

WHY DO WE PLAN? WHAT PURPOSE DOES IT SERVE IN A BUILT-OUT COMMUNITY?

A Comprehensive Plan is an attempt to establish guidelines for the future growth of a community. The elements of a comprehensive plan can vary from one jurisdiction to another. In most cases though, the plan consists of a study of existing conditions and a discussion of future trends, goals, and objectives. Land-use patterns, housing conditions, population, infrastructure, and the economy are usually the primary areas studied. However, the content of plans has evolved as the needs of society and technology have changed. Today, plans may take into consideration sustainability issues as well as public health concerns.

While the questions of what a plan is and what it should contain may meet with general agreement, the question of what makes a “good plan” may generate more debate. One answer to this is “one that has significant community support and that can be implemented.” It would seem that these two elements are not easily separated. A plan that has significant community support is usually one that can be easily implemented, as one of the major hurdles to implementation is public approval. At the same time, is a plan that does not have significant community support worth implementing even if it receives the necessary approvals?

A different perspective is that a Comprehensive Plan is really nothing less than a business plan for a political jurisdiction. The stockholders, or voters, may vote out the Board of Directors, or governing body, if their investment, (taxes), provides them with a negative return on property values or quality of life.

There are also a number of policy frameworks that need to be considered. In the case of Tarentum Borough these include:

The Keystone Principles & Criteria for Growth, Investment & Resource Conservation

(Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Economic Development Cabinet)

Back to Prosperity: A Policy Agenda for Pennsylvania (The Brookings Institution)

Allegheny County Comprehensive Plan

Allegheny County Development Policy – Route 28 Corridor

Allegheny Places Principles

Eastern Corridor Visioning Study (Port Authority of Allegheny County)

Beyond these elements, a Comprehensive Plan should also be consistent with the applicable county plan and those of any contiguous municipalities; although the local plan supersedes the County plan according to the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code.

If we have a good plan, the challenge then is to get from point A to point B in the most timely and efficient manner.

With population trends in most Southwestern Pennsylvania municipalities experiencing continuing decline, planning means more than making linear projections to meet demand. Managing decline is, at best, a concept not well defined and at worst, not a desirable course of action to predict. In the current economic climate, economic development means responding to reduced consumption trends. An important consideration under these conditions must be to increase efficiency of existing systems.

While a Comprehensive Plan should be long range, it should also have short and medium timeframe components to allow early successes and build momentum for the long haul.

After holding a number of public meetings and talking to local officials and municipal staff, this Comprehensive Plan makes a number of key recommendations:



- *Utilize the area designated as a Keystone Opportunity Zone as an energy facility with the Borough's natural gas resources being converted to electrical energy through the use of fuel cells to supply Tarentum's Redcat Power Company through an upgraded smart grid system*



- *Designate the Borough's Third Ward as a Redevelopment Area that will intermix renovated and new construction mixed-use structures along West Seventh Avenue with new housing and Tarentum's new LEED certified green roof municipal center.*
- *Create a special Riverfront Assessment District that will allow the Borough to capture a portion of sales from recreation related businesses to help support maintenance of the riverfront and the Community Trail Initiative.*



- *Implement a multi-component Housing Strategy combining the conversion of unmarketable structures into appropriate scale residential units, renovation of vacant upstairs areas in the commercial district, development of new housing in the Borough's Third Ward, and designation of an Elm Street District as Tarentum's commercial district revitalization program matures.*



- *Although Tarentum Borough may be representative of Western Pennsylvania's older declining urban municipalities, it also possesses a number of resources that can be instrumental in making it a prototype for 21st century communities. This Comprehensive Plan will serve as a basic blueprint to guide Tarentum in that effort.*