

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Sussex County Strategic Growth Plan (SGP) begins with a vision for the County.

A place where:

- The air is clean.
- The water is pure.
- The view is of fields, hills, valleys and lakes.
- Agriculture remains a viable sector of the economy
- Traffic is smooth and transit is readily available.
- Towns, villages and hamlets hum with activities where one may walk in safety.
- Homes are available to all, regardless of income.
- Good jobs and education are close to home.
- Open space will always be abundant.

From this vision, developed from input at dozens of meetings with public bodies and the public at large, the County now moves toward implementation.

The framework of the plan is the landscape. This is an area or community that is immediately identifiable. The landscapes in the SGP are:

- Rural/Agricultural
- Highlands
- Traditional Centers
- Job Creation Centers
- Parks and Wildlife Management Areas
- Lake Communities

Critical development issues including reorganizing development patterns to emphasize walkable, mixed use centers; support for agriculture and agricultural industry; provision of opportunities for housing for all segments of the County population; resource conservation with emphasis on water supply; waste treatment with the use of new technologies and recharge; water quality, emphasizing the importance of stream buffers, wetlands protection, and upgraded individual discharges; circulation, working to integrate the efforts of both public and private sectors to expand the range of transportation options, building on the concentration of development in traditional and job creation centers; capitalizing on and expanding the abundant open space and recreation resources in the County; preserving historic places and buildings are reviewed in the context of each landscape.

The SGP contains extensive baseline data on population, housing, economic development, transportation, historic sites, open space and recreation, and a build out analysis. The build out analysis provides a perspective on potential development. Land considered available for development is that which is not preserved, otherwise developed, steeply sloping,

encumbered by surface waters, wetlands or their buffer areas. These lands are considered for each municipality, by zone and specific zone requirements with an estimate of the potential yield if the zoning were to be completely realized. This is not a hard and fast number but does serve to illustrate the community impact of the adopted zoning scheme.

The build out analysis will also have the potential for infrastructure analysis as it would relate to development. This will be part of the further work to be accomplished by the County in the event the SGP is endorsed by the State Planning Commission.

The SGP contains a number of Appendices. Those provide additional detail on Municipal Centers, Developable Lands and Buildout, Center Design, County Transportation Projects, and Transportation/Smart Growth Procedures.

Building on the visioning, the baseline data and the landscape characteristics, the Strategic Growth Plan next outlines critical landscape issues relating to development patterns, housing, transportation, agriculture, resource conservation, and landowner equity. General strategic goals are set forth for each of these subject areas. For example:

Development in the future will be strongly encouraged in designated growth areas (centers) and discouraged outside those centers. In particular, new strip commercial development will be discouraged. Existing strips will be renovated vertically and in depth.

Housing must be understood as a regional issue given the thousands of households who have had to move west into Pennsylvania to find somewhat affordable housing. This imposes costs on existing businesses employing these long distance commuters and on the County in lost local spending (long distance commuters tend not to shop and utilize services locally).

Transportation is a key to the County's long term economic viability and quality of life. It will be crucial for all levels of government and the private sector to work together to maximize existing assets and create new opportunities such as the reactivation of the Lackawanna Cutoff and expansion of bus services.

Agriculture is an inseparable part of the County fabric. Sussex County would not be the same without active farms and other agricultural businesses. This vital part of the County provides food, jobs, scenic values, and broadens the range of wildlife habitats.

The County is wholly dependent on its natural resources. Our understanding of those resources and the impact of development on them has expanded manifold, leading use to better assess the whole of the development picture. Development in the future must be based upon the capacity of the resource base to sustain it.

Landowner equity has been a major point of contention since the beginning of zoning. Zoning, by its nature, limits the use we may make of land. Large scale shifts in zoning standards often result in windfalls (to those receiving greater use) and wipeouts (to those whose use is more severely restricted). Techniques such as Transfer of Development Rights, purchase of easements and land in full fee are means by which we may preserve environmentally sensitive

land, develop land in centers rather than the outlying regions (environs), and provide low cost farmland to encourage young farmers. These techniques all are based on the premise that “If there is a public purpose to taking land, the public should pay a fair price for it.”

The plan goes on to review specific objectives for each landscape. These include:

- Minimize sprawl through incentives for density transfer and focus development into designated growth areas (centers).
- Require development to provide a buffer where it is adjacent to agricultural operations.
- Protect streams, lakes and other water bodies from degradation.
- Reduce light pollution.
- Permit development in the Highlands in growth centers.
- Expand job creation centers.
- Market the County’s unique character and workforce to create new and expanded employment opportunities.
- Acquire inholdings and link preserved parklands, trails, and historic/cultural sites.
- Expand the range of housing opportunities through judicious planning of service infrastructure.
- Implement septic management programs, particularly in lake communities.
- Develop interpretive centers for the Highlands and in northern Sussex County for the State and Federal Parks and Forests.

Finally, the plan relates the Sussex County approach to growth to the Goals and Policies of the State Development and Redevelopment Plan. Eight State Goals and seventeen Policies are reviewed along with the SGP elements that advance those goals and policies.