

# Introduction

The new Penn Township Comprehensive Plan is intended to provide a blueprint for future planning and decision making on the part of Township officials. The Township's previous comprehensive plan, completed in 1985, was a useful document, but it did not address many of the problems now being posed by a growing Township that seeks to accommodate residential development while preserving prime agricultural farmland.

Indeed, Penn Township's extraordinary growth provides the underlying impetus for the current planning effort. Penn Township's population grew at a rate of 24% during the last decade, outpacing other municipalities in the region. Correspondingly, housing units in the Township grew at a rate of 32% for the same period.

Agriculture remains the most important industry in the Township and assures protection of a striking visual and physical landscape. This setting attracts new residents and gives older inhabitants, many of whom can trace back generations on the same property, a genuine sense of place and value. To continue farming as a way of life, however, requires some major changes in the way agriculture is conducted. Larger farms and more mechanized equipment have made farming operations more productive. But, increasingly, farmers have begun to look beyond traditional field crops and small dairy herds to more intensive farming practices in order to

maintain a standard of living comparable to other segments of the population.

Coupled with greater diversification in farm practices is an increased awareness by the Commonwealth and the Chesapeake Bay consortium that farmlands hold the key to improving water quality and reducing pollution. Controlling runoff by creating riparian buffers along streams and tributaries that may only be active in the Spring is now an accepted practice. However, the number of farmers participating in stream bank conservation and other programs to restore and protect watersheds remains low in the Township.

By contrast, the number of Township farmers participating in the Agriculture Security Zone is quite high and, with the exception of lands along both sides of Route 522, most of the Township's prime farmland is now located within an ag security zone.

As a result of increased residential development, stormwater runoff has become a major concern and created spot flooding problems in neighboring Selinsgrove and in at least one new development. Sewer and water are now available in the more populated areas of the Township, but, as more land is developed, the Municipal Authority must determine how new customers can be served in a cost-effective manner. Channeling new housing to existing developments with available lots or to adjacent vacant property helps to create a

critical mass for infrastructure and preserves prime farmland.

Route 522, which cuts through the center of the Township, has become an important corridor for commerce -- both service oriented and highway commercial -- as well as for light industry and warehousing operations. Increased traffic has also generated safety concerns at several busy intersections, most notably Eighteenth Street.

The Township has had a unique relationship with Selinsgrove Center which is by far its largest landholder. On one hand it has derived part of its operating revenue from the Center, while on the other it has had a limited role in defining and shaping land uses as the institution has downsized both its population and land holdings. Developing a more proactive role in dealing with the Commonwealth and Snyder County, which has been the principal local State contact, is important if these lands are to be used for important public, and in some cases, private purposes.

Recreation has not been a primary focus of the Township, but with continued growth in population the need for both passive and active recreation activities will continue to grow. The Township has acquired 30 acres of land adjacent to the existing softball and Little League baseball fields that will help to address this need, but without effective planning for this tract, including

identification of funding sources and maintenance responsibilities, its future utilization could be in doubt.

And lastly, as the Township continues to grow, it finds that the municipal building is inadequate to handle many Township functions and services. The public meeting room, for example, must also function as an office for the Municipal Authority, map and record room, Planning Commission conference and work space and Supervisors meeting area.

The municipal building also contains the Township's road maintenance and related construction equipment and the space is cramped to say the least. Expansion of the present building to achieve adequate office, meeting and equipment storage space is one alternative. But relocation to a larger site would allow greater flexibility in design for both administrative and maintenance functions. The separation of these functions, and creation of a dedicated maintenance facility, also needs to be considered.

The new comprehensive plan comes at a time when the Township must make crucial decisions about its future direction, including land use, infrastructure, recreation, storm-water management, municipal facilities, and ordinance preparation to protect a quality environment that is under great stress.