

DESIGNATED RURAL AREAS

Local Implementation Strategy

BACKGROUND

The Designated Rural Area (DRA) concept was introduced in the Rural Strategy of the Lancaster County Comprehensive Plan's Growth Management Element, *Balance*, as a method of local implementation. *Balance's* Growth Framework Map depicts the following four types of designations at a countywide scale:

1. Designated Agricultural Areas
2. Designated Agricultural with Natural Areas
3. Designated Natural Areas
4. Rural Centers

The key to implementing the Rural Strategy is its refinement from the countywide scale down to the township or multi-municipal level. Therefore, the purpose of this DRA Implementation Strategy is to create a locally reproducible methodology that identifies and maps DRAs through a local Comprehensive Plan update and/or separate strategic planning update process. In order to effectively meet this challenge, the Implementation Strategy should center on the following concept found in *Balance*:

“Designated Rural Areas contain resources and uses that support agriculture, other significant economic links to the land and/or traditional outdoor activities. They are to be maintained in a predominantly rural condition supportive of agriculture and other traditional uses of the land for the foreseeable future.”

Furthermore, this local implementation strategy is guided by the County Comprehensive Plan's Green Infrastructure Element, *Greenscapes*, specifically in its approach to planning for Lancaster County's natural resources. Within its introductory Key Message, we find the following concept that stands on equal footing as the above statement:

“[*Greenscapes*] highlights the importance of protecting large blocks of contiguous land and improving connectivity as it aims to establish a network of natural areas, conservation lands, and working landscapes...a blueprint for accommodating appropriate growth and development while preserving the region's most valuable natural resources, native species, cultural assets and agricultural economy.”

GIS MAPPING ANALYSIS

It is essential to remember that the Rural Strategy is based on maintaining concentrations of RESOURCES, whether agricultural, natural, and historical. Successfully maintaining these resources will positively impact Lancaster County's heritage, economy, environment, and land use. These aspects are interconnected, especially with regard to the protection of the rural areas' environmental functions such as a clean, abundant water supply and improved air quality.

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology is the key tool in defining DRAs at the local level. The definition process relies on identifying concentrated natural and/or agricultural resource areas. In this regard, local implementation of the Rural Strategy should result in the designation of Natural Areas, Agricultural Areas, and Rural Centers throughout Lancaster County. The composition of Natural Areas and Agricultural Areas depend on the type, quality, and concentration of resources present.

- **Designated Natural Areas**

Natural resource areas can be directly associated with the Preservation and Conservation Areas identified in *Greenscapes*. These areas contain concentrations of Lancaster County's high- and highest-quality natural resources. Judgment calls must be made to determine whether some fragmented or corridor-based supporting Conservation Areas should be incorporated into a larger Designated Agricultural Area rather than be included here. To help explain the criteria listed below, a glossary has been provided at the rear of this document.

Preservation (Core) Areas

There is a direct correlation between the *Greenscapes*' Preservation Area and the core of a Designated Natural Area. These resource areas of Lancaster County are guided by the goal to "preserve Lancaster County's exceptional natural resources." The following criteria were used to map Preservation Areas for *Greenscapes*:

- highest quality streams and riparian buffers
- unique geologic features
- Lancaster County Conservancy's natural gems
- species of concern core habitat
- highest quality natural communities
- interior forests
- forest blocks greater than 100 acres in size
- important bird and mammal areas

Conservation (Supporting) Areas

Some Conservation Areas mapped in *Greenscapes* have a slightly different spatial quality than the Preservation Areas, in that riparian corridors, wetlands,

floodplains, and the like can be strewn throughout the landscape. Where found in sizeable blocks, especially around Preservation Areas, they are suitable for designation as Natural Areas in a supporting role. These features are included in the Conservation Areas:

- wetlands
- 100-year floodplain areas
- steep slopes and highly erodible soils
- medium quality streams and riparian buffers
- medium quality natural communities
- species of concern supporting habitat
- forest blocks less than 100 acres in size
- other natural vegetation
- important groundwater and wellhead protection zones

Depending on the relative sizes of both the core and supporting areas, a municipality may choose to make separate designations or consolidate them into a single region. This is a flexible approach to a situation that requires a case-by-case analysis to be effective.

