



Mercer County Changes- Action Planning and Implementation Strategies

For Mercer County to achieve the vision it has defined, a number of policy changes or revisions must occur. These changes are outlined in the following action plans. Each action plan corresponds to specific regional planning activities (e.g., land use, transportation, housing, etc.). These action plans provide a guided approach for achieving the County's vision identified in Chapter 3. While the action plans address policy changes, the capital improvements program (CIP) outlines the various community development projects that embody the greatest potential for community improvement.

Action Plans

Action Plans answer the question "How can we change what we do today in order to become the community we want to be?" The Action Plans build on the goals and objectives developed earlier in the planning process to identify and recommend policies for decision making and tasks for making change. There are seven Action Plans that address each of the components of community planning:

- Land Use Action Plan
- Community Facilities and Services Action Plan
- Urban Recreation Action Plan*
- Economic Action Plan
- Natural Resources Action Plan
- Cultural Resources Action Plan
- Housing Action Plan

The highest priority strategies for each plan are presented in the form of a matrix at the beginning of the chapter and include recommendations for implementing partners and potential funding sources. The matrices are followed by a more in-depth presentation of the plans, including the mid- and low priority strategies.

The reader is referred to the Long Range Transportation Plan, which is a separate document, for the transportation recommendations.

Rural recreation is addressed within the County's Greenway, Open Space and Rural Recreation Plan.

LAND USE ACTION PLAN – HIGH PRIORITY STRATEGIES

GOALS:

DEVELOPMENT: PROMOTE SOUND LAND USE PLANNING THAT IS CONSISTENT WITH TOWN, VILLAGE AND RURAL SETTINGS FOUND WITHIN MERCER COUNTY, AND THAT PROTECTS THE HEALTH, SAFETY, AND WELFARE OF THE COUNTY’S RESIDENTS.

EDUCATION: CONTINUE TO EDUCATE LANDOWNERS, RESIDENTS, AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS ABOUT LAND USE ISSUES WITHIN THE COUNTY AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE.

Priority Strategies	Implementing Parties	Funding Sources
Prioritize revitalization projects for incorporation into “Priorities for Mercer County”	LEAD: Local municipal officials. Local redevelopment authorities SUPPORT: MCRPC, DEP, Penn-Northwest	Brownfield Inventory Grants Under the Hazardous Sites Cleanup Act (DEP); Brownfield Tax Incentive
Review and amend municipal zoning and subdivision and land development ordinances to identify provisions that may be viewed as disincentives to revitalization efforts.	LEAD: MCRPC SUPPORT: Local municipal officials, the business community, and developers	Mercer County and Local municipal officials; LUPTAP (DCED)
Implement the recommendations of the GIS Needs Assessment Report completed by GeoDecisions in January 2004, including the identification of additional uses of GIS Data.	LEAD: MCRPC SUPPORT: Commissioners Office, Emergency Management Agency, Penn-Northwest, the County Bridge Department, and the Housing Authority, Local municipal officials	Mercer County; Local Municipal Resources and Development Program (DCED); Shared municipal services.
Adopt the updated Mercer County Comprehensive Plan, including the new Future Land Use Map.	LEAD: Mercer County Commissioners SUPPORT: MCRPC and Local municipal officials	Implementing Parties

LAND USE ACTION PLAN – HIGH PRIORITY STRATEGIES

GOALS:

DEVELOPMENT: PROMOTE SOUND LAND USE PLANNING THAT IS CONSISTENT WITH TOWN, VILLAGE AND RURAL SETTINGS FOUND WITHIN MERCER COUNTY, AND THAT PROTECTS THE HEALTH, SAFETY, AND WELFARE OF THE COUNTY’S RESIDENTS.

EDUCATION: CONTINUE TO EDUCATE LANDOWNERS, RESIDENTS, AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS ABOUT LAND USE ISSUES WITHIN THE COUNTY AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE.

Priority Strategies	Implementing Parties	Funding Sources
Evaluate Growth Target areas and other elements of the future land use map in relation to the availability of existing infrastructure on a regular basis.	LEAD: Local municipal officials and planning offices SUPPORT: MCRPC	Mercer County, Local municipal officials
Aggressively pursue sewer and water systems facilities development and funding that are consistent with future land use policies.	LEAD: Local municipal sewer and water authorities, Local municipal officials SUPPORT: MCRPC, developers	Pennsylvania Infrastructure Investment Authority; CDBG Program, Act 537 - Sewage Facilities Planning Assistance
Encourage a mix of residential and commercial uses in the County’s boroughs and cities.	LEAD: Local municipal officials and planning offices SUPPORT: MCRPC	New Communities Program, LUPTAP, Housing and Redevelopment Assistance Program, Community Revitalization Program (DCED)
Encourage the development or update of local comprehensive plans and continue to assist with funding applications.	LEAD: MCRPC SUPPORT: Local municipal officials/planners	MCRPC, LUPTAP (DCED), Local Planning Departments/Offices,
Identify existing Brownfields sites that meet the needs of target industries identified in the Economic Target Location Assessment Study completed in March 2004.	LEAD: Penn-Northwest SUPPORT: MCRPC, Local municipal officials and developers	Brownfield Inventory Grants Under the Hazardous Sites Cleanup Act (DEP); Brownfield Tax Incentive, EPA Brownfields Program

LAND USE ACTION PLAN – HIGH PRIORITY STRATEGIES

GOALS:

DEVELOPMENT: PROMOTE SOUND LAND USE PLANNING THAT IS CONSISTENT WITH TOWN, VILLAGE AND RURAL SETTINGS FOUND WITHIN MERCER COUNTY, AND THAT PROTECTS THE HEALTH, SAFETY, AND WELFARE OF THE COUNTY’S RESIDENTS.

EDUCATION: CONTINUE TO EDUCATE LANDOWNERS, RESIDENTS, AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS ABOUT LAND USE ISSUES WITHIN THE COUNTY AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE.

Priority Strategies	Implementing Parties	Funding Sources
Provide local municipal officials with Model Ordinances as tools for managing land development.	LEAD: MCRPC	DCED - LUPTAP, County, Local municipalities
Adopt the draft County Subdivision/Land Development Ordinance (December 2005-06).	LEAD: Mercer County Commissioners SUPPORT: MCRPC and Local municipal officials	DCED - LUPTAP, County

COMMUNITY FACILITIES, SERVICES, AND UTILITIES PLAN – HIGH PRIORITY ACTION STRATEGIES

LIBRARIES

GOAL: MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE THE COUNTY'S PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Priority Strategies	Implementing Parties	Funding Sources
Develop a Mercer County Library Board with representatives from each public library to improve services and funding opportunities	LEAD: Public and private libraries SUPPORT: MCRPC, Educational institutions, CareerLink, Interested businesses	Foundations, Friends of Mercer County (if 501c3 organization is created), State Library Grants
Broaden the role of libraries as community centers to provide additional services to residents in the community	LEAD: Public and private libraries SUPPORT: MCRPC, Educational institutions, CareerLink, Interested businesses, municipalities	Foundations, CDBG

PUBLIC SAFETY

GOAL: PROVIDE PUBLIC SAFETY SERVICES THAT MEET THE NEEDS OF MERCER COUNTY RESIDENTS AND ARE CONSISTENT WITH NATIONAL AND STATEWIDE STANDARDS.

Develop alternative arrangements to improve working relationships among the police, fire, and EMS organizations within the County.	LEAD: Local EMS, Fire, and Police Departments SUPPORT: Municipalities, County 911, MCRPC	Federal Emergency Management Agency -- Related Grant Programs, CDBG, DCED Shared Municipal Services
Ensure that local police, fire, and EMS have the current Homeland Protection training.	LEAD: Local EMS, Fire, and Police Departments SUPPORT: Municipalities, County 911, MCRPC	Federal Emergency Management Agency -- Related Grant Programs
Provide important information to county residents and officials regarding disaster planning and management	LEAD: MCRPC SUPPORT: Local EMS Departments, Fire Departments, Police Departments, PEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency -- Related Grant Programs, CDBG, DCED

COMMUNITY FACILITIES, SERVICES, AND UTILITIES PLAN – HIGH PRIORITY ACTION STRATEGIES		
PUBLIC SAFETY		
GOAL: PROVIDE PUBLIC SAFETY SERVICES THAT MEET THE NEEDS OF MERCER COUNTY RESIDENTS AND ARE CONSISTENT WITH NATIONAL AND STATEWIDE STANDARDS.		
Priority Strategies	Implementing Parties	Funding Sources
Develop an emergency plan for Springfield Township specific to the Outlet Mall, I-79, and the Grove City Regional Airport.	LEAD: Springfield Township	Federal Emergency Management Agency -- Related Grant Programs, CDBG, DCED
	SUPPORT: MCRPC, Grove City Borough, EMS Departments, Fire Departments, Police Departments, PEMA	
Coordinate with the 911 Office to encourage the development and updating of Hazard Mitigation plans throughout the County.	LEAD: County 911 Office	Federal Emergency Management Agency -- Related Grant Programs; Competitive Hazard Mitigation Grants (PEMA)
	SUPPORT: MCRPC, Municipalities, PEMA	
WATER AND SEWER INFRASTRUCTURE		
GOAL: ENCOURAGE SANITARY SEWER AND WATER SYSTEMS THAT ARE COST-EFFICIENT, MEET RESIDENTS’ NEEDS, MAINTAIN COMMUNITY HEALTH, AND PROVIDE AN EQUITABLE LEVEL OF SERVICE.		
Encourage consistency between water and sewer infrastructure investments and the growth management policies indicated on the Mercer County Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map.	LEAD: Municipalities, Water and Sewer Authorities,	Implementing Partners
	SUPPORT: MCRPC, Penn North-west	
Support the updating/expansion of water infrastructure capacity in the following locations: Fredonia, Jamestown Borough, West Middlesex, and areas of Greenville. Other areas have also been identified and could be considered; however, first priority should be given to areas that are consistent with the County’s Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map.	LEAD: Municipalities & Water and Sewer Authorities	PENNVEST, CDBG, Infrastructure and Facilities Improvement Program, Small Water Systems Regionalization Grant Program, Small Water Systems Consolidation and Construction Grant Program
	SUPPORT: MCRPC, Penn North-West	

COMMUNITY FACILITIES, SERVICES, AND UTILITIES PLAN – HIGH PRIORITY ACTION STRATEGIES

WATER AND SEWER INFRASTRUCTURE

GOAL: ENCOURAGE SANITARY SEWER AND WATER SYSTEMS THAT ARE COST-EFFICIENT, MEET RESIDENTS' NEEDS, MAINTAIN COMMUNITY HEALTH, AND PROVIDE AN EQUITABLE LEVEL OF SERVICE.

