Pennsylvania Planning Toolbox

Overview

Pennsylvania Planning Toolbox includes two activities:

Activity 1: *The Planning Toolbox*
Activity 2: *A Comprehensive Plan for Keystone Township*

The following activities provide a broad overview of four key components described in the Municipalities Planning Code (MPC). Discussions focus on the role of citizen leadership in making planning decisions on a local level. The activities challenge participants to learn about the tools that can be used by municipalities to help define future growth and land use. Participants will apply their knowledge as they take on the role of community members and develop a comprehensive plan for their community.

Activity 1:
The Planning Toolbox

Summary: Participants will discuss the concept of planning and examine samples of planning tools outlined by the MPC. They will study samples of the zoning ordinance, subdivision and land development ordinance (SALDO), the official map and the comprehensive plan. After completing a worksheet, they will discuss the purpose of their tool in land use planning and review examples of specific ordinances using real-life scenarios.

Questions: What are four tools that a community can implement to help guide future growth and land use decisions? How can these tools help your community? Why are they used in some communities and not others?

Preparation

• Copy and cut the Major Planning Tools (p 79). You could provide an opportunity for participants to select one of four tools out of a "hat" or count off by fours. Each participant should be assigned one of the four planning tools.

• Copy Major Planning Tools Worksheet (p 80) for each participant.

• Collect samples of a comprehensive plan, subdivision and land development ordinance, zoning regulations and the official map from communities. For additional information, view and copy the Pennsylvania Planning Series booklets at www.newpa.com. Click on "Get Local Gov Support," then "Community Planning."

• Provide cards and markers/pens.

• Copy and prepare What is Planning Worksheet (p 81).

Procedure

Discuss the importance of the community and "a sense of place." What is planning? Discuss why and when we plan. We plan for a party. We plan for a vacation. What do you think about when you plan for a camping trip?

1. Why plan? Discuss reasons for planning and write them on the board. Some reasons could include: to keep a sense of order, to avoid danger, to avoid problems, to have a sense of peace, security, and to know where we are going so we get there. If we don't know where we are going, we could end up somewhere else we don't want to be.

Can plans be changed? Is it easier to make changes when you have the security of an existing plan? Planning is a road map to guide the actions of the future so we can know the steps we need to take to reach goals and meet expectations.

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Planning can be done on many levels. Communities can choose the type of planning tools they want to use and those they don't want to use. If they select to implement a planning tool, they follow the guidelines outlined in the MPC. Many communities use planning tools because they feel that the tools provide guidelines for future growth. Communities enact ordinances which are laws that protect the rights of landowners from potential unwanted situations while maintaining a community character. Some communities prefer not to adopt tools that might restrict the rights of individual land ownership. One community's interests may differ from those of other communities. Communities are encouraged to join together to plan for the best situation for multi-municipal decisions. The responsibility rests with the leadership and local citizenry of each individual community. Citizen education is critical in making wise decisions. It is imperative that every Pennsylvanian understand their responsibility in making land use decisions and become involved in the democratic process within their own communities.

2. Who does the planning? What does a "planner" look like? Planners could look like you. Some people study laws, regulations and designs associated with planning, successfully pass examinations and achieve professional standing as planners. There are affiliations with professional planning organizations such as the American Institute of Certified Planners. There are college courses and degrees in land use planning.

Community leaders are elected by local citizens to govern their community to the best of their ability. They are NOT required to have a planning degree or any special training but they do have a vested interest in the welfare of their community.

Many take classes, attend conferences and study other communities to learn about local government issues so

they can make the best decisions for their communities. Many elected leaders rely on the advice of officially recognized and appointed entities of local government such as the planning commission or the Environmental Advisory Council. Many rely on the advice of knowledgeable and motivated citizenry. Learning about local government is important to help your community make wise decisions.

While some areas of land planning include federal and state involvement, groundwater management or wildlife management, the core of land use planning for Pennsylvania rests with a local form of government called a municipality. A municipality could be a township, a borough or a city. There are 2,563 municipalities in Pennsylvania: 56 cities, 959 boroughs and 1,456 townships of the second class and 91 townships of the first class (2007).

The control of land use in Pennsylvania is dominated by municipalities, not by the state or federal government. Pennsylvania has more local governments than any other state except Illinois and Minnesota.

Local government control means that land decisions are made by members of your municipality which are given jurisdiction by the Pennsylvania MPC.

Historically, people in Pennsylvania have preferred less involvement by state government. Local governments are more responsive, controlling land close to home. However, fragmentation hinders the ability of communities to work together, to share responsibilities and to develop a long-term economic plan. Some say it increases sprawl and limits issues to amateur concerns, not addressing the widening challenges of suburbanization and revitalization.

To address some of the concerns, there are amendments to the MPC that encourage municipalities to cooperate

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with each other, incentives to develop and apply comprehensive plans and to protect natural and historic areas. If you are interested in helping make land decisions, it is important to understand Pennsylvania's local government and to involve yourself in the process.

3. Municipal Government. Each person in Pennsylvania lives in one of 67 counties and also belongs to one of the 2,563 municipalities. Each municipality decides how it wants to plan for the future per the MPC. This code outlines the framework for municipalities to govern themselves. (Philadelphia and Pittsburgh have their own code.) The MPC was recently amended to encourage more cooperative planning among municipalities and to support forestry and protect natural and historic resources.

Each municipality has many planning tools it may choose to use. Municipal governments are allowed by state law to choose which of these tools they want to use based on the authority outlined in the MPC. We are going to review four of the planning tools. Have a collection of each of the tools: Comprehensive Plan, Zoning Ordinance, SALDO, and Official Map.

4. The Planning Toolbox. "Open" the "Planning Toolbox" and learn about four important land use planning tools. Participants will divide into groups, and each group will receive one tool to review. They will fill out the worksheet, discuss it in groups and reorganize into new groups, or present to the large group to share information. Ask if anyone has previously reviewed or used any of the planning tools.

Have participants count by fours and gather at one of four designated work areas. All the "ones" will review information on "the comprehensive plan," "twos" will review "the official map," "threes" will review "the subdivision and land development ordinance," and "fours" will review the "zoning ordinance."

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Each group is given a description of their tool, a worksheet and samples of their assigned tool. Participants will follow the protocol for working in groups and designate a facilitator and a timekeeper.

5. Present Information. Each group is to present information on their assigned planning tool to a core group so each must learn the information well enough to teach it to others. Each group must insure that each person in the group is able to teach information to others. Participants may use notes or draw a poster to help them remember the information.

Participants review samples and identify examples of the purpose of the planning tool. They are to take notes and understand the planning tool assigned to them. On the worksheet provided, cut and distribute the photos of planning tools in action, and have participants determine which tool is associated with the photo.

6. Develop Hypothetical Situations. Participants will develop two brief hypothetical situations involving their planning tool that can be solved by looking in the planning tool under the suggested page number. They are to describe the situation on separate cards with the answers (and page number) if appropriate. The cards are collected by the facilitator.

Here are some examples of scenarios that could be used:

1. Your township wants to check this document before it rezones and changes zoning regulations. What are you going to use? **Answer:** The Comprehensive Plan

2. Your planning commission is reviewing a plan to build 50 new lots and dedicate open space in the area. What tool will you use to review the plan for the development? **Answer:** Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance.

3. Your neighbor wants to open a candy store in the neighborhood. What tool will you use to see if this is allowed? **Answer:** Zoning Ordinance

Regroup participants into groups that will have representatives from "one", "two", "three" and "four" in each. Participants explain their planning tool to the other three so that all have an understanding. Distribute the two hypothetical situations to different groups. Groups must decide what tool they will need to solve the situation and travel to the location of the tools needed. They are to answer the problem. When groups have completed the task, they share their situations and the tools they used.

Activity 2:
A Comprehensive Plan for Keystone Township

Summary: Participants will participate in contributing information in the development of a comprehensive plan for a fictional community called Keystone Township. They will become characters in a community and present their recommendations on specific aspects of the comprehensive plan. They will assume the perceived role of their character as they make decisions and learn the value of leadership, compromise and information.

Questions: What are the elements considered in developing a comprehensive plan? How do different members of the community differ in their point of view? What skills and techniques help you to work with individuals and groups with different views?

Preparation

• Copy the Keystone Township Map for each team of participants (p 82).

• Cut and copy the Community Visioning Worksheet for each team of participants (p 83).

• Cut and copy the Toolbox Vocabulary and assign it to the appropriate characters (pp 84-86).

• Cut and copy the Invitation and Township Description for each team of participants (pp 87-88).

• Copy and cut out the citizen's roles and provide a role to one or more participants (p 88).

• Provide groups of participants with flip charts and markers to develop their presentation.

• Comprehensive Plan Considerations Activity Sheet (p 89).

Procedure

We are going to divide into groups and become members of Keystone Township. We have been invited to participate in a community visioning process to help the planning commission develop a comprehensive plan for the township. Keystone Township did not have a comprehensive plan but would like to develop one. The planning commission has asked for input from the community. Each of you will be assigned a role and your group will be assigned one aspect of the comprehensive plan to address. Your task is to make recommendations based on your role and include a tool from the toolbox in your discussions.

A comprehensive plan is a statement of future goals for the community. It is an official document that will guide future decisions about how to develop the community. Each group will share their contribution to the whole group.

Review the description of Keystone Township. Hand out roles to each person. Each group will be assigned one aspect of the comprehensive plan to address. Groups

Activity 2