



ANNUAL REPORT 2022



Chairman's MESSAGE



Michael Heberg, Chair

Implementing the Plan

The Chester County Planning Commission is pleased to submit the annual report for the calendar year 2022. The Planning Commission had another successful year of implementing *Landscapes3*, including the start-up of two significant new initiatives in sustainability and transportation. We were excited to once again be able to meet with

colleagues and planning partners in person while offering the option to attend many of our meetings virtually. Just a few highlights this year are noted below centered around the *Landscapes3* goal areas of Preserve, Protect, Appreciate, Live, Prosper, and Connect.

PRESERVE: A major milestone was passed this year with the preservation of over 30%, or 147,000 acres, of the county's land as protected open space. The annual Open Space Summit was well attended on a beautiful day at Springton Manor Farm with the focus on farm preservation.

PROTECT: A new Sustainability Division and Sustainability Director position were created this year to focus on the implementation of the county's *Climate Action Plan* and other environmental initiatives. This division hit the ground running working proactively with the Chester County Environmental and Energy Advisory Board on topics such as supporting clean energy and protecting natural resources.

APPRECIATE: The 2022 theme of the popular Town Tours and Village Walks was "Founding Mothers and Fathers" with the final tour held in the Village of Marshallton, highlighting the many accomplishments of its founder Humphry Marshall. The county's 250th Commission also began kicking into high gear this year in anticipation of the country's semiquincentennial in 2026.

Board members



Nathan M. Cline, P.E.,
Vice-Chair



Roberta
Consentino



Stephanie
Duncan



Douglas A.
Fasick, DC



Matthew
Hammond, P.E.



Molly Morrison



E. Martin Shane



Angela
Thompson-Lobb

LIVE: The annual housing report showed a dramatic 12 percent increase in home prices between 2020 and 2021. Appropriately, the annual A+ Homes Forum looked at the hurdles to building more affordably priced housing, drawing on the experience of both developers and municipal officials.

PROSPER: The Agricultural Development Council released its annual *Guide to Local Farm Products*, highlighting the county's robust agricultural economy and the many options for buying locally produced farm products. The updated Chester County Economy report continues to show that the county has a strong economy and a low unemployment rate.

CONNECT: A new passenger rail authority, the Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority, was created in partnership with Chester, Berks, and Montgomery counties with the ambitious and exciting goal of returning passenger rail to Phoenixville, Pottstown, and Reading.

On behalf of the Planning Commission Board, I would like to express our appreciation for the staff's hard work and ongoing commitment to our county and its quality of place. Their efforts are highlighted above and in this annual report and available on the Planning Commission's website, chescoplanning.org, which contains a wealth of information on planning topics, mapping, tools, and upcoming events. We look forward to working with our many partners in 2023 in keeping Chester County a great place to live and work.

Very respectfully,

Michael Heberg Chairman

Achieving the VISION



Implementing Landscapes3

The Planning Commission's work program is guided by *Landscapes3*, Chester County's comprehensive plan, which seeks to balance growth and preservation. With recent surges in residential development around the county, the need to foster smart growth while preserving existing community character is more important than ever.

To achieve the vision shown in the Landscapes Map, design guides are being prepared for each landscape. A fourth guide prepared in 2022, the *Rural Center Landscapes Design Guide*, illustrates how new development in growing parts of rural communities can be compatible with existing villages and commercial centers.

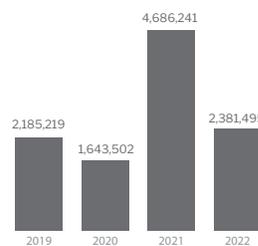
Development Proposals and Landscapes3

Consistency with the Landscapes Map and the planning principles in *Landscapes3* is part of the Act 247 review process for subdivisions, land developments, ordinances, and plans. In 2022, 99 percent of all relevant subdivision and land development plan submissions were consistent with *Landscapes3*. Approximately 82 percent of proposed dwelling units were in *Landscapes3* growth areas. For nonresidential proposals, 90 percent of the square footage was in growth areas. For ordinance and comprehensive plan submissions in 2022, 99 percent were consistent with *Landscapes3*.