Priority Strategies	Implementing Parties	Funding Sources
Develop a community-based source water protection plan to safeguard public drinking water supply from wells. Specifically target those areas that have been identified in the PADEP Source Water Assessment and Protection Reports in 2002, particularly the “critical area” that has been identified in the Shenango River watershed.	LEAD: MCRPC SUPPORT: Water and Sewer Authorities, Municipalities, COGs, Penn North-West	PENNVEST, CDBG, Infrastructure and Facilities Improvement Program, Small Water Systems Regionalization Grant Program, Small Water Systems Consolidation and Construction Grant Program
Update local and regional Act 537 Sewage Facility Plans.	LEAD: Municipalities, Sewer Authorities, SUPPORT: MCRPC	DEP, PENNVEST, CDBG, Act 537 Sewage Planning Assistance
Expand capacity at the following sewage treatment facilities to meet projected demands: Grove City Borough, Mercer Borough, Coolspring Township, Sandy Lake Township, City of Hermitage, and the City of Sharon.	LEAD: Municipalities, Sewer Authorities, SUPPORT: MCRPC	DEP, PENNVEST, CDBG, Act 537 Sewage Planning Assistance
Work with local officials to implement rural wastewater management strategies that best meet each community's needs and budgets	LEAD: MCRPC SUPPORT: Water and Sewer Authorities, Municipalities, COGs, Penn North-West	DCED, PENNVEST, DEP

COMMUNITY FACILITIES, SERVICES, AND UTILITIES PLAN – HIGH PRIORITY ACTION STRATEGIES		
Develop a model On-lot Management District Ordinance. The ordinance would specifically state what existing and proposed land uses within the municipality should be serviced by on-lot septic systems and would comply with Act 537 plans.	LEAD: MCRPC	DCED, PENNVEST, DEP
	SUPPORT: Water and Sewer Authorities, Municipalities, COGs, Penn North-West	
STORM WATER MANAGEMENT		
GOAL: MANAGE DEVELOPMENT TO MINIMIZE SITE DISTURBANCE AND STORM WATER GENERATION, MAXIMIZE INFILTRATION (WHERE APPROPRIATE) AND MAINTAIN WATER QUALITY.		
Priority Strategies	Implementing Parties	Funding Sources
Work with municipalities to update stormwater regulations to adequately address water quality as required by government agencies	LEAD: Municipalities, Watershed Associations	DEP Growing Greener Grant Program, DEP Storm Water Management Program
	SUPPORT: MCPRC	
Develop a plan review checklist to address stormwater management and incorporate the checklist into MCRPC and local plan reviews.	LEAD: MCPRC	DEP Growing Greener Grant Program, DEP Storm Water Management Program
	SUPPORT: Local Officials	
SOLID WASTE		
GOAL: PROVIDE AN ADEQUATE SOLID WASTE DISPOSAL AND COLLECTION SYSTEM TO SERVE THE NEEDS OF MERCER COUNTY RESIDENTS WHILE MAINTAINING PUBLIC HEALTH		
Implement Mercer County’s Act 101 Solid Waste Management Plan.	LEAD: Mercer County Solid Waste Authority	DEP Act 101 County Planning Grants
	SUPPORT: MCPRC, Local Officials	
Support the County’s recycling goal through the Countywide Recycling Depot System.	LEAD: Mercer County Solid Waste Authority, Recycling Consolidation Center	DEP Act 101 County Planning Grants
	SUPPORT: MCPRC, Local Officials	

URBAN RECREATION PLAN – HIGH PRIORITY ACTION STRATEGIES

GOALS

RECREATION NETWORK: SUPPORT DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF A RECREATIONAL NETWORK ACROSS MERCER COUNTY

RECREATION SERVICES: SUPPORT PROVISION OF YEAR ROUND RECREATIONAL PROGRAMS FOR RESIDENTS AND VISITORS OF ALL AGES

Priority Strategies	Implementing Parties	Funding Sources
Establish municipal and/or regional recreation commissions.	LEAD: municipalities and intermunicipal partnerships, school districts SUPPORT: MCRPC, business community (e.g. Chambers of Commerce)	DCNR Circuit Rider program, DCED Shared Municipal Services Program
Coordinate with local school boards to provide greater public access to school and other community facilities for recreational programs.	LEAD: municipalities and intermunicipal partnerships, public and private recreation organizations, school districts SUPPORT: MCRPC, private recreation organizations	DCNR Recreation Technical Assistance Program (RECTAP)
Prepare and adopt local Comprehensive Recreation, Park, and Open Space Plans to aid in identifying recreation issues, needs, policies, and capital investment priorities. Continue to utilize existing intermunicipal planning partnerships as planning regions for these studies.	LEAD: municipalities and intermunicipal partnerships, public and private recreation organizations SUPPORT: MCRPC, schools, business community	Community Conservation Partnership Program (DCNR), Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program (DCED), private foundations and sponsors
Review municipal and multi-municipal comprehensive plans and ordinances for consistency with 1) the 10-acre/1,000 residents guideline; 2) provisions for recreational land dedication and/or fees-in lieu thereof; and 3) recreational facilities planning	LEAD: MCRPC SUPPORT: municipalities and intermunicipal partnerships	Community Conservation Partnership Program (DCNR), Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program (DCED)

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN – HIGH PRIORITY ACTION STRATEGIES

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND DIVERSITY -

GOAL: BROADEN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES TO INCLUDE A WIDER VARIETY OF ECONOMIC SECTORS AND TO BETTER ENCOURAGE THE EXPANSION OF EXISTING BUSINESSES.

Priority Strategies	Implementing Parties	Funding Sources
Advertise local employment opportunities on the Penn-Northwest website and encourage its use by businesses and residents.	LEAD: Penn-Northwest, Private Businesses SUPPORT: MCRPC, School Districts, Mercer County's Convention and Visitor's Bureau, Local Chambers of Commerce	DCED, CDBG, TeamPA Foundation
Promote Penn-Northwest's listing of available economic development sites for manufacturing and innovation, particularly those associated with the KOZ, KOEZ, Enterprise Zones, and KIZ programs. Also, support the Shenango Valley Chamber's efforts to develop a list of available commercial sites.	LEAD: Penn-Northwest SUPPORT: MCRPC, Mercer County Convention and Visitor's Bureau, Local Chambers of Commerce and Industrial Corporations	Keystone Innovation Zones (KIZs), New PA Venture Capital Investment Program, New PA Venture Guarantee Program, Second State Loan Program, Tax Increment Financing (TIFs), Business in Our Sites, Enterprise Zones, KOZs & KOEZs
Explore marketing and promotion activities to nurture the development of new agricultural and forestry related businesses.	LEAD: Rural Industries Board, Penn State Cooperative Extension, SUPPORT: MCPRC, Municipalities, Interested Farmers, Foresters, Local Chambers of Commerce	Core Industries, First Industries Fund
Explore rural niche business markets, including furniture making, antiquing, wineries, organic farming, specialty cheese making, green housing, and others.	LEAD: Rural Industries Board, Farmers, Foresters SUPPORT: MCPRC, Penn State Cooperative Extension, Municipalities, Mercer County Convention and Visitors Bureau, Local Chambers of Commerce	Core Industries, First Industries Fund
Establish Main Street programs and affiliated Elm Street programs in towns such as Greenville, Mercer, Sharon, Jamestown, and Grove City. Use a regional approach to ensure inclusion of smaller communities.	LEAD: Local Officials, MCRPC SUPPORT: Local business owners	DCED -- Governor's Stimulus Package Main Street Program and Elm Street Program

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN – HIGH PRIORITY ACTION STRATEGIES

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND DIVERSITY -

GOAL: BROADEN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES TO INCLUDE A WIDER VARIETY OF ECONOMIC SECTORS AND TO BETTER ENCOURAGE THE EXPANSION OF EXISTING BUSINESSES.

Priority Strategies	Implementing Parties	Funding Sources
Take advantage of the new Keystone Innovation Zones (KIZ) program. Encourage the development of new innovative businesses with university partners such as Grove City College, Thiel College, and Penn State University Shenango Campus.	LEAD: Education Institutions, Penn-Northwest SUPPORT: MCRPC, Local business owners. Local Officials, Local Chambers of Commerce	DCED -- Governor's Stimulus Package KIZ Program
Continue to recruit target businesses identified in the 2004 Target Location Assessment report developed by Penn-Northwest. Develop clear roles, assignments, and marketing material for staff to assist in the recruitment process.	LEAD: Penn-Northwest SUPPORT: MCRPC, municipalities, COGs, Chambers of Commerce, and private businesses	Keystone Innovation Zones (KIZs), New PA Venture Capital Investment Program, New PA Venture Guarantee Program, Second State Loan Program, Tax Increment Financing (TIFs), Business in Our Sites, Enterprise Zones, KOZ & KOEZs

WORKFORCE SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT

GOAL: IMPROVE WORKFORCE SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT TO IMPROVE THE EMPLOYABILITY OF MERCER COUNTY RESIDENTS.

Support the efforts of Team Pennsylvania's CareerLink as a networking/partnering resource for job searches and/or job training.	LEAD: Mercer County Career Link, Penn-Northwest, Education Institutions, SUPPORT: MCRPC	Implementing Partners
Create and regularly update an inventory of local business needs regarding employee skill sets and integrate into school and job training curriculum within the County.	LEAD: Mercer County Career Link, Mercer County Career Center, Mercer County Schools SUPPORT: MCRPC	Implementing Partners

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN – HIGH PRIORITY ACTION STRATEGIES

WORKFORCE SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT

GOAL: IMPROVE WORKFORCE SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT TO IMPROVE THE EMPLOYABILITY OF MERCER COUNTY RESIDENTS.

Priority Strategies	Implementing Parties	Funding Sources
Consider creating a Train-to-Work Committee, in cooperation with Penn-Northwest, to consist of representatives from the universities, school districts, interested local businesses, and CareerLink. The committee would be charged with fostering public-private partnering between the educational institutions and the local businesses.	LEAD: Mercer County Career Link, Mercer County Career Center, Mercer County Schools	Implementing Partners
	SUPPORT: MCRPC, Local Chambers of Commerce	
Identify specific barriers to new business start-ups and develop strategies and incentives to overcome them, e.g., create a revolving loan fund to micro-finance value-added activities that use unique local assets such as recreation, agriculture, natural/historic tourism, etc.	LEAD: Penn-Northwest and Local Chambers of Commerce	Implementing Partners
	SUPPORT: MCRPC, Educational Institutions, Mercer County's Convention and Visitor's Bureau,	
Support the efforts of the Mennonite Economic Development Association (MEDA) and the Community Action Partnership to develop and ASSETS+ program in Mercer County.	LEAD: Community Action Partnership and MEDA	Implementing Partners
	SUPPORT: MCRPC; Mercer County Career Link, Mercer County Career Center, Mercer County Schools	

LEADERSHIP AND COORDINATION --

GOAL: ENCOURAGE LEADERSHIP AND COORDINATION AMONG PUBLIC, PRIVATE, AND NON-PROFIT SECTORS TO SEAMLESSLY CARRY OUT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES.

Explore tax-base sharing, revenue sharing, and cost sharing strategies to reduce local competition for new businesses.	LEAD: Local Officials, COGs	Implementing Partners
	SUPPORT: MCRPC, Penn-Northwest	

NATURAL RESOURCES PLAN – HIGH PRIORITY STRATEGIES

NATURAL RESOURCE SYSTEMS --

GOAL: RETAIN NATURAL LANDSCAPE SYSTEMS

Priority Strategies	Implementing Parties	Funding Sources
Implement a GIS/MIS program to supplement current and future planning and development activities with a countywide spatial database of natural resources, including surface waters, wetlands, floodplains, geologic formations, and soils, and recommended protection measures.	LEAD: MCRPC SUPPORT: Local Officials, County Commissioners, Mercer County Conservation District, Penn State Cooperative Extension Service	DCNR, DEP, PA Department of Agriculture, USDA, Additional Sources outlined in GIS Assessment Report
Adopt and implement the Mercer County Open Space, Greenway, and Rural Recreation Plan.	LEAD: Mercer County Commissioners SUPPORT: MCRPC, DCNR, Local Municipal Officials, Mercer County Convention and Visitors Bureau	Community Conservation Partnership Programs (DCNR), Growing Greener Grant Program (DEP)
Promote innovative subdivision and land development procedures, land use management practices, and resource protection techniques.	LEAD: MCRPC, Local Municipal Officials SUPPORT: Local Conservation Groups, DCNR, DEP, Development Community	LUPTAP (DCED), County, Local Municipalities, Natural Lands Trust, WPC

NATURAL RESOURCE QUALITY --

GOAL: SUSTAIN OR IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF NATURAL AND MANMADE ENVIRONMENTAL FEATURES

Establish a date/mileage target for removing stream segments from the DEP Integrated List of All Waters (formerly 303(d) list of impaired waters).	LEAD: MCRPC, Conservation District SUPPORT: DEP, Local Officials, Local Watershed Groups, DCNR	Mercer County
--	---	---------------

EDUCATION

GOAL: DEMONSTRATE (OR SUPPORT DEMONSTRATION OF) THE VALUE OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT TO LANDOWNERS, RESIDENTS, AND VISITORS

Establish a Landowner Outreach Team(s) of agriculture, forestry, planning and local government representatives to interface with local landowners to educate them and answer questions on conservation programs, techniques, benefits, etc.	LEAD: Conservation District SUPPORT: MCRPC, County Agricultural Land Preservation Board, DCNR/DCNR Bureau of Forestry, Cooperative Extension Service, Western PA Conservancy, watershed and environmental organizations	Support Organizations, Growing Greener Grant Program (DEP)
---	--	--

CULTURAL RESOURCES PLAN – HIGH PRIORITY ACTION STRATEGIES		
GOALS		
HISTORIC PRESERVATION: SUPPORT PROTECTION AND ENCOURAGE ACTIVE USE OF HISTORIC SITES.		
CONTEMPORARY IDENTITY: PROMOTE A CULTURE OF CONNECTEDNESS TO COMMUNITY.		
Priority Strategy	Implementing Parties	Funding Sources
Identify and market historic sites as redevelopment opportunities. Offer incentives for historic site rehabilitation.	LEAD: Mercer County Historical Society, Local Historical Societies; Penn-Northwest	PHMC, Private Foundations and Individual Donors
	SUPPORT: MCRPC, Local Officials, PHMC	

HOUSING PLAN – HIGH PRIORITY ACTION STRATEGIES

GOALS

HOUSING DIVERSITY: PROMOTE DEVELOPMENT OF A DIVERSITY OF WELL MAINTAINED HOUSING OPTIONS THAT MEET A RANGE OF NEEDS AND INCOME LEVELS FOR MERCER COUNTY RESIDENTS.

