

Union County Planning Commission

2010 Annual Report



County Commissioners

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John R. Showers, *Vice Chairman*
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Shawn McLaughlin, AICP, CPRP *Director*
John Del Vecchio, *Community Planner*
Robert Huntington, *Recycling Coordinator*
Pamela Mabus, *Community Planner*
Janice Wagner, *Administrative Assistant*



From the Director's Desk

Even though we found our nation still struggling to pull itself from recessionary forces as the year drew to an end, several milestones were reached in the county during 2010. These are summarized in this annual report along with the traditional activities of the Union County Planning Commission.

The county was privileged to have *Cultivating Community: A Plan for Union County's Future* nominated for and ultimately selected as the winner of the Daniel Burnham Award, given by the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association in recognition of outstanding comprehensive planning. The award is a testament to the hard work and commitment invested in the planning process by our municipalities, the public, and county. It also speaks volumes to the leadership of our local and county officials who several years ago understood the potential benefits of working together. While the award is appreciated, it also serves as a reminder of the work remaining over the next 10 years and beyond. Successful implementation of the county and multi-municipal plan recommendations will likely be achieved in the same manner the plan was developed, through strong partnerships that leverage and maximize resources.

Looking ahead to 2011 there remains much uncertainty, particularly for planning endeavors. The state budget again allocates essentially no money to the programs that have traditionally funded land use, community, and economic development planning. A new administration is taking the reigns in Harrisburg and once the transition is completed more changes will be forthcoming as new ideas and priorities emerge. While it is possible that funding for programs to support local planning efforts and community investment could be restored in the next round of state budget negotiations, it is highly unlikely given the projected multi-billion dollar deficit the Commonwealth is facing.

County and local governments are also feeling the fiscal strain and find themselves in the same boat due to challenges created by dwindling state and federal aid and declining tax receipts. With residents remaining unemployed, underemployed, and experiencing rising costs for basic goods and services the County Commissioners, not wanting to contribute more to the financial pain people are feeling, held the line on taxes and requested that each county department be fiscally responsible. As a result the Planning Commission and staff did its part by not proposing any major new initiatives and/or costs for 2011.

On the plus side there are subtle signs that things are beginning to improve as evidenced by the increase in building and construction activity this past year. After seeing a major decline in new housing starts in 2009 there was a rebound this year and non-residential investment was significantly higher as well. It remains to be seen if this trend will continue. Additionally, at the time of writing this annual report, the DOW Jones pushed closer to 12,000, more than 3,000 points higher than two years ago.

Sincerely,

Shawn McLaughlin

Planning Director



COUNTYWIDE PLANNING



CULTIVATING COMMUNITY

A Plan for Union County's Future

Multi-Municipal Comprehensive Planning

The year 2010 brought a continuation of the cooperative planning spirit in the county as the first multi-municipal comprehensive plan was adopted. During the summer months the *Multi-Municipal Comprehensive Plan for East Buffalo, Kelly, and White Deer Townships and Lewisburg Borough* was officially adopted by the respective municipalities. The elected officials, appointed planning commissioners, and contributing staff of these municipalities are to be commended for their hard work, dedication, and leadership as this was no easy task. CONGRATULATIONS!

Work also continued on the multi-municipal plan for the Central Planning Area that includes Buffalo, Limestone, Union, and West Buffalo Townships and Mifflinburg and New Berlin Boroughs. A Plan Advisory Team (PAT) meeting was held in the spring with a follow up coordination meeting in the summer. The purpose was to discuss the draft plan, necessary revisions, and the adoption process. At the conclusion of the year the plan had not been adopted but the majority of loose ends were addressed. It is expected that adoption of the multi-municipal plan will occur in 2011.

