

An aerial photograph of Forks Township, showing a mix of residential neighborhoods and large agricultural fields. In the foreground, there are several houses and a large farmstead with multiple silos. The middle ground shows more residential areas interspersed with open fields. The background features rolling hills and a distant town under a cloudy sky.

Forks Township

Growth Management and Open Space Strategy

Who We Are – Environmental Planning and Design

Andrew Schwartz, AICP CUD, PLA, LEED® AP, SITES® AP
Director of Design



- American Institute of Certified Planners
- Certified Urban Designer
- Registered Landscape Architect
- SITES AP
- LEED AP

Mr. Schwartz's 35 years of experience with the public sector includes assisting planning agencies, commissions, and stakeholder groups to assess capacities, explore planning alternatives, evaluate trade-offs, and define viable solutions. Through the course of his career, he has contributed to the preparation of over 120 zoning and subdivision ordinances and comprehensive plans. AJ has provided expert testimony in more than 25 land use disputes; four cases have been decided by the Commonwealth and are published cases. One dispute was heard by the PA DEP Environmental Review Board and led to permitting changes within DEP.

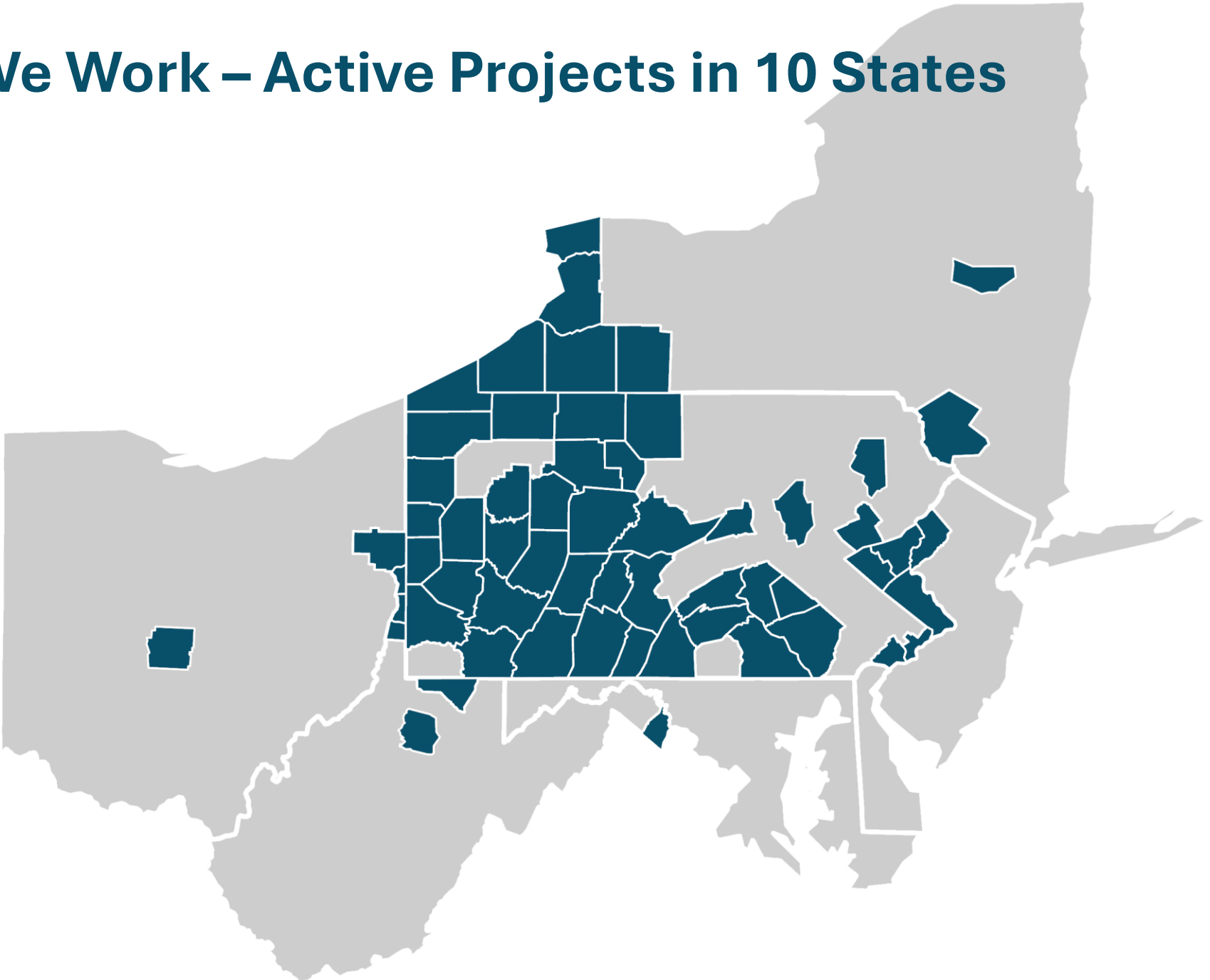
Carolyn Yagle, AICP, PLA, NAP
Director of Planning and Policy



- American Institute of Certified Planners
- Registered Landscape Architect
- National Association of Parliamentarians

Carolyn Yagle brings over two decades of experience in threading the relationships of land use regulations, community planning, development, economics, infrastructure assessments and civic amenity design. She understands how these factors can influence design and policy decisions at the local and regional scales. Many of Carolyn's ordinances focus on resource protection and environmental performance standards. She has developed multiple joint or multi-municipal zoning ordinances that utilize shared land uses zoning schemes.

Where We Work – Active Projects in 10 States





Purpose of the Assessment and Current Circumstances

Purpose of the Assessment

- Evaluate the Township's current approaches and development circumstances related to growth management and open space preservation
- Facilitate a work session with the Board of Supervisors to discuss these approaches and additional opportunities and garner consensus on the best means to address open space issues and managing growth within the Township

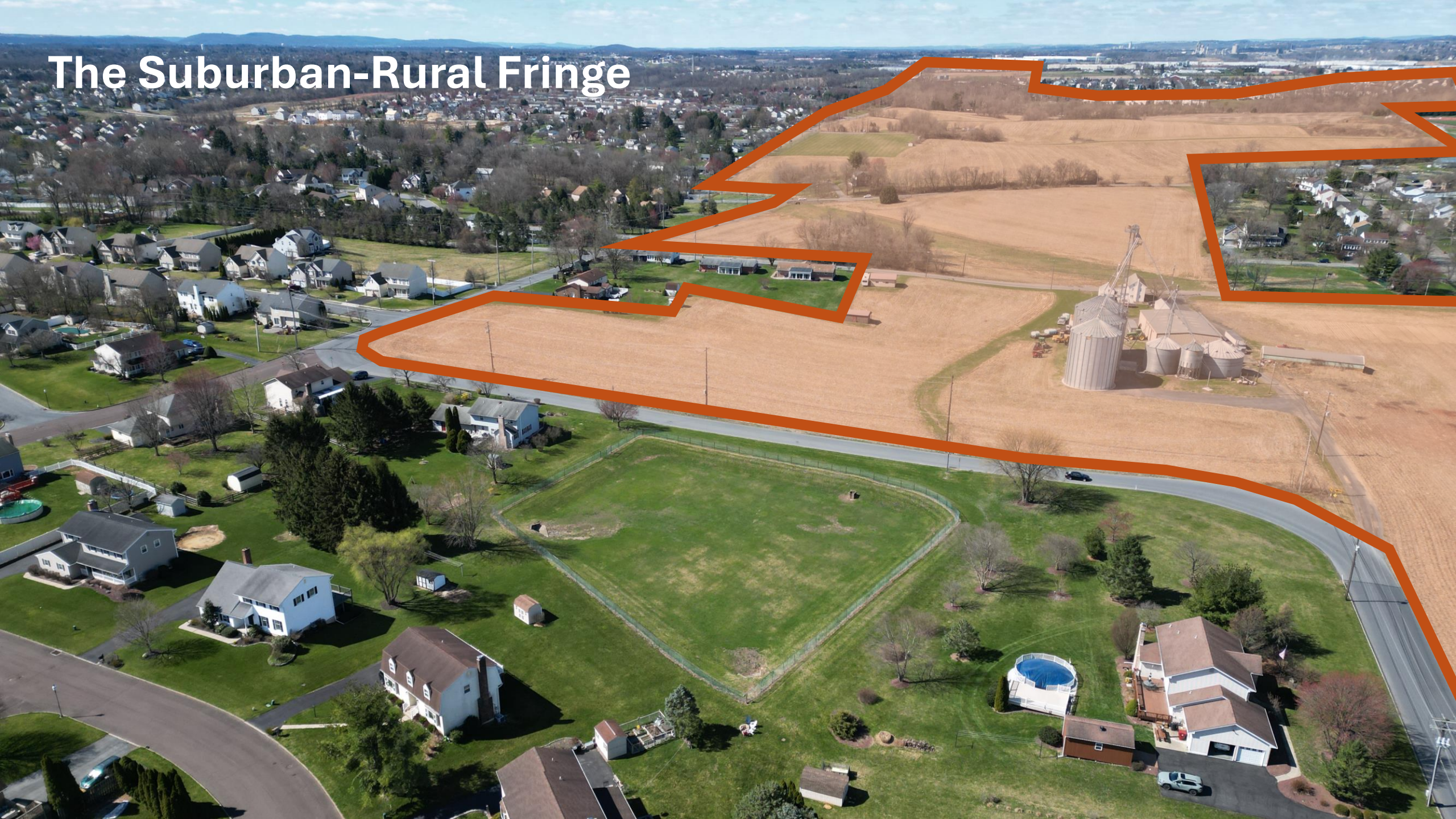
Past Development Patterns



More Recent Development Patterns



The Suburban-Rural Fringe



An aerial photograph showing a suburban-rural fringe. In the foreground, a large, flat, brown field is outlined by a thick orange line. To the right of this field is a large, white, rectangular industrial building with a series of small windows along its side. Behind the industrial building is a green field with a white fence. In the background, there are more industrial buildings, parking lots, and a residential area with houses. The entire scene is set against a backdrop of rolling hills and a blue sky with scattered clouds. The text "The Suburban-Rural Fringe" is overlaid in white on the brown field.

