

Chapter 1

Introduction

Why a Comprehensive Plan?

The purpose of the Comprehensive Plan is to work proactively to assure that the future of the Oley, Alsace, and Ruscombmanor Region will be shaped by the municipalities' own vision, rather than by reactions to forces acting upon the Townships. This Plan manages, rather than just reacts, to growth in the region.

Oley and Alsace Township have prepared a joint comprehensive plan in the past but this Comprehensive Plan is the first joint comprehensive land use planning effort by Oley, Alsace and Ruscombmanor Townships, and was initiated because of the recognized need to examine overall planning for the Region in light of development trends and pressures in the region; to determine common goals and objectives for land use, transportation, community facilities and services, housing, economic development, natural, scenic, historic and cultural resources; coordinate land use and infrastructure planning on a regional basis; and build upon regional planning efforts of the Berks County Comprehensive Plan, the Berks County Greenway, Park and Recreation Plan.

The following objectives were identified at the outset of this planning process.

- Identify desired community vision for the Region and develop an effective plan scenario to attain that vision.
- Provide a means of perpetuating for future generations those environmental, historic, scenic, cultural, agricultural and economic resources which make the Region special to those who live and work in the community.
- Provide for open space preservation and recreation opportunities consistent with municipal goals and community needs.
- Prepare a scenario which will enable the municipalities to accommodate appropriate levels of new development, but not overburden municipal resources, utilities and roads, nor degrade environmental resources.
- Properly control, manage, allocate, balance and locate future development in the community consistent with the community vision through establishment of designated growth areas, future growth areas, rural resource areas, and public infrastructure areas.
- Integrate land use, open space, economic development, resources, recreation, utility and transportation planning into one cohesive document.

- Maintain and enhance the quality of life in the area.
- Prepare recommendations which are reasonable, achievable, and tied to implementation means so the plan will be a living document used by the municipalities throughout the following years.
- Comply with Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (PMPC) requirements.
- Prepare a Comprehensive Plan which is generally consistent with the Berks County Comprehensive Plan.
- Prepare a Plan which provides consistent land use proposals along the common municipal boundaries and promotes common goals for the logical development of the area as a whole.
- Take advantage of opportunities and benefits established in the MPC for municipalities which prepare joint plans and identify possible future opportunities for intermunicipal cooperation in the region.
- Identify the unique characteristics of the area and provide means of protecting these characteristics while providing for responsible, well-planned and managed development.
- Provide specific recommendations for an appropriate mixture and amounts of land use in the rural settings in Oley Township.
- Coordinate planning for the Region with School District Planning.
- Provide a Comprehensive Plan which provides a unified approach to managing future growth and development in the Region.
- Determine future infrastructure needs within the Region, including capacity and allocation.

What does a Comprehensive Plan Accomplish?

The Comprehensive Plan contains a vision of what the Townships want to be and includes goals, policies and strategies for realizing that vision.

The Comprehensive Plan is an educational document, providing discussion of conditions, issues, and opportunities, and identifying resources that are worthy of protection and preservation.

The Comprehensive Plan contains policies for land use, circulation and community facilities which will serve as a guide for public and private decision-making to accomplish the goals and objectives, and thus the vision, for the Townships.

The Comprehensive Plan provides a basis for implementation techniques, such as land use ordinances, official maps and capital improvements programs, which will implement the policies contained in this plan. It is critical that the Action Plan be implemented.

Planning jointly allows allocation of land uses, housing types, densities, and development patterns over the entire region, rather than trying to fit all types of uses and densities into each municipality. It also allows for coordinated land use planning along municipal boundaries; coordinated planning for trails, recreation and open space, and transportation throughout the Region; and coordinated planning along the common road corridors in the Region. Coordinated input can be provided to County and State agencies and an overall approach to economic development can be presented, addressing retention of major components of the economy and allowing for appropriate commercial and industrial development, which complements rather than detracts from existing commercial areas. Benefits of multi-municipal planning are summarized below.

