



Wolf Creek Slippery Rock Council of  
Governments Comprehensive Plan  
May 2005

**Prepared by the  
Wolf-Creek-Slippery Rock Council  
of Governments  
Assisted by the  
Mercer County Regional Planning Commission  
And  
Graney, Grossman, Colosimo and Associates, Inc.**

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**\*Revised September 2005**

This document and all attached maps were financed, in part, by a Land Use Planning Technical Assistance Program (LUPTAP) grant from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Department of Community and Economic Development.

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# **Wolf Creek Slippery Rock Creek Council of Governments Mercer County Comprehensive Plan**

**T**his document is the first comprehensive plan to include all of the Mercer County municipalities which are members of the Wolf Creek Slippery Rock Creek Council of Governments. The Council of Governments, or COG, is a voluntary cooperative association of the chief elected officials and staff of Grove City Borough and the townships of Pine, Liberty, Springfield, and Wolf Creek. In this document, each of the communities has attempted to look beyond their borders and examine future opportunities and issues, which will affect each. This document is also intended as a local amendment to be integrated into the Mercer County Comprehensive Plan.

## **The Comprehensive Plan: Basic Policy Document**

A comprehensive plan is an official municipal document. The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (PA MPC) regulates its preparation and contents. The plan itself serves several roles:

- State agencies rely on the plan in making a variety of funding decisions, ranging from competitive grants to highway permits.
- If the plan is adopted, any decision relative to public property such as extension of water/sewer lines, construction, demolition or sale of municipal or school district buildings/land, and adoption of land use ordinance amendments must be reviewed for consistency to the plan. (This review is non-binding, and conducted by the municipal planning commission.)
- Zoning and subdivision and land development ordinances must be generally consistent with the comprehensive plan. Beyond the consistency requirement, the plan is important as a place to explain these laws in easy to understand terms. This helps citizens. It also can be very useful in a dispute between a developer and a community.

The following table helps briefly understand both what a comprehensive plan is, as well as what it is not.

## A Pennsylvania Comprehensive Plan

<i>Is . . .</i>	<i>Is not . . .</i>
The official statement of where and how the community wants to see future growth and development.	An ordinance that makes decisions about individual properties.
The explanation of policies behind ordinances, funding policies, and general changes (construction, demolition, etc.) in public facilities.	A document that binds the community to unchangeable policies.
A measuring stick State agencies use to make funding or permitting decisions.	A specific plan to build, design or locate any public or private facility.
A way to focus on major issues.	A document to deal with every possible issue in the future.

The Wolf Creek Slippery Rock Creek Council of Governments Comprehensive Plan is somewhat special because it is a multi-municipal plan. Plans adopted by more than one municipality have greater power and status. The municipalities that adopt the Plan have the right to develop intergovernmental agreements. These agreements can be simple or complex, based on local needs. Intergovernmental agreements can be developed to share tax revenue between participants. Legal obligation to zone for all conceivable uses can be shared among several communities. State agencies grant inter-municipal plans more consideration. If an inter-municipal plan is offered as an amendment to the county comprehensive plan, it must generally be accepted.

## The Communities of the Wolf Creek COG

### Introduction to the Region

The impetus of this multi-municipal planning process and document came from two sources. The Borough of Grove City was in the process of updating its old comprehensive plan. In fact, the borough had already begun work on its update. Simultaneously, Mercer County was beginning a ten-year update to the County plan. State assistance was sought from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Department of Community and Economic Development. The COG was awarded a Land Use Planning Assistance (LUPTAP) grant from the Commonwealth, and the Borough of Grove City agreed to integrate its plan into the overall COG process. Thus, this Plan hopes to accomplish the simple goal of a uniform blueprint for the future among all the local governments in this portion of Mercer County.

Central to this intergovernmental planning process was broad-based input. Citizens were surveyed to determine their attitudes about local government priorities and activities. Thus, representatives of over one thousand households shared their vision for the future. Town hall meetings were conducted in every one of the participant municipalities (reports on the survey and Town Hall meetings are included in the appendices). After citizen input, a congress of local leaders was convened at the Grove City Area School District. This meeting brought together zoning hearing board members, planning

commissioners, general government officials, and school district officials to examine the opportunities available through cooperative approaches to the future. This meeting produced a vision map. Following a lengthy information-gathering process, COG officials invited the local leaders back for a review of a sketch plan. The sketch plan was then refined into this document.

Valentine Cunningham, along with his wife Margaret and children were the first European settlers in the area named Wolf Creek, the symbolic heart of the region. They settled along the banks of the creek in 1798 in what is now Grove City Borough. Cunningham named the creek, presumably for the number of wolves that roamed the area.

Wolf Creek runs south from Pine Swamp in Worth Township through Wolf Creek and Pine Townships, then through the Borough of Grove City and Liberty Township where it meets Slippery Rock Creek in Butler County.

## **Grove City Borough**

Wolf Creek enters the borough from Pine Township to the north. Grove City Borough has over 25.89 miles of borough roads and 5.2 miles of state roads and encompasses an area of approximately 2.3 square miles. With its educational centers, theaters, and distinct downtown, the borough is the cultural center of the region. The borough has very little open land and no agricultural security areas.

Grove City Borough had 8,024 residents in 2000, making it the largest community in the study area. However, the borough is losing some population, seeing a decline of 216 residents since 1990. The borough has sewer and water throughout its borders. In addition, the Grove City Borough sewer system extends through Pine Township to the intersection of Route 208 and Interstate 79, just west of Old Ash Road; the George Junior Road in Pine Township; and north to Scrubgrass Road on Route 173 and east into Butler County. Water is provided to borough residents and to residents in Pine Township. Grove City residents are served by the Grove City Post Office.

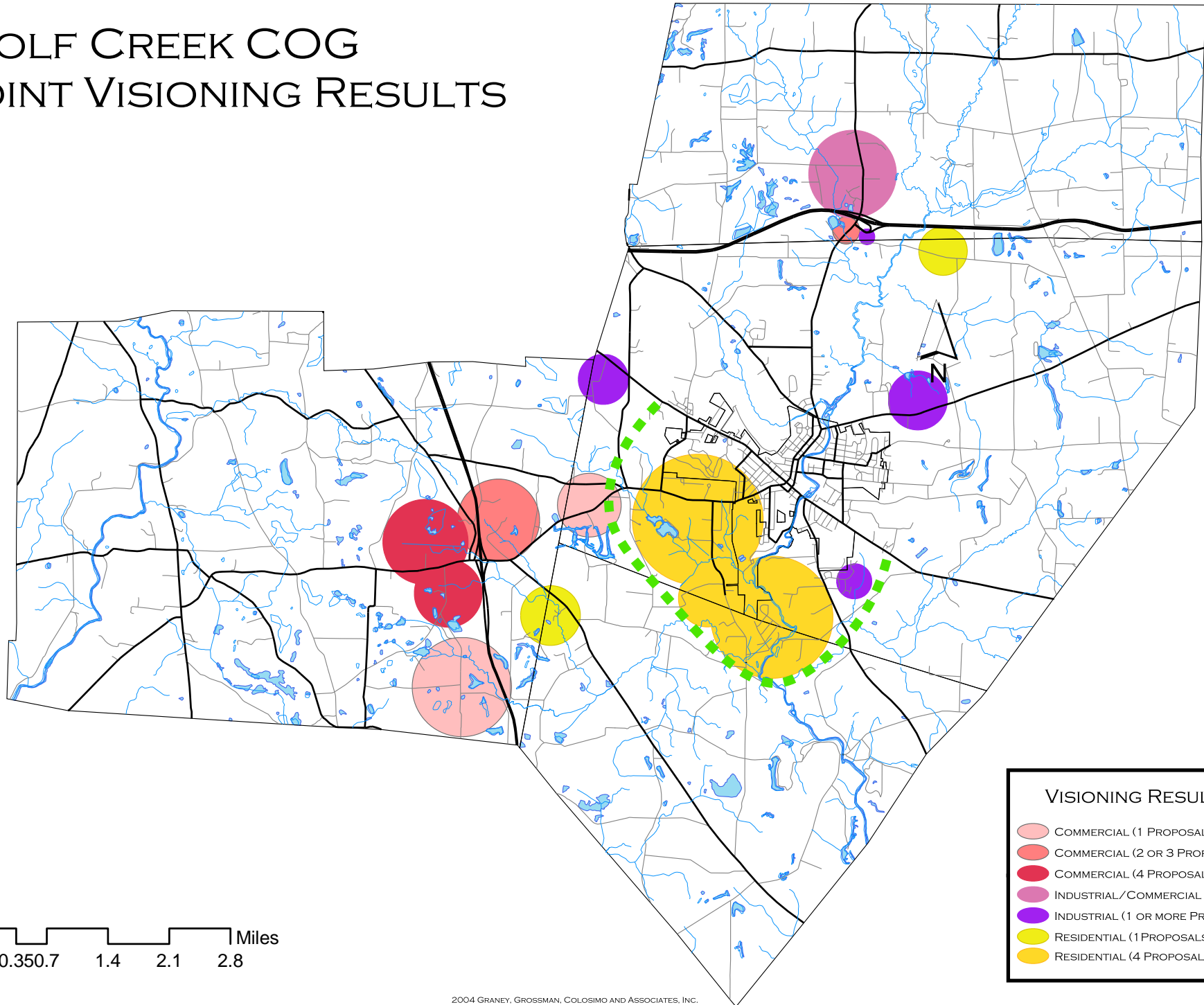
All of the schools in the Grove City Area School District (GCASD) are in the borough: Grove City Area High School, on Highland Avenue; GCASD Middle School, 130 East Main Street; Highland Primary Center (Highland Avenue); Hillview Intermediate Center, East Main Street; and Washington Kindergarten Center, Madison Avenue. In addition, the privately held Grove City College (GCC) is also roughly within the borough.

The offices of the Allied News, a twice-weekly paper, are in the borough. There is a movie theater in the borough, and a number of programs at the college, as well as other venues, offer cultural programming.

## **Liberty Township**

Wolf Creek enters Liberty Township from Pine Township south of the Borough of Grove City. Liberty Township has 28.59 miles of township road and 6.57 miles of state

# WOLF CREEK COG JOINT VISIONING RESULTS



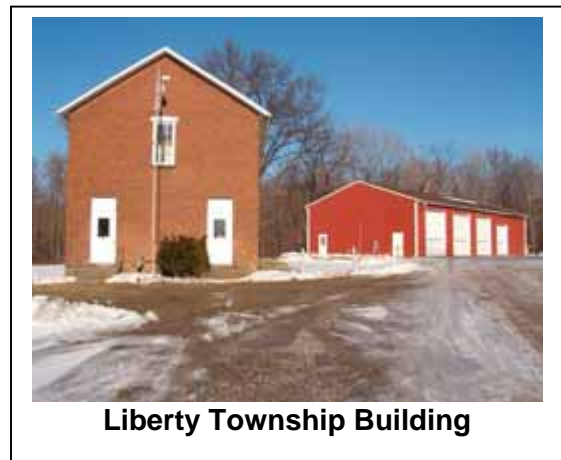
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highway. Liberty Township had 1,276 residents in 2000—a growth of 53 residents since 1990. With its proximity to Interstate 79, Liberty Township is poised to become a bedroom community to Cranberry Township, Butler County, and other North Pittsburgh communities. At the same time, Liberty has long been a farming community and has extensive agricultural security areas.

There are two main thoroughfares in the township:

- Route 258 runs south to north from Slippery Rock to London, where it intersects with Route 208 in Springfield Township.
- There is a short distance of Route 173 North in Liberty Township, from the Pine Township line to the border of Mercer Township, in Butler County.

The Liberty Township building is in the old North Liberty School, at 2873 Mercer-Butler Pike/Route 258 in the Village of North Liberty. The township also owns a large pole building on the same property as the township building. It is used for storage and as an office building. There are no township parks or other public lands. Liberty Township does not have public water and sewer systems. Liberty Township residents are served by the Grove City Post Office. Residents must contract with a private garbage collection service for trash hauling.



**Liberty Township Building**

Children in the Township are bused to the Grove City Area School District.

Liberty Township has comparatively few business and residential developments, perhaps because there is no public water and sewer. Tri-County Industries has a transfer station in Liberty Township. There is also Faull Fabricating, which is a welding and manufacturing facility and Campbell Asphalt. There are two small housing developments: Liberty Gait on Route 173 South and Kimberly Estates on Airport Road. There are also several home-based businesses, such as a dog kennel and a beauty shop, and firearms dealer.

## **Pine Township**

Wolf Creek enters Pine Township from Wolf Creek Township north of Pine Township and east of Route 173. Pine Township has over 50 miles of roads and encompasses an area of approximately 28.65 square miles. With its manufacturing facilities and service and retail businesses, Pine Township is one of the commercial centers of the region. Pine Township had the second largest population in the study area, with 4,493 residents. It has grown by 300 residents since 1990.

There are four main thoroughfares in the township:

- Interstate 80 crosses the northwest corner of the Township. Though it crosses the Township, there is no direct access to the interstate in the municipality.
- Route 173 runs north to south from the Township's border with Wolf Creek Township to its border with Grove City and then again from the southern border of town to Liberty Township.
- Route 208 runs west to east from Springfield Township to Venango County, with the Borough in the middle.
- PA Route 58 runs east to west from Butler County through the Borough and once again through Pine Township to Findley Township.

The Pine Township building is at 545 Barkeyville Road/Route 208. The township has a community center located next door to the township offices. There is a community park on this site as well and ball fields behind the building. The Pine Township Engine Company is also housed in this complex.

The township owns three sewage pump stations: (1) North Broad Street Extension/Route 173, (2) Village Park/Route 173 South, (3) Route 208 West. These pump stations are owned by the township but feed into the Grove City sanitary sewer system. The township owns a water tower on Eastgate Industrial Drive and a storage building on Gill Road. Pine Township has water and sewer to many of its residents. United Community Hospital (UCH) is located on Route 173 north of Grove City. Several related medical facilities, such as doctors' offices, etc., are also located in Pine Township. The township is also home to George Junior Republic, a group-quarter facility for youth.

Residents contract with a private garbage collection service for trash hauling. Children in Pine Township are bused to the Grove City Area School District. Pine Township residents are served by the Grove City Post Office.

The majority of manufacturing facilities and retail and services businesses in the greater Grove City area is in Pine Township. Alcoa is located on Route 208 as is Montgomery Builders. The General Electric Locomotive Diesel Works on PA Route 58/Main Street is partially in the township as well as the borough. Orchard Manor Nursing Home and the YMCA are also located in Pine Township.

## **Springfield Township**

Springfield Township is the only township in the study area not wholly in the Wolf Creek watershed. Most of the township is in the Neshannock Creek watershed. Springfield Township had 1,972 residents in 2000, and experienced a growth of 80 residents since



**Old Johnson Tavern in  
Springfield Township**

1990. Springfield Township has over 38.24 miles of roads and encompasses an area of 28.7 square miles. The township has three NHI sites identified by the WPC in its 2003 natural heritage inventory study.

The Grove City Prime Outlets and surrounding service businesses help make Springfield Township one of the primary commercial centers in the region.

There are four main thoroughfares in the township:

- **Interstate 79** runs north to south from the Springfield Township border with Findley Township, Mercer County, to its border with Plain Grove Township, Lawrence County. The Grove City Outlet Mall was developed, in part, because of its proximity to this important arterial.
- **Route 19** runs north to south from the Springfield Township border with East Lackawannock Township, Mercer County, to its border with Plain Grove Township. Route 19 parallels I-79 and was the primary north-south route in the county before the interstate was constructed.
- **Route 208** runs from the southwest corner of the Township through Leesburg, then due east to Pine Township.
- **Route 258** runs south to north from Liberty Township to Springfield Township's border with Findley Township.



The Springfield Township building is at 1791 Perry Highway, in the Village of Leesburg. The township also has a fire hall and emergency operations center at 303 Old Ash Road. There is a garage and maintenance facility on Old Ash Road South.

There are public sewer lines from the southern point of the village of No. 5 Mine and along Old Ash Road and east on Route 208. There are also two private water companies in Springfield Township: Buhl Community Water and Leesburg Community Water. Springfield Township residents are

served by the Grove City, Mercer, Volant, and New Wilmington Post Offices. Residents contract with a private garbage collection service for trash hauling. Children in the township are bused to the Grove City Area School District.

Springfield Township's strategic location on I-79 and close to Interstate 80 has helped it to become an important shopping area within the tri-state region and New York and southern Ontario. The development of the Grove City Outlets has attracted numerous other businesses, including restaurants, motels, service stations, etc. There are a number

of small retail and craft businesses as well throughout the Route 208 corridor and in the Village of Leesburg.

## Wolf Creek Township

The eponymous Wolf Creek enters the township just north of Scrubgrass Road in an unnamed swamp. Much of the land in the township is characterized by rolling hills and farmland, intersected by the broadly flowing Wolf Creek. The township has remained rural and though it is growing, it is the smallest community in the study area. There were 729 residents in 2000, 76 more than were in the township in 1990. The township has 28.3 miles of roads and covers an area of 18 square miles.

There are two main thoroughfares in the township:



Wolf Creek Township

- **Interstate 80** runs east to west on the edge of Wolf Creek Township. Exit 20 is at Perrine's Corners in the township.
- **Route 173** runs north and south through the township, intersecting with I-80 three miles north of Grove City.

The township owns an office building at 851 Centertown Road and a garage at 827 Centertown Road. It does not own any other property. The township does not have water or sewer.

The Grove City and Jackson Center Post Offices serve the residents of Wolf Creek Township. Residents contract with a private garbage collection service for trash hauling. Children in the township are bused to the Grove City Area School District.

There are several small businesses in Wolf Creek Township, most of which are related to agricultural practices. For example, Wolf Creek Custom Hardwoods is a lumber mill. McDowell Implements sells farm machinery. In addition, there are several other, small or home-based businesses, a small restaurant and an alternator-repair business.

In summary, the planning area encompasses nearly 100 square miles, and includes over 16,000 citizens, broken down as follows.

Community	Population	Square Mileage
Grove City	8,024	2.3
Liberty Township	1,276	26.5
Pine Township	4,493	28.65
Springfield Township	1,972	28.7
Wolf Creek Township	729	18.0

This diverse area includes small town commercial areas, a major regional retail center, and wide choice of neighborhoods, diverse employment base, and excellent transportation access. The Wolf Creek Slippery Rock Creek COG area has many of the components of a healthy, thriving community and sound local economy. This Plan can be another tool to keep the Grove City area prosperous and healthy.

## Community Development Goals and Objectives

*“It is the overall goal of the Borough of Grove City to develop and preserve a pleasant, attractive, healthy, safe, and convenient environment for living, working, shopping, and relaxing.”*

- Grove City Zoning Ordinance

*“Preserve the Township’s rural community character most exemplified by open spaces and woodlands, farms, low-density development, un-congested roads, clean air and water, and quiet noise levels.”*

- Liberty Township Zoning Ordinance

*The regulations of the “Zoning Ordinance” are made in accordance with a Comprehensive Plan.”*

- Pine Township Zoning Ordinance

*“By the year 2007, Springfield Township should be primarily a rural, small-town community; keep its natural/scenic qualities, its ability to farm, personal freedoms and other high qualities of life; and plan of a targeted and limited development area in which to provide for economic development opportunities, yielding higher-pay job opportunities and thriving local businesses, and not result in sprawl or undesirable impacts or costs for the community.”*

- Springfield Township Zoning Ordinance

*“This Zoning Ordinance reflects the policy goals of the Township as stated in the following community development objectives and has been developed as a legislative and administrative tool of the Township to implement these objectives.”*

- Wolf Creek Township Zoning Ordinance

The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code requires a comprehensive plan to contain, “A statement of objectives of the municipality concerning its future development, including, but not limited to, the location, character and timing of future development, that may also serve as a statement of community development objectives as provided in section 606.” (Section 606 refers to the community development objectives, which must precede a zoning ordinance.) The ideal is simply that a municipality that is involved in formal planning has a general idea of where it wants to go, and what kind of future it wants. Then, specific actions and policies can be based upon achieving the

overall goal or objective. At its worst, this kind of general goal or objective can result in such earth-shattering statements, as “trees are nice.” However, at its best, the overall goals and objectives represent a significant defense of local policies from outside legal challenge, and a measuring stick to make sure individual actions are moving toward a cohesive vision, not away from it.

This section of the Plan contains two sets of goals and objectives. The first is the general statement concerning the location, character, and timing of future growth, based upon geography. The second are the general objectives and policies in each subject area of the Plan. To avoid confusion, the following terms are defined in the manner intended by the Wolf Creek Slippery Rock Creek Council of Governments.

*Growth:* The action of getting bigger. An increase in size, whether in population, housing units, or land area.

