

MLJCP

MUHLENBERG/LAURELDALE JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



ADOPTED OCTOBER 16, 2023

RESOLUTION NO. 2023-04

MUHLENBERG TOWNSHIP

**A RESOLUTION OF THE TOWNSHIP OF MUHLENBERG,
COUNTY OF BERKS, TO ADOPT AN INTER-MUNICIPAL COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

WHEREAS, the Board of Commissioners of Muhlenberg Township, Berks County, Pennsylvania has participated in the preparation of the intermunicipal "Muhlenberg-Laureldale Joint Comprehensive Plan" (the "Comprehensive Plan"); and

WHEREAS, the Board of Commissioners of Muhlenberg Township recognizes the need for a new intermunicipal Comprehensive Plan to address the long-term development and preservation of the two municipalities, to provide a solid foundation for development regulations, and to provide coordination of development, infrastructure and traffic across municipal borders, and to guide other public policies; and

WHEREAS, the intermunicipal Comprehensive Plan has been prepared under the direction of a committee of representatives of the two municipalities with assistance of professional community planning consultants; and

WHEREAS, there has been compliance with the required elements and adoption procedures of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code, as amended, and a review has been completed by the Berks County Planning Commission;

WHEREAS, the Comprehensive Plan consists of a bound volume entitled "Muhlenberg-Laureldale Joint Comprehensive Plan" dated October, 2023, including all maps and illustrations included in such volume, and including but not limited to the "Draft Land Use Plan Map" which is a part thereof.

NOW, THEREFORE, be it resolved and enacted by the Board of Commissioners of Muhlenberg Township that the Muhlenberg-Laureldale Joint Comprehensive Plan is hereby enacted as the official Comprehensive Plan for Muhlenberg Township.

Resolved this date of October 16, 2023

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS OF MUHLENBERG TOWNSHIP



President, Board of Commissioners



Attest, Township Secretary



BOROUGH OF LAURELDALE
3406 KUTZTOWN ROAD
LAURELDALE, PA 19605

2023-07

RESOLUTION

A Resolution of the Borough of Laureldale, Berks County, Pennsylvania, Amending the Laureldale Comprehensive Plan shall refer expressly to the maps, charts, textual matter, and other matters intended to form the whole or part of the plan, and the action shall be recorded on the adopted plan or part.

WHEREAS, the Municipality of Laureldale, Berks County, Pennsylvania has adopted The Muhlenberg and Laureldale Comprehensive Plan of 2023 in accordance with the Pennsylvania Municipalities Code; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to the Pennsylvania Municipal Planning Code Act of 1968, P.L.805, No.247 Section 302(a), a municipality may amend its comprehensive plan from time to time.

This Resolution shall be effective immediately upon its legal enactment. ADOPTED and RESOLVED this 11th day of September, 2023.



Council President

Attest: 

Secretary

Date: 9/11/23

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Introduction

WHAT IS THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?

This Comprehensive Plan is intended to provide direction and guidance for future growth, development, redevelopment, revitalization, and preservation for Muhlenberg Township and Laureldale Borough over the next 15 years. It is one of the basic planning documents authorized by the Pennsylvania Municipal Planning Code (MPC), Act 247 of 1968, that empowers local governments to plan for development. This Plan is not by itself a regulation but is intended to provide the policy direction for changes to the municipalities' development regulations. Through the implementation of this comprehensive plan, the municipalities will continue to be an exceptional place to live, work, and play.

The Comprehensive Plan in accordance with Article III of the MPC includes the following major elements:

- The Overall Vision and Goals of the Plan
- The Demographics and Housing Overview
- The Natural Features and Agricultural Conservation Plan
- The Community Facilities and Services Plan
- The Historic Preservation Plan
- The Economic Development Plan
- The Transportation Plan
- The Existing Land Use Plan
- The Future Land Use Plan
- The Implementation Plan
- The Action Program

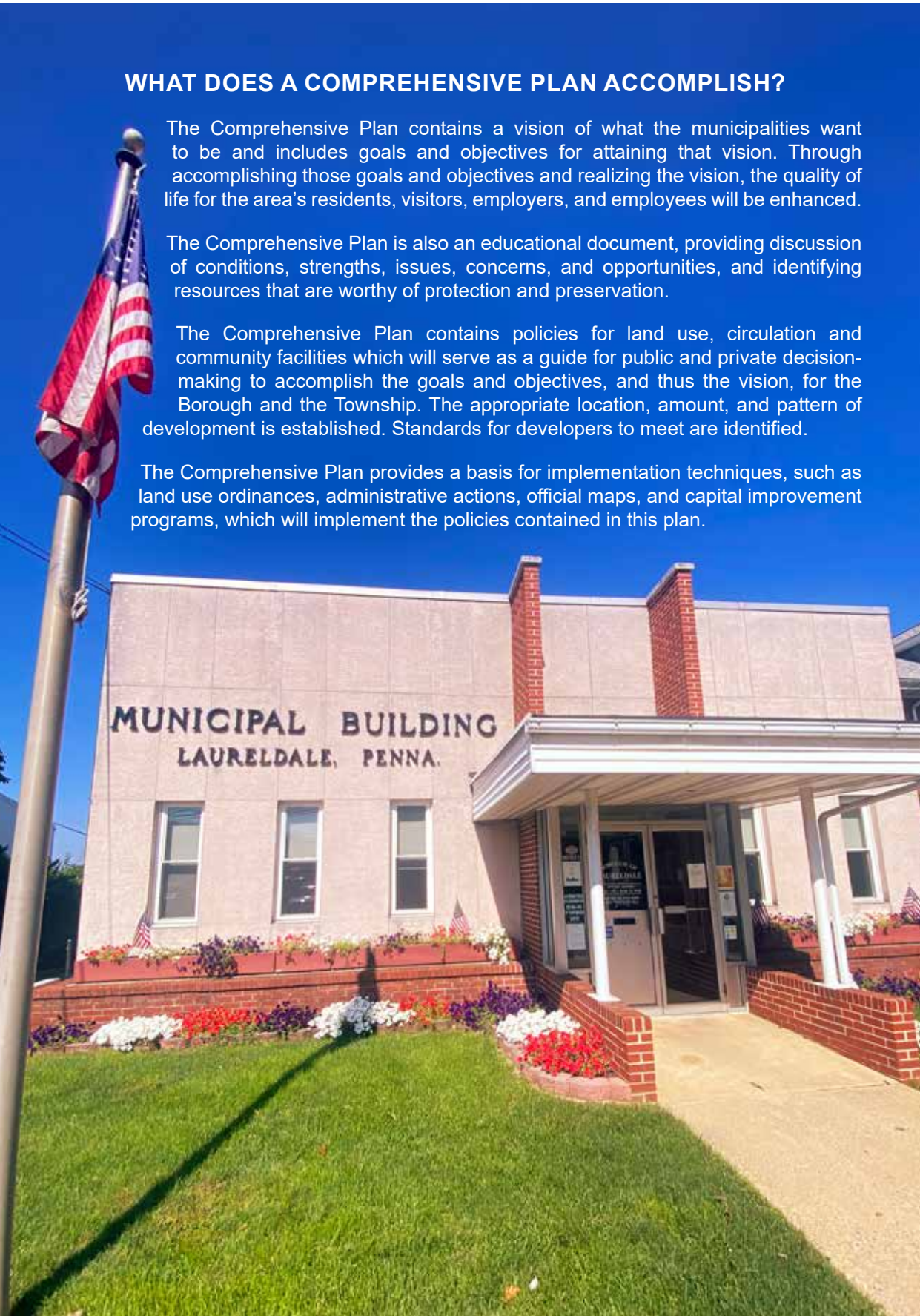
WHAT DOES A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN ACCOMPLISH?

The Comprehensive Plan contains a vision of what the municipalities want to be and includes goals and objectives for attaining that vision. Through accomplishing those goals and objectives and realizing the vision, the quality of life for the area's residents, visitors, employers, and employees will be enhanced.

The Comprehensive Plan is also an educational document, providing discussion of conditions, strengths, issues, concerns, and opportunities, and identifying resources that are worthy of protection and preservation.

The Comprehensive Plan contains policies for land use, circulation and community facilities which will serve as a guide for public and private decision-making to accomplish the goals and objectives, and thus the vision, for the Borough and the Township. The appropriate location, amount, and pattern of development is established. Standards for developers to meet are identified.

The Comprehensive Plan provides a basis for implementation techniques, such as land use ordinances, administrative actions, official maps, and capital improvement programs, which will implement the policies contained in this plan.



THIS COMPREHENSIVE PLAN IS A LIVING DOCUMENT

This Comprehensive Plan is just a start. It is the foundation for the attainment of the goals and objectives established within the plan, which can be accomplished only with the support of the municipal governments, municipal commissions, boards and committees, area businesses, area residents, and surrounding municipalities and regional planning groups.

The objective has been to prepare a plan which will not sit on a shelf and gather dust, but a plan that will be implemented and used by municipal governing bodies, planning commissions and other groups within the municipalities to guide their actions in attaining the goals of this Plan.

This Plan presents a strategy to guide municipal officials and other agencies in making decisions that will assure that Muhlenberg Township and Laureldale Borough will continue to be an attractive place in which to live, work, and play. Again, this Comprehensive Plan **is not** an ordinance or regulation, but is the basis for proposing regulations and undertaking specific functional plans designed to implement the policies established within this plan. Implementation of the action plan is critical.

NEED FOR CONTINUING PLANNING

Planning is not a static discipline. Planning is an ongoing process, and this Comprehensive Plan must be continually reviewed in light of development trends, the state of the economy, unforeseen influences, availability of public infrastructure, changes in community goals, and the appropriateness of the Plan's objectives, policies, and implementation program.

HOW WAS THIS PLAN DEVELOPED?

Muhlenberg Township completed their last comprehensive plan in October of 2003. Over the course of nearly two decades of progress, the Township's Planning Commission reviewed the municipality's ten (10) designated planning categories, assessing the successes and potential missed opportunities, and was proud to report its Board of Commissioners and Township staff had successfully executed over 80% of its Goals and Objectives. This is testament to the Plan having been effectively utilized as a living document to help guide future policy development and direction. However, the Township determined a need to discuss updating the original document. During this time, the Berks County Planning Commission (BCPC) was approached by the Township to inquire about how to start the process of updating their current comprehensive plan. The BCPC provided guidance and met with Township officials to discuss what the process of updating the plan would be. During these discussions it became clear that this plan should incorporate the Borough of Laureldale as well. Laureldale's comprehensive plan was adopted in 1995, well over 25 years old. The Borough is also entirely surrounded by Muhlenberg Township. It only made sense to jointly plan for the future of the area. Laureldale Borough, having been presented the advantages of modernizing their Plan cooperatively with Muhlenberg Township and Muhlenberg School District, agreed to partner for a document to benefit all residents and guests within the school district boundaries.

Ultimately, BCPC was chosen by the municipalities to work on putting the Plan together and began work in the beginning of 2022.

Since the 2003 and 1995 plans, much has changed in the area. For instance, in Muhlenberg Township a large commercial area that was once a bustling mall has seen some closures and redevelopment. There have been zoning amendments and new demographics, and new economic and housing information have also become available. After almost 20 years it is a good time to assess the current comprehensive plans and amend them to make it compatible with the issues and conditions that are impacting the municipalities today. Because of this, the municipalities decided to pursue a joint comprehensive plan as opposed to singular municipal plans.

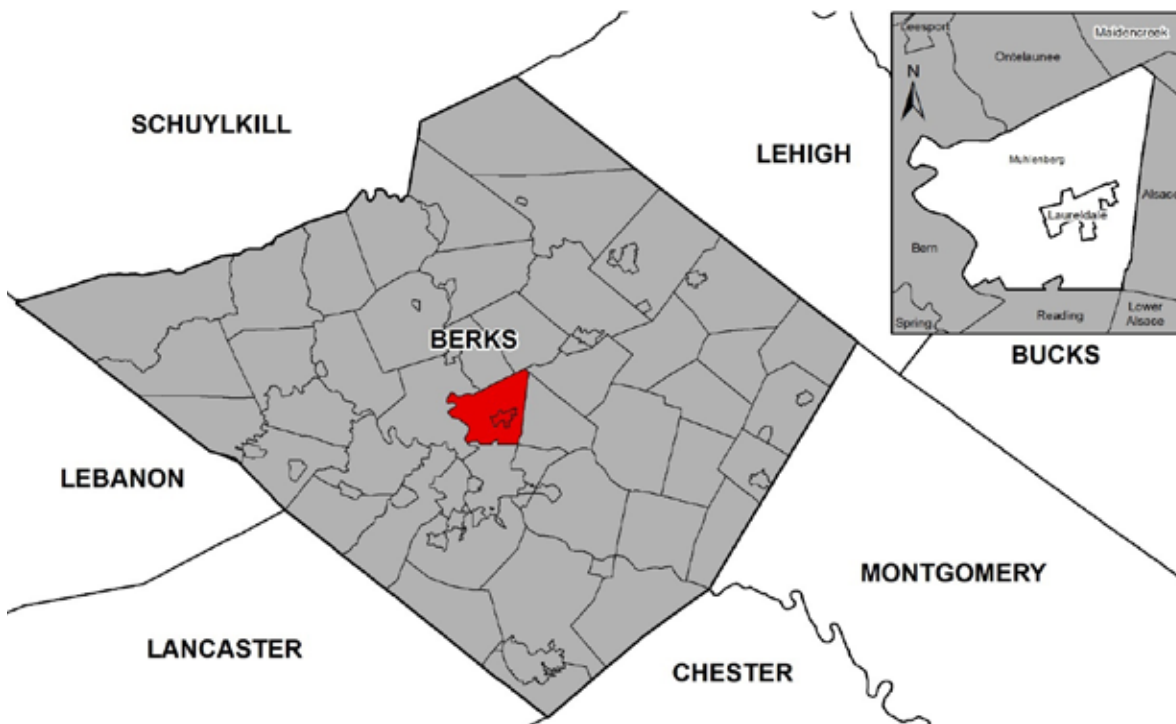
The first step in the process was the identification of major issues and concerns that needed to be

addressed. The next step was an analysis and mapping of the existing conditions and trends. The mapping started with computerized information provided by the BCPC. A survey was prepared to gather input from the public on their thoughts about the community.

An “overall vision” was prepared, and a set of goals were written to provide overall direction for the Plan. Next, a series of alternatives were considered to guide development in different areas of the Region. The Land Use Plan was prepared, followed by recommendations concerning Community Facilities, Transportation, Economic Development, Historic Preservation and Natural Features. All of these elements were produced and reviewed by the Planning Committee at monthly meetings advertised and open to the public. Online surveys were conducted by BCPC with the help of Muhlenberg School District and both of the municipalities’ social media managers. Two (2) resident public information opportunities were held by the Muhlenberg Township Planning Commission at the June 2021 Spring Fiesta Event and August 2021 RiverFest at Jim Dietrich Park. Public hearings were then held that described the comprehensive plan and its process and solicited input creatively through the use of a board game. After making revisions to respond to public input, the Plan was adopted by the elected officials of the municipalities.

REGIONAL LOCATION

The regional planning area consists of a little over 8,276 acres of land (12.9 square miles) with a total population of 126,192 residents (2020 Census). While both municipalities are located within the central portion of Berks County, it shares many demographic, socioeconomic, land use and environmental characteristics as other municipalities within the southeastern portion of Pennsylvania. In addition, the planning area is influenced by many urbanized centers including the City of Reading; the City of Allentown located 27 miles to the northeast; the City of Philadelphia located 49 miles to the southeast; the City of Lancaster located 32 miles to the southwest; the City of Harrisburg located 51 miles to the west. The map below shows the geographic proximity of the municipalities within Berks County.





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The Vision And Goals Of This Plan

THERE'S SOMETHING
Special
 ABOUT OUR
COMMUNITY!

THE OVERALL VISION OF THIS PLAN

From our new traditions and cherished customs, our neighborhoods of families and nearby friends, our wide-ranging businesses from family-owned and entrepreneurial, small and large, newly invested and institutions of the community, our diverse housing stock including single-family and townhomes, multi-family and rental communities, our education system both public and private, or our employers both small and large, our new and well-established, all and more have created a shared sense of belonging and ultimately have strengthened the social, cultural, and economic character of our community.

As we look to the future, the best features of older development in the region will have been retained and their character embraced moving forward with new development.

5th Street Highway, State Route 61, and Kutztown Road will continue to serve as active business corridors for the region. Attractive streetscape and road improvements will make the corridor more pedestrian friendly and vehicle circulation more efficient.

Historic buildings will be preserved, and many will be restored in a sensitive manner, with appropriate new uses. Older neighborhoods will remain strong and stable, with a high percentage of homes being owner-occupied.

New business development will occur in ways that fit into the character of the community. This will include reuse of older buildings and sites and infill construction of newer commercial buildings throughout the community that is similar in character to adjacent older buildings. Special agriculture areas will continue to be farmed in Eastern Muhlenberg Township. Areas of woodlands will be preserved within low density development areas, providing attractive visual relief between developments.

The creek valleys will be preserved, many in public greenways and trails, building upon the parks along the Schuylkill River and Laurel Run Creek. High-quality groundwater supplies will remain available, with large amounts of stormwater recharging into the ground. The creeks will also have high water quality, with the benefit of careful erosion controls. Conservation easements will have ensured the permanent preservation of large areas of open land.

Most new development will be served with public water and sewage service that will minimize the total amount of land that is consumed. Substantial areas of open space will have been preserved within most new development. "Cookie-cutter" subdivisions sprawling across the rural landscape will have been avoided.

Unightly and inefficient "strip" commercial development of new commercial businesses with individual driveways along long stretches of major roads will have been avoided. Extensive landscaping will add to the attractiveness of new development.

Traffic will have increased but will be carefully managed, with improvements to smooth traffic along major corridors and existing choke points. As traffic is better managed along major roads, there will be less incentive for vehicles to travel on residential streets. Coordinated driveways and interconnected parking lots will be provided between adjacent businesses. Wider shoulders will be provided on roads to increase safety and promote bicycling and walking.

Signs will be of modest size and height. Lighting and sound will be controlled to avoid nuisances to neighbors and motorists.

A wide variety of recreation opportunities will be available, and the Muhlenberg Area School district and area private educational institutions will continue to provide a high-quality education.

THE SURVEY

As part of the process of updating this joint comprehensive plan a community survey was prepared to gauge the public's perception of the planning region and to inquire about possible future planning initiatives in the municipalities. The twelve-question digital survey was distributed to households via newsletter, email communication via Muhlenberg School District, social media, and municipal websites. The survey was available for a year, beginning in January of 2022 and ending in January 2023. During this timeframe the planning committee received 558 responses representing approximately 2% of the Region's population. The following are the main takeaways from the community survey:

- Approximately 70% of responses were generated from Muhlenberg residents, and 30% from Laureldale Borough. Just three responses were from outside of the Muhlenberg-Laureldale Region. The average respondent is between 40-49 years old and owns their home.
- Nearly all responses indicated that the community is concerned with crime and safety in the Region. Over 75% considered this the most important issue in their neighborhood, and another approximately 20% classified crime and safety as important to them.
- Approximately 94% of respondents classified quality education in the area as being important or very important to them as well. Muhlenberg School District is frequently cited as an asset to the community in the open question responses. Despite that, a number of responses were concerned with the future of the school district.
- Residents were least concerned about parking in their Region; under 10% of responses classified parking as a very important within their community and nearly 27% of them said that parking is the least important issue within their Region.
- Over half of the responses indicated that they are satisfied with the road conditions within the Region- approximately 52% said they are good while approximately 4% said they are in excellent condition.
- Opinions were split as to the future of the former Fairgrounds Square Mall located in Muhlenberg Township. 35% would like to see mixed use development, 25% commercial/retail, 13% parkland, and 4% housing. Over 22% of responses were for 'other' with creative suggestions such as a community center, an aquarium, a commercial entertainment center, and a concert venue.
- Residents agree with Regional efforts to attract businesses to keep down taxes for the Region (89%) through efforts like using local taxes to offering business incentives (79%) or redevelop properties (72%). They support intermunicipal cooperation to expand emergency services (84%) and expanding opportunities for active transportation and recreation (80%). Attitudes on housing were split 28% strongly agreeing the region is growing too fast and 21% disagreeing.

- Residents primarily would like to see more of their tax dollars allocated towards street repair (23%), additional recreational opportunities (23%), and economic development and job creation (21%). They were least interested in additional parking facilities; this category ranked last in importance for 52% of residents.
- Approximately three quarters of those polled believe beautification projects such as streetscapes or road corridor projects would attract new businesses.
- Over 76% of residents use the recreational opportunities already offered within the community. Within the open questions in the survey, many residents indicated among the Region's assets is its park system; quite a number named the rail trail/trails and Jim Dietrich Park specifically. Some requested additional facilities: places for seniors to walk, basketball courts, and tot lots/playgrounds.
- Residents in the open comments indicated often that they enjoy being close to everything, while many of them felt they lived in a quiet neighborhood despite this convenience. While they appreciate the close proximity to assets such as grocery stores, highways, and large retailers, a number of responses indicated they are interested in attracting more small businesses and "high-end" businesses. They would like to see more variety, particularly in restaurant options within the Region.
- Residents have indicated that they want more transparency among the municipalities and their elected officials indicating that the Region may benefit from increased advertising of public meetings on social media and their websites.

Q12 Please tell us what you think are the assets or benefits of living in your community? (i.e. parks recreation areas, trails, restaurants, shopping, etc.)

shopping centers activities **opportunities** Peaceful playgrounds dining **easy access**
 children benefits festivals **beautiful** Target etc s **rail trail** convenient safety near
 recreation areas job **schools** facilities everything don't location
 medical facilities **shopping restaurants** quiet neighborhood **access** fast food
 walking availability walking trails family businesses retail
 neighborhood friendly **many** grocery stores **good** Dietrich park
 stores nearby **trails** things **area** used **shopping** safe
 parks neighbors **restaurants** house **close**
 Everything close **nice** Parks Rec **Jim Dietrich park** asset
 great feel **love** groceries **need** much living really
 restaurants shopping access roads **Parks trails** Nice neighborhood
 Close shopping Parks recreation **events** options quiet services lot medical
 close everything still places None **convenience** quality Proximity city
 community environment township kids **people** local go available enjoy Jim Dietrich
 close proximity **good school**

DIRECTION: THE MAJOR GOALS OF THIS PLAN

The following goals provide overall direction for this Plan. The recommendations work to carry out these goals. More on these goals can be found in the corresponding chapter of the plan.

Overall Goal: Continually strive to make the region an even greater place in which to live, work, learn, visit, shop and play, with a strong sense of community, scenic preserved open spaces, an attractive historic character, a vibrant economy, and an excellent quality of life.

While all of these proposed goals and action steps are important for the continued vitality of the region, it is of the utmost importance that all persons involved and/or interested in the future of this Region read and understand this document. Local decision-makers should keep this plan available when evaluating future development proposals, service adjustments or public investments.

The following tables plot an ambitious list of recommended activities. These tasks are vital if the Region is to optimally manage its growth and development and to plan and implement its “vision” for the future. The completion of many of these tasks should result in an improved quality of life within the Region.

Municipal officials are responsible to monitor, evaluate, and adjust appropriately the implementation strategy aimed at achieving the locally-expressed objectives and resultant recommendations set forth in this Plan.

Cooperation among all administrative bodies and levels of government is an essential component to a streamlined and successful implementation strategy. The continued use of public participation is also a very important duty of municipal officials. If, for some reason, the recommendations of this Plan do not appear to address the current conditions at any given time, municipal officials should not hesitate to amend portions of this Plan or any other policy to rectify those deficiencies.

This Plan holds a wealth of information, which is easily obtainable and understood. Its implementation can be equally understood so that all residents, businesses, and visitors know the Plan is vital, and that the future of the Region is deliberate, and the result of considerable analysis and public scrutiny.

Muhlenberg And Laureldale Strategic Action Plan

Natural Features and Agriculture		
Goals	Action	Partners
Protect important natural resources, with a special emphasis upon the Schuylkill River, Laurel Run, Bernhart Creek and other creek valleys, wetlands and steeply sloped woodlands.	Review and maintain zoning and SALDO ordinance requirements that preserve the natural resources of the communities.	SRGA, DCNR, Berks Nature, BCCD, NLT
Maximize groundwater recharge.	Review stormwater regulations within the municipalities' SALDO regarding impervious coverage. Encourage additional green infrastructure whenever possible.	BCCD, BCSWA, Berks County Sourcewater Protection Program
Seek to maintain interconnected corridors for wildlife	Seek funding for the continuation of preservation along stream beds. Promote open space in new developments to allow for wildlife movement.	DCNR, Berks Nature
Protect a safe, long-term supply of water, which is adequate for all land uses.	Continue to invest in capital infrastructure projects to maintain potable water supply.	MTA, DCED, RAWA
Discourage development in floodplains to protect public safety and water quality, and reduce public costs from flood damage.	Review and amend zoning ordinances for restrictions on development in floodplain areas.	BCSWA
Promote stormwater management and soil conservation practices to reduce erosion and sedimentation.	Continue to participate in the Berks County MS4 steering committee to further outreach efforts and incentives for residents to apply stormwater best management practices on their properties.	BCMS4SC
Continue effective woodland extraction and tree replacement provisions as part of the zoning.	Explore options for programs such as ones that encourage the use of shade trees in developments to promote the reintroduction of vegetation to urban areas.	DCNR, Berks Nature, BCCD
Monitor the clean-up and reclamation of contaminated areas, such as Superfund sites or Brownfield sites.	Maintain an inventory of contaminated sites. Continue to play an active role the promotion and oversight of those sites' cleanups. Encourage appropriate brownfield development.	EPA, DEP Berks County

Community Facilities and Services

Goals	Action	Partners
Provide high-quality community facilities and services in the most cost-efficient manner, including addressing needs for future growth and seek to provide public facilities and services on a regional basis to avoid duplication of efforts.	Continue to seek and/or support funding for projects to plan, upgrade, and/or improve services for the Region's ongoing needs.	DCED, DEP, Berks County, local utilities, municipal authorities, volunteer groups, neighboring municipalities
Provide central water and sewage services in the most cost-efficient manner, with regular investments to provide reliable services.	Continue to invest and support funding for improvements and upgrades to the area's infrastructure.	Muhlenberg Township Authority, Reading, RAWA, Berks County, DCED
Encourage connecting areas with malfunctioning on-lot systems, areas with contaminated water supplies, and small privately owned sewer or water systems to existing sewer or water systems where economically and physically possible.	Continue to monitor on-lot systems and provide support for properties as needed.	BCCD, DEP
The municipalities should maintain an up-to-date Sewage Facilities Plan (Act 537). This includes continuing the implementation of an On-Lot Disposal Ordinance in place that promotes the maintenance of on-lot septic systems.	n/a	Municipal Authorities, BCWSA
Notify police, fire, and EMS personnel of proposed subdivision and land development plans. Input from these organizations provides valuable insight during the planning phase of such projects.	Give emergency personnel an opportunity during the review period to provide feedback regarding major developments within the Region.	Central Fire Company, Muhlenberg Fire & Ambulance
Municipalities should work with the Muhlenberg School District to adequately plan for increased demands on the district caused by future developments coming into the area.	Solicit input from MSD when planning for future growth, inform MSD of future developments as they are proposed, explore the benefits of shared facilities such as parks to provide a wider range of services in the Region for school-aged children within the community.	MSD

Community Facilities and Services continued on page 14

Community Facilities and Services Continued

Goals	Action	Partners
Coordination between municipalities to provide adequate emergency services.	n/a	Berks DES, CELG, local EMS and fire companies, municipal police forces
Assess the need for expanding emergency services such as additional paid personnel, apparatuses, or locations based on population, land use, and social trends.	Conduct an audit of emergency services to determine where additional resources may need to be allocated/relocated. Consider regionalization as a method to provide more comprehensive coverage.	DCED, Berks DES
Continue to publicize the efforts and accomplishments of the various police, fire, and EMS services in the Region. Maintaining a positive image and goodwill within the community is essential for efficient, safe, and secure emergency response and plays an important role in fundraising efforts for these services.	Increase goodwill stories involving police, fire, and EMS within the region on municipal pages, publications, and social media. Participate in larger scope events such as National Night Out and Coffee with a Cop Day to promote a positive relationship within the community.	local EMS and fire companies
Enhance recreational programming to ensure a mix of activities that appeal to and can be enjoyed by whole families as well as individuals all ages, cultures, and abilities. Explore collaborating with private and non-profit groups in providing park and recreation facilities, festivals, and entertainment and build upon the economic potential of recreational destinations and events.	Host events soliciting public input from the community. Collaborate with MSD to coordinate the need for new programs with the area's youth. Explore how hosting events and groups that accommodate senior citizens' needs can fit into the area's programming. Increase environmental education opportunities. Create sponsorship opportunities for businesses to participate.	MSD, SRGA, Muhlenberg Soccer Association, Lions Club and Rotary, Centro Hispano, Nolde Park, Berks Nature, Penn State Berks Extension, other regional recreation and outdoor groups

Community Facilities and Services continued on page 15

Community Facilities and Services Continued

Goals	Action	Partners
Plan for the increased use of new technologies in recreation areas such as e-bikes, EV charging stations, Wi-Fi connectivity, mobile app-based recreation games or QR code-based activities or information in order to expand services, increase safety, and attract and retain new generations of visitors into the future.	Consider including planning for technology in future parks and recreation plans. Explore grant funding public and private grants, consider adopt-a-bench or similar type programs for private funding of park upgrades.	DCNR, DEP, DCED, PennDOT, Drive Electric Pennsylvania Coalition, People for Bikes, private business/utility providers, Centro Hispano
Explore options for more efficient ways to address trash pickup at parks, particularly in those along the Schuylkill River that have become increasingly popular with guests.	Advocate for innovative ways of addressing parks concerns in future parks planning. Explore future funding options for enhanced options for maintaining clean parks despite increased demands.	SRGA, DCNR, DCED, Berks Nature, private partners within the business community
Complete where feasible a system of bicycle and pedestrian trails to provide vital links between existing recreation areas, commercial and residential developments, and school facilities.	Continue to build upon the current bicycle and pedestrian accommodations as outlined in the current Muhlenberg Parks and Recreation Plan as well as the County Greenway, Park and Recreation and Bicycle and Pedestrian Plans.	SRGA, DCNR, DCED, MSD, Berks County, PennDOT, People for Bikes, private business
Continue to support the proposed connection of the Schuylkill River Trail gap along River Road through Muhlenberg.	Continue to provide valuable input for the Region regarding the location and construction of the proposed Schuylkill River Trail within the Region and beyond.	SRGA, DCNR, Berks County
Continue to support proposed connections and/or extensions to the Muhlenberg Rail Trail where appropriate and feasible as identified in the Berks County Greenway, Park and Recreation Plan.	Explore options for the purchase of easements that can connect and/or extend the trail beyond its current capacity.	DCNR, DCED, PennDOT, Berks County, Ontelaunee Township, Reading

Community Facilities and Services continued on page 16

Community Facilities and Services Continued

Goals	Action	Partners
<p>Continue to promote the Schuylkill River Sojourn and recognize this event as a community function with special educational, recreational, historical, and cultural values as well as an opportunity for a tourism draw.</p>	<p>Continue to promote this and similar events that have a positive impact on the Region through municipal webpages, publications, and other various social opportunities.</p>	<p>SRGA, private business</p>
<p>Continue to support Muhlenberg Area Ambulance Association financially. Currently both municipalities partially fund the Association which provides a critical role in the service's annual budget.</p>	<p>Continue to acknowledge, promote, and support EMS an essential public service.</p>	<p>Muhlenberg Area Ambulance Association</p>
<p>Explore funding options for updating the region's parks and recreation plans. Consider updating as a joint recreation plan to maximize recreation opportunities for both municipalities' residents and avoid potential duplication of efforts.</p>	<p>Continue to meet periodically with participating joint municipalities to discuss further projects once the joint comprehensive plan is adopted.</p>	<p>DCNR, DCED, BCPC</p>
<p>Continue to improve neighborhood and communitywide parks and playgrounds to offer equitable access to outdoor recreation.</p>	<p>Encourage intergovernmental cooperation between the municipalities as well as a positive relationship with Muhlenberg School District and local community volunteer groups in order to meet these growing needs throughout the community.</p>	<p>DCNR, DCED, Berks County, MSD, SRGA, Centro Hispano</p>

Economic Development		
Goals	Action	Partners
Consider changing the goal from “development” to prosperity.	Consider the long term goals of the comprehensive plan when making decisions regarding Planning Commission recommendations, zoning amendments, and Zoning Hearing Board appeals. Focus on best practices and best use for the community rather than “any use any way any how”.	BCPC, BCCD, MSD, local emergency services
Focus on providing high quality, fundamental public services.	Continue to seek funding for the regular maintenance and upgrading of infrastructure and public programs to maintain the higher quality of life residents have come to expect within the Region.	DCED, PennDOT, Berks County
Prioritize infrastructure improvements.	Consider long term goals as outlined in the comprehensive plan and other planning documents for project areas when prioritizing improvements. Plan for future capacities if feasible when adding to or repairing current infrastructure.	n/a
Encourage regulatory alignment with both municipalities.	Plan together and address ongoing regional issues on a regular basis, at least annually and as needed.	BCPC, CELG
Boost the diversification of the local economy.	Review zoning ordinances and amend where needed to allow for a mix of new and desirable uses within your Region.	GRCA, DCED
Support the creation and growth of local businesses.	Work with partners to identify potential areas of the Region appropriate for infill and redevelopment. Market the Region as a business	GRCA, DCED, Berks County
Attract and cultivate a skilled workforce.	Connect with partners to support and implement identified strategies.	GRCA, DCED, MSD, RMCTC, Centro Hispano, Workforce Development Board, Berks County Community and Economic Development Office

Transportation

Goals	Action	Partners
The municipalities in the planning area should have a “united voice” to vote or petition legislators for the benefit of transportation issues within the Region and communicate unified requests for improvements to RATS through the TIP and LRTP.	Discuss transportation issues amongst the municipalities. When issues are agreed upon, petition with support of the other. When requesting improvements to RATS, do so as one, or note the support of the other municipality.	Reading MPO, PennDOT
The municipalities should pursue preliminary technical evaluation of identified priorities and share recommendations with the appropriate municipalities and agencies. The analysis may determine that a project is not feasible before cost is incurred.	n/a	Reading MPO, PennDOT
The municipalities should collaborate on a regional basis to focus limited funding on the most effective solutions and to maximize the potential for cost sharing and savings.	Discuss transportation issues amongst the municipalities. When issues are agreed upon, share financial responsibility considering benefits against lowest life cycle cost	Muhlenberg, Laureldale, and any other affected surrounding municipalities
Review municipal ordinances, especially in the Borough, for parking standards and amend as necessary to ensure parking requirements are both appropriate and flexible.	Adjust parking ordinances if necessary after review to properly accommodate use.	Muhlenberg, Laureldale
The municipalities should encourage areas of truck parking to reduce trucks parking in non-designated or unsafe areas. Consideration should be given to encourage developers to include an area of safe truck parking within the property they are developing for drivers that are servicing that location.	When interest in developing a parcel comes to the municipality, speak with the developers about inclusion of park trucking for overnight stays and/or mandated breaks.	BCPC, Reading MPO, PennDOT
Each municipality should implement low-cost safety improvements where such measures provide an immediate impact on safety.	Review safety data on Pennsylvania Crash Information Tool (PCIT) to determine high crash corridors and intersections, see if any low cost solutions will help improve. Ex: signage, lighting, etc.	Muhlenberg, Laureldale

Transportation continued on page 19

Transportation Continued

Goals	Action	Partners
<p>The municipalities should attempt to ensure future development does not create detrimental access issues, increase congestion, or create safety problems.</p>	<p>When future development is presented, speak with developers about maintaining access for all modes of transportation including pedestrian, bicycling, and transit, not just cars and trucks. Review development's traffic plan and number of anticipated trips, to determine if existing infrastructure can handle the increased load, if not, ask developer to include traffic improvements based on increase.</p>	<p>Muhlenberg, Laureldale, BCPC, PennDOT</p>
<p>Communicate with the operators of commercial and industrial facilities regarding issues with regular truck movements and designated routes.</p>	<p>Prepare a list of operators of commercial and industrial facilities in the region, note all issues with truck routes from officials and/or residents, report these issues to the individual responsible for transportation logistics for that company and review route with them to determine if better routes exist. This should also be done when new facilities are coming into the region.</p>	<p>Commercial and industrial facilities in Muhlenberg/ Laureldale and/ or those bordering that use roads through this region</p>
<p>Consider the development of a regional trail/pedestrian/bicycle plan that provides guidance for an interconnected system of pedestrian improvements between the municipalities.</p>	<p>Use provided link to learn how to conduct a walk audit, download the resource packet, and conduct the audit. https://americawalks.org/how-to-conduct-a-walk-audit-in-your-community-quick-video-guide-for-assessing-your-neighborhood-walkability/ Explore and apply for funding for Active Transportation Planning. Reference Berks County Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Plan.</p>	<p>DCNR, DCED, PennDOT, Reading MPO, PA WalkWorks, America Walks, Neighboring Municipalities</p>
<p>Ensure municipal subdivision and land development ordinances contain requirements for sidewalks in appropriate locations. Going forward, new land developments and subdivisions, especially ones served by public sewer and water utilities, should be encouraged to have sidewalks on one side of all streets when within two (2) miles of school, or half (0.5) of a mile of a greenway, park, shopping center, business complex, transit stop, or when there is an existing sidewalk network adjacent to the proposed development.</p>	<p>Review and update ordinances where applicable.</p>	<p>Muhlenberg, Laureldale</p>

Transportation continued on page 20

Transportation Continued

Goals	Action	Partners
Encourage the addition of sidewalks within the planning area especially where there are missing links or where sidewalks would facilitate appropriate connections to existing or future neighborhoods and destinations (such as schools, parks, recreation facilities, major job generators, or shopping centers).	Look at sidewalk maps to identify missing links. Look at recent aerial imagery to determine if there are footworn paths anywhere in the region, this is where people are walking without proper infrastructure in place. Use provided link to learn how to conduct a walk audit, download the resource packet, and conduct the audit. bit.ly/CommunityWalkAudit	BCPC, Reading MPO, PennDOT
Communicate with SCTA\BARTA regarding future bus routes, shuttles, and other transit opportunities. Municipal officials and developers should work with SCTA/BARTA early in the design process of a new project, rather than placing stops at later stages in construction, with considerations for pedestrian access, existing bus operations, and potential stop facilities.	Contact SCTA/BARTA when resident concerns arise. Contact SCTA/BARTA when a new developer with a potential large number of employees to provide transit service to their business. Promote BARTA Community Survey to residents approximately every 4 years when work is being done on their Transit Development Plan (TDP), 2023 in development now, survey currently open. Attend BARTA TDP Public Meetings. Review PennDOT/Pennsylvania Public Transportation Association (PPTA) Building Better Bus Stops Resource Guide bit.ly/BetterBusStops	SCTA/BARTA
Continue to improve 5th Street Highway/ Allentown Pike as a place to live, work, and play by advocating for traffic calming in and surrounding the corridor	Advocate for improvements during PennDOT Connects process on future projects, continue improvement recommendations in 5th Street Highway/Allentown Pike Corridor Revitalization Plan and consider updating plan to reflect on accomplishments and evaluate current conditions and needs for the study area	PennDOT, BCPC, Reading MPO, DCED, stakeholders from Revitalization Plan
Active Transportaion Goals	Action	Partners
Ensure that local ordinances and regulations include requirements for pedestrian and bicycle accommodations into and within all new developments;	Review and update ordinances where applicable. Discuss with potential developers early.	Muhlenberg/ Laureldale

Transportation continued on page 21

Transportation Continued

Goals	Action	Partners
Examine existing bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure for strengths and weaknesses, and devise plans for improvements; Throughout the region and across boundaries to address needs for the community; formalize those needs/desires within municipal planning documents.	<p>Conduct walk audit to improvements to existing pedestrian infrastructure available here: bit.ly/AmericaWalks</p> <p>Conduct a survey, have email account designated for active transportation comments year round.</p>	Muhlenberg, Laureldale, PennDOT Connects, Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP), surrounding municipalities, Residents
Encourage businesses to provide bike racks for visitors and storage facilities for employees; seek or support funding where applicable	Reach out to local businesses to determine foot/pedal traffic along trails and major corridors where active transportation is a more popular mode of traveling. Discuss with developers early on; review local development guidelines regarding installation of bike facilities advocate to county, state and federal officials for funding.	Local Businesses, PennDOT, Reading MPO, FHWA
Review local development guidelines for pedestrian facilities;	Review and update guidelines where applicable. Discuss with potential developers early.	Muhlenberg, Laureldale, potential developers
Enact policies that new development, when located near transit lines, engages early with BARTA to ensure adequate transit access;	Enact policy where applicable. Discuss with potential developers early in process. Review PennDOT/Pennsylvania Public Transportation Association (PPTA) Building Better Bus Stops Resource Guide bit.ly/BetterBusStops	SCTA/BARTA, Potential Developers

Transportation continued on page 22

Transportation Continued

Goals	Action	Partners
<p>Examine bus stops and sidewalk connections to bus stops and prioritize missing connections and/or areas needing repair;</p>	<p>Review Berks County Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Plan for missing connections around bus stops. BARTA routes and existing sidewalks are mapped. Review PennDOT/Pennsylvania Public Transportation Association (PPTA) Building Better Bus Stops Resource Guide bit.ly/BetterBusStops</p>	<p>SCTA/BARTA, BCPC, Reading MPO, PennDOT</p>
<p>Engage with PennDOT officials during the PennDOT Connects process on all state roadway projects;</p>	<p>Respond to all PennDOT Connects Meeting Requests and attend/host the meeting, even if nothing major to comment on, it may lead to positive discussion and contacts being made.</p>	<p>PennDOT, BCPC, Reading MPO</p>
<p>Be aware of grant funding opportunities and requirements of those programs;</p>	<p>Create a list of potential projects, match projects with funding that is available, plan for requirements accordingly. If Active Transportation related, check Berks County Greenway, Park, and Recreation Plan for funding sources, also check websites of Partners. If transportation related, check FHWA and PennDOT site. If multimodal, check DCED and PennDOT.</p>	<p>FHWA, DCNR, DCED, PennDOT, Reading MPO, PA WalkWorks, America Walks</p>
<p>Adopt and enforce Complete Streets policies to ensure the entire public right-of-way is available for appropriate users;</p>	<p>Review Complete Street Policies, adopt, and enforce. Complete Streets are most often achieved by passing binding ordinances, laws, and resolutions. They should include the 10 elements of a Complete Streets Policy. Review policies on Smart Growth America's website at: bit.ly/3JeaSY8</p>	<p>Muhlenberg/ Laureldale</p>

Historical and Cultural Resources

Goals	Action	Partners
Explore and identify the remaining historic, architectural and cultural resources of the Muhlenberg-Laureldale region	Build effective partnerships among public and private partners. Create and adopt an official policy statement for the protection and preservation of the historical resources within the Muhlenberg-Laureldale region	PHMC, Berks County Historic Preservation Trust, BCPC, Property Owners
Determine the role municipalities should play in historic preservation through land use ordinances, incentives, and regulations, and efforts to create historic districts and historic overlay zoning	Consider the role historic resources will play while updating the municipalities' zoning ordinances.	PHMC, Berks County Historic Preservation Trust
Encourage adaptive reuse of historic structures where appropriate and discourage inappropriate development in the historic areas of the Region	Identify appropriate uses for historic structures based on the character of the resource itself and the surrounding neighborhood, and ensure that such uses are accommodated within that resource's zoning district.	PHMC, Berks County Historic Preservation Trust
Consider the creation of trails to link historic sites throughout the Region	Gather research regarding significant historical areas and events within the region and incorporate data in future recreation planning. Consider markers with QR codes with more information on these significant resources.	PHMC, Berks County Historic Preservation Trust, DCNR, DCED, BCPC
Promote the resources of the Region to encourage cultural heritage tourism	Share the stories of the Region's cultural heritage and resources through publications and social media. Consider an historic element in recreation programming.	PHMC, Berks County Historic Preservation Trust, PGCHC
Foster appreciation of the role of the Schuylkill River in the history and culture of the area and foster an appreciation of the Pennsylvania Dutch heritage	Continue to play an active role in the development of the Schuylkill River Trail through the Township, and continue to invest in educational resources in the Region's parklands nearby the trail.	PHMC, Berks County Historic Preservation Trust, SRGA, PGCHC

Land Use		
Goals	Action	Partners
Continue to place a high priority on the enforcement of all housing and property maintenance codes to maintain quality housing in the Region.	Study historic property maintenance complaints and municipal response to determine where more potential resources may need allocation. Explore ways of addressing overcrowding/overoccupancy through of code enforcement or other mechanisms Consider a joint enforcement effort/program.	
Identify blighted properties and develop a database of housing conditions.	Consider a joint effort by creating a blight team comprised of code enforcement officials, municipal solicitors and representatives as well as selected community organization versed in housing, community health, equity or community development. This database can be used to aid in blighted housing assistance requests to the county, state, and federal officials.	Berks Redevelopment Authority
Consider establishing a fund for a small grant or loan program that assists property owners for minor house repairs or façade improvements. This could be funded potentially using county, state, or federal grants as well. Course programs on home maintenance could be offered to residents through a partnership with the local library, local businesses or other groups.	Determine an area(s) of the Region to begin a façade improvement program. Partner with library, Centro Hispano, or other interested party to offer courses on home maintenance to encourage improvements throughout the Region.	DCED, Berks Redevelopment Authority, Muhlenberg Community Library, Centro Hispano
Continue to support construction of a diverse housing stock to meet community demands, particularly with housing rehabilitation, infill development, and the addition of 55+ communities.	Consider providing areas that are zoned to allow by right denser development to accommodate 55+ development. Review design standards such as setback requirements for infill, adaptive reuse, or redevelopment. Consider carefully blending the new construction in with the surrounding community.	n/a

Land Use continued on page 25

Land Use Continued		
Goals	Action	Partners
Discourage single family to multifamily housing conversions in order to limit parking and school capacity concerns within the Region by use of special exception where appropriate in residential districts.	Review zoning provisions regarding multifamily housing.	n/a
Promote adaptive reuse and revitalization efforts for vacant commercial and industrial sites.	Create inventory of underutilized properties within the Region.	Berks IDA, DCED, Berks Redevelopment Authority
Identify, assess, and support the safe cleanup and productive reuse of brownfield sites.	n/a	Berks IDA, DCED, DEP, EPA, Berks Redevelopment Authority
Prepare and market the former Aqua Pool Club property recently acquired by the Township for appropriate commercial activity that fits the character of the surrounding area.	Prepare site for sale. Ensure that property is zoned to encourage desirable development that fits the neighboring area.	Local Real Estate Agents, RBAR
Explore options for identifying a downtown area or main street program such as along the Kutztown Road corridor to encourage small business growth and development and promote the Region's identity within the community. Foster and promote walkable spaces within the commercial areas of the Region.	Develop a group of interested parties representing the public sector, the target area's residents, the target area's businesses and other volunteers.	PDC, RDA, CELG, BCPC, Wyomissing Foundation, RBAR, GRCA

Land Use continued on page 26

Land Use Continued

Goals	Action	Partners
Explore options for revitalizing the former Reading Fairgrounds area. Apply for funding to update the 5th Street Highway/Allentown Pike Corridor Revitalization Plan. Consider what is in demand in both the Region and its surrounding municipalities to attract businesses that fill in gaps in service.	Refresh the 5th Street Highway Corridor Plan with a study of new data to determine if the area's needs have changed since the last plan's adoption.	DCED, GRCA, BCPC, private industry, residents
Update the municipalities' zoning ordinances where needed to reflect the vision of the Region's Comprehensive Plan. This can be done independently, or the municipalities can explore funding to write a coordinated zoning ordinance that will share uses but maintain municipal autonomy.	Reach out to DCED for information on coordinated zoning. Determine what works best for the Region, and update for consistency with the comprehensive plan accordingly.	DCED, BCPC
Update the municipalities' subdivision and land development ordinances where needed to reflect the Comprehensive Plan.	Check municipalities' SALDO to ensure consistency with the joint comprehensive plan.	n/a

KEY PARTNERS:

DCNR Pennsylvania Department of Natural Resources	BCCD Berks County Conservation District	BMP Berks Municipal Partnership	DCNR Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources	GRCA Greater Reading Chamber Alliance
BCSWA Berks County Sewer and Water Association	RAWA Reading Area Water Authority	BCPC Berks County Planning Commission	DCED Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development	RMCTC Reading Muhlenberg Career & Technology Center
BCMS4SC Berks County Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System Steering Committee	MSD Muhlenberg School District	PennDOT Pennsylvania Department of Transportation	Berks DES Berks Department of Emergency Services	CELG Center of Excellence in Local Government

Implementation		
Goals	Action	Partners
Update municipal development regulations to carry out this Plan, and periodically update the Plan and regulations as needed.	Update SALDO and zoning ordinances where needed upon adoption of the joint comprehensive plan.	n/a
Maximize communications, coordination and cooperative efforts between the municipalities, the Muhlenberg School District, adjacent municipalities, the County and other agencies and organizations.	Assemble a group that will meet periodically to discuss current issues and trends, and explore how the municipalities can respond accordingly.	n/a
Develop a plan to meet annually or more frequently as needed as a joint municipal group with representatives appointed by the governing bodies. Consider inviting stakeholders such as Muhlenberg School District and Berks County Planning Commission to collaborate on these regional efforts.	Meet regularly and provide a report to the governing bodies and citizens.	MSD, BCPC
Promote substantial citizen input, including making sure residents are well-informed about community issues and encouraging volunteer efforts to improve the community.	Advertise public meetings on social media, municipal websites, in publications. Consider citizens as part of public-private partnerships when gathering input for regional improvements.	Residents
Encourage and facilitate volunteer efforts to improve the community	Perform cooperative efforts to implement and enable the communication and administrative efforts of volunteer organizations. Also monitor these organizations and broadcast information about relevant community activities.	Residents, Volunteer Groups
Continually work to put this Plan into action - through a program of updated planning and many short-term actions within a long-range perspective.	n/a	n/a

KEY PARTNERS:

SRGA Schuylkill River Greenways Association	Reading MPO Reading Metropolitan Planning Organization	BARTA Berks Area Regional Transportation Authority	DEP Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection	Berks IDA Berks County Industrial Development Authority
PHMC Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission	FHWA Federal Highway Administration	LTAP Pennsylvania Local Technical Assistance Program	RBAR Reading-Berks Association of Realtors	MTA Muhlenberg Township Authority
PGCHC Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center	SCTA South Central Transit Authority	EPA Environmental Protection Agency	PDC Pennsylvania Downtown Center	



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Implementation Plan

This section describes methods that should be considered to implement this Plan.

GOAL: Promote substantial citizen input, including making sure residents are well-informed about community issues and encouraging volunteer efforts to improve the community.

The volunteer efforts of neighborhood and civic organizations and individuals are essential to further improve the region and to carry out this Plan. The objective is to strengthen community pride and emphasize volunteer efforts for residents and property-owners to improve their surroundings. The websites of each municipality should be regularly updated with information that will help

It is essential to keep citizens informed and provide opportunities for meaningful citizen input, while making use of new technologies for communication.

spur public interest, enthusiasm, and involvement. This should include information on recreation programs, special events and agendas for upcoming municipal meetings. Opportunities for citizen involvement should also be highlighted through the newspaper, social media platforms, municipal newsletters, and other media.

GOAL: Continually work to put this Plan into action - through a program of updated planning and many short-term actions within a long-range perspective.

Planning is an on-going process. The Comprehensive Plan should be implemented through a continuous process of follow-up planning and action. The most immediate action should be updating, as needed, each municipality's development regulations.

Maximize communications, coordination and cooperative efforts between the municipalities, the Muhlenberg School District, adjacent municipalities, the County, and other agencies and organizations.

To be effective, community development efforts need wide participation. A close working relationship is needed with Federal, State and County agencies and adjacent municipalities.

This Comprehensive Plan should be consistently used as an overall guide for land use and transportation decisions. In addition, the Plan needs to be reviewed periodically and, if necessary, updated to reflect changing trends.

The municipalities cannot implement this Comprehensive Plan alone. Involvement is needed by residents, neighborhood organizations, civic groups, businesses, institutions, property-owners, and many other groups.

USE A FULL SET OF TOOLS TO IMPLEMENT THIS PLAN

This Comprehensive Plan establishes overall policies for guiding the future development and conservation of the Muhlenberg-Laureldale region. However, this Plan is not a regulation. The following major tools are available to help implement this Plan:

- Municipal Zoning Ordinances
- Municipal Subdivision and Land Development Ordinances
- Construction Codes
- Existing Property Maintenance Code
- Official Map
- Explore LERTA areas (Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance)
- Computerized (GIS) mapping
- Capital Improvements Planning
- The municipality's annual spending, and
- Seeking Federal, State, County and Non-Profit Organization grant funds to accomplish important projects

Zoning Ordinance

The municipalities' Zoning Ordinances are the primary legal tool to regulate the uses of land and buildings. Each Zoning Ordinance includes a Zoning Map that divides the municipality into different zoning districts. Each district permits a set of activities and establishes a maximum density of development. Each Zoning Ordinance and Map should be updated as needed to be generally consistent with this Comprehensive Plan, to modernize standards and to address local concerns. Building trends and uses change over time so it is important to make sure that the zoning ordinance reflects these changes and accommodates new trends in development.

In addition to regulating land uses and densities, zoning also controls the following:

- Heights of buildings
- building types permitted
- Percentage of a lot that may be covered by buildings and paving
- Minimum distances that buildings may be placed from streets and property lines
- Minimum size of lots
- Maximum sizes and heights of signs
- Protection of important natural features

Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance

Each municipality is regulated by a Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance (SALDO). These Ordinances mainly regulate the creation of new lots, the construction of new streets by developers, and the site engineering of new commercial, industrial, and institutional buildings.

GOAL: Update municipal development regulations to carry out this Plan, and periodically update the Plan and regulations as needed.

Construction Codes

State law requires that a full set of modern construction codes be enforced within all municipalities. The State is using the International Construction Codes, which were prepared by a national organization. These codes are particularly important to minimize fire hazards. The construction codes include provisions allowing modifications of the codes to spur renovations of historic buildings. As noted in the Historic Preservation Plan section, a well-qualified appeals board is important to address these types of modifications.

Existing Property Maintenance Codes

Each municipality should adopt and/or enforce an Existing Property Maintenance Code to control blight. This standard code is used throughout much of the nation and sets basic standards for existing buildings, as opposed to new construction.

Official Map

The State Municipalities Planning Code grants municipalities the authority to adopt an “Official Map.” An Official Map can designate proposed locations of new streets, street widenings, intersection improvements, municipal uses, and parks. The Map may cover an entire municipality, or only certain areas. This process may be particularly useful, for example, to reserve right-of-way for a future street widening.

Once an Official Map is officially adopted by the governing body, then the municipality is provided with a limited amount of authority to reserve land for the projects on the map. If the land affected by the proposed project is proposed for development, then the municipality would have one year to either purchase the land for its fair market value or decide not to go forward with the project. This one-year period is intended to provide time to raise funds to acquire the land and avoid lost opportunities. If this one-year period is not in effect, a person could obtain a building permit almost immediately in many cases and construct a building that could obstruct an important project. An Official Map also serves to provide notice to property-owners about the municipality’s future plans.

LERTA

Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance allows taxing authorities to exempt new construction and improvements to a commercial, industrial, and/or business property if such property is located in a deteriorated area. In order for a LERTA to apply to a property, each taxing authority (County, Municipal and School District) must by ordinance or resolution, exempt from real estate property taxes, the assessed value of the improvements to deteriorated properties and the assessed value of new construction within the designated areas.

Typically, the exemption schedule is not to exceed ten years and shall specify the portion of the improvements to be exempted each year. Savings would be realized on a sliding scale beginning with 100% in year one and decreasing annually 10% until the tenth year.

The County has adopted a resolution that enables any municipality in Berks County to enact a LERTA provided the location that the proposed LERTA area is located within a Future Growth Area as identified in the Berks County Comprehensive Plan.

Computerized Mapping (GIS)

The County, and some municipalities, operate modern computerized mapping “Geographic Information Systems (“GIS”). These systems have been used for the maps in the Plan as well as doing the Future Land Use analysis. Increased efforts are needed to fully integrate this system with operations of municipal agencies. For example, regular mapping of traffic accident locations can be helpful to identify hazardous conditions that need to be resolved, such as sight distance problems. Berks County has a robust GIS system and has made much of the mapping available to municipalities and other agencies for their use provided they enter into a sharing agreement with the County.

Capital Improvements Planning

Each municipality should have a system in place to continually plan and budget for major capital expenditures. “Capital” improvements are projects involving a substantial expense for the construction or improvement of major public facilities that have a long lifespan and that are not

annual operating expenses. Examples of capital projects include major street improvements, acquisition of parkland, major storm sewer construction projects and new bridges.

A municipal Capital Improvements Program (CIP) can help identify projects that will be needed, prioritize the projects, identify possible funding sources, and then budget for their completion. A typical CIP looks five years in the future. A CIP should identify major street reconstruction projects that will be needed over the next few years, which can help coordinate the reconstruction with underground construction projects by various utilities. This avoids the need to cut into a street after it has been recently repaved. Through a CIP, many different projects can be combined into a single bond issue, which avoids the high administrative costs of multiple bond issues. A CIP also can allow a municipality to carefully time any bond issues to take advantage of the lowest interest rates.

Other Implementation Tools

Many other tools are available to carry out the Comprehensive Plan, including the following:

- Priorities decided as part of each municipality's annual budget, and the annual setting of tax rates, which affect decisions of businesses and residents on whether to remain or move into a municipality, and
- Aggressively seeking Federal, State and County grants to reduce the burden upon local taxpayers.

GOAL: Maximize communications, coordination and cooperative efforts between the municipalities, the Muhlenberg School District, adjacent municipalities, the County, and other agencies, and organizations.

This Plan helps to establish a framework for further cooperative ventures among the municipalities in the Muhlenberg-Laureldale region, and between municipalities and the County. Intergovernmental cooperation can not only decrease the costs of many services, it can also improve the quality of services. The Pennsylvania Intergovernmental Cooperation Act provides broad and flexible authority to organize joint efforts as municipalities deem appropriate. In most cases, the Act promotes the use of ordinances that are adopted by each municipality to formalize an agreement. One option involves one municipality providing a service to a second municipality through a contract. It should be noted that one of the toughest issues involving cooperative municipal services is determining a fair allocation of costs. Because of this, the State Department of Community and Economic Development has several publications that can assist in these issues.

These same concepts can also apply between a municipality and a school district. For example, a municipality may agree to plow snow from school parking lots and driveways in return for free municipal use of some school facilities.

A State law also provides that State agencies must treat a Council of Governments (COGs) in the same manner as a municipality in any funding program.

The following are some examples of inter-governmental cooperation options available:

- Shared Services and Shared Staff-persons - Shared staff-persons can be particularly beneficial for specialized staff, such as different types of construction inspectors, codes enforcement personnel or zoning officers. Two or more municipalities could hire the same person to do the same job, with so many hours assigned to each municipality. This allows each municipality to hire a highly qualified person who is working full-time, as opposed to each trying to find several part-time employees. This can reduce turnover, which reduces training costs and reduces the potential for mistakes being made by inexperienced staff. In addition, sharing staff makes staff-persons available during more hours of the day, which is beneficial to residents and business owners. It also provides greater coverage during periods of illness or vacation. Some municipalities also have a shared application and testing programs for police officer applicants, which reduces costs and results in a larger pool of applicants.

- Shared Consulting Staff - There are also great efficiencies when adjacent municipalities choose the same consultants, such as municipal engineers, sewage engineers or solicitors. This promotes good communications between municipal governments. It also reduces the costs of having different professionals having to become educated about complex issues and having to spend time meeting with consultants of other municipalities to share information.
- Shared Recreation Programs - When municipalities share and coordinate recreation programs, it greatly increases the types of programs that can be offered. For example, one municipality may offer a soccer program, while another municipality offers basketball programs, with residents of each municipality being allowed to participate in each at the same cost per person. There has been great success in parts of Pennsylvania with multi-municipal recreation programs, where each municipality contributes funds towards one set of programs. These programs are often organized in partnership with a school district.



- Shared Yard Waste Collection and Composting - This is a very cost-effective way of handling the disposal of yard waste, which requires significant land and expensive equipment.
- Snowplowing - There may be cases where both municipalities must each send out a snowplow to clear different segments of the same street. It may be beneficial to trade responsibility for different street segments, so that a single snowplow can be used to clear the entire length of a street.

- Joint Purchasing - Joint purchasing can reduce the costs to each municipality of preparing bid documents and legal ads. It also can result in lower costs because larger volumes are being purchased. This process is particularly useful for annual purchases of standardized materials, such as road salt. The State also has arrangements that allow municipalities to "piggyback" upon State purchases. State law allows a similar process of "piggyback" bids between municipalities and a County. The State Intergovernmental Cooperation Act includes rules for joint municipal purchasing. Under State law, one municipality can be the lead municipality in purchases, without requiring multiple municipalities to seek bids. Municipalities can also join together to jointly purchase insurance, to hire traffic signal maintenance services, or to jointly contract for solid waste collection. Joint auctions can also be used to sell surplus vehicles and equipment.
- Sharing of Equipment - This sharing is most beneficial for expensive equipment that is needed by each municipality for only portions of the year, such as paving, rolling, or grading equipment. The equipment could be jointly owned or be owned by one municipality and leased to the other municipality. Or an arrangement could allow trading of equipment.
- Joint Tax Collection - The Local Tax Enabling Act allows municipalities and the school districts to contract with each other to have one office jointly collect local taxes in the event of a vacancy in any taxing district.
- Councils of Governments (COGs) - A COG can provide municipal services if authorized by municipalities. For example, some COGs take care of code enforcement. Other COGs primarily serve to promote good communications between municipal officials, to study issues, and to lobby for State or Federal funding for projects.
- Joint Authorities - Municipalities can create formal joint municipal authorities to address many types of matters.
- Joint Planning Commissions - Municipalities can appoint joint planning commissions. These joint commissions could serve in place of municipal planning commissions, or in addition to them.
- Cooperation Between Fire Companies - Consideration should be given to promoting additional cooperation between or merger of fire companies, including one or more fire companies in neighboring municipalities. Merger or cooperation are particularly beneficial to make the best use of extremely expensive fire apparatus, such as rescue trucks, hazardous materials equipment, tanker trucks and aerial ladder trucks. Merger or cooperation are also important to make the best use of the limited number of volunteers.
- Cooperative Police Forces - A joint cooperative police force involves two or more municipalities establishing one police force that is directed by commission members appointed by each municipality. Another option is to have one municipality contract for police services from a second municipality, which then manages the force. This arrangement may often make it easier to provide 24-hour service and specialized services, such as for investigations and youth programs. Cooperation among police forces can result in increased training and professionalism, which can reduce liability costs. Cooperation also makes it easier to investigate crime that crosses municipal borders.
- Incentives for Intergovernmental Cooperation in Grants - Many competitive State grant programs provide preference to projects that involve cooperation between more than one municipality. Therefore, if two similar projects are in competition for a grant, and one involves cooperation between two municipalities, the two-municipality project is most likely to be funded.

ROLE OF THE JOINT PLANNING COMMITTEE

The Joint Planning Committee has played an active role in developing and implementing this Joint Comprehensive Plan update.

GOAL: **The Committee should continue to meet at least annually or as needed to promote the implementation of this plan and address regional issues. At least once a year they should meet to review this plan and discuss projects of regional concern or significance. The vision is that these meetings serve as informal information sharing and discussions on issues of regional significance.**

As with any committee, members will come and go over time. It is imperative that the region municipalities be proactive in securing membership for the joint planning committee. Participation in a joint planning committee is voluntary but members should be appointed by the governing bodies of the member municipalities. The specific structure of the committee is up to the members to decide. Committee members will need to decide who is responsible for chairing/leading meetings and documentation of topics of discussions.

ROLE OF THE MUNICIPAL PLANNING COMMISSIONS

Some of the greatest responsibilities of each Planning Commission are to oversee the preparation and implementation of the Comprehensive Plan and the preparation of Zoning and Subdivision Ordinance revisions. On a monthly basis, the Planning Commission also reviews proposed developments. The Planning Commission also has a role in reviewing proposals of other government agencies.

ROLE OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS AND BOROUGH COUNCIL

The final decision on nearly all matters affecting the growth and preservation of each municipality rests with its Borough Council or Board of Commissioners. Therefore, close communications and cooperation between the Planning Commissions, the municipal staff, and the elected officials will be essential in continuing to improve the quality of life in the Muhlenberg-Laureldale region.

ROLE OF THE PUBLIC

The Municipalities should continue to engage their residents, businesses, and volunteer organizations.

GOAL: Encourage and facilitate volunteer efforts to improve the community

The Region is only as strong as its community. Engaging in cooperative efforts to foster volunteer organizations' efforts and improve communication with those organizations will help the Region grow positively together. Monitoring and highlighting local achievements helps to celebrate success as a community. Sharing information on available community building activities with residents can help make connections with resources needed and/or available.



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4

Demographics And Housing

DEMOGRAPHICS PROFILE

Population

As of 2020, The Muhlenberg-Laureldale planning area is home to 26,192 residents. Since 2000, the area's population grew almost 30.5% or by approximately 6,128 residents, a considerably higher rate of growth than both county and state figures. The area added the majority of these new residents between 2000 and 2010.

Since 2010, population growth has increased but not at the rate that was seen between 2000 and 2010. For the most current time period between 2010 and 2020 growth occurred at a rate of 11.3% within the area.

Not surprisingly, Muhlenberg Township has the largest population between both municipalities in the planning area with 21,915 residents. The region (Muhlenberg and Laureldale) accounts for a little over 16% of the total population of the County.

Population									
Municipality	2000 Census	2010 Census	2020 Census	2000-2010 # Change	2000-2010 % Change	2010-2020 # Change	2010-2020 % Change	2000-2020 # Change	2000-2020 % Change
Laureldale Borough	3,779	3,911	4,277	132	3.5%	366	9.4%	498	13.2%
Muhlenberg Township	16,285	19,628	21,915	3,343	20.5%	2,287	11.7%	5,630	34.6%
Region	20,064	23,539	26,192	3,475	17.3%	2,653	11.3%	6,128	30.5%
Berks County	373,638	411,442	428,849	37,804	10.1%	17,407	4.2%	55,211	14.8%
Pennsylvania	12,281,054	12,702,379	13,002,700	421,325	3.4%	300,321	2.4%	721,646	5.9%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000, 2010 and 2020 Decennial Census Counts (DP1, P1)

Population Projections

Population projections can help the area plan efficiently for future land use and community service needs.

Background methodology: There are numerous ways to create population projections. None is necessarily 'right' or 'wrong', and each method has its own benefits and pitfalls. Some are better for large-area forecasts, others are better for smaller areas, and still others are better depending on available data. Staff used two separate methods, one for countywide population totals and another for municipalities.

Countywide: These forecasts were developed using the FORECAST function contained in Microsoft Excel. This function employs a least-squares trending/regression curve and works well when consistently spaced 'anchor points' are available. In our case, given the recent slowdown in population growth, we used more recent anchor points within the FORECAST function. By having a 1:2:2 weighting on more recent years (2010, 2015, 2015, 2020, 2020), projections are more realistic.

1. Gather Decennial Census counts for 2010 and 2020, along with Census Bureau estimates for 2015;
2. Employ FORECAST function to create a 2025 projection, then
3. Employ the same methodology for five-year intervals out to 2045.

Municipalities: once countywide control totals are created, municipal projections were completed next. Staff employed the same FORECAST method for municipalities. Unfortunately, some municipal results were unrealistic and deemed insufficient for use. As an alternative, (and one that has been used in the past), the countywide totals are allocated back to municipalities. Known as “Shift-Share Allocation”, this particular method applies the municipality’s percentage share of the county population- in this case, 2020 Decennial Census-and applied that same percentage to all future years. While this method shows all municipalities with increasing population, those increases are in direct proportion to the municipality’s share of the county total.

Based on these projections and the analysis described above the area is expected to add nearly 2,989 residents by 2045. The increase in population is pretty evenly distributed between the two municipalities as both municipalities are projected to see an 11.5% growth rate between 2025 and 2045.

Population Projections						
Municipality	2020 Base	2025	2030	2035	2040	2045
Laureldale Borough	4,277	4,257	4,469	4,563	4,667	4,765
Muhlenberg Township	21,915	21,812	22,899	23,378	23,913	24,416
Region	26,192	26,069	27,368	27,941	28,580	29,181
Berks County	428,849	426,837	448,095	457,485	467,942	477,789

Sources: Berks County Planning Commission, 2022; U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2020

Population Projections									
2020-2025 # Change	2025-2030 # Change	2030-2035 # Change	2035-2040 # Change	2040-2045 # Change	2020-2025 % Change	2025-2030 % Change	2030-2035 % Change	2035-2040 % Change	2040-2045 % Change
-20	212	94	104	98	-0.5%	5.0%	2.1%	2.3%	2.1%
-103	1,087	479	535	503	-0.5%	5.0%	2.1%	2.3%	2.1%
-123	1,299	573	639	601	-0.5%	5.0%	2.1%	2.3%	2.1%
-2,012	21,258	9,390	10,457	9,847	-0.5%	5.0%	2.1%	2.3%	2.1%

Sources: Berks County Planning Commission, 2022; U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2020

Population Density

The United States Census Bureau defines places “urban” as territory that has a population density of at least 1,000 people per square mile. By this definition, the area overall is considered urban. As you can see from the chart below, Laureldale is considerably more densely populated than Muhlenberg.

Population Density				
Municipality	Size (Sq.Mi.)	2020	Density	Urban
Laureldale Borough	0.8	4,277	5,346	Yes
Muhlenberg Township	12.1	21,915	1,811	Yes
Region	12.9	26,192	2,030	Yes

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Decennial Census Counts (DP-1)

School Enrollment

One school district serves the municipalities. The Muhlenberg School District has one (1) elementary school, one (1) intermediate school, one (1) middle school, and one (1) high school. As of 2021, the district has over 4,100 students. Between 2017 and 2021, the district's student population increased by 9.3%. Although there was an overall increase in the number of students enrolled in the school district there is one thing that should be noted. The decrease in enrollment numbers at the Muhlenberg Elementary Center (MEC) is a direct result of a change made for the 2017-2018 school year. Prior to 2017-2018 the MEC handled grade levels K-4 and C.E. Cole Intermediate School was grades 5-6. Starting in the 2017-2018 school year, MEC was changed to K-3 and C.E. Cole was changed to 4-6. This explains the dramatic drop in enrollment at MEC and the dramatic increase in students at C.E. Cole. Also, the slight drop in overall student enrollment from the 2019 to the 2020 school year was most certainly pandemic related as the district was predominantly virtual that year and some parents opted to enroll their children in alternative education choices. The numbers for the most recent school year seem to be rebounding as the schools have returned to normal in-person instruction.

School District Enrollment by Building - 2017-2021							
Muhlenberg School District Building Name	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	# Change 2017-2021	% Change 2017-2021
Muhlenberg High School (10-12)	894	911	986	1,041	1,063	169	18.9%
Muhlenberg Junior High School (7-9)	928	979	1,015	1,023	1,062	134	14.4%
C.E. Cole Intermediate School (4-6)	593	956	918	874	897	304	51.3%
Muhlenberg Elementary Center (K-3)	1,348	1,098	1,113	1,063	1,091	-257	-19.1%
Total	3,763	3,944	4,032	4,001	4,113	350	9.3%

Source: PA Department of Education

Households

The average size of households in the planning area are generally consistent with both county and state averages. Laureldale and Muhlenberg both have almost equal numbers with regards to household size and average family size.

Muhlenberg, in terms of demography, is the older of the two municipalities in the planning area and that is reflected in the chart below. It has the most people over the age of 65. Laureldale borough has a slightly higher percentage of persons under 18 years of age.

Households & Families								
Municipality	Households	Population	PPH	Municipality	Average Family Size	Percent With People Under 18	Percent With People Over 65	Percent Living Alone
Laureldale Borough	1,554	3,900	2.51	Laureldale Borough	2.88	32.2%	6.5%	22.4%
Muhlenberg Township	7,563	19,838	2.62	Muhlenberg Township	3.11	31.5%	12.8%	23.1%
Berks County	154,712	404,622	2.62	Berks County	3.13	31.9%	11.8%	25.3%
Pennsylvania	5,053,106	12,367,989	2.45	Pennsylvania	3.04	28.1%	12.8%	29.7%

Source: U.S. Census, 2014-2019 American Community Survey (S1101)

Age

Age distribution is an important indicator of future population dynamics. For example, a large concentration of children could mean a coming boom of young children or a high concentration of baby boomers may suggest out-migration as people in that demographic move elsewhere after retirement. In terms of this region both municipalities have almost the exact median age and all other age groups are pretty evenly distributed and consistent with both county and state numbers.

Age Composition by Percent of Population				
Age Group	Laureldale	Muhlenberg	Berks	PA
Under 5 years	6.2%	6.2%	5.8%	5.5%
5 to 9 years	4.8%	5.4%	6.3%	5.7%
10 to 14 years	7.5%	6.9%	6.3%	6.0%
15 to 19 years	3.0%	6.5%	7.1%	6.4%
20 to 24 years	6.7%	7.3%	6.7%	6.5%
25 to 29 years	7.4%	6.4%	6.3%	6.7%
30 to 34 years	11.2%	5.3%	5.9%	6.4%
35 to 39 years	3.1%	6.8%	5.7%	6.0%
40 to 44 years	4.4%	4.4%	5.9%	5.7%
45 to 49 years	7.1%	7.6%	6.5%	6.4%
50 to 54 years	6.7%	7.1%	7.1%	6.9%
55 to 59 years	8.5%	7.7%	7.4%	7.2%
60 to 64 years	3.9%	4.3%	6.1%	6.9%
65 to 69 years	2.3%	5.2%	5.3%	5.7%
70 to 74 years	3.8%	4.2%	4.2%	4.3%
75 to 79 years	4.8%	3.1%	3.0%	3.1%
80 to 84 years	3.8%	2.9%	2.1%	2.2%
85 years +	5.0%	2.6%	2.3%	2.5%
Median Age (years)	40.4	39.0	39.9	40.8

Source: 2014-2019 American Community Survey (S0101)

Below, we compile the above age data into three specific groups. They are:

Under 10: This group represents young children. Communities with high numbers in this category may see future demand for education and recreation services.

25-64: This age group represents the working age adults. This age group will generally consist of core taxpayers in their prime earning years that generate and spend income on goods and services.

65+: This group represents largely retired adults. Communities with high numbers in this category may reflect a growing number of residents and taxpayers on fixed incomes with growing demand for healthcare and social assistance services.

Comparison of Major Age Groups Between Municipalities, County and State				
Age Group	Laureldale	Muhlenberg	Berks	PA
Under 10	11.0%	11.6%	12.1%	11.2%
25-64	52.3%	49.6%	50.9%	52.2%
65+	19.7%	18.0%	16.9%	17.8%

Source: 2014-2019 American Community Survey (S0101)

- The two municipalities have percentages of “Under 10” residents that are consistent with both county and state percentages.
- Both municipalities are consistent in terms of percentage of individuals between the age groups of 25-64 when compared to both the state and county.
- The two municipalities in the region have either a similar percentages of residents age 65 and above. These figures also align with county and state numbers.

Mobility

A high percentage of people that have lived in the same place for longer than a year is indicative of stable communities. Studies have found that there is a direct correlation between poverty and a high mobility rate. That is, low-income individuals or families may move at a higher rate than individuals or families above the poverty line. Based on the numbers below the region is relatively stable.

Percentage of households that lived in the same house/apartment one year prior - 2019			
Geography	Stayed	Total	Percent That Stayed
Laureldale Borough	3,523	3,838	91.8%
Muhlenberg Township	16,742	19,513	85.8%
Region	20,265	23,351	86.8%
Berks County	350,964	400,476	87.6%
Pennsylvania	10,853,883	12,233,010	88.7%
United States	270,988,786	312,896,477	86.6%

Source: U.S. Census 2014-2019 American Community Survey (B07013)

Educational Attainment

Compared to Berks County and the state, the two municipalities have higher percentages of total residents age 25 and up that are high school graduates. Conversely, the region as a whole has lower percentages of residents age 25 and older that have bachelor’s degrees when compared to the county and state.

Educational Attainment of the Resident Population by Percentage (25 and Older)				
Level	Laureldale	Muhlenberg	Berks	PA
Less than 9th Grade	4.5	4.8	5.3	3.2
High School, No Diploma	7.1	7.1	8.0	6.3
High School Graduate	47.7	39.4	36.7	34.7
Some college, no degree	16.3	19.2	16.5	15.9
Associates degree	8.1	8.7	8.6	8.5
Bachelors degree	10.7	14.2	16.1	19.0
Graduate or Professional degree	5.6	6.6	8.8	12.4

Source: U.S. Census 2014-2019 American Community Survey (S1501)

Race

In the municipalities, the majority of the residents are white, below both county and state numbers. The Hispanic or Latino population is high in Berks and that correlates to the higher numbers seen in both municipalities.

Racial Composition - Percent of Resident Population				
Race	Laureldale	Muhlenberg	Berks	PA
White	63.0%	63.7%	72.1%	75.0%
Black	4.8%	6.2%	5.1%	10.9%
Hispanic or Latino	35.8%	30.7%	23.2%	8.1%
American Indian	0.5%	0.7%	0.5%	0.2%
Asian	0.9%	2.1%	1.5%	3.9%
Pacific Islander	0.0%	0.08%	0.04%	0.03%
Some Other Race	19.1%	16.3%	11.7%	3.9%
Two or More Races	11.7%	10.9%	9.0%	5.9%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Decennial Census Counts (P3, P4)

Poverty

In 2019, with the exception of Lehigh County, Berks County has the second highest overall poverty rate of the surrounding six (6) counties. The poverty rate in the planning area is much lower and below both the county and state averages. Muhlenberg has an overall higher level of poverty when compared to Laureldale. Muhlenberg also has a slightly higher rate of family poverty and a higher rate of “single mother” and elderly poverty.

Poverty Composition by Percentage of the Resident Population in 2019				
Municipality	Overall Poverty Level	Families	FHNHP*	Elderly*
Laureldale	6.8	4.0	10.0	2.1
Muhlenberg	7.5	4.4	13.8	8.5
Berks County	12.0	8.4	26.5	8.0
Pennsylvania	12.4	8.4	25.8	8.1

Source: 2014-2019 American Community Survey (DP03, S1701, S1702)

* FHNHP: Female Household with family, no husband present

* Elderly: Residents that are 65 years of age or over

Free/Reduced Lunch Enrollment by School/School District

Another indicator of poverty is examining enrollment in the free/reduced lunch program at school. Children from families with incomes at or below 130% of the poverty level, and children in families receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and children in families receiving food stamp benefits are eligible for free lunches. Children in families whose income is between 130% and 185% of the poverty level are eligible for reduced price lunches.

Percent Free/Reduced Lunch Enrollment by School Building: 2019						
Muhlenberg School District Building Name	Enrollment	Free Eligible	Reduced Eligible	% Free Enrollment	% Reduced Enrollment	% Free / Reduced Enrollment
Muhlenberg High School	986	619	65	62.8%	6.6%	69.4%
Muhlenberg Junior High School	1,015	706	70	69.6%	6.9%	76.5%
C.E. Cole Intermediate School	918	631	57	68.7%	6.2%	74.9%
Muhlenberg Elementary Center	1,113	728	70	65.4%	6.3%	71.7%
Total	4,032	2,684	262	66.6%	6.5%	73.1%

Source: PA Department of Education - Division of Food and Nutrition, National School Lunch Program (NSLP), 2019 data.

Overall, in 2019, the Muhlenberg School District ranks 3rd out of all county school districts in students enrolled in the program. While the district enrollment numbers are higher compared to the overall county and state, it is important to note the share increase in enrollments in each district since 2010.

During the pandemic, all students at Muhlenberg and all Berks County schools received free Breakfast and Lunch, no matter of economic status, due to Federal programs enacted. These programs ended at the conclusion of the 2021-2022 school year. However, because Muhlenberg has such a high rate of students at or below the poverty level (over 73%), Pennsylvania Department of Education recommended the District apply for the following Federal program: " The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) is a non-pricing meal service option for schools and school districts in low-income areas. CEP allows the nation's highest poverty schools and districts to serve breakfast and lunch at no cost to all enrolled students without collecting household applications. Instead, schools that adopt CEP are reimbursed using a formula based on the percentage of students categorically eligible for free meals based on their participation in other specific means-tested programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)." Muhlenberg School District has applied for this program and it was School Board approved. MSD is expecting approval from PDE any time before the start of the 2022-2023 school year. The CEP program has a four year term at which time, based again by the amount of students.

Percent Free/Reduced Lunch Enrollment by School District: 2010 and 2019

School District	2010	2019	% Change
I-Lead Charter School	N/A	100.0	**
Reading School District	90.3	100.0	10.7%
Muhlenberg School District	37.2	73.1	96.5%
Antietam School District	39.3	50.5	28.5%
Hamburg Area School District	40.0	46.0	15.0%
Governor Mifflin School District	25.8	44.1	70.9%
Berks Career and Technology Center	22.4	41.2	83.9%
Conrad Weiser Area School District	28.7	41.0	42.9%
Daniel Boone Area School District	16.3	40.6	149.1%
Tulpehocken Area School District	35.2	40.4	14.8%
Wyomissing Area School District	27.6	34.8	26.1%
Brandywine Heights Area School District	17.9	33.4	86.6%
Exeter Township School District	17.9	31.7	77.1%
Wilson School District	19.9	31.3	57.3%
Kutztown Area School District	20.0	31.2	56.0%
Oley Valley School District	19.7	31.2	58.4%
Twin Valley School District	20.8	31.0	49.0%
Boyertown Area School District	16.8	30.4	81.0%
Fleetwood Area School District	17.1	30.4	77.8%
Schuylkill Valley School District	19.7	30.2	53.3%
Upper Perkiomen Area School District	23.0	29.2	27.0%
Berks County	39.9	51.9	30.1%
Pennsylvania	39.4	54.3	37.8%

Source: PA Department of Education - Division of Food and Nutrition, National School Lunch Program (NSLP), 2010 and 2019 data

Veterans

As of 2019 the area has 1,444 veterans of the nearly 22,270 in Berks County – with the majority serving during the Vietnam War era. Laureldale Borough has the most veterans from recent conflicts and the Korean War while Muhlenberg Township has the highest concentration of World War II veterans.

Veteran Composition - Percent of Veterans Residing in Municipality

Period of Service	Laureldale	Muhlenberg	Berks
Gulf War (9/2001 or later) veterans	13.7	9.0	11.1
Gulf War (8/1990 to 8/2001) veterans	19.8	11.8	13.3
Vietnam era veterans	26.2	37.8	36.5
Korean War veterans	23.3	10.5	10.1
World War II veterans	7.3	11.1	5.0
Total Veterans	313	1,131	22,270

Source: U. S. Census 2014-2019 American Community Survey (S2101)

HOUSING PROFILE

The two communities in the planning area have a stable housing stock with relatively low vacancy rates. Vacancy rates are an important indicator of supply and demand. A low rate of vacant-for-sale units can show a positive correlation of lack of supply and high demand. Typically, a healthy vacancy rate hovers around 2 percent or below while a vacancy rate of 12 or more percent can be considered high. Anything above 20 percent is considered hyper-vacancy.

The type of housing each community provides is relatively similar, however. As no surprise, Laureldale has a slightly higher number of attached units. This is mostly due to the denser population within the smaller borough.

Profile of Housing Characteristics - 2019				
Type	Laureldale		Muhlenberg	
	#	%	#	%
Total Units	1,687		8,067	
Occupied housing units	1,554	92.1%	7,563	93.8%
Vacant housing units	133	7.9%	504	6.2%
1-unit, detached	1,064	63.1%	4,893	60.7%
1-unit, attached	492	29.2%	2,070	25.7%
2 units	39	2.3%	191	2.4%
3 or 4 units	38	2.3%	352	4.4%
5 to 9 units	0	0.0%	70	0.9%
10 to 19 units	7	0.4%	172	2.1%
20 or more units	39	2.3%	58	0.7%
Mobile home	8	0.5%	261	3.2%
Boat, RV, van, etc.	0	0.0%	0	0.0%

Source: U. S. Census, 2015-2019 American Community Survey (DP04)

Both municipalities saw their highest period of construction between 1939 or earlier.

Interestingly, based on the numbers below, Laureldale Borough saw more significant housing development between 1939 to 1979. As the borough began to get built out, Muhlenberg Township's construction increased between 1990 and 2009. In the last two periods where there is data the housing construction in both municipalities has waned considerably.

Year of Housing Construction				
Type	Laureldale		Muhlenberg	
	#	%	#	%
Built 2014 or Later	0	0.0%	127	1.6%
Built 2010 to 2013	0	0.0%	135	1.7%
Built 2000 to 2009	37	2.2%	1,011	12.5%
Built 1990 to 1999	67	4.0%	1,214	15.0%
Built 1980 to 1989	62	3.7%	566	7.0%
Built 1970 to 1979	173	10.3%	647	8.0%
Built 1960 to 1969	226	13.4%	861	10.7%
Built 1950 to 1959	375	22.2%	1,433	17.8%
Built 1940 to 1949	250	14.8%	493	6.1%
Built 1939 or earlier	497	29.5%	1,580	19.6%

Source: U. S. Census, 2015-2019 American Community Survey (DP04)

Housing Values

The planning area's housing stock comes in at a variety of affordability levels. The median value of homes in both communities varies. The median value of homes in Laureldale and Muhlenberg are lower than the county's median home value (\$178,700).

Values of Housing Units				
Type	Laureldale		Muhlenberg	
	#	%	#	%
Less than \$50,000	39	3.0%	278	4.4%
\$50,000 to \$99,999	298	22.6%	482	7.7%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	668	50.7%	1906	30.5%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	237	18.0%	2,104	33.6%
\$200,000 to \$299,999	36	2.7%	1,170	18.7%
\$300,000 to \$499,999	40	3.0%	287	4.6%
\$500,000 to \$999,999	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
\$1,000,000 or more	0	0.0%	26	0.4%
Median (dollars)	\$122,800		\$158,400	

Source: U. S. Census, 2014-2019 American Community Survey (DP04)

Laureldale Borough saw a decrease in median housing value since 2010. Comparatively, lower home purchase prices represent a selling point to would-be buyers in the area and could attract young families to the area. However, rising valuation is desirable from a municipal perspective in maintaining a viable and sustainable tax base. Muhlenberg Township saw an increase in housing values since 2010, a 1.4% positive change.

Median Housing Values Between 2010 and 2019				
Municipality	2010	2019	\$ Change	% Change
Laureldale	\$127,000	\$122,800	-\$4,200	-3.3%
Muhlenberg	\$156,200	\$158,400	\$2,200	1.4%
Berks County	\$170,400	\$178,700	\$8,300	4.9%

Source: U.S. Census, 2006-2010, 2007-2011, 2008-2012, 2009-2013, 2010-2014, 2011-2015, 2012-2016, 2013-2017, 2014-2018, 2015-2019 American Community Survey (DP04)

Owner Profile

The relationship between tenure (owner or renter occupancy) and vacancy rates typically corresponded with the availability of and demand for housing. Owner-occupied homes are often regarded to be a more desirable land use because they retain a higher resale value and are generally more likely to be well maintained than the rental units.

In the municipalities, the majority of units are owner occupied, but both have lower percentages of owner-occupied units than the County's (92.6%). Of no surprise, Muhlenberg Township has the most overall units. The majority of residents moved into Laureldale Borough prior to 1989. Muhlenberg Township saw the majority of their residents move into the Township between 2000 and 2009.

Owner Profile				
Type	Laureldale		Muhlenberg	
	#	%	#	%
Total Units	1,554		7,563	
Owner-occupied	1,318	84.8%	6,253	82.7%
Renter-occupied	236	15.2%	1,310	17.3%
Moved in 2017 or later	173	11.1%	574	7.6%
Moved in 2015 to 2016	189	12.2%	990	13.1%
Moved in 2010 to 2014	337	21.7%	1,411	18.7%
Moved in 2000 to 2009	295	19.0%	2,051	27.1%
Moved in 1990 to 1999	167	10.7%	1,273	16.8%
Moved in 1989 or earlier	393	25.3%	1,264	16.7%
Source: U. S. Census, 2015-2019 American Community Survey (DP04)				

The chart below shows the change in owner and renter units between 2006-2010 and 2015-2019. Both municipalities have had a relatively sizable increase in homeownership.

Change in Owner/Renter Profile Between 2010 and 2019		
Type	Laureldale	Muhlenberg
	% Change	% Change
Owner-occupied	33.0%	13.6%
Renter-occupied	-19.3%	-4.3%
Source: U.S. Census 2006-2010 and 2015-2019 American Community Survey (DP04)		

Shown below are the monthly costs of mortgages and rents in the two municipalities. Laureldale's mortgage and rent figures are both lower than the county median. In Muhlenberg Township, the median mortgage is lower than the County's but the monthly rent is higher.

Median Monthly Mortgages and Rents in 2019 in Dollars		
Municipality	Mortgage	Rent
Laureldale	\$1,194	\$913
Muhlenberg	\$1,456	\$1,078
Berks County	\$1,543	\$939

Source: U.S. Census, 2006-2010 and 2013-2017 American Community Survey (DP04)





MLJCP

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Natural Features And Agriculture Conservation

NATURAL FEATURES AND RESOURCES

Natural features and resources are the components present or produced by the physical and natural environment including geology, soils, hydrology, topography, biology, and botany. It is essential to identify these important natural features, as well as environmentally sensitive land areas within the Muhlenberg-Laureldale Region to guide development towards sustaining and protecting them.

GEOLOGY AND SOILS

The geologic features underlying the Muhlenberg-Laureldale Region contribute significantly to the determination of the suitability for land use. The geology of a given area has a direct correlation with the soil suitability, topographic constraint, and hydrologic features, all of which play a vital role in groundwater quality and quantity. Therefore, trends in the land development of the Muhlenberg-Laureldale Region show as the result of favorable geological conditions associated with slopes, drainage, porosity, permeability, stability as well as the supply of groundwater.

The rock formations in this Region were a result of three distinct geologic periods: Cambrian, Pre-Cambrian, and Ordovician as shown in Figure 01.

The majority of Muhlenberg and Laureldale consists of geologic formations from the Cambrian period with Ordovician formations present in the northwestern corner of Muhlenberg bordering Bern Township as well as a slice in central Muhlenberg Township beginning at the southern border and extending into a large portion of Laureldale Borough. Limestone, dolomite, and shale comprise the soils with mild to moderate slopes are present through much of the area, making the area favorable for development. Much of this area is developed; the majority of Muhlenberg and Laureldale's higher density residential communities as well as commercial and industrial development are located within these formations. However, opportunities for redevelopment are promising in areas where land for development otherwise is scarce.

The remaining land in the Region is interspersed Cambrian and Pre-Cambrian rock consisting generally of the steep slopes of the Irish and Frush Valley Mountains consisting of pink and black gneiss as well as gray quartzite. This area tends to be unsuitable for large development due to the topography of the hillsides. Concerns with further development range from cut-slope stability to storm water drainage. Much of the existing development is considered low density residential, and limited amounts of agricultural production on mushrooms farms are present.

PRIME AGRICULTURAL SOILS

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) defines and rates soils by their agricultural capabilities. The land capability classification generally shows the suitability of soils for most kinds of field crops. They are grouped based on limitations of the soil, the risk of damage to the soils when used and the way they respond to treatment. Capability classes are the designated by numbers 1 through 8, indicating progressively greater limitations and narrower choices for practical use as the class number increases:

- Class 1:** Soils that have few limitations that restrict their use. Muhlenberg-Laureldale contains 52 acres of Class 1 soils representing 0.6 percent of the overall total land area.
- Class 2:** Soils have moderate limitations that reduce the choice of plants or that require moderate conservation practices. Muhlenberg-Laureldale contains 1,970 acres of Class 2 soils representing 23.8 percent of the overall total land area.
- Class 3:** Soils have severe limitations that reduce the choice of plants or that require special conservation practices, or both. Muhlenberg-Laureldale contains 734 acres of Class 3 soils representing 8.9 percent of the overall total land area.

Classes 4-8: Soils have very severe limitations that reduce the choice of plants or that require very careful management, or both. Soils are subject to little or no erosion but have other limitations, impractical to remove, that restrict their use mainly to pasture, rangeland, forestland or wildlife habitat.

Soils have severe limitations that make them generally unsuitable for cultivation and that restrict their use mainly to pasture, rangeland, forest land, or wildlife habitat. Soils and miscellaneous area have limitations that preclude commercial plant production and that restrict their use to recreational purposes, wildlife habitat, watershed, or aesthetic purposes.

Using this classification, the Municipal Planning Code (MPC) defines prime agricultural land as that of which is used for agricultural purposes containing soils rated Classes 1-3.

Prime soils contained within the Muhlenberg-Laureldale Region are displayed in Figure 02. Much of the prime agricultural land located in Muhlenberg-Laureldale region is located within both the northwestern and eastern portions of Muhlenberg Township. However, these areas are generally unsuitable for most agricultural production due to steep slopes and/or present urbanization.

HYDRIC SOILS

Hydric soils are those of which formed under conditions of saturation, flooding, or ponding long enough during the growing season to develop anaerobic conditions in the upper part. Hydric soils pond long enough to support the growth of hydrophytic (or water loving) vegetation. They are poorly draining soils and mapped as such in Figure 02. Areas of hydric soils can overlap areas of wetlands, but the land area they appear on is more extensive than that identified as wetlands. They are generally found around watercourses within the Muhlenberg-Laureldale region, mostly concentrated along the banks of the Schuylkill River. Preservation of areas with hydric soils should be encouraged and development limited as hydric soils act as natural sponge filters absorbing floodwaters as a first defense to limit widespread damage. When coupled with wetlands (discussed later in the Chapter), hydric soils then help filter pollutants from the water protecting surface and groundwater.

AGRICULTURAL AND NATURAL PRESERVATION

Much of this Region is urbanized, with little room for agricultural and natural preservation. However, agriculture (mostly from mushroom farming) and natural resources on steep slopes and along creek beds are present throughout the community. Local farms provide the region and beyond with opportunities including local food sources, employment, and agritourism, but also serves as a connection with the region's cultural history. Natural areas provide a safe home for endangered and threatened wildlife as well as opportunities for both residents and visitors to explore and learn more about the region's offerings. Preservation of appropriate lands can serve as a buffer from the pressures of development, providing balance in a growing community.

AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

Berks County established its Agricultural Conservation Easement (ACE) Program in 1988. Funded largely by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and County of Berks, the program is designed to purchase the development rights of prime agricultural land areas in perpetuity. Landowners submit applications to the Berks County Agricultural Land Preservation Office on a volunteer basis by December 31st of any given year. Farms are ranked based on soil quality, development pressure, productivity of farm and the ability to create clusters of preserved farmland and funding is allocated on a yearly basis. Municipalities may choose to participate in the ACE program along with the

County and Commonwealth. County of Berks has purchased 15,844 acres of prime farmland to date through the ACE program, however none are located within the Muhlenberg-Laureldale Region.

