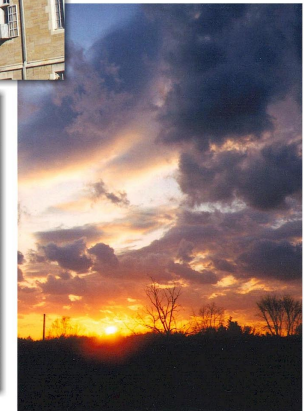


MCRPC Annual Report 2001



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"Planning for Livable Communities"

Mercer County has and should maintain a diversity of community types and living conditions.

MERCER COUNTY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION
2491 HIGHLAND ROAD, HERMITAGE, PA 16148 www.mcrpc.com

MCRPC 2001 Annual Report

December 19, 2001

MCRPC is poised at the brink of an exciting year – 2002 is the Commission's 50th Anniversary! The natural inclination is to look back at 50 years of planning. Instead, circumstances compel us to look ahead. Mercer County is preparing to undertake a major update of its 1996 comprehensive plan to be spearheaded by MCRPC and to focus on new issues and more intergovernmental cooperation. The Commonwealth's Growing Smarter initiative, being continued by new Governor Schweiker, is directing state actions – funding, projects, and permit decisions – to follow and support local planning. Also, MCRPC is working to implement exciting new recycling and housing programs, and complete a major revision of the county subdivision and land development ordinance.

2001 was a year of preparation for these new activities. There was also much work on a staple of more “routine” MCRPC activities such as zoning assistance, community development projects and funding, and transportation.

MCRPC is proud to enter its 50th year as part of a top-notch team of community officials, organizations, professionals, and hard-working citizens committed to making livable communities in Mercer County.



- MCRPC assisted PA DOT in looking at what improvements to the roadway and intersections around Trinity Industries in Greenville would be necessary to make the property more inviting to potential development.
- MCRPC worked with the City of Hermitage to seek funding for a study that would analyze traffic movements along the Broadway Corridor. It is anticipated that this study would begin in 2002.
- MCRPC continues to work with the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation's “Geographic Information Systems” Taskforce. Several meetings have been attended at which data sharing issues are being discussed. The development and access of GIS information will play an important role in future planning activities for the Commission.
- MCRPC oversaw the completion of the PA18 Median Barrier Study in Pymatuning Township. PA DOT provided the funding for this project. The emphasis of the study was to examine if future removal of the existing median barriers between Rutledge Road and Edgewood Drive would be safe. The study identified four possible alternatives dependent upon future development patterns.
- MCRPC has been actively working with the City of Farrell, Mercer County Housing Authority, and developers to develop a Hope VI housing redevelopment project at Steel City Terrace in Farrell, replacing dilapidated public housing units with new single, two, and three family dwelling units.
- MCRPC also completed many project reviews and other efforts of assistance to member municipalities and agencies too numerous to mention in detail herein.
- MCRPC filled numerous agency and private requests for information on population, income, employment, and other characteristics for Mercer County and its communities.
- MCRPC web site (www.mcrpc.com) continued to be updated and improved throughout 2001.
- 911 Addressing – MCRPC assigns addresses for 32 of the 48 municipalities in Mercer County and maintains & updates the street/address range database. Approximately 170 address applications were submitted and processed throughout 2001.

Other Items of Interest

MCRPC provided assistance in cooperation with Penn-Northwest Development Corporation and other county economic development groups:

- Studying potential reuse of closed Trinity Industries facilities in Greenville.
- Studying new economic development opportunities in the Mercer area.
- Providing design and funding info for Gateway Commerce Park in Hermitage.
- Assisting in creation of a countywide marketing brochure.
- Director Denny Puko was honored to be the featured speaker at the 2001 Mercer County Cooperative Extension Annual Dinner in November at which he talked of the need for planning in rural communities. He also made presentations on planning at Pennsylvania's First Annual Growing Smarter Conference in March and at the Pennsylvania Economic Development Association Conference in April.
- MCRPC staff participated in several regional and statewide task forces to represent interests of Mercer County and network and share information with other planners.
 - PA Center for Local Government Services Land Use Trends Committee
 - PennDOT State Transportation Plan Needs Assessment Steering Committee
 - Pennsylvania Planning Association Legislative Committee
 - American Planning Association Planners Day on Capitol Hill
 - Northwest Pennsylvania Regional Planning & Development Commission KOZ Task Force and Entrepreneurial Assistance Network
 - French Creek Project Advisory Committee
 - Hermitage 8 Headwaters Steering Committee
 - Professional Recyclers of Pennsylvania
 - Shenango Valley Intergovernmental Study Sub-Committees
 - Pennsylvania Vector Control Association
 - Local Emergency Planning Committee
 - PA DOT GIS Task Force
- Highland Road Transportation Project - MCRPC assisted in the preliminary engineering and planning needs that would see improvements along the Highland Road corridor in the City of Hermitage.

