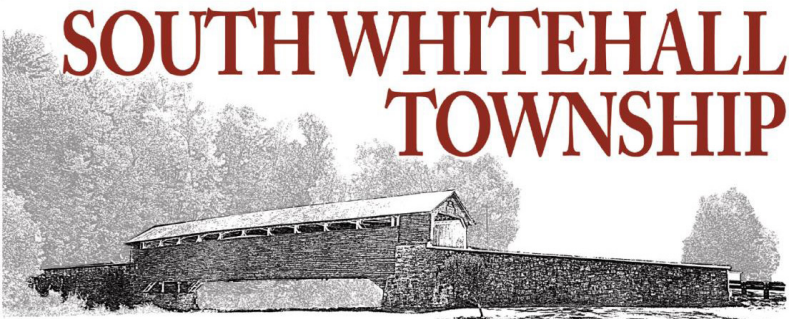


SOUTH WHITEHALL TOWNSHIP



South Whitehall⁶⁷ Township *Comprehensive Plan*

RE-EXAMINATION REPORT

DRAFT

2024

DR



Acknowledgements

Board of Commissioners

Diane Kelly | President
 Monica Hodges | Vice President
 Jacob D. Roth | Asst. Secretary
 Thomas Johns | Commissioner
 Chris Peischl | Commissioner

Planning Commission

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 Planner/Special Projects Coordinator

The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) enables local jurisdictions to conduct a comprehensive planning process to identify areas where growth and development will occur so that a full range of public infrastructure services, including sewer, water, highways, police and fire protection, public schools, parks, open space and other services can be adequately planned and provided as needed to accommodate growth.

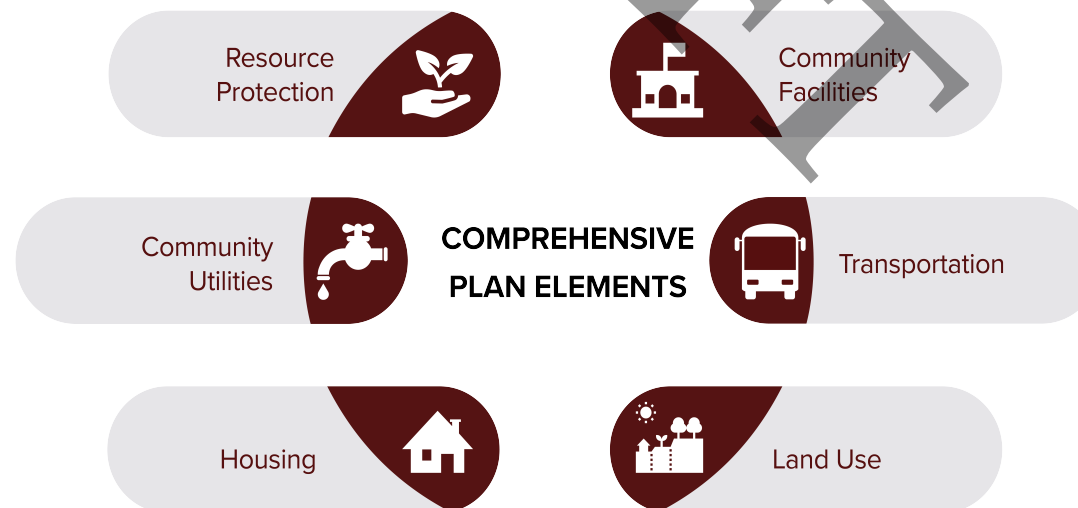
Introduction

The Comprehensive Plan

In Pennsylvania, the planning for and regulation of land use is determined by local government. State enabling legislation known as the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC), Act 247 is what specifically governs local planning and provides guidance to municipalities, including aspects like the operations of planning agencies and commissions, enacting a zoning ordinance, or preparing a Comprehensive Plan.

The Comprehensive Plan is an important tool available to counties and municipalities to effectively plan for land use and local governance. The Comprehensive Plan can often be described as an organized vision for the community, meant to guide the development, management, and the functionality of a municipality. This long-range plan is an official document that once adopted by the municipality, should guide all future policy, additional planning, and decision-making. Comprehensive Plans set goals and objectives for elements of a municipality such as land use, housing needs, transportation, facilities and services, and resource management. Typically, a municipal Comprehensive Plan is set out to guide a community over a 10-15 year period, before it should be revisited or updated.

