

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT IN CONTIGUOUS MUNICIPALITIES, PIKE COUNTY AND THE REGION

Planning Code

The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) dictates, and common sense suggests, that planning and development in contiguous municipalities, the county and the region be considered when a local municipal plan is adopted. MPC §301.4(a) goes on to state that *municipal comprehensive plans which are adopted shall be generally consistent with the adopted county comprehensive plan.*

County Planning

In 1988 the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) was amended to require all counties in the Commonwealth to prepare and adopt a comprehensive plan within three years. Pike County adopted its first comprehensive plan in 1993 which identified a broad range of growth and development issues facing the County, suggested a framework to address the issues, called for ongoing planning, and recognized the importance of intermunicipal cooperation. The same, but much intensified, issues continue to face the County, and the Board of Commissioners and the County Planning Commission initiated the preparation of a Plan update in 2003 with its completion and adoption anticipated for the Summer of 2006.

Given that the *County Plan* sets goals which are similar to those of this *Milford Borough / Milford Township Comprehensive Plan* and will provide a broad framework for the future, no inconsistencies between the two plans are anticipated. In addition, local municipalities are responsible for many of the actions proposed by the *County Plan*, particularly those related to land use management and community facilities and services. In any case, Milford Planning Area Officials must review the proposed County Plan to ensure it addresses local issues in concert with this *Comprehensive Plan*.

The new County Comprehensive Plan updates the previous plan completed in 1993, and builds upon the County-wide Visioning efforts conducted in 1995 and 1998. The Plan focuses on what future actions should be taken to successfully address the challenges facing Pike County because of its rapid growth and stresses the need to create partnerships within the County to

achieve the Vision for Pike County in the 21st Century.

The Comprehensive Plan is intended to proactively manage growth, discourage suburban sprawl, improve the quality of development, and foster a sense of stewardship for the conservation of the natural resources of the County in order to maintain and enhance the quality of life for County residents.

The Plan encourages smart growth - growing in ways that support economic development and jobs; creating strong neighborhoods with a range of housing, commercial and transportation options; and achieving healthy communities that provide families with a clean environment. Elements of smart growth include compact development, permanent protection of open space, greenway systems, infrastructure to concentrate development and attract new business, use of traditional village settings surrounded by rural working land, and revitalized existing towns.

Regional approaches to addressing issues within the County are supported in the Plan, including the continuation of the highly successful Pike County Road Task Force and the formulation of a similar County-wide Sewer and Water Task Force to coordinate land use planning and infrastructure for orderly, concentrated, and efficient growth in identified growth areas.¹

Regional Planning

Regional planning in the Pike County area of Pennsylvania is not formalized in any municipally organized body. Each county planning agency is responsible for review and coordination of planning within its jurisdiction. The Northeastern Pennsylvania Alliance, located in Pittston, Luzerne County, serves as a community and economic planning and development information source and funnel for grants and special projects for Carbon, Lackawanna, Luzerne, Monroe, Pike, Schuylkill and Lackawanna Counties, but has no municipally authorized regional planning power.

¹<http://www.pikepa.org/Comprehensiveplan.htm>

Planning and Zoning in Contiguous Municipalities

The three local municipalities in Pennsylvania which adjoin the Milford Planning Area, Dingman Township, Shohola Township and Westfall Township, have each adopted comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances. In the area along the common borders, the adjoining municipalities are generally similar in character to the Planning Area, that is, residential generally adjoins residential, commercial adjoins commercial, and open land adjoins open land. Although the adjoining comprehensive plans vary in date, status of formal adoption, and content, all of the plans concentrate on land use issues and no significant inconsistencies are anticipated between those plans and this *Plan*. The public review and adoption process for this *Comprehensive Plan* will enable municipal officials of the contiguous municipalities to identify any potential inconsistencies. The zoning district designations in the Planning Area have been in place for a number of years and no district changes along adjoining municipal borders are proposed. While the potential for conflicting land uses does exist, this is the case where any two dissimilar districts adjoin, and zoning ordinance performance standards are expected to provide protection for adjoining uses.

Contiguous Municipality Review

MPC §502.1(b) provides standing for local municipal governing bodies to appear before and provide comments to any contiguous municipality considering a proposed subdivision, change of land use, or land development, thereby allowing issues of conflicts to be raised. Any changes made to zoning districts must be considered in terms of the zoning and existing land uses in any adjoining municipality to avoid such land use conflicts. For example, it would be inappropriate to designate an industrial or heavy commercial area adjacent to an existing residential development or residential zoning district in an adjoining municipality. Milford Planning Area local official should work with Dingman Township, Shohola Township and Westfall Township officials to establish agreements to formalize this process among contiguous municipalities so that any municipality potentially affected by a zoning change or a development project has the opportunity for review. The MPC already requires this for comprehensive plans and amendments.