

Chapter 1

The Joint Comprehensive Plan

Introduction and Purpose

The Bernville Borough, Penn and Jefferson Townships is a special area in Berks County. The rural and agricultural areas of Penn and Jefferson Townships, the quaint and quiet streets of Bernville and the Village areas of Mt. Pleasant and New Schaefferstown present unique challenges as well as opportunities in future land use planning. Issues such as economic growth, historic preservation, job creation, agricultural and open space preservation, cultural resource development, and maintenance of the rural setting were the themes in this Comprehensive Plan.

The challenge is to help create places and spaces where people want to be and make a future – safe, convenient and pleasant places to live; good job opportunities; a transportation system which allows convenient movement through the area; places to walk, meet and interact; restaurant and entertainment venues after work; and attractive areas in which to shop while preserving the rural and charming feel of the Region.

In 1968, the Pennsylvania legislature passed Act 247, the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code. This was the legislation that enabled local governments to develop Comprehensive Plans, Zoning Ordinances, Subdivision and Land Development Ordinances, and Official Maps. In the years since then, the Act has been amended numerous times, providing municipalities with more means to implement their plans, but these original planning tools remain the foundation of local planning.

In 2000, Pennsylvania adopted amendments to the Municipalities Planning Code, specifically Acts 67 and 68, known as “Smart Growth” legislation. This new legislation allows municipalities to work together to plan regionally across municipal borders using “smart growth principles” and specifically enabled the creation of joint municipal Comprehensive Plans. A Joint Comprehensive Plan can address both development and preservation issues with the flexibility of allocating land uses over the entire planning area, rather than the traditional method of providing for all land uses within each municipality. Additionally, a Joint Comprehensive Plan allows for regional coordination of transportation and community facilities issues, which helps to prevent overlap of municipal resources. The Action Plan will address specific recommendations pertaining to these new planning tools.

A Joint Comprehensive Plan is more than just a plan for development. The Plan is a means granted to local governments by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania by which participating communities may work together to create a vision of what they want to become and how they intend to achieve that vision. Surrounding communities are changing as well. This Joint Comprehensive Plan will help to anticipate change, to

identify community goals, and to examine local resources. It will provide the guidance that allows a higher degree of control in *how* change occurs in the Region.

Penn Township has prepared an individual Comprehensive Plan in the past while Jefferson Township and Bernville Borough prepared a Joint Comprehensive Plan. This Joint Comprehensive Plan was initiated because of the recognized need to update and examine overall planning for the area in light of development trends and issues in the Region, and to determine common goals and objectives for land use.

Contents of a Comprehensive Plan

The State allows local governments to address virtually any issue that is of municipal concern, but Act 247 established certain minimum requirements. According to §301 of Act 247, a valid Comprehensive Plan must include:

- a statement of objectives concerning future development;
- a plan for land use;
- a plan to meet the housing needs of present residents and of any anticipated increase of population;
- a plan for the movement of people and goods, which may address automobile travel, parking facilities, non-motorized trail systems, and public transportation facilities;
- a plan for community facilities and services, which may address public and private education, recreation, municipal buildings, fire and police services, libraries, hospitals, water supply and distribution, sewerage and solid waste management, storm drainage, and utilities;
- a statement of the inter-relationships among the components of the plan;
- a discussion of short-range and long-range implementation strategies for the plan objectives;
- a review of how compatible the plan is with the existing and proposed development and plans in contiguous portions of neighboring municipalities outside of the planning region;
- a statement regarding consistency with the county comprehensive plan;
- a plan for the protection of natural and historic resources; and
- a plan for the reliable supply of water.

In addition, the municipalities may address virtually any area of local concern.

It is important to realize that this Joint Comprehensive Plan does not have the force of law, although it provides the foundation for ordinances and regulations that do. In fact, a sound Joint Comprehensive Plan becomes critical in the event that an ordinance of any of the participating municipalities is challenged in court: if the ordinance in question is shown to be consistent with a duly adopted Joint Comprehensive Plan, a successful legal challenge is much more difficult than it would be otherwise.

What does a Comprehensive Plan Accomplish?

The Comprehensive Plan contains a vision of what Bernville Borough, Jefferson and Penn Townships want to achieve and includes goals, policies and strategies for realizing that vision.

The Comprehensive Plan is an educational document, providing discussion of conditions, issues, and opportunities, and identifying resources that are worthy of protection and preservation.

The Comprehensive Plan contains policies for land use, housing, circulation and community facilities which will serve as a guide for public and private decision-making to accomplish the goals and objectives, and thus the vision for the municipalities. The Plan is a guideline as to how to shape the future of the Region in accordance with that vision.

The Comprehensive Plan provides a basis for implementation techniques, such as land use ordinances, official maps and capital improvements programs, which will implement the policies contained in this plan. It is critical that the Action Plan be implemented. The Plan also provides a framework for the creation of partnerships to implement the plan.