The current South Whitehall Township Comprehensive Plan was adopted in March 2023, following several years of extensive public engagement and planning. The vision for this plan was to overload on community engagement in the onset in order to help direct the crafting of individual goals and strategies, which would be fine-tuned by a more informed steering committee. Additionally, the plan was designed to be simple, easily referenced, and implementable. The six critical elements (which serve as individual chapters) discussed in the plan each have a set of individual goals and strategies. However, all of these elements and their connection with each other were considered in the development of a final Implementation Action Plan.



Introduction

Community Development Goals & Objectives

The MPC requires a community to create or revise a statement of objectives of the municipality concerning the location, character, and timing of future development. These objectives and goals form the basis for the rest of the Comprehensive Plan and the subsequent plans and policies developed. The overarching objective and goals developed throughout the updated comprehensive plan are as follows:

Objective: Guide future growth in a sustainable and harmonious manner that preserves the character, community, and diversity of South Whitehall Township.



GOAL

Identify areas based on existing neighborhood, natural characteristics, and existing physical boundaries to strategically plan for potential growth that is harmonious within the identified area.



GOAL

Plan for future land use, development, and redevelopment to remain within the capacity to install and maintain infrastructure in a fiscally responsible manner.

Reexamination

Implementation Action - Reexamination Report (R2): *Establish a process and timeline in accordance with recognized best management practices to periodically track progress and identify significant revisions or changes to the Comprehensive Plan.*

Why Re-Examination?

Early in the recent comprehensive planning process, the question was raised about the status of the previous Comprehensive Plan, adopted by the Township in 2009. The community and elected officials wanted to know what had been accomplished and what impact has this plan had on the community. While some of the recommendations of the 2009 plan had been completed, the structure of the plan itself made it difficult to objectively evaluate how recommendations had been implemented and what has been achieved during the lifetime of this plan.

This question of measuring impact and tracking progress has led to the discussion of needing to revisit the Comprehensive Plan on a more frequent basis and regularly review progress. Implementation Action R2 calls for the Township to establish a process for a Reexamination Report, which would trigger a period review of the Comprehensive Plan and provide an opportunity to summarize progress to date. Additionally, this Reexamination Report will highlight the status of implementation actions and call for any changes, additions, or alterations to be made to this action plan, so that progress is not only tracked, but also pursued. This allows the Township Planning Commission, Board of Commissioners, and Community Development Department to pause and reflect on how the proposed actions continue to fulfill the goals of the Comprehensive Plan, but also take a moment to celebrate any successes.

This standalone document is a compliment to the Planning Commission Annual Report, which serves its own purpose and is updated in format consistent with the MPC. At a minimum the Planning Commission and Community Development Department shall review this document every other year, but always retain the option to review and update the report more frequently as needed, especially the Implementation Action Plan.

Implementation Update

Implementation Action Plan

The Implementation Action Plan was developed to be a prioritized, goal-oriented list of actions that the Township should take to ensure the vision developed in the Comprehensive Plan is fulfilled. These actions were developed to inform decision-makers and staff of the steps, timing, resources, and partners necessary to implement. Actions were given priority at the time the plan was written, considering the resources and information available at that time.

This Implementation Action Plan is intended to be dynamic and laid out in a way that is easy to track progress and make adjustments as necessary. The matrix on the following pages is a snapshot of the original 26 individual actions from the Comprehensive Plan and their status as of March 2024. The timeline, priority, or details of these actions shown in the matrix have not been adjusted since the Comprehensive Plan was adopted.

