

2nd Inning: Public Participation & Review of Past Plans

In order to develop a broad base of information for the BAMB Plan, several different forms of public participation and information gathering techniques were employed early and often in the planning process. In chronological order, these included:

- Steering Committee meetings – throughout the planning process.
- Review of previous plans and studies.
- Key Person Interviews.
- Residential Survey.
- Guided tours and public meetings in each of the municipalities.
- Working Group meetings.
- Public Forum discussion of the Draft Plan.
- Public presentation of the final BAMB Plan and formal approval of the Plan at each municipality.

This chapter discusses the various public participation processes utilized, and briefly summarizes the results of each.

Steering Committee Meetings

The initial Steering Committee (SC) meeting was held on November 8, 2007. A majority of the SC members from each municipality, DCED representative Denny Puko, DCNR representative Kathy Frankel, and representatives from PDG and HRG were in attendance. Following an overview of the intended planning process and State expectations for the plan, key issues within the BAMB area in general, and within each of the individual municipalities, were identified and discussed. Major issues as initially identified include:

- Wastewater
 - BASA has plan in place to remedy the Consent Order Agreement with DEP.
 - Affects development/redevelopment in the City, East Butler, Butler Township and Summit Township.
 - The Saxonburg Area Authority is expanding services in Penn Township.
 - DEP is mandating sanitary sewer for the Village of Herman – a major issue for Summit Township.
- Water – no major issues identified, but likely to be the next major infrastructure issue.
- Storm Water – issues within the City and any areas where it is being directed to the public sanitary sewer system.
- Roads – issues throughout the BAMB area, including:
 - Condition of the roads.
 - Connectivity between the municipalities and between major roads in the area.
 - Access management for future development.
 - Need for a connector between the City's downtown and the West End redevelopment area.
- Regional routes needing improvements:
 - New Castle Road
 - SR 8
 - SR 68
 - SR 228
- Better connections needed to I-79 and I-80.

- Alternative transportation
 - Rails to Trails – regional opportunities with tourism implications.
 - Need for a County-wide Greenways Plan.
 - Major corridors in Butler Township are not walkable.
- Parks & Recreation:
 - New Penn Township Park planning will be treated as a separate issue.
 - City has good parks than need to be updated.
 - Opportunities in Butler Township for new parks.
 - No parks in Summit Township – on-going debate within the Township.
 - East Butler has a great baseball park complex but needs more/better playgrounds.
 - Options providing less maintenance and fewer opportunities for vandalism discussed.
 - Open spaces.
 - Walking trails - connected to other trails within the area.
 - Trails connecting subdivisions and required within new subdivisions.
- City issues and needs:
 - High percentage of rental properties vs. home ownership.
 - High number of non-taxable properties.
 - Blighted properties.
 - Duplication of services – within the City and with neighboring municipalities.
 - Need more structured activities for youth (in the City and throughout the BAMM area).
- Summit Township – strong desire to remain rural.
- East Butler – tax breaks for industries resulting in low tax revenues.
- Review of zoning and development regulations needed in City and Townships.
- Preservation issues and objectives:
 - Preserve open space.
 - No more available industrial land in the County.
 - Involve CDC in the creation of a new Industrial/Commercial Park.
 - Include large and small non-retail employers (insurance, tech support, etc.).
 - Preserve Ag lands, especially in Summit and Butler Townships.
 - Floodplain management – especially in the City, East Butler and Butler Township.
 - Lyndora’s historic character.
 - Utilization of “Green Building” standards.
- Top-notch medical facilities:
 - Butler Hospital
 - Health clinic on East Butler Road
 - VA Hospital

The second and third SC meetings were held on March 12 and May 28, 2008 to refine the key issues facing the BAMM Area municipalities and residents, review the subjects to be covered in the Key Person Interviews and Resident Survey, and begin to form the foundation for the Working Groups. It was at the conclusion of the second SC meeting that the idea of officially naming this Butler area multi-municipal plan the “BAMM Plan” originated.

Key issues within each of the municipalities, and common to the entire BAMM area, were reviewed, refined and initially organized into the following groups:

- Parks & Recreation
- Infrastructure
- Transportation
- Heritage Tourism
- Quality of Life
- Downtown Butler
- Preservation
- Economic Development
- Future Land Use
- Intergovernmental Coordination/Consolidation of overlapping Organizations

Review of Past Plans

To supplement the information to be gathered via public participation, PDG and HRG compiled and reviewed demographic data for each of the municipalities, and reviewed nine previous plans and studies completed within the County and the BAMB area between 1995 and 2007. Summaries of each are provided in **Appendix 2-1**. The previous studies that were reviewed and summarized include:

- Butler County Steel Heritage Plan – December 2007
- Butler County Historical Sites Survey – 2007
- Butler County Ethnographic Survey – January 2007
- Steel Industry Heritage Corp. Ethnographic Survey of Lyndora – December 2006
- City of Butler Main Street Application – August 2006
- City of Butler Comprehensive Recreation, Parks and Open Space Plan – 2005
- Penn Township Comprehensive Development Plan – 2002
- Butler County Comprehensive Plan – 2002
- Butler Township Comprehensive Recreation, Parks and Open Space Plan – 1995

Key Person Interviews

The Steering Committee provided PDG and HRG with a list of more than 40 people to be invited to participate. The list included elected officials, municipal employees, business owners, new and long-term residents, and others active in the five municipalities. 38 agreed to participate in the one-on-one interviews, and responded to a series of questions designed to help prioritize the major issues identified by the Steering Committee, identify additional issues, and create an atmosphere for a candid and confidential discussion of the issues facing both their individual communities and the greater Butler area as a whole.

Interviews were conducted on April 22 & 23 and May 28, 2008. A detailed summary of the Key Person Interviews is in **Appendix 2-2**. Highlights of comments regarding specific issues include:

BASA: What is taking so long? Need total change – administration and system. Absolutely a priority.

Revitalization of Downtown Butler is critical to whole area: Heart of the County; Hub of entire region; Image for whole area.

Recruit specific businesses to Downtown: Specialty shops, restaurants, professional services, upper floor residential.

More and better parks: Key to quality of life, bringing people in.

Industrial development in addition to West End: East Butler. Tie West End and East Butler together with a road.

Parking problem areas other than DT: At the schools (especially at special/sporting events. At Pullman Ball Park. In City neighborhoods (references to restrictions on building garages and number of former single-family homes that are now multi-family).

Local schools: Problems caused by “No child left behind” program. There are tax base issues. Disconnect between schools and parents. Huge drug problem exists. Good facilities.

BC3: Very positive comments.

Vo Tech: Good asset with excellent reputation. It should be expanded to 9-12 grades.

Penn United: Important, need to get the word out about its programs. Some disconnect with expectations and jobs actually landed by trainees.

Chamber of Commerce: Mostly positive comments, especially regarding new leadership. There are issues with funding and attracting volunteers, and possibly the amount of emphasis on events rather than promoting and attracting business.

City Council/Administration: Recognize budget limitations. There’s hope that having a Main Street Manager will help. There are concerns about ability to really change things that need to be changed. The mercantile tax issue is driving businesses out of City & downtown.

Township Supervisors/Administration: Butler and Penn – generally high marks. Summit has issues between Board members and inconsistencies with Planning Commission.

County Commissioners/Administration: Sense of renewed hope with two new commissioners. The County is still smarting from prison issues.

Trails: Moraine Trail recently improved. There are Rails to Trails issues in Summit Township. Need for safe bike routes for both recreation and transportation.

Level of cooperation - City & County: Hopes are raised with new Mayor and Commissioners, but generally considered pretty minimal for a long time. Consensus, however, is that cooperation between the two is critical for the area and that the City needs the County’s financial and other support.

Level of cooperation among the municipalities: Improving and needed, but still minimal. Need to find some common ground and/or starting places, as well as explore shared services. Hopes raised with multi-municipal planning effort.

Housing opportunities/availability: Lots of issues in the City – too many rentals, tough for young families to find affordable and safe areas to live, etc. Need for housing for middle-income families, seniors, and families throughout the area.

Tourist attractions and Cultural facilities: A good number already in the area, and opportunities for others suggested. Need more publicity and marketing of local opportunities, especially in conjunction with parades and other special events.

Entertainment opportunities: Need much more for teens, preteens, singles and young adults especially, but also in general. However, there are lots of things to do in the area, but not very well publicized.

Safety Services: High marks all around. Lots of comments about sharing of services, how long we can afford paid Fire Departments, need for more drug enforcement, etc.

Infrastructure/Utilities: Sidewalks, roads, stormwater, and BASA issues. There were mixed comments about utilities in each municipality.

Should it be a priority to create a network of trails in the Greater Butler Area? Overwhelmingly yes.

Transportation issues: Mass transit and Park & Ride needs expected to grow with fuel prices. There are parking issues near prison and in Lyndora. Picklegate intersection at Pullman should be a 4-way light intersection. Bridge issues identified. Additional corridors/areas for consideration in the planning effort: SR 8 By-pass, SR 422 at Jefferson and at Bonniebrook, access to SR 422 on N. Duffy, turn lanes on Keck and Karnes Roads, etc. Need for multiuse trails for recreation and transportation. A Skateboard Park is needed, as well as a BMX track.

Main things to attract more businesses: Tax and Development incentives. Eliminate/reduce the mercantile tax. Better zoning, more parking, affordable housing, more downtown businesses, solve BASA issues, and street improvements.

Main things to attract more residents: Jobs. Fix downtown facades. Add more recreation and entertainment, and middle-income housing. Fix BASA. Clean-up the drug problems. Add more retail and lower taxes.

Types of businesses that should be recruited to area: Family recreation and entertainment, coffee shop, microbrewery, family restaurants, services, manufacturing, specialty shops in downtown, warehousing, health care, banquet facility for 400+and “Whatever we can get.”

Where your municipality spends too much money: Ranging from some essential services to “none”.

Where your municipality doesn't spend enough money: Mostly roads and other infrastructure.

Cooperation regarding Parks & Recreation: Getting people to understand that they are not islands but that they are attractions that cut across municipal boundaries. Coordinate with the County as well.

Resident Survey

A Resident Survey was undertaken in July 2008. In order to economically reach as many residents within the BAMM Plan area as possible, a survey was distributed as an insert in the Butler Eagle, and was also available on-line via links on the Penn Township and Butler Township websites. Advanced publicity on local radio and TV helped promote the survey. To further encourage participation, local businesses and organizations donated nearly 100 separate prizes including such things as: 4 box seats at a Pirates game, golf for four at local courses, swimming pool passes, theater tickets, bottles of wine, and gift certificates for local merchants and restaurants, to be awarded by drawing to twenty of those completing the survey.

A total of 522 responses were received, including some from non-residents of the BAMM Area. With a total population of 42,933 (2000 census figures), this level of response provides a 99% level of confidence in the results with a margin of error between 5.6 and 6.5%. 80% of those responding were between the ages of 36-75. The number of responses by municipality was also a reasonable reflection of the respective populations.

Questions were organized into three main areas based on the recommendations of the Steering Committee and prioritization of issues from the Key Person interviews – Quality of Life & Community Development, Parks & Recreation, and Downtown Butler. Those responding to the survey agreed with the Key Persons, regardless of residence, that the revitalization of

Downtown Butler is critical for the entire Greater Butler Area and should be a top priority for all concerned.

A copy of the survey itself and the detailed results are provided in **Appendix 2-3**. Major highlights include:

- The top five issues regarding **Quality of Life and Community Development** were:
 - The revitalization of Downtown Butler.
 - Selected neighborhoods also need to be revitalized, especially the “Island” area, the West End, and the South Side.
 - Local governments need to improve communications with the public.
 - Projects such as the Penn Theater, Pullman Park, Centre City, Wayne Street Connector, and West End redevelopment projects, are important to the revitalization of the area.
 - Open space, floodplains, habitat areas and natural resources should be preserved.
- Better highway connections are especially needed on these roads (in priority order).
 - 68
 - 228
 - 8
 - 528
 - 422
- Major areas of emphasis, based on comments received for this section of the survey, should be:
 - DT revitalization.
 - Safe, attractive, drug-free communities.
 - Jobs.
 - More activities for youth.
 - Increased home ownership.
 - Preserve open space.
- Highlights from the **Parks & Recreation** portion of the Survey include:
 - Almost 90% of those responding felt that the Butler area municipalities should partner in the development of parks and recreational programs and facilities.
 - Existing parks and recreational facilities should be improved.
 - The types of facilities that would get the most use are:
 - Walking trails
 - Restrooms
 - Nature trails
 - Picnic areas and tables
 - Bike trails
 - Relatively speaking, there was little demand for team and individual sports facilities such as tennis and basketball courts or baseball, softball, soccer and football fields. Instead, it was obvious that the BAMB Area residents want more opportunities for family-oriented, general fitness and play activities, and more facilities supporting those kinds of activities including picnic areas and restrooms.
- Highlights from the **Downtown** portion of the Survey include:
 - About 60% of the BAMB Area residents visit Downtown Butler at least once a week, with most of them spending less than \$50 per visit.
 - The primary reasons for visiting the Downtown are:
 - Post Office
 - Banking/Financial
 - Restaurants/Bars

- Doctors/Dentists/Opticians
- The kinds of new or additional stores or services most desired are:
 - Family restaurant
 - Theater showing current movies
 - Clothing store
 - Upscale restaurant
- At the end of the survey there was an opportunity to provide **general comments**. The general issue receiving the most comments was **safety**, with multiple specific references to drugs, Main Street, neighborhood crime, speeding, and the need for more police presence.

Tours and Visioning Sessions with each Municipality

Over a four-day period in September 2008, PDG representatives were given guided tours of each of the municipalities by municipal officials and/or staff personnel. Each evening following the tours, public visioning sessions were held in the municipalities. At those sessions, results from the key person interviews and resident surveys specific to that municipality were presented as a catalyst for discussion.

The meeting in Summit Township was held at the Herman Fire Hall and was attended by over 55 residents from the Township and the Borough of East Butler. Attendance in each of the other public meetings ranged from 15-25 attendees. In each session, there was a lively discussion regarding the issues of particular interest to those in attendance.

The information garnered during the tours, and in the public visioning sessions provided an even more in-depth and invaluable perspective on the issues facing each of the five municipalities and the BMM Area as a whole.

Detailed summaries of the four tours and public sessions, which make for some very interesting reading, are provided in Appendix 2-5. Brief highlights of each of the public meetings, with an emphasis on newly-identified issues and definite corroboration of previously identified issues, include:

- **East Butler/Summit Township:**
 - Township Zoning Code needs to be updated.
 - Commercial development is needed to improve the quality of life and increase Township revenues. Need both public water and sanitary sewer services throughout most of the Township.
 - The need for parks and recreation facilities in the Township remains a debated issue.
 - The park behind Summit Academy was not maintained and fell apart.
 - Don't raise taxes to have parks in the Township.
 - The land behind the Herman Fire Department building is available for a park.
 - Consider the Township-owned 10 acres near the Township building and adjacent to the planned Rails-to-Trails area.
 - East Butler parks need pavilions and restrooms.
 - Issues with high levels of traffic and speeding on Keck Road and Bonnie Brook.
 - Issues with Pennsylvania American Water Company, including insufficient water pressure to fight fires at many area fire hydrants.
 - Communications within the Township and among the area municipalities need to be improved greatly.

Penn Township:

- Several Township roads need to be upgraded, especially with the anticipated continued development.

- Need additional commercial development along SR 8, but need to address access management issues as well.
 - Need zoning continuity with adjacent municipalities.
 - Need public water.
 - Need to promote better utilization of the County Airport.
 - Loss of local schools from the Township has had a big impact on the sense of community within the Township and the amount of regular contact among families.
 - It is hoped that the potential new Township Park could provide a place for Township-wide activities and special events that would help renew a greater sense of community.
 - Penn Township has a website and produces a Township flyer.
- **Butler Township**
 - Safety issues after dark and with regard to walking in the Township.
 - Opportunity for multi-use trails for both recreation and transportation.
 - Need activities for youth.
 - Parks & Recreation should be a greater Butler cooperative effort.
 - Significant potential for regional mass transportation.
 - SR 68 is a major problem area.
 - Need affordable senior housing in the Township.
 - There are opportunities for consolidation of services.
 - **City of Butler**
 - Need better code enforcement, especially with regard to property maintenance.
 - There are serious real and perceived issues regarding crime in the Downtown.
 - The key to revitalization is safety.
 - Communications between the City and the residents is poor.
 - There are several disincentives for people to locate businesses in the City.
 - Need an emphasis on economic development.

Working Group Meetings

Additional public input into the planning process continued in late 2008 and in 2009, primarily in Working Group meetings. Based on the identification of the major issues facing the BMM Area and individual municipalities, six Working Groups were created and organized into compatible groupings which included:

- Downtown Butler
- Economic Development/Heritage Tourism/Quality of Life
- Infrastructure and Transportation
- Intergovernmental Coordination/Organization/Consolidation
- Land Use/Zoning/Preservation
- Parks & Recreation

These Working Groups consisted of interested volunteers from each of the municipalities, as well as Steering Committee members. The primary objectives for each of the Working Groups were to prioritize the issues germane to their specific areas, develop prioritized recommendations with regard to the major issues, and develop specific implementation steps necessary to accomplish the recommendations.

Butler Downtown Annual Meetings

PDG manned booths at the 2008 and 2009 Annual Meetings of Butler Downtown and provided maps and information on proposed goals and strategies being developed by the BMM Plan

Steering committee and Working Groups. PDG also attended Butler Downtown Committee meetings.

Public Forum

March 30, 2010

Work Session/Retreat

Municipal Presentations

The recommendations and implementation steps developed by the Working Groups, which make up the essence of the BMM Plan, are detailed in the following six chapters.