



LANCASTER COUNTY  
**PLANNING**

**Pequea Valley Regional Comp Plan  
Committee Meeting – Taking Care of What We Have**

Thursday, May 30, 2024 at 1:30 p.m.

**Attendees**

**Lancaster County Planning Department**

Kip Van Blarcom, Sharon Cino, Mark Huber, Mike Domin

**Partners**

David Thompson (Paradise Township), Kirsten Peachey (Salisbury Township), Damian Clawser (Salisbury Township), Rich Eby (Pequea Valley School District), Christopher Slaymaker, Frank Howe (Leacock Township), Erik Orndorff (Pequea Valley School District), Merv King (MK Builders), Gordon Hoover (LFT and Salisbury Township), Wally Hockensmith (Paradise Township), Mike Hartmann (Paradise Township), Mike Sensenig (Leacock Township), Dale Hershey (Paradise Township), Dylan Coleman (Paradise Township)

**Agriculture**

**Presentation** (Mike Domin)

- Lancaster County has over 120,000 acres of farmland that are permanently protected.
- The east region of the county includes approximately 110,00 acres of land in agricultural use.
- Of that, approximately 21,600 acres are permanently protected with perpetual conservation easements.
- More of the Amish and Old Order Mennonite farm owners are open to working with the county to preserve farmland. But because of the slow start, the East region fell a bit behind the other regions.
- Two primary entities involved in preserving agricultural land in Lancaster County are the Lancaster County Agricultural Preserve Board and the Lancaster Farmland Trust (LFT). LFT is a private nonprofit organization that primarily gets its funding from private donors.
- Although each entity has its own priorities, they both agreed to a policy of not preserving farmland inside designated growth areas.
- One of the goals promoted in *places2040* is to establish large, contiguous areas of preserved agricultural land.
- The maps and data that were presented display much of the preserved farmland scattered throughout the region.
- After the adoption of *places2040*, the Lancaster County Planning Department (LCPD) completed an analysis designed to identify high-priority agricultural lands.
- One of the most important criteria in the process of identifying high-priority agricultural land is the concept of “adjacency.” Agricultural lands located in close proximity to preserved farms received more points in the scoring process.
- Almost 31,000 acres of farmland in the region was identified and met the criteria we developed.
- They are considered the highest priority farms in the region because they help us achieve the goal of “clustering” preserved farms together to build large, contiguous areas of preserved agricultural land.

- This policy change of building large contiguous areas of preserved farmland has been adopted as part of the scoring process of both farmland preservation agencies.
- Education about regulation of farm-based businesses with zoning regulations continues to be encouraged with local farm-based business owners.

### **Discussion**

- Getting farmers to preserve their farms is a challenge. They are not being offered much money despite land value increasing, and it doesn't benefit future generations who work the land.
  - Zoning may be a better way to preserve farms, as opposed to buying conservation easements.
- Another big challenge is keeping the farmer on the farm. How do we keep small farmers farming?
- Plain sect are "urbanizing" in the East region.
- While some municipalities embrace TDRs to preserve land (use of sending and receiving areas), LCPD has not been a huge proponent of it.
- Several people expressed interest in joint zoning in the region, or better cooperation among the three townships with zoning regulations.
- The current Urban Growth Area (UGA) recalibration process led by LCPD is another way to manage growth and preserve farms, so participation is strongly encouraged.

### **Natural Lands**

#### **Presentation** (Mike Domin)

- There are 12,532 acres of land in some type of natural form in the region.
- Of that, approximately 3,500 acres are preserved.
- Three primary preservation entities active in the region include the PA game Commission, the County of Lancaster, and the Lancaster Conservancy.
- Two government entities and one non-profit land trust.
- The Lancaster Conservancy is a private non-profit entity, it permits public access to all its lands.
- State Game Lands 52, Money Rocks County Park, and the Welsh Mountain Nature Preserve are the largest publicly accessible natural lands in the region.
- The analysis completed for priority agricultural lands was also completed for natural lands.
- 927 acres of land are considered a high priority for preservation to create large contiguous areas preserved natural lands.
- There are opportunities to work with these entities to acquire these additional natural lands for the region and open them up to the public for community outdoor recreation.

