

A PLAN FOR THE FUTURE OF CROSS CREEK TOWNSHIP AN ADDENDUM TO THE CROSS CREEK REGION COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

INTRODUCTION

While the Cross Creek Region Comprehensive Plan identifies regional trends and recommendations for land use and community facilities from a regional perspective, this addendum to that Plan further details policies and recommendations to guide the future development of Cross Creek Township. The specific recommendations in this Plan Addendum are designed to identify specific actions that Cross Creek Township can undertake to implement regional goals and objectives. This Plan Addendum provides a blueprint for future projects in the Township, as well as a policy guide for future local land use decisions.

SETTING THE STAGE

Cross Creek Township has developed slowly over the past four decades as a rural residential community. The current population of the Township values the rural atmosphere and wants to preserve it.

In the last decade, only 85 permits for new dwellings were issued and fifty percent (50%) of these new housing units were for modular mobile homes. Modular and mobile homes in the rural areas of the Township contribute to the Township's share of affordable housing.

Large areas of the Township do not have public water or sewers and will not have these services within the 10-15 year planning period discussed in this Comprehensive Plan. In recognition of the absence of utilities and the desires of the residents, the primary focus of the Township's growth policy should be rural preservation in those areas of the Township that are not programmed to have public utilities in the planning period.

Several small villages exist in the Township that have some attached dwelling units, a few businesses and single family dwellings on small lots. Because of the density of development in the villages, septic system malfunctions present health and environmental issues that must be corrected. Once sewers are available, these villages will provide the opportunity for expansion of mixed use development, including small businesses to serve the residents, additional multifamily dwellings and affordable single family housing on small lots.

The villages are geographically disbursed throughout the Township and are able to provide services to the majority of the population. In addition to providing necessary local services, the focus of the villages will be a mix of housing types that accomplish the goal of providing variety in the housing stock and contributing to the supply of affordable housing.

The planned improvements included on the Act 537 Plan for the Independence-Cross Creek Joint Sewage Authority depends on the availability of funding for construction. During the planning period, sewage will be extended to the Western quadrant of the Township. As the Township experiences residential growth, dwellings on smaller lots can be directed to the villages and those areas of the Township where public sewers will be extended during the planning period.

As public utilities become available in Cross Creek during the planning period, the Township should be prepared to accommodate an increase in housing construction in areas serviced by sewers that lie outside the established villages.

Cross Creek Township is competitive with its neighbors in terms of the total tax bill its residents pay. The Township millage rate is the lowest (9.8 mills) of the four (4) communities in the Cross Creek Region and the Avella School District millage (104 mills) is lower than that of neighboring Fort Cherry (112 mills) and is only slightly higher than neighboring Burgettstown (96 mills) School Districts.

Cross Creek Township's Annual Budget averages about \$250,000. Property taxes bring in about 30%-35% of the annual revenue while Earned Income Tax generates an additional 30%-35%. The biggest expenditures in the Township's Annual Budget are public works and general government.

As the Township grows, revenue will grow, as well; however, studies have shown that single family residential growth often costs more in municipal and school district services than it generates in revenue. The Township must be pro-active in seeking additional sources of revenue to undertake new programs and support the expansion of municipal services.

One source of revenue is government grant and loan programs to undertake specific capital projects. Limited foundation grants may be available to local governments for projects that fit the mission of the foundation. Property tax and occupational tax revenue from business and tourism development could be another important source of revenue for the Township.

The growth of tax revenue from business and tourism development contributes to the School District budget without supplying any additional children to be educated. Business and tourism development will require public safety services, but will not increase Township expenditures for garbage, recreation, library services, code enforcement or debt service. Businesses and tourism activities will most likely locate on State roads, so the impact on maintenance of Township roads will also be minimal.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

The Cross Creek Region Comprehensive Plan identifies several opportunities for improvement with respect to community facilities in the Township:

- Acquire Township owned recreation land for the future.
- Investigate cooperative ways to provide local police coverage.
- Expand existing cooperative efforts to deliver municipal services.
- Expand and/or supplement library services available at the Avella Community Center.
- Promote regional assets, including the limited development of the Cross Creek County Park.
- Improve communication with residents.

Township Owned Recreation Land

Currently, the Township does not meet the population density criteria required to establish a Community Park. However, it is wise for a community to plan for the future and acquire the acreage necessary for a Community Park in a central location. The cost of land increases as a community develops so early acquisition while land costs are low is a wise investment.

