

MOVING FORWARD



MERCER COUNTY
COMPREHENSIVE
Plan



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LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS AND OUR CITIZENRY

We sincerely thank the residents of Mercer County for their time, insight, and commitment to shaping this Comprehensive Plan. From community surveys to public meetings, your voices and ideas ensured this plan reflects our shared vision and priorities. Planning for the future only matters when it includes those it serves – and your involvement made that possible.

We also extend our gratitude to the many local stakeholders who contributed their expertise and perspective, including municipal officials, planning commission members, housing agencies, economic development leaders, business owners, school districts, educators, service providers, and environmental partners.

Your input helped ground this plan in both data and lived experiences.

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Resolution

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INTRODUCTION



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6 | Mercer County Comprehensive Plan

Charting Our Course: Why This Plan Matters

Mercer County stands at a turning point — where deep roots meet new possibilities. This Comprehensive Plan is not a checklist or a shelf-bound report. It's a living document that reflects the collective voice of our communities and sets the course for what comes next.

This plan is a compass, designed to help navigate complex decisions about growth, development, and stewardship. It captures the stories, values, and goals of our residents and turns them into strategies that can be acted on today and built upon tomorrow. Rather than predicting the future, this plan equips us to shape it. It does so by:

- **Framing Our Shared Vision** – Articulating what kind of place Mercer County aspires to be and the principles that guide community leaders.
- **Setting Priorities** – Identifying the investments, policies, and actions most needed to support strong neighborhoods, resilient infrastructure, a vibrant economy, and healthy environments.
- **Connecting the Dots** – Bridging gaps between ideas and action, between regional efforts and local realities, and between short-term wins and long-term change.
- **Amplifying Local Voices** – Ensuring that all community perspectives are woven into the decisions that shape our places.

What makes this plan different? It's rooted in real conversations. It was built through community workshops, listening sessions, interviews, and creative engagement tools that invited people from all walks of life to share their hopes and frustrations. Farmers, business owners, educators, parents, municipal leaders, young professionals — each brought a piece of the puzzle.

And this plan doesn't stop at inspiration. It provides tools to act: from land use guidance to housing solutions, economic development ideas to environmental protections. It is built to evolve, adapt, and stay relevant as Mercer County grows and changes.

In essence, this is more than a plan.

It's a statement of who we are — and who we're ready to become.

INTRODUCTION

Making It Happen: Using the Plan as a Roadmap

How to Use This Plan

This Comprehensive Plan is more than a report — it's a working guide, built to inform decisions, inspire action, and evolve over time. Whether you're a County Commissioner reviewing infrastructure investments, a municipal elected official shaping land use policy, or a local nonprofit seeking alignment with broader goals, this plan gives people a place to start. It is designed with one central question in mind: What kind of Mercer County do people want to live in and how does everyone get there together?

A Shared Vision, A Playbook for Action

At the heart of the plan is a future vision crafted with input from people across the County and is supported by guiding principles that reflect Mercer County's values: collaboration, heritage, innovation, and resilience.

To bring this vision to life, the plan offers a playbook of strategies and priority actions. These were informed by public workshops, surveys, data analysis, and expert input and then refined through real conversations about what's possible, what's needed, and what matters most.

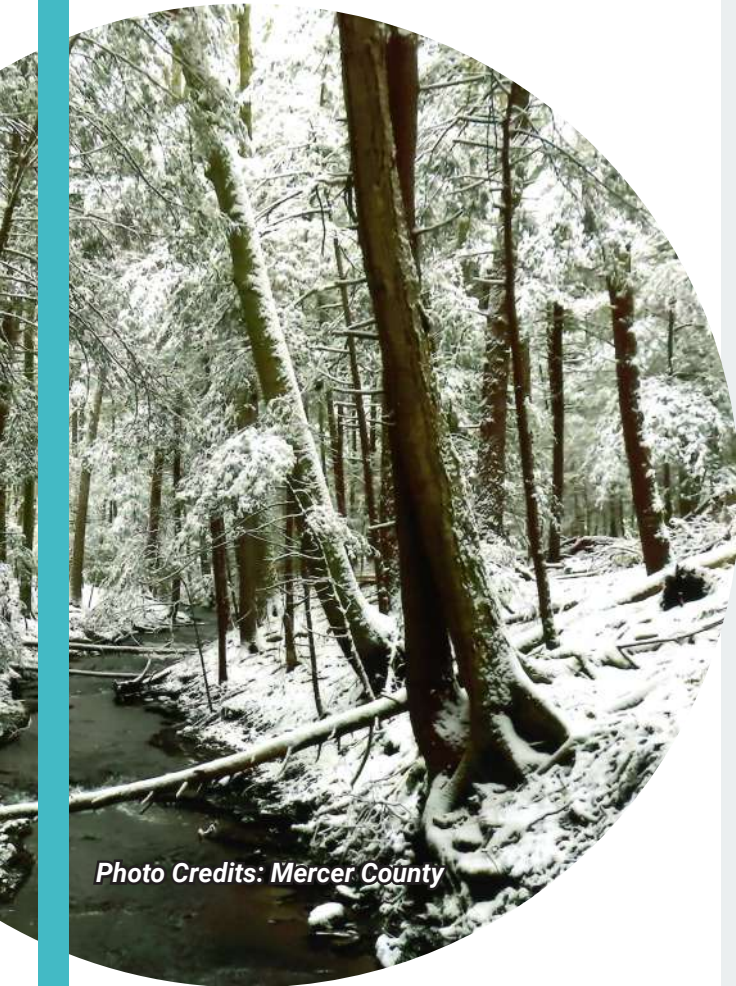


Photo Credits: Mercer County



Navigating the Plan

Here's a quick breakdown of how the document is structured and how each section can be used:

Demographic & Economic Outlook - A snapshot of where Mercer County is now – including population trends, housing dynamics, workforce shifts, and infrastructure conditions. This section's purpose is to help the reader understand key challenges and opportunities shaping Mercer County's present and future.

Vision, Goals & Focus Areas - The big picture. This section outlines the shared vision and the five Focus Areas that organize the plan's goals and recommendations:

- **Resilient Infrastructure & Connected Communities**
- **Diverse Housing & Stronger Neighborhoods**
- **Vibrant Economy & Workforce Development**
- **Stewardship of Natural Resources & Outdoor Assets**
- **Thriving Communities & Enhanced Quality of Life**

Each Focus Area includes a clear summary of community priorities and targeted objectives to move from ideas to implementation.

Implementation Tools - This section is the "how." It details the key players, resources, and tools needed to turn plans into projects. It includes:

- Agencies or partners responsible for action
- Estimated costs and timelines
- Potential funding sources (local, state, federal, or philanthropic)
- Milestones and performance indicators

Appendices - The appendices contain key supporting materials compiled throughout the planning process. This includes public engagement summaries, survey results, stakeholder input, and additional background information that informed the plan.

One appendix is a standalone Housing Study conducted by Fourth Economy, which provides deeper insight into Mercer County's housing needs and market trends.

Note: Figures in the Housing Study may differ slightly from the core Demographic Outlook due to variations in data sources and reporting years.

INTRODUCTION

Mercer County: Where We've Been

A Place with Deep Roots

Mercer County was established in 1800, and was named after Revolutionary War General Hugh Mercer. Its early growth was shaped by agriculture, as settlers took advantage of fertile land and abundant natural resources to build small farming communities throughout the region.

The arrival of railroads in the 19th century transformed Mercer County into an industrial center. Communities such as Sharon, Farrell, and Greenville became hubs for steel, coal, and glass manufacturing, attracting workers and supporting the rise of middle-class communities. Public institutions—schools, churches, libraries—expanded alongside this growth, reinforcing a strong civic identity.

In the second half of the 20th century, as manufacturing diversified across the region, Mercer County experienced population shifts, job losses, and economic challenges. Despite these changes, the County's communities have remained resilient—diversifying their economies, investing in education and health care, and preserving their agricultural roots.

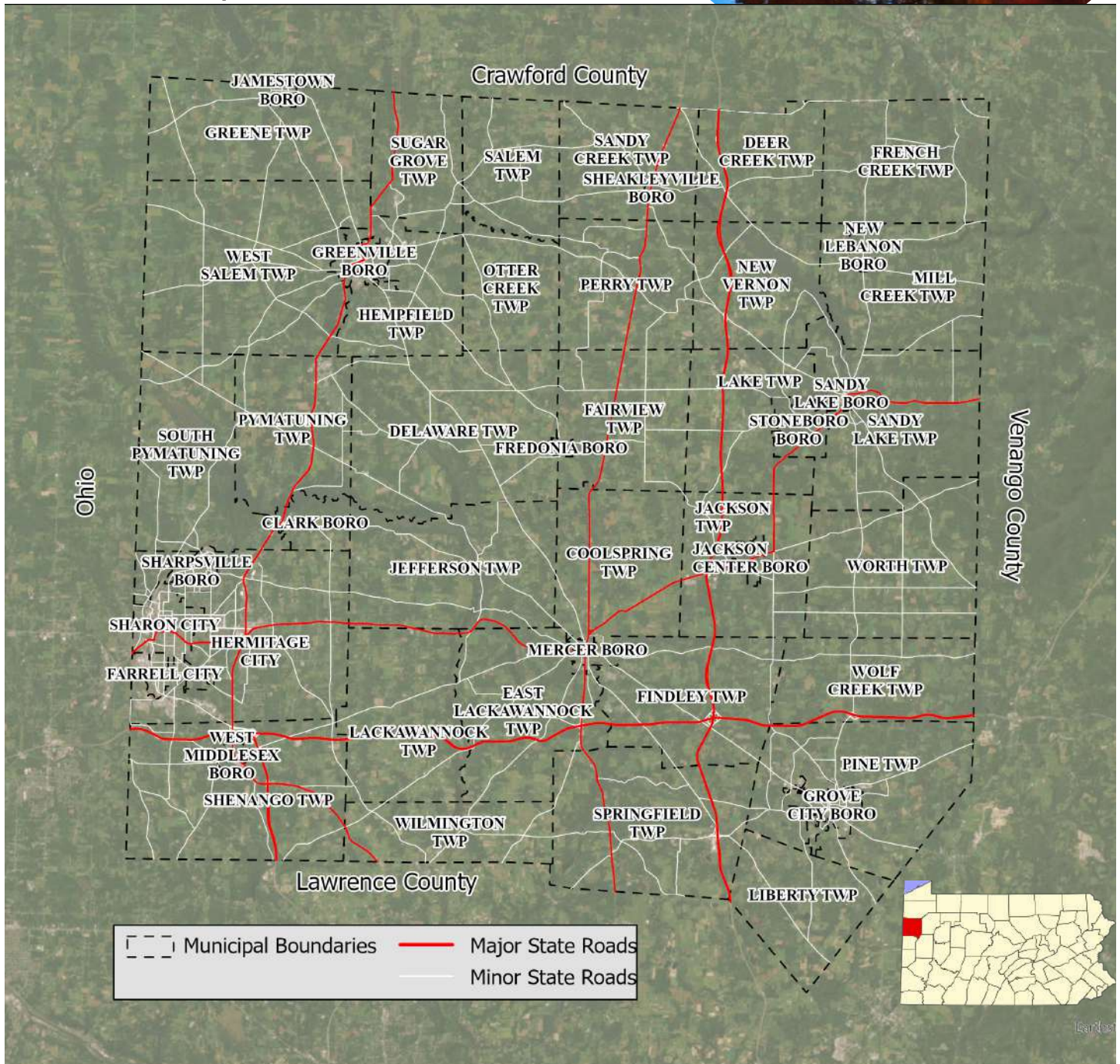
Today, Mercer County is a blend of historic towns, rural landscapes, and emerging centers of innovation. Its legacy of hard work, adaptation, and community pride continues to guide its development into the future.



Photo Credits: Mercer County



Reference Map



INTRODUCTION

Layers of Progress

Planning Framework

Effective planning does not start from scratch – it builds on the momentum of what’s come before. Over the past two decades, Mercer County has taken a thoughtful, layered approach to planning by developing focused strategies around housing, transportation, economic development, natural resources, and land use. This Comprehensive Plan represents the next evolution of that work: a unified, forward-looking framework that weaves together past efforts, new data, and broad community input into a single vision for the future.

A Living Agenda for a Dynamic County

The Comprehensive Plan functions as a community agenda – a strategic guide that helps Mercer County and its municipalities anticipate and prepare for the future. It’s grounded in the lived experience of Mercer County’s residents and shaped by the opportunities and challenges identified throughout the planning process. This includes:

- Community surveys and open houses across all five regions of the County;
- Input from municipal officials, local organizations, and regional partners;
- Quantitative analysis of demographic, housing, infrastructure, and labor trends;
- Review of key local and regional plans developed in recent years.

This plan does not stand alone—it builds upon existing planning efforts in Mercer County. Key companion documents are listed in the Appendices, while additional plans will be referenced and maintained on the County’s website as they are adopted or updated.

Layers of Progress

A Foundation of Planning in Mercer County

Building on that momentum, the County has completed a range of focused plans and studies that have shaped policy, investment, and decision-making. These efforts that each address a specific issue or opportunity now serve as important building blocks for this Comprehensive Plan:

- **Long Range Transportation Plan** - The Long Range Transportation Plan identifies regional priorities and investment strategies for roads, bridges, public transit, trails, and multimodal infrastructure. Its goals directly support the Resilient Infrastructure and Connected Communities focus area, guiding future improvements that enhance safety, accessibility, and regional connectivity.
- **Recreation, Parks & Trails Planning** - Municipal and countywide efforts on greenways and trails support goals related to open space, recreation access, and outdoor stewardship.
- **Economic Development Strategies** - Through collaboration with Penn-Northwest Development Corp., the County's four Chambers of Commerce, and others, the County has advanced plans focused on business retention, entrepreneurship, and workforce readiness.
- **Farmland Preservation & Agricultural Development** - Mercer County has actively supported farmland protection and rural economic development – foundational to land use and natural resource strategies in this plan.
- **Watershed, Stormwater & Infrastructure Studies**- Regional and municipal initiatives have examined infrastructure capacity and environmental resilience to guide future growth and safeguard public health.

Integrating It All

Each of these efforts represents a building block in Mercer County's broader planning framework. Together, they inform a single, coordinated vision—integrating transportation, housing, economy, environment, and community health into a cohesive strategy for the County's future.

INTRODUCTION

A Community-Driven Process

Planning Framework

Mercer County’s Comprehensive Plan reflects a truly collaborative process — one shaped by the insight, experience, and aspirations of those who know the County best. With support from Mackin Engineering & Consultants, the County led a year-long planning process involving elected and appointed officials, local stakeholders, and the general public. The plan is rooted in deep community engagement, rigorous research, and shared goals for the future.

Project Launch and Research

The planning process began in January 2025 with a project kickoff and review of existing studies. Initial work centered on analyzing demographics, land use, infrastructure, and economic trends to build a clear picture of current conditions. A Steering Committee of local officials, community leaders, and stakeholders met regularly to review materials, shape outreach, and guide the plan’s direction. Their feedback helped ensure alignment with local priorities. At the same time, the team launched public engagement through surveys, focus groups, and interviews to ensure the plan reflected both data and lived experience.

Community Engagement and Input

Public outreach was central to every stage of the process. An initial online survey helped gather insights from residents, followed by a parallel survey distributed to all municipalities. Focus groups were held throughout the summer of 2025 to gather input from specific sectors and communities. These included:

- Housing organizations and developers;
- School district administrators;
- Natural resources, conservation, and recreation leaders.

Each session provided valuable feedback on key issues and emerging priorities — helping to shape the direction of the plan before recommendations were drafted.



Photo Credits: Mackin

A Community-Driven Process

Following this input, the Steering Committee worked alongside the consultant team to draft the plan’s vision statement, core goals, and focus areas. These materials were presented to the public during five regional open houses, held in accessible locations across the County. Residents who attended were invited to weigh in on recommendations and future priorities – utilizing a “money exercise.” Meeting attendees were asked to allocate funds to the objectives they most valued. Attendees also reviewed a Future Land Use Map, sharing feedback on development direction and land use preferences.

In addition to these open houses, County staff also attended local fairs and community events to promote the plan and gather informal feedback. A second online survey mirrored the open house experience for those who could not attend, ensuring broader input into plan priorities.



Some of the images captured during the 5 region public input sessions.



INTRODUCTION

A Community-Driven Process

Stakeholder Collaboration

Throughout the process, County staff and the Steering Committee maintained regular communication with local experts and stakeholders, including housing authorities, major employers, nonprofit leaders, environmental organizations, and educational institutions. Input was gathered through interviews, surveys, and small group sessions to better understand on-the-ground needs and opportunities.

This targeted outreach helped ensure that the plan is not only visionary, but also realistic—aligned with local capacity and community assets. A full summary of stakeholder engagement and outreach activities is provided in the final chapter of this document.

Public Review and Adoption

As the draft plan neared completion in late 2025, and in early 2026, a formal public comment period was launched. Draft copies were sent to:

- All internal municipalities;
- Public school districts;
- Surrounding counties;
- Neighboring municipalities.

The draft was also made available online and in print, encouraging feedback from residents and organizations across the County.

All comments received during the public review period were evaluated and, where appropriate, integrated into the final document.

To conclude the process, Mercer County Commissioners held a public hearing to solicit final feedback before formally adopting the plan. This marked the culmination of months of engagement, analysis, and collective effort.

A Community-Driven Process

Project Timeline: Key Milestones

Winter 2025:

- Project Kickoff
- Existing Plan Review
- Background Research

Summer 2025:

- Focus Groups Conducted
- Attended Local Fairs
- Drafted Vision, Goals, & Objectives

Winter/Spring 2026:

- Public Review Period
- Final Revisions
- Public Hearing
- Adoption



Spring 2025:

- Research & Data Analysis
- First Public Survey Launch
- Municipal Public Survey
- Stakeholder Outreach

Fall/Winter 2025:

- 5 Regional Public Input Sessions
- Attended Annual Township Convention
- Second Public Survey
- Draft Plan Creation

CONTEXT & PRINCIPLES



Photo Credits: City of Sharon

Understanding Where We Are: Existing Trends & Conditions

A strong plan begins with a clear understanding of current realities. As part of this process, key data and local context were reviewed and analyzed which included demographics, housing, infrastructure, employment trends, land use, and environmental conditions. These findings were then paired with direct community input.

Surveys, focus groups, workshops, and interviews helped validate what the data showed and revealed how issues such as housing costs, transportation access, job opportunities, aging infrastructure, and changing neighborhood dynamics affect residents in their daily lives.

By combining hard data with local insight, the planning team identified a number of cross-cutting trends that influence how Mercer County grows, adapts, and serves its residents. These insights inform the recommendations and action steps found throughout the plan. The following pages explore some of these core trends in greater detail, beginning with a look at population, household, and workforce characteristics. Understanding these demographic dynamics is essential to ensuring that future policies and investments reflect the people they are meant to serve.

Note: The data presented on the following pages was compiled from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2020 Decennial Census, 2023 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates, the U.S. Census OnTheMap tool, and other publicly available datasets as of 2024. Figures reflect the most recent and reliable information available at the time of publication.



Photo Credits: Mercer County

CONTEXT & PRINCIPLES

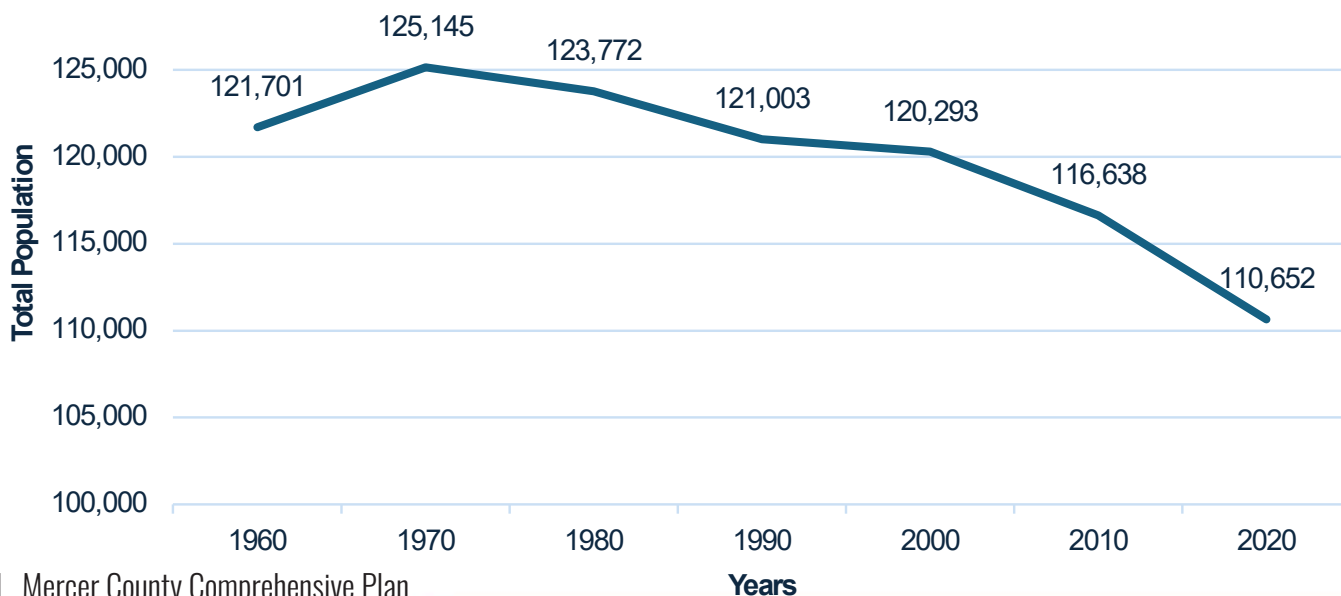
Demographic Snapshot

Population Trends

Mercer County has experienced a gradual, but sustained population decline since reaching its peak population in the mid-1970s. After topping out around 129,200 residents, in 1976, the population declined to approximately 120,293 by 2000 and dropped further to 110,652 by the 2020 Census. Current estimates in 2024 place the County’s population at just under 108,500.

This long-term population decrease – a loss of nearly 15% since the 1980s – is driven primarily by demographic shifts associated with an aging population. Mercer County’s median age continues to rise, and the number of deaths has exceeded births in recent years, contributing to natural population decline. While some migration has occurred, the most significant factor shaping the County’s population trends is the increasing share of older residents and the resulting demographic imbalance between younger and older age groups.

These demographic trends signal potential challenges ahead: a shrinking labor force, greater demand for senior services, and mounting pressure on the tax base to sustain infrastructure and essential services. The County’s population trajectory reflects a broader pattern seen in many post-industrial regions across the Northeast and Midwest.



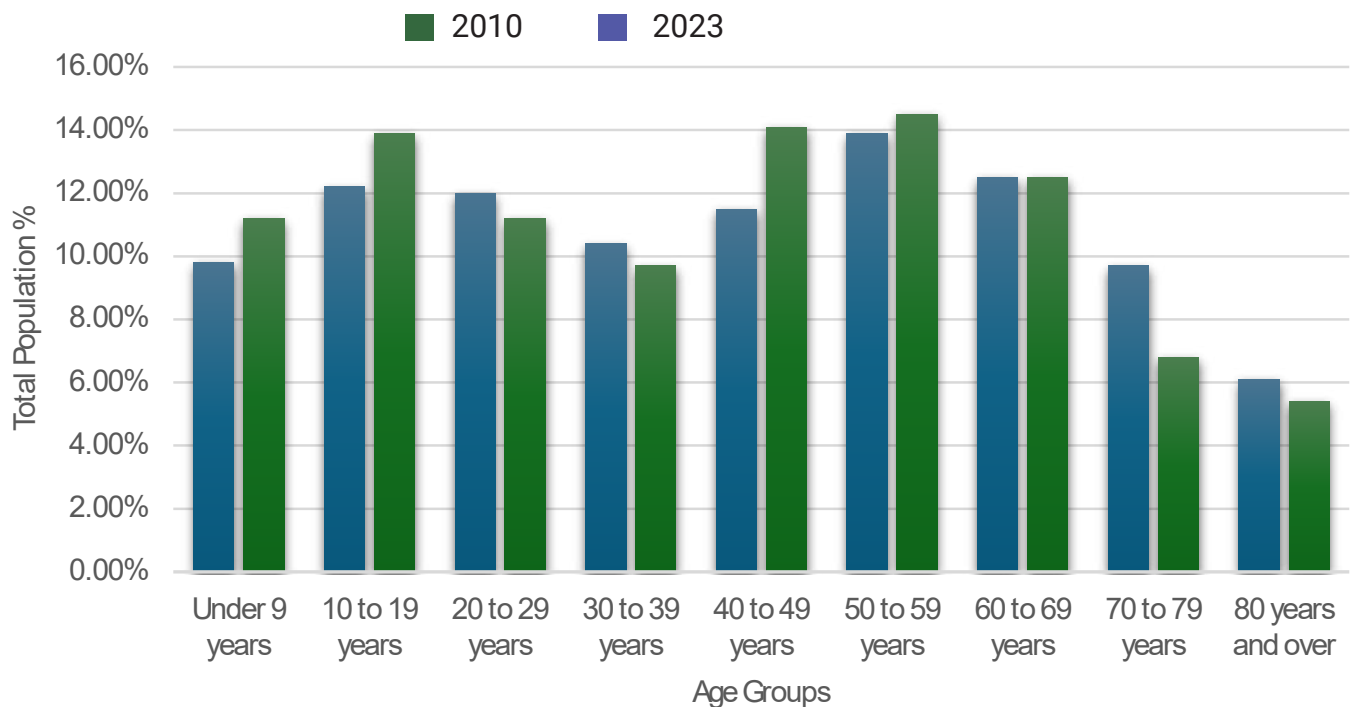
Demographic Snapshot

Age Distribution (Population Pyramid)

Mercer County’s population is growing older, with fewer young residents and a larger share of older adults. Only about 9% of the population is under age 9, while nearly 28% is over the age of 60 including more than 6% over age 80. The largest single age group is residents aged 50 to 59, who make up approximately 14% of the total population.

This demographic distribution creates a wide “end” in the County’s age pyramid – a clear sign of an aging community. Mercer’s median age of 44.5 years stands well above the Pennsylvania median (41.1) and the national figure (39.2), underscoring the County’s distinct age structure.

Why does this matter? An older population brings increased demand for healthcare, transportation, and senior services, while reducing the number of working-age residents. It also means a smaller school-age population, which has long-term implications for schools, housing needs, and workforce development.



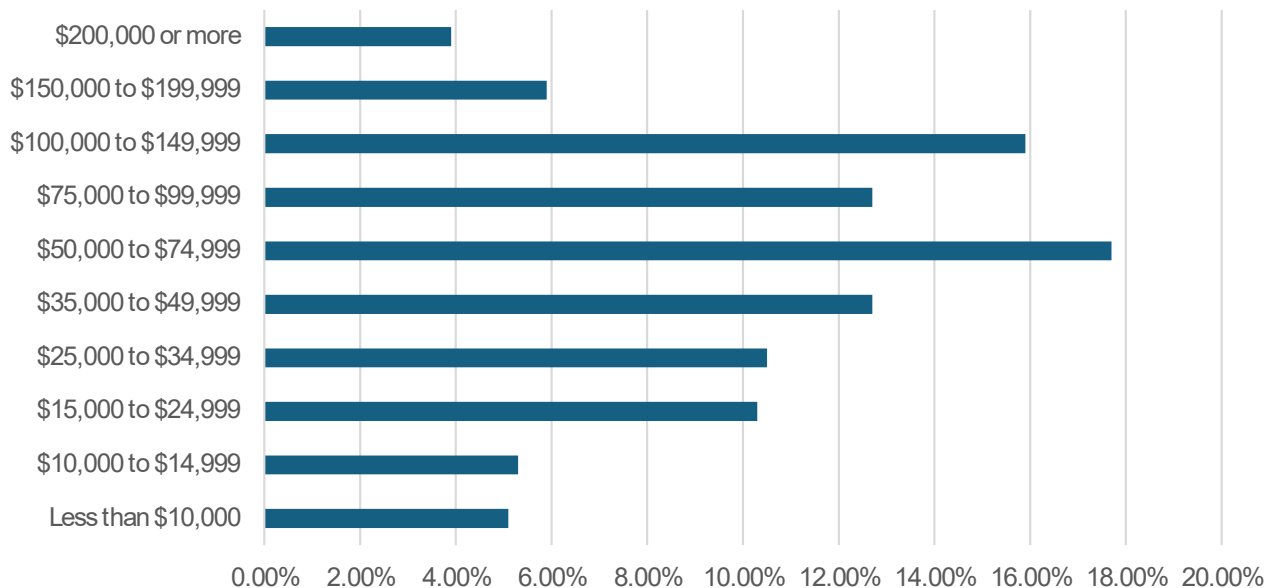
CONTEXT & PRINCIPLES

Demographic Snapshot

Household Income Distribution

Mercer County households tend to fall within moderate income brackets. The largest share (about 18%) earns between \$50,000 and \$74,999 annually, while only around 9% report incomes above \$100,000. The County’s median household income is approximately \$61,669 (ACS 2023), which is roughly 80% of the Pennsylvania state median.

Income distribution in Mercer County skews toward the middle class. However, more than a quarter of households earn less than \$35,000 per year, suggesting a substantial segment faces economic challenges despite overall affordability. Very high earners remain relatively uncommon compared to state and national averages. Income levels shape everything from local housing demand to consumer spending to municipal tax revenues. A lower median income may limit access to market-rate housing and reduce household financial flexibility.



Poverty Consideration

Roughly 14–15% of individuals in Mercer County live below the federal poverty line. This underscores the need for supportive services, diverse housing options, and economic development strategies aimed at raising income levels across the board.

Demographic Snapshot

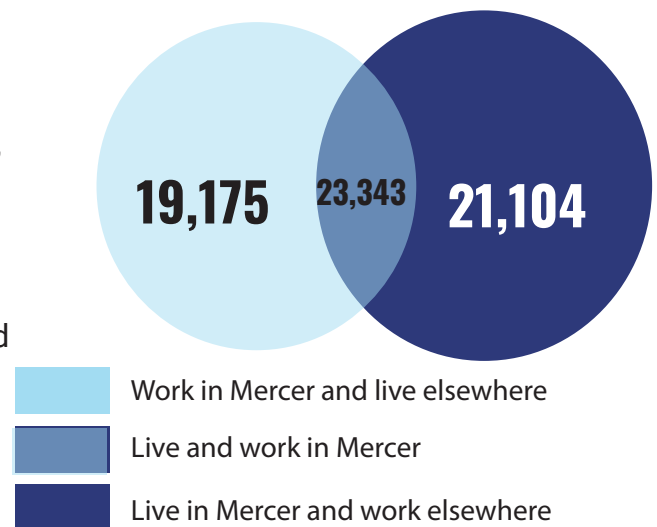
Mercer County's Workforce and Employment Landscape

Mercer County's labor market is closely connected to the surrounding region, reflecting its role within a broader regional economy. Of the County's 42,518 jobs, nearly half (45%) are filled by workers who live outside Mercer County, while about 21,000 residents commute elsewhere for work. This two-way commuting pattern highlights the importance of strong regional partnerships, transportation connections, and workforce development strategies.

Major employment sectors include health care and social assistance, manufacturing, retail trade, accommodation and food services, and education.

Educationally, about 90% of residents over age 25 have completed high school and 22% hold a bachelor's degree or higher—slightly below statewide averages—indicating opportunities to expand workforce training and strengthen local employment pipelines.

45% of people who work each day in Mercer live elsewhere.



Highest Number of Jobs in Mercer County by Business/ Industry Type	2022		2010	
	Number	%	Number	%
Manufacturing	8,280	19.5%	7,344	16.3%
Health Care & Social Assistance	8,206	19.4%	10,146	22.6%
Retail Trade	5,350	12.6%	6,337	14.1%
Accommodation and Food Services	3,658	8.6%	3,652	8.1%
Educational Services	3,654	8.6%	4,398	9.8%
Public Administration	1,738	4.1%	1,593	3.5%
Finance and Insurance	1,691	4.0%	1,535	3.4%
Construction	1,591	3.7%	1,327	3%
Other Services (excluding Public Administration)	1,563	3.7%	1,317	2.9%

This table shows the principal types top number of businesses and industries in the County for the most current year available (2022) and the last decade (2010).

CONTEXT & PRINCIPLES

Demographic Snapshot

Housing Trends in Mercer

As of the 2020 Census, Mercer County contained approximately 51,200 housing units – a decline from the 52,500 recorded in 2010, amounting to a net loss of more than 1,300 homes. This decline mirrors the County’s broader population decrease over the past several decades and reflects a combination of demolition, abandonment, and the conversion of older units, along with limited new residential construction.

The County’s housing stock is also aging. A substantial portion of homes were built before 1980, with peak development occurring in the 1950s and 1960s. Over the last two decades (2000–2020), housing construction has been minimal, leaving a relatively small supply of new or modern units available. This poses concerns for affordability, accessibility, and housing quality—especially for first-time homebuyers, aging residents, and families seeking energy-efficient options.

Future strategies must prioritize housing rehabilitation, reinvestment in existing neighborhoods, and the expansion of housing choices across all income levels. These recommendations are explored in greater detail in the *Mercer County*

27%

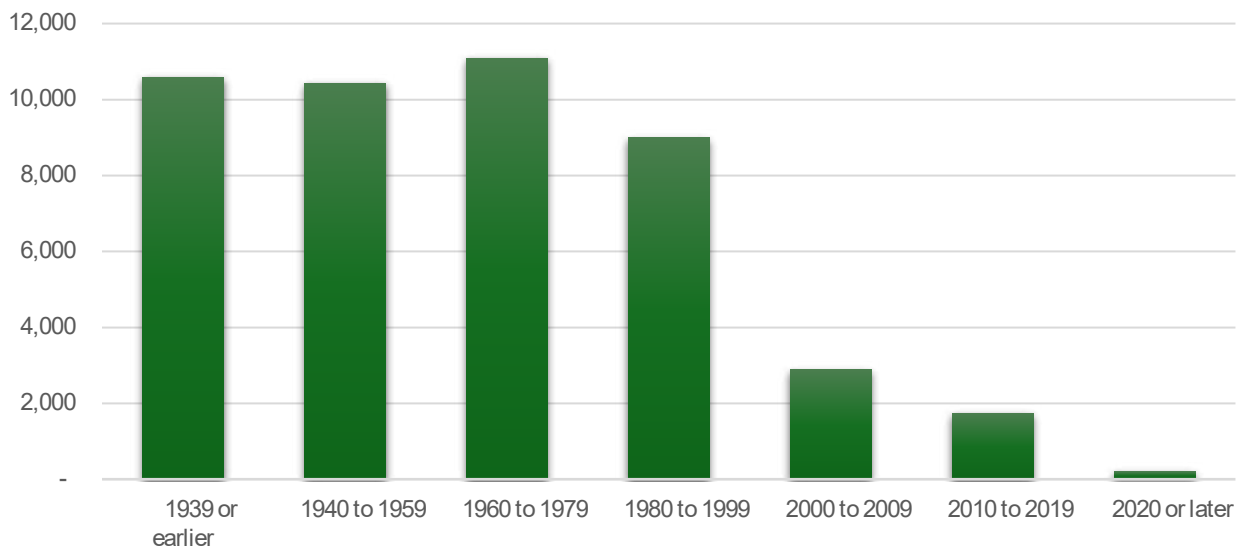
of Mercer County’s homes are renter-occupied.

73%

of Mercer County’s homes were constructed prior to 1980.

9%

of Mercer County’s total housing units are vacant.

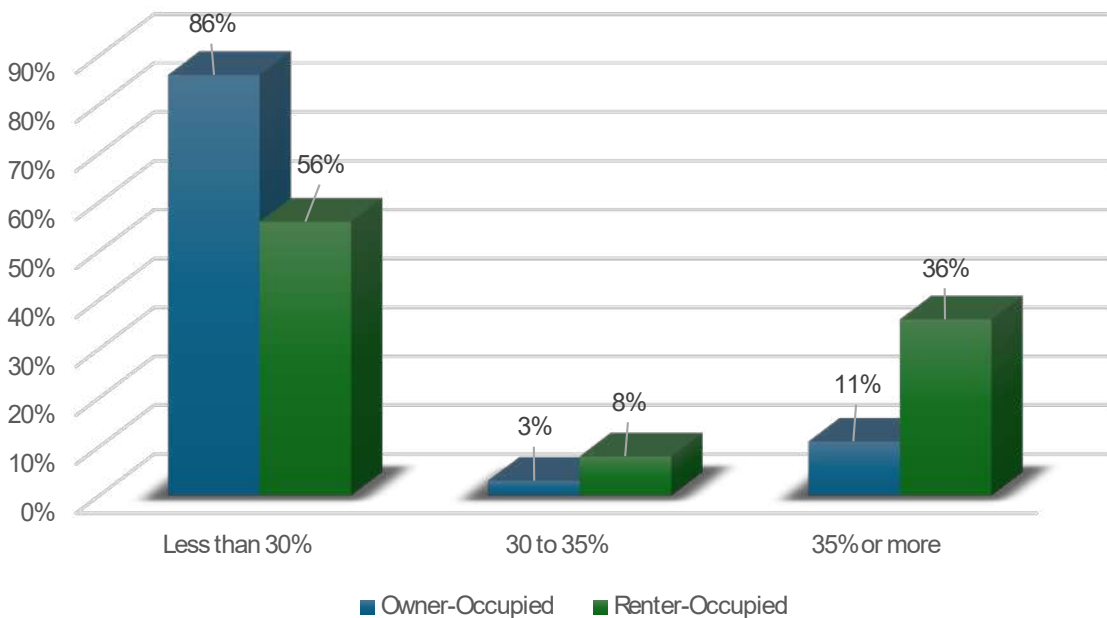


Demographic Snapshot

Housing Costs in Mercer County

Housing in Mercer County remains relatively affordable compared to state and national averages. The median home value is approximately \$153,600, well below Pennsylvania’s statewide median of around \$220,000. Rental prices are also modest, with a median gross rent of about \$808 per month, including utilities. These price points make Mercer County one of the more accessible housing markets in the region, particularly for first-time homebuyers and cost-conscious renters.

