

This section describes methods that should be considered to implement this Plan.

## GOAL

*Promote substantial citizen input, including making sure residents are well-informed about community issues and encouraging volunteer efforts to improve the community.*

The volunteer efforts of neighborhood and civic organizations and individuals are essential to further improve the region and to carry out this Plan. The objective is to strengthen community pride and emphasize volunteer efforts for residents and property-owners to improve their surroundings.

If a municipality does not have a dedicated website then consideration should be given to developing one. The websites of each municipality should be regularly updated with information that will help spur public interest, enthusiasm and involvement. This should include information on recreation programs, special events and agendas for upcoming municipal meetings. Opportunities for citizen involvement should also be highlighted through the newspaper, social media platforms, municipal newsletters and other media.

## GOAL

*Continually work to put this Plan into action - through a program of updated planning and many short-term actions within a long-range perspective.*

Planning is an on-going process. The Comprehensive Plan should be implemented through a continuous process of follow-up planning and action. The most immediate action should be updating, as needed, each municipality's development regulations.

To be effective, community development efforts need wide participation. A close working relationship is needed with Federal, State and County agencies and adjacent municipalities.

This Comprehensive Plan should be consistently used as an overall guide for land use and transportation decisions. In addition, the Plan needs to be reviewed periodically and, if necessary, updated to reflect changing trends.

*It is essential to keep citizens informed and provide opportunities for meaningful citizen input, while making use of new technologies for communication.*

*Maximize communications, coordination and cooperative efforts between the municipalities, the Hamburg Area School District, adjacent municipalities, the County and other agencies and organizations.*

*The municipalities cannot implement this Comprehensive Plan alone. Involvement is needed by residents, neighborhood organizations, civic groups, businesses, institutions, property-owners and many other groups.*

## Use a Full Set of Tools to Implement this Plan

This Comprehensive Plan establishes overall policies for guiding the future development and conservation of the Northern Berks region. However, this Plan is not a regulation. The following major tools are available to help implement this Plan:

- Municipal Zoning Ordinances
- Municipal Subdivision and Land Development Ordinances
- Construction Codes
- Existing Property Maintenance Code
- Official Map
- Explore LERTA areas (Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance)
- Computerized (GIS) mapping
- Capital Improvements Planning
- The municipality's annual spending, and
- Seeking Federal, State, County and Non-Profit Organization grant funds to accomplish important projects

### Zoning Ordinance

The municipalities' Zoning Ordinances are the primary legal tool to regulate the uses of land and buildings. Each Zoning Ordinance includes a Zoning Map that divides the municipality into different zoning districts. Each district permits a set of activities and establishes a maximum density of development. Each Zoning Ordinance and Map should be updated as needed to be generally consistent with this Comprehensive Plan, to modernize standards and to address local concerns. Building trends and uses change over time so it is important to make sure that the zoning ordinance reflects these changes and accommodates new trends in development.

In addition to regulating land uses and densities, zoning also controls the following:

- heights of buildings
- building types permitted
- percentage of a lot that may be covered by buildings and paving
- minimum distances that buildings may be placed from streets and property lines
- minimum size of lots
- maximum sizes and heights of signs
- protection of important natural features

### Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance

Each municipality is regulated by a Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance (SALDO). These Ordinances mainly regulate the creation of new lots, the construction of new streets by developers, and the site engineering of new commercial, industrial and institutional buildings.

#### GOAL

*Update municipal development regulations to carry out this Plan, and periodically update the Plan and regulations as needed.*

### Construction Codes

State law requires that a full set of modern construction codes be enforced within all municipalities. The State is using the International Construction Codes, which were prepared by a national organization. These codes are particularly important to minimize fire hazards. The construction codes include provisions allowing modifications of the codes to spur renovations of historic buildings. As noted in the Historic Preservation Plan section, a well-qualified appeals board is important to address these types of modifications.

### **Existing Property Maintenance Codes**

Each municipality should adopt and/or enforce an Existing Property Maintenance Code to control blight. This standard code is used throughout much of the nation and sets basic standards for existing buildings, as opposed to new construction.

### **Official Map**

The State Municipalities Planning Code grants municipalities the authority to adopt an “Official Map.” An Official Map can designate proposed locations of new streets, street widenings, intersection improvements, municipal uses and parks. The Map may cover an entire municipality, or only certain areas. This process may be particularly useful, for example, to reserve right-of-way for a future street widening.

Once an Official Map is officially adopted by the governing body, then the municipality is provided with a limited amount of authority to reserve land for the projects on the map. If the land affected by the proposed project is proposed for development, then the municipality would have one year to either purchase the land for its fair market value or decide not to go forward with the project. This one-year period is intended to provide time to raise funds to acquire the land, and avoid lost opportunities. If this one-year period is not in effect, a person could obtain a building permit almost immediately in many cases and construct a building that could obstruct an important project. An Official Map also serves to provide notice to property-owners about the municipality’s future plans.

