

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

“We must ask where we are and whether we are tending.”

--Abraham Lincoln

Why a Comprehensive Plan?

The purpose of the Joint Comprehensive Plan is to proactively work to assure that the future of Lower Heidelberg and South Heidelberg Townships and Wernersville Borough will be shaped by the municipalities' own vision, rather than by reactions to forces acting upon the Townships and the Borough.

The Borough and the Townships prepared and adopted the first Joint Comprehensive Plan in January 2001. This Joint Comprehensive Plan was initiated because of the recognized need to examine overall planning for the area in light of development trends and pressures in the region; determine common goals and objectives for land use, circulation, community facilities, housing, open space and recreation, natural resources, municipal services, and resource preservation; analyze interconnections with and connections to surrounding municipalities; coordinate land use and traffic planning in the Route 422 Corridor; and recognize the Comprehensive Plan for Berks County. This update to the Joint Comprehensive Plan reviews these concerns while also taking under consideration population and development growth since 2001.

What does a Comprehensive Plan Accomplish?

The Comprehensive Plan contains a vision of what the Townships and Borough want to be and includes goals and objectives for realizing that vision. It is also an educational document, providing discussion of conditions, strengths, weaknesses, threats, 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 serve as a guide for public and private decision-making to accomplish the goals and objectives, and thus the vision, for the Borough and 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.

Organization of Report

This Report is organized into four parts:

1. Part 1 contains a statement of the **Community Development Goals and Objectives** for the future development of the Borough and the Townships, a summary of the results of planning questionnaires, and issues facing the municipalities.
2. Part 2 contains a set of **plan recommendations** which set forth policies for land use and housing, circulation, community facilities and economic and community development.
3. Part 3 contains a **strategy for implementation** which outlines the **Action Plan** for implementing the Comprehensive Plan, the interrelationships of plan components, and the relationship of development of the area to development and plans in adjoining municipalities, to the objectives and plans for development in the county, and to regional trends.
4. Part 4 contains the **background studies** which discuss resources and natural features, trends in population and housing, land use, circulation, community facilities, public sanitary sewer and water, the history of the area, and regional influences. Part 4 is contained in a separate volume.

This Joint Comprehensive Plan is a Living Document

This Plan is the vision for the future. 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 government, 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 Townships of Lower Heidelberg and South Heidelberg and Borough of Wernersville will continue to be attractive places in which to live and work. This Comprehensive Plan is not an ordinance or regulation, but is a basis for proposing regulations and undertaking specific functional plans designed to implement the policies established within this plan.

Need for Continuing Planning

Planning is an ongoing process, and this 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.

PART 1

THE VISION, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES AND ISSUES

CHAPTER 2

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

“I have a dream.”

-- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Vision for Southwestern Berks County

The quality of life in Lower Heidelberg Township, South Heidelberg Township and Wernersville Borough will be preserved and these communities will remain attractive places in which to live and work.

The pace, quality and location of development will be managed while preserving natural features, open space, buffers and stream corridors.

Residential development will be concentrated in the Borough, in portions of the Townships adjoining the Borough, and where developments have been constructed and planned adjoining Sinking Spring Borough and Spring Township in the eastern portions of the Townships. Commercial development will be located where commercial development has already occurred along the Route 422 Corridor and villages in the Townships. Industrial development will occur near Route 422, the Norfolk Southern Rail Line, and Krick Lane.

A large area of agricultural land in the central portion of the region will remain in agriculture, in order to maintain the large swaths of land, that are currently and historically, farmed within the region. The preservation of larger land areas for farming helps to conserve and preserve the agricultural economy of the area. Open space and natural and scenic resources will also be protected by the Blue Marsh Recreation Area and an interconnected resource preservation area in the South Mountain extending from the eastern to the western border of South Heidelberg Township. Historic, recreational, architectural and cultural resources will be preserved, interconnected and enhanced.

Open space corridors will be preserved along the streams to protect and enhance the quantity and quality of water within these streams. Ground water quality will be protected through serving most development located within the Designated Growth Areas and Future Growth Areas with public sanitary sewer and water systems and protecting watersheds and wellhead areas, including steep slopes and woodlands.

The rural character of the Townships, where such rural character exists, will be retained through protection of watersheds, natural resources, stream corridors, forested areas and agricultural areas.

Aesthetics of the Route 422 Corridor will be enhanced and steps taken to lessen congestion on the highway. Pedestrian and bicycle access will be improved, particularly through a series of trails throughout the region. Access from Route 422 to the Borough and South Heidelberg Township will be improved and access between Routes 422 and 222 managed so as not to adversely impact residential areas of South Heidelberg Township.

Essential services, such as recreation, fire protection and police protection, will be provided to area residents. There will be continued and increased cooperation among the three municipalities in planning and provision of services to area residents.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

This chapter of the Comprehensive Plan presents the goals and objectives of the Townships and the Borough. Goals are general statements indicating the desired direction for the municipalities, and reflect the relatively long term conditions which they wish to maintain or establish. Objectives are more specific, relatively short-term policy guidelines for the municipalities to follow. Goals are achieved through accomplishment of the stated objectives.

