



CHESTER  
COUNTY  
PLANNING  
COMMISSION

# ANNUAL REPORT

2020



# Chairman's Message



## CHESTER COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION BOARD

*Nine-member advisory board appointed by the Board of County Commissioners. Standing from left: Douglas A. Fasick, DC, Vice-Chair; Nathan M. Cline, P.E.; Matthew Hammond, P.E.; Kevin C. Kerr, Chair; Angela Thompson-Lobb; Stephanie Duncan; and Michael Heaberg. Sitting from left: Molly Morrison and E. Martin Shane.*

## Implementing the plan

The Chester County Planning Commission is pleased to submit this annual report for the calendar year 2020. This past year was a challenge on many levels. The Planning Commission quickly pivoted in mid-March to working remotely and holding virtual meetings with all of our stakeholders by utilizing webinars, public hearings and many municipal outreach initiatives. With adjustments made to address pandemic issues, work at the Planning Commission continued to focus on implementation of the six goal areas of *Landscapes3*:

**PRESERVE:** Open space preservation continued to be a high priority in Chester County with several hundred additional acres protected in 2020, including five farms and a 91 acre addition to Crow's Nest preserve. Staff analyzed municipal open space tools and created an interactive map where these local efforts can be viewed online.

**PROTECT:** The Commissioners' newly created Environmental & Energy Advisory Board, administered by the Planning Commission, began meeting in the spring of 2020. The advisory board quickly began to oversee the development of the county's draft *Climate Action Plan*. The Planning Commission celebrated the 50th anniversary of Earth Day through the release of *50 Ways Your Community Can Protect Our Planet*.

**APPRECIATE:** Brandywine Battlefield preservation efforts continued with the release of the latest battlefield study, *The Army Marched at Dawn – Southern Battlefield Strategic Landscapes Plan*. Town Tours and Village Walks shifted to six virtual events, with over 1,000 households logging into the webinars and many more viewing the recorded online events.

**LIVE:** The county's Housing Choices Committee sponsored the annual A+ homes Forum featuring webinars on housing for an aging population and on housing costs. The Chester County Complete Count Committee, working with the Planning Commission, led an outreach effort resulting in a 78 percent response rate, the second highest county response in Pennsylvania and exceeding the county's response rate in 2010.

**PROSPER:** In response to the economic impacts of the pandemic, the planning commission participated in the Restore Chester County Task Force, developing the Restore Chester County website and partnering with the Chester County Economic Development Council on a county economic development report. The annual Urban Centers Forum included presentations on business support during the pandemic and main street design.

**CONNECT:** The *Active Transportation Inventory and Analysis* was completed, resulting in a customized report for all 73 municipalities with specific guidance on enhancing walking, biking, and use of public transportation in their communities. An interactive Circuit Trail map was also created showing the status of multi-modal trails specific to Chester County.

These efforts, and many more, such as the new *Suburban Center Landscapes Design Guide*, are available on the Planning Commission's website, [www.chescoplanning.org](http://www.chescoplanning.org). This website contains a wealth of information on planning topics, mapping, tools, and upcoming events.

After making it through a challenging 2020, we are looking forward to a productive 2021 and working with our many partners. Thank you for taking the time to read our 2020 annual report and most importantly for helping us make Chester County the best place to live, work, and play!

Very respectfully,

Kevin C. Kerr, 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. In 2020, we began to measure the success of *Landscapes3* implementation by tracking 18 metrics and recording success stories throughout the year. Overall, the county is making solid progress on a wide range of goals, particularly on preservation related metrics.

To achieve the vision shown in the Landscapes map, the Planning Commission is creating design guides for each landscape. In 2020, staff completed a second guide, the *Suburban Center Landscapes Design Guide*. This document illustrates how new development and redevelopment in the county's suburban employment centers can create a better sense of place, accommodate mixed use development, and offer alternative modes of transportation.

## Development Consistency with Landscapes3

Consistency with the *Landscapes Map* is part of the Act 247 review process for proposed subdivisions, land developments, ordinances, and plans. In 2020, 99 percent of all relevant subdivision and land development plan submissions were consistent with *Landscapes3*. Approximately 96 percent of proposed dwelling units were in *Landscapes3* growth areas. For non-residential proposals, 95 percent of the square footage was in growth areas.

