

Landscapes2

Bringing growth and preservation together for Chester County

Focus Group Sessions

Final Report

Presented to the Chester County Planning Commission - May 9, 2007

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Planning Commission**
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INTRODUCTION – Seeking Community Opinion

The Chester County Planning Commission is in the process of updating *Landscapes*, the County Comprehensive Plan Policy Element (1996). The plan established a strategy for managing change within the county. While this policy plan has served the county well over the past ten years, significant changes have occurred within the county that warrant a revisit of the plan.

The first phase of the update process involved a series of events designed to understand the contemporary concerns, issues and perspectives of the citizens of Chester County. Community events consisted of three initiatives: (1) an on-line public opinion survey; (2) a series of regional meetings with municipal and school district officials; and (3) a series of focus group meetings.

This report summarizes the findings of the focus group meetings.

METHODOLOGY

The Planning Commission conducted a total of twelve focus group meetings organized for stakeholders in the following areas of interest:

- Agriculture 5
- Business..... 8
- Consultants 10
- County Government Departments..... 13
- Education..... 16
- Historic Preservation 19
- Housing 21
- Municipal Managers..... 23
- Open Space..... 26
- State Government Agencies 29
- Transportation 32
- Utilities 34

These meetings were held between January 12 and March 1, 2007. A select number of stakeholders were identified, representing the interests for each topic and invited to attend a meeting. A total of 137 people participated in the focus groups. Each focus group involved a small number of individuals in order to hold a constructive dialogue with a given stakeholder group. The sessions ranged from five participants in the state agencies meeting to eighteen in the municipal managers meeting, with an average of eleven participants per meeting.

The participants represented organizations with an active role and a broad understanding of the topic of the selected focus group. Each group discussed the important aspects of their topic through a dynamic exchange of ideas among all the participants. Either the Director or Assistant Director of the Planning Commission facilitated each meeting and posed the following questions:

1. How has Chester County changed in the past 10 years for the good or for the bad?
2. What do you believe are the critical issues impacting the County today? What are the emerging issues for the County over the next 10 to 20 years?

3. Can you identify any strategies or solutions that would address the existing or emerging issues?
4. If you are familiar with *Landscapes*, the county's comprehensive policy plan, what have been the positive and negative impacts from the plan?
5. What is the highest priority issue that you most want to ensure is addressed in *Landscapes2*?

The focus group conversations resulted in an identification and better understanding of the issues the county should address in the *Landscapes2* update. The information generated by the discussions will help the Planning Commission focus its research on critical concerns and possible solutions to the problems.

Please note that this summary report conveys the ideas, concerns, and suggestions of the individuals who attended and participated in the focus group meetings. These comments do not necessarily represent a consensus of any particular group or the position of the Chester County Planning Commission relative to that topic. Individuals participating in the focus groups generated the recommendations presented in this report and all recommendations may not be addressed by CCPC as part of the *Landscapes2* update.

MAJOR FINDINGS – Common Ground

Each focus group identified the most important issues related to their community of interest. While discussions focused on a given topic, there were a number of common issues that were identified by many of the groups. Sometimes there was agreement among different focus groups, while in some areas there were conflicts that will need to be reconciled.

The following issues were identified by most of the focus groups:

- Impacts of Housing Costs – Housing cost increases have affected employer recruitment and retention across many sectors. Employees have trouble finding housing, especially near their work place. This has resulted in long commutes, which increases traffic congestion and hurts productivity. Students and educators alike have problems finding housing and remaining in the area after graduation. Homebuilders find it increasingly difficult to build affordable housing due to rising costs of land and materials, and long delays in receiving regulatory approval.
- Education and communication - There is a greater need for knowledge as the issues of growth management have become more complex. There is a need for planning education programs due to the turnover rate of local officials and the large number of new residents moving into the area. People are often not aware of local services or the needs of others within the community, for example, the needs of farm operations. Citizens need to understand the issues so they can be part of the solution instead of just expressing opposition.
- Regional planning - There is a need to address many issues on a larger geographical area. Local municipalities cannot solve transportation, housing and environmental issues that transcend their borders on their own. Regional planning efforts should include a broad range of groups so the needs of all can be coordinated.

- Traffic - Traffic congestion has increased and has a negative impact in all focus groups. Work trips take longer and are more stressful; air quality is compromised; deliveries for businesses and farms are more difficult; school buses take more time; and demands for road improvements are great. More alternatives to automobile travel are needed. The connection between transportation and land use must be recognized in the plan update.
- Infrastructure - Much of the physical infrastructure in the county, including highways, public transit, sewer and water facilities, energy and communications systems, and educational facilities, is aging and inadequate to meet growing demands. Infrastructure has a tremendous impact on the pattern of development. The improvements and expansion of infrastructure will be costly and require careful planning.
- Open space and development - There needs to be a balance between development and preservation. While there has been much progress with securing open space preservation because of *Landscapes*, there should be more progress on the development side, including revitalization, to reduce sprawl. There should also be more consideration of the management of open space, including resource protection, and provision of active recreation.
- Technology - New technology is having an impact on all sectors in the county. It is changing how business, government, education, transportation, and communications operate. The plan update must take technology under consideration for both planning the future of the county and when considering the means of communicating the plan to the public.

PLAN UPDATE PRIORITIES

The focus group participants discussed their priorities for *Landscapes2* and topics that they felt must be covered in the plan. Most participants felt that *Landscapes* has been successful, but they also have high expectations that the updated plan can add improvements.

The following list provides an overview of priority topics identified by several groups for *Landscapes2*. More specific recommendations are listed in the individual focus group meeting reports section.

- **There must be a balance between preservation and growth:** *Landscapes2* should provide the big picture plan for growth and preservation. The plan should guide and support development to where it is appropriate. Target infrastructure improvements and expansion to promote development in the desired growth areas. Direct preservation efforts away from areas with infrastructure.
- **Agriculture as a viable industry:** Saving agriculture as an industry is as important as saving the farmland. Unconventional farming must be considered as well as conventional farming to maintain the long-term viability of agriculture. The importance of new farming methods and expanding farm products and services must be recognized.
- **Housing:** Provide opportunities for a diversity of housing choices, including a variety of structure types and prices, and owner-occupied and renter units. Address the need for affordable work force housing. Change public perception and NIMBY attitudes about affordable housing. Creative approaches are needed to addressing the housing issues.

- **Open space and environmental considerations:** *Landscapes2* must move beyond just the preservation of open space to include the use and maintenance of preserved land, including the development of recreational facilities. Preserved open spaces are becoming the last remaining areas for maintaining, enhancing and restoring natural communities, water quality, and air quality, and they need to be managed in perpetuity. The plan should address access to protected open spaces where appropriate so that the public can “connect” with lands that were publicly funded.
- **Transportation:** Support a balanced multi-modal transportation system, including affordable public transportation. Encourage land use patterns and development that supports the transportation system. Leverage private sector involvement to expand transportation funding.
- **Implementation must be an important element of the plan:** Use real life examples of innovative planning concepts and development ideas, including examples of high quality historic preservation. There should be a toolbox for each topic area and a list of resources available for more help. Encourage municipal cooperation and consider model ordinances. Promote a more consistent and streamlined development review process.
- **Regional planning:** Enhance coordination and cooperation between all players, including municipalities, school districts, colleges, businesses, organizations, and transportation providers. Subjects where regional planning is important include transportation, stormwater management, utilities, and natural resources. It is also important to recognize areas of planning that are best handled on the local level.
- **Education:** *Landscapes2* should be a tool to educate people. It is important to provide educational opportunities for public officials, residents, businesses, consultants, and municipal staff about planning issues and techniques.

