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## INTRODUCTION

### A. Statutory Authority/Intent

A prime responsibility of a County Planning Commission is to prepare and adopt a Comprehensive Plan as an overall policy guide for the physical development of the County, pursuant to the requirements of Pennsylvania Act 247 of 1968, as amended by Act 170 of 1988 which states:

"The governing body shall have the power to adopt and amend the comprehensive plan as a whole or in parts."

This Comprehensive Plan identifies and assesses a broad range of social, economic, and environmental issues by incorporating the traditional elements of a Comprehensive Plan as required by the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (Act 247 of 1968, as amended by Act 170 of 1988). The overall intent of this plan is to provide a framework from which policymakers can act to manage, enhance, and preserve the natural and manmade environment within Elk County. It is intended as a document to be periodically reviewed, amended, and updated to be maintained as a useful tool for development. To be effective, the planning effort should have support of local citizens. This citizen support can not be maintained without periodic updates and citizen education. The importance of citizen participation cannot be stressed enough.

A relevant portion of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code is provided in Appendix D of this plan.

### B. The County Plan Purpose

Elk County and its municipalities can directionalize their destiny in such a manner that conservation and preservation goals will be achieved simultaneously with economic growth and development objectives. The Elk County Comprehensive Plan update is prepared to serve as a base level tool, from which amendments to municipal comprehensive plans, subdivision and land development ordinances, and zoning ordinances may be developed to assist municipalities in creating quality communities.

### C. Implementation

The County will evaluate the Comprehensive Plan every two (2) years and make recommendations to the Commissioners for proposed amendments, revisions, or changes resulting from growth and growth management occurrences from the two (2) years preceding. Annual recommendations will be made regarding needed implementation, i.e., studies, plans, ordinances.

All development projects will be evaluated in terms of compliance with the Comprehensive Plan's goals and objectives. The County plans to work closely with the following agencies to promote success of overall planned economic development including, but not limited to:

- North Central Pennsylvania Regional Planning and Development Commission (NCPRPDC);
- Elk County Industrial Development Authority;
- Johnsonburg Area Revitalization Committee (JARC);
- Ridgway Industrial Development Corporation;
- St. Marys Area Economic Development Corporation;
- Wilcox Area Development Corporation;
- Johnsonburg Industrial Development Corporation;
- Elk County Recreation and Tourist Council;
- Rural Transportation Committee;
- St. Marys Area Chamber of Commerce;
- Ridgway/Elk County Chamber of Commerce;
- Johnsonburg Chamber of Commerce;
- Individual Contacts with Private Industries;
- Johnsonburg Community Trust;
- Ridgway Heritage Council;
- Allegheny Hardwoods Utilization Group (AHUG);
- Allegheny Natural Forest (ANF);
- Lumber Heritage Region;
- Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT).
- St. Marys Redevelopment Authority

The successful implementation of this plan will depend on:

- Linking a prosperous economy to environmental stewardship through public involvement and education of the County's citizenry;
- Development within appropriate flexible environmental standards formulated by partnering local governments and the private sector to improve the future environment;
- The ability for land use tools to be appropriately used to respect individual property rights while instilling social and cultural responsibility.

#### **D. Basis for the Plan**

Since the onset of early planning efforts over the last three decades, the need has been seen for planned development but appropriate action to facilitate planned development has not occurred. During the last three (3) decades even, development in Elk County largely has occurred without regard to social/cultural or environmental impacts as well as without regard to impacts on quality of life. Recently it is heard that development, spreading into the countryside, raises new concerns about the effect of suburban sprawl and a lost sense of community. This is not a "new" concern. It is just that the results are beginning to be felt in rural communities.

Elk County is committed to protection of the environment, cultural values, strong communities, a stewardship ethic, and a strong economy, providing a high quality of life for present and future generations. The plan is intended to facilitate understanding of the interconnection of economic, cultural, community, and environmental well being. There is a need to facilitate that understanding by having policies and practices in place that effectively support the mutual goals of environmental quality, community well being, and economic prosperity. These policies and practices need to be mutually dependent and not in conflict with each other in order to maintain Elk County as a desirable place to live, work, and visit.

#### **E. Public Participation**

At the onset of the comprehensive plan update process, a municipal survey was mailed to all the County's twelve municipalities (See example in Appendix B). Of the twelve (12) municipalities, eleven (11) municipalities responded. The survey addressed a wide array of community and land use issues. A community survey was also presented to the citizens of Elk County to help the plan to reflect goals of its citizens. Overall, the most major concerns were in the areas of public sewage service, on-lot sewage disposal, land development, subdivision and land development requirements, and stormwater. The next most important concerns identified were public water service, transportation, recreation, and government services. A smaller percentage of municipal residents identified private water service, housing, wetlands, and natural resource conservation, education, and zoning as concerns. The issues generating the least concern were prime agricultural lands, resource extraction, and municipal waste handling. Housing was a major issue in the Johnsonburg and Ridgway Boroughs and the City of St. Marys, however.

Although not necessarily representative of all interested parties, governments, agencies, and citizens of Elk County, the surveys give an indication of pre-conceived needs in the County and by its local governments.

#### **Public Workshop #1**

The County held a Comprehensive Plan Update "Kick-off" meeting on January 28, 1998 to discuss the purposes of the plan with the citizens of Elk County and to solicit input from the citizens and other interested parties. The workshop addressed the individual components of a comprehensive plan and the need/use for those components. Interested representatives were the St. Marys Regional Medical Center, the St. Marys School District, the County Conservation District, the Allegheny National Forest, the Area Transportation Authority of North Central Pennsylvania, a local water authority, and six (6) of Elk County's twelve municipalities.

A decision was reached to hold a public workshop on Wednesdays to coincide with planning commission meetings each month and to contact persons interested in forming a steering committee prior to the next meeting. Several persons signed up for committee involvement or otherwise voiced an interest to participate. Those persons represented the following concerns:

1. Natural resources/conservation
2. Health facilities
3. Zoning
4. Recreation
5. Transportation
6. Industry

### **Public Workshops #2 Through Project Completion**

See Appendix B.

### **Committee Reviews**

Through public workshops and dissemination of various plan components to interested parties, plan components were reviewed and written comments submitted by the following number of committee members and interested parties:

Physical Setting/Natural Resources - 12

Demographics/Population - 7

Housing - 7

Economics - 7

Public Utilities and Infrastructure - 3

Transportation - 3

Public Sewers and Recreation - 8

Landuse - 3

### **Input by Local Governments**

Meetings were held independently with each municipality of Elk County during the initial phases of plan development and again for development of the future land use plan. Each municipality was encouraged to have their views and goals considered in development of this plan.

The Final Draft plan was presented at a public meeting on March 24, 1999. The Final Plan was presented at a public hearing on May 26, 1999.