Overall Goal

Preserve the quality of life and conserve and enhance the special features of the Borough and the Townships, assuring that they will remain attractive communities in which to live and work. This will be accomplished by managing the pace, quality and location of development while preserving natural features, open space, buffers and stream corridors.

Natural and Scenic Resources

Goal: Protect, conserve and enhance the natural and scenic resources of the municipalities.

Objectives:

- Protect water resources within the municipalities and thus the quantity and quality of surface and groundwater. Of special concern will be the water courses, particularly the Cacoosing, Little Cacoosing, Spring, Manor, Tulpehocken and Hospital Creeks, and tributaries to these creeks, wetlands and floodplains along the creeks, and steep slopes draining to the creeks.
- Protect groundwater throughout the municipalities, particularly in limestone areas where the potential for pollution tends to be greatest and groundwater resources tend to be greatest.
- Protect and improve water quality in the municipalities, with special emphasis on Spring Creek.
- Protect and manage woodlands within the municipalities and encourage new planting of trees.
- Protect the steep slopes within the municipalities.

- Protect watersheds and wellhead areas for community water supplies within the municipalities.
- Encourage property owners and developers to preserve the scenic viewsheds and scenic road corridors within the municipalities.
- Protect and maintain the rural character in portions of the Townships still possessing that rural character.
- Protect and conserve unique natural areas in the Townships, such as South Mountain and Cushion Peak, Blue Marsh, and the Tulpehocken Creek.
- Conserve, enhance, and manage the ecosystems within the Planning Area and maintain adequate critical mass by connecting those ecosystems.

Historic and Cultural Resources

Goal: Preserve and enhance the historic, architectural and cultural resources of the municipalities.

Objectives:

- Encourage property owners and developers to preserve, protect, and enhance historic resources within the municipalities.
- Foster increased public awareness of the history of and historic resources within the municipalities.
- Support efforts of organizations to identify and protect historic resources.
- Require new development to reflect and consider the history, architecture and development patterns of the municipalities in order to preserve the important historic and architectural resources of the area.
- Determine the role which the municipalities should play in historic preservation through land use ordinance incentives, controls and regulations, and efforts to create historic districts and/or historic overlay zoning.
- Encourage adaptive re-use of historic structures where appropriate. Provide incentives for re-use of structures that will encourage their preservation.
- Encourage interconnection of historic resources and structures with recreational and natural resources where appropriate.

Agricultural Resources

Goal: Protect and preserve agricultural areas for agricultural use.

Objectives:

- Promote the preservation of agricultural areas within the Townships through conservation development, agricultural security areas, purchase and donation of development rights, and conservation easements.
- Continue and consider expansion of effective agricultural zoning in the Townships.
- Assure policies regarding public sewer and water do not encourage development pressure on designated agricultural areas.
- Minimize conflicts of agricultural and non-agricultural uses around the perimeter of designated agricultural areas.
- Recognize and build upon agricultural preservation efforts in surrounding municipalities, including West Cocalico, Heidelberg, North Heidelberg and Spring Townships.
- Promote policies that will help the economic vitality of the agricultural community.

Open Space

Goal: Provide an open space system within the municipalities through the preservation of stream corridors, woodlands and steep slopes, and the planning and retention of recreation areas and parks.

Objectives:

- Coordinate growth management and open space policies so that those areas desired as open space will not be designated as growth areas nor planned for infrastructure improvements which would encourage development.
- Link recreation areas and natural areas within the municipalities through open space and trail systems.
- Recognize that when development occurs, ecosystems must be preserved and the natural environment protected, and use innovative land development techniques which will minimize land consumption and preserve natural resources and open space.
- Require developers to provide open space and recreation areas for active and passive recreation and to coordinate open space systems among adjoining developments.
- Encourage the maintenance and enhancement of open space and recreation areas.

- Encourage developers to provide both visual and physical access to the open space system.

Land Use and Housing

Goal: Establish a pattern of land use that is compatible with the existing character and land use patterns of the municipalities and which are consistent with the goals of preserving the natural, scenic, historic and agricultural resources of the municipalities.

Objectives:

- Identify future growth areas which are logical extensions of existing concentrations of development, have appropriate access, can be efficiently served by the circulation system, and can be efficiently served by public sewer and water systems.
- Direct most new development in the municipalities to the future and designated growth areas.
- Discourage development in areas not suitable for on-site sewage disposal which cannot be feasibly sewered.
- Coordinate policies for land use, circulation and community facilities and services to assure realization of the goals and objectives of the Plan.
- Minimize the conflict between non-residential and residential uses through proper allocation of land use and utilization of performance and design standards and buffer yards. Discourage proximity of incompatible land uses within the area and along adjoining municipalities.
- Allow for a variety of housing densities and attractive residential housing types in appropriately designated areas, within the natural constraints and service constraints of the municipalities.
- Encourage land development techniques, such as conservation development, based on land characteristics which will preserve natural resources, agricultural lands, and open space.
- Provide for well-planned development in each municipality which will be consistent with community character, including the rural character of the Township's and the "small-town" character of the Borough.
- Discourage development in areas susceptible to sinkhole development unless adequate mitigation measures are practiced.
- Provide for adequate, safe and sound housing for present and future residents.
- Provide for the maintenance of the character of existing residential areas and housing stock through appropriate land use controls.