FOCUS GROUP MEETING REPORTS

The following discussion identifies summaries of each of the twelve focus group meetings. Each group report includes a list of the participants and the organizations they represented. The comments expressed are summarized within the following format:

- Major Changes in the Past Ten Years
- Most Important Topics
- Other Important Issues
- Possible Solutions to Issues/Problems
- Priorities/Expectations for Landscapes2
- Quotes

AGRICULTURE FOCUS GROUP

Meeting Date: January 12, 2007

Major Changes in Past 10 Years

- Major advances in technology.
- The fragmentation of farmers into specialized interest groups.
- The loss of the farm community as a cohesive social unit.
- The rise of unconventional farming, and the blurring between crop production and processing.
- The rise of communities opposing and limiting certain types of agricultural practices.
- The enactment of ACRE.
- A rise in traffic volumes that add additional transportation costs in a market that is now more time sensitive and opposition by residents to transportation improvements.
- Farming requiring more efficient transportation and major highways for truck access not available on traditional rural roadways.
- The rise of the equine industry, which is part agriculture, part recreation, part retail (equipment and feed).
- The increase in farm families that conduct non-farm business activities on the farm and rely on non-farm family members for benefits.
- The rise in deer population is heavily impacting orchards and nurseries.
- Rising farm expenses, especially insurance and fuel, have out paced farm profits.
- A reduction in nearby farm support industries.

Most Important Topics

- Farm Community: The farming community as a cultural unit and a social support group has dramatically diminished due to the loss of farms and farmers. Farms are being operated more like businesses with tight profit margins.
- Farm Sector Interrelationships: A threat to any sector of the farming/equestrian industry could pose a threat to other sectors due to the interrelationships of each sector, such as hay used for dairy, horses and mushrooms.
- Education: Residents, school students, municipal officials, and solicitors are not sufficiently educated about modern farming, and farmers do not have a unified voice to get this message across.
- Regulations: Federal, state and municipal regulations and ordinances, even those directed at preserving the land on farms, are inconsistent and are not protecting agriculture as an industry or a way of life.

Other Important Issues

- Good soil, abundant rainfall, and close proximity to major cities and seaports along the east coast make Chester County well suited for agriculture over the long term.
- As conventional agriculture has declined and become a less reliable investment, the equine industry has remained stable and profitable and is expected to stay that way in the long term. Other less conventional farms, such as CSA's, are also on the rise.
- Many new residents have a positive but unrealistic expectation of rural life and do not understand the high-tech nature of farming nor the tradeoffs essential to rural life.
- Farmers have decreasing representation by elected officials at the local level and have become less involved with unifying organizations, such as the Grange, which could promote farm issues.

- The success of agriculture as a viable industry is dependent on issues not typically seen as rural, such as fuel costs, highways for truck access, affordable housing and immigration policy.
- Few farmers make a living by farming alone. Many, if not most, have a secondary business, often on the farm, and rely on a spouse with a non-farm job for benefits.
- The costs of starting a new farm have made it extremely difficult for young people to get into farming. Most young farmers have inherited their land, machinery and buildings.
- Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms near residential areas are viable because there is a growing demand for locally grown crops. There will likely never be enough CSAs to meet the total demand of the surrounding population.
- The price of corn is now being significantly affected by ethanol production, and the use of bio-fuels is expected to have an increasing impact. This situation may help farmers selling corn and hurt farmers needing corn for feed.
- ACRE (Act 38, Agriculture, Communities and the Rural Environment) helps farmers seek judicial review of ordinances that restrict normal farming, but it is misunderstood by farmers, the public and municipal officials.
- Municipal ordinances are often based on a misreading of sound science and they often fail to take into account regional issues that affect farmers. Some may even be illegal in their attempts to regulate farming.
- Modern farming requires well-functioning roadways for shipping and, as a result, farming is helped when roadways are improved. Old rural roadways do not accommodate modern farming.
- Farmers work long and odd hours if needed, and there is always high risk even when it is profitable, but overall it provides a great quality-of-life, and that is why farmers choose to continue farming despite the difficulties.

Possible Solutions to Issues/Problems

- Educate residents, municipal officials and solicitors about the needs of modern farming.
- Provide a mechanism for all types of farmers and agricultural pursuits to interact.
- Provide assistance to municipalities regarding Transfer of Development Rights.
- Provide assistance to municipalities regarding ACRE.
- Establish regional, multi-municipal Transfer of Development Rights.
- Municipalities should permit non-farm “second job” activities on farms through their zoning ordinances.
- Municipalities should cooperate in regional agriculture planning.
- Improve major highways in farm communities for the movement of equipment, supplies and farm products.

Priorities/Expectations for *Landscapes2*

- Because of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and small niche farms, it is possible, and can be preferable, to locate farms with active crop production in suburban settings.
- Unconventional farming is as important as conventional farming to maintaining agriculture as a viable industry in the County, and its importance will likely increase.
- Traffic volumes, land prices and taxes may drive the Amish and other farmers out of Chester County.
- Regional TRD and agricultural planning are needed to preserve agriculture as a business.
- Saving agriculture as an industry is as important as saving the land that is farmed.
- Municipal ordinances should reflect modern, high tech-farming technology.

Quotes:

- “We got the soil, the market and the climate.”
- “They heard from some rabble rousers that ACRE was communism.”
- “Farming changed since I woke up this morning.”
- “I’m rich because of my family.”
- “I never dreamed that an acre of land would cost as much as a farm used to cost.”

Participants in the Agriculture Focus Group

- Duncan Allison Agricultural Development Council, Chairman
- Sam Cantrell Maisie’s Farm, small and direct marketing farm
- Michelle Cross Russellville Grange
- Cheryl Fairbairn Penn State Cooperative Extension/Angus Purebred farmer
- Joe Feconda Sylvestri Mushroom Farm
- Blaire Fleischmann Russellville Grange
- Dan Greig Chester County Conservation District
- Don Hannum Delaware/Chester Farm Bureau
- Sam High USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
- David Hodge Highland Orchards
- Barclay Hoopes Hoopes Brothers family farm/New Garden Township Supervisor
- Nancy Mohr Chester County 2020
- Bill Moore County Agricultural Land Preservation Board/dairy farmer
- Robert Ray Agricultural Development Council/dairy farmer
- Sandy Reynolds Kennett Grange/Small scale farmer/raises pets
- Mary Sproat London Grove Grange

BUSINESS FOCUS GROUP

Meeting Date: February 7, 2007

Major Changes in Past 10 Years

- There has been an acceleration of development and growth.
- The information technology, bio-pharmaceutical, and financial sectors of the economy are experiencing significant growth, particularly along the Route 202 corridor. Also, technology is changing the manufacturing sector; businesses need to keep up.
- There has been more “sprawling” development; municipalities are not following *Landscapes*.
- Urban centers have been redeveloping, becoming cultural destinations.
- The population in Pennsylvania is aging; young people are leaving and older people are choosing to come here to retire; the PA tax structure is favorable for retirees.

Most Important Topics

- Infrastructure: Through *Landscapes*, the County has put too much emphasis on preservation, and not enough on maintaining and improving the infrastructure that is needed to sustain economic growth. A major factor that limits business growth is the lack of sewer and water capacity.
- Resources: The “Number 1” business resource in Chester County is our workforce. There is no longer a strong need for rail service and raw materials; businesses choose locations based upon other factors.
- Municipal Approval Process: The increase in “soft costs” has made it very difficult for businesses to develop here. The length and complexity of the municipal approval process adds significantly to the cost of a project, reducing the funds available for hard costs/infrastructure improvements that a municipality typically expects.
- Slowing of Growth: Business growth in Chester County is beginning to slow. Also, the population is slowly beginning to shift south, into Delaware, Maryland and beyond.
- Affordable Housing: Employers are having trouble recruiting and retaining staff because of the shortage of affordable homes in the county. Many employees are commuting from Lancaster and Berks Counties, and also from Delaware. The county has become a “net importer” of employees, and longer commutes put more stress on families.