Mercer County Regional Planning Commission 2001 Annual Report

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Mercer County Regional Planning Commission

MCRPC Commission Members

Chairman:

Ron Faull - Liberty

Vice Chairman:

Larry McAdams - Fredonia

Secretary:

Clifford McCandless - Grove City

Treasurer:

James Pat White - Hermitage

Jerry Miller - Farrell

Mark A. Petrillo - Farrell

Rita Ferringer - Hermitage

James A. Rollinson - Hermitage

George Gulla - Sharon

Louis Rotunno - Sharon

Frank Smeraglia - Sharon

Russell Shaffer - Clark

James Carucci, Sr. - Clark

Patricia McAdams - Fredonia

Burroughs Price - Greenville

Todd Sturgeon - Jackson Center

Darryl Pinney - Jamestown

Doug McElhaney -Jamestown

Jim Carnes - Mercer

Jerry Johnson - Mercer

Janice Good - New Lebanon

Mary A. Ziegler - New Lebanon

Carol J. Paul - Sandy Lake

Robert Kaltenbaugh - Sandy Lake

Alex Kovach - Sharpsville

Bob Piccirilli - Sharpsville

Samuel A. Scott - Stoneboro

Linda Bollinger - West Middlesex

Raymond Lucich, Jr. - West Middlesex

Ray Foster - Wheatland

Thomas R. Stanton - Wheatland

Jane Clark - Fairview

Mont Clark - Fairview

John Courtney - Findley

Elliott Lengel - Findley

Pamela Brown - Hempfield

Russell L. Dawes - Hempfield

Mary Gealy - Jackson

Linda L. Baun - Jackson

Robert Angermeier - Jefferson

Bert Weston - Jefferson

Dave Beatty - Liberty

Frank Cochran - New Vernon

Albert W. Law - New Vernon

Richard Straub - Otter Creek

Paulette Young - Otter Creek

Richard Marshall - Perry

Fred Brenner - Pine

H. Thomas Paxton - Pine

James F. Rowe - Pymatuning

Joseph A. Selnekovic - Pymatuning

Mathew Frontino - Shenango

Kristen Robinson - Shenango

Michael Nashtock - South Pymatuning

Mourice G. Waltz - South Pymatuning

Larry T. Gruntz - Springfield

Judy A. Hassler - Springfield

Charles Garrett - Wilmington

Jeff Hoy - Wilmington

Jim Morton - Wolf Creek

Mark Smith - Wolf Creek

Lynn Christman - Mercer County

Jean Hodge - Mercer County

James L. Hogan - Mercer County

Tom Jack - Mercer County

Richard A. Mackell - Mercer County

Patricia Meehan - Mercer County

Jeff Fiedler - Mercer County

To Be Determined - County Commissioner

Robert G. Kochems - Solicitor

Dave George - Borough's Association

To Be Determined - Supervisor's Association

MCRPC Staff

Dennis G. Puko, Executive Director

Daniel M. Gracenin, Assistant Director

Chris Conti, Senior Planner

Jeremy P. Coxe, Planner

Frederick Frank, Planner

Margaret B. Helderfer, Associate Planner

Donald A. Blakesley, Recycling Coordinator

Carmen L. Reichard, Program Administrator

Evelyn Wike, Administrative Secretary

Jill E. Boozer, Secretary

Mercer County Commissioners

Cloyd E. Brenneman, Chairperson

Kenneth A. Seamans

Olivia M. Lazor

Committees are active backbone of the Commission

MCRPC has several working committees that undertook important tasks in 2001:

- **Zoning & subdivision review committee** – Met monthly with few exceptions to review major subdivision plans, requests for subdivision modifications, and proposed municipal zoning amendments. Committee members were:

Samuel Scott, Chrm. (Stoneboro)

James Rollinson, V. Chrm. (Hermitage)

Fred Brenner (Pine)

Chuck Garrett (Wilmington)

Clifford McCandless (Grove City)

James L. Hogan (Mercer County)

