

**Potter County Comprehensive Plan –
Preserving and Enhancing the Quality of Life for Current and Future Residents of Potter County**

Chapter 5 – Housing

Introduction

Attractive housing and well maintained residential neighborhoods are among the most important assets of any community. In addition, housing must be affordable to the residents that live in the county or desire to live in the county. Good housing not only assures a sound tax base that will continue to appreciate in value, but also assures residents are living in an environment that is conducive to healthful and satisfactory life.

The quality and condition of housing is extremely important to the growth and prosperity of the county. Where substandard or deteriorated conditions exist, positive public and private action is required to prevent the spread of these conditions and to restore these areas to a sound condition. By analyzing existing housing characteristics and evaluating housing conditions, those areas of the county which require attention can be identified and recommendations for appropriate actions can be made.

Housing Inventory

In order to determine what the housing needs are, it is necessary to assess existing characteristics and patterns.

The county experienced an increase of 825 new dwelling units over the ten years from 1990 to 2000. This represents a 7.3% increase in that time period and averages out to 82.5 new dwelling units per year. This time frame correlated with the growth of Adelphia Communications, one of the county's largest and fastest growing companies during the decade of the 1990's. New housing units were needed not only for new employees of Adelphia, but for new employees of other successful companies and natural growth of the county. In the same time frame, the number of occupied dwellings increased by 12.1%. This is a positive trend since vacant dwellings tend to be neglected, which in turn not only affects the immediate neighborhood but the community as a whole. Renter occupied units increased by a modest 3.1% from 1990. Owning your own home is an American dream. Owner occupied units increased by 711 or 15.1% from 1990 – 2000. Ownership translates into pride and contributes to a healthy community and a solid tax base. Rental units provide housing for transient workers, young married couples, older residents downsizing, and young adults moving out on their own. Rental units meaningfully contribute to a healthful housing environment when properly maintained. It has been said that during special events, such as hunting season, the county's population could double. The natural beauty of the county, coupled with its manmade natural resources, geographic proximity to major population centers, and lower land values contributes to the county's high number of housing units classified as Seasonal, Recreational, or Occasional Use. The number of Seasonal, Recreational, or Occasional Use dwelling units increased by 16.2% from 1990 to 2000, which represents an increase of 658 new units. The units are generally in the form of cabins which have been in families or clubs for generations and decades; however, new seasonal units are being constructed for easy conversion to year-round residences. The conversion of these dwelling into year round housing is one the greatest threats to the quality of housing, and in some cases the environment. Typically, these older units are not constructed to the same standards that traditional homes are, and may not have a properly sized or operating septic system.

Table 5-1 provides the statistical breakdown on the county's housing inventory.

**Table 5-1
Housing Inventory - 2000
Potter County**

Potter County	1990	2000	Number Change 1990 - 00	Percent Change 1990 - 00
Total Dwelling Units	11,334	12,159	825	7.3
Occupied Housing Units	6,245	7,005	760	12.1
Owner Occupied	4,707	5,418	711	15.1
Renter Occupied	1,539	1,587	48	3.1
Vacant	1,035	443	(592)	(57.2)
Seasonal, Recreational, or Occasional Use	4,053	4,711	658	16.2

Source: U.S. Census

Dwelling Types

As identified in Table 5-2, the single family detached unit is the most common housing type in the county. Of the total 12,159 housing units, 9,268 or 76.2% are classified as 1-unit, detached. This is common among rural counties with smaller populations. Multi-unit dwellings, consisting of two or more units, total 837 units or 6.0% of all dwelling units in the county. Mobile homes are another form of housing. In total, there were 2,007 mobile homes in the county, which represents 16.5% of all units. Other forms of dwellings include boats, RV's, and vans. This category totaled 47 units. As identified in Table 5-1, of the county's 12,159 units, 4,711 are considered Seasonal, Recreational, or Occasional Use units. The exact breakdown between year round units and Seasonal, Recreational, or Occasional Use units is not possible; however, in reviewing Table 5-2, it appears the seasonal units are mainly comprised of mobile homes; boats, RV's, vans; and a small percentage of single family detached units.

**Table 5-2
Dwelling Types - 2000
Potter County**

Potter County	2000	Percent
Total Housing Units	12,159	100
1-unit, detached	9,268	76.2
1-unit, attached	69	.6
2 units	333	2.7
3 to 4 units	195	1.6
5 to 9 units	79	.6
10 to 19 units	84	.7
20 or more units	77	.6
Mobile home	2,007	16.5
Boat, RV, Van	47	.4

Source: U.S. Census

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Household Size

The distribution of persons among all housing units is an important index of general household size and the types of housing that may be needed in the county. A household includes all of the people who occupy a housing unit. A housing unit may be a house, an apartment, a mobile home, a group of rooms, or a single room that is occupied (or if vacant, is intended for occupancy) as separate living quarters. There are a total of 7,005 households in the county, which equates to an average household size of 2.54 persons per household. Persons per household were used instead of total housing units, which would provide a false person per household due to the high number of Seasonal, Recreational, or Occasional Use units. As identified in Table 5-3, Potter County had a higher average household size than the surrounding counties. The average household size will be used to determine future housing needs based on the population projections in Chapter 2.

**Table 5-3
Average Household Size - 2000
Potter County and Surrounding Counties**

County	Average Household Size
Potter County	2.54
Tioga County	2.48
Lycoming County	2.44
Clinton County	2.42
Cameron County	2.39
McKean County	2.40

Source: US Census

Occupancy and Vacancy Rates

Occupancy and vacancy rates are key indicators of the health of the county's housing market and in a broader sense its economic health. A strong occupancy rate indicates there is little available housing stock to absorb new residents moving into the county. A sudden growth of a single company or a new industry could conceivably require development of new homes. A high vacancy rate is an indicator that the county's population is shifting, and in some cases moving out of the county, and the existing housing stock is remaining vacant. As identified in Table 5-4, Potter County had an occupancy rate of 94.05% and a vacancy rate of 5.95%. These rates are based on the assumption that there are 7,448 year round dwelling units in the county (12,159 total housing units – 4,711 seasonal units = 7,448 year round dwelling units).

The county's vacancy rate is close to 6%, which is higher than the recognized healthy rate of 5%. As reported in the 2000 Census, there are a total of 7,005 occupied housing units and 443 vacant units.

**Table 5-4
Occupancy and Vacancy Rates - 2000
Potter County**

	Occupied Housing Rate	Vacant Housing Rate
Potter County	94.05%	5.95%

Source: US Census

Age of Structure

Statistics regarding the age of a structure are useful in evaluating structural conditions. Although the age of a structure does not necessarily imply its condition, it may point to an area or areas where repairs, heating costs, and inadequate plumbing and electrical systems could be prevalent. Table 5-5 shows that over 33.4% of the county's dwelling units were constructed in 1939 or earlier which indicates the county has older housing stock. The 1995 to 1998 time period saw the greatest number of new homes being constructed on average per year. In total, 789 homes were constructed in that time frame, which averages out to 263 units per year. The time periods between 1970 to 1989 and 1999 to 2002 have been consistent with the number of new homes being constructed ranging from 175 to 184 per year. The housing boom experienced in the mid to late 90's represents a period of economic growth and prosperity that led to new home construction.

**Table 5-5
Age of Structure - 2000
Potter County**

Age	Number	Percent	Average Number of New Homes per Year
1999 to 2002	550	4.4	183
1995 to 1998	789	6.5	263
1990 - 1994	719	5.9	179
1980 - 1989	1,661	13.7	184
1970 - 1979	1,575	13.0	175
1960 - 1969	1,216	10.0	135
1940 - 1959	1,886	15.5	99
1939 or earlier	4,106	33.8	-
Total	12,499*	-	-

Source: US Census and Potter County Planning Commission

* - Includes 340 Permits for new units received between March 2000 and 2002

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Housing Value and Rental Costs

Due to market changes, industry shifts, and the innate difficulties of estimating actual “worth” of a dwelling, determining the value of housing is one of the most difficult areas in which to establish current figures. Census data represents the most comprehensive survey of housing values and rental costs. As identified in Table 5-6, 2,479 units fall within the less than \$50,000 to \$99,999 value range. This represents 77% of the Specified Owner-Occupied Housing in the county, and is consistent with rural counties. The \$100,000 to \$199,999 value range represents the next largest value block with 658 units falling with in that range. The \$200,000 and greater value range represents the smallest value set, which can be expected in a county with a small population, no major city, and limited industry.

