

PRIMARY LAND USES BY CATEGORY AND MUNICIPALITY

Land Use	Resident. And Urban	Rural Resident.	Vacant Forest & Agricult.	Industrial	Commerc. & Light Industrial	Public & Semi-Public	State Forest	State Game Lands	Allegheny National Forest	Total
Township										
Benezette	0	4	21	<1	<1	<1	67	7	0	100
Fox	4	13	61	<1	<1	<1	20	0	0	100
Highland	0	6	2	<1	<1	<1	0	10	81	100
Horton	0	16	65	<1	<1	<1	0	18	0	100
Jay	0	12	72	<1	<1	<1	16	0	0	100
Jones	0	7	49	<1	<1	1	16	10	17	100
Millstone	0	7	14	<1	<1	<1	0	5	74	100
Ridgway*	7	9	37	<1	1	1	0	21	23	100 *1
St. Marys	7	11	52	2	1	2	0	25	0	100
Spring Creek	0	7	14	<1	<1	<1	0	35	43	100

\* Includes Johnsonburg Borough and Ridgway Borough.

The nature of development is not drastically different than in the late 60's in terms of "kind" or "type". It is the "how" and "where" that is causing incompatible land uses and diminishment to sense of community in some of Elk County's communities. Part of the solution will be in removing barriers which would jeopardize implementation of this plan. A part of this is to transform the barriers into functional processes. For example:

Barrier

Environmental protection through zoning is in conflict with private property rights.

Accomplishment

Antagonism

Transformation

Environmental stewardship and responsible land use promotes a higher quality of life, more marketable properties, and stronger economic communities.

Accomplishment

Alliances

## H.2 Land Use Development and Natural Resources

Sprawl and its effects on natural resources has been a focal point of this plan development. It is desirable to focus on local municipal land use regulations and policies to improve the attractiveness of Elk County as a place for businesses and industries to locate or remain and people to live and visit. Flexibility is needed, within such land use controls, to promote innovations within regulated communities.

One type of tool available for implementation, among others, is performance zoning. Performance zoning is authorized under Articles V & VI of Act 247 and is included in a zoning ordinance as a permitted use in selected and identified districts.

Goals and objectives established in the plan are developed to begin to develop better tools within the County to vision, plan, and implement regional initiatives. The first step, accomplished in this plan, is recognition of the problems created by current land use patterns. The next step is to build consensus for effectuation.

Performance zoning standards for natural resource protection can be developed to provide guidelines for site-specific evaluation of natural features for residential development. Guidelines typically follow a procedure that:

1. Determines base area (Site minus unuseable property, i.e. rights-of-way, land zoned for other uses).
2. Determines resources to be protected, i.e. floodplain soil, lakes, ponds, wetlands, severe slopes, mature forest areas.
3. Determines a minimum area to be used for recreational activities and open space.
4. Determines lands unrestricted for development (base area minus 2 & 3 above).
5. Determines number of dwelling units to be planned for based on net buildable site area and density set by a zoning district and develop lot layout around protected natural resources and planned recreational and open space areas.

Property values of resultant smaller lots often exceed those of larger lots in subdivisions planned without these natural resources, open spaces, and recreational opportunity ammentities.

**H.3 Existing Land Use Regulations**

Eight (8) of Elk County's municipalities have some form of land use controls in place, some of which are recent and some which are quite dated. Four (4) have no up to date land use planning tools in place and rely on the 1968 Comprehensive Plan and subsequent 1971 update.

Land Development Tool	Comprehensive Plan	Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance	Zoning
Benezette Township	None - relies on County Plan 1971	None	None
Fox Township	1977, amended 1981	1981 Rev. 1998	None
Highland Township	None - relies on County Plan 1971	None	None
Horton Township	None - relies on County Plan 1971	None	None
Jay Township	None - relies on County Plan 1971	1993	None
Johnsonburg Borough	1964	1967	1965
Jones Township	None - relies on County Plan 1971	1993	None
Millstone Township	None - relies on County Plan 1971	None	None
Ridgway Borough	1964	1978	1978
Ridgway Township	1978 Rev. 1998	1967 Rev. 1979	1967 Rev. 1981
City of St. Marys	1994	1996	1995
Spring Creek Township	None - relies on County Plan 1971	1980	None

Elk County Survey 1998

#### **H.4 Land Use Plan**

Central to the land use policy issues that Elk County must address are the great diversity of residential density, development intensity, land use incompatibilities, and sprawl. Virtually all types of development could be accommodated somewhere within the boundaries of most of the County's municipalities. For those municipalities, local policy should recognize the value of both very rural and very urban areas within their jurisdiction. For some municipalities, it needs to be recognized, that rural character needs to be maintained and that economic gains are not confined to municipal bounds. The following land uses are recommended as a future guiding policy.

#### **LAND USE CATEGORIES**

##### **DOWNTOWN AREAS**

Downtown areas, for the purpose of this plan, are designated as those areas which provide locations for provision of convenience goods and services (i.e. grocery stores, drug stores, restaurants, hair care salons, etc.), the sale of general merchandise and the assembly of products such as furniture and which already have public infrastructure to service related development. Land use in a downtown is normally a mixture of commercial, residential, and public uses.

Where growth of downtown areas would be determined by appropriate zoning, certain benefits might be incurred, for example:

1. Concentration of commercial growth.
2. Employment opportunities in sales, service and assembly type manufacturing in downtown areas.
3. Encouragement of multi-family residential growth in downtown areas.

The intended boundaries of downtown areas should be delineated based on natural features, existing uses, and planned future uses.

Downtown development should focus on drawing tourism, in Elk County, to key historic places in the Boroughs and City which are currently largely not publicized. For example the Sylvania Corporation (started in 1906 and operating as the worlds largest incandescent lamp manufacturing facility), and Speer Carbon Company (started in the early 1900's) in the City of St. Marys are two places which might be given consideration. Speer Carbon Company is currently Carbide Graphite. Willamette Industries in Johnsonburg is a probable focal point for the newly created Johnsonburg Community Trust Downtown Improvement Committee.

## **HIGHWAY COMMERCIAL CORRIDORS**

There are numerous existing businesses located outside of downtown areas which are important to the local economy and should be encouraged to prosper. New uses should be low impact commercial uses and should not include location of and expansion of businesses that are more suited to downtown areas and industrial parks. These areas are intended to be for low impact commercial uses. Commercial development outside of these groupings along corridors should be grouped at nodes where public sewer and water are available and where traffic volumes are high.

Commercial highway corridors need to provide for retail and service industries which complement and do not compete with historic downtown centers in the County. Provisions should be made to limit actual space in commercial highway corridors so that retail business is not shifted from existing downtown areas to highway corridors.

## **RURAL CONSERVATION - LOW DENSITY**

The vast majority of land area in Elk County should remain in rural conservation and low-density uses. The area so designated is area containing physical features which are unsuitable for dense development i.e. severe slopes, poor soils, flood plains, wetlands, or other physical environmental constraints. These areas are better retained for other valuable uses such as agriculture, saw timber, habitat management, outdoor recreation, and limited scattered residential development. Residential development should not be impacted by land uses which would adversely affect them.

The larger property holdings in areas with such restrictions will stand limited development provided the developer can mitigate any potential adverse environmental impacts. Flexible land use policies for rural areas can provide for environmentally compatible industries such as agriculture, farms, saw mills, and appropriate recreational uses. Subdivision policies should promote larger tracts and discourage small lots and high density proposals. When environmentally compatible industries are permitted, buffering should be required for visual and activity impacts between resident and industrial/commercial uses. In home occupations can be permitted in rural conservation - low density areas but should limit the number of employees, (usually one or two), and should exclude retail sales. In general, nonresidential uses outside of neighborhood businesses providing essential goods and services to the local citizens, should not be encouraged.

Carefully planned and managed environmentally sensitive land can be a visible long-term investment in terms of timber sales, recreational expenditures by tourists to augment other public benefits, and in terms of improved quality of life for residents.

## **URBAN - SUBURBAN**

Development of vacant tracts in urban and suburban neighborhoods should only be compatible developments. The need for meeting the demands for low income housing should be met in areas planned for flexible use and affordable housing.

In the County's Boroughs and City, zoning of districts for "Mixed Use" is encouraged in areas with older business buildings. As mentioned in the economic plan, commercial uses of older multi story industrial buildings may offset the difficulty of marketing out of date structures for modern industrial uses. Again, ordinances should not restrict a lot to a single use or one primary building as to restrict incubator, flex-space, or mixed business and residential uses.

