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Issue Overview...

...Regional Planning

Lancaster County has been at the forefront of the movement in Pennsylvania toward greater regionalism, especially in land use planning

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F O U N D A T I O N

123 NORTH PRINCE STREET + LANCASTER, PENNSYLVANIA

Pennsylvania has 2,568 separate municipalities, each with its own control over zoning and planning decisions. A single borough or township can authorize the construction of a major shopping center or industrial plant that will have traffic or air quality consequences on an entire region without making any considerations for their neighbors. Local control is often a very rewarding process that encourages civic participation and places decisions in the hands of those who care most about their consequences. However, increasingly over the last few decades, critics of Pennsylvania's system of local control have called for greater regional planning among the state's municipalities and counties.

There are regional bodies operating in Pennsylvania. The most important is probably the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC), which was created in 1965 by the states of Pennsylvania and New Jersey. The DVRPC has a budget of more than \$14 million and a staff of nearly 100. The organization has been designated as a federal Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), which means that it is responsible for coordinating the distribution and application of federal transportation funds. It also engages in local land use planning, transportation planning, coastal zone management and air quality planning. The DVRPC covers Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery and Philadelphia counties in Pennsylvania and Mercer, Burlington, Camden and Gloucester counties in New Jersey. The region includes 5.2 million people and 2.7 million jobs. DVRPC Executive Director John Coscia appeared at an Hourglass Forum in May 2000 to discuss trends in regionalism. Among other issues, he highlighted the pressing need for more efficient transportation, suggesting that better roads and public transit and more regional airports were critical to the area's future.

Technically, municipalities in Pennsylvania have had the ability to plan regionally since 1968 when the state's Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) was revised to include a multi-municipal planning feature called "joint supervision." However the complicated and burdensome requirements necessary to make this feature a reality largely discouraged its use. That is partly why reformers led an effort to change the state's law, a movement that culminated this past summer with the passage of Act 67, the Intergovernmental Cooperative Planning Act. This new law attempts to encourage more regional planning by establishing an effective framework for local governments to work together and with their county planners. The statute includes a process for counties and municipalities to enter into implementation agreements that create comprehensive plans, achieve consistency among various plans, establish a joint review and approval procedure, and provide for annual reports on their activities. Of course, this does add "another layer of planning bureaucracy" in the words of the *Lancaster Sunday News* editorial board, but it also attempts to streamline the approval process.

In many ways, Lancaster County has been at the forefront of the movement in Pennsylvania toward greater regionalism, especially in land use planning. Former County Commissioner Terry Kauffman, who now heads the state's leading anti-sprawl group, 10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania, probably helped more than any other elected official to focus public attention on the challenge of smarter growth and wiser land use in the 1990s. During his tenure as commissioner, the Lancaster County Planning Commission hired director Ronald Bailey, who has since created a widely admired Comprehensive Plan that helps local planners put their decisions in a larger context. The county has also worked diligently with local municipalities to preserve farmland and fight sprawl. The Joint Center for Sustainable Communities recognized these efforts by awarding the county one of its first-ever community awards in 1999.

Related Links:

10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania www.10000friends.org/ *leading anti-sprawl organization*
 ACT 67 www.legis.state.pa.us/WU01/LI/BI/BT/1999/0/HB0014P3711.HTM
full-text of groundbreaking state statute
 Lancaster County Planning Commission www.co.lancaster.pa.us/Planning.htm
county comprehensive plan
 Joint Center for Sustainable Communities [www.usmayors.org/USCM/sustainable/](http://www.usmayors.org/USCM/sustainable/sponsored%20by%20US%20Conference%20of%20Mayors)
sponsored by US Conference of Mayors
 Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) members.aol.com/StatutesP1/53.Cp.30U.html
full-text of state laws on land use planning
 Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors www.psats.org/legislation.html
active in regional planning issue