

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Muhlenberg Township Comprehensive Plan Update has been prepared to provide direction and guidance for future growth, development, revitalization and preservation efforts for this generation as well as the next generation. Through the implementation of this Comprehensive Plan, Muhlenberg Township will continue to be an exceptional place to live and work.



A. REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Muhlenberg Township is located within the central portion of Berks County, abutting the northern municipal boundary of the City of Reading. The total planning area consists of 7,702.8 acres of land (12.04 square miles) with a total population of 16,305 residents (2000 Census). While Muhlenberg Township is located within the central portion of Berks County, it shares many demographic, socioeconomic, land use and environmental characteristics as other municipalities within the southeastern portion of Pennsylvania. In addition, the planning area is influenced by many urbanized centers including the City of Reading; the City of Allentown located 27 miles to the northeast; the City of Philadelphia located 49 miles to the southeast; the City of Lancaster located 32 miles to the southwest; the City of Harrisburg located 51 miles to the west. Figure 1 depicts the geographic proximity of the Muhlenberg Township within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

During the 1998 and 1999 calendar years, representatives from Muhlenberg Township and Temple Borough met with the representatives from the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (PA DCED) to discuss the feasibility of a municipal merger. On July 20, 1998, an ordinance approving a joint agreement to merge Temple Borough with Muhlenberg Township was agreed upon with the registered voters endorsing the municipal merger as part of the general election held on November 3, 1998. On January 1, 1999, Temple Borough was officially merged with the lands of Muhlenberg Township. As part of this effort, the PA DCED agreed to allocate the necessary funding for the Muhlenberg Township to complete an update to the Comprehensive Plan as well as the Zoning Ordinance and the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance. The purpose of this funding was to further implement the municipal merger agreement by codifying and updating municipal plans and ordinances. As part of this process, the Muhlenberg Township Planning Commission has been assigned to oversee the preparation and development of the Muhlenberg Township Comprehensive Plan. In October of 2001, Muhlenberg Township selected a consulting team and work of the Comprehensive Plan commenced in January of 2002. Although this document represents the conclusion of a specific work element, the local and regional planning efforts that are required to implement the Muhlenberg Township Comprehensive Plan Update should continue to evolve over the next twenty (20) years and beyond.

B. COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

Comprehensive planning is a continuous process that requires evaluation periodically to insure that a community's plans and policies reflect the current events, philosophies and theories of the residents, property owners and businesses within the community. This reflection is vital to Muhlenberg Township since this last Comprehensive Plan Update was completed in 1992 and a municipal merger has occurred with Temple Borough. The Muhlenberg Township Comprehensive Plan is based upon the foundation that guidance should be provided on a municipal and regional level in an effort to implement the goals, objectives and policies, which have been developed by the Muhlenberg Township Planning Commission to reflect the needs of the community.

The Muhlenberg Township Comprehensive Plan was prepared considering the following subjects, which are discussed in the subsequent chapters of this document:

Goals, Objectives and Policies: This chapter provides direction on how the Comprehensive Plan will be developed considering the existing and future needs of Muhlenberg Township. The planning goals serve as guidelines for directing future growth, development and other planning activities within the community. These guidelines are broad enough to encompass all major planning considerations, but are also specific enough to guide and evaluate the progress of the functional elements contained within the Comprehensive Plan. The goals, objectives and policies were derived through a detailed survey of the members of the Muhlenberg Township Planning Commission and through interviews with special interest groups, organizations and professionals, including the Berks County Planning Commission, Berks County Conservancy, Schuylkill River Greenway Association, Muhlenberg Township Parks and Recreation Department, Muhlenberg School District, Muhlenberg Township Municipal Authority, Laureldale Borough, and members of the local business community. In addition, each of the municipal departments within Muhlenberg Township provided their contribution in establishing the goals, objectives and policies of this Comprehensive Plan.

Natural Features and Resources: This chapter contains a detailed inventory and analysis of the physical and natural environment including geology, soils, hydrology, topography, biology and botany. It is essential to determine the presence of important natural features, groundwater resources, prime agricultural lands, wetlands, floodplains, woodlands, soil capabilities, as well as other natural resources and environmentally sensitive land areas within Muhlenberg Township.

Historical and Cultural Resources: Muhlenberg Township has a rich and diverse heritage that is reflected in the historic and cultural resources that are integrated within the existing land use patterns. This chapter will focus upon the preservation of these historic and cultural resources in an effort to establish a community bond from past generations to future generations. In addition, a historical profile has been prepared for Muhlenberg Township.

Demographics: This chapter provides past, current and anticipated demographic statistics including population, housing, education, income and employment. An analysis of this statistical information has been preformed in order to determine the future needs as they relate to the allocation of resources within Muhlenberg Township.

Community Facilities and Services: This chapter provides special attention to the community facilities and services within Muhlenberg Township including those relating to municipal government, police protection, fire protection, ambulance service, solid waste management, education and libraries.

These community facilities are essential to the existing and future residents of Muhlenberg Township and should be carefully planned in an effort to maintain an effective level of service.

Parks and Recreation: This chapter provides focus on the existing and future demands for recreation facilities and programs on a municipal and regional level. The planning for both passive and active recreation opportunities is a vital component to any comprehensive planning effort. As part of this effort, a detailed inventory has been developed and a special park analysis was performed to address recreational deficiencies and needs. Through the implementation of the recommendations contained within this chapter, recreation opportunities should be available to meet the demands of the residents within Muhlenberg Township.