However, affordability alone doesn’t guarantee availability. While many residents may be able to afford housing at these levels, there is a noticeable shortage of move-in-ready homes and quality rental units, particularly those suited to smaller households, seniors, and lower-income families. Nearly 40% of renters are considered cost-burdened, spending more than 30% of their income on housing. This pressure is compounded by limited new construction and an aging housing stock that may no longer meet expectations for efficiency, accessibility, or safety. These conditions point to the need for targeted strategies that address both the affordability gap and inventory shortage, ensuring that Mercer County’s housing supply matches the needs of its evolving population.



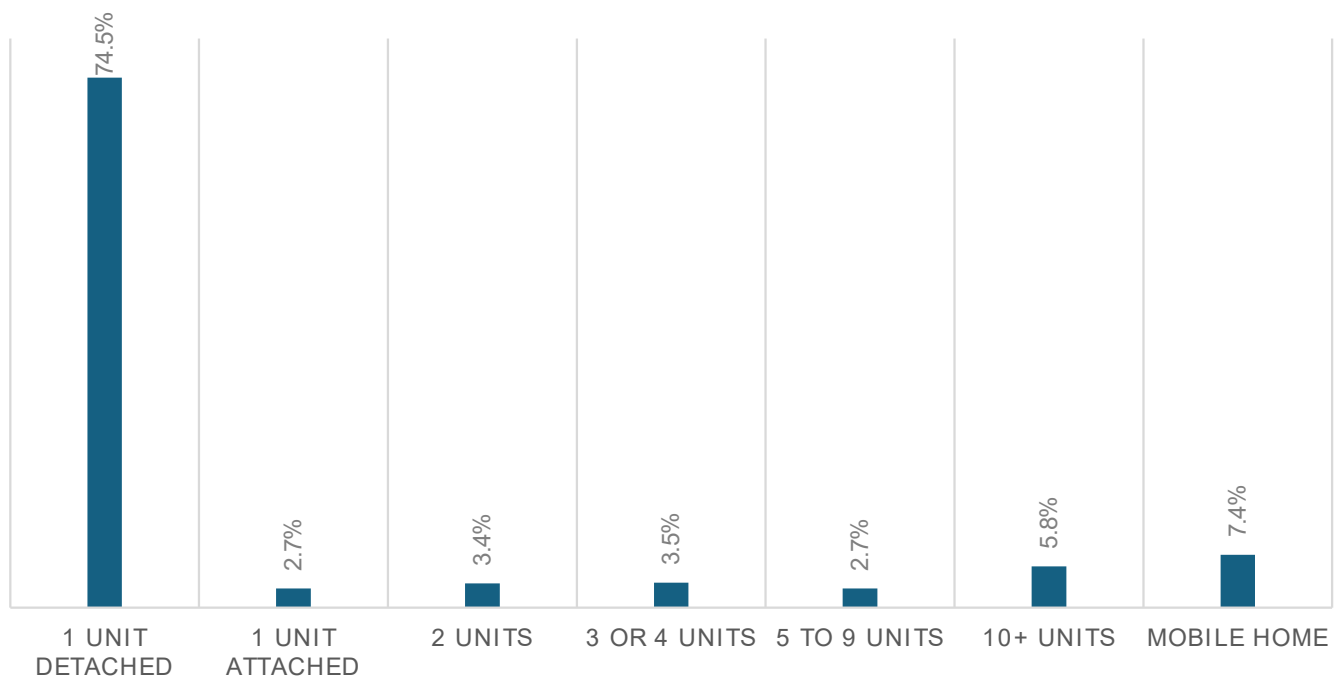
CONTEXT & PRINCIPLES

Demographic Snapshot

Housing Types in Mercer County

Mercer County's housing stock is overwhelmingly made up of single-family detached homes, which comprise 74.5% of all residential units. This reflects the County's suburban and rural roots, where standalone homes on individual lots remain the norm and offer residents privacy, space, and access to outdoor areas.

Other housing types exist but in smaller proportions. Attached single-family homes account for just 2.7%, while small multifamily structures – such as duplexes and triplexes – represent a combined 6.9% of units (including 3.4% in 2-unit buildings and 3.5% in buildings with 3–4 units). Larger apartment complexes (5+ units) make up 8.5% of the stock, with 2.7% in 5–9 unit buildings and 5.8% in buildings with 10 or more units. These denser housing formats are primarily found in urban communities like Sharon, Farrell, Hermitage, and Grove City. Mobile homes and manufactured housing comprise a meaningful 7.4% of the overall housing mix, particularly in the County's more rural townships. While often a more affordable option, these homes may face issues related to aging infrastructure, accessibility, or zoning constraints.

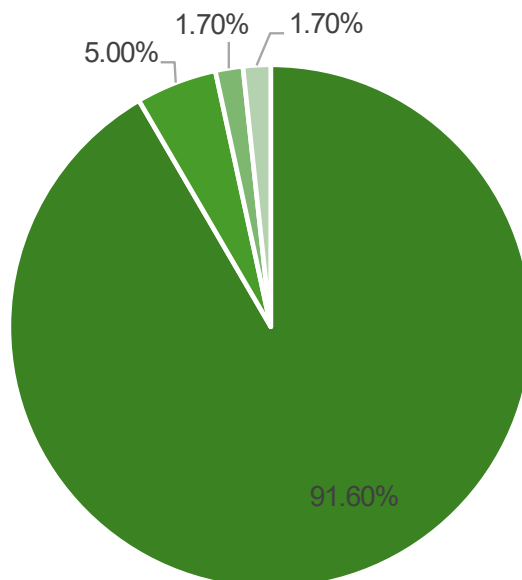


Demographic Snapshot

Residential Stability and Mobility

Mercer County residents tend to be highly stable. According to the latest Census data, more than 91% of residents aged one year and older lived in the same home as the previous year. Only about 5% moved within the county, while roughly 1.7% relocated from another county in Pennsylvania, and another 1.7% moved from out of state. This stability reflects strong community ties but also highlights the importance of attracting and retaining new residents, particularly younger households and workforce talent.

Long-term residency patterns reinforce this trend. The 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates indicate that 55% of households have lived in the same home since 2009 or earlier, including more than 18% who moved in before 1990, while only about 6.7% relocated in 2021 or later. Limited housing turnover can restrict the availability of homes for new households entering the market.



To maintain stable neighborhoods while welcoming future residents, Mercer County should expand the range of housing options. Supporting smaller homes, workforce housing, and rental opportunities can help older residents downsize while opening existing homes to younger households and new workers. Rehabilitation of existing housing and infill development can further strengthen neighborhoods while increasing housing availability.

CONTEXT & PRINCIPLES

Plan Foundations: Vision and Focus Areas

Purpose of the Vision and Focus Areas

Every successful plan begins with a shared vision – a clear expression of where a community wants to go and what values should guide that journey. Mercer County’s vision was shaped through extensive input from residents, stakeholders, and community leaders. It captures the County’s aspirations for the future, reflecting a desire for resilience, opportunity, and innovation.

To turn this vision into action, the plan identifies **five (5) Focus Areas** – priority objectives where targeted actions can make the greatest impact. These areas reflect recurring themes that emerged during community outreach and data analysis and they are illustrated on the following page. Each Focus Area includes a high-level goal supported by specific objectives and action steps designed to address real challenges and unlock new opportunities.

Together, the vision and focus areas serve as the strategic foundation of this plan – a framework to help Mercer County align its investments, policies, and partnerships over the next decade and beyond.

Mercer County’s Vision

Mercer County envisions a vibrant future where growth is guided by our heritage and community values. Through collaboration, innovation, and smart planning, our interconnected communities will support thriving downtowns, sustainable industries, accessible housing, quality infrastructure and services, and a healthy environment. By strengthening partnerships and fostering resilience, Mercer County will remain a place where current and future generations can thrive.

**VIBRANT ECONOMY
& WORKFORCE
DEVELOPMENT**

**RESILIENT
INFRASTRUCTURE
& CONNECTED
COMMUNITIES**

**THRIVING
COMMUNITIES &
ENHANCED QUALITY
OF LIFE**



1

2

3

4

5



**DIVERSE HOUSING & STRONGER
NEIGHBORHOODS**

**STEWARDSHIP OF NATURAL
RESOURCES & OUTDOOR
ASSETS**

Focus Areas



Photo Credits: VisitMercerCounty

Understanding Mercer County's Subregional Approach

Mercer County is a geographically and economically diverse place. While communities across the County share common values and goals, they also face distinct challenges based on location, development patterns, access to services, and local economic conditions. To ensure that this Comprehensive Plan reflects those differences, the planning process intentionally organized the County into five subregions:

- Northwest
- Northeast
- Center
- Southwest
- Southeast

This subregional framework emerged through outreach sessions, municipal interviews, steering committee discussions, and public surveys completed throughout the planning process. It allows the plan to speak to the unique needs of each area while reinforcing shared countywide priorities. The approach reflects the real ways Mercer County residents identify with place – not just through municipal boundaries, but through school districts, travel patterns, daily commutes, and local business networks.

Why Subregions Matter

Each area of Mercer County has distinct:

- Economic strengths and employment centers;
- Transportation connections and infrastructure conditions;
- Housing characteristics and neighborhood patterns;
- Access to rural land, recreation assets, and natural resources; and
- Demographic and workforce trends.



Photo Credits: VisitMercerCounty

Focus Areas

Understanding Mercer County's Subregional Approach

A Subregional Framework for Shared Progress

Across the planning process, residents and stakeholders identified shared priorities that resonated countywide, though implementation will vary by subregion. These priorities were informed through public engagement activities, including the countywide community survey, stakeholder interviews, focus groups, public workshops, and Steering Committee input (see *Appendices*).

In the Shenango Valley and larger community centers, input emphasized downtown revitalization, infrastructure reinvestment, and redevelopment of vacant or underused sites. In contrast, engagement in rural townships in the Northeast, Northwest, and Southeast subregions highlighted the need for senior housing near services, stronger support for entrepreneurship and agriculture, and targeted infrastructure expansion to sustain small and home-based businesses. Workforce development priorities also differed by context—urban areas focused on site readiness and redevelopment, while rural communities emphasized apprenticeships, mentoring, and agribusiness innovation.

This subregional lens ensures that the recommendations in this plan are adaptable, scalable, and responsive to place. It reinforces a shared countywide vision — one rooted in collaboration, stewardship, and community pride — while recognizing that each part of Mercer County will contribute to achieving that vision in ways that reflect its own strengths, challenges, and opportunities.

The following pages include color-coded icons to show priority levels by subregion—**red for high, yellow for medium, and green for lower** priorities. This visual guide ensures strategies that reflect each area's needs and opportunities.

Each Focus Area also includes a **Catalytic Objective**—a key initiative with the potential to create lasting, Countywide impact. These will be further detailed in the Implementation Chapter with supporting actions, funding sources, timelines, etc.



HIGH PRIORITY

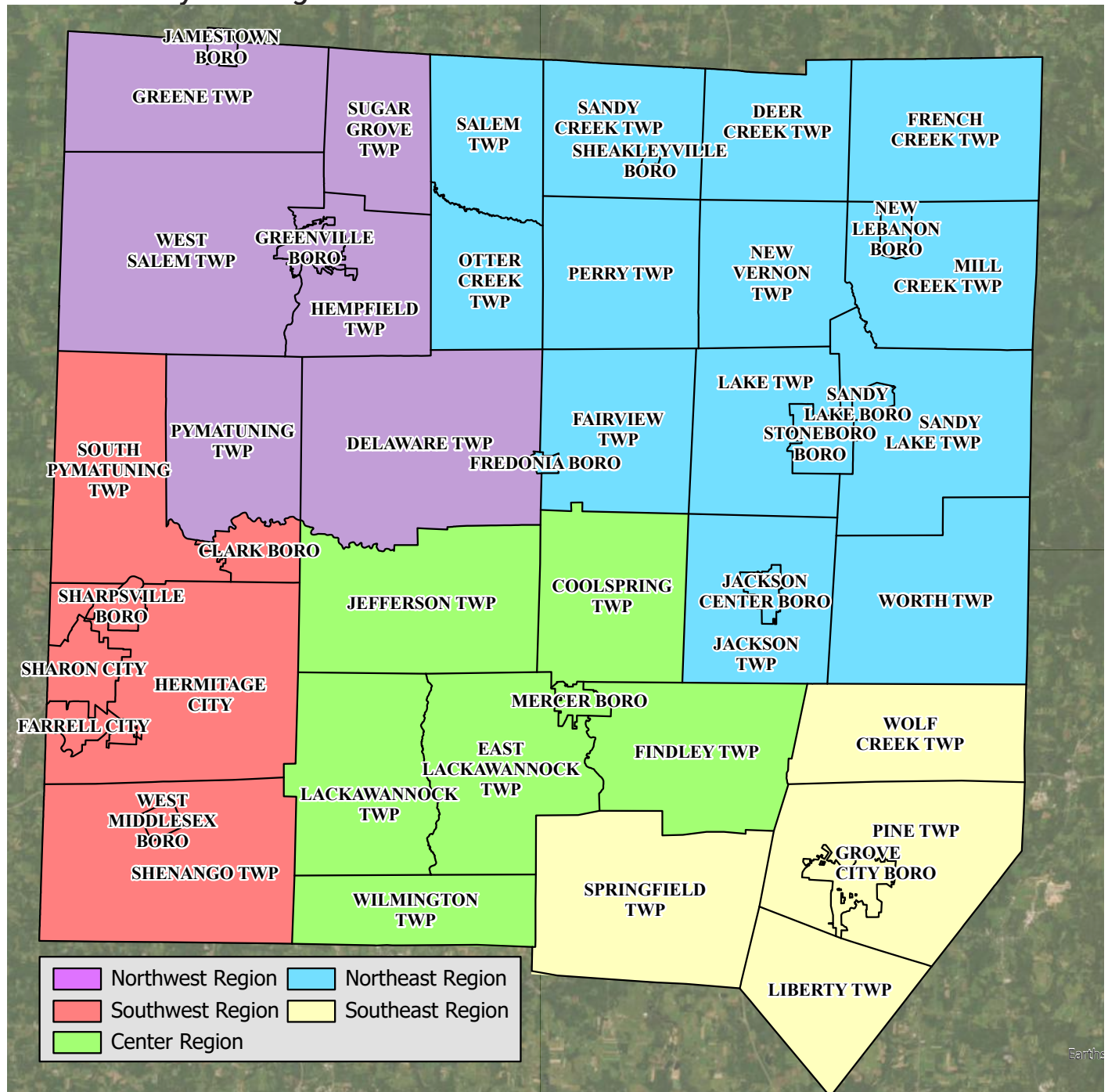


MEDIUM PRIORITY



LOW PRIORITY

Mercer County Sub-Regions



VIBRANT ECONOMY & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

**GOAL: GROW A DIVERSE ECONOMY THAT
RETAINS YOUTH, SUPPORTS BUSINESSES,
AND CREATES GOOD-PAYING JOBS.**

Mercer County's economic future depends on supporting the businesses and industries that are already here while preparing for new opportunities. The County's economy has long been shaped by manufacturing, health care, education, logistics, and small business entrepreneurship – sectors that continue to anchor local employment. At the same time, shifting workforce demographics, an aging population, the outmigration of young people and the need to reinvest in older industrial and commercial sites are creating new challenges that require coordinated action.

Public input made it clear that residents want stronger job pathways that connect education and training to local employment, reinvestment in downtowns/ city centers and employment corridors, and more support for small and locally-owned businesses. Improving broadband and infrastructure, redeveloping underutilized and vacant properties, and preparing site-ready locations will be essential to attracting new industries and encouraging innovation.

This Focus Area centers on strengthening the workforce, supporting business growth, and reinvesting in key commercial and employment centers to ensure that Mercer County remains a place where residents of all ages can build meaningful careers and where employers can grow and succeed.



Photo Credits: VisitMercerCounty



Photo Credits: Mercer County

Homegrown Initiative, Regional Impact

Mercer County is home to 2,000+ businesses across sectors—from manufacturing and healthcare to logistics and tech—supported by organizations like Penn-Northwest Development Corporation and its Homegrown Initiative, which helps recruit talent and attract new residents through relocation incentives, job connections, and marketing campaigns.

Penn-Northwest plays a pivotal role in business attraction and retention, managing revolving loan funds, shovel-ready site development, and over 500 acres of land within Keystone Opportunity Zones to reduce barriers for new investment. Their team works directly with employers to facilitate permitting, incentives, and expansion strategies.

State Incentives That Power Local Growth

Mercer County businesses can tap into a wide array of Pennsylvania’s incentive programs to fuel expansion, workforce training, and job creation. From low-interest loans through the Pennsylvania Industrial Development Authority (PIDA) to job-creating tax offsets via the Manufacturing Tax Credit (MTC), these tools reduce the cost of doing business and support long-term investment.



*Photo Credits: Penn-Northwest
Development Corporation*



*Photo Credits: Penn-Northwest
Development Corporation*

OBJECTIVE 1:



SUPPORT EXISTING INDUSTRIES, ATTRACT NEW INDUSTRIES, AND REDEVELOP UNDERUTILIZED PROPERTIES FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH.

REVITALIZING THE ECONOMIC LANDSCAPE

Mercer County's next chapter of economic growth begins with reclaiming and reinventing the spaces that once powered its economy. Across the County, former industrial sites, aging commercial corridors, and underused business parks represent untapped potential ready to be brought back to life.

Strategic investment in site readiness, infrastructure, and redevelopment incentives can transform these areas into engines of innovation and opportunity—attracting modern industries, strengthening the tax base, and creating quality jobs.

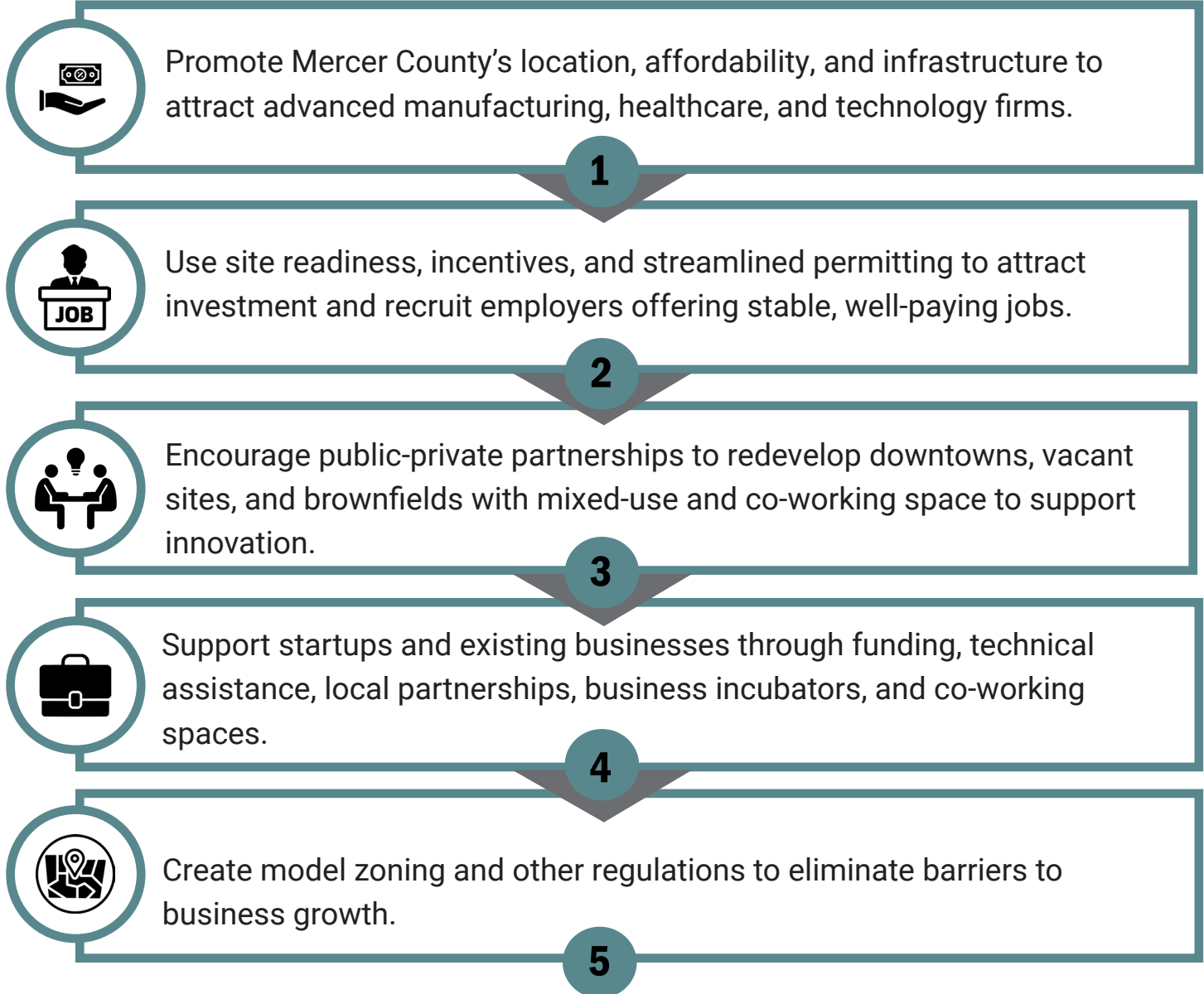
SITE READINESS AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR GROWTH

Pennsylvania's Business in Our Sites Program shows how proactive site preparation drives local investment and job creation. Communities have redeveloped vacant industrial land into shovel-ready sites, unlocking millions in private investment and attracting advanced manufacturing, logistics, and technology employers.

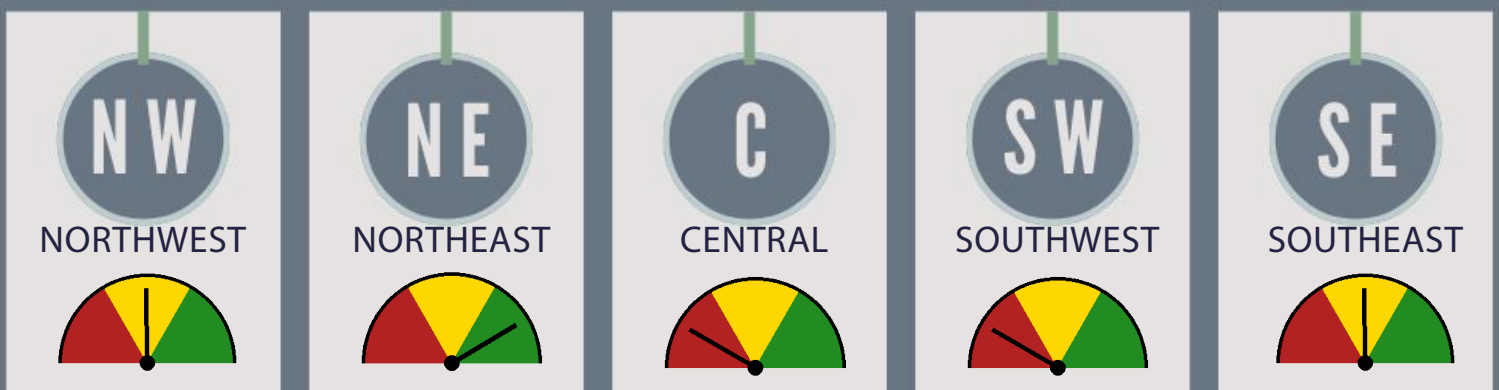
Mercer County can apply this model locally. Strategic sites like Greenville-Reynolds Industrial Park, the former Sharon Steel site, and corridors near I-80 and I-376 can be repositioned for modern industry through infrastructure upgrades, environmental remediation, and public-private partnerships.

Preparing these sites in advance by improving utilities, transportation access, and zoning flexibility, can give Mercer County a competitive edge in attracting high-value employers and expanding its economic base.

OBJECTIVE 1 KEY ACTIONS



SUB-REGIONS



OBJECTIVE 2:

SUPPORT ENTREPRENEURSHIP, LOCAL BUSINESSES, CITY CENTERS, AND DOWNTOWN VITALITY.

EMPOWERING LOCAL ENTREPRENEURS AND SMALL BUSINESSES

Mercer County's economy thrives on the creativity and grit of its entrepreneurs and small business owners. These enterprises shape downtowns, city centers, and neighborhood corridors—forming the core of local economies and community life. Supporting their growth preserves the County's unique identity and spreads prosperity region-wide.

The County and strategic partners will expand entrepreneurial resources, spur innovation, and revitalize commercial districts as hubs of commerce and culture. Linking small business owners with institutions and development groups will provide essential tools, expertise, and funding. Investments in marketing, events, programming, and infrastructure will boost foot traffic, revive main streets, and enhance competitiveness.

By fostering entrepreneurship and reinvesting in commercial corridors, Mercer County will build a business-friendly ecosystem that drives innovation, energizes activity centers, and secures its economic foundation for future generations.

STRENGTHENING SMALL BUSINESSES THROUGH COLLABORATION

Organizations and municipalities in Mercer County are already showing how collaboration boosts local business and downtown vitality. Sharon and Hermitage have collaborated on a facade improvement program and have coordinated events drawing new investments in commercial corridors.

In Grove City and Greenville, partnerships among chambers of commerce, leaders, and owners have spurred new storefronts, pop-up shops, and events that begun to start reviving main streets.

Building on these examples, Mercer County can expand small business support networks and regional marketing to link entrepreneurs with resources, training, and promotion. Strengthening these partnerships will help businesses grow, encourage downtown reinvestment, and sustain the County's diverse, resilient economy.

OBJECTIVE 2 KEY ACTIONS:



Market and leverage a network of programs, diverse funding, and education to expand entrepreneurial opportunities and equip small business owners with best practices for success.

1



Enhance access to capital and business expertise through microgrants, workshops, and expanded development services.

2



Coordinate regional shop-local campaigns, small business fairs, and other events to drive foot traffic.

3



Foster a business-friendly climate that encourages reinvestment and revitalization in commercial corridors.

4

SUB-REGIONS



NORTHWEST



NORTHEAST



CENTRAL



SOUTHWEST



SOUTHEAST



OBJECTIVE 3:

BUILD A SKILLED WORKFORCE AND RETAIN YOUTH THROUGH CAREER PATHWAYS AND TRAINING.

PREPARING A SKILLED WORKFORCE FOR THE FUTURE

Mercer County's economic success relies on preparing a workforce for current and future industries. Employers cite workforce shortages as a top challenge. As technology evolves, education, training, and employment pathways must adapt to provide residents with needed skills, certifications, and resources.

Partnerships between schools, training providers, employers, and workforce organizations are key to aligning education with demand. Expanding vocational training, apprenticeships, and internships will equip students and job seekers for high-demand fields like manufacturing, health care, logistics, and skilled trades.

Improving transportation, childcare, and broadband access removes participation barriers. Investing in people helps retain talent, support lifelong learning, attract employers, grow businesses, and ensure residents have pathways to meaningful, well-paying work.

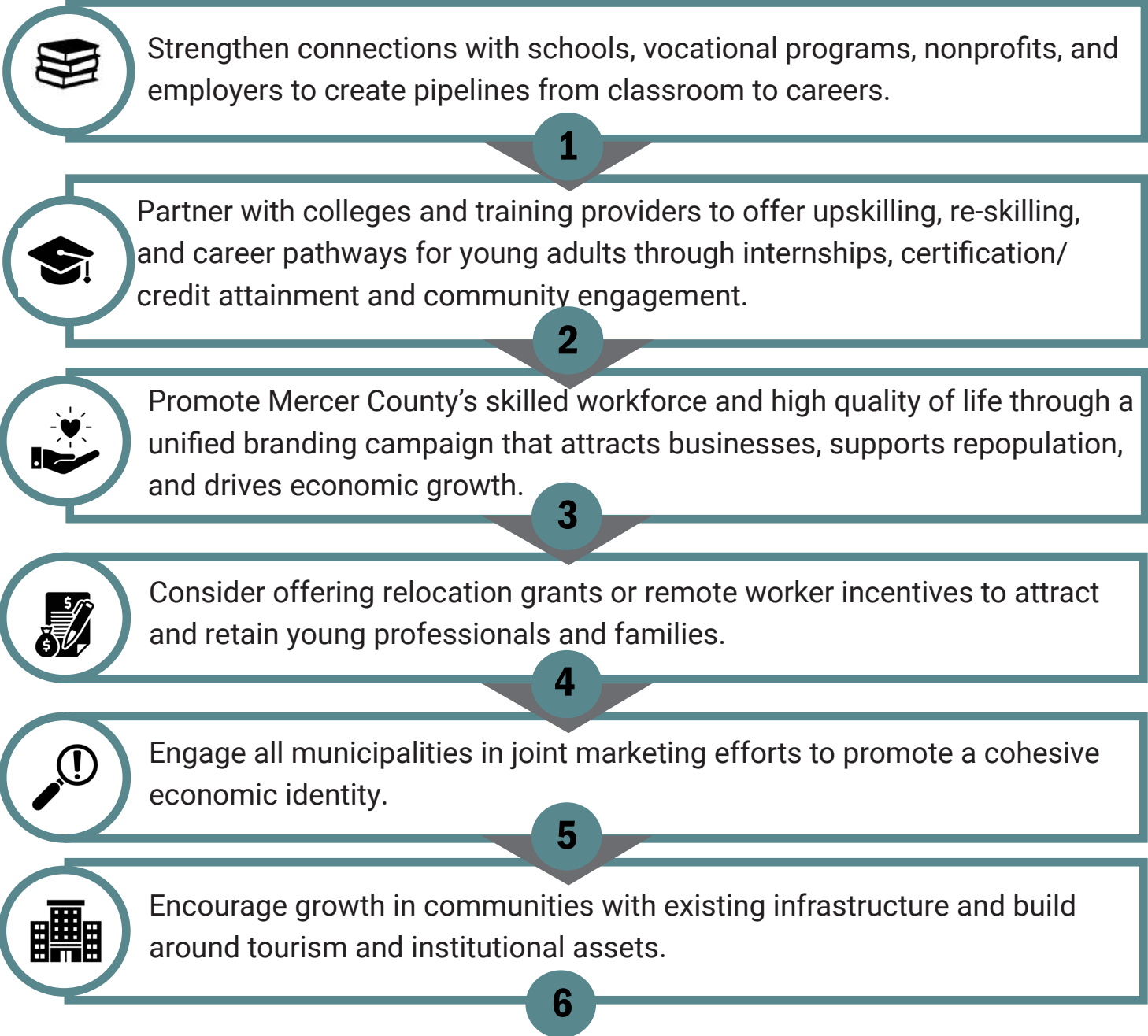
PREPARING FOR THE JOBS OF TOMORROW

Technology is reshaping industries, and Mercer County is preparing its workforce with innovative training and hands-on learning. Institutions like Mercer County Career Center, Laurel Technical Institute, PA Cybersecurity Center, and higher education partners are expanding programs in advanced manufacturing, health care, and logistics.

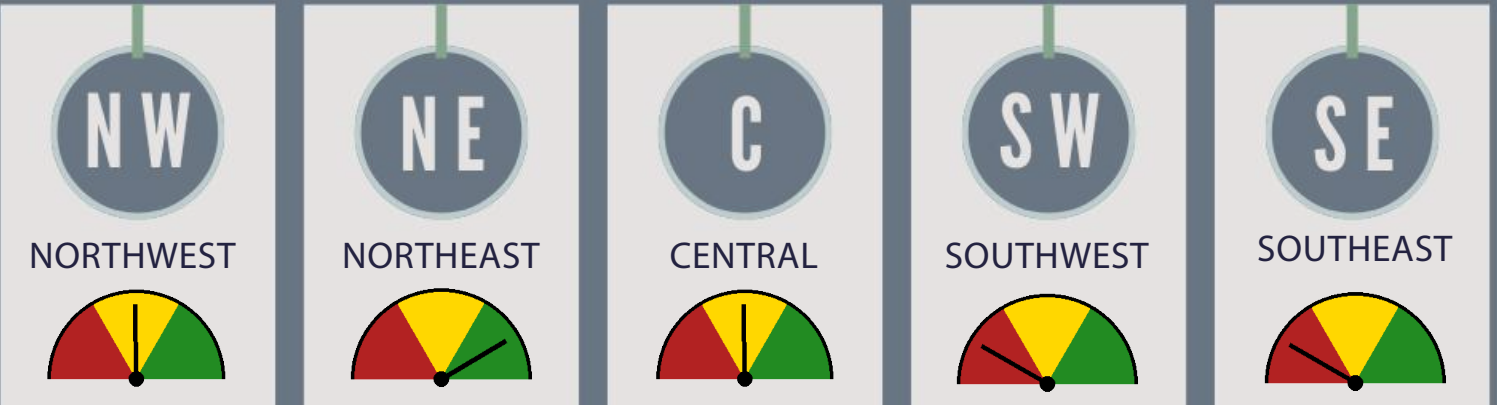
One initiative helping to prepare residents for tomorrow's jobs is the Penn-Northwest Seedling Initiative. Through community partnerships and career awareness efforts geared toward K-12 students, the program introduces youth to local career paths early.

Continued support for workforce education innovation will help Mercer County adapt to industry shifts, attract new employers, and retain growing talent.

OBJECTIVE 3 KEY ACTIONS:



SUB-REGIONS



**FOCUS
AREA 2**

DIVERSE HOUSING & STRONGER NEIGHBORHOODS

**GOAL: ENSURE SAFE, ATTAINABLE,
AND VARIED HOUSING OPTIONS WHILE
REVITALIZING EXISTING NEIGHBORHOODS.**

Mercer County's future depends on providing housing that meets the needs of all residents—young professionals, families, and seniors alike—while strengthening the neighborhoods that define its communities. A healthy housing market offers variety and stability, ensuring that every household can find a home that fits their needs and budget. Across the County, demand for quality, attainable housing continues to grow as aging homes, rising development costs, and shifting demographics place new pressure on supply.

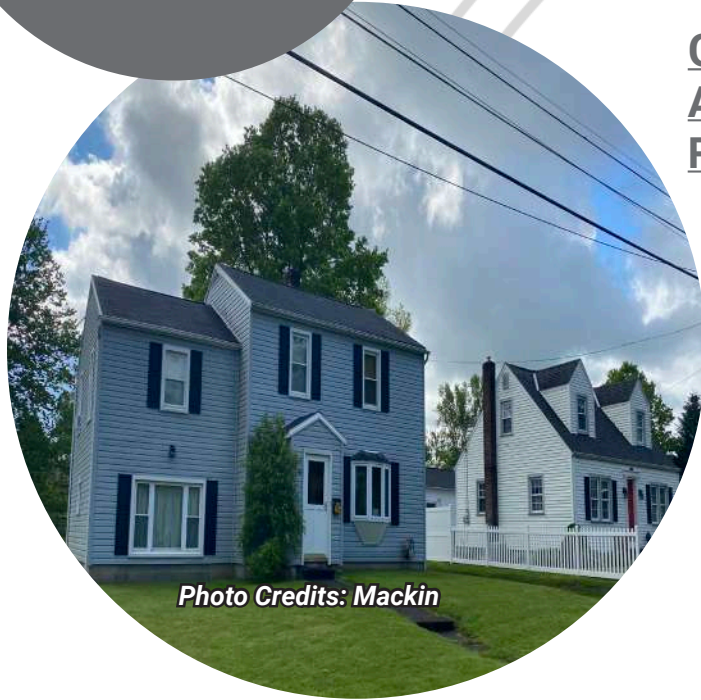


Photo Credits: Mackin

Revitalizing existing neighborhoods is equally important. Many of Mercer County's boroughs and city centers feature strong bones and historic character but face challenges related to aging housing stock, deferred maintenance, and vacancy. Reinvestment in these neighborhoods—paired with new housing options near jobs, schools, and services—can create vibrant, communities where residents choose to stay and new families want to settle.

This Focus Area expands housing choice, promotes reinvestment, and strengthens neighborhood identity across the County. These strategies align with regional and statewide initiatives, including the Northwest Commission Housing Toolkit and Pennsylvania's Statewide Housing Action Plan, which support expanding housing supply, rehabilitating existing homes, and improving access to attainable housing.



Photo Credits: Mackin

Housing Snapshot: Understanding Mercer County's Evolving Needs

The Mercer County Housing Study, conducted as part of this Comprehensive Plan, highlights growing gaps between current housing supply and resident needs. Among the key takeaways:

- **Mismatch in Housing Types:** While over 70% of the county's housing stock is single-family detached homes, demand is rising for multi-family units, accessible one-story homes, and rental options that better serve seniors, young professionals, and low-income households.
- **Ageing Housing Stock:** Nearly half of homes were built before 1960, with many in need of repair or modernization, especially in older neighborhoods and boroughs.
- **Affordability Pressure:** One in four renters is cost-burdened, paying more than 30% of their income on housing costs. At the same time, many households earn too much to qualify for housing assistance, yet too little to afford market-rate options. Further, the costs to develop new housing stock often requires a price that exceeds what the market will bear.
- **Low Vacancy, Limited Options:** Mercer's low rental vacancy rate (estimated at 3.9%) signals a constrained market, especially for new or updated rental units in desirable areas.

These findings reinforce the need to expand and diversify housing options, revitalize existing homes, and promote development that aligns with the county's demographic and economic shifts. *The Full Housing Study is available in the Appendices.*



Different housing typologies across Mercer County - Photo Credits: Mackin

OBJECTIVE 1:

EXPAND AND DIVERSIFY HOUSING OPTIONS FOR RESIDENTS OF ALL AGES AND INCOME LEVELS.

EXPANDING HOUSING CHOICE FOR A CHANGING COUNTY

Mercer County's housing landscape is changing due to shifts in population, household size, and lifestyle. Providing safe, attainable, high-quality housing for all ages and incomes is key to long-term vitality. A balanced market with diverse ownership and rental options across urban, suburban, and rural areas will retain residents, attract families, and support the workforce.

With an aging population and younger residents seeking affordable, modern options, demand grows for varied housing types like single-family homes, townhouses, apartments, and mixed-use developments. New investment should enhance existing community character while offering real living choices.

REINVESTING IN HOUSING FOR EVERY GENERATION

Mercer County communities are expanding housing choices while respecting neighborhood character. In Sharon, upper-story apartments and adaptive-reuse projects are bringing residents back downtown. In Hermitage, modest housing growth and ongoing neighborhood investments including over \$1.5 million in 2025 are helping maintain strong, stable neighborhoods.

Greenville, Grove City, and Mercer are other examples of advancing neighborhood reinvestment and small-scale infill housing that fits existing streetscapes. Modernizing older homes and converting vacant buildings creates quality residences.

Encouraging development that preserves neighborhood identity, with targeted reinvestment near community centers, downtowns, and infrastructure corridors, promotes walkability and efficiency. Coordinated planning and collaboration will expand housing opportunities while maintaining Mercer County's distinctive, desirable communities.

These strategies meet needs across life stages, provide attainable choices, and revitalize neighborhoods, keeping Mercer County vibrant, welcoming, and sustainable for future generations.

OBJECTIVE 1 KEY ACTIONS:



Develop zoning best practices to encourage various housing.

1



Encourage new housing through various incentives, reduced regulatory barriers, and public-private partnerships.

2



Collaborate with developers and local governments to facilitate high-priority projects, with a focus on multi-family and mixed-use development in strategic locations.

3



Promote accessible one-story homes and senior housing to support aging in place and mobility.

4



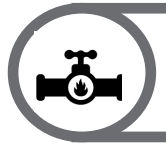
Encourage family housing near communities poised to grow.

5



Support housing within and surrounding downtown districts.

6



Encourage sewer and utility expansion in areas suitable for housing development

7

SUB-REGIONS



NORTHWEST



NORTHEAST



CENTRAL



SOUTHWEST



SOUTHEAST



OBJECTIVE 2:



REVITALIZE BLIGHTED PROPERTIES AND STRENGTHEN NEIGHBORHOOD CONDITIONS.

REVITALIZING NEIGHBORHOODS AND RECLAIMING BLIGHTED PROPERTIES

Revitalizing Mercer County's neighborhoods is key to sustaining community character and livability. Many areas have strong identity but face disinvestment, aging housing, and vacancy. Reversing these trends creates stability, restores pride, and ensures safe, welcoming places to live.

This has been identified as a **catalytic objective**, as reinvestment in neighborhoods can spark broader economic and social benefits across the region. Addressing blight, reinvigorating older housing, and reactivating vacant properties can have a compounding effect—encouraging nearby investment, attracting new residents, and improving quality of life for those who already call these places home.

Success requires collaboration among governments, organizations, and private partners to strengthen housing, modernize homes, and reuse properties. Sustained reinvestment will transform neighborhoods into resilient, thriving communities reflecting Mercer County's heritage and future.

LAND BANKING AS THE BACKBONE FOR NEIGHBORHOOD RENEWAL

Many of Pennsylvania's communities use Land Banks to control abandoned properties and create opportunities. In Erie County, the Erie Land Bank acquires, cleans, and repurposes vacant lots and derelict buildings for housing, green space, and redevelopment.

This effort reduces blight, improves safety, and restores confidence in disinvested areas. Mercer County can follow suit by building a framework to reposition neglected properties for productive use.

By creating a system to manage and redevelop blighted parcels such as a Land Bank, the County can help municipalities take proactive steps to strengthen their housing markets and revitalize the communities that form the heart of Mercer County.

OBJECTIVE 2 KEY ACTIONS:



Provide a toolkit for municipalities to use to build a robust blight elimination program for renovating or removing vacant and dilapidated structures.

1



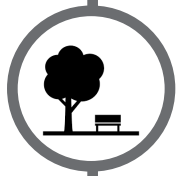
Support code enforcement and landlord accountability to improve housing safety and appearance.

2



Support rehabilitation loans and grants to help homeowners and landlords repair aging homes and rental units.

3



Develop a County land bank to reposition abandoned properties for new housing, parks, or community spaces.

4



Collaborate with experienced housing and neighborhood revitalization organizations (such as the YNDC) to leverage existing resources and best practices.

5

SUB-REGIONS



NORTHWEST



NORTHEAST



CENTRAL



SOUTHWEST



SOUTHEAST



OBJECTIVE 3:

IMPROVE NEIGHBORHOOD QUALITY AND INCREASE ATTAINABLE HOUSING.

STRENGTHENING NEIGHBORHOOD LIVABILITY THROUGH HOUSING OPPORTUNITY

Mercer County must remain welcoming for all ages and incomes to sustain growth and strong communities. Residents need attainable, high-quality housing that fits diverse lifestyles and price points while preserving neighborhood character and stability.

Improving neighborhood quality and expanding housing attainability require consistent coordination among local governments, developers, housing organizations, and community partners. By aligning efforts across the region, Mercer County can make better use of available resources and ensure that investment benefits all areas of the County.

Through steady reinvestment, policy alignment, and partnerships, Mercer County can strengthen its housing market and enhance quality of life for residents across the region. The result will be neighborhoods that are welcoming, resilient, and reflective of the County's enduring sense of community pride.

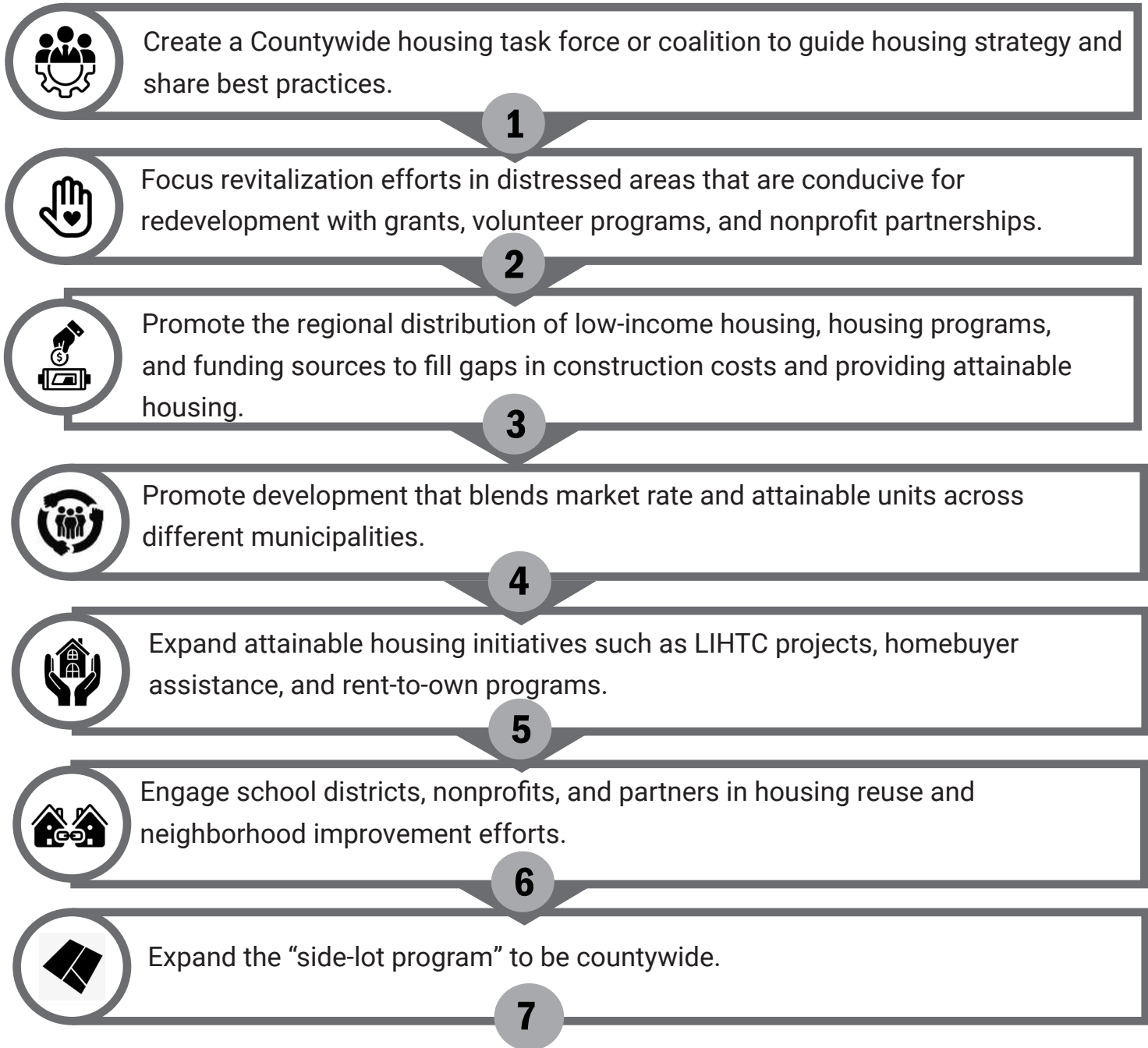
THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIP IN EXPANDING HOUSING OPPORTUNITY

Strong partnerships drive successful housing strategies. Local governments, developers, and community organizations together achieve more than any one alone. Regional collaboration in western PA and eastern OH expands attainable housing and improves neighborhoods.

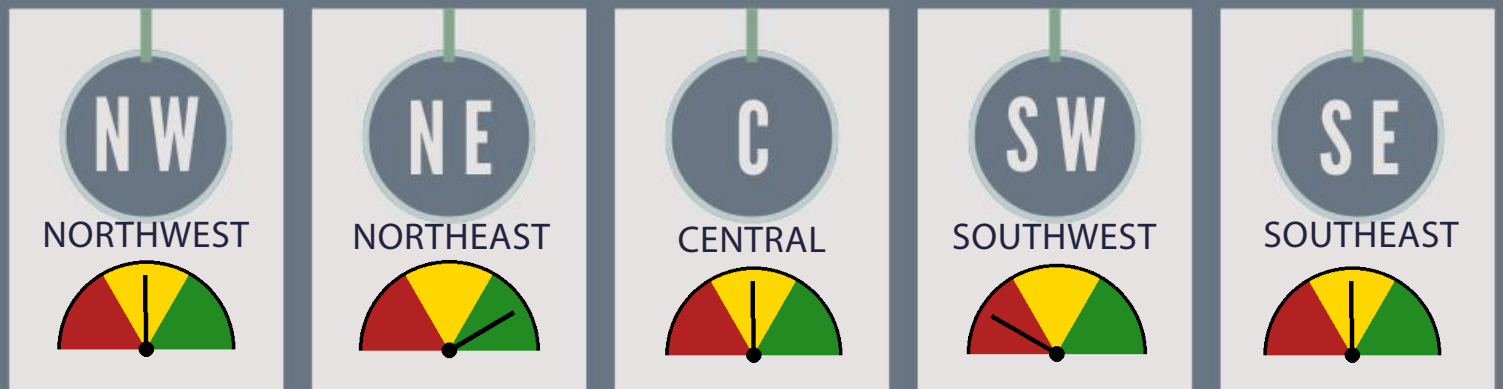
In Butler County, municipalities and nonprofits coordinate to support reinvestment and create mixed-income options in growing areas. Erie County's Land Bank and Our West Bayfront combine public funding, private investment, and engagement to transform properties into quality housing and vibrant spaces.

The Youngstown Neighborhood Development Corporation is partnering with Shenango Valley communities to assess neighborhoods and provide housing rehab services that they have scaled. The partnership may further extend to neighborhood reclamation and new construction.

OBJECTIVE 3 KEY ACTIONS:



SUB-REGIONS



**FOCUS
AREA 3**

RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURE AND CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

GOAL: BUILD THE PHYSICAL AND DIGITAL FOUNDATION THAT SUPPORTS SAFE, ACCESSIBLE, AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES.



Photo Credits: Mercer County

Reliable infrastructure is the foundation of strong communities and a vital driver of economic growth. Mercer County's transportation systems, utility networks, and broadband connections are essential to daily life that support residents, businesses, and institutions across both urban and rural areas. Maintaining and upgrading these systems ensures that Mercer County remains accessible, competitive, and prepared for future growth.

However, infrastructure challenges are becoming increasingly complex. Many roadways, bridges, and utility systems are aging, while extreme weather events and flooding are testing the limits of stormwater infrastructure. Broadband access also remains uneven, particularly in rural parts of the County, limiting opportunities for remote work, online education, and business expansion. Addressing these issues requires coordinated investment and forward-looking planning that links infrastructure improvements with community goals.

This Focus Area works to strengthen the County's physical and digital connections by prioritizing infrastructure that is modern, efficient, and resilient. By aligning transportation, utility, and broadband investments with sustainable land use practices, Mercer County can enhance safety, support economic development, and ensure that every community—large or small—is connected to opportunity.



*Photo Credits: Short Span
Steel Bridge Alliance*

Strengthening Connections Across Mercer County

Resilient and connected communities rely on infrastructure that keeps people moving, supports economic growth, and adapts to changing needs. Across Mercer County, a range of projects and partnerships are already laying the groundwork for smarter, more coordinated infrastructure investments. These examples demonstrate how the goals of this plan are already being put into motion.

- **Mercer County's Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)**, led by AECOM, complements this Comprehensive Plan. It assesses existing systems, identifies future mobility needs, and sets long-term investment priorities for roadways, transit, pedestrians, and trails which directly aligns with the priorities of this planning process.
- **Hermitage Broadband Expansion:** Omni Fiber has installed a new fiber-optic network in Hermitage, concentrating on denser neighborhoods and expanding available internet service options. The network provides higher-speed connectivity for households and small businesses.
- **Old Mercer Road Bridge Replacement:** The purpose of this project is to provide an efficient vehicle crossing of Old Mercer Road over Neshannock Creek in East Lackawannock Township.
- **Grove City Sidewalk and Streetscape Upgrades:** Recent improvements in Grove City's core have enhanced pedestrian access, ADA compliance, and public realm design, creating a more walkable and inviting environment.
- **Route 18 Upgrades:** This included a realignment of Route 4006 on the east side to be directly opposite the west side. Other work included safety improvements at all corners of the intersection, as well as drainage upgrades, milling, paving, sign updates, and pavement markings.
- **Sharon/Hermitage Sidewalk Project:** This extends pedestrian connections along East State Street from downtown Sharon to Route 18, with a link to the Hickory Fields development.
- **PennDOT Connects Program:** Mercer County municipalities are using PennDOT Connects to coordinate transportation projects with local planning goals. By integrating land use, community input, and transportation planning early in project development, the program helps improve safety, strengthen connections, and support long-term economic resilience.



OBJECTIVE 1:



MAINTAIN, MODERNIZE, AND EXPAND INFRASTRUCTURE TO SUPPORT GROWTH, SAFETY, AND LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY.

BUILDING A STRONG FOUNDATION FOR THE FUTURE

Reliable, modern infrastructure is vital to Mercer County's economy, safety, and quality of life. Roads, bridges, utilities, and stormwater systems connect residents to jobs, services, and each other. As they age, proactive investment ensures they meet current and future needs.

A **catalytic objective**, infrastructure modernization supports all community goals. Upgrading transportation, expanding water/sewer, and improving reliability enables growth, supports development, protects neighborhoods, and advances sustainability with green infrastructure and cost-saving technologies.

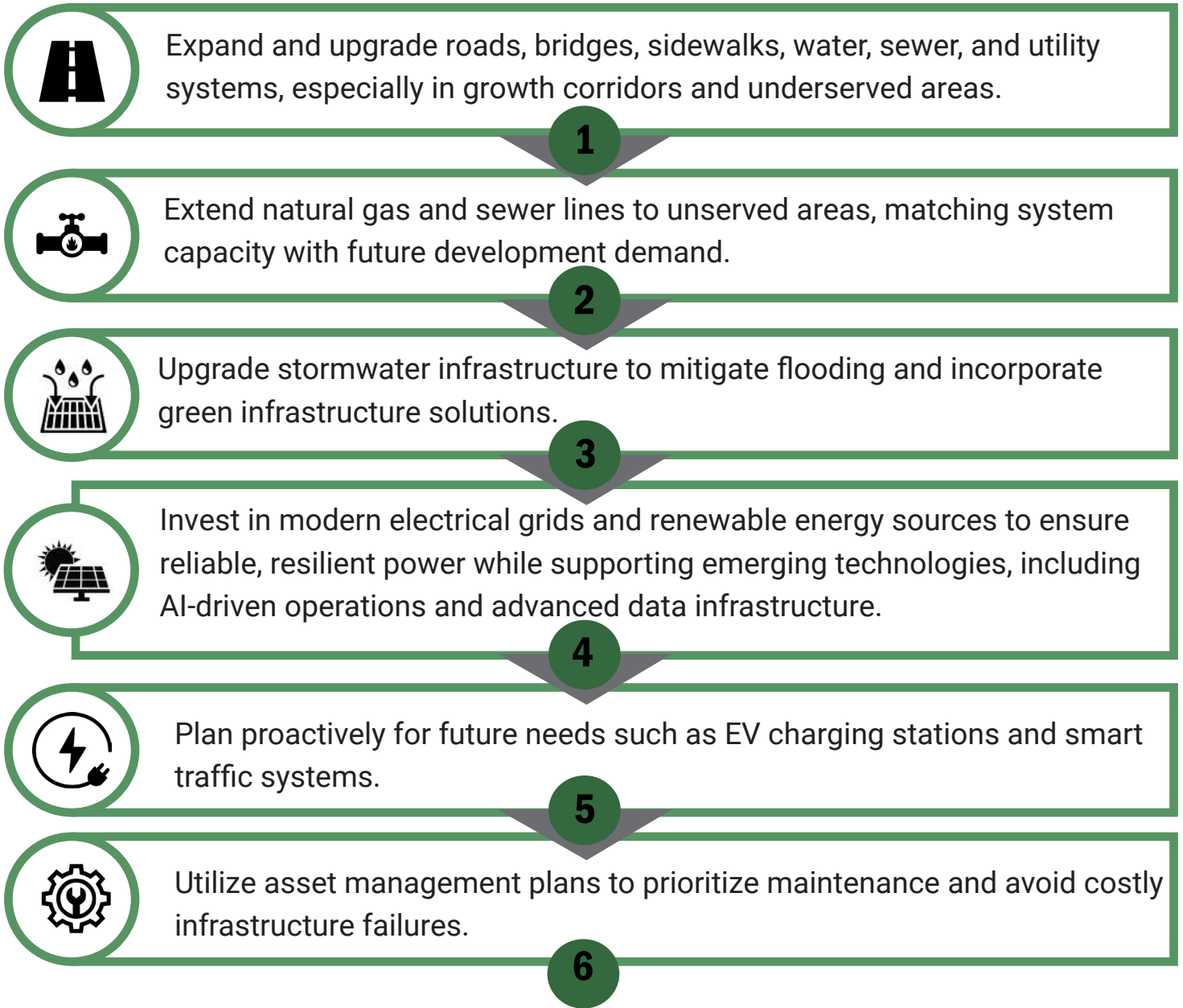
INVESTING IN SMARTER, STRONGER INFRASTRUCTURE

Proactive infrastructure planning boosts economies and quality of life. In Butler County, corridor reinvestment pairs transportation upgrades with land use planning to support safe growth, attract businesses, reduce congestion, and improve access.

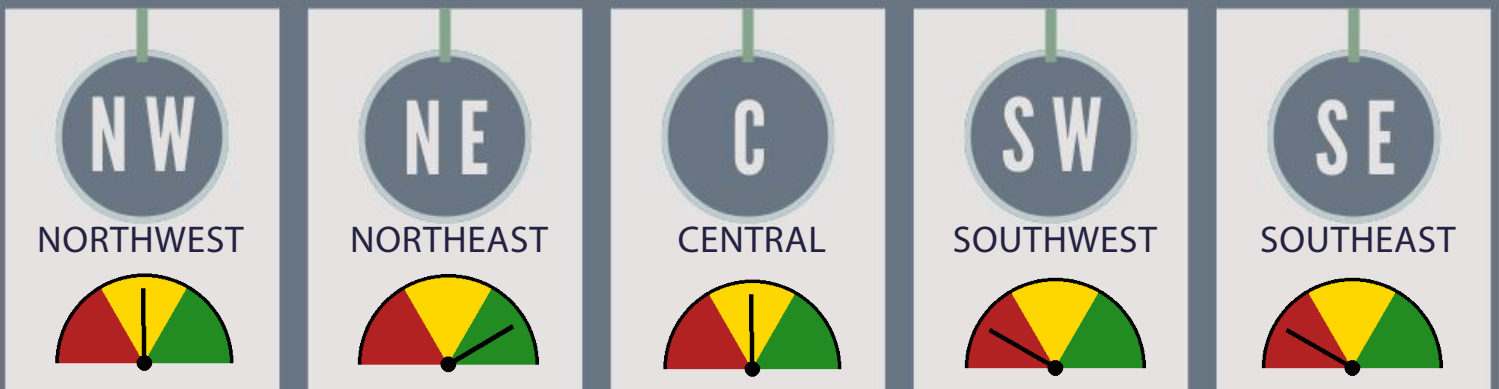
Erie County's Smart Growth initiatives integrate green infrastructure, broadband, and utility upgrades for sustainable, connected neighborhoods. Public-private-regional partnerships enhance resilience and encourage redevelopment in established areas.

Mercer County can draw on these approaches to create infrastructure systems that are both future-ready and grounded in local character.

OBJECTIVE 1 KEY ACTIONS:



SUB-REGIONS



OBJECTIVE 2:

EXPAND BROADBAND AND DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY ACROSS THE COUNTY.

CONNECTING THROUGH COMMUNITY

Reliable digital access is essential for the economy, education, and community life. Expanding broadband and cell service connects Mercer County's residents and businesses to opportunities, supporting learning, telework, entrepreneurship, healthcare, and innovation across urban and rural areas.

Mercer County's geography creates connectivity challenges, with many areas underserved by high-speed internet. This limits access to online education, telehealth, and remote work. Expanding coverage and reliability will close the digital divide, enabling all households, students, and businesses to thrive.

CLOSING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE THROUGH PARTNERSHIP

Neighboring counties are bringing reliable broadband to rural areas. In Crawford County, partnerships with private providers and the Northwest Commission have expanded high-speed internet to remote locations once seen as unviable.

Venango County uses state and federal grants to boost connectivity for residents and small businesses, improving telework, online education, and digital health access. Lawrence County employs public-private partnerships and data-driven planning to close service gaps.

These efforts prove coordinated leadership and strategic funding bridge the digital divide—enhancing quality of life, supporting economies, and ensuring all residents have access to modern tools.

OBJECTIVE 2 KEY ACTIONS:



Encourage private investment in countywide high-speed internet and cell coverage to eliminate service gaps.

1



Support public-private partnerships and grant programs to expand access to rural and low-income areas.

2



Prioritize broadband in areas with poor connectivity to support telework, education, and telehealth.

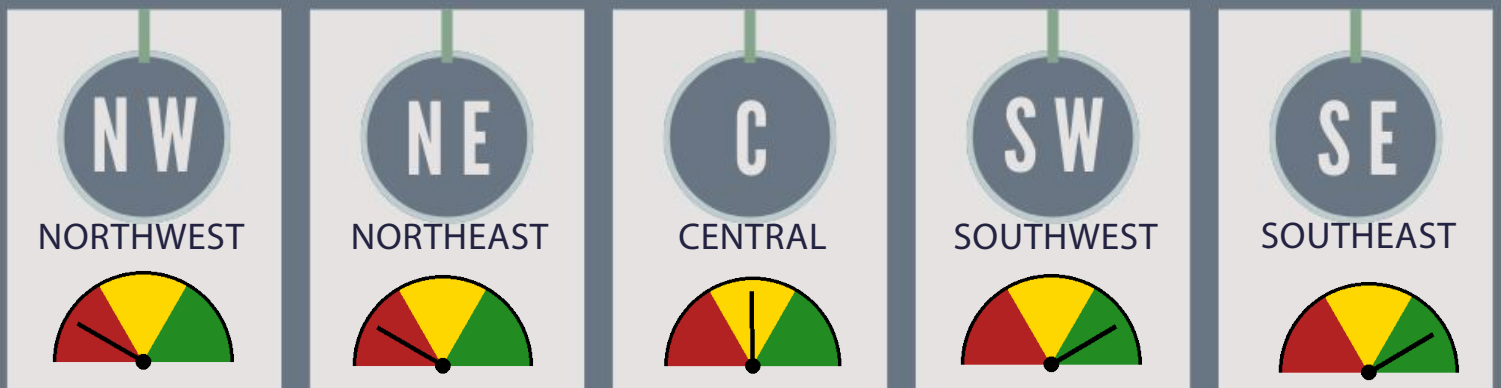
3



Encourage competition among providers to improve service quality and lower costs.

4

SUB-REGIONS



OBJECTIVE 3:

STRENGTHEN MULTIMODAL TRANSPORTATION AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION.

CONNECTING PEOPLE AND PLACES

A connected Mercer County needs safe, reliable, accessible transportation for all residents. Beyond roads and highways, future mobility includes public transit, walkable neighborhoods, and trails, supporting economic opportunity, quality of life, and sustainability.

Improving multimodal connectivity requires collaboration among municipalities, transit agencies, and regional partners to align priorities, streamline funding, and target impactful infrastructure investments.

Shared planning ensures sidewalks, bike routes, trails, and roads form a cohesive network linking jobs, schools, parks, and services. This approach reduces barriers, fosters community ties, promotes healthy lifestyles, and builds resilient, connected neighborhoods.

ALIGNING WITH MERCER COUNTY'S LONG RANGE TRANSPORTATION PLAN

Mercer County's Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), led by AECOM, complements this Comprehensive Plan. This plan assesses existing systems, identifies future mobility needs, and sets long-term investment priorities for roadways, transit, pedestrians, and trails.

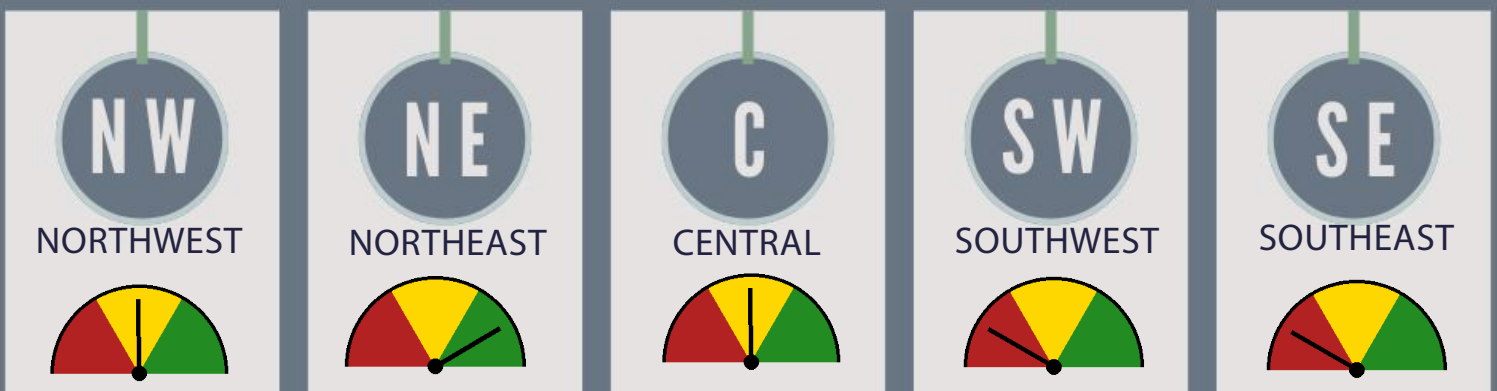
The LRTP will guide transportation coordination over the next two decades. Aligning it with the Comprehensive Plan ensures planning and funding decisions create a connected, safe, efficient system region-wide.

Detailed information about the LRTP, including data analysis, public input summaries, and proposed project timelines, is available in the Appendices. Reviewing these resources will provide deeper insight into how the plan supports broader community goals.

OBJECTIVE 3 KEY ACTIONS:



SUB-REGIONS



**FOCUS
AREA 4**

STEWARDSHIP OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND OUTDOOR ASSETS

GOAL: PROTECT AND ENHANCE RURAL LANDSCAPES, WATERWAYS, FARMLANDS, AND RECREATION RESOURCES.



Photo Credits: Mercer County

Mercer County's natural environment is one of its greatest strengths—defining the County's identity, supporting its economy, and enriching the daily lives of residents. Its rolling farmland, scenic rivers, and extensive park and trail systems provide beauty, recreation, and economic value while fostering a deep sense of place. Preserving these natural and rural landscapes ensures that the County's unique character endures for future generations.

At the same time, Mercer County faces growing pressures that threaten these assets. Development along key corridors, loss of farmland, aging water and sewer systems, and increased stormwater and flooding concerns pose challenges to the health of local ecosystems. Protecting water quality, managing growth, and maintaining outdoor assets require careful planning and collaboration between municipalities, landowners, and conservation organizations.

This Focus Area promotes a proactive approach to land and resource stewardship—one that balances growth with conservation. By protecting farmland, expanding outdoor recreation opportunities, and investing in the long-term health of waterways and open spaces, Mercer County can enhance its quality of life, strengthen its tourism economy, and ensure that its landscapes remain both productive and resilient for generations to come.



Photo Credits: Mercer County

Recreation That Powers Community and Conservation

Mercer County is rich in outdoor destinations that do more than provide scenic views. They support economic growth, attract tourism, and protect natural landscapes. With major assets like Maurice K. Goddard State Park, Buhl Park, and the Shenango River Lake, the County offers year-round opportunities for hiking, paddling, fishing, biking, and more.

Outdoor tourism is a growing economic engine. In Pennsylvania, outdoor recreation contributes \$19 billion annually to the state’s economy, and Mercer County’s lakes, trails, and forests play a key role in drawing regional visitors and tourism dollars. Trails like the 23-mile Shenango River Paddle Trail and the evolving network of hiking and biking routes are helping position the County as a hub for adventure.

Recent conservation wins are expanding access and preserving natural beauty. In 2025, the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy helped add 203 acres to State Game Lands 294—enhancing public hunting and fishing options while protecting critical wetlands and woodlands. Planned trail connections like the Spillway Trail extension toward Greenville will strengthen links between local systems and regional greenways, making it easier for residents and visitors to explore Mercer County’s outdoor offerings.

Together, these assets form a foundation for sustainable tourism, healthier communities, and a stronger sense of place.



Conservation assets across Mercer County - Photo Credits: VisitMercerPA

OBJECTIVE 1:

EXPAND TRAILS, BLUEWAYS, AND RECREATION ACCESS AS PART OF A COUNTYWIDE OUTDOOR NETWORK.

EXPANDING MERCER COUNTY'S OUTDOOR CONNECTIONS

Mercer County's trails, waterways, and open spaces are among its most valued community assets. From the Shenango River and Lake Wilhelm to the County's expanding network of parks and green corridors, these natural features define the County's rural character and offer abundant opportunities for recreation and tourism.

Expanding and connecting these into a countywide network enhances quality of life, boosts economies, and promotes healthy lifestyles. Seamless links between parks, waterways, and communities enable recreation while showcasing natural beauty.

STRENGTHENING REGIONAL TRAIL CONNECTIONS

Mercer County is strategically positioned in Pennsylvania's regional trail network, with potential to unify major systems into a recreation and tourism corridor.

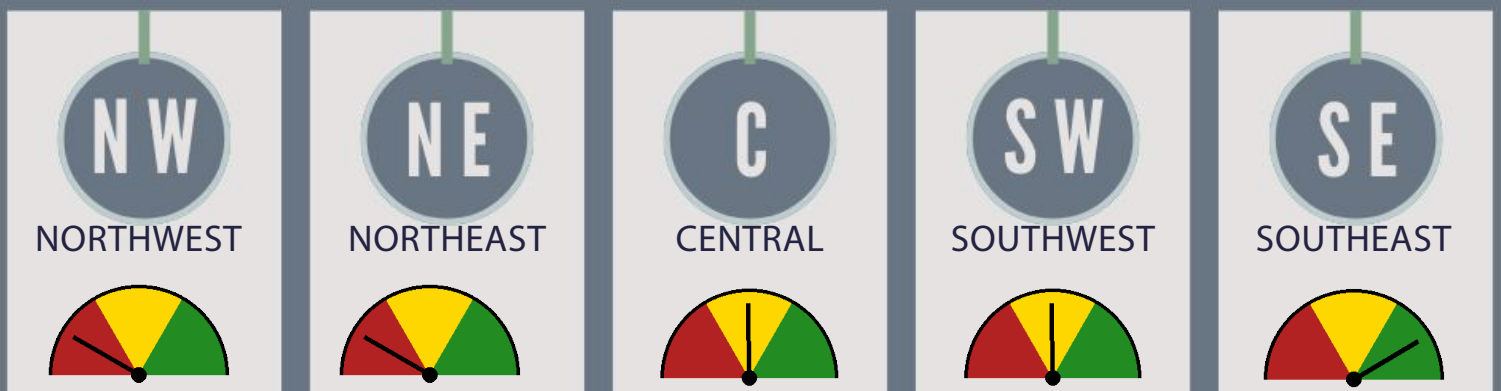
Linking local trails to the Erie to Pittsburgh Trail creates a north-south route from Lake Erie through Mercer County to the Allegheny River; westward ties could connect to Ohio's network across state lines.

These linkages attract cyclists and enthusiasts, bolster local trails, and support businesses, lodging, and tourism. By filling gaps and advancing connections, Mercer County can help build one of western Pennsylvania's most complete, accessible trail systems.

OBJECTIVE 1 KEY ACTIONS:

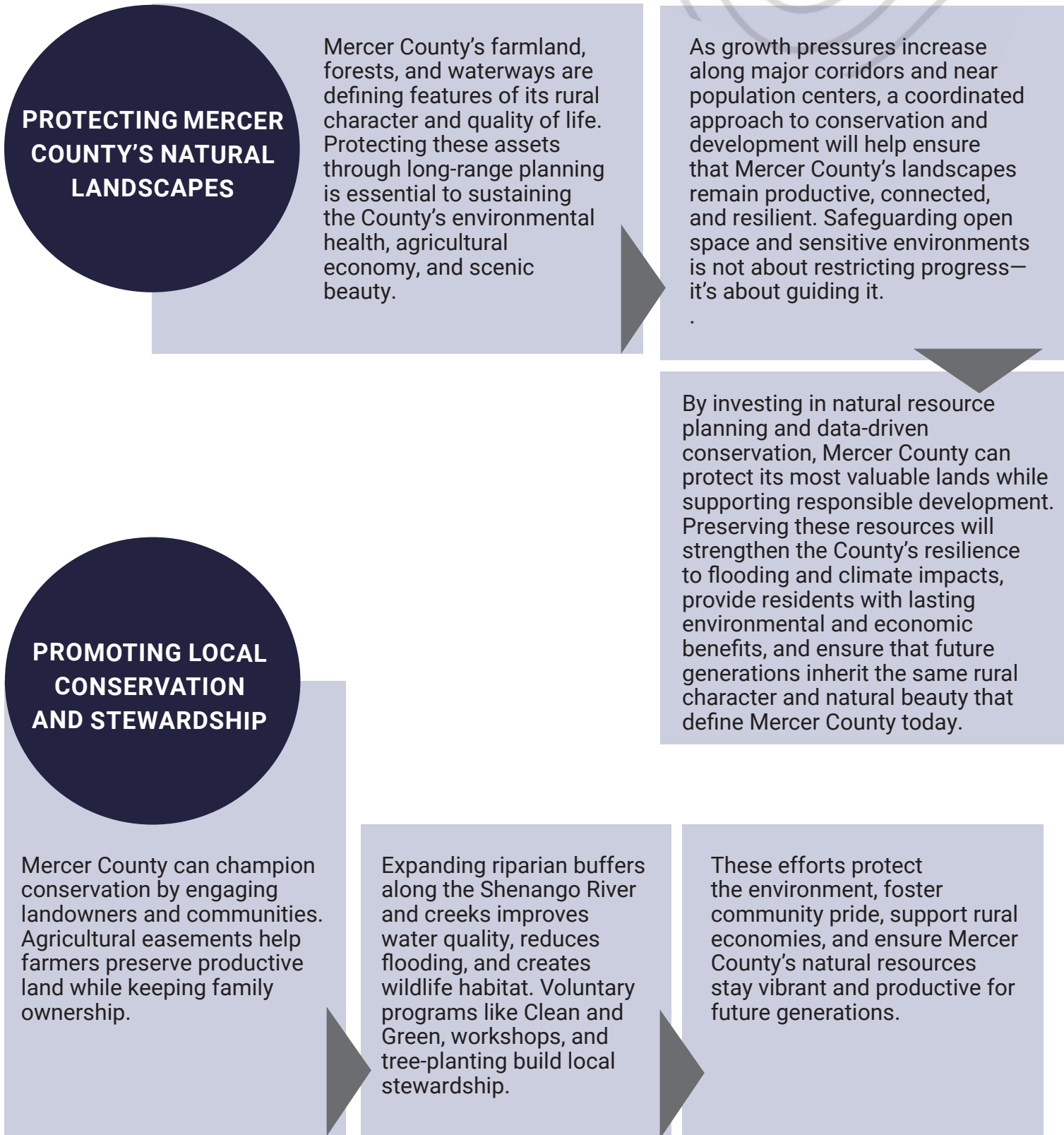


SUB-REGIONS



OBJECTIVE 2:

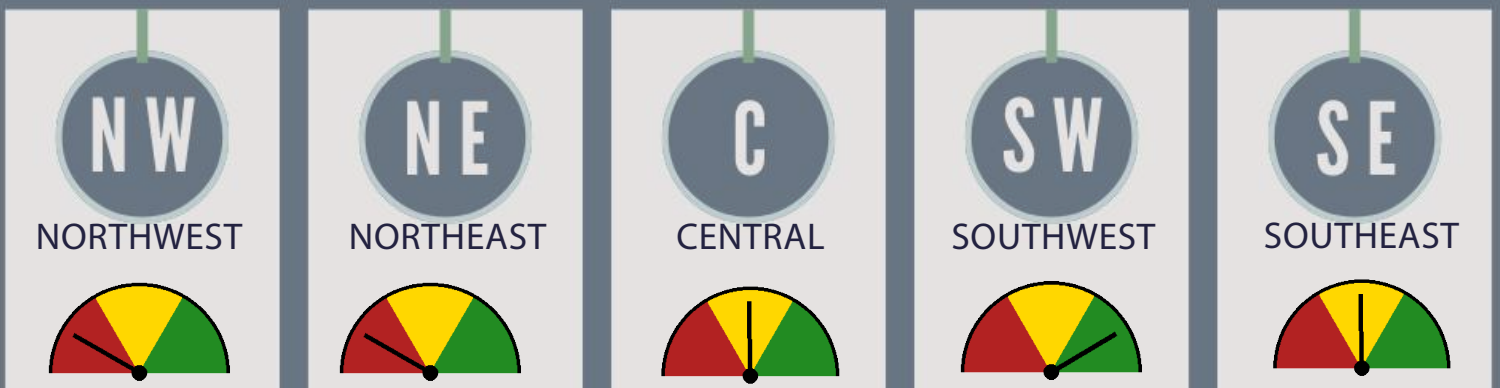
PROTECT FARMLAND, OPEN SPACE, AND SENSITIVE ENVIRONMENTS THROUGH LONG-RANGE PLANNING.



OBJECTIVE 2 KEY ACTIONS:



SUB-REGIONS



OBJECTIVE 3:



PROMOTE OUTDOOR RECREATION AS A DRIVER FOR TOURISM AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.

OUTDOOR RECREATION AS AN ECONOMIC ENGINE

Outdoor recreation is a core economic driver for Mercer County. Assets like Maurice K. Goddard State Park, Buhl Park, Hermitage Athletic Complex, Shenango River, and the trail network draw residents and visitors for adventure, sports competition, and relaxation fueling tourism and small-business growth. Mercer County offers exceptional opportunities for residents and visitors to explore, relax, and connect with nature.

As a **catalytic objective** for Mercer County, this has the potential to drive economic growth, enhance community identity, and attract new investment across multiple subregions. Outdoor activities also have broad ripple effects on local economies. Visitors drawn to parks, trails, and waterways often support local restaurants, lodging, and retail businesses, while community events and outdoor festivals help showcase the County's unique character.

HOW OTHER RURAL COMMUNITIES BUILT OUTDOOR TOURISM

Rural Pennsylvania communities prove outdoor recreation drives tourism and pride via branding and collaboration. Titusville and Oil Creek Valley created an "Outdoor Adventure Corridor," linking Oil Creek State Park, Drake Well Museum, and bike trails into a unified identity.

Elk County joined the PA Wilds initiative to promote elk viewing, outdoor recreation, local crafts, and eco-tourism across the region. By partnering with neighboring counties, the program highlights natural assets, supports small businesses and artisans, and attracts visitors.

These successes highlight coordinated branding, storytelling, and partnerships blending nature, history, and community. Mercer County can adopt similar strategies, uniting its rivers, trails, and parks under a shared identity celebrating outdoor adventure and rural beauty.

OBJECTIVE 3 KEY ACTIONS:



Market major indoor and outdoor destinations like Maurice K. Goddard State Park, Buhl Park, Hermitage Athletic Complex, and Shenango River.

1



Work with partners, such as Visit Mercer County, to host events such as fishing tournaments, paddle races, sporting events and eco-tourism weekends to attract visitors.

2



Coordinate with county and state tourism agencies and develop an online presence and calendar for parks and outdoor events.

3



Develop a public interactive map of parks, trails, waterways, and amenities, updated regularly and shared widely.

4



Leverage grant opportunities from DCNR, USDA, and others for recreation and environmental projects.

5



Partner with environmental groups to create additional indoor and outdoor spaces for hands-on educational experiences.

6

SUB-REGIONS



NORTHWEST



NORTHEAST



CENTRAL



SOUTHWEST



SOUTHEAST



**FOCUS
AREA 5**

THRIVING COMMUNITIES & ENHANCED QUALITY OF LIFE

SUPPORT THE HEALTH, SAFETY, IDENTITY, AND WELL-BEING OF ALL RESIDENTS AND COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE COUNTY.

Thriving communities are built on the well-being of their people. In Mercer County, access to quality healthcare, education, public safety, and essential services forms the foundation of a strong and resilient community. As populations shift and local needs evolve, ensuring that every resident—regardless of age, income, or location—can live safely, learn successfully, and access the services they need is vital to sustaining the County’s long-term health and prosperity.

Photo Credits: Mercer County

Mercer County benefits from strong local institutions—its hospitals, schools, emergency responders, and community organizations—but many face growing challenges. Rural areas often struggle with access to healthcare and transportation; emergency service providers must adapt to limited budgets and recruitment needs; and families are balancing the pressures of childcare, housing, and job stability. Strengthening these community systems will ensure that essential services remain reliable and accessible across all parts of the County.

This Focus Area seeks to build healthier, safer, and more connected communities by supporting people where they live, work, and learn. By expanding access to health and human services, enhancing education and youth engagement, and celebrating the County’s cultural diversity, Mercer County can foster a stronger sense of belonging and ensure that every resident has the opportunity to thrive.

Photo Credits: Mercer County

Mercer Moments: Building a Healthier, Safer, and More Connected Community

Mercer County has been investing in the services and experiences that make everyday life better. Some great initiatives recently include

- **Healthcare on Wheels:** A doctor’s office on wheels is changing lives in Mercer County. In its first year, a mobile health unit provided over 270 primary care visits through 94 clinic sessions at 37 community sites.
- **Innovations in Public Safety:** Mercer County is investing nearly \$18 million to modernize its countywide emergency radio and 911 systems. This high-tech network will link every police, fire, and ambulance service on one communication system, ensuring first responders in even the smallest towns can coordinate quickly during an emergency.
- **Education & Industry Partnerships:** Schools and businesses are teaming up to prepare the next generation. Mercer County’s career programs offer cooperative education where high school students work with local companies in their chosen trade and even earn a paycheck while in school.
- **Free Concerts, Shared Joy:** Across Mercer County, communities host free outdoor concert series that bring residents together to relax, listen to live music, and enjoy time with neighbors. From community bands and summer series in local parks to town-sponsored performances on village greens, these events draw audiences of all ages and continue to grow in popularity each year.

Together, these investments in health, safety, education, and community traditions strengthen connections across Mercer County—fostering a more united, resilient, and vibrant place to call home.



Photo Credits: Meals on Wheels



Photo Credits: Mercer County Career Center



Photo Credits: Buhl Park

OBJECTIVE 1:



EXPAND HEALTHCARE ACCESS, PUBLIC SAFETY, AND BASIC SERVICES FOR ALL RESIDENTS.

ENCOURAGING A HEALTHIER AND SAFER MERCER COUNTY

As Mercer County's population ages and needs diversify, equitable access to medical care, wellness programs, and public safety is essential for quality of life. Strengthening infrastructure and outreach closes gaps, building a resilient, fair care system.

Mercer County benefits from four small hospitals and a network of clinics that provide essential care close to home, yet they face familiar rural challenges. As a **catalytic objective**, stronger coordination among providers and local partners can align services, close gaps, and reduce duplication, while preventive care and mobile outreach help reach rural and underserved residents.

EXPANDING HEALTH AND EMERGENCY ACCESS IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

Mercer County currently uses a mobile unit to deliver services to residents with limited access to care. Comparable programs in Clarion and Forest Counties provide additional lessons — using mobile clinics to offer primary care, mental health services, and preventive screenings in remote communities which can help inform future enhancements here.

Crawford and Venango Counties have also advanced regionalized EMS models that share staff and equipment to sustain response times amid budget and volunteer shortages.

These examples show how strategic partnerships, combined with the assets already in place, can strengthen care delivery and emergency readiness across Mercer County, ensuring that residents receive both life-saving and life-improving services, no matter where they live.

OBJECTIVE 1 KEY ACTIONS:



Support local high-quality hospitals and clinics, encourage expanded outreach such as mobile clinics and health fairs, and increase thru care and telehealth options to help address service gaps.

1



Promote preventative care through wellness programs at parks, schools, and community centers.

2



Work with partners, such as Mercer County Regional Transit, to improve access to mental health, primary care, maternal care, and addiction services, including transportation for rural residents.

3



Support efforts of local fire, EMS, and police services to broaden funding and remain sustainable.

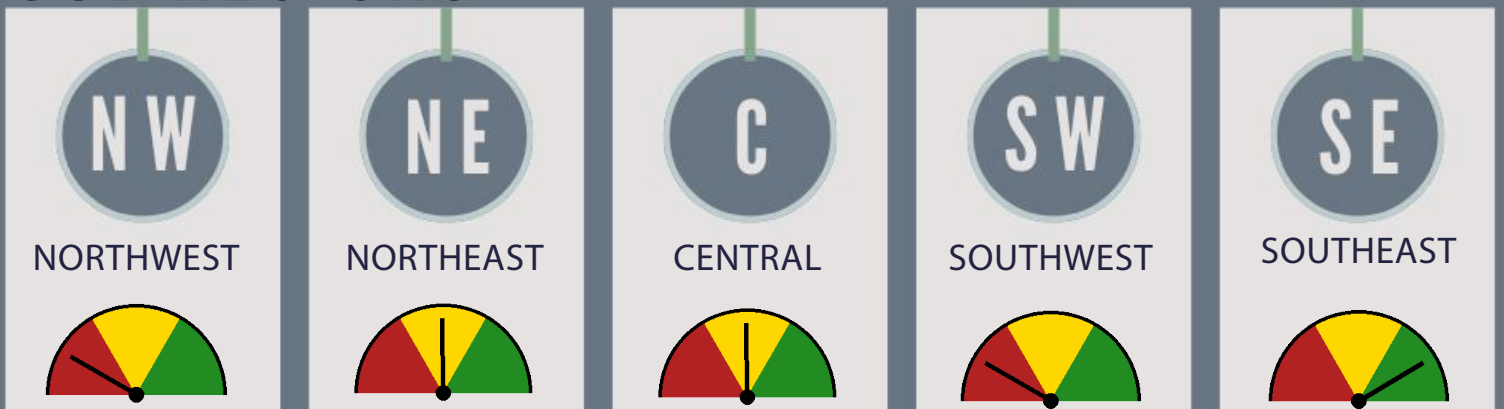
4



Encourage regionalization of emergency services for broader coverage and efficiency.

5

SUB-REGIONS



OBJECTIVE 2:

STRENGTHEN EDUCATION, YOUTH ENGAGEMENT, AND FAMILY SUPPORT SYSTEMS.

INVESTING IN EDUCATION AND YOUTH OPPORTUNITY

Quality education and family resources prepare youth for the workforce while strengthening Mercer County's social and economic fabric. Expanding opportunities through education, mentorship, and career exposure helps retain talent and shows young people a future in the County.

Schools and strategic partners provide vital programs but face resource limits, staffing shortages, and collaboration gaps. Cooperation among districts, nonprofits, and employers can broaden initiatives, share services, and innovate—addressing childcare, after-school, and early learning needs for family stability.

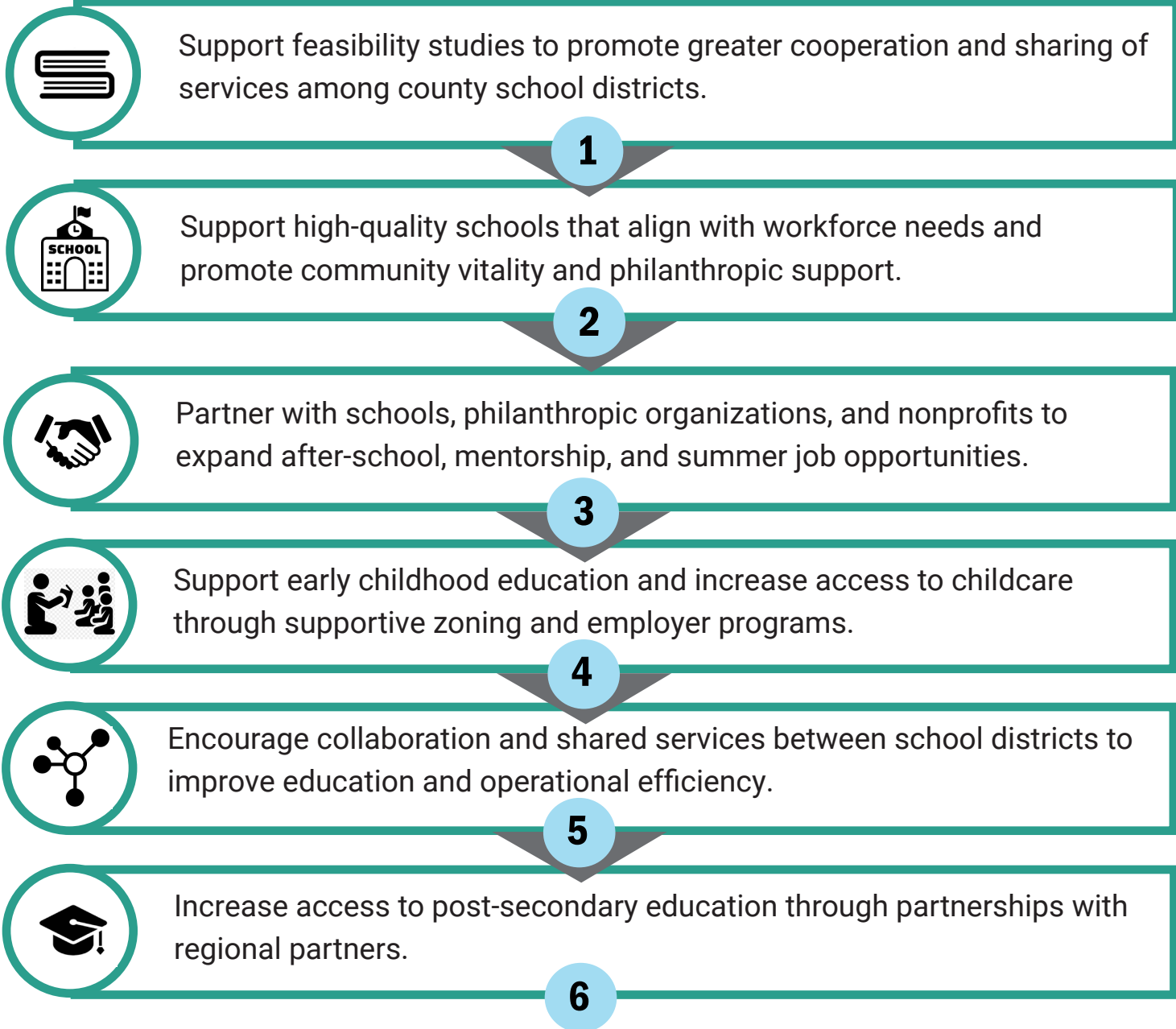
CONNECTING EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE THROUGH REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

Regional counties strengthen education-workforce links through coordination. In Medina County, Ohio, schools, agencies, and employers host annual career fairs exposing students to local industries like manufacturing, logistics, and healthcare, helping them envision futures at home.

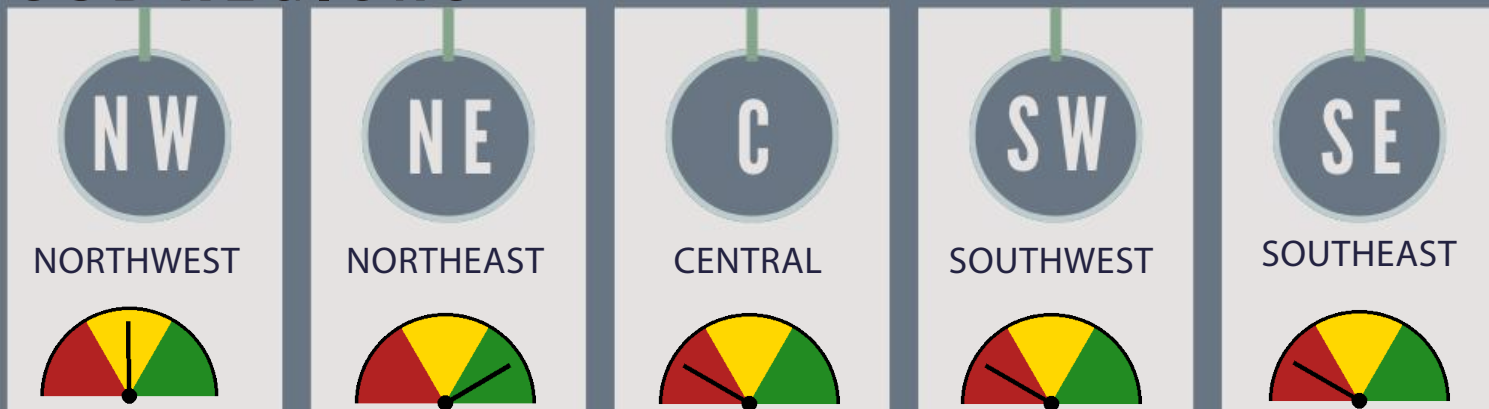
Mercer County needs stronger school district collaboration. Shared services, coordinated curricula, and joint programming maintain standards while optimizing resources.

Cross-district partnerships expand access to career-technical education, advanced courses, and dual enrollment. This unified approach ensures every student gains high-quality preparation for college, careers, and community success.

OBJECTIVE 2 KEY ACTIONS:



SUB-REGIONS



OBJECTIVE 3:

PROMOTE COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT, ACCESS, AND SUPPORT FOR ALL COUNTY RESIDENTS.

BUILDING COMMUNITIES THROUGH ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

Mercer County depends on communities that are welcoming and engaged. Strengthening civic life means ensuring every resident—regardless of age, background, income, or geography—can participate in shaping their community and access the support they need to live with dignity and purpose.

This reinforces the County’s commitment to fostering pride, connectedness, and collaboration across neighborhoods and municipalities. From celebrating local culture to expanding access to housing, health, and social services, creating meaningful opportunities for civic participation and support helps build a stronger, more resilient Mercer County.

STRONGER TOGETHER: THE POWER OF CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Empowered communities are resilient communities. When people are invited to the table—whether through festivals, local projects, youth programs, or public planning—they feel more connected, valued, and motivated to give back. Community involvement not only improves individual well-being, but can also fuel collective action.

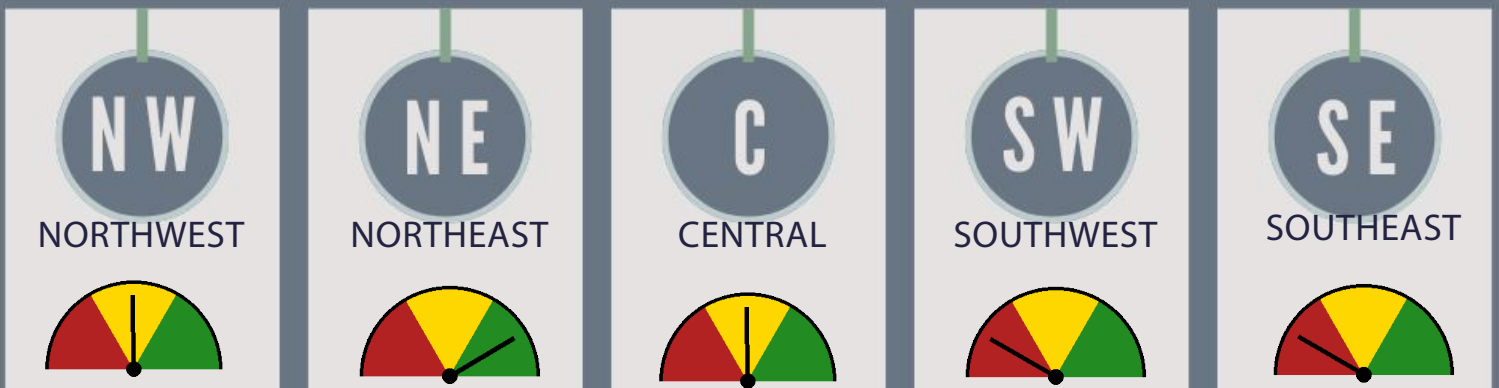
Counties like Butler and Lawrence often support teen leadership councils that organize school supply drives, clean-up days, and peer mentoring—giving students a stake in their communities.

Several rural counties in Western PA run volunteer-driven mobile pantries—delivering groceries and meals to seniors, veterans, and low-income families who can’t reach a food bank. Mercer County can continue to build on its strong community spirit by encouraging these grassroots initiatives—proving that everyday residents are one of the County’s greatest assets.

OBJECTIVE 3 KEY ACTIONS:



SUB-REGIONS



Implementation Tools



Photo Credits: VisitMercerPA

From Vision to Implementation

Effective implementation turns the plan's goals into real outcomes. This plan is intended to be a living document. After adoption, the County will regularly monitor development trends, update policies, and adjust priorities. The Pennsylvania Municipal Planning Code also requires that new development proposals and ordinance changes be reviewed for consistency with the plan. These steps ensure the vision and Future Land Use Map remain relevant as Mercer County evolves.

Implementation Approach

To ensure the plan's goals become reality, the County will pursue a structured, ongoing approach:

1. Implementation Oversight Committees

Establish a committee for each focus area to oversee execution of the Comprehensive Plan. Each committee—composed of County staff, municipal representatives, and key partners—will meet at least quarterly to ensure the action items for their Focus Area are being implemented.

2. Integration Into Budgeting and Capital Planning

Make the plan a central driver of budget and Capital Improvement Project (CIP) decisions. Encourage use of the plan to guide budgets and prioritize infrastructure investments, focusing on aging systems, connectivity, and long-term community needs beyond reliance on grants.

3. County–Municipal Partnership Agreements

Develop optional partnership agreements with municipalities for shared priorities such as infrastructure improvements, trail networks, or housing initiatives. Agreements outline roles, timelines, and outcomes, supporting equitable implementation across the County.

4. Public-Facing Implementation Portal

Create an online portal with interactive maps, dashboards, and project trackers to provide real-time transparency. The platform allows residents to view progress, offer feedback, and track county–municipal collaboration.

5. Vision and Goals Check-In

Facilitate a countywide visioning process in Year 8 to reaffirm or adjust long-term goals and strategies based on emerging trends, performance data, and resident input.

6. Preparation for the Next Comprehensive Plan

Begin preparing the next Comprehensive Plan update in Year 9, using data from evaluations, public feedback, and the Year 8 visioning process to guide the next Comprehensive Plan update.

IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS

Implementation Matrix

The Implementation Matrix serves as the roadmap for putting the Comprehensive Plan into action. While each Focus Area includes multiple objectives and key actions, the Matrix and accompanying performance tracking framework emphasize a subset of **Catalytic Objectives**—priority actions identified through public engagement, including the community survey, as having the greatest potential to advance plan goals and generate meaningful near-term impact.

The designation of an Objective as catalytic does not imply that it is more important than other Objectives, nor does it suggest that non-catalytic Objectives will not be implemented. Rather, **Catalytic Objectives** represent strategic starting points for coordinated action, measurement, and reporting, while the County remains committed to advancing all objectives of the Comprehensive Plan over time as resources, partnerships, and opportunities allow.

For each **Catalytic Objective**, the Implementation Matrix organizes actions into clear, actionable steps designed to advance the County’s long-term vision while establishing measurable benchmarks to track progress. Each action is paired with key implementation details—including estimated cost ranges (where appropriate), potential funding pathways, and anticipated timeframes—providing a practical guide for aligning local initiatives with countywide priorities and identifying when major milestones should be achieved.

The Implementation Matrix is intended to function as a dynamic and evolving tool, updated as conditions change, partnerships develop, and new opportunities emerge. Through regular use and refinement, it will help Mercer County move beyond broad concepts toward focused, accountable implementation that supports sustained progress and long-term success.

Tracking Progress for Milestones and Performance Indicators

To keep the Comprehensive Plan active and measurable, each Focus Area includes milestones and performance indicators that help guide progress over time. Rather than relying on a static plan, these indicators create a structure for evaluating what has been accomplished and identifying where additional support is needed. Each Implementation Oversight Committee will use these indicators to track priority actions for Years 1–5 and secondary actions for Years 6–10, ensuring the County maintains a steady pace of progress. These milestones and indicators are intentionally designed to be simple, transparent, and easy to communicate to County leadership, municipal officials, and the public. Annual updates from the Implementation Oversight Committees will also provide a clear picture of what is working, where adjustments are needed, and how the County can build momentum.

Leading the Path Forward

Through this process, MCRPC will take on a leadership role in organizing and coordinating implementation. Mercer County’s municipalities are formal members of MCRPC and will remain active partners throughout; however, many lack the full-time staff, technical expertise, or funding needed for zoning updates, SALDO revisions, infrastructure planning, and major development initiatives. For that reason, the responsibility for advancing the Comprehensive Plan cannot—and should not—rest primarily on individual local governments.

Rather than carrying out every action directly, MCRPC will convene partners, align resources, and guide the overall implementation framework. This includes helping streamline development processes, supporting public–private partnerships, identifying and pursuing grant opportunities, coordinating regional ordinance and policy updates, and providing technical assistance where it is most needed. Implementation efforts will be shared across agencies, municipalities, nonprofit partners, and private-sector stakeholders, with MCRPC serving as the organizer and facilitator.

By clearly defining roles and acknowledging capacity constraints for both municipalities and MCRPC, the County can advance an implementation program that is realistic, collaborative, and results-oriented.

Focus Area: Vibrant Economy and Workforce Development

Milestones and Performance Indicators

Milestones

Years 1–5 (Priority Milestones):

- Establish a countywide business attraction and branding program.
- Identify and prepare priority redevelopment and growth sites.
- Launch a small business assistance and entrepreneurship support network.
- Formalize partnerships that strengthen career pathways and workforce training.

Years 6-10 (Secondary Milestones):

- Advance major redevelopment projects (downtowns, brownfields, corridors).
- Expand business retention, outreach, and microgrant programs.
- Strengthen countywide workforce recruitment and youth retention strategies.
- Increase development activity in areas with existing infrastructure and assets.

Performance Indicators

Objective 1:

- Create or retain at least 50–100 jobs countywide each year through the expansion of incumbent businesses, attraction of new industries, and support for startups and emerging enterprises.

Objective 2:

- Increase the number of small businesses assisted through training, microgrants, or technical support to at least 25-50 businesses per year across Mercer County’s downtowns and commercial corridors.

Objective 3:

- Enroll at least 50–100 students, young adults, and workers each year in Mercer County–aligned career pathways, internships, apprenticeships, or upskilling/reskilling programs in partnership with schools, employers, and training institutions.

CATALYTIC OBJECTIVE

Support existing industries, attract new industries, and redevelop underutilized properties for economic growth.

ACTION	COSTS	FUNDING	TIMELINES
Promote Mercer County's location, affordability, and infrastructure to attract advanced manufacturing, healthcare, and technology firms.	Staff Time	EAA, ARC, RBDG, CDBG, SBA Programs, DCED Keystone Communities Program PA SSBCI, PA First Program, PIDA	2027–2029: Develop countywide business-attraction branding. 2029–2031: Launch targeted recruitment to key industries. 2031–2036: Expand and refine outreach based on market response.
Use site readiness, incentives, and streamlined permitting to attract investment and recruit employers offering stable, well-paying jobs.	\$100,000–\$250,000 per site infrastructure costs may range from \$500,000 to \$5,000,000+ depending on scope.	DCED Keystone Communities Program, DCED BIOS, EDA Public Works & Economic Adjustment Assistance Grants, EPA Brownfields Grants, PA First Program	2027–2028: Prepare site-readiness assessments and identify needed upgrades. 2028-2031: Implement incentives and streamlined permitting procedures. 2031: Evaluate effectiveness of incentive programs and adjust based on market response and development activity.
Encourage public-private partnerships to redevelop downtowns, vacant sites, and brownfields into mixed-use and co-working spaces.	\$500,000 – \$3 million (depending on building size and use mix)	EPA Brownfields Grants, EAA, CDBG, ARC, USDA, DCED Keystone Communities Program, DCED BIOS, PIDA, Pennsylvania First Program	2027–2028: Identify priority downtown, corridor, and brownfield sites with redevelopment potential. 2028–2030: Engage developers, anchor institutions, and investors to explore partnership models. 2030-2033: Formalize public-private agreements and begin advancing mixed-use or co-working redevelopment projects. 2033+: Support phased construction and expansion of redevelopment initiatives as market conditions and funding allow.
Support startups and existing businesses through funding, technical assistance, and local partnerships.	\$10,000 – \$50,000 (business resource guides, online tools, entrepreneur portal)	EAA, ARC, RBDG, CDBG, SBA Programs, DCED Keystone Communities Program PA SSBCI, PA First Program, PIDA	2027–2028: Establish a coordinated support network for startups and small businesses. 2028–2030: Launch pilot microgrant and technical assistance programs. 2031+: Expand access to microgrants, business services, and mentorship programs based on available funding and demonstrated demand.
Create model zoning and other regulations to eliminate barriers to business growth	Staff Time	DCED Municipal Assistance Program (MAP), DCED Keystone Communities Program	2027–2029: Draft model zoning and regulatory templates to reduce barriers to business growth. 2029+: Work with municipalities to refine and adopt the model standards as needed.

Focus Area: Diverse Housing and Stronger Neighborhoods

Milestones and Performance Indicators

Milestones

Years 1–5 (Priority Milestones):

- Develop zoning best practices and reduce regulatory barriers to encourage diverse housing.
- Launch incentives and partnerships to support new housing, including mixed-use and senior-friendly options.
- Create a blight-elimination toolkit and strengthen code enforcement.
- Expand rehabilitation programs and consider establishing the County Land Bank.
- Establish a Housing Affordability Board to implement countywide attainable housing strategies.

Years 6-10 (Secondary Milestones):

- Advance redevelopment of abandoned and blighted properties through the Land Bank.
- Expand revitalization efforts in distressed neighborhoods with grants and partnerships.
- Increase attainable housing through LIHTC, homebuyer assistance, and mixed-use housing development.

Performance Indicators

Objective 1:

- Facilitate the construction or rehabilitation of 25–50 new or upgraded housing units per year across Mercer County, with a mix of single-family, multi-family, senior-friendly, and downtown-adjacent options.

Objective 2:

- Reduce the number of vacant, blighted, or abandoned properties by 15–30 properties per year through demolition, rehabilitation, code enforcement action, or land bank disposition.

Objective 3:

- Create or preserve 25–50 attainable housing units per year through affordable housing projects, rehabilitation programs, financial assistance, mixed-income developments, and countywide neighborhood revitalization efforts.

CATALYTIC OBJECTIVE

Revitalize blighted properties and strengthen neighborhood conditions.

ACTION	COSTS	FUNDING	TIMELINES
Provide a toolkit for municipalities to build a blight-elimination program (renovating or demolishing vacant/dilapidated structures).	Toolkit Development: \$15,000 – \$40,000	DCED Keystone Communities Program, DCED STMP, PHFA, CDBG EPA Brownfields Grants, USDA	2027–2029: Develop a countywide blight-elimination toolkit with model ordinances, procedures, and funding options. 2029–2032: Train municipalities on using the toolkit and assist with launching local programs. 2032+: Support implementation, monitor results, and update the toolkit as new resources/best practices emerge.
Support code enforcement and landlord accountability to improve housing safety and appearance.	Staff Time	DCED Municipal Assistance Program MAP, DCED Keystone Communities Program, PHFA, CDBG, HUD Healthy Homes Program	2027–2028: Coordinate with municipalities to assess code enforcement gaps and identify shared needs. 2028–2031: Provide targeted technical assistance and support ordinance or staffing improvements. 2031+: Monitor housing conditions and update strategies to support long-term neighborhood stabilization.
Support rehabilitation loans and grants to help homeowners and landlords repair aging homes and rental units	Total Program Range \$150,000 – \$500,00 annually, depending on program scale, grant/loan mix, and match requirements.	CDBG HUD HOME Investment Partnerships Program, USDA Rural Housing Repair Grants, EDA, HUD Lead Hazard Reduction Grants, PHFA, DCED HOME, DCED Keystone Program, YNDC, Federal Home Loan Bank	2027–2029: Partner with lenders, municipalities, and housing organizations to deliver rehabilitation loans and grants to homeowners and landlords. 2029+: Expand program capacity as funding grows and monitor improvements in housing quality countywide.
Develop a county land bank to reposition abandoned properties for new housing, parks, or community spaces	Total Initial Program Range \$135,000 – \$525,000 for startup + first year (scales with number of municipalities participating)	DCED Keystone Communities Program, Act 152 County Demolition Fund, PHFA, Whole Home Repairs Program, CDGB, EPA, EDA, USDA	2027–2028: Evaluate land bank governance options and prepare the legal framework, policies, and startup procedures. 2028–2032: Launch the Mercer County Land Bank, begin acquiring priority abandoned or tax-delinquent properties, and establish reuse criteria. 2032+: Redevelop or transfer properties for housing, parks, and community spaces in partnership with municipalities and nonprofits.
Collaborate with experienced housing and neighborhood revitalization organizations (such as the YNDC) to leverage existing resources.	Staff Time	PHFA Whole-Home Repairs Program, DCED Keystone Communities Program, HOME, CDBG, County Housing Trust Funds, USDA Rural Development	2027–2029: Identify priority neighborhoods and housing needs; formalize partnerships with experienced housing and revitalization organizations and coordinate with municipalities. 2029+: Pursue funding and implement housing rehabilitation, infill, and neighborhood stabilization projects.

Focus Area: Resilient Infrastructure & Connected Communities

Milestones and Performance Indicators

Milestones

Years 1–5 (Priority Milestones):

- Identify priority upgrades for roads, utilities, stormwater, and broadband.
- Strengthen partnerships to expand natural gas, broadband, and grid improvements.
- Begin stormwater upgrades and introduce green infrastructure.
- Improve transit access and key sidewalk, trail, and bike connections.
- Establish a county–municipal infrastructure task force.

Years 6–10 (Secondary Milestones):

- Implement major road, utility, and stormwater improvements.
- Expand broadband access through grants and partnerships.
- Advance EV charging and smart transportation systems.
- Complete priority multimodal and trail connections.
- Use asset management plans to guide long-term maintenance.

Performance Indicators

Objective 1:

- Complete 6–10 infrastructure improvements per year across roads, bridges, water/sewer, stormwater, utilities, broadband, or energy systems—prioritized through countywide asset management and focused on growth corridors and underserved areas.

Objective 2:

- Increase access to high-speed broadband to approximately 85–100% of Mercer County households and serve or upgrade an estimated 1,500–2,000 locations through a combination of private investment, public–private partnerships, and targeted public funding where feasible.

Objective 3:

- Construct or upgrade 10–12 miles of multimodal infrastructure per year—including sidewalks, trails, bike lanes, alternative transportation conveyances, transit stops, and pedestrian safety improvements—through coordinated County–municipal planning and joint funding efforts.

CATALYTIC OBJECTIVE

Maintain, modernize, and expand infrastructure to support growth, safety, and long-term sustainability.

ACTION	COSTS	FUNDING	TIMELINES
Expand and upgrade roads, bridges, sidewalks, water, sewer, and utility systems (especially in growth corridors and underserved areas).	Total Program Range \$5 million – \$50+ million depending on how many corridors and systems are prioritized.	IIJA, FHWA STBG, BUILD/RAISE Grants, PA CWSRF, EPA DWSRF, USDA Rural Development Water & Waste Disposal Loans/Grants, EDA, ARC, FEMA BRIC & FMA, PENNVEST, MTF, TASA	2027–2029: Identify priority infrastructure needs in growth corridors and underserved areas and complete project estimates. 2030+: Implement phased improvements and expand system capacity as funding allows.
Extend natural gas and sewer lines to unserved areas, matching system capacity to demand.	\$250,000 – \$1 million per mile (typical range for medium-pressure distribution lines)	EDA, IIJA, USDA, DCED BIOS, DEP, PA PUC, ARC POWER Grants	2027–2028: Identify unserved areas and assess system capacity needs in coordination with utility partners. 2029–2031: Complete feasibility, cost estimates, and pursue funding for extensions. 2032+: Coordinate extensions in priority areas as funding and demand expand
Upgrade stormwater infrastructure to mitigate flooding and incorporate green infrastructure.	Total Program Range \$500,000 – \$10+ million, depending on problem areas, green infrastructure, and municipalities involved.	FEMA BRIC & FMA, EPA CWSRF, USDA NRCS, US Army Corps of Engineers Section 205 Progra, DEP, PENNVEST, DCNR, PA Small Water & Sewer Grants	2027–2029: Identify priority flooding areas and develop countywide stormwater improvement strategies, including preliminary engineering and cost estimates. 2023–2036: Pursue funding and implement phased upgrades, incorporating green infrastructure in targeted locations.
Invest in modern electrical grids and renewable energy sources to ensure reliable, resilient power while supporting emerging technologies, including AI-driven operations and advanced data infrastructure.	Total Program Range \$1 million – \$20+ million, depending on grid scale, renewable sites, and resilience needs.	DOE Energy Grants, IIJA, IRA, USDA, EDA POWER Grants, ARC, PA Alternative Energy Program, DEP AEP, PA PUC Act 129 Funding, SEP. PENNVEST	2027–2030: Assess grid capacity needs and identify priority opportunities for renewable energy expansion with utility providers. 2030–2033: Partner with utilities and stakeholders to pursue modernization projects and advance renewable energy initiatives.
Plan proactively for EV charging stations and smart traffic systems.	Cost per Charger (e.g. ~\$100k per fast charger; ~\$10k–\$50k per smart signal)	Federal NEVI Funds, USDOT CFI, USDOT SMART Grants, DOE, PennDOT Green Light-Go Program, PennDOT ARLE Fund, PA PUC / Utility EV Pilot Programs	2027–2029: Map priority EV charging and smart-traffic locations and assess infrastructure needs. 2029–2033: Install initial charging stations and deploy targeted smart-traffic upgrades.
Utilize infrastructure asset management plans to prioritize maintenance and avoid failures.	Staff Time	IIJA, FHWA STBG, BUILD/RAISE Grants, PA CWSRF, EPA DWSRF, EDA, ARC, PENNVEST, MTF, TASA	2027–2029: Develop or update infrastructure asset management plans with municipal and utility partners. 2029+: Use these plans to prioritize maintenance and schedule critical upgrades.

Focus Area: Stewardship of Natural Resources & Outdoor Assets

Milestones and Performance Indicators

Milestones

Years 1–5 (Priority Milestones):

- Advance planning for major trail and blueway connections.
- Strengthen partnerships and secure easements for trail and access expansion.
- Develop the Greenways & Recreation Plan and update the Natural Heritage Inventory.
- Launch coordinated recreation marketing and event partnerships.
- Promote recreation marketing and events outdoor environmental education partnerships.

Years 6-10 (Secondary Milestones):

- Expand trail, blueway, and recreation amenities through phased development.
- Implement Greenways Plan priorities and advance watershed and stormwater initiatives.
- Increase farmland and open space protection through conservation programs.
- Grow outdoor tourism with recurring events and improved online resources.

Performance Indicators

Objective 1:

- Add 3–5 miles of new or upgraded trails and blueway access points per year across Mercer County—including multi-use paths, rail-trail conversions, paddle launches, and portage improvements—through partnerships with municipalities, landowners, and trails/conservation organizations.

Objective 2:

- Preserve or permanently protect approximately 150–200 acres of farmland, open space, or sensitive environmental land per year through agricultural easements, conservation agreements, greenway acquisitions, or strategic land-use planning.

Objective 3:

- Increase outdoor recreation–related visitation and participation by 5–10% per year through events, destination marketing, trail/park promotion, and partnerships with Visit Mercer County and state tourism agencies.

CATALYTIC OBJECTIVE

Promote outdoor recreation as a driver for tourism and economic development.

ACTION	COSTS	FUNDING	TIMELINES
Market major indoor and outdoor destinations.	\$25,000 – \$150,000 (branding, photo/video content, social campaigns)	RTCA, DCNR, PA Heritage Areas Program, DCED Keystone Communities Program, Corporate Sponsorships, Local Non-profits	2027–2029: Develop a unified marketing strategy for major parks, rivers, and recreation destinations and identify funding partners. 2029+: Launch and expand marketing efforts and track tourism growth and visitor metrics.
Work with partners to host events such as fishing tournaments, paddle races, sporting events, and eco-tourism weekends.	Staff Time	RTCA, USDA, EPA, DCNR, PA Fish & Boat Commission Event Grants, PA Tourism Office Grants	2027–2029: Coordinate with partners to identify event locations and establish a countywide outdoor event schedule. 2029+: Expand events and build recurring annual programs tied to major destinations, as capacity and sponsorships grow.
Coordinate with county and state tourism agencies and develop an online presence and events calendar for parks and outdoor activities.	\$20,000–\$75,000 initial setup; ongoing maintenance required.	PA Tourism Office Cooperative Marketing Grants, DCNR, USDA, EDA, RTCA	2027–2028: Develop a unified online presence for Mercer County’s parks and outdoor recreation, including branding and platform design. 2029+: Launch and maintain a countywide events calendar with regularly updated activities and promotions.
Develop a public interactive map of parks, trails, waterways, and amenities, updated regularly.	Initial Development \$15,000 – \$50,000 (StoryMap or custom web map, trail digitization)	DCNR Greenways/Trails grants, Recreational Trails Program grants, County IT budget	2027–2028: Compile data, secure funding as needed, and develop a public interactive map of parks, trails, waterways, and key amenities. 2028+: Maintain and update map as needed.
Leverage grant opportunities (DCNR, USDA, etc.) for recreation and environmental projects.	Staff Time	DCNR, DEP Growing Greener Grants, Fish & Boat Commission Access & Habitat Grants, USDA, RTCA,	2027–2029: Identify priority recreation and environmental projects and pursue available grant opportunities. 2029+: Support recurring funding applications and assist municipalities in preparing competitive proposals as programs become available.
Partner with environmental groups to create additional outdoor spaces for hands-on educational experiences	Variable (project-dependent)	Foundation grants (land trusts), DCNR Conservation Landscape grants, federal grants (NRCS, NPS Rivers & Trails), DCED Greenways, Trails, and Recreation Program	2027–2029: Collaborate with partners to identify sites and design hands-on outdoor education opportunities. 2029+: Launch and promote new outdoor learning spaces through joint programming and partnerships, as funding and capacity allow.

Focus Area: Thriving Communities & Enhanced Quality of Life

Milestones and Performance Indicators

Milestones

Years 1–5 (Priority Milestones):

- Strengthen partnerships with health services and nonprofits to expand outreach, preventative care and clinics.
- Improve public safety coordination and funding for fire, EMS, police services, and code enforcement.
- Support school district cooperation and feasibility studies.
- Strengthen community events, cultural programs, and volunteer initiatives.

Years 6-10 (Secondary Milestones):

- Advance regional emergency service models for broader coverage.
- Grow wellness and preventative health programming countywide.
- Expand mentorship, leadership, and summer job opportunities for youth.
- Improve transportation access for healthcare, services, and daily needs.

Performance Indicators

Objective 1:

- Expand access to essential community and public safety services by supporting regional and shared-service approaches to fire, EMS, and police delivery; strengthening clinics, wellness programs, and transportation-assisted medical visits; and increasing coordinated outreach efforts with the goal of expanding service access and utilization by approximately 5–10% each year.

Objective 2:

- Increase youth and family engagement by enrolling 250–500 students and children per year in expanded after-school programs, mentorships, early-childhood education, childcare programs, and summer job opportunities through partnerships with schools, nonprofits, and employers.

Objective 3:

- Engage residents through community events, volunteer programs, public outreach, and partnerships with nonprofits and faith-based organizations, with the goal of increasing participation in community programs and services by approximately 5-10% each year.

CATALYTIC OBJECTIVE

Expand healthcare access, public safety, and basic services for all residents.

ACTION	COSTS	FUNDING	TIMELINES
Support local high-quality hospitals and clinics, encourage expanded outreach such as mobile clinics and health fairs, and increase Thru Care and telehealth options to help address service gaps.	Total Program Range \$10,000 – \$100,000 annually, depending on event frequency and scale.	HRSA Rural Health Grants, CDC Community Health Programs, USDA Rural Development – Health Care Services Grants, SAMHSA Grants, DHS, PA Department of Health – Preventive Health Block Grants, PA Office of Rural Health Funding	2027–2028: Coordinate with hospitals and clinics to assess outreach gaps and identify priority expansion opportunities. 2029+: Support expanded outreach efforts and strengthen partnerships to improve countywide access to care, as funding allows.
Promote preventative care through wellness programs at parks, schools, and community centers.	Staff Time	CDC Community Health Grants, HRSA Rural Health Grants, USDA SNAP-Ed, SAMHSA Grants, PA Department of Health – Preventive Health & Health Services Block Grant, PA Office of Rural Health, DCNR Grants Buhl Regional Health Foundation, Primary Health Network Charitable Foundation	2027–2028: Collaborate with partners to design wellness and preventative care programs. 2028+: Promote wellness initiatives and track participation and community health outcomes over time.
Improve access to mental health, primary care, maternal care, and addiction services (including transportation for rural residents).	Total Program Range \$100,000 – \$700,000 annually, depending on the number of routes, pilots, and participating partners.	FTA Section 5311 Rural Area Formula, RSA Rural Health Outreach Grants, SAMHSA Grants, USDA Grants, CDC Community Health Grants, ACF Grants, MATP, PennDOT Shared Ride Program, PA Office of Rural Health Buhl Regional Health Foundation, Primary Health Network Charitable Foundation	2027–2028: Work with healthcare providers and nonprofits to assess service gaps and access barriers. 2028–2032: Expand partnerships and pilot transportation or access solutions, as funding allows. 2032+: Strengthen long-term service networks and monitor improvements in countywide access.
Support local fire, EMS, and police with broadened funding and sustainability.	Staff Time	FEMA AFG, FEMA SAFER, HSGP, DOH JAG, COPS Office Grants, SAMHSA/HRSA, OSFC Fire & EMS Grants, PA EMS Operating Fund, PA Department of Health EMS Funding, PEMA Grants	2027–2028: Assess emergency service funding needs and pursue state and federal grant opportunities. 2028+: Support coordinated funding strategies, shared resources, and ongoing technical assistance, as funding allows.
Encourage regionalization of emergency services for broader coverage and efficiency.	Staff Time	FEMA AFG, FEMA SAFER, HSGP, DOH JAG, COPS Office Grants, SAMHSA/HRSA, OSFC Fire & EMS Grants, PA EMS Operating Fund, PA Department of Health EMS Funding, PEMA Grants, PCCD Grants	2027–2029: Evaluate opportunities for shared services and regional emergency coverage models with local departments. 2029+: Support implementation of regional partnerships that improve efficiency, response times, and long-term sustainability (as locally supported).

IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS

Future Land Use

The Future Land Use Map is a key policy tool that illustrates where and how Mercer County aims to grow over time. It organizes the County into six broad land-use categories based on existing conditions, infrastructure capacity, and the community's long-term vision. Importantly, the map was developed by public workshops, municipal meetings, and input from key stakeholders to reflect where residents and local leaders believe future development and preservation are most appropriate over the long term.

Land Use categories include:

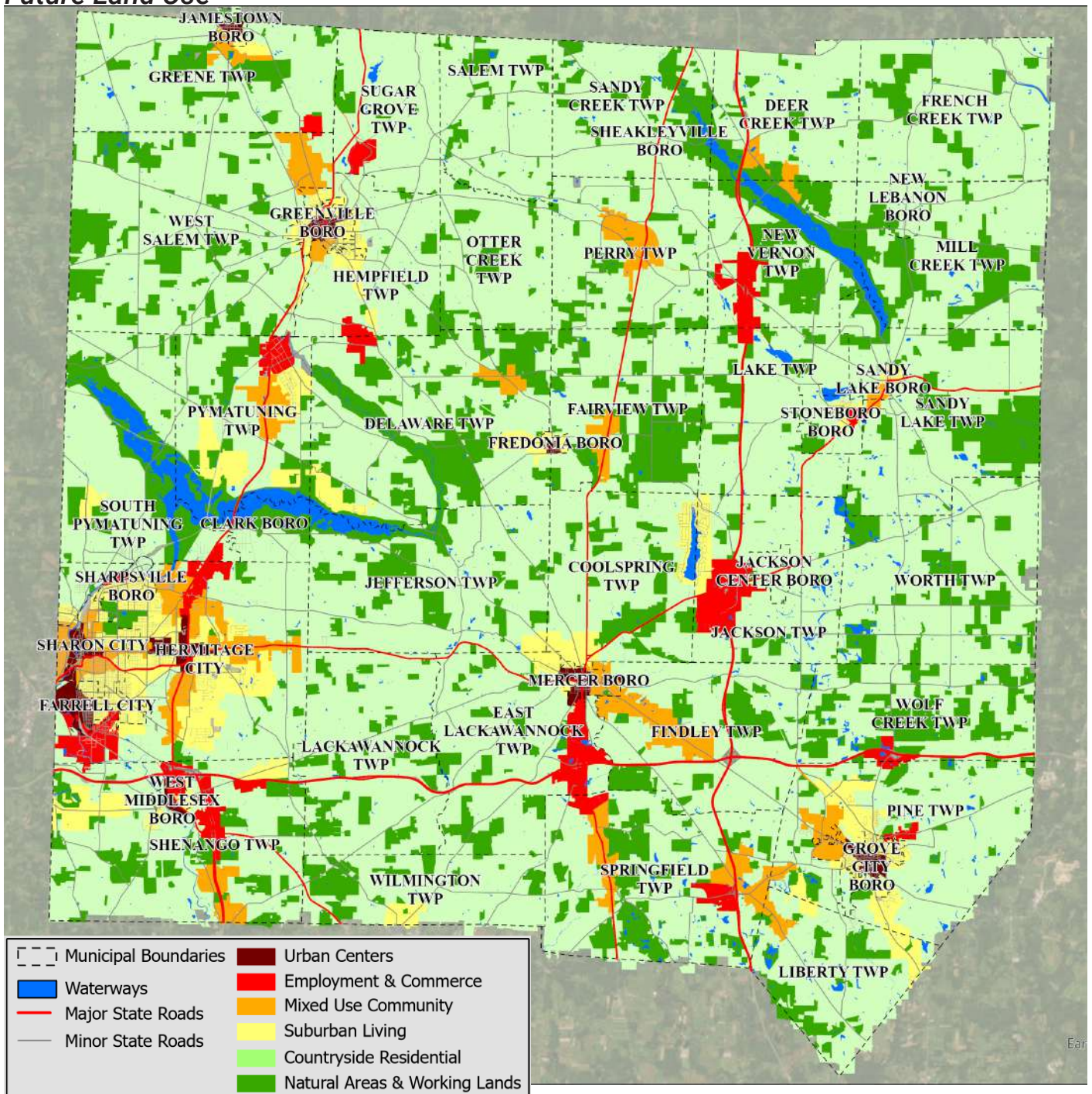
- **Urban Centers:** Walkable boroughs and downtown districts with the highest mix of housing, commercial, civic, and cultural uses.
- **Mixed Use Community:** Compact areas that blend housing with neighborhood-scale commercial, offices, and community amenities.
- **Suburban Living:** Medium-density neighborhoods with public utilities, primarily single-family and townhome development.
- **Countryside Residential:** Low-density, large-lot residential areas that maintain rural character and complement nearby farmland.
- **Employment & Commerce:** Commercial corridors, retail centers, industrial parks, logistics facilities, and other job centers.
- **Natural Areas & Working Lands:** Farmland, forests, parks, wetlands, floodplains, and other natural or agricultural lands prioritized for conservation and sustainable use.

The map guides decisions on future development, encouraging growth in areas planned for activity such as Urban Centers, Mixed Use Community, and Employment & Commerce while prioritizing preservation and low-intensity uses in Countryside Residential and Natural Areas & Working Lands.

Municipalities and the County should align zoning and local plans with these designations to support consistent land-use policy. The Future Land Use Map is intended to be updated periodically, typically every 5–10 years, to reflect changing conditions, new data, and community input. Regular updates ensure that land-use decisions remain strategic, coordinated, and supportive of Mercer County's long-term goals.

Countywide Future Land Use

Future Land Use



IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS

Subregional Future Land Use

While the countywide Future Land Use Map establishes an overall vision for growth and preservation across Mercer County, the following pages examine future land use patterns at a more detailed subregional level. Mercer County is diverse in character, development patterns, infrastructure availability, and economic activity, and these differences influence how future growth and conservation should be approached throughout the County.

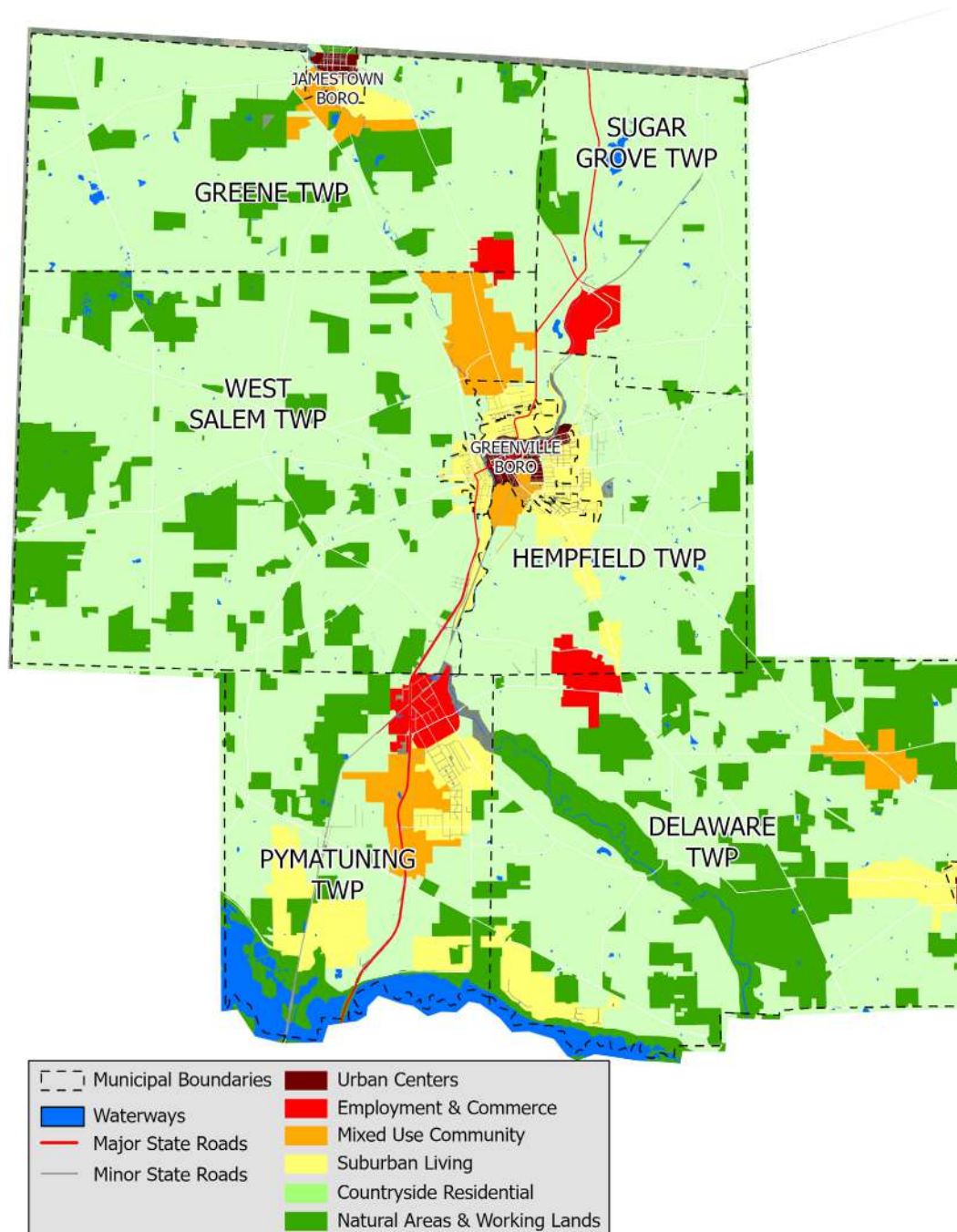
To better reflect these varying conditions, the Future Land Use Map has been organized into five subregions: Northwest, Northeast, Central, Southwest, and Southeast Mercer County. Each subregion contains unique communities, transportation networks, employment centers, rural landscapes, and environmental features that shape future land-use priorities and opportunities. The subregional maps provide a closer look at how future development, redevelopment, infrastructure investment, and preservation efforts may occur within different portions of the County over the long term. These maps are intended to help municipalities, developers, agencies, and residents better understand how local land-use patterns contribute to the broader countywide vision.

The subregional Future Land Use Maps were developed through extensive public outreach and coordination efforts conducted throughout the planning process. Input gathered from public meetings, stakeholder discussions, Steering Committee meetings, municipal outreach, and community engagement activities helped identify local priorities, growth areas, redevelopment opportunities, and important natural and agricultural resources within each subregion. The maps also recognize that future growth in Mercer County will not occur uniformly. Certain areas may be better suited for new housing, commercial investment, industrial expansion, or mixed-use development due to existing infrastructure, transportation access, utility availability, and market conditions. Other areas may be more appropriate for agricultural preservation, environmental protection, low-density residential development, or conservation efforts intended to maintain the County's rural character and natural assets.

Together, these subregional maps provide a more detailed planning framework that supports coordinated land-use decisions while still aligning with the overall goals and policies established in the countywide Future Land Use Map.

Northwest Future Land Use

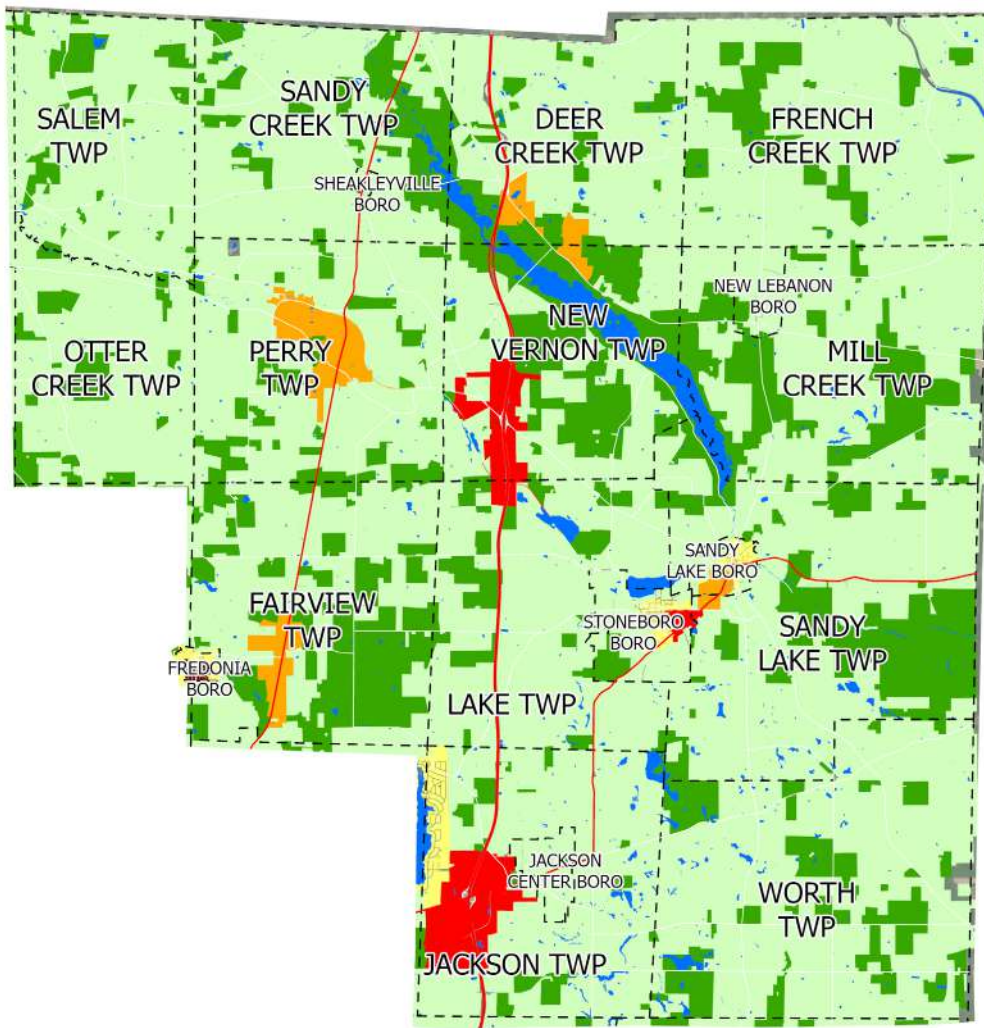
Future Land Use



IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS

Northeast Future Land Use

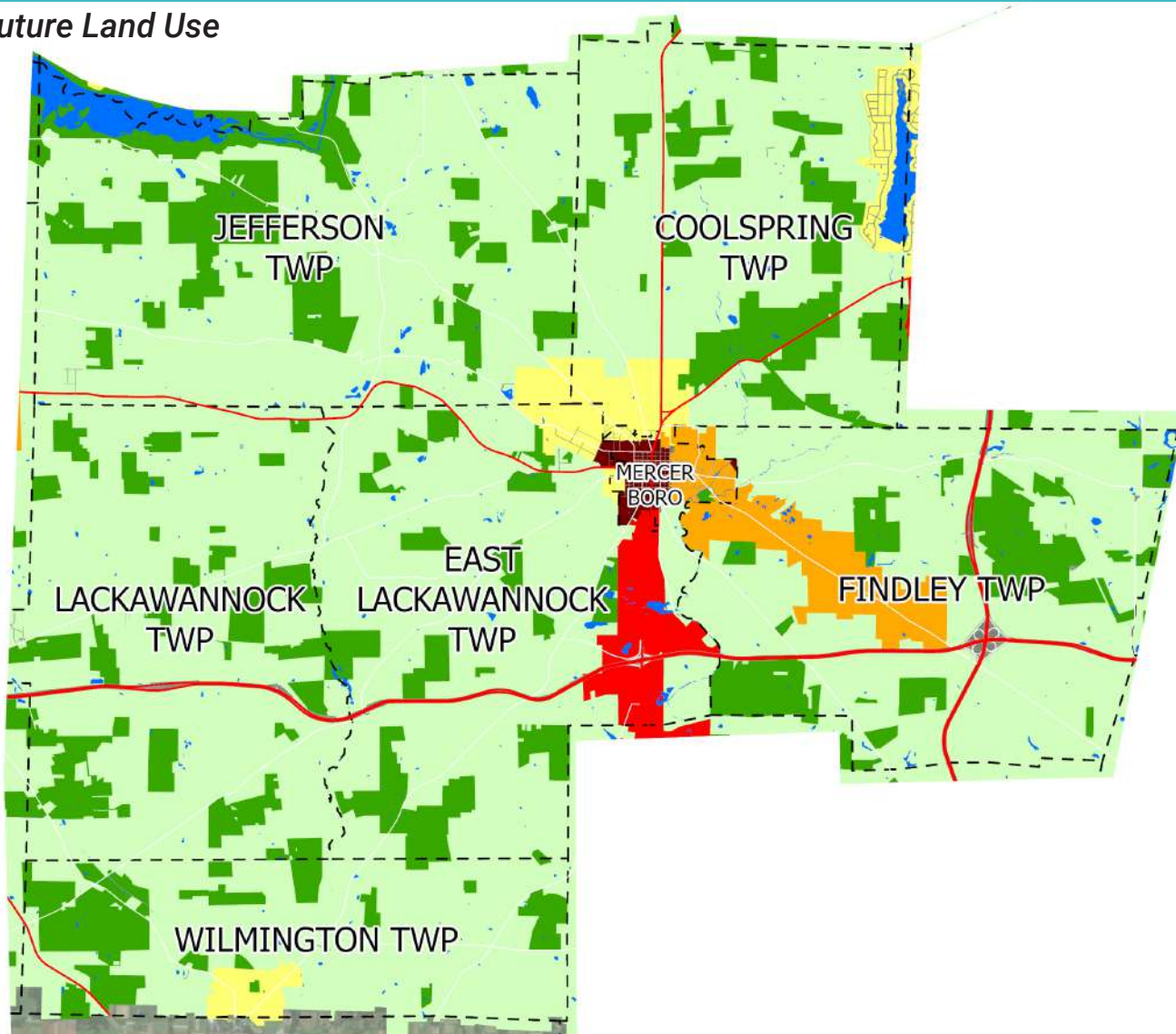
Future Land Use



Municipal Boundaries	Urban Centers
Waterways	Employment & Commerce
Major State Roads	Mixed Use Community
Minor State Roads	Suburban Living
	Countryside Residential
	Natural Areas & Working Lands

Central Future Land Use

Future Land Use

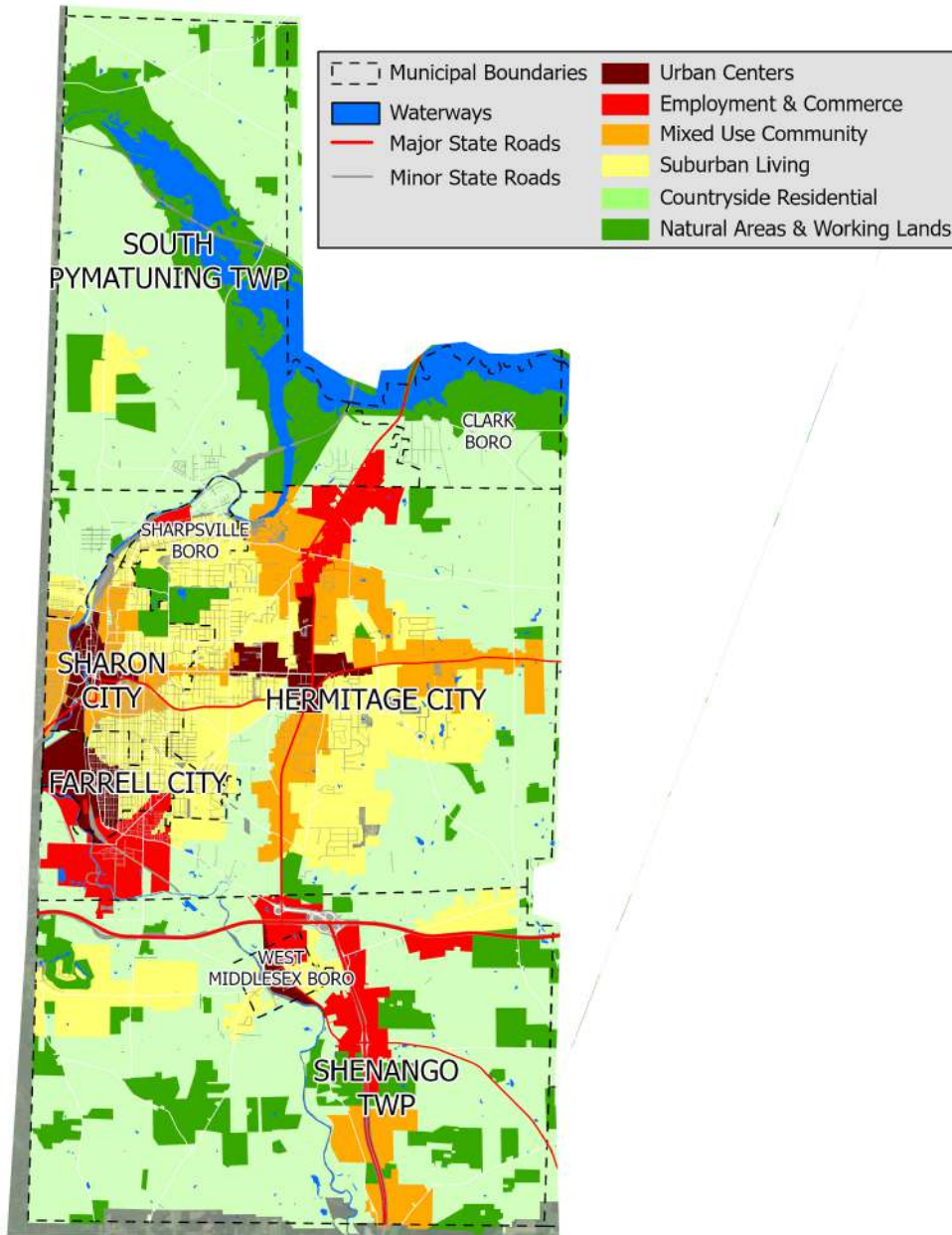


Municipal Boundaries	Urban Centers
Waterways	Employment & Commerce
Major State Roads	Mixed Use Community
Minor State Roads	Suburban Living
	Countryside Residential
	Natural Areas & Working Lands

IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS

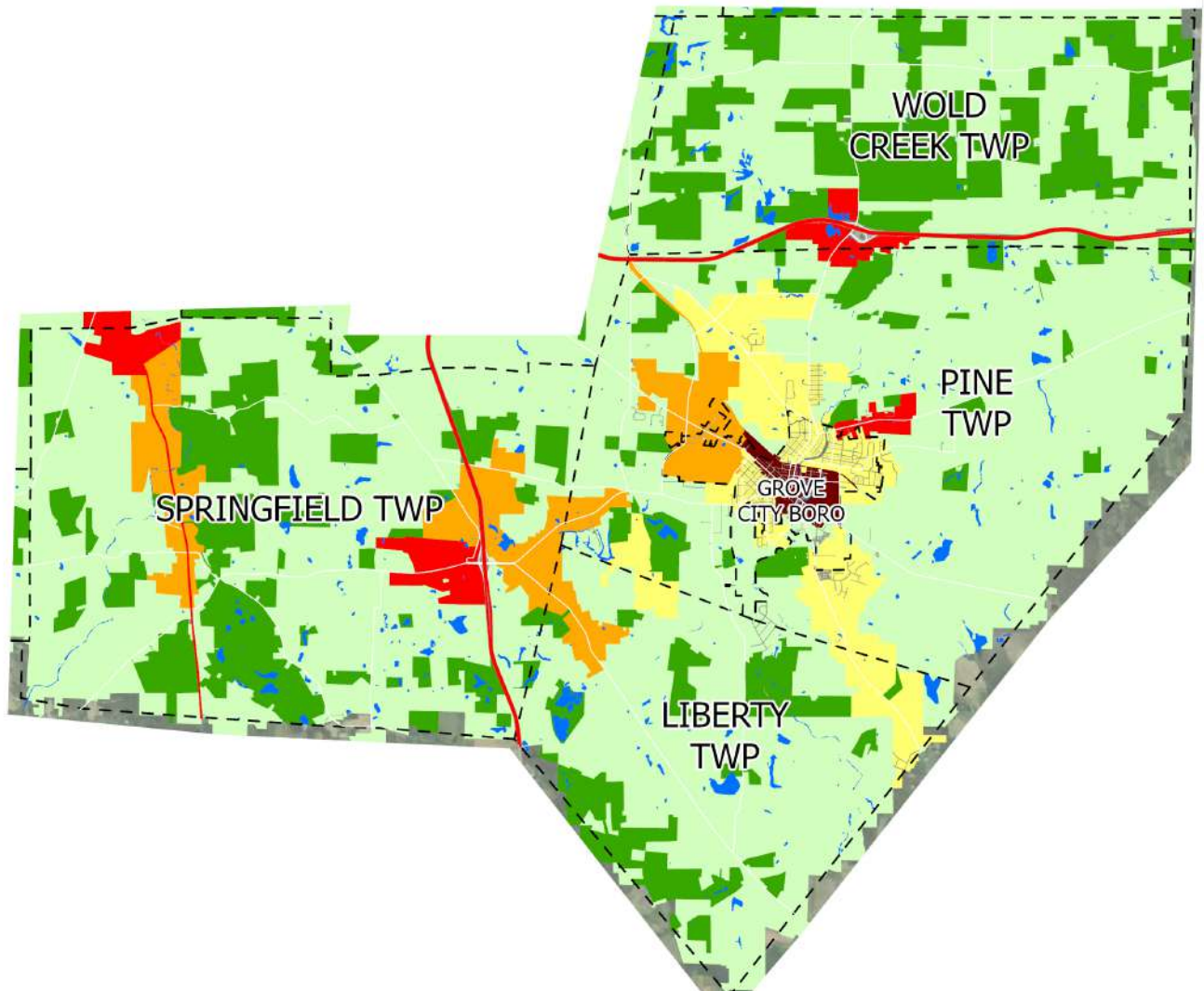
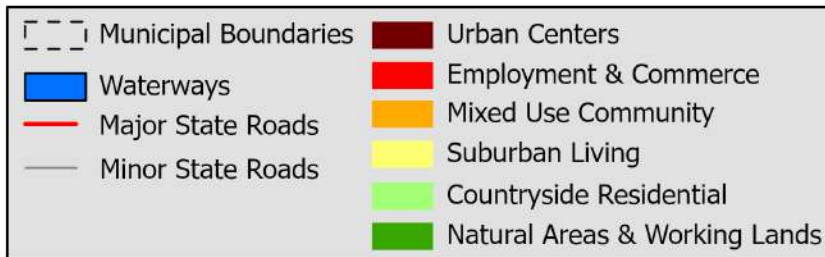
Southwest Future Land Use

Future Land Use



Southeast Future Land Use

Future Land Use



IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS

Partnerships as the Engine of Implementation

Successful implementation of this Comprehensive Plan depends on strong, coordinated partnerships. No single organization—public or private—has the staff, funding, or capacity to deliver these strategies alone. Progress happens when local governments, regional agencies, utilities, nonprofits, schools, businesses, and state and federal partners work together toward shared goals.

Because the Mercer County Regional Planning Commission (MCRPC) is the primary implementer, collaboration is essential. Many municipalities have limited staff or financial capacity, and they rely on MCRPC to lead regional planning, secure funding, coordinate large projects, and prepare needed policy updates. At the same time, MCRPC depends on its partners to maintain infrastructure, deliver community services, support housing and economic development, expand health access, and steward natural resources. These relationships create a network of shared responsibility that strengthen outcomes across the entire County.

Partnerships also increase the County's competitiveness for grants and technical assistance. Joint applications, regional planning efforts, and coordinated investments make it easier to secure funding from state and federal programs such as DCNR, PENNVEST, DCED, USDA, and EDA. By combining resources and aligning priorities, partners can deliver larger and more impactful projects—from broadband expansion and trail development to housing revitalization and workforce initiatives.

Ultimately, partnerships are what turn ideas into action. They ensure that local efforts are not isolated, that resources are maximized, and that each community benefits from coordinated and sustained progress.

On the next page is a Partner Key that the Implementation Oversight Committees can pull from and gather resources from as they begin advancing the County's long-term vision.

Partners Key

Countywide & Local Government

MCRPC – Mercer County Regional Planning Commission
Mercer County Commissioners
Municipal Governments (Cities, Boroughs, Townships)
MCRCOG – Mercer County Regional Council of Governments
Mercer County Department of Public Safety
Mercer County Treasurer's Office
Mercer County Sheriff's Office
Mercer County Assessment Office
Mercer County GIS / IT Departments
Mercer County Conservation District
Municipal Public Works / Streets Departments
Municipal Zoning & Code Enforcement Departments
Municipal/County Solicitors

Housing, Neighborhood & Social Service

YNDC - Youngstown Neighborhood Development Corporation
Community Action Partnership of Mercer County
Local Habitat for Humanity
Local Housing Authorities
Nonprofit Housing Organizations
Mercer County Area Agency on Aging
Mercer County Children and Youth Services
Mercer County Behavioral Health Commission
LCSS - Lawrence County Community Action Partnership

Natural Resources, Conservation & Outdoor Recreation

DCNR – Department of Conservation & Natural Resources
PA Fish & Boat Commission
PA Game Commission
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Shenango River Watchers
Mercer County Trails Association
Environmental NGOs, Watershed Groups & Land Trusts
Local Parks & Recreation Departments
Outfitters, Recreation Clubs, Outdoor Tourism Operators

Health, Safety & Emergency Services

Local Hospital & Clinic Systems
EMS Providers & Local Fire Departments
Municipal Police Departments & PA State Police
Mercer County EMA
Public Health Partners & Healthcare Coalitions
Behavioral Health & Addiction Service Providers
Buhl Regional Health Foundation.

Economic Development & Business

PNDC – Penn-Northwest Development Corporation
Chambers of Commerce
Commercial & Industrial Developers
Real Estate Investment Groups
Redevelopment Authorities
Business/Industrial Parks
Small Business Support Organizations and SBDCs
Greenville Reynolds Development Corporation

Education, Workforce & Training

School Districts
Local Colleges, Universities & Career/Technical Schools
Educational & Training Institutions
West Central Job Partnership
Mercer County Career & Technical Education Programs
YMCA, Community Centers, Libraries, Youth Organizations
United Way of Mercer County
Buhl Club

Infrastructure, Utilities & Transportation

PennDOT
MCCT – Mercer County Community Transit
Utility Providers (electric, gas, water, sewer)
PUC – Public Utility Commission
DEP – Department of Environmental Protection
Pipeline/Utility Regulators
Private EV Charging Companies
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
FEMA
FHWA & USDOT
Local Authorities

Tourism, Marketing & Community Engagement

VisitMercerCountyPA (Tourism Bureau)
DCED Pennsylvania Tourism Office
Local Event Boards, Arts Organizations, & Cultural Institutions
Universities & Community Organizations Hosting Events

Disclaimer: This list is not intended to be a comprehensive or exhaustive inventory of all potential partners. Instead, it represents broad overarching categories to help guide implementation efforts. Many additional individuals, organizations, and community stakeholders—beyond those listed here—may play valuable roles in supporting and advancing the plan's goals.

IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS

Funding Strategy Overview

Implementing a countywide Comprehensive Plan requires a sustained, coordinated investment from local, state, federal, nonprofit, and private-sector partners. While Mercer County plays a leadership role in guiding the plan's vision, it cannot shoulder the financial responsibility alone. Many actions—such as upgrading infrastructure, supporting housing, improving public safety, expanding parks and recreation, and strengthening health and human services—require funding levels well beyond what the County's annual budget can accommodate.

To ensure long-term success, Mercer County must:

- Leverage diverse funding sources rather than relying solely on County tax revenue
- Pursue competitive grants aligned with state and federal priorities
- Form partnerships with municipalities, nonprofits, institutions, and employers
- Use local investments as match funding to unlock larger external dollars
- Prioritize catalytic projects that yield measurable community benefits
- Plan ahead for grant readiness, including concept plans, cost estimates, and shovel-ready projects
- Build a flexible funding strategy that combines grants, loans, incentives, public-private partnerships, and local contributions

Many of the initiatives identified in this Comprehensive Plan are eligible for substantial external funding, particularly in areas such as infrastructure modernization, economic development, recreation and tourism, housing rehabilitation, public safety, and environmental conservation. By pursuing a diversified funding strategy, the County can maximize impact, reduce the fiscal burden on taxpayers, and accelerate progress on shared priorities.

The following page has an Implementation Key which provides clear definitions for all acronyms used throughout the plan's action items, funding discussions, and implementation matrix. It includes local, regional, state, federal, nonprofit, and private-sector partners, as well as major grant programs.

Implementation Key

Local & County Agencies

- MCRPC – (Mercer County Regional Planning Commission) Leads countywide planning, land use coordination, GIS mapping, and long-range planning.
- MCRCOG – (Mercer County Regional Council of Governments) Supports intergovernmental cooperation, shared services, and regional coordination.
- MCRT – (Mercer County Regional Transit) Provides public transportation including rural and shared-ride services.
- PNDC – (Penn-Northwest Development Corporation) County’s lead economic development agency for business attraction, retention, and expansion.
- CVB - (VisitMercerCountyPA) Markets Mercer County’s destinations, events, and visitor experiences.
- MCCD – (Mercer County Conservation District) Supports soil conservation, water quality, stormwater, and environmental projects.
- MCDPS – (Mercer County Department of Public Safety) Oversees emergency services, 911 dispatch, and emergency management.
- MCTA – (Mercer County Trails Association) Expands and maintains the countywide trail network.

State/Federal Agencies & Programs

- DCNR – (Department of Conservation & Natural Resources) Funds parks, trails, conservation, and recreation planning.
- DCED – (Department of Community & Economic Development) Funds revitalization, economic development, planning, and infrastructure.
- DEP – (Department of Environmental Protection) Oversees stormwater, watershed restoration, and water quality.
- PFBC – (PA Fish & Boat Commission) Supports boating access, water trails, and aquatic habitat improvements.
- PGC – (PA Game Commission) Manages public lands, hunting areas, and wildlife habitat.
- PEMA – (PA Emergency Management Agency) Funds emergency preparedness, communication, and response.
- OSFC – (Office of the State Fire Commissioner) Supports fire/EMS equipment, training, and regionalization efforts.
- PCCD – (PA Commission on Crime & Delinquency) Funds policing, community safety, youth justice, and prevention.
- PENNVEST – (Pennsylvania Infrastructure Investment Authority) Provides water, sewer, stormwater, and green infrastructure loans/ grants.
- FEMA – (Federal Emergency Management Agency) Funds resilience, hazard mitigation, emergency services, and recovery.
- FEMA BRIC – (Building Resilient Infrastructure & Communities) Supports large-scale resilience and flood mitigation projects.
- FEMA FMA – (Flood Mitigation Assistance) Funds drainage, buyouts, and flood reduction projects.
- EPA – (Environmental Protection Agency) Supports brownfields, water quality, environmental education, and stormwater projects.
- USDA – (U.S. Department of Agriculture) Funds rural development, community facilities, broadband, health, and recreation.
- USDA RD – (Rural Development Programs) Focused on rural infrastructure, water/sewer, and health access.
- EDA – (Economic Development Administration) Supports infrastructure, business growth, tourism, and job-creation projects.
- FHWA – (Federal Highway Administration) Funds roadway, safety, multimodal systems, and corridor enhancements.
- FTA – (Federal Transit Administration) Funds rural transit, mobility programs, senior and disability transportation.
- DOE – (Department of Energy) Supports grid modernization, renewable energy, and EV charging.
- HRSA – (Health Resources & Services Administration) Funds rural health, maternal care, clinics, and health access.
- SAMHSA – (Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration) Funds mental health, addiction treatment, crisis response, and prevention.
- ARC – (Appalachian Regional Commission) Supports broadband, workforce, infrastructure, and economic development.
- PHFA (PA Housing Finance Agency) -Finances and supports affordable housing across Pennsylvania.

Appendices



Photo Credits: VisitMercerPA

Public Outreach Results

The Mercer County Comprehensive Plan was built on one of the most extensive public outreach efforts conducted in the County in more than a decade. Engagement occurred across the County's five subregions and included residents, businesses, institutions, nonprofits, and municipal officials. This chapter summarizes the key input collected through multiple engagement methods, including:

- Countywide public surveys (Survey #1 and Survey #2).
- Regional public meetings and ranking exercises.
- Municipal official surveys.
- Focus groups (Housing, Natural Resources & Recreation, Economic Development, Education).
- Stakeholder interviews.

Countywide Survey #1 – Summary

Mercer County collected 833 public survey responses during the first public survey, with results analyzed across the county's five regions: Northwest, Northeast, Center, Southeast, and Southwest. This represents a survey response rate of approximately 0.91% of the county's population, which is notably strong and comparable to or higher than response rates seen in several similar regional planning efforts, including Crawford County (0.94%), Venango County (0.83%), and Warren County (0.71%), and significantly higher than counties such as Fayette (0.41%), Lawrence (0.27%), and Washington (0.08%). This strong level of participation reflects a high degree of public interest in Mercer County's future.

Across all regions, the overwhelming reason residents choose to live in the County is that they "Grew up here," indicating deep generational ties (ranging from 45% to 71% depending on region). Secondary factors included rural character, affordability, and sense of community. Job opportunities played a role in more urbanized areas like Grove City and the Shenango Valley.

The top priorities to promote or preserve included:

- Rural character and small-town feel.
- Outdoor recreation and natural resources.
- Walkability and traffic safety.
- Historical heritage (more prominent in northern and central regions).

Appendices

Public Outreach Results

Countywide Survey #1 – Summary

The #1 issue across all five regions was industry and business attraction, reflecting widespread concern about declining job opportunities and economic stagnation. Other major concerns included:

- Declining population.
- Loss of institutions.
- Housing availability.
- Blight.
- Access to high-speed internet (particularly in rural regions).

Unique Competitive Advantages which residents widely cited included:

- Strategic location at Interstates 79, 80, and 376.
- Affordability and low cost of living.
- Rural character and open space.
- Strong sense of community.
- Outdoor recreation assets such as Shenango River Lake, Goddard State Park, and trail systems
- Although most see these as strengths, respondents also noted these assets are under-promoted and underutilized.

Municipal Survey Summary

Thirty (30) municipalities out of 47 completed the municipal survey, providing insight into local priorities, challenges, infrastructure conditions, and opportunities for intergovernmental coordination.

Municipalities identified their top assets as:

- Environment and natural resources (36%).
- Recreation and parks (19%).
- Historical and cultural resources (13%).
- Rural character and agriculture (frequent write-in responses).
- Municipalities see these resources as central to local identity and long-term planning.

Public Outreach Results

Municipal Survey Summary

The most significant local challenges that municipal leaders stressed are following countywide challenges:

- Economic development and job creation (32%).
- Aging or insufficient public infrastructure (32%).
- Public facilities and long-term capital needs (16%).
- Housing affordability and diversity (9%).
- Concerns about population loss and limited broadband/mobile coverage were noted in write-in comments.

Housing needs that municipalities reported include:

- A need for more single-family homes, senior housing, and diverse options.
- Housing quality issues, including vacancies and code violations.
- High demand for housing rehabilitation and repair programs.
- Difficulty attracting new housing developers.
- Housing challenges were strongly echoed across other outreach efforts.

The Infrastructure, Transportation & Asset Management summary included that half of municipalities do not have public water/sewer access, limiting development potential. Only 6 out of 31 communities have infrastructure asset management plans. Municipalities consistently expressed concerns about:

- Road maintenance.
- Pedestrian safety.
- Transportation access for seniors and those without vehicles.
- Broadening public transit options.
- Many municipalities want assistance preparing capital improvement plans and grant applications.

Appendices

Public Outreach Results

Housing Focus Group Summary

The Housing Focus Group (provided detailed insight into housing market challenges, development barriers, and strategies for revitalizing neighborhoods. Key issues identified included:

- High vacancy rates and aging housing stock - Participants emphasized the need to understand why units are vacant, suggesting use of postal data. Outdated mobile homes and aging single-family units limit housing quality.
- Barriers to new development which include appraisal gaps, difficulty securing financing, limited workforce in construction trades, and tax abatements creating school district challenges.
- School districts and municipalities need stronger coordination, especially regarding tax policies, student enrollment patterns, and land development.
- Housing strategy components which supported diverse housing types (multi-family, workforce, senior housing), rehabilitation and reuse of existing homes, anti-blight strategies and neighborhood revitalization, strategic marketing to attract out-of-state movers, and banking and coordinated redevelopment approaches.

Natural Resources & Recreation Focus Group Summary

The Natural Resources & Conservation Focus Group emphasized the County's environmental assets and the need for better coordination of recreation initiatives. Key themes were identified as:

- Water Access & Blueway Development - Organizations expressed strong interest in expanding paddling access, water trails, and recreation infrastructure, particularly along the Shenango and French Creek watersheds.
- Trail Connectivity - There is high demand for completing east-west and north-south trail corridors linking Mercer County to Ohio and the Erie-to-Pittsburgh Trail.
- County Role in Recreation Leadership - Many organizations want the County to lead trail planning, asset inventory, and coordination among municipalities, since many communities lack capacity
- Funding & Capacity Challenges- Improved grant coordination, access to DCNR Circuit Rider programs, and stronger partnerships for environmental education and conservation

Public Outreach Results

School District Focus Group Summary

The School District Focus Group had the school districts superintendents talk about what service and action could be taken to increase quality of life for the districts and its residents and students. These conversations included:

- Funding Challenges - School districts face rising costs, inadequate facilities funding, and disparate tax bases. Rural districts, in particular, struggle to maintain programs and services.
- Coordination with Municipalities & Service Providers - Better coordination with municipal planning efforts, aligning transportation routes with community needs, and expanding shared programs with libraries, social service agencies, and health providers
- Enrollment Decline & Demographic Shifts - Declining enrollment is a major concern, limiting district revenue and long-term sustainability.
- Feasibility of District Consolidation - Participants discussed whether merging smaller districts could improve educational offerings, stabilize finances and expand curriculum and extracurricular programs.
- Student Needs & Support Systems - Districts highlighted a growing need for mental health services family support programs, early childhood education partnerships, workforce development pipelines.

Stakeholder Summary

Stakeholder interviews reinforced themes from the public surveys and focus groups. Key Themes:

- Housing shortages and persistent blight.
- Population decline, youth out-migration, and workforce concerns.
- Need for economic diversification beyond traditional industries.
- Infrastructure limitations, especially in rural areas.
- Strong quality of life assets (parks, trails, affordability, small-town feel).
- Need for coordinated leadership and shared services.
- Funding and capacity gaps across nonprofits and municipalities.

Stakeholders emphasized that Mercer County's success depends on unified leadership, shared goals, and stronger regional partnerships.

Appendices

Public Outreach Results

Regional Public Meetings

Objectives and Actions were presented to the public during five regional open houses, held at accessible locations across the County. Approximately 60 residents participated, offering feedback on recommendations and future priorities through an interactive “money allocation” exercise. Participants were asked to distribute a limited pool of funds to the objectives they felt were most important for Mercer County’s future. In addition to the funding exercise, attendees reviewed and commented on the Future Land Use Map, providing input on development patterns, growth areas, and long-term land use preferences. A summary chart illustrating how participants prioritized the various objectives is provided on page 101.

Across all meetings, the highest-ranked priorities included:

- Support existing industries, attract new employers, and redevelop underutilized properties for economic growth.
- Revitalize blighted properties and strengthen neighborhood conditions.
- Maintain, modernize, and expand infrastructure to support growth, safety, and long-term sustainability.
- Promote outdoor recreation as a driver for tourism and economic development.
- Expand healthcare access, public safety services, and basic community supports for all residents.

Countywide Survey #2 – Summary

The second countywide survey asked participants to allocate budget points across focus areas to indicate priority actions. Public comments stressed:

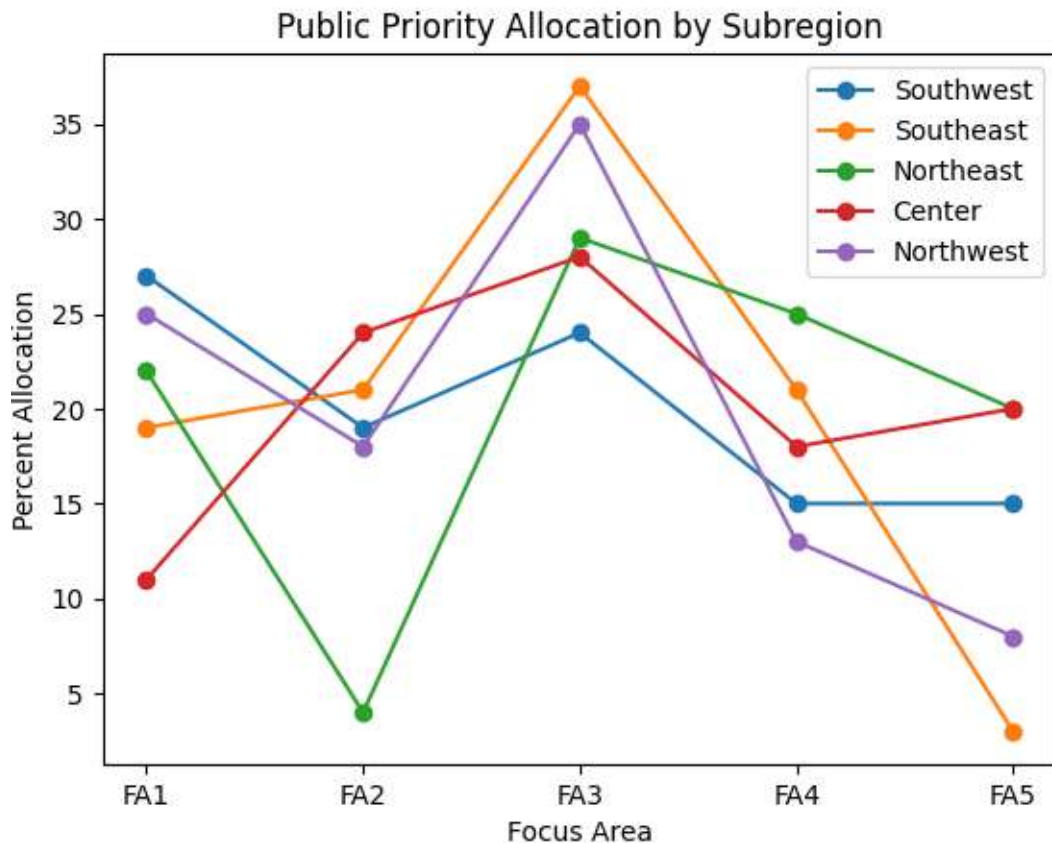
- Keeping taxes low.
- Encouraging development at interstate corridors.
- Limiting large solar arrays on farmland.
- Increasing housing, especially modern multi-unit options.
- Improving public transportation
- Preserving unique municipal identities
- Increasing support for agriculture and protecting land from landfill expansion

Public Outreach Results

Regional Public Meetings Ranking Summary

During the regional open houses, participants allocated funding across the five Focus Areas to reflect their priorities for Mercer County’s future. Across the five subregions, Focus Area #3 consistently ranked as the top priority.

The Southeast (37%), Northwest (35%), Northeast (29%), and Center (28%) regions all allocated the largest share to Focus Area #3. The Southwest Region placed the greatest emphasis on Focus Area #1 (27%), though Focus Area #3 (24%) remained a strong priority. Overall, the results show strong countywide support for Focus Area #3, while other priorities varied slightly by subregion based on local needs and perspectives.





Mercer County Economic & Housing Analysis

2026

Report by Fourth Economy



Fourth Economy is a national community and economic development consulting firm. Powered by a vision for an economy that serves the people, our approach is centered on principles of competitiveness, equity, and resilience. We partner with communities and organizations, public and private, who are ready for change to equip them with tools and innovative solutions to build better communities and stronger economies.

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Cover Photography Credit: [Jon Dawson](#)

Mercer County

Demographic & Economic Key Takeaways

- **Population decline remains a challenge:** Mercer County's population declined 5% from 2013 to 2023, from 116,000 to 109,800 people.
- **Population is projected to further decline:** Population is expected to decrease by 1.6%, or 1,778 people, between 2024 and 2029.
- **Population would further decline without in-migration:** Without migration, Mercer's population would decline further. Mercer's deaths outpaced births by 2,286 from 2020-2023
- **Many Mercer County residents are aging in place:** Almost 23% of Mercer County residents are 65 years of age or older (Census).
- **Educational attainment lags:** Only 15.9% of Mercer residents possess a Bachelor's Degree, 5.5% below the national average. Mercer similarly lags in Graduate Degree attainment.
- **Jobs are declining:** From 2019 to 2024, jobs declined by 5.5% in Mercer County, PA from 51,076 to 48,245. This change fell short of the national growth rate of 3.9% by 9.4%. As the number of jobs declined, the labor force participation rate decreased from 56.8% to 52.6% between 2019 and 2024.
- **Industry specialization varies:** The top three industries in 2024 are Restaurants and Other Eating Places, Education and Hospitals (Local Government), and General Medical and Surgical Hospitals.

Demographics

Total Population

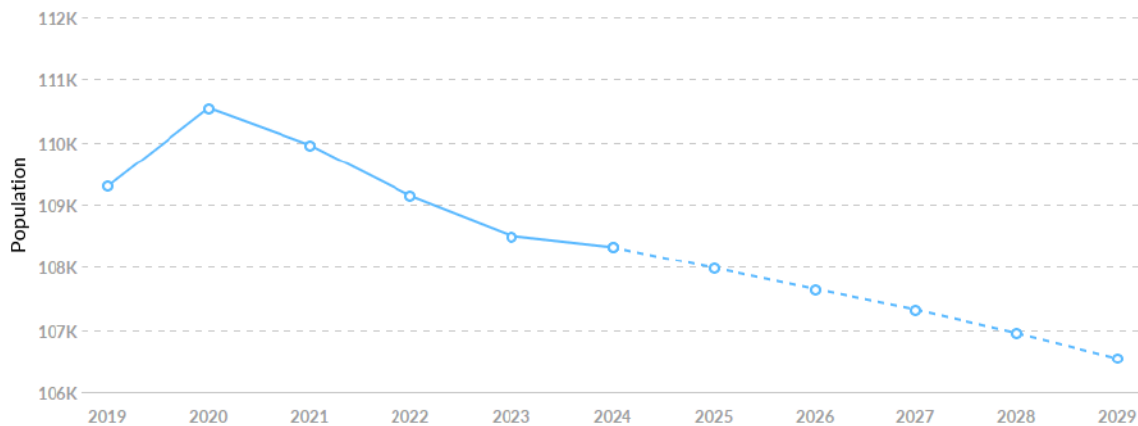
	2013	2023	Percent Change
Mercer County	116,059	109,852	-5.3%
Pennsylvania	12,731,381	12,986,518	2.0%

Source: Census ACS 2023 5-year

Mercer’s population declined by 5% between 2013 and 2023. This contrasts with Pennsylvania’s overall modest population growth rate (2%). However, this decline did not occur evenly over the last decade, slowing to 1.5% decline since 2019. This recent trend is more consistent with the region. The [Center for Rural Pennsylvania](#) found counties in Western Pennsylvania averaged declines of 1.5% from 2020 to 2023. Bordering counties Lawrence (-1.9%), Venango (-2%), and Crawford (-2.3%) largely experienced similar rates of population decline since 2020, with the exception of Butler, which grew 2.4%.

Mercer County experienced positive net migration from 2020 to 2023, meaning more people moved into the county than moved out. With a net migration of 110 individuals, Mercer’s migration rate is slightly lower than neighboring counties, with the exception of Crawford, which had a negative migration rate. Without migration, Mercer’s population would decline further. Mercer’s natural population change (Births - Deaths), was -2,286 from 2020-2023, meaning deaths outpace births. Lack of population replacement is a common characteristic of rural counties with aging populations.

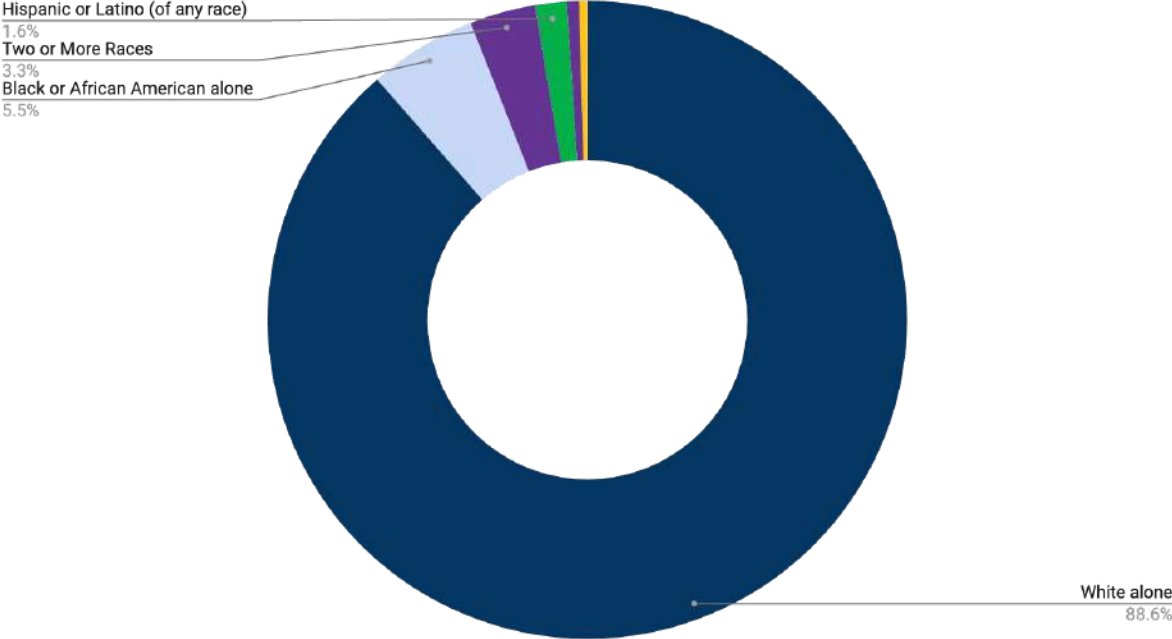
Population Projection



Source: Fourth Economy Analysis using Lightcast™

As seen across Western Pennsylvania, population decline is expected to remain a challenge for Mercer County. The population is projected to decrease by 1.6%, or 1,778 people, between 2024 and 2029.

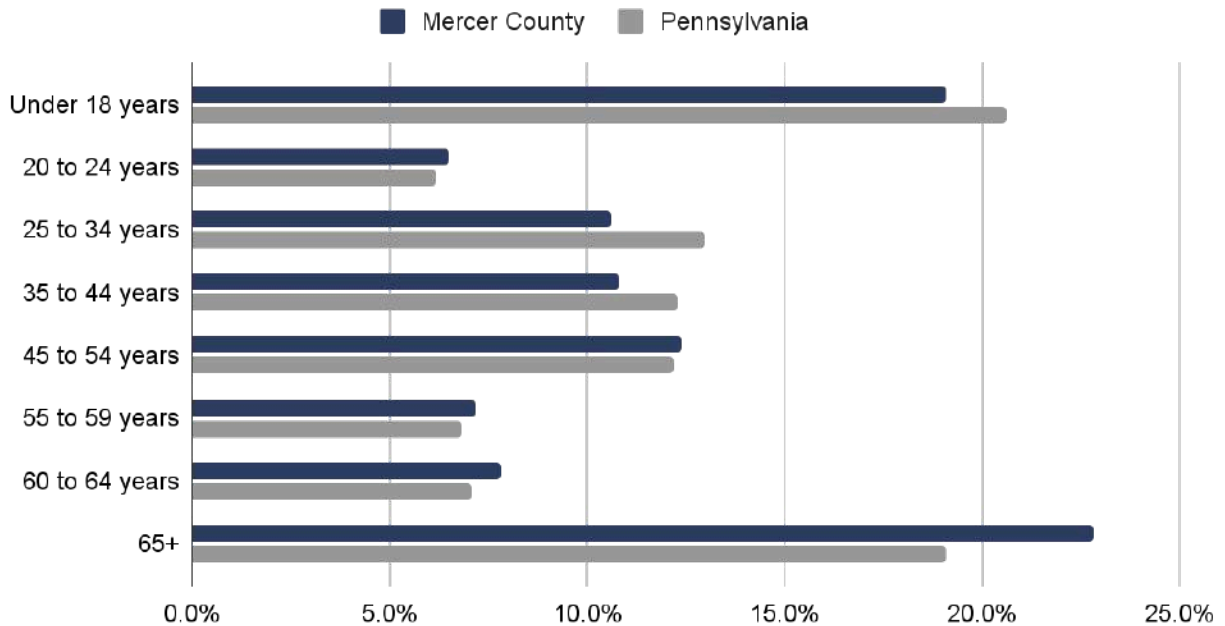
Racial and Ethnic Composition



Source: Census ACS 2023 5-year

Mercer County is less racially diverse than Pennsylvania, with nearly 90% of the population identifying as white. While Mercer matches the state rate of individuals of two more races (3.3%), it has lower shares of Asian, Black, and Hispanic or Latino individuals.

Age



Source: Census ACS 2023 5-year

Mercer County has a slightly lower share of children (under 18 years) and working-age people (25 to 44 years of age) and more older adults (65 years of age and older) than Pennsylvania. Almost 23% of Mercer County residents are 65 years of age or older.

Retirement risk, the share of the number of workers approaching retirement age, is high in Mercer County. The national average for an area this size is 32,754 people 55 or older, while there are 41,443 people in Mercer County. Mercer County has 17,728 millennials (ages 25-39). The national average for an area this size is 22,046.

Educational Attainment

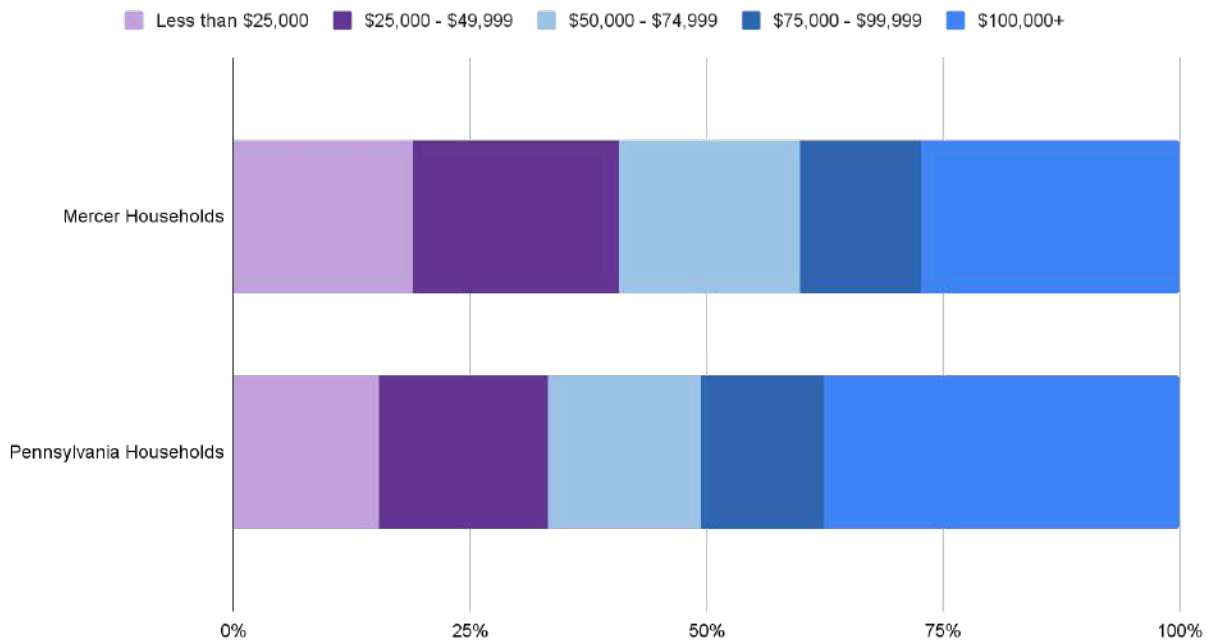
	Mercer County	Pennsylvania
Less than 9th Grade	3.2%	2.8%
9th Grade to 12th Grade	6.0%	4.9%
High School Diploma	39.7%	32.7%
Some College	16.0%	15.3%
Associate's Degree	10.4%	9.1%
Bachelor's Degree	15.9%	21.0%
Graduate Degree or Higher	8.9%	14.2%

Source: Lightcast 2024

The state outpaces Mercer County in educational attainment, particularly in terms of professional degrees. Slightly more Mercer County residents lack a high school diploma (9%) than the state averages (7.7%). Most Mercer County residents have at least a high school diploma; nearly one quarter have a bachelor’s degree or higher.

Economy

Households Income



Source: Census ACS 2023 5-year

Mercer County's median income of \$61,669 lags behind Pennsylvania's median of \$76,081. Just one-third of Pennsylvania households earn less than \$50,000 in annual income, compared to 41% of Mercer County households.

Employment

Light Hiring Competition Over an Average Supply of Regional Talent



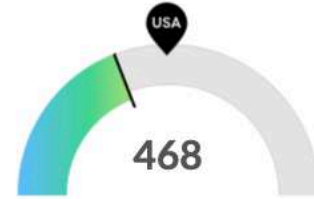
Supply (Jobs)

Mercer County, PA is about average for this kind of talent. The national average for an area this size is 48,245* employees, while there are 48,245 here.



Earnings Per Job

Earnings per job are below the national average. Earnings per jobs is the total industry earnings divided by the number of jobs in the industry.



Demand (Job Postings)

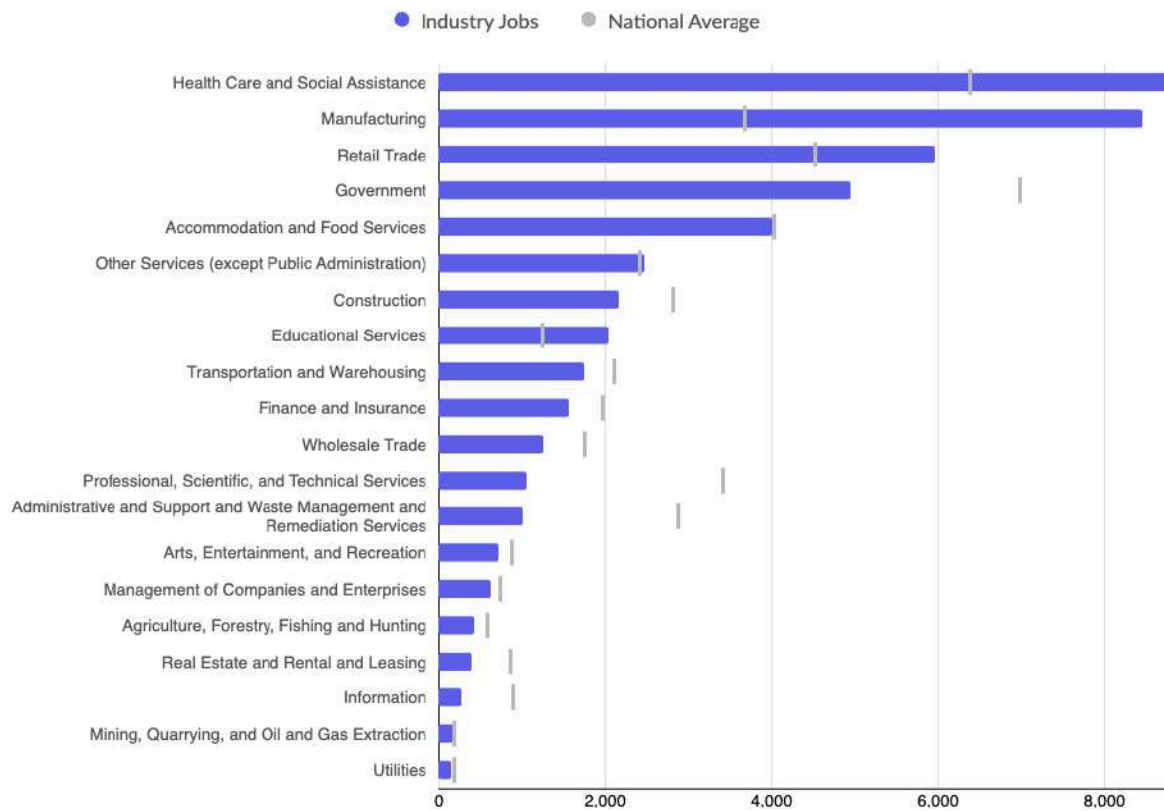
Competition from online job postings is low in Mercer County, PA. The national average for an area this size is 673* job postings/mo, while there are 468 here.

*National average values are derived by taking the national value for your industries and scaling it down to account for the difference in overall workforce size between the nation and Mercer County, PA. In other words, the values represent the national average adjusted for region size.

Source: Lightcast 2024

Low earnings, coupled with an average supply of jobs, and lower than expected number of job postings complicates the county's ability to retain and attract workers. The national average of earnings per job is \$88,501.

Industry Concentration



Source: Lightcast 2024

The Health Care and Social Assistance industry is highly concentrated in the region, which aligns with national growth patterns and the demands of an aging population. Manufacturing is the next most concentrated industry, suggesting the legacy industry remains critical to the county. Retail is also a large employing industry that is highly concentrated, which may be putting downward pressure on wage averages.

Housing

Housing Key Takeaways

- **The majority of Mercer County housing is single-family:** Three-quarters of Mercer County housing units are detached single-family homes.
- **Like across Pennsylvania, housing stock is aging:** In Mercer County, 72% of housing units were constructed before 1980, with 30% of housing units constructed before 1950.
- **There is an opportunity to reduce housing vacancy:** Almost 10%, or 4,700 Mercer County units, are vacant as of 2023.
- **Housing cost burden (spending more than 30% of income on housing expenses) varies between owners and renters:** While 14% of homeowners are housing cost burden, 44% of renters are housing cost burden.
- **Transportation costs are high:** Mercer County residents spend \$14,992 in annual transportation costs. This means the average Mercer County resident spends 50% of their income on housing (23%) and transportation (27%) expenses.

Overall Housing Stock Trends

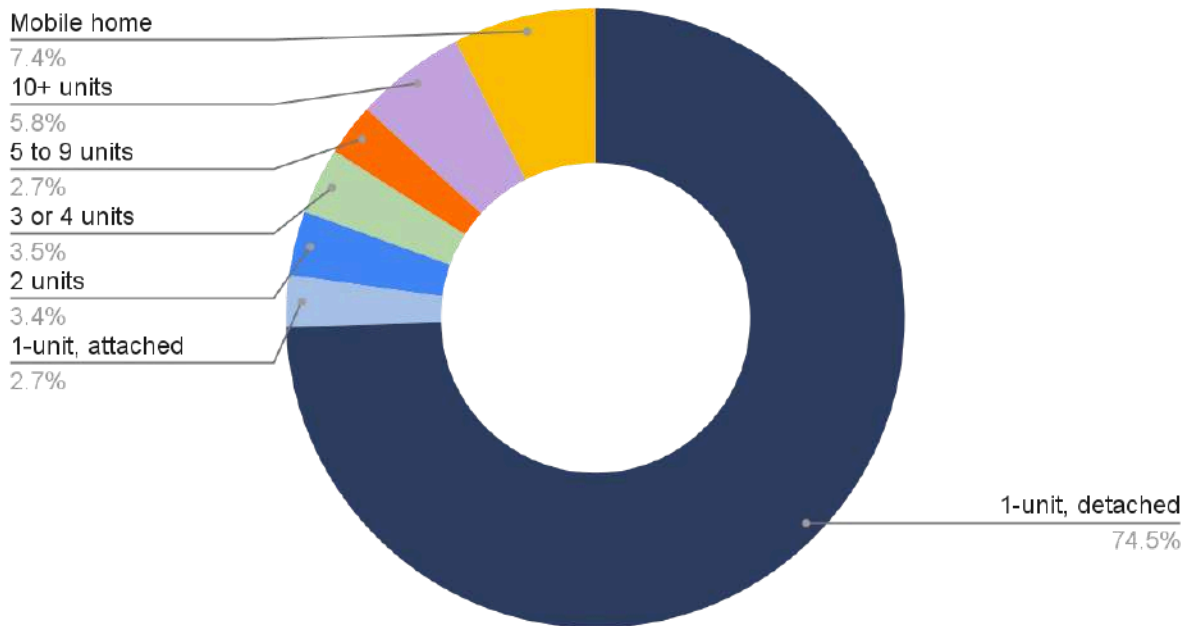
Total Housing Units

	Units	Rate
Occupied housing units	46,123	90.6%
Vacant housing units	4,761	9.4%
Total housing units	50,884	100.0%

Source: Census ACS 2023 5-year

In total, Mercer County has almost 51,000 housing units. Of those units, 9.4%, or 4,700 units, are vacant. Of the occupied housing units, 73% are owner-occupied, and 27% renter occupied.

Housing Units by Type



Source: Census ACS 2023 5-year

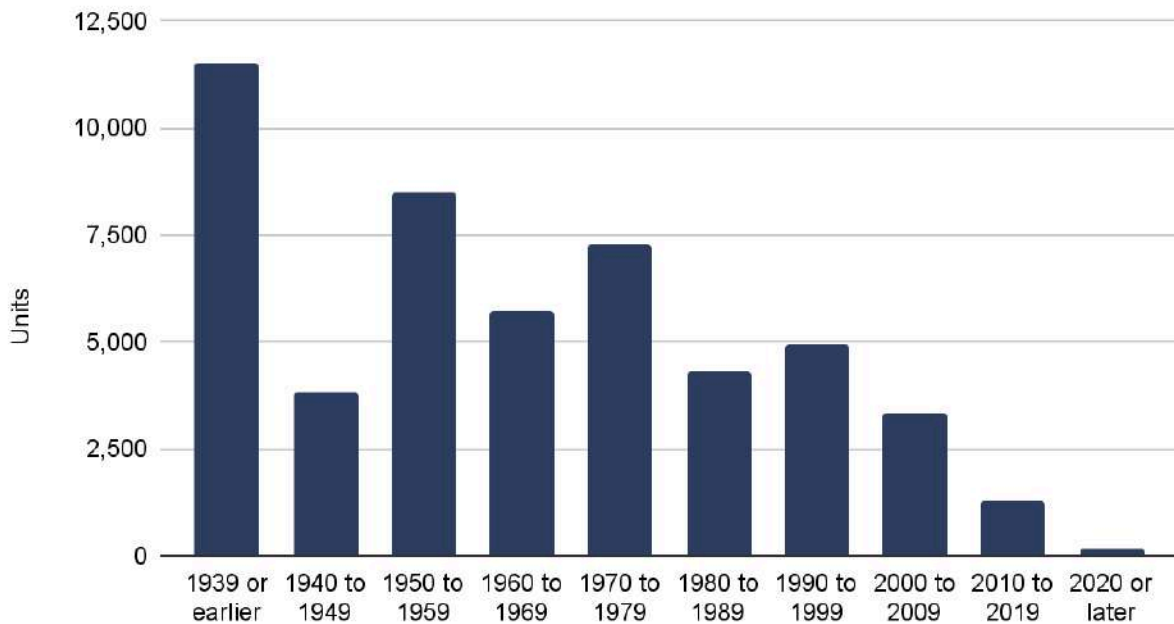
Mercer County lacks a variety of housing types. **Three-quarters** of Mercer County housing units are detached single-family homes. The next most common types of housing units are mobile homes (7.4%).

	Units	Share of Units
Studio/Efficiency	550	1.1%
1 bedroom	4,493	8.8%
2 bedrooms	12,450	24.5%
3 bedrooms	24,524	48.2%
4 bedrooms	7,267	14.3%
5 or more bedrooms	1,600	3.1%

Source: Census ACS 2023 5-year

Almost half (48%) of units have three bedrooms, where one quarter (24.5%) of units have two bedrooms. Meanwhile, the average household size for owner-occupied units is 2.22, and for renters is 1.94, suggesting the number of bedrooms surpasses household members in many Mercer households.

Age of Housing Stock



Source: Census ACS 2023 5-year

As seen across Pennsylvania, housing production has declined over time. In Mercer County, 72% of housing units were constructed before 1980, with 30% of units constructed before 1950.

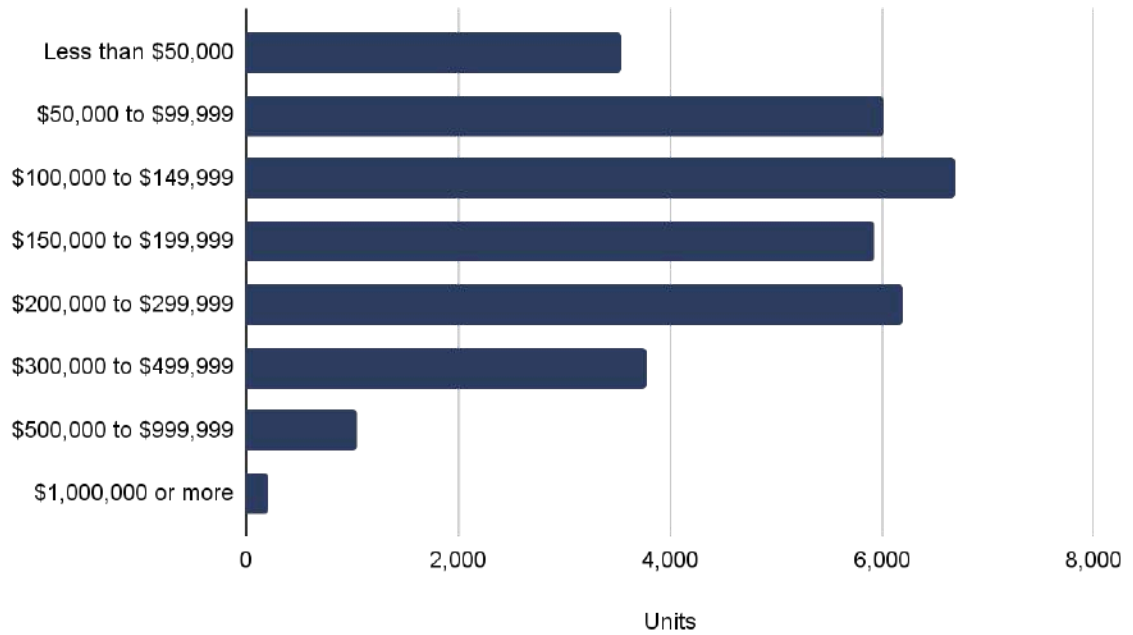
Year Householder Moved into Unit

	Householders	Share of Households
Moved in 2021 or later	3,078	6.7%
Moved in 2018 to 2020	8,399	18.2%
Moved in 2010 to 2017	11,680	25.3%
Moved in 2000 to 2009	9,049	19.6%
Moved in 1990 to 1999	5,523	12.0%
Moved in 1989 and earlier	8,394	18.2%

Source: Census ACS 2023 5-year

Half of Mercer households have not moved since at least 2009. More than 30% of Mercer households have not moved since the new millennium. Long-term tenancy can contribute to community building, but may also lead to households living below their means, making it challenging for newcomers to enter the market.

Value of Owner-Occupied Units



Source: Census ACS 2023 5-year

As of 2023, the median value of an owner-occupied home in Mercer County was \$153,600.

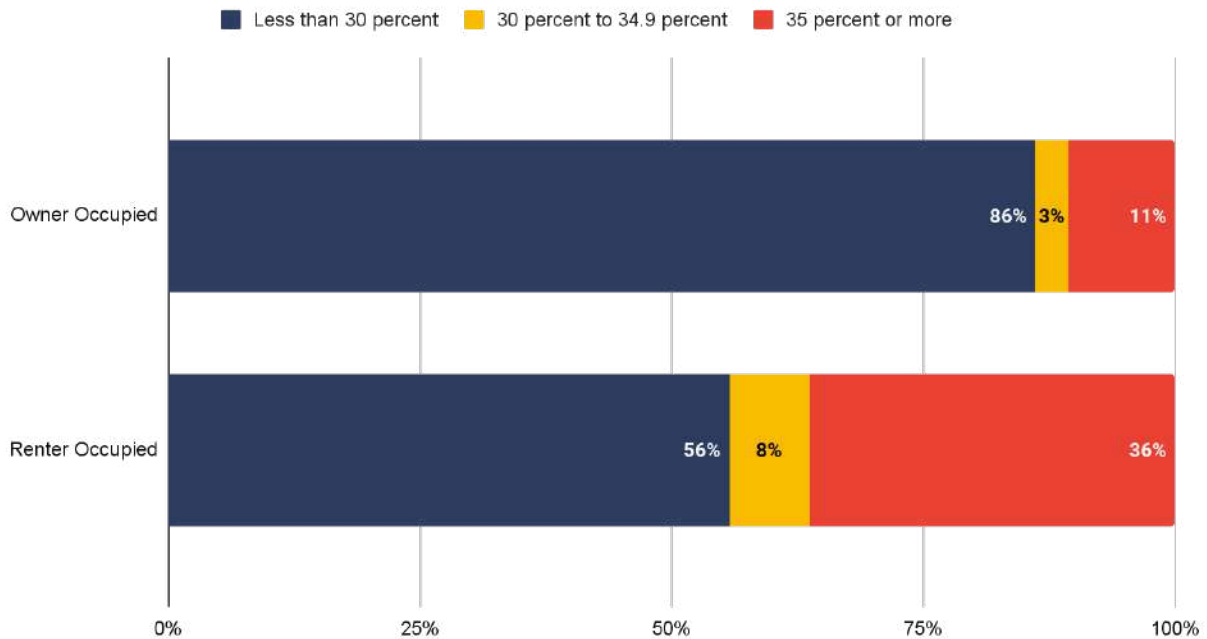
Median Monthly Housing Costs

	Monthly Median Costs Mercer County	Monthly Median Costs Pennsylvania
Housing units with a mortgage	\$1,216	\$1,722
Housing units without a mortgage	\$493	\$630
Rental Units	\$808	\$1,162

Source: Census ACS 2023 5-year

Median monthly housing costs in Mercer County are well below Pennsylvania medians.

Housing Cost Burden



Source: Census ACS 2023 5-year

Households are cost-burdened if they contribute more than 30% of their monthly income to housing expenses. Housing cost burden measures the expenses of both renters and homeowners.

Housing cost burden varies greatly between homeowners and renters in Mercer County. While 14% of homeowners are housing cost-burdened, 44% of renters are housing cost-burdened. More than one-third of Mercer County renter households, 4,097 households, contribute more than 35% of their monthly income to housing-related expenses. In Mercer County, [10%](#) of households are severely cost-burdened, spending half or more of their income on housing.

Vehicle Access

	Households	Share of Households
No vehicles available	4,421	9.6%
1 vehicle available	16,571	35.9%
2 vehicles available	16,900	36.6%
3 or more vehicles available	8,231	17.8%

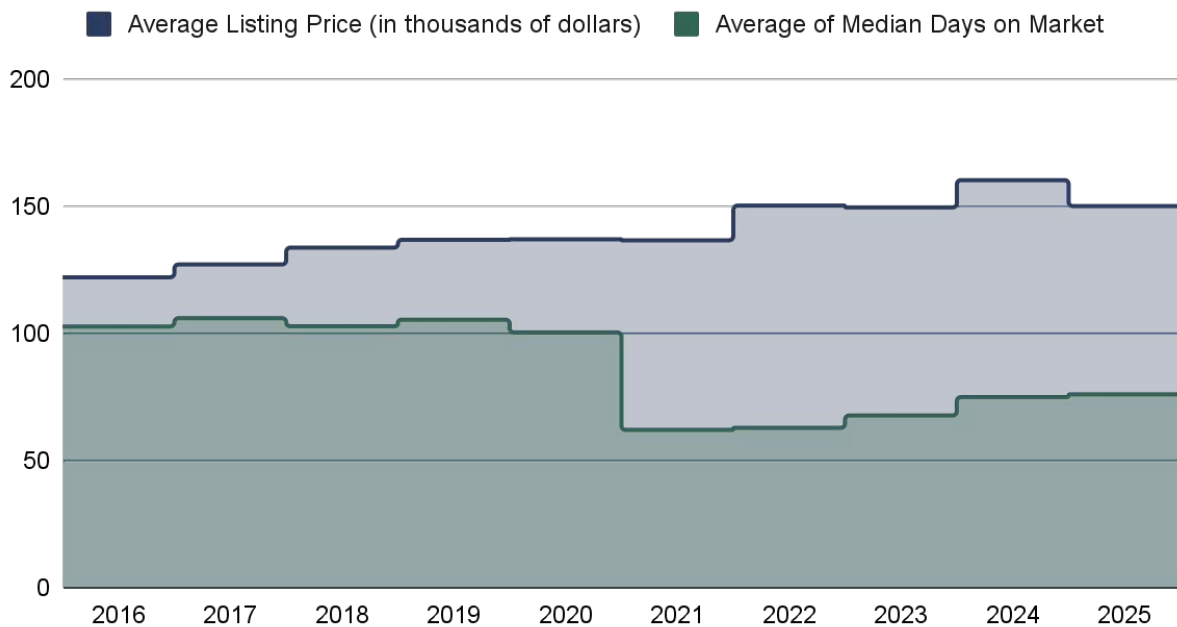
Source: Census ACS 2023 5-year

Almost 10% of Mercer households lack a vehicle. Similar shares of households have either one or two vehicles.

Though housing cost burden does not include a transportation measurement, factoring in such costs are especially important in rural communities. According to [The Center for Neighborhood Technology \(CNT\)'s Housing and Transportation Affordability Index](#), Mercer County residents spend \$14,992 in annual transportation costs. This means the average Mercer County resident spends 50% of their income on housing (23%) and transportation (27%) expenses.

Housing Market Trends

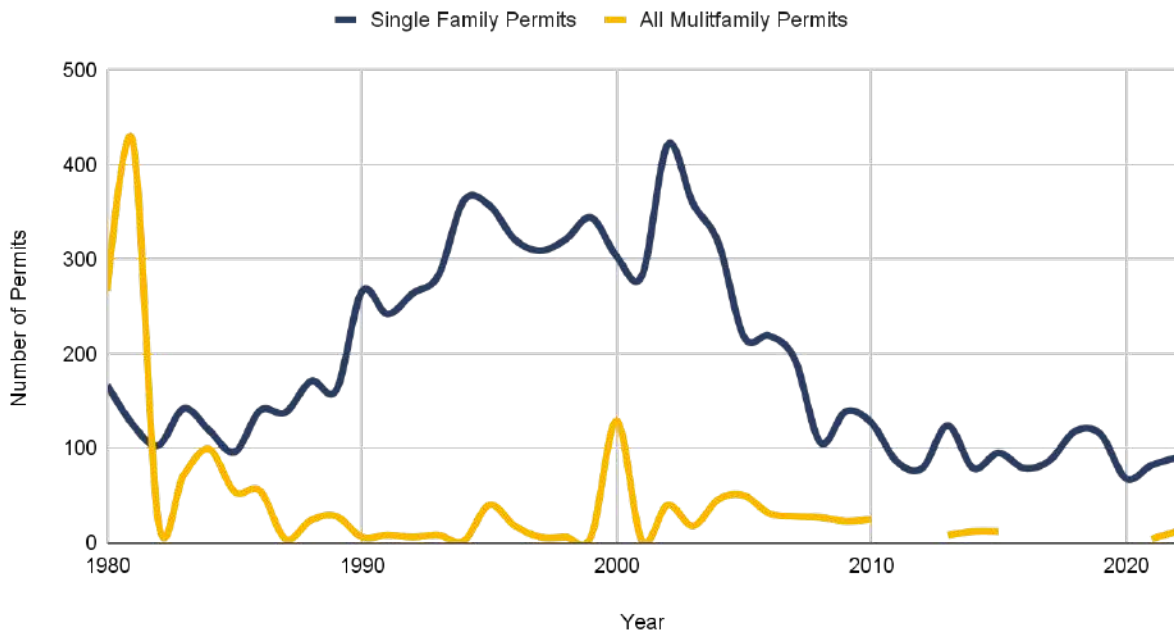
Housing Inventory



Source: Realtor.com

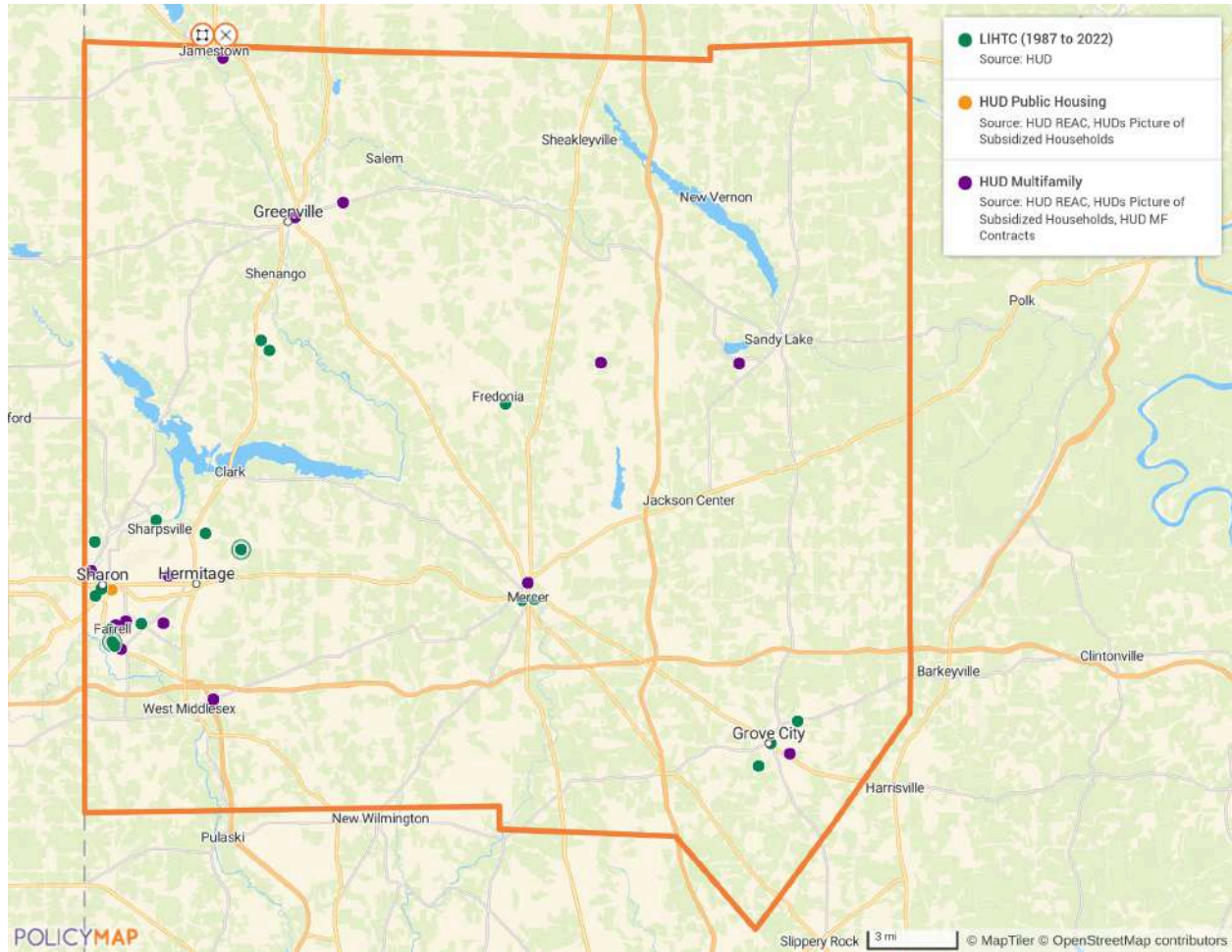
List prices increased in Mercer County since 2016, with average housing list prices rising from approximately \$122,000 in 2016 to \$150,000 as of 2025 (2025 data was incomplete at the time of reporting). Rather than a consistent increase over the decade, Mercer saw listing prices averages remain stable from 2019-2021, increasing in 2022.

Building Permits



Source: [US Census Bureau Building Permits Survey](#)

Building permit trends have fluctuated since 1980, but generally trended downward since 2000. Consistent with overall regional trends, permit rates of the last decade lag behind those of preceding decades. Single-family permits are more consistent at lower levels in recent years, particularly compared to multifamily permits.



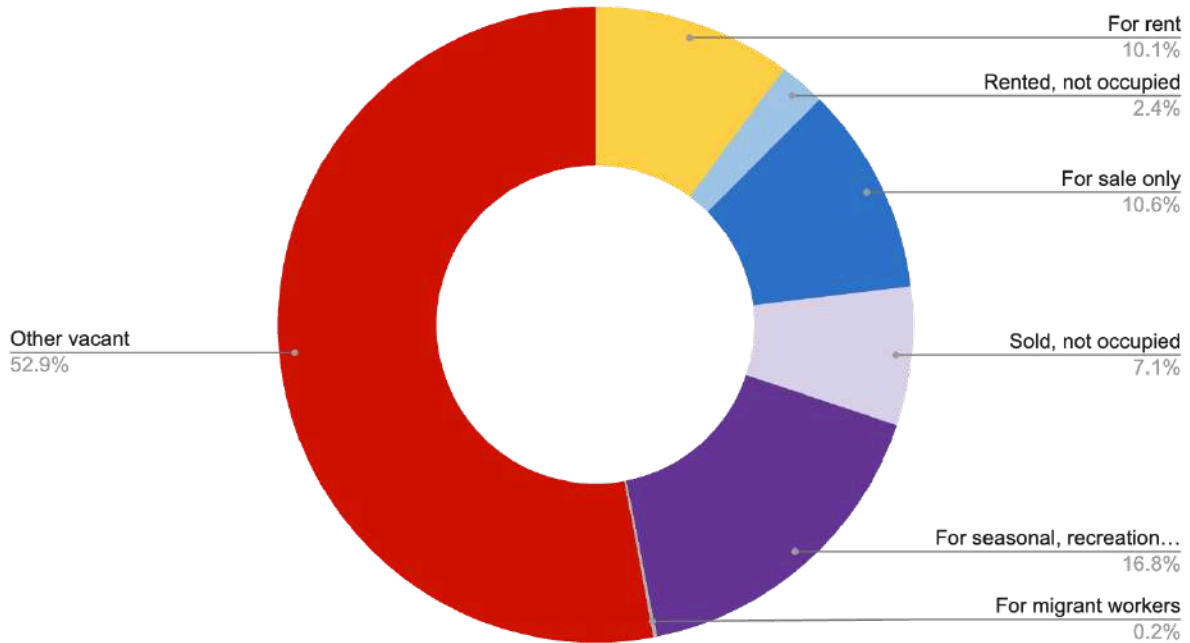
Source: PolicyMap | HUD, 2023

Subsidized housing in the county is almost evenly split between HUD multifamily and LIHTC developments, with 25 and 21 locations, respectively. However, more than double the subsidized units are HUD multifamily (2,042) compared to LITHC. HUD multifamily units see an average household rental contribution of \$355 per month from residents. Mercer County has 1,141 total LITHC units, 59% or 671 units are subsidized.

Vacancy Analysis

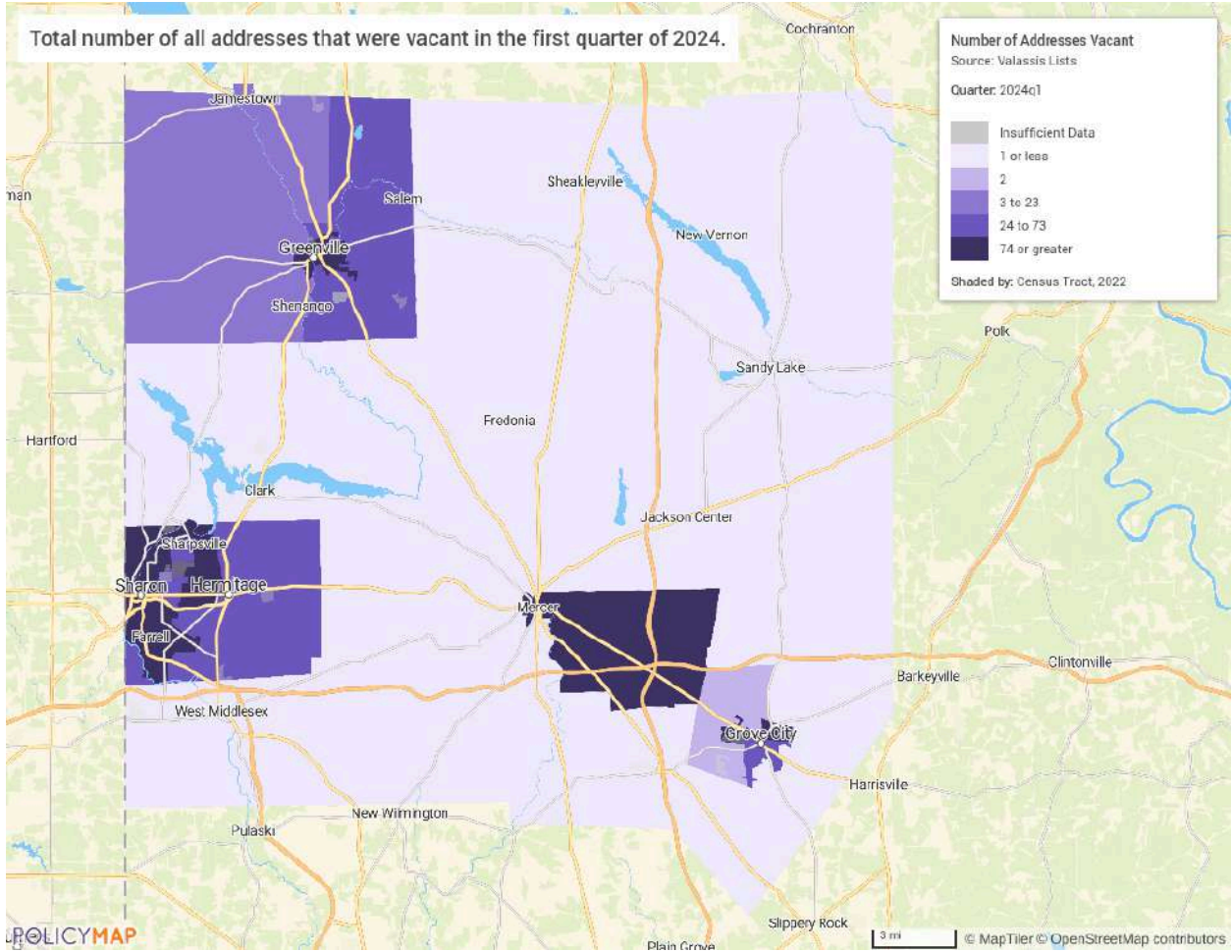
With 4,761 vacant units, 9.4% of total residential units, vacancy is a challenge in Mercer County.

Reasons for Residential Vacancy in Mercer County



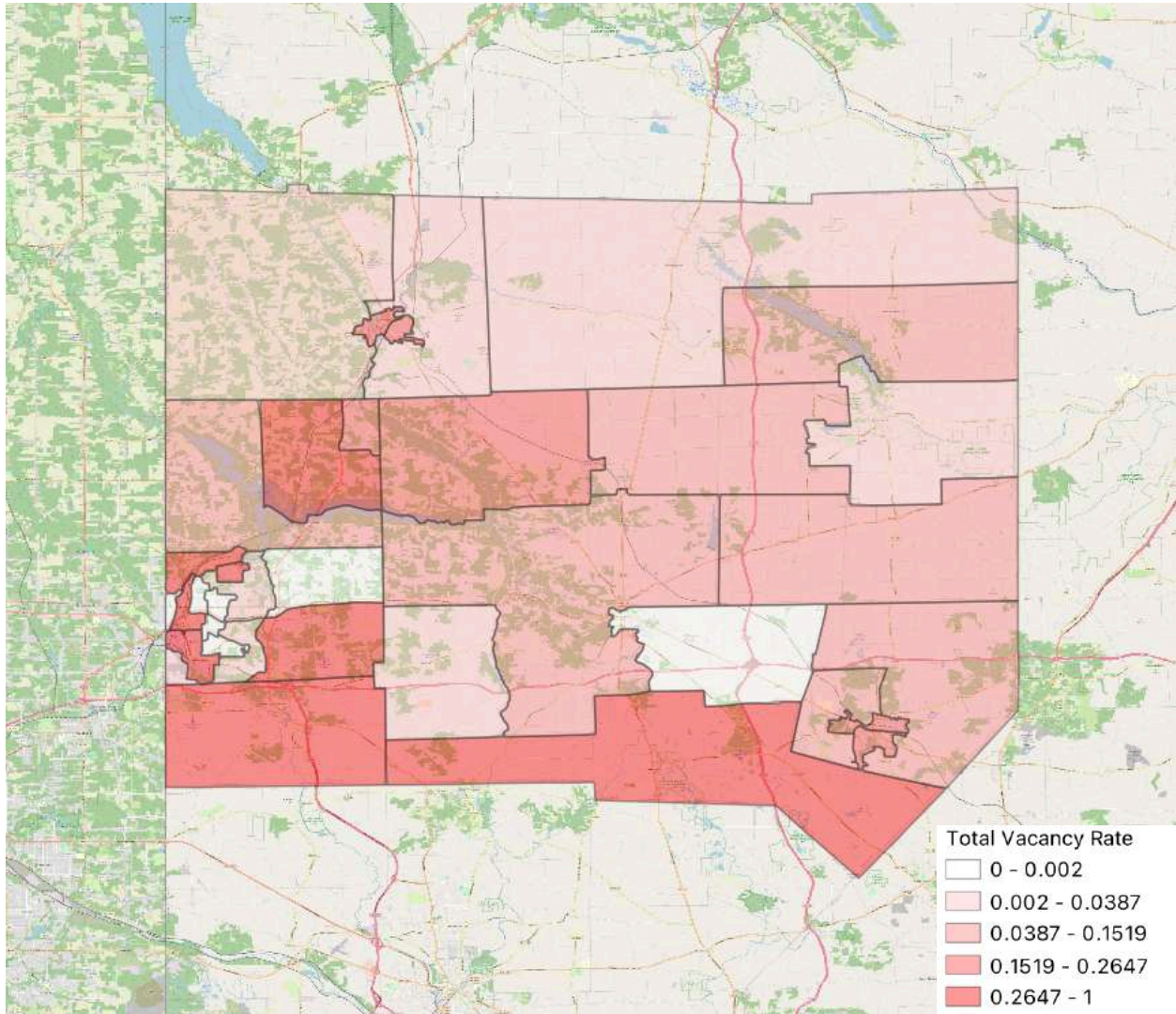
Source: Census ACS 2023 5-year

The reasons for the prevalence of residential vacancy can vary. For instance, homes for sale (11%) or rent (10%) are considered temporarily vacant. Homes that serve seasonal, recreational, or occasional use also contribute to vacancy (17%). In Mercer County, however, the majority of vacant residential units (53%) are “other vacant” or unexplained vacancies. [Other vacant](#) housing units may consist of unoccupied units undergoing renovation, foreclosure, estate settlement, title dispute, or abandonment. Mercer County’s “other vacant” rate outpaces that of Pennsylvania (42%). There is an opportunity to uncover the status of other vacant properties through programming.



Source: [Valassis Lists](#)

Vacancy is not evenly distributed throughout the county. Vacancy is most highly concentrated in Mercer County's cities - particularly Sharon, Hermitage, Mercer, Grove City, and Greenville.



Source: [HUD USPS](#)

Vacancy is not evenly distributed throughout the county. Residential vacancy is most highly concentrated in Mercer County's cities - particularly Sharon, Mercer, Grove City, and Greenville - as well as Mercer's southern census tracts.

Housing Gaps and Mismatch

The following analysis, conducted using a model built by Fourth Economy that compares Area Median Income to housing supply, mortgage/rent rates, and vacancy, measures existing housing affordability alignment (including gaps and mismatch) and can inform market demand for new housing. This analysis uses the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy data to project housing supply gaps across

income levels for owner-occupied and renter-occupied units. Although this analysis includes projections for Mercer County, the income limits are based on the Pittsburgh, PA MSA.

County Area Median Income (AMI) Income Limits

		1 Person	4 People	Owner Value (Low Estimate)	Owner Value (High Estimate)	Monthly Rent
	30% AMI	\$16,600	\$31,200	\$81,000	\$112,000	\$780
	50% AMI	\$27,600	\$39,400	\$102,000	\$142,000	\$990
	80% AMI	\$44,150	\$63,050	\$164,000	\$227,000	\$1,580
	100% AMI	\$55,200	\$78,800	\$205,000	\$284,000	\$1,970

Source: Fourth Economy Analysis of HUD FY 2024 Income Limits

For Mercer, owner housing ranges in affordability from \$81,000 at the lower estimate for the lowest AMI band to \$205,000 for the upper estimate for the highest AMI band. For renter housing, affordability ranges from \$780 a month to almost \$2,000 a month.

Owner Households and Units Gap Calculation

	Households	Occupied Units	Vacant Units	Unit Shortage <i>Too few owner units</i>	Unit Surplus <i>Too many owner units</i>
0-50% AMI	4,640 14%	15,470 48%	160 0.5%		10,990
51-80% AMI	5,360 17%	8,910 27%	50 0.2%		3,600
81-100% AMI	3,670 11%	2,910 9%	0 0.0%	760	
101%+ AMI	18,525 58%	4,905 15%	90 0.3%	13,530	

Source: Fourth Economy Analysis of HUD Data, 2024

Among owner housing units, there is a unit shortage of 14,290 units at 81%+ AMI, while there is a unit surplus for households at 80% AMI and below. There is almost a 1:1 ratio between “market rate units” and low-income units.

Owner Households Mismatch

	Unaffordable <i>Households occupying units that are unaffordable to them</i>	No Mismatch <i>Households with income that matches unit cost</i>	Lives Below Means <i>Households with income above the unit cost they occupy</i>
0-50% AMI Households	1,505 32%	3,135 68%	0 0%
51-80% AMI Households	730 14%	1,300 24%	3,330 62%
81-100% AMI Households	345 9%	210 6%	3,115 85%
101%+ AMI Households	0 0%	3,810 21%	14,715 79%

Source: Fourth Economy Analysis of HUD Data, 2024

The surpluses and gaps by affordability are only part of the story of housing cost burdens. Even in the absence of mismatches, households may still face cost burdens. Almost one-third of owner households in the lowest-income bracket (0-50% AMI) are cost-burdened, whereas the vast majority of other households are living below their means. While more than two-thirds of households at the lower-income level are not experiencing a housing mismatch, the share of higher-income households living below their means indicates potential demand for higher-value properties.

Renter Households and Units Gap Calculation

	Households	Occupied Units	Vacant Units	Unit Shortage <i>Too few rental units</i>	Unit Surplus <i>Too many rental units</i>
0-30% AMI	3,415 27%	3,350 25%	120 0.9%	65	
31-50% AMI	3,060 24%	4,940 37%	240 1.8%		1,880
51-80% AMI	2,500 20%	4,135 31%	70 0.5%		1,635
81%+ AMI	3,785 30%	335 3%	0 0.0%	3,450	

Source: Fourth Economy Analysis of HUD Data, 2024

Among renter households, there is a renter shortage at the lowest and highest income levels, with a unit surplus for the middle two income bands. This is a common pattern in rental markets.

