
Chapter 1
Introduction

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a brief introduction and background on open space planning in Cumberland County. This chapter includes; a physical description of Cumberland County, a history of previous greenway and open space planning and explains the benefits of open space preservation and smart growth as envisioned by *Land Partnerships*.

County Description

Cumberland County is located in south central Pennsylvania. While the County originally included most of the western portion of the state, today it encompasses 550 square miles and is home to over 200,000 residents within its 33 municipalities. The County includes 11 boroughs and 22 townships. Adams, Dauphin, Franklin, Perry, and York are its neighboring counties (Figure 1-1).

The County's borders align with its distinct physical features, typical of the ridge and valley province. The Susquehanna River separates Cumberland County from Dauphin County and the state capital of Harrisburg. The Blue Mountain-Kittatinny ridge divides Cumberland County from Perry County. The County border with Adams and York Counties is formed by the Yellow Breeches Creek and the ridges and uplands of South Mountain.

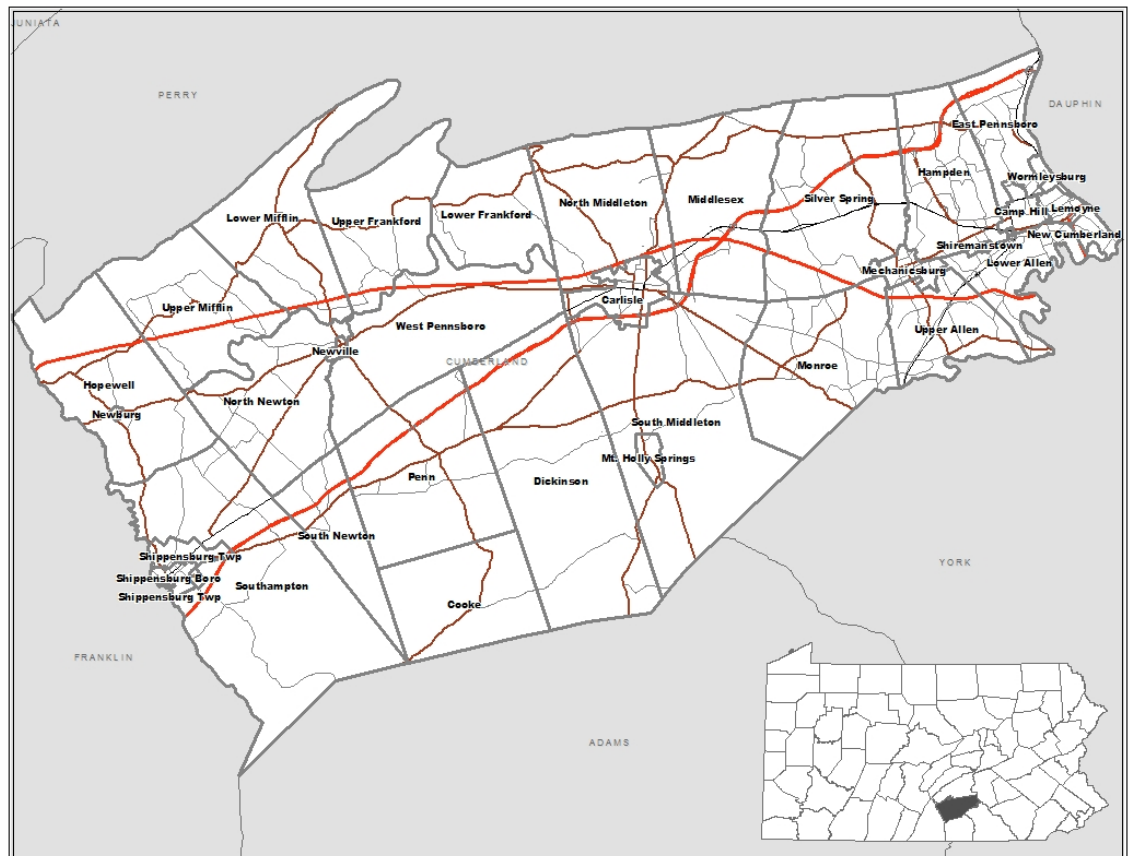


Figure 1-1 Cumberland County and its municipalities

Open Space and Greenway Planning in Cumberland County

Open space planning is not a new concept for Cumberland County. The County has been addressing this issue incrementally over the last ten years. A summary of relevant County open space and greenway planning activities is provided below:

Cumberland County Conservation and Open Space Task Force Report – 1995

In 1992, the Cumberland County Board of Commissioners created a task force to address the emerging issue of open space preservation. The task force was directed to define open space, identify types of open space by category; establish priorities for preservation; identify environmental issues facing Cumberland County and problems that effect natural resources, environment, economic viability and quality of life; and identify means and ways that will promote the resolution of environmental issues and problems.

The final report identified the following issues as major areas of concern:

1. Lack of coordinated land use planning
2. Threats to water quality
3. Traffic congestion
4. Loss of farmland

The report also included the following recommendations:

1. Develop a vision for Cumberland County's future
2. Conduct a natural resources inventory
3. Provide more resources for planning
4. Institutionalize the task force
5. Take steps to protect water quality
6. Integrate transportation planning
7. Enhance farmland preservation efforts

Cumberland County Natural Area Inventory (NAI) – 2000

As recommended by the 1995 Task Force Report, the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission coordinated with the Pennsylvania Science Office of The Nature Conservancy to begin a natural areas inventory in 1996. The document contains information on the locations of rare, threatened and endangered species and high quality natural areas in the County. The report identifies eight important natural areas, forty-six areas of statewide significance and six areas of local significance. The inventory is intended to be a conservation tool and includes general management recommendations that would help to ensure the protection and continued existence of these rare plants, animals and natural communities.

Timeline

1992

Cumberland County Conservation and Open Space Task Force formed

1995

Cumberland County Conservation and Open Space Task Force Report completed

1996

Cumberland County Natural Area Inventory study began

1997

Greenway Study Project Task Force formed

2000

Cumberland County Natural Area Inventory report completed

2000

Cumberland Countywide Greenway Study completed

2001

Creation of a County Greenway & Open Space Coordinator position

2001

Open Space Preservation Steering Committee formed

2003

Tri-County Regional Growth Management Plan adopted

2003

Cumberland County Comprehensive Plan adopted

2004

\$3M bond issue for open space and farmland preservation

Cumberland Countywide Greenway Study - 2000

In response to increasing municipal interest and community awareness about greenways, Cumberland County embarked on a Countywide Greenway Study in 1997. The Greenway Study examined ways in which Cumberland County could create greenways and provide a framework for the establishment of greenways through a collaborative effort of public-private partnerships.

The Greenway Study identified eight regional greenway corridors and outlined six recommendations, including the development of a pilot greenway project. In addition to identifying greenway recommendations, the study determined that the emphasis on greenway planning may be too narrow to meet the ultimate needs of Cumberland County. The Study recommended that the larger issue of open space planning and a potential bond issue should be addressed at the County level.

Creation of a County Greenway & Open Space Coordinator Position - 2001

To respond to the findings of the Greenway Study and Task Force Report, the Cumberland County Board of Commissioner's authorized creation of a Greenway & Open Space Coordinator position to provide additional professional planning resources for environmental issues. The Coordinator is responsible for developing and implementing county-level open space and greenway initiatives as well as providing education and technical assistance to all facets of the community.

Tri-County Regional Growth Management Plan - 2003

The Regional Growth Management introduces the concepts of Planned Growth Areas (PGA) and "land-needs" to the region. The PGA concept is not a mandatory growth boundary. Rather, the intent of the PGA is to encourage the majority of new development to locate in or near areas with existing public services and infrastructure such as: sewer, water, transit and highway access. The building densities in PGA should be planned to maximize public resources. The size of PGA's is calculated by forecasting the amount of land needed to accommodate projected population growth and development. Promoting growth strategically in PGA's will in turn help preserve open space.

Cumberland County Comprehensive Plan - 2003

Cumberland County adopted its revised Comprehensive Plan in 2003. The Plan is a policy document intended to guide future growth and development in the County. The core principals of the 2003 Comprehensive Plan are the basis for development of Land Partnerships.

The comprehensive planning process identified open space preservation and smart growth planning as important issues that need further attention by the County. Through the public

participation process, farmland preservation and land use compatibility ranked #1 and conservation of natural features & open space ranked #2 for needing more attention countywide.

The Cumberland County Board of Commissioners recognized that natural resource conservation and open space preservation were two key issues that needed to be addressed to maintain the quality of life and economic vitality of the county. Therefore, based the results of the comprehensive planning process and other previous planning initiatives, the Commissioners formed the Open Space Preservation Steering Committee that would guide the development and implementation of a countywide open space preservation program, our current Land Partnerships program.

\$3 M Bond Issue for Open Space Preservation and Farmland Preservation - 2004

In the spring of 2004, the Cumberland Board of Commissioner's earmarked \$3M in bond funds for farmland and open space initiatives. Of the \$3M, \$2M was directed to the existing farmland preservation program and \$1M was directed to greenway and open space preservation initiatives. The \$1M greenway and open space funding was intended to be seed money to gauge interest in a formal open space program and to bridge the gap until a countywide open space preservation plan could be adopted.

Benefits of *Land Partnerships*

The benefits of *Land Partnerships* are diverse and significant. The most important benefits of farmland preservation, natural resource protection and parks, trails and greenways, as described in the following paragraphs, provide the rationale for our efforts to protect the best areas of Cumberland County.

Farmland Preservation

Cumberland County's farmlands are the foundation for a strong agricultural industry and a way of life for generations of farm families. Scenic landscapes of green, productive fields are an important part of what makes Cumberland County a desirable place to live, work and play. Farmland preservation is an important investment in our economy, our environment and the overall quality of life for all residents of the County.

Preservation of Cumberland County's best working farmland benefits the agricultural community by securing the land base and improving the long-term business environment. Once farmland is converted to development, it cannot be returned to farming. In today's marketplace, large clusters of farmland are needed to create a long-term business environment for farm operations. Essential infrastructure such as farm equipment suppliers, processors, and other agribusinesses will leave if they don't have a sustainable customer base. In addition, the investment in farming operations requires a long-term business

Importance of Agriculture Industry

- Agriculture is considered Pennsylvania's number one industry
- 1 of every 5 jobs in Pennsylvania is agriculturally related
- In 2002, the total value of Pennsylvania's agriculture industry was nearly \$5 billion
- In 2003, the total value of Cumberland County's agricultural sales was nearly \$90 million
- Dairy is a leading agribusiness in Cumberland, including a herd of over 17,800 milking cows with a total milk production value of \$46 million

Source: 2002 Census of Agriculture

environment to generate a return over the next 10-15 years. The uncertainty of land use patterns creates a situation whereby farmers are not willing to make additional investments because of the likelihood they will be surrounded by non-farm neighbors who do not understand normal farming practices and the associated noise, dust and odors. Farmland protection is all about creating a long-term business environment for agriculture, similar to what communities do for other commercial and industrial businesses¹.

Preservation of farmland through the purchase of development rights provides numerous benefits to the individual farmer. The following aspects make farmland preservation attractive to farmers:²

- The landowner can access a portion of the land equity while still maintaining ownership and agricultural use of the land without having to sell it for development or non-farm uses.
- Cash from the sale of the development rights can be used for reducing debt, lowering operating costs, improving or expanding farm operations, investing in value-added agriculture initiatives, retirement, or be passed on to heirs with proper estate planning.
- Proceeds from easement sales are often recycled back into the local economy, supporting agribusiness and creating additional economic development.
- Property taxes and inheritance taxes are based only on the agricultural value of the land rather than the full developmental value, reducing the tax burden on farmers and enhancing the annual bottom line and overall profitability.
- Preserved farmland is more affordable for younger farmers and eases the transfer of property to future generations and other farmers who are interested in farming. Expanding farming operations is often not an option when competing with developmental values.

In addition to the benefits farmland preservation provides farmers and the agricultural community, farmland preservation provides economic, scenic and environmental benefits to all residents throughout the County³:

- Protecting local farmland helps keep property taxes down. For every dollar a farm family pays in property taxes, they only use 33 cents in public services.

“Agriculture has always been an important part of the social and financial fabric of Cumberland County. Recently there has been an increased emphasis on the preservation of farmland and other open space. To me this is important for many reasons including the maintenance of the quality of life as we currently know it and the preservation of our water resources.”

Wilbur E. Wolf, Jr.,
President, Future of
Cumberland County
Agriculture

¹ *Isabella County Farmland Preservation* Isabella County, Michigan website <http://www.isabellacounty.org/farmlandpres/>, Accessed November 1, 2005.

² *Ibid*

³ *Why Preserve Farmland?* Pennsylvania Farmland Preservation Association website <http://pafarmland.org>, Accessed October 28, 2005

- Local farms provide fresh food at a reasonable cost. Locally produced food is more nutritious and less costly. Transportation and environmental costs are high for foods that are imported from distant regions and other countries. The average distance that food travels from farm to plate is 1,500 miles.
- Locally preserved farms benefit the environment. Farms enrolled in the farmland preservation program are managed by private landowners using sound soil and water conservation practices that protect soil from erosion and also protect local surface waters from contamination. Open farmlands are important for the recharge of ground water in our communities. Farms also provide critical habitat for local wildlife populations.
- Preserved farmland protects local scenery and promotes local tourism. Local scenic landscapes are important for attracting visitors and for keeping the quality of life high for local citizens.

Natural Resource Protection

The most prominent natural features of Cumberland County include the Susquehanna River, the Conodoguinet and Yellow Breeches stream corridors, the North and South Mountain ranges and the fertile Cumberland Valley. *Land Partnerships* encourages the preservation of Cumberland County's most important natural resources for their environmental, economic and scenic benefits to the County and region.

Open space and greenways are necessary to preserve critical plant and wildlife habitat. Most plants and animals require a specific type of habitat and a specific amount of habitat to survive and thrive. When development activities destroy, fragment or reduce that natural habitat it has a direct impact on the diversity of plants and animals.

A statewide biodiversity study, *Snapshot 2002: Biodiversity in Pennsylvania* concluded that increasing human population and expanding development is the primary cause of extinction of most plant and animal species. Since the arrival of European settlers, 156 known species of plants and animals have been lost in Pennsylvania and nearly 800 species of plant and animal species are considered rare, threatened or endangered in the state⁴.

Open space, particularly forested areas and wetlands naturally filters pollutants, sediments and nutrients from our drinking water sources. Wetland vegetation and soils serve as water filters, intercepting surface water runoff before it reaches the stream. As water courses through the wetland, plants serve as natural filters, trapping sediment and capturing pollutants. The

Watershed Protection is cheaper than Watershed Clean-up!

For many years the Catskills watershed provided clean water to the City of New York and surrounding communities. But when the watershed became polluted with sewage, agriculture runoff and other human activities the city faced a choice. Either spend \$6-8 billion (+ \$300 million/year operating costs) on a water filtration plant or spending \$1.5 billion create a watershed protection area (80,000 acres).

⁴ *Snapshot 2002: Biodiversity in Pennsylvania*, Biodiversity Partnership, 2002.

What is the cost of flood damage along rivers and streams?

FEMA indicates riverine flood damage now exceeds \$5B annually

Source:
http://www.fema.gov/pdf/hazards/fmf_sec1.pdf

York County Rail Trail Generate Millions Annually

In York County, the York County Heritage Rail Trail attracts over 300,000 visitors annually. In a recent study they discovered that on average visitors spend \$8.33 per visitor/per trip on meals, water, snacks, gas. That amounts to over \$9 million annually. In addition, new businesses have started along the trail to serve hikers and bikers.

Source:
<http://www.yorkcountyrails.org/index.html>

removal of excess nutrients, pollutants and sediment from the water helps improve water quality. Maintaining land as open space for watershed protection can reduce the need for future spending to clean-up our water supply. It is much more costly to clean-up water than to preserve the land and let the earth do it naturally.

Floodplains serve as natural storage areas for floodwater. Preservation of floodplains helps prevent and slow down flooding. Today, increased development has exasperated flooding problem. In highly developed areas with large areas of parking lots, roads, rooftops and pavement the existing green spaces cannot absorb all the rainwater from a storm. As a result, communities often experience increased flood damage and property loss and they must build expensive manmade flood control and stormwater management measures. The Federal Emergency Management agency indicates riverine flood damage now exceeds \$5 billion annually⁵.

