

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Planning Needs

This *Northern Tier Coalition Comprehensive Plan* was undertaken by the governing bodies and planning commissions of the twelve participating municipalities in recognition of a number of principal critical community needs:

- to identify and inventory the changes which have taken place in the planning area over its development history, and particularly over the last ten years;
- to establish a framework for the conservation of the area's historic character, residential neighborhoods, open land, and environment while concurrently providing for sustainable growth and development;
- to provide a base for the evaluation and consideration of land use management tools, principally zoning ordinances and subdivision and land development regulations, to ensure current growth and development issues are addressed;

<p>NORTHERN TIER COALITION SUSQUEHANNA COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA PARTICIPATING MUNICIPALITIES (See Figure Introduction -1)</p>
<p>Apolacon Township Bridgewater Township Choconut Township Forest Lake Township Franklin Township Friendsville Borough Jessup Township Liberty Township Little Meadows Borough Middletown Township Rush Township Silver Lake Township</p>

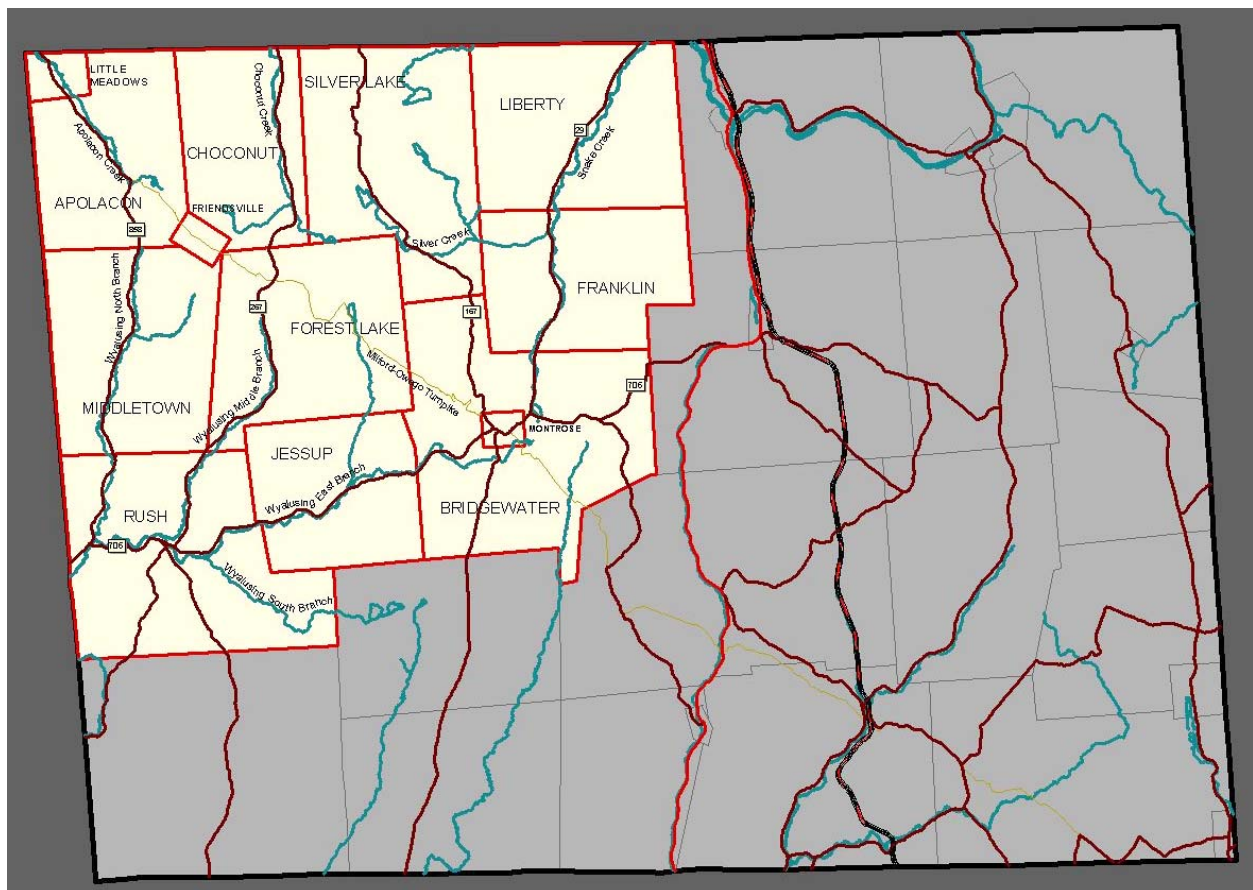


Figure - The NTC and Susquehanna County (RRIR)

- to organize for the most efficient administration of township government and the delivery of community facilities and services; and,
- to fully explore the possibilities and benefits of inter-municipal cooperation for providing facilities, services and administration.

Planning Process

The Northern Tier Coalition planning process is the first in Susquehanna County, and, in terms of land area and number of municipalities, the largest in Northeastern Pennsylvania to be conducted cooperatively under the recent amendments to the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code. The Code governs land use planning and land use management throughout the Commonwealth. The twelve municipalities, recognizing the changes occurring in the area, came together and organized the inter-municipal planning effort by a formal agreement adopted in accord with the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code and the Pennsylvania Intergovernmental Cooperation Act. Each municipality adopted an ordinance authorizing participation in the Coalition.

The Northern Tier Planning Committee, comprised of one Regular Representative and one Alternate Representative from each of the municipalities appointed by the respective governing body, conducted the planning process. Shepstone Management Company of Honesdale, Pennsylvania, and Community Planning and Management Associates of Paupack, Pennsylvania, provided professional assistance. Citizen participation included a community survey distributed to all registered voters in the twelve-municipality planning area, a series of community meetings, and the meetings and hearings required by the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code prior to the adoption of the *Plan*. The results of the community survey are included in the *Community Survey* section.

