



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Visions for the 21st Century

THE MIFFLIN COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2014

April 24, 2014

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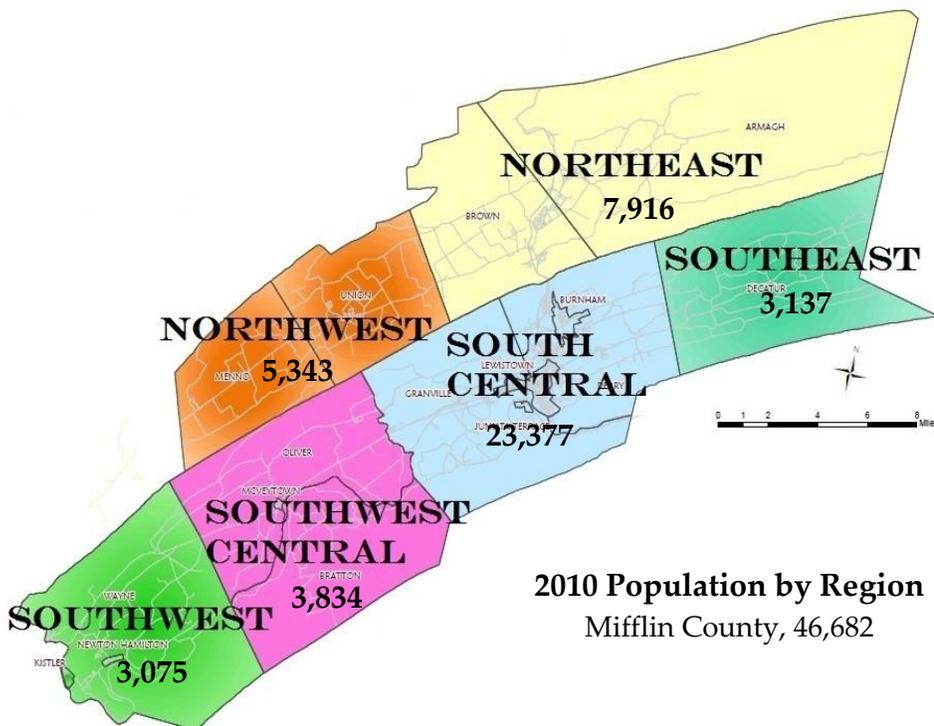
Paths and Bridges to the 21st Century, the County's Comprehensive Plan adopted in 2000, has served the County well, providing a sound blueprint for community and economic development initiatives. Specifically, its policies have supported infrastructure improvements, service extensions, and additional planning efforts led or supported by County departments. The Plan has provided the foundation for the County's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program, an important funding source for water and sewer improvements and service extensions; parks; housing rehabilitation; road maintenance and economic development.

While we face many of the same issues today as we did at the turn of the century, new issues and opportunities have emerged. *Visions* updates our policies and potential actions for addressing local issues in the areas of land use, transportation, economic development, housing, public utilities and services, and natural and cultural resource conservation to ensure that Mifflin County offers a great place to live and work, to raise a family and to retire.

Our success in addressing our issues and opportunities will depend on the County's leadership and the cooperation and support of various partners. Read on to see how we intend to conserve our character and develop our communities toward a more prosperous future for all who call Mifflin County home.

