

## **FOREST RESOURCES RECOMMENDATIONS**

Trees are important for both urban and rural ecosystems. Mature trees provide desirable habitat, microclimate, and shelter for wildlife. Trees also have economic value as a raw material for the production of paper, buildings, furniture, and other wood products. Forest resources are also recognized as valuable cultural, historic, and recreational resources. Balancing these environmental and economic considerations is a goal of Elk County.

The County identified the following goals for forest resource management.

### **Forest Resources Goals**

1. Promote Economic Development multiple use forest resources development, management and marketing including job development in final product industries, tourism, and cultural preservation.
2. Cultural Conservation - Promote conservation of economic, cultural, historical, and sustainable forest resources for future generations.
3. Recreation - Promote development of recreational opportunities and tourism opportunities. Coordinate opportunities prescribed by an abundance of public lands for recreational development.
4. Education - Foster development of education providing citizen involvement in decision making processes surrounding sustainable management of forest resources.
5. Resource Conservation - Promote industry development of technical upgrades that minimize adverse environmental impacts and involve resources waste recycling.

### **Forest Resources Objectives**

1. Support goals and objectives of the Lumber Heritage Region Plan which are consistent with the goals established under this plan and are appended to this section.
2. Support scientifically based forest management practices that insure an even flow of forest products and intrinsic or amenity values that are sustainable for future generations.
3. Provide incentives for private and public land owners to invest in professionally developed management plans. Consider encouragement of land use practices such as conservation easements, transfer of development rights (TDRs) and urban growth boundaries.
4. Promote forest management practices that are compatible with other planning objectives such as scenic values or recreational development.

5. Support educational efforts in schools and the communities that explain the values of forested land and the principals of sustainable forest management practices.

## **PUBLIC UTILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Public Utilities/Infrastructure Goals**

1. Provide for public health and safety through the provision of adequate public utilities, and infrastructure.
2. Provide for economic growth by improvement to existing infrastructure and careful planning of future infrastructure.
3. Encourage defined growth development areas. Encourage infrastructure improvements in "infill" areas over extensions outside of growth development areas which lend to sprawl. Examples of infill areas would be areas where there are existing empty lots where public infrastructure already exists or where existing structures are planned for demolition, etc.
4. Discourage expenditure of public funds outside of designated growth areas.

### **Public Utilities/Infrastructure Objectives**

1. Develop a procedure for ensuring that 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.
2. Encourage "infill" development where available infrastructure already exists.
3. Encourage planning of infrastructure in urban growth development boundaries to provide public sewer where public water already exists.
4. Limit expenditures of public funds to within established urban growth areas.
5. Encourage municipalities to prioritize infrastructure based on:
  - a. Compatibility with the County and/or Municipal Comprehensive Plan.
  - b. Compatibility with subdivision/land development and zoning regulations.
  - c. Potential for the project service area to gain economic diversification and not competition with existing business/industries, etc.
  - d. Compatibility with, and implementation of, housing objectives in the County Comprehensive Plan.

- e. Compatibility with the economic objectives in the County Comprehensive Plan.
  - f. The projects' ability to increase the tax base without encroaching on rural areas and without precipitating land use conflicts.
6. Develop a County-wide Act 537 Plan.

## **TRANSPORTATION POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

Transportation planning should develop around other land use planning elements to enhance our social, cultural, health care systems in economically appropriate ways.

### **Transportation Goals**

The general goals established by this plan include:

1. Provide residents access to employment and social opportunities, particularly for persons on fixed incomes and with disabilities.
2. Maintain safe effective access by emergency vehicles.
3. Provide cost and time effective import/export of goods/services.
4. Reduce traffic congestion on roads with loads exceeding design capacities.
5. Develop road systems compatible with planned land uses, i.e. unpaved in areas which are primarily agricultural and with minimum design standards for residential areas.
6. Develop pedestrian systems which meet varied needs.

### **Transportation Objectives**

1. Coordinate with PennDOT to develop solutions to transportation obstacles in Elk County.
2. Eliminate some of the "bottleneck" load in Ridgway Borough, City of St. Marys, seasonally in Benezette, and at the paper mill in Johnsonburg. Support the proposed 219 bypass.
3. Encourage the reduction of dangerous curves, impeded sight distances, etc.
4. Provide for tourism, i.e. elk viewing while reducing impediments to normal traffic flow.
5. Encourage replacement of substandard bridges where restoration is not significant in terms of historical value.
6. Promote the development of rails to trails opportunities and trails which link communities to natural areas.

7. Support projects enhancing services at the Bradford Regional Airport.
8. Support the Continental One project.

## **PUBLIC SERVICES AND RECREATION RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Public Service Goals**

1. The County will endorse projects and programs which will ensure the availability and accessibility of adequate health care particularly for the elderly, children, and the handicapped.
2. The County will endorse the promotion and development of employer supported day care programs for the elderly and children.
3. Provide for public health and safety through the provisions of adequate emergency services.

### **Public Service Objectives**

1. The County will endorse public service improvement projects which are deemed in need of substantial improvement, i.e. American Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance, fire protection improvements, public use structures/facilities upgrades to better accommodate persons with disabilities, and upgrades to provide support facilities, i.e. daycare.

### **Recreation Goals**

1. The County will endorse local and regional recreational and cultural projects.
2. The County will endorse planned residential development that incorporates recreational areas and pedestrian walkways to increase conservation of and maximize the aesthetic benefits of environmentally sensitive areas.
3. The County will encourage the establishment of community recreation centers in existing vacant structures.
4. The County will endorse the development of public/community parks in those municipalities that lack such spaces, and support those that exist.

### **Recreation Objectives**

1. Encourage public/community parks and green spaces that protect environmentally sensitive areas while providing recreational/educational opportunity.
2. Promotion of Rails-to-Trails programming.
3. Promotion of the Lumber Heritage Region Project.

4. Incorporate open space/walkways, etc. into subdivision/land development ordinance/zoning where applicable.
5. Promotion of recreational facilities for local youth where such programs are limited.

## **ENERGY CONSERVATION RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Energy Conservation Goals:**

1. Increase public awareness of the need to conserve energy in the areas of structures (buildings) and transportation.
2. Encourage cooperative efforts with the private and public sectors on energy conservation programs. Encourage and receive energy conservation suggestions from the public and help implement suggestions that are feasible.

### **Energy Conservation Objectives:**

1. Encourage Elk County's municipalities to pass an energy conservation resolution as an official policy where such policies do not presently exist.
2. Encourage "energy audits" of businesses, schools, and individual homes. Some utility companies provide this service at no cost. Their recommendations can save money, provided the conservation measure is economically feasible.
3. Provide education on Act 222, the existing State Law regarding insulation requirements for new construction.
4. Provide voluntary guidelines for new construction, which detail life-cycle costing for energy conservation measures. These can include: energy efficient building designs and orientation; heating, ventilating and air conditioning systems design; lighting; insulation; active and passive energy designs; landscaping; variations of glass; and siding materials.
5. Prompt municipalities to encourage building owners to implement energy saving measures in existing buildings. Funding for energy conservation measures through the weatherization program may be available for qualified low income and elderly residents.
6. The County may wish to be a resource for free information on energy conservation. Pamphlets and books are available from the Governors Energy Council and the local utility companies.

## **LAND USE RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Land Use Goals:**

1. Preserve and improve the County's friendly, pleasant, small-town communities character and quality of life.
2. Protect and enhance each individual community's identity and sense of place.
3. Encourage a sense of community cohesiveness.
4. Conserve and protect the County's natural, scenic, historical, and environmental resources.
5. Preserve and enhance property values especially in the County's Boroughs and City.
6. Promote the conservation and efficient use of energy.
7. Promote responsible land use.
8. Promote and encourage civic pride responsibilities and upkeep of properties.

### **Land Use Objectives:**

1. Guide residential and nonresidential land uses in a way that optimizes their compatibility with each other by adhering to the goals and objectives established herein for housing, economics, public utilities and infrastructures, transportation, recreation, and land use.
2. The County will assist municipalities in development of long range planning for land use and zoning.
3. The County will promote refurbishment of vacant industrial complexes.
4. The County will promote conservation and sustainable use of natural resources.

**B. PLAN FOR POPULATION AND GROWTH**

The success of the economic well-being and availability of jobs is heavily dependent upon an industrial base in carbon and primary metal industries and support industries. This causes a fragile economic climate that runs with the success or failure of specific segments of those industries. The County endorses projects which will diversify the industrial base and to help the County continue to maintain a relatively low rate of unemployment.

This facet of the plan is dependent on the integration of all other plan comments. A few examples follow:

1. Transportation: Local transportation systems do not currently favor the attraction of major employment generators. While transportation somewhat limits growth, efforts need to be focused on existing business retention and expansion.
2. Public Transportation: Where sprawl leads to placement of elderly and handicapped population housing facilities in areas removed from the County's main hubs, public transportation becomes increasingly costly or is not available.
3. Infrastructure: To promote growth and provide jobs for a growing population without sprawl and the negative economic impacts associated with infrastructure extensions, efforts need to direct new prospective employers to already available industrial sites with existing infrastructure.
4. Land Use: Uncontrolled use of land often results in incompatible land uses which serve only to deter the development of residential and industrial growth. Compatible uses of land, on the other hand, make an area more inviting for both prospective markets.
5. Natural Resources:
  - a. Soils which are prime agricultural soils are, in most cases, the same soil types exhibiting the fewest impediments to development. There are some large remaining areas of prime agricultural soils (Hartleton, Lack Kill, and Hazelton) in primarily Jones Township, Horton Township, Ridgway Township, and Spring Creek Township. Careful consideration should be given to prevent the loss of these few remaining undeveloped prime agricultural areas to development.

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- b. Timber producing lands have been much of a concern through development of this plan. Again, it is noted that sprawl leads to development of those lands which would be better preserved for timber management where sprawl pushes development outward instead of controlling development with inward development incentives.
- c. Some of the Route 255 Corridor in Fox Township is under “development pressures”. Some of the same area may be considered environmentally sensitive since it is tributary to the main public water supply recharge area for the City of St. Marys.

Consideration should be given to the nature of development permitted in environmentally sensitive areas, especially where public water supplies and community health may be severely impacted, such as within the Laurel Run watershed area.

This plan endorses projects that will provide for growth in an orderly, economical, environmentally sound manor. In other words, this plan endorses projects which are compatible in the goals and objectives outlined in Section IIA of this plan.

**C. HOUSING PLAN**

**C.1 Introduction**

In this section of the Comprehensive Plan, the socioeconomic trends presented in background analysis will be reviewed collectively to determine the housing needs.

**C.2 Findings**

The following findings were formulated as a result of a windshield housing condition survey performed by the County and their consultant, previously documented statistical data, and interviews with knowledgeable local professionals, some of which include: real estate brokers, real estate developers, hospital administrators, nursing home and personal care home administrators, and State agencies. See Pages IC-3 to IC-15 for information on the windshield survey.

**HOUSING CONSTRUCTION**

Housing construction trends in Elk County indicates a slight increase in residential development over the last decade. Based upon population projections, no great influx of persons can be expected. Other types of residential construction, i.e. remodeling, attached and detached additions, etc., are difficult to compile. The reason for this difficulty is the lack of records indicating compliance with and enforcement of building permit ordinances. New construction has been generally scattered. There appears to be space for additional residential development with consideration given to existing infrastructure and needed infrastructure and community land use goals.

**AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND LOW/MODERATE INCOME HOUSING**

It is suggested that coordination with local banks and mortgage lenders be sought to incorporate manufactured housing as an affordable housing source that is non-subsidized for city and borough lots to replace dilapidated structures. This may help to revive some areas in the County where deteriorating pockets of substandard housing exist.

**HOME OWNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES**

First time buyers are finding it difficult to obtain the required down payment for standard mortgages. For this reason, the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA) created a first time home buyer program whereby down payments are reduced. A local bank must sponsor this program. Northwest Bank of Ridgway offers a Guaranteed Rural Housing Loan Program for qualifying applicants. Requirements include loans of up to 100% of the appraised value for single family residences. Applicants cannot own another home. No down payment must be provided by the borrower. Loans are for a term of 30 years.

## **HOUSING REHABILITATION**

It was previously documented that 37.5% of the housing stock in Elk County was built prior to 1940. Typically, structures of this era are of frame construction and require ongoing remedial treatment in order to remain free of code deficiencies. This, coupled with a low and moderate income population, translates into pockets of deterioration. Funding for rehabilitation need to be pursued. In addition to utilizing Act 137 to establish an affordable housing funds to be drawn as a matching fund source for the National Housing Act of 1990 home funds, the County should consider careful planning for housing and the development of county wide land use and subdivision ordinances.

## **ASSISTED, ELDERLY, AND SPECIAL NEEDS HOUSING**

A summary of the statistical data reveals a growing elderly population of persons over the age of 65. This indicates a potential need for additional nursing care, and personal care facilities.

An alternative to nursing home care is personal home care, provided the resident does not require 24 hour a day nursing care. The increased utilization of personal care homes has become a national trend. This is due, in part, to the overwhelming demand being placed on nursing homes. The exact future demand for various forms of elderly housing is unknown. It is assumed however, that as beds become scarce, both non-profit and for profit corporations will seek public assistance to create additional facilities.

It is likely that the County's need for alternative housing arrangements will increase during the next 10 years. The range of elderly-specific housing choices are currently limited in Elk County. Assisted or non-assisted elderly housing is recommended. The vacating of existing single housing units by residents housed in new elderly housing complexes would further overall housing opportunities. Ideally, the vacated units would become occupied by young families.

It was previously documented that there is a need to increase housing opportunities for special needs groups and the elderly in Elk County. Consideration should be given to planning for housing opportunities to meet this need. The County supports infusion of available public funds and obtainment of grant funds to support increased housing opportunities for these groups.

LIFT is working with various agencies to promote integrated, affordable, accessible housing in Elk County. The County plans to endorse this effort where applicable.