are additional recommendations on ways to preserve farmland and maintain the viability of the local agricultural economy.

- **Continue to participate in the sale of agricultural easements.**

Using County, state and federal funds, Berks County has preserved the development rights to over 12,000 acres of farmland since the Pennsylvania Farmland Preservation Program began in 1989. Governor Ridge has proposed, as part of his Growing Greener initiatives, that additional state funds be redirected for farmland preservation. The Berks County Commissioners recently issued a \$30 million bond that will allow the County to buy development rights to over 25,000 acres in the next five years - an estimated 50 to 60 farms annually. Act 138 of 1998 authorizes Pennsylvania municipalities to purchase agricultural easements either on their own or in combination with county and Commonwealth funding.

- **Expand agricultural security districts.**

Farmers join agricultural security areas established pursuant to Act 43 of 1981 for protection against certain nuisance complaints and to become eligible to have their development rights purchased. Land enrolled in agricultural security areas is extensive in the Western Berks area. (See the Agricultural Preservation map in the Background Reports section of this plan.) Heidelberg, Marion and North Heidelberg townships should continue to expand its participation as farmers must be enrolled in an agricultural security area before their development rights are eligible for purchase.

- **Do not extend public sewer service into prime agricultural areas.**

In desirable areas such as the Western Berks area, public sewer lines attract development. If public sewers are established in rural areas with failing septic systems, the new system should have only the capacity necessary to serve affected homes and help finance the system through reasonable user costs.

- **Ensure zoning regulations allow farmers sufficient opportunities to supplement their incomes.**

Western Berks area municipalities should ensure their municipal regulations permit farmers a variety of opportunities to earn supplemental income. Uses such as custom furniture construction, farm equipment repair, tool sharpening and others may be appropriate provided they are restricted to five non-resident employees. Corn mazes, pick your own pumpkins, horseback riding, bed & breakfast uses and roadside produce stands are other examples, provided regulations exist to limit the magnitude of the activity.

- **Increase local control of intensive animal feeding operations.**

Very intensive livestock operations that involve large numbers of animals and resemble industrial activities should be restricted to certain areas within the three township's agricultural zoning districts. These operations (which can be specifically defined in zoning) can generate animal wastes, odors and flies far in excess of what is typically tolerated in rural areas. The possibility of accidents involving liquid animal waste stored on-site is a threat to groundwater and local streams.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is considering additional regulations on these operations to protect water quality. Municipalities need similar actions to avoid potential land use problems. Special overlay zones within agricultural zoning districts, larger lot sizes, additional setbacks and approval only by special exception are among the regulations to consider.

- **Investigate the demand for transfer of development rights (TDR).**

Many counties in Maryland, such as Montgomery County, and a small number of eastern Pennsylvania municipalities have used transfer of development rights (TDR) to preserve farmland and environmentally sensitive areas. TDR involves the right to develop a certain number of additional homes beyond that permitted by the underlying zoning if development rights are purchased from a landowner in a "sending area", usually a farming or conservation area. TDR compensates landowners who sell some or all of their development rights to a landowner in a "receiving area", an area with sufficient water and sewer service to accommodate growth. TDR and any variation of TDR can be an extensive and time-consuming administrative responsibility. An understanding of the local real estate market and promotional effort to ensure local residents understand and support a TDR program are other prerequisites for success.

Under current PA law, (that is now being reconsidered by the State legislature), TDR is not permitted across municipal borders. Intermunicipal TDR would be ideal in the Western Berks area where conservation-oriented townships are located adjacent to densely developed boroughs with public water and sewer capacity. Under current law, the possibilities for TDR in the Western Berks area would be more limited because "receiving areas" would have to be delineated in each municipality considering TDR.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Historic preservation is important in the Western Berks area. Within the five study area municipalities, entries on the National Register of Historic Places include four historic districts, and several other properties, including an historic bridge. (See the Historical Origins section of the Background Reports). In addition, many historic resources that are not officially recognized statewide may have local significance. The following are ways to conserve the area's historic resources short of creating formal historic zoning districts, which usually require an historic architectural review board to approve most types of exterior changes.

