

THE VISION AND GOALS OF THIS PLAN

The Overall Vision of this Plan

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

Penn Avenue will continue to serve as an active business corridor for the region, including the centers of Sinking Spring, Wyomissing and West Reading. Attractive streetscape and road improvements will make the corridor more pedestrian friendly and vehicle circulation more efficient.

Historic buildings will be preserved and many will be 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.



Vanity Fair

New business development will occur in ways that fit into the character of the community. This will include reuse of older buildings and sites and construction of newer commercial buildings along Penn Avenue that is similar in character to adjacent older buildings.

Large areas will continue to be farmed, particularly in the southern part of Spring Township. Substantial areas of woodlands will be preserved, providing attractive visual relief between developments.

The creek valleys will be preserved, some in public greenways and trails, building upon the parks along the Wyomissing, Tulpehocken and Cacoosing Creeks. Plentiful high-quality groundwater supplies will remain available, with large amounts of stormwater recharging into the ground. The creeks will also 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 will 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, particularly through clustering in the southern part of Spring Township. "Cookie-cutter" subdivisions sprawling across the rural landscape will have been avoided.

Unightly 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 have increased but will be carefully managed, with improvements to smooth traffic along major corridors and existing choke points. As traffic is better managed along major roads, there will be less incentive for vehicles to travel on residential streets. Coordinated driveways and interconnected parking lots will be provided between adjacent businesses. Wider shoulders will 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 Wilson and Wyomissing School Districts and Penn State-Berks will continue to be known for high quality education.

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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.

Natural Features and Agricultural Conservation

- Protect important natural features, with a special emphasis upon the Tulpehocken, Cacoosing and Wyomissing Creeks, other creek valleys, wetlands and steeply sloped woodlands.
- Seek to maintain agricultural activities in large portions of Spring Township.
- Protect the amounts and quality of groundwater and creek waters.
- Protect natural resources and regional open space from utilities.

Energy Conservation

- Encourage modes of transportation, patterns of land uses and designs of sites and other actions that conserve energy.

Community Facilities and Services

- Provide high-quality community facilities and services in the most cost-efficient manner, including addressing needs for future growth.
- Provide central water and sewage services in the most cost-efficient manner, with regular investments to provide reliable services.
- Improve parks and playgrounds to meet a wide variety of recreational needs.
- Complete a system of bicycle and pedestrian trails to provide vital links between existing parks and recreational opportunities.
- 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 more coordination between the municipal economic development committees.
- 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.
- Consider developing and sponsoring a summer jobs program for high school students in the Wyomissing and Wilson school districts.

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- Consider an “Eds and Meds” focus on proactively planning for the expansion of health care and higher education facilities and attract the services and providers that complement the hospital and the university.
- Make sure ordinances address industry trends and the needs of retail businesses and retail development.
- Emphasize tourism that is built upon the area’s heritage, arts and culture, and recreational assets.

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 identified 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.
- Review municipal ordinances for parking standards and amend as necessary to ensure parking requirements are both appropriate and flexible.
- The municipalities should consider a joint parking study that identifies present and future needs and proposes short and long-term solutions.
- 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 southern Spring Township. 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 highways with individual driveways.
- Strengthen older commercial areas, particularly along Penn Avenue, and 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. Take full advantage of Penn State - Berks, the Reading Hospital, the Reading Museum and the many other strong institutions in the region.
- 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 ten 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 throughout the month of November 2017. During this timeframe the planning committee received 397 responses. The following are the main takeaways from the community survey:

- Overall, people in the joint planning region are satisfied with the quality of life in their municipality.
- Roughly 73 percent of respondents indicated that traffic congestion and transportation is the top issue facing the region. Too many vacant commercial buildings (45%) and high taxes (37%) came in at two and three respectively.

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- 46 percent of respondents felt strongly that the region needs to attract new business development to generate additional tax revenue to reduce the tax burden upon residents. At the same time, the same amount (46%) thought it is important to preserve farmland in the rural parts of the region.
- 32 percent of respondents think that road/street repair and economic development/job creation should be the highest priorities for municipalities when spending municipal tax dollars.
- The majority of respondents (78%) believe that beautification projects such as streetscapes or road corridor improvements benefit the region by attracting new businesses to the area.
- More than three quarters of the respondents indicated that they use the recreational opportunities available to them in the community.

