

Chapter 9 - Intergovernmental Cooperation/Participation



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Intergovernmental Cooperation/Participation

A. Overview

In 1997, the Berks County Board of Commissioners established an Intergovernmental Cooperation Policy for the County. This policy reflects the growing interest in initiatives that allow municipalities with limited resources to work together to provide programs and services as efficiently and inexpensively as possible. This policy is the primary way of implementing the goals of this Plan through cooperation, partnerships, coordination, and intergovernmental initiatives.

B. Partnerships and Coordination

As costs increase, municipalities are finding it difficult to provide the same levels of public services to their growing population. Municipalities are also finding that there are many opportunities for them to explore methods of delivering services and administering programs, at less cost to the taxpayer. Coordination of efforts, between municipalities, authorities, the County of Berks and others accomplish this goal. Entering into partnerships with other municipalities, emergency service providers, or the private sector may be the only way that municipal governments can provide these services and remain financially secure.

There are many ways that municipalities can work together to provide better services and potentially save money. Sharing of equipment, resources, information, or even staff can go a long way when municipal budgets are stretched to their limits. Besides the budgetary savings, the sharing of information and equipment can also improve public safety and welfare through more efficient law enforcement, emergency and fire protection services, and infrastructure repair and maintenance.

C. Inter-municipal Initiatives

Many issues local municipalities deal with are regional in nature, such as planning and zoning, sewer and water provisions, agricultural preservation, and transportation. Neighboring municipalities frequently face the same problems, but do not realize it. The passage of Act 67 encourages municipalities to participate in multi-municipal planning. Joint planning efforts between municipalities can identify and eliminate any duplication of effort, and may create cost-effective solutions to local planning issues.

Berks County established the Joint Planning Program in 1992. Since that time, sixty municipalities have cooperated, successfully, to complete 18 joint comprehensive plans. The success of this program led to the establishment of the Joint Zoning Program in 1997. Currently, there are 14 municipalities that are part of 5 joint zoning ordinances. In order to continue the momentum of this award winning, popular program and help municipalities to update and implement their joint comprehensive plans, the Berks County Planning Commission is establishing the Municipal Planning Program. Figure 9.1 depicts the municipalities that currently have Joint Comprehensive Plans.

The overall goal of the Municipal Planning Program is to continue the positive regional cooperative efforts of the previous programs, and also; continue to ensure the quality of local joint comprehensive plans; continue existing and encourage new regional cooperative efforts; ensure consistency of local planning documents and the Berks County Comprehensive Plan

while continuing to build a greater dialogue between the County and municipalities during the planning process. The County has also completed an update to the *Sewer and Water Regionalization Study* that explores potential regional solutions to sewer and water and infrastructure maintenance, as well as encourage the creation of a countywide organization that will help sewer and water providers share information and ideas.

In addition, the County has undertaken other inter-municipal initiatives involving law enforcement, fire training, communications, municipal mergers and other emergency service related programs. The Planning Commission staff also coordinated a countywide approach to meeting the requirements for the recent Uniform Construction Codes Board of Appeals. This coordination involves contacting each municipality annually to verify participation and collection of a nominal yearly fee for the costs of coordination. The cost of an appeal is paid for by the requesting applicant. Out of the 73 municipalities in Berks County, 41 municipalities are participating in the 2012 Berks County Uniform Construction Codes Countywide Board of Appeals. This initiative saves the municipalities money and is more efficient, since the Board of Appeals must have appointed members that are experts in the field of construction.

The County leads the State in the number of municipal mergers. This is where one municipality, for one reason or another, determines that it is better for the municipality to merge into another municipality. In order for this to occur, both municipalities must put the merger on a ballot and have a majority of the residents from each municipality agree. There have been 3 municipal mergers in the County since the late 1990's. West Lawn Borough merged into Spring Township in 2006; Wyomissing Hills Borough merged into Wyomissing Borough in 2001; and Temple Borough merged into Muhlenberg Township in 1999. A number of other municipalities have studied the benefits of merging with a neighboring municipality. There are a number of school districts, within the County, that have tentatively discussed studying mergers with other adjoining school districts. Budgetary reasons were the main issue that brought up the merger discussions.

D. Regional Cooperation with City of Reading

The City of Reading is in the process of revising its comprehensive plan of 2000. As part of the Comprehensive Plan a Regionalization Task Force, which included City and County officials and members of the business community, explored ways in which the County and City could cooperate more closely. The Regionalization Task Force examined the changes needed for the City to continue as the regional hub of Berks County. The Task Force explored methods for creating regional support of "regional" assets and public services that contribute to the area's quality of life such as the library and stadium, parks, police and fire academy, water and sewer service, Civic Center, and the Airport for example.

The Regionalization Task Force states that "A strong region starts with a strong urban core. For over 250 years, Reading has maintained its place as the regional center for finance, government, transportation, and cultural activities. To continue this, the City must create and enhance partnerships with the County, other municipalities, and the private sector. These partnerships, designed to facilitate a strong regional agenda, will not only strengthen the City, but more importantly, the County as a whole."

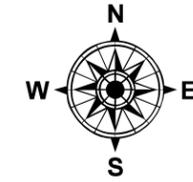
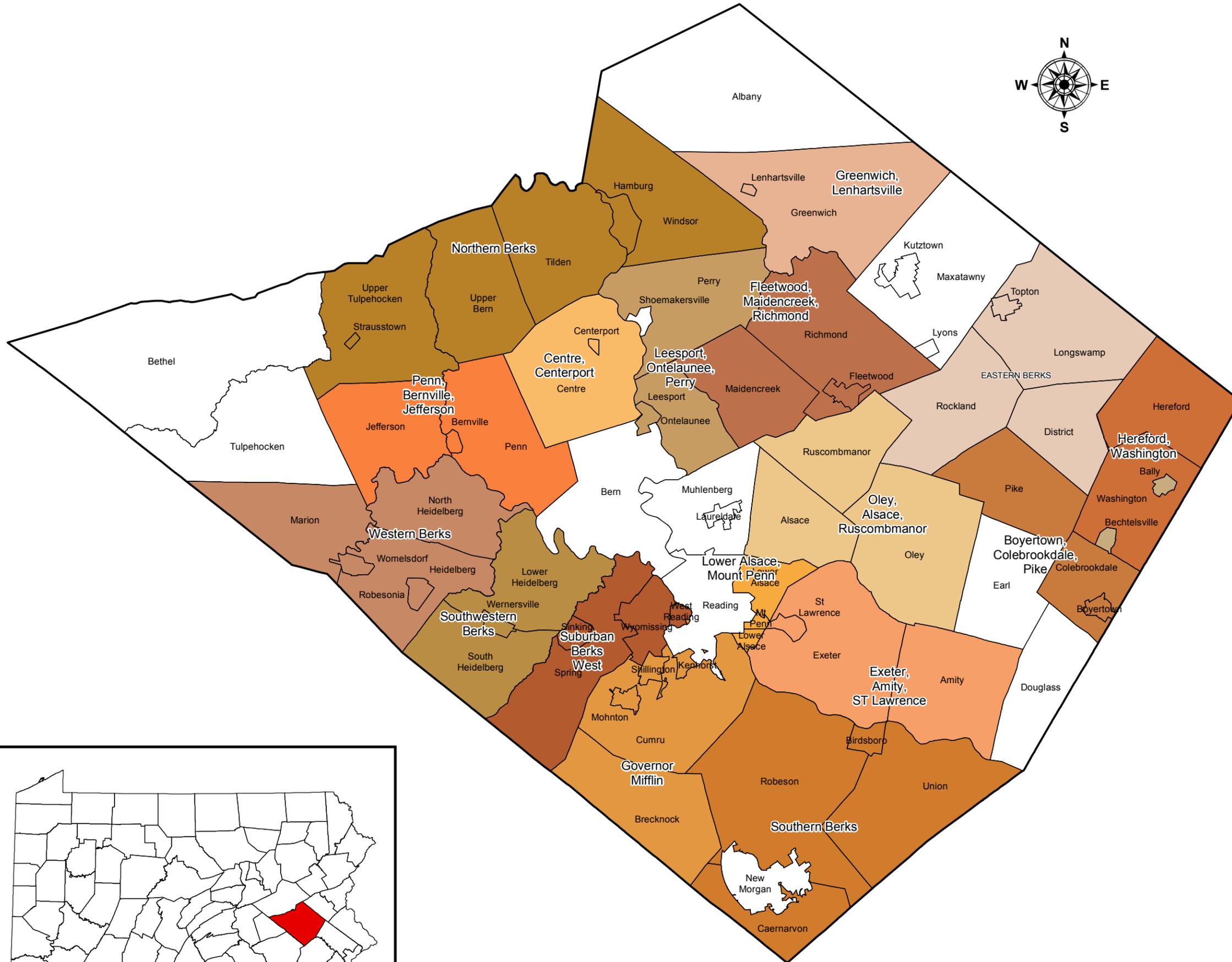
Many of these issues addressed in the Final Report of the Regionalization Task Force are still valid. The City of Reading has made progress in some areas, such as creating a joint Park and Recreation Commission with the Reading School District, increasing entertainment opportunities along the Penn Street Corridor, and working towards improving the quality of life issues of City residents.

