

## **TICKET TO TOMORROW A West Bradford Community Conversation • June 14, 2007**

**A partnership program of Chester County 2020 and the  
West Bradford Supervisors and Planning Commission.**



### **Community Conversations and Productive Partnerships**

Community Conversations have become a hallmark of Chester County 2020's efforts in support of community cooperation at many levels. They have proved especially effective when they include diverse interest groups that may not have previously recognized the existence of common ground. There is an element of the unexpected that consistently emerges in the findings, conclusions and recommendations. When any number of individuals of varied backgrounds and experience come together, the dynamics are surprising and productive. The participants in Ticket to Tomorrow confirmed expectations of shared wisdom, movement toward consensus, and the value of dedicating an evening to exploring issues important to West Bradford Township's future.

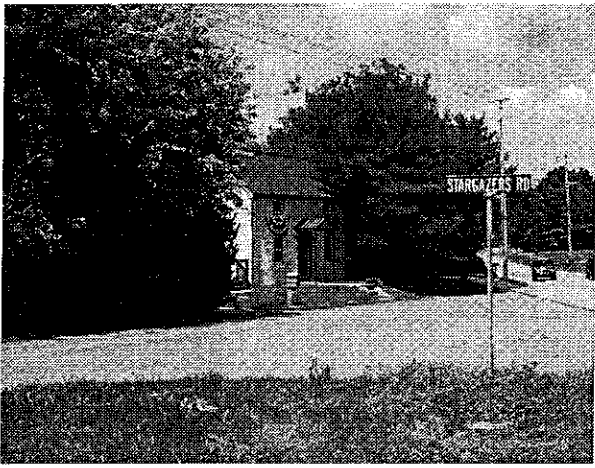
Although as a non-profit organization, Chester County 2020 has no formal relationship with the County, executive director Nancy Mohr and advisory board member Judy DiFilippo are among the appointed volunteers who serve as members of the Chester County Planning Commission. They and the others on the CC2020 Board are committed to involving residents in determining the future of their communities. Many of CC2020's community conversations have been made possible by grants that cover the major portion of the costs. Each partnering municipality lends organizational support, identifies and obtains a site for the conversation, and provides box suppers for the participants.

### **Setting the Scene**

Chester County 2020's executive director served as facilitator for the Conversation, preparing the way for Ticket to Tomorrow by emphasizing the importance of the current, ten-year review of Landscapes, the county's award winning comprehensive plan. For all that the county's preservation programs, municipalities, land trusts, and other non-profit entities have accomplished in contributing to the fulfillment of Landscapes, critical countywide components still remain to be addressed. The most significant examples involve urban center revitalization, affordable homes, infrastructure, transportation, and long-term environmental outcomes – all of which relate directly to the issues that the West Bradford residents selected for discussion.

Every county municipality has been impacted by population increases. Since 2000, more than 49,000 new residents have moved to Chester County, considerably ahead of projections and with an inevitable increase in the financial challenges for municipalities, the County, and school districts. In connection with the update of Landscapes, every county resident enjoyed the opportunity to participate in the review process through a survey that was accessed either on-line or in hard copy at county libraries. Progress updates may be found at [www.Landscapes2.org](http://www.Landscapes2.org) Community Conversations represent smaller scale contributions to the body of information, generally municipality-specific but also may be regional or address a single topic such as transportation or housing.

CC2020 staff was available at the West Bradford Conversation to answer questions and offer assistance to the breakout groups. An important ground rule centered on the recognition



that all municipal planning in Pennsylvania is guided by the State's Municipal Planning Code (MPC). The MPC, by law, sets the standards for action by the planning commissions and supervisors. Often suggestions surface that, by law, cannot be implemented by the elected and appointed officials without changes to the MPC.

This Conversation offered within a single forum the opportunity to discuss a variety of challenges ranging from open space to traffic. 160 residents responded to the invitation. Sixteen breakout groups of 8-10 were pre-assigned to reflect a mix of experience and representation,

as well as longevity as residents. The format produced thought-provoking ideas in addition to excellent anecdotal material.

