



**Part I**  
**Vision and**  
**Framework for**  
**the Future**

UNION COUNTY, PA



# Part I - Vision and Framework for the Future

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Why a Comprehensive Plan?

The primary purpose of *Cultivating Community: A Plan for Union County's Future* is to chart a course that can be used by the County and municipalities; their partners in the public, private, and non-profit/institutional sectors; and by citizens in making decisions that affect the County's future. While not technically a legal document dictating how a community is to be developed, a comprehensive plan outlines a vision and how it is to be realized via planning policy, capital investment, and regulatory tools.

The plan establishes countywide and multi-municipal vision statements, a framework for future growth and preservation, goals and strategies, and actions to achieve this vision. The three multi-municipal planning areas are illustrated in Figure 1-1 (Location and Planning Areas). The vision, framework, goals, and strategies were developed with input from residents, local stakeholders, and municipal leaders. Consistent with the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC), the components of the plan include:

- Community Vision, Goals, and Objectives
- Natural and Agricultural Resources
- Land Use
- Housing
- Economic Development

- Transportation
- Cultural, Historic, and Recreational Resources
- Community Facilities, Utilities, and Energy Conservation
- Implementation

The Plan addresses the interrelationships between plan elements through the identification of "sustainability keys" for each element. The Implementation component defines a blueprint for action at the countywide and municipal levels. Included are projects, initiatives, policies, and procedures that will be followed over the short, medium, and long terms to realize the vision.

Union County completed its previous Comprehensive Plan (*Vision 21*) in 1996. While agriculture and woodlands remain the predominant land uses, new patterns of growth and development, increased mobility, and regional economic changes have affected the County over the last decade. In this context, the Comprehensive Plan provides a guide to assist decision-makers, including municipal leaders, with managing future growth, promoting sustainable economic development, and preserving farmland, forestland, and other key natural resources.

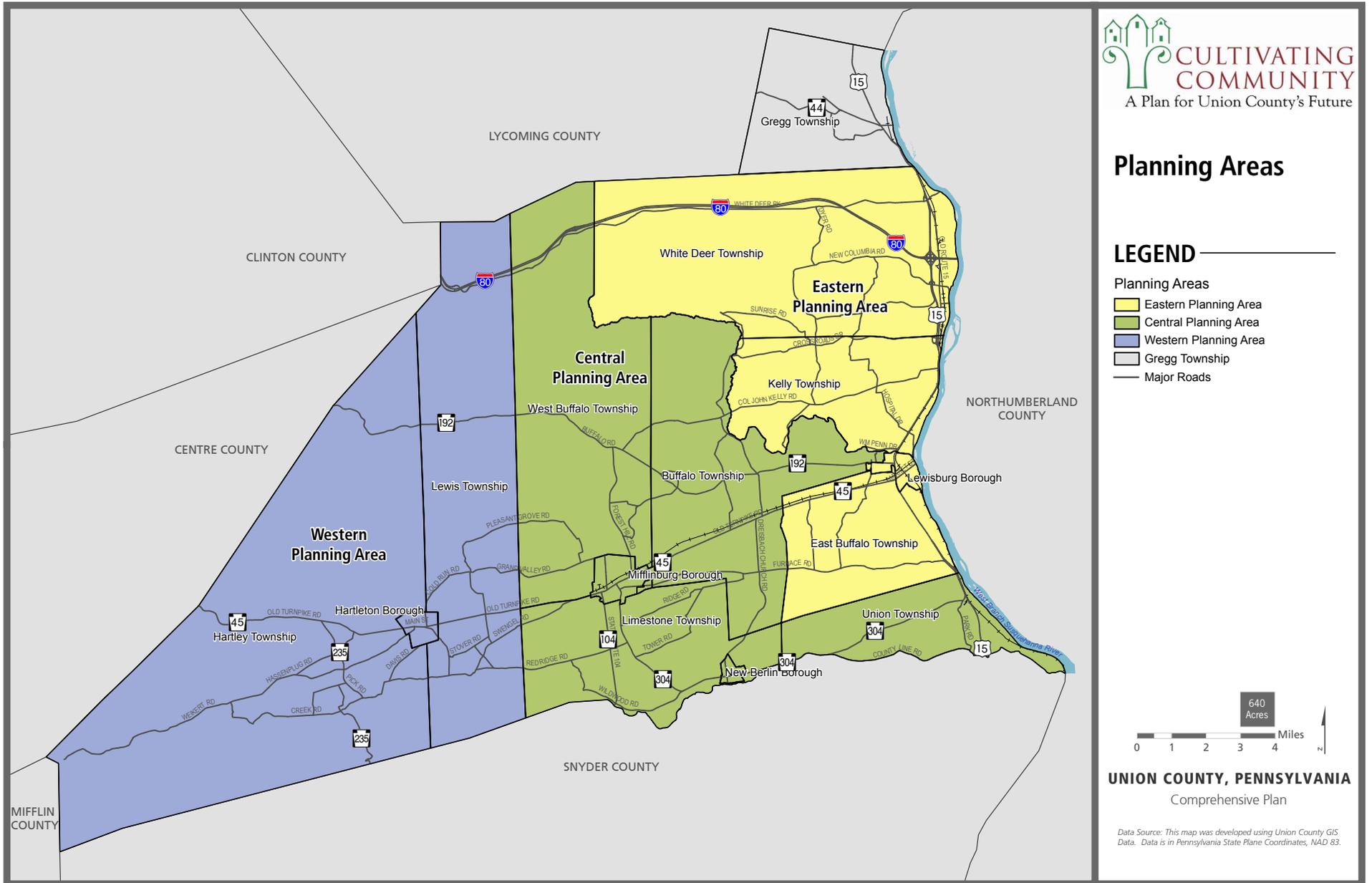
**Multi-Municipal Planning** provides many benefits for participating municipalities. Examples include:

- Consistency in land use and transitions between adjoining municipalities
- Increased ability to protect rural resources by directing development to regionally designated growth areas
- Protection against "curative amendment" lawsuits because municipalities within a multi-municipal planning area do not have to provide for every use
- Priority eligibility for state funding programs
- Increased capacity to share costs and resources among participating municipalities
- Ability to Transfer Development Rights (TDR) across municipal boundaries within the planning region.

It is important to note that this Comprehensive Plan has a ten-year timeframe and should be updated by the year 2018.<sup>1</sup> During the ten-year period, the action plan presented in Chapter 11 should be reviewed and updated periodically to reflect implementation progress and change.

<sup>1</sup> The MPC requires that county plans be updated not less than once every ten years (MP Section 302(d)).

**Figure 1-1**  
Location and Planning Areas



## 1.2 Plan Overview

Union County's Comprehensive Plan, *Cultivating Community: A Plan for Union County's Future* is divided into three major parts:

### I. Vision and Framework for the Future

### II. Comprehensive Plan Elements

### III. Partnerships for Implementation

The Comprehensive Plan functions on both the county-wide and multi-municipal levels. Three multi-municipal Planning Areas are addressed by the Plan:

- **Eastern Planning Area** (White Deer, Kelly, and East Buffalo Townships and Lewisburg Borough)
- **Central Planning Area** (West Buffalo, Buffalo, Limestone, and Union Townships and Mifflinburg and New Berlin Boroughs)
- **Western Planning Area** (Lewis and Hartley Townships and Hartleton Borough).