Plan Takes Esteemed Award

In October the American Planning Association Pennsylvania Chapter recognized **Cultivating Community: A Plan for Union County's Future** with the *Daniel Burnham Award for a Comprehensive Plan*. The PA Chapter of APA noted "*Creating a planning ethic in a region of the state that has not traditionally done extensive planning work is always challenging. Through an exhaustive public participation process, partnerships with municipal governments, use of well-known outside experts, and creation of alternative development scenarios, Union County has*



accomplished this difficult task, creating an excellent county plan that can also function as multi-municipal plans for groups of municipalities in three planning areas." This award is given for comprehensive plans that advance the science and art of planning and honors one of America's most famous planners, Daniel Burnham. The award was accepted at the APA-PA Chapter Conference by Planning Director Shawn McLaughlin on behalf of the Planning Com-

mission, but it is truly an award shared by everyone that was involved in making the plan a success. In particular county and municipal officials that had the foresight and courage to approach this plan in somewhat of an unorthodox manner, and the public which was engaged every step of the way.



Other Comprehensive Plan News

While counties and municipalities develop comprehensive plans and adopt them, the actual implementation is often shared by a diverse group of stakeholders. Already there are actions being taken within the county to carry forth the plan's vision. Some examples include municipalities asking developers to evaluate non-traditional solutions to intersection improvements, such as roundabouts; upgrades and additions to community parks; continued discussions between municipalities and developers about mixed-use development; investments by both school districts in facilities; energy efficient renovations to public and quasi public buildings; a community energy independence project; a regional transit study; and continued funding for agricultural land preservation to name a few.

COUNTYWIDE PLANNING (Continued from Page 2)

Technical Assistance

The Planning Commission staff continued to provide technical assistance to the Lewisburg Area Recreation Authority (LARA) by administering two funding contracts and through participation on the trail design committee. The grant with the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources is for engineering design, which was completed and approved in the summer.

The other funding source, from the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT), is for construction of the trail between Lewisburg and Mifflinburg. The project was let for bidding during the fall and bids were subsequently received from contractors and certified by PennDOT. Construction is expected to commence in spring 2011 and be completed by October.



While the rail trail may still have its doubters, it is yet another example of how the comprehensive plan is being implemented. One of the plan's transportation goals was for increased pedestrian and bicycle mobility, including the development of a countywide network of trails and other improvements to accommodate non-motorized travel. The trail should provide enhanced transportation and recreational opportunities for residents.

Countywide Planning

RECYCLING PROGRAM



Program Performance

Receipts for 2010 show 2,990 tons of materials were recycled in the county, a 9% increase. This included cardboard, aluminum cans, HDPE and PETE plastic bottles, bi-metal cans, magazines, glass, newspapers, mixed metals, wood material, appliances, and tires.

Recycling Events

Special collection events were held in partnership with New Berlin Borough in May and Lewisburg Borough in October. Over 31 tons of electronics were collected.

Grants & Other News

The extensive roll-off container rehabilitation project concluded in 2010. Overall 48 containers were refurbished with structural modifications, sandblasting, and new a new coat of paint during the past two years. This work was funded by a PA DEP Act 101, Section 902 grant. The multi-county solid waste planning effort got underway in 2010. The steering committee and stakeholder groups were convened to get input about the future of recycling and solid waste management throughout the five county region. The plan involves Columbia, Lycoming, Montour, Snyder, and Union Counties.

SUBDIVISION AND LAND DEVELOPMENT

County Ordinance Administration

The County Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance is in effect in Hartley, Lewis, Limestone, and West Buffalo Townships and Hartleton and New Berlin Boroughs. Twenty one plans were approved resulting in 10 new lots involving 109 acres, two large agricultural/forest lots accounted for 93 acres of the total. These figures do not include the acreage of the parent tract remaining after subdivision. Of the plans approved 15 were single lot subdivisions or lot addition plans.



2010, 40 plans were reviewed and comments were provided to the municipalities as applicable. A total of 23 lots were created in these municipalities on 82 acres. The table on Page 6 shows 2010 countywide subdivision and land development activity in more detail.

