

# I. INTRODUCTION

## A. Purpose of the Plan

Healthy, attractive and economically sound communities do not “just happen.” They are created through vision and foresight and grow, and change successfully with the same. Today, local governments are responsible for guiding growth and development within communities, for setting aside open spaces, and for delivering public services. Like any business, local governments need to chart the future so that they can assure the efficient use of resources. The preparation of a comprehensive plan provides a deliberate framework of information that can be used to make future decisions regarding local government functions. The Comprehensive Plan further provides a sound legal basis for specific implementing measures, such as zoning, subdivision regulations, and the Official Map designed to carry out the intent of the Comprehensive Plan. One definition of comprehensive planning is “the allocation of municipal resources towards municipal goals and objectives”; this definition describes the essence of this work.

The Eastern Berks County Regional Comprehensive Plan embodies a truly regional effort. The municipalities of District, and Rockland Townships and Topton Borough, as well as the Brandywine Heights Area School District, have come together to prepare a sound plan for the future growth and development of the Eastern Berks County Region. This regional cooperation has been enhanced by the involvement and of the Berks County Planning Commission in this process.

This Comprehensive Plan first sets forth a set of Community Planning Goals. These goals can include broad objectives, such as the provision of adequate housing and employment opportunities, the protection of the environment, and the provision of a balance of public services. They can also seek to correct existing or foreseeable deficiencies or problems, such as improving the design of a particular road intersection or reducing localized flooding through improved storm water management.

Next, this Plan inventories, maps and describes the Region's natural, man-made and human resources over several chapters. These resources include many features, such as land, streams, roads, utilities, parks, housing, schools, police and fire service, businesses, and so on. Analyses are performed within each of the Plan's chapters to determine whether these resources will be adequate to meet the desired future, recognizing that many goals can compete for the same resources. Then, each chapter makes specific recommendations to target resources to attain the local planning goals.

Next, the analyses of resources and recommendations are used together with the Community Planning Goals to develop a future land use scenario and a plan for the future delivery of public and other services. The period for this Comprehensive Plan is to the year 2025; all recommendations made within this Plan are structured around this period.

Finally, implementation strategies are discussed and recommended that will enable the Region's municipalities to set in motion the goals, objectives and recommendations identified in the Plan. In the end, any planning process is meaningless unless its recommendations find application as part of the Region's business—the protection of public welfare and the delivery of public services.

## **B. MPC Requirements**

Pennsylvania's Constitution gives the General Assembly the power to enact laws that protect the public health, safety and general welfare of its citizens. The General Assembly has given local municipalities' primary responsibility for community comprehensive planning. Municipalities in Pennsylvania are empowered by the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC), Act 247 of 1968, to prepare and adopt comprehensive plans according to specified requirements and procedures. Revisions to the MPC made by Act 170 of 1988 expanded the subject matter and goals of comprehensive planning to enable municipalities to manage growth more effectively, and to provide greater protection for environmentally sensitive lands and important historic and cultural sites. Furthermore, Act 170 also requires that all counties in Pennsylvania prepare and adopt comprehensive plans and that municipal plans be generally consistent with the adopted county plans. Municipalities are also empowered by this Act to carry out joint planning with one another. Finally, the Act 67/68 of 2000 amendments to the MPC specifically enables municipalities to work together and develop regional plans for the allocation of growth and development, along with the delivery of public facilities and services.

These MPC standards are the foundation upon which the Comprehensive Plan for the Eastern Berks County Region is built. This Plan, therefore, is born not only out of a belief that sound planning is the key to a healthy, attractive and economically sound community, but also out of a respect and regard for the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

## **C. How To Use This Plan**

This Comprehensive Plan is designed to serve several important purposes. Principally, the Plan is intended to share with Eastern Berks County residents a vision for the Region's future. Secondly, it is designed to assist the Region in the administration of land use planning programs. A detailed table of contents appears at the beginning of the text that provides quick reference to the appropriate sections of the Plan. ***Action-oriented recommendations within each of the Plan's chapters are printed in bold, italicized letters so that the decision-maker's attention is immediately drawn to them.*** Many of these recommendations tie in to specific implementation strategies discussed in the final Plan chapter.

