

Marion Township Draft Recommendations

Chapter 1 - Rural Character and Open Space

1. Protect active farmland by guiding development away from key agricultural soils and working farms.
 - 1.1. Strengthen the Agricultural/Residential zoning district with minimum residential lot sizes greater than 1 acre that discourage fragmentation of farmland.
 - 1.1.1. Amend the zoning ordinance to set a minimum lot size in the Agricultural/Residential district.
 - 1.1.2. Amend the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance, Article VIII Design Standards, Section 801 Land Requirements, to require subdivisions to be located along non-major arterial roadways and less productive soils, preserving large interior tracts of farmland as contiguous and functional agricultural areas.
 - 1.1.3. Amend the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance to establish a point-based incentive system that expedites the review process for projects that preserve at least 20% of the land as contiguous farmland, in addition to meeting existing recreation space requirements.
 - 1.2. Partner with Beaver County to expand participation in the Agricultural Land Preservation Board (ALPB) and Clean & Green program.
 - 1.2.1. Establish a township outreach program in coordination with Beaver County to provide information sessions, application assistance, and property tax benefit guidance for landowners eligible for ALPB and Clean & Green enrollment.
 - 1.2.2. Designate a township staff member or planning commission representative to assist property owners with completing ALPB and Clean & Green applications and to connect them with county staff.
 - 1.2.3. Incorporate program promotion into the township website, newsletters, and tax bill inserts to ensure broad outreach to eligible landowners.
 - 1.3. Strengthen participation in and promote the Beaver County Agricultural Land Preservation Board to protect farmland through conservation easements permanently.
 - 1.3.1. Compile and map existing data on soil quantity, farm size, and proximity to preserved parcels using USDA Natural Resources Conservation (NRCS) and Beaver County resources, and share the analysis with Beaver County ALPB to help guide conservation easement outreach.
 - 1.3.2. Assist landowners and the Beaver County ALPB in preparing applications for state and federal farmland preservation programs such as the Pennsylvania Bureau of Farmland Preservation and USDA Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) by providing letters of support,

- helping compile required local data, and identifying matching funds to leverage county preservation dollars.
- 1.3.3. Develop a farmland preservation outreach campaign by mailing informational packets to all agricultural landowners and posting program details on the township's website.
- 2. Safeguard woodlands, steep slopes, and water resources using land use tools and conservation partnerships.
 - 2.1. Adopt riparian buffer protections along Brush Creek and Connoquenessing Creek.
 - 2.1.1. Draft ordinance language requiring minimum buffer widths and native vegetation along waterways.
 - 2.1.2. Adopt riparian buffer protections into the zoning ordinance and subdivision regulations.
 - 2.1.3. Partner with conservation groups and outside funding sources to support restoration and landowner education.
 - 2.2. Identify, map, and work to preserve flood-prone and steep-slope areas for open space conservation.
 - 2.2.1. Compile GIS data of steep slopes, floodplains, and other sensitive areas to map areas of concern.
 - 2.2.2. Draft ordinance updates limiting development in mapped areas to reduce hazards.
 - 2.2.3. Pursue conservation partnerships and external funding to protect high-priority parcels through easements or acquisitions.
 - 2.3. Create a land stewardship program in partnership with county and regional entities to implement best practices for preserving agricultural and natural land, supported by outside grant funding.
 - 2.3.1. Establish a township–county collaboration to provide training and technical assistance to landowners.
 - 2.3.2. Develop voluntary stewardship agreements that include incentives, such as streamlined approvals or recognition programs.
 - 2.3.3. Apply for outside funding to implement pilot projects demonstrating effective conservation practices.
- 3. Shape land use regulations to ensure that new development reinforces, rather than diminishes, the township's rural character.
 - 3.1. Partner with the County and other municipalities to establish new road standards to limit curb cuts, signage height, and non-agricultural lighting in designated rural zones.
 - 3.1.1. Draft shared roadway design standards that reflect rural character and preserve scenic views.
 - 3.1.2. Adopt consistent standards across municipalities through intergovernmental agreements.