Burroughs Price (Greenville)

Ron Faull, Ex-Officio (Liberty)

- **Finance-personnel committee** – Met often in 2001 to prepare the budget, consider staff salary changes, and conduct interviews and make recommendations for new hirings. Committee members were:

Fred Brenner, Chrm. (Pine)

Jeff Hoy, Vice Chrm. (Wilmington)

James Rollinson (Hermitage)

Russell Dawes (Hempfield)

Patty McAdams (Fredonia)

Ron Faull (Liberty)

- **Program review committee** – Did not meet in 2001, but conducted project and funding reviews via mail and e-mail communications. Committee members were:

Paul Mehalko (Mercer County)

Rita Ferringer (Hermitage)

Richard Mackell (Mercer County)

Fred Brenner (Pine)

John Courtney (Findley)

Ron Faull, Ex-Officio (Liberty)

- **50th Anniversary committee** – Met several times to plan events and activities for the upcoming MCRPC 50th Anniversary. Committee members were:

Jerry Johnson, Chrm. (Mercer)

Patty McAdams (Fredonia)

Pat White (Hermitage)

Jean Hodge (Mercer County)

Tom Stanton (Wheatland)

Ron Faull, Ex-Officio (Liberty)

MCRPC assisted county organizations in preparing the following applications:

Federal Emergency Management Agency - Assistance to Firefighters Program

- Jackson Center Volunteer Fire Company applied for \$270,534 to purchase a new pumper truck and associated equipment.
- Greenville Fire Department applied for \$224,056 to purchase a heavy rescue vehicle specifically fitted for trench rescue and collapsed buildings as well as an air compression system.
- Wolf Creek Township – Community Conservation Partnership Program application was completed. Funding in the amount of \$29,536 was applied for to construct a picnic pavilion and playground equipment.

Community Revitalization Program

- Shenango Township Police Department completed an application for \$8,840 purchase new radio equipment.

MCRPC's project administration / management is a daily process that occurs throughout the year to insure compliance with numerous applicable local, state, and federal laws, regulations and standards. Preparing requests for proposals, project bidding, holding public hearings, financial management, environmental reviews and labor standards compliance are several of the multitude of administrative tasks performed to successfully bring a project to fruition.

New Countywide Initiatives

Affordable Housing Trust Fund

In June, the Mercer County Commissioners established the Mercer County Affordable Housing Trust Fund. As enabled by PA Act 137, the trust fund will collect an increased portion of county recording fees for deeds and mortgages and use said funds for affordable housing activities, including building, acquiring, or rehabilitating housing or providing housing support services. Activities must benefit persons with incomes below the county median. The fund will generate an estimated \$150,000 to \$200,000 annually.

MCRPC played a lead role with the Mercer County Housing Authority and Mercer County Community Action Agency to devise the new program. The county commissioners designated MCRPC to administer it. MCRPC will work with an advisory committee of representatives from housing and community groups to seek and rank project proposals for eventual funding decisions by the county commissioners. A first round of funding decisions is anticipated for late 2002 or early 2003.

Natural Heritage Inventory

Another countywide effort facilitated by MCRPC is the Mercer County Natural Heritage Inventory (NHI). It is a study of unique or rare biological species and natural communities in the county. It will provide valuable information to aid public planners and private developers to target development to locations that are free from protected species and the restrictions they place on development. It will lessen the necessity for municipalities and developers to conduct expensive studies to support development proposals. It will also further an appreciation of the county's outstanding natural qualities, which helps market the county as an attractive place to live or visit.

The PA Departments of Conservation and Natural Resources and Community and Economic Development are providing primary funding for the study, estimated to cost \$85,000. The state has a goal to perform NHIs in every county. The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy is conducting the study and providing a 20% non-state match.

The study began in May and will continue through spring of 2003. A 30 member advisory committee is working with MCRPC and the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy to review findings and guide policy recommendations to be included in the final report.

Community Planning Activities

In addition to the efforts to initiate an updated county comprehensive plan and sub-regional cooperative plans, MCRPC was involved in two other community planning projects in 2001.

Jamestown Community Plan

MCRPC facilitated and prepared a plan of community development needs and opportunities in Jamestown. About 40 community leaders, citizens, and business people participated in three working meetings in March, April, and May to set goals and a course of action involving an array of potential project, program, and funding opportunities.