Mifflin County by the Numbers

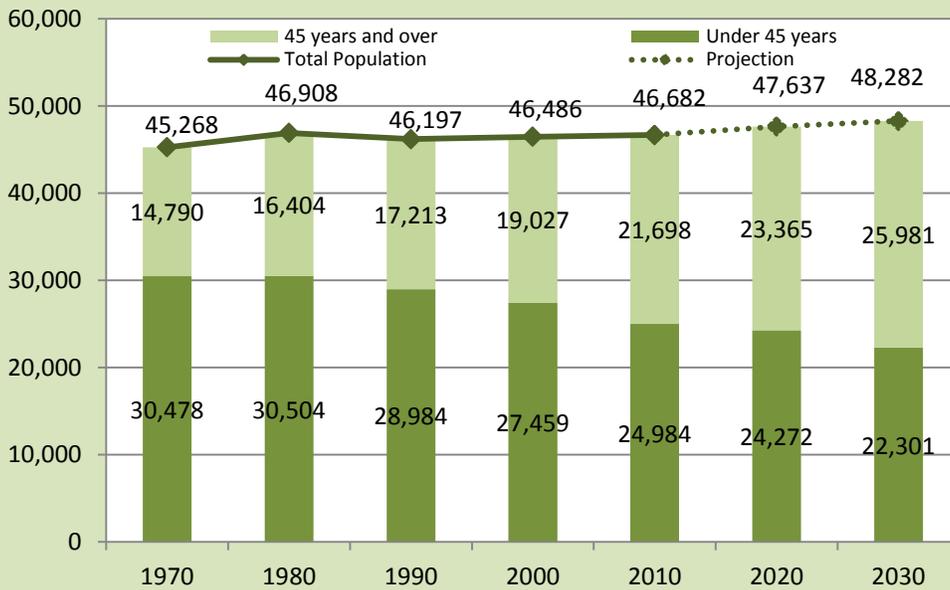
Our population in 2010 was 46,682 persons. This figure has grown slowly—less than 1% growth in each of the past two decades. The Northwest (Menno and Union Townships) and Southeast (Decatur Township) planning regions had the largest numeric and largest rate increases, while the South Central (Greater Lewistown) region lost population. Although overall growth was slow, there is one sizeable development, Blossom Hill (Derry Township), still under construction and another, Quillas Creek (Brown Township), still in the planning stages. As these homes are completed and occupied, local and county populations will increase. If the developments are successful, other large developments may follow. Reuse and redevelopment of underutilized and blighted properties in Lewistown could stabilize the population in the South Central region.



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In 2010, our percentage of seniors (65 years and older) was 19% and rising. The trend in growth among mature and older residents was actually much broader. All age groups 45 years and older grew in number from 2000 to 2010, while all age groups 44 years and younger, with one exception,

Mifflin County Population History and Projection, 2020 and 2030



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Mifflin County Planning and Development Department, 2013

declined. The County expects this trend of a growing older population to continue and to have specific impacts on housing, transportation, and community service needs.

An older population is reflected in declining household sizes – an average of 2.46 persons per household in 2010, resulting in potential demand for some smaller housing units and increased demand on services, e.g. transportation, once provided by family or household members.

Our economy and employment are led by a few key industries. Manufacturing employed the most resident workers in the County in 2010, followed by education, health care and social services, and retail trade. Both manufacturing and agriculture and natural resource industries were among the six industries with stronger employment trends than the state, 2006-2010.

Mifflin County had strong local employment (residents working here, not elsewhere) but inbound commuters competed better for local jobs, increasing their share of jobs from 31% in 2006 to 36% in 2010. Comparatively fewer residents with a college education versus surrounding counties may have been a factor and contributed to the smallest 10-year increase in median household income, which remains the lowest in the region. Given these numbers, it's no surprise that citizens ranked employment opportunities, small and large business development and workforce training and retraining as top priorities in the 2011 Quality of Life Citizen Survey.



Top 5 Industries of Resident Employment

Industry	Mifflin
Civilian employed population 16 years and over	19,375
Manufacturing	24.50%
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	22.90%
Retail trade	11.90%
Construction	6.20%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	6.00%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-10 American Community Survey

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Because We Value Our Long-Standing Community Character, We Need to Actively Conserve its Many Facets



