



WASHINGTON COUNTY
 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The County Commissioners would like to recognize the efforts of the Washington County Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee members who guided the planning process and helped to refine and prioritize the strategies contained within the Comprehensive Plan.

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A Vision Statement for the People of Washington County

The people of Washington County will lead the region and the Commonwealth in working together to encourage a vibrant and prosperous quality of life for people of all ages. We will serve as an example of responsible and sustainable use of land and natural resources. With this as our foundation, we will create a climate that promotes economic diversity and emphasizes education while celebrating our agricultural character, historical significance and scenic beauty.



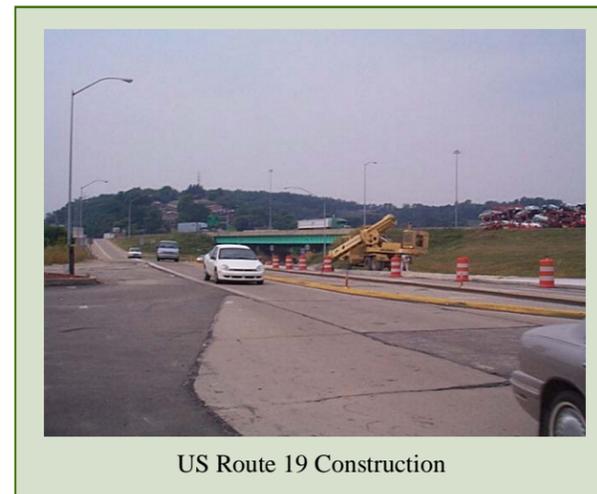
WASHINGTON COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code, Act of 1968, P.L. 805, No. 247, as reenacted and amended, defines a County Comprehensive Plan as “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 Washington County Comprehensive Plan will better equip the County Leadership to guide municipal officials as they prepare and update their local comprehensive land use plans and supporting land use ordinances.

With the Comprehensive Plan as its guide, the County has the essential data and strategies needed to determine where future growth and development should be directed. The active and ongoing utilization of this plan will establish County-level policies and will encourage development that aligns with the smart growth principles and initiatives supported by the Commonwealth. Such policies are justified by the County Comprehensive Plan’s analysis of development trends and identified concerns, which were based on public input and quantifiable data. The Washington County Comprehensive Plan recommendations will serve to counteract the identified deficiencies within the county. The recommendations were developed to be inclusive of all the plan elements and their corresponding impacts for the future growth and development of the County.

Fix it First

The County has assumed a “Fix It First” philosophy to remedy existing or pending infrastructure and transportation deficiencies prior to embarking on new development activities. Such a position reduces the expenditure of funds and extensions of infrastructure to areas not identified as a Target Area for Investment. The built environment in Washington County supports this philosophy as does the corresponding analysis of land use and the recommendations contained within the Comprehensive Plan. Examples of the data analysis and development policies include the prioritization of transportation improvements according to the populations and industry clusters they serve, the protection of important natural / cultural resources, and to resolve identified maintenance and safety issues.



US Route 19 Construction



WASHINGTON COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The Washington County Comprehensive Plan was prepared and produced by the Washington County Planning Commission and Mackin Engineering Company.

The following organizations provided financial and technical resources throughout the planning process:

- Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development
- Pennsylvania Department of Transportation
- Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission
-

The County Commissioners would like to thank the Pennsylvania Economy League for their efforts to ensure that a public involvement strategy was included in each phase of the planning process.

The Washington County Commissioners would also like to thank the following contributors who have helped to make the Washington County Comprehensive Plan a success:

- 84 Lumber Company
- Abate-Irwin, Inc.
- Buffalo Township
- Burgettstown Area Elementary Center
- California University
- Carroll Township Social Hall
- Charleroi Area High School
- Dr. Richard Feldstein
- Highway Appliance Company
- Intermediate Unit 1
- Jaycee Foods, Inc.
- Mon Valley Career and Technology Center
- Monongahela Valley Hospital, Inc.