Other Important Issues

- The typical community’s approach to development in Chester County is to *stop* it, rather than *manage* it. NIMBYism continues to be an issue – communities need to be educated that not all growth is “bad”. Municipal resistance to development limits business/economic growth.
- Municipalities lack the “vision” to see the bigger picture, to see beyond their boundaries and understand the regional impact of their policies and decisions.
- Chester County has very good colleges and universities. Students come here for their education, but do not stay because there is a shortage of entry-level jobs and not enough affordable housing located near employment centers.
- Schools are not updating their curriculum to meet the needs of businesses.
- Young professionals would like to live in the urban areas that have social and cultural amenities (West Chester, Kennett Square) but housing there is unaffordable to many. There is a need in Chester County for more “Class A” apartment space. Young families are looking in outlying areas, like Oxford and West Grove, for affordable housing options.

- Age-restricted communities are the only form of high density housing in some parts of the county. There is a concern about what will become of all the developments of huge, single family homes; what will happen to the housing stock as the population ages?
- Much of the land that is being developed for residential use has been re-zoned from commercial/office/industrial zones, leaving little green space available for business/economic development. However, it is more economical to develop “greenfields” than to undertake rehabilitation or redevelopment projects.
- The County is utilizing funds to purchase farms, but there is no consideration given to the “economics of agriculture.” We need to understand regional issues like transportation.

Possible Solutions to Issues/Problems

- The County should act as a “broker” between the municipalities, developers, and the state, in an effort to streamline the development process.
- There is a need to plan regionally for housing and open space, higher density housing options in the urban centers balanced by open space preservation in rural areas.
- The County should be more involved in regional growth issues.
- Businesses and educators should improve communication.
- County level, or regional management of some state-level approval processes would be more efficient than the current system.

Priorities/Expectations for *Landscapes2*

- Preservation is important, but there needs to be more emphasis on infrastructure improvements. There should be a better balance between preservation and growth.
- *Landscapes* should guide growth and development where it’s appropriate. Density should be increased in the “Suburban Landscapes.”
- The County needs to be stronger in implementing the policies of *Landscapes*, and stop providing funding to municipalities that don’t comply.
- Provide education for local officials about planning issues.

Quotes

- There has been “hysteria” among municipalities over open space preservation.
- “Housing, housing, housing.”
- There is a “disconnect” between the workforce and housing options.
- The economics don’t “pencil-out” for redevelopment.
- “I survived the land development process.”

Participants in Business Focus Group

- | | |
|-----------------------|---|
| • Michael Bontrager | Chatham Financial |
| • Sue Bratton | Wawa/CC Chamber of Business & Industry |
| • Marybeth DiVincenzo | CC Economic Development Council |
| • David Farrington | Brickhouse Environmental |
| • Mike Grigalonis | CC Economic Development Council |
| • Bob Gross | Vanguard/CC Chamber of Business & Industry |
| • Tom McIntyre | CC Economic Development Council |
| • Tim Phelps | Main Line Chamber of Commerce |
| • Gary Smith | CC Economic Development Council |
| • John Snyder | Saul Ewing/CC Chamber of Business & Industry |
| • Brian Torrence | Phoenixville Hospital/Phoenixville Regional Chamber |

CONSULTANTS FOCUS GROUP

Meeting Date: February 6, 2007

Major Changes in Past 10 Years

- An increase in municipal understanding about planning issues such as sprawl and cluster development.
- Significant deterioration of the transportation infrastructure: roads, bridges, rail systems.
- A decrease in public funding available for transportation/infrastructure improvements.
- A reverse in commuting patterns for employment.
- More municipalities actively preserving land, less dependence on assistance from the County and local land trusts.
- More general discussion of affordable housing, not just among planners.
- A change in development trends, favoring cluster development and smaller lots.
- An increase in multi-municipal planning.

Most Important Topics

- Municipal Awareness of Planning Issues: *Landscapes* has been very effective in educating municipalities/officials about sprawl and preservation. Planning consultants benefit from working with more educated municipalities. Local officials use *Landscapes* as a tool to combat sprawl, and sometimes as a political platform.
- Infrastructure: Transportation and infrastructure are the critical issues facing the county. Roads and bridges are aging and showing the impact of years of deferred maintenance. There is not enough public funding available to make needed improvements, and the existing infrastructure cannot support continued development.
- The Vision: The “big picture” plan for Chester County must consider what the build-out scenario will look like, and when it might occur. The plan should also recognize that, when all open land has been developed, redevelopment will begin.
- Regional Planning: Some issues should be approached from a regional (multi-municipal) perspective, particularly traffic/transportation and storm water management. Implementation of regional planning is critical.

Other Important Issues

- The success and recognition of *Landscapes* made Chester County a more popular place to live, and to build.
- The trend to preserve open space has made open land less available and, in turn, more expensive. This trend made it more difficult to develop affordable housing in the county.
- Cluster development is not achieving affordable housing; builders put large houses on small lots. Affordability of housing will eventually have an impact on the economy, if employers cannot maintain the labor base.
- Mixed-use and higher density communities should be considered. New Morgan Borough, Berks County is an example of a proposal for traditional neighborhood design, a mixed-use and mixed-income community.
- CCPC planners should offer design and planning consulting services to municipalities, and encourage innovative approaches to growth management and preservation.
- In continuing the effort to preserve agricultural land, it is important for the County to approach farmers before the developers do. Farmers need to know what preservation options are available.

- Often, the most recent developer to build within a community is expected to rectify all the traffic and storm water problems that have developed over time.
- Counties are encouraging more regional planning, but the adopted plans are not being implemented.

Possible Solutions to Issues/Problems

- Provide more public funding for infrastructure improvements.
- Promote the idea of public transportation to municipalities and residents, as a method of reducing traffic congestion on local roads.
- Study examples of successful, medium- to high-density communities; assist municipalities with “visualizing density” so that the concept becomes more acceptable.
- Create more boroughs to accept density; this would help with reducing sprawl.
- Focus open space funding on developable land that is not otherwise protected.
- Link further development to existing infrastructure.
- Outreach to other entities to assist with implementation of *Landscapes2*; private sector developers, consultants, nonprofits and other government agencies should become part of the effort.

Priorities/Expectations for *Landscapes2*

- *Landscapes2* should be a “big picture” plan for growth and preservation.
- *Landscapes2* must be more effective in implementing regional planning for transportation and storm water management. It should also recognize those areas of planning that are better handled at the local level.
- Use available GIS/technology to produce a current and accurate *Landscapes* Map.
- Provide “real-life” examples of innovative planning concepts and development ideas.
- Identify the “places of the heart”, the specific features of Chester County that make it such a desirable place to live and work.
- Consider what areas are appropriate for upgrading or expansion of infrastructure.
- Put a stronger emphasis on agricultural preservation; direct preservation efforts away from the areas with existing infrastructure.
- Promote conservation design and increase funding for open space preservation.
- Provide opportunities for diversity in housing; but don’t exclude the “one-acre single family” community.
- Address the transportation & traffic impact of development.
- Promote the use of TDR as a municipal planning tool.

Quotes

- Some municipalities are “playing the *Landscapes* card.”
- Municipalities have become active in “controlling their own destinies.”
- Regarding transportation funding, “why doesn’t the county step in and help out?”
- It is important to “get the map right.”
- What are we doing to protect the “places of the heart?”