- **Designated Agricultural Areas**

Agricultural land uses dominate most of Lancaster County's rural landscape. This is due to the region's cultural history and the agricultural resources intrinsic to the land, notably the fertile soils. And because much of our county contains prime agricultural soils, this cannot be the sole determining factor for an Agricultural Area designation. Therefore, greater depth is needed to identify Agricultural Areas with long-term viability on municipal or regional scales.

In addition to the agricultural resources, Designated Agricultural Areas must acknowledge the presence and importance of natural resources in these large portions of the county. *Greenscapes'* Conservation Areas consist of a collection of natural resources that are deemed to be not as high-quality as those contained in Preservation Areas, but are "still essential to the health of our natural environment and to the quality of our lives." The identification and incorporation of integrated Conservation Areas (e.g. stream corridors) into Designated Agricultural Areas increases the comprehensiveness of resource conservation by meshing natural resource planning into agricultural resource areas. The inseparable relationship of natural resources within the large Designated Agricultural Areas renders *Balance's* Agricultural with Natural Areas designation ineffective for the purpose of locally implementing the Rural Strategy. Since this approach is based on conserving agricultural and natural resources, policy implementation measures must be attentive to both types of resource management in Lancaster County's rural communities.

GIS mapping aids the identification of Designated Agricultural Areas by locating specific criteria in the study area. Even though all decisions should be scrutinized

locally, the mapping process helps visualize where these factors are concentrated. This list may be expanded, reduced, or altered to suit specific local preferences that are consistent with the underlying planning objectives:

- agricultural conservation easements (ACEs)
- parcels within adopted agricultural security areas (ASAs)
- active farms/agricultural tracts (e.g. cropland, animal feeding operations, & pasture)
- Agricultural Preserve Board high-clustering potential farms^{*}

Logically, areas comprised of multiple agricultural resource factors readily lend themselves to this designation. Areas that contain significantly less (either in number or in concentration) should be discussed further for applicability, in a similar vein as the “Analysis Beyond the Mapping” section covered later. Prime agricultural soils are not listed in the above criteria as an across-the-board factor since Lancaster County has an abundance of this resource. However, this criterion may need to be considered in some communities where it is not as prevalent.

An inventory of agricultural support businesses could help the DRA planning process in several ways. While enterprises like implement dealers, feed distributors, supply stores, and the like are not necessarily found exclusively in agricultural districts, there are definite economic, transportation, and land use connections. Knowledge of a business’s general market reach (e.g. local or regional) can also prove useful. This information may lead to better decision making, even if the businesses are not located within a Designated Agricultural Area. In fact, it may play a role in the identification of Rural Centers, which is discussed in further depth below.

Although details on the preliminary mapping process are contained in the next section, the basic approach to displaying agricultural resources includes inventorying farms by their size. Because Lancaster County contains a variety of definitions of agriculture depending on location and demographics, the merits of maintaining or promoting large farms, small farms, or a mixture of farm sizes in a municipality or region should ultimately be decided locally. At minimum, conservation of the existing stock of large-acreage farm tracts should provide flexibility for both near-term and future farming operations, helping Lancaster County’s agricultural industry adapt to broad changes in the economy.

^{*} The Lancaster County Agricultural Preserve Board (APB), at the time of this Strategy’s development, is considering the addition of a “clustering potential” element to their ranking system. Using a GIS-based evaluation system, clustering potential is determined by factoring in existing preserved farm clusters and the proximity of other farms. If adopted by the APB, their planning should be incorporated into the DRA process by using high-potential farms as another criterion in determining Designated Agricultural Areas.

Small farm tracts play a role in the county's big-picture agricultural economy. Produce farming, community gardening, or other niche operations can be viable on smaller parcels, even those smaller than the generally accepted ten acre-plus definition. However, it is recommended that these operations be established on existing small-farm tracts rather than be accommodated by the subdivision of Lancaster County's declining number of large-acreage lands. Smaller tracts scattered throughout a large Designated Agricultural Area zoned for agriculture are likely to be under less pressure for development or a fundamental land use change than those located on the edge of a settlement.

Smaller farms found on the fringe of UGAs or other developed areas may be more prone to a transition to residential use, but at the same time are likely in close proximity to the consumers of their products. This goes to show that a somewhat-flexible approach is needed, especially considering how different regions of Lancaster County have varying opinions of what functional, long-term viable agriculture really is. The DRA process can prove to be a good forum for local discussions on this topic, especially with regard to how both planning and land use controls should promote successful agricultural enterprises on any scale.

