

**CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND/PLANNING PROCESS**

**Growth Trends and Issues**

Centre Township, in which Centerport Borough is embedded, is located in north-central Berks County, approximately eleven miles north of the City of Reading (Figure 1.1). The township measures a little less than five miles in both the east-west and north-south directions and contains about 22 square miles of land. The borough is geographically small by comparison, measuring only one-half mile by three-quarters of a mile. The combined 1990 population of the two municipalities was 3,438; the borough containing 284 persons and the township 3,154 persons.

Centre Township lies to the west of the Schuylkill River, which forms the eastern boundary of the township and separates it from PA Route 61, paralleling the river. The township consists mostly of rolling and sometimes hilly terrain, the pattern of which is dominated by Irish and Plum Creeks, which carve through the landscape en route to the Schuylkill River.

Historically, the township has been sparsely built-up, with the exception of two older urban settlements of modest size, Dauberville and Mohrsville. Centerport Borough constitutes another older, compact, and relatively dense urban settlement.

Centre Township had a comprehensive plan prepared in the 1970s, making the document 25 years old by the mid-1990s. Centerport Borough never had a comprehensive plan prepared prior to 1996. The two municipalities, however, have shared a zoning ordinance for some years and both municipalities have subdivision regulations and active planning commissions.

Development activity in the township and the borough (together, the two municipalities are commonly referred to as the "Joint Area" in this document) had been nominal over the years, largely due to the absence of major roads, only three modest bridge connections to PA Route 61, and the almost total lack of central sewer and water facilities anywhere in the Joint Area.

Recently, however, as a result of new industrial and commercial development just to the east and southeast of the Joint Area near Shoemakersville and Leesport and further south along PA Route 61, as well as the continuing residential suburbanization of the City of Reading, there has been more development activity in the township. This new wave of development began in

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the 1970s in the form of small, scattered subdivisions stripped along parts of the many roads of the township, although tending to be found near the Schuylkill River crossings. A few ten-to-twenty-unit subdivisions also were constructed. In the 1980s and 1990s, however, the pace and extent of residential development picked up, with larger developments occurring in a mostly-scattered pattern throughout the township. This suburban-style residential development has now become a significant feature of the township, despite its still-present rural character.

This recent development activity and its anticipated continuation concern the two municipalities in terms of the adequacy of the existing road system, the lack of central sewer and water utilities, and the potential effects of this development on the agricultural atmosphere and way-of-life in the countryside and the character and integrity of Centerport, Mohrsville, and Dauberville.

By early 1996, when the consultant and the Joint Comprehensive Plan Committee began to work together, the following issues and challenges to be addressed in the comprehensive planning process had been identified:

- Development pressures on Joint Area from PA Route 61 highway corridor;
- New residential development and land speculation harm farming activities;
- Local road system is inadequate to accommodate all the traffic from new residential developments occurring in Centre Township;
- Traffic from new local developments and from regional growth affects older settlements, such as Centerport, Dauberville, and Mohrsville;
- New residential development has strong fiscal impact on Schuylkill Valley School District;
- No central sewers, but could be here soon;
- Potential public health problems in older settlements, such as Centerport, Dauberville, and, to a lesser extent, Mohrsville, due to on-lot water and sewer systems;
- Existence of and possible increase in number of 'package' sewage treatment plants;
- Limited park and recreation facilities for a growing population.

**The 1996-97 Joint Comprehensive Plan**

The purpose in preparing an updated Comprehensive Plan is fourfold. First, the data base for the Joint Area has been brought up to date. Chapter Two includes surveys of natural and cultural features, the current land-use pattern, the road system, and the systems of public services and utilities; analyses and projections of population and housing; and an examination of the rate and types of change in the Joint Area over the last fifteen to twenty years. Second, the Plan identifies the basic direction and structure recommended for the future development of the Joint Area, derived from explorations of alternative development patterns. Third, the Plan specifies the goals, policies, and individual elements that will form the basis for the development of the Joint Area. Finally, the Plan lays forth a specific implementation strategy and program to aid the Township and the Borough in achieving the goals of the Plan.

A joint comprehensive plan for Centre Township and Centerport Borough has the potential to provide a highly-effective planning tool that will support day-to-day decisions about future development so that they may be thoroughly rational and consistent and at the same time move the Joint Area in a desirable direction in terms of agricultural and open space conservation, historic preservation, traffic management, utilities and recreation facilities development, and fiscal balance.

