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Beyond Boundaries

HOW THREE BOROUGHS ARE COLLABORATING TO CREATE A BRIGHTER FUTURE—TOGETHER

For perhaps one of the first few times in Pennsylvania's history, three boroughs have joined forces to develop a multi-borough, joint comprehensive plan that could well become the role model for inter-governmental agency cooperation. While the plan itself is the product of three boroughs working together for the greater good of the community, the evolution of how these communities have grown from separate entities to collaborative partners is a story all its own.

By **Anthony Haubert**, Public Relations Specialist, RETTEW

Located in the heart of south central Pennsylvania directly across from Harrisburg on the west bank of the Susquehanna River, the contiguous boroughs of Camp Hill, Lemoyne and Wormleysburg serve as the gateway to Cumberland County. The area is commonly known as the West Shore, with the three communities preferred by many for their proximity to the state capital and easy on and off to several interstates—not to mention their quaint, small-town charm. Camp Hill is known for its architectural buildings, boutiques, a shopping center, Frederickson Library and restaurants along Market Street. Lemoyne is a thriving community earmarked by a culture of music as well as home to many long-time, family-owned businesses, the West Shore Farmers Market, salons and shops. Wormleysburg, a scenic riverside community, is coveted for its idyllic location along the Susquehanna River, views of Harrisburg's skyline, boating activities and a cluster of restaurants along Front Street.

While each community is individual, they're more alike than they are different. Specifically, all three boroughs, as with most core communities, are presently facing the same challenge—they are "built out," have reached full capacity, have aging infrastructure and are challenged with attracting new residents and businesses and keeping their neighborhoods and downtowns vibrant. Geographically, they're bound by several major arteries and the Susquehanna River that has resulted in transportation-related challenges. Yet despite all these similarities—and there are many more—they've always chosen to remain separate entities.

Each also has its own comprehensive plan dating back to the 1970s, but unfortunately these documents provided little guidance

to inform the boroughs' decision-making process over the past 30 years.

"Our plan is a 70s-era, 10-page plan that really is not a plan; it was just sort of like rote stuff thrown together," said Joe Deklinski regarding Wormleysburg's comprehensive plan. "It really didn't help us at all," the Wormleysburg resident and former borough council member added. He and other community leaders were concerned about how the lack of an effective comprehensive plan would impact Wormleysburg's future and their ability to effectively plan for it. Camp Hill's comprehensive plan was of the same 1970s vintage and ineffectual as well. Matt Best, a member of the Camp Hill Borough Planning Commission, explains:

"When you have a vague plan that doesn't really have any detail in it, you have no help when having to make a decision that often happens

when a petitioner comes before the borough and, say, wants to donate land for a park," said Best. "With a more detailed comp plan, you've already thought about it at a 10,000-foot level."

Lemoyne's comprehensive plan dates back to 1975. According to Shireen Farr, newly elected president of Lemoyne Borough Council, the document included basic guidelines, but not much else.

"Lemoyne has changed over the past 30-plus years, so whatever was in that old plan doesn't really address our current status as a community, let alone our future," said Farr.

Now that all three boroughs are more than 100 years old, like many communities across the Commonwealth, they are faced with planning for their future, promoting economic growth, revitalizing their downtowns and surrounding neighborhoods and protecting and

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preserving their diverse residential base. To that end, in 2004 the Cumberland County Planning Commission (CCPC) developed a grant program called the Land Partnerships Program, which is dedicated to open space preservation and smart growth planning initiatives, including multi-municipal planning efforts.

Realizing that the program was a perfect opportunity to obtain funding, Lemoyne and Wormleysburg Boroughs collaborated and applied jointly to obtain grant monies to create a joint comprehensive plan to update their 30-plus-year-old plans. While the two communities have joint police and fire departments and work together in that capacity, they had never before embarked on a joint planning effort. Before the application was submitted, however, a third borough—Camp Hill—came on board. The three boroughs used \$65,000 of county funding to leverage an additional \$65,000 in grants from the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) and the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED). In total, the boroughs received \$130,000 in funding for the plan.

“If each of these boroughs would have gone individually to DCED and DCNR for funding, they would have probably gotten turned down,” said

Kirk Stoner, AICP, Director of CCPC, adding that grants are typically given to multi-municipal projects.

In early 2007, the three contiguous boroughs came together to discuss their challenges, goals and collective future. Although it was evident that they were eager to embark on this new venture jointly, the mix of residents, staff and elected officials had never experienced this type of collaborative approach to planning. Three representatives from each of the boroughs made up a nine-member steering committee to tackle the components that would, over an 18-month period, become Imagine West Shore (IWS), the name of the multi-municipal comprehensive plan. Planning consultants from RETTEW Associates, Inc., with assistance from ARRO Consulting, Inc., developed the plan, working closely with the nine-member committee to determine both regional and borough-specific challenges and goals.

“I think it was the first time these three communities had ever sat at the same table,” Farr said. Building trust was a critical first step.

As Kirk Stoner, who sat on the IWS steering committee representing CCPC, recalls, “There seemed to be an initial ‘feeling out’ process by all the steering committee members. I think they were asking themselves, ‘Is everyone who is into this sincere

and really want to do it?’ Within a short period of time, however, it was obvious that everyone was truly committed to making this plan happen.”

As the steering committee members began meeting on a monthly basis, other attendees could see the group begin to work together and think more from a regional perspective than a borough-specific point of view. Throughout the entire planning process, which involved monthly meetings from early 2007 through mid-2008, the group of individuals who came together—primarily because of funding to improve their respective boroughs—began to cultivate a working relationship—and a future for the West Shore Region.

Shireen Farr witnessed the group’s transformation firsthand. She attended the first few meetings as an observer and then intermittently while focusing on her campaign for Lemoyne Borough Council. She rejoined the meetings as a steering committee member in January 2008.

“When I started to go to the meetings again, the dynamics of the group had completely changed. It was just different,” Farr said. “The folks sitting at the table had become friends. You could clearly see that they had a mutual respect for each other.” Farr added that she firmly believes that the exercise of coming together to work on the plan also created a stronger sense of camaraderie among the boroughs.

Kirk Stoner saw the transformation too.

“It was interesting from the county’s perspective as part of the committee to watch the meetings. Eventually what started to happen is that you could see the communities really starting to think regionally. They weren’t as concerned about ‘what’s in it for my borough?’ as they were ‘what’s in it for the region?’”

Stoner reflected. Matt Best of Camp Hill points out that the meetings made the representatives from each borough realize just how much their communities had in common and what one borough does ultimately impacts the other two.

“There was just a growing understanding and a growing respect for the fact that we do face a lot of the same problems, such as aging infrastructure,” Best said. “We have the same problems: traffic is a common problem among all three of our boroughs. With doing the comp plan together, it will help develop a culture of cooperation among the three of us.”

While all three boroughs agree that funding was the main driver for joining forces—the alliance that resulted has proven enriching and rewarding. After much hard work and collaboration, Imagine West Shore—a joint comprehensive plan for the Boroughs of Camp Hill, Lemoyne and Wormleysburg—is presently in draft format and up for public review and comment.



A magnanimous effort by a team of individuals dedicated to their respective communities and shaping the region’s future, Imagine West Shore is a groundbreaking approach to multi-municipal comprehensive planning. From a technical aspect, the plan provides a proverbial roadmap to West Shore’s legacy, addressing challenges and issues relating to future land use development; downtown; natural, cultural and historic resources; transportation; housing and neighborhoods; community facilities and economic development.

Raring to go, the three boroughs have, in fact, already begun working together, with the assistance of

Cumberland County, on an initiative independent of the IWS plan. They are working on a streetscaping project that promises to visually enhance and connect Market Street in Camp Hill and Lemoyne and Front Street in Wormleysburg.

Improvement projects suggested by the draft comprehensive plan, slated for adoption in early 2009, include strategies that promote partnering, downtown and neighborhood revitalization initiatives, additional streetscaping projects, redefining zoning ordinances to better define residential and downtown and much, much more. After the current public comment period, the borough councils will hold a public meeting—together—which is tentatively scheduled for November 2008.

Until then, residents from all three boroughs can view the draft comprehensive plan by visiting Cumberland County’s Web site, www.ccpa.net, and typing “Camphill/Lemoyne/Wormleysburg” in the search bar located in the upper left-hand corner.

Looking back at the past year and a half, the steering committee members unanimously agree that the whole experience has been extremely positive—and eye-opening. Everyone involved in the process is confident that this multi-borough, history-in-the-making comprehensive plan is the key to making Pennsylvania’s West Shore Region a cohesive, regional neighborhood for the 21st Century while preserving the character, charm and individuality that’s so indicative of boroughs’ collective past.

Kirk Stoner sums it up best: “These towns are the gems of tomorrow, really.” Through the implementation of this joint comp plan, each promises to shine even brighter within their common setting. **(B)**