Creating a successful planning partnership between LCPC, APB, Lancaster County Conservation District (LCCD), and a municipality can better align the actions and resources of all parties with regard to rural lands planning. This collaboration is important not only from the standpoint of focusing perpetual agricultural preservation efforts, but for promoting natural resource conservation practices on productive farmland. The APB requires the preparation of a conservation plan as part of securing a conservation easement, and the LCCD works with the landowner to implement said plan to protect soil and water on site: a good example of integrated natural and agricultural resource conservation.

- **Rural Centers**

Balance states that Rural Centers are “areas of existing development to which development not directly related to the rural economy is to be guided.” They are typically focused on a specific geographic location like a roadway intersection or historic center because of their concentrated nature, despite being located in a rural setting. These areas of existing development are not necessarily identified as suitable for growth, but may be good sites for accommodating limited future development and infill development. As continued in *Balance*, the 1997 Lancaster County Growth Management Plan identified the following varieties of Rural Centers:

- *Villages, including Designated Village Growth Areas (VGAs)*

These compact communities with well-defined edges typically consist of 50 or more dwellings. Although they are primarily residential in nature, other uses like small-scale commercial enterprises may be present. Public facilities such

as schools, parks, municipal buildings, and churches often make Lancaster County's villages civic centers for the local population.

All villages fitting the preceding description are not necessarily suitable for designation as a VGA. The main differentiating factor for this determination is whether there is "additional development capacity to absorb a portion of the township's future land use needs through reinvestment or new development." Efficient, but rurally-suitable growth in a VGA should occur at an average of 2.5 dwelling units per net acre. Public sewer and/or water facilities will be needed to accomplish this residential density target.

- *Crossroads Communities*

Generally speaking, these rural areas are smaller versions of villages, containing approximately 20-50 dwellings with a few supporting commercial establishments and/or public uses. However, the expansion of crossroads communities is not recommended. Compatible growth in the form of infill or reinvestment is more suitable than larger greenfield development.

- *Rural Neighborhoods*

Existing residential developments like rural subdivisions and mobile home parks exist in many communities. New development of this nature is discouraged, but Rural Neighborhoods can be targeted to accept a very limited amount of residential growth. This may mean building on vacant lots or subdividing land located between existing subdivisions. In either case, limited is key when guiding growth into this type of Rural Center.

The primary characteristic differentiating Rural Neighborhoods from Villages and Crossroads Communities is historic character. Historic Villages and Crossroads Communities have a distinct feel when compared to post-WWII Rural Neighborhoods. A Rural Neighborhood's style may take the form of a suburban-style subdivision or frontage lots stripped from a larger tract along a rural road. Both examples' differences from historic Rural Centers are apparent on both parcel maps and on the ground.

- *Rural Business Areas*

Clustered business areas are also found in Lancaster County's rural areas, some containing vacant lots that can accept limited expansion. These employment centers may include industrial, institutional, tourist-related, and service establishments. Additional development should either take place via infill or by limited expansion, where applicable.

A series of three guidance documents will supplement planning for Lancaster County's Rural Centers. The first piece will tackle the subject of identifying one

of the four Rural Center types listed above with expanded criteria, examples from throughout the county, and other visual aides. Information in this document will help with the task of identifying and delineating a community's Rural Centers based on what exists today. The other two pieces are discussed further in the Designated Rural Areas and Policy Implementation section.

PRELIMINARY MAP PRODUCTS

Visual aides are critical to engage the public in any planning project, and Lancaster County GIS data enables the creation of map illustrations that will convey rural resources. Preliminary map products can be tailored to the project area, but will need to follow the general guidelines below and the detailed instructions found in the accompanying GIS Tutorial. Agricultural resources, natural resources, and built lands are shown to present participants with multiple views of the information that will ultimately result in the identification of DRAs.

- **Agricultural Lands**

The Agricultural Lands map shows the audience the location and size of farms within the study area, as well as those tracts contained in an Agricultural Security Area (ASA) or preserved by an Agricultural Conservation Easement (ACE). A distinct approach to this illustration is the mapping of farms by acreage, using color gradations to display four classes of sizes. Grouping agricultural tracts according to ranges should help the planning participants visualize the locations and concentrations of these resources with regard to both the large-farm and small-farm approaches. The inclusion of DGAs provides context for where the municipality and LCPC have identified suitable areas for growth, as opposed to long-term agricultural activity.