A Plan that is fully responsive to the needs of the residents of the Joint Area needs to contain both long-range and short-range programs, must balance local needs and perceptions with regional requirements and perspectives, and contain its own logic and strategy for implementation. A good Plan can also serve as a "road map" for Centre Township and for Centerport Borough, both in terms of informing and improving the process of reviewing and approving development plans, and in projecting a coherent and mutually agreed-upon development framework and visual image of the Joint Area. A new Comprehensive Plan should serve as an everyday working document to be referred to regularly in the review of development proposals and in the planning of long-range capital improvements.

A joint comprehensive plan for Centre Township and Centerport Borough needs to relate to and be coordinated with the newly-adopted Berks County Comprehensive Plan, but at the same time must reflect the unique characteristics and setting of the two municipalities and the point of view of the residents. The joint comprehensive plan must also be responsible to the requirements of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Municipalities Planning

Code (MPC) as to content and the procedure for the preparation and adoption of municipal comprehensive plans.

### **The Comprehensive Planning Process**

Growing local concerns about the location, pace, and character of recent and future development in the two municipalities coincided with the desire of the Berks County Planning Commission to have modern, up-to-date comprehensive plans prepared and adopted throughout the county to provide for orderly urban growth, protect the natural environment, and furnish a rational basis for planning for open space and recreation facilities and strategic infrastructure (water, sewer, and road) improvements throughout the county.

The Berks County Planning Commission has been promoting cooperative sub-regional planning throughout the county for the past several years and has succeeded in sponsoring a number of multi-municipal planning efforts, including a joint planning program involving Leesport Borough and Ontelaunee and Perry Townships, just across the Schuylkill River, begun in early 1995. The decision of Centre Township and Centerport Borough to cooperate for the purpose of preparing a joint comprehensive plan was therefore consistent with the spirit and method of the Berks County planning program and, in addition, afforded the opportunity to coordinate the preparation of a new comprehensive plan with the three communities across the Schuylkill River to the east.

As has been the approach in other areas of the county, a Joint Comprehensive Plan Committee consisting of representatives from Centre Township and Centerport Borough was formed to act as a unified "client" with which the consultant selected to prepare the plan would interact.

During the course of the preparation of the Plan, February through December 1996, the planning consultant met with the Joint Comprehensive Plan Committee on a monthly basis and held three Public Information Meetings -- April 15, June 18, and October 15. In addition, a joint Public Hearing was held on the completed Draft Comprehensive Plan in early 1997, for independent adoption actions by the Centerport Borough Council and Centre Township Board of Supervisors, which took place in July 1997. The Work Program Schedule (Figure 1.2) outlines graphically the Comprehensive Plan process that was observed, consisting of three distinct phases.

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The Public Hearing formal review process rounded out an extensive community participation program, including the three aforementioned Public Information Meetings and a questionnaire survey undertaken during the early part of the study. Community participation was a hallmark of the comprehensive planning process, in order to fully inform Joint Area residents and to create a strong consensus as to the most desirable and achievable common future for Centre Township and Centerport Borough.