Overall, 2020 was a mixed year on development proposals. The number of actual reviews dropped from 236 to 163, while the number of proposed residential lots/units (excluding second reviews) increased from 2,159 to 2,681. Of note, the number of townhouse lots/units increased from 149 to 676, and the number of apartment lots/units increased from 1,246 to 1,303.

The proposed non-residential square footage (excluding second reviews) decreased from 2,185,219 to 1,643,502 square feet, and proposed comprehensive plans and ordinance amendments decreased from 170 to 102 reviews.

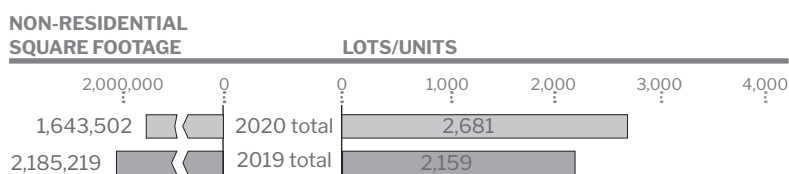
The Planning Commission also reviewed nine unofficial sketch plan submissions in 2020, which addressed the overall creation of 391 residential lots/units, and 79,945 square feet of non-residential structural square footage. All nine sketch plan submissions were consistent with *Landscapes3*.



*The Suburban Center Landscapes Design Guide was completed at the end of the year and provides planning and design guidance for new development in corridors, underutilized shopping centers, older office and business parks, and infill locations.*



*The seventy-eight percent increase in proposed townhouse lots played a large role in the total increase of proposed multi-family units.*



# Vision Partnership Program

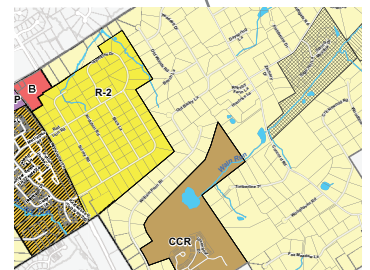
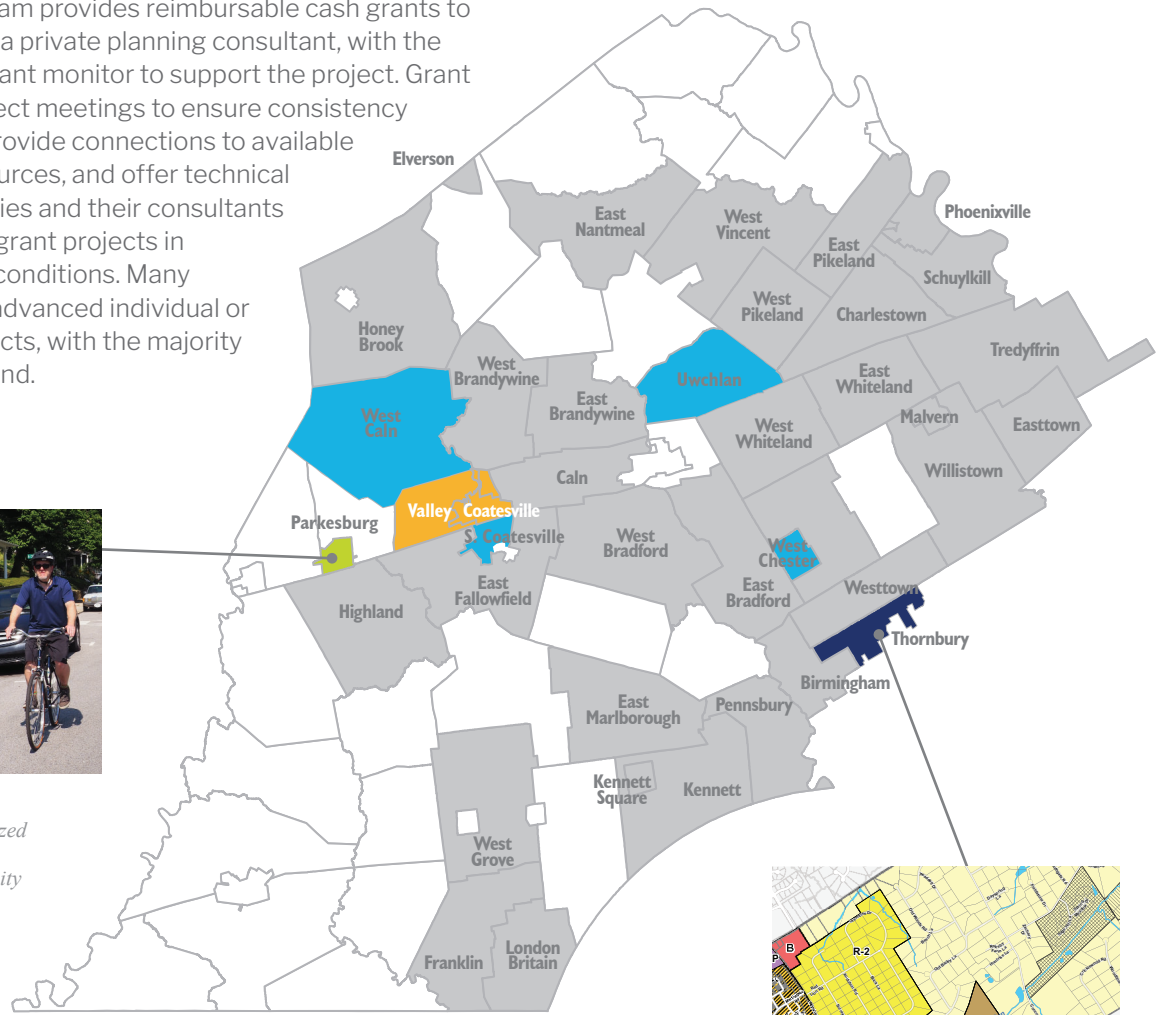
## Partnering with Municipalities

