
Chapter 1

An Introduction to Mercer County

Mercer County is located in northwestern Pennsylvania, along the Ohio Border. Interstates 80 and 79 cross almost midway between Mercer Borough and Grove City, providing excellent access to the area. The county is also strategically placed between the ports of Erie and Pittsburgh, which has played a large role in the development of Mercer County throughout its history. The wealth of natural resources found in the county has been instrumental in shaping the diversity of communities within its borders. Agriculture, mining, and the network of rivers and streams continue to play a role in the economic and cultural fabric of Mercer County.

Location and Regional Context

Mercer County is located on Pennsylvania's western border adjacent to the state of Ohio. Neighboring Pennsylvania counties include Lawrence and Butler Counties to the south, Venango to the east, and Crawford to the north. Trumbull and Mahoning Counties in Ohio border Mercer to the west.

Mercer County is a 5th class county with 48 municipalities: 14 boroughs, 31 second class townships and the incorporated cities of Sharon, Farrell and Hermitage.

Mercer County ranks 33rd among Pennsylvania counties in land area, with 672 square miles.

Mercer County is wedged between two of the Commonwealth's Heritage

Regions/Parks. The State Heritage Parks

are "large geographic regions or corridors that span two or more counties and contain a multitude of cultural, historic, recreational, natural and scenic resources of state and national significance that collectively exemplify the industrial heritage of Pennsylvania."¹ The Oil Heritage Region includes Venango and Crawford Counties and is the location of a number of resources that tell the story of the birth of the oil industry. The Rivers of Steel Heritage Region is focused on the history of iron and steel, coal and coke, and other related industries in the counties of Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Fayette, Greene, Washington, and Westmoreland. Mercer County's history is tied to both, but the county is not included in either region.

Mercer County, along with the neighboring counties of Clarion, Crawford, Erie, Forest, Lawrence, Venango, and Warren, are served by the Northwest Pennsylvania Planning and Development Commission, a Local Development District (LDD) providing economic and community development services to businesses and communities in its seven county service region.

Settlement and Development History

Mercer County was established in 1800 from Allegheny County. The county was slow to settle due to conflicts with the native Seneca Indians, but by 1795 small settlements were established in the forks of the Mahoning, Shenango and Neshannock Creeks. Between 1801 and 1811, fifteen townships were formed and in 1814 Mercer Borough was incorporated. By 1818, semi-weekly postal routes between Pittsburgh and Erie through Mercer had been established and the Pittsburgh and Erie Turnpike opened for travel.

Mercer County was built on both agriculture and steel. Coal was discovered in early 1835 in a hillside west of Sharon and by 1845-46, the first of the blast furnaces and rolling mills opened in the Shenango Valley. Over the next 150 years, the steel industry and related manufacturing industries dominated the county, employing thousands of residents and playing an

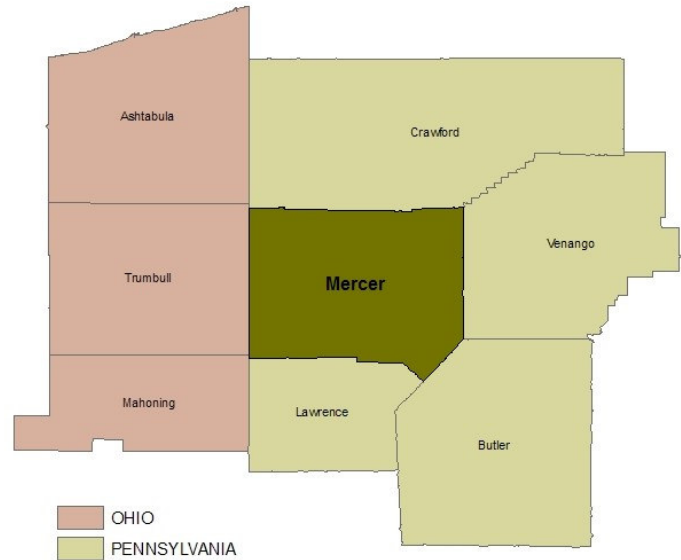


Figure 1-1 Mercer County Regional Location

¹ Pennsylvania Heritage Parks Program Manual, 2005.

instrumental role in the development of numerous communities, as well as the railroads that served them.

Then, during the 1980s, the steel mills and manufacturing plants began to close and the 1990s ushered in a period of major transition in Mercer County that continues to this day. Once prominent economic centers – the Shenango Valley, Greenville, and Grove City – continue to re-establish an identity and fill the voids left by Westinghouse, Sharon Steel, and others. The trickle down effect has influenced all aspects of life in Mercer County, including housing and infrastructure, not to mention the number of residents, particularly young residents, who have left the County in search of employment.

Facts about Mercer County

Location: Northwest Pennsylvania, USA

Date of Establishment: March 12, 1800

Namesake: Revolutionary War General Hugh Mercer (1726-1777)

Number of Municipalities: 48

County Seat: Mercer Borough

Form of Government: 5th Class County; elected 3-member Board of Commissioners

World Wide Web: www.mcc.co.mercer.pa.us

Size: 671.5 square miles

Population (2000): 120,293 (Estimated 2004: 119,797)

Population Change (1990-2000): - 0.6%

Population per Square Mile (2000): 179.1 persons

Median Age: 39.6

Community / Economic Profile:

Leading Industries (by employment)

Health Care
Education
Social and government services

Employment Centers

Greenville Area
Grove City Area
Mercer Area
Sandy Lake/Stoneboro
Shenango Valley

Hospitals

Horizon Hospital System
Sharon Regional Health System
United Community Hospital

Schools

12 public districts
7 private/parochial institutions

Public Libraries: 7

Yet the future is promising. Initiatives that took shape during the 1990s are beginning to have an impact. Traditional natural resource based industries – agriculture, forestry, and mining – will continue to play important roles, with new opportunities in the form of both passive and active outdoor recreation. The county’s rich history presents yet another opportunity, given the increased popularity of heritage-based tourism. This plan will help Mercer County continue to utilize its many valuable natural resources as effectively and sensitively as possible.

More Facts about Mercer County

Largest Municipality by population (2000)

City of Sharon: 16,328 persons

Smallest Municipality by population (2000)

Sheakleyville Borough: 164 persons

Natural Setting:

Major waterways/watersheds:

Shenango River
French Creek
Wolf Creek
Sandy Creek
Neshannock Creek

Forest cover: 162,000 acres (37% of County)

Mineral resources: coal, gravel, sand,

Public Lands:

Federal Recreation Site: Shenango Lake Reservoir

Parks: Pymatuning State Park,
Maurice K. Goddard State Park
Numerous municipal parks

State Game Lands:

#130 – East of Stoneboro in Sandy Lake and Worth
#270 – North and east of Sheakleyville
#284 – South of Springfield Falls in Springfield Township

Historical Sites:

Wendell August Forge
Bridge in French Creek Township
Frank H. Buhl Mansion
Mercer County Courthouse
Gibson House
Johnston’s Tavern
Christiana Lindsay House
Jonas J. Piece House
The Quaker Bridge
First Universalist Church of Sharpsville

Recent Socioeconomic Conditions and Trends

The Updated Mercer County Comprehensive Plan (2005) provides a snapshot look at current socioeconomic conditions and a brief analysis of select historic trends. The following bulleted points were taken from the comprehensive plan with additional analysis and interpretation to relate them to the open space, greenways and outdoor recreation plan.