**Table 5-6
Housing Values
Potter County**

Value	Number	%
Specified Owner-Occupied Units	3,215	100
Less than \$50,000	965	30.0
\$50,000 to \$99,999	1,514	47.1
\$100,000 to \$149,000	455	14.2
\$150,000 to \$199,999	203	6.3
\$200,00 to \$299,999	64	2.0
\$300,000 to \$499,999	10	.3
\$500,000 to \$999,999	2	.1
\$1,000,000 or more	2	.1
Median Home Value	\$68,700	

Source: 2000 U.S. Census

As shown in Table 5-7, from 1980 to 1990 the county saw a 7% decline in the median value of housing. The 1998 Plan noted that the county’s housing stock appeared to have been stagnant with new housing unit starts barely exceeding the number of abandoned units. This was probably due in part to the economic downturn experienced during that time period. However, from 1990 to 2000 the county experienced a healthy increase of 68% or \$27,800 in the median value per unit. This increase can be attributed to the approximately 1,718 new dwelling units that were constructed between 1990 and 2000. The housing surge and increase in value can be correlated with the economic growth and prosperity experienced in the county during that time frame. Maintaining such growth during population and economic shifts is challenging. As one industry downsizes or vacates the county, available housing will flood the market, driving down the median value, and overall values. This surge in housing value has elevated the county from lowest to fourth highest median value when compared against the surrounding counties.

**Table 5-7
Median Value
Potter County 1980, 1990, 2000
Surrounding Counties - 2000**

County	2000 Median Value	1990 Median Value	1980 Median Value
Potter County	\$68,700	\$40,900	\$43,988
Tioga County	\$72,000	N/A	N/A
Lycoming County	\$86,200	N/A	N/A
Clinton County	\$78,000	N/A	N/A
Cameron County	\$61,300	N/A	N/A
McKean County	\$53,000	N/A	N/A

Source: 2000 U.S. Census, 1990 Potter County Comprehensive Plan

Rental units play a significant role in the overall housing market. Retirees, young adults, transient employees, and young families utilize rental units as temporary housing, or in some downsizing cases, permanent residences. When compared against the surrounding counties, Potter County has the second highest median contract rent behind Lycoming County. The relatively high median rent value can be attributed to transient employees working in the healthcare and technology industries in the county.

Table 5-8 provides a statistical breakdown of the county’s contract rents, and Table 5-9 compares the county’s median rent value against the surrounding counties.

**Table 5-8
Contract Rents
Potter County**

Value	Number	%
Specified Renter-Occupied Units	1,478	100
Less than \$200	78	5.3
\$200 to \$299	116	7.8
\$300 to \$499	697	47.2
\$500 to \$749	321	21.7
\$750 to \$999	73	4.9
\$1,000 to \$1,499	2	.1
\$1,500 or more	0	0
No Cash Rent	191	12.9
Median Rent Value	\$432.00	

Source: 2000 U.S. Census

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**Table 5-9
Median Contract Rent
Potter County and
Surrounding Counties - 2000**

County	Median Rental Value 2000
Potter County	\$432.00
Tioga County	\$421.00
Lycoming County	\$449.00
Clinton County	\$411.00
Cameron County	\$368.11
McKean County	\$416.00

Source: 2000 U.S. Census

Housing Conditions

Statistics reflecting the proportion of dwelling units that lack complete kitchen and plumbing facilities are useful as indicators of substandard housing.

The U.S. Census defines these housing conditions as follows:

Kitchen Facilities - A unit has complete kitchen facilities when it has all of the following:

1. An installed sink with piped water.
2. A range or cook stove.
3. A mechanical refrigerator.

Plumbing facilities - The data on plumbing facilities are obtained from both occupied and vacant housing units. Complete plumbing facilities include:

1. Hot and cold piped water.
2. A flush toilet.
3. A bathtub or shower.

All three facilities must be located in the housing unit.

**Table 5-10
Dwelling Units by Plumbing and Kitchen Facilities
Potter County – 2000
Occupied Dwelling Units**

County	Lacking Complete Plumbing Facilities		Lacking Complete Kitchen Facilities	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Potter County	51	.7	53	.8
Tioga County	96	.6	91	.6
Lycoming County	184	.4	298	.6
Clinton County	58	.4	52	.4
Cameron County	10	.4	12	.4
McKean County	69	.4	125	.7

Source: US Census

Potter County has a higher percentage of occupied dwelling units lacking complete plumbing and kitchen facilities than the surrounding counties. This can be attributed to seasonal, recreational, and occasional use homes being converted to year round residences.

As part of the 1998 Comprehensive Plan, a housing condition survey was completed. The survey identified deferred maintenance properties. A deferred maintenance unit is a unit which has three or more deficiencies which should have been maintained within the past three to five years and typically requires rehabilitation beyond routine repairs. No attempt was made to identify dilapidated or unsuitable units for rehabilitation since those units will be lost and not considered part of the county's housing stock.

**Table 5-11
Housing Condition Inventory
Potter County - 1998**

Municipality	Units	Deferred Maintenance	% Total
Coudersport	1,247	148	12.0
Shinglehouse	539	100	19.0
Genesee	437	23	5.0
Ulysses	294	35	12.0
Oswayo	82	16	20.0
Galeton	637	164	26.0
Austin	278	77	28.0
Total	3,514	563	16.0

Source - 1998 Potter County Comprehensive Plan

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563 units or 16% of the surveyed homes were classified as deferred maintenance. Good quality well maintained housing contributes to a healthy community. As is evident in Table 5-11, work is needed to ensure that the county's housing stock is conserved and updated for healthy living conditions for existing and future home owners. Those municipalities that exhibit a large percentage of deferred maintenance structures must be targeted by conservation and rehabilitation improvement programs to update plumbing, electrical, and weather proofing to reduce energy dependency. Residents living in those structures may not have the wherewithal or economic means to initiate needed improvements.

Elderly Housing and Care Facilities

As the population of the county continues to age, the need for elderly housing and care facilities will become widely needed. The following Long Term Care and Nursing Home Facilities are located in the county:

Facility Name	Type	Location
Charles Cole Memorial Hospital	Nursing Home	Coudersport
Hewitt Manor	Long Term Care	Shinglehouse
Brosius Manor	Personal Care	Galeton
Hancock's	Long Term Care	
Thunderbird Rest Facility	Long Term Care	
Cole Manor	Elderly Housing	Coudersport
Drakes Personal Care Home	Personal Care	Galeton
* Freeman House	Elderly Housing	Coudersport
* Honeoye Haven	Elderly Housing	Shinglehouse
Maple View Residential Services	Nursing Home	Coudersport
Maple View Residential Services Maple View II	Nursing Home	Coudersport
Maple View Residential Services	Nursing Home	Roulette
* Redwood Village	Elderly Housing	Galeton
Sweden Valley Manor	Nursing Home	Coudersport
Oswayo Apartments	Elderly Housing	Shinglehouse
Silver Maples	Elderly Housing	Ulysses

Source: Potter County Planning Commission,
* - Operated by the Potter County Housing Authority

All of the elderly care facilities are located in or in close proximity to Coudersport, Galeton, Ulysses, or Shinglehouse Boroughs, which provide services to the elderly, and more importantly, are walkable. The Coudersport area is home to the Cole Memorial Hospital and many general practitioners and specialty doctors are located at the hospital or in the surrounding community.

Potter County Housing Authority

Housing Authority of Potter County

8 East Seventh Street, PO Box 312, Coudersport, PA 16915
(814) 274-7031

Goals:	Provide housing for elderly and low-income families in Potter County
Services:	Public housing, low-income housing, elderly housing and rental assistance.
Eligibility:	Income eligibility requirements.

The Potter County Housing Authority operates the following elderly housing facilities:

- Freeman House
- Honeoye Haven
- Redwood Village

Housing Plan

Suitable housing is certainly a basic human need. People's housing needs tend to focus on finding a home that balances a variety of characteristics. Thus, it is critical for the county to provide strategies and guidance to its municipalities regarding housing and how a variety of housing types and values provide for its existing and future residents.

The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (Act 247) requires a Housing Plan that will meet the housing needs of present residents and those individual and families anticipated to reside in the county, 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 for households of all income levels. The Housing Plan will serve to outline approaches to improving and maintaining sound housing in the county and ensure fair share housing requirements are met.

The concept of "fair share housing" was addressed in the following two court cases before the Pennsylvania Supreme Court:

- Robert B Surrick v. Zoning Hearing Board of the Township of Upper Providence et. al. – Decided December 24, 1977
- Robert C. Fernely, Lois M. McNeil and Joan M. McCracken v. Board of Supervisors of Schuylkill Township. – Decided December 27, 1985.

In general, the court has determined that in the fair share issue, the percentage of land available for multi-family dwellings becomes relevant. This percentage must be considered in light of current population growth pressure within the community as well as the county, and in light of the total amount of undeveloped land in the community. Where the amount of land for multi-family dwelling is disproportionately small in relation to the above factors, the municipality will be held to be exclusionary.

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To help determine future needs and services, a population projection was prepared utilizing a straight line projection, which is the simplest form of projecting population increases and decreases. The Advisory Committee reviewed and agreed the projection fairly represented the future direction of the county. The agreed upon projection has the county growing at a modest 5.66% from 18,080 to 19,104 residents over the ten year period from 2000 to 2010. From 2010 to 2020, the county is projected to grow by another 1,194 residents, which represents a growth rate of 6.25%. In total, the county is projected to grow by 2,218 residents over a twenty year period from 2000 to 2020.

For comparison purposes, a projection developed by the Pennsylvania State Data Center and the Population Research Institute at the Pennsylvania State University was reviewed. This projection has Potter County losing population over the next twenty years. The projected 2010 population is 15,276 residents and the 2020 population is 14,852. The Data Center prepared a projection for year 2000 at which time it estimated the county would have a population of 15,899, which is off the actual 2000 population by 2,181 residents. It was evident after reviewing the Data Center's population projection that the projection prepared by the planning commission best represented the future growth of the county.

New Housing Units

As discussed earlier, a population projection was prepared through year 2020. Based on that projection and applying the county's average household size of 2.54 persons per household, a total of 1,123 new dwelling units is required to meet the housing needs of the projected population. This estimate does not consider conversions of seasonal dwellings (4,711 units) to year round dwellings, or vacant dwellings, which total 443. The total number of housing units in the county will increase from 12,159 to 13,282 from 2000 to 2020. Applying a vacancy rate of 5%, a total of 664 units will remain uninhabited in year 2020.

The distribution of these homes will ultimately fall within those school districts that have growing municipalities. Twenty-two of the thirty municipalities are projected to experience a positive rate of growth. They include the following municipalities:

- Abbott Township
- Austin Borough
- Bingham Township
- Clara Township
- Eulalia Township
- Galeton Borough
- Hebron Township
- Hector Township
- Homer Township
- Oswayo Township
- Pleasant Valley Township
- Portage Township
- Roulette Township
- Sharon Township
- Stewardson Township
- Summit Township

- Sweden Township
- Ulysses Township
- Ulysses Borough
- West Branch Township
- Wharton Township

Table 5-13 looks at housing needs at a regional level utilizing the county's school districts. A total of 1,123 new housing units are required to meet the county's 2020 population and maintain a 5% vacancy rate. By looking at housing needs on a regional level, areas that are served by public sewer and public water but are not growing, such as Coudersport Borough, can accommodate a percentage of the new housing that will be constructed in the Coudersport Area School District. This is keeping in line with the growth management strategy discussed in the Future Land Use Plan. For example, based on the population projections, the Austin Area School District will need 59 new homes to meet the district's 2020 population. The actual number of homes constructed in the district from 2000 to 2003 totaled 27 for an average of nine per year. The required yearly housing starts to meet the projected 20 year housing projection are three. All of the school districts, except for the Austin Area School District and Coudersport Area School, are on target to meet their projected housing needs. Both the Austin Area and Coudersport Area School Districts are experiencing higher home construction rates than is required to meet their 2020 population. If the average rate continues in both school districts, the Austin Area School District will have 180 new homes and the Coudersport Area School District will have 640 new homes over the 20 years.

The growth districts correlate with resident location of Adelphia employees as identified in the Impact Assessment Study prepared by Delta Development. They are generally located around Coudersport Borough and along the Route 44, 49, and 449 Corridors. Recent changes at Adelphia have shifted jobs out of the county; however, Adelphia is still one of the largest employers in Potter County and will continue to help shape the housing market.

From 2000-2002, 232 new homes were constructed for a three year average of 77 homes per year. Required yearly starts to meet the 2020 population projection total 56. Based on the current yearly average, the county will meet its housing needs in 15 years, and exceed it by 417 units after 20 years.

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**Table 5-12
Projected New Housing Units, Actual Housing Units from 2000-2002 Building Permit Data,
Actual Three Year Average, and Required Yearly Housing Starts to meet
Projected Housing Needs by School District**

School District	Projected Housing Units Based on Population Projection	Actual number of New Units Based on Building Permits 2000-02	Actual Three Year Average	Required Yearly Starts to Meet Projected Housing Needs
Austin Area School District	59	27	9	3
Coudersport Area School District	473	96	32	23
Galeton Area School District	195	34	11	10
Northern Potter Area School District	244	47	15	12
Oswayo Area School District	121	25	8	6
Port Allegany Area School District	28	0	0	1
Keystone Central Area School District	3	3	1	1
Total	1,123	232	77	56

Source: Potter County Planning Commission and RETTEW Associates

Future Land Use and Housing

The Future Land Use Plan formally establishes the desired land uses and general development design guidelines for Potter County. The Plan is formulated from a variety of resources and analysis of information contained in previous chapters of the Comprehensive Plan. In general, the Plan defines areas best suited for new growth, redevelopment, and infill development.

A growth management strategy was conceived in lieu of a traditional land use pattern. The growth management strategy is predicated on Growing Smarter principles where new growth is guided to areas of the county that can support it. These areas are generally consistent with existing public water and sewerage service areas, access to transportation infrastructure, and existing development patterns. Based on this strategy, the county was divided into the following land use classifications:

1. **High Growth Area** – The high growth area generally consists of low to high density residential, commercial and industrial uses and services. This classification has excellent accessibility to highways and generally can be considered a destination point for shopping, employment, government activity and health and human resources. A high growth area is served by public water and public sewer with reserve capacity for future growth.

2. **Rural Growth Area** – The rural growth area is typically smaller in size than a high growth area, but still includes low to high density residential and smaller scale commercial and industrial uses and services, and generally has good to excellent accessibility to local highways. Rural growth areas serve sub-regions of a larger geographic area, and are served by public water and sewer with limited reserve capacity for future growth.
3. **Village Area** – Villages include unincorporated and incorporated boroughs that are developed with low to medium density residential and very small scale commercial and industrial uses. Accessibility is generally from a state road; however, it may not be considered a major thoroughfare. Historical villages serve a sub-region of a rural growth area and are generally served by public water or public sewer, but not both, and are recognized by the local population; therefore, the sense of place is very important. Growth in this classification should be limited to new and infill residential development and very small scale non-residential uses.
4. **Rural Hamlet** – Rural hamlets are clusters of homes and very small scale non-residential uses generally located at major highway crossroads. They are historic in nature and are recognized by the local population as important landmarks; therefore, similar to the village areas, the sense of place is very important. On-lot water and septic systems are the primary source of water and sewage treatment and growth is not encouraged. Infill and redevelopment will be the primary growth catalysts in the rural hamlets.
5. **Rural Resource Area** – The rural resource area generally consists of all areas outside of high growth, rural growth, historical village, and rural hamlet areas. This classification includes areas of the county that have rural resources, such as, rural occupations, agriculture, low to very low residential uses, hunting cabins and vacation properties, public lands and timbering. On-lot water and sewage are the primary method for potable water and sewage treatment.
6. **Town Centers** – The town center is similar to a central business district, which is defined as an intensively developed, mixed use area within a borough, usually containing retail uses, government offices, service uses, professional uses, cultural and entertainment establishments, restaurants, hotels, and appropriate transportation facilities. Town centers may include second story apartments above street level businesses.

Each of the county’s five primary school districts is anchored by a borough, which is served by public water and public sewer, and represents an epicenter of activity, including shopping and employment. The Future Land Use Plan builds upon the borough’s geographic configuration and different service levels. Coudersport Borough is the county seat and provides a variety of services to the community, including a variety of housing types, shopping, employment, human and social services, and health services. It is a central node in the county to which all other boroughs and municipalities are connected.

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Coudersport Borough is part of the Coudersport School District. Based on the population projection and as identified in Table 5-12, the district’s housing total is expected to increase by 473 units over the next twenty years, making it by far the fastest growing school district in the county. The Future Land Plan identifies Coudersport Borough and areas immediately adjacent to the borough as a high growth area, which generally consists of low to high density residential uses. Higher density development can take advantage of the borough’s public facilities while encouraging low density development in areas not served by public facilities.

Shinglehouse Borough, Ulysses Borough, Galeton Borough, and Austin Borough are all classified as rural growth areas, and each of their respective school districts is projected to grow in total housing units as identified in Table 5-12, however, not as fast as the Coudersport Area School District. The rural growth area is typically smaller in size than the high growth area, but still includes low to high density residential at an appropriate scale to its surroundings. Because of constraints on the public sewer systems in these boroughs, high density development may be limited in size. Low density development would be permitted in the rural resource areas of the district not served by public facilities.

Within each of the county’s primary school districts, village areas and rural hamlets have been identified. These areas provide additional opportunities for low to medium density residential development.

Vacancy Rates

Generally, a vacancy rate between 4% and 6% is considered a healthy rate. Below 4% is an indicator of too few housing units, which may lead to inflated prices and/or higher demand for new housing; whereas, a vacancy rate of greater than 6% is an indicator of too many units, which may lead to deflated prices and lower demand. Unfortunately, a true picture is difficult to discern from one point in time since new units coming on line or in the process of being built may cloud the true picture.

The Census provides vacancy rates for the county. In 2000, the homeowner vacancy rate county wide was 5.95%, which is nearing the upper end of what is considered to be healthy; however, it does fall within the acceptable 5% to 6% range. This vacancy rate would lead to the conclusion that the county has the proper mix of occupied and vacant dwelling units to ensure a building boom and/or that inflationary changes are not looming. Table 5-12 list the occupancy and vacancy rates for the county’s 31 municipalities.

**Table 5-13
Occupancy and Vacancy Rates
2000**

Municipality	Occupancy Rate by %	Vacancy Rate by %
Abbott Township	95	5
Allegany Township	94	6
Austin Borough	93	7
Bingham Township	92	8
Clara Township	88	12
Coudersport Borough	95	5

Municipality	Occupancy Rate by %	Vacancy Rate by %
Eulalia Township	98	2
Galeton Borough	89	11
Genesee Township	90	10
Harrison Township	93	7
Hebron Township	97	3
Hector Township	95	5
Homer Township	96	4
Keating Township	96	4
Oswayo Borough	95	5
Oswayo Township	90	10
Pike Township	96	4
Pleasant Township	86	14
Portage Township	96	4
Roulette Township	96	4
Sharon Township	97	3
Shinglehouse Borough	95	5
Stewardson Township	83	17
Summit Township	96	3
Sweden Township	94	6
Sylvania Township	94	6
Ulysses Borough	93	7
Ulysses Township	95	5
West Branch Township	96	4
Wharton Township	92	8

Source: Potter County Planning Commission and 2000 U.S. Census

As is evident in Table 5-13, sixteen of the county’s 30 municipalities have acceptable vacancy rates, four have vacancy rates less than 4%, and eleven have rates higher than 6%. Those municipalities with a vacancy rate lower than 4% are subject to inflated housing prices or are susceptible to increased housing development. Those municipalities with a vacancy rate higher than 6% have a glut of housing which could cause home prices to decrease. Map 5-1 shows the location of those municipalities that have vacancy ranges between 0 to 3%, 4% to 6%, and 7% and greater.

Housing Unit Distribution

The distribution of housing throughout the county is important to meeting its future housing needs. Table 5-14 shows dwelling types and percentages by school districts. Not surprisingly, the Coudersport Area School District had the highest number of dwelling units and the greatest distribution of housing types. In total, the Coudersport Area, Galeton Area, and Northern Area School Districts have the greatest diversity of housing and coincide with those districts projected to experience the greatest growth, and which offer a variety of services, such as, employment, shopping, and accessibility. This further supports the Future Land Use Plan and associated growth strategies. Table 5-12 lists the projected number of housing units per school district based on the population projection. For planning purposes, the distribution of housing must be further defined by predicting the number of dwelling

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types per school district. This is important because the distribution of multi-family units within the district should be located within public sewer and public water service areas. Single family detached units can be located within public service areas; however, they are well suited for the rural areas of the county classified as Rural Resource in the Future land Use Plan. The distribution of housing is based on the assumption that the county's current housing distribution trend will continue to remain similar as in 2000 over the next twenty years. Table 5-15 represents the distribution of dwelling units throughout the county's seven school districts. The distribution was divided into the following three categories: Single-family detached, multi-family units consisting of 1-unit attached to 20 or more units, and finally, mobile homes, boats, recreational vehicles and vans. Not surprisingly, the Coudersport Area School District is projected to receive the greatest distribution of multi-family housing with 50 dwellings of varying unit totals. This is in keeping with the Future Land Use Plan which has identified Coudersport Borough as a High Growth Area. The Galeton Area, Northern Area, and Oswayo Valley School Districts have similar multi-unit dwelling distribution projections, and would be encouraged to be constructed within the district's respected boroughs. Mobile homes currently play an important role in providing housing and will continue to do so in the future.

**Table 5-14
Dwelling Types and Percentage
by School District - 2000**

Housing Type	Austin	Coudersport	Galeton	Northern	Oswayo	Keystone	Port Alleg.
Total Housing Units	1,770	3,170	2,193	2,469	1,447	348	774
% of Total Housing Units	14.5	26.0	18.0	20.7	11.9	2.8	6.3
1-unit, detached	1,460 82.4	2,429 76.6	1,725 78.6	1,839 74.4	1,055 72.9	316 90.0	550 71.0
1-unit, attached	2 .11	16 .5	12 .5	17 .6	17 1.1	4 1.1	0
2 units	9 .5	163 5.1	48 2.1	61 2.4	31 2.1	0	21 2.7
3 to 4 units	13 .7	68 2.1	26 1.1	44 1.7	31 2.1	0	13 1.6
5 to 9 units	0	42 1.3	20 .9	8 .3	9 .6	0	0
10 to 19 units	0	42 1.3	13 .5	3 .1	26 1.7	0	0
20 or more units	0	7 .2	11 .5	25 1.0	34 2.5	0	0
Mobile home	282 15.9	385 12.1	333 15.1	460 18.6	228 15.7	28 8.0	190 24.5
Boat, RV, Van	4 .5	18 .5	5 .2	12 .4	16 1.1	0	0

Source: U.S. Census

**Table 5-15
Housing Unit Distribution by School District
2020**

Housing Type	Austin	Coudersport	Galeton	Northern	Oswayo	Keystone	Port Alleg.
Total New Housing Units	59	473	195	244	121	3	28
1-unit, detached	49	362	153	181	88	1	20
1-unit, attached							
2 units							
3 to 4 units	1	50	12	15	12	1	1
5 to 9 units							
10 to 19 units							
20 or more units							
Mobile home	9	59	30	46	20	1	7
Boat, RV, Van							

Source: U.S. Census and RETTEW Associates, Inc.

