

Lawrence County Three Year Housing and Community Development Plan

I. Executive Summary

Lawrence County, Pennsylvania is a relatively small county (approximately 360 square miles) that is bound on the north by Mercer County, to the east by Butler County, to the south by Beaver County and to the west by the State of Ohio. The County itself is subdivided into twenty-seven municipalities, twenty three of which are considered non-entitlement by the Commonwealth. Lawrence County is designated a rural county, with over 90% of its area being rural and over 40% of its population living in rural areas.

As a rural community, the County has significant areas of poverty, and struggles with a multitude of community concerns including a deteriorating public infrastructure, lack of employment/economic growth, transportation and probably one of the largest growing concerns, an increase in homelessness due to the lack of the above listed issues, and also because of the increase in the amount of foreclosures, sub-prime lending, and vacancy rates of Lawrence County residents. The current unemployment rate is 8.0% (BLS, July 2013), so the individuals/families that were helping to “carry” the prosperity of the community are now finding themselves in a vulnerable situation.

Lawrence County municipal leaders, County Commissioners and planning office determined that a unique plan is needed in order to meet the various distinctive needs of the County to conquer these extensive issues and to develop and cultivate neighborhood revitalization. Lawrence County Social Services (LCSS), the County’s CDBG Program Administrator, was selected to take the lead on a county-wide comprehensive housing strategy that will integrate Neighborhood Stabilization Goals as well as support neighborhood sustainability and revitalization goals.

Community stakeholders, non-entitlement community representatives, CDBG administrators, potential partners and the general public were sought out to add input to the following strategy. In order to meet the comprehensive needs of the County, the following strategy was developed to increase neighborhood prosperity.

For the purpose of this strategy, the proposed funding sources include the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), Emergency Shelter Grant (ESG), HOMES Grant, and Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP). The plan addresses the concerns listed by community type - healthy communities, tipping point communities, and distressed communities. The specific areas to be addressed in consideration with the Lawrence County Comprehensive Plan include 1) Residential (Housing); 2) Infrastructure (Public Community Facilities and Improvements/Public Services); 3) Economic Development, and 4) additional Human Services needs conveyed by current economic stressors.

The County will analyze all proposed projects in relation to their relevance to this Plan. Specifically, projects must 1) Relate to priority needs, 2) Demonstrate a concentration of low-moderate income households, 3) Provide information regarding cost efficiency, and 4) Show relevance to the County’s overall Community Development Plan.

II. Low-Moderate Income Population

Lawrence County is predominantly a rural community that houses a diverse population of approximately 91,108 residents. According to the 2010 Census Bureau, the median income of 36,587 households was \$42,570. Lawrence County has one of the highest percentages of residents below poverty level in Pennsylvania- 17.9% of the families with related children under 18 years of age residing within the county are living at or below the 80% (low) level of the median income. To address the needs of the community, Lawrence County works collectively with its’ partners in order to alleviate poverty and overcome other community concerns. In order to accurately determine eligibility for its CDBG and HOME programs, Lawrence County assesses several of the individual municipalities through survey methods to determine low-moderate income benefits to the specified areas.

Indicator	Number	Percent
Total Population	91,108	100.0
Age 60 +	22,965	25.2
Age 20-59	46,320	50.8

Age 0-19	21,823	24.0
Average Household Size	2.39	n/a
Average Family Size	2.94	n/a
Median Household Income	\$42,570	n/a
Median Family Income	\$52,370	n/a
Poverty Status (Families)	n/a	10.1
Poverty Status (Individuals)	n/a	12.7
Children Under 5 in Poverty	n/a	20.9

U.S. Census 2010

III. Community Types

To gain an accurate perspective on the needs of the communities located within the twenty-three non-entitlements of Lawrence County, a county-wide community assessment is performed on a regular basis. Through this assessment, several needs are addressed including 1) housing, 2) public community facilities and improvements, 3) public services, and 4) economic development. In order to address the needs in an appropriate, specific manner, each community will be ranked accordingly based on area and need. The communities are ranked by the following conditions:

1. **Healthy Communities-** Communities which show little to no effect by the current economic downturn in markets and have limited, foreclosure and blight issues. Examples include parts of Neshannock Township, Wilmington Township, and Scott Township.
2. **Tipping Point Communities-** Those communities determined to have the greatest chance for success due to the fact they show signs of strength, which includes marketable assets needing only minor stabilization methods to reestablish their value, thus having the ability to turn, forcing current marketability to remain stable or perhaps move upward. At this point four (4) tipping point communities have been identified in the County:

- a. Bessemer/North Beaver Township
 - b. Ellwood City area
 - c. South New Castle Borough/Upper East Side of the City of New Castle connecting to Northern Shenango Township
 - d. Northern section of the City of New Castle connecting to Union Township
3. ***Distressed Communities***- Generally the lowest income communities with large areas of blight, abandoned and foreclosed properties. These communities would benefit the greatest by a simple blight removal program and include:
- a. City of New Castle’s Lower East Side
 - b. City of New Castle’s West Side
 - c. City of New Castle’s Croton Area
 - d. Pulaski Township

Please see attachment A for further documentation on the community types listed above.

The community type will determine the method(s) implemented to address the needs of that community. The following goal and action plan has been developed for each type of community to address the needs identified in the County’s Strategic Plan.

1. Housing (See Attached Plan)

- Acquisition, Rehab and Rental for Homeless/Special Needs Housing
- Acquisition and Clearance- Donation to Non-Profit for existing program
- Acquisition, Demolition for Land Banking
- Acquisition and Rehab for Lease/Purchase Program
- Provide Shelter and Supportive Services
- Blight Removal
- Acquisition, Clearance or Rehab for Public Facility
- Shelter and Supportive Services

2. Public Community Facilities and Improvements

- Evaluate Public Community Facilities

Lawrence County will continue to evaluate each community's public facility format and infrastructure to ensure all facilities are maintained and improved as necessary. CDBG programs will specifically focus on the twenty-three non-entitlement areas throughout the County, to determine Low-Moderate Income areas that will benefit from Community Development Block Grant monies. Projects that will be assisted include street improvements and water/sanitary sewer facilities, as well as other eligible CDBG improvements, as needed.

3. Public Services

- Provide transportation services to all areas of the county
Lawrence County will continue to provide a much needed transportation element to the County. The public busing system runs from early morning to early evening to every area of the county. This system provides a service to individuals throughout the county that may not have their own transportation.
- Provide transportation to the elderly and/or low-moderate income population through Community Development Block Grant funds. This service allows individuals to access personal-need trips, including doctor appointments and trips to the grocery store.
- Provide Services Based on Community Need
Lawrence County will continue to evaluate and assess the needs of its residents, and each individual community, to best determine their current needs. Lawrence County recognizes that what may have been a need one year, may not be in the next.

4. Economic Development

- Job Creation and Retention

Lawrence County will work with the Lawrence County Economic Development Corporation to identify the economic needs of the community, as well as the best methods to achieve those needs. The Community Development Block Grant aims to expand job creation and retention through the employment of local contractors and laborers who may not otherwise have employment due to current economic conditions.
- Utilize the "Buy American Provision"
Lawrence County will utilize the "Buy American Provision" when possible, to assist the local business owners through the provision of purchased goods and services, and

continue employment and services of American-owned products. Contractors utilizing CDBG funds will purchase and use US-made products, where possible, on all projects.

Short Term Plan:

1. Housing:

- a. Continue single unit housing rehabilitation in the twenty-three non-entitlement municipalities of the County using current and future CDBG funds.
- b. Evaluate the condition of local housing to eliminate abandoned, blighted structures and provide rehabilitated housing structures to the special needs population through the County's NSP program.
- c. Provide shelter and supportive housing to the County's low-moderate income and/or homeless population.

2. Public Community Facilities and Improvements:

- a. Continue to assess local municipal roads and water/sanitation systems for the provision of improved infrastructure utilizing various funding options.

3. Public Services:

- a. Continue to provide transportation routes to the twenty-three non-entitlement municipalities.
- b. Evaluate community needs in order to provide necessary services.

4. Economic Development:

- a. Retain current jobs by contracting out to local businesses for services.
- b. Buy American-made projects as often as possible in order to support local businesses.

Long Term Plan:

1. Housing:

- a. Continue single unit housing rehabilitation in the twenty-three non-entitlement municipalities of the County using current and future CDBG funds.
- b. Evaluate the condition of local housing to eliminate abandoned, blighted structures and provide rehabilitated housing structures to the special needs population through the County's NSP program.
- c. Provide shelter and supportive housing to the County's low-moderate income and/or homeless population.

2. Public Community Facilities and Improvements:

- a. Continue to assess local municipal roads and water/sanitation systems in order to provide improved infrastructure through the use of available local funds while expanding the options for funding through various federal and state programming.
- 3. Public Services:**
- a. Continue to provide transportation routes to the twenty-three non-entitlement municipalities throughout the County.
 - b. Evaluate community needs to provide necessary services.
- 4. Economic Development:**
- a. Retain current jobs by contracting out to local businesses for services.
 - b. Buy American made projects as often as possible to support local businesses.
 - c. Attract businesses and development to the Lawrence County area to promote the creation of jobs for Lawrence County residents.