





.....preparing our neighborhood plan.....

what is planning?

Planning is a process through which we can establish a vision for State College. State College leaders work to ensure that this is a collaborative process which involves citizens, representatives from the business community, our civic leaders and other community entities. The goal of our planning activities is to inventory what currently exists and assess the missing pieces and areas of opportunity. This assessment helps staff, elected officials and residents prepare strategies, programs and policies that will improve the quality of life in State College.

Sometimes, the planning process is thought of as only considering the land use and infrastructure concerns that are associated with a particular project. However, planning must consider not only the physical and regulatory needs, but also the social, environmental and economic characteristics that ensure the sustainability of State College. In addition to zoning and redevelopment opportunities, our planning efforts include actions that can be taken to improve housing opportunities, mobility, community building, employment, economic sustainability and natural resources.

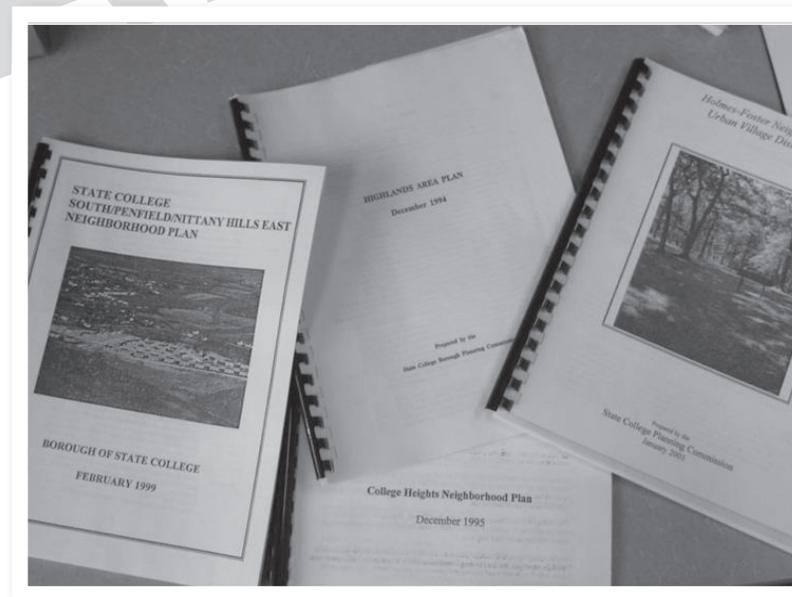
Neighborhood planning is a process that is specific to sub-areas of our community. This level of planning considers the individual needs and characteristics of our neighborhoods and their relationship to the larger community. Neighborhood planning can be more specific, sometimes focusing on one or more aspects of planning in greater detail than others. For example, a neighborhood plan may include more strategies related to community relations and home ownership than to zoning issues and economic development.

Neighborhood planning presents an opportunity to consider the goals and objectives of region-wide and Borough-wide plans, combine them with the priorities of each neighborhood, and determine the best method for implementation of these goals. This plan was prepared in order to outline the

goals for neighborhood sustainability, inventory the unique concerns for each neighborhood and determine priorities for addressing those goals within each neighborhood.

neighborhood planning history

The State College Neighborhood Plan was born out of the Planning Commission's work in 2012 to update of the 1994 Highlands Area Plan. The Commission participated in neighborhood planning meetings with the residents of the Highlands and reviewed a first draft of the update. At that time, the Borough also had neighborhood plans for the Holmes-Foster/Urban Village, College Heights and State College South/Nittany Hills/Penfield which were scheduled to be updated in consecutive years following the Highlands



Neighborhood Plans had been prepared for some Borough neighborhoods between the mid 1990s to the early 2000s.

Plan. The Planning Commission felt that it would be beneficial to prepare a single neighborhood plan for all of the Borough's neighborhoods. The purpose of this new plan would be to identify common themes affecting all of the Borough's neighborhoods and to consider the character and concerns of the individual neighborhoods.

