

UNION TOWNSHIP THREE YEAR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PLAN

I. **Description - Low/Moderate Income and Minority Populations**

Union Township, Lawrence County, Pennsylvania, is a second class township, juxtapositioned to the City of New Castle; Neshannock, Mahoning, North Beaver, and Taylor Townships. According to the 2010 Census, Union Township is made up of 5,190 residents, with a small percent of minorities. In the eastern terminus of Union Township (Census Tract 107) where it borders New Castle's west side, there is a substantial area of low/moderate income residents, including minorities, residing in the township. Also, due to the aging population of the township, concentrations of low/moderate residents are interspersed throughout the municipality. Many of these residents are now retired and have only Social Security income, leaving them in the lower income categories.

During the 1950's, several moderately priced residential developments were built in the township. Today, these areas consist of a mixture of the older, original owners and young families with children. Many of the newer residents of these areas qualify in the low/moderate category as much of this housing in the township is affordable to the LMI population. Discussions with local real estate agents indicate that many of the families moving into these developments would qualify as low/moderate income category as they are buying homes through special programs such as the **First Time Home Buyer Program** that are affiliated with local banking institutions.

The minority population of Union Township is interspersed among the residential areas, with several areas a little more dense. The largest concentration of LMI residents is Census Tract 107, Block Group 1, where the township borders the city of New Castle. The adjoining area in the city is also a LMI dense area according to US Census information. The 2010 Census reports only 4% minority residents in the township.

II. **Community Development Needs - Union Township Assessments**

A. **Housing**

Generally, the condition of housing in Union Township has experienced a slow deterioration due to the declining income of the aging residents and the overall decline in economic conditions. Although unemployment is not as rampant as in the past, the wages are much less than what many of the residents made in the mills during the 1980's. The escalation of food prices, taxes and utilities have created additional financial constraints to the residents on fixed income and to those who earn low wages. The township's multi-municipal Comprehensive Plan cites that there are numerous homes in need of rehabilitation. The majority of the homes in need of rehab are found primarily in the areas where there is older housing and higher concentrations of low/moderate income residents. Various rehabilitation programs beginning in 1988, along with CDBG funds from many years, have been utilized to rehabilitate more than 150 homes. Two HOME Programs in the 1990's were used to rehabilitate many homes.

The numerous homes rehabilitated throughout the township have benefitted the neighborhoods and improved the quality of life for the participants. The extent of need in the area of housing rehabilitation should continue to be monitored as these programs are valuable to the residents by making improvement affordable; and to the township by preserving the neighborhoods. A need still exists within the township to continue residential rehabilitation. The list of eligible program participants has increased and the township is willing to pursue any additional funds available for this cause. During the past several years, Union Township has worked with the Lawrence County Healthy Homes lead Program to rehabilitate 5 homes. This cooperation occurs when a home in the township to be rehabilitated has children under 6 years of age. This cooperation allows rehab dollars to be extended for both programs. In 2005, the township passed a Property Maintenance Code to address dilapidated and unsafe structures within the Township. In 2014, the township established a Code Enforcement Department to help clean up the neighborhoods and improve the safety of rental units. Several programs working hand-in-hand accomplish more to assist in rehabilitating the housing stock of the township.

Housing values in Union Township, as well as in the neighboring municipalities, have stabilized during the past several years. Union Township has only a 3% vacancy rate in housing, which may be attributed in part to a lower median value of housing than many of the surrounding areas. It is believed that the lower cost of existing housing elicits the influx of low/moderate income residents as they are the most likely candidates for reasonable housing.

During 2000 and 2001, a local developer built 148 upscale apartment units behind the Walmart development. A developer from California has undertaken the construction of condominiums on property near the Lawrence County Airport. Six additional units have been built here in the last several years and there is also room for future residential expansion.

B. Public/Community Facilities and Improvements

Public/Community Facilities are an area in need of improvements in Union Township. Numerous needs exist in areas such as public works and buildings, street and road improvements, storm sewer repair, and extensions of sanitary sewers and public water lines.

There are several areas of the township where storm sewer improvements may be addressed. Storm sewer improvement were made with CDBG programs in 1990, 1994, 2001, 2005 2006 and in 2011, 2012 and 2014. They made major road ways safer for all who used these streets and roadways. The township has completed a storm sewer project on Scotland Lane between State Street (Route 224) and West Washington Street. This area of Scotland Lane is used for all school bus traffic, all fire department vehicles, and the police department.

Street conditions in the township are slowly deteriorating in many areas. However, there are only a limited amount of funds available for paving streets, so priority decisions must be made for their best use. Liquid Fuel funds are used yearly to address the roads which are in need of resurfacing, but they can't address all the roadways. Funds from the 1994 CDBG Program were designated to address street and associated repairs in areas determined necessary for safety reasons. The township must remain aware of the needs of street and road repairs and continue to address this need as township funding permits. Future program funds could effectively be used in this area.

Several years ago, the township spent \$75,000 to put a new roof on the municipal building. In 2004, a new boiler was installed in the municipal building. This was a priority so employees would not be in the cold. The boiler was a mandatory project and had to be addressed immediately. Electrical work has been done at the Municipal Building to make it more energy efficient. Grants from the power company assisted with this effort. The township has done electrical work in the township's offices. A salt storage facility has been constructed in the rear area of the municipal building to house road materials. The township continues to look at programs that may help to increase the municipal building's energy efficiency.

In consideration of the traditional activities, Union Township's budget capabilities can only fund selected priority items, thus leaving much to be done, with little money to do it. Infrastructure falls into this category. An extension of the sewer line on Route 224 was imperative for economic development growth. Route 60, with access to both Route 224 and Route 422 within the township, has been designated as I-376. This may bring additional funding for development in the area. To enable economic development to prosper and grow, infrastructure needs must continue to be met to keep the township economically competitive. The extension of the sanitary sewer lines was deemed a priority as additional economic and residential development hinges on their availability. Sanitary sewer line extensions in various areas of the township have been accomplished. Union Township now has approximately 90% of all households sewered.

Several years ago, it was announced that a new horse racing track, casino, waterpark and related complexes would be opening in Ivfahoning Township in 2009. This project is still on hold until the Gaming Commission makes a decision on whether or not the casino will be at this site. Should the development occur, Union Township will have positive residential and commercial benefits. Although years have passed, there is still a viable chance that the racetrack/casino will still open here.

Water lines are available to approximately 98% of all areas of the township. If not presently served by Pennsylvania American Water Company, water lines could be made available without major expense.

The presence of water and sewer lines in the outer regions of the township now provide an incentive for residential and commercial development. Public water and sewers attract interest in new development. A Twenty Year Plan has been developed by the Union

Sewer and Disposal Authority which is proceeding in a timely manner. Currently, the Union Sewer Department has completed their Act 537 update to prepare for a sanitary sewer expansion project on Route 422, which will have the exit that directly leads to the new track/casino, if developed.

There were three bridges in Union Township that were of concern: the Grandview Avenue Bridge, the Miller Avenue Bridge, and the Covert Crossing Bridge. In 1998, the Grandview Avenue Bridge was replaced and in 2001 the Miller Avenue Bridge was replaced using Liquid Fuel funding. These were both on well traveled secondary roads. Several years later, the Covert's Crossing Bridge was replaced, making this connection between Union Township and North Beaver Township much safer. The older bridge was a one lane plank bridge that became submerged with heavy rain. There were many accidents and several fatalities on this bridge. Now it is a concrete, wide bridge that is safe to travel on, even in a heavy rain. Therefore, the bridges in Union Township are safe and in good condition.

C. Public Services

Fortunately, Lawrence County, wherein Union Township lies, has fine programs such as Lawrence County Social Services and the Human Service Center to deal with problems of mental health disorders, aging, special needs, etc. In order to avoid costly duplication of services and in consideration of the close proximity, there is no need to fund individual programs of this type in the township. Public bus service is available to the township during daylight hours. It is used by seniors who are unable to drive, many "welfare to work" employees of the township businesses, and for shoppers coming to the business district.

One of the key problems of Union Township is that, due to diminishing financial resources that have occurred because of the declining tax base, underemployment, rising fuel and home heating costs, and the increase in other fixed costs; they are unable to provide the levels of basic community services to the residents and businesses in sufficient quantity. Additional fire and police protection are necessary as economic and residential development increases. The police force has increased to 5 full time and 5 part time officers, providing 24/7 coverage. Although hard on township finances, a well staffed police force attracts and enhances commercial and residential development. A new pick up truck and dump truck have been added to the road department in the last few years and a police vehicle was purchased in 2006 and 2011. More road equipment and another police car are needed as soon as finances allow. With a larger police department and rising costs of hospitalization and workman's compensation insurance, the township deemed it necessary to increase the tax base by 1 mill in 2012.

An addition to the Union Township Fire House was completed with help from prior CDBG funding. CDBG funding also provided "Jaws of Life" equipment for the fire department during the mid 1990's. Prior use of CDBG funds include playground equipment, improvements to the tennis courts, and a roof on the bocce courts and related

improvements. The township insured that all areas were ADA compliant by installing paved, smooth surfaces to the improved areas. CDBG funding in the early 2000's was used to install new stainless steel fixtures and related improvements to the bathroom at Scotland Meadows Park. It meets all ADA requirements. These improvements were included *in* both the short term and long term goals of the township and have been successful in meeting the needs of the township's low/moderate income residents.

Union Township recently made infrastructure improvements at the Park, including new electric and water lines, and has erected a 12' x 20' gazebo in Scotland Meadows Park, which is adjacent to the municipal building. Funding for this worthwhile project came, in part, from a DCNR grant. In 2013, the township spent over \$100,000 for new play equipment for the park. This money came from a one-time Marcellus Shale payment to lease our oil rights.

D. Economic Development

Union Township does not have a large tax base of business and/or industry. The Township has made steady progress in economic growth due to the completion of the Route I-376 corridor and the influx of a business district that began in 1996. A Walmart facility with an adjoining plaza, a Lowe's, and several banks, restaurants, and fast food establishments were built in the township. As much of the improvements abated property taxes with a TIF program (which aided infrastructure in the area), the township did not see a large increase in property taxes. However, wage taxes did increase. In November of 2014, the TIF Program was paid off. Now the township will be getting new revenues from the development that occurred in the late 1990's. In December of 2014, a Holiday Inn Express broke ground near the Hampton Inn on Route 224. Many jobs in the new developments became available to township residents. With the new development occurring, an existing older plaza in the township erected a new, more appealing facade. Thus, as the township used CDBG funding to help the township in the aforementioned ways, this enhanced the viability for economic development. Union Township has worked cooperatively with the City of New Castle in extending the city's Enterprise Zone into our municipality. Hopefully, the incentives of this program will enhance the possibility of industrial development in the designated area.

The township must continue to meet the needs of business/industry when possible. Sufficient public services must be in place to take advantage of opportunities for economic progress. The township is working with potential developers, attempting to spur new development. A Hampton Inn has been built in the township and is doing well. Butler County Community College is completed on the western end of the Route 224 business corridor. This development provides educational opportunities for township residents, as well as enhancing commercial viability. A methadone clinic has opened on Route 224, providing 25 new jobs to the community. In 2011, New Castle School of Trades moved into Union Township which provided additional educational opportunities within the township. A Petsmart is now in the township and Sheetz and Aspen Dental were completed in 2014. Also, Penn Power built a large transmission facility within the township. Commercial progress has been slow, but steady.

In December of 2009, Union Township passed an amended Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map to protect the residents and businesses of the township. Additionally, Union Township updated their Comprehensive Plan in a joint effort with Pulaski and Mahoning Townships. A Property Maintenance Code was adopted in 2005 and a Code Enforcement Department was established in 2014. These are positive steps to foster development and to be prepared for future growth.

Economic development is necessary for Union Township to enhance the fiscal environment. It appears wise at this time, that the township should continue to approach economic development by concentration on the aforementioned areas of need. As the interest is already present and commercial development is progressing, it is what the township can offer in infrastructure and public services that will make the difference in continued economic progress. This, in turn, will enhance progress in residential development, public services, and public and community facilities. If approved, the new proposed track/casino in adjacent Mahoning Township lends potential for commercial development on the Route 422 corridor in Union Township.

Union township is cognizant of the needs of the township's low moderate income residents and have developed their community development programs accordingly. Effort was taken to accommodate needs of areas with minority populations when residential rehabilitation, street resurfacing and storm sewer improvements were done. The needs of physically challenged individuals were recognized in the area of recreational facilities. Rehabilitation activities have assisted minority and handicapped individuals throughout the township. By reviewing the past and evaluating the present, it can be seen that the programs activities have been spread out among the many needs of the township. By taking care of the township needs as a whole, Union Township has created an environment that is attractive for both prospective economic and residential development.

HI. Community Development Objectives

The objectives of Union Township's Community Development Plan have been formulated after careful review of the needs in all areas of the township. Care has been taken to assure focus upon objectives which are likely to benefit low moderate income and minority persons. The objectives developed in the areas of housing, public/community facilities and improvements, public services and economic development have been evaluated as to need, urgency and ability to have the resources to undertake programs to meet the objectives.

The objective for housing in Union Township is to arrest slum and blight conditions in the neighborhoods, eliminate structures that present health and/or safety hazards, and to assist residents in keeping their homes up to standards. Efforts in assistance to homeowners will be directed to aid low moderate income persons. Maintaining the quality of housing in the township is vital in keeping the integrity of the neighborhoods intact. Efforts are continuing in residential rehabilitation through CDBG funding and the pursuit of competitive funding. Working cooperatively with the Healthy Homes Lead Stabilization Program has enabled our rehab dollars to be used helping LMI families

with children under 6 years of age.

The objectives of public /community facilities and improvements in the township are numerous. Infrastructure needs such as extension of water/sewer lines must continue as they affect other areas as residential and economic development and promote the health and safety standards of the township. Currently, public water and sewers are available to the vast majority of the township. Street and road improvements and bridge repairs must be done to keep the roadways and bridges safe and to enhance the appearance of the vicinity. Storm sewers must be kept in good repair so they won't present dangerous conditions or disturb the topology of township property. Public buildings and recreation facilities must be kept in good repair to be available for public use and to maintain their value. It is important to have safe recreation equipment and areas available to the public. The low moderate income population reaps the most benefit from the recreation facilities as they often do not have the funds available for private recreation.

The objective of public services in the township is to provide the highest quality of police and fire protection and municipal services using the limited resources of the township. This is important as it has a direct relationship to attracting new residential and commercial development and to maintaining the quality of life for township residents.

Economic development is an essential objective and has expanded in the township. Retail complexes, two hotels, two new banks, various fast food establishments, and a gas station complex now are located within the township. Prime land is available for additional development and is of interest to developers contingent upon infrastructure availability. As the aforementioned objectives of the Community Development Plan are met, they will enhance the feasibility of economic development.

IV. Short Term and Long Term Plan

Union Township's short term (1 year) and long term (3 year) plans have been developed after an analysis was made of the community development assessments and objectives. Proposed projects were reviewed and evaluated to determine their consistency with the objectives and their potential for maximizing scarce financial resources. Using these considerations, the following plan has been designed.

A. One Year Plan

The short term plan for the FY 2014 Community Development Block Grant Program is to use available funding for Owner Occupied Residential Rehabilitation. As many of the funds in the past years were spent on storm sewers, the waiting list for rehab has grown. This activity will have a positive impact for the residents of Union Township.

\$75,846 for Housing Rehabilitation will be used, along with approximately \$200 monthly in repayments from previous programs, to rehabilitate 3 to 4 homes. When possible, we will combine the rehab funds with other programs such as the Lead Program of Lawrence

County Healthy Homes to stretch our dollars. This residential rehabilitation, along with the work being done by the Code Enforcement Department making landlords clean their properties and make exterior and safety improvements, will positively impact the LMI areas of the township.

B. Long Term Plan (3 Year Plan)

The long term plan for the Union Township Community Development Program is cognizant of the assessment of needs within the township. Although sewer and water lines have been extended to the majority of the township areas, encouragement will still be given to make these valuable utilities available to the outreaches of the township when feasible. The township has updated the Act 537 and is prepared for infrastructure should the racino be designated for our area.

The township will address the needs of streets and roads, public facilities and services on a priority basis as funds are available. Storm sewer improvements will be addressed on a priority basis. These improvements eliminate dangerous culverts, making the roadways and yards safer for vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Economic development is steadily progressing within the township and will continue to benefit as other areas of need are addressed in a satisfactory manner.

As the waiting list for residential rehabilitation is extensive, the township will continue to use available funding from various sources including CDBG, and program income from previous rehabilitation programs. All available avenues of funding will be pursued for this worthy endeavor. The township will work cooperatively with Lawrence County Social Services on programs such as the Lead Free Homes and HOME funding to assist township residents. Considering all factors, Community Development Block Grant funds will be used in some manner yearly, as long as there are people waiting for the help.

Union Township has updated the Union Township Comprehensive Plan which was last done in 1993. The updated Multi-Municipal Comprehensive Plan is a valuable tool for use in future township planning and development. The township has joined with the neighboring municipalities of Mahoning Township and Pulaski Township to make a joint municipal Comprehensive Plan. The three townships are considering amending the joint comprehensive plan to include the huge impact the new racetrack/casino facility will have on the area, should it be built.

The township recognizes the need for an expanded police force and has added police personnel as quickly as the budget allows. The township now has 2417 police coverage. The Union Township Volunteer Fire Department is made up of qualified, well trained, dedicated volunteer fire fighters. The fire fighters ask for donations and hold fund raisers to get money for their needs. The township pays for their fuel and insurance costs. Enhanced fire services benefit all areas of development in the township including housing, economic development, public/community services, and safety.

As the township's commercial base has been slowly but consistently expanding, the long term plan is to encourage residential expansion. A condominium project and apartment complex have been completed in the township. Many township residents have sold their homes and moved to the condominiums. Some of these homes have been sold to families with young children, which is good for the school census. The township works hand-in-hand with the school district to inform and interest potential residents of the assets that Union Township has to offer.

As the tax abatement TIF Program from the past has expired and additional revenues will be realized, the township should be able to maintain the full-time and part-time police force to enhance public safety. The additional commercial development that has already occurred, and the continued plans for commercial and residential development make the long range plan of increased police and fire protection a viable long term goal. The future increase of revenues will also aid the township in providing municipal services, improvements of streets and roadways, storm sewer improvements, and recreational facilities updates.

V. Summary of the Three Year Plan

See attached Three Year Activity Summary

VI. Community Development Plan Resources

The Community Development Plan of Union Township, Lawrence County, Pennsylvania was developed in consideration of local and area wide development plans to provide effective and purposeful use of funding. The following resources were utilized in plan formulation.

- A. The 2010 U.S. Census of Population and Housing
- B. The 2007 multi-municipal Comprehensive Plan of Mahoning, Pulaski, and Union Townships
- C. Discussions with Union Township officials and departments such as Supervisors, Planning Commission, School Officials, Zoning and Police and Fire Departments
- D. Discussions with local real estate agents
- E. Taylor Engineering, the township engineers
- F. Discussions with current and potential commercial developers
- G. Input from a local Council of Government (COG) which included information and views from the realm of business, schools, and residents

- H. Discussions with Lawrence County Economic Development Corporation and officials of the city of New Castle, Mahoning Township, Pulaski Township, Neshannock Township, and North Beaver Township
- I. Discussions with the Lawrence County Planning Department
- J. Discussions throughout the year with PA Representative Chris Sainato and PA Senator Elder Vogel.
- K. Citizen participation from public meetings

VII. Map
See attached



LAWRENCE COUNTY