



Broad regional planning needed

Metro-York is right on need for land-use coordination - but include the whole county.

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Nov 21, 2007 — This is the second in a series of eight editorials focusing on the Metro-York proposal put forth by YorkCounts:

Recommendation 2:

Engage in additional meaningful regional planning, ideally incorporating all of the municipalities in the heart of York County: YorkCounts concludes that integrated land use, infrastructure and transportation planning must be the foundation for determining how our region will look in the future. From sewers to zoning, some of our communities have developed excellent plans within their own borders; others have established strong inter-municipal plans; in both cases, elected leaders and administrators should be commended for their innovative efforts. Regional planning would strengthen the York area from an economic development perspective. Also, state law already empowers communities to plan regionally. Now the best of the existing plans should be coordinated, enhanced and integrated into a true

comprehensive plan for the Metro-York region. In addition to land use, infrastructure and transportation elements, a truly comprehensive plan should address at least two more issues: housing affordability (no matter what their income level - people should be able to have choices for quality, affordable housing throughout the region) and tax consequences (see the next recommendation).

Our thoughts: Metro-York is certainly right that our community would benefit greatly from good regional land-use planning.

Unfortunately, this recommendation might be too late and too narrowly focused.

Implementing such regional land-use plans can take a long time as they move through various municipal boards.

It's worth coordinating land-use plans in the Metro-York region. But look at the boundaries of that region: It encompasses the York, York Suburban, West York, Central and Dallastown school districts.

These are areas that either already "built out," with little room for new development, or are already sprawling with suburban development - with literally thousands of new houses planned under current zoning.

By the time a Metro-York regional comprehensive plan is completed, how much land will be left that could still be developed?

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A plan that focuses solely on the Metro-York region might be no more effective than rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic.

Admittedly, the heart of the county is not exactly sinking. But it is in some perilous waters. And the icebergs are mainly in the outskirts of the county where Marylanders and other newcomers are floating into our community.

What we really need is a good countywide comprehensive plan that directs development toward where infrastructure already exists and away from places where expensive new schools and sewers would have to be built - destroying precious green space. As it happens, we do have such a county plan. It's just not easily enforceable. Municipalities are largely in charge of land use.

While state law "empowers" regional municipal planning, it doesn't mandate it. Will that ever change? The movers and shakers of Metro-York could lobby state lawmakers in that direction. But they might be more successful lobbying municipal leaders in our own county to closely follow the county's plan.

That plan generally encourages development in areas with existing infrastructure (such as the overall Metro-York region) and encourages redevelopment of underused commercial and industrial sites (such as those in York city).

Bottom line on this recommendation: Broaden the scope. The county must focus on a plan that encompasses outlying areas. Preservation must

be brought now to the less developed parts of the county while simultaneously creating a coordinated Metro-York plan.

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Read the entire Metro-York proposal at <http://www.yorkcounts.org> . Read previous YDR editorials on the Metro-York plan at <http://www.ydr.com/Opinion> .

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