- Encourage traditional town and traditional neighborhood planning to promote a more compact, integrated and sustainable development pattern.
- Provide opportunities for suitable and compatible commercial, office, and environmentally responsible industrial activities at appropriate locations, within the context of existing land use patterns, support services, transportation networks and environmental concerns.
- In recognition that the Route 422 corridor is the most visible section of the Planning Area, adequately manage development in the corridor and require development in the corridor that employs techniques such as increased setbacks, access management, landscaping, street furniture, and location of parking to the side and rear of buildings, to prevent the decline of the aesthetics of the corridor.
- Provide for a mix of land uses which will balance growth with the need to preserve open land, manage traffic, maintain the quality of life in the area, and have manageable tax structures.

Circulation

Goal: Plan for a safe and efficient circulation system which will enhance pedestrian and bicycle movement and the ease of vehicular travel within the municipalities, given the limits of the existing system and natural and fiscal constraints.

Objectives:

- Coordinate land use and road improvement policies between the three municipalities.
- Preserve and improve the capacity of the existing roads within the area as future development occurs through cooperative efforts with developers and PennDOT as applicable.
- Monitor impacts on roadway capacity from new development and require developers to address projected increased traffic volumes in the road system by improving the existing system. Examine the usefulness of the existing Transportation Impact Fee system in South Heidelberg Township, and explore the creation of such Impact Fees in both Lower Heidelberg Township and Wernersville Borough, as well. Determine if there is a potential for a joint Impact Fee.
- Promote coordinated access management programs and policies along the road corridors within the area, to minimize the number of new access points to the road system and, at the same time, coordinate with existing access points and address negative access issues.
- Preserve the scenic road corridors within the area.
- Provide maintenance of the existing road system as warranted.

- Recognizing that substantial traffic within the municipalities is generated outside the area, work with State, County, Reading Area Transportation Study (RATS), and officials from surrounding municipalities to address areas of concern within the area.
- Encourage the development, maintenances and improvement of a non-motorized network of sidewalks, pedestrian and bicycle trails, shared bikeways and paved shoulders that connect residential areas with each other, schools, recreational resources, and commercial and employment centers.
- Plan for a system of roads within future development areas to provide for convenient local circulation and access to primary routes of travel and transit.
- Identify and address existing deficiencies and safety concerns in the circulation system with landowners, PennDOT and developers as appropriate.
- Investigate ways of relieving congestion on area roadways, particularly Route 422, and commonly-used parallel routes, such as increased use of public transportation, traffic and access management policies along Route 422, and relationships of workplaces and residence-serving businesses and residences.
- Facilitate pedestrian and bicycle access to community facilities and recreational areas.
- Develop policies and implement methods to discourage the use of streets in residential areas as shortcuts for externally generated through traffic.
- Investigate ways to improve access from Route 422 to south of the railroad tracks through grade separated crossings. Determine where those crossings would be most applicable and the steps, including costs, necessary to create them.
- Require consultation with BARTA no later than the preliminary plan stage whenever development is planned for anywhere along the Route 422 corridor.
- Expand working relationships with the Wilson and Conrad Weiser School Districts to ensure proper transportation access, particularly pedestrian and bicycle facilities, whenever school building plans are being created. Use that cooperative relationship to examine existing school campuses and areas where pedestrian and bicycle access can be provided or improved.

Community Facilities and Services

Goal: Provide essential facilities and services necessary to meet the existing and future needs of area residents within the fiscal capacity of the Borough and Townships.

Objectives:

- Periodically evaluate the need and opportunity for additional, expanded or improved community services and facilities and plan for the efficient and economical provision of those services and facilities.

- Review proposed developments to ensure that required infrastructure is provided by the developer.
- Review opportunities and/or needs for regional cooperation in the provision of services and facilities.
- Determine what efficiencies can be obtained in the provision of services to area residents.
- Work with the School Districts to assure adequate, local school facilities are available to area residents and new facilities are located to be consistent with the goals and objectives of this plan.
- Work with School Districts when updating the Plan to assure continued coordination.
- Extend any needed community facilities to schools in the area.
- Investigate opportunities for cooperation among municipalities and school districts in providing facilities and programs to area residents.
- Encourage the interconnection of water systems within the region where appropriate.
- Require developers to adequately manage stormwater runoff and erosion and sedimentation in manners consistent with the protection of water resources in the area.
- Work toward the provision of a variety of recreation facilities and programs for area residents.
- Assure that the scale of development in the area is consistent with the capacity of the area's infrastructure.
- Coordinate sewer and water planning with land use policies.
- Assure sewage treatment plant discharges and standards are consistent with the highest stream fishery standards classification for receiving streams.
- Foster the establishment and linkage of community resources within Wernersville.
- Encourage cooperation, management and staffing of fire companies in the area to address the fire protection needs of the community. Continue to encourage regionalization and cooperation of fire protection where appropriate.
- Work with fire companies to assure there are adequate fire hydrants and volume and pressure of water to provide adequate fire protection.
- Work with the State regarding future use of buildings at the Wernersville State Hospital.

Economic Development

Goal: Enhance the economic vitality of the area while fostering a small-town character for Wernersville and a rural and open character where such exists in Lower and South Heidelberg Townships.

