

CENTRE COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN PHASE I

An initiative of the Centre County Commissioners

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The attached document represents Phase I of the Centre County Comprehensive Plan. This Plan, initiated in 2000 by the Centre County Board of Commissioners, has been prepared under the guidance of the Centre County Planning Commission with funding from the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development through the Land Use Planning and Technical Assistance Program.

Phase I includes background studies, inventories of existing conditions, and recommendations to serve as a foundation for Phase II, Growth Management and Community Development as required by the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC). The elements included in Phase I are Natural Resources, Historic and Cultural Resources, Housing, Community Facilities and Services, Economic Development, Transportation, and Land Use.

This Phase has been prepared to provide a comprehensive inventory of existing conditions. Consistent with the MPC, each of the Plan's chapters has been written to identify key interrelationships among the elements. Such interrelationships include an identification of the importance of agricultural, mineral, and historic resources to the County's economy. In addition, housing, land use, and growth trends have been related to community facilities and transportation infrastructure to provide a comprehensive overview.

While Phase I provides an integrated and comprehensive inventory of existing conditions in Centre County, it has also been prepared such that each chapter can stand alone as a guide and reference document for citizens, business interests, elected and appointed officials, planners, and others interested in Centre County. Recommendations have been provided to guide future decision making and to assist in Plan implementation.

Along with the detailed recommendations presented in the Phase I, the interrelationships of each Chapter will be critical in providing the foundation for Phase II, Growth Management and Community Development. It is in Phase II where the interrelationships among each of the Plan elements will be key in guiding future growth and development consistent with the goals of the Plan.

Overview

The following is a brief overview of the Phase I Comprehensive Plan chapters and their corresponding recommendations. The goal of each chapter is to clearly identify important historic trends, catalog existing conditions, and identify recommendations for future planning.

Natural Resources

The Natural Resources chapter of Phase I includes many distinct elements that comprise the County's natural environment. These elements include mineral resources, wildlife and forest resources, climate, agriculture and soils, surface water, and ground

water resources. Also included in this chapter are physiographic analyses including flood plains, wetlands, and steep slopes.

The elements of the Natural Resource chapter will assist in future decision making by identifying development constraints, opportunities for farmland preservation, and threats to the natural environment. In addition, this chapter will identify unique natural resources of benefit to the County's diverse economic development opportunities.

The goal of the Natural Resources chapter is to assist the County and its municipalities in making efficient, cost effective, and environmentally sensitive land use decisions in support of long-range growth management and community development strategies.

Historic and Cultural Resources

Similar to the Natural Resources section, the Historic and Cultural Resources Chapter identifies and catalogs unique County resources for the purpose of preservation and promotion as part of County, regional, and municipal economic development strategies.

Such strategies include rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of historic structures, promotion of Main Street revitalization programs, and integration of historic preservation strategies and tourism opportunities.

Housing

An adequate and diverse housing stock is critical to the County's long-range development potential. However, Centre County's housing market varies considerably by planning region. For example, the rapid population and employment growth experienced by the Centre Region contributes to escalating property values. Demand then shifts to outlying municipalities that may lack the infrastructure to support rapid population growth.

Each of the County's planning regions and municipalities have different short term and long term housing needs. While some regions must address ways to accommodate rapid residential development demand, others are concerned with a deteriorating housing stock and a declining population base.

Understanding the County's housing market on both a County and regional level will assist in the development and implementation of the growth management and community development vision of Phase II. Phase II will assist the County's planning regions and municipalities in identifying comprehensive land use strategies that will maximize land resources and minimize infrastructure costs to promote fiscally sound long term development practices in support of County, regional, and municipal planning goals and objectives. Strategies will also be developed to coordinate municipal community development goals with assistance programs (e.g. housing rehabilitation grants).

Community Facilities and Services

Centre County's continued population growth creates challenges for service providers. The County and its municipalities are mandated by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to provide for a certain level of community services (e.g. Courts, Public Safety, Human

Services programs, etc.). Other services initiated by the Board of Commissioners, serve the needs of particular communities.

The efficient, effective, and equitable delivery of services demands the provision of capital facilities distributed throughout the County as dictated by demographic and socioeconomic trends and conditions. Capital facilities include buildings (e.g. courthouse, municipal buildings, etc.) as well as public and private support infrastructure (e.g. sewer and water lines, utility lines, telecommunications facilities).

The Centre County Planning Office collects and analyzes such data to ensure that necessary and required services can be delivered in a cost effective manner. As with each of the other chapters of Phase I of the County Comprehensive Plan, the Community Facilities and Services chapter identifies and describes existing conditions and provides recommendations to satisfy future needs. However, due to potential security concerns, a concerted effort has been made to catalog the County's resources without providing significant detail on the physical location of infrastructure, particularly as concerns the County's electric, fuel, telecommunications distribution systems. Rather than identifying the location of such facilities, the Plan identifies areas of future need and provides recommendations for future decision making in support of the County's growth and development strategies.

Economic Development

The Economic Development Chapter of Phase I identifies important trends in commercial and industrial growth in the United States, Pennsylvania, and Centre County. Much of Centre County's economy is based on the direct and indirect influences of Penn State University. However, a successful economic development strategy must include a diverse set of industries and must take advantage of the unique resources of the County (e.g. agricultural services, mineral resource extraction, tourism opportunities, etc.).

Understanding the diverse economic landscape of Centre County, sub-county strategies have also been identified to promote economic development strategies for each of the County's Planning Regions and municipalities.

Transportation

The Transportation Chapter of Phase I is an assessment of Centre County's transportation facilities, including road networks, transit opportunities, rail systems, airports, and bicycle/pedestrian facilities.

Once complete, the County's Long Range Transportation Plan, a cooperative effort between Centre County and the Centre Region Metropolitan Planning Organization, will be incorporated as an element of Phase II Growth Management and Community Development Strategies.

Land Use

The Land Use Chapter of Phase I presents an overview of land use changes since 1995. This data assists in the analysis of changes over time and provides the baseline conditions necessary to evaluate alternative development scenarios in Phase II.

Summary

Each of the aforementioned chapters and elements of Phase I of the Centre County Comprehensive Plan combine to provide the foundation for the County's long-range growth management and community development strategies. Phase II will include significant participation from County and municipal elected and appointed officials, citizens, and business interests.

Phase II of the Plan will include the identification of the growth management and development strategies that will form an overall vision for the future of Centre County. As required by the Pennsylvania MPC, this vision will be consistent with the goals of each municipality and will be compatible with the land use strategies of neighboring Counties. Implementation measures will be clearly identified and performance measures will be established to ensure that the goals of the Centre County Comprehensive Plan can be fulfilled.