Trends

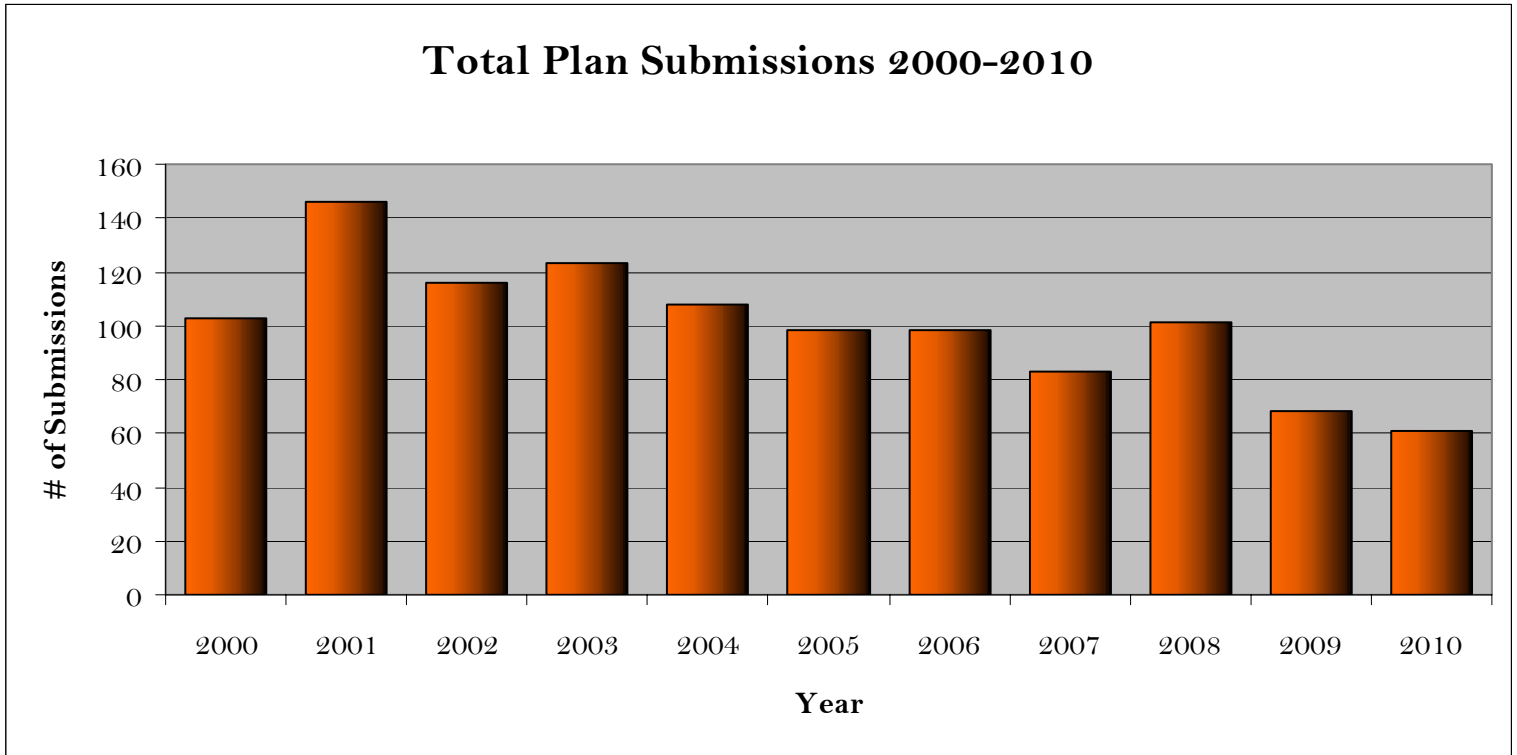
This year marked the lowest total number of plans submitted countywide since 1990 when the county began tracking these figures. The trend of less plan volume actually started downward in 2003. The previous decade of 1990 to 1999 had an annual plan average of 139 plans per year, while the 2000 to 2009 period had a 25% lower annual volume.

33 new lots were created countywide in 2010

Non-Jurisdictional Plans

The Planning Commission provides ordinance administration services for Gregg Township and Mifflinburg Boroughs and staff reviews subdivision and land development plans for Buffalo, East Buffalo, Kelly, White Deer, and Union Townships and Lewisburg Borough as per the Municipalities Planning Code. During

Since 2000 an average of 100 plans are processed per year.



