

## HOUSING PLAN

Access to transportation, commuting patterns, access to services and education, and consumption of energy and other natural resources are all important factors in determining the value and desirability of housing. By creating a range of housing choices, communities can mitigate the environmental costs of auto-dependent development, use infrastructure more efficiently, ensure an adequate jobs-housing balance, and generate a strong foundation of support for transit, commercial centers, and other services.

Sections 301.a.2.1 and 604.4 of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code require that the housing component of the Comprehensive Plan provide:

“A plan to meet housing needs of present residents and of those individuals and families anticipated to reside in the municipality, which may include conservation of presently sound housing, rehabilitation of housing in declining neighborhoods and the accommodation of expected new housing in different dwelling types and at appropriate densities for households of all income levels.”

and

“To provide for the use of land within the municipality for residential housing of various dwelling types encompassing all basic forms of housing, including single family and two-family dwellings, and a reasonable range of multifamily dwellings in various arrangements, mobile homes and mobile home parks, provided, however, that no zoning ordinance shall be deemed invalid for the failure to provide for any other specific dwelling type.”

As per the 2020 Decennial Census there are 6,137 housing units, which is an increase of approximately 2.3 percent from the 2010 Decennial Census (6,000 housing units). The LVPC estimates that population will grow by 4,852 people between 2020 and 2040. Using the average household size of 2.63 persons per household from the 2019 ACS Estimates, this translates to over 1,800 new housing units. Between 2010 and 2021, the Township received land development plans for residential activity amounting to over 300 residential units in total. Projecting housing demand can be difficult because of unknown factors such as the state of the economy, interest rates, accuracy of population projections and changes to household size; however, it provides estimates that are useful for long range planning.

One significant trend that may have an impact on housing demand into the near future is the aging population. As shown in the age pyramids in Chapter XX, the largest cohort of Township residents is between 50 to 64 years of age, and between 2010 and 2019 there has been an increase in residents aged 65 years and older. This is indicative of persons looking to age in place. In the coming decades, increasing life expectancy, a declining birth rate, and the aging of the baby boom generation will dramatically increase the number and proportion of the U.S. population over the age of 65. Most seniors indicate that they would prefer to age in place, either staying in their current home or choosing from a range of affordable, age-appropriate housing options within their community. A 2010 AARP survey found that 88 percent of respondents over age 65 wanted to remain in their homes for as long as possible, and 92 percent said they wanted to remain in their communities.<sup>1</sup> Providing affordable housing and diverse housing types encourage aging in place. This demographic benefits from pedestrian-friendly communities, transit access, neighborhood retail and services, and public spaces for social interaction.

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<sup>1</sup> Teresa A. Keenan. 2010. “Home and Community Preferences of the 45+ Population.” AARP Public Policy Institute.

The Township has several zoning districts which permit varying types of housing. The Conservation Residential (CR) District permits larger lot single-family detached dwellings and cluster developments; the Agricultural Rural Residential (AR) District, the Agricultural Rural Residential Institutional Option (AR-I) District and the Agricultural Rural Residential Livestock (AR-L) District also permits single-family detached dwellings and cluster developments; the Suburban Residential (SR) District permits single-family detached dwellings, semi-detached dwellings (twins), cluster developments, and townhouses; and the Village Residential (VR) District permits single-family detached dwellings, semi-detached dwellings (twins), cluster developments, low-rise apartments, manufactured/mobile home parks and townhouses. Additionally, the Village Center (VC) District and the Commercial (C) District permit residential development including single-family detached dwellings, semi-detached dwellings (twins), two-family dwellings, low-rise apartments and townhouses.

### **Housing Implementation Strategies and Recommendations**

Continue to encourage a variety of housing types at appropriate densities and scale through land use and adaptive re-use provisions.

Periodically review land use ordinances to ensure that housing choices continue to be provided for all types of living units and arrangements.

Monitor zoning to ensure that it continues to support mixed-uses in commercial and higher density areas while protecting the quality of residential life and neighborhood character.

Support public and private efforts to rehabilitate and maintain housing stock, including, but not limited to, disability-adaptive improvements, rehabilitation of owner-occupied and rental properties, and historic preservation.

Conduct certificate of occupancy inspections and other building, health, and safety code enforcement.

Ensure that regulatory controls are consistent with the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH) rule.

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

Economic development is the manifestation of a community's fiscal, social, and physical resources as part of a long-term planning process aimed at preserving and improving its overall quality of life. Economic development focuses on important aspects of a community that are provided by the private sector—employment opportunities, businesses serving residents, a stable and growing tax base, and business involvement as corporate citizens in a community's activities and decision-making. Understanding the demographics of those who live and work in North Whitehall Township as well as local and regional retail markets helps to identify potential economic development opportunities.