It is expected that the GIS system source data will omit most, if not all, agricultural tracts smaller than 10 acres. Because Lancaster County Assessment Office land use classifications for agriculture are combined with a tract's acreage, it is unlikely that any farms on tracts smaller than 10 acres in area will be identified prior to local review of the maps. Locating these small farms is another reason why information exchange is a critical part of the local planning process, and can help support the establishment or furtherance of a small-farm strategy.

- ***Greenscapes'* Natural Resource Areas**

The Preservation and Conservation Areas created through the *Greenscapes* planning process are comprehensive geographies containing wide arrays of natural resources on two levels of importance. This map shows the aggregated resource areas along with topography and DGAs. Simplicity is the key with this map since the Preservation and Conservation Areas are the most important features needed to form the basis for a community's Designated Natural Areas.

- **Mixed Rural Resources**

The agricultural lands and natural resource areas depicted in the two maps noted above will likely occupy a majority of a township's rural lands. Showing these features on the same map will be useful in identifying overlapping areas as well as gaps between them. Since these types of situations will probably involve the biggest decisions in the planning process, proper identification is key.

- **Built Environment**

A generalized land use/land cover illustration is useful in identifying residential and commercial/industrial land uses throughout the study area. The purpose of the Built Environment map is to help participants visualize the locations and boundaries of Rural Centers. Although many VGAs, Villages, and Crossroads Communities have been named in *Balance* and/or local comprehensive plans, others may need designation or delineation. The guidance document listed in the previous section will provide criteria and visuals intended for use in these situations.

- **Aerial Photo**

The fifth piece of the initial map offerings is an aerial photo of the study area, overlaid by parcel lines and DGA boundaries. Although the ortho photography layer is updated only every few years, it is a good reference that can help answer questions that may arise when looking at the features shown on the other four maps. Woodlands, farmlands, and settlements are relatively apparent in this view as well.

The presentation of these maps is made with the intent to gather feedback from the participants. Feedback should be used to customize the maps with the assumptions, conditions, and improvements that local knowledge can impart. Recommended changes translated to the illustrations should be brought back to the table so that the delineation of Designated Rural Areas can occur with more refined information.

ANALYSIS BEYOND THE MAPPING

Overlapping designations or undesignated areas left between the preliminary DRAs and established/planned DGAs must be addressed through the local planning process. *Balance* notes that local planning analysis "is likely to reveal areas that are not suitable for designation as Rural Areas due to conditions such as existing development patterns and absence of high value resources." Where an obvious application of a DGA or DRA is not clear in the planning process, the desired approach may be to stand pat to avoid making a hasty designation.

The Lancaster County Planning Commission supports this difficult decision-making process at the local level. Where unclear fringe areas between DRAs and DGAs exist, a case-by-case analysis should occur. Issues such as the relative concentration of natural or

agricultural resources and the feasibility of public utility extensions to an area can help determine whether it has a particular identity (e.g. urban, rural, or in the path of growth). And if the identity is unclear, answering the following questions may help formulate an interim land use policy:

- Does the current zoning designation permit land uses that may be barriers to the area's future fulfillment as a DRA or DGA?
- If some agricultural resources are present, should resource conservation (as in a DRA) be promoted, but with reassessment expected in the future in light of changing trends?
- If relatively little natural or agricultural resources are present, should it be categorized as having potential for future growth, although the form of which is currently unknown?

If thorough analysis of such an area results in the deferral of making a formal designation, the municipality is not neglecting its responsibility to plan for land within its boundaries. By not immediately assigning the label of DGA or DRA, the municipality is effectively creating a transitional "future planning area" that is maintained as rural until enough information is available to make the decision, which may not be evident until the next planning period. A rush to designate contested fringe or transition areas may be flawed when future population, housing, land use, resource, and economic trends are currently unknown.

DESIGNATED RURAL AREAS AND POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

The establishment of Designated Rural Areas at the local level is the gateway to implementing the Rural Strategy. Mapping analysis should yield one or more types of DRA within a municipality or region, depending on the distribution of rural resource groups and settlements present in the community. Planners and the local leadership are called upon to approach conflict areas created by the analysis and define boundaries for the areas. Municipalities can officially designate DRAs either by adopting them as part of a full comprehensive plan update or as a strategic amendment to the plan.

