

NORTH POCONO MULTI-MUNICIPAL



COMPREHENSIVE PLAN & ZONING UPDATES



GUIDE TO THE PLANNING PROCESS

1. INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

Purpose & Scope

This North Pocono Multi-Municipal Comprehensive Plan provides a cohesive, data-driven framework for guiding growth, land use, zoning policy, and regional coordination across eight municipalities in Lackawanna County. It establishes a unified vision that balances development needs, conservation, infrastructure, and economic sustainability while maintaining each municipality's unique character. The plan will ensure long-term land-use efficiency by modernizing zoning ordinances, addressing development trends, improving transportation networks, and aligning with state and regional planning policies. By fostering intermunicipal cooperation, it enables municipalities to streamline regulatory processes, leverage funding opportunities and enhance economic resilience. The plan's overarching goals include:

- **Responsible Development:** Encouraging thoughtfully managed land use that preserves community character, respects local priorities, and minimizes regulatory burdens.
- **Land Use Resilience:** Encouraging practical conservation efforts and common-sense hazard mitigation that protect property values and ensure long-term development stability.
- **Economic Strength & Business Growth:** Facilitating business retention, workforce development, and commercial investment to create jobs and promote expansion.
- **Infrastructure & Transportation Efficiency:** Improving roads, utilities, and broadband access to support growth and investment without excessive government spending.
- **Regional Consistency:** Aligning zoning ordinances across municipalities to streamline development approvals, reduce uncertainty and encourage responsible growth.
- **Community Input & Stakeholder Collaboration:** Ensuring planning decisions reflect local priorities, with transparent public engagement and business-friendly policies.

Regional Context

Through this approach, the North Pocono Multi-Municipal Comprehensive Plan serves as a roadmap for balanced, sustainable, and resilient development, equipping municipalities with the tools to adapt to changing conditions while preserving the region's quality of life. North Pocono spans suburban, rural, and semi-rural landscapes. These issues transcend municipal boundaries, necessitating a unified, multi-municipal approach. Each municipality faces unique challenges:

- **Infrastructure Capacity** – Roads, public transit, utilities, broadband.
- **Housing Demands** – Affordability, senior housing, new development pressures.
- **Economic Transitions** – Balancing commercial, industrial, agricultural, and tourism.
- **Environmental Pressures** – Floodplains, wetlands, forest and stormwater regulations.

By building on existing strengths, promoting cooperation, and carefully managing shared resources, the North Pocono region is well-positioned to proactively address demographic shifts, safeguard its assets, and promote sustainable growth. A cohesive regional approach to land use, economic development, infrastructure, and conservation, ensures that municipalities can adapt effectively and efficiently to evolving challenges. As the region experiences shifts in population dynamics, including changing housing demands, an aging demographic, and an increasing need for workforce housing and commercial services, coordinated planning becomes essential. While each municipality has distinct goals, the regional plan seeks to harmonize regulatory approaches, unify land-use strategies, and provide consistency for future development.

Through strategic land-use policies, zoning updates, and carefully considered investments, municipalities can preserve their unique character while facilitating responsible, well-planned growth that balances economic vitality with environmental stewardship. By leveraging regional policies, funding opportunities, and multi-municipal cooperation, the region is ready to implement a practical, adaptive, and community-driven planning strategy that will ensure long-term economic resilience, environmental health, and a high quality of life for all residents. To achieve these objectives, the plan aligns with the following statewide and regional planning frameworks:

- **Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC)** – Ensures compliance with state-mandated planning requirements, intermunicipal agreements, and land-use regulations.
- **Lackawanna-Luzerne Bi-County Comprehensive Plan** – Provides overarching guidance for regional economic growth, infrastructure development, and housing policies.
- **Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Long-Range Transportation Plan** – Supports roadway improvements, multimodal transportation options, and transit feasibility studies.
- **Statewide Climate Action Plan** – Integrates sustainable land-use strategies, conservation zoning, and flood mitigation measures.
- **County Hazard Mitigation Plans** – Aligns with emergency management policies for flood prevention, stormwater control, and environmental hazard response.
- **Open Space & Outdoor Recreation Plans** – Protects greenways, public parks, and ecologically sensitive areas.

