

ACTION PROGRAM

The following table summarizes the major recommendations of this Plan. Certain items are recommended as high priorities. The timing of each recommendation is listed, as well as which agencies should have the primary responsibility to carry out the recommendations. Short-term timeframes typically are between two and four years and Long-term is about four to eight years respectively.

While all of these proposed actions are important for the continued vitality of the region it is of the utmost importance that all persons involved and/or interested in the future of the Southern Berks Region read and understand this document. Local decision-makers should keep this plan available when evaluating future development proposals, service adjustments or public investments.

NATURAL FEATURES AND AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION			
Recommended Action:	Responsible Parties	Time-frame	High Priority?
Continue to expand Agricultural Security Areas where applicable to make land eligible for agricultural easement purchase and to protect farmers against nuisance challenges.	Township Supervisors, PCs, Property-Owners	Ongoing	
Consider zoning provisions that preserve farmland and natural areas, particularly through promoting the optional transfer of density to more suitable lands.	Governing Bodies, PCs	Short-term	
In rural conservation areas, permit a range of activities that allow opportunities for supplemental income for farmers on large tracts of land.	Governing Bodies, PCs	Short-term	
To protect water quality and fish habitats, carefully enforce State regulations on erosion control through on-site inspections.	Governing Bodies, PCs, Property-Owners	Ongoing	
Minimize unnecessary removal of trees during construction, and make sure temporary fencing is used to avoid damage to tree trunks and root systems.	Governing Bodies, PCs, Property-Owners	Short-term	
Consider the adoption of strengthened subdivision and land development regulations to protect the Region's state-designated high-quality and exceptional value streams and watersheds.	Governing Bodies, PCs, Property-Owners	Short-term	
Require professional wetland studies whenever development is proposed in suspect areas and establish a 20 foot building setback around wetlands to avoid intrusions by construction equipment. Require a building paving setback from all creeks. A smaller width is appropriate in more urban areas, while a larger width should be required in rural areas.	Governing Bodies, PCs, Property-Owners, PennDOT	Ongoing	

Chapter 12 - Action Program

Recommended Action:	Responsible Parties	Time-frame	High Priority?
Require professional geologic studies to address sinkhole/subsidize hazards at the time any major new development is submitted for approval within areas with limestone geology within the region.	Governing Bodies, PCs, Property-Owners	Ongoing	
Continue to use mandatory dedication provisions in subdivision ordinances to require dedication of open space or payment of recreation fees as part of major new residential developments.	Governing Bodies, PCs, Property-Owners	Ongoing	
Minimize potential impacts to core habitat areas. Development activities should be extremely limited in areas of known core habitat.	Governing Bodies, PCs, Property-Owners	Short-term	X
<p>Protect important natural features, with a special emphasis upon the creeks, steep slopes and mature woods.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continually work to avoid and address stormwater problems. - Continue to limit development in flood-prone areas. - Work with neighboring municipalities, State agencies and volunteer organizations to preserve important natural areas. - Maintain and plant thick vegetation along streams to protect water quality and fishing habitats, including carrying out Best Management Practices 	Governing Bodies, PCs, ZHBs, Property-Owners, Adjacent Municipalities	Ongoing	X

COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES			
Recommended Action:	Responsible Parties	Time-frame	High Priority?
Continue to improve existing parks and playgrounds to meet a wide variety of recreational needs.	Governing Bodies, Municipal Parks and Recreation	Ongoing	
Protect and promote the Horseshoe and Thun/Schuylkill River Trails as part of the Region's open space system.	Governing Bodies, Municipal Parks and Recreation	Ongoing	

Recommended Action:	Responsible Parties	Time-frame	High Priority?
Emphasize high-quality police, emergency medical and fire protection services. Promote continued cooperation between providers, including those in adjacent municipalities.	Emergency Providers, Governing Bodies, Adjacent Municipalities	Ongoing	X
Continually explore ways to minimize local government expenses and increase revenues, including use of grants.	Governing Bodies, Municipal Staff	Ongoing	
Continue to provide excellent water and sewage services, with regular investments to provide reliable services.	Municipal Authorities and Water Companies	Ongoing	
Facilitate communication between the State police and the local policing agencies to ensure adequate and timely response should there be an emergency incident involving either of the school districts.	Governing Bodies, School Districts, Emergency Providers	Short-term	X