- North Strabane Social Hall
- Observer Publishing Company
- Pepsi-Cola Roadhouse
- Peters Township Library
- Schneider's Dairy, Inc.
- Senate Engineering Company
- Slovan VFW Barto Post 6553
- Washington and Jefferson College
- Washington County Fairgrounds
- Washington County Library System
- Washington County Tourism
- Western Area Career & Technology Center



WASHINGTON COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Public participation is the most important component of a planning process and this may be especially true for a countywide comprehensive plan. The Washington County Board of Commissioners and Planning Commission implemented an approach to public participation that showcased their commitment to achieving the highest level of public participation possible. In a unique public and private partnership, Mackin Engineering Company and their sub-consultant McCormick Taylor partnered with the Western Division of the Pennsylvania Economy League, a state-wide, non-profit organization. The Pennsylvania Economy League provided support to the public participation process at no cost to the County. Public involvement activities occurred during critical points in plan development, to ensure that the most accurate information was gathered and that the goals and implementation steps were feasible, and most importantly, that the Plan truly reflected the vision of the general public, Steering Committee members and municipal officials.



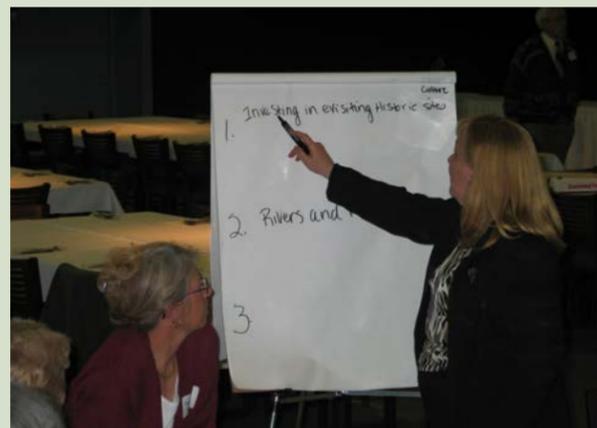
Public Meetings Round 1 (Pepsi Roadhouse, 2003)



Steering Committee Meeting (2003)



Public Meetings Round 2
(North Strabane Social Hall, 2004)



Ranking Exercise with Focus Group (2004)

WASHINGTON COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Future Development Strategy

To provide County Officials with a framework to direct investment and establish policies, the Comprehensive Plan includes a future development strategy. The Washington County Comprehensive Plan prioritizes locations within the county to direct investment and encourage the sound and logical allocation of resources. To support the Fix-It-First philosophy, resource allocation will be reserved to areas where intervention is needed to correct deficiencies, encourage appropriate development, or provide new infrastructure to meet an existing need. Other investments will preserve resources, encourage community revitalization, and foster an overall collective growth strategy that benefits the County as a whole. The Future Development Strategy identifies the following categories: Targeted Areas for Investment, Transitional Reserve Lands, Village Areas, and Rural Resource Areas.

Targeted Areas for Investment were identified within Washington County to align with the Commonwealth's classification of Designated Growth Areas as specified under the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code, Act of 1968, P.L. 805, No. 247, as reenacted and amended. The County has the authority under the MPC Article XI, Section 1103 (1) to designate growth areas where orderly and efficient development to accommodate the projected growth of the area within the next 20 years is planned. The Targeted Areas for Investment (TAI) adhere to development policies as determined by Washington County:

- The TAI will be used to control development away from agricultural and forest lands as well as important open spaces
- Development inside the TAI will provide a mix of uses and adequate, accessible government services
- The TAI will include roads, water and sewer systems, parks, schools and fire / police protection that create a quality of life that, in turn, attracts and retains residents and businesses
- Incentives will be identified to help develop / re-develop land and buildings in the TAI and encourage infill development where current infrastructure exists before expanding to areas outside of the designated TAI
- Resources can be targeted to make existing roads, transit service and other services more efficient to facilitate the mobility of people and goods throughout the region
- Encourage efficient land use by directing development along major transportation corridors (within a TAI and in a manner that is consistent with the capacity levels of existing infrastructure)
- Promotes a balanced multi-modal transportation system within the region that includes options such as bicycling, walking, driving and public transportation
- Supports the region's goal of developing sustainable communities by providing jobs and shopping in close proximity to where people live
- Provide a variety of housing options and densities to accommodate all income levels, races, and family composition



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Transitional Reserve Land includes lands considered necessary to accommodate future growth. Such classification will identify the potential, but not guarantee, to land owners, developers and governments that future development of the land may become a priority for Washington County. While some of these areas could include farm or forest land or other quality environmental areas, it is acknowledged that the County does not support unnecessary development of these areas that are considered "high value" lands. Municipalities will be encouraged to utilize zoning to direct development in a desired fashion to allow for appropriate economic development but in a balanced manner.