Participants in the Consultants Focus Group

- Bill Bryant Pennoni Associates
- Tom Comitta Comitta Associates
- Dan DiMucci Pennoni Associates
- Chad Dixon Traffic Planning & Design
- Monica Drewniany Natural Lands Trust
- Al Giannantonio Yerkes Associates, Inc.
- Susan Guisinger-Colon McCormick Taylor
- Ann Hutchinson Natural Lands Trust
- Rob Pingar McCormick Taylor
- John Theilacker Brandywine Conservancy EMC

COUNTY DEPARTMENTS FOCUS GROUP

Meeting Date: February 28, 2007

Major Changes in Past 10 Years

- The tremendous increase in development and growth has caused an increase in the volume of work for county departments. Departments have expanded the use of technology and have increased staff.
- The Department of Human Services receives the majority of its funding from state and federal sources; as the county's population, and service needs, have grown, funding levels have remained flat.
- There has been increasing need for emergency food and rental assistance countywide.
- The "village community" nature of Chester County has been lost; commercial centers have become remote and unfriendly. Some changes in character have been positive; Chester County now has an excellent 911 system and many conveniences of daily living.
- Open Space Preservation still has support among county residents, but not as strong as it was ten years ago.
- Abandoned industrial sites are being redeveloped, but these projects can be complicated to manage. Experienced developers and political support at the municipal level are critical to their success.

Most Important Topics

- Service Needs: Population growth has had a significant impact on County services. Human Services needs are growing; even wealthy families are now expecting to access treatment services, such as, for children with developmental disabilities. State and federal funding has remained level. This is a significant issue for the County and must be considered in the budget.
- Water Resources: The County's Department of Emergency Services experiences a high percentage of water-related emergencies; there has been recent flooding in areas that had never experienced flooding in the past. Stormwater management, flooding, and water quality are significant issues in the county.
- Unconventional Development: Developers are turning to more environmentally constrained sites, sometimes building on steep slopes, woodland, and floodplain areas. There has been an increase in applications for the use of dynamite for blasting on development sites. At the same time, the County has begun to observe the subdivision of small, infill lots; "tear-downs" of existing structures on those lots; and construction of larger, more expensive homes.
- Balance: It is critical for the County to achieve a reasonable balance between revitalization, growth management, and open space preservation.

Other Important Issues

- Disaster and recovery planning is becoming a prominent concern for county and local government. Some federal funding awards are linked to the development of "Continuity of Operations" plans.
- Residents who come to Chester County from other areas expect a very high level of service from county government. There are new demands for recreation facilities, especially trails. Residents also demand scrutiny of public projects and oversight of public expenditures.

- Some departments, like the library system, have seen funding increases based upon population growth.
- The elderly population is growing. There is a proliferation of age-restricted communities, and a corresponding increase in the need for emergency medical services.
- We are seeing many families stretched financially, and some are seeking reassessment of their homes because of high property taxes.
- Schools districts are growing, and acquiring large tracts for development of new schools. This practice leaves less land available for preservation.
- Development is breaking up the natural areas in the county, and access to natural resources has been greatly reduced.
- Growth has outpaced stormwater and transportation infrastructure.
- Drip-irrigation incentives, offered through the Vision Partnership Program, permit developers to exceed the carrying capacity of a development property.
- Homeless clients may be migrating to Chester County because of the quality of services available here.
- The increase in traffic is a problem. “Commuting to work” patterns have changed; there has been an increase in the number of commuters who travel from other areas into Chester County.
- Affordable housing is an issue for many, including DHS clients, working families, and County employees.
- Municipalities have been wary of the county’s role in governing. The Vision Partnership Program is changing that relationship. When funding is available, municipalities are more willing to cooperate.
- The countywide GIS Consortium has been successful; municipalities are working well with the County.

Possible Solutions to Issues/Problems

- The financing of infrastructure improvements will become a major issue; the county could become a “broker”, or financial manager for these projects.
- The County needs more legislative authority over land use.
- The County will need to assist municipalities with stormwater management problems.

Priorities/Expectations for *Landscapes2*

- Keep development near infrastructure.
- More active recreation facilities.
- Better management of runoff.
- Environmental issues; clean air and clean water.
- A balance between revitalization, open space preservation, and growth management.
- Address the growth in the retirement and human services populations.
- Municipal cooperation.
- An affordable public transportation system.
- Affordable housing for working families.

Quotes

- “You aren’t given trust, you earn it.”
- “We get flooding where it has not occurred before.”
- SEPTA came to the County to ask, “what can you do?”
- “When it comes to stormwater and transportation, we are paying for past sins.”
- “What kind of community will we have if none of our children can afford to live here?”
- “Traffic!”

Participants in the County Departments Focus Group

- Pat Bokovitz Community Development
- Jan Bowers Water Resources Authority
- Peirce Eichelberger DCIS – GIS
- William Gladden Open Space Preservation
- Cecy Keller Chester County Library
- Ruth Kranz-Carl Human Services
- Jeff Laudenslager Tax Assessment
- Robert McRae Tax Assessment
- Karl Mehn Department of Emergency Services
- John Mikowychok Parks and Recreation
- Stephanie Phillips Recorder of Deeds
- Mark Rupsis Commissioners Office
- Evelyn Walker Commissioners Office

EDUCATION FOCUS GROUP

Meeting Date: March 1, 2007

Major Changes in Past 10 Years

- Computers and other technology are prevalent throughout the schools.
- Legislation has changed the educational process and funding.
- Population growth has been constant and has occurred throughout all school districts. There are no exclusively rural school districts anymore.
- There are many new and “alternative” programs, including dual enrollment programs with high school students taking college courses concurrently.
- All school districts have implemented major capital projects, including new and renovated schools and support facilities.
- Vocational education has changed with the growth of technology.

Most Important Topics

- Technology: Schools have had to update their facilities to accommodate new technology. The number of computers has increased dramatically and they are located in all areas of the schools. Fiber optics and other systems have been added. The Chester County Intermediate Unit (CCIU) operates a cyber school. Kids knowledgeable with using technology are forcing changes in curriculum and teaching methods.
- Delivery of Educational Services: CCIU and Delaware County Community College are opening a new technical school in southern Chester County that will offer high school and college classes. Fiber optics is making it practical for school districts to share courses, such as Latin or Chinese, for students from several districts. The role of university teaching is changing to emphasize critical thinking skills because students are prepared to find facts using technology. There are more educational alternatives, such as charter schools, home schooling, and many continuing education options for adults.
- Housing: West Chester University is having some trouble recruiting new faculty because of the high cost of housing. Housing costs are a problem for university and school district employees, including teachers, service workers, and bus drivers. There is an increasing student demand for on-campus housing, including more modern suite-style dormitories. College students want to be involved in campus life and community events that living on or near campus permits.
- Changing Rules for Funding: Pennsylvania Act 1 is changing the tax rules for funding public education. There are provisions to shift from property tax to income tax. Voter referendums are required which will bring community residents into the school districts’ planning process. This process could restrict future building projects and staff expansion. The “No Child Left Behind” law has provided funding, but its requirements to test student progress have impacted the educational program.

Other Important Issues

- There are differences in technology access among areas of the county so local school programs must reflect these differences.
- Because of technology, students are better educated at a younger age. University students are “well-tooled” relative to technology and do not have to be taught basic computer courses.
- There is a “brain drain” with many college graduates leaving the region for jobs. We should try to keep them here.
- Home schooled and parochial/private school students need public school services.

