Sustainable Growth in Rural PA: Union County’s New Model

APA PA Chapter Conference
October 13, 2008
1. Union County Background

2. Community Outreach Results

3. Future Growth Options / Growth Management Framework

4. Cultivating Community: A Sustainable Comprehensive Plan for Union County

5. Discussion

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Union County Background
Union County Background

- Located along the Susquehanna River 60 miles N of Harrisburg, 165 miles NW of Philadelphia, and 200 miles E of Pittsburgh

- Comprehensive Plan for 9 Townships and 4 Boroughs

- Multi-municipal plans for three planning areas
Union County Background

- Attractive rural quality of life with strong agricultural heritage and small towns / villages
- Forests and agriculture represents 60% and 30% of total land use, respectively
- Access to major urban areas via I-80 and other routes
- Historic downtown districts in Lewisburg and Mifflinburg
- Bucknell University is located in Lewisburg
Union County Background

- 80% of County zoned for Agricultural or Woodlands / limited low-density housing is permitted in most of these districts

- Residential housing growth: 14% from 1990-2000 and 8% from 2000-2006

- 40% housing growth projected by 2030 / highest growth expected in agricultural townships
New Structures 2001-2006 (+1,000 units) & Land Preservation
Community Outreach Results
Outreach & Involvement Techniques

- Website
- Advisory Teams
- Branding, Advertising & Marketing
- Citizen Survey
- Public Forums
- Meeting In a Box
- Stakeholder Interviews
- Municipal Officials Meetings
- School Programs
Union County has embarked on a new planning process that will shape its future. The process will result in a new comprehensive plan for the County and multi-municipal plans for three regions within the County, intended to guide decision-makers in managing future growth, promoting sustainable economic development, and preserving its rural landscape.

However, the success of the project depends on you. Meaningful public input will increase the effectiveness of the plan and the probability of its success. We invite you to share your passion for Union County by getting involved and voicing your opinion.

For more information about the comprehensive plan and the planning process, click here.

This is your future. What do you want it to look like?
Advisory Teams

- **Countywide Plan Advisory Team – 28 Volunteers**
  - Meets every other month on average
  - 2nd Thursday, 7PM at Mifflinburg High School LGI

- **3 Multi-Municipal Advisory Teams**
  - Elected Officials & Planning Commissioners
  - Meet as needed
We need you in Union County
GET INVOLVED!
www.cultivatingcommunity.net
Citizen Survey Results

Q2. Importance of Various Issues Facing Union County

by percentage of respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Somewhat Important</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
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<tr>
<td>Energy conservation</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>3%</td>
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<td>Manage future growth</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>31%</td>
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<td>Improved roadways and transportation</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maintain low tax rate</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>6%</td>
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<td>More employment opportunities</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maintain community identity, uniqueness &amp; quality</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>More agricultural preservation</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<td>7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increase public safety</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>7%</td>
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<td>Limit environmental impacts</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<td>Stronger controls for character of new development</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greater business development</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expand walking and biking trails</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>18%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expand parks, recreation, open space</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>17%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greater Town and Village revitalization</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>12%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increased historic preservation</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>18%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increase commercial development</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>23%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expand school services</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>More affordable housing</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>24%</td>
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<tr>
<td>More water/sewer availability</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>24%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greater diversification of housing types</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Promote population growth</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>43%</td>
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Source: Leisure Vision/ETC Institute (November 2007)
Public Forums
Meeting in a Box
Municipal Officials Meetings
Middle School Program
Future of Agriculture
On-Farm Interviews

• 72 farmers interviewed by volunteer visitor teams

• Survey data analyzed by Penn State University & American Farmland Trust

• Strategic plan for agriculture & rural economy
Outreach & Involvement Themes

- Preservation of Agriculture & Natural Resources
- Energy Conservation & Sustainability
- Growth Management
- Create Trails & Pedestrian-Friendly Development
- Expand Public Transportation
- Vitality of Town Centers
- Regional Cooperation
- Concern About Quality of New Growth
- Economic Opportunity for Current Residents
- Strategic Infrastructure Investment
Future Growth Options / Growth Management Framework
Purpose of the Scenarios

• Illustrate different “patterns” of future growth

• All scenarios show developed area, future growth area and rural resource areas using generalized existing land use

• Accommodate 80%+ of total housing growth and all major non-agricultural commercial expansion in growth areas (2006-2050)

• Right-of-way, utilities and preserved open space are accounted for in growth area calculations
**Total Land Area Needed for 2006-2050 @ 1 DU/Net Acre***

* 1) An additional 20% in land area is included in acreage calculation to accommodate utilities and ROW; 2) Gregg Township is included in the total projection, but is excluded from the Planning Area totals.

**+ 8,826 Housing Units**

**= 10,590 Net Acres in Union County***

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[Map showing Union County with various townships and boroughs, along with projected housing units and acres for 2050 projections for West, Central, and East Planning Areas.]
Growth Scenario #1
Growth Tiers

Accommodate primary growth in Tier 1 (generally existing Boroughs), additional growth in Tier 2, and limit development in Rural Resource Areas.

Assumptions:
1. Growth is based on projected number of housing units through 2050 at the following densities: Growth Tier 1 = Average of 3.5 DU/Acre; Growth Tier 2 = Average of 1 DU/Acre.
2. Rural Resource Areas are based on generalized existing land use.
3. An overall target of 85% of population occurring in Growth Tiers and 15% occurring outside of tiers is assumed to meet the 2050 housing projections.
4. Of the 85% target, focus majority (60-85%) in Growth Tier 1 with the remaining growth occurring in Growth Tier 2.

Note: Acreage calculation includes an additional 20% in land area to accommodate utilities and ROW.
Growth Tiers

Cultivating Community
Growth Scenario #2
Town and Village Centers
Accommodate primary growth in compact Town Centers, secondary growth in Village Centers, and limit development in Rural Resource Areas.
Assumptions:
1. Growth is based on projected number of housing units through 2050 at the following densities: Town Centers = Average of 6 DU/Acre; Village Centers = Average of 2.5 DU/Acre.
2. Rural Resource Areas are based on generalized existing land use.
3. An overall target of 85% of population occurring in centers and 15% occurring outside of centers is assumed to meet the 2050 housing projections.
4. Of the 85% target, focus majority (70%+) in Town Centers with the remaining growth occurring in Village Centers.

Note: Acreage calculation includes an additional 20% in land area to accommodate utilities and ROW.
Growth Scenario #3
Town Centers and Rural Neighborhoods

Accommodate 50% of growth in Town Centers and 50% of growth in Rural Neighborhoods utilizing conservation design. Limit development in rural resource areas.

Assumptions:
1. Growth is based on projected number of housing units through 2050 at the following densities: Town Centers = Average of 3.5 DU/Acre, Rural Neighborhoods = Average of 1 DU/Acre.
2. Rural Resource Areas are based on generalized existing land use.
3. Rural Neighborhoods (conservation subdivision design) are located away from Prime Agricultural Land and designed with 60% of the land area in preserved in open space.
4. An overall target of 85% of population occurring in centers or rural neighborhoods and 15% occurring outside of these areas is assumed to meet the 2050 housing projections.
5. Of the 85% target, 50% is focused in Town Centers and 50% is focused in Rural Neighborhoods.

Note: Acreage calculation includes an additional 20% in land area to accommodate utilities and ROW.
Future Growth Challenge

Low Density Development

Higher Costs of Services, Environmental Impacts, & Decreased Sustainability
Draft Vision Statement

Union County will be a prosperous and beautiful valley in 2030 by:

- Protecting precious natural resources & agriculture
- Supporting sustainable economic growth
- Promoting its unique town & country lifestyle

Three concurrent regional visions will contribute their special strengths to achieving these goals:

The western region will be a home for rural enterprise and connecting with nature.

The central region will be the heart of Union County’s agricultural and small town heritage.

The eastern region will be a center of county government, medical service, and higher education in a town and country setting.
Sustainability Goals

1. Focus new development in and around established communities
   - Promote reinvestment in existing towns and villages
   - Develop in close proximity to existing infrastructure

2. Preserve rural resources
   - Maintain agriculture and prime farmland soils
   - Preserve sensitive natural features and scenic views

3. Conserve energy
   - Decrease fossil fuel consumption
   - Reduce automobile use / promote transportation alternatives

4. Conserve fiscal resources
   - Limit the negative impacts of new development on municipal budgets
   - Limit the negative impacts of new development on community services
Future Growth Management Framework

- Citizen Direction & Sustainability
- Continue Small Town Patterns
What the Future Could Look Like
Cultivating Community: A Sustainable Comprehensive Plan for Union County
What is a Sustainable Comprehensive Plan?
Model 1: Discrete Topical Elements

- **MPC Elements**
  - Land Use and Development
  - Housing
  - Transportation
  - Community Facilities and Utilities
  - Natural and Historic Resources
  - Agricultural Lands (county plans only)
  - Energy Conservation (optional)
  - Implementation

- **Disadvantages**
  - Does not promote integration of related topics, although it does call for a statement of plan interrelationships
  - Does not address implementation capacity and accountability
What is a Sustainable Comprehensive Plan?  
Model 2: Interrelated Systems

• **Community Systems or Networks**
  • Energy / Utility
  • Food
  • Mobility
  • Green Infrastructure
  • Building
  • Economic
  • Social
  • Implementation Capacity-Building / Partnerships / Indicators of Progress

• **Disadvantages**
  • Not promoted by MPC guidance for comprehensive planning
  • Requires a fundamental rethinking of how we approach planning
Union County’s Cultivating Community Comprehensive Plan: A Hybrid Approach

- **Topical Plan Elements**
  - Natural and Agricultural Resources
  - Land Use
  - Housing
  - Economic Development
  - Cultural, Historic, and Recreational Resources
  - Community Facilities, Utilities, and Energy Conservation
  - Implementation

- **Integrating Factors**
  - Sustainability Principles
  - Sustainability Keys
  - Sustainability Indicators
Sustainability Keys

1. Natural and Agricultural Resources - System Integrity
2. Land Use - Mixed Use
3. Housing - Diversity
4. Economic Development - Building Local Assets
5. Transportation – Multi-Modal Choices
6. Cultural, Historic, and Recreational Resources - Adaptive Reuse
Sample Sustainability Indicators (in progress)

- **Natural and Agricultural Resources – System Integrity**
  - Water quality
  - Animal & plant species / key indicator species
  - Agricultural / forest lands preserved (easements, TDR, etc.)
  - Agricultural production / output

- **Land Use – Mixed Use**
  - Land consumption / development inside & outside growth areas
  - Vertical vs. horizontal mixed uses
  - Carbon footprint / greenhouse gas emissions

- **Housing – Diversity**
  - Housing demand based on demographics vs. mix of housing types
  - Affordability
  - Access to services (e.g., recreation, community facilities, retail)
Sample Sustainability Indicators (in progress)

- **Economic Development** – **Building Local Assets**
  - Locally-owned businesses
  - Employment opportunities / living wages
  - Growth of locally based economic sectors

- **Transportation** – **Multi-Modal Choices**
  - Reduction in vehicle miles traveled (VMT)
  - Length of sidewalks, recreational / multi-use trails, bike lanes
  - Connectivity index
Sample Sustainability Indicators (in progress)

- **Cultural and Historic Resources – Adaptive Reuse**
  - Historic resources preserved
  - Recycled building stock
  - Heritage tourism activity

- **Community Facilities, Utilities, and Energy Conservation – Energy Conservation**
  - Compactness of infrastructure systems
  - Renewable energy installations
  - Green buildings
  - Reduction in VMT
Union County’s Cultivating Community
Comprehensive Plan: Implementation

- **Geographic Scale**
  - Countywide Action Plan
  - Multi-Municipal Action Plans

- **Actions**
  - Types (regulatory, policy / planning, capital investment, partnerships)
  - Timeframes
  - Responsibilities
  - Funding sources

- **Monitoring**
  - Annual Assessments / Work Programs
  - Measures of Progress (sustainability indicators)
Key Issue: Capacity-Building

- **Union County and its municipalities have a small population and limited resources**
  - Three municipalities do not have zoning ordinances

- **Partnerships among the public, private, and nonprofit / institutional sectors will be key to success**
  - Public / public (e.g., PA DCED / Union County / municipalities)
  - Public / private (e.g., Lewisburg Area Recreation Park – LARA / Playworld; Pennsylvania House redevelopment)
  - Public / institutional (e.g., Union County / Bucknell University)
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