Initially, Jamestown is most interested in pursuing a downtown marketing plan, senior housing, and a zoning ordinance. MCRPC arranged a meeting of borough officials and Bill Fontana of the Pennsylvania Downtown Center to discuss a means of preparing the marketing plan. Borough officials are also in contact with local housing groups about senior housing opportunities and MCRPC regarding preparation of a zoning ordinance. More activity will likely occur in 2002.

Mercer Area Sewage Facilities Plan

MCRPC assisted a group of Mercer area municipalities – Mercer, Coolspring, East Lackawannock, Findley, and Springfield – in the preparation of a regional sewage facilities plan. The plan was completed in draft by consultant Gannett Fleming, Inc. and reviewed before a committee of representatives from each municipality. Penn-Northwest Development Corporation played a lead role in the plan because of the economic development implications.

The draft plan proposes a new wastewater treatment plant in the vicinity of the I-80/US 19 interchange to initially accept sewage from the proposed county jail, existing regional prison, and existing interchange commercial development. The plant could be expanded in later phases to facilitate further targeted interchange development and eventually serve Mercer Borough if found cost feasible. Adoption and implementation of the plan is targeted for 2002.

MCRPC Assists Community Development Projects

MCRPC continued to serve its members community development needs via grant writing and project administration/management expertise in 2001.

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Projects that received funding and/or were applied for include those in the following categories:

Competitive CDBG Application Process:

- Jamestown Borough received \$500,000 to undertake a complete replacement of its municipal water system. This will entail constructing a new 250,000 gallon storage tank, a new water treatment plant, 35,000 feet of 8" water line, 26,250 feet of 3/4" service line, and 340 water meters.
- Wheatland Borough received \$250,000 to undertake housing rehabilitation.
- Springfield Township applied for \$250,000 to undertake housing rehabilitation.

Mercer County's FY 2001 CDBG Entitlement Program:

- Mercer County Area Agency on Aging received \$290,000 to assist with the purchase and/or renovation of a building to house both a multi-service senior center and a geriatric health center for the Shenango Valley.
- Jamestown Borough received \$43,403 to assist in the construction of a new 250,000-gallon water supply storage tank.

Other FY 2001 CDBG Entitlement Programs:

- Greenville Borough received \$159,404 to undertake housing rehabilitation, code enforcement and street and road improvements (sidewalks).
- Pine Township received \$118,122 to undertake housing rehabilitation.

2001 "Partner" Award

Mercer County Regional Council of Governments



MCRPC occasionally recognizes an organization or individual who provides exceptional assistance and support to the commission. The award has no name, but has come to be known as the "partner" or "friend of the commission" award.

In 2001, MCRPC gave this award to the Mercer County Regional Council of Governments. COG has long worked closely with the commission, but in 2000 and 2001 provided assistance that has done much to strengthen MCRPC. COG built new office space to house MCRPC and creatively funded the addition such that rent is low. COG also readily provided joint service benefits to MCRPC including shared computer and phone networks, computer upgrading, internet service, and web site hosting.

The award was presented at MCRPC's Annual Dinner in December.

Prior winners of the "partner" award were:

- 1999 – Mercer County Housing Authority
- 1997 – Mercer County Board of Commissioners
- 1996 – Penn-Northwest Development Corporation
- 1994 – Mercer County Cooperative Extension

Careful, steady progress on Shenango Valley consolidation study Chamber honors study group

MCRPC continued to play a major role in the study to consolidate the Shenango Valley municipalities of Farrell, Hermitage, Sharon, Sharpsville, and Wheatland. MCRPC is serving in an advisory role and providing technical assistance to the Shenango Valley Intergovernmental Study Committee (SVISC), a study committee of representatives from each municipality. The Commission is also hosting a study web site.



During 2001, eight sub-committees worked to outline a 5-municipality consolidation in functional areas such as governmental structure, sewer & water, fire, police, and others. Committee members worked carefully through issues such as combining paid and volunteer personnel, combining multiple department personnel into a new consolidated department, and combining different financial management and tax structures. MCRPC Director Denny Puko chaired a sub-committee on community & economic development, zoning, and codes. The sub-committee completed its report in July. Other committees are finalizing their reports early in 2002 for consideration by the SVISC and participating municipalities.

In recognition for the difficult and groundbreaking work done to date, the Shenango Valley Chamber of Commerce honored the SVISC with its 2001 Community Service Award. The award was presented at the Chamber's Annual Dinner in November.

