

DRAFT

Palmerton Area Comprehensive Plan

**Bowmanstown Borough, Lower
Towamensing Township, Palmerton
Borough and Towamensing Township**

Carbon County, Pennsylvania

Draft - With Minor Revisions - March 2008

This Plan was prepared by the Palmerton Area Joint
Comprehensive Plan Committee

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Names to be added.

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INTRODUCTION

What Is a Comprehensive Plan?

This Joint Comprehensive Plan addresses Bowmanstown, Lower Towamensing Township, Palmerton, and Towamensing Township. This Plan provides an overall set of policies for the future development and conservation of the municipalities over the next 15 years. The Comprehensive Plan is not a regulation by itself. However, under State law, any future change to a municipality's zoning ordinance is supposed to be generally consistent with a Comprehensive Plan. This Plan is intended to provide the policy direction for future changes to the municipalities' development regulations.

The Comprehensive Plan includes the following major parts:

- The Overall Vision and Goals of the Plan
- The Natural Features and Agricultural Conservation Plan
- The Land Use and Housing Plan
- The Community Facilities and Services Plan
- The Transportation Plan
- The Historic Preservation Plan
- Putting this Plan into Action
- Appendices

How Was This Plan Prepared?

The draft Plan was prepared by a Regional Comprehensive Plan Committee consisting of residents appointed by the elected officials of each of the municipalities. The Committee developed the policies at monthly workshop meetings that were open to the public.

The first step in the process was the identification of major issues and concerns that need to be addressed. The next step was an analysis and mapping of existing conditions and trends. A full set of computerized maps was prepared.

An "overall vision" was prepared and a set of goals was written to provide overall direction for the Plan. Then, alternatives were considered to guide development. An initial public meeting was held on the entire Plan, and a second public meeting focused on Downtown Palmerton. Then, the Land Use Plan was prepared, followed by recommendations concerning Community Facilities, Transportation, Agriculture, Historic Preservation and Natural Features. A set of public meetings was then held. After making revisions to respond to public input, the Plan will be considered for adoption by the elected officials of each municipality. The final decision regarding the Plan's policies in each municipality were decided upon by the elected officials of that municipality. Therefore, no one municipality is able to force a decision upon another municipality.

Major Benefits of the Comprehensive Plan

The Comprehensive Plan offers many benefits to the municipalities, including the following:

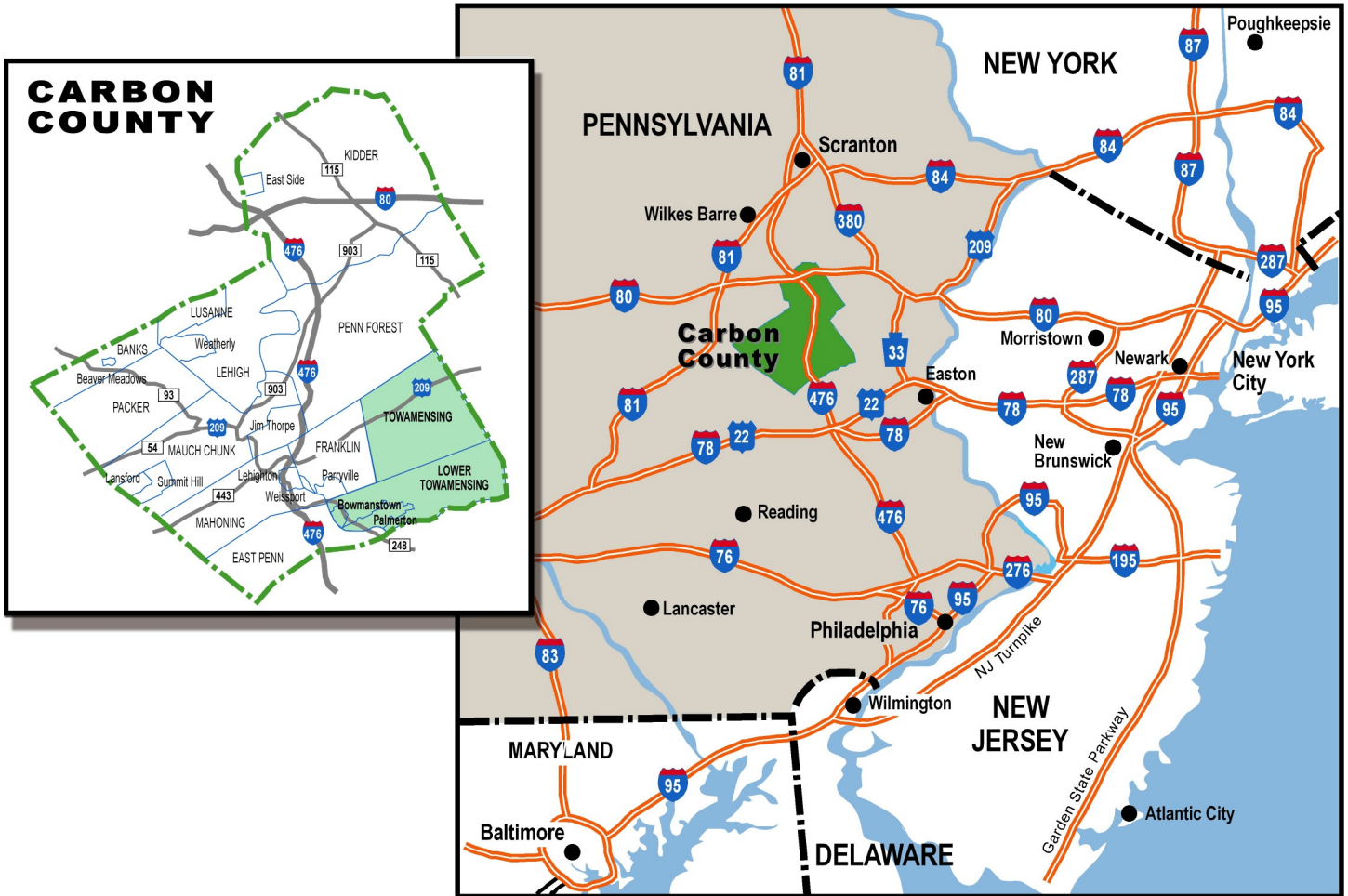
- Addressing land uses in coordination with roads, to avoid future traffic problems.
- Avoiding conflicts between different types of development, particularly across municipal borders, such as having intense business uses placed adjacent to a residential neighborhood.
- Considering development policies in a comprehensive and coordinated manner, as opposed to piecemeal review of individual lots.
- Reducing the threat of expensive challenges of the zoning ordinances of a municipality. If the Comprehensive Plan is carried out in the zoning ordinance of each municipality, then each municipality will receive additional protection against these types of challenges.
- Increasing opportunities to obtain State grants. State law provides that communities can receive preference in certain grants if they complete a Joint Plan. Also, State agencies are more likely to fund projects if they are highlighted in a Comprehensive Plan that was based upon public input.
- Highlighting opportunities where the municipalities could save money through shared services.
- Saving money in the Comprehensive Plan process itself. By joining together in a regional plan, the communities became eligible to have the State pay 50 percent of the cost. Moreover, the cost of having four municipalities prepare one Plan is much lower than if each municipality would prepare a Plan on its own.