- 3.1.3. Incorporate the standards into local subdivision and land development ordinances.
- 3.2. Partner with other municipalities to draft and adopt a tree preservation ordinance to require tree preservation or replanting for new development along scenic corridors.
 - 3.2.1. Draft a model ordinance in coordination with adjacent municipalities.
 - 3.2.2. Adopt the ordinance locally and encourage neighboring communities to do the same.
 - 3.2.3. Create a monitoring process to ensure compliance and replanting when tree removal occurs.
- 3.3. Revise the zoning code to prevent cul-de-sac and strip development patterns in agricultural and open space-focused zoning districts.
 - 3.3.1. Draft ordinance amendments prohibiting cul-de-sacs except where required by topography.
 - 3.3.2. Adopt subdivision standards that encourage interconnected street networks.
 - 3.3.3. Apply design guidelines to discourage strip-style development and promote clustered layouts.
- 3.4. Draft and adopt siting and screening standards for new buildings to blend with rural surroundings.
 - 3.4.1. Draft ordinance language requiring new construction to include screening, landscaping, and appropriate setbacks.
 - 3.4.2. Adopt design review criteria into the zoning ordinance for projects in rural districts.
 - 3.4.3. Provide applicants with design guidance materials to encourage compatibility with the township's rural identity.

Chapter 2 - Balanced and Strategic Growth

- 4. Focus new development near existing roadways and utility service areas to reduce sprawl and infrastructure costs.
 - 4.1. Require new subdivisions to demonstrate proximity to or extension of existing infrastructure.
 - 4.1.1. Draft ordinance language requiring documentation of utility and roadway connections in subdivision applications.
 - 4.1.2. Adopt review standards that discourage development in areas lacking adequate services.
 - 4.1.3. Monitor approvals to ensure compliance with infrastructure proximity requirements.
 - 4.2. Coordinate with utility providers and PennDOT to maintain up-to-date infrastructure capacity data and service boundaries.

- 4.2.1. Establish a regular coordination schedule with providers to exchange data on system capacity and utilization.
 - 4.2.2. Compile township-level service maps to identify growth areas supported by infrastructure.
 - 4.2.3. Use data to inform zoning updates and subdivision approvals.
- 4.3. Through a future land use map, identify priority growth areas near existing water and sewer infrastructure.
 - 4.3.1. Draft growth area designations within the township's future land use map.
 - 4.3.2. Adopt the updated land use map as part of the comprehensive planning process.
 - 4.3.3. Link capital improvement planning to identified priority growth areas.
- 5. Encourage businesses in trades, agriculture, home occupations, and rural tourism that align with the township's scale and economy.
 - 5.1. Permit small-scale contractor shops, farm markets, and agri-tourism in rural zoning districts.
 - 5.1.1. Draft zoning amendments clarifying permitted uses in rural districts.
 - 5.1.2. Adopt updates through public hearings and ordinance revision.
 - 5.1.3. Provide educational materials to property owners on allowable business activities.
 - 5.2. Establish a streamlined tiered permitting process that allows no- and minimal-impact home occupations to be approved administratively, using clear performance standards and online applications to reduce barriers for rural entrepreneurs.
 - 5.2.1. Draft tiered performance standards that distinguish no-, low-, and moderate-impact home occupations.
 - 5.2.2. Adopt procedures for administrative approval of low-impact uses.
 - 5.2.3. Launch an online permitting process to simplify applications.
 - 5.3. Update permitted uses in the A-1 Residential Agriculture District (PRD Allowed) and R-1 Residential District (PRD Allowed) to allow low-impact trades and agricultural services.
 - 5.3.1. Draft ordinance revisions to expand permitted uses.
 - 5.3.2. Adopt updated use tables following the planning commission review and public comment.
 - 5.3.3. Monitor use approvals to ensure compatibility with residential surroundings.
 - 5.4. Establish performance-based site standards as part of broader Design Standards in the ordinance (e.g., outdoor storage, hours, signage) to ensure compatibility.
 - 5.4.1. Draft design standards addressing storage, signage, and hours of operation.
 - 5.4.2. Adopt standards into zoning and subdivision ordinances.
 - 5.4.3. Provide applicants with design guidance materials to encourage compliance.

