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Introduction

Purpose and Requirements of the Comprehensive Plan

The Comprehensive Plan is a policy guide for the continuing development of the Town of Bloomsburg over the next ten years. The plan provides a vision of community life as a vibrant riverside community of citizens, businesses, and community and University partners, and establishes policies for improvement toward that vision over the next ten years. Moreover, it provides a foundation for land use and development regulations, investment decisions, and partnerships with government bodies and organizations that can help the Town reach its goals.

The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code, Act 247 of 1968, as reenacted and amended, requires the Comprehensive Plan to consider and plan for many factors that influence a community. It evaluates the existing conditions of the natural and manmade environments and markets, including land use, transportation system, housing, community facilities and services, and natural and cultural resources, primarily within the municipal boundaries, but also in the context of the surrounding area and region. The Comprehensive Plan projects future community and economic growth trends and considers their impacts on the community. Most importantly, the Comprehensive Plan recommends a future land use plan, infrastructure investments, and service improvements to accommodate and guide expected growth while protecting the area's natural and cultural resources consistent with the municipality's vision of its future character. To assist in the Implementation of the comprehensive plan, recommended partners, funding sources and a schedule of priorities are noted.

"If you don't have a picture of where your community wants to go, all the decisions just kind of get made without a purpose."

Jeff Soule,
Policy Director
American
Planning
Association

The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code, Act of 1968, P.L. 805, No. 247 as reenacted and amended empowers local municipalities ...

... to plan for their physical development.

... to develop a "blueprint" for housing, transportation, community facilities and utilities, and land use.

... to establish community development goals and objectives that guide future growth and development.

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The Comprehensive Plan can...

- Form consensus on a vision for the Town's ten-year future and corresponding goals for the various elements of community and economic development.
- Engage local officials and community residents in a planning process to develop policies that address quality of life issues locally and in the surrounding region.
- Address growth and development trends and issues with innovative solutions.
- Provide a realistic projection of future land use scenarios based on current patterns and proposed strategies for a more desirable and sustainable future.
- Establish consistency between future land use policies, land use and land development regulations, infrastructure investments, and conservation policies.
- Assist state, county, and municipal officials in their decision-making process by establishing the Town's needs and priorities.
- Outline feasible areas for cooperation and partnership among government bodies and stakeholder organizations.

The Comprehensive Plan cannot...

- Act as land use regulation; land use is regulated by zoning ordinances and maps.
- Require new standards for development and construction; subdivision and land development ordinances regulate these topics.
- Determine what land will be developed; this is a property owner's decision.
- Determine what land will be owned by the public sector or by private owners.

As a policy document, the Comprehensive Plan does not change or establish new requirements or standards. It may however recommend that these planning tools be revised to guide the development of a more cohesive and sustainable community. It is through the implementation of the plan's recommendations, not the planning itself, that the quality of community development, resource conservation, and public services are sustained and/or improved.

Planning as an Ongoing Process

The Town of Bloomsburg has a long history of planning. While the early planning efforts that laid out the patterns of streets, blocks and public buildings were largely informal, the Town prepared its first formal development plan in 1947. Revised and updated plans were prepared in 1965 and 1974. In the 1980s, the Town prepared a revitalization study and proposal. This effort sparked an era of historic preservation and renovation for the downtown business district. It called for the designation of the historic district, the beautification of Main Street, and the creation of walking tours, all of which has been accomplished.

The Comprehensive Plan is intended to be a living document—a plan that Town Council implements, evaluates, and revises regularly to maintain it as a useful tool.

