

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

Feedback from the community through conversations with the residents and the survey results indicate a strong desire for more recreational amenities. Each Township has a park which promotes the enjoyment of natural areas – Natural Park in North Centre Township and Briar Creek Lake Park in Briar Creek Township. There are opportunities to improve both parks to make them more active and attractive to the residents.

Briar Creek Lake Park is a 173-acre site with a 53-acre lake. The lake was built by the Army Corps of Engineers in the 1970s as part of the county’s flood control program. The

property is owned by the PA Fish and Game Commission. Columbia County leases the park from the state and maintains the park grounds. The lake is stocked with fish by the PA Fish and Game Commission. It offers year-round trout fishing, boating, a playground, a picnic area, bathrooms, a 2.5-mile walking trail, open fields, and wildlife sightings. The Fowlersville Covered Bridge was moved to the park in 1986. Trail enhancements are a medium priority in the Middle Susquehanna Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan (2019).

The Columbia County Comprehensive Recreation, Parks, Greenways and Open Space Plan (2007) suggests that a master plan should be developed for Briar Creek Lake Park. The plan could include



improvements such as paving the walking trail, promoting food trucks, creating ADA accessible routes that connect parking, recreation facilities, trails, and walkways, constructing a warming hut for ice skaters and cross-country skiers, and allowing meadow grasses to grow adjacent to the lake to deter geese.

Natural Park is a 13-acre area along Fowlersville Road in North Centre Township that was created to provide space for residents to enjoy the outdoors and explore nature. The site offers bathrooms and two pavilions with picnic tables and benches. Trails have been started and are maintained in accordance with wetlands regulations.

Camp Louise, a former Girl Scout camp that closed in 2016, is located on the edge of State Game Lands No. 55 in Briar Creek Township. It encompasses 340 acres. The site has a 12-acre lake, pool, cabins, a lodge, and picnic areas. A developer has purchased the site.

Parks and natural areas are essential for personal and community health. According to the Columbia County Comprehensive Recreation, Parks, Greenways and Open Space Plan (2007), there should be 15 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. In the two Townships, there is a total of 133 acres of parkland between Natural Park in North Centre Township and Briar Creek Lake Park. Thus, there are 25.8 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents which exceeds this standard.



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

Briar Creek and North Centre Townships are part of the Susquehanna Greenway Corridor. The community is in close proximity to the Borough of Berwick, Town of Bloomsburg, and the Susquehanna Warrior Trail; however, there are not currently safe connections between these areas and the Townships. In addition, it is not safe to walk and bike along roads in the Townships because they are narrow with little or no

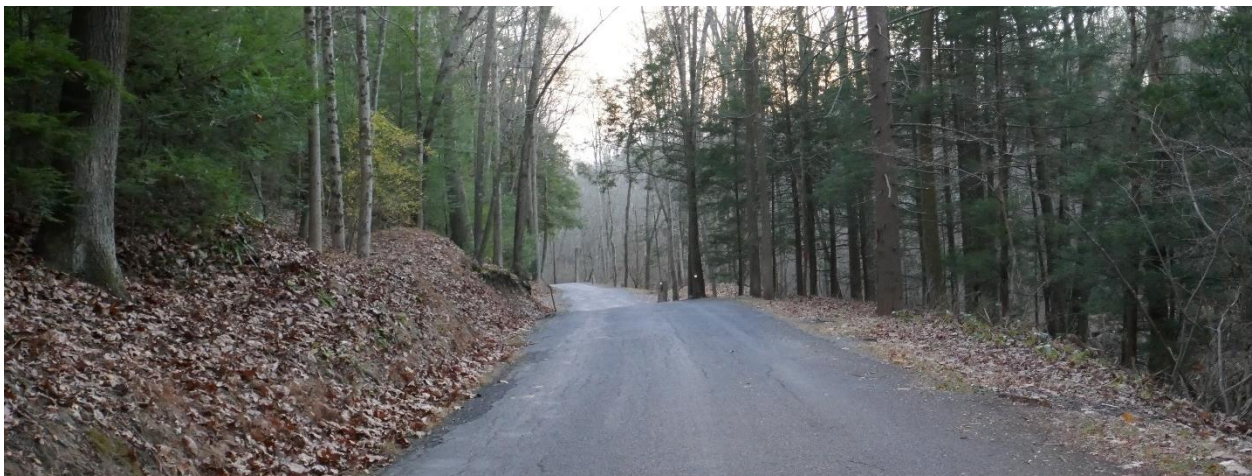
shoulders. The Middle Susquehanna Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan (2019), created by SEDA-COG, proposed a pathway to connect Berwick and Bloomsburg; once this is developed, the Briar Creek Lake trail can be connected to the Berwick/Bloomsburg trail. This Plan also suggests that it is imperative to improve safety for walkers and bikers and to increase the number of people who regularly walk and cycle.

