

MONROE COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

MONROE 2020

STATE OF THE PLAN

JUNE, 2006

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 June 2006 Current Municipal Events 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 County 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. Also, the pending development of a regional transportation plan by NEPA is discussed on page 6.

The County's transit system has improved significantly in recent years, both in terms of service, and facilities and equipment. Additional routes have been added/expanded to accommodate the County's growing population, and public transit has become an integral part of the overall system. Continued coordination with other modes of transportation has resulted in a Transportation Enhancements grant to provide bicycle racks on MCTA buses, and this coordination should continue and will be a part of the regional plan to be developed by NEPA.

2. Signage and roadway access are being addressed on two fronts. Both the Litter Control and Beautification Program and the former Committee on Signage Excellence (COSE) have promoted a model sign ordinance, developed a recognition program for good signs and have advocated enforcement of existing regulations to reduce sign clutter. Stroud, Eldred, Chestnuthill and Middle Smithfield Townships and Mt. Pocono Borough have adopted 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 was developed and presented to the participating municipalities (Smithfield and Middle Smithfield in Monroe County, Lehman Township in Pike County) and was subsequently adopted.

Access management ordinances also have applicability in other municipalities and should be considered.

B. Initiatives with DEP (Department of Environmental Protection)

1. The plan recommends one or more pilot programs to establish watershed-wide sanitary disposal techniques. The first such pilot project was in the Pocono Creek Watershed and was 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 developed in Phase II of the project may fulfill, at least partially, the development of a watershed-wide sanitary disposal plan. A watershed assessment has been completed for the Paradise Creek Watershed, and a Management Plan is currently being reviewed.

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 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. To date, approximately \$4.5 million dollars have been obtained.

- 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 have been adopted and acquisitions at the County, regional and municipal level have occurred. These acquisitions and the easements obtained under the Ag. Preservation Program total approximately \$23 million dollars spent and/or currently allocated to specific acquisitions. Total acreage acquired under the open space program is just over 3,300. Over 5,500 acres have been protected in the Ag. Preservation Program, an event that was celebrated in August 2005 with Governor Rendell in attendance.

- E. Making the GIS Available - The availability of the GIS (Geographic Information System) is another short term success. Currently, 19 municipalities are using ArcView or Arc Explorer software which enables them to use the County's database and all 20 municipalities have access to the GIS through the Arc IMS (Internet Map Service) web site. Several ArcView training sessions have been coordinated by the County and these will continue. Staff have also provided individualized training to municipal personnel.

Expansion of the database continues and new orthophotos (aerial photography) were acquired during 2003. Subsequently, the County received preliminary color aerial photographs in early 2006, (flown in 2005 as part of the PAMAP project in which the County is a participant) and these photos are being reviewed. Also, many of the planimetric features will be updates as part of the countywide addressing project which recently began.

- 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, and these reviews are currently distributed to the municipalities and school districts. The Planning Commission Staff completed an update to the fiscal impact analysis model in 2005 and is now using this updated revision.
- 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 has convened several meetings with its State Senators and Representatives to begin to develop 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 as a Critical Impact Area due to rapid growth.
- J. Biennial "State of the Plan" - The third 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, although significant progress has been made in developing an overall economic development plan and accompanying implementation strategy with the appointment of the Economic Advisory Board (EAB) in early 2004. A preliminary report from the EAB is expected by mid 2006.

- L. Periodic Conferences and Workshops - The Planning Commission has worked with the County Commissioners, Open Space Advisory Board, Pocono Heritage Land Trust, NLT, EPA, PSATS, PHCA and other groups in presenting the following workshops and programs:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Program</u>
4/12/02	Economic Summit
9/26/02	Open Space Funding
11/14/02	Transfer of Development Rights
Jan.-May 2003	MCPC On-The Road (Meetings with all municipal Planning Commissions)
1/22/03	EPA Indicators Workshop
1/23/03	Land Trust Partnerships
3/5/03	Innovative Development Techniques for Land Conservation
4/3/03	Innovative Financing Techniques for Land Conservation
6/4/03	Planning Beyond Boundaries
9/4/03	MPC Made Easy
4/29/03	Sustainable Infrastructure
10/9/03	Open Space Program Celebration
3/25/04	Housing Summit
5/15/04	Historic Preservation
5/27/04	Regional Economic Development
6/3/04	Growing Greener Workshop
10/14/04	Conservation Subdivision Design
2/9/05	The Official Map Workshop
5/26/05	State Planning Board Breakfast Forum
6/15/05	Multi Municipal Planning Workshop
8/4/05	5,000 Acre Event for the Ag. Preservation Program
9/17/05 – 2/14/06	MCPC Back-on-the-Road Meetings
9/25/05	Comparing Costs and Benefits of Open Space and Development
4/26/06	Administering Conservation Subdivision Design
5/16, 23 and 30/06	Community Planning Course

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. The recent “MCPC Back-on-the-Road” activity underscored the desire of municipal officials to have more workshops.

