



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

2025

State Land Use and Growth Management Report





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Chair, Pennsylvania State Planning Board

c/o Department of Community and Economic Development
Commonwealth Keystone Building
400 North Street, 4th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17120

December 15, 2025

Dear Governor Shapiro and members of the Pennsylvania General Assembly:

On behalf of the Pennsylvania State Planning Board, I am pleased to transmit the 2025 State Land Use and Growth Management Report. This report represents the culmination of extensive collaboration among Board members, State agencies, local government officials, and policy experts, and fulfills our statutory duty to provide recommendations that advance the orderly growth and sustainable development of the commonwealth.

Since the last report in 2020, Pennsylvania has experienced significant changes in how its communities grow, redevelop, and adapt. The 2025 report provides a framework to unify the Commonwealth's land use goals, policies, and principles across agencies and levels of government. It calls for renewed attention to interagency coordination, strengthened technical assistance for local governments, and the continued modernization of land use tools to meet the challenges of our time.

During our September 15, 2025, meeting, the Board emphasized the importance of three key priorities among the report's recommendations:

- **Energy and Resiliency.** Pennsylvania must develop an integrated approach to energy planning that balances growth with sustainability. The Board recommends expanding guidance for solar and renewable development, exploring energy demand management in light of new technologies and data centers, and ensuring equitable access to reliable and affordable energy.
- **Housing and Community Vitality.** The Commonwealth should promote diverse, attainable, and well-located housing. Investment in property maintenance, adaptive reuse, and coordinated housing policy can strengthen our communities while addressing affordability and livability challenges.
- **Natural Resources and Climate Adaptation.** Protecting Pennsylvania's forests, waters, and open spaces remains central to our economic and environmental future. The report supports the integration of hazard mitigation and climate resiliency strategies into comprehensive plans, prioritizing green infrastructure, and the preservation of natural landscapes.

In addition to these priorities, the report reiterates the Board's recommendation to establish a revived interagency land use team to coordinate State efforts and ensure consistency among policies. The Board also calls for a five-year review of the Keystone Principles, ensuring that they remain aligned with the Commonwealth's long-term vision for sustainable growth.

The Pennsylvania State Planning Board appreciates the leadership and support of the Department of Community and Economic Development and all partners who contributed to this work. We view this report not merely as a reflection of the Commonwealth's land use policies, but as a roadmap for aligning our growth with our shared values – resiliency, stewardship, and opportunity for all Pennsylvanians.

Respectfully submitted,

Alexander J. Graziani, AICP
Chair, Pennsylvania State Planning Board



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State Land Use and Growth Management Report (2025)

The maps and graphics in this document are for planning purposes only.

They are not adequate for legal boundary definition, regulatory interpretation, or parcel level analysis.



Pennsylvania
Department of Community
& Economic Development

Prepared by the PA Department of Community & Economic Development
on behalf of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania State Planning Board

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01 Introduction

Purpose

The State Land Use and Growth Management Report is authorized by Section 307 of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) and is to be prepared by the Department of Community and Economic Development's (DCED) Governor's Center for Local Government Services (Center) at five-year intervals. The report, "shall contain information, data and conclusions regarding growth and development patterns in this commonwealth and which will offer recommendations to Commonwealth agencies for coordination of executive action, regulation and programs." The Center is the designated State entity for land use assistance and monitoring.

This 2025 report inventories, assesses, and incorporates current State agency plans that have an impact on land use with the goal of unifying executive actions, regulations, and programs of the Commonwealth. It is a means to centralize key strategies for managing land use across the state to facilitate collaboration and achieve the Commonwealth's vision for smart, sustainable, and equitable growth. While the report assesses the past five years, it also looks forward to the next five years and beyond, with subsequent updates.

Although this report focuses primarily on programs and policies of Commonwealth agencies, it also aims to be a resource for counties and municipalities as they plan for growth and development within their jurisdictions and make land use decisions at the local level.

State Planning Board

The State Planning Board (Board) is an advisory board within the Governor's Office. Board membership comprises 15 gubernatorial appointees confirmed by the Senate serving four-year terms. It also includes secretaries from six Commonwealth departments and four representatives from the General Assembly. Established by the Administrative Code of 1929, the Board was instrumental in creating the Pennsylvania Turnpike, planning the State Capitol grounds, establishing planning agencies in Pennsylvania's counties, and enacting the Commonwealth's original Municipalities Planning Code in 1968. The Board was reauthorized by Act 42 of 1989, which established the following powers and duties:

- Conduct research and collect, compile, and analyze data bearing upon social, economic, physical, demographic and other factors which may influence the present and future welfare of the commonwealth;
- Monitor national and state trends, identify issues of potential interest and concern to the Commonwealth, and prepare for the Governor and the General Assembly on an annual basis, or more often, if necessary, reports detailing the findings of the Board;
- Develop strategic plans and programs to promote and enhance the welfare of the commonwealth and make such recommendations thereon to the Governor as it may deem proper and advisable;
- Solicit information and input from State and local government officials and private citizens in Pennsylvania as part of the process of developing strategic plans and programs; and
- Submit annually to the Governor, the president pro tempore of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives a report on its program and activities.

After a period of inactivity, the Board was reactivated in 2004. Staff support for the State Planning Board is currently provided through the Governor's Center for Local Government Services within DCED. The Center provides a full range of vital programs, training, and services to support local governments and provides a wide range of both technical and financial assistance for their revitalization and recovery. The Center also houses the Office of Community Planning.

Municipalities Planning Code

The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code, originally enacted as Act 247 of 1968, establishes the basic authority for the exercise of municipal land use controls in Pennsylvania. It empowers all municipalities, except Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, to plan individually or jointly for their development and to govern the same by zoning, subdivision and land development ordinances, planned residential development and other ordinances, by reservation and acquisition of certain land for future public purposes, and provides for the establishment of planning commissions, planning departments, planning committees, and zoning hearing boards. The MPC has since been subject to numerous ad hoc amendments, most recently by Act 44 of 2024, to specifically provide authorization for digital submissions and electronic transmittals.

Growing Smarter

Acts 67 and 68 of 2000, or the Growing Smarter Act, resulted in significant modernization of the MPC. These acts specifically authorized municipalities to engage in cooperative planning activities and required all State agencies to consider and rely upon comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances when making infrastructure decisions that impact land use. Among these MPC amendments was a mandate that the Governor's Center for Local Government Services prepare a comprehensive [State Land Use and Growth Management Report](#) every five years, beginning in 2005.

Report Process and Organization

As part of drafting this 2025 report, the State Planning Board synthesized a set of shared values out of the goals, policies, and principles detailed in the Guiding Principles section of the document. The Board intends to review and update these values in future iterations of the report. Each section herein provides background data and analysis, identifies successes and challenges, and provides recommendations and strategies to coordinate land use policies in a consistent manner across the commonwealth. This report was largely compiled by the Center's Office of Community Planning with advisement from a subcommittee of the State Planning Board. It includes contributions by the PA Department of Community and Economic Development, PA Department of Transportation, PA Department of Agriculture, PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, PA Department of Environmental Protection, PA Department of Human Services, PA Historical & Museum Commission, and PA Emergency Management Agency. The report was reviewed by the full Board and endorsed on March 16, 2026.

The Center conducted a survey of county and municipal planning agencies, and additional stakeholders, during late 2024 through early 2025. Fifty-five of Pennsylvania's 67 counties provided a response, as well as 676 out of 2,559 municipalities, equating to response rates of 82.0% and 26.4% respectively. Survey results are discussed in the Land Use and Growth Management section, and full results can be viewed online at dced.pa.gov. The following sections of this report focus on specific areas of land use planning as a result of the survey and are presented and addressed in corresponding order of importance and depth.



02 Guiding Principles

Commonwealth Land Use Policies

In 1993, in the absence of statewide land use policies and recognizing that Commonwealth programs, policies, and regulations affect land use patterns and decisions, the State Planning Board was charged with identifying goals to guide State agencies in carrying out their programs. Upon issuance of Executive Order 1993-3, all agencies under the Governor’s jurisdiction were directed to “consider and aspire to” the following goals.

The full E.O. with enumerated objectives is available at pa.gov. E.O. 1993-3 further directed State agencies to fully cooperate with the State Planning Board on implementing the goals and objectives, to consult with each other and the Board when land use planning programs or policies conflict, and to report annually on their progress. At the end of the 1990s, development in Pennsylvania outpaced growth in major metros, rapidly depleting farmland. Concerns about the long-term social, environmental, and economic consequences of land use patterns prompted a second Executive Order (E.O. 1999-1) that set forth eight policies to guide all Commonwealth agencies when making decisions that impact land use.

Land Use Policies

for Commonwealth Agencies,
PA Code Title 4 Chapter 7 Sec. 7.771

Policy A – Soundly planned growth is in the best long-term interest of the Commonwealth and should be encouraged at all levels of government.

Policy B – Farmland and open space are valued commonwealth natural resources, and reasonable measures for their preservation should be promoted.

Policy C – Development should be encouraged and supported in areas that have been previously developed or in locally designated growth areas.

Policy D – Because land use decisions made at the local level have an impact that expands beyond municipal boundaries, regional cooperation among local governments should be encouraged.

Policy E – The constitutional private property rights of Pennsylvanians must be preserved and respected.

Policy F – The Commonwealth will work to improve the understanding of the impact of land use decisions on the environmental, economic, and social health of communities.

Policy G – Sustaining the economic and social vitality of Pennsylvania’s communities must be a priority of State government.

Policy H – Infrastructure maintenance and improvement plans should be consistent with sound land use practices.

Land Use Goals for Commonwealth Agencies, PA Code Title 4 Chapter 7 Sec. 7.661-Sec. 7.615



Goal 1

Establish efficient land use patterns by encouraging growth which is consistent with existing infrastructure.



Goal 2

Preserve the commonwealth’s natural resources and protect the people’s constitutional right to clean air, pure water, and the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic, and aesthetic values of the environment.



Goal 3

Establish consistent and coordinated land use practices statewide.



Goal 4

Encourage the development of an adequate supply of affordable housing.

Principles and Criteria

The Keystone Principles (Principles) and Criteria for Growth, Investment, and Resource Conservation (Criteria) were adopted by the Economic Development Cabinet in 2005 to foster and measure the effectiveness of sustainable economic development and conservation of resources through the investment of Commonwealth funds in its municipalities. They were developed by an interagency land use team, a working group of the cabinet, over two years. The Principles and Criteria provide a framework for strategic, sustainable growth in Pennsylvania, ensuring that State investments and development activities benefit communities while preserving natural resources and heritage for the long term.

The Principles lay out general goals and objectives for economic development and resource conservation as agreed upon among the agencies and programs that participated in their development. The Criteria are designed to help measure the extent to which projects accomplish these goals. They largely reflect the Commonwealth Land Use Policies and provide additional guidance for implementation. The Criteria do not replace agency program guidelines or criteria. Rather, at each agency's discretion, they are either integrated into existing program criteria (preferable) or used as additional, favorable considerations in the decision-making process.

The Principles and Criteria are designed to encourage multifaceted project development that will integrate programs and funding sources from a variety of State agencies into a comprehensive strategy to address issues affecting entire communities. While approaching 20 years, the Principles have endured and continue to be utilized by State agencies and municipalities for planning purposes as well as in program guidelines and evaluation criteria. This report proposes re-establishing an interagency land use team, led by the Office of Community Planning, as a subcommittee of the State Planning Board, with the goal of evaluating and updating these Principles in advance of the 2030 report, and encouraging and exploring continued collaboration and coordination.



Keystone Principles for Growth, Investment, and Resource Conservation

Redevelop First. Support revitalization of Pennsylvania’s many cities and towns. Give funding preference to reuse and redevelopment of “brownfield” and previously developed sites in urban, suburban, and rural communities for economic activity that creates jobs, housing, mixed use development, and recreational assets. Conserve Pennsylvania’s exceptional heritage resources. Support rehabilitation of historic buildings and neighborhoods for compatible contemporary uses.

Provide Efficient Infrastructure. Fix it first: use and improve existing infrastructure. Make highway and public transportation investments that use context sensitive design to improve existing developed areas and attract residents and visitors to these places. Provide transportation choice and intermodal connections for air travel, driving, public transit, bicycling and walking. Increase rail freight. Provide public water and sewer service for dense development in designated growth areas. Use on-lot and community systems in rural areas. Require private and public expansions of service to be consistent with approved comprehensive plans and consistent implementing ordinances.

Concentrate Development. Support infill and “greenfield” development that is compact, conserves land, and is integrated with existing or planned transportation, water and sewer services, and schools. Foster creation of well-designed developments and walkable, bikeable neighborhoods that offer healthy lifestyle opportunities for Pennsylvania residents. Recognize the importance of projects that can document measurable impacts and are deemed “most-ready” to move to successful completion.

Increase Job Opportunities. Retain and attract a diverse, educated workforce through the quality of economic opportunity and quality of life offered in Pennsylvania’s varied communities. Integrate educational and job training opportunities for workers of all ages with the workforce needs of businesses. Invest in businesses that offer good paying, high quality jobs, and that are located near existing or planned water and sewer infrastructure, housing, existing workforce, and transportation access (highway or transit).

Foster Sustainable Businesses. Strengthen natural resource based businesses that use sustainable practices in energy production and use, agriculture, forestry, fisheries, recreation and tourism. Increase our supply of renewable energy. Reduce consumption of water, energy and materials to reduce foreign energy dependence and address climate change. Lead by example: support conservation strategies, clean power and innovative industries. Construct and promote green buildings and infrastructure that use land, energy, water and materials efficiently. Support economic development that increases or replenishes knowledge-based employment, or builds on existing industry clusters.

Restore and Enhance the Environment. Maintain and expand our land, air and water protection and conservation programs. Conserve and restore environmentally sensitive lands and natural areas for ecological health, biodiversity and wildlife habitat. Promote development that respects and enhances the state’s natural lands and resources.

Enhance Recreational and Heritage Resources. Maintain and improve recreational and heritage assets and infrastructure throughout the commonwealth, including parks and forests, greenways and trails, heritage parks, historic sites and resources, fishing and boating areas and game lands offering recreational and cultural opportunities to Pennsylvanians and visitors.

Expand Housing Opportunities. Support the construction and rehabilitation of housing of all types to meet the needs of people of all incomes and abilities. Support local projects that are based on a comprehensive vision or plan, have significant potential impact (e.g., increased tax base, private investment), and demonstrate local capacity, technical ability and leadership to implement the project. Coordinate the provision of housing with the location of jobs, public transit, services, schools and other existing infrastructure. Foster the development of housing, home partnerships, and rental housing opportunities that are compatible with county and local plans and community character.

Plan Regionally; Implement Locally. Support multi-municipal, county and local government planning and implementation that has broad public input and support and is consistent with these principles. Provide education, training, technical assistance, and funding for such planning and for transportation, infrastructure, economic development, housing, mixed use and conservation projects that implement such plans.

Be Fair. Support equitable sharing of the benefits and burdens of development. Provide technical and strategic support for inclusive community planning to ensure social, economic, and environmental goals are met. Ensure that in applying the principles and criteria, fair consideration is given to rural projects that may have less existing infrastructure, workforce, and jobs than urban and suburban areas, but that offer sustainable development benefits to a defined rural community.

Shared Value Framework

This report is guided by the Commonwealth's land use goals and policies as well as the Keystone Principles, all of which have been synthesized into five value categories: Grow Smart, Preserve and Protect, Housing for All, Healthy, Prosperous, and Resilient Communities, and Coordinated and Connected Communities. In summary, these values aim to balance growth and development, conservation, equity, and resiliency for a stronger Pennsylvania.



Grow Smart values and prioritizes efficient land use and development patterns that utilize existing infrastructure and conserve land and water resources, while revitalizing communities. It establishes that infrastructure investments should be aligned with and in support of development/redevelopment that is near transit, utilities, and services.



Preserve and Protect values safeguarding the full breadth of Pennsylvania's environmental and cultural resources. It encourages the protection of these critical and interrelated systems, such as agricultural land, forests, waterways, landscapes, and historic sites, through thoughtful and coordinated land use planning.



Housing for All, in alignment with the Commonwealth's *Housing Action Plan*, values expanding diverse housing opportunities, with affordable options near jobs and transit served by adequate infrastructure. Additionally, it seeks to balance the rehabilitation of existing housing while preserving neighborhood character.



Healthy, Prosperous, and Resilient Communities values sustainable environmental practices designed to conserve natural resources. It also focuses on measures that support health and well-being, such as parks, food access, safe drinking water, effective wastewater treatment, jobs, and economic opportunity.



Coordinated and Connected Communities values strong planning partnerships across all levels of government with these shared values in mind. The Commonwealth seeks to support multi-municipal plans with consistent ordinances, the use of geospatial data to align State investments with local priorities, and provide technical assistance for modernized zoning codes.

These shared values are woven throughout this report. The report also outlines recommendations to carry out the various goals, policies, and principles to address land use and growth management.

State Planning Board Recommendations

- Seek to unify the Commonwealth's land use goals, policies, and principles.
- Identify and allocate resources to facilitate carrying out duties and conducting special studies.
- Review and update the Keystone Principles in advance of the 2030 report and implement a five-year review coinciding with report preparation.
- Develop a vision statement and work program for the current Board, and at each subsequent appointment of members to the Board.
- Take a proactive approach to carrying out its legislatively mandated powers and duties including annual reports to the Governor and legislature.
- Serve as the convening body of a revived interagency land use team, or similar.

03 Land Use and Growth Management



Land use planning is fundamental to effectively managing growth in Pennsylvania and our communities. Land use decisions made at the State, county, and municipal levels influence community character and impact local government budgets.

The [Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code \(MPC\)](#) enables county and municipal governments to plan for and regulate land use. Through effective planning and the thoughtful use of land use tools and regulations, communities can guide development, protect natural resources, and improve the quality of life for residents.

This main section of the report examines recent trends in population and land cover; describes some of the planning tools available to local governments and assesses their utilization; discusses the impact of land use decisions on local government finances; and provides recommendations for effectively planning for and managing land use.

Trends

Population

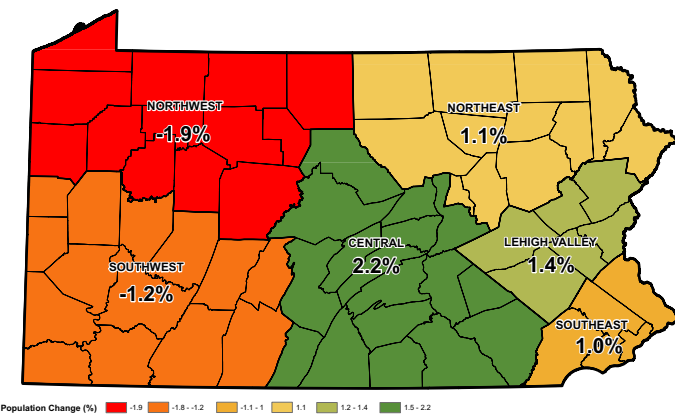
According to the US Census Bureau's Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for Counties in Pennsylvania (April 1, 2020 to July 1, 2024), **Pennsylvania's total population, as of 2024, was 13,078,751**. This indicates growth of approximately 0.6% (or 82,608 people) since 2020. Philadelphia County and Allegheny County are the state's two largest population centers. Philadelphia County (population 1,573,916) and Allegheny County (population 1,231,814) include 12.0% and 9.4% of the commonwealth's total population, respectively. Outside of Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and their surrounding areas, much of the commonwealth is rural in character. Cameron County (population 4,348) is the least populous county.

Between 2020 and 2024, the commonwealth's central and eastern regions experienced population increases, while the western regions experienced a decline. Within the southeast and Lehigh Valley regions, nearly every county experienced population growth. The only exceptions were

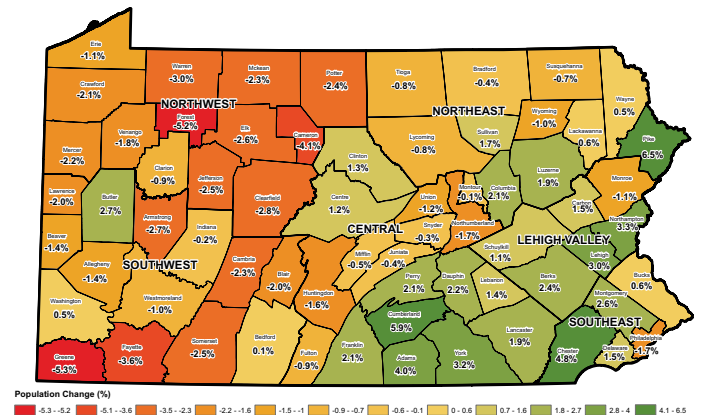
Philadelphia County and Monroe County. The central region experienced the greatest population growth at 2.2%, or 56,002 people. However, that growth was less geographically distributed, with most of the growth occurring in Cumberland, York, and Lancaster counties. Seven of the central region's 17 counties experienced a decline in population. The northeast region experienced a 1.1% increase in population, primarily due to growth in Luzerne and Pike counties. Out of the 12 counties in the northeast region, half of them experienced declines in population.

The northwest and southwest regions both experienced population decreases during this time, and the loss was widespread. Of the southwest region's 14 counties, 11 experienced a decline. Butler County was a notable exception, experiencing an increase of approximately 5,272 people (2.7%). The northwest region experienced the greatest percentage of population decline (1.9%), with all 13 counties experiencing population loss.

Population Change by Region



Population Change by County



Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for Counties in Pennsylvania

Region	2020 Population	2024 Population	Population Change	Percentage Change
Northwest	815,331	799,726	-15,605	-1.90%
Southwest	2,951,848	2,916,984	-34,864	-1.20%
Central	2,503,034	2,559,036	56,002	2.20%
Northeast	1,018,636	1,029,591	10,955	1.10%
Lehigh Valley	1,825,413	1,851,692	26,279	1.40%
Southeast	3,881,881	3,921,722	39,841	1.00%
Pennsylvania	12,996,143	13,078,751	82,608	0.60%

Source: US Census Bureau, Population Division; Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for Counties in Pennsylvania: April 1, 2020 to July 1, 2024 (CO-EST2024-POP-42); Release Date: March 2025

Land Cover

The US Geological Survey (USGS)'s [Annual National Land Cover Database \(NLCD\)](#) provides data on land cover and surface change characteristics for the United States, and the [Multi-Resolution Land Characteristics \(MRLC\) Consortium](#) provides an [Enhanced Visualization and Analysis \(EVA\) Tool](#) that provides detailed county statistics and supports land cover change analyses. This section of the report examines land cover change from 2020 to 2024 in four general categories: development, agriculture, forests, and wetlands, based on data from the NLCD provided by the MRLC.

Developed Land

Developed land is considered a mixture of construction and vegetation and is separated into four subcategories based on the percentage of impervious surface area. They range from “open space,” which has less than 20% impervious cover, and includes large lot single-family housing, parks, golf courses, and similar uses, to “high intensity,” which has 80% or more impervious surface area. Examples of “high intensity” include apartment complexes, row houses, and commercial and industrial facilities. The remaining categories are “low intensity,” which ranges from 20% to 49% impervious surface area, and “medium intensity,” which ranges from 50% to 79% impervious surface area.

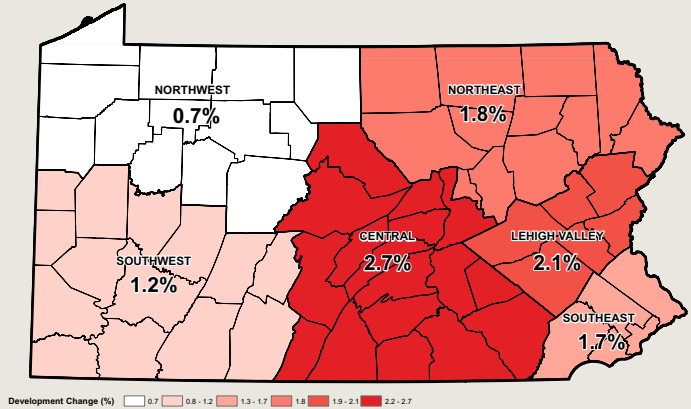
The analysis shows that during the study period (2020-2024), the commonwealth experienced a 1.7% increase in developed land cover, which equates to a total of approximately 121 square miles. Developed “open space” accounted for most of the increase (66 square miles), followed by “low intensity” (26 square miles), and “medium intensity” (23 square miles), while “high intensity” accounted for the least amount (6 square miles).

Regionally, the commonwealth’s central region experienced the greatest increase in developed land cover in terms of square miles (41) as well as percent change (2.7%), while the northwest region experienced the smallest increase in terms of square miles (5.8) and percent change (0.7%).

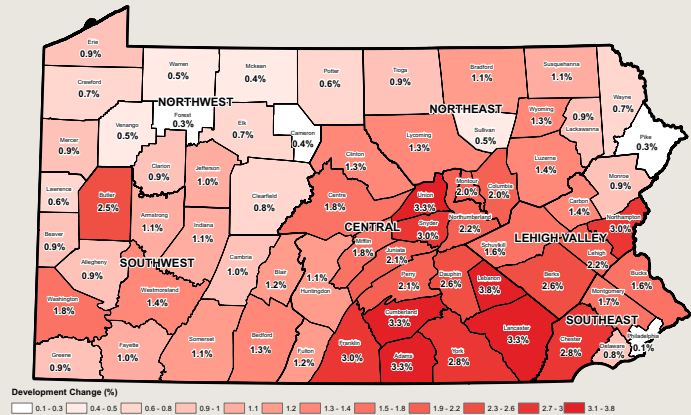
Increase in Developed Land Cover by Region, 2020-2024

Region	Square Miles	Percent Change
Northwest	5.8	0.7%
Southwest	21.7	1.2%
Central	41.0	2.7%
Northeast	19.6	1.8%
Lehigh Valley	15.2	2.1%
Southeast	17.8	1.7%
Pennsylvania	121.1	1.7%

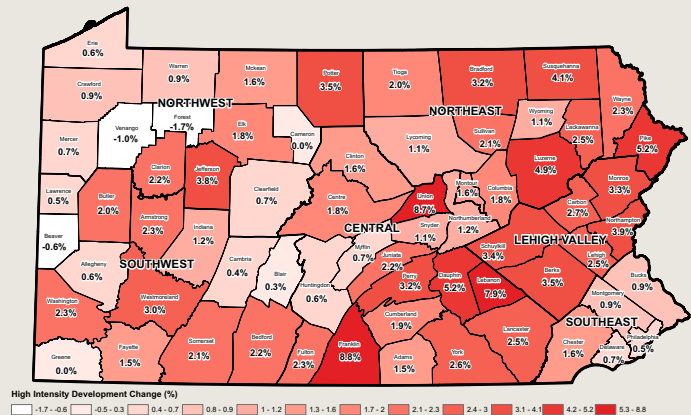
Development Change by Region



Development Change by County



High Intensity Development Change by County





Lancaster County, PA

Agriculture

Agricultural lands include cultivated crops such as corn, soybeans, and vegetables; perennial woody crops such as orchards and vineyards; and areas of grasses, legumes, or grass-legume mixtures planted for livestock grazing or the production of seed or hay crops. This category also includes all land being actively tilled. During the study period (2020-2024), the commonwealth experienced a decrease of approximately 110.7 square miles of agricultural land, which equates to a 1.1% decrease. Every county also experienced a decrease in agricultural land cover.