Village Development Area includes locations within Washington County that are consistent with traditional pedestrian-friendly of an established town center area. It is the intent of the Village Development Area to encourage existing and new commercial uses, residential dwellings, civic and downtown entertainment and social uses, which are compatible with the existing development.

Rural Resource Areas are lands that coincide with the MPC definition of “an area described in a municipal or multi-municipal plan within which rural resource uses including, but not limited to, agriculture, timbering, mining, quarrying, and other extractive industries, forest and game lands, and recreation and tourism are encouraged and enhance, development is compatible or supportive of such uses is permitted, and public infrastructure services are not provided except in villages.” Rural resources areas identified for Washington County include State Game Lands, County Parks, Active Farms, and other farm or forest land, and high quality watersheds. Also to be considered within these categories are soil classes or areas of forest productivity where productive farms or forest lands will be the last land to be considered for inclusion in the TAI.

Implementation of the Washington County Comprehensive Plan

It is the finding of the Washington County Comprehensive Plan that development pressures will continue to affect the Washington County landscape, thereby necessitating that a targeted investment policy be adhered to for future development and preservation efforts. True economic sustainability can be realized only if sound land use practices are in place to direct how and where growth will occur. Transportation and infrastructure improvements must be in concert with, not driven by, economic development strategies. Such coordination must also occur in a true cooperative manner with local municipal officials, school districts, and community service providers. The impacts of development and growth must not come at the expense of the County’s quality of life or its valued rural characteristics.

Compliance with the requirements of the MPC specifies that the County Planning Commission shall provide guidelines for municipal leaders to follow as they develop local land use regulations. The Washington County Comprehensive Plan is submitted with the intent that such guidelines may be developed based upon the County Development Objectives and implementation strategies adopted by Washington County.



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Historical Character

- *Capitalize on the wealth of cultural and historic resources in Washington County*
- *Develop partnerships between existing organizations to help educate the public about the County’s cultural and historical assets*
- *Market historic and cultural resources as a means for economic growth*
- *Promote the creation of a countywide technology infrastructure*

Washington County’s history is one found in the records of our nation’s development and is chronicled by numerous events that contributed to settlement of America. Washington County literally was positioned at the forefront of westward expansion and colonization. Due in part to its geographic location and natural resources, the county has always been a major player in the social, agricultural, and industrial contributions of the Commonwealth. It is this legacy that provides a wealth of resources upon which to build a new future. The Future Development Strategy directs the County to capitalize upon its heritage and develop new social and cultural outlets to celebrate the natural, cultural, historic resources. The rich heritage steeped in agriculture, education, transportation, and industry offers diverse experiences for those interested in exploring what once was. By establishing the county as a destination rich in historical significance, entrepreneurs can initiate new business development opportunities and realize the economic benefits while preserving the heritage of Washington County.



US Route 40—S Bridge

Meadowcroft Rockshelter

Century Inn



WASHINGTON COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Economic Development

- *Build wealth in the communities*
- *Promote quality employment opportunities that will allow individuals and families to pursue their desired lifestyle*
- *Balance development and open space/agricultural/recreational space*
- *Support business and educational strategies to support economic viability*
- *Guide infrastructure investment to support our existing community assets*
- *Recognize the value of and support the existing economic base*
- *Focus economic development efforts in the County*

Washington County has made tremendous strides to deliver economic development services more efficiently, but there remains more to be done to centralize certain activities. The 1999 Washington County Economic Development Strategy called for consolidation of economic development organizations and, in response, the County leadership formed the Washington County Economic Development Partnership. The Partnership is in charge of executing the County’s economic development goals. Washington County officials and the Partnership should ensure that it has a targeted approach to its economic development investments. The policies and goals of County officials and economic development agencies need to demand that economic development coincides and supports improvements for transportation and infrastructure.

Many communities within Washington County are home to former industrial sites. Many of these properties are “clean” but require significant investment in the infrastructure and buildings if the sites are to be competitive in today’s marketplace. However, as these sites are situated in key geographic locations with ample transportation (barge, rail, roadway, even air), and public utility services, it is the County’s position to invest in these locations to foster their revitalization.



Southpointe Industrial Park



Alta Vista Industrial Park



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Role of Washington County Planning Commission

Section 209.1 (Powers and Duties of Planning Agency) of the MPC, Act of 1968, P.L. 805, No. 247 as reenacted and amended, outlines duties of the planning agency. Washington County operates under a county department planning commission that oversees the adherence to development policies along with an appointed planning commission board who serves as an advisory body to the department and County Commissioners. Counties are required to prepare a county comprehensive plan and publish advisory guidelines to promote general consistency with the adopted county comprehensive plan. These guidelines are to “promote uniformity with respect to local planning and zoning terminology and common types of municipal land use regulations.” Counties may consider amendments to their comprehensive plan if proposed by a municipality to achieve general consistency. The County Plan is to be updated every ten years.

Once a county has adopted its comprehensive plan, the MPC (Section 304. a.) requires that municipalities must notify the county planning agency regarding: “Any proposed action of the governing body of a municipality, its departments, agencies and appointed authorities within the county shall be submitted to the county planning agency for its recommendations if the proposed action relates to:

- The location, opening, vacation, extension, widening, narrowing or enlargement of any street, public ground, pierhead or watercourse;
- The location, erection, demolition, removal, or sale of any public structures located within the municipality;
- The adoption, amendment or repeal of any comprehensive plan, official map, subdivision or land ordinance, zoning ordinance or provisions for planned residential development, or, the construction, extension or abandonment of any water line, sewer line or sewage treatment facility.

Municipalities in Washington County are required to forward a certified copy of their municipal comprehensive plan (including amendments) to the county planning agency within 30 days of adoption. The county planning agency has 45 days in which to review the action and provide a recommendation to the governing body of the affected municipality. The municipality must not take action prior to receiving the recommendation or after 45 days have passed. Washington County has defined what the county planning agency requires from municipalities regarding their review and report for all subdivision and land development applications. This information is available online at the County’s website.

School districts in Washington County also must comply with the MPC and provide notice to the Washington County Planning Commission regarding specific actions that the district may take regarding land development. Section 305 of the MPC states that the governing body of a public school district must submit notice of the location, demolition, removal, sale or lease of any school district structure or land to both municipal and county planning agencies within 45 days for comment.



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The land use of Washington County includes traditional small lot housing and commercial areas located near industrial employment centers, suburban-style residential subdivisions developed along transportation corridors, and farming homesteads that continue to impart a strong agricultural flavor. Perhaps more than other counties in the region, Washington County had and continues to have its development patterns influenced by its existing transportation routes. The Monongahela River, the railroads, and National Pike (US Route 40) were significant forms of transportation and established historic settlement patterns. The construction of the interstate highway system accessed new lands within the County attracting development along Interstate 70 and Interstate 79. The recent completion of the Mon Fayette Expressway from Allegheny County to Washington County is expected to create new development patterns. However, the largest single land use characteristic in Washington County is Open Space (64.7%) with Agriculture being the second highest land use (25.7%). The following categories were used for classifying land within Washington County.

Agriculture:

Land being used predominantly for agricultural purposes. As of January 2005, there were a total of 377,425 acres enrolled in the Clean and Green program in the county, and as of April 2005, approximately 60,000 acres were included in agricultural security areas and 16 farms with 2,455 acres were enrolled in the agricultural conservation easement program.

Community Facilities:

Sites containing any building or structure owned or operated by a governmental agency or nonprofit community service provider open for public uses with or without a fee that provides a service to the public. Included in this category are municipal offices, fire departments, ambulance providers, police departments, post offices, schools, and churches.

Recreation:

Land currently used for passive or active recreation purposes. The Washington County Department of Parks and Recreation is responsible for 4,900 acres of park land in Washington County. Washington County has over 70 miles of trails available for recreational and alternative transportation purposes. Approximately 1,600 acres of municipal recreational lands were identified during the planning process.



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and shortline rail roads, County airport, and Monongahela River are essential to the efficient and safe movement of people and goods as well as the economic sustainability of the County. These elements provide a supporting role to local, national and even international shipping of goods and lessen the negative impacts of freight shipments via heavy trucks on roadways. Washington County must support efforts to update the lock and dam system on the Monongahela River, improve services at the County Airport, and support connectivity of all transportation modes.

