

OUTREACH

DEVELOPMENT



GROWTH



AWARENESS



VISION

MUNICIPAL IMPLEMENTATION TOOL # 3 :

MULTI-MUNICIPAL PLANNING



Delaware Valley Regional
Planning Commission

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Multi-municipal planning allows neighboring municipalities to develop a shared vision and to coordinate on various planning issues, including growth management, infrastructure provisions, preservation of natural and historic resources and economic development. It can also help municipalities receive funding from state agencies, address issues that cross municipal boundaries and reinforce the importance of local planning.

Why Does DVRPC Care about Multi-Municipal Planning?

This brochure is part of a series being published by the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) in support of the region's long-range plan, Horizons 2025. The Plan provides an integrated land use and transportation vision for the region's growth and development through the Year 2025, and specifically seeks to encourage core city revitalization, stabilization of older townships and boroughs, growth management in growing suburbs, and preservation of rural communities and natural areas.

In Pennsylvania and New Jersey, townships, boroughs and cities have the primary authority and responsibility to implement these policies. This series of brochures are designed to introduce local officials and citizens to planning

tools that may be useful in their communities, and to provide introductory information about these tools. Multi-municipal planning can be one of the most effective ways to implement the policies of Horizons 2025.

A variety of sources are available to provide additional information on multi-municipal planning, such as the 10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania report, *Planning Beyond Boundaries: A Multi-Municipal Planning Manual for Pennsylvania Municipalities*. That report outlines the process, barriers and case studies of cooperative planning. DVRPC has also published several reports on multi-municipal approaches to transportation, open space and recreation planning. Interested readers are encouraged to consult the sources listed on pages 10 and 11 for more details on the topics summarized in this brochure.

Multi-municipal planning has long been permitted by **Pennsylvania's Municipalities Planning Code (MPC)** Act 247, of 1968. The "Growing Smarter" amendments, Acts 67 and 68, to the MPC in June 2000 made the use of multi-municipal planning easier and more attractive for local governments.

For example, local governments are now able to designate growth areas (and, conversely, areas where growth will not be encouraged) and to distribute all uses throughout the municipalities involved in the multi-municipal plan. A key point in the 2000 MPC amendments involve curative amendment challenges to a zoning ordinance. Instead of basing the area for a given land use or dwelling type on a single municipality, the challenge (and defense) must address the entire area of the cooperating municipalities. The 2000 Amendments clearly specify elements that must be included in the multi-municipal plan. They are objectives, goals, land use, housing, transportation, community facilities, natural resources, regional impact and a ten-year update review.

New Jersey Municipal Land Use Law also provides for multi-municipal efforts. The process for "joint exercise of powers of planning and land use control" is outlined in section 40:55D-77. Two or more municipalities may enter into an agreement to provide for joint administration, planning or zoning. Joint administration may also provide for a regional planning board, a regional board of adjustment, or other joint officials. The regional board must then prepare a master plan for the physical, economic and social development of the region with elements similar to municipal land use plans, such as the required land use, a statement of objectives and housing elements and optional elements such as open space, historic preservation, natural resources, circulation or recycling. As more local municipalities are realizing the effects of development in neighboring towns, recent planning efforts are now involving several groups of municipalities with either common transportation corridors or watershed areas. Working cooperatively with neighboring municipalities is encouraged through the State Development and Redevelopment Plan; while special priority is given to joint municipal plans for Smart Growth Planning Grants.

Through recent efforts to combat suburban sprawl and preserve natural resources, many municipalities have been taking a pro-active approach to planning and are working cooperatively with neighboring municipalities to plan for future development. What follows summarizes some of the benefits that multi-municipal planning can bring.

Multi-municipal planning can **encourage economic development**. By cooperating, local governments can formulate a consistent and comprehensive strategy for economic development, rather than competing for tax revenues. Because local governments may designate growth areas, they can identify areas where commercial or industrial development should be encouraged, and provide public investment in these areas to attract developers. This can also **strengthen existing communities** by focusing development within existing centers, and by concentrating all commercial and high-density residential growth in these areas.

Multi-municipal planning can preserve farmland and natural resources. Often, natural features such as watersheds are more appropriate areas for environmental planning activities than political boundaries. Also, by allowing Transfer of Development Rights (discussed later) across municipal boundaries, more farmland and other

natural resources can be preserved. Multi-municipal planning can **save money**. Not only can costs of activities, such as developing a comprehensive plan, be shared by several municipalities, multi-municipal planning can provide the basis for other service-sharing relationships. State agencies often give priority in grant programs and funding decisions to multi-municipal planning areas, and often give greater weight to **multi-municipal plans** more than individual local plans.