MCRPC / Pitt-GSPIA advance new county and cooperative plans

In cooperation with the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, MCRPC spent the year analyzing how the county can capitalize on new state planning laws. Pitt-GSPIA received a state land use planning grant to facilitate discussion about cooperative planning and its benefits of zoning protections, state funding and permit support, and more afforded by amendments to the PA Municipalities Planning Code enacted in June of 2000. This work also set the stage for a planned update of the Mercer County Comprehensive Plan to address state planning law changes.

A 20-member countywide steering committee met four times in 2001 to review the law and new planning opportunities. In September, MCRPC and Pitt-GSPIA staged public input meetings in 5 sub-regions of the county – Lakeview, Grove City, Shenango Valley, Greenville, and Mercer. Over 70 community officials and leaders attended the sub-regional meetings.

Most community leaders are interested in but unsure of joining with neighbors in cooperative plans. The benefits and incentives appear attractive, but due to the newness of the law there is no testimony of success from any community elsewhere in the Commonwealth. Cooperation is the “right” thing to do, but municipalities need to balance cooperation with responsibilities to their citizens to which they are held closely accountable.

Cooperative plans were initiated in the Lakeview region, where an 11-municipality 1999 comprehensive plan is being updated to address new state laws, and in the Mercer region, where Mercer, Coolspring, East Lackawannock, Findley, and Springfield are developing a regional sewer plan and intend to extend the effort to a cooperative comprehensive plan. Cooperative planning opportunities are being discussed with Grove City and Greenville area municipalities. Five Shenango Valley municipalities are studying consolidation, but may have opportunities for cooperative planning. Any and all of these sub-regional cooperative plans will be integrated into the update of the county comprehensive plan.

Discussions will continue into 2002 at which time the county and MCRPC are expected to seek state funding for then begin new county and cooperative plans.

Subdivision Update

In 2001, 599 new lots were created through the County Subdivision and Land Ordinance and additional lots were created through municipalities with local Subdivision Ordinances, not counted here. This enforces a recent trend of increased annual subdivision activity, from 336 newly created lots in 1999, to 417 in 2000, to 599 this year.

The updated Mercer County Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance is progressing well and is on track to be implemented in the first quarter of 2002. A second round of Focus Group meetings were held in November where surveyors, engineers, realtors, builders, developers, and municipal officials throughout Mercer County were given a final opportunity to comment on the Ordinance before a final draft was created. Following the Focus Group meeting, MCRPC staff worked with Graney, Grossman, Ray and Associates to develop a final draft of the Ordinance. The final draft was presented and reviewed at the December meeting of the Zoning and Subdivision Review Committee.

The updated Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance will incorporate many new and exciting ideas for the County. The Ordinance creates standards for three different types of subdivisions, including standards for urban like subdivisions with sidewalks and street trees that will mesh with existing traditional urban development. Steep slopes, natural features and open spaces will also be better preserved. The Ordinance also will require a review of certain land developments, in municipalities that do not have their own Zoning Ordinance, of greater than 5 acres or 40,000 square feet, communications towers, and multi-family dwellings. This land development review will allow MCRPC to ensure development will incorporate proper screening, storm water management, and setbacks.

Major Plans Reviewed by MCRPC in 2001:

Village Park (Preliminary)- 105 lots in Pine Township.

Lucas Subdivision- 8 lots in Pine Township.

Filer Subdivision- 38 lots in Pine Township.

Mystic Landing Estates (Preliminary)- 12 lots, 46 residential units in Hempfield Township.

New England Estates (Preliminary)- 37 lots in Pine Township.

Milk Transport, Inc. Subdivision (Preliminary)- 3 industrial lots in Pine Township.

The Homestead (Preliminary)- 61 lots in Hempfield Township.

Country Village Estates (Preliminary)- 7 lots in Hempfield Township.

New zoning ordinance in Liberty, Mercer & Hempfield

Help given to Springfield

MCRPC completed significant work in new and revised zoning ordinances in 2001, incorporating new and creative concepts.

- Liberty Township – The township’s first zoning ordinance was adopted in February. MCRPC prepared the ordinance working with a township task force. The ordinance breaks the mold of traditional rural zoning and contains flexible rural opportunity and village zoning districts.
- Hempfield Township – A major ordinance revision was adopted by the township in August. It updates the ordinance to current law and zoning concepts and includes more rural preservation and mixed use opportunities.
- Mercer Borough – A major ordinance revision awaits adoption by the borough as of this writing. It reestablishes a sidewalk-oriented downtown zoning district, encourages flexible reuse of existing and historic buildings, and promotes quality development in the borough’s gateway corridors.
- Springfield Township – The township’s first zoning ordinance was adopted in August. It was prepared by consultant Graney, Grossman, Ray & Associates with MCRPC input. It provides for an interchange oriented commercial area, but encourages more rural village and country development over the balance of the township.

