



CASE STUDIES IN SMART GROWTH IMPLEMENTATION

Mount Joy Borough, Pennsylvania

About the Community

Incorporated in 1851, Mount Joy Borough is situated in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, a rich agricultural area. In recent years, low density suburban development has been rapidly replacing farms in the townships surrounding the Borough.

The most current population figures available for Mount Joy Borough are from the 2000 Census, which recorded a population of 6,765. Lancaster County Planning Commission growth projections based on the Census predict a 2020 population of 7,522, which represents about 0.5 percent increase per year, about the same rate experienced between 1990 and 2000.¹

In contrast, adjoining Mount Joy Township grew by nearly 2.8 percent per year between 1990 and 2000, and its projected growth rate between 2000 and 2010, though substantially lower is still more than twice that projected for the Borough—1.26 percent per year. The projected annual growth rate for the nearby East Donegal Township over the same period is 1.1 percent, while for Rapho Township it is 0.9 percent.

At the time Mount Joy Borough applied for SGLI assistance, the community had adopted a Traditional Neighborhood District ordinance and a developer was already engaged in plans to build a TND project near the borough's periphery. Built on a grid with densities generally in the range of 9 to 12 units per acre, the core of the borough is typical of towns of similar age in the region, but despite the historic pattern of development, some members of the community resisted the higher densities and mixed-use aspects of the proposed TND project.

¹ <http://www.co.lancaster.pa.us/planning/cwp/view.asp?a=476&Q=473063>



State Of Smart Growth Implementation

Smart growth leadership emanated both from the Borough offices and the private sector. Borough Councilors, the Borough Manager and planning staff were all in support of the TND ordinance and other changes to the zoning ordinance that would facilitate the development of infill parcels and adaptive reuse of underutilized parcels.

The Lancaster County Planning Commission also supported smart growth principles and was hoping to engage surrounding townships in discussions about limiting sprawl and stemming the conversion of agricultural land to suburban uses. On the private side, one developer in particular was eager to build a model TND. Others, having been stymied in their attempts to do infill development, were anxious for changes to codes that allow new development without detracting from the look of historic development.

The urgent issue facing the community, which forced the issue of smart growth, was —and to an extent still is —the conversion of agricultural land to urban uses in response to a strong demand for housing.

The primary source of demand is neighboring Dauphin County, in particular from Harrisburg, which is the state capitol, and Hershey, home to the Hershey Medical Center. Both cities are within reasonable commuting distance from Mount Joy and surrounding townships. Also, in the period immediately following September 11, 2001, Lancaster County experienced a fairly sizeable influx of people from the metropolitan New York and Washington, D.C. regions.

The counter-argument against smart growth partly rested on a dislike for urban densities and on a perceived consumer preference for large lots in rural setting. But the crux of the opposition in this politically conservative area seemed to be a property rights-free market issue. It rested on a long-standing expectation on the part of agricultural landowners, that they would be able, at the time of their choosing, subdivide and sell their property.

Mount Joy teamed with Lancaster County asked SGLI's Technical Assistance team to audit not only the Mount Joy Borough zoning code and subdivision regulations, but also the corresponding codes and regulations of surrounding townships. They were expecting the audits to identify any inconsistencies between and among various sets of documents and wanted to know how well these regulations addressed smart growth principles. Mount Joy Borough specifically requested a critique of their TND ordinance. Lancaster County asked for assistance in addressing smart growth issues from a wider perspective that would engage the surrounding townships

At the time SGLI became involved, proponents of smart growth had not yet successfully answered community concerns. Efforts had been made to address the issue of density by showing opponents that the densities proposed for the TND were comparable to densities found in the older, most desirable sections of Mount Joy Borough. The concern about threatened landowner expectations did not seem to have been answered even though transfer



of development rights programs were already in place elsewhere in Lancaster County² and in neighboring York County.

The team found that there was no consistency between the codes of the various municipalities with respect to zoning classes, parcel configurations or density allowances.

Over the course of years, zoning and subdivision regulations had changed to preclude the development of varied housing types within zones and to disallow mixed-uses in all but central business district.

Also, no incentives existed in the Mount Joy Borough codes to encourage infill or adaptive reuse, and several features of the code practically discouraged them.

The team recommended that the County and the Borough engage residents of the area's municipalities in developing a regional growth vision and to work together to bring zoning classifications, lot size and configuration requirements and density allowance into agreement, particularly at borders common to the borough and the townships.

The team also advised that the local governments pursue a transfer of development rights program to ease the pressure on landowners to convert agricultural land to urban uses.

The team advised Mount Joy Borough in particular, to change codes to allow the development of a wider range of housing types within zones and to allow greater mix of uses in areas outside the central business district; to remove the barriers to infill and adaptive reuse development that were then in the codes and to devise incentives to permit those types of development to occur; and, to adopt a revised version of the proposed TND ordinance.

Lessons Learned

Talk about rights and responsibilities

Communities such as Mount Joy, while anxious to manage growth, are cautious about adopting smart growth measures. Low-density development is preferred even while the consequences of such growth patterns are decried. And though the historic downtown offers a good example of a relatively high density mixed-use district, single-use districts are preferred.

Because the area's strong sentiment for protecting private property rights (and a sense that planning impinges on those rights), it was important to discuss the interplay of rights and responsibilities in the context of community and to offer suggestions about equitable solutions—such as TDR programs—for consideration.

² *Manheim Township has had a transfer of development rights program since 1991. Several programs exist in York County.*



Talk about the economics and the cost

In general, the most persuasive arguments for smart growth in this fiscally conservative area were the economic ones related to the cost implications of infrastructure construction and operations costs.

It was remarked after that fact that at the outset local officials had hoped for very specific suggestions, in retrospect they appreciated the approach taken by the team. The general nature of the recommendations gave them direction but left it to the communities to find their own solutions.

Postscript

The communities used SGLI's report as a basis for further discussions and progress has been made on several fronts. The TND ordinance was revised and adopted and the development that was being planned at the time of the audit was approved. The first phase, which included market rate housing, has been constructed and the second phase is poised to break ground in the near future. The project is reported to be holding its own in the market with workforce housing selling well.

A fire in February of 2007 destroyed a block of historic buildings in the downtown. In the months since then, the Borough, the County, Redevelopment Agency and the Economic Development Corporation formed a collaborative and the Redevelopment Agency acquired the property. A three-story mixed-use project is planned that will include retail, offices, and apartments in a traditional design to replicate the historic street pattern.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the Borough and the surrounding townships have drawn up a preliminary master plan that will soon be adopted. Changes to township zoning ordinances to address the boundary issues will also be made.

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Written by: *Susan Weaver*

Tools used: *Smart Growth Policy Audit
Smart Growth Code and Zoning Audit*

Technical Assistance Team: *Susan Weaver of Weaver Consulting & Research; Deepak Bahl, Associate Director at the USC Center for Economic Development.; and, Jessica Cogan Millman, Deputy Director of the Smart Growth Leadership Institute.*



About the Case Studies

Communities across the country are facing tremendous opportunities to shape their future and provide solutions to the most pressing local, national and global challenges of our time. Community leaders, serving as stewards of the future, have the power to change previous patterns of unsustainable growth and realize the benefits of smarter growth.

The Case Studies present the key findings and lessons learned about smart growth implementation from the Smart Growth Leadership Institute's four-year technical assistance program that was funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The Case Studies are meant to help communities that are committed to (or are exploring) smart growth but struggle with its implementation. The cases highlight successful strategies in building support, in identifying the most problematic policies and in other issues that typically accompany a major change in development practice. The case studies also showcase the use of the tools included in the Smart Growth Implementation Toolkit.

Visit www.sgli.org for more information about the Smart Growth Leadership Institute.

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