Agriculture

All three valley landscapes—the Kishacoquillas Creek Valley or Big Valley, the Ferguson Valley, and the Juniata River Valley—are predominantly used for agriculture. These 66,484 acres of farmland embody cultural, economic, and environmental value. Culturally, these farmlands connect us to the earliest settlers who chose Mifflin County over other locations for their farms and to the idea of self-sufficiency. Economically, they produce crops and livestock totaling more than \$86 million (2007). Environmentally, farmland plays a vital role, providing habitat for wildlife and a pervious soil surface for infiltration and groundwater recharge. Farmland gives Mifflin County its scenic character and contributes greatly to its quality of life. Development puts pressure on the agricultural landscape when it clears the vegetation used

by wildlife for food and shelter, introduces residences and the potential for complaints, and covers the surface and concentrates stormwater. To date, 2,295 acres of farmland have been preserved from development by the Mifflin County Agricultural Land Preservation Board. Leaders will need to decide how aggressively to manage growth and protect farmland from development and its impacts.

Plain Sect Community

Mifflin County is home to the second largest settlement of Amish church districts in Pennsylvania and the 9th largest in all of North America. Within the County, the estimated Amish population in 2010 was 2,760, representing about 6% of the total population. The large families and limited use of government services by Amish, Mennonite and Brethren citizens – the Plain Sect – are of special interest to planners. While they shy away from public affairs, the Plain Sect relies heavily on highway and rail facilities. They use hospitals for emergency medical care and are sensitive to the increasing cost of health care. And they comply with building and agricultural regulations. Changes to any of these public and community facilities, services or policies affect these citizens. Consideration for their values and practices should be given as community and business leaders evaluate change.

The Twelve Largest Amish Settlements in North America (approximate, as of July 2010)

Settlement	Church Districts	Estimated Population
1. Holmes County Area, OH	227	29,510
2. Lancaster County Area, PA	179	29,535
9. Mifflin County Area, PA	23	2,760
11. Indiana County Area, PA	18	2,395
12. New Wilmington Area, PA	18	2,285

Note: The number of people in a church district varies by settlement. Therefore, one settlement may have more districts than another yet fewer people than another.

Sources: Raber's *Almanac*, Amish publications, annual migration report in *The Diary*, state and regional settlement directories, and informants in various settlements.





Long, Forested Ridges

Long, forested ridges are the counterpoint to our agricultural valleys. The forested lands of Reeds Gap State Park, Bald Eagle, Rothrock and Tuscarora State Forests, and State Game Lands in Derry, Decatur, Oliver and Granville Townships total nearly 70,000 acres. With another 103,000 acres of private forest primarily on the ridges, forestland covers nearly 2/3 of the County. Like agriculture, forestland performs vital environmental functions, is productive economically, and has cultural value. The high quality, cold water fisheries classification given and Important Bird Area designations are due in large part to the forested ridges. Forestlands in Mifflin County contribute \$65 million to the economy each year, according to a mid-2000s Penn State report. With approximately 40 forest-related businesses and more than 1,000 employees, clearly forestland has economic value. And it's sustainable. Finally, nature-based recreation generates spending on food, gear, and other supplies in our local economy and provides health and wellness benefits to our residents and visitors. For some, quick access to the forest is so important that seasonal homes and cabins amid the trees have increased each year.

River and Stream Valleys

Finally, the Juniata River and all of its tributary streams round out our landscape with historic and seasonal attributes. The streams powered the mills that processed and refined the grain, lumber and iron that were then floated downstream to market or later carried up- or downstream on the Juniata Division of the Pennsylvania Canal between Pittsburgh and Philadelphia. Today, the waterways' primary uses are recreational, offering fishing in coldwater streams and the warm water river, as well as canoeing and kayaking to locals and visitors.



Manufacturing

Because of its location along the Juniata Division of the Pennsylvania Canal, later replaced by the railroad, communities in Mifflin County were well suited to host manufacturing operations. Today, manufacturing continues to employ the largest percentage of workers in the County but operations are quite different from the past. Manufacturers use more automation, larger spaces, and fewer employees, which translates to larger facilities and fewer jobs. Fortunately, the industry is diversified across wood, metal, nonmetallic mineral, plastic and rubber materials, including GE Inspection Technologies, Sumitomo Metals Industries (formerly Standard Steel), First Quality Enterprises, Philips Ultrasound, Trinity Plastics, and various fence, cabinet and pallet companies.



