

# COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

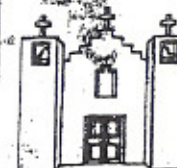
## COLUMBIA BOROUGH LANCASTER COUNTY, PA

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CBPC: Columbia Borough Planning Commission

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# I. INTRODUCTION

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## A. PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

Like any business, local governments need to chart future plans so that they can assure an efficient use of resources. Local governments are in the business of assuring the public welfare and delivering public services. The preparation of a comprehensive plan provides a deliberate framework of information that can be used to make future decisions regarding local government functions.

One definition of comprehensive planning is "the allocation of municipal resources toward municipal goals and objectives"; this definition truly describes the essence of this study.

This Comprehensive Plan first catalogs, maps and describes the Borough's resources. These resources include many things, such as land, streams, roads, utilities, parks, neighborhoods, schools, municipal staff, police and fire equipment, businesses, residents, and so on. Analyses are performed to determine the capacities of these resources to serve or accommodate particular land uses.

Next, a set of community goals and objectives are formulated. These goals can include general health and welfare-type objectives, like the provision of adequate housing and employment opportunities, or the protection of the environment. Community-wide goals are also important and could look to preserve the Borough's diverse character or improve recreation facilities. Specific neighborhood goals can improve a local imbalance of public services, or preserve the historical architecture of a given area. Finally, problem-solving goals seek to correct existing or foreseeable deficiencies or problems, such as improving the design of a particular road intersection or preventing the construction of a use that threatens compatibility with adjoining land uses.

Third, the community goals and objectives are applied to the municipal resources, yielding a future land use scheme/transportation network. In addition, some guidelines are offered regarding the future delivery of public services.

Finally, implementation strategies are discussed and recommended that enable the Borough to set in motion the analyses and information presented in the Plan. These strategies will involve those planning technologies currently available for use by local governments. In the end, any planning process is meaningless, unless its



recommendations find application as part of the Borough's business—the protection of the public welfare and the delivery of public services.

## B. HOW TO USE THIS PLAN

This Comprehensive Plan has been assembled to serve several important purposes. Principally, the Plan is aimed at assisting Borough officials in the administration of their land use planning program. Many action-oriented recommendations have been expressed throughout the Plan text; these recommendations have been *italicized* and printed in *bold letters* so that the decision-maker's attention is immediately drawn to them. The several maps within the Plan have also been carefully prepared and colored so that the information can be easily visualized. The many analyses utilized throughout the study were devised to maximize utility of the findings. Step-by-step descriptions of these methodologies have been furnished to enable the reader to gain a better understanding of the issue, and its planning implications. Finally, a detailed table of contents appears at the beginning of the text which provides quick reference to the appropriate sections of the study. All of these features will aid local decision-makers in their evaluation of future planning proposals.

A second important function of this Plan is its collection of important information. The term "Comprehensive Plan" accurately describes the composition of this report; its contents are quite comprehensive. Accordingly, the Plan provides convenient access to a wealth of up-to-date information concerning its many interrelated factors. This information will serve not only Borough officials, but service agencies, property owners, residents, business leaders, and prospective developers. The cataloging of existing conditions will also provide the groundwork upon which future Plan updates can be more easily accomplished.

Finally, the Plan conveys a set of policies regarding future development within the Borough. These policies are based upon community development objectives and can be useful to many landowners. For example, residents can get a glimpse of land use that is projected around their homes. Prospective developers can use the Plan to package development proposals that conform to the Borough's goals, thereby ensuring a smooth development review process. Business leaders can glean a sense of secure investment climate from each municipality's organized government administration and future land use scheme. In all, the Plan considers many competing interests and devises a strategy to assure their relative harmonious coexistence.

In summary, it is important for all of those persons involved and/or interested in the future of Columbia Borough to read and understand this entire Plan, at least once. Then, local decision-makers should keep it handy when evaluating future development proposals, service adjustments, or public investments. The Plan's format will avail considerable information, analysis and expertise without requiring its complete rereading. In the end, it is hoped that the Plan will become a powerful yet practical tool in local decision-making.



## C. REGIONAL CONTEXT

Columbia Borough is situated in the extreme west-central portion of Lancaster County in south-central Pennsylvania. Columbia borders the Susquehanna River and is the largest town along the river between Harrisburg and the mouth of the river at the Chesapeake Bay in Maryland. Columbia is located approximately 10 miles west of the City of Lancaster, which serves as the County seat of government.