- 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. The MCPC has also partnered with PSATS to present several workshops.

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 subsequently prepared a proposed Financial Assistance Program (FAP) which directly addresses this plan recommendation and this program was adopted by the County Commissioners in April 2002. The program allows up to \$10,000 per municipality for developing resource protection ordinances and has been used by ten municipalities thus far. A status report on the FAP is included in EXHIBIT A.

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 made available.
- 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 were provided by consultants trained by the NLT (Natural Lands Trust) and contracted through the County. Funding was provided by DCED (Department of Community and Economic Development) and DCNR at no cost to the municipalities.

Courtesy reviews and technical reviews of proposed ordinances and plans continue to be conducted by the Staff. Requests for technical assistance continue and have increased, including requests for GIS assistance which has been provided to a growing number of municipalities and agencies.

As advocated in the plan, the County continues to work with NLT to improve project designs. To date, eight projects have followed the 4-step design process recommended by NLT. The County also has an on-going contract with NLT to provide technical assistance with regard to the conservation subdivision design process.

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

A number of studies are completed, underway or proposed, and the development of a County-wide transportation plan will essentially occur through the regional plan to be developed by NEPA as further discussed below. Currently, PENNDOT has indicated that new projects can only be added to the TIP (Transportation Improvement Plan, which is the first four years of the Twelve Year Program) if adequate funding is available. This situation seriously impacts the ability to move projects from the planning stage to implementation.

It should be noted that NEPA (the Northeastern PA Alliance) has received funding from PENNDOT to prepare a regional transportation plan for the counties of Carbon, Monroe, Pike, Schuylkill and Wayne. This activity should start in 2006. The County also continues to be an active member of the Rural Planning Organization (RPO) for the five counties.

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. Re-visit the issue of hiring an Infrastructure Coordinator, either as Staff or as a consultant. (The job description for this position was prepared as recommended in a previous State of the Plan.)
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.

2. Initiatives with DEP

These initiatives center on public water and sewage disposal systems, particularly in regard to sustainable infrastructure. Currently, the major water suppliers in the County [PAWC (PA American Water Company), BCRA (Brodhead Creek Regional 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 - Brodheads ville and Tannersville, currently have no central facilities and should be the main focus. A workshop on Sustainable Infrastructure was held in April 2004 to provide information on alternative methods. Currently, there is a proposal to extend a sewer line along Rt. 611 from the Bartonsville Truck Stop to sanofi pasteur in Swiftwater. This proposed is preliminary and is being reviewed

Recommended Actions:

1. Actions 1 and 2 from the PENNDOT Initiatives are applicable here also.
 2. Closely coordinate the results of the Pocono Creek Pilot Project with any plans for centralized sewage disposal in the Tannersville area in particular and the Route 611 corridor in general.
 3. Support additional Watershed Assessment/Management Studies such as that recently completed in 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. It should be noted, however, that the Monroe County Conservation District (MCCD) has been working with DEP on the issue of concurrent review of stormwater plans.

The new statewide building code involves additional activities and permits. All municipalities have implemented the process and are using outside contractors except for the Borough of Stroudsburg and East Stroudsburg which have staff to undertake code enforcement activities. There are no proposals for a detailed study of all municipal permit processes at this time.

Recommended Actions

1. Support the activities of the Economic Advisory Board and increase communication and interaction between the MCPC and the EAB.
2. Consider a detailed study of permitting processes since the regional comprehensive plans have been completed. This activity may need to be assigned outside existing staff resources.

4. Economic Development

In terms of developing an overall economic development plan and an implementation strategy, an Economic Summit was held on April 12, 2002 to focus attention on this issue. 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 and in response to the first recommendation in the White Paper which followed the Summit, the Economic Advisory Board was appointed in early 2004. The preliminary report of this group is expected by mid 2006.

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 is 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 MCPC website. A press release will also be used when the report is released to the public.

On-going communications activities include the Monroe 2020 newsletters, website, press releases for specific events/occurrences and memoranda which are distributed from the MCPC to the municipalities on a regular basis. The MCPC Board and Staff have 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.

A new initiative, “MCPC On-the-Road,” was undertaken in 2003 when Board and Staff members attended a planning commission meeting in each municipality. The purpose of this effort was to determine how the MCPC might better serve the municipalities and to receive comments on current practices. This round of meetings was very successful and changes were implemented. A second round of meetings, “MCPC Back-on-the-Road” was undertaken in late 2005/early 2006. Additional workshops and GIS training were indicated as items that should be provided and efforts will be directed toward there requests.

SUMMARY

Overall, in the four 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 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.

