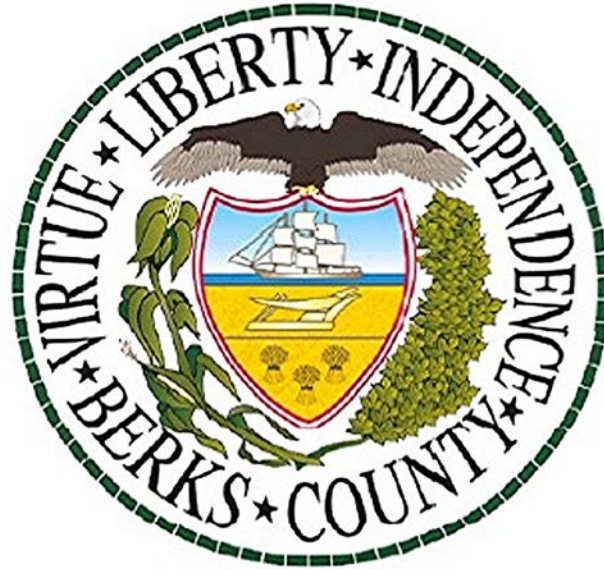


Chapter 12 - Plan Interrelationships



STATEMENT REGARDING IMPROVEMENT OF PLANNING, IMPLEMENTATION PROCEDURES, AND GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY.....	237
STATEMENT REGARDING PLAN INTERRELATIONSHIP	238
STATEMENT REGARDING PLAN IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES	240
STATEMENT REGARDING PLAN RELATIONSHIP TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF ADJACENT MUNICIPALITIES.....	240
CONCLUSION	240

PLAN INTERRELATIONSHIPS**A. Statement Regarding Improvement of Planning, Implementation Procedures, and Government Efficiency**

Prior sections of this Plan offered recommendations and suggestions to be accomplished within the existing growth management framework. Those proposals comply with and are limited by the current legal and financial mechanisms authorized within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. This section recommends legislative initiatives and other actions that include changing certain governmental priorities, procedures, and operations to further assist with implementation of this Plan. The recommended actions are intended to supplement recommendations contained elsewhere within this Plan and should not be construed as the only recommended activities for the specified level of government. However, the recommendations listed below are considered of such significance as to warrant special mention.

Federal Actions

- (1) Provide the financial resources to fund community development and environmental protection in a flexible manner to permit the county and its local municipalities the opportunity to implement developmental goals and improve environmental quality in accordance with area wide goals and objectives.

State Actions

- (1) The Commonwealth should ensure that the activities of all state agencies are consistent with county plans. Efforts to link funding proposals and permitting to county plan consistency should continue.
- (2) The Commonwealth should allocate funds for the development of local plans, regulations and municipal training.
- (3) Once municipalities have formulated effective local plans, the state should provide adequate funds and/or the tools to locally finance plan implementation. The Commonwealth should ensure that municipalities with up-to-date plans and controls are not subjected to problems due to either inadequate state funding or the absence of legislation authorizing local methods to finance the construction or expansion of infrastructure concurrent with development pressure. Furthermore, municipalities with current and effective planning should receive priority consideration for state infrastructure and improvement funding. This would also serve as an incentive for municipalities to undertake and update local plans. The state should create a technical and financial assistance program similar to what was previously known as the Land Use Planning and Technical Assistance Program (LUPTAP).
- (4) The Commonwealth should explore mechanisms to provide a more equitable revenue structure for counties. County government is continually burdened by additional responsibilities without concurrent increase in state funds or the authority to adopt flexible revenue options.

County Actions

- (1) The county will continue to participate in multi-county planning processes for matters of regional importance, as well as expand and improve our contacts and communications with other counties.
- (2) The county will employ the mandated and optional review processes to advance projects that comply with the Comprehensive Plan and disapprove projects that promote needless duplication of efforts or are inconsistent with the Plan. Throughout these reviews, the Berks County Planning Commission will consider regional solutions as a stated priority.
- (3) The Planning Commission will continue to monitor and review local municipal plans and development regulations for consistency with the *County Comprehensive Plan*. The Commission should explore additional methods for increasing the effectiveness of reviews and local consistency with the Comprehensive Plan.
- (4) The county will continue technical assistance to municipalities regarding the formulation of local plans and regulations.

Chapter 12 - Plan Interrelationships

- (5) The county will condition receiving County-controlled funds upon the consistency of the intended project with the Comprehensive Plan.
- (6) The county will continue to work with the Center for Excellence in Community Leadership's Local Government Program to administer the Commission's Master Planner and Advanced Master Planner Program.
- (7) The county will support actions that improve the efficiency and cost effectiveness of local government including offering incentives for municipal mergers and consolidation of municipal authorities.
- (8) The county will work with local governments to develop and implement new programs that take advantage of joint municipal plans in Berks County.