- Total population in Mercer County has declined by almost 6 percent over the past 40 years. The impact of the industrial closures during the 1980s on the county's population is clearly evident as the total population declined by over 7,000 residents during that decade. During the 1990s, the decline was less than 1 percent. (See Table 1-1)

A closer look at the data, however, reveals that many of the county's townships are experiencing growth, while the boroughs and cities have lost population. This suggests that residents are relocating from the older "urban" centers (boroughs and cities) to the outlying rural townships. This shift to township living impacts both borough and township communities. The boroughs are left to maintain their infrastructure of roads, water and sewer, and services with support from a shrinking population. Rural townships that had little development between the early and mid 1900s now host "modern" development densities, patterns and design that seem non-traditional and impact increasingly larger portions of the rural landscape. (See Table 1-2)

Table 1-1 Population Change 1960 - 2000

	Population					2003 estimate	Population Change	
	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000		1990-2000	1960-2000
Pennsylvania	11,319,366	11,793,909	11,863,895	11,881,643	12,281,054	12,365,455	3.4%	8.5%
Mercer County	127,519	127,225	128,299	121,003	120,293	119,895	-0.6%	-5.7%
Butler County	114,639	127,941	147,912	152,013	174,083	180,040	14.5%	51.9%
Crawford County	77,956	81,342	88,869	86,169	90,366	89,846	4.9%	15.9%
Lawrence County	112,965	107,374	107,150	96,246	94,643	93,408	-1.7%	-16.2%
Venango County	65,295	62,353	64,444	59,381	57,565	56,600	-3.1%	-11.8%
Mahoning County, OH	300,480	303,424	289,487	264,806	257,555	251,660	-2.7%	-14.3%
Trumbull County, OH	208,526	232,579	241,863	227,813	225,116	221,785	-1.2%	8.0%

Source: US Census Bureau

Table 1-2 Municipal Population Trends 1970 - 2000

Jurisdiction	Total Population				Population Change			
	1970	1980	1990	2000	1990-2000		1970-2000	
					#	%	#	%
Mercer County	127,225	128,299	121,003	120,293	-710	-0.6	-6,932	-5.4
Greenville-Reynolds	24,615	25,766	23,585	23,240	-345	-1.5	-1,375	-5.6
Delaware	1,863	2,205	2,064	2,159	95	4.6	296	15.9
Fredonia	731	712	683	652	-31	-4.5	-79	-10.8
Greene	1,099	1,292	1,247	1,153	-94	-7.5	54	4.9
Greenville	8,704	7,730	6,734	6,380	-354	-5.3	-2,324	-26.7
Hempfield	3,628	4,078	3,826	4,004	178	4.7	376	10.4
Jamestown	937	854	761	636	-125	-16.4	-301	-32.1
Pymatuning	3,073	3,880	3,736	3,782	46	1.2	709	23.1
Sugar Grove	1,029	1,153	987	909	-78	-7.9	-120	-11.7
West Salem	3,551	3,862	3,547	3,565	18	0.5	14	0.4
Northern Tier	4,505	5,160	4,982	5,092	110	2.2	587	13.0
Deer Creek	398	496	513	465	-48	-9.4	67	16.8
French Creek	601	765	789	764	-25	-3.2	163	27.1
Perry	1,368	1,597	1,468	1,471	3	0.2	103	7.5
Otter Creek	565	605	583	611	28	4.8	46	8.1
Salem	679	695	678	769	91	13.4	90	13.3
Sandy Creek	753	847	806	848	42	5.2	95	12.6
Sheakleyville	141	155	145	164	19	13.1	23	16.3
Lakeview	7,029	8,145	8,080	8,462	382	4.7	1,433	20.4
Fairview	889	965	910	1,036	126	13.8	147	16.5
Jackson	691	1,045	1,089	1,206	117	10.7	515	74.5
Jackson Center	274	265	244	221	-23	-9.4	-53	-19.3
Lake	544	598	651	706	55	8.4	162	29.8
Mill Creek	466	587	604	639	35	5.8	173	37.1
New Lebanon	211	197	209	205	-4	-1.9	-6	-2.8
New Vernon	402	476	493	524	31	6.3	122	30.3
Sandy Lake Borough	772	779	722	743	21	2.9	-29	-3.8
Sandy Lake Township	884	1,163	1,161	1,248	87	7.5	364	41.2
Stoneboro	1,129	1,177	1,091	1,104	13	1.2	-25	-2.2
Worth	767	893	906	830	-76	-8.4	63	8.2
Shenango Valley	66,469	62,534	56,506	54,800	-1,706	-3.0	-11,669	-17.6
Clark	467	667	610	633	23	3.8	166	35.5
Farrell	11,000	8,645	6,841	6,050	-791	-11.6	-4,950	-45.0
Hermitage	15,421	16,365	15,300	16,157	857	5.6	736	4.8
Lackawannock	1,974	2,814	2,677	2,561	-116	-4.3	587	29.7
Sharon	22,653	19,057	17,493	16,328	-1,165	-6.7	-6,325	-27.9
Sharpsville	6,126	5,375	4,729	4,500	-229	-4.8	-1,626	-26.5
Shenango	3,141	4,399	4,339	4,037	-302	-7.0	896	28.5
South Pymatuning	2,973	3,016	2,775	2,857	82	3.0	-116	-3.9
West Middlesex	1,293	1,064	982	929	-53	-5.4	-364	-28.2
Wheatland	1,421	1,132	760	748	-12	-1.6	-673	-47.4
Mercer	9,377	10,956	11,649	12,205	556	4.8	2,828	30.2
Coolspring	1,518	1,984	2,140	2,287	147	6.9	769	50.7
East Lackawannock	1,314	1,709	1,606	1,701	95	5.9	387	29.5
Findley	1,337	1,651	2,284	2,305	21	0.9	968	72.4

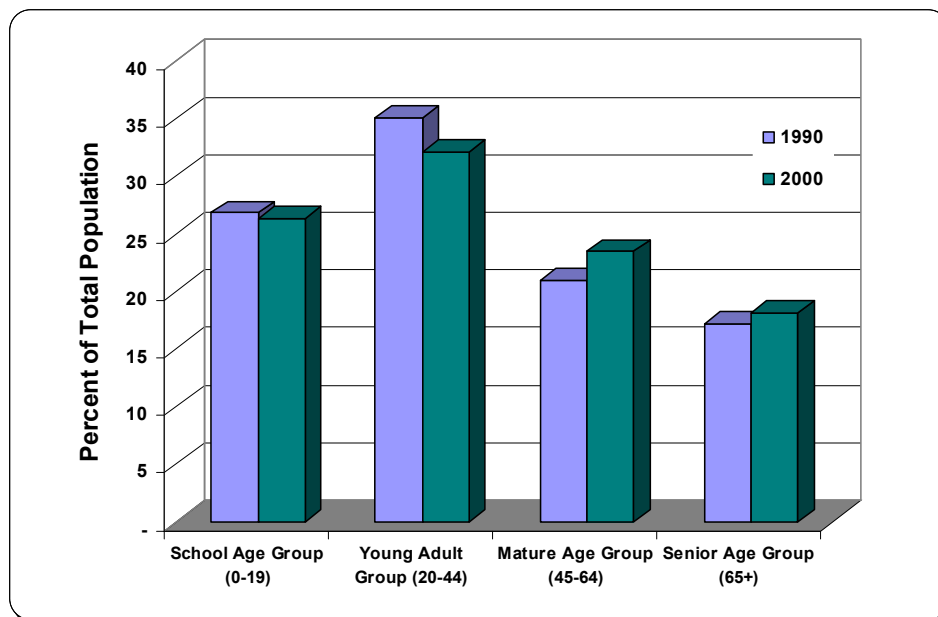
Jurisdiction	Total Population				Population Change			
	1970	1980	1990	2000	1990-2000		1970-2000	
					#	%	#	%
Jefferson	1,623	2,007	1,998	2,416	418	20.9	793	48.9
Mercer	2,773	2,532	2,444	2,391	-53	-2.2	-382	-13.8
Wilmington	812	1,073	1,177	1,105	-72	-6.1	293	36.1
Grove City	15,230	15,738	16,201	16,494	293	1.8	1,264	8.3
Grove City	8,312	8,162	8,240	8,024	-216	-2.6	-288	-3.5
Liberty	916	1,199	1,223	1,276	53	4.3	360	39.3
Pine	3,514	3,762	4,193	4,493	300	7.2	979	27.9
Springfield	1,878	1,904	1,892	1,972	80	4.2	94	5.0
Wolf Creek	610	711	653	729	76	11.6	119	19.5

Source: Mercer County Comprehensive Plan (1996); U.S. Census Bureau

- **Mercer County's population as a whole is aging.** Older age cohorts are growing in their percentage of the overall population, while the percentage of younger residents is declining. This trend is common throughout rural Pennsylvania.

