

INTRODUCTION

THE VISION

The Western Berks area includes the boroughs of Robesonia and Womelsdorf, and the surrounding townships of Heidelberg, Marion and North Heidelberg. The Western Berks Joint Comprehensive Plan is a vision for the future of five unique rural and small town landscapes. The plan shows how residents can help preserve their area's character and environment by avoiding unplanned growth and accommodating only desirable changes in the area's current land use pattern.

Most growth in the Western Berks area should be in and around existing developed areas, including Robesonia Borough, Womelsdorf Borough and, to a lesser extent, the village of Stouchsburg. The extensive prime agricultural soils of Heidelberg, Marion and North Heidelberg townships should be reserved for farming. The vital environmental functions and limitations of steep slopes, woodlands, flood prone lands and other natural areas should be respected. Where new homes are constructed, they should be sited on the most physically suitable land. Open space should be preserved within new developments wherever feasible. Sewage treatment should be engineered to maintain public health and protect local water quality without encouraging sprawl.

The Western Berks area encourages new commerce and industry that is well planned, environmentally safe and located near existing infrastructure. Businesses along major roads such as Route 422 and Route 419, should use common entrances and exits to improve traffic safety, facilitate circulation and help prevent commercial strip development. In both residential and non-residential areas, people should exercise care in using and reusing historic structures. Commercial signs should complement, not detract from, the local environment, particularly in the area's most historic locations.

Working with local organizations, the five municipalities should continue to promote fire protection and emergency services. Education, recreation, and culture should remain priorities. The spirit of intermunicipal cooperation that led to this plan should be maintained and extended.

OTHER JOINT PLANNING INITIATIVES

Intermunicipal cooperation should also be extended beyond the borders of the Western Berks area. Nearby Jefferson Township and Bernville Borough have completed their own joint comprehensive plan. The adjacent municipalities of Lower Heidelberg, South Heidelberg and Wernersville are also nearing completion of a joint comprehensive plan. A joint meeting was held between the five Western Berks area municipalities and the three municipalities referenced above to discuss common issues and coordinate progress of the two comprehensive plans before they were completed. These and other regional planning initiatives are necessary to effectively deal with the area's growth and conservation issues, issues not confined by municipal borders.

THE PLAN

The Western Berks Joint Comprehensive Plan has three major parts:

- The Background Reports summarize existing conditions and trends in the area.
- The Plan For the Future contains the goals, recommendations and policies on future conservation and development in the five municipalities.
- The Action Program summarizes the actions these five municipalities can take to put the plan into practice.

The five municipalities will derive the most benefit from this plan if they follow it in the future. Local officials, business leaders and other residents should only support proposals for change that are consistent with the visions outlined above and that help carry out this plan.