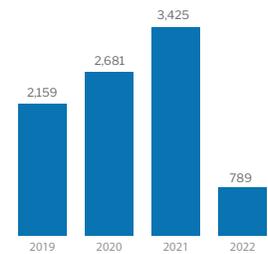
The Rural Center Landscapes Design Guide illustrates best practices for new development.

Excluding second reviews, the Planning Commission reviewed 202 subdivision and land development plan submissions in 2022, a seven percent increase from the number of plans reviewed in 2021 (188). However, the number of proposed residential lots/units for the entire county decreased substantially, from 3,425 in 2021 to 789. While proposed nonresidential structural square footage decreased from 4,298,938 in 2021 to 2,381,495 in 2022, it should be noted that 2021 was the first year since 2007 that the Planning Commission had reviewed more than four million square feet of nonresidential structural square footage in one year. Over the past decade, except for 2020, at least two million square feet of nonresidential square footage has been proposed each year in the county.

Proposed Non-residential Square Footage



Proposed Residential Lots/Units



VISION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

Funding community planning initiatives since 1996

Partnering with Municipalities

Chester County's *Vision Partnership Program* (VPP) promotes *Landscapes3* by providing grant funding and technical assistance to municipalities for comprehensive plan updates, ordinances, and special studies. Projects are either completed by the Planning Commission staff or by a professional planning consultant selected by the municipality. At any one time, there may be 30 or more active VPP projects. In 2022, ten VPP projects were completed.

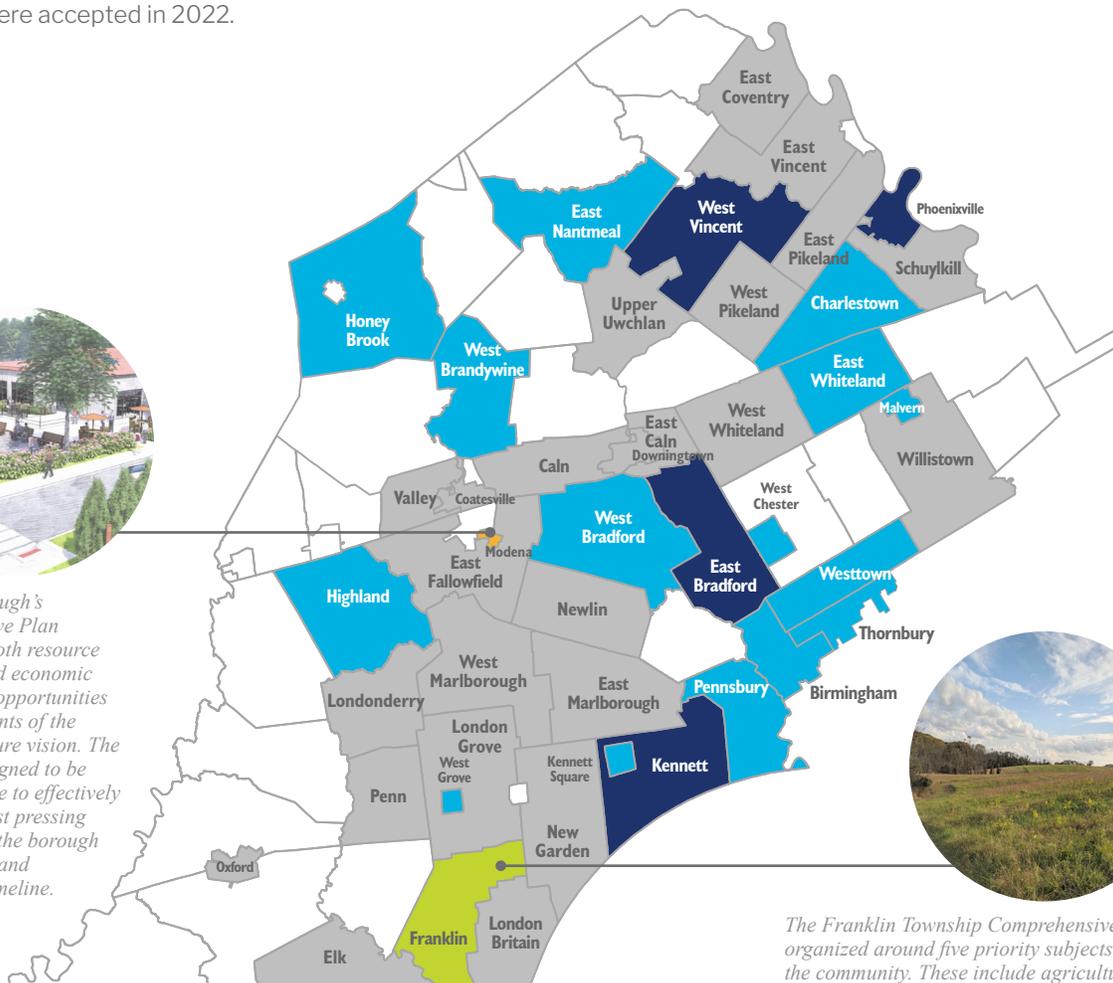
Inquiries for county consulting projects are welcomed on a rolling basis, and staff availability determines accepted proposals. Cash Grant applications are accepted in two competitive grant rounds each year; one in the spring and one in the fall. The Chester County Commissioners allocate \$250,000 per year for VPP Cash Grants. Fourteen new VPP projects were accepted in 2022.