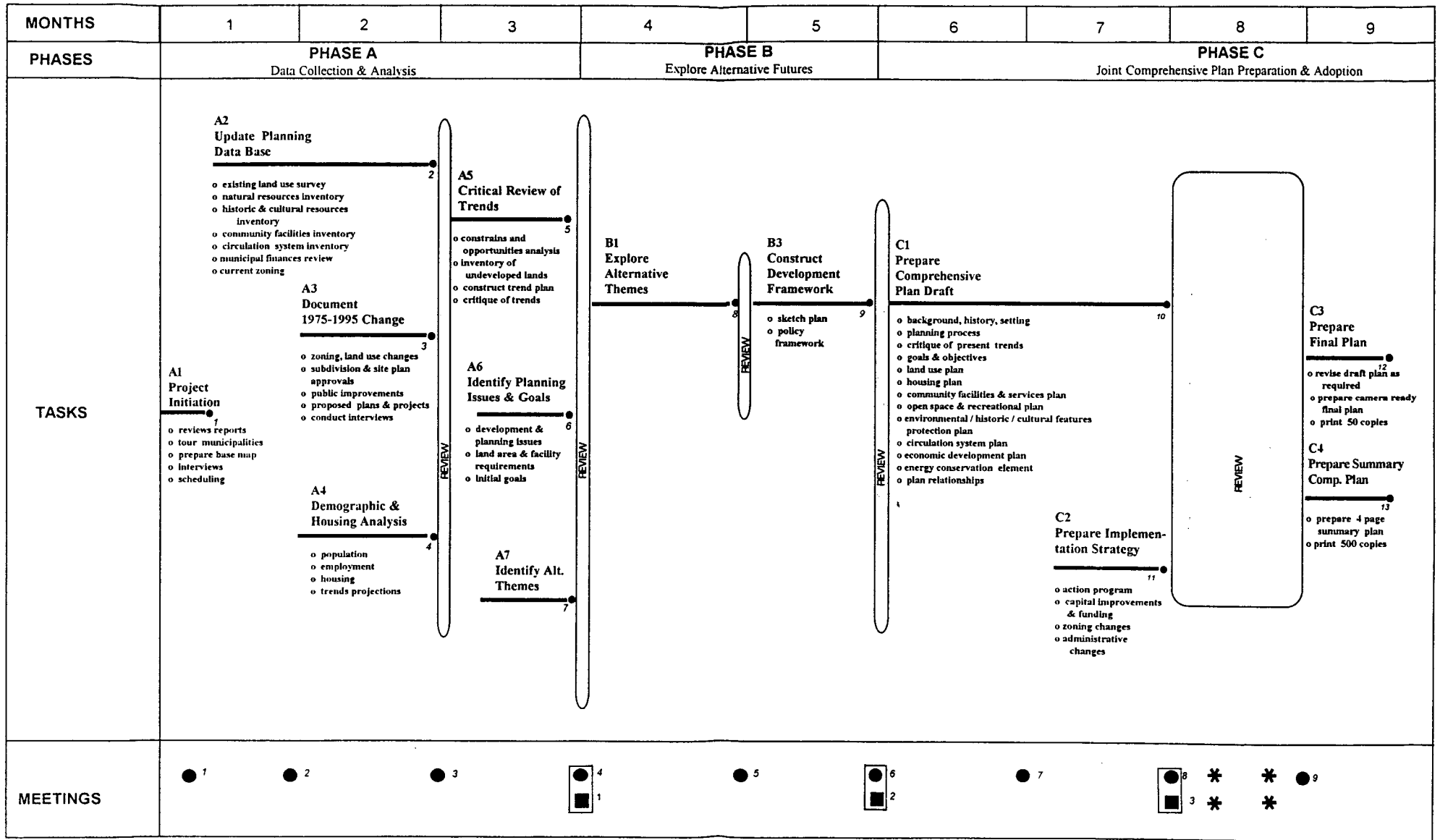
The first phase of the Plan preparation was primarily devoted to background data collection and the documentation of change in the Joint Area during the last fifteen-to-twenty years. Tasks within this phase included a review of earlier planning documents and data, creating the base maps of the Joint Area for the study, an inventory of natural and cultural features and development limitations, documentation and projections of demographics and development activity, a land-use field survey, documentation of water and sewer facilities, and documentation of physical change.

As a foundation for the work in Phase B, Phase A concluded with the setting of preliminary goals and objectives for the Plan. Phase B itself incorporated a systematic exploration of a variety of planning and development issues and alternative development patterns, culminating in the definition of preliminary development plan recommendations based upon on the approach to the future development of the area selected by the Joint Comprehensive Plan Committee.

The third phase focused on the actual preparation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan for Centre Township and Centerport Borough. The Plan was prepared as preliminary drafts, reviewed by the Joint Comprehensive Plan Committee, and revised to final draft form. The end of Phase C encompassed the period of public reviews and hearings on the final draft of the Plan. Revisions were made based on those reviews and hearings and a camera-ready original of the Plan was prepared for printing and public distribution.

# WORK PROGRAM SCHEDULE

Centre Township / Centerport Borough Joint Comprehensive Plan



● Joint Municipalities Planning Committee Workshops    ■ Public Information Meetings    \* Public Hearings    ● Study Products

Figure 1.2