

# Planning Trends Westmoreland

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Westmoreland County Department of Planning & Development

## Marcellus Shale Impact Fee: 2013

2012 could be summed up as the year of Marcellus Shale in Westmoreland County.

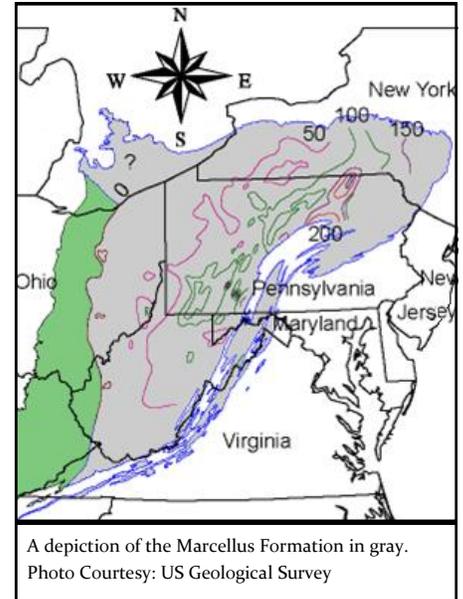
Act 13 brought Impact Fees to the state, conservation districts, counties and municipalities where drilling is taking place. That same legislation may have raised more questions than answers, though.

After all the excitement of 2012, what can we expect in 2013? Many local governments will spend the year trying to unravel the tangled ball of strings surrounding Marcellus Shale.

The County Planning Department will continue to offer our services to elected officials and planning commissioners as we all work to maximize the benefit of this important resource. Be sure to visit our website [www.co.westmoreland.pa.us/planning/drilling](http://www.co.westmoreland.pa.us/planning/drilling) for more information.

To that end, there are some issues and dates to keep track of in the proceeding months:

- We're looking forward to hearing the PA Supreme Court's ruling on Act 13's preemption of local zoning ordinances
- We expect impact fees to remain neutral or decline in 2013 based on reduced drilling activity and natural gas prices.
- March 1st is the latest date for local governments to report their budget to the PUC. The budget reporting form can be found on our website.
- April 15th is the due date for funds usage reports to be sent to the PUC. Those reports are to be posted on municipal websites. If you don't have a local website, we can post it on the county's.



A depiction of the Marcellus Formation in gray.  
Photo Courtesy: US Geological Survey

## The Toolbox: CommunityViz

As a municipal official or planning commission member, have you ever wondered what your community would be like if it was completely built-out? Or what impact development would have on your finances or quality of life? Or how zoning affects development?

The County Planning Department is offering municipalities help in answering those questions through CommunityViz.

CommunityViz is a computer program designed to analyze how development impacts a community. It is a versatile and powerful tool to provide real answers to some of the toughest land use questions.

CommunityViz allows users to setup different land development scenarios to see development alternatives.

This tool could be useful in numerous situations where abstract zoning ordinances can be brought to life, redevelopment scenarios can be played out, and proposed development can be visualized.

If you think your community could benefit from this tool, contact Brian Lawrence, Assistant Deputy Director at 724-830-3772 for a free consultation.



Build-out Analysis results for New Alexandria



3D Build-out Analysis results for New Alexandria

## New County Website



Over the past few years, it has become apparent to the County Commissioners that the county website had gotten stale and functionally incompatible with new technology and software.

Therefore, the Commissioners contracted

with CivicPlus, a web-design company, to completely revamp the website and our electronic portal to residents, businesses and visitors.

The new website will accomplish a number of goals. Mainly, it will improve the transparency of county government. A newly designed e-services section will enhance the ability of the public to access public records. The new site will be mobile device friendly. Email and text subscription services will be offered as well to keep the community engaged and up-to-date about county services and issues. It also looks great.

The Development Council will have a unified presence on the site as well; bringing all of the resources and services of the Council in one online location.

The website should be live around February and will maintain the same address.



## County Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance Review

Last updated in 1995, the County Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance is ready to be updated for 2012 and beyond.

The process for developing a new ordinance began last year with a review of all of the issues in the current Ordinance.

Bringing more flexibility to design standards and clarifying sometimes confusing rules is a major goal.

The addition of a Conservation Development Option (CDO) is a part of the draft Ordinance. CDO's offer developers the opportunity to make use of a substitute process for subdivision and land development.

Essentially, developers are able to realize density bonuses in return for open space, recreation, and trail dedications. The net

effect is a more eco-friendly development that, because of density of bonuses, improves the return on investment for developers.

Over the next few months the Department will be working toward adoption of the new ordinance.. We'll be meeting with municipalities, surveyors, developers and the public to hear their

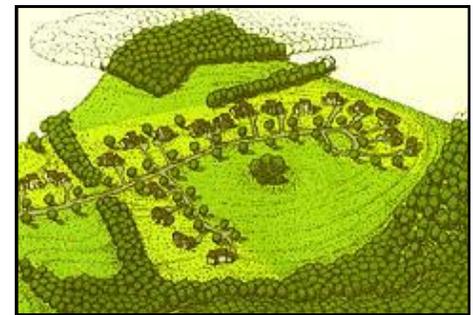
concerns and input.

The end result will be an ordinance that supports development while making it a more flexible set of development rules.

To learn more visit our website, [www.co.westmoreland.pa.us/planning](http://www.co.westmoreland.pa.us/planning) and click on the For Developers page.



Typical subdivision development  
Image Credit: Randall Arendt



Conservation subdivision development  
Image Credit: Randall Arendt

*Planning Trends Westmoreland* aims; to inform local officials and planning commissions about current planning initiatives in the County, to educate about new developments and techniques in the planning field, and to empower local planning that improves the quality of life for the residents of Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania.