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PREFACE

A. Purpose

The purpose of the Berks County Comprehensive Plan update (the Plan) is to revise certain aspects of the Comprehensive Plan of 2013, and subsequent Plan documents. This revision serves as a set of recommendations rather than a regulatory document. It acts as a guide to growth and development and assists the Berks County Planning Commission in evaluating various development proposals and requests for financial assistance by local agencies to County, State, and Federal agencies. This Plan is a general guide and does not reflect in detail the location for all future development nor the precise boundary of such development. This revision is not a fixed or rigid document, but will be modified by the Commission when changes in the development of Berks County indicate the need to alter the Plan. The Plan, unless otherwise noted, supersedes the Comprehensive Plan of 2013. The target year for this Plan is 2030.

The Plan recognizes that the *Greenway, Parks and Recreation Plan of 2007* and the *Long Range Transportation Plan and the Transportation Improvement Plan of 2016* are also elements of the Berks County Comprehensive Plan.

B. Vision Statement

Berks County will take full advantage of its geographic location along major roadways that connect Berks County to the Philadelphia Region, Lehigh Valley, New York/New Jersey Metro Region, Lancaster, and Baltimore/Washington Metro Region to create jobs and new economic opportunities.

Berks County will continue to protect its rich agricultural land and heritage, expand its parks and trail systems, and promote the settlement of its population in a reinvigorated City of Reading and in boroughs and townships planned to emphasize higher density and more intimate walking-biking friendly communities. The county and its local communities will work together to promote smart growth policies and practices that accomplish these end results.

Berks County will continue to expand its use of new technology to link the county's economic, educational, and social institutions and continue to emphasize its already recognized policy of cooperation among municipal and county government agencies, to create a highly interactive county environment that serves all of its citizens more efficiently.

C. MPC Requirements

One of the most important powers of local government is the ability to plan for and to control land use. The *Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code* (MPC), otherwise known as Act 247 of 1968, P.L. 805, provides the enabling legislation to accomplish this task. Since its inception, the legislation has been amended numerous times. However, the first comprehensive update of the MPC was adopted in December of 1988. These amendments to the MPC, known as Act 170 of 1988, standardized procedures, changed time limits, definitions, jurisdictional matters and enforcement powers. Act 67 and 68 of 2000 made substantial amendments to the MPC. The amendments provided for increased intergovernmental cooperation, implementation agreements, and other new requirements for the County Comprehensive Plan. New land use designations such as "Designated Growth Areas", and "Rural Resource Areas" (called Rural Conservation Areas in Berks Vision) were added, as well as additional requirements for agriculture, water resources, mining, timbering, and historic preservation. Acts 67 and 68 provided increased authority to the County Comprehensive Plan by stressing consistency between county and municipal plans, and making it a key criteria for State funding eligibility. The MPC mandates that the comprehensive plan contains certain elements. The elements are as follows:

- A statement of objectives concerning the location, character and timing of future development, that may serve as a statement of community development objectives.
- A land use plan, now expanded to include a plan to meet the housing needs of present residents and those anticipated to reside in the future, in different dwelling types at appropriate densities for households of all income levels.
- A plan for community facilities and utilities.

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- A plan for transportation
- A statement of the interrelationships among the various plan components.
- A discussion of short and long-range plan implementation strategies.
- A statement indicating the relationship to the plans in contiguous municipalities and to regional trends.
- A plan for the protection of natural and historic resources.
- Identify important natural resources and appropriate utilization of existing minerals.
- Identify current and proposed land uses which have a regional impact and significance.
- A plan for the preservation and enhancement of prime agricultural land.
- A plan for historic preservation.
- A plan for the reliable supply of water.

In preparing the comprehensive plan, the Act requires that the Planning Commission make careful surveys, studies and analyses of housing, demographic, economic characteristics and trends. The Commission must also consider amount, type, general location and interrelationships of the various land uses; general location and extent of transportation and community facilities; natural features affecting development; natural, historic and cultural resources; and the prospects for future growth in the county. Based on our files and data resources, with consideration of the community development objectives, the future plans for land use, transportation, and community facilities can be prepared.

D. Smart Growth Principles

The policies and recommendations contained in this plan are guided by the principles of smart growth. Smart growth principles encourage well-planned development, with a range of housing and transportation choices that also preserves community resources, farmland and open space.

At the community level, smart growth principles provide for sound design and redevelopment practices that result in communities that are enjoyable places to live and work. On a regional level, smart growth fosters a more efficient use of a land by encouraging a larger share of regional growth to occur within the urbanized areas and areas already serviced by infrastructure. Smart growth reduces the percentage of growth on open areas, farmland, and on environmentally sensitive areas.

As a founding member of the Smart Growth Alliance of Berks County, the Planning Commission has worked hard to instill the principles of smart growth into the plans and actions of a range of community groups and trade associations throughout Berks County. Our smart growth principles are as follows:

- Create a Range of Housing Opportunities and Choices – Providing quality housing for all households is a key component of a healthy community.
- Create Walkable Neighborhoods – Walkable communities are desirable places to live and work, and therefore a key component of smart growth.
- Encourage Community and Stakeholder Collaboration – Growth can create great places to live, work, and play-if it follows a community’s own sense of how and where it wants to grow.
- Foster Distinctive, Attractive Communities with a Strong Sense of Place – Smart growth encourages communities to craft a vision and set standards for designs and construction that blend with community architecture and creates an authentic environment.

- **Make Development Decisions Predictable, Fair and Cost Effective** – For a community to be successful in implementing smart growth, it must be embraced by the private sector.
- **Mix Land Uses** – Smart growth supports the integration of land uses to provide jobs and services that are necessary for a quality community.
- **Preserve Open Space, Farmland, Natural Beauty and Critical Environmental Areas** – Open space preservation complements communities and local economies by preserving sensitive areas, protecting water supplies, air quality, and food supply.
- **Provide a Variety of Transportation Choices** – High quality communities provide residents with a range of transportation choices to connect home, work and shopping.
- **Strengthen and Direct Development Towards Existing Communities** – Smart growth directs development towards existing communities already served by infrastructure, seeking to use resources that existing neighborhoods offer, and conserve open space and irreplaceable natural resources on the urban fringe.
- **Take Advantage of Compact Building Design** – Smart growth provides a means for communities to incorporate more compact building design as an alternative to conventional, land consumptive development.

If we use these principles as a guide, our communities will reinforce our distinct historic, agricultural, recreational and economic values. Well planned communities will consume less land, attract new businesses and skilled workers, provide affordable housing, and lead to more community participation and civic life.