Throughout 2013, the State College Planning Commission and Borough Staff worked with residents to identify issues, shape recommendations and prepare a plan. The planning process began with a review of the existing neighborhood plans to assess which recommendations had been completed and which were still in progress. Staff also prepared an inventory of the demographic and other trends taking place within each of the Borough's neighborhoods. Following this review, the Planning Commission held an information gathering meeting with each neighborhood. These meetings gave residents the opportunity to share their impressions of their neighborhood's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities

and threats (SWOT Analysis). Identifying these conditions also provide a basis for drafting a series of planning goals that would be addressed in a completed plan.

Additionally, a Citizen's Planning Workbook was developed to accompany the planning process. This guide provided an introduction to neighborhood planning, the goals for the final plan, and worksheets to help residents participate in the planning process outside of neighborhood meetings. The first of these worksheets, a mental mapping exercise, encouraged residents to create a map of their neighborhood without using any aids in order to highlight residents' understanding of a place and the things that are of personal importance within that place. The next worksheet provided an outline to assist residents in an evaluation of walking and biking routes within the Borough. These evaluations were aimed at understanding the quality and maintenance of these routes, their accessibility and areas for improvements. The next worksheet invited residents to continue listing their thoughts on the neighborhoods' strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Finally, an additional worksheet was added that listed the twelve planning goals that emerged throughout the planning process and asked residents to indicate which of these were of highest importance and any suggested actions they had for these goals.

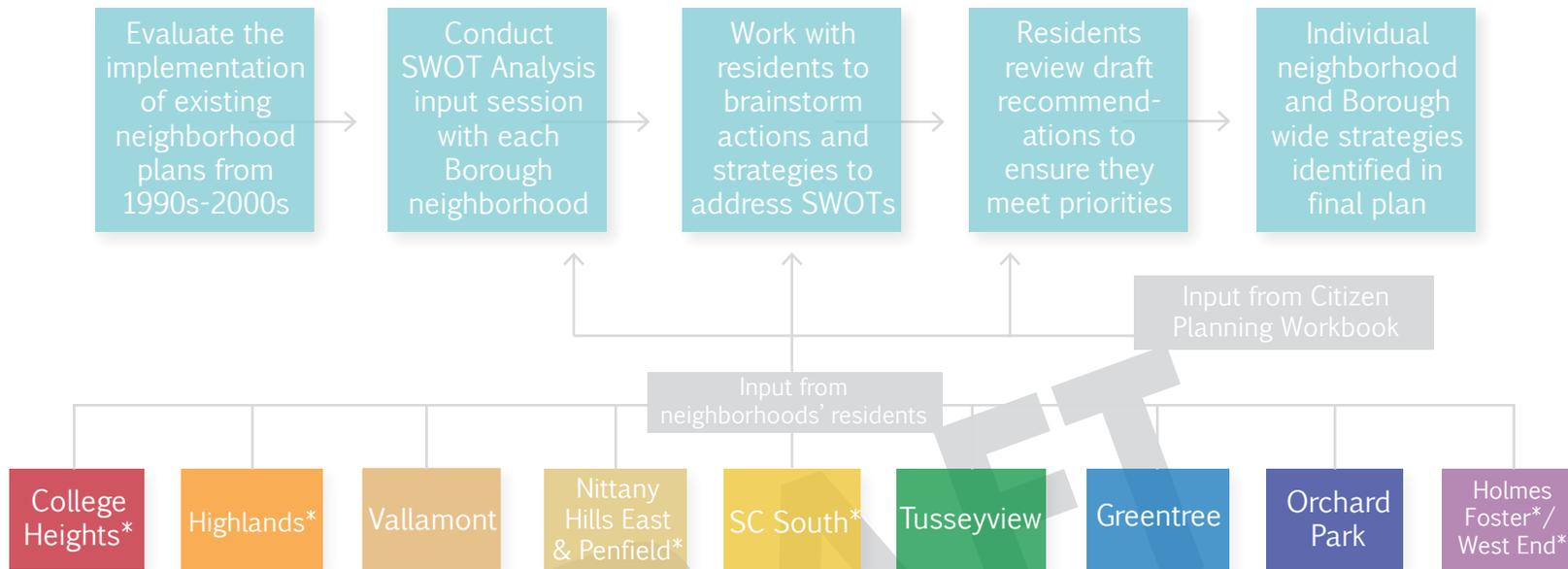


Residents from Holmes-Foster discussing ideas for improving neighborhood conditions with Planning Commission and staff.

Once these planning goals were drafted, the Planning Commission again held meetings with each neighborhood. The purpose of these meetings was to evaluate which of the goals were most important to each neighborhood and identify residents' ideas for unique strategies to address these needs. This input helped formulate the recommendations that are contained within this plan.

Once a set of recommendations were drafted for the Neighborhood Plan, the Planning Commission hosted three additional community meetings. During these meetings, residents reviewed the recommendations that were drafted

Neighborhood Plan Process 2013



**The asterisks indicate neighborhoods for which the State College Planning Commission or a Borough Planning Consultant had prepared a plan between 1994 and 2008.*

as the result of their input.

The goal of the Planning Commission and Planning Staff was to ensure that the State College Neighborhood Plan was informed by residents and stakeholders, with actionable strategies that can be implemented by residents, neighborhood associations, Council and the ABC's and staff. The Plan's content is meant to be engaging so that citizens learn about their neighborhood and are inspired to get involved. Most importantly, the recommendations are meant to be measurable so that champions can easily be identified and successes evaluated.

The State College Neighborhood Plan was completed by the Planning Commission in February of 2014 and forwarded to Borough Council for review. State College Borough Council accepted the plan in XXXX of 2014.



Residents from College Heights sharing their thoughts on neighborhood strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats with Planning Commission and staff.

neighborhood preservation

Neighborhood preservation, sometimes referred to as “neighborhood sustainability” is frequently discussed as a critical issue impacting the quality of life in the Borough’s neighborhoods. However, it is not always clear as to what constitutes a sustainable neighborhood.

In the context of our neighborhood planning efforts, neighborhood sustainability refers to much more than environmental sustainability. It also refers to social, economic and physical sustainability. The Borough considers neighborhood sustainability to be the condition within a residential area in which quality of life is high. It is a state in which considerable effort is given to recognizing and building upon the strengths of an area and minimizing its threats. It not only addresses the maintenance and enhancement of current conditions, but also ensures that actions and attitudes promote the continued success of the neighborhood long into the future. A sustainable neighborhood recognizes the values that are shared by its



State College neighborhoods feature a diversity of housing types and architectural styles and tree-lined streets.

residents and portrays them in a way that is observed by the larger community.

The Borough produces a Neighborhood Sustainability Report each year outlining critical neighborhood conditions and their trends. The report discusses such trends as housing, particularly in conversion from owner-occupied housing to rental housing, ordinance violations, crime and other conditions and seeks to make connections to larger community issues that may contribute to these trends.

Additionally, the Borough frequently partners with the National Research Center to conduct a survey of Borough residents. This survey, called the National Citizens Survey, is randomly distributed throughout the community. The survey helps local leaders understand residents’ overall impressions of quality of life, provision of services and strength of neighborhoods and community. When considered together with other input, these tools help civic leaders and decision-makers understand the overall condition and impressions of the community and its neighborhoods, as well as discuss programmatic or policy updates that can help improve the quality of life in State College.

Overall, neighborhood sustainability is about how we can work together to make our neighborhoods work for all of the residents that live in them. As a college community, State College’s neighborhoods will always face the challenge of balancing a wide variety of residents, housing types and lifestyles. By working together, and planning together, we can get a better sense of what our neighborhood residents’ needs are, how to accommodate them and how to balance them with other community needs. Achieving sustainable neighborhoods means that our student and non-student neighbors work together with Borough officials to solve problems and understand how our neighborhoods can thrive. This will help mitigate conflicts and improve quality of life for all.