6. Use planning tools and periodic updates to ensure growth aligns with preservation values and community priorities.
 - 6.1. Develop a multi-jurisdictional Open Space and Land Preservation Plan to identify long-term priorities, standards, and annual benchmarks for preserving critical open areas.
 - 6.1.1. Draft a shared framework with neighboring municipalities for open space planning.
 - 6.1.2. Pursue external funding and partnerships to support plan creation.
 - 6.1.3. Adopt the final plan into township policy for implementation.
 - 6.2. Establish a five-year review cycle for the comprehensive plan and zoning ordinance.
 - 6.2.1. Draft a resolution mandating review of planning documents every five years.
 - 6.2.2. Adopt a review schedule into township policy and assign responsibility.
 - 6.2.3. Publish review findings for public transparency and accountability.
 - 6.3. Partner with the County to track building permits and land conversions annually to assess development trends.
 - 6.3.1. Formalize data-sharing agreements with the County to obtain annual reports.
 - 6.3.2. Compile township-level development trend reports each year.
 - 6.3.3. Use data findings to adjust zoning and policy as needed.
 - 6.4. Adopt an ordinance requiring large rezonings to include a community impact assessment.
 - 6.4.1. Draft ordinance language defining thresholds for rezonings that trigger assessments.
 - 6.4.2. Adopt standards that require applicants to analyze the infrastructure, fiscal, and community impacts.
 - 6.4.3. Require assessments as part of the development review process.

Chapter 3 - Community Roots and Family Life

7. Allow flexible housing arrangements and family land divisions to maintain intergenerational presence and ownership.
 - 7.1. Work with other municipalities and the County to explore housing models that support multi-generational living, such as duplexes or co-located family homes.
 - 7.1.1. Partner with regional planners to draft sample ordinance language that enables multi-generational housing.
 - 7.1.2. Facilitate public workshops to build support for family-oriented housing models.
 - 7.1.3. Encourage pilot projects in collaboration with private developers and nonprofits.

- 7.2. Work with local lenders and partner with other municipalities to promote farm succession planning and land transfer assistance.
 - 7.2.1. Coordinate with lenders to expand financing options for intergenerational farm transfers.
 - 7.2.2. Provide technical assistance for landowners on succession planning resources.
 - 7.2.3. Encourage partnerships with extension services and county agencies to host educational programs that benefit the community.
- 7.3. Amend the zoning ordinance to specify permitted accessory uses by right, including accessory dwelling units, to provide clarity and support diversified land use in the A-1, R-1, and CN districts.
 - 7.3.1. Draft zoning amendments that clearly define accessory dwelling unit (ADU) standards.
 - 7.3.2. Adopt ordinance updates following public hearings and stakeholder input.
 - 7.3.3. Educate residents on ADU opportunities through township communication tools.
- 7.4. Permit cottage court home arrangements in zoning districts near main streets or commercial corridors to provide middle housing options.
 - 7.4.1. Draft ordinance language permitting cottage court housing in designated areas.
 - 7.4.2. Establish design standards for shared open space, pedestrian access, and parking.
 - 7.4.3. Adopt ordinance revisions and encourage use through incentives such as streamlined approvals.
- 8. Maintain infrastructure, protect residential areas from incompatible uses, and coordinate with public safety services.
 - 8.1. Prioritize road maintenance and stormwater upgrades in older neighborhoods.
 - 8.1.1. Conduct an infrastructure audit to identify high-need areas.
 - 8.1.2. Develop a phased improvement plan tied to available funding.
 - 8.1.3. Pursue external funding sources to implement stormwater and road upgrades.
 - 8.2. Update zoning to buffer residential zones from noise- or traffic-generating land uses.
 - 8.2.1. Draft buffer requirements for landscaping, setbacks, and screening in zoning updates.
 - 8.2.2. Adopt ordinance amendments to ensure consistent protections.
 - 8.2.3. Review new development applications for compatibility with residential areas.
 - 8.3. Hold annual coordination meetings with emergency service providers to assess needs.
 - 8.3.1. Schedule joint meetings with fire, EMS, and police providers.
 - 8.3.2. Track response time data and facility needs on an annual basis.

- 8.3.3. Adjust township capital planning based on service provider input.
- 8.4. Apply for PennDOT's Dirt & Gravel Roads Program for environmentally sensitive drainage in rural areas.
 - 8.4.1. Identify priority rural roads with recurring drainage issues.
 - 8.4.2. Draft concept plans for low-impact drainage solutions.
 - 8.4.3. Pursue external funding partnerships to implement improvements.
- 8.5. Strengthen ordinances and enforcement to address code violations and nuisances and stabilize existing neighborhoods.
 - 8.5.1. Review property maintenance and nuisance ordinances for clarity and effectiveness.
 - 8.5.2. Establish consistent enforcement procedures with timelines for compliance.
 - 8.5.3. Provide education and outreach to encourage voluntary compliance.
- 9. Encourage volunteerism, public input, and local pride through community events and leadership opportunities.
 - 9.1. Partner to establish a multi-municipal youth advisory or community ambassador program to involve new voices.
 - 9.1.1. Collaborate with schools and civic organizations to recruit participants.
 - 9.1.2. Create a program framework with clear roles and mentorship opportunities.
 - 9.1.3. Recognize youth contributions through annual township events or awards.
 - 9.2. Publicize and simplify the process for joining township boards and commissions.
 - 9.2.1. Draft clear guidance and application forms for interested residents.
 - 9.2.2. Post opportunities regularly on township communication channels.
 - 9.2.3. Hold informational sessions to encourage participation.
 - 9.3. Develop a township newsletter and a monitored online platform to share updates and gather feedback.
 - 9.3.1. Launch a quarterly newsletter with project updates and engagement opportunities.
 - 9.3.2. Create an interactive online platform for residents to submit feedback.
 - 9.3.3. Assign township staff to monitor communications and ensure timely responses.

Chapter 4 - Historic Preservation and Pride

- 10. Identify, document, and preserve key historic properties that reflect Marion Township's rural history.
 - 10.1. Partner and pursue grant funding to inventory historic barns, cemeteries, and homesteads for potential protection or reuse.
 - 10.1.1. Collaborate with historical societies and regional partners to conduct a township-wide inventory.

- 10.1.2. Pursue external funding opportunities to support documentation and mapping efforts.
- 10.1.3. Develop a database to track properties with preservation or reuse potential.
- 10.2. Pursue National Register individual eligibility for key historic structures with support from property owners.
 - 10.2.1. Identify candidate properties with architectural or cultural significance.
 - 10.2.2. Provide technical assistance to property owners interested in pursuing eligibility.
 - 10.2.3. Partner with regional preservation organizations to guide nomination processes.
- 10.3. Establish a local tax abatement for the maintenance or restoration of historic buildings, with permission from property owners.
 - 10.3.1. Draft ordinance language authorizing a local tax abatement program.
 - 10.3.2. Adopt the ordinance following public hearings and property owner feedback.
 - 10.3.3. Promote program benefits through township newsletters and outreach.
- 11. Introduce tools to safeguard character-defining sites and structures.
 - 11.1. Partner with adjacent municipalities and the state to develop design guidelines illustrating rural architectural styles and materials.
 - 11.1.1. Draft rural design guidelines in collaboration with nearby communities.
 - 11.1.2. Align township ordinances with regional architectural standards.
 - 11.1.3. Distribute guidelines to property owners and developers as a reference tool.
 - 11.2. Provide expedited review and possible code standard exemptions for maintaining original architectural features in older structures.
 - 11.2.1. Establish a “fast-track” permitting process for preservation-focused projects.
 - 11.2.2. Draft code amendments that allow flexibility for projects retaining historic character.
 - 11.2.3. Publicize streamlined review opportunities to encourage participation.
 - 11.3. Integrate historical compatibility criteria into the site plan review process.
 - 11.3.1. Draft site plan review standards that emphasize compatibility with historic context.
 - 11.3.2. Train planning commission members to evaluate applications against criteria.
 - 11.3.3. Require applicants to submit renderings showing alignment with the township's character.
- 12. Celebrate and interpret the township's history through signage, programs, and local events.
 - 12.1. Support and promote school programs that explore local history and connect students with longtime residents.

- 12.1.1. Partner with schools to integrate township history into classroom projects.
- 12.1.2. Facilitate oral history programs linking students with older residents.
- 12.1.3. Showcase student projects through township communication platforms.
- 12.2. Partner with nearby municipalities to create interpretive signage or driving tours highlighting legacy farms.
 - 12.2.1. Identify key farmsteads and heritage landscapes for inclusion in tours.
 - 12.2.2. Pursue partnerships and funding to design and install interpretive signage.
 - 12.2.3. Collaborate with tourism agencies to market heritage tours.
- 12.3. Host an annual public engagement event to involve residents with tools to understand development in the region better.
 - 12.3.1. Plan an annual event combining historical exhibits with community dialogue on growth.
 - 12.3.2. Partner with civic groups and volunteers to organize and promote the event.
 - 12.3.3. Provide educational materials linking preservation goals to township development.

Chapter 5 - Recreation, Connectivity, and Well-Being

- 13. Identify opportunities to preserve land or partner with neighbors for new public or semi-public recreational areas.
 - 13.1. Strengthen regional collaboration to plan for open space and trail connectivity.
 - 13.1.1. Draft a joint planning framework with neighboring townships and the County.
 - 13.1.2. Pursue funding partnerships to complete the plan.
 - 13.1.3. Adopt the final plan into township policy to guide zoning and subdivision decisions.
 - 13.2. Expand public access to waterways in an environmentally sensitive way.
 - 13.2.1. Identify priority access sites that minimize environmental disturbance.
 - 13.2.2. Partner with landowners and civic groups to support siting and maintenance.
 - 13.2.3. Pursue funding to design and implement access improvements.
 - 13.3. Coordinate with regional partners to connect open space to countywide greenway systems.
 - 13.3.1. Engage in regional greenway planning meetings to align township priorities.
 - 13.3.2. Draft intermunicipal agreements for long-term trail maintenance.
 - 13.3.3. Market greenway connections as part of a broader regional recreation network.
 - 13.4. Require developers to dedicate trail corridors or public access easements in new projects.

- 13.4.1. Draft ordinance updates requiring trail or easement dedication as part of subdivision approvals.
- 13.4.2. Map priority corridors to guide where dedications are most beneficial.
- 13.4.3. Adopt the ordinance and integrate requirements into the review process.
- 14. Prioritize shoulder improvements, shared-use paths, and safe crossings to enhance walkability and biking access.
 - 14.1. Apply for PennDOT, DCNR, or DCED grants to fund bike and pedestrian improvements and complete gaps.
 - 14.1.1. Identify gaps in the existing sidewalk and trail network.
 - 14.1.2. Prepare conceptual designs to strengthen grant applications.
 - 14.1.3. Pursue partnerships with schools and civic groups to demonstrate community need.
 - 14.2. Prepare a walkability audit and identify high-priority safety improvements, prioritizing community hubs and high-injury locations.
 - 14.2.1. Draft an audit framework to evaluate sidewalks, crossings, and lighting.
 - 14.2.2. Engage the public to identify areas of concern.
 - 14.2.3. Prioritize quick-build and low-cost improvements for early implementation.
 - 14.3. Require a standardized sidewalk or shared-use path as part of all new developments.
 - 14.3.1. Draft subdivision regulations mandating sidewalks or shared-use paths.
 - 14.3.2. Adopt the standards and apply them consistently in project reviews.
 - 14.3.3. Provide flexibility for rural-appropriate designs while maintaining connectivity.
- 15. Encourage future development patterns that incorporate green space, trails, and community gathering areas.
 - 15.1. Update subdivision regulations to require open space or trail linkages in major subdivisions.
 - 15.1.1. Draft ordinance amendments that establish open space requirements.
 - 15.1.2. Adopt the updates into the subdivision ordinance.
 - 15.1.3. Monitor compliance to ensure meaningful open space and linkages.
 - 15.2. Draft and adopt a conservation subdivision ordinance to encourage open space preservation in new residential developments.
 - 15.2.1. Draft ordinance language allowing clustered housing with preserved open space.
 - 15.2.2. Adopt the ordinance through the comprehensive review process.
 - 15.2.3. Promote conservation subdivisions as a cost-effective way to preserve rural character.