AGRICULTURAL SECURITY AREAS

Under Pennsylvania Act 43 of 1981 (as amended), local governments are authorized to create Agricultural Security Areas (ASAs) on a voluntary basis of land areas consisting of at least 250 acres upon petition of interested landowners. Once established, an ASA is protected from local laws and ordinances that otherwise may unreasonably restrict farm structures or farm practices. Likewise, any political subdivision law or ordinance regarding public nuisance must exclude any agricultural activity conducted using normal farming operations within the ASA as long as the operations do not affect public health and safety. ASAs are largely protected from condemnation and eminent domain of productive agricultural lands; Act 43 requires the Agricultural Lands Condemnation Approval Board to accept the proposal prior to condemnation. Since its enactment 165,564 acres have been designated Agricultural Security Areas in Berks County. There are no agricultural security areas in the Muhlenberg-Laureldale region presently.

EFFECTIVE AGRICULTURE ZONING

Effective agriculture zoning, sometimes called agricultural protection zoning, was first used in Pennsylvania in Berks County, in Lower Heidelberg Township in 1973. Since then, the practice has spread throughout much of rural Berks County and across the Commonwealth. Effective Agriculture Zoning can be used to protect many large tracts of prime farmland all at once quickly, relatively easily and at a relatively low cost. It is easy to modify when needed as well. The agricultural zoning designations help reduce conflict between farms and other uses. However, Effective Agriculture Zoning is an effective tool at preserving farmland, but it is not permanent; a municipality can change zoning in these areas at any time and leave the farmlands open for development. In order for this tool to protect farmland at its maximum potential, it needs both the support of the municipality's elected body and its local farmers. Currently neither municipality has effective agriculture zoning.

CLEAN & GREEN

The Clean & Green Act of 1974 a tax assessment program by the Commonwealth that was enacted as a tool for encouraging the protection of valuable farmland, forestland, and open spaces. A land assessed using the Clean & Green program is assessed at its use value rather than fair market value. This typically amounts to tax savings for the average landowner. Generally, the property must be 10 or more acres, the exception being agriculture producing at least \$2,000 of farm income annually. This designation is not permanent. However, if a landowner breaches the covenant, the landowner is subject to seven years rollback taxes, the difference in use and fair market value, plus interest. Limited subdivision, land development and non-agricultural activities are still allowed on the property while enrolled in this program.

CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

Land can also be protected through a conservation easement. A conservation easement is a legal agreement between the landowner and a land trust or government agency that permanently limits the uses of the land in order to protect its conservation values. Conserved land can still be utilized by the property owner as well as sold or passed down to heirs. However, the easement will bind all future landowners as well. The landowner decides how the land is conserved; Some owners will restrict the ability to build upon the land while allowing farming practices for example. Conservation easements can be sold or donated. There are no conservation easements currently in Muhlenberg-Laureldale Region.

NATURAL HERITAGE AREAS

In 1991 the Pennsylvania Science Office of the Nature Conservancy prepared the Berks County Natural Areas Inventory, a list and mapping of rare and endangered plants and animals and the best natural habitats for them in Berks County. Most recently, the Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program (PNHP) through the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy on behalf of the Berks County Planning Commission updated this inventory in 2014. The Berks County Natural Heritage Inventory (CNHI) can be used to steer development away from these environmentally sensitive areas, to plan appropriate recreational parks and trails, or to conserve and preserve areas for the region's most vulnerable habitats, providing balanced economic growth and environmental conservation.

According to PNHP, a Natural Heritage Area (NHA) is an area containing one or more plant or animal species of concern at state or federal levels, exemplary natural communities, or exceptional native biological diversity. They are mapped according to their sensitivity to human activities, with designations of Core Habitat and Supporting Landscape. Core Habitats are defined as areas representing critical habitat that cannot absorb significant levels of activity without substantial negative impacts to elements of concern. Supporting Landscapes are defined as areas directly connected to Core Habitats that maintain vital ecological processes and/or secondary habitat that may be able to withstand some lower level of activity without substantial negative impacts to elements of concern. The sensitivity of each designation varies significantly according to the particular plant, animal or natural community habitat that the area represents and is discussed in detail in each NHAs Site Description.

Though there are no NHAs in the Region, the municipalities have opportunities to protect natural areas and wildlife habitats, particularly within the Muhlenberg open space network and through careful planning of remaining undeveloped lands.

PARKS, PRESERVATION AND PUBLIC LANDS

Riverside Basin Park: This 122.4-acre park currently houses passive recreation, primarily biking and hiking. However, in 2007 the Township adopted a Master Plan for improvements at this park as well as Jim Dietrich Park. The park was acquired from the Commonwealth with restrictions that limit the property to recreational and other municipal uses. The Master Plan includes a natural trail and natural areas with native plantings throughout the park in addition to proposed amenities such as multipurpose fields, a dog park, a playground, and picnic areas. The park locationally is supported by nearby Laurel Run Park, Pioneer Grove, and Kelly's Lock offering residents even more variety in the forms of both passive and active recreation as well as wildlife access to greenway corridors.

Dominic Manzella Memorial Park: Much of the 71.2-acre Dominic Manzella Memorial Park is undeveloped and open to passive recreation. However, the park offers two covered pavilions, a walking path, volleyball, horseshoes, a tot lot, and a picnic area as well.

Bernhart's Dam: This 36.9-acre property is owned by the City of Reading. It was originally dammed in 1796 for a grist mill. It was enlarged over the years to accommodate business expansion, and in 1865 acquired by the City of Reading to draw water from the springs feeding the dam for public water access. However, the Bernhart Park closed in 1996 as it became known that the lake had become polluted by lead dust from a nearby battery company. It was remediated for public recreational use in 2011. Then in 2022, the City began to drain the dam to assess structural integrity and further contamination concerns. The City is still determining the fate of Bernhart's Dam, though some passive recreation does still exist including a walking trail around the pond.

Hartman Open Space: Situated southwest of Irish Mountain, Hartman Open Space is 48.4-acre preserve that offers hiking and nature study opportunities.

Laurel Run Park/Laurel Run Linear Park: This space is a 53-acre park mostly for passive recreation along both sides of Laurel Run. Active recreation opportunities are offered including a

tot lot and sports fields, with long spans of passive recreation including hiking, biking, and fishing.

Felix Dam: This 9.2-acre park located along the Schuylkill River in Muhlenberg Township hosts passive recreation opportunities such as picnicking, hiking, fishing, kayaking, and canoeing. Visitors can also enjoy interpretive signage, scenic views of the river, and a short segment of the Schuylkill River Trail connecting Upper and Lower Felix Dam Park.

Kelly's Lock (Pioneer Grove): A 19.06-acre park downstream of Felix Dam along the Schuylkill River, this park also offers similar passive recreation opportunities including interpretive signage describing the canal lock system, scenic views of the river. A current proposal by the Schuylkill Greenways Association and supported by Muhlenberg Township would provide a connection to both parks, completing another planned link of the Schuylkill River Trail.

For more information on parks and parks programming, see the Community Facilities section of this Plan.

WATER RESOURCES

As is the case throughout the planet, water is one of the most essential resources within the Muhlenberg-Laureldale Region. It is critical to all forms of life and shapes the landscape, but also has a direct influence on subdivision and land development patterns. Proper management of hydrologic resources is vital to meet growing demands, while protecting water quality and quantity from degradation and depletion.

WATERSHEDS

A watershed is a regional area bounded peripherally by water parting and ultimately draining into a particular watercourse or body of water. The boundaries of a drainage basin/watershed are defined by natural ridge lines, which separate one drainage basin from another. The Muhlenberg-Laureldale Region is located within the Schuylkill River Basin which drains to the Delaware River. The Region is comprised of two (2) major watersheds, which are geographically depicted on Figures 03 and 04 of this Plan.

Maiden Creek: The Maiden Creek basin runs on the northern tip of Muhlenberg Township. The portion within the Township is the Willow Creek subbasin where various tributaries from surrounding municipalities drain into the Township.

Schuylkill River: This watershed is located within the majority of Muhlenberg Township and all of Laureldale Borough. The Schuylkill River Basin in this region contains the subbasins of Laurel Run and Bernhart Creek as well. The Schuylkill River is designated a Scenic River by the Commonwealth. The Schuylkill River Water Trail runs downstream from Frackville, Schuylkill County to Philadelphia (as highlighted in the Community Facilities section of this Plan).

SURFACE WATER FEATURES

Surface water features in the region have a wide range of functions such as wildlife habitat, public drinking water supply, and recreation. Types found in the Muhlenberg-Laureldale Region include a river, streams, ponds, a reservoir, and other various smaller bodies of water.

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) develops water quality standards for all surface waters of the Commonwealth. These standards, which are designed to safeguard Pennsylvania's streams, rivers, and lakes, consist of both use designations and the criteria necessary to protect those uses. These uses include aquatic life habitat, water supply and recreation. As part of the water quality standards program, DEP conducts stream use designation evaluations on an ongoing basis. Evaluations may be conducted on streams or stream segments that are found to be missing from the water quality standards (Title 25, Chapter 93 of the Pennsylvania

Code), or on streams or segments DEP considers to be improperly classified. The redesignation of evaluations may also be conducted at the request of the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC). In addition, any person, agency, group, organization, municipality, or industry may submit a rulemaking petition to the Environmental Quality Board (EQB) to request a stream redesignation. A number of waterbodies, mostly streams and ponds, are located within the Muhlenberg-Laureldale Region.

A few noteworthy water features in the area include:

Schuylkill River, the most prominent water feature in the area, runs northwest to southeast and flows for 135 miles from headwaters in Pottsville to where it joins the Delaware River in Philadelphia as one of its largest tributaries. It creates the western boundary of Muhlenberg Township with neighboring Bern Township. The river is a hotspot for the region's recreation. Kayakers often visit the region to recreate at the river and at parklands located along the river. Fishing is also popular with anglers catching a variety of species such as brook trout, rainbow trout, bluegill, smallmouth bass, largemouth bass, and muskellunge. Schuylkill River Greenway Association is in the process of planning a route for the Schuylkill River trail along its banks in Muhlenberg as well.

Berks Products Abandoned Quarry Site is located off the Fifth Street Highway in Muhlenberg. Containing 6 million to 7 million gallons of water, it was obtained by the Muhlenberg Township Authority in 2010, which serves both Muhlenberg and Laureldale residents, for a potential future water supply. The grounds are not open to the public.

Bernhart Reservoir, located within the open space at Bernhart Dam covered earlier in the chapter, was labelled "high risk" in 2016 and was drained in 2022 for assessment. Presently owned by the City of Reading, it was abandoned as a water source in 1940 and has been used as recreation for much of that time. The future of the park may include rebuilding the dam breast and spillway and refilling the lake, permanently lowering the lake, and leaving a smaller body of water or removing the dam entirely and naturalizing the creek.

EXCEPTIONAL VALUE AND HIGH-QUALITY STREAMS

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) develops water quality standards for each of the streams in the Muhlenberg-Laureldale region. They are labeled as per the aquatic life use of the stream: Warm Water Fishes (WWF), Trout Stocking (TSF), Cold Water Fishes (CWF) and Migratory Fishes (MF). In addition to these use-based designations, streams with excellent water quality may be labelled as High-Quality Waters (HQ) or Exceptional Value Waters (EV). The water quality in an HQ stream, according to DEP, can be lowered only if a discharge is the result of necessary social or economic development, the water quality criteria are met, and all existing uses of the stream are protected. EV waters, however, are protected at their existing quality; water quality shall not be lowered. There are no exceptional value or high-quality streams located within the Muhlenberg-Laureldale Region.

FLOODPLAINS

Floodplains can provide ecological, aesthetic, and recreational benefits, but also impose constraints to development within them. The primary function of a floodplain is to provide an area that will accommodate the floodwaters during periods of high discharge. They are a natural defense against destructive flooding in developed areas. However, unchecked development of floodplains can lead to more frequent and severe flooding as the water is displaced elsewhere. Consequences of excessive alteration of a floodplain can include loss of property and loss of life in a major storm event. Floodplains also provide habitat for many species that would otherwise be displaced by development as well. Mapped in Figure 04, the 1% floodplain areas are those that on average have a 1 in 100 (or 1%) chance of flooding in any given year as defined by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Similarly, FEMA has defined the 0.2% floodplain that has a 1 in 500

chance of flooding. The majority of both the 100-year and 500-year floodplains are found along the banks of the Schuylkill River, Laurel Run, and Bernhart Creek.

WETLANDS

Wetlands are areas where water covers the soil or is present at or near the surface for a portion or more of the year. They are among the most productive ecosystems in the world, fostering aquatic and/or terrestrial species of flora and fauna depending on the hydrology or saturation levels of the water present in the wetland. In Muhlenberg-Laureldale, they can include floodplains, swamps, marshes, or bogs as well as river, stream, and pond banks. Some wetlands are wooded while others are wet meadow. Wetlands serve a dual function, providing enormous amounts of food for the basis of the food web while filtering impurities that normally would contribute to surface and groundwater pollution. They absorb and detain water from flooding and recharge groundwater as well. Given their important role within the region, it is vital that they are preserved and protected from destruction as much as possible. Wetland margins or fringe areas should be considered for preservation as well. By carefully regulating wetlands and the lands surrounding them, the municipalities can control the land use in these fragile ecosystems. Mapped on Figure 03 are the Region's wetland areas.

STORMWATER MANAGEMENT

The water that runs off the land into low land, valleys, and surface waters during and immediately following a rainfall event is referred to as stormwater. In a developing watershed, the volume of stormwater resulting from a particular rainfall event increases due to the amount of impervious surface that is required to support the improvements. The conversion of natural land and topography to residential, commercial, industrial, institutional, and even agriculture and recreation, results in decreased infiltrations of rainfall and an increased rate and volume of stormwater.

As subdivision and land development activity occurs, the increased quantity of stormwater must be properly addressed. Failure to do so can result in greater flooding, stream channel erosion, sedimentation, and reduced groundwater recharge. Provisions for stormwater management must be addressed in every subdivision and land development application within the Muhlenberg-Laureldale Region. Past efforts to manage stormwater have usually focused upon controlling the rate of discharge on a municipal basis. This focus is changing to consider stormwater impacts on a watershed-wide basis.

Individual subdivision and land development projects are often viewed as separate incidents, and not necessarily as part of the bigger picture. Even if a municipality takes a comprehensive review of the proposed subdivision or land development plan application, its focus usually does not extend beyond municipal borders. However, the cumulative nature of individual subdivision and land development applications dramatically affects flooding conditions. This cumulative effect includes flooding, stream bank erosion, sedimentation, and property damage, which sometimes result in expensive repairs or even loss of life. Therefore, given the disturbed and cumulative impacts of development, a regional comprehensive approach must be taken if a reasonable management approach is to be successfully implemented for the Muhlenberg-Laureldale Region.

Recognizing the need to resolve serious problems associated with flooding, the Pennsylvania General Assembly enacted Act 167, the Pennsylvania Stormwater Management Act.

Act 167 changed the local stormwater management theories to a watershed-based comprehensive program of regional stormwater management. Act 167 requires all counties within Pennsylvania to prepare and adopt stormwater management plans for each watershed within the county, as designated by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). Most importantly, these plans are to be prepared in consultation with municipalities within the watershed, working through a Watershed Plan Advisory Committee. The plans are to contain stormwater controls to manage stormwater runoff from proposed subdivision and land development applications.

All proposed watershed management plans within the Muhlenberg-Laureldale Region should be developed in accordance with the following criteria:

1. They should be consistent with the Muhlenberg-Laureldale Comprehensive Plan;
2. They should conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the local and regional hydrological conditions of the watershed;
3. The standards and criteria should be developed from sound technical evaluations performed in the planning process; and
4. The standards and criteria should be adopted by each municipality once completed.

The final product of the Act 167 watershed planning process is to be comprehensive, practical, and developed considering the overall needs of the municipalities within the watershed.

In October of 1999, the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Phase II Stormwater Permitting Regulations were signed into law. The Environmental Protection Agency's objective in Phase II regulations include:

1. Provide a comprehensive stormwater program that designates and controls additional sources of stormwater discharges to protect water quality.
2. Address discharges of stormwater activities not addressed in Part I, including:
 - Construction activities disturbing between 1 and 5 acres;
 - Light industrial activities not exposed to stormwater;
 - Municipal separate storm sewer systems (MS4s); and
 - Municipally-owned industrial facilities previously exempt under Phase I.
3. Facilitate and promote watershed planning as a framework for implementing water quality programs whenever possible.

While certain activities and facilities are easily defined, MS4s are defined as stormwater conveyance or a system of conveyances owned by a state, county, or municipality that discharges into the waters of the United States of America and is not a combined sewer or part of a publicly-owned treatment system. Townships and Boroughs are determined to be an MS4 based on census data which uses urbanized area populations. As shown on Figure 04, MS4 Areas in both Muhlenberg Township and Laureldale Borough have been identified as municipal MS4s. Both municipalities are required to address the following six (6) minimum control measures:

1. Public education and outreach to the general public concerning stormwater impacts;
2. Public participation in the development of the stormwater management program;
3. Detection and elimination of illicit discharges, including the development of storm sewer map showing the location of all facilities and topographic features;
4. Management of stormwater runoff from subdivision and land development sites;
5. Management of post-construction stormwater runoff from new subdivision and land development sites; and
6. Pollution prevention and good housekeeping practices at municipal operations.
Best Management Practices (BMPs) are techniques that have been shown to be most effective for stormwater management associated with subdivision and land development activity, in a manner that is more consistent with the natural characteristics of the receiving watershed resources. BMPs are a broad series of land and water management strategies designed

to minimize the adverse impacts of subdivision and land development activity. These BMPs provide varying levels of watershed protection and are becoming more widely utilized within southeastern Pennsylvania. Stormwater and watershed management is fundamentally concerned with developing programs to protect the natural resources in order to sustain the diverse needs of a community. BMPs provide opportunities to reduce impacts associated with subdivision and land development activity in a manner that endorses conservation management.

BMPs can be “structural” or “non-structural”. Structural BMPs are measures that require the design and physical constructions of a facility to assist with reducing or eliminating a non-point source of pollution and control stormwater. Structural BMPs are most often applied to agricultural operations and stormwater management. Non-structural BMPs are approaches to planning, site design, or regulations that positively affect water quality and reduce stormwater runoff. Non-structural BMPs are generally implemented through the enactment of municipal ordinances that specify site design and construction activities for all subdivision and land development plan applications.

WOODLANDS

Pennsylvania is among the most forested states in the nation, containing some of the most intact hardwood forest lands in the temperate world. The woodlands provide clean air and water, filtering oxygen with their leaves and water with their roots. Trees and other vegetation in the woodlands also provide stabilization from erosion, especially within areas of steep slopes and streambanks. They protect surrounding areas of adverse climate conditions, buffering the wind and filtering direct sunlight. Woodlands provide scenic views and places for passive and active recreation as well. Much of the woodland area is located on the eastern boundaries of the municipalities in areas largely unsuited for residential, commercial, or agricultural development, situated in areas of steep slopes, floodplains, and other limitations.

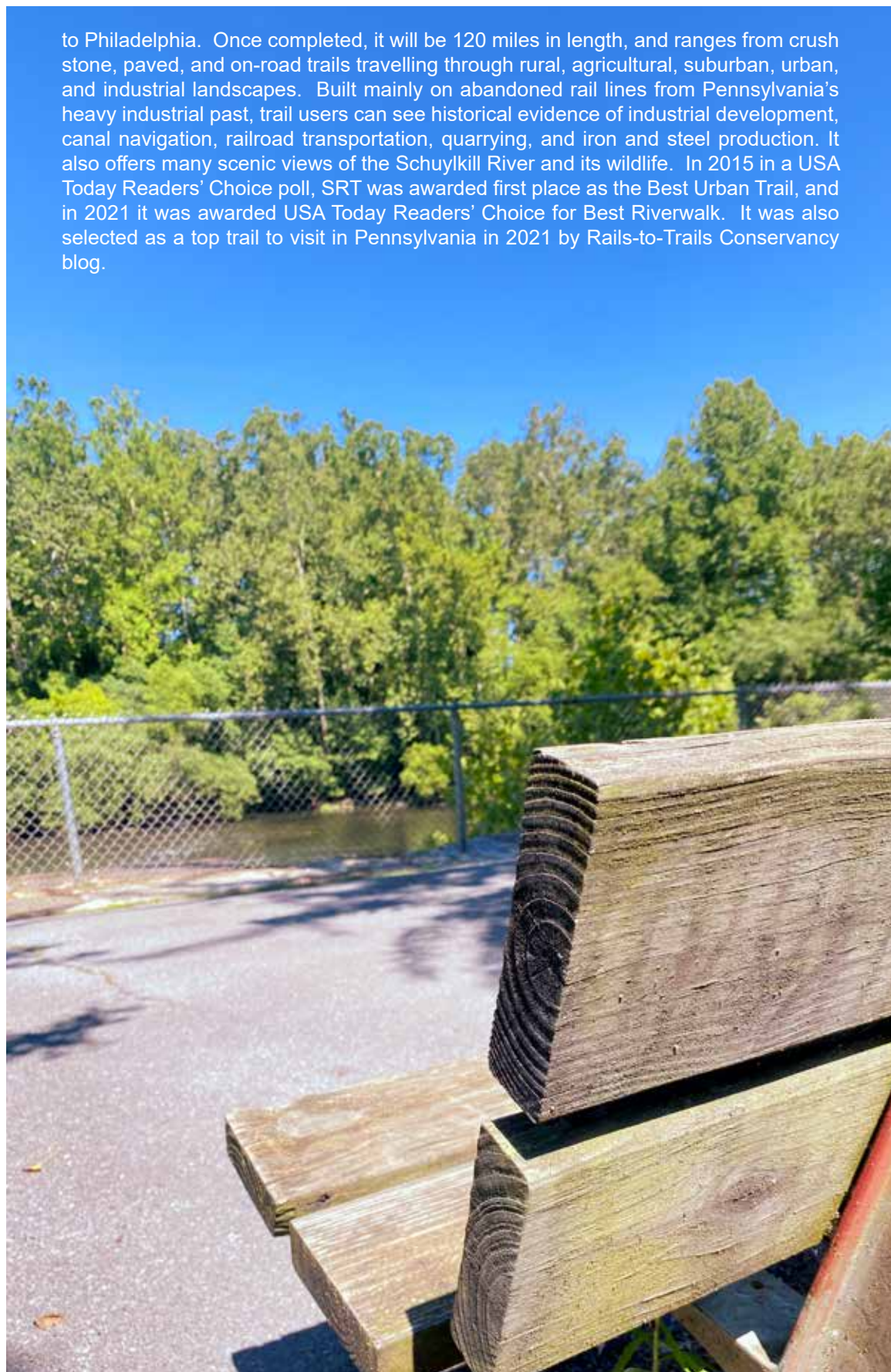
SCENIC RESOURCES AND TOURISM

Scenic tourism helps stimulate the local economy while protecting and promoting the beauty of the natural surroundings in a community.





to Philadelphia. Once completed, it will be 120 miles in length, and ranges from crush stone, paved, and on-road trails travelling through rural, agricultural, suburban, urban, and industrial landscapes. Built mainly on abandoned rail lines from Pennsylvania's heavy industrial past, trail users can see historical evidence of industrial development, canal navigation, railroad transportation, quarrying, and iron and steel production. It also offers many scenic views of the Schuylkill River and its wildlife. In 2015 in a USA Today Readers' Choice poll, SRT was awarded first place as the Best Urban Trail, and in 2021 it was awarded USA Today Readers' Choice for Best Riverwalk. It was also selected as a top trail to visit in Pennsylvania in 2021 by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy blog.



The SRT is managed by the Schuylkill River Greenways National Heritage Area. Formed in 1974 as the Schuylkill River Greenway Association (SRGA), Schuylkill River Greenways has always considered the SRT their signature project. SRGA worked closely with state officials and in 1995 Governor Tom Ridge designated the Schuylkill Heritage Corridor as an official Pennsylvania Heritage Park which then allowed the group to receive state funding for projects and studies. Similarly in 2000 SRGA worked successfully towards the Schuylkill River Valley to be designated a National Heritage Area for its historical ties to the American, Industrial and Environmental Revolutions as well as a diverse portfolio of natural and recreational resources. To date SRGA has completed dozens of projects focusing on recreation, education, conservation, and historic preservation, much of which has benefited communities along the river.

In Muhlenberg, a new section of trail is currently proposed that will run along the Schuylkill River throughout Township parks between Kelly Lock and Laurel Run Park. It is proposed as a 12' wide compact gravel trail with designated pedestrian crossings on River Road.

Schuylkill River Scenic Waterway

The Schuylkill River Watershed is the most densely populated region in Pennsylvania with over 3.2 million people living, working, and recreating within its 1.2 million acres. Additionally, nearly a quarter of US population lives within a five-hour drive of the Schuylkill River opening tourism opportunities to a significant portion of the country.

Schuylkill River Greenways also has advocated, promoted, and protected the Schuylkill River Scenic Waterway. In 1978, Pennsylvania state legislature designated the Schuylkill River as the Commonwealth's first Scenic River. It has also since been designated a National Recreation Trail. The Schuylkill River Water Trail, 126 miles long with over 40 public access points, is mainly used by paddlers in the Muhlenberg-Laureldale Region, but there are opportunities for recreational motorboaters, water skiers, and rowers in many places along the river. The river is considered a Class I-II+ river; Class I denotes moving water with a few riffles and small waves, few or not obstructions, and Class II denotes easy rapids with small waves and clear channels that are obvious without scouting. There are three public access points for the river trail in Jim Dietrich Park, Felix Dam, and Kelly's Lock in Muhlenberg maintained by the Township as well Epler's Access just north of Felix Dam across the river in Bern Township.

Natural Features and Agricultural Conservation Goals to Consider

The over-arching goal of this plan is to conserve natural features and farmland for future generations to experience, view, farm and enjoy. Programs should be encouraged and/or continued so that conservation of natural resources and farming occurs in order to preserve the quality of life of the region's residents. Continuation of preservation efforts can help to slow the upward pressure on taxes as well as take advantage of the burgeoning ecotourism industry.

Protect important natural resources, with a special emphasis upon the Schuylkill River, Laurel Run, Bernhart Creek and other creek valleys, wetlands, and steeply sloped woodlands.

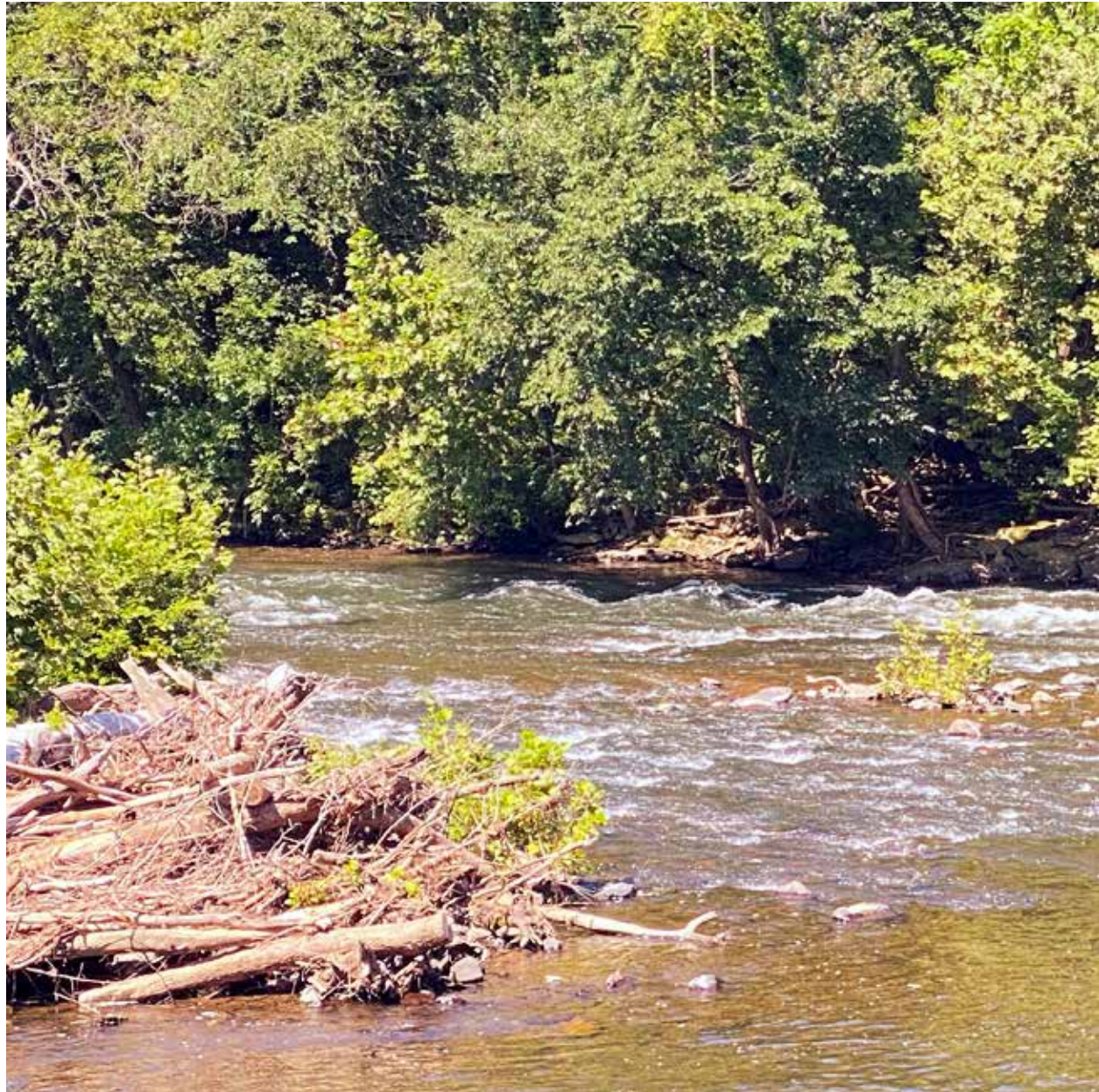
It is essential to maintain vegetation along streams and creek corridors to protect the water quality and fish habitats. Where this vegetation does not exist, property owners should be encouraged to plant along the creek beds so that they may help the individual municipalities of the region fulfill requirements of the municipal separate storm sewer (MS4) permit.

As part of new developments in wooded areas, developers should be required to designate areas of trees that will be removed or preserved. Then suitable measures should be put into place to protect the trees from damage during construction.

Maximize groundwater recharge.

The total percentage of a lot that is covered by buildings and paving should be limited to make sure that there are areas available for absorption of stormwater. For parking areas that are not used on-a-daily-basis, alternative surfaces and materials should be considered that encourage groundwater recharge.

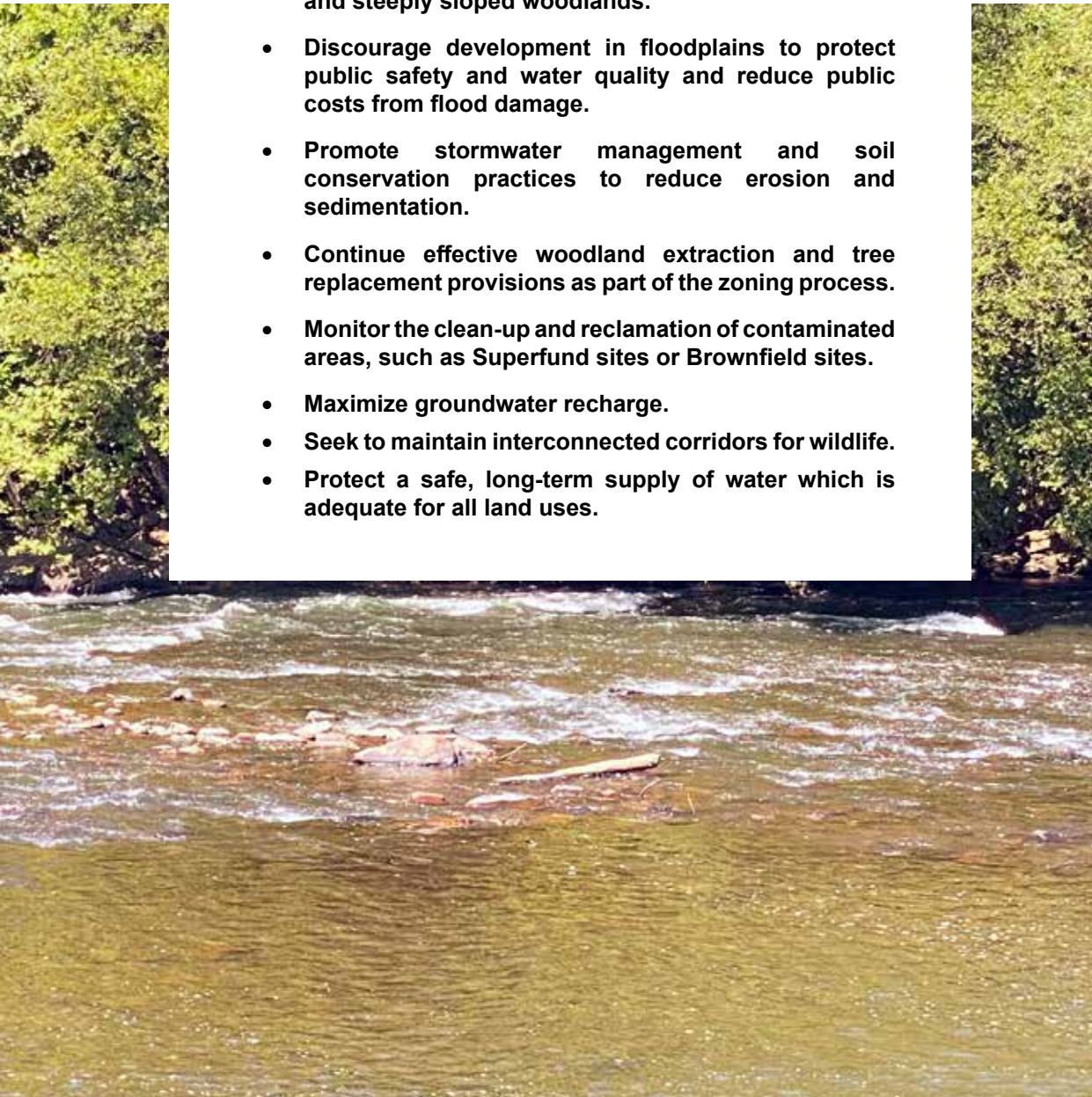
Ordinance provisions should be reviewed to make sure that they do not unintentionally increase the amount of land covered by paving. For example, sidewalks should only be required where they are needed. Front yard setbacks should be modest so that long driveways are not needed. Where cul-de-sac streets are used, a landscaped island should be considered in the middle of the cul-de-sac. Excessive amounts of parking should be avoided. Where there is a question about the amount of parking that may be needed, a developer can be allowed to reserve land for parking that would only be paved if the municipality determines it is actually needed after the use has been in operation. Adjacent businesses should be encouraged to share parking, which can reduce the total amount that is needed.



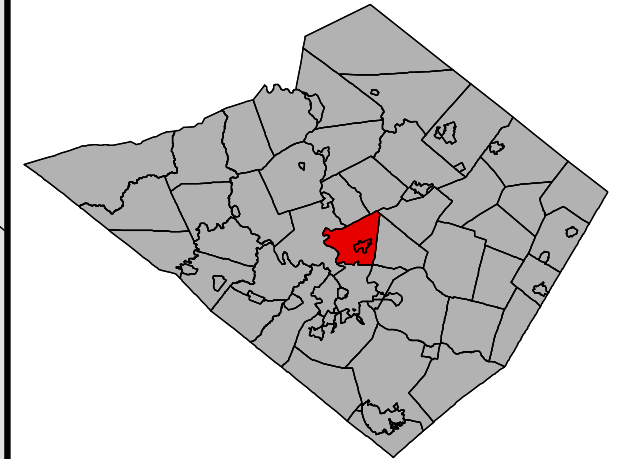
Seek to maintain interconnected corridors for wildlife Ideally, corridors along steeply sloped areas and along creeks would be permanently preserved as interconnected open space. In addition to the benefits of preserving natural features, these inter-connected corridors also provide cover for wildlife to move throughout the region. It is particularly important to have areas with woods or other thick natural vegetation that connect large areas that have been preserved. Too often, land preservation involves fragmented areas that do not allow for wildlife travel.

As part of the 2003 iteration of the Muhlenberg Township Comprehensive Plan there were a number of objectives and policies identified that the municipality should consider. Many of these objectives and policies outlined in the 2003 document are still relevant today. They are listed below:





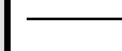

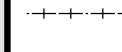


- **Protect important natural resources, with a special emphasis upon the Schuylkill River, Laurel Run, Bernhart Creek and other creek valleys, wetlands, and steeply sloped woodlands.**
- **Discourage development in floodplains to protect public safety and water quality and reduce public costs from flood damage.**
- **Promote stormwater management and soil conservation practices to reduce erosion and sedimentation.**
- **Continue effective woodland extraction and tree replacement provisions as part of the zoning process.**
- **Monitor the clean-up and reclamation of contaminated areas, such as Superfund sites or Brownfield sites.**
- **Maximize groundwater recharge.**
- **Seek to maintain interconnected corridors for wildlife.**
- **Protect a safe, long-term supply of water which is adequate for all land uses.**



Geology



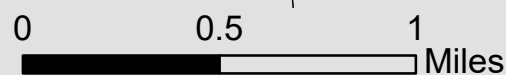
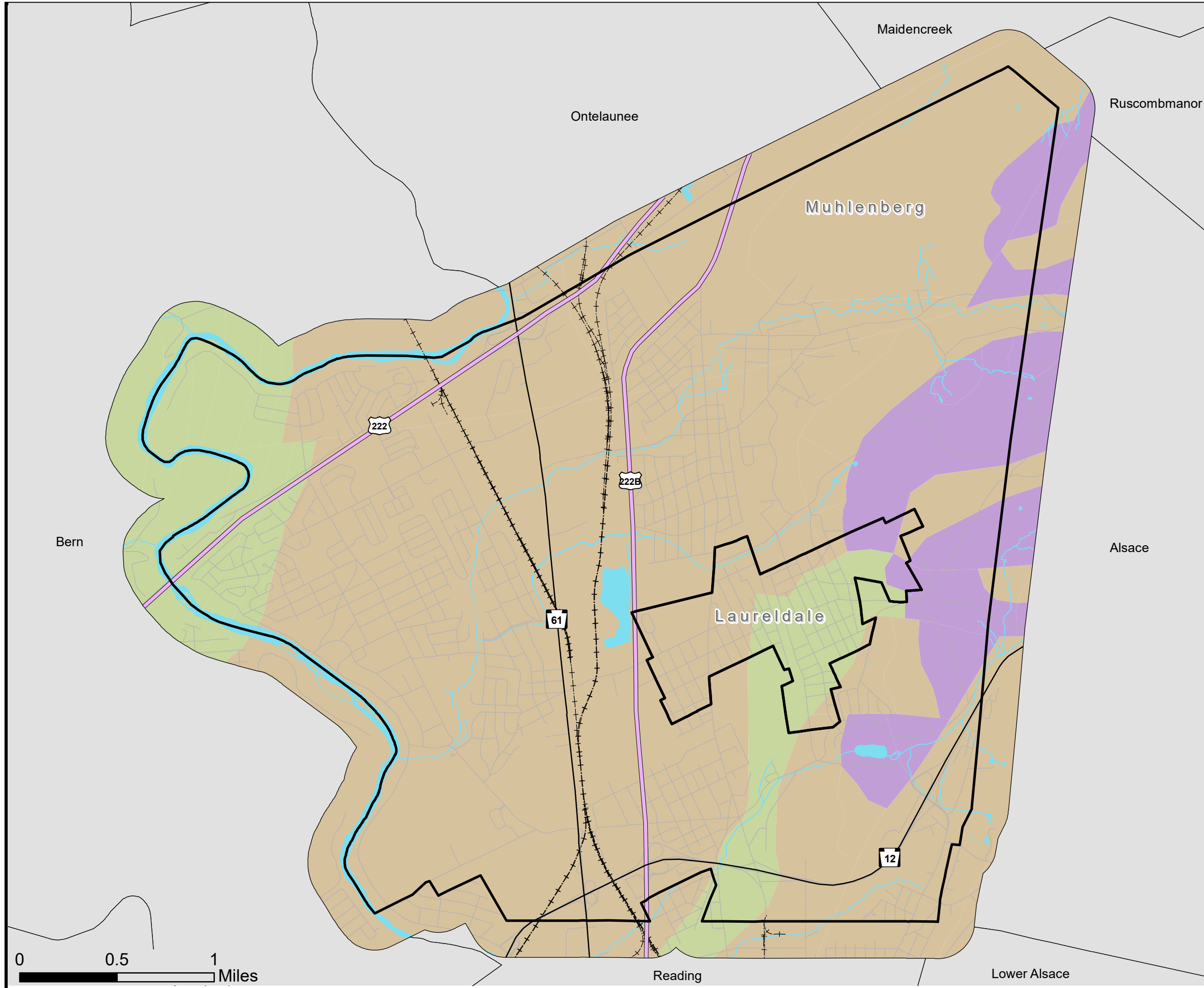
Geologic Period

-  Cambrian
-  Ordovician
-  Precambrian
-  US Route
-  State Route
-  Roads
-  Railroads
-  Streams and Water Bodies
-  Municipal Boundaries

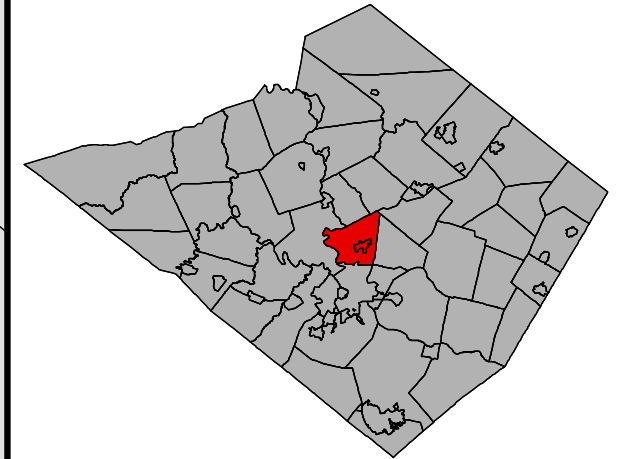
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Soils



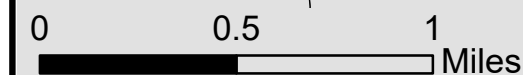
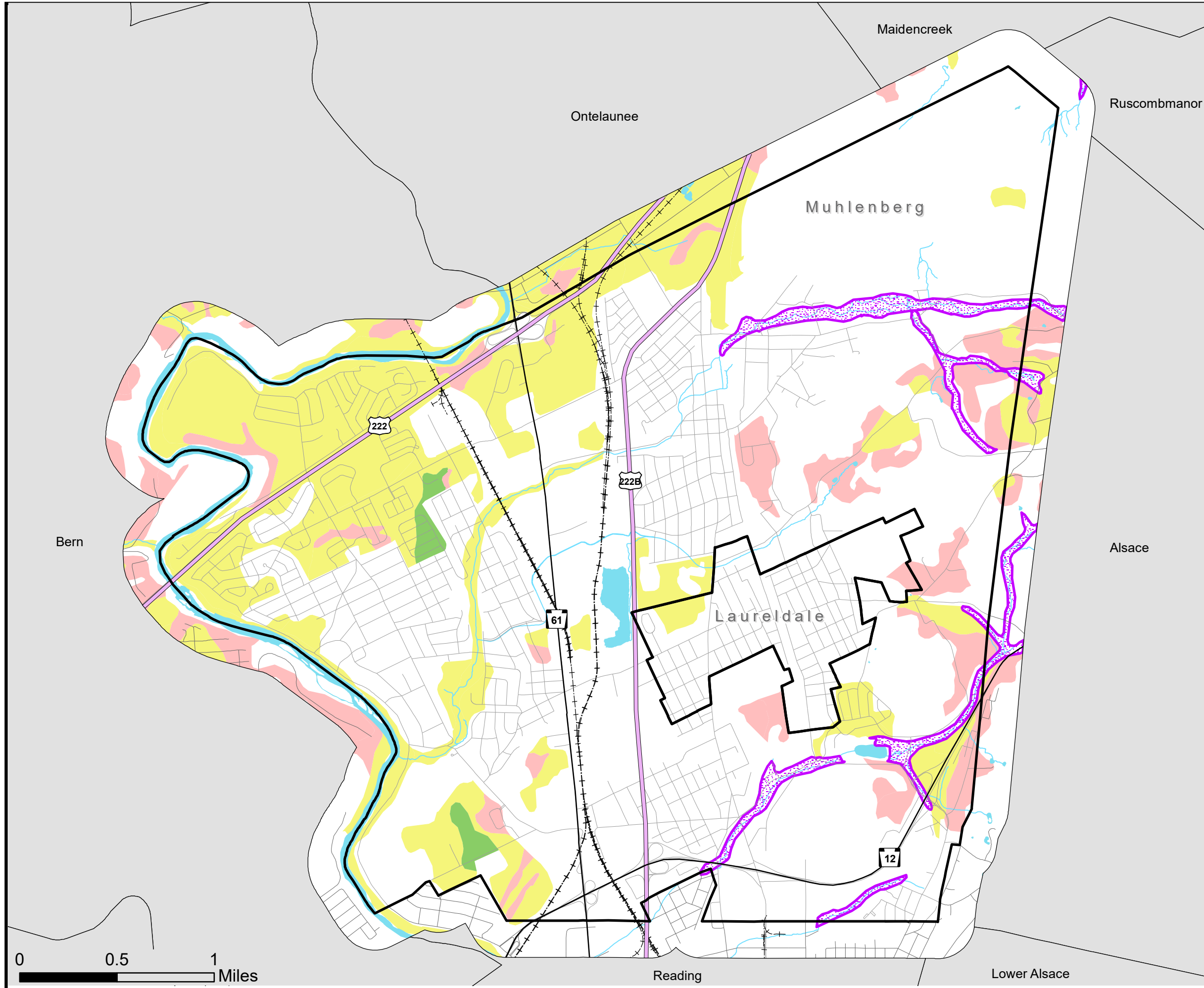
Legend

- Class 1 Soil
- Class 2 Soil
- Class 3 Soil
- Class 4-8 Soils
- Poorly Drained Soils
- US Route
- State Route
- Roads
- Railroads
- Streams and Water Bodies
- Municipal Boundaries

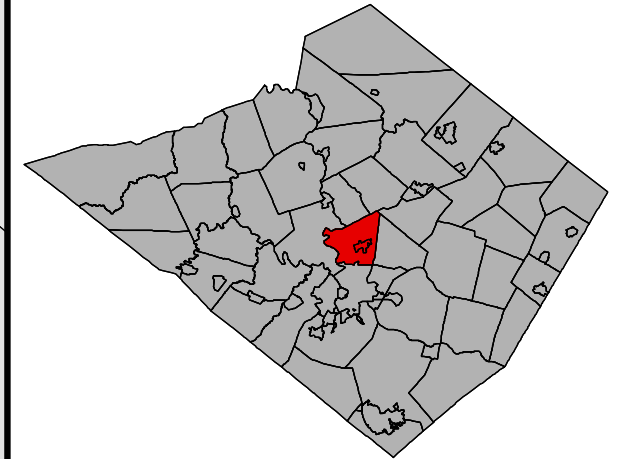
Source data: Berks County Planning Commission GIS, Berks County GIS/IS, Berks County Mapping, Berks DES, USDA NRCS September 2019