Vibrant and attractive commercial districts are an integral component of a successful residential suburb. Traditionally centered on public transit nodes, along heavily traveled streets or at prominent intersections, suburban commercial districts are a natural extension of their immediate residential neighborhoods and provide locations for the day-to-day services and operations necessary for modern life, such as grocery stores, restaurants, dry cleaners, florists, and offices. The Township's various commercial areas are essentially the “downtown” of their respective neighborhoods, places where residents can conduct business, gather, or informally socialize. Because of their prominent locations along major roadways, the visual appearance of non-residential districts often defines the identity of the neighborhood which it represents.

The Future Land Use Plan for North Whitehall Township identifies several “village” areas. These areas are meant to consist of a variety of residential uses and a variety of commercial and institutional uses in smaller traditional-style buildings. Promoting economic development in these village areas should focus on flexibility in design standards and infill or adaptive reuse of existing structures.

The Township has a sufficient supply of land designated for commercial activities to serve local needs and support the local tax base. No net increase in commercial areas is recommended, but it is recommended that there be no further loss of commercial land area to non-commercial land uses. North Whitehall Township will continue to attract residential development so care should be taken to ensure that areas currently designated for commercial land use remain commercial and that commercial areas evolve to serve community needs.

An emerging trend in the Lehigh Valley region is the development of “mega” warehouses. These warehouse developments are designed to accommodate the continuing growth of e-commerce and one-day delivery. The Lehigh Valley serves as a prime location for these new warehouse distribution centers with the accessibility of I-78 and other highways and the proximity to major metropolitan areas along the East Coast, along with a readily available workforce. North Whitehall Township is primed to experience this surge in warehouse development and should plan proactively to manage the impacts of such development. One step the Township has taken to address warehouse development in the area is the recent adoption of an amendment to the zoning ordinance regulating such uses. The amendment clarifies the definition of warehouses and establishes area and dimensional regulations based on the size of the facility. Additionally, the zoning districts in which such uses are permitted were reevaluated and updated.

### **Economic Development Implementation Strategies and Recommendations**

Evaluate the feasibility of implementing physical improvements (i.e., façade improvements, landscaping, signage) and improving access within the commercial corridors.

Market vacant spaces within the commercial areas for appropriate uses.

Promote regional activities (e.g., recreation, entertainment, and retail events) to benefit the local and regional economy.

Examine existing off-street parking requirements and develop regulations which minimize impervious coverage while still meeting parking demand.

Promote mixed use opportunities in the village areas which are consistent with the character of these villages and provide for both residential and nonresidential development.

## **COMMUNITY FACILITIES PLAN**

Community facilities and services are necessary for public health, safety, and welfare. These facilities include police, fire protection, emergency services, medical and healthcare facilities, schools, libraries, other municipal services provided by the Township (e.g., public works, and solid waste and recycling) and utilities. Many of these community facilities tie into other elements of this Comprehensive Plan such as the promotion of historic and cultural resources, and the preservation of natural resources. Community facilities and services help determine the quality of life experienced in North Whitehall Township and involve such matters as staffing, funding, on-going maintenance, and capital project needs to ensure that adequate services are provided well into the future.

Section 301.a.4 of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code requires that the community facilities component of the Comprehensive Plan provides:

“A plan for community facilities, which may include public and private education, recreation, municipal buildings, fire and police stations, libraries, hospitals and other similar facilities or uses.”

Planning for utilities is a critical component of municipal planning. The Township Code of Ordinances includes Chapter 342 Sewers and Sewage Disposal, Chapter 363 Stormwater Management, and Chapter 407 Water. Most of the Township is serviced by on-site sewage systems. A few higher density developments are served by privately owned sewage treatment plants, and around the village of Ormrod and Laurys Station there are some homes/developments served by public sewer. The Township’s Stormwater Management Ordinance was adopted in 2007 and is intended to reduce runoff and improve water quality through the implementation of regulatory tools and best management practices. The Whitehall Township Authority (WTA) and the Northampton Borough Municipal Authority (NBMA) both provide water service to North Whitehall Township. Those areas not served by public water are served by on-lot wells.

While North Whitehall Township has been affected by natural and man-made disasters in the past, Township staff and emergency management personnel are more prepared than ever to protect life and property from these hazards. Township officials also recognize the potential impacts of disasters and the need to support proactive mitigation efforts to prevent or reduce the impacts of hazards. Investing in mitigation planning and practices now will significantly reduce the need for future recovery efforts and costs associated with recovery, repair, and reconstruction.

Township finances and budgeting are an important part of the comprehensive planning process. To carry out the goals and objectives of this Comprehensive Plan, the Township must be in good financial shape. Moreover, decisions about how funds are spent reflect the Township’s priorities, making it essential to link what the Township wishes to do with the available funds.

Each year an annual budget is submitted as required by local and state ordinances. The budget for each fiscal year reflects as nearly as possible the estimated revenues and expenses for budget and calendar year. The budget is intended to meet Board goals and objectives, set service priorities, make clearer the operational service demands and establish base funding available. The budget encompasses capital equipment and projects and continues allocating resources to reserve and emergency funds to ensure the

financial stability of the Township in the future. The budget is a public document and is available for review.

The maintenance, continuation and update of existing community facilities is essential to the Township's ability to provide its residents with needed services which is a major contributor to the quality of life and safety within North Whitehall.

### **Community Facilities and Services Implementation Strategies and Recommendations**

Prepare and implement a comprehensive greenway and trail network study to identify where connections can be made within the Township and to neighboring municipalities, and ensure these facilities are designed to provide safe measures for its users.

Identify potential improvement projects (e.g., trail construction, signage/crosswalks/trail markers, and information kiosks) and potential funding sources for their implementation.

Collaborate with adjacent municipalities to provide regional trail connections.

Continue to work with other organizations in the development of facilities to maximize the use of public and quasi-public buildings or recreation space.

Continue to monitor resident needs to evaluate demand for service and facilities expansion that may arise.

Cooperate with State, County, and adjacent municipalities to ensure that adequate provision of regional services such as fire services, ambulance services and medical services are provided for the Township's residents.

Establish a long-range, strategic plan that closely monitors the response times and needs of emergency services and ensure that the police and fire services have sufficient capabilities and are efficiently meeting the needs of the current and future Township residents. If necessary, and when appropriate, such services should be expanded.

Continue to manage the rate, volume and quality of storm runoff.

Coordinate with sewer and water utility providers to ensure systems are working adequately and explore the potential for extensions.

## **HISTORIC AND NATURAL RESOURCES PROTECTION PLAN**

North Whitehall Township's historic and natural resources are a significant part of the community's fabric and character. There are many historic and culturally significant properties in the Township. If these resources were to be demolished, inappropriately modified, or neglected, the Township's heritage would be diminished. Natural resources play an important role in the ecology of a community and region. These resources include waterways, floodplains, open space, wetlands, riparian vegetation, steep slopes, and woodlands. The natural areas present in North Whitehall Township support a rich diversity of native vegetation and wildlife, indicating a healthy living environment for people, plants, and animals. Both historic and natural resources also carry economic, recreational, aesthetic, and educational benefits which can be depleted if resources are not protected.

Section 301.a.6 of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code requires that this component of the Comprehensive Plan provide:

"A plan for the protection of natural and historic resources, to the extent not pre-empted by federal or state law. This clause includes, but is not limited to, wetlands and aquifer recharge zones, woodlands, steep slopes, prime agricultural land, flood plains, unique natural areas and historic sites."

The importance of protecting natural resources has been recognized by the Pennsylvania Constitution, which guarantees the rights of all citizens to clean air and pure water. While Federal and Commonwealth regulations provide some broad-brush protection for certain natural resources such as wetlands, municipal regulations are necessary to preserve and protect the majority of a community's natural heritage. North Whitehall Township recognizes the importance of protecting natural resources and has provisions in the zoning ordinance for preserving them. Additionally, North Whitehall Township actively works toward the preservation of open space and agricultural land through acquisition.

The North Whitehall Township Farmland Preservation/Open Space Committee is a group of twelve members including Townships Supervisors and staff, as well as Township residents working towards preserving open space and farmland within North Whitehall. They oversee the allocation of funds raised by the Farmland and Open Space Preservation tax assessment.

The Township is also in the process of updating and adopting a Comprehensive Park, Recreation, and Open Space Plan. This plan will include an inventory of existing facilities and will address future needs of the community.

Climate change has also become a serious problem with substantial impacts such as extreme weather events, flooding and runoff problems, increased risk of respiratory disease, and changes to farming. Planning for the conservation of energy and moving toward the future of alternative sources of energy to reduce dependence on non-renewable resources is an element of this Comprehensive Plan and includes various actions that will contribute to a comprehensive approach to a sustainable energy future.

### **Historic and Natural Resources Implementation Strategies and Recommendations**

Undertake a historic survey to identify potential additions, deletions, or modifications to the Township's historic resources.

Consider identifying key resources with historic or cultural markers.

Continue seeking funding sources for historic and cultural resources in need of preservation and rehabilitation.

Continue to promote site development practices that are sensitive to the natural features of the site.

Conduct an assessment of existing riparian areas and establish appropriate standards to protect water quality and habitat of North Whitehall Township's waterbodies.

Continue to provide enforcement of existing regulations providing natural resources protection.

Encourage conservation design standards which offer flexible and innovative approaches to site development, which enhance environmental features of the site and minimize impacts on natural resources.

Continue to encourage flexible and innovative approaches to site development such as reductions of unnecessary impervious coverage and replacement with open space, landscaping, or pervious materials.

Promote, through educational material and social media, energy conservation and efficiency practices to residents and businesses. Implement practices that reduce energy consumption, increase efficiency, and increase use of alternative and renewable energy sources.

Continue to protect agriculture, natural resources, and open space through regulatory controls, land acquisition, and other creative solutions.