

Sustainable Pennsylvania Community Certification for the Borough of Chambersburg: An Assessment of Policies and Practices for a Sustainable Community in South Central PA

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**Abstract**

The main purpose of this research project is to assist the Borough of Chambersburg with their goal of reaching either the Silver or Gold achievement level for the Sustainable Pennsylvania Community Certification. This certification is intended to recognize local/municipal governments in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for enacting the policies and practices of sustainability for their communities' growth. However, sustainability can be a fairly complex concept to tackle and understanding what sustainable communities are or how they operate may seem confusing or unattainable for some communities. This research proposal will also discuss what sustainability is, what sustainable communities are, give background on the Sustainable Pennsylvania Community Certification, and identify another local municipality that has already attained the highest level of certification that can be achieved within the program.

**Introduction**

Sustainability, at its most basic definition, is the "ability or the capacity of something to maintain or sustain itself." It is a complex system involving ideas, people, development, environmental issues and more, to allow for management and growth in the present that will not put future generations in jeopardy. Practicing sustainability is living within the means of our natural resources and land availability without causing harm to others, requiring careful thought about the future and how a community plans to develop. It is a concept and multi-modal practice that intertwines social/cultural issues, environmental issues, economic development, and governmental policies.

Sustainable communities, according to the Geographical Association, are "places where people want to live and work, now and in the future. They meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, are sensitive to their environment, and contribute to a high quality of life. They

are safe and inclusive, well-planned, built and run, and offer equality of opportunity and good services for all.” Maintaining a community’s environmental and economic health, engaging and fostering its’ citizen participation, and social inclusion are the key aspects to creating a successful sustainable community, yet 8 main components are required to be in accordance with sustainable development practices and are:

- 1.) They are active, inclusive and safe
- 2.) Well-run
- 3.) Environmentally sensitive
- 4.) Well-designed and built
- 5.) Well-connected
- 6.) Thriving
- 7.) Well-served
- 8.) Fair to everyone

Balancing the economic, environmental, and social needs of the community, meeting those needs, and respecting the needs of other local communities are the values that embody sustainable development. Sustainable communities require cooperation from multiple government agencies, community residents, developers, business owners, non-profit organizations, and surrounding municipalities to help achieve these components for a community’s road to sustainability.

### **Background of the Sustainable Pennsylvania Community Certification**

Partnering with the Pennsylvania Municipal League, there are 5 levels of certification achievements a municipality can strive for in this certification program. Each level of achievement has its own separate point and validation requirements, then needing to be approved by the Pennsylvania Municipal League after providing the appropriate documentation. Levels are determined by a point system and a percentage of documentation to be available to the public. Achievement levels from lowest to highest are: Associate (1-34 points), Bronze (35-79 points), Silver (80-135 points), Gold (136-202 points), and Platinum (203-300 points).

Certification criteria include 131 policies, actions, and best practices that must be enacted and documented, with 10 main topics and multiple sub-topics that need to be assessed. These

topics are broken down into sub-topics to better address all aspects of the community as it transitions into adopting sustainability practices. The topics and sub-topics that communities must address for this certification are as follows:

- 1.) **Governance and Community Engagement**- includes municipal operations, community engagement, local and regional cooperation, sustainability, and public safety.
- 2.) **Healthy Communities**- includes local food and healthy people
- 3.) **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**- includes human resources and the local economy
- 4.) **Education**- includes cooperation and engagement with schools, local non-profit organizations, and community organizations to offer education programs to students about community issues
- 5.) **Energy Use, Conservation and Green Building**- includes municipal energy use, community energy use, green buildings, and renewable energy policies and practices
- 6.) **Environmental Stewardship**- includes water use and its conservation and quality, air quality, and green infrastructure policies to protect and conserve environmentally and ecologically sensitive areas
- 7.) **Housing**- includes affordability and sustainable neighborhoods
- 8.) **Land Use and Transportation**- includes mobility, community and green space
- 9.) **Local Economy**- includes thriving local green businesses, material use, waste and recycling
- 10.) **Other Sustainability Innovation**- includes additional initiatives

### **Study Area**

The Borough of Chambersburg is located in Franklin County, Pennsylvania with a population of about 20,508 residents (2013). It is the County Seat and is a full-service municipality, offering all services and utilities to the town and is the only municipality in Pennsylvania to do so. Under the Pennsylvania Borough Code, Chambersburg employs over 300 full-time, part-time, and seasonal workers to serve the residents and local businesses. This allows the borough to not only be able to provide all utilities, including electricity and gas, but also to operate their own police force, storm sewer system, a combination paid and volunteer fire department, emergency services, a recreation

department, municipal parking program, a residential rental inspection program, and an active public works program, which includes a downtown revitalization effort and a neighborhood preservation program.