Figure 1-2 illustrates the changes in the county's age groups between 1990 and 2000. As shown, the School Age and Young Adult Groups continue to represent the largest percentage of the population. However, between 1990 and 2000, their share of the total declined by almost 5 percent from 61.9 to 58.5 percent. At the same time, the Mature and Senior age groups increased.

Figure 1-2 Age Groups in Mercer County 1990 – 2000



- **Mercer County's total population could continue to decline.** Independent population projections, based on 1990 and 2000 census data and utilizing an average of four projection methods, indicate that Mercer County's population will continue to decline at a decreasing or slowing rate over the next 15-20 years. 2003 estimates by the U.S. Census Bureau also suggest population decline.

However, as with the historical population figures, there will continue to be areas of growth within the county. As suggested in the Comprehensive Plan, the Mercer region will have the greatest population increase and will be the fastest growing region. Lakeview ranks second in projections of additional residents and growth rate. The Shenango Valley and Greenville-Reynolds regions are projected to continue to lose population.

- **The county's average household size is declining** slightly more rapidly than the state but slower than several of the surrounding counties. The average household size has decreased from 2.54 in 1990 to 2.44 in 2000.

These changes in the demographic composition of the county will have substantial impacts on the demand for recreation and leisure services and transportation services; they may also affect income-based government revenue and the overall availability of disposable income for household and leisure pursuits and capital and community investments

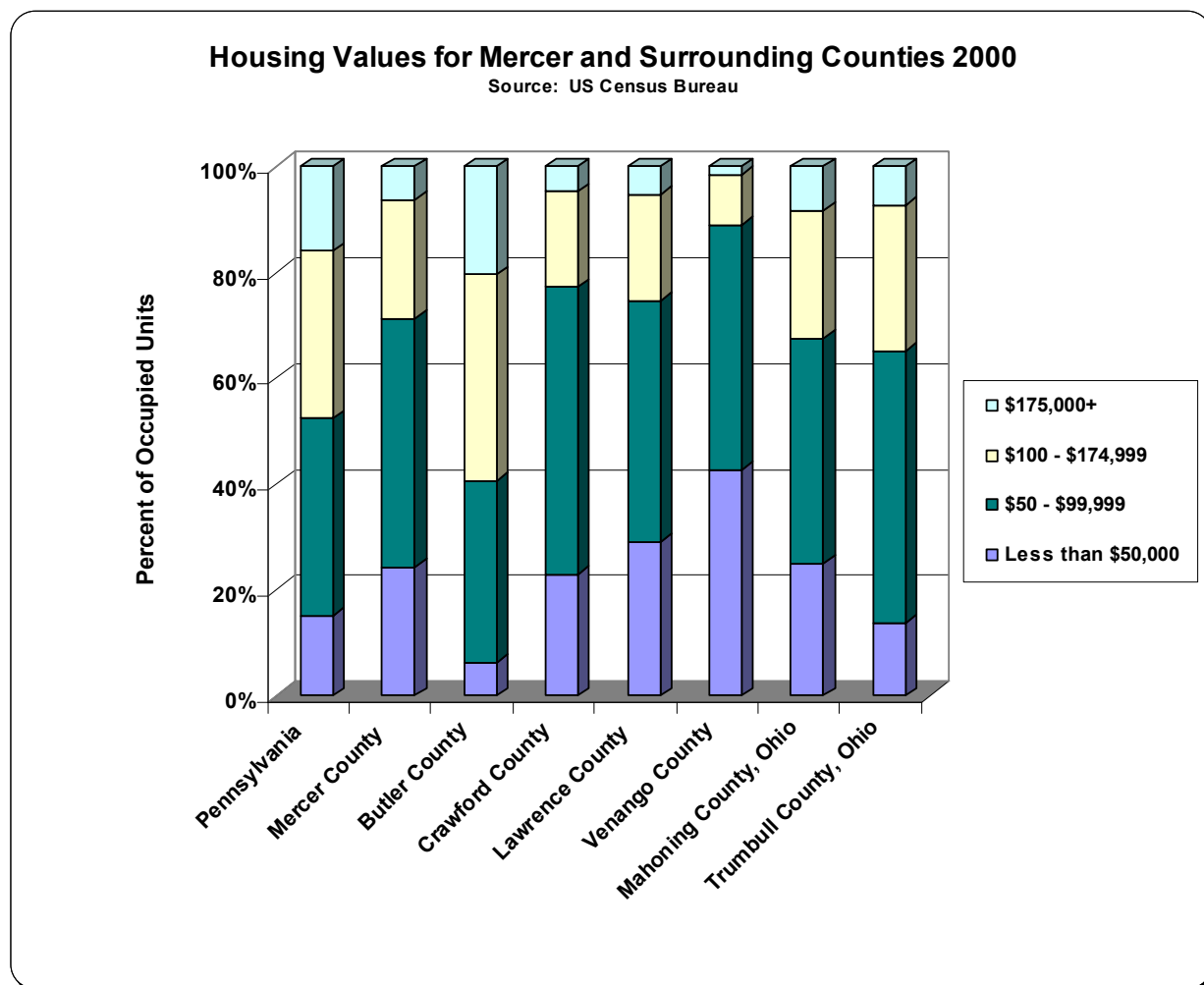
Table 1-3 Average Household Size 1990 -2000

Jurisdiction	Average Household Size		Change in Household Size, 1990-2000	
	1990	2000	#	%
Pennsylvania	2.57	2.48	-0.09	-103.6
Mercer County	2.54	2.44	-0.10	-104.1
Butler County	2.65	2.54	-0.11	-104.3
Crawford County	2.60	2.50	-0.10	-104.0
Lawrence County	2.57	2.47	-0.10	-104.0
Venango County	2.58	2.45	-0.13	-105.3
Mahoning County, OH	2.57	2.44	-0.13	-105.3
Trumbull County, OH	2.62	2.48	-0.14	-105.6

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 1990 and 2000 STF3A

- **Mercer County household incomes experienced real growth from 1990 to 2000.** Mercer County's median household income was \$34,666 in 1999. There was a \$10,067 increase in dollars from median household income in 1989 (\$24,599), which indicates approximately 5 percent real growth. Trends in per capita income also reflect growth within the County. Per capita income increased from \$15,190 in 1989 to \$17,636 in 1999, resulting in real growth of 16.1 percent. Regarding both median household income and per capita income, Mercer County fared better than Pennsylvania (-4.1 percent real growth in median household income; 3.2 percent real growth in per capita income).
- **Housing values in Mercer County typically fall below state and national levels,** but are consistent with each of the surrounding counties except Butler County. Just over 47 percent of the county's specified owner-occupied housing units fall within the \$50,000 to \$99,999 value range; an additional 24.2 percent had values less than \$50,000. Housing affordability is critical to community development, particularly the affordability of starter homes whose sale supports transactions throughout the housing market. (See Figure 1-3)

