

**Countywide Advisory Team
Meeting #7 Summary**

The seventh meeting of the Countywide Planning Advisory Team (PAT) for *Cultivating Community: A Plan for Union County's Future* was held on Wednesday, July 9th, 2008 at the Carriage Corner Restaurant in Mifflinburg.

I. Welcome & Introductions

The meeting was called to order by Shawn McLaughlin of the Union County Planning Commission at 7:00 PM. David Rouse and Robert Kerns reintroduced the PAT to Julia Freedgood of the *American Farmland Trust (AFT)* and Susan Huffman of *Susan Huffman & Associates*. Mr. Rouse then quickly reviewed the agenda for the evening.

II. Introduction of Sustainability Keys

Mr. Rouse introduced the concept of sustainability keys in the plan. He noted that from early on in the planning process, including discussions with county staff, the PAT, and citizen surveys, it was clear that sustainability was important, particularly energy conservation. The intent of the sustainability keys is to establish measurable indicators that can be tracked over time to determine if plan goals are being met. An example that was used was increased transit usage vs. vehicle miles traveled. Mr. Rouse stated that selection of the keys and indicators is important and we need to be careful since there are limited staff resources available to monitor and track results.

Mr. Hostetler stated that Bucknell University might have the capacity, through faculty members and students, to assist in monitoring and evaluating progress using data and indicators since sustainability has become a major issue on campus as well.

Mr. Woodruff asked if any consideration is being given to connecting both parts of the Lewisburg area that are currently bi-sected by US Route 15. Mr. Rouse said it goes beyond that corridor because some parts of US 15 and adjacent neighborhoods do not presently accommodate pedestrians. Mr. McLaughlin indicated that McMahan Transportation Associates would be looking at these issues as part of the transportation element as well.

Mr. Bowman suggested that public transportation is a sustainability key that is needed as did Ms. Warner-Mills. Mr. Martin said the Plain Sect does not drive automobiles and therefore public transportation is important to them and much needed in the county.

Ms. Hagenbaugh felt that maintaining historic buildings had to be a part of the sustainability equation since they are the true green building and define our sense of place and the feel of our communities. Her concern is that if old buildings keep being removed in favor of modern structures it will eventually get to the point where everything will look the same.

III. Review Draft Elements

Agricultural and Woodland Resources

Ms. Freedgood led a discussion on the Agricultural and Woodland Resources element of the plan and quickly reviewed highlights of the draft chapter. She noted that the main issues in the county related to these resources are scattered development, water quality, and the increase of contract farming and citizen perceptions of it. She also referred to the goals and then asked for questions and comments from PAT members.

Ms. Moyer asked whether or not something should be included regarding local use of agricultural products and direct to consumer marketing opportunities. Mr. Spangler said that niche markets only support so many growers and farmers are not necessarily marketers. He also noted that for most products local farmers produce far more than what could be consumed locally. Ms. Freedgood said this same discussion took place earlier in the day with the County Ag Advisory Board. One suggestion she had is for expanding the view of “local” to include a larger region that would encompass several of the major cities that are within a three to four hour drive.

Mr. Auman said that preserved agricultural lands are important but he questioned how much needs to be protected in order to have core areas that will support and retain critical agricultural infrastructure. Mr. Spangler and Mr. McLaughlin were under the impression that 40,000 acres is needed to support a viable agricultural industry while only about 6,000 acres of farmland are permanently protected in the county. Mr. Bowman suggested that the amount of core farmland necessary be researched and included in the plan with some specific details.

Ms. Gallagher suggested that somewhere in the plan a statement be included that would prevent all trees and vegetation from being eliminated when a development is created.

Ms. Freedgood stated that AFT sees the interface between farm and non-farm residents as a significant issue in the county as both agriculture changes and expands and development pushes outwards into rural areas.

Economic Development

Ms. Huffman led discussion on this draft chapter and touched upon the sustainability key of building local industries. The economic development goals include development of cottage industries, allowing for the growth of home-based businesses, business retention, public and private partnerships to prepare the workforce, and adding agricultural infrastructure.

Mr. Hoskins reported that some European cities and towns have non-polluting industries in the middle of the community where people can have close access. Mr. Auman suggested that the focus be on a balanced economy with high-tech, blue collar, white collar, and creative class opportunities.

Ms. Huffman then reviewed the various strategies in the plan designed to facilitate meeting the goals (See draft document). Mr. Auman felt that the Sun Career and Technology Center is missing an opportunity to teach restorative building trades where students would learn skills pertaining to properly restoring historic buildings.

Ms. Hagenbaugh emphasized the need for tourism to be a part of the economic development plan since it is the 2nd leading economic generator in the state. She felt people in the region need to be educated about the contributions of tourism to the local economy. A discussion about eco and heritage tourism then followed where it was noted the county is part of a feasibility study looking to create a multi-county heritage tourism region.

Ms. Moyer stated that agriculture is equally important to the economy of the western planning area. She also questioned whether or not the impact of the former Laurelton Center redevelopment might be overstated in the document since nothing has really happened on the property over the past several years.

Mr. Hostetler said it should be noted that Bucknell is working with the regional economic development council to establish a Keystone Innovation Zone. The group is presently looking for a site and one of the criteria is that it has to be within proximity of a university.

Housing

Ms. Huffman also led a review of the draft housing element, including the sustainability key of housing diversity and the goals and issues that were listed in the document (see draft element).

Ms. Gallagher asked if there was anything left to develop in Lewisburg. Ms. Barrick suggested that people think of it as the 17837 zip code which is the greater Lewisburg area and not just the borough. Mr. Rouse and Mr. Kerns also added that while there might not be many empty or vacant lands there are properties that might be underutilized, such as the Pennsylvania House site and some of the older retail stores and strip malls, that could be redeveloped.

Mr. Auman recommended that energy efficiency be stressed as a housing priority.

Mr. Bowman said there are significant concerns in the Mifflinburg area about increases in subsidized housing. Ms. Huffman indicated that based on her research the number of vouchers for public housing has remained stable in the county. Ms. Barrick said the number of vouchers is about the same but they are moving around and in some instances are becoming more concentrated. She said that not all voucher recipients are bad people and many of them today in fact are senior citizens.

Ms. Gray voiced a concern of the low rate of owner occupancy in Lewisburg Borough. She said although the county may have a high rate of owner occupancy it is only 40% in the borough. It is a pocket that exists and she wondered what could be done to improve the ownership rate.

Ms. Warner-Mills stated that not all rentals are Section 8 and that in fact a new market that is developing in the Lewisburg area is luxury rentals that are priced at up to \$1,500 per month. Ms. Warner-Mills said the concentration of lower income people all in one area is part of the problem and that we should instead have neighborhood diversity with a mixture of incomes. Ms. Gray agreed that all the less fortunate residents should not be clustered together as has become the practice in recent years.

Ms. Warner-Mills stated that more single-floor living arrangements are needed for older residents along with ways to keep them in their homes. Mr. Reber said he has seen Mifflinburg and New Berlin lose a number of older long-time residents to the Lewisburg area because there are no options for them as they age. There needs to be a way to provide housing for these citizens, which could be regulated through zoning.

IV. Discuss Future Land Use Categories by Planning Area

The remainder of the meeting was dedicated to revisiting the future land use maps and general categories of uses. The PAT members were organized into groups based on planning area where they had group discussion and worked with members of the consultant team and county staff to recommend adjustments to the maps.

V. Comprehensive Planning Schedule

At approximately 9:10 PM the meeting concluded. The next meeting will be held on Thursday, September 11th, 2008.