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Natural Resources



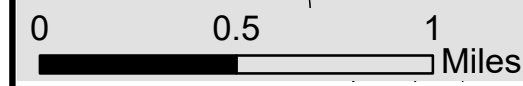
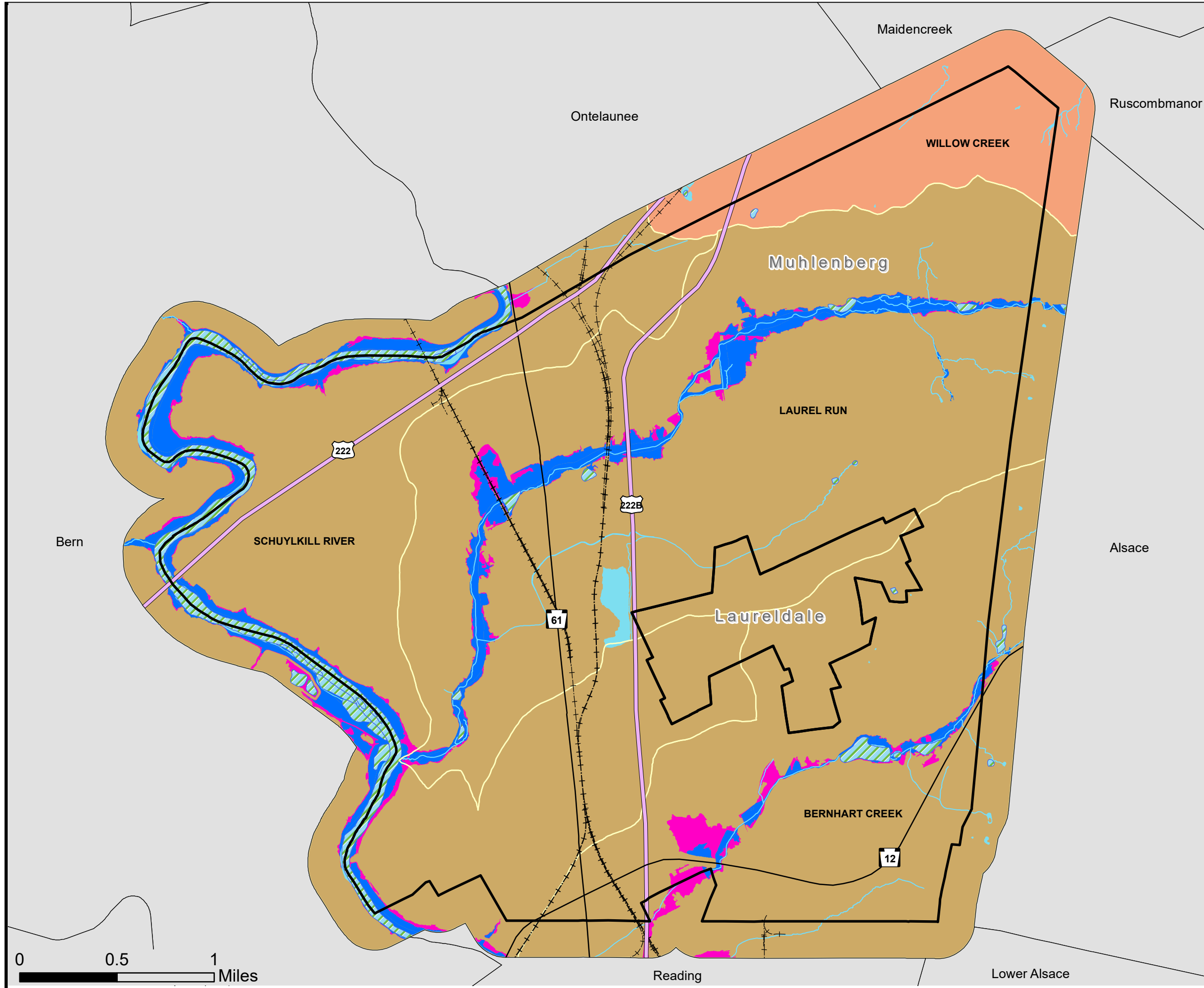
Legend

- Maiden Creek Watershed*
 - Schuylkill River Watershed*
 - Subwatersheds
 - 1% Floodplain
 - 0.2% Floodplain
 - Wetlands
 - US Route
 - State Route
 - Railroads
 - Streams and Water Bodies
 - Municipal Boundaries
- * Drains to Delaware River

Source data: Berks County Planning Commission GIS, Berks County GIS/IS, Berks County Mapping, Berks DES, FEMA, PSU, NWI

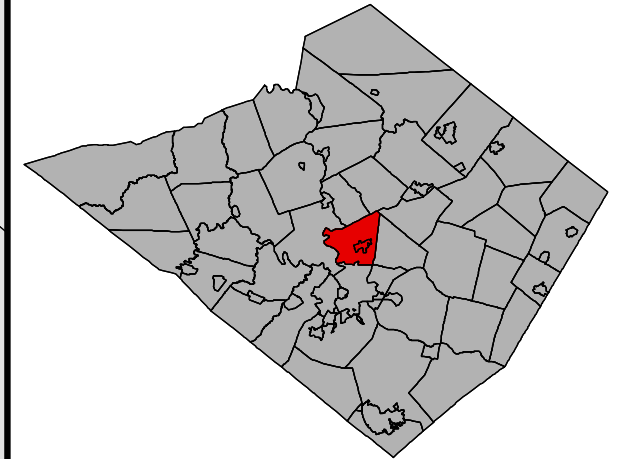
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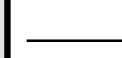
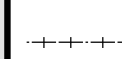




Muhlenberg Township and Laureldale Borough
Joint Comprehensive Plan Update: October 16, 2023

MS4 Areas



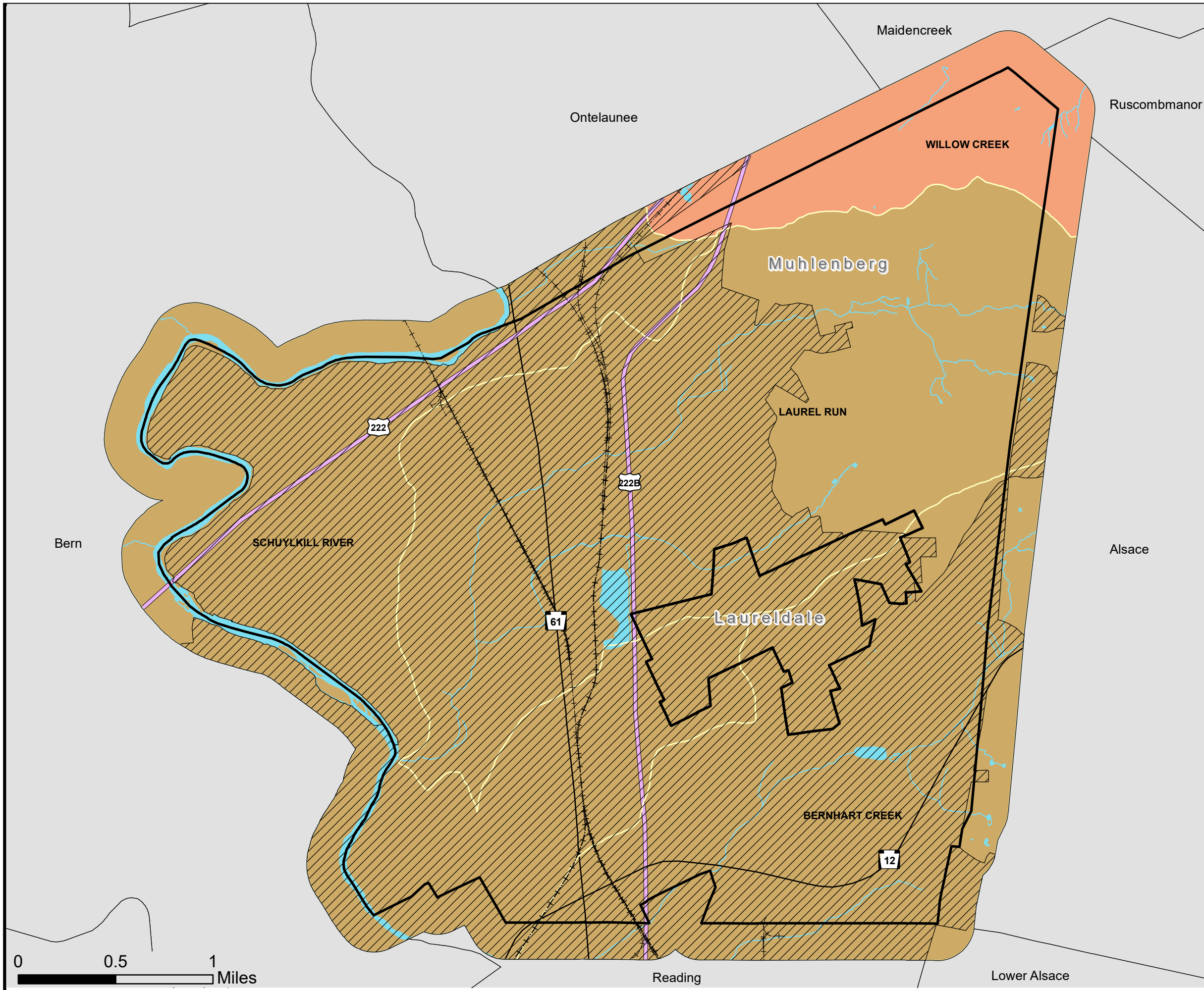
Legend

-  Urbanized Area 2010
 -  Maiden Creek*
 -  Schuylkill River*
 -  Subwatersheds
 -  US Route
 -  State Route
 -  Railroads
 -  Streams and Water Bodies
 -  Municipal Boundaries
- * Drains to Delaware River

Source data: Berks County Planning Commission GIS, Berks County GIS/IS, Berks County Mapping, Berks DES

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MULLENBERG

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6



Community Facilities And Services

COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES

Community facilities include parks, fire stations, municipal buildings, public schools, and similar facilities. Community services include police and fire protection, sewage and water services and municipal government.

Education

Muhlenberg Township and Laureldale Borough are served by the Muhlenberg School District. Muhlenberg School District is governed by a nine-member school board. Board members serve 4-year terms with no compensation. Meetings are held on the second Wednesdays of the month. In addition, Holy Guardian Angels Regional School is private school located in Muhlenberg teaching Pre-K – 8th grade. The Community Facilities and Recreation Maps – Figure 05 illustrates the location of the Muhlenberg-Laureldale planning region’s public and private school sites. The remainder of this section will focus upon conditions at the public schools within the region.

Presently, Muhlenberg School District employs the following grade format:

- Muhlenberg High School: Grade 10 through Grade 12
- Muhlenberg Junior High School: Grade 7 through Grade 9
- C.E. Cole Intermediate School: Grade 4 through Grade 6
- Muhlenberg Elementary Center: Kindergarten through Grade 3
- Muhlenberg Virtual School: Kindergarten through Grade 12

The following tabulates conditions at each of the Muhlenberg School District’s four classroom buildings:

SUMMARY OF MUHLENBERG SCHOOL DISTRICT FACILITIES

School Name	Year Built	Renovation Dates	Site Size (acres)	Grades Housed	2021 Enrollment
Muhlenberg High School	1972	2003	88.13*	10-12	1,063
Muhlenberg Middle School	1925	2000	88.13*	7-9	1,062
C.E. Cole Intermediate School	1950s	2008	88.13*	4-6	897
Muhlenberg Elementary Center	1960s	1996	88.13*	K-3	1,091
Total					4,113

*located on one campus

Source: Muhlenberg School District, PA Department of Education, Berks County Planning Commission



Included in enrollment numbers for each grade is a tuition-free online curriculum; Muhlenberg Virtual School is an extension of the Muhlenberg School District intended for students who excel in non-traditional learning environments. Students Kindergarten through Grade 5 attend virtual classes utilizing a Pennsylvania standards-aligned curriculum held by Imagine Learning Monday through Friday, while Grades 6 through 12 attend a flexible online classroom held by partners Edgenuity aligned with Common Core academic standards. Students are encouraged to participate and use all district resources and programs, events, and facilities, including guidance counseling, summer programs, libraries, sports, clubs, activities, field trips, scholarships, awards, and dances. Students can enroll at Reading-Muhlenberg Career and Technology Center simultaneously while enrolled in virtual schooling as well. Students earn a Muhlenberg School District diploma and are welcome to participate in commencement activities. Both curricula are tuition free and are approved by Muhlenberg School District with live teacher support.

In 2022, Muhlenberg Area School District, with the aid of consultants, engaged in a feasibility study that has identified the district is operating beyond its maximum capacity. Assuming a 15% increase in enrollment per year on average, the study identifies an increase of over 600 new students by the 2031-2032 school year. With these enrollment numbers in mind, several strategies for alleviating overcrowding have been presented, including additional buildings and/or wings on current buildings. All expansions are currently proposed on the existing district campus.

SCHOOL YEAR	ENROLLMENT TOTAL K -12
2011/2012	3,546
2016/2017	3,647
2021/2022	4,114
2026/2027	4,428
2031/2032	4,736

Source: Muhlenberg School District, Marotta/Main Architects

Keeping the ever-growing school district in mind, cooperative recommendations include:

- Muhlenberg School District could benefit from an improved process of residential development review. By learning of proposed developments early, the districts can better prepare for needed school expansion and bus routing.
- Each municipality within the Muhlenberg-Laureldale planning region should revise its subdivision and land development application requirements so that adequate and timely notification to the school district is assured. Similarly, the school district should allocate manpower and resources in order to be equipped to properly respond to such applications and provide meaningful feedback to the municipalities by coordinating development within the region with public school capacity.
- Finally, the school district should continue to cooperate with the municipalities in the delivery of parks and recreation opportunities, provided student use takes priority during the school year, adequate supervision is provided, and other administrative issues can be resolved. Muhlenberg School District has already contributed to the availability of parks and facilities within the Muhlenberg Laureldale planning region to the benefit of all residents and municipalities. This represents potential savings of millions of dollars to both municipalities who would otherwise need to fulfill this demand for the community.

Library Service

The Muhlenberg Community Library is located on Kutztown Road in Laureldale Borough. It is part of the Berks County Public Library System. The library was founded by the Junior Woman's Club of Muhlenberg in 1960, initially comprised of three mobile carts containing 300 books at the now defunct Wilson Sarig Elementary School. By 1991 it was the second largest library in the library system. Having had a number of locations within the former Borough of Temple and Laureldale Borough, the library finally settled at its present location at 3612 Kutztown Road in 1999, a building on the grounds of CE Cole Intermediate School leased initially for 20 years from Muhlenberg School District.

Public Water Service

Public water service is available throughout much of the Muhlenberg Laureldale region from the Muhlenberg Township Authority system with emergency supply connections from Reading Area Water Authority (RAWA). Muhlenberg Township Authority began in 1940. They draw their water from nine deep groundwater wells located throughout Muhlenberg Township. Their existing water system includes five booster pumping stations, six storage reservoirs, and about 112 miles of mains. The Authority system serves portions of Muhlenberg Township (including the former Borough of Temple), and portions of Laureldale Borough and Alsace Township, approximately 9,013 customers using an average of 3.477 million gallons per day. It has a Board comprised of five members. RAWA was introduced to Berks County in 1821 by the Reading Water company. The City of Reading purchased the water system in 1865, and the Maiden Creek Filter Plant was constructed in 1935, treating 40 million gallons of water per day from Lake Ontelaunee. An Authority was formed in 1994 with a governing body of seven Board members. It serves 125,000 people, including a portion of the Muhlenberg Laureldale area. Figure 07 depicts the location of water service areas within the region.

Sanitary Sewage Service and On-Lot Sewage Disposal Systems

All of Laureldale Borough and much of Muhlenberg Township is serviced by a public sanitary sewer system (shown on Figure 6). Upon the dissolution of the Laureldale Sewer Authority, the Borough took over responsibility for the lines contained within the borough as well as a pump station. Sewage is pumped directly to the City of Reading for treatment. Muhlenberg Township Authority also directly connects to the City of Reading where the sewage then is treated. Neither Laureldale nor Muhlenberg operate their own treatment facility. Muhlenberg has ten pump stations and over 462,000 feet of mains, nearly 16,000 of which are force mains. Another approximately 11,000 feet of mains is proposed within Muhlenberg, most of which could be found in a new residential development in the northwestern corner of the Township. Laureldale has over 92,000 feet of mains, 3,400 of which are force mains and one pump station.

Most properties in the region rely upon the municipalities' public sewer systems. However, approximately 500 properties, mostly on larger lots in the eastern border of Muhlenberg where topology has restricted urbanization, have on-lot septic systems. Public education is important to make sure that residents know how to properly take care of on-lot septic systems. Many residents may have relocated from suburban areas where they previously had public sewers. Of most importance, property-owners must understand the need to have their septic systems pumped regularly (typically at least once every three years). If a system is not pumped regularly, the drain field eventually will need to be replaced. Muhlenberg Township has a Sewage Enforcement Officer (SEO) who administers all on-site sewage disposal regulations through Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). All properties utilizing an on-lot septic system are required to have their systems pumped and inspection at least once every three years.

Recycling

Both municipalities have curbside pickup programs for their residents' recycling needs. Muhlenberg also encourages its residents to recycle plastic bags, wraps, and film using drop-offs outlined at plasticfilmrecycling.org. Additionally, Berks County provides several recycling programs at 1316 Hilltop Road Leesport, PA 19533 and hosts recycling events throughout the year. For more information, visit: <https://www.co.berks.pa.us/Dept/SWA/Pages/default.aspx>.

Emergency Services

Muhlenberg and Laureldale both have their own municipal police departments. The Laureldale Police Department is located in Laureldale Borough Hall and is comprised of a chief of police and patrol officers, four full time and six part time. Muhlenberg Police Department employs 32 officers in three divisions: patrol, criminal investigations, and administration. The administration oversees day to day operations, the criminal investigations divisions investigate more complex and time-consuming incidents, and the patrol division, the largest and most visible division of the department, are involved with responding to various calls for service as well as traffic enforcement among other duties.

The Muhlenberg Laureldale Region contains one EMS station, Muhlenberg Ambulance Association. It services Muhlenberg, Laureldale, and neighboring Alsace Township. The outfit was started in 1963 as a non-profit ambulance service by the Muhlenberg Lions Club, which still runs the Board of Directors presently. Funding for the group comes from their annual subscription drive, billing for their services, as well as financial support provided both by Muhlenberg Township and Laureldale Borough. The Association has four ambulances and is run by both volunteer and paid paramedics and EMTs.

Muhlenberg and Laureldale are primarily served by Central Fire Company and Muhlenberg Township Fire and Rescue. Central Fire Company No. 1, located in the Borough, has 19 members, eight who are certified at a minimum of Firefighter 1 and operate one engine and one engine tanker. The Company has been in service for the Borough since 1917; however, the current facility was built in 1964. Muhlenberg Township Fire and Rescue is the result of a 2020 merger between Temple Fire Company No. 1 (established 1910) and Goodwill Fire Company Stations 1 and 2 (established 1907). It is currently run by a paid fire chief with a volunteer staff.

These three volunteer-based organizations, like most in Pennsylvania, continually pursue the addition of more volunteers as current volunteers age out quicker than they are replaced. Continued efforts are needed to make sure that fire and emergency medical services are fully coordinated across municipal borders. It is essential that the emergency service providers continue to train together and coordinate the provision of the specialized vehicles and equipment, specialty trained volunteers and similar needs.

Parks and Recreation

Figures 07 and 08 show the recreation opportunities for the Region including state, municipal, nonprofit, private, and school (public and private) owned land. According to the Berks County Greenway, Park and Recreation Plan of 2007, both Muhlenberg and Laureldale had well above the recommended minimum acreage of parkland and recommended minimum acreage of active recreation based on projections for their 2020 projected populations. At the time the Plan was adopted, the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) recommended that most communities have 6.25 - 10.5 acres of active recreation land available for community use for every 1,000 persons.

The County has since adopted Greenway, Park, and Recreation Plan in December 2022. Since the previous Plan, NRPA has revised their recommendations to create a new dynamic plan based on several factors within a given municipality. This helps tailor a recreation plan that would be

more customized particularly to rural municipalities' needs that don't necessarily have uniform and tight population densities such as that within cities and the surrounding areas. NRPA offers a performance survey tool that a municipality can enter metrics such as agency size and budget, jurisdiction population and geography, and compare its performance to other peers. NRPA reports that in general a typical park and recreation agency offers one park for every 2,281 residents served, with 9.9 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. For more information on the performance survey tool, refer to <https://www.nrpa.org/publications-research/ParkMetrics/>.

While the amount of parkland is important, the distribution of park and programs throughout the municipalities is critical, and special attention should be given to neighborhoods lacking in amenities such as smaller neighborhood parks nearby. Continued efforts are needed to rehabilitate older recreation areas as well, particularly to make sure they meet modern safety standards, to add recreation in underserved higher density areas, and wherever practical, new developments should be required to include pedestrian connections to nearby parks, residential developments, and existing trails to greater increase access to these amenities. Ideally a resident should be able to walk or bicycle to a park that is suitable for informal recreation without having to cross a heavily traveled road within urbanized areas.

- Greater cooperation among the municipalities, school district and major non-profit recreation groups would be valuable in providing recreation facilities and services. Goals for this group should include:
- Updating basic data on the sizes of each recreation program and trends in their growth
- Identifying the greatest needs for recreation facilities based on actual use and current population trends
- Identifying opportunities to share or cooperatively provide recreation facilities and programs, particularly to meet times of peak demand and avoid potential over-use of facilities
- Identifying recreation programs that are needed but are currently not provided

The Region's park system does include a variety of active and passive facilities within its denser areas. Some notable recreational opportunities include Jim Dietrich, Riverside Basin (proposed), and Dominic Manzella Memorial Parks, and the Schuylkill River Trail (proposed) and Muhlenberg Rail Trail. Additionally, Muhlenberg School District has a playground and fields on their school campus.

More information on these parks can be found in the Natural Resources section of this document in addition to below:

Jim Dietrich Park- In 2021, the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association recognized Jim Dietrich Park as one of Pennsylvania's Great Public Spaces. The 121-acre park borders the Schuylkill River and includes a launch area for water recreation. Previously an apple orchard, Muhlenberg acquired the property in 1997, paying installments while the previous occupants continued to live on the property. In 2007 the Township completed a master site plan for the property; today the park includes a variety of sport fields, a short loop trail, pavilions, a dog park, as well as open space. The Muhlenberg Soccer Association, Lions Club. And Muhlenberg School District Junior Varsity teams play on these fields as well. The Township also hosts a variety of events on the property including a stop on the Schuylkill Sojourn and RiverFest. Residents and nonresidents can rent one of three pavilions or the Jim Dietrich house on the property for private events as well.

Riverside Basin Park- Part of the 2007 Master Plan along with Jim Dietrich Park, the 140-acre site was acquired from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania with a use restricted to recreation and other municipal uses. The majority of the acreage is comprised of earthen berms leftover from the desilting of the Schuylkill River in the 1950s. Including within this park system is a series of smaller parklands: Laurel Run Park, Pioneer Grove, and Kelly's Lock, as well as the Township's recreation building. The property contains approximately 0.58 miles of river frontage. Future plans for the site include plenty of natural areas interspersed with a variety of amenities such as playground equipment, a dog park, and all-purpose fields.

Dominic Manzella Memorial Park- Previously known as simply Laureldale Park or Laureldale Community Park, on August 13, 2007, the over 70-acre park was posthumously dedicated to longtime Laureldale mayor, Dominic Manzella, who had served the Borough for over 60 years. Its acreage is largely comprised of open space, but also contains the Laureldale Playground and walking track, the Veteran's Memorial, and a pavilion available for rental. The Borough has received grant funding and is currently in the process of updating the trail system in this park at the time of this study. Programming such as Sundaes in the Park, an annual food and entertainment event, are hosted here as well.

Rosedale Playground- This playground is located on a 3.78-acre parcel that faces both Rosedale Ave and Hawthorne Streets in Laureldale Borough. There are baseball facilities on location, a small building with bathroom facilities, and playground equipment among its amenities. At the time of the comprehensive plan study, the Borough has applied for grant funding to improve the park, proposing to repave as well as to install basketball nets and other assorted entertainment options. The Borough holds Fallfest at the Rosedale playground the end of September each year, inviting vendors, music, and family activities.

The Schuylkill River Trail (proposed) and Schuylkill River Water Trail- The SRT is a multiuse path managed by the Schuylkill River Greenways National Heritage Area with improvements underway through Muhlenberg Township. In 2022, the Township received \$140,000 for the development of a portion of the Schuylkill River Trail. The project will include construction of the trail from Kelly's Lock Park to Laurel Run Park, a trailhead, as well as landscaping, signage, and other related site improvements. This project was prioritized in both the Berks County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan of 2020 as well as the Berks County Greenway, Park, and Recreation Plan of 2007. Completing the trail gaps along the SRT is also a recommendation for the Metro Region in the proposed Berks County Greenway, Park, and Recreation Plan in progress.

Running mostly parallel to the SRT, the Schuylkill River Water Trail is a National Recreation Trail used by paddlers throughout the Commonwealth with three public access points in Muhlenberg Township. Throughout the year, events are organized celebrating the river that launch at Jim Dietrich Park including Muhlenberg Drift Jam and a portion of the Schuylkill River Sojourn. For more information on the Schuylkill River Trail or Schuylkill River Scenic Waterway and Water Trail, see the Natural Features section of this plan.

Muhlenberg Rail Trail- The Muhlenberg Rail Trail is approximately a 1.8-mile long relatively flat asphalt trail running north to south through residential and industrial areas from Mt. Laurel Road in Muhlenberg to Montrose Avenue near Prince Street in Laureldale Borough along the former corridor of East Penn Branch Railroad. It is a path that accommodates visitors of virtually any ability, and its central location is convenient for a large portion of the residents to utilize the resource for both recreation and active transportation. Surveys done for the Berks County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan in 2020 indicated a renewed interest in extending the length of the trail as well as the number of access points throughout the neighborhoods. Additionally, extending the trail south to Reading and North through Ontelaunee and Maiden creek Townships was identified as a priority in the Berks County Greenway, Park, and Recreation Plan of 2007 and is also identified as a priority trail gap connection in the County's proposed Greenway, Park, and Recreation Plan update. The northern extension of the trail is supported in the Maiden creek Open Space and Recreation Plan as well.

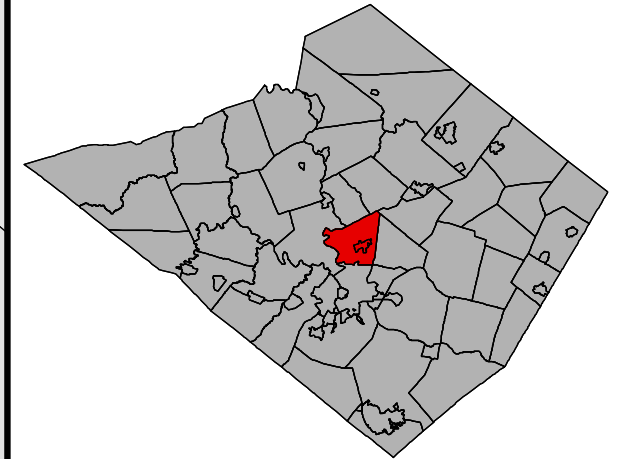
Community Facilities and Services Goals

- Provide high-quality community facilities and services in the most cost-efficient manner, including addressing needs for future growth and seek to provide public facilities and services on a regional basis to avoid duplication of efforts.
- Provide central water and sewage services in the most cost-efficient manner, with regular investments to provide reliable services.
- Encourage connecting areas with malfunctioning on-lot systems, areas with contaminated water supplies, and small privately owned sewer or water systems to existing sewer or water systems where economically and physically possible.
- The municipalities should maintain an up-to-date Sewage Facilities Plan (Act 537). This includes continuing the implementation of an On-Lot Disposal Ordinance in place that promotes the maintenance of on-lot septic systems.
- Municipalities should work with the Muhlenberg School District to adequately plan for increased demands on the district caused by future developments coming into the area.
- Coordination between municipalities to provide adequate emergency services.
- Assess the need for expanding emergency services such as additional paid personnel, apparatuses, or locations based on population, land use, and social trends.
- Continue to publicize the efforts and accomplishments of the various police, fire, and EMS services in the Region. Maintaining a positive image and goodwill within the community is essential for efficient, safe, and secure emergency response and plays an important role in fundraising efforts for these services.
- Notify police, fire, and EMS personnel of proposed subdivision and land development plans. Input from these organizations provides valuable insight during the planning phase of such projects.
- Continue to support Muhlenberg Area Ambulance Association financially. Currently both municipalities partially fund the Association which provides a critical role in the service's annual budget.
- Explore funding options for updating the plan recommendations the region's parks and recreation plans. Consider updating this as part of a joint recreation plan to maximize recreational opportunities for both municipalities' residents and avoid potential duplication of efforts.
- Continue to improve neighborhood parks and playgrounds to offer equitable access to outdoor recreation. Enhance recreational programming to ensure a mix of activities that appeal to all ages, cultures, and abilities. Encourage intergovernmental cooperation between the municipalities as well as a positive relationship with Muhlenberg School District and local community volunteer groups in order to meet these growing needs throughout the community.
- Enhance recreational programming to ensure a mix of activities that appeal to and can be enjoyed by whole families as well as individuals of all ages, cultures, and abilities. Explore collaborating with private and non-profit groups in providing park and recreation facilities, festivals, and entertainment and build upon the economic potential of recreational
















destinations and events.

- Plan for the increased use of new technologies in recreation areas such as e-bikes, EV charging stations, Wi-Fi connectivity, mobile app-based recreation games or QR code-based activities or information in order to expand services, increase safety, and attract and retain new generations of visitors into the future.
- Explore options for more efficient ways to address trash pickup at parks, particularly in those along the Schuylkill River that have become increasingly popular with guests.
- Complete where feasible a system of bicycle and pedestrian trails to provide vital links between existing recreation areas, commercial and residential developments, and school facilities.
- Continue to support the proposed connection of the Schuylkill River Trail gap along River Road through Muhlenberg.
- Continue to support proposed connections and/or extensions to the Muhlenberg Rail Trail where appropriate and feasible as identified in the Berks County Greenway, Park and Recreation Plan.
- Continue to promote the Schuylkill River Sojourn and recognize this event as a community function with special educational, recreational, historical, and cultural values as well as an opportunity for a tourism draw.

Community Facilities



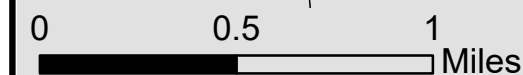
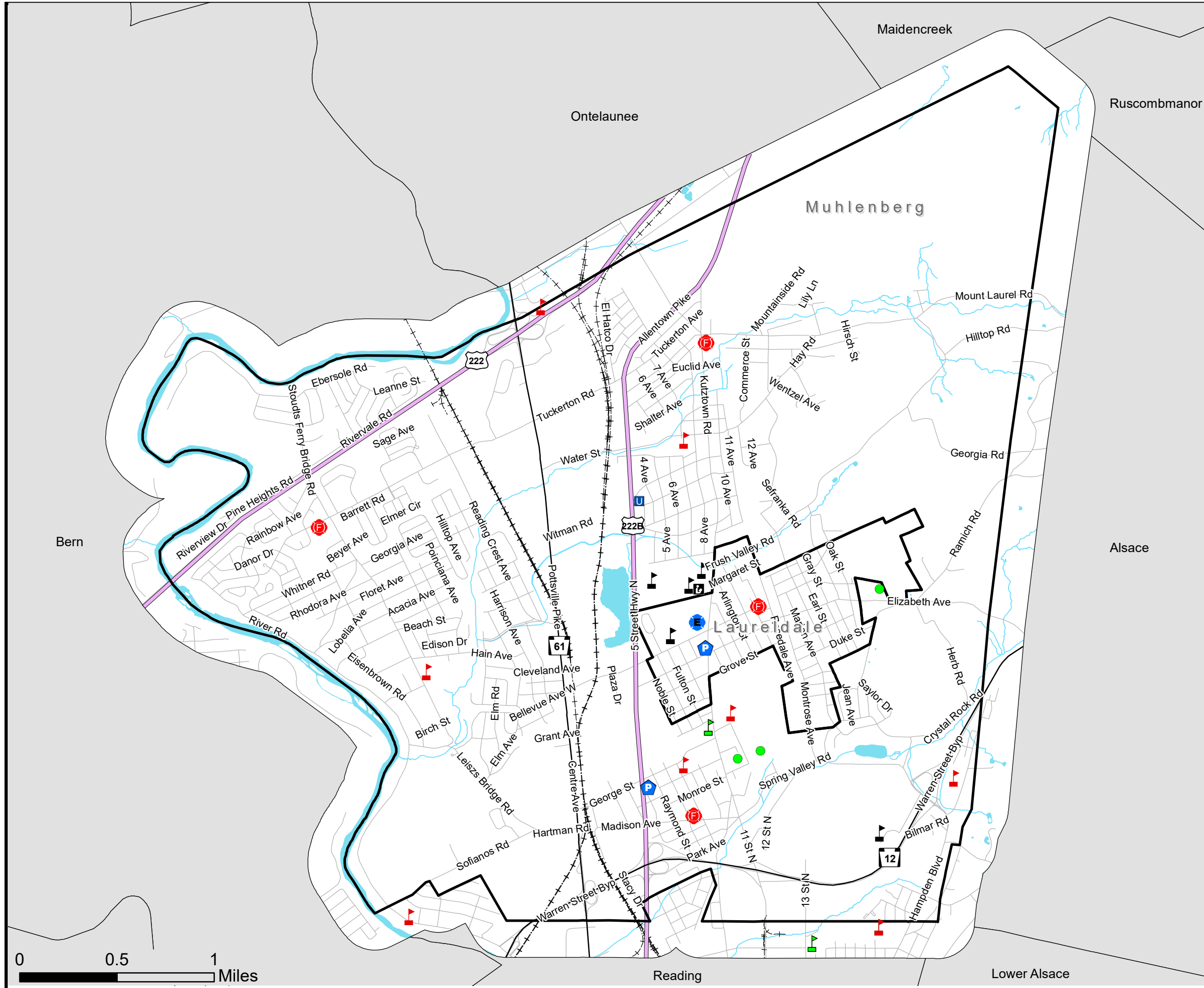
Legend

-  Library
-  Municipal and Police Building
-  Fire Station
-  EMS Station
-  Urgent Care
-  Senior Citizen Facilities
-  Higher Education
-  Public School
-  Private School
-  US Route
-  State Route
-  Roads
-  Railroads
-  Streams and Water Bodies
-  Municipal Boundaries

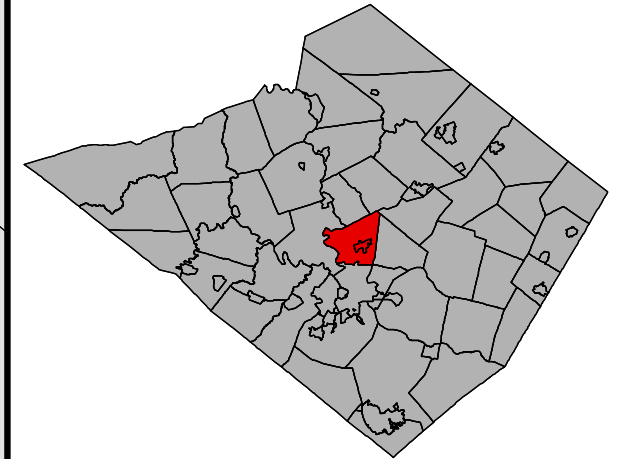
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Public Utilities



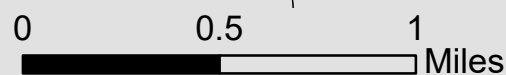
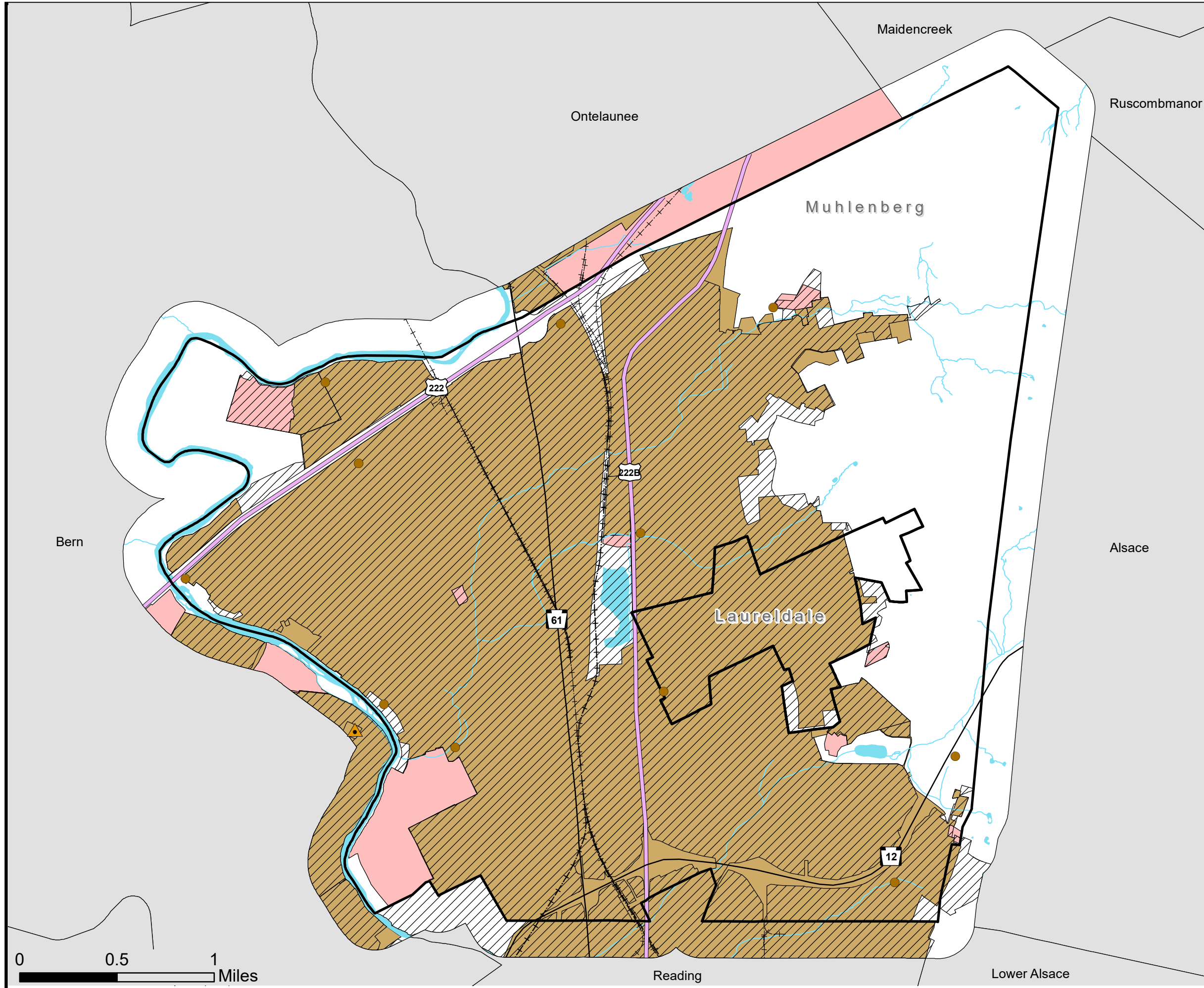
Legend

-  Existing Public Sewer Plant
-  Existing Sewer Pump Stations
-  Existing Public Water Service
-  Existing Public Sewer Service
-  Proposed Public Sewer Service
-  US Route
-  State Route
-  Railroads
-  Streams and Water Bodies
-  Municipal Boundaries

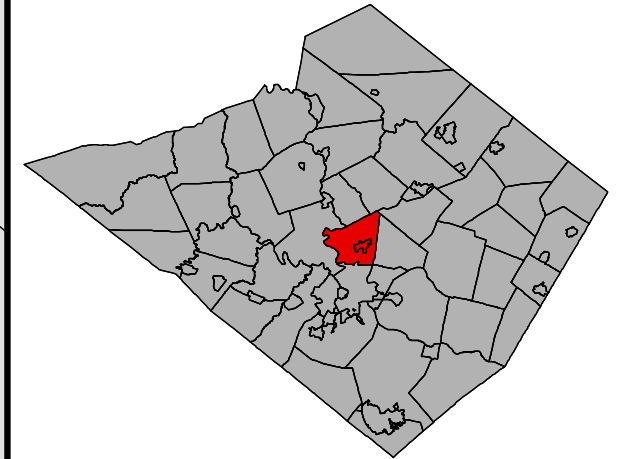
Source data: Berks County Planning Commission GIS, Berks County GIS/IS, Berks County Mapping, Berks DES

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Recreation Facilities



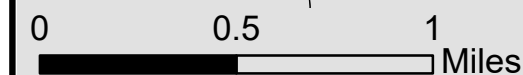
Legend

- State Recreation Land
- Municipal Recreation Land
- Nonprofit Recreation Land
- Private Recreation Land
- School Recreation Land
- Existing Trails
- US Route
- State Route
- Roads
- Railroads
- Streams and Water Bodies
- Municipal Boundaries

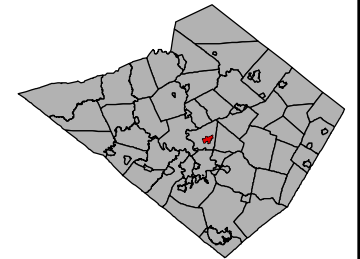
Source data: Berks County Planning Commission GIS, Berks County GIS/IS, Berks County Mapping, Berks DES

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Recreation Facilities Laureldale Borough



Legend

- State Recreation Land
- Municipal Recreation Land
- Nonprofit Recreation Land
- Private Recreation Land
- School Recreation Land
- Existing Trails
- US Route
- State Route
- Roads
- Railroads
- Streams and Water Bodies
- Municipal Boundaries

Source data:
Berks County Planning Commission GIS, Berks County
GIS/IS, Berks County Mapping, Berks DES

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Historical And Cultural Resources

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

The Muhlenberg-Laureldale region has a rich and diverse heritage that is reflected in the historic and cultural resources that are integrated within the existing land use patterns. The preservation of these historic and cultural resources is essential to maintaining a sense of place and identity within the community. Since these resources are not renewable, it is essential to recognize their value and promote a future land use plan that is based upon fundamental principles that preserve, protect, and enhance their presence within the community.

HISTORICAL PROFILES

Muhlenberg Township: The land that is now Berks County was sold to William Penn and his sons in a series of agreements dating between 1684 and 1736. The land now occupied by Muhlenberg Township was part of a deed released by the Lenni Lenape Indian Tribe in September of 1718. By 1737, the first European settlers, mainly of German and English descent, began to occupy and settle parts of Muhlenberg Township and the surrounding communities. By 1745, all of the land area that modern day Muhlenberg Township encompasses was initially incorporated as Alsace Township. At that time, Alsace Township included the areas now occupied by Laureldale Borough, Alsace Township, Lower Alsace Township, and Muhlenberg Township.

With the discovery of rich coal deposits in the central and northeastern portions of the state, the Schuylkill River became an important commercial and transportation asset. In 1815, the Schuylkill Navigation Company was established to construct a canal along the Schuylkill River between Philadelphia and Port Carbon, near Pottsville in Schuylkill County. The Schuylkill Canal project was completed in 1825 and spanned 106 miles with 92 locks. Of those 92 locks, 3 locks were located in Muhlenberg Township. The original Felix Dam was constructed as part of the project in 1823.

As a result of the completion of the Schuylkill Canal, commercial and industrial growth began to occur along the river. Mt. Laurel Furnace, located along Laurel Run along the base of Irish Mountain, began operations in 1836 as a local iron manufacturer. The increased growth also led to the establishment of the first post office in 1838 in the area currently known as Tuckerton.

In 1842, the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad began operating between Port Carbon and Philadelphia. This created intense competition between the Schuylkill Canal and the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad. Train service became much more reliable and efficient in the transportation of goods across the region than the Schuylkill Canal could provide. As a result, the Schuylkill Canal became obsolete and ceased operations in 1870.

The industrial and commercial opportunities that the transportation system provided spurred population growth within the region. By 1838, Hyde Park started to be developed as a small hamlet containing a combination of residential, commercial, public, and institutional uses. As a result of the population increase, conflict arose between the residents from the eastern and western portions of Alsace Township over taxes that were required to improve and maintain roads in their respective areas. Two separate commissions were established, one in 1849 and the other in 1850, to produce a report and survey that provided recommendations concerning the division. In 1851, Muhlenberg Township was officially established as a municipality within Berks County. The western portion of the original municipality is named after the Muhlenberg family which consisted of many well-known dignitaries dating back to the 10th century. Members of the Muhlenberg family were instrumental in settling the land known today as Muhlenberg Township. The eastern portion of the original municipality retained its name as Alsace Township.

Growth continued in Muhlenberg Township with the establishment of a one-room school (Schlottman School) located on Kutztown Road in 1851. In 1853, the Temple Hotel (previously known as Solomon's Temple) was established as a hotel and restaurant. And in 1854, the Gehret Mansion

(later known as the Lescher Hotel, Whit-Mar Inn, and Apple Inn) was established as a stagecoach shop. In 1999, this resource was demolished to make room for a Wawa Convenience Store. By 1860, the first decennial census of Muhlenberg Township noted a total population of 2,069 persons. By 1881, Tuckerton started to resemble a small village containing 30 dwellings, a church, tavern, general store, warehouse, and post office. By 1901, transportation infrastructure expanded to include trolley service initially from Reading to Temple and later extended from Temple to Kutztown. In 1906, the Goodwill Fire Company was organized as a volunteer group to provide fire protection service. Following along, the Temple Fire Company was organized in 1910 to provide fire protection service. Beginning in 1914, the Reading Fair relocated to the Reading Fairgrounds in Muhlenberg Township and was an annual event until 1978.

As time progressed, development continued in Muhlenberg Township. Dairy industries began to flourish, and manufacturing expanded with the Rosedale Knitting Mills commencing operation in 1914. Transportation improvements continued with the establishment of bus service along the 5th Street Highway from Reading to Temple in 1930. The need for public services grew to include the Muhlenberg Township Authority (1940), Muhlenberg Police Department (1948), and the Muhlenberg Area Ambulance Association (1963). By 1977, construction on the Warren Street Bypass (State Route 12) began, providing a vital transportation link with other major traffic routes. In 1978, the Reading Fairgrounds was sold to the developer of the Fairgrounds Square Mall. Later, the mall was sold to another developer with plans to redevelop the site. The original Fairgrounds Square Mall was demolished in 2020 but the anchor stores that were part of the mall were retained. In 2001, Muhlenberg Township celebrated its 150th anniversary as a municipality, and in 2003 the new Muhlenberg Township Municipal Building was completed.

Along the course of Muhlenberg Township's development, Temple Borough was officially established as a municipality in 1922. Following suit, Laureldale Borough was officially incorporated as a municipality in 1930. By 1998, representatives from Muhlenberg Township and Temple Borough began to discuss the feasibility of a municipal merger. On July 20, 1998, an ordinance approving a joint agreement to merge Temple Borough with Muhlenberg Township was agreed upon with the registered voters endorsing the municipal merger as part of the general election held on November 3, 1998. On January 1, 1999, Temple Borough became part of Muhlenberg Township and was renamed as the Village of Temple.

Laureldale Borough: Around 1900, Edward A. Lauter laid out the Rosedale housing development on the lands of the Henry Gass farm. There were 320 lots available for purchase by 1904, and the ease of access to Reading was a major selling point. In 1904, Charles Eisenbrown began to lay out the Laurel Hill Section. Three years later, the Rosedale Addition was laid out by M.E. Lauter who was a son of the developer of the original Rosedale section. Further development of the area followed much the same progress as Muhlenberg Township which the current Laureldale Borough was a part of at that time. As mentioned above, Laureldale Borough, named from a combination of "Laurel Hill" and "Rosedale", became the 29th borough in Berks County in 1930. The Borough consisted of 645 houses and encompassed 446 acres.

Similar to Muhlenberg Township, Laureldale Borough grew steadily over the years with early growth centered on the trolley line and westward to Kutztown Road. After World War II, development expanded to open lands west of Kutztown Road, and infill development occurred. The growth of the area continued with the expansion of public community facilities and utilities. The Muhlenberg School District, with facilities in both Muhlenberg Township and the Borough, has been prominent in the Borough since the 1850's. By the 1980's, about eighty percent of the land in the Borough was residential with little room for additional development within the existing neighborhoods. Local churches functioned as gathering places for the community with the most prominent being the Holy Guardian Angels Roman Catholic Church, Rosedale Reformed Church, and Calvary Lutheran Church. Industry also grew when Yuasa Battery Corporation began operation in the southern part of the Borough.