The numerous maps within the Plan have been carefully prepared so that the information can be easily visualized and meaningful. Related features are composited together so that the reader gains a better understanding of their connection. The many analyses utilized throughout the study are intended to maximize the utility of the findings. Step-by-step descriptions of these methodologies are furnished to enable the reader to gain a better understanding of the issues and their planning implications. All of these features will aid local decision-makers in their evaluation of future planning proposals. Data used to compile the maps in this Plan was largely furnished by the Berks County Planning Commission as part of its County-wide Geographic Information System (GIS). Therefore, the data is readily consistent with the County's database and new layers of data created by this Plan are similarly compatible with the County's system.

An additional important function of this Plan is its collection of important information. The term *Comprehensive Plan* accurately describes the composition of this report; its contents are quite comprehensive. Accordingly, the Plan provides convenient access to a wealth of up-to-date information concerning the Region's resources. This information will serve not only local officials, but also service agencies, property owners, residents, business leaders, and prospective developers. The inventories of existing conditions will also provide the groundwork upon which

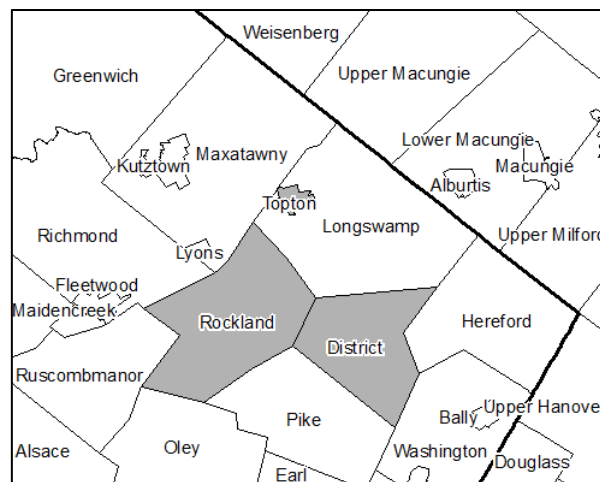
future Plan updates can be more easily accomplished.

Finally, the Plan provides a future land use scenario that can be useful to many landowners. For example, residents can get an idea of the land uses that are projected around their homes. Prospective developers can use the Plan to package development proposals that conform to the regional and municipal goals, thereby ensuring a smooth development review process. Business leaders can glean a sense of secure investment climate from the Region's future land use scenario. In all, the Plan considers many competing interests and devises a strategy to assure their relative harmonious coexistence. It is hoped that the Plan will become a powerful and practical tool in local decision-making.

***It is important for all persons involved and/or interested in the future of the Eastern Berks County Region to read and understand this Plan. Local decision-makers should keep the Plan handy when evaluating future development proposals, service adjustments or public investments.***

## **D. Regional Setting**

As mentioned previously, the Eastern Berks County Region is composed of District and Rockland Townships and Topton Borough, as well as the Brandywine Heights Area School District. The Region is situated in the northeastern portion of Berks County in southeastern Pennsylvania, approximately 10 miles northeast of the City of Reading, which serves as the County seat of government and is the County's major urban area. The Eastern Berks County Region contains a total of 29.38 square miles. The Region is within Berks County and it is within commuting distance of the Allentown/Bethlehem metropolitan area. Furthermore, the Region also has convenient access to nearby urban destinations that can influence its economy and development pattern.



The Region abuts Longswamp and Maxatawny Townships to the northeast; Hereford and Washington Townships to the southeast; Pike, Oley and Ruscombmanor Townships to the southwest; and Richmond and Maxatawny Townships to the northwest. Topton Borough is surrounded by Longswamp and Maxatawny Townships. The Region's three municipalities are in the Brandywine School District. The Region's rugged character has historically impeded the construction of primary transportation corridors. However, the Region is generally encircled by major roads that lie just a few miles beyond its periphery. US Route 222 runs just north of the Region and provides ready access to Allentown, Reading and Lancaster Cities. PA Route 100

runs a few miles to the east of the Region between Allentown, Pottstown and Philadelphia to the south. PA Route 73 generally parallels the Region's southwestern boundary between Boyertown and Maiden creek. Locally, Pricetown Road provides the most direct connection between the Region and the City of Reading.