VPP Project Status

- Municipality with VPP project completed by Planning Commission staff in 2022
- Municipality with VPP cash grant project completed in 2022
- Municipality with VPP project completed by Planning Commission staff in 2022 and an ongoing project
- Municipality with VPP cash grant project completed in 2022 and an ongoing project
- Municipality with ongoing VPP project



Modena Borough's Comprehensive Plan emphasizes both resource protection and economic development opportunities as core elements of the borough's future vision. The plan was designed to be implementable to effectively tackle the most pressing issues facing the borough in an orderly and reasonable timeline.



The Franklin Township Comprehensive Plan is organized around five priority subjects identified by the community. These include agriculture retention, resource protection as green infrastructure, trail and other pedestrian connections, roads and infrastructure, and Kemblesville Village enhancements.

How We PRESERVE

open space • farmland • nature preserves •
parks • forests • scenic views

Open Space Preservation

At the start of 2022, 147,000 acres, or more than 30% of the county, was protected open space, according to the Planning Commission's [annual tracking](#) of land preservation by the Department of Parks and Preservation, land trusts, municipalities, and other preservation partners. Many new properties were preserved during 2022, such as a 166-acre expansion of Elk Creek State Park in Elk Township, a 154-acre addition to Starr Farm Park in East Bradford Township, and a 115-acre easement on Castle Rock Farm in West Bradford and Newlin Townships.

30% of the county is protected open space

Municipal Open Space Outreach

To help municipalities achieve their open space goals, county staff analyzed every municipality's open space accomplishments and current preservation tools, sharing this information with each municipality while also identifying additional open space tools they might want to consider.



*The conservation easement on Castle Rock Farm preserved additional land along the West Branch Brandywine Creek greenway.
(Photo credit: Jack Stefferud)*

Open Space Summit

The 2022 open space summit, which focused on farm preservation, was held at Springton Manor Farm. Pennsylvania Secretary of Agriculture Russell Redding was on hand for an informative and fun event that included tours of the farm and Chester County Food Bank operations. In conjunction with the event, the Planning Commission and Parks and Preservation Departments arranged tours of five preserved Chester County farms.

Conservation Subdivision Design Guide

Planning Commission staff updated and modernized the [Conservation Subdivision Design Guide](#), creating an online version of the guide that shows municipalities how significant amounts of open space can be preserved as part of a residential subdivision.

How We PROTECT

woodlands • streams • wetlands • soil health • steep slopes • natural heritage areas

New Sustainability Division

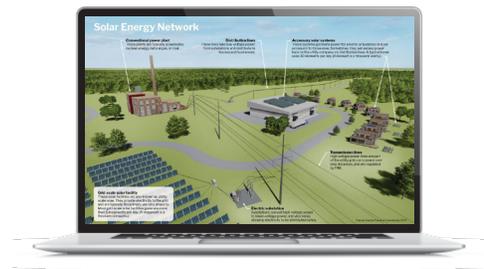
To help implement the county's *Climate Action Plan* and to support environmental initiatives, the county created a new Sustainability Director position, which has become part of a new Sustainability Division within the Planning Commission.