The Borough limits were reconfigured in 1992 when the Laurel Hill area was annexed to the Borough for use as a municipal park. This annexation increased the Borough's size by almost 73 acres to approximately 518 acres.

HISTORICAL SITES AND RESOURCES

The Muhlenberg-Laureldale region contains numerous buildings and sites that have historical and cultural significance. Local officials recognize the value of conservation, preservation, rehabilitation, and adaptive reuse of these historic features. Well maintained historic resources can preserve the unique identity of the Muhlenberg-Laureldale region, as well as provide educational and tourism opportunities.

To further identify the Region's specific historic resources, the Berks County Planning Commission Historic Resources Inventory was used. This inventory includes Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC), George Meiser IX (a local historian), Berks Nature, and other resource data. The inventory includes 59 different sites and 14 districts that have been identified from a local, state, and national perspective. The Region has 7 National Register Eligible historic resources. The National Register of Historic Places is a comprehensive listing of districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects of historical and cultural significance to the locality, state, or nation.

The following tables identify by municipality the sites in the Berks County Historic Resources Inventory with their respective historic name, data source, and National Register status. The Resource ID is the corresponding number found on the Historic Resources maps for each municipality.

List of Historic Resources

(See corresponding numbers on Historic Resources maps, Figures 09 and 10)
Muhlenberg Township

Resource ID	Historic Name	Source	National Register Status*
1270	Schuylkill Navigation Canal - Felix Dams	PHMC	Eligible
2778	Daniel Zacharias House	PHMC	Undetermined
2779	Eugene & Delores Plum Property	PHMC	Undetermined
2780	Fred Hartman Farm; Shalter House	PHMC	Ineligible
2781	Frimire Hotel / Post Office; Freymoyer's Hotel	Meiser	Unknown
2782	George Street Bridge	PHMC	Ineligible
2783	Gethsemane Cemetery	Meiser	Unknown
2784	Hinnershitz Church (Dedicated 1850); Good Shepherd Church (1927) - Union Church; Good Shepherd U.C.C. Church; Hinnershitz's Church	PHMC	Ineligible
2785	Bernhart Gristmill; John Bernhart Grist Mill	PHMC	Undetermined
2786	Kerling's Tavern; Jacob Kervin Tavern	Meiser	Unknown
2787	Kevin Painter Property	PHMC	Undetermined
2789	Laurel Run Aqueduct; Schuylkill Canal Aqueduct	PHMC	Undetermined
2790	Leisz's Bridge; Covered Bridge (wood); House adjacent - at 3100 River Road	PHMC	Undetermined
2791	Michael Adam Store; Adam's Store	PHMC	Undetermined
2792	Mildred Ford Property	PHMC	Undetermined
2793	Miller's Store	Meiser	Unknown

2794	Mount Laurel Furnace; Clymer Iron Co.; Temple Furnace	PHMC	Undetermined
2795	Nicholas Stoltzfus House	PHMC	Undetermined
2796	Philip R. Anewalt Property; Christopher H. Shearer, MD (1914-58)	PHMC	Undetermined
2797	Reading Belt Line - Warren Street ByPass Bridge	BCPC	Unknown
2798	Reading Railroad Freight & Passenger Depot; Pennsylvania Reading Railroad Freight & Passenger Depot; Schuylkill Division of Parr	PHMC	Ineligible
2799	Reading-Berks Fairground Site	Meiser	Unknown
2801	Schuylkill Navigation Lock#42; Ritz's Lock; Rothermel's Lock; Felix Dam Park; Schuylkill Canal	PHMC	Eligible
2802	Schuylkill Navigation Canal - Felix Dam; Dam #19	PHMC	Eligible
2803	Schuylkill Navigation Lock#43; Kelly's Lock, Lock #43	Meiser	Unknown
2804	Solomon's Temple Hotel; Temple Hotel	PHMC	Undetermined
2806	Spring Valley Hotel; Bernharts Post Office	Meiser	Unknown
2807	St Michael's Convent; Sacred Heart Villa	PHMC	Undetermined
2811	Temple Iron Furnace; Temple Furnace	PHMC	Undetermined
2812	Twin Churches Grace Alsace UCC; Alsace Lutheran Church; Alsace Union Church	PHMC	Undetermined
2818	Willow Bank Orchard	PHMC	Ineligible
5378	Tuckerton Hotel; Horning Inn	Meiser	Unknown
6431	Bridge	PHMC	Ineligible
6432	Beryllium Corporation	PHMC	Undetermined
6433	Mengel - Street Duplex	PHMC	Ineligible
6434	Street House	PHMC	Ineligible
6435	Laureldale Cemetery	PHMC	Ineligible
6436	Kurtz Property	PHMC	Ineligible
6437	Rightmyer -Glaser Duplex	PHMC	Ineligible
6438	C.E. Cole School	PHMC	Eligible
6439	Reading Armory	PHMC	Ineligible
6440	Semmel House	PHMC	Ineligible
6441	Bridge; E Bellevue Avenue Bridge	PHMC	Undetermined
6442	Bridge	PHMC	Ineligible
6443	Bridge	PHMC	Ineligible
6444	Bridge	PHMC	Ineligible
6445	Bridge	PHMC	Ineligible
6643	Schuylkill Canal (aggregate file)	PHMC	Undetermined
6839	Spillman Engineering Carousel	PHMC	Ineligible
7100	Bridge	PHMC	Ineligible
7101	Bridge	PHMC	Ineligible
7102	Sefranka Road Property	PHMC	Undetermined
7194	Bernhardt Mill Dam; Bernhardt Dam	PHMC	Ineligible

Laureldale Borough

Resource ID	Historic Name	Source	National Register Status*
2278	Belmont; C.A. Bennett Property	PHMC	Undetermined
2279	Village of Laureldale	PHMC	Undetermined
2281	Rosedale Sunday School	PHMC	Undetermined
2282	Rosedale United Church Of Christ	PHMC	Undetermined
6446	Muhlenberg Middle School	PHMC	Ineligible
6447	Luppold House	PHMC	Ineligible

List of Historic Districts

(See corresponding numbers on Historic Resources maps, Figures 09 and 10)

Muhlenberg Township

Resource ID	Historic Name	Source	National Register Status*
2808	Temple - Kutztown & Mt. Laurel Rds Section	PHMC	Undetermined
2810	Temple - Mt. Laurel Rd & Temple Ave Section	PHMC	Undetermined
2809	Temple - Leesport Ave Section	PHMC	Undetermined
2788	Village of Temple; King Solomon's Temple	PHMC	Undetermined
3107	Blue Mountain & Reading Railroad in Hamburg; Pennsylvania Railroad Schuylkill Division	PHMC	Ineligible
6393	Pennsylvania Railroad Schuylkill Valley Branch	PHMC	Ineligible
6377	Reading Railroad Main Line (Philadelphia to Port Clinton)	PHMC	Eligible
6335	Schuylkill Navigation Company Canal (Port Carbon to Philadelphia)	PHMC	Eligible
6380	Schuylkill River Desilting Project	PHMC	Eligible
6305	Philadelphia and Reading Railroad	PHMC	Eligible
6429	Pennsylvania Schuylkill Valley Railroad	PHMC	Undetermined
6393	Pennsylvania Railroad Schuylkill Valley Branch	PHMC	Ineligible

Laureldale Borough

Resource ID	Historic Name	Source	National Register Status*
2280	Laureldale--Frush Valley Rd Section	PHMC	Undetermined
6305	Philadelphia and Reading Railroad	PHMC	Eligible

***National Register Status Defined**

Listed: Historical site/district is listed on the National Register.

Eligible: Historical site/district is considered eligible for the National Register according to the PA State Historic Preservation Office.

Ineligible: Historical site/district is considered not eligible for the National Register according to the PA State Historic Preservation Office.

Undetermined: The PA State Historic Preservation Office has record of the historical site/district, but it has never been evaluated to determine if the site/district should or should not be considered for the National Register of Historic Places.

Unknown: This is not a National Register Status. This status signifies a historical site/district identified by George Meiser, IX or surveys returned to the Berks County Planning Commission that are not identified in the National Register database or by the PA State Historic Preservation Office but are still historically significant to Berks County.

State Grants for Preservation of Historic Resources

The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) was established in 1945 to preserve, interpret, and collect information on Pennsylvania's historical resources. PHMC provides guidance and grant opportunities for preservation planning through a variety of options. Prospective applicants may determine how PHMC's multiple funding opportunities can best meet their needs, the needs of their constituents, and can best serve the people of Pennsylvania. Grant programs are available for nonprofit organizations and local governments while tax credits are available for owners of certified historic buildings in income producing use. Guidelines and information on the various grant types and tax credits can be found by visiting PHMC's website at <https://www.phmc.pa.gov/Preservation/Grants-Funding/Pages/default.aspx>.

Historical and Cultural Resources Planning

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has enacted the following two (2) laws, which provide the legal foundation for municipalities to protect and preserve historical resources:

Pennsylvania Act 167: The Pennsylvania Historical District Act (PA Act 167 of 1961) authorizes municipalities to establish local historical districts in an effort to protect and preserve the historic and architectural character through regulations for the erection, reconstruction, alteration, restoration, demolition, or razing of building or structures within the historical district. The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) must certify the creation of the historical district and the municipalities are required to appoint a Historical Architectural Review Board (HARB) to advise the local governing body of building or construction activity within the historical district.

Pennsylvania Act 247: The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (PA Act 247 of 1968, as amended) authorizes municipalities to use zoning regulations to protect and preserve places of historical resources. The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code specifically provides for the regulation of places having historical, architectural, or patriotic interest or value to the community. Historic preservation zoning provisions may be applied to specific sites within a historic overlay zone. Special permits and review procedures may also be established by the municipality.

Historical and Cultural Resources Goals

- Explore and identify the remaining historic, architectural, and cultural resources of the Muhlenberg-Laureldale region.
- Determine the role municipalities should play in historic preservation through land use ordinances, incentives, and regulations, and efforts to create historic districts and historic overlay zoning.
- Encourage adaptive reuse of historic structures where appropriate and discourage inappropriate development in the historic areas of the Region.
- Consider the creation of trails to link historic sites throughout the Region.
- Promote the resources of the Region to encourage cultural heritage tourism.
- Foster appreciation of the role of the Schuylkill River in the history and culture of the area and foster an appreciation of the Pennsylvania Dutch heritage.



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Economic Development



ECONOMY

The health of the Region's economy has an obvious, major impact on the overall welfare of the community. A healthy economy provides not only needed goods and services, but employment opportunities and tax revenues, which pay for public facilities and services. There are a number of measures of the health of a community's economy, among them the employment rate, the tax base, and the diversity of the local economy.

Berks County, as well as the communities in the planning area, share a unique geographic location. Two major routes bisect the region, Route 222 which links the region to Allentown and New York City via Interstate 78 to the north and the City of Lancaster to the west and State route 61 linking the area to the cities of Pottsville and Reading. Because of this location and the availability of the infrastructure to efficiently move goods and services the planning area, much like other similar locations within Berks County, has become a desirable area for the warehousing industry.

From the area, businesses can reach more than 35% of the United States population and 50% of Canadian customers within a one-day drive. The region, just like the remainder of Berks County, relies heavily on the manufacturing sector for employment.

The Berks County Economy

The two municipalities in the planning area are just one part of the almost \$18 billion-dollar Berks County economy which, by output in dollars, ranks eighth out of the 18 metropolitan areas in Pennsylvania. The county's manufacturing and finance industries are the largest sector contributors to GDP. Overall, service producing industries account for 65% of the total County GDP, goods producing industries, 25%, trade 10%, government 9%.

An active working-age population is a critical component to support economic growth, and the labor force participation rate – calculated as the percentage of the civilian population 16 years or older who have a job or are actively looking for one – provides a helpful measure of this activity and the health of the region's economy.

According to the U. S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2020 Berks County had a labor force of 211,486 people, of which 191,443 (or 90.5%) were currently employed and 20,043 (or 9.5%) were unemployed. The County has a labor participation rate of 65.3%, higher than the state level of 62.8%. (This means that out of those who are 16-64 years of age in the County, a little over 65% are actively working or seeking employment and 34% are not employed nor seeking employment).

**Change in Real GDP by PA Metro Area Between 2001 and 2020
(millions of chained 2012 dollars)**

Ranked by GDP Output in 2020

Metropolitan Area	2001 \$	2020 \$	# Change	% Change
Philadelphia	307,062	382,410	75,348	24.5%
Pittsburgh	105,760	136,338	30,578	28.9%
Allentown/Bethlehem/Easton	42,922	40,885	-2,037	-4.7%
Harrisburg/Carlisle	27,325	34,927	7,602	27.8%
Lancaster	21,399	25,958	4,559	21.3%
Scranton/Wilkes-Barre/Hazleton	20,381	23,974	3,593	17.6%
York/Hanover	14,801	18,531	3,730	25.2%
Reading	14,714	17,992	3,278	22.3%
Erie	10,188	10,149	-39	-0.4%
State College	5,427	7,697	2,270	41.8%
East Stroudsburg	4,638	6,513	1,875	40.4%
Williamsport	4,061	5,666	1,605	39.5%
Lebanon	3,807	5,551	1,744	45.8%
Chambersburg/Waynesboro	3,989	5,439	1,450	36.3%
Altoona	4,608	5,309	701	15.2%
Johnstown	4,495	4,281	-214	-4.8%
Bloomsburg/Berwick	3,163	3,992	829	26.2%
Gettysburg	2,591	3,371	780	30.1%
Pennsylvania	544,790	683,773	138,983	25.5%

Source: U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis

Note: The use of unchained dollars adjusts real dollar amounts for inflation over time so that numbers from different years can be compared

Incomes

The median household incomes in the planning area differ between the municipalities. Laureldale Borough has the lowest median household income out of the two municipalities. Both of the municipalities in the planning area saw median household incomes grow between 2010 and 2019. Muhlenberg Township had the largest change between 2010 and 2019 in median household income – 22.2%. Except for the Laureldale, the median household incomes for Muhlenberg Township are above state and county averages.

Median Household Incomes (Inflation Adjusted)

Municipality	2010	2019	% Change
Laureldale	\$50,951	\$54,483	6.9%
Muhlenberg	\$55,132	\$67,389	22.2%
Berks County	\$53,470	\$63,728	19.2%
Pennsylvania	\$50,398	\$61,744	22.5%

Source: U.S. Census, 2006-2010 and 2015-2019 American Community Survey (DP03)

Household Income Distribution

In both municipalities, the majority of households have incomes from \$50,000 to \$74,999, which is consistent, albeit higher, than county and state levels. Of note, however, is that Muhlenberg Township has a slightly higher percent of households making between \$100,000 and \$149,999 than the county and state.

Household Income Distribution by Percent of Total Households				
Income Group	Laureldale	Muhlenberg	Berks	PA
Less than \$10,000	3.2	3.9	5.2	6.1
\$10,000 to \$14,999	1.0	4.5	3.8	4.3
\$15,000 to \$24,999	6.0	6.1	8.3	9.3
\$25,000 to \$34,999	16.0	7.2	9.0	9.2
\$35,000 to \$49,999	17.8	11.4	12.6	12.3
\$50,000 to \$74,999	26.1	23.8	18.3	17.6
\$75,000 to \$99,999	13.6	16.9	14.0	13.1
\$100,000 to \$149,999	13.4	19.2	17.0	15.2
\$150,000 to \$199,999	2.4	5.4	6.8	6.4
\$200,000 or more	0.5	1.6	4.9	6.6
Median Income	\$54,483	\$67,389	\$63,728	\$61,744

Source: U.S. Census, 2015-2019 American Community Survey (DP03)

Sources of Household Income

Most households in the planning area generate income by wage and salary earnings from employment. In the Municipalities, the higher number of households reporting income from social security and retirement shows an older, retiring population as regular payments from social security, pensions and retirement savings are an important income source for older individuals.

Households in Laureldale report slightly more income from transfer payments such as cash/public assistance and food stamps. While the borough is below county and state levels in regard to total income generated by food stamps/SNAP, cash/public assistance figures are higher than both county and state numbers. It could be an indication that there are households in the borough that may be having difficulty making ends meet.

Household Income Sources by Percentage				
Income Group	Laureldale	Muhlenberg	Berks	PA
Earnings	82.5	77.6	77.4	75.4
Social Security	38.5	37.4	35.1	35.2
Retirement	26.2	30.9	22.6	22.4
Supplemental Security	6.9	3.3	5.6	5.8
Cash/Public Assistance	4.2	2.8	2.6	3.2
Food Stamps/SNAP	11.1	8.7	13.2	13.3

Source: U.S. Census, 2015-2019 American Community Survey (DP03)

EMPLOYMENT

In each of the municipalities, the unemployment level for teenage workers (ages 16-19) and college age workers (20-24) is relatively high and can skew numbers. If we remove those age groups from the analysis, the age bands with the highest unemployment in each municipality are shown below:

Municipality	Age Band	Unemployment Rate %
Laureldale	25-29	15.8
Muhlenberg	55-59	4.9

Source: U.S. Census, 2015-2019 American Community Survey (S2301)

Resident Employment Profile

Shown below is data on the age of the workforce in each municipality and the types of industries that residents ages 16 and older are employed in. Most residents in the planning area are employed in the manufacturing industry. The health care and social assistance category employs the second largest number of residents in the planning area.

Resident Employer Profile - Workers 16 and Older - 2019				
Type	Laureldale		Muhlenberg	
	#	%	#	%
Total Resident Workers	2,090		10,122	
Age 29 or younger	356	17.0%	1,541	15.2%
Age 30 to 54	610	29.2%	2,811	27.8%
Age 55 or older	225	10.8%	1,067	10.5%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	7	0.3%	67	0.7%
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	0	0.0%	32	0.3%
Utilities	24	1.1%	290	2.9%
Construction	173	8.3%	346	3.4%
Manufacturing	339	16.2%	2,359	23.3%
Wholesale Trade	82	3.9%	259	2.6%
Retail Trade	258	12.3%	1,441	14.2%
Transportation and Warehousing	165	7.9%	296	2.9%
Information	78	3.7%	52	0.5%
Finance and Insurance	80	3.8%	398	3.9%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	8	0.4%	190	1.9%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	92	4.4%	301	3.0%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	7	0.3%	0	0.0%
Administration & Support, Waste Management	64	3.1%	717	7.1%
Educational Services	214	10.2%	713	7.0%
Health Care and Social Assistance	282	13.5%	1,559	15.4%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	45	2.2%	112	1.1%
Accommodation and Food Services	82	3.9%	495	4.9%
Other Services (excluding Public Administration)	60	2.9%	285	2.8%
Public Administration	30	1.4%	210	2.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2015-2019 American Community Survey (S2403 & B23001)

Mean Hours Worked at a Job

Residents in the planning area work a nearly 40-hour week on average. Declines in hours worked could be due to retirements, underemployment, or unemployment. Full time employment is defined as working 35 hours or more per week. Residents in Laureldale Borough saw a decline in the hours worked at their jobs between 2010 and 2019 while residents in Muhlenberg saw a small increase. Overall, Berks County saw one tenth of a percentage point increase in hours worked between 2010 and 2019.

Mean Usual Hours Worked				
Municipality	2010	2019	Difference	% Change
Laureldale	40.1	38.3	-1.8	-4.5%
Muhlenberg	39.0	39.9	0.9	2.3%
Berks County	38.6	38.7	0.1	0.3%
Pennsylvania	38.4	38.6	0.2	0.5%

Source: U.S. Census, 2006-2010 and 2015-2019 American Community Survey (B23020)

Commute Times

In the two municipalities the residents work relatively close to home. The percentages of residents that commute less than ten miles and between ten and 24 miles to their jobs are evenly distributed. Muhlenberg Township has a greater percentage of resident workers that travel greater than 50 miles to their place of employment.

Percent of Resident Workers Who Commute to Work (in miles) in 2019				
Municipality	Less than 10	10 to 24	25 to 50	50 +
Laureldale	66.3%	12.7%	13.2%	7.7%
Muhlenberg	52.9%	13.8%	18.1%	15.1%
Berks County	50.8%	23.7%	15.0%	10.6%

Source: U.S. Census LEHD, 2019

Percent of Resident Worker Travel Time to Work in Minutes				
Municipality	Less than 10	10 to 24	25 to 59	60 +
Laureldale	15.5	50.7	29.9	3.9
Muhlenberg	17.0	57.3	21.3	4.2
Berks County	12.8	46.7	32.4	8.0

Source: U. S. Census, 2015-2019 American Community Survey (S0802)

Employment Inflow and Outflow

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2019 Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) data 15,647 people come into the planning area to work while 11,529 leave the planning area for employment, making the area a net importer of labor. 1,459 people both live and work in the planning area.

This is inconsistent with Berks County as a whole, which has more residents leave to work than those from surrounding counties who come into Berks County for employment.

Worker Flow in 2019				
Municipality	In to Work	Staying to Work	Out to Work	Difference
Laureldale	973	48	2,037	-1,064
Muhlenberg	14,674	1,411	9,492	5,182
Region	15,647	1,459	11,529	4,118
Berks County	69,810	115,259	88,477	-18,667

Source: U.S. Census LEHD, 2019

Top Industries in the Planning Area

Laureldale has 1,021 jobs inside the borough with slightly over 25% of those jobs in manufacturing businesses.

Distribution of All Jobs in the Municipality	
Laureldale	
Total Jobs	1,021
Industry	% of Total Jobs
Manufacturing	25.5%
Administration and Support, Waste Management and Remediation	21.1%
Educational Services	18.4%
Health Care and Social Assistance	8.6%
Retail Trade	7.6%
All Others	16.4%

Source: U.S. Census LEHD, 2019

Unlike Laureldale, Muhlenberg Township has the largest percentage of their 16,085 jobs in retail trade. Manufacturing is a close second in terms of type of jobs workers are employed in the Township.

Distribution of All Jobs in the Municipality	
Muhlenberg	
Total Jobs	16,085
Industry	% of Total Jobs
Retail Trade	16.3%
Manufacturing	14.6%
Administration and Support, Waste Management and Remediation	12.7%
Educational Services	10.4%
Wholesale Trade	7.4%
Accommodation and Food Services	7.2%
All Others	30.5%

Source: U.S. Census LEHD, 2019

Top Employers in Berks County

Listed below are the top 20 employers in Berks County as of 2021. Walmart, Amazon, Boscov's Inc., and the Berks County Intermediate Unit have facilities located within the planning area.

Top 20 Employers in Berks County - 2010 to 2021 and Net Change in Employment				
Ranked by Number of Employees in 2021				
Company	Industry Type	2010 Employees	2021 Employees	Change
East Penn Manufacturing Company	Manufacturing	5,800	7,908	2,108
Tower Health (formerly Reading Hospital)	Health Care and Social Assistance	6,877	7,206	329
Walmart Stores	Retail	1,786	2,300	514
Penske Truck Leasing	Rental and Leasing	1,208	2,253	1,045
Reading School District	Education	2,583	2,250	-333
Penn State Health St. Joseph Medical Cntr.	Health Care and Social Assistance	1,525	2,177	652
Berks County Government	Government	2,494	2,125	-369
Amazon	Retail	*	2,000	*
Carpenter Technology Corporation	Manufacturing	2,040	1,878	-162
Wilson School District	Education	1,150	1,541	391
Boscov's Inc.	Retail	1,400	1,485	85
Redner's Markets Inc.	Retail	1,411	1,448	37
Pennsylvania Government	Government	1,800	1,338	-462
Berks County Intermediate Unit	Education	1,270	1,252	-18
Giant Food Stores	Retail	1,080	1,151	71
Inperium Inc. (Apis Services)	Health Care and Social Assistance	*	1,085	*
Ashley Furniture Industries, Inc.	Manufacturing	*	990	*
U.S. Government	Government	1,200	990	-210
Boyertown School District	Education	1,075	945	-130
Kutztown University	Education	1,075	890	-185

Source: Reading Eagle, Berks County Planning Commission
The * denotes a company that was not ranked in the top 20 in 2010; the NR denotes Not Reported

TAX BASES

From the perspective of municipal administration, the tax base drives the ability to invest in amenities and provide quality professional services that your residents expect. From a resident's perspective, tax burden influences where people buy homes, whether they reinvest in property and where they develop businesses. The ability to raise revenue to provide infrastructure and services is affected by the tax base. The existing and future real estate of the municipality provides opportunities and constraints for maintaining and attracting homeowners, businesses, and jobs. Overall, the key to economic stability or growth is to optimize the tax base by making every acre of land as productive as it can be without compromising community wants and needs or the natural/ environmental resources in the community.

The Pennsylvania State Tax Equalization Board (STEB) provides the information on the Berks County and municipal tax bases that will be discussed in this section of the economy chapter. STEB's primary role is to determine, on an annual basis, the total market value of taxable property in all 67 counties and 2,561 municipalities in the state. This data is primarily used in the disbursement of school funds to the state's 501 school districts.

Berks County Planning Commission staff uses the STEB data to analyze tax base trends. Annually collected for every county, it allows us to analyze multi-year trends at both the municipal and county levels. We wanted to see if the municipal tax bases genuinely expanded between 2006 and 2020, so we adjusted all dollar figures to constant dollars, accounting for inflation. We do this because over time, inflation gives a false picture of monetary growth. We also have broken out the municipal tax base into several categories. The 2006 year is a good year for this analysis, as it is pre-recession.

In the two municipalities, the market value and the assessed value of the tax base has increased or remained stagnant. Laureldale Borough saw very little change in the assessed value of their tax base. There are three primary factors, combined, that drive this incongruence. One, Berks County has not done a reassessment since 1994. The longer the period between reassessments generally means less of the "market" value of the base will be collected over time. Secondly, any number of successful reassessment appeals further decreases that assessed tax base. Thirdly, when property values decline, the tax base upon which the tax is levied shrinks. Property values declined substantially in Berks County due to the 2007-2009 recession and have been slow to rebound to the 2006 levels. Although, times are constantly changing and there has been a recent increase in home prices that could ultimately impact property values. However, the data is currently not yet available to support this trend.

Laureldale Borough

In 2006, the borough was collecting taxes on a little over 100% of the market value of its tax base. However, by 2020, this has declined to roughly 77%.

Market Value of Tax Base - 2006 and 2020				
Municipality	2006	2020	\$ Change	% Change
Laureldale	\$135,986,000	\$176,496,000	\$40,510,000	29.8%
Assessed Value of Tax Base - 2006 and 2020				
Municipality	2006	2020	\$ Change	% Change
Laureldale	\$136,626,100	\$136,631,900	\$5,800	0.0%
Tax Collection on Market Value of Tax Base				
Municipality	2006	2020	% Change	
Laureldale	100.5%	77.4%	-22.9%	

Source: Pennsylvania State Tax Equalization Board Land Use and Market Value Reports: 2006 and 2020

The borough saw very little growth in any of the tax base sectors. The 2006 and 2020 borough tax bases are nearly identical. Residential units make over ¾ of the borough's tax base. The Borough has also lost some of its commercial tax base during this timeframe.

Percentage Breakdown of County Tax Base by Category						
2006	Residential	Lots	Industrial	Commercial	Agriculture	Land
Laureldale	84.6%	0.5%	5.7%	9.1%	0.0%	0.0%
2020	Residential	Lots	Industrial	Commercial	Agriculture	Land
Laureldale	86.0%	0.0%	6.0%	7.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Change	Residential	Lots	Industrial	Commercial	Agriculture	Land
Laureldale	1.4%	-0.5%	0.3%	-2.1%	0.0%	0.0%

Source: Pennsylvania State Tax Equalization Board Land Use and Market Value Reports: 2006 and 2020

Muhlenberg Township

The township was collecting taxes on 99.8% of the market value of its tax base in 2006. However, by 2020, this has declined to 73.4%.

Market Value of Tax Base - 2006 and 2020				
Municipality	2006	2020	\$ Change	% Change
Muhlenberg	\$1,075,511,700	\$1,520,562,160	\$445,050,460	41.4%
Assessed Value of Tax Base - 2006 and 2020				
Municipality	2006	2020	\$ Change	% Change
Muhlenberg	\$1,072,891,900	\$1,115,407,400	\$42,515,500	4.0%
Tax Collection on Market Value of Tax Base				
Municipality	2006	2020	% Change	
Muhlenberg	99.8%	73.4%	-26.5%	

Source: Pennsylvania State Tax Equalization Board Land Use and Market Value Reports: 2006 and 2020

The Township saw a small decrease in the lots, industrial, commercial and land sectors of the base and increases in the residential and agriculture sectors.

Percentage Breakdown of County Tax Base by Category						
2006	Residential	Lots	Industrial	Commercial	Agriculture	Land
Muhlenberg	57.7%	1.8%	8.1%	31.5%	0.1%	0.1%
2020	Residential	Lots	Industrial	Commercial	Agriculture	Land
Muhlenberg	63.0%	1.0%	7.0%	28.0%	1.0%	0.0%
Change	Residential	Lots	Industrial	Commercial	Agriculture	Land
Muhlenberg	5.3%	-0.8%	-1.1%	-3.5%	0.9%	-0.1%

Source: Pennsylvania State Tax Equalization Board Land Use and Market Value Reports: 2006 and 2020

TAXES

Components of Real Estate Taxes

The chart below illustrates the change in taxes by components from 2004 to current tax rates. The Muhlenberg School District saw the most change in number of mills. The Laureldale Borough municipal real estate tax saw the largest percent increase.

Components of Real Estate Tax Mills - Comparison				
Unit	2004	2021	# Change	% Change
Berks County Tax	5.18	7.65	2.47	47.7%
Muhlenberg School District	20.81	31.48	10.67	51.3%
Laureldale	2.60	6.80	4.20	161.5%
Muhlenberg	3.55	5.00	1.45	40.8%

Source: Berks County Planning Commission, Berks County Assessment Office

The chart below shows the entire millage (municipal, school district, county) combined. Between 2004 and present, Laureldale has seen the most change for millage.

Total Tax Millage Comparison (SD, Municipal and County Together)				
Unit	2004	2021	# Change	% Change
Laureldale	28.59	45.93	17.34	60.7%
Muhlenberg	29.54	44.13	14.59	49.4%

Source: Berks County Planning Commission, Berks County Assessment Office

The chart on the next two pages depicts the entire millage (municipal, school district, county) combined for all of the municipalities in Berks County. The region municipalities are highlighted to show where they fall in comparison to the rest of the County. The regional municipalities are in the middle-of-the-road in terms of how much taxes have gone up between 2004 and 2021-2022.

**Total Tax Millage Comparison (SD, Municipal and County Together)
for all other Municipalities in Berks**

Unit	2004	2021-2022	# Change	% Change
Lower Heidelberg	22.05	41.35	19.30	87.53%
Mount Penn	34.34	62.58	28.24	82.24%
Sinking Spring	24.56	43.69	19.13	77.89%
Brecknock	22.59	39.33	16.74	74.10%
Lower Alsace	34.94	60.82	25.88	74.07%
Spring	22.87	39.76	16.89	73.85%
West Reading	29.39	51.05	21.66	73.70%
Shillington	25.34	43.89	18.55	73.20%
Mohnton	25.11	42.45	17.34	69.06%
Cumru	25.59	43.23	17.64	68.93%
Wyomissing (Wilson SD)	23.59	39.81	16.22	68.76%
Exeter	26.99	45.32	18.33	67.91%
Saint Lawrence	29.53	49.36	19.83	67.15%
Boyertown	26.51	44.19	17.68	66.69%
Kenhorst	25.69	42.57	16.88	65.71%
Douglass	25.16	41.50	16.34	64.94%
Robeson	23.86	38.97	15.11	63.33%
Washington	24.15	39.40	15.25	63.15%
Pike	23.57	38.19	14.62	62.03%
Bally	25.95	41.70	15.75	60.69%
Laureldale	28.59	45.93	17.34	60.65%
Bechtelsville	26.65	42.70	16.05	60.23%
Colebrookdale	25.56	40.70	15.14	59.23%
Earl	23.16	36.70	13.54	58.46%
Birdsboro	29.72	46.90	17.18	57.81%
Wyomissing	28.37	44.70	16.33	57.56%
Hamburg	27.31	42.87	15.56	56.98%
Tilden	23.52	36.71	13.19	56.08%
Union	28.09	43.69	15.60	55.54%
Caernarvon	24.77	38.20	13.43	54.22%
South Heidelberg	28.20	43.19	14.99	53.16%
Fleetwood	31.24	47.72	16.48	52.75%
Richmond	29.24	44.52	15.28	52.26%
Amity	28.18	42.84	14.66	52.02%
Upper Tulpehocken	23.62	35.61	11.99	50.76%
Oley	27.14	40.88	13.74	50.63%
Shoemakersville	27.31	41.11	13.80	50.53%
Perry	23.56	35.41	11.85	50.30%
Muhlenberg	29.55	44.13	14.58	49.34%
Upper Bern	24.51	36.56	12.05	49.16%
Windsor	23.61	34.91	11.30	47.86%
Womelsdorf	29.45	43.54	14.09	47.84%
Bern	26.86	39.66	12.80	47.65%

North Heidelberg	27.15	40.03	12.88	47.44%
Marion	27.95	41.03	13.08	46.80%
Centerport	26.28	38.57	12.29	46.77%
Wernersville	31.15	45.63	14.48	46.48%
Robesonia	30.10	43.93	13.83	45.95%
Heidelberg	27.85	40.53	12.68	45.53%
Ruscombmanor	26.03	37.69	11.66	44.79%
Centre	25.00	35.83	10.83	43.32%
Longswamp	31.69	45.28	13.59	42.88%
Maidencreek	29.99	42.76	12.77	42.58%
Topton	34.84	49.63	14.79	42.45%
Alsace	26.93	38.19	11.26	41.81%
Kutztown	29.77	42.21	12.44	41.79%
Ontelaunee	28.08	39.52	11.44	40.74%
Leesport	30.00	41.19	11.19	37.30%
Bernville	28.49	39.09	10.60	37.21%
District	31.69	43.18	11.49	36.26%
Rockland	31.64	43.08	11.44	36.16%
Hereford	25.40	34.08	8.68	34.17%
Greenwich	29.17	38.61	9.44	32.36%
Lenhartsville	29.57	39.11	9.54	32.26%
Albany	29.16	38.21	9.05	31.04%
Maxatawny	30.73	39.97	9.24	30.07%
Penn	27.04	35.15	8.11	29.99%
Lyons	30.42	39.46	9.04	29.72%
Bethel	27.54	35.65	8.11	29.45%
Jefferson	26.22	33.83	7.61	29.02%
Tulpehocken	27.54	35.25	7.71	28.00%
Reading	35.24	43.72	8.48	24.06%
New Morgan	48.39	54.32	5.93	12.25%

Impact of Real Estate Taxes in the Planning Area

For the purpose of our analysis, we assume each municipality has a house with a 2021 fair market value of \$100,000 with no homestead exemption applied. A fixed value allows us to look solely at the tax burden in the area. Both municipalities have seen a decrease in real estate tax.

Tax Bill on a \$100,000 Market Value House in 2004 and 2021					
Laureldale	Total	Assessed Value	Tax Bill	OVERALL	
2004	28.59	\$86,210	\$2,464	\$ Change	% Change
2021	45.93	\$52,080	\$2,392	-\$72	-2.9%
Muhlenberg	Total	Assessed Value	Tax Bill	OVERALL	
2004	29.54	\$86,210	\$2,546	\$ Change	% Change
2021	44.13	\$52,080	\$2,298	-\$248	-9.74%

Source: Berks County Planning Commission

Looking at tax burden, with all Berks County municipalities having the same exact \$100,000 house, you can see in the first column that Laureldale has the 9th highest amount of taxes in Berks County while Muhlenberg has the 16th highest amount of taxes in the County.

However, if the tax rate was applied to the assessed value based on real median housing values, the numbers change substantially. Laureldale's tax bill ranks 68th, relatively low when compared to the other 71 municipalities in Berks County. This is due to the lower median housing values in the borough. Consequentially, due to relatively high median housing values in Muhlenberg residents pay the 56th highest amount of taxes in the County.

Ranking of the 2021 Tax Bill in the Planning Area Versus All Other Berks County Municipalities		
Municipality	Same \$100,000 House	Median House Value
Laureldale	9th	68th
Muhlenberg	16th	56th

Source: Berks County Planning Commission

Tax Exempt Parcels

There are 171 parcels in the planning area that are entirely or partially exempt from paying school, municipal and county property taxes, according to Berks County assessment data. The majority of these properties are government, school district, and church owned. The most valuable exempt property is the Muhlenberg School District's main campus in Muhlenberg Township with a value of just over \$17 million.

Top Ten Tax-Exempt Parcels by Value in the Planning Area - 2022			
Owner	Address	Municipality	Value in \$
Muhlenberg School District	5th St Hwy	Muhlenberg	17,158,900
Muhlenberg School District	370 Kutztown Road	Muhlenberg	12,568,600
Muhlenberg School District	715 Bellevue Ave	Laureldale	8,626,500
Reading / Muhlenberg School District	2615 Warren Road	Muhlenberg	6,550,100
BCIU	1111 Commons Blvd	Muhlenberg	6,058,100
Schlert Most Rev Alfred A Holy Guardian Angel Church	3121 Kutztown Road	Muhlenberg	4,512,500
Muhlenberg School District	Kutztown Road	Muhlenberg	4,470,500
US Postal Service	2201 N 11th Street	Muhlenberg	4,325,400
Schlert Most Rev Alfred A % St Paul Pastor	3139 Kutztown Road	Muhlenberg	3,701,600
Missionary Sisters of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus Inc	51 Seminary Ave	Muhlenberg	3,134,600

Source: Berks County Planning Commission

Top Ten Tax-Exempt Parcels by Size in the Planning Area - 2022				
Owner	Address	Municipality	Size in Acres	Value in \$
Muhlenberg Township	1199 Sofianos Road	Muhlenberg	137.71	423,200
Muhlenberg Township	4899 Stoudt's Ferry Bridge Road	Muhlenberg	80.17	541,700
Schlert Most Rev Alfred A % St Paul Pastor	3139 Kutztown Road	Muhlenberg	72.98	3,701,600
Laureldale Borough	Elizabeth Ave	Laureldale	71.15	488,500
Reading / Muhlenberg School District	2615 Warren Road	Muhlenberg	54.87	6,550,100
Muhlenberg Township	Mt. Laurel Road	Muhlenberg	48.37	144,900
City of Reading	Bernhart Lake	Muhlenberg	36.64	129,400
Muhlenberg Township	W. Bellevue Ave	Muhlenberg	31.36	62,000
Muhlenberg Township	Stoudts Ferry Bridge Road	Muhlenberg	28.22	84,400
Missionary Sisters of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus Inc	51 Seminary Ave	Muhlenberg	27.61	3,134,600

Source: Berks County Planning Commission

What Does This All Mean?

Like Berks County, a significant issue for the municipalities moving forward is addressing the stagnation of the tax base. So far, in response to slow tax base growth the municipalities and the school district have had to raise the tax rate to generate needed revenue to offset growing expenditures. As stated previously in this chapter, the key to economic stability or growth is the optimization of the tax base by making every acre of land as productive as it can be without compromising community wants and needs or the natural/environmental resources in the community. Moving forward, the municipalities should look at ways to boost the tax base. This could include but is not limited to using the tools and resources available to attract new industries to the area that offer higher paying, sustainable jobs.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

Berks County is served by many economic development-related agencies, organizations, programs, and resources. In terms of focus, some of these organizations are broad-based business organizations (e.g. PA Department of Community and Economic Development, chamber of commerce) while others are targeted to specific industry sectors or activities (e.g. Manufacturers Resource Center or SCORE). Collectively they represent an extensive network of information and resources. The following organizations primarily provide services and resources towards economic development in Berks County or the region specifically.

In recent years, there has been emphasis on a more coordinated economic development approach that attempts to align both economic and workforce development plans at the municipal and county level. The Leak-Goforth Company prepared in-depth site selection studies for the County in 1997 and 2001. In 2003, the Berks Community Foundation, Berks Economic Partnership, and the Initiative for a Competitive Inner City (ICIC) led the community process that created the Initiative for a Competitive Greater Reading that looked at market-based strategies and efforts to increase the county's economic competitiveness. The Berks Economic Partnership, in conjunction with Sasaki Architects and The Brookings Institution developed the Penn Corridor Development Plan in 2007 that looked at development and redevelopment opportunities along Penn Avenue from Reading to Wyomissing. While the latter study focuses primarily on the urban core of the County much of the same strategies for development and redevelopment can be employed in the Muhlenberg-Laureldale region as well.

In 2017, the primary economic development agency in Berks County is the non-profit **Greater Reading Chamber Alliance (GRCA)**. This organization is the result of a 2016 alignment of the Greater Berks Development Fund, Greater Reading Economic Partnership and the Greater Reading Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The merger aims to create the county's "one stop shop" for business recruitment, business retention, expansion, and regional promotion.

In early 2021, Berks County, along with multiple partners both public and private started the process of creating a 5-year action plan for economic development in the County. A consultant was hired to put together the plan that will become known as *Imagine Berks*. This plan will seek to encourage sustainable land development, suggest improvements to local regulatory and tax policy and strategies, and achieves competitive market positioning to sustain and grow existing businesses and attract new businesses.

The **Berks County Industrial Development Authority (BCIDA)** is an authority created by Berks County in 1969. It can finance and acquire land, buildings, machinery, and equipment through the issuance of tax-exempt or taxable bonds, and through other authorized programs. BCIDA's primary focus in recent years has been the development of Berks Park 78 in Bethel Township and Berks Park 183 near the Reading Regional Airport in Bern Township.

The **Berks County Redevelopment Authority (BCRA)** is an authority created by Berks County in 1969 under the auspices of the Pennsylvania Urban Redevelopment Law. Its primary mission is to build a vibrant community through the elimination of blight and dangerous housing conditions. In coordination with other partners, it assists local businesses with obtaining the capital they seek to invest and expand inside the county.

The **Berks County Workforce Development Board** is responsible for the long-term strategic planning to meet Berks County's workforce development needs. This includes planning, analysis, oversight, evaluation and monitoring, and the development and cultivation of partnerships within the Berks County community and/or on a regional basis.

Pennsylvania's Americana Region of Reading and Berks County guides and refers travelers to the specific destinations and information they are seeking in Berks County. They market the county's destinations to visitors, namely the array of accommodation, retail stores, restaurants, heritage sites, museums, and entertainment/recreation venues.

Economic Development Goals

Consider changing the goal from “development” to prosperity.

The planning area's prosperity is influenced by the quality of the area as a place to live, the public education system, availability of capital, and the condition of both the natural (parks, open space, environmentally sensitive areas) and built environments. The planning area should not evaluate success nor be satisfied solely on single metrics such as the number of jobs created or how “nice” a building or area looks. The municipalities should make investments and attract private investment and enterprise that improves the area's ability to weather economic changes (e.g. ecommerce and its effect on bricks and mortar retail, rise in healthcare demand) and downturns and improves prosperity for developers, business owners, and residents alike.

Focus on providing high quality, fundamental public services.

The area's infrastructure assets are valuable and represent generations of investment. They also require maintenance, repair, and attention. Sidewalks, streets, bridges, stormwater management systems, parks and open space, and water and sewer systems ensure that business and residents can move around the area, drink clean water, and have reliable sewer service. Having an intentional investment strategy to maintain and improve these systems will continue to make the planning area an attractive location to invest, reside, and reduce the expensive consequences of deferred maintenance.

Prioritize infrastructure improvements.

Identify the infrastructure improvements needed to attract and support the growth of industries and businesses the planning area wants to have and prioritize the completion of these improvements. Consider joint capital improvements planning to increase awareness and visibility of infrastructure needs.

Encourage regulatory alignment both municipalities.

The planning area should strive to keep their planning and permitting processes current and streamlined, eliminating excessive or obsolete requirements, with fee structures for planning services and permitting that recover no more than the actual costs to conduct such programs and reviews.

Municipalities should monitor county, state, and national trends and maintain timely and modern zoning regulations that foster investment and redevelopment of sites in the area.

Boost the diversification of the local economy.

Encourage the development, redevelopment, and reinvestment in an array of retail, service, office, and other employment uses in all mixed residential/commercial, commercial, and industrial land use areas as shown on the Future Land Use Plan. Support small business such home occupations and limited, neighborhood-serving commercial and employment uses in the (residential land use categories).

Support the creation and growth of local businesses.

Support the creation of local businesses by promoting a positive business environment by reducing the municipal barriers to opening businesses, leveraging existing programs, providing information and business resources through coordinated websites, and exploring and advertising potential incentives financial tools and resources to assist in new business establishment.

Attract and cultivate a skilled workforce.

Cultivate and attract a skilled workforce by providing access to attainable and high-quality housing options, supporting vibrant, well-maintained neighborhoods and amenities, and ensuring high quality schools for families. Support the growth of businesses that employ people with advanced skills and degrees.



Tools for Economic Development

There are various tools and programs available to municipalities who want to strengthen, promote, retain and/or incentivize economic development in their respective jurisdictions. The following is a list of plans and common programs, some of which are administered through the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) (www.newpa.com), for municipalities to use to implement economic development initiatives:

IMAGINE Berks Economic Development Action Plan – This 5-Year Action Plan was developed to encourage sustainable land development, suggest improvements to local regulatory and tax policy and strategy, and to achieve competitive market positioning to sustain and grow existing businesses and attract new businesses to Berks County and its municipalities.

Keystone Innovation Zone Tax Credit Program (KIZ) – This program provides tax credits to early-stage technology-oriented businesses and entrepreneurs operating in a Keystone Innovation Zone (KIZ); companies without a tax liability may sell tax credits to companies with tax liabilities for cash. Funding provides tax credits for companies that have been in operation less than 8 (eight) years, whose gross revenues have increased over the previous year, are located in a KIZ Zone, and fall under the industry sector focus.

Keystone Opportunity Zone (KOZ) – The program provides state and local tax abatement to businesses and residents locating in one of the 12 designated zones. Businesses, property owners and residents located in a KOZ are eligible to receive significant state and local tax benefits. Projects in KOZs are given priority consideration for assistance under various community and economic building initiatives. Pennsylvania businesses relocating to a KOZ must either: increase their full-time employment by 20 percent within the first full year of operation or make a 10 percent capital investment in the KOZ property based on their prior year's gross revenues. Eligibility for benefits is based upon annual certification. In order to receive benefits, any entity applying must be compliant with all local and state taxes and building and zoning codes.

Keystone Special Development Zone (KSDZ) – The KSDZ program was established for the purpose of providing incentives to for-profit businesses that locate and operate in designated geographic zones. Pennsylvania continues to have a surplus of abandoned, deteriorated commercial and industrial sites in need of revitalization. The KSDZ program is an incentive-based tax credit program to foster redevelopment of these former industrial and commercial sites. To be eligible, sites must be located within a Special Industrial Area as of July 11, 2011, for which the PA Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has executed a Special Industrial Area Consent Order and Agreement. Businesses that provide job-creating economic development opportunities in these sites through the expansion of existing operations or the relocation of operations to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania may be eligible for tax credits under this program.

Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance (LERTA) – LERTA allows local taxing authorities to exempt new construction and improvements to a commercial, industrial, and/or business property if such property is located in a deteriorated area. In order for a LERTA to apply to a property, each taxing authority (County, Municipal and School District) must, by ordinance or resolution, exempt from real estate property taxes, the assessed value of the improvements to deteriorated properties and the assessed value of new construction within the designated deteriorated areas.

Municipal Assistance Program (MAP) – The Municipal Assistance Program (MAP) is created to help local governments efficiently and effectively plan and implement a variety of services, improvements, and soundly manage development. The program provides funding for three groups of activities – shared service, community planning, and floodplain management. The program is administered by the Governor's Center for Local Government Services (GCLGS) (www.newpa.com/local-government/) in the DCED.

Pennsylvania Infrastructure Investment Authority (PennVEST) – The program provides low-interest loans for design, engineering and construction costs associated with publicly and privately-owned drinking water distribution and treatment facilities, stormwater conveyance and wastewater collection, conveyance, treatment facilities and Brownfield site remediation.

Tax Increment Financing Guarantee Program (TIF) – This program promotes and stimulates the general economic welfare of various regions and communities in the commonwealth and assists in the development, redevelopment and revitalization of Brownfield and Greenfield sites in accordance with the TIF Act. The program provides credit enhancement for TIF projects to improve market access and lower capital costs through the use of guarantees to issuers of bonds or other debt. Funds are used for infrastructure and environmental projects for industrial enterprises and retail establishments, infrastructure, environmental and building projects for manufacturers, hospitals, or convention centers, utilization of abandoned or underutilized industrial, commercial, military, previously mined institutional sites or buildings; or undeveloped sites planned and zoned for development in accordance with an existing comprehensive municipal plan.

These are just a sample of some commonly used programs for facilitating economic development within communities. Programs and policies are subject to change, the most up-to-date information can be found on Pennsylvania grants and resources at PA DCED's website at www.newpa.com.

Economic Development Goals:

- Consider changing the goal from “development” to prosperity.
- Focus on providing high quality fundamental public services.
- Prioritize infrastructure improvements.
- Encourage regulatory alignment with both municipalities.
- Boost the diversification of the local economy.
- Support the creation and growth of local businesses.
- Attract and cultivate a skilled workforce.



MLJCP

9



Transportation

TRANSPORTATION PLAN

Moving into, around and through the Muhlenberg-Laureldale planning area is reliable and predictable. The area is connected to Berks and surrounding counties, enabling local and regional access for businesses and neighborhoods. These municipalities are served by an extensive transportation system comprised of roads and bridges, bus and paratransit services and rail. In addition, an extensive sidewalk and trail system serves pedestrian and bicycle travel. The roads, bridges, and public transit system accommodate thousands of trips every day.

In addition to experiencing population growth discussed in Chapter 4, the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the population in the Muhlenberg-Laureldale planning area has changed and will continue to change in the future. These demographic changes contain challenges for the provision of transportation facilities and services. For example, both of these municipalities currently have a larger percentage of elderly age (65+) residents than the county and state. In addition, these municipalities have very similar percentages of working age (25-64) residents to the county and state, and as this population ages, it becomes more important to provide transportation options and services geared to their needs with more emphasis on safety improvements tailored to elderly drivers.

It is also important to remember that there is a direct correlation between land use and transportation needs. As residential, commercial, and industrial land is developed, more and more people use the roads, and the roads become congested for longer periods of time. This is particularly true for rush hours. In response, as roads are improved to address the traffic congestion, the adjoining land becomes easier and more lucrative to develop, and more traffic is generated.

The highest priority of this plan will continue to be to preserve and maintain the existing transportation system with a primary focus on paving and upgrading existing roads and bridges.

TRANSPORTATION PLANNING CONTEXT

A key aspect of transportation planning is effective coordination between the different government agencies responsible for maintaining the various parts of the transportation infrastructure. In addition to the Muhlenberg-Laureldale planning area, these include the Reading Area Transportation Study (RATS), the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT), Berks County, and neighboring communities. As part of the process of preparing this transportation chapter, the RATS FFY 2023-2045 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) was reviewed and considered. This section of the plan will focus on the local transportation infrastructure. Details on the PennDOT owned infrastructure can be found in the RATS Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and the LRTP.

RATS is the regional transportation planning organization for the Reading, Pennsylvania metropolitan area, which covers all of Berks County. Working with PennDOT and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), RATS facilitates and is responsible for prioritizing annual funding to advance transportation improvement projects throughout the county. PennDOT, South Central Transit Authority (SCTA), and the 72 municipalities in the County are responsible for project implementation.

Capital Improvement Plans

Capital Improvement Plans (CIP) outline a schedule of public service expenditures over a certain period of years. The CIP does not address all the capital expenditures for the municipality, but provides for large, physical improvements that are permanent, including the basic facilities, services and installations needed for the functioning of the community. These include utilities, municipal facilities and other miscellaneous projects.

5th Street Highway/Allentown Pike Revitalization Plan

The final report for the 5th Street Highway/Allentown Pike Revitalization Plan was completed in October 2013. This plan provides a detailed blueprint that enables Muhlenberg Township to create an inviting and vibrant corridor that encourages people to live, work, play, and visit. Specific infrastructure improvements and key implementation strategies for the transportation network are provided in this plan. Transportation specific implementation strategies include pedestrian improvements, streetscape improvements, capacity improvements, leveraging public funding, and creating ADA compliant bus stops with a goal to develop a transportation system to include access to roads, trails, pedestrian connections, and streetscape enhancements. Any transportation improvement considerations along this corridor should reference this plan for cohesion.

ROADS

According to Berks County DES centerline GIS data, the Muhlenberg-Laureldale planning area has approximately 144 miles of roads, including approximately 37 miles of state-owned routes, 101 miles of municipal roads, 2 miles of ramps, and 4 miles of private lanes. Nearly all of the roads are paved or improved. All roads owned by the municipalities are part of the Pennsylvania State Liquid Fuels Programs that provides state payments to the municipalities for road maintenance and reconstruction based on population and miles of roads meeting PennDOT specifications. A municipality may also use up to 20% of their net allocation for the purchase of major equipment every year. However, the Liquid Fuels funds comprise only a small part of the municipal maintenance budgets and do not cover the cost of long-term maintenance and reconstruction.

Shown below is a comparison of the liquid fuels allocations in 2018 and 2022. The amount of money allocated to each municipality decreased and overall, LFF in the Muhlenberg-Laureldale planning area decreased 2%. This decrease is not based on a loss of eligible road miles or loss of population, but due to slightly decreased funding. The difference in percent change over this time period between each municipality is due to the different rate of population growth each municipality experienced, with Muhlenberg facing a higher rate of population growth compared to Laureldale during this period. Streets and roads owned and maintained by these municipalities are mostly in good condition. Municipalities will focus on continued maintenance, including resurfacing, and monitor the need to correct specific drainage problems and add shoulders based on available funding. Paving projects are scheduled annually based on street/road condition and available funding.

Liquid Fuels Net Allocations by Municipality 2018 & 2022						
2018			2022			% Change
Municipality	Miles	Allocation	Municipality	Miles	Allocation	
Laureldale	13.17	\$119,434.01	Laureldale	13.17	\$116,021.47	-2.9%
Muhlenberg	74.91	\$626,298.76	Muhlenberg	74.91	\$614,829.86	-1.8%

Source: PennDOT Bureau of Municipal Services MLF Allocation Report, 2018 & 2022

Figures 11 through 12 show the federal functional classifications assigned to roads in the area. The functional classification of a roadway may change over time based on changing traffic conditions. Classification of a road is based on an analysis of the volume of traffic using the facility, the type of trip provided, the length of trip, and the speed of the trip.

Arterials provide the highest level of service at the greatest speed for the longest uninterrupted distance, with some degree of access control. These roads are typically classified as principal arterials (sub-grouped by Interstate, Freeway/Expressway, and other principal arterials) and minor arterials. Examples of roads of this type in the area include U.S. 222, U.S. Business 222, Route 12, Route 61, Elizabeth Avenue, and Kutztown Road. These roads are owned and maintained by PennDOT.

Collectors provide a lower level of service at a slower speed. They provide service for shorter distances by collecting traffic from local roads and connecting them with arterials. These roads provide access to individual properties and serve short distance, low speed trips. Examples include Mount Laurel Road, Tuckerton Road, Hay Road, Spring Valley Road, Reading Crest Avenue, Stoudts Ferry Bridge Road, and River Road. These roads are owned by PennDOT and the municipalities.

Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) is the total number of vehicles traveling on a road on an average day. Annual average daily traffic (AADT) volumes provide an overview of the traffic flow in the Muhlenberg-Laureldale planning area for planning purposes. An important point to remember is that AADT does not reflect daily and seasonal traffic volumes that can far exceed AADT. The proportionate increase in daily and seasonal counts can be significant. PennDOT conducts traffic counts on state roads, and the counts provide the means to assess the overall traffic conditions in the area. Figures 11 through 12 illustrate 2021 AADT on area roadways. The heaviest traveled roads are the arterials in the area, namely U.S. 222, U.S. Business 222, Route 12, and Route 61. Roadway surfaces in the area are mostly comprised of paved surface roadways. Of the paved surface roadways, pavements are either asphalt or concrete. PennDOT assesses pavement surface conditions using a variety of metrics that include International Roughness Index (IRI). IRI measures pavement roughness in terms of the number of inches per mile that a laser, mounted in a specialized van, jumps as it is driven along highway – the lower the IRI, the smoother the ride. PennDOT uses IRI in its pavement condition performance measures, Figure 13 show the condition of pavement on state roads in the area.

BRIDGES

The topography and hydrology of the area provide ample recreational activities and commercial activities, but also create a transportation challenge to safely and efficiently move people and freight over them in Berks County. Overall, the bridges in the Muhlenberg-Laureldale planning area are in fair condition. As of June 2022, there are 41 bridges in the area, with the majority (30 bridges) owned by PennDOT. These bridges are those that require inspections – state bridges longer than eight (8) feet and local bridges longer than twenty (20) feet. Two (2) of the bridges in this region are currently owned by Berks County, with one bridge being in good condition and one rated as fair condition. The bridge over Spring Valley Road in fair condition is set to be under construction for rehabilitation and after the work is completed, the bridge will then be under ownership by Muhlenberg Township, bringing the total bridges owned by the municipalities to nine (9). Figure 13 show the approximate location of bridges in the area.

As the area's bridges continue to age and deteriorate, it is sometimes necessary to close bridges unexpectedly due to problems revealed during routine inspections. Bridges closed to traffic are those structures deemed unsafe to carry any type of traffic. As of June 2022, none of the bridges are closed in the Muhlenberg-Laureldale planning area.

Load posting a bridge is required by the National Bridge Inspection Standards when a bridge is not capable of safely carrying a legal load. If a bridge is deemed deficient, officials will post a maximum load for the bridge. Bridges may be posted for other load-capacity restrictions including speed and number of vehicles permitted on the bridge. There are four (4) load-posted bridges in the area, one is state-owned and the other three are local-owned.

Poor condition bridges are characterized by deteriorated conditions of the major components of a bridge. This may include cracked concrete, the bridge deck, the support structure, or the entire bridge itself. A poor designation does not imply that a bridge is unsafe. However, such bridges typically require significant maintenance and repair to remain in service and would eventually require major rehabilitation or replacement to address the underlying deficiency. There are seven (7) such bridges in the area. Five (5) bridges are owned by PennDOT and the other two (2) are owned by Muhlenberg Township. The state currently plans on a rehabilitation/replacement for two

poor condition bridges, Bellevue Avenue over the Reading Blue Mountain and Northern Railroads, and 5th Street Bridge over PA Route 12. Figure 13 show the location of the poor and posted bridges.

The table below shows the bridges of most concern in the region because municipalities own them, and they are in poor condition as of June 2022. However, plans are underway to conduct preventative maintenance activities/rehabilitation on these bridges to lift them out of poor condition status.

Bridges of Concern					
Bridge/Location	Built	Municipality	Length (ft)	Deck Area (sq ft)	Condition/ Issue
8 th & Shalter Avenues over Shalter Floodway Between Pine and State Sts	1935	Muhlenberg	47	2068	Poor
River Road over Laurel Run	1832	Muhlenberg	24	576	Poor/Posted

Source: PennDOT Bridge Condition Summary Report June 26, 2022

CONGESTED CORRIDORS

RATS developed a Congestion Management Process (CMP) in May 2016 that included an examination of the 38 most congested corridors in the County. These corridors were identified using both a Travel Time Index (TTI) and the Average Annual Daily Trips (AADT) in that corridor. The TTI is the ratio of the peak-period travel time to the free flow travel time. This congested speed data, from purchased GPS information, shows peak period travel (7-9 a.m. and 4-6 p.m.) speeds as a function of free-flow (non-congested) speeds. By plotting segments with TTI greater than 1.20 (speeds 20 percent slower than free-flow averages), congested segments can be easily identified. The identification of these segments can support effective decision making when providing input into regional transportation plans. Of the 38 most congested corridors in Berks County, eight (8) have been identified with at least a portion in the Muhlenberg-Laureldale planning area. Special consideration should be given to the two (2) corridors shown in bold on the chart below, as most if not all the mileage, for these two (2) corridors are located within Muhlenberg Township.

Corridor	Peak TTI	AADT	Length (Miles)	Truck %
PA 12 (Warren Street Bypass)	1.44	20,438 – 59,132	4.59	6-10
PA 12 (Pricetown Road)	1.60	8,616 – 18,218	4.86	4-9
PA 61 (U.S. 222 Business to PA 12)	1.40	7,955 – 12,388	2.04	5-6
PA 61 (PA 12 to U.S. 222)	2.38	8,450 – 16,455	2.93	10-15
PA 61 (U.S. 222 to Schuylkill County)	2.03	16,455 – 28,743	13.07	10-17
U.S. 222 (U.S. 422 Merge to U.S. 222 Business Merge)	1.92	57,687 – 74,847	10.60	10-17
U.S. 222 Business (U.S. 422 West Shore Bypass to PA 12)	1.90	6,553 – 15,347	4.20	3-10
U.S. 222 Business (PA 12 to U.S. 222 Merge)	2.19	9,478 – 24,705	4.20	6-8

Source: RATS Congestion Management Process, 2016

FREIGHT

Trucks move a great majority of freight (in terms of both tonnage and value) within and through Berks County, illustrating the importance of the county's highway network. From Berks County, business can reach nearly 40% of the United States population and 50% of Canadian customers within a one-day drive.

Truck freight is the most utilized method of transporting goods in the region. Berks County has one of the largest manufacturing concentrations of the surrounding counties and serves as a major conduit between warehousing hubs elsewhere in Pennsylvania. Of note Routes 61 and 222 are primary inter-county truck freight corridors. Route 61 provides a north-south route from the city of Reading to Schuylkill County. Route 222 North (21 percent truck traffic) links Reading to the western end of Lehigh County. Part of the higher volumes of truck traffic can be attributed to the presence of truck generating industries.

Land use and zoning should help determine where to locate these industries as last mile truck traffic can sometimes find its way onto local roads and through residential communities. The municipalities should examine their current zoning ordinance and potentially update to accommodate truck generating industries in locations such as those convenient to highway access while restricting them in areas that could potentially create a nuisance in residential neighborhoods. This only addresses future land use and is not a foolproof strategy. To deal with present issues, the municipalities can sign local roads to discourage use. The municipalities can benefit from having open communication with the facility itself, asking them to consider more appropriate routes through the community when possible.

Truck parking has been an issue affecting drivers in recent times especially since the inception of the Electronic Logging Device (ELD) Mandate in December of 2017. With Routes 61 and 222 being primary inter-county truck freight corridors, truck parking is of high demand in the planning area. When adequate truck parking is unavailable or full, some truck drivers resort to parking on the shoulders of ramps and highways and in non-designated commercial parking lots. A lack of truck parking has been recognized in Pennsylvania and state officials are searching for solutions. Municipalities in the Muhlenberg-Laureldale planning area should encourage areas of truck parking to reduce truck parking in non-designated areas. In addition to developing designated truck parking areas and rest stops another way to increase truck parking would be to encourage developers to include an area of safe truck parking within the property they are developing for the drivers that are delivering or picking up goods at their location. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Truck Parking Development Handbook should be referenced for quantitative approaches for estimating truck parking demand, conducting a cost-benefit analysis of truck parking developments, and siting truck parking facilities all while maintaining quality of life for residents of the Muhlenberg-Laureldale planning area.

Pennsylvania is a rail-intensive state. Railroads play a major role in moving freight within and throughout the state and across the country. Several short line railroads provide service in the Muhlenberg-Laureldale planning area. A railroad at-grade crossing is an intersection where a roadway crosses railroad tracks at the same level (grade). At-grade crossings can also have significant impacts on the transportation network. The "gate-down delay" creates delays caused when passing trains block the crossing. In addition, grade crossings can reduce road capacity. The uneven surfaces at grade crossings require vehicles to cross at lower speeds and passing trains can preclude coordinating nearby traffic signals as they pass through that area.

The annual average daily trips (AADT) on roadways with at-grade crossings are typically below 5,000 vehicles in Berks County. There are only 21 crossings in Berks County that exceed this criteria. The active rail crossings in this planning area are located on Tuckerton Road to the west of U.S. 222 Business. The 2018 AADT for this portion of Tuckerton Road was 6,698. This higher AADT and the occurrence of one collision at this intersection in 2021 have contributed to the crossing being ranked number 3 in the county at the end of 2021 for Predicated Accidents per Year at Public Highway-Rail Crossings in Berks County as shown in the US DOT Federal Railroad Administration, Railroad Crossings – At Grade & WBAPS Report. An additional crossing has been proposed by Reading Blue Mountain and Northern Railroad across Route 61. Safety issues should be strongly integrated into a crossing opening at this location, as it would have significant impact on Route 61, a primary inter-county freight corridor, with an AADT just under 18,000 vehicles. Note that changes to railroad operations may increase or decrease rail traffic at a crossing, affecting type of capital and safety improvement needs. Demand for rail service can change with the arrival or

departure of industrial customers on the line. These and other economic changes can affect the volume, location, and timing of rail traffic.

SAFETY

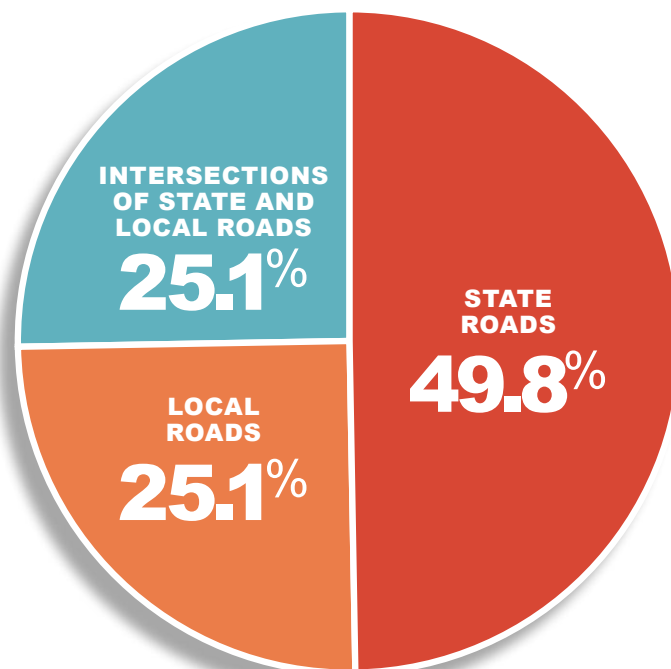
Maintaining a safe transportation system is essential to sustaining and enhancing the quality of life for Berks County residents. Deaths and injuries resulting from traffic crashes are a public health concern and impact local communities with medical costs, lost wages, insurance costs, taxes, police, fire, and emergency medical services, legal and court costs, and property damage.

As part of its safety program, PennDOT collects traffic crash data for the entire state and reports data at the state, county, and municipal level. For the purposes of this plan, county crash data for Berks County was analyzed. Motor vehicle crashes generally involve multiple contributing factors that may be related to drivers, the roadway, or the vehicle(s) involved, thus making transportation safety a multidisciplinary concern.

Analyzing crash trends allows PennDOT, RATS, and the municipalities of Laureldale and Muhlenberg to focus on setting goals to improve upon those trends by programming safety improvements to the road system itself or encouraging greater emphasis on education and enforcement.

Berks County has been attempting to reduce the significant number of crashes occurring on the roads. According to the 2020 Pennsylvania Crash Facts and Statistics released by PennDOT, Berks County ranked sixth in the state in the number of overall crashes and sixth in the number of fatal crashes in 2020. During the time period of 2016 through 2020, there were 1,362 crashes in the Muhlenberg-Laureldale planning area. Approximately 49.8% of crashes occur on state roads, 25.1% on local roads, and 25.1% at intersections of state and local roads. Between 2016 and 2020, crashes decreased by 9.9% in the area. Ten (10) of the 1,362 crashes were fatal.

Crash Locations in the Muhlenberg-Laureldale Planning Area 2016-2020



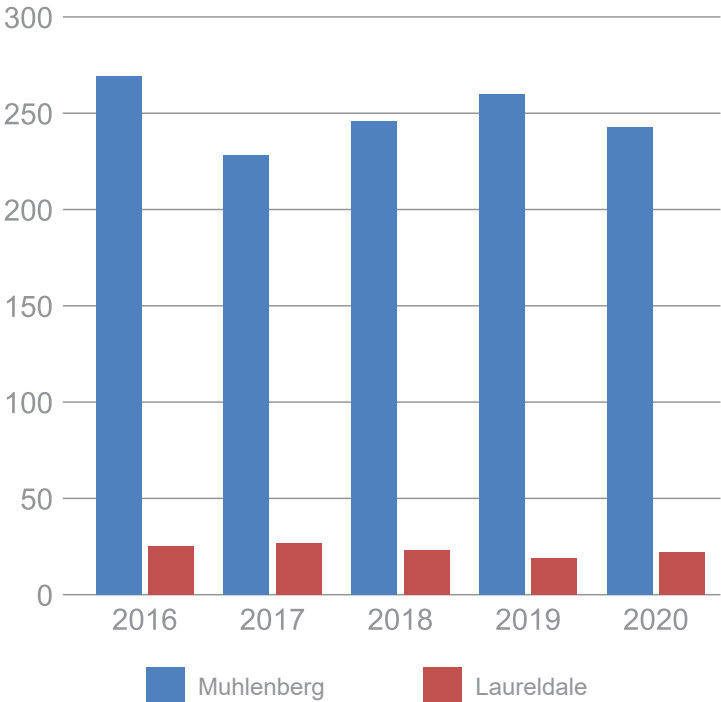
Safety is always a concern for residents, municipalities, and commuters while traveling within and through the Muhlenberg-Laureldale planning area. Due to this concern, transportation improvement projects have occurred over the years and are still occurring. The current and planned transportation improvement projects involving this planning area can be found in the Future Projects section of this chapter.

The two tables below show the total number of crashes and fatal crashes in each municipality for the years 2016 through 2020. The number of crashes in the Borough of Laureldale represents 8.5% for the entire planning area and crashes have decreased 12.0% over these years. The Borough of Laureldale has not experienced any fatalities due to crashes from 2016 through 2020. The number of crashes in Muhlenberg Township accounts for 91.5% of the crashes in the planning area. Muhlenberg Township experienced 10 fatal crashes over the same five years. This can be attributed in part to the size of the borough, which primarily contains low speed, local and collector streets serving residents with short distance, low-speed trips. Kutztown Road has the highest AADT and the highest speed in the borough at 35MPH as opposed to Muhlenberg Township which contains portions of PA 12, PA 61, U.S. 222 and U.S. 222 Business which range in speed from 40-55MPH.

Total Number of Crashes in the Muhlenberg-Laureldale Planning Area								
Municipality	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total	% of Total	% Change
Laureldale	25	27	23	19	22	116	8.5%	-12.0%
Muhlenberg	269	228	246	260	243	1246	91.5%	-9.7%
Total	294	255	269	279	265	1,362	100%	-9.9%

Source: PennDOT, Pennsylvania Crash Information Tool, 2016-2020

Total Number of Crashes in the Muhlenberg-Laureldale Planning Area

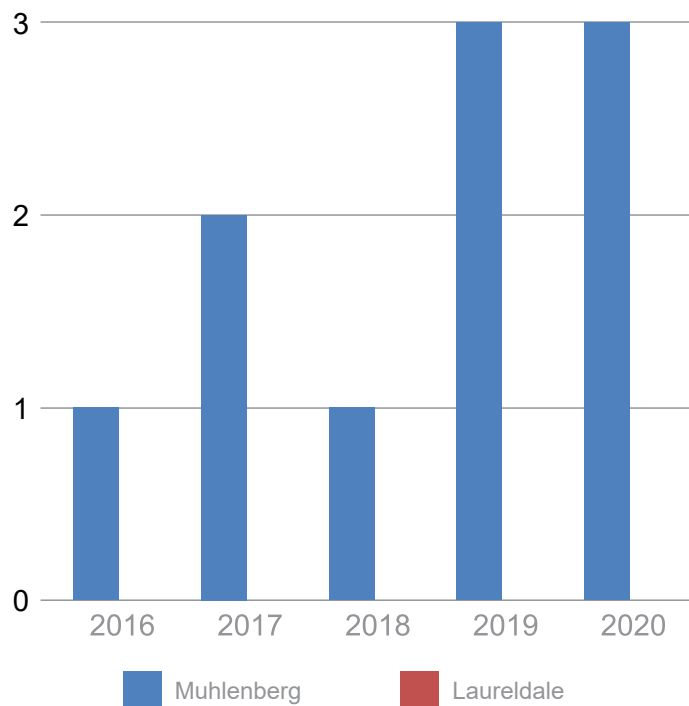


Source: PennDOT, Pennsylvania Crash Information Tool, 2016-2020

Number of Crashes Resulting in Fatality in the Muhlenberg-Laureldale Planning Area

Municipality	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Laureldale	0	0	0	0	0	0
Muhlenberg	1	2	1	3	3	10
Total	1	2	1	3	3	10

Number of Crashes Resulting in Fatality in the Muhlenberg-Laureldale Planning Area



Source: PennDOT, Pennsylvania Crash Information Tool, 2016-2020

DRIVING BEHAVIORS

Unsafe driving behavior plays a significant role in crashes in Berks County. Aggressive and distracted driving are major factors and increasingly present contributors to crashes. Drivers are more distracted and more prone to speeding than they were in the 1990s or 2000s. Of note, crashes because of distracted driving in Berks County began to rise with the mass adoption of smartphones in the early-mid 2000s.

Number of Crashes Involving Aggressive Driving Behavior in the Muhlenberg-Laureldale Planning Area

Municipality	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Laureldale	0	1	1	0	2	4
Muhlenberg	18	12	21	21	15	87
Total	18	13	22	21	17	91

Source: PennDOT, Pennsylvania Crash Information Tool, 2016-2020

Number of Crashes Involving Distracted Driving Behaviors in the Muhlenberg-Laureldale Planning Area

Municipality	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Laureldale	7	2	5	4	3	21
Muhlenberg	22	31	28	35	35	151
Total	29	33	33	39	38	172

Source: PennDOT, Pennsylvania Crash Information Tool, 2016-2020

VULNERABLE ROAD USERS

Vulnerable road users are those that are using the road without a vehicle surrounding them for protection. Most commonly, these are pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorcyclists in Berks County.

The chart below shows there were thirty (30) accidents involving pedestrians from 2016 to 2020. Four (4) of these crashes resulted in pedestrian fatalities in Muhlenberg Township during these same years. There were eight (8) accidents involving a bicycle during the same time period, however none of these resulted in fatality. The majority of accidents involving pedestrians and bicyclists between 2016 and 2020 occurred in Muhlenberg Township. Seven (7) of the eight (8) crashes involving a bicycle were during the daytime in normal driving conditions and at intersections. To minimize the amount of accidents involving pedestrians and bicyclists, these municipalities should focus on creating safe links between residential areas and popular destinations, such as schools, parks, and shopping centers. This could be achieved through widening of shoulders, the addition of protected bike lanes, filling gaps in the sidewalk network, and safety focused intersection improvements. Muhlenberg Township has been focused on improving their active transportation network, especially along the U.S. 222 Business Corridor in an attempt to provide a safer network for these vulnerable road users.

Number of Crashes Involving Pedestrians in the Muhlenberg-Laureldale Planning Area

Municipality	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Laureldale	1	0	0	1	0	2
Muhlenberg	8	7	1	5	7	28
Total	9	7	1	6	7	30

Source: PennDOT, Pennsylvania Crash Information Tool, 2016-2020

Number of Crashes Involving Bicycles in the Muhlenberg-Laureldale Planning Area

Municipality	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Laureldale	0	0	2	0	0	2
Muhlenberg	2	1	2	0	1	6
Total	2	1	4	0	1	8

Source: PennDOT, Pennsylvania Crash Information Tool, 2016-2020

From 2016 through 2020, twenty-five (25) crashes occurred involving a motorcycle, with one (1) of the crashes resulting in fatality.

Number of Crashes Involving Motorcycles in the Muhlenberg-Laureldale Planning Area

Municipality	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Laureldale	1	1	1	0	0	3
Muhlenberg	5	3	2	3	9	22
Total	6	4	3	3	9	25

Source: PennDOT, Pennsylvania Crash Information Tool, 2016-2020

Of the ten (10) crashes in the Muhlenberg-Laureldale planning area that resulted in fatalities from 2016 through 2020, five (5) of these crashes involved vulnerable road users.

TRANSIT

Public transportation forms a key component of the Berks County transportation system. While most travel in the area is by automobile, there is a significant and growing segment of the population that relies on public transportation to fulfill their needs. Public transportation is provided by both non-profit and profit organizations, supplying fixed route and demand response services. For reference, transit routes in the Muhlenberg-Laureldale planning area at the time of this publication are depicted on Figures 14 through 15 at the end of this chapter.

The principal provider of public transportation services in Berks County is the South Central Transit Authority (SCTA). This authority oversees two divisions: Berks Area Regional Transit Authority (BARTA) that serves Berks County and the Red Rose Transit Authority (RRTA) that serves Lancaster County.

The BARTA fixed route services 33 Berks County municipalities and carried approximately 1.8 million passengers from June 2020 through June 2021. Overall, major trip origins/destinations (major employers, shopping centers, post-secondary schools) are served by BARTA fixed route bus service. BARTA provides three routes that service the Muhlenberg-Laureldale planning area, which are Routes, 1, 2, and 3.

Route 1, which provides service between Reading and the Walmart/North Reading Plaza in Muhlenberg Township via North Fifth Street, had the highest fixed route ridership out of the 19 routes in the BARTA system, serving 385,489 passenger trips from June 2020 through June 2021. This route currently runs every day of the week. Major stops along this route include the Fairgrounds Square Mall/Boscov's, the Muhlenberg Shopping Center, Penn Plaza, Plaza 222, Target, and the Walmart/North Reading Plaza.

Route 2, which provides service between Reading and the Fairgrounds Square Market in Muhlenberg Township, had the lowest fixed route ridership out of the 19 routes in the BARTA system, serving 4,307 passenger trips from June 2020 through June 2021. This route currently runs only on Fridays and Saturdays. The two major stops along this route include Careerlink, the Fairgrounds Square Mall/Boscov's, and the Fairgrounds Square Market.

Route 3, which provides service between Reading and the Walmart/North Reading Plaza in Muhlenberg Township via Kutztown Road, had the eighth highest fixed route ridership out of the 19 routes in the BARTA system, serving 83,543 passenger trips from June 2020 through June 2021. This route currently runs Monday through Saturday with no service on Sundays. Major stops along this route include the Walmart/North Reading Plaza, Temple, Kutztown Road, North 9th Street, and Careerlink.

SCTA updated their Transit Development Plan in August of 2018 which included recommendations for changes to occur over time. Route 1 did not receive any alignment or service recommendations in this plan. The service recommendations for Route 2 included additional morning and afternoon trips as well as expanding service by adding more weekdays to this route if needed based on demand. Route 3 was the only route in the planning area that received an alignment recommendation, which was to extend the route to the Fairgrounds Square Mall and the North Reading Plaza/Walmart. The service for Route 3 has already been extended to the North Reading Plaza/Walmart based on this recommendation.

Goal 3 identified in the 2018 SCTA Transit Development Plan Final Report is to connect people to desired locations. A desired location for many is their jobs. One way to improve access to jobs would be for developers and planners to consider bus stop location early in the design process.

As more businesses and jobs come to the Muhlenberg-Laureldale planning area, planners and developers should work with BARTA early in the design process of a new project, rather than placing stops at later stages of construction, with considerations for pedestrian access, existing bus operations, and potential stop facilities.

The Pennsylvania Public Transportation Association (PPTA) in partnership with PennDOT published the Building Better Bus Stops Resource Guide in December 2020. This resource guide promotes safe access to fixed route bus service and provides municipalities, transit agencies, planners, and designers with resources to encourage consideration and incorporation of transit in planning and design. The review and implementation of strategies from this resource guide is encouraged in order to provide quality and efficient transit service and ensure bus stops meet the needs of all riders, transit agencies, and the community. The Building a Better Bus Stop Resource Guide can be found at: www.ppta.net/pages/betterbusstops/index.html.

Special Services Operations

BARTA's Special Services Division is responsible for operating and administering most human service transportation in Berks County. These services including the Shared Ride, ADA, and Medical Assistance Transportation Program (MATP) programs, and are specialized, demand-responsive paratransit service and provide public transportation to persons whose disabling condition prevents the use of fixed route transit.

Taxi Service and Ride Sharing

For areas in the Region that are not served by BARTA, or individuals unable to take advantage of BARTA's Special Services Division, other options exist. One of the options is to receive transportation through one of the eight taxicab operators that provide 24 hour/7-day service in Berks County. The Public Utility Commission lists the following taxi operators as active in Berks County: Reading Checker Cab Inc., La Mexicana Express Service LLC, Fleetwood Cab Services LLC, Grab A Cab Inc, Reading Checker Cabs LLC, Reading Yellow Cab Inc., Reading Metro Taxi Cab Inc, and Dominicana Taxi Express LLC. Ride sharing has emerged as a popular mode of transportation when personal transportation does not exist to an individual. Berks County has been serviced by Uber since operations began in 2015, shortly followed by Lyft.

Commuter Services

Berks County joined Commuter Services of Pennsylvania, a program of the nonprofit Susquehanna Regional Transportation Partnership in 2009. The program covers 13 counties. It is locally sponsored by RATS, BARTA, and Greater Reading Chamber of Commerce and Industry and offers transportation demand management strategies and assistance to employers and individuals for finding options other than driving alone to work. The program goal is to reduce the number of vehicle miles traveled and to increase the efficiency of the highway system by reducing congestion and improving air quality. Participation in the program is free. Participation in the program has been successful – increasing involvement and reducing VMT since 2009. The program is funded with federal Congestion Mitigation & Air Quality (CMAQ) funds through participating MPO's.

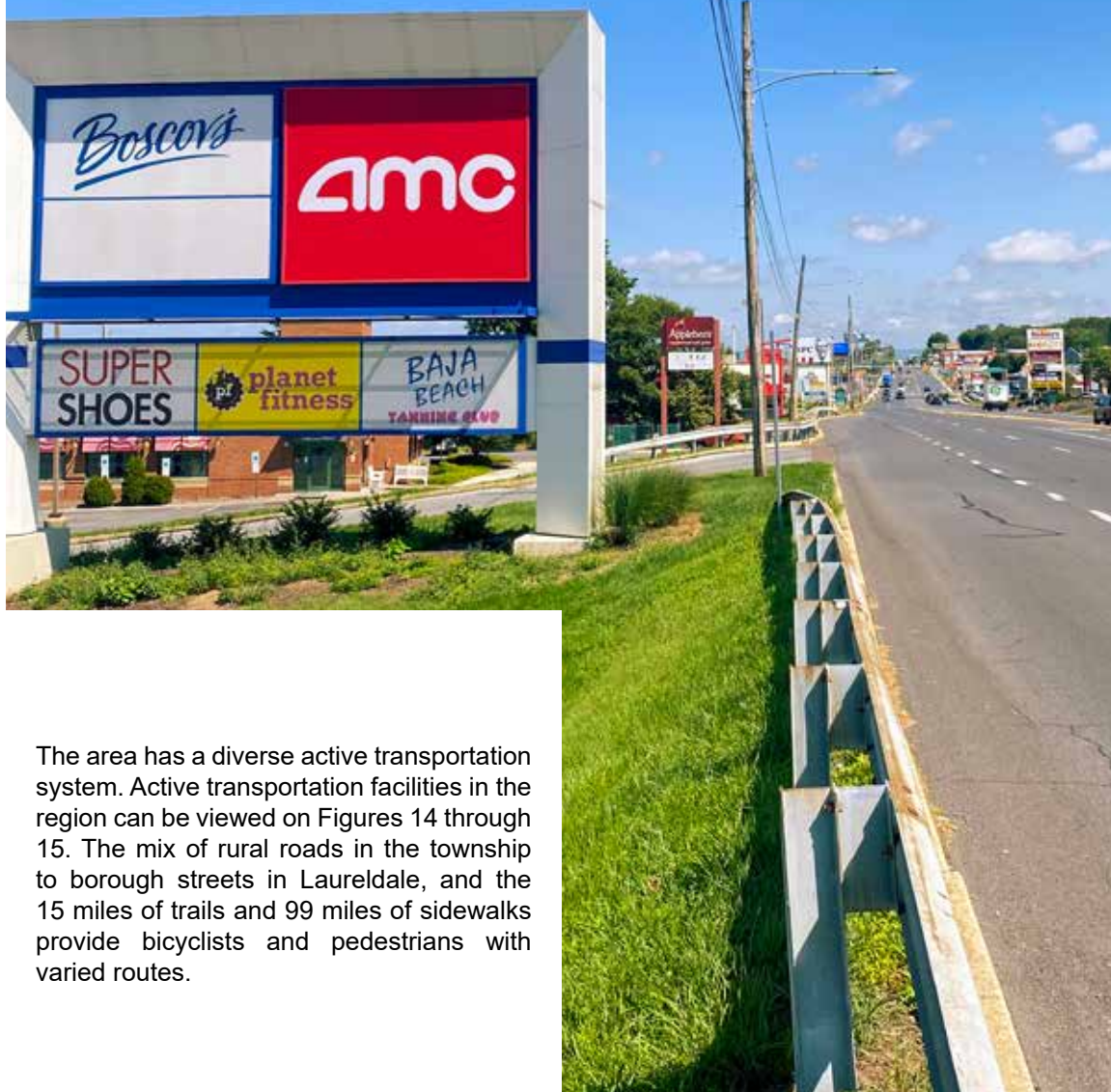
When new businesses move into the Muhlenberg-Laureldale planning area, it is important to promote Commuter Services of Pennsylvania. Commuter Services of Pennsylvania can provide free assistance in tailoring programs to meet employer's needs and aid in building a program that works at getting employees out of their individual vehicles and/or rush hour traffic. Benefits to employers from working with Commuter Services of Pennsylvania can include recruiting and retaining workers, savings on payroll taxes, reducing parking costs and/or spaces, getting employees to work on time, improving attendance, improving morale, and achieving environmental benefits. These benefits can be provided through working with Commuter Services of Pennsylvania to achieve plans specific to each employer. Options tailored to employers can include carpooling/

vanpooling, transit promotion, Emergency Ride Home program, preferential parking, active transportation options, teleworking, staggered shifts, compressed work weeks, payroll tax savings, and promotional/educational activities.

Not only do employers have an option to partner with Commuter Services of Pennsylvania, but communities can as well. Community Partners work with the Commuter Services of Pennsylvania program to provide commute option assistance to their member organizations, residents, and other interested parties within their communities.

ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION

Active transportation is defined as any form of human-powered transportation that engages individuals in healthy, physical activity while traveling from place to place. These trips take place on a variety of different facilities, some reserved exclusively for non-motorized users such as sidewalks and trails, while others take place on multi-function transportation facilities such as bike lanes on streets. Walking and biking are important parts of the area's overall transportation system as they are two of the most basic and affordable forms of transportation available.



The area has a diverse active transportation system. Active transportation facilities in the region can be viewed on Figures 14 through 15. The mix of rural roads in the township to borough streets in Laureldale, and the 15 miles of trails and 99 miles of sidewalks provide bicyclists and pedestrians with varied routes.

The Schuylkill River Trail is a major north-south trail corridor consisting of continuous and unconnected segments of trails from Philadelphia into Schuylkill County. As of June 2022, the Schuylkill River Greenways National Heritage Area is working on the Northern Berks County Feasibility Study to determine the best route for the Schuylkill River Trail from Reading to Hamburg, with an expected completion of the study in Fall 2022. Currently there is approximately half (0.5) of a mile of off-road trail that is part of the Schuylkill River Trail along the western border of Muhlenberg Township. This feasibility study will help determine the best route to close the gaps of this trail along the Schuylkill River, with a priority for off road trail where available. To connect and improve safety on the Schuylkill River Trail, there are approximately 3.5 miles of proposed on road and 1 mile of proposed off road trail in Muhlenberg Township.

An existing major north-south trail corridor located further east through the township and borough is the Muhlenberg Rail Trail. This mostly flat, paved, 1.8-mile trail runs from the trailhead at Mount Laurel Road/Railroad Ave in the north to the Montrose Avenue/Prince Street trailhead at the southern end. The trail parallels Rosedale Avenue and 11th Avenue, with direct access to residential areas and parks. Small businesses and restaurants are also nearby. The commercial offerings of Kutztown Road are never more than half a mile from the trail as well as the larger commercial shopping centers of U.S. 222 Business never being further than one mile away. All of the Muhlenberg School District buildings are also within a one-mile distance. When traveling from this trail to these destinations most routes have existing sidewalk. Any improvements to these connections would be ensuring ADA compliance, as well as well-lit, well-marked intersections to increase accessibility and safety.

Most pedestrian trips are short; therefore, sidewalks along key corridors connecting residences to nearby amenities have the greatest influence on creating viable pedestrian transportation networks. Sidewalk networks provide a safe means for residents of Muhlenberg and Laureldale to access nearby attractions such as schools, parks, and adjacent subdivisions. Going forward, new land developments and subdivisions, especially ones served by public sewer and water utilities, should be encouraged to have sidewalks on one side of all streets when within two (2) miles of a school, or half (0.5) of a mile of a greenway, park, shopping center, business complex, transit stop, or when there is an existing sidewalk network adjacent to the proposed development.

RATS updated their Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Plan in 2020 and identified potential projects based on public, municipal, and non-profit survey responses. Potential projects identified in the Muhlenberg-Laureldale planning area include a bike lane and sidewalks along the U.S. 222 Business corridor, sidewalks on Tuckerton Road between Stoudts Ferry Bridge Road and U.S. 222 Business, sidewalks on East Bellevue Avenue and George Street between PA 61 and U.S. 222 Business, a marked bicycle lane between Hampden Heights and Bernhart Reservoir, a more complete trail along River Road, and extending the Muhlenberg Rail Trail further north.

In order to implement the Berks County Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Plan, actions need to be taken at different levels of government. Municipalities such as Laureldale and Muhlenberg should:

- Adopt and enforce Complete Streets policies to ensure the entire public right-of-way is available for appropriate users.
- Ensure that local ordinances and regulations include requirements for pedestrian and bicycle accommodations into and within all new developments.
- Examine existing bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure for strengths and weaknesses, and devise plans for improvements throughout the Region and across boundaries to address needs for the community;
- Formalize those needs/desires within municipal planning documents.

- Encourage businesses to provide bike racks for visitors and storage facilities for employees; seek or support funding where applicable.
- Review local development guidelines include requirements for pedestrian facilities.
- Enact policies that new development, when located near transit lines, engages early with BARTA to ensure adequate transit access.
- Examine bus stops and sidewalk connections to bus stops and prioritize missing connections and/or areas needing repair.
- Engage with PennDOT officials during the PennDOT Connects process on all state roadway projects.
- Be aware of grant funding opportunities and requirements of those programs.

Surveys conducted for the Plan targeted municipal officials, non-profit groups and public input to identify the community's needs for active transportation. Projects identified indicated a desire for safer pedestrian crossings at S.R. 0061, sidewalks for safer pedestrian access to the 5th Street Highway along Tuckerton Avenue, George Street and Bellevue Street, bicycle accommodations along the 5th Street Highway, an extension of the Muhlenberg Rail-Trail north to Ontelaunee, and access to the Schuylkill River Trail.

For more information on bicycle and pedestrian access, refer to the Berks County Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Plan 2020 located at <https://www.co.berks.pa.us/Dept/Planning/Pages/BicycleandPedestrianPlanning.aspx>.

ALTERNATIVE FUELS

The introduction of alternative fueled vehicles, primarily liquid propane gas (LPG) and electric have been somewhat of a novelty in the past, but over recent years the growth of this sector has had dramatic impacts on the environment by lowering emissions. U.S. Route 222 has been identified as a potential route for Alternative Fuel Corridor (AFC) designation or charging deployment in the Pennsylvania State Plan for Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Deployment. Although the Muhlenberg-Laureldale planning area does not currently contain any nationally designated AFCs it is important to consider the potential for alternative fuel infrastructure throughout the planning area to support travel of these vehicles.

An Electric Vehicle (EV) AFC must have EV charging infrastructure installed every 50 miles along the route and located within 1 travel mile of an exit or highway intersection that consists of at least four 150kW DC fast chargers (DCFCs) with Combined Charging System (CCS) ports capable of simultaneously DC charging four EVs with a minimum station power capability at or above 600kW. Since U.S. Route 222 has been identified as a potential AFC, planning for this type of EV charging infrastructure within 1 travel mile of the U.S. Route 222 exit onto Route 61 South and the U.S. Route 222 exit onto Business 222 would support this potential AFC.

There are currently two public alternative fueling stations in the planning area, which are both electric charging stations, shown on Figure 14. There are two electric chargers located at the Muhlenberg Township Building and two chargers at a grocery store along 5th Street Highway. Planning for additional alternative fueling stations should be considered to aid in the reduction of greenhouse emissions and support transportation electrification for not only personal vehicles, but transit, fleets, and freight. Consideration to time spent in a location should be given when planning additional Level 2 EV charging stations to ensure a convenient, reliable, affordable, and equitable charging experience for all users. Typical examples of ideal locations include workplaces or public

destinations such as trailheads, parks, shopping centers, and movie theaters. Consideration to adding EV chargers should focus on these ideal locations and along heavily traveled roads in the region including Route 61, 5th Street Highway/Allentown Pike, and Kutztown Road to provide more access and availability to more residents and visitors of the area.

Grant programs have been made available to aid in the development of alternative fuel infrastructure and to educate and communicate the existence of this infrastructure to promote increased alternative vehicle usage. Federally, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, signed into law in November 2021, contains specific funding to support the development of infrastructure supporting the expansion of EVs making it the most transformative investment in EV charging in United States history.

FUTURE PROJECTS

Figure 16 shows the location of the proposed projects and their corresponding project numbers as shown in the RATS FFY 2023-2026 Transportation Improvement Plan, as well as other significant potential and upcoming projects.

Bellevue Avenue over Reading Blue Mtn & Northern RR – PennDOT Project ID 10527

This project involves a bridge replacement/rehabilitation on State Route (SR) 2016 (Bellevue Avenue) over the Reading Blue Mountain and Northern Railroads in Muhlenberg Township.

Freeway Service Patrol – PennDOT Project ID 94900

This project funds the freeway service patrol on US Route 422, US Route 222, and PA 12.

222 from 61 to Business 222 - Resurface – PennDOT Project ID 110009

This project involves the roadway resurfacing of US Route 222 from Route 61 to Business Route 222 (5th Street Highway). Work will include concrete patching and diamond grinding, and bridge preservation activities on 6 structures in Muhlenberg Township as well as Ontelaunee Township.

RATS Bridge Preservation #9 – PennDOT Project ID 114378

This project funds consultant design, construction of bridge repairs and preservation of various bridges in Berks County to reduce outstanding priority bridge repair items. These Bridge Preventative Maintenance projects vary based on current conditions. Two state owned fair condition bridges are current candidates for preventative maintenance activities under this project.

5th Street Bridge over PA Route 12 – PennDOT Project ID 93626

This project involves the bridge replacement/rehabilitation of State Route 2005 (5th Street) over State Route 12 (Warren Street Bypass) in Muhlenberg Township. This project has been removed from the FFY 2023-2026 Transportation Improvement Plan; however, it is identified in the Mid-Range Period of the Long Range Transportation Plan.

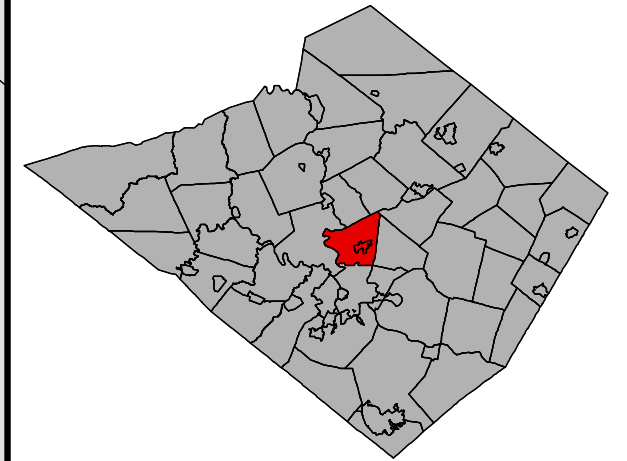
AIRPORTS AND RAILROADS

Given the regional nature of airport and railroad development and support, this Comprehensive Plan calls for no specific regard to air and rail service and instead adopts the RATS FFY 2023-2045 Long Range Transportation Plan in regard to these modes as reference.

TRANSPORTATION GOALS

- The municipalities in the planning area should have a “united voice” to vote or petition legislators for the benefit of transportation issues within the Region and communicate unified requests for improvements to RATS through the TIP and LRTP.
- The municipalities should pursue preliminary technical evaluation of identified priorities and share recommendations with the appropriate municipalities and agencies. The analysis may determine that a project is not feasible before cost is incurred.
- The municipalities should collaborate on a regional basis to focus limited funding on the most effective solutions and to maximize the potential for cost sharing and savings.
- Review municipal ordinances, especially in the Borough, for parking standards and amend as necessary to ensure parking requirements are both appropriate and flexible.
- The municipalities should encourage areas of truck parking to reduce trucks parking in non-designated or unsafe areas. Consideration should be given to encourage developers to include an area of safe truck parking within the property they are developing for drivers that are servicing that location.
- Each municipality should implement low-cost safety improvements where such measures provide an immediate impact on safety.
- The municipalities should ensure future development does not create detrimental access issues, increase congestion, or create safety problems.
- Communicate with the operators of commercial and industrial facilities regarding issues with regular truck movements and designated routes.
- Consider the development of a regional trail/pedestrian/bicycle plan that provides guidance for an interconnected system of pedestrian improvements between the municipalities.
- Ensure municipal subdivision and land development ordinances contain requirements for sidewalks in appropriate locations. Going forward, new land developments and subdivisions, especially ones served by public sewer and water utilities, should be encouraged to have sidewalks on one side of all streets when within two (2) miles of school, or half (0.5) of a mile of a greenway, park, shopping center, business complex, transit stop, or when there is an existing sidewalk network adjacent to the proposed development.
- Encourage the addition of sidewalks within the planning area especially where there are missing links or where sidewalks would facilitate appropriate connections to existing or future neighborhoods and destinations (such as schools, parks, recreation facilities, major job generators, or shopping centers).
- Communicate with SCTA/BARTA regarding future bus routes, shuttles, and other transit opportunities. Municipal officials and developers should work with SCTA/BARTA early in the design process of a new project, rather than placing stops at later stages in construction, with considerations for pedestrian access, existing bus operations, and potential stop facilities.
- Continue to improve 5th Street Highway/Allentown Pike as a place to live, work, and play by advocating for traffic calming in and surrounding the corridor.

Road Classifications and Average Daily Traffic



Legend

- Principal Arterials
- Urban Collectors
- Urban Minor Arterial
- Urban Principal Arterial Other Freeways
- Rural Major Collectors
- Traffic Volume
- Roads
- Railroads
- Municipal Boundaries

Source data: Berks County Planning Commission GIS, Berks County GIS/IS, Berks County Mapping, Berks DES, PennDOT

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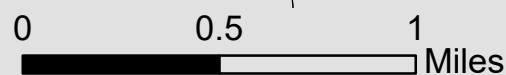
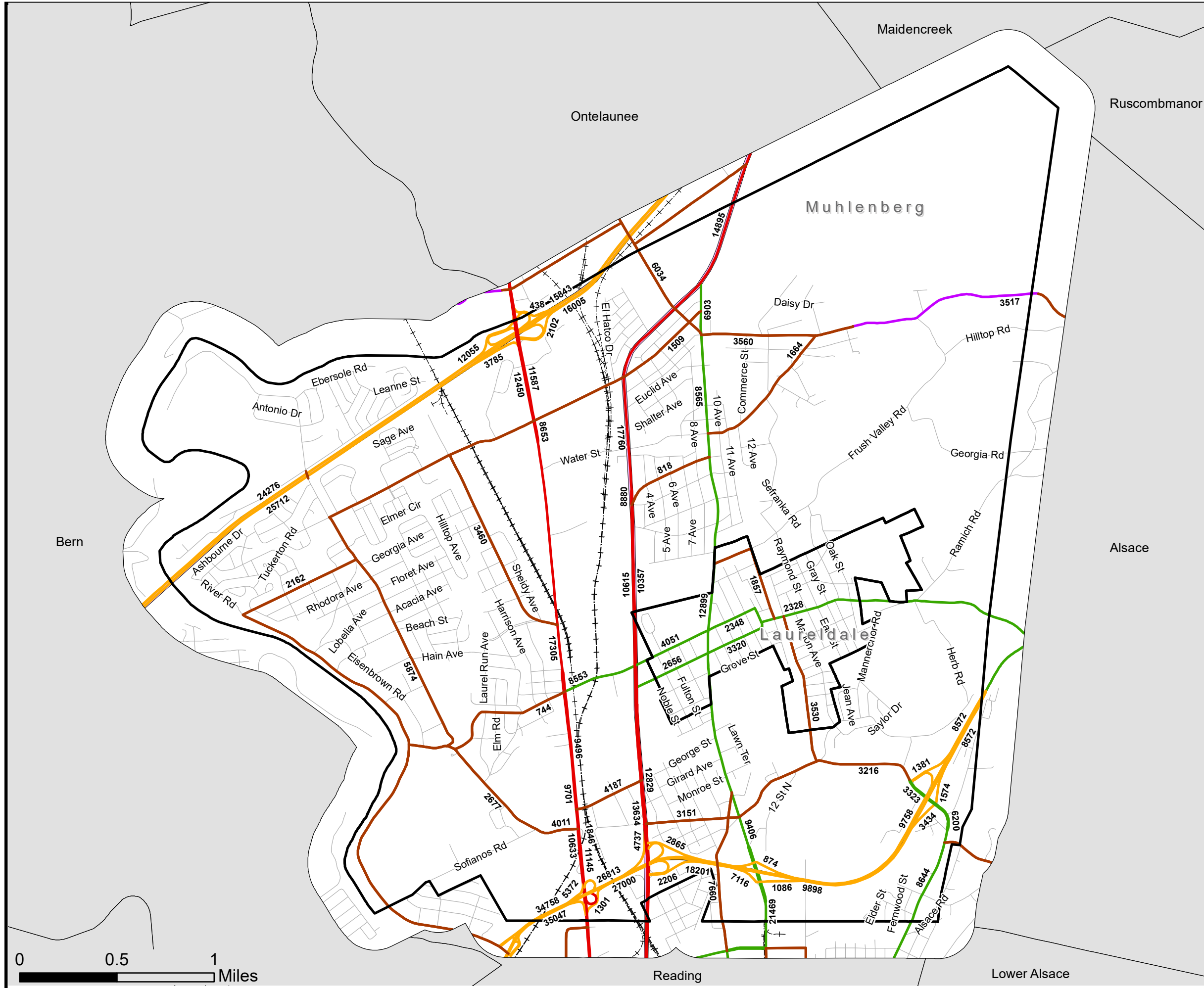
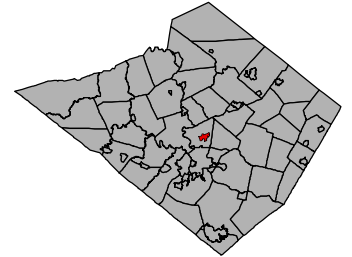


FIGURE 12

Muhlenberg Township and
Laureldale Borough
Joint Comprehensive Plan Update
October 16, 2023

Road Classifications and Average Daily Traffic Laureldale Borough



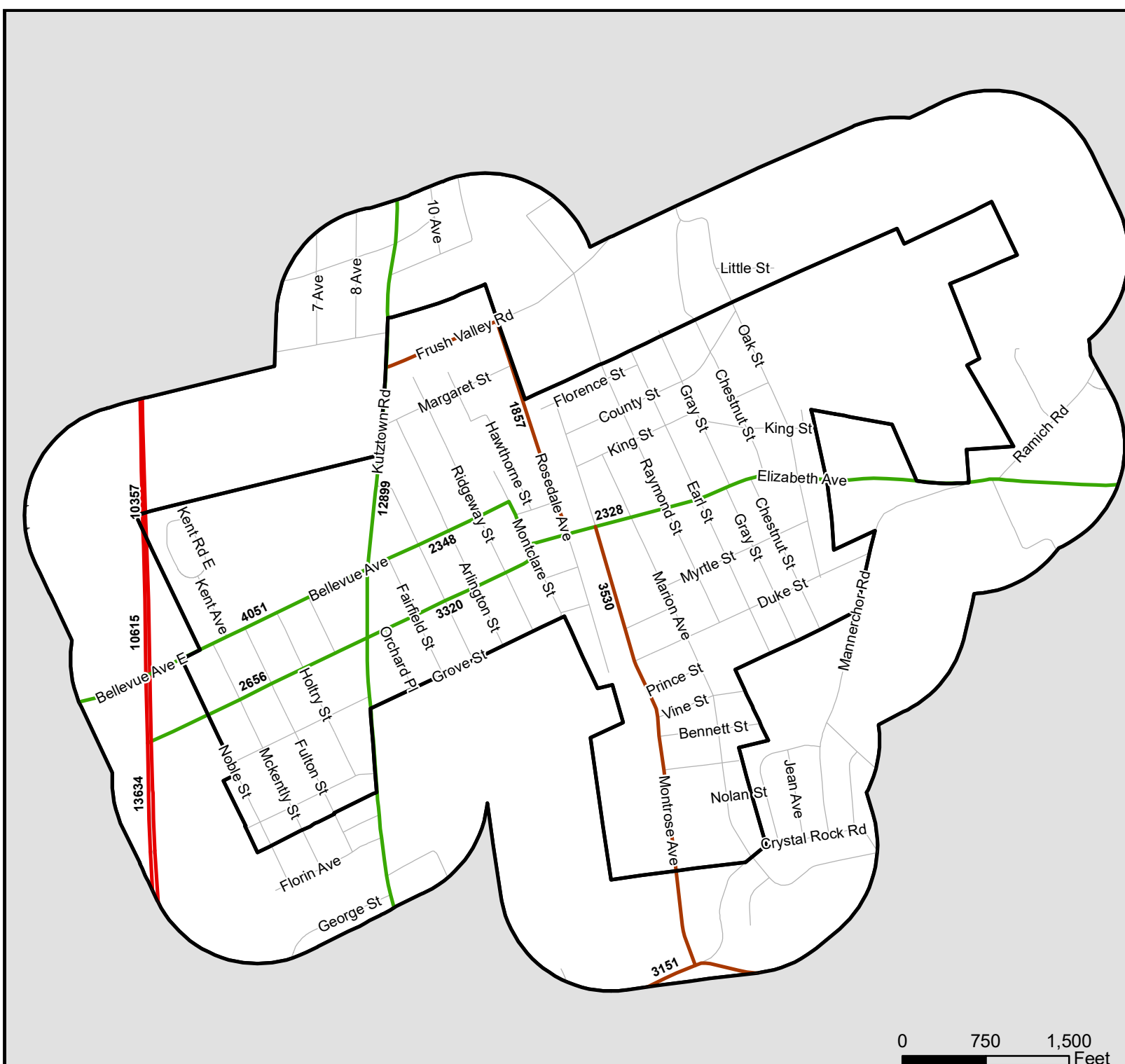
Legend

- Principal Arterials
- Urban Collectors
- Urban Minor Arterial
- Urban Principal Arterial
- Other Freeways
- Rural Major Collectors
- 555- Traffic Volume
- Roads
- Railroads
- ▭ Municipal Boundaries

Source data:
Berks County Planning Commission GIS, Berks County
GIS/IS, Berks County Mapping, Berks DES, PennDOT

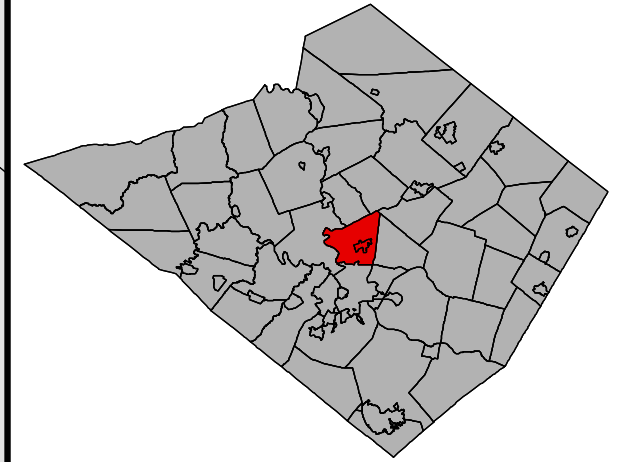
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www.countyofberks.com/planning

Bridge and Pavement Conditions



Legend

- State Bridges
- County Bridges
- Municipal Bridges
- Posted Bridges
- Bridge Condition: Good
- Bridge Condition: Fair
- Bridge Condition: Poor
- Roads
- Railroads
- Streams and Water Bodies
- Municipal Boundaries

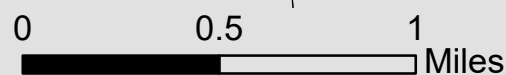
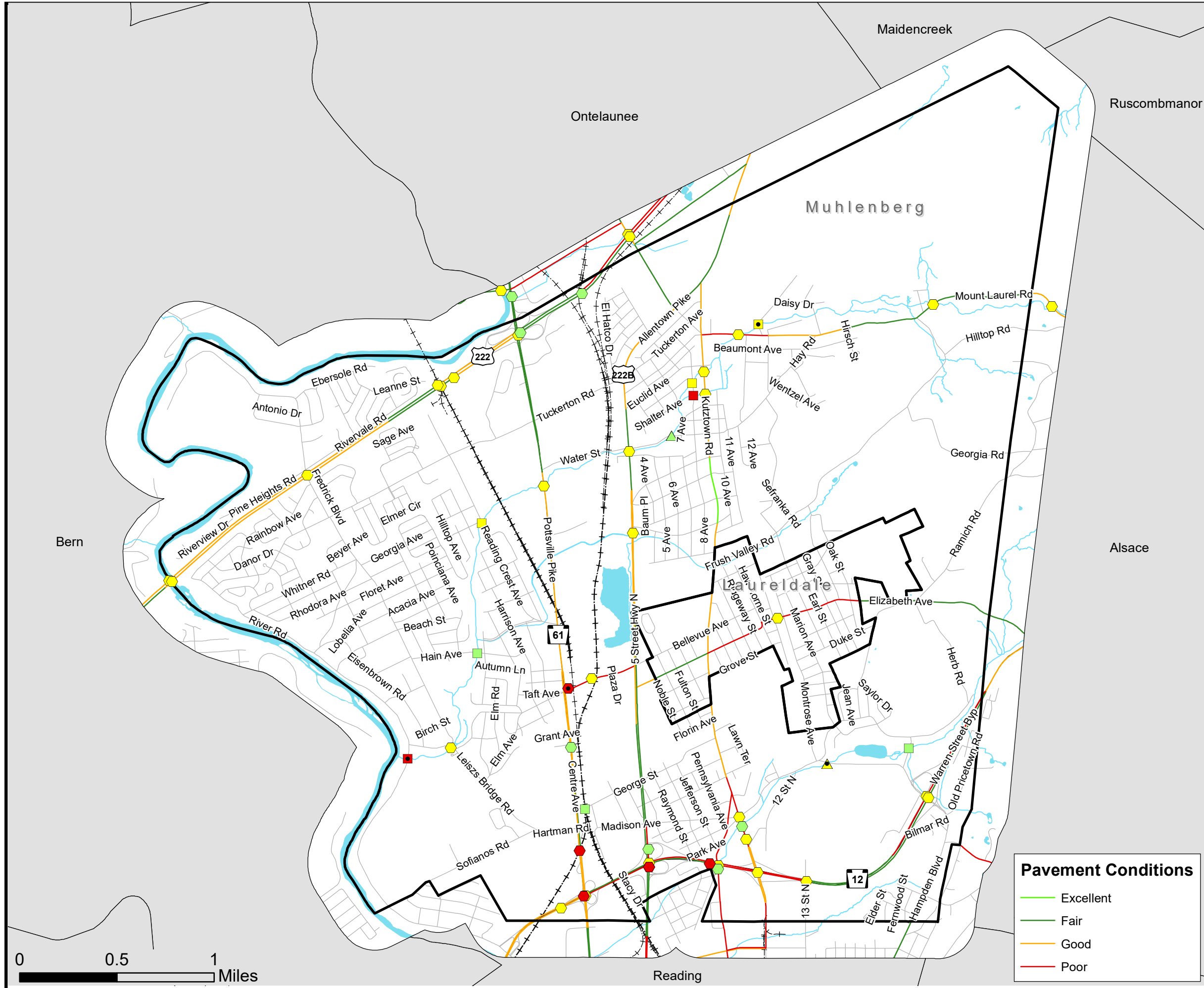
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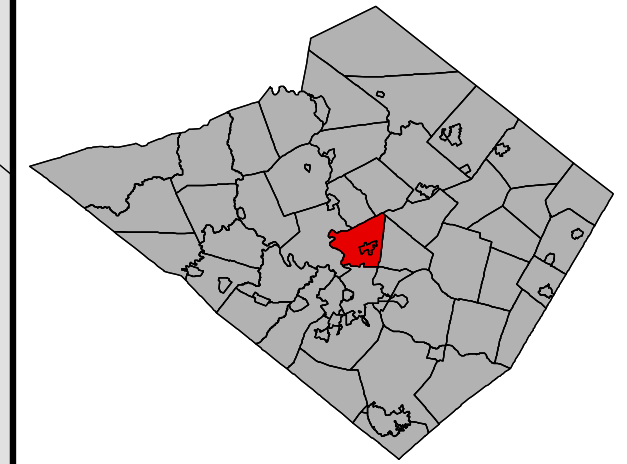
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Pavement Conditions








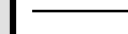

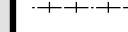

- Excellent
- Fair
- Good
- Poor



Active Transportation and Transit



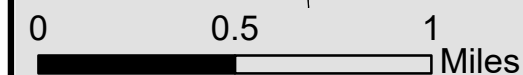
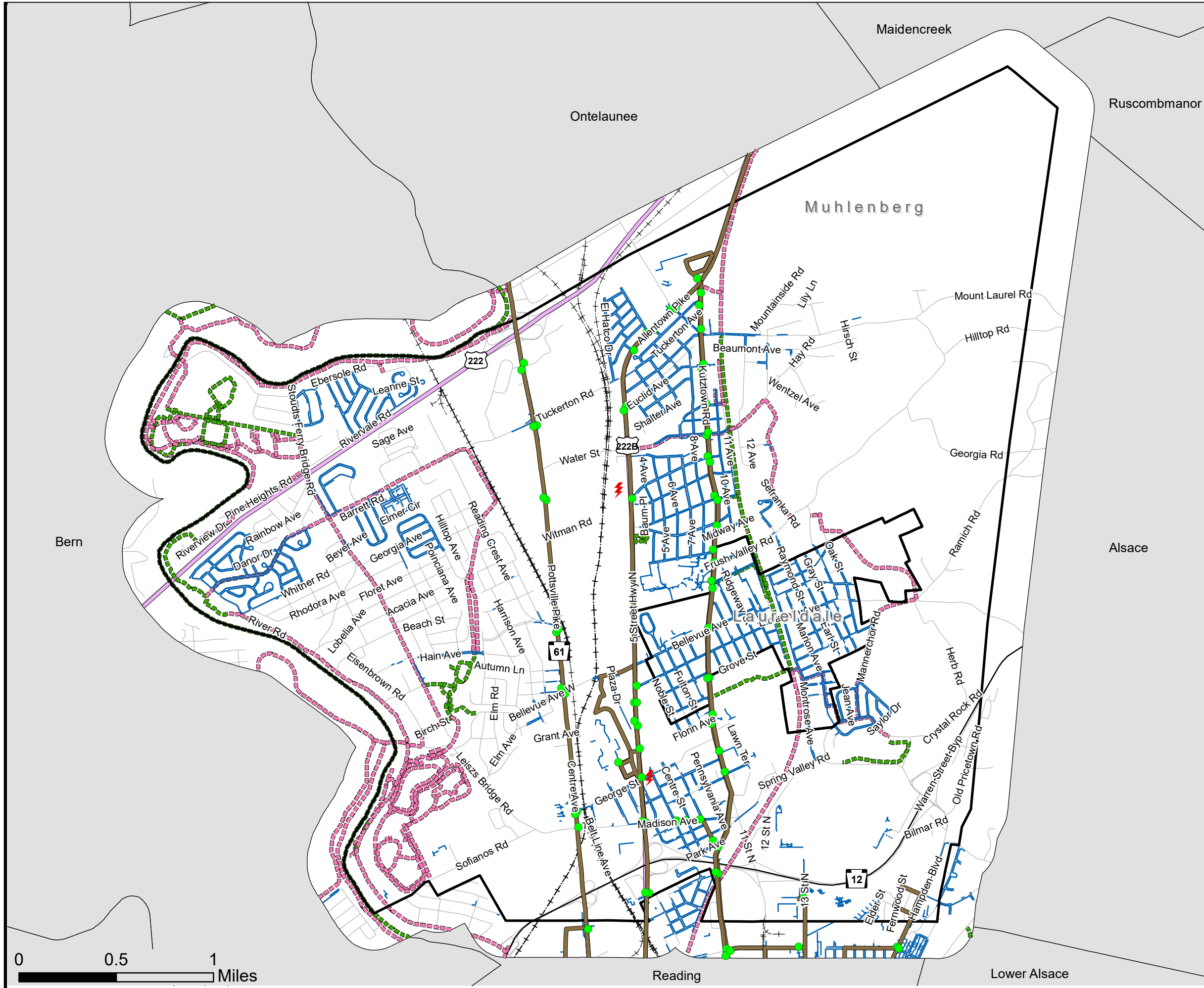
Legend

-  Sidewalks
-  Existing Trails
-  Proposed Trails
-  Electric Vehicle Charging Stations
-  BARTA Bus Stops
-  BARTA Bus Routes
-  US Route
-  State Route
-  Roads
-  Railroads
-  Municipal Boundaries

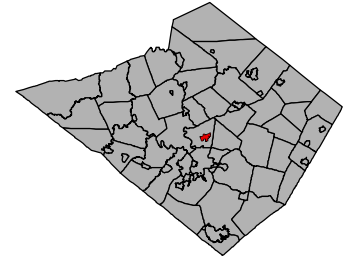
Source data: Berks County Planning Commission GIS, Berks County GIS/IS, Berks County Mapping, Berks DES

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Active Transportation and Transit Laureldale Borough



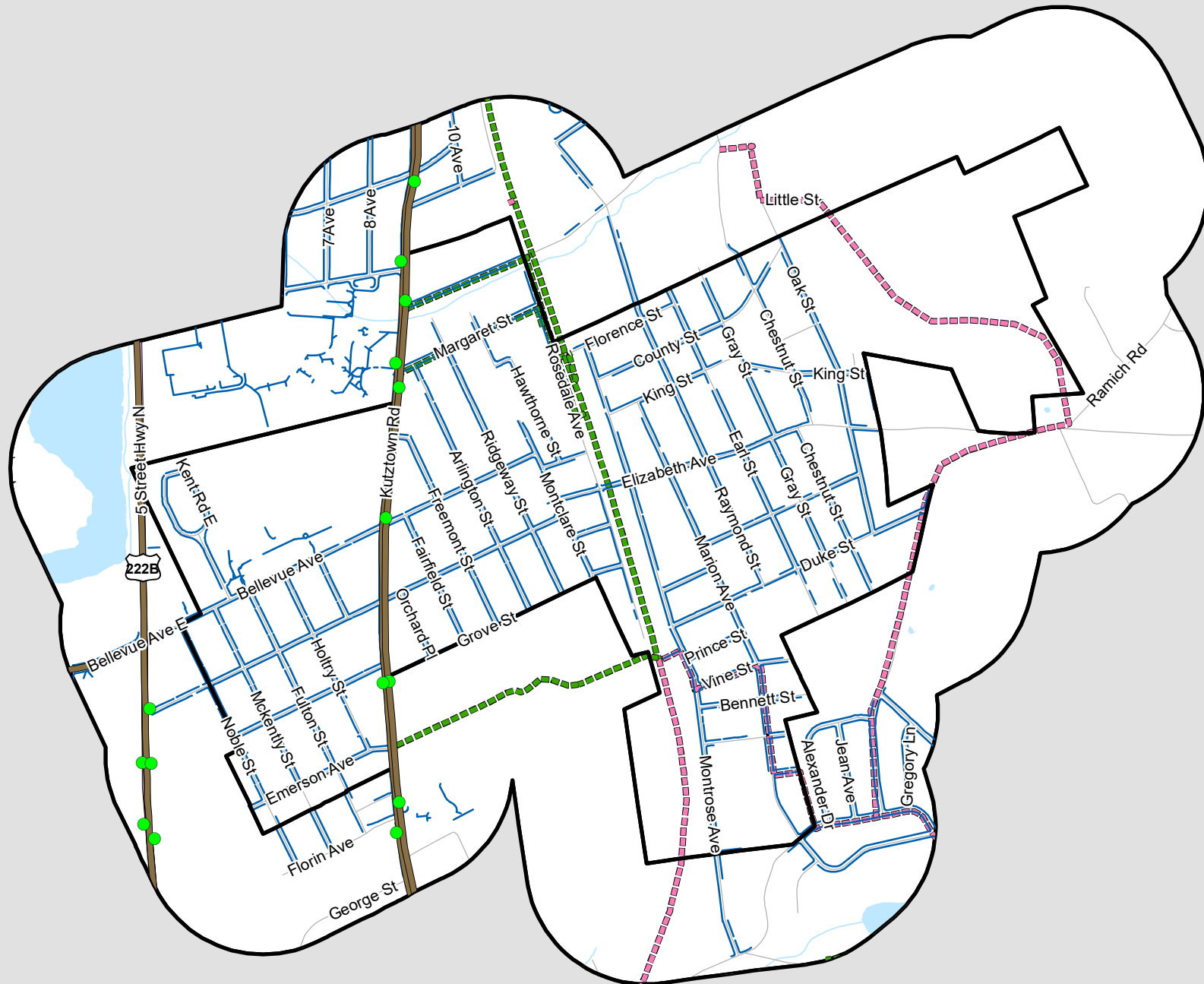
Legend

- Sidewalks
- Existing Trails
- Proposed Trails
- Electric Vehicle Charging Stations
- BARTA Bus Stops
- BARTA Bus Routes
- US Route
- State Route
- Roads
- Railroads
- Municipal Boundaries

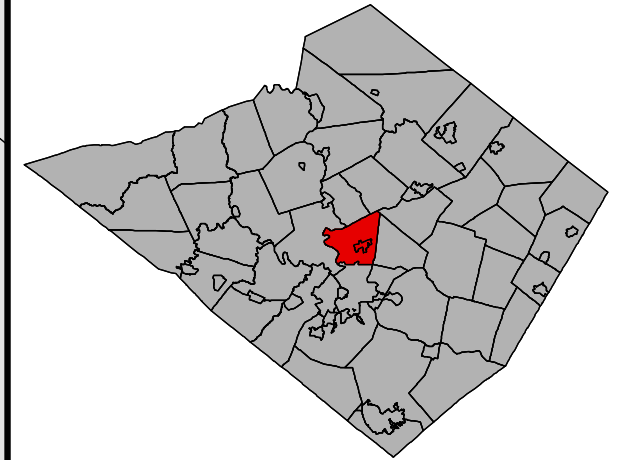
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GIS/IS, Berks County Mapping, Berks DES

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


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Future Projects



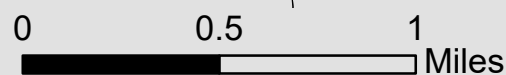
Legend

-  Bridge
-  Highway
-  US Route
-  State Route
-  Roads
-  Railroads
-  Streams and Water Bodies
-  Municipal Boundaries

Source data: Berks County Planning Commission GIS, Berks County GIS/IS, Berks County Mapping, Berks DES, PennDOT

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MLJCP

10



Existing Land Use Plan

EXISTING LAND USE PLAN

Land use is only one aspect of planning; however, it is an extremely important one. Land use is the alteration of the natural environment into man-made or built environment and includes lands which are undisturbed by man. Development regulations, physical restraints and highway networks all contribute to the land use patterns within a region. Land use is used as a tool for evaluating current zoning and subdivision and land development policies as well as provides guidance for future development. Land use helps evaluate public needs, potential environmental impacts as well as prevents potential conflicts. Municipalities utilize land use planning to balance development and preserve natural resources. It serves to guide official decisions regarding the distribution and intensity of private development, reinvestment in urban centers and capital improvement programs.

For a land use plan to be practical, it must accurately inventory existing land uses and development characteristics. Then, with proper analysis, future land use schemes can reflect reality, and avoid the creation of nonconforming uses when implemented through zoning regulations. To determine existing land uses, two sources were consulted. First, the Berks County Planning Commission has prepared a land use GIS map coverage which combines tax parcel records with land cover features from aerial photography. Specifically, tax parcel data is used within “developed” areas while land cover data is used in outlying rural areas. In rural areas this land cover data can potentially “split” larger properties into several uses. Conversely, within more densely developed areas like Laureldale Borough and the former Temple Borough, the County’s tax parcel information was used to determine land use. Here, the tax records list one predominant land use on the entire property, which is also more accurate than aerial photo interpretation when analyzing a “built” environment. Second, the GIS data was reviewed by the Muhlenberg Laureldale Joint Planning Committee at the onset of this update with corrections noted. Regionally, the existing land use pattern includes a wide range of uses and settings which are depicted on the Existing Land Use Maps, found following this section.

Existing Land Use Analysis

1. Methodology

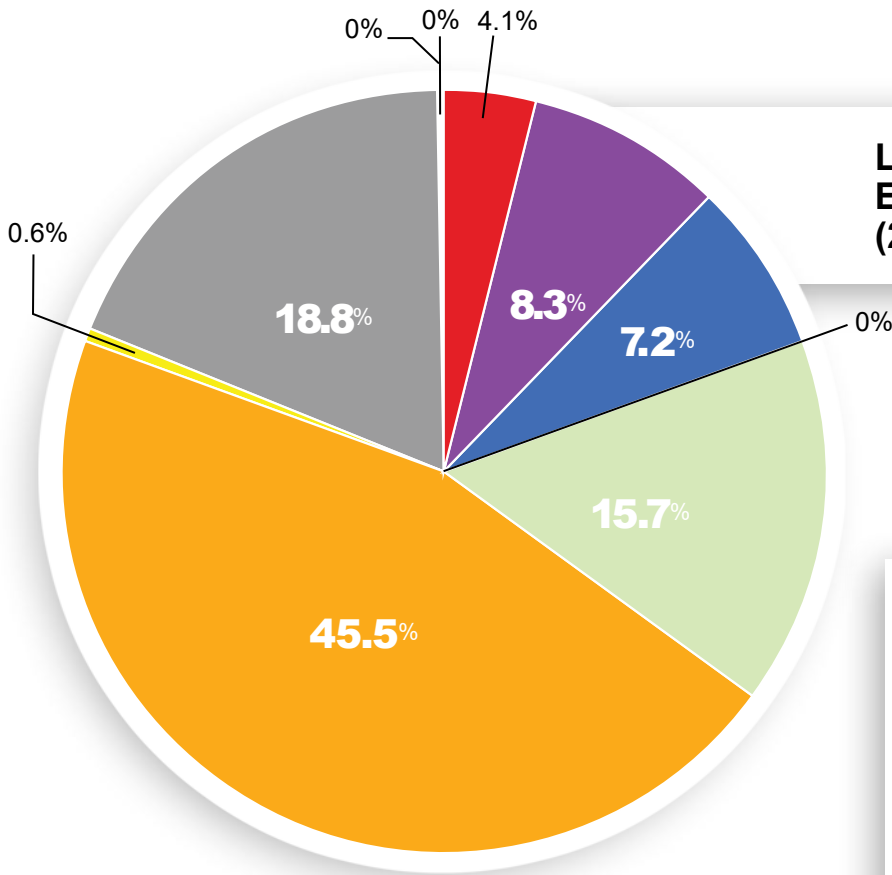
The Existing Land Use Map was created digitally using a geographic information system (GIS). The Berks County GIS tax parcel data was modified to include a specific existing land use designation for each parcel. Land use assessment codes, aerial imagery, information from Act 537 sewer plans, and other GIS data related to land use was also used in the analysis.

The table and chart below illustrate the existing land uses by acreage in the region:

Existing Land Use in the Muhlenberg-Laureldale Joint Planning Area, 2022

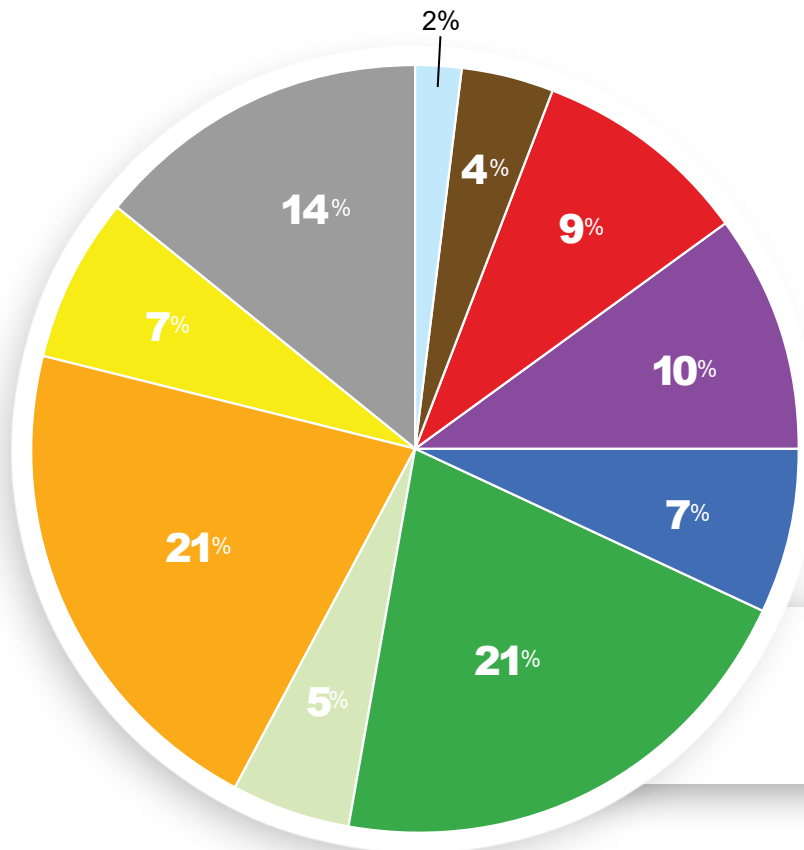
Land Use	Muhlenberg Township		Laureldale Borough		Joint Planning Area	
	# Acreage	% of Area	# Acreage	% of Area	Total Acreage	% of Area
Agriculture	347	4%	0	0%	347	4%
Commercial	685	9%	21	4%	706	9%
Industrial	776	10%	43	8%	819	10%
Institutional	513	7%	37	7%	550	7%
Open Space	1,624	21%	0	0%	1,624	20%
Recreation	415	5%	81	16%	496	6%
Residential High	1,663	21%	235	45%	1,898	23%
Residential Low	526	7%	3	1%	529	6%
Transportation	1,050	14%	97	19%	1,147	14%
Water	153	2%	0	0%	153	2%
Total	7,752	100%	517	100%	8,269	100%

Source: Berks County Planning Commission



Laureldale Existing Land Use (2022)

- Agriculture
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Institutional
- Open Space
- Recreational
- Residential High
- Residential Low
- Transportation
- Water



Muhlenberg Existing Land Use (2022)

1. Residential Lands

Residential Low

The Residential Low category consists of primarily single-family detached dwelling units on one to five acre lots. A lot size larger than five acres was subject to more than one existing land use designation, as the residue land was typically designated as Open Space.

- Comprising 6% of the region's total land area or 529 acres, Residential Low land ranks 7th largest among land use categories. Muhlenberg Township (526 acres) contains the vast majority of acreage of this type of residential development.
- Just three parcels within this category, measuring approximately 3 acres total, are located within Laureldale Borough.

Residential High

The Residential High category is characterized by a variety of dwelling unit types, including single-family detached, semi-detached, townhouses, apartments, and mobile homes within parks, at densities that exceed one unit per acre.

- At 23% of the planning area, this designation is the most prevalent land use in terms of acreage within the region. The majority of the high-density residential development within the region is located throughout Laureldale Borough as well as Hyde Park and Temple in Muhlenberg Township.
- Notably, 45% of Laureldale Borough is considered Residential High.

2. Commercial Lands

The Commercial lands category contains such uses as retail, offices, utilities (electric and phone companies) as well as personal, professional, and business services.

- Commercial uses comprise 9% of the region's total land area or 706 acres.
- The majority of the commercial uses are located on or near the S.R. 61 and S.R. 222B corridors.

3. Industrial Lands

Industrial land uses include processing, fabrication, or assembly of raw materials or component parts, wholesale trade, and warehousing. Landfills, junk yards, and quarries are also included within this designation.

- Approximately 819 acres or 10% of industrial land uses encompass the land in the Muhlenberg-Laureldale Region.

4. Institutional Lands

Institutional lands are used for public services such as governmental and public safety facilities, educational facilities (including athletic fields owned by educational institutions), cemeteries and religious institutions.

- Institutional lands occupy 550 acres or approximately 7% of the region's land area.

5. Agricultural Lands

The rich soil, aided by a favorable climate and centralized Mid-Atlantic location, has contributed to a strong agricultural tradition in Berks County, some which is still carried on today in the Region. Agriculture lands are used for crops, pasture, the raising of livestock, farmsteads, barns, silos, mushroom farms, and the fields where trees and plants are harvested for lumber and nurseries.

- Agricultural land accounts for 347 acres or 4% of the land use in the region.
- All of the agriculture in the region is located within Muhlenberg Township, the vast majority of which is found in eastern Muhlenberg Township.
- Acreage of agriculture in Muhlenberg Township was reduced nearly by half (282-acre loss). Much of this acreage has been converted into residential or recreation.

6. Recreation Lands

Recreation land provides space and facilities for people to engage in active and passive recreation activities. These include playgrounds, parkland, state gamelands/forests, as well as recreation land owned by non-profit recreational groups (i.e. homeowners associations, sportsman clubs, little league) and commercial recreation (i.e. golf courses, miniature golf courses, campgrounds).

- Recreation lands occupy 496 acres or 6% of the region's total land area.
- 16% of Laureldale Borough is comprised of recreational lands, but the distribution is lopsided with Dominic Manzella Memorial Park accounting for 70 of the municipality's 88 acres of parkland.
- Similarly, over 250 acres of the 415 acres of recreation located within Muhlenberg Township are located within Jim Dietrich and Riverside Basin Parks, both located on the western border of the Township near the Schuylkill River.

7. Open Space Lands

Open Space is land that is predominantly wooded or open land that does not include a structure such as meadows and fields (not farmland). Residue land associated with large residential lots over 5 acres, as well as forested land on farmland is also included in this category. The majority of this land is private except for municipal watershed lands.

- Open Space is the second largest use of land in the region at 1,624 acres or approximately 20% of the region's total land area.
- However, none of this land is located within Laureldale Borough.

8. Transportation Lands

Transportation lands are used for roads and railroads. While the network of transportation modes that serves the region also includes bus and motor freight services, these land uses, as well as parking garages are included in the commercial category.

- The amount of land area consumed by such a network is significant (1,147 acres or approximately 14% of the region's total land area), due to the varying widths of rights-of-way associated with the highway and railroad modes of transportation as well as the dense development found in several areas of the region that requires a robust transportation network to accommodate substantial residential, commercial, and industrial traffic generators throughout.
- The transportation category is the third largest land use designation by area in the joint planning region, and next to housing, the second largest land use in Laureldale Borough.

9. Water

The water category is comprised of rivers, streams, ponds, and lakes.

- Water occupies 153 acres or approximately 2% of the region's total land area, entirely located within Muhlenberg Township.

Existing Land Use Patterns

The map accompanying this section illustrates the existing land uses of different areas in the Region, as of 2020. The Muhlenberg-Laureldale region encompasses a total area of 8,269 acres. Commercial development is concentrated sporadically throughout the region with higher concentrations located along the Routes 61 and 222B corridors in Muhlenberg Township and Kutztown Road in Laureldale Borough. It should be noted that in 2013 the region prepared a 5th Street Highway/Allentown Pike Corridor Study to revitalize development and provide a sense of place along S.R. 222B. The commercial uses in these areas range from offices, restaurants, local and regional shopping centers, and warehouses.

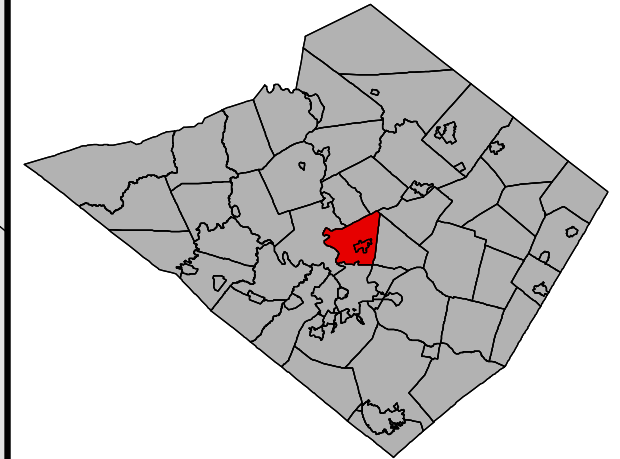
The area has a moderate amount of industrial properties. Again, the bulk of these industrial uses are located along Route 61, the rail lines running north-south, and near Spring Valley Road in Muhlenberg Township and in the southern tip of Laureldale Borough.

There are a number of Institutional uses in the Region. Institutional land use designations include municipal buildings, schools, churches, and hospitals. The Region's schools, primarily Muhlenberg School District and Reading Muhlenberg Career and Technology Center, as well as Laureldale and Gethsemane Cemeteries provide the bulk of the Institutional land within the region.

The denser areas of residential development have been limited to areas where central sewage service has been available and where it was allowed by zoning. However, this includes much of the Region with exceptions largely within the eastern portion of Muhlenberg and Laureldale where slope largely prohibits such development.

For the most part, the area is urban/suburban. Agriculture is sparse however present in the region. Agriculture has played an important role in the economic prosperity and vitality of the region historically and what is currently farmed, is anticipated to continue for the foreseeable future.

Existing Land Use



Legend

- Residential Low
- Residential High
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Institutional
- Recreation
- Open Space
- Agriculture
- Water
- Transportation
- US Route
- State Route
- Roads
- Railroads
- Municipal Boundaries

Source data: Berks County Planning Commission GIS, Berks County GIS/IS, Berks County Mapping, Berks DES

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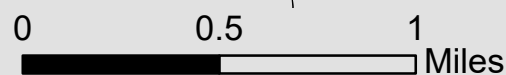
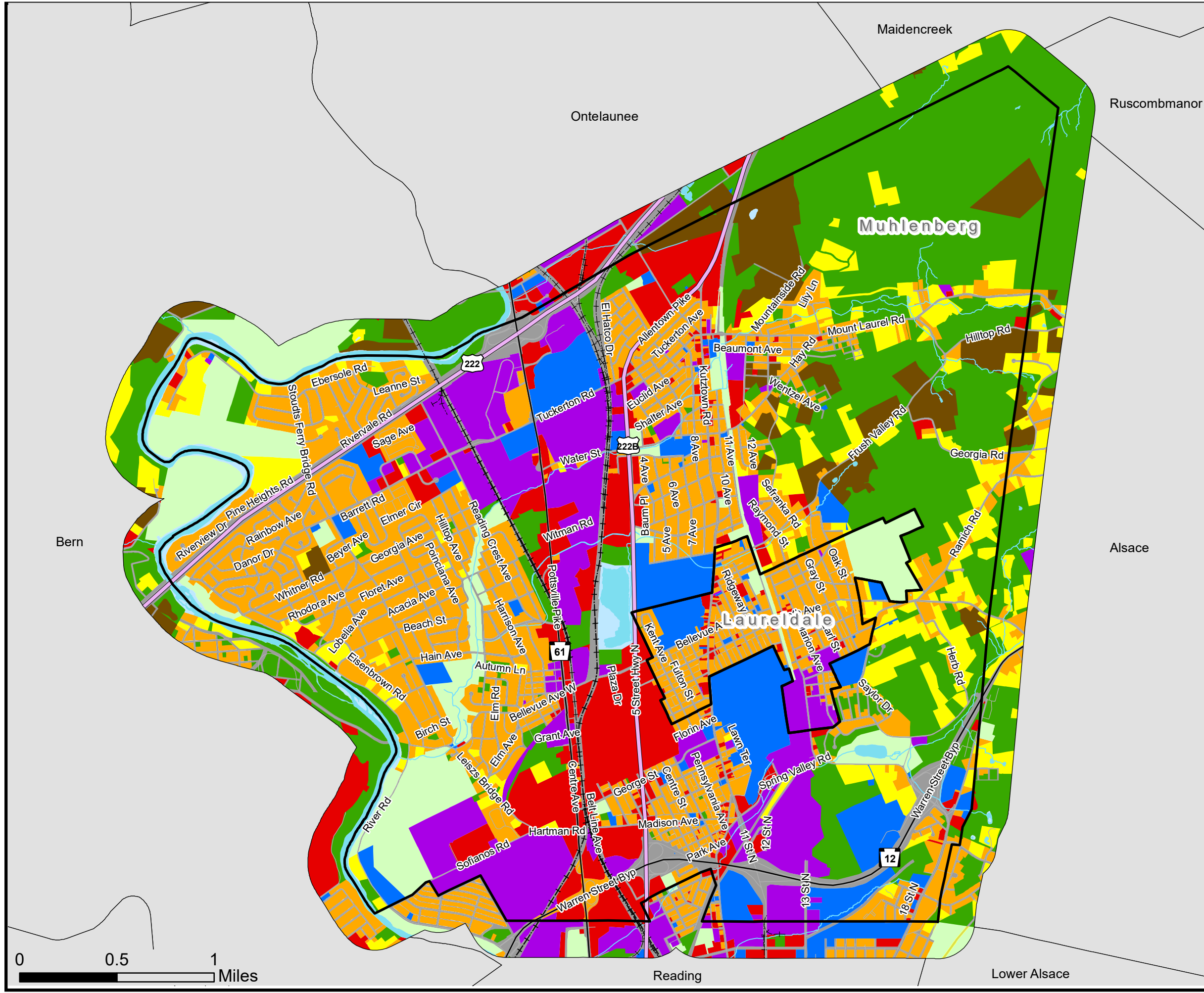
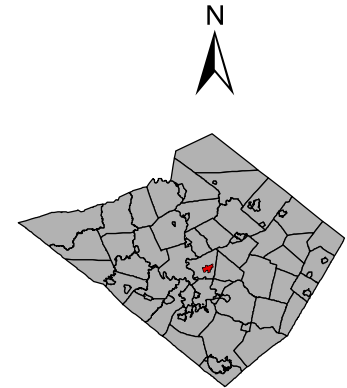
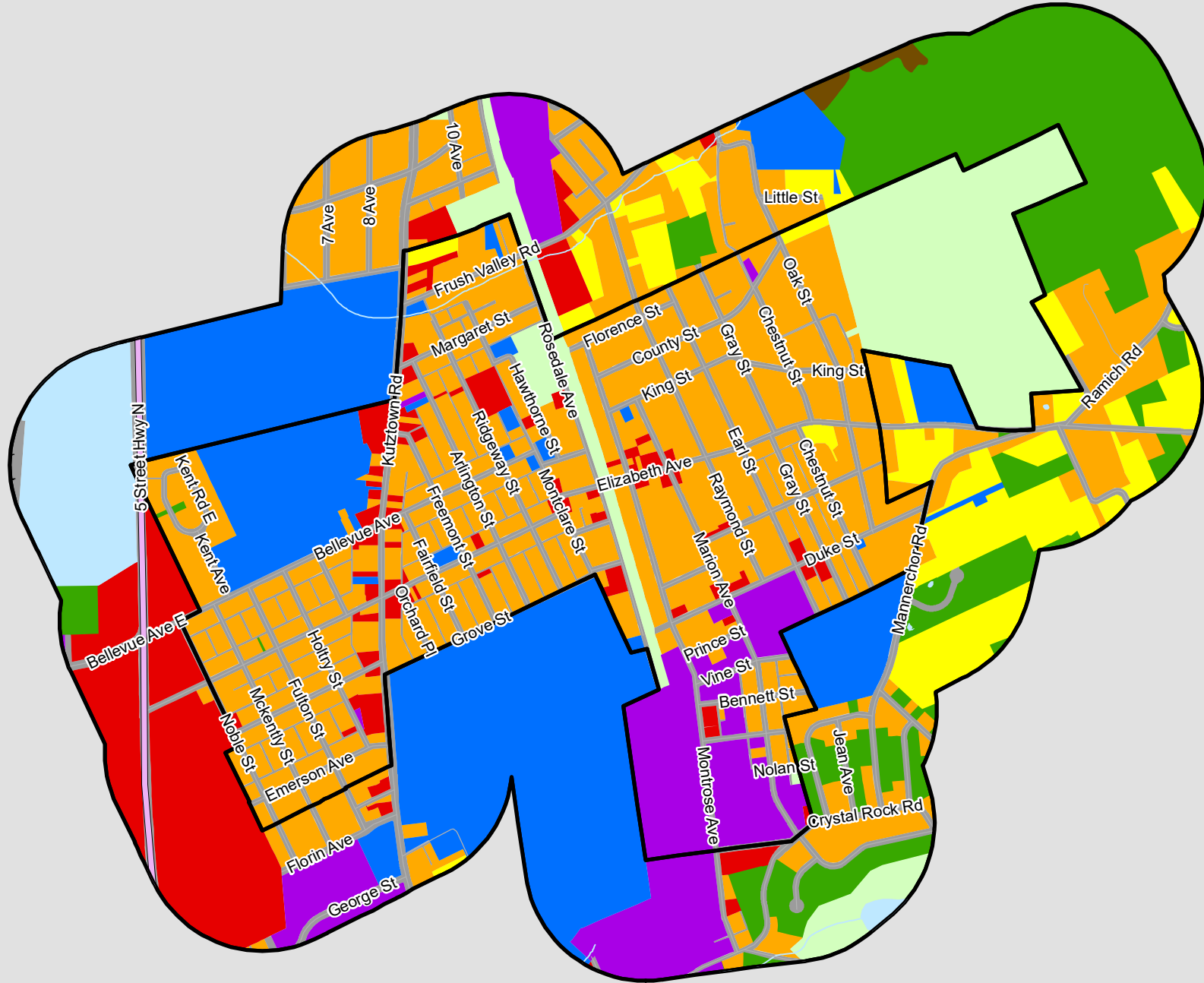


FIGURE 18

Muhlenberg Township and
Laureldale Borough
Joint Comprehensive Plan Update
October 16, 2023

Existing Land Use Laureldale Borough



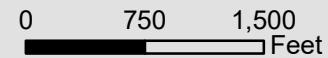
Legend

- Residential Low
- Residential High
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Institutional
- Recreation
- Open Space
- Agriculture
- Water
- Transportation
- US Route
- State Route
- Roads
- Railroads
- Municipal Boundaries

Source data:
Berks County Planning Commission GIS, Berks County
GIS/IS, Berks County Mapping, Berks DES

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11



Future Land Use Plan

FUTURE LAND USE PLAN

The Future Land Use Plan emphasizes land use planning that accommodates projected community and economic growth, directs growth to areas of existing or planned infrastructure, and protects sensitive resources from development and its impacts. It suggests a roadmap for Commercial, Industrial, and Residential Development/Re-development/Revitalization so as to provide balanced economic benefits for Residents, Employers, Employees, Visitors, and Developers alike. The core purpose of the Future Land Use Plan is to manage the amount, intensity, character, and timing of development.

Future Land Use Plan Recommendations

The following describes land use categories, as shown on the Future Land Use Plan Maps. In most cases, these categories are intended to **generally** relate to zoning districts. The Future Land Use Plan is primarily intended to:

- a) protect existing residential neighborhoods,
- b) moderate the rate and type of housing construction to avoid overloading the public-school system, roads, utilities, and groundwater supplies,
- c) coordinate development across municipal borders, including municipalities that are not part of the Muhlenberg Laureldale Regional Comprehensive Plan,
- d) avoid serious traffic congestion and safety problems, particularly by avoiding new commercial strip development along major roads, or including interconnecting driveways/access roads,
- e) promote new business development in appropriate locations, including the strengthening of older business areas, with careful attention towards the types of businesses allowed in areas near homes, and
- f) make sure development properly relates to the natural features of the land, particularly to protect steeply sloped areas, major water supplies and creek valleys.

Future Land Use Analysis

Methodology

The Future Land Use Plan was created digitally using a Geographic Information System (GIS). The existing land use and zoning GIS data was used as the foundation to create the Future Land Use Maps. Additional GIS data such as public water and sewer areas, slopes, floodplains, tax parcels, and preservation easements were overlaid onto the existing land use. The combination of all the different GIS data allowed an analysis to be performed which determined areas that are currently developed, areas where growth should occur at different densities, conservation areas, recreation, as well as areas where industrial and commercial development should occur.

The Future Land Use Plan depicts the pattern of projected land use, targeting areas that are appropriate for urban growth and reinvestment, as well as areas that should be preserved/conserved for their agricultural, recreational, or natural resource assets.

The Future Land Use Plan is divided into twelve (12) categories:

1. Low Density Residential
2. Medium Density Residential
3. High Density Residential
4. Mobile Home Park
5. Mixed Residential / Commercial
6. Agriculture
7. Rural Conservation
8. Commercial
9. Industrial
10. Public / Institutional
11. Recreation
12. Transportation Network

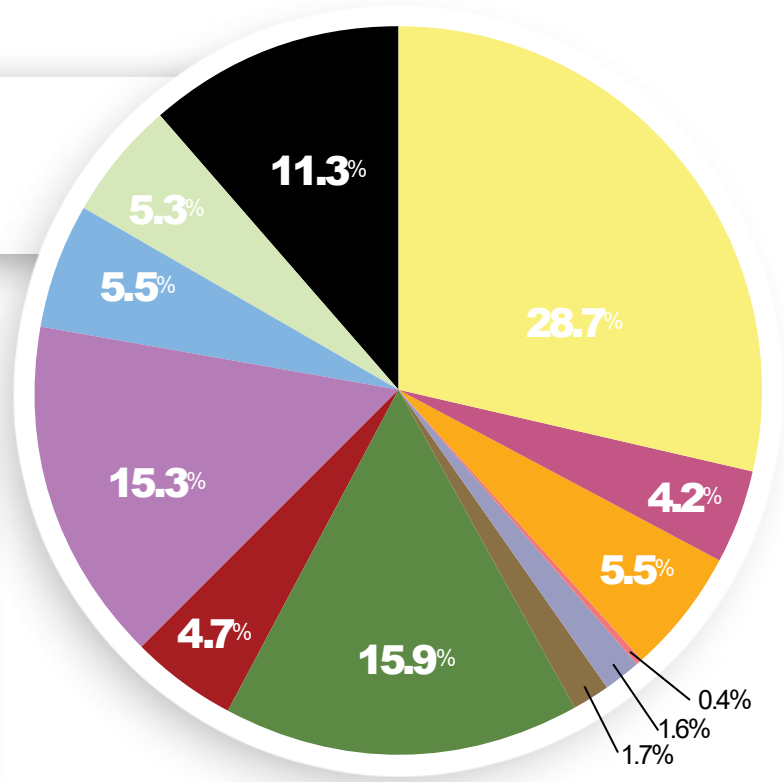
The table below shows the acreage for each Future Land Use category for the Region:

Future Land Use in Muhlenberg Laureldale Joint Planning Area, 2022

Future Land Use	Muhlenberg		Laureldale		Joint Planning Area	
	# Acres	% of Area	# Acres	% of Area	# Acres	% of Area
Low Density Residential	2,641	28.7%	134	25.8%	2,775	28.5%
Medium Density Residential	390	4.2%	0	0.0%	390	4.0%
High Density Residential	505	5.5%	92	17.7%	597	6.1%
Mobile Home Park	35	0.4%	0	0.0%	35	0.4%
Mixed Residential / Commercial	146	1.6%	0	0.0%	146	1.5%
Agriculture	154	1.7%	0	0.0%	154	1.6%
Rural Conservation	1,461	15.9%	0	0.0%	1,461	15.0%
Commercial	437	4.7%	35	6.7%	472	4.8%
Industrial	1,409	15.3%	44	8.5%	1,453	14.9%
Public / Institutional	511	5.5%	37	7.1%	548	5.6%
Recreation	487	5.3%	80	15.4%	567	5.8%
Transportation Network	1,041	11.3%	97	18.7%	1,138	11.7%
Total	9,217	100.0%	519	100.0%	9,737	100.0%

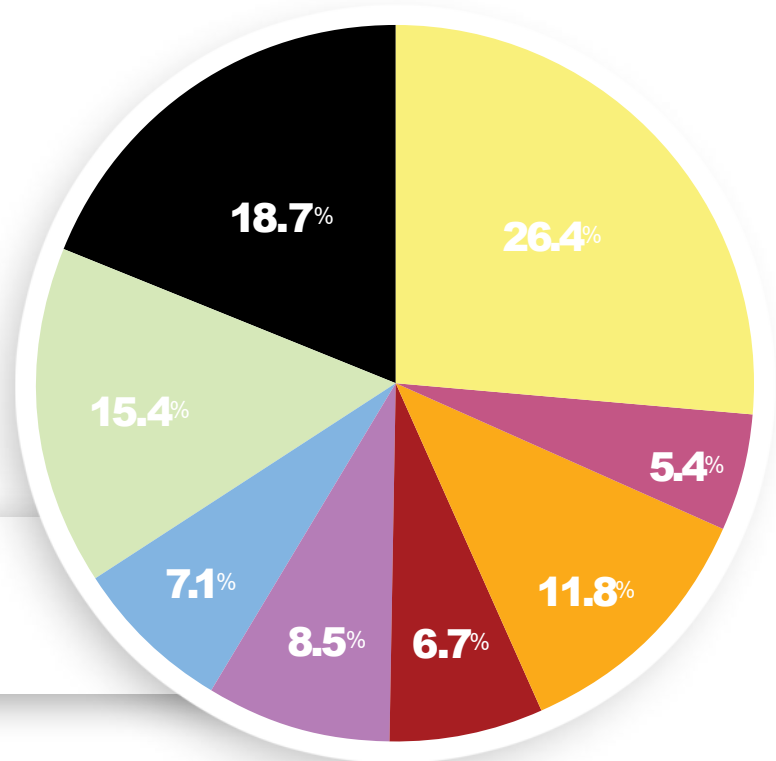
Source: Berks County Planning Commission

**Future Land Use Designations (2023)
Muhlenberg Township**



- Low Density Residential
- Medium Density Residential
- High Density Residential
- Mobile Home Park
- Mixed Residential/Commercial
- Agriculture
- Rural Conservation
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Public/Institutional
- Recreational
- Transportation Network

**Future Land Use Designations (2023)
Laureldale Township**



The following describes the twelve (12) land use categories portrayed in the Future Land Use Plan:

1. Low Density Residential

This category is primarily intended to provide for single family detached development. With on-lot well and septic systems, a one or one-and-a-half-acre minimum should be required depending on the municipality. With central water and sewage services, a lot size of approximately ½ acre to 1/3 acre would be appropriate in most areas.

The Low-Density Residential designation accounts for approximately 28.5% or 2,775 acres of the planning area.

2. Medium Density Residential

This category is primarily intended to provide for single family detached homes and twin houses. With central water and sewage services, an average of approximately 4 to 5 homes per acre would be appropriate without open space preservation. The Open Space Development option could provide for approximately 1/4- or 1/6-acre average lot sizes with 30 percent of the tract preserved as open space.

The Medium Density Residential category encompasses approximately 390 acres or 4.0% of the land use within the region.

3. High Density Residential

This category is intended to provide for a mix of housing types at densities at over 6 homes per acre. Higher densities (such as 8 to 12 homes per acre) could be appropriate if the housing was limited to persons age 55 and older or through transfer of development rights. These areas should allow for all housing types. These areas are particularly important to meet obligations under State law to offer opportunities for all types of housing. It also is important to provide opportunities for various housing types to meet the needs of different types of households, such as empty nesters, singles, low income, and senior citizens. All apartment and townhouse developments (except the smallest) should be required to include some recreation or open space area for residents.

High Density Residential makes up 6.1% of the land area in this Region. It is appropriate to locate this type of development in areas already served by existing or proposed infrastructure particularly by use of infill development and redevelopment.

4. Mobile Home Park

Mobile home parks can be considered a high-density type of residential development and can be developed at the density described above. Because of the small down payment and low monthly payments associated with purchasing a mobile home, along with the inherent mobility of mobile home living it is considered a desirable option for some, especially low-income populations. Careful consideration should be given when locating and regulating mobile home parks within a specific area.

Mobile home parks encumber just 0.4% of the total planning area of the Region. Most, if not all, of the land classified as mobile home park is located within Muhlenberg Township.

5. Mixed Residential / Commercial

This category is intended to provide for a mix of light businesses and a mix of housing types. These areas should provide for retail stores, offices, personal services, day care centers, banks, exercise clubs and similar uses. The intent is to prohibit the heaviest commercial uses that are most likely to spur demolition or create nuisances for neighbors, such as 24-hour convenience stores, gas stations, vehicle repair, adult bookstores, restaurants with drive-through service and vehicle sales.

In the Borough and older villages, development should be encouraged that complements, rather than detracts from, the existing character of historic areas. In older areas, new buildings should be placed with setbacks from the road/street that are like nearby older buildings. To the maximum extent feasible, parking should be located to the rear or side of buildings. If desired, the Traditional Neighborhood provisions of the State Planning Code could be used to require that new construction be consistent with existing buildings (such as requiring parking to be to the side or rear of buildings and requiring front porches for new homes).

In the planning area this designation encompasses 146 acres or 1.5% of the total land area. This land use designation is located in the more densely populated areas in Muhlenberg that are serviced by existing sewer and water infrastructure.

6. Agriculture

The need for agricultural preservation and methods to achieve it are described in the Natural Features and Agricultural Conservation section of this Plan. The Region's history has its roots partly in agriculture, and agribusiness is another important facet of the Region's economy that should be considered when addressing future growth.

In addition to discouraging large numbers of homes in prime agricultural areas, it is also desirable to carefully locate new homes on a tract to minimize conflicts with agricultural activities. New homes should be placed as far as is reasonable from its operations, and preferably should be upwind from agricultural activity.

Agricultural activities comprise 154 acres of land in Muhlenberg Township. This equates to 1.6% of the land being utilized for some form of agricultural production.

7. Rural Conservation

This category is intended to emphasize conservation of important natural features. This area is not proposed to be served by central sewage systems. These lands are characterized by low density development, prominent forest cover, and may contain slopes greater than 15%, as well as fragmented areas of farmland and land eased for agriculture, open space, natural resource, or woodland conservation. Development should be subject to flexible siting standards, conservation design standards, and disturbance limitations designed to avoid the most critical environmental constraints and allow land to be developed efficiently with the least degree of environmental impact.

Rural Conservation accounts for over 15% of the region's total acreage all located within the eastern portion of Muhlenberg Township.

8. Commercial

This category is intended to provide for a wide range of commercial development. As opposed to the Mixed Residential / Commercial areas described earlier in this chapter, these areas should provide opportunities for uses such as gas stations, vehicle sales and drive-thru restaurants. A careful set of standards are needed to require coordinated traffic access among different uses. In most cases, these areas are not adjacent to residential development.

If an excessive amount of commercial zoning is allowed at one time, it may encourage sprawled development, with businesses simply relocating from one business site to a new site, leaving the old site vacant. If the supply of commercially zoned land is held to a moderate amount, it will encourage rehabilitation and redevelopment of older commercial sites.

4.8% or a total of 472 acres of the region includes this Commercial designation.

9. Industrial

The Industrial areas are intended to provide for a wide range of industrial uses. These areas are particularly important to meet obligations under State law to provide opportunities for all types of business uses, including some uses that are less desirable. The heaviest industrial uses should need special exception from the zoning hearing board or conditional use approval from the supervisors/borough council.

Because this plan involves multiple municipalities, it will not be necessary for each municipality to provide for all types of industrial uses. It is recommended that the heavier industrial uses be concentrated around the existing industrial areas within the region.

A high-quality setting will help to attract additional desirable types of business development and higher paying types of jobs. In newer industrial areas, a set of site design regulations should be used to promote light industrial/office parks in a well-landscaped campus-like environment. Truck parking and outdoor storage areas should be required and should be screened from view from roads. The majority of the first 30 feet along a road should be landscaped, with truck loading docks and truck parking located to the side or rear of buildings.

Approximately 1,453 acres or 14.9% of the region's total land area is reserved for Industrial use.

10. Public / Institutional

This category recognizes existing large public, semi-public and institutional uses, such as hospitals, schools, and municipal buildings. A total of 548 acres or 5.6% are designated as Public/Institutional within the planning area.

11. Recreation

Recreation land provides space and facilities for people to engage in active and passive recreation activities. These include playgrounds, parkland, trails, as well as recreation land owned by non-profit recreational groups (i.e. sportsman clubs, and little league organizations) and commercial recreation (i.e. golf courses, miniature golf courses, campgrounds).

The Region has an abundance of recreation land within its jurisdiction discussed further in Chapter 07. Jim Dietrich, Riverside Basin, and Dominic Manzella Memorial Parks are major contributors to the acreage of recreation land uses within the area. Recreation makes up 567 acres or 5.8% of the total land area of the region.

12. Transportation Network

Land in this category contains roads and railroads. While the network of transportation modes that serves Berks County also includes air service, bus and motor freight services, these land uses, as well as parking garages are included in the commercial category.

While many factors can influence growth and development patterns, the existing transportation network has always been prominent in shaping Berks County. The same is true for the Muhlenberg Laureldale planning region. Over time, development has historically concentrated near major transportation facilities to take advantage of their accessibility. The amount of land area consumed by such a network is 1,138 acres or approximately 11.7% of the region's total land area.

Further discussion of the transportation network within the Region can be found in the Transportation section of this plan.

Recommendations for Future Development

1. Extend the best features of older development into newer development.

Consideration should be given to strongly encouraging forms of “traditional neighborhood development.” This involves extending the best features of the older areas into new neighborhoods, especially as development occurs in and around Laureldale Borough. As discussed later in this Chapter, this concept also involves making sure that development or redevelopment of lots within older neighborhoods occurs in a way that fits within the “urban fabric.” Traditional neighborhood development primarily involves the following:

- Street trees could be planted to eventually provide a canopy of shade over streets where appropriate. Studies show that mature street trees can increase the value of homes up to 10 percent. If it is not appropriate to have shade trees in the right-of-way, they can be required immediately outside of the right-of-way.
- Requiring that new streetlights meet a certain design standard that is similar to older styles of streetlights.
- Sidewalks should be provided. There should be an orientation to pedestrians, with an ability to walk or bicycle to stores, schools and parks. Overly wide residential streets and intersections should be avoided to discourage speeding and to make it easier for pedestrians to cross the street.
- A modest density should be encouraged that is similar to the typical development that occurred during the 1930s through 1940s. This density (such as 5 to 8 homes per acre) should make best use of available land, while avoiding overly dense development and parking problems.
- Whenever practical, parking should be located to the rear or side of buildings, so that the front yard can be landscaped.
 - If rear access to garages is not practical, then garages should enter onto the side of homes whenever possible, particularly on corner lots. If a front-entrance garage is proposed, it should be designed so that it is not an overly prominent part of the street. For example, a one lane driveway can pass along the side of a house and then widen to enter a two-car garage that is setback from the front of the house. "Snout" houses should be avoided that have a front entrance garage as the home's most prominent feature.
 - Care is needed to discourage new twin and townhouse development that have numerous driveways entering directly onto a street from the front. Garage doors should not be an overly prominent part of the views of housing from the front. Where garages and parking cannot be avoided in the front yard, larger lot widths should be required to make sure that there is green space in the front yard. Regulations are needed to make sure that the majority of the front yards of housing developments are not covered by paving.
- Buildings should be placed relatively close to the street, with front or side porches, to encourage interaction among neighbors. On a corner lot, a side porch can have the same effect. If residents spend time on their front porch, they can help oversee the neighborhood and report suspicious activity to the police.

This concept can be used to maintain the character of older residential areas, especially within areas such as Laureldale and the former Temple Borough. For example, driveways can be required to access onto an alley or side street where it is available, as opposed to having a front garage and

driveway. This design avoids conflicts between sidewalks and vehicles backing into the street and allows the entire curbside to be available for on-street parking. Otherwise, new driveways may remove as many parking spaces as they create.

New buildings can be required to have a maximum setback from the street that is similar to other buildings on the block. New buildings can also be required to include front porches. Front porches encourage interaction among neighbors, which builds more of a community spirit. If residents spend time on their front porch, they can help oversee the neighborhood and report suspicious activity to the proper authorities.

Most new parking can be required to be placed to the rear or side of the main building on the lot, which makes the building and not parked cars the most visible feature along the street.

New street trees can be required by a zoning ordinance as part of the construction of any new principal building, instead of only being required for new subdivisions. Neighborhood character can also be established with older styles of streetlights and street name signs.

Under the State Planning Code, a municipality can require some of these features in zoning ordinances, or a municipality could offer density incentives for this type of traditional development.

2. Traffic Access Control

If traffic access onto a major road is properly managed, the road will be able to safely handle large volumes of traffic. However, if a road combines a large number of business driveways entering a road at many locations, there will be right-hand turns and left-hand turns at many locations. The constant stopping and starting from these turns greatly affect the smooth flow of vehicles and create safety hazards. This is known as “strip” commercial development.

At best, intense business development should be concentrated in well-planned developments with internal roads that access a major road with a traffic signal and turn lanes. Where a traffic signal is not warranted at the present time, there should still be a plan for where traffic signals are intended to be built in the future. This will allow driveways and street intersections to be directed towards those intersections so that the traffic signal will be well-placed in the future. Where traffic signals are not appropriate, adjacent commercial uses should have shared driveways and interconnected parking lots. The interconnected parking lots are particularly valuable so that a person can visit more than one adjacent business without having to enter and re-enter a major road.

3. Transfer of Development Rights (TDRs)

This concept should be considered as a voluntary option in the Zoning Ordinances of the municipalities. TDRs offer incentives for private developers to pay to preserve land. If a developer of one tract of land pays an owner of another tract to permanently preserve their land, then the developer could receive approval to build at a higher density on the developer’s tract. The tract that receives the higher density would need to be in an area that the municipality has designated as being suitable for a higher density. The tract that would be permanently preserved would need to be in an area that the township has targeted for preservation. The developer and the owner of the open land would negotiate on their own to determine how much the developer pays to the other landowner for the preservation.

- This method allows development to be shifted from locations where preservation is desired to allow a higher density on other tracts in a municipality that are well suited for development.
- The municipality would then approve the development at a higher density at the same time as a conservation easement went into effect to preserve the other land. The preserved land would remain privately owned but could never be developed. The preserved land could be re-sold and could be used for agriculture or certain open space uses.

- For example, this process might allow preservation of land in the Rural Conservation area, in return for allowing a higher density in a Low Density Residential or Medium Density Residential area. Or density might be transferred from one part of a Rural Conservation area to another part of the Rural Conservation area.
- The number of homes that could be transferred from one tract to another would be based upon a "Yield Plan." This sketch plan would show how many homes would have been permitted on the tract that is to be preserved. Once the township accepts this Yield Plan, that number of homes could be transferred from one tract to another tract. However, there would still be limits on the density of the tract being developed to make sure that it is not excessive.
- TDR can also be used in combination with commercial development. For example, for every housing unit that is transferred from one area of a municipality, an additional amount of building coverage or impervious coverage could be allowed in a business district.

4. Work to Preserve Open Space in New Development

Throughout the nation, there is increased emphasis in permanently preserving important open spaces as part of new development. This concept has been promoted by the Natural Lands Trust and the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources using the term "Conservation Design" development. This Plan uses the term "Open Space Development."

Attractive incentives are needed so that any development of the large open tracts of land available in any given municipality would be developed with substantial areas of preserved open space (such as 35 to 70 percent), as opposed to standard "cookie-cutter" type lots.

The intent is to design development in a manner that conserves the important natural, scenic, and historic features of a site. Large percentages of a tract are permanently preserved in open space. In comparison, "Conventional Subdivisions" typically involve very little or no open space preservation. Conventional Subdivisions are also known as "Cookie Cutter Subdivisions" because every lot is typically the same size and shape, regardless of the features of the land.

Advantages of Open Space Developments - Based upon the work of the Natural Lands Trust, the following are some of the major advantages of Open Space Development:

- *Important natural features can be preserved.* Regulations and incentives should direct buildings away from steep slopes, wetlands, waterways, and other important natural features. As a result, homes are placed on portions of the tract that are most environmentally suitable for development - as opposed to being evenly spread across the land. Large contiguous areas can remain in woods and other natural vegetation - which are important as wildlife corridors. Thick natural vegetation can be preserved along creeks - which is essential to filter out eroded soil and other pollutants from runoff before it enters the creek. This vegetation along creeks is also important to maintain high quality fishing habitats.
 - In comparison, if an entire tract is divided into lots, it is likely to mostly be in mowed grass - which is a "mono-culture" that does not have the same environmental benefits.
 - With open space preservation, stormwater runoff can be managed in a more natural manner that encourages recharge into the groundwater. This may negate the need to build extensive stormwater systems which are costly to build and maintain.

- *Scenic features can be preserved.* Open Space Developments can place homes on less visible portions of a tract, while maintaining scenic views. For example, many Open Space Developments set back homes from main through-roads and limit placement of homes on major ridgelines. As a result, the main angle of vision along major roads involves green space.
 - Mature woods can be preserved in locations that hide views of development. The preservation of open space also provides visual relief from seeing continuous development.
 - Stormwater runoff can also be managed in a more attractive manner - as opposed to within deep man-made channels and detention basins.
- *Recreational opportunities can be increased.* Open Space Developments typically include attractive areas for walking, jogging, cross-country skiing and nature study. In some cases, active recreation facilities can be included. These open spaces can also increase interaction among neighbors.
- *Developers can achieve lower costs* for grading, lengths of roads, lengths of utilities and other improvements.
 - Developers may also be able to save time and money by avoiding wetland alterations and waterway crossings.
 - Open Space Developments can provide the flexibility in layout to move homes off of steep slopes, which are more expensive to build upon. Avoiding steep slopes can also reduce the need for blasting.
 - By allowing flexibility in placement of buildings, it is easier to find suitable sites for septic systems.
- *Municipalities can save on maintenance costs.* Shorter lengths of roads, utilities and other improvements mean there is less to maintain. It is expensive to maintain and plow snow from steeply sloped roads. Open Space Developments can result in roads being placed at more modest slopes.
- *Developers can often achieve higher sales prices.* More and more developments are stressing in their advertising that homes are adjacent to preserved open spaces. Developers can often receive a premium price for lots that are adjacent to or overlook preserved open space. The presence of trails and other open space amenities can also spur sales.
 - Studies have also shown that homes near preserved open space are likely to increase in value faster than other homes.
- *Reliable central water and sewage services* can be extended. It is usually uneconomical to provide central water and sewage services with lot sizes of 2 acres or larger. However, if homes are clustered on a tract, then it is often possible and/or necessary to provide central water and sewage services. Public water and sewage services typically are more reliable than individual wells and septic systems.
 - Central sewage service avoids the threat of groundwater contamination from failing malfunctioning septic systems. Central water service avoids the risks of well water contamination from various sources.

Open Space Development can also occur with a design that allows homes to be “hidden in the woods” and in clusters that resemble a rural village, while allowing most of the farmland to be preserved.

The following major policies should be emphasized to encourage Open Space Developments:

1. Strong incentives and disincentives are needed to encourage open space preservation in new development. It typically is not sufficient to allow the same density for an Open Space Development as for a conventional subdivision. This is because developers prefer to build what has been successful in the past, as opposed to trying new concepts. Also, developers may feel (often inaccurately) that the homes on larger lots may have a higher market value than homes on smaller lots with open space. Therefore, density bonuses are needed for open space preservation. A community needs to trade-off a modestly increased number of dwelling units in return for substantial open space preservation.
2. The process for approval of an Open Space Development should not be much more burdensome or time-consuming than the process for a Conventional Subdivision. Where practical, the process to gain approval for a desirable type of development should be easier than the process for a Conventional Subdivision. Discipline is needed in writing Open Space Development standards to make sure that they are not overly restrictive. If Open Space Development standards are too detailed or too extensive, they may not allow enough flexibility for a good design. If the standards get in the way of a developer's marketing plans or cause excessive costs, a developer may choose to do a Conventional Subdivision.
3. Proper standards are needed to make sure that the preserved open space is well-located and improved so that it serves important public functions. In many cases, mature woods, steep slopes, and creek valleys should simply be preserved in their natural state. In other cases, the open spaces may be intended for active recreation. In still other cases, trees should be planted in the open spaces and trails should be installed. The key is to avoid a process in which the "open space" is simply the land that is left over after the most economical set of lots and roads are laid out. Narrow strips of open space should be avoided unless they would preserve a scenic tree line or provide an important trail link.

5. Strengthen Older Residential Areas

It is extremely important that the older areas of the Region remain strong and viable business and residential areas. This includes the older areas of Laureldale and the Temple, South Temple, and Hyde Park neighborhoods in Muhlenberg. The best way to control sprawl is to make sure that older areas remain healthy and desirable places in which to live and conduct business.

This section recommends actions to stabilize and improve older residential neighborhoods. Stable neighborhoods are not only important to provide desirable places to live, but also to protect the health of nearby business areas. If the residential areas deteriorate, they will cause crime and vandalism problems that will discourage business activity. If the surrounding residential areas are strengthened, they will provide a strong base of customers who will hopefully find the downtowns a convenient place to serve their shopping, entertainment, and service needs.

To maintain its economic health, it is important to continually work to attract and retain middle-income households in older areas. This is particularly true because there will always be existing residents moving into newer and more expensive houses, and because there will always be older residents who will be moving to nursing homes, personal care centers, or retirement communities. To maintain the same owner-occupancy rate, there needs to be a continual stream of new homebuyers.

Promoting Home Ownership - Many households could afford the monthly costs of owning a home, but do not have sufficient savings for the closing costs and down payment. These households need to be linked with available programs to help them achieve home ownership.

The availability of housing designed for senior citizens is an important part of the mix. This type of

housing typically relieves older persons of maintenance and repair responsibilities and expenses. If older persons decide to move from traditional homes to senior housing, it then frees up that housing to fill demand from current as well as potentially new residents. Presently, nationwide there is a widespread shortage on housing, and the Region is also seeing these increased demands. However, if there is insufficient demand by homebuyers for those homes, this trend of older homeowners moving out can reduce owner-occupancy rates.

Maintaining Housing Conditions - It is important to prevent blight and deterioration before it occurs. A single problem property can encourage responsible residents of nearby properties to move out of the neighborhood and can discourage new homebuyers from investing in the neighborhood. A problem property can also discourage homeowners from investing in improvements to their home because they do not believe they will be able to see any return on their investment if they sell.

To promote home ownership and neighborhood stability, and to avoid parking problems, the conversions of existing one family homes into additional numbers of housing units should be prohibited in specific zoning districts.

The municipalities must continue to emphasize enforcement of the basic property maintenance codes to require property owners to: a) properly maintain their buildings or b) sell the buildings to another party who will make the needed improvements. The goal in code enforcement must be to intervene before buildings deteriorate to the point where it is no longer cost effective to repair them. If property owners are forced to complete basic maintenance and repairs in a timely manner, severe deterioration can be avoided.

Many older communities have adopted programs for the periodic inspection of rental properties to make sure they meet basic safety standards. These programs aid in maintaining homes primarily to keep tenants safe from fires and other hazards, but also can help encourage regular maintenance on rental properties to preserve the character of the surrounding neighborhoods. Presently, both Muhlenberg Township and Laureldale Borough have a rental inspection program.

Emphasize housing rehabilitation - Most housing efforts primarily involve low-interest loans to rehabilitate homes owned by households with low or moderate incomes. Expanded marketing efforts are needed to make sure that eligible owners of properties in need of rehabilitation are aware of the financing programs that are available. Particular attention needs to be paid to low-income resident owners of property who need to make improvements to comply with municipal codes.

The Berks County Area Agency on Aging also offers a "Home Modification" program for minor household repairs and safety modifications. In most cases, the homeowner only pays for the cost of materials. The program is mainly aimed towards older persons with limited incomes and persons with disabilities.

Buyers of older homes should be encouraged to take advantage of the Federal Housing Administration's 203(k) program. This allows a homebuyer to receive a single loan to purchase a home and to complete a major rehabilitation of it.

It would be desirable to combine job training funding with County housing rehabilitation programs. The Federal Government has provided greater flexibility to use Federal job training dollars in ways that address local needs. Local non-profit housing organizations should work with job training agencies to design programs to meet mutual needs. Residents can learn useful job skills, while the job training programs help provide funding for needed housing rehabilitation.

Densities - Higher densities should only be considered for: a) housing developments that are limited to senior citizens and the physically handicapped, and b) the conversions of older non-residential buildings (such as old mills) into apartments.

Density bonuses should be considered for developments limited to persons age 55 and older and

their spouses, with no children under age 18. These density bonuses are logical because the typical household of older persons generates less traffic, less need for parking and less water and sewage usage compared to other types of housing. Housing for older persons also does not generate additional public-school students, thereby avoiding negative impacts upon school finances.

Compatibility in Uses - It is important to protect older residential areas from incompatible development. This is particularly a concern in older areas where there is typically a relatively dense mix of commercial, industrial and residential uses, with small setbacks.

In commercial areas near neighborhoods, the types of commercial uses should be carefully controlled. Most commercial areas near neighborhoods should not allow for heavy commercial uses, such as warehouses, gas stations, 24-hour convenience stores, nightclubs, and auto repair.

In industrial areas near neighborhoods, great care is needed about the types of uses that are allowed. The heavier types of industrial uses should be prohibited from these areas or need special exception or conditional use approval.

Neighborhood Character - Zoning provisions can be put into place to require that new buildings in older neighborhoods be compatible to nearby buildings. This concept is described earlier in this chapter.

6. Strengthen Older Business Areas

The Kutztown Road corridor running through both municipalities could potentially be strengthened as business, cultural and civic center for the region. The recommendations in this section are based upon the "Main Street Program," that has been very successful in Berks County and in many towns across the country.

The Main Street Program stresses four major approaches:

- Organization and Cooperation - To have a strong organization of all interested parties working cooperatively in partnerships to carry out needed actions.
- Design and Renewal - To improve the physical environment including the "streetscape" and the attractiveness of the fronts of buildings (particularly through rehabilitation of historic features) and providing adequate parking.
- Economic Development - To recruit and retain businesses and investors to expand job opportunities and generate additional local tax revenue. To provide information to support new business development. To maintain regular contacts with existing businesses to help them remain and grow in the downtowns. (More on Economic Development in the Muhlenberg Laureldale Region can be found in the so titled section of this document).
- Promotion - To market the downtowns with a unified identify. To use special events to attract new customers and businesses. To emphasize high-quality distinctive products and services, including businesses serving a special market niche that is not served by mass-market discount retailers.

7. Locate New Development Where it is Efficiently Served by Existing Infrastructure

Commercial, industrial, and high-density residential housing should be located where it can easily access the available sewer and water systems of the region. Furthermore, thought should be given during the design phase of proposed development to involve the local transit provider. This is beneficial in allowing the efficient and safe transport of workers to and from a given facility or commercial business.

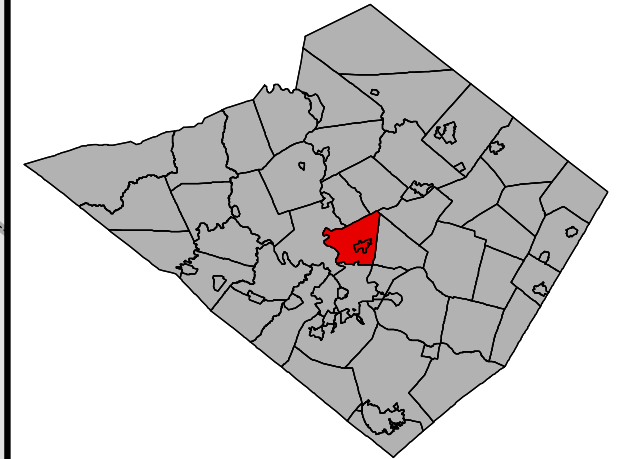
8. Encourage the Continuation of Agricultural Activities in the Region

It is important to continue to encourage and promote these activities, not only because they are a major component of the Region's economy, but it will help preserve part of its history that residents are accustomed to and appreciate.

Land Use Goals

- Continue to place a high priority on the enforcement of all housing and property maintenance codes to maintain quality housing in the Region.
- Identify blighted properties and develop a database of housing conditions.
- Consider establishing a fund for a small grant or loan program that assists property owners for minor house repairs or façade improvements. This could be funded potentially using county, state, or federal grants as well. Course programs on home maintenance could be offered to residents through a partnership with the local library, local businesses, or other groups.
- Continue to support construction of a diverse housing stock to meet community demands, particularly with housing rehabilitation, infill development, and the addition of 55+ communities.
- Discourage single family to multifamily housing conversions in order to limit parking and school capacity concerns within the Region.
- Promote adaptive reuse and revitalization efforts for vacant commercial and industrial sites.
- Identify, assess, and support the safe cleanup and productive reuse of brownfield sites.
- Prepare and market the former Aqua Pool Club property recently acquired by the Township for appropriate commercial activity that fits the character of the surrounding area.
- Explore options for identifying a downtown area or main street program such as along the Kutztown Road corridor to encourage small business growth and development and promote the Region's identity within the community. Foster and promote walkable spaces within the commercial areas of the Region.
- Explore options for revitalizing the former Reading Fairgrounds area. Apply for funding to update the 5th Street Highway/Allentown Pike Corridor Revitalization Plan. Consider what is in demand in both the Region and its surrounding municipalities to attract businesses that fill in gaps in service
- Update the municipalities' zoning ordinances where needed to reflect the vision of the Region's Comprehensive Plan. This can be done independently, or the municipalities can explore funding to write a coordinated zoning ordinance that will share uses but maintain municipal autonomy.
- Update the municipalities' subdivision and land development ordinances where needed to reflect the Comprehensive Plan.

Future Land Use



Legend

- Low Density Residential
- Medium Density Residential
- High Density Residential
- Mobile Home Park
- Mixed Residential / Commercial
- Agriculture
- Rural Conservation
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Public / Institutional
- Recreation
- Transportation Network
- Streams and Water Bodies
- Municipal Boundaries

Source data: Berks County Planning Commission GIS, Berks County GIS/IS, Berks County Mapping, Berks DES

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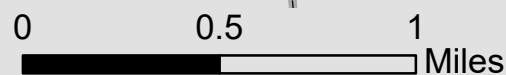
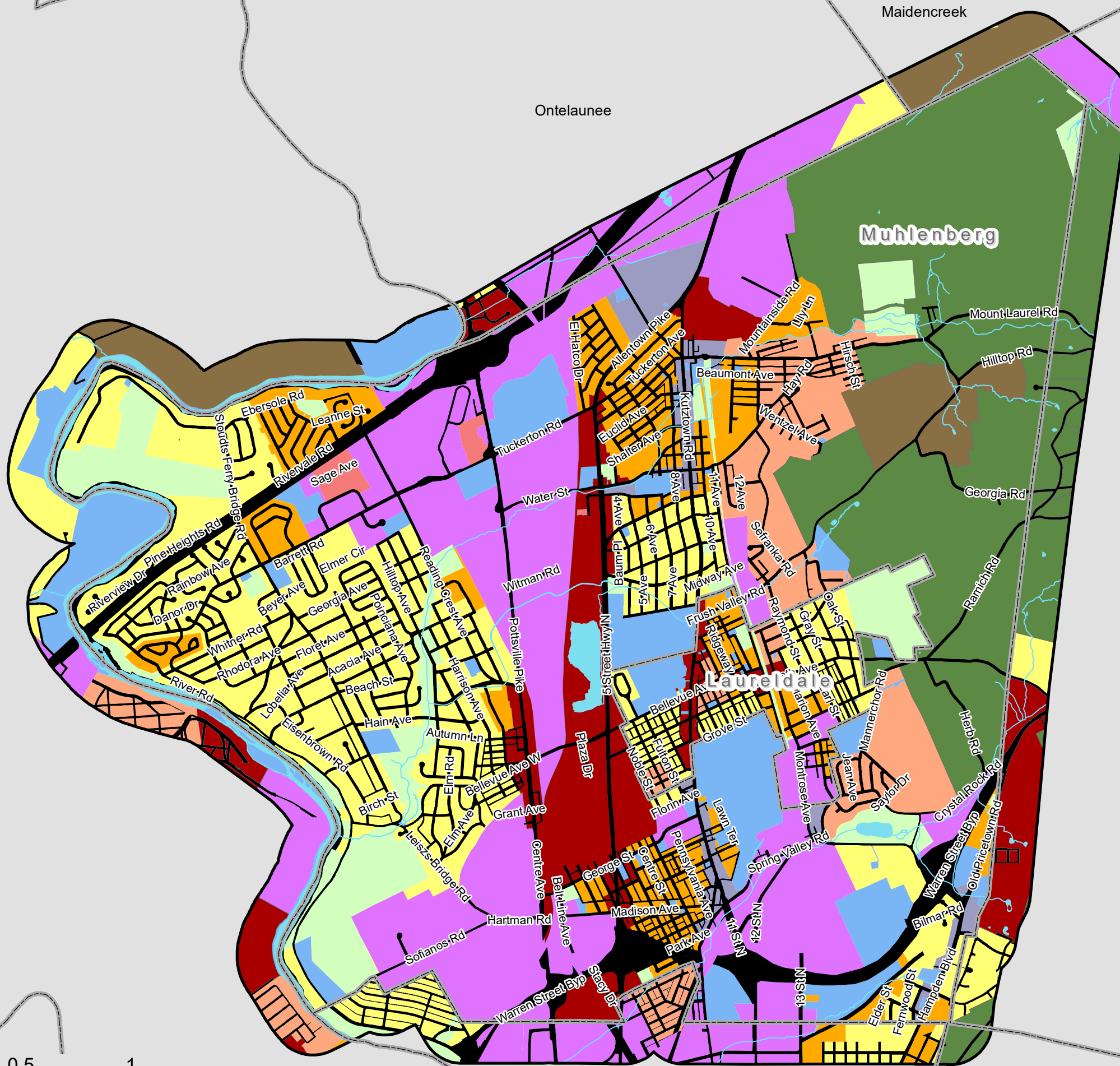
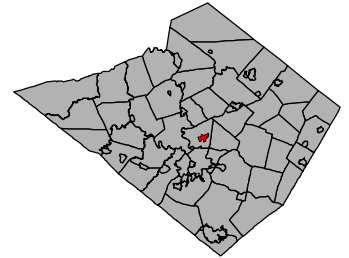


FIGURE 20

Muhlenberg Township and
Laureldale Borough
Joint Comprehensive Plan Update
October 16, 2023

Future Land Use Laureldale Borough



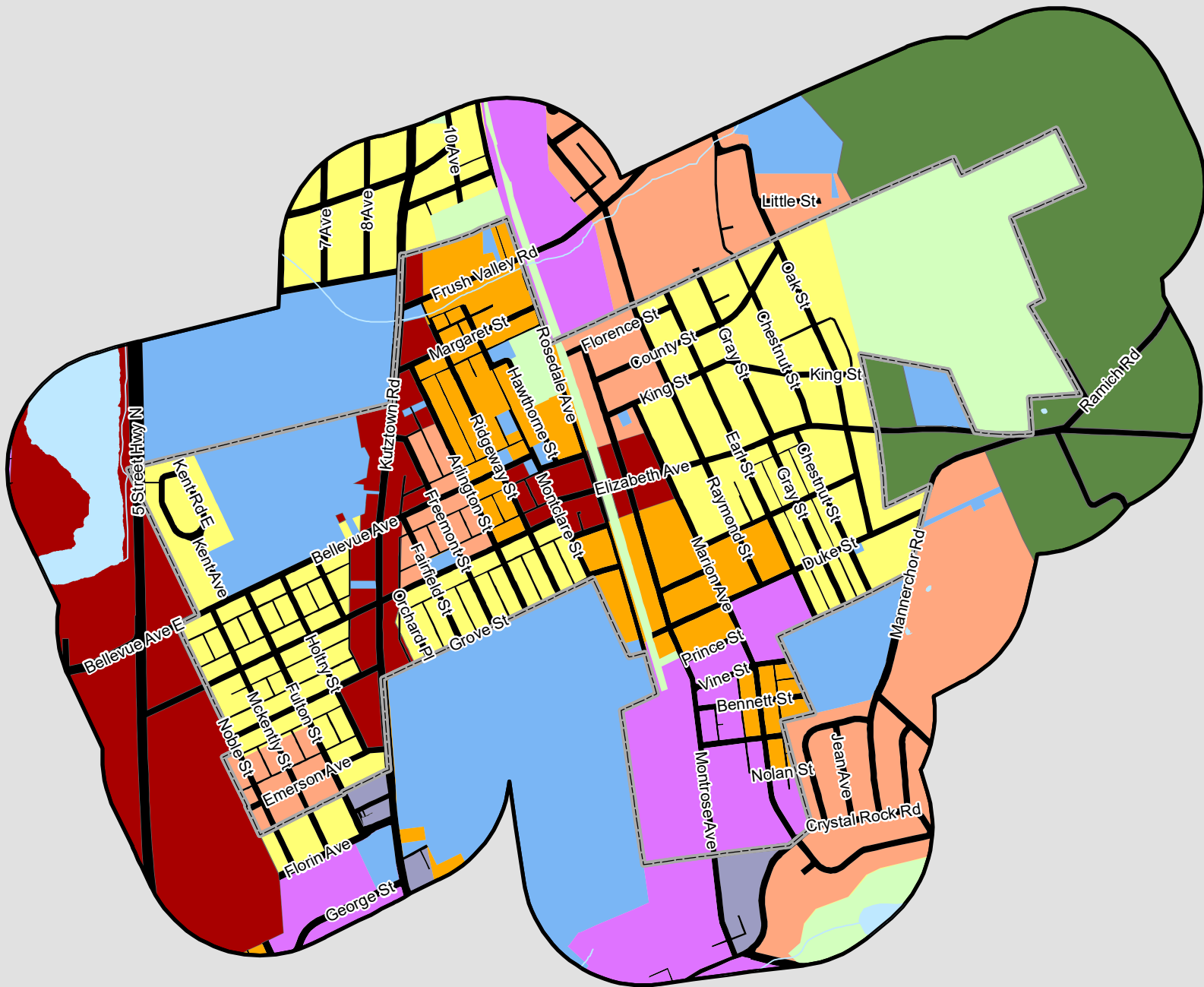
Legend

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All maps and aerials presented within this Plan rely upon digital information of the Berks County Geographic Information System. While the accuracy of this information is believed to be very high, it should only be used for community planning purposes and cannot be relied upon for definitive site survey delineation.



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