Planning Area
Encompassing the city of Lancaster and ten other municipalities in central Lancaster County, a 154-square-mile area with a population of more than 198,000, Growing Together represents one of the largest and most ambitious multi-municipal planning efforts in Pennsylvania. Participating municipalities include six second-class townships (East Hempfield, East Lampeter, Lancaster, Manor, West Hempfield, and West Lampeter), one first-class township (Manheim), three boroughs (East Petersburg, Millersville, and Mountville), and one third-class city (Lancaster).

Well-known for its rich farmland and agricultural heritage, central Lancaster County has experienced rapid development in recent decades, growing by 27 percent between 1980 and 2000. Further growth is anticipated in future years, but at a somewhat slower rate. Population is expected to reach about 240,000 by 2030.

Growing Together builds upon a strong growth management foundation established by the Lancaster County Comprehensive Plan, which in the 1990s proposed a series of growth areas aimed at concentrating development around existing communities and protecting farmland. The growth areas have been adopted by 59 of the county’s 60 municipalities.

Status
Completed in April 2006, the plan was adopted by the eleven participating municipalities in April 2007. By July 2008, all the municipalities had approved an implementation agreement.

Plan Development
Growing Together is an initiative of the Lancaster Inter-Municipal Committee (LIMC), a council of governments dating back to the 1960s. Discussions about launching a large-scale regional plan for central Lancaster County began in 2001. LIMC members...
responded favorably to the idea, partly because their long history of working together helped make them comfortable with inter-governmental cooperation, and also because they believed that collaboration in land use planning would enhance their ability to protect farmland—a goal to which most were already firmly committed. Other motivations included the need to deal with mounting traffic congestion and the desire to coordinate transportation planning.

Nevertheless, there were some reservations because of fears that the regional plan might reduce municipalities’ autonomy or override their individual land use policies. By early 2003, eleven LIMC municipalities had signed an inter-governmental planning agreement to launch the planning process. Only Pequea, a mostly rural township south of Lancaster, declined to participate.

To guide the process, LIMC hired a planning team consisting of two firms, ACP Visioning of New York and Thomas Comitta Associates of West Chester. Consultant costs amounting to $300,000 were fully covered by grants from LUPTAP and Lancaster County. Staff of the Lancaster County Planning Commission participated actively in the planning process, and the Commission held a voting position on the steering committee. The process of plan development took about three years and included some 44 steering committee meetings as well as eight public meetings.

While all eleven municipalities voted unanimously to adopt the final plan, about half of them adopted Growing Together in conjunction with existing comprehensive plans. One participating municipality, East Lampeter Township, is involved in a second multi-municipal planning effort known as the Conestoga Valley Joint Comprehensive Plan. In an unusual adoption agreement, East Lampeter has adopted both multi-municipal plans, but has stipulated that in case of conflict the Conestoga Valley plan would take precedence.

**Features of the Plan**

Building on the recently updated county comprehensive plan, Growing Together recommends that 100 percent of future growth within the next 25 years occur within designated growth areas (DGAs). Combined with Lancaster County’s award-winning purchase-of-development-rights program, the plan provides for strong protection of agricultural uses outside of designated growth areas. The plan clearly calculates future land use needs, including housing, and demonstrates that adequate developable land is still available within DGAs and that future population and housing needs will be accommodated.

Growing Together goes beyond designating growth areas to identify Growth Opportunity Areas—focal areas that will accommodate compact, mixed-used development. The following language from the plan shows the intent:

"Growth Opportunity Areas (GOAs) represent a distinctive element of future land use within Central Lancaster County. They were identified by the Steering Committee in response to public comment that future growth should be more compact, involve integrated uses, and be consistent with the walkable urbanity of older neighborhoods in the boroughs. GOAs respond to the critical land use question of Growing Together: where and how should growth occur? … The Steering Committee identified and carefully refined a total of 35 Growth Opportunity Areas. These areas share the following characteristics.

- Larger than 40 acres;
- Bordered by existing development;
- Served by major roads; and
- Served by or accessible to public sewer and public water service.

The GOAs encompass a total of 3,039 buildable acres, which represent 38 percent of the total buildable area inside the DGAs. The plan recommends that municipalities provide incentives and regulatory tools so GOAs become the target of exemplary intensive development in the coming years."

The designation of shared land uses—uses that serve the entire region and need not be accommodated in every municipality—is not a major emphasis of the plan. For the most part, Growing Together builds upon prior planning and zoning that provided for a wide range of land uses and housing types in each municipality. The plan states, however, that because existing industrial areas and commercial areas are sufficient to serve the entire region, there is no need for additional commercial and industrial areas in other locations. Nor does the plan foresee a need for new landfills, airports, or county parks.

Growing Together includes among its goals “revitalizing and energizing downtown Lancaster City,” and offers a number of specific strategies including: a market analysis to assess the city’s viability as a retail destination, multi-municipal funding for a strategic investment plan for the city, traffic calming measures, an increased number and more strategic deployment of police officers, and “a
mechanism to enable Lancaster City and the other LIMC municipalities to partner on urban revitalization.  

Implementation
The recently approved implementation agreement establishes a Land Use Advisory Board composed of one representative and one alternate from each municipality. The Board will review municipal actions such as zoning amendments, share information on developments of regional impact, and encourage a regional transfer-of-development-rights program.

One township, East Hempfield, has rejected a proposed Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND) ordinance in response to organized opposition from residents living near Growth Opportunity Areas. The residents were particularly concerned about plans for a large TND project that would have included 3,000 housing units, to be constructed over a period of 20 years, along with substantial retail development. Some of the project’s opponents supported TND in principle but felt this particular project would be too large, while others objected to the concept of TND, arguing that existing low-density suburban neighborhoods were already “traditional.”

Whether the East Hempfield revolt against TND presages a more extensive backlash against compact, mixed-use development in Lancaster County remains to be seen. While public opposition to compact development could pose a challenge to the plan’s goal of targeting future development to existing growth areas, the Growing Together plan has helped forge a consensus among municipalities and the county that provides an important framework for future growth.