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## Introduction

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## ***The Role and Purpose of the Comprehensive Plan***

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The Comprehensive Plan is a policy guide for Lebanon County over the next 10 years. It provides a general direction for community development and resource conservation policy and investment. The Comprehensive Plan provides a framework for decision making in the areas of land use, transportation, economic development, housing, public utilities and services, and natural and cultural resource conservation within its borders but also in the context of the surrounding region. The plan projects future growth trends and proposes the best possible land use, infrastructure, economic development and public service approaches to accommodate expected growth while protecting the county's varied resources.

This 2007 Comprehensive Plan updates the county's previous Interim Plan, which was adopted in 1987. It provides the most recent U.S. Census Bureau data, as well as resource, development and economic data from state and local sources. Extensive public input was used to gain an even greater understanding of the changes the county has experienced over the past 20 years and to inform the preferred direction of future development and conservation policy and investment.

### **What the Comprehensive Plan does**

The Comprehensive Plan is a policy document, establishing the general framework for how community development should take place. For each planning element and the greater whole of these parts, the Comprehensive Plan:

- Focuses on current trends and issues in Lebanon County and addresses these concerns with solutions that are both practical and innovative.
- Provides the best possible projection of future conditions based on current patterns and strategies to create a more desirable and sustainable future.
- Directs future change through a vision of community potential.
- Establishes the framework for consistency between future land use policies and land use regulatory measures.
- Assists officials at all levels in their decision making processes.

### **What the Comprehensive Plan does not do**

The Comprehensive Plan is not a regulatory document. Its purpose is to provide information, preferred direction of trends and conditions that can be used in developing and administering regulatory provisions that will foster and facilitate the evolution of preferred community conditions.

- It does not affect individual properties.
- It does not prescribe land development—neither public nor private.
- It does not preclude future analysis or decision making.

**“If you don’t have a picture of where your community wants to go, all the decisions just kind of get made without a purpose. They don’t add up to a complete picture of the future”**

**Jeff Soule, Policy Director  
American Planning Association**

## ***Relationship of the Comprehensive Plan to Other Plans***

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The County Comprehensive Plan gives policy guidance and direction to county regulations and codes. The plan makes recommendations to update or complete the following plans and regulations to provide residents of the county with a quality of life commensurate with available resources.

- Lebanon County Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance
- Lebanon County Solid Waste Management Plan
- Act 167 Stormwater Management Plans
- Municipal Comprehensive Plans, Zoning Ordinances, Subdivision and Land Development Ordinances, and Act 537 Sewage Facilities Plans

Lebanon County’s Comprehensive Plan aims to achieve its established goals and objectives in a manner that is generally consistent with those of local municipal comprehensive plans as required by the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC). The plan acknowledges the local goals of the municipalities while making broad recommendations appropriate for the county.

## ***Frequently Asked Questions***

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### ***Does Lebanon County need a new comprehensive plan?***

Yes, the county’s current comprehensive plan was developed and adopted in 1970. It was later amended by an Interim Plan in 1987. The current Interim Plan is now 20 years old. More importantly, Lebanon County has changed quite a bit over those years and needs to be guided by policy that addresses the contemporary community needs. In addition, the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code requires that county comprehensive plans be reviewed and updated at least every ten years.

### ***What happens after the plan is finished?***

Once the plan is adopted, the Lebanon County Board of Commissioners will direct the implementation of the plan – in other words, put the plan into action. The Commissioners may direct county departments and offices to carry out specific plans or individual action items. It is recommended that the Commissioners request assistance from state, local and private partners in order to leverage staff and volunteer time, skill, and other resources to implement the plan as efficiently and effectively as possible.

### *Who is in charge of making this plan work?*

While the Board of County Commissioners, Planning Department, and municipal officials will implement much of this plan, other agencies have a lead or support role for many action items. Public support for the vision and recommendations will also be important. This public includes residents, business owners, and organizations that have a direct interest in the future of Lebanon County.

## *The Planning Process*

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Lebanon County began organizing for its new comprehensive plan in 2002. The county recognized that significant change was taking place and the policy established by the 1987 Interim Plan was no longer relevant for decision making. The county's designation had been changed from rural to urban by the U.S. Census Bureau and new statistical data had been released from the Bureau.

Under the direction of the Board of Commissioners, the Lebanon County Planning Department applied to the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development for planning and technical assistance funds. PA DCED was indeed interested in funding the new comprehensive plan and brought with it the support of several other state agencies: the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and the Department of Environmental Protection. The Department of Transportation (PennDOT) was already engaged in discussions with the newly formed Metropolitan Planning Organization for the preparation of a long range transportation plan. In coordination with the four state agencies, the Lebanon County Planning Department developed a four phase planning process to develop a new comprehensive plan and engaged the services of a team of professional planners.

The project began in January 2005. The first phase explored issues and concerns among the public and community representatives. During this phase, the project team assembled a 15-member Task Force, conducted 123 interviews, and hosted six regional meetings to identify current issues in the county and concerns for the future. This phase concluded with the development of an initial list of goals and objectives in early Fall 2005.

The second phase completed a detailed inventory of Lebanon County's physical character and resources. Ten county profiles, or background studies, documented current (2005 and 2006) conditions and recent trends in demographics, housing, the economy, parks and recreation, natural resources, historic resources, transportation, community facilities and utilities, land use and energy use and conservation. Extensive spatial or map data was also gathered and presented in the profiles to illustrate the location of various resources and facilities. Where possible, the types and amounts of growth and change were projected through the year 2020. The findings of this research were shared with the Task Force for common sense validation. This work occurred over nearly the entire project period with several profiles completed in early 2006 and others only by mid 2007. Concurrent with this technical research, more detailed investigation of municipal perspectives and public perceptions and concerns were gathered through a series of surveys in late 2005 and early 2006.

The third phase of the plan's development brought the findings of the technical research together with those of the surveys to envision a future for Lebanon County that sustains quality of life and accommodates change. This phase revisited the preliminary goals and objectives and, where appropriate, revised them to more accurately outline a future that residents would embrace and support. This phase occurred as each planning element transitioned from inventory and analysis to plan development between mid 2006 and early 2007.

The fourth and final phase developed an action plan for each planning element. Each action plan contains a set of recommendations addressing a wide range of actions to update policy, regulations, best practices, educational efforts and partnership coordination. These recommendations were reviewed with the Task Force in late 2006 and early 2007 and further developed with recommended implementation partners, time horizons, and potential funding sources. These action plans were reviewed with municipal officials and the public in a series of workshops and open houses in the spring of 2007. Following presentation of the revised action plans, the Citizen Task Force and Planning Department identified priority recommendations as the actions that the Lebanon County Commissioners should consider implementing immediately. The draft plan was then finalized for formal public review by the Planning Department and adoption by Lebanon County Commissioners by the end of 2007.



Throughout the planning process, the Lebanon County Planning Department kept project partners and the public abreast of the plan's preparation. Periodic progress reports were made to Lebanon County Commissioners, municipal officials and the four state agencies that funded the project. The project website was kept current with Task Force meeting agendas and summaries, as well as completed draft documents. Brief progress reports and presentations were made to local organizations upon request, and completed project milestones were reported through local news media.

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