HOUSING MAINTENANCE: PROMOTE SOUND MAINTENANCE AND MODERNIZATION OF EXISTING HOUSING.

RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS: PROMOTE SAFE, VIBRANT AND LIVABLE NEIGHBORHOODS

Priority Strategies	Implementing Parties	Funding Sources
Identify local issues and concerns, including property maintenance and code enforcement.	LEAD: Local Officials and residents SUPPORT: MCRPC, County Commissioners	Implementing Parties
Work with Mercer County residential real estate professionals and developers to identify gaps in the current housing market and develop a strategy to fill them.	LEAD: MCRPC, Mercer County Housing Authority, Community Action Partnership of Mercer County, Real Estate Professionals SUPPORT: Development Community , Local officials	Mercer County, PHFA, Development Community
Develop and build new housing, in locations that are consistent with the County Comprehensive Plan's Future Land Use Plan and supported by current or planned infrastructure.	LEAD: Development and Mercer County Housing Authority, Community Action Partnership of Mercer County, SUPPORT: MCRPC, Local Officials, Real Estate Professionals, Developers, Sewer and water authorities	Mercer County, PHFA, Development Community
Prioritize specific housing rehabilitation opportunities in existing neighborhoods throughout Mercer County, especially in the urbanized areas of the Shenango Valley, Greenville, Grove City and Mercer.	LEAD: Local Officials, Real Estate Professionals SUPPORT: MCRPC, Mercer County Housing Authority, Community Action Partnership of Mercer County, Development Community	Mercer County, PHFA, Development Community
Develop alternative housing types (e.g., upper level loft apartments) in the downtown areas of Sharon and Farrell to attract people back to the city centers and help to restore economic energy and health to the downtowns.	LEAD: Local Officials, Real Estate Professionals SUPPORT: MCRPC, Development Community	PHFA, Development Community, Urban Development Program, Main Street and Elm Street Programs

HOUSING PLAN – HIGH PRIORITY ACTION STRATEGIES

GOALS

HOUSING DIVERSITY: PROMOTE DEVELOPMENT OF A DIVERSITY OF WELL MAINTAINED HOUSING OPTIONS THAT MEET A RANGE OF NEEDS AND INCOME LEVELS FOR MERCER COUNTY RESIDENTS.

HOUSING MAINTENANCE: PROMOTE SOUND MAINTENANCE AND MODERNIZATION OF EXISTING HOUSING.

RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS: PROMOTE SAFE, VIBRANT AND LIVABLE NEIGHBORHOODS

Priority Strategies	Implementing Parties	Funding Sources
Develop and adopt land use regulations (zoning/subdivision & land development) that allow for flexible housing development techniques such as cluster/open space, conservation by design, zero lot line, and neo-traditional housing development.	LEAD: Local Officials, MCRPC	Implementing Parties
	SUPPORT: Development Community	
Establish design guidelines for the villages, boroughs and cities in the county that are consistent with the existing character of their streetscapes.	LEAD: MCRPC	Implementing Parties
	SUPPORT: Local Officials, Development Community	

Land Use Plan

The Land Use Plan for Mercer County is comprised of land use action strategies and the future land use map. It constitutes the most important component of the comprehensive plan. The Land Use Plan emphasizes local planning that expresses and fosters community values and protects resources from harmful development impacts through regulatory and incentive programs. The Plan acknowledges that most land use decisions in Mercer County are made at the local level. Therefore the County's role is primarily advisory; however, even an advisory role can lead to better decision-making and community development results. Through education targeted at municipal officials, increased coordination with state and federal agency programs, and the County's development plan review process, the County can inform decision makers of precedents and best practices.

Future Land Use Map

The Future Land Use (FLU) Map builds on the 1995-96 FLU Map; however, it introduces several new categories designed to provide greater detail regarding the purpose of each designation. When referring to residential densities, the following general scale applies:

- Low Density: 1 dwelling unit per acre
- Medium Density: 3-6 dwelling units per acre
- High Density: 7 or more dwelling units per acre

The accompanying Design Guide, "Visualizing Future Land Uses", provides additional details regarding the recommended uses in each category.

Category - Economic Revitalization Areas

Purpose: Assist with prioritizing and focusing limited economic development dollars, as well as protecting investments in existing infrastructure, including sewer, water, and transportation.

Primary Uses: Mixed commercial, public, light industrial and medium and high density residential.

Secondary Uses: Recreation

Locations: Existing Downtown Centers in the Shenango Valley, Mercer Borough, Greenville, Grove City, as well as other boroughs and traditional population centers in the county.



Category - Neighborhood Revitalization Areas

Purpose: Assist with prioritizing and focusing limited funds for housing rehabilitation and/or the removal of dilapidated buildings.

Primary Uses: High, medium and low density residential, including single and multi-family units

Secondary Uses: Recreation (refer to the Greenways Plan),
Neighborhood commercial

Locations Urban residential neighborhoods adjacent to Downtown Centers in the Shenango Valley, Mercer Borough, Greenville, Grove City, and Jamestown.

Category - Mixed Use Growth Areas

Purpose: Provide for targeted growth and infill surrounding existing boroughs throughout the county that takes advantage of existing or planned infrastructure.

Primary Uses: High to medium density residential and neighborhood commercial, public facilities

Secondary Uses: Recreation, public utilities, light industrial

Locations Areas adjacent to the county's developed communities, including Mercer Borough, Shenango Valley, Greenville, Grove City, and others.

Category – Economic Growth Areas

Purpose: Provide additional locations to accommodate larger scale industrial uses.

Primary Uses: Manufacturing, transportation and warehousing

Secondary Uses: Regional Commercial, Public Facilities/Utilities

Locations Existing KOZ sites, industrial and business parks, locally identified interchange areas, 2204 Target Assessment Sites.

Category – Community Gateways (Overlay)

Purpose: Promote limited, high quality development that provides a sense of place as one travels along the major roadway corridors to the established town centers. Design standards for allowed uses would be more stringent so as to prevent the corridors from developing as “strip centers” that would interfere with the performance of the main

roadway. Key design concepts for new development include proper access management, adequate buffering, and distinctive signage.

Primary Uses: Agricultural, office, recreation, local commercial

Secondary Uses: Public Facilities, residential,

Locations US 19 from I-80 to Mercer Borough, PA 208 from I-79 to Grove City, and others

Category – Urban/Suburban Preservation Areas

Purpose: Recognize the importance of the county's existing neighborhoods and encourage new uses that will be compatible with the existing development patterns.

Primary Uses: Residential

Secondary Uses: Public Facilities/Utilities, local commercial, and recreation

Locations Various



Category – Natural Resource Protection Areas

Purpose: Protect the county's most sensitive natural resources.

Primary Uses: Functioning natural systems, including land and water bodies

Secondary Uses: Limited public recreation

Locations Steep slopes, floodplains, Natural Heritage Inventory sites, State Parks and Game Lands

Category – Natural Resource Production Areas

Purpose: To protect the viability of the county's agricultural, forestry, mining, and other natural resource-based businesses.

Primary Uses: Farming, timbering, mining, and related businesses

Secondary Uses: Low density residential, limited recreation, low impact, home-based businesses

Locations Existing Agricultural Security Areas (ASAs), areas with Prime Agricultural Soils and Soils of Statewide Importance, Privately held woodland, existing quarries

“Designated growth area,” a region within a county or counties described in a municipal or multi-municipal plan that preferably includes and surrounds a city, borough or village and within which residential and mixed use development is permitted or planned for at densities of one unit to the acre or more, commercial, industrial and institutional uses are permitted or planned for and public infrastructure services are provided or planned.

“Rural resource area,” 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 enhanced, development that is compatible with or supportive of such uses is permitted and public infrastructure services are not provided except in villages.

Act 2000-67 (amendment to the PA Municipalities Planning Code)

Land Use – Planning and Regulations

Goals:

Development: Promote sound land use planning that is consistent with town, village and rural settings found within Mercer County, and that protects the health, safety, and welfare of the County’s residents.

Education: Continue to educate landowners, residents, and other stakeholders about land use issues within the County and their implications for the future.

Desired Outcomes

- Provide technical guidance to municipal officials and local planning organizations.
- Guide new development in such a way as to retain a community’s existing character.
- Continue Smart Growth Policy development and implementation.
- Ensure consistency between land use designations and the availability of public sewer and water capacity.
- Advance the application and capability of providing countywide GIS data, and expand coordination with public and private sector entities.
- Facilitate and incentivize multi-municipal planning efforts, joint and/or compatible zoning ordinances, and cooperative



implementation agreements throughout the county, as well as with surrounding counties and states.

- Enhance and maintain the county's Future Land Use Map to ensure consistency with the county's Growth and Development Policy statement as stated in the previous chapter.
- Encourage stewardship of agricultural and forest land for recreation, timber production, wildlife habitat, and water quality protection. The natural resources action plan provides greater details regarding these recommended strategies.

Strategies for Organization and Coordination

High Priority

Prioritize revitalization projects for incorporation into a "Priorities for Mercer County" package. Possible criteria for prioritization could include regional vs. local benefits, quality of life benefits, economic development benefits, and the opportunity for public/private partnerships.

Review municipal zoning and subdivision and land development ordinances to identify provisions that may be viewed as disincentives to revitalization efforts.

Implement the recommendations of the GIS Needs Assessment Report completed by GeoDecisions in January 2004, including the identification of additional uses of GIS data.

Medium/Low Priority

Support local efforts to promote stewardship, including watershed groups and the Forest Stewardship Council by providing technical guidance and grant writing assistance.

Sponsor regular Regional Planning Round Table Discussions to keep abreast of local issues, as well as to keep citizens and stakeholders informed. Keeping the lines of communication open is the key to successful implementation of any plan. Guest speakers, including those with local and regional "success stories," could provide local officials and citizens with new ideas and good examples of sound land use planning.

Develop and distribute educational materials that provide a greater understanding of resource-based and development industries. The materials should be tailored in such a way as to reflect the diversity of the County's communities.



Strategies for Planning and Implementation

High Priority

Adopt the updated Mercer County Comprehensive Plan, including the new Future Land Use Map.