Regional Cooperative Actions

- (1) The county will assist municipalities that have adopted joint comprehensive plans and wish to explore using the tools and opportunities contained in Article XI of the Municipalities Planning Code; specifically the formulation of implementing agreements, sharing of revenues and fees within a region, transfer of development rights programs, and the adoption of Specific Plans as referenced in Section 1106.
- (2) The county will assist municipalities and authorities that wish to explore consolidation or merger of sewer and water facilities in a manner consistent with this Plan.

Local Government Actions

- (1) Foster and participate in multi-municipal activities. Municipalities should engage in joint municipal plans consistent with the Municipalities Planning Code.
- (2) Develop, maintain, and revise specialized plans and functional plans consistent with the Berks County Plan.
- (3) Develop and maintain municipal zoning, subdivision, planned residential development and other land use ordinances that reflect innovative growth management techniques that are result oriented.
- (4) Adopt and enforce building, housing, electrical, and fire prevention codes consistent with the Uniform Construction Code.
- (5) In accordance with the Environmental Advisory Council Law of 1973, establish an Environmental Advisory Council (EAC) to assist and advise the municipal planning commission and governing body regarding local environmental problems, conservation and community environmental programs, and to maintain data regarding open space and other unique features.
- (6) Develop equitable and documented fee structures and schedules for planning related procedures, permits, hookups, and other community services.
- (7) Seek interested and qualified individuals to serve on local planning commissions, zoning hearing boards, and environmental advisory councils. Governing bodies should publicly advertise and conduct interviews to select the most qualified individuals. Also, the governing body should allocate funds for the training of local officials.

B. Statement Regarding Plan Interrelationship

Section 301(a)(4.1) of the Municipalities Planning Code (Act of 1968, P.L.805, No. 247 as reenacted and amended), specifies that comprehensive plans must include a discussion of "the interrelationships among the various plan components, which may include an estimate of the environmental, energy conservation, fiscal, economic development and social consequences on the municipality." This clause is intended to ensure that the various components of the Plan are integrated and not in conflict with the primary community goals and objectives. Furthermore, this section requires that the Plan consider the impacts each component has upon the other so that the consequences of future decisions are known.

As a precursor to drafting the detailed recommendations of this Plan, the Planning Commission formulated and approved general goals and policies as a statement of community development objectives. The goals and objectives resulted from

the Planning Commission's prior plan, public input and staff recommendations. Each of the policies relates directly to its own general goal. Designing a county comprehensive plan is a difficult undertaking simply because the plan must offer recommendations concerning a variety of seemingly disparate and perhaps conflicting topics. The comprehensive plan is expected to encourage growth, while at the same time preserving large areas of the county.

During preparation of the Plan, each element was drafted and reviewed for compliance with all of the general goals and objectives. In this way, technical inconsistencies were eliminated and conflicts in policy were minimized. Similarly, each element of the Plan acts to support other elements. For example, the Community Facilities Plan recommends the expansion or construction of public sewer and water systems in certain areas that are designated by the Land Use Plan. As another example, the Transportation Plan, while recognizing the need to improve regional circulation and access through the construction of new limited-access highways, does not recommend interchanges to local access roads within agricultural or environmentally sensitive areas. The Planning Commission believes that the principle of integration was followed to the greatest extent possible throughout this Plan. However, due to compelling needs, in a limited number of cases the Planning Commission was required to select recommendations that did not entirely comply with other sections of the Plan. These are summarized as follows:

- (1) To achieve a compact future growth pattern, promote in-fill development, and resolve illogical existing development patterns. The Planning Commission designated certain existing farmland, including some operations with prime agricultural soils, as suitable for future growth.
- (2) Certain proposed new highways, in addition to the upgrading or relocation of certain existing highways, cannot avoid consuming some farmland, including farmland with prime agricultural soils. The regional importance of these highway projects, along with the tremendous costs of re-routing to avoid farmland, outweighs the need to preserve small areas of farmland. The highways will be designed to minimize the loss of agricultural land.
- (3) This Plan designates a large percentage of the total county land area for preservation, conservation and low density uses. Accordingly, the total amount of land available for development, although deemed more than adequate by this commission, will be less than the currently available acreage. As such, the price of land designated for future development could increase at a rate exceeding the current level. Although this occurrence would impact all residents, new homebuyers and new residents would be the most severely impacted. The Planning Commission assumes that the long-term economic benefits of compact urban and suburban development, along with the protection of environmental sensitive land, are worth the adjustment.
- (4) Throughout this Plan, the commission has offered recommendations regarding the need for multi-municipal action and increasing the direct and indirect actions of the county to control land use. It is important that the unique needs of each community remain part of the planning process.
- (5) Various Plan recommendations request the county and local municipalities to assume new responsibilities. The commission knows that the additional responsibilities will require additional funds at a time when the revenue ability of local government is strained. Furthermore, the benefits of the suggested new programs may seem intangible or realized only after many years. However, the commission assumes that the long-term benefits of these programs outweigh immediate funding problems.
- (6) Throughout the Land Use Plan, municipalities and authorities are requested to expand service into adjacent areas to achieve a compact land use pattern and avoid the expense of building new facilities elsewhere. Many of these authorities serve a defined geographic or municipal area. The commission is in effect requesting that they voluntarily become regional facilities. The commission is aware of the risks it is asking the municipalities and authorities to assume. However, the Land Use Plan can only be achieved by more efficiently using our existing facilities.