We Recognize Emerging Issues and Opportunities

Improved Highway Access

The completion of the Narrows project has reduced travel time to the Capital Region but access to the interstate system in adjacent Centre County is still a barrier to better economic opportunities for Mifflin County and its residents. This connection remains the County's number one transportation priority and one for which coordination with the Centre County and SEDA-COG Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) will be needed. At the same time, there are safety and circulation issues for both motorized and non-motorized travel, as well as public transportation options, throughout the County that should be addressed promptly.



Potential for Wind Energy and Gas Production

Over the past 10 years, Pennsylvania has contributed to American energy production through the development of wind and natural gas based energy production facilities. At present, only the wind industry has an active interest in Mifflin County. The Marcellus Shale formation, which underlines northern and western Pennsylvania, is not found here, but a deeper shale gas formation, the Utica, does lie beneath us. While both wind and natural gas reduce our dependence on foreign oil and “dirty” fossil fuels, they also impact our communities at the intersection of technology and the environment. As these industries approach Mifflin County, elected officials will need to guide such development to protect public health, safety and welfare based on the best available information.

Our Aging Population

The 2010 census brought to light the fact that our population is growing among those 45 years and older, and declining among younger age groups. This demographic shift represents a number of potential changes in the County's future. Older households are typically smaller. With fewer children at home, householders may look to downsize from a large single family home to a smaller (even an attached or multi-family) modern unit. The hundreds of applicants for the 31 units at Mann Edge Terrace was a testament to this demand. We also need to consider that seniors are more active in retirement than past



generations; they engage in recreational fitness and sports, and travel more, thus they want access to local, regional and long-distance travel options. Finally, we can expect our health care system to grow to meet the needs of seniors in Mifflin County and surrounding areas. The recent merger of Lewistown Hospital with Geisinger Health Systems and a proposed Life Sciences Campus in Derry Township, which together with other medical and health services, will operate as a federally qualified health network, demonstrates the industry's forecast for health care needs in the County.

More Modern Housing across all Types

Mature families and seniors aren't the only ones looking for modern homes. Newly relocated professional, e.g. doctors, look for modern units near their employers. Young families with school age children look for homes that don't require a lot of renovation and are located near parks and schools. With numbers of school age children declining, new schools aren't likely but more parks and trails could provide focus for new or redeveloping residential neighborhoods. People in transition or supported by social services are more successful citizens when they have safe, stable housing. Housing that is affordable often doesn't meet code and therefore isn't eligible for housing assistance programs, resulting in continued reliance on shelters, families, and friends, which don't offer the same stability. Modern efficiencies, such as small apartments, are needed to help these people reach their potential as County citizens.



Challenges in Providing Community Service



Providing public or community services is a moving target these days. On the supply side, funding and regulations are ever changing, forcing agencies to review and revise their activities and budgets and distracting them from providing their service and improving efficiency. On the demand side, expectations for levels of service and quality of service rise as residents from more urban areas relocate to the County. The situation is further challenged by dispersed residences in rural areas. The school district consolidation was the most recent hurdle, but water and sewer systems are examples of other services that may face consolidations of administrative tasks or service areas as budgets tighten.

Coordination of Assistance Services

The circumstances of unemployment, homelessness, hunger, and alcohol/drug addiction are often interrelated. Addressing one condition is insufficient and may in fact draw resources away from other needed assistance. Public and private partners in Mifflin County are working together with the leadership of the Coalition of HOPES to leverage assistance services and funding to meet local needs in a progressive way. Through this local coordination, residents are moving from assistance toward independence.



With Sound Policies, We Renew Our Priorities

The Commissioners and County Departments remain committed to smart growth principles that include a balanced approach to development. This strategy takes into consideration the preservation of natural resources while constructively maintaining and encouraging housing, infrastructure, transportation choices and economic development.

