

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Municipal governance has become increasingly more complex due to budget constraints, changes in the social fabric of today's communities, and an increased interest in preserving environmentally sensitive lands and open spaces. Because of these changes, many municipalities have formed partnerships to plan from a regional perspective so as to strengthen their ability to sustain economic viability and enhance the quality of life for residents. The effectiveness of these partnerships is often dependent upon the willingness of municipal leaders to think creatively and act cooperatively. This intergovernmental cooperation is essential to the completion of any multi-municipal planning effort and fundamental to ensuring the long-term sustainability of each participating community.

PROJECT LOCATION

The City of Monongahela and New Eagle Borough are located along the Monongahela River in eastern Washington County, Pennsylvania, as shown in **Figure 1.1: General Location**. The Project Area is approximately 30 minutes east of the City of Washington via Interstate 70 (I-70) and roughly 45 minutes southeast of the City of Pittsburgh via Toll Road 43 and/or SR 88 / SR 837. The two contiguous communities are surrounded by Carroll Township and are a part of the Ringgold School District. **Map 1.1: Project Location** depicts the Project Area's relationship to surrounding communities.



Figure 1.1: General Location

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The City of Monongahela and New Eagle Borough Joint Comprehensive Plan was funded through a Land Use Planning Technical Assistance Program (LUPTAP) grant provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) and through a multi-municipal planning grant through the Local Government Academy (LGA). In August of 2007, Mackin Engineering Company was hired by the Washington County Redevelopment Authority, on behalf of the local communities, to facilitate the development of a multi-municipal comprehensive plan for the City of Monongahela and the Borough of New Eagle in a manner to achieve the following objectives:

- Recognize, preserve and enhance the unique characteristics and service requirements of each municipality, as well as their contribution to the quality of life for area residents.
- Identify social and economic interdependencies affecting the viability of these municipalities.
- Identify responsibilities and services that one municipality might be better suited to provide for the region and develop strategies to make such efforts cost effective for all involved.
- Strengthen the municipalities' ability to guide future development in an effective and orderly manner.

In June of 2000, Pennsylvania adopted smart growth legislation that reflected the traditions, laws and politics of Pennsylvania. These reforms – Act 67 (House Bill 14) and Act 68 (Senate Bill 300) – amended the Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) and enabled counties and municipalities to assume control of their destiny by planning together for the development and conservation of resources, and most importantly, implementing plans through cooperative agreements and consistent ordinances and actions. More specifically, multi-municipal planning under Act 67 and Act 68 can:

Promote the protection of rural resources

The laws require all municipalities to plan and zone for natural and historic resources, and agricultural lands. Within a multi-municipal plan, it is easier to protect larger areas of lands from intense development by designating growth areas in or around existing developed places and rural resource areas for more limited development.

Promote development in older boroughs and suburbs

Cities and boroughs have the opportunity to plan with neighboring municipalities for more dense development in their municipalities, making use of and improving existing infrastructure, and providing for infill traditional neighborhood development.

Provide funding incentives

State agencies can provide funding priority under state funding programs for multi-municipal planning and implementation.

Require state agencies to incorporate local plans in decision-making

State agencies must consider the joint plan in making funding and permitting decisions.

Address regional issues

Planning for issues regional in nature, such as sewer and water provisions, emergency services, agricultural preservation, and transportation issues can eliminate duplication of efforts, encourage communication between municipalities and create opportunities for more efficient use of resources.

Allow cost sharing

Municipalities can share the significant costs of a sound land use plan, and use the technical assistance and expertise of county planning departments, state, regional, and local agencies, and/or share planning tasks among the participating municipalities.

Protect against curative amendment lawsuits

Municipalities within a joint planning area no longer have to provide for every use. The laws now direct the court in a zoning challenge to look at the availability of uses under the zoning ordinances of municipalities that have adopted and implemented a joint plan and not to limit its consideration to the zoning ordinance being challenged.

Allow tax-revenue sharing across municipal boundaries

The tax and revenue sharing tools mean that the burdens and the benefits of such development are shared and contribute to the economic health of all the municipalities in the plan. For example, some percentage of the real estate tax from a large shopping mall or industrial park could be shared among municipalities in the plan on a formula basis.

Retain local control

The laws allow municipalities to retain local control over implementation and local issues so long as implementation is consistent with the multi-municipal framework.

The City of Monongahela / Borough of New Eagle Joint Comprehensive Plan was prepared in accordance with the MPC and other Land Use Initiatives established by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Once adopted, this document will be:

- General guidelines for future development that will promote the public health, safety, morals and general welfare of all residents;
- A promotion of the public interest of all residents, rather than the interests of certain individuals or special interest groups;
- A public policy guide to decision making regarding the physical development of the municipalities that includes strategies for future land use, housing, economic development, natural, cultural and historic features, transportation, community facilities and services, and parks, recreation and open space;
- An educational tool that provides and understanding of the past and present conditions of the region; and
- An expression of the municipalities' "vision" of the optimally desirable pattern of development for the future.

COMMUNITY VISIONING

The primary goal of the visioning activity was to have people focus on the future of the region. What do they want to see in their community five years from now, ten years from now and twenty years from now? The answers to these questions emerged during this process and allowed the elected officials to hear what the residents believe to be the most important features to have in their community. These statements identify the most important values according to community residents. The visioning process involved the following consensus building ideals:

- Develop resident supported preliminary / final goals and objectives
- Develop regional strategies
- Prioritize objectives
- Develop recommendations and implementation strategies that will provide the basis for the plan

The Community Development Objectives are reflective of Article III, Section 301 (1) of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC). "A statement of objectives of the municipality concerning its future development, including, but not limited to, the location, character and timing of future development objectives as provided in section 606". The Community Development Objectives will provide guidance to direct growth to appropriate areas of the municipalities, plan regionally and share resources in order to control future land development in a positive and orderly manner.

Community Development Objectives

Together the City of Monongahela and Borough of New Eagle will take proactive approaches to implement strategies that foster a sustainable community and encourage future developers to implement LEED-ND practices.

We will retain our strong heritage and thriving local economy, exemplified by our historic and vibrant downtown that is attractive and welcoming to visitors.

A variety of commercial developments will strengthen our economic future by preserving the traditional Central Business District while offering modern retail pursuits geared to a regional market.

New and infill development will align with the existing community character and instill a sense of identity and pride.

While industry will continue to operate along the peaceful banks of the Monongahela River, it will be intermixed with upscale housing, retail stores and greenways.

The Monongahela Aquatorium is a focal point of the communities and will be a destination for cultural festivities and pleasure boating pastimes.

Parks will be located within safe and walkable distances of revitalized neighborhoods and children can play safely along tree-lined streets.

Our communities will provide alternative transportation choices (park-n-rides, transit, etc.) to reduce motor vehicle use and traffic.

We will strive to provide attractive and safe pedestrian connections to local destinations and neighborhood centers.

Economic development will not take place at the expense of environmental health and we will continue to promote the extraordinary quality of life our river and its valley offer our citizens and visitors.

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 the City of Monongahela and the Borough of New Eagle to existing and proposed plans of adjacent municipalities and the objectives of the region. Monongahela and New Eagle are bordered by Carroll Township (south and east), Union Township (west), and the Monongahela River (north). The Monongahela / New Eagle Joint Comprehensive Plan was developed with respect to surrounding land uses of the adjoining communities. It is the belief of the City of Monongahela and the Borough of New Eagle and the Joint Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee that the goals and objectives of this plan are consistent with those of adjacent municipalities within Washington County. The plan was submitted on December 14, 2007 to the Ringgold School District; Washington County Planning Commission; Carroll Township, Washington County; Union Township, Washington County, and Forward Township, Allegheny County. In addition, the following plans were reviewed and proposed future land use strategies taken into consideration during the development of the Monongahela / New Eagle Joint Comprehensive Plan:

Multi-Municipal Comprehensive Plan for Carroll Township, Finleyville Borough, Union Township, and Nottingham Township (not yet adopted as of December 2007)

The Multi-Municipal Comprehensive Plan for Carroll Township, Finleyville Borough, Union Township, and Nottingham Township was reviewed for consistency in proposed land use and development. The future land use plan for Carroll Township proposes neighborhood residential and agriculture primarily along the border with Monongahela and New Eagle, which is consistent with the residential and open spaces that are proposed Monongahela and New Eagle. The proposed future land use in Union Township at the New Eagle border is heavy industrial, which will be buffered from residential with the proposed open space in New Eagle Borough.