Forests

Forested land is considered areas dominated by trees generally greater than five meters tall, and greater than 20% of total vegetation cover. During the study period (2020-2024), the commonwealth experienced a loss of approximately 80.7 square miles of forest cover, which equates to a 0.3% decrease. All regions of the commonwealth also experienced a decrease in forest cover. The northwest and southwest regions experienced the greatest decreases, losing 16.3 square miles and 19 square miles, respectively. The southeast region experienced the smallest decrease but still lost 4.6 square miles of forest cover.

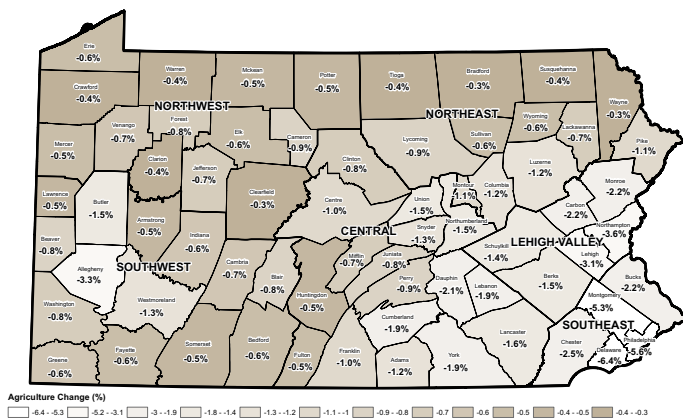
Decrease in Agricultural Land Cover by Region, 2020-2024

Region	Square Miles	Percent Change
Northwest	-7.8	-0.5%
Southwest	-18.5	-0.8%
Central	-43.6	-1.4%
Northeast	-10.9	-0.6%
Lehigh Valley	-11.7	-1.8%
Southeast	-18.3	-3.0%
Pennsylvania	-110.7	-1.1%

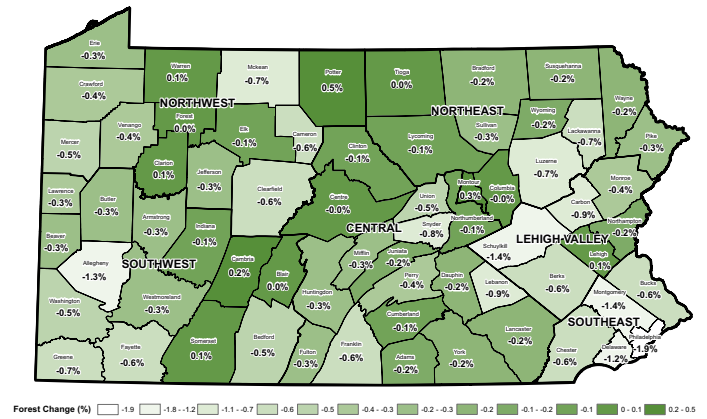
Decrease in Forest Cover by Region, 2020-2024

Region	Square Miles	Percent Change
Northwest	-16.3	-0.2%
Southwest	-19.0	-0.3%
Central	-13.4	-0.2%
Northeast	-14.4	-0.3%
Lehigh Valley	-12.9	-0.8%
Southeast	-4.6	-0.7%
Pennsylvania	-80.7	-0.3%

Agricultural Change by County



Forest Change by County



Wetlands

Wetlands include two subcategories. Woody wetlands are considered areas where forest or shrubland vegetation accounts for greater than 20% of vegetative cover, and emergent herbaceous wetlands are areas where perennial herbaceous vegetation accounts for greater than 80% of vegetative cover. For both types, the soil or substrate is periodically saturated with or covered with water. During the study period (2020-2024), the commonwealth experienced a slight increase of approximately 0.6 square miles of wetland cover. Wetland cover was stable in all regions, with most regions experiencing a slight increase. The southeast region was the only region that experienced a decrease in wetland cover (0.4 square miles).

Natural processes often play a role in altering wetland cover over time. This can include changes in precipitation, river avulsion and flooding, erosion due to wave action, currents, and drainage, and prolonged periods of drought.

Change in Wetland Cover by Region, 2020-2024

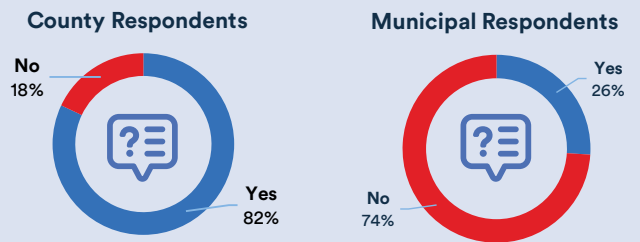
Region	Square Miles	Percent Change
Northwest	0.4	0.1%
Southwest	0.0	0.1%
Central	0.1	0.2%
Northeast	0.5	0.2%
Lehigh Valley	0.0	0.0%
Southeast	-0.4	-0.6%
Pennsylvania	0.6	0.1%

County and Municipal Government Input

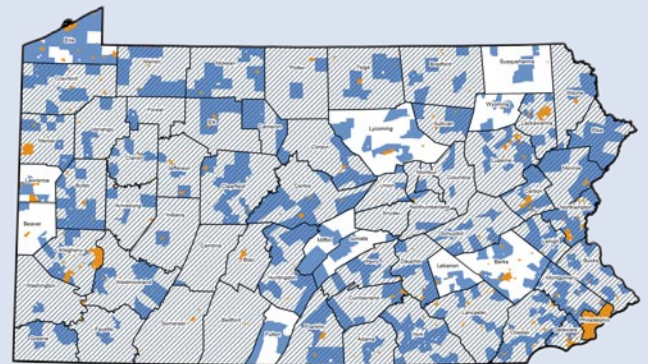
DCED's Office of Community Planning surveyed counties and municipalities during the preparation of this report to gather insights on local land use and growth management practices within Pennsylvania and identify community priorities. Every local government was requested to complete the survey, limited to one submission for each county and municipality. **Fifty-five of the commonwealth's 67 counties (82%) and 676 of 2,558 municipalities (26%) responded to the survey.**



Who Responded to the Survey?



County and Municipal Survey Responses

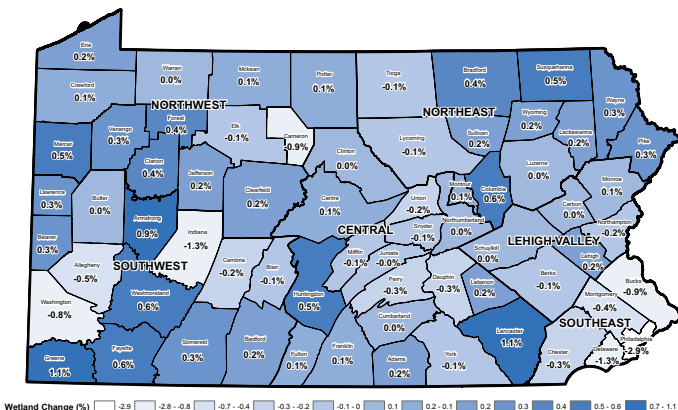


Survey Source: ■ Cities and Boroughs ■ Townships Counties

When asked which aspects of land use planning are of greatest importance, top issue areas identified by both counties and municipalities included guidance on administration and regulations, housing, parks, trails, recreation, and open space, and development/redevelopment. Other issues of importance included transportation, broadband, blighted and vacant properties, agriculture, and conservation and natural resources.

The survey also asked for information concerning county and local government use of land use and growth management tools such as comprehensive plans, zoning ordinances, and other planning and regulatory tools. Survey results are included in the subsections that follow and at dced.pa.gov.

Wetland Change by County



Wetland Change (%) ■ -2.9 ■ -2.8 - -0.8 ■ -0.7 - -0.4 ■ -0.3 - -0.2 ■ -0.1 - 0 ■ 0.1 ■ 0.2 - 0.1 ■ 0.2 ■ 0.3 ■ 0.4 ■ 0.5 - 0.6 ■ 0.7 - 1.1

Land Use and Growth Management Tools

Planning Tools

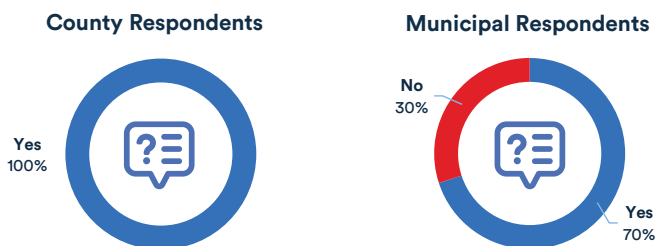
Comprehensive Plans

Comprehensive plans provide local governments with an opportunity to identify and establish their goals for land use, future development, character, housing, transportation, community facilities, and growth management; and provide support for implementing regulatory tools such as zoning ordinances, subdivision and land development ordinances, and official maps.

The [MPC](#) requires counties to have a comprehensive plan, and to update the plan at least every ten years. Municipalities are permitted, but not required, to have comprehensive plans. The MPC also permits multi-municipal-comprehensive plans and encourages them by offering various benefits and incentives. For example, “Where municipalities are participating in a joint municipal zoning ordinance or implementing a multi-municipal comprehensive plan – via individual zoning ordinances consistent with the plan – the municipalities are afforded protection from exclusionary zoning challenges. Pennsylvania case law has long held that municipal zoning ordinances must provide for any conceivable, lawful use. Where there is a joint zoning ordinance or individual ordinances consistent with the multi-municipal plan via an intergovernmental agreement, this requirement may be met if a use is reasonably provided for somewhere within all participating municipalities.”¹

According to the survey of counties and municipalities by DCED, nearly all of the responding counties and nearly 70% of responding municipalities have comprehensive plans. Of the municipalities that have comprehensive plans, approximately 46% have multi-municipal plans. A multi-municipal comprehensive plan approach was utilized by 53% of responding boroughs, 47% of townships, and 12% of cities.

Do you have a Comprehensive Plan?



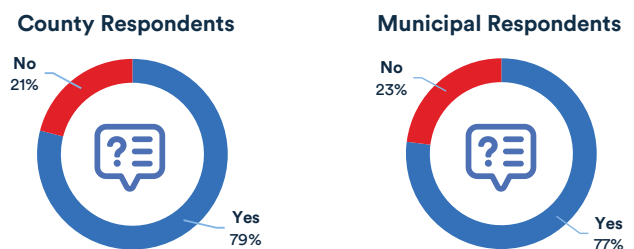
Stormwater Management Plans

The [Pennsylvania Stormwater Management Act \(Act 167\)](#) requires counties to prepare and adopt watershed-based stormwater management plans, and it also requires municipalities to adopt and implement ordinances to regulate development consistent with these plans.²

Survey responses suggest that Pennsylvania needs to invest in stormwater management planning and ordinance development. Many counties either do not have a stormwater plan or have a plan that is over five years old. Only 79% of county respondents indicated that their county has a stormwater management plan, and the median age was reported to be 15 years old. Additionally, only 77% of municipal respondents indicated that their municipality has a stormwater management ordinance in support of their county’s plan.

The [PA Department of Environmental Protection \(DEP\)](#) provides additional information about Act 167 funding availability and the status of Act 167 plans across Pennsylvania.

Do you have a Stormwater Plan or Ordinance?



Sewage Facilities Plans

The [Pennsylvania Sewage Facilities Act \(Act 537\)](#) requires all municipalities to develop and implement a comprehensive official sewage facilities plan that addresses their present and future sewage disposal needs. These plans are modified when new land development projects are proposed or whenever a municipality’s sewage disposal needs change. DEP reviews and approves the official plans and any subsequent revisions.³

Solid Waste Management Plans

Pennsylvania requires each county to develop and regularly update a Municipal Waste Management Plan (MWMP) under the [Municipal Waste Planning, Recycling, and Waste Reduction Act of 1988 \(Act 101\)](#). DEP oversees these plans and the Commonwealth’s [Solid Waste Management Program](#). These plans provide a comprehensive strategy for waste management within each county, including how the county will address its specific waste management challenges and achieve long-term waste reduction goals.

¹ PA DCED, *Local Land Use Controls in Pennsylvania, Planning Series #1*, Sixth Edition, October 2020, <https://dced.pa.gov/library/>

² PA DCED, *Local Land Use Controls in Pennsylvania, Planning Series #1*, Sixth Edition, October 2020, <https://dced.pa.gov/library/>

³ PA DEP, Act 537: An Overview of the Sewage Facilities Program Fact Sheet, Rev. 7/2019, <https://www.pa.gov/agencies/dep/programs-and-services/water/clean-water/wastewater-management/act-537-sewage-facilities-program.html>

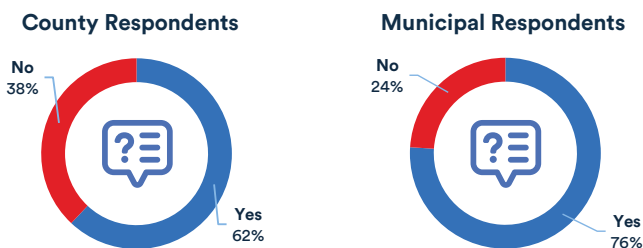
Regulatory Tools

Subdivision and Land Development Ordinances

A subdivision refers to the creation of new lots or changes to property lines, while land development involves the construction of public or private improvements to land. Subdivision and land development regulations offer municipalities a degree of protection against unwise, poorly planned growth. The community ensures proper placement of public improvements such as new roads, water and sewer lines, and drainage systems. Regulations also provide that improvements are installed and paid for by the developer and not the taxpayers. By requiring review and inspection reports from the municipal engineer, local officials guarantee that public improvements are properly designed and constructed.⁴

According to the results of DCED's survey, nearly 62% of responding counties and approximately 76% of responding municipalities are covered by a subdivision and land development ordinance (SALDO). Of the municipalities covered by a SALDO, most (88%) have their own, while the remaining 12% indicated that they fell under the jurisdiction of a county SALDO. The MPC provides that county SALDOs have authority in municipalities that do not have a local SALDO.

Do you have a SALDO?



Zoning Ordinances

Zoning is a tool available to local governments that can be used to regulate land use, including the location and intensity of development. Along with subdivision and land development ordinances, zoning ordinances are a primary implementation tool for comprehensive plans.

The purpose of zoning is to guide development consistent with a community's development goals and objectives. While zoning does not create development, it can enable and encourage desired development in appropriate locations. Overly restrictive zoning may result in unintended consequences and discourage the types of development necessary to support the community.

Responses to DCED's survey suggest that cities are most apt to use zoning. In fact, all 19 cities that responded to the survey indicated that they have zoning ordinances. Approximately 80% of responding boroughs and 70% of responding townships stated that they have a zoning ordinance. County zoning is less common, with less than 13% of county respondents indicating the use of a county zoning ordinance.

Official Maps

An official map is a community planning tool that identifies specific parcels or portions of private property within a municipality where public rights-of-way, easements, or open spaces are envisioned. Adopted by ordinance, the official map is a municipality's declaration to reserve private land for future public acquisition and use. While it can be used to set aside land for future use, an official map does not impose eminent domain on property. A municipality must use methods authorized under law to acquire property reserved on an official map. Methods may include friendly negotiation or condemnation proceedings.⁵ Official map ordinances are often used to reserve lands for future public streets, public parks, flood control basins, and stormwater management areas and drainage easements.

In response to DCED's survey, approximately 60% of responding municipalities indicated that they have an official map, with a median age of approximately 9 years. However, this data should be treated with caution. Approximately 2.5% of respondents noted adoption dates prior to the adoption of the MPC (1968). This suggests that some respondents may be unfamiliar with official map ordinances or may have misinterpreted the survey question.

Uniform Construction Code

The [Pennsylvania Uniform Construction Code \(UCC\)](#) regulates the codes and standards of building projects and has been enforced throughout the commonwealth since 2004. The UCC is administered by the [Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry](#). According to the Department, over 90% of Pennsylvania's municipalities have elected to administer and enforce the UCC locally, using their own employees or via certified third-party agencies (private code enforcement agencies). In these municipalities, the Department has no code enforcement authority, except where the municipality lacks the services of a person certified as an accessibility inspector or plans examiner.⁶

Floodplain Management Ordinances

In Pennsylvania, the [Floodplain Management Act \(Act 166\)](#) requires all municipalities identified by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as having areas subject to flooding to adopt floodplain management regulations. Regulations must meet minimum standards set by the [National Flood Insurance Program](#). They can be enacted as single-purpose ordinances or as part of zoning, subdivision and land development ordinances, and/or building codes.⁷

Of the 676 municipalities that responded to the survey, approximately 82% indicated that they have a floodplain ordinance. This included approximately 89% of cities, 85% of townships, and 76% of boroughs.

⁴ PA DCED, *Local Land Use Controls in Pennsylvania, Planning Series #1*, Sixth Edition, October 2020, <https://dced.pa.gov/library/>

⁵ PA DCED, *Local Land Use Controls in Pennsylvania, Planning Series #1*, Sixth Edition, October 2020, <https://dced.pa.gov/library/>

⁶ *Uniform Construction Code*. Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry. Retrieved July 8, 2025 from <https://www.pa.gov/agencies/dli/programs-services/labor-management-relations/bureau-of-occupational-and-industrial-safety/uniform-construction-code-home.html>

⁷ PA DCED, *Local Land Use Controls in Pennsylvania, Planning Series #1*, Sixth Edition, October 2020, <https://dced.pa.gov/library/>



Allentown, PA

Impact of Land Use Decisions on Government Finances

In Pennsylvania, local governments rely on property tax revenues, which are based on property values, and property values are influenced by the density and intensity of development. As a result, the types of land uses and the density of development impact the amount of revenue received by a municipality. In addition, development patterns influence the cost of maintaining the infrastructure necessary to support the development. For example, when compared to high-density development, low-density development requires more road miles and more linear feet of utility lines to serve the same number of people.

Unfortunately, local governments do not always consider the long-term financial impacts that land use decisions have on their budgets. *“If the land within a local government’s boundaries is not productive at generating revenues, then local government will find it difficult, if not impossible, to keep up with the costs of providing services and maintaining infrastructure.”*⁸

The National League of Cities, Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA), and a number of allied organizations have undertaken an [initiative to rethink local government revenue](#), and in April of 2022, released [Rethinking Revenue](#), which examined the impact that land use decisions have on local government revenues.

The Rethinking Revenue initiative encourages local governments to consider the return on investment (ROI) provided by development on a per-acre basis when making land use decisions, and to establish criteria and policies to promote revenue-positive development. It recommends calculating and mapping revenue per acre for all areas to show decision-makers how land use decisions impact revenues. Other recommendations include zoning for increased density, encouraging infill development and accessory dwelling units, and reducing parking requirements.

Local land use decisions and policies related to infrastructure, such as public water and sewer, and roads, can either contain or guide development to the most appropriate locations within a municipality or contribute to sprawl. As part of the report survey, municipalities were asked if they have a policy to require adjacency and concurrency to ensure that all future development is within the bounds of existing infrastructure. Of the 676 municipalities that responded to the survey, only 211 (31.2%) indicated that they have such a policy. Additionally, only 146 (21.6%) responded that they have a policy in place to prevent the overextension of infrastructure. For more survey results on local land use policies, go to Chapter 05 on Conservation and Natural Resources.

Less than

32%



of municipalities

have policies to ensure new development is within the bounds of existing infrastructure or prevent its overextension

⁸ Joseph Minicozzi, AICP, Justin Weiss, MPA, ICMA-CM, and Shayne Kavanagh, *Rethinking Revenue, The Root of Local Government Revenues*, Copyright 2022 Government Finance Officers Association, <https://www.gfoa.org/materials/the-root-of-local-government-revenues>

Policy Recommendations



Provide technical assistance and training for local governments. DCED’s survey for this report asked respondents which aspects of land use planning are of greatest importance. “Guidance, administration, and regulation (comprehensive plans, official maps, SALDOs, zoning, etc.)” was identified as a top priority among both municipalities (13%) and counties (11%). DCED’s Office of Community Planning should continue to provide technical assistance and training for local governments. Additionally, the Commonwealth should continue to provide funding for DCED’s Municipal Assistance Program (MAP) that aids in the development and update of various planning and regulatory tools.



Consider and aspire to the Commonwealth’s land use goals, objectives, and policies. [Pennsylvania Code, Title 4, Chapter 7, Section 7.611 – Section 7.615](#) directs Commonwealth agencies under the jurisdiction of the Governor to consider and aspire to the following land use goals whenever developing new policies and programs, reviewing existing policies and programs, or implementing policies or programs which affect land use. The code lists objectives in support of each goal.

- Establish efficient land use patterns by encouraging growth which is consistent with existing infrastructure.
- Preserve the commonwealth’s natural resources and protect the people’s constitutional right to clean air, pure water, and the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic and aesthetic values of the environment.
- Establish consistent and coordinated land use practices statewide.
- Encourage the development of an adequate supply of affordable housing.

[Pennsylvania Code, Title 4, Chapter 7, Section 7.771](#) also identifies land use policies that provide additional support for the Commonwealth’s goals.



Consider the Keystone Principles when evaluating State programs and projects. The [Keystone Principles and Criteria for Growth, Investment and Resource Conservation](#) were adopted in 2005, and are still relevant today. They provide State agencies with a set of guidelines to foster sustainable economic development and resource conservation through State investments. The principles and criteria are designed to encourage multifaceted project development that will integrate programs and funding sources from a variety of State agencies into a comprehensive strategy to address issues affecting communities.



Continue to provide funding for stormwater management planning. Act 167 requires counties to prepare and adopt a stormwater management plan (Act 167 plan) for each watershed located in the county. These plans must be reviewed and revised at least every five years. Responses to DCED’s survey indicate that many counties do not have a current stormwater management plan. It is also recommended that an update to a county Act 167 plan include a model stormwater ordinance for municipalities.



Encourage and incentivize multi-municipal planning and regulatory efforts. It makes sense for municipalities to coordinate and cooperate in planning and managing land use. Economic markets and natural systems do not suddenly end or change at municipal boundaries. Many roads, water and wastewater systems, and parks serve regional areas. People live in one municipality, work in another, and shop in another, etc. There are economies of scale to be realized by working together.⁹

The MPC provides voluntary opportunities for intergovernmental cooperation. Two or more municipalities may enact a single joint zoning ordinance covering their whole area, preceded by a joint municipal comprehensive plan. Also, two or more contiguous municipalities and their county may work together via an intergovernmental cooperative agreement to undertake and implement a multi- municipal comprehensive plan.¹⁰

⁹ PA DCED, Local Land Use Controls in Pennsylvania, Planning Series #1, Sixth Edition, October 2020, <https://dced.pa.gov/library/>

¹⁰ PA DCED, Local Land Use Controls in Pennsylvania, Planning Series #1, Sixth Edition, October 2020, <https://dced.pa.gov/library/>

Shared Values

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Grow Smart



Preserve and Protect



Housing for All



Healthy, Prosperous, and Resilient Communities



Coordinated and Connected Communities



53%

**of Pennsylvania's population can walk to
PARKS, TRAILS, OR OPEN SPACE
within 10 minutes**

04 Parks, Trails, Recreation, and Open Space



Rimrock Overlook, Allegheny National Forest
Photo Credit: Warren County Visitors Bureau

Pennsylvania is a national leader in outdoor recreation, offering vast natural resources and a thriving outdoor economy. With over 60% of the commonwealth covered in forest and more than five million acres available for public recreation, residents and visitors alike have unparalleled access to nature. As of 2025, the commonwealth's outdoor recreation sector ranks eighth in the nation, contributing an impressive \$19B annually to Pennsylvania's economy and supporting over 168,000 jobs. According to 2023 data from the Pennsylvania Tourism Office, tourist spending on recreation reached \$9.1B, accounting for nearly 19% of all visitor expenditures.

State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)

Every five years, the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) develops the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan. The plan provides resources, guidance, and direction to enhance public access to outdoor recreation and guide Commonwealth investment in future recreation.



The State recently adopted the [2025-2029 SCORP](#), which prioritizes public recreation space as a shared benefit socially, economically, and ecologically. It is structured around five priorities, including:

1. Promoting Community and Economic Development;
2. Advancing Health and Wellness;
3. Supporting Access and Inclusion;
4. Addressing Infrastructure and Maintenance; and
5. Progressing on Sustainability and Climate Change



Pennsylvania's Thriving Outdoor Economy

124 State Parks
encompassing **300,000 Acres**

300 Game Lands
totaling over **5 Million Acres**

14,000+ Miles
of Trails

28 Water Trails
spanning **2,300+ Miles**

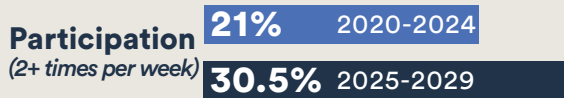
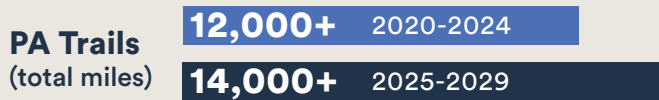
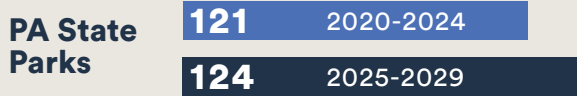
2,400 Miles
of designated **Bicycle Routes**

61 Major Greenways

Trends

The [2025-2029 SCORP](#) was built on robust community engagement. In part, the plan concluded that while Pennsylvania communities are uniquely positioned to realize economic and community benefits associated with recreation, many lack critical programmatic, technical, and staffing capacity to activate those benefits.

Outdoor Recreation



Source: Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, DCNR

Economic Impacts of Travel and Tourism in Pennsylvania



Visitor Spending on Recreation



Direct Jobs

Source: PA Tourism Office, DCED

Most Visited Recreation Areas Among Pennsylvania Residents (PA SCORP 2025-2029)*

Local or County Parks, Trails, Public Pools, and Recreation Areas
50.2%

State Parks, Forests, or Game Lands
21.2%

Private or Commercial Recreation Areas (golf courses, private pools, etc.)
9.2%

National Parks, Forests, or Recreation Areas
3.9%



*14.6% did not visit one of these outdoor recreation areas in the last year.

Policy Recommendations



Advance community revitalization and connectivity through coordinated planning for trail networks, improved river and park access, active transportation, and nature-based placemaking.

Recreation can be a tool for community and economic revitalization. Closing critical trail gaps and creating interconnected networks support tourism and active transportation. Increased and improved public access to parks and rivers, along with nature-based placemaking, can create more attractive and livable communities across the commonwealth. Municipalities should conduct comprehensive recreation, park, and open space (CRPOS) plans, and counties should conduct or update open space and greenways plans.



Support the growth of the tourism and outdoor economies with targeted land use planning.

Abundant natural resources, a range of recreational assets, and charming historic small towns are the backbone of the state's tourism industry. Local spending by tourists reached over \$9B in 2023, growing over ten percent from the prior year. Thoughtful and coordinated land use planning can help ensure that the tourism industry grows in a way that is sustainable and protects valuable natural and cultural resources while also providing for equitable access and benefit.



Foster partnerships between State agencies, local governments, and advocacy groups to implement the land use-related goals of the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan.

Many of the Commonwealth's agencies, including, but not limited to, those summarized to the right, play a role in supporting recreation goals through diverse programs and initiatives. Coordinating these varied efforts within the context of a comprehensive land use and development strategy is essential for achieving recreation goals statewide.

Agency Roles in Recreation Land Use

Department of Community & Economic Development (DCED) provides funding through the administration of programs like the Greenways, Trails, and Recreation Program for the development of parks, trails, and other recreational facilities.

Department of Conservation & Natural Resources (DCNR) manages Pennsylvania's 124 State parks, 20 State forests, 12 heritage areas, and 8 conservation landscapes which provide a wide array of recreational opportunities. They also provide grants and technical assistance to local communities and nonprofits for parks, trails, heritage, and other recreation projects.

Department of Transportation (PennDOT) is a clearinghouse for a number of funding streams that can be used for the development of trails and multimodal improvements that can serve to connect recreational opportunities across the state. PennDOT also plays a role in ensuring safe access to recreational areas.

Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) While not directly a recreation agency, DEP's work safeguards the commonwealth's water, land, and air resources, which are often at the center of many recreational activities. However, DEP does administer Coastal Zone Grants, which directly support the development and maintenance of recreational infrastructure.

Department of Health (DOH) promotes physical activity to combat chronic diseases like obesity. This includes supporting programs that encourage active transportation, such as walking and biking, and advocating for policies that create safe and accessible places for people to be active.

State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) provides programs, incentives, and technical assistance to preserve the commonwealth's historic assets, which attract heritage tourists and recreation enthusiasts. Preservation of historic properties provides unique experiences for outdoor recreation along trails and waterways, and in State, county, and local parks.



For more than 15 years, place-based landscape partnerships in Pennsylvania have been driving strategic investment and action in sustainability, conservation, community revitalization, and recreation projects. Spearheaded by DCNR, the [Conservation Landscapes Program](#) is an innovative example of State leadership in the realm of collaborative landscape conservation.

Shared Values

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Grow Smart



Preserve and Protect



Housing for All



Healthy, Prosperous, and Resilient Communities



Coordinated and Connected Communities



Promote the use of parks, trails, open spaces, and recreation areas as a development tool that sows multi-system benefits to communities. Parks, trails, open spaces, and recreation areas are key components of a healthy and resilient community. They make neighborhoods more attractive and livable, thereby bolstering local economies. They improve environmental factors such as air quality and stormwater management; provide opportunities for improved physical and mental health; preserve and protect the habitats of important flora and fauna; and foster a sense of community. Planning for, and investing in, parks, trails, open space, and recreation areas can result in widespread community benefits.



Prioritize the protection, enhancement, conservation, and restoration of natural resources as a key component to sustaining and growing Pennsylvania's outdoor recreation economy.

Pennsylvania's outdoor recreation economy is critically dependent on the protection of natural resources and landscapes. Not only are parks, trails, and open space preservation essential tools for maintaining ecological integrity, but they are the basis for a thriving outdoor recreation economy. Planning for and strategically investing in programs that facilitate environmentally sensitive development will ensure the long-term viability of Pennsylvania's outdoor recreation economy.



05 Conservation & Natural Resources



Natural Lands' Stroud Preserve, PA

Conservation

Land conservation protects Pennsylvania's natural resources and lands while providing multiple ecological, social, and economic benefits. Land conservation is one of the most efficient means of accomplishing mutual benefits that traverse our natural and built environments. Such benefits include providing public access for outdoor recreation, mitigating climate change impacts, strengthening community resiliency, protecting ecosystems, supporting wildlife habitat, protecting air and water quality, controlling stormwater, preserving cultural and historical resources, improving public health, enhancing quality of life, and supporting regional economies and community revitalization.

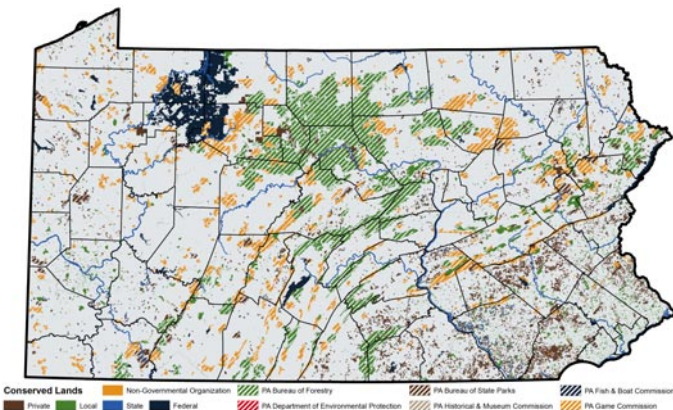
Pennsylvania's natural and agricultural lands are a vital component of its identity; nearly 70% of the commonwealth is covered by forests and farmland, working lands that serve as the backbone of Pennsylvania's core industries, including agriculture, forest products, outdoor recreation, and tourism.

Sustainable land use practices seek to balance ecological integrity, economic viability, and social equity, ensuring that natural resources support present needs while not compromising the needs of future generations. Such practices prioritize land conservation, sustainable forest management, community resiliency, sustainable agriculture, green infrastructure, landscape conservation, and biodiversity and habitat protection.

Planning is a critical tool in advancing sustainable land use as it considers the multiple dimensions of a community or region and seeks to create livable and resilient places that support economic growth, health and wellness, climate resiliency, quality of life, and equitable access to critical services. Planning should take into account all forms of development and infrastructure, recognizing that viable communities require transportation systems, industrial and commercial development, energy infrastructure, agricultural production, etc.

Mixed-use and infill development consider holistic approaches to community and economic development that support multiple needs while reducing development pressures and reinvesting in areas in need of rehabilitation and revitalization.

Conserved Lands of PA

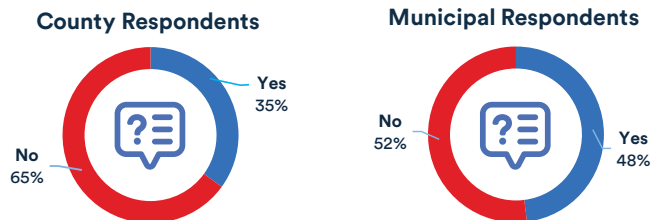


Trends

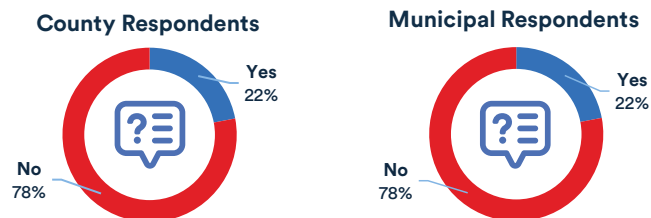
The Indigenous peoples who originally inhabited Pennsylvania's lands viewed those lands as a sacred, living being. This belief shaped their relationship with the natural world, guiding how they hunted, farmed, and gathered to meet community needs while safeguarding ecological balance for generations to come. With the arrival of European colonists, conservation principles found new expression. In 1682, founder William Penn decreed that those who took titles to portions of the land grant had to leave one acre wooded for every five they cleared. This was just the beginning of Pennsylvania's longstanding commitment to conservation-based planning policies and practices.

According to WeConservePA's Pennsylvania Land Trust Census Report from 2023, there are 66 county-based Conservation Districts and 99 land conservation organizations in the state. On average, there are 51 acres conserved per day statewide, and there's been a 29% gain in conserved acres in the last decade. Cameron County in the northwest region has the highest percentage of conserved land at 67% and Armstrong County in the southwest has the lowest at 3%.

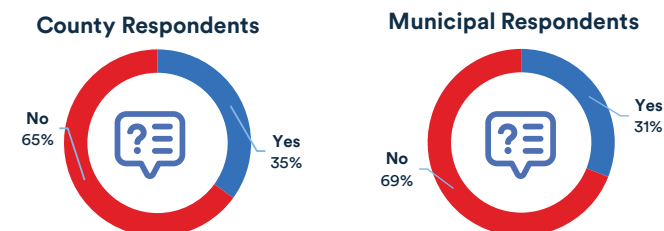
Do you have SALDO Provisions for Conservation Subdivision Design?*



Do you have a Policy to Prevent Overextension of Infrastructure?*



Do you have a Policy to Encourage Adjacency and Concurrency Requirements?*



*Based on results from DCED's survey of counties and municipalities with 55 county respondents and 676 municipalities.

Recent Trends in Land Trust Holdings in Pennsylvania

281,272 **304,711**
2019 2023

Easements (acres)

117,599 **126,182**
2019 2023

Lands Held in Fee (acres)

389,104 **410,320**
2019 2023

Government Transfers (acres)

20,193 **24,254**
2019 2023

Non-Government Transfers (acres)

Source: [WeConservePA Land Trust Census](#)



Pennsylvania Game Commission Annual Legislative Reports

2024

10,963 Acres

added to the game lands system, including **12 Indentures** and **6 Acquisitions** completed through partnerships with land conservancies

2019

6,151 Acres

added to the game lands system, including two properties with sensitive habitats with species of special concern. **3 Indentures** and **7 Acquisitions** completed to improve access to existing game lands

Source: [PA Game Commission Annual Report](#)

Policy Recommendations



Support the integration of conservation best practices into land use planning. Provide technical assistance for local zoning ordinances, subdivision and land development ordinances, and comprehensive plans that incorporate conservation principles, address sprawl, and protect sensitive lands. Additionally, the Commonwealth can facilitate regional, watershed-based planning collaboration to further broader environmental and economic goals. Examples include:

- Encourage infill development and redevelopment.
- Promote compact design and clustering.
- Where feasible, consider incentives for enhanced riparian buffers and green stormwater infrastructure.
- Utilize wildlife habitat data and natural resource inventories.
- Consider no net loss of forested lands through mitigation and afforestation.
- Consider impacts of light and noise pollution on sensitive habitats.



Part of an investment to improve local water quality and protect the Chesapeake Bay, 700 trees were planted along a stream at a dairy farm in York County. The project will establish a 2.5-acre streamside forest buffer along Orson Run in the Muddy Creek watershed to reduce runoff, prevent erosion, and filter nutrients before they reach the Susquehanna River, the largest tributary to the Chesapeake Bay.

Agency Roles in Conservation Land Use

Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) is the primary conservation-focused agency, administering numerous programs related to natural and heritage resource conservation, addressing climate change, geology, sustainability, forests, wildlife biodiversity, outdoor recreation, and water resources.

Department of Transportation (PennDOT) follows a [Green Plan Policy](#) in addition to leading several multi-agency conservation-focused efforts, such as the Wildlife Crossings Strategic Plan and the Pollinator Habitat Plan.

Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) maintains a conservation focus particularly with respect to aquatic resource conservation and carries this through all their work. Additionally, the PFBC, with the Game Commission, prepare the Pennsylvania Wildlife Action Plan to address the conservation needs native wildlife, maintenance of viable habitats, and to protect species of greatest conservation. PFBC also prepares a conservation-focused climate action plan.

Game Commission (PGC) maintains a conservation focus with the goal of managing and protecting wildlife and their habitats. This includes management of over 480 species of wild birds and mammals, conducting wildlife surveys and health surveillance, and providing technical and financial assistance to landowners. The PGC co-authors the Pennsylvania Wildlife Action Plan with the PFBC.

Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) The responsible use of Pennsylvania's natural environment and protection of public health through sound regulatory and policy decision-making is one of DEP's core values. DEP prepares the Climate Action Plan and administers many programs supporting air quality, clean water, environmental cleanup, natural resource extraction, waste management, watershed restoration, and wetlands.

Department of Agriculture (PDA), Agriculture's Bureau of Farmland Preservation is a national leader in administering programs that protect prime farmland for future generations. This includes permanent agricultural conservation easements, [Clean and Green](#), and [Agricultural Security Areas \(ASAs\)](#).

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Grow Smart



Preserve and Protect



Housing for All



Healthy, Prosperous, and Resilient Communities



Coordinated and Connected Communities



Bolster State-level support for new or expanded programs to achieve conservation goals. Utilizing partnerships among government agencies and nongovernmental entities, the Commonwealth can actively pursue effective enhancement of programs, policies, and incentives for conservation. As part of reconvening the interagency land use team, existing Commonwealth policies and programs that impact conservation land use goals can be evaluated and prioritized for targeted investment.

- Conservation Easements
- Land Acquisition
- Growth Boundaries
- Transfer of Development Rights Programs
- Designated Wildlife Corridors
- Conservation by Design
- Official Maps
- Conservation Landscapes
- Heritage Areas
- Conservation Referenda



Expand the audience for the wide range of existing educational and technical resources to promote the use of conservation models and tools. Increased education around land use and conservation can help raise awareness of the importance of conservation-focused land use planning. Many counties and municipalities may lack

critical resources for developing conservation-based policies. As such, the Commonwealth can spread awareness of the importance of conservation through the promotion of best practices and related tools. Examples include:

- **Return on Environment (ROE):** ROE is the principle of assessing an economic value to be conserved. By understanding the value of those spaces to the local economy, development can be more targeted and zoning more holistic.
- **Conservation by Design:** Conservation by design or conservation subdivision is a model of residential development where homes are clustered or placed on smaller lots so that a significant portion of the development is conserved or left open.
- **Conservation Modeling:** A tool that directly supports land use planning by determining the impact of development on the ecosystem, predicting the impacts on biodiversity, and identifying practical conservation strategies.
- **Conservation Referenda:** Municipalities are authorized by PA Act 153 (formerly the Open Space Lands, Acquisition and Preservation Act) to purchase land or easements for the purpose of conservation. Local governments may levy a tax on real estate or earned income above the existing limits of the Commonwealth's laws, but only if they first receive referendum approval from the voters.



Susquehanna River north of Harrisburg, PA

Water Resources

Pennsylvania is flowing with water resources. The commonwealth's water resources provide communities with reliable drinking water and abundant recreational opportunities while also supporting an array of economic activity, including agriculture, manufacturing, and the cooling of power plants and data centers. But Pennsylvania's ample water resources also come with challenges, such as flooding and stormwater management, legacy impacts of mining, and restoring polluted waterways.

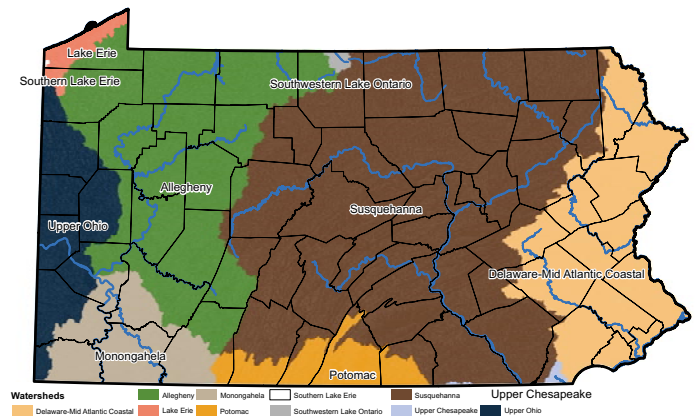
Land use and water resources are interconnected. Land use affects flood risks and water quality. Water doesn't recognize political boundaries, which makes stewardship and management of water resources a shared responsibility among individuals, companies, nongovernmental organizations, and all levels of government. Partnerships among all these entities are key to effectively addressing the challenges facing Pennsylvania's water resources, primarily through thoughtful land use and stormwater control measures.

Approximately 61% of the state's land area is considered forested, providing a natural filter for the state's water resources. Of the remaining land area, 12.2% is considered developed, based on the amount of land area covered by impervious surfaces ranging from 20%-100% coverage. Agricultural land accounts for 21.7%. The remaining 5.1% is considered "other," land that is either barren, wetlands, open water, and/or vegetation other than forest or agriculture. Careful consideration of prescribed and predicted land uses is integral to protecting Pennsylvania's vital water resources.

Whether it's the small valley of your local creek or the landscapes that drain into the commonwealth's larger rivers, all land in Pennsylvania is part of a watershed. A watershed is simply the area of land that drains to a particular waterway. Larger watersheds are sometimes referred to as basins. The six major river basins in Pennsylvania include the Delaware, Genesee, Great Lakes, Ohio, Potomac, and Susquehanna.

Pennsylvania's surface water resources include over 80,000 miles of streams and rivers, more than 4,000 lakes, reservoirs, and ponds, and 120 miles of coastal waters, overall totaling nearly 2.5 trillion gallons of water. Below the surface, roughly thirty times this volume (80 trillion gallons) is stored in groundwater aquifers. In an average year, more than 40 inches of precipitation fall to replenish the surface water supplies, which drive the commonwealth's economy.

PA Watersheds



2022 Pennsylvania State Water Plan

Every five years, under the PA Water Resources Planning Act (Act 220 of 2002), the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) updates the State Water Plan. The purpose of the plan is to provide the public and decision-makers at all levels with essential information and a list of priorities as it relates to Pennsylvania's water resources. At the State level, the plan recommends that 100 actions be continued, expanded on, or initiated in:



- floodplain and stormwater management;
- water withdrawal;
- water efficiency;
- legacy impacts from coal mining and oil and gas wells;
- drinking water and wastewater treatment;
- contaminants of emerging concern;
- agricultural nonpoint source pollution; and
- waterway navigability.

Pennsylvania's Water Resources

6 Major Surface Water Basins

85,568 Miles
of rivers & streams

310 Lakes
publicly owned

63 Miles
of Great Lakes shore

6 Square Miles
of Presque Isle Bay

17 Square Miles
of Delaware Estuary

1,591,012 Acres
of freshwater wetlands



Source: 2024 Pennsylvania Integrated Water Quality Report



CASE STUDY

Municipal Green Infrastructure for Stormwater Management

In February 2023, Ferguson Township (Centre County) was awarded the *Public Works Building LEED Gold Certification*. The township's municipal building and surrounding land was improved upon via the installation of green infrastructure and features for stormwater management. Following best management practices (BMPs) for stormwater management, the township implemented grow zones, reforestation, landscape restoration, and pervious pavement to reduce runoff and localized flooding impacts.

Grow zones at the building are marked by small signs noting that the natural meadows:

- Increase diversity and maintain balance throughout the natural community;
- Improve and collect stormwater runoff;
- Promote sustainable landscapes;
- Encourage observation and create a learning environment; and
- Reduce costs and environmental impacts.

The grow zones are full of native plants that are deep-rooted and absorb lots of water, which will greatly enhance the land's capacity to absorb stormwater.

Trends

Water is plentiful in Pennsylvania, but a variety of user groups place high demands on our resources, including emerging users such as data centers. The total water withdrawal in Pennsylvania exceeds five billion gallons per day via use by various sectors. The largest user sectors include power generation, public water, and industrial. Proactive land use planning is the most efficient tool for monitoring and minimizing the impacts of land uses that may strain our water resources.



Over
5 Billion
gallons of water
withdrawn per day

Water Withdrawals

by Major Industry Sector in PA, Gallons Per Day

Thermoelectric Power

3,278,132,163

Public Water Supply

1,345,884,066

Industrial

475,865,318

Livestock

78,267,119

Mining

66,399,572

Wastewater Collection and Treatment

10,893,136

Oil and Gas

9,040,013

Commercial and Institutional

5,931,125

Irrigation

4,021,539

Total Withdrawal 5,274,434,050



Tioga County, Flooding from Tropical Storm Debby 2024, PA

Policy Recommendations



Re-establish an interagency land use team to develop cohesive land use recommendations, policies, and education on water resources. The Pennsylvania State Water Plan includes an overarching recommendation to improve interagency coordination concerning planning and implementation as it relates to water resources. The Commonwealth should re-establish an interagency committee to develop and promote recommendations, policies, and educational resources about how land use decisions impact water resources, including flood risk mitigation, stormwater management, climate resiliency, and the protection and restoration of water quality.



Review the Act 167 Stormwater Management Program and enable DEP staff to assist and support counties and municipalities in developing, updating, and implementing stormwater plans. Act 167 requires each county to prepare and adopt a stormwater management plan, in consultation with the municipalities located within each watershed, and plans are to be reviewed and revised at least every five years. As of early 2025, only one of the state’s 67 counties has a current plan, and only nine counties have updates in progress. Additionally, the State Planning Board identified Act 167 stormwater plans as a key tool for storm preparedness, flood hazard mitigation, and community resiliency. Though funding is available for developing, updating, and implementing Act 167 plans, funds are limited. Additional DEP support will help counties and municipalities with plan development and local implementation.



Support communities in modernizing and maintaining stormwater infrastructure, focusing on resiliency and, where practical, prioritizing green stormwater infrastructure, including the preservation and enhancement of natural landscapes. Thoughtful land use planning, including the modernization and upkeep of stormwater infrastructure, can help mitigate stormwater issues and flood risks while providing community benefits across the state. The Commonwealth should support communities in maintaining and modernizing stormwater infrastructure, including smaller-scale solutions, which may be more accessible for municipalities to implement, along with larger-scale collaborative and regional approaches where appropriate. The Commonwealth should particularly support communities in ensuring that stormwater infrastructure is resilient to current and projected impacts of climate change. The Commonwealth should assist communities in managing stormwater through funding programs, regulatory requirements, guidance, training, and technical support.

To decide on the best stormwater solutions for particular situations, communities often need to balance many factors, including flood risks, regulatory requirements, affordability, water quality, climate resiliency, and co-benefits. In some situations, green stormwater infrastructure (like green roofs, constructed wetlands, rain gardens, and the preservation or enhancement of open space and natural landscapes) may be preferred over, or used in combination with, gray infrastructure solutions (like stormwater storage tunnels and the expansion of storm sewer systems) to meet a community’s stormwater management goals. The key to successful stormwater management is finding the best solution for the best location, which will provide public safety, ecological, and community benefits.

Shared Values

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Grow Smart



Preserve and Protect



Housing for All



Healthy, Prosperous, and Resilient Communities



Coordinated and Connected Communities

Forests

Forests and trees provide environmental, health, social, cultural, and economic benefits. Trees improve air and water quality, support biodiversity, and help mitigate and adapt to climate change through carbon sequestration and flood mitigation. Studies show that trees greatly improve human health outcomes by reducing stress, encouraging physical activity, and providing space for relaxation and socialization.¹

The Pennsylvania Forest Products Association reports the commonwealth's leading position in the nationwide forest products industry with \$115B in annual sales and \$39B in annual economic impact. The association further reports that the industry employs over 60,000 Pennsylvanians and over 10% of the manufacturing workforce.²

16.6
Million Acres
or about **57% of the commonwealth is forested land**, from large contiguous tracts to small woods and urban and community forests



11.6
Million Acres
or about **68% of all forested land is privately held**



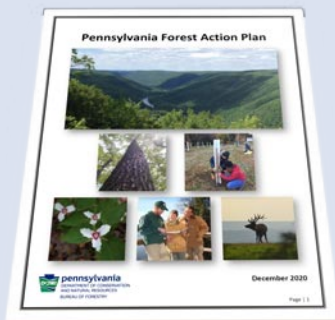
2.2
Million Acres
or about **13% of all forested land is managed by the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources**



1.5
Million Acres
or about **9% of all forested land is managed by the Pennsylvania Game Commission**

2020 Pennsylvania Forest Action Plan

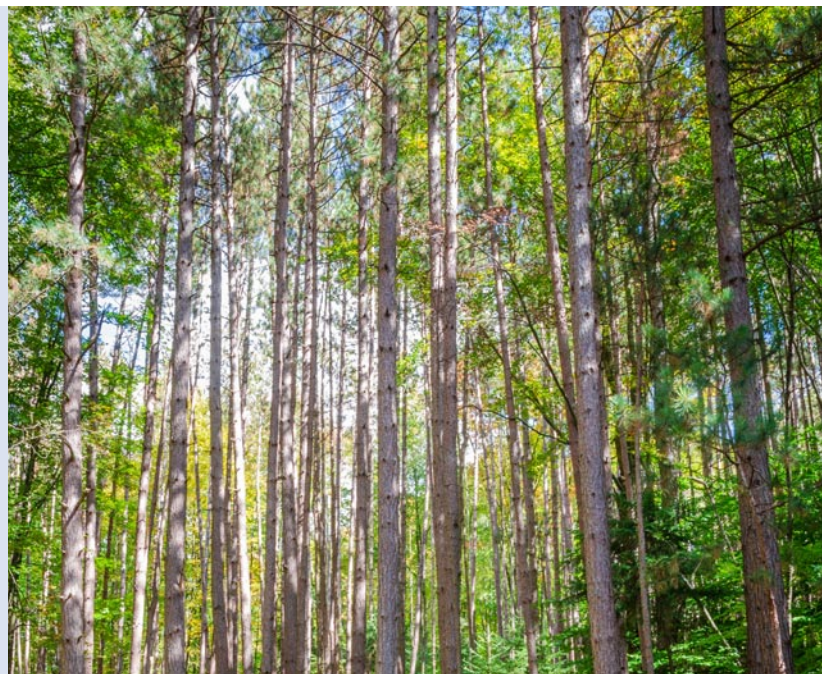
The Pennsylvania Forest Action Plan is part of national forest planning effort. It assesses the condition of Pennsylvania's forests across all ownerships and establishes a framework of strategies to achieve long-term forest sustainability. The Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' (DCNR) Bureau of Forestry receives funding from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service for Forest Stewardship, Urban and Community Forestry, Forest Health, and Wildland Fire programs.



Completing a decennial Forest Action Plan is a requirement of the federal Farm Bill (Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018, 2018 H.R. 2, 115 H.R. 2). In addition to meeting the federal requirements, the Bureau of Forestry will utilize the 2020 Forest Action Plan to inform a future strategic plan for the Bureau of Forestry, replacing the current strategic plan, Penn's Woods, from 1995.

Strategies developed in the 2020 PA Forest Action Plan are related to USDA Forest Service national priorities set forth in the Farm Bill. State and private forestry national priorities are:

1. Conserve and manage working forest landscapes for multiple values and uses;
2. Protect forests from threats; and
3. Enhance public benefits from trees and forests.



Eastern Hemlock: Pennsylvania's State Tree

Pennsylvania is experiencing warming temperatures, which are expected to affect the eastern hemlock, a keystone species with a rich cultural history and wide-ranging benefits for people, wildlife, and the surrounding ecosystem. Pennsylvania's state tree, the eastern hemlock, has a major presence in Pennsylvania forests and has been the subject of many conservation efforts.

