

1 - Introduction

1.1 Purpose and Scope of the Comprehensive Plan

Guidelines for Growth is Willistown Township's comprehensive plan. The purpose of the plan is to provide a rational basis for municipal decision-making on matters related to Willistown's future, be it the protection of community values, guidance for future growth, or the provision of adequate community services. The plan describes goals and policies which together constitute a set of guidelines for municipal action and provides strategies by which the plan's policies can be implemented.

This is the 6th edition of the plan, and it reflects the evolving needs and interests of the community as it prepares for the next decade. At the same time the plan continues to respect the core tenants and long-held interests of Township residents and elected officials: to protect natural resources, preserve the Township's agricultural heritage, ensure the adequate provision of community services and infrastructure, and provide for sustainable growth in an equitable and socially-conscience manner.

The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (Act 247 of 1968, as amended) gives municipalities in the Commonwealth the responsibility and authority to plan for their own future. According to the Code, a comprehensive plan shall include but need not be limited to the following related basic elements:

1. A statement of objectives of the municipality concerning its future development;
2. A plan for land use, which may include the amount, intensity, and character of land use proposed for residence, industry, business, agriculture, major traffic and transit facilities, public grounds, flood plains and other areas of special hazards and similar uses;
3. A plan to meet the housing needs of present residents and of those individuals and families anticipated to reside in the municipality; which may include conservation of presently sound housing, rehabilitation of housing in declining neighborhoods and the accommodation of expected new housing in different dwelling types and at appropriate densities for households of all income levels;
4. A plan for movement of people and goods, which may include expressways, highways, local street systems, parking facilities, mass transit routes, terminals, airfields, port facilities and other similar facilities or uses;
5. A plan for community facilities and utilities, which may include public and private education, recreation, municipal buildings, fire and police stations, libraries, hospitals, water supply and distribution, sewage and waste treatment, solid waste management, storm drainage, flood plain management, utility corridors and associated facilities, and other similar facilities or uses;

6. A statement of the interrelationships among the various plan components, which may include an estimate of the environmental, energy conservation, fiscal, economic development and social consequences on the municipality;
7. A discussion of short- and long-range plan implementation strategies, which may include implications for capital improvements programming, new or updated development regulations, and identification of public funds potentially available;
8. A statement indicating the relationship of existing and proposed development of the municipality to the existing and proposed development and plans in contiguous municipalities, to the objectives and plans for development in the county of which it is a part (indicating that the existing and proposed development of the municipality is generally consistent with the objectives and plans of the county comprehensive plan), and to regional trends.
9. A plan for the protection of natural and historic resources to the extent not preempted by federal or state law.

The Code states that during the preparation of the comprehensive plan, the planning agency shall make careful surveys and studies of existing conditions and prospects for future growth in the municipality. Once adopted by the governing body of a municipality, a comprehensive plan can be implemented through ordinances and other methods.

Of additional importance to Willistown is Article I of the Pennsylvania Constitution, which was amended on May 18, 1971 by the addition of Section 27, Natural Resources and the Public Estate. This Article states that:

The people have a right to clear air, pure water, and to the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic and aesthetic values of the environment. Pennsylvania's public natural resources are the common property of all the people, including generations to come. As trustee of these resources, the Commonwealth shall conserve and maintain them for the benefit of all people.

As with prior planning efforts, Willistown continues to recognize its responsibility to protect Pennsylvania's public natural resources for future generations.

1.2 Planning in Willistown Township

Willistown Township's original comprehensive plan, *Guidelines For Growth*, was completed in 1961 and adopted in 1962. In 1968, the plan underwent its first revision to reflect changes that had occurred during the seven intervening years.

Guidelines for Growth was amended again, beginning in 1979 and ending with adoption by the Township Supervisors in 1980. That update process was driven by significant changes in Willistown Township and in the immediate vicinity, including the relocation of US Route 202, the installation of a public sewer system in the northeastern section of

the Township, the extension of the water system into the northwestern section of the Township, the consolidation of the Township's public school system into the Great Valley School District, and the construction of townhouse developments within the Township.

In 1993, the Township prepared an Open Space, Recreation, and Environmental Resources Plan. That plan included an extensive inventory of Willistown Township's natural, scenic, biotic, and water resources. It also contained a plan for recreation, based on a detailed analysis of needs.

