

# INTRODUCTION

## COMPREHENSIVE PLAN OVERVIEW

Briar Creek Township and North Centre Township came together to develop a multimunicipal comprehensive plan. A comprehensive plan is a tool that communities use to plan for their future. It starts by describing a community’s vision for their character and quality of life. The plan is a policy guide for land use, development, and land conservation that aligns with the community’s ten-year goals. The plan identifies goals and strategies to implement the vision. The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) is the enabling legislation that allows municipalities to develop comprehensive plans.

A multimunicipal plan allows communities to work together to coordinate and jointly

implement strategies that will fulfill the community’s vision. By working together, each municipality will leverage their limited resources and unique assets to address challenges and create opportunities. This plan is based on both Townships’ commitment to preserving their semi-rural community and existing quality of life. The plan will facilitate regional planning related to land use and zoning while also favorably positioning the community for state funding programs.

The plan will be implemented based on the availability of resources, including time and funding. The Townships have the ability to amend the plan as priorities and circumstances change.



## COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION

Briar Creek Township and North Centre Township are adjacent second-class townships in Columbia County, Pennsylvania. The area is bordered by Luzerne County to the east, the Borough of Berwick, Borough of Briar Creek, and South Centre Township to the south, Fishing Creek Township to the north, Orange Township to the northwest, Fishing Creek Township and Scott Township to the west.

This mostly rural community is close to the Boroughs of Briar Creek, Berwick, and Orangeville as well as the Town of Bloomsburg, and offers a peaceful quality of life defined by friendly neighbors, low crime, and abundant farmland. Geisinger – a health system that includes nine hospitals, a medical school, two research centers, and 16,000 physicians – is within and surrounds the area’s footprint. The entire area is served by the Briar Creek Township Police Department and several small, volunteer-based fire companies. Students attend Berwick Area and Central Columbia School Districts. The residents enjoy the parks located within the Townships, Briar Creek Lake Park and Natural Park.

This plan takes into consideration the region in which the Townships are situated. The nearby Borough of Berwick has a population of 10,167 and the Town of Bloomsburg has 14,275 residents. These communities have a defined downtown and a variety of densely populated residential areas. The municipalities located along the State Route 11 corridor – Berwick Borough, Briar Creek Borough, South Centre Township, Scott Township, and Town of Bloomsburg – offer more amenities such as supermarkets and restaurants. The area also offers many natural resources including Ricketts Glen State Park, the Susquehanna River, State Game Lands No. 55, and Jonestown and Knob Mountains. All of these resources are available to the residents of Briar Creek and North Centre Township.

The population of the Townships has increased 7.1% since 1990; however, there has been a slight decline in population in Briar Creek Township (-1.9%) since 2000. The population is expected to decline between 0.32% and 8.7% through 2040.



## COMPREHENSIVE PLAN ORGANIZATION

The plan is organized into the following sections:

- Priority issues;
- Implementation;
- Background information to provide additional research to support the priority issues, as well as general information about the community; and
- Appendices.

The priority issues were developed based on input from the community. Through discussions with Township residents and survey results, the community described their vision and identified several priorities for implementing their vision.

## PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Public participation is key to developing a comprehensive plan that reflects the community's vision. The public participated in the development of this plan through a steering committee, a survey, focus groups, and public meetings.

### Steering Committee

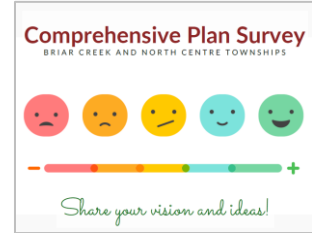
A Steering Committee was designated by the Township Boards of Supervisors. The Steering Committee was made up of 5 representatives from each Township, plus a representative from the Columbia County Office of Planning and Development, the PA Department of Community and Economic Development, and Pennsylvania State Representative David R. Millard.



The Steering Committee met in April, July, and October 2020 and received bi-weekly email updates from the consultant through November 2020. In December 2020, the planning process was put on hold due to COVID-19. The planning process picked back up in May 2021. The Steering Committee was invited to participate in meetings in June and August 2021 to review the draft plan.

Survey

An online survey was made available from June 29 - August 28, 2020. It was completed by 74 individuals representing both Townships. The survey was promoted using email, the Township websites, a postcard which was distributed at local events and businesses, and an advertisement in the Press Enterprise.



Focus Groups

Four focus groups were held at the North Centre Township building on August 5, 2020. Twenty-three members of the community participated in the focus groups.

Public Meetings

Two socially distanced public meetings were held at Freas Farm Winery on September 22, 2020. During the public meetings, 21 residents participated in three activities to develop the community’s vision, identify its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, and provide insight into each Township’s needs and unique assets.

The Planning Commission meetings and Boards of Supervisors meetings where the plan was reviewed and approved were open to the public.



Individual Interviews

Over 25 individual interviews took place over the telephone. This was an opportunity to learn more about specific aspects of the community and the community’s needs.

## VISION STATEMENT

*Our community provides a peaceful quality of life in a uniquely beautiful setting.*

*Our land use policies align with our semi-rural landscape.*

*We preserve our farmland and promote our agricultural economy.*

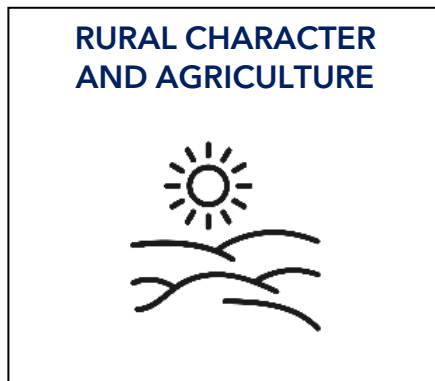
*We protect our natural resources.*

*Residents enjoy the availability of modern community and municipal services such as reliable broadband and cellular connectivity, access to local recycling, well-maintained roads, safe pedestrian and bicycle routes, and well-designed and active parks.*

*We collaborate with partners in our region to coordinate and enhance services that contribute to our sustainability and economic vitality.*

# PRIORITY ISSUES

The plan identifies four priority issues:



Priority issue organization:

**VISION**

**INTRODUCTORY AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

**GOALS**

**STRATEGIES**

## PRIORITY ISSUE 1

## RURAL CHARACTER AND AGRICULTURE

**VISION**

*The community maintains its rural character and agricultural resources through proactive smart growth land use and development policies.*

**RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT****GOAL 1**

The majority of the residential lots in the Townships will continue to be one acre or larger. Provide for the community's changing housing needs by providing limited opportunities for new housing on smaller lots and permitting accessory dwelling units.

**STRATEGIES**

1. Keep most of the residential zoning district locations and regulations the same.
2. Identify areas on the zoning map to change the zoning district and decrease the minimum lot size requirement when public water and sewer are available for the purpose of permitting housing that is more affordable on smaller lots with less outside maintenance responsibilities.
3. Identify opportunities for in-fill development where public water and sewer lines exist.
4. Develop a plan for extending existing water and sewer lines to provide for limited small lot housing development.
5. Define standards for and permit attached and detached accessory dwelling units.

**COMMERCIAL/INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT****GOAL 2**

Meet the community's limited need for development opportunities, including commercial services and industrial space.

**STRATEGIES**

1. Review the commercial district zoning locations in both Townships and consider permitting more commercial activities along State Route 93 and changing some of the existing commercial districts to residential or agricultural zoning districts.
2. Identify appropriate locations for small convenience stores.
3. Identify appropriate locations for additional light industrial development.

## **AGRICULTURAL LAND PRESERVATION**

### **GOAL 3**

Preserve and protect prime agricultural land.

#### **STRATEGIES**

1. Continue to promote the agricultural security area program.
2. Promote the agricultural conservation easement program (farmland preservation program) in partnership with the County Conservation District.
3. Consider amending the Briar Creek Township zoning ordinance to balance protecting farmland, open space, and residential subdivision opportunities.
4. Continue to ensure the agricultural district subdivision regulations in North Centre Township protect enough agricultural land to preserve the semi-rural character of the Township.

### **GOAL 4**

Promote agricultural economic sustainability and growth through agritourism and farmers' markets.

#### **Strategies**

1. Promote existing farmers' markets and work with farmers to create a new and larger community farmers' market.
2. Permit agritourism in the Briar Creek Township zoning ordinance.



## PRIORITY ISSUE 2

## RECREATION, COMMUNITY, AND YOUTH

**VISION**

*The residents enjoy abundant active outdoor recreational opportunities and feel a strong sense of community. The youth are engaged with programs that promote positive development.*

**RECREATIONAL AMENITIES****GOAL 1**

Improve the park amenities in the Townships to offer more opportunities for recreation, enjoyment of the outdoors, and environmental education.

**STRATEGIES**

1. Advocate for the development of a Briar Creek Lake Park master plan to improve the park and promote utilization.
2. Develop a Natural Park master plan to improve the park and promote utilization.
3. Meet with the owners of the former Camp Louise to learn about their plans for the property.
4. Require the dedication of recreational land or a fee in-lieu of recreational land or facilities in the SALDO.

**WALKING AND BIKING SAFETY****GOAL 2**

Create new safe opportunities for walking and biking and improve connectivity to regional trails.

**STRATEGIES**

1. Create a multimodal master plan for the Townships. Identify roads where walking and biking paths can safely be created. Acquire land/easements to expand road widths. Connect new walking and biking paths along roadways to the regional trail network.
2. Support implementation of the Middle Susquehanna Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan (2019). Participate in the Middle Susquehanna Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee and advocate for the needs of the Townships.
3. Adopt a complete streets policy to require bike and pedestrian infrastructure, such as wider shoulders on roads and bridges and rumble strips along the edge of the travel lane, on all new or rebuilt local roads.

4. Consider installing and/or improving curbs and sidewalks in the Avenues in Briar Creek Township.

### **ALL-TERRAIN VEHICLES**

#### **GOAL 3**

Increase opportunities for riding All-Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) in Briar Creek Township.

#### **STRATEGIES**

1. Work with PennDOT and/or traffic engineers to develop a safe plan to permit ATVs to travel on some roads in Briar Creek Township.

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**

#### **GOAL 4**

Increase opportunities for community engagement and youth development.

#### **Strategies**

1. Increase opportunities for youth activities and engagement in the community. Promote and support the activities at the For the Cause Teen Center, including assistance with fundraising. Identify other development resources for children and teens. Coordinate transportation so that more children and teens can participate in activities.
2. Create new – while expanding and promoting existing – community events, such as the events that take place at the wineries.
3. Evaluate the need for a community building/community space to host events and provide opportunities for children, teens, and adults to gather.