Recreation

- *Encourage cooperation between the public (federal, state, county and local) and private sectors to provide diverse recreational opportunities*
- *Preserve and strengthen existing recreation amenities*
- *Develop recreational opportunities that celebrate the natural, cultural, historic resources in the county and region*

Washington County's recreational facilities and county parks are a tremendous assets; however, County Officials need to capitalize upon an underutilized resource, the Monongahela River. The County can achieve this goal by identifying areas to offer river-related recreational amenities and development opportunities. But, it must be understood that County officials should partner with local municipalities to secure funding and develop river-oriented recreation plans prior to such actions. Additionally, the County should work to establish natural linkages to preserve its green infrastructure as well as developing its trail network. Locations such as the State Game Lands are wonderful opportunities to build upon for extending an open space network.



Ten Mile Creek County Park



Cross Creek Lake, Cross Creek County Park



WASHINGTON COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Movement of People and Goods

- *Support the completion of transportation projects that will facilitate the movement of people and goods throughout the region*
- *Ensure that future transportation network improvements support and enhance communities through the effective and efficient use of land and resources*
- *Ensure that future improvements to the transportation system include alternative modes of transportation (mass/public transit, pedestrian and bicycle facilities, rail, water, and air)*

Washington County has a high percent of interstate roadway miles as compared to the Southwestern Pennsylvania region. Therefore, transportation planning efforts must specifically address interstate roads as they serve the same role assumed by non-interstate expressways and principal arterials in other counties. State level policy on interstate maintenance will have more of an impact on Washington County than other counties in the region in terms of public travel, safety, and the overall performance of the transportation system. Proactive efforts will need to address access, road maintenance, and safety and ensure that planning for future transportation systems and economic development are intertwined. The interrelationship between the movement of people and goods with economic development is critical for long lasting economic sustainability. Land use and transportation are inherently tied together – each being, in some manner, influenced by the other. Washington County must remain diligent in the effort to act as a regional leader for transportation, land use, and economic development partnerships.

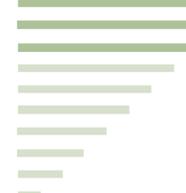
Other transportation modes will be fundamental to the future land development of Washington County. Freight centers will remain a primary economic and transportation component and the existing rail, water and air freight infrastructure must not be permitted to deteriorate. Ongoing commercial use of the regional



MonFayette Expressway



US Route 19



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Open Space:

Open space is defined as land that has not been built upon or substantially altered and can be publicly or privately owned. These areas may have important ecological functions, natural resources, or cultural resources that are worthy of conservation and protection. There are seven State Game Lands in Washington County and, with almost 17,000 acres of public land; this is an important asset for residents and visitors alike.

Commercial:

Areas used by private individuals or by organizations for capital gain, which may include retail shopping, automotive, financial, professional, governmental and miscellaneous recreational and service activities to which the public requires direct and frequent access. Commercial lands are scattered throughout the County, though much of it is concentrated in established cities and boroughs. With the growing development of the I-79 and US 19 corridor, the County has experienced an increase of linear commercial development from the City of Washington to the Allegheny County border.

Industrial:

Sites involved in such activities as construction, excavation, processing, storage and distribution, and manufacturing. Industrial uses are found primarily along the major transportation roadways in the County and along the Monongahela River.

Mixed Use:

The Mixed Use land classification includes land that is densely developed with both commercial and residential uses. This land classification can be found throughout the county but is primarily located in older communities such as the City of Washington, along primary roadways in some of townships, and in many of the older boroughs along the Monongahela River.

Residential:

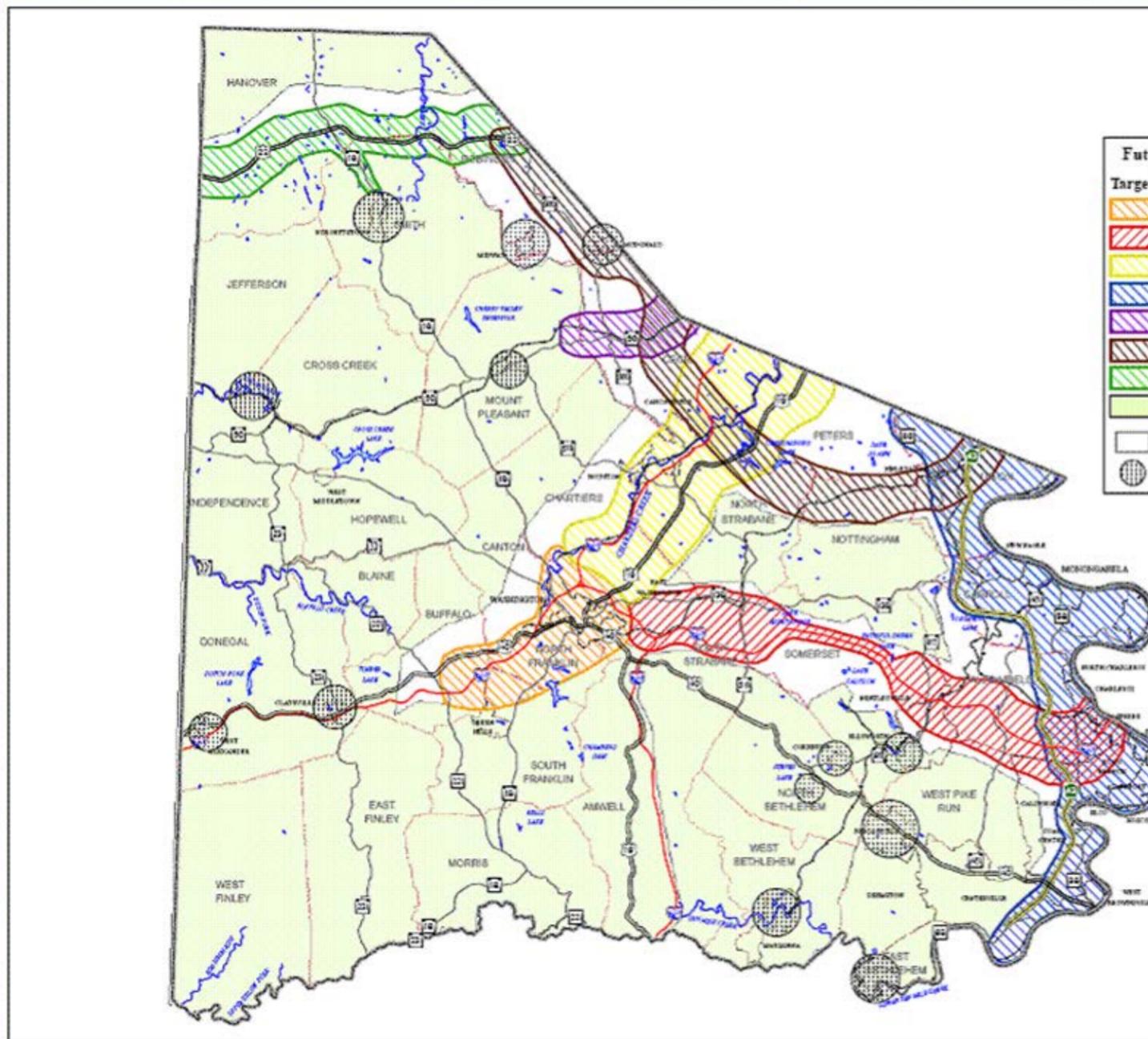
This category includes all dwellings used for residential purposes. Residential uses can include single family dwellings and multi-family dwellings. These types of structures can range in density and type of construction.





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MAP 10.C.2: TARGET AREAS FOR INVESTMENT



WASHINGTON COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Natural Resources

- *Protect natural resources to create a desirable ecological balance that supports diverse life systems*
- *Encourage the wise and efficient utilization of natural resources to promote a sustainable economy*
- *Preserve farmland/open space and maintain land use diversity throughout the county*
- *Establish the county as a leader in sustaining its natural systems*
- *Strategically direct infrastructure investments to protect the environment*

The Future Development Strategy acknowledges the sensitive nature of the environmental resources within the County as well as its wealth of natural resources. The natural characteristics of Washington County in a particular area dictate the suitability of the site or area for development or preservation. The Comprehensive Plan includes detailed descriptions of the many attributes of the natural environment of the County including its geological, climatological, and topographical characteristics as well as water resources. The presence of sensitive areas and important ecological resources directed the identification of the Rural Resource areas for the Future Development Strategy.



State Game Lands 232, Wetland Interpretative Area



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Agriculture

- Recognize the significance of the agricultural industry to Washington County's economy
- Celebrate the agricultural and rural character of the County's quality of life
- Provide the resources necessary to preserve and protect agricultural land

As economic conditions changed throughout the years, agriculture and agriculture related industries have remained a constant fixture in the economy of Washington County. The agriculture industry has remained as one of the most economically viable economic sectors for County residents. Farming continues to be entrenched into the character and social aspect of the County and will continue to play a role in its economic stability and quality of life. Counties have been charged to consider agricultural lands when completing a comprehensive plan and prepare a plan for preserving and enhancing that land. The Washington County Comprehensive Plan acknowledges the importance of its agricultural industry to both the economic structure of the county and its character. This Plan provides a solid foundation from which to direct development efforts and ensure that agricultural land will continue to contribute to the quality of life in Washington County.



Main Street Farmers Market



Agricultural Lands Washington County



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MENT



Future Development Strategy

- Areas for Investment**
- City of Washington / County Airport
 - I-70 Corridor
 - I-79 / US 19 Corridor
 - Mon Valley Corridor
 - PA 50 Corridor
 - Southern Beltway Corridor
 - US 22 / PA 18 Corridor
 - Rural Resource Area
 - Transition Area
 - Village Development

Map 10.C.2: Future Development Strategy Map Legend

- | | | | |
|--|-------------|--|----------|
| | Interstate | | County |
| | Toll Road | | City |
| | US Route | | Township |
| | State Route | | Borough |
| | Railroad | | Waterway |

Location Map



Prepared by:
Mackin Engineering Company: GIS and Planning Departments
November 2005



Data Source: PennDot state and local road files. All other data obtained from the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission.

Future Development Strategy

- Manage future growth in an efficient and orderly manner
- Maintain the rural character in the county
- Upgrade and / or expand public services and infrastructure in locations that have aging facilities in place
- Protect natural, cultural, and historical features in rural resource areas from future uncontrolled developments
- Utilize existing brownfield sites and already developed industrial parks to locate future commercial and industrial employers
- Coordinate future transportation, infrastructure, housing, and economic development improvements with county land use policies



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County Development Objectives

Washington County Elected Officials, Agencies, and Staff assume a leadership role to promote the county's predetermined land use policies. This leadership mantle includes an educational aspect and outreach effort to each the County's 67 municipalities. Many of the boroughs and townships do not have the local capacity to implement sound land use planning practices. The County must be prepared to offer guidance and technical expertise on such issues as the delivery of services, watershed planning, sewerage facilities planning, etc. Among these responsibilities will be to foster intergovernmental partnerships and, where appropriate, coordinate efforts to regionalize services.

Public Facilities and Services

- *Assume a leadership role in creating regional partnerships to provide public safety and other community services*
- *Assure the adequacy of human services for Washington County Residents*
- *Ensure a desired quality of life by providing coordinated and reliable infrastructure*
- *Guide development to locations that have public utility infrastructure in place*
- *Identify and develop funding sources to provide communities with the best available technology and infrastructure systems*

The western and southwestern portions of the County will benefit from land use applications that support sound investment to preserve pristine forest lands and agricultural areas. These areas of the County have minimal public water and sewerage infrastructure to support large-scale development. Additionally, most of this area is removed from transportation networks that would support efficient access to commercial and employment centers. The dedication of resources to support rural development coupled with preservation measures will ensure localized economic development opportunities without negative consequences from unplanned development.



Allegheny Power facility



Open Space Washington County



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Residential Characteristics

- *Provide housing options to meet the present and future needs of residents of all ages and income levels*
- *Encourage and promote coordination between county and municipal housing strategies*
- *Ensure that future planning activities address demographic factors, market forces, infrastructure needs, and existing housing conditions*

The County Development Strategy includes policies for developing areas to incorporate aspects of rural preservation to mitigate negative effects of urban development. For instance, those townships and larger boroughs that are facing development pressures should reduce the reliance on traditional residential subdivisions, which can overtax municipal resources and infrastructure. As Washington County has one of the highest rates of new housing starts, as compared to the Southwestern Pennsylvania region, it is strongly recommended that the County remain proactive in reviewing subdivision and zoning ordinances to ensure the consistency of local regulations to the goals contained within the County Comprehensive Plan. Additionally, the County should employ a policy of educating local governing bodies and developers regarding the County's desire to retain its rural character and ensuring a high quality of life while promoting economic revitalization and sustainability.



New Residential Development



Traditional Neighborhood Housing