

Chapter 1 Introduction

BACKGROUND

Delaware Township



Silver Thread Falls

The picturesque natural beauty of Delaware Township has long made it a popular vacation spot, attracting visitors from across the northeastern United States. Since the early 19th century, wealthy city dwellers vacationed in the inns and hotels of Dingmans Ferry. As the area became more accessible its popularity broadened. Growing numbers of people vacationed here and many retired in and around Dingmans Ferry. In recent decades, Delaware Township has transitioned from a seasonal vacation community and retirement community to a bedroom community with year-round residency. Increasing numbers of families and individuals have migrated to Delaware Township, primarily from out of state, and established permanent homes.

Despite recent development pressure, Delaware Township has maintained its scenic and rural character. However, the growth and transformation of the township has placed extraordinary demands on its resources and services. In response, the township has recognized the need to re-evaluate its current land planning policies and strategies for future growth management.

The comprehensive plan update has been motivated by a growing realization that current development patterns and practices cannot be sustained over the long term without irreparably degrading the environment and the quality of life in the township. The intensity of existing development coupled with aging and inadequate infrastructure threatens to compromise local ecosystem health, and the health and

welfare of the township's citizens. Overburdened wastewater disposal systems and excessive stormwater runoff are of particular concern to the township. Furthermore, existing development has occurred in the form of somewhat isolated communities dispersed throughout the township. Environmental degradation and other problems become correspondingly more widespread and more difficult to manage. Providing emergency services to these communities is also challenging, as access is extremely limited.

Development in Delaware Township is currently guided and regulated by a set of documents – the comprehensive plan, zoning ordinance, and subdivision and land development ordinance (SLDO), among others - dating from the 1960s and 1970s. As the township continues to grow, facing development pressure particularly from New York and New Jersey, it is imperative that it adopt contemporary planning practices aimed at achieving manageable and sustainable growth. Updating the comprehensive plan is the first step in this process.

Comprehensive Plan

The comprehensive plan is a policy and planning tool enabled by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania through Act 247, the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC). It inventories a community's existing conditions, outlines its short- and long-range planning goals, and provides recommendations and strategies aimed at achieving those goals. As a policy document (rather than a regulatory document), the comprehensive plan guides future land use decisions. The policies and recommendations put forth in the comprehensive plan are implemented through regulatory documents such as the zoning ordinance and SLDO, and through other non-regulatory means. The comprehensive plan is important from a legal standpoint in that it provides the rationale for zoning ordinance and SLDO provisions and amendments, and other planning initiatives.

The Delaware Township Comprehensive Plan update includes the following elements as mandated by the MPC:

- Demographic Profile
- Statement of Community Development Goals and Objectives
- Natural and Historic Resources Protection Plan
- Transportation Plan
- Housing Plan
- Land Use Plan
- Community Facilities and Utilities Plan
- Park, Recreation, and Open Space Plan
- Statement of the Interrelationships Among the Plan's Components
- Statement of the Plan's Compatibility with Adjoining Municipalities and the County Comprehensive Plan
- Statement of Plan's Implementation Strategies

Work on the comprehensive plan update began in June 2005. Meetings of the Comprehensive Plan Task Force were conducted monthly. Public workshops for the purpose of gathering community input were held in December 2005 and May 2006, each generating a large turnout from the community. The first of the two public workshops focused on the analysis of existing conditions and the formulation of community development

goals and objectives. Results of the community survey conducted by Pike County for its comprehensive plan were used to facilitate the formulation of goals and objectives. The second public workshop focused on future planning recommendations and implementation strategies. Drafts of each of the plan elements were presented and participants were invited to comment and ask questions.



Delaware River

The policies and recommendations contained in the comprehensive plan update are based on input gathered at the two public workshops and the monthly task force meetings, and on various analyses. Understanding that development pressures on the township are significant, the overall goal of the plan is to direct growth to the most suitable areas of the township, coordinating it with infrastructure and services. Environmentally sensitive areas, best suited for conservation, receive appropriate protection measures. These principles result in a coherent land use pattern that accommodates future growth with maximum efficiency and sustainability while minimizing adverse impacts on the community and environment. The pattern takes the form of a gradient of development intensity, with a relatively dense area of development in the form of a town center located in the northern part of the township on Route 739. The town center is surrounded by an area of moderate development intensity. The pattern then graduates to a low intensity area, and finally conservation and open space in the township's interior.

Regional Setting

Delaware Township lies in the Pocono Mountains along the upper reaches of the Delaware River in northeastern Pennsylvania. It is part of the Delaware River Highlands and is one of Pike County's 13 municipalities. Adjoining municipalities include Dingman Township to the north, Lehman Township to the south, and Porter Township to the west. Northern New Jersey lies to the east across the Delaware River, accessed by the Dingmans Ferry Bridge. Port Jervis, New York is approximately 15 miles to the north along Route 209. New York City is approximately 65 miles and a 1½-hour drive to the east. The Scranton and Wilkes-Barre metropolitan area is approximately 60 miles and a one-hour drive due west on Interstate 84.



Pocono Mountains

The Delaware River Highlands comprise the area on either side of the upper Delaware River valley between the Pocono Mountains to the southwest and the Catskills to the north. It encompasses Pike and Wayne counties in Pennsylvania, Sullivan and Orange counties in New York, and Sussex County, New Jersey. The Highlands are a pristine natural landscape featuring several state parks, forests, and game lands, and two National Park Service properties: the 75,000 acre Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River (most of which is privately owned land) and the 69,000 acre Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, which occupies a portion of Delaware Township.

The Pocono and Catskill Mountains, part of the Appalachian chain, are an ancient landscape of rounded mountains formed by receding glaciers and millions of years of erosion. Much of the region is forested with second and third growth stands of northern hardwoods and evergreens. Glacial lakes and waterfalls are found throughout the area.

The region's scenic and natural beauty led to its long history as a recreation and vacation spot for the northeastern United States. Many

local economies are supported by recreation and tourism. In addition, the region's abundant natural and mineral resources proved important to the nation's industrial economy. Cities such as Scranton and Wilkes-Barre arose on heavy industry, primarily coal mining, manufacturing and timber harvesting. Much of the area still persists on tourism and heavy industry, although to a lesser extent as the regional and national economy gradually shifts to technology, information, and service.