Evaluate Growth Target Areas and other elements of the Future Land Use Map in relation to the availability of existing infrastructure on a regular basis. Ideally the Growth Target Areas will serve to protect sensitive natural features, particularly water quality and prime agricultural lands, as well as make efficient use of existing transportation, sewer, and water infrastructure. This concept also helps to protect the historical investments of a community and to improve the efficiency of the systems.

Aggressively pursue sewer and water systems facilities development and funding that are consistent with future land use policies. The importance of weighing costs and benefits associated with extending these services cannot be understated, particularly given the need for the maintenance of existing systems. Additionally, this information is invaluable during the development plan review process and is essential to making good decisions regarding the location, intensity and timing of new development.

Encourage a mix of residential and commercial uses in the County's boroughs and cities. One of the keys to downtown revitalization is downtown residents. Opportunities may exist for 2nd story loft apartments with small businesses located on the first floor. This kind of development can provide needed alternative housing for those who are not in the market for the traditional single family detached house.

Encourage the development or update of local comprehensive plans. These plans ultimately provide the basis for the development of zoning and other community development ordinances within a community. Incentives could include a funding contribution from the County or a streamlined review process.

Identify existing Brownfields sites that meet or could meet the needs of target industries identified in the Economic Target Location Assessment Study completed in March 2004. Not all of these target industries require vast amounts of land. While the study focused on large parcels for business park-scale development, smaller, previously developed parcels may fulfill the needs of select industries.

Medium/Low Priority

Provide assistance with the implementation of regional plans, including the development of ordinances, grant writing,

administration of shared services agreements, and other tasks that local staff may not be equipped to handle.

Strategies for Regulatory Guidance and Enforcement

High Priority

Provide local officials with Model Ordinances as tools for managing land development. This can be handled through in-house development and by providing examples of successful ordinances in the County and across the Commonwealth. The MCRPC website could be used to share this information via links to other sites or an electronic “Land Management Library” that includes ordinances that would be appropriate for communities in Mercer County.

For example, subdivision and land development ordinances should include conservation design principles based on the Natural Lands Trust Growing Greener approach, such as those found in the Greener Visions model ordinances. They should also include provisions to protect existing agricultural, timbering, and quarrying activities through the use of buffers and other nuisance mitigating techniques. Zoning ordinances should include language that allows for mixed use developments rather than the traditional segregation of each use. They should also include setback, height and bulk and other provisions that are complementary to existing development, which may include minimal setbacks, lighting performance standards to ensure protection from excessive light pollution in rural areas, and pedestrian scale design elements.

Adopt the draft subdivision/land development ordinance (December 2005-06). Once adopted, the ordinance will provide stronger protection of sensitive natural features, e.g. steep slopes, than the current ordinance (1995).

Medium/Low Priority

Assist with the development of municipal and regional planning documents and review of local subdivision/land development plans. This will help to ensure consistency with other local documents, as well as with the County’s land use and economic development policies.

Promote and provide assistance with the development of design guidelines for the various regions throughout the County. These guidelines would provide a reference manual for the continuing preservation of the community’s character by giving developers, property owners, architects and others basic information needed to make design decisions that are sensitive to the surroundings.

Review existing zoning ordinances to determine if permitted uses, setbacks and other requirements are consistent with the historic development patterns of the area. If not, MCRPC should assist with

Smart Growth techniques strive to reduce development of raw land, improve the efficiency of public services and utilities, reduce vehicular transportation demand, and provide transportation alternatives, among other goals. These techniques are most likely to be used in town and village growth areas to expand existing communities. However, even in rural resource areas, Smart Growth techniques could be used to establish new towns or villages, if so desired.

Action Planning

updating the ordinance or provide guidance as needed. Community character in Mercer County is strongly connected to an historic development pattern of towns and villages surrounded by the open spaces associated with agriculture and forest land. Expanding traditional development patterns will help to reinforce the connection between the new and old areas. The creation of historic districts may be appropriate in some situations.

Community Facilities, Services, and Utilities

The Community Facilities and Services Plan focuses on meeting community service needs at appropriate levels. The Plan emphasizes the need for health care and continuing educational services at the local level, and the opportunities for coordination of public safety and codes enforcement at a regional level.

Goals:

Libraries: Maintain and enhance the County's public libraries.

Public Safety: Provide public safety services that meet the needs of Mercer County residents and are consistent with national and statewide standards.

Water and Sewer Infrastructure: Encourage sanitary sewer and water systems that are cost-efficient, meet residents' needs, maintain community health, and provide an equitable level of service.

Stormwater Management: Manage development to minimize site disturbance and stormwater generation, maximize infiltration (where appropriate) and maintain water quality.

Solid Waste Infrastructure: Provide an adequate solid waste disposal and collection system to serve the needs of Mercer County residents while maintaining public health, environmental quality, and land use compatibility standards.



Libraries - Desired Outcomes:

- Provide services to students, educators, and senior citizens.
- Provide or partner to provide literacy programs.
- Cooperate with the business community to make the libraries a center for business information and outreach.
- Work with the Chamber of Commerce and County to develop the libraries as a source of information for tourists and prospective residents.

Strategies for Organization and Coordination

High Priority

Develop a Mercer County Library Board with representatives from each public library, including Grove City Community Library and Stey-Nevant Public Library. Involve CareerLink, businesses, and other educational institutions that are interested in participating. The purpose of the Board would be to fundraise, partner with one another, other institutions, and businesses to reduce administrative and operating costs, and identify other educational and social service opportunities. The Board should also consider the feasibility of becoming a County Library system. If designated as a county library system, they will become eligible for state funds.

Broaden the role of libraries as community centers to provide additional services to residents in the community including: leadership programs, business meeting rooms, living history rooms, children programs, work training programs (coordinate with CareerLink), literacy programs, senior programs, ADA programs, and continuing education programs.

Public Safety - Desired Outcomes

- Maintain the number of fire fighting organizations and volunteers needed to be consistent with statewide and regional standards.
- Maintain the number of municipal police officers needed to be consistent with statewide and regional standards.
- Provide training of public safety professionals.
- Explore cooperative efforts to provide cost effective public safety services.

Strategies for Organization and Coordination

High Priority

Develop alternative arrangements to improve working relationships among the police, fire, and EMS organizations within the County. There are 12 local police departments and 27 local fire companies within Mercer County. Identify which local fire, EMS, and police organizations are not meeting the statewide and regional standards. Examine how regional cooperation could reduce costs, eliminate duplication of services, and raise service quality.

Ensure that local police, fire, and EMS have the current Homeland Protection training so they are prepared to handle emergency situations.



Provide important information to county residents and officials regarding disaster planning and management.

Strategies for Planning and Implementation.

Develop an emergency plan for Springfield Township specific to the Outlet Mall, I-79, and the Grove City Regional Airport.

Coordinate its development with Grove City and local police, fire, and EMS. Anecdotal reports suggest that there have been difficulties evacuating the area quickly, specifically during peak periods.

Coordinate with the 911 Office to encourage the development and updating of Hazard Mitigation plans throughout the County.

Follow the guidelines laid out by FEMA and explore funding sources.

Water and Sewer Infrastructure - Desired Outcomes

- Meet existing community needs as a first priority.
- Encourage cooperation and shared facility use by multiple government entities or agencies.
- Develop new facilities in a cost-effective manner.
- Update Act 537 Sewage Facilities Plans.
- Encourage innovative approaches to managing on-lot systems.
- Support municipalities and authorities with their funding and rehabilitation initiatives to maintain existing sewer and water systems.
- A plan for the reliable supply of water, considering current and future water resource availability, uses and limitations, including provisions adequate to protect water supply sources. It is recognized that lawful activities such as extraction of minerals impact water supply sources and such activities are governed by statutes regulating mineral extraction that specify replacement and restoration of water supplies affected by such activities. In addition, commercial agriculture production also impacts water supply sources.



Strategies for Organization and Coordination

Medium/Low Priority

Support the development of the Neshannock Creek Joint Municipal Sewerage facility. The idea is being explored by the five participating municipalities (Coolspring, East Lackawannock, Mercer Borough, Findley, and Springfield) as well as the Neshannock Creek Watershed Joint Municipal Authority, which formed in 2004.

Strategies for Planning and Implementation

High Priority

Encourage consistency between water and sewer infrastructure investments and the growth management policies indicated on the Mercer County Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map.

Support updating and expanding water infrastructure capacity in the following locations: Fredonia, Jamestown Borough, West Middlesex, and areas of Greenville. Where service extension is considered, give first priority to areas that are consistent with the County's future land use map. Residents from the County have indicated that additional or updated water service is needed in the following locations: Perrys Corners – Perry Township, Sheakleyville, Shenango Township – south of West Middlesex, Hope Mills, and Pymatuning Township – east of Reynolds Heights.

Develop a community-based source water protection plan to safeguard public drinking water supplies from wells. Specifically target those areas that have been identified in the PADEP Source Water Assessment and Protection Reports in 2002. The purpose would be to ensure healthy water sources and reduce potential treatment costs. Focus on the “critical area” that has been identified in the Shenango River watershed. Specific threats that have been identified that need to be addressed through a community based source water protection program include:

- accidental release of known and unknown contaminants along the major transportation corridors, bridges, and railroads
- accidental release of petroleum products from auto repair and storage facilities or cumulative release of fuel products from boating and recreation activities at either the Shenango River Lake or Pymatuning Reservoir
- stormwater runoff from agricultural activities throughout the watershed and/or residential development near the intake carrying multiple contaminants
- accidental releases or overflows from wastewater treatment and package plants
- specific to the Grove City region, the greatest threats to water supply wells include: former and active industrial sites, previous coal mining sites and underground storage tanks.

Update local Act 537 Sewage Facility Plans. Currently, sewage plans for areas of public sewer service are up-to-date (updated within the past 10 years). Emphasis should be given to areas that do not have public sewers. Updates should be consistent with the County's future

land use map. Extensions should be proposed for areas where growth is targeted to make the most efficient and cost-effective use of sewer lines. The Reynolds Disposal Company's Evaluation of Wastewater Treatment Plant Needs, Pymatuning Township, developed in August 2003 provides a good example.

Expand capacity at the following sewage treatment facilities to meet projected demands.

- The Grove City Borough sewage treatment plant should be expanded from 3.0 MGD to 4.0 MGD to serve current and future demands. Estimated cost for the improvements is \$13 million. The expansion would provide continued service to Pine and Springfield Townships in Mercer County and Harrisville Borough in Butler County. With these improvements, new service should be provided to Liberty and Wolf Creek Townships. Future growth/development around the SR 208/I-79 Interchange in the area of the Grove City Outlet may continue to place additional demands on the system.
- Mercer Borough's Sewage Treatment Plant is expected to reach capacity. Additional capacity is needed to provide sewage service to East Lackawannock Township, Findley Township, and new development near the I-80 and SR 19 corridors.
- Coolspring Township is currently developing an Act 537 plan.
- Sandy Lake Township is currently developing an Act 537 plan; this region was designated as a problem by DEP, specifically along Route 62.
- The City of Hermitage is under a PADEP consent order and agreement. The City will need another \$5 million to provide for additional capacity.
- The City of Sharon's Sewage Treatment Plant should be expanded from 4.5 MGD to 8.66 MGD to resolve hydraulic and organic overloads. The overloads are the basis for a consent order that was issued to the City of Sharon and the Upper Shenango Valley Water Pollution Control Authority (USVWPCA) by PA DEP. The expansion is estimated to cost \$21.5 million.

Work with local officials to implement rural wastewater management strategies that best meet the community's needs and budget. The 2000 Census for Mercer County indicated there were approximately 120,000 people living in the County. About one-third or 40,000 of the County's residents rely upon some type of alternative

or on-lot wastewater treatment and disposal system. The large number of residents in Mercer County who rely upon these on-lot systems represents a great opportunity for potential degradation of groundwater and surface water if these systems are not properly managed, or if new technologies for wastewater treatment are not available.

