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INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Planning Needs

This *Comprehensive Plan* was undertaken by the local officials of Porter Township in recognition of a number of principal critical community needs:

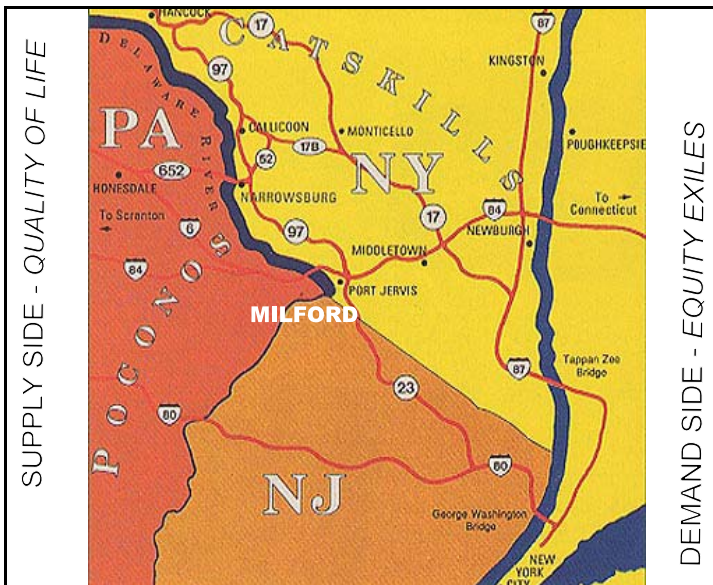
- to identify and inventory the changes which have taken place in the Township and particularly since the adoption of the 1999 Comprehensive Plan;
- to establish a framework for the conservation of the historic character, residential neighborhoods, open land, and environment while concurrently providing for sustainable growth and development;
- to provide the foundation for updated land use management tools, principally the zoning ordinance and the subdivision and land development ordinance to ensure well designed development and to minimize sprawl;
- to organize for the most efficient administration of local government and the delivery of community facilities and services.
- to address consistency with the 2006 Pike County Comprehensive Plan

Porter Township

Every community is unique in terms of community character and development concerns. Simply stated, the Township, and the other municipalities in Pike County, are grappling with and must manage the tremendous growth occurring in the County.

Geographically, the Township lies at the south center of Pike County within easy reach of metropolitan areas of New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania. Concurrently, the Township and County are blessed with thousands of acres of public land and thousands more acres of private forest land. This position has been key to shaping the area’s character and will perpetually affect its future growth and development as Pike County continues as the fastest growing county in the Commonwealth.

In past years, Porter Township was seen largely as a second home community or a destination for recreating visitors. However, in recent years more and more homes are being constructed or are being converted to permanent residences for families whose breadwinners commute out of the Township to work; many for *equity exiles* who sell expensive metropolitan area homes and purchase more affordable homes in Pike County.