Washington County Comprehensive Plan (2005)

Washington County completed a countywide comprehensive plan in 2005. The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code, Act of 1968, P.L. 805, No. 247, as reenacted and amended, (MPC) defines a county comprehensive plan as “a land use and growth management plan prepared by the county planning commission and adopted by the county commissioners which establishes broad goals and criteria for municipalities to use in preparation of their comprehensive plan and land use regulation.”

The Washington County Comprehensive Plan identified Target Areas for Investment (TAI). The TAI designated within Washington County were designed to align with the Commonwealth’s classification of Designated Growth Areas as specified under the MPC (p. 2). A Designated Growth Area is “a region within a county that preferably includes and surrounds a city, borough or village, and within which residential and mixed use development is permitted or planned for at densities of one unit to the acre or more, commercial, industrial and institutional uses are permitted or planned for and public infrastructure services are provided or planned” (p. 2).

The City of Monongahela and the Borough of New Eagle are located in the Mon Valley Corridor TAI, which focus investment to achieve the following goals:

- Encourage infill development where current infrastructure exists before expanding to areas outside of the designated TAI
- Make existing roads, transit service and other services more efficient to facilitate the mobility of people and goods throughout the region
- Direct development along major transportation corridors consistent with the capacity levels of existing infrastructure
- Promote a balanced multi-modal transportation system that includes options such as bicycling, walking, driving and public transportation
- Develop sustainable communities by providing jobs and shopping in close proximity to where people live
- Provide a variety of housing options and densities to accommodate all income levels, races, and family composition

INTERRELATIONSHIP STATEMENT

The Interrelationship Statement for the Monongahela and New Eagle Joint Comprehensive Plan acknowledges how the various plan components are inherently linked to and affected by one another. This synergy between plan elements creates a series of interrelated activities to address the identified concerns of the City of Monongahela and the Borough of New Eagle. Each plan recommendation is related and all serve to achieve, in a holistic fashion, the vision for the future as expressed by the residents, stakeholders, and elected officials of Monongahela and New Eagle.

The recommendations contained in the Joint Comprehensive Plan were developed after investigating the demographic trends of the two communities and how such trends might fluctuate or change in the future. Additionally, the plan recommends specific actions based upon the assessment and evaluation of the built and natural environment. With this in mind, the Comprehensive Plan identifies priority rehabilitation needs, infill development goals, remediation measures for transportation deficiencies, and offers methods to enhance the local economic development potential.

The fundamental approach behind the Monongahela and New Eagle Joint Comprehensive Plan based the planning process on the concepts of Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design - Neighborhood Development (LEED – ND). LEED-ND places an emphasis on the elements that create cohesion for neighborhoods and understanding the elements that relate the community to its larger region and landscape. A thorough public involvement process was employed throughout the planning process to gauge the public support of the LEED – ND philosophy and corresponding plan recommendations. This effort created a succinct set of priority projects that are fundamentally intertwined to coincide with the realization of the Monongahela and New Eagle vision for their future development.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT SUMMARY

Participation by the residents, community leaders, service providers, and representatives of the business community was essential in the development and completion of the Monongahela / New Eagle Joint Comprehensive Plan. By including the public from the onset of the project, they have stayed involved and developed a sense of ownership in the plan. The public involvement process identified community values and the desired vision for the future of the City of Monongahela and the Borough of New Eagle. Through these efforts, a process was utilized to identify the most appropriate strategies for the future preservation and enhancement of the region.

Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee

A steering committee was developed to oversee the project and met on a monthly basis from October of 2006 through December of 2007. The committee was comprised of council-appointed representatives from both Monongahela and New Eagle, including council members, planning commission members, municipal authorities, local residents and business owners, and other interested parties. The role of the steering committee was to review plan sections, provide data and information, and to assist in the development and prioritization of goals and strategies.

Stakeholder Interviews

Stakeholders were identified by the steering committee members and included persons representing municipal service organizations, community organizations, business owners, and other interested parties. The interviews were conducted via mail-in surveys, phone interviews, and face-to-face meetings.