Improve Travel Connections and Circulation

1. Support the South Central Centre County Transportation Improvement Plan to improve highway access between Centre and Mifflin Counties to enhance the County's economic competitiveness.
2. Seek funds to improve bridges, rail crossings, interchanges, and access roads to business and industrial parks to improve safety and attract business.
3. Work with transportation and social service agencies to provide public transportation services for all ages and abilities.

Locally,...

- ◇ Review/Revise signal timing at the Walnut Street/Valley Street intersection.
- ◇ Monitor operations and safety performance at the Charles Street/Dorcas Street intersection.
- ◇ Assess circulation and operations in the Greater Lewistown area; develop an improvement plan.
- ◇ Increase the turn radii of Three Cent Lane at PA 655.
- ◇ Implement traffic control of Mill Road at Electric Avenue.
- ◇ Expand bicycle and pedestrian networks like the Kish Riverwalk through transportation projects and the land development process.
- ◇ Undertake access management improvements along US 522.
- ◇ Replace non-standard traffic control and safety signage.



Improve Competitiveness for Industry

1. Devote county staff, perhaps part-time, to coordinate economic development efforts.
2. In coordination with economic development partners, prioritize sites to be used for light, "clean" industry, considering rail and highway access as well as utilities.
3. Develop financial incentives to encourage economic development.