Wastewater Management Systems

Wastewater systems have traditionally been managed in two different ways. On-lot site or individual systems have been managed by home owners who are responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of their systems. Centralized collection and treatment systems are managed and operated by either the municipality or a special purpose authority that has been created to manage these facilities. However, an important trend in wastewater systems management has begun to emerge: individual on-lot systems are being integrated into wastewater management systems that allow for better oversight and management of the operation of these systems.

Many on-lot systems have come under more careful scrutiny as potential public health problems. Many of these systems are poorly maintained and operated, which increases the likelihood of groundwater and surface water pollution. These problems are caused by numerous factors including lack of public education on proper operation and maintenance of the systems and cost. Failure to properly maintain on-lot systems can impact the life of the wastewater disposal system, causing failures and contamination. These problems often force municipalities or authorities to expand their municipal collection systems at great cost to serve the problem areas. This can lead to sprawl development as new areas are opened up to development, when the solution could have been better management of the existing on-lot systems.

System Management Alternatives

There are several different levels of management that are usually associated with the management of on-lot or alternative systems ranging from the individual homeowners to central management by a government organization.

Level 1 – This level leaves responsibility for operations and maintenance to the homeowner, but local government develops an inventory of all systems and provides educational information to owners and users on a regular basis.

Level 2 – Provide an inspection and maintenance certificate program, providing a standard of maintenance which would be carried out by an operator hired by the homeowner.

This would involve a government organization getting involved, setting standards across the system area, and requiring upgrades or repairs/ where necessary to remove threats to public health.

Level 3 – A local government unit (municipality or authority) takes over the monitoring and maintenance of all systems. Cost would be recovered either through a rate system or direct cost for services. This could also be done by a private operator who would have reporting responsibility back to the public agency.

Level 4 – All of the assets of the on-lot/alternative systems are vested with the local government which manages them directly.

On-Lot Sewage Management Districts

In Pennsylvania the most widespread system of sewage management programs in rural areas has been the development of on-lot management districts. These are created by local ordinance and usually involve a specific geographic area or on-lot district in the community that utilizes on-lot wastewater disposal systems. These programs are administered by the local municipality or authority. Usually they require regular septic tank pumping and system inspection. These inspections should include only septic systems. Administration of the on-lot sewage management program can be performed by the local sewage enforcement officer (SEO) or by individuals working under the supervision of the SEO. Fees can also be levied on the property owners for inspections and sampling to cover the costs of the program.

An important part of the on-lot sewage management program is the homeowner education program. These should be ongoing educational programs for homeowners with on-lot sewage disposal systems. These educational programs can be provided in a municipal newsletter or direct flyer that educates the homeowners on the public health and natural environment impacts of malfunctioning on-lot sewage disposal systems; how the systems work; maintenance that can be performed by the homeowner; and potential cost of a well maintained system.

Decentralized System Technologies

There are a wide range of decentralized system technologies that are available for a variety of applications in rural areas. The following identifies some of the technologies that might be applicable to rural Mercer County. Each of these technologies are subject to approval by PA DEP.

Technology	Advantages/Disadvantages
Septic System Tanks – Engineered systems installed in appropriate soils to receive wastewater from one or multiple residences.	<i>Advantages</i> – Cost effective decentralized systems. <i>Disadvantages</i> – Some soils are unsuitable for septic tank effluent treatment and renovation. Sludge may cause odor problems.
Aerobic Treatment- Provides an oxygen rich environment to reduce organic portion of the waste to carbon dioxide and water.	<i>Advantages</i> – Higher treatment level. Alternative to septic tank. <i>Disadvantages</i> – Cost. Requires maintenance and electricity.
Intermittent Sand Filters – Use filter beds of carefully graded media. Treated effluent is transported for further treatment or disposal.	<i>Advantages</i> – High quality effluent. Low energy requirements. Drainfields are elevated gravel beds.. <i>Disadvantages</i> – Regular maintenance is required.
Mound Systems – Pressure dosed sand filters that discharge directly to natural soil. Intended to overcome local soil restrictions.	<i>Advantages</i> – Enable use of same sites unsuitable for conventional septic systems. Can be use in most climates. <i>Disadvantages</i> – Construction costs higher than conventional systems. Mounds may not be pleasing to local landscaping.
Recirculating Sand Filters (RSF) – Modified version of the single pass open sand filter system. Used to augment or substitute for inadequate soil conditions.	<i>Advantages</i> – Good effluent quality. No chemicals required. <i>Disadvantages</i> – Regular maintenance required.

Management and Treatment Alternatives Applicable to Mercer County

In developing approaches to wastewater strategies for any area it is important to combine sound management techniques with effective treatment alternatives. Treatment technologies selected must be adaptable to the area and will need the concurrence of PADEP. The previous table provides the leading techniques for wastewater management in rural areas that are currently available in Pennsylvania.

Technology Checklist

Each technology has its applications depending upon local conditions. The following chart provides a checklist to use when selecting a technology for a specific site:

Physical characteristics of the site: <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Limitation of site (soils, geology, slope)✓ Protection from natural hazards
Ecological <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Impacts on habitats✓ Impacts on waterways✓ Opportunities for ecological restoration✓ Impacts on surface water and groundwater
Public health <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Impacts of system failures on community health systems✓ Operational safety✓ Proximity to housing and other public uses
Technical system <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Reliability✓ Serviceability✓ Life of the system✓ Flexibility✓ Expandability
Management <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Convenience✓ Operation and Management Implications
Economic/Cost Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Capital costs✓ Operations and Maintenance Costs✓ Administrative Costs
Community impacts and change <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Local management✓ Flexibility for future growth

System Management Alternatives

There are numerous organizational management approaches that can be taken to managing alternative systems in rural areas. Choice of management organization depends largely on local needs and preferences. Management entities could include:

- Local municipality – Township, Borough or City
- Public Authority

- Multi municipal management agency
- County wide special purpose agency dealing with public health/on lot management – Some counties in Pennsylvania (Chester, Erie, Bucks and Allegheny Counties) have health departments that govern a variety of public health related services.

Factors to consider in selecting a management agency would include:

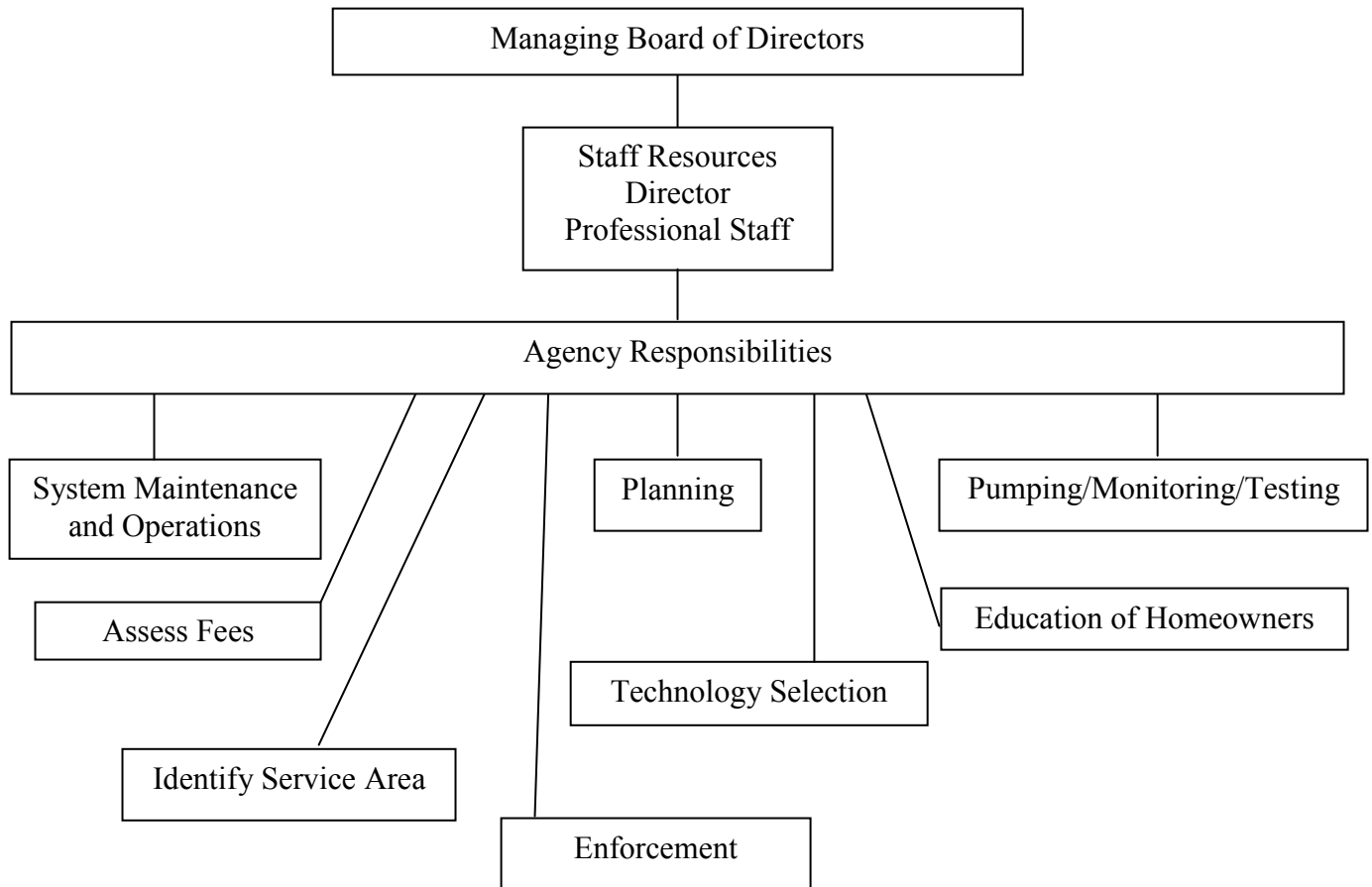
- Provide management continuity.
- Charge fees for services.
- Require system users to comply with system management requirements.
- Maintain adequate financial responsibility.
- Hire and retain qualified employees.

Once a management entity is selected the following services need to be provided to adequately govern the management, operation and maintenance of wastewater systems in rural Mercer County:

- Update the Act 537 Sewage Facilities Plan
- Establish on-lot management districts(s) – geographically based
- Manage systems oversight and inspections
- Regular pumping of septic tanks
- Regular water quality monitoring of surface and subsurface water supplies and resources.
- Insure that mechanical systems are functioning properly and meeting operational and maintenance requirements
- Provide for sewage enforcement officer (SEO) oversight
- Develop a homeowner education program with the following components
 - Public health hazards of malfunctioning systems
 - Demonstrations of how septic systems work
 - Cost comparisons of on lot systems vs. central system sewer rentals
 - Fee schedules
 - Maintenance and operations suggestions and requirements

Action Planning

Based upon the above considerations a wastewater management system for rural Mercer County could include the following components.



Medium Priority

Develop a Countywide Water Supply Plan to examine the most cost effective management of water at a regional or County level.

Furthermore, the plan examines water supply issues as they are relevant to local officials, economic development institutions, businesses, and other decision makers. It also seeks to create consensus on a clear direction for the future supply of water. The study is based on considerations of hydrology, the environment, protection of public health, engineering, management, economics, and water conservation. The plan would recommend options for regional authorities and other institutions that would provide efficient and cost-effective operations as well as ensure a healthy water source for the future. Refer to the Water Supply Plans of

Beaver County and Clinton County for examples. More specifically, the scope of work could consist of:

- Community water system identification and inventory
- Groundwater contamination
- Evaluation of existing and future water system needs
- Evaluation of alternatives to address identified needs and assure long-term viability of the water systems
- Recommend alternatives and implementation plans

Strategies for Regulatory Guidance and Enforcement

High Priority

Develop a model On-lot Management District Ordinance. The ordinance would specifically state what existing and proposed land uses within the municipality should be serviced by on-lot septic systems and would comply with Act 537 plans.



