



Comprehensive Development Plan

Shenango Township, Lawrence County, PA

Chapter 1 - Introduction and Purpose

The Comprehensive Plan

The simplest way to approach planning is a process – an organized way of thinking about the future. If such thinking is to be translated into action, it needs to be accomplished in an orderly fashion, and made a part of an administrative process. Generally, the process consists of making surveys, analyses and projections; defining problems, setting goals and objectives; formulating alternative ways to reach objectives; choosing among alternatives; implementing decisions; experiencing outcomes; and finally evaluating those outcomes and updating goals and/or methods.

The vehicle through which this process is initiated and formalized for the guidance of officials and the understanding of the general public is the comprehensive plan. This Chapter defines the comprehensive plan: its development, its uses, its adoption and its implementation.

A comprehensive plan is a document that is designed to state basic policies and to guide future growth and development of the community. It carries no weight of law, but it can assist decision makers. It contains no rules or regulations, but it serves as a basis for any land use provisions enacted by the Shenango Township. It is broad in scope, examining the physical, social and economic characteristics that mesh to make the Shenango Township of today, but it seeks to apply this knowledge to the future. It speaks to various issues in general terms, but it can also make specific recommendations. Basically the comprehensive plan is, in part, a factual report that examines how the past has led to the present, as well as a report that can be used to chart the community's path into the future.

Contents of the Comprehensive Plan

The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC), Act 247 of 1968, as amended, mandates that the comprehensive plan contain certain basic elements. These elements are:

1. A statement of community development goals and objectives;
2. A land use plan;
3. A housing needs plan;

4. A transportation and circulation plan;
5. A community facilities and utilities plan;
6. A statement of plan component interrelationships;
7. A discussion of short and long range implementation strategies; and
8. A statement of the relationship of the community's future development to adjacent areas.
9. A plan for the protection of natural and historic resources.
10. A plan for the reliable supply of water.

****THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN IS BY NO MEANS LIMITED TO THESE ELEMENTS, NOR SHOULD IT BE.***

In preparing the plan, studies must be conducted on various subjects, including the existing conditions within the community and the prospects for future growth. Usually, these studies include such items as a settlement history, existing land use, transportation and circulation, community facilities, municipal government, socio-economic analyses, natural features, population and housing. A recent amendment to the Municipalities Planning code also encourages the study of using renewable energy sources within Shenango Township.

Uses of the Comprehensive Plan

The comprehensive plan is an official statement setting forth basic policies concerning physical development and social and economic goals. It is typically of a general nature, with both short-term and long-range goals in its recommendations, and considers all factors affecting growth and development. While some view its function as a general guide or framework for the future growth and development of a municipality, the use of specific proposals have more utility. The comprehensive plan has several uses:

1. Policy determination: the plan aids in the consideration and evaluation of alternatives for general, short-term and long-range development policies;
2. Policy effectuation: the plan lends guidance to specific and immediate programs and problem areas;
3. Communication: the plan informs individuals of the present and future growth and development policies of the community;
4. Conveyance of advice to the Township Board of Supervisors;
5. Education: the plan helps everyone who uses it to understand the conditions, problems, and opportunities of the community by providing factual information.

Development of the Comprehensive Plan

The Studies

The studies conducted in the areas previously mentioned attempt to objectively analyze the community from a number of different perspectives. Each individual study takes an in-depth look at a topic. When completed, each study will then lend support to the development of the plan.

Various studies must be utilized to gather the data necessary to prepare the studies. Historical documents, municipal records, soil surveys, various census reports and other such sources of information are essential. From these sources, facts and trends can be assimilated and used to develop the basic assumptions and forecasts necessary for the development of the plan.

The Community Development Goals and Objectives

Often developers and even municipal officials will dismiss the plan's community development goals and objectives as meaningless rhetoric and idealistic theory. While it may be true that some statements may be lofty, their importance cannot be overstated. In addition to being statutory requirement, they are not only supposed to guide the policy decisions made in the development of the plan, but also are closely examined by the courts should a land use decision be challenged.

The community development goals and objectives should be written as specifically as possible and be unique to each community. The goals and objectives should not be copies from another Municipality, nor should they be drafted without thought and/or discussion. These statements underlie the future growth and development of your community.

The Plan Document

The plan document itself is the final element of a comprehensive plan. After the studies have been completed and a factual base exists from which to make decisions, and after the community development goals and objectives have been stated to guide future decisions, a preferred plan chosen from several alternative plans will form the foundation for the community's future growth.

The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code requires that the plan contain at least a separate element for future land use, future housing needs, future transportation and circulation, future community facilities, the protection of natural resources, a reliable supply of water, an implementation plan and a statement of community objectives.

While future plans for transportation circulation and for community facilities may evolve quite naturally after the studies have been completed, there may be no one “perfect” plan for future land use that can be assimilated from this collection of data. Several different viable plans will be formulated. Only through thought and discussion will the best future land use plan be produced.

Adoption of the Comprehensive Plan

The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code contains the procedural requirements for adopting the comprehensive plan. The Board of Supervisors of Shenango Township must hold at least one (1) public hearing after having given public notice of the hearing. The plan can then be adopted by resolution of the Board of Supervisors, provided that a majority of all members of the Board of Supervisors vote in the affirmative.

Although it is not specifically required, the planning commission should hold one or more public meetings on the comprehensive plan. Such meetings held during the plan preparation and after the plan completion, help to keep municipal residents informed of the planning process prior to the public hearing by the Township Board of Supervisors.

Implementing the Comprehensive Plan

After the plan is prepared and adopted, the recommendations and policies set forth in the plan should be put into effect, or implemented. This is perhaps the most difficult step in planning. While the comprehensive plan carries no weight of law, many of the plan implementation devices do. If the planning commission and the Board of Supervisors properly perform their tasks, and invite participation, the plan can be implemented with a minimum of hardship.

The Zoning Ordinance and the Subdivision Ordinance are the tools for carrying out the plans set forth by the Comprehensive Plan. They provide the regulations which must be followed by all developers so that the community’s needs can be accomplished. They are specific, detailed pieces of legislation designed to carry out the general proposals stated in the Comprehensive Plan. Local land use regulations are used to coordinate and guide development, by providing standards for that development based on specific detailed regulations which promote quality land uses. How effectively these regulations are administered depends on the Township’s planning philosophy.

The Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance:

- sets minimum standards for the layout or design of developments;

- promotes coordinated development;
- guides the type and locations of streets and other public facilities;
- insures the installation of necessary improvements;
- minimizes existing or foreseen problems; and
- manages stormwater runoff and erosion.

The Zoning Ordinance regulates:

- uses of land, water courses and other bodies of water;
- size, height, bulk and location of structures;
- areas and dimensions of land to be occupied or to be unoccupied by uses and structures;
- density of population and intensity of use; and
- protection of natural resources and agricultural land.

Conclusion

A community's development plan serves as the policy statement for zoning, subdivision and land development, and planned residential development regulations. It coordinates the delivery of municipal services such as sanitary sewerage, public water, and fire protection and recreational programming.

A development plan is an inventory of the strengths and weaknesses of a community and provides guidelines for new development to occur in order to protect existing development.

The comprehensive plan is a document prepared to assist in the determination of future growth and development policies. It contains sections which study various aspects of the community, community characteristics, community development goals and objectives, and future plans for several basic areas of everyday living. It is officially adopted by the Board of Supervisors of Shenango Township, and is implemented to a large extent by zoning and by subdivision and land development ordinances. The plan must be periodically reviewed and updated, and must have the understanding, coordination and support of the residents, the planning commission and the Board of Supervisors.