

## Alternatives Reviewed and the Plan Approach

Monroe 2020's task forces reviewed two alternatives for guiding density and distribution of future growth. Alternative I represented continuation of present approval practices in residential lot sizes, and in location and site treatment of commercial development. Alternative I demonstrated that the county can, physically, accommodate projected new residential and commercial growth to the year 2020. The resulting development pattern will, however, prove counter to the Goals and Policies of Monroe 2020.

Alternative II identified, both for the municipalities and the County, viable options to present practices that do support Monroe 2020's goals of containing sprawl, maintaining large areas of open space, protecting the County's unique environment, and moderating the need for public services (e.g. extremely lengthy school bus routes, lengthy utility line extensions) that are not self-supporting through user fees/tax revenues.

The Comprehensive Plan advocates Alternative II. Achieving it will be more difficult than carrying on business as usual. It will require changes in regulatory instruments and far more coordination of infrastructure. It is put forward as the essence of the Comprehensive Plan because it corresponds much more closely to the task forces' vision for Monroe County in 2020.

## Housing

Housing is the largest single consumer of land in the built environment.<sup>21</sup> Understanding how much land the housing demand will require is thus an essential building block in designing the Comprehensive Plan. If the trend line undermines the goals of Monroe 2020, what alternative scenarios can the plan and implementing policies foster?

Between 1996 when Monroe 2020 was launched and the target year 2020, about as many new dwelling units will have been built in Monroe County as there were in 1990. Approximately 34,000 occupied dwelling units were counted in that Census. Since 1990, the county's municipalities have issued permits for close to 10,000 new dwelling units, about 3,000 of them between 1996 and the end of 1998. Based on the intermediate range population projections discussed earlier, between 26,500 and 30,500 more new dwellings will probably be built by the year 2020.

It is reasonable to assume that most new dwelling units in Monroe County will be built in subdivisions<sup>22</sup> municipalities have approved, or will approve during the planning period. Table 6 indicates by school district/planning areas the number of subdivided lots that municipalities in those districts approved between 1990 and 1997, along with their total acreage and average lot size. Of course, some new dwellings will be built on parcels subdivided prior to 1990. Nevertheless, the figures on Table 6 are indicative of developable sites currently available.<sup>23</sup> The geographic distribution of currently vacant lands is shown on the accompanying Vacant Lands map.

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<sup>21</sup> More extensive discussion of housing land demand and the options may be found in Rivkin Associates, "Housing Increase and Land Demand, Initial Options for the Monroe 2020 Comprehensive Plan", November 1998.

<sup>22</sup> Redevelopment of existing sites is also possible but would probably represent a small portion of additions to the housing supply.

<sup>23</sup> As of 1998, the County had 27,311 undeveloped subdivision lots of five acres or less, totalling 21,400 acres. According to anecdotal reports many of these subdivided lots (and some entire subdivisions) are undeveloped or can not be serviced, and there is some municipal or developer interest to re-subdivide at more contemporary, land conserving standards. Servicing issues are particularly apparent in both the Pocono Mountain and East Stroudsburg school districts which have some older subdivisions, with lots smaller than one acre, originally designed as vacation homes, and still without utilities for year round use.