In the borough's 2014 Annual Report, Chambersburg announced the focus on being a safe, clean, green, and healthy community, outlining various new projects and improvement plans over the next year. Some of these plans included an update to the downtown vision and downtown master plan, a separate downtown re-development plan, a camera and security project to assist the police department, record numbers of street resurfacing projects, and a pedestrian and bicycle improvement plan. The borough also established a new Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) department, which became operational in 2015. This department is responsible for any and all issues concerning stormwater management, including improving water quality and groundwater recharge, development, maintenance, and best management practices. The department strives for cost effective and efficient practices to address public health issues, the natural environment, and economic development. All of these new projects and plans for the Borough fall under the necessary components for a community undergoing sustainable development practices, addressing multi-faceted areas of the community including public health, economic development, environmental stewardship, and being efficiently run. This puts the Borough in a favorable position to reach towards a Sustainable PA Community Certification achievement.

### **Examination of a Platinum Level Sustainable Community in Pennsylvania**

The highest level of achievement under the Sustainable PA Community Certification is the Platinum Level, which requires the highest range of points a municipality can earn and needs 90% of web-accessed links to provide documentation to the public. Only two townships in the state have achieved this level of certification; Cranberry Township in Butler County and Warwick Township in Lancaster County. Warwick Township is the municipality of interest for this research to explore what policies and practices were enacted to achieve this level, as well as to provide an example for the Borough of Chambersburg to assist in their sustainability goals.

Warwick Township began enacting sustainable practices back in the early 1990s with a focus on quality of life issues, establishing strong partnerships with the Lancaster Housing Opportunity Partnership, the Lititz Run Watershed Alliance, and Lititz Borough. What makes

Warwick Township unique is that they began these sustainable plans before the term sustainability became well known or the practices of developing sustainable communities gained traction. The township website refers to these plans as the “common sense approach” to community growth in the region. Warwick Township has a strong watershed and ecological preservation focus, enacting Warwick Watershed Day for middle-school students, which educates young people on the importance of clean water, hosting an annual stream cleanup day for Lititz Run, and working with land developers to restore, maintain, and protect natural watershed environments. The township has also made it a requirement in the planning of any public area to include plans that address stormwater runoff and flooding issues as well as utilizing bio-retention areas and native plants to filter stormwater.

Warwick Township maintains cooperation with various non-profit and for-profit organizations and initiatives, as well as fostering a community where residents actively participate and volunteer. Sustainable food programs through the Lititz Farmers Market and the Venture Lititz organization links farmers and local food to the people of the community, and the township created a reference map of local roadside market stands so people can find local food more easily. Warwick Township makes a commitment to sponsor sustainability awareness events for public outreach and education as well, providing educational materials at all events. Fostering community engagement and education is one of the most important ways a community can reach sustainability goals, because the people the municipality is serving can be involved and informed.

The township has also created a Community Sustainability Policy, developed to ensure that elected officials adhere to the policies of sustainability for the township, maintaining the balance of environmental stewardship, economic growth, and social equality. Agricultural preservation, emergency services, preservation of natural resources, regional recreation, and stormwater management are just a few of the areas Warwick Township strives to continue in their mission to provide residents and businesses with a sustainable community.

## **Data and Methods**

### **Methods:**

Utilizing the Sustainable PA Community Certification Checklist as a way to assess Chambersburg’s current progress and future development while using borough documents as sources material. I

will also be working with Phil Wolgemuth, the borough's Land Use and Development Director/Assistant to the Borough Manager, Andrew Stottlemyer, the Storm Sewer System manager, and staff of other associated municipal departments, including Guy Shaul, the Recreation Department Superintendent and Jason Cohen, the Director of Finance.

Data:

Documents that will be provided by the municipality as proof that certification criteria has been met or is in the process of being enacted, as well as using the borough's 2014 Annual Report, the 2014-2015 MS4 report, Comprehensive Plan (2008) and its associated Executive Summary, the Franklin County Greenway and Open Space Plan (2007), and the borough's 2015 Annual Water Quality Report.

**Results**

The Borough of Chambersburg has begun the process of enacting policies, actions, and best practices that adhere to the Sustainable PA Communities Certification criteria, yet there are still improvements and policies that need to be addressed. The certification process will take time and this research project is designed for another student to continue with as an independent research study or as an internship with the Borough.

From the research that has been currently performed, the Borough's full-service utilities for residents remain one of their best sustainable practices. The ability of the Borough to provide their own police force, EMS services, and combination paid and volunteer fire department allows the Borough to not rely on contracting these services through other municipalities or a regional service program. The Borough's electricity that is purchased from providers has also reached 18% purchase from renewable energy sources in 2014, surpassing the state's renewable energy requirements set for 2020. The Pedestrian and Bicycle Improvement Plan outlined in the 2014 Annual Report is also an aspect of sustainable development that the borough has achieved, as well as having at least 16 parks for residents to enjoy, an active farmer's market, and an extensive sidewalk system that allows for many residents to walk almost anywhere.

The new MS4 department that the Borough created in 2014 has been fully operational since 2015, with the new Storm Sewer System manager, Andrew Stottlemeyer, delivering a 2015 MS4 Report that covers all of the new department functions, necessary repairs and instances of MCM violations, goals for Stormwater Management Compliance with Chapter 251 of Borough Code, and new educational, cooperative, and public participation and outreach goals and actions. Mr. Stottlemeyer has reached out to target groups and audiences that are served by the Borough's MS4, including the Franklin County Watershed Association (FCWA), Wilson College, Chambersburg Area School District (CASD), and the Borough's Gas, Electric, and Water/Sewer departments. Public education and outreach programs are being developed for schools to educate students on the importance of stormwater management, as well as causes and preventions of stormwater pollution (2015 MS4 Report, pg. 4). Mr. Stottlemeyer has also undergone a Certified Stormwater Inspector Training program in 2015, beneficial to all municipal employees who work with MS4 (2015 MS4 Report, pgs. 5-6).

Most municipal operations under the criteria topic of **Governance and Community Engagement** are being enacted, with information given by the Borough's Director of Finance, while under the **Land Use and Transportation** criteria topic, the borough's Department of Recreation is working closely with Franklin County on their Greenway and Open Space Plan, which is a multi-municipality involved plan for the entire county. In this county-wide plan, the Comprehensive Recreation, Park, and Open Space Plan's trail development efforts have been implemented in some areas, including Chambersburg's construction of the Rail-Trail that runs along the west bank of the Conococheague Creek and through the downtown (Franklin County Greenway and Open Space Plan, pgs. 43-44).

The Recreation Superintendent, Guy Shaul, was able to provide ample information about what the borough's Recreation Department is currently doing under the Sustainable PA Communities Certification Criteria, and one of the aspects under the **Healthy Communities** topic that the Borough could address is the availability of community gardens, as well as a borough implemented program on the importance of locally purchased food. Wilson College currently has a program in place, but the borough itself does not. The Recreation Department is doing an excellent job of promoting programs within their 16 parks across the borough that provide activities and outdoor opportunities in a pollution-free environment and the borough does support the local

North Square Farmer's Market. The borough could provide education materials on the importance of locally grown, organic food at this market and promote the idea of establishing more community gardens.

Areas of the community certification criteria that still need to be addressed are various sub-topics included under the main topics of:

- **Governance and Community Engagement**
- **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**
- **Education**
- **Energy Use, Conservation, and Green Building**
- **Environmental Stewardship**
- **Housing**
- **Land Use and Transportation**
- **Local Economy**

### **Conclusion**

The Borough of Chambersburg has begun implementation of numerous sustainable policies, actions, and best practices outlined in the Sustainable PA Communities Certification Criteria, but still has many other aspects of the criteria to address. This was expected at the beginning stages of this project. The borough is doing and has done a lot of work to attain the goals of being a safe, clean, green, and healthy community and their pledge to the Sustainable PA Community Certification Program has proved their dedication to this plan. The residents of Chambersburg are living in a great town that provides full-service utilities, quality public services, and is an asset to Franklin County.

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