MCRPC also provided assistance to:

- Farrell – Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND) zoning overlay.
- Greenville – college housing zoning provisions.
- Jackson Township – billboard and sign zoning provisions.
- Sharon – communication tower zoning provisions.
- Many municipalities – day-to-day basis for questions, interpretations, and minor help requests.

Through the course of the year, MCRPC and its zoning and subdivision review committee reviewed and made recommendations, in accord with the PA Municipalities Planning Code on 13 zoning amendments – 3 comprehensive ordinance revisions, 7 rezoning requests, and 3 text changes – involving 8 different municipalities.

KOZ adds new areas in Mercer County

In 2001, the Pennsylvania General Assembly opened a second opportunity for the creation of Keystone Opportunity Zones. Mercer County, with major involvement by MCRPC and Penn-Northwest Development Corporation, joined with other counties in Northwest Pennsylvania to submit an application in February to designate roughly 1,500 acres. The Commonwealth approved the new NW KOEZ (the “E” stands for expansion) to be effective January 1, 2001.



Two new Mercer County sub-zones were created in the NW KOEZ proposal:

- Farrell-Sharon – 100.6 brownfield acres including a parcel at the corner of Broadway and Roemer in Farrell targeted for a new industrial facility by Haywood Industries and the Sharpsville Quality Products property in Sharpsville. In effect 1/1/2001 to 12/31/2010.
- Reynolds East – 258 acres of undeveloped land in Hempfield and Delaware Townships owned by Greenville-Reynolds Development Corporation. In effect 1/1/2001 to 12/31/2013.

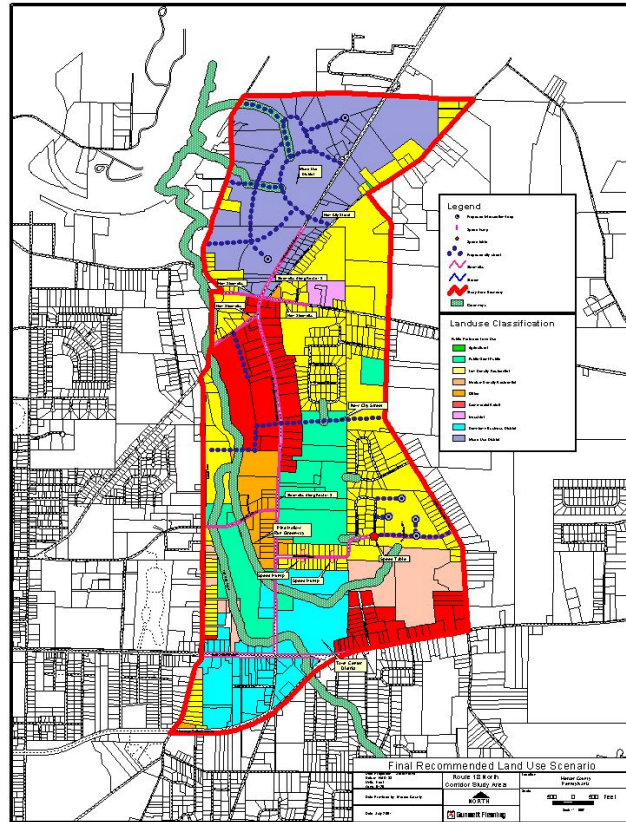
The KOEZ designation makes property owners, businesses, and residents eligible for tax exemptions including real estate taxes, business and personal income taxes, and sales tax. Tax exemptions were authorized not only by the state, but also by the municipalities, school districts, and the county for the affected parcels and occupants.

Ongoing KOZ management

MCRPC handles local management of the original Shenango Valley KOZ sub-zone and the new Farrell-Sharpsville and Reynolds East KOEZ sub-zones. It involves annual notices to 290 property owners, over 160 rental households, and about a dozen leased businesses. Upwards of 100 applications for KOZ tax benefits are processed by MCRPC and forwarded for state approval each year.

