

**NORTHERN PENNSYLVANIA
TRI-COUNTY
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

MCKEAN

POTTER

CAMERON

**POTTER COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA
2019 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

DECEMBER 2019

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**Established
1804**

Douglas C. Morley, Chairman
Paul W. Heimel
Susan S. Kefover
Commissioners

County of Potter Board of Commissioners

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Kathleen H. Majot
Chief Clerk

Thomas R. Shaffer
Solicitor

RESOLUTION No. 15 OF 2019 Potter County Board of Commissioners

A RESOLUTION adopting the Potter County Comprehensive Plan Update, dated December 2019, as prepared by the Potter County Planning Commission and facilitated by Michael Baker International.

WHEREAS, the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) requires that county comprehensive plans be updated every 10 years; and

WHEREAS, the MPC outlines content and procedural requirements associated with the preparation, review and approval of county comprehensive plans that have been followed in this County Plan Update process; and

WHEREAS, the Potter County Planning Commission coordinated the preparation of the Potter County Comprehensive Plan Update that has been published in one document, entitled *Northern Pennsylvania Tri-County Comprehensive Plan of Potter County* dated December 2019 and comprised of charts, textual matter, narratives, and implementation plans; and

WHEREAS, the Potter County Planning Commission conducted a robust and inclusive public participation and engagement process, and

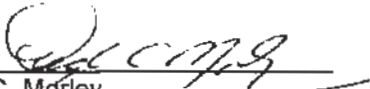
WHEREAS, the proposed Potter County Comprehensive Plan Update was submitted to school districts within and contiguous to Potter County, and contiguous counties and was otherwise made publicly available for municipal and citizen review and comment; and

WHEREAS, the Potter County Planning Commission adhered to the Public Meeting and Public Hearing requirements of the MPC in finalizing the County Plan Update; and


WHEREAS, the Potter County Planning Commission duly noted and considered all public comments received in finalizing the County Plan Update; and

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the County Commissioners of Potter County hereby adopt the Potter County Comprehensive Plan Update that has been published in one (1) document, entitled *Northern Pennsylvania Tri-County Comprehensive Plan of Potter County* dated December 2019 and comprised of charts, textual matter, narratives, and implementation plans that form the whole of the County Plan Update and fulfills county responsibilities under the MPC.

A true and correct copy of said NORTHERN PENNSYLVANIA TRI-COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN OF POTTER COUNTY dated December 19, 2019 is attached hereto.

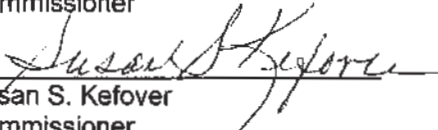


Doug C. Morley
Commissioner

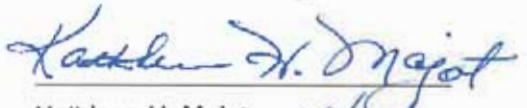


Paul W. Heimel
Commissioner

Date: December 19, 2019



Susan S. Kefover
Commissioner



Kathleen H. Majot 12/19/19
Chief Clerk

Acknowledgements

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Introduction to the Plan

Northern Pennsylvania Tri-County Comprehensive Plan

The *Northern Pennsylvania Tri-County Comprehensive Plan* serves as the official policy guide for short-term and long-term decision making relative to priority investments in Potter County over the next 10-years. At its core purpose, a county comprehensive plan is intended to answer the question, “what is our game plan moving forward?” Throughout the planning process, comprehensive plans allow public officials, staff, and residents to take a step back and look at the big picture to form a strategic plan for county initiatives and investments.

Unique to this plan, Potter County partnered with Cameron and McKean Counties to facilitate the planning process. This approach has provided one unified strategy for the region supported with county-specific actions. The three plans were developed in 2018 and 2019 with extensive public outreach and engagement. Based on public input, five prominent areas of focus, or “issues”, were identified as regional priorities and validated throughout plan development. The issues are stated as goals with action items for each county in the individual plans and are not listed in any priority order.

- **Workforce Development**
Expansion of recruitment efforts to attract talent to the region from across the state and nation.
- **Economic Base**
Business attraction and retention to provide high-quality jobs and living wages for the region’s residents.
- **Communities**
Invest in communities to enhance quality of life for residents, employers, and visitors.
- **Infrastructure/Environment**
Deliver reliable, cost-effective infrastructure to support a high quality of life for residents, employers, and visitors.
- **Public Health**
Ensure access to health care, including mental health and substance abuse services.

Overarching these goals is a shared region wide vision to ensure the premier wilderness and natural resources in Cameron, McKean, and Potter Counties are available for the enjoyment and benefit of current and future generations. To further this vision, each of the counties will:

- Continue efforts to make certain a reliable water supply is available.
- Ensure future land use is concentrated in areas of existing development, to the maximum extent possible, and is compatible with contiguous municipalities and counties.
- Work with local officials and North Central to promote transportation access and improvements to efficiently move people and goods throughout the region.
- Protect natural and historic resources consistent with state and federal statutes and laws.
- Ensure resource extraction activities protect property owner rights while balancing natural resource protection.

Recognition of Existing County Efforts

The action items as presented are based on public input as well as input from businesses and community and economic development partners received during the planning process. The actions are areas on which the vast majority of stakeholders believe the county should focus its efforts. As one stakeholder framed it, “If we simply continue to do what we have done in the past, nothing will ever change. We need new radical ideas.”

For each of the five goal statements, the action items will require a fresh look and likely revisions to existing policies, programs, and efforts; many identified in Potter County’s 2005 Comprehensive Plan. This should not be disconcerting, but rather encouraging as the community recognizes the importance of the work to be performed by the county and its partners.

Planning Horizon

On a final note, the Comprehensive Plan is long-range in nature. The action items need to be prioritized and addressed incrementally. The plan is also a living document; it should be updated each year to reflect measurable progress and refine approaches as may be warranted by ongoing trends and conditions.



Planning Process

The *Northern Pennsylvania Tri-County Comprehensive Plan* was funded by the North Central Pennsylvania Regional Planning and Development Commission (North Central) with matching funds provided by Cameron County, McKean County, and Potter County. The regional approach to the planning process, under the leadership of North Central, provided synergy, substantial cost efficiencies for the three counties, and reduced the overall investment of taxpayer dollars. In total, Potter County's financial contribution to the plan was \$11,500. Cameron and McKean Counties also each contributed \$11,500. The overall plan, for all three counties, totaled \$115,000.

The consultant team, Michael Baker International and Vernon Land Use, was engaged under an existing contract with North Central. The project team guided the overall planning effort, which was based on robust public engagement, to understand the desires of the community and visions for the future. Under the direction of North Central and the three counties, the planning process also reflected the Commonwealth's guidance on implementable comprehensive plans, focusing on fewer, but more relevant community issues.

Steering Committee

Through the leadership of the county planning departments, a diverse Steering Committee was convened to help guide the comprehensive planning process. The 44-member Steering Committee consisted of county residents and a diverse range of community stakeholders and community leaders to provide a strong grassroots foundation and champions for the plan's successful implementation. At the onset of the planning process, the Steering Committee was critical in identifying relevant issues affecting the Northern Pennsylvania region and supporting public outreach efforts. In addition, the Steering Committee helped analyze the public input received and was responsible for finalizing the list of goals that serve as guiding framework for this plan.



Focus Groups

The project team facilitated focus groups early in the planning process to gather initial public input regarding the top issues in the region as well as in each of the three counties. In total, 75 individuals participated in four focus groups presenting a broad range of interests. The list of attendees invited to participate was developed in close coordination with Cameron, McKean, and Potter County as well as the Steering Committee. Focus group participants included concerned citizens, farmers, tourism professionals, education professionals including school superintendents, energy industry representatives, municipal officials, and health care professionals, among others. Through the four focus groups, attendees identified specific opportunities and challenges in Cameron, McKean and Potter Counties and provided local knowledge and insight surrounding socioeconomic and industry trends.

Online Public Survey

An online survey was made available for a one-month period to provide residents and interested stakeholders the opportunity to give detailed input for the *Northern Pennsylvania Tri-County Comprehensive Plan*. The survey was developed to highlight and expand upon the top issues discussed during the Steering Committee meetings and focus groups, and was widely advertised through social media, news media, e-mail, and through the counties and Steering Committee. In addition, a simple random mailing sample of 1,500 property owners was administered to ensure the public at-large was represented in the survey. In total, 2,374 public participants completed the survey across the three counties, offering valuable insight on a number of important topics and issues.

Interviews with Major Employers

Concurrently with the online survey, the consultant team conducted one-on-one interviews with major employers in the region. In total, 13 companies participated representing manufacturing, health care, energy, and telecommunications. The purpose of the interviews was to gather insights and observations about the region's top employers and their recommendations to improve the region's business climate. Many of the employer concerns echoed input received via the Steering Committee and focus groups specifically related to workforce availability, infrastructure, and telecommunications. Businesses contacted for the interviews included private sector employers in each of the three counties.

Public Open Houses

A public open house was held on June 27, 2019, at Port Allegany High School and was widely advertised and promoted via social media, news media, email, and through the counties and Steering Committee. In total, 57 individuals attended the Open House. The event was held to:

- Inform the public about the comprehensive plan and offer an opportunity to provide feedback, ideas, and suggestions directly to the project team;
- Showcase existing condition findings to the public and describe historical and projected trends in the region;
- Share the public input findings obtained through the Steering Committee, focus groups, business interviews, and online survey; and
- Facilitate meaningful dialogue with members of the public, property owners, and stakeholders to generate consensus on the goal statements and initial strategies that were developed based on public involvement.

In addition, Potter County held a second public open house on October 16, 2019 to collect public comments on the draft plan, which was posted on Potter County’s website in early October for public review and comment.



An Overview of Cameron, McKean, and Potter Counties

The Tri-County region includes Cameron, McKean, and Potter Counties located in north central Pennsylvania. Together, the three counties are home to 63,758 residents and 19,605 jobs.

Encompassing 1.5 million acres of land, Cameron, McKean, and Potter Counties are located within the heart of the Pennsylvania Wilds, one of the best outdoor recreation destinations in North America. The region is largely rural and forested, has a rich history and unique small-town culture, and offers breathtaking beauty and fresh air. Among other visitor attractions, the three counties and the larger Pennsylvania Wilds region are known internationally for:

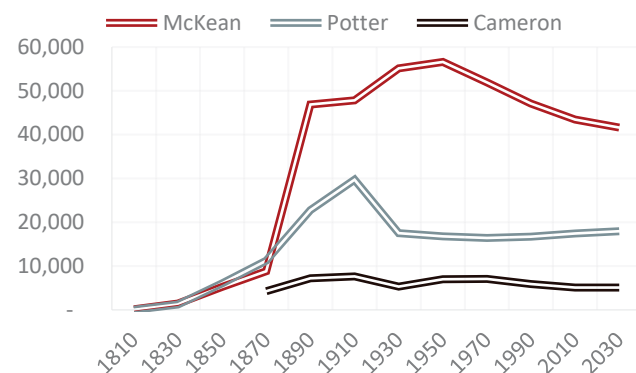
- Dark Skies
- Allegheny National Forest
- Elk Scenic Drive
- Kinzua Skywalk

Population Trends

Cameron, McKean, and Potter Counties were generally first settled in the 19th century to make use of the local timber resources, which continue to play a key role in the local economy. The expansion of the railroad and discovery of oil in the late 1800s and early 1900s resulted in strong population growth. Throughout the 1900s, all three counties experienced slight shifts in population, growing during certain periods and contracting in others.

Since approximately 1980, however, the population of the three counties has experienced a decline, decreasing from 75,035 residents in 1980 to an estimated 63,758 residents in 2018. Potter County’s population has remained the most stable, while McKean County has lost the most residents (a loss of 8,610 residents between 1980 and 2018). McKean County is forecasted to lose additional residents through 2040, while Cameron and Potter County are forecasted to remain relatively stable.

Historical and Projected Population Shifts, 1810-2030



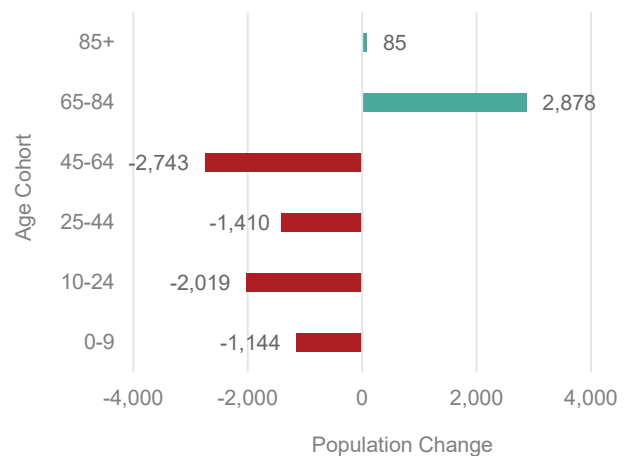
Tri-County Population, 1960-2040

Year	Population	% Growth
1960 (Actual)	78,586	
1970 (Actual)	75,406	-4.0%
1980 (Actual)	75,035	-0.5%
1990 (Actual)	69,761	-7.0%
2000 (Actual)	69,990	0.3%
2010 (Actual)	65,992	-5.7%
2020 (Estimated)	65,460	-0.8%
2030 (Projected)	64,690	-1.2%
2040 (Projected)	63,240	-2.2%

Age Distribution

Cameron, McKean, and Potter Counties have an aging population and, when compared to the Commonwealth, is one of the oldest regions in the state. Cameron County has the oldest population of the three counties with a median age of 50.6.

Tri-County Absolute Population Change by Age Cohort, 2010 to 2023



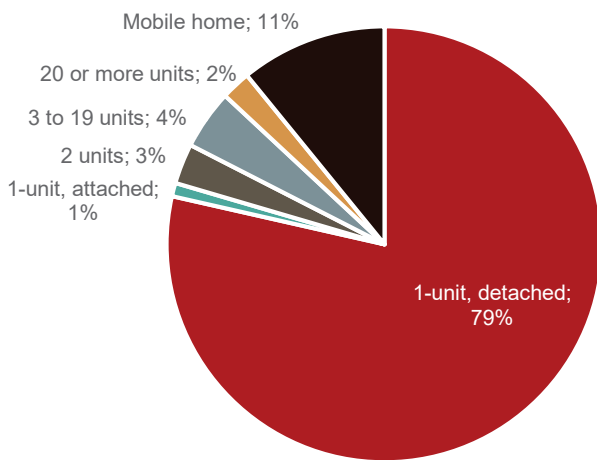
These types of age distribution trends are occurring across the country as America’s baby boomer generation is in retirement or reaching retirement age. However, this trend is more pronounced in the rural Tri-County region and will have implications for housing, workforce development, transportation, and overall economic resiliency.

Housing Trends

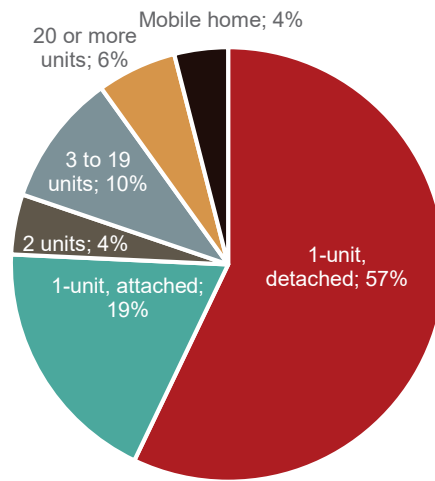
Housing Overview

Based on U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey estimates (2018), the primary housing stock in the Tri-County region is 1-unit detached homes. The second most common housing type is mobile homes. This differs from statewide averages as many communities have an abundance of 1-unit and multi-unit attached homes, which are less common in Cameron, McKean, and Potter Counties.

Tri-County Housing Units by Structure Type, 2018



Pennsylvania Housing Units by Structure Type, 2018



Housing Units by Value

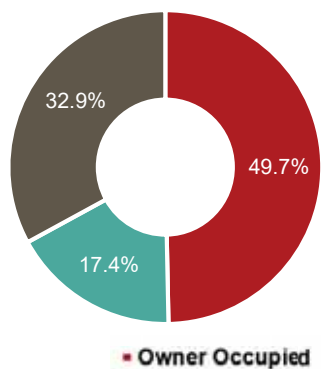
Based on 2018 data, the majority of home values (70% of all homes) in the Tri-County region range between \$50,000 and \$150,000, with an average home value of \$133,509. Potter County has the highest median home value in the Tri-County region at \$114,844. In comparison, the median 2018 home value in Pennsylvania was \$185,452.

Housing Type

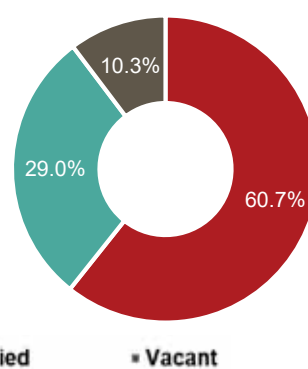
Based on 2018 data, there are an estimated 38,563 housing units in the three counties. Of these, 49.7% are owner occupied, 17.4% are rented, and 32.9% are vacant. Vacant housing is most prevalent in Cameron County and Potter County, which currently have a vacancy rate of 52.5% and 45.3%, respectively. McKean County's vacancy rate is 21.2%. Statewide, 10.3% of housing units are vacant.

Unique to the region, a large percentage of vacant housing in the three counties is due to seasonal homes. Data from the 2010 census (most recently available) shows that over 85% of vacant homes in Cameron and Potter Counties are used seasonally and for recreational use. In McKean County, that number is 57.9%.

Tri-County Housing Units by Type, 2018



Pennsylvania Housing Units by Type, 2018

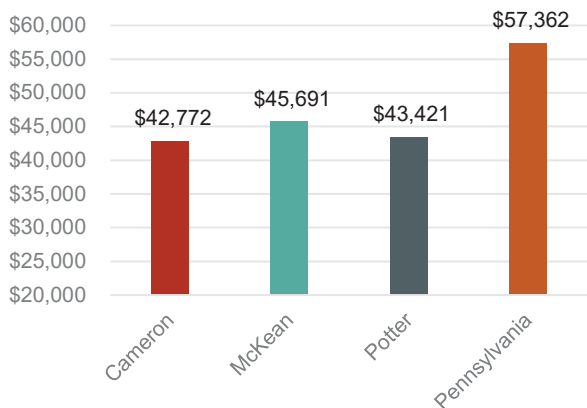


Income and Employment Trends

Median Household Income

The median household income in the Tri-County region was \$44,788 in 2018 and is projected to increase to \$51,498 by 2023. The region’s median household income is lower than the statewide average of \$57,362.

Tri-County Median Household Income, 2018



Labor Force and Unemployment

The Tri-County’s labor force, defined as resident individuals age 16 and older who are employed or are seeking employment, is 27,400 individuals. Approximately 95% of the region’s labor force are employed and 5% are unemployed. Potter County has the highest unemployment rate of the three counties at 5.7%.

Unemployment spiked regionally, statewide, and nationally in 2008, 2009, and 2010 due to the recession, but has trended downward since 2011. The Pennsylvania statewide average unemployment rate is 4.1%.

Labor Force and Unemployment Rate, 2018

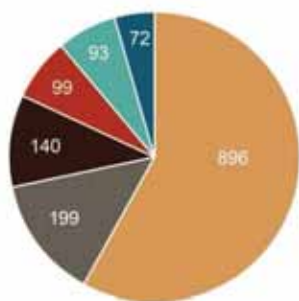
Year	Labor Force	Unemployment
Cameron	2,100	4.9%
McKean	18,100	4.9%
Potter	7,200	5.7%

Employment Trends

Beginning in the 1980-1990s, the nation began to witness a shift in its economic base where the manufacturing sector began to decline, and the service sector began to grow. This shift was due to multiple factors, including automation, off-shoring, and recessions; but the shared result has been a decrease in manufacturing jobs. Cameron, McKean, and Potter Counties have been affected by this trend. Since 2010 alone, the Tri-County region has lost more than 865 jobs across all sectors.

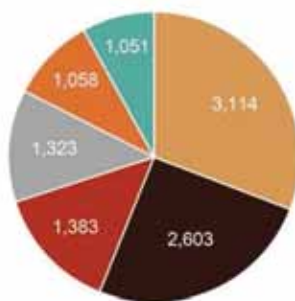
Today, there are 19,605 jobs located within Cameron, McKean, and Potter Counties. The top employing sectors are Fabricated Metal Product Manufacturing, Educational Services, and Nursing and Residential Care Facilities.

Top Industries by Employment, 2018



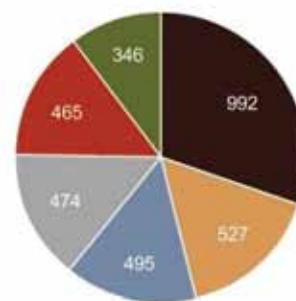
Cameron Top Industries, 2018

- Manufacturing (896)
- Public Administration (199)
- Health Care and Social Assistance (140)
- Retail Trade (99)
- Accommodation and Food Service (93)
- Other Services (except Public Administration) (72)



McKean Top Industries, 2018

- Manufacturing (3,114)
- Health Care and Social Assistance (2,603)
- Retail Trade (1,383)
- Educational Services (1,323)
- Construction (1,058)
- Accommodation and Food Service (1,051)

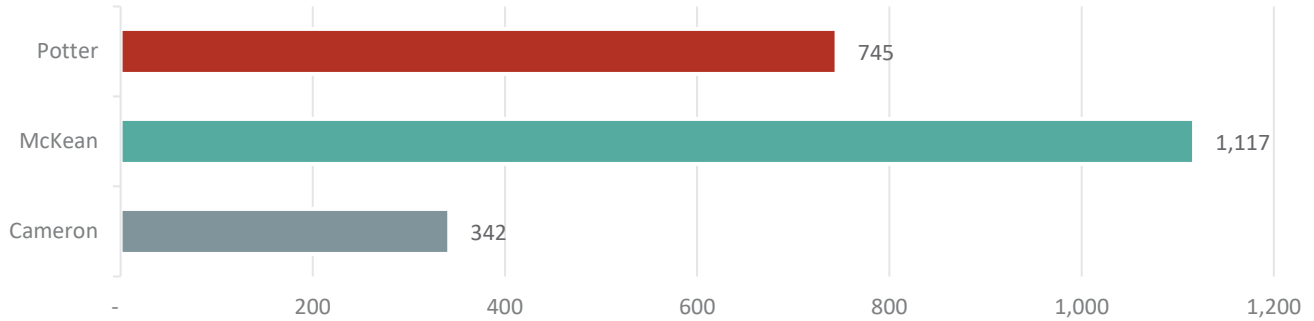


Potter Top Industries, 2018

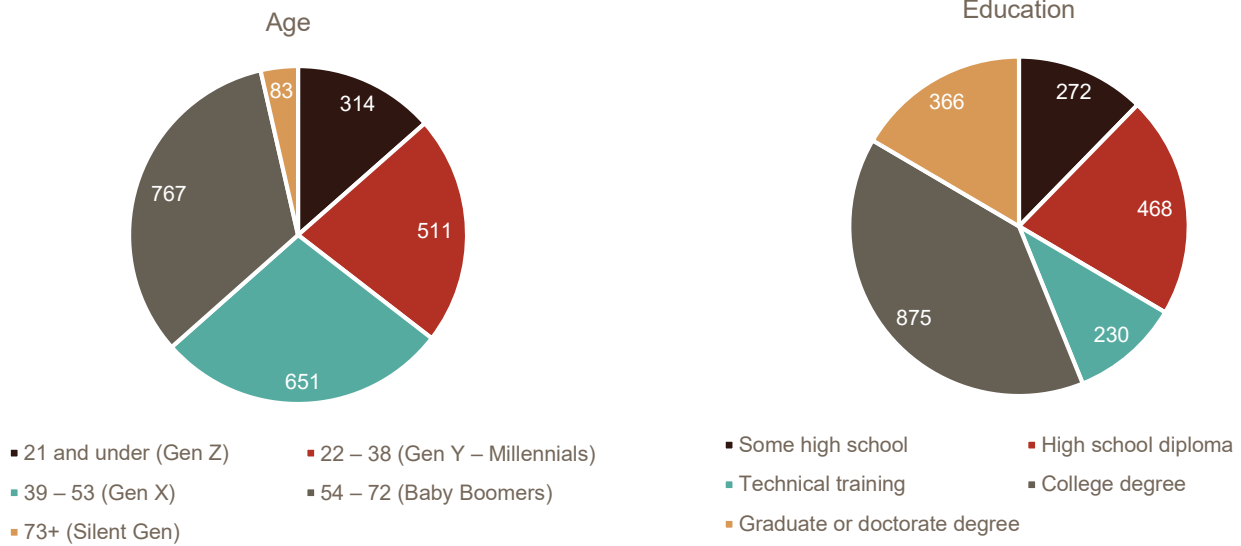
- Health Care and Social Assistance (992)
- Manufacturing (527)
- Transportation and Warehousing (495)
- Educational Services (474)
- Retail Trade (465)
- Information (346)

Survey Results at a Glance

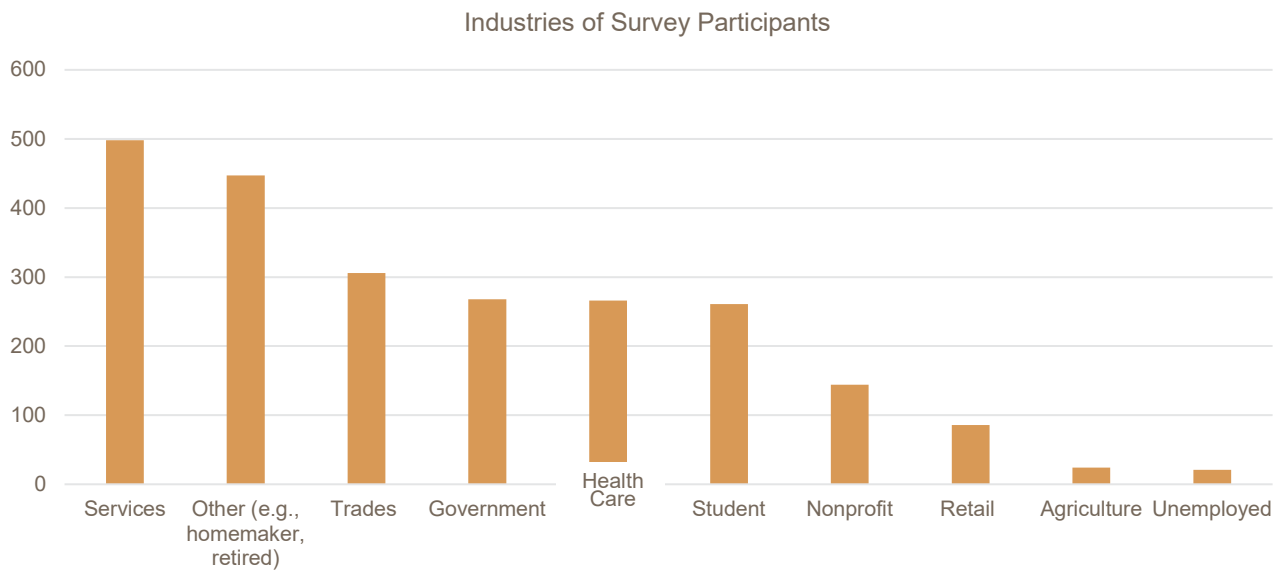
How Many Survey Responses?



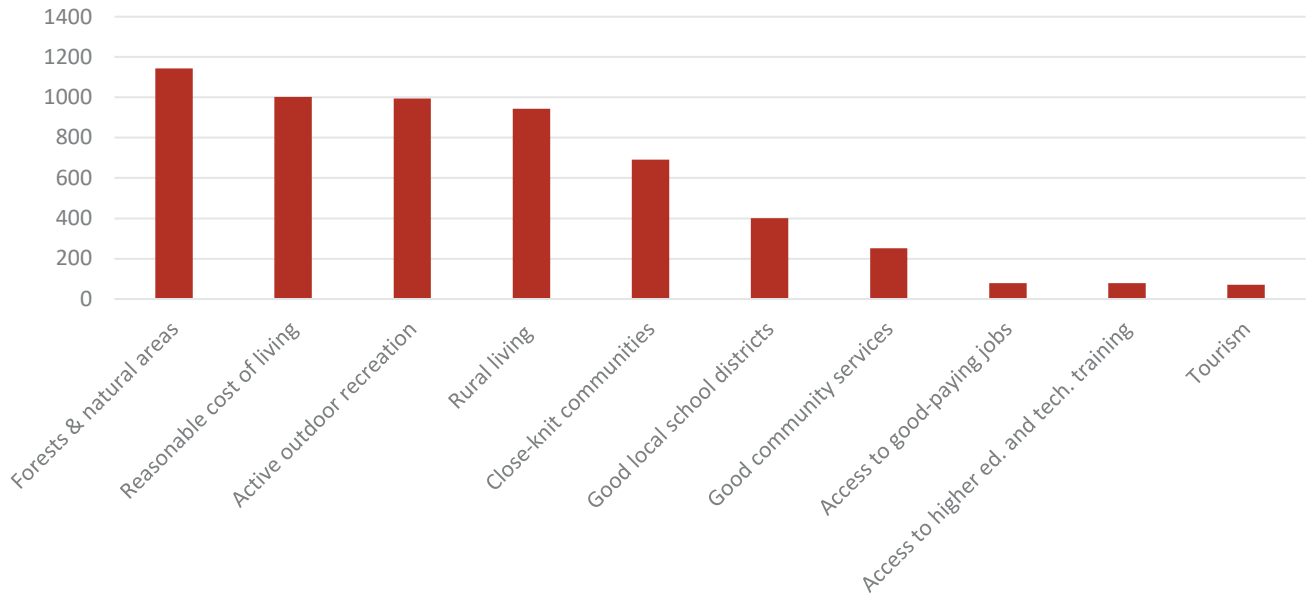
Who Completed the Survey?



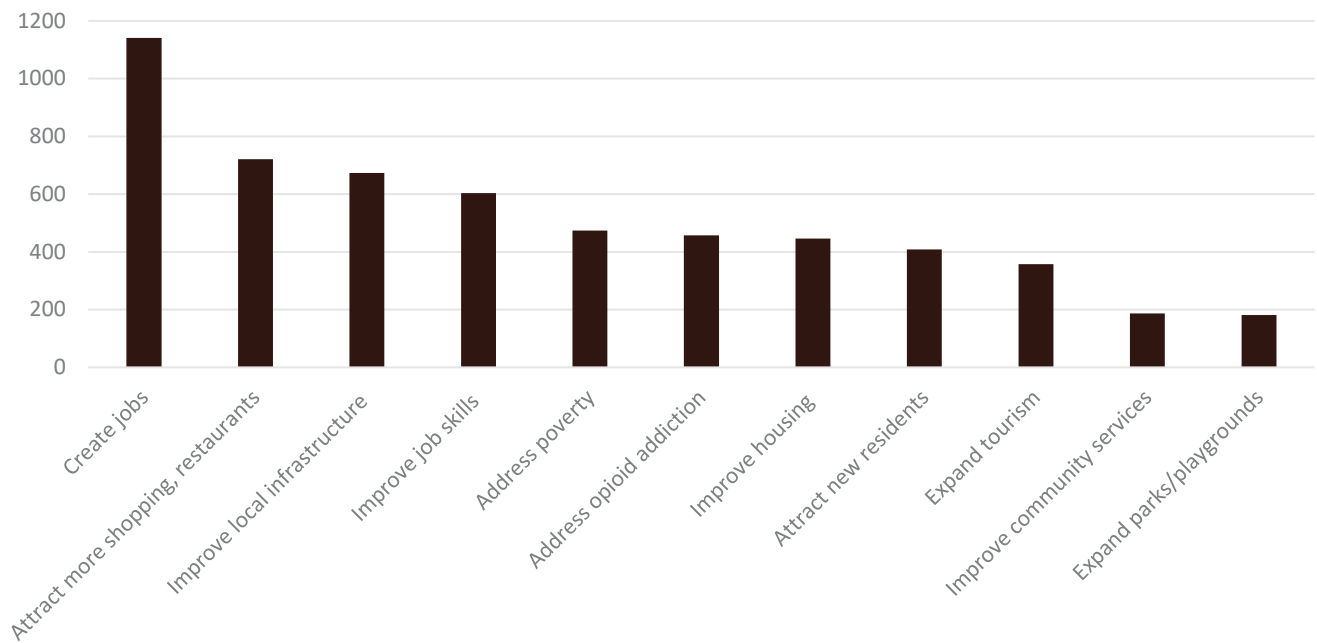
Where do Survey Participants Work?



What Makes Your County a Great Place to Live?



Where Taxes Should be Invested in the Future?



Workforce Development

The Challenge

Since the 2008 recession, Pennsylvania's economy, like the nation's, has rebounded. Unemployment is at its lowest level in 45+ years, employment in the Commonwealth reached a record high in 2019, and total jobs in Pennsylvania were up 30,300 with gains in the majority of industry sectors. But as the economic picture has improved over the past 10 plus years, a workforce shortage has emerged.

Statewide, Pennsylvania's workforce is retiring as the Baby Boomer generation reaches 65+ years of age. In fact, 17.1% of the Commonwealth's population is over age 65, making Pennsylvania the fifth oldest state in the nation. The aging workforce is also coupled with low unemployment throughout the state, creating a tight labor market where there are often more jobs than qualified candidates. According to the Pa. Chamber of Business and Industry's most recent Economic Survey, employers have identified difficulties finding skilled and qualified employees to fill positions as the biggest problem facing their companies today.

In manufacturing, which has historically been the backbone of the Tri-County region, workforce shortages are also driven by a skills gap. The Manufacturing Institute reports the manufacturing industry contends with the following challenges:

- Employers have reported that a large proportion of today's prospective employees lacks the computer skills, programming skills, digital skills, working with tools, and critical thinking needed to be successful.
- During the past academic year (2018-2019), only 81.4% of seats available to high school students were utilized in career and technical education facilities. Additionally, there are anecdotal stories of high-scoring students being steered away from career and technical education opportunities.
- Many manufacturers depend on outdated approaches for recruiting the right people, developing their employees' skills, and improving performance.

“... only 81.4% of seats available to high school students were utilized in career and technical education facilities in 2018-2019.”

Primary Goals for Workforce Development

The Commonwealth has prioritized workforce development and is advancing several prominent initiatives that will provide grants for education and workforce development, provide guidance, and share best practices. Potter County can continue to support the North Central Workforce Development Board leverage these initiatives and continue to build collaborative partnerships with industry leaders. The Comprehensive Plan has outlined the following priority goals for workforce development.

Expansion of recruitment efforts to attract talent to the region from across the state and nation.

- **Close the training gap in the region's workforce**
- **Enhance marketing and employee attraction**
- **Increase student interest in the trades and promote technical training**

Close the training gap in the region's workforce

Workforce development is under the purview of three primary organizations in Potter County, including the North Central Workforce Development Board, Pa. CareerLinks, and the Potter County Education Council. From a planning outlook for Potter County, it's beneficial to understand how these organizations are providing workforce development and, based on existing efforts, how the county can be an active partner to further cultivate a highly skilled workforce.

North Central Workforce Development Board: The North Central Workforce Development Board serves as the primary facilitator of workforce development for a region that includes the counties of Cameron, McKean, Potter, Clearfield, Elk,

and Jefferson. The agency, which is federally funded and mandated, is led by the private sector. For this reason, private sector representatives from all six counties (including Cameron, McKean, and Potter) serve as the majority on the Board of Directors and are responsible for overseeing programming. In addition, the Workforce Development Board has agreements in place with the six county governments outlining roles and responsibilities. A commissioner from each county sits on the board and attends meetings on a quarterly basis. County representatives are to serve as a liaison and should be updating respective staff and county agencies of ongoing efforts and opportunities. All meetings are open to the public.

At the core of its mission, the Workforce Development Board strives to meet the human capital needs of employers by providing resources for job seekers. The organization has recently updated its FY 2017-2020 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Multi-Year Local Area Plan outlining trends, strategies/programming, strengths and weaknesses, and vision and goals. In addition, the Workforce Development Board participated with Workforce Solutions and Manufacturing, Education, and Employee Advancement, Inc. (MEEA) to complete a regional action plan for workforce solutions. These documents are up to date, detailed, and provide a strategy for advancing workforce development.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

One area of success for the Workforce Development Board has been the Business and Education Connect Program. In Potter County, the Workforce Development Board partners with the Potter County Education Council to go into the schools and provide a variety of career exploration workshops and activities. The program's goal is to make all youth aware of the available occupations in the region so they can make an informed career decision.

Among other programming, the organization is overseeing three active Next Generation Sector Partnerships in the region supporting Manufacturing, Health Care and Social Assistance, and Building and Construction Industries. The top priorities of each partnership are summarized below:



MANUFACTURING

- Develop Technical Training
- Metal Working Hub
- School to Work
- Best Kept Secret: Marketing of Our Region



HEALTH CARE AND SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

- Policy Changes
- Technology
- Prospective Employees - Recruitment and Retention



BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION

- Educating pre-high school students on trades and skilled-labor occupations and opportunities
- Business partnering with education

OTHER WORKFORCE PROVIDERS

Pa. CareerLink:

Pa. CareerLink is a statewide initiative that assists individuals with finding a job in Pennsylvania. In the tri-county region, Pa. CareerLinks works in conjunction with Workforce Solutions for North Central Pennsylvania and operates a branch office in each county. The primary function of Pa. CareerLink is to serve as a job-matching system where employers post jobs and candidates can apply online.

Potter County Education Council:

The Potter County Education Council is a nonprofit organization that provides cost effective educational services, including accredited courses, skills training, seminars, and workshops, as well as career and financial counseling. The organization also works closely with Potter County businesses and industry to create a strong economic base by providing a skilled and qualified employee base.

The Comprehensive Plan’s actions call for communications planning with the region’s economic development, workforce, and tourism agencies/partnerships to outline a collaborative approach to ongoing coordination and communication. In addition, actions include:

- Increasing Potter County’s participation in the Workforce Development Board meetings each quarter.
- Coordinating with the Workforce Development Board to offer the quarterly meetings in two locations as opposed to the one current location. Given the geographic size of the six-county region, conducting meetings with a smaller subset (e.g., three counties) may help improve private and public sector participation by minimizing travel time.
- Embracing an ambassador role where Potter County actively conducts outreach to its private sector businesses to increase the number of Workforce Development Board members and, therefore, representation of Potter County.

TOP ANNUAL OPENINGS IN NORTH CENTRAL WORKFORCE REGION



Enhance marketing and employee attraction

One of the items the county heard consistently during public engagement was the need to increase marketing of the region to students and prospective employees. On one hand, the public input process revealed that worker attraction is a major challenge in Potter County. It was noted schools, private businesses including manufacturers, local hospitals, and health care providers have difficulties finding employee candidates even for good paying jobs. Likewise, residents, business owners, and community leaders are passionate about Potter County’s natural beauty and recreational offerings, low cost of living, and close-knit communities. With advances in internet availability, living in rural North Central Pennsylvania but remaining connected to metropolitan areas and jobs is more feasible.

Attracting new residents, both for jobs as well as for the region’s natural rural landscape, requires improvements in how the county is marketed. The Comprehensive Plan recommends communications planning sessions with the region’s economic development, workforce, and tourism agencies/partnerships to outline a collaborative approach for marketing. To avoid duplication of resources, a planning process will help outline the best platform for a targeted marketing campaign geared toward recruiting students and workers to the region. In addition, providing technical resources for employers relative to employee recruitment was identified as an opportunity.

Increase student interest in the trades and promote technical training

Over the last few decades, the United States has experienced steady increases in educational attainment. According to the US Census, while just under 1 in 20 adults completed at least 4 years of college in 1940, that ratio rose to 1 in 4 by 2000. Today, 89% of people 25 years and older have completed high school and 60% have studied beyond the high school level. The value society has placed on educational attainment has led younger generations to often think of skilled labor career paths as outdated or “dark, dirty, and dangerous” work involving repetitive tasks.

The public input process uncovered a need to help students think strategically about their career path and diminish the stigma that currently surrounds technical training. Technological advances have changed the factory floor. Today, manufacturing provides a range of highly skilled, high paying jobs and a strong ladder for career advancement.

To help students better explore career paths in the trades, the Comprehensive Plan offers two primary action items.

- Expose students to the trades beginning in middle school and extending through high school to garner interest in and awareness of the region’s technical career opportunities. This action item is already being coordinated through the Workforce Development Board’s Business and Education Connect Program, but Potter County can help support increased coordination with the local school districts.
- Expand the use of career and technical courses offered via teleconferencing and explore the potential to open a Career and Technical Center (CTC) to service Potter County residents. Currently, the primary CTC serving Potter County is the Seneca Highlands CTC, located in Port Allegany, McKean County. The commute to Seneca Highlands, more than an hour for some portions of the county, is a significant deterrent for Potter County students.

Economic Base

The Challenge

Beginning in the 1980-1990s, the nation began to witness a shift in its economic base whereby the manufacturing sector began to decline, and the service sector began to grow. This shift was due to multiple factors, including automation, off-shoring, and recessions; but the shared result has been a decrease in manufacturing jobs. In rural Pennsylvania, including Cameron, McKean, and Potter Counties, this national trend has greatly impacted the local manufacturing industry. Since 2010, the Tri-County region has lost more than 865 jobs.

The local economic base was one of the most prominent discussion topics during all stakeholder and public engagement events during the planning process. Residents and community leaders recognize the need to diversify the economy to promote job growth, while also supporting and adding value to the region's legacy industry base. Tied directly to workforce development, as previously discussed, attracting workers to the region to fill jobs is also a critical priority.

Primary Goals for Economic Base

The goal statement for economic base is to support "business attraction and retention to provide high-quality jobs and living wages for the region's residents." For existing businesses, the action items outlined are intended to increase awareness of the resources and support that local economic development organizations provide, as well as to provide pad-ready sites that can support business attraction and retention for larger companies. Equally important, there are specific action items for supporting cottage industries and tourism.

Business attraction and retention to provide high-quality jobs and living wages for the region's residents.

- **Promote the county's economic development resources**
- **Leverage natural resources and focus on economic diversification**
- **Grow agriculture and tourism**

Promote the county's economic development resources

Today, the top employment sectors in the Tri-County region are Manufacturing, Nursing and Residential Care Facilities, Retail Trade, Education Services, and Accommodation and Food Service. These industries, along with others, currently employ 21,562 individuals in the Tri-County region and 5,207 in Potter County (based on 2018 second quarter employment data). In Potter County, the two top industries are Healthcare and Social Assistance and Manufacturing. UPMC Cole is the largest employer in the county.

Since 2000, Potter County's economy has lost a total of 2,256 jobs, largely during the 2008 recession. While job numbers have rebounded in recent years (growing by 314 jobs since 2010), total employment still lags well behind pre-recession levels.

To promote continued job growth in the county, the Comprehensive Plan recommends two key action items: First, increase awareness of available business resources and, second, continue to identify and market the county's opportunity sites and offer incentives to expand existing businesses or attract new ones. The county and its economic development partners already offer local businesses a wide range of support services, but improvements can be made in the areas of technical assistance with brand development, job posting and recruiting techniques, and funding incentives. An example of funding assistance is UPMC Cole's use of the Pennsylvania Primary Health Care Loan Repayment Program, which has helped the hospital attract health care professionals by repaying education loans for those working for a period of two years. As a second example of funding incentives, the county can leverage Commonwealth programs to identify and market a priority site for development. Providing pad-ready sites, subsidized through grant funding, is a strong mechanism for supporting a business expansion or relocation project.

Leverage natural resources and focus on economic diversification

The community recognizes the value of "cottage industries" (a business or manufacturing activity conducted in a person's home) as an excellent way to diversify job opportunities. Cottage industries support the region's tourism market and leverage natural resources, often providing hand-crafted, local products. In addition, maximizing the region's forest and timber products has been identified as an opportunity to take advantage of natural resources.

In terms of economic diversification, investing in arts, culture, and music is identified as a priority item. Supporting the establishment and growth of cultural establishments will support thriving, downtown communities while also providing

jobs. Currently, county employment data shows there are only 20 existing jobs in the Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation industry.

Energy in Potter County

Comments from the public on issues related to the energy industry were varied. There's a recognition of economic development potential from energy development, coupled with a concern that irresponsible and uncontrolled growth could result in environmental damage and unwelcome social changes.

Much of the focus is on the discovery of vast natural gas resources that have been confirmed in shale layers two miles or more below the ground in much of Potter County. Recent technological innovations have enabled energy companies to access these resources with horizontal drilling and hydrofracturing to bring the gas to the surface. Three inhibiting factors have slowed shale gas development during the early part of the 21st century – lack of pipelines to usher the gas to market, a glut of natural gas in the market, and low prices at the wellhead. Industry experts forecast that, as conditions evolve, gas production will occur in earnest across much of the Appalachian Basin.

Thousands of acres in gas, oil and mineral rights on private property are currently under lease. In addition, a substantial number of subsurface rights are owned by energy companies. At the same time, a significant portion of state-owned land in the county is split – surface rights owned by the commonwealth and subsurface rights privately held.

Meanwhile, development of alternative energy sources has been growing nationwide and Potter County is beginning to see early forays into wind and solar energy production. These renewable energy sources are largely dependent on market factors, as well as state and federal government policies related to tax incentives and other potential supportive measures.

Grow agriculture

Agriculture, including the lumber and forest products industries, continues to serve as a major component of the county's economy and its way of life, as it has for more than a century. However, the number of family farms and dairy operations have been declining in Potter County as a result of many factors, including poor economics, changes in consumers' habits, marketing obstacles, outmigration of young adults, and a growing wave of consolidation.

To support the agriculture industry, Penn State Extension researchers have documented the potential for "contract farming" for specific products, leasing of farmland for alternative energy production such as solar energy collectors, and alternative crops that could be profitable to local farmers, from soybeans, carrots and mint, to cucumbers and hemp. A growing number of consumers are seeking products from USDA-certified organic farms, and are also eager to purchase locally produced fruits, vegetables, and other food items providing potential for business growth in locally grown food. Likewise, the potential exists to make greater use of local forest products for furniture manufacturing, wooden crafts, and other commercial products.

There is potential for growth in the agricultural sector through a concerted campaign of education and outreach, marketing innovations, and collaborations from both within the agricultural community and with partnering organizations and agencies. The plan, accordingly, recommends Potter County continue to support and encourage farm and forest owners by providing technical assistance, education, and marketing support.

Grow tourism

Potter County is part of a 12-county region marketed as the Pennsylvania Wilds, an area promoted for its untouched forests, world-class stargazing, and outdoor recreation. Multiple studies have found a link between exposure to nature, and stronger mental and physical health. Spending time in nature has been known to decrease stress levels, which has many residual health benefits. Many Potter County visitors are searching for that peaceful relaxation where they can "unplug" and immerse themselves in nature. That's a selling point that community planners and tourist promoters should bear in mind as they seek to reverse trends of rural outmigration and draw more visitors to support their local economies.

Based on a 2017 Economic Impact of Travel and Tourism in Pennsylvania, travelers spent nearly \$1.8 billion in the region, a 3.6% increase over 2016, and accounting for 10.7% of the region's employment. Compared to its neighbors in the Pennsylvania Wilds region, Potter County ranked 9 of 12 in terms of visitor spending. To further capture tourism activity

in the county, the Comprehensive Plan recommends increased marketing and the identification and completion of high priority tourism projects.

In terms of marketing, there are several tourism organizations in the region providing high quality promotion and branding. As shown, many of the organizations have overlapping coverage areas, which may be confusing to a visitor trying to access a single, comprehensive resource for planning a trip. The Comprehensive Plan, accordingly, recommends a communications planning effort to ensure resources and initiatives are not duplicative and continued collaboration and communication remains.

Prominent Tourism Agencies in Cameron, McKean and Potter Counties

The infographic is divided into three horizontal sections, each with a title on the left and logos with coverage information on the right.

- PA State Tourism Office Region Initiative:** Includes the Pennsylvania WILDS logo (Cameron, McKean, and Potter Counties + 10 additional counties) and the Wilds Cooperative logo (D. POSE).
- Local Official Tourism Promotion Agencies and Destination Marketing Agencies:** Includes the Pennsylvania Great Outdoors Visitors Bureau (Cameron County + 4 additional counties), the Allegheny National Forest ANF (McKean County), Trail Central (McKean County), and the Potter-Tioga logo (Potter County + 1 additional county).
- Additional Tourism Agencies in the Region:** Includes the LHR Lumber Heritage Region logo (Cameron, McKean, and Potter Counties + 12 additional counties) and the D6 logo (McKean and Potter Counties + 9 additional counties).

Tourism in Potter County

Promoted decades ago as “God’s Country,” and in more recent years as “Untouched, Unspoiled, Untamed,” Potter County is all that and more when it comes to its appeal to visitors. The same assets that attracted its early settlers – vast natural resources – are now the foundation for a tourism industry that pumps millions of dollars annually into the county’s economy. With about a quarter-million acres of state forest, game and park lands open to public use, Potter County has vast potential to build on the success of past and current tourist promotion and marketing activities.

The fastest-growing attraction of the new century is the certified International Dark Sky Preserve at Cherry Springs State Park, which draws tens of thousands of astronomers, photographers, hobbyists and families eager to view constellations, planets, the Northern Lights, meteor showers and other celestial attractions unimpeded by light pollution. Visitor counts there are increasing annually, thanks most recently to an effective marketing push by Visit Potter-Tioga, the two-county tourist promotion agency. Potter County is fortunate that the Commonwealth has consistently invested in Cherry Springs and other state parks within the county’s borders, while supporting sound management practices and recreational activities on state forest and game lands.

At the same time, the Commonwealth continues to seek a vendor/concessionaire willing to partner for an ambitious plan to invest in creating a four-season recreational attraction at Denton Hill State Park. The park’s once-popular alpine skiing attraction has now been idle for six winter seasons – and counting. A vibrant Denton Hill State Park is a key element to a broader plan to link and market a series of attractions that would draw tourists to Potter County.

Hunting and fishing were the mainstays of the tourist economy for decades. Those outdoor pursuits along with hiking, camping and nature-watching remain a big draw. Social scientists confirm that a larger proportion of young adults are drawn to areas such as Potter County for outdoor endurance events, as well as family adventures in nature-based settings. Additionally, the county has multiple festivals and unique attractions – the Coudersport Ice Mine and Austin Dam Memorial Park among them – that are highly marketable.

Opportunities exist to boost the tourism economy and build on the promotion and marketing activities of Visit Potter-Tioga, the Pennsylvania Wilds, Pennsylvania Lumber Heritage Region, Pennsylvania Route 6 Alliance and others through a coordinated and concerted effort by business owners and event planners across the county.

Communities

The Challenge

The population of the Tri-County region has declined, decreasing from 75,035 residents in 1980 to an estimated 63,758 residents in 2018. Potter County’s population has remained the most stable of the three counties although is still slightly declining with a projection of 16,459 residents by 2023. Today, Potter County has just 16.1 persons per square mile and is the fifth least populated county in the Commonwealth.

From a national outlook, the population in the United States continues to urbanize and 81% of all residents now live in urbanized areas. Millennials, born between 1977-2000, have continued the trend. As one NPR article describes,

“With wi-fi and telecommuting, young people theoretically could dodge overpriced real estate and ugly commutes and opt instead for a spacious house with a big yard and a broadband connection. But it turns out the millennial generation is only accelerating the demographic shift.”

The national population trends create a challenging path forward for Potter County. Based on public input, 57% of survey respondents reported population decline needs to be addressed. As part of the same narrative, 62% of residents reported that amenities, shopping, and restaurants in the region need to be improved to help retain and attract residents. Finding ways to retain the region's youth and attract new residents is a priority outcome of the Comprehensive Plan.

Primary Goals for Communities

As part of the previous comprehensive plans, each of the three counties adopted a Future Land Use map that identified areas for population growth and development. In Potter County, Coudersport is identified as a high growth area, and Austin, Galeton, Shinglehouse, and Ulysses are identified as rural growth areas. Contextually at this time, "high growth" may not translate into high increases in population or new development. What it can translate to, however, is concentrated investments in community amenities to create a strong sense of place in Potter County's quintessential small towns, focusing on restaurants, cultural attractions, night life, and, quite simply, things to do.

The strategies in this Comprehensive Plan address building deterioration and blight, housing, investments in streets and façade improvements, and short-term visitor lodging as important areas for reinvestment to support community development. Making these improvements will, over time, help curb migration trends out of the region while also attracting visitors.

Invest in communities to enhance quality of life for residents, employers, and visitors.

- Encourage boroughs and townships to address building and property deterioration and blight
- Bolster well maintained, vibrant downtown communities
- Expand short-term visitor lodging

Encourage boroughs and townships to address building and property deterioration and blight

Based on data collected during the focus group sessions, residents would like to see the three counties combat deteriorating conditions and blight throughout all municipalities.

While local governments in each of the three counties have addressed blight to some degree, improving code enforcement is recognized as necessary. Enforcing building codes improves safety and helps retain property values by regulating the safety, sanitation, and appearance of the interior and exterior of structures and all exterior property areas. Another tool to address blight is Pennsylvania Act 152-2016 which amends Act 87-1982, the Recorder of Deeds Fee Law. It allows counties to enact a fee for the recording of deeds. The collected fees may then be used to fund the demolition of blighted properties. Establishing a county land bank under the provisions of Pennsylvania Act 153-2012 is another tool to return vacant, abandoned properties to productive use.

The Potter County Housing and Redevelopment Authorities are currently addressing blighted properties with a focus on Coudersport Borough. The action strategies recommend investigating the establishment of a land bank and providing training for local officials on ways to address blight including the use of tool lending programs.

Only **9.5%** of the **261** high school students responding to the community survey indicated they will stay in the region after high school graduation.



Bolster well maintained, vibrant downtown communities

As described above, cultivating investment in Potter County’s downtowns is a priority outcome of the Comprehensive Plan. Investment will help maintain and create vibrant communities with a variety of shopping, restaurants, and things to do to retain residents, attract new residents, and leverage visitor spending. While real estate market conditions play a key role in private sector investment, the public sector can help create a positive environment that is attractive for investors. Public improvements to be considered should include well-maintained, attractive streets with new sidewalks, consistent branding and wayfinding signs, street trees, and pedestrian fixtures. These improvements will also create an excellent gateway and first impression and help encourage visitors driving through to stop and spend time in each community.

Community-Building/Volunteerism

Social trends and changing demographics have loosened the bonds of the community fabric in many parts of rural America. The impact can be measured in Potter County, through the declining memberships in many civic organizations and the growing difficulty that many groups have encountered in filling their volunteer ranks. Yet, “a sense of community” is cited as an asset by those who are looking to relocate from a more populated area, and by those who cite the leading factors that make them want to stay in a rural area.

Housing

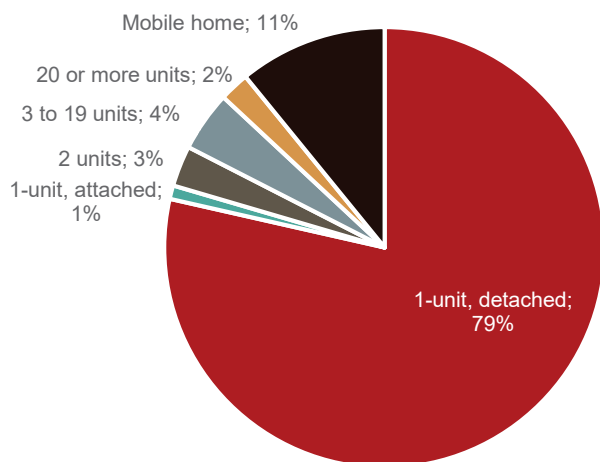
Offering a variety of high-quality housing stock is the foundation of healthy, vibrant communities. Communities need a mix of detached, attached, and multi-family homes of varying sizes to meet all income levels.

In the Tri-County region, the current mix of housing is predominantly limited to 1-unit, detached homes. While generally sold at lower than statewide averages, these single-family homes are large and typically have not been updated by owners, requiring substantial investment to renovate and maintain. For example, during the focus group sessions, young professionals reported that while they would like to purchase their first home, they are unwilling to invest in the large single-family homes on the market. Instead, they would prefer smaller, but more upgraded detached units.

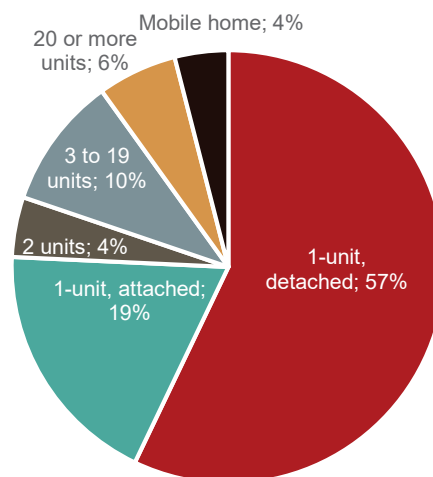
Statewide, 18% of all housing is 1-unit attached homes. In the Tri-County region, just 1% of housing are 1-unit attached homes, demonstrating how limited the housing stock is in terms of variety. In addition, the region has a higher proportion of mobile homes. While offering an affordable option for low-income families, mobile homes are more vulnerable to natural disasters and present hazard mitigation concerns.

A key action item in the Comprehensive Plan is to work with local developers to rehabilitate housing stock and/or convert large homes into two or more units. In addition, Potter County should consider developing a financial model to incentivize market-rate apartments, townhouses, and ADA-accessible single-family homes.

Tri-County Housing Units by Structure Type, 2018



Pennsylvania Units by Structure Type, 2018



Expand short-term visitor lodging

In terms of supporting the region's tourism industry, the planning process revealed a shortage of short-term visitor lodging. Currently, there are no chain-affiliated hotels in the Tri-County region, which is a preferred lodging type for some visitors. Residents and tourism professionals indicated visitors often travel to St. Marys in Elk County which offers several chain-operated hotels. Limited lodging accommodations detract from the region's ability to capture visitor spending on lodging and food. Pennsylvania estimates that 35% of all visitor spending is on lodging and food and beverage. By not offering a variety of places to spend the night, Potter County's tourism industry isn't capturing a third of its potential revenue. By category, visitors to the Pennsylvania Wilds spend less on lodging than in any other region in Pennsylvania.

Based on discussions with county officials, staff, tourism professionals, and residents, the Comprehensive Plan recommends conducting a hotel market study for the purpose of attracting additional tourism lodging options to the region. If feasible, the county should also identify investors and grant funding to support expanding lodging options. For example, the Commonwealth awarded \$3 million in state grant funding to support a hotel project in St. Marys in 2010.

Visitors today also prefer to stay in short-term rentals, often provided through online platforms. Short-term rentals are a good opportunity, as nearly one-third of all

housing units in the region are identified as vacant due to the large number of seasonal homes. Census 2010 data (the most recent available) shows that over 85% of vacant homes in Cameron and Potter Counties are used seasonally and for recreational use. Online interfaces for renting homes, such as Airbnb, are an excellent opportunity to generate income for home owners, as well as county and state taxes, while also meeting the need for visitor lodging. The plan recommends encouraging the use of homes for tourist lodging and updating ordinances to ensure municipalities and the county receive applicable taxes.

Pennsylvania estimates that **35%** of all  visitor spending  is on lodging and food and beverage and, by not offering a variety of places to spend the night, Potter County's tourism industry isn't capturing a third of its potential revenue. By category, visitors to the Pennsylvania Wilds spend less on lodging  than in any other region in Pennsylvania.

Additional ongoing efforts in the county

In addition to the prioritized issues, Potter County Board of Commissioners recognizes the importance of supporting local libraries and increasing volunteerism. In communities with limited resources and financial challenges, public libraries are providing essential services at unprecedented levels. At the same time, community organizations are dependent on corps of reliable volunteers to remain viable. Among these are fire and ambulance companies, civic groups, and many valued community service organizations.

Support/Leverage Local Libraries

Potter County is fortunate to be served by vibrant public libraries whose roles have been evolving from repositories of books and periodicals to vital services and programs that benefit our communities in immeasurable ways. All signs point to that trend continuing in the 2020-29 decade. Some school districts have reduced their library services, which has increased demands on the county's public libraries.

Local libraries have expanded their research tools and targeted programming to positively impact children and families. They are also providing high-speed internet access – which is becoming a modern necessity – to the underserved, including a significant proportion of the county's senior citizens. With educational opportunities expanding and a growing need for services, public libraries are well-positioned to serve as community hubs in the next decade.

The 11 location Potter-Tioga Library system recorded some 165,000 visits in 2018. More than 6,500 children participated in programs held at the libraries, many of them during the summer months when schools were in recess. Some of the libraries are also increasing their programming for adults and forging partnerships with other organizations, such as the Pa. Bureau of State Parks.

Public officials and library patrons must recognize the fact that, for libraries to continue to offer their services and expand their roles in the community, financial and volunteer support will be critical in the coming years.

Infrastructure/Environment

The Challenge

Modern, reliable infrastructure is foundational to quality of life and economic development. Infrastructure includes physical and organizational structures that allow communities to operate effectively and efficiently. Transportation infrastructure includes roads and bridges, which enable the movement of people and goods, while water and sewer infrastructure support the health and growth of communities. In the 21st century, transferring information through telecommunications infrastructure (e.g., internet and cellular service) plays a significant role in the livelihood of communities. Providing efficient emergency services is also part of the infrastructure that communities rely on every day.

Rural communities in Pennsylvania are adversely impacted by deteriorating physical infrastructure, dwindling resources for emergency management, and a lack of reliable communication channels. Residents in the Tri-County region understand these impacts and see a need for critical, focused infrastructure investments. When asked which public infrastructure improvements local governments should be funding, the top two responses from Comprehensive Plan survey respondents included road and bridge improvements and expanded internet/cell service.

Primary Goals for Infrastructure/Environment

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has demonstrated a commitment in recent years to improving its critical infrastructure. In 2013, the state legislature signed into law House Bill 1060, also known as Act 89, creating Pennsylvania's most comprehensive state transportation funding package in decades (approximately \$2.3 billion invested over 5 years). Act 89 also established a special fund within the state treasury called "Fee for Local Use Fund." This new revenue source is generated by a county-adopted \$5 vehicle registration fee and can be used for a variety of transportation improvements, including upgrading local bridges.

Beyond transportation, a Pennsylvania Broadband Initiative was launched in 2018 with the goal of providing high-speed internet access to every household and business in the state. Tri-County Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc., based in Mansfield, Pennsylvania, was awarded \$1.5 million in state grant funding. This funding will supplement federal funding and Tri-County Rural Electric Cooperative's own investment to construct 103 miles of above-ground fiber that will expand access to broadband internet service to 1,400 customers in Potter County.

Infrastructure improvements, such as the extension of water and sewer, are critical items for future development in a community. While many people in the region voiced that improved infrastructure of all types would be beneficial, some members of the community expressed concern surrounding growth and would rather focus on conservation. Clearly, a balanced approach is needed to ensure a state of good repair of the region's public infrastructure while protecting the region's expansive natural resources.

Deliver reliable, cost-effective infrastructure to support a high quality of life for residents, employers, and visitors.

- **Expand broadband and cellular service**
- **Improve local roads, bridges, and 4-digit state routes**
- **Attract additional volunteers for emergency services**
- **Upgrade water and sewer infrastructure**
- **Protect water quality and environment**

Expand broadband and cellular service

According to the latest 2019 estimates from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), more than 800,000 Pennsylvania residents do not have access to broadband connectivity. Broadband speeds are generally faster in urban areas, while residents in rural areas such as North Central Pennsylvania pay higher rates for internet speeds that do not meet the federal or state definition of broadband. Several important factors limit the expansion of broadband connectivity in rural areas, including:

- The topography and landscape of rural counties, specifically dense tree canopies and widespread areas with no land development;
- The cost of building and maintaining last-mile broadband infrastructure to businesses without immediate demand for service; and

- Access to capital and financial resources.

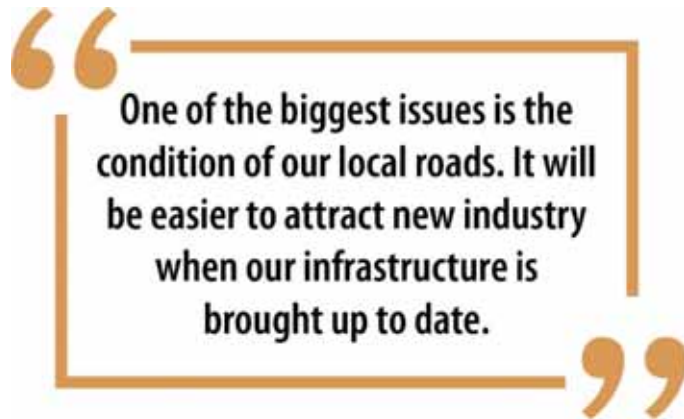
This lack of high-speed internet puts the region at a disadvantage in an increasingly interconnected, knowledge-driven economy. To position itself to meet the challenges of the 21st century and embrace new opportunities for not only growth but simply retention of businesses and competitiveness, the region must develop and support a cellular and broadband deployment strategy to proactively engage service providers and identify potential anchor customers. Potter County can assist in this effort by participating on a broadband deployment task force, which is a key recommendation of this Comprehensive Plan.

Improve local roads, bridges, and 4-digit state routes

Rural roads and bridges in Pennsylvania often do not receive adequate and timely maintenance. In addition to an entirely rural road network, over half of the Tri-County region’s road system is locally-owned as shown in the table below.

Linear Miles of Roadway, 2018

County	Local	State	Total
Cameron	124.8	152.9	277.7
McKean	479.1	541.9	1,021.0
Potter	639.9	451.1	1,091.0
Tri-County Region	1,243.8	1,145.9	2,389.7



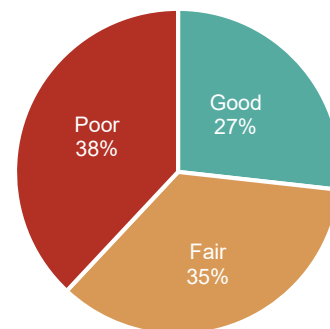
The Potter County state road network experiences the worst pavement conditions in the Tri-County region. In the county, 292 miles (or 26.8% of the county total) of state-owned roads are in poor condition. Of these 292 miles, 237 (or 81%) are 4-digit state routes.

Statewide, local bridge conditions are improving. Since 2008, the number of locally-owned bridges (greater than 20 feet long) in Pennsylvania rated “poor” in condition decreased from 2,131 to 1,863 (representing a 12.6% change). However, extensive investment is required to bring many local bridges into a state of good repair. Shown below, nearly 40% of all local bridges across the three counties are in “poor” condition.

Local Bridge Conditions, 2018

	Good	Fair	Poor	Total
Cameron	4	5	7	16
McKean	22	29	30	81
Potter	12	16	17	45
Tri-County Region	38	50	54	142

Local Bridge Conditions in the Tri-County Region, 2018



Bridges by Local Jurisdiction, 2018

	County	Township	City/ Boro	Other	Total
Cameron	5	11	0	0	16
McKean	5	58	17	1	81
Potter	0	38	7	0	45
Tri-County Region	10	107	24	1	142

Rural roads and bridges are critical links within communities, providing access to natural resources, agriculture, manufacturing, and many other economic drivers. Several state and federal transportation investments in the Tri-County region have been made since 2013 and address rural road and bridge conditions. As of spring 2019, more than 165 projects totaling nearly \$300 million have either been planned, are currently underway, or have already been completed.

Act 89 Transportation Projects in the Tri-County Region, Completed as of spring 2019

	Projects	Cost (000s)
Cameron	12	\$46,325
McKean	62	\$120,796
Potter	91	\$126,901
Tri-County Region		\$294,022

To begin addressing local road and bridge conditions, Potter County must first engage and educate its municipalities on the need for capital improvement planning and programming. This can be accomplished by offering training programs to local officials on capital improvement plans and their benefits. After local transportation needs are documented, Potter County will be better equipped to coordinate with the North Central RPO and PennDOT District 2-0 to improve local transportation infrastructure.

Attract additional volunteers for emergency services

Two primary challenges in delivering critical emergency response services must be addressed: the lack of funding for EMS providers and the decrease in the number of volunteer firefighters and ambulance service personnel. As reported by stakeholders, emergency response professionals in the Tri-County region are burdened by service and training demands, staffing issues, and a lack of proper resources available to address increasingly complex emergencies.

The most critical component of the emergency response system is the use of volunteers to provide life-saving services. While Pennsylvania has taken an active role in offering funding assistance to volunteer emergency service organizations, much more remains to be done to assist in the recruitment and retention of volunteers. As recommended by the Comprehensive Plan, the following resolutions, among others, could be advanced within the Tri-County region:

- Continuing word of mouth recruitment, as it is still the most effective way to find individuals interested in volunteering.
- Implementing career and technical education training in each county through public safety programs.
- Identifying alternative funding for organizations that provide state-approved first responder training in order to reduce the burden on volunteer systems.
- Advocating for the proposed First Responder Loan Forgiveness Program, which proposes student loan forgiveness up to \$16,000 for college graduates after serving four years with a volunteer fire company, rescue company, or emergency medical services agency.

Increase volunteerism

Civic groups and community institutions are having increasing difficulty in attracting and retaining volunteers. The very existence of some of these organizations is in jeopardy. In a rural area with a limited tax base and declining population, an active force of dedicated volunteers is vital. Therefore, it is imperative that local leaders study successful models that have been employed in other communities and refine their approaches.

Among reasons cited for not volunteering are a lack of time, not having enough information on the cause, and simply not being asked. There are many steps that can be taken to enhance volunteer participation, such as developing recruitment campaigns and policies and procedures for volunteers to follow. These will ensure that volunteers know and understand what is expected of them. Organization leaders should also show their appreciation to individuals who are volunteering their time.

The benefits of increased volunteerism are immeasurable – from more vibrant and well-operated festivals and events, to expanded hours at local attractions and a more involved and active community.

Reversing the decline of volunteer involvement and capitalizing on the idyllic image that many potential new residents have of rural communities present formidable challenges and promising opportunities. But there are no easy solutions.

Upgrade water and sewer infrastructure

Communities across Pennsylvania are struggling to maintain their aging water infrastructure. The 2018 Report Card for Pennsylvania graded the state's water and wastewater systems at a D and D-, respectively. Infrastructure receiving a D grade are in poor to fair condition and mostly below standard, with many elements approaching the end of their service life. County officials and stakeholders echoed this, reporting severe deterioration of many systems in the county that needs to be addressed in the short and long term. Increasing environmental regulations, older systems, and costs to operate are some of the constraints associated with operating Potter County's existing water and sewer systems.

Deferring needed investments will only result in greater expenses in the future and pass a greater burden on to future residents. Comprehensive studies of water and sewer service areas are needed to determine the needs of the systems and allow for effective capital planning. Local governments, with support from the county, need to proactively pursue state and federal funds for its priority water and sewer projects.

Protect water quality and environment

Pennsylvania has the highest density of stream miles per acre in the continental United States. Unfortunately, a quarter of those stream miles are impaired and unsafe for their intended use, according to the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection. These intended uses range from drinking water supplies, to sustenance fishing, to recreation. Many agencies are charged with watershed protection but lack the resources to fully address threats to water quality and comply with state and federal clean water laws. Collectively, the three counties have more than 24,000 water wells. Pennsylvania state law does not require construction standards or private well testing, and regulatory agencies do not routinely monitor private water quality. Accordingly, periodic water testing is the only way owners of private wells can be ensured water is safe to drink.

Two water quality protection organizations have been assembled in recent years by the Potter County Board of Commissioners:

- The Triple Divide Watershed Coalition (TDWC) is comprised of all public water systems in Potter County. TDWC, winner of a Pa. Governor's Award for Local Government Excellence, is charged with protection of sourcewater through state-certified watershed management plans.
- The Potter County Water Quality Work Group covers stewardship of the county's surface water and free-flowing water resources through a partnership of the Potter County Conservation District, regional watershed protection associations, Penn State Extension water resources specialists, and Trout Unlimited.

Health Services

The Challenge

Access to affordable, quality health care consistently ranks as one of Americans' greatest concerns. Meeting that need is a major challenge in rural communities. At the same time, the Tri-County region has been affected by a drug abuse epidemic that has been declared a public health crisis in Pennsylvania, resulting in addiction, overdose emergencies, and deaths for people of all ages.

Health care officials were sounding alarm bells about an opioid epidemic – particularly the abuse of prescription painkillers and a growing number of heroin addicts – from 2010 to 2018. Most recent trends in Potter County reflect declines in opioid abuse, but rising incidences of methamphetamine addiction as well as marijuana and alcohol abuse, according to data from Potter County Human Services Drug & Alcohol Services. Another recent trend is an increase in drug-related impaired driving arrests.

At the same time that the need for care has risen, the availability of behavioral health services (mental illness and addiction treatment) has declined. Public health officials cite an inability to recruit and retain qualified specialists for psychiatry, behavioral health, and casework. In Potter County, UPMC Cole (formerly Charles Cole Memorial Hospital) is planning to expand behavioral health and telepsychiatry services and is also looking into the possibility of providing medication-assisted treatment to medically qualifying substance abusers, a proven tool to incrementally reduce dependence on certain addictive drugs.

There is a direct connection between drug/alcohol addiction and/or mental illness, and the rising costs associated with Potter County's criminal justice system. More than half of the individuals involved in the system have mental health issues, addiction disorders, or both. Research shows that, without treatment, most of these offenders will cycle in and out of the county jail or state prison, resulting in increased public expenses and immeasurable social costs. One measure of the financial toll can be found in an analysis by the Potter County Fiscal Department showing that some 45 percent of the county's annual operating budget of nearly \$10 million today is related in one way or another to the administration of criminal justice, including expenses of \$1,592,783 at the county jail (2018).

Potter County is a rural leader in a series of innovative criminal justice reform measures that have the potential to reduce expenses, enhance public safety, lessen the number of offenders who are incarcerated, and help those who are involved in the system to become more productive members of society and stabilizing forces in their own families. Specialty courts, pre-trial diversion, re-entry services in the county jail, and other "smart justice" strategies are being implemented, in accordance with the strategic plan of the Potter County Criminal Justice Advisory Board.

Primary Goals for Health Services

While continuing to curb the availability of opioids is a critical step, so is providing the highest level of care locally for individuals fighting substance abuse. The Comprehensive Plan recognizes the importance of the Potter County Human Services Department, which provides a range of services for alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs, mental health, and aging and youth services among many others.

Improve county mental health and substance abuse treatment and rehabilitation services.

- **Increase investment in priority services and treatment**

Increase investment in priority services and treatment

Looking forward, the priority action item is to review the county's existing mental health and substance abuse treatment and rehabilitation centers and services to identify opportunities to strengthen existing resources as well as to attract new providers. In addition, a dedicated review will help ensure the county is leveraging state resources to the maximum extent possible.

Implementation Plans

To support the implementation of the comprehensive plan goals, the following pages provide a complete list of implementation strategies and corresponding action items. These strategies outline a tactical approach for advancing the Northern Pennsylvania Tri-County Comprehensive Plan vision by specifying tangible action steps that can be taken to ensure progress over the next 10 years. This chapter also identifies key partners with which the counties may collaborate to support implementation. Partners include local, regional, and state entities, as well as qualified consultants who offer expertise in specific areas.

Measures

In the public sector, the program logic model is the preferred framework for measuring progress toward a stated goal. It's used to measure whether a specific public program is achieving the desired outcomes and is, therefore, an effective use of public resources.

The logic model, simply stated, clearly defines what a program does and what its intended results are to be. This includes the following indicators:

- **Resources:** The human and financial resources dedicated by the county for program activities.
- **Input:** The actual program activity that is conducted by the county.
 - Example 1: Code Enforcement
 - Example 2: Tourism Marketing
- **Output:** The direct yield of the program activity.
 - Example 1: The number of houses inspected in each municipality, the number of hours worked by the code enforcement officer; etc.
 - Example 2: The number of paid advertisements issued in print, in social media, and in radio, the number of wayfinding signs installed, etc.
- **Outcome (short-term)**
 - Example: Improved housing conditions
 - Example: Increased unique visitor views of websites
- **Outcome (long-term)**
 - Example 1: Increased home values
 - Example 2: Increased visitor spending

For purposes of the Comprehensive Plan, the measures identified are outputs. This is important. The county cannot achieve short and long-term outcomes without first providing the appropriate program activity inputs.

For purpose of the Comprehensive Plan, the measures identified are outputs. This is important. The county cannot achieve short and long-term outcomes without first providing the appropriate program inputs. By concentrating first on inputs and direct outputs and then, in 3-5 years, looking at outcomes, each county will be able to identify which actions are providing concrete results and which actions may need to be revisited.

Workforce Development

<p>Expansion of recruitment efforts to attract talent to the region from across the state and nation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close the training gap in the region’s workforce • Enhance marketing and employee attraction • Increase student interest in the trades and promote technical training 			
1			
1.1	<p>Action Conduct communications planning sessions with the region’s economic development, workforce, and tourism agencies/partnerships to outline a collaborative approach for regular communication and coordination.</p>	<p>Measure Completion of facilitated planning sessions to identify a clear structure for communication and collaboration.</p>	<p>Partners (Who and When)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cameron, McKean, and Potter County Boards of Commissioners • Economic development, workforce, and tourism agencies/partnerships
1.2	<p>Action Leverage regional marketing to highlight the county’s high quality of life and low cost of living to students and workers seeking employment opportunities.</p>	<p>Measure Implementation of a targeted marketing strategy for the region that, while pulling on existing efforts, enhances the overall approach and effectiveness.</p>	<p>Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contingent on 1.1 findings to identify the best public-sector lead to facilitate regional marketing for employment
1.3	<p>Action Increase Potter County participation with organizations engaged in workforce development and training activities.</p>	<p>Measure Attendance at meetings with private sector businesses to attract new members for the Workforce Development Board, and meetings with other current and emerging workforce development organizations.</p>	<p>Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potter County Board of Commissioners • Potter County Community Development Department

<p>1.4</p>	<p>Action Increase student exposure to the trades beginning in middle school and extending through high school to garner interest in and awareness of the region's technical career opportunities. Opportunities could include presentations, a job-shadow program, job fairs, and other school district-coordinated events to connect students with employers.</p>	<p>Measure Qualitative and quantitative expansion of school district awareness events between base year (2020) and target improvement (2025).</p>	<p>Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potter County Community Development Department • Workforce Development Board (Business and Education Connect Program) • Potter County Education Council • Potter County School Districts (Austin Area; Coudersport Area; Galeton Area; Northern Potter; and Oswayo Valley)
<p>1.5</p>	<p>Action Explore the potential to offer Career and Technical Center (CTC) courses via teleconferencing as well as the potential to open a CTC to service Potter County residents.</p>	<p>Measure Number of meetings (e.g., regular coordination) with the Northern Pennsylvania Regional College and Seneca Highlands CTC. Establish a CTC in Potter County, if analysis and evolving conditions warrant.</p>	<p>Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potter County Community Development Department • Potter County Education Council • Northern Pennsylvania Regional College • Seneca Highlands CTC • Workforce Development Board • Other Workforce Development Organizations

Economic Base

<p>2</p> <p>Business attraction and retention to provide high-quality jobs and living wages for the region’s residents.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the county’s economic development resources • Leverage natural resources and focus on economic diversification • Grow agriculture and tourism 			
<p>2.1</p>	<p>Action Participate in the DCED Engage! Program to understand business needs. Investigate other federal, state, regional, or foundation grant/technical assistance programs.</p>	<p>Measure Restructure the county’s Community Development Department to incorporate elements of economic development. Application for and initiation of the DCED Engage! Program in Potter County to regularly and proactively interact with targeted companies.</p>	<p>Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potter County Community Development Department • Potter County Redevelopment Authority
<p>2.2</p>	<p>Action Increase business awareness and offering of business resources (e.g., technical assistance with brand development, job posting and recruiting techniques, etc., and funding).</p>	<p>Measure Qualitative and quantitative expansion of awareness efforts and resource offerings between base year (2020) and target improvement (2030).</p>	<p>Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pa. CareerLink • Potter County Community Development Department • Chambers of Commerce • Potter County Education Council
<p>2.3</p>	<p>Action Continue to identify and market the county’s opportunity sites and offer incentives to expand existing business or attract new ones.</p>	<p>Measure Identification of one priority site for business attraction and coordination with the Governor’s Action Team to list the site on Pa. Site Search, secure state grant funding to incentivize development/redevelopment, and, if warranted, complete a development feasibility study.</p>	<p>Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potter County Community Development Department • Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development • Potter County Redevelopment Authority

2.4	<p>Action Encourage efforts to promote the business incubator in Coudersport for small, diverse business startups and cottage industries and advance other shared-work space programs throughout Potter County.</p>	<p>Measure Qualitative and quantitative utilization increase between base year (2020) and target improvement (2025).</p>	<p>Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potter County Community Development Department • Wilds Cooperative of Pennsylvania • Potter County Redevelopment Authority
2.5	<p>Action Support a diversity of economic development efforts by focusing/investing in arts, culture, and music in support of regional vitality. Resurrect the Potter County Council on the Arts.</p>	<p>Measure Operating support to promote, advocate, and foster opportunities for arts organizations and audiences.</p>	<p>Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potter County Community Development Department • Local artisans, musicians, and volunteers
2.6	<p>Action Support and encourage farm and forest owners seeking to increase demand for local agricultural and forest products, through technical assistance, education, and marketing support.</p>	<p>Measure Convene a summit of farmers and forest owners, together with public agencies, to develop a strategic marketing plan. Investigate federal and state support programs for marketing of local agricultural products. Conduct educational activities on the health benefits of dairy products, fruits, and vegetables.</p>	<p>Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Penn State Extension • Potter County Conservation District • Local Farming and Forest Owners Organizations
2.7	<p>Action Leverage the resources of the region's tourism agencies to market Potter County as a tourism destination.</p>	<p>Measure Expansion of tourism marketing and consistent branding in the county. Active engagement and coordinated partnership with Visit Potter-Tioga.</p>	<p>Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contingent on 1.1 findings to identify the best public-sector partners to attract more visitors.
2.8	<p>Action Convene training for local officials and business owners on a variety of topics including tourism marketing.</p>	<p>Measure Measured by the number of training sessions held annually, and number of officials and business owners trained.</p>	<p>Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potter County Community Development Department • County Association of Township Officials

2.9	<p>Action Identify high priority tourism projects in Potter County and develop a corresponding funding and implementation strategy. May include expanding four-season attractions, trails, bike tourism, and motorized vehicle tourism.</p> <p>Quiet</p>	<p>Measure Advancement of at least one priority tourism project and/or annual event to include funding for planning and implementation (may include state grant funding). Evaluate and amend, as needed, municipal and county land development ordinances to protect the Dark Skies at Cherry Springs State Park and other critical natural resources upon which nature-based tourism is dependent. Investigate opportunities to link trails and recreational watercourses with wider networks, including the Triple Divide Trail System connecting Rochester, NY with Williamsport, Pa, and the Susquehanna River headwaters section of the 3,000-mile-long Capt. John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail. Advocate with state and municipal agencies, as well as private property partners, for reasonable measures that balance the need for trails that accommodate motorized recreational vehicles with environmental stewardship and nature-based “quiet places.” Support public engagement and education on trail development issues and their potential economic impact on Potter County.</p>	<p>Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potter County Community Development Department • Potter County Municipalities • Pa. Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR)
2.10	<p>Action Participate in state advocacy to help shape Pennsylvania’s legislative and policy initiatives for agricultural, forestry, timber, and energy industries.</p>	<p>Measure Formulation of proposed legislative strategies and advocacy events that provide information on legislative activities and provide opportunity to speak to, and hear, from legislators and representatives</p>	<p>Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State Senators and Representatives • Potter County Board of Commissioners

2.11	<p>Action Continue to advocate for the Denton Hill State Park Study to be implemented and continue to support its development into a four-season recreation park.</p>	<p>Measure Reopening of Denton Hill State Park as a vibrant four-season attraction.</p>	<p>Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potter County Board of Commissioners • DCNR Bureau of Forestry • DCNR Bureau of State Parks
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Communities

<p>Invest in communities to enhance quality of life for residents, employers, and visitors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage boroughs and townships to address building and property deterioration and blight • Bolster well maintained, vibrant downtown communities • Expand short-term visitor lodging 			
3			
3.1	<p>Action Adopt a strategy for promoting and supporting home maintenance and neighborhood pride.</p>	<p>Measure Establishment of a training program for Potter County's local officials and community leaders. Measured by the number of training sessions held annually, and number of individuals trained.</p>	<p>Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potter County Community Development Department • County Association of Township Officials
3.2	<p>Action Improve building code enforcement countywide through borough/township engagement.</p>	<p>Measure Creation and enforcement of local ordinances governing property maintenance.</p>	<p>Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potter County Community Development Department • Potter County Municipalities
3.3	<p>Action Continue to leverage statewide programs to remove blight. In addition, identify and address locations of illegal dumping throughout Potter County.</p>	<p>Measure Number of blighted properties addressed and number of illegal dumping sites identified and addressed.</p>	<p>Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potter County Housing and Redevelopment Authorities • Potter County Municipalities • Potter County Conservation District
3.4	<p>Action Investigate creating a land bank (Pa. Act 153-2012) and working with local developers to rehabilitate housing stock and/or convert large homes into two or more units, and consider developing a financial model to incentivize market-rate apartments, townhouses, and ADA accessible single-family homes.</p>	<p>Measure Review results of land bank investigation and, if warranted, pursue specific strategies for housing rehabilitation. Number of housing units rehabilitated or converted, and the implementation of a financing model to incentivize the private sector.</p>	<p>Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potter County Community Development Department • Potter County Housing and Redevelopment Authorities • Potter County Municipalities

3.5	<p>Action Reimagine catalyst sites/core main streets and determine phased projects, initially along U.S. Route 6 and later along other highways in Potter County, for redevelopment to potentially include streetscapes, façade improvements, and the development of shopping, dining, and cultural amenities.</p>	<p>Measure Conduct a visioning session with the public and stakeholders and advance a Master Plan for one or more prioritized sites/corridors.</p>	<p>Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potter County Community Development Department • Potter County Municipalities
3.6	<p>Action Support regional efforts to implement high quality wayfinding and signs as a way to brand and market the region's growth areas.</p>	<p>Measure Number of municipalities improved with wayfinding.</p>	<p>Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contingent on 1.1 findings to identify the best public-sector lead to facilitate wayfinding and signage
3.7	<p>Action Conduct a market study for the purpose of attracting additional tourism lodging options to the region. If feasible, identify investors and grant funding to support implementation.</p>	<p>Measure Completion of a lodging market study. Identification of investors and grant funding.</p>	<p>Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potter County Planning and Community Development Departments • Visit Potter-Tioga
3.8	<p>Action Encourage the use of homes for tourist lodging and update ordinances to ensure municipalities and the county receive applicable taxes.</p>	<p>Measure Completion of ordinances and an awareness campaign surrounding the county's need for tourist lodging. Provide education to seasonal home owners on the benefits of using their homes for short-term rentals to tourists.</p>	<p>Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potter County Planning and Community Development Departments • County Association of Township Officials • Homeowners (year-round and seasonal) • Real Estate Professionals
3.9	<p>Action</p>	<p>Measure Partnerships established with foundations, institutes, and other entities (Harwood</p>	<p>Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potter County Human Services

	Investigate establishment of a “volunteer bank” and other measures to increase community engagement.	Institutes, Orton Family Foundation, Pa. Humanities Council, etc.) to implement proven community revitalization strategies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potter County Community Development Department
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Infrastructure/Environment

<p>4</p> <p>Deliver reliable, cost-effective infrastructure to support a high quality of life for residents, employers, and visitors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand broadband and cellular service • Improve local roads, bridges, and 4-digit state routes • Attract additional volunteers for emergency services • Upgrade water and sewer infrastructure • Protect water quality and environment 			
4.1	<p>Action</p> <p>Continue to develop and support a county and regional cellular and broadband deployment strategy. In addition, support Potter County Education Council’s efforts to expand through telecommunications.</p>	<p>Measure</p> <p>Convening of a task force that inventories existing infrastructure, identifies anchor customers, and proactively engages service providers to expand coverage.</p>	<p>Partners (Who and When)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • North Central Pa. Regional Planning & Development Commission (North Central) • Potter County Planning and Community Development Departments • Potter County Education Council • Tri-County Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.
4.2	<p>Action</p> <p>Convene training for local officials on municipal adoption and use of capital improvement programming to address locally-owned transportation infrastructure.</p>	<p>Measure</p> <p>Establishment of a training program for Potter County’s local officials on a variety of topics, including capital improvement programming. Measured by the number of training sessions held annually, and number of officials trained. Long-term, the success of</p>	<p>Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potter County Board of Commissioners • Potter County Planning and Community Development Departments • North Central RPO

		municipal adoption and use of capital improvement programming.	
4.3	<p>Action Improve coordination with the North Central RPO and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) District 2-0 to improve local bridges and roadways.</p>	<p>Measure Attendance at North Central RPO meetings and the number of projects on the regional Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommendation of priority roadway and bridge projects, betterment needs, and other modal infrastructure. • Development of a regional bridge bundling program to address off-system bridges or locally-owned structures less than 20 feet in length. • Utilization of the PennDOT Connects initiative to incorporate pedestrian and bicycle improvements. </p>	<p>Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potter County Planning Department • Potter County Municipalities • Potter County Board of Commissioners
4.4	<p>Action Address the shortage of volunteer first responders and investigate the use of municipal and/or county funds to help cover training and certification requirements.</p>	<p>Measure Number of actions implemented; total funding used to support first responders training and certification; and the total increase of volunteer first responder numbers.</p>	<p>Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Fire/Ambulance Stations/Companies • Potter County Local Emergency Planning Committee • Potter County Department of Emergency Services
4.5	<p>Action Support municipal water/sewer authorities in their capital improvement planning and assist with identifying grant funding (e.g., USDA Rural Development).</p>	<p>Measure Prioritization of one or more water/sewer infrastructure upgrade projects for implementation and the total amount of grant funding secured.</p>	<p>Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potter County Planning and Community Development Departments • Water/Sewer Authorities USDA Rural Development

4.6	<p>Action Organize a team to identify areas that are in greatest need of water protection and determine potential sources of contamination in those areas. Expand current partnerships. Educate local government leaders and the public on potential threats to water quality and steps that can be taken to protect water resources.</p>	<p>Measure Number of studies completed/areas evaluated. Implementation and updating of state-certified sourcewater management plans. Prioritization of one or more environmental quality risks with corresponding action items.</p>	<p>Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potter County Planning and Community Development Departments • Potter County Conservation District • Triple Divide Watershed Coalition • Potter County Water Quality Work Group • County Association of Township Officials • Local schools
4.7	<p>Action Work with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to address floodplain issues affecting insurance rates and community development potential.</p>	<p>Measure Number of meetings held with FEMA and impacted communities to outline next steps.</p>	<p>Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potter County Board of Commissioners • Potter County Planning and Community Development Departments • Townships and Boroughs

Public Health (including Mental Health and Substance Abuse)

<h1 style="font-size: 2em; margin: 0;">5</h1> <h2 style="font-size: 1.2em; margin: 0;">Ensure access to health care, including mental health and substance abuse services.</h2> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase investment in priority services and treatment Advance coordination of core services to ensure increased access to previously limited services 		
<p>5.1</p>	<p>Action Review county's current available health care services to identify obstacles to access, as well as opportunities to retain and expand providers and services.</p> <p>Devise strategies to address identified obstacles and gaps.</p>	<p>Measure Implement strategies and garner requisite support from the medical community and government agencies.</p> <p>Partners (Who and When)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potter County Board of Commissioners Potter County Human Services UPMC Cole
<p>5.2</p>	<p>Action Review the county's existing mental health and substance abuse treatment and rehabilitation centers and services to identify opportunities to strengthen existing resources as well as to attract new providers.</p>	<p>Measure Complete review of existing services and outline needed investments and/or expansion of services.</p> <p>Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potter County Board of Commissioners Potter County Human Services Dickinson Center, Inc.
<p>5.3</p>	<p>Action Partner to coordinate services for mental and behavioral health and substance abuse.</p>	<p>Measure Review number of coordinated visits prior to partnership with number of yearly visits after established.</p> <p>Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potter County Human Services UPMC Cole
<p>5.4</p>	<p>Action Continue with implementation of criminal justice strategic plan.</p>	<p>Measure Fill vacant Criminal Justice Coordinator position. Review of progress on strategic plan. Improve collection, analysis, and dissemination of data.</p> <p>Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potter County Board of Commissioners Potter County Criminal Justice Advisory Board

APPENDIX

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Community-Building/Volunteerism

Social trends and changing demographics have loosened the bonds of the community fabric in many parts of rural America. The impact can be measured in Potter County, through the declining memberships in many civic organizations and the growing difficulty that many groups have encountered in filling their volunteer ranks. Yet, “a sense of community” is cited as an asset by those who are looking to relocate from a more populated area, and by those who cite the leading factors that make them want to stay in a rural area.

Support/Leverage Local Libraries

Potter County is fortunate to be served by vibrant public libraries whose roles have been evolving from repositories of books and periodicals to vital services and programs that benefit our communities in immeasurable ways. All signs point to that trend continuing in the 2020-29 decade. Some school districts have reduced their library services, which has increased demands on the county’s public libraries.

Local libraries have expanded their research tools and targeted programming to positively impact children and families. They are also providing high-speed internet access – which is becoming a modern necessity -- to the underserved, including a significant proportion of the county’s senior citizens. With educational opportunities expanding and a growing need for services, public libraries are well-positioned to serve as community hubs in the next decade.

The 11 location Potter-Tioga Library system recorded some 165,000 visits in 2018. Some 6,500 children participated in programs held at the libraries, many of them during the summer months when schools were in recess. Some of the libraries are also increasing their programming for adults and forging partnerships with other organizations, such as the Pa. Bureau of State Parks.

Public officials and library patrons must recognize the fact that, for libraries to continue to offer their services and expand their roles in the community, financial and volunteer support will be critical in the coming years.

Increase volunteerism

Civic groups and community institutions are having increasing difficulty in attracting and retaining volunteers. The very existence of some of these organizations is in jeopardy. In a rural area with a limited tax base and declining population, an active force of dedicated volunteers is vital. Therefore, it is imperative that local leaders study successful models that have been employed in other communities and refine their approaches.

Among reasons cited for not volunteering are a lack of time, not having enough information on the cause, and simply not being asked. There are many steps that can be taken to enhance volunteer participation, such as developing recruitment campaigns and policies and procedures for volunteers to follow. These will ensure that volunteers know and understand what is expected of them. Organization leaders should also show their appreciation to individuals who are volunteering their time.

The benefits of increased volunteerism are immeasurable – from more vibrant and well-operated festivals and events, to expanded hours at local attractions and a more involved and active community.

Reversing the decline of volunteer involvement and capitalizing on the idyllic image that many potential new residents have of rural communities present formidable challenges and promising opportunities. But there are no easy solutions.

A Shot in the Dark Sky

Kori and John Ditty, a young couple from the Philadelphia suburbs, picked up a dart and threw it at a map of rural Pennsylvania. It landed on their new home, Potter County. The Dittys say things couldn’t have worked out better. They’re both employed in jobs that allow them to pay their bills. And they’re regularly smiling at social media messages from downstate friends who express envy of their new lifestyle.

Kori and John knew what they were searching for -- a rural area where they felt safe and connected to both nature and their community. They’ve made local friends, and most recently they’ve signed on to portray Roaring ‘20s characters for Coudersport’s Eliot Ness Fest and the new Eliot Ness Museum downtown.

They appreciate the natural backdrop of Potter County, its clean air and water, the lack of congestion and the therapeutic impact of spending time outdoors. The Dittys have also joined the growing legion of regulars traveling to the Cherry Springs State Park International Dark Sky Preserve – and they’ve hosted downstate guests who have joined them in marveling at the wonders of the night sky.

When asked if they expect to ever return to the suburbs, both were quick to respond in near-unison, “Absolutely not! This is home now.”



Kori and John Ditty portray Roaring '20s characters during regular appearances at Coudersport's Eliot Ness Museum.



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