

INTRODUCTION

A Vision for the Lower Dauphin Area

The Lower Dauphin area includes the townships of Conewago, East Hanover, Londonderry, and South Hanover, as well as the borough of Hummelstown. The *Lower Dauphin Area Regional Comprehensive Plan* is a vision for the future of the area. The plan shows how residents and public officials can help preserve Lower Dauphin's character and environment by avoiding unplanned growth and accommodating only desirable changes in the area's current land use pattern.

Most growth in the Lower Dauphin area should be in and around existing developed areas, including Hummelstown Borough. The extensive prime agricultural soils of the area townships should be reserved for farming. The vital environmental functions and limitations of steep slopes, woodlands, flood-prone lands, and other natural areas should be respected. New homes should be located on the most physically suitable land. Open space should be preserved within new developments wherever feasible. Sewage treatment should be engineered to maintain public health and protect local water quality without encouraging sprawl.

The Lower Dauphin area encourages new commerce and industry that is well planned, environmentally safe, and located near existing infrastructure. Businesses along major roads such as Interstate 81, PA 283, and U.S. 22, should use common entrances and exits to improve traffic safety, facilitate circulation, and help prevent commercial strip development. Historic structures should be respected in both residential and nonresidential areas.

Working with local organizations, the Lower Dauphin municipalities should continue to promote fire protection and emergency services. Education, recreation, and culture should remain priorities. The spirit of intermunicipal cooperation that led to the plan should be maintained and extended well into the future.

The Lower Dauphin Area Regional Planning Group

The Lower Dauphin Area Regional Planning Group is a unique organization composed of the Lower Dauphin School District and its contingent municipalities dedicated to promoting cooperative efforts in planning and public services. In March 2000, representatives of all the elected bodies of the five district municipalities (Hummelstown and the townships of East Hanover, South Hanover, Londonderry, and Conewago), the school district, the Dauphin County Commissioners, Senator Piccola, Representative Marsico, and Representative Tulli met to discuss issues of mutual concern. One of the major issues cited was growth patterns. The Lower Dauphin School District experienced considerable residential growth during the 1990s with no significant increase in commercial or industrial growth. The residential growth typically came at the expense of agricultural land. Several

participants noted that the Lower Dauphin School District has the highest percentage of residential land use in Dauphin County. Furthermore, several analyses have shown that residential land uses require more government services than any other type of land use.¹

As a result of the first meeting, the elected officials of the five municipalities asked the group to continue discussions and appointed several representatives to a regional study group. The regional group met monthly through October 2000 at which time they reported back to the municipalities, recommending that the group be formalized and that a comprehensive plan be developed for the region. For the next several months, the municipalities and school district discussed the recommendations and adopted a resolution creating the Lower Dauphin Area Regional Planning Group (LDARPG). The first formal meeting of LDARPG took place on 24 January 2001.

Developing The Plan

After preparing goals and objectives for the region, LDARPG retained the consulting firm of Urban Research and Development Corporation (URDC) of Bethlehem, PA to assist in preparing the *Lower Dauphin Area Regional Comprehensive Plan*. LDARPG and URDC met for the following 18 months and held several public meetings. URDC conducted extensive background studies, including personal interviews with key community leaders. The Tri-County Planning Commission, which regularly attends LDARPG meetings, provided valuable support for the plan. As a result, the *Lower Dauphin Area Regional Comprehensive Plan* is truly a cooperative document which recognizes the importance of local governments working together for the common good.

One of the important developments in the preparation of the *Lower Dauphin Area Regional Comprehensive Plan* pertains to the state planning law. Municipal planning is enabled by the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (Act 247, as amended), sometimes referred to as the MPC. According to the MPC, municipalities participating in a multimunicipal planning program had to be contiguous. The Lower Dauphin area is *not* contiguous.

One of the most important effects of local land use policy is property value, which is directly linked to taxes. Three levels of government in Pennsylvania—municipal, county, and school district—levy taxes on the basis of property value. By far, the largest of the three is the school district levy. Therefore, cooperative planning to address land use issues makes sense on a school district basis. However, 13 of the 501 school districts in Pennsylvania are not contiguous, including Lower Dauphin.

While preparing the *Lower Dauphin Area Regional Comprehensive Plan*, LDARPG contacted state legislators in an attempt to clarify the issue of contiguity. As a result, the state legislature passed Act 99 of 2004, which amended the MPC to allow noncontiguous municipalities to develop a multimunicipal plan provided all municipalities are in the same school district.

¹ One such study is *Fiscal Impacts of Different Land Uses; The Pennsylvania Experience*; Timothy W. Kelsey; Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences; 1997

Understanding the Plan

The *Lower Dauphin Area Regional Comprehensive Plan* begins with an examination of the community and its many characteristics, from population and other demographic information to public services (such as water, sewer, and recreation) to public opinion, in the form of a community survey. The background studies (chapter 2) identify the issues which must be addressed in the policies of the comprehensive plan.

The plan itself (chapter 3) was developed to address the issues identified in the background studies. The focus of a comprehensive plan is land use. Recommendations are also included in other areas which lend support to and guide community efforts in housing, transportation, and community services. Nevertheless, the legally binding tools which emanate from the comprehensive plan are local ordinances (typically a zoning ordinance and a subdivision and land development ordinance) which address the use and development of the land. Therefore, land use and land use policy are the strongest elements of the comprehensive plan.

The action program provides further detail for the recommendations in the plan. The action program identifies a time frame or priority for each recommendation, an entity(ies) responsible for implementing each recommendation, and information on potential funding for each recommended action.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

At the beginning of the regional planning process, South Hanover Township chose to withdraw from LDARPG. Therefore, the Lower Dauphin Area Regional Comprehensive Plan was developed without input and direction from South Hanover Township. In addition, Conewago Township chose to withdraw from LDARPG prior to municipal adoption of the plan.

The community survey contains responses from both South Hanover and Conewago Township residents, and the background material includes both Conewago and South Hanover Townships. However, in the absence of guidance from South Hanover Township, the land use plan simply illustrates current land use policy as reflected in the township zoning ordinance. Also, though Conewago Township representatives participated in LDARPG while the plan was prepared, the Conewago Township Board of Supervisors never adopted the plan prior to the township withdrawing from LDARPG.

Therefore, the land use plan herein does not necessarily reflect the current thinking of South Hanover Township or Conewago Township officials nor should the plan be interpreted as a recommendation for future land use policy in either South Hanover Township or Conewago Township.

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