The Sustainability Division consists of Rachael Griffith, Director, and Carrie Conwell, Environmental Planner.

Chester County Solar Power Guide

The Planning Commission produced an [online guide](#) to solar power, which is primarily focused on grid-scale solar facilities. This guide is divided into three topic areas: Solar Power Trends, Planning for Solar Power, and Regulating Solar Power at the Municipal Level.



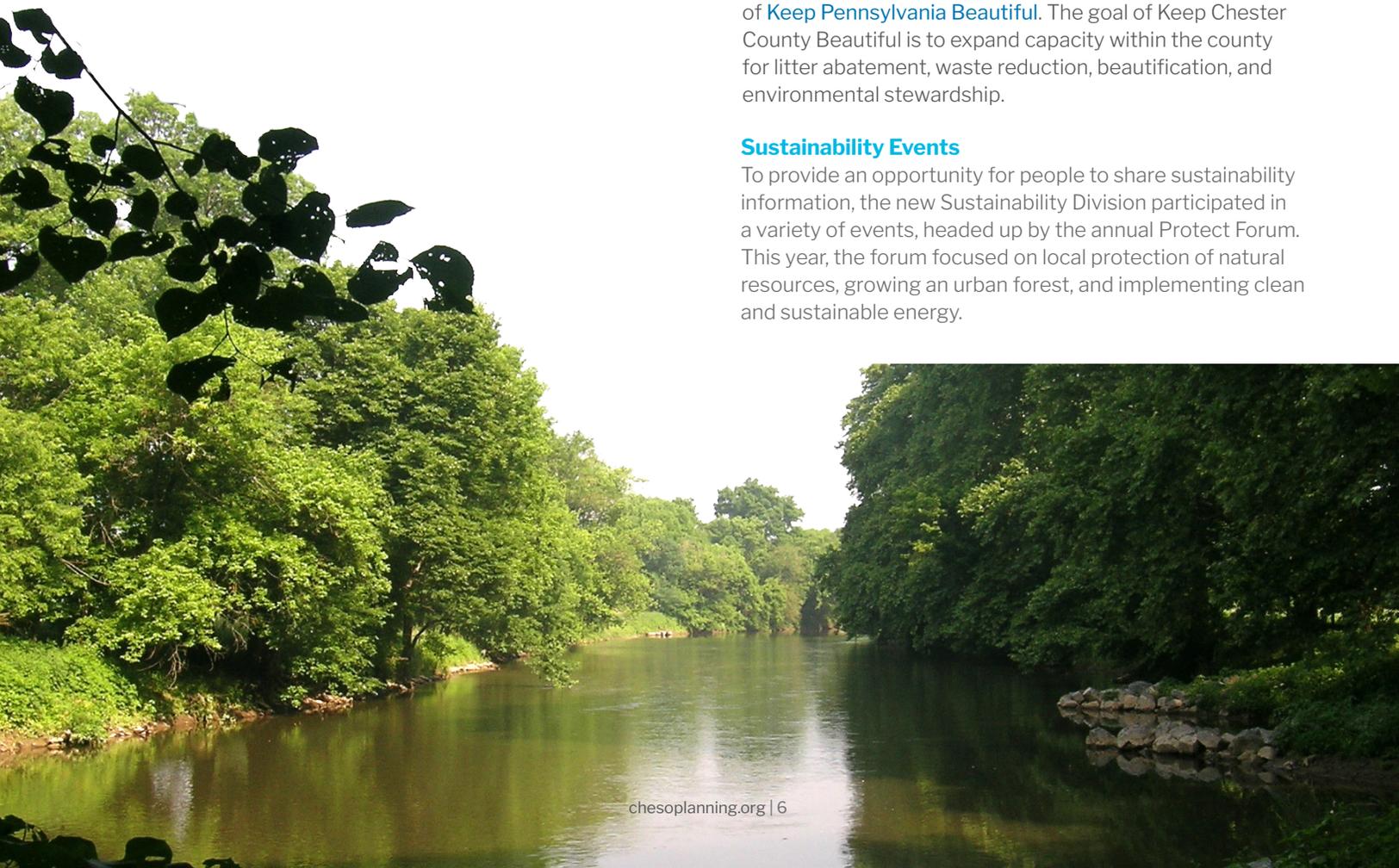
The Solar Power Guide provides guidance on the best locations for solar power generation facilities.