HISTORIC PRESERVATION			
Recommended Action:	Responsible Parties	Time-frame	High Priority?
Consider alternative ways to preserve important historic buildings, such as requiring special zoning approval by the governing body or zoning hearing board before demolition is allowed.	Governing Bodies, PCs, Historic Organizations	Long-term	
Seek cost-effective ways of preserving historic buildings, including providing information and advice to property owners. Promote greater interest in the region's history and historic buildings.	Municipal Staff, Historic Organizations	Ongoing	
Consider zoning incentives to promote the preservation of historic buildings. This could include allowing certain uses within restored historic buildings that otherwise would not be allowed in the zoning district. For example, a restored historic building in a residential district might be allowed to be used as an office or bed and breakfast inn.	Governing Bodies, PCs	Short-term	
Promote historic preservation tourism to utilize the abundant historic resources of the Region	Governing Bodies, Historic Organizations	Short-term	

Chapter 12 - Action Program

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT			
Recommended Action:	Responsible Parties	Time-frame	High Priority?
Update zoning ordinances to make sure that all desirable types of businesses are allowed in appropriate business zoning districts. Hold requirements for special zoning approvals to a reasonable minimum and minimize setbacks between adjacent businesses. These steps are important to promote economic development and a wider choice of employment opportunities.	Governing Bodies, PCs	Short-term	X
Utilize the County's Economic Development Web Mapping Tool to identify appropriate sites to locate industrial and commercial development.	Governing Bodies, PCs, EDs, BCIDA, BCPC	Short-term	
Market high priority sites for economic development initiatives.	Governing Bodies, PCs, EDs, BCIDA, BCPC	Short-term	X
Prioritize infrastructure improvements associated with sites that are identified as potential locations for industrial development.	Governing Bodies, PCs, EDs, BCIDA, BCPC	Short-term	X
Support entrepreneurship and small business development and partner with higher learning institutions and technical schools.	Governing Bodies, PCs, EDs, Local Colleges, School Districts, GRCCI	Short-term	
Strengthen business districts to maximize revenue, including pedestrian amenities and transportation systems. Support reuse of existing buildings and infill development.	Governing Bodies, PCs, EDs	Short-term	
Strengthen the quality and competitiveness of the Region's workforce. Partner with higher learning and workforce institutions.	Governing Bodies, PCs, Local Colleges, School districts	Short-term	
Position the Southern Berks Region as a destination Region. Partner with Convention and Visitors Bureau, Chamber, and arts organizations to promote arts, historical significance, culture, recreation and events.	Governing Bodies, PCs, GRCVB, Municipal Parks and Recreation	Short-term	

Recommended Action:	Responsible Parties	Time-frame	High Priority?
Cultivate and attract a skilled workforce by providing access to attainable and high quality housing options, well-maintained neighborhoods and amenities and ensuring high quality schools for families.	County Agencies, Job Training Organizations, School Districts, Local Colleges	Ongoing	X
The municipalities should strive to keep their planning and permitting processes current and streamlined, eliminating excessive or obsolete requirements, with fee structures for planning services and permitting that recover no more than the actual costs to conduct such programs and reviews,	Governing Bodies	Short-term	X

TRANSPORTATION			
Recommended Action:	Responsible Parties	Time-frame	High Priority?
Work with PennDOT to resolve traffic congestion bottlenecks and traffic safety problems. Seek funding through the 12 Year Plan to resolve traffic problems in the region.	Governing Bodies, PCs, PennDOT	Ongoing	X
Design residential streets (in new developments) to discourage use by through-traffic, limit truck traffic on residential streets where feasible, and improve major roads to relieve congestion so traffic will not be diverted to residential streets.	Governing Bodies, PCs	Ongoing	
Improve pedestrian and bicycle access and encourage greater use of public transit. Study the potential of expanded public transit service in the region.	Governing bodies, PCs, BARTA/SCTA	Ongoing	
Consider the development of a regional trail/ pedestrian/bicycle plan that provides guidance for an interconnected system of pedestrian improvements between the municipalities and to other regional trail and recreation systems.	Governing Bodies, PCs, Municipal Parks and Recreation	Long-term	