Objectives:

- Provide land for and encourage additional environmentally responsible industrial and office development in the Route 422 railroad corridor.
- Provide for managed limited additional commercial development in the Route 422 corridor, while preserving a sense of open space between communities.
- Encourage adaptive re-use of vacant and underutilized properties in the center of the Borough of Wernersville.
- Encourage the continuation of agriculture as a major component of the economy of the Lower and South Heidelberg Townships.
- Coordinate the location of businesses and transportation systems to limit traffic impacts on residential areas.
- Encourage the enhancement of the aesthetics of the Route 422 corridor.

Planning

Goal: Assure that the Comprehensive Plan will be a “living document” used in the decision making of Township and Borough officials and commissions.

Objectives:

- Create a structural mechanism for the municipalities to meet to review this plan and planning issues which arise.
- Work with surrounding communities, regional planning organizations, BARTA, and PennDOT to address vehicular, and mass transportation, non-motorized transportation, land use, community facility and economic development impacts on the Planning Area arising from development and transportation improvements in surrounding communities.
- Cooperate in the review of plans of intermunicipal significance.

Implementation

Goal: Identify and utilize appropriate implementation techniques to accomplish the goals, objectives and policies of this Comprehensive Plan.

Objectives:

- Each year review the goals, objectives and policies of the Plan, their continued relevance, the extent to which they have been accomplished, and the need for revision, and establish a work program for implementation of the Plan.
- Identify ways the municipalities can work together to accomplish the goals and objectives of the plan.
- Improve communication and relationships with PennDOT and encourage cooperation with PennDOT and PennDOT involvement in reviewing subdivision and land development plans to accomplish the goals and objectives of this plan and local circulation objectives.
- Consider participation in Pennsylvania programs which will aid in the implementation of this Plan.
- Consider participation in Berks County and State programs designed to encourage intermunicipal cooperation.
- Provide the basis for land use regulations which will implement this Plan.

CHAPTER 3

PLANNING QUESTIONNAIRES

In the course of developing the update to the Joint Comprehensive Plan, planning questionnaires were sent out to households in Wernersville Borough, Lower Heidelberg Township and in South Heidelberg Township. The people to receive questionnaires in each municipality were identified by Joint Planning Committee members from the municipality. 57 questionnaires were returned. In addition, questionnaires were placed, postage paid at the Wernersville Community Library and the Wernersville United States Post Office along with some at each of the municipal offices. 40 questionnaires were returned. The composite results of the questionnaire are contained in the Appendix F in Volume 2. The highlights of the questionnaire results are given below.

Questionnaire Results Highlights

1. Residents generally agree that the municipalities should cooperate with one another where possible.
2. Many residents rated the residential development in the area as appropriate or excessive, especially within the Townships. The majority of residents rated the commercial and industrial development as appropriate or lacking within the area.
3. The majority of residents were satisfied with the amenities of the region, except for four items; job opportunities, road surface conditions, tax rates and the least liked aspect was traffic volume.
4. Residents overwhelmingly supported stronger policies to preserve agriculture, protect agriculture through zoning and to protect the natural and environmental resources of the region through zoning.
5. Many residents, when asked if they would agree to a \$20 tax hike for specific types of projects or programs were supportive or neutral/undecided. The projects/programs most supported were those involved in preservation of resources (historic, open space, recreational, and agriculture within the municipalities and increased police/public safety.
6. Most residents agreed that there are plenty of shopping experiences in the region. Residents would like to see more facilities that are job creators, such as manufacturing, professional services, and research and technical firms. Also, more restaurants and small businesses in the downtown Village/Borough areas are needed. In addition, residents once again supported preservation of open space/farmland, cultural/community facilities, recreation, and heritage tourism.

7. Most residents agreed that properties were adequately maintained in the area, however many residents did agree that the municipalities should get stricter with enforcement of codes.
8. Many residents listed street intersections that they would like to see improved.
9. Most residents that responded did not live within walking distance to schools. Of those that did, only one walked. Many of the concerns listed were safety related, lack of sidewalk or safe biking concerns. These same concerns were also reflected when asked about walking/biking to other places in the region.
10. The residents were very prolific in listing those areas within the region that felt were “treasures” and deserved protection. Some of the most listed places were; Blue Marsh, South Mountain, Wernersville train station, Grings Mill area and the Hains Church and Jesuit Center.

CHAPTER 4

ISSUES FACING THE TOWNSHIPS AND THE BOROUGH

“...sprawl. It has already degraded our Commonwealth, and it threatens to rob us of our cities and towns, our farms and forests, of those very things we hold most dear: our sense of place and belonging.”

--Thomas Hylton

INTRODUCTION

The following issues to be addressed in the Comprehensive Planning process and observations were identified from responses to the planning questionnaires, interviews with community leaders identified by the Joint Municipal Planning Committee members, analysis of background maps and data, and discussion at Joint Municipal Planning Committee meetings. The issues are addressed in the Goals and Objectives and Parts 2 and 3 of this Plan.

ISSUES AND OBSERVATIONS

Tax Base/Land Use Trends

- There is concern over the costs associated with increased development in the area, including traffic-related and road maintenance costs, public protection costs, costs of sewer and water systems, and education costs. These costs typically are reflected in higher taxes, which can be especially burdensome on long-time residents and people on fixed incomes. Additional cooperative efforts of the municipalities and volunteer organizations may be necessary to try to control costs of services.

Much past and proposed development is residential, which often does not pay for itself because of costs of educating children. Southwestern Berks County has experienced some larger commercial developments, including the Sinking Spring Marketplace, 422 Shopping Center (proposed, on hold), while some smaller businesses have located in the South Heidelberg Industrial Park and commercial development along Mountain Home Road.

It is necessary to determine what types, location, pattern, and extent of non-residential development will be encouraged in the future. Most residents would like to see increased industrial development in order to increase the tax base. The Route 422 area and along the Railroad is the preferred area. Also, in order to increase the viability of the downtown villages and Borough small businesses are needed.

- It is necessary to determine what types, location, pattern, and extent of residential development will be encouraged in the future. In the past, most residential construction was of single family homes. Currently, there are developments with single, semi-detached and

townhomes being built in the area. Due to the downturn in the economy it is anticipated that homes built in the near future will be smaller and more modest than those of the recent past.

Should use of cluster and conservation subdivisions be encouraged in the area?

Should development patterns found in Wernersville be expanded into surrounding portions of the Townships?

Should mixed use communities such as Eagle View in Chester County, with residential, office/industrial, and commercial uses, with a defined “Town Center”, be encouraged in the Townships, or should Wernersville play the role of “Town Center” in the area?

- There is substantial non-profit and publicly held land in the Townships, such as Blue Marsh, the Jesuit Center, churches, the YMCA, Wernersville State Hospital, Caron Foundation and Wernersville Municipal Authority. While this land can provide benefits such as open space and recreation, employment opportunities, agricultural and woodland preservation, watershed protection, and scenic amenities, it does limit the tax base of the municipalities.
- Much of the development under construction or proposed for development was or is farmland. Farmland is typically a tax plus to the community. Loss of farmland also results in the loss of scenic roads, scenic views and rural character in the community, especially when houses are stripped along existing roads.

Continued development affects the rural character of the area, which was one reason some longer-term residents were attracted to the area in the first place. Farmland, wooded areas, scenic areas and historic resources are valued elements in the area. It will be necessary to balance growth with providing open land and managing traffic. Maintenance of the quality of life in the area should be addressed.

- The Wernersville State Hospital is a major land use, and potential future uses include agriculture, industry, office and commercial, community facility, and conference center. A number of the buildings have already been converted to a PA State Community Corrections Center. The location of this property lends itself to many uses for re-development and could become a major employment center.
- Contrasting commercial development in the area includes the Sinking Spring Market Place, Route 422, and proposed 422 Shopping Center on one hand, and the Wertz ice cream stand in Wernersville on the other. Is the development along Route 422 in the Townships an acceptable pattern with sufficient attention to aesthetics? Should more emphasis be placed on creating a pedestrian scale and providing common areas such as plazas, thus creating more of a Town Center appearance and feel?

Should commercial establishments serving day-to-day needs of residents, many of whom live away from Route 422, be allowed closer to the homes being built away from Route 422, at villages and/or at crossroads or within or adjoining the developments? Design and performance standards and appropriate area and bulk regulations would be necessary.

Should a village green/community center concept be encouraged for the Borough? Where would it be appropriately located: Vacant car lot(s) near the train station -Route 422, near the Fire Company – Library – Borough Hall complex, or at the vacant Morrow lot on Werner Street?

- Southwestern Berks County, especially the eastern portion, has become a transition area between the developed urban area of Berks County and the rural western portion of the County. There are still very attractive open spaces and rural landscapes in Southwestern Berks County, and upon leaving Sinking Spring one senses a change in the nature of the landscape; but Southwestern Berks County is rapidly changing in appearance, gaining traffic, and losing landscapes.

To what extent should this change be limited, and where should the change be permitted, if allowed? Should development which occurs be required to “fit in” with the character of the area to the greatest extent possible, rather than transform the area?

- Wernersville could face the trend other Boroughs have experienced, loss of businesses providing day-to-day services to area residents to strip malls, while gaining more restaurants and specialty businesses.
- Agricultural preservation efforts in Southwestern Berks County should be coordinated with agricultural preservation efforts in West Cocalico, Heidelberg, North Heidelberg and Spring Townships.

Natural Resources

- Much of the area does not generally produce high aquifer yields, but the Wernersville Municipal Authority has wells which are judiciously located to provide adequate water supply in such a “low-yield” area. The most productive aquifers are supposed to be the limestone Ontelaunee, Millbach and Richland Formations located in a belt in South Heidelberg Township south of Route 422 and in southeastern Lower Heidelberg Township. The impacts of any development in these areas should be analyzed to assure there will be no negative impact on these high-yield aquifers.
- Lower Heidelberg Township has extensive agricultural preservation areas, justifiably so given the extent of prime agricultural soils, ACE (agricultural conservation easements) properties and agricultural security areas within the Township. Should agricultural areas be maintained as is, or expanded into adjoining areas of prime agricultural soils, ACE properties and agricultural security areas. Land adjoining agricultural security areas in Heidelberg, North Heidelberg and Spring Townships could also be considered for agricultural preservation.
- South Heidelberg Township has a small area of agricultural preservation zoning adjoining the Lancaster County boundary, near Vinemont, and some areas to the south and to the west of Wernersville, though it has substantial farmed areas, prime agricultural soils, agricultural

security areas, and Wernersville State Hospital farmland in the northern third of the Township. Agricultural security areas are also found in the central and southeastern portions of the Township. Prime agricultural soils are scattered in the southwestern, central, and southeastern portions of the Township. Agricultural security areas and agricultural preservation zoning are found in adjoining West Cocalico Township. It should be determined whether agricultural preservation areas should be expanded in South Heidelberg Township.