### Rating the Issues

Every Conversation begins with identification of issues that the audience considers important to the municipality's future — written on large sheets of paper. The participants are instructed to indicate the five issues they considered most important by placing colored dots next to their choices. Each issue has its supporters, but five interrelated items attracted the largest number of dots:

- Farmland and open space preservation 103
- Traffic safety 74
- Taxes 41
- Too much new construction, too fast 37
- Water quality and supply 21

The remaining issues with their ratings appear at the end of the report. Four of the five highest ranked topics served as departure points for discussion in each breakout group. Although taxes rated high, recent experience with the Act I referendum seemed to channel energy away from the topic. Nine breakout groups addressed **farmland and open space preservation**; 3 concentrated on **traffic safety**; and 2 each on **Too much construction, too fast** and **water quality and supply**.

The breakout reports addressed the topics in terms of 1) regional & local trends and their potential impacts on the chosen issues, 2) priority values, 3) important players, and 4) opportunities to work together. Discussion of the issues produced substantial common ground.

### Regional and Local Trends

The most significant trends — increased development with accompanying costs to existing homeowners, increased traffic and safety issues, higher taxes, and storm water problems -- are difficult to address. Historically, the most effective option, regional planning, has also been the one to encounter the greatest resistance. Regional or joint planning became far more appealing with the improved flexibility provided under the changes to the MPC in 2000.

The following are perceived as trends in the township and immediate region. If some of them do not appear to be on target, that may be an indication that information is not easily available, that conclusions are being made on the basis of sound bites, or that it is difficult to accurately grasp the wide-ranging changes.

- Over-development prompted by desirable Chester County quality of life
- Exploding development leads to more infrastructure
- Land must sell for market value, and that figure is determined by the push for development

- Inadequate roads
- Dramatic population increases
- Economic pressures make it hard for the farmer to survive.
- Right to buy and build as long as codes are followed
- Increased construction requires clearing of trees
- Huge profits in big lot development
- Large developers dictate land management.
- Farms going, going, gone
- No farm co-ops to help the individual farmers survive
- Houses are clustered in attempts to save open space.
- Good schools draw new residents.



## **Background Information in Response to Selected Trends**

### **Over-development prompted by desirable Chester County quality of life**

Chester County's dramatic increase in population can be credited to the scenic, historic, cultural, economic and educational attractions that in being attractive are also the source of pressures too severe to be handled under the current limitations of the Municipal Planning Code. There is usually insufficient time or resources available to effectively assess the impact of sprawling new construction upon the road systems, storm water run-off, schools, or the financial impact upon existing taxpayer-residents. The quality of life that attracts new residents is vulnerable to destruction by over-development. The Act 537 process has value in addressing these issues when systems are designed to be consistent with the comprehensive plan.

### **Exploding development leads to more infrastructure.**

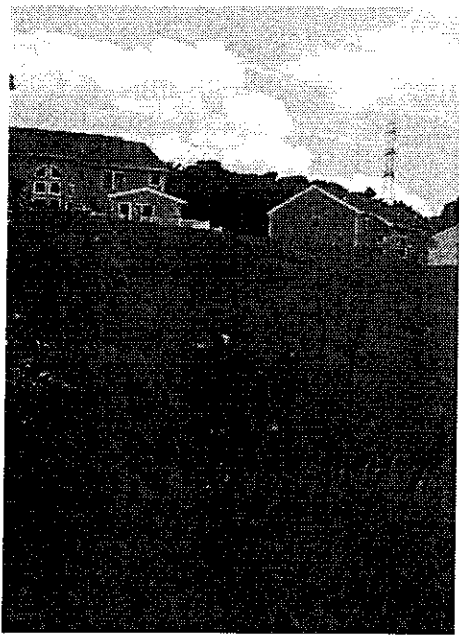
All development requires water and sewer services, whether public or on-site. Where on-site is not possible, a developer will often propose extending public water and sewer, perpetuating the sprawl model. West Bradford has already met failing on-site problems with sewage treatment and spray irrigation facilities. Although the township is addressing the update of its 537 Plan, a shortfall of service availability seems to be aggravating the relationship with the developers. The municipality has to determine how much infrastructure is "enough," and that is a tough question. The failure to plan in a manner consistent with the comprehensive plan can be costly, as Westtown has discovered; cost projections for sewers there are \$13,000 to \$50,000 per household -- real aggravation.