Planning jointly allows allocation of land uses, housing types, densities, and development patterns over the entire region, rather than trying to fit all types of uses and densities into each municipality. It also allows for coordinated land use planning along municipal boundaries; coordinated planning for trails, recreation and open space, and transportation throughout the Region; and coordinated planning along the common road corridors in the Region. Coordinated input can be provided to County and State agencies and an overall approach to economic development can be presented, addressing retention of major components of the economy and allowing for appropriate commercial and industrial development, which complements rather than detracts from existing commercial areas. The following list summarizes benefits of multi-municipal planning:

Benefits of Multi-Municipal Planning

- Provides a regional planning approach and allocation of land uses
 - Where
 - How much to accommodate population projections
 - Patterns of development
- Establishes growth areas and future growth areas regionally
 - Coordination with infrastructure
 - Opportunities for infill
- Provides coordinated planning along the common boundaries of the municipalities
- Supports existing centers rather than weaken them
- Coordinates road corridor planning, standards, and management
- Provides for linkages between municipalities
- The Plan and implementing ordinances are considered by state agencies in permitting decisions
- Addresses review of “developments of regional impact”
- Identifies opportunities for future joint efforts
- Promotes common land use designations and definitions
- Establish goals for economic character over the entire Region
- Provides support for municipalities in zoning challenges
- Enables Transportation Impact Fees across municipal boundaries
- Enables Transfer of Development Rights across municipal boundaries
- Enables priority consideration in state funding programs
- Provides opportunity to learn from neighbors’ shared experiences
- Enhances the Region’s attractiveness to quality development

- Enables developing a “specific plan” for an area designated for non-residential development, preparing regulations for that area, and streamlining the approval process

Arrangement of This Document

This Joint Comprehensive Plan has been arranged in that the conclusions and plan elements are presented in one chapter. The Plan should be a reference document that users will consult for guidance or research on specific topics. Also, since this document is a *plan*, it is logical to give the plan elements prominence rather than precede it with research about conditions that will change over time and become increasingly irrelevant.

The initial introductory information is designed to provide the user with sufficient information on the planning process and planning terms to assure clear understanding of the document. A summary of the public participation information is provided to give a sense of the character of the community and of the issues that will be addressed by the plan, and finally the Vision, Goals and Objectives which name the more specific issues to be addressed by this Plan.

Methodology

The Planning Committee began the planning process in 2007 by selecting Spotts, Stevens and McCoy (SSM) as the professional planning consultants to work with the County and municipalities. Local officials appointed a Planning Committee to work with the consultants, including representatives from the Townships of Penn and Jefferson and Bernville Borough and the Berks County Regional Planning Commission.

The Committee held meetings starting in the Fall of 2007 for the duration of the planning process. Among the earliest actions of the Committee was to identify ways to gain input from local residents and business owners regarding their perceptions of the municipalities, and any critical issues they share.

- Interviews were done via telephone to key persons identified by the committee.
- Surveys were sent out and set out at the local Post Office. Responses were tallied and cross tabulated to analyze the input of the public.

A summary of all public participation is included in Chapter 3, *Identification of Issues – Public Participation*.

Once the planning process was underway, Committee meetings were largely occupied with discussion of the various plan issues and review of text as prepared by SSM. Upon

completion of the text and maps, the entire draft document was reviewed to assure that the plan elements created a coherent whole.

As required by Act 247, the complete draft was submitted to the Berks County Planning Commission, the adjacent school districts, and each adjoining municipality in regional order to allow them to review and comment upon the Plan. Drafts were also available for public review. Each Municipal Planning Commission convened a public meeting for the purpose of presenting the draft as submitted by the Committee to the public, and to solicit comments. Following the Public Meetings, the governing bodies held official public hearings, as per the requirements of the Municipalities Planning Code, to hear any additional comments from their respective residents. The Plan was officially adopted in _____.

Need for Continuing Planning

This Comprehensive Plan is just a start. It is the foundation for the attainment of the goals and objectives established within the Plan, which can be accomplished only with the support of the municipal governments, municipal commissions, boards and committees, area businesses, area residents, and surrounding municipalities and regional planning groups.

The objective has been to prepare a plan, which will not sit on a shelf and gather dust, but a plan that will be implemented and used by municipal governing bodies, planning commissions and other groups within the municipalities to guide their actions in attaining the goals of this Plan.

This Plan presents a strategy to guide municipal officials and other agencies in making decisions that will assure that the Region will continue to be an attractive place in which to live, work, and visit. This Comprehensive Plan is not an ordinance or regulation, but is a basis for establishing regulations and undertaking specific functional plans designed to implement the policies set forth within the plan. Each municipality retains the right to control zoning within its municipality, whether through individual zoning ordinances or a joint zoning ordinance.

Planning is an ongoing process and this Joint Comprehensive Plan must be continually reviewed in light of unforeseen changes in development trends, the state of the economy, capacity of public infrastructure, changes in community goals, and the appropriateness of the Plan's objectives, policies, and implementation program. It is recommended that the recommendations of this Plan be reviewed every 5 years.