On the pages following the Implementation Action Plan matrix are summaries of South Whitehall Township projects and initiatives that are currently underway or soon to be kicked off. All of these projects and initiatives directly support one or multiple Implementation Actions from the original plan.














































	↓	↓	↓
PRIORITY	High	Medium	Low
TIMELINE	Short	Mid	Long
	↑	↑	↑

PLAN ELEMENTS

















































Elements highlighted in red are impacted by the proposed implementation item



Implementation Action Plan Status 2024

Implementation Item	Description	Plan Elements						Timeline	Priority	Status
Active Transportation (A1)	Develop plan to provide safe/efficient bicycle and pedestrian connectivity							Short Term	High	In Progress
Advisory Committee Evaluation (A2)	Evaluate roles/duties of boards, committees, and subcommittees							Short Term	High	In Progress
Agricultural Preservation (A3)	Develop plan and programs to preserve agricultural lands and culture							Short Term	Medium	In Progress
Broadband Infrastructure (B1)	Increase access to high-speed internet							Mid Term	Medium	Not Started
Capital Improvements Plan (C1)	Integrate capital improvements budgeting and planning across departments							Short Term	High	Not Started
Energy Conservation (E1)	Investigate energy reduction opportunities/policies							Long Term	Low	Not Started
Hazard Mitigation (H1)	Coordinate hazard mitigation planning between Township and regional entities							Short Term	Medium	Complete
Historic Preservation (H2)	Develop plan to preserve historic assets and places							Short Term	Medium	In Progress
Housing (H3)	Develop programs and policies to ensure current and future housing needs are met							Mid Term	Low	Not Started
Infrastructure Evaluation (I1)	Evaluate municipal services and utilities for functionality and expansion							Short Term	High	Not Started
Landscape Preservation (L1)	Develop plan and policies to preserve important cultural and historic landscapes							Mid Term	Medium	In Progress
Open Space Preservation (O1)	Develop a plan, strategy, and process to preserve open space and natural areas							Short Term	Medium	In Progress
Official Map Updates (O2)	Update the Official Map with new recommendations from the Comp Plan							Short Term	High	Not Started

Implementation Action Plan Status 2024

Implementation Item	Description	Plan Elements						Timeline	Priority	Status
Park & Rec. Plan (P1)	Implement the priority goals of the P&R Plan							Long Term	Low	In Progress
Public Safety Evaluation (P2)	Evaluate public safety needs of SWT (including outside 3rd party evaluation)							Short Term	High	Not Started
Regional Coordination (R1)	Investigate regional/multi-municipal planning opportunities (transportation, watershed, etc.)							Mid Term	Medium	Not Started
Reexamination Report (R2)	Establish timeline and mechanism to reexamine and reevaluate the Comp Plan							Short Term	Medium	Complete
Resource Protection Ordinances (R3)	Draft ordinances to protect specific resources (riparian areas, woodlands, steep slopes, etc.)							Long Term	Low	In Progress
SALDO Updates (S1)	Update the SALDO based on Comp Plan recommendations (design standards)							Short Term	Medium	Not Started
Sewer Plan (Act 537) (S2)	Update Township sewage facilities plan per DEP requirements							Short Term	High	Completed
Solid Waste (S3)	Evaluate SWT waste collection and recycling processes							Mid Term	Medium	In Progress
Stormwater Plan (Act 167) (S4)	Develop a stormwater management plan							Mid Term	Medium	Not Started
Transfer of Development Rights Program (T1)	Investigate the feasibility/applicability of a TDR program							Mid Term	Medium	Not Started
Traffic Safety (T2)	Identify high crash and priority safety improvement areas							Short Term	High	In Progress
Transportation Plan (T3)	Inventory critical transportation infrastructure, investigate Act 209 feasibility, update necessary transportation policies							Short Term	High	In Progress
Zoning Updates (Z1)	Update zoning ordinance to be consistent with the Comp Plan							Short Term	High	In Progress

Implementation Projects/Initiatives

BOARDS/COMMISSIONS/COMMITTEES RE-WRITE

2024 SUMMARY

The Township is in the process of re-writing and reorganizing the ordinances for all volunteer Boards/Commissions/Committees to be laid out in a consistent manner. Staff has prepared an outline of each heading under Chapter 17 as follows:

- Article I Board of Commissioners
- Article II Planning Commission
- Article III Zoning Hearing Board
- Article IV Public Safety Commission
- Article V Environmental Advisory Council
- Article VI Parks and Recreation Board
- Article VII Landscape and Shade Tree Commission

All subheadings are intended to be the same in order to better outline the purpose and intent of each board, membership composition, duties/responsibilities, and the manner in which meetings are to be conducted.

In January 2024, the new Landscape and Shade Tree Commission ordinance was adopted, which included a corresponding ordinance *Chapter 330 Trees*. A new Environmental Advisory Council ordinance was also adopted in January that combined the duties of several out of date environmental-related boards/councils. Staff will continue to bring forward new ordinances for review and revision as necessary.

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS

- Advisory Committee Evaluation (A2)

NEXT STEPS

- Identify next board re-write

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PRIORITY	High	Medium	Low	
TIMELINE	Short	Mid	Long	
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Implementation Projects/Initiatives

TRANSPORTATION PLAN

2024 SUMMARY

The Township is in the process of developing a comprehensive transportation plan that will cover the following chapters/topics:

- Vol. 1 ENGAGE: Outlines the public engagement process
- Vol. 2 ACTIVE: Develops the “Active Transportation” network
- Vol. 3 SAFETY: Highlights priority safety concerns and corridors
- Vol. 4 CLASS: Updates roadway classifications for function and character
- Vol. 5 FREIGHT: Evaluates the movement of freight in South Whitehall
- Vol. 6 TRAFFIC: Develops congestion management strategies

The Township is currently working with a consultant on the first three chapters including a robust public engagement strategy. These volumes of the plan are anticipated to be completed and adopted at the end of 2024.

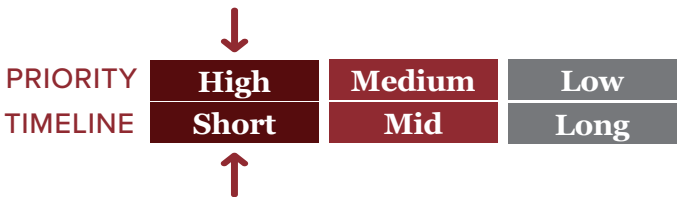
Staff is also working with the Township Engineer to review roadway classifications in preparation to complete Vol. 4 CLASS.

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS

- Active Transportation (A1)
- Traffic Safety (T2)
- Transportation Plan (T3)

NEXT STEPS

- Complete and adopt Vol. 1-3 in 2024
- Continue to move forward on Vol. 4



Implementation Projects/Initiatives

SOUTH WHITEHALL LANDSCAPES PLAN

2024 SUMMARY

The Township is finalizing the Landscapes Plan, which outlines resource preservation priorities and recommended actions for the following:

- Agricultural Resources
- Natural Resources
- Historic Resources
- Open Space

The intent of this plan is to depict how while there are various strategies that can be used to preserve these resources individually, the Township should also focus on how to preserve these resources in a more wholistic approach as a connected landscape. Most of these resources in the Township exist in a concentrated geography and therefore strategies towards preservation should be complimentary and consider how multiple resources can be preserved together.

This plan is anticipated to be adopted in the Spring of 2024 and will outline priority implementation actions including, but not limited to, the development of resource protection ordinances, a “Preservation Toolbox”, guidelines on open space management, and specific considerations for future zoning/SALDO updates.

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS

- Agricultural Preservation (A3)
- Historic Preservation (H2)
- Landscape Preservation (L1)
- Open Space Preservation (O1)
- Resource Protection Ordinances (R3)

NEXT STEPS

- Finish and adopt Landscapes Plan
- Begin drafting Resource Protection Ordinances
- Update SALDO Open Space Requirements
- Develop the “Preservation Toolbox” as recommended in the plan

PRIORITY	High	Medium	Low
TIMELINE	Short	Mid	Long

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Implementation Projects/Initiatives

LEHIGH VALLEY HAZARD MITIGATION PLAN

2024 SUMMARY

The 2024 Lehigh Valley Hazard Mitigation Plan is currently drafted and out for public review. This bi-county plan identifies current natural disaster risks and vulnerabilities, then outlining coordinated regional and local strategies to protect people and property from these risks. 27 natural and non-natural hazards are identified in the plan, with eight key mitigation goals:

1. To minimize the risk to human life associated with natural and non-natural hazards
2. To promote hazard avoidance, especially in floodplains
3. To reduce the damages and functional loss from natural and non-natural hazards to existing and future public and private assets, including structures, critical facilities, and infrastructure
4. To preserve and enhance the effectiveness of natural resources, including woodlands, streams rivers, wetlands, floodplains and riparian buffers to provide resiliency benefits
5. To develop, prioritize and implement cost-effective, long-term actions that will reduce the impacts of natural and non-natural hazards
6. To improve local regulations to reduce the impacts of natural and non-natural hazards
7. To enhance planning and emergency response efforts among federal, state, county and local emergency management personnel to protect public health and safety
8. To promote public awareness on both the potential impacts of natural and non-natural hazards and actions to reduce those impacts

South Whitehall Township was involved in the development of the regional plan and provided key information for the Township's Municipal Annex including personnell/organizational contacts, compliance summaries, available resources, and ongoing planning efforts.

PRIORITY	High	Medium	Low
TIMELINE	Short	Mid	Long

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IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS

- Hazard Mitigation (H1)

NEXT STEPS

- Continue to support the adoption of the 2024 Lehigh Valley Hazard Mitigation Plan
- Implement the actions of the 2024 Lehigh Valley Hazard Mitigation Plan



Implementation Projects/Initiatives

COMPREHENSIVE PARKS & RECREATION PLAN

2024 SUMMARY

In November 2023, the Township adopted an updated Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Plan. This plan identifies the methods, resources, organizational capacity, and capital investments needed to accomplish short-term and long-term recreational goals. This plan identifies 22 implementation goals in the following categories:

- Planning
- Construction
- Programming
- Collaboration
- Sustainability
- Financing

Since the plan’s adoption, the Township has moved forward on several of the priority implementation goals including an increase to the Township Recreation Impact Fees, moving forward with construction of the Jordan Creek Greenway, developing program/event evaluation surveys, defining categories of “open space”, and continuing to investigate collaborative opportunities with municipal and nonprofit partners.

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS

- Park & Rec. Plan (P1)

NEXT STEPS

- Complete existing park capital improvement projects (Jordan Creek Greenway, Vistas Park, Covered Bridge Park Phase C)
- Utilize recommendations from the Park & Rec. Plan to plan future capital improvements and grant applications
- Continue to evaluate maintenance and recreation staffing needs as recommended in the Plan

PRIORITY	High	Medium	Low
TIMELINE	Short	Mid	Long

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Implementation Projects/Initiatives

ACT 537 SEWAGE FACILITIES PLAN UPDATE

2024 SUMMARY

The Township has recently adopted the Public-to-Public System Transfer Act 537 Plan Update to outline and officially recognize the transfer of the South Whitehall Township Authority to South Whitehall Township. This is a critical step to complete the dissolution of the previous sewer authority and allow for future sewer planning by the Township.

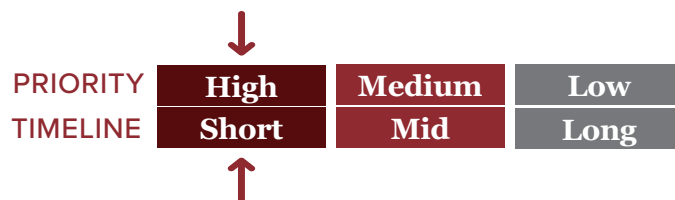
Following the approval of this plan by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, the Township can begin the process to update a more comprehensive sewer capacity plan.

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS

- Sewer Plan (Act 537) (S2)

NEXT STEPS

- Complete steps to officially dissolve municipal authority
- Seek funding and consulting assistance for full Act 537 Capacity Plan



Implementation Projects/Initiatives

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS PLAN (C1)

2024 SUMMARY

The Township currently plans capital improvements by individual department. Staff has started to streamline this process and is working towards a coordinated plan for the entire Township.

INFRASTRUCTURE EVALUATION (I1)

2024 SUMMARY

The Township is starting to conduct a study of rate price and maintenance cost of infrastructure.

SOLID WASTE (S3)

2024 SUMMARY

The Township is currently working with a consultant on an evaluation and analysis of solid waste and recycling practices in South Whitehall. This analysis will look at items collected, frequency of collection, collection routes, and alternative programs or options to reduce both waste and cost.

ZONING UPDATES (Z1)

2024 SUMMARY

The Township has started a cursory review of the existing Township Zoning Ordinance. As part of this process staff is incorporating zoning districts into ArcGIS Urban to evaluate current zoning and prepare to test future zoning scenarios.

Evaluation

This evaluation was conducted by the South Whitehall Township Planning Commission with the assistance of staff in the Township Community Development Department. Over the course of several Planning Commission meetings, the Planning Commission reviewed the Implementation Update and were asked a series of questions to consider the impact and relevance of the Comprehensive Plan since its adoption in March 2023.

Questions

Question 1: *What are the major problems related to land development in the Township since adoption of the Comprehensive Plan?*

Answer:

Being that only one year has passed since the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan, there has not been any major problems or impacts to land development in South Whitehall Township. Eight major plans were reviewed by the Planning Commission in 2023, with the most significant being Ridge Farms Phase 1B. The multi-phased Ridge Farms mixed-use development continues to be one of the most significant and impactful land developments currently in the Township at the corners of Cedar Crest Boulevard and Walbert Avenue. Construction of Phase 1A started in 2023, along with the required road improvements to Walbert Avenue.

Evaluation

Question 2: *To what extent have these problems been reduced or increased?*

Answer:

The Planning Commission did not identify any specific problems since the adoption of the plan but would like to highlight the progress made on the Implementation Action Plan. 17 out of 26 Implementation Actions have either been started, are in current development, or have been completed since the Comprehensive Plan was adopted in March 2023.

Question 3: *To what extent have there been significant changes to the goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan, particularly regarding the following:*

- *Density and distribution of population and land uses*
- *Housing conditions and need*
- *Transportation circulation*
- *Conservation of natural resources*
- *Energy conservation*
- *Collection and disposal of waste and recyclable materials*
- *Changes in Federal, State, County, and/or Municipal Policies and Objectives*

Evaluation

Answer:

The Township has initiated the development of Transportation PLAN, which looks to analyze multiple components of the Township's transportation network. Additionally, a new Traffic Calming Policy was adopted in 2023, which provides an analytical and equitable approach to implementing traffic calming devices in residential neighborhoods. The first pilot case of this policy is being tested along Trexler Boulevard.

The South Whitehall Landscapes plan lays out specific goals and actions regarding the conservation and preservation of natural resources, agricultural resources, historic resources, and open space. Following the adoption of this plan, the Township will begin to develop some of the recommended resource protection ordinances, policies related to open space management, and consideration of programs to actively protect open space. Related to this initiative, the Township Environmental Advisory Council (EAC) has been re-established and will be a significant contributor to help implement the actions of the Landscapes plan.

In January 2024, South Whitehall entered into a new five-year contract with J.P. Mascaro & Sons for the collection and disposal of residential solid waste and recyclables. Due to inflation, increased commodity costs, and increased costs for personnel, vehicles, and equipment, this contract saw an increase of 62% compared to the previous year. Separate from this contract, the Township has engaged an independent consulting firm to conduct an evaluation of alternative solid waste, recycling, and yard waste programs. This independent evaluation will also analyze ways to optimize waste collection in the Township in anticipation of the next waste collection contract. The results of this evaluation may recommend significant changes to the methodology and operations of solid waste/recycling/yard waste collection and disposal in the Township.

Recommendations

Following the evaluation conducted by the Planning Commission members and Community Development staff, recommendations were made to address the comments in the evaluation or make appropriate adjustments to the Implementation Action Plan. Recommendations are provided in the following formats:

- Amendment to the Comprehensive Plan
- Amendment to an Implementation Action
- Creation of a new Implementation Action
- Reprioritization of an Implementation Action
- Addition or change to the Township Official Map

Recommendation 1: Since it has only been one year since the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan, the Planning Commission does not recommend any specific changes to the plan goals or actions at this time. The Planning Commission does however recommend that the Township continue to reexamine the Comprehensive Plan (and future Reexamination Reports) on an annual basis or else when necessary.



DRAFT