### **Land must sell for market value, and that figure is determined by the push for development**

The value of land is determined by the price a buyer is willing to pay. It is common knowledge that competition for development land has escalated purchase offers dramatically. Even the current downturn in building and sales has not dampened the competitive climate. A landowner may set an unrealistic price and then wait for a willing purchaser. Zoning, or the prospect of zoning change, plays a role, too.

### **Right to buy and build as long as codes are followed**

The ability to buy and build is a realistic assumption. The critical element today is the presence or absence of planning. Does a community want to determine its future, or is it satisfied with letting anything happen anywhere? A developer generally looks for the easiest route in line with the by-right provisions of municipal zoning ordinances; the question becomes



whether a municipality really wants what it gets. Is the current by-right the best option? The comprehensive plan and zoning ordinances determine how land will be used. If a review of the plan shows that it is not consistent with the desires of the municipality, it is time for revision – for both the plan and the supporting ordinances. Annual monitoring is essentially a function of the planning commission; comprehensive plans are not intended to sit on the shelf.

### **Inadequate roads**

Chester County's road system was not intended for fast moving, heavy traffic. With the exception of the highways like Route 202 and the Route 30 by-pass, the roads tend to be narrow, two-lane, twisting and incapable of efficiently carrying the traffic they attract today. It was once the weather that everyone complained about and could not change; today it is the traffic. Consideration of traffic

impacts is important and often ignored until it is too late to make it a part of the planning – and then it becomes the problem. There are tools under the MPC that address functional classification and rights of way that can be very useful to municipal planning.

### **Dramatic population increases**

The population increases in Chester County are exceeding projections. This simple statement affects the lives of nearly every resident because of the accompanying demands for services at both the county and municipal levels, the impact on schools, rising taxes, traffic, and erosion of the quality of life that has attracted new residents. In addition, when employees experience increasing difficulty finding affordable homes or cost of living increases become burdensome, the business community may reconsider the benefits of locating or remaining in the county.

### **Economic pressures make it hard for the farmer to survive.**

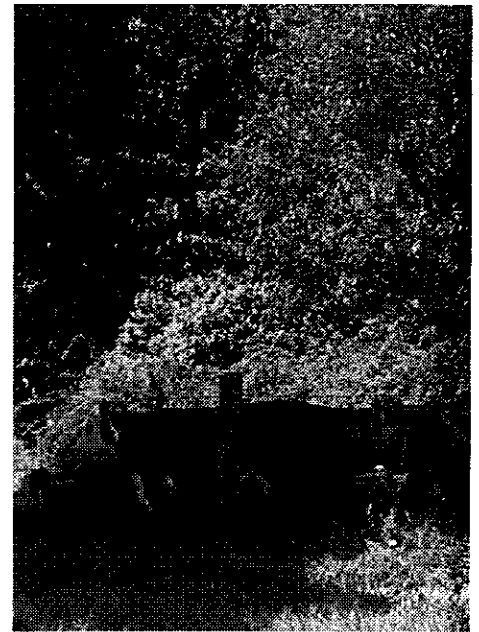
Survival of the farming community in West Bradford and around the county is dependent on a number of factors: locally available farm services, markets for crops, ability to move equipment on local roads, competitive prices for the inputs they need each season, and a next generation of farmers to take over the farms. As locally produced food becomes an ever more important facet of the food security issue, consumers will acquire an increased interest in helping the farmer maintain his economic viability.