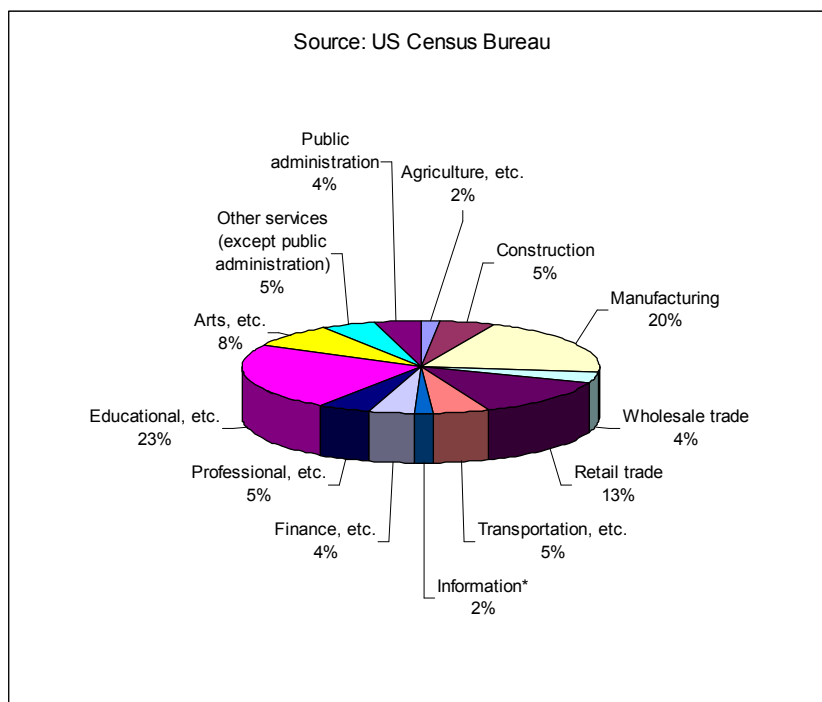
Figure 1-3 Housing Values, 2000



- More Mercer County residents were working in 2000 than in 1990.** Mercer County's total labor force participation was 58.1 percent in 2000; an increase of just over 2.0 percent from 1990. The county had the lowest male labor force participation (65.1 percent) of the surrounding counties, while the female labor force participation (51.7 percent) *increased* by nearly 5.0 percent between 1990 and 2000. This placed Mercer County fifth among the surrounded counties. These statistics reflect an older community comprised of many senior and retired residents who do not participate in the labor force, as well as a greater percentage of women over the age of 16 years who work outside the home.

- Serving people and making products have become the focus of Mercer County's economy.** Mercer County's leading major industries and their respective percentages of the labor force are education, health, and social services (23.7 percent); manufacturing (20.1 percent) and retail trade (13.4 percent). Together these three major industries employ 57.2 percent of the County's work force. These industries are also the leading industries across Pennsylvania and the surrounding counties. Mercer County's resident employment is higher in each of these industries than Pennsylvania as a whole, and on par or slightly higher than the surrounding counties. The County's resident employment in finance, insurance, real estate, and rental and leasing, and in professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services is lower than that of Pennsylvania, and in the lower range of the values for the surrounding counties.

Figure 1-4 Resident Employment by Industry, 2000



- The list of top employers (Table 1-4) further illustrates the importance of the education, health, and social services industries to Mercer County's economy.** Employees in these industries tend to be strong advocates for health and wellness and are supportive of walkable communities with clean air, water, and recreation sites, even though they generally manage a far smaller portion of land and water resources.

Table 1-4 Top Employers in Mercer County, 2004

Rank	Employer	Rank	Employer
1	Sharon Reg. Health System	11	Sharon School District
2	Horizon Hospital System Inc.	12	Sharon Tube Company
3	Werner Co.	13	General Electric Company
4	John Maneely Co.	14	Hermitage School District
5	Wal-Mart Associates Inc.	15	Pennsylvania Department of Corrections
6	Duferco Farrell Corp.	16	Grove City Area School District
7	George Junior Republic Inc.	17	Mercer County
8	United Community Hospital	18	St Paul Homes
9	U.S. Investigations Services Inc.	19	Farrell Area School District
10	Grove City College	20	Thomas & Betts Corporation

Source: Penn Northwest

- **Manufacturing pays the highest wages in the County.** The average annual wage across all industrial sectors in Mercer County was \$24,804. Manufacturing offered the highest average annual wage (\$34,788) of all industrial sectors. Public administration ranked second with an average annual wage of \$33,436. Construction ranked third with an average annual wage of \$31,824.

Mercer County's average annual wages are lower than those of Pennsylvania by as little as \$4,316 for the construction industry and as much as \$15,600 for the wholesale trade industry. Alternatively, looking at the difference in value as a percentage, Mercer County's wages range from 12 percent (construction) to 40 percent (arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services) lower than those of Pennsylvania. As a result, businesses have a lower payroll costs (one cost of doing business) in Mercer County and resident employees have lower incomes (one measure of quality of life) than most other areas of Pennsylvania.

- **Tourism and related service industries are growing in the county.** The history and natural resources of the area attract more and more visitors to the county each year.

Table 1-5 Average Annual Wages by Industry

Industry Sector	Mercer County		Pennsylvania		Difference in annual wage value	
	% Labor Force	Annual Wage	% Labor Force	Annual Wage	\$	%
Educational, health and social services	23.7%	\$25,688	21.9%	\$30,524	\$4,836	16%
Manufacturing	20.1%	\$34,788	16.0%	\$41,080	\$6,292	15%
Retail trade	13.4%	\$13,104	12.1%	\$16,484	\$3,380	21%
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services	7.7%	\$10,816	7.0%	\$18,148	\$7,332	40%
Construction	5.1%	\$31,824	6.0%	\$36,140	\$4,316	12%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	5.0%	\$31,304	5.4%	\$40,560	\$9,256	23%
Other services (except public administration)	5.0%	n/a	4.8%	n/a	n/a	n/a
Professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services	4.7%	n/a	8.5%	n/a	n/a	n/a
Finance, insurance, real estate and rental and leasing	4.2%	\$32,084	6.6%	\$45,084	\$13,000	29%
Public administration	4.2%	\$33,436	4.2%	\$45,448	\$12,012	26%
Wholesale trade	3.8%	\$26,468	3.6%	\$42,068	\$15,600	37%
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting	1.5%	\$16,068	1.0%	\$21,476	\$5,408	25%
Mining	0.1%	\$31,096	0.3%	\$45,136	\$14,040	31%
Information	1.6%	n/a	2.6%	n/a	n/a	n/a
All Industries	100.0%	\$24,804	100.0%	\$32,292	\$7,488	23%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 STF3A
Pennsylvania Covered Employment, Annual 1999

Major Communities

Population and Employment Centers

- **The Shenango Valley** - Located on the western border of the county, the “Shenango Valley” is the collective name for the cities of Sharon, Farrell, and most recently, Hermitage. These communities grew up with the iron and steel manufacturers that line the Shenango River. Traditional neighborhoods are seeing the impacts of the loss of these businesses; however, the Pennsylvania Land Recycling Program has been used to clean up 14 properties totaling over 500 acres of brownfields.
- **Mercer Borough** is located near the center of the county and is the county seat. Located on the original route of the Pittsburgh and Erie Turnpike, the borough was a key point along the way. The original square is surrounded by traditional neighborhoods and continues to be a key crossroads. Its history is tied closely to the county’s political history and the surrounding agricultural communities.
- **Greenville Borough** is located on the Shenango River north of the Shenango Valley along PA 18. It was founded in 1838 and is currently home to Thiel College. The borough is surrounded by Hempfield Township and the two communities completed a joint comprehensive plan in 2004.
- **Grove City** is located in the southeast corner of the county at the crossroads of PA 58, PA 173, and PA 208. The city is surrounded by Pine Township and is a member of the Wolf Creek/Slippery Rock Council of Governments (COG), which also includes Liberty, Springfield, and Wolf Creek Townships. These communities have also completed a multi-municipal comprehensive plan. The Prime Outlets at Grove City are located west of the city at the I-79/PA 208 interchange and attract visitors from around the region.

