

PRIORITY ISSUE 3

GOVERNMENT AND SERVICES

**VISION**

Government is financially sustainable, proactive, and efficient in its coordination of services desired by the residents.

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY**GOAL 1**

Ensure financial sustainability through a responsive budget that reflects the Townships' priorities.

STRATEGIES

1. Develop a long-term financial plan to understand revenue and expenditure targets and challenges.
2. Explore economic and housing development initiatives that will generate tax revenue while maintaining the community's rural character and quality of life.
3. Explore the feasibility of additional cooperative municipal purchasing programs and services with the other Township and with other municipalities throughout the region.
4. Develop a Capital Improvements Plan.
5. Research and apply for relevant state and federal funding opportunities.

MUNICIPAL AND REGIONAL COLLABORATION**GOAL 2**

Strengthen services and reduce costs through municipal and regional collaboration.

STRATEGIES

1. Evaluate existing and new opportunities for sharing resources and services. Develop a plan for expanding opportunities for collaboration. Execute intergovernmental agreements.
2. Develop a road maintenance plan that addresses staffing and equipment needs, and a sustainable funding strategy to support road maintenance and paving responsibilities.
3. Meet with Susquehanna Economic Development Association – Council of Governments (SEDA-COG), the Berwick Industrial Development Association (BIDA), and Driving Real Innovation for a Vibrant Economic – Council of Governments (DRIVE) to communicate needs and explore opportunities for partnership.

HIGH SPEED AND RELIABLE BROADBAND INTERNET AND CELLULAR SERVICE

GOAL 3

All residents and businesses have access to high speed and reliable broadband internet and cellular service.

STRATEGIES

1. Identify areas in the Townships that lack access to mobile broadband services and mobile wireless networks.
2. Identify and engage with an organization to advocate for and develop a plan for expanded mobile broadband services and mobile wireless networks in the Townships. This may include pursuing assistance from the Governor's Office, Columbia County, the U.S Department of Agriculture, the Appalachian Regional Commission, and other government agencies working on expanding mobile broadband services and mobile wireless networks.

CONVENIENT RECYCLING

GOAL 4

Provide affordable recycling drop-off services in each Township.

STRATEGIES

1. Explore the feasibility of partnering with the Borough of Berwick or the Town of Bloomsburg to pick up recycling in the Townships.
2. Identify the costs involved with reinstating local recycling services and pursue funding sources, which may include grants, tax revenue, or fees to residents to pay for the service.

EMERGENCY SERVICES

GOAL 5

Support local and county emergency management planning and response.

STRATEGIES

1. Participate in the county's hazard mitigation planning and implementation process to reduce vulnerabilities to natural and human-made hazards and enable a more resilient community.
2. Promote disaster-resistant future development.

GOAL 6

Maintain community safety through a responsive and sustainable regional police force.

STRATEGIES

1. Develop a long-term plan for financial sustainability of the police department.
2. Develop a long-term plan for officer recruitment and retention.

3. Explore the feasibility of joining a larger, regional police force.

GOAL 7

Improve the sustainability of local fire departments.

STRATEGIES

1. Advocate for state-level funding to support local fire companies.
2. Support the fundraising activities of local fire companies.
3. Increase municipal allocations for fire companies.
4. Partner with surrounding municipalities to explore the feasibility of regionalization and to jointly apply for funding opportunities.
5. Support volunteer recruitment and retention efforts.

CONTEMPORARY MUNICIPAL CODE**GOAL 8**

Amend ordinances in a timely manner to reflect the community's vision and regulate new uses. Collaborate on land use planning.

STRATEGIES

1. Revise the SALDO, zoning ordinance, and other relevant ordinances to align with the multimunicipal comprehensive plan.
2. Keep ordinances current by reviewing the ordinances for deficiencies and proposing amendments in a timely manner.
3. Consider adopting joint zoning, either through one zoning ordinance or two separate ordinances that are coordinated through an intergovernmental cooperative planning and implementation agreement. Review opportunities for sharing land uses, especially commercial and industrial uses.
4. Zone for all new uses and update existing use regulations, as needed. Both Townships should consider zoning for short-term rentals, accessory dwelling units, and expanded home occupation allowances. Briar Creek Township should consider updating the zoning ordinance to regulate digital signs and permit agritourism.

ACTIVE CODE ENFORCEMENT**GOAL 9**

Strengthen code enforcement and eliminate blighted properties.

STRATEGIES

1. Explore the feasibility of merging code enforcement efforts between the Townships, including adopting the same property maintenance ordinance and standardizing property maintenance priorities and procedures.

2. Actively address property maintenance code and zoning violations by issuing violation letters and filing citations with the district magistrate's office.
3. Collaborate with a nonprofit housing developer, such as Community Strategies Group and the Columbia County Redevelopment Authority, to develop a plan to remediate blighted properties. This may include property acquisition, demolition, and rehabilitation.

PRIORITY ISSUE 4

CONSERVATION, NATURAL RESOURCES, AND OPEN SPACE



VISION

*Natural resources and open space are conserved and protected.
The preserved ecosystem contributes to the community's health, quality of life,
and enjoyment of the region's natural beauty.*

GOAL 1

Conserve and protect natural resources and open space.

STRATEGIES

1. Complete a Growing Greener Ordinance Assessment as recommended in the Columbia County Great Outdoors Plan and make modifications that promote natural resource protection and open space preservation.
 - a. Use "The Growing Greener – Conservation by Design" planning steps which include a community assessment, conservation planning, changes to the SALDO, and changes to the zoning ordinance.
 - b. Steer development away from sensitive natural resources.
 - c. Create buffer and development setbacks from sensitive resources such as wetlands, stream corridors, steep slopes, and riparian areas.
 - d. Establish overlay zoning provisions for specific natural resources such as woodlands, prime agricultural soils, steep slopes, stream buffer areas, and wetlands.
2. Consult with the Columbia County Conservation District and the Briar Creek Association for Watershed Solutions (BCAWS) to implement best practices for natural resource conservation, preservation, and restoration.
3. Promote the establishment of "no mow zones." Align property maintenance ordinance with "no mow zone" policy.
4. Limit development in areas that would diminish scenic views or negatively impact woodlands, recreational, or agricultural uses.
5. Support applications for funding to support environmental restoration projects.
6. Support environmental education programs organized by the Columbia County Conservation District, BCAWS, and other organizations.
7. Consider adoption of an official map to conserve and protect natural resources.
8. Develop and implement an open space plan.

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.



Through community meetings, a survey, and interviews, residents indicated that they value their quiet, semi-rural community. Residents desire preservation of their existing quality of life, which balances beautiful open space and farmland with sparsely populated, mostly single-family dwellings and limited commercial activity.

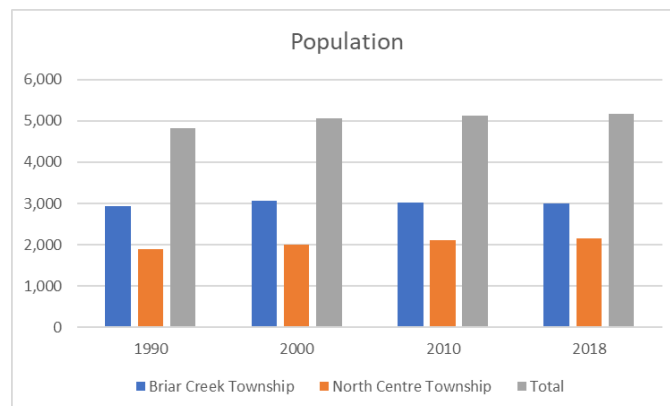
Residential development, commercial development, and agricultural land are each

reviewed independently below. However, all three elements are tied together in how the Townships manage land use. The Township zoning ordinances and subdivision and land development ordinances will be revised to align with the multimunicipal comprehensive plan. In general, the ordinance revisions should reflect the desire to keep the semi-rural character of the community. This may be best accomplished by considering the sharing of land uses between the Townships through joint zoning.

RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

There has been some population growth since 1990, mostly in North Centre Township. Most of this growth occurred between 1990 and 2000, when the population of the Townships increased 5.2% (4.29% in Briar Creek Township and 6.57% in

North Centre Township). While the population continued to grow slightly in North Centre Township (an increase of 7.4% from 2000 to 2018); there was a decline in population in Briar Creek Township (-1.9%) during this time.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, Five-Year Estimates 2014-2018

The Townships maintain a low population density – 144.32 people per square mile in North Centre Township and 143.26 people per square mile in Briar Creek Township. In comparison, the population density is 3,304.83 in the Borough of Berwick and 3,281.43 in the Town of Bloomsburg. In North Centre Township, the minimum density per lot for a single family detached dwelling is .25 acres in the Village District if public water and sewer are available. In Briar Creek Township, the minimum density per lot is .25 acres if public water and sewer are available; however, in the Avenues, the typical lot is approximately .17 acres. If public water and sewer are not available, the lot sizes must be larger to meet Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection minimum horizontal isolation distances for on-lot septic systems. However, where there is public water and sewer, lot sizes can be smaller.

Currently, there are 2,335 housing units in the two Townships – 1,449 in Briar Creek Township and 886 in North Centre

Township. The number of housing units grew 27.7% from 1990 to 2018, with most growth occurring between 1990 and 2000. While all housing types are permitted, the majority of homes (84.1%) are single family detached houses. About 12.4% of housing units are mobile homes. Most homes (85.9%) are owner-occupied. The homeownership rate has declined slightly since 2000 – 3.4% in Briar Creek Township and 7.1% in North Centre Township.

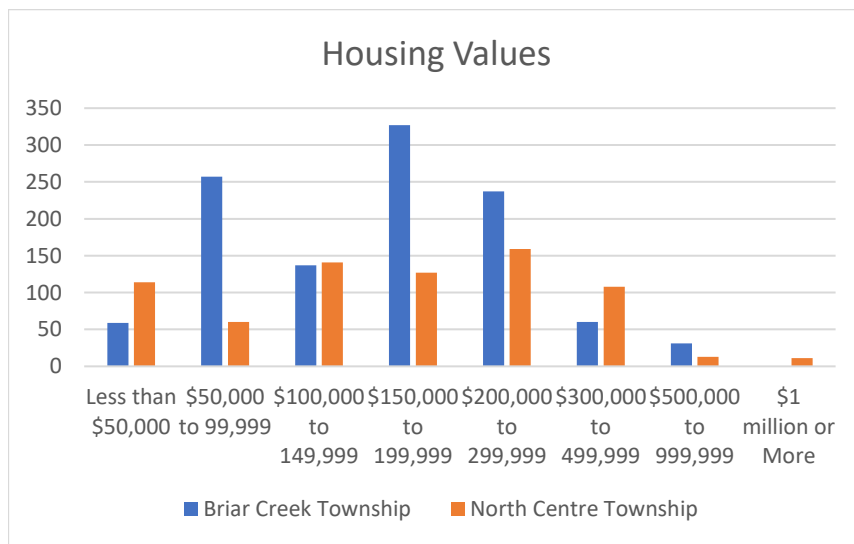
The average value of an owner-occupied home is \$162,500 in Briar Creek Township and \$165,700 in North Centre Township. There are few affordable rentals in the two Townships. About 51.3% of renters are cost burdened and use more than 30% of their income toward housing expenses. There are two rentals that accept Housing Choice Vouchers in North Centre Township and none in Briar Creek Township. Recent Analyses of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice Reports in the Borough of Berwick and Town of Bloomsburg revealed a lack of affordable housing throughout the region.



There are a variety of housing price points available in the Townships. More than a quarter (26.6%) have a value of less than \$100,000, 39.7% are valued between \$100,000 and \$199,999, 33% are valued between \$200,000 and \$500,000, and 2.9% of homes have a value of more than \$500,000.

It is typically possible for people to purchase a home with a value of three times their annual household income. Based on residents' income and housing prices, there

appears to be a deficit in ownership opportunities for residents with income between \$25,000 to \$49,999; however, these housing needs may be partially met by the rental market. In addition, these residents may be older adults who have already paid off their mortgage. There also appears to be a deficit of housing for households with annual income of \$100,000 or more which suggests, in general, that current residents are living well within their means in terms of housing expense.



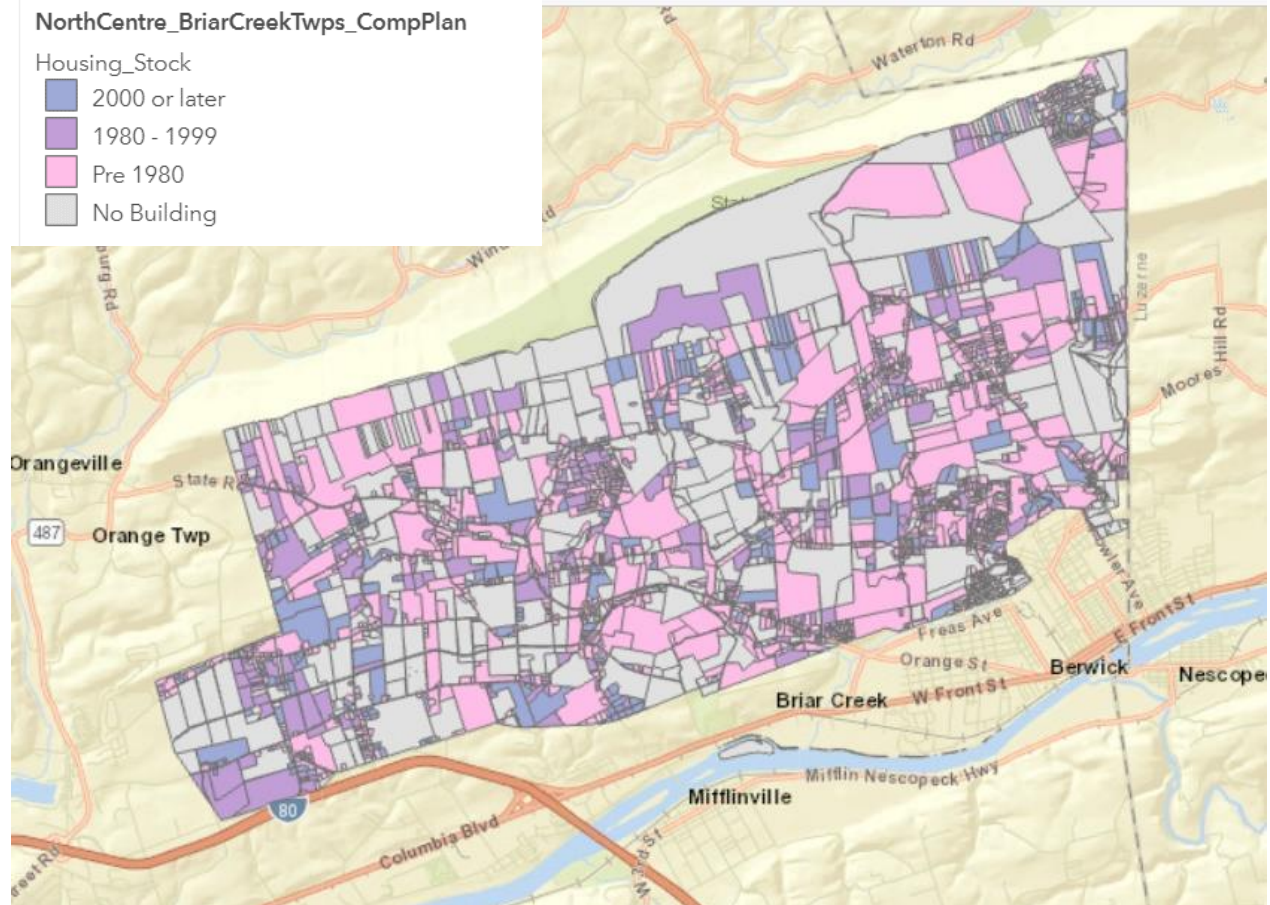
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, Five-Year Estimates 2014-2018

Annual Household Income	Housing Value	Housing Surplus/Deficit
Less than \$15,000 (6.2%)	Less than \$50,000 (9.4%)	3.20%
\$15,000 to 24,999 (8.4%)	\$50,000 to \$99,999 (17.2%)	8.80%
\$25,000 to \$49,999 (26.7%)	\$100,000 to \$149,999 (15.1%)	-11.60%
\$50,000 to \$74,999 (22.6%)	\$150,000 to \$199,999 (24.6%)	2%
\$75,000 to \$99,000 (11.8%)	\$200,000 to \$299,999 (21.5%)	9.70%
\$100,000 to \$149,999 (15.4%)	\$300,000 to \$499,999 (9.1%)	-6.30%
\$150,000 or More (9%)	\$500,000 or more (2.9%)	-6.10%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, Five-Year Estimates 2014-2018

The housing stock in the townships is generally newer than in more densely populated areas. More than 65% of homes in the Townships have been built since 1970.

As previously discussed, there are also fewer types of housing and homes placed on larger lots with more space in-between them.



The median age is 52.1 in Briar Creek Township and 48.9 in North Centre Township. In addition, 25.2% of the population in Briar Creek Township, and 20.4% of North Centre Township residents, are over the age of 65. The percent of population over the age of 85 has also increased tremendously over the past 20 years – 195.42% in Briar Creek Township and 1103.33% in North Centre Township. This community is much older than the surrounding areas and the state. The median

age in both Columbia County and Pennsylvania is 41. Only 18.4% of Columbia County residents and 17.4% of residents in the Commonwealth are over the age of 65. Thus, the Townships will pay particular attention to the housing needs of a growing older adult population. To ensure that long-term residents can continue to enjoy being a resident of their community, the Townships will need different housing options such as smaller homes with less land to maintain and accessory dwelling units.

An accessory dwelling unit is a second smaller dwelling unit that is attached to an existing single-family dwelling. It can also be detached on the same lot as a single-family dwelling or other residential dwelling unit, such as an apartment over a detached garage or a small structure in a rear yard.

The Center for Rural Pennsylvania projects that the population of Columbia County will remain relatively stable through 2040; however, ProximityOne projects a population loss of 6.3% between 2020 and 2040 and a total population loss of 13.1% from 2020 to 2060. While there does not appear to be a strong demand for an increase in the number of housing units due to the lack of population growth, there does seem to be a demand for housing types to meet the needs of the aging population, as well as demand from the neighboring communities, the Borough of Berwick and the Town of Bloomsburg.

In order to prepare for the demand for smaller homes with smaller lots that are affordable, the Townships should identify locations to permit more dense housing developments. The housing developments would be most appropriately located along or near the existing public water and sewer lines in Briar Creek Township. The Berwick Area Joint Sewer Authority does not have any immediate plans to expand the sewer lines.



Source: New England Outdoor Sheds and Gazebos

When considering locations to permit higher density housing, the Townships should consider smart growth principles. The US Environmental Protection Agency identifies several smart growth principles in their “Essential Smart Growth Fixes for Rural Planning, Zoning and Development Codes” publication. The applicable principles include compact design; a range of housing opportunities and choices; preservation of open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas; and strengthening and directing development toward existing communities.

Ordinance revisions should be considered to allow for smaller lot sizes closer to Berwick and Bloomsburg. The SALDOs should also address responsibility for infrastructure and utility improvements. Ordinances should also limit the ability to subdivide in the agricultural zoning districts for residential purposes.



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.
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COMMERCIAL/INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

There are limited businesses located within the Townships. Nearly all businesses (97.4% of businesses in Briar Creek Township and 97.6% of those in North Centre Township) have less than 50 employees. Businesses based in the Townships do not offer all of the goods and services desired by residents. Township residents typically travel a short distance to Berwick Borough, Briar Creek Borough, the Town of Bloomsburg, and other areas to meet their shopping, dining, healthcare, and other service needs. Residents prefer this five to 20-minute drive to additional commercial development within the Townships as they value the rural beauty in their community. A few residents shared that they would like to have a small convenience store closer to home to purchase basics such as milk and eggs. Data indicates that there is untapped market potential for several types of retail establishments including restaurants, pet supplies, sporting goods, and clothing and accessories.

These opportunities would be well-placed on State Route 93, which is traveled by nearly 7,400 vehicles each day. Allowing limited retail along this corridor would

generate new tax revenue that could be used to maintain and enhance residents' quality of life. However, the creation of new retail establishments should be balanced with residents' desire for limited development and maintenance of a quiet, peaceful quality of life.

Most residents commute more than 20 minutes each day to their place of employment. More than 10% of residents commute 45 minutes or more. About 4.4% of residents – 6.9% of Briar Creek Township residents and 1.6% of North Centre Township residents – work at home. Survey respondents suggested that the Townships should ease restrictions so that more residents can start or expand their home-based businesses.

BIDA indicated that there is a demand for warehouses and light manufacturing space in the region. The Townships could consider expanding the land available for industrial development, especially close to the existing industrial space in Briar Creek Township. This type of development also could benefit the Township tax base.



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 Rt 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.



Source: Google Maps

AGRICULTURAL LAND PRESERVATION

In Columbia County, farmland decreased 13% from 2012 to 2017. Farming generates tax revenue for the Townships and provides employment opportunities. In addition, farmland is central to the area’s quality of life.

Both Townships have taken steps to preserve farmland and maintain their semi-rural way of life. North Centre Township amended their zoning ordinance in 2018 to protect the subdivision of land in the Agricultural Preservation District. In this District, a tract of land larger than 20 acres as of January 1, 2009, may only be subdivided for residential or nonagricultural purposes if the total amount of land subdivided is less than or equal to 20 acres or 20% (whichever is less) of the parent tract, unless one of the open space residential development options is used by the property owner. If the land is subdivided for agricultural purposes, the minimum lot size is 20 acres.

Both Townships have amended their zoning ordinances to conserve open land, protect farmland, and conserve scenic views. Briar

Creek Township adopted optional conservation design residential standards and North Centre Township adopted an open space residential development option. However, there is nothing preventing tracts of land from being subdivided down to a one-acre minimum lot size in the Agricultural District in Briar Creek Township.

Briar Creek Township has an Agricultural Security Area which was formed in 1990. There are 75 participating members and 4,991 acres are protected. North Centre Township has an Agricultural Security Area which was formed in 2007. There are 33 participating members and 3,682 acres are protected. The Agricultural Security Area designation provides the landowners limited protection from local regulations, such as nuisance ordinances and condemnation of land. Neither Township has farmland enrolled in the agricultural conservation easement program.

North Centre Township added to their zoning ordinance an agritainment enterprise use in 2017 and a winery use in 2020.



Source: onthefarmradio.com

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.



Source: narrowsburgfarmersmarket.org

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.