Parks, Trails & Greenways

Parks, trails and greenways are an important part of Cumberland County's open space system. They contribute to the quality of life of a community and help to protect natural resources. Parks help build livable communities and create a sense of place. Recreation and parks reduce the isolation and alienation of modern society. The U.S. Surgeon General named parks as weapons in the battle against the epidemic of obesity, its related health care costs and disease.

Greenways and trails are vital to creating a connected open space system. Connected open space is key to preserving wildlife habitat, bio-diversity and natural resources. Linear corridors of open space also provide important opportunities for recreation and non-motorized transportation. They link abundant natural, cultural and recreational resources through diverse landscapes.

Parks, greenways and trails also have numerous economic benefits:

- Open space, parks and greenways generate tourism dollars for an area. Travel destinations generate revenue on food, lodging, gas, equipment and a variety of other services. Tourism is the second largest industry in PA. In 2000, tourism generated over \$15 billion dollars a year and supports more than 563,440 jobs⁶.
- Open space preservation can increase business development. Businesses prefer to locate and expand their operations in communities with ample parks, open space and a clean environment.

⁵ Report of the Floodplain Management Forum, FEMA, 2000.

http://www.fema.gov/pdf/hazards/fmf_sec1.pdf, Accessed December 2005.

⁶ PA Tourism at a Glance, <http://media.experiencepa.com>, Accessed January 2006.

-
- Parks and open space enhances property values. Studies have shown property values are higher in communities with athletic fields, walking trails, parkland, open space, and scenic vistas than comparable homes in communities that don't provide and protect these assets.

Livable Communities

Maintaining and enhancing the livability of Cumberland County's boroughs and adjoining older townships is an important goal of *Land Partnerships*. By making these "existing communities" attractive places to live, work, and shop, we can decrease growth pressures on outlying areas while maximizing the use and maintenance of our existing infrastructure. Similarly, smart planning for the "communities of tomorrow" provides the opportunity to integrate open space preservation techniques into municipal planning processes. In doing so, we protect critical natural resources and provide new park and recreation facilities through the normal development process. Residents, businesses, developers and the environment can benefit by development of more livable communities. The various benefits of livable communities are described below:

Benefits for Residents

- Provides a choice in the type and price of housing.
- Provides a choice of living environment other than single family living on larger lots in suburban and rural areas.
- Decreases the costs of public services by maximizing the usage of public sewer, water, and other public utilities.
- Adds to the local tax base as underdeveloped properties are redeveloped and placed back on the tax rolls as higher valued uses.
- Enhances opportunities for usage of public transit.
- High density, mixed-use development decreases dependence on the automobile and promotes non-motorized transportation.
- Open space is preserved through the normal land development process and therefore large publicly funded acquisition programs may not be needed.

Benefits for the Environment

- Decreases land consumption as future populations are housed in existing neighborhoods and not in outlying areas.
- Decreases the need for on-lot sewer and water systems and the associated potential for land and water pollution as existing communities.

**Livable
Communities Facts**

- For every \$1 million spent on the rehabilitation of a historic building, 15.6 construction jobs and 14.2 other jobs are created in the economy thereby adding \$779,800 to household incomes of the host region.
- 72% of consumers prefer shopping in a mixed-use village center rather than in a strip shopping center.

Source: "Better Models For Development in Pennsylvania", The Conservation Fund, 2005.

- Suitable areas for preservation and development are identified before development occurs, thereby avoiding the negative impacts associated with unplanned growth.

Benefits for Businesses

- High-density, mixed use development allows businesses to directly serve the needs of nearby consumers.
- High density, mixed-use development is often preferred by consumers over traditional strip malls.
- Land is conserved as businesses locate in existing communities.
- By locating in an existing community, businesses avoid common start up costs such as purchasing land, engineering/design, and site construction.
- Businesses in existing communities are eligible for a number of federal, state, and local grant programs that can decrease their start-up and ongoing costs of doing business.

Benefits for Developers

- Residential redevelopment projects in existing communities are eligible for a number of federal, state, and local grant or tax abatement programs that can decrease project costs.
- Decreases needs for large public infrastructure extensions into outlying areas.
- Creates consumer demand by providing an attractive environment in which people want to live, work, and shop.
- Redevelopment projects create jobs for construction companies and related industries.
- Smaller lots allow for workforce housing opportunities.