Table 5-16 further refines the distribution of dwelling units identified in Table 5-15 by dwelling type. The Coudersport Area School District and Oswayo Valley School District both are projected to be recipients of a multi-family dwelling unit of twenty units or greater. All of the school districts are recipients of additional single family detached dwelling units and mobile homes.

**Table 5-16
Housing Distribution by Unit Type
2020**

Housing Type	Austin	Coudersport	Galeton	Northern	Oswayo	Keystone	Port Alleg.
Total New Housing Units	59	473	195	244	121	3	28
1-unit, detached	49	362	153	181	88	1	20
1-unit, attached	0	3	0	3	1	1	0
2 units	1	25	5	7	3	0	1
3 to 4 units	0	9	3	4	3	0	0
5 to 9 units	0	6	3	1	0	0	0
10 to 19 units	0	6	1	0	2	0	0
20 or more units	0	1	0	0	3	0	0
Mobile home	9	57	30	45	20	0	7
Boat, RV, Van	0	2	0	0	2	1	0

Source: U.S. Census

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Conservation, Rehabilitation, and Redevelopment

The traditional program approach to housing rehabilitation and redevelopment can be effectively applied to Potter County to meet the overall housing needs. As part of the 1998 Comprehensive Plan, a housing condition survey was completed. The survey identified deferred maintenance properties. A deferred maintenance unit is a unit which has three or more deficiencies which should have been maintained within the past three to five years and typically requires rehabilitation beyond routine repairs. No attempt was made to identify dilapidated or unsuitable units for rehabilitation since those units will be lost and not considered part of the county's housing stock. As identified in Table 5-11, 563 units or 16% of the surveyed homes were classified as deferred maintenance. A housing rehabilitation program is comprised of the following techniques:

Conservation

This technique is directed toward the prevention of blighted conditions and should be applied to those areas of the county with little or no existing blight. Conservation involves continued maintenance of structures and properties, repair of deteriorated structures, repair or removal of dilapidated structures and conditions, and enforcement of housing and/or building code standards.

Rehabilitation

This technique is directed toward the revitalization of more deteriorated areas by turning them into sound, healthy neighborhoods. This is accomplished by the use of an area wide renovation plan and facilitating rehabilitation activities of deteriorated structures and properties. Community Development Block Grant money can be used for housing rehabilitation.

Redevelopment

This technique is directed towards the removal of severely blighted area wide conditions through the combined use of conservation and rehabilitation methods. In a redevelopment project, property is normally acquired by a public body and substantially modified and sold to an agency to improve in accordance with an approved plan. This method, although the most costly and time consuming, is the most comprehensive method of eliminating blight.

Good quality well maintained housing contributes to a healthy community. Work is needed to ensure that the county's housing stock is conserved and updated for healthy living conditions for existing and future home owners. Those municipalities that exhibit a large percentage of deferred maintenance structures must be targeted by conservation and rehabilitation programs to update plumbing, electrical, and weather proofing to reduce energy dependency. Residents living in those structures may not have the wherewithal or economic means to initiate needed improvements. Redevelopment, although a viable option, is the most controversial and should only be used as a last resort to improve housing.

Potter County Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance

The Potter County Planning Commission has approval authority in all municipalities with the exception of Coudersport Borough; therefore, the county has the greatest influence on development. The Potter County Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance is the legislative ordinance that controls development in the county, by establishing requirements, such as minimum lot size, building setbacks, and stormwater control, for subdivision and land development activity. The subdivision and land development ordinance regulates how land is developed, not the use of the land.

Table 1 in Chapter 6 of the ordinance establishes minimum lot areas based on the availability of public water and public sewer. Minimum lot area for lots served by public water and sewer is 10,000 sq. ft., a lot served by public sewer only is 20,000 sq. ft., and a lot not served by public sewer is 40,000 sq. ft.

Soil suitability for standard on-lot septic systems was analyzed in Chapter 4. It was determined that with the exception of the Lackawanna-Wellsboro-Cattaraugus-Culvers, and Bath Soils, all soils in the county were not suited for standard on-lot septic-systems. Since the majority of new dwelling units in the county will be single-family detached in the Rural Resource land classification, it is recommended that the minimum lot area for single-family detached dwellings be increased from forty thousand square feet to one and one-half acres (65,340 sq. ft.) The larger lot will allow additional area to replace a malfunctioning septic system.

Regulatory Barriers to Affordable Housing

The Governor's Center for Local Government Services (The Center) has identified the following problems that are contained in many local regulations that prevent development of affordable housing. The Center has also developed suggested strategies to overcome the identified problems.

1. An insufficient amount of land in the Commonwealth is zoned for medium density (4 to 8 units/acre) and high density (nine or more units/acre) residential development to meet housing needs. In Potter County, twenty-nine of the county's thirty municipalities are regulated by the County's Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance. Medium and high density development could occur in those municipalities that have public infrastructure available. The following strategies are generally implemented through a zoning ordinance. Implementation of these strategies can occur through a county-wide zoning ordinance or through development of local or regional zoning ordinances.

Land zoned for higher density may not be suitable because central sewers are not available or treatment capacity is inadequate. Revenue sharing funds, that once funded many capital improvements, including sewerage infrastructure, are no longer available. Other federal funds are available only to upgrade current sewage treatment but not to expand service. Therefore, a large share of the burden of expanding lines has shifted to newcomers.

Where properly zoned land has sewerage available, the hookup (tap-in) fees may contribute to increasing the cost of the house beyond affordability.

Too much land may be zoned for industrial uses.

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Office park districts often fail to encourage or permit mixed uses with medium and high density residential uses.

Some zoning does not allow different types of multifamily structures (such as apartments and townhouses) or mixed-use districts. Instead, housing types are segregated.

The minimum site size, such as 100 acres for planned residential developments (PRDs) and cluster subdivisions is often excessively large. Many ordinances require 100 or more acres. These large vacant tracts are increasingly scarce, and their large size is unnecessary for development of a successful PRD.

Minimum lot sizes often start at one-half acre or more and are, therefore, too costly to make construction of smaller single-family houses financially feasible.

A high percentage of total municipal land area is frequently zoned for larger lots and/or houses with minimum floor area requirements that are often excessive. The size of living area needed for public health purposes (to prevent overcrowding) is much lower than most ordinances demand. Public health minimums are linked to occupancy standards, which are absent from zoning regulations. Sizes of houses could be left for the housing market to determine.

Suggested Solutions

- (a) Zone a greater amount of land for medium and high density residential development.
 - (1) Rezone excess land that may be currently zoned industrial for moderate and high density residential uses.
 - (2) Medium and high-density residential uses should be encouraged or permitted in office park and commercial districts.
 - (3) Downsize lots to accommodate smaller single family homes.
- (b) Land should be rezoned to allow differing types of residential structures and to allow mixed-use districts.
- (c) Reduce or eliminate the minimum site size for PRDs and cluster subdivisions.
- (d) Eliminate minimum floor area requirements.

2. Zoning favors conventional site design rather than less expensive cluster design techniques.

PRDs and cluster subdivisions are often not allowed or are allowed only at low, non-affordable densities. Many townships in some areas repealed their PRD provisions or reduced allowable densities.

Flexible cluster designs that can accommodate various housing types often are allowed only as special exceptions or conditional use, which entails more delay and expense. In addition, cluster developments can be designed to reduce adverse environmental impacts and can even be sited on a working farm in

the less productive portions and soil types. Further, disallowing clustering and mixed types of housing also creates barriers to continuing care retirement communities—a necessity to help house the burgeoning elderly population.