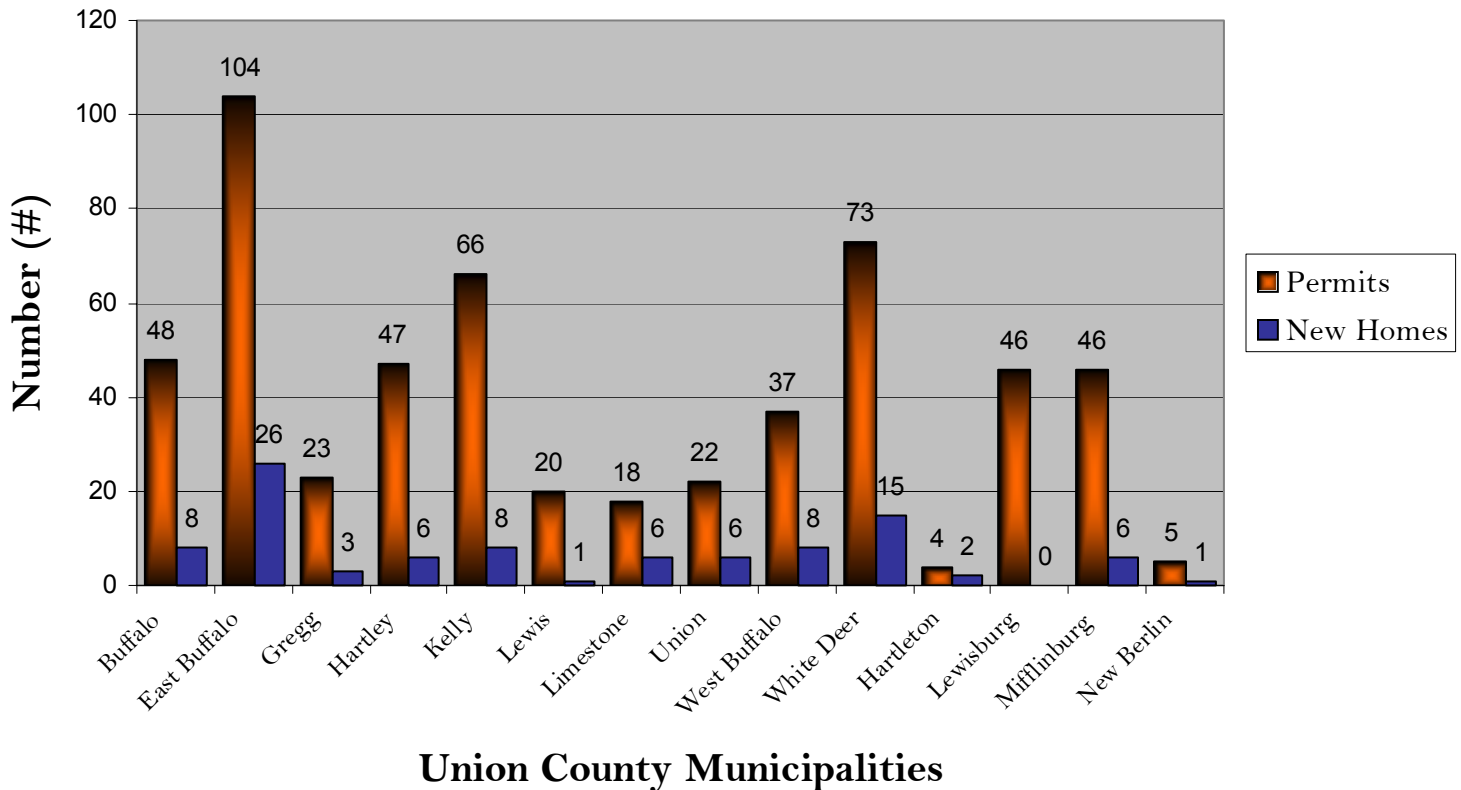
DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY



There were 96 new homes permitted for construction in 2010 within the county, which is an increase of 60% from the prior year, but right on the 10-year average. However this is still 100 homes less than the peak of 196 in 2005. The estimated total value of these new homes was \$10,954,118. This is for the structures only and does not include the cost of the building lot. East Buffalo Township saw the most new homes with 26, followed by White Deer with 15 and Buffalo, Kelly, and West Buffalo Townships all with 8 each. This is the eleventh consecutive year in which Buffalo, East Buffalo, Kelly, West Buffalo and White Deer Townships accounted for 65% or more of all new housing growth in the county. The average new home cost was highest in Lewis Township at \$400,000, a bit misleading since only one home was permitted, followed by East Buffalo Township at \$314,192 and Buffalo Township at \$186,774. There were also 148 home additions constructed in 2010 for a total estimated value of \$9,612,457 or an average of \$64,949 per addition. This dollar value is higher than the yearly average.