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

Many residents in the Townships enjoy riding ATVs. The residents would like to have more opportunities to ride their ATVs, both on the road and on trails.

PA Title 75, Section 7721 states that it is unlawful to operate a snowmobile or an ATV on any street or highway which is not designated and posted as a snowmobile or an ATV road by the governmental agency having jurisdiction. Section 7722 states that the Department of Transportation on State-designated highways and local authorities on roads within its jurisdiction may

designate any highway, road, or street as a snowmobile road, an ATV road, or both, and may determine whether such road shall be closed to vehicular traffic or whether snowmobiles and ATVs may share this designated road with vehicular traffic.



Source: wiscnews.com

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

A strong sense of community and connection to neighbors contributes to a vibrant quality of life. Residents shared that there are few opportunities for building community, particularly for youth who are becoming increasingly busy and reliant on technology. In addition, volunteerism has decreased which is impacting community services, such as the fire companies. Several community events no longer take place due to a lack of interest.



Freas Farm Winery in Briar Creek Township and Three Dogs Vino in North Centre Township offer a community gathering space where people can visit and enjoy wine. The wineries also organize events using their indoor and outdoor space including live music and food trucks.



The For the Cause Teen Center, located in the Avenues section of Briar Creek Township, serves youth throughout the Berwick Area School District. The teen center is a 3,500 square foot facility that has recreation and study areas, food that is provided at no cost, Wi-Fi access, and a musician rehearsal space. Children and teens also have the opportunity to participate in school-based activities including sports, music, and drama. The Teen Center connects the students to the community. It can be a resource to businesses and non-profits for employees and volunteers. One of the challenges to increasing student participation is the lack of transportation.

Natural Park and Briar Creek Lake Park provide an opportunity for community members to learn about and enjoy the natural environment. The parks can be made more active by serving as a community gathering space with events such as live music, food festivals, and community sports.

Residents expressed the need for a community center large enough to host indoor events, such as parties and weddings. In the past, the building next to the Teen Center, on the corner of 6th Avenue and Warren Street, was a community gathering spot for bowling and roller skating. Currently it is a vacant building in need of redevelopment. The area is in the 100-year floodplain so redevelopment of a building may be difficult. However, the land could be an opportunity for space for the community to gather, indoors or outdoors, if building is not possible.

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.
-



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

Municipal budgets reflect communities’ needs, goals, and priorities. It is essential to ensure that municipal budgets are critically assessed to ensure that they are responsive to changing community dynamics, responsible, and sustainable.

In 2020, Briar Creek Township had an annual general fund budget of \$1,229,280. The budget increased 11.7% since 2015 and 56.8% since 2006. Approximately 30.15% of income is from real estate taxes and another 29.2% is from earned income tax. The Township’s largest expense is police, and this accounts for 43.52% of the annual budget. About 19.46% of the budget goes toward maintenance and repair of roads and bridges and another 7.79% is allocated to fire service.