- The “No Child Left Behind” law requires school districts to meet the needs of every child.
- Act 1 is bringing residents into the school planning process by requiring referendums on taxes, budgets and building projects.
- Some school districts need additional high schools and are looking at different alternatives to traditional buildings.
- Immaculata University is expanding facilities to meet the needs of increased and coed enrollment. To meet current housing needs the university is using apartment complexes for student housing. Shuttle buses are needed to get the students to campus.
- College students want to be involved in campus and community events. The strength of the college experience is socialization and networking.
- Students are demanding programs requiring technical proficiency with an emphasis on job skills.
- New residents moving from more urban areas and affluent areas are highly educated families that demand high levels of school services.
- Many families are moving in from Delaware County and bringing different demands.
- Population trends and enrollment projections are difficult for districts to anticipate. School districts should work with municipalities to receive regular updates about development proposals.
- Population growth often occurs without increases to the tax base from commercial development or housing transfer fees.
- The fiscal impact studies required for new development always understate the impact on schools. Districts should be allowed to collect impact fees.
- School districts have to pay municipal impact fees when they develop new buildings.
- School districts and municipalities should work together on planning for new development.
- Regional planning is needed because developments in one township affect the entire school district.
- School redistricting is a negative impact of development and enrollment growth.
- Only about 20% of households have kids in the school districts, so many voters are opposed to school projects and tax increases.
- Senior citizens are negatively impacted by school taxes, but they like living in Chester County and want to stay here.
- Dual enrollment programs and busing to private schools require more buses and longer trips for students. Busing private school students is more costly than the busing within the district.
- Parents are more cautious and have more demands for transportation to school. They want closer and safer bus stops, and bus rides that take less time.
- Older students are driving to school and more parents drive their kids to school. This requires more parking and drop-off facilities at schools and increases traffic on roads.
- The universities and Delaware County Community College need public transportation services to get students and employees to their campuses.
- Fix transportation without expanding highways. We don’t want to lose all 2-lane roads, which add to the quality of life.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION FOCUS GROUP

Meeting Date: February 12, 2007

Major Changes in Past 10 Years

- This is a greater public awareness about historic preservation issues, more information, and an increased acceptance of preservation mechanisms.
- Local officials are not much more informed than 10 years ago.
- The context of sprawl is more apparent to the public; people are more aware of the loss of historic context.

Most Important Topics

- Municipal Priorities: Municipalities are not aggressively regulating historic properties. With increasing property values, landowners are concerned about preserving their rights and interests. Consequently, personal property rights are more of a priority for municipalities. Some Historic Preservation plan components are not being implemented.
- Historic Context: Locally, open space preservation is supported; there must be a connection between open space and historic resources, as open space serves as the context. New subdivisions destroy the context that surrounds the structures.
- Economic Viability: The economic viability of a preservation project is critical. It is expensive to purchase and rehabilitate historic properties; new construction is more economical. Builders have begun to do “tear-downs” of historic structures, to make room for infill new construction.

Other Important Issues

- The general public does not understand preservation issues. Sometimes there is misinformation in the media, which makes the education process more difficult.
- There is more awareness of historic resources, but not of the “tools” for preservation.
- The lack of accurate historic resource inventories makes it difficult to implement protection.
- Preservation regulations are geared to the resource and not the “context”, which is open space. There is a need for better historic preservation planning, and ordinances that are developed properly.
- Some incentives for preservation may be at odds with other local regulations, or with community sentiment; development can be appropriate if it maintains the resource context.
- The County is not doing enough to aid preservation, but they do not have the resources to do more.
- The Chester County Historic Resource network provides support to local Historic Architectural Review Boards, but resources are limited.

Possible Solutions to Issues/Problems

- Natural resources are often linked to historic resources; municipalities should take advantage of environmental advocacy related to open space.
- Municipalities need to conduct surveys of existing conditions and historic resources. They could use county funding to hire staff to create an Historic Resources/Context Map.
- Ordinances must be set up to accommodate preservation.
- It is important to offer incentives for preservation; provide flexibility and alternatives for uses and densities. There could be trade-offs that are acceptable to all parties.

- The County should become an education and resource provider, and act as a liaison between developers, non-profits and municipalities.
- Local officials should be more sensitive to neighboring land uses. Municipalities must look beyond their boundaries and plan regionally for historic resources.
- Resources should just be protected; don't offer incentives to developers.
- Use the Tom Hylton book *Save Our Land, Save Our Towns* as the basis for incorporating preservation into the high school curriculum.

Priorities/Expectations for *Landscapes2*

- Fund a countywide inventory of resources, context, and “viewsapes”, to provide a tool for the municipalities. Consider using student volunteers or interns to assist.
- Highlight examples of quality historic preservation projects. A section that features “break-out” boxes could achieve this.
- Complete the Patriots Path as soon as possible, before the context for the project is lost.
- Consider a focus on the “crossroads” locations for historic preservation.
- Model ordinances are needed.
- Consider the sustainability of agriculture in preservation planning.

Quotes

- “People get involved too late in the process.”
- “Open space is the context of historic resources.”
- Convince the public that “everyone is a preservationist”.
- There should be more “strings” attached to funding.
- Provide “bricks and mortar” funding for preservation projects.

Participants in the Historic Preservation Focus Group

- Peter Benton John Milner Associates
- Mary DeNadai John Milner Architects
- Kristina Heister Valley Forge National Historic Park
- Seth Henshaw Wise Preservation Planning
- Bruce Knapp Paoli Battlefield Preservation Fund
- Rob Lukens Historic Yellow Springs
- Andrea MacDonald PA Historic and Museum Commission (PHMC)
- Roy Smith Preservation Pennsylvania
- John Snook Brandywine Conservancy EMC
- Robert Wise Wise Preservation Planning/CC Historic Preservation Network
- Peter Zimmerman Peter Zimmerman Architects

HOUSING FOCUS GROUP

Meeting Date: January 30, 2007

Major Changes in Past 10 Years

- Increase in the cost of building storm water infrastructure for housing development.
- Increase in the price of “for-sale” homes beyond that which is affordable to first-time buyers.
- Increase in the complexity of development regulations and length of time to gain approvals.
- Decrease in the diversity of housing choices available.
- More cars on the roads and longer commutes to and from work places in Chester County, partly resulting from a lack of housing availability.

Most Important Issues

- Housing Cost: The costs of building housing, especially land and infrastructure that supports housing development, have increased significantly in the last 10 years. This has had a major impact on housing prices.
- Regulation: The review process for housing proposals has become very long, difficult, and expensive for developers. There is duplication and conflicting rules at the local, state, and federal levels.
- Community Opposition: The “Not in My Back Yard” (NIMBY) mentality towards housing development, especially affordable housing, is still very strong among community residents and local officials in Chester County.
- Supply: There is a shortage of “affordable” homes in the county; more diversity in housing choices is needed. Affordable rental units are needed as well. Municipalities are resistant to change and diversity.
- Taxes: Real Estate taxes in Chester County are generally very high. These taxes are often the highest in school districts that are the least attractive to homebuyers. Taxes drive up the cost of housing that otherwise would be affordable.

Other Important Issues

- “Affordability” of housing means different things to different people. Workforce housing is becoming a more common term for less expensive housing. This is not just subsidized housing.
- Realtors are faced with challenges when working with relocation clients; it is difficult to find comparable housing in Chester County at the client’s price level.
- More and more people who work in Chester County are forced to look outside the county for housing they can afford. Many are commuting from Berks and other surrounding counties, adding to congested traffic conditions.
- Due to the cost of land, infrastructure, and the long approval process, builders are forced to elevate housing prices in order to make a profit.
- Municipalities attach many “strings”, or conditions to the approval of a housing proposal; the cost of these conditions adds to the cost of housing.
- Mixed-use projects encouraged by *Landscapes* are difficult to get approved by municipalities. Multi-family housing proposals often require conditional use approval, which adds time delays and costs to the projects.
- Land preservation in Chester County is sometimes undertaken with the sole purpose of stopping development, with no public benefit coming from the preserved land.
- Homebuyers are taking on increasingly risky mortgage products, which impacts the foreclosure rate for “high-end” homes throughout the county.
- Storm water management related to development is a critical issue. It adds to housing costs and should be addressed from a regional perspective.

