

Ensuring the Sustainability of Cambria County through 2030 Goals, Objectives and Recommendations

According to the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) the County Comprehensive Plan is characterized as a policy and framework for local planning. MPC defines the County Plan as follows:

A land use and growth management plan prepared by the county planning commission and adopted by the county commissioners which establishes broad goals and criteria for municipalities to use in the preparation of their comprehensive plan and land use regulation

The *Cambria County Plan: Toward a Sustainable Future 2010-2030* has dual focal points – deal with real world issues and opportunities and further the sustainability of Cambria County and its communities, economy and environment during the next two decades. This requires data collection on conventional functional areas - land use, transportation, housing and infrastructure, among others - but then placing them into more user-friendly and understandable categories. The information, findings, trends and major issues that emerge from synthesizing these functional topics are as follows:

Access: While sections of the County have benefitted from improved highway access in recent decades, much of it remains disconnected from the regional transportation network and nearby metropolitan areas. This affects the County's developmental potential and quality of life.

- The east/west access afforded by an improved US Route 22 Corridor has greatly benefitted central Cambria County, one of the few sections that have shown positive economic and demographic change since 1990, even at a time when local rail service declined in that area.
- Much of northern Cambria County is largely isolated from the regional multi-modal transportation system, depending on two-lane highways, local rail service confined to the northeastern section and distance from commercial air service.
- While southern Cambria County benefits from a limited-access US Route 219, proximity to commercial air service and local rail service, southwestern Cambria County relies on outdated highway access with US Route 22 (ultimately the Pittsburgh Metro Region) and southwestward to the PA Turnpike (and ultimately the Baltimore/Washington Metro Regions) that impacts public safety and development, and southeastern Cambria County relies on two-lane highways for connection with the growing Richland area and no fixed route public transit in the Forest Hills Area.
- Industrial and business parks developed since the 1970's are not served by freight rail relying on truck access for deliveries and shipments, which are hampered by or benefitting from the access opportunities or issues identified above.
- Passenger rail and air travel are hampered by limited service, convenience and, particularly in the case of air travel, cost.



Environmental Quality of Life: Residents enjoy many forms of outdoor recreation – active and passive - and nature-tourism is an important part and can be even a more important part of the economic base for residents and visitors alike.

- Prince Gallitzin State Park, Rock Run ATV Park and Cambria County Duman Lake Park are important outdoor recreation destinations in northern Cambria County.
- The Ghost Town Trail offers additional types of outdoor recreation in central and western sections of the County, there are several trail segments in the Johnstown Urbanized Area and other trails exist on public lands owned by the Commonwealth and water supply agencies. Trail segments are being considered and planned in various southern sections of the County.
- Acid Mine Drainage (AMD) remains a problem especially in southern and northwestern sections of the County, even though great strides have been made in the last 30 years.
- While there is greater public interest in the recreational use of rivers and other water resources in the County and sections of adjacent counties, river and lake access points are extremely limited.
- The proposed Mainline Canal Greenway links environmental resources with recreational and quality of life opportunities.
- Environmental conditions directly affect nature and heritage tourism that are not only components of the quality of life but components of the economy as well.
- Most densely populated sections of the County appear to have adequate public water and sanitary sewer systems in place, with major near-term infrastructure investments presently focused on resolving long-standing sanitary sewer overflow and capacity problems, improvements that reinforce the identified Growth Areas and extensions that resolve malfunctioning on-lot system problems.
- In light of changing demographic and economic trends, long-term sanitary sewer needs should be analyzed regionally since they are not confined to corporate municipal limits.



Public Financial: Many communities, public service providers, school districts and local utilities are facing moderate to severe financial limitations, exacerbated by flat or no growth in the near or mid-term.

- A number of service providers have found it impossible to continue to exist alone and have either ceased operations and/or joined in with nearby providers.
- Municipal debt has increased and/or the level of public services offered has decreased among many County municipalities.
- In an era of flat or no population growth, economic and market forces should reinforce the concept of multi-municipal cooperative service provision, even though there are some jurisdictional obstacles.
- Municipalities, counties and school districts need help at the State level to address the burden and limitations related to reliance on property taxes and earned income taxes, in an era of changes within each type of tax.



Developmental: County-wide developmental efforts are highly decentralized, disjoint and unfocused.

