

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The major goals for this Plan are described on the following pages. These goals include attracting new businesses and economic development into appropriate areas, protecting natural features, preserving agriculture in key areas, providing for orderly development with compatibility between different uses, promoting the preservation of open space within new development, strengthening the downtowns, minimizing traffic safety and congestion problems, and making sure there are high-quality community services and facilities.

This Plan seeks to direct most development to locations that can be efficiently served by public water and sewage services. This will greatly minimize the total amount of land that is consumed by development and also works to direct most housing away from agricultural areas.

The Economic Development Plan proposes specific goals and recommended actions to help maintain and grow the economies of the region as well as emphasizes directing new commercial uses to the downtowns and other selected locations that allow for safe and efficient traffic access. This Plan is designed to prevent long strip commercial development along major highways with individual driveways, where such development does not currently exist.

This Plan recommends ways to strengthen business activity, build historic community character and provide a pedestrian-friendly environment in the centers of Kenhorst, Mohnton and Shillington.



The 47 acre Buxton Conservancy in Brecknock Township opened in 2015

It is essential to avoid excessive densities of development to avoid overwhelming the capacity of the road system, the public school system, groundwater supplies, other community services and the natural features of each site.

The Plan includes recommendations to protect steeply sloped lands, wetlands, creek valleys and other important natural features. This includes strictly limiting the density of development on steep slopes and maintaining a buffer of natural vegetation along creeks.

Owners of farms are encouraged to apply to the County to have their land preserved, while remaining in private ownership. Owners of land should also be encouraged to consider the income tax benefits of preserving land. For example, if an owner donates an easement on their land that prevents development, the reduction in the market value can be deducted as a charitable contribution.

The Future Land Use section identifies land use policies and categories that are intended to be the basis for revisions to the municipalities' development regulations.

This Plan includes recommendations to maintain an attractive rural character in much of the region. One concept involves the idea of "Open Space Development" when planning/engineering new subdivisions. Open Space Development involves clustering homes on the most suitable portions of a tract. In return for allowing smaller lots on part of a tract, the developer would be required to permanently preserve a large portion of the total tract (such as 30 to 50 percent) in permanent open space. This open space could be maintained in public, homeowner association or private ownership, but could never be developed.

Chapter 1 - Executive Summary of Recommendations

This Plan recommends providing areas for a range of housing types and densities. State law requires the municipalities to meet certain obligations to provide opportunities for all types of housing and all legitimate types of land uses. Most areas that would allow new medium density housing are planned where public water and sewage services are feasible and where access is convenient to Interstate 176 or interchanges of the Route 222 Expressway.

A number of recommendations are provided to strengthen older residential neighborhoods. This includes an emphasis upon encouraging home-ownership, rehabilitating older buildings, and avoiding incompatible development. In most neighborhoods, the conversion of a one family home into two or more apartments should be prohibited. This Plan also seeks to extend the best features of older development into newer development, in a concept named Traditional Neighborhood Development. Moreover, this Plan promotes compatible types of “infill” development in villages and older parts of the boroughs.



Lancaster Avenue in Cumru Township

Older buildings with significant architecture should be reused and rehabilitated. In historic areas, types of new construction should be encouraged that will be compatible with the historic surroundings.

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New businesses need to be attracted into appropriate areas, and existing businesses should be encouraged to expand. This business development is essential to reduce the tax burden upon homeowners and to provide wider employment opportunities.

Congested road corridors are identified and prioritized. The most serious congestion and safety problems are at the U.S. 222 Business interchange with U.S. 422 West Shore Bypass. Although this location is located in the jurisdiction of the City of Reading and technically out of this region’s planning area it still has a profound effect on the circulation and efficiency of traffic flowing into the region. In order for improvements to State roads to occur in a timely fashion, in most cases it is critical for the municipality to take the lead in engineering improvements, seeking needed right-of-way and providing municipal funds or contributions from developers.

Moreover, this Plan also includes a full series of recommendations to improve opportunities throughout the region for safe bicycle and pedestrian travel, including a system of recreational trails.

DIRECTION: THE MAJOR GOALS OF THIS PLAN

The following goals provide overall direction for this Plan. The recommendations work to carry out these goals.

Overall Goal: Continually strive to make the region an even greater place in which to live, work, learn, visit, shop and play, with a strong sense of community, scenic preserved open spaces, preserved agricultural areas, an attractive historic character, active downtowns, a vibrant economy, desirable locations for businesses, high-quality schools, and an excellent quality of life.

Agricultural and Natural Resources Conservation

- Protect important natural features, with a special emphasis upon the Schuylkill Riverfront, creek valleys, wetlands and steeply sloped woodlands.
- Make sure that new development properly respects the natural features of a site.
- Seek to maintain agricultural activities in large portions of the region.
- Protect the amounts and quality of groundwater and creek waters.
- Encourage farmers to practice no-till farming.

Historic Preservation

- Protect and preserve the most important historic structures.
- Encourage appropriate reuse and historic rehabilitation of older buildings, as well as encouraging new construction that is consistent with historic surroundings.