Regional Location

The map on the following page shows the location of the Palmerton area within Carbon County and within the larger surrounding region. The four municipalities are located east of the Lehigh River and along the north side of the Blue Mountain. The four municipalities are at the southeast corner of Carbon County, with Monroe County to the east and Lehigh County to the south. Palmerton is approximately 18 miles north of Allentown, 45 miles south of Wilkes-Barre and 75 miles north of Philadelphia.

The Northeast Extension of the Pennsylvania Turnpike (I-476) passes north-south through the region. The Turnpike is accessed from the Mahoning Valley interchange at Route 209. The Turnpike provides links to the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton area to the north and the Philadelphia area to the south. Route 248 provides connections to the Lehigh Valley to the south. Routes 248 and 209 provides access to Lehigh Valley and Jim Thorpe to the north. Route 209 connects to the Stroudsburg area to the east. Route 895 extends into Schuylkill County to the west.

REGIONAL LOCATION



The base map on the following page shows the boundaries of the four municipalities, major roads and lot lines, as of 2006.

Base Map

GOALS: THE OVERALL DIRECTION OF THIS PLAN

Mission Statement

The following is the mission statement to guide the Comprehensive Plan:

To 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, preserved agricultural areas, an attractive historic character, a vibrant economy, and an excellent quality of life.

Major Goals

The following are the major goals of this Plan:

- Protect important natural features, with a special emphasis upon the creek valleys, lakes, wetlands and steeply sloped woodlands.
- Work to continue agricultural activities in large portions of the region.
- Protect the amounts and quality of groundwater and creek waters.
- Provide for orderly patterns of development that provide compatibility between land uses, particularly to protect the livability of existing residential areas.
- Maintain an attractive rural character in much of the region.
- Promote various types of business development in selected areas.
- Strengthen Downtown Palmerton and promote redevelopment of older industrial areas.
- Provide areas for a range of housing types and densities, to meet obligations under State law.
- Strengthen and protect older residential neighborhoods, with an emphasis on encouraging home-ownership, rehabilitating older buildings, and avoiding incompatible development.
- Provide high-quality community facilities and services in the most cost-efficient manner, including addressing needs for future growth.
- Provide for logical extensions of public water and sewage services to accommodate planned growth areas.
- Emphasize coordination of municipal and emergency services across municipal borders.
- Work to control heavy truck traffic, through-traffic and higher speed traffic on residential streets/roads.

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- Make well-targeted cost-effective improvements towards congested and unsafe road segments, in cooperation with PennDOT and adjacent landowners/developers.
- 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.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Use a range of methods to fund land conservation.