*Development:* A change in the use of land, normally resulting in more buildings, or a change in intensity

*Intensity:* The concentration of activities within a site. Intensity can include the number of vehicles, the amount of noise or light, or the variety of activities

*Density:* The quantity of people or buildings within a given space

*Character:* The qualities that make a place distinctive

*Scale:* The size of buildings, and structures, including height, bulk, and square footage

## **Location of Future Growth**

The region will welcome future growth and development that conforms to the overall character, scale, and intensity of development within the area’s diverse neighborhoods and regions. For this to succeed will require that new development within the various municipalities be cognizant of pre-existing development, the natural environment, and the presence of community facilities and transportation infrastructure.

The highest priorities in the region are as follows:

- Protect the rural uses and features of the region from over-development pursuant to both local desires and the mandate within the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code to conserve natural resources. The region can best accomplish such conservation by encouraging a variety of small-scale economic activities within rural areas, while limiting development whose scale, character, density, or intensity are more typical of suburban or urban development. It is essential that any major development in these areas be planned to minimize impact on natural resources, especially the natural stormwater management of streams and wetlands, scenic resources of the Wolf Creek and Neshannock Creek Valleys, and prime or significant farmlands.

- Maintain the integrity of existing single-family residential neighborhoods, whether an older neighborhood in the borough or a village or newer single-family areas. This can be done by limiting the scale of buildings and developments, and limiting uses to those compatible with single-family dwellings.
- Promote continued economic diversification through select high-quality business sites, support of existing businesses, and recognizing that past community success has rested on many different economic activities.
- That each municipality should retain its autonomy and unique identity, but that cooperation in financial and land use matters is imperative if this area is to avoid the mistakes made by so many other Pennsylvania communities.

Within the context of these overall regional goals, each municipality has specific goals and objectives. These focus on unique aspects of each municipality. Though they are different, they are compatible and consistent with the role of each jurisdiction within the whole.

## Grove City Borough Zoning Ordinance

**Land Use** – To provide and perpetrate a land use pattern, which includes a wide variety of uses appropriate in a small urban area

**Environmental** – To preserve natural features in a manner consistent with a small urban area

**Aesthetic** – To enrich the lives of all residents by striving to improve the aesthetic quality and visual impact of the built environment and preserving elements of the natural environment that enhance the small-town setting

**Transportation, Traffic, and Circulation** – To maintain safe and convenient circulation and movements of goods and people within the community and to points beyond by all means practical. The multi-modal functions of pedestrian, auto, rail, and air available through the borough shall be continued as possible.

**Economy** – To establish areas for all forms of economic endeavor at various scales, including small businesses, highway commercial areas, information and services, manufacturing and industry as infrastructure is available and within an appropriate geographic context.

**Housing** – To support the continuation of the borough’s many high-quality residential neighborhoods, as well as provide a variety of housing choices to borough residents within the appropriate settings.

**Community Facilities and Services** – To provide for facilities, services, and utilities of the quantity and quality necessary to meet the physical, social, cultural, recreational, and esthetic needs of the community and to do so in a timely and fiscally responsible manner. Within this context, the borough will strive to provide

these facilities, services, and utilities outside its jurisdictional boundaries in a mutually cooperative and fair manner.

**Energy Conservation** – To promote the conservation of energy in every way possible as a matter of serious public concern

**Historic Preservation** – To preserve Grove City’s historical heritage for the enjoyment, enrichment, and education of future generations, and to engender and perpetuate an appreciation and respect for Grove City’s early efforts and achievements

**Citizen Participation** – Provide mechanism for continual discussion among residents concerning the development of Grove City and for their participation in regional affairs

**Intergovernmental Cooperation** – To participate fully in matters of regional importance, and provide for the continued development of a healthy community with the neighboring townships, school district, and greater region

## **Liberty Township Zoning Ordinance**

1. Preserve the township’s rural community character most exemplified by open spaces and woodlands, farms, low-density development, uncongested roads, clean air and water, and low noise levels
2. Identify development that may adversely impact the township’s desired community character and the health, safety, and welfare of its residents and establish conditions to minimize impacts
3. Identify areas where growth is desired and where it is not desired and establish site development standards to minimize impacts of growth on adjacent lands
4. Provide opportunities for types of development beneficial to the rural economy including farming, home occupations, and home based businesses, but ensure that such development maintains a scale and character compatible with the township’s desired rural community character
5. Provide opportunities for mixed development so that residents can have close-to-home access to needed goods and services
6. Provide opportunities for industrial and commercial development which would create jobs and enlarged tax base for the township and would be located where adequate highway access, public sewer service, and public water service is available now or in the near future and where such development would be a reasonable extension of existing similar development
7. Provide for a variety of housing choices, including a variety of housing types (single-family, duplexes, apartments, etc.)

8. Encourage buffer areas and vegetative screening to minimize impacts of commercial and industrial uses on adjacent non-commercial and non-industrial uses and to encourage that commercial/industrial uses “blend in” with the township’s desired rural community character
9. Control construction and placement of signs to minimize public safety hazards
10. Control off-street parking to minimize public safety hazards and to promote conformity to the township’s desired community character
11. Control the development and location of adult entertainment establishments, acknowledged to be threatening to the public health, safety, and welfare of the community especially its minors, and acknowledged to have adverse secondary effects including but not limited to unhealthy conditions, the spread of diseases, illegal sexual activities, and crime, in order to minimize exposure of such establishments to township residents, minimize the blighting impact of such uses, and protect the health, safety, and welfare of township residents
12. Preserve and enhance the “village” characteristics of the village of North Liberty
13. Encourage public involvement in the development of and any amendments to the zoning ordinance
14. Encourage land uses and development and location of development that is most efficient to the delivery of township services and minimizes the cost of same

## **Pine Township Zoning Ordinance**

**Overall Goal** – It is the overall goal of Pine Township to develop and preserve a pleasant, attractive, healthy, safe, and convenient environment for living, working, shopping, and recreating in the township.

**Land Use Goal** – To provide and perpetuate a land use pattern which is able to function efficiently, which features an optimum degree of compatibility between land uses and between development and the natural environment, and which enhances the orderly timing of development.

### **Specific Objectives**

1. To encourage the concentration of land uses into discernable clusters and limit both “spot” development and irregularly dispersed development patterns.
2. Prevent undesirable land use relationships and protect property values by avoiding the mixing of incompatible, conflicting land uses.
3. To encourage new growth and development by providing adequate land use area in each zoning district to meet anticipated future needs and demands.

4. To develop a land use patterns which considers highway load capacities, traffic volumes and patterns, and speed limits.

**Economic Goal** – To provide adequate shopping and employment opportunities for Pine Township residents while at the same time preserving a healthful, secure, and pleasant residential environment.

**Specific Objectives**

1. To encourage economic growth in the township via new commercial and industrial development
2. To encourage commercial development along major transportation routes and areas of existing or proposed public sewer and water facilities
3. To discourage the indiscriminate spread of commercial and industrial development
4. Encourage the orderly development of business and industry and minimize the undesirable impacts of sight, noise, odor, or other public hazards and nuisances generated by commercial and industrial development
5. To provide site development controls and protective buffer areas where commercial and industrial development will occur adjacent to residentially zoned lands

**Housing Goal** – To provide and maintain an adequate supply of sound, safe, and sanitary housing in a variety of price ranges for all the residents of Pine Township.

**Specific Objectives**

1. Preserve the residential character and quality of viable residential areas and protect them from incompatible land uses
2. Provide for diversity in housing types in the township so that every family or individual has a choice of residential environment and lifestyle
3. Control the placement of mobile homes and the development of mobile home parks in order to ensure their conformity with the aesthetics and neighborhood character of existing residential areas in the township
4. To discourage the scattering of high-density, multi-family residential development

**Community Facilities and Services Goal** – To provide for facilities, services, and utilities in the quantity and quality necessary to meet the physical, social, cultural, recreational, and aesthetic needs of the community

### **Specific Objectives**

1. Provide adequate land area for the provision and maintenance of essential public facilities and services such as water and sewers, streets, recreation, schools, police and fire protection, and human services
2. Encourage an orderly and efficient pattern of development, which facilitates and minimizes the cost of provision of community facilities and services
3. Provide for efficient traffic circulation; prevent congestion of streets/pedestrian ways
4. Discourage land use development, which would create safety hazards to vehicular and pedestrian traffic

**Environmental and Aesthetic Goal** – To enrich the lives of all residents and to promote Pine Township’s attractive, small-town atmosphere by striving to improve the aesthetic quality and visual impact of the manmade environment and to preserve and enhance the natural environment

### **Specific Objectives**

1. Eliminate or carefully control all causes of pollution including but not limited to noise, water, air, and surface pollution
2. To discourage or control development in areas characterized by unsuitable soil conditions or potential for flooding
3. To preserve wetlands and unique natural areas and protect them from development
4. Promote the conservation of energy as a matter of serious public concern
5. Encourage the elimination, isolation, or screening of all scenic detriments created by man
6. Encourage the user of aesthetically pleasing landscaping practices to enhance the visual quality of the manmade environment
  - a. Control the use of signs in terms of number, type, size and location, and encourage aesthetics and attractiveness in their design

## **Springfield Township Zoning Ordinance**

### **Objectives**

#### **Residential**

- A. Maintaining low density residential development
- B. Promote low density, single-family residential development
- C. Control location of multi-family residential development

- D. Provide housing for all economic levels
- E. Promote the preservation of historic residential structures

### **Agricultural**

- A. Promote the preservation of active farmland
- B. Encourage participation of farm owners in the Agricultural Security Area program
- C. Provide farm owners the opportunity to develop property within certain guidelines
- D. Discourage the subdivision of farm tracts into small building lots, unless public open space is guaranteed
- E. Encourage farmers to participate in county and state programs that support and promote sound farming practices, such as surface water protection and erosion and sedimentation control

### **Economic Development**

- A. Provide for commercial/industrial development in limited areas
- B. Identify areas with adequate infrastructure that can support commercial and/or industrial development
- C. Create site development controls to protect adjacent properties
- D. Provide adequate opportunities to expand the tax base
- E. Provide for a variety of commercial and industrial development opportunities

### **Infrastructure**

- A. Ensure that existing facilities and services are maintained at a level that meets the needs of current residents and businesses
- B. Promote construction standards that address township goals
- C. Require development applications to address the health, safety and general welfare needs of township residents

### **Traffic/Circulation**

- A. Create a safe, well-constructed road system within the township
- B. Promote an adequate, safe non-vehicular circulation system with the township
- C. Encourage efficient land use patterns that minimize traffic congestion
- D. Encourage new development to provide for alternative modes of transportation

- E. Encourage identification and protection of rights of way for future public use

**Historic Preservation**

- A. Encourage preservation of cultural and historic sites
- B. Cooperate with other agencies, both public and private, in the promotion of preserving identified sites
- C. Encourage new development to be architecturally compatible with existing structures and sites

**Recreation**

- A. Encourage adequate recreational opportunities for township residents
- B. Encourage new development to provide open space and/or recreation areas
- C. Encourage development of community-wide recreation program and facilities

**Natural Resources Preservation**

- A. Discourage development on, or in, identified environmentally sensitive areas
- B. Promote the preservation of identified environmentally sensitive areas and natural resources

**Land Use**

- A. Encourage development that enhances the rural character of the township
- B. Promote open space requirements for new development
- C. Encourage a variety of housing opportunities in the township
- D. Promote development arrangements that require less lineal footage of roads, sewers and water lines.

**Wolf Creek Township Zoning Ordinance**

**Land Use Objectives**

1. The township should retain its rural and agricultural characteristics.
2. The township should realize that it is becoming increasingly difficult to farm for a living and should allow some development of farmland.
3. The township should promote low-density development.
4. The township should regulate corporate animal feeding operations.
5. The township should discourage the placement of disabled vehicles and junk in areas that can be seen from public rights-of-way.

## **Economic Objectives**

1. The township should allow for small businesses, especially home-based businesses and home occupations throughout the township.
2. Economic development in the township should not disturb neighboring properties with light, noise, dust, pollution, and other nuisances.
3. The township should promote some development near the I-80/Route Interchange but should be cautious not to overrun existing or potential residences in the area.
4. The township should allow for the reasonable construction of signs, particularly to promote businesses in the I-80/Route 173 Interchange area.
5. The township should support economic development that would support the agricultural industry.

## **Housing Objectives**

1. The township should allow multiple residential dwellings on the same lot, making it favorable for family members to live in separate residential units on the same lot.
2. The township should regulate the development of multi-family residential units.
3. The township should promote single-family residential.

## **Transportation Objectives**

1. Development in the township should occur along transportation routes that can support such development without placing a burden on that transportation route itself or on the township to improve a particular transportation route.

## **Natural Resource and Preservation Objectives**

1. The township should preserve woodlands, wetlands, waterways and other natural and environmental areas and resources.

## **Community Resource Objectives**

1. The township should maintain safe, quiet neighborhoods.

## **Land Use Plan**

Land use is the heart of the comprehensive plan for several reasons. First, the comprehensive plan is the factual basis for zoning and subdivision and land development ordinances. The plan is proof that a zoning policy was not just arbitrarily invented, but is an effort to work toward a greater future vision for the development of the community. It thus has the most direct bearing on a comprehensive plan as an official, quasi-legal

document. Typically, the land use chapter is also the broadest chapter, because land use policies are tied to issues such as housing, community facilities, transportation, and others. Finally, in a growth scenario such as anticipated for the COG region, land use planning is the palette on which the community attempts to accommodate the expected growth and development.

## A Summary of Pertinent Facts and Issues






The region is expected to continue to grow, and it is even likely that this growth will accelerate. For the purposes of the plan, a future growth scenario was adopted that assumed a continued high rate of growth. This was largely based upon trends in nearby Butler County and the affects of Interstate 79 on the COG region’s accessibility.

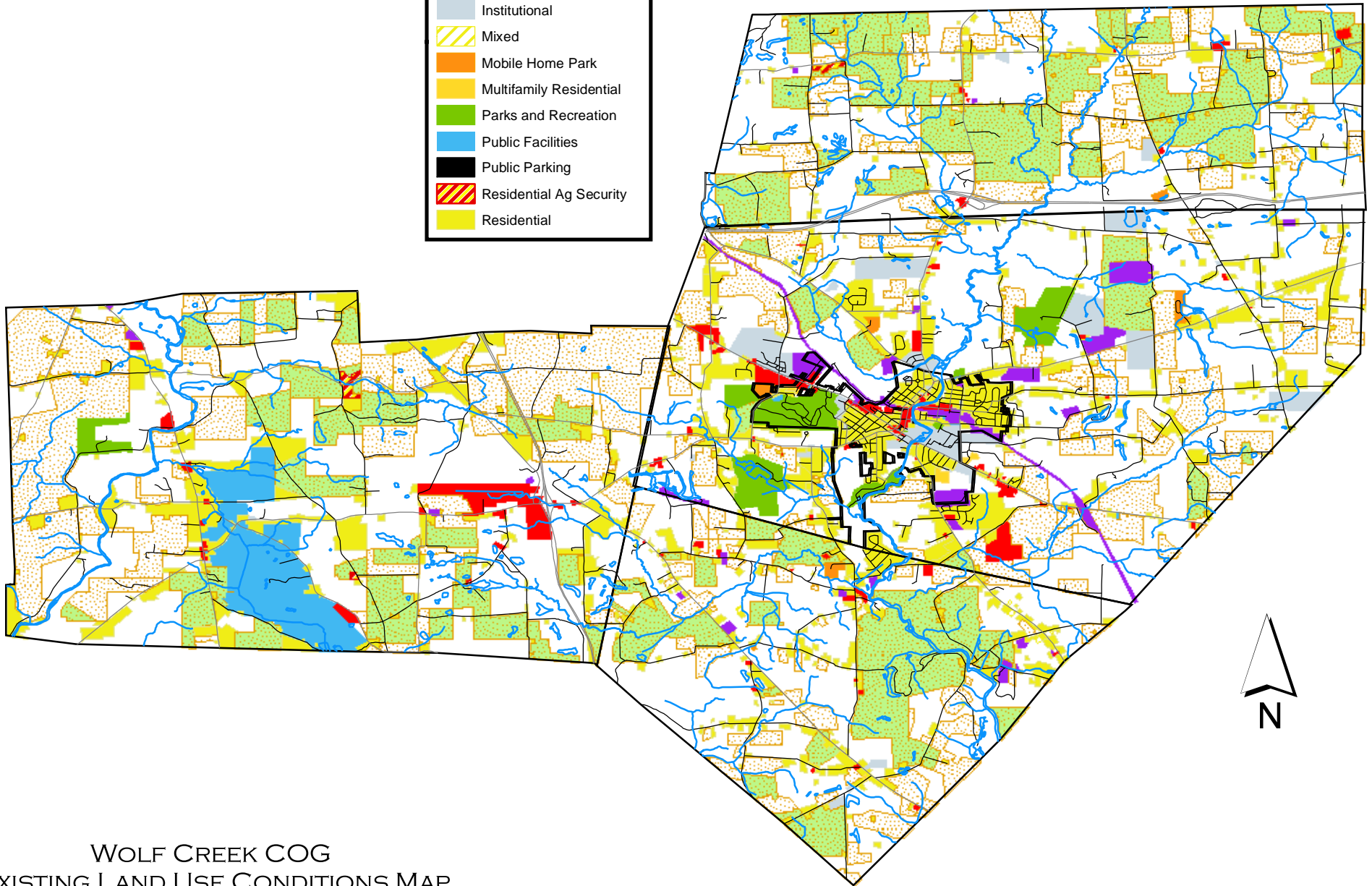
It is important to note that a Pennsylvania municipality cannot completely shut the door to future growth and development. Zoning must allow for reasonable development of all types of housing, commerce and industry. Regions or communities in “the path of growth” must accept a reasonable role in accommodating that growth. Central to efforts to plan for future growth and development in the region is an honest attempt to analyze future growth and development. There is no doubt that this region is one of the key growth areas in Mercer County. Through the past two decades, there was a pattern of slow steady growth. There is reason to believe that this will accelerate over the next decades. The Butler County Comprehensive Plan has forecast significant growth for the northwest section of Butler County, which borders the COG area (Butler County townships such as Mercer and Slippery Rock).

Even in the context of a joint or multi-municipal comprehensive plan, the community still has a legal obligation to provide for the reasonably anticipated level of growth over the period of the plan. Pursuant to this, the following represent a high growth projection, which would account for increases in historic levels of demographic growth, due to out-migration from the regional population center in Allegheny County. This typically creates a donut-hole situation—a decaying urban center surrounded by a band of suburban sprawl, each with unique problems. So far, this has not happened in the study area. However, the joint plan may be the best opportunity to prevent this from happening in the future. The next table illustrates a very conservative growth scenario, in which past trends would play a greater role. Even in this, most COG communities will see some growth.