- Developmental efforts should be focused on Growth Areas suited to sustain the various types of development that is appropriate for each Area.
- Transportation linkages between and within Growth Areas and infrastructure enhancements between and within Growth Areas should be prioritized by developmental agencies when planning and programming improvements and seeking funding.
- Technical assistance for planning, regulations and developmental projects should be prioritized to those communities within and/or having identified Growth Areas.
- The activities of the numerous economic development and promotion agencies should be better coordinated via a highly visible partnership that becomes the central “point of contact” and takes advantage of newer technological (i.e. Smart phone apps, social media) and conventional marketing (i.e. brochures, website) efforts.
- Agriculture is a critical part of the economic base and land use profile of the County, and should first be recognized as such, be preserved and be included in economic development activities in the future.
- Nature- and cultural-tourism activities are increasingly important to the County economy and should first be recognized as such, continued, expanded and further coordinated by a partnership of allied tourism/heritage agencies.
- Alternate energy production and supportive industries should be a priority of the suggested economic partnership focusing on businesses and industries producing and/or supporting alternative energy forms including Marcellus Shale gas, wind power, geothermal, electric production and clean coal production and application.



Recreation: Recreational opportunities and potentials are abundant in the County for residents, visitors and as an incentive to attract new residents

- Other than trails, recreation planning, programming and facilities are largely decentralized and vary considerably among the communities and sub-county regions.
- In an era of flat or no growth, multi-municipal approaches in providing recreational services are economically logical.
- Trail projects are increasingly popular among some segments of the population and not by other segments, seen as being either an economic base contributor by proponents or as a threat to local property enjoyment by opponents.
- Greater appreciation and use of rivers, lakes and other waterways has become popular, and should embrace AMD clean-up and multiple uses for water supply dams.



Life-cycle Housing: Demographic trends and housing market changes due to national trends have created issues and opportunities within Cambria County

- The County was minimally impacted by recent housing market issues largely because there were no real spikes in value and new housing development leading up to The Great Recession.
- Newer developing townships mostly outside of the Johnstown Urbanized Area and/or in rural sections of the County have seen housing development since 1990, while many communities within the Urbanized Area have experience flat or no growth in housing, relatively high vacancy rates and/or instances of residential blight.
- At the same time as many people find themselves forced out of the homeownership market, the supply and location of non-subsidized middle- and higher-income rental housing is severely limited.
- The maturization of the County population results in a continuing decline in household sizes that has created a market for the development of smaller age-restricted housing units, although the net out-migration of younger families has limited the market for potential buyers of those houses coming on the market.
- There are areas of residential blight especially involving tax-delinquent housing especially among some of the older-settled communities in the County requiring targeted rehabilitation, demolition and/or code enforcement activities.
- Higher-density new housing development should be prioritized in those identified Growth Areas having the infrastructure capacity, with low-density development not requiring a public infrastructure outside of the Growth Areas.
- Technical assistance for planning, land use and subdivision regulations and new housing developments should be prioritized to those communities within and/or having identified Growth Areas.



Future Land Use – Balancing, Linkages and Reality

Section 301 (d) of the MPC encourages what may be construed as “real world planning” by enabling plans to identify “growth areas”. This MPC subsection notes the following:

The municipal, multi-municipal or county comprehensive plan may identify those areas where growth and development will occur so that a full range of public infrastructure services, including sewer, water, highways, police and fire protection, public schools, parks, open space and other services can be adequately planned and provided as needed to accommodate growth.

In the spirit of this MPC subsection, the staff of the Cambria County Planning Commission (CCPC) delineated nineteen (19) Growth Areas within Cambria County even prior to this County Plan update effort. The Growth Areas vary considerably with some being in relatively rural areas, others being rather “suburban” and still others being parts of an urbanized area. They also vary in the types and/or densities of land uses they can sustain. They do share certain common characteristics:

- ❑ The Growth Areas either have or are anticipated to have in the planning period the appropriate access and utility infrastructure necessary to sustain context-sensitive land uses existing in or envisioned for the respective areas;
- ❑ The Growth Areas reinforce or expand localized developmental assets, opportunities and experience;
- ❑ The development anticipated in the Growth Areas reflect the land use history and profile of the respective area; and
- ❑ The Growth Areas balance the need to encourage growth and development at appropriate locations throughout the County while conserving unique resources and avoiding identified developmental constraints.