Renter Household Mismatch

	Unaffordable <i>Households occupying units that are unaffordable to them</i>	No Mismatch <i>Households with income that matches unit cost</i>	Lives Below Means <i>Households with income above the unit cost they occupy</i>
0-30% AMI Households	1,885 55%	1,530 45%	0 0%
31-50% AMI Households	920 30%	1,320 43%	820 27%
51-80% AMI Households	70 3%	915 37%	1,515 61%
81%+ AMI Households	0 0%	185 5%	3,600 95%

Source: Fourth Economy Analysis of HUD Data, 2024

More than half (55%) of households at the 0-30% and 30% of households at 31-50% AMI are occupying rental units that are unaffordable to them. Meanwhile, 61% of households at 51-80% AMI and 95% of households at 81%+ AMI are living below their means with income above the unit cost they occupy. This likely creates competition between the lowest income level households and all others for housing units that are affordable to them. This problem is exacerbated by the housing unit shortage at the highest-income limit.

This housing analysis indicates the need for affordable owner and renter housing units, including additional subsidized housing opportunities, as well as the development of higher-value owner and renter housing units targeted at households in the higher income brackets.

Regional Housing Need by Employment Growth Scenario

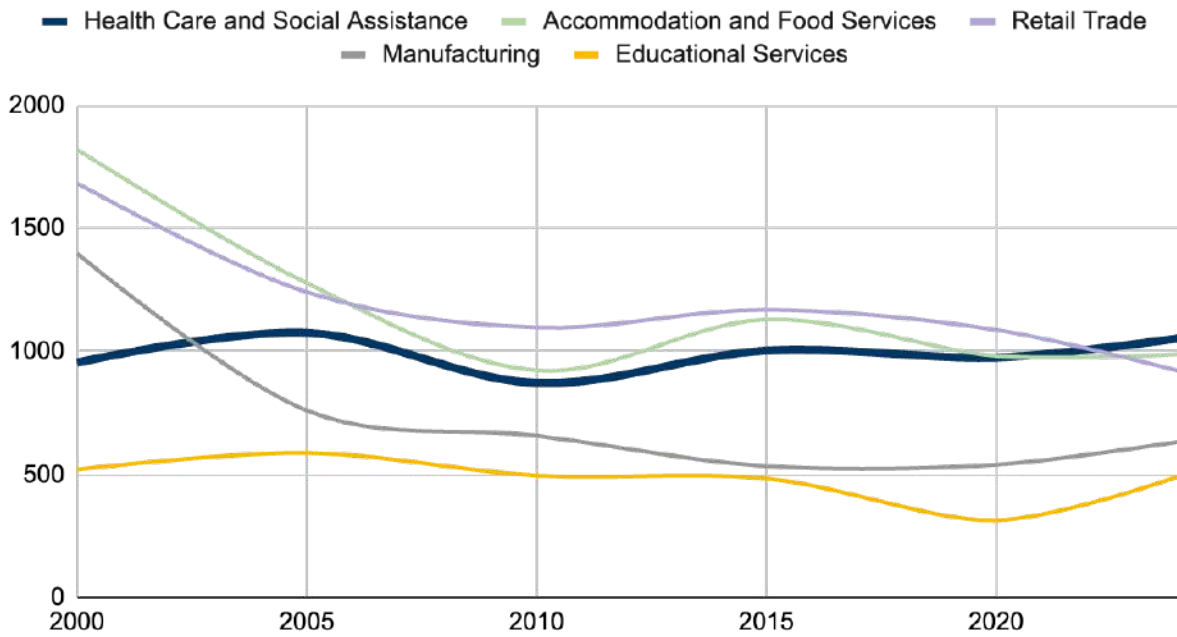
	100 Job Growth Scenario	500 Job Growth Scenario	1,000 Job Growth Scenario
Job Growth	100	500	1,000
Regional Owner Unit Demand	48	239	480
Regional Renter Unit Demand	27	135	270
Regional Housing Unit Demand	75	373	750
Home Value	Owner Unit Demand (Regional)	Owner Unit Demand (Regional)	Owner Unit Demand (Regional)
Less than \$100K	2	8	16
\$100K to \$149K	3	15	29
\$150K to \$199K	4	19	38
\$200K to \$249K	4	22	45
\$250K to \$299K	4	22	45
\$300K to \$399K	9	47	94
\$400K to \$499K	12	61	122
\$500K or more	9	45	89
Total Owner Units	48	239	480
Monthly Rent	Renter Unit Demand (Regional)	Renter Unit Demand (Regional)	Renter Unit Demand (Regional)
Less than \$500	3	14	28
\$500 to \$749	2	9	17
\$750 to \$999	3	13	25
\$1,000 to \$1,249	2	11	21
\$1,250 to \$1,499	3	13	26
\$1,500 to \$1,999	5	24	49
\$2,000 to \$2,499	3	13	26
\$2,500 or more	8	38	76
Total Renter Units	27	135	270

Employment growth can also drive the need for new housing. For every 100 additional jobs in Mercer County, 75 new housing units would be needed, according to an analysis of internal modeling by Fourth Economy. The breakdown of these housing units would be 48 owner units and 27 renter units, assuming the composition of owner and renter households matches the national rate. The model shows the greatest demand for owner units priced at \$300,000 and up, while rental demand varies more across the scenarios.

Health Care

Based on stakeholder feedback, a deeper understanding of Health Care was sought to inform the need for senior housing and nursing care. Health care is essential to Mercer County as both an employing industry and an important component of aging in place. 23% of Mercer County residents are 65 years of age or older, and future growth in the senior population will increase demand for assisted living and health care services.

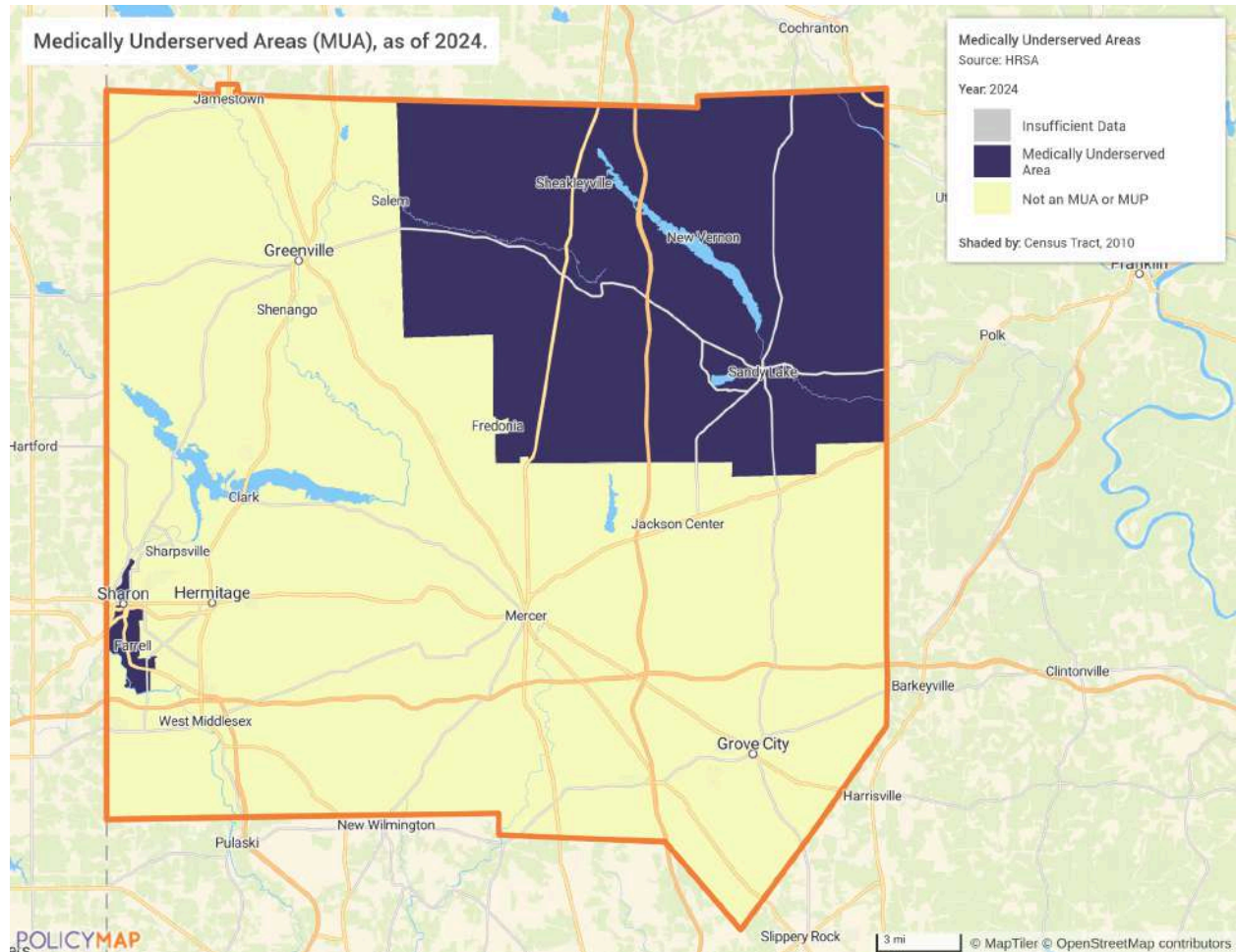
Top Employing Sectors 2000-2024



Source: Census QWI 2000-2024

While other top employing sectors have lost employment alongside population loss since 2000, health care employment has remained stable.

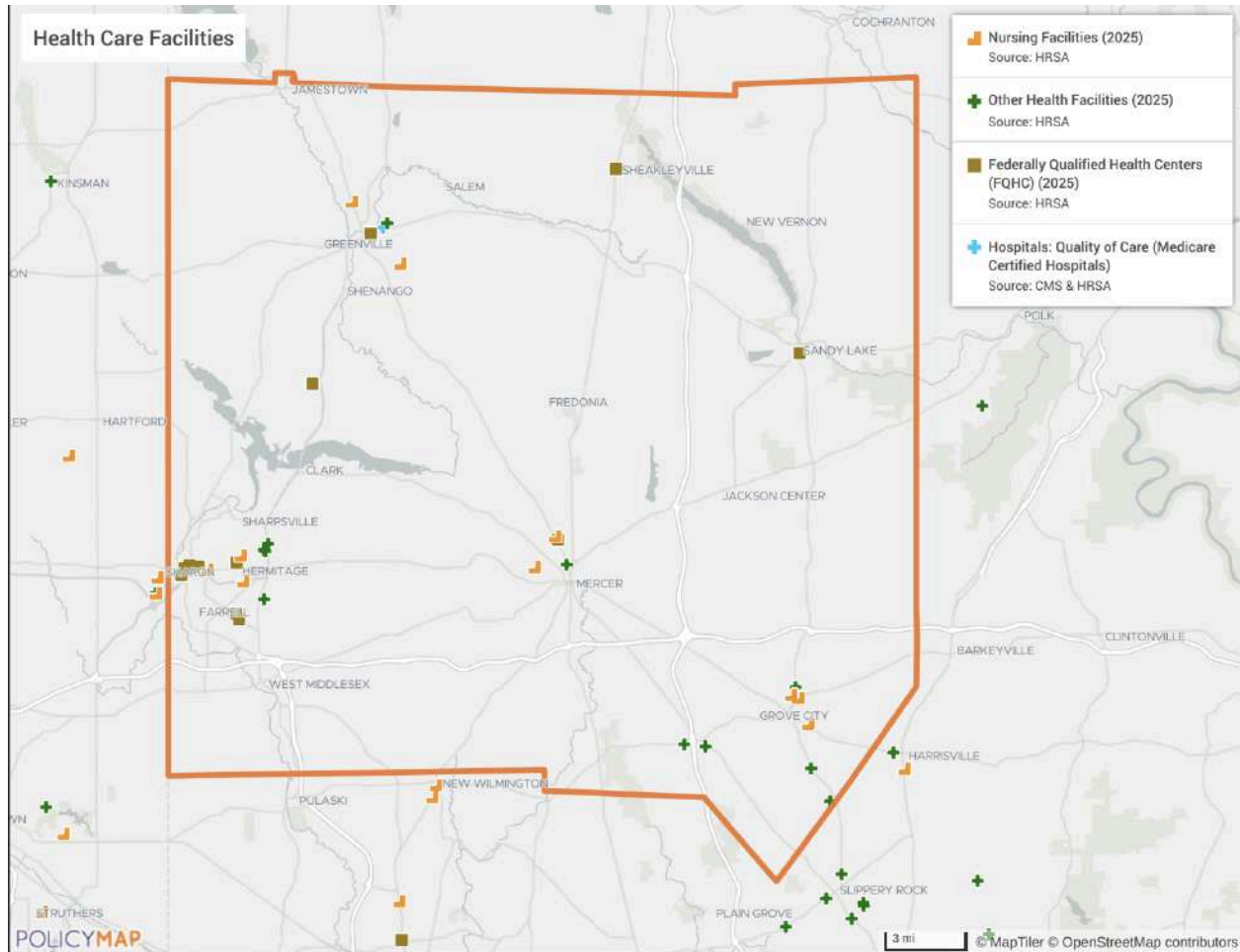
Health Care Access



Source: PolicyMap 2025

Sharon and Farrell, as well as the Northeast portion of the county, are Medically Underserved Areas according to the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). [Medically Underserved Areas \(MUAs\)](#) are “census tracts designated by the Health Resources and Services Administration as having too few primary care providers, high infant mortality, high poverty, and/or high elderly population.”

Health Care Facilities

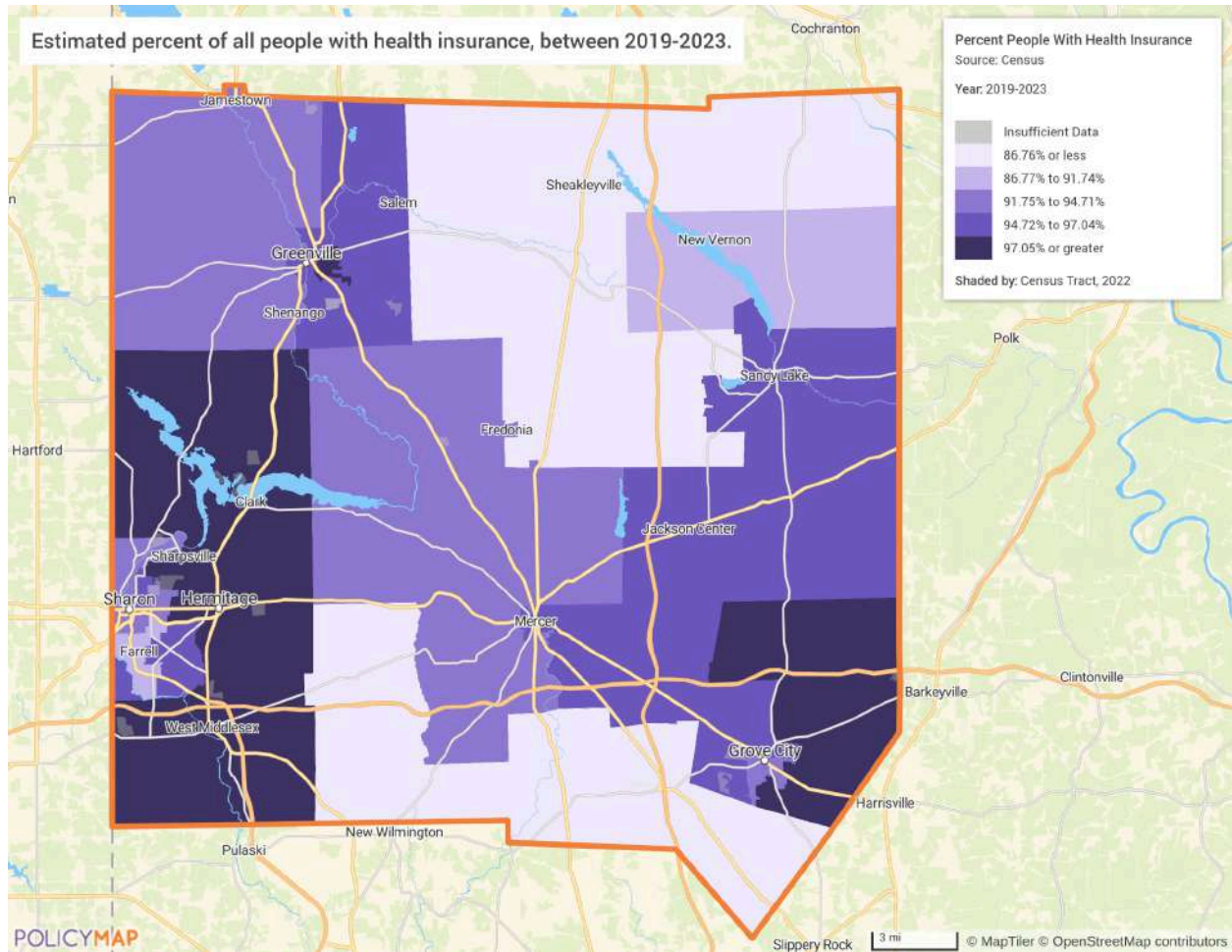


Source: PolicyMap 2025

Existing healthcare access is concentrated in the county's city centers. The county is home to ten nursing care facilities. There are just over 1,000 nursing facility beds in Mercer County. Whether this meets local demand depends on the range of estimates used. Supply surpasses the 2023 Administration of Community Living Profile on Older Americans expected rate of those at least 75 years of age in care (2%) and those at least 85 years of age in care (8%).¹

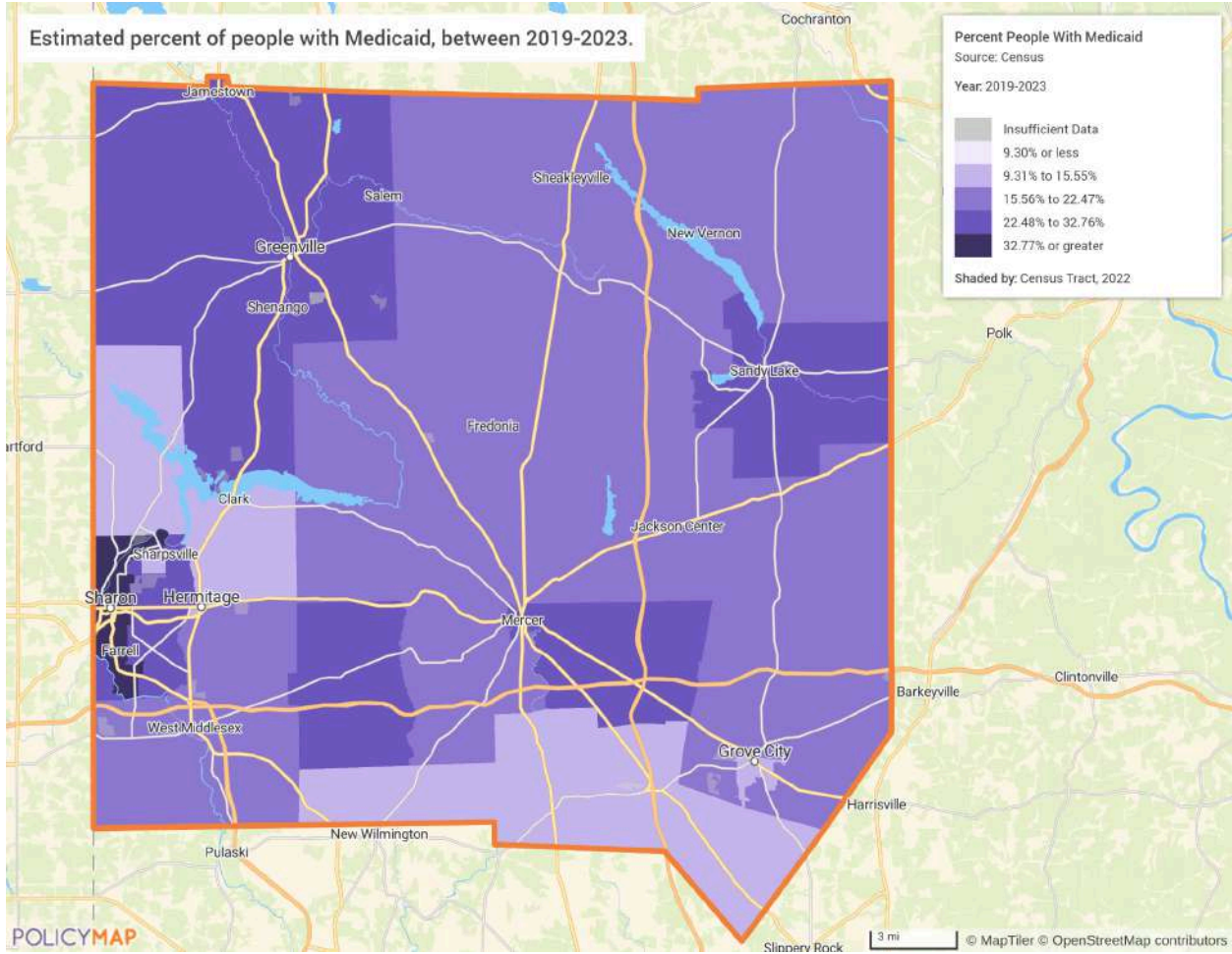
¹ Administration of Community Living [Profile on Older Americans 2023](#)

Health Insurance Coverage



Source: PolicyMap 2025

Overall, 6% of Mercer County residents lack health insurance. Health insurance coverage varies across the county, with the highest concentrations of coverage surrounding urban centers, and less coverage in the rural southern and northern portions of the county.



Source: PolicyMap 2025

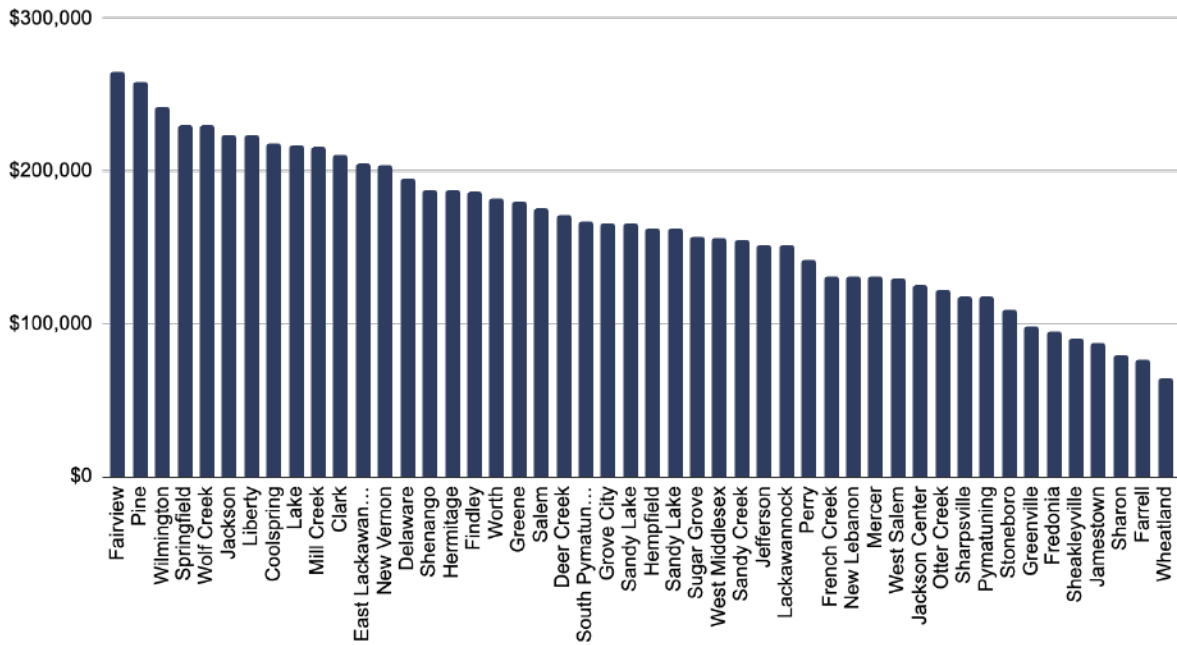
Many Mercer residents may be vulnerable to the 2025 Budget Reconciliation Act’s Medicaid cuts. At the county level, 24% of people rely on Medicaid. In Sharon, for example, 42% of people are on Medicaid. Another 8% of Mercer County residents rely on Medicare, and 16% are SNAP recipients.

Appendix

Additional Data Analysis

County Subdivision Level Analysis

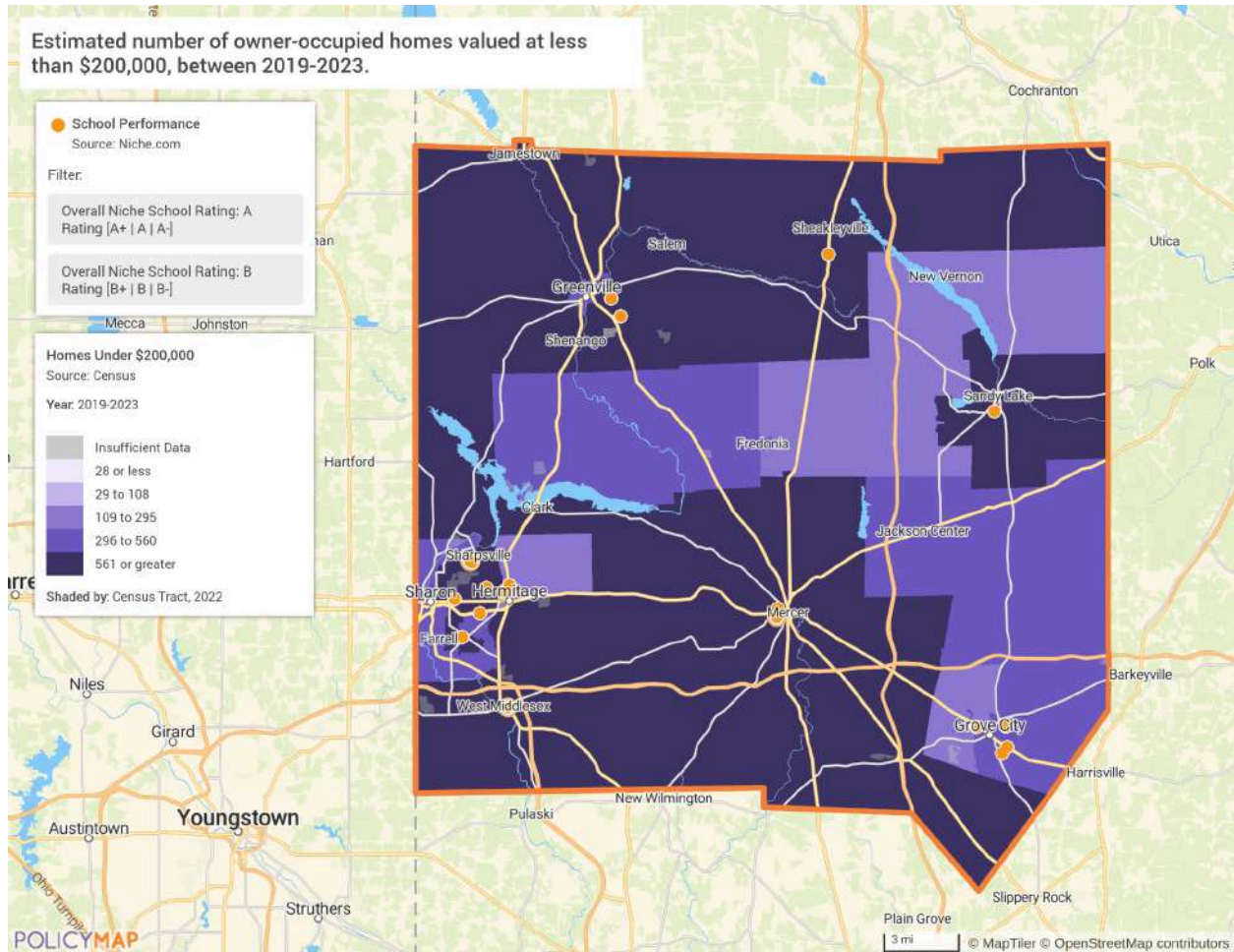
Median Home Value across Mercer County



Source: Census ACS 2023 5-year

Median home values across Mercer County municipalities vary by more than \$140,000.

Schools and Housing Development



Source: Census ACS 2023 5-year

Throughout the planning process, developers and county housing advocates vocalized their desire to attract young families. Census tracts that have nearby schools and homes under \$200,000 are good candidates for affordable housing development targeted at families.

Census Tract Level Housing Characteristics

While there is an opportunity to build additional housing at higher values, this demand is driven by current residents living below their means and the need to free up middle-range houses.

Attracting families with children, a desire expressed throughout the planning process, requires increasing housing supply across home values (through moves or new builds). According to HUD, a four-person household earning the area median income of \$78,800 should be able to afford a home between \$205,000 and \$284,000 (see [County Area Median Income \(AMI\) Income Limits](#)). We use a cutoff of \$200,000 as the closest proxy.

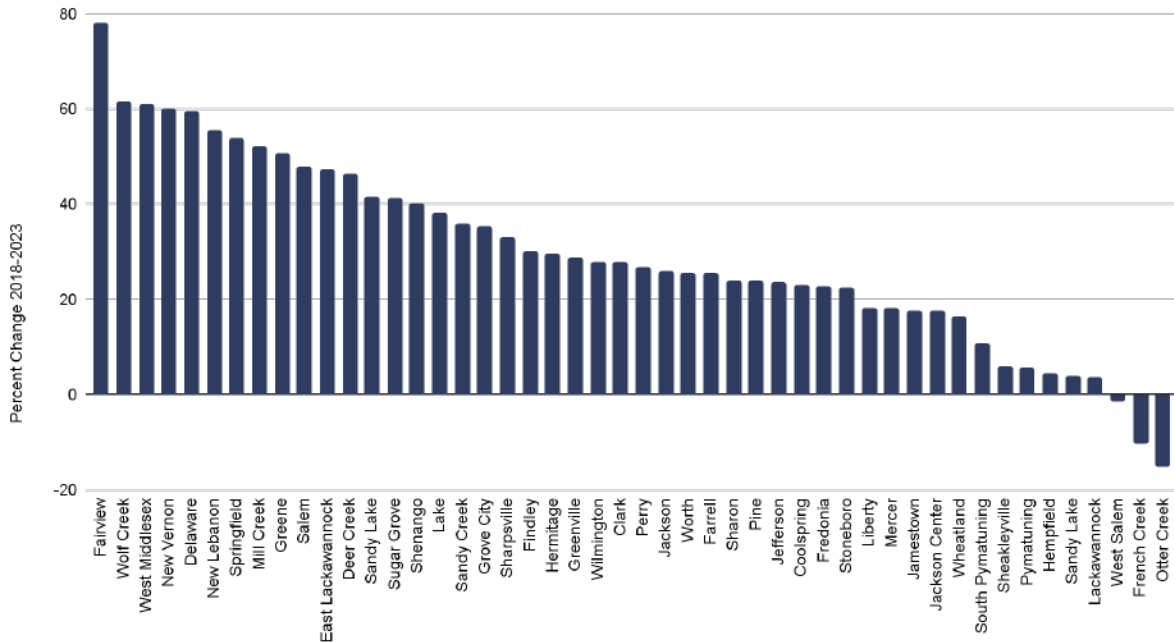
GeoID Formatted	Population	Population Density (People per Square Mile)	Vacancy Rate	Median Home Value	Median Amount Home Loans	Homes under \$200,000	Nearest Schools (A or B Niche Rating)
42085030100	1,677	3,500	29.9	\$45,900	N/A	348	
42085032502	2,071	48	25.7	\$190,900	\$155,000	414	
42085032200	2,711	3,417	16.1	\$91,900	\$105,000	797	Greenville Junior/Senior High School
42085031800	4,592	49	15.8	\$152,400	\$155,000	1,049	Commodore Perry School (K-6)
42085032100	2,822	2,580	15.7	\$106,400	\$80,000	523	
42085033200	2,866	2,267	15.2	N/A	N/A	409	
42085030300	3,246	4,458	15.1	\$71,100	\$115,000	688	
42085032602	4,472	200	11.5	\$153,500	\$115,000	621	Mercer Middle & High School
42085032504	2,736	98	11.2	\$140,100	\$105,000	659	Oakview Elementary
42085032503	1,719	49	11.2	\$237,000	\$165,000	174	
42085032402	1,386	528	11.1	\$106,700	\$110,000	526	
42085032601	5,521	85	11.0	\$189,800	\$175,000	1,047	Mercer Elementary
42085032900	2,912	2,235	10.3	\$176,900	\$155,000	537	Grove City Christian Academy, Grove City High School
42085030400	2,886	3,499	10.2	\$99,800	\$120,000	709	Sharon High School
42085031900	4,434	167	9.7	\$161,800	\$150,000	927	Greenville Elementary
42085032801	3,059	89	9.6	\$229,800	\$235,000	443	
42085032505	1,502	43	8.7	\$194,000	\$200,000	262	

Geoid Formatted	Population	Population Density (People per Square Mile)	Vacancy Rate	Median Home Value	Median Amount Home Loans	Homes under \$200,000	Nearest Schools (A or B Niche Rating)
42085032701	4,566	148	8.5	\$176,200	\$140,000	1,048	Oakview and Luther Low
42085032000	5,072	85	8.0	\$131,700	\$135,000	1,322	
42085031100	1,508	394	7.9	\$105,500	\$130,000	487	Kennedy Catholic
42085031400	4,793	1,371	7.8	\$172,300	\$165,000	1,026	St. John Paul II, Delahunty Middle School
42085030900	2,467	2,484	7.4	\$79,400	\$105,000	907	Farell
42085032403	2,480	75	7.4	\$173,700	\$130,000	503	
42085032300	3,252	144	7.4	\$176,500	\$155,000	753	
42085033300	2,906	1,193	6.4	\$87,300	\$105,000	526	Grove City Middle School
42085032401	1,699	126	6.0	\$123,700	\$165,000	489	
42085033400	2,540	1,168	5.7	\$62,800	\$65,000	412	
42085031300	2,902	332	4.6	\$259,900	\$195,000	292	Hickory High, Artman Elementary, Karen A. Ionta Elementary, Delahunty Middle
42085033100	4,826	88	3.9	\$231,000	\$185,000	631	
42085031700	2,295	3,254	3.4	\$127,300	\$125,000	748	Sharpsville Schools
42085030500	2,344	4,928	3.2	\$59,100	\$75,000	748	
42085032702	2,333	112	2.9	\$151,200	\$130,000	591	
42085032802	2,414	307	1.0	\$281,500	\$255,000	213	
42085031200	5,882	506	0.0	\$215,200	\$185,000	1,010	

Source: Census ACS 2023 5-year

Census tracts that contain vacancy greater than 5%, homes that are affordable for a four-person household couple earning the area median income, and have A or B Niche-rated schools are highlighted in green and could be prioritized for housing development, including infill or rehabilitation. Tracts that do not meet these criteria are labeled in yellow. In order to conduct this analysis, Niche was the best available data source, and is one used commonly by developers, real estate professionals, and potential residents to judge school performance.

Change in Home Value 2018-2023



Source: Census ACS 2023 5-year

The vast majority of Mercer County municipalities saw increases in home values from 2018 to 2023. Those municipalities that experienced value loss, experienced at least a 17% increase in value from 2013 to 2018. Decreases thus may reflect more of a reset in value.

Chart Summary of Above Tables

County Subdivision	Median Home Value	Percent Change 2018-2023
Fairview	\$264,400	78.17
Pine	\$258,000	61.74
Wilmington	\$242,000	60.93
Springfield	\$230,300	60.19
Wolf Creek	\$230,000	59.57
Jackson	\$223,600	55.48
Liberty	\$223,200	53.84
Coolspring	\$217,500	52.08
Lake	\$217,300	50.8
Mill Creek	\$215,800	47.94

County Subdivision	Median Home Value	Percent Change 2018-2023
Clark	\$210,800	47.44
East Lackawannock	\$204,800	46.44
New Vernon	\$203,600	41.71
Delaware	\$195,000	41.24
Shenango	\$187,600	40.21
Hermitage	\$187,600	38.06
Findley	\$186,300	35.81
Worth	\$182,400	35.32
Greene	\$179,300	33.03
Salem	\$175,900	30.28
Deer Creek	\$170,600	29.56
South Pymatuning	\$167,200	28.7
Grove City	\$165,900	28.04
Sandy Lake	\$165,800	27.84
Hempfield	\$162,600	26.85
Sandy Lake	\$162,500	25.9
Sugar Grove	\$157,200	25.71
West Middlesex	\$156,100	25.54
Sandy Creek	\$155,100	23.98
Jefferson	\$151,900	23.8
Lackawannock	\$151,200	23.6
Perry	\$142,200	23.16
French Creek	\$131,300	22.86
New Lebanon	\$130,600	22.51
Mercer	\$130,300	18.16
West Salem	\$129,400	18.13
Jackson Center	\$125,000	17.75
Otter Creek	\$122,200	17.59
Sharpsville	\$117,200	16.61
Pymatuning	\$117,200	10.95
Stoneboro	\$109,400	5.96
Greenville	\$98,200	5.68
Fredonia	\$94,600	4.57
Sheakleyville	\$90,700	3.9

County Subdivision	Median Home Value	Percent Change 2018-2023
Jamestown	\$86,900	3.7
Sharon	\$79,100	-1.45
Farrell	\$76,200	-10.44
Wheatland	\$64,600	-15.02

Source: Census ACS 2023 5-year

Census Tracts with Affordable Homes

Census Tract	Population	Population Density (People per Square Mile)	Vacancy Rate	Median Home Value	Median Amount Home Loans	Homes under \$200,000*
42085030100	1,677	3,500	29.9	\$45,900	N/A	348
42085032502	2,071	48	25.7	\$190,900	\$155,000	414
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42085031300	2,902	332	4.6	\$259,900	\$195,000	292
42085033100	4,826	88	3.9	\$231,000	\$185,000	631
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42085030500	2,344	4,928	3.2	\$59,100	\$75,000	748
42085032702	2,333	112	2.9	\$151,200	\$130,000	591
42085032802	2,414	307	1.0	\$281,500	\$255,000	213
42085031200	5,882	506	0.0	\$215,200	\$185,000	1,010

*\$205,000 is the HUD affordability value for a 4 person household at the area median income.