

## Chapter 1

# The Joint Comprehensive Planning Process

### Introduction & Purpose

The Shippensburg Region (Shippensburg Borough and Shippensburg Township) is unique in many ways. The Borough of Shippensburg, the economic and social center of the region, contains a vibrant main street, interesting neighborhoods, a well maintained historic district, and an array of recreational opportunities. Shippensburg Township, which surrounds most of the Borough, is home to Shippensburg University and its 6500 undergraduate students and 1000 graduate students. While the Township has been rapidly suburbanizing, it still includes areas that are predominantly rural in character. The combination of the Borough, Township, and University presents unique challenges as well as opportunities for future land use planning. Issues such as economic growth and cultural development of the Borough, traffic congestion, student housing, and the preservation of remaining natural resources in the face of increasing development make this plan a critical one.

In 1968, the Pennsylvania Legislature passed Act 247, the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code. This legislation enabled local governments to develop Comprehensive Plans, Zoning Ordinances, Subdivision and Land Development Ordinances, and Official Maps. In the intervening years, the Act has been amended numerous times, providing municipalities with additional means of implementing their plans, but these original document types are still the foundation of local planning.

In 2000, Pennsylvania adopted amendments to the Municipalities Planning Code, specifically Acts 67 and 68, known as "Smart Growth" legislation. This new legislation allows municipalities to work together to plan regionally across municipal borders using "smart growth principles", and specifically enables the creation of joint municipal Comprehensive Plans. A Joint Comprehensive Plan can address both development and preservation issues with the flexibility of allocating land uses throughout the entire planning area, rather than the traditional method of providing for all land uses within each municipality. Additionally, a Joint Comprehensive Plan allows for regional coordination of transportation and community facilities issues, thereby helping to prevent overlap of municipal resources. The Action Plan will address specific recommendations regarding these new planning tools.

A Joint Comprehensive Plan is more than just a plan for development. The Plan is a vehicle by which the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania authorizes local governments to work together to create their own visions of what they want to become and how they intend to achieve such visions. The plan must also take into account the fact that surrounding municipalities are simultaneously undergoing change. This Joint Comprehensive Plan is designed to help anticipate change, to identify community goals, and to examine local resources. It will provide guidelines that allow a greater measure of control in regard to *how* change occurs in the Shippensburg area.

In the past, the Borough and the Township have always prepared individual comprehensive plans. This Joint Comprehensive Plan was initiated because of the recognized need to examine overall planning for the area in light of development trends and pressures in the region and to identify common land use goals and objectives.

## Contents of a Comprehensive Plan

The State allows local governments to address virtually any issue that is of municipal concern, however Act 247 established certain minimum requirements. According to §301 of Act 247, a valid Comprehensive Plan must include

- a statement of objectives concerning future development;
- a plan for land use;
- a plan to meet the housing needs of both current residents and anticipated future residents;
- a plan for the movement of people and goods, which may address automobile travel, parking facilities, non-motorized trail systems, and public transportation facilities;
- a plan for community facilities and services, which may address public and private education, recreation, municipal buildings, fire and police services, libraries, hospitals, water supply and distribution, sewerage and solid waste management, storm drainage, and utilities;
- a statement regarding the interrelationships among the components of the plan;
- a discussion of short-range and long-range implementation strategies for the plan objectives;
- a review of the plan's compatibility with the existing and proposed development and plans in contiguous portions of neighboring municipalities outside the planning region;
- a plan for the protection of natural and historic resources; and
- a plan for the reliable supply of water.

In addition, the municipalities may address virtually any area of local concern.

It is important to realize that this Joint Comprehensive Plan does not have the force of law, although it does provide the foundation for ordinances and regulations that do so. In fact, a sound Joint Comprehensive Plan becomes critical in the event that an ordinance of the Borough or Township is challenged in court: if the ordinance in question is shown to be consistent with a duly adopted Joint Comprehensive Plan, a successful legal challenge proves far more difficult to mount.

## Some Basic Terms

Sound planning requires clear communication. A potential source of confusion lies in the meaning of basic terms. Many of these terms are commonly used words, and different individuals have different interpretations of their precise meanings and how they are meant to relate to each other. Planning terms tend to reflect the iterative process of revision and refinement that is planning itself. For the purposes of this document, the following terms shall be defined as follows. Note that the terms are arranged in ascending order of precision.

- An **ISSUE** is a particular topic that is addressed. It is value-neutral and can usually be expressed as a single word or phrase. Examples of **ISSUES** addressed in this Comprehensive Plan are "traffic" and "housing."
- A **POLICY** expresses the municipalities' position regarding a given issue. For purposes of clarity, it is ideal to establish a single **POLICY** statement for each issue, but this is not a

strict rule. Depending upon the complexity of the issue, it may be necessary to define several policies, although it is critical to be sure that they are not in conflict. A POLICY statement relative to the issue of traffic would be "promote the smooth flow of vehicular traffic along major routes."

