

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

A. COMPREHENSIVE PLAN GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

A.1 Introduction

The following statement of goals and objectives is an expression of the desires of Elk County residents and the Elk County Planning Commission, in regard to the future Program Planning Policies. These recommendations are based on an overall analysis of the existing conditions and trends documented in Part I of the plan.

A.2 General Planning Goals

- Promote diverse, but controlled economic opportunities.
- Encourage the expansion of existing businesses, support local industries, encourage industry diversification.
- Direct development to areas that are environmentally suitable and where infrastructure is available or, scheduled for installation, or able to be installed.
- Develop provisions for the diverse housing needs of all of County residents including affordable housing to those whom are economically disadvantaged and physically or mentally handicapped.
- Encourage the rehabilitation of the existing housing stock.
- Encourage diverse, but compatible and responsible land use patterns.
- Develop/maintain safe water supplies and proper disposal of sewage.
- Promote public/private cooperation/communication in policy matters and public investment.
- Identify, preserve, maintain and enhance natural resources, including prime farmlands, traditional agricultural enterprises, wetlands, and waterways.
- Develop and maintain an efficient, environmentally sensitive solid waste disposal program including recycling.
- Promote the preservation of the County's historic, archaeological, and cultural resources.
- Promote the development of recreational and tourist opportunities.
- Develop and maintain appropriate emergency service programs such as fire protection and (or) emergency management programs.
- Assist the County's municipalities who wish to develop a Comprehensive Plan on a more local level.

A.3 Planning Goals By Category

Recommendations follow for individual planning areas in the order presented below:

- Population Recommendations
- Economic Development Recommendations
- Housing Recommendations
- Environmental Recommendations
- Forest Resource Recommendations
- Public Utilities and Infrastructure Recommendations
- Transportation Recommendations
- Public Service and Recreation Recommendations
- Energy Conservation Recommendations
- Land Use Recommendations

POPULATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Population Development Goal:

1. Encourage activities aimed at minimization of population out-migration.

Population Development Objectives:

1. Establish effective communication and education interfaces between the Planning Commissions' land use planning activities and those of other local, public, and private agencies to provide for more effective coordination of land use projects and utilization of resources.
2. Encourage development that increases the number of adult daycare and child daycare options in the County.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Economic Development Goals:

1. Promote diversification of economic opportunities.
2. Promote development of business/industry that will broaden the County tax base which do not significantly contribute to environmental degradation.
3. Develop a clear link between indigenous natural resource and local value added industry i.e. furniture making.

Economic Development Objectives

1. Support efforts to expand the tourist trade market in Elk County, utilizing the existing attractions of the area: the ANF, East Branch Dam, Twin Lakes, the historic districts of Ridgway, the City of St. Marys, and Johnsonburg, the Route 219 corridor, the Clarion River, Lumber Heritage, the State Forests, the State Game Lands, and the Elk herd.
2. Encourage the necessary infrastructure improvements to activate potential growth areas which do not encourage sprawl. Implement measures to reduce costly sprawl by encouraging "sustainable" development patterns and revitalization of existing developed areas. It is of vital importance that infrastructure be accessible to areas that are conducive to growth. Without the necessary infrastructure, the efforts to market growth areas in the County are futile.
3. Promote community awareness. Community involvement is essential for economic development. Local attitude can either be the greatest asset or deterrent to obtaining both industrial/commercial establishments and significant tourist attractions. By involving local business leaders the County will be able to expand economic development efforts.
4. Work toward improvement of the County's housing stock and reducing existing barriers to affordable housing.
5. Work towards improvements to road and pedestrian systems to move goods and people more effectively in Elk County. Work centers are inaccessible, currently, to some sectors of the County's population, i.e. the handicapped.
6. Work to retain small business in town centers.
7. Promote centralized infrastructure improvements as opposed to strip development to concentrate development and increase the tax base.
8. Work to develop existing abandoned industrial sites, e.g. "Brown fields".
9. Promote developer supported daycare facilities for the elderly and children.

HOUSING RECOMMENDATIONS

Housing Goals:

1. Encourage the rehabilitation and stabilization of the existing housing stock.
2. Ensure the availability of a variety of housing choices to all County residents regardless of age, sex, national origin, familial status, or physical handicap.