### **LERTA**

Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance allows taxing authorities to exempt new construction and improvements to a commercial, industrial, and/or business property if such property is located in a deteriorated area. In order for a LERTA to apply to a property, each taxing authority (County, Municipal and School District) must by ordinance or resolution, exempt from real estate property taxes, the assessed value of the improvements to deteriorated properties and the assessed value of new construction within the designated areas.

Typically, the exemption schedule is not to exceed ten years and shall specify the portion of the improvements to be exempted each year. Savings would be realized on a sliding scale beginning with 100% in year one and decreasing annually 10% until the tenth year.

The County has adopted a resolution that enables any municipality in Berks County to enact a LERTA provided the location that the proposed LERTA area is located within a Future Growth Area as identified in the Berks County Comprehensive Plan.

### **Computerized Mapping (GIS)**

The County, and some municipalities, operate modern computerized mapping “Geographic Information Systems (“GIS”). These systems have been used for the maps in the Plan as well as doing the Future Land Use analysis. Increased efforts are needed to fully integrate this system with operations of municipal agencies. For example, regular mapping of traffic accident locations can be helpful to identify hazardous conditions that need to be resolved, such as sight distance problems. Berks County has a robust GIS system and has made much of the mapping available to municipalities and other agencies for their use provided they enter into a sharing agreement with the County.

### **Capital Improvements Planning**

Each municipality should have a system in place to continually plan and budget for major capital expenditures. “Capital” improvements are projects involving a substantial expense for the construction or improvement of major public facilities that have a long lifespan and that are not annual operating expenses. Examples of capital projects include major street improvements, acquisition of parkland, major storm sewer construction projects and new bridges.

A municipal Capital Improvements Program (CIP) can help identify projects that will be needed, prioritize the projects, identify possible funding sources and then budget for their completion. A typical CIP looks five years in the future. A CIP should identify major street reconstruction projects that will be needed over the next few years, which can help coordinate the reconstruction with underground construction projects by various utilities. This avoids the need to cut into a street after it has been recently repaved. Through a CIP, many different projects can be combined into a single bond issue, which avoids the high administrative costs of multiple bond issues. A CIP also can allow a municipality to carefully time any bond issues to take advantage of the lowest interest rates.

## Other Implementation Tools

Many other tools are available to carry out the Comprehensive Plan, including the following:

- priorities decided as part of each municipality's annual budget, and the annual setting of tax rates, which affect decisions of businesses and residents on whether to remain or move into a municipality, and
- aggressively seeking Federal, State and County grants to reduce the burden upon local taxpayers.

### GOAL

*Maximize communications, coordination and cooperative efforts between the municipalities, the Hamburg Area School District, adjacent municipalities, the County and other agencies and organizations.*

This Plan helps to establish a framework for further cooperative ventures among the municipalities in the Northern Berks region, and between municipalities and the County. Intergovernmental cooperation can not only decrease the costs of many services, it can also improve the quality of services. The Pennsylvania Intergovernmental Cooperation Act provides broad and flexible authority to organize joint efforts as municipalities deem appropriate. In most cases, the Act promotes the use of ordinances that are adopted by each municipality to formalize an agreement. One option involves one municipality providing a service to a second municipality through a contract. It should be noted that one of the toughest issues involving joint municipal services is determining a fair allocation of costs. Because of this, the State Department of Community and Economic Development has several publications that can assist in these issues.

These same concepts can also apply between a municipality and a school district. For example, a municipality may agree to plow snow from school parking lots and driveways in return for free municipal use of some school facilities.

A State law also provides that State agencies must treat a Council of Governments (COGs) in the same manner as a municipality in any funding program.

The following types of alternatives should be considered to promote inter-governmental cooperation:

- **Shared Services and Shared Staff-persons** - Shared staff-persons can be particularly beneficial for specialized staff, such as different types of construction inspectors, codes enforcement personnel or zoning officers. Two or more municipalities could hire the same person to do the same job, with so many hours assigned to each municipality. This allows each municipality to hire a highly qualified person who is working full-time, as opposed to each trying to find a part-time person. This can reduce turnover, which reduces training costs and reduces the potential for mistakes being made by inexperienced staff. In addition, sharing staff makes staff-persons available during more hours of the day, which is beneficial to residents and business-persons. It also provides greater coverage during periods of illness or vacation.

Some municipalities also have a joint application and testing programs for police officer applicants, which reduces costs and results in a larger pool of applicants.