Funding for the acquisition of parkland is available from the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (PA DCNR). In the future, as the population grows, a Master Plan for the development of the park property can be drawn up, indicating the types of facilities proposed and a phasing schedule to accomplish the plan over a number of years. At that time, financing can be obtained from PA DCNR for the implementation of the Master Plan.

The National Recreation and Park Association recommends that a Community Park should be between twenty-five (25) acres and one hundred (100) acres. Additionally, the recommended acreage is dependent on the size of the Township's population. The recommended acreage is five (5) acres per one thousand (1,000) population.

A good starting place is to acquire a minimum site of twenty-five (25) acres. A twenty-five (25) acre site would support a population of five thousand 5,000 persons. The estimated growth of the Township during the planning period does not approach this population, so the development of the site would not be necessary during the planning period. However, the early acquisition of parkland during the planning period and the preparation of a Master Plan as the population approaches five thousand (5,000) persons is recommended. This is a ***long-range project***.

Local Police Coverage

Because of the current low density of its population, the Township currently does not meet recommended standards for local police coverage. Neighboring Mt. Pleasant Township is the only community in the Cross Creek Region that does meet those standards at this time. Mt. Pleasant employs two (2) full-time officers.

As the Township population grows and, particularly if business development occurs, the Township should begin to plan for local police coverage. The most effective way of providing services would be to purchase services from the already established Mt. Pleasant Township Police Department. As the time approaches, the Township should initiate discussions with Mt. Pleasant Township about the terms and conditions of an agreement to share police protection services. This is a ***long-range project***.

Expanding Cooperative Efforts to Deliver Municipal Services

The Townships of Cross Creek, Hopewell, Independence, Jefferson and Mt. Pleasant currently cooperate in the delivery of public works services under the auspices of the Cross Creek Valley Regional Planning Commission. Representatives of each municipality elect officers, vote on projects to be undertaken, contribute financing and utilize joint bidding procedures. Equipment and personnel are shared to accomplish projects.

In addition to implementing public works projects in each of the Townships, the cooperative effort is utilized at the School (three of the five (5) cooperating municipalities are part of the Avella Area School District) and at the Cross Creek County Park. The County purchases the materials and the joint public works crew maintains the park entrance road.

The cooperative public works effort provides a model for implementing other cooperative approaches to the delivery of municipal services. Recreation and fire protection are other services that present opportunities for joint programming and joint use of facilities or equipment.

Cross Creek Township contributes to Avella Athletics, a non-profit organization, to help maintain its recreational programs. Because of the low population density in each of the Townships in the Avella Area School District, a recreation program financed entirely by each Township is not economical. In the ***short-term***, continuing financial support for the non-profit organization and expansion of its programming as the population grows is a desirable alternative to hiring one or more Township recreation coordinators and operating the programs by one or more Township governments.

A **long-term project** is to initiate discussions among the three (3) Townships in the School District to consider forming a joint recreation board comprised of citizens from each Township. The recreation board would undertake planning and programming of recreational facilities for the residents of the three (3) communities as Township owned parkland is developed for use by the growing population.

The Watershed Association donates equipment and personnel to maintain the stream valleys and remove litter. The Association, another multi-municipal non-profit organization, has established a nature trail on the School District property and a parklet adjacent to the Senior Center. Coordination between this organization, the Townships and Avella Athletics and/or the future recreation board can maximize environmental conservation and recreation resources.

Another opportunity for regional cooperation exists with the local fire departments that provide services in Cross Creek Township. None of these facilities is physically located within Cross Creek Township. Avella Volunteer Fire Department is located in Independence Township; Mt. Pleasant Volunteer Fire Department is in Hickory; and Slovan Volunteer Fire Department is in Smith Township. Each has a service area that covers a portion of Cross Creek Township. The possibility of merging these services into an “umbrella” agency that could pool resources and personnel while maintaining distinct service areas should be investigated. This is a **long-range project**.

The Senior Center that operates in the Cross Creek Township Building was jointly funded and provides services to residents of Cross Creek and surrounding communities. The expansion of activities as the elderly population grows, including providing “Meals on Wheels” is a **short-range project** that builds on a well-established, successful cooperative service.

Library Services

Library services are available at the Avella Community Center on a part-time basis. The number of volumes and the hours of operation of the Library are not adequate to serve the entire population of the Cross Creek Region. Volunteers who operate the Library may be the basis for forming a group of interested citizens to expand library services in the Region as the population of the region grows. An expanded Library could also house historic artifacts and publications that are distributed throughout the region.

Initially, a newsletter article and/or citizen survey about the residents’ desire for library services, the type of services and the possible inclusion of historic resources should be circulated. Depending on resident interest, a volunteer committee comprised of representatives of the four (4) Townships could be established to study:

- The need for expansion of library services;
- The pros and cons of the current location versus another location;
- The involvement of the Townships and the School District (including a possible donation of space);
- Relationship with the McKeever Library in West Middletown;
- Potential educational programs for children and adults;
- State laws governing libraries;
- Potential sources of funding; and
- Local fund raising ideas.

A student in library sciences from a local college (Bethany, Waynesburg, W & J, Pitt) could assist the volunteers. The citizen survey is a **short-range project**. If the citizen survey does not produce interest at the current time, it should be repeated again in the future, before the end of the planning period, as warranted by the growth of population in the Region. The volunteer committee is a **long-range project**

Development of Cross Creek County Park

The Cross Creek Region Plan describes the Master Plan for the Cross Creek County Park and indicates that lack of funding and a shift in priorities are delaying the implementation of the Master Plan by the County. The Master Plan proposes low intensity activities related to the use of the Cross Creek Lake for fishing, including nature trails, boat docks, additional picnic areas and recreational vehicle campsites. These activities are compatible with the rural character of the Township.

The additional development of the Cross Creek County Park is an essential part of the Township's program to promote tourism related to the agricultural, historical and recreational resources of the area. Currently, the County Park is underutilized because of lack of facilities and lack of access to large areas of the park, except by boat. Expanding the supporting facilities for family recreation and providing access by vehicle to more of the shoreline will attract more visitors from outside the Cross Creek Region. Along with the attractions at Meadowcroft Village and potential historic and agricultural tourism activities in the Township, the County Park is an important asset to draw visitors to the Region.

Township officials should communicate to the Washington County Planning Commission, the County Department of Parks and Recreation and the County Commissioners the importance of accomplishing the Master Plan for Cross Creek Park and its relationship to the Township's goals of promoting tourism as an economic development tool. Continued discussions should be undertaken to assess resources available to the Township from these agencies, as well as the County Tourist Promotion Agency in accomplishing this goal. This is a ***long-term project***.

Promote Regional Assets

The Cross Creek County Park, Meadowcroft Village and Rock Shelter and the historic resources related to early mining activities and the underground railroad in the region are assets that draw people to the Cross Creek Region. The Avella Area Community Association is an organization dedicated to the promotion of Avella businesses and the adjoining Townships. The Association provides a vehicle to coordinate and promote community activities and businesses to visitors to the historic and recreational resources in the region.

The Association should identify a community activity such as a weekend festival that would involve businesses and community organizations (scouts, seniors, Band Boosters, fire departments). The activity should be coordinated with the County and Meadowcroft Village to complement a featured event at one or both of those sites. Shared advertising could maximize publicity for the events. Brochures could be provided to Meadowcroft, the County Parks Department and the County Tourism Agency. Newspaper and website advertising should be included. A secondary benefit of such an activity is the promotion of the Avella business district.

The timing and theme for the selected activity should be sensitive to and non-competing with established community events in the immediate area such as the Hickory Apple Festival, Cecil Fall Festival, Houston Pumpkin Festival and Eldersville Christmas in the Village. This is a ***short-range project***.

Improved Communication with Residents

An overwhelming majority of the respondents to the Citizen Attitude Survey support the idea of the Township publishing a Newsletter to communicate with the residents. Several opportunities exist for providing a newsletter. Cooperation with the School District is an avenue that spreads the cost of the newsletter. Each Township in the School District could have an insert or section in a School District produced document.

Another option is to utilize high school or college students studying communications to prepare a newsletter on behalf of the Township, utilizing information provided by the Township.

A third option is to solicit volunteers from residents with publishing or advertising experience to assist with the layout and production of the newsletter and preparation of articles.

The vehicle for distributing the newsletter should minimize cost. If the newsletter can be sent as "bulk mail" or as an insert in another mailing, there will be a cost savings.

In the early stages, publication once or twice a year would be sufficient. The format could be as simple as an 11" x 17" sheet, copied on both sides. The first issue might include a message from the Supervisors and a report on the proposed Zoning Ordinance. Articles about permit requirements, leisure and recreation opportunities, Township and Penn DOT projects, local history, featured citizens, new businesses or successful housing revitalization efforts can be included in future issues. This is a ***short-range project***.