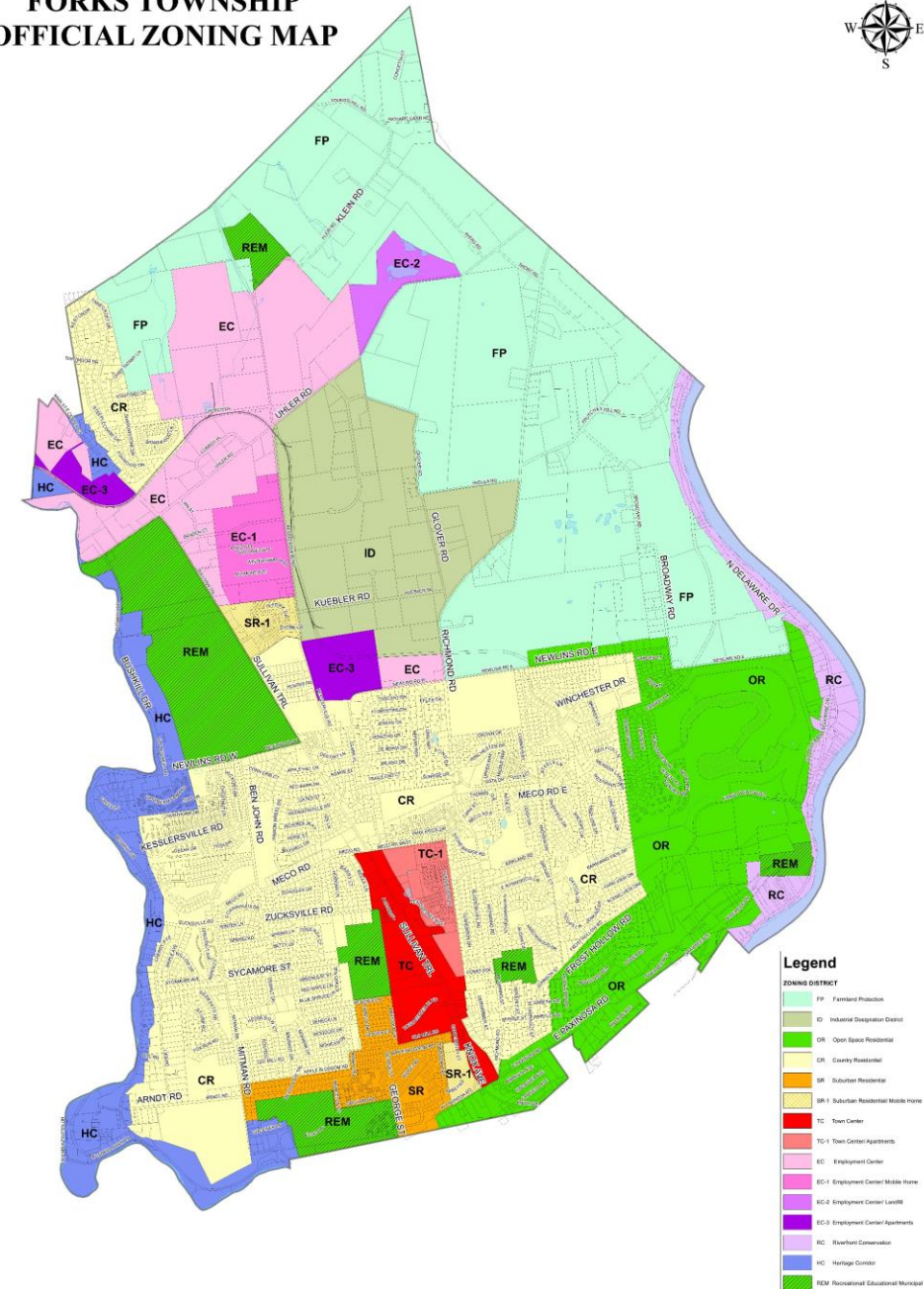
The Suburban-Rural Fringe



The Suburban-Rural Fringe

Current Township Policies – Zoning Map

FORKS TOWNSHIP OFFICIAL ZONING MAP



Current Township Policies – Rural Zoning Districts

(FP) Farmland Protection District. Traditionally, farming practices and residential uses have been incompatible because of conflict with traffic, noise and odor. The FP District is intended to conserve agricultural land within the Township, discouraging residential consumption of prime agricultural land. Given the housing projections until at least the year 2010, the area within the FP District is not needed to meet the projected housing needs of the Township. Further, **this district will remain with little development incentives since it is not intended to be served by public sewers.** In addition, the FP District is intended to encourage and enhance the preservation of the cultural landscape within the Township and to act as a primary open space link within the residential and employment centers in the community.

Current Township Policies – Rural Zoning Districts

(OR) Open Space Residential District. The intent of the district is to preserve the low-density residential conservation district located along the top of the palisades of the Delaware River and to protect and preserve the viewsheds and rural character of this area in the form of conservation open space, parkland and/or golf courses. In addition, this district could function as the Township's principal open space and recreational area and would be linked through open space trails and recreation paths to the existing Township and county parks, schools and the Town Center. This district would also help reinforce the RC District along the Delaware River.

Current Township Policies – Rural Zoning Districts

(CR) Country Residential District. This district is currently a series of residential subdivisions and single-family detached dwellings that are not interconnected to create a strong sense of community or neighborhoods. The intent of the district is to connect the disjointed residential uses with the current Comprehensive Plan for roads and a street hierarchy of boulevards with a network of open space, consisting of parkland, greenways and recreation paths with recreational opportunities woven throughout the district. Parks will act as important focal points to create areas of space. In addition, the district is intended to link the Town Center with the municipal park system.

Current Township Policies

– Comprehensive Plan

The majority of respondents rank the protection of natural resources and the provision of community recreation facilities as important issues when planning for the future of the Township.

Other issues that ranked highly focused on future planning considerations include traffic and road conditions, and growth management.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE



PREPARED FOR:

FORKS TOWNSHIP, NORTHAMPTON COUNTY, PA

JULY 2022



GILMORE & ASSOCIATES, INC.
ENGINEERING & CONSULTING SERVICES

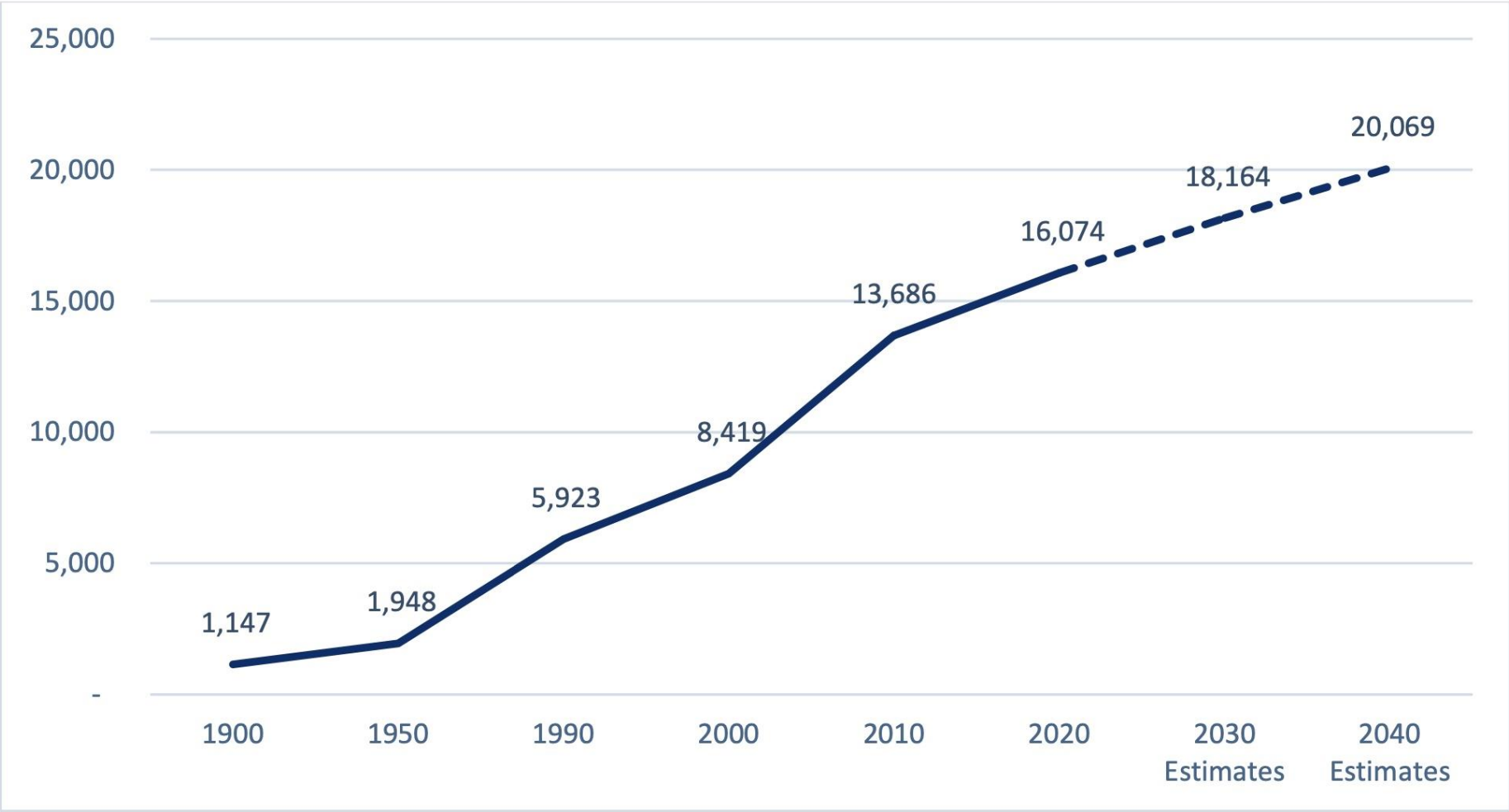
Current Township Policies

– Comprehensive Plan

Protect agriculture, natural resources, and open space through the use of regulatory provisions.	Review and evaluate current ordinance provisions.	High	BOS, PC and Township staff
	Explore opportunities for preservation of land through purchase of land and/or easements.	Medium	BOS and Township staff
Promote economically viable and environmentally sustainable agriculture as an important land	Support appropriate agriculture operations as a source of locally grown food i.e. farmers market, roadside stands.	On-going	BOS and Township staff

Current Township Policies – Comprehensive Plan

Forks Township Population Growth, 1900 to 2040



Source: U.S. Census and LVPC

An aerial photograph of a rural landscape, likely in a mountainous region. The foreground is dominated by a large, flat field with a distinct diagonal line of trees or a road. In the middle ground, there are several smaller fields, some with patches of snow or light-colored soil, and a few small buildings or structures. The background shows rolling hills and mountains under a hazy sky. The overall color palette is muted, with a blueish-grey tint.

State-wide Planning Objectives

State-wide Planning Objectives – Growth Management

#1 To ensure that municipalities enact zoning ordinances that facilitate the present and future economic viability of existing agricultural operations in this Commonwealth and do not prevent or impede the owner or operator's need to change or expand their operations in the future in order to remain viable.
PA MPC Article 1

#2 A plan for land use, which may include provisions for the amount, intensity, character and timing of land use proposed for residence, industry, business, agriculture, major traffic and transit facilities, utilities, community facilities, public grounds, parks and recreation, preservation of prime agricultural lands, flood plains and other areas of special hazards and other similar uses. *PA MPC Article 1*

State-wide Planning Objectives – Growth Management

- #3** A plan for the protection of natural and historic resources to the extent not preempted by federal or state law. This clause includes, but is not limited to, wetlands and aquifer recharge zones, woodlands, steep slopes, prime agricultural land, flood plains, unique natural areas and historic sites. *PA MPC Article 1*
- #4** Provisions to promote and preserve prime agricultural land, environmentally sensitive areas and areas of historic significance. *PA MPC Article 6*

State-wide Planning Objectives – Important Concepts

“Prime agricultural land” – land used for agricultural purposes that contains soils of the [first, second or third class as defined by the United States Department of Agriculture](#) natural resource and conservation services county soil survey. [PA MPC Article 1](#)

“Rural resource area” – an area described in a municipal or multi-municipal plan within which rural resource uses [including, but not limited to, agriculture](#), timbering, mining, quarrying and other extractive industries, forest and game lands and recreation and tourism are encouraged and enhanced, development that is compatible with or supportive of such uses is permitted, and public infrastructure services are not provided except in villages. [PA MPC Article 1](#)

State-wide Planning Objectives – Important Concepts

“Transferable development rights” – the attachment of development rights to specified lands which are desired by a municipality to be kept undeveloped, but permitting those rights to be transferred from those lands so that the development potential which they represent may occur on other lands where more intensive development is deemed to be appropriate. *PA MPC Article 1*

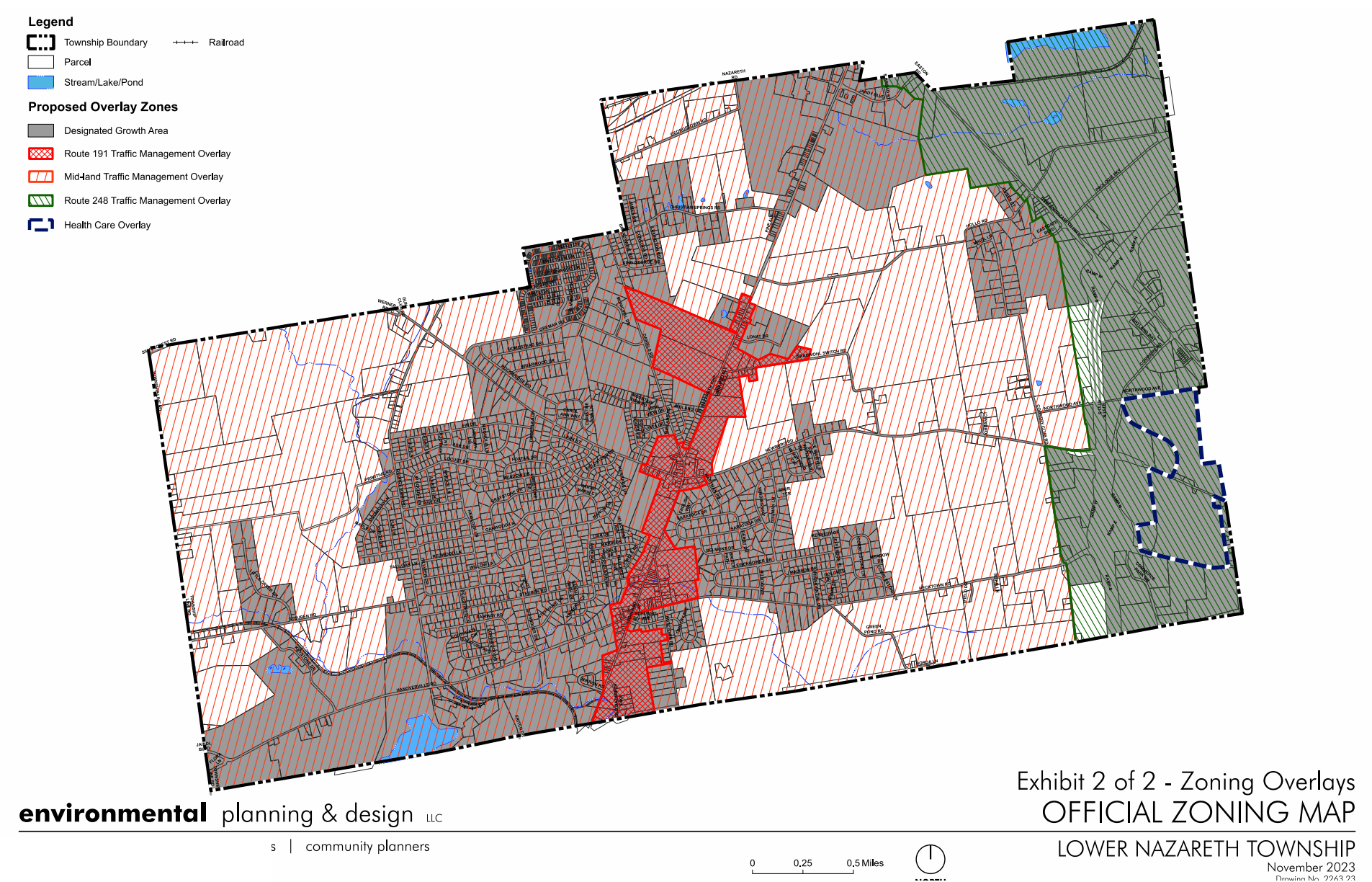
An aerial photograph of an airport, showing various hangars, a terminal building, parking lots, and runways. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. The text "Growth Management Tools Available to Municipalities" is centered over the image in a white, bold, sans-serif font.

Growth Management Tools Available to Municipalities

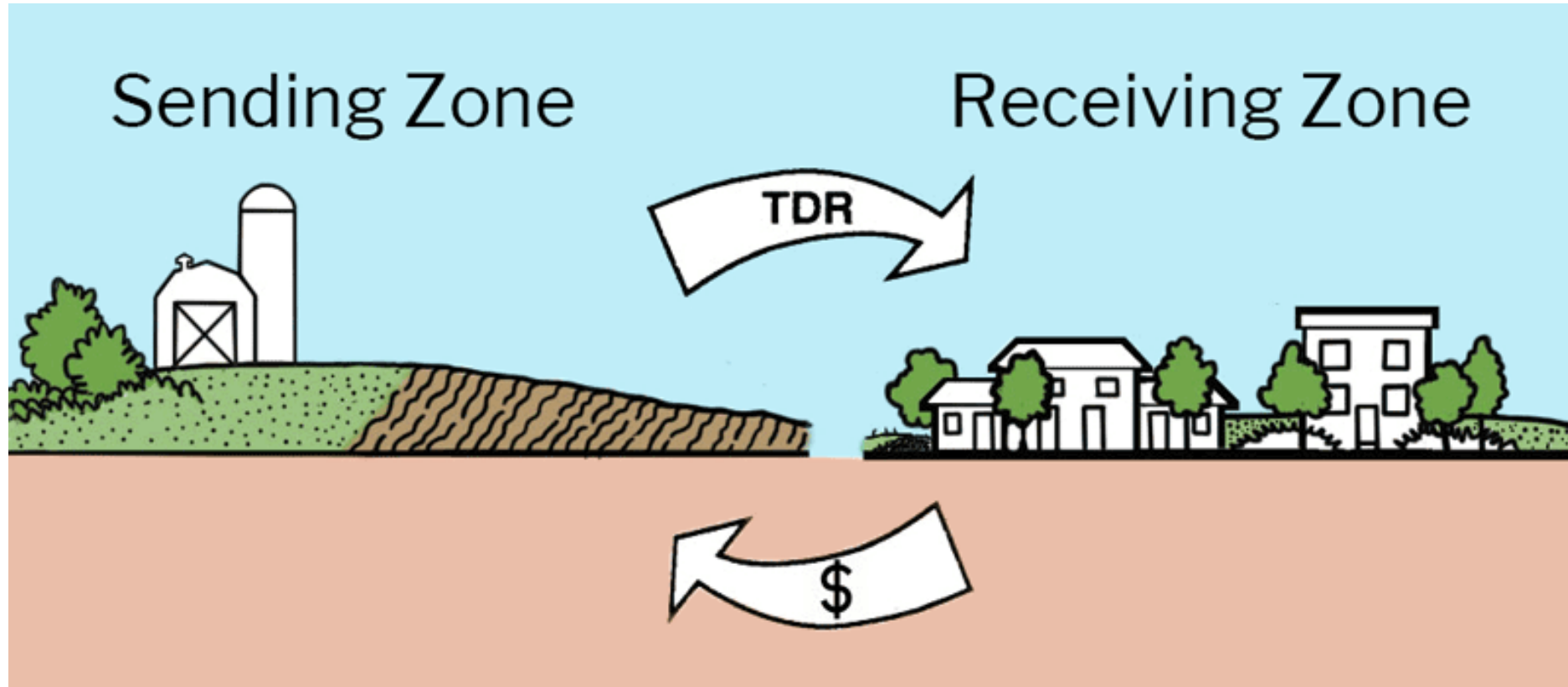
Tools Available to Municipalities

- **Farmland Preservation Programs**
- **Zoning Ordinance**
 - Rural Resource Areas
 - Designated Growth Areas
 - Planned Residential Development (PRD)
 - Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND)
 - Conservation Development (density controls)
 - Transferable Development Rights (TDR)
- **Subdivision and Land Development Ordinances**
 - Conservation Development (improvement standards)
- **Official Map**
 - Lands For Development Right Purchase or Open Space Purchase

Tools Available to Municipalities – Rural Resource Areas



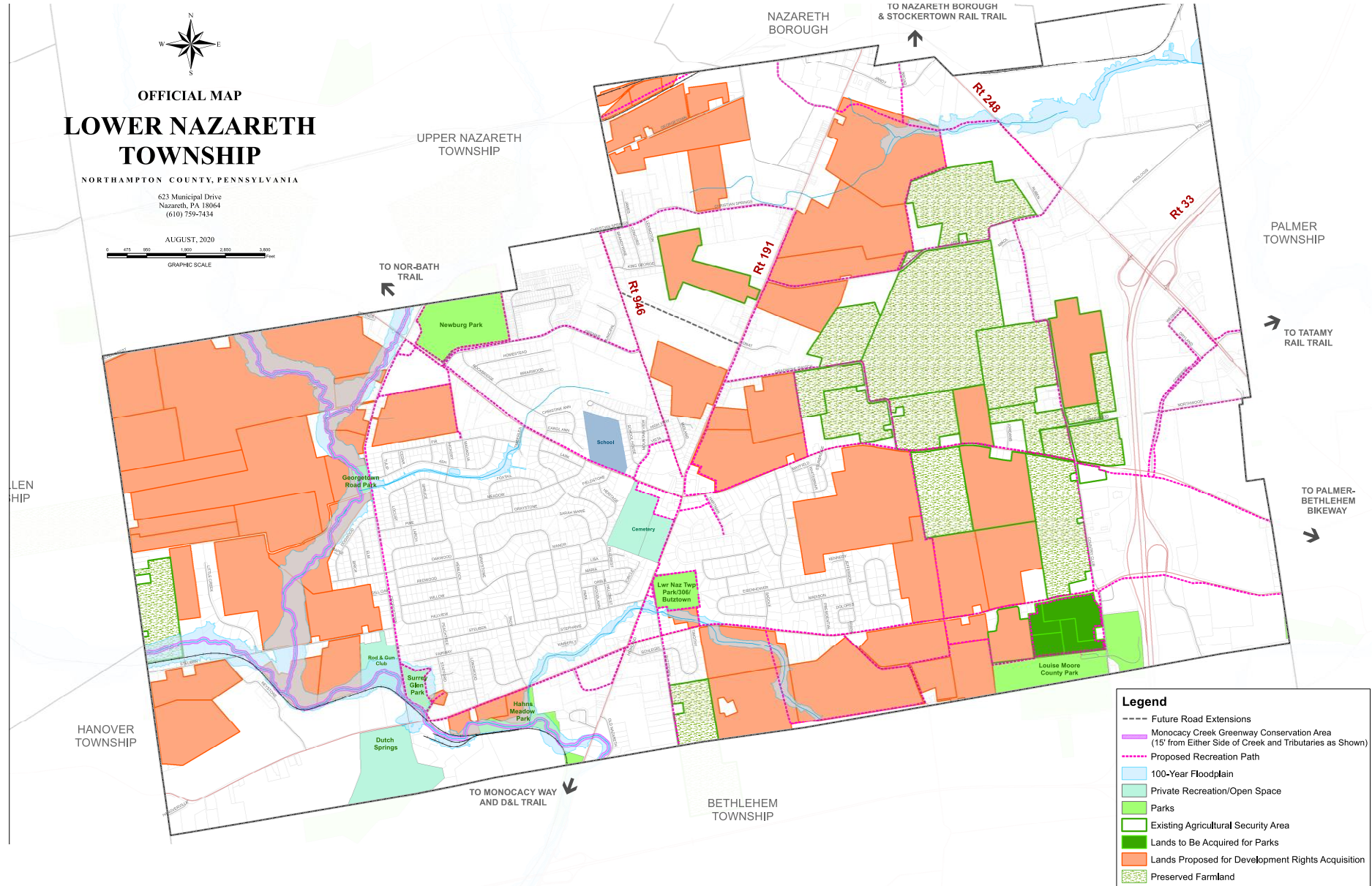
Tools Available to Municipalities - TDR



Tools Available to Municipalities - TDR



Tools Available to Municipalities – Official Map



An aerial photograph of a rural landscape. In the foreground, a large, flat, green field stretches across the frame. In the middle ground, on the left side, there is a large, white, rectangular barn with a dark roof. To its left is a smaller, dark-colored building. Further back, there are more fields, some trees, and a line of buildings in the distance. The sky is overcast and grey. The text "Future Development Potential" is overlaid in the center of the image in a white, sans-serif font.

Future Development Potential

Current Development Conditions

Feature		Acres	% of Total Land Area
1	Township's Total Land Area	7,876	100.0%
2	Developed/Built Land	5,062	64.3%
3	Gross Developable Land Remaining	2,814	35.7%
4	Preserved Farmland	199	2.5%
5	Net Developable Land Remaining	2,615	33.2%

Environmental Constraints Remaining Within the Township

Feature		Acres	% of Total Land Area
1	Floodplain	85	3.3%
2	Wetlands	12	0.5%
3	Steep Slopes	263	10.1%
a.	15 - 25%	125	4.8%
b.	>25%	138	5.3%
4	Prime Agricultural Lands		
a.	Class 1 Soils (USDA/NRCS)	1,790	22.7%
b.	Class 2 Soils (USDA/NRCS)	337	4.3%

Application of the Currently Regulated Constraints

Feature		Acres	% of Total Land Area		Develop. Factor	Area Protected From Future Development (Acres)
1	Floodplain	85	3.3%		1.0	85
2	Wetlands	12	0.5%		1.0	12
3	Steep Slopes	263	10.1%			
	a. 15 - 25%	125	4.8%		0.8	100
	b. >25%	138	5.3%		0.9	124
					Total	321
					Net Developable	2,294

Projected Future Development within the Agricultural/Undeveloped Areas – No Prime Agricultural Soils

Net Developable Land Remaining	2,294	Acres			
Estimated Land Available for Future Subdivision (assumes a cluster development open space requirement of 50%)	1,147	Acres			
Estimated Number of Dwelling Units (assumes a cluster development density of .33 acres per lot)	3,475	Future Dwelling Units			
	8,341	Projected New Residents (assumes 2.4 persons per dwelling unit)			

Projected Future Development within the Agricultural/Undeveloped Areas – Prime Agricultural Soils

Net Developable Land Remaining	520	Acres			
Estimated Land Available for Future Subdivision (assumes a cluster development open space requirement of 50%)	260	Acres			
Estimated Number of Dwelling Units (assumes a cluster development density of .33 acres per lot)	787	Future Dwelling Units			
	1,889	Projected New Residents (assumes 2.4 persons per dwelling unit)			

Important Observations

- The majority of the lots developed to date in the Township is between .30-.50 acres.
- The open space network created through the years of regulation has not produced substantially, inter-connected lands
- The 2040 residential population projection is about half of the capacity of the unprotected lands remaining available for future development
- The Township has an abundance of Class 1 and 2 soils; these are currently unprotected by Ordinance
- The Palisades and the Delaware River are unique natural resources that can be justifiably considered “extraordinary” features to the Commonwealth
- While some adjustments could be made to current Ordinance requirements for environmental protection, the amount of additional lands that would be protected is a fraction of the prime agricultural soils protections that could be imposed

An aerial photograph of a vast, flat landscape, possibly a field or a plain, with a blue tint. The horizon is visible in the distance, showing some trees and a few small buildings. The text "Thoughts and Direction" is overlaid in the center of the image.

Thoughts and Direction