Timing DRA adoption with a municipal or regional comprehensive planning process may be the exception rather than the rule in order to achieve a near-term goal for countywide municipal adoption. This places an emphasis on LCPC's promotion of the DRA process as a supplement to an established comprehensive plan rather than pushing for a full-blown update where it may be untimely or even unnecessary. The plan amendment or element approach can be pitched to local officials as a cost effective and less time consuming way to conduct this rural planning initiative. However, its incorporation into a full plan update should be pursued whenever there is a good chance of one taking place. Another option available for when a comprehensive plan has just been completed would be a process prepared mostly by LCPC Staff, then presented to the municipality for concurrence or confirmation of the adopted plan's framework.

Actionable land use policy must accompany the plan's DRA designations for them to be fully effective. Local goals can be meshed with the Rural Strategy's policies for each of the applicable DRA types, integrating municipal rural planning with that of the entire county. The next step beyond creating policy is implementation via both regulatory and non-regulatory approaches. The application of resource conservation policy to Designated Agricultural Areas will differ in detail from the application to Designated Natural Areas, but it is carried by the same underlying foundation of conserving resources for their economic, ecologic, and cultural values. In the case of Rural Centers, the central point is limited accommodation of harmonic rural development.

- **Designated Natural Areas**

Greenscapes states that the resources in these areas “require the highest degree of protection and management as necessary to ensure their continued existence and eliminate disruptive forces.” From a regulatory standpoint, true conservation zoning should be applied here in order to minimize negative impacts upon these resources. The Lancaster County Planning Commission has drafted model zoning ordinance language that will provide municipalities with a starting point or supplement for implementing this principle into local land use controls.

Beyond zoning and other similar controls, communities can look to non-regulatory approaches like outreach to spread the concept of land stewardship to landowners in these critical areas. *Greenscapes* mentions a strategy to “work with landowners to develop site-specific management plans to maintain and restore the integrity of high quality natural heritage areas.” These are obviously voluntary measures, and at the highest level of resource conservation the Lancaster County Conservancy or other similar organizations could purchase open space easements to preserve the county's exceptional natural resources in perpetuity.

Key Strategies

- Protect river and stream corridors, floodplains, wetlands, forested areas, steep slopes, and other natural resources through municipal zoning and subdivision regulations and conservation easements.
- Provide information and incentives to developers to encourage site design practices that reduce impervious surfacing and conserve open space and natural resources.
- Work with farmers and other landowners to establish riparian buffers of native vegetation along river and stream corridors.
- Encourage all home and business owners to landscape with native plants.
- Promote water quality restoration and reduction of pollutant loads to surface and ground waters through regional initiatives, with the objective of meeting or exceeding all applicable water quality standards.

- Promote wellhead protection strategies for public water supplies.
- Develop local greenway trail systems linking regional and countywide networks.

- **Designated Agricultural Areas**

The name implies that agriculture is the dominant land use, but it does not go without the need for conservation of the various natural resources found throughout these areas. Most municipalities use some version of effective agricultural zoning to restrict the subdivision of land and focus its uses. The Lancaster County Planning Commission has developed a model agricultural zoning district to serve as a municipal resource.

Since Lancaster County contains a variety of definitions for agriculture, there is a need for both a large-farm and small-farm strategy. A small-farm strategy could permit 10-acre (or smaller) minimum agricultural tracts for less intense operations like produce or niche farming, but restrictions on non-agricultural lot splits and uses must still be present. LCPC is cautious in promoting small-farm land use policy since it could erode concentrated blocks of large agricultural tracts. Initially, areas that may be suitable for this approach could be characterized by the type of parcelization conducive to smaller operations (e.g. concentrations of tracts smaller than 25 acres).

The most encompassing approach focuses on maintaining the existing proportion of farm sizes to allow for a diversity of agricultural activities on a countywide level. Accommodating variety and flexibility should permit Lancaster County's agricultural industry to adapt to changing economic conditions locally and on a global scale. However, land use controls must strike a balance between promoting small-acreage farming on existing tracts and conserving large-acreage lands. Once large farms are broken down into multiple pieces, the chances of their reassembly are vastly reduced, which may hamper future needs for large-acreage operations.