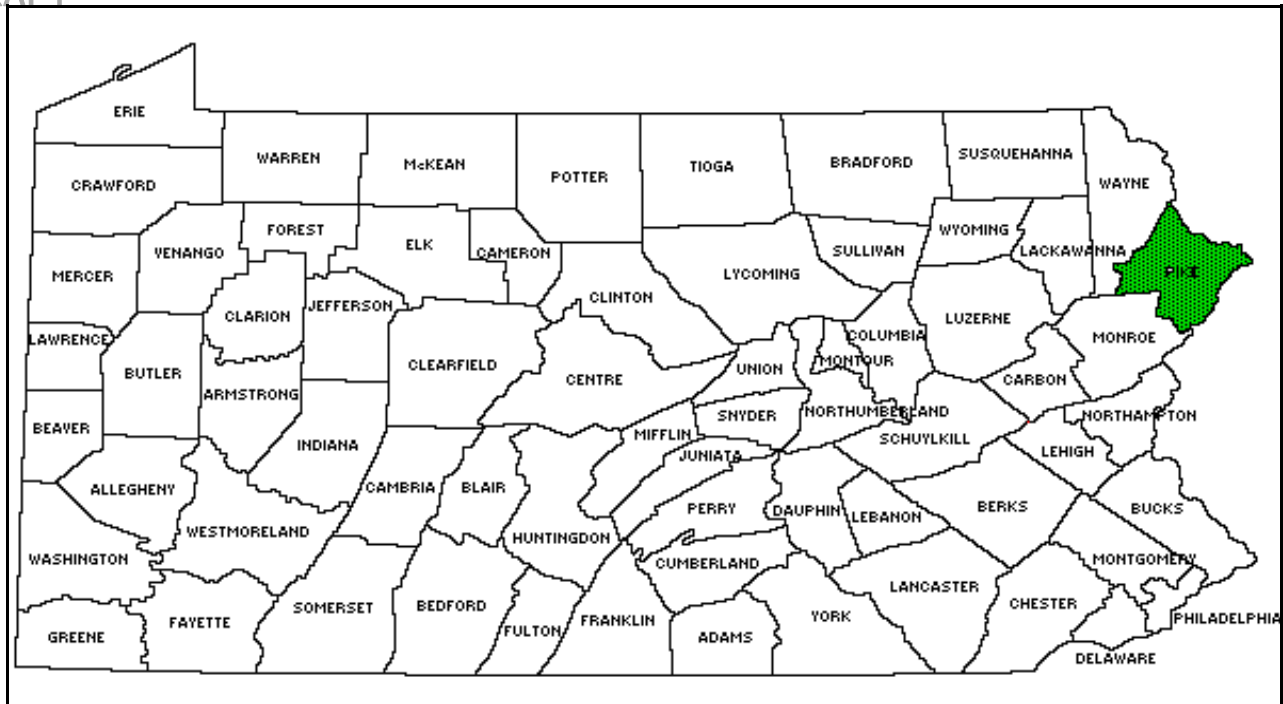


Equity Exiles

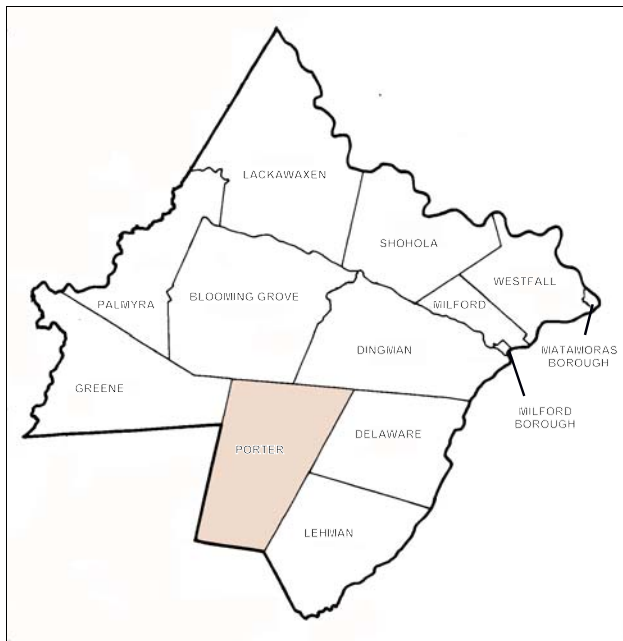
The recent and future growth and development of Porter Township and Pike County is aptly described in Balancing Nature and Commerce in Gateway Communities:

Communities that once promised refuge from the ills of the city have been transformed into congested towns with clogged highways, burgeoning crime rates, and mile after mile of look-alike shopping malls, franchise architecture, and soulless housing tracts.