Suggested Solutions

- (a) Allow PRDs and cluster subdivisions at higher densities.
- (b) Allow cluster designs without special exception or conditional use requirements.
- (c) Reduce or eliminate large minimum tract sizes for cluster developments.

3. Lot dimensions such as frontage, front setbacks, and side yard requirements can be excessive and add unnecessary cost. These devices also operate as a redundant density control.

Lot frontage determines the number of linear feet of street per lot, which directly determines the quantity of pavement, curbs, storm water control, sidewalks, sewer lines, water lines, and other utility installations, all of which add to the cost of a development. (Typically, a lot frontage of 150 feet may be required for a large lot (1 acre) single family detached home compared to 100 feet of frontage for half acre lots or 50 feet of frontage for detached homes allowed on lots of 6,000 square feet.)

Front setbacks typically require the house to be set back 40 to 60 feet from the street right-of-way line which itself is usually another 10 or 15 feet removed from the cartway/curb line.

- (a) Front setbacks were a reaction to city blocks with buildings at the curb line and to a perceived need for protection from street noise, headlight glare, and runaway vehicles. Today, other techniques combined with minimal setbacks can provide protection from those hazards.
- (b) Each foot of front yard setback increases costs for service lines for sewers, water, driveway paving, site clearing, and landscaping.
- (c) A rule of thumb is each foot of setback costs five times as much as each foot added at the rear. Rigid side yards can result in little usable space.
- (d) Space at the side of conventional detached homes is seldom used for outdoor activities; it is often shaded, too narrow, or devoid of privacy.
- (e) Alternate site designs can maximize the usefulness of outdoor space on smaller lots.

Suggested Solutions

- (a) Reduce lot frontage and thereby reduce costs for paving, storm water control, and utility installations.
- (b) Reduce front setbacks and thereby reduce costs for paving, service lines, site clearance, and landscaping.

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(c) Allow zero lot line and patio and atrium houses on smaller lots, which can reduce costs and still provide amenity.

4. Excessive street widths and construction standards can be required in subdivision ordinances when the standards are unrelated to expected uses.

The same development standards are applied to both large and small developments instead of being tailored to fit the development's use or intensity.

(a) A street serving a minor subdivision or cul-de-sac can be narrower than one planned for more intense use.

(b) Streets comprise about half of the improvement costs of the typical single-family detached house.

(c) Street dimensions directly affect the cost of other improvements, such as utilities, storm water control, curbs and sidewalks.

(d) Wider streets cost more to maintain and plow, thereby increasing municipal costs, which impact on real estate taxes and therefore housing costs.

Wider streets are required in an attempt to solve problems related to parking and special vehicles such as fire trucks, snowplows, and garbage trucks.

(a) Off-street and common parking areas can cut costs by reducing street widths.

(b) Since paving standards for parking are less expensive than for streets, it is cost-effective not to use streets to serve as parking lots.

(c) Narrower streets reduce traffic speeds and increase safety.

(d) It is costly to design residential streets to accommodate infrequent access by special vehicles. Fire trucks need quick access to the site and can make backing and turnaround movements at leisure after the fire has been extinguished.

(e) Requirements for residential street widths usually range from 26 to 36 feet, averaging about 30 feet. (Some planners believe a street width of 20 feet or less is sufficient.)

(f) Excessive street widths discourage internal subdivision streets in favor of developing sprawl-type frontage lots. Excessive street widths engender troublesome substandard private streets.

Suggested Solutions

(a) Tailor development standards for streets to expected use or size of development, thereby reducing the cost of other improvements, such as utilities, storm water control, curbs and sidewalks, and the cost of maintenance.

(b) Allow or use off-street and common parking areas to reduce need for wider streets.

5. Some subdivision ordinances still require traditional concrete and pipe storm water systems that are costly to build and maintain. Traditional storm drainage regulations also prevent or impede recharge of the groundwater supply at or near the site and may unnecessarily increase the velocity and quantity of runoff as it concentrates at collection points.

Some subdivision ordinances contain outdated and unreasonable storm water management provisions that add unnecessarily to the cost of development. The provisions may require overly stringent standards in regard to peak runoff and quantities. For example, some ordinances unfairly require developers to limit storm water runoff to less than the runoff that occurred prior to development, or to correct off-site deficiencies caused by errors of the past or the cumulative impacts of past developments.

Suggested Solution

(a) Unless directed otherwise by an applicable watershed storm water plan pursuant to the Storm Water Management Act (Act 1978-167), subdivision ordinances should encourage the use of natural surface drainage that reduces the need for expensive infrastructure, relying instead on existing swales wherever possible to accommodate runoff. Municipalities should make sure that the standards contained in their ordinances regarding peak flow, total runoff and other factors are not unreasonable. Cost savings of natural versus traditional storm water management can possibly be higher than 50 percent depending upon: (1) the difference between the old standards and the new; (2) the proportion of the site which can be drained naturally; and (3) the specific soil absorption characteristics.

6. Subdivision regulations often require sidewalks on both sides of the street and inhibit the use of alternate, cost-saving pedestrian walkways.

Suggested Solutions

(a) Require sidewalks only where needed, such as on just one side of the street rather than on both sides. Sidewalks may be unnecessary on low-density cul-de-sacs.

(b) Where feasible, use pathway systems instead of sidewalks to connect logical destinations away from roads. Allow alternate lower cost materials such as bituminous paving for pathways, which do not cross driveways.

7. Developers may need incentives to produce affordable units and to encourage infill development of vacant tracts.

Suggested Solutions

(a) Award density bonuses for construction of affordable housing units at controlled, below-market rate prices, and for infill development of vacant tracts.

(b) Award density bonuses for rehabilitation of existing substandard housing provided the bonus units are available for low and moderate-income persons.

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8. Landscaping requirements, such as large minimum tree sizes, inflexible street tree requirements, and screening buffer standards, can be excessive and too costly or rigid.

Buffers, which are usually required in too many circumstances, may be necessary to screen residential uses from commercial or industrial uses, but not other residential uses. Tree sizes of 2 1/2 inch caliper or larger are common and can increase cost over a 1 or 2 inch caliper. Ordinances designed to promote or create a rural appearance can produce an urban-like setting through a combination of requirements for street trees at fixed intervals, sidewalks on both sides of wide streets, and curbing.

Suggested Solutions

- (a) Modify large minimum caliper tree size requirements.
- (b) Only require screen buffers around certain areas of the site such as parking lots, primary streets, and the most intensely developed areas instead of requiring buffering around the entire perimeter of a residential development.
- (c) Allow existing topography, vegetation, and berms as options to achieve buffering.

9. Subdivision regulations sometimes demand more land for park or recreation purposes than is required by MPC Section 503(11).

Ordinance standards that govern the amount of land required being dedicated for park or recreation purposes are sometimes arbitrary and excessive. Developers are often required to pay fees in lieu of dedication of land for park and recreation purposes without the option of dedicating land. Developers are sometimes required to provide park or recreational facilities in addition to the dedication of land.

Suggested Solutions

- (a) The municipality should prepare and adopt a recreation plan as an element of the comprehensive plan to use as a guide to establish the regulatory (subdivision and land development ordinance) standards.
- (b) The regulatory standards must adhere to and be in accordance with the prerequisites mandated by MPC Section 503(11).

10. Common open space requirements associated with cluster and PRD (planned residential development) provisions are sometimes excessive.

Requirements for dedication of land for "park and recreational" purposes are now strictly governed by MPC Section 503(11), and any additional dedications or reservations for common open space should be commensurate with appropriate increases of density. Common open space dedications or reservations, according to the MPC, are for the use and enjoyment of the residents of the development.

Suggested Solutions

- (a) Municipalities may obtain open space for the benefit of the general public by purchase or by condemnation pursuant to the official map device (MPC Section 401 (a)).
- (b) Density bonuses should be incorporated into ordinance provisions when increased amounts of common open space beyond some reasonable amount or percentage are desired. A reasonable base percentage of open space should take into consideration the proposed use or uses, locational factors, the zoning district or otherwise allowable density, the amount of land required to be dedicated for recreation purposes, and the presence of significant environmental features such as wetlands that need to be protected.
- (c) Open space dedications grounded upon reasonable requirements also provide protection for the municipality against potential "takings" claims.