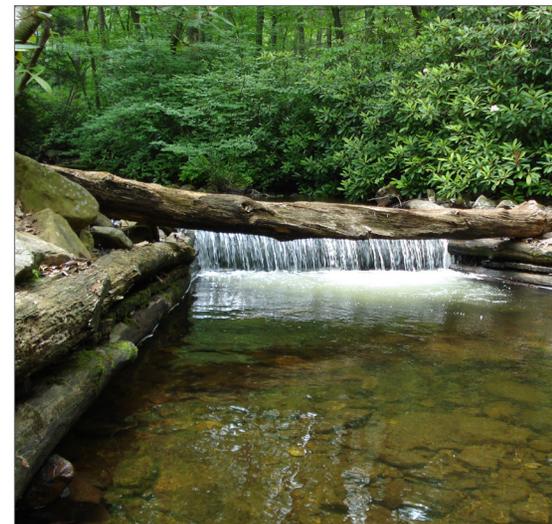
Although referenced in some sections of the plan, Gregg Township (which is located in northern Union County) participated in the 2006 US 15 South Planning Area comprehensive plan and is not included in any of the three Planning Areas. The US 15 South Comprehensive Plan can be viewed at [www.lyco.org](http://www.lyco.org) or at the Gregg Township Supervisors' office in Allenwood.

**Part I (Vision and Framework for the Future)**, provides an introduction and overview of the process used to develop the plan, summarizes existing conditions and trends, and sets the vision and framework for what citizens want the County to be over the next 10 to 20 years and beyond.

**Chapter 1 (Introduction)** provides an overview of a Comprehensive Plan under state law, describes the structure of the plan, and summarizes the planning process used to create the plan.

**Chapter 2 (Regional Context)** summarizes existing conditions and future growth trends in the County and each of the Planning Areas. It addresses demographics, housing, the economy, land use and zoning, community services, natural and historic resources, and transportation.

**Chapter 3 (Sustainable Growth and Preservation Framework)** presents a vision statement for the County and its three multi-municipal planning areas. In addition, it sets the framework for future growth and preservation through a series of sustainability principles. The vision and principles are supported by a growth management policy and map to guide future develop-



ment and preservation in Union County. The vision and framework were developed based on input from municipal leaders, the Planning Advisory Teams (PAT), and the general public.

**Part II (Comprehensive Plan Elements)** contains the seven topical elements of the plan. These elements are:

- **Chapter 4 (Natural and Agricultural Resources)**
- **Chapter 5 (Land Use)**
- **Chapter 6 (Housing)**
- **Chapter 7 (Economic Development)**
- **Chapter 8 (Transportation)**
- **Chapter 9 (Cultural, Historic, and Recreational Resources)**
- **Chapter 10 (Community Facilities, Utilities, and Energy Conservation)**

Each element provides a summary analysis of its subject area elaborating on the existing conditions. Information presented in Part II identifies related strengths and issues, and presents goals and strategies to guide implementation. In addition, each element identifies a “sustainability key” that sets the priority direction for implementation. Sustainability keys highlight important

themes in each element and are designed to activate the sustainability principles (introduced in Chapter 3) through more detailed strategies and actions. They also reveal the interrelationships between elements. For example, the sustainability keys for Chapter 4 (Natural and Agricultural Resources) and Chapter 5 (Land Use) are “system integrity” and “mixed-use”, respectively. To maintain the integrity of the agricultural economy and conserve farmland, new development must be compact and focused in mixed-use centers, rather than spread out across the rural landscape. Similar relationships can be drawn between each of the sustainability keys. The keys are also important for future plan monitoring, specifically with regard to identifying indicators to measure success (see Chapter 11).

**Part III (Partnerships for Implementation)** defines different types of actions (regulatory, policy/planning, capital investment, and partnerships) to implement the strategies described in the plan elements. In addition, it addresses how progress made in implementing the plan will be monitored.

**Chapter 11 (Implementation)** provides an overview of the Countywide and three Planning Area Action Plans. It also identifies the major interrelationships between the plan elements as expressed in the sustainability keys.

**Chapter 12 (Plan Monitoring)** establishes a framework for monitoring progress in implementing the Comprehensive Plan. This framework includes annual progress reports, complete plan updates at five to more than ten year intervals, and use of sustainability indicators to measure implementation progress. The sustainability indicators are tied to the sustainability keys for the various plan elements.