- **Shared Consulting Staff** - There are also great efficiencies when adjacent municipalities choose the same consultants, such as municipal engineers, sewage engineers or solicitors. This promotes good communications between municipal governments. It also reduces the costs of having different professionals having to become educated about complex issues and having to spend time meeting with consultants of other municipalities to share information.
- **Shared Recreation Programs** - When municipalities share and coordinate recreation programs, it greatly increases the types of programs that can be offered. For example, one municipality may offer a soccer program, while another municipality offers basketball programs, with residents of each municipality being allowed to participate in each at the same cost per person. There has been great success in parts of Pennsylvania with multi-municipal recreation programs, where each municipality contributes funds towards one set of programs. These programs are often organized in partnership with a school district.
- **Joint Yard Waste Collection and Composting** - This is a very cost-effective way of handling the disposal of yard waste, which requires significant land and expensive equipment.
- **Snowplowing** - There may be cases where two municipalities must each send out a snowplow to clear different segments of the same street. It may be beneficial to trade responsibility for different street segments, so that a single snowplow can be used to clear the entire length of a street.
- **Joint Purchasing** - Joint purchasing can reduce the costs to each municipality of preparing bid documents and legal ads. It also can result in lower costs because larger volumes are being purchased. This process is particularly useful for annual purchases of standardized materials, such as road salt. The State also has arrangements that allow municipalities to “piggyback” upon State purchases. State law allows a similar process of “piggyback” bids between municipalities and a County. The State Intergovernmental Cooperation Act includes rules for joint municipal purchasing. Under State law, one municipality can be the lead municipality in purchases, without requiring multiple municipalities to seek bids. Municipalities can also join together to jointly purchase insurance, to hire traffic signal maintenance services, or to jointly contract for solid waste collection. Joint auctions can also be used to sell surplus vehicles and equipment.
- **Sharing of Equipment** - This sharing is most beneficial for expensive equipment that is needed by each municipality for only portions of the year, such as paving, rolling or grading equipment. The equipment could be jointly owned, or be owned by one municipality and leased to other municipalities. Or an arrangement could allow trading of equipment.
- **Joint Tax Collection** - The Local Tax Enabling Act allows municipalities and the school districts to contract with each other to have one office jointly collect local taxes.
- **Councils of Governments (COGs)** - A COG can provide municipal services if authorized by municipalities. For example, some COGs take care of code enforcement. Other COGs primarily serve to promote good communications between municipal officials, to study issues, and to lobby for State or Federal funding for projects.
- **Joint Authorities** - Municipalities can create formal joint municipal authorities to address many types of matters.
- **Joint Planning Commissions** - Municipalities can appoint joint planning commissions. These joint commissions could serve in place of municipal planning commissions, or in addition to them.
- **Cooperation Between or Merger of Fire Companies** - Consideration should be given to promoting additional cooperation between or merger of fire companies, including one or more fire companies in neighboring municipalities. Merger or cooperation are particularly beneficial to make the best use of extremely expensive fire apparatus, such as rescue trucks, hazardous materials equipment, tanker trucks and aerial ladder trucks. Merger or cooperation are also important to make the best use of the limited

number of volunteers.

- **Joint Police Forces** - A joint police force involves two or more municipalities establishing one police force that is directed by commission members appointed by each municipality. Another option is to have one municipality contract for police services from a second municipality, which then manages the force. A joint police force makes it easier to provide 24-hour service and specialized services, such as for investigations and youth. A joint police force can result in increased training and professionalism, which can reduce liability costs. A joint force also makes it easier to investigate crime that crosses municipal borders.
- **Incentives for Intergovernmental Cooperation in Grants** - Many competitive State grant programs provide preference to projects that involve cooperation between more than one municipality. Therefore, if two similar projects are in competition for a grant, and one involves cooperation between two municipalities, the two-municipality project is most likely to be funded.

### Role of the Joint Planning Committee

The Joint Planning Committee has played an active role in developing and implementing this Joint Comprehensive Plan update. The Committee should continue to meet quarterly to promote the implementation of this plan and address regional issues. If the committee cannot meet quarterly they should meet at least once a year to review this plan and discuss projects of regional concern or significance. The vision is that these meetings serve as informal information sharing and discussions on issues of regional significance.

As with any committee, members will come and go over time. It is imperative that the region municipalities be proactive in securing membership for the joint planning committee. Participation in a joint planning committee is voluntary but members should be appointed by the governing bodies of the member municipalities. The specific structure of the committee is up to the members to decide. Committee members will need to decide who is responsible for chairing/leading meetings and documentation of topics of discussions.

### Role of the Municipal Planning Commissions

Some of the greatest responsibilities of each Planning Commission are to oversee the preparation and implementation of the Comprehensive Plan and the preparation of Zoning and Subdivision Ordinance revisions. On a monthly basis, the Planning Commission also reviews proposed developments. The Planning Commission also has a role in reviewing proposals of other government agencies.

### Role of the Board of Supervisors and Borough Councils

The final decision on nearly all matters affecting the growth and preservation of each municipality rests with its Borough Council or Board of Supervisors. Therefore, close communications and cooperation between the Planning Commissions, the municipal staff, and the elected officials will be essential in continuing to improve the quality of life in the Northern Berks region.