MCPC CURRENT MUNICIPAL EVENTS

Key:

Z.O. - Zoning Ordinance
 SALDO - Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance
 GG - Growing Greener
 Ord(s) - ordinances
 CSD - Conservation Subdivision Design
 Munic. - Municipal
 FAP - Financial Assistance Program

updated
 6/12/2006

Regional Planning Effort	Status	Funding
Top of Mountain Region Tobyhanna/Tunkhannock Coolbaugh/Mt. Pocono	All Municipalities have adopted. Finalizing Intergovernmental Cooperative Implementation Agreement *Spotts, Stevens & McCoy, Inc. - Consultant	Fully funded from DCED and DCNR
HSPS Region Hamilton/Stroudsburg Pocono/Stroud	All Municipalities have adopted. Begin adopting Intergovernmental Cooperative Implementation Agreement. *Spotts, Stevens & McCoy, Inc. - Consultant	Fully funded DCED, DCNR and Penn Dot
CJER Region Chestnuthill/Jackson Eldred/Ross	<u>2nd draft review</u> - Public hearing July *Spotts, Stevens & McCoy, Inc. - Consultant	Partially funded from DCED/DCNR and Munic. Match
Municipal Planning Effort	Status	Funding
Barrett Twp.	CSD - Z.O. & SALDO: Adopted 5/4/05. Updating Comp. plan - Future Land Use Map	FAP DCED Grant
Chestnuthill Twp.	County's 1st Official Map (adopted 9/7/04) TDR Revisions: Adopted 9/20/05 *Carson Helfrich - Consultant	FAP/Munic.
Coolbaugh Twp.	Moving forward with implementation of Regional Comprehensive plan.	
Del. Water Gap Borough	Submitting FAP application for Z.O. amendments.	
East Stroudsburg Borough		
Eldred Twp.	GG-Z.O.: Adopted 4/21/04 GG-SALDO: Adopted 4/20/05. *Carson Helfrich - Consultant	FAP/Munic.
Hamilton Twp.	Incorporating GG provisions in Z.O. & SALDO. Reviewed - SALDO. Public Hearing Pending *David Sweet - Consultant	FAP/Munic.
Jackson Twp.	Reviewed GG provisions in Ords. Awaiting CJER Regional Comprehensive Plan	
Middle Smithfield	GG provisions in Ords. Adopted Ord - 9/8/04 / Reviewed under FAP *URDC - Charlie Schmehl/consultant	FAP/Munic.

MCPC CURRENT MUNICIPAL EVENTS

Municipal Planning Effort	Status	Funding
Borough of Mount Pocono	Adopted GG - Z.O. 5/17/04 - SALDO 6/28/04 Adopted Well Head Ord. 9/7/04	FAP/Munic.
Paradise Twp.	Adopted GG - Z.O. & SALDO 4/20/05	FAP/Munic.
Pocono Twp.	Updated and adopted Z.O., Nov. 03 Discussing the development of an official map.	Munic.
Polk Twp.		
Price Twp.	Updated and adopted Z.O., Nov. 03. Reviewed SALDO under MPC	Munic.
Ross Twp.		
Smithfield Twp.	GG provisions in Ords. *Tom Shepstone - Consultant	FAP/Munic.
Stroud Twp.	Adopted GG standards in SALDO Reviewed GG Standards Z.O. - Begin working on Official Map	FAP/Munic.
Stroudsburg Borough		
Tobyhanna Twp.	Moving forward with implementation of Regional Comprehensive plan.	
Tunkhannock Twp.	CSD - SALDO adopted 3/14/05 Adopted GG provisions in zoning Dec. 05 Discussing the development of an official map.	FAP/Munic.

Current Transportation Studies/Initiatives
 Monroe County, PA
 6/30/06

<u>Area</u>	<u>Activity Description</u>
- West End (209 Corridor)	Prelim. Study completed by HNTB 12/01. Additional study funded by PENNDOT currently underway.
- Smithfield (209 from I-80 to Marshalls Creek Bypass)	Study continuing, includes 447/209 intersection improvements.
- Smithfield/M. Smithfield	CTLUMS process completed. Bypass construction commenced in 2006.
- Stroud	PA 611 Corridor (Phillips St.-Bridge St.) Study completed by HRG, being reviewed by PENNDOT.
- Stroud, E.S., Stbg.	Rt. 611-Congested Corridor Improvement Program completed. Improvements being programmed.
- HSPS Region	Grant received from PENNDOT, part of multi-munic. comp. plan. Plan completed and adopted in 2005.
- I-80 Corridor (DWG-380)	Safe 80 Initiative, funding secured, consultant selected, process underway.
- Pocono Township	Point-of-Access Study for Exits 298 & 299 completed. Funding being secured for improvements.
- PMMA (Airport)	Master Plan Process complete, implementation initiated.

EXHIBIT B

- MCRA (Rail)

Lackawanna Cutoff project continues, Station Site Committees formed, NJT is project coordinator.

- Countywide

Municipalities, County and PENNDOT have formed a Road Task Force to further address trans. issues.