Rural Centers

- **Fredonia Borough** is located north of Mercer Borough just west of US 19. The Bessemer and Lake Erie Shortline runs through the borough, connecting Greenville and Grove City. It is surrounded by Delaware Township to the west and Fairview Township to the east. Ball Run is just north of the Borough.
- **The Lakeview Region** includes four boroughs and seven townships located in northeastern Mercer County. The boroughs of Jackson Center, Stoneboro, Sandy Lake and New Lebanon are typical rural boroughs with a small mix of commercial businesses and fairly dense housing development. The townships (Mill Creek, Sandy Lake, Worth, Jackson, Lake, Fairview, and New Vernon) enjoy primarily single-family residential development, agricultural uses, small businesses/home occupations dotted here and there and light industry and service businesses concentrated near interchange areas. The rural region is further enriched by Goddard State Park, State Gamelands, Lake Wilhelm, Sandy Creek and Stoneboro Lake which serve the recreational needs of the area in conjunction with local community parks, playing fields and the Lakeview School District complex.²
- **Jamestown Borough** is located on the northern border of the county with Crawford County. In fact, it is in both counties. The Shenango River runs through the western part of the borough, and highway access is primarily via PA 58 and US 322.

² Lakeview Region Comprehensive Plan, 2002

- **Sheakleyville** is located on US 19 in north central Mercer County. It is surrounded by Sandy Creek Township and is just north and west of Lake Wilhelm. Part of State Game Land #270, and Maurice K. Goddard State Parks are easily accessed from the borough via SR 1018 (Sheakleyville Road) and SR 1014 (Georgetown Road).

Major Transportation Corridors

In 2003, the Mercer County Regional Planning Commission (MCRPC) followed PennDOT's lead and began an update of its existing long-range plan using the PennPlan model. This direction was also consistent with federal policy, which strongly promotes the need for and value of long range transportation planning. MCRPC, as the staff agency for the Shenango Valley MPO, identified 11 corridors of regional significance, which are centered on the county's major highways and are listed in Table 1-6.

Interstates 79 and 80 intersect south and east of Mercer Borough, providing residents and businesses with access to Pittsburgh, Erie, New York, and Chicago. Three of the county's major highways have been divided into segments in order to better understand travel patterns along those routes: PA 18, PA 60, and US 62. A brief discussion of Mercer County's major state and US routes follows, including three that were not selected for independent corridor analysis – US 322, US 19, and PA 173. The reader is referred to the corridor profiles of the Long Range Transportation Plan for additional information.

Table 1-6 Transportation Planning Corridors in Mercer County

No.	Corridor Name	Centered On
1	Pittsburgh to Erie Regional Thruway	I-79
2	New York to Chicago Regional Thruway	I-80
3	Shenango Valley to Pittsburgh Regional Thruway	PA 60
4	Shenango Valley N-S Commercial Core	PA 18
5	Shenango Valley E-W Commercial Core	US 62
6	Broadway Avenue	PA 60
7	Shenango Valley to Mercer	US 62
8	Shenango Valley to Greenville/Reynolds	PA 18
9	Grove City - Southern Mercer County Tourism Pathway	PA 208
10	Greenville to Mercer	PA 58
11	Greenville to I-79	PA 358

Major Land and Water Features

- Mercer County falls within the Appalachian Plateaus Physiographic Province, specifically the Northwestern Glaciated Plateau section. The dominant topographic form within this section is characterized by "broad, rounded upland and deep, steep-sided, linear valleys that are partly filled with glacial deposits."³ The underlying rock is shale, siltstone, and sandstone.

³ PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Bureau of Topographic and Geologic Survey, 2000.

- **Mercer County has an abundance of surface waters.** The Shenango River runs north/south in the western part of the County and is the major river in the County. In 1965, the Army Corps of Engineers completed The Shenango River Lake project, which provides flood protection for the Shenango River Valley, as well as for the Beaver and upper Ohio Rivers. The project also provides seasonal discharge regulation for water quality improvement and recreation opportunities. Table 1-7 below lists the major water ways in the County. Other significant lakes include Lake Wilhelm, which is north of Sandy Lake Borough; Sandy Lake, which is in Stoneboro; and Lake Latonka, which is located along the border of Coolspring Township and Jackson Township.

Table 1-7 Major Waterways in Mercer County

Waterway	Tributary of...	Location
Crooked Creek	Little Shenango River	Sugar Grove Twp
Little Shenango River	Shenango River	Lake Twp, New Vernon Twp, Perry Twp, Salem Twp, Sugar Grove Twp, Hempfield Twp, Greenville Borough
Big Run	Shenango River	Greene Twp, West Salem Twp
Otter Creek	Neshannock Creek	Otter Creek Twp, Delaware Twp, Fairview Twp, Coolspring Twp, Findley Twp, Mercer Borough
Cool Spring Creek	Neshannock Creek	Jackson Twp, Coolspring Twp, Findley Twp, Mercer Borough, Fairview Twp
French Creek	Allegheny River	French Creek Twp
Little Neshannock Creek	Neshannock Creek	Jefferson Twp, border between Lackawannock and East Lackawannock Twp
Little Neshannock Creek (West Branch)	Neshannock Creek	Hermitage, Lackawannock Twp, Wilmington Twp
Neshannock Creek	Shenango River	Mercer Borough, border of East Lackawannock and Findley Twp, Springfield Twp
Wolf Creek	Slippery Rock Creek	Worth Twp, Wolf Creek Twp, Pine Twp, Grove City Borough, Liberty Twp
Sandy Creek	Allegheny River	Sandy Creek Twp, Deer Creek Twp, New Vernon Twp, Mill Creek Twp, Sandy Lake Twp and Borough

As shown in Table 1-8, the vast majority of the County's land use falls into the undeveloped categories. Almost 50 percent of the total land area is classified as Agricultural, with an additional 37 percent in the Forest/Woodland category. These uses are generally dispersed throughout the county. However, there is a significant concentration of woodland in the eastern part of the County.

Less than 10 percent of the County is classified as either high- or low-density urban areas. These areas are primarily located at the junctions of the County's original major transportation routes and include the Shenango Valley (Sharon/Farrell/Hermitage), Greenville, Mercer, and Grove City, as well as several of the smaller boroughs and villages. Land uses within these areas include residential, commercial, industrial, and public and semi-public uses.