<b>Place</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2020</b>
Grove City With Students	8,024	7,942	7,878	7,830	7,820
Grove City Without Students	5,961	5,899	5,847	5,812	5,785
Liberty Township	1,276	1,311	1,330	1,339	1,336
Pine Township	4,493	4,530	4,537	4,517	4,484
Springfield Township	1,972	2,021	2,059	2,084	2,096
Wolf Creek Township	729	749	762	765	762
Regional Total (With/Without Students)	16,494 (14,431)	16,553 (14,510)	16,566 (14,535)	16,535 (14,517)	16,498 (14,463)

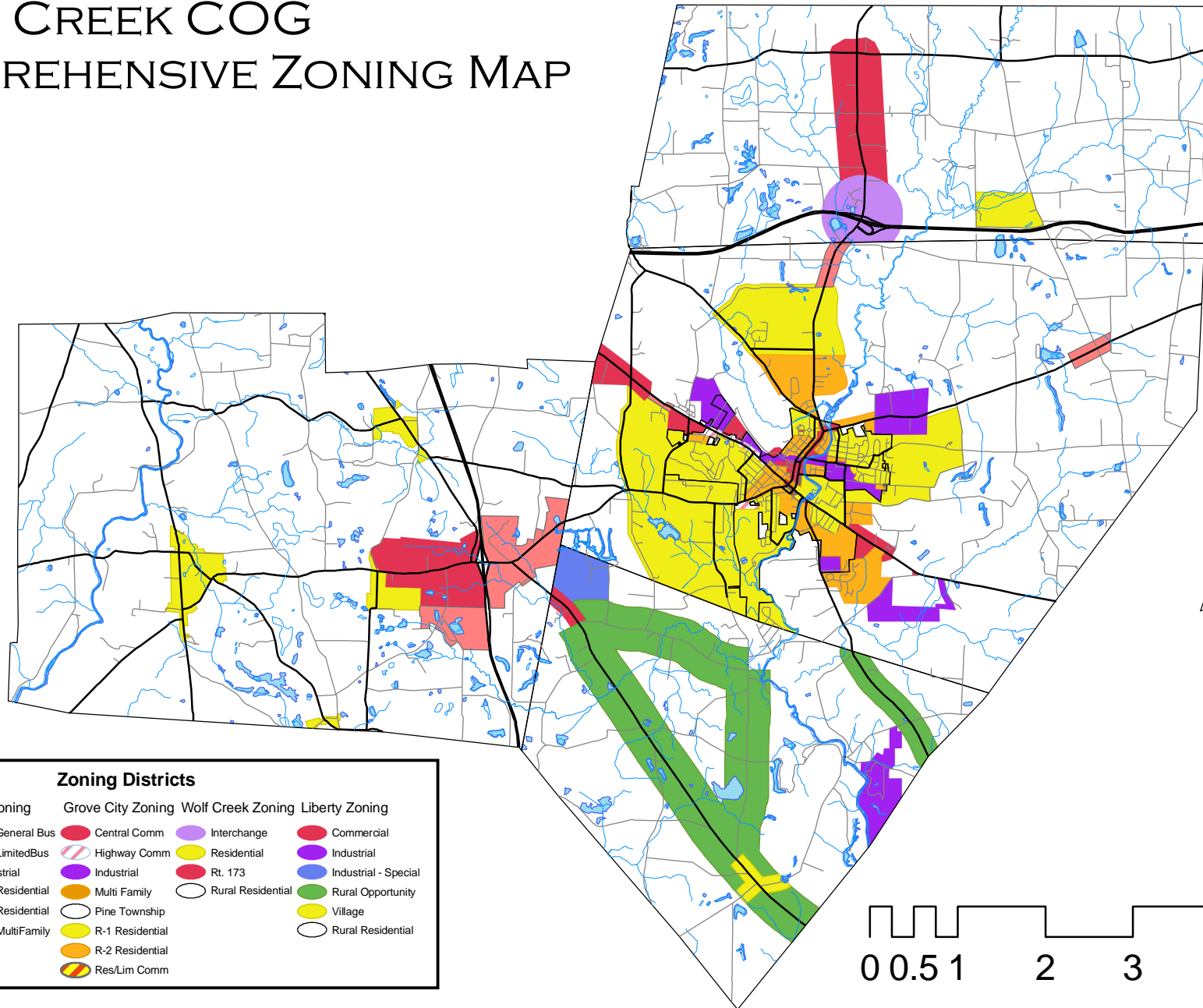
**LAND USE**

-  Agricultural Security Area
-  Agriculture
-  Commercial
-  Industrial
-  Institutional
-  Mixed
-  Mobile Home Park
-  Multifamily Residential
-  Parks and Recreation
-  Public Facilities
-  Public Parking
-  Residential Ag Security
-  Residential

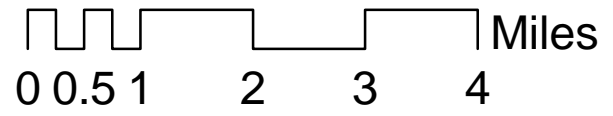


WOLF CREEK COG  
EXISTING LAND USE CONDITIONS MAP

# WOLF CREEK COG COMPREHENSIVE ZONING MAP



Zoning Districts				
Springfield Zoning	Pine Zoning	Grove City Zoning	Wolf Creek Zoning	Liberty Zoning
C-1 Commercial	B-1 General Bus	Central Comm	Interchange	Commercial
C-2 Commercial	B-2 Limited Bus	Highway Comm	Residential	Industrial
Village	Industrial	Industrial	Rt. 173	Industrial - Special
Rural Residential	R-1 Residential	Multi Family	Rural Residential	Rural Opportunity
	R-2 Residential	Pine Township		Village
	R-3 Multi Family	R-1 Residential		Rural Residential
		R-2 Residential		
		Res/Lim Comm		



However, this is conservative, as previously mentioned. The northwest region of Butler County (Slippery Rock area) is anticipating a population growth rate of over 20% by 2010. Even modest spillover of this will create the reality of a COG region of 20,000 people by 2020.

This makes an analysis of land use especially pertinent. The attached maps illustrate historic land use patterns and zoning. As of this writing, all of the COG communities have enacted some form of zoning ordinance. When zoning and subdivision ordinances are well conceived, they can become primary means to implement the community comprehensive plan. In the context of a multi-municipal plan, they can become even more important, as the relationship between availability of land for various uses will affect every community's economy and quality of life.

All of the communities within the Grove City region have chosen to adopt zoning ordinances (Grove City Borough, Pine Township, Liberty Township, Springfield Township and Wolf Creek Township). Two of the municipalities have local subdivision and land development ordinances (Grove City and Springfield Township), with Pine Township, Wolf Creek Township, and Liberty Township falling under the jurisdiction of the Mercer County Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance. This section will initially examine the borough and township zoning ordinances as they stand, then make some comparative analysis.

## **Grove City Zoning Ordinance**

The development of land use ordinances in a substantially developed community presented some challenges. Perhaps the most important of these was the need to develop regulations that were consistent with both the enabling legislation and majority of conditions found in the community. Grove City was no exception. For example, in residential areas, minimum lot sizes can be as small as 7,200 square feet in the R-3 and R-LC Districts to 9,375 square feet in the R-1 and R-2 Districts. These standards reflect the reality of the lots that were established one hundred or more years ago.

The fact that Grove City, a relatively small municipality, requires four different residential districts is a testimony to the various uses that existed when the zoning ordinance was developed. The R-1 District is almost exclusively composed of single-family, detached homes. The only other uses permitted in this district are public schools and public recreational spaces. The special exceptions are limited to essential services, churches, private schools, and government buildings.

The R-2 District expands on the uses of the R-1 District. In addition to those uses allowed in the R-1 District, R-2 allows for multi-family and multi-person housing situations. It, too, is a very residential district in character and practice. Non-residential uses of the land in the R-2 District are confined to the following special exceptions: essential services, public and rental parking, funeral homes, hospitals, nursing homes, and charitable institutions. It is also interesting to point out that home-based occupations are permitted

as an accessory use in either of these districts. However, non-family employees are not allowed nor can the business occupy more than 10% of the home's floor space.

These first two districts are almost exclusively residential in look and feel. The other two residential districts have much more of the mixed-use residential make up that was found in neighborhoods of the late 1800s to early 1900s. The minimum lot size of 60 feet by 120 feet helps to add to this feeling. All residential uses, single-family, duplex, and multi-family are permitted uses in the R-3 District. The multi-family units can be either result from the conversion of single-family units to multi-family or new construction.

Also permitted in the R-3 District are those uses which have a residential-like quality, such as nursing homes, boarding houses, college and preparatory school dormitories. Institutions that arguably enhance family/residential life, such as churches, day care centers, schools, and hospitals are permitted as well. Finally, government buildings and publicly owned facilities for service, safety, and recreation were also uses by right in this district. Essential services are a special exception.

The final residential district, the R-LC District, is a mixed residential and commercial use district. Most low-intensity business uses, such as barbers, shoe repair, medical offices, art studios, funeral homes, day care centers, and many others are all permitted by right. Small-scale retail establishments can be permitted as a special exception, as are essential services.

In addition to these four residential districts there are two commercial districts and the industrial district. The commercial districts permit traditional commercial operations; restaurants, movie theaters, laundries, doctors' office or lawyers' chambers, stores and other retail outlets, and the multitude of other uses typically found in commercial districts. In the Highway Commercial District, larger commercial operations can exist, such as mobile home sales and building supply houses. This enables commercial development appropriate to the context of the district.

The Industrial District is the last of Grove City's zoning districts. Either through permitted use or special exception, no industrial use is specifically forbidden. Several specific industrial uses are permitted by right, such as manufacturing processing, warehousing, and research work. Industrial uses not specifically mentioned in the permitted use section can be brought before the zoning hearing board. The purpose of this feature of the zoning ordinance is to identify possible adverse affects to both the borough and its neighbors.

## **Liberty Township Zoning Ordinance**

Liberty Township's zoning ordinance also dates from 2001. Its principal objective seems to be to preserve the rural nature of the township from an environmental and economic vantage. Some specific goals include:

- Provide opportunities for types of development beneficial to the rural economy, including farming, home occupations, and home-based businesses,

mobile home parks, which are all principal permitted uses. Business uses are limited to veterinary, mini-storage, or personal storage units, and residentially related uses (home occupations, bed and breakfast, etc.).

- The Rural Opportunity District allows all RA District uses but includes provisions for auto sales, light manufacturing, and various indoor commercial uses.
- The Village District has great similarity in its use structure to Springfield Township. This was a natural occurrence due to the concurrent process and involvement of county planning staff in both projects.
- The Business Districts are fairly standard. C-Commercial is a small highway business district to take advantage of proximity to I-79 and the Prime Outlets. The I-District is light manufacturing, similar to Pine Township's, and the I-S District encompasses the Tri-County site.

## **Pine Township Zoning Ordinance**

The most recent edition of the Pine Township zoning ordinance dates from 1997, but was a comprehensive amendment of a 1972 ordinance. The ordinance divides the Township into seven zoning districts:

- Rural Residential (R-1)
- Residential One Family (R-2)
- Residential Multiple-Family (R-3)
- General Business (B-1)
- Limited Business (B-2)
- Industrial (I)
- Floodplain (F)

The ordinance's Community Development Objectives are not site-specific, but rather to provide for a variety of economic and societal and civic opportunities. Of particular note are the stated objectives to discourage the scattering of high-density residential development of mobile home parks and to buffer residential and industrial/commercial developments from each other.

The R-1 District is entitled Residential Rural and includes the explicit goal of encouraging agriculture (while still providing for orderly development). The district provides for single-family dwellings, farms, some civic uses (sportsmen, grange, school, church, etc.), and a few limited or restricted business uses (sawmills, veterinary/human clinics and hospitals, recreational vehicle parks). One unusual feature of the district is a distinguishing of "campgrounds" and "recreational vehicle parks."

The R-2 District is expressly for residential purposes. This district differs from the R-1 in that it allows agriculture, but a smaller range of agriculture-related facilities. The district

differentiates mobile homes from other single-family dwellings. This district would meet what is regarded in common national parlance as “R-1” zoning.

The R-3 District provides for all forms of residential development, and some medical uses. This district includes design standards for multi-family dwellings of more than five units, such as stormwater management, 2,000 square feet of undeveloped open space per unit and minimizing pedestrian/vehicular traffic problems.

The Business Districts include B-1, which is a standard highway commercial district, and B-2, which is limited business, while also allowing all R-1 Residential rural uses. The B-2 requires some design standards for business uses, which would abut residential areas. The I-Industrial District is purely an industrial district, with no commercial or independent office uses permitted. All industrial uses are also excluded from the “B” districts.

## **Springfield Township Zoning Ordinance**

Springfield Township’s zoning ordinance was adopted in September 2001. The ordinance was the culmination of a fairly lengthy planning process that started when the Prime Outlets was proposed to locate in the township. It is based upon a detailed set of community development goals and objectives, which were part of a participatory planning process sponsored by the Mercer County Regional Planning Commission. The objectives of the ordinance include:

- Maintaining low-density residential development
- Promoting the preservation of active farmland
- Create site development controls to protect adjacent properties
- Encourage preservation of cultural and historic sites
- Promote development arrangements that require less lineal footage of roads, sewer and waterlines

The ordinance contains only four districts. These are RD Rural Development, C-1 Commercial, C-2 Commercial, and V-Village.

The RD Rural Development District provides for a wide range of activities and cannot be characterized as strictly residential or agricultural. In addition to the standards, rural uses such as single-family dwellings, farms, and mineral extraction, the district allows for such uses as professional offices, multiple-family dwellings, sawmills, mini-storage facilities, repair/service businesses, and eating and drinking places. It can be characterized as taking a libertarian approach to rural development.

The C-1 District is built around a classic Highway Commercial District. However, this might be regarded as an all-purpose district for intensive uses. In addition to standard business uses, there are conditional use provisions for such high-impact uses as heavy manufacturing, junkyards, and sexually oriented businesses.

The C-2 District functions more like a Transitional or Limited Business District. Less-intensive businesses are allowed by right (landscaping/ nursery, personal services, and retail businesses of less than 20,000 square feet floor area). Higher-impact business uses (shopping centers, eating and drinking places) must meet more stringent conditional use standards.

The V-Village District is perhaps the most restrictive district in terms of use standards. However, it remains a mixed-use district as well, utilizing conditional use standards to limit the impact of commercial uses upon residential ones.

## **Wolf Creek Township Zoning Ordinance**

Wolf Creek's zoning ordinance was adopted on June 14, 2004. The ordinance divides the Township in four districts:

- Rural Residential (R-1)
- General Residential (R-2)
- Mixed Use (B-1)
- Industrial (I)

The Rural Residential: The R-1 District is intended to promote and allow for agricultural operations, low-density single-family residential, open space, recreational facilities, home based business, and home occupations as primarily found throughout the township.

The General Residential: The R-2 District was created to allow, primarily, for the development and expansion of manufactured/mobile home parks in the township.

The Mixed Use: The B-1 District promotes and allows for a mix of residential dwellings and business along Route 173, expanding north from the I-80 interchange.

The Industrial: The I-District, promotes industrial and commercial development at the Route 173/I-80 interchange, and allows for the residential uses compatible with existing residential uses, while minimizing the impact between industrial, commercial, and residential uses. Overall, the ordinance reflects the rural nature of the township.

## **Comparison**

Density standards vary tremendously between local zoning ordinances, as depicted in the next two charts.

### Rural/Agricultural District Lot Standards

Municipality	Minimum Lot Size	Minimum Front Yard Setback	Minimum Side Yard	Minimum Rear Yard	Maximum Lot Coverage	Minimum Lot Width
Grove City Borough	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Liberty Township	40,000 square feet	75 feet	20 feet (10 feet accessory)	25 feet (10 feet accessory)	25% structures only	125 feet
Pine Township	25,000 square feet	100 feet major roads 75 feet all other roads	12 feet	10 feet	35% structures only	100 feet
Springfield Township	1.5 acres (65,340 square feet)	40 feet	25 feet	50 feet	15%	150 feet
Wolf Creek Township	1.5 acres (65,340 square feet)	75 feet Route 173 50 feet all other roads	10 feet with sewer 15 feet without sewer	25 feet with sewer 35 feet without sewer	30%	100 feet

### Single-Family Residential District Lot Standards

Municipality	Minimum Size	Minimum Front Yard Setback	Minimum Side Yard	Minimum Rear Yard	Maximum Lot Coverage	Minimum Lot Width
Grove City Borough	9,375 square feet	25 feet	10 feet	10 feet	NA	60 feet
Liberty Township	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Pine Township	25,000 square feet on-lot sewer or water 15,000 square feet Both public water and sewer	100 feet major roads 75 feet all other roads	12 feet	10 feet	35% structures only	100 feet
Springfield Township	No District	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Wolf Creek Township	1 acre	50 feet	10 feet	35 feet	20%	125 feet

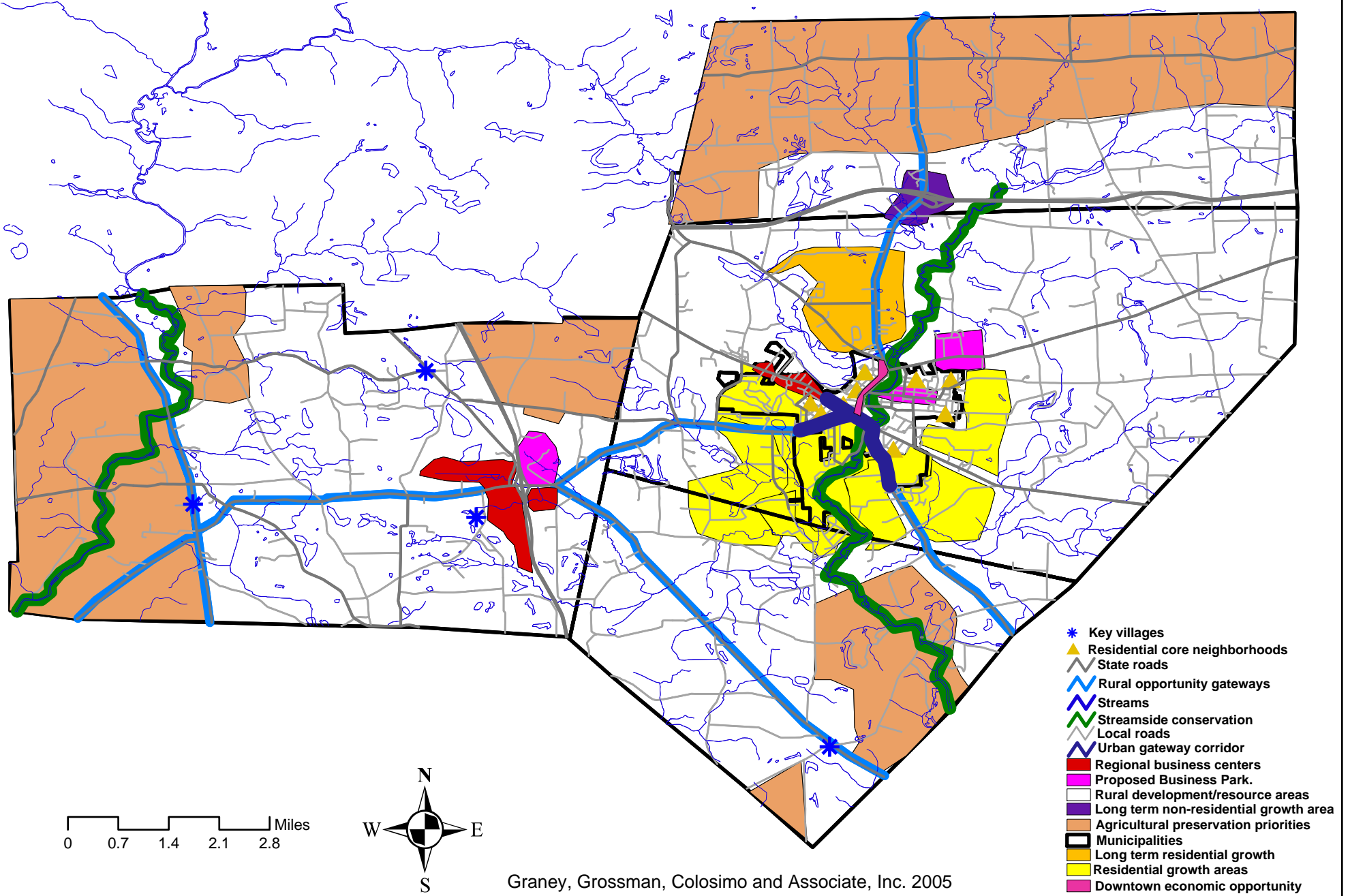
## Land Use Plan

### Central Vision

The region avoids the “donut-hole” syndrome, where older settled areas decline and formerly rural areas become congested and lose rural/small-town character. The COG communities accomplish this by:

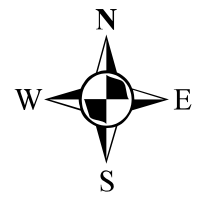
1. Ensuring that older settled areas in the COG remain sound places where citizens wish to continue to reside and invest. These areas include the traditional neighborhoods of Grove City Borough as well as the numerous villages located throughout the Townships.

# Wolf Creek COG Future Land Use Plan



- \* Key villages
- ▲ Residential core neighborhoods
- ≡ State roads
- ≡ Rural opportunity gateways
- ≡ Streams
- ≡ Streamside conservation
- ≡ Local roads
- ≡ Urban gateway corridor
- Regional business centers
- Proposed Business Park.
- Rural development/resource areas
- Long term non-residential growth area
- Agricultural preservation priorities
- Municipalities
- Long term residential growth
- Residential growth areas
- Downtown economic opportunity

0 0.7 1.4 2.1 2.8 Miles



2. Avoiding mistakes made by other regions in the state where growth and development has led to traffic congestion, higher taxes, loss of natural resources, and intergovernmental conflicts.

### **KEY IDEAS**

*Create a regional growth fund from the tax base, which qualifies as self defined “Developments of regional impact and significance.”* A mutually agreed percentage of tax funds generated by such developments will be placed into a COG-controlled fund to pay for infrastructure, road improvements, and other investments in each participating community.

Define such development of regional impact and significance as:

- Subdivision of more than 30 lots
- New commercial buildings of 50,000 or more square feet
- New industrial buildings of 80,000 square feet

Any rehabilitation, or expansion of an existing taxable building that exceeds an increase in valuation of one to two million dollars. It is anticipated that this activity will be one of the COG’s first activities. It will be essential if crucial sewage facility improvements are to be made. It will also be essential if every community is to fairly pay for growth and prosper from development.

**Priority Ranking: Top**

Create a uniform standard for village districts, throughout the COG area. Base this on the best of the village development standards from Springfield Township and Liberty Township.

**Priority Ranking: Top**

Consider creating a specific plan for the most intensive commercial growth areas. This specific plan would be implemented through a site specific ordinance which would outline where new streets, connections to existing streets and infrastructure and stormwater systems would be placed and design features of the development. By being much more specific than zoning or subdivision and land development ordinances, it could ensure very efficient land utilization.

**Priority Ranking: Top**

If a specific plan is created, it should include West Main Street in Grove City and Pine Township.

**Priority Ranking: Top**

If a specific plan is created, it should include the west side of the Route 208/I79 Interchange.