Municipalities may wish to go beyond the general Designated Agricultural Area definition by identifying priority areas for the purpose of guiding farmland preservation efforts. If the community wishes to actively participate in programs like that of the Lancaster County Agricultural Preserve Board, these areas can be further dissected. Identifying strategic locations within a Designated Agricultural Area, especially those that contain dense concentrations of large farms or locations of high "clustering potential", can help a municipality guide preservation funds within their community. Working with organizations like the APB during the planning process should also be considered to ensure concurrence with their policies.

Enacting holistic resource-based land use controls in the Designated Agricultural Areas may present municipalities with a bigger challenge because of the need to

conserve both natural and agricultural resources. These large DRAs are likely laced with a variety of natural resources, ranging from stream corridors to steep slopes. *Greenscapes* defines conservation as “the management of these resources to maintain their ecological functions and natural carrying capacity.” The plan promotes conservation of natural resources via zoning (e.g. effective agricultural zoning, or requiring better site design practices with regard to these features). LCPC’s model agricultural district brings this concept to light, and the model conservation district will help guide local actions to integrate natural resource conservation into agricultural areas.

Non-regulatory approaches can involve an array of local organizations that promote the conservation of agricultural and/or natural resources. The Lancaster County Conservation District, local watershed associations, and Lancaster Farmland Trust are a few examples that actively promote and conduct outreach to citizens and officials on their importance. Information and technical assistance from groups like these can help landowners practice conservation techniques on their own farms or backyards.

Key Strategies

- Adopt effective agricultural zoning defining a minimum lot size viable for agricultural use and a maximum residential lot size that limits the amount of land devoted to non-agricultural use, coupled with prohibitions on subdivisions and other development not related to agriculture.
- Integrate natural resource conservation measures (e.g. riparian buffers and steep slope restrictions) into agricultural zoning districts via a green infrastructure overlay or similar approach.
- Change rural residential and other inappropriate zoning that promotes non-farm related development to agricultural zoning to maintain compatibility with agricultural uses.
- Limit the extension of public water and sewer only as necessary for health and safety, with design controls to prevent further expansion to serve new development in the Designated Agricultural Area.
- Conduct an Agricultural Access Network Study to identify key agricultural routes, and shift county policy to funnel transportation improvement funds to improving such routes.
- Support the agricultural industry and sustain land in agricultural production.
- Continue to develop an understanding of the countywide agricultural industry, including economic trends, interrelationships, and needs.
- Promote wellhead protection strategies for public water supplies.

- **Rural Centers**

The theme underlying the establishment of and/or planning for Rural Centers is to contain development while allowing for infill opportunities, redevelopment, expansion of existing businesses on a lot, and the like. Growth in Rural Centers should be judiciously monitored to limit any conflicting impacts on the adjacent agricultural or natural resources. Additionally, such development should be done in a manner that respects the existing built environment, especially in historic settlements.

Key Strategies

- Permit development that directly relates to the rural economy and way of life with appropriate standards to protect rural resources.
- Limit the scale of development that does not directly relate to the rural economy and way of life and focus it in Rural Centers.
- Direct public and institutional uses to Urban Growth Areas whenever possible.

A wastewater treatment alternatives study has been conducted in response to the recent Aberdeen Proving Grounds Base Realignment and Consolidation (BRAC) activity. With the Kirkwood VGA and three other locations in Colerain Township as the study's focus areas, it has been structured so that the findings can be applied throughout Lancaster County. The study works through wastewater planning beyond the "traditional" on-lot septic or institutional wastewater treatment plant and collection systems. A non-traditional treatment approach could be used to serve Rural Centers, namely VGAs, accommodating limited growth and/or curing problems resulting from aging or failing on-lot septic systems. Municipalities that have Rural Centers with potential for growth or disposal issues are encouraged to pursue Act 537 planning that considers these alternatives as available options for wastewater treatment.

As mentioned in the GIS Mapping Analysis section, the three-piece Rural Center document package plays a key part in implementing policy. A rural water and wastewater discussion, based on the BRAC study, should help with important land use and financial decisions where public utilities are lacking. The final part of the package is a Rural Community Handbook containing design guidelines for infill, redevelopment, and growth within existing Rural Centers aimed at maintaining rural and historic character in Lancaster County. Understanding the characteristics of desirable Rural Centers is important in applying county and local comprehensive plan policy to maintain them.