- Much of the southern two-thirds of South Heidelberg Township is wooded. Though substantial development has occurred in the northern third of the Township, much of the land is still farmed.

In Lower Heidelberg Township, south of Brownsville Road, there is limited woodland. Most is found on steep slopes within stream corridors. The predominant land use is agriculture.

Only small portions of Wernersville are wooded or farmed.

- Limited areas of steep slopes are found in Wernersville. Lower Heidelberg does not have extensive areas of steep slope. Steep slopes tend to be found in stream corridors and typically are wooded. Substantial areas of steep slope are found in the southern two-thirds of South Heidelberg in the South Mountain area. The steep slopes are usually wooded.
- There are a number of streams within the area, with related wetlands, hydric soils and floodplains.

The Tulpehocken Creek south of the Blue Marsh dam is Special Regulated Trout Waters. The Spring Creek is Regulated Trout Waters. Classifications of other watercourses include Trout Stream Fishery, Cold Water Fishery, and Warm Water Fishery.

The Tulpehocken Creek/Cacoosing Creek corridor was found to satisfy eligibility criteria for Scenic River Designation for Historical value, Fishery/Wildlife and/or Vegetative value, Recreational value and Cultural value.

The Forest Resources Report for the Tulpehocken Creek Watershed and Tulpehocken Creek Watershed Protection Plan and Environmental Assessment include proposals for improving water quality and protecting and enhancing natural resources in the watershed. Major recommendations of these reports are the use of riparian forest buffers along the watercourses in the watershed; use of Best Management Practices in urban development, agriculture, and forestry; voluntary conservation easements; and stream habitat improvement, including wetland restoration and stream bank restoration/stabilization.

- The limestone areas in the Planning Area are subject to sinkholes and depressions and contain areas of moderate nitrogen leaching potential.
- Identified natural features of special interest in the area include Big Spring (on private land), PA Big Tree (on State land), Cushion Peak (on YMCA land) and Blue Marsh Lake (listed in

Preserving Berks County's Resources, An Action Plan for the Berks County Conservancy) and Blue Marsh Lake, State Gamelands No. 280 and the Reber's Bridge Mesic Forest between Tulpehocken Creek and Reber's Bridge Road (listed in the Natural Areas Inventory).

- The Berks County Greenway, Park and Recreation Plan identifies a number of greenway corridors, ecological nodes/hubs and historic resources in this area. Many are associated with Blue Marsh, South Mountain, and riparian corridors.
- The southern portion of South Heidelberg Township is in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

Traffic Circulation

- As development has occurred in southwestern and western Berks County, traffic volumes have increased on roads not intended for the volumes experienced or the function performed. Substantial through traffic crosses the area on Route 422, and to avoid Route 422 delays and reach the Pennsylvania Turnpike, alternative routes are found. As volumes increase, additional attention to the deficiencies of the road system will be required.
 - South Heidelberg Township has proposed and completed some road improvements to Lincoln Drive, Krick Lane, Wernersville Road, Mountain Home Road, and Montello Road to address anticipated traffic in the northeastern part of the Township. Lower Heidelberg Township has, along with developers and Wilson School District, completed improvements to the Green Valley Road – Route 422 intersection. Improvements are still planned for the State Hill Road-Evans Hill Road intersection to accommodate traffic from proposed development, and improvements to State Hill Road just west of Van Reed Road have been completed by adjacent commercial properties.
 - Fritztown Road, which experiences substantial traffic to and from Lancaster County, Spring Township and Sinking Spring, continues to see moderate increases in traffic. Though some of that traffic is connecting to the recently-completed U.S. 222 south, the rest is mainly background growth due to residential development in the area and adjacent townships in Lancaster County. Route 222 has interchanges outside the planning area at Route 724, Grings Hill Road, Mohns Hill Road, and Routes 272 & 568. Pressure continues to be placed on South Heidelberg Township roads between Route 422 and residential concentrations in the area.

Many roads in South Heidelberg and Spring Townships that intersect Fritztown Road are either offset or intersect with less than ideal angles and sight distances. A safety analysis of the Fritztown Road corridor should be undertaken to determine what improvements may be required.

- When trains pass through Wernersville and South Heidelberg, only one point of access exists to Route 422 from south of the tracks – Furnace Road. This is of concern to both municipalities. South Heidelberg is pursuing having a bridge constructed at Krick Lane.

Using Furnace Road does not provide a direct route to destinations such as the elementary school. Additionally, the need for a traffic signal at Furnace Road and Route 422 should be monitored.