Possible Solutions to Issues/Problems

- Regional, or county-level, land use planning would be more effective for the development of affordable housing than the current system - a different set of regulations in each of the county's 73 municipalities.
- Municipalities should work with builders to negotiate the donation of open space as part of a development proposal, e.g. with cluster development – the builder receives a density bonus and the municipality receives open space without spending public tax money to acquire it.
- Municipalities and county residents must support proposals to build a variety of housing types at varying densities. Some municipalities may be willing to partner with builders and non-profits to develop affordable housing.
- Regulatory reform is needed - the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development offers assistance to communities trying to reduce regulatory barriers to affordable housing.
- There are some examples of quality affordable housing in Chester County (such as the Potter Building for seniors at Eagleview) that can be highlighted to help change the public perception of “affordable housing.”

Priorities/Expectations for *Landscapes*²

- Changing the public perception/NIMBY attitudes about affordable housing.
- Supporting and encouraging more diversity of housing choices, including structure types and prices.
- Achieving a more consistent and streamlined development review process.
- More focus on the public benefit of open space, as it relates to housing, and not land preservation alone. Open space should have a specific public purpose. For example, encourage multiple use of open space for storm water management.

Resources

- Web site referrals:
 - Suburban Realtors Alliance: <http://www.suburbanrealtorsalliance.com/>
 - Overcoming Regulatory Barriers: <http://www.housingbarriers.com/>

Participants in the Housing Focus Group

- Pat Bokovitz Department of Community Development
- David Brant Suburban West Realtors Association
- Dolores Colligan Department of Community Development
- Nancy Frame Housing Partnership of Chester County
- Shaun Gallagher Brandolini Companies
- Kathy McCarthy Department of Community Development
- Mike McGee Homebuilders Association of Chester & Delaware Counties
- Dave Norwood Department of Community Development
- Craig Poff Homebuilders Association of Chester & Delaware Counties
- Jamie Ridge Suburban West Realtors Association
- Bridget Scanlon Homebuilders Association of Chester & Delaware Counties
- David Sweet Housing Partnership of Chester County
- Joe Tarantino Chester County Planning Commission Board
- Sal Triolo Suburban West Realtors Association

MUNICIPAL MANAGERS FOCUS GROUP

Meeting Date: February 9, 2007

Major Changes in Past 10 Years

- Intensive land development has occurred and land values have increased significantly. There are few “greenfields” remaining in the central and eastern portions of the county; Redevelopment, including brownfield sites, will become the option for accommodating future growth.
- Municipal management has become much more difficult; local and state regulations are more complicated, and sometimes regulations are conflicting. The processes of both DEP and PennDOT have become harder to manage and coordinate. Residents are less likely to give citizens the benefit of the doubt that local officials are working in the citizen’s best interest.
- There has been a lot of change within residential communities, people moving in and out. There are many new residents; some are getting involved with local governments. They bring new ideas and greater expectations.

Most Important Topics

- Demands on Local Government: Municipal governments are finding it difficult to serve their growing populations. They require more staff to provide the needed services. More revenue is needed, but tax increases place a burden on long-time residents, and generally benefit the newcomers.
- Infrastructure: Storm water management and transportation infrastructure are major concerns for municipalities. The urban centers are still in need of revitalization as well as infrastructure improvements. Sewer system expansion is needed in some areas to accommodate growth, but current DEP policies are limiting the expansion.
- Recreation Needs: Much of the county’s funding is awarded to rural areas for open space or agricultural preservation. The populated urban and suburban areas also need funding - for parks and active recreation, and for maintenance of these facilities.
- Taxation: The municipal taxation system needs to be updated. Redevelopment is positive, but municipalities do not benefit financially. With redevelopment, there is a greater demand for services but no new tax revenue for the municipality.
- Emergency Services: Fire companies in different municipalities are competing with one another, rather than cooperating to share resources. Each wants its own equipment and trucks, but may not have a need for them, or even the ability to be fully trained in their use. The volunteer corps is shrinking; municipalities need to hire paid staff. This creates conflicts between new staff and long-term volunteers. Also, there are so many resources allocated to the fire companies when ambulance services and health care are the bigger issues.

Other Important Issues

- Development of any kind will meet opposition from the community. Related to housing, people are generally opposed to any development that will add children to the schools.
- Many new residents have such busy lives, and are struggling to pay for expensive housing, that they do not have the time to get involved with the local community. People don’t understand which municipality they live in, or who their local officials are.
- Agricultural and open space preservation are more cost efficient land uses than residential communities. In general, new residential development does not “pay for itself” in new tax revenue.

- People do not really understand farming and agricultural land uses. They are surprised by, and unhappy about, the negative aspects of having farms as neighbors.
- Cooperation between municipalities is happening. Joint purchasing of materials is the area where there has been long-time municipal cooperation. Municipal managers in neighboring municipalities generally work well together, but elected officials often do not. Because of this, regional planning and other initiatives can be difficult to sustain.
- The housing situation for Latino families has become an issue in some municipalities; cultural and language barriers create difficulties between local residents/officials and the Latino community.
- More “workforce” housing is needed. In some areas, the only type of affordable housing is mobile homes. But some mobile home parks are being sold off for development and residents have nowhere affordable to go.

Possible Solutions

- People, in general, need to become more educated about local government. Residents do not understand the role of local government, what can and cannot be handled by local officials.
- Some planning-related issues, like storm water and transportation, should be addressed at the regional level. Other issues, however, should continue to be addressed by the local municipality.
- School districts should be included in local planning efforts; they are often out of touch with the local community.
- Paramedic and ambulance services need to be expanded and coordinated countywide.

Priorities/Expectations for *Landscapes2*

- The County and municipalities need to address the implementation phase of planning.
- *Landscapes2* should not just support revitalization, but should also address the state and local taxation system, such that local municipalities receive revenue to support service provision in redeveloped areas.
- The preservation of open space was the focus of *Landscapes*. Now there is a need to stress the use, facilities and maintenance of open space for recreation.
- Infrastructure should be a focus of *Landscapes2*; sewer and water expansion is needed to support targeted growth areas. Residents want more traffic-calming measures on local streets, although this is not always a good idea on heavily traveled roads; traffic needs to be better distributed to reduce concentration of traffic.
- Municipalities do not want *Landscapes* to be viewed as a directive; the plan does not override local authority. They would like to have a toolbox for each topic area, and a list of resources they can access to determine where more help is available.

Quotes

- Communities are losing their “sense of place.”
- The tax system is “antiquated.”
- School districts are “out of control and out of touch with citizens.”
- In West Chester Borough, “change is the norm.”
- Conflicts between municipal officials are “personality-driven.”
- Some comprehensive plans “sit on the shelf.”