2. PARTICIPATING MUNICIPALITIES

Below is an overview of each municipality's general characteristics and planning considerations:

1. **Borough of Moscow**
 - Urbanized center with suburban characteristics
 - Active Main Street district and small-scale commercial hubs
 - Zoning Code last updated in 2021
2. **Covington Township**
 - Growth area for commercial and residential development
 - Comprehensive Plan adopted in 2007; Zoning Code established in 2007
3. **Elmhurst Township**
 - Predominantly residential with significant natural areas
 - Comprehensive Plan adopted in 2011; Zoning Code established in 2011
4. **Jefferson Township**
 - Emerging suburban residential zone
 - Comprehensive Plan adopted in 2007; Zoning Code last updated in 2021
5. **Madison Township**
 - Rural and agricultural community focus
 - Comprehensive Plan adopted in 2007; Zoning Code established in 2009
6. **Roaring Brook Township**
 - Balanced suburban and conservation zoning
 - No Comprehensive Plan; Zoning Code last updated in 2018
7. **Spring Brook Township**
 - Residential and rural growth dynamics
 - Comprehensive Plan adopted in 2015; Zoning Code established in 2012
8. **Thornhurst Township**
 - Conservation-oriented, rural character
 - No Comprehensive Plan; Zoning Code established in 1995

3. GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE & STAKEHOLDER ROLES

North Pocono Planning Association (Steering Committee)

The North Pocono Planning Association serves as the steering committee guiding the comprehensive planning effort, ensuring a structured process aligned with local and regional objectives. It fosters inter-municipal collaboration, approves key milestones, and integrates public input. Through transparent governance, regular meetings, and clear communication, the Association ensures coordinated, evidence-based, and community-responsive planning.

- **Composition:** Municipal officials, planning commissioners, community representatives, business leaders, and regional stakeholders.
- **Responsibilities:** Approve milestones, provide local insights, coordinate regional policy alignment, and support outreach efforts.
- **Meeting Frequency:** At least 12 meetings over the project timeline (roughly once per quarter, plus special sessions when needed).

Project Team

- **Planner & Local Liaison (Ted Ritsick):** Manages meetings and community outreach, organizes workshops, and ensures public feedback is integrated.
- **Lead Planner (Steve Neratko):** Oversees planning activities, ensures compliance with MPC, manages technical analyses and budgeting.
- **Planning VP (Shannon Calluori):** Provides guidance, zoning ordinance specialist, coordinates intergovernmental relations, assists with grant applications.
- **Principal Oversight (Sara Hailstone):** Provides high-level guidance, maintains relationships with key municipal leaders, ensures alignment with funding requirements.
- **Assistants:** Support data management, survey distribution, and documentation.

Municipal Officials & Local Planning Commissions

- **Mayors, Supervisors, & Zoning Officers:** Ensure local compliance, facilitate planning commission reviews, host public hearings, and adopt final ordinances.
- **Local Planning Commissions:** Provide feedback on draft plans and zoning amendments, guide local priorities, coordinate with the Steering Committee.

Public & Other Stakeholders

- **Residents, Businesses, & Community Organizations:** Contribute to visioning, attend public meetings, respond to surveys and workshops.
- **Regional & State Agencies:** PennDOT, Lackawanna-Luzerne MPO, environmental agencies, grant providers.
- **Special Interest Groups:** Conservation and farmland preservation boards, real estate developers, housing advocates, environmental nonprofits.

4. DETAILED PLANNING PHASES & METHODOLOGIES

Phase 1: Project Initiation (Mar-May 2025)

1. **Formalize Administrative Structures:** Execute contracts, confirm roles, set up digital project management.
2. **Steering Committee Kickoff:** Establish project scope, timeline, engagement strategy, compliance requirements.
3. **Legal & Regulatory Framework Review:** Ensure alignment with MPC, state/regional plans, and local ordinances.
4. **Municipal Orientation Meetings:** One-on-one sessions with each municipality to identify pressing needs and local concerns.

Phase 2: Data Collection & Existing Conditions Analysis (May-Aug 2025)

1. **GIS-based Spatial Analyses:** Map current land uses, zoning boundaries, environmental constraints, infrastructure networks.
2. **Infrastructure & Transportation Assessment:** Road capacity, public transit feasibility, stormwater systems, utility coverage.

3. **Demographic & Market Studies:** Population projections, housing supply/demand, workforce trends.
4. **Zoning Audit & Gap Analysis:** Compare existing ordinances, highlight inconsistencies, recommend updates.
5. **Environmental Assessments:** Identify floodplains, wetlands, sensitive habitats, and hazard mitigation priorities.

Phase 3: Public Engagement (May–Nov 2025)

1. **Comprehensive Outreach Launch:** Workshops, surveys, open houses, social media campaigns.
2. **Focus Groups & Stakeholder Interviews:** Youth, seniors, businesses, environmental advocates, etc.
3. **Multi-lingual Strategies:** Ensure translation for major documents, hold accessible meetings.
4. **Feedback Integration:** Summarize input into preliminary plan elements (land use, transportation, housing, environment).

Phase 4: Comprehensive Plan & Zoning Drafting (Aug 2025–Mar 2026)

1. **Synthesis of Research & Public Input:** Develop draft chapters on land use, transportation, economy, environment, etc.
2. **Zoning Modernization:** Update zoning districts, overlays, permitted uses, procedural clarity.
3. **Scenario Modeling:** Evaluate growth vs. conservation outcomes, test land-use changes, refine policy solutions.
4. **Ongoing Stakeholder Engagement:** Public workshops presenting draft proposals, gathering additional feedback.

Phase 5: Regulatory Review & Public Hearings (Jan–Mar 2026)

1. **Legal Compliance Checks:** Ensure updated ordinances align with MPC, environmental laws, hazard mitigation regulations.
2. **Public Comment Period:** Host public hearings, gather feedback, finalize plan and zoning text.
3. **Planning Commission Reviews:** Each municipality's planning commission reviews and endorses final drafts.

Phase 6: Adoption & Implementation (Jun 2027 onward)

1. **Municipal Adoption:** Formal approval of comprehensive plan and zoning updates.
2. **Implementation Dashboard:** Deployment of a digital tool tracking progress on action items, performance indicators, ongoing rezoning requests.
3. **Five-Year Review Cycles:** Scheduled plan and zoning updates to adapt to evolving conditions and revised community needs.

Updated Meeting Calendar & Key Milestones

Month/Year	Phase	Meeting Name	Attendees
Mar 2025	Start Phase 1: Project Kickoff	Steering Committee Meeting 1: Project Kickoff & Orientations	Steering Committee, Project Team
May 2025	Ongoing Phase 1	Steering Committee Meeting 2: Stakeholder Coordination & Public Engagement Strategy	Steering Committee, Stakeholders
Jun 2025	Ongoing Phase 1	Stakeholder Meeting 1: Infrastructure & Environment	Land Use Experts, Municipal Officials, Organizations
Jul 2025	Ongoing Phase 1	Technical Meeting: Economic & Housing Market Trends	Economic Development Agencies, Housing Experts
Aug 2025	End of Phase 1 / Start Phase 2: Data Collection	Steering Committee Meeting 3: Initial Framework Development	Steering Committee, Zoning & Land Use Specialists
Sep 2025	Ongoing Phase 2	Community Workshops: Land Use, Housing, & Transportation	Residents, Business Owners, Municipal Officials
Oct 2025	Ongoing Phase 2	Stakeholder Meeting 2: Housing, Economy, & Transportation	Housing Advocates, Business Leaders, Transit Planners, Environmental Groups
Nov 2025	End of Phase 2 / Start Phase 3: Refinement	Steering Committee Meeting 4: Refining Draft Plan Based on Stakeholder Input	Steering Committee, Municipal Officials, Planning Team
Jan 2026	Ongoing Phase 3	Public Review & Municipal Comment Period	General Public, Municipal Boards, Legal Advisors
Mar 2026	End of Phase 3 / Start Phase 4: Finalization	Public Hearings & Refinements Workshop	Residents, Elected Officials, Planning Commissions
May 2026	Ongoing Phase 4	Steering Committee Meeting 5: Final Plan Presentation	Steering Committee, Elected Officials, Stakeholders, Public
Jun 2027	End of Phase 4 / Start Phase 5: Adoption	Municipal Zoning & Plan Adoption Meetings	Municipal Boards, Legal Advisors, Public
Sep 2027	Ongoing Phase 5	Steering Committee Meeting 6: Implementation Progress Review	Steering Committee, Local Governments, Planning Commissions
Dec 2027+	Ongoing Phase 5	Implementation, Monitoring & Evaluation Meetings	Local Governments, Planning Commissions, Stakeholders

6. TECHNICAL ANALYSIS TOOLS & METHODS

We will utilize modeling tools to conduct spatial analyses, economic forecasting, and infrastructure assessments. These tools will support GIS mapping, land-use scenario planning, and impact modeling, ensuring data-driven decision-making. By integrating cutting-edge technologies, we can identify development opportunities, mitigate risks, and optimize long-term planning strategies.

Advanced GIS & Spatial Analysis

1. **GIS:** Mapping current land use, future scenarios, and identifying sensitive areas.
2. **Traffic Modeling:** Analyzing transportation flows, congestion points, and the potential for multimodal expansion.
3. **Environmental & Hazard Mitigation Tools:** Floodplain mapping, wetland delineation, FEMA compliance reviews.

Economic & Demographic Forecasting

1. **Market Feasibility:** Commercial viability, local and regional demand for retail and services.
2. **Housing:** Supply vs. demand analysis, affordability, senior and multi-family developments.
3. **Workforce & Employment Analysis:** Projections based on current economic sectors, potential business attraction strategies.

Scenario-Based & Data-Driven Planning

1. **Land Use Scenarios:** Evaluating outcomes under balanced-growth, controlled-growth, and conservation-oriented strategies.
2. **Modeling Tools:** For visualizations of proposed zoning changes.
3. **Sensitivity Analysis:** Identifying areas for development vs. strict conservation.

7. LEGAL & REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC)

Ensuring compliance with these frameworks not only strengthens the legal foundation of zoning updates but also enhances the region's ability to secure state and federal funding for infrastructure, economic development, and land-use planning initiatives. By aligning with established regulations, municipalities can streamline development approvals, minimize legal challenges, and provide greater predictability for property owners and investors. Additionally, adherence to these guidelines ensures that proposed zoning changes are technically sound, enforceable, and resilient to potential litigation or policy shifts. All plan elements must comply with the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC), including

- Required public hearings, notices, and adoption procedures
- Legal foundations for zoning district boundaries, uses, and enforcement
- Methods for intermunicipal cooperation and consistency

State & Federal Regulations

1. **PennDOT & MPO Requirements:** Coordinating long-range transportation planning, federal funding eligibility.
2. **FEMA & Hazard Mitigation Plans:** Integration of floodplain management and hazard preparedness.

County & Regional Policies

- **Lackawanna-Luzerne Bi-County Comprehensive Plan:** Overarching guidance on regional growth, economic development, infrastructure.
- **Hazard Mitigation Plan:** Consistency with county-level disaster resilience strategies.
- **Open Space & Outdoor Recreation Plans:** Preservation of greenways, recreation amenities, scenic corridors.

8. STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT & ZONING MODERNIZATION

The North Pocono Multi-Municipal Comprehensive Plan places a strong emphasis on zoning, ensuring all participating municipalities operate under a streamlined, efficient, and predictable regulatory framework. This removes inconsistencies, simplifies approvals, and ensures that zoning supports economic growth and investments. The modernization of zoning will focus on clarity, consistency, and ease of administration, making it simpler to navigate land use regulations.

Intermunicipal Consistency

Creating a cohesive, predictable zoning framework across municipalities is a top priority to streamline development, reduce administrative burden, and ensure consistency for businesses, developers, and property owners. Standardizing zoning district names, definitions, and permitted uses will simplify planning and minimize confusion across jurisdictions. Shared thresholds for major projects will help guide growth while maintaining local oversight and efficiency. This effort focuses on three key strategies:

- **Shared Land Use Designations:** Harmonizing naming conventions and permitted uses across municipal borders.
- **Collaborative Review Approaches:** Exploring various practical strategies, including joint evaluation processes, for reviewing major developments affecting multiple municipalities.
- **Standardized Enforcement Approaches:** Ensuring consistent interpretation and application of zoning codes.

Legal & Public Adoption Path

1. **Draft Reviews & Public Hearings:** Presentation of updated ordinances to each planning commission, open to public feedback.
2. **Municipal Adoption:** Formal legislative action by each municipality, ensuring alignment with county and state requirements.
3. **Post-Adoption Training:** Workshops for zoning officers, planning commissions, code enforcement staff, and local elected officials.

9. IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING & TRANSPARENCY

The success of this plan depends on practical implementation and ongoing oversight, ensuring that zoning updates and development policies are actionable, enforceable, and aligned across municipalities. The primary goal is to establish a common zoning framework that simplifies development approvals, enhances regional coordination, and reduces regulatory inconsistencies. By prioritizing clear enforcement mechanisms, measurable performance indicators, and structured reporting, municipalities can effectively track progress, adapt to changing conditions, and ensure long-term success. A phased approach will guide implementation, focusing on short-, medium-, and long-term actions.

Implementation Roadmap

- **Phased Project Delivery:** Identify short-term (1-2 years), medium-term (3-5 years), and long-term (5+ years) actions.
- **Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) Alignment:** Prioritize infrastructure projects (roads, water/sewer expansions, broadband upgrades) that support plan goals.
- **Funding Strategies:** Pursue grants from DCED, PennDOT, Appalachian Regional Commission, and possible public-private partnerships.

Performance Indicators (KPIs)

1. **Economic Vitality:** Supporting local businesses, maintaining stable commercial corridors, changes in tax base.
2. **Housing Metrics:** Affordable units built, senior housing availability, rental vacancy rates.
3. **Environmental Gains:** Protected open space, stormwater compliance, reduced flood risk.
4. **Transportation Efficiency:** Road congestion metrics, pedestrian/cycling infrastructure upgrades, transit ridership growth.

Municipal Enforcement & Oversight

- **Training for Enforcement Staff:** Clarification of new zoning language, enforcement procedures, and permit review.
- **Intermunicipal Reporting:** Annual or biannual reporting on zoning compliance, project completions, and plan impacts.
- **Amendment Procedures:** Clear protocols for updating or revising ordinances as conditions evolve.

Transparency & Public Engagement

1. **Interactive Online Dashboards:** Real-time updates on permit activity, new developments, ongoing CIP projects.
2. **Regular Public Updates:** Newsletters, municipal websites, social media, highlighting successes and upcoming opportunities.
3. **Regular Planning Association Reviews:** Ongoing meetings to assess progress, discuss potential amendments, and identify new funding opportunities.

10. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Public engagement helps ensure zoning updates and planning decisions align with community priorities. The plan emphasizes broad participation through traditional communication methods, including a project website, social media, and local media. Workshops, open houses, and surveys will enable residents to offer direct input on zoning, housing, and transportation policies.

Continuous feedback channels, such as public comment periods and advisory group meetings, will keep the community informed and involved during plan implementation.

Multi-Channel Engagement

- **Project Website:** Repository for documents, schedules, contact info, and public feedback.
- **Social Media Campaigns:** Targeted outreach via Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Nextdoor for event promotion.
- **Press Releases & Traditional Media:** Local newspapers, radio stations, community bulletin boards for broader coverage.

Inclusive & Equitable Outreach

- **Inclusive Engagement:** Encourage broad community involvement through clearly communicated public meetings and accessible information.
- **Community Workshops:** Provide general workshops and open houses to gather input from various community members.
- **Accessible Meetings:** Select venues that are convenient, comfortable, and accessible to all community members.
- **Clear Communication:** Utilize straightforward, easy-to-read materials and notices to facilitate public understanding and participation.

Public Workshops & Open Houses

- **Initial Visioning Sessions:** Capture broad community goals and concerns.
- **Thematic Workshops:** Discuss zoning updates, housing needs, transportation issues, and environmental concerns in focused sessions.
- **Community Event Outreach:** Engage residents at popular local events such as high school football games and community events to share information and encourage participation.
- **Draft Plan Review Meetings:** Provide opportunities for community members to review and comment on draft plans and proposed zoning updates.

Ongoing Feedback Loops

- **Surveys & Polls:** Periodic collection of community sentiment on plan effectiveness.
- **Public Comment Portals:** Online forms and interactive maps allowing location-specific recommendations.
- **Community Advisory Groups:** Citizen-led committees to help shape detailed policies and monitor plan progress.

11. VISION & ADAPTIVE POLICY MANAGEMENT

A flexible, practical, common-sense approach ensures that the plan remains relevant and effective as conditions change. Regional collaboration with county, state, and federal agencies will help municipalities secure funding, align with transportation plans, and coordinate large-scale projects. Ongoing public and steering committee engagement will ensure that policy adjustments continue to reflect community goals and development needs.

Dynamic Planning Framework

- **Demographic Shifts:** Adjust strategies to accommodate evolving population trends, including aging populations.
- **Infrastructure Demands:** Continual assessment of roads, transit, utilities, and digital connectivity to support growth.

Five-Year Review Cycle

- **Comprehensive Plan Update:** Revisit and revise plan elements in response to new data or emerging best practices.
- **Zoning Ordinance Updates:** Evaluate zoning provisions to accommodate emerging land-use considerations, such as infrastructure improvements and utility enhancements.
- **Public & Steering Committee Engagement:** Confirm that updates reflect the community's current goals.

Regional Collaboration

- **Coordination with County & MPO:** Stay aligned with transportation funding cycles and economic development grants.
- **Intermunicipal Projects:** Jointly pursue large-scale initiatives like corridor improvements, farmland preservation, or shared public facilities.
- **Link to State & Federal Programs:** Access resources from PennDOT, DCED, HUD, FEMA for infrastructure and disaster resilience.

12. KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. **Comprehensive, Collaborative Approach:** The multi-municipal process unites North Pocono communities under shared goals and consistent regulatory standards.
2. **Robust Zoning Modernization:** Aligning ordinances across municipalities fosters clarity for developers, business owners, and residents.
3. **Thorough Technical Analyses:** GIS mapping, traffic modeling, economic projections, and scenario-based planning provide an objective basis for decision-making.
4. **Inclusive Public Engagement:** Ongoing community input ensures that future growth remains equitable, transparent, and reflective of local priorities.
5. **Adaptive Implementation:** Long-term success requires performance tracking, regular plan updates, and flexible policies to meet evolving needs.