

# EARTH CONSERVANCY NEWS

VOLUME II

ISSUE 3

March, 1996

## OPINION AND FACT: Public meetings provide forums for both

Two public meetings of Earth Conservancy's Land Use Planning Committee (LUPC), held mid-February, offered the community a wealth of information on various characteristics of the Wyoming Valley and Luzerne County. The meetings were important steps in the process of developing a long-range land use plan for Earth Conservancy's approximately 17,000 acres.

Organized by EDAW, Inc., EC's land use planning consultants and leaders of an expert team of other planning specialists, both meetings were held the week of February 12 because of previous weather postponements. According to Mike Dziak, President of Earth Conservancy, the meetings "provided the background and base line data necessary to help EDAW develop plans for the eventual use of EC's land."

The first of the two public meetings, on February 13, was a panel discussion on local development. The purpose of the discussion was to provide the LUPC with information it can use in assessing the appropriateness of alternative land uses that EDAW will propose in the coming months. Sixty-five people attended the discussion, including LUPC members and interested community residents.

Two panels of local experts were present at the February 13 meeting.

---

*According to Mike Dziak, President of Earth Conservancy, the meetings "provided the background and base line data necessary to help EDAW develop plans for the eventual use of EC's land."*

---

The discussion was moderated by Vernon George of Hammer Siler George Associates. The first panel presented their views on industrial, institutional, and business development. Members of this panel included Stephen Barrouk, president, Greater Wilkes-Barre Partnership; Rob Mericle, president, Mericle Commercial Real Estate; Raymond Ford, managing director, Harris Semiconductor; Stephen Koppleman, president, Comwave; Christopher Breiseth, president, Wilkes University; and Mike Morgan, vice president and regional manager, PNC Bank.

### LOCAL DEMOGRAPHICS

Trish Curran of Hammer Siler George, the economic consultant working with EDAW on EC's land use plan project, preceded the first

### CONGRESSMAN COMMENTS AT ECONOMIC SESSION

Congressman Paul Kanjorski, whose vision helped found Earth Conservancy in 1992, attended the February 13 panel discussion. In his comments, he congratulated Earth Conservancy on getting to the public the economic development information presented that evening. He said that if he had to score our area based on what he had heard in the panel discussion, he would say it rates a "gentlemanly C-minus."

He said that what he heard the panelists saying was that the area has the land, but sometimes obtaining capital is a problem, there is difficulty recruiting people to the area, and the local structure of government is cumbersome. The Congressman noted that the area cannot be competitive unless it scores a B-plus.

"It is good to start this dialogue," Kanjorski commented. "It is my hope that new sites can be developed for a mix of uses, including condominiums, co-operatives, and other uses not traditionally found in this area."

"Our region's people and land are its greatest assets," the Congressman continued. "To be competitive in the 21st century, we need to make the most of the next five years," Kanjorski said. "The planning process by the Earth Conservancy is an excellent opportunity for Northeastern Pennsylvania to fully utilize our assets and to control our own destiny." ♦

## **OPINION AND FACT: Public meetings provide forums for both**

panel discussion with findings on the demographics and economics of Luzerne County. She reported that Luzerne County has been losing population since the 1980's, but despite this fact, the economy has been growing and diversifying. The elderly make up 25 percent of the population now, but the age sixty and over group will comprise 33 percent of the population by the year 2000. The unemployment rate has gone down. Manufacturing is growing faster here than elsewhere in Pennsylvania, accounting for 20 percent of all jobs in the County.

Ms. Curran briefly discussed industrial growth in Luzerne County in recent years, noting that the industrial and business parks in the area attracted eight million square feet, or 1400 acres of occupancy in the past ten years. Since the late 80's, the emphasis on manufacturing has given way slightly to an increase in back office and distribution space.

With regard to housing in the area, Ms. Curran said that a gap exists between the cost of older, established housing, which sells for around \$60,000 and less, and new construction, which is marketed at more than \$150,000. Ms. Curran also stated that there are a few historical and recreational activities in our area, but no one major attraction exists to draw visitors to Luzerne County. She concluded that recreation and tourism is a major opportunity for EC lands.

## **PANELISTS' REMARKS**

The first panel discussion followed Ms. Curran's remarks. Some of the opinions expressed by the panelists are outlined below:

**MR. BARROUK:** The Greater Wilkes-Barre Partnership has four industrial parks with a total of 2,600 acres. Given expected land consumption rates, they have only five or six years of land remaining.

**MR. MERICLE:** Mericle Company currently has 1.4 million square feet of leased space used primarily for light manufacturing, office, warehouse, and services. He sees growing activity in the area.

