The Center for
Rural Pennsylvania
A Legislative Agency of the Pennsylvania General Assembly

200 North Third St., Suite 600
Harrisburg, PA 17101
(717) 787-9555
www.rural.palegislature.us

Jonathan Johnson – Senior Policy Analyst
johnsonj@rural.palegislature.us
Center for Rural Pennsylvania

Legislative research agency of the Pennsylvania General Assembly (Act 16, 1987)

Mandates

• Administer grants to conduct research on rural conditions.
• Maintain a database on rural conditions and needs.
Examples of Publications of Center-Sponsored Research
What Is Community Visioning?

• A process and a product

• Short statement of what residents:
  – Value about their community
  – Want their community to be in the future
Creating a Community Vision

• Define community boundaries
• Inventory & analyze community resources
• Write & adopt a vision statement
• Develop an action plan
• Implement the action plan
Where to Begin?

• Establish a steering committee
  – Local individuals interested in improving the community

• Committee’s Task:
  – Identify who is missing
  – Define the community’s boundaries
  – Select a facilitator
  – Plan first community workshop
First Community Workshop

• Agenda
  – Explanation of visioning process
  – Trends affecting the community
  – Small group discussions

• Outcomes
  – Understanding of visioning process
  – List of top issues/concerns affecting the community
  – Date for next community workshop

WORKSHEET #1
MCKEAN COUNTY

Change can be both good and bad, it all depends on how it is managed. To manage change effectively, citizens need to agree who they are and where they want to go. An important component of defining who we are is an assessment and inventory of the region in which we live. Please rank each issue listed below (indicate number 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5) for its degree of importance. Please feel free to add items to the list at the end on the other side of this sheet. Allow five minutes for this activity. Once you are finished, please compare your list with other members in your group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>How Important is this Issue?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase funding for basic education</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retaining youth in the region</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide more services to area senior citizens</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attracting young professionals to the region</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive programs to prevent teenage pregnancies</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make housing more affordable for working families</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective land use policies to maintain property values</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase environmental protection enforcement</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expansion of the public sewage system to encourage development</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide safe drinking water</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuing education opportunities for adults</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternatives for high school dropouts and other youth at risk</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing the number of students going on to college or trade school</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment of manufacturing firms to the region</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educating private landowners on good forest management practices</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open more land for oil and gas production</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More small businesses using local forest products</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
After the First Workshop: Establishing Taskforces

• Assign a taskforce for each of the top issues identified at the workshop.
• Steering committee members should temporarily chair taskforce and:
  – Informally recruit other taskforce members.
  – Gather primary information on the issue
# Second Community Workshop: The Task of the Taskforces

## Workshop
- After intros & explanations, break into taskforce groups
- In the taskforce groups:
  - Identify who is missing
  - Select the next meeting date
  - Begin inventory process

## Inventory Process
- Understanding of how the community got to where it is at
- List of community assets and values
- List of community organizations and their activities
- List of problems and potential opportunities
Third Community Workshop: What Have We Learned?

• Each taskforce reports its findings
  – What are the resources?
  – What are the challenges/opportunities?
  – What are the priorities?

• Taskforce writes a draft vision statement
Drafting Visioning Statement &
Fourth Community Workshop

• Steering committee combines all
  taskforce statements into one vision
  statement

• Fourth Community Workshop
  – The “public” unveiling of vision
    statement
  – Celebrate! Have fun!
Marketing & Strategic Action Plan

• “Adopt” the vision statement
  – Attend meetings, use resolutions
  – Using statement when making community-wide decisions

• Combining taskforce priorities to develop a strategic action plan
  – Focus on small “do-able” projects first
  – Steering committee making sure the work gets done
Annual Progress Report

• Celebrate your accomplishments!
• Keep a record-- give yourself a report card
• Recognize individuals & groups
• Highlight successes and difficulties
• Outline activities for next year
Tamaqua Area 2004 Case Study

• Five municipalities
  one borough, four townships

• 123 Square miles

• 17,000 residents
1994– A Bleak Winter

- Decades of population decline
- High youth out-migration
- Decline in downtown businesses
- Little coordination among municipalities
- Limited recreational opportunities
- Winter of 1994– 7.5 feet of snow
Tamaqua Area 2004-- Timeline

• Formed citizen steering committee in March, 1994

• First community workshop, June 1994
  – Historic preservation/tourism
  – Economic development
  – Downtown revitalization
  – Recreation

• Second community workshop, September 1994
  – Each taskforce identified specific short-and long-term goals
  – Drafted a vision statement

• Third community “workshop” June 1995
  – Adopted vision statement at June festival
Statement of Principles
(Vision Statement)

We all want the Tamaqua area to be a good place to live and work. Preserving and further enhancing the quality of life that this area enjoys requires citizens from all walks of life from Rush Township, Schuylkill Township, Tamaqua Borough, and West Penn Township to work together to:

• Aggressively pursue an economic development strategy
• Identify and preserve historic resources and develop a tourism effort
• Revitalize Tamaqua’s downtown business corridors
• Improve and coordinate recreational opportunities for all ages
## Accomplishment – First 10 Years

### Recreation
- Established a regional recreational authority (Eastern Schuylkill Recreation Commission)
- Developed a rails-to-trail plan with Schuylkill River National Heritage Corridor
- Helped YMCA establish summer basketball league
- Assisted municipalities in submitting recreational grant applications

### Historic Preservation/Tourism
- Developed & installed historic markers throughout area
- Published brochure on historic sites
- Developed trolley tour of area
- Developed Newkirk Tunnel Site
- Helped County CVB develop Molly Maguire Tour
- Assisted in completion of Train Station
### Accomplishment – continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Downtown Revitalization</th>
<th>Economic Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Assisted Borough in applying for DCED’s Main Street Program</td>
<td>• Worked with economic development agencies to fill industrial park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Promoted Façade improvement program</td>
<td>• Worked with school district to improve business/education environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Developed greenspace along river</td>
<td>• Conducted hotel/motel feasibility study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Gateway program for downtown</td>
<td>• Established community bulletin board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Completed retail marketing program for downtown</td>
<td>• Review signage ordinances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Improved pedestrian environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Beyond 2004

Name change–

**Tamaqua Area Community Partnership**

- Blueprint Communities
- Community College opens
- Keystone Opportunity Zone
- New YMCA recreational complex
- Downtown farmers’ market & façade program
- Elm Street community designation
- Inter-municipal regional plan (Eastern Schuylkill Planning Region)
- LISC Sustainable Community designations
- New health clinic
- Active regional recreational program, new community park
- Return of the Countryside Exchange Team (Glynwood)
- Planning charrette– for downtown & recreational areas
- Establish historic district & HARB
- Restored old shoe factory in affordable housing
- Development of a riverwalk area
Tamaqua – A Case Study
Train Station: Before
Train Station After
Streetscape Program
Façade improvements in downtown Tamaqua have been completed on over 60 projects – both commercial and residential – within the commercial corridor.
Lessons Learned

• Local Leadership and responsibility is important
• Citizen participation is a must
• Regional perspective is important
• Wealth/poverty not important
• Visioning is not economic development
• Coordination does not mean control
• Outcomes are NOT predetermined
• Visioning is a challenging process
• Visioning should be fun!!!