Standards For Review Of Town Plans

Purpose:

The purpose of this set of standards is to provide County officials a basis for reviewing locally prepared plans to assure that the plans will be coordinated with other local plans; will be helpful in developing the countywide plan; and that will be capable of meeting the requirements of the State Farmland Preservation Act.

The following standards are to be considered as the minimum requirements. Localities may want to include other aspects in their planning programs.

I. Standards for Plan Preparation Process

The process for preparing local plans should consist of at least the following elements:

A. The formation of a committee or commission to direct the planning program
B. Development of a work program to guide the entire planning effort
C. Maximum citizen involvement throughout process

II. Standards for Local Town Plans

The Plan shall consist of three basic elements: policy statements, mapped districts and an implementation program.

A. Policy statements should address at least the following:
   1. Preservation of agricultural lands
   2. Urban growth (sewered and unsewered)
   3. Provision of public facilities (what services will be provided where)
   4. Preservation of natural resources and open space, scenic, historic and architectural areas

B. The mapped element of the Plan should include at least the following:
   1. Agricultural districts to be preserved; individual parcels should be aggregated into districts comprised not less than 106 acres
   2. Environmental, natural resource or open space areas of significance, such as wetlands, steep slopes, wooded areas or prairies
3. Rural nonfarm or transition areas (predominately agriculture now but identified for future development); individual parcels should be combined into districts of not less than 35 acres.

4. Urban service areas (land areas adjacent to existing communities determined as most suitable for expanded urban development) as approved by affected local units.

5. Other areas, determined by local units to be significant; for example: mineral extraction or commercial recreation.

6. The plan maps should reflect the data and materials prepared as a part of the mapping program. As a minimum these should include:
   - soil types
   - productivity
   - ownership patterns
   - parcel size
   - land use
   - population density
   - open space
   - natural resources
   - housing
   - public facilities

7. The plan should note how it is related to any other local or regional plans. The adopted Regional Open Space, Transportation, Water Quality or Land Use Plans as well as other local master plans should be considered in local plan preparation. If plans differ, the reasons should be explained.

Comment: Not all Town plans would include all the elements noted above. For example, certain very rural Towns might not have any urban service areas or transition areas.

C. If the plans are to have meaning and if they are to reflect a commitment by the Town, a program for carrying out or implementing the plan should be spelled out. This implementation program should consist of recommended public actions designed to preserve agricultural lands and to guide urban growth. These could include:

1. A description of land use controls needed to implement the policies
   a. Zoning amendment recommendations
   b. Town subdivision regulations or recommendations for County ordinance amendments
   c. Official mapping, where appropriate
d. Others

2. Public facility program including a description, of the timing, location, use, capacity, and financing procedures for existing and proposed facilities. This program may be applicable only in Towns providing extensive public services such as sewer, water, storm sewers, etc.

3. Programs to protect areas of special environmental, natural resource or open space, such as dedication requirements or purchase through an acquisition program

4. Preparation of criteria or standards for proposed development of less sensitive or valuable open areas such as wooded areas or slopes

5. Procedures for periodic review and evaluation of adopted plans in light of changing needs or conditions

6. A statement of intent on how the plan is to be used in making land use decisions when the plan is submitted to the County Board for consideration

III. Review and Approval Process

Process for review and approval of the local plans and their amendments by the County should generally follow these steps:

A. The local Unit of Government will submit a preliminary version of the Plan to the Regional Planning Commission and Planning and Development Department for staff review;

B. The plan is reviewed by the staffs of the RPC and County Planning and Development Department and other units of government where appropriate The staffs shall respond to the local unit with any comments or concerns within 30 days. If there are significant issues raised which cannot be resolved by staff, the local unit may request a meeting with the RPC or ZNR. or both. to discuss the issues. Local unit makes appropriate adjustments. takes approval action and submits by letter to the County Clerk. along with 90 copies of the plan amendment;

D. The plan is then formally referred to the ZNR Committee which will set a Public Hearing Date allowing for at least a 60 day review period and will immediately refer the plan or plan amendment to the Regional Planning Commission for its review and comment;

1. The Department of Planning and Development will then coordinate with the County Clerk and mail the proposed plan to all required jurisdictions for review prior to the hearing.
2. The RPC complete its review and public hearing within the 50-day public comment period. RPC action and comments will be sent to the ZNR.

3. The ZNR will conduct the public hearing and shall complete its review and recommendation before the next public hearing.

4. In the event ZNR is unable to complete its review within the time allotted, it report the plan to the county board without recommendation.

5. The local unit submitting the plan or amendment may agree to an extension of these timelines but requests and approvals must be done in writing by local officials.

E. County Board shall consider the matter and recommendations of the ZNR, RPC and other commenting agencies and take action as appropriate.

As noted in the initial paragraph, the County has the responsibility of preparing and adopting a countywide Agricultural Preservation Plan. The countywide plan should contain essentially the same elements identified in these procedures. It is the intent of the County to utilize the Town plans that meet the standards as a basis for the County plan. This should provide for the fullest coordination and reinforcement of both local and area-wide policies.

NOTE: The complete text of Appendix I showing specific amendments to Part III is on file in County Clerks office.