### **Priority Ranking: Top**

If a specific plan is created, it should include all of Route 208 from the Grove City Borough/Pine Township line to the I-79 Interchange.

### **Priority Ranking: Top**

For new residential development outside the residential growth target area, create a design standard which conserves natural features or keeps density low for all properties after the creation of five new lots.

### **Priority Ranking: Top**

Endorse the creation of a lot standard throughout the region, which removes unbuildable or environmentally limited areas from the stated minimum lot area.

### **Priority Ranking: High**

Work to strongly limit major residential development to within the residential growth areas depicted on the sketch land use plan map.

### **Priority Ranking: High**

Create a new standard for an Agricultural Protection Zoning District. Apply this to the best areas of farmland, especially in northern Wolf Creek Township, western Springfield and the Wolf Creek valley area of Liberty Township. Standards can include, sliding scale to set aside farmland from development lots, deed notation to enhance protection of farmers from nuisance suits, and standards for large developments to preserve and re-sell farmland as permanent open space.

### **Priority Ranking: High**

Within the defined residential growth area, create a standard for suburban development, which mirrors the density, street patterns, and design features of older neighborhoods in the Grove City area. Create design bonuses for developers (easier approval, additional lots) and disincentives for poor design.

### **Priority Ranking: High**

## **Policies and Actions**

Local leaders have come to the conclusion that the future success of all the communities that make up the Wolf Creek COG/watershed and encompass the Grove City Area School District must act as a region for the purposes of economics, public investment, and growth/ development policies. This is explicitly to avoid the “donut-hole” syndrome, which has plagued a vast majority of Pennsylvania communities. This unenviable situation is characterized by an older settled place (such as a borough or city) suffering from aging populace, large percentage of non-taxable properties, numerous absentee rental properties, population decline, physical decay or physical distress. The township

that surrounds the older settled place is characterized by population growth, conversion of farm and open land to other uses, problems with traffic congestion, overwhelmed infrastructure, or loss of a sense of place or rural character. At its worst, the situation is marked by animosity between the older settled place and the growing township. The older settled place frequently tries to withhold public services, and the township often replicates expensive infrastructure. The long-term effects are typically a local economy where there is no real growth, just a shifting of activities, overspending and replication of services and facilities, or the loss of neighborhood, small town, or rural quality of life.

To avoid this damaging syndrome, the COG communities should embark on three major tasks. The first is planning for land uses on a regional basis so that there will not be dilution of public investment, or unnecessary spreading of infrastructure. The second task will be the means to implement the land use plan by sharing in “big ticket” improvements to support development. The third will be a fair means to share in increased revenues derived through joint planning.

The attached Future Land Use Plan map envisions a variety of future land uses.

In the center of Grove City, a downtown Economic Opportunity District is depicted. Policy here is to continue providing for a variety of small business opportunities that can thrive in an older urban, pedestrian-oriented environment. At times, these may not be traditional retail businesses. But, newer service or technology businesses are certainly appropriate here, due to low impact (lack of noise, favorable rents, etc.). Efforts should be made to maintain this area as a pedestrian-oriented business district.

Surrounding this is a number of core residential neighborhoods. While often comprised of 50-plus year-old housing, most are sound. Public policy should prioritize the continued use of these neighborhoods through continued investment in the public realm (sound streets, decent sidewalks, street trees, and public parks). Where single-family dwellings remain the dominant land use, they should be strongly protected through single-family (“R-1”) zoning designations.

Residential growth areas surround the residential core neighborhoods. Primarily located in Pine Township (with a small area in Liberty Township), these areas have seen some recent residential growth and development. Because there has not been tremendous growth pressure, development has been small scale or phased. The danger in this area is that new street systems will lose interconnectivity, and the area will develop into a maze of dead-end streets. There may also be opportunities here for developers to create better subdivisions based upon rural and small-town models, rather than urban/suburban ones. There are opportunities for new developments that entail “better suburbs” from a design standpoint.

The long-term residential growth area lies in the northern part of Pine Township. Due to technical and market factors, it is not envisioned that this area will see immediate residential growth. Public investments will be thus tied to timing, as necessary and prudent. For areas within this designated growth area, that are served by public sewer,

higher-density or alternative housing types may be appropriate here because there is less traffic congestion than other major corridors.

Two sites are also identified as business park locations. These sites should be reserved or encouraged for uses that will offer non-retail businesses an opportunity to expand. They are discussed in detail within the Economic Development Plan chapter.

Two regional retail/service business centers are depicted on the map. The first of these is the Route 58 corridor through Grove City Borough and a portion of Pine Township. The second entails quadrants of the interchange of I-79 and PA Route 208. The former has developed as a classic highway “strip” commercial area. It has been economically successful, and serves local residents. Its principal problem at the present is highway congestion. The latter area (the I-79 Interchange) may arguably be the most successful regional retail center in rural western Pennsylvania. Shoppers routinely drive 50 to 150 miles to purchase a variety of goods there. The base outlet mall facility is well designed and avoids many of the issues of large retail centers elsewhere. The key to this area’s future lies in recognizing its success and expecting that future developments enhance this good design base. This also increases the likelihood that new retail stores will complement, rather than compete with other retail districts in the COG area.

A number of rural opportunity gateways are also depicted on the Future Land Use Plan map. These areas are often outside public sewer or water service areas, and cannot support major business activities. However, these areas bring much traffic into the area and present local small businesses with the means to reach customers. Rural, small-scale businesses are wholly appropriate in these areas if they do not adversely impact pre-existing residences. Two townships in the COG (Springfield and Liberty) have explored this corridor approach to rural development.

In a similar manner, three urban gateway corridors are depicted on the map. These are primarily residential areas, which are all located in Grove City Borough along Routes 173, 58, and 208. They represent the first view visitors get of the heart of the community. Public policy should emphasize preserving the well kept, often stately homes.

Within the growth area are also a number of major parks and institutions, which add immensely to residential quality of life. Development around these areas should remain principally residential or low-impact/low-intensity businesses.

Outside the areas recommended for growth and development lie thousands of acres of streams, farms, woods, and wetlands, as well as scattered residential development and small businesses. There are also four principal villages, which are small urban areas of mixed residential and commercial use.

The village areas have a stock of older houses and buildings. Buildings generally sit on smaller lots. Only one, the village of No. 5 Mine has both community water and sewer. The villages are an important addition to the character of the COG area as well as a source of rural affordable housing. Public policy should emphasize traffic safety, sound streets, and the provision of infrastructure.

Rural resource areas are where the COG communities do not intend to extend public water or sewer. A number of rural uses are appropriate here. These include:

- Single-family homes on lots large enough to ensure adequate on-lot water supply and safe on-lot sewage disposal
- Small businesses on lots large enough to prevent impacts to residences
- Responsible natural resource extraction, such as natural gas drilling or mining
- Agriculture and agricultural related businesses

New residential development in these areas should be developed with regard to the area's mixed-use setting and its natural environment. Larger developments may need to either reserve open space, provide additional lot area, or buffer developments from pre-existing uses. Also there is the very real possibility that mining or agricultural activities can impact water supplies in these areas, as stated in Article III of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code.

The map depicts farmland preservation priority areas. These are rural resource areas that have a concentration of prime agricultural land, active farmland, and agricultural security areas. The foremost goal of these areas is to protect farmland from nuisance actions or other conflicts from development. Policy will also emphasize support for farm-related businesses as a means of preserving the rural economy. Residential development in this area should be confined to small-scale creation of new lots by farmers. Large-scale residential development should only occur with maximum protection for surrounding farms.

Finally, the streams, which give the area its name and character, merit special consideration. These should be further studied and setbacks should be considered where possible to preserve water quality through natural stormwater management and avoidance of flooding.

Within this overall policy plan, each community has a role, and can assist in implementing key policies. Municipal actions are discussed as follows. Further specific recommendations are included in the Action Plan.

## **Grove City Borough Land Use Plan**

The Borough of Grove City has identified the preservation of a high-quality environment for single-family residential neighborhoods as its highest land use priority. Throughout Pennsylvania, older urban places have been losing population. Many face issues of crime, crumbling infrastructure, and difficulty in maintaining public services. Thus far, Grove City has escaped much of this disturbing trend. While the housing stock is mostly comprised of pre-1950 homes, rates of deteriorated housing are much lower than the norm. Residents enjoy a wide range of sound, well-maintained public services and infrastructure. This wide range of positive features includes a park system, which includes two major parks and numerous neighborhood playgrounds. The Borough also

offers full public water and sewer with municipal electric, all of which are offered at reasonable rates, full police protection, and smaller benefits such as free compost and street trees. The ability of the municipality to offer these at reasonable cost has been a major factor in Grove City's remarkable stability. Thus, continuation of existing policies is in order.

There are, however, a few policies that could improve upon the situation. First is an examination of a few residential neighborhoods that, while not deteriorated, could become so in the next ten years. Efforts should be made to target where residential neighborhoods lack elements locally defined as creating high quality. Then, the priority should be to revitalize them. Activities can include removal of abandoned isolated blighting buildings. Continued housing rehabilitation [the borough has successfully rehabilitated 56 homes using Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds] and careful monitoring and control of rental properties can also be a major factor in neighborhood quality. Pursuant to the latter, it is also recommended that a number of R-2 zoned areas be upgraded to R-1 designation, where single-family dwellings remain the dominant housing type. This could be done by incorporating standards into the existing R-1 District or creation of a new single-family residential district.

While it is an important part of the community, a major land use inconsistency in the borough is the zoning of major institutions such as Grove City College as R-Residential areas. The borough should create a new clear institutional zoning district for major educational facilities. This serves three purposes. First, it allows major institutions to have an area where they are free to expand their activities. Second, it protects tax base by reserving some areas for substantially private sector, taxable activities. Finally, it allows freedom to homeowners to know major institutional facilities will not locate in residential areas. This area should also receive priority for Elm Street funds by the Commonwealth.

The borough has two principal commercial business areas; the traditional pedestrian-based downtown, and the West Main Street business district, which flows into Pine Township. The concern of the first is loss of traditional business activities. The principal need of the latter is traffic control. For the downtown, consideration has been given to physical revitalization of the downtown, through the utilization of grants to rebuild and rehabilitate infrastructure. However, it must be noted that physical revitalization alone is not a solution to an economic problem.

In addition to its zoning policies, the borough can foster the preservation of high-quality residential *and* business districts through its direct policies. Numerous studies have shown that urban decline is preceded by a lack of attention to spot blight. The abandoned house with broken windows, the vacant dilapidated business building, and the litter-strewn alley are the precursors to out-migration and street crime. In addition to the current code program, consideration should be given to a demolition program, which could be conducted using CDBG funding (spot slum/blight).

There are many examples of downtowns in western Pennsylvania where significant spending in public improvements has brought neither increased retail activity nor private

investment. Pursuant to the desire of citizens, revitalization grants should be pursued to make initial public improvements. However, this process should be accompanied by an economic development process that emphasizes business startups, cost of capital issues, and market analysis. This process should recognize the dual character of the downtown. The first component of that character is the traditional retail business community. The second component is numerous professional service businesses, which are less dependent on a downtown location. Zoning should remain flexible to accommodate both.

## **Liberty Township Land Use Plan**

As previously mentioned, Liberty Township's approach to zoning shares much with Springfield Township. The idea of the rural opportunity district is a means to allow rural small businesses to thrive in areas without concentrated development or utilities. Sewer is very likely being extended to northern Liberty Township and is part of a short-term sewer service project recommendation. Within the next few year's areas of northern Liberty Township will have access to sewer services (see map entitled: Wolf Creek COG Sewer Service Areas). This will make the area more attractive for residential development. Zoning may need to reflect this change. At that point, a small suburban residential district may be in order.

The second issue is whether the township wishes to provide for major highway commercial uses at all. The small district on Route 258 could be changed to a rural opportunity district and agreements with Springfield and/or Pine could supersede its need.

## **Pine Township Land Use Plan**

Pine Township is the home of most of the residential growth areas depicted in the plan map. In addition to sharing a major commercial area with Grove City Borough and being home to one of the priority economic sites, the township's development patterns also have the greatest continuity with Grove City Borough.

This continuity is a local strength that should be built upon and expanded. Whether this can succeed will depend upon how well new subdivisions are related to the existing transportation network and community design.

There are three principal tools to accomplish this: subdivision and land development regulations, a traditional neighborhood development zoning district or planned residential development regulations, and a specific plan.

The Mercer County Regional Planning Commission currently administers the subdivision and land development regulations in the township. As countywide regulations, they must apply to all situations, from the Shenango Valley to the rural northern parts of the county. Pine Township could enact updated local regulations, which would meet their specific needs. Key features should include:

- Discouraging unnecessary cul-de-sacs
- Requiring large parking lots to interconnect
- Laying out lot and block patterns which extend the design styles of the best borough neighborhoods
- Making street designs conform to anticipated traffic

The second tool is traditional neighborhood development (TND), or planned residential development (PRD). Each of these is authorized by the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code and allows municipalities to combine subdivision and land development standards within zoning to ensure a cohesive development process. Municipalities can use the process to gain high-quality development (street trees, sidewalks, sensible street systems). Developers like the fact that separate zoning and subdivision requirements are combined. Again, the development of these regulations could be a very good joint project for Pine Township and Grove City Borough (the borough has very antiquated subdivision and land development regulations).

Finally, multi-municipal comprehensive plans are a pre-requisite to a specific plan. A specific plan allows the community to precisely locate future public improvements *before* development comes. Standards may also include building siting and coverage, stormwater, and greenspace. As an incentive to developers, it could be combined with a tax incremental financing package to help pay for improvements. The specific plan may include text, maps, and diagrams. However, it may only address non-residential development, so it is most useful in an area such as West Main Street or Route 58.

## **Springfield Township Land Use Plan**

Springfield Township is anticipated to be the host of significant non-residential developments, primarily around the four quadrants of the I-79, PA 208 interchange. Dense residential development is not anticipated outside the village areas.

If the Land Use Plan develops as depicted, there are two major concerns. The first would be continued traffic congestion. The second would be a loss of some of the good design features of the initial outlet mall complex. The aforementioned specific plan is strongly recommended as a principal tool for the township. Future road rights-of-way and building coverage may mean the difference between the current success and just another congested highway commercial area.

Springfield Township also shares a number of development aspects with neighboring Liberty Township. Both employ village zoning techniques. Both employ limited business districts on major state highways. Both have large rural development districts. It is recommended that planning commissions in each community investigate each other's standards in the interest of promoting greater uniformity.

## **Wolf Creek Township Land Use Plan**

Wolf Creek Township is the most recently zoned COG community. As such, it has independently zoned for all conceivable uses. This is no longer necessary, though long-term development of the I-80/PA 173 Interchange may be a consideration. Sewer service north of the I-80 interchange is part of the long-term sewer service area recommendation. Realistically, within the next 10 to 12 years sewer will be extended from Pine Township south to I-80 (see map entitled: Wolf Creek COG Sewer Service Areas). However, current township zoning reflects this change.

If Wolf Creek Township wishes to remain rural, fostering its farms, low-density homes, and small businesses, zoning can be the tool to discourage large major developments that threaten rural lifestyles.

## Economic Development Plan

*Of all the sections of the Comprehensive Plan, economic activities are one of the least restricted to municipal borders. Residents routinely commute to jobs in other communities both within and outside the COG region. Shopping patterns are similarly widespread. Therefore, economic development activities are not offered on a municipal basis, but on a regional one. However, each municipality has a role to play in building a strong regional economy. All economies must be able to import capital by having a product, service or, other means of bringing dollars from the outside. Once money is imported to within a system, the task becomes retaining it for as long as possible by keeping it cycling within the region. The Wolf Creek/Grove City region has great potential for a continued healthy economy due to the diversity of economic activity. Capital enters the region through a variety of goods and services. These include manufacturing entities such as General Electric, which sells and refurbishes diesel locomotive engines all over the world. It also includes entities such as Grove City College whose students pay tuition that benefits the local economy. Often, retail businesses retain capital through spending, but in the COG area, even retail brings in outside dollars through the international and interstate customers of the Prime Outlets.*

According to the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), Division of Insurance and Research, Pennsylvania continues to have a slow rate of recovery from the recent “deep recession.” The bureau specifically states that the “slow recovery in manufacturing, especially in the western part of the state, is driving the state’s net job losses.”

At the same time, however, the Wolf Creek COG area has a robust economy. In fact, it is one of the few growth areas in Mercer County. There are several reasons for this, some of which will be discussed in this document.

The communities in the study area, particularly Grove City, its hub, are centrally located just a few miles from both Interstate 79 and 80. It is thus relatively easy for local residents to commute to jobs in the northern suburbs of the Pittsburgh area. It was also a factor in the growing regional retail concentration at the interchange of I-79 and PA 208. The Prime Outlets mall in Springfield Township has become a very strong employer. Its strategic location indicates that it will continue to do well. The General Electric (GE) plant in Pine Township remains sound with over 700 direct employees. George Junior Republic is another major employer. At the same time, US Investigation Services has its world headquarters in Grove City. United Community Hospital and the GCSO are ranked 8<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>, respectively on the County’s list of 50 employers. Grove City College, another service-sector employer, is slowly, but steadily, growing, and has about 450 part- and full-time employees.

There has been much local success in gaining various elements of the “new economy” from small information services in downtown Grove City to education, health, and

regional retailing. However, there are still healthy remnants of a more traditional economy, and adequate local retail and service businesses, such as restaurants, small shops establishments, etc. Additionally, people want to live in the communities that make up the study area. In other words, this area has the underpinnings of a strong economy.

Still, the leaders of the communities that make up this study will have to guide the economic future of the region. While detailed recommendations are beyond the scope of this document, there are areas that community leaders might want to study more fully. These are discussed in the next section. Sound economic and business development plans rely on a comprehensive assessment of resources and assets as well as finding innovative solutions to common problems. The local leaders of the COG work well together and through this Comprehensive Plan, are well on their way to developing a regional plan that benefits all of the members communities equally. The communities in the Wolf Creek COG have at least one asset that could well set it apart from other, similar communities; its people.

Median household incomes are analyzed for the state, Butler and Mercer Counties, as well as the five communities in the study area. Data are compared from the 1990 and 2000 Censuses. These numbers have not been adjusted for inflation.

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**Median Household Incomes, 1999 and 1989**  
**Nation, Pennsylvania, Butler, Mercer Counties**  
**Grove City Borough, and Liberty, Pine, Springfield, Wolf Creek Townships**

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Community	1999 <sup>1</sup> (\$)	1989 <sup>2</sup> (\$)	Increase (\$)	Percent Change (%)
Nation	41,994	30,056	11,938	40
Pennsylvania	40,106	29,069	11,037	38
Butler County	42,308	29,358	12,950	44
Mercer County	34,666	24,599	10,067	41
Grove City Borough	34,598	24,828	9,770	39
Liberty Township	43,355	26,799	16,556	62
Pine Township	41,423	29,795	11,628	39
Springfield Township	40,341	23,177	17,164	74
Wolf Creek Township	37,500	30,625	6,875	22

*1 From the 2000 U.S. Census*

*2 From the 1990 U.S. Census*

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As can be seen from the above data, the study area has generally been consistent with the rest of the nation in terms of growth in personal income. There are a few exceptions, which are discussed below.

**Grove City Borough** – Residents had an increase in MHI of 39%, which is just one percentage point below the national average, and one percentage point above the state average.

**Liberty Township** – Residents had an increase in MHI of 62%, more than 20 percentage points higher than the national or state averages, but 12 points less than

Springfield Township, which had the greatest increase. There are likely several reasons for this increase. A number of small family farms ceased operation in the decade between 1989 and 1999. The farming sector is generally less lucrative than virtually any other sector. Farmers may have retired, found other work in the area (full-time or augmenting farm income), or moved elsewhere. All would positively affect the median household income, albeit for different reasons. According to Occupation-by-Sector data, Liberty Township had the fewest residents employed in agriculture and related industries.

Additionally, Butler County had an increase in MHI of 44%, the highest of any of the counties in the region. The data may indicate that Liberty Township is becoming a bedroom community for Butler County communities. Newer residents in Liberty are likely commuting to communities in Butler and Allegheny Counties, such as Cranberry, Wexford, and Pittsburgh. It is likely that these residents have higher household incomes. Note that at least some of these residents are also likely working in better-paying positions closer to the area, such as in management positions at Prime Outlets, or in Educational, Health, and Social Services. The Occupation-by-Sector data, again, show this is likely the case. Over 100 individuals in Liberty work in manufacturing and retail trade, respectively. An additional 137 residents work in the Educational, Health, and Social Services sectors.

**Pine Township** – Pine Township residents had the same increase as residents in the borough, at 39%, just below the national MHI and just above the state’s increase. According to Occupation-by-Sector data, 27% (450) of residents in the township worked in the Educational, Health, and Social Services sector. As is discussed in more detail in the next section, these jobs tend to be higher paying, thereby causing the MHI to increase. An additional 22% (368) work in the Manufacturing sector, which is again a relatively well-paying sector.

