



Top 10 Myths about Multi-Municipal Planning

The 2000 Amendments to the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (Acts 67 & 68) paved the way for communities to engage in comprehensive planning efforts that extend beyond municipal boundaries, also known as multi-municipal planning. LGA is proud to have assisted many of these initiatives take off through its Multi-Municipal Planning Grant Program. In the course of administering the grant and while developing training on multi-municipal training programs, we have talked to a lot of municipal officials about why they do, or do not engage in multi-municipal planning. Sometimes the reasons for not engaging in multi-municipal planning are rooted in a number of misconceptions. To address these misconceptions, LGA borrows an idea from the late night talk shows and presents, "Top 10 Myths of Multi-Municipal Planning" and correspondingly, presents some information to the contrary:

Myth #1: Multi-Municipal Plans Only Relate to Land Use

The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) enable municipalities to identify and address issues that cross municipal borders, such as sewer and water service, stormwater management, emergency services, agricultural preservation, transportation issues and development of all kinds. Other area wide planning efforts such as strategic planning can also take place within a multi-municipal planning effort.

Myth #2: Our Community Recently Updated our Comprehensive Plan, a Multi-Municipal Plan is Not Needed

An existing comprehensive plan for a single municipality is of great benefit because existing conditions are documented with up to date information and the community visioning process provides valuable insight. This plan will save time and money for communities that have an interest in planning together, and should not be discarded or overlooked. However, municipalities that have prepared a comprehensive plan for their community alone have lost the flexibility of allocating uses throughout the overall planning area. Further, the benefit of a multi-municipal plan as a means to make your community more attractive for state investment is not available in a single jurisdiction plan.

Myth #3: A Multi-Municipal Plan will Just Sit on the Shelf

Perhaps it will, but only if you let it! There a few factors that will determine if the multi municipal plan is implemented and utilized and you should be sure to address them in your planning effort. Does the plan address major issues impacting the community? Is the plan grounded by a community visioning process that involved a wide range of stakeholders? If your multi municipal plan does both of these things, then the elected bodies must refer to this document for guidance and keep it updated.

Myth #4: Multi-Municipal Plans are Too Expensive

Communities can take advantage of numerous funding sources to offset the costs associated with the development of a multi-municipal plan. The State's Land Use Planning and Technical Assistance Program (LUPTAP) can provide financial support for up to 50% of these costs. In addition, the Local Government Academy's Multi Municipal Comprehensive Planning Grant Program can provide up to \$7,500 per municipality involved in the planning process. There is also an array of other programs that can be used for specific elements of the plan.

Myth #5: Multi-Municipal Plans Diminish Local Control

This is a common misconception; in fact, engaging in a multi-municipal planning effort actually increases local control. Remember, that if a community develops a comprehensive plan alone, it must under state law allow for all uses (commercial, industrial, residential, etc.) within their own borders. Likewise, that same community has no way to work with its neighbors—who are likewise bound by state law. This means local leaders have less ability to manage the development of all areas that impact their residents. Most municipalities already engaged a number of multi-municipal activities ranging from mutual aid to joint services. Local leaders must decide—is working with the neighbors with whom they are already cooperating more or less local control than state law?

Myth #6: The County is Developing a Comprehensive Plan, So Why Should We Do It?

County comprehensive plans are fairly broad, and do not provide the level of detail that a multi-municipal plan does. Since all land use control is at the local level, it is wise for both a county plan and various multi-municipal plans to coexist. Your multi-municipal plan will provide the fine-tuning that represents the interests and needs of your community, and should complement the countywide plan. To assure coordination, the MPC has provisions that ensure the compatibility of both planning efforts.

Myth #7: Isn't This a Function of our Planning Commission?

Local communities receive great benefit from their planning commissions, and their work is done best when supported by effective planning and policy-making done by the governing board. Even if the planning commission functions so well that it can serve as the project lead on any planning effort—multi-municipal and otherwise—leadership on multi-municipal efforts from the elected officials is crucial in order to attain the best outcome.

Myth #8: Isn't This a Trick that Environmentalists Use to Stop Development?

Research has demonstrated that communities with clear and comprehensive land use plans and zoning laws attract development by providing developers with a clear picture of how and where development can occur. A multi-municipal plan creates a more structured and appealing offering to potential developers. Furthermore, municipalities within a multi-municipal plan are authorized to develop tax base sharing

agreements. These agreements allow the burden and benefits of development to be shared and contribute to the economic health of all the municipalities in the plan, instead of these same communities competing for such development.

Myth #9: The Process is Too Time Consuming and Not Worth the Investment

A well-organized planning process can be accomplished in about one year. Given the benefits described above, this is a relatively small investment for communities to make.

Myth #10: This Sounds Like a Backdoor Attempt to Merge or Consolidate Municipalities

Multi municipal planning and municipal mergers and consolidation are two completely different issues. Any degree of intergovernmental cooperation up to and including municipal mergers are completely in the control of the local governing bodies and citizens. The presence of a multi municipal plan doesn't necessarily encourage or enable a merger or consolidation to take place. The premise behind multi municipal planning is to recognize that the activities of one municipality inevitably impact those of neighboring communities, and by jointly addressing these issues; municipalities increase the chances of overcoming them.