Chapter 12 - Action Program

Recommended Action:	Responsible Parties	Time-frame	High Priority?
Update, if necessary, each municipality's development regulations to carry out the Future Land Use Plan.	PCs, Governing Bodies	Short-term	
Adopt and/or enforce existing municipal property maintenance codes to avoid blighted and unsafe conditions.	Governing bodies	Short-term	X
Utilize the County's Blighted Property Review Committee to review and eliminate blighted residential properties from neighborhoods so that they can be redeveloped into usable housing.	Governing Bodies, BCRA, BCPC	Ongoing	
Help to link residents that are in need of assistance with the resources that are available, including housing rehabilitation and job training programs.	Municipal Staffs and Non-Profit Organizations	Short-term	
Work to increase home ownership, including expanding programs to help persons afford closing costs of home purchases.	Co. Agencies, Financial Institutions, PHFA	Ongoing	
Review and/or update zoning ordinances to make sure that all desirable types of businesses are allowed in appropriate business zoning districts. Hold requirements for special zoning approvals to a reasonable minimum and minimize setbacks between adjacent businesses. These steps are important to promote economic development and a wider choice of employment opportunities.	Governing Bodies, PCs	Short-term	X
Make sure that local regulations and permit processes are as streamlined as reasonable, to avoid unnecessary delays and higher housing costs. This is particularly important for routine changes to existing homes and for new and expanding employers.	Governing Bodies, PCs, ZHBs, Municipal Staffs	Short-term	
Use zoning regulations to direct most housing away from areas planned for rural conservation and important natural areas. Provide moderate densities on areas that can be served by existing public water and sewage services - to minimize the total amount of land consumed by development.	Twp. PCs, Property Owners, Co. Conservation District	Ongoing	

Recommended Action:	Responsible Parties	Time-frame	High Priority?
Place an emphasis on zoning provisions that preserve farmland and natural areas, particularly through “Open Space Development” that involves clustering of homes in return for permanent preservation of a substantial part of the tract in open space. In the townships, promote the optional transfer of development rights that allows the number of homes that would have been allowed on an outlying tract to be developed on a more suitable tract, in return for preservation of the outlying tract.	PCs, Property-Owners, Co. Conservation District	Ongoing	
Review and/or update zoning ordinances to make sure that excessive setbacks are not required for routine additions to homes and for decks and pools. These types of improvements should not be overly regulated in order to encourage residents to invest in older homes, instead of moving to new homes in outlying areas. This policy is particularly important because excessive setback requirements can cause an administrative burden upon property-owners and the municipalities.	Governing Bodies, PCs	Short-term	
Update zoning ordinances to carefully control the types and locations of intense business uses near neighborhoods. This particularly includes gas stations, 24-hour stores, adult uses and similar uses that may cause nuisances for neighboring homes.	Governing Bodies, PCs	Short-term	
Provide density incentives for housing developments that are permanently limited to occupancy by older persons.	Governing Bodies, PCs, ZHBs	Ongoing	
Work with adjacent municipalities to ensure that compatible land uses and road patterns are in place.	Governing Bodies, PCs	Short-term	
Emphasize code enforcement to avoid blight in neighborhoods.	Governing Bodies, PCs, Adj. Mun.	Short-term	
Use this plan as a guide to direct development, both in terms of location and type, where and how you want it to occur.	Governing Bodies, PCs	Ongoing	
The municipalities should periodically review the need to update this joint comprehensive plan. A typical timeframe for an update is 10 years but could be more depending on the needs of the municipality.	Governing Bodies, PCs	Long-term	

Chapter 12 - Action Program

Abbreviations of Responsible Agencies/Groups:

Governing Bodies = Borough Councils and Township Boards of Supervisors/Board of Commissioners

PC = Municipal Planning Commissions

ZHB = Zoning Hearing Boards

Adj. Mun. = Adjacent Municipalities

DA = Downtown Associations

EDs = Berks County Economic Development Organizations

BCPC = Berks County Planning Commission

PennDOT = Pennsylvania Department of Transportation

PHFA = Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency

PHMC = Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission

SCTA = South Central Transit Authority

BCRA = Berks County Redevelopment Authority

BCIDA = Berks County Industrial Development Authority

GRCVB = Greater Reading Convention and Visitors Bureau

The preceding tables plot an ambitious list of recommended activities. These tasks are vital if the Region is to optimally manage its growth and development and to plan and implement its “vision” for the future. The completion of many of these tasks should result in an improved quality of life within the Region.

Municipal officials are responsible to monitor and evaluate the implementation strategy aimed at achieving the locally-expressed objectives and resultant recommendations set forth in this Plan.

Cooperation among all administrative bodies and levels of government is an essential component to a streamlined and successful implementation strategy. The continued use of public participation is also a very important duty of municipal officials. If, for some reason, the recommendations of this Plan do not appear to address the current conditions, municipal officials should not hesitate to amend portions of this Plan or any other policy to rectify those deficiencies.

This Plan holds a wealth of information, which is easily obtainable and understood. Its implementation can be equally understood so that all residents, businesses and visitors know the Plan is vital, and that the future of the Region is deliberate, and the result of considerable analysis and public scrutiny.