Perhaps the above common characteristics best explain the challenging land use and developmental profile of Cambria County, since the county is not all urban or all rural or all suburban or all small towns or all farms. Cambria County is complex. *It is a little of each.*



Future land use planning in Cambria County faces two related challenges. First of all, the varied land use and developmental profile requires a careful *balancing of uses*, meeting the needs of industry, energy, residents, outdoor enthusiasts, farmers and travelers. Secondly, nearly two-thirds of the 63 municipalities in the County have no regulations governing land use (i.e. zoning). Thus, future land use recommendations range from “guidance” for the regulating land uses for the 36% of the zoned municipalities, but merely “advice” for the many more unzoned municipalities. For this latter reason, the Existing Land Use Map is rather detailed, while the Future Land Use Map is somewhat more conceptual.



The Conceptual Future Land Use Map on page 10 graphically depicts this delicate balancing and conceptual categorization of uses. Some understanding of the Growth Areas and other underlying definitions are in order.



Growth Areas, Resource Protection and Resource Production

The Conceptual Future Land Use Map classifies the 19 Growth Areas into five (5) categories.

- *Urbanized:* This category includes three Growth Areas in the City of Johnstown sustaining multiple and relatively high density land uses one would expect in an older urban area where future development would likely be in the form of in-fill, redevelopment and/or Brownfield reuse. This includes the following cluster:



- West End – essentially includes the City of Johnstown west of the Stone Bridge including residential/mixed use neighborhoods (i.e. Oakhurst, Cambria City and Morrellville) and former/existing industrial areas;
- Central Business District – in addition to the downtown area includes several former Bethlehem Steel and other industrial areas and the Kernville and Woodvale neighborhoods; and
- South Side – includes residential/mixed use neighborhoods (i.e. Hornerstown, Moxham) and a portion of the 8th Ward including the Conemaugh Health System complex.

- *Suburban:* This category includes a cluster of three (3) in the Richland/Geistown area as well as one in the Ebensburg area, and is characterized by moderate density residential, commercial and manufacturing land uses directly accessible from and largely dependent on the regional highway network. New development is largely a function of new construction and the expansion of existing development along major roadways.



- PA 56/Scalp Avenue – essentially Geistown and the western section of Richland Township including the older commercial district along Scalp Avenue and adjacent residential areas;
- Galleria Drive/Airport – includes the Airport and environs and The Galleria, its outparcels and commercial area along Galleria Drive, as well as large tracts of vacant land;
- PA 756/Industrial Park – includes UPJ, and the Johnstown Industrial and Business Parks, as well as large tracts of vacant land; and
- Ebensburg – includes all of Ebensburg Borough and central Cambria Township, including the traditional downtown, most County facilities, various residential areas and subdivisions, the Cambria County Industrial and Business Parks and a highway commercial area along Route 22.

- *Community*: This category includes six (6) distinct Growth Areas that consist of small urban cores with small outlying residential and commercial areas and/or villages sustaining a mix of land uses. New development embraces everything from the in-fill/redevelopment/Brownfield development as seen in the *Urban* category to the new development/construction seen in the *Suburban* category. These include the following:



- Northern Cambria/Hastings – includes the denser older developed boroughs, the low density sections of Elder and Susquehanna Township, the HAIDA Industrial Park and Miners Hospital;
- Cresson - includes Cresson Borough with its commercial district and residential areas and abutting sections of Cresson Township embracing the State Correctional Institution, the Allegheny/Portage Railroad Historic Site and the Route 22/Route 56 interchange;
- Gallitzin – includes the Boroughs of Gallitzin and Tunnelhill and sections of Gallitzin Township just west of Gallitzin Borough along Route 53;
- Portage – includes Portage Borough and adjacent sections of Portage Township to the west, south and east, the traditional business district in the Borough as well as the more highway-oriented one along Route 53;
- South Fork – includes the Boroughs of South Fork, Summerhill and Ehrenfeld and a relatively large section of Croyle Township, with older and denser commercial and residential development in the Boroughs and essentially low-density residential development and considerable vacant land in the Township; and
- St. Michael – includes the moderate density villages of St. Michael, Creslo and Sidman in Adams Township and small sections of Croyle Township a linear commercial district along Route 869, the Johnstown Flood National Memorial and Visitors Center, the South Fork Fishing and Hunting Club Historic District, a Norfolk Southern Branch Line and an interchange on Route 219.