Benefits of Multi-Municipal Planning

- Provides a regional planning approach and allocation of land uses
 - Where
 - How to accommodate population projections
 - Patterns of development
- Establishes growth areas and future growth areas regionally
 - Coordination with infrastructure
 - Opportunities for infill
- Provides coordinated planning along the common boundaries of the municipalities
- Supports existing centers rather than weaken them
- Coordinates road corridor planning, standards, and management
- Provides for linkages between municipalities
- The Plan and implementing ordinances are considered by state agencies in permitting decisions

- Addresses review of “developments of regional impact”
- Identifies opportunities for future joint efforts
- Promotes common land use designations and definitions
- Establish goals for economic character over the entire Region
- Provides support for municipalities in zoning challenges
- Enables Transportation Impact Fees across municipal boundaries
- Enables Transfer of Development Rights across municipal boundaries
- Enables priority consideration in state funding programs
- Provides opportunity to learn from neighbors’ shared experiences
- Enhances the Region’s attractiveness to quality development
- Enables developing a “specific plan” for an area designated for non-residential development, preparing regulations for that area, and streamlining the approval process
- Enables establishment of housing goals and a housing plan on a regional basis to address the current and future needs of all households, including younger workforce, and older households.

The Oley, Alsace, and Ruscombmanor Township Joint Comprehensive Plan demonstrates one of the key benefits to planning on a multi-municipal, rather than single municipality level: the ability to manage growth on a regional basis. Land use categories can be allocated on a regional basis and it is not necessary to try to fit every type of land use into each municipality. Growth areas can be established around a core of existing development, where community facilities and infrastructure are available to serve future development and permit logical, efficient growth. Agricultural lands, stream corridors, and rural lands outside the core can be conserved.

Multi-municipal planning also enables coordinated transportation planning, including planning for road corridors such as the PA Route 12 and PA Route 73 corridors.

Planning together helps to integrate, on a multi-municipal basis, the various elements of planning, such as land use planning, sewer and water planning, community facilities

planning, economic development planning, natural resources planning, and transportation planning. A key to effective establishment of the growth area boundaries is coordinating land use planning with the availability of public sewer and water facilities, and not extending public sewer and water facilities to areas intended for preservation of agricultural lands, protection of other natural resources, and retention of rural character.

It is important to plan for economic development on a regional basis, so revitalization efforts can be supported and complementary economic development could be accommodated at locations where it is determined to be appropriate. Appropriate building re-use, gateway treatments, and design elements can be addressed.

As growth occurs, additional demands are made on water supplies, sewer systems, recreation facilities, schools, and other municipal services. The most effective and efficient way to address these impacts is on a regional basis. Directing growth near existing facilities and services can lessen the pressure for additional, dispersed facilities.

Planning to address Regional influences is done in the context of County and regional planning which has already been done, including the Berks County Comprehensive Plan, the Berks County Greenways, Parks and Recreation Plan.

This Joint Plan is also an opportunity to attain general consistency with the Berks County Comprehensive Plan.

This Comprehensive Plan is a Living Document

This Comprehensive Plan is just a start. It is the foundation for the attainment of the goals and objectives established within the plan, which can be accomplished only with the support of the municipal governments, municipal commissions, boards and committees, area businesses, area residents, and surrounding municipalities and regional planning groups.

The objective has been to prepare a plan, which will not sit on a shelf and gather dust, but a plan that will be implemented and used by municipal governing bodies, planning commissions and other groups within the municipalities to guide their actions in attaining the goals of this Plan.

This Plan presents a strategy to guide municipal officials and other agencies in making decisions that will assure that the Region will continue to be an attractive place in which to live, work, and visit. This Comprehensive Plan is not an ordinance or regulation, but is a basis for establishing regulations and undertaking specific functional plans designed to implement the policies set forth within the plan. Each municipality retains the right to control zoning within its municipality, whether through individual zoning ordinances or a joint zoning ordinance.

Need for Continuing Planning

Planning is an ongoing process and this Comprehensive Plan must be continually reviewed in light of development trends, the state of the economy, unforeseen influences, changes in community goals, and the appropriateness of the Plan's objectives, policies, and implementation program.