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## LAND USE

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The Natural Resources Plan and the Farmland Preservation Plan present the land preservation components of this comprehensive plan. This chapter presents the recommended general land use plan for the Lehigh Valley which includes recommendations for urban, suburban and rural areas. Also included are LVPC goals and policies for developments of regional significance.

### GENERAL TRENDS AND PATTERNS FOR DEVELOPMENT IN THE LEHIGH VALLEY

As previously noted the Lehigh Valley population is growing modestly. With a few exceptions cities and boroughs in the Lehigh Valley are not growing. Residential growth is greatest in suburban townships with public sewer and water on the perimeter of Allentown, Bethlehem and Easton. Between 75% and 80% of the subdivided lots in the Lehigh Valley are in urban or suburban areas where urban development is recommended. Unfortunately the remaining 25% of lots that are subdivided in rural areas constitute 75% of the acreage of subdivided land. This is because rural densities are much lower than urban and suburban densities. People who move to rural areas want larger lots and need them to handle septic tanks, sand mounds, and wells. Zoning policies enacted by municipalities promote this type of development. The inevitable consequences are:

- a) increasing consumption of farmland and natural resources;
- b) increasing dispersion of development;
- c) increasing traffic on rural roads.

These trends are not unique to the Lehigh Valley. They exist throughout Pennsylvania and the nation. Also these trends are not new; they have existed for most of the post WWII period in the United States. In comparison with other parts of the country Pennsylvania seems to be less successful in dealing with them.

The Lehigh Valley is changing from a predominantly agricultural area to a predominantly urban area. In 1975 67% of the area was agriculture and vacant land. By 2030 this percentage will drop to about 45%.

Map 12 shows land use patterns in the Lehigh Valley. Most urban development in the region is between Route 22 and I-78 from Route 100 east to the Delaware River. Interchange locations in this corridor have been popular sites for business and industrial locations since the late 1950s. The corridor is also bounded by rapidly developing suburbs such as Hanover and Bethlehem townships in Northampton County and Upper and Lower Macungie townships in western Lehigh County. Development in western Lehigh County was strongly influenced by the development of a long sewer interceptor from western Allentown to the industrial area around the I-78/Route 100 interchange in the late 1960s.

Expanses of farmland and other open space still exist in northwestern Lehigh County, southwestern Lehigh County, northeastern Northampton County and southeastern Northampton County. There is also an area of prime farmland south of Bath and Nazareth. However, farmland is disappearing rapidly. Rural single family subdivisions on large lots served by on-lot sewer and water are scattered throughout the region. In the less developed areas individual lots or small groups of lots are found along existing roads and at rural road intersections.

Map 13 shows municipal zoning in the Lehigh Valley in 2010. In preparing the map the LVPC staff paid primary attention to the existing regulations in various zones and not zoning district labels which are frequently misleading. The fact is many municipal zoning ordinances that designate areas for agricultural protection are ineffective in accomplishing the goal. In the Lehigh Valley only six municipalities have strong zoning regulations that will protect agriculture. These are Lynn, Heidelberg, Lower Macungie, Upper Saucon, Lower Milford, Allen, East Allen and Upper Nazareth townships. Only small areas are protected in Lower Macungie, Upper Saucon, Allen and East Allen. In Heidelberg and Lynn townships property owners are limited to subdivision of 10% of their property for non-agricultural purposes. This has helped to reduce development pressure in these townships.

Environmental protection zoning has been successfully initiated in many Lehigh Valley municipalities. Thirteen municipalities have enacted strong

environmental protection zoning. A number have added environmental overlays to existing zones. Effective environmental protection generally includes very low density zoning. On Blue Mountain Lehigh and Moore townships limit single family residential zoning to 10 acres per dwelling unit. Most of the other municipalities have passed zoning ordinances that require minimum residential lot sizes in the range of 3 to 5 acres per lot.

Unless municipalities are willing to curb development with large minimum lot sizes, land acquisitions, or measures that will limit subdivision development, they will not conserve much natural and agricultural land. A minimum lot size of one acre will only assure more large lot subdivision development, which is a primary characteristic of urban sprawl. The emphasis in this plan is on natural resources and agricultural preservation because they comprise a large part of the Lehigh Valley landscape. Restrictive zoning to protect these resources is in accord with Pennsylvania land use law. Growth management in the region depends largely on how municipalities deal with these zoning categories.

Some suburban and rural townships are reaping substantial tax benefits from new development, especially development of large expensive homes. It is tempting to create zoning regulations that will promote this type of development. Pennsylvania courts have long taken a dim view of large lot zoning practices. Large lot zoning must have some relationship to natural resource protection or agricultural preservation. Large lot zoning just to support expensive housing is probably not sustainable if challenged.

Managing commercial development is another problem in many suburban and rural municipalities. Long ribbons of commercial zones are evident in many municipalities. Although this type of zoning may be attractive to business it adds to traffic congestion and traffic accidents because it creates too many points of access that conflict with moving traffic. Municipalities need to concentrate business activities and control access along major roadways.

### **REGIONAL LAND USE PLAN**

Map 14 shows the recommended General Land Use Plan for the Lehigh Valley. The map deals with broad categories of land use — natural resources,

farmland preservation, urban and rural development. Table 3 shows the types of land use activities envisioned in each category. The natural resources and agricultural areas illustrated are based on policies recommended in earlier chapters of this report. Urban areas include cities, boroughs and the existing urbanizing portions of suburban townships. It is recommended that most future urban growth, including most residential, industrial and business expansion, be located in the urban areas. In designating the urban areas on Map 14 LVPC considered recommendations of multimunicipal plans underway in early 2004, local zoning, and potential expansion of public sewer systems. Rural areas are low density areas with no existing public sewers and a mixture of low density housing, scattered businesses and farms. Major residential, employment and institutional development is not recommended in rural areas.

### **GOAL**

*To provide a regional framework for protecting natural and agricultural resources, guiding the location and intensity of development, and matching land development with appropriate infrastructure.*

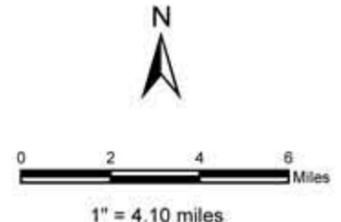
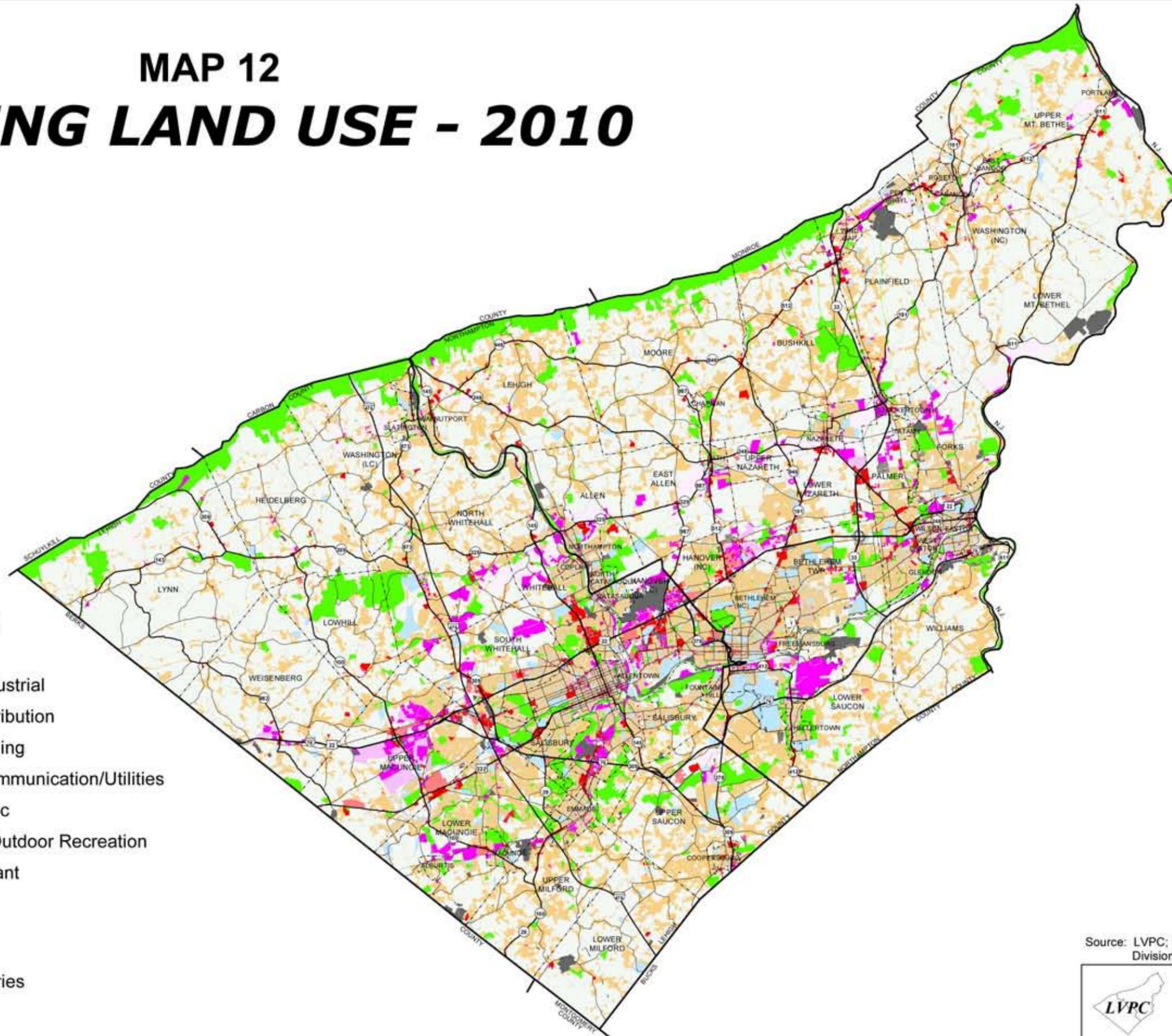
### **POLICIES**

- New growth should locate in areas designated for urban development on Map 14.
- New growth should not go into areas recommended for natural resource protection or agricultural protection.
- Generally, housing density and housing variety should be increased in urban development areas.
- Rural areas not designated for natural resource protection, agricultural protection or future urban growth are planned for low density, low intensity rural uses.
- Land uses and land use intensities should be compatible at adjoining municipal borders.
- Municipalities should require access management measures to minimize and control land use impacts on major roads.
- Public buildings and facilities should be located in areas recommended for urban development in this plan unless the facility clearly requires a rural location.
- Oppose use of federal and state funds for projects that will create or encourage sprawl.
- The urban development areas designated in this plan may be expanded into rural areas

# MAP 12

## **EXISTING LAND USE - 2010**

-  Residential
-  Retail/Commercial
-  Offices
-  Manufacturing/Industrial
-  Warehousing/Distribution
-  Quarrying and Mining
-  Transportation/Communication/Utilities
-  Public/Quasi-Public
-  Parks and Other Outdoor Recreation
-  Agricultural & Vacant
-  Right Of Way
-  Major Roads
-  Other Roads
-  Municipal Boundaries
-  County Boundary



Source: LVPC; Northampton County Dept. of Fiscal Affairs, GIS Division, 2010; Lehigh County Assessment Dept., 2010

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