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Pike County in Pennsylvania



Porter Township in Pike County

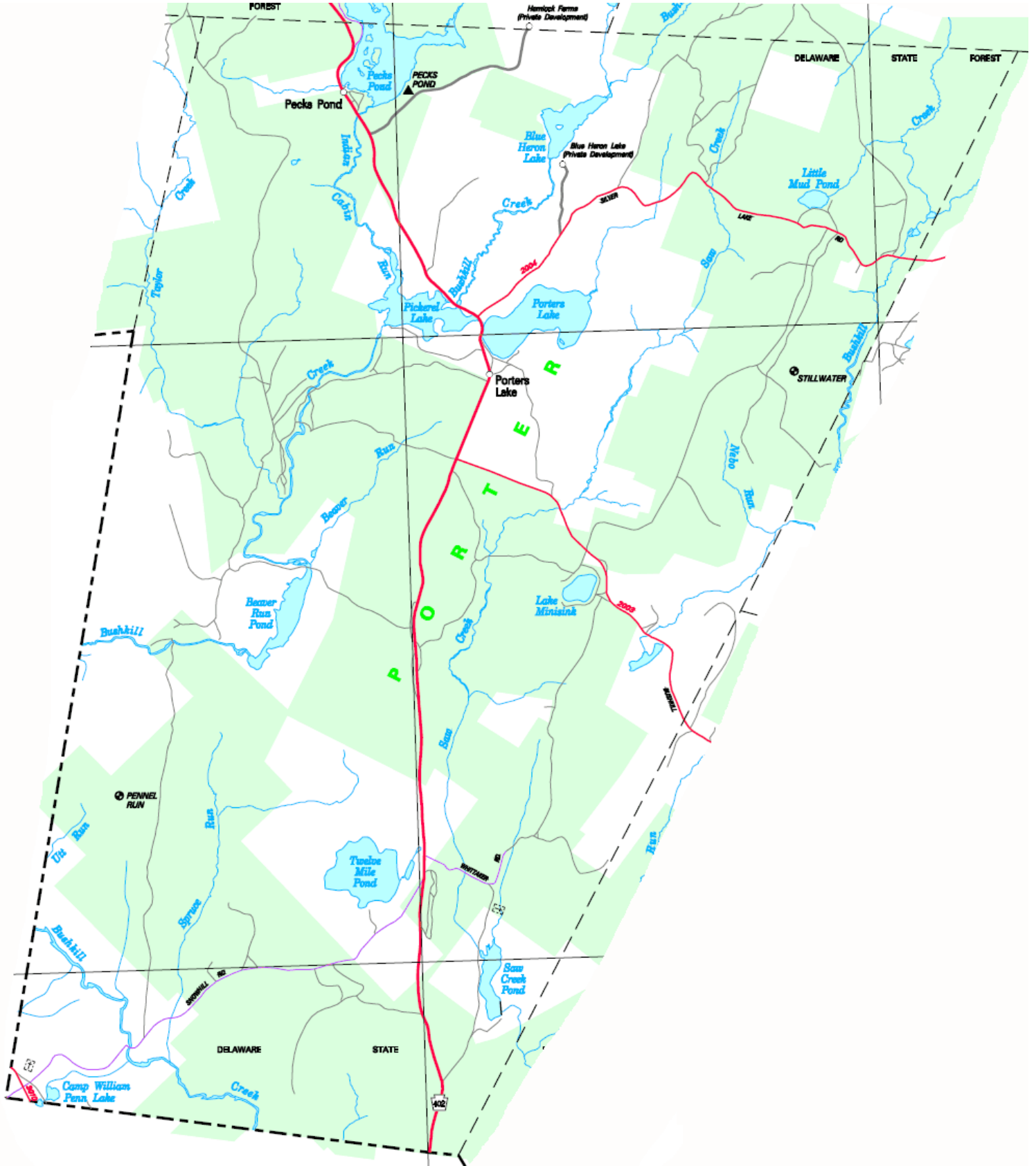
It should come as no surprise, then, that Americans are once again on the move, this time in a migration that pushes growth even farther into the countryside. Increasing numbers of people are fleeing the suburbs and choosing to live in the small towns and open spaces surrounding America's magnificent national and state parks, wildlife refuges, forests, historic sites, wilderness areas, and other public lands.

Gateway communities – the towns and cities that border these public lands – are the destinations of choice for much of the country's migrating populace. With their scenic beauty and high quality of life, gateway communities have become a magnet for millions of Americans looking to escape the congestion, banality, and faster tempo of life in the suburbs and cities.¹

Unlike many U.S. cities and suburbs, gateway communities offer what an increasing number of Americans value: a clean environment, safe streets, and a friendly, small-town atmosphere. But just as in the suburbs, unplanned growth and rapid development in gateway communities can create

the same social and scenic ills from which many Americans are now fleeing. Worse, rising real estate values and higher property taxes brought on by an increased demand for housing can force lifelong residents from the communities they call home.

¹Balancing Nature and Commerce in Gateway Communities, Howe, J., McMahon, and Propst, L., Island press, Wash., D.C., 1997, p. 1.



Porter Township, PennDOT Type 10 Map - 2008

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Skyrocketing property values can quickly translate into housing shortages for longtime residents .² If current demographic trends continue, gateway communities will experience astronomical growth rates for at least the next 20 years.³

Planning Issues Overview

Although the Township has been as accessible to thousands of urbanites as the other communities in Pike County and the Poconos, the vast majority of Porter Township remains undeveloped woodland. This includes some 22,900 acres of State Forest Land, about 61% of the total Township area of 37,500 acres. In addition, thousands of acres of land owned by long established hunting and fishing clubs add to the open space in the Township including among others Beaver Run Hunting and Fishing Club, Easton Anglers, Green Valley Hunting Club, Nebo Hunting Club and Porter's Lake Hunting and Fishing Association.

At one time considered relatively secure from development, more and more clubs are finding it difficult to retain their land given the value of the land and changing interests of members. The sale of any of these clubs for development will certainly have an impact on the community in terms of required facilities and services.

The early recreation related development in the Township occurred in association with the leasing of land by the Commonwealth for the construction of private cabins, and some 482 of these cabins are scattered throughout the Township. Most other residential development in the Township is concentrated in several residential subdivisions including Blue Heron Lake, the Earl Ness Development, Fox Hollow, Hemlock Farms, the Sell Development and Spruce Run Creek. The Township contains very limited commercial development, and this is located primarily at Peck's Pond.

While there have not been significant land use changes in the Township since the adoption of the 1999 Comprehensive Plan, the potential for development remains. Any such change will present to the Township the challenge of providing public services and facilities to meet the demands of the increasing population. Concurrently, the Township is responsible to ensure that the 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 must resolve the land use conflicts which result from the necessary balance between new development and the need for facilities and services, environmental protection, community character and open land conservation. This combination of growth and development issues clearly demonstrates the critical need for this *Comprehensive Plan*, and the consideration of new and innovative land use and community management techniques. The Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance and the Zoning Ordinance will continue to 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.

²Ibid. p. 2.

³Balancing Nature and Commerce in Gateway Communities, Howe, J., McMahon, and Propst, L., Island press, Wash., D.C., 1997, p. 3.

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Key Questions**

The Board of Supervisors appointed a Planning Committee to conduct the planning process. Citizen participation included community meetings, key person interviews and the Planning Commission meeting and Supervisors' hearing required by the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code prior to the adoption of the plan. Community Planning and Management, LLC, of Paupack, Pennsylvania, provided professional assistance with the support of the Pike County Office of Community Planning.

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

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

**Where are we?
Background Studies**

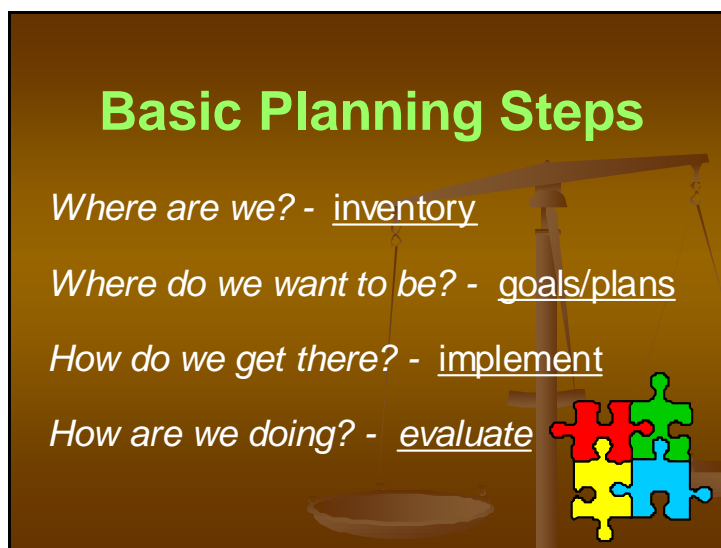
The initial step in the process is the collection and analysis of information on a wide range of community characteristics and concerns aimed at defining the existing condition of the community and identifying planning implications. Data is compiled for the following:

- *Community Character and Development History*
- *Growth and Development, and Existing Land Use*
- *Natural Features, Land Suitability for Development and Development Concerns*
- *Demographics and Economic Base*
- *Community Facilities and Services*
- *Highways and Transportation*
- *Planning and Development in Pike County, the Region and Contiguous Municipalities*

**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 public input and the findings of the background studies. 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 Township including:

- *Land Use Plan*
- *Natural Resource Conservation Plan*
- *Community Facilities and Services Plan*
- *Transportation Plan*
- *Housing Plan*
- *Historic Resources Plan*



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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 and Implementation Strategies* 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.

While the ultimate responsibility for the Township lies with the Board of Supervisors, much of the work of implementation, assessment of the accomplishment of goals and objectives, and periodic comprehensive plan review can be accomplished by the Planning Commission and citizen volunteers who are appointed to special committees or task forces along with Township officials. These groups can provide evaluations and recommendations to the Board of Supervisors for action.

How are we doing?

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. The *Plan* should be used by the community when important decisions are made and its goals and objectives and prioritized actions should be reviewed at least each year to assess the community’s accomplishments or the need to shift priorities for action.

Simply stated, a comprehensive plan is a starting point - a blueprint to guide the future development of the Township 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 Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors.

State Mandated Plan Review

The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (§301,c) requires local municipal comprehensive plans to be reviewed *at least every ten years*. The change suggests a greater Commonwealth emphasis on planning and the need for local municipalities to incorporate the planning process into normal functions. However, the ten-year review window is certainly far too long. Planning, that is, assessing how decisions and community changes fit into the plan, should be practiced continually.