Participants in Municipal Managers Focus Group

- Mike Brown Honeybrook Township
- Steve Brown London Grove Township
- Rick Craig West Goshen Township
- Mildred Donnell South Coventry Township
- Mimi Gleason Tredyffrin Township
- Jack Hines West Bradford Township
- Kathy Howley Pennsbury Township
- Sandra Kelley Malvern Borough
- Sharon Lynn West Goshen Township
- Ernie McNeeley West Chester Borough
- Gail Murphy Atglen Borough
- Sharon Nesbitt West Grove Borough
- Greg Prowant Caln Township
- Ronald Rambo West Brandywine Township
- Vince Visoskas West Bradford Township
- John Weller West Whiteland Township
- James Wendelgass West Vincent Township
- Terry Woodman East Whiteland Township

OPEN SPACE FOCUS GROUP

Meeting Date: January 22, 2007

Note: Although a range of environmental and open space representatives were invited to this meeting, the majority of attendees represented open space land preservation groups. As a result, topics raised by this group focused mostly on open space, and there was not a significant discussion of natural resource issues.

Major Changes in the Past 10 Years

- There is more understanding of the value of open space. Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) is being talked about and adopted and the level of open space planning is higher than it was ten years ago. The County's matching grant program has helped protect open space in clusters.
- Chester County is becoming a less diverse, exclusively wealthy community. Some people now think open space preservation has contributed to this by eliminating affordable housing.
- Chester County has good watershed associations and now has more information on water quality. *Watersheds* data has been very useful. This kind of data was not available in the past. We have improved surface water quality but now we need to maintain it. Non-point source runoff is now the issue. The past three years have seen weather changes and increased flooding.
- There is now the Highlands Legislation Act, and the Highlands Atlas and Map. The Northern Federation, covering much of northern Chester County, has strategic planning for open space.

Most Important Topics

- Rising Land Cost - Rising land costs are making it more difficult for land trusts to finance the protection of open space. Rising land costs increase the tax burden of large landowners and farmers, which encourages them to subdivide, sell or develop their property and buy cheaper land outside the County.
- Scattered Development Fragments Open Space - Scattered development patterns fragment open spaces and make it difficult to protect large clusters of open space. Scattered development is promoted by poorly planned infrastructure expansion and building schools far from existing developed areas.
- Managing Open Spaces – Large areas of the County are protected as open space and needs to be managed in perpetuity. Management concerns include maintaining native vegetation and biodiversity, providing security and liability coverage, trail access and maintenance; and securing maintenance funding and staff.
- Access to Open Spaces - There is a need to ensure access to protected open spaces where appropriate so that the public can “connect” with lands that were publicly funded. In most settings, trails linking open spaces are the preferred mechanism for providing this access. Access must be balanced to avoid overuse.
- Natural Resources on Open Space - As areas with large unprotected open spaces have diminished, protected open spaces are becoming the last remaining areas for maintaining, enhancing and restoring natural communities, water quality, and air quality, or for locating projects that buffer climate change.

- Education about Open Space and Natural Resources - Municipalities do not have the resources, expertise or regional outlook to educate residents, businesses, or municipal officials and staff regarding open space preservation and natural resource protection. From a practical standpoint, it is County that ends up taking a lead role in open space and environmental education.

Other Important Issues

- Open space education at the local level is not consistent and most residents do not really understand how zoning works in relation to open space protection from development. TDR could be a valuable open space preservation tool but it is not being done properly and people do not know how to use it.
- Municipalities ultimately make the decisions on open space but have overburdened planning commissions. The County does not have much authority to protect open space or to guide development. Municipal turnover means local officials are not experienced with open space.
- Expansion of infrastructure like roads and sewage is a threat to open space because it makes it easier for developers to build. Too many open spaces are set aside mostly to provide land for drip sewage systems
- There is a link between open space and public health. Walking on open space is beneficial for health. Obesity is affecting children as they spend more time watching TV and on computers. People are envious of trails in Montgomery County, and we have not been able to do that here. Trails must be maintained. People need to stay on trails and not damage preserved areas. Horse trails and nature trails need to be protected.
- The management of open space is not being considered in the discussion of preserving it. Each municipality handles open space management its own way. Open space is more than just mowed lawns. Retention basins are mowed and not properly managed.
- The Hopewell Big Woods has 15,000 acres of contiguous forest. Remnant forests are being damaged and cannot replace themselves due to deer. Forests are also degraded by invasive plants. Wooded hilltops need to be protected. Biodiversity is important to open space.
- Water filtration is a value of open space. GVA was way ahead in talking about open space and water issues, and now the discussion of water issues commonplace. Funds from the Chesapeake Bay groups get awarded to other counties as soon as they are made available. They are not being allocated to Chester County.
- We need consensus on school construction. Schools should be built in population centers so students can walk to school. Schools are being built in rural areas that should be protected as open space. People need to know that open space reduces public school costs.
- Land trusts used to work on protecting 100-acre parcels and now we only have fragmented parcels remaining to be protected. Easily protected parcels have been protected. It will take more effort to protect what is left. Agriculture is very important in Chester County in terms of open space preservation. Community Sponsored Agriculture (CSA) should be promoted.

Possible Solutions to Issues/Problems

- Pursue recommendations of the Open Space Task Force to address rising land costs.
- “Great Futures” by the Montgomery County Land Trust is a resource for educating officials, solicitors, and engineers about green infrastructure. We need more meadows and riparian buffers. We need guidelines for HOAs to follow. We need open space management plans.

- We need to create incentives to get developers to build infrastructure. Local planners need to have partnerships with developers to protected open space. Open space protection helps to protect heritage resources.
- New businesses should be near infrastructure so that they are concentrated where development is appropriate and have less impact on open space areas.
- Municipal ordinances need to address trails. We need planning for multi-municipal trails. Open spaces need to be linked with trails.
- We need to measure the carrying capacity of open space to determine how it can be used for recreation without damaging the natural resources of the land. We need to educate the public that preserves can only support a limited number of visitors before they get damaged by overuse.
- We should do land planning on a school district basis because that is how the taxes are based.
- Some people think there should be a County official map to preserve open space.
- Landscapes2 needs to note how many land trusts are active in the County and explain how much good work they do. Landscapes2 should address how federal legislation gives tax breaks to landowners who donate easements.
- The County pushed economic development in the 1980s, and should push sustainability now. County vehicles should use alternative fuels and plug-ins, and the County should encourage other to do this as well.

Quotes:

- “People are scared to death of TDR.”
- “Why do we need 20 acres for a new school?”
- “We don’t have our grandfather’s weather any more.”
- “Trails should be a huge priority.”
- “We have loved this county to death.”
- “Is mowed lawn of any real value?”

Participants in the Open Space/Environmental Focus Group

- Pam Brown French and Pickering Creek Trust
- Sheri Evans-Stanton Brandywine Conservancy
- Bill Gladden Department of Open Space Preservation
- Molly Morrison Natural Lands Trust
- Claire Quinn Municipal Official, French and Pickering Creek Trust
- Edie Shean-Hammond Hopewell Furnace National Park
- David Shields Brandywine Conservancy
- Bob Struble Brandywine Valley Association, Red Clay Valley Association
- Dick Whiteford Sierra Club
- Peter Williamson Natural Lands Trust
- Marilyn Wood 10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania

STATE AGENCIES FOCUS GROUP

Meeting Date: February 21, 2007

Major Changes in Past 10 Years

- The cost of land has skyrocketed. The PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) is focusing on how to purchase land for preservation in the most efficient manner.
- There has been rapid population growth and sprawling development.
- Continued growth and development creates more conflict with wildlife; the deer population has become a major issue for Chester County.
- The Governor's "Keystone Principles" have become the framework for policy development and funding strategies within state agencies. It is anticipated that these principles will remain, in some form, beyond the next election.