In short, the planning process involves finding the sometimes complex answers to three simple questions:

1. Where are we?
2. Where do we want to be?
3. How do we get there?

Where are we? – Background Information

The initial step in the process is the collection and analysis of information on a wide range of community characteristics and concerns aimed at defining the existing condition of the Coalition area and identifying planning implications. Much of this data was compiled by students from a Planning Conservation Class from Cornell University and reported in *A Rural Resource Inventory & Report for the Northern Tier Coalition of Susquehanna County (RRIR)*. Cornell's participation grew out of a number of projects in the Coalition area supported by the Edward L. Rose Conservancy. The Cornell Report provides much of the background information for the *Plan* and it is summarized in the *Findings* section of this *Comprehensive Plan*. The Cornell Report will serve the municipalities well as each proceeds to consider the adoption of land use management ordinances. The report really serves as the first phase of Northern Tier Coalition planning and called for continuation with a comprehensive plan for the twelve municipalities and adoption of land use management and special purpose ordinances.

Where do we want to be? - Goals & Objectives, Plans

The *Plan Goals and Objectives* are a vision of how residents and local officials expect the community to develop and evolve into the future. Objectives are specific actions which are designed to achieve goals and satisfy community needs. The *Goals and Objectives* were formulated by the Planning Committee based on the community survey, community meetings, and the findings. Based on this community vision and the needs identified in the planning process, the Planning Committee formulated the various plans to guide the future growth and development of the Northern Tier Coalition planning area including:

1. *Land Use, Natural Resource Conservation and Environmental Protection Plan*
2. *Community Facilities and Services Plan*
3. *Transportation Plan*
4. *Housing Plan*
5. *Capital Improvements Program*
6. *Official Map*
7. *Regional Planning and Intermunicipal Cooperation*
8. *Planning Process and Interrelationship of Plan Elements*

How do we get there? – Implementation Strategies

The specific means to effect the various plans are also included, and are detailed in the *Planning Process and Interrelationship of Plan Elements* section and discussed at various points in the various specific plans. In addition, and to facilitate on-going use of the *Plan*, the actions and the responsible entities required to carry out the *Plan's* expectations are summarized in a matrix titled *Implementation Strategies and Specific Actions*. Examples of *implementation strategies* include zoning ordinances, subdivision and land development ordinances, historic structures preservation, and capital improvement budgeting.

