

**Bradford County Comprehensive Plan Update
Community Workshop – Meeting No. 1
June 28, 2017**

The first Community Workshop meeting was held on Wednesday, June 28, 2017 at the Bradford County Airport in Towanda, PA at 6:00 PM to gather public input. A total of twenty-nine (29) people signed the attendance sheet (copy attached). Mark Lazzari, a planner with The EADS Group, attended and facilitated the proceedings. Matthew Williams, County Planning Director, and other County Planning staff, including Scott Molnar, Emily Vollmer and Rich Lasko, were in attendance and participated in the meeting. Matthew Williams welcomed the attendees and provided introductory remarks. The Bradford County Department of Community Planning and Mapping Services under the direction of the Bradford County Commissioners and the Bradford County Planning Commission is spearheading the planning effort in consultation with The EADS planning staff. Mr. Lazzari then gave a presentation focused on the following:

1. **Background and Context** – The planning process was reviewed in terms of approach and as enabled in the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) that emphasizes issues-oriented and implementable recommendations. It was suggested that this plan will organized recommendations into real-world categories of *Community, Economy and Future Land Use*.
2. **“Factoids”** – Various factors were reviewed graphically and in brief narratives as a setting for the planning process, including mapping of the planning area, the population profile and decline, housing change and profile, income profile and change, and employment profile. The graphics displayed a comparison of Townships, Boroughs, County and the State of Pennsylvania for context.
3. **Public Participation** – The multi-faceted engagement process was reviewed including the Community Survey interactive on-line comment mapping, a multi-day Community Workshop (CW#2) with focus group sessions, and the MPC-mandated Public Meeting and Public Hearing. Sign-up forms for potential Focus Groups were made available for those attending (copy attached). Copies of the Community Survey were distributed to attendees who were encouraged to complete the survey and return it at the end of the meeting.

The remainder of the meeting involved participation by attendees. The engagement focused on major positive changes in the past 10 years, major negative changes in the past 10 years, and major issues facing the County. The following summarizes the comments received.

Major positive Changes in the past 10 Years

- The County has made major upgrades to the County Park system and this was recognized and appreciated by attendees:
 - Hornbrook Park has a new ADA inclusive playground as well as an improved camping area.
 - Sunfish Pond has a new playground, camping area and fishing docks.

- Mount Pisgah has made trail improvement and the overall cleanliness is noteworthy.
- The walking path along the Merrill Parkway along the Susquehanna River was identified as being heavily used and well appreciated as an outdoor recreation asset.
- Planning is moving forward on the proposed 8-mile network of pedestrian and bicycle trails in central Bradford County (Central Bradford Trail Network) – professional firms are being sought to conduct a feasibility study for the trail system.
- Construction of the Diahoga Trail in the Sayre-Athens valley is underway – the Trail will connect recreation assets and the river. Construction of the trail continues efforts to implement the Susquehanna Greenway.
- The scenery throughout Bradford County was identified a key asset – it is welcoming to residents as well as non-residents.
- There are now plenty of hotel options (resulting primarily from the Marcellus Gas growth) to support the growth of tourism and eco-tourism in the County.
- The Guthrie health care system (Troy Community Hospital, Guthrie Robert Packer Hospital and the Guthrie Towanda Memorial Hospital) and a new Health Clinic are recognized as important community and health related assets. The Guthrie Packer Hospital in the Sayre area was noted as being a facility that could spur growth and development in the surrounding area.

Major Negative Changes in the past 10 Years

- There is not enough river access points for non on-river users – residents want to experience the river without having to enter it.
 - More river observation opportunities were requested (vistas, overlooks, scenery spots).
- Better wayfinding signage to outdoor and nature related resources is needed. Attendees encourage the County to focus on eco-tourism opportunities by marketing and increasing wayfinding signage.
- Need for more trails and other methods to connect existing facilities/resources/assets and to develop more opportunities for ecotourism.
- Attendees requested that the County update their website and online portals to better communicate information with residents. Same comment for Municipal websites.
- Current telecommunication services (Internet & Phone) are unreliable and do not serve the entire county.
 - Significant cellular coverage gaps exist.
 - It is hampering future growth for schools and businesses and creates a safety concern for first responders.
 - Job opportunities in technology driven fields are limited due to poor telecommunications in the County.
- Noted that school enrollments are decreasing throughout the County.
- There is a trend of people moving out of downtown centers and into the surrounding rural areas – this is leading to sprawl and development in rural areas and empty storefronts in downtown areas.

- There is a decrease in the farming and farmer population. There is an overwhelming population of older/aging farmers – younger farmers seem to have little to no interest in the County. Noted that potential younger farmers are now employed in the natural gas industry (a copy of the 2015 AG Coalition Viability Study was provided).
 - Increases to concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFO) and “niche” farming observed in County.
- Need more amenities, services and businesses that attract a younger population in Wysox, Athens and Sayre communities – tied in with recruitment to Guthrie Hospital.

Major Issues facing the Community/Region

- Aging Population - Bradford County is not retaining younger, educated residents.
- Youth Retention – Overall there are a lower number of younger people in school (K-12) schools and in the workforce.
Agriculture – declines in this industry are impacting the County in and of themselves and but also through the loss of population (follow recommendations made in the 2015 AG Coalition Viability Study).
- Connections to the River - The County is not capitalizing on the river resource as a means to improve the quality of life for residents and to attract tourists and non-residents to the area. – Need observation opportunities and scenic overlooks.
- Telecommunications - the low quality internet service is a barrier to population growth and economic development within the County.
- Nature Tourism – opportunities need to be identified to increase this industry in the County for locals and tourists – river access and observation, wayfinding signage, trail connections, communication of resources are seen as realistic things the County can do to improve.
- Communications – There is a need for better communication between the County and residents as well as the municipalities and residents – website improvements noted as achievable action.
- Guthrie Hospital – better capitalize on this resource – identifies ways to mutually grow and develop surrounding areas.