

Priority Issue #3



Fragmentation of local government & the sense of being disenfranchised are challenges facing Pennsylvania municipalities

Back Story The majority of Pennsylvania’s 67 counties are “fragmented” into a large number of small municipalities. In fact, there are 2,562 local governments in Pennsylvania--Lycoming County has 52 of them. In Pennsylvania, many government rules, regulations, and policies are delegated to the most local level of government to administer. Likewise, many services are provided separately by each municipality. This type of government construct provides a number of distinct benefits; but, it also creates a very challenging environment. In short, that environment is characterized by two principal issues: fragmentation that inevitably hampers the efficient execution of the municipal mission by locally elected and/or appointed officials and disenfranchisement that perpetuates the sense of isolation and powerlessness by local municipalities.

The Benefits The Township, Borough, and City level is the most local form of government in Pennsylvania. As such, it allows citizens easy accessibility to elected and appointed officials. This enables the maximum degree of local citizen dialogue related to policymaking, service delivery, and taxation. In general, this form of government is viewed as being accessible, accountable and effective.

Twin Challenges -- #1 Fragmentation Since local municipalities must operate within the bureaucratic construct of an overarching Federal, State, and County Government, they have become increasingly vulnerable to fragmentation. Quite often, the unavoidable outcome of this fragmentation is a lost opportunity for improved cost efficiency and enhanced service delivery. Moreover, many municipalities find it increasingly difficult to recruit adequate numbers of citizens and trained professionals, to serve on their legislative bodies, boards, and commissions. Another challenge involves capital-intensive services such as water, sanitary and storm sewer, emergency services, as well as managing administrative functions that local governments are required to provide. In communities with small populations or tax bases, these requirements could be considered redundant overhead.

As depicted above, the demands placed on local leaders can overwhelm their resources. This is perhaps most acutely experienced in the area of essential emergency services for Police, Fire, and

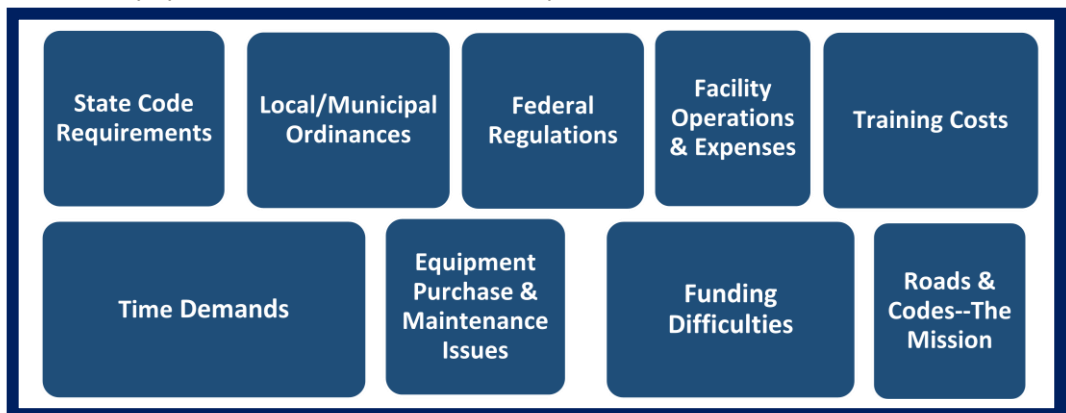


Figure 20: Challenges and Obligations of Local Governments

Emergency Medical Service (EMS) due to three vexing issues: decrease in volunteer capacity, intensive certification requirements and the lack of sustainable financial resources.

Twin Challenges -- #2 Disenfranchisement Over time, expectations placed on local governments by the State as well as from citizens' perspectives have changed. Local leaders themselves, are feeling more disenfranchised from all levels of government above them—county, state, and federal. Their increasing sense of isolation is compounded by a trend that suggests local governments have been assuming an increasing number of responsibilities over the past 10-15 years. The net effect of this dynamic is that it has become more and more difficult for the traditional structure(s) of local government to function effectively and efficiently.

As well-documented in Samuel Long's 2012 publication, *The Handbook of Political Behavior (Volume 4)*, disenfranchisement—also called political alienation—is “associated generally with a lack of institutionalized power.” Individual citizens, as well as individual municipalities, lack the force and magnitude of the larger population. Frustration is attributed to the feeling of being powerless and unheard, which all-to-often devolves into apathy. Rural community municipal leaders may be more susceptible to this dilemma given their relatively small size and geographic distance from higher levels of government.