Most Important Topics

- Watershed Planning: There is no empowered entity to do watershed planning in PA. The Delaware River Basin Commission (DRBC) is attempting to promote growth management through water quality, utility, and land use planning. The Commission primarily functions as an advocate for the river.
- Water Resources: It is a struggle to coordinate all the processes of development while keeping water resources protected. There is a need to overlay water source protection with protection of other resources, and to improve implementation strategies for watershed management.
- Quality of Life: Protecting land has become a cultural issue – in terms of the desire of communities to preserve their quality of life. The main focus of DCNR is to support livable communities, and to develop a sense of place. It is important to consider the "bigger picture" and to look at issues like global warming.
- Invasive Species: Fragmentation of wild life habitat permits the introduction of invasive plant species. Municipalities are looking to DCNR for assistance and guidance in managing invasive species. The Pennsylvania Game Commission will also assist county and local parks, and individual property owners.

Other Important Issues

- DRBC is assisting municipalities with flood hazard mitigation plans; these plans are required in order for municipalities to access mitigation resources through PEMA or FEMA.
- In terms of DCNR funding awards, Chester County often "outranks" other jurisdictions because of the availability of match funding from County open space and preservation programs.
- It is important to focus not just on the acquisition of land, but also on the use of the land/open space.
- DCNR is now considering the need for preservation, parks, and trails in urban areas.
- Protecting open space for wildlife habitat is important. There are "critical species" everywhere in Pennsylvania. There have been three bald eagle nests identified in Chester County.
- Open space, as part of a development, will attract wildlife, but people don't want the animals venturing into the developed areas.
- Access to private properties for hunting/deer control is limited.

- The “Hopewell Big Woods” area of northern Chester County is of great interest to DCNR. There is a desire, by the state, to create a connection between the Big Woods and the Schuylkill River.
- The intersection of the PA Highlands and the Schuylkill River watershed is also something that DCNR is studying.
- DCNR is looking at “gateway” communities, like St. Peters Village, as a place to create business opportunities.
- Planners are now more skilled with Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology, and are utilizing it for planning and growth projections.
- The PA Natural Diversity Inventory may be expanded to include mammals.
- The DCNR Bureau of Geology has mapping and subsidence data that is available to the counties for planning purposes.

Possible Solutions to Issues/Problems

- The County should consider using the “Transfer of Development Rights” concept to address issues like habitat management. Wetlands banking is another idea to consider.
- There is still an opportunity in Chester County to create linkages between parks and open space; this needs to happen before development occurs.
- Conservation planning should be addressed on an “eco-system basis”, not just within a particular site or property. The PA Code provides for “critical protected areas”, which cross political boundaries.
- The state should take on a larger role in water resources management, preservation and monitoring.
- The state’s “Tree-Vitalize” program is winding down; it is not yet known if there will be continued funding for this program.

Priorities/Expectations for *Landscapes2*

- It is important to include a “greenways” component in *Landscapes2*.
- The County comprehensive plan should identify priorities for conservation and natural resource initiatives and funding; DCNR will look to the County to confirm consistency of municipal proposals with the County’s plan.
- Geologic planning, especially the mining of limestone, is an issue that should be considered in *Landscapes2*. It is important to sustain the economic viability of the mining industry, and plan for adaptive reuse of mining sites.
- Invasive species should be addressed in the County’s comprehensive plan. This topic could be addressed in coordination with the County Conservation District and the Cooperative Extension.
- Chester County should use its comprehensive plan as a tool to educate municipalities.
- County Planners should work with the Bureau of Geology, early in the process, to identify geologic hazards.

Quotes

- The state “should take a larger role” in preservation and monitoring of water resources.
- “Chester County is prime real estate for white-tailed deer.”
- Fragmentation of habitat “paves the way for invasive species”.
- *Landscapes* is not a “no-growth” plan.

Participants in the State Agencies Focus Group

- George Love Department of Conservation & Natural Resources (DCNR),
 Bureau of Geology
- John Morgan Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC)
- Fran Rupert DCNR, Bureau of Recreation and Conservation
- Pam V'Combe Delaware River Basin Commission (DRBC)
- Carolyn Wallis DCNR, Bureau of Recreation and Conservation

TRANSPORTATION FOCUS GROUP

Meeting Date: January 18, 2007

Major Changes in Past 10 Years

- There is increased vehicular traffic, including on narrow roads in rural areas.
- There is increased truck traffic, particularly on local roadways.
- Increased congestion on the roadways.
- Land use has become more suburban, increasing auto-dependency.
- Demand for bike and pedestrian travel has increased, while bike and pedestrian travel has become more difficult and less safe.
- Increased usage of SEPTA rail and realization that SEPTA is a regional asset.
- Increased capital and operating costs for both highways and public transportation.

Most Important Topics

- Public Transportation System: The development of an efficient, effective, affordable, and reliable public transportation system is a priority.
- Non-automotive alternatives: There needs to be incentives for non-automobile trips and disincentives for autos. The current system encourages automobile usage over everything else. Use the “complete streets” approach to ensure that all modes of travel benefit from road improvements.
- Land Use Supportive of Transit: The recognition of the land use/transportation connection is critical for the success of transit. Current development patterns are too spread out to justify transit. Clustering and higher density are needed.
- Congestion Management: There is a need for traffic management and demand management. More is needed than capacity improvements, for example, emergency notification systems and shared-ride programs.
- Citizen Opposition: NIMBYism (Not in My Back Yard) makes it difficult to make transportation improvements. Communities want better access to transportation facilities, such as highways and train stations, but do not want them located too near to where they live.

Other Important Issues

- There is a need for improved connections between train stations and surrounding communities.
- PennDOT regularly hears complaints from local communities against road improvements. Residents feel these improvements will increase truck traffic.
- There are conflicting policies between keeping roads narrow and scenic versus improving and widening roads for safety.
- There is a need for greater intergovernmental communication and education of officials, especially with the turnover of local officials.
- There is a growing awareness of transportation as a quality of life issue. For example, municipalities are expanding sidewalk linkages.
- Bikes need greater accommodations, including wider shoulders on roads and bike racks on buses.
- Encouragement of walking and bicycling can address public health and obesity concerns.
- Limits in funding are limiting new ideas, innovation, and system expansion.
- There is a local inability to raise funds for roadway improvements. Requirements of Act 209 (transportation improvement fees) are complex.

- Emphasis is given to maintenance rather than new facilities (fix it first). This may not be the best policy for a growth area like Chester County.
- The cost of driving is inappropriately priced compared to mass transit. There are incentives to drive.
- Highway capacity expansion rewards auto-dependency.
- There is negative public perception towards buses.
- Improved scheduling and marketing is needed to support transit feasibility.
- Current connections to train stations, such as Exton, are poor.
- Local development regulations are preventing densities that can make transit, bikes, and pedestrian travel successful.
- Planning of developments should be integrated with transportation planning.
- There should be greater use of existing train lines. It is cheaper to add rail cars than to increase highway capacity.
- Schools are required to provide bus seats for all students even though many students drive or are driven to school. This results in public funding being wasted on excessive buses, parking, and drop off facilities.
- There should be a focus on practical, cost realistic projects that can be implemented.
- There needs to be regional leadership that can facilitate regional communication, including regional forums.

Possible Solutions to Issues/Problems

- Increase the use of traffic/travel demand management and Intelligent Transportation systems.
- Encourage appropriate land use that supports transit, bicycling, and pedestrian travel.
- Use the “Complete Streets” approach to highway improvements so that all forms of transportation, instead of just automobile travel, will benefit.
- Identify existing policies that negatively affect transportation planning efforts, so that changes to these policies can be made to reduce the negative impacts.

Priorities/Expectations for Landscapes2

- Support a balanced multi-modal transportation system.
- Encourage land use that supports a multi-modal transportation system.
- Expand transportation funding by leveraging private sector involvement.

Participants in the Transportation Focus Group

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| • Rich Bickel | Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission |
| • Chuck Davies | PennDