

Chapter 3

Identification of Issues - Public Participation

For a Joint Comprehensive Plan to be a useful tool for guiding future development and policy in an area, it must represent a consensus among the Region's stakeholders. The residents, business owners, community service providers, and municipal officials must each have a part in forming the policies of the Joint Comprehensive Plan.

The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) requires public input at the *end* of the process, in the form of public meetings and public hearings. Restricting public involvement to merely what is required is not likely to produce a successful plan, as the public will have little sense of participation in the process or ownership of the final document: they are being asked to approve a plan in which they had no voice. Early and frequent public participation is essential to the development of a practical, community-based Comprehensive Plan, regardless of the number of municipalities that are involved.

The public participation component of the Penn, Jefferson and Bernville Joint Comprehensive Plan far surpasses the requirements of the MPC. Public input was sought early in the planning process, well before any policies or future land uses were determined. A three-pronged approach to direct public input was implemented.

- The Committee held monthly meetings, which were open to the public, starting in September 2007 for the duration of the planning process. Among the earliest actions of the Committee was to identify ways to gain input of residents of the Region, as well as business owners and community stakeholders identified by the Committee, regarding their perceptions of the municipalities, and any critical issues they share.
- The Committee and SSM prepared a written questionnaire that was given to over 51 households in the Region and placed at the Bernville Post Office for general population input. The written questionnaires allowed the responders to be anonymous, but some personal information was asked in order to identify concerns that were more prevalent among specific demographic groups. The questions were largely similar to those asked in the interviews, but were structured in a way that allowed for quantitative analysis of the responses. Questionnaire responses were reviewed and analyzed by Berks County Planning Department.
- SSM conducted a series of telephone interviews with specific individuals identified by the Committee. The selected persons were chosen because of their positions within the community and the particular insights those positions gave them. The interviewees included a variety of public officials, local business leaders, and farmers. These individuals were questioned about their specific likes and dislikes in the Region, what they felt were the most pressing issues facing the

community, what they would like the community to become, and other questions more directly related to their particular areas of expertise.

- SSM, The Committee, and Berks County Planning Department Coordinator held a public meeting on June 2, 2008 to review a draft of the plan prior to sending it to the Planning Commissions for review and approval. The meeting was attended by 14 people representing a variety of interests. There were minor adjustments noted. The decision was made to make the necessary changes and move forward to the Planning Commission meetings for recommendation that the Joint Comprehensive Plan be forward for the official review and adoption process.

This chapter will include an analysis of the results of the public outreach, including a summary of the questionnaire results.

Actual detailed questionnaire results for each municipality can be found in Appendix A.

QUESTIONNAIRE ANALYSIS AND PLANNING CONCLUSIONS

Over 50 surveys were handed out to specific residents while over 100 surveys were placed at the Bernville Post Office. 51 surveys were returned from the handed out questionnaires and 47 were returned from the Post Office.

Three people per municipality were selected to be interviewed. Of these, eight were able to participate and one was unable to be interviewed due to a personal situation.

The breakdown of participation per municipality is as follows:

	Bernville	Penn Township	Jefferson Township
Committee Survey	8	22	21
Post Office Survey	31	5	11

The following results are combined for the Planning Region. The results are tallied according to the Committee or Post Office Surveys. Undecided, neutral, or blank responses are not included in this summary chapter; therefore, most categories will not add up to 100% response. It can be concluded that the balance of results fall into the aforementioned categories.

CITIZEN SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS / COMPARISONS

1. Would you agree or disagree that there should be more cooperation among the municipalities in the Penn/Jefferson/Bernville region in the following areas?

	COMMITTEE SURVEYS		POST OFFICE SURVEYS	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Joint Zoning Ordinances	51%	22%	58%	15%
Regional Fire Protection	73%	8%	77%	8%
Regional Police Protection	65%	17%	79%	13%
Economic Development/Retention	57%	14%	65%	10%
Public sewer and water service	27%	39%	48%	27%
Emergency medical service	76%	4%	85%	2%

2. Please indicate whether you are satisfied with each of the following aspects of the Region:

	COMMITTEE SURVEYS		POST OFFICE SURVEYS	
	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied
Attractiveness/aesthetics of the area	82%	6%	63%	13%
Housing cost	57%	12%	48%	17%
Convenience to shopping	61%	24%	54%	23%
Fire protection services	88%	2%	67%	2%
Housing availability/choice	59%	6%	60%	6%
Law enforcement services	43%	29%	40%	25%
Management of growth and new development	33%	24%	10%	44%
Parks/open space	80%	6%	50%	17%
Playgrounds for children	65%	12%	48%	23%
Quality of public schools	65%	18%	46%	19%
Recreational opportunities	65%	12%	58%	10%
Road surface conditions	61%	25%	42%	29%
Sense of community	55%	12%	40%	17%
Traffic volume	29%	51%	21%	50%
Job opportunities	27%	43%	17%	40%
Convenience to work	51%	10%	40%	15%
Tax rates	31%	57%	10%	63%
Cost of living	43%	27%	35%	31%
Walking opportunities	71%	14%	46%	23%
Biking opportunities	67%	14%	40%	15%
Medical services	84%	4%	65%	4%
Feeling of safety	71%	8%	50%	13%