Economic Development: This chapter provides an overview of the economic and employment characteristics within Muhlenberg Township. A healthy economy provides not only needed goods and services, but also employment opportunities and tax revenues, which pay for public facilities and services. This chapter will also focus on the abilities to retain and expand economic development opportunities within Muhlenberg Township.

Existing Land Use: The existing land use composition and development patterns within Muhlenberg Township are essential planning elements to formulate a plan for future growth and conservation management. This chapter will focus on the existing land use conditions, construction activity, and subdivision and land development activity within Muhlenberg Township. This documentation shall be utilized to formulate a plan for future land use over the next 20 years

Adjacent Planning and Zoning: There are seven (7) municipalities surrounding the perimeter of Muhlenberg Township. This chapter provides a regional evaluation of the existing land use patterns, zoning ordinances and comprehensive plans of each municipality to avoid potential land use conflict and discrepancies. In addition, the Berks County Comprehensive Plan was also evaluated to avoid planning and land use discrepancies.

Utilities: Utilities provisions are essential components to support growth and development. A coordinated and cooperative approach is essential in order to properly plan utilities within planned growth areas. This chapter will focus upon the existing and planned utilities within Muhlenberg Township and evaluate their ability to adequately support future growth and development

Transportation: Transportation routes often determine the general direction of growth within any community and are often deciding factors of residential, commercial, institutional and industrial developments. The effectiveness of a transportation system is measured by its ability to provide safe and efficient modes of travel on a local and regional level. Therefore, it is imperative to develop an effective plan for transportation in order to support growth and development within Muhlenberg Township. The objective of this chapter is to develop a detailed transportation profile and plan considering local and regional needs.

Future Land Use: One of the most important elements in the comprehensive planning process is the charting of the future land uses and growth boundaries. This chapter attempts to reflect the goals, objectives and policies for future land use, development, redevelopment and adaptive reuse within Muhlenberg Township. The documentation and recommendations contained within the previous chapters are utilized to support the rationale that was utilized to chart the future land uses and growth boundaries. The Future Land Use Map will be utilized as a guide by Muhlenberg Township in considering future zoning ordinance and zoning map amendments.

Implementation: The Muhlenberg Township Comprehensive Plan must be strategically implemented in an integrated, coordinated and opportunistic manner. The purpose of this chapter is to provide direction concerning the following issues:

- How will the Muhlenberg Township Comprehensive Plan be implemented;
- How will the assignments be managed and delegated within the municipal departments;
- Who will be assigned the responsibilities for implementing specific tasks;
- What are the tasks that will be required to successfully implement the assignments;
- When should the tasks and assignments be completed;
- What priorities should be assigned to each task and assignment;
- Who monitors the effectiveness of the Muhlenberg Township Comprehensive Plan.

The Muhlenberg Township Comprehensive Plan should be considered as a continuous process that provides sound guidance and direction over the next twenty (20) years. The content of the chapters and maps have a direct and indirect correlation with each other, but ultimately reflect the vision of Muhlenberg Township. The municipal officials should continuously monitor the effectiveness of each chapter in an effort to effectively implement the recommendations established in this Plan.

C. MPC REQUIREMENTS

The overall focus of this comprehensive planning process is to provide guidance on a municipal and regional level in an effort to implement the goals, objectives and policies, while complying with the guidelines established by the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Codes (MPC), as amended. More specifically, Article III of the MPC requires that all comprehensive plans include the following basic elements:

1. A statement of objectives of the municipality concerning its future development, including, but not limited to, the location, character and timing of future development, that may also serve as a statement of community development objectives.
2. A plan for land use, which may include provisions for the amount, intensity, character and timing of land use proposed for residence, industry, business, agriculture, major traffic and transit facilities, utilities, community facilities, public grounds, parks and recreation, preservation of prime agricultural lands, flood plains and other areas of special hazards and other similar uses.
3. A plan to meet the housing needs of present residents and of those individuals and families anticipated to reside in the municipality, which may include conservation of presently sound housing, rehabilitation of housing in declining neighborhoods and the accommodation of expected new housing in different dwelling types and at appropriate densities for households of all income levels.

4. A plan for movement of people and goods, which may include expressways, highways, local street systems, parking facilities, pedestrian and bikeway systems, public transit routes, terminals, airfields, port facilities, railroad facilities and other similar facilities or uses.
5. A plan for community facilities and utilities, which may include public and private education, recreation, municipal buildings, fire and police stations, libraries, hospitals, water supply and distribution, sewerage and waste treatment, solid waste management, storm drainage, and flood plain management, utility corridors and associated facilities, and other similar facilities or uses.
6. A statement of the interrelationships among the various plan components, which may include an estimate of the environmental, energy conservation, fiscal, economic development and social consequences on the municipality.
7. A discussion of short- and long-range plan implementation strategies, which may include implications for capital improvements programming, new or updated development regulations, and identification of public funds potentially available.
8. A statement indicating that the existing and proposed development of the municipality is compatible with the existing and proposed development and plans in contiguous portions of neighboring municipalities, or a statement indicating measures which have been taken to provide buffers or other transitional devices between disparate uses, and a statement indicating that the existing and proposed development of the municipality is generally consistent with the objectives and plans of the county comprehensive plan.
9. A plan for the protection of natural and historic resources to the extent not preempted by federal or state law. This clause includes, but is not limited to, wetlands and aquifer recharge zones, woodlands, steep slopes, prime agricultural land, flood plains, unique natural areas and historic sites. The plan shall be consistent with and may not exceed those requirements imposed under federal and state laws.

The Muhlenberg Township Comprehensive Plan (2003) has been sufficiently prepared to address these basic planning elements.