The City of Reading cannot expect significant revenue growth in the near future. As a result, certain services that do not directly benefit City residents should continue to be examined from a cost-benefit point of view. In some areas of service, the County, or an adjacent local government is a more logical management entity. The County and the City have accomplished this with the Berks Fire Training Center, Reading Airport Authority, BARTA, and Antietam Lake Park.

The City is actively redefining its strategy to address the issues that have negatively affected the City of Reading. There is renewed interest in the previously vacant “outlet buildings”, new ideas for the Penn Street Corridor with a draft Downtown 2020 Plan, Main Street Plan and the City’s Act 47 Economic Development Strategy.

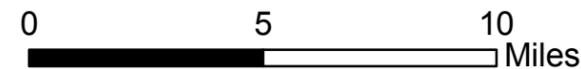
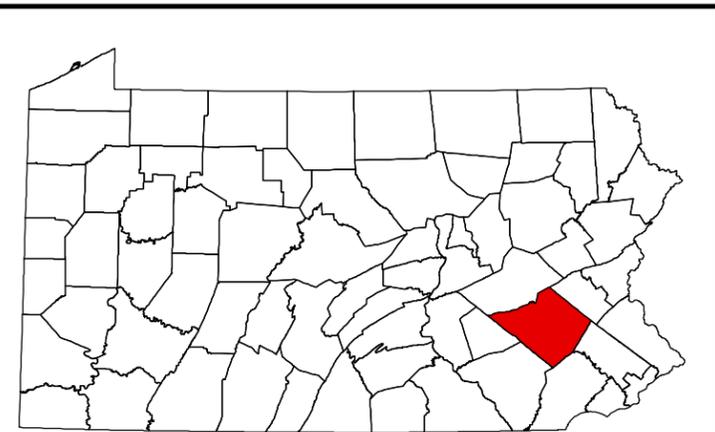
Berks County Comprehensive Plan Update
Adopted: September 2013

Joint Comprehensive Planning Berks County, Pennsylvania



Legend

- Bally, Bechtelsville (1994)
- Boyertown, Colebrookdale, Pike (2005)
- Centre, Centerport (1997)
- Eastern Berks (2004)
- Exeter, Amity, St Lawrence (2005)
- Fleetwood, Maiden creek, Richmond (2011)
- Governor Mifflin (2005)
- Greenwich, Lenhartsville (2009)
- Hereford, Washington (2006)
- Leesport, Ontelaunee, Perry (1996)
- Lower Alsace, Mount Penn (2006)
- Northern Berks (2005)
- Oley, Alsace, Ruscombmanor (2009)
- Penn, Bernville, Jefferson (2008)
- Southern Berks (2004)
- Southwestern Berks (2011)
- Suburban Berks West (2003)
- Western Berks (2000)
- Berks County Boundary
- Municipal Boundaries



Source: Berks County Planning Commission, Berks County GIS, Berks County Mapping, Berks County Department of Emergency Services

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Intergovernmental Cooperation/Participation Policies

Intergovernmental Cooperation/Participation Goal:

To develop and expand cooperation and communication among municipal officials and citizens to provide for increased participation in the planning process, and to create a more efficient mechanism to meet governmental responsibilities.

a. Partnerships and Coordination

Goal:

To develop and expand partnerships, communications, and coordination among municipal officials, the private sector, and citizens during the planning process.

Policies:

- (1) The County will continue to encourage and identify avenues for intergovernmental cooperation. Every aspect of County government will be explored for potential cooperative efforts.
- (2) The County will establish an intergovernmental computer network that will link all local municipalities, authorities, and school districts. This network will be developed in conjunction with internal efforts to link all County departments and agencies.
- (3) The County will continue to maintain and keep updated the Berks County Web Page.
- (4) The County will facilitate an initiative to establish a computer network connecting all emergency service agencies throughout the County.
- (5) The County will continue to work with all groups and organizations interested in intergovernmental cooperation.
- (6) Collaborate with the City of Reading to determine the City's and County's most appropriate role in the operation and maintenance of regional assets.
- (7) Increase the number of cultural and entertainment events occurring within the City. Increase suburban participation and tourism.
- (8) Maintain and expand the City's position as a regional education and training center.

b. Inter-municipal Initiatives

Goal:

To take an intergovernmental approach to planning, zoning, and municipal service projects.

Policies:

- (1) The County Planning Commission will continue to encourage cooperation and implementation of municipalities through the Berks County Municipal Planning Program.
 - (i) The Planning Commission staff will continue to administer the Joint Comprehensive Planning Program. Staff will continue to encourage municipalities to maintain existing joint planning efforts and to expand these where possible.
 - (ii) The Planning Commission staff will continue to encourage and facilitate updates, when needed, of existing joint comprehensive plans and joint zoning ordinances to bring them into compliance with amendments to the *Municipalities Planning Code*.
 - (iii) The County will continue to encourage implementation of joint comprehensive plans through joint zoning ordinances.

- (iv) The Planning Commission staff will, upon request by municipalities, complete updates to joint comprehensive plans and joint zoning ordinance maps; identify needed updates to joint zoning ordinances; and create draft official maps and ordinances.
- (2) The County will implement the Municipal Merger Program. The County Community Development office will provide assistance to help complete economic studies for municipalities interested in merging. The County will notify municipalities of the availability of this assistance.
- (3) The County Community Development office will assist developed boroughs and townships with site specific redevelopment concept plans to assist in the redevelopment of vacant buildings within developed areas.
- (4) The County will explore implementing Specific Plans as a demonstration project, in accordance with the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code. All municipalities that have participated in the Berks County Joint Comprehensive Planning Program will be eligible to complete a Specific Plan.
- (5) The County will continue to include and solicit comments from local municipalities and other county agencies when reviewing projects of local and regional significance.
- (6) The Planning Commission staff will continue to coordinate the Berks County Uniform Construction Codes Countywide Board of Appeals. Each year Planning Commission staff will send outreach to all Berks County municipalities, regardless if they participated previously, and encourage them to participate with the Countywide Board of Appeals.
- (7) The County will support efforts that implement the Berks County *Sewer and Water Regionalization Study*. The Planning Commission staff will maintain and update the Study as new information is received.
- (8) Explore the feasibility of a regional sewer authority to oversee regional services for the City of Reading's sewage treatment facility.
- (9) Encourage citizen involvement in planning changes in service delivery.
- (10) Assess legal constraints to cooperation and seek to change where necessary.
- (11) Identify appropriate funding mechanisms.