The Natural Heritage Inventory for Mercer County⁴ provides a preliminary report of the County's natural heritage. Completed by the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy in June 2003, the inventory identifies and maps the most significant natural places in Mercer County. Plant and animal species, natural communities that are unique or uncommon in the County and areas

⁴ *Mercer County Natural Heritage Inventory*. Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, June 2003

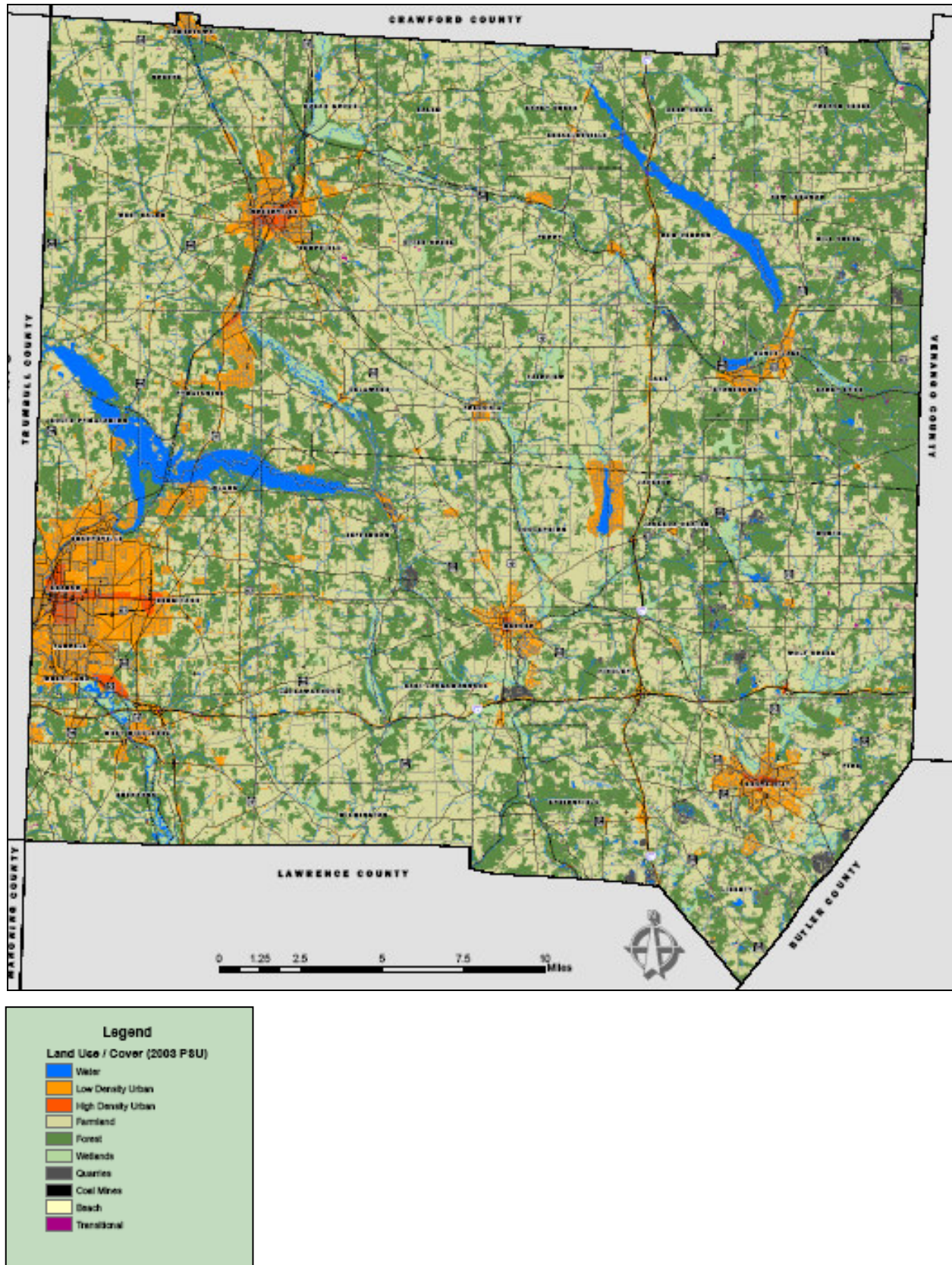
important for wildlife habitat and scientific study were investigated and included in the inventory process. While the inventory does not protect these areas, it provides the necessary information to guide land acquisition and conservation decisions. It can also be used in the development of municipal comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances, as well as in the review of development plans.

Table 1-8 Existing Land Use, 2003

Land Use Category	# of acres	% of Total
Low Density Urban	29,658.3	6.80
High Density Urban	2,459.7	0.56
Transitional	3,625.0	0.83
Total Developed Land	35,743.0	8.19
Hay/Pasture	67,081.7	15.37
Row Crops	149,788.4	34.32
Probably Row Crops	2.2	0.00
Total Agricultural Land	216,872.3	49.69
Coniferous Forest	4,664.0	1.07
Mixed Forest	2,853.7	0.65
Deciduous Forest	154,650.7	35.44
Total Forest/Woodland	162,168.4	37.16
Water	7,463.8	1.71
Woody Wetland	10,740.8	2.46
Emergent Wetland	1,581.8	0.36
Quarries	1,757.7	0.40
Coal Mines	103.7	0.02
Beach	0.0	0.00
Total Other Land Area	21,647.8	4.95
Total Land Area	436,431.5	100.00

Source: PSU

Figure 1-5 Existing Land Use in Mercer County, 2003



Major Recreation Facilities

Public recreation and resource lands are inventoried in detail in Chapter 2 and through the various maps.

US Army Corps of Engineers – Shenango River Lake

The Shenango River Lake is the reservoir created by the Shenango River Dam, which was constructed by the US Army COE in 1965. The dam serves multiple purposes: flood control and seasonal discharge regulations for water quality improvements on the beaver and Upper Ohio Rivers, as well as recreation. The property includes 15,071 acres (589 acres above the dam) and 3,560 acres (5.5 square miles) of water surface during the summer pool stage. The Pennsylvania Game Commission manages approximately 3,000 acres for waterfowl and other wildlife.

State Parks

Maurice K. Goddard State Park – The 2,856-acre Maurice K. Goddard State Park features the 1,860-acre Lake Wilhelm, which is very popular with anglers. Many recreational activities attract visitors in all seasons. The large lake, abundant wetlands, old fields and mature forests provide a diversity of habitats for wildlife, especially waterfowl and eagles and ospreys.

Pymatuning State Park - Pymatuning is one of the largest state parks in the Commonwealth. The large lake provides excellent fishing throughout the year. Pymatuning State Park is located in southwestern Crawford County. The park office is located near the Crawford-Mercer County line about 1.5 miles north of Jamestown, Pennsylvania. Approximately three-fourths of the reservoir area is located in Crawford County and the remaining one-fourth is located in Ashtabula County, Ohio.

County Parks

There are no county parks in Mercer County.

Municipal Parks

There are approximately 75 municipal parks in the county; less than 10 are located in the county's most rural municipalities.

County and Local Government

Mercer County is a 5th class county with 48 municipalities: 14 boroughs, 31 second class townships and the incorporated cities of Sharon, Farrell and Hermitage.

Growth Management Policy

The authority to establish growth management policy and implement management tools in Pennsylvania lies with local government, as authorized by the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (as enacted and amended). Any national or state policy simply provides guidance to local decision makers and does not supersede established local policy and standards.

National Policy

As a whole, the nation has not witnessed the dramatic impacts of intensive and rapid development. While no national policy exists, several states have developed policies on growth management, which can serve as references for county and municipal policy development in Pennsylvania. Maryland and Oregon have perhaps the strongest statewide policies on record. Maryland has, in fact, established the Governor's Office of Smart Growth "to better coordinate the State's renowned anti-sprawl program and to strengthen its core mission of encouraging development in older communities."⁵ The department has also enabled the county designation of priority funding areas to attract development and published a number of guidance documents for local government. Oregon has also taken a cooperative approach between its Department of Transportation and Department of Land Conservation and Development to support sound land use and transportation development at the state and local levels. "The Oregon program has served as a model for similar programs in Vermont, Maine, Florida, and Georgia."⁶

State Policy

The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code was enacted in 1968 and amended as recently as 2000. The recent amendments expanded county and municipal authority and responsibility to plan for their futures. Amendments included provisions for farmland preservation, forestry activities, mixed uses and new tools for designating the most basic of land use planning decisions: growth and conservation areas.

The Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) has historically required counties to provide regional guidance; it and now requires local municipal planning efforts to be consistent with this guidance.