Housing Objectives:

1. Update the housing rehabilitation strategy plan that prioritizes rehabilitation efforts. A housing condition survey was conducted as part of this Comprehensive Plan. The results of this survey can be found in the Housing Resources section of this document, beginning on page IC-3. Rehabilitation efforts should be prioritized to those areas of the County that suffer the most deterioration or which will eliminate housing barriers to persons with disabilities.
2. Continue to support rehabilitation efforts through the infusion of available public funding.
3. Encourage local government to enforce newly developed building code standards that reinforce basic health, safety, accessibility, and energy standards. Encourage protection of housing stock from conversion of use, i.e. single residence to apartment complex or commercial to residential, in order to reduce unsafe housing conditions with the development of ordinances.
4. Support adaptive reuse activities by identifying structures and developing plans and financing for reuse activities. Occasionally, an older structure may be vacated and made available for public use or reuse. The structure might be a school, office building, or other non-residential structure. The functional reuse of an old structure for residential purposes is an innovative method for providing housing and maintaining the local tax base.
5. Encourage residential ownership. First time home buyers should be encouraged to take advantage of the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Administration (PHFA) First Time Home Buyer Program, and similar programs, i.e. Rural Development.

6. Encourage housing development investment opportunities. The County does not appear to have diminished housing development opportunities limited by available land area for middle/high income housing construction. More so, limits appear to be, at this time, available public infrastructure. The County may work to support a desirable location for a retirement community for retirement aged persons interested in living in a small, quiet community in an area with most potential for public infrastructure, and which blends into existing residential areas.
7. Encourage historically sensitive rehabilitations in tourist areas and potential historic districts.
8. Develop a County Land Use and Subdivision Ordinance to ensure coordination and consistency between communities and municipalities.
9. Develop a procedure for ensuring sewage facilities planning requirements are met prior to recording of deeds for subdivision of properties i.e. Act 537 compliance and compatibility with the County's Comprehensive Plan.

ENVIRONMENTAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Environmental Goals

1. The County and the County's Solid Waste Authority will continue to support development of solutions to existing problems relating to the County's industrial waste.
2. The County will support development incentives for profitable and environmentally sound applications of the County's renewable resource base including planned communities with performance zoning (See Section I.H.2).
3. The County will encourage improvements to and preservation of the environment through environmental stewardship.
4. The County and the County's Solid Waste Authority will work towards promotion of recycling programs.
5. The County will endorse environmental programs which positively affect the wood industry in terms of a sustainable supply of natural resource based commodities for economic and recreation enhancement opportunities.
6. The County will promote preservation of prime agricultural lands. Restrict uses to low intensity uses such as parks and natural preserves.
7. The County will direct development to areas that are environmentally suitable and where infrastructure is available or scheduled for installation. A goal, which must go hand in hand, is that of intergovernmental cooperation.

Environmental Objectives

1. Update the County's wastewater management plan in accordance with Act 537. The County plan is outdated. The plan would offer a direction for meeting the future infrastructure needs.
2. Encourage soil management and erosion and sedimentation control as regulated by the Conservation District, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), and the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS).

Soil erosion depends on many factors including soil type, ground cover, rainfall, and man's activities. Erosion can be obvious and evidenced by muddy creeks or deep gullies. However, more destructive and less obvious forms of erosion, such as sheet erosion, can cause damage to productive properties. Proper conservation techniques can be utilized to prevent the loss of productive soils.

3. Protect wetland functions and values. Wetlands provide food and water storage, pollution control, wildlife habitat and a major food supply for untold numbers of aquatic organisms, migratory waterfowl and other wildlife. Proper conservation techniques can prevent loss of productive habitat and stormwater storage.
4. Encourage management of timber resources. Woodlands are areas dominated by trees, shrubs, and other vegetation. Woodland vegetation serves to restrict runoff, induce groundwater recharge, minimize flooding, reduce erosion and sedimentation, and provide shelter and food for wildlife.

Sustainable forest management practices on public and private lands should be encouraged for production of wood products, forest stand improvements, and reforestation. Consideration may be given to the development and inclusion of procedures in any Zoning Ordinance and for the management of woodlands in open space.
5. Protect prime agricultural and open-space lands from encroachment by residential and strip-commercial development. Foster agricultural use of prime agricultural land. Foster the development of agricultural businesses, forestry and related land uses. Major road improvements should be discouraged in prime agricultural areas. "Cluster" or performance zoning standards for development will be encouraged to retain productive farmland soil areas as open space areas.
6. Introduce county wide land use regulations and performance standards that adequately address potentially hazardous land uses, in preparation for future industry locations. Encourage reuse of old industrial sites. Broaden the County's role in the Brownfield Initiative (Act 2) within a County Environmental Advisory Council.
7. The County will support municipalities in the development of projects that will reduce or eliminate the problems of public health hazards, unsafe conditions, and physical and environmental deterioration.
8. The County will support measures to coordinate organizations to protect, enhance, restore wetlands, forest buffers and stream corridors (as riparian buffers) important to water quality and fish/wildlife habitat.
9. The County will develop a Stormwater Management Plan addressing watersheds located wholly or partly in Elk County according to Act 178 Standards.