



MONROE COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
MONROE 2020

STATE OF THE PLAN

APRIL, 2002

STATE OF THE PLAN

INTRODUCTION

The Monroe County Comprehensive Plan adopted in June, 1999 indicates that the County will prepare, on a biennial basis, a "state of the plan" report indicating progress made toward achieving Monroe 2020 goals and implementing the Comprehensive Plan. The report will also include a status report on municipal actions to revise zoning and other regulatory ordinances.

Implementation of the plan began in earnest in December 2000 with the adoption of the Municipal Partnership Program (MPP). The current status of the MPP is indicated on the Monthly Status Report which is included as EXHIBIT A.

The format of the report follows the items indicated on pages 42-44 of the Comprehensive Plan which is the section entitled Commitment (Monroe County's Commitment to Implement the Comprehensive Plan).

I. DIRECT ACTIONS

A. Initiatives with PennDOT (Pennsylvania Department of Transportation)

1. The joint preparation of a County-wide transportation plan that would address all transportation modes in an integrated fashion is clearly recommended in the Comprehensive Plan. While an overall plan has not materialized, there are a number of individual plans and studies which are underway or have recently been completed (see attached Exhibit B). These activities need to be coordinated and integrated, and can serve as a de facto County-wide plan upon completion.

Efforts to retain a staff transportation planner were not successful and there are concerns about the alternative of using a consultant. Also, recent discussions have included the possibility of creating the position of Infrastructure Coordinator/Planner since transportation facilities are only a part of the overall infrastructure.

2. Signage and roadway access are being addressed on two fronts. Both the Litter Control and Beautification Program and the Chamber of Commerce Committee on Signage Improvement (COSI) have promoted a model sign ordinance, developed a recognition program for good signs and have advocated enforcement of existing regulations to reduce sign clutter. It is possible that the efforts of these two entities can be pooled in the future to further address signage issues. Recent (2/02) articles in the Pocono Record indicated that Smithfield Township was actively working to eliminate obsolete signs (for businesses/attractions that no longer exist) and that Stroud Township is

moving forward with new signage regulations that are consistent with the County's goals and Roadscape Policy.

Roadway access is one of the initial proposals of the CTLUMS (Comprehensive Transportation and Land Use Management Strategy) project related to the Marshalls Creek By-pass. A draft access management ordinance has been developed and presented to the participating municipalities (Smithfield and Middle Smithfield in Monroe County, Lehman Township in Pike County). The draft is currently under review and will have applicability to other municipalities as well.

B. Initiatives with DEP (Department of Environmental Protection)

1. The plan recommends one or more pilot programs to establish watershed-wide sanitary disposal techniques. Currently there is a pilot project in the Pocono Creek Watershed which is funded through DEP with a Growing Greener grant. This project is a goal-based watershed management strategy to preserve and enhance the existing water resource. Sewage disposal impacts water quality, which is one of the water resource target areas for the Pocono Creek project. Management strategies which will be developed in Phase II of the project may fulfill, at least partially, the development of a watershed-wide sanitary disposal plan.

C. Initiatives with DCNR (Department of Conservation and Natural Resources)

1. The plan recommends close coordination with DCNR to maximize leveraging of the open space bond issue funds and this has been accomplished in the development of the six regional open space plans and the first County acquisition. Leveraging of DCNR funds continues to be a primary focus for the open space program, and it is anticipated that this will continue.

D. Executing the Open Space Program - The implementation of the Open Space Program has been one of the short term successes of the Monroe 2020 process. The County-wide plan was adopted in 2001, the six regional plans are almost complete and the first acquisitions at the County and regional level have occurred.

E. Making the GIS Available - The availability of the GIS (Geographic Information System) is another short term success. Currently, 13 municipalities have purchased the ArcView software which enables them

to use the County's database. Several ArcView training sessions have been coordinated by the County and these will continue. It is anticipated that at least 3 more municipalities will secure the ArcView software in 2002. Expansion of the database continues and new orthophotos (aerial photography) will be acquired during 2002.

- F. Educating Municipal Staff in GIS Use - see above.
- G. Consistency Issue added to Plan Reviews - The Planning Commission has incorporated in its reviews a determination of whether proposed projects are consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and how consistency could be improved. Fiscal impact reviews continue to be done, although the widespread publication of fiscal and consistency reviews has not occurred. These reviews are currently distributed to the municipalities and school districts.
- H. Provision of "Tool Kits" - All municipalities were provided with a series of reference works which comprise a municipal "tool kit". The materials contain a wide variety of tools, techniques and model ordinances to assist in growth management.
- I. Legislative Lobbying - The County recently convened a meeting with all its State Senators and Representatives to begin what will hopefully be a unified voice for Monroe County in Harrisburg. This initiative needs to be sustained and strengthened in order to effectively advance the County's priority needs.
- J. Biennial "State of the Plan" - The initial report is presented herein.
- K. Review of Permitting Process - The plan recommends a detailed study of each municipal permit review and issuing process to determine if streamlining could occur as an economic development incentive. This activity has not yet been initiated, nor has significant progress been made in developing an overall economic development plan and accompanying implementation strategy.
- L. Periodic Conferences and Workshops - The Planning Commission and the Open Space Advisory Board, with assistance from the County Commissioners, have sponsored the following workshops and field trips:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Event</u>
9/27/99	Open Space Program -Natural Areas Tour
7/99	Open Space Program -Planning Grant Manual Workshops

<u>Date</u>	<u>Event</u>
10/17/00	Acts 67 & 68 Panel Presentation
11/99	Open Space -Regional Park and Recreation Forums
1/25/01	MPP Presentation
3/3/01	Open Space Workshop - Draft Plan
5/31/01	Field Trip - Conservation Design
11/11/01	Field Trip - Conservation Design
1/30/02	Sound Land Use Decisions Workshop (PSATS)
2/9/02	Open Space-Municipal Initiatives Workshop

Additional sessions will be scheduled as appropriate. It should be noted that attendance at these events has been excellent, and the County continues to promote inter-governmental cooperation in all activities.

- M. Establish Relationships with Pennsylvania Environmental Council, 10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania, PSATS (Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors) - These relationships have been established and communication occurs regularly, however, this is an additional area where more effective lobbying could occur in order to advance the County's priorities.

II. COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP INCENTIVES

- A. Financing - The plan recommends that a portion of the Open Space Bond funds be used for planning activities. Subsequent to the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan, the Open Space Advisory Board recommended an allocation of bond funds for planning, education and promotion. The Planning Commission has recently prepared a draft of a proposed Financial Assistance Program (FAP) which will directly address this plan recommendation. The draft program proposes up to \$10,000 per municipality for developing resource protection ordinances. The draft of this program is available in the MCPC office.

It should also be noted that all municipalities received a bonus allocation of open space planning funds because they chose to plan jointly with other municipalities.

- B. Grant Application Processing and Support - Grant application support has been provided through both the Open Space Program and the Municipal Partnership Program. This assistance has been provided through the MCPC and continues to be provided to municipalities.

- C. Technical Assistance - The MCPC Staff and others have provided significant technical assistance through the MPP and its component activities. For example, the Growing Greener audits are provided by consultants trained by the NLT (Natural Lands Trust) and contracted through the County. Funding is provided by DCED (Department of Community and Economic Development) and DCNR at no cost to the municipalities.

The Community Audits are provided by Staff and several technical reviews of proposed ordinances and plans have also been conducted by the Staff. Requests for technical assistance will undoubtedly continue, including requests for GIS assistance which has also been provided to a number of municipalities and agencies.

As advocated in the plan, the County is currently working to have NLT prepare a revised design of a proposed subdivision. If this process is successful, it would be the first conservation subdivision in the County.

DEFICIENT ITEMS AND PROPOSED ACTIONS

It is clear from the preceding narrative that several activities have not progressed as well as others. These items are discussed further in terms of why they haven't progressed and what can be done to advance them.

1. Initiatives with PennDOT

Even though a number of studies are underway and others are proposed, there isn't a definite path for arriving at a County-wide transportation plan. Currently, PennDOT has indicated that no new projects will be added to the TIP (Transportation Improvement Plan which is basically the first four years of the Twelve Year Program) due to funding constraints. This situation seriously impacts the ability to move projects from the planning stage to implementation.

The need to coordinate current projects and plans is becoming more pressing, and additional staff resources are being directed to this effort. Hiring a transportation planner or consultant seems unlikely due to funding constraints.

Recommended Actions

1. Prepare a job description for an Infrastructure Coordinator/Planner.
2. Work with State Senators and Representatives to secure funding for this position, even if it's for a relatively short time frame (2 years minimum).

3. Increase contact/lobbying with State Senators and Representatives in regard to securing additional funding for infrastructure, particularly highway projects at this time.

2. Initiatives with DEP

These initiatives center on public water and sewage disposal systems. Currently, the major water suppliers in the County [PAWC (PA American Water Company), SMA (Stroudsburg Municipal Authority), East Stroudsburg Municipal Authority and Pocono-Jackson Water Authority] have expansion plans and projects and the completed regionalization study to guide their efforts. The same can't be said for sewage disposal as there are fewer "suppliers" who have the ability to expand at present. The growth centers identified in the Comprehensive Plan are the key areas that need centralized sewage disposal, however, two of these centers - Brodheadsville and Tannersville currently have no central facilities and should be the main focus. (It should be noted that DEP is involved with the design process for the conservation subdivision that the Staff has been involved with and a community drip irrigation system is proposed).

Recommended Actions:

1. Actions 1 and 2 from the PennDOT Initiatives are applicable here also.
2. Closely coordinate the Pocono Creek Pilot Project with any plans for centralized sewage disposal in the Tannersville area.
3. Support additional Watershed Assessment/Management Studies such as that currently proposed for the Paradise Creek Watershed.

3. Detailed Study of Permit Review Process

This is an item that has not been addressed thus far in the plan implementation process. Although the comprehensive plan indicates that streamlining of the permit review and issuance process could be an economic development incentive, there are other potential benefits as well.

In terms of developing an overall economic development plan and an implementation strategy, a concerted effort needs to be made on this item. Although transportation and other infrastructure are critical to economic development, a coordinated plan that includes all sectors of the County's economy and a means for implementation is also necessary. The Economic Development Policy spelled out in the Comprehensive Plan provides the overall framework within which the effort needs to be focused. Moving this activity forward will be a key priority for 2002.

The new statewide building code (if municipalities decide to administer it) will entail additional activities and permits. There is some indication that several municipalities are considering a joint code enforcement office to save costs, however, there are no proposals for a detailed study of all municipal permit processes.

Recommended Actions

1. Encourage sharing of code enforcement personnel among municipalities.
2. Focus attention on the need for an overall economic development plan and implementation strategy by holding at least one economic summit in 2002. This event will mark the initiation of a concerted effort to implement an economic development program that will parallel the Open Space Program.
3. Defer a detailed study of permitting processes until the regional comprehensive plans are completed unless this activity can be assigned outside existing staff resources.

COMMUNICATIONS

Extensive public participation and dissemination of information have been cornerstones of the Monroe 2020 process since its beginning. In order to continue this tradition, the State of the Plan report will be widely distributed via direct mailing to all Task Force members and County agencies, delivery to all municipal buildings and libraries and by posting on the Monroe 2020 website. A press release will also be used when the report is released to the public, preferably at a major event.

On-going communications activities include the Monroe 2020 newsletter, website, press releases for specific events/occurrences and memoranda which are distributed from the MCPC to the municipalities on a regular basis. The MCPC Staff has also increased their effort to have closer and more frequent contact with the municipalities and accordingly have increased their attendance at municipal meetings and special events. This increased contact is very important in keeping Monroe 2020 where it needs to be – in front of the municipal decision makers during implementation. This direct contact has proven very beneficial and will continue as the Monroe 2020 process moves forward.

SUMMARY

Overall, in the two years since plan implementation officially began, there has been significant progress on a number of issues. This progress has required a tremendous effort on the part of the MCPC Board and Staff, the M2020 Executive Committee, the Open Space Advisory Board, the County Commissioners, numerous municipal officials and many citizen volunteers. Further progress will require a continuation of this effort and actually an increased effort to advance the items that have not yet progressed. All those involved should be proud of what has been accomplished to date.