- Traffic delays on Route 422 significantly affect the quality of life in the area. Major capital improvements to Route 422 are not currently planned. However, a recently-completed project to link all signals between Sinking Spring and Robesonia helped to alleviate some of the traffic delays on U.S. 422. That project connected and computerized all signals and allows them to ‘talk’ to each other and adjust according to traffic needs. One negative effect of that project has been to add delays to traffic turning onto Route 422 from intersecting streets. The municipalities should work with PennDOT regularly to assess the timing of those traffic signals and adjust them accordingly.

Additional major commercial development along Route 422 could result in additional lights and turning movements and further increase delays along the road. Access Management and trip reduction strategies will play an increasingly significant role in controlling traffic growth in the corridor.

- Within the Borough, Fairview Street provides access to abutting properties, including businesses and community facilities, and provides an alternative to Route 422 for circulation within the Borough, but it is narrow. The merits and feasibility of widening it should be reviewed.
- The feasibility of aligning North and South Church Streets should also be reviewed.
- Depending on development patterns chosen (location, concentration, density) and the relationship between residential development and commercial areas and employment centers, possibilities for expanded public transportation or local circulators (perhaps in conjunction with the adjoining Western Berks planning area) should be investigated.
- “Connections” is a key concept: vehicular, transit, bicycle and pedestrian connections. Connecting developments, connecting roads within the planning area, and connecting residents to community facilities, employment opportunities and recreation facilities such as Blue Marsh, South Mountain Park and Wernersville Park must be addressed.

Linking Land Use and Transportation Along Route 422

- Should attempts be made to maintain some open farm areas along Route 422 between the Boroughs of Sinking Spring, Wernersville and Robesonia? More development will have an impact on the roadway, but the needs for property tax revenue may outweigh the traffic impacts.
- Should the south side of Route 422 in Wernersville remain “no-parking”? Is there enough cartway to allow on-street parking, and how would additional parking affect traffic flow on Penn Ave.? The lack of parking inhibits commercial activity on the south side, but parking

would likely further slow down the movement of traffic on Route 422. On-site parking on the south side is also limited.

- Should streetscape improvements in Wernersville be encouraged, such as additional trees, street furniture (benches, lighting, planters, trash receptacles, etc.), widened sidewalks, and landscaping? Is there enough room between houses and the street to accommodate these improvements?
- Should additional attention be given to aesthetics the length of Route 422?
- The traffic on Route 422, including the large amounts of truck traffic, and new competing development such as Sinking Spring Marketplace, can adversely affect the “small-town” character of Wernersville and development of a viable community center in the Borough. What types and locations of development should occur throughout the planning area that will have the least negative impacts on Route 422 and parallel routes? What methods of trip reduction can be used to effectively remove local short trips from the roadway?
- Ways of improving traffic congestion on Route 422, such as timing of traffic lights, access management, and left turn lanes (such as a left turn lane at Furnace on westbound Route 422) should be identified. In 2008 the municipalities along the Route 422 corridor from Sinking Spring to Womelsdorf completed a full-scale traffic signal replacement, connection and timing project. Local officials need to monitor traffic along the corridor and its’ connector streets to ensure traffic is still moving effectively.
- Federal Transportation Enhancement funds have been spent on rehabilitating the former Train Station in Wernersville along U.S. 422. Borough officials need to continue the planning and implementation processes to incorporate this asset into the region. As part of that planning, clear pedestrian, bicycle and motorist access needs to be provided.

Pedestrian Circulation

- There are gaps in the sidewalk system in Wernersville. Current Borough policy is that sidewalks are constructed when a property is sold. Should this policy be continued or should a more proactive policy be followed, particularly when routes to community facilities are involved? The borough should consider conducting a pedestrian accessibility audit that documents not only sidewalk location but also condition. Uplift caused by tree roots, cracking and spalling, lack of curb cuts, encroaching trees and telephone poles, and other conditions limit the usability of the sidewalk system by those with physical impairments, the elderly, very young and others.
- Should sidewalk connections from the South Heidelberg sidewalk/pathway system to the Wernersville sidewalk system be planned? In particular, can elementary school students that live in South Heidelberg safely walk to the elementary school in the borough? Are there missing links in the sidewalk system that prevent even the closest students from walking/biking to school? Are there bike racks at the school?

- Can students in Green Valley Estates and surrounding residential areas safely access the new Green Valley Elementary and Middle schools without the need to drive? Are there bike racks at the schools to accommodate bicyclists? Is there a need for pedestrian/bicycle accommodations along Green Valley Road and surrounding roads?
- The South Heidelberg Township Recreation Plan provides for a trail system in the Township. A trail system along the Little Cacoosing and Cacoosing Creeks is incrementally being implemented in Lower Heidelberg Township. A trail system will be constructed in Heidelberg Run East and West. The Joint Plan promoted a trail system be planned throughout the area and linked to the other major trail systems and recreational opportunities in the area such as Blue Marsh and Union Canal Towpath. Additionally, can those trail systems be expanded to provide links between residential, commercial and employment opportunities throughout the planning area?