3. Agricultural Preservation Questions:

Questions:	COMMITTEE SURVEYS		POST OFFICE SURVEYS	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Should the municipalities consider stronger policies for preservation of agricultural land?	75%	12%	73%	10%
Should Penn / Jefferson / Bernville protect agricultural resources through zoning regulations?	82%	8%	77%	8%
Should Penn / Jefferson / Bernville protect natural and environmental resources such as stream corridors through zoning regulations?	82%	8%	71%	6%

4. Property/Code Questions:

Questions:	COMMITTEE SURVEYS		POST OFFICE SURVEYS	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Do you think that properties in the region are being adequately maintained?	67%	14%	52%	25%
Should the municipalities get stricter when enforcing codes (building maintenance / yard maintenance), particularly with rental properties?	57%	18%	63%	13%

5. How likely would you be to support an increase in taxes that might address each of the following initiatives? This question is specifically exploring whether you would be willing to increase your taxes for these services. For each individual item, please assume your total annual tax increase would be approximately \$20?

	COMMITTEE SURVEYS		POST OFFICE SURVEYS	
	Likely	Unlikely	Likely	Unlikely
Road improvements in the Borough/ Townships	45%	39%	21%	44%
Public sewer and water improvements in the Borough/ Townships	16%	59%	13%	56%
Promoting economic development in the Borough/Townships	35%	47%	42%	31%
Preservation/protection of historic resources	41%	31%	44%	33%
Preservation/maintenance of open space for environmental and aesthetic purposes	49%	27%	42%	25%
Improvements to or maintenance of existing parks and recreational facilities in the Borough/Township	45%	27%	38%	31%
Biking, hiking, and walking trails in the Borough/Townships	35%	37%	42%	31%
Preserving agricultural land	63%	22%	56%	17%
Increased police/public safety	61%	27%	44%	31%
Acquisition of additional Borough/ Township property for public parkland (new parks or expansion of existing parks)	25%	51%	25%	38%

6. In your opinion, are more of these services desirable in the region? (Please check one opinion per category)

	COMMITTEE SURVEYS		POST OFFICE SURVEYS	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Light Manufacturing	71%	14%	67%	19%
Medium to heavy manufacturing	29%	39%	42%	25%
Warehousing and distribution	35%	37%	46%	27%
Shopping centers	14%	65%	25%	48%
Strip malls	16%	59%	15%	54%
Convenience stores	31%	49%	25%	48%
Specialty retail	27%	39%	31%	38%
Personal services (beauty /fitness)	20%	39%	27%	29%
Health services	41%	31%	46%	17%
Professional service firms	47%	27%	35%	21%
Legal and financial services	29%	33%	29%	21%
Technology based firms	37%	20%	27%	17%
Research and development firms	27%	25%	29%	21%
Restaurants	73%	12%	58%	17%
Preservation of open space / farmland	88%	8%	73%	6%
Cultural/community facilities	39%	25%	40%	21%
Recreational opportunities	39%	25%	35%	23%
Heritage tourism attractions	39%	27%	48%	10%
Door to door transit	16%	47%	19%	33%

7. Would you be in favor of additional traffic lights on Route 183 through the region?

	YES	NO
Committee Survey	61%	29%
Post Office Survey	61%	19%

ADDRESSING SURVEY FINDINGS IN THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

This Joint Comprehensive Plan will include five (5) distinct plan elements. The responses from the residents could affect these elements in the following ways.

Land Use: Respondents stated that they like the current character of their communities. While “character” is a somewhat indefinable quality touching on a range of aspects, there is a strong visual element. Preservation of community character may be largely (although not entirely) addressed by the land use and housing elements of the plan. These elements should therefore provide for growth that represents a natural evolution of the existing development patterns, rather than a dramatic departure from those forms.

Economic Development: The respondents did not show much of an interest in economic development; especially when it came to financially supporting it through tax money. We note that this concern complements those expressed by the Region respondents regarding the loss of agricultural and rural areas to residential development. A large majority of respondents desire light manufacturing in the Region and restaurants. Almost half are interested in professional service firms and a third are interested in technology based firms for the Region. There were some significant differences in respondents from the committee surveys and the post office surveys. Most notably on the desire for medium to heavy manufacturing and warehousing and distribution. Both sets of respondents were dissatisfied with the job opportunities in the Region. Respondents on the phone interview surveys as well as the additional commenting section of the written survey, all expressed a need to streamline the process for new businesses in the Region.

Transportation: Transportation concerns, mainly volume and flow issues, ranked high with residents. Respondents were generally satisfied with road surface conditions and were less likely to support a tax increase for road improvements. Most respondents favored additional traffic lights on Route 183. A few respondents commented on the poor road conditions in Bernville Borough. The transportation plan has identified

intersection improvements as well as road widening needs in the Region.

Facilities & Services:

All respondents indicated a high level of satisfaction with emergency services (i.e., police and fire protection), and also indicated these services were an appropriate use of tax money. Respondents from the Region were enthusiastic regarding regional services and protection.

There was some support to maintaining or improving existing parks and recreational facilities in the Region but very little support for the development of new recreational areas. Respondents felt like they had plenty of recreation, especially with nearby Blue Marsh Lake, however, there were several comments that Jefferson Township does not have a community park, only sports fields.

**Resource Conservation &
Historic Preservation:**

Respondents indicated strong interest in farmland/open space and historic preservation. This suggests that a standing committee for historic and/or environmental preservation concerns may do well.