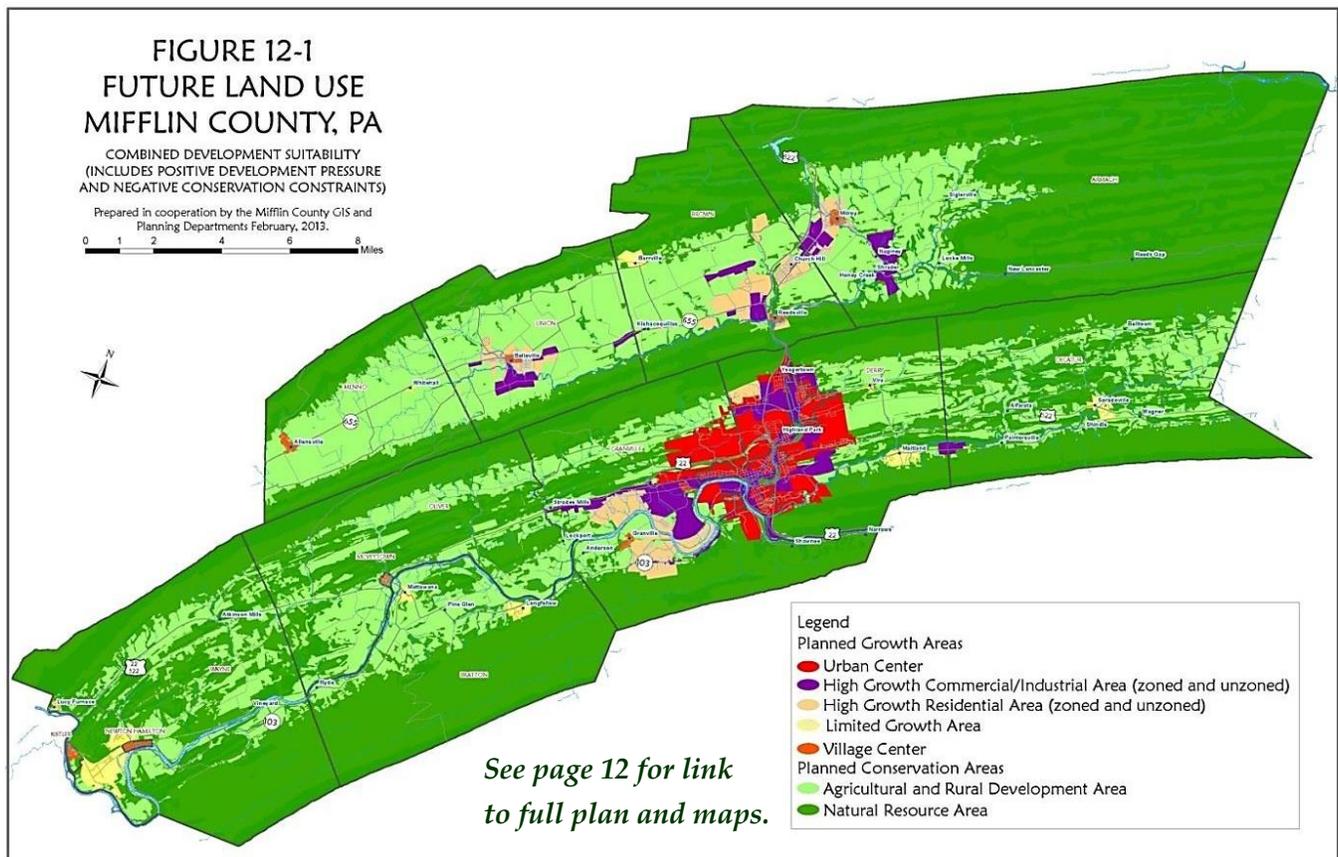
Enhance Housing Choices

1. Continue housing rehabilitation and accessibility efforts, improving the safety, efficiency and quality of housing overall.
2. Encourage the development of modern *affordable* housing for seniors and low/moderate income residents and modern *market rate* housing for the general population, particularly through incentivized reuse/redevelopment.
3. Support the coordination of housing and social services among county and non-profit agencies.



Guide Urban and Suburban Development to Areas served by Public Infrastructure

1. Stimulate re-use and redevelopment of urban centers and villages through education and targeted incentives; educate officials on relevant moderate density, mixed use and conservation subdivision techniques and encourage the use of incentives to apply them in priority locations.
2. Strengthen the County's Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance, so that new development and property improvements contribute to the overall improvement of the community.
3. Minimize fragmentation and other development impacts in planned conservation areas.



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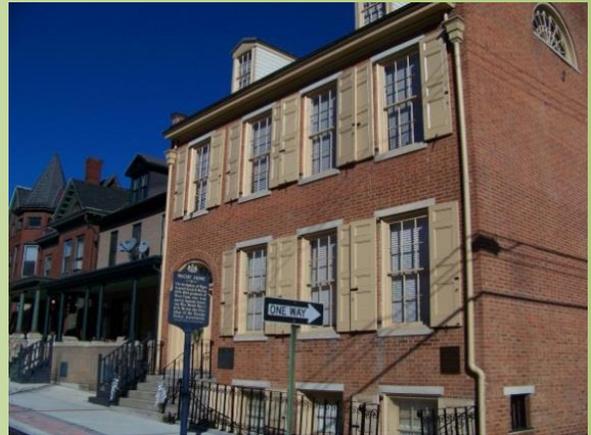
Improve Efficiency in Public Services and Utilities

1. Promote consolidation of local emergency services.
2. Support extension of water, sewer, broadband and natural gas service within the planned growth area; support interconnection of water and regionalization of wastewater systems where desirable.
3. Encourage updates of Act 537 Sewage Facilities Plans and on-lot sewage disposal management programs to anticipate plan service areas and protect groundwater.
4. Support expanded recycling programs.



Elevate the Importance of Heritage

1. Update and expand upon the Historical Sites Survey–Mifflin County, 1978, especially in areas of development pressure; conserve most resources with standards; prioritize a select few for true preservation.
2. Promote historic districts where appropriate, i.e. Lewistown.
3. Recognize historic transportation systems of all modes; nominate those that are especially significant as Pennsylvania Byways.



Protect Critical Open Space in Communities and in the Rural Landscape

1. Protect steep slopes, floodplains, wetlands, riparian areas, wildlife habitat, and ridge tops from development and its impacts; provide model regulations.
2. Preserve contiguous open space; interconnect protected lands and waterways where feasible; support public access where appropriate.
3. Establish a local land trust or conservancy; provide public information and support for voluntary easements.
4. Foster the development of parks, boat launches, and scenic byways for residents and visitors.

