

THE VISION AND GOALS OF THIS PLAN

The Overall Vision of this Plan

As we look to the future, hopefully the best features of older development in the region will have been preserved and extended into new development.

Birdsboro and Morgantown will continue to serve as active business hubs and support the higher density housing needs of the region.

Historic buildings should be preserved and many restored in a sensitive manner, with appropriate new uses. Older neighborhoods will remain strong and stable, with a high percentage of homes being owner-occupied.

New business development should occur in ways that fit into the character of the community. This should include reuse of older buildings and sites and construction of newer commercial buildings only where it is appropriate.

Large areas will continue to be farmed and substantial areas of woodlands preserved, providing attractive visual relief between developments, recreational opportunities and further promoting the rural nature of the region that residents are used to.

The creek valleys will be preserved, some in public greenways and trails. Plentiful high-quality groundwater supplies will remain available, with large amounts of stormwater recharging into the ground. The creeks will also continue to have high water quality, with the benefit of careful erosion controls. Conservation easements will have ensured the permanent preservation of large areas of open land.

Most new development should be served with public water and sewage service that will minimize the total amount of land that is consumed. Substantial areas of open space will have been preserved within most new development. "Cookie-cutter" subdivisions sprawling across the rural landscape will have been avoided.

Unsightly and inefficient "strip" commercial development of new commercial businesses with individual driveways along long stretches of major roads will have been avoided. Extensive landscaping will add to the attractiveness of new development.

Traffic will increase but should be carefully managed, with improvements to smooth traffic along major corridors and existing choke points. Coordinated driveways and interconnected parking lots will be provided between adjacent businesses. Wider shoulders should be provided on roads to increase safety and promote bicycling and walking.

Signs will be of modest size and height. Lighting will be controlled to avoid nuisances to neighbors and motorists.

A wide variety of recreation opportunities will be available and the Daniel Boone and Twin Valley School Districts will continue to be known for high quality education.

Direction: The Major Goals of This Plan

The following goals provide overall direction for this Plan. The recommendations work to carry out these goals. More on these goals can be found in the corresponding chapter of the plan.

Overall Goal: Continually strive to make the region an even greater place in which to live, work, learn, visit, shop and play, with a strong sense of community, scenic preserved open spaces, an attractive historic character, a vibrant economy, and an excellent quality of life.



Housing in Birdsboro

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Natural Features and Agricultural Conservation

- Protect important natural features, with a special emphasis upon the Hopewell Big Woods, the Schuylkill River, French and Hay Creeks, other creek valleys, wetlands and steeply sloped woodlands.
- Seek to maintain and protect agricultural activities within the region.
- Protect the Birdsboro Watershed area.
- Protect the amounts and quality of groundwater and creek waters.
- Protect natural resources and regional open space from utilities.
- Encourage smart growth practices and low impact development to protect water quality.
- Incorporate regulations into the zoning and SALDO ordinances which encourage riparian buffers, environmental protection overlays and smaller street widths to support stormwater management.
- Include regulations into the zoning and SALDO ordinances for stormwater Best Management Practices (BMPs) and green infrastructure.
- Adopt policies for the maintenance of stormwater management facilities and encourage municipal ownership.

Community Facilities and Services

- Provide high-quality community facilities and services in the most cost-efficient manner, including addressing needs for future growth. Seek to provide public facilities and services on a regional basis to avoid duplication of efforts.
- Provide central water and sewage services in the most cost-efficient manner, with regular investments to provide reliable services.
- Continue to improve parks and playgrounds to meet a wide variety of recreational needs.
- Emphasize full coordination of municipal and emergency services across municipal borders.

Historic Preservation

- Protect and preserve the most important historical structures
- Encourage appropriate reuse and historic rehabilitation of older buildings, as well as encouraging new construction that is consistent with historic surroundings.

Economic Development

- Focus on providing high quality, fundamental public services.
- Prioritize infrastructure improvements.
- Encourage regulatory alignment/consistency in all municipalities.
- Boost the diversification of the local economy.
- Support the creation and growth of local businesses.
- Attract and cultivate a skilled workforce.

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- Consider developing and sponsoring a summer jobs program for high school students in the Daniel Boone and Twin Valley school districts.
- Make sure ordinances address industry trends and the needs of retail businesses and retail development.

Transportation

- Continued efforts should be made to vote or petition legislators for the benefit of transportation issues within the region and communicate unified requests for improvements to the Reading Area Transportation Study (RATS) through the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP).
- Pursue preliminary technical evaluation of transportation priorities and share recommendations with the appropriate municipalities and agencies.
- Collaborate on a regular basis to focus limited funding on the most effective solutions and to maximize the potential for cost sharing and savings.
- Each municipality should implement low-cost safety improvements where such measures provide an immediate impact on safety.
- The municipalities should ensure future development does not create detrimental access issues, increase congestion, or create safety problems.
- Consider more specific access management strategies for growth areas and designated roadways or corridors.
- Communicate with the operators of commercial and industrial facilities regarding issues with regular truck movements and designated routes.
- Coordinate with Norfolk Southern to maximize the utility of the rail line in spurring appropriate economic development within the planning area, including coordination of land use planning, in conjunction with the rail line.
- Consider the development of a regional trail/pedestrian/bicycle plan that provides guidance for an interconnected system of pedestrian improvements between the municipalities.
- Ensure municipal subdivision and land development ordinances contain requirements for sidewalks in appropriate locations.
- Encourage the addition of sidewalks within the planning area especially where there are missing links or where sidewalks would facilitate appropriate connections to existing or future neighborhoods and destinations (such as schools, parks, recreation facilities, major job generators, or shopping centers).
- Communicate with SCTA\BARTA regarding future bus routes, shuttles, and other transit opportunities.

Land Uses and Housing

- Provide for orderly patterns of development that provide compatibility between land uses, particularly to protect the livability of existing residential areas.
- Seek to extend the best features of older development into newer development.
- Maintain an attractive rural character in the region. Use the “Open Space Development” process to cluster development on the most suitable portions of a tract, in order to permanently preserve important natural features and open spaces.

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- Direct most development to locations that can be efficiently served by public water and sewage services, in order to minimize the total amount of land that is consumed by development and to direct most housing away from agricultural areas.
- Direct new commercial uses to selected locations that allow for safe and efficient traffic access, as opposed to long strip commercial development along major corridors with individual driveways.
- Strengthen older commercial areas, particularly in Birdsboro and Morgantown, and continue to reuse or redevelop older industrial sites.
- Promote pedestrian-friendly “human scale” development that is not overly dense and that includes substantial landscaping.
- Strengthen residential neighborhoods, with an emphasis on encouraging home-ownership, rehabilitating older buildings, and avoiding incompatible development.
- Continue to further improve the visual attractiveness of the region, with an emphasis upon the most highly visible corridors, and with an emphasis upon street trees, landscaping and preserved creek valleys.
- Stress a strong diversified economy that generates stability, sufficient tax revenues and wide employment opportunities.
- Emphasize tourism that is built upon the area’s heritage, arts and culture, and recreational assets.
- Encourage appropriate reuse and historic rehabilitation of older buildings, as well as encouraging new construction that is consistent with historic surroundings.
- Make sure that obligations are met under State law to provide opportunities for all types of housing and all legitimate types of land uses.

Putting this Plan into Action

- Update municipal development regulations to carry out this Plan, and periodically update the Plan and regulations as needed.
- Continually work to put this Plan into action - through a program of updated planning and many short-term actions within a long-range perspective.
- Promote substantial citizen input, including making sure residents are well-informed about community issues and encouraging volunteer efforts to improve the community.
- Maximize communications, coordination and cooperative efforts between the municipalities, the school districts, adjacent municipalities, the County and other agencies and organizations.

The Survey

As part of the process of updating this joint comprehensive plan a community survey was prepared to gauge the public’s perception of the planning region and to inquire about possible future planning initiatives in the municipalities. The twelve question digital survey was distributed to households via a link on each municipality’s quarterly newsletter as well as advertised using social media and municipal websites. The survey was available starting in November 2018 and was closed in February 2019. Because the initial response rate was low it was decided to let the survey open for additional time to market it for more responses. Unfortunately, during this timeframe the planning committee only received 148 responses. The following are the main takeaways from the community survey:

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- The majority of responses were from residents of Caernarvon Township (40%). Union Township followed second (35%), Robeson Township (13%) and Birdsboro (8%). 3% of respondents did not live in any of the municipalities within the Southern Berks Joint Comprehensive Plan region.
- Approximately 33% of respondents were 60 years or older in age.
- The overwhelming majority (98%) owned their home as opposed to renting.
- Overall, residents who answered the survey believed the quality of life in the region is good (59%).
- Roughly 56 percent of respondents indicated that high taxes is the top issue facing the region. Lack of recreational opportunities and too many vacant commercial buildings tied for second with 36% of respondents thinking these items were important issues for the municipalities. Traffic congestion and transportation came in third at 35%.
- Respondents reported that the roads in the region are good (47%) and/or fair (40%).
- Almost 49 percent of respondents felt strongly that it is important to preserve farmland in the rural parts of the region. 42 percent of respondents strongly believe that the Southern Berks region needs to attract new business development to generate additional tax revenue in order to reduce the tax burden on the residents.
- The majority of respondents think that road/street repair and economic development/job creation should be the highest priorities for municipalities when spending municipal tax dollars.
- 56 percent of respondents believe that beautification projects such as streetscapes or road corridor improvements benefit the region by attracting new businesses to the area.
- 63 percent of the respondents indicated that they use the recreational opportunities available to them in the community.
- One question asked respondents to express their thoughts on what they perceived as being the assets of the community. The majority of respondents enjoyed the quiet, rural nature of the region and the abundant opportunities for recreational activities.