Some of the County's older residential neighborhoods, such as portions of Ridgway Borough and the City of St. Marys, have quaint, well maintained Victorian style homes which are always attractive for commercial uses. Service industries, consistently carrying the highest wage base, are commercial and light industrial office uses. Provisions should be made to facilitate these quaint houses in older neighborhoods for light commercial and service industry office spaces, where intended uses are compatible with other amenities, i.e. parking.

Elk County's lesser publicized unique historic features provide a good opportunity for heritage based tourism in its urban/suburban areas. The Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission, (PHMC) Bureau of Historical Preservation, maintains a list of properties in Elk County which are "listed" or "eligible" historic properties.

Both St. Marys and Ridgway have five (5) structures listed with the PHMC as eligible structures. Additionally, it is reported that the old St. Marys Borough building once housed the Hygrade Sylvania plant and may be of historic significance. Also, it is reported that the John Fernan residence located in Ridgway, once considered a mansion, has a ballroom on the third floor, lit by the first candescent bulbs manufactured by Hygrade Sylvania and that those fixtures are still operable. Other buildings mentioned during the study include the convent building in St. Marys, the Gymnasium in St. Marys and of course, Decker's Chapel. A comprehensive list of historical resources in the County has been prepared as part of the Lumber Heritage Program. Special use restrictions and protection measures may work toward preservation of these resources while bolstering sense of community, the tourism sector of the local economy, etc.

The City of St. Marys has begun to develop a historic district encompassing the downtown area and some adjacent residential areas which certification obtained from the PHMA on November 25 of 1998, opening many possibilities for tourism development.

## **URBAN RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOOD**

Urban residential neighborhoods are those areas currently served or scheduled to be served by public sewer and water. This area would contain multi-family residential structures i.e. townhouses and multi-family apartment units. Development of urban residential areas should incorporate adequate recreational facilities, i.e. parks, play areas. Density of development should be greater than in rural conservation areas. Development of urban residential areas should be encouraged near schools.

## **FLEXIBLE HOUSING AREAS**

This area constitutes larger tracts that should be planned for flexible and affordable development of housing in areas with existing or planned infrastructure. When not situated adjacent to urban residential parks, public park areas should be incorporated.

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AREAS**

Also, some areas of the County have less dense development but are under pressure to develop more intensely for a wide variety of uses, both residential and non residential. These areas are viable targets for public infrastructure in the near future, or have relatively new infrastructure. Some areas of Elk County are areas which should be considered for further economic development. James City, for example, has the remnant site from the glass plant that flourished in the early 1900s. This area, located south of T-319 between James City and Route 66, might be refurbished. The site is still in need of clean up from activities of the late 1900s. Being mindful that Wolf Run is a high quality cold water fish stream, an environmentally compatible industry might be located at the old glass plant site.

Similarly, Jones Township (Wilcox) is home to the remnant site of the purported largest tannery in the world. The recently designated Keystone Opportunity Zone (KOZ) may be considered an economic development area. A KOZ is an area where state and local governments partner to eliminate taxes for employers and citizens who stimulate job creation and private investment where needed for an established period of time. Community-development projects in a KOZ will receive a number of advantages through many of DCED's other programs, including lower interest rates on state loans and priority consideration for several grant programs.

## **INDUSTRIAL AREAS**

Industrial development has succeeded in Elk County in spite of poor Interstate access. Future development of high impact industries is encouraged in more accessible areas restricted by zoning for that purpose. Light industries can often be compatibly located in the same highway corridors as commercial uses. Industrial areas do not need to be located on high traffic roads, but consideration to proximity to interstate access should be given.

## **INSTITUTIONAL COMMUNITIES**

Institutional uses, such as the Elk County Regional Health System Hospital, contribute to Elk County's currently favorable economic climate. It is recommended that policy developers and municipal planners focus on infusion of federal funds into the development of additional institutional land uses such as elderly housing and most formal zoning for such uses.

## **REDEVELOPMENT AREAS**

Finally, there are areas of the County which would benefit largely from redevelopment. Active redevelopment authorities in the County's eligible Boroughs and City are encouraged. Areas where redevelopment may be considered may include areas with conflicting land uses, and those with existing economically undesirable land uses (uses better located elsewhere for economic viability).