Stormwater Management - Desired Outcomes

- Develop and support development of Act 167 stormwater management plans for each watershed in the County.
- Encourage best practices and innovative stormwater management techniques to minimize runoff from new land development, thereby reducing the potential for increased flooding and flood damage.
- Minimize erosion potential from existing development, construction sites, and rural industries.

Strategies for Planning and Implementation.

High Priority

Work with municipalities to update stormwater regulations to adequately address water quality as required by government agencies.

Medium Priority

Encourage and support the development of Act 167 Stormwater Management Plans for the County's watersheds, including the Shenango River, Lower Shenango River, Sandy Creek, French Creek, Neshannock Creek, Wolf Creek, and Lower Neshannock Creek watersheds.

Maintain and upgrade stormwater management systems to adequate capacity and encourage innovative design. The County should consider providing information to developers to inform them about innovative and good stormwater management design. Consider providing the information to municipalities and proactively meeting with potential developers to review and recommend design techniques and stormwater management options specific to areas of future development.

Strategies for regulatory guidance and enforcement

High Priority

Develop a plan review checklist to address stormwater management and incorporate the checklist into the MCRPC plan review process. Also provide the checklist to municipalities to give guidance on innovative stormwater management techniques. Reference DEP's stormwater guidelines and model ordinances.

Support compliance with DEP's Phase II Stormwater regulations.

Under the 1987 Clean Water Act Amendments, the U.S. EPA developed new stormwater regulations to address storm water that might impact water quality. The new regulations are set up in two Phases based on population criteria. Phase I is already being instituted. DEP is required to regulate the Phase II regulations. There are about 1,000 municipalities in Pennsylvania that fall under the Phase II requirements. Those municipalities that are located within an "urbanized area", as defined by the 1990 Census and the 2000 Census, were required to apply for a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit to discharge stormwater from their municipal separate storm sewer system (MS4s). Those urbanized municipalities are required to follow the Phase II requirements.

To meet the new requirements, each municipality must submit a permit to the DEP for approval. The permit period is five (5) years. The permit application is an action plan for the municipality to institute six requirements called minimum control measures (mcm): 1. Public Education, 2. Public Participation, 3. Illicit Discharge Detection and Elimination, 4. Construction Site Storm Water Runoff Control, 5. Post-Construction Storm Water Management in New Development and Redevelopment, and 6. Pollution Prevention/Good Housekeeping for Municipal Operations Maintenance. The municipality will have five years to implement the 6 prong program outlined above, however certain protocols must be completed earlier than others. Many of these six components are directly related to the [PA Act 167 Stormwater Management Planning Program](#).

Solid Waste - Desired Outcomes

- Encourage coordination of solid waste planning and programming at all levels of government through the Mercer County Act 101 Municipal Waste Management Plan.
- Support the development and continuation of recycling programs.
- Promote proper handling and location of disposal sites for hazardous materials and solid waste.

Strategies for Planning and Implementation

High Priority

Implement the Mercer County Act 101 Solid Waste Management Plan.

Support the County's recycling goal through the Countywide Recycling Depot System. The Act 101 Plan suggests that waste generation must decrease while the collection of recyclables must increase to reach the 35% goal. Currently, there are eight recycling drop-off depots in Mercer County. They are located at the Findley Township Building, the Grove City Wal-Mart, the Wilmington Township Building, West Middlesex Area on North Street, The Shenango Valley Mall in Hermitage, the Sandy Lake Township Building, The Greenville Wal-Mart on Williamson Road, and at the corner of Washington and Water Street in Jamestown.. Encourage other municipalities to host additional recycling depots and to use the New Recycling Consolidation Center, which is being built by the Mercer County Solid Waste Authority. It will be located at the Jackson Center Industrial Park near the interchange of I-79 and Route 62. Use the Multi-County Education Grant as an opportunity to catalyze continued support for recycling throughout the County.

Urban Recreation Plan

MPC Requirement: *A plan for community facilities and utilities, which may include public and private education, **recreation**, municipal buildings, fire and police stations, libraries, hospitals, water supply and distribution, sewerage and waste treatment, solid waste management, storm drainage, and flood plain management, utility corridors and associated facilities, and other similar facilities or uses.*

MPC Article III, Section 301(a)(4)

Goals:

Recreation Network: Support development and sustainable management of a recreational network across Mercer County

Recreation Services: Support provision of year round recreational programs for residents and visitors of all ages

Desired Outcomes:

- Promote a guideline of 10 acres of public parkland per 1,000 residents in urbanized areas.
- Encourage urbanized municipalities to provide neighborhood parks within walking or short-driving distance (10 minute walk or 5 minute drive) of residential areas and community parks within a short-driving distance (15 minute drive) of residential areas.
- Develop and support development of on-road and off-road trails that link residential neighborhoods with park facilities.
- Improve access to the County's waterways. Various types of access should be considered – visual access, boat access, fishing access, etc.
- Encourage the development of accessible resource-based recreation opportunities, e.g. fishing piers, playgrounds, etc.
- Encourage the development of adequate recreational infrastructure, e.g. parking, trash receptacles, picnic and seating benches, restrooms, etc.



- Encourage new development to incorporate trail connections with adjacent properties.
- Encourage re-development of underused or substandard recreation facilities.
- Encourage shared use of specialized recreational facilities, e.g. indoor swimming pools, that require significant investment and operations/maintenance support.
- Support recreational and leisure programs for specific age groups (pre-school, elementary, teens, adults, seniors) and for intergenerational groups.
- Integrate environmental education and historical interpretation efforts with the recreation network.

Strategies for Organization and Coordination

High Priority

- Establish municipal and/or regional recreation commissions.
- Coordinate with school boards to provide greater public access to school athletic facilities, e.g., for adult sports programs.



Medium/Low Priority

- Assist municipalities and recreation organizations in marketing facilities and their services in ways that attract new users.
- Assist municipalities in exploring funding options for facility development, maintenance, improvement, and policing.
- Facilitate regional cost-sharing for specialty recreational facilities requiring significant capital investment and operational costs, e.g., community pools, skate parks, ice rinks/ponds, etc. Promote public-private partnerships to fund construction, operation and maintenance of such facilities.

Strategies for Planning and Implementation.

High Priority

Prepare and adopt local Comprehensive Recreation, Park, and Open Space Plans to aid in identifying recreation issues, needs, policies, and capital investment priorities in urbanized areas. These plans would serve as a guide for the acquisition, development, rehabilitation, and protection of resources, and provision of recreation opportunities and services to the citizens of Mercer County. Continue to utilize existing intermunicipal planning partnerships as planning regions for these studies, particularly where there is little or no recreation/open space planning in place.

Medium/Low Priority

- Develop and maintain an inventory of existing private sector and other jurisdictional parkland and open space facilities for use in future park analyses.
- Improve and provide additional recreation and open space facilities suitable for all age groups and abilities, as needed.
- Interconnect recreation and other community facilities with bike/pedestrian routes or trails. Coordinate trail planning efforts with school districts, local watershed organizations and trail organizations.
- Provide interpretation of natural, cultural and historic sites along the recreation network.
- Create riverfront parks and develop riverfront trails and water trails to interconnect riverfront parks and communities.
- Expand existing recreational and leisure programs.
- Demonstrate resource conservation and protection techniques in passive areas of public and private recreation and open space lands.

Strategies for Regulatory Guidance and Enforcement.

High Priority

- Review municipal and multi-municipal comprehensive plans and ordinances for consistency with 1) the 10-acre /1,000 residents guideline; 2) provisions for recreational land dedication and/or fees-in lieu thereof; and 3) recreational facilities planning for neighborhood and community parks.
- Review and revise downtown ordinances to require new development to provide pocket parks or donate fees-in-lieu consistent with the PA MPC.
- Encourage recreation organizations to maintain facilities consistent with established national safety standards.
- Utilize local zoning, potentially with overlay districts, to manage land use development along recreational corridors.



Economic Development Plan

MPC Requirement: *In preparing the comprehensive plan, the planning agency shall make careful surveys, studies and analyses of housing, demographic, and **economic characteristics and trends**; amount, type and general location and interrelationships of different categories of land use; general location and extent of transportation and community facilities; natural features affecting development; natural, historic and cultural resources; and the prospects for future growth in the municipality.*

MPC Article III, Section 301.2

Goals:

Business Development & Diversity: Broaden economic development initiatives to include a wider variety of economic sectors and to better address the expansion of existing businesses.

Workforce Support and Development: Improve workforce support and development to improve the employability of Mercer County residents.

Leadership and Coordination: Encourage leadership and coordination among public, private, and non-profit sectors to seamlessly carry out economic development initiatives.

Business Development and Diversity Desired Outcomes

- Provide support for new agri-businesses, marketing, and other agricultural support activities to encourage the sustainability and livelihood of the industry
- Promote opportunities for sustainable forestry in urban, suburban, and rural areas and support the development of forestry economic development initiatives
- Support the development of agriculture and forestry niche markets
- Promote the County's vision and incorporate the County's natural areas, green infrastructure, and wealth of recreational opportunities into tourism initiatives



Action Planning

- Market the low cost of living, affordable housing, educational opportunities, and safe communities to attract and retain young persons and new residents
- Develop a countywide tourism promotion program
- Promote reuse of brownfields and development of infill properties
- Streamline the process for review and approval for revitalization projects (brownfield, infill, and redevelopment projects)
- Focus incentives and programs (such as KIZ, KOEZ, and KOZ) to underutilized areas where infrastructure investment has already been made
- Give higher priority to brownfields, infill, and redevelopment projects in County grant programs, transportation programming, and infrastructure improvements
- Designate a variety of land uses that will support an array of economic development possibilities through County and municipal future land use maps and ordinances
- Designate and develop a business industry corridor that is served by highways, rail, and sewer/water infrastructure
- Promote compatibility of the LRTP and TIP through timely identification and advancement of transportation projects that support priority economic development initiatives
- Explore innovative financing mechanisms and agency cooperation to obtain funding for water and sewer infrastructure that supports priority economic development projects
- Place a higher priority on economic development sites that have supporting infrastructure in place and reasonable highway or rail access



Strategies for Organization and Coordination.

High Priority

Advertise local employment opportunities on the Penn-Northwest website and encourage its use by businesses and residents. Website should list preferred qualifications, as well as where to obtain specific education/training if the position requires a specific skill set.

Promote Penn-Northwest's listing of available economic development sites. The list includes the following information about potential sites: acreage, property name, location, zoning, and infrastructure access, including water, sewer, and transportation (all modes).

Explore marketing and promotion activities to nurture the development of new agricultural and forestry related businesses.

Medium/Low Priority

Coordinate with educational institutions to make them aware of the skill sets needed by local private, public, and non-profit sectors.

Coordinate with Penn State Cooperative Extension to encourage linking existing farms with resources, as well as assisting with writing grants on behalf of farmland owners to support new agricultural related economic initiatives.

Consider expanding the role of the Rural Industries Board to include linking agriculture and forestry with economic development opportunities. Utilize and partner with the Penn State Cooperative Extension Service as a resource. The mission of the organization is to provide timely research-based information for all Pennsylvania citizens on important current and emerging issues pertaining to agriculture.

Utilize and promote the Extension's State AgMap in Mercer County – a resource for publicizing agriculture businesses to various consumer markets.

Facilitate innovation in farm ownership and operation in order to preserve agriculture, e.g. co-ops, land leasing, public-private partnering, educational partnerships, etc.



Strategies for Planning and Implementation

High Priority

Explore rural niche business markets. Mercer County's Convention and Visitors Bureau publicizes a variety of attractions and tours within the County. Rural niche businesses could catalyze greater tourism interest. Ideas to explore include: furniture making, antiques, wineries, organic farming, specialty cheese making, green housing, developing specialty wools and fibers, and specialty dairy products. The County could seek out appropriate local and regional markets for targeted promotions and business development initiatives.