**Springfield Township** – The residents in Springfield Township enjoyed the greatest increase in MHI of any of the communities in the study area. Their MHI increased by 62%, 34 points above the national average and 36 points above the state average. Residents in Springfield Township had an MHI 52 points higher than Wolf Creek, which had the lowest gain in median household income. Springfield residents paralleled Pine Township residents in Occupation-by-Sector data. Nearly 21% (199) worked in the Educational, Health, and Social Services sector. An additional 17% (169) worked in the Manufacturing sector, and 14% (139) worked in Retail Trade, likely at Prime Outlets. According to 1990 census data<sup>1</sup>, there were 44 residents who worked in the Agriculture or Mining sectors. That level dropped to 29 by the 2000 Census.

**Wolf Creek Township** – Wolf Creek Township residents had the lowest increase in the area, realizing a net increase of 22%, or \$6,875. There are likely several reasons for this small increase. Wolf Creek Township remains the most rural of all the communities in the study area. It also had the highest per capita number of farmers in the region. Of

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<sup>1</sup> Note that the data are only reviewed for Springfield Township. For more information, see the next section, Occupation by Sector.

the number of residents working (as shown in the Occupation-by-Sector data), 8% (29) worked in agriculture or related sectors. In Springfield Township, which also had 29 residents working in these sectors, only 3% of the residents were farmers or in related businesses. It is also the least accessible community to jobs in the Pittsburgh Metro area.

**Generally, personal incomes have held their own compared to larger economies, such as the region, the state, and the nation. While this is good news, Wolf Creek residents trail other residents in personal wealth.**

## Core Employers: Occupation by Sector

*The U.S. Census Bureau classifies industries by the North American Industrial Classification System (NAICS). This system groups industries in 13 major sectors, from Agriculture and Mining to Wholesale Trade, and an additional 12 subcategories.*

*The Census Bureau provides data on the number of employees in each of these categories. The general breakdown of all sectors for the entire national economy is shown in this image.*



Economies that have diversified core employers are generally stronger. Further, the traditional sector of manufacturing is giving way to more service-base industries across the nation. These points are true in the local economy as well, as illustrated by the following analysis of Occupation-by-Sector data. The employment data by sector for all five communities are shown in the table on page 39. Note that this table is based on *sample data* from the U.S. Census. Not every citizen was polled regarding his or her employment. Also, please note that the following chart shows the industry where individuals work, not that the community has a particular number of such positions.

For example, there are 585 residents in Grove City who work in retail trade positions. This does not mean that there are 585 retail positions in Grove City, but rather that 585 individuals who live in Grove City work in retail businesses. Given the number of retail businesses in Springfield Township, it's likely that many of these residents commute to Springfield. It is important to look at the total number of jobs, rather than the individual totals by community.

## Where Income is Earned: Economic Census

Every five years, the U.S. Census Bureau conducts an economic census as a measure of the structure and functioning of the nation’s economy. The information in this census can be used to determine which sectors provide the best wages. While ideally the five top job-producing sectors in the previous section would be analyzed for income earned, the information in the Economic Census cannot always be directly correlated to the Population Census. The following table presents data that can be directly compared.

<b>Economic Census: Top Five Sectors, Wolf Creek COG Area, 1997<sup>1</sup></b>					
Sector	Community	No. Businesses	Payroll (\$1,000)	No. Paid Employees	Average Salary (\$)
Agriculture/Agriservices	Data collected not equivalent to other sectors				
Educational Services	Data collected not released because of small number of institutions				
Health Care and Social Assistance	Grove City	29	10,786	472	22,852
Information	Data collected not applicable to study area				
Manufacturing	Grove City	13	36,832	1,023	36,004
Retail Trade	Grove City	135	16,589	1,311	12,654

<sup>1</sup> Information from U.S. Census Bureau, 1997 Economic Census, Geographic Area Series, Pennsylvania, Various Sectors, and consultant calculations.

These data show the differences in the salaries in the sectors that can be analyzed. In 1997, Manufacturing salaries in Grove City were, on average, \$36,004—the highest level of any of the three sectors analyzed. These salaries included all levels of workers, from line workers to upper-level management. The next highest category, in terms of salary, was the Health Care sector, with the average salary at \$22,852. Finally, the Retail Trade sector had an average salary of \$12,654 per person in 1997.

In other words, though the Manufacturing sector still (according to the most recent data) provides the best jobs in terms of salary, the Health Care sector had the largest number of jobs. Retail jobs, *on average*, do not pay a living wage. Note, however, that all categories include the lowest as well as highest salaries and they include part- and full-time employees.

Finally, related fields, for which data are not available, would likely yield similar results. For example, salaries in the Educational Services sector would be equivalent to the Health Care sector. Salaries in the Information Services sector would likely fall in between the Manufacturing and Educational Services sectors.

### Key Ideas

Prioritize sites within the COG area for industrial or business park developments. Prioritization would include transportation and infrastructure improvements to facilitate

development, proper zoning, and, in some cases, facilitating site acquisition or preferential tax policies (abatements, tax incremental financing). The advantage of prioritizing is it makes for a realistic target of funds to actually get improvements made so the sites can be occupied by businesses.

**Priority Ranking: Top**

### **Choice of Sites:**

1. The area of the former Cooper Bessemer plant in Grove City Borough. (In addition to providing business space, consideration may be given to a small business training and development center, or a training facility for instruction in crafts and trades.)

**Priority Ranking: Top**

2. Land in Pine Township on 208 East of Grove City Borough (near the Alcoa Reynolds plant)

**Priority Ranking: Top**

3. Prioritize the southwest corner of the I-79/PA 208 interchange for regional retail developments. Recognizing this area is highly desirable, demand excellent design, which minimizes new traffic congestion and stormwater impacts.

**Priority Ranking: Top**

Explore ways to help local residents create and expand small businesses, capitalizing on the strong local crafts traditions.

**Priority Ranking: Top**

Work with Grove City College to expand opportunities through their entrepreneurship program to benefit the local economy.

**Priority Ranking: High**

Examine the local economic delivery system, and create local means to ensure opportunities do not slip away due to lack of communication.

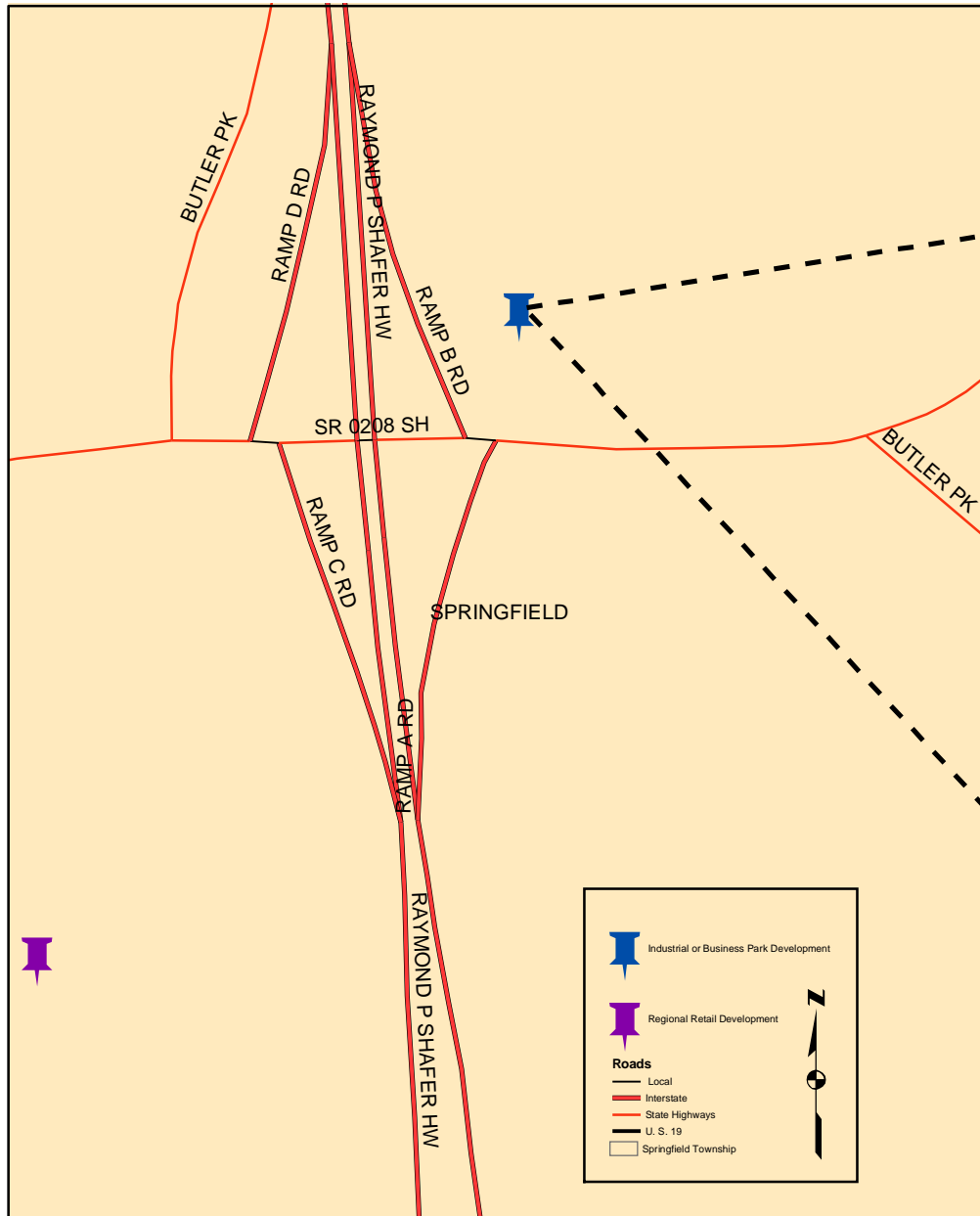
**Priority Ranking: High**

Initiate a new regional tourism development strategy that emphasizes the rural setting of the area and can allow small businesses and some farms to reap some of the benefits of the nearby major retail developments.

**Priority Ranking: Moderate**



# Proposed Development Site: Northeast Quadrant of I-79 and 208



## Overall Policies and Actions

As recently as a decade ago, the common approach to economic development involved marketing to larger companies who were interested in locating or re-locating plants. If a company was interested in a town, they would take time to analyze a site carefully, examine labor force statistics, allied industries, and distances to major customers. The site selection process could take months or even years.

Today, an economic development professional is more likely to get a call from a business executive already within the region, who says something like, “I just received a major new contract. I need 40,000 square feet of space with 15-foot ceilings and 2,000 square feet of office space next month. I also need to hire twenty new employees with welding experience. What do you have available?”

Within the chaos of this just in time environment, communities have learned valuable lessons. Communities must treat economic development by examining all sectors. Sites for new business must be turnkey or a least shovel-ready. Skilled employees are an asset that can attract new enterprises. Above all else, assistance packages and sites must be available *before* the inquiry comes from a business.

The key local policy is to prioritize the best sites for development within the area, identify any impediments to their development, and get them as ready as possible to serve as homes for new business. This is followed by efforts to broaden the local economy, and prepare local residents to have the skills they need to become either valued employees or entrepreneurs.

Western Pennsylvanians have earned a reputation as having an excellent work ethic. Further, there are many in the region, particularly older residents, who are quite skilled craftspeople. For example, one of the world’s premier slate roofers lives in the area. The metalworkers employed by Wendell August Forge have reached a level of craft that is also artistic. There are woodworkers, metal smiths, and others as well, that are highly talented, or who could be highly talented, given the proper training and background.

Further, some of our natural resources, such as Pennsylvania Cherry, are prized throughout the world for their quality. And, given the cost of living in the area, craftspeople in the region can earn a living wage, which is still a relative bargain compared to equally skilled workers in many other locations.

What these craftspeople lack, however, is a cohesive approach to marketing themselves and, often times, training. The Wolf Creek COG may be able to fill these gaps by establishing a cooperative that would provide training as well as provide a central location for the shops needed for these workers. The abandoned Cooper Bessemer building would be an ideal location for several small trade shops to set up businesses. There could be an apprentice program, but unlike many other such programs, a business and marketing component could be incorporated.

- The space could be easily remodeled to allow several small crafts shop to be set up. Since the shops would be industrial in nature, the abandoned plant would not have to be brought to the standards required of clean office space.
- Empty portions of the old Cooper Bessemer building would be put to good use, one well suited to its current state.
- The area could earn a reputation as a go-to location for such hard-to-find craftspeople.
- Many of the local craftspeople that love the work they do but don't quite have the ability to move to the next level, could take advantage of the economies of scale offered by such a cooperative venture.
- The apprenticeship program would build on the expertise of elders in the community, while offering real jobs for local residents, the kind that would help the communities retain citizens.

Developing this kind of venture could well help the COG communities build an economy that combines the best of all worlds—one that builds on the past, while taking full advantage of the future. The three priority sites represent a variety of Greenfield and Brownfield opportunities. What is needed is an action plan to allow them to be actually developed.

Site One has been discussed as far as its potential use (see Proposed Small Business Training Site: Cooper Bessemer map). A first step to begin to realize it is some organization to take the lead in developing a training and marketing plan. The Commonwealth could fund initial analysis, and Grove City College's entrepreneurial program may be of particular assistance. Much of Site Two is presently on the private market. Possibly the greatest impediment to its development will be whether a private-sector industry could afford to develop it. The process could be expedited by public involvement in pre-engineering, site planning, and grants to pay for infrastructure costs, lot layout, and street planning. There are two options. The first would be public acquisition of the site. The second would be a public-private partnership in which an agreement is signed to provide public improvements, either prior to development or when a business wishes to locate there, through a tax incremental financing arrangement (the public-private partnership between landowner and county economic development agency was a factor in funding initial development of the Barkeyville Industrial Park). Finally, there is Site Three, Southwest Corner of the I-79/PA 208 Interchange, which is recommended for regional retail development. As stated in the Land Use Plan, high-quality development should be expected at this very desirable site. In the current market, there is no reason to accept second-rate retail design, or businesses that will only "move the deck chairs," rather than truly grow the economy.

Within the context of the entire COG, these sites must become county priorities as well as local ones. The Wolf Creek COG region has the most dynamic economy in Mercer County. The successful development of these four sites will benefit many outside the

COG municipalities. COG officials should work carefully with the entire economic development delivery system to ensure local priorities are a part of a cohesive countywide approach to building the economy.

# Conservation of Natural and Historic Resources Plan

*Citizens have prioritized rural landscape values as an important aspect of the community's future. However, these are precisely the aspects of the community that are most at risk in a future scenario, which anticipates high levels of growth and development. The Plan hopes to both wisely use and protect these areas, while accommodating necessary development*

A first step in planning for natural and historic resources is simply knowing what and where they are. The COG area has a number of pertinent natural features that can, or should, limit development. It also has a rich history.

The slope of land (and to a lesser extent the related categories of soil and surface geology) determines where development can take place. Steeply sloped land (with slopes greater than 15%) is inappropriate for development in Pennsylvania. Though most of the land in the Wolf Creek COG area does not have steep slopes, there are a few areas of fairly steep slope. Soils are also a determining factor for development activities. For example, the flow of septic waste through soils is affected by soil type. If the soils have too much clay, then water cannot penetrate them, potentially contaminating the surface water. If the soils are too sandy, water and septic wastes are drained too quickly, thus potentially contaminating the groundwater. The area has very few soils which are ideal for on-lot sewage disposal. On the other hand, good, fertile soils are a valuable and limited resource. They are one of the most important factors in rural land use planning, especially in Pennsylvania, which has a stated mandate to protect agricultural lands. In the COG area, soils range from "prime soils," defined by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) as those soils that are of such quality that they have few limitations for farming and "soils of statewide significance," that while not prime, have good potential for farming, if well managed for any inherent deficiencies. A third classification in the area is "not prime," or soils that are not suitable for farming for various reasons, and "wetlands" areas that are inundated or saturated by water and support vegetation and animals specifically adapted to life in saturated soil conditions. Prime soils make up more than half (50.5%, or about 28,221 acres) of all the soils in the study area. Soils of statewide significance make up an additional 30.8% (about 17,209 acres) of the soils. Not prime soils are just 12.6% (about 7,027 acres) of the soils, and water or wetlands make up 6.1% (about 3,360 acres) of the area.

Hydrological resources are very important to the area. Even the name of the COG is taken from the stream that local communities identify with. In general, water quality in local streams is good. There is some degradation related to existing land use (some nutrient runoff from agriculture, and some septic tank pollution of streams from residential areas). However, the mix of wildlife species and plant communities shows the area's streams to be generally healthy.

The area also has significant concentrations of wetland areas, due to a combination of low slopes and favorable soils. These have a generally beneficial effect on water quality;

but, along with farmland and soil limitations for septic systems, wetlands may be the most significant impediments to development in the area. This is due to state and federal legal constraints on development of wetland areas.

The attached map series details some of the aforementioned environmental factors and their extent in the COG area.

## **Historic Resources**

Historic resources are more generally scattered, but there are historic resources everywhere. Underneath many places in the COG region, there are archeological resources dating back perhaps ten thousand years. Many homes built or lived in by the first generation of settlers remain occupied, some by their direct descendants. Many early industrial, agricultural, and institutional buildings remain. Unfortunately, a complete inventory of all historically significant structures has never been undertaken within the region. Some material about existing resources is available from several sources. These include the National Register of Historic Places, local historical society information, and some informal municipal inventories.

## **National Register Properties**

The National Register of Historic Places was created by the Federal Historic Preservation Act of 1966. The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission's State Historic Preservation Office maintains the Register in Pennsylvania. Listing (or eligibility for listing) confers some level of protection from adverse impacts to the resource by government activities (highway projects, etc.). Listing or eligibility also allows implementation by the owner of a tax credit under certain circumstances.

At present, the following properties in the region are known to be eligible or formally listed:

- Wendell August Forge, Grove City Borough, Listed 1996
- U.S. Post Office, Grove City Borough, Eligible
- Chestnut Street Bridge, Grove City Borough, Eligible
- Johnston's Tavern, Springfield Township, Listed 1972

Smith and Swetnam's Guidebook to Historic Western Pennsylvania also lists

- The Cooper Bessemer plant
- Filer Homestead (Kinder Avenue)
- Cunningham Memorial Park
- Grove City College
- The Fleming House (Liberty Street)
- George Junior Republic
- The Village of North Liberty
- One Room School (Springfield Township)

Schollard house on Schollard Road (Springfield Township)  
Iron Furnace remains near Schollard House (Springfield Township)

The Grove City Area Historical Society has also begun collecting information about historic structures, and Springfield Township maintains a database of points of historical interest within the township.

### ***Key Ideas***

Examine local funding of the purchase of agricultural conservation easements.

#### **Priority Ranking: High**

Create a streamside yard area setback in all local ordinances where land abuts Wolf Creek or Neshannock Creek. This buffer would be a building/parking lot setback from the stream, and would preserve natural vegetation to naturally manage stormwater runoff. Dependent on slope between the stream and proposed development, the setback size would range from perhaps 30 to 100 feet. However, it must be emphasized such setbacks are for private land protection and do not allow public access.

#### **Priority Ranking: High**

Begin to undertake a formal historic resources survey, in cooperation with the county or Grove City Area Historical Society. The object of this would be to get all data about historic and architecturally significant structures into one place.

#### **Priority Ranking: Low**

Begin to prioritize tracts of open space for purchase by the COG for long-term outdoor recreation, open space, and income from forestry activities.

#### **Priority Ranking Moderate**

Every new subdivision of over 20 lots should be required to set aside permanent open space.

#### **Priority Ranking: High**

Major subdivisions and land developments should have green buffer areas, and leave natural vegetation around watercourses and such features as old fence rows.

#### **Priority Ranking: High**

Create an adaptive reuse code that would allow the reuse of historic buildings for additional uses, provided that they meet National Register listing criteria and local design standards.

#### **Priority Ranking: High**

## Policy Plan and Strategies

One of the priorities that local residents continually stated during the development process was to preserve and protect the area's rural and small-town character.

### Overall Actions and Policies

It is equally important to understand that many of these environmental issues are more than ambiguous rural character. Poor development practices can create real harm. Property damage from stormwater runoff, well water pollution, and loss of the economic activity of farming to the local economy are all real issues.

The key to a successful policy will be the standards that the communities set for development of the large rural resource/rural development areas. Some residential development may be expected in these areas, and it is the task of the COG to protect traditional rural uses and features through planning standards.

A very simple technique is a modification to the basic lot requirements used by all COG communities. The minimum lot size should be a *buildable* lot, free of wetlands, undevelopable steep slopes, and floodplain. Lot size should be increased to ensure this buildable minimum, or in the case of moderate steep slopes, increased proportionately. Such standards can be integrated into either zoning or subdivision and land development ordinances. They have been used in Huntingdon County, Butler County, and other areas. The standards can be applied through a definition of "lot" or a series of charts that show developers how to remove the unbuildable or constrained lands from consideration. This approach also gives the developer the option of dealing with the constrained lands through a variety of configurations.