In 2020, North Centre Township had an annual budget of \$584,968. The budget decreased 9.4% since 2015 and increased 63.2% since 2006. Approximately 46.28% of income is from real estate taxes and another 42.74% is from earned income tax. The Township’s largest expense is maintenance and repair of roads and bridges, and this accounts for 33.23% of the annual budget. About 16.53% of the budget is for police service and 3.76% is for fire service.

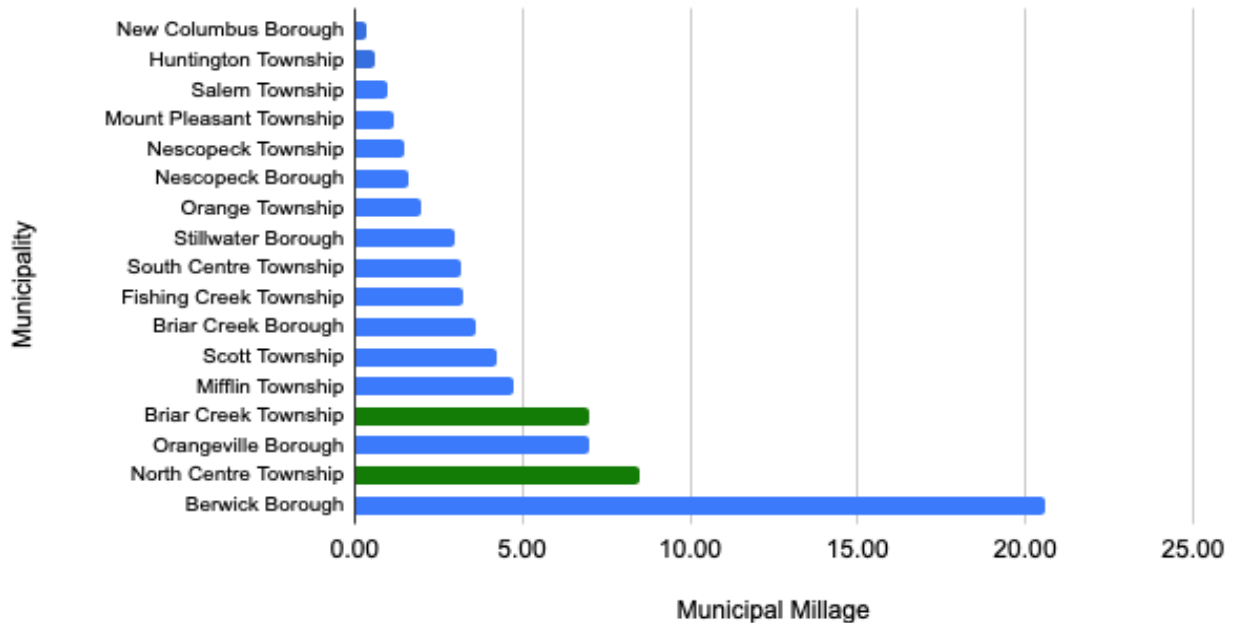
The Townships’ 2020 budgets show that Briar Creek Township had total revenue of \$1,229,280 (\$409.49 per capita) and North Centre Township had total revenue of \$584,968 (\$270.94 per capita). The per capita revenue from real estate taxes and earned income taxes are nearly equivalent. Increases in the Townships’ annual budgets outpace the change in population and households.

	Population Change 2010 - 2018	Household Change 2010 - 2018	Budget Change 2010 - 2020
Briar Creek Township	-0.46%	+2.99%	+26.3%
North Centre Township	+2.57%	+11.71%	+30.2%

Briar Creek Township has a millage rate of 7.0 and North Centre Township has a millage rate of 8.5. With the exception of Berwick

Borough and Orangeville Borough, these rates are much higher than the surrounding communities.

Municipal Millage Rates



There are some large differences in the Township’s expenses; however, it may be difficult to compare budgets due to the unique structure of each municipality. The

chart below shows each municipality’s approved 2020 budget, the amount allocated to each line item, and the cost per capita for each expense.