Establish Main Street programs and affiliated Elm Street programs in towns such as Greenville, Mercer, Sharon, Jamestown, and Grove City. The Main Street program encourages reinvestment and revitalization in mixed-use business districts while the Elm Street program focuses on revitalizing the surrounding residential neighborhoods. Jamestown Borough is currently working with the Pennsylvania Downtown Center and has completed a feasibility

Action Planning

study to be designated as a Main Street Affiliate. Grove City and Sharpsville Boroughs submitted Elm Street applications in 2004. Grove City was awarded \$345,000 in June 2005 for both Main and Elm Street related project and Sharpsville's application was still under review as of this writing. Farrell is developing an Elm Street plan and a portion of Sharon has received program funds but has not been officially designated.

Take advantage of the new Keystone Innovation Zones (KIZ) program, supported by Governor Rendell's Economic Stimulus package. Encourage the development of new innovative businesses with university partners such as Grove City College, Thiel College, and the Penn State University-Shenango Campus.

Medium/Low Priority

Establish a way-finding or tourism signage system within the County to designate and direct visitors to specialty shops and other significant historic, cultural, and natural landmarks. The design of the way-finding system should be unique and reflective of the character of the region.

Prepare brownfields for redevelopment through site clean-up initiatives partnered with revitalization/redevelopment plans. Seek funding through DEP's Land Recycling Program which encourages private brownfields clean-up of sites and revitalizes them for future productive uses.

Proactively recruit potential businesses that meet the Target Location Assessment criteria. Develop clear roles, assignments, and marketing material for staff to assist in the recruitment process. Partners could include Penn-Northwest, MCRPC, municipalities, COGs, Chambers of Commerce, and private businesses.

Prioritize transportation projects as identified in the Long Range Transportation Plan to support the County economic development initiatives.

Explore opportunities to utilize sites with rail and highway access, specifically for regional distribution, value-added services, as well as manufacturing opportunities.

Regularly update and expand the Mercer County Convention and Visitors Bureau website listings of Things To Do, Places To Tour, and other special promotions that are related to natural, recreational, cultural, historic, and entertainment assets in the County.

Build upon the Travel Information and Tours outlined on the Mercer County Convention & Visitors website by developing a tourism map that includes self-directed and guided tours of thematic attractions and experiences and coordinating marketing materials with restaurants and lodging in the area.



Strategies for Regulatory Guidance and Enforcement.

Medium Priority

Develop land use regulations (zoning and subdivision and land development ordinances) that encourage a variety of economically related land uses. Encourage developing mixed-use business, office, high-tech, and light industrial parks. Subdivision and land development ordinance standards should encourage innovative campus design and stormwater management. Design should be human in scale and respect the natural environment, as well as incorporate pedestrian and recreational amenities, where appropriate.

Workforce Support and Development Desired Outcomes

- Promote pre-employment training, on-the-job training, and continuing educational programs.
- Link the local workforce with existing businesses in Mercer County.
- Identify workforce needs of County businesses and coordinate with school districts, universities, and job training programs to prepare skilled workers for employment within Mercer County.
- With local universities, encourage entrepreneurialism and business incubator services that will support existing and new small businesses.
- Provide a diversity of employment options for all citizens in order to help eliminate poverty in the county.



Strategies for Organization and Coordination.

High Priority

Support the efforts of Team Pennsylvania's CareerLink as a networking/partnering resource for job searches and/or job training.

Update inventories of local businesses needs, regarding employee skill sets, and suggest incorporating the needs into school and job training curriculum within the County.

Consider creating a Train-to-Work Committee, in cooperation with Penn-Northwest, to consist of representatives from the universities, school districts, interested local businesses, and CareerLink. The committee would be charged with fostering public-private

Action Planning

partnering between the educational institutions and the local businesses.

Strategies for Planning and Implementation

High Priority

Identify specific barriers and gaps to new business start-ups for local entrepreneurs and develop strategies and incentives to overcome them. Capitalize on unique local assets within the County for value-added and support services that create job opportunities for County residents. Create a revolving loan fund to micro-finance value-added activities that use unique local assets such as recreation, agriculture, natural/historic tourism, etc.

Support the efforts of the Mennonite Economic Development Association (MEDA) and the Community Action Partnership to develop and ASSETS+ program in Mercer County. The Community Action Partnership of Mercer County has partnered with MEDA to develop an ASSETS+ program in Mercer, Pennsylvania. The Community Action Partnership provides critical services to many low-income residents in Mercer County through housing services, early childhood education and job placement programs. To date MEDA has provided pre-development support to the Community Action Partnership to determine feasibility and provided assistance in implementing the ASSETS+ program. The Community Action Partnership anticipates they will begin offering business training classes in January 2006.

Leadership and Coordination - Desired Outcomes

- Promote inter-governmental cooperation to reduce duplication of resources, streamline review and approval processes, and maximize time and resources
- Provide seamless coordination between the County, municipalities, developers, Penn-Northwest, and other economic development agencies to leverage and nurture new projects
- Seek out opportunities to partner with local universities, businesses, government agencies, and non-profit groups to achieve County's economic development goals
- Continue to support and build leadership within Penn-Northwest and other public, private, and non-profit parties
- Encourage and support small businesses and entrepreneurs in the County



Strategies for Planning and Implementation

Explore tax-base sharing, revenue sharing, and cost sharing strategies to reduce local competition for new businesses. The tax base sharing formula can be tailored specifically for the County or sub-county regions. The formula could be designed to share tax revenue generated by specific land uses – industrial, commercial, etc. The sharing arrangement could also include cost sharing so municipalities along with the County could jointly afford to plan and develop incentives that make sites attractive to businesses. [The Homestead Waterfront Development Project in Pittsburgh is a good example of one type of revenue/cost sharing: Tax Increment Financing].

Strategies for Organization and Coordination

Medium Priority

Encourage and support leadership development programs through educational institutions, school curriculum, and special training initiatives.

Natural and Cultural Resources Plan

MPC Requirement: *A plan for the protection of natural and historic resources to the extent the municipalities are not limited by other federal or state statutes, these resources include, wetlands, aquifer recharge zones, woodlands, steep slopes, prime agricultural land, flood plain, unique natural areas and historic sites.*

MPC Article III, Section 301(a)(6)

Natural Resources

Goals:

- **Natural Resource Systems:** Retain natural landscape systems.
- **Natural Resource Quality:** Sustain or improve the quality of natural and manmade environmental features.
- **Resource-based Industries:** Encourage the sustainable management of natural resources for resource-based industries, such as agriculture and mining.
- **Education:** Demonstrate (or support demonstration of) the value of the natural environment to landowners, residents, and visitors.



Natural Resources Systems Desired Outcomes

- Coordinate land use planning with resource knowledge and management.
- Strengthen municipal regulations to minimize the impact of development on sensitive environmental features and their functions.
- Assist municipalities in assembling essential data to support local regulations.
- Develop and maintain a detailed resource inventory to support County, municipal, multi-municipal and watershed planning efforts.
- Promote connectedness of landscape features.

Strategies for Organization and Coordination.

Medium Priority

Encourage private initiatives and public-private partnerships to preserve sensitive resources through acquisition, easements and education. Applicable organizations and partnerships include the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, watershed associations, the Conservation District, and Cooperative Extension office and their respective programs.

Coordinate with adjacent counties, regional planning agencies, and advocacy organizations on resource conservation initiatives that cross municipal boundaries.



Strategies for Planning and Implementation.

High Priority

Implement a GIS/MIS program to supplement current and future planning and development activities with a countywide spatial database of natural resources.

- Develop a comprehensive database of natural resource inventory and protection recommendations. The database should illustrate sensitive natural features, including surface waters, wetlands, floodplains, geologic formations, and soils, and recommended protection measures. Consistently present sensitive resource locations and prioritized protection areas to keep such locations in the minds of local, county, and state decision makers. Consider the following sources:
 - Forest land inventories prepared by the USDA Forest Service.
 - Prime farmland areas, preserved farmland and priority protection areas prepared by the Mercer County Agricultural Land Preservation Board
 - Mercer County Natural Heritage Inventory (NHI) sites.

Adopt and implement the Mercer County Open Space, Greenway, and Rural Recreation Plan. The plan characterizes how open space contributes to quality of life in Mercer County including environmental quality, the business climate, recreational activities, and county culture. The plan outlines a network of open space that can continue to sustain these qualities and prioritizes sites that should be protected and those that can best be managed by the private sector. The plan includes greenways as corridors of open space for human passage or linkages within ecological systems.

Medium Priority

Facilitate the development of Act 167 Stormwater Management Plans for each of the County's state-designated stormwater management watersheds.

Pursue and coordinate funding that is designated for the preservation of specific resources, e.g. farmland, forest, and water resources. Monitor and keep abreast of state and federal programs for resource preservation. Capitalize on the state's "Growing Greener Environmental Stewardship and Watershed Protection Act" program. The program was established to revitalize the towns and cities across Pennsylvania that are struggling as a result of a changing economy."

- Growing Greener II is the second phase of this program to be funded through a number of waste and toxic release fees and has yet to be approved by the Pennsylvania Legislature. The Growing Greener program attracted much attention and many applicants. Competition for funding is becoming more competitive. The County should continue to monitor this legislation. If approved, the County should support municipal and non-profit applicants with letters of support where proposed activities are consistent with the comprehensive plan. The County may use the smart growth policies in the comprehensive plan and to substantiate its own applications or those of others.



Coordinate conservation easements, land acquisition, and tax incentives to encourage protection of natural resources and their production capacity. Support public and private easement donations and purchases with letters of support and/or matching funds. Coordinate with partners to:

- Inform and engage landowners in conservation practices. Encourage the development or enhancement of property management plans to address biodiversity, e.g. the use of integrated pest management techniques over chemical pest controls (herbicides, insecticides, etc.) for cultivated landscapes, such as farms and residential and commercial lawns.
- Lead, support and/or participate in additional scientific studies in order to
 - Establish baseline ecological conditions for the French Creek watershed and Sandy Lake watershed
 - Understand groundwater systems and their relation to surface water resources in the Sandy Lake watershed
 - Document ecological, recreational and scenic qualities of the Shenango River watershed

- Support additional species and site studies in the Barmore Creek Biological Diversity Area (BDA) and the Sandy Creek BDA.
- Encourage landowners and land managers to monitor and remediate invasive terrestrial and aquatic species, particularly in the French Creek watershed, the Pine Swamp BDA, the Sandy Lake BDA and the Shenango Lake BDA.
- Promote retention of the forest canopy, buffers and linkages, especially in the French Creek BDA and in the Sandy Creek and Shenango River watersheds.
- Promote multi-municipal planning that addresses the location and impacts of development and infrastructure, including on-lot septic systems, on ecological systems.
- Conserve Important Mammal Areas (IMA) and Important Bird Areas (IBA) and buffer them from nearby development.

Encourage the use of incentives to promote the continued use of forestland for economic and ecological purposes. Promote property enrollment in forest conservation programs, such as the Forest Legacy Program and the Clean and Green – Forest Reserve Program.

Strategies for Regulatory Guidance and Enforcement.

High Priority

Promote innovative subdivision and land development procedures, land use management practices, and resource protection techniques, individually and in concert. Consider relevant applications of effective agricultural zoning, open space and cluster development patterns, transfer of development rights programs, riparian buffer overlay districts, infrastructure service limits, and designated growth areas to guide development.

Medium Priority

Assist municipalities in reviews, updates or re-writes of municipal regulations. Reviews may include Growing Greener Audits performed by the Natural Lands Trust or review by MCRPC. Provide incentives, where practical.

Provide model ordinances, model overlay districts, or ordinance topics for municipal and multi-municipal consideration, regarding sensitive natural and scenic resources. Provide assistance in tailoring model policy and provisions to meet local needs and achieve local support. Look to other counties and communities for model ordinances and incentive programs:

Action Planning

- Chester County – Cluster Subdivision Design Guide
- Manheim Township, Lancaster County - Riparian Buffer Ordinance

Encourage municipalities to include the relevant NHI data and recommendations in their planning and regulatory documents and reference during development plan reviews.