In a similar fashion, local zoning ordinances can require setbacks from streams to minimize stormwater runoff. Vegetative buffers can slow up to 70% of the water from a major rain event. The buffers are similar to setbacks from roads or streets, except they are sized to match the slope between a building and the stream bank. Thus, in a small slope area, the buffer might be smaller, but larger in steep slope areas. An objective standard for this would be the best management standards for timber harvest erosion and sedimentation controls developed by the Commonwealth. As with buildable lots, these standards could be a part of either zoning or subdivision and land development ordinances.

One of the most important local resources is farmland. The COG can protect farmland in a number of ways that will not affect the ability of farmers to sell for development. The right of farmers and landowners to market their land will not be infringed. The intent of this document is to recommend ways of protecting existing farmers and farmland, so that the quality of life they help to provide will be ensured. At the most basic level, deed covenants should be attached to new lots that abut agricultural security areas. This

strengthens the protection of farmers from nuisance actions by homeowners who may not understand that farms generate noise, dust, and odors.

For the COG area, the sliding scale might best be combined with some sort of planned residential development approach, which would ensure that large-scale developments remain rural. If a developer wanted to create more lots than the sliding scale allowed, ordinances could allow planned residential development by conditional use or special exception. A condition of the planned residential development would be the mandatory creation of permanent open space, which would preferably be farmland. In exchange for this, developers could achieve higher density of a portion of the site. The remaining farmland could then be sold to another farmer. The design of these developments should also account for rural features, and integrate them into planning, rather than obliterate them. Such features include trees, fencerows, and the context of lots on the site. A threshold of twenty new lots is being suggested for this in priority farmland preservation areas.

In some cases, the best way to protect resources is to buy them. The COG is interested in pursuing the purchase of agricultural conservation easements at the local level. An Agricultural Security Area is a voluntary covenant between a local farmer and the township. Generally, the farmer intends to continue keeping the land in agriculture, and the township agrees not to pass an ordinance to restrict farming activities and not to use eminent domain to run sewer, water, and new roads on the given property. Another option is to encourage farmers to sell their land as an Agricultural Conservation Easement program. In this case, the county buys the development rights from the farmer. The amount paid for the development rights is the property value as developed land minus the value as farmland. In the COG farmland is worth roughly \$2,000 to \$3,000 dollars per acre and developed land is worth \$10,000 to \$12,000 per acre, roughly. This means that development rights might be purchased from the farmer for \$5,000 to \$10,000 per acre. However, current PACE payments in Mercer County are in the \$1,000 to \$1,300 range. The money paid to the farmer does two things. First, it helps to ensure that the farm stays in business and secondly, it helps to protect and ensure the rural quality of this area. Initially, it would request that priority farmland preservation areas on the land use map be countywide priorities for the purchase of easements. The COG will also investigate local funding to supplement this important program.

The greatest concentration of historic resources is within the borough. Generally, the architectural quality of residential structures exceeds that of commercial ones in the borough. There are a number of particularly fine, potentially significant older homes in the urban gateway corridors. Owners who may wish to preserve or restore them are eligible for significant Federal historic preservation tax credits. However, these credits are contingent upon the structure qualifying as “income producing property” In the high traffic context of the urban gateways, the borough should consider allowing light commercial uses (bed and breakfast, professional office) in the older homes. Instituting an adaptive re-use code could do this. Such a code makes broader use contingent on using the older structure without altering its historic features.

Other purchase priorities include green space along Wolf Creek. In Grove City this green space would take the form of urban linear parks. In the townships, it may be reserves held for forestry purposes (forestry is an excellent investment for municipalities as they are not subject to property taxes, and can manage tracts for long-term gain and conservation).

Finally, the effort to learn about natural and historic resources should continue. Toward this, the COG endorses efforts to fund watershed planning for the Wolf Creek and Neshannock Creek basins. Over the long term, a more comprehensive historic resource survey might also be considered.

# Transportation and Community Facilities Plan

*If the anticipated level of growth happens, the rural setting that residents cherish may be significantly threatened. If large a developer begins extending utilities to the edges or beyond service areas, the intervening farmland will be converted over time to residential use as well. In such a scenario, residential growth can create significant traffic congestion on rural roads, and create an unsustainable tax-base situation from an excess of residential development in harder-to-serve areas (residential development is typically revenue neutral in terms of municipal and school taxes). The key to a successful policy in these areas is to build financially secure infrastructure policies, which are clearly linked to land use planning.*

## Community Facilities

### Water

The Grove City municipal water system is the only publicly owned water system in the region. This system services approximately 8,200 residential, industrial, and commercial customers in Grove City Borough and areas of Pine Township. Water is obtained entirely from groundwater sources consisting of three water supply wells. Two of these wells are located in the northeastern part of the borough, the other well is in Memorial Park, close to the high school. All of the wells are relatively deep (357 feet deep) and intercept groundwater from a fractured medium bedrock aquifer. Total source capacity is 1,800 gallons per minute (gpm), or 2.592 million gallons per day (MGD). A 2003 Source Water Assessment and Protection Report, prepared by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), identified the greatest potential threats to the Grove City water supply wells would be from non-point pollution sources, such as former and active industrial sites and previous coal mining and underground storage tanks.

Together, the Park Street and Memorial Park facilities processed nearly 410 million gallons of water in 2002, averaging almost 1.3 MGD. The extremes of usage in the year 2002 went from roughly 750,000 gallons on December 24<sup>th</sup>, Christmas Eve, to roughly double that, about 1.5 million gallons on October 28<sup>th</sup>. Available water supply for the system is 1,300 gpm, or 1.872 MGD; therefore, the plants are operating at approximately 69% capacity.

Pine Township owns its distribution system and a water tank. The water tank is located in the Pine Township Industrial Park and has a capacity of approximately 300,000 gallons.

The Buhl Community Water Company (Buhl) and Leesburg Water Company provide water to Springfield Township. Buhl provides service to about three square miles of Springfield Township, including the outlet mall and surrounding development at the I-79/SR 208 intersection. Buhl's water plant and distribution system were recently expanded and has two wells that are about 410 feet deep and a 200,000-gallon holding tank. Buhl currently has plenty of capacity for its current customer base (74 total

connections—52 residential and 22 commercial) and, at times, average maximum daily usage amounts to 100,000 gallons per day.

Liberty and Wolf Creek Townships currently are not serviced by public water. Homes and businesses in the region obtain water from private wells.

## Sewer System Supply

The Borough of Grove City operates a wastewater treatment plant located along Greenwood Drive adjacent to Wolf Creek in the south central portion of the Borough of Grove City. The service area includes the Boroughs of Grove City and Harrisville and the built-up portions of Pine and Springfield Townships and serves approximately 6,800 customers. Pine, Springfield, Liberty, and Wolf Creek Townships have requested additional future capacity. (Liberty and Wolf Townships are currently not serviced by the Grove City sanitary sewer system.). Exclusive of public sewer, private on-lot systems serve the sewer needs of the region.

According to the Chapter 94, Municipal Wasteload Management Report for Operating Year 2002, the Grove City wastewater treatment plant has the capacity to handle projected flows until 2010. The annual average flow for 2002 was 65% (1.947 million gallons per day [MGD]) of the plant's permitted capacity (3 MGD). The maximum consecutive three-month average was 73% (2.184 MGD) of its permitted capacity.

The wastewater treatment system is comprised of the following systems:

- **Grove City Sewers:** The borough's collection system is considered to be in good condition. The borough is implementing a plan to rehabilitate the wastewater collection system (laterals, main line pipe, and manholes). This program is expected to reduce the flows to the wastewater treatment plant by 85,000 gallons per day (gpd).
- **Springfield Township Sewers:** Springfield Township owns its sewer distribution system that was completed in 1994, with an extension in 1999 and is generally considered new.
- **Pine Township Sewers:** Pine Township owns its sewer distribution system as well and it is in good overall condition. This system services approximately 902 dwelling units (EDUs) and is responsible for about 354,000 gallons of daily flows, or about 14% of sewage received at the Grove City wastewater treatment plant each day.
- **Harrisville Borough Sewers:** Good overall condition.

## Fire and Rescue

Fire protection is provided by a number of volunteer fire companies. Grove City Borough covers itself and Wolf Creek Township. Springfield Township Volunteer Fire

Department provides protection to the township and about one third of Liberty Township. The Slippery Rock (Butler County) Volunteer Fire Department services the remainder of Liberty Township. The Grove City Area Rescue Squad and Life Support Unit covers all the COG communities.

## Police

The Grove City Borough Police Department (8 full-time personnel) and the Pennsylvania State Police provide police service for the region.

## Education

### Grove City Area School District

Primary and secondary public education is provided by the Grove City Area School District. Students attend the Washington Kindergarten Center, the Highland Primary Center (grades 1-2), the Hillview Intermediate Center (3-6), Middle School (7-8), and Senior High School (9-12).

During the 2002-2003 school year, 2,760 students attended the Grove City Area School District. Enrollment projections for the district are as follows:

School Years	Enrollment Projection
2003-2004	2,797
2004-2005	2,790
2005-2006	2,837
2006-2007	2,831
2007-2008	2,840
2008-2009	2,852
2009-2010	2,845
2010-2011	2,845
2011-2012	2,875
2012-2013	2,921
Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education	

*Note: Rated school student performance is well above average.*

### 2003 Scaled Scores

	Grade 8 Grove City (Statewide Average)	Grade 11 Grove City (Statewide Average)
Mathematics	1,420 (1,320)	1,410 (1,320)
Reading	1,410 (1,340)	1,420 (1,320)
Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education		

## Recreation

The main recreation area for the Grove City region is the borough's Memorial Park. It is approximately 250 acres in size, with its main entrance on SR 58 (West Main Street). Throughout the park, there are large stands of mature oak, hickory, beech, and hemlock trees, as well as a large tract of white pine. The facilities located at Memorial Park include softball and baseball fields, basketball courts, war memorials, a fountain and pond, picnic shelters, a swimming pool and bathhouse, picnic shelters, and Pine Grove Lodge. The Girl Scouts have a facility in the park and it borders upon the Grove City High School and Highland Elementary School campuses. The park is adjacent to Grove City Area High School on the east and residential areas to the north and south.

Also within the borough is an area of open space, known as Hunter Farm. This area is bordered by Wolf Creek and contains open fields, forests of partially mature timber, streamside forests, wetlands, and riparian zones. Wolf Creek is stocked for trout fishing by the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission. This area does contain several small soccer fields and a small playground. Scattered throughout the borough are neighborhood playgrounds, complete with all the apparatus that the younger residents enjoy so much.

Grove City College also has numerous recreation facilities on campus that local residents may use. Perchance, the most accessible of these are the tennis courts located near the college's football stadium, just north of East Main Street.

Outside the borough limits, the Grove City region contains a wide variety of other recreational venues. These range from the large Pine Township baseball field complex off Route 208, to state gamelands and small church or community organization ball fields. The YMCA has a large, modern complex just east of the Borough in Pine Township on SR 58.

## Transportation

Transportation modes in the COG region are primarily of vehicular and pedestrian types. No passenger rail or water systems directly service the area, although the Bessemer and Lake Erie Railroad carries freight through the area. Within Grove City Borough, pedestrian transportation is fairly important. The borough maintains and financially supports the Grove City Airport at the Interstate 79 interchange, across from the Prime Outlets in Springfield Township. It is a small, single runway airport geared to small private planes. The airport has a sailplane towing service and a school for parachute training. Additionally, small corporate jets have access to the field. These factors contribute to the economic impact the airport has on the local economy. Two thirds of those who responded to the citizen survey (61% for versus 30.5% against, with 8.5% not responding) believe that the borough should continue to financially support the airport.

The area has developed due to its importance as a regional crossroads. Several roadways with local, statewide, and national significance converge either in or near the community. The most important of these highway systems is Interstate 80 (I-80), which connects the

east and west coasts of the United States. The convergence of I-80 with I-79 ensures that local manufacturers can easily send and receive goods and services. The interstates are important to the community in a macro, “big picture” sense. These highways enable the quality of life in the region to be similar to that of any other community in the nation, which is often considered desirable. The condition of state and local roadways, however, are perhaps more important to most citizens on a day-to-day basis. It is the secondary roads that move citizens through the borough and from one community to another. In particular, State Routes 208, 58, and 173 provide important access to the community on a daily basis.

It is hard to decide which of these roadways is most important to the area. They all provide unique access to other communities. Route 208 is an east-west road that connects the borough with I-79 to the west and to southern Venango County to the east. Its roadway parallels I-80 for much of its run from the Ohio line to the middle of Clarion County. Along this road are such communities as New Wilmington, Barkeyville, Emlenton, and Knox. Route 208 connects these small towns of regional importance to one another. In rural western Pennsylvania, a road such as Route 208 is very important in the day-to-day lives of local citizens. Route 58 has a similar purpose. Originally the road from Mercer to Cunningham Mills, Route 58 now continues east through Harrisville to Clarion County as well. Its connection with Pennsylvania Route 8 in Harrisville was for many years the main travel route to Butler, as well as the larger cities of Erie and Pittsburgh. Route 173 travels north and south. It is the connector to I-80 for the Borough to the north and to Slippery Rock Borough to the south. Each of these highways has a significant impact on the travel in and out of the borough. In recent years, sections of both Routes 208 and 173 have seen extensive improvements outside of Grove City, thus making travel to and from the borough more convenient. All three roadways in the immediate vicinity are in good repair—a plus for the region and the borough.

Because all of these highways are, to some extent, based on old cartways from well over one hundred years ago, there are some limitations to modern transportation needs. The most pressing of these limitations is the turning radius found at many intersections. With the narrow width of the roadways which lead to these intersections, it is often difficult for modern trucks, both straight body and semi, to negotiate the turns. Trucks need to swing wide, cars must back up, and traffic must stop while the trucks negotiate the intersection. This prevents traffic from flowing as it should and is a common occurrence at some of Grove City’s most important and heavily traveled intersections.

The intersection of West Main and South Center Streets, at the junction of Routes 208, 58, and 173 South is frequently a problem. As one can imagine, the traffic there is the busiest of any roadway in the community. The traffic volumes at this intersection are 10,000 vehicles per day (VPD) from Main Street (PA 58), 8,000 VPD along South Center Street (PA 208) to the south and west, and 6,300 VPD approaching the intersection from the north, also from South Center Street (PA 173). Turns from Route 208 westbound onto eastbound Route 58 often tie traffic because trucks making the turn cannot complete it before the light turns. Usually, the truck will need to wait until the signal starts to change

before even beginning the turn. The result is that the vehicles already on Main Street are not able to continue their journey. The other turns at the intersection by large vehicles also create similar delays. While some modern traffic pattern changes do help the situation (e.g. one-way traffic on South Center Street and the left turning lane for eastbound West Main Street), the intersection is roughly the same today as it was in the 1890s. The Borough of Grove City's dependence on this intersection makes it critical that solutions be both proposed and explored to expedite the flow of traffic.

This is true not only of the Routes 58/173/208 intersection, but also of much of the Route 58 corridor in Grove City, of which most is only two lanes wide. Particularly difficult is the section from Kinder Street to South Center Street. Besides the traffic volume, roughly 10,000 vehicles a day, this section of West Main has several cross streets that have substantial traffic flows as well. Stewart and Elm Streets are the most prominent. Also, this stretch of West Main is a very residential street. It is not uncommon for people to be pulling into or out of a family driveway onto West Main. It is not the danger associated with these activities per se. Instead it is the disruptions that all these activities place on the regular flow of traffic that gives one cause for concern.

Routes 208, 58, and 173 are all governed by PennDOT and as such, are controlled by the State of Pennsylvania. Therefore, design or capacity changes to these roads will be made by PennDOT and not Grove City. The community is responsible for the rest of the roadways in Grove City though, including determining what is appropriate for upkeep and maintenance. These municipal streets and roads are the backbone of Grove City's transportation grid. Some of these streets have the typical small town, residential vehicle trips per day. For example, North Center Street, which is lined with numerous residences and several large institutions (nursing homes and churches), averages just under 1,500 VPD. Other residential streets though, for various reasons, see much higher traffic flows. East Pine Street sees nearly 4,300 vehicles per day, nearly triple that of North Center. In fact, East Pine has nearly the same vehicle use, as does PA 58 (5,000 VPD) east of Broad Street.

One of the most important public facilities that the borough is responsible for are the community's streets. The importance of the local roadways to the community and its budget cannot be overlooked. The borough maintains an aggressive street cleaning program during the spring, summer, and fall. During the winter, snow plowing and road salting are done on a regular basis to ensure safety of local commuters. And in all seasons, road repair and maintenance are accomplished on a timely basis. The borough's streets are the facility that most residents encounter on a daily basis, but that they often forget about. Only when there is a problem in the quality of the roadway do the community leaders hear any feedback. In the community development survey, nearly 94% of those who answered the question thought that the borough's streets were maintained in a satisfactory to excellent manner. A similar proportion was equally pleased with the snow removal efforts. Given the magnitude of the job, that is high praise.

The Bessemer and Lake Erie Railroad has a line that runs through the Borough of Grove City and Pine Township. For the most part, it does not stop in the community as it once did. Most of the cargo that is transported on these tracks consists of coal and scrap metals which are in transit to and from destinations outside of the borough. Still, the tracks are used frequently and are well maintained. Unlike in many communities, the railroad is not a hindrance.

The community bus service, operated by Mercer County, is designed to give access to the elderly and disabled to local shops and services. The bus picks up riders at the place of their choosing and takes them to their destination. It is a free service to all those who meet the program's criteria. This service is especially welcomed by the residents of College View Towers, enabling them the freedom of movement without need of their own vehicle. With the large elderly population in the borough, the continued existence of this program is very valuable.

In terms of other transportation options, such as airline service, direct air cargo shipping, bus and cab service, the Borough of Grove City is lacking in these options. The size of the community and its close proximity to larger communities such as Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Erie and even the Franklin/Oil City area make commercial air service, both commercial and cargo, a non-viable option.

### ***Key Ideas***

Create future public utility service areas that are consistent with the residential and business growth areas in the Land Use Plan. Use lot size and lot width regulations to discourage further extensions outside these areas.

#### **Priority Ranking: High**

Develop a regional investment committee to include representation from all municipal sewer service users. This committee will develop fair schemes for tax-base sharing between the borough and neighboring municipalities where the benefits of borough utilities can be shown to make a difference in whether development will occur or not. The result of this committee will be passed on to the governing body of each participant for consideration as an adopted intergovernmental agreement.

#### **Priority Ranking: High**

Re-examine the finance capacity for large sewer projects. At present, there is a Pine/Springfield/Harrisville joint municipal authority. Liberty Township may be joining. If pursuant to a mutually agreeable intergovernmental agreement, the borough could join. Another option would be a new super-authority structure.

#### **Priority Ranking: High**

Adopt a limited transportation impact fee district in the area of the PA 208 and I-79 interchange. Use funds generated to pay for long-term improvements.

**Priority Ranking: High**

Build upon the best aspects of the C-2 Commercial District in Springfield Township and the Rural Opportunity District in Liberty Township to create a new “Rural Gateway” District for Routes 208, 173, and 58. The standards of this district should be to create a mix of rural residential and business uses while still preserving highway capacity and rural setting.

**Priority Ranking: High**

Adopt a limited transportation impact fee district in the area of PA 58. Use funds generated to pay for long-term improvements.

**Priority Ranking: Moderate**

Amend all current subdivision and land development ordinances to require a recreation impact fee for new homes, based upon adopted the Recreation Plan (Grove City Borough) and text from this Plan. Utilize fees for the existing park system and acquisition of new parcels for greenspace within growth areas.

**Priority Ranking: Moderate**

Create urban gateways on Routes 173, and residential parts of Routes 58 and 208 in Grove City Borough. Allow some additional uses in these areas if they can be compatible with residential settings.

**Priority Ranking: High**

## **Grove City Borough**

Prioritize the expansion of the Borough water and sewer plants as the *highest* local financial priority.

**Priority Ranking: Top**

Conduct a congested corridor study of Route 58, possibly including part of Route 208.

**Priority Ranking: High**

Have a traffic engineer run Simtraffic (a traffic modeling program) scenarios on Broad and Center Streets, illustrating various peak hour flows and potential lane changes.

**Priority Ranking: High**

Create linear park corridors linking the Cunningham Mill site with Grove City College and the downtown along Wolf Creek.

**Priority Ranking: High**

## **Liberty Township**

Initiate a traffic-calming program for the Village of North Liberty. Include intersection improvements, curbing, pavement changes, turn off for police car, signage, possibly bulb outs, or similar devices.

**Priority Ranking: High**

Examine creation of an alternate or small flow sewage system for the Village of North Liberty/sewage management program, to be managed at a COG or system level.

**Priority Ranking: Low**

Extend Grove City public sewer service to North Liberty village, thus increasing the southern bound of the growth boundary.

**Priority Ranking: Low**

Consider the creation of special police service districts where additional taxation would fund local police protection through agreement with Grove City in dense or high-growth areas of the townships.