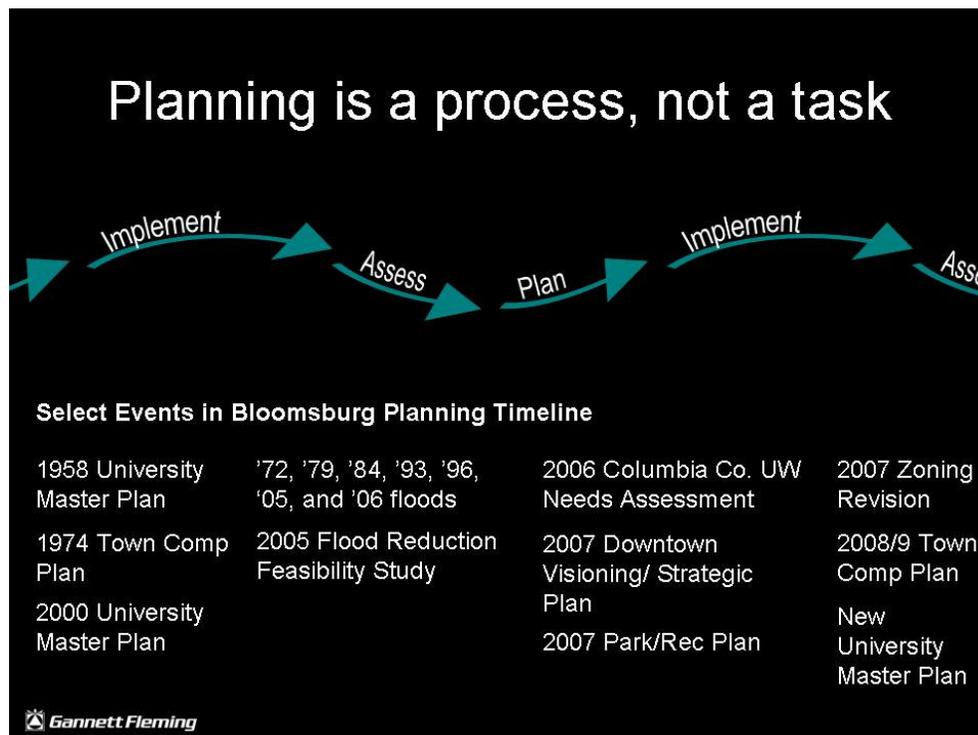


Diagram from the Stakeholder Workshop presentations held during the preparation of the Comprehensive Plan.

Recent planning efforts for Bloomsburg and the surrounding area have been completed by the Town, Columbia County, Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc., and other community organizations.

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- Severe and recurring flooding led to a flood reduction feasibility study by the Army Corps of Engineers in 2005; the engineering design and construction details for a system of levees and walls is now underway.
- In 2007, the Town completed a new Master Plan for the Bloomsburg Town Park to prioritize capital and volunteer investments in the development and maintenance of this beloved recreational destination.
- Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc. updated its visioning/strategic plan in 2007 as it matured from “Main Street Community” to “Achiever Community” status in the National Main Street Program.
- The widespread development of student housing projects prompted the Town to strengthen its zoning regulations to protect the livability of the Town for residents, both students and non-students, in 2007.
- Concern for the seemingly inadequate amount of parking in downtown raised support for a parking study, which was completed in early 2009. Its recommendations are found within.
- Shortly after this planning effort began, Bloomsburg University revisited its master plan with a focus on academic and program facilities.

These efforts will surely not be the end of planning in Bloomsburg and the surrounding area. New conditions, issues and opportunities, large and small, will require the Town’s attention. Leadership from the Town Council, staff, and citizens will emerge to take corrective and proactive steps to sustain the quality of life in Bloomsburg.

Relationship between the Comprehensive Plan and Other Plans

Bloomsburg’s 2009 Comprehensive Plan is a policy document that gives direction to Town Council, its appointed committees, and administrative staff on municipal regulation, codes and other planning efforts. The Comprehensive Plan makes recommendations that may affect the following municipal plans and regulations:

- Bloomsburg Act 537 Sewage Facilities Plan.
- Bloomsburg Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance.
- Bloomsburg Zoning Ordinance.
- Bloomsburg Hazard Mitigation Plan.

The Comprehensive Plan also recommends that the Town actively represent the planning area and participate in county and regional planning efforts that can benefit residents, such as:

- Columbia County Comprehensive Plan and Hazard Mitigation Plan.
- Columbia County Greenway and Open Space Plan.
- Susquehanna Greenway Plan.
- Act 167 Stormwater Management Plans.
- Susquehanna Economic Development Association - Council of Government (SEDA-COG) Transportation Plans.
- SEDA-COG's Valley Vision: 2020 A Plan for Pennsylvania's Heartland
- SEDA-COG's Revitalizing Rivertowns project.
- Middle Susquehanna Heritage Area Feasibility Study.

Overview of the Planning Process and Document

Technical Preparation

The technical preparation of the plan was conducted in three phases. The first phase developed a detailed understanding of the Town's current socio-economic and physical conditions. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau, current municipal and county comprehensive plans, and other regional plans and studies were referenced to analyze trends and issues in Bloomsburg. Spatial data from federal, state and county sources was used to illustrate these conditions through various inventory maps using geographic information systems (GIS) technology. This phase concluded with the production of eight profiles that characterize the physical, functional and demographic markets of Bloomsburg. These profiles and maps are located in the appendix and summarized in Chapter 2.

The second phase established the ten year vision for the Town. It characterized where future development and conservation should each be focused. It outlined goals and objectives for guiding growth through land use policies and the placement of physical infrastructure in support of the existing community and planned future growth, and for enhancing the local quality of life through community services. See Chapter 3 for the vision and goals. Chapter 3 also demonstrates consistency of the vision and goals with county planning policy.

A committee of Town representatives, including

- elected officials
- planning commission members
- code enforcement staff
- the Bloomsburg-Berwick Chamber of Commerce
- Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc.
- Bloomsburg University
- Bloomsburg Fair Association,
- and local citizens

oversaw the preparation of the comprehensive plan.

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Blueprint for Bloomsburg is organized around a citizen's perspective of community life.

The third and final phase translated the goals and objectives into a series of action plans organized around a citizen's perspective of community life.

- **Bloomsburg as Place**, Chapter 4, addresses the opportunities and constraints of Bloomsburg's location along US Route 11, near the confluence of Fishing Creek and Susquehanna River.
- **Living in Bloomsburg**, Chapter 5, presents topics related to housing, neighborhoods and community services.
- **Working and Doing Business in Bloomsburg**, Chapter 6, focuses on economic development.
- **Lifelong Learning in Bloomsburg**, Chapter 7, addresses the education and cultural enrichment of residents of all ages, including the workforce.
- **Relaxing and Visiting Bloomsburg**, Chapter 8, offers recommendations on recreation and tourism topics.

The recommendations contained in these action plans, once implemented, will advance the Town toward its vision. Particular emphasis was given to flood protection, circulation and parking, the impact and role of the University, gaps in housing choices, anticipated land use changes and land development patterns, their impacts on infrastructure needs such as sewer, water and transportation, and the need for effective community services, including recreation. Implementation partners, timelines, and tools were also identified. See Chapter 10 for the implementation schedule.

Public Involvement

The public participation process employed a variety of techniques to foster local ownership and build support for plan approval and implementation.

1. A Planning Advisory Committee or PAC was comprised of Town representatives, including elected officials, planning commission members, code enforcement staff, and community representatives, namely the business community through the Bloomsburg-Berwick Chamber of Commerce and Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc., Bloomsburg University, Bloomsburg Fair Association, and citizens. The PAC met throughout the planning process to oversee the preparation of the plan

and provide regular local input on trend and issue analysis, potential approaches, recommendations, and implementation.

2. A Stakeholder Workshop was held on April 17, 2006 at the Bloomsburg Fire Hall to identify and prioritize the assets, issues and opportunities that the consultants and planning advisory committee should research and address. The summary results of this workshop are presented in a matrix in the appendix.



3. A second stakeholder workshop was held on October 16, 2008 at Monty's on Bloomsburg University's upper campus to discuss how the comprehensive plan should address the assets, issues and opportunities. The summary and results of this workshop are also presented in a matrix in the appendix.
4. A Public Open House was held on March 19, 2009 at the Bloomsburg Fire Hall to present the preliminary recommendations and solicit citizen priorities for implementation. Citizen comments expressed or emphasized the following:
 - Still need to address student parking in residential neighborhoods.
 - More internal communication among volunteer commissions, committees and staff.
 - Add a dog park (noted in the Town Park Master Plan).
 - Address the timing of pedestrian crosswalks.
 - Protect quiet neighborhoods from student housing and from pre-dawn garbage pick-up.
 - Expand sidewalks and walking/biking paths for recreation and for daily transportation to in-Town destinations, e.g. 5th Street Hollow to grocery stores, and to adjacent communities, Scott Township, Hemlock Township, etc.
 - Keep the composting site local and accessible.

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- Integrate the arts and culture into the plan.
- Buy women's center and adjoining property for office expansion.
- Encourage partnership between Bloomsburg Area School District and the University.
- Protect wetlands and open space.
- Expand our urban forest and green space; replace street trees.



- Bury overhead wires as streets are improved.
- Designate periodic community clean-up days.
- Publish information online; use print selectively.
- Take steps to reduce energy use and light pollution, e.g. street lights.
- Improve street maintenance, curb/sidewalk maintenance, street tree pruning/maintenance.

- Create transit in Town and between Berwick, Bloomsburg, and Danville (and even Catawissa).
- Improve maintenance/code enforcement of property maintenance, esp. rentals.
- Protect the integrity of the historic district.

The formal public review fulfilled the requirements of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning for comprehensive plan adoption.

1. A public meeting was conducted by the Town Planning Commissions on April 23, 2009.
2. The Town Council held its public hearing on the draft Comprehensive Plan on June 8, 2009.
3. Subsequently, the Town Council discussed the public comments made at the public hearing or submitted in writing, specified changes, and adopted the Comprehensive Plan that same evening, June 8, 2009.