PA 18/North Hermitage Road Land-Use Study

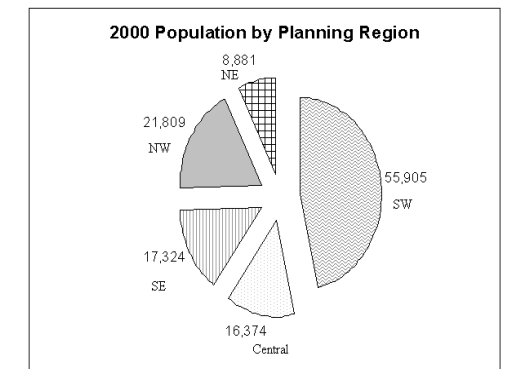
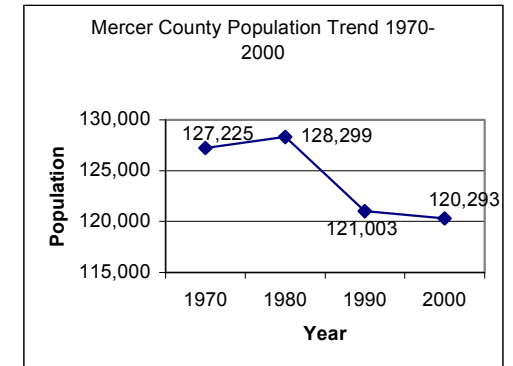
The PA18 Land-Use study funded through a special study grant by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation was complete in June of this year. The study was undertaken to address the land use issues relating to the widening of PA 18, and future development patterns of this important corridor. The consulting firm of Gannett Fleming completed work on the 10-month project with the assistance of the MCRPC, City of Hermitage, PA 18 Steering Committee, and PA DOT. The study will guide the future development of the PA 18 North corridor in the years to come. Identified in the study were issues relating to access management, road connectivity, bicycle/pedestrian, greenways, economic development, and future land use and ordinance recommendations. As the study progressed public meetings were held to gather input, recommendations from these meetings were then incorporated into the study. One key component of the study was the development of a “ultimate land use scenario” for the corridor. The City, MCRPC and PA DOT will be using this study in the development of future transportation programs.



Census Update

The U.S. Census Bureau has released the first round of population and household characteristics from Census 2000. Remaining information on housing and income should be released in late 2002. A summary of Census 2000 shows:

- Between 1990 and 2000, Mercer County's population began to stabilize, dropping from 121,003 in 1990 to 120,293 in 2000. A loss of 710 or .6%, which is drastically less than in previous decades.
- Mercer County Townships saw a 2.6% increase in population.
- The population of minorities in Mercer County increased from 6,917 in 1990 to 8,785 in 2000.
- Minorities represent 7.3% of the population in Mercer County.
- The median age in Mercer County rose from 36.4 in 1990 to 39.6 in 2000.
- The population of people aged 65 and over increased from 20,777 in 1990 to 21,740 in 2000, representing 18.1% of the population.
- The number of housing units in Mercer County increased 2.3%.
- The number of households in Mercer County with children under the age of 18 and headed by a single parent increased 8.5%.



Merger County Recycling System



In May 2001, the State Department of Environmental Protection (PADEP) awarded Mercer County the full amount (\$745,260) of a 902 grant that will be used to purchase the necessary equipment to establish and operate 10 Drop-off Recycling Centers within the County. By June 2002 all Centers are scheduled to be operating 24 hours 7 days a week. In an unprecedented action the Solid Waste Authorities from Lawrence, Crawford and Mercer Counties submitted a joint 902 application to PADEP to fund a two-year

education and promotion campaign for the new recycling centers in each county. This multi-county grant is part of a new effort by the Recycling Coordinators of Lawrence, Crawford and Mercer Counties to cooperatively promote their respective drop-off programs and to educate all residents in the why, what, where, and how to close the loop and purchase recycled content products.

Other recycling activities included:

- Received a Pennsylvania Waste Watcher award for sponsoring the Fredonia Super Saturday in 2000.
- Sponsored the third year of *The Illusion Maker* environmental & recycling education program in County elementary schools.
- Completed the first year of the new SWA Grant program to provide funding to municipalities, institutions, and non-profits for recycling, solid waste reduction, and composting programs.
- Sponsored the Third Annual Recycling Poster Contest for students in grades K-6.
- Participated in a statewide Waste Composition Study at the Lakeview Landfill in Erie County.
- Assisted George Junior Republic in expanding their school-wide recycling program to add plastic containers in their collection program.