Community Facilities and Services

- Provide high-quality community facilities and services in the most cost-efficient manner, including addressing needs for future growth.
- Provide for logical extensions of public water and sewage services to accommodate planned growth areas.
- Emphasize full cooperation and coordination of municipal and emergency services across municipal borders.

Transportation

- Maintain and improve the existing transportation system and services used today where financially feasible.
- Keep travelers safe and secure, no matter the mode of transportation.
- Invest in projects that strengthen the ability of regional commerce to access national and international trade markets, and support regional economic development and tourism opportunities.
- Give travelers a variety of well-designed transportation choices that are in good condition.
- Enhance the performance of the transportation system in environmentally sustainable ways that increase resiliency to both climate change and vulnerability to natural disaster.

Chapter 1 - Executive Summary of Recommendations

Economic Development

- Develop appropriate policies to guide the development of land suited for development and redevelopment.
- Prioritize public infrastructure investment that will attract businesses and development to commercial corridors.
- Promote the Lancaster Avenue/Pike corridors and recruit and retain appropriate businesses in these corridors.
- Develop tools to reduce impediments to challenging sites.
- Remove existing blight and prevent future blight and neighborhood decline.

Land Uses and Housing

- Provide for orderly patterns of development that provide compatibility between land uses, particularly to protect the livability of existing residential areas.
- Maintain an attractive rural character in much of the region. Promote use of the “Open Space Development” concept to cluster development on the most suitable portions of a tract, in order to permanently preserve important natural features and open spaces.
- Make sure that the overall densities of development are kept moderate to avoid overwhelming the capacity of the road system, the school district and the region’s natural features.
- Provide areas for a range of housing types and densities. Work to meet obligations under State law to provide opportunities for all types of housing and all legitimate types of land uses.
- Strengthen older residential neighborhoods, with an emphasis on encouraging home-ownership, rehabilitating older buildings, and avoiding uses that are likely to create nuisances.
- Direct most development to locations that can be efficiently served by public water and sewage services, in order to minimize the total amount of land that is consumed by development and to direct most housing away from agricultural areas.
- Direct most development of the uses that generate the highest amounts of traffic to locations that have good access to interchanges of Route 222 or Interstate 176.
- Direct new commercial uses to the downtowns, existing commercial areas and other selected locations that allow for safe and efficient traffic access. Avoid new strip commercial development with individual driveways onto heavily traveled roads, which would interfere with the ability of those roads to carry through-traffic.
- Strengthen business activity, historic community character and a pedestrian-friendly environment in the centers of Kenhorst, Mohnton and Shillington.
- Promote the reuse or redevelopment of older industrial sites.
- Seek to extend the best features of older development into newer development and promote compatible “infill” development in villages and older parts of the boroughs.
- Further improve the visual attractiveness of the region, with an emphasis upon the most highly visible corridors, and by promoting street trees, landscaping and preservation of creek valleys.
- Emphasize tourism that is built upon the area’s heritage, arts and culture, and recreational assets.

Putting this Plan into Action

- Update municipal development regulations to carry out this Plan, and periodically update the Plan and regulations as needed.
- Continually work to put this Plan into action - through a program of updated planning and many short-term actions within a long-range perspective.
- Promote substantial citizen input, including making sure residents are well-informed about community issues and encouraging volunteer efforts to improve the community.
- Maximize communications, coordination and cooperative efforts between the municipalities, the school district, adjacent municipalities, businesses, the County and other agencies and organizations.

Chapter 1 - Executive Summary of Recommendations

COORDINATION WITH THE COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

An emphasis is needed upon coordinating the region’s development policies with policies of the Berks County Planning Commission (BCPC). Under State law, a municipal or joint municipal comprehensive plan must be generally consistent with the Berks County Comprehensive Plan 2030. BCPC is charged with coordinating development, preservation and transportation policies across municipal borders throughout Berks County.



The Berks County Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 2013 and can be found on the Berks County Planning Commission website

The Future Land Use Plan in the County Comprehensive Plan recommends that most growth in the Governor Mifflin region occur in the northern part of the region. This particularly includes areas within and around Shillington, Kenhorst and Mohnton, as well as areas around the interchanges of the Route 222 expressway.

The County Plan recommends an emphasis on Agricultural Preservation in central Brecknock Township. The intent is to greatly limit the number of homes that are allowed, in order to avoid conflicts with agricultural activities. Areas that are flood-prone or wetlands are recognized as Environmental Hazard areas. Neversink Mountain is recommended to become Permanent Open Space/Recreation land.

Most other lands in the region are designated as Rural Conservation. This includes most of the southern part of Cumru Township and almost all of Brecknock Township. These areas include a blend of steep slopes and farmland. In these areas, the County Plan recommends a mix of forestry, agriculture, and low density development. The Plan recommends that any development be planned to conserve sensitive environmental areas. The Plan recommends that municipalities allow flexibility in the siting of homes so that development can be kept off of natural areas. In most cases, public water and sewage services are not recommended. The County Plan recommends that a density of no less than one home per acre be maintained.