The eastern hemlock has played an important role in Pennsylvania's cultural and ecological history. These trees were abundant in pre-colonial Pennsylvania forests and provided a valuable resource for Indigenous Peoples of the region. Indigenous Peoples used the tree's vitamin- and mineral-rich bark, roots, and leaves for medicinal purposes. Early European settlers in the region also used the tree's needles to make tea and the bark to create dye. [Climate Change Connections: Pennsylvania \(Eastern Hemlock\) | US EPA](#)

Trends

Pennsylvania forests face significant and ongoing threats from a variety of sources, including fragmentation and development, invasive species, biodiversity loss, climate change, and other emerging issues. Increasing development pressures from suburban sprawl, large-scale energy development, and warehouses put the sustainability of forests at risk. Conserving wooded tracts of land, including those in developed areas, is critical to slowing the loss of forest lands.

According to the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's 2020 report on the state of the forest products industry in Pennsylvania, the amount of forest land peaked in 2013 at approximately 17 million acres. Based on 2019 data, the report noted a net loss of 378,000 acres of forested land and attributed the loss primarily to the conversion to agricultural use and development, including rights-of-way and gas development.³

Forest Land Areas

16.8M 2018  16.7M 2023

Forest Land Area (acres)

8.0B 2018  7.8B 2023

Live Trees on Forest Land

54.4B 2018  55.8B 2023

Forest Land Volume (cubic feet)

1.7B 2018  1.8B 2023

Forest Land Carbon Storage (metric tons)

Adapted from US Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, 2025. Forests of Pennsylvania, 2023: FIA annual snapshot. Resource Update FS-626. Washington, DC: USDA Forest Service, <https://doi.org/10.2737/FS-RU-626>.

¹ [Sustaining human and community health through urban forestry](#)

² [Pennsylvania Forest Products Association](#)

³ [2020 State of the Industry.pdf](#)

Policy Recommendations



Promote local efforts to conserve existing forest and riparian areas. Municipal implementation of land use tools such as conservation zoning and riparian buffer setbacks should be incentivized in order to protect forested land. The Commonwealth should provide educational and technical assistance regarding municipal forestry ordinances, no-net-loss policies, conservation by design, and effective use of the official map to achieve forest conservation goals. The Commonwealth can also facilitate regional transfer of development rights programs across environmentally sensitive forested land. Additionally, financial incentives could be created for private landowners to enhance natural forest regeneration and deploy sustainable forest management practices.



Ensure all communities have the resources to access forests and their many benefits. Underserved and highly vulnerable, often urban, communities persistently have less of a tree canopy. The Commonwealth should ensure that its local planning, technical, and financial assistance supports tree equity and urban forestry initiatives. Forest planning and conservation should be inclusive and consider the environmental, recreational, and cultural values of forests. Tree planting and green infrastructure should be promoted in all of the Commonwealth's planning and development projects.



Capitalize on the ability of forests to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and mitigate climate change and its related impacts. The Commonwealth should encourage the integration of forest conservation and climate adaptation strategies into growth management programs. Interagency State and local partners can support sustainable land use practices by incorporating forest conservation in zoning, SALDOs, and official maps.



Protect large contiguous forest areas through regional collaboration and informed planning. The Commonwealth should foster multi-municipal planning that incorporates the goals of forest conservation and recreation. Funding, education, and technical assistance should be provided to programs that support forest stewardship and conservation planning such as forest inventories and canopy assessments. These tools should be used to inform local land use planning and acquisition for the purpose of conservation.

Shared Values

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Grow Smart



Preserve and Protect



Housing for All



Healthy, Prosperous, and Resilient Communities



Coordinated and Connected Communities

Climate

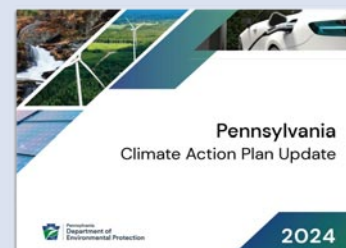
Pennsylvania is experiencing the growing impacts of climate change, exacerbated by historical land use and modern development patterns. This portion of the report relies heavily on two key plans, including the [2024 Pennsylvania Climate Action Plan \(PCAP\)](#) and the [2023 Hazard Mitigation Plan \(HMP\)](#). These plans provide a strategic framework for resilient land use, hazard mitigation, emissions reduction, and equitable development.

Climate change is driven by greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The [2025 Pennsylvania Greenhouse Gas Inventory Report](#) provides data on GHG emissions in the commonwealth from 2005 to 2022, tracks progress toward GHG emission-reduction targets, and provides an overview of key emission trends by sector. According to this report, the three sectors contributing the greatest amount of GHG emissions in Pennsylvania are industrial, electricity production, and transportation. GHG emissions have decreased across all sectors, apart from the industrial sector, since 2005. The forestry and land use sector provides a net carbon sink, however, the ability of this sector to sequester carbon has decreased over time.

Transportation and land use are critical components of reducing the negative impacts of climate change. For example, in the transportation sector, planning for bus, rail, biking, and walking infrastructure can reduce the number of vehicles on the road resulting in fewer tailpipe emissions. More efficient freight route planning can have a similar effect. Land use planning can foster smart growth by promoting practices that focus development near transit routes (transit-oriented development) which reduces vehicle traffic and prevents development of sensitive natural or agricultural lands.

Pennsylvania Climate Action Plan (PCAP)

The Pennsylvania Climate Change Act (Act 70 of 2008) requires the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to compile an annual Greenhouse Gas Inventory and develop a Climate Impacts Assessment (CIA) and Climate Action Plan (CAP), which are updated every three years.



The 2024 PCAP includes 22 GHG reduction measures across seven major sectors (built environment, transportation, industrial, fuel and gas systems, power generation, waste, and land use and agriculture) as well as measures that crosscut those sectors (hydrogen fuels and carbon capture, utilization, and storage). Implementation of these 22 measures can help Pennsylvania meet its GHG reduction goals, while providing benefits to human health and our economy.

The plan also presents adaptation strategies to help Pennsylvania adapt to climate change-related hazards that we are already experiencing, as well as legislative recommendations to enable implementation of the CAP.

Pennsylvania's CAP was coordinated by staff from PA DEP and informed by interested parties across the state.

Summary of Key Emissions Trends

Category	2022 Emissions	% Change from 2021	% Change from 2005
Residential	20.43	↑ 4.5%	↓ -15.6%
Commercial	12.18	↑ 6.3%	↓ -6.1%
Industrial	78.41	↓ -1.8%	↑ 13.8%
Transportation	56.08	↓ -0.1%	↓ -20.8%
Electricity Production	74.52	↓ -4.1%	↓ -41.0%
Agriculture	7.4	↓ -5.7%	↓ -6.4%
Waste Management	3.8	↓ -0.1%	↓ -23.4%
Forestry and Land Use Non-CO2 Emissions	0.2	↓ -21.6%	↑ 123.1%
Total Gross Emissions	253.01	↓ -1.4%	↓ -20.0%
Forestry and Land Use Net Carbon Flux	-28.42	↓ -1.0%	↓ -9.2%
Total Net Emissions	224.39	↓ -1.5%	↓ -21.2%

Source: PA Greenhouse Gas Inventory Report, 2025

Trends

Pennsylvania's [2024 Climate Impacts Assessment](#) reports that flooding from heavy rain is the state's most significant and growing risk. Additionally, dangerous heat waves are intensifying and could become as serious as flooding by the middle of the century. These hazards bring increasing harm to human health, the environment, and the economy. These climate impacts affect low-income families, the elderly, outdoor workers, and people with health conditions hardest, especially in urban areas. While other threats like landslides and sea level rise are less of a statewide problem, they can be locally devastating. Fair and proactive planning is critical to ensure all are prepared for and included in climate adaptation measures.

Local comprehensive plans provide a vision for the physical design and development of a community, and the principles in comprehensive plans are typically implemented via zoning ordinances, subdivision regulations, and capital improvement programs. **Therefore, integrating hazard mitigation into the comprehensive plan helps to guide the community's development in a way that does not lead to increased hazard vulnerability.** For instance, future development can be guided away from areas with known hazards, and design standards to withstand potential hazards can be created for new or improved construction.

– PA 2023 Hazard Mitigation Plan



Select Trends from the 2024 Pennsylvania Climate Impacts Assessment

- A dramatic increase in very hot days is expected. Historically, Pennsylvania experienced about five days per year with temperatures over 90°F. By mid-century, this is projected to increase more than sevenfold to 36 days per year. Environmental justice (EJ) areas are 1.8 times more exposed to high numbers of days above 90°F than the state average.
- From 2020 to 2023, the average annual temperature has been rising 1.2°F. When compared to the 1971-2000 baseline, the average annual temperature across the state is projected to increase by 6.7°F by mid-century.
- Nighttime will not provide as much cooling relief. The number of nights where the temperature stays above the threshold for human health recovery (68°F) from daytime heat is projected to jump from a historical average of about four nights per year to 26 nights per year by mid-century.
- Heavier, more intense, but less frequent, rain events will become more common. A 9% increase during individual heavy precipitation events by mid-century will lead to more rainfall.
- Coastal flooding will dramatically increase in the Delaware Estuary due to sea level rise. As a result, Philadelphia is likely to experience 74 days of tidal flooding per year by mid-century, compared to approximately eight days per year experienced early in this decade.

Pennsylvania Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP)



The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, under the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 (DMA 2000), which amended the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (Stafford Act), is required to have a Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP) to receive certain types of disaster assistance and hazard mitigation funding. Mitigation planning requirements emphasize greater interaction between State and local mitigation activities to ensure comprehensive mitigation planning takes place.

The Pennsylvania HMP identifies dangers in the commonwealth, assesses their impact on people and property, and develops strategies and actions to reduce those risks. It also helps Pennsylvania qualify for funding, comply with legal requirements, and improve community resiliency in a disaster.

Policy Recommendations



Support the integration of hazard mitigation and climate resiliency strategies into comprehensive plans and land use planning and across all levels of government.

The integration of hazard mitigation and climate adaptation into land use planning is critical in achieving measurable progress in the Commonwealth's climate and greenhouse gas reduction goals. Local and regional planning, zoning codes, land development ordinances, and capital improvement programs should address factors like flood risk reduction, heat mitigation, and critical infrastructure protection. The Commonwealth should prioritize investments in places with current hazard mitigation plans, as well as those where efforts are being made to implement the State's Climate Action Plan.



Reduce the disparate impacts of climate change on low-income residents and advance policies that address environmental justice.

Since climate change disproportionately impacts historically marginalized communities, explicit prioritization in climate adaptation and hazard mitigation planning processes and implementation programs should be made for vulnerable populations. Equitable access to building retrofits, energy upgrades, and air-quality improvements should be advanced and customized to achieve the greatest impact in [EJ areas](#).



Direct development away from vulnerable areas by encouraging infill development and strengthening existing infrastructure.

Vulnerable areas may include floodplains and those with aging infrastructure. Local land use policies should be crafted to avoid high-risk and flood-prone situations, while promoting infill and brownfield redevelopment. Infrastructure investments and nature-based solutions should be made to support reinvestment in the desired areas and to enhance overall resiliency.



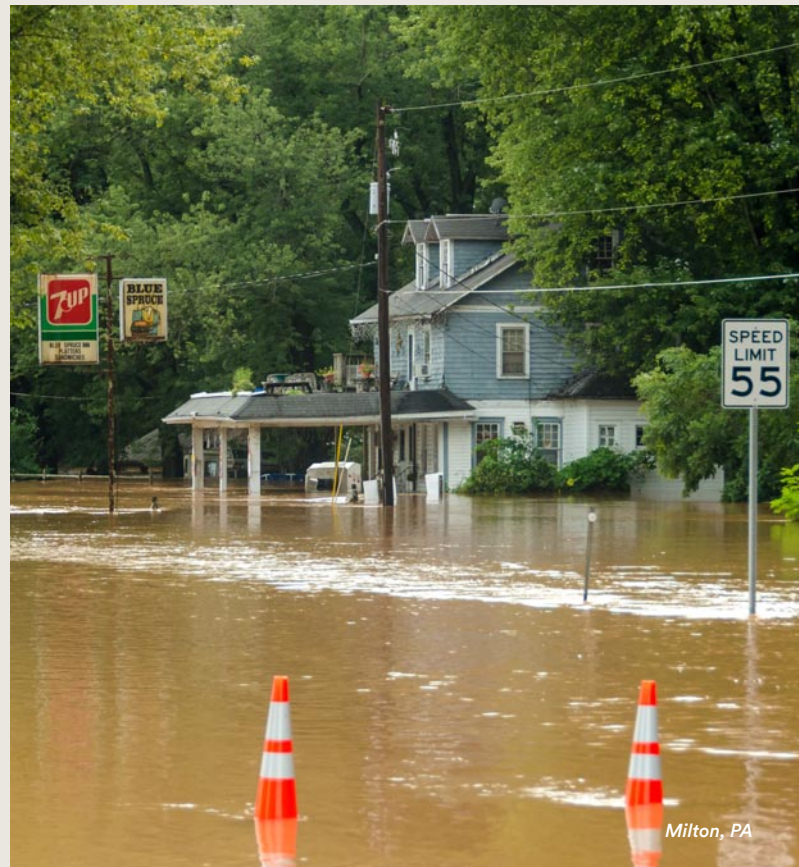
Ensure regulations allow for the development of affordable, energy-efficient, and climate-resilient housing.

The Commonwealth should identify and reduce any regulatory barriers hindering innovative and emerging construction techniques that would otherwise contribute to safe, affordable, and climate-resilient housing and encourage complementary efforts at the local level. Enhanced funding should be provided for weatherization; energy retrofits; renewable energy installations; and flood, heat, and disaster resiliency measures in affordable housing programs.



Encourage diverse economies to reduce dependency on climate-vulnerable sectors and enhance resiliency.

Diverse economies are critical to minimize the disproportionate dependence of certain industries on climatic conditions. Intragovernmental economic and workforce development efforts should take advantage of emerging "green" sectors and programs to promote economic strength and security.



Milton, PA

Shared Values

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Grow Smart

Preserve and Protect

Housing for All



Healthy, Prosperous, and Resilient Communities



Coordinated and Connected Communities

06 Housing



For one reason or many others, we've chosen Pennsylvania and our communities to live. Be it local roots, access to schools, jobs, or services, natural surroundings, character, affordability, or amenities, housing is an essential need. Housing not only shapes the physical aspects of a community, but also the day-to-day lives of residents, including our social and mental well-being.

Housing, growth, and development, without thoughtful consideration to location, quality, or type can create or exacerbate issues regarding infrastructure, resources, services, transportation, and quality of life. Additionally, when housing is left to deteriorate, it occupies valuable land while negatively impacting the community, reducing safety and property values.

Here, the goal is to develop and maintain a quality, affordable, and attainable housing stock consisting of a mix of types for residents and communities to thrive.



Develop and maintain a quality, affordable, and attainable housing stock consisting of a mix of types for residents and communities to thrive.

Housing Action Plan

During the development of this report, Governor Josh Shapiro signed Executive Order 2024-03, directing the DCED, in collaboration with other agencies and stakeholders, to develop a comprehensive housing plan. The plan proposes a strategy to help ease the burden of high housing costs in Pennsylvania by increasing the supply and preservation of housing. View the [Housing Action Plan](#) for more information and additional recommendations.



Trends

Housing Units¹

From 2019 to 2023, the state saw its number of occupied housing units increase by over 180,000; from 5,053,106 to 5,235,339. During this period, the northwest was the only region to experience a decrease (of 5,002 to 333,351 units). Regional increases include 8,970 in the southwest to 1,261,242, 33,403 in the central to 983,529, 7,736 in the northeast to 415,980, 22,261 in the Lehigh Valley to 571,762, and 114,865 in the southeast to 1,669,475 units.

Vacancy²

During the same time period, there was a substantial decrease in vacancy statewide. Total housing vacancy decreased by nearly 96,000 units to 544,324 in 2023. Vacancy type consisted of 19.8% (rental), 11.5% (for sale), 26.9% (seasonal, recreational, or occasional use), 0.1% (migrant workers), and 41.7% (other). There was a net two percentage point increase among rental vacancies, and a 1.9 percentage point decrease among for-sale units.

Regionally, the southeast has the largest percentage of rental and for-sale vacancies at 33.7% and 14.4% respectively, while the northwest has the largest seasonal, recreational, or occasional vacancy at 54.9%, as of 2023.

Housing Types³

Of Pennsylvania's 5.2 million housing units in 2023, 57.4% were one-unit detached, 19.0% one-unit attached, 4.0% two-unit apartments, 3.8% three- or four-unit apartments, 3.0% apartments with five to nine units, 9.4% apartments with ten or more units, and 3.3% mobile homes or other. The top three housing types to gain units from 2019 to 2023 were one-unit detached (81,101), one-unit attached (55,244), and apartments with ten or more units (44,847). Mobile homes and apartments with five to nine units were the only two types to decline (by 7,766 and 3,201 units, respectively).

Among the regions, the northwest has the largest percentage of one-unit detached housing units at 75.1% and mobile homes or other at 7.0%. The central region has the largest percentage of apartments with five to nine units (3.4%), while the northeast has the largest percentage of two-unit apartments (5.5%), and the southeast has the largest percentage of one-unit attached (35.5%), three- or four-unit apartments (4.4%), and apartments with ten or more units (14.1%).

Statewide, there was a marginal decrease in housing type share among one-unit detached, two-unit apartments, apartments with five to nine units, and mobile homes, whereas there were marginal increases among one-unit attached and apartments with ten or more units. Three- or four-unit apartments remained relatively the same.

¹ US Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates, Table S2504, 2023

² US Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates, Table B25004, 2023

³ *Ibid*

Tenure

As of 2022, the percentage of housing that was owner-occupied was 74%, while 26% was renter-occupied across the state. This was a three percentage point change from 2019, with owners decreasing and renters increasing.

The owner/renter breakdown for each region includes 75%/25% for the northwest, southwest, and northeast, 73%/27% for the central and Lehigh Valley, and 69%/31% for the southeast. The northwest and northeast regions saw the largest percentage point change in tenure at four points each, with a decrease in owners and an increase in renters.

Age of Housing

Over 86% of Pennsylvania's housing stock dates back to the 1900s. As of 2023, less than six percent of housing has been built in the last decade. The largest shares of housing date from 1960-1979 (22.7%) and 1939 or earlier (24.1%).

The northeast region has the highest percentage of units from 1939 or older (31.0%), and the southeast has the largest number, with over 409,000.

There are over
1.25 Million
housing units
from 1939 or earlier



Vacant Housing by Region (2023)

Northwest 66,321 units

Southwest 144,081 units

Central 70,459 units

Northeast 88,388 units

Lehigh Valley 59,593 units

Southeast 115,482 units



Altoona, PA

Building Permits⁴

From 2019 to 2024, Pennsylvania has averaged 27,610 building permits for new private housing units. In 2021, there was a spike of over 44,500 permits issued.

Housing Costs

The Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT) analyzes data to explore sustainability through location efficiency and provides [index scores](#) to comprehensively view and measure affordability through the lens of housing and transportation.

From 2019 to 2022, housing costs as a percent of income decreased by one percentage point among typical households and moderate-income (80% AMI) households to 24% and 29%. It is recommended that housing costs be no more than 28% of income for owners and 30% for renters.

Regionally, the Lehigh Valley and southeast saw the largest decrease in housing costs as a percent of income among both household groups of two percentage points, yet the southeast leads the regions with the highest costs at 28% among typical households and 35% among moderate-income households, as of 2022. This signifies the potential for cost burden among households in the southeast.

As of 2022, the average monthly housing cost for owners was \$1,314, and the median gross rent was \$779 for renters statewide. The northwest region had the lowest average monthly housing cost of \$1,030, where the southeast had the highest of \$2,009. And rents followed suit, with \$659 in the northwest and \$1,069 in the southeast.

Housing and transportation costs are two of the largest expenditures for any household. When considered and viewed together, we can see where there are potential issues or opportunities to address affordability or location regarding proximity to jobs and services. A combined cost of no more than 45% of a household's income is considered to be affordable.

Additionally, increasing energy and utility costs, and a lack of quality or efficiency among housing units compound the cost burden, especially among low- to moderate-income households.

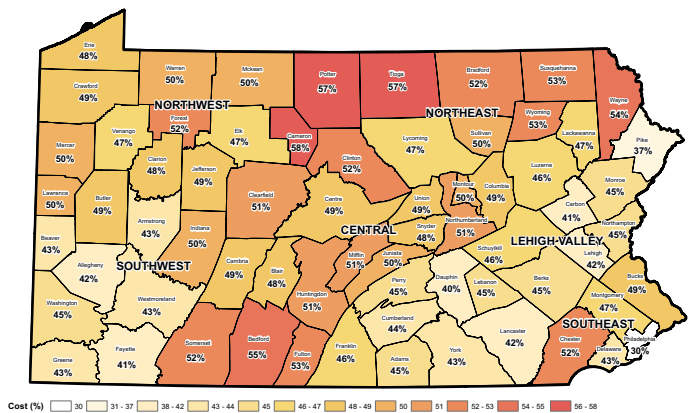
Average Monthly Housing Cost / Median Gross Rent for PA Households*

\$1,510 / \$895

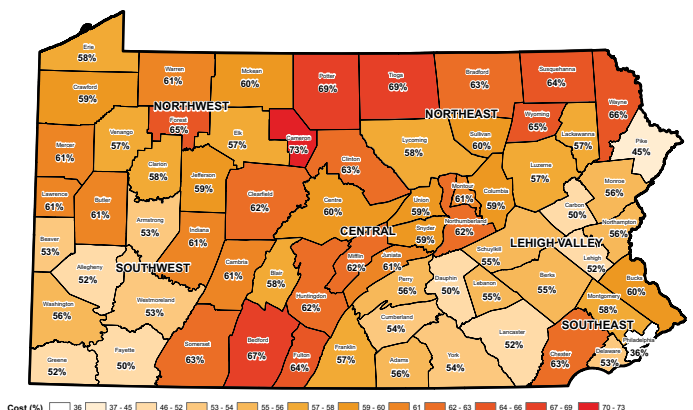
*2022 \$ adjusted to 2025 \$

*Typical household assumes a household income that is the median income for the region. Moderate-income household assumes a household income that is 80% of the area median income.

Housing and Transportation Costs as Percent of Income for Typical Household by County



Housing and Transportation Costs as Percent of Income for Moderate-Income Household by County



⁴ Federal Reserve Economic Data, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, 2025



Blight

When housing ages and remains unmaintained, and commercial properties become vacant and abandoned, blight sets in and diminishes property taxes, devaluing the blighted property itself, and reducing the property values, safety, and community pride of neighboring properties. Furthermore, blighted structures on a property inhibit opportunities for that property to realize its full economic potential. Combatting blight can be an onerous task for municipalities, and expensive. Preventing blight often requires investment in code enforcement, and managing blight can involve costly demolitions, cleanup, or maintenance.

Respondents to DCED's survey of counties and municipalities indicated that blighted, abandoned, and vacant properties are of a top 5 priority for 19 of the responding counties and 254 of the responding municipalities. Similarly, the [2024 Property Maintenance Code Enforcement Report](#) by the Local Government Commission (LGC) asked municipal respondents how they would characterize the degree of blight in their municipality. Of the 137 responses, only 7% answered that there was a high or severe degree of blight, 61% answered that there was a low degree of blight, and 32% said moderate. This indicates that blight may be a more acute issue in the communities facing blight, or more so reflects on the municipalities that had the ability to answer either survey. To further this point, of the 137 respondents to the LGC survey, 90% had zoning, 83% held a property maintenance ordinance, and 49% of respondents required rental licensing and inspections. The high utilization of these blight prevention tools could contribute to the moderate to low impact of blight among respondents.

In the LGC survey, municipal officials were asked whether they agree that their municipality's capacity to combat blight is sufficient; only 5% of respondents strongly agreed with the statement. About 43% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Municipal officials also indicated that absentee or negligent landlords were the greatest contributing factor to blight (51%), followed by aging housing stock (26%) and poverty (17%). Additional factors included aging residents, vacant and foreclosed property, and the tax sale process.

Homelessness

According to a 2024 Continuum of Care (CoC) Homeless Populations and Subpopulations Report, of the 14,088 individuals experiencing homelessness in Pennsylvania, 2,270 struggle with chronic homelessness. Between 2019 and 2024, Pennsylvania saw chronic homelessness increase by 22%, despite overall homelessness only increasing by 6.7%. During this period, there was also a 58.5% increase in unsheltered households and a 61.7% increase in unsheltered persons.

Aging in Place

The 60-and-over population of Pennsylvania is projected to increase from 3.35 million in 2020 to 3.85 million in 2050, according to the Pennsylvania Department of Aging (PDA). And according to AARP, only 5.7% of Pennsylvania's nursing home residents live in a 5-star facility compared to the national rate of about 22%. National trends regarding increases in long-term at-home care and a lack of access to high-quality facilities in Pennsylvania suggest the quality of life for our growing demographic of senior citizens is at risk.

Housing and thoughtful land use planning play a significant role in the sustained wellness of our growing senior population and the ability of a community to meet the needs of its residents as they grow and age.

Policy Recommendations



Support housing diversity for all stages of life. Create innovative, accessible, diverse housing to meet the physical, financial, and social needs of citizens in all stages of life and ability, enabling individuals to remain active participants in their communities, whether they are starting out on their own as young adults or downsizing as senior citizens. Tactics include shared housing and resource exchanges, accessory dwelling units (ADUs) and elder cottage housing opportunities (ECHOs), affordable-for-young adults housing, and visitable senior-living communities. Incentivize transitional housing for our growing senior population and adopt new technologies for at-home care, as well as fill geographic gaps in services with smaller care facilities. Address the “missing middle*” by supporting zoning and funding programs that encourage mixed housing types and mixed-use development.



Locate housing in proximity to transportation and amenities. Improve access between residential development and community assets through investments in public transportation, lighting, sidewalks, benches, bus shelters, parks, trails, and walking paths. Encourage strategic development by prioritizing funding for housing and the extension of infrastructure in proximity to existing population centers. Sound land use and housing decisions support overall affordability, provides options and choice, can introduce and incorporate gentle/increased density, support transit, and provide better access to jobs and services.

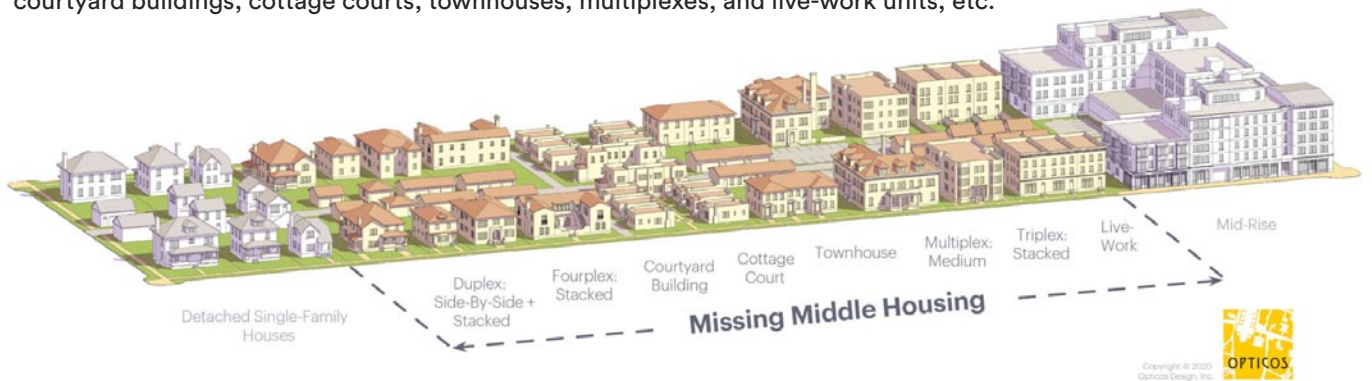


Support housing affordability and attainability. Maintain housing affordability near services and amenities by expanding land trust opportunities. Review options available to municipalities to protect and retain good landlords and tenants, such as rent caps, incentives, inspections, evictions, etc. Additionally, support shelters, short-term interim housing, and supportive services towards sustainable long-term housing solutions for the homeless, vulnerable, low-income, and senior populations.



Ensure quality and enable convenient development. Identify more tactics that encourage development that communities want, rather than restrict and keep what they don’t want at bay. Support municipalities in the development of pre-approved housing designs that reflect local needs and reduce time and permitting for developers. Amend the Universal Construction Code (UCC) to provide more flexibility for adaptive reuse of underutilized or historic buildings. Support the use of energy-efficient materials and design. Encourage municipalities to entertain shared zoning, enforcement, coordination, and cooperation. Also, develop workforce programming to create a pipeline of qualified builders and contractors, and review the licensing process to hold them accountable.

***Missing Middle Housing** is a range of house-scale buildings with multiple units compatible in scale and form with detached single-family homes located in a walkable neighborhood. Such housing types include duplexes, fourplexes, courtyard buildings, cottage courts, townhouses, multiplexes, and live-work units, etc.



Shared Values

To help readers understand how our policy recommendations align with the **Shared Value Framework** (see page 6), each recommendation is labeled with one or more icons indicating the type of value connected to the policy.



Grow Smart



Preserve and Protect



Housing for All



Healthy, Prosperous, and Resilient Communities



Coordinated and Connected Communities



Invest in property maintenance. In effort to prevent properties from falling into disrepair and revitalize housing, continue to support or increase funding to programs like Whole-Home Repairs, Neighborhood Assistance Program (NAP), and PA Housing Affordability and Rehabilitation Enhancement (PHARE) Fund, with fewer restrictions, and expand weatherization programs. Look for ways to incentivize rental inspection programs and/or code enforcement in communities to address the condition of existing housing and preserve naturally occurring affordable housing.



Better equip communities to fight blight. Develop model rental and vacant property registries and quality of life ordinances. Promote municipal adoption of the International Property Maintenance Code (IPMC) and support regional enforcement partnerships. Establish a statewide vacant and blighted property registry where municipalities can report problem properties. Provide funding and training for municipalities to execute necessary demolitions and adopt or pursue other **blight-management and property maintenance enforcement tactics**, such as property succession planning to prevent tangled titles, quality-of-life ticketing, criminal sanctions for multiple code violations, liens, blighted property review boards, permit denials, and pre-sale inspections.

Municipalities are also encouraged to utilize the lesser-known [Improvement of Deteriorating Real Property or Areas Tax Exemption Act](#) (similar to LERTA, which is for industrial or commercial properties) to provide for tax exemption for improvements to deteriorated dwellings and areas.

For more information on blight, visit the Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania's list of guides to combat blight at housingalliancepa.org/comprehensive-guides-to-combatting-blight/.

APPROACHES AND SUCCESS



277 S 52nd Street West Philadelphia (2021-2023)

[The Enterprise Center](#) addresses blight, vacancy, and housing shortage in the 52nd Street corridor (*pictured before and after to the left*) by revitalizing dilapidated structures and attracting community-oriented, mixed-use redevelopment to inspire like-minded investment.

Pittsburgh

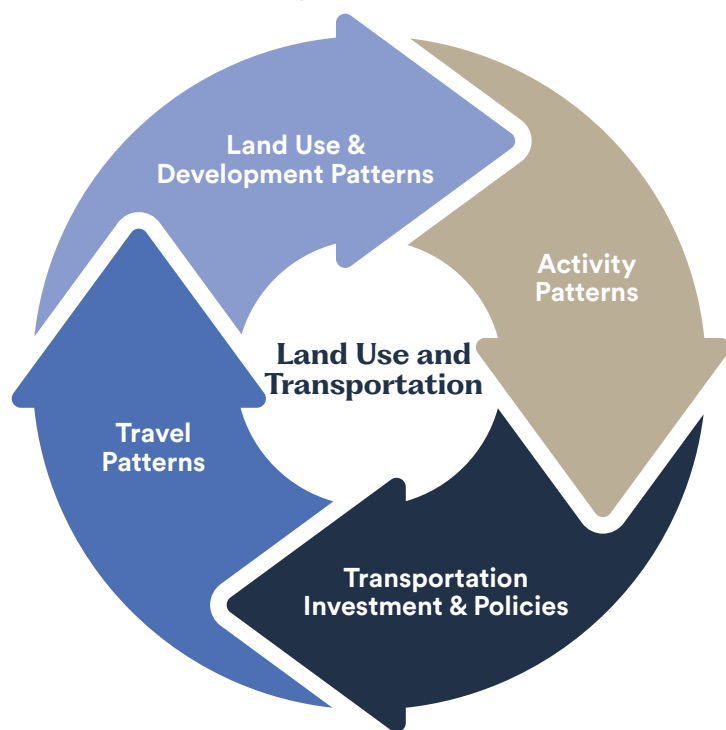
[Rising Tide](#) addresses housing affordability and neighborhood displacement by establishing firm local partnerships, purchasing at-risk sites, and establishing community-based property management.

07 Transportation



Interstate 70 North of Bentleyville, PA

Transportation systems shape where Pennsylvanians live, work, and play. The design and condition of our streets, roads, highways, rail, and transit networks influence development patterns, guide private investment, and determine access to jobs and services. Land use and transportation are inherently linked, where decisions about new residential, commercial, or industrial growth depend on the availability of reliable transportation, while infrastructure needs are driven by how land is developed.




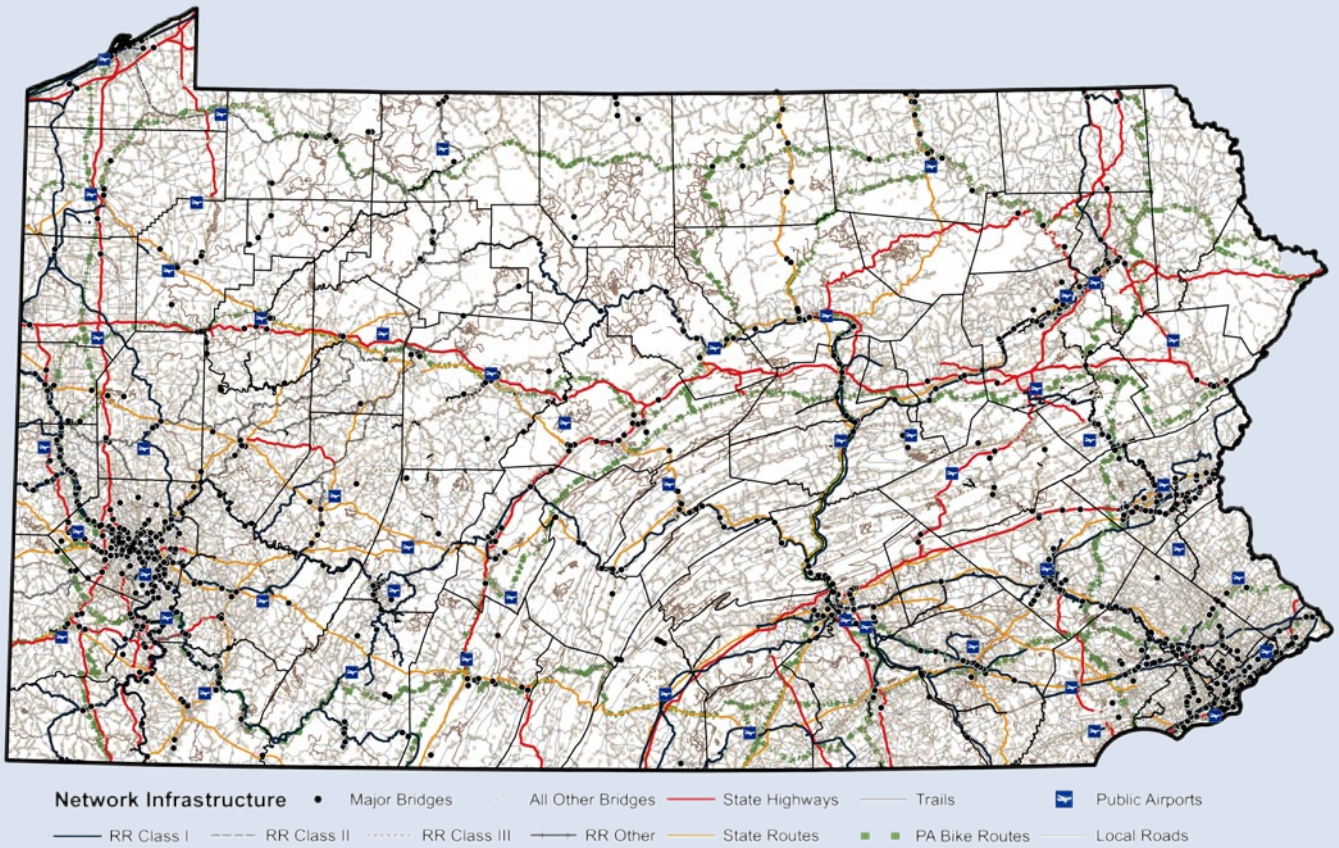
Transportation in Pennsylvania


120,000 Miles
of public roads


79,000 Miles
of local roads


25,000
state-owned
bridges


6,900
local
bridges



Pennsylvania's Transportation Network

Highways and Roads

The Commonwealth oversees some 120,000 miles of public roads, including the Interstate Highway System that connects Pennsylvania to national markets. Non-interstate roadways serve as lifelines for rural and suburban communities, supporting daily commutes and freight distribution.

Bridges

With more than 25,000 State-owned bridges, Pennsylvania has one of the largest bridge inventories in the US, requiring ongoing maintenance and modernization.

Public Transportation

More than 30 transit agencies provide bus, paratransit, light rail, and commuter rail services. These services are critical for populations without access to private vehicles and for supporting compact, transit-oriented development.

Passenger Rail

Amtrak's Pennsylvania and Keystone services provide high-capacity connections to regional job centers, while long-distance lines link rural communities to larger cities.

Active Transportation

Pennsylvania's 14,000-mile-plus trail system is among the largest in the nation, contributing to tourism as well as mobility. Expanding pedestrian, bicycle, and trail networks enhances community health, reduces vehicle dependency, increases other mode options, improves air quality, reduces greenhouse gas emissions (GHG), and supports community revitalization.

Airports, Ports, and Freight

Commercial airports in Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and other regions link the state globally, while the Ports of Erie, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia handle critical commodities. Freight rail, trucking, and intermodal facilities reinforce Pennsylvania's position as a logistics hub.

Local Roads and Bridges

Of the 120,000 miles of public roads, 79,000 miles are locally maintained, as are nearly 6,900 bridges in the state. These roads and bridges provide direct access for local communities and are vital to the overall transportation network, supporting shorter, local travel.

The scale of this system underscores the importance of land use planning that coordinates growth with infrastructure investment.

The [Pennsylvania Department of Transportation \(PennDOT\)](#) and local planning partners maintain one of the nation's largest and most complex transportation networks, guided by the [2045 Long-Range Transportation Plan](#). This system supports economic competitiveness, community vitality, and environmental sustainability. At the same time, emerging technologies like electric vehicles (EVs) and connected and automated vehicles (CAVs) are reshaping how the system performs and how communities plan for the future.

Trends and Metrics

Access and Modes¹

From 2019 to 2023, there was a slight increase (1.6% or 4,961) among Pennsylvania workers over the age of 16 who did not have access to a vehicle. Those who had access to one vehicle increased the most at 5.2% or 66,909. Those with access to two, three, or more vehicles remained relatively the same.

During this timeframe, the COVID pandemic dramatically impacted travel, and more significantly, work from home. Those working from home increased by 193.5% to a total of 839,744. Travel to work by taxi, motorcycle, bicycle, or other means were the only modes to see an increase (21.0%) during this period. All other modes experienced a decrease including car, truck, or van (alone) (6.6%); car, truck, or van (carpool) (8.4%); public transportation (excluding taxi) (29.2%); and walking (9.9%). And many transit agencies are still trying to recover from the decrease in ridership today.

Regionally, the west and central saw slight decreases among those who did not have access to a vehicle, whereas the northeast (7.5%), Lehigh Valley (7.4%), and southeast (2.3%) experienced increases among those without access to a vehicle.

Much like the state, every region saw a decrease in all modes of travel to work (with the exception of taxi, motorcycle, bicycle, or other means, and walking (5.1% increase in the northeast)) due to the increase in working from home. The southeast and southwest regions experienced the largest increases in work from home at 239.4% and 202.0% respectively. The northeast was the least negatively impacted in public transportation (excluding taxi) at a 17.6% decrease, while the Lehigh Valley, central, northwest, and southwest regions all experienced decreases greater than the state, with the southwest experiencing a 34.2% decrease among those who take public transit.

Travel Time²

Travel time to work remained the same statewide (26 minutes on average) from 2019 to 2023. Regionally, the northwest, central, northeast, and southeast saw one-minute decreases to their averages. As of 2023, Cameron County, Elk County (northwest), and Union County (central) had the shortest average commute times at 18 minutes, while Pike County (northeast) had the longest at 44 minutes.



26 mins.

Average Travel Time to Work

18 mins.

Shortest Commute (Cameron, Elk, Union)

44 mins.

Longest Commute (Pike)

Transportation Costs

The Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT) analyzes data to explore sustainability through location efficiency and provides [index scores](#) to comprehensively view and measure affordability through the lens of housing and transportation.

Statewide, from 2019 to 2022, transportation costs as a percent of income decreased by two percentage points among typical households and moderate-income (80% AMI) households to 24% and 29% respectively.

Regionally, transportation costs decreased by three percentage points for both household groups in the Lehigh Valley and southeast. As of 2022, households in the northwest had the highest transportation costs as a percent of income at 28% for typical, and 34% for moderate-income households. Households in the southeast had the lowest cost percentages at 16% (typical) and 19% (moderate-income).

Also as a result of the pandemic, annual transportation costs decreased statewide and regionally for typical and moderate-income households. In 2022, the state average for transportation costs was \$15,686 for typical households, and \$15,075 for moderate-income households.

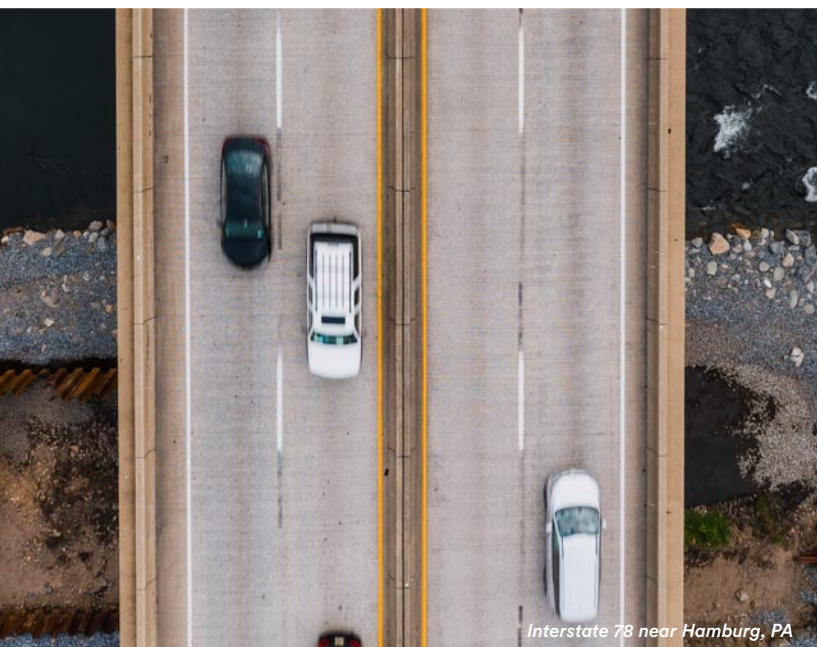
The central region had the highest average annual costs at \$16,119 and \$15,587 for typical and moderate-income households. Households in the southeast had the lowest at \$13,769 (typical) and \$12,987 (moderate-income).



\$15,381

Average Annual Household* Transportation Cost (2022)

**Typical household assumes a household income that is the median income for the region. Moderate-income household assumes a household income that is 80% of the area median income.*



Interstate 78 near Hamburg, PA

¹ US Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates, Table B08141, 2023

² US Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates, Table S0801, 2023

Single-Family Detached Households

As part of CNT’s analyses, they look at the percentage of single-family detached households in development. How and where we develop impacts how we get around, including what mode options are available or required, how long it takes, how far we have to go, etc.

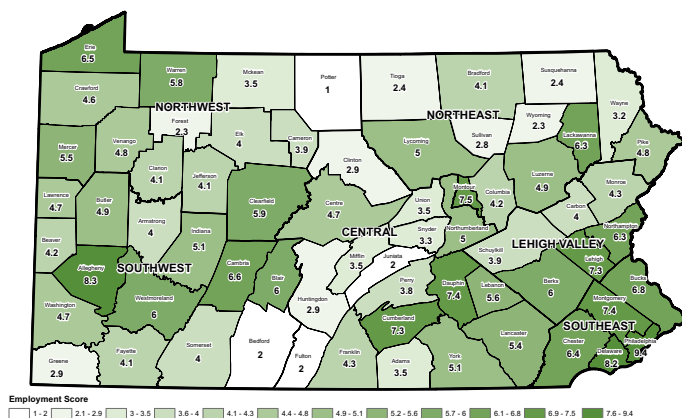
From 2019 to 2022, Pennsylvania’s percentage of single-family detached households increased by one percentage point from 69% to 70%. All regions increased by one percentage point, except for the southeast, which remained the same. As of 2022, the percentage of single-family households was 77% for the northwest, 73% for the southwest, 68% for the central, 74% for the northeast, 63% for the Lehigh Valley, and 47% for the southeast region. The top three counties with the highest percentage of single-family detached households were Pike (88%), Sullivan (85%), and Wayne (83%), all in the northeast.

Employment Access Index

Where we live and where we work are two of the largest driving factors that determine our travel. CNT also analyzes job accessibility, counting the number of jobs in an area and assigning more weight to jobs that are closer to residents, and assigns a score from 0 to 10. A higher score indicates a greater number of job opportunities within an area.

According to CNT’s data, Pennsylvania experienced a 1.3-point increase to its job access score from 2019 to 2022 to a 4.7. 2022 scores for the regions include 4.3 (northwest), 4.8 (southwest), 4.2 (central), 4.2 (northeast), 5.3 (Lehigh Valley), and 7.6 (southeast).

Employment Access Index by County



Policy Recommendations



Coordinate land use and transportation planning.

Encourage counties, municipalities, metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), and rural planning organizations (RPOs) to align transportation investments with comprehensive plans and zoning. Additionally, PennDOT should continue to support and implement its [PennDOT Connects](#) collaborative and holistic approach to planning with communities.



Utilize data to inform land use decisions and measure transportation performance and impacts.

Use mode, travel time, VMT, traffic counts, crash data, and land use-based indices to inform and guide land use decisions and guide transportation investments and measure outcomes. Support more compact and mixed-use growth patterns that provide mode options, reduce the number and length of trips, reduce conflicts and improve safety, and support transit ridership.



Prioritize safety. Develop, adopt, and promote policies such as Complete Streets and Vision Zero at the State and local levels to guide the planning, design, and maintenance of streets to improve and ensure safety for all users, with the goal of eliminating all traffic fatalities and severe injuries. Implement traffic calming, bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, and street tree programs to create safer, healthier, and more attractive communities.



Support active transportation and advance multimodal connectivity. Support walking, biking, and transit to reduce vehicle dependency. The State should increase the share of funding for, and prioritize investments in, active, multimodal, and transit programs. First-mile/Last-mile connections, walkability, and bikeability at the local level, and trails and transit at the regional level, combined with sound land use decisions, improve connections to and within communities, access to jobs and services, and support a robust transportation network.



Utilize existing transportation funding programs to better support housing and transit initiatives.

Include and apply housing and land use metrics that prioritize or give weight to projects that reduce trips, trip lengths, and support housing and mixed-use development across State transportation funding programs. Incentivizing higher-density, mixed-use, transit-supportive, and transit-oriented development near transit corridors reduces congestion, improves ridership, and strengthens local economies.



Support freight and logistics without compromising community.

Develop regional land use strategies for siting warehouses, distribution centers, and truck parking facilities near interstate and freight rail corridors to minimize impacts to and conflicts with residential growth and environmental resources. Additionally, investments in rail freight and inland ports can reduce the impacts of truck-heavy corridors and distribution hubs.



Plan for emerging technologies and trends. Integrate EV charging infrastructure, connected and automated vehicle (CAV) readiness, drone logistics, micromobility, and on-demand transit and delivery into local and regional land use frameworks. Encourage adaptive zoning that supports innovation while safeguarding community goals.



Erie, PA

Shared Values

To help readers understand how our policy recommendations align with the **Shared Value Framework** (see page 6), each recommendation is labeled with one or more icons indicating the type of value connected to the policy.



Grow Smart

Preserve and Protect

Housing for All



Healthy, Prosperous, and Resilient Communities



Coordinated and Connected Communities

08 Economic Development



Carlisle, PA

In 2023, Pennsylvania found itself at a crossroads after many years compared to and in competition with neighboring states concerning a focus on and investment in economic development. That is why, in 2024, Governor Shapiro unveiled [Pennsylvania Gets It Done, a ten-year strategic plan for economic development](#) – the first of its kind in nearly two decades.

This section examines employment, industry, and workforce trends and offers recommendations on how our commonwealth and local communities can become more and remain economically vibrant.

Ten-Year Strategic Plan for Economic Development in Pennsylvania

The plan aims to maintain and advance the commonwealth's economic competitiveness and deliver results for the 13 million people and 1.2 million businesses that call Pennsylvania home.

In addition to our proximity to major US markets, small businesses and Fortune 500 companies, colleges and universities, Pennsylvania's diversity of place and abundance of natural resources enhance our economic competitiveness.



Agriculture



Energy



Life Sciences



Manufacturing



Robotics and Technology

Employment, Industry, and Workforce Trends

Employment¹

Pennsylvania lost 56,694 jobs, from 5,843,207 in 2018 to 5,786,513 in 2022. During this time, there was also a 9.6% decrease in the net outflow of jobs. As of 2022, the number of those living and working within Pennsylvania was 5,434,458. Notably, during this five-year span, external jobs in the trade, transportation, and utilities industry class and filled by Pennsylvania residents increased by 3.1% or 2,623 jobs; and there was a 5.0% or 3,389-job increase among Pennsylvania jobs filled by outside workers in the same industry class.

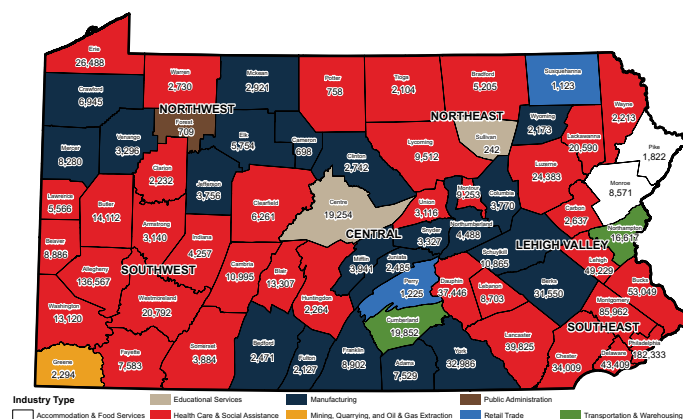
Industry²

Pennsylvania-wide, the transportation and warehousing sector saw the largest increase of jobs in number (43,289) and percentage (16.1%) from 2018 to 2022. The sectors that saw the largest decreases were accommodation and food services (44,555) in number, and mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction (24.7%) by percentage. Other notable increases include the information (6.1%) and professional, scientific, and technical services (6.0%) industry sectors.

Industry Strengths by Region and County³

As of 2022, the top industries at the regional level are generally consistent with the top industries at the state level – health care and social assistance (18.4%), retail trade (10.5%), and manufacturing (9.7%). Additional top industries include educational services in the southwest and professional, scientific, and technical services in the southeast. The map below shows the leading industry by the number of jobs for each county.

Total Jobs in Leading Industry by County



¹ US Census Bureau, OnTheMap Application and LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (Beginning of Quarter Employment, 2nd Quarter of 2002-2022)

² *Ibid*

³ *Ibid*

⁴ *Ibid*

Workforce⁴

Much like the general population, our workforce is getting older. As of 2022, the number of workers age 29 or younger and 30 to 54 decreased by 4.3% and 0.7% respectively since 2018. Those 55 or older increased by 1.4%.

Statewide, jobs where workers had a high school education or equivalent, or no college decreased 2.7% and jobs where workers had some college or an associate degree decreased by 1.4%. Jobs where workers had a bachelor's or advanced degree increased 0.8% during the same 2018 to 2022 time period. The region with the smallest share of jobs where workers have a bachelor's or advanced degree is the northwest at 17.8% (or 55,386 jobs). The northwest also has the largest share of jobs where workers have a high school education or equivalent, or no college at 28.4% (or 88,635 jobs). As of 2022, the southeast has the largest share of jobs where workers have a bachelor's or advanced degree at 27.0% (or 546,495 jobs).

Earnings increased during this time as well. The number of jobs making \$1,250 per month or less and \$1,251 to \$3,333 per month both decreased by over 18%. Jobs that pay more than \$3,333 per month grew by 18.3% to 3,278,354. Regionally, the northwest has the smallest share of jobs that pay more than \$3,333 per month at 47.3%, whereas the southeast has the largest share at 60.5%.

Number of Jobs by Region

Northwest **311,712 jobs**

Southwest **1,332,076 jobs**

Central **1,091,559 jobs**

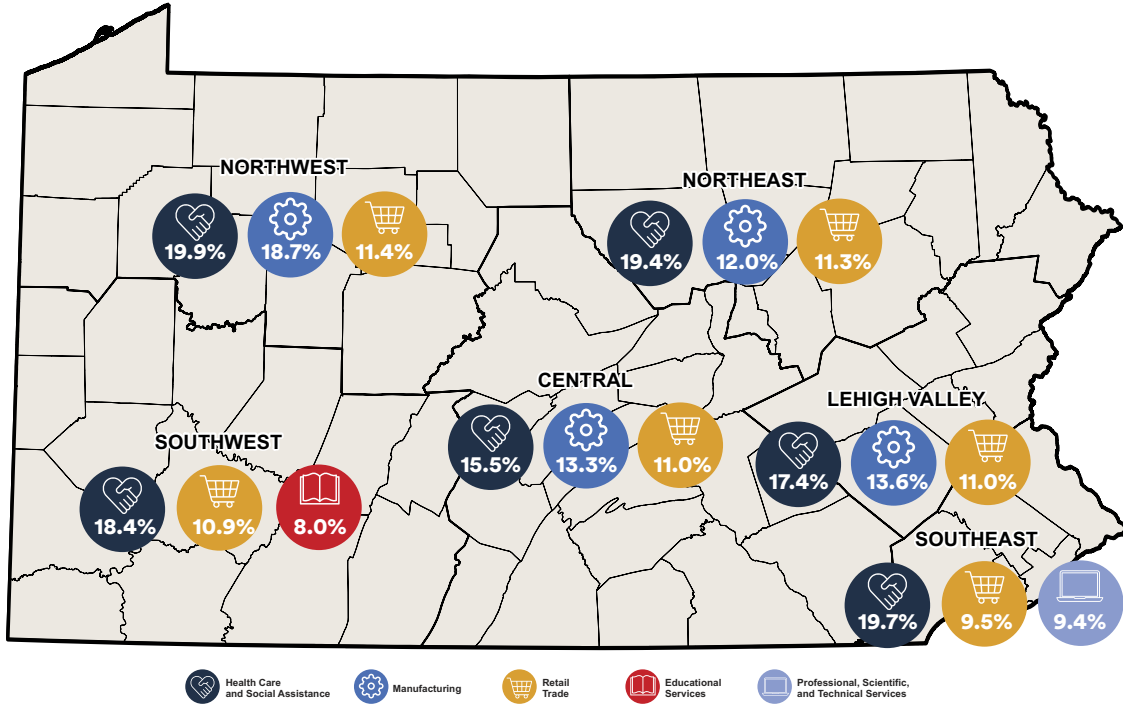
Northeast **407,258 jobs**

Lehigh Valley **622,798 jobs**

Southeast **2,021,110 jobs**



Industry Strengths by Region



Rising Industries



16.1%

Transportation and Warehousing



6.1%

Information



6.0%

Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services



Port of Philadelphia, PA

Office Space, Warehousing, Data Centers, and Broadband

Office Space

The shift to remote work since the pandemic has led to a significant rise in office building vacancies across Pennsylvania. Not only do these vacancies decrease individual property values, but they also negatively impact the local and state economies as empty office buildings contribute to urban decline, reduce tax revenues, and diminish the vibrancy of commercial districts and cores.

Warehousing

The state's 120,000-mile roadway network, 65 railroads, three major ports, and six international airports make it a prime location for warehousing and logistics. Additionally, the rise of e-commerce has caused warehouse development to surge. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (as of 2023), warehouse jobs were 1.7 times more concentrated in Pennsylvania than the rest of the country, behind only Nevada, Delaware, Mississippi, Indiana, and Kentucky. The Lehigh Valley region and the Harrisburg and York areas have become popular for warehouses due to light zoning restrictions, access to large population centers, and ample affordable land to build on.

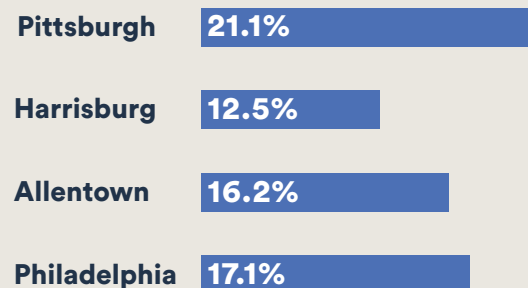
Data Centers

Pennsylvania is experiencing rapid data center growth, with major investments and expansions planned across the state. Most notably, in June 2025, Governor Shapiro announced Amazon's plans to invest \$20B for high-tech cloud computing and artificial intelligence (AI), making it the largest capital investment in commonwealth history. The first of these data center locations includes Salem Township (Luzerne County) and Falls Township (Bucks County). Data center growth is driven by our strategic location, robust fiber infrastructure, and access to substantial power resources, including natural gas and nuclear energy. Pennsylvania has 82 data facilities, totaling 3,739,986 square feet of space and 693 megawatts of power.

Broadband

Though the state has a robust network of fiber infrastructure, our mountainous terrain and rural geography make broadband deployment difficult and expensive. As of 2025, 95% of locations are served with 100 Mbps download / 20 Mbps upload service. However, there are still nearly 255,000 locations without good to fast 100/20 service. Reliable, high-speed, and affordable broadband is necessary to connect people, industries, customers, and families, and plays a critical role in the economic development and productivity of Pennsylvania. To date, 53 infrastructure projects have been approved, with \$204M of total broadband funding approved. Additionally, the [Pennsylvania Broadband Development Authority](#) is reviewing 172 applications for the State's \$1.16B allocation of Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) funding for broadband deployment to close the digital divide. A final decision on awards and a plan is due to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration by early September 2025.

Office Vacancy Rates Among Metros (2024)



Hot Topic: Data Centers



Data centers have become a major topic in Pennsylvania as the State positions itself to attract growing digital infrastructure. Their development brings significant economic benefits, including new jobs, tax revenue, and opportunities to modernize rural and post-industrial areas. However, large-scale facilities also raise concerns about resource use — they require substantial land for server farms and supporting infrastructure, high volumes of water for cooling systems, and massive amounts of electricity that can strain local grids or require new energy generation. As Pennsylvania seeks to balance economic growth with sustainability goals, data centers sit at the intersection of technological advancement and environmental stewardship, making them a key focus for further local and statewide development discussions.

It is recommended that the State Planning Board undertake a special study to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the various land use and resource implications of data centers and develop policy and ordinance recommendations for local communities.

Strategic Plan for Economic Development

Given recent trends, the economic development strategy for Pennsylvania targets five specific industries, building on our history and strengths while having an eye towards the future – agriculture, energy, life sciences, manufacturing, and robotics and technology.



Agriculture

Pennsylvania is the fourth largest producer of food products in the country and a national leader in farmland preservation. We also have competitive specializations in dairy production, food and beverage manufacturing, livestock and poultry production, and organic food production.



Energy

Pennsylvania is the second largest net supplier of energy, having competitive specializations in natural gas production, hydrogen development, and nuclear power development.



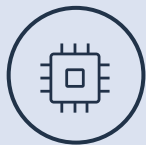
Life Sciences

The state is also home for over 3,000 life science firms, where the sector's average growth rate exceeds the US average. Pennsylvania has competitive specializations in precision medicine, pharmaceutical and chemical manufacturing, and biomanufacturing.



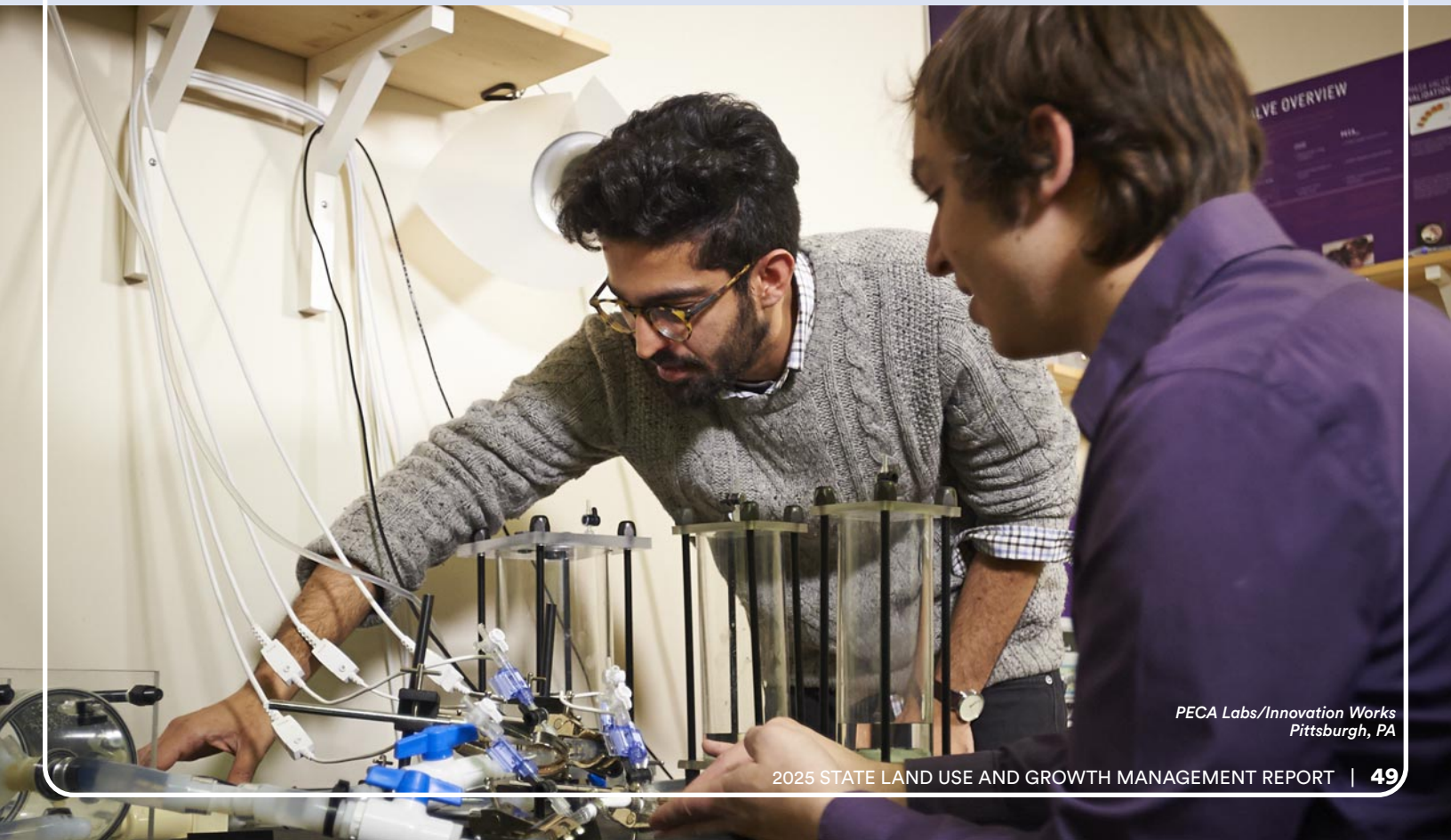
Manufacturing

There are over 11,500 manufacturing companies located in the state, with proximity to major transportation corridors and markets. Our competitive specializations include plastics and metal manufacturing, as well as supply chains.



Robotics and Technology

Additionally, Pennsylvania is home to over 15,000 robotics and tech firms, including federally designated tech hubs for robotics, AI, and precision medicine. The state has competitive specializations in electrical equipment, navigational instrument, and hardware manufacturing, as well as autonomous systems.



Policy Recommendations



Work at the speed of business. County and municipal planning agencies, planning commissions, and zoning hearing boards should assess and streamline internal review and approval processes for land developments, within the guidelines and requirements of the MPC, without sacrificing quality, regulations, or standards. Try to make the development process less onerous and challenging.



Build vibrant and resilient communities. Focus development and redevelopment efforts in downtowns and along main streets; implement a preservation ethic; modernize and strategically invest in transportation, water, sewer, and broadband infrastructure; and expand housing options to attract and retain businesses. Quality of place is a key factor for business attraction, retention, and expansion.



Ensure land use regulations support regional and industry strengths and are updated frequently enough to accommodate trends. Maintain traditional farm uses and consider other scales or types of agriculture such as community gardens, co-ops, urban gardens, and controlled-environment facilities. Also, ensure ample land and opportunities are available for energy (gas, solar, hydrogen, etc.), life science, manufacturing, and technology and innovation facilities.

Additionally, municipalities should revise or develop zoning to allow for the mix of uses, including the conversion of office space to housing and coworking spaces. Attention should also be given to warehousing and data centers to allow for their use, while considering light, noise, transportation, electricity consumption and grid capacity, and other quality of life standards.

Counties and municipalities are also encouraged to participate in the [Broadband Ready Communities \(BBRC\) Program](#) to reduce procedural, policy, and permitting barriers to broadband infrastructure investment and deployment. Reliable, high-speed broadband is not only key to our urban, suburban, and rural communities, it's critical for successful businesses and our economy.



Maintain and participate in key programs and utilize available tools for economic development. The State should maintain and continue to fund programs such as the [Pennsylvania Strategic Investments to Enhance Sites \(PA SITES\)](#) and [Main Street Matters \(MSM\)](#). Meanwhile, communities should utilize tools such as the [Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assessment Act \(LERTA\)](#), [Keystone Innovation Zone \(KIZ\) Tax Credit Program](#), [City Revitalization and Improvement Zone \(CRIZ\) Program](#), and [Tax Increment Financing \(TIF\) Guarantee Program](#) to foster local economic development.



Ensure development adds value to your community. Land use decisions impact local revenues. Municipalities should promote fiscally savvy development over conventional development. Municipalities should also conduct revenue per acre analyses to see just how decision-making impacts revenue, and encourage infill development, building up, and gentle density rather than greenfield development and building out. Building and zoning regulations can also create incentives for revenue-positive land uses.



Explore and embrace other niche or non-traditional forms of economic development. Consider opportunities for local and regional heritage, tourism, agritourism, outdoor recreation, and other place-based experiences, as and where applicable.



Study data centers and develop subject matter guidance. The State Planning Board should undertake a special study to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the various land use and resource implications of data centers and develop policy and ordinance recommendations for local communities.

Shared Values

To help readers understand how our policy recommendations align with the **Shared Value Framework** (see page 6), each recommendation is labeled with one or more icons indicating the type of value connected to the policy.



Grow Smart



Preserve and Protect



Housing for All



Healthy, Prosperous, and Resilient Communities



Coordinated and Connected Communities

09 Agriculture



Mifflin County, PA

Agriculture is a way of life for many Pennsylvanians, and not only is it critical for ensuring a stable food supply, but with good stewardship, agricultural lands help to protect our water quality and provide habitat for wildlife and native species.

Pennsylvania's [Ten-Year Strategic Plan for Economic Development](#)¹ identifies agriculture as one of the Commonwealth's five priority industries. It lists the commonwealth's proximity to major US markets and ports for international trade as a competitive advantage, and notes that Pennsylvania is a national leader in several key commodity areas including dairy, fruit production, specialty crops, livestock, and poultry production.



¹ PA DCED, A Ten-Year Strategic Plan for Economic Development in Pennsylvania (2024-2033) <https://pagetsidone.com/economic-development-strategy/>

Trends

The USDA Census of Agriculture² is conducted every five years, and provides data on farm size, demographics, and production. This data is useful in identifying trends in agriculture that are occurring within the commonwealth.

According to the census data, the market value of agricultural products sold in Pennsylvania in 2022 was nearly \$10.3B. This represents an increase of 32.5% from 2017. However, the news is not all good. The data also shows that over 4,000 farms and 220,000 acres of farmland were lost between 2017 and 2022.

Threats

Agriculture in Pennsylvania faces several threats, including:

Poorly Planned Development

Inefficient development uses more land than necessary, and poorly located development often results in a loss of farmland as well as fragmentation into smaller parcel sizes which can impact the viability of agricultural operations.

Weather Extremes and Natural Threats

Droughts, floods, heat, and extreme weather, as well as threats from pests, pathogens, and diseases, can negatively impact both crops and livestock by reducing yields, harming animal health, and decreasing profitability.

Energy Demand

A rising demand for energy is prompting the need to further energy conservation and efficiency efforts and to expand energy production beyond fossil fuels, such as coal, oil, natural gas, to renewables, including solar, wind, hydroelectricity, and biofuels. Without thoughtful planning, the expansion of all of these energy sources can compromise or lead to the conversion of farmland. Additionally, increased energy costs can negatively impact farm profitability.

Socioeconomic Trends

According to 2022 USDA Census of Agriculture data, the average age of farm producers in Pennsylvania is 55, and 32.8% are 65 years old or older.³ As producers retire, there is a possibility that farmland will be sold for development, and while the next generation is interested in farming, the challenge of finding affordable land is keeping many of them from starting successful farm businesses.

Workforce Shortages

A long-term threat to Pennsylvania agriculture is the inability to attract and retain skilled workers. A sustainable workforce requires a focus on addressing the need for advanced technological skills due to the adoption and use of automation and technology; wage competition from rising wages in retail and other competitive workplaces; and anti-immigration sentiments, threatening the ability of farms to attract a growing crop of workers.⁴

Loss of Small Farms

Pennsylvania is facing a significant loss of its small farms due to development pressure and displacement, land loss, or lack of succession planning, as well as economic threats due to commodity pricing and rising technology costs.⁵



² USDA Census of Agriculture, 2022, Pennsylvania State and County Data, Table 1, https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2022/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_1_State_Level/Pennsylvania/

³ USDA Census of Agriculture, 2022 Pennsylvania State and County Data, Table 62, https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2022/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_1_State_Level/Pennsylvania/

⁴ Econsult Solutions, Inc., Team Pennsylvania, and the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, The Economic Impact of Agriculture in Pennsylvania: 2021 Update, <https://digitalcollections.statelibrary.pa.gov/Documents/Detail/the-economic-impact-of-agriculture-in-pennsylvania-2021-update/295979>

⁵ *Ibid*

Farmland Protection

The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Farmland Preservation administers programs that protect prime farmland for future generations. Pennsylvania is a national leader in farmland preservation with 6,314 farms and 632,856 acres⁶ protected through permanent agricultural conservation easements. In addition, programs and tools like [Clean and Green](#) and [Agricultural Security Areas \(ASAs\)](#) help prevent the loss of farmland to other forms of development. ASAs strengthen and protect quality farmland by protecting against local nuisance ordinances related to farming activities and providing oversight in certain cases of eminent domain. As of 2023, just over 1,000 ASAs have been formed in 65 counties across Pennsylvania, totaling 4,059,056 acres.⁷

The [PA Farm Bill](#) became law in 2019 and has invested in Pennsylvania agriculture to grow opportunities and resources, remove barriers to entry, and inspire future generations of leaders within agriculture. The Agricultural Business Development Center was established as part of the bill to help facilitate the transition of farms from one generation to the next and to help farmers capture new business opportunities.

More information about farmland protection in Pennsylvania is available online at <https://www.pa.gov/agencies/pda/plants-land-water/farmland-preservation.html>.

⁶ Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Farmland Preservation, 2023 Annual Report, <https://www.pa.gov/agencies/pda/plants-land-water/farmland-preservation.html>

⁷ *Ibid*



Policy Recommendations



Maintain and grow agricultural conservation programs. The Commonwealth should maintain and grow agricultural conservation programs, including the [Resource Enhancement and Protection \(REAP\) Program](#), [Agriculture Linked Investment Program \(Agri-Link\)](#), [Conservation Excellence Grant \(CEG\) Program](#), and Agriculture Conservation Assistance Program. These programs support conservation practices on farms that protect water quality and are crucial for long-term farm viability and sustainability.



Plan for agriculture. The Commonwealth should continue to support and incentivize planning for agriculture through its grant programs and by providing educational opportunities and planning assistance. Agriculture should be considered and integrated into all applicable planning efforts, including economic development, housing, infrastructure, and energy development. The protection of prime farmland should be considered in the municipal planning process because farmland cannot be converted back once land is developed for other uses.



Continue the Agricultural Land Conservation Easement Purchase Program. The [Pennsylvania Agricultural Conservation Easement Purchase Program](#) enables state, county, and local governments to purchase conservation easements from farm owners. These easements protect farmland in perpetuity.



Balance the needs of agriculture and solar energy development. Responsible solar energy development can help to ensure that the most productive farmland stays in agricultural use. Solar energy on farmland provides farmers with an additional, stable revenue stream. Lease payments from solar energy developments can significantly improve a farm's overall profitability. The supplemental income can help farm ownership stay in the family and provide crucial financial stability during unpredictable or challenging agricultural years. It also helps to prevent farms from being sold for private development or being divided into smaller parcels, which are less suitable for farming.

⁸ Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, Pennsylvania's Solar Future Plan, <https://files.dep.state.pa.us/energy/Office%20of%20Energy%20and%20Technology/OETDPortalFiles/Pollution%20prevention%20and%20Energy%20assistance/SolarFuture/Plan/PAsolarFuturePlanBookletWebfile.pdf>

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection's [PA Solar Future Plan](#)⁸ proposes the creation and adoption of uniform policies to streamline siting and land use while encouraging conservation. The plan also suggests that Pennsylvania can use its state tax policy to incentivize grid scale solar deployment on brownfields as opposed to farmland or forest land.



Invest in workforce development. Pennsylvania's Ten-Year Strategic Plan for Economic Development identifies agriculture as one of the Commonwealth's five priority industries and recognizes the importance of creating workforce development programs that will train Pennsylvania's next generation of agriculture workers.



Grow opportunities in agriculture. Encourage and support a transition to the next generation of farmers. Young and beginning farmers often face barriers to entry, including a lack of affordable farmland, as well as the need for support with business, succession, and transition planning.



Support agritourism. Agritourism in Pennsylvania combines the state's strong agricultural industry with its tourism sector, offering various on-farm experiences for visitors. These activities can range from farm-to-table dining and farm stays to corn mazes, hayrides, and educational tours. Agritourism can be a valuable way for farmers to diversify their income and increase profitability, especially for smaller farms. Zoning regulations can help protect agricultural land and guide the development of agritourism activities. [Visit PA](#) promotes agritourism activities in Pennsylvania.



Support urban agriculture programs and opportunities. Urban agriculture is active throughout Pennsylvania, including its largest cities, [Philadelphia](#) and [Pittsburgh](#), as well as smaller cities, boroughs, and suburban areas. It can be supported by improving awareness through educational offerings to local government officials and the public. It should be included in comprehensive plans and can be further supported by the development of zoning regulations that allow for gardens and farming, farmers markets, and animal keeping and composting in appropriate areas.

Shared Values

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Healthy, Prosperous, and Resilient Communities



Coordinated and Connected Communities

10 Historic Preservation



Historic places are irreplaceable resources that represent Pennsylvania's past and define the character of communities today. Conservation of heritage and the preservation of historic places also translates to conservation of the environment with measurable benefits, such as reducing construction waste sent to landfills, decreasing conversion of forests, farms, and wetlands for new residential, commercial, and industrial uses, and promoting density and reinvestment in established communities. Conservation practices and historic preservation programs and incentives help to revive vacant or underutilized buildings while maintaining a community's unique identity. When fully integrated into planning, historic preservation and heritage conservation help realize other land use goals.

PA's Inventory of Historic Places

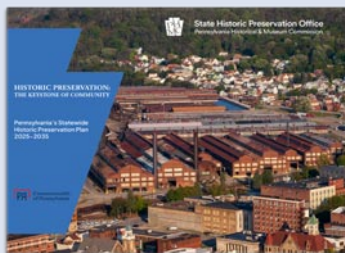


212,279
above ground
resources



28,385
archaeological
sites

The Keystone of Community Pennsylvania's Statewide Historic Preservation Plan 2025-2035



The Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), a bureau of the Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission (PHMC), leads historic preservation planning statewide. In early 2025, SHPO announced completion of the [Statewide Historic Preservation Plan](#), which serves as a practical guide for Pennsylvanians, municipalities, organizations, and agencies to inform and guide their efforts to protect and revitalize the commonwealth's historic places through 2035.

The yearlong planning process included broad public participation and collaboration with diverse partners across local, regional, state, and federal levels. It also analyzed trends and aims to address unique challenges across the commonwealth. This effort led to the following three goals to enhance preservation outcomes:

- Real and perceived barriers to historic preservation have been reduced or eliminated through data-driven and thoughtful investments in relationships, programs, funding, and policies;
- Historic preservation and historic places are valued as integral to community identity, sense of place, economic development, and sustainable growth in Pennsylvania communities; and
- Pennsylvanians create more meaningful preservation outcomes by leveraging knowledge and opportunities offered by historic preservation and historic places.

Trends

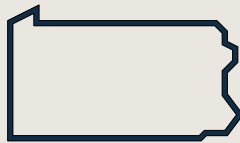
The [Statewide Historic Preservation Plan](#) identifies inadequate planning and zoning policies, insufficient incentives and economic strategies, and a lack of understanding of community benefits as issues, and the significant role of partnerships in successful preservation.

Stakeholders increasingly acknowledge that local and regional planning does not adequately address historic preservation, largely due to a lack of integration into local, regional, and statewide planning processes and policies. As a result, growing development pressure contributes to the loss of historic places, archeological sites, and cultural landscapes that make up community identity. There is a need for reliable strategies for adapting and reusing historic buildings in a way that is sustainable and energy efficient, while retaining historic character. Lastly, there is a need to guide public perception about historic preservation away from the idea that it hinders progress and instead highlight its role in managing change and supporting economic development.

Experiencing historic places frequently rises to the top of Pennsylvania’s favorite outdoor recreation activities, as confirmed by the most recent Pennsylvania Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). This preference can be noted in comparable plans dating back to the 1970s and enshrined in environmental rights legislation. This steady attention to heritage-based events and historic settings by Pennsylvania’s outdoor recreationists is a significant economic driver.

Pennsylvania’s Heritage Areas Program, one of the few State programs nationwide, is illustrative of the Commonwealth’s commitment to heritage conservation and heritage planning. The Heritage Areas Program aims to create cross-sector partnerships supporting a regional “sense of place” through asset-based economic development. Of the 12 State-designated heritage areas, six are also designated as National Heritage Areas. Three additional areas are working towards obtaining federal National Heritage Area designation.