Priority Issue Overview

Solutions Proposed & Explored There have been a number of creative solutions that PA municipalities have pursued to address their needs. Local governments have developed or joined regionally-scaled entities, including: regional council of governments (COGs), metropolitan and rural planning organizations (MPOs and RPOs), and various other regional planning-type councils, commissions, and organizations. In addition, there have been a growing number of multi-municipal cooperatives, joint efforts, and mergers related to the provision of police, fire, EMS, zoning, codes, sewer, water, storm water, and other infrastructure and public work programs. These entities have helped local governments begin to address fragmentation; but, there is much more to do. These same entities have also helped small municipalities leverage each other to form a stronger, more united voice and confront the feeling of isolation and powerlessness.

Local Success Stories There are a number of excellent examples where local governments have crafted partnerships or structures to mitigate the challenge of fragmentation, more efficiently perform their duties and tackle the growing sense of disenfranchisement. Some of these Best Management Practices have proven to be quite effective, but there's much more to do.

- **Lycoming County Comprehensive Planning.** Required by Pennsylvania's Municipalities Planning Code, the comprehensive plan update process is arduous, lengthy, vision-oriented, and can be costly. In collaboration with 26 of the County's 52 municipalities, the County Planning Department has developed six multi-municipal comprehensive plans. Each plan was developed in partnership with local citizens and elected officials from the respective planning areas. The remaining 26 municipalities participated in the Rural Planning Advisory Team (PAT) meetings conducted over a 17-month period. The visions, needs, and issues of the rural municipalities are documented in the Countywide Comprehensive Plan.
- **Lycoming County MS4 Coalition.** Because Lycoming County lies within Chesapeake Bay watershed, the County is impacted by the Federal & State mandates regarding water pollution that flows from the Susquehanna River south

to the Chesapeake Bay. This unfunded US EPA-mandated challenge is particularly daunting for the small number of local municipalities that have storm water infrastructure and have been designated as MS4 (Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System) communities. MS4 communities are required to prepare Chesapeake Bay Pollution Reduction Plans (CBPRP's) that define how they will reduce sediment and nutrient levels, including nitrogen and phosphorous. The MS4 program is permitted and enforced at the state level through the PA DEP. To lessen the municipal cost burden of the MS4 program, in 2011, nine municipalities and one college came together to form the Lycoming County MS4 Coalition and funded a County staff position (MS4 Planner) to manage all of their permits and complete the required six minimum control measures. The Coalition allows them to share costs in permit fees, training, implementation of best management practices and consultant fees. The Coalition keeps the participants in regulatory compliance, while maintaining effective economies of scale.

- Lycoming County Planning Commission. Created over 40 years ago, the LCPC is tasked with a review and approval role for subdivisions, lot additions, and land developments for 26 of the County's 52 municipalities. Appointed by the County Commissioners, this all-volunteer group is assisted by the County Planning Department. On a larger scale, the LCPC is charged with the responsibility for developing and updating the Comprehensive Plan.
- Lycoming County Water and Sewer Authority (LCWSA). In 1988-89 the LCWSA was established to provide much needed public water and sewer service to areas of the County that were underserved yet had significant opportunity to be developed. Once the water and sewer service was established, other utility services, such as natural gas, were enticed to expand their service delivery. Together, these critical infrastructure investments paved the path for expanded business and industry growth, particular in the east end of the County. Additionally, rail-served sites within the SEDA-COG Joint Rail Authority region became more attractive.
- Lycoming County Zoning Partnership. Over the past 25 plus years the County has provided zoning services for 21 municipalities by which the County administers zoning using the unified County Zoning Ordinance. These services may be expanded to additional municipalities, as desired, as a cost-share service.
- Williamsport Area Transportation Study MPO. Chaired by PennDOT District 3-0 and administered by County Planning, the WATS MPO provides a comprehensive decision-making forum for reviewing, prioritizing, and funding infrastructure projects related to transportation throughout Lycoming County, including those nominated by local municipal leaders.
- North Central Pennsylvania Source Water Protection Alliance. Protect the region's drinking water sources from potential contamination by encouraging local planning and inter-municipal coordination efforts among other steps.
- Recreation—examples of joint initiatives. Today the Susquehanna River Walk forms a connection between Williamsport and South Williamsport. It continues through Loyalsock Township into Montoursville Borough forming a seamless 12+ mile recreational asset. The East Lycoming Recreation Authority has assembled an ~150-acre park facility for the enjoyment of area residents. The 62-mile Pine Creek Rail Trail travels north from Jersey Shore Borough through 6 Lycoming municipalities into Tioga County.

The Most Urgent Issue The most ubiquitous and dominant concern identified by municipalities across the County involves their respective Fire and EMS Agencies’ ability to provide adequate levels of emergency medical services and fire services to the residents they serve. As in other rural communities around the state, the local emergency medical service providers are also experiencing declining numbers of volunteers. In short, Fire and EMS Agencies’ ability to provide these essential and required services has become more difficult due to a number of interrelated factors:

- Increasing service and certification requirements—greater time commitment for training
- Decreasing staff capacity—fewer volunteers
- Increasing cost to provide certification training and essential equipment
- Funding limitations to support the above

Fire & EMS Challenge #1 -- The Increasing Requirement

Adequate levels of EMS are dictated by the 2009 Pennsylvania EMS System Act 37 (EMS Act) which further established requirements for service coverage and certification standards.

Provisions of the EMS Act actually took effect in 2014 and now require that all EMS agencies (including those located throughout Lycoming County) provide 24 hours a day, seven days a week coverage in order to respond to a request for EMS assistance that is dispatched. The EMS Act does permit the EMS Agencies to provide less than 24/7 services, if they participate in a County-level (or broader) EMS Response Plan approved by the Pennsylvania Department of Health.

According to the EMS Act, all EMS certification examinations recognized by the Commonwealth are required to align with the National EMS Education Standards. To comply with these standards, Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) certification requires a minimum of 150 hours of training plus co-requisites including two on-line courses and a 2.5 hour Haz-Mat Awareness class. The Cost of training is over \$900. Currently, a Basic Life Support Ambulance must be staffed by one person trained to EMT standard or higher and one Emergency Medical Responder (EMR). The EMR may be the driver if they are credentialed as the driver as well. This requires an additional 16 hour driving course.

The extensive training hours and costs required to become a volunteer fireman or EMS personnel are making it difficult for new recruits to commit the time required to become certified while meeting the demands of a career and family.

In addition to the responsibilities levied by the EMS Act, municipal codes also regulate the provision of emergency services at the local level. The Second Class Township Code that governs Lycoming County’s 42 townships requires each of these municipalities to “be responsible for ensuring that fire and emergency medical services are provided within the township by the means and to the extent determined by the township, including appropriate financial and administrative assistance for these services.”^{xxvi}

Borough code that governs Lycoming County’s nine Boroughs, states that each of these municipalities will “...be responsible for ensuring that fire and emergency medical services are provided within the borough by the

means and to the extent determined by the borough, including appropriate financial and administrative assistance for these services.”^{xxvii} The City of Williamsport is governed by the Third Class City Code. Each of these three overarching codes requires a municipality to consult with emergency service providers to discuss the needs within their respective communities.

Because townships, boroughs, and cities are required to ensure that adequate fire and EMS services are provided in their municipalities, strong and consistent communication between volunteer and paid fire and EMS departments and the respective governing municipal bodies is absolutely indispensable. Most importantly, both parties should have a mutual understanding and agreement upon such things as: annual budget, funding needs, service delivery parameters and requirements, operational management, and problems being encountered. A healthy working relationship, built upon a shared concern for public safety and welfare, must be cultivated.

The funding and time demands associated with this increased training and needed equipment are exacerbated by the shrinking number of volunteer recruitments with the net effect being a decreased capacity to provide required services. This dilemma is not unique to Lycoming County—it’s a statewide issue.



Figure 21: Requirements and Resources Trend

Fire & EMS Challenge #2 -- The Decreasing Resources

Since 1985 the number of volunteers in PA has declined 54%: from 152,000 to 70,000. There are 2,146 fire companies and 1270 EMS Agencies in Pennsylvania and majority of them are all-volunteer. Across the state, volunteer agencies are being challenged to maintain services while suffering from a declining pool of volunteers. The lack of volunteers has hit the volunteer fire departments and emergency service agencies especially hard.

EMS is provided to over 1,200 square miles in Lycoming County through a combination of multiple service delivery methods including: hospital based (basic and advanced) life support services, paid and volunteer fire department based units, paid duty crews, and all-volunteer crews. The Fire and EMS membership for agencies serving Lycoming County is in excess of 860 (2017 DPS survey). Nineteen percent of these individuals are female—76% are males with the largest age group being males of ages 41 to 59.

The Providers - Currently the following emergency medical service agencies provide services to the municipalities of Lycoming County:

- ✓ Williamsport Bureau of Fire (only career department) serving Williamsport
- ✓ South Williamsport Fire Department (SWFD) serving South Williamsport
- ✓ Duboistown Fire Department serving Duboistown & Armstrong Twp
- ✓ OLT Volunteer Fire Company serving Old Lycoming Township
- ✓ Loyalsock Volunteer Fire Co. serving Loyalsock Township
- ✓ UPMC/Susquehanna Regional EMS – Ambulance and paramedic services provided to 38 municipalities and 5 counties
- ✓ Montgomery Fire Department—serving Montgomery Borough

- ✓ Clinton Township Fire Department serving Clinton and Brady Townships
- ✓ Willing Hand Fire Department serving Montoursville Borough & Fairfield Township
- ✓ Citizens Fire House serving Jersey Shore
- ✓ Independent Hose Company serving Jersey Shore Borough & Porter Township
- ✓ Woodward Fire Department serving Woodward Township & Anthony Township
- ✓ Plunketts Creek Volunteer Fire Company
- ✓ Lairdsville Community Fire Company
- ✓ Muncy Area Volunteer Fire Company
- ✓ Muncy Township Volunteer Fire Company
- ✓ Hughesville Volunteer Fire & Rescue
- ✓ Hepburn Township Volunteer Fire Company
- ✓ Eldred Township Volunteer Fire Company
- ✓ Pine Creek Fire Company
- ✓ Waterville Volunteer Fire Department
- ✓ Ralston Volunteer Fire Company
- ✓ Trout Run Volunteer Fire Company
- ✓ Nisbet Volunteer Fire Company
- ✓ Unityville Volunteer Fire Company & Jordan Township
- ✓ Antes Fort Fire Company & Nippenose Township
- ✓ Nippenose Valley Volunteer Fire Company & Limestone and Bastress Townships

The firefighting capacity and capabilities of local fire departments are critical to the future growth and development potential in Lycoming County and its municipalities. If adequate capacity is not sustained, let alone increased, due to limiting capabilities, funding, and/or other reasons, businesses and industries seeking new or expanded locations may look elsewhere. Firefighting capacity and advanced safety training and equipment related to service of hazardous material operations is equally critical. It is important that Fire and EMS services be considered an essential infrastructure factor during the planning and feasibility phases of all new developments.

Countywide Trends - For the six-year period between 2012 and 2017, the total volume of calls from the two counties served by the Lycoming/Sullivan 911 Center has actually declined. Yet, the workload has been increasing since the type of 911 calls has changed. In recent years, there has been a significant increase in personal care and assistance requests as opposed to traditional emergency situations. Moreover, there has been an increase in the number of Fire/EMS and Police Incidents during this same period. The majority of Fire/EMS incidents are medical emergencies; however, it is difficult to separate the data since many of the calls are handled by the Fire Company personnel and units. Of particular note, in the last three years, the EMS calls that are tagged as MED Priority 1 calls (chest pain, unresponsive, cardiac arrest gunshot/stabbing patient) have increased from 2,182 in 2015 to 2,348 in 2017. The chart below displays these statistics with the overwhelming majority of activity coming from Lycoming County.

Lycoming/Sullivan County 911 Center Activity 2012-2017						
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Fire/EMS Incidents	17,378	16,915	17,314	18,856	18,601	21,631
Police Incidents	43,068	40,403	41,397	42,532	43,773	48,347
Total 911 Calls	61,598	59,836	60,628	58,223	56,295	58,111
Working Fires	126	97	125	113	137	166
2nd Alarm Fires	19	18	27	11	12	17
3rd Alarm Fires	1	2	3	2	2	4
MVA w/entrapment	74	46	80	75	64	43
Water Rescues	19	11	17	11	20	12

Table 2: Lycoming/Sullivan County 911 Center Activity 2012-2017

Source: Lycoming County Department of Public Safety

While each municipality in the County may be committed to 1) protecting the health, safety, and welfare of their residents; 2) meeting the requirements of their respective municipal codes for providing EMS services; and 3) fulfilling the requirements of Pennsylvania’s EMS Systems Act 37, more must be done.

A more integrated, holistic, and comprehensive approach must be developed, adopted, and implemented. It is becoming increasingly difficult for the traditional structure of EMS service delivery to remain effective in the 21st century due to a number of factors:

- Mix of geography and terrain: dense urbanized area as well as low density population areas, some very rural and remote
- Mixture of paid and volunteer service providers
- Changing demographics and family responsibilities

At a minimum, discussions should begin in order to find ways for Fire and EMS units to share the costs of Finance/Planning/Bookkeeping/Auditing and consider a paid position to act as a resource for multiple entities.

Key Implications

There are a number of potential problems that local government fragmentation and disenfranchisement create. Poorly planned programs, solutions, and approaches to these twin issues can often cause more harm than good. However, the do nothing approach—or simply conducting business as usual—sustains a toxic environment that may result in long-term, harmful consequences:

- Increased sense of being disenfranchised—marginalized—powerless—frustrated
- Risk of Financial Insolvency
- Inability to attract citizen volunteers, hire quality staff, or both
- Inefficient use of manpower resources
- Duplication of resources
- Mission execution degraded or compromised
- Operational effectiveness jeopardized
- Limited time (if any) to develop long range planning

If the fragmentation and disenfranchisement focus is placed on the Fire and EMS arena, the potential problems are even more foreboding. If municipalities and the Fire and EMS Agencies do not find ways to work together more effectively and if higher levels of government and/or professional associations remain aloof to local communities, the following five impacts are likely:

- Further increases to program administrative costs for municipalities.
- Residents of these municipalities will not be provided the required level of EMS service needed.
- The municipalities may not meet the requirements of Pennsylvania EMS System Act 37 of 2009 and their respective Municipal Codes.
- The municipalities may be required to hire emergency service and fire personnel, which would create a substantial cost burden and other related fiscal challenges.
- Municipalities may be forced to cut existing programs and services that local residents rely on.

Projects of Countywide Significance for Fragmentation

PREPARE, COORDINATE, REVIEW, APPROVE, AND IMPLEMENT A LYCOMING COUNTYWIDE EMS RESPONSE PLAN

Lycoming County Department of Public Safety (DPS) has begun to work with the EMS Response and Staffing Task Force to address the requirements and challenges of providing sufficient service to municipalities in the County. The municipalities of Lycoming County and their respective Fire and EMS agencies will work together with County DPS and the Regional EMS Council to evaluate their abilities to provide a readily accessible and efficient level of EMS services to all residents and meet the service requirements of the EMS Act. The agencies will examine and assess their individual and collective resources, services, capacity, management structures, training requirements, costs, and funding potentials in support of the development of a *Countywide EMS Response Plan*. Conversations and planning are already being facilitated by Susquehanna Regional EMS to develop a membership-based approach to regional EMS service provision.

If progress continues to be made with partnership agreements through a membership-based EMS approach, it is possible that a third-party consultant will not be necessary to develop an overall countywide plan. If this proposal does not progress, then a third-party consultant should be hired to support the development of the Countywide EMS Response Plan and assist with its implementation. The Fire and EMS Agencies will need to work with their municipal governments to identify specific shortcomings and needs within their respective territories to help provide the necessary data and information for decision-making. The “Municipal Fire/EMS Service Delivery Chart” (included in Appendix C) will be used to assist in this preparation.

The following is a sample of the types of data and information that will be needed in order to adequately complete the assessment and make viable recommendations to the County’s EMS Response and Staffing Task Force. It is recommended that municipalities and EMS agencies begin collecting this information prior to the hiring of the consultant and the development of the plan.

Volunteer Fire Departments and EMS Providers— data needed:

- Service area (EMS services need to verify their response area, is it consistent with their PA DOH license?)
- Service call volumes and call volume trends/changes over last 5 years
- Where are the gaps of providing 24/7 service?
- Annual costs for equipment and technology/Annual facility costs (includes rent, mortgage, lease, utilities)/Annual insurance costs (liability, workers comp, vehicle)
- EMS services should review their response times based upon the following “time blocks” – 0600 hours – 1800 hours and then from 1800 hours – 0600 (overnight). This can help evaluate impacts of volunteers working their primary “day job” and perhaps help identify a gap/need for alternative response/compensated staffing.
- EMS services should inventory their personnel rosters annually with special attention to recertification dates/milestones and CPR certification. A review of age and gender demographic information would prove helpful for local/regional recruitment efforts.

- Average compensation (salary) of employee(s): EMS services should verify current number of volunteer and compensated staff for the service. Additionally, what is the hourly rate paid to EMT's and does that include a shift or weekend differential? Is there a budgetary shortfall to attain part-time career staffing?
- EMS services should identify shortfalls in training and recertification. Is there a need for additional training consortiums/resources in the County to provide both career and volunteer EMS staffing?
- Annual budgets: EMS services should provide an annual operating budget and 3 – 5 year capital asset replacement plan to its board of directors/local government. This could serve as the catalyst for municipal funding allocations/tax support.
- The EMS Council should provide a current listing, by statute, of training required by PA DOH for EMS unit licensure (both transport and non-transport services).
- EMS services should identify other internal training requirements in place to meet insurance, HIPPA, or infection control policies as examples.

It is expected that this plan will provide a framework for how EMS Agencies will collectively manage, administer, and provide services to all 52 municipalities in Lycoming County, when they are unable to provide 24/7 staffing coverage. The Plan will include recommended formal agreements among the participating Agencies and municipalities and additional strategies for how they will provide readily accessible service coverage throughout Lycoming County.

The development of an **EMS Response Plan** in Lycoming County will meet the requirements of Act 37 as well as provide a blueprint for how each EMS Agency will assist in the provision required and critically important EMS services.

PROJECT LEADERSHIP

Lead Agency – Lycoming County DPS, LTS EMS Council, and Lycoming County EMS Council

Other Partners – UPMC/Susquehanna Regional EMS, Jersey Shore EMS, Fire Chief's Advisory Board, Lycoming County Commissioners, and Department of Planning and Community Development (PCD) along with the PA Department of Health Bureau of EMS will participate and support this effort.

Projects of Countywide Significance for Disenfranchisement

STRENGTHEN COGS AROUND THE COUNTY

Lycoming County Planning Department (PCD) will communicate and coordinate with Councils of Government (COGs) around the County such as Pine Creek COG, West Branch COG, and others that have an interest in expanding their mission and/or scope. PCD will assist with organizational restructuring, goal-and-mission setting, and meeting facilitation. Examples of additional issues that COG's could address, mentioned during the Comprehensive Planning process, include: community and economic development issues, preservation of natural resources, outdoor recreation opportunities, communications infrastructure, protection of water quality, increasing volunteerism, and dealing with the impacts of the natural gas industry.

CONVENE AN ANNUAL MUNICIPAL SUMMIT

PCD will plan, prepare and facilitate an Annual Municipal Summit with and for all Lycoming County municipalities. Each annual summit will focus on a different subset of topics based on the priority issues identified in the Comprehensive Plans and/or other ubiquitous issues of general concern to municipal leaders. Organizations that provide relevant services and/or technical assistance should be invited to attend and participate in this summit event, such as: SEDA-COG, state agencies, and other non-governmental organizations, as appropriate.

VISIT FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATORS

PCD will plan, coordinate and facilitate an annual visit with our US Congressman’s regional office as well as our US Senators’ offices to brief them on issues of highest importance to the County and its municipal leaders. The goal is to ensure those issues and concerns are on the legislators’ radar. Opportunities to seek federal funding will likewise be addressed. Regarding our State Legislators, PCD will arrange semi-annual visits with similar objectives, but tailored to programs and funding opportunities that are State managed.

MUNICIPAL SERVICES ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The Municipal Services Division of the County Planning Department could provide economies of scale services for County municipalities that do not have the capacity or professional staff to provide important services and respond to the changing needs of their communities in order to stay relevant and competitive for development. PCD would need additional staff capacity to assist with the following types of requests. Most of these things can be offered as fee-for-service assistance.

- Assistance with zoning ordinance amendments that are compatible with land use patterns and densities that define the local character of communities.
- Updates to land use regulations to limit the development of private sewage treatment plants, meet DEPs sewage management requirements (especially for on-lot septic systems), and update ordinances (especially bulk standards: minimum lot size, setbacks, etc.) when public sewer becomes available.
- Ensure that ordinance are adequately designed to provide for all uses either specifically or generally, and have a mechanism to handle uses that haven’t been contemplated.
- Update land use regulations to limit access to high volume roadways.
- Utilize land use regulations to mitigate the impacts of development such as erosion and sedimentation control, flood hazards, and stormwater runoff.
- Ensure that ordinances do not require excessive impervious surface coverage.
- Explore beautification options and gateway opportunities in/around commercial districts and village centers.
- Encourage consistency in administration and enforcement of zoning practices with neighboring municipalities.
- Provide adequate training opportunities for planning commission, zoning hearing board, municipal officials, and land use review officers.

These services can only be provided with additional PCD staff capacity.