Redevelopment authorities have substantial flexibility in the purchase and selling of property and can begin to resolve the existing problems associated with conflicting land uses by adopting plans for redevelopment. The Authority is empowered to prepare studies and plans for such as rehabilitation and conservation of properties, codes and regulations related to land use, feasibility studies, etc. The Authority can work within a redevelopment area to acquire, sell or lease property.

The City of St. Marys has several sites identified in the City's 1994 CERP report where redevelopment is warranted. The City of St. Marys Redevelopment Authority is working to resolve existing problems in those designated areas including faulty street layouts, poor lot layouts, conflicting land uses, and little or no open space in areas of excessive structure coverage, and uses which would be more appropriately sited in another area. The Comprehensive Plan prepared in 1994 reiterated these needs. An Authority was created in August of 1994. The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program provides for certified redevelopment areas to use 30 percent of entitlement funds to address slum and blight problems. This can include land acquisition, codes enforcement, and demolition of blighted properties. Again, water and sewer extensions are only encouraged where they conform to the Land Use Plan, as discussed in the Community Facilities Plan.

## **GROWTH BOUNDARIES**

Finally, future growth should be encouraged within "growth boundaries" which encourage "infill development" and "compatible land uses" and discourage "sprawl". Public infrastructure development outside of growth boundaries should be discouraged. Infusion of public funds for development of infrastructure should be limited to projects inside of growth boundaries. See Community Facilities Plan.

Growth boundaries are strategically located to maximize the economic stability that comes with increased densities and best use of land in areas with existing infrastructure. Where moneys can be infused into upgrade of existing infrastructure instead of expansion of service areas in sprawl like patterns, revenues can be generated to provide better and less costly service. For example, many of Elk County's sewage treatment plants are currently undersized, have substantial infiltration and inflow problems, or are otherwise in need of upgrade. To continue to expand service areas prior to these upgrades can only lead to furthering these deficiencies. Growth boundaries establish a priority for development which helps to regain economic stability.

Development should:

1. Conform to the County Land Use Plan.
2. Conform to the Local Government Land Use Plan.
3. Create economic diversity.
4. Conform to the Housing and Infrastructure Plans.
5. Recognize growth boundaries established by this plan for proposed infrastructure development.
6. Propose sewer extensions where public water is already available.
7. Consider impacts to aquifers and water recharge areas tributary to public water supply sources.

The designation of a growth boundary is compatible to a “development district”. The application, on a regional content, requires intermunicipal cooperation and regional planning, such as would be necessary for Fox Township and the City of St. Marys, see **Exhibit No. 9**. In this case, the two municipalities would need to jointly enact zoning and other regulations to implement the goals intended by the Urban Growth boundary and to accomplish planned growth outside of environmentally sensitive areas such as public water supply reservoir watershed areas. As an example, the City of St. Marys and Fox Township are encouraged to consider the potential impacts of development along Route 255 in light of the Laurel Run Reservoir. “Low impact” uses are suggested.

Effectively implemented, growth boundaries will conserve fiscal resources, reduce land consumption, encourage conservation of sustainable natural resources, reduce sprawl, encourage “sustainable” growth where appropriate, accommodate mixed land uses, revitalize existing infrastructures, revitalize the County’s rural communities, and revitalize the communities’ downtown areas and urban communities.

## **COMMUNITY LAND TRUSTS AND CONSERVATION LAND TRUSTS**

Additionally, one more tool available to the development of affordable housing, commercial space, and parks while promoting homeownership, historic preservation, local control, neighborhood revitalization, and agricultural land preservation is a land trust. A land trust can be a conservation trust, which acquires and protects open space and agricultural land and a community land trust which tends to focus more on housing and community development.

Of particular applicability in Elk County, may be the use of community land trusts. A community land trust can acquire and hold land, but sell residential or commercial buildings which are on the land. Cost of land in the housing equation is minimized making the housing more affordable. The land leases can be long-term renewable, and assignable to the heirs of the lease holder.

Consideration of such trusts will be encouraged by the County.

Usually, someone interested in buying or selling property will contact a land trust for the trusts’ help. The trust negotiates the right to buy based on an appraisal price. Trusts are non-profit organizations whose main goal is to preserve open space and maintain affordable housing by helping other agencies and local governments.