The Township should continue and keep up to date its web page that was recently launched. Once established, the maintenance of the website is critical to keep information accurate and current. As an alternative to a contract with a consultant, there may be volunteers in the community who could assist with the development and maintenance of the website.

The Township website should ultimately include contact information for elected and appointed officials at the Township and County level, copies of Township ordinances, Planning Commission and permit application forms, meeting agendas, schedule of community events, reports of actions taken by the Board of Supervisors and Zoning Hearing Board and recreational programming. This is a ***short-range project***.

FUTURE LAND USE

The Cross Creek Region Future Land Use Plan identifies the following eight (8) land use categories:

- Rural Resource
- Rural Residential
- Suburban Residential
- Neighborhood Residential
- Neighborhood Core
- Tourism Support
- Highway Commercial
- Industrial

Based on the existing pattern of land use and the goals of the Township for future land use, only the following future land use categories appear on the future land use map:

Rural Resource

Rural Resource is similar to the regional land use category “Rural Resource.” The emphasis is on preservation of rural character in Cross Creek Township. The land use category in the Regional Plan called “Tourism Support” has been incorporated in the “Rural Preservation” category.

Both Tourism and Agribusiness are concepts that should be accommodated in the Rural Resource areas of the Township to provide opportunities for sustainable farm operations. The zoning regulations that are drafted to incorporate these uses should carefully define each of these activities and authorize them as conditional uses or uses by special exception so that express standards and criteria regarding traffic, parking, employment and intensity of activity can be regulated.

The areas identified on the Future Land Use Map as “Rural Resource” are those areas where there are active farms, including those that are participating in the Agricultural Security Program, and those areas that are unlikely to be served by sanitary sewers in the near or distant future.

Rural Neighborhood

The “Rural Neighborhood” land use category in Cross Creek Township is equivalent to the “Rural Residential” land use category in the regional land use plan. The Rural Neighborhood classification accommodates those areas within the larger agricultural community where clusters of single family dwellings have been established, usually along major roads on larger lots that accommodate on-site sewage treatment. Rural neighborhoods provide a “non-farm” opportunity to reside in a rural environment.

Areas designated for the expansion of rural neighborhoods should be centered on existing clusters along major roads where sanitary sewers are unlikely to be provided in the near future. These areas may also provide transition between the “Rural Resource” areas and the “Residential” areas that are projected to have sanitary sewers within the near future. The recommended dwelling unit density in the Rural Neighborhood is one (1) unit per acre.

Residential

The “Residential” land use category in Cross Creek Township is equivalent to the “Suburban Residential” category in the regional land use plan, however, the character of this category in Cross Creek is not “suburban” and the densities do not approach “suburban” densities. The “Residential” land use category in Cross Creek Township accommodates those areas where moderate density residential development is or will be possible because of the availability of sanitary sewers now or in the near future. These areas also have good access to the regional highway network and are attractive for future single family development on smaller lots than in the “Rural Neighborhood” areas. The recommended dwelling unit density in the Residential areas that have sanitary sewers is two (2) units per acre. That is, the minimum lot area required for properties with public sewers would be 0.5 acre.

Village Residential

The “Village Residential” land use category in Cross Creek Township is to accommodate existing villages that historically have developed along the major roads in the Township. The pattern of land use in the villages is primarily single family on small lots; however, there are some two family dwellings and limited commercial uses in some of the villages.

This character should be continued in the Township’s Future Land Use Plan. A mix of single family and two family housing on smaller lots and limited businesses along the main roads should be incorporated in this land use category. In addition, undeveloped areas immediately adjacent to the established villages should be included in this land use category to provide opportunities for more intense residential development, including multifamily housing, as public sewers become available in the established villages. The recommended dwelling unit density for the villages and undeveloped adjacent property is four (4) units per acre for single family dwellings and ten to twelve (10-12) units per acre for multifamily dwellings.

General Business

Because there is no industry in the Township’s existing land use scheme and, further, because the locational requirements for industry (convenient regional

highway access, labor force and public utilities) do not exist in the Township, a separate industrial land use category is not provided.

The “General Business” land use category accommodates customary retail and service uses, as well as some “heavy commercial” uses such as contracting business, craftsman, light manufacturing on a small scale, warehousing and wholesaling. In addition, the tourism activities encouraged in the Rural Resource areas should be authorized in the General Business areas, as well, but without the same size, parking and employment restrictions that apply in the Rural Resource areas, since the General Business areas are located in the Route 50 corridor.

At the outset, the General Business land use category in the Township should be limited because of the lack of public sewers to support more intensive commercial development.

The Future Land Use Map shows a larger area in the General Business category than is currently practical because of the lack of public sewers; however, as sewers are extended in the Route 50 corridor and the demand for additional commercial development increases, the Township Zoning Map should be amended to expand the General Business classification in general conformance with the Future Land Use Plan. **This is a long-range strategy.**

Areas designated for “General Business” in the Township are in the Route 50 corridor. Because the Route 50 corridor provides access to the County Regional Park, as well as the commercial corridor in Mt. Pleasant Township along Route 50 and the business district in Avella, the Route 50 corridor is the natural location for the “General Business” land use category. Expansion of this category should be considered as public sewers become available in the Corridor. General Business uses should be concentrated in the Route 50 corridor while limited commercial uses (businesses of a more local nature) are directed to the main roads through the villages.

Special Conservation

Cross Creek Township has a unique natural resource in the Cross Creek County Park. The preservation of natural features and limitations on intensive use of the Park can be accomplished by a “Special Conservation” land use category that applies to the park property located within the Township. This land use category applies exclusively to the Cross Creek County Park and a single historic cemetery site.

This “Special Conservation” land use classification places strict limitations on the intensity of use of the park property. If, for any reason, in the future, the County would sell any portion of the park for private development, the Township would have discretion to evaluate any rezoning request to permit more intensive use of

the land. If, for example the Rural Resource land use classification were applied to the County Park property, more intensive development would automatically be allowed for private development if some or all of the park property would no longer be used for park purposes. The Special Conservation category gives the Township discretion in deciding on the approximate re-use of County property if it is ever sold for private development.

ENACTMENT OF ZONING ORDINANCE

In order to implement the Future Land Use Plan, the Township should enact a new Zoning Ordinance and Zoning District Map based on the policies and goals of the Future Land Use Plan. This is a ***short-range strategy***.

The Independence – Cross Creek Joint Sewer Authority proposes a sewage treatment plant and pump station to the North and West of Avella near the boundary between Cross Creek and Independence Townships. Sanitary sewer service in Cross Creek Township is proposed to be extended from Avella to Cedar Grove along S.R. 4029, Cross Creek Road. In the short term, properties immediately East of Avella along Route 50 will be able to be serviced by public sewers, also. In the long term, as sewers are extended to the area immediately outside Avella, the opportunity to extend sewers farther to the East along Route 50 will be created.

The Township's future land use scheme generally concentrates business, village and residential development in the corridor proposed for public sewers. As sewers are extended in the Corridor, the Future Land Use Plan should be a guide in considering the rezoning of property for higher density uses. While every requested rezoning does not need to conform exactly to the classifications shown on the Future Land Use Plan, a request for reclassification of property should conform to the "spirit and intent" of this Comprehensive Plan and Future Land Use Map. Business uses should be directed to the villages and the Route 50 corridor. More intense residential uses and village development should be expanded in the projected sewage service area and should be adjacent to similarly zoned and/or developed areas.

As the Township grows and public sewers become available, the Zoning District Map should be evaluated in terms of the goals of the Future Land Use Plan. Changes in the Zoning Map to accomplish the goals of the Plan should be considered. This is a ***long-range strategy***.

SHORT AND LONG-RANGE STRATEGIES

Based on the foregoing, the following is a summary of the recommended short-range and long-range strategies to implement the Comprehensive Plan.

Short Range Strategies

- Continue financial support for Avella Athletics.

- Expand senior citizen activities at the Senior Center.
- Circulate a Citizen Survey regarding the need for expanded library services.
- Promote a Community Festival and coordinate it with other attractions and activities in the Region.
- Develop a Township newsletter and maintain the Township's website.
- Enact a new Zoning Ordinance and Zoning District Map to carry out the objectives of the Future Land Use Plan.

Long Range Strategies

- Acquire a 25 acre site for a future Township Park as the Township's population approaches 5,000 persons.
- Work with the County to implement some of the Master Plan recommendations for Cross Creek Park to increase usage of the Park.
- Work with the Tourist Promotion Agency to attract visitors to the County Park and other regional attractions and promote regional assets.
- Work with Avella Area Community Association to revitalize and promote Avella businesses.
- Monitor the Zoning Ordinance and Zoning District Map to continue to implement the Future Land Use Plan as circumstances change and public sewers are extended in the future.
- Expand the existing Cross Creek Regional Planning Commission activities to include other shared services.
- Form a Joint Recreation Board with the other two Townships in the School District.