11. Traditional zoning frequently uses a proliferation of residential districts with rigid prescriptive lot size, lot coverage and bulk requirements for each district.

Performance zoning, as an alternative, recognizes that all land is not created equal. It tailors density to the natural carrying capacity of the site and protects environmental features. Care must be taken to avoid stifling construction of affordable housing by demanding excessive performance standards that reduce the net buildable area. Performance zoning encourages clustering on the "net buildable area" and can allow a mix of dwelling types.

Suggested Solutions

- (a) Allow flexible performance zoning with appropriate environmental standards.
- (b) To avoid exclusionary zoning, allow greater densities on the buildable areas of the site and smaller minimum site areas.
- (c) Promote a flexible layout of the units and reduce bulk requirements, such as large rigid side yards.

12. Zoning and subdivision ordinances often erect barriers to the use of affordable manufactured and industrialized housing.

The Pennsylvania Supreme Court requires that zoning ordinances must treat mobile homes the same as other single family detached dwellings. (See Appeal of Geiger, 510 Pa. 231, 507 A.2d 361 (1986).) The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) as amended by Act 1988-170, Sec. 604(4) states that zoning ordinances shall be designed... to provide for the use of land for ... mobile homes and mobile home parks. The MPC directive is supported by numerous court decisions.

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Suggested Solutions

- (a) Revise zoning allowing placement of mobile homes and modulares on individual lots that meet the respective setbacks and lot sizes required for conventional site-built single-family detached dwellings.
- (b) Increase the amount of land zoned for mobile home parks at affordable densities of 4 to 8 units per acre.

13. Zoning requirements for home occupations can be restrictive or even discriminatory.

Home occupation requirements favor selected white-collar professions, such as doctors and lawyers, whose endeavors might generate more traffic than some frequently prohibited uses such as barber or beauty shops. Home occupations are rarely permitted by right and instead require the expense and delay of a special exception hearing before the zoning hearing board.

Suggested Solutions

- (a) Liberalize restrictive or discriminatory requirements for home occupations.
- (b) Criteria for home occupations can be retained and utilized by the zoning officer to grant permits instead of utilizing the zoning hearing board; i.e., convert home occupations from special exceptions to uses permitted by right.

14. Many zoning ordinances limit affordable housing opportunities for one- and two-person households and elderly households.

Suggested Solutions

- (a) Revise zoning provisions to:
 - (1) Facilitate conversion or alteration of an existing single family dwelling into two residential units (an accessory apartment) subordinate to the primary dwelling, or into two or more residential units (residential conversions);
 - (2) Allow the addition of a single, small elder cottage to a single-family lot to be used by either elderly or disabled family members related to the occupant of the principal dwelling;
 - (3) Allow shared housing which involves the occupancy of a dwelling unit by two or more unrelated individuals who live as a single housekeeping unit and share kitchen, bath, living and dining space;
 - (4) Allow group homes for foster children, the developmentally and mentally disabled, and the elderly by right in all districts where single-family dwellings are permitted.

The Federal Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination against the "handicapped" which includes not only the physically disabled and mentally ill or retarded, but also recovering drug or alcohol addicts. Discriminatory treatment might include restricting the number of unrelated persons allowed in a group home, requiring a special exception or conditional use approval or by establishing a dispersal or spacing requirement between group homes. Monetary damages and penalties have been awarded to victims of discrimination where violations of the Federal Fair Housing Act have been found. The court case law concerning group homes is in a state of flux and every municipality should review its group home restrictions with its solicitor.

15. Parking standards can consume more land than necessary, especially in multifamily development.

Parking standards often do not relate to the number of cars or trips generated by a particular use. A small apartment may be required to supply the same number of parking spaces as a large single family home. Required parking stall dimensions are often excessive.

Suggested Solutions

- (a) Link the number of required parking spaces to the number of bedrooms rather than the number of units in multifamily developments.
- (b) Reduce a percentage of the stalls in size to accommodate smaller compact cars, e.g., when 25 or more stalls are required, up to 25 percent could have reduced dimensions. Alternatively, conventional parking stall dimensions of up to 10' x 20' could be downsized to 8' x 16', saving one-third the space.

Application Processing

1. Lack of uniformity among land use ordinances adds time and, therefore, increases costs to developers. The absence of professionally drafted ordinances has a similar impact in many communities.

Land use ordinances vary tremendously from one community to the next. This lack of uniformity in format and substance adds time to the process of understanding the requirements. This confusion also adds unnecessary costs because small builders must hire a consulting planner or engineer. When counties complete the required guidelines for uniform zoning terms confusion, will be reduced.

Land use ordinances can be poorly drafted. Poorly drafted ordinances consist of a collection of amendments tagged onto an outdated base, lack an index or only contain an out-of-date table of contents, and are devoid of illustrative material. Definitions of key terms are usually absent or unclear. Confusing and vague ordinances are difficult to understand and administer, and engender appeals resulting in more expense and delay.

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Suggested Solutions

(a) Act 68 of 2000 directs county planning commissions to publish advisory guidelines to promote general consistency with the adopted county comprehensive plan. These guidelines are to promote uniformity with respect to municipal planning and zoning terminology. Once prepared, these suggested common standards help to solve some of the problems.

(b) County-wide zoning and subdivision ordinances help to promote uniformity of standards and create cost effective, professional administration of the ordinances.

(c) The Municipalities Planning Code encourages joint municipal planning and zoning which can accomplish a high degree of uniformity and professionalization that is uncommon in the current fragmented system. The "joint municipal" approach can work anywhere, but "county-wide" ordinances may be better suited to the more rural counties. However, experience in Lebanon County shows that county-administered zoning can also work in urbanizing areas.

2. Medium and higher density housing developments that are more likely to be affordable usually encounter more red tape in the form of needed rezonings, hearings for special exceptions or conditional uses, or the need to have additional technical reports such as traffic impact studies prepared.

Suggested Solutions

(a) By right, zoning ordinances should allow more land for higher density uses. Consider converting selected special exceptions and conditional uses to uses permitted by right.

(b) By right, zoning ordinances should allow various types of multifamily structures.

(c) An expensive traffic impact study should not be required because the study cannot be used to compel financial contributions from the developer for off-site transportation improvements, except in strict conformity with the new "impact fee" requirements of MPC Article V-A (Act 1990-209).

3. Land development plans are reviewed by unpaid lay planning commissions causing delays and increased costs.

Lay planners pass judgment on technical matters about which they have only limited expertise. Often, consultants are hired to review the same plans and report to the lay planning commission. This cost is passed on to the developer.

Lay planners generally meet on a monthly basis, notwithstanding the need for more frequent meetings.

Lay planners, who epitomize the Jeffersonian ideal of citizen participation, are usually too busy reviewing plans to deal with value-laden policy issues inherent in developing comprehensive plans, zoning amendments, or capital improvement programs.

Lay planners usually lack training in the planning field.

The Municipalities Planning Code, which evolved from the Standard State Zoning Enabling Act of 1924, was not designed to take full advantage of professional planning or to give trained planners an important role in decision-making.

Suggested Solutions

(a) Professionalization of planning and zoning administration improves efficiency and cuts delays.

(b) Under the Municipalities Planning Code, plan approval power may be delegated to a planning department director in lieu of, or in conjunction with, a planning commission.

(c) Municipalities interested in expediting approvals should appoint a professional planning department director or a planning consultant to approve plans or, where economies dictate, engage a circuit-riding planning director.

(d) Efficiency could be enhanced by administering land use ordinances through a county planning department or a joint municipal planning department.

(e) Professional planning departments are also more likely to utilize new technology to enhance administrative efficiencies.

(f) Some municipalities could make better use of county planning agency expertise by utilizing their subdivision and zoning reviews.