12 State-Designated Heritage Areas



Allegheny Ridge Heritage Area

Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor

Endless Mountains Heritage Region

Lackawanna Heritage Valley

Lincoln Highway Heritage Corridor

Lumber Heritage Region

National Road Heritage Corridor

Oil Region National Heritage Area

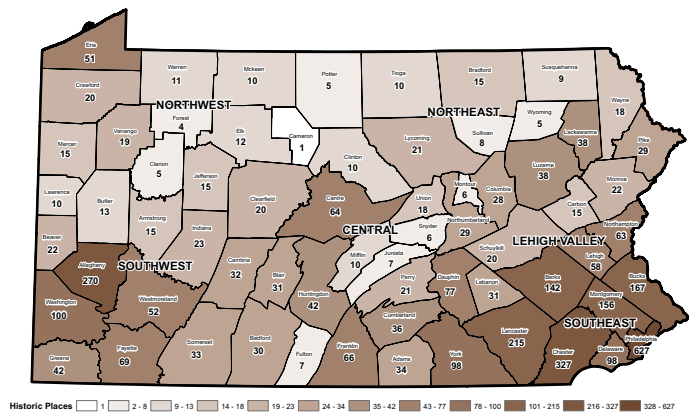
PA Route 6 Heritage Corridor

Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area

Schuylkill River Greenways National Heritage Area

Susquehanna National Heritage Area

Number of Listed National Register of Historic Places by County



As of 2025, PA has **3,666** properties listed in the National Register of Historic Places



2021 **33 properties added**

2022 **24 properties added**

2023 **19 properties added**

2024 **24 properties added**

2025 **38 properties added**

Pennsylvania Historic Preservation Tax Credit (HPTC) Facts



In a 2019 evaluation of program performance, the Independent Fiscal Office reported that 67% of approved PA Historic Preservation Tax Credit projects were previously vacant buildings.¹



State historic tax credits start paying back during construction, returning 37% of the value to the Pennsylvania Treasury before the credit certificate is issued.²

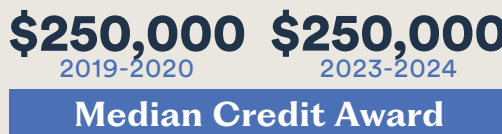


A \$1M investment in a historic rehabilitation project generates 6.4 direct jobs and 5.6 indirect jobs in Pennsylvania, more than any other industry, including the gas industry.³

The amount of credit available under this program equals 25% (or 30% if the project qualifies as a “workforce housing project”) of the qualified rehabilitation expenses of a project, not to exceed \$500,000 for a single qualified taxpayer in a fiscal year.

PA Historic Preservation Tax Credit Allocation, Award Caps, Participation, and Award Data

PA Historic Preservation Tax Credit Allocation and Award Caps	2012-2018	2019-2024	2025
Annual Credit Allocation Aggregate Dollar Cap	\$3,000,000	\$ 5,000,000	\$ 20,000,000
Per Project Dollar Cap	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000



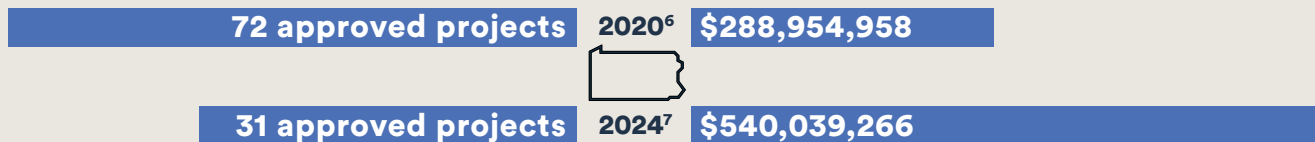
Federal Incentives for Rehabilitation of Historic Buildings

Tax credits facilitate the rehabilitation of vacant, blighted, or underutilized income-producing buildings, often in prominent locations within communities. Historic tax credits are frequently used in conjunction with other federal and State incentive programs, such as the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) or New Market Tax Credits (NMTC), to help finance projects. Rehabilitation projects generate significant federal, state, and local tax revenue, jobs, and other spinoff effects, including housing creation and catalyzing revitalization in adjacent areas.

- In 2024, there was \$334.8M+ of new rehabilitation work in Pennsylvania’s communities through 22 completed federal historic tax credit projects.⁴
- Federal historic tax credit investment from FFY01-FFY24 generated an estimated 125,738 jobs in Pennsylvania.⁵

Trends in Federal Incentives for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings

Qualified Rehabilitation Expenditures (QRE) in Pennsylvania



¹ [Pennsylvania Historic Preservation Tax Credit: An Evaluation of Program Performance](#), Independent Fiscal Office, January 2019
² [Issue Brief: PA Historic Preservation Tax Credit](#), Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia and Preservation Pennsylvania, June 9, 2025
³ *Ibid*
⁴ [2024 Annual Report Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office](#), Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission
⁵ National Trust for Historic Preservation, [Federal Historic Tax Credit Projects by State](#)
⁶ [Federal Tax Incentives for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings Annual Report](#) for Fiscal Year 2020
⁷ [Federal Tax Incentives for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings Annual Report](#) for Fiscal Year 2024

Policy Recommendations



Integrate community character and the conservation and preservation of historic places as a core component of all State, regional, and local planning initiatives.

Pennsylvania’s historic communities feature walkable and mixed-use neighborhoods that can support infill development, and which serve as a model for new sustainable development. Planning and zoning practices across the commonwealth are often in conflict with the preservation of these core historic communities and the adaptive reuse of historic structures. As a result, historic buildings are vulnerable to demolition despite a community’s values. Often this occurs through a process of neglect which contributes to and spreads blight and disinvestment. Community planning initiatives should focus on the modernization of zoning codes and the updating of comprehensive plans with community-based preservation goals in mind in order to support the proactive protection of these important places and help manage change.



Expand and modernize financial incentives and policies to position historic preservation as a driver of economic development, affordable housing, and sustainability.

Historic preservation offers significant environmental and economic benefits, especially when supported by modernized regulations and broader, more inclusive incentives that encourage rehabilitation and adaptive reuse. Integrating preservation into economic development strategies can expand workforce development, shift public perception, and strengthen community identity. Reusing historic buildings for housing and protecting cultural landscapes helps manage sprawl and maintain neighborhood character and resident quality of life. When aligned with broader goals like sustainability and climate resiliency, preservation becomes a powerful tool for smart, inclusive growth.

Specific financial incentives for consideration include expanding the State Historic Preservation Tax Credit program, creating a private homeowner tax credit for rehabbed historic properties, and increasing Keystone Historic Preservation Grant allotments for preservation projects.



Promote historic places as essential for community health and well-being, and prioritize the reuse of historic buildings.

Beyond their architectural and historical significance, historic places are vital assets that directly contribute to quality of life for residents. Leveraging historic buildings and neighborhoods can create diverse and affordable housing options, which is a critical need in many communities. Historic mixed-use neighborhoods can provide benefits like walkability, better access to public transportation, a network of mature urban trees, and a concentration of public gathering places. These factors enhance the sense of place and foster community identity along with promoting physical activity and social connection. Furthermore, heritage areas, trails, and scenic byways provide valuable open space for recreation and tourism.



Foster and expand partnerships to educate and build capacity for preservation.

Collaboration has proven to be key to preservation successes in Pennsylvania. Fostering greater connections within groups such as the State Planning Board, SHPO, Pennsylvania Downtown Center, DCNR’s Heritage Areas Program, municipalities, advocates, and other community organizations will generate better conservation and preservation outcomes across the commonwealth. This collaboration can support the needed technical assistance and educational resources to help communities establish their own historic commissions and adopt effective local ordinances to proactively protect the places and heritage that matter the most to them.



Improve access to preservation trades.

Develop training programs for preservation trades to improve historic preservation efforts and develop a skilled workforce, creating employment opportunities for Pennsylvanians. Despite high demand from residential and commercial property owners, State agencies, and nonprofits, the lack of skilled tradespeople with the knowledge and expertise in historic materials and building techniques presents a significant barrier to historic preservation.

Shared Values

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Healthy, Prosperous, and Resilient Communities



Coordinated and Connected Communities

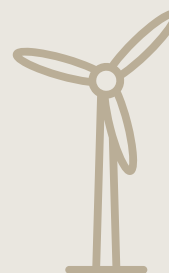
11 Energy Resources



York Haven, PA

Pennsylvania's energy profile has become increasingly dynamic in recent decades, as both fossil fuel and renewable energy production have grown. While the commonwealth is one of the nation's leading natural gas producers, falling costs of renewable energy and policies such as [Alternative Energy Portfolio Standards \(AEPS\)](#) have boosted the role of renewables in the energy mix.¹

¹ Pennsylvania Energy Programs Office Clean Energy Program Plan, Prepared by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection with support from ICF and Yborra & Associates, November 2020, <http://www.depgreenport.state.pa.us/elibrary/GetDocument?docId=3412364&DocName=CLEAN%20ENERGY%20PROGRAM%20PLAN.PDF%20%20%3Cspan%20style%3D%22color:green%3B%22%3E%3C/span%3E%20%3Cspan%20style%3D%22color:blue%3B%22%3E%28NEW%29%3C/span%3E>



Trends

Pennsylvania’s comprehensive [Energy Assessment Report](#) (April 2019) identified trends related to energy production and consumption, through 2050, under a “business-as-usual” scenario. Key trends include:²

- Energy used to generate electricity is projected to increase due to increasing power exports.
- The transportation sector is electrifying and will continue to do so. As of June 2025, there were over 98,000 electric vehicles (EVs) registered in Pennsylvania, nearly double the number in June of 2023.³ And as of August 2025, there were 5,377 EV charging ports among 1,968 stations across the state.⁴

- Natural gas consumption is projected to increase significantly, bringing economic growth and environmental risks. It is rapidly becoming the commonwealth’s primary electricity generation fuel, and is projected to continue to grow, increasing 925% from 2005 to 2050.
- Use of biogas and corn ethanol is rising.
- Greenhouse gas emissions are declining moderately, as coal use declines and natural gas and renewable energy grows.
- Coal production continues to fall, as competition from lower-cost, lower-emission natural gas continues to displace coal use for power generation.
- Oil production is projected to increase, due in large part to increased gas development activity, which encourages parallel oil resource development.
- Renewables (mainly solar, wind, hydroelectric, and wood and biogenic waste) are projected to increase through 2050 but fall short of coal and natural gas generation as a percentage of total electricity generation. By 2050, renewable power is expected to account for about 6% of total generation in the commonwealth, which represents an increase of 230% from 2005 to 2050.
- Nuclear power generation is anticipated to decrease but remain significant.

Increased Energy Production Predictions 2005 to 2050



Natural Gas
925%
by 2050



Renewables
230%
by 2050



Kingsley, PA

Photo Credit: Lindsay Lazarski/WHYY

In addition to the trends noted above, the increasing demand for data centers is an emerging trend impacting energy resources. Data centers are currently a major energy consumer, and demand from the AI sector is expected to grow exponentially, with potential to significantly increase overall electricity use. Key issues are ensuring grid reliability, managing costs for consumers, and mitigating environmental impact as electricity demand soars. In Pennsylvania, the primary agency overseeing energy use among data centers is the Public Utility Commission (PUC).

² Energy Assessment Report for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Prepared for the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection by ICF, April 2019, <https://greenport.pa.gov/elibray//GetDocument?docId=1451239&DocName=ENERGY%20ASSESSMENT%20REPORT%20FOR%20THE%20COMMONWEALTH%20OF%20PENNSYLVANIA.PDF%20%20%20%3Cspan%20style%3D%22color:blue%3B%22%3E%28NEW%29%3C/span%3E>

³ Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, June 2025, [Electric Vehicle Registrations](#)

⁴ U.S. Department of Energy, Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy, Alternative Fuels Data Center, Electric Vehicles Charging Station Locations, Accessed August 27, 2025, [Alternative Fuels Data Center: Electric Vehicle Charging Station Locations](#)

Policy Recommendations



Promote energy-efficient land use through planning and land use regulations. Land use decisions influence how much energy is used by local governments, businesses, and residents, and as a result, have an impact on the environment as well as household and municipal budgets. Compact development patterns, mixes of uses, shade trees, and reduced distances between homes, employment opportunities, shopping, social services, and other amenities can help reduce energy consumption and decrease energy costs.



Promote sustainable energy development. Pursue renewable energy generated from resources that are not depletable, but naturally replenished, such as solar, wind, geothermal, biomass, and water. These resources can provide energy for air and water heating and cooling, electricity, and transportation.

In Pennsylvania, solar energy siting is primarily handled at the municipal level, with State agencies providing guidance and some oversight. The State respects local decision-making on project siting through existing comprehensive planning efforts. Under the MPC, local governments are responsible for developing and enforcing zoning ordinances and permitting requirements for solar projects, including setbacks and height limits. DEP offers a [Solar Energy Resource Hub](#) to guide municipalities, developers, and residents. It provides sample ordinance frameworks and best practices.

Additionally, the [Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Grid-Scale Solar Siting Policy](#) provides guiding principles to encourage the responsible siting of grid-scale solar installations. The Commonwealth should continue to promote sustainable solar development that includes strategies to minimize impacts to the natural environment, maintain production on prime agricultural lands, safeguard cultural and historical resources, and achieve a net reduction in carbon emissions.

⁵ Pennsylvania Energy Programs Office Clean Energy Program Plan, Prepared by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection with support from ICF and Yborra & Associates, November 2020

⁶ National Association of State Energy Officials (NASEO). 2025. *Energy Assurance Planning*. Accessed June 5, 2025, <https://www.naseo.org/energyassurance>



Implement greenhouse gas reduction strategies. The [PA Climate Action Plan](#) (2024 update) recommends strategies designed to improve energy efficiency, expand the use of low-carbon fuels, and support emission reductions from buildings, transportation, and industrial electrification. Implementation of these strategies will help reduce greenhouse gas emissions.



Integrate energy assurance and resiliency in planning efforts. [PA DEP's Energy Programs Office](#) is the primary entity responsible for energy assurance in the commonwealth and should continue to actively consider how to bolster assurance and resiliency in planning efforts, and how to effectively communicate their importance with partners.⁵ The goal of energy assurance planning is to achieve a robust, secure, and reliable energy infrastructure that is also resilient – able to restore services rapidly in the event of any disaster. While the owners and operators are responsible for their energy infrastructure and delivery systems, it is the responsibility of State and local officials to work with energy providers and stakeholders from other jurisdictions, government agencies, businesses, and related organizations, to reduce consequences and assure public safety, and provide for rapid recovery.⁶



Cambria, PA

Shared Values

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Housing for All



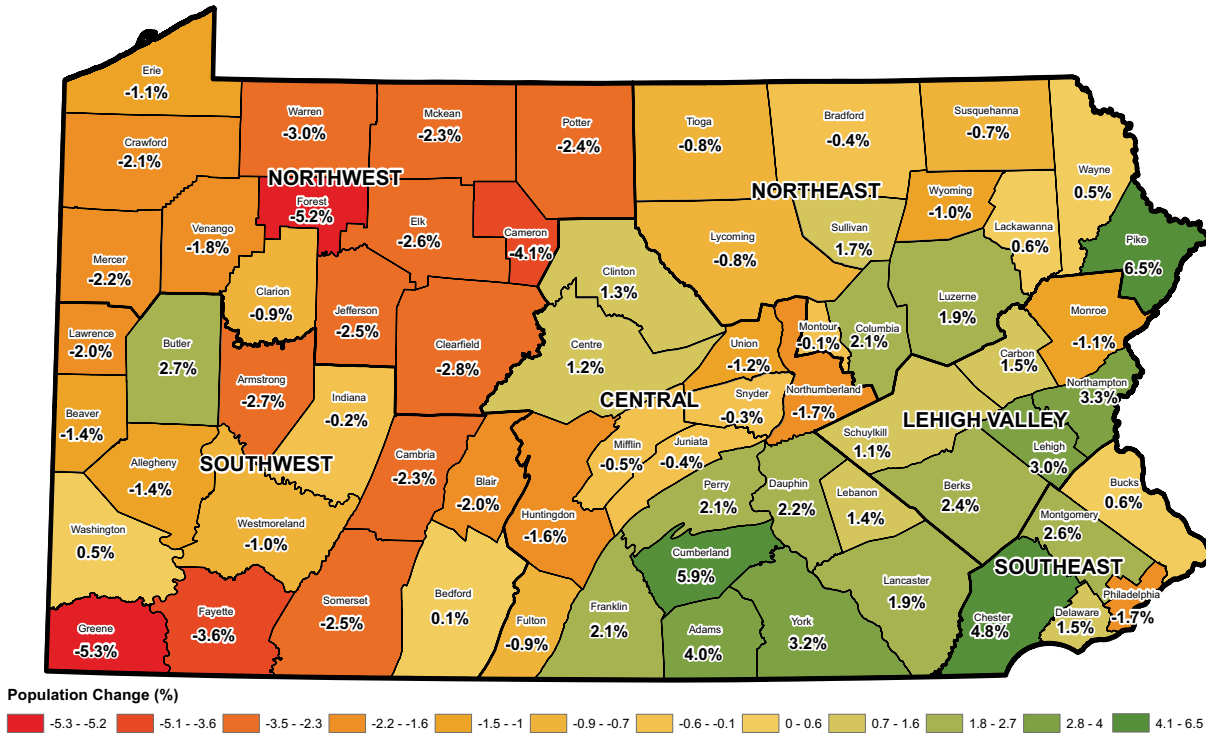
Healthy, Prosperous, and Resilient Communities



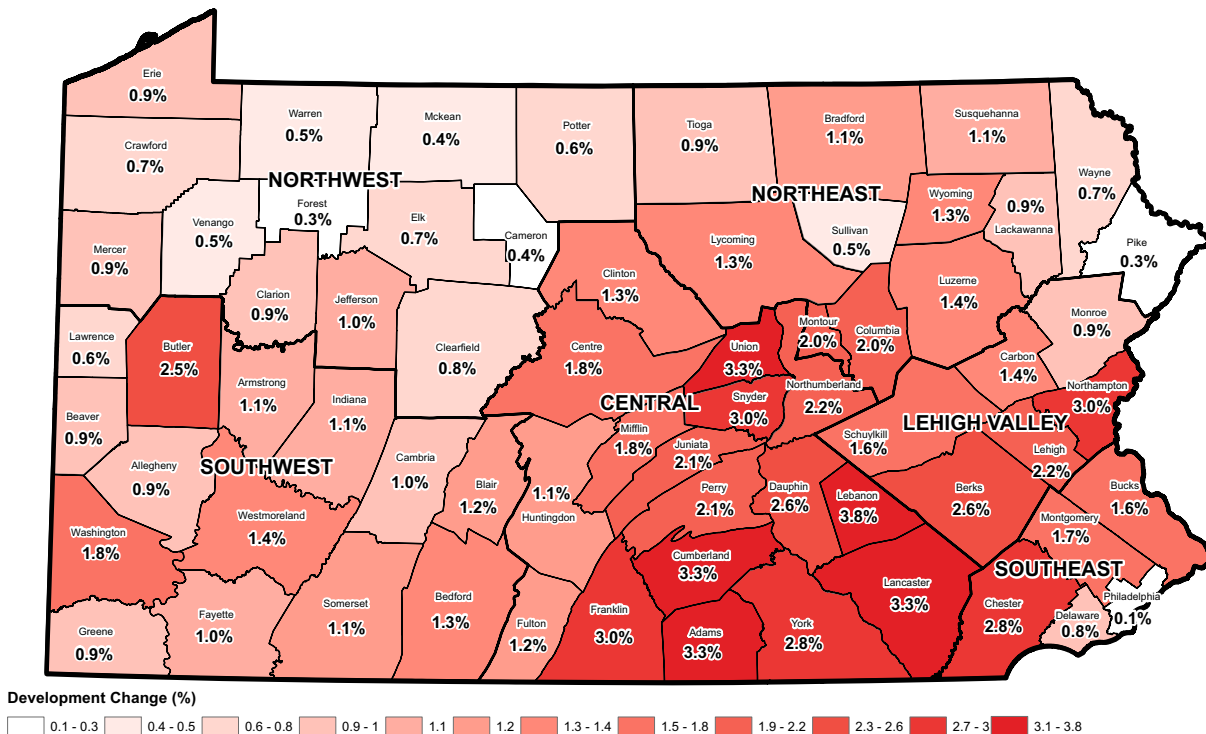
Coordinated and Connected Communities

12 Appendix - Maps

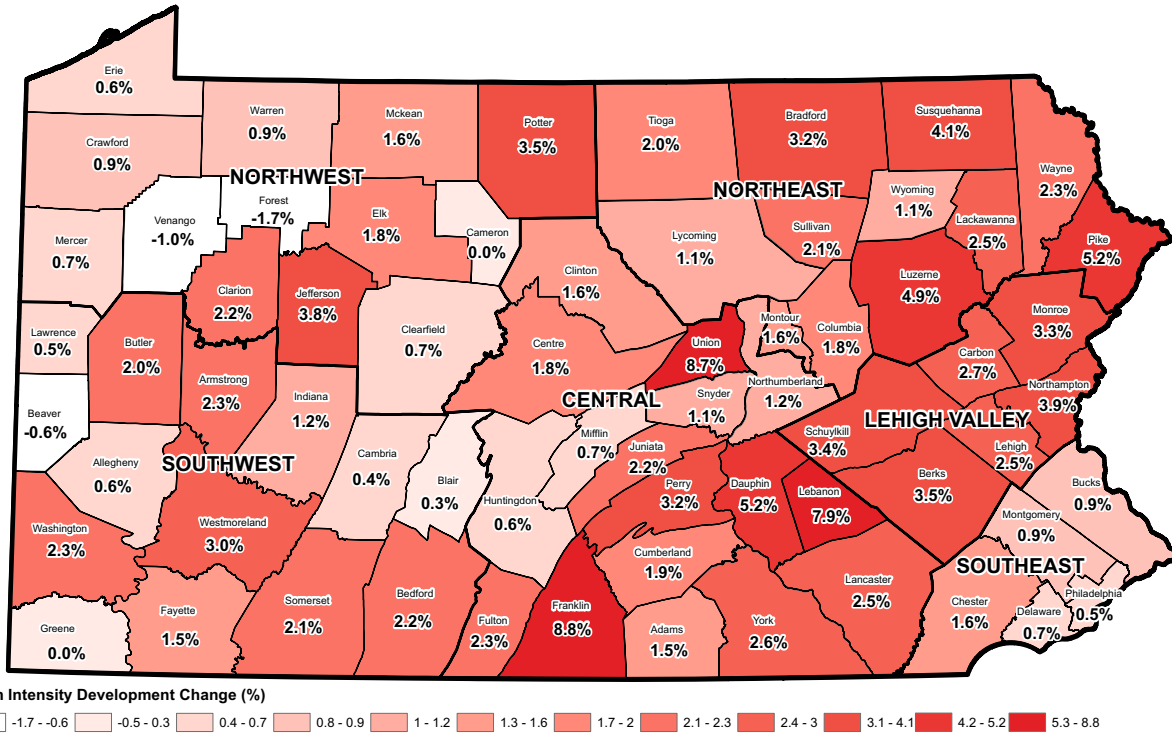
Population Change by County • Referenced on page 8



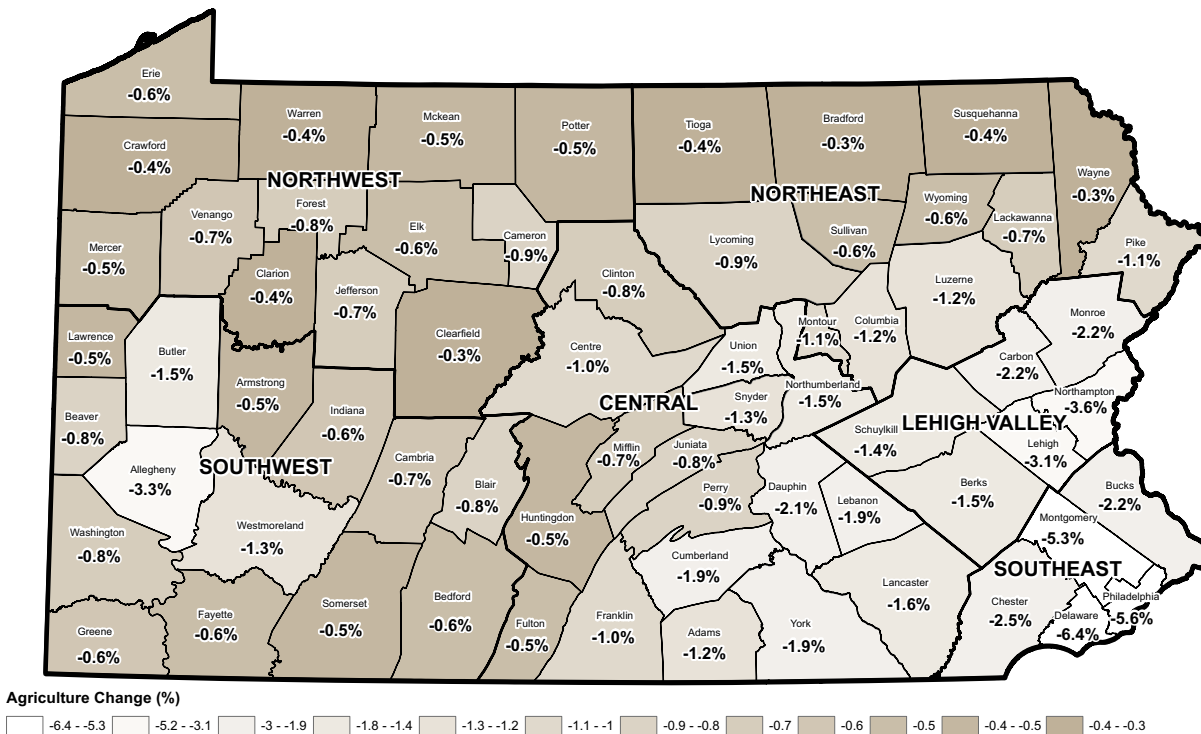
Development Change by County • Referenced on page 9



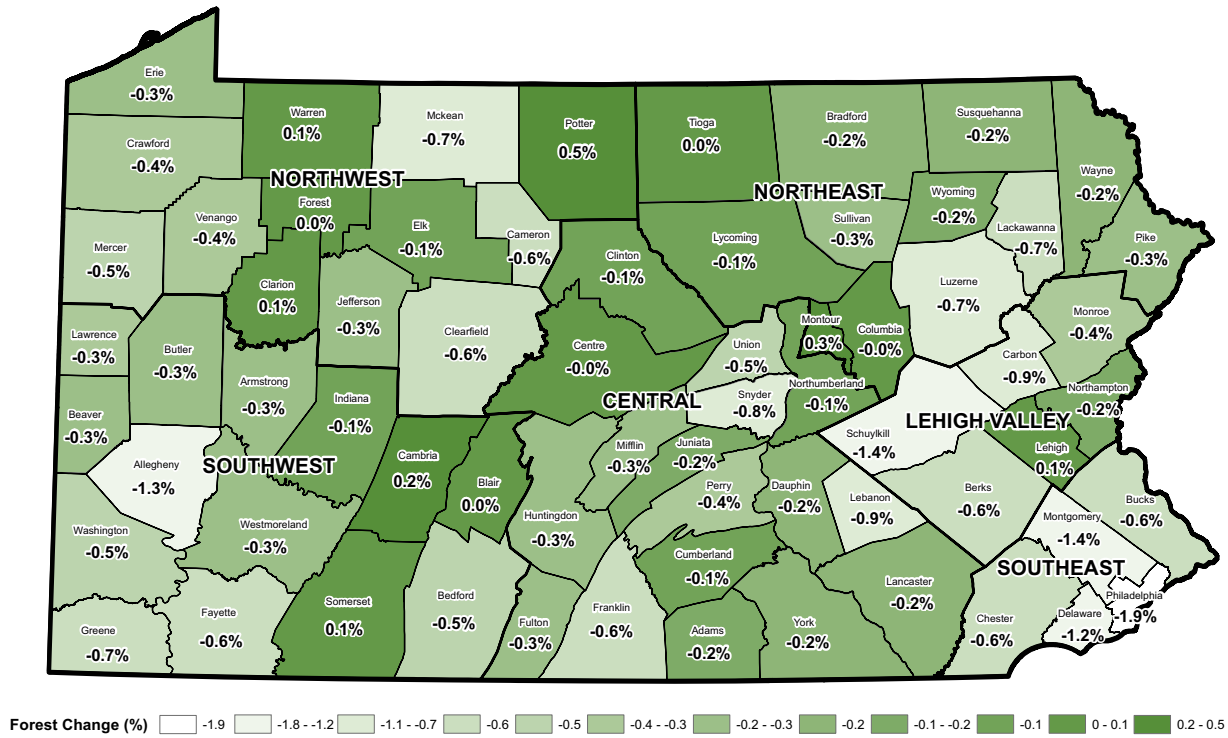
High Intensity Development Change by County • Referenced on page 9