Encourage municipalities to require development applicants to document the environmental conditions and impacts of their proposals. Requirements could include:

- A description or generalized mapping of natural site conditions with an emphasis on significant environmental features that would be impacted by the proposed development or retained upon completion of the project.
- A description of mitigation efforts that will occur as part of the proposed development.
- An impact assessment that discusses the anticipated effect of the proposed development on the environment.
- Measures that are proposed by the applicant to mitigate the impacts of the proposed development on the environment.

Alternatively, the MPRPC could provide additional education for local decision-makers to help them analyze the potential impacts of new development more effectively.

Protect resource conservation areas from incompatible public facilities, e.g. public utilities and major road improvements.

Natural Resource Quality Desired Outcomes

- Promote forest stewardship by landowners and residents for recreation, timber production, wildlife habitat, and water quality protection.
- Reduce the mileage of impaired streams in the County.



Strategies for Organization and Coordination.

Medium Priority

Support watershed organizations and other private sector projects to address acid mine drainage (AMD) through letters of support or financial contribution.

Analyze forest fragmentation and quality and develop strategies to reconnect fragmented patches through reforestation and other conservation initiatives.

Strategies for Planning and Implementation.

High Priority

Establish a date/mileage target for removing stream segments from the DEP Integrated List of All Waters (formerly 303(d) list of impaired waters).

Medium/Low Priority

Identify and prioritize stormwater infrastructure improvements that would improve water quality.

Monitor the status of the Commonwealth's Forest Legacy Program.

The Commonwealth is in the process of developing a Forest Legacy Plan, a prerequisite for the national Forest Legacy Program. The Forest Legacy Program provides grants to states for the purchase of conservation easements and fee acquisition of environmentally-sensitive or threatened forest land. The county should monitor the start-up of the Forest Legacy Program in Pennsylvania and become familiar with the grant process in order to compete effectively for this funding.



Strategies for Regulatory Guidance and Review

Medium/Low Priority

Monitor the development of total maximum daily loads (TMDLs) for impaired streams in Mercer County.

- "A TMDL identifies allowable pollutant loads to a waterbody from both point and non-point sources that will prevent a violation of water quality standards. A TMDL also includes a margin of safety to ensure protection of the water.

Action Planning

A TMDL is designed to reduce pollutant loads to impaired waters and enable these waters to meet water quality standards. Pennsylvania has committed to developing TMDLs for all impaired waterbodies and will use both traditional and new approaches to correct water quality problems.

Public participation is an important part of TMDL development. DEP publishes notice of the availability of each TMDL and provides a comment period as well as the opportunity for a public hearing. All comments are considered before the TMDL is submitted for EPA's approval." *Source: 2004 Pennsylvania Integrated Water Quality Monitoring and Assessment Report (www.dep.state.pa.us)*

Link resource protection programs and conservation techniques with riparian areas, e.g. riparian buffers, easements/greenways.

Encourage sustainable forestry, including the use of Best Management Practices (BMPs) for timber harvesting, soil conservation, habitat conservation, etc. by public and private land owners and managers.

Resource-Based Industries Desired Outcomes

- Promote the accessibility and marketability of local forest and agricultural products through farmers' markets, trade shows, etc.
- Promote managed development of tourism destinations, activities, and programs that showcase the County's natural resources.
- Protect productive farmland from incompatible, adjacent land uses or activities that will adversely affect the long-term viability and investment in land and improvements (may be moved to Land Use, if not already covered).

Strategies for Regulatory Guidance and Enforcement.

Medium/Low Priority

Market the County's natural resource production to broader product industries.

Market preserved and protected lands as key assets for sustainable rural economies. Develop an annual report of preserved and



protected properties, including summary statistics and map illustrations.

Explore niche markets in agriculture and forestry e.g. organic produce, specialty livestock, aquaculture, etc., for economic diversity and for the continued use of protected open space. Include land use regulations and marketing in this effort.

Education Desired Outcomes

- Integrate environmental education efforts with nature-based recreation sites.
- Increase public knowledge of the natural resource production in Mercer County, as well as its associated benefits (revenues, open space) and regulations.
- Encourage restoration of natural floodplain functioning, and use of acquisition and restoration or demolition programs.

Strategies for Organization and Coordination.

High Priority

Establish a Landowner Outreach Team. The county conservation district would designate a small team of 2-4 persons that would represent agriculture, forestry, planning and local government as they interface with local landowners to educate them and answer questions on conservation programs, techniques, benefits, etc.

Medium Priority

Disseminate public education materials on natural resource production and conservation. Potential partners include the Conservation District, Western PA Conservancy, Cooperative Extension Service, watershed and environmental organizations. Include sustainable agriculture and sustainable forestry practices and publications tailored with local statistics, trends and recommendations.

Continue and expand the County's field tour of natural resource production areas, and its policies that support their viability. Make the tour available to local schools, scouting, outing and environmental organizations, and the public at-large.

Cultural Resources

Goals:

- **Historic Preservation:** Support protection and encourage active use of historic sites.
- **Contemporary Identity:** Promote a culture of connectedness to community.

Desired Outcomes

- Support preservation and conservation easements of historic sites
- Encourage innovative development approaches that integrate historic resources into new site and building design
- Encourage innovative approaches to adaptive reuse and building rehabilitation/ restoration
- Encourage public and private investment and preservation opportunities for the education and enjoyment of the county's cultural resources
- Promote cultural sites and events to residents and visitors
- Encourage compatible development within and adjacent to significant cultural features and landscapes
- Integrate historical interpretation efforts with the recreation network
- Promote community vision and values statements, as defined by municipal and multi-municipal planning efforts
- Promote strong community leadership and volunteerism
- Promote participation in community decision-making
- Promote heritage events and other cultural activities
- Promote community coordination and cooperation where common values and objectives exist



Strategy for Organization and Coordination

Medium Priority

Assist the Mercer County Historical Society and the various grass-roots historical organizations with applications for the various grants, tax credits and other assistance programs.

Strategies for Planning and Implementation

High Priority

Identify and market historic sites as redevelopment opportunities. Offer incentives for historic site rehabilitation. Some businesses, and individuals who lead them, are drawn to historic structures for their historic value and aesthetic appeal. The office environment of architects, designers, lawyers, and other professionals is often telling of their personal style, and can be viewed as a marketing component of their business. The County should identify a few historic structures for targeted marketing to such investors.

Medium/Low Priority

Prepare a countywide Historical Sites Survey, including an inventory and assessment of the County's cultural and historic resources resulting in a master plan containing a series of goals and planning recommendations for the enhancement and continued preservation of these resources. The County should work in cooperation with local historical organizations, as well as the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. A prioritization list should be developed so that available efforts and funds can be directed toward the most vulnerable properties.



Assist communities with defining and promoting their local identities. Use logos and slogans on the County website, lamppost banners, bulletin boards, etc., to promote local identity and values. Assist in marketing these images to new business prospects, land developers, and realtors as a desired continued outcome of community development.

Support the preparation of studies and master plans that focus on the physical, functional and aesthetic features of community centers and downtowns.

Develop a handbook of defining site and architectural features of Mercer County communities. Encourage developers to integrate these features into projects in their respective communities.

Develop Community Gateways that reflect community heritage.

Strategies for Planning and Implementation

Medium Priority

Assist local municipalities to amend their zoning ordinances for incorporating Historic District Overlay provisions and other cultural resource protection measures.

Document any proposed actions that may impact National Historic properties or properties deemed eligible for the National Register by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission during subdivision and land development reviews.

Develop guidelines for historic site/district redevelopment. Include in these guidelines flexibility for conversion and adaptive re-use of historically significant structures. For historic districts, this should entail an Historic District Overlay. For individual sites not located in a historic district, an overlay or specific historic site provisions should be developed.



Housing Plan

MPC Requirement: *A plan to meet the housing needs of present residents and of those individuals and families anticipated to reside in the municipality, which may include conservation of presently sound housing, rehabilitation of housing in declining neighborhoods and the accommodation of expected new housing in different dwelling types and at appropriate densities for households of all income levels.*

MPC Article III, Section 301(a)(2.1)

Goals:

- **Housing Diversity:** Promote development of a diversity of well maintained housing options that meet a range of needs and income level for Mercer County residents.
- **Housing Maintenance:** Promote sound maintenance and modernization (where appropriate) of existing housing.
- **Residential Neighborhoods:** Promote safe, vibrant and livable neighborhoods.



Desired Outcomes

- Continue to support development of new owner-occupied housing.
- Develop and support development of housing options for seniors.
- Promote construction or renovation of rental units (all types).
- Encourage a variety of housing designs, types and values to meet the residential needs of all segments of the County's present and future population.
- Assist municipalities in developing alternative zoning and subdivision/land development techniques that provide for flexible housing design.
- Promote housing renovation.
- Eliminate and prevent conditions that contribute to and perpetuate blight in residential areas.
- Assist municipalities with the development and enforcement of property maintenance codes.

Action Planning

- Provide regulatory amendments that will augment the revitalization of existing neighborhoods.
- Encourage redevelopment that is compatible with neighborhood character.

Strategies for Organization and Coordination

High Priority

Identify local issues and concerns, including property maintenance and code enforcement

Medium/Low Priority

Work closely with realtors and developers to create and promote livable communities both in existing neighborhoods and in new developments.

Work with the Mercer County Housing Authority and the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA) to provide and promote educational programs on housing revitalization

Strategies for Planning and Implementation

High Priority

Work with Mercer County residential real estate professionals and developers to identify gaps in the current housing market and develop a strategy to fill them.

Identify areas in Mercer County for new housing, including infill locations, that are consistent with the County Comprehensive Plan's Future Land Use Plan and supported by current or planned infrastructure.

Identify and prioritize specific housing rehabilitation opportunities in existing neighborhoods throughout Mercer County, especially in the urbanized areas of the Shenango Valley, Greenville, Grove City and Mercer.

Promote the development of alternative housing types (e.g., upper level loft apartments) in the downtown areas of Sharon and Farrell to attract people back to the city centers and help to restore economic energy and health to the downtowns.

Medium Priority

Utilize the Mercer County Affordable Housing Fund to assist first time homebuyers.

Provide model ordinances to municipalities to regulate location and standards for mobile homes and mobile home parks.



Expand the use of currently available housing rehabilitation programs, particularly for low income applicants.

Improve neighborhood livability by allowing for integrated and/or nearby human services, learning centers (schools) and employment.

Conduct housing rehabilitation projects in existing neighborhoods to revitalize housing and attract new residents to these areas.

Address issues such as traffic, stormwater management, and flooding, through neighborhood design and rehabilitation initiatives.

Improve neighborhood safety by encouraging the use of street lighting, regular police patrols, and neighborhood watch teams.



Strategies for Regulatory Guidance and Enforcement.

High Priority

Adopt land use regulations (zoning/subdivision & land development) that allow for flexible housing development techniques such as cluster/open space, conservation by design, zero lot line, and housing developments that utilize historical design elements.

Establish design guidelines for the villages, boroughs and cites in the county that are consistent with the existing character of their streetscapes.

Medium Priority

Develop and enforce provisions for including affordable housing into new and existing neighborhoods

Amend zoning, subdivision and land development and other relevant ordinances to eliminate obstacles to developing housing in downtown areas.

Maintain and enforce property and building maintenance requirements including: landscape maintenance; maintenance and screening of utility areas; storage of unused vehicles and equipment; foundations for mobile homes; enforcement of home occupations and parking requirements.

Work with local municipalities to enforce the new Uniform Construction Code and encourage them to document their enforcement efforts and cooperate with one another where possible.

Develop zoning regulations and other codes that support the preservation of historic structures.

