

## CHAPTER 4

# Community Vision and Priorities

To be reflective of the values and goals of a community, the comprehensive plan must be representative. On April 28, 1999, the residents and Zoning Commission noted that the essence of Berlin Township is:

1. Open spaces
2. Rural feel as characterized by:
  - Agriculture and preservation of agricultural buildings when agriculture is gone.
  - Green Space between developments.
  - Preserved ravines, jurisdictional wetlands, slopes greater than 20%, trees, and fence lines.
  - Access to Alum Creek State Park.
  - Large lots.
  - Mature trees on scenic roads; rough road edge, farm fences, split rail.
  - Large agricultural areas, retention of open space along roads to remind of the former agricultural land.
  - Wildlife corridors maintained.
  - Parks/green areas, established in neighborhoods to replace farms that disappear.
  - Greenbelts/bike paths which tie together neighborhoods, perhaps using drainage way or utility corridors.
3. Planned developments with a mix of land uses (residential, commercial, industrial, institutional) for a balanced tax base.
4. Low level lighting, downward cast for commercial uses.
5. Effective landscape buffers between commercial and residential uses.
6. Diverse housing types.
7. Ideally, to be less auto dependent, by designing connecting paths between developments.
8. Moderate traffic.



During the process that led to the 1999 plan, the Steering Committee formulated a set of “likes” or strengths and “dislikes” or weaknesses about the township. For the 2010 updated plan, the current Zoning Commission was asked to assign a ranking for each item based on whether the respondent thought that item was still relevant and to what extent. While not intended to be a scientific survey, the results are intended to generally honor the goals of the 1999 plan while updating them to meet the needs of today. A chart detailing the strengths/weaknesses identified by the commission can be found in Appendix B. The results, which are summarized below, are not intended to be all inclusive or ranked by relevance, but merely a summary of findings.

### Strengths

- Open green areas and natural resources including Alum Creek Park with fresh air, wildlife, recreation, and a rural agricultural atmosphere lacking excessive development with a small town feeling.
- The ideal location allows for a non-transient, diverse community of low-density housing with appreciating property values, large lot sizes, good utilities, and commercial development in well-defined areas.
- Other attributes include the low crime rate and quality schools.

## Weaknesses

- More industrial/commercial development is needed to stabilize the tax base and moderate the high taxes.
- Lack of central focus or town center as well as a lack of and little variety of shopping, entertainment, and jobs.
- Signs of rapid growth including growth of schools, undesirable development, and excessive land ownership by developers.
- Issues with utilities including not enough utilities where needed and overhead power lines as well as public safety concerns (traffic control, need for full-time fire department) and potential pollution concerns (noise and light pollution).

## Vision Statement

When Berlin Township is built out, we would like to be a community with a rural feel and character. Rural roads would have a rough edge, with fencing that reminds us of the rural past, and mature landscaping to replace fence/tree rows that are removed. We would like areas with low-density, large lots, as well as areas with greater density and diversity of housing.

We would like planned, commercial and industrial uses, with attractive landscaping in commercial corridors and at entrances to neighborhoods. We would like useable green spaces throughout the community. We would like to retain historic and agricultural structures that give a sense of our heritage. We would like to preserve unique scenic views and our critical natural resources such as ravines, floodplains, wetlands, and forests.

We would like to see a center of the township, perhaps at Historic Village of Cheshire, where a traditional village with neighborhood shops would be an attractive destination. We would like to retain the small town feel in the human scale of structures, the use of natural materials and traditional structural colors. Roads should remain as narrow as possible, but safely carry the traffic.

## Goals

Similar to the process used to evaluate the Strengths and Weaknesses as discussed above, the 2010 Zoning Commission ranked the 1999 Goals. A complete and detailed listing of the goals and assigned rankings may be referenced in Appendix B. Based on the results, which are summarized and combined below in no particular order, all previous goals appear to be applicable today.

- To preserve the rural, scenic character of Berlin Township through preservation of natural resources, open spaces, agriculture, and low density, single-family, diverse housing. This includes maintaining wildlife corridors, preserving rural look along township roads, and dense landscape buffering between incompatible uses.
- Create a heart of the township at Historic Village of Cheshire with mixed uses.
- Promote passive/active recreational activities including linking developments with green spaces and paths.
- To encourage commercial and light industrial development in planned districts to broaden jobs and tax base while limiting land use and density to suitability, utility availability, and carrying capacity of land infrastructure.
- Determine and implement an appropriate land use mix while discouraging overdevelopment or pre-mature development and maintaining services needed for predominantly rural/low density communities and management controls to limit key access points to minimize highway congestion.
- To implement and maintain the land use plan and enforce zoning regulations.

- To expand township services at a rate to ensure public health and safety.
- To acquire suitable land for the township and school future needs.

In addition to ranking the Goals above, members of the Zoning Commission were encouraged to name other ideas that could be discussed as new Goals. Those comments included:

- Create a Berlin Township Parks Board;
- Fair signage rules for the community;
- Trails to areas like adjoining township trails, Alum Creek, new Delaware shopping plaza, schools, recreation;
- Actively pursue the types of industry that would decrease the tax burden to residents;
- Township enforcement of zoning violation to ensure neighborhoods remain clutter free;
- Increase commercial areas especially on 36/37 (need sewer);
- Continue to work to preserve and protect township boundaries from annexation;
- Require developers to donate land for recreational areas (example: Mariner's Watch has a great deal of open space, and it's all passive and unused).

Finally, the township distributed surveys to all township residents. A total of 100 responses were received. The following is a summary of the **land use related** sentiments and is not intended to be all inclusive or exhaustive. The complete survey results are included in Appendix B.

- Zoning should be utilized to prevent annexation.
- Keep large lot sizes and preserve the right mix of housing density by utilizing zoning restrictions and controlling growth to minimize impact on schools.
- Develop more recreational opportunities such as a recreational center with a pool, library, paths/parks for family use, sports fields, playgrounds (perhaps in the Historic Village of Cheshire area to create a town center), bike trails. More green space is needed.
- Update the home occupation regulations and signage standards to promote businesses.
- Encourage retail centers and commercial use in appropriate areas as well as affordable housing.
- Ensure farmland preservation and maintenance of a local food source
- Work towards extension of sewer services
- Address high tax issues.