3. **Edinboro/Franklin/Washington Multi-Municipal Comprehensive Plan (Erie County)**

**Planning Area**

This plan covers the borough of Edinboro and the townships of Franklin and Washington. Home of Edinboro University of Pennsylvania, Edinboro is a town of about 7,000 people bordering Edinboro Lake, a natural glacial lake of about 250 acres. Washington Township surrounds Edinboro and shares some of the lakeshore. Franklin Township borders Washington Township on the northwest.

With a combined population of about 13,000, the planning area grew by nearly 19 percent between 1980 and 1990, but lost 1.4 percent of its population between 1990 and 2000. All of that loss occurred in Edinboro. Franklin and Washington townships continued to grow, by 13 and 10 percent respectively, during the 1990s.

**Status**

The plan was initiated in 2002 and adopted by the three municipalities in 2005. There is no formal implementation agreement.

**Plan Development**

The three municipalities decided to prepare a multi-municipal plan because their existing comprehensive plans were out of date and they realized a regional plan would be more cost effective than three individual plans. Two additional townships that are part of the same school districted declined an invitation to participate.

Unlike most of the plans we have reviewed, in which regional organizations (usually county planning commissions or COGs) played important coordinating roles, this planning process was administered entirely by the three municipalities. They formed a joint planning commission consisting of at least one elected official, a planning commission member from each municipality, and, for Edinboro and Washington Township, a staff member. (Franklin Township had no professional staff.) Washington Township’s zoning officer took the lead in managing the process.
Tom Graney of GCCA, Inc. served as planning consultant. The Erie County Planning Commission provided assistance with mapping. The cost of plan preparation, which amounted to $34,000, was covered by LUPTAP funding and municipal contributions.

The planning process included surveys of local leaders, town hall meetings in the three municipalities, and a citizen survey. Public participation revealed a strong preference for lower-density development, preserving the rural character of the townships, and protecting Edinboro Lake.

A major challenge involved reconciling longstanding tensions between Edinboro and Washington Township regarding sewers. Washington Township built its own sewage treatment plant in the 1960s because Edinboro's facility would not accept the township's wastewater. The township's plant is no longer adequate, and its effluent has proved to be the major source of nutrient pollution in Edinboro Lake. A consent order issued by the Department of Environmental Protection in 2002 required the two municipalities to find a cooperative solution to their sewage problems.

**Features of the Plan**

This plan begins with a detailed summary of the public participation process and survey results. Responding to the public’s preference for preserving rural character, it emphasizes use of the Growing Greener conservation subdivision technique to preserve land and manage low-density development.

The plan identifies Edinboro Borough and proximate parts of Washington Township where sewer service is available as the “core development” area to which growth and development are targeted. Places outside of the core development area are designated agricultural or for low-density residential development.

Although the plan finds that current housing in Edinboro Borough is of adequate density and variety to meet the region’s forecasted needs, it identifies a large demand for additional senior housing. Regarding transportation, the plan recommends that special corridor studies be conducted to address traffic congestion, especially on Route 6N, a major road linking the study area to I-79.

The plan states that it is to be used as the basis of future land use sharing agreements, and that municipalities would be expected to revise zoning ordinances to be consistent with the future land use map.

However, while the three municipalities discussed the possibility of sharing less desirable uses (adult services, junk yards, and mobile home parks), they were unable to reach consensus on land use sharing arrangements.

**Implementation**

Following adoption of the plan, the three municipalities considered joint zoning, but the idea was abandoned when Washington Township officials decided to move ahead on their own with comprehensive rezoning. They were eager to implement the plan’s land use recommendations and felt joint zoning would take too much time. The township’s rezoning included changes to accommodate a growth area west of Edinboro and downzoning a section east of the borough, where sewer service is not available, from residential (R2) to rural conservation. These revisions were accomplished within a year and half of the plan’s adoption. Franklin Township has been slower to update its land use ordinances, but it is now doing so with the help of a LUPTAP grant.

In addition, the municipalities have followed through on plan recommendations by conducting a study of the Route 6N corridor and by working with developers on senior housing projects.

Perhaps the most significant outcome of the planning process has been an agreement between Edinboro and Washington Township to resolve the lake’s pollution problems. The agreement was not included in the multi-municipal plan document, but as a result of the process the two municipalities decided to prepare a joint sewage facilities (Act 537) plan. The Act 537 plan has led to an agreement whereby Washington Township will pay the full costs of an upgrade to Edinboro’s treatment plant. This will allow the township to abandon its own underperforming plant, the principal source of lake pollution, and pipe its sewage to Edinboro’s facility. In return, Edinboro will grant the township a seat on its sewer authority’s board. Officials from the two municipalities say they never would have arrived at this solution had they not worked together on the multi-municipal plan.

The relationships fostered by the planning process have led to other kinds of collaboration as well. For example, Franklin Township is now contracting with Washington Township for snow plowing services, and Washington Township has avoided having to purchase a new road grader by borrowing one from Franklin Township when necessary.