

Statement of the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association to the  
Senate Local Government Committee and the Senate Urban Affairs and Housing Committee  
Re: Multi-Municipal Comprehensive Planning and Shared Services

April 10, 2008

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

My name is Joy M. Wilhelm, AICP, Southwest Section Chair of the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association. I am employed by Mackin Engineering Company, in Pittsburgh, where I serve as Manager of Planning Services.

On behalf of the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association, I thank you for the opportunity to speak today. We represent more than 2800 individual and organizational members, including both professional and citizen planners across the Commonwealth. **The statement that I am presenting has been authorized by the Board of the Pennsylvania Chapter for presentation at this hearing.**

**Overall Position:**

Multi-Municipal Planning

As you are aware, multi-municipal planning is authorized by Pennsylvania's Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) Act 247, of 1968 and Acts 67 and 68, in June 2000. Multi-municipal planning allows two or more municipalities to develop a shared vision for their future and coordinate on various issues, including the use of land, infrastructure provisions, preservation of natural and historic resources, and economic development. Municipalities receive many benefits through a multi-municipal planning effort not the least of which is the opportunity to address issues that span municipal boundaries and enhanced communication between local governing bodies and services providers.

Additionally, multi-municipal planning can encourage sustainable economic development. Through cooperative means, local governments can formulate a consistent and comprehensive strategy for economic development, rather than competing for tax revenues. Because local governments may designate growth areas, they can identify areas where future development should be encouraged, and provide public investment in these areas to attract sound and sustainable development.

By identifying important natural characteristics such as prime agricultural soils wetlands, and ecological areas, multi-municipal planning can help to preserve viable farmland, critical habitats, and sensitive environmental resources. Through a partnership approach, communities have a method by which to direct conservation and stormwater management efforts, which is especially important for natural areas such as watersheds that span political boundaries.

Multi-municipal planning is a cost-effective method for communities to take inventory of their community and plan for the future. Not only can costs of the planning activities be shared, but

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also multi-municipal planning can provide the basis for other service-sharing relationships such as joint purchasing, code enforcement, and solid waste bidding.

Communities that implement their Multi-Municipal Comprehensive Plan through the creation of Zoning Ordinance or other land use regulations also benefit from the current legislation and have additional defense against curative amendments. Municipal Zoning Ordinances are required to provide land for every type of use; however, communities that adopt multi-municipal planning can offer the accommodation of land uses across the planning area not individually. For example, if a borough or township participates in a multi-municipal plan, and the borough has adequate high-density housing, the participating communities may agree to plan or zone for all of the additional high-density housing. If the ordinance were challenged, the court would evaluate the entire area of the multi-municipal plan, not just the individual municipality, enhancing the rationale for the zoning strategy.

Finally, Multi-Municipal Comprehensive Plan fulfills the goals outlined by the Keystone Principles & Criteria for Growth, Investment & Resource Conservation (adopted by the Economic Development Cabinet May 31, 2005). The Keystone Principles do not replace program guidelines but rather are to be used as additional, favorable considerations in the scoring or decision-making process. State level approval of certain development or activities is to be guided by the information contained in Multi-Municipal Comprehensive Plans. In fact, municipalities that participate in Multi-Municipal Comprehensive Plans are to be given priority consideration in regards to permitting and funding decisions by state agencies. Therefore, municipalities that engage in multi-municipal planning are more likely to receive favorable review of grant applications.

#### Shared Services

The responsibility to provide community services is legislated through the City, Borough, or Township Code. Local governments have the powers to provide such services in a manner that protects the health, safety, and welfare of residents. As such, elected officials are authorized to offer such services in a cost effective and efficient manner.

The Pennsylvania Intergovernmental Cooperation Law (1972) establishes the opportunity for municipalities to work together to save money and improve delivery of goods and services-if they so choose. We support locally initiated efforts to enter into formal shared services agreements as well as informal methods of working together. Such concepts range from a handshake agreement to share road equipment to the creation of a multi-municipal authority to develop a shared water and sewer program. Successful efforts in our region include numerous Councils of Governments and municipal authorities that make group purchases, provide joint code enforcement activities, and even share personnel.

#### Success Stories and Lessons Learned

As a planning Consultant, I work with many communities across Western Pennsylvania. I have witnessed both successes and failures of multi-municipal planning efforts and it is my opinion

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that the benefits far outweigh the costs. It is my belief that success is typically founded in some basic underlying commonality that is shared among the planning partners or when there is an already established partnership of some kind. The planning effort itself contributes to the success as well, as it is essential to have regular opportunities for the elected officials to participate in the process, hear from the public, and interact with the other municipal officials. Three recent successes include the following:

1. Jefferson Morgan Partnership (Greene County) – This cooperative effort was strengthened by the fact that the four municipalities were already members of a Council of Governments. Two boroughs and two townships were facing new residential growth and demands for public water and sewerage extensions. The four communities successfully adopted a multi-municipal plan and are in the process of enacting a multi-municipal zoning ordinance. The Zoning Ordinance will be administered and enforced through the partnership effort thereby realizing true cost savings for all municipalities.
2. The Townships of Franklin, Jefferson, Menallen, and Perry (Fayette County) – Although these communities had minimal interaction prior to the planning effort, they shared similar characteristics. The planning effort involved the township supervisors at each meeting and challenged them to think regionally to direct future growth to locations with existing infrastructure, which would reduce development pressures for the townships that desired to remain rural. Two successful outcomes are the enactment of a Zoning Ordinance for the township receiving growth (the remaining three have county zoning) and the initiation of a shared purchasing program for solid waste disposal.
3. Northwestern Butler County Planning Group – This planning effort between three townships and two boroughs has established a formal partnership between Slippery Rock Township, Slippery Rock Borough, Brady Township, West Liberty Borough, and Worth Township. The planning process also engaged the elected officials of each municipality, which has led to three of the communities expressing interest in amending their land use regulations to ensure consistent development to align with economic and preservation goals. Additionally, the five municipalities are beginning a regional approach to recreation planning to provide local recreational opportunities at sites identified as lacking through the Comprehensive Plan.
4. City of Monongahela & Borough of New Eagle Joint Comprehensive Plan (Washington County) – The City of Monongahela and the Borough of New Eagle are older communities, located along the Monongahela River in Washington County. These communities are typical river valley towns that have experienced economic stagnation and population losses corresponding to the decline of the steel industry. Faced with similar issues, the communities completed a Joint Comprehensive Plan and Early Intervention Program, which has led to a formal partnership to develop a multi-municipal zoning ordinance and subdivision and land development ordinance. Other potential outcomes include a joint bid for refuse hauling and recycling, a shared code enforcement

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program, shared public work services, and ongoing commitment to a regional police force.

**Conclusion:**

The Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association recognizes the importance of community planning and the legislation and funding programs that make this possible. We hope that this body will continue to support the established legal principles and judicial support for multi-municipal plans and projects that implement such plans. Additionally, I would like to reiterate the support for community-initiated shared service programs be it formal or informal agreements.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer these remarks, and I will be happy to respond to any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

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