Need for Continued Planning

It is important to emphasize that a comprehensive plan should not simply be considered a *document on a shelf*, but instead, one element of a community management process dependent upon the attitude and on-going foresight of the public officials charged with the responsibility of guiding the growth and development of the community. A comprehensive plan is a starting point - a blueprint to guide the future development of the twelve-municipality NTC area and should be revised and updated periodically to reflect changing conditions, attitudes, situations, and goals of the community. The success of the planning program will be measured only in the form of accomplishment. The effectuation of the plan will be the responsibility of the area's residents. It will require public support and positive action by the Township Boards of Supervisors and Borough Councils.

Planning Issues Overview

Every community is unique in terms of community character and development concerns. Geographically, the Northern Tier Coalition (NTC) planning area encompasses the northwest section of Susquehanna County and this position has been key to shaping the area's character and will continue to effect its future growth and development. Interstate Route 81 which traverses the County just to the east of the planning area. provides easy access to both the Scranton, PA and Binghamton, NY metropolitan areas, where many NTC area residents work, shop and find personal services such as health care. The northern border of the planning area lies within easy access to NYS Route 17 for connection to the Binghamton area. Although parts of the NTC area are relatively close to these densely developed areas, most of the twelve-municipality area, remains undeveloped. The municipalities in the southwestern corner of the

planning area are even more distant from metropolitan areas.

Little concentrated or large scale commercial development is found in the NTC area, with the greatest number and size of businesses located in Bridgewater Township around the Borough of Montrose and particularly along Route 706. Commercial development is also found concentrated to a lesser extent in Friendsville and Little Meadows, with many other businesses scattered throughout the planning area. Single-family dwellings are the predominate type of residential development with greater densities in the two boroughs and small unincorporated villages, and a number of mobile home parks and larger planned residential subdivisions. While agriculture has declined in economic importance, it remains an important element of the rural working landscape. Timber harvesting also continues to be an integral part of the productive use of open lands and bluestone quarrying has regained economic importance.

The population changes in the twelve municipalities have been mixed with several declining in population, several holding steady and several increasing. Nevertheless, given the amount of undeveloped land in the area, the attractive lifestyle associated with the rural character, and the planning area's relatively close proximity to urbanized and developing areas, continued long-term growth in population and number of housing units is expected for the NTC planning area as a whole. However, when compared to the growth being experienced by communities in Pike County and Monroe County from New Jersey and New York metropolitan areas, any growth will be very modest and the NTC planning area will remain rural for many years. The economic health and growth and development in the NTC area will also be affected by County and local efforts to bring new jobs to the County, a long-time need identified by many local residents.

In any case, change, whether growth or decline, will occur and this anticipated change presents to the municipalities the challenge of providing public services and facilities to meet the needs of the changing population. Rapid population increases can result in demand difficult to meet and a stagnant or declining population can present challenges related to a decreasing tax base and shrinking resources inadequate to maintain current services. Concurrently,

the local governments are responsible to ensure that growth and development occurs in accord with sound planning principles with the goal of preserving the environment and community character. In short, the citizens and public officials of the Northern Tier Coalition area must resolve the land use conflicts which result from the necessary balance between new development and need for facilities and services, and environmental protection and community character and open land conservation. The twelve municipalities working together provide a clear advantage to meeting the challenge.

This combination of growth and development issues clearly demonstrates the critical need for this *Comprehensive Plan* and consideration of new and innovative land use management techniques. A subdivision and land development ordinance and a zoning ordinance can play a vital role in the growth and development planning program by directing residential and commercial development to the areas best suited for such development and requiring adequate community facilities and infrastructure. Each individual municipality must choose its direction, and continue to work cooperatively within the area to accomplish the goals of the *Plan*.