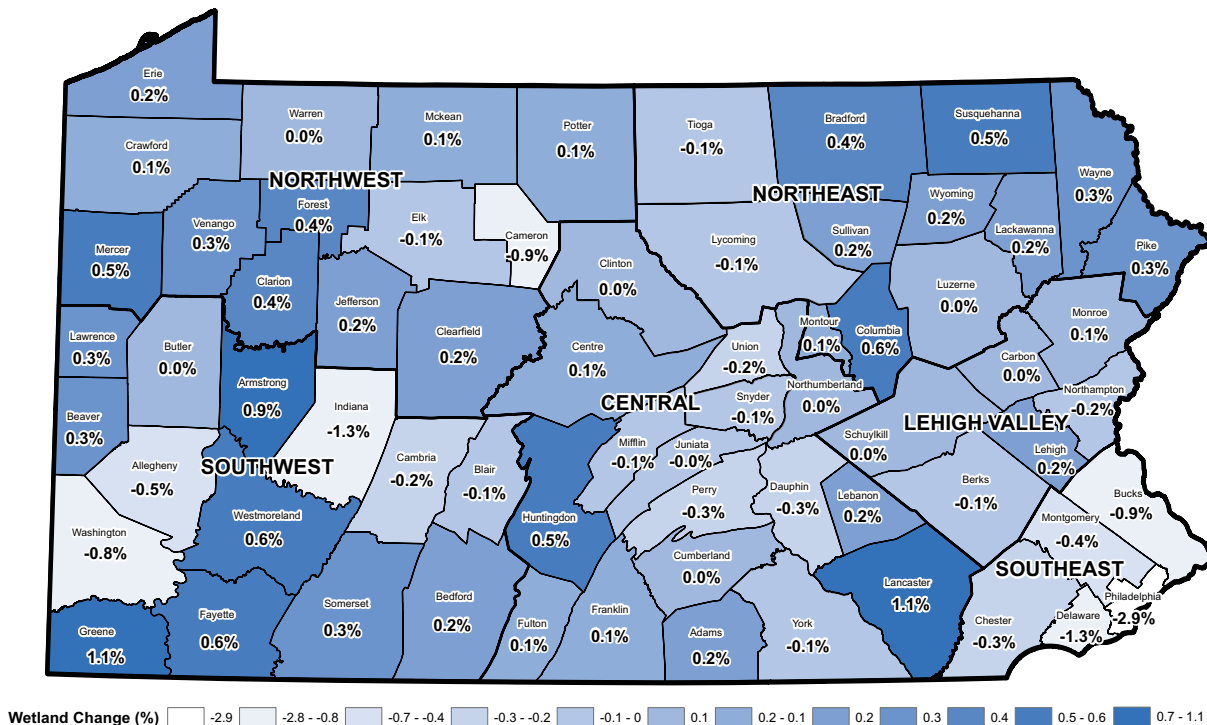
Agricultural Change by County • Referenced on page 10



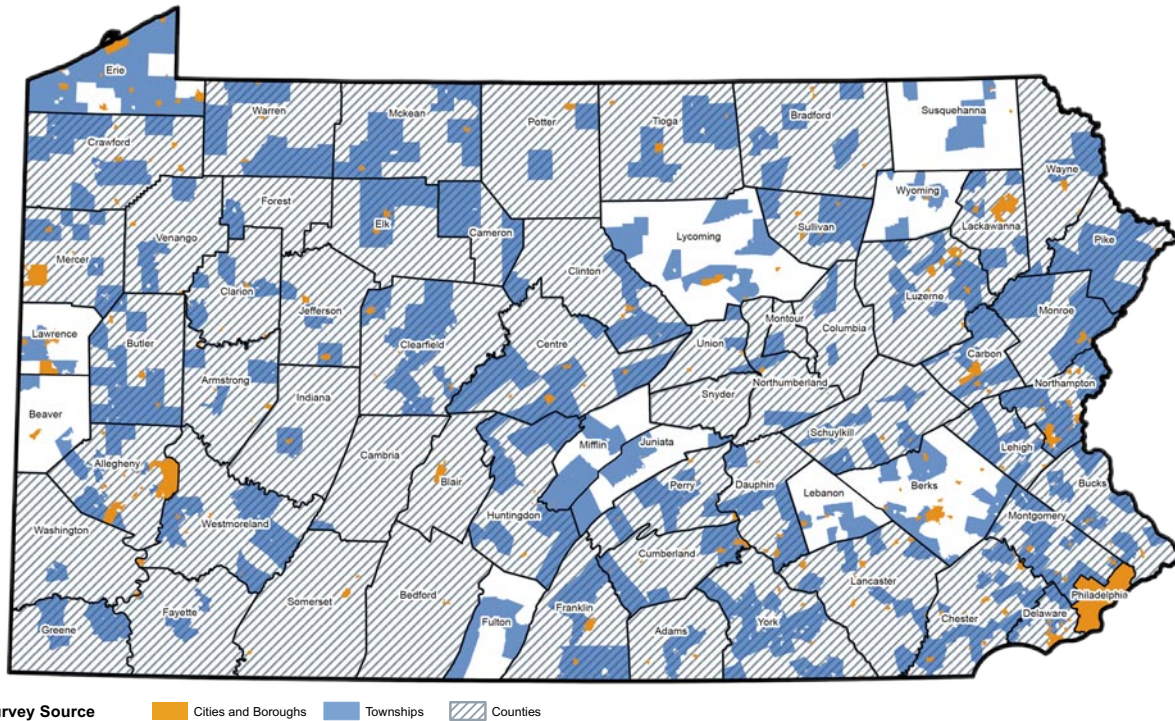
Forest Change by County • Referenced on page 10



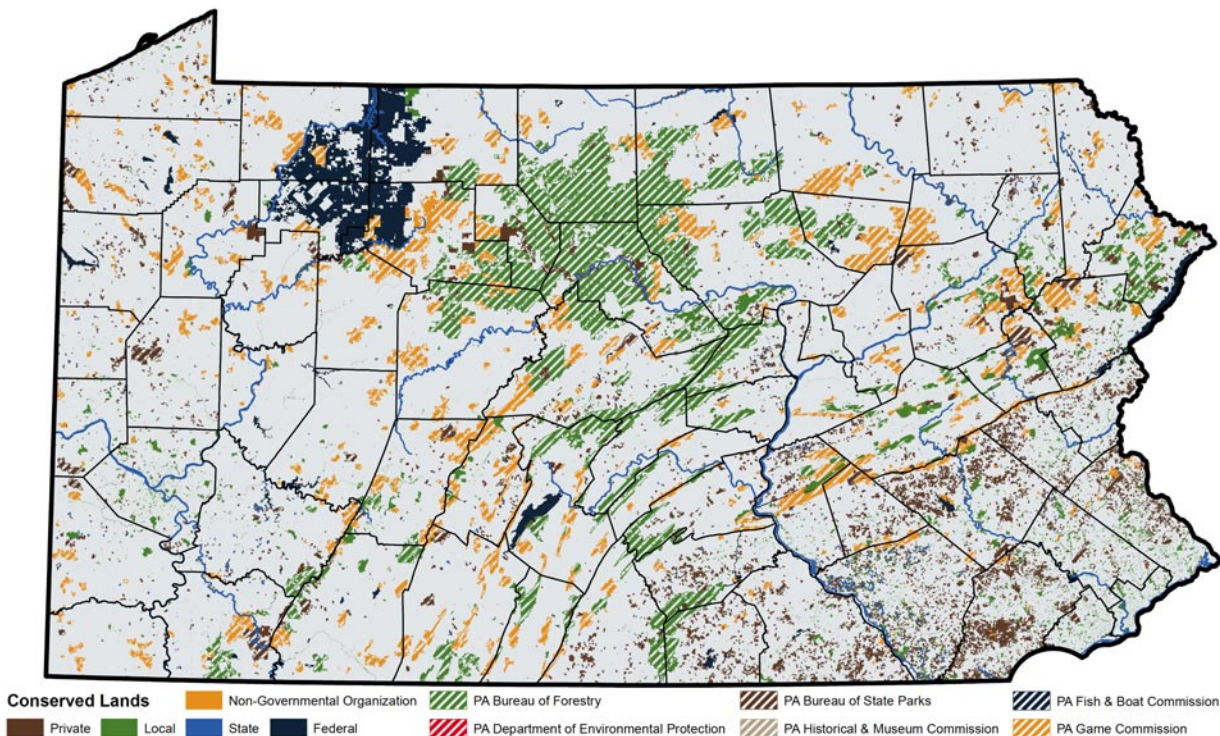
Wetland Change by County • Referenced on page 11



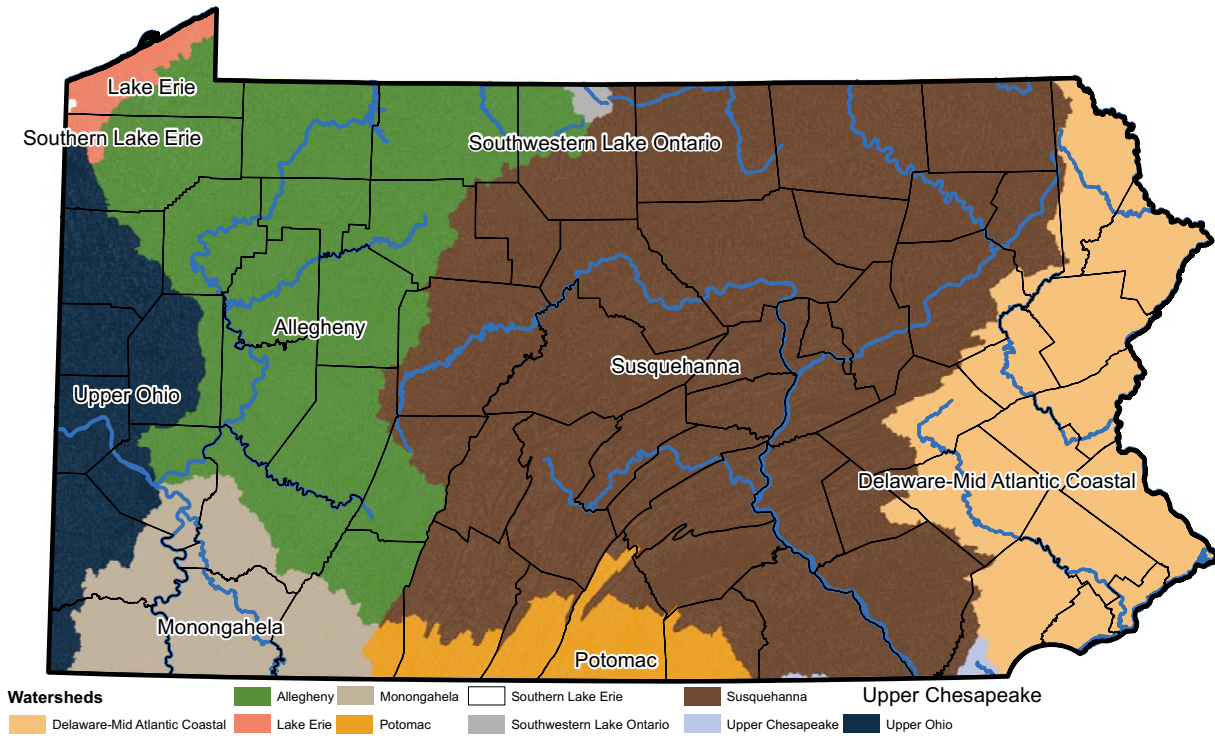
County and Municipal Survey Responses • Referenced on page 11



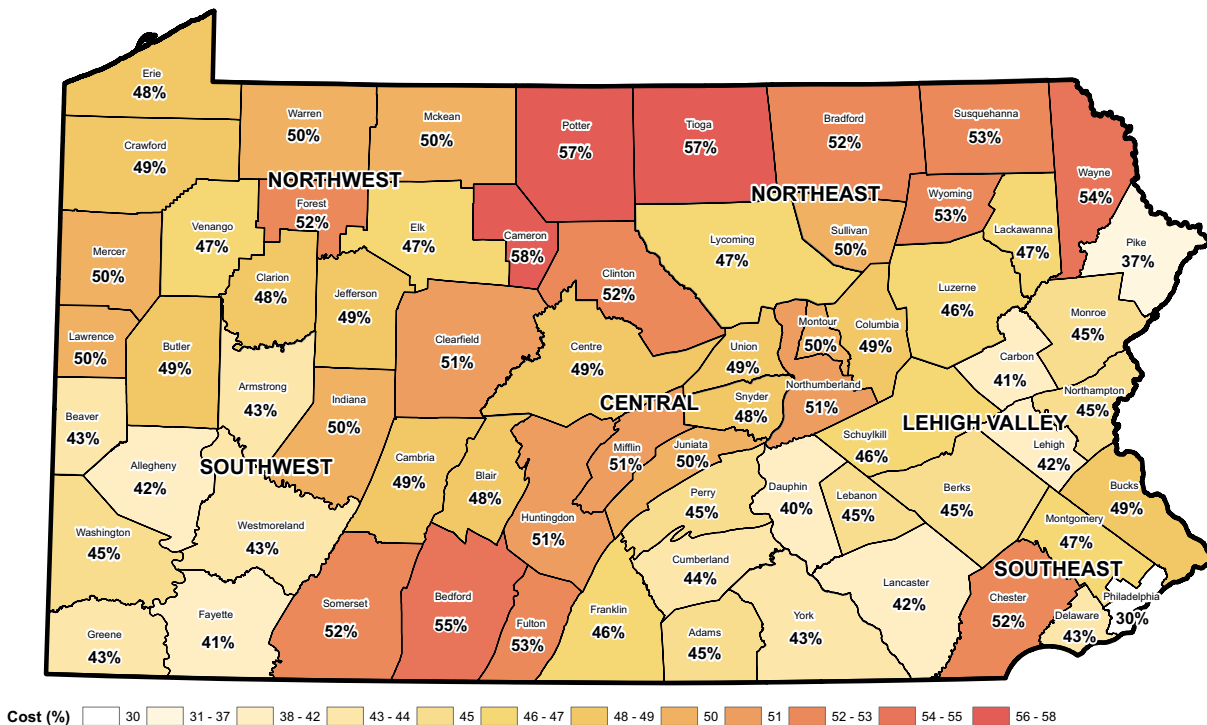
Conserved Lands of PA • Referenced on page 21



PA Watersheds • Referenced on page 25

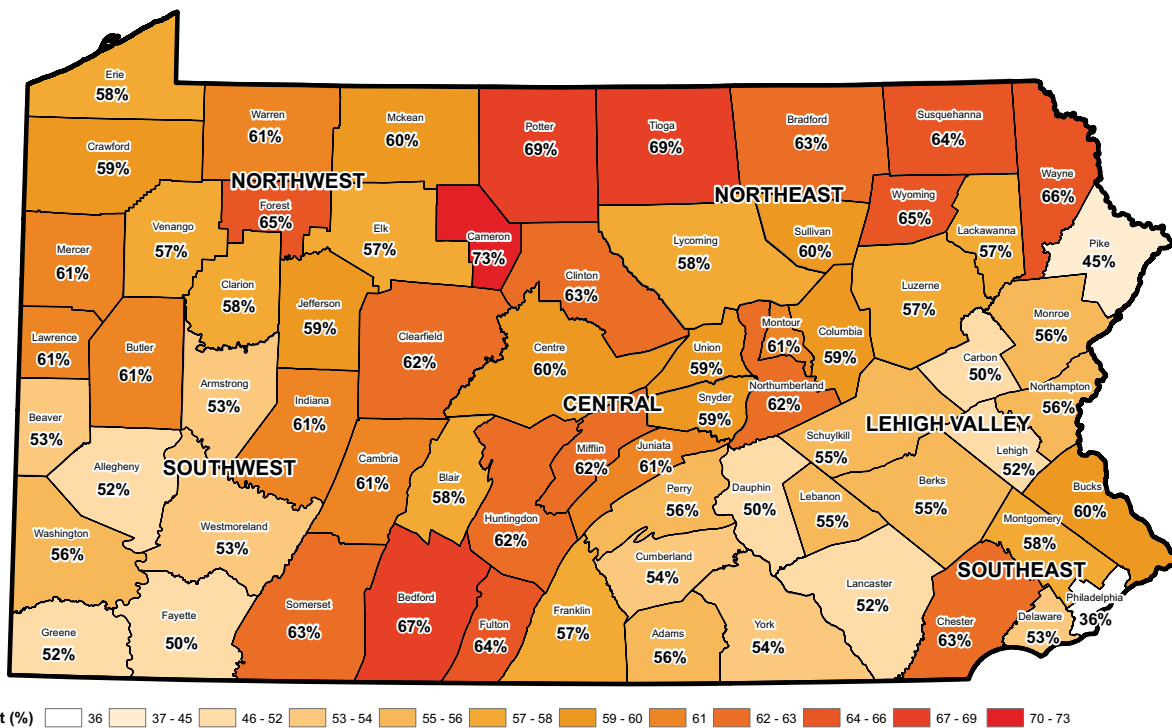


Housing and Transportation Costs as Percent of Income for Typical Household by County • Referenced on page 35

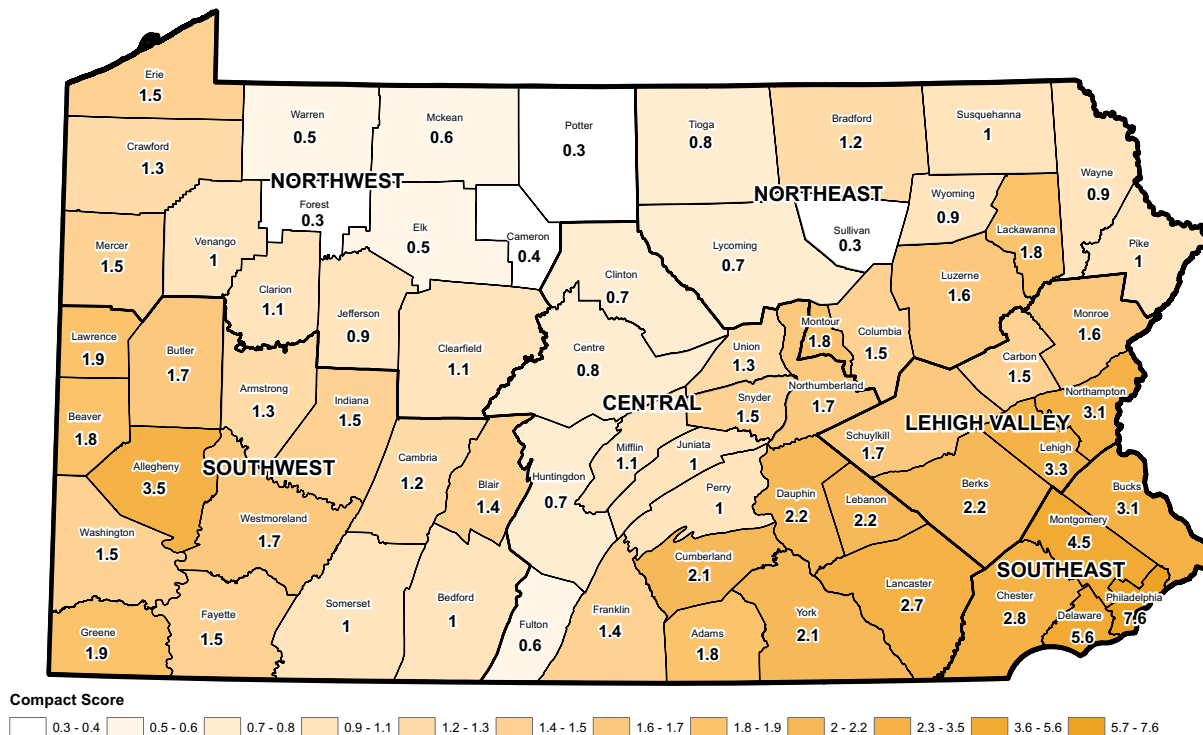


Housing and Transportation Costs

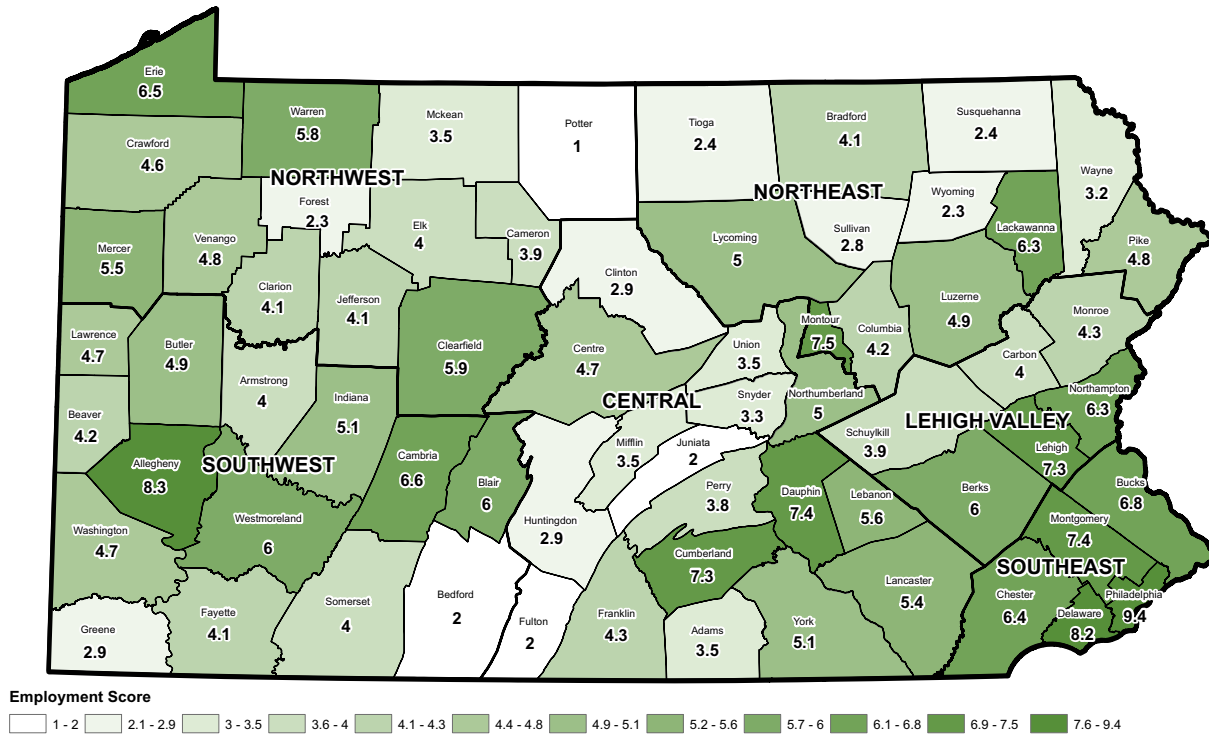
as Percent of Income for Moderate-Income Household by County • Referenced on page 35



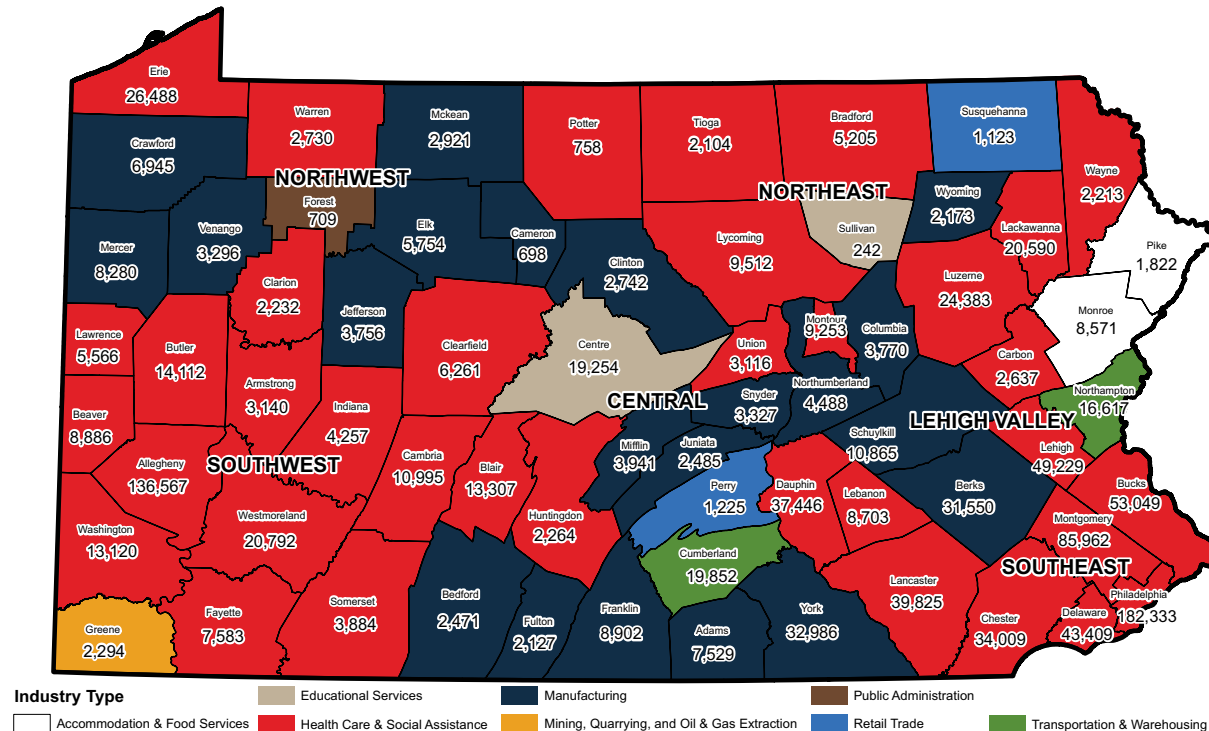
Compact Index by County • Referenced on page 42



Employment Access Index by County • Referenced on page 43



Total Jobs in Leading Industry by County • Referenced on page 46





Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

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