### **Priority Values Translate into Common Ground**

The group reports uncovered considerable common ground, with the participants exhibiting strong agreement about the following priorities:

1. A desire for planning that maintains the historic values and remaining rural areas of the township. Regional planning if that is determined to be the best route.
2. As happens in nearly every Community Conversation, there is a call for “stop development” and imposition of a broad range of impact fees – neither of which is possible under the Municipal Planning Code. The only impact fee provisions under the MPC deal with road improvements adjacent to a development and open space, both directed by the comprehensive plan.
3. Water and air quality are important to the good health of the residents.

4. Preservation of the scenic views, wild life and natural areas. There was understanding that preserved land must have a function and provisions for ongoing maintenance, with the accompanying financial responsibility.
5. As much land preservation as possible, combined with understanding of the needs of working farmers.
6. Accountability on the part of the developers
7. Respect for citizen input
8. Accountability on the part of the elected and appointed township officials



## Findings

1. West Bradford residents want to participate in the planning process. Everyone in 7 of the 16 groups signed up as volunteers for future township committees and activities. This number far exceeded that of willing volunteers in any single, previous CC2020 Community Conversation.
2. The consequences of increased, often fast-moving traffic on narrow roads concern the residents -- especially in the area between Route 322 and the Strasburg Road. For instance:
  - Commuting drivers find it easier to access 322 at the light at Shadyside Road rather than at Sugarsbridge Road and 322 where there is no signal; creating a heavier traffic pattern on Marshallton–Thorndale Road and Shadyside. Actually, all three roads are heavily residential but are functioning as “small highways.”
  - Broad Run Road was considered a poor choice for increased traffic because of 1) the elementary school activity and 2) the number of turns necessary to reach Strasburg Road in turning right out of the school driveway.
  - Glenside Road, the most direct link to Downingtown and the immediate area’s only station served by both Amtrak and SEPTA, is a narrow, winding route through a residential area -- generally considered hazardous, especially during morning and evening commuter hours. Functional classification and implementation could have prevented much of the present situation. It is not too late to address these traffic issues, with the cooperation of residents and PennDOT.
3. As in most townships, too few residents are able (or wish) to set aside time to attend planning commission and regular township meetings. Consequently, they become vulnerable to the “sound bite syndrome,” making decisions for or against projects on the basis of hearsay or too little concrete information.
4. Because the questions arose in several groups, it seemed useful to inquire about the status of the Vision Quest Program and the Pennsylvania Clinical School at Embreeville. The Vision Quest Program for adjudicated youth is a national program that was formerly housed at Embreeville, but is no longer at that site. The Clinical School is a secure facility State program for youth sex offenders up to the age of 21. The residents have been placed there by the courts and pursue an academic program.



5. Traffic safety is high on the list of concerns (speeding, passing on double lines, sliding through stop signs or ignoring them altogether, failing to signal turns, driving small secondary roads as if highway conditions prevailed). There was mention of traffic control at the sports center being a problem. This seems to be a matter of driver habits, rather than a land planning issue, except that that all roads in West Bradford tend to function the same, with no designated hierarchy.

6. Diminishing opportunities to preserve open space translate into a desire to take advantage of any and all options for setting land aside – whether through purchase of development rights, donated easements or municipally-purchased land for park land and public-access preserves. (Appreciation was expressed for the proximity of the newly combined Embreeville Park and the Lenfest Preserve.)

7. The proposed development at Romansville was generally seen as appropriate because of its location on the Strasburg Road which, although possibly overused as a commuter route, is the best secondary road in the township. The historic existence of a small village at the not-quite-a true-crossroads contributes to its appropriateness as a Landscapes-responsive development. Comments about the plan to simplify the road intersection with a roundabout were positive. However, concern was expressed about W. Strasburg Road becoming a collector road and alternate route for trucks. The unanswered question is “Is it appropriate to add traffic to a road already approaching capacity?”

8. Marshallton has serious traffic and historic preservation concerns. The residents would welcome any assistance that might be forthcoming. They know they can't turn the clock back, but are not sure what options exist to effectively slow through-traffic. The “silent policemen” crossing signs are definitely slowing some of the traffic, but their survival is in question since the original 6 are now down to 2 – victims of bad driving.

9. While there was much head-nodding as the topic of taxes was added to the list of issues, it was interesting to note that no group chose to tackle it. Unfortunately, the recent Act I debacle did nothing to encourage any degree of optimism about tax reform.

10. Affordable homes, while a major topic county-wide, did not attract much attention at this meeting.

11. Regarding the subject of important players, property owners took the leading position for their decisions about the future of their land. The Planning Commission is regarded as the critical source of a coherent vision for the township's future and also for development of the supportive ordinances. The supervisors' decisions will lead the way in fulfilling The Plan and taking the township into the regional planning arena.

12. At the end of the evening, when an inquiry was made about meeting new people, every hand went up. A number of positive comments were made about the sense of camaraderie that developed during the discussions

## Conclusions

1. West Bradford seems to “stand alone,” not firmly connected with its regional neighbors. Although it is part of the Downingtown School District, West Bradford is the only municipality below Route 30. Neither is it really connected to West Chester or the Western Region municipalities, even though it is contiguous with East Fallowfield.
2. In light of the expectation of continuing development pressures in W. Bradford, regional planning is an important option in thinking about greater land preservation. The challenge will be the choice of regional partners.
3. The supervisors and the planning commission can benefit from the Community Conversation model on a smaller scale when a contentious issue looms, so that varied opinions may be heard in a respectful environment.
4. Essentially, West Bradford residents and municipal officials have two choices:
  - 1) To embark upon a creating a comprehensive plan that fully expresses a vision for the future of the township and then commit to enforcing it.
  - or
  - 2) Respond to development proposals, one by one, that rarely reflect sensitivity to the township’s vision – and watch the highly valued community fabric erode.
5. Marshallton residents would benefit from professional assistance in dealing with the issues that impact the village’s survival as a historic treasure.
6. The Conversation participants were an interesting mix of residents with the largest number having lived in West Bradford 10 years or less, but with a similar sized total of longer term residents – all the way to two gentlemen with a lifetime residency of 78 and 83 years. They represented wonderful diversity for the discussion groups.
7. West Bradford is regarded as a well-run township where increased attention from developers disturbs the residents. They want to know how to contribute to preserving the remnants of the rural atmosphere.
8. The appropriate level of police resources seems to be an unresolved issue.
9. An unusually high number of willing volunteers surfaced at the Conversation. This should please the supervisors and planning commission for its demonstration of interest in contributing to the community. Free time is hardly plentiful as elected and appointed officials know better than most. Their commitment of time and energy tends to far exceed initial expectations, no matter how efficient the support staff may be.



## Recommendations

1. Solid thoughtful planning is the township’s best option in being responsive to the residents in determining the future of the township. The municipal officials and the community must work together to create a solid vision strengthened by the necessary ordinances that are necessary to its fulfillment.
2. The interest in land preservation expressed at the Conversation translates into an ideal



opportunity to convene an open space task force responsible for conducting inventories of 1) as yet undeveloped properties, 2) preserved properties, 3) trails. Look to maximize the benefits of adjacency of preserved land, especially farmland, and potential trail connections. Explore the options for funding open space acquisition.

3. Organize a local continuing education program for training in planning, not just a once-and-done, perhaps a follow up of this community conversation. Access grants for local citizen training, and planning courses. Learn what the limits are in Pennsylvania, who is responsible for what.

#### 4. Tasks for the residents

Determine the extent of your potential contributions to strengthening the community. We always find time for the things we really want to do. Try these for a start:

- Attend one township, planning commission, or school board meeting a month. Take a friend along.
- Invite a new neighbor over for coffee or potluck supper.
- Share the ride to work.
- Tour your township web site -- regularly.
- Subscribe to the local or county newspaper. Read hometown news.
- Don't rely on "sound bites" when you weigh in on an issue. Take time to get the whole story.
- Say "good morning" to a neighbor you don't know – and smile.

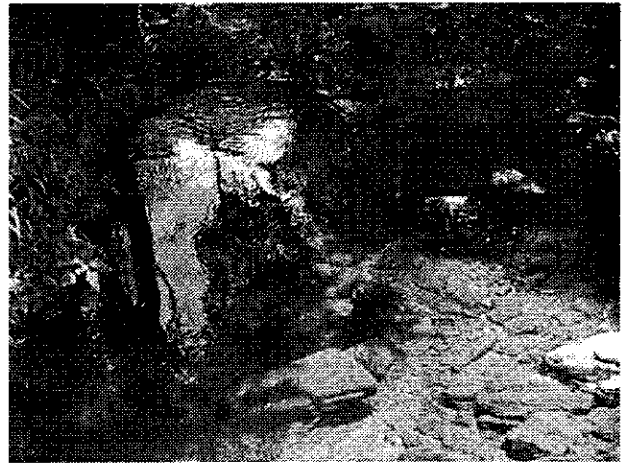
5. Consider establishing a municipal land trust, and determine the extent of support for an open space bond issue referendum

6. Make the most of the major land trust programs (Brandywine Conservancy and Natural Lands Trust are among the most active in the immediate area) and the County's Agricultural Preservation Program. Land placed under easement by donation bears no cost to the township; during 2007 improved benefits are available to the donating landowner. When agricultural development rights are purchased either by the county alone or in partnership with municipalities, remember that ownership stays with the farmer. In both instances, the owner is responsible for land stewardship that meets sound environmental standards. High quality soils are preserved to grow crops rather than houses, school taxes and traffic are not increased, nor does the township face the financial challenges of providing additional services. The township retains more of its rural character and the natural resource protection is forever.

7. West Bradford is about to embark upon a review of the Comprehensive Plan. This should be a vital and living document, never relegated to sitting on the shelf gathering dust. The plan should be revisited each year by the planning commission in the context of assessing the status of each activity. It should be institutionalized into the regular functions of the township decision-making process. Each potential action of the township and its various bodies/agencies should be measured for consistency with the plan.

8. Revisit zoning for open space.

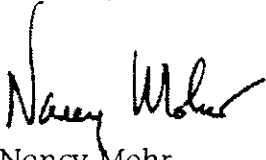
9. Create a historic preservation committee to address township-wide concerns and opportunities.
10. Arrange for new residents to receive copies of the West Bradford history to encourage respect for the township's traditions and historic treasures. Developers should be encouraged to provide the books to new home buyers.



11. Join the Western Chester County Regional Committee effort to create a regional safety program. West Bradford's section of Strasburg Road is an important component of the traffic pattern. The activities may include a safety audit of certain roads or intersections in which volunteers could be of value.
12. Use the model of the Community Conversation to address projects with a potential for contention – before the rumors start flying. Allow residents a chance to identify issues and prioritize their concerns (dot exercise). This gives both the township and the applicant the opportunity to provide answers in a non-confrontational manner. This might even be a two-meeting process; the first to establish the issues, the second to share information and, if necessary, generate ideas about solutions where common ground seems elusive. Where lengthy, often difficult conditional use hearings are anticipated, all the participants can benefit.
13. In the best interest of dealing with increased traffic, encourage developers to bring their sketch plans to the township before getting PennDOT approvals.
14. Strengthen the township's regional visibility by participating in the Western Chester County Regional Committee monthly meetings and projects.
15. Planning education for supervisors and all ABC members (Authorities, Boards, Commissions) is an excellent investment. Funding should be set aside for this purpose. Readily available resources include the Master Planner Program at [www.CC2020.org](http://www.CC2020.org) ; American Planning Association courses at [www.planning.org](http://www.planning.org) and the offerings of the Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors (PSATS) at [www.psats.org](http://www.psats.org) Continuing education credits are available.
16. Develop an individual strategic plan for each issue or objective. Too many municipalities pay the price of a flawed ordinance.
17. Take advantage of the participants' enthusiasm. The wide range of initiatives they would like to help launch as well as the support they offer for existing committees should be utilized. In the Appendix, we have listed not only all the issues that were identified and their rankings but also a long list of action items that beg for cooperative energy.
18. And finally, choose change carefully. You have choices. Don't let change "just happen," and then have regrets. Re-examining the past should be a matter of learning lessons from history, not revisiting former roadblocks and letting them limit forward motion. And yes, that can happen – but hopefully not in West Bradford.

The Advisory Board and staff of Chester County 2020 appreciate the opportunity to conduct a Community Conversation for West Bradford – and for the anonymous contribution that covered our expenses. Each of these Conversations is truly a partnership, with the municipality organizing the invitations, registration, meeting place, and box supper while we enjoy meeting and working with so many residents. We look forward to keeping in touch as you pursue the demanding but laudable task of preserving the most valued characteristics of your community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nancy Mohr". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "N".

Nancy Mohr  
Executive Director  
Chester County 2020

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX I

#### Issues and their Ratings

Issue	Rating
Farmland/open space preservation	103
Traffic safety	74
Taxes	41
Too much new construction, too fast	37
Water quality and supply	21
Alternative energy grants	19
Emergency services	18
Promotion of green building techniques	16
Multi-municipal cooperation	14
Litter	14
Vision Quest relocation	11
Creation of new trails	11
Sewage management	11
Storm water management	10
Road impact fees	9
Hunting ban	9
Vehicle noise pollution	8
Township control of state roads	7
Imbalance: residential vs. ag. zoning	6
Affordable housing	5
School overcrowding	5
Stream preservation/recreation opportunities	4
Township-wide code enforcement	4
Megan's Law updates	4
Embreeville complex	4
Diminishing sense of community	4
One ZIP code for entire township	4
Smoke-free township	3
Permanence of municipal decisions	2
Dog noise law	2

### APPENDIX II

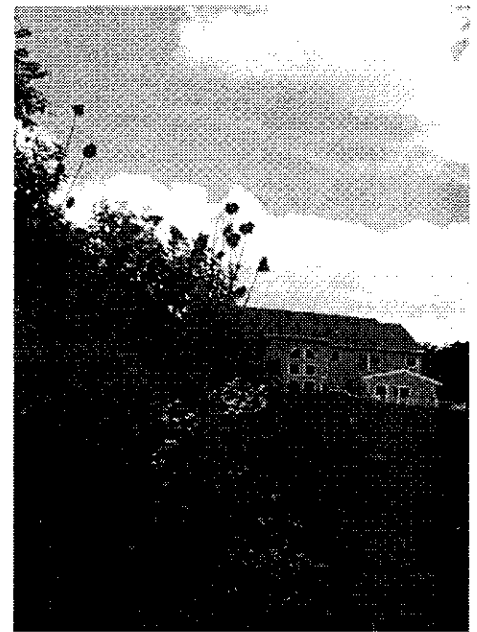
#### Summary of Group Reports

##### Preferred future

Conservation trusts in place  
Educated population  
Restricted house-to-property size,  
Township-owned alternative energy  
Preserved open space, water quality, quality of life  
Controlled development

##### Action Items

Ideas for open space preservation  
Community farming  
Solar farms





### Common plan to achieve goals

- School outreach
- Tax reform
- Email campaign
- Update code
- Full time solicitor
- Land trust
- Preserve open space
- Limit development
- Find models in other areas.
- Learn how we can influence legislation
- Staying connected, encouraging pro-active involvement
- Accountability
- Allow community to be involved

### How?

- Code changes
- Utilize local committees
- Coordinated effort
- Better communication
- Citizens' network
- Separate residential and agricultural zoning
- Raise money
- Inventory open space,
- Impact fees
- Infrastructure planning;
- Tax incentives
- Attend township meetings

### Ways to Work Together

- Local committees
- Land trusts
- Education
- Outreach
- Secure easements
- Citizen action group
- Don't compromise with deep-pocket builders
- Land trusts
- Redevelopment
- Open space referendum
- Petition local officials,
- Use community organizations
- Appeal to affluent citizens
- Group meetings like this one
- Staying connected
- Pro-active involvement
- Improve communications
- Involve state and local officials – require accountability