Economic Development Focus Group

Input regarding current economic development issues was gathered from local officials, civic leaders and the business community within the project area during a series of focus groups conducted on three occasions. The first two focus groups were held at locally owned businesses in Monongahela (CJ's Furniture and Goody Two Shoes English Tea Room). The third focus group took place during the April 2007 Monongahela Area Chamber of Commerce meeting located at Hill's Restaurant in New Eagle. A total of twenty-five people attended the three sessions. Four people attended more than one session. Of the twenty-one different people who attended, five either resided in or owned/operated businesses in New Eagle, while sixteen resided or conducted business in Monongahela. The discussion at each meeting was structured to examine the economic strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in the Project Area.

Participants also discussed the existing and desired business mix as well as how to build clusters of compatible businesses around existing and potential market niches.

Community Education

An educational workshop was held on Monday, October 2, 2006 in order to educate the communities about the importance of the planning process and the pivotal role of the community and stakeholders in ensuring the success of the Comprehensive Plan. Steering committee members, stakeholders, community leaders, and Washington County representatives all attended the workshop.

The educational component of the workshop was facilitated by Mr. Dennis Puko, Local Government Policy Specialist for the Governor's Center for Local Government Services of the Department of Community & Economic Development (DCED). Mr. Puko reviewed what a Comprehensive Plan is, how it is perceived, and how municipalities can use the plan to realize a stronger economic base and revitalized community. The "Planning Beyond Boundaries" manual was provided to the workshop attendees.

A second educational workshop was held on Tuesday, June 7, 2007 to discuss zoning and the potential for a multi-municipal zoning ordinance for Monongahela and New Eagle. All City and Borough council members were invited to attend, along with members of the planning commission, zoning hearing board, zoning / code enforcement officer, and steering committee members.

The educational component of the workshop was again facilitated by Mr. Dennis Puko, who discussed the legal aspects of zoning, the benefits of zoning and multi-municipal zoning, and the opportunities it presents.

Public Meetings

Two public meetings were held throughout the project in order to provide an update to the public on the status of the comprehensive plan and to gather input and feedback for plan goals and recommendations.

Public Meeting #1

The first meeting was held on Monday, January 25, 2007 at the New Eagle Social Hall. The purpose of this meeting was to introduce the comprehensive planning project to the public and gather input on each planning element. Approximately 80 people attended the public meeting, including Pennsylvania State Senator Barry Stout and Washington County Commissioner Bracken Burns. The top issues, according to the public in attendance, were as follows:

- Make Monongahela / New Eagle safe and inviting places to live
- Extend the streetscape from Monongahela into New Eagle
- Need more marketing and promotion of the area, local businesses, etc.
- Lack of communication between residents, business owners and local municipal officials
- Stronger emphasis on zoning and code enforcement
- Need to utilize the Aquatorium more
- Provide jobs and activities for young people

Public Meeting #2

The second and final public meeting was held on Monday, November 11, 2007 at the New Eagle Social Hall. Approximately 30 people were in attendance. The draft priority recommendations were presented to the public via a PowerPoint presentation and mapping. Discussions took place in support of and/or questioning the recommendations and their impact on the City and the Borough.

SUMMARY REVIEW OF PREVIOUS STUDIES & PLANS

The first step in examining land use trends is to review previous plans and studies that have been completed for the City of Monongahela and the Borough of New Eagle. Since the PA MPC recommends that municipalities complete and update their comprehensive plan every ten years, the updated plan should examine previously made recommendations and review them for applicability.

Monongahela Valley Regional Comprehensive Plan (1962)

In 1961, the Monongahela Valley Regional Planning Commission developed a regional plan for its eight member municipalities, which included both Monongahela and New Eagle along with Carroll Township, Donora Borough, Charleroi Borough, Speers Borough, Dunlevy Borough, and the City of Monessen (Westmoreland County). Upon completion of the regional plan, each member municipality then completed their own comprehensive plan that provided specific recommendations for their community.

Monongahela City Comprehensive Plan (1962)

The City of Monongahela completed the comprehensive plan in 1962. At that time, roughly 25 percent of the land in the City was classified as vacant, most of which includes the Monongahela River since the boundary line is located in the middle of the river. Overall, land use patterns have not changed much since 1962; heavy industrial is still found along the riverfront, commercial activity is concentrated along Main Street, residential development is mostly found between Chess Street and the City boundary, and the Monongahela Cemetery continues to occupy approximately nine percent of the City's land area. Significant land use changes that have occurred since the 1962 plan include the realignment of SR 88, which bisected a residential neighborhood, and the dissolution of the Donora Southern Railroad.

New Eagle Comprehensive Plan (6/1/1962)

The Borough of New Eagle completed their comprehensive plan in 1962, however a copy of the plan was not available for review.

Monongahela and New Eagle, Progress Bound: An Exploratory Report on Programming Tools, Techniques and Options (2007)

The Local Government Academy (LGA) sponsored an intern for the City of Monongahela and the Borough of New Eagle during the summer of 2007, to supplement the Joint Comprehensive Plan and explore various programming options available to Monongahela and New Eagle in order to better facilitate the utilization of historic architecture (as well as some other community assets) as a vehicle for local economic development. The report was completed by Kyle Sapkiewicz, candidate for Masters of Public Administration at the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs (GSPIA), University of Pittsburgh

The report identifies a variety of programming options and funding sources, as well as barriers to the various options. Examples are provided of what similar communities have done or are doing and the report explores alternatives to ameliorate the volunteer shortage facing the area's non-profit/civic organizations.

A Management Action Plan for the “Fueling a Revolution” Journey Area of the Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area, Homestead, PA, 2007.

The seven-county Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area (ROSNHA) was created by the U.S. Congress in 1996 to guide the preservation, promotion and interpretation of cultural and historical resources related to the steel and sister industries located in Southwestern Pennsylvania. ROSNHA is comprised of five “Journey Areas,” each with a common theme. Monongahela and New Eagle are located within the “Fueling a Revolution” (FAR) Journey Area, which focuses on the transportation of goods and raw materials down the Mon River to steel-making plants throughout the Pittsburgh region.

In partnership with FAR Journey Area communities and local and regional heritage leaders, ROSNHA recently completed a “Management Action Plan” to identify and prioritize opportunities for heritage tourism development within the FAR Journey Area. The plan makes recommendations for a three-to-five year timeframe. The planning process produced an inventory of heritage sites and events related to the steel industry and the immigrants who came to Southwestern Pennsylvania to work in the mills. Some of the Monongahela / New Eagle area heritage resources mentioned in the plan are:

- Mon Valley Aquatorium (Monongahela) and Tubby Hall Park (New Eagle) as excellent opportunities for riverfront park and boat landing development;
- Mon River Buffs Museum (Monongahela) as an important and unique, but at-risk resource;
- Ethnic clubs and St Anthony's Festa (Monongahela) as a prime example of cultural institutions clustered together;
- Mid Mon Valley Railroad Club (New Eagle) as a potential opportunity for interpreting local history through authentically detailed railroad model layouts;
- Maple Creek Mine (New Eagle) as one of the most impressive and accessible coal mine and processing facilities in the region; and
- Wightman Glass Company Industrial Park – aka Therm-o-Rock (New Eagle) - as an early example of a planned industrial complex.

Although the FAR plan is regional in scope, the following recommendations are relevant to heritage resource protection and tourism development in the context of the Monongahela / New Eagle Joint Municipal Comprehensive Plan:

- Strengthen physical connections between heritage resources located along:
 - Rivers and at river landings (Aquatorium, Tubby Hall Park, Black Diamond);
 - Rail lines; and
 - Heritage Corridors – of note to Monongahela / New Eagle is a proposed Heritage Corridor, which would include State Route 88 / 837 from the West Virginia state line to Pittsburgh.
- Support and promote cultural heritage programs to attract visitors and generate income to sustain heritage groups.
- Develop strategies and resources for securing at-risk properties. Examples include the Monongahela City Trust Building, the Marble Hotel, and the former Maple Creek Mine.
- Develop strategies and resources for securing at-risk artifacts and collections such as the Mon River Buffs collection.
- Reinforce sound resource conservation and restoration practices such as green building / rehabilitation practices, multi-municipal cooperation, projects located within communities with a current comprehensive plan; and Stormwater management to protect water quality in the ROSNHA.