While Pennsylvania has no statewide growth management policy, the State Planning Board was reinstated in 2004. "This advisory board, comprised of cabinet secretaries, state legislators and citizens, has a mission to monitor trends and issues of concern to the Commonwealth, gather input from state and local officials and citizens and develop reports and recommendations for the Governor and the Legislature on improved state policies and programs."⁷

County Policy

Mercer County and its communities should plan for continued development and should work to enhance the sense of place in each of the urban, suburban and rural areas. This will be established by policies that:

- define existing developed areas and areas for future growth
- encourage redevelopment in existing developed areas and encourage new development near existing developed areas
- balance a variety of land uses and densities, as well as combinations of uses, appropriate to urban, suburban, and rural character
- encourage land uses that support a strong tax base, including agriculture and forest industries in rural areas

⁵ Maryland Department of Planning, Smart Growth Program website.

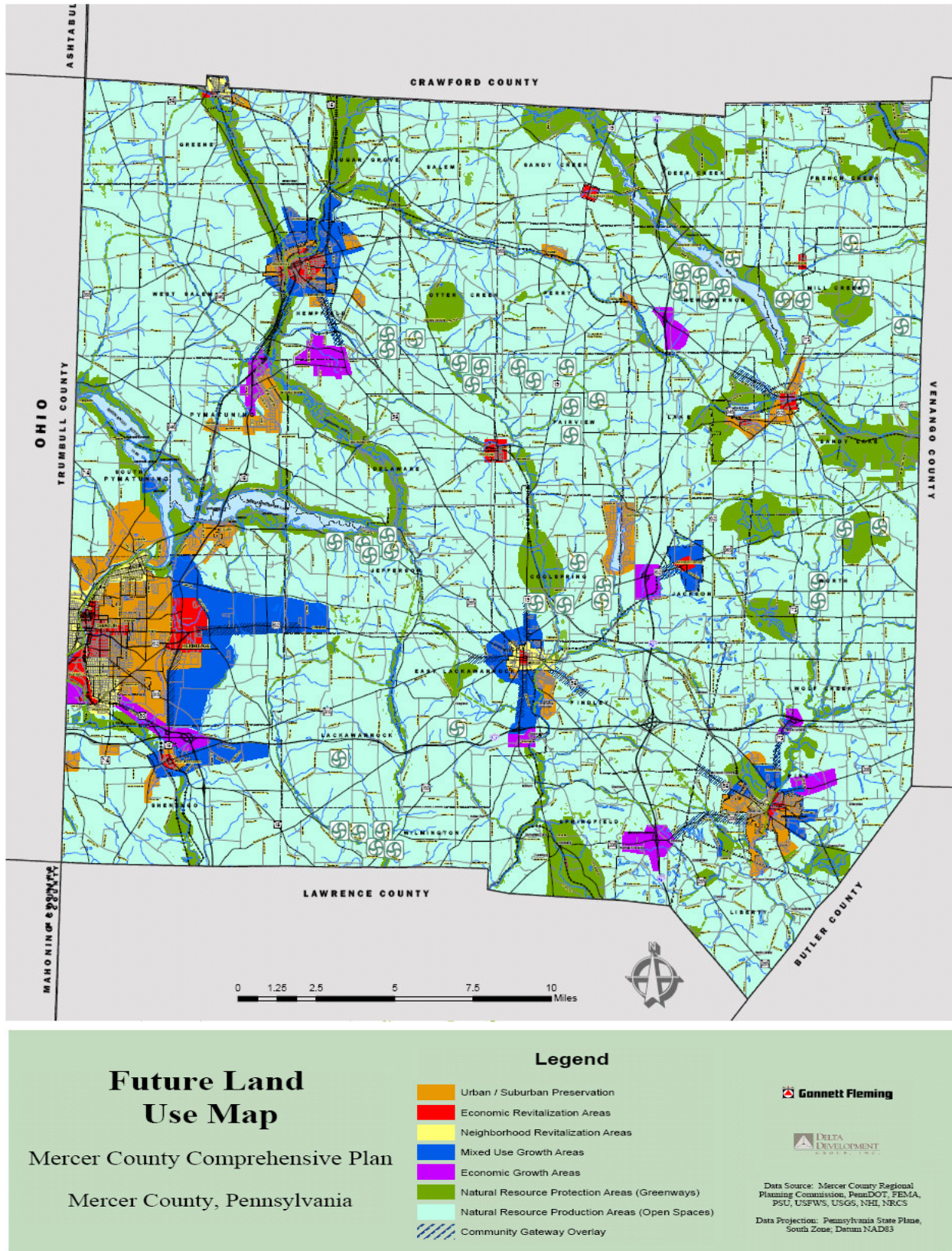
⁶ Cited among Quotations About Oregon's Statewide Planning Program, prepared by the Department of Land Conservation and Development, October 1991.

⁷ Press Release from the Office of the Governor, July 21, 2004.

- encourage development patterns that complement and preserve existing natural, environmental, and historic features
- coordinate infrastructure (water, sewer, and transportation) upgrades and extensions in areas of existing development and those areas targeted for growth
- incorporate public participation in the decision-making and land development process

This growth policy statement encompasses sustainable smart growth principles where urban, suburban, and rural areas complement one another.

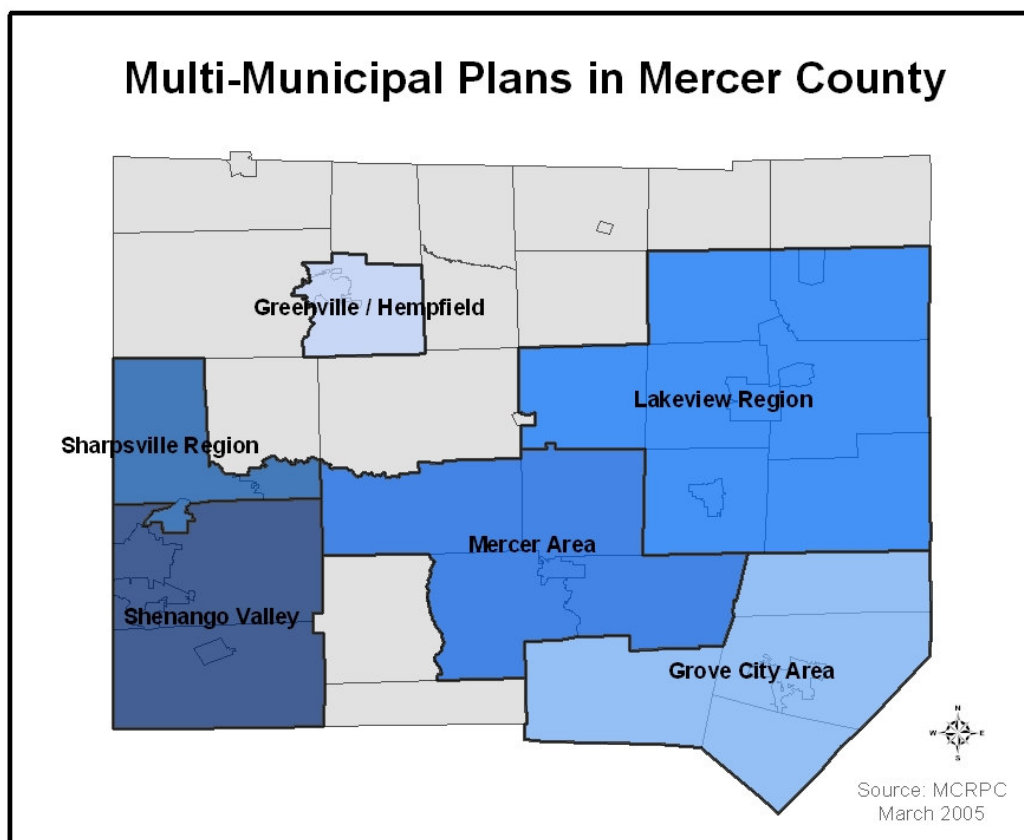
Figure 1-6 Future Land Use



Local Policy

Mercer County has a strong history of planning. Figure 1-7 shows those municipalities that have either completed or are starting a multi-municipal planning effort. As shown, 32 of 48 (66.6%) municipalities are involved in these planning efforts. These 32 communities also represent 98,679 residents or 82% of the population.

Figure 1-7 Multi-Municipal Planning in Mercer County



There are also many municipalities within the county that have the necessary ordinances in place to assist with the implementation of their plans. Mercer County Regional Planning Commission also administers a subdivision and land development ordinance for municipalities that have not adopted their own. The following tables list the municipalities that have these ordinances in place.

The majority of the county's municipalities and the largest portion of county residents are covered by a community plan and zoning. However, most are more than 10 years old. Almost 50 percent of the communities' plans are over 20 years old. Given the economic and demographic changes that have occurred in the interim it is most likely that they are seriously outdated and have little relevance to existing conditions.

Table 1-9 Community Comprehensive Plans in Mercer County, 2003

County Residents in Municipality with:	Population	% of total	No. of Municipalities	% of total
Some form of community comprehensive plan	111,033	92.3%	38	79.2%
Plan no more than 10 years old	20,787	17.3%	17	35.4%
Plan 10-20 years old	30,979	25.8%	3	6.3%
Plan more than 20 years old	59,267	49.3%	18	37.5%
New plan or update pending	52,014	43.2%	25	52.1%

Source: MCRPC

Figure 1-8 Zoned and Unzoned Municipalities, 2003

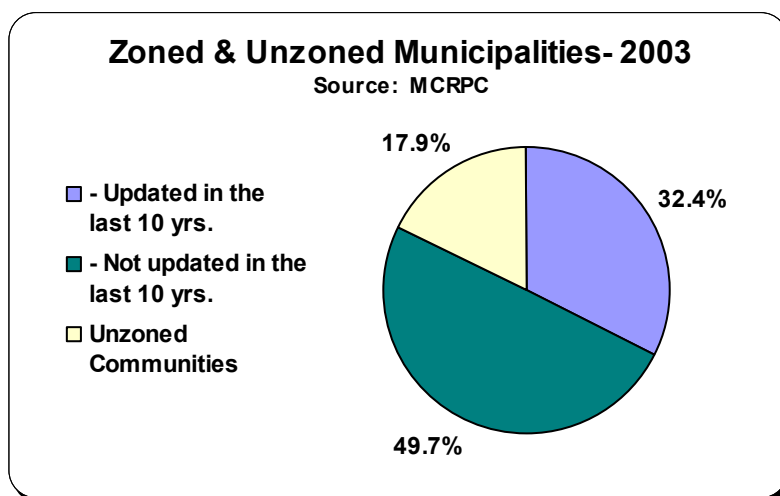


Figure 1-9 Municipal Zoning in Mercer County

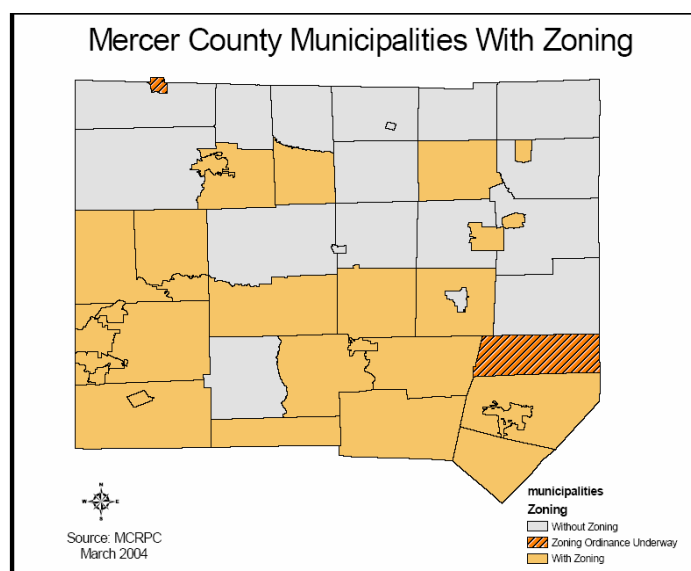


Table 1-10 Land Use Regulations by Municipality

Municipality	Comprehensive Plan	Zoning Ordinance	SLDO
Clark Borough	X	X	X
Coolspring Township		X	County
Deer Creek Township			County
Delaware Township			County
East Lackawannock Township		X	County
Fairview Township			County
Farrell City	X	X	X
Findley Township		X	County
Fredonia Borough	X		County
French Creek Township			County
Greene Township			County
Greenville Borough		X	County
Grove City Borough	X	X	X
Hempfield Township		X	County
Hermitage City	X	X	X
Jackson Center Borough			County
Jackson Township		X	County
Jamestown Borough	X	X	County
Jefferson Township	X	X	X
Lackawannock Township			County
Lake Township			County
Liberty Township		X	County
Mercer Borough		X	X
Mill Creek Township			County
New Lebanon Borough		X	County
New Vernon Township		X	County
Otter Creek Township		X	County
Perry Township			County
Pine Township		X	County
Pymatuning Township		X	County
Salem Township			County
Sandy Creek Township			County
Sandy Lake Borough		X	County
Sandy Lake Township			County
Sharon City		X	X
Sharpsville Borough		X	X
Sheakleyville Borough			County
Shenango Township		X	County
South Pymatuning Township		X	X
Springfield Township		X	X
Stoneboro Borough		X	County
Sugar Grove Township			County
West Middlesex Borough		X	X

Municipality	Comprehensive Plan	Zoning Ordinance	SLDO
West Salem Township			County
Wheatland Borough		X	X
Wilmington Township		X	County
Wolf Creek Township		X	County
Worth Township			County

Source: MCRPC

Resource and Recreation Planning

While the Open Space, Greenways and Outdoor Recreation Plan is the first contemporary countywide plan of its kind in the region, many previous studies and plans have provided data, analysis, policy recommendations and priority projects with similar or related objectives for resource protection and management and recreation services.

The Mercer County Regional Planning Commission prepared a Recreation and Open Space plan in the early 1970s. The goals of this plan were to:

- Enforce policy to preserve slope land, undeveloped portions of the existing flood plains and sub marginal areas for brush and forest growth
- Insure the best utility of land and to encourage concentrated development through applications of higher subdivision design standards
- Include farmland in proposed greenbelts
- Discourage isolated, leap-frog development
- Control urban growth
- Develop component greenbelt facilities and amenities to promote tourism economy
- Integrate open space and recreation plans with Northwest Pennsylvania planning and Economic Development Commission
- Maximize funding available from state and federal sources to acquire and enhance lands for recreation and open space
- Reserve scenic areas and river shoran for recreation and leisure

The 1970 Recreation and Open Space Plan was not officially adopted and was not implemented in any structured fashion. The same is true of its comprehensive plan counterpart. Several communities also developed local recreation plans at approximately the same time. These plans have been implemented in some degree, and recreation facilities and programs have been evolving, particularly in the Shenango Valley, Grove City and Greenville areas.

In the mid 1990s, the Mercer County renewed its interest in community planning and developed a new county comprehensive plan, entitled Planning for Livable Communities. The 2006 update took advantage of 2000 data from the US Census Bureau and new tools authorized by the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code in 2000. Recent studies, such as the Natural Heritage Inventory for Mercer County (2003), which identifies and maps the most significant natural places in Mercer County, were also referenced in the plan update. The county is ready and focused on implementing its county plans and assisting municipalities in implementing local comprehensive and recreation/open space plans.