

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Why a Comprehensive Plan?

The St. Lawrence, Amity and Exeter area is a distinctive and unique place. It has beautiful, unspoiled rural areas affording scenic views; historic villages; traditional neighborhoods; recreational opportunities in and along its parks, woodlands, trails, streams, and river; a vivid history and interesting historic resources; and a rich agricultural heritage. In the St. Lawrence, Amity and Exeter area there is still an opportunity to really plan to make a difference. The purpose of this Comprehensive Plan is work proactively to address the future of the area so that it may be shaped by the municipalities' own vision, rather than by the pressure of forces acting upon the Borough and the Townships. This plan will manage rather than react to growth pressures in the area, work to retain the vitality of the Borough and existing development, and protect the area's many assets and resources.

The Borough and the Townships have prepared individual comprehensive plans in the past. This Comprehensive Plan is the first joint planning effort by all municipalities, and was initiated because of the recognized need to examine overall planning for the area in the face of development trends and pressures in the region; to develop common goals and objectives for land use, circulation, community facilities, housing, open space and recreation, natural resources, municipal services, and resource preservation; analyze interrelationships with surrounding municipalities; coordinate land use, housing, transportation, community facility and utility, economic development, and resource preservation planning; and acknowledge the Comprehensive Plan for Berks County.

Planning jointly allows allocation of land uses, housing types, densities, and development patterns over the entire region, rather than trying to plan for all types of uses and densities into each municipality. It also allows for coordinated land use planning along municipal boundaries; coordinated planning for trails, recreation and open space, and transit throughout the region; and coordinated planning along the common road corridors in the region. An overall approach to economic development can be provided, addressing retention of one component of the economy, agriculture, and allowing for appropriate commercial and industrial development which complements rather than detracts from existing downtowns at appropriate locations. An opportunity for coordinating with County and State agencies to provide joint input during the planning process is afforded.

What does a Comprehensive Plan Accomplish?

The Comprehensive Plan contains a vision of what the Borough and the Townships want to be and includes goals and objectives for realizing that vision. Through accomplishing those goals and objectives and realizing the vision, the quality of life for the area's residents will be enhanced.

The Comprehensive Plan is also an educational document, providing discussion of conditions, strengths, issues, concerns, and opportunities, and identifying resources that are worthy of protection and preservation.

The Comprehensive Plan contains policies for land use, circulation and community facilities which will serve as a guide for public and private decision-making to accomplish the goals and objectives, and thus the vision, for the Townships and the Borough. The appropriate locations, amount, and patterns of development are established and standards for developers to meet are identified.

The Comprehensive Plan provides a basis for implementation techniques, such as land use ordinances, administrative actions, official maps and capital improvements programs, which will implement the policies contained in this plan.

This Comprehensive Plan is a Living Document

This Comprehensive Plan is just the beginning. It is the basis for the attainment of the goals and objectives established within the plan, which can be accomplished only with the support of the elected officials, municipal governments, municipal commissions, boards and committees, area businesses, area residents, and surrounding municipalities and regional planning groups.

The objective has been to prepare a plan which will not just sit on a shelf and gather dust, but a plan that will be implemented and used by municipal governing bodies, planning commissions and other groups within the municipalities to guide their actions in attaining the goals of this Plan.

This Plan presents a strategy to guide municipal officials and other agencies in making decisions that will assure that the St. Lawrence, Amity and Exeter area will continue to be attractive places in which to live and work. This Comprehensive Plan is not an ordinance or regulation, but is a basis for proposing regulations and undertaking specific functional plans designed to implement the policies established within this plan. Implementation of the action plan is critical and essential.

Need for Continuing Planning

Planning is an ongoing process and this Comprehensive Plan must be continually reviewed in light of development trends, the state of the economy, unforeseen influences, availability of public infrastructure, changes in community goals, and the suitability of the Plan's objectives, policies, and implementation program.

Benefits of Multi-Municipal Planning

- Provides a regional planning approach and allocation of land uses
 - Where
 - How much to accommodate population projections
 - Patterns of development
- Establishes growth areas and future growth areas regionally
 - Coordination with infrastructure
 - Opportunities for infill
- Provides coordinated planning along the common boundaries of the municipalities
- Supports existing centers rather than weaken them
- Coordinates road corridor planning, standards, and management
- Provides for linkages between municipalities
- The Plan and implementing ordinances are considered by state agencies in permitting decisions
- Addresses review of “developments of regional impact”
- Identifies opportunities for future joint efforts
- Promotes common land use designations and definitions
- Establish goals for economic character over the entire Region
- Provides support for municipalities in zoning challenges
- Enables Transportation Impact Fees across municipal boundaries

- Enables Transfer of Development Rights across municipal boundaries
- Enables priority consideration in state funding programs
- Provides opportunity to learn from neighbors' shared experiences
- Enhances the Region's attractiveness to quality development
- Enables developing a "specific plan" for an area designated for non-residential development, preparing regulations for that area, and streamlining the approval process