"Conservation easements" can be used to permanently preserve land without outright purchase of the land. With a conservation easement, the land remains privately-owned. The easement involves the property owner voluntarily agreeing to donate or sell the right to develop his or her land. The property owner agrees to place a restriction in the deed of the property which becomes binding on all future owners of the land. One goal is to preserve large contiguous areas of farmland over time. The County agricultural easement encourages landowners to apply to have the County pay them to preserve their farmland.

A referendum can be used to ask voters to approve an additional tax that would be dedicated to land purchase. A bond is typically issued, with the annual payments on the bond paid from the tax receipts. State law allows voters to approve an increase in their earned income tax (up to 0.25 percent) or an increase in the real estate transfer tax (up to 0.25 percent) only paid by people selling or buying land. The real estate transfer tax increase can be particularly attractive because it only affects properties that are sold.

Act 4 of 2006 is a State law that can be used to promote the preservation of additional land through permanent easements. The municipalities, school district and county can jointly agree to freeze real estate taxes on preserved lands. This provides a strong incentive for landowners to seek to have their easements purchased by the county or to donate easements.

Work to protect creek corridors, with thick vegetation along creeks.

The primary goal is to maintain thick natural vegetation along creeks, and to re-plant areas along creeks where thick vegetation does not exist. This thick vegetation is essential to provide high quality habitat for fishing and to filter out eroded soil and pollutants from storm water runoff. At best, there should be mature canopy trees over a creek, plus thick underbrush. The municipal zoning ordinances could also be strengthened by requiring a setback of approximately 25 to 100 feet from the bank of major perennial creeks.

Limit development on steeply sloped lands.

Moderately steeply sloped lands (15 to 25 percent) are generally only suitable for low intensity development. Very steep lands (over 25 percent) are generally not suitable for any development. Consideration should be given to strengthening zoning regulations to control development on steeply sloped lands.

Promote Open Space Development that permanently preserves key portions of development sites.

Open Space Development involves allowing homes on smaller lots in return for permanent preservation of a substantial percentage of the tract of land in some form of open space. The use of Open Space Development should be strongly encouraged, including strong incentives to promote the permanent preservation of substantial portions of a tract in open space. Homes should be clustered on the most

suitable portions of a site, and important natural areas should be planned for preservation before any lot lines are proposed. Great attention should be paid to the standards for the open space - to avoid narrow and unusable areas counting as open space.

Preserve the Blue Mountain

Consideration should be given to whether the region wishes to encourage public acquisition of additional areas of the Blue Mountain. Such acquisitions typically occur with assistance by the Wildlands Conservancy and the State Game Commission, with the Game Commission owning the land.

Carry Out the Future Land Use Plan With Zoning Changes, Particularly in Lower Towamensing

The Land Use Plan section includes recommendations for various types and densities of development in each area of the region. The most significant recommended changes in zoning are in Lower Towamensing Township.

Work to Strengthen Downtown Palmerton

This Plan seeks to strengthen Downtown Palmerton as the business, cultural and civic center for the region. This includes work to improve the appearance, make the most convenient parking spaces available for high turnover by customers, using joint promotions and additional special events, and improving pedestrian safety.

Consider zoning provisions to protect historic buildings.

Zoning revisions should be considered by each municipality to require approval before an important historic building could be demolished. There also could be zoning incentives for reuse of a historic building, such as allowing additional types of uses.

Emphasize road improvements at key problem areas, in cooperation with PennDOT and adjacent landowners/developers.

The following road segments are of particular concern:

1. Access to the former West Plant Site - This land in the west end of Palmerton north of Route 248 has great potential for new business redevelopment.
2. Forest Inn Road - The length of Forest Inn Road is a series of problems, from an awkward intersection with Little Gap Road to a series of sharp turns and an awkward high volume intersection at Route 209.
3. Trachsville - The intersection of Route 209 and Trachsville Hill Road is a problem because of limited sight distance from the east. The situation is aggravated because of a hill on the north side of the intersection and the presence of vehicles towing boats to and from Beltsville Lake.
4. Route 895 and Bank Street - This intersection in Bowmanstown may eventually need to be signalized, near the Lehigh River bridge.
5. Outdated Bridges - There are several outdated bridges, including narrow bridges and bridges with structural problems.
6. Shoulders Along Little Gap Road and Lower Smith Gap Road - These roads need improved shoulders, to improve safety.

8. Route 209 - Towamensing Township and PennDOT should work together over the years to obtain additional right-of-way to provide for improvements along this highway, such as turn lanes and wider shoulders.

Extend central sewage service to areas with failing septic systems, particularly in Aquashicola and along the western part of Little Gap Road.

Many of these lots are served by cesspools that predated modern septic system standards. There were many situations where wastewater was found to be running onto the surface of the ground or into creeks. The extension of public sewage service to this area along Little Gap Road should be a priority not only to address public health, but also to promote economic development in business areas along Little Gap Road.