

COMMUNITY CHARACTER AND DEVELOPMENT HISTORY

General Characteristics

A community's character evolves from, and is defined by, a variety of interrelated factors. Blooming Grove Township's regional location, physical characteristics (geology, topography, soils), early settlement patterns, the area transportation network and the regional economy have been synthesized into the existing community character and the Township's context in Pike County, the Pocono Mountains, and the larger region.

Blooming Grove Township can best be characterized as a rural-recreational community which serves largely as a bedroom community to the larger region. Open land remains a predominate, yet fragile, feature of the landscape. Fortunately, the thousands of acres of State Game Lands and State Forest Land in the Township should preserve much of this open space for future generations. Couple with this, the thousands of acres of forest owned by the Blooming Grove Hunting and Fishing Club appear secure from development.

Continued residential development is clearly on the horizon as stimulated by recent internal population growth and migration from nearby urban areas to the Township and other Pike County municipalities. However, residential development is not anticipated at the rate experienced by other municipalities in Pike County where more land is available for subdivision. Single-family homes are the most numerous type of dwellings, with relatively few mobile homes, two-family or multi-family dwellings. Most residential development is concentrated in planned communities, with Hemlock Farms the largest. Commercial development is mainly concentrated along Route 739 within one or two miles of Interstate Route 84.

Given the attractive natural environment and quality lifestyle of the Township and its regional location, continued population growth is expected. Without careful planning and land use control, this growth will certainly change the community character with increased traffic congestion, fragmented open lands and increased demand for community facilities and services.

Development History

- History does not tell us the origin of the name of Blooming Grove, but two possibilities are considered:
 - One is that the settlers found a grove of apple trees.
 - The other is the existence of an abundance of blooming pink Mountain Laurel.³
- A map of Pennsylvania drawn by W. Scull in 1770 shows *Blooming Grove*, the *Sheholy Creek* and the *Sheholy House*.³
- A writing about Sylvanus Seely, by Theodore Thayer, mentions that Jonas Seely obtained a warrant in 1765 which included the Blooming Grove tract.³
- In 1793 and 1794 land grants were issued and twelve persons obtained the lands that are now known as Hemlock Farms.³
- The first white settler in Blooming Grove was Levi Lord.
 - Lord and twelve English associates purchased a tract of land from Dr. Philip P. Monington, a land speculator.
 - They all came from England in 1809 and discovered Monington's title was not valid.
 - All but Lord settled in other parts of Pike County. Mr. Lord repurchased the land and settled in what is known today as Lords Valley.¹
- Samuel Preston wrote in his diary of 1787 that Blooming Grove was *but an indifferent, poor tract of stony land and scrubby timber*. He did not think it was worth anything. Interesting to note is his reference to Blooming Grove Tavern, located about 7 miles from Sheholy House.³
- The Wilderness Road once ran through Blooming Grove. It was one of the first roads in the area.²