Guidelines for Growth was again updated in 1997 and represented the third update to the Township's comprehensive plan. Philosophically that plan retained its basic focus, however changes were made to reflect changing demographics, traffic congestion, natural resource protection strategies, and open space and recreation planning. Demographic changes—such as longer life expectancies, a movement away from the nuclear family, delayed marriage, and women working outside the home—indicated the need for more housing choices. Development in neighboring municipalities increased traffic and congestion in Willistown Township. Recognition of serious threats to the natural environment prompted the development of new regulatory techniques to help minimize damage.

In 2001, Willistown and Tredyffrin Townships completed work on the Paoli Community Master Plan, a joint municipal planning effort for the Paoli Community supportive of a multi-modal transportation center and growth management needs of the surrounding neighborhoods.

Recognition of agricultural uses and purposes prompted the Board of Supervisors to amend the comprehensive plan again in 2002. This amendment attests to the significant role played by agriculture in the Township, recognizing agriculture as a leading industry and significant land use.

In 2004 a Parks and Recreation Survey was conducted to gain community input for planning and programming purposes.

The Township published the Okehocking Preserve Management Plan, with funding assistance provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, in 2006; the intent of this plan is to assist with the management and improvement of the Township's first nature preserve.

A second Parks and Recreation Survey was conducted in 2009 to gain additional community input for park planning and programming. This effort was incorporated into the 2011 *Guidelines for Growth* Plan.

The 2011 edition of *Guidelines for Growth* was a direct outgrowth of the 1997 plan and the 1993 Open Space, Recreation, and Environmental Resources Plan. In fact, much of that plan's mission was to meld the two planning documents into one plan oriented to the provision of growth management, environmental resource protection, and recreation

planning. As such, the plan placed significant emphasis on goals and policies for future growth and the provision of services, protection of community values, provision of adequate community facilities, including parks and recreation, and guidance for implementation.

The Township took a closer look at trails and greenways in the 2013 *Malvern – Willistown Greenway Master Plan*. A cooperative planning process involving the Township, Malvern Borough and the Willistown Conservation Trust, the plan was intended as a multi-phased effort to create an inter-municipal greenway, consisting of existing and new pedestrian walkways ranging from community sidewalks to hard surface trails to mown paths and natural, soft surface trails.

In 2020, the Township undertook a comprehensive plan survey as an initial step in the planning process for the 2022 plan update. The survey was conducted online, as well as mailed to every Willistown household and business, to better understand community perspectives on municipal services, infrastructure, and the protection and enhancement of the Township’s natural, scenic, and historic resources.

The 2022 plan update continues to build on the Township’s past planning efforts while recognizing the unique nature and continued relevance of the 2011 plan revision. The 2011 effort was considered a full plan revision, that is, every component of the plan was reevaluated, prior open space planning and comprehensive planning efforts were combined, and new implementation strategies were devised to address the host of issues facing the community. The current plan update expands on this effort but recognizes that the 2011 plan is unique to the region, still timely, and relevant (it is not uncommon for an update to follow a full plan revision, particularly if the existing plan still holds value). This approach also builds efficiencies into the planning process and saves the community time and effort.

1.3 Preparation of This Plan

The planning process for this comprehensive plan involved the assistance of many community residents, appointed municipal board and committee members, and elected officials. Participants included the Board of Supervisors, the Planning Commission (which served as the Steering Committee for this effort), the Environmental Advisory Council, the Historical Commission, the Park and Recreation Board, the Open Space Review Board, the Environmental Sustainability Commission (formally the Recycling Commission), municipal staff, and citizens at large. Many of the Township’s staff and volunteers participated in past planning efforts and their assistance provided valuable continuity to this process. The comprehensive plan survey was also a key source of information for this plan.

It should be noted that this effort was partially funded by and supported through a Chester County Vision Partnership Grant. Chester County’s grant program is intended to support the Township’s planning efforts as well as ensure the Township’s planning policies are consistent with the objectives of *Landscapes* (including *Landscapes3*,

Watersheds, Linking Landscapes, and other county publications related thereto). County Planning staff worked closely with the Township and provided helpful guidance throughout the process.

Finally, several public information/review meetings and a public hearing were held during the planning process; discussions held, and comments received were reflected in the plan's content and ultimately contributed greatly to the process.