

Background

The Township of East Bethlehem is located along the Monongahela River in eastern Washington County, Pennsylvania. The river contributed to the township's early settlement in the late 1700's and is one of the original communities in Washington County.

The township is approximately 30 minutes east of the City of Washington via US Route 40 and roughly 60 minutes southeast of the City of Pittsburgh via Toll Road 43 and SR 88. *Map 1.1: Project Location* depicts the Project Area.

East Bethlehem Township is comprised of distinctly different residential neighborhoods and one small downtown commercial district. Despite significant population losses over the last few decades, the township remains a desirable place to live.

Planning Process

The East Bethlehem Township Comprehensive Plan was funded through a Community Development Block Grant administered by the Washington County Redevelopment Authority. The township leaders recognized the need to prepare for the future as issues such as vacant properties and structures were becoming prevalent negative factors affecting the community. In the spring of 2007, the township retained Mackin Engineering to prepare a Comprehensive Plan. The charge to the consultant was to assist the community to understand its history and current conditions and prepare recommendations for future growth of the municipality.

What is a Comprehensive Plan?

A comprehensive plan is a document that guides future development in a community. It contains the vision and goals of a community and is typically a 10 year plan.

The plan describes the community in terms of physical, economic, and social development. The plan is an important tool in the growth and development of the overall community and the protection of natural and historical resources, the preservation of prime agricultural lands, provision of community services and the improvement of the quality of housing stock. The plan is also an educational tool to help residents understand the strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats in their

community. The Comprehensive Plan is a public document that is adopted by the governing body.

The Comprehensive Plan for East Bethlehem Township was prepared in accordance with the Pennsylvania’s Municipalities Planning Code Act of 1968, as reenacted and amended. The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) requires Comprehensive Plans to address specific elements, ensure compatible development with neighboring municipalities, and that plan recommendations are by their nature internally consistent.

Vision Statement

The following vision statement was developed for East Bethlehem Township through the public involvement process:

“Our community offers inviting opportunities for people to visit, to call home, and to establish their business. Capitalizing on a rich history, the influences from our past can still be seen in the walk-able and vibrant neighborhoods and downtown area that make East Bethlehem a destination for those looking to discover a path to their future.”

“Residential and commercial areas overlook marinas that are part of the revitalized riverfront while a reminder from the past, the Fredericktown Ferry still shuttles vehicles across the Mon as it did over one hundred years ago. The connections to the regional transportation network- roadways, river, railroad, and trail- allow people to find our community and enjoy their stay in this haven along the Mon.”

“Local establishments fill the business district and have helped the economy become more vibrant while historical, cultural, and natural attractions are increasing tourism from throughout the region. While East Bethlehem has undergone a rebirth, this community still has the same small town feel that most of its residents remember from years gone by. “

Contiguous Municipalities Statement

As per Article III, Section 301 (5) of the MPC, a statement has been prepared indicating the relationship of the existing and proposed

development of East Bethlehem Township to existing and proposed plans of adjacent municipalities and the objectives of the region.

The following plans for surrounding communities were reviewed to ensure compatible development with the future land use plan for East Bethlehem Township:

- § Washington County Comprehensive Plan
- § Washington County Greenways and Recreation Plan
- § Washington Natural Heritage Inventory
- § East Bethlehem Zoning Ordinance
- § Conceptual study for Ten Mile Creek Waterway Trail
- § Lower Ten Mile Joint Sewer Authority ACT 637 Plan
- § Southeast Greene Cooperative Communities Comprehensive Plan
- § Greene County Comprehensive Plan
- § Jefferson Morgan Multi-Municipal Comprehensive Plan

The plan was developed with respect to surrounding land uses of the adjoining communities. It is the belief of East Bethlehem Township and the Steering Committee that the goals and objectives of this plan are consistent with those of adjacent municipalities.

The plan was submitted on March 12, 2008 for public review by Beth-Center School District, Washington County Planning Commission and the following contiguous municipalities:

- § Deemston Borough, Washington County
- § Centerville Township, Washington County
- § Morgan Township, Greene County
- § Clarksville Borough, Greene County
- § Jefferson Township, Greene County
- § Luzerne Township, Fayette County

Interrelationship Statement

This comprehensive plan was developed knowing that each of the plan elements are interrelated and changes to any of these elements will have an impact and effect on the other. The recommendations prepared are reflective of the overall goals that were identified during the public

participation phase, visioning process, and steering committee meetings. The recommendations contained in this plan were developed after existing conditions were analyzed and reviewed. The plan recommends specific actions to address vacant and blighted structures, infill development, transportation deficiencies, and park and recreation needs.

Community Development Objectives

The comprehensive plan is a guide for local leaders to achieve the desired future vision of East Bethlehem Township. The following Community Development Objectives are reflective of Article III, Section 301 (1) of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC):

- § Implement strategies to preserve the historic features of the community
- § Capitalize upon the Monongahela River and Ten Mile Creek as recreational destinations to stimulate the local economy
- § Strive to provide attractive and safe pedestrian connections to local destinations and neighborhood centers
- § Develop community parks within walking distance to revitalized neighborhoods
- § Promote the desirability of the community to attract new residential development
- § Encourage economic growth and new development to enhance municipal resources and retain the high quality of life offered in East Bethlehem Township

Public Participation

Public Participation is vital to the comprehensive plan process. The needs of the citizens of East Bethlehem Township will direct the goals of the comprehensive plan. To help facilitate this process a Steering Committee was formed by the East Bethlehem Board of Commissioners. The Steering Committee's role in the process was to guide the consultant, review the plan, and refine the recommendations. Two public meetings were held in the township so that residents, business owners, and community leaders could identify the desired vision of the future of East Bethlehem Township. Throughout the process, interviews were conducted with stakeholders such as municipal staff, community leaders, civic organizations, etc.

Public Involvement Round One

The first public meeting occurred on May 23, 2007 to gain residential and business owner input. Meetings were advertised in the local newspaper, flyers/posters were distributed, and announced at township meetings, resulting in 23 people attending the first meeting.

The public process confirmed the desire of the residents to maintain the small town character of the Township and its villages. Residents agreed that the lack of economic opportunities is a challenge and partnerships need to be established with the County and other communities in the region. Residents stressed concerns with the lack of property maintenance, the need to address abandoned buildings, and the re-use of vacant properties. Another concern is the condition and lack of sidewalks in the villages throughout the township.

A community imaging exercise was completed to understand what the residents would like to see in the township. Residents would also like to see riverfront development, elderly housing, and the extension of the Greene Rail Trail. Residents identified the following natural/cultural/historical features for preservation or protection; the Fredericktown ferry and library, the Monongahela River and Ten Mile Creek, and various churches throughout the area.

Residents expressed their desire for the redevelopment of the Clyde Mine Property. Various ideas for the development of the Clyde Mine site include:

- § Restaurant/recreation area
- § Community Park
- § Township building complex
- § Residential homes
- § Mixed use development

Public Involvement Round Two

The second public meeting was held in February 27, 2008 to gauge public support to the plan recommendations. The meeting was advertised in the local newspaper, flyers/posters were distributed, and announced at the

township meetings, resulting in 24 people attending the meeting.

The public support for the plan was confirmed by comments made at the public meeting and on the public meeting exit surveys.

The results of the comments provided on the exit surveys are as follows:

- § Do you support the East Bethlehem Township Comprehensive Plan? 85% responded yes
- § Do you support the recommendation to extend the Greene River Trail into the township? 95% responded yes
- § Do you support the recommendation to create a water trail on Ten Mile Creek? 95% of the respondents stated yes
- § Do you support a shared municipal facility? 85% responded yes
- § Do you support a portion of your taxes be allocated to repair and or remove blighted structures within the municipal boundaries? 70% yes, 15% stated no
- § Do you support the idea of redeveloping the Clyde Mine Site? 75% yes, 10% no
- § Do you support the idea of creating a common theme and identity to promote the township? 90% of the respondents stated yes
- § Attendees were asked if they would be interested in volunteering to implement the recommendations. 58% marked yes
- § When asked what was the most important issue that East Bethlehem commissioners should face first, the majority of respondents stated:
 - Clean-up unsightly areas to make the township attractive
 - Revitalize and fix up the downtown area including sidewalks and bring business back
 - Concentrate on functionality and using funds strategically

Acknowledgements

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