Implementation by Mifflin County and Municipalities



The Board of Commissioners is ultimately responsible for implementation of the comprehensive plan. The Commissioners and their service departments will need to review the plan's priorities and the resources available to take the next steps.

Yet the needs of our county will not be answered by County action alone. The County will need to partner with municipal, community and private leaders to leverage the funding, knowledge and expertise to make efficient and coordinated investments to maintain and improve our quality of life in Mifflin County.

Collaboration will be needed for the following recommendations.

For Economic Development

- Reestablish the Mifflin County Economic Development Committee (the former Team Mifflin County).
- Revitalize downtowns and villages.
- Designate new sites for business and industry; adjust zoning, as needed.
- Use tax abatement tools, in partnership with municipalities and the school district, to attract business.

For Transportation

- Maintain a list of transportation needs for all types, sizes and modes of travel.
- Expand requirements for new development to include bicycle, pedestrian, and transit facilities in planned growth areas.

For Housing

- Provide consistent code enforcement and enact rental inspection, where applicable.
- Offer incentives for private housing rehabilitation.
- Encourage CDBG entitlement communities to undertake housing rehabilitation.

For Community Facilities and Services

- Revitalize the Mifflin County Council of Governments for shared local government services
- Encourage municipal participation in the Mifflin County Parks and Recreation Council for recreational development and promotion.

- Regionalize or share community safety services where feasible and desirable.
- Support fire protection with dry hydrants and a fire tax.
- Update Act 537 Sewage Facilities Plans; extend water and sewer service within the planned growth area; consider on-lot sewage disposal management.
- Expand recycling programs.
- Promote sound stormwater management practices; improve stormwater ordinances.

For Land Use and Development

- Strengthen municipal subdivision and land development ordinances and zoning ordinances.
- Allow mixed use and conservation development techniques as appropriate.
- Encourage adoption of the county's model ordinances for special uses, e.g. wind turbines, natural gas
- Use all of the authorized planning tools to manage land use, development and conservation toward county and local goals.

For Natural and Cultural Resource Conservation

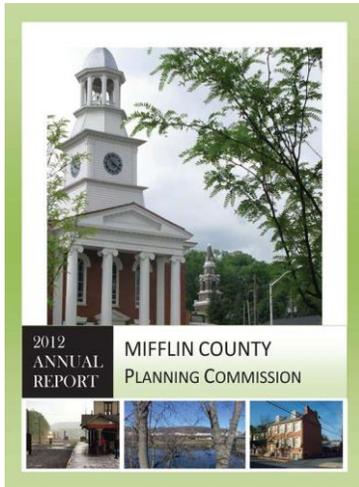
- Protect, connect, and buffer natural resources with regulations and support for easements.
- Work with PennDOT to designate scenic byways to promote conservation and tourism.
- Update historic resource inventories in planned growth areas; integrate aspects of historic development into local development standards or incentives.

Citizen Support

Consider how you might become more involved in the development and conservation of Mifflin County and its quality of life.

1. Serve on your local or county planning commission. Contact your municipality or the Mifflin County Planning and Development Department.
2. Volunteer your time and skills with agencies working to meet local and countywide needs.
3. Support public agencies, private business, and non-profits serving local and countywide needs with your financial contributions and patronage.

How We'll Know Planning Is Working



Evidence of the comprehensive plan's implementation will be found in the Mifflin County Planning Commission Annual Report. The Planning Commission takes care to report on the County's community and economic

development projects and celebrate the County's accomplishments. Ultimately, these changes should enable residents to say that they live a fulfilling modern 21st century life in Mifflin County.

For More Information

View the full plan at www.co.mifflin.pa.us/PlanningandDevelopment/Pages/ComprehensivePlanning.aspx

or at the Mifflin County Planning and Development Department
20 North Wayne St. Lewistown, PA 17044
Phone: 717-242-0887

Visions, the Mifflin County Comprehensive Plan, 2014

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