- A GOAL is a statement of a long-term objective relative to a particular policy. While each policy should be supported by at least one GOAL statement, multiple GOALS may be necessary. A GOAL is always a qualitative statement. Continuing with our example, a sample GOAL for the policy could be "to reduce congestion along US Route 11 in the Borough."
- OBJECTIVES are specific steps toward a goal. Typically, a single goal will be supported by multiple OBJECTIVES. OBJECTIVES are always quantitative. One OBJECTIVE for the sample goal could be "to recommend the construction of an inner loop around the Borough."
- The ACTION PLAN, also known as the implementation strategy, includes a compilation of all the objectives identified in the Joint Comprehensive Plan, setting forth specific steps to achieve each one. The ACTION PLAN will also identify who should be responsible to execute each step, including a time element. Obviously, financing is a critical part of implementation. An ACTION PLAN should include guidance on funding sources, but a comprehensive budget and financing strategy would be premature.

When the Joint Comprehensive Plan is first adopted, the Action Plan is likely to be the most useful portion of the document, as it provides very specific direction. As time passes and objectives are (one hopes) achieved, the less specific elements will be more useful. Clear goals and policy statements are particularly helpful as unforeseen circumstances arise, as they assist local decision-makers to determine what actions are in the best interest of the community.

## Arrangement of This Document

In this Joint Comprehensive Plan the conclusions and plan elements are presented *first*, with the research and documentation provided at the end. This arrangement may be confusing for someone attempting to read the Plan straight through - and it is certainly not the order in which the document was written - but the Plan will be used most efficiently when organized like a research document. The Plan should be a reference document that users will consult for guidance or research on specific topics. Also, since this document is a *plan*, it is logical to give the plan elements prominence rather than precede them with research about conditions that will change over time and become increasingly irrelevant.

Part I is the Introduction. This section provides the user with sufficient background on the planning process and planning terms to assure clear understanding of the document. A summary of municipal-related information gives a sense of the character of the community and of the issues that will be addressed by the plan.

Part II, Issues and Policies, lists the specific issues addressed by this Plan, reviews the procedure by which policies were identified, and then presents each of the policies that have been established.

Part III contains a detailed exposition of the plan elements arranged by topic. This part includes a chapter reviewing the interrelationships among the plan elements, which is required by Pennsylvania law. This analysis highlights how objectives may be mutually supportive as well as objectives that may have slight conflicts with one another. The latter is particularly critical as it anticipates such problems and considers how they may be addressed. This part also includes the Action Plan, which describes how to execute the plan.

Part IV presents the research conducted in the course of the planning process, including a more detailed description of the public participation process, described below in brief.

## The Planning Process

The Cumberland County Board of Commissioners began the planning process in September 2003 by selecting Spotts, Stevens and McCoy (SSM) as the professional planning consultant to work with the Borough and Township. Local officials appointed a Planning Committee to work with SSM, including representatives from Shippensburg Borough, Shippensburg Township, and Cumberland County.

The Committee held monthly meetings starting in September 2003 for the duration of the planning process. Among the earliest actions of the Committee was to identify ways to gain input from Township and Borough residents and business owners regarding their perceptions of the municipalities, and any critical issues they share. A three-pronged approach to direct public input was implemented.

- SSM conducted a series of interviews (some via telephone, others in person) with specific individuals identified by the Committee. The selected persons were chosen because of their positions within the community and the particular insights those positions gave them. The interviewees included a variety of public officials, public and school district employees, and other local leaders. These individuals were questioned about their specific likes and dislikes in the region, what they felt were the most pressing issues facing the community, what they would like the community to become, and other questions more directly related to their particular areas of expertise.
- The Committee and SSM prepared a written questionnaire that was mailed to 86 households in the Township (68 homeowners and 18 renters), and 240 households in the Borough (190 homeowners, 50 renters). The written questionnaires allowed the responders to be anonymous, but some personal information was asked in order to identify concerns that were more prevalent among specific demographic groups. The questions were largely similar to those asked in the interviews, but were structured in a way that allowed for quantitative analysis of the responses. Questionnaire responses were reviewed and analyzed by SSM.
- Finally, the Committee and SSM facilitated a visioning session that was open to all interested residents. The session was in two parts, the first being a detailed presentation of the analysis of the survey responses and the second being a discussion about possible solutions to the principal issues identified by the resident survey: traffic and growth management.

Once the planning process was underway, Committee meetings were largely occupied with discussion of the various plan issues and review of text as prepared by the planning consultant. Upon completion of the text and maps, the entire draft document was reviewed to assure that the plan elements created a coherent whole.

As required by Act 247, the complete draft was submitted to the Cumberland County Planning Department, the Shippensburg Area School District, Shippensburg University, and each adjoining municipality in order to allow them to review and comment upon the Plan. Drafts were also available for public review. The Township and Borough Planning Commissions convened a joint public meeting for the purpose of presenting the draft as submitted by the Committee to the public. Subsequent to this meeting, both the Township and Borough held

public hearings to solicit comments from their respective residents. The Township Supervisors and Borough Council officially adopted the plan in June and July of 2005, respectively.

### **Need for Continuing Planning**

Planning is an ongoing process and this Joint Comprehensive Plan must be continually reviewed in light of unforeseen changes in development trends, the state of the economy, capacity of public infrastructure, changes in community goals, and the appropriateness of the Plan's objectives, policies, and implementation program. It is recommended that the recommendations of this Plan be reviewed every 10 years.