**Priority Ranking: Low**

## **Pine Township**

Conduct a congested corridor analysis of the section of Route 58 from Wal-Mart east to the Grove City Borough line.

**Priority Ranking: Top**

Examine intersection improvements at the intersection of PA Route 173 and Route 208 to better accommodate truck traffic.

**Priority Ranking: Top**

Upgrade the intersection of Route 208 and George Junior Road, study traffic signal warrants.

**Priority Ranking: Top**

Initiate a curb cut/access management program along the entirety of Route 208 in the township.

**Priority Ranking: High**

Initiate a curb cut/access management program along Route 173 in the township from the Grove City Borough line to the Wolf Creek Township line.

**Priority Ranking: High**

Examine an upgrade of the township road network, including possibly Cranberry Road, George Junior Road, Irishtown Road, and Gasper Road as a new collector road from PA 208 to PA 173 North of Grove City Borough.

**Priority Ranking: High**

Utilize CDBG funds to repair, upgrade, and, in some cases, interconnect septic systems existing houses in the township, based upon income of householder and location outside future sewer service areas.

**Priority Ranking: High**

## **Springfield Township**

Initiate a curb cut/access management program along the entirety of Route 208 in the township.

**Priority Ranking: Top**

Examine creation of an alternate sewage system built around purchase of the Springfield Restaurant Group package plants, and managed at a COG or system level.

**Priority Ranking: Low**

## **Wolf Creek Township**

Extend public sewer north of the I-80 interchange, thereby extending the growth boundary north and bringing the possibility of major growth and development to Wolf Creek Township.

**Priority Ranking: High**

## **Policy Plan and Strategy**

### **Transportation**

At present, the area suffers from isolated areas of traffic congestion. There are several reasons for this. The first is the design of roads and streets in Grove City Borough, where a number of major state roads intersect in a small portion of the downtown, and two-lane roads are carrying 10,000-plus vehicles per day, at 35 miles per hour speeds.

As a part of the overall Mercer County comprehensive plan, Gannett Fleming has assessed the traffic and transportation issues to help identify specific projects for the Grove City area. For each of the issues identified, Gannett Fleming has developed potential concept(s) for improvements and a relative order of magnitude planning cost estimate. The project concepts and cost estimates are only included for initial program

planning and will need to be further developed through feasibility studies or in the early parts of the project development process. The following sections identify transportation-related issues that have been identified up to this point with cost estimates.

## **1. Intersection of 208/58/173 and Route 58 Corridor West**

### **1a. West Main Street Intersection Improvements**

#### **Issue Description and Recommendation**

Intersection exists in the heart of the town of Grove City. Three main approaches feed into a one-way road, West Main Street/PA 58. Retail businesses, homes, and offices are located near the intersection and setback close to the street. Sidewalks front the road. Intersection alignment and turning radii are narrow along all four approaches. Truck traffic, which can be heavy through town, is a concern. Truck turning alignment is too narrow resulting in unsafe or slow turning capabilities, specifically among trucks. A variety of strategies have been discussed and proposed to resolve the issue.

#### **Possible solutions include:**

- ✓ Conduct a feasibility study to determine the most appropriate solution to the problem. The feasibility study should include a public involvement process with residents of Grove City and area shippers and carriers as well as a context sensitive approach to designing alternatives. A transportation solution should be sought as well as a streetscape design that is compatible with the town of Grove City and immediate surroundings.

#### Estimated Cost:

- Feasibility Study – \$40,000 to \$80,000

- ✓ Redevelop the intersection in a context sensitive manner. Right-of-way would need to be enlarged which would result in taking adjacent properties and relocating them. Widen the intersection turning radii for additional capacity for queuing, approximately 100 to 150 feet.

#### Estimated Cost:

- \$1.5 to \$2.5 million to construct intersection
- \$2 to \$7 million to acquire right-of-way (depends on number of parcels that need to be acquired)
- Signalize intersection - \$250,000

- ✓ Re-route truck traffic using arterial roads. Consider Blacktown Road, Irishtown Road, and George Junior Road. Considerable upgrades will be needed if those routes are used. The purpose of developing an alternative route would be to avoid Main Street/PA 58 within Grove City. The street serves as a focal point and hub of businesses and offices within Grove City as well as the college in Grove City.

Estimated Cost: Depends on size of route to be upgraded and projected traffic volumes.

## **1b. Route 58 Corridor West Congestion and Access Management Strategy**

### **Issue Description and Recommendations**

Traffic is a concern in both directions along the Route 58 West corridor.

- ✓ Consider adding additional turning lane.

Estimated Cost: Cost is dependent on the length of the corridor to which the center turning lane is to be added.

- ✓ Investigate and propose solutions to manage driveway access points along the corridor. MPO and PennDOT to coordinate to make recommendations and improvements.

## **2. Route 173 Interchange Development with I-80/ Access Improvements to Grove City from I-80 using Route 173 and PA 208**

### **Issue Description and Recommendations**

The interchange has been developed. Water and sewer infrastructure does not exist at this location. If infrastructure is extended, the township would like to encourage economic development opportunities by creating incentives to leverage commercial and industrial land uses. Land use regulations need to support and accommodate the future development. Zoning does exist; however, if plans for extending the water and sewer infrastructure are developed, ordinances will need to be updated allowing the appropriate mix of land uses and with specific access management and design standards.

- ✓ Access and capacity improvements will need to be made to Route 173 and PA 208 to Grove City if infrastructure is extended and development occurs at the interchange.

Estimated Cost: Will vary, based on projected traffic volumes and impact assessments at time of upgrade.

- ✓ Zoning and subdivision and land development ordinance updates should be considered if infrastructure is extended to the area surrounding the interchange. Updates should consider access management, stormwater management, and design standards appropriate for future land uses. An interchange overlay zone should be explored, which can be applied to the municipal zoning ordinance.

Estimated Cost: \$10,000 to \$25,000 for ordinance and zoning map updates

### **3. Route 258 – Village of North Liberty – Speeding Concern/Traffic-Calming**

#### **Issue Description and Recommendations**

Road is narrow, yet speeding is a concern through the town.

- ✓ Consider implementing traffic-calming techniques, which may include a series of striping and speed humps through town.
- ✓ As an alternative, a design process could involve citizens of the village. This could be funded as a PennDOT pilot program.

Estimated Cost: Up to \$100,000 (\$20,000 per hump and stripe)

### **4. Intersection Improvements with PA 208**

This road serves as the main arterial between I-79 and the heart of the region. Its performance must not be allowed to deteriorate. Key intersections include:

PA 208/Brent Road  
PA 208/Mercer Road  
PA 208/Spring Road  
PA 208/Blacktown Road  
PA 208/Irishtown Road  
PA 208/George Junior Road

#### **Issue Description and Recommendations**

Offset intersections and site distance problems. Problems consist of overgrown vegetation, poor alignment of intersections, steep grades causing blind curves, and placement of stop signs and markings too far away from the intersection.

- ✓ Turning movement counts and level of service data should be collected for all of these intersections.
- ✓ Consider placing a line item on the TIP titled “TIP Safety Upgrades,” which should address intersections all over the county. The MPO and PennDOT to prioritize the intersection upgrades.

Estimated Cost: Allocate \$150,000 to \$300,000 per TIP project. Intersection improvements may range from \$150,000 to \$300,000 per intersection and problem.

These priority projects will deal with short-term congestion. However, planning must also avoid congestion in the future. There are two approaches warranted. The first is curb-cut management on Routes 58 and 208. The idea of this is simply to encourage new developments to link into neighboring ones through the zoning or land development approval process. Interconnecting parking lots, requiring corner lots to access from existing intersections, or reserving rights-of-way for secondary access can do this. Springfield Township has integrated some of these standards in its C-2 Commercial District. Creating traffic overlay zones could expand this approach, or additional standards for land developments, which abut major arterials.

Even with a host of intersection improvements, long-term collectors should also be examined. This can be done through subdivision street planning (primarily by not allowing unnecessary cul-de-sacs) and the identification of the collector network of Irishtown, Centertown, and Cranberry Roads. Consideration might also be given to an entirely new collector road in Grove City Borough to roughly parallel Route 58/West Main Street. It could begin in the area of the old National Guard Armory and extend to the area of Breckenridge.

## **Community Facilities**

The real “big ticket” item in the region’s future is the need for sewage plant capacity expansion and technical improvements. Without these improvements, real economic development will be hampered. Based upon an engineering report prepared for the COG, improvements must be made to meet the growth projected by this Plan.

Percentage of use by communities is as follows (from spreadsheet):

	<b>Startup (2003) Percentage (%)</b>	<b>Projected (2020)</b>
Grove City Borough	76	63.0
Harrisville Borough	6	6.0
Liberty Township	0	2.5
Pine Township	15	17.0
Springfield Township	3	9.0
Wolf Creek Township	0	2.5

Given a calculated cost of \$11.22/gallon for new capacity and the expected rate of contribution (mgd/community), the cost to the communities is estimated as follows:

	<b>Estimated Cost</b>
Grove City Borough	\$338,283
Harrisville Borough	\$219,912
Liberty Township	\$1,703,760
Pine Township	\$1,937,738
Springfield Township	\$2,667,914
Wolf Creek Township	\$1,065,260

The goal must be to fund this project within the near term to sustain the growth and development that is already occurring in the area. Given local financial limitations, funding assistance from state agencies must be a part of this project. It is estimated that the cost will be \$5.2 million to keep up with the current needs. In order to plan for anticipated future growth, a figure of \$7.2 million should be anticipated.

In conjunction with the plant expansions and upgrades, decisions must be made about future service areas. As serving the priority economic development sites is an issue of capacity, not geography, the greatest geographic priority is to serve the residential growth areas, first to the south of Grove City Borough. Over the longer term, extensions to the north on PA 173 will create more non-residential development sites and possibly allow for better interconnection of the system with the secondary residential growth area.

Outside the principal service areas are also some village areas, of which only one has public sewer. Extensions from the Grove City system will probably be financially impractical. North Liberty is perhaps in long-term reach of the Slippery Rock system, but near-term plans have been abandoned with the Butler County Community Development Corporation, who is no longer pursuing an industrial park on the border area. Therefore, an alternative should be sought. Package plant technology is one real solution for limited the service area, especially if these could be included as a public service area, and a second small plant. Restaurant package plants also exist in Leesburg, which would be taken over and managed at a COG or authority level.

Outside either the villages or the growth areas, there will remain a variety of on-lot systems. If well managed, these are not problematic, but many older homes may have

failed systems. CDBG funding could be used to repair malfunctioning septic tanks on an individual volunteer basis. This will prevent failed septic tanks from forcing unnecessary extensions of public sewer.

Water also presents real difficulties. There is a need to serve the east side of the I-79/208 Interchange, but no present customer base. There are also land use and traffic congestion concerns in the intervening area. However, service to this area should be a top priority.

There are also issues of developed recreation in the COG area, in light of anticipated residential growth and the local priority of residential neighborhood preservation. Only two COG communities have significant developed recreation opportunities (Grove City Borough, with two major parks, and the ball field complex in Pine Township). In reality, residents from every COG community use these facilities, but only two fund them. Consideration should be given to regionalizing recreation plans, adopting them, and instituting recreation impact fees pursuant to subdivision powers in the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code. These parks should also be a regional grant priority for DCNR funding, or other programs that may be available. In particular, priority should be given to continuing to develop a linear park with strong conservation linkages in the land owned by both Grove City Borough and Pine Township along Wolf Creek.

It is important that the COG communities share the same school district. District officials participated in the development of this Plan. There are two items of concern. One is future school facility sizing, which should be planned with some account of the future growth scenarios from this document. The second issue is tax base, which is discussed in the final chapter of this document.

An unanswered question is whether anticipated growth will lead to a greater need for local police services? Whether retail crime or isolated areas of speeding, there may be circumstances where local police are needed, though probably not township-wide. It may be possible to create police service districts through intergovernmental agreements. This would allow the borough-type public services to be extended only to those areas of the townships that actually need them. There must also be some examination of fire protection needs as these growth areas develop.

# Housing Plan

*Housing plans are an outgrowth of the land use plan in respect to the need to estimate and account for future growth and the need to accommodate that growth. However, it is also important in the need for decent, affordable housing and sustainable tax base policies.*

## A Summary of Pertinent Facts and Issues

One of the high points of community pride is the overall quality of the area’s housing stock. This section is primarily a statistical view of the housing stock in each community, though a visual exterior survey was conducted as well. This pride seems to reflect the fact, that this is largely a community of homeowners. The next table illustrates the overall number and ratio of homes by tenure in the COG communities.

**Overall Number and Ratio of Homes by Tenure  
In the COG Area**

Name	Number of Owner-Occupied Units	Percent of Owner-Occupied Units As a Ratio of All Occupied Housing	Number of Renter-Occupied Units	Percent of Renter-Occupied Units As a Ratio of All Occupied Housing
Grove City Borough	1,639	63.7%	936	36.3%
Liberty Township	449	91.3%	43	8.7%
Pine Township	1,538	87.3%	196	12.7%
Springfield Township	627	87.4%	90	12.6%
Wolf Creek Township	256	92.4%	21	7.6%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

By comparison, the national rate of homeownership is 66.2 percent. Statewide, it is 71 percent. Thus, only one COG community does not exhibit this pattern.

### Grove City Borough Housing

The condition of the housing stock in the borough is primarily sound. Much of the housing stock, more than 60%, is over 50 years old, while less than 15% has been constructed since 1970. Therefore, only a small portion of the borough’s housing stock has been built with current, or relatively current, construction practices and techniques. Such items as the electrical systems, plumbing, insulation, windows, and doors are frequently not up to current standards or codes. At the same time, roofing, siding, and other details more than likely need addressed, since they are either approaching or at the end of their useful lives. According to a recently completed windshield survey in the borough, approximately 1%, or 25 to 30 housing units, are deteriorated and need

extensive renovation. Much of this seems to be a result of the borough's focused efforts at rehabilitating housing units.

However, there are a number of items of concern relative to the housing stock. Much of it is old, and values are lower than the nation. In 1990, Grove City's MHV was \$45,000, well below Pennsylvania's MHV of \$69,700. According to the 2000 Census, the borough's MHV was \$84,200 while the state's was \$97,000. Looking at the 1990 MHV in terms of constant, year 2000 dollars, the borough's and the state's MHV were \$59,300 and \$91,800, respectively. The real value increased in borough homes; therefore, was greater than that in the state. In constant dollars, between 1990 and 2000, the typical borough home gained nearly \$25,000 in value, or 42%, while the typical residential unit in the state had a \$5,200, or 6%, increase. Despite this increase, the borough's home values were, and still are, significantly below state norms (Pennsylvania also lags the nationwide MHV of \$119,600).

As previously mentioned, the borough's owner-occupancy rate is lower than the state and countywide owner-occupancy rates. Owner occupancy tends to result in better neighborhoods and housing conditions. A well-maintained property means a higher resale value, thus increasing overall wealth. However, renter occupied does not always equate with blight. Housing must meet the needs of people at various life stages. There are many elderly persons residing in the borough who rent small units that meet their needs. There are a large number of renter residences in the downtown above businesses. Additionally, the College View Towers Senior Apartment complex is downtown. The rental mix includes residential homes geared to college faculty and staff who are in Grove City for a short period of time. All of this helps to contribute to the overall good quality of the housing stock for both owner occupied and rental units in the borough.

Thus, borough policies of emphasizing residential neighborhoods have served it well. However, like an older home, older neighborhoods must be monitored for signs of deterioration.

## **Liberty Township Housing**

Liberty Township had a small number of housing units (514) in 2000. About six out of every ten homes were built after 1970. This newer housing stock exceeds even Pine Township in terms of valuation. At a median of \$109,100, it is the highest owner-defined median value in the COG region. Housing is a little less affordable per resident incomes, with about 15% of the population paying more than 30% of their income in housing. Of all the COG communities, Liberty Township seems to share the most similarity with emerging patterns of housing in nearby Butler County.

## **Pine Township Housing**

Unlike Grove City Borough, Pine Township has a higher proportion of newer homes, largely due to the rapidity of growth in the township over the past 20 years. From 1990 to

2000, the township gained about 300 housing units, per building permit records. The vast majority of these are single family detached or mobile homes. Only 13% of the housing stock was built before 1939. The median value of homes was \$105,000 in 2000, placing the township well above the state MHV and approaching the national level. Yet, this is not an unaffordable luxury home market. No homes were valued at over \$1,000,000, and 90% of the township's 936 homeowners are spending less than 30% of their income on housing costs.

### **Springfield Township Housing**

Values are at \$105,000, almost matching the situation in Pine Township. However, it is an older stock, with 35% of housing being pre-1940. There are only 19 units with more than one housing unit in the structure, but 16% of the total units are mobile homes. As in Pine Township, 90% of residents are spending less than 30% of their income on housing costs.

### **Wolf Creek Township Housing**

Wolf Creek Township has a small stable stock of housing. With lower levels of growth, there are higher proportions of pre-1940 housing. Almost the entire stock is single-family detached; values are more consistent with Pine Township.

### **Key Ideas**

Create a new uniform standard for mobile home parks throughout the townships. This standard would demand high quality, including:

- Street Trees
- Vegetated buffering
- Paved Streets and sidewalks
- Recreation areas

#### **Priority Ranking: Top**

Concentrate on new multiple-family housing developments of over three units per building in Grove City Borough or more dense sections of Pine Township.

#### **Priority Ranking: High**

Limit mobile home parks of over four units to within the growth boundary.

#### **Priority Ranking: High**

Preserve housing affordability by creating some modest lot standards in areas around the villages of Leesburg and North Liberty.

#### **Priority Ranking: High**

The COG should take a lead in annual licensing and inspection of rental housing based upon the Springfield Township ordinance.

**Priority Ranking: High**

Allow mobile home parks outside the growth boundary only if they meet the density standards of other dwelling types.

**Priority Ranking: Moderate**

## **Overall Policies and Actions**

One major factor in the community's economic and social stability is due to the fact that it is a community of homeowners. Thus, the foundation of local government housing policy should be the continuance of homeowner neighborhoods. This can be accomplished by addressing affordability and the quality of neighborhoods. While the single-family detached dwelling is expected to remain the norm within the study area, the community can, and should, plan for high-quality rental housing as well. This ensures a variety of housing choices to meet the needs of people in various life situations. An elderly widow is probably less interested in owning a home with a half an acre of yard, than the young family with two children would be. This section will address three principal policy areas: affordability, quality, and meeting the housing needs of a variety of persons.

### **Preserving Affordable Housing While Growing**

Because demographic growth is anticipated, there will be a growth in housing units, probably in excess of population growth (because household size is decreasing). In such a situation, land costs rise, and housing costs are reflective of this. Without planned growth, local governments get trapped into increasing housing costs when they need to extend public infrastructure too far. Inadvertently, some local governments also increase housing costs by requiring excessive road widths, or permitting excessive cul-de-sacs within new developments.

The communities' key policy is to permit relatively modest lot and road standards for new single-family homes within the residential growth areas depicted on the Future Land Use Map.

### **Grove City Borough Housing Plan**

The borough has a number of housing issues. It has a high proportion of older housing stock and greater proportions of rental units. The greatest need is to monitor these rental units to prevent absentee rental properties from becoming a blighting influence. This activity must be combined with strong efforts to maintain high-quality residential neighborhoods. Thus, key activities include:

- Adopting a rental-licensing ordinance to control the quality of rental housing in the borough. This has been done by Springfield Township. Admittedly, Springfield has a smaller number of rental units.
- There is also a concern that Slippery Rock University students are locating in parts of the borough. The borough should consider creating a new zoning category for “student homes” This has been done by State College Borough to prevent over-concentration of transient student within family neighborhoods.
- The borough recently completed a borough-wide income survey to better identify where low-moderate income (LMI) persons live. They could, therefore, create a CDBG neighborhood revitalization initiative in low-moderate income neighborhoods, which focus on complete sidewalk replacement, street trees, housing (as fundable), and neighborhood parks. CDBG funds could also be used as leverage for the new Pennsylvania Elm Street Program. It is highly recommended that the borough pursue Elm Street funding. This will allow for bricks-and-mortar assistance in older neighborhoods near the downtown area.
- Housing rehabilitation has been a success, though new lead based paint regulations are making it more difficult. A homeownership program could be created in concert with local banks or the Grove City Area Credit Union using CDBG funding. This could focus on vacant or for sale units, and utilize rehabilitation funding as an alternative to a down payment for otherwise credit-worthy LMI families.
- From a multi-municipal vantage, the borough also has the ability to be the COG’s home for high-quality multi-tenant dwellings. The borough can accomplish this through an intergovernmental agreement, as well as local zoning standards that distinguishes between newly built apartments, and conversions apartments (former single-family units.)