The Vision Partnership Program (VPP) is one of the county's primary means of partnering with municipalities to encourage smart growth and effective preservation. The VPP relies on two components to implement *Landscapes3*: county consulting services and cash grants. For the county consulting services, Planning Commission staff members act as planning consultants to municipalities. Despite the challenges of ensuring public engagement under evolving restrictions, two county consulting projects were completed in 2020, with four others ongoing at year end.

The cash grant program provides reimbursable cash grants to municipalities to hire a private planning consultant, with the county providing a grant monitor to support the project. Grant monitors attend project meetings to ensure consistency with *Landscapes3*, provide connections to available information and resources, and offer technical guidance. Municipalities and their consultants completed five cash grant projects in 2020 under difficult conditions. Many other municipalities advanced individual or multi-municipal projects, with the majority still ongoing at year end.



*The Borough of Parkesburg Comprehensive Plan prioritized revitalization, streetscaping, traffic calming, and community enhancements.*



*The Thornbury Township zoning ordinance preserved open space through cluster zoning, included comprehensive natural features protection, and incorporated extensive historic preservation standards, particularly for portions of the township within the Brandywine Battlefield area.*

- Municipality with VPP project completed by Planning Commission staff in 2020
- Municipality with VPP cash grant project completed in 2020
- Municipality with ongoing VPP project
- Municipality with VPP project completed by Planning Commission staff in 2020 and an ongoing project
- Municipality with VPP cash grant project completed in 2020 and an ongoing project

# How We PRESERVE

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

## Protected Open Space Tracking (POST)

The Planning Commission [tracks protected open space](#) annually in conjunction with the Department of Parks and Preservation, land trusts, municipalities, and other preservation partners. At the start of 2020, 142,200 acres, or over 29 percent of the county, was protected open space. New properties preserved during 2020 include 91 acres added to the Crow's Nest Preserve and eighteen farms totaling over 600 acres.

*The purchase by Natural Lands of additional acreage adjacent to its Crow's Nest Preserve in Warwick Township provides a scenic buffer for a section of the Horse-shoe Trail, which traverses the property and expanded protection of woodlands along Mine Run. Photo by Dan Barringer*



## Open Space Inventory and Map

In support of greater open space preservation, county staff conducted an analysis of the open space tools used by the county's 73 municipalities, creating an interactive map showing these local efforts.