The detailed Countywide and Planning Area Action Plans are provided at the end of the Part III. Each plan details actions to carry out the strategies from the plan elements.

## 1.3 Planning Process

The planning process was completed in five phases over a 16-month period (see Figure 1-2).

### Phase One: Project Organization and Mobilization

This phase set the direction for the planning process, including organization of the Planning Advisory Teams (PAT's) and the design of the public involvement process.

The County PAT included community representatives from across the County with special interest related to issues such as land use, recreation, agriculture, natural resources, and the economy. The three Planning Area PAT's included municipal elected officials and planning commission members designated by the municipalities. The PAT's role in the planning process has been to act as a sounding board, review and provide comments on the plan text and maps, and ensure that public input is translated into plan concepts. The County PAT has met on a regular basis with Union County staff and the consultant team to discuss the Plan and provide feedback throughout its development. The Planning Area PAT's met as needed.

The Comprehensive Plan has been developed through an open planning process with numerous opportunities for public input, including municipal officials' meetings, a random, statistically valid mail/telephone survey of County residents, stakeholder interviews and focus groups, "Meetings in a Box" (materials and instructions made available to citizen groups upon request), Mifflinburg Middle School program, and website comment. Two series of public meetings were held across the County in November 2007 and March 2008. The final public meeting series was held in early 2009. For a more detailed description of the extensive public involvement process refer to Appendix A.

Similar to the public workshops, municipal meetings were structured to discuss and gather information from breakout groups about the issues, challenges, and opportunities facing Union County and to review the future direction of the County. Throughout the process, survey results, meeting summaries, draft maps, and completed sections of the plan have been made available on the Internet at [www.cultivatingcommunity.net](http://www.cultivatingcommunity.net).





### Phase Two: Existing Conditions, Trends, and Issues

Phase Two included an analysis of existing conditions and trends and identification of key issues affecting Union County's future. This phase developed a detailed snapshot of physical and demographic conditions and trends, including GIS mapping and analysis. Subject areas addressed include housing, economy, land use and zoning, community services and utilities, natural and historic resources, and transportation. In addition to existing conditions data, a review of current plans and initiatives in the County was conducted and relevant nationwide "best practices" were compiled to address Union County's issues. The work developed in this phase is presented in Chapter 2 (Regional Context).

### Phase Three: Framing the Vision

Input from the PAT meetings, stakeholder interviews, survey results, public meetings, and the existing conditions and trends analysis informed the development of a long-term vision statement and guiding principles for the Comprehensive Plan. The countywide vision statement and sustainable growth principles set the framework for the place that citizens want Union County to be in the year 2030. This vision and framework is presented in Chapter 3 (Sustainable Growth and Preservation Framework).

### Phase Four: Plan Development

The Comprehensive Plan is organized into elements as required by the MPC, with plan elements defining policies and strategies in support of the Sustainable Growth and Preservation Framework. Presented in Chapters 4 to 10, the elements build on the framework set by Chapters 2 and 3 (Regional Context and Sustainable Growth and Preservation Element). Each Comprehensive Plan Element was developed in close coordination with the County PAT, including a series of reviews during the period from May through October 2008.

### Phase Five: Comprehensive Plan Preparation, Review, and Adoption

Based on the review of plan elements in Phase Four, a complete Comprehensive Plan was prepared and presented to the County PAT, the Union County Planning Commission, and municipal officials for review and comment. The Final Draft Plan was made available, online and in hard copy format, for a 60-day public review period, from April through June 2009. During this public review period, the Draft Plan was presented at public meetings. Once revisions were made to the Plan, the Final Plan was submitted to the municipalities and county for adoption.

**Figure 1-2**  
Planning Process Chart

## Union County Comprehensive Planning Planning Process Chart