Keep Chester County Beautiful

During the year, Chester County became an official affiliate of [Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful](#). The goal of Keep Chester County Beautiful is to expand capacity within the county for litter abatement, waste reduction, beautification, and environmental stewardship.

Sustainability Events

To provide an opportunity for people to share sustainability information, the new Sustainability Division participated in a variety of events, headed up by the annual Protect Forum. This year, the forum focused on local protection of natural resources, growing an urban forest, and implementing clean and sustainable energy.



How We APPRECIATE

historic buildings • historic viewsheds • cultural landscapes • villages • historic town centers

Interpreting the Brandywine Battlefield

The Planning Commission continued facilitating the installation of Brandywine Battlefield historic markers in 2022, including signs in Birmingham, Pennsbury, Pocopson, and Thornbury Townships, as well as Kennett Square Borough. So far, 12 of an intended 15 municipal signs have been installed.



In May, a new historical marker detailing an event that occurred during the Battle of the Brandywine was dedicated at the Barns-Brinton house in Pennsbury Township.



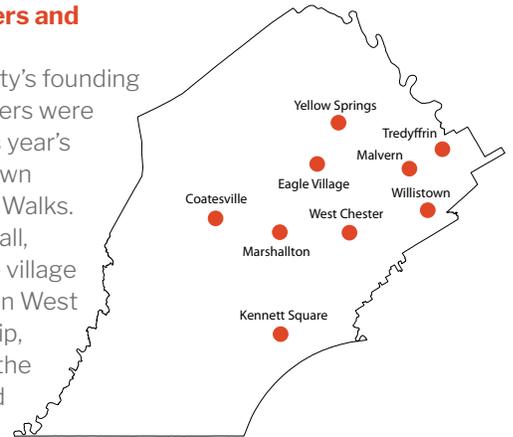
In August, Laura DeMatteo joined the Planning Commission staff as its new Heritage Preservation Coordinator.

America 250PA Chester County Commission

The county's new Chester County 250th Commission began meeting in the summer to start preparing educational materials, programs, and events that will highlight the diverse history of the county over the past few hundred years.

Founding Mothers and Fathers

Many of the county's founding mothers and fathers were recognized in this year's nine in-person Town Tours and Village Walks. Humphrey Marshall, whose namesake village of Marshallton is in West Bradford Township, was the focus of the kickoff event held in West Chester.



How We LIVE

neighborhoods • housing • community facilities • parks and recreation • community health

Housing Data

The annual [Housing Report](#) showed that there were dramatic changes in housing between 2020 and 2021. The median housing value in 2021 rose to \$420,000, a huge 12% jump over the prior year and the highest inflation-adjusted sales price ever for the county. A total of 3,743 units were built in 2021, the largest number of units built in the county since 2001. And 9,049 units were sold, the largest number of units sold since 2005.



SINGLE FAMILY
916 UNITS BUILT



SINGLE FAMILY ATTACHED
864 UNITS BUILT



MULTI-FAMILY
1,963 UNITS BUILT

Understanding Social Equity

With social equity being a top concern of the public, Planning Commission staff created a social equity [web area](#) that provides background information, data, maps, and helpful web links on demographics, housing, the economy, education, transportation, and the environment.

Missing Middle Housing Report

As part of the county's ongoing A+ Homes initiative, the Planning Commission released a new housing guide: [Planning for Attractive Homes – Missing Middle Housing](#). The report provides many examples of Missing Middle housing and shows how it can easily match existing community character.