	Briar Creek Township		North Centre Township	
	Amount	Per Capita	Amount	Per Capita
Police	\$534,930	\$178.19	\$96,717	\$44.80
Fire	\$95,720	\$31.89	\$22,000	\$10.19
Code Enforcement	\$9,685	\$3.29	\$0	\$0
Planning and Zoning	\$12,710	\$4.23	\$29,252	\$13.71
Recycling	\$0	\$0	\$6,000	\$2.78
Snow Removal	\$10,000	\$3.33	\$22,000	\$10.19
Public Works	\$0	\$0	\$21,200	\$9.82

Roads and Bridges	\$239,245	\$79.70	\$194,406	\$90.04
Highway Construction and Rebuilding	\$62,975	\$20.98	\$17,788	\$8.24
Employer Paid Taxes	\$41,280	\$13.75	\$12,305	\$5.70
Pension	\$71,610	\$23.85	\$15,719	\$7.28
Workers Compensation	\$16,800	\$5.60	\$8,792	\$4.07

Both Townships have capital needs, such as building, vehicle, and road improvements, that will need to be addressed in the next 10 years. At the same time, residents desire flat taxes that do not overly stress their personal

budgets. State and federal grant funding can be pursued to address the Townships' capital needs so that residents are not unduly burdened with the costs associated with these projects.

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

Communicating, collaborating, and coordinating with other municipalities and organizations is key to providing comprehensive, cost effective, and efficient services to municipal residents. Briar Creek and North Centre Townships currently partner and have agreements in place to formalize collaboration; however, these efforts can be strengthened.

Both Townships are part of the area served by SEDA-COG. SEDA-COG coordinates quality of life and economic development initiatives in 11 counties in central Pennsylvania. The Townships are also a part of DRIVE, a COG that coordinates economic development efforts in five counties. BIDA promotes workforce development and economic and industrial retention and development in the region.

North Centre Township has an agreement in place with Benton, Fishing Creek, Jackson, and Sugarloaf Townships to purchase equipment and materials for road improvements.

The Briar Creek Township Police Department serves both Briar Creek and North Centre Township. Both Townships partner with volunteer fire companies as they do not have their own department. Briar Creek Township partners with Summerhill Fire Company which has mutual aid agreements in place with several other fire companies. North Centre Township has agreements in place with Lime Ridge Volunteer Fire Company, Lightstreet Volunteer Fire Company, and Orangeville Volunteer Fire Company. Each of these fire companies has been identified as a primary provider for a specific part of the Township, but all have mutual aid agreements to support each other.

The Townships should consider building on these collaborative efforts to improve services and reduce costs. Specifically, the Townships should consider joint zoning so that there are shared uses and the semi-rural character of the Townships can continue to be preserved, drop-off recycling service, road maintenance, and volunteer development for fire companies, parks, cemeteries, and other community needs.



Source: cat.com

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



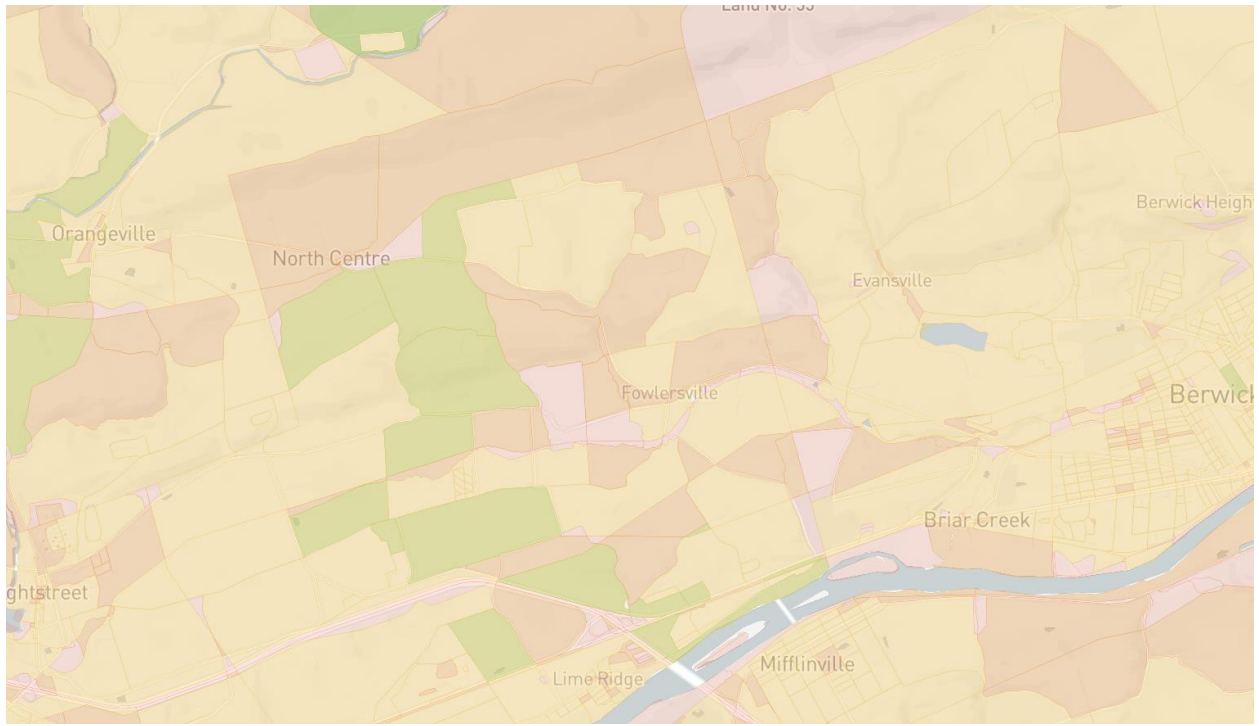
Many residents in Briar Creek and North Centre Townships lack high speed and reliable broadband internet and cellular service. Approximately 3,000 people in Columbia County do not have access to any wired Internet (broadbandnow.com). Those who are connected often lack reliable access to cellular and Internet service. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the need for connectivity due to more people working and participating in school from home.

There are several Internet providers that serve parts of Briar Creek and North Centre Townships:

Provider	Type of Service	Highest Speed
Atlantic	Cable	1 Gbps
Earthlink	Fiber-optic	1 Gbps
ViaSat	Satellite	100 Mbps
Frontier	DSL	90 Mbps
HughesNet	Satellite	25 Mbps
Verizon	DSL	15 Mbps

Source: Broadbandnow.com

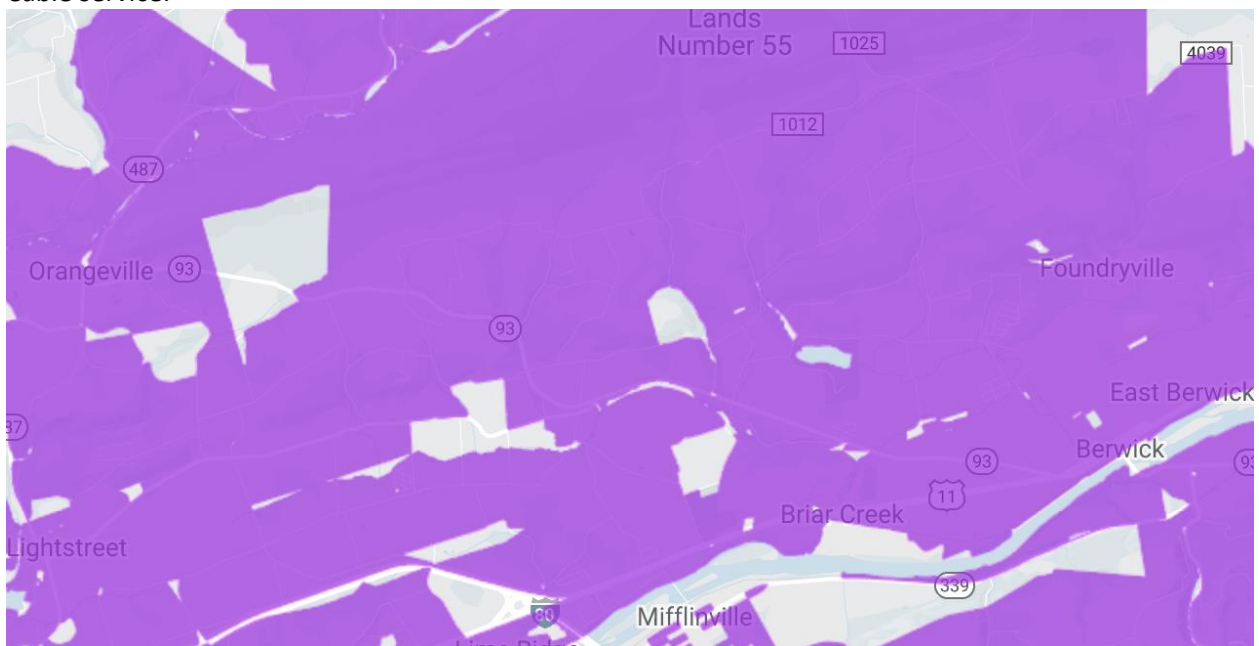
The map below shows the number of providers throughout the region. The pink areas have no providers, orange areas have one provider, yellow areas have two providers, and green areas have three or more providers.



Source: Broadbandnow.com

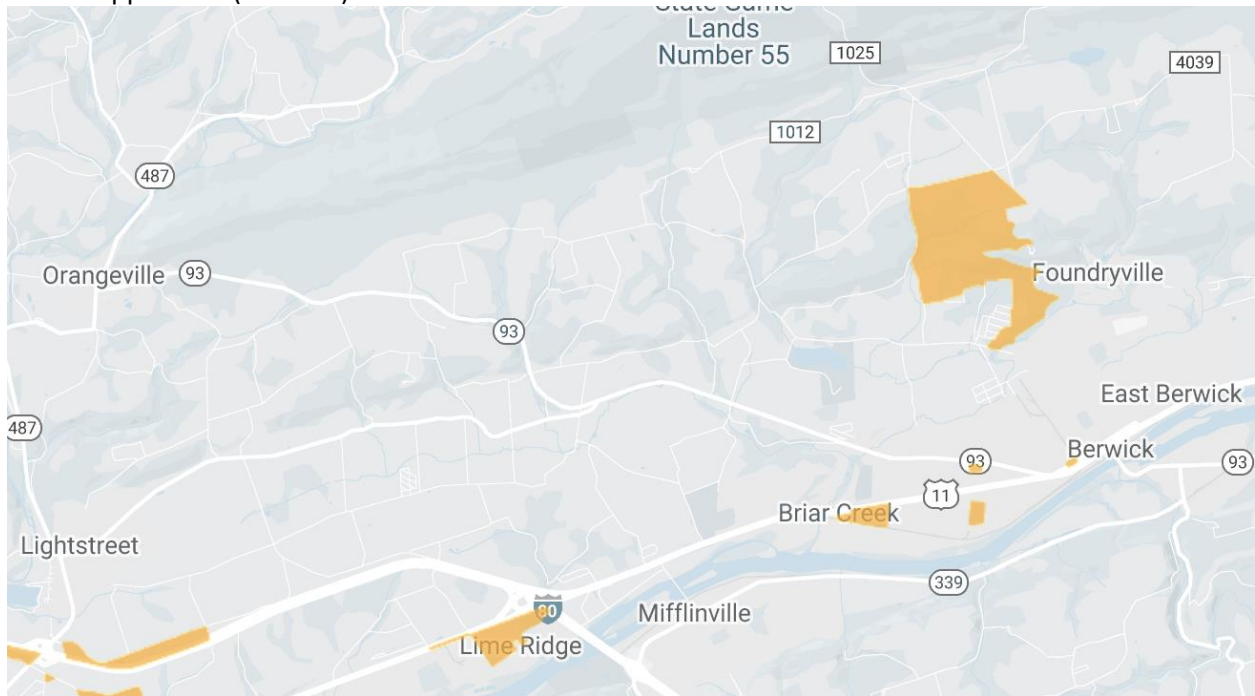
The maps that follow show coverage for the various types of available Internet service.

Cable service:



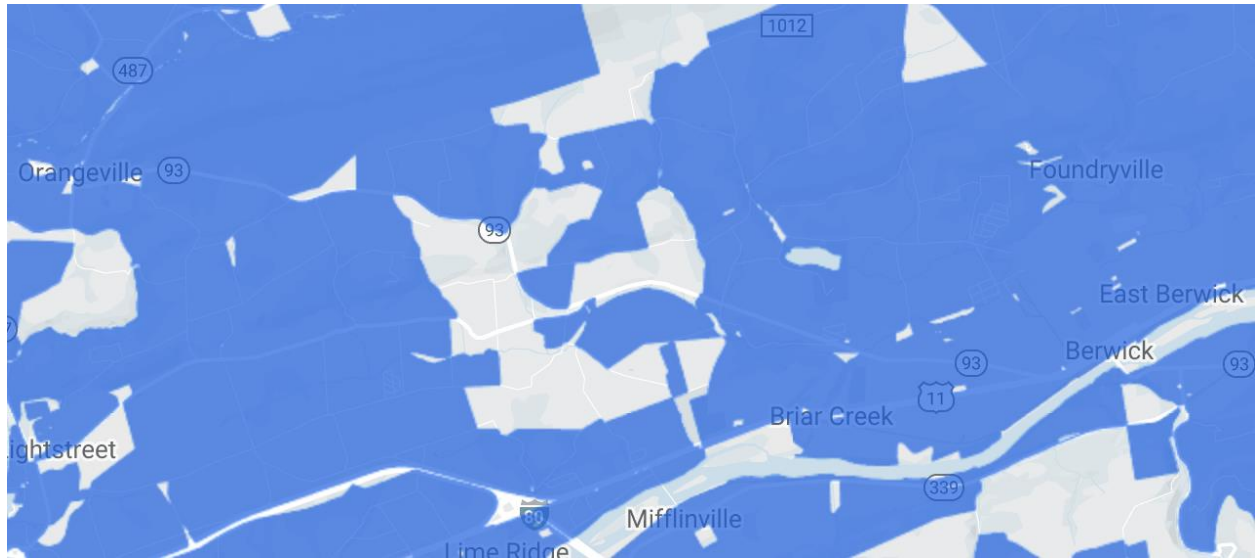
Source: Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development

Other copper wire (non-DSL):



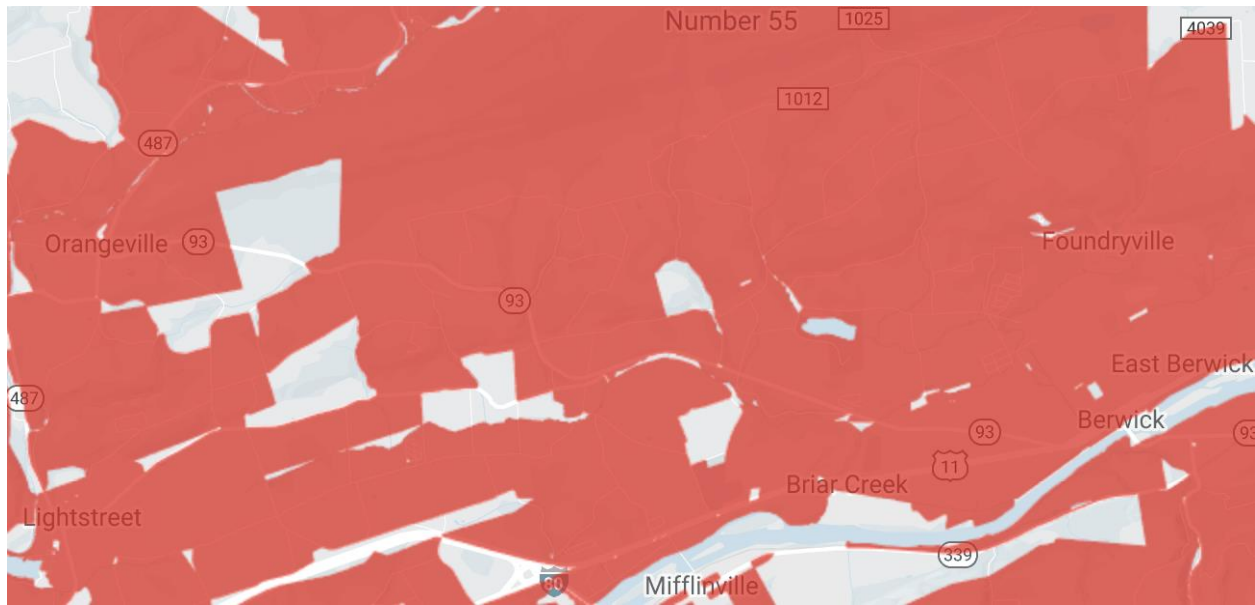
Source: Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development

DSL:



Source: Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development

Fiber:



Source: Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development

Because there is a great cost to building the infrastructure required for internet service, many companies do not invest in rural communities without incentives. Providers have told the Townships that the cost is too high given the small number of people who would be served.

In 2018, Governor Wolf announced the Pennsylvania Broadband Investment Incentive Program. This program offers up to \$35 million in financial incentives to private providers. The Pennsylvania Office of Broadband Initiatives is working to make access to high speed, broadband internet available to every Pennsylvanian over the next four years.

The DRIVE Council of Governments, which includes Columbia, Montour, Snyder, Union, and Northumberland Counties, built a broadband network in Montour County. DRIVE is working to expand the network to the other four counties. This is a fixed-base wireless network that uses microwaves and vertical assets such as county and police towers, grain silos, and tall buildings. While this project will not address all of the connectivity needs of the Townships, it has the potential to increase access for many Township residents. DRIVE is developing relationships with internet providers and will serve as an intermediary to connect them with the Townships. DRIVE indicated that they are working on developing the resources needed for this project to be successfully implemented.

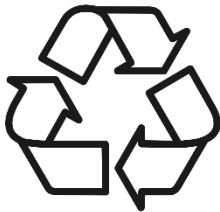
GOAL 3

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



Until late 2019, both Townships had recycling drop off points at the Township buildings. North Centre Township was paying \$425 per month for collection twice a week. The recycling containers were very large and were always full. The recycling collection company increased their rates to \$1500 per month, reflecting their increased cost of landfill disposal. As a result, the Township stopped the service. Briar Creek Township also stopped the service due to the price increase.

Currently, many North Centre Township residents drop off their recycling in Bloomsburg and Briar Creek Township residents drop off their recycling in Berwick with these municipalities’ permission. The

Bloomsburg recycling facility has a drop off site and also offers once a month curbside pickup in Danville. The recycling center has four full-time and one-part time employees. Bloomsburg requires that materials be separated prior to drop off. North Centre Township provides financial support to Bloomsburg for this service. The Berwick facility is single stream. In 2021, the Borough plans to purchase a new recycling truck so that they can coordinate their own recycling service rather than subcontract. These partnerships have assisted in filling in the gap left by the loss of local recycling.

Although the Townships are not required to offer recycling due to their small size, residents have requested that recycling services be reinstated so that they can drop off recycling at their Township building. In addition, residents desire single stream recycling.