Recreation/Community Facilities

- Lower Heidelberg Township has had a policy that the Township would not proactively provide or accept recreation facilities for Township residents. The responsibility is placed on the developer. This policy is reflected in the Township's Recreation Plan. Should this policy be followed in the future?
- Wernersville currently has facilities at the Borough Park and Playlot north of 422 and at the elementary school south of Route 422. Should the Borough continue the policy of obtaining recreation fees from developers in order to improve existing facilities?
- To what extent should the recreation facilities in the Planning Area be linked by a trail system and should pedestrian and bicycle access to recreation facilities be improved?
- To what extent should the recreation facilities and community facilities in the Planning Area be linked by actual land connections through land acquisition and/or acquisition of conservation easements, thus forming contiguous open areas. In Lower Heidelberg Township, a potential connection would be Hain's Church – the Jesuit Center, Green Valley Country Club – Green Valley Estates Open Space – Cacoosing Meadows – Tulpehocken Creek Park. In South Heidelberg Township, a potential connection would be State Game Lands No. 274 in Spring Township, Cushion Peak Rod and Gun Club – South Mountain YMCA – Caron Foundation – Lebanon Valley Sportsmans Association – Robesonian Fish and Game Club – Womelsdorf-Robesonian Joint Authority Watershed.
 - Should linkage of community facilities via trails, development of common recreation/community facilities, or development of an accessible commercial/community center be pursued to foster a sense of community in the Planning Area?
 - Should cooperative efforts with the school districts to provide increased recreational opportunities for youths be considered?

Historic Resources

- There are a number of historic resources in the three municipalities. In Lower Heidelberg Township, which historically has been an agricultural community, the historic buildings tend to be scattered throughout the Township. Wernersville has a concentration along Route 422. South Heidelberg Township has buildings scattered throughout the Township, but also has two historic farms (Belle Alto and Grandview Dairy), the large Wernersville State Hospital complex, and a concentration of former resort-oriented properties on South Mountain.
 - If it is determined that preservation of these historic properties is to be valued, it should be determined whether land that is developed near historic resources must be done in such a way to mitigate the impacts on historic resources.
 - Prior to development of land on which historic resources remain, should developers be required to prepare a plan for the preservation of historic resources and their context?
 - Should historic districts be considered where concentrations of resources occur?
 - Should trail systems link historic sites and should informative displays be erected near the historic sites?

Scenic Resources

- Southwestern Berks County contains a number of scenic roads and vistas. In recent years, some scenic roads have been lost as road frontage is developed. The Joint Plan promotes the preservation of scenic resources. To what extent should preservation of scenic resources be emphasized as a goal of the Plan?
- If preservation of scenic resources is encouraged, should this be encouraged through broad land use policies such as agricultural and woodland preservation and/or through performance and design standards for development and/or through conservation and cluster subdivision design?

Public Sewage Disposal

- Sewer system expansion plans should be consistent with land use planning policies
 - The only concentration of suspected malfunctioning on-site sewage disposal systems is found in the Boulder Lake Area.

- Most new development is proposed to be served by public sewage disposal, though small and scattered developments with on-site sewage disposal continue to be planned in the more rural areas of the region.
- Except for limited areas in the southern portion of South Heidelberg Township, the area is classified as having severe limitations to or hazardous for on-site sewage disposal.
- In the past, sewer systems have been constructed to serve existing development or proposed development. Extensions of systems should generally not be planned for areas proposed for agricultural preservation, watershed protection, or protection of other natural resources or conservation areas.
- In Lower Heidelberg Township, public sewers will be extended to the boundaries of areas currently intended for agricultural preservation through the Rosewood Hills subdivision and by the Green Valley Estates interceptor along the Little Cacoosing Creek to the Sinking Spring Sewage Treatment Plant.
- It will be necessary to coordinate locations of lines, purchased capacity in plants, and land use policies.
- The treatment standards at the sewage treatment plant along Spring Creek should be such that the stream will not be degraded and can achieve its maximum fishery potential.

Water Supply

- Should Interconnection of Systems be encouraged?
 - Western Berks Water Authority and Wernersville Municipal Authority systems are connected.
 - There have not been any discussions between Wernersville Municipal Authority and Womelsdorf-Robeson Joint Authority.
 - There is an interconnection of the Wernersville Municipal Authority system to the Wernersville State Hospital system.
 - Western Berks Municipal Authority and Pennsylvania American have cooperated in provision of service to Rosewood Hills in Lower Heidelberg Township. They have discussed working together in the future.
 - There is no connection of the Wernersville Municipal Authority and Pennsylvania American lines in Lincoln Drive and Mountain Home Road and no connection between the Wernersville Municipal Authority line in Lincoln Drive and the Pennsylvania American line in Heidelberg Run East. No interconnection has been

proposed to date. The Wernersville Municipal Authority line has been extended to the boundary of the Pennsylvania American franchise area.

- There are no plans for interconnection between the Wernersville State Hospital and Womelsdorf-Robesononia systems.
- Galen Hall has a private water system which has been available for purchase in the past.

- Water Supplies should be protected:

Wernersville Municipal Authority watershed and wellhead protection areas

Wernersville State Hospital watershed

Womelsdorf-Robesononia Joint Authority watershed and wellhead protection areas

Citizens Utilities wellhead protection areas

Western Berks Municipal Authority treatment plant supply

Galen Hall Water Company watershed and wellhead protection areas

Both surface and groundwater are used as sources of water supply, and both sources should be protected

- Water System expansion plans should be consistent with land use planning policies