Finally, the Planning Commission is aware of gaps in this Plan that must be filled during the coming years. Detailed proposals regarding open space and recreation, historic preservation, and planning tools must be undertaken as soon as possible. It is assumed that this Plan provides a sound regional framework for the development of these future plans.

Chapter 12 - Plan Interrelationships

C. Statement Regarding Plan Implementation Strategies

Section 301(a)(4.2) requires that every Comprehensive Plan include a “discussion of short- and long-range plan implementation strategies, which may include implications for capital improvements programming, new or updated development regulations, and identification of public funds potentially available.” The intent of this clause is to encourage the formation of guidelines and recommendations for the manner in which the Plan’s objectives are to be most effectively implemented.

Each component of this Plan contains a section on policies and implementation strategies. It is, therefore, not necessary to reiterate the commission’s recommendations regarding implementation. However, since so much depends upon the willingness of municipalities to incorporate the recommendation contained within the Plan, the commission must improve and expand its municipal programs for technical assistance regarding the development of local plans and ordinances.

D. Statement Regarding Plan Relationship to the Development of Adjacent Municipalities

Section 301(a)(5) of the Municipalities Planning Code requires that the Comprehensive Plan consider “the relationship of the existing and proposed development of the municipality to the existing and proposed development and plan in contiguous municipalities, to the objectives and plans for development in the county of which it is a part, and to regional trends.” The intent of this section is to ensure that all plans give consideration to the existing development and proposed development patterns of municipalities located within the County and the situations of adjacent counties.

During the course of preparing this Plan, local comprehensive land use plans and zoning ordinances for each municipality in Berks County were mapped. Similarly, all public sewer and water lines, and Act 537 plan future proposals for each municipality were mapped. The commission considered each of these factors during the initial design of the Draft County Future Land Use Plan. The local regulatory information was most important in regard to identifying areas that were zoned for agricultural preservation (exclusive large-lot or sliding- scale zoning) and high-density development. The development trends of areas bordering Berks County along U.S. 422, U.S. 222, and I-78 were of particular concern. The future land use plans for each adjacent county were mapped. Additionally, those plans were reviewed for background regarding development trends. The Land Use Chapter provides further information regarding existing land use and development trends within the county in addition to the Existing Land Use Map.

The draft Future Land Use Map was compared to local development regulations in order to identify areas of conflict. Meetings were held for each region where planning commission and governing body members could inquire about any conflicts or issues that needed to be addressed. The draft Plan was edited to resolve as many conflicts as possible between the County Future Land Use Map and the development regulations within each municipality and adjacent counties. In this way, the county hopes to guarantee the maximum level of plan consistency among townships, boroughs, the City of Reading and neighboring counties.

E. Conclusion

Regional planning is a shared venture involving not only the county and its local communities but also private citizens, organizations, and business interests. It remains the responsibility of these citizens and groups to participate and cooperate in carrying out this Plan and to continue the area wide planning process. In the past few years the Berks County Comprehensive Plan has enjoyed significant support and buy-in from local governments and civic groups. It has served as a rallying point for many environmental and economic development interests. We have been successful in implementing the plan through our joint comprehensive planning program and it is very important that we continue to build relationships with local communities and organizations throughout Berks County.

Although the economic recession that was experienced a couple of years ago has mainly ebbed many of the resources that we relied upon to fund regional and local plans have been eliminated or drastically reduced. We do not expect these resources to be available in the near future. Therefore, it is critical that we cooperate to find new efficiencies and processes to continue our planning programs, methods and training.

Quite often regional plans are predicated on new infrastructure for sewer, water, highways and passenger rail. However, funding for infrastructure expansion is similarly reduced. We can no longer depend upon regional projects to implement our ideas. In fact, funding maintenance of our existing infrastructure is now problematic. Municipalities will be tempted

Chapter 12 - Plan Interrelationships

to defer rehabilitation and repairs. Development patterns that make use of existing infrastructure and minimize future costs must become a central part of our planning philosophy.

Regional cooperation, joint planning, and service sharing will be more important than ever. Berks County, municipalities, and the private sector must work together to solve the challenges of providing services with limited resources. We believe that this Plan serves as a blueprint for continuing to move Berks County forward.