**VACANT  
LANDS**  
MONROE COUNTY,  
PENNSYLVANIA

**LEGEND**

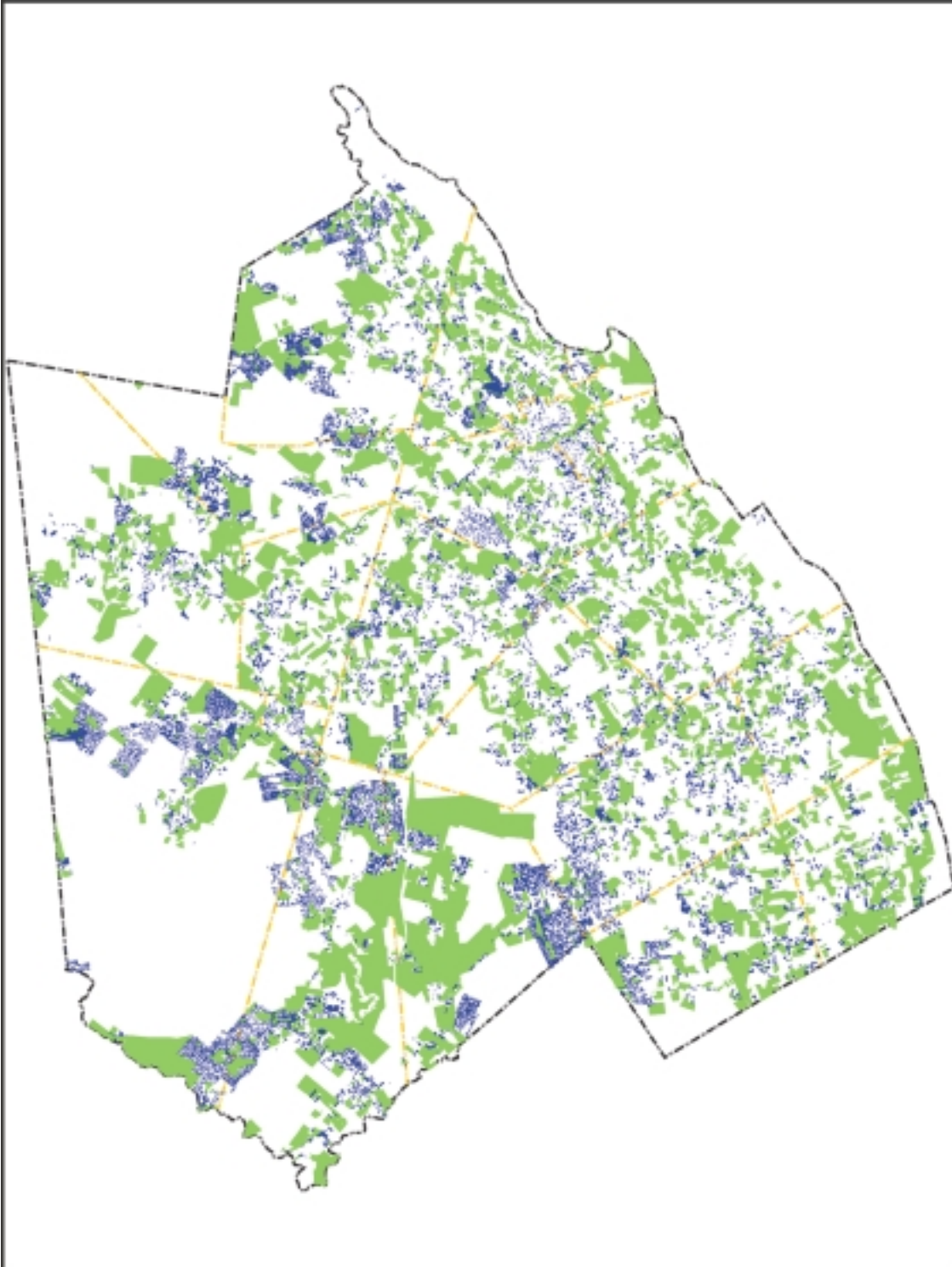
-  Vacant Lands
-  Vacant Lands < 1 Acre
-  Municipal Boundaries
-  County Boundary



[www.monroe2020.org](http://www.monroe2020.org)

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**Table 6**  
**Approved Subdivisions 1990-97 by Planning Area**

| <i>Planning Area</i>       | <i>Number of Lots</i> | <i>Acreage</i> | <i>Average Lot Size<br/>(in acres)</i> |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|--|
| <i>E. Stroudsburg</i>      | 567                   | 637            | 1.12                                   |
| <i>Pleasant Valley</i>     | 425                   | 729            | 1.72                                   |
| <i>Pocono Mountain</i>     | 992                   | 1,343          | 1.35                                   |
| <i>Stroudsburg</i>         | 440                   | 655            | 1.49                                   |
| <i>Monroe County Total</i> | 2,424                 | 3,364          | 1.35                                   |

*Alternative I, Continuation of the Trends*

Here, the basic assumption is that housing development will most likely occur at densities reflected by the average lot sizes in recent subdivisions. Table 7 shows the general implications by school district planning area over the 1998 - 2020 period. The higher end of the range of dwelling unit demand (Part II, B.) is rounded to the closest 500 units to afford a single base number for calculations in each district.

**Table 7**  
**Housing in Alternative I**  
**Residential Land Conversion Implications of**  
**Current Subdivision Trends**

| <i>Planning Area</i>       | <i>New DUs<br/>1998-2020</i> | <i>Average Lot Size<br/>(in Acres)</i> | <i>Total Acreage</i> |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|--|----------------------|
| <i>E. Stroudsburg</i>      | 5,500                        | 1.12                                   | 6,160                |
| <i>Pleasant Valley</i>     | 7000                         | 1.72                                   | 12,040               |
| <i>Pocono Mountain</i>     | 13,000                       | 1.35                                   | 17,550               |
| <i>Stroudsburg</i>         | 5,000                        | 1.49                                   | 7,450                |
| <i>Monroe County Total</i> | 30,500                       | 1.39                                   | 43,200               |

## Part II . . . The Analysis

Converted into square miles of development, the acreage figure on the previous page totals 67.5 square miles for approximately 30,500 units. In terms familiar to Monroe County, the 67.5 square mile figure is roughly equivalent to the combined areas of Jackson and Pocono Townships (33.1 and 33.8 square miles respectively, for a total of 66.9 square miles). Such a massive amount of land conversion, especially with the stripping of vegetation that accompanies many developments could transform forever the image of Monroe County.

Low density land conversion at such a scale will challenge the entire vision and goal structure of Monroe 2020. It will also plunge the County, its municipalities and school districts into deep deficits for public services, as indicated by the Burchell/Listokin fiscal impact study.

### *Alternative II, Emphasizing Compact Development*

Alternative II's housing strategy is to urge that up to 60 percent of the demand be accommodated at much more efficient standards, still emphasizing single family detached dwellings as the primary choice for Monroe County residents. A substantial proportion could be accommodated as infill or as extensions of existing centers at densities roughly comparable with those in the boroughs today (see Part I, B.). An additional portion could be built at suburban standards in compact subdivisions with large areas of open space as a transition to clearly rural areas of the County where very low density patterns (or even lower) would continue.<sup>24</sup> So long as a market for large lots remains strong and much already subdivided land remains undeveloped, it is unrealistic to anticipate municipalities will prevent development of properties with vested rights. It is also realistic to assume that municipalities with largely rural or forested areas, relatively far from commercial centers and services, will continue to approve very low densities. Thus Alternative II recognizes as much as 40 percent of new housing will be produced at present standards.

For the centers, however, and their extensions the plan recommends densities averaging 5.5 units per acre. Service areas could be designated within which utilities would be available. This option rests on the assumption that Monroe 2020 has sensitized local governments to the advantages of more efficient land use patterns. It suggests that municipalities may be ready to experiment with some changes and modify existing zoning and subdivision ordinances to do so. The 5.5 units per acre is still a "moderate" density by urban standards. It would permit some apartments and attached units in areas where these could be readily serviced. (This average density is what the highly regarded Lancaster County plan recommends within designated urbanizing areas the County is establishing with several municipalities.)

For Monroe's two eastern planning districts, this scenario would mean concentration in the Stroud/Stroudsburgs/Water Gap/Smithfield area. In Pocono Mountain the extensions would be from Mt. Pocono and in Coolbaugh, especially as residential areas convenient to the new Economic Development Corridor between Routes 611 and I-380. Compact residential areas near Tannersville in Pocono Township are also possible.

Pleasant Valley does not yet have a core, or an area with central utilities. For this planning area, consideration should go to invoking the long-discussed idea of creating a town center, probably in the Brodheads ville vicinity around the intersections of Route 209 and 115, and directing technical and financial assistance to that end.

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<sup>24</sup> No Monroe County municipality has yet established estate zoning (i.e. 10 acres or over) or even larger minimum parcel agricultural zoning (both of which have been upheld in Pennsylvania) which can protect open space more effectively than the current 1-2 acre lot sizes.

## D. Alternatives

Adjoining numerous hamlets and villages such as Sciota and Canadensis, and as a transition to more rural housing areas, Alternative II recommends densities averaging 2 units per acre. (This is comparable with a strategy proposed by Chester County for portions of its planning area where densities of one unit per acre or more were showing incipient sprawl). Accompanying such a strategy would be efforts to encourage water supply systems for groups of subdivisions and efficient alternative approaches to wastewater treatment - not necessarily conventional sewers and treatment systems or traditional individual septic systems. (see Chapter on Utilities) A 2-unit per acre goal provides room for both larger lots in outlying areas and more compact arrangements serviced by utilities close to villages or hamlets. It does not mean the plan envisions a uniform pattern of half-acre lots.

Leaving large areas of woodlands and fields, siting dwelling units in verdant settings that maintain existing landscape and tree cover and providing accessible open space for neighborhoods are objectives served by strategies that encourage such density levels. They could be achieved by "open space" or "conservation" subdivisions at these densities, as has been advocated by the Natural Lands Trust in seminars sponsored by USEPA and the County Planning Commission. They could also be achieved by restructuring existing undeveloped subdivisions throughout the County. As one of the Land and Water Resource Goals of the Pocono Mountain Task Force indicates:

*Enable restructuring of approved but undeveloped subdivisions to permit greater open space and more compact development patterns.*

Alternative II, in contrast to continued sprawl under Alternative I, could save an enormous amount of open land - 45 percent, as Table 8 on the following page illustrates. Varied densities, some higher than the current norm are a genuine and realizable alternative to sprawl. Their potential to preserve scenic open space and reduce vehicle miles of travel, makes them well worth fostering in the Comprehensive Plan.

### *Economic Activities*<sup>25</sup>

#### *Retail, Service, and Finance, Insurance, & Real Estate (FIRE)*

These three sectors are major generators of employment. They are also the principal non-residential uses which together, support residential neighborhoods, establish the "commercial" character of a community and consume major shares of non-residential land. As indicated in the Employment Chapter, over the 1997-2020 period, together they could require about 5.4 million square feet of new building space. It is possible to convert that figure into a range of land space requirements by the use of a Floor Area Ratio (FAR) index. The FAR is a term used in many zoning ordinances and master plans across the country. A Floor Area Ratio for a given land use represents the ratio of the amount of space within a building to a given site's land area. For example, a Floor Area Ratio of 1 signifies that a particular use has as much area within its buildings as on its land. Actual space could be configured in many ways, from a one-story building covering the entire site, to a 10 story structure sitting on one-tenth of the land.

FAR's of 1 or higher are normally found in urban areas, while land uses in suburban or rural areas are normally well below 1 to permit open lot parking and substantial amounts of landscaping and other open space.

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<sup>25</sup> More detailed background material and analysis may be found in two technical memoranda by Rivkin Associates: "Non-residential Building and Land Demand Estimates, Monroe County 1997-2020", November 1998 and "Key Non-residential Land Uses, Monroe 2020 Plan Options", December 1998.

**Table 8**  
**Residential Land Demand, Monroe County**  
**and Planning Areas, Density Alternative II**

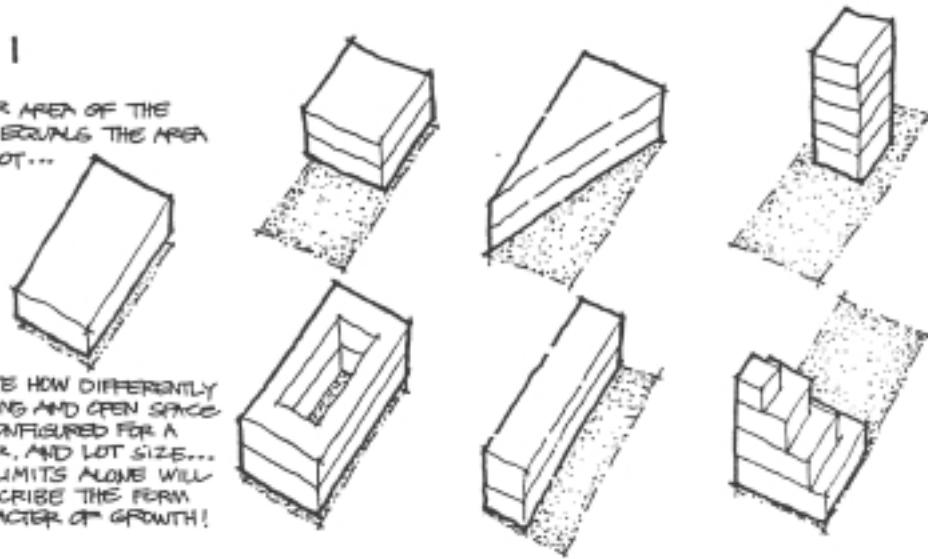
|   | <i>East<br/>Stroudsburg</i> | <i>Pleasant<br/>Valley</i> | <i>Pocono<br/>Mountain</i> | <i>Stroudsburg</i> | <i>Monroe<br/>Total</i> |
|---|-----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>Projected New DU's<br/>1998-2020</i>           | 5,500                       | 7,000                      | 13,000                     | 5,000              | 30,500                  |
| <i>30% of Dwelling<br/>Units</i>                  | 1,650                       | 2,100                      | 3,900                      | 1,500              | 9,150                   |
| <i>Projected Acreage<br/>@5.5 Du/Acre</i>         | 300                         | 382                        | 709                        | 273                | 1,664                   |
| <i>30% of Dwelling<br/>Units</i>                  | 1,650                       | 2,100                      | 3,900                      | 1,500              | 9,150                   |
| <i>Projected Acreage<br/>@2 Du/Acre</i>           | 825                         | 1,050                      | 1,950                      | 750                | 4,575                   |
| <i>40% of Dwelling<br/>Units</i>                  | 2,200                       | 2,800                      | 5,200                      | 2,000              | 12,200                  |
| <i>Av. Ac/lot Approved<br/>subdiv. '90-'97</i>    | 1.12                        | 1.72                       | 1.35                       | 1.49               | 1.35                    |
| <i>Projected Acreage<br/>for 40% of dwelling</i>  | 2,464                       | 4,816                      | 7,020                      | 2,980              | 17,280                  |
| <i>Total Acre Absorption<br/>for 100% of DU's</i> | 3,589                       | 6,248                      | 9,679                      | 4,003              | 23,519                  |

## The Floor Area Ratio (FAR)\*

**FAR = 1**

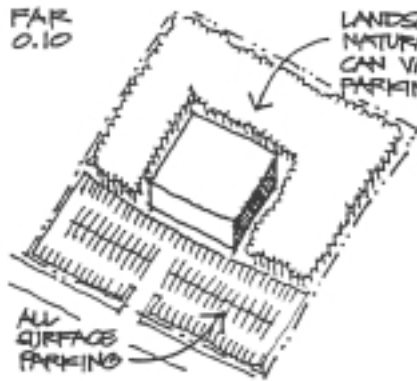
THE FLOOR AREA OF THE BUILDING EQUALS THE AREA OF THE LOT...

... BUT NOTE HOW DIFFERENTLY THE BUILDING AND OPEN SPACE CAN BE CONFIGURED FOR A GIVEN FAR, AND LOT SIZE... DENSITY LIMITS ALONE WILL NOT PRESCRIBE THE FORM AND CHARACTER OF GROWTH!

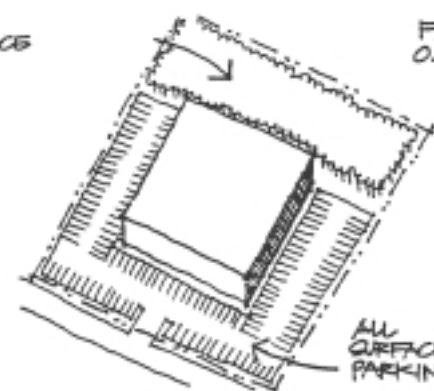


**FAR 0.10**

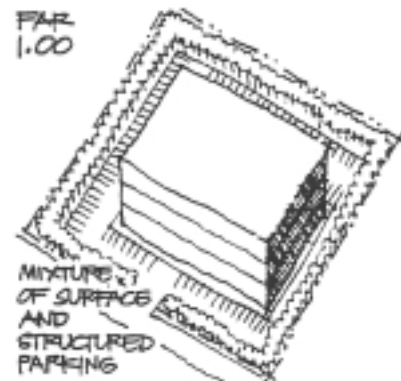
LANDSCAPED OR NATURAL OPEN SPACE CAN VARY WITH PARKING DEMAND



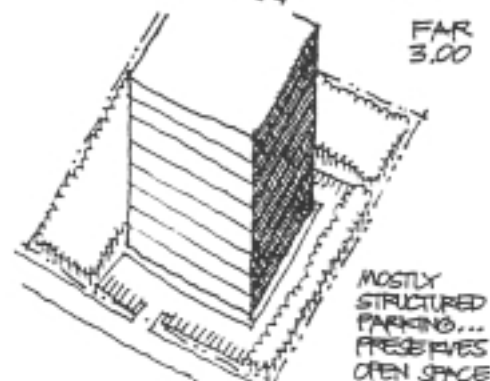
**FAR 0.25**



**FAR 1.00**



**FAR 3.00**



\*Drawing by Roger K. Lewis, FAIA: *The Growth Management Handbook*  
Middlesex, Somerset, Mercer Regional Council, 1989

**Table 9  
Land Requirements for Retail, Service, and FIRE 1997-2020**

| <i>Building Space<br/>(Square Feet)</i> | <i>Land Need<br/>@ FAR 0.25</i> |              | <i>Land Need<br/>@ FAR 0.10</i> |              |
|---|---------------------------------|--------------|---------------------------------|--------------|
|   | <i>Square Feet</i>              | <i>Acres</i> | <i>Square Feet</i>              | <i>Acres</i> |
| 5,386,000                               | 23,344,000                      | 537          | 53,860,000                      | 1,238        |

The retail, service, and FIRE uses can be developed at a wide range of moderate to low densities. Table 9 above selects a level of FAR 0.25 as the top and a FAR of 0.10 as the bottom of the range.

While the sheer amount of land is far less than would be consumed in the demand for housing, it will be nonetheless strategic in shaping the character of the Monroe 2020 community.

*Alternative I, Continuation of the Trends*

Alternative I represents a continuation of present practices in retail, service, and FIRE location. While some development and re-development has occurred in the boroughs, by and large most recent commercial construction (with attendant parking areas) has been along the arterial highways, i.e. Routes 209, Business 209, 611, 115, 940, 715, etc.

Retail, Service, and FIRE, are most likely to locate on land zoned commercial in one form or another. According to information from the County’s GIS, substantial areas are zoned commercial both within the older, developed boroughs and in relatively shallow strips bordering the major arterials. This strip zoning amounts to approximately 77 linear miles, and, since the designations generally extend along both sides of the highways, a total of close to 140 total miles of almost uninterrupted commercial zoning. With the exception of a few areas where large, commercially zoned holdings adjoin the right-of-way,<sup>26</sup> the strips probably average not more than 200’ in depth.

Far more highway-oriented land is zoned commercial (including existing homes that adjoin the road) than is actually in commercial use. Alternative I for Monroe 2020, therefore, calls for new retail and allied commercial development to continue the strip pattern by filling land zoned commercial along the arterial highways but currently undeveloped or in other uses.

If such growth occurs on sites averaging 200’ depth, new strip commercial would consume approximately 20 linear miles at an FAR of 0.25 and over 51 linear miles at the very low density option of FAR 0.1. Few rezonings would be required to achieve this pattern, and water and sewer utilities could likely be extended to service the new strips or be approved for construction on a case by case basis.

<sup>26</sup> Locations in Hamilton, Pocono, Tobyhanna, and Tunkhannock Townships. See Composite Zoning Map.

The “down side” of this option is that it would contravene explicit goals of Monroe 2020 to protect scenic views, contain sprawling strip development, and limit driveways that contribute heavily to congestion along these principal transportation routes. Unless municipalities make major changes in their ordinances, moreover, the billboards, curb cuts, and barren appearance characteristic of current commercial sites outside the boroughs will deepen Monroe County’s roadscape distress. The results will obscure more and more of the scenic quality that gives a positive cast to the County’s image.

### *Alternative II, Centers and Business Parks*

There is at least one option to this pattern. Concentrated non-residential growth on ample sites can complement residential options that emphasize concentration of new growth in existing town and village centers or their extensions. New non-residential uses could be the “core” of some centers. A commercial alternative for Monroe 2020 would have three components:

1. *Density.* To encourage clustering and compact development, the higher end of the density range (e.g. FAR 0.25) would prevail.
2. *Infill.* Some new growth would be channeled into redevelopment, work-at-home, and/or development on vacant land within boroughs, township centers or villages. Alternative II calls for approximately 100 acres of retail, FIRE, and services development to occur in this fashion. Infill communities would include the same town and village centers as the housing recommendations as well as some smaller crossroads hamlets.
3. *Extensions or new complexes.* Here, the business or service park concept would prevail over scattered strips. Offices, retail, and allied space would cluster in contiguous holdings of 20-60 acres (averaging, say, 50 acres) where development could be designed as a unit, provided with environmentally sound utilities, and monitored by the receiving municipalities. Locations would be extensions or consolidations of existing commercial zoning along the arterials. Alternative II recommends identifying eight or more such clusters, some of which could serve as multi-purpose community and government centers for their surrounding residential areas by adding governmental, school and community/religious uses.

One candidate could be the much discussed town center for the West End in the Brodheadsville area; another, a new town core for Coolbaugh whose resident population is growing rapidly. Others could consolidate the demand for commercial uses in Pocono and Stroud Townships along Route 611, in the Smithfields along Route 209, at Blakeslee on Route 115, in Paradise Valley and possibly other sites along Route 940.

Consolidating much (400 acres or more) of the commercial expansion demand into eight or more carefully planned, attractive sites would have a marked effect on Monroe County’s roadscape prospects not to mention the character of community life. Assuming sufficient depth from the arterial right-of-way (i.e. 800’-1,000’), new commercial development at FAR 0.25 would consume four linear miles or less of highway frontage as contrasted to the 20-51 miles in Alternative I.

Analysis in the GIS indicates that such consolidated sites appear to be available or could be assembled. To upgrade roadside commercial, municipalities can strengthen site plan review for any projects in their commercial zones. Site plan review ordinances can mandate ample

## Part II . . . The Analysis

landscaping, building setbacks, and consolidated highway access as well as lighting and sign controls. Model ordinances are available from the County, and the negative features of strip growth can be overcome. Generous landscaping requirements for any commercial venture could be a most important contribution to Monroe County as viewed from the road.

An important element in Alternative II would be to utilize the Open Space bond issue money and other techniques to establish high priority for securing scenic views along major arterials (i.e. Routes 209, 611, and 940) and for restoring scenic views to break up the image of strip development. Restoration of scenic views could be accomplished by serious work with PennDOT to remove illegal billboards (especially where clustered) and by utilizing some of the available funds to purchase other billboards in especially sensitive areas.

### *Manufacturing and Distribution*

Manufacturing and wholesale/distribution are other private sector employment activities that will generate land demands for Monroe 2020. Their location will have significant effects on the county's pattern of physical development. Given the nature of manufacturing and distribution activities and their potential sites, the plan suggests a basic siting approach that can be applied in both alternatives.

At a Floor Area Ratio of 0.1, projected manufacturing and distribution uses would require about 230 acres. However, even lower densities for some activities may be warranted and even more space may be required. That is because the county's aggressive economic development promotion program could possibly attract much more manufacturing and distribution activity than the employment projections can suggest.

That economic development program seeks to capitalize on the County's superb Interstate highway access to the Middle Atlantic region, soon to be combined with prospects for more extensive rail freight service. Highway and rail systems are close together in the Mt. Pocono-Coolbaugh area, and also in the Stroudsburgs, with a number of sites affording access to both. Monroe County could thus become a highly desirable location for land-extensive operations that rely on both components of transportation.

Of particular interest is a roughly triangular corridor in the Mt. Pocono-Coolbaugh area. This "economic development corridor" is framed by I-380 and Routes 611 and 940. The railroad line runs north/south through it before turning east and running parallel to Route 940. The triangle, roughly 5 miles by 2.5 miles, comprises about 8,000 acres, or about 12.5 square miles. It contains the County's existing industrial park as well as the Pocono Mountains Municipal Airport. It also contains the County's Senda property and Camp Tegawitha for which purchase is being negotiated and other potential industrial sites. The triangle is just north of the new Amber Milling enterprise which is also served by both road and rail.

Two aspects of this triangle are especially important.

- It contains the largest concentration of industrially zoned land in Monroe County,<sup>27</sup> and
- It is directly served by, or is near to, water and sewer systems.

Utility extensions would be needed, raising environmental issues to be resolved. Such challenges notwithstanding, accessibility and suitability for major industrial and distribution

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<sup>27</sup> Probably about one - quarter to one-third of land currently zoned industrial.

activity clearly makes this corridor a locus for non-residential development. The location offers many amenities for employees because of its proximity to the resort areas. From a scale standpoint, moreover, the corridor can readily absorb potential growth projected to 2020 for industrial and distribution activity<sup>28</sup>, with ample room for expansion beyond then.

Other promising locations could be infill and extensions of industrial areas in Stroud and East Stroudsburg and the possibility of a “pilot” site in the West End close to Route 33 which could address that planning area’s need for economic development.<sup>29</sup> Given the substantial amount of commercial zoning on arterial roads throughout the County, it is likely that some additional growth in industrial or distribution uses could occur along these routes if the zoning categories are sufficiently flexible or are changed. That would, however, further compound the problem of strip development, could compromise open space protection, and lead to additional sprawl. Under any circumstances, the county appears to have ample land, appropriately sited, to absorb both short and long term needs of industrial and distribution enterprises.

From the research preparatory to the plan, the County has a collection of detailed descriptions of high quality private sector development projects at various scales (from 12 to 800 acres) across the country. These include a variety of land use types: retail, services, industrial, distribution, and mixed uses. Development like these attractive prototypes could be accomplished in Monroe County on appropriately located sites under a regulatory system that emphasizes landscaping and high quality design.

### *Challenges of the Comprehensive Plan*

Alternative II reinforces the potential of existing centers. It maintains and improves the accessibility of the corridors. It offers more efficient options for residential development and shows promise for protecting the open space that is so critical to Monroe County’s future. Alternative II clearly moves toward the goals articulated by the Monroe 2020 task forces. At the same time, since it represents major changes in how municipalities handle their land development activity, issues will be formidable.

- Local master plans and zoning ordinances will need to be revised to conform with Alternative II.
- Utility systems will require extension and consolidation.
- A major cooperative effort between the County, PennDOT, DEP, and the municipalities will need to focus on establishing a plan and a capital financing program for improvements to the arterial transportation system and simultaneous upgrading of the parallel utilities systems.
- Major research and development of alternative sewer systems will be needed.
- Intermunicipal planning and regulatory reform will be essential.
- A full array of incentives from Monroe County will be needed, from financial support of municipal planning in keeping with the Monroe 2020 principles, financial support for purchase of easements and fee simple land, along with technical assistance in grant writing, establishment of code reform, lobbying the state legislature for changes

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<sup>28</sup> Expansion of existing industrial and distribution operations will probably occur as well, in locations contiguous to present operations such as at Swiftwater or Cresco.

<sup>29</sup> Adequate water and sewer service would need to be established for such a site.

## Part II . . . The Analysis

in enabling legislation, etc.

- The participatory effort between the County, municipalities, and interest groups begun with Monroe 2020 will need to continue.
- An intensive public education campaign, building upon and expanding that of Monroe 2020, will be required to build continuing County citizen support for reforms needed to achieve implementation of the Plan.