4. Good community design should be actively promoted.

A landowner who desires to create building lots will usually draw a rough sketch and hire a surveyor to prepare the subdivision plan. Surveyors are generally the first point of contact. If surveyors prepare poorly designed plans, the battle is lost. The plans may technically meet the ordinance standards but still be deficient in design concept. Most landowners are reluctant to pay twice for approvable plans.

Suggested Solutions

(a) The county planning agency could sponsor and invite all surveyors to a seminar on subdivision design, as well as seek the help of surveyors to educate landowners in good design techniques.

(b) The county planning agency should actively promote improved community design by making the services of an experienced planner who has a knack for good design available for free to assist landowners or surveyors at the sketch plan stage.

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5. Delays in receiving approvals for land development add to the cost of projects.

The Municipalities Planning Code plan approval provisions are fairly reasonable. The MPC envisions a two-step land development approval process (preliminary and final), each taking up to 90 days. The MPC also provides safeguards in the form of deemed approvals if the time limit is exceeded or if a denial is not properly justified in writing.

In addition, the county planning commission review period was reduced by Act 1988-170, from 45 to 30 days. Given inherent delays with lay planning commission reviews and delays attributable to other factors, the MPC approval process is still fairly reasonable.

Suggested Solutions

(a) Developers should ensure that their development plans are complete and include all required supplemental materials. (Most delays are due to incomplete plan submissions, the need for zoning amendments or prior zoning approvals and hearings related to special exceptions and conditional uses.)

(b) Municipal planning commissions do not need to wait for the county planning agency review to begin their review of subdivision and land development plans. The two reviews can proceed simultaneously. If the county report has not been received prior to the municipal planning commission's advisory report, the municipal governing body should be reminded of the requirement to consider county comments prior to their action.

(c) Where professional staffing exists, the planning director could be delegated approval power for final plans in order to reduce delays.

(d) Convert appropriate special exceptions or conditional uses to uses permitted by right.

6. Delays in receiving approval for minor subdivision plans can add to the cost of projects.

Minor plans that are not defined in the Municipalities Planning Code are processed in an expedited manner by a majority of municipalities. Minor subdivision plans are usually defined as the creation of less than a specified number of lots (often 10 or less) which require no new street or easement of access. Processing time for minor plans is shortened by the waiver of the preliminary plan requirement.

Suggested Solutions

(a) Minor subdivision plans could possibly be approved in a week or less if authority is delegated to a planning director or circuit-riding planning director.

(b) County planning directors can also be delegated similar authority for minor plans where the county ordinance has jurisdiction.

7. Plan review fees and fees for engineering inspection of improvements can be excessive.

Suggested Solutions

(a) Municipalities should abide by the new Act 1988-170 amendments to the Municipalities Planning Code concerning plat review fees and fees for engineering inspection of improvements. Fees shall be based upon a schedule established by ordinance or resolution and be reasonable. Fees may not exceed the rate or cost charged by the municipal engineer or consultant to the municipality.

(b) Act 1988-170 provides a new dispute resolution process for disagreements on review fees and fees for inspection of improvements. See MPC Sections 503(l) and 510(g).

8. Time delays in scheduling or rescheduling zoning hearing board (ZHB) hearings can add costs to developments.

Suggested Solution

(a) To reduce time delays in scheduling or rescheduling ZHB hearings due to illness, absences, or possible conflicts of interest of members, municipalities could appoint alternate ZHB members as authorized by the Act 1988-170 amendments to the MPC. See MPC Section 903(b).

(b) Consider using a hearing officer as authorized by MPC Section 908(2).

9. Land use disputes ending up in court add costs to development.

Suggested Solutions

(a) When land use disputes occur, either the municipality or the developer may initiate a voluntary mediation option process that was recently authorized in the Municipalities Planning Code by Act 1988-170. Potential benefits of mediation include:

(1) Assistance in relieving an overburdened court system and support for encouraging out-of-court settlement;

(2) Providing a potentially less costly mechanism for resolving land use disputes; and

(3) Providing a less polarized process than that which an adversarial administrative hearing or legal proceeding create. Note: The zoning hearing board may not initiate mediation nor participate as a mediating party.

**Potter County Comprehensive Plan –
Preserving and Enhancing the Quality of Life for Current and Future Residents of Potter County**

Chapter 5 – Housing

Senior/Assisted Housing

When the burden of property maintenance becomes too much to handle, the county's elderly population will seek institutionalized senior housing and assisted living facilities. There are a total of sixteen senior/assisted housing facilities in the county, three of which are operated by the Potter County Housing Authority. The retiree and special needs age cohorts include all county residents age 65 and over. This age cohort totaled 2,302 in 1980, 2,754 in 1990, and 3,014 in 2000. Over the twenty year time period from 1980 to 2000 this age cohort increased by 31% from 2,302, which is an indicator of an aging population. This aging trend is consistent with Pennsylvania as a whole, and is expected to continue over the planning horizon of this plan.

The need for senior/assisted housing in the county has not hit critical mass. According to the Potter County Housing Authority, the waiting list for the three county operated facilities does not warrant the need for additional units; however, as the elderly population continues to grow, the need for such facilities in the county will also grow. The housing authority must continue to monitor the balance of elderly residents, available units, and future needs.

County Housing Programs

Potter County offers a wide variety of housing assistance that can assist homeowners with maintenance, utility payments, and mortgage and rental assistance. The following is a listing of these important programs and the services they provide:

Homeowners' Emergency Mortgage Assistance Program

Northern Tier Community Action Corporation, Box 389, Emporium, PA 15834
(814) 486-1161 ext. 228

Services: A loan program designed to assist homeowners who are unable to make mortgage payments and have received an Act 91 foreclosure notice from their lending institution. Northern Tier acts as a counseling agency in preparing applications for this program and forwards them to the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency for processing.

Rental/Energy Assistance

Northern Tier Community Action Corporation, Box 389, Emporium, PA 15834
(814) 486-1161 ext. 215 or 228

Services: Provides financial assistance in the form of rent and utility payments to families who are in imminent danger of eviction or are currently homeless. This program is designed for families in crisis situations who are in immediate need of housing and energy assistance.

Rural Development

P O Box 1473, Smethport, PA 16749
(814) 887-7775

Services: Housing and Community Assistance

Weatherization

Northern Tier Community Action Corporation, Box 389, Emporium, PA 15834
(814) 486-1161 ext. 215 or 226; (814) 486-1760

Services:

Weatherization assistance is provided to families with household income within 150% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines. Priority is given to households with children under the age of 6 and those homes with handicapped, and/or elderly occupants. Highly skilled staff assesses the entire household to determine which materials cost will effectively provide a warm, energy efficient home while insuring occupant health and safety. Clients are also provided with information on ways in which they can control high utility costs. Services are provided to owner occupied dwellings as well as rental units.

Potter County Habitat for Humanity

PO Box 208
Coudersport, PA 16915

Phone: 814-274-9750
Contact: Doug Orbaker, President

Habitat's first home was built in Austin Borough and was completed in 1998. The second county project is currently being constructed in Galeton.

Partner Families

Habitat for Humanity is organized at the local level. More than 1,900 affiliates are helping out worldwide. They set up the building of the houses and select the partner families. The families are chosen according to their needs, the ability to repay the no-profit, no-interest mortgage; and their willingness to work side by side with Habitat.

Purpose of Potter County's Chapter

The purpose of Potter County's chapter is to witness and implement the gospel of Jesus Christ in Potter County by working with economically disadvantaged people to help them create a better human habitat in which to live and work. (Reprinted from the Bylaws of Potter County Habitat for Humanity)

**Potter County Comprehensive Plan –
Preserving and Enhancing the Quality of Life for Current and Future Residents of Potter County**

Chapter 5 – Housing

Mission Statement

Habitat for Humanity International is an ecumenical ministry with the goal of eliminating poverty housing from the world. By having affluent and poor people work together in equal partnership, Habitat for Humanity builds new relationships and a sense of community as well as new houses. (Reprinted from the Affiliate Operations Manual)