Of the 73 communities, 35 have special funding programs for open space preservation, which include earned income taxes, property taxes, and special open space bonds. Thirteen municipalities have transfer of development rights ordinances, where development is transferred from open space areas to places that are more appropriate for growth. Eleven have true agricultural zoning, which only allows agricultural uses or very low density residential development. And many municipalities have strong cluster ordinances, where 50 percent or more of a development is preserved as open space.



*The inventory of open space tools was compiled into a web application, which allows a user to see where Chester County municipalities are planning for open space preservation and have implemented agricultural zoning, conservation subdivision regulations, and transfer of development rights ordinances.*

# How We PROTECT

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

## Environmental and Energy Advisory Board

Recognizing that environmental protection and climate change are critical issues, the County Commissioners created a new board, the Environmental and Energy Advisory Board, which is administered by the Planning Commission. This board is tasked with helping the county identify the best environmental and energy practices and policies.

## Climate Action Plan

The Environmental and Energy Advisory Board oversaw the preparation of a draft *Climate Action Plan* for the county, which will replace the county's 2010 Greenhouse Gas Reduction Report.

## Celebrating Earth Day





To honor the 50th anniversary of Earth Day, the Planning Commission released a pamphlet, titled *50 Ways Your Community Can Protect Our Planet*, which shows how municipalities can rewild the suburbs, provide greening for everyone, support new transportation options, corral growth, and befriend the environment.

## Natural Resource eTools

In preparation for a new municipal outreach program on natural resources, the Planning Commission completed a series of eTools focused on natural resource protection, including floodplain protection, riparian buffers, steep slope protection, wetlands protection, woodlands conservation, greenways, and conservation easements.



*The climate protection measures achieved by the Climate Action Plan will continue to spur business and job growth during the design, manufacture, and installation of energy efficient technologies, which presents a particular opportunity to reinvest in the local economy and generate green jobs within Chester County.*

 How it Works	 <b>Get Started</b>	 Examples
 <p>Municipalities can manage stream corridor buffers through non-regulatory and regulatory processes.</p>	<h3>Get Started</h3> <p>There are a variety of ways to preserve and protect riparian buffers during the land development process and through normal land use activities. Municipalities can manage stream corridors and their buffers through both non-regulatory and regulatory processes. Active planning and involvement by the local municipal government can be very effective in conserving this critical component of the natural environment.</p> <h3>Establish Policy</h3> <p>Municipal policy planning such as a formal comprehensive plan or an adopted open space and recreation plan is the most direct process for establishing conservation policy. These plans can contain maps, inventories, and descriptions of the streams and riparian areas in a municipality, and goals and objectives for their conservation.</p>	

*The eTools are intended to be an easy read, providing a quick overview of each topic, a brief explanation of how it works, and considerations in addressing the topic or regulating the use.*

## Act 537 Sewage Facility Reviews

Thirty-four sewage facility plan updates and amendments were reviewed during 2020, including one major update.

# How We APPRECIATE

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

*The Town Tours and Village Walks virtual summer series took place through Zoom, a video conferencing software for use with computers, tablets and cell phones.*



## **Brandywine Battlefield Protection**

To support Brandywine Battle-related land conservation, historic resource protection, and heritage interpretation efforts by local municipalities, the Planning Commission completed a study of the British approach to the battle, titled *The Army Marched at Dawn – Southern Battlefield Strategic Landscapes Plan*. This plan was released at a special Brandywine Battlefield Task Force webinar, which also featured a sneak peek at the next phase of the Brandywine Battle study, which is examining the core battlefield area.

## **Town Tours and Village Walks**

In 2020, the county shifted the annual [Town Tours and Village Walks](#) program to six virtual events focused on art and architecture. This program introduces the public to the great and varied historic resources around the county, and more than 1,000 households logged into the webinars, with many more viewing the recorded videos online.



*The virtual Town Tours had over 1,000 participants. The recordings are available on the Planning Commission's website, including the Historic Sugartown tour.*

## **Coordination with Preservation Network**

A leadership luncheon for municipal historic commissions, committees, and historical architectural review board leaders was held in coordination with the Chester County Historic Preservation Network. Training at this event focused on the process for saving a historic structure, historic preservation ordinances, and Pennsylvania's 1776-2026 250th State Committee.

## **Protection of Historic Bridges**

The Planning Commission continued to serve as a resource for identifying ways to protect the county's historic bridges, working closely with the county's Facilities Department.

# How We LIVE

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

## Housing Data

The *Annual Housing Report* indicated the median housing value in 2019 rose to \$355,000, a 4.4 percent increase over the prior year. A total of 1,409 units were built in 2019, with 43 percent of these single-family detached, 42 percent single-family attached, and 16 percent multifamily. This housing report is now available in a new, interactive, online format.

## Housing Choices Committee

The county's Housing Choices Committee continued to focus on how the county can encourage **A+ homes**, which are attractive, affordably-priced, adaptable, aging-friendly, and accessible. The committee also sponsored the annual A+ homes Forum, which in 2020 featured two webinars, one on housing for an aging population and the other on housing costs.

## Housing Studies

During the year, staff at the Planning Commission prepared two housing studies. The first study focused on the county's aging population and policies designed to help seniors age in place or in their communities. The second study examined housing costs, breaking down the cost of a typical home into smaller pieces to identify costs where municipalities, builders, and others could make a difference.

## 2020 Census Complete Count Committee

Making sure all residents of Chester County are heard and counted, no matter what their background might be, is very important. To help with this, the Chester County Complete Count Committee, working with Planning Commission staff, encouraged residents to participate in the decennial census. In the end, 78.3 percent of all households in Chester County responded to the census (which is much higher than the national or state average), ranking second across all counties in the Commonwealth, and exceeding our 2010 response rate of 75.6 percent.



*The Housing Choices Committee continued providing guidance on development of tools and materials to inform municipalities, partners, and the public on the value of creating A+ homes, including a short video that gives an overview of the initiative.*

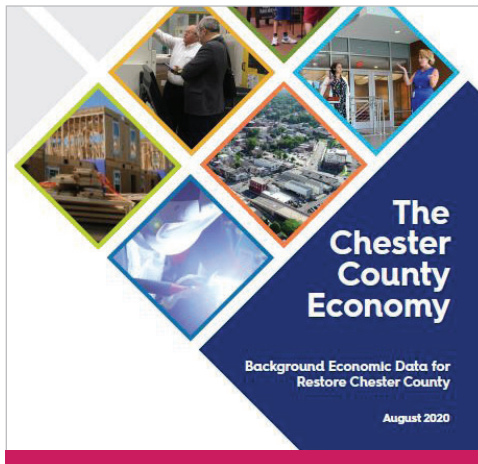


*Planning Commission staff coordinated the work of the Chester County Complete Count Committee, including communication materials that provided guidance and updates to the public on the 2020 Census.*



# How We PROSPER

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



*This [Chester County Economy Report](#) provides background data about the local economy that can be used to guide economic recovery planning for impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic.*

## Restore Chester County

As part of the county's response to the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Planning Commission participated in the Restore Chester County Task Force, preparing the Restore website and leading the effort to create economic action steps for businesses and business-support organizations.

## The Chester County Economy Report

For the first time, the Planning Commission, in partnership with the Chester County Economic Development Council, prepared a report on the county's economy. This report shows that the county has a strong and diverse economy, with particular strength in management of companies, finance, professional and technical services, and agriculture.

## Urban Centers Guidance

The Planning Commission's urban centers planner, who provides technical support to the county's urban centers, prepared eTools describing the four cornerstones of a Main Street Program, which include organization, marketing, design, and economic development. These were featured at the annual Urban Centers Forum, which also included presentations on business support during the pandemic and main street design.

## Nonresidential Construction

Through our new, online [Nonresidential Construction Report](#), the Planning Commission analyzed nonresidential construction, which showed that approximately 1,000,000 square feet of building area was constructed in 2020.

## Support for Agriculture

The Agricultural Development Council provided support to the county's agricultural community with its annual [Guide to Local Farm Products](#), farmer of the year award, and the new Farm and Table Tales webinar series. They continued to bring agricultural-related organizations together on a monthly basis as part of an Ag Task Force.



*The Board of Chester County Commissioners and the Chester County Agricultural Development Council (Ag Council) presented the Farmer of the Year award to Sonya Beltran and her family, owner-operators of First Generation Farms in Avondale.*

# How We CONNECT

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

## Active Transportation Inventory

To encourage active transportation improvements during the land development process, Planning Commission staff examined planning documents and ordinances for all 73 county municipalities to determine how well their regulations support walking, biking and using public transportation. The overall results of this analysis were summarized in a county-wide report, *Bicycles, Pedestrians, and Transit*. In addition, every municipality in Chester County received a customized report about their plans and ordinances. The recommendations from the report were then featured at a special transportation event.

## Southern Chester County Trail Study

This study examined the feasibility of connecting the urban and suburban centers of southern Chester County with each other and with the Circuit Trail system via a multi-modal trail. Although there is no ideal route for a continuous multi-modal trail that would be part of the Circuit, there are many opportunities to improve bicycle and pedestrian routes and connections in southern Chester County.

## Interactive Circuit Trail Status Map

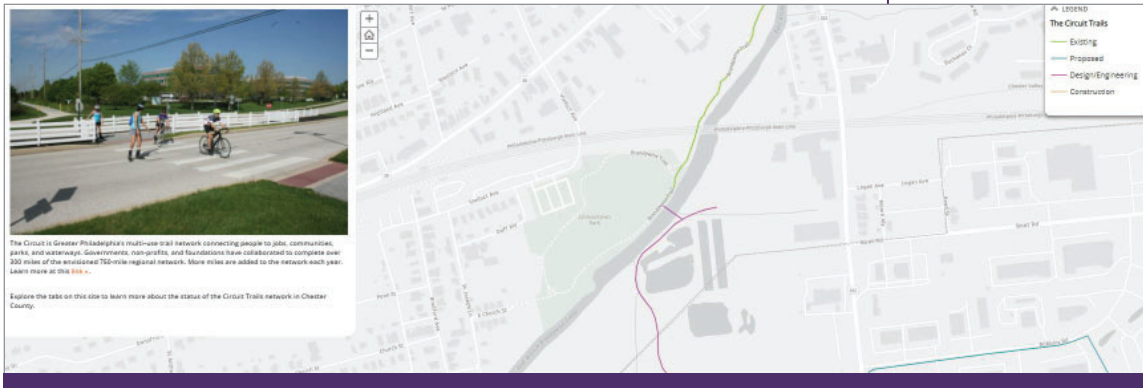
The Planning Commission prepared an [interactive map](#) showing the status of the regional Circuit Trail system in Chester County. These are proposed and existing multi-modal trails that function as the “highways” of the trail system for the Philadelphia region.

## Bicycles, Pedestrians & Transit

A summary of findings and recommendations from the **Active Transportation Inventory** prepared for all 73 Chester County municipalities.



*The primary benefit to municipalities from this project will be the codification of active transportation elements into ordinance documents. The inclusion of active transportation elements within municipal ordinances will allow for this critical element of public infrastructure to be completed as part of the land development process.*



## Pipeline Information Center

Planning Commission staff continuously updated the [Pipeline Information Center](#) with current information and participated in the county’s new Pipeline Safety Advisory Board.

## Significant Grant Support

With technical support from the Planning Commission, local municipalities and organizations received approximately \$5.9 million from state and federal programs for transportation related projects. Infrastructure related funding from the state and coordinated through other county departments totaled approximately \$17.4 million and went towards sewer and water upgrades and public works projects, such as the Coatesville parking structure.

*On the interactive map, each Circuit Trail segment has a designated tab that allows users to view the trail along with detailed descriptions of the status of the existing, proposed, and in-progress work.*

# Director's Message

## Recovering from the Pandemic with Landscapes3

It is difficult to predict how the pandemic will impact our built and natural environments; however, it will likely affect our choices about commuting, work location, and home location for years to come. The choices we make can have many related impacts on the environment and our overall community character. *Landscapes3*, Chester County's comprehensive plan, provides a strong framework for smart growth and effective preservation as the recovery begins. No matter how development trends change because of the pandemic, local municipalities and the county can be prepared by following *Landscapes3* and implementing good planning.

In 2021, the Chester County Planning Commission will continue to implement the goals of *Landscapes3* through the initiatives listed on the right. Because of the pandemic, we will have a special emphasis on the Prosper goal, land development guidance, and A+ Homes; however, we will also be conducting major preservation efforts related to the Preserve, Protect, and Appreciate goals.

Working together, we can help Chester County recover from the pandemic in a way that protects the county's great character while providing flexibility for our citizens and businesses as they determine the best path for moving forward.



Brian N. O'Leary, AICP  
Executive Director



### Major 2021 initiatives

- Chester County economy report and support for the VISTA2025 plan update
- Agricultural economic development plan
- Urban center guidance and Main Street tools
- Redevelopment opportunities map
- Suburban Landscape design guide
- Housing tools for missing-middle housing
- Vision Partnership Program grants and technical assistance
- Outreach on open space preservation opportunities
- Climate action plan
- Guidance on renewable energy ordinances
- Support to municipalities on natural resource protection
- Adaptive reuse design guide
- Town Tours and Village Walks
- Phase one of an updated public transportation plan
- Transportation Improvement Inventory
- Bike and pedestrian safety campaign

## Budget

Expenditures	2018	2019	2020
Personnel Services	\$3,024,233	\$3,046,147	\$3,053,094
Materials & Services	\$216,112	\$205,825	\$147,001
Contributions, Grants, Subsidies	\$179,859	\$174,669	\$170,910
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$3,420,204</b>	<b>\$3,426,641</b>	<b>\$3,371,005</b>

Revenues	2018	2019	2020
Federal	\$251,158	\$317,115	\$246,498
State	\$29,016	\$5,000	\$0
Local	\$45,706	\$129,754	\$329,224
Subdivision/Land Review Fees	\$230,749	\$187,980	\$182,450
Misc.	\$595	\$865	\$108
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$557,224</b>	<b>\$640,713</b>	<b>\$758,279</b>

\* Remaining revenue comes from Chester County



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Marian Moskowitz  
Josh Maxwell  
Michelle Kichline

## Staff

### Administration Services

Brian N. O'Leary, AICP, *Executive Director*  
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Beth A. Cunliffe, *Office & Communications Manager*  
Carolyn Oakley, *Communications Supervisor*  
Elle Steinman, *Communications Coordinator*  
Suzanne Wozniak, *Administrative Coordinator*  
Marie Celi, *Information Specialist*  
Jenn Kolvereid, *Land Development Analyst\**  
Kylie Sentyz, *Administrative Support*  
Nancy Shields, *Administrative Support*  
Patti Strauber, *Administrative Support*

### Agricultural Development Council

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

### Community Planning

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Katherine Clark, AICP, *Community Planner*  
Mark Gallant, *Community Planner*  
Mason Gilbert, *Community Planner*  
Libby Horwitz, AICP, *Housing & Economic Planner*  
Karen Marshall, *Heritage Preservation Coordinator*  
Kevin Myers, *Urban Planner*  
Chris Patriarca, AICP, *Community Planner*  
Jeannine Speirs, *Community Planner*

### Environment & Infrastructure

Brian Styche, RLA, AICP, *Environment & Infrastructure Director*  
Brian Donovan, *Transportation Planner*  
Rachael Griffith, RLA, *Trails and Open Space Planner*  
Eric Quinn, *Transportation Planner*  
Carolyn Conwell, AICP, *Environmental Planner*  
Jake Michael, AICP, *Demographer*

### 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*  
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Diana Zak, *Graphics Supervisor*  
Christopher Bittle, *Graphics Specialist*  
Ian Mix, *Graphics Specialist*  
Albert Park, *Design Specialist*

\* Former staff