The Borough's municipal boundaries have been determined by a combination of natural and man-made lines. The entire western boundary of the Borough is formed by the Susquehanna River. York County and Wrightsville Borough are located on the opposite side of the river. The Susquehanna River has played an integral part in creating the character of the Borough; the influence of the river has made Columbia a unique place. The northern and eastern boundaries of the Borough are with West Hempfield Township. The configuration of these boundaries is very erratic due to numerous annexations which occurred prior to 1970. The southern boundary of the Borough is shared with Manor Township.

Columbia Borough is somewhat centrally located between the metropolitan areas of Lancaster, York and Harrisburg. However, the Borough is most physically and economically linked to the Lancaster urbanized area. The main transportation links connecting Columbia Borough with other parts of Lancaster County include U. S. Route 30, and PA Routes 462 and 441. As part of the larger Lancaster/York/Harrisburg Metropolitan area, residents and businesses of the Borough enjoy excellent access to the many large cities of the eastern United States. Route I-76 (the Pennsylvania Turnpike), I-83, U. S. Route 30, U. S. Route 222, and PA Routes 283 and 41 provide convenient access that links York and Lancaster Counties with Philadelphia, New York, Pittsburgh, Wilmington, Baltimore, and Washington, D. C.

As mentioned above, Columbia Borough is located close to the York and Harrisburg metro areas; the Lebanon and Reading areas are also less than one hour's driving time from Columbia.

The Regional Location Map located on page 7 illustrates the location of Columbia Borough within Lancaster County and the surrounding area.

## D. HISTORICAL SKETCH

Columbia Borough, like much of south-central Pennsylvania, possesses a rich historical heritage. The Borough has its own unique history, which has contributed to the overall historic evolution of Lancaster County. The following is a brief description of the historic development of Columbia Borough. Much of this information is based upon the history of the Borough provided in Chapter 1 of the *Columbia Borough Background Study, Volume I*, prepared for the Columbia Borough Planning Commission by the staff of the Lancaster County Planning Commission in 1965.

The history of Columbia Borough can be traced back to pre-historic times when the Indians occupied the land area known today as Columbia. This area was an attractive



location because it was flanked by low hills to the north and south, and formed a natural gateway to the west. The first European settlers in the area arrived in 1726. The families of three men, John Wright, Robert Barber and Samuel Blunston, acquired tracts of land and established permanent homes. John Wright developed a ferry business in 1730, carrying goods and people across the Susquehanna River. Because the ferry was located here, the name Wright's Ferry was given to the settlement.

Early on, Wright's Ferry became well-known throughout the middle Colonies. It served as a frontier town and became the principal center of activity along the Susquehanna River. Wright's Ferry provided a convenient location to watch Native Americans' movements on the western shore of the Susquehanna, for all settled areas were concentrated east of the Susquehanna, and the area to the west was frontier land.

In 1788, Samuel Wright, grandson of Wright's Ferry founder, John Wright, laid out 160 lots in what is now the central section of the Borough. Samuel Wright called the town Columbia instead of Wright's Ferry, naming the town after Christopher Columbus. The growing importance of Columbia became evident in 1789 when the town missed being selected as the site of the nation's capital by a very close margin of votes in Congress. Later, Columbia was seriously considered as the site for the capital of Pennsylvania. Harrisburg, however, was chosen because it was closer to the center of the State.

The 1800s was a period of rapid growth and prosperity for Columbia. The town was officially incorporated as a borough in 1814. During that same year, the ferry operations were suspended when the first bridge across the Susquehanna River linking Columbia to York County was completed. In 1830, the Borough became the terminal of the first link of the Pennsylvania canal system. This extensive canal system followed the eastern shore of the Susquehanna River, linking Columbia with the confluence of the Susquehanna and Juniata Rivers north of Harrisburg. This canal was part of a larger system to ship goods to the west by means of canal barges which were floated as far as possible, then carried over the Appalachian Mountains by a system of inclined planes.

A large canal basin was constructed at Columbia to facilitate the loading and unloading of canal barges. While this first link in the canal system brought a great deal of trade to the Borough, the boom grew larger when the Pennsylvania Main Line Canal was built on the west shore of the Susquehanna River linking Wrightsville with the Chesapeake Bay. A low dam was built across the Susquehanna to facilitate the floating of the canal barges across the river and to supply water to the second canal.

By 1834, some of the first rail cars reached the Borough via the Philadelphia and Columbia Railroad. This railroad shipped goods and people to and from Philadelphia. The goods were transferred on and off canal barges at the Columbia basin. Other rail lines were soon added north and south of the Borough along the banks of the Susquehanna and across the River to Wrightsville where the tracks joined those of the Baltimore and Susquehanna Railroad. In 1857, the Reading and



Columbia Railroad was incorporated, further strengthening Columbia's position as a growing railroad and transportation hub.

The Borough's position as a transportation hub created a boom in the establishment of local industries. Products could reach many markets by rail from Columbia. The prosperity generated by the canals and railroads during the mid part of the nineteenth century resulted in a doubling of the Borough's population between 1830 and 1850, growing from 2,046 to 4,140 persons.

The discovery of the Chestnut Hill iron ore deposits led to the beginning of the iron industry in Columbia. Furnaces were erected at Columbia during the 1840s and 1850s. Rolling mills were also added to the industrial inventory after 1850. While the furnaces were shut down with the depletion of the best Chestnut Hill iron ores, and the rise of the iron and steel industry elsewhere in Pennsylvania, the rolling mills remained in operation throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century and into the beginning of the 1900s.

By 1900, two of the Borough's primary economic activities were on the decline. The canal operations had waned as the railroads continued to increase in importance. The depletion of much of the woodlands in the area and the use of rail transport to haul lumber from ever-increasing distances resulted in the decline of log rafting on the Susquehanna, and Columbia's lumber industry. However, as these industries diminished in importance, the textile industry was on the rise, and Columbia became the home of several factories which produced silk and other textile products. Other industries, such as those producing stoves, baked goods, and machinery were also being established in the Borough during the late 1800s.

Several bridges linking Columbia to York County were built during the nineteenth century. As mentioned earlier, the first bridge was constructed in 1814, which replaced the ferry service upon which Columbia was initially founded. This wooden-covered bridge was destroyed by ice and flooding and carried downstream in 1832. A second covered bridge was constructed to replace the first one and was opened in 1834. Rail and horse-drawn vehicle traffic both used this bridge, and two tow paths were provided to allow horses to pull the canal barges across the river. This bridge was deliberately burned in 1863 as a defense against the advancing Confederate Army. A third bridge was constructed and opened in 1869. This bridge was also a covered bridge designed to handle both rail and horse-drawn vehicle traffic. Like the previous bridges, disaster befell this one as it was blown away by a hurricane in 1896. A fourth bridge, constructed of steel, was built by the Pennsylvania Railroad in 1897 to carry both rail and vehicle traffic. The Columbia-Wrightsville Veterans Bridge was constructed close to this one in 1930 to carry automobile traffic between York and Lancaster Counties. The use of the nearby railroad bridge was suspended in 1958 and the bridge was later removed. A second vehicle bridge was constructed in 1967 as part of the U. S. Route 30 Bypass.

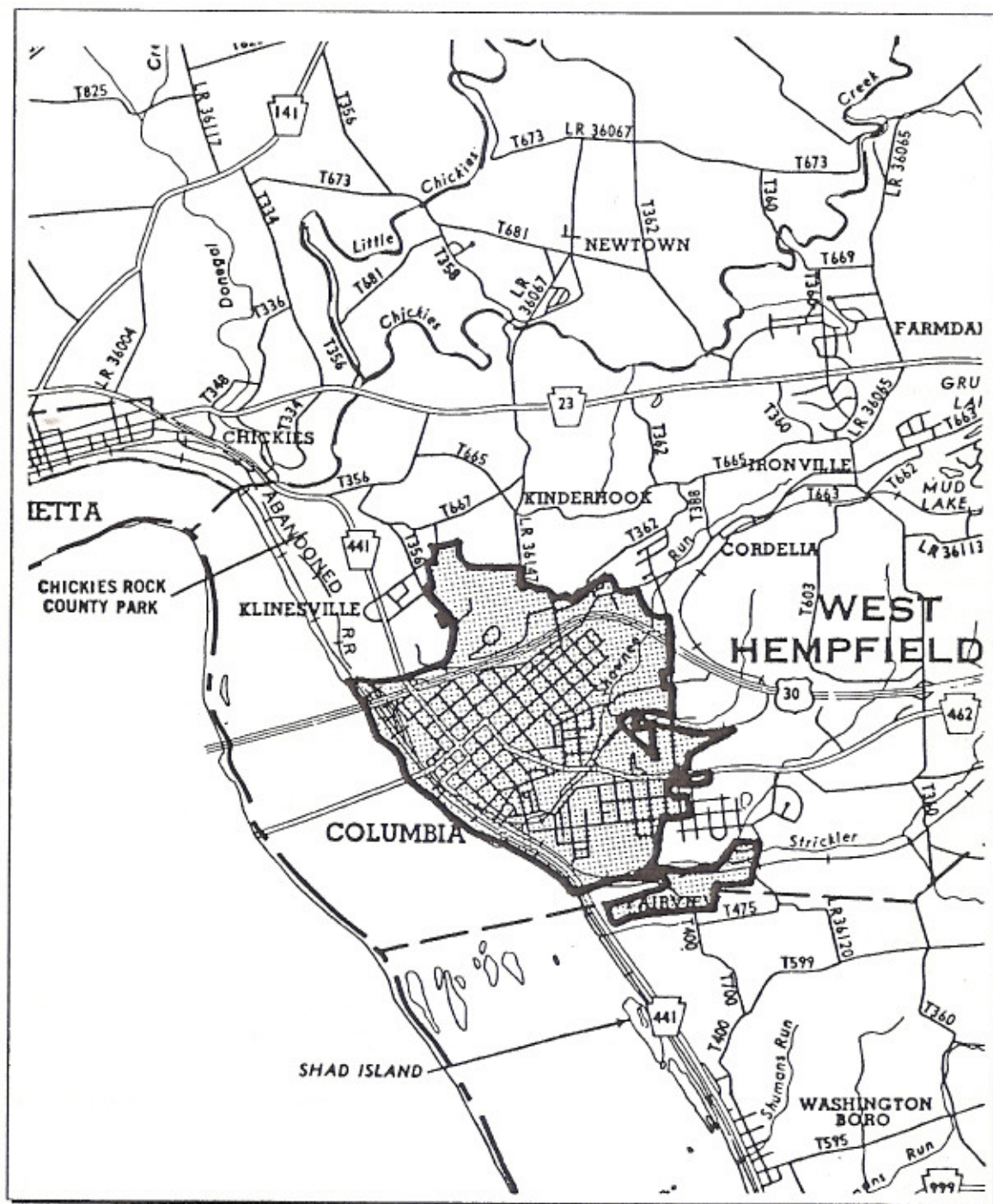
During the first two decades of the twentieth century, Columbia experienced its first decline in population since its founding. In 1900, the Borough's population stood at 12,316 persons; by 1920, the population had dropped to 10,836. A significant factor contributing to this decline was the displacement of much of the railroad activities

from Columbia. When the Pennsylvania Railroad constructed Atglen-Susquehanna Branch Railroad in 1906, the extensive railroad facilities located at Columbia were moved to the Enola Yards just west of Harrisburg. This shift in railroad activity led to an exodus of hundreds of workers from the Borough during the following years. A decline in the rolling mill activities, which had flourished during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, also adversely affected the Borough.

Since 1920, the Borough has experienced several periods of population growth and/or decline. Almost all of the population loss which occurred between 1900 and 1920 was regained by 1960. After 1960, the Borough's population declined by 13.3% between 1960 and 1980. This decline was probably a result of the loss of a significant portion of the Borough's once large industrial base, and the resulting flight of many residents to the suburbs where job creation was occurring at a rapid pace. Since 1980, the Borough's population has shown signs of growth indicating that more people are staying and/or returning to the Borough.



## REGIONAL LOCATION MAP



## II. COMMUNITY PLANNING GOALS



**L**ike any effective planning effort, the preparation of the Columbia Borough Comprehensive Plan must seek to articulate and achieve desired goals and objectives. These goals and objectives range from universal human and societal needs to the resolution of particular issues and problems. Essentially, the Borough's goals formulate an agenda or set of priorities that will be used in allocating municipal resources.

To derive these goals and objectives, members of the Borough's Comprehensive Plan Study Group were asked to complete a 35-question survey about the character and existing conditions within the Borough and how future growth and development should proceed. In addition, public participation was solicited via a Town Meeting held on April 13, 1993, and a community-wide survey which was circulated to every household in the Borough during the early summer of 1993. The public input derived from these two public participation instruments was evaluated and incorporated into the following goals statements.

This section lists those goals expressed by the study group and the public at-large and are divided into several functional categories.

### A. LAND USE

1. Recommend the location for a cohesive and identifiable "town center" that will form the cornerstone of a larger Central Business District (CBD).
2. Promote economic development through the preservation and adaptive reuse of historic structures, particularly within the CBD.
3. Develop strategies and policies that will attract commercial uses such as retail, service and specialty stores to the CBD.
4. Encourage and direct the location of small commercial offices within the CBD, particularly focused on Locust Street between Front and Fifth Streets.
5. Expand public access to the riverfront and to River Park via the establishment of a greenway linking the Columbia riverfront with Chickies Rock County Park and Marietta Borough.
6. Promote the preservation of the Borough's extensive historic resources.



7. Consider the development feasibility of the Borough farm located off Blue Lane.
8. Conserve the natural quality of the Susquehanna River riverfront and link its natural and aesthetic attributes to the CBD.
9. Protect sensitive and important natural features (e.g., floodplains, wetlands, unique geologic features, steep slopes, woodlands, wildlife habitats, etc.) from indiscriminate development.
10. Limit the number of single-family residential conversions into multi-unit structures.
11. Provide for the diverse housing needs of the Borough's existing and future residents by providing for a range of housing types, affordability and densities within the Borough.
12. Identify vacant "infill" areas within the Borough and suggest suitable development options.
13. Identify and evaluate the current character, types and locations of industrial land uses and recommend suitable areas within the Borough for future industrial expansion.
14. Suggest improvements to the Borough Zoning Ordinance to achieve many of the goals articulated here.
15. Explore the various methods used to regulate and enforce architectural and aesthetic design standards in order to promote quality construction and compatibility within the Borough's historic neighborhoods.
16. Support Lancaster County and adjacent municipalities in the implementation of the Urban Growth Boundary concept in the Columbia-Marietta Region.

## **B. PUBLIC UTILITIES**

1. Maximize the efficient use of the Borough's public sewer facilities and identify any additional capacity needs based upon future growth projections for residential, commercial, industrial and institutional uses.
2. Identify any problems with the Borough's sewer system (i.e., inflow and infiltration) and suggest methods for improving the system.
3. Encourage continued cooperation between the Borough and the Columbia Water Company so that future public water needs will be adequately facilitated.
4. Describe the means by which the Borough disposes of its recyclables and solid waste.

## **C. PUBLIC FACILITIES**

1. Encourage continued cooperation and coordination between the Borough and the Columbia School District; identify any areas where such cooperation can be enhanced.
2. Identify areas within the Borough that could be utilized to create linear park corridors, then establish guidelines to acquire and develop such corridors.
3. Develop policies aimed at conserving energy and that promote the provision of a wide variety of reliable and affordable energy resources.
4. Acknowledge and plan for the diverse demographic composition of the Borough. Provide opportunities for the establishment of needed human services for those residents that do not have access to such services.
5. Evaluate the existing level of improvement and use of the Borough's parks and recreation facilities and recommend areas in need of additional parkland.
6. Identify and evaluate the need for a community-oriented recreation/social center.
7. Identify and evaluate the methods by which emergency services are provided within the Borough.
8. Explore the use of shared public facilities and services with other nearby municipalities.

## **D. TRANSPORTATION**

1. Identify hazardous roadway intersections and road segments and recommend needed improvements.
2. Promote the use of alternative means of transportation, such as pedestrian movement, the use of non-motorized transportation, mass transportation and car/van pooling.
3. Identify the Borough's primary transportation network and assign functional classifications to those roads and streets which comprise that network.
4. Where practicable, assure that recommended land use designations are compatible with the adjoining roadway functions in order to maximize efficient use of the Borough's major roads and streets.
5. Consider the adequacy of parking in determining future land use strategies.
6. Evaluate the feasibility of the completion of through streets within the Borough to improve traffic circulation.
7. Identify and evaluate ways to alleviate through traffic from the CBD (i.e., bypass, re-routing of Route 441).