Business, commercial, industrial, and agricultural construction is estimated to have been \$48.8 million during 2010, a 124% increase over 2009 and nearly 450% above 2008 levels. Perhaps a sign that the economic climate in the county and valley is improving.

Permits and New Homes*, 2010



*Figures were taken from zoning and building permit applications and are to be used as a fair estimate of activity that occurred in the county during the year.

2010 SUBDIVISION & LAND DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY

<i>County Ordinance</i>	<i>Plans Approved</i>	<i>Single Add-on Lot Plans</i>	<i>Multi-lot Plans</i>	<i>Land Developments</i>	<i>Number of Lots *</i>	<i>Area * (in acres)</i>	LAND USE (Lots)					
							Res.	Ag.	Indust.	Comm.	Rec.	Other
Hartley Township	3	2	1	-	3	46.9	2	1	-	-	-	-
Lewis Township	7	6	-	1	2	3.5	2	-	-	-	-	-
Limestone Township	5	4	-	1	3	46	2	1	-	-	-	-
West Buffalo Township	4	3	-	1	2	12.2	2	-	-	-	-	-
Hartleton Borough	2	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
New Berlin Borough	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
TOTAL COUNTY ORDINANCE	21	15	1	5	10	108.6	8	2	-	-	-	-
<i>Municipal Ordinance</i>												
Buffalo Township	6	3	1	2	4	8.2	3	-	-	1	-	-
East Buffalo Township	12	3	2	7	15	50.2	15	-	-	-	-	-
Gregg Township	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Kelly Township	5	2	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Union Township	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
White Deer Township	12	8	1	3	4	23.4	3	1	-	-	-	-
Lewisburg Borough	2	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mifflinburg Borough	2	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
TOTAL MUNICIPAL ORDINANCE	40	16	4	20	23	81.8	21	1	-	1	-	-

* DOES NOT include add-ons, tract residual or land development area.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING FUND



In 2010, eight applications were funded for a total amount of \$35,400, which was more awards but less money distributed than the prior year. The Union County Affordable Housing Trust Fund supports first time home purchases. The program, which is administered by Commission staff and an advisory

board, provides down payment and closing cost assistance to those who qualify. The accompanying table lists 2010 income eligibility levels for program participants. Since 1996, nearly 60 applications have been approved, providing assistance in 13 municipalities for first time home purchases, housing rehabilitation and senior housing opportunities.

INCOME ELIGIBILITY LEVELS

Number Of Family Members	Income Limits
1	\$ 41,500
2	\$ 47,400
3	\$ 53,300
4	\$ 59,200
5	\$ 64,000
6	\$ 68,700
7	\$ 73,500
8	\$ 78,200

MISCELLANEOUS

Planning Commission Member Attendance, 2010 (P=Present)

Member	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
Harry Adrian	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	12
Martha Barrick	P	P	P	P	P	-	P	P	P	P	P	-	10
Susan Benfer	P	-	-	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	10
Don Bowman	P	-	P	P	P	-	P	P	P	P	P	P	10
Allan Grundstrom	P	P	-	P	P	P	P	-	-	P	P	P	9
Jeff Koppel	P	P	-	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	11
John Pyper	P	P	-	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	11
Wes Stahl	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	-	P	P	P	11
Jeff Thompson	P	-	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	-	P	P	10

Commission members represent different regions of the county and collectively make recommendations to the County Commissioners and staff on policies and programs related to land use and quality of life. The Commission meets the 2nd Monday of each month at 4:30 PM in the Union County Government Center. Many thanks to these individuals for their commitment and hours of volunteer service!

Thank You!

Miscellaneous

A WORD ABOUT THE STAFF & COMMISSION



The staff participated in a number of training opportunities related to planning, recycling, parks and recreation, and community development during the past year. Director Shawn McLaughlin and John Del Vecchio represented the Commission at the American Planning Association's Pennsylvania Chapter Annual Conference in Lancaster, PA.

In 2010 John "Jack" Pyper was appointed to the Commission by the Union County Commissioners to fill the vacancy created by Neal Woodruff's retirement. Jack is a Kelly Township resident and is retired from Bucknell University. Welcome aboard!

MISSION STATEMENT

The Planning Commission mission is to foster quality planning that promotes orderly growth and development by balancing competing community needs such as economic expansion to retain viability, with the protection of the built and natural environment.

Staff & Commission

US ROUTE 15 CORRIDOR PLAN

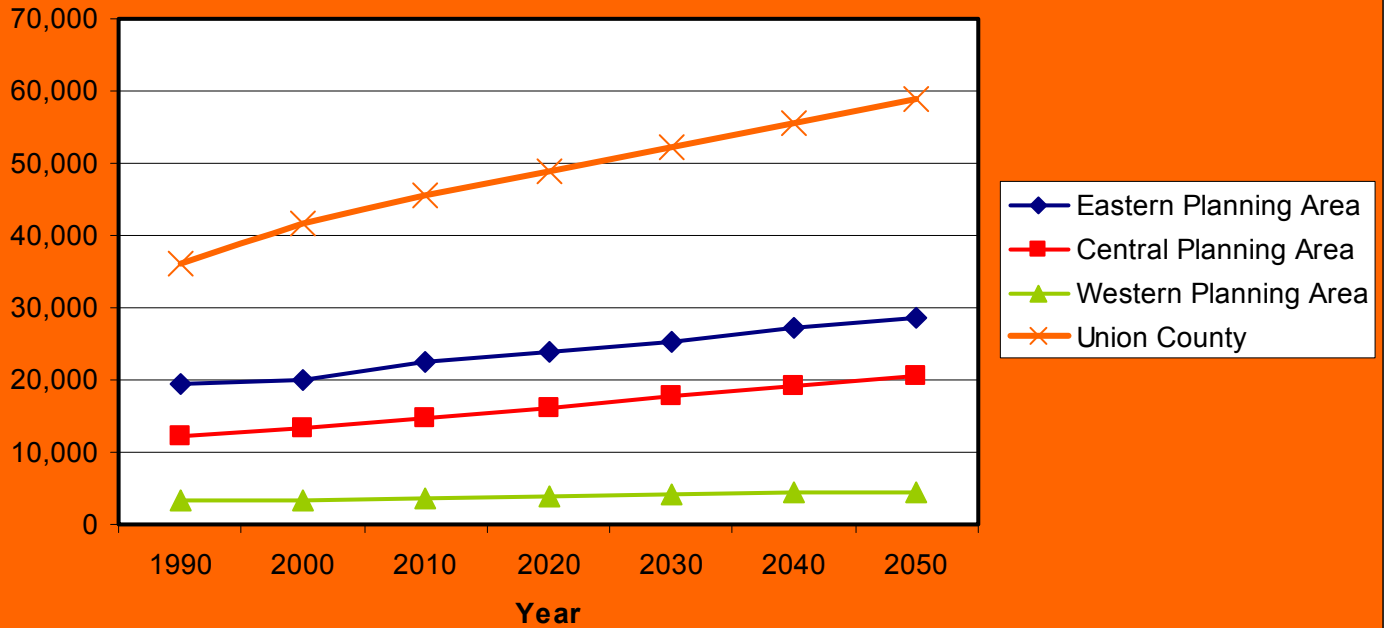


The funding contract and scope of work was finalized with the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) for the US Route 15 Smart Transportation Corridor Improvement Plan. The Commission staff is providing administration services to East Buffalo Township and Lewisburg Borough for the project. McCormick Taylor Associates was selected as the consultant and the municipalities agreed on a plan steering committee structure. Appointees were made to the steering committee, representing local government, business, education, and transportation interests.

The plan will examine US Route 15 between Beagle Club Road and William Penn Drive and make recommendations for improvements following smart transportation principles. For more information on PennDOT's smart transportation program visit <http://www.smart-transportation.com/>. The planning process will officially get underway with the first steering committee meeting convening in early 2011.



Union County Population Projections 2000-2050



The Annual Report of the Union County Planning Commission 2010

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