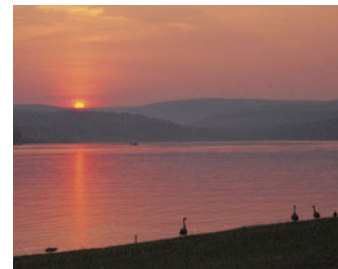


- *Rural Corridor/Village*: This category is similar to the *Community* Growth Area, but at a smaller scale. In essence this type of Growth Area is centered on a village (i.e. New Germany, Mundys Corner, etc.) or along a corridor or crossroads (i.e. Munster, Belsano, etc.). Land uses are low- to moderate density and the areas typically have public water and/or sanitary sewer service, or are anticipated to have these services in the planning period.



- Belsano – includes the village of Belsano in Blacklick Township that is essentially the crossroads of Routes 422 and 271, a residential village with some commercial uses along the roadways;
- Mundys Corner/Nanty Glo – includes the village of Mundys Corner in Jackson Township centered on the Route 271 Interchange on Route 22 and a portion of

- Nanty Glo Borough. This is a mixed use area with a number of commercial and highway-oriented establishments as well as residential uses;
- Carrolltown – includes a relatively large primarily rural area comprised of Carrolltown Borough and sections of East Carroll and Cambria Townships. Carrolltown sustains mixed land uses with commercial establishments along its Main Street (US Route 219) and scattered along Route 219 north and south of the Borough. Active agriculture can be found south of the Borough;
 - New Germany – is centered on the village of New Germany in Croyle Township and the half US Route 219 interchange (northbound limited access lanes). While the village is primarily low-density residential there are wood products industries and some small commercial uses; and
 - Munster – comprised of a swath of Munster Township on either side of Route 22 including the Route 164 interchange area. While this is largely an agricultural area there is a highway-oriented business at the interchange area and residential uses along SR 2014 (former Route 22). A branch railroad line operated by the RJ Corman Railroad Group parallels Route 2014 (former 2-lane Rt. 22) in this area.
- *Seasonal/Recreational:* This category actually includes only the Prince Gallitzin/Rock Run Growth Area, the largest in terms of geographic area. Its prime nodes are contained in the title, each offering different types of outdoor recreational opportunities and each drawing outdoor enthusiasts from a large multi-county region. It also contains year-round and seasonal recreational and agricultural uses.



The map on Page 10 also defines other future land use concepts, the most significant perhaps being those identified for *Resource Production* and *Resource Protection*. Other areas sustaining residential and commercial uses outside of the Growth Areas are also identified since they will remain during the planning period.

- *Resource Production:* Much of the land area of the County is within this land use concept. Essentially this is comprised of land in and expected to remain in wooded, agricultural and cleared or grassland uses as per the *Existing Land Use Map*, outside of the Growth Areas. The various natural and physical resources on or under this have possible productive roles during the planning period. Development on this land should be accompanied by planning and resource management since this land is expected to sustain timber and forest products, agricultural and horticultural products, minerals and natural gas and other forms of energy.



- ❑ *Resource Protection*: Land in this conceptual future land use category is identified as meriting some form of protection or attention as or if development occurs. This category includes lands identified as Landscape Conservation Areas, Biological Diversity Areas and landscapes supporting Biological Diversity Areas on the *Natural Heritage Inventory Map*. In addition, water supply, detention and recreational impoundments are also included. In several cases parts of Growth Areas are in this category suggesting the need to locally couple future developmental and preservation planning.



Refining Growth Areas

The final map in this section *Cambria County Comprehensive Plan Growth Areas* is on page 11. This map was prepared by the CCPC staff and illustrates those areas within the recommended nineteen (19) Growth Areas of Cambria County in terms of developmental suitability. These recommendations are a refinement of the five (5) developmental categories found on the *Conceptual Future Land Use Map* on page 8. Within the five developmental categories of



Urbanized, Suburban, Community, Rural Corridor/Village and Seasonal/Recreational are subareas that are further defined as *Good for Development*, *Better for Development* and *Best for Development*, as well as subareas that have some *Restrictions for Development*. The subareas within the nineteen Growth Areas that do not have a color indicating its suitability for development are considered *Developmentally Neutral*. These geographic locations are neither recommended for development nor are they restricted for development, thus are considered developmentally neutral. This allows for their development in the respective developmental categories or left undeveloped.

Summary

The remainder of this section (1) graphically illustrates the conceptual future land use recommendations for Cambria County, (2) highlights recommendations that help fulfill the goal of sustaining the County through 2030, (3) suggests and implementation strategy identifying steps in the Short-term (present-4 years) and Long-term (beyond 4 years) and (4) addresses various MPC-mandated considerations.