## **Township Housing Plans**

For all of the townships, housing issues will be different than Grove City Borough. As mentioned earlier in this document, Pine Township will likely be the home of much new residential growth. Affordability could become a problem for long term residents. The idea of homebuyer programs outlined for the borough would also benefit this community. In fact, a joint application might be sought with the borough to run a pilot homebuyer program. A second key need would be to ensure that affordable housing does not mean low quality. In this, the township should work with other townships to create a reasonable standard for high-quality mobile home parks.

In Springfield, Wolf Creek, and Liberty, special attention might be paid to older rural housing, both in villages and elsewhere. These three townships might apply for rehabilitation funds to duplicate the Pine Township and Grove City programs. A joint application should be well received. If funding were available, village revitalization might be pursued in North Liberty, Leesburg, and Number Five Mines. This should treat these areas as residential neighborhoods, in an Elm Street-like approach.

## Action Plan and Multi-Municipal Comprehensive Plan Implementation

The process and document of the Wolf Creek Slippery Rock Creek COG Joint Comprehensive Plan represents a shared vision for the community’s future. However, this vision cannot become a reality unless it is implemented through further intergovernmental cooperation and use of the enabling tools under the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code. A multi-municipal plan is more than just a plan prepared by two or more municipalities. Article XI of the Pennsylvania MPC gives multi-municipal plan participants special planning tools and unique authorities not given to municipalities that prepare comprehensive plans alone. The table illustrates some of these differences.

<b>Multi-Municipal Comprehensive Plans Unique Planning Tools and Authorities</b>	
<b>Optional Plan Content</b>	<b>Legal Effects</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May designate <i>growth areas</i> for 20-year development at one-plus unit per acre where public services are provided or planned for.</li> <li>• May designate <i>future growth areas</i> for longer term growth and orderly extension of services.</li> <li>• May designate <i>rural resource areas</i> for low-density, rural development where publicly-financed services are not intended.</li> <li>• May plan for the accommodation of all categories of land uses within the entire area of the plan without all uses being provided for in each municipality.</li> <li>• May plan for developments of regional significance and impact.</li> <li>• May plan for conservation of scenic and aesthetic resources in addition to natural and historic resources.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Municipalities will be given protection from exclusionary zoning challenges if land uses are accommodated within the entire area of the plan without all uses being provided for in each municipality.</li> <li>• Municipalities will be given more favorable state decisions regarding funding requests and certain facilities permitted by the state.</li> <li>• Municipalities may share tax revenues and fees.</li> <li>• Municipalities may adopt a transfer of development rights program enabling transfer between municipalities.</li> <li>• Municipalities may adopt specific plans to guide development, in greater detail, of specific non-residential properties.</li> </ul>

## Implementation Agreement

The means to take advantage of these tools is through intergovernmental agreements. The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code provides that municipalities may enter into an intergovernmental cooperative agreement to implement the multi-municipal comprehensive plan. While entering into such agreement is optional, municipalities *must* enter into such agreement in order to legally utilize most of the above-described tools and authorities.

Therefore, it is recommended that COG municipalities enter into an intergovernmental cooperative agreement. Such agreements are enacted by ordinance, as provided for in the Pennsylvania Intergovernmental Cooperation Law. As such, they may parallel agreements already entered into by COG participants. The content of such an agreement must be consistent with both the Pennsylvania Intergovernmental Cooperation Act and the MPC. Key requirements are listed below:

- *Implementation agreement content required by the Pennsylvania Intergovernmental Cooperation Law*
  1. Conditions of the agreement
  2. Duration of the agreement
  3. Purpose and objectives of the agreement, including powers and scope of authority delegated in the agreement
  4. How the activities and actions specified in the agreement will be financed
  5. Organizational structure necessary to carry out the agreement
  6. Manner in which any property involved in the agreement will be acquired, licensed, or disposed
  7. Provisions for employee insurance and benefit contracts, if any, associated with the agreement
- *Implementation agreement content required by the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code*
  1. Consistency review process to be used by participating municipalities to judge consistency of implementing actions, like zoning ordinances or capital projects, with the multi-municipal comprehensive plan
  2. Process for the review and approval of developments of regional significance and impact
  3. Roles and responsibilities of participating municipalities with respect to implementation of the multi-municipal comprehensive plan, including particularly the provision of public infrastructure and services
  4. Yearly report of implementation activities, particularly infrastructure projects undertaken and development applications and approvals
  5. Process by which the multi-municipal comprehensive plan can be amended and growth, future growth, and rural resource areas can be redefined

A sample implementation agreement is included in the Appendix. The agreement can be modified to address more specific plan implementation activities. Also, other parties—municipal authorities and utility providers, the county, and/or county planning commission—can be added to the agreement to serve in specific roles to help implement the Plan.

Many MPC-related aspects of multi-municipal plan implementation—including designation of growth, future growth, and rural resource areas, area-wide accommodation of land uses, and developments of regional impact—are discussed in more detail in the main body of this document. However, one important aspect deserves additional attention here—*consistency review process*.

## **Consistency Review Process**

A consistency review process is a required element of an implementation agreement. It ties implementing actions taken by municipalities to the comprehensive plan. As the adopted comprehensive plan is a form of partnership, in which municipalities agree on long-range regional development and how to implement it, the consistency review process is a major part of keeping the partner municipalities on the same course in implementing the agreed plan.

The consistency review process provides a means in which implementing actions can be reviewed by both partner municipalities and determined to be consistent with the goals and recommendations of the multi-municipal comprehensive plan. Implementing actions can include adoption or amendment of land use ordinances like zoning, subdivision and land development, or official map; implementation of capital projects like water or sewer system improvements; street and highway upgrades; and other publicly funded projects like streetscape, industrial development, housing development, or parks. A joint review process is outlined below and further addressed in the sample implementation agreement included in Appendix 6.

### ***Basic Elements of a Consistency Review Process***

- According to the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code, implementing ordinances must be adopted within two years of plan adoption date. The primary focus will be amendment, as necessary, of municipal zoning ordinances to reflect the new comprehensive plan.
- A joint review committee should be established to conduct consistency reviews. COG municipalities could authorize the COG itself, which served as advisory committee established for this comprehensive plan, to serve as the consistency review committee.
- Definition of consistency

- ▶ According to the PA MPC, “an agreement or correspondence between matters being compared which denotes a reasonable, rational, similar, connection or relationship.”
- ▶ Other recommended criteria:
  - An implementing action furthers or complements, or at least does not interfere with, the goals, policies, and recommended actions and strategies contained in the comprehensive plan
  - An implementing action is compatible with the proposed future land uses and densities and/or intensities contained in the comprehensive plan
- A participant municipality would provide notice and information about a proposed implementing ordinance or project to the joint consistency review committee
- The committee would review the proposal and confirm consistency in writing or identify corrections needed to make the ordinance or project consistent.

What advantage will these agreements and processes bring in making the shared vision become a reality? For the Wolf Creek COG area, there are several. First and foremost is the ability to concentrate development within the area of the Plan so that public investments in infrastructure (such as water, sewerage and road improvements) are appropriately focused. Through this, areas that wish to remain rural can do so without the threat of needing to accommodate major development. If this is done, fiscal planning can follow to allow each community share in both the needed public investments and the subsequent revenues. Equally important, limited municipal capital can be focused on the areas that will both grow, and produce forms of tax base that will exceed service costs.

## **Implementing Land Use Planning On An Area-Wide Basis**

The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code grants zoning flexibility to municipalities participating in multi-municipal comprehensive plans. Those municipalities may plan for zoning of land uses considering the whole geographic area of the plan. On the contrary, municipalities without the benefit of a multi-municipal plan, as interpreted by Pennsylvania courts, must accommodate, via zoning, every conceivable, reasonable, and lawful use in their municipality, whether or not the use is compatible.

Multi-municipal plan participants may zone for higher-density uses requiring a full range of public services in an urban core municipality where such uses are appropriate and services are available, and not zone for such uses in a more rural municipality where such uses are not appropriate and services are not available. Conversely, multi-municipal plan participants may zone for low-density uses and uses that require space to buffer their impacts in a more rural municipality, and not zone for such uses in an urban core municipality. This will facilitate a more rational and efficient development pattern.

In preparing a plan for area-wide accommodation of uses, the MPC specifies that the plan must accommodate uses within a “reasonable geographic area.” This term and concept are not defined in the MPC. Also, since the law is new (2000), courts have not yet heard cases on any further defined reasonable geographic area. However, two criteria make sense in support of the reasonable geographic area concept:

1. **Market** – Uses should be accommodated in quantity and location reasonably appropriate for their markets. For example, fewer locations are needed for major retail department stores with regional markets, while more locations throughout an area are needed for personal service uses like beauty salons with neighborhood markets.
2. **Compatibility** – Uses accommodated, where reasonable and appropriate, for the character of an area, i.e. its density, scale, physical attributes, etc.

As part of the Wolf Creek Slippery Rock Creek COG Plan process, all categories of land uses were evaluated using the above criteria for appropriate locations and potential to be best accommodated in any of the participating municipalities. The following table contains initial recommendations and explanation.

<b>Land Use</b>	<b>Municipality in Which Best Accommodated</b>	<b>Market Rationale</b>	<b>Compatibility Rationale</b>
Mobile Home Parks	<u>Large-Scale:</u> Pine <u>Small Scale:</u> Springfield, Liberty, Wolf Creek Townships	Rarely located in urban core municipalities, typically found in surrounding more rural municipalities	Need for large land area to accommodate the development plus space to buffer it from adjacent development
High-Density Multi-Family Dwellings	Grove City Borough, portions of Pine Township surrounding the borough	Can thrive in an environment of higher density near public services (police, sewer, parks, etc.)	There are already significant concentrations in these areas.
Independent Elderly Housing	Grove City Borough, portions of Pine Township surrounding the borough	Need higher density for non-drivers, and proximity to public services	There are already significant concentrations in these areas.
Farms and Agriculture	Eastern Pine Township, Springfield, Wolf Creek, and Liberty Townships	A predominant use in more rural municipalities, rarely located in urban core municipalities	Need for large land area typically separated from urban development. May require various levels of protection from residential uses in growth communities.
Mineral Extraction	Springfield, Wolf Creek, and Liberty Townships	Rarely located in urban core municipalities, typically some in surrounding more rural municipalities	Need for large land area plus space to buffer it from adjacent development
Regional Retail Facilities	Springfield Township	Concentration has already developed and significant infrastructure investment will likely follow.	Produces significant traffic light and stormwater impacts
Non-taxable Institutions (schools, colleges, hospitals)	Grove City Borough and portions of Pine Township near the borough	Need for proximity to public services. While they do not generate taxes, they have a value as symbolizing the heart of the community, and generate beneficial spin-of development.	Large institutions can have a large impact (traffic, noise, etc).

There are other uses that may need to be discussed as well, but rationale may need to be more nuanced. Such uses include telecommunications towers, sexually oriented businesses, and sanitary landfills. Once discussion is complete, the base agreements can be used to enable additional agreements whereby a municipality can relieve itself from

accommodating a use on the list (provided it is accommodated elsewhere within the area).

## **Investing in Infrastructure and Sharing Revenues From New Developments**

The Community Facilities Plan notes that fairly extensive and expensive improvements are needed to the sewage treatment system of Grove City Borough to accommodate expected new development.

One of the highest priorities in the Land Use Plan is to “create a regional growth fund from tax base” or “develop a regional investment committee” to develop fair schemes for tax base sharing. If this can be carried out, the COG will be on the road to wisely prospering from development, rather than simply growing and playing a game of financial catch up.

There are several areas that must initially be considered:

- The link between land use, tax revenues, and public service needs
- The implications of this upon the Land Use Plan
- The need to fund infrastructure to bring beneficial development
- Allowing each community to play its role in the region without going broke

## **Tax Base, Public Services, and Land Use**

All land uses have various service needs and produce various levels of tax for local governments. In some cases, the public service needs equal or exceed tax revenues. In other cases, taxes exceed service needs. Individual communities often must maintain a careful balance to avoid growth actually causing a tax increase to its residents. The Pennsylvania experience has been analyzed by Professor Tim Kelsey. Kelsey’s analysis generally shows the following:

- Residential development of median-price homes will be a wash from a revenue service vantage. Luxury homes generally contribute more than they require. Higher-density housing will normally require more in services than it contributes, though elderly housing is a notable exception. Commercial and industrial developments can generate surpluses well in excess of service needs for both the host municipality and the school district. These surpluses may be as high as 70 cents of each tax dollar. Open private woodland or farmland contributes smaller per-acre revenues, but surpluses can be even higher, and cows and trees seldom go to school or call the police.
- When this is considered against the Land Use Plan, each community is affected differently. Wolf Creek and Liberty Townships will have low tax revenues, but low needs to provide services. They may not be able to afford high-density residential development. However, if each transferred some of its commercial/

industrial growth capacity to other municipalities, modest re-numeration would serve it well. In simple terms, it might merit consideration to not grow or receive compensation to shift some growth elsewhere. Springfield Township has the potential of generating significant new revenues above its public service costs. However, it cannot do this without providing public sewer at a township or regional level. It, thus, faces a choice of spending significant funds before new development can occur, or sharing regional revenues. Pine Township's revenues may rise, but public service costs will equal these in the large residential growth area. Actually seeing some non-residential growth would be critical. Grove City Borough has significant public service management capacity. However, its land use/public service ratios are the least enviable in the region. In addition to large modest residential neighborhoods, there are large areas of tax-exempt properties that still require public facilities and services.

Allowing each community to play its role in the regional Land Use Plan will require careful consideration of four issues:

- Regional investment strategy for “big- ticket” items (such as the sewer plant)
- Portions of tax base in excess of service needs should be pooled into a COG fund for growth and development
- Portions of tax base in excess of public service needs should be shared with communities who either will not see much development or have relinquished rights to certain forms of development
- The system must be simple and not require any changes to the present municipal taxation structure (assessments, millage, tax collection)

Fortunately, there are a number of models for regional tax sharing through intergovernmental agreement. Each has applicability to elements of the COG situation.

The City of Racine, Wisconsin embarked on a regional approach with neighboring communities due to lack of sewage treatment plant capacity. It developed a capacity-selling formula that separated upgrade and expansion costs. The latter were sold as capacity rights to other communities. This approach led to a regional effort to reduce competition for beneficial development, share beneficial tax base, and link revenue to fiscal capacity. Basically, portions of both existing and new industrial/commercial development are placed in a pool and redistributed based upon an agreed formula. Thus, “growth pays for growth.”

The Meadowlands district in New Jersey had inter-municipal tax sharing established by the legislature. Key to their program is each municipality continues its own taxing. A base year was established and current tax revenues analyzed. New taxable development is based upon what happens after the base year. Initial, large proportions of new revenue are directed to the growth pool, but this declines over time. This helps pay up-front costs of

large development to the host community. This is also combined with Racine-style formulaic redistribution.

Minnesota law has enabled an approach that allows area-wide base distribution and which is used by the Twin Cities region. In this approach, a distribution index is established (total property valuation divided by population then multiplied by population). This is compared to the total regional base, and distributed on a ratio of population to valuation. Thus, low population/low valuation communities receive funds proportionate to lower needs, and high population, low valuation communities receive higher distributions.

Finally, some communities have established site-specific “joint economic development zones.” In this very simple approach, only future revenue of raw land likely to be developed is shared.

The COG must explore all of these options toward an intergovernmental agreement to fit its needs and fulfill this Plan.

### **Planning for Developments of Regional Significance and Impact**

The Wolf Creek Slippery Rock Creek COG Comprehensive Plan recommends that certain large land uses be given greater scrutiny when proposed. The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code terms such uses “developments of regional significance and impact” and defines them as follows:

“Any land development that, because of its character, magnitude, or location will have substantial impact upon the health, safety, or welfare of citizens in more than one municipality.”

DRI (short for developments of regional impact) are developments, large in size or impact, or both, that will affect neighboring municipalities in addition to the one in which located. Examples of DRIs include large residential subdivisions, shopping malls, industrial parks, waste disposal facilities, and major highways. Development impacts may include traffic, noise, light, stormwater runoff, pollutants, open space loss, commercial market encroachment, and/or water/sewer demand. It makes sense for all affected municipalities to participate in reviewing the development.

The Wolf Creek Slippery Rock Creek COG Plan recommends establishing a process allowing both municipalities to review proposed DRIs. The process is outlined in the suggested intergovernmental cooperative agreement for implementation included in the Appendices. It includes a few basic elements:

- Referral by the host municipality of a zoning permit application by a DRI
- Review by a committee consisting of representatives from both municipalities
- Comments and recommendations, as appropriate, by the review committee
- Consideration by the host municipality of the review committee’s comments.

While DRIs may be subject to review of both municipalities, Pennsylvania planning law clearly specifies that the host municipality retains the decision-making authority to grant or deny the permit (unless such authority is pre-empted by State or Federal law). According to law, the host municipality must approve the DRI if it meets all local requirements. Further, though DRI review may involve both municipalities, the review process may take no longer than already provided for in state planning law.

Since the PA MPC definition for DRIs is broad, additional threshold criteria should be employed to determine if a development is a DRI and should be subject to the DRI review process. The following criteria were researched from other states with DRI threshold criteria and modified to best fit the Wolf Creek Slippery Rock Creek COG.

*Determined to be DRI in the Wolf Creek COG Area Because of Character of Land Use*

- Sanitary landfills
- Airports and rail terminals
- Community water/wastewater plants
- Hospitals
- Colleges and universities

*Determined to be DRI Because of Magnitude of Land Use or Development*

- Commercial, retail, service, etc. greater than 50,000 square feet
- Industrial facility, park, etc. greater than 80,000 square feet, or creating more than 200 jobs
- Attractions and recreation facilities with more than 500 parking spaces or capacity for more than 2,000 patrons
- Housing developments creating more than 30 lots or units
- Any development causing more than 100 acres of earth disturbance
- Any development generating more than 1,000 vehicle trips per day or 100 truck trips per day

The task for the community will be to develop a process that allows meaningful comment by all COG member municipalities while remaining within the context of Pennsylvania law. Two different approaches could be codified into all municipal ordinances. The first would be to treat DRIs as a sort of super-major subdivision/land development. The second choice would be conditional use standards. In either case, objective standards for traffic, screening, land use conflict, and similar impacts should be included in the actual text of each community's code.

Within this context, there are three DRIs that will likely affect COG communities in the near future. The first of these is the proposed sewage treatment plant upgrades. The second is the potential for major new retail development in Springfield Township that

rests upon said improvement. The last is the potential of Tri-County Industries to convert the current transfer station into a sanitary landfill facility. The site is located near the point where Springfield, Pine, and Liberty Townships meet. A recent application to begin landfilling was turned down by PA DEP due to the potential of bird strike hazards at the nearby airport. While a landfill is normally a Development of Regional Impact, the influence of the COG Comprehensive Plan in this particular case is potentially nominal. At this particular time, PA DEP does consider county, and multi-municipal plans before issuing permits. The issue evolves around whether or not there will be a “land use change.” Prior to Tri-County’s transfer operations at the site, there was a landfill there that ceased operations.

## **Plan Interrelationships**

Section 301 of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code requires that a comprehensive plan contain both a statement of the interrelationship between various plan components, and a statement outlining the consistency of this Plan with the plans of neighboring municipalities. The plan is generally consistent with plans of neighboring municipalities, particularly with the rural development or agricultural preservation areas of Slippery Rock Township, Butler County, and Plain Grove Township, Lawrence County, as well as rural areas in Venango County. It is anticipated that consistency with the Mercer County comprehensive plan will be achieved through co-adoption, and incorporation of this document into the county plan. Internal interrelationships are achieved through basing the entirety of this document on the Land Use Plan.

## **Conclusion: An initial Action Plan**

*The preceding Comprehensive Plan contains a large number of activities for the COG communities, all of which cannot be undertaken at once. This recommends some key projects to break down the many activities into a one-year starting point. Following completion of these items, additional actions plans can be created on an annual basis.*

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>First Step</b>	<b>Possible Funding</b>
Sign intergovernmental agreements to allow use of specific tools	COG	Use model in Plan	Minimum Cost
Negotiate short term (sewer plant expansion) and longer-term tax base sharing arrangements	COG	Select a municipal financial consultant, or file grant application	LUPTAP Shared Municipal Services
Elm Street funding for Grove City	Grove City Borough	Apply with assistance of Mercer County	Elm Street
Undertake a zoning and Subdivision amendment action plan to implement land use plan (both amendments and possible intergovernmental agreements)	COG or committee of all local planning commissions	Apply for LUPTAP funding, or discuss with MCRPC staff.	LUPTAP
Develop Simtraffic model for Broad and Center Streets	Grove City Borough	Get prices from transportation engineers	PennDOT
Specific plan for Springfield Township Regional Retail Area	Springfield Township	Meet MCRPC and DCED officials	LUPTAP TIF
Prepare and file specific plans	COG	Apply with assistance of Mercer County	LUPTAP
Funding for a Route 58 congested corridor study	Pine Township/ Grove City Borough	Ask MCRPC to investigate sources of funding	PennDOT
Liberty Township Traffic-Calming Initiative	Liberty Township	Ask MCRPC to investigate sources of funding	PennDOT