- Part of another more ancient trail known as the Minisink Path also crossed the Township. It was used by Indians to travel from the New Jersey seacoast to points inland as far as Wyoming, present day Wilkes-Barre.²
- Lumbering was a principal industry in the early development of the Township.²
- One of the first known land developments was the property the Lord family purchased when coming here in 1809. It seems a development was advertised in the Philadelphia paper and they came to see what it was, purchased property, and settled Lords Valley.³
- In 1814, when Pike County was first established, the village of Blooming Grove was considered as the location for the county seat.²
- It was not until March 26, 1836, through an Act of the State Legislature, that Pike County was erected and Milford became the county seat.²
- The first Pike County Courthouse was constructed in 1815, the current Courthouse in 1874, and the administration building in 1985.¹
- Established December 17, 1850, Blooming Grove Township was created from Lackawaxen and Palmyra Townships which were two of the original townships created with the organization of Wayne County in 1798.²
- The first annual election of officers in the Township was held at the house of Gilbert Y. Cron on Friday, March 7, 1851.
- The Bethany-Dingman's Choice Turnpike passed through Lords Valley. Present day Route 739 is a good approximation of the course the old road took through the Township.²
- During the 1860's, many lumber jacks traded their saws and axes for a rifle and Yankee uniform to fight in the Civil War.²
- The Blooming Grove Hunting and Fishing Club was established in March of 1871 through a purchase of approximately 12,000 acres in Pike County. The Club was established by legislative act of the Pennsylvania General Assembly and granted a charter as the Blooming Grove Park Association.
- A meeting of the auditors was held on April 8, 1878, and the first resolution on record was made *fixing wages for the ensuing years as follows, for man and team two dollars & fifty cents, for a man \$ 1.00 per day, full days work of ten hours.*³
- By 1880 . . .
 - The Township contained a total of 472 people. (In 1960 the Township population was 424.)
 - Two post offices were located in the Township at Lords Valley and Blooming Grove.
 - Although there were no churches located in the Township, occasionally a preacher would speak in one of the school houses.¹
- A March 19, 1892 inventory of road equipment included:
 - John M. Decker - Road machine, good order; 1 scraper-good order; 2 stone hammers; 1 pick, 2 shovels; 1 crow bar.
 - William Vennie - 1 road machine, fair order; 1 road scraper, new; 1 plow, old; 2 stone hammers, 2 shovels, 1 pick, 1 bar, 1 brush hook.
 - Simeon Lord - 1 road machine, good order; 2 plows, one new, one old; 1 brush scythe, 1 brush hook, 2 shovels, 1 pick, 1 crow bar.³
- In April, 1900 the amount of seated assessment was \$63,686 and unseated assessment was \$30,474, with a tax rate of 8 mills. In 2007 the total assessed valuation was \$122,099,880.³
- Built in 1901, the Blooming Grove Baptist Church is the oldest church in Blooming Grove Township.²
- The Pennsylvania Department of Highways was formed in 1903 and the March 26, 1906 Supervisors' minutes state: *This is the first settlement under the New Law of Road laws of 1905 and the first year of the Board of Supervisors.*³
- The Blooming Grove road and Route 739 from the

Lord house to Route 6 were *tarred and chipped* in 1930. Route 739 was paved from the Lord House to McConnell's Pond in 1952-53. The Well Road was improved in the 1960's.³

- The Blooming Grove Fire Department No.1 was founded in May 1959.³
- Hemlock Farms was, until the early 1960's, the private country estate of George M. Brewster. Originally comprising more than 4,000 acres, the property was maintained as a steer ranch and as a retreat for the Brewster family, friends, and business associates.²
- Hemlock Farms was platted after the Brewster property was sold in 1963 to Western Heritage Properties, Ltd., from Toronto, Canada, for the sum of \$700,000.³
- The Hemlock Farms Volunteer Fire and Rescue Company was founded in August 1969.³
- The Blooming Grove Township Building was constructed in 1974.
- Interstate 84 was completed in 1973 -74.³
- The Township Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance was adopted in 1977 and the Zoning Ordinance in 1989.
- Census 2000 reported Pike County as the fastest growing County in Pennsylvania, and Blooming Grove Township increased from 2,022 to 3,621 persons, a 79% increase.

¹ *Blooming Grove Township Comprehensive Plan*, July 21, 1986, Community Planning & Transportation Corporation.

² *Pike County Historic Site and Scenic Area Survey*, Blooming Grove Township. George J. Fluhr, Editor.

³ *Blooming Grove Township, Pike County, PA, Celebrating 150 Years*, Gail B. Masker, Township Historian, 2001.

Past, Present and Future

Timbering, farming and milling served as the base for the initial settlement and early economic development of the Township and Pike County. During the Nineteenth Century, the Township saw the beginning of tourism and recreation which would lead to the many second homes of the 1970's and 1980's. Today, the basic natural resource activities have lost significance to the local economy and many acres in the region which once were forested or in agriculture are now subdivided into residential lots. Nevertheless, open land remains an important part of the local landscape. Early settlers relied heavily on waterways for transportation, continuing improvements, initiated by railroad access and culminating in modern road improvements and the completion of the interstate highway system, have transformed Pike County into the mix of communities of today. In the midst of these changes, the Township's population has increased rapidly over the forty years. The Township is now continuing the transformation from a rural community to a suburban bedroom community dependent on the larger region for employment.

Given its proximity to New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania metropolitan areas, its attractive lifestyle, recreation appeal, and the effect of 9-11, the Township holds potential, for continued development as the population of the County and larger northeast region shifts from urban to less populated municipalities. The direction plotted by this *Comprehensive Plan* and the land use control and growth management actions taken by the municipal officials of Blooming Grove Township, along with the private development decisions made in response to demands for housing and commercial development, will shape the community's character over the next ten to twenty years.