### **Water Quality / Stormwater**

#### **Discussion**

- There are opportunities to encourage conservation groups to work with the Plain Sect community. Some key water quality and stormwater management tools include the use of official maps to acquire lands in natural preservation priority areas for future parks or open space. Other tools may include developing riparian buffers and maintenance teams to address agricultural runoff resulting in many impaired streams.
- The Pequea Creek Watershed Restoration Plan was completed in 2023. The plan includes guidelines for protecting riparian buffers. This is a Section 319 Plan, so having this plan in place creates opportunities for other funding sources. This type of plan must list methods and amount of projected pollutant loads (sediment, nitrogen, phosphorus).
- Gordon Hoover of the Lancaster Farmland Trust (LFT) has visited every farm in the three townships regarding conservation plans and water quality. Gordon thinks they are in good shape,

as most farms have conservation plans in place and he thinks most have been implemented. They further elaborated that the key is to document practices (BMPs) that are already in place, so we get credit for these projected reductions in the Bay model.

- Some farmers have reservations about implementing water quality best management practices (BMPs) because they are not sure it is worth spending the money, as they aren't sure their children will be farming the land.
- Riparian buffers offer the most cost effective. Grass buffers, with fences excluding livestock are okay, but forested buffers are the best.

### Outreach Exercise: Bad Ending, Good Ending

Staff facilitated an outreach exercise focused on the Big Idea **Taking Care of What We Have**. Topics discussed included tourism, development opportunities for the US 30 and PA 340 corridors, housing, preserving farms, streams and natural spaces, and multigenerational communities.

### Discussion

- School districts would like to see more affordable housing. Only 38% of school-age children in the district are educated by the Pequea Valley School District.
- The school district would like to involve more students in water quality protection / improvement projects. They referred to this as authentic learning.
- Amtrak runs through the region – are there opportunities to build on this?
- The region has a strong tradition of multigenerational families living and working in the region. Many people would like their children to live here, but housing costs make it challenging.
- Losing farms isn't anything new. We can look to the counties to our east and see they have lost many (or most) of their farms.
- Is there any way to ease the tax burden on farmers?
- We are in need of water / sewer infrastructure to support new growth (for both business / industry and housing).
- The school district thinks public transit is lacking. They likes to encourage students to get internships, but this is difficult for kids without a car.

### Results

<i>What We Have</i>	<i>Bad Ending</i>	<i>Good Ending</i>
<b>Farms &amp; Farmers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Farmers' equity depleted</li> <li>• Farmers taxed out of operations</li> <li>• Farms sold</li> <li>• Dairy industry disappears</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ag flourishes</li> <li>• Profitable farming</li> <li>• Local ag infrastructure maintained or grows</li> <li>• Equity maintained</li> </ul>
<b>Natural Areas, Parks, &amp; Streams</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developed</li> <li>• Polluted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Areas grow slightly</li> <li>• Less pollution</li> <li>• Farmers work together</li> </ul>
<b>Local Business</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business gone or stagnant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ag employers grow</li> </ul>
<b>Housing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Airbnbs / short-term rentals</li> <li>• Expensive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Available and affordable</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Split between luxury and dilapidated rentals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comfortable growth with eased costs</li> <li>• Low impact on infrastructure</li> <li>• Sewer growth addressed</li> </ul>
<b>Tourism</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agritourism dies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tourism continues, but not too much</li> </ul>
<b>Villages &amp; Historic Buildings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Character disappears</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Walkable</li> <li>• Add a gateway village</li> <li>• Character maintained</li> </ul>
<b>Intergenerational Lifestyle</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transient community</li> <li>• Expectations change to that of transplants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Families live here</li> </ul>
<b>Safe &amp; Connected</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crime increases</li> <li>• No community support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community support maintained</li> </ul>
<b>Engaged Community &amp; Youth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People become more physically spread out</li> <li>• Young people move away</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community-minded public</li> <li>• Plain Sect part of community</li> </ul>
<b>First Responders</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All paid</li> <li>• No volunteers</li> <li>• Lost Plain Sect participation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plain sect community remains</li> <li>• Public steps up</li> </ul>
<b>US 30 &amp; PA 340</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Worse congestion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traffic circles</li> <li>• Worker transportation</li> </ul>
<b>Employers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leave the region</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional and trained workforce</li> </ul>
<b>Schools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lower student count</li> <li>• Fewer opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintained student count</li> </ul>

### Schedule / Meetings

- The next meeting will be scheduled in mid-July.
- The topic of discussion will be housing and placemaking.
- We will focus on the next Big Idea, **Creating Great Places**.