Bicycle/Pedestrian Action plan for the Shenango Valley Developed

The MCRPC completed the initial development of a Bicycle/Pedestrian plan for the Shenango Valley during the summer of 2001. MCRPC worked in conjunction with the communities and school districts in the municipalities of Farrell, Sharon, Hermitage, Sharpsville and Wheatland. Funding for the study was provided through the annual work program of the local Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), which is run through the MCRPC.

The study was undertaken to identify and develop both a north/south and east/west corridor through the Shenango Valley on which bicyclists and pedestrians could travel safer. The study calls for the placement of signage indicating a bicycle route, locations for possible lane markings and widening a small section of Highland Rd. for sidewalk / bicycle lanes. The primary focus of the study was to identify a system that would center on the Buhl Farm Park. It is anticipated that initial work on identified study projects will start in 2002. Funding for a large portion of the improvements was applied for through the Transportation Enhancement (TE) Program in November 2001. The awarding of the TE money will occur in March of 2002.

Transportation Plans Updated

Once again the MCRPC started the process of updating the State's 12-Year program and short range Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Updating of the 12-Year program and TIP occurs on a semi-annual basis, and was kicked off this year with a transportation workshop held in Mercer on August 8, 2001. These plans identify what projects are expected to be started/completed in a four (4) and twelve (12) year horizon. With the help of workshop participants the MCRPC was able to identify critical transportation issues that affect both Mercer County residents and those that travel through the County.

In addition to the workshop held in August by the MCRPC the State Transportation Commission held their semi-annual hearings to gather public input for the development of the State's 12-Year program. Several speakers represented Mercer County, with the MCRPC Executive Director Dennis Puko starting the STC presentation by giving an overview of priority projects for Mercer County. Development of both programs will continue through the winter and spring with final adoption occurring late summer 2002.

Priority Projects:

- I-79 / PA 208 Interchange
- Broadway Corridor
- Highland Road
- PA 60 / PA 318 Interchange
- Lamor Road / Pinehollow Bridge

Gracenin promoted to replace Widel

Other staff changes

Significant changes in the professional planning staff occurred in 2001. Assistant Director Julie Widel resigned in May, ending 14½ years with the Commission, 5 as Assistant Director, during which time she helped numerous communities with community development and planning projects. She left to assume the full-time operation of the family business – Lakeside Park – in Stoneboro.

Dan Gracenin was promoted to Assistant Director from Senior Planner in May. He has worked 8 years for the Commission as a transportation planner, also working on county and community plans and other projects. He is a life-long resident of the Shenango Valley (except for college years) with an undergraduate degree from Edinboro and a graduate degree from Indiana, PA.

After a number of interviews, Chris Conti was hired as Senior Planner in December to replace Dan. Chris is a native of Mercer County (Jefferson Township) and worked previously as a planner in Adams and Beaver Counties in PA and Brooke-Hancock-Jefferson Regional Planning Agency in West Virginia. He has an undergraduate degree from Penn State and a graduate degree from Pitt.



Chris Conti (left) Fred Frank (right)

Planner Lisa Holm resigned in February and was replaced in June by Fred Frank. A native of Buffalo, New York, Fred is beginning his first full-time planning job after graduating with undergraduate and graduate degrees in planning from Buffalo State and the University of Tennessee respectively. He also worked in part-time planning positions while attending both schools.

County Solid Waste Plan Approved

The Pa Department of Environmental Protection approved the Mercer County Municipal Waste Management Plan in July of 2001. The purpose of this Plan is to revise and update the Mercer County Municipal Waste Management Plan of 1990. The most important features are that this Plan:

- Develops new projections for the generation of municipal waste in Mercer County for the next ten years;
- Designates disposal facilities to be used for the disposal of Mercer County generated wastes for the next ten years based on a fair, open and competitive qualification process;
- Considers the County's current recycling rate and discusses what is needed to work toward the state's 35 percent recycling goal.

MCRPC, in conjunction with the Mercer County Commissioners, Solid Waste Authority, Solid Waste Advisory Committee and R.W. Beck Consultants, developed the plan with guidance from interested parties and citizen input. Mercer County entered into disposal capacity agreements with 9 facilities located throughout the region and has secured capacity for all Mercer County generated municipal waste for the next 10 years.

Mercer County Solid Waste Authority Members 2001

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Vice-Chairman Richard Schuller (Lackawannock Twp.)
Secretary James "Pat" White (Hermitage)
Treasurer Joseph Baldwin (Sharon)
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