This DRA local implementation strategy can also guide the process needed to evaluate the logistics of sending and receiving areas for a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program, either at a municipal or regional level. By designating DGAs and DRAs, the general concept of locating sending areas (DRAs governed by zoning districts that restrict

subdivision rights) and receiving areas (DGAs) should be relatively clear. Even if a municipality does not intend on implementing a TDR program right away, addressing the location of these essential components can be tackled during the planning process and documented in the plan or report.

LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS

LCPC's Designated Rural Area strategy relies heavily upon the actions made at the local level. As usual, multi-municipal participation is strongly recommended for planning projects, and regional planning is especially urged to tackle large-area matters such as this, where DRAs have the high likelihood to span municipal boundaries. LCPC Staff representation during the local planning process allows for two-way interaction and feedback for Rural Strategy policy implementation. This holds true for land use regulation amendments as well, where policy meets application and plans are put in action.

A brief handout is available to provide local participants at the onset of the DRA local implementation. It outlines the purpose of the planning process and a summary of the upcoming steps, which is also presented in a flow chart format. This will help the participants have an idea of what is to come, and why their involvement is important in making this rural planning effort successful.

GLOSSARY OF NATURAL RESOURCE CRITERIA*

100-year Floodplain Areas – Lands that have been determined to have a 1% of flooding in a given year.

Forest Blocks – Large contiguous areas of woodlands, noted as containing either greater than or less than 100 acres. Blocks are considered to have a higher conservation value than several, smaller fragmented pieces.

Highly Erodible Soils – Class VI and VII soils as defined by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service's soil classification system. These soils are defined as having severe limitations that make them generally unsuitable for cultivation.

Important Bird Areas – Sites that are part of a global network of places recognized for their outstanding value to bird conservation. They provide essential habitat for one or more species of breeding, wintering, and/or migrating birds.

Important Groundwater and Wellhead Protection Zones – Surface and subsurface areas surrounding a public water supply well, wellfield, spring, or infiltration gallery through which contaminants are reasonably likely to move toward and reach the water source.**

Important Mammal Areas – Areas that contain habitats with high mammalian diversity.

Interior Forests – The portions of large woodlands inside the fringe areas, considered to have different light, temperature, and moisture qualities than other land cover types.

Natural Communities – Assemblages of different plant species that live together in a common area at a particular time and in a specific habitat, and which interact with each other, with animal populations, with animal populations, and with the physical environment. The “high quality” designation applies to those with little evidence of invasion by introduced species, while the “medium quality” designation is associated with those that have some sort of a negative influence, such as the presence of an invasive species.

Natural Gems – The Lancaster County Conservancy's priority natural resource areas that are the focus of the organization's preservation efforts. A set of seven environmental attributes (water bodies, wetland, forestland, grassland, geological features, plants, animals, and adjacency to other preserved areas) are used for their designation.

Other Natural Vegetation – Non-agricultural herbaceous and shrub/brush growth, or a mixture thereof.

Species of Concern Core Habitat – The actual and adjacent similar habitat of exemplary natural communities, areas with exceptional native diversity, or plants and/or animals considered rare, threatened, or endangered at state or federal levels.

Species of Concern Supporting Habitat – Areas necessary to maintain vital ecological processes or secondary habitat that could be impacted by certain types of habitat-disturbing activities.

Steep Slopes – Areas of land in excess of 15% slope, where slope is calculated as the ratio of the vertical rise in elevation to the horizontal distance of the slope. Precautionary measures are required when natural cover is removed. Areas in excess of 25% are considered severe and unsuitable for both agriculture and land development.

Streams and Riparian Buffers – Lands directly adjacent to streams, creeks, and rivers, as well as the surface waters that they encompass. Buffer segments are designated as “high quality” or “medium quality” depending on an analysis that used variables assessing upstream road crossings and point sources of pollution, as well as the percent of the segment and watershed in agriculture, in urban uses, or undeveloped.

Unique Geologic Features – Natural resources that have been identified as areas of geological significance in Pennsylvania. They are typically scenic and offer opportunities to learn about the natural history of the county and state.

Wetlands – Areas that are inundated or saturated by surface or groundwater at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances do support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions. Wetlands generally include swamps, marshes, bogs, and similar areas. **

* Source – *Greenscapes*: The Lancaster County Comprehensive Plan Green Infrastructure Element

** Source – Pa Code 25 Section 109

*** Source – United States Clean Water Act