Multi-municipal planning can **provide additional defense against curative amendments**. Municipalities are required to provide land for every type of use. Local governments that adopt multi-municipal planning still must provide land for every use, but not individually. For example, if a borough or township participates in a multi-municipal plan, and the borough has adequate high-density housing, the participating communities may agree to plan or zone for all of the additional high-density housing in the township. If the ordinance is challenged, the court would evaluate the entire area of the multi-municipal plan, not just the individual municipality, enhancing the rationale for the zoning strategy.

Multi-municipal planning also enables local governments to use other related planning tools in more effective ways. The Pennsylvania amendments address:

- **Transfer of Development Rights (TDR)** programs, which direct growth into designated areas, allowing conservation of natural or rural areas. In a TDR program, the rights to develop land are separated from the title of the land, and these rights may be sold to landowners in areas designated for growth. Multi-municipal planning enables a larger market area for the development rights to be created, thus enhancing their purchasing potential.
- **Tax Revenue or Service Sharing** between the governments in the planning area. This can allow municipalities that conserve sensitive land to still benefit from nearby commercial or industrial development.
- **Specific Plans** provide detailed strategies for non-residential development that supersede zoning and other land use regulations, and can speed up development approvals.

Planning Areas

One of the most important elements of multi-municipal planning is to decide on priority areas that each participating government has in common and what activities will benefit them the most. The decision on what area to focus on is entirely up to the participating governments, however, the municipalities must be contiguous. The planning area could be:

- Existing configurations of political jurisdictions - city or borough and surrounding townships or a school district that already shares a tax base in the region;
- A natural resource- based area such as a watershed;
- A corridor or an area surrounding a proposed highway expansion, interchange or network;
- An area motivated to preserve viable farmland and/or aquifer recharge capacity by focusing growth in boroughs and villages;
- An area comprised of municipalities that have more commercial and industrial development and municipalities that are more residential, where services can be shared and benefit both.

First Steps in Multi-Municipal Planning

Municipalities can get started by simply adopting a resolution authorizing their participation in a multi-municipal planning process. The most important first step is to decide what they would like to accomplish. It is a good idea to have county planning assistance or a planning consultant for the development of the multi-municipal plan. A facilitator or professional planner can help them reach consensus on goals and objectives, develop a scope of work and to provide related technical assistance. Within the resolution of the newly formed planning committee, a timetable for the development and adoption of the multi-municipal plan should be clearly defined, as well as implementation agreements among all the participating governments. This will ensure quick and decisive steps to put the new plan into place.

Other Efforts in Multi-Municipal Planning

Joint Purchasing Programs

Joint purchasing agreements between boroughs or townships is another form of multi-municipal planning. This allows municipalities to benefit from certain economies of scale in either their purchases or services. For instance, if two neighboring boroughs are paying for private trash pickup, it

may be costing millions of dollars from each borough's budget each fiscal year. With joint purchasing agreements, these boroughs could purchase private trash pickup together and pay less.

Joint Zoning

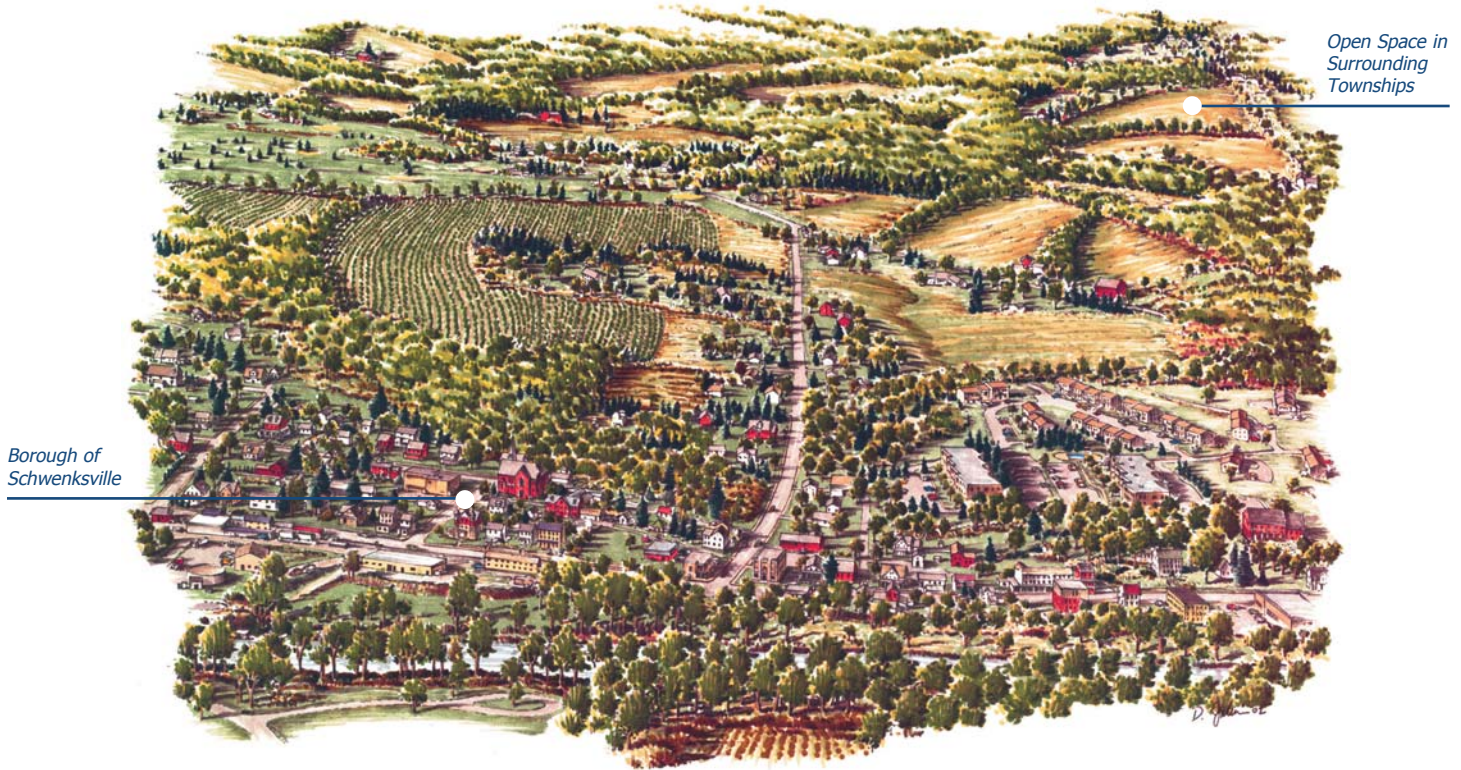
Once a multi-municipal plan has been completed, a joint zoning ordinance may also be prepared. The joint zoning ordinance would become the primary implementation tool for the multi-municipal plan. However, each municipality may still enact their own zoning ordinance. If separate zoning ordinances do remain, each of the participating municipalities need to work together to at least ensure consistency with the multi-municipal comprehensive plan.

The Central Perkiomen Regional Planning Commission consists of seven municipalities in upper Montgomery County, including Upper Frederick, Lower Frederick, Skippack, and Perkiomen Townships, and Collegetown, Trappe, and Schwenksville Boroughs. These municipalities have been conducting joint meetings for several months, assisted by the Montgomery County Planning Commission, and are in the first year of a three-year multi-municipal planning process. As shown in the rendering on the next page, there is a clear distinction between land use in Schwenksville Borough and in the surrounding townships. The Borough has a fairly dense land use pattern, with homes, businesses and streets in a grid pattern. Meanwhile, portions of Lower Frederick and Perkiomen Townships are mostly undeveloped, covered by acres of forests and productive farmland. These communities are aware that there are few areas left in the entire Delaware Valley Region that retain this traditional pattern of development, a historical village surrounded by farmland and open space and are taking pro-active steps to preserve the rural character of their municipalities. The adjacent chart shows the forecasted growth that is expected for the Central Perkiomen Valley, while the following three illustrations provide three scenarios of what exists today, what will inevitably occur with no action at all and what can

result from cooperative, multi-municipal planning. Creating a multi-municipal plan is in their best interest, as any development will affect each of the surrounding municipalities.

| Municipality | 2000 Census | 2025 Forecast | % Change |
|----------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| Collegetown Borough | 4,628 | 5,050 | 9% |
| * Lower Frederick Township | 4,795 | 8,490 | 77% |
| * Perkiomen Township | 7,093 | 11,000 | 55% |
| * Schwenksville Borough | 1,693 | 1,700 | 0% |
| Skippack Township | 9,720 | 14,850 | 53% |
| Trappe Borough | 3,210 | 3,510 | 9% |
| Upper Frederick Township | 3,141 | 5,080 | 62% |
| Total Central Perkiomen | 34,280 | 49,680 | 45% |
| * Total Study Area | 13,581 | 21,190 | 56% |

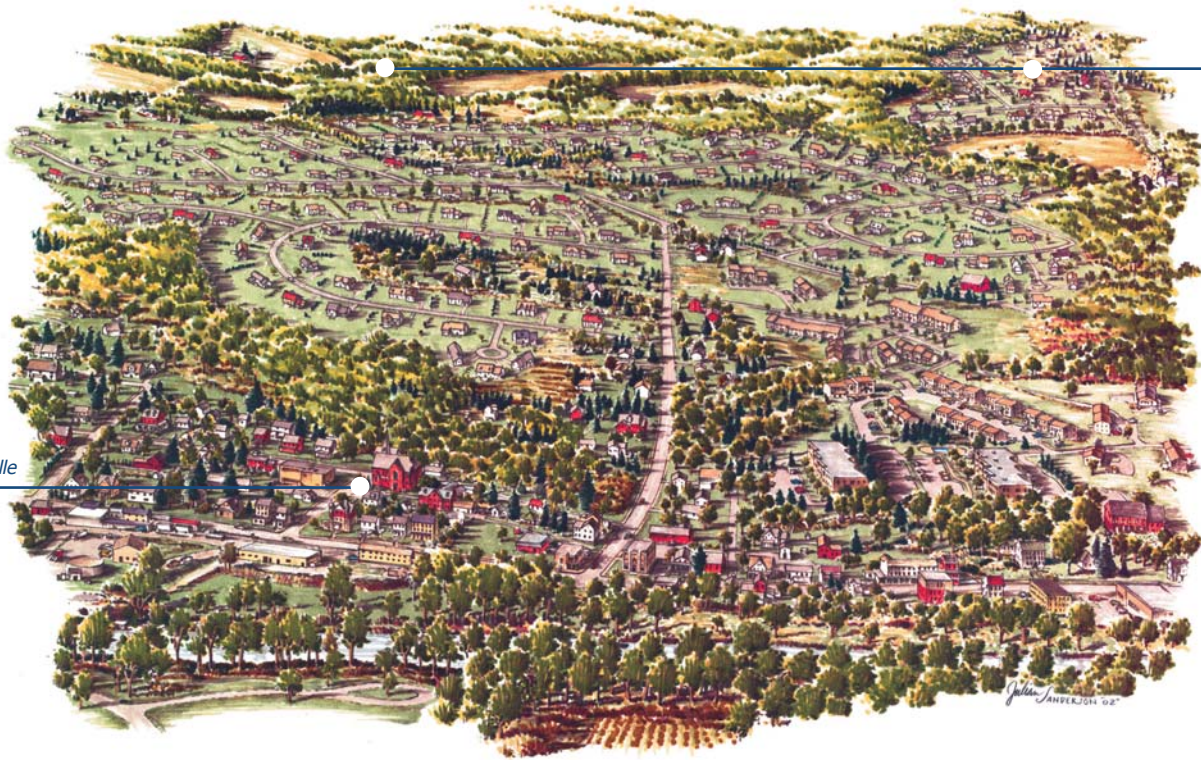
Source: 2000 Census and DVRPC 2025 Forecasts.



*Borough of
Schwenksville*

*Open Space in
Surrounding
Townships*

This illustration shows the Village of Schwenksville as it exists today, surrounded by the Townships of Lower Frederick and Perkiomen in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania.



*Borough of
Schwenksville*

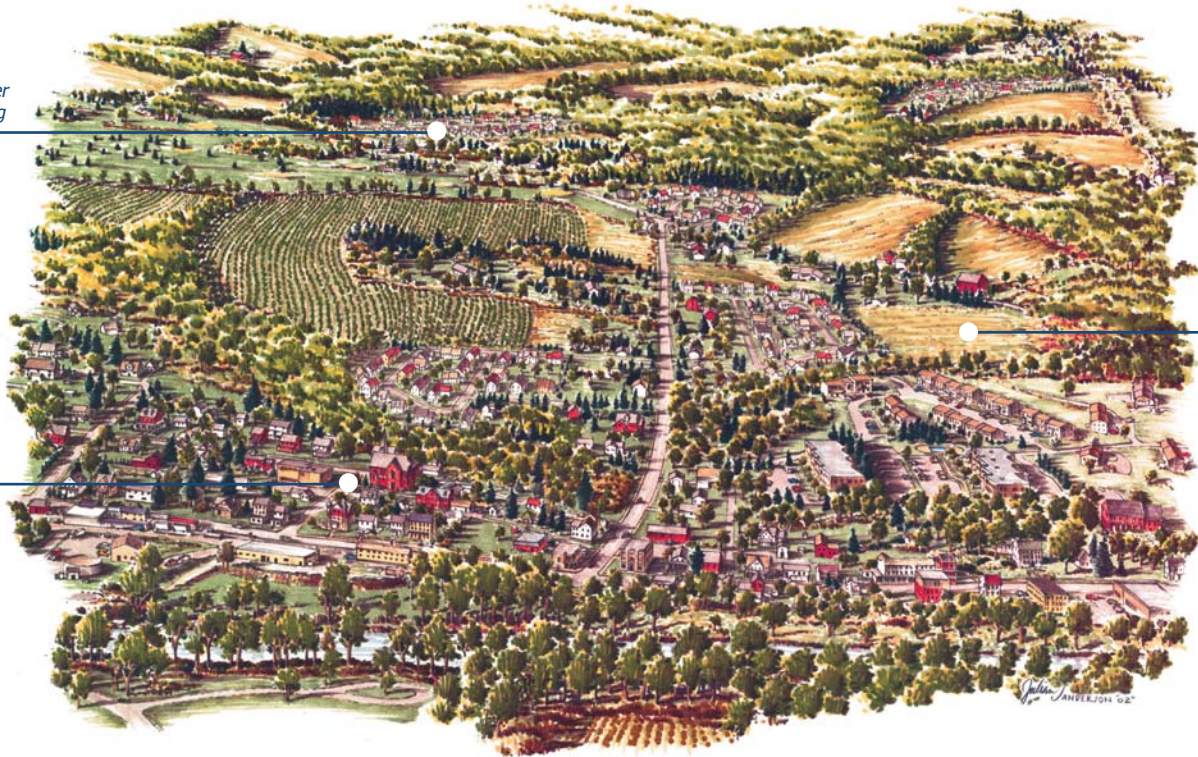
Development pressures in Lower Frederick and Perkiomen have caused sprawl

In this illustration, development of available farmland and open space in the Township of Perkiomen and Lower Frederick is reflecting the forecasted 56% average population growth in these municipalities by 2025.

Targeted higher density housing

Borough of Schwenksville

Preserved open space



This illustration is an example of one of the benefits of multi-municipal planning. The cooperating municipalities pro-actively created a regional plan where they were able to target more clustered development to certain areas while maintaining large tracts of farmland and open space.

Governor's Center for Local Government Services

www.inventpa.com

The Governor's Center provides a range of technical and financial assistance to Pennsylvania local governments. Located in Harrisburg, this Center is responsible for land use planning assistance. For more information, call the southeastern PA Regional Office at 1.215.560.2374.

10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania

www.10000friends.org

10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania is an alliance of various organizations and individuals working to promote sound land use policies and planning in Pennsylvania in order to reduce sprawl and its effects. For more information, call 1.877.568.2225.

American Planning Association (APA)

www.planning.org

The APA is the leading organization for planners across the nation. They publish several journals and periodicals each month to keep planners and other professionals up to date with new trends in the planning field. For more information on multi-municipal planning, call 1.312.431.9100.

New Jersey Future (NJF)

www.njfuture.org

NJ future is a non-profit organization working to promote smarter land use and improving the quality of life for New Jersey residents. NJF promotes New Jersey as a sustainable state, recognizing the balance of economic, environmental and social goals to enhance the quality of life. For more information, call 1.609.393.0008.

New Jersey Office of Smart Growth

www.state.nj.us/dca

Located in the Department of Community Affairs, the Office of Smart Growth provides assistance to New Jersey municipalities on redevelopment, design, or grant development. For more information, call 1.609.292.7156.

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Created in 1965, the **Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC)** is an interstate, intercounty and intercity agency that provides continuing, comprehensive and coordinated planning to shape a vision for the future growth of the Delaware Valley region. The region includes Bucks, Chester, Delaware, and Montgomery counties, as well as the City of Philadelphia, in Pennsylvania; and Burlington, Camden, Gloucester and Mercer counties in New Jersey. DVRPC provides technical assistance and services; conducts high priority studies that respond to the requests and demands of member state and local governments; fosters cooperation among various constituents to forge a consensus on diverse regional issues; determines and meets the needs of the private sector; and practices public outreach efforts to promote two-way communication and public awareness of regional issues and the Commission.



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