

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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## Introduction

This Executive Summary highlights the recommendations of the 2005 Update to the Mercer County Comprehensive Plan. The 1996 Comprehensive Plan established a framework to help guide the county into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The update builds upon that work and includes new statistical data, a revised growth and development policy statement, and some new ideas to continue the county's transition into the new economy. An update to the county's Long Range Transportation Plan and a new Greenways, Open Space, and Recreation Plan were developed concurrently to provide greater consistency in the planning processes. All of the plans are available at the MCRPC website: [www.mcrpc.com](http://www.mcrpc.com).

In addition to the above mentioned plans, MCRPC has been working on several regional plans within the county:

- ❖ Mercer Region Multi Municipal Plan
- ❖ Sharpsville Region Multi Municipal Plan
- ❖ Lakeview Region Comprehensive Plan
- ❖ Wolf Creek COG Multi Municipal Plan
- ❖ Greenville / Hempfield Comprehensive Plan
- ❖ The Shenango Valley Multi-municipal Comprehensive Plan



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The update process resulted in the creation of several independent documents, which are listed below and described briefly at the end of this summary. While this summary focuses on the comprehensive plan and the actions that will be needed to achieve the vision that has been expressed by residents of Mercer County, readers are encouraged to read each of the planning documents so as to gain a better understanding of the plan's recommendations.

- ❖ Volume 1 - Technical Background Studies
- ❖ Volume 2 - The Comprehensive Plan
- ❖ Volume 3 - The Long Range Transportation Plan
- ❖ Volume 4 - The Greenways, Open Space and Rural Recreation Plan
- ❖ Volume 5 - Supporting Studies



## A Vision of Mercer County

As part of the planning process, a vision of what Mercer County should be like in twenty years was developed. Input from the Planning Advisory Committee (PAC) and the community were used to finalize the Vision Statement. The Comprehensive Plan's goals and objectives, which are found in Chapter 3 of the Comprehensive Plan, were based on the final statement as shown here.

### In Year 2025...

....Mercer County maintains a diverse array of urban, suburban and rural community types, yet has grown in a manner that respects the rural character and provides a high quality of life for all residents.

....the County has embraced the concept of "smart growth," as evidenced through guiding policies, strong leadership, and citizen feedback.

....existing towns continue to invest in their core districts and continue to grow in areas that are suitable for development. Municipalities plan and implement jointly to save costs and provide high-quality services as a region.

....economic opportunities are flourishing within the County, creating new jobs and attracting new residents. Sustainable forestry and agriculture are strong economic components of the rural landscape and economy.

....the County provides many recreational, cultural, and educational opportunities for residents and visitors through sound planning and program development.

....young persons are staying or moving to the region to take advantage of abundant entertainment and recreation opportunities, as well as safe, affordable neighborhoods well-served by water/sewer and telecommunications utilities.

....existing residents and newcomers enjoy many opportunities to live, work, learn, retire, and play among the County's strong community fabric and friendly people.

## Growth & Development Policy Statement

The PAC also worked to update Mercer County's Growth and Development Policy Statement. The revised version is presented below and focuses on the growth management policies needed for Mercer County to achieve the Vision statement above.

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 striving to achieve the Vision and by establishing 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
- ❖ 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.

## The Future Land Use Map

### FUTURE LAND USE **Frequently Asked Questions**

- 1. What is the Future Land Use Map?**
- 2. Is Future Land Use the same as Zoning?**
- 3. Why do we need Future Land Use Planning?**

**1.**

The **Future Land Use** map is used to guide development to appropriate areas so that the goals of the Comprehensive Plan can be realized. By targeting areas that are most suitable for development and those that should be protected, local officials are better able to plan for infrastructure and community services. The Future Land Use Map also becomes the foundation for developing appropriate land use regulations, including zoning ordinances and subdivision and land development ordinances.

**2.**

**No.** The Plan makes broad recommendations concerning potential land use changes, but it does not make zoning changes. The Plan should be used as a guide to support future changes to municipal zoning ordinances.

**3.**

**Future Land Use Planning** provides an opportunity to strengthen municipalities' tax bases and quality of life by targeting growth into areas that allow for strategic investments in the community's infrastructure for maximum benefit, including the protection of existing agricultural and open space areas.

## Mercer County's Future Land Use

Mercer County's new Future Land Use Map builds on the Future Land Use Map found in the county's 1996 Comprehensive Plan. However, it introduces several new categories designed to provide greater detail regarding the purpose of each land use designation. Efforts have been made to be consistent with the more detailed, local Future Land Use Maps that have recently been completed in the county. The categories are described here, along with a brief description of their general purpose. Examples of primary and secondary uses, as well as a brief description of the targeted locations are also presented. A Design Guide has been prepared to accompany the map to help visualize the proposed development for each category.

### Orange – Urban/Suburban Preservation Areas

**Purpose:** Recognize the importance of the county's existing neighborhoods and to 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

### Red - 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.

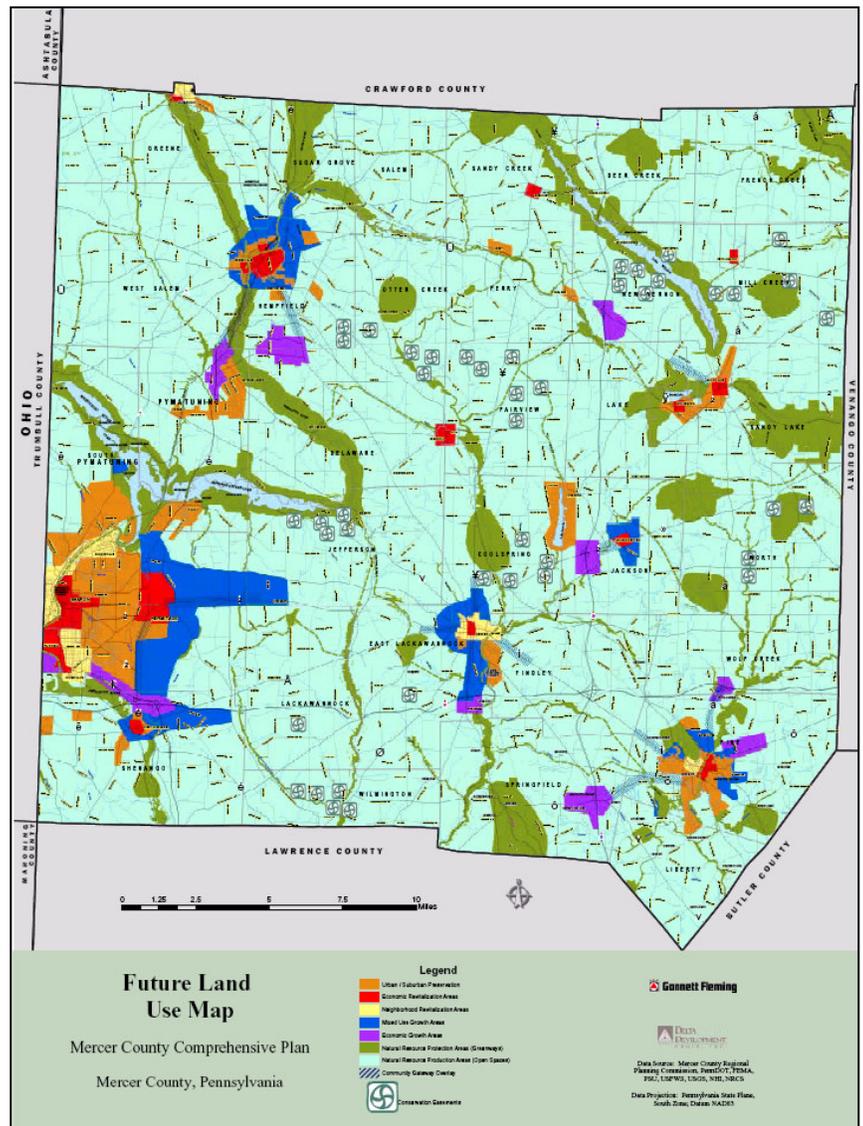
### Yellow - Neighborhood Revitalization Areas

**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, Neighborhood commercial

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





**Blue - Mixed Use Growth Areas**

**Purpose:** Provide for targeted growth 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:** Fredonia, Jackson Center, Jamestown, Sandy Lake, and Stoneboro Boroughs

**Purple – 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, interchange areas, 2004 Target Assessment Sites.

**Hatch Pattern – 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 roadway.

**Primary Uses:** Agricultural, residential, office, recreation

**Secondary Uses:** Public Facilities/Utilities, local commercial

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

**Dark Green – Natural Resource Protection Areas**

**Purpose:** Protect the county’s most sensitive natural resources.

**Primary Uses:** Functioning land and water natural systems

**Secondary Uses:** Limited public recreation

**Locations:** Steep slopes, floodplains, Natural Heritage Inventory sites, State Parks and Gamelands

**Light Green – 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

A more thorough discussion of future land use is found in Chapter 4 of the Comprehensive Plan.

“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, agricultural, 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)

## Priority Initiatives for Implementation

Four priority initiatives have been identified for Mercer County to begin the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan. They are presented here in an abbreviated form along with the basis for their inclusion. The initiatives tie the priority action items together from each of the planning elements to address county-wide issues. They also provide the framework for achieving desirable growth and resource conservation. The initiatives are:

- ❖ Planning and Ordinance Leadership and Development Assistance
- ❖ Infrastructure Maintenance and Strategic Expansion
- ❖ Economic and Neighborhood Revitalization
- ❖ Natural Resource Protection

The action items that were the basis for determining the priority initiatives are found in Chapter 4 of the Comprehensive Plan. They are summarized in a matrix at the beginning of the chapter and then discussed in greater detail in the main body.



### 1 Planning and Ordinance Leadership and Development Assistance

**Adopt and implement the County Comprehensive Plan, the Open Space Plan, and the Long Range Transportation Plan.**

**Basis:**

- ❖ Provides a Mercer County Land Use Vision
- ❖ Provides guidance for natural and historic resource protection
- ❖ Addresses need for proactive, long-range transportation planning
- ❖ Identifies potential funding sources for a variety of infrastructure improvements
- ❖ Prioritizes revitalization of neighborhoods and traditional economic centers of the County

### Implement a county-level GIS System

**Basis:**

- ❖ Provides a much needed data analysis tool for a variety of Mercer County organizations.
- ❖ Allows for more accurate identification of natural, historic, and cultural resources
- ❖ Allows for better monitoring of several Mercer County indicators, including changes in land use

**Provide technical guidance to local officials by assisting with the development of local ordinances, design guidelines, and regional comprehensive plans.**

**Basis:**

- ❖ Modernize local ordinances
- ❖ Focuses on higher quality built environment and protecting the natural environment
- ❖ Ensures greater consistency throughout the county

### 2 Infrastructure Maintenance and Strategic Expansion

**Prioritize maintenance and improvements to existing infrastructure in the county's older communities when budgeting limited financial resources.**

**Basis:**

- ❖ Protects historic investment in the county's infrastructure, including sewer, water, and transportation
- ❖ Allows for infill development in the county's cities and boroughs by addressing DEP consent orders first





**Be strategic when considering infrastructure expansion investments to ensure consistency with targeted growth areas and community objectives.**

**Basis:**

- ❖ Prioritizes and focuses expansion projects
- ❖ Helps to minimize sprawl development
- ❖ Reflects the desire for incorporating smart growth principles

### 3 Economic and Neighborhood Revitalization

**Prioritize revitalization efforts in Mercer County's traditional downtowns and older neighborhoods when providing technical, financial, and grant writing assistance to local officials and community groups.**

**Basis:**

- ❖ Consistent with target growth concepts
- ❖ Protects traditional neighborhoods and downtown centers
- ❖ Protects natural resources by discouraging sprawl

**Promote economic diversity through the support of downtown revitalization, natural resource based industries and new industries that can take advantage of the county's accessibility, work force, and cultural and historic assets.**

**Basis:**

- ❖ Provides additional economic stability over the long term
- ❖ Provides existing and potential new businesses with skilled labor force

- ❖ Encourages new ideas for agriculture and forestry industries
- ❖ Takes advantage of trends and interest in heritage tourism and outdoor recreation

### 4 Natural Resource Protection

**Protect Mercer County's most sensitive natural resources by targeting growth, developing appropriate land use ordinances, and encouraging environmentally sensitive site design for new development.**

**Basis:**

- ❖ Provides protection for sensitive features, including water ways, woodlands, and prime agricultural soils
- ❖ Discourages sprawl

**Encourage public/private partnerships to protect the county's environmental resources by providing technical and financial support for the efforts of the many organizations currently working in Mercer County.**

**Basis:**

- ❖ Provides additional sources of needed funding
- ❖ Encourages sense of community



# Detailed Plans and Supporting Studies

The Mercer County Comprehensive Plan Update process resulted in five separate volumes:

- ❖ Volume 1 – Technical Background Studies
- ❖ Volume 2 – The Comprehensive Plan
- ❖ Volume 3 – The Long Range Transportation Plan
- ❖ Volume 4 – The Greenways, Open Space and Rural Recreation Plan
- ❖ Volume 5 – Supporting Studies

## Volume 1- Technical Background Studies

This volume includes eight individual profiles that correspond to the planning elements required by the MPC. They provide a “snapshot” of Mercer County in 2004-05. Census data, interviews, and other relevant research was used to provide an understanding of where the county is today.

The profiles include:

- ❖ Natural Resources
- ❖ Socioeconomic
- ❖ Housing
- ❖ Economics
- ❖ Cultural Resources
- ❖ Land Use
- ❖ Transportation
- ❖ Community Facilities and Services.

## Volume 2 – The Comprehensive Plan

In addition to the Future Land Use Map and Plan, this volume also contains separate action plans for each of the elements listed above except a Transportation Plan, which has been expanded into the county’s Long Range Plan and is under separate cover. Priority strategies for each planning element are summarized in matrix form for quick reference. The matrices also include recommendations for lead and support organizations,

as well as potential funding sources. Additional medium and longer range strategies are also presented. The Comprehensive Plan also introduces the concept of “Community Indicators” as a way to measure the county’s success in achieving the goals and objectives of the plan. Indicators are basically numeric measures of a community’s well-being and are organized around the plan elements. These indicators are based on data collected in the Technical Background Studies and will be monitored over time to determine if implemented strategies are having a positive effect.

## Volume 3 – Long Range Transportation Plan

In 2003, the Mercer County Regional Planning Commission (MCRPC) 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 as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Corridors of Countywide Significance**

	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



The municipalities directly served by the primary corridor roadway defined the corridors. Thus, the I-79 Corridor would include not only the interstate, but other transportation facilities such as US 19 and BicyclePA Route A. Two of the corridors - I-79 and I-80 - are covered at a more strategic level as part of PennDOT's previous LRTP - PennPlan.

In developing the corridor profiles, MCRPC drew from a variety of sources, including the 2000 Census data, stakeholder meetings, an FHWA safety field view, and key person interviews.

The plan includes a list of candidate projects, as well as a financial plan.

### Volume 4 - The Greenways, Open Space, and Rural Recreation Plan

Mercer County's Greenways, Open Space, and Rural Recreation Plan addresses the need to plan and manage open spaces and to provide recreational opportunities for the health, safety and well-being of county residents. A plan of similar scope was developed in the 1970s. Since then, the county comprehensive plan has been the guiding policy document for natural resource protection and recreation in coordination with community development policies.

The plan was developed to ensure that:

- ❖ open space under public and private ownership preserves the functions of sensitive natural resource systems,
- ❖ local communities remain connected with the natural and cultural features that define them and the region,
- ❖ open space for active and passive recreation remains accessible to all residents, and
- ❖ the recreational needs of rural residents are met.

In addition, the Pennsylvania Department of Natural Resource encourages counties to develop open space, greenways and recreation plans in response to land development trends and planning code requirements for recreational services. *The Pennsylvania's Greenways: An Action Plan for Creating Connections* initiative aims to connect Pennsylvania's open space, natural landscape features; scenic, cultural, historic, and recreation sites; and urban and rural communities

through direct state investment and through public and public-private partnerships. The Mercer County Greenways, Open Space and Rural Recreation Plan is consistent with this initiative.

The Greenways, Open Space, and Rural Recreation Plan begins with an introduction to the county and the region in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 inventories the county's current open space resources and recreation facilities and Chapter 3 identifies the organizations working in the fields of resource management and recreation and evaluates their policies and programs. Chapter 4 compares residents' need for recreation and open space to the available facilities. Chapter 5 presents Mercer County's vision and goals for open space, greenways and recreation. Chapter 6 presents an action plan to improve management of current open space and recreation resources and finally, Chapter 7 outlines tools, resources and funding sources to facilitate implementation of the plan, including descriptions, eligibility and contact information on technical and financial assistance programs

### Volume 5 - Supporting Studies

Two additional documents were prepared in conjunction with the Comprehensive Plan: The Target Location Assessment and a Design Guide.

The Target Location Assessment was used to further document the need to prepare additional property for economic development and to select particular sites for the county to focus its resources. The goal was to identify and rank three or four sites within Mercer County that could serve as a catalyst for implementing Strategy 1000 - preparing a new supply of shovel ready properties.

The Design Guide was prepared to assist municipal officials and county residents with visualizing the land use recommendations found in the Comprehensive Plan. It uses sketches and photographs to illustrate a variety of alternatives to the typical sprawl development that is becoming so prevalent.



In 1995/1996 the Mercer County Regional Planning Commission prepared the Mercer County Comprehensive Plan, Planning for Livable Communities. Its theme was making Mercer County communities a better place to live, work and play. This 2005 Mercer County Comprehensive Plan is an update to the 1995/96 Comprehensive Plan and recognizes that much has occurred in the intervening 10 years. The 2000 Census data is now available, major changes were made to the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code in 2000, and much progress has occurred in Mercer County.

This Updated Comprehensive Plan renews the vision for Mercer County – a vision that integrates our rural character with sound community development, a healthy economy, and coordinated public and private resource management to sustain and enhance our quality of life.

The Comprehensive Plan has incorporated many innovative techniques during the plan development process. Community indicators have been used to measure the community health and well being. Public involvement sessions have identified and prioritized community planning concerns and issues, as well as an

updated vision for the future. The plan also incorporates a new Long Range Transportation Plan for Mercer County, as well as a Target Location Assessment for identifying potential economic development sites in Mercer County.

The Comprehensive Plan includes action strategies that touch on every aspect of community life in Mercer County. These strategies create an agenda for creating change and managing future growth in the County. The Plan also provides strategies for protecting our natural resources and preserving the rural character of the County.

We hope you will find the Comprehensive Plan visionary and inspiring. As we look to the future, we believe it is filled with opportunities for the residents of Mercer County. We look forward to working with you to implement this plan and continue the theme of making Mercer County a better place to live, work and play.

**Mercer County Board of Commissioners**

- Brian Beader, Chair**
- Michele Brooks, Vice-Chair**
- Olivia M. Lazor**



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