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Pike County is Growing Naturally

It is no surprise that Pike County is Growing Naturally. The County’s high quality natural resources and its broad base of public lands create a rural atmosphere and an exceptional quality of life for residents. Natural resources and public lands have attracted residents and visitors to Pike County for over a century. After all, Pike County is one of the closest destinations for enjoying the outdoors for more than 12 million people living in the major metropolitan areas to the east. The proximity of the County to the New York City and other metropolitan areas and the exceptional lifestyle which Pike County can provide combine to make it an attractive place to visit and live. Our growth over the past four decades has shown how important these qualities are. Since 1970, Pike County’s residential population has grown by staggering 385%. This number does not include the thousands of tourists who visit the area on weekends or vacations. Once visitors see what this area has to offer, they often decide to stay.

We know Pike County will continue to grow, and it will be important as we move into the future to encourage growth that respects and preserves Pike County’s most sensitive natural resources. This balance can only be achieved through thoughtful planning and implementation of best management practices.

Pike County and its Office of Community Planning are key players in helping our County and our communities develop the tools needed to encourage growth and guide it in a manner that respects the sensitive natural, cultural, and historic features which make Pike County unique. Pike County’s fourteen local municipalities are also critical players shaping the future landscape of the county through comprehensive planning and land use ordinances. Our professional staff has implemented “smart growth” strategies and best planning and management practices. Our County and our local communities must address this important balance on their own. An outward and involved citizenry plays an equally important role in the future character and complexion of Pike County’s landscapes.

Smart growth helps communities shape the future. With appropriate planning, local governments can make land use decisions and development decisions that will improve our communities, overall quality of life by protecting the best of their unique economic, political, social, and environmental characteristics.

Understand how we grow into the future needs to be based on analyses of where we have grown historically and where development exists, then laying a thoughtful plan that will act as a guide into the future. With these tools and best planning practices, coupled with the support and involvement from local, county, and state government officials and the public, Pike County can, and will, continue to grow smarter.

Current Residential Development

This Pike County Office of Community Planning completed a mapping analysis to identify existing residential subdivisions in the county. The map serves as a tool to help us better understand the scale of existing residential development, what potential still exists for future development, how we might further develop our county’s greenway network as an asset to residents in these subdivisions, and how we might better plan for infrastructure needs that they require in the future.

The analysis and mapping was created using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology as well as mapping surveys, historic development maps, and other planning information and resources. GIS technology allowed professional planners to map the development data to better analyze the data spatially. This information included number of lots, developed lots, total acres, source disposal, and water supply methods, school district, and forest fire department, and other data. The location of the county’s residential developments in relation to public lands, lakes, highways, and municipalities is also shown. (Note: the map and data refers to residential development only; commercial development is not included.)

This map is an important tool in order to update and improve. There are developments proposed that will need to be added to the map. GIS technology allows for future change as well as feedback. The map is updated.

Marcellus Shale

As we plan for the future of our county and our region, a critical new challenge and opportunity has presented itself in the form of the Marcellus Shale. Municipalities and the county must begin the process of integrating the prospects of Marcellus Shale activities into the existing community and county planning for the future. Landowners must assess their own goals to determine if Marcellus Shale plays a role in the land management plan which each individual landowner has for the future of their land. Everyone must address the protection of water resources and the impacts this activity presents to our changing landscapes.

Currently only a small amount of private land acreage in Pike County is leased to the gas companies for possible production. There are, however, other impacts both negative and positive that must be planned for. Even if no wells are drilled in the county, the surrounding areas are expected to see significant Marcellus Shale gas drilling activity. There are still impacts which will need to be addressed in Pike County’s future—water withdrawals, job creation, transportation and roads, environmental issues, infrastructure expansion on natural resources, the area’s tourism economy, and local business economic opportunities—to name a few.

Pike County Marcellus Shale Task Force

In late 2010, the Pike County Commissioners appointed a Marcellus Shale Task Force to build capacity for addressing current and future issues and opportunities related to Marcellus Shale activity in Pike County. The hope is to create a framework within which the County through planning, education, cooperation and communication can address concerns and opportunities related to Marcellus Shale gas activity in Pike County—minimizing negative impacts and ensuring that positive impacts are fully realized.

A tremendous number of informational resources on Marcellus Shale have been circulated by the industry, by citizens groups concerned about the activities, by scientific and academic institutions, and others. It will be important as we all move forward to obtain the most accurate information.

The County hopes that the Task Force can create a communication network that will provide fact-based information to facilitate effective decisions and build capacity to address the issues and opportunities that arise.

Please visit http://www.pikepa.org/marcellus.html for more information.

Private Land Stewardship

Just as the County and our municipalities are laying a plan for how Pike County and our communities should grow into the future, private landowners play an equally important role in the future character and complexion of Pike County’s landscapes.

Our forests are perhaps the most characteristic natural resources in Pike County’s landscapes. Beyond their scenic value, forests are integrally related to the quality of many other natural resources. Forests purify the air, filter the surface water and recharge groundwater. They create wildlife habitat, shade streams keeping them cool for fish and aquatic species and regenerates soil. Our private forest woodlands are also a tremendous economic resource.

Well over 200,000 acres in the County are forested tracts of land held in private ownership. How these lands are managed over the longterm will play an important role in the future character of Pike County’s landscapes.

Protecting Your Resources

Protecting and managing private forest lands are an essential part of managing your biggest financial investment—your land. By envisioning what you as a landowner want your land to be and setting goals and a plan for the future, you begin a land management planning process that can protect the quality of the soil, water, and forest resources on your property and thus protect value.

Knowing what you have on your property and deciding what is most important to you then form the foundation for everything else you will do on your land. Management such as timber harvesting and other forest management activities have both short and longterm effects on the entire forest ecosystem. To ensure that these effects are positive, the use of Forest Management Practices (FMPs) is essential. FMPs must also remain flexible to adapt to future changes in your forest land.

Just as there are Smart Growth Principles for Future Development of our Communities, there are also planning and land management tools that can assist you in managing your lands today to create a legacy for the future.

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