A+ Homes Forum

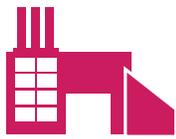
The county's [Housing Choices Committee](#) sponsored the annual A+ Homes forum, Costs and Challenges of Building A+ Homes. A panel of developers and municipal officials highlighted the hurdles to building more affordably-priced housing.



job centers • business parks • main streets • industrial areas • retail centers • agriculture

Nonresidential Construction

The county's *Nonresidential Construction Report* showed that nonresidential construction was moderate in 2021, with about 1,140,000 square feet built, with institutional and commercial development accounting for most of the new building square footage. One project, West Chester University's Commons Building, accounted for 315,000 square feet of the total.



INDUSTRIAL
150,111 SF BUILT



COMMERCIAL
436,378 SF BUILT



INSTITUTIONAL
533,622 SF BUILT



AGRICULTURAL
19,040 SF BUILT

Outreach to Municipalities on Agriculture

Many people don't realize that agriculture can occur on relatively small properties and even in buildings. To provide guidance on this topic, the Planning Commission and Agricultural Development Council shared a flyer, called *Agriculture in Developed Communities*, with the county's municipalities.

The Chester County Economy Report

The Planning Commission, in partnership with the Chester County Economic Development Council, prepared the third *annual report* on the county's economy. This report continues to show that the county has a strong and diverse economy with a low unemployment rate and rising participation in the workforce.

Urban Centers Forum

In October, the Planning Commission held its Urban Centers Forum in South Coatesville, with a theme of density, diversity, and discussion. Borough and city representatives from the county's 16 urban centers shared their own success stories and issues with the group as a whole for robust conversation and input.

Farm Products Guide

The Agricultural Development Council released its annual farm guide, *A Guide to Local Farm Products in Chester County*. This magazine style guide featured stories about Pigeon Creek Farm, Styer's Peonies, and the Thorncroft Equestrian Center, and also included the usual list and map of farms and other locations where residents can purchase locally produced agricultural products.

How We CONNECT

roadways • sidewalks • trails • public transportation • airports • freight • communications • utilities • energy • pipelines

Transportation Forum

In September, the Planning Commission hosted its annual transportation forum, titled “Trails, Transit, and Tractor Trailers.” Speakers at the forum described the process for creating a county-wide trail plan, provided an overview of the draft freight plan, and summarized a state bus stop design guide.

Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Campaign

To improve the safety of bicyclists and pedestrians, who are very vulnerable when hit by a vehicle, the county launched a new social media campaign that highlights best safety practices for drivers, pedestrians, and bicyclists.



Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority

In consultation with Amtrak and other transportation partners, Chester, Berks, and Montgomery counties created a new passenger rail authority focused on returning passenger rail to Phoenixville, Pottstown, and Reading. With the new federal infrastructure bill and Amtrak’s ambitious expansion plans, there could be Amtrak service in these communities in the future.



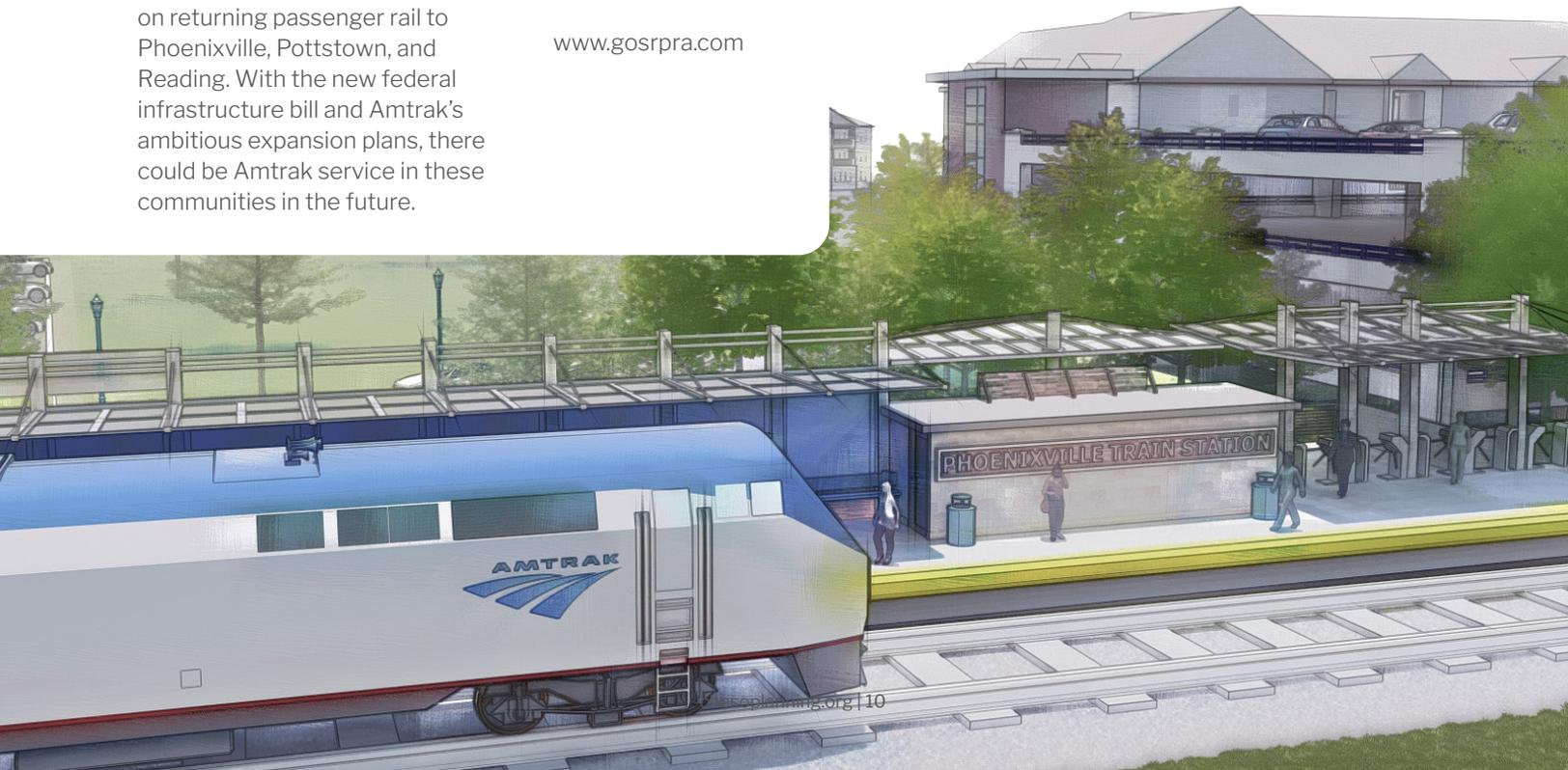
www.gosrpra.com



In anticipation of connecting the Philadelphia and Thorndale right-of-way to an extension of the Chester Valley Trail, Multimodal Transportation Division staff visited a new trail bridge in Lancaster County.

Chester County Freight Plan

Planning Commission staff provided guidance to DVRPC on the creation of a new freight plan for the county that identifies existing freight areas, designates a truck network for the county, and describes freight priority areas.





Director's MESSAGE



Brian N. O'Leary, AICP

Keeping Planning Front and Center

Although we remain in uncertain times in our nation and the world, the planning issues we face in Chester County are well established. To address these, we need to continue preserving our quality of place, encouraging smart growth, creating more transportation choices, facilitating

more varied housing, protecting our natural resources, and bolstering the economy.

The infusion of federal money over the past few years has accelerated many of our planning efforts. It has also moved us closer to certain long-range goals, such as returning passenger rail service to Phoenixville, encouraging affordably-priced homes, or preserving more open space. And it has helped our many partners advance their projects, particularly in the infrastructure realm.

In 2023, we will keep things moving forward. By the end of the year, we expect to complete three major plans – an updated public transportation plan, a new county trail plan, and a heritage tourism study. Meanwhile, we will continue implementing *Landscapes3* and new related plans, including our *Climate Action Plan*, the *Agricultural Economic Development Strategic Plan*, and our *Freight Plan*. And most importantly, we will continue providing extensive support and resources for the county's 73 municipalities.

There are lots of opportunities to make a planning impact in 2023, and we look forward to working with our partners to keep Chester County a great place to live, work, and raise a family.

Brian N. O'Leary, AICP
Executive Director

Major 2023 Initiatives

- Public transportation plan
- County-wide trail master plan
- Historic tourism plan support
- Climate action plan implementation
- Ag economic strategic plan implementation
- Municipal open space outreach
- Sustainable practices for homeowners' associations
- Adaptive reuse guide
- Village preservation guide
- A+ homes initiative
- VPP grants and technical assistance
- Rural landscapes design guide

Budget

Expenditures	2020	2021	2022
Personnel Services	\$3,053,094	\$3,084,212	\$3,266,016
Materials & Services	\$147,001	\$237,251	\$170,416
Contributions, Grants, Subsidies	\$170,910	\$170,911	\$170,910
TOTAL	\$3,371,005	\$3,492,374	\$3,607,432

Revenues	2020	2021	2022
Federal	\$246,498	\$251,946	\$263,466
State	\$0	\$5,000	\$20,425
Local	\$329,224	\$48,701	\$45,475
Subdivision/Land Review Fees	\$182,450	\$211,770	\$175,849
Miscellaneous	\$108	\$11,822	\$1,250
TOTAL	\$758,279	\$529,238	\$506,465

* Remaining revenue comes from Chester County

Chester County Planning Commission
601 Westtown Road • Suite 270
P.O. Box 2747
West Chester, PA 19380-0990
610-344-6285

Email
ccplanning@chesco.org

Web
www.chescoplanning.org

We're social! Follow us

 **Facebook**

 **Twitter**

 **LinkedIn**

 **Flickr**

 **YouTube**

 **Instagram**

Staff

Administration Services

Brian N. O'Leary, AICP, *Executive Director*
Carol J. Stauffer, AICP, *Assistant Director*
Beth A. Cunliffe,
Office & Communications Manager
Carolyn Oakley, *Communications Supervisor*
Elle Steinman, *Communications Coordinator*
Nancy Shields, *Administrative Coordinator*
Jenn Kolvereid, *Land Development Analyst*
Patti Strauber, *Administrative Support*
Sally Warren, *Administrative Support*
Suzanne Wozniak, *Administrative Coordinator* *

Agricultural Development Council

Hillary Krummrich, Esq., *Director*
Ann Lane, *Program Coordinator*

Community Planning

Bill Deguffroy, AICP,
Community Planning Director
Katherine Clark, AICP, *Community Planner*
Laura DeMatteo,
Heritage Preservation Coordinator
Mark Gallant, *Community Planner*
Libby Horwitz, AICP,
Housing & Economic Planner
Kevin Myers, *Urban Planner*
Chris Patriarca, AICP, *Community Planner*
Joe Shanley, *Community Planner*
Jeannine Speirs, *Community Planner*

* Former staff

Multimodal Transportation Planning

Brian Styche, RLA, AICP,
Multimodal Transportation Planning Director
Stephen Buck, RLA, *Trails Planner*
Brian Donovan, AICP, *Transportation Planner* *
Jake Michael, AICP, *Demographer*
Eric Quinn, *Transportation Planner* *
Patricia Quinn, *Transportation Planner*
Alex Sankaran, *Transportation Planner*

Sustainability Planning

Rachael Griffith, RLA, AICP, *Director*
Carolyn Conwell, AICP, *Environmental Planner*

Design & Technology

Paul Fritz, RLA, AICP,
Design & Technology Director
Glenn Bentley, *Plan Reviewer*
Wes Bruckno, AICP, *Plan Reviewer*
Paul Farkas, *Plan Reviewer*
Gene Huller, *Technical Services Supervisor*
Colin Murtoff, *GIS Planner*
Benny Nein, *Technical Services Specialist* *
Richard Drake, *Technical Services Specialist*
Diana Zak, *Graphics Supervisor*
Christopher Bittle, *Graphics Specialist*
Ian Mix, *Graphics Specialist*
Albert Park, *Design Specialist*



Marian Moskowitz
Josh Maxwell
Michelle Kichline