- Ensure municipal zoning ordinances permit appropriate adaptive reuse of historic structures. Buildings no longer economically viable as homes can be preserved as bed and breakfast establishments, offices and a variety of other uses. Use of the Furnace Mansion in Robesonia by the Chit Chat agency is a local example.
- Identify a grassroots organization that may be interested in working with the Berks County Conservancy to seek formal recognition for more historic properties in the five municipalities.
- Promote the donation of historic facade easements (and associated tax advantages) to preserve key historic structures in the same way as agricultural easements have been sold.
- Expand local participation in the Pennsylvania Blue Markers Program. The Pennsylvania Historic Museum Commission will fund Blue Markers for sites of statewide significance. Blue Markers for locally significant sites must be funded locally.
- Install historically appropriate welcome signs at key gateways to the two boroughs and the Village of Stouchsburg.
- Work with the Berks County Planning Commission, the Berks County Conservancy and/or others to prepare a pamphlet of design guidelines identifying the essential do's and don'ts of proper historic rehabilitation.
- Enact zoning and subdivision regulations that encourage developers of new homes to reflect the scale, proportions, spacing, setbacks and materials traditionally found in the Western Berks area.
- Reflect the historic qualities of the area in any future improvements to sidewalks, lighting and other public improvements in the boroughs or the Village of Stouchsburg.
- Strengthen sign regulations in the boroughs and in the Village of Stouchsburg to distinguish between signs permitted there and those permitted in the highway commercial area.
- In all five municipalities, prohibit internally illuminated free standing signs, review billboard regulations to ensure maximum size and setback standards are adequate, and establish specific regulations for portable signs.

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation in the Western Berks area refers mainly to vehicular circulation since the area does not have regular bus or passenger rail service. The following recommendation focus on maintaining traffic safety and improving circulation. Ideas are also included on enhancing pedestrian and bicycle service.

Streets and Highways

- Work with PennDOT to periodically assess the need for a traffic signal at key intersections in the area, such as at U.S. 422 and Bernville Road. Although a signal may not be needed now, one may be desirable in the future in a specific location as traffic continues to increase.
- Investigate the possibility of Penn Township establishing a traffic signal at Bernville Road and Route 183, just north of the North Heidelberg/Penn Township municipal boundary.
- Work with Berks County and PennDOT to move up the priority of improvements planned for the "S" Bridge on Main Street in Marion Township.
- Prepare a multi-year program of road repavings and reconstructions instead of responding to these needs on a year-to-year basis.
- Allow narrower roads without curbing within certain low density areas to avoid over-design of roads and preserve rural character.
- Incorporate the following highway design guidelines, as contained in the Berks County Comprehensive Plan, into each municipality's subdivision and land development ordinance.

**TABLE 18
HIGHWAY FUNCTIONAL CLASSIFICATIONS AND RECOMMENDED DESIGN FEATURES**

Classification	General Provisions	Right-of-Way Width (Feet)	Cartway Width
Arterial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 35-55 MPH - Some access controls to and from adjacent development - Encourage use of reverse and side street frontage and parallel access roads - No parking 	80	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 48-52 feet - 12' wide travel lanes with shoulders in rural area and curbing in urban areas
Collector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 25-35 MPH - Some access controls to and from adjacent development - Parking permitted on one or both sides 	60	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 34-40 feet - 12' wide travel lanes with stabilized shoulders or curbing - 8' wide lanes provided for parking
Local	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 15-35 MPH - No access control to and from adjacent development - Parking permitted on one or both sides 	50	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 28-34 feet with stabilized shoulders or curbing - Cartway widths can be reduced based on interior traffic patterns

NOTE: Speed limit recommendations are generalized guidelines. Existing conditions should be used to establish specific speed limits on specific roads.

- Designate the following roads in the five municipalities' subdivision and land development ordinances as shown below:

Arterials:

U.S. 422	PA Route 501
Bernville Road/Heidelberg Road (Bernville-Robbie Road)	PA Route 419

Collectors:

High Street	Charming Forge Road (all segments)
Koziar Road	Stouchsburg Road
School Road	Milestone Road
	Brownsville Road

Local Roads:

All Others

- Ensure the following design principles are reflected in each of the five municipalities' subdivision and land development ordinances. Then work with PennDOT to ensure these principles are enforced in PennDOT's review of driveway permit applications to access the arterials designated above.
 - Limit direct access where feasible by using common entrances to adjacent business properties rather than multiple curb cuts.
 - Control the size and location of signs to preserve vision triangles
 - Require additional setbacks and appropriate landscaping along the highway to reduce highway noise and distractions to motorists
 - Align driveways on the opposite sides of the highway wherever possible instead of allowing staggered access points within close proximity to each other.
- In addition to establishing a multi-year road repaving and reconstruction program as recommended above, the five municipalities should identify and address areas where storm water problems affect road safety. The need for speed limit signs on all roads should also be determined.

Pedestrian and Bicycle Access

- Design long range sidewalk and sidewalk replacement program in the two boroughs and the Village of Stouchsburg to encourage more walking and less use of automobiles.
- See recommendations for greenway development under the Parks and Recreation part of the following section on Community Services and Facilities.

COMMUNITY SERVICES AND FACILITIES

In addition to municipal administration, the five Western Berks area municipalities each provide, or assist in providing, a variety of community services to their residents. Changing needs and rising costs affect the provision of all these services. The following recommendations are proposed to help coordinate the continued efficient delivery of emergency management (police, fire and rescue), public water and sewer service, education, and parks and recreation.

Police, Fire and Rescue

- Continue to support the Western Berks area's four police departments (Heidelberg, Marion, Robesonia and Womelsdorf) and continue working with the Pennsylvania State Police, who patrol North Heidelberg Township.
- Periodically re-assess the desirability of establishing joint police services involving two or more Western Berks area municipalities.
- Maintain municipal contributions to the area's volunteer fire companies and ambulance associations as listed in the Background Reports section of this plan.

Public Water and Sewer Service

- Periodically re-examine the need to expand capacity at the Wernersville-Robesonia Municipal Authority Wastewater Treatment Plant but only to serve: a) areas with failing on-lot septic systems and b) areas specifically designated for growth in this comprehensive plan and the joint comprehensive plan being prepared in Lower Heidelberg Township, South Heidelberg Township and Wernersville Borough.
- Ensure additional treatment capacity soon to be available at the Womelsdorf Sewage Treatment Plant will also be used to either address health concerns or provide new service to approved growth areas in accordance with this comprehensive plan.
- Finalize the on-going investigations into how best to provide cost-effective public water and public sewage treatment for the Village of Stouchsburg and the Shady Acres area in Marion Township.
- Continue to examine opportunities to regionalize water service by extending Womelsdorf-Robesonia Joint Authority water service in Heidelberg, Marion and North Heidelberg townships.

Education

- Continue providing public input to the Conrad Weiser School District on projected growth trends and coordinate as needed with the school district to ensure a smooth transition into the new Conrad Weiser High School.

Parks and Recreation

- Maintain use of the existing municipal parks as important outdoor athletic facilities serving the Western Berks area.
- Look for opportunities to add additional parkland acreage to address the per capita parkland deficit that, according to National Recreation and Park Association guidelines, will soon exist as the region continues to grow. This is described in the Parks and Recreation portion of the Background Reports.
- Continue existing arrangements with the Conrad Weiser School District for community use of indoor and outdoor recreation facilities at local schools.
- Work with Berks County, Berks County Conservancy, neighboring municipalities and local trail groups to plan for a greenway along the Tulpehocken Creek Corridor, which as described in the Berks County Open Space Plan, could connect Blue Marsh Lake with Womelsdorf Borough and possibly Lebanon County.
- In cooperation with Lower Heidelberg and South Heidelberg townships, investigate the feasibility of a greenway along Spring Creek that could connect to the Tulpehocken Greenway noted above and to the eastern portion of the Tulpehocken Greenway, which the Berks County Open Space Plan envisions along the Tulpehocken Creek between Blue Marsh Lake and the City of Reading.
- Promote the following techniques in addition to fee simple acquisition to establish rights of way for greenway corridors: conservation easements, access easements, stream setback regulations, donation, mandatory dedication of specific stream corridors through a zoning overlay. Recognize that establishing and maintaining regional greenways will require multiple stewards, including governmental, private and non-profit entities
- Ask Berks County to apply for State Keystone funding or allocate County Community Development Block Grant funds to initiate a greenways feasibility study in the region similar to Montgomery County's Schuylkill River Greenway Stewardship Study.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT/DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

Recommended land use policies in this comprehensive plan are based on preserving the area's overall environment and quality of life. Within this context, local planning should support the area's economy and the growth of local business. New jobs and enhanced tax revenues from business development and farming are important ingredients in a healthy local economy. In addition to farming, a variety of industry and commerce is important for establishing and maintaining a strong job base within the region.

This Economic Development/Downtown Revitalization Plan addresses business development in the Western Berks area that could help revitalize the vitality and appearance of the town centers in Womelsdorf Borough, Robesonia Borough, and to a lesser extent, in the Village of Stouchsburg. The emphasis is on helping to create an improved setting for new business investment and the expansion of existing businesses in these areas and in industrial areas on both sides of Robesonia Borough, north of Womelsdorf Borough and along Route 501.

Regional Business Development

- Encourage businesses which relate to agriculture and will help sustain the local agricultural economy.
- Work with regional economic development officials to improve marketing of vacant or underused buildings and land, particularly targeting users who desire rail service.
- Work with the Reading and Berks County Visitors Bureau to encourage more heritage-based tourism in the Western Berks Area.

Town Center Revitalization

- Create Town Center Improvements Committees to oversee design and construction of the following physical improvements within the town centers of the two boroughs and the Village of Stouchsburg:
 - Plant street trees and other landscaping enhancements,
 - Replace inadequate sidewalks,
 - Place utility wires underground as feasible when doing other major work,
 - Add other streetscape elements such as planters, benches, trash receptacles, etc.,
 - Place "Welcome to" signs at major entrances
 - Amend municipal zoning ordinances to strengthen existing sign regulations.

This will build on the activities accomplished by Robesonia under the Route 422 Corridor Project, including new street signs and new gateway signs that welcome people to the Borough. The annual meeting of the Pennsylvania Association of Boroughs was hosted by Robesonia in 1999, an opportunity for the Borough to showcase its accomplishments and emphasize its needs.

- Use the following design guidelines to encourage the type of building improvements that will retain and enhance the architectural integrity:
 - Use construction materials, architectural details and paint colors that complement rather than conflict with, the predominant development patterns,
 - Avoid covering historic wood, brick or stone buildings with vinyl siding, aluminum siding or false fronts,
 - Minimize historically inappropriate alterations to building features such as rooflines, windows, columns, cornices and doorways, among others,
 - Emphasize the human scale in buildings by avoiding oversized, single-pane windows, large blank walls, flat invisible roofs and other features that do not relate to pedestrians and other building users, and
 - Use common building features such as awnings, other detailing and unity of color to tie together various building elements.
- Use the following do's and don'ts to distinguish creative design from unappealing development based on the use of signs, lighting, road access, parking, pedestrian circulation, utilities and other amenities.

Signs

- Locate signs wherever possible on buildings; avoid off-site billboards, portable signs and other freestanding signs,
- Situate any freestanding signs against a backdrop of vegetation or a building to soften their impact and avoid interrupting a distant view,
- Group signs on one structure in the case of a multi-tenant development,
- Use consistent typography or a design theme to link building signs in multi-tenant developments,
- Limit the number of signs on a building to one or two to avoid visual clutter,
- Avoid using bright colors and garish designs on signs,
- Choose externally lit signs instead of internally lit signs,
- Use white light on externally lit signs and obscure the source of the light with shrubbery and other vegetation,
- Use wooden signs rather than plastic signs where feasible to ensure the sign is compatible with the building upon which it is placed,
- Place all signs to avoid obscuring significant building features such as windows, cornices and other decorative elements, and
- Avoid signs that project above the roof of a building.

Lighting

- Use light standards or poles that are a maximum of 15 feet tall or shorter than surrounding tree heights to avoid casting shadows over trees and creating unsafe areas,
- Choose light poles and fixtures whose design, materials and colors are compatible with the surrounding areas, such as historically appropriate styles,

- Use shielded lights to ensure that illumination from overhead lights is directed sufficiently downward and does not shine on adjacent properties or roads, and
- Position lights so that no more than one-half foot candles of light exists at the point midway between adjacent light standards.

Road Access and Parking

- Establish shared entrances to roadside development sites instead of multiple curb cuts that permit several adjoining properties to each have their own direct road access,
- Locate parking areas to the side or behind buildings rather than in front,
- Use landscape buffering along the perimeter of parking areas to separate them from roadways and other parts of a site,
- Install landscape buffers within large parking lots to direct circulation and provide visual relief from large expanses of parking,
- Use planted medians to signify and narrow parking lot entrances rather than constructing wide, unlandscaped entrances, and
- Consider gravel or other pervious materials in parking lots rather than paved surfaces in rural settings to allow some recharge of groundwater.

Pedestrian Circulation

- Construct safe, functional sidewalks that are handicapped-accessible between buildings and adjacent parking areas,
- Link internal circulation paths with existing public sidewalks, and
- To allow wheelchair access, use hard surface materials for pedestrian circulation paths such as concrete, interlocking pavers, brick or asphalt instead of gravel or stepping stones.

Utilities and Other Amenities

- Bury utility lines underground wherever possible; place them behind buildings or in back of roadside vegetation where they cannot be buried,
- Locate delivery areas, service bays and outdoor storage at the rear or side of a building,
- Place trash dumpsters at the rear of a building or heavily screen them from view using brick walls or wood fencing,
- Position air conditioning units, satellite dishes and other building equipment at ground level to the rear of a site rather than on the roof of a building, and
- Construct fencing as low as possible, make it open instead of opaque and build it of wood, ornamental iron, brick or fieldstone rather than metal, plywood or concrete.

Energy Conservation

In each of the five Western Berks area municipalities, it is important to recognize the need to conserve energy and preserve non-renewable resources. The municipalities should encourage developers to utilize the following techniques:

- Site homes on an east-west axis to maximize solar access and minimize heating costs.
- Use land forms such as steep slopes to deflect winter winds.
- Site homes on south and southeast facing slopes, with large windows on southern exposures, to maximize solar heating.
- Orient unheated buildings (such as detached garages) to buffer heated buildings (such as homes) from winter winds.
- Use darker colors to absorb more radiant energy from the sun.
- Use summer awnings to shade windows.
- Favor deciduous trees over evergreens, especially on southern exposures, to provide more shade in summer and more sun in winter. Use evergreens adjacent to northern exposures and other areas where winter winds should be buffered.

These techniques respect the two basic principles of energy conservation: proper orientation to the sun and protection from the extremes of summer and winter weather. Municipal officials can save energy by monitoring municipal operations. The municipalities should investigate updating heating, ventilating, indoor lighting and any outdoor street lighting systems and building insulation to determine whether it would be cost-effective over the long-run by increasing energy efficiency. Drivers of municipal vehicles should be made aware of methods that can be used to reduce fuel consumption.