**MR. FORD:** Harris is expanding by 250,000 square feet in the Crestwood Industrial Park. His company is investing 250 million dollars in new semiconductor facilities. The advantages of the area are the work ethic and the work force, but the labor force needs more high-tech training.

**MR. KOPPLEMAN:** Comwave has doubled its work force from 70 two years ago to 140 today. Their need is for white collar professionals, and training of semi-skilled workers is also an issue for his company. Local high schools are not providing graduates with sufficient basic skills in reading and math to satisfy his company's employment needs.

**DR. BREISETH:** Wilkes University began offering an advanced degree in engineering years ago in response to the needs of RCA, whose plant is now occupied by Harris. Wilkes is very interested in working with local businesses to improve employee training. Wilkes is trying to start an apprenticeship program for local businesses.

**MR. MORGAN:** PNC Bank and two other multi-regional banks, as well as several local banks, serve the area.

The area's older population has a lot of capital deposited locally which can be used to meet the needs of incoming business. Money is available for real estate and business loans. Small business programs are available to assist smaller businesses starting in the area.

**MR. MERICLE:** Warehousing operations want access to highways, modern buildings, and proximity to other developed areas. Much of the flat, developable land here is very rocky, making it costly to develop. The site work required here is often more difficult and expensive than in areas like Allentown.

**MR. BARROUK:** Local government sometimes makes it difficult to develop projects because they do not always work cooperatively. Something has to be done at the local level to address infrastructure and leadership.

**MR. KOPPLEMAN:** Comwave is trying to attract two types of employees - semi-skilled and professional. The area needs to sell itself to make it more attractive to professional employees. The local colleges are assets.

## **LUPC Comments**

Moderator Vernon George then took comments from the Land Use Planning Committee. Joseph Kotroski of Conyngham Township indicated that his community would support an industrial park on their 3,000 acres of EC land. John Klimuszka of Hanover township remarked that a Council of Governments would allow municipalities to get together to make purchases, share ideas, and save money. Dr. Breiseth responded that some work has been done locally toward the goal of a Council of Governments. He agreed that such a group is a good idea.

Howard Grossman, president of the Economic Development Council of Northeastern Pennsylvania, asked Mr. George to list the major characteristics that make our area competitive. Mr. George noted that the regional market location, the

reputation of the work force, and the solid quality of life are the most positive characteristics of Luzerne County.

Frank Shaulis of Nanticoke asked whether the local airport is a problem when trying to attract businesses to our area. Mr. Ford of Harris Semiconductor responded that it definitely is not a plus; our area is difficult to access.

## RESIDENTIAL, RETAIL, RECREATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

After a brief intermission, Mr. George initiated the next panel discussion with panelists representing residential, retail, and recreational/tourism development. Present for this discussion were Nancy Eckert, manager, Lewith and Freeman Real Estate; Ruth Smith, broker/owner, Century 21 Real Estate; Dennis Brislin, president, Brislin Construction; Carolyn Mertz, vice president, Mertz Corporation; Allen Sachse, supervisor, Eastern District Heritage Parks; and John Blake, executive director, Northeast Territory Visitors Bureau.

The following is a brief summary of the participants' comments:

- **Ms. Eckert:** There is a gap in the residential market for new homes under \$150,000. There are a number of developments with homes in the \$200,000 price range that are selling. Townhouses are not very common in our area.
- **Mr. Brislin:** If Earth Conservancy could devote some land for residential development at \$20,000 an acre, affordable housing could be developed, filling the existing gap between low and high cost homes.
- **Ms. Smith:** Some townhouse developments have been successful here; those costing between

\$70,000 and \$100,000 would sell quickly to first time home buyers, single and retired people. EC might consider including some of that type housing in its plans. There is a tremendous demand for housing in the range of \$100,000 to \$140,000.

- **Mr. Brislin:** Good schools and safety are what people look for in a residential development.
- **Ms. Mertz:** Retailers all want to be next to Toys R Us, near the Wyoming Valley Mall. Downtown is a hard sell. Other high demand locations include sites along the interstate high ways for hotels/motels. Natural gas is important, as are buried utilities. Roads are necessary for retail development on EC proper ties. Outlet centers are a possibility, but also need roads and a developer. Land banking acres for future retail development is a good idea.
- **Mr. Sachse:** The biggest tourism assets are the area's hills and valleys. We need to respect the land, protect the outstanding views, and avoid creating new scars on the land. The local heritage resources are strong.
- **Mr. Blake:** Visitorship to our area from Pennsylvania is very strong. It is a new phenomenon to see Luzerne County as a destination for travelers. His office received 20,000 phone calls in 1995 regarding tourism options. The negative factors for our area are that there isn't a facility large enough for trade shows; Luzerne County does not have a big tourism attraction like Steamtown in Lackawanna

County; and despite the 25 golf courses in the area, travelers bypass the region to play golf elsewhere. Tourism and recreational development are an adjunct to residential development, just as is retail development.

## LUPC Comments

At the conclusion of the second panel's discussion, members of the Land Use Planning Committee asked questions and made comments. Joe Kotroski of Conyngham Township commented that the area needs housing for the elderly. Mr. Shaulis of Nanticoke noted that Nanticoke is landlocked, and expressed interest in building affordable housing in his community. Margaret Bakker of Shavertown asked whether planned residential developments could be successful locally. Ms. Eckert responded that new housing types are difficult to sell here; residents reject what they view as "coal company row home" housing. Ms. Bakker asked if there are ways to make strip malls more visually appealing. Vernon George replied that nationally, developers are designing alternatives to the traditional park-in-front strip malls. ♦

## MARCH 28TH

is the date for the next  
land use planning meeting.



Everyone interested in  
potential uses for EC's land  
should attend this meeting.

Earth Conservancy

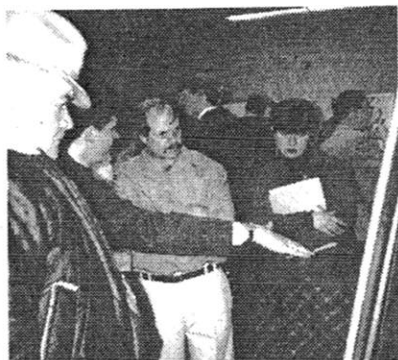
# Maps are Focus of Second Meeting



Richard Dorrier (with the microphone), EDAW's project manager on the Earth Conservancy land use plan project, begins the public meeting on mapping.



Ed Heiselberg of Mountaintop, seated, listens as Michael Hannagan of Borton Lawson explains one of the transportation maps.



Joe Durkin of Reilly Associates, second from left, discusses one of the utility systems maps with Charles Karazy, left, Dr. Ken Klemow of Wilkes University, and Nancy Kostelega, LUPC member.

On February 15, members of the LUPC returned to Earth Conservancy for the second public meeting dealing with EC properties. Approximately 85 people attended this meeting, which presented not expert opinions, but scientific data related to Earth Conservancy land.

Three consulting firms made presentations on their areas of expertise. Environmental data were mapped by Skelly and Loy of Harrisburg. Borton Lawson Engineering of Wilkes-Barre discussed transportation data, and Reilly Associates of West Pittston presented their maps on the utility systems in the area. The series of maps was displayed throughout the room for people to review at the end of the presentations.

Richard Dorrier of EDAW, project manager for the development of the land use plan, opened the program with slides taken in four local townships where much of EC's land lies: Conyngham, Newport, Hanover and Plymouth Townships. The slides illustrated that much of the land is scarred by mining activity, but there are also many acres of beautiful untouched land. Mr. Dorrier then reviewed maps developed by EDAW that represented Luzerne County and the study area. A base map of the study area showed topography, surface water features, roadways, railroads, municipalities, and Earth Conservancy properties. Another map outlined county land use features including state game lands, state forests, state parks, county and municipal parks, major institutional uses and industrial areas, airports, and Earth Conservancy properties. EDAW's third map dealt with land development patterns: forests, parks, recreational uses, institutional uses, commercial areas, mixed-use development areas, industrial parks, and EC properties.

## ENVIRONMENTAL DATA

Consultants from Skelly and Loy presented base line findings of environmental features on a series of three maps. The first described natural resources: wetlands, threatened and endangered species habitat, hydric soils, statewide important soils, prime agricultural land, 100-year floodplain, unique natural communities, unique geologic features, agricultural security areas, watershed boundaries, and state forests/game lands.

Skelly and Loy's second map defined cultural features: National Register historic properties and districts, potentially eligible historic properties, archaeological sites and study areas, cemeteries, churches, schools, hospitals, municipal buildings and fire halls.

Mining features comprised the third map's data: coal basin limits, vertical openings, hazardous equipment facilities, acid mine drainage, unstable slopes, abandoned ponds, refuse piles, strip mines, subsidence prone areas, and mine fires.

## TRANSPORTATION DATA

Representatives of Borton Lawson presented their base line findings on the local transportation network. One map showed existing roads according to their classifications: limited access highways, arterial roadways, collector roads, local roads, and gravel and dirt paths. Another map showed existing transit routes, rail lines, and airports. Existing 1996 traffic volumes on area roadways and projected future traffic volumes for the year 2021 were depicted on another map. A fourth map showed existing 1996 levels of service and projected future levels of service for the year 2021.

## UTILITY SYSTEMS DATA

Reilly Associates then presented a series of maps that depicted water systems, sewer systems, natural gas lines, electricity transmission systems, telephone and cable television.



The enormous amount of facts and data collected on the Earth Conservancy land will now be evaluated and interrelated by EDAW, Inc. Over the course of the next few weeks, the EDAW team will develop preliminary alternative planning concepts, which will be presented at a public workshop on March 28 (see back page for details). At the workshop, the community will have the opportunity to comment on the preliminary plans. EDAW will then take those comments and develop more precise plans for presentation to the community later this spring. ♦

Earth Conservancy

In addition to its work on a long-range land use plan, Earth Conservancy continues to be involved in a number of environmentally related projects that are funded by various federal and state grants. These projects are part of EC's mission to improve our region's economic competitiveness and quality of life. Here is an update on these projects:

## LAND RECLAMATION

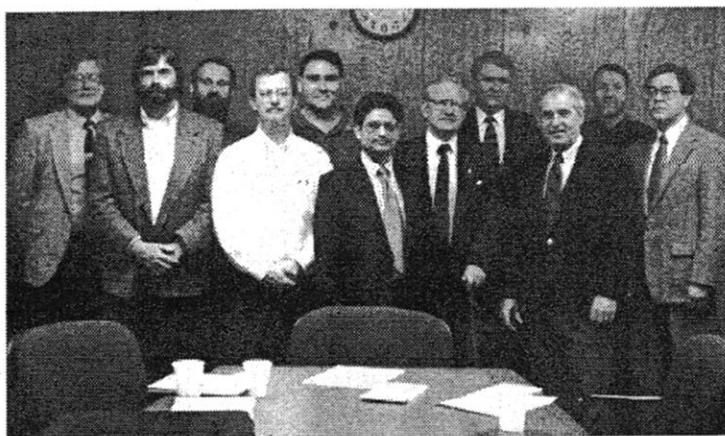
Earth Conservancy will begin reclaiming a 47-acre parcel in Nanticoke as soon as the winter weather breaks. It is hoped that all of the necessary permits for the project will be in hand by March. The reclamation will include leveling hills of mine spoil, filling in pits, grading, and seeding the area.

This project, and one other that has been identified for reclamation next year, are technically supported by scientists from Wilkes University's School of Science and Engineering, under the direction of Dr. Brian Redmond. Funding is provided by the Advanced Research Projects Agency of the Department of Defense.

## COMPUTERIZED SYSTEM FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SURVEY AND LAND USE (SESLU)

Earth Conservancy is developing a computer model which provides a large scale environmental and geographic inventory.

SESLU, a Geographic Information System (GIS), delineates information on geography, topography, demographics, population, municipal boundaries, utilities, roads, and other environmental and geographic data. The GIS will be used in EC's land use planning, and also for future applications requiring large scale mapping. During the last several months, researchers have been working to coordinate the



Members of the Recycling Operation with Waterjet (ROW) project met recently at the University of Missouri at Rolla (UMR). They are, from left, Keith Simms, U.S. Navy; Robert Fossey, UMR; Greg Galecki, UMR; Mark Benston, U.S. Army; Sean Thompson, UMR; Dr. Perwez Kalim, Wilkes University; Dr. David Summers, UMR; John Renfer, Earth Conservancy; Mike Dziak, Earth Conservancy; Dr. Hamish Miller, UMR; Jim O'Karma, Wilkes University; and Dr. Matt Stein, Wilkes University.

SESLU data with the computer system housed by EDAP, the planning consultants. SESLU will be extremely helpful to the consultants, who would have had to compile similar data had SESLU not existed.

The project is funded by the Advanced Research Projects Agency, and is managed by Dr. Dale Bruns from Wilkes University and Rev. Ronald Wasowski from King's College.

## WATERJET TECHNOLOGY

The ability to safely and economically extract energetics from conventional munitions is a major challenge for the U.S. Government. Earth Conservancy's Recycling Operation with Waterjet (ROW) project has the potential to save the Department of Defense millions of dollars.

We have completed construction of the recycling

system at the University of Missouri - Rolla. Representatives of the Army and Navy have examined the assembled system. The dismantling and moving of the unit to the Crane Naval Base will begin within the next month. It is anticipated that we will begin the full-scale demonstration process in late spring or early summer.

## WETLANDS PROJECT

Work on EC's man-made wetland demonstration project, along Espy Creek in Hanover Township, is still on hiatus because of winter weather. As weather permits, workers will continue clearing and excavating the site for the wetland that will treat acid mine drainage (AMD) beginning this summer. If successful, this is the first of many anticipated water treatment projects on EC land.

Earth Conservancy is committed to cleaning up the effects of coal mining on our land and water. This wetland project, the first of its kind in our area, is a demonstration project funded by the Environmental Protection Agency. The scientists working on the project are Drs. Ken Klemow, Tom Walski, and Bill Tarutis from Wilkes University, and Dr. Susan Jones-Held from King's College.

## COMPOSTING PROJECT

Truckloads of material continue to arrive at EC's new composting facility, located in Newport Township. This facility will turn leaves and other yard waste into a rich compost material that can be used to promote the growth of new vegetation on reclaimed mine-spoiled land. Last fall's leaves from Wilkes-Barre City and Newport Township, the communities currently involved in the project, can become fertile compost in just three months with the process used at the facility.

After the holidays, several communities brought Christmas trees for chipping and recycling into compost material. Communities involved in this effort included Ashley, Edwardsville, and Hanover Township. The City of Nanticoke brought compostable material picked up after the January flooding. We hope to attract additional community participation as spring clean-up activities begin.

The design and startup of this project was made possible by a Northeast Tier Ben Franklin Technology grant. The design of the site was performed by Smith Environmental Technologies, Pocono Summit, Pa., under the direction of Dr. Bryce Payne of Wilkes University. ♦

# DIALOGUE ON TRASH BEGINS

EC president Mike Dziak invited elected officials and others from twenty local communities to attend a December meeting to discuss the problem of the illegal dumping of trash and garbage throughout our area. In attendance were Daryl Pawlusch, Conyngham Township; John Elmy, Newport Township; Don Belles, Laurel Run Borough; Frank Revitt, Wilkes-Barre Township; Ed Latinski, Luzerne County Solid Waste Management; Bob Ambrose, Nuangola Borough; Larry Simpson, Laurel Run Borough; and several EC staff members.

The illegal dumping of trash on EC property was discussed, but the group talked about doing something on a larger scale, as well. The consensus of the meeting was to make the focus a broad one to raise community awareness, and try to get residents to participate in some type of trash clean up and prevention program.

*The following were discussion items:*

- restricting access to open undeveloped land;
- posting signs indicating that dumping on private land is illegal;
- local ordinances requiring contractors to prove where they dumped their trash;
- raising fines for dumping;

- offering rewards for identifying those who dump illegally, as in Newport Township;
- development as a means to stop dumping; prevention as the most effective tool (Wilkes-Barre Township makes disposing of large items very easy for residents);
- a public relations campaign about prosecuting illegal dumpers;
- education programs for children;
- using prisoners to clean up the trash.

Several specific action items were developed in the meeting, which EC staff are currently working on. They include soliciting media involvement; learning more about Wilkes-Barre Township's program; involving local scrap businesses; contacting the Department of Corrections regarding the use of prisoners for clean up work; informing DEP and local representatives and senators of this initiative; looking for funding for an educational video.

Earth Conservancy welcomes any and all input from the community regarding this issue. Please call Elizabeth Ortega if you would like to be involved in our community wide effort to put an end to the trashing of Luzerne County. ♦

## Preliminary land use plans to be presented

Mark your calendar now to attend the next meeting of Earth Conservancy's Land Use Planning Committee:

- March 28, 1996
- 6:30 pm
- Educational Conference Center Room 132
- Luzerne County Community College
- Maps will be displayed for public review at 6:00 pm.

At this meeting, the community will have the opportunity to hear and see EDAW, Inc.'s presentation of a series of broad based alternatives for land uses - the next step in reaching a final plan. Following the successful format of the November visioning workshop, after EDAW's presentation, the audience will break into small groups, review the alternatives, and allow everyone at the meeting to express their ideas and make comments. EDAW will then take the comments from that meeting and return at a future date for our review of more precise plans which will then be based on combined community input.

Everyone with a stake in Earth Conservancy's final land use plan should attend this meeting. For more information, please call Elizabeth Ortega at 717-823-3445. ♦



101 South Main Street  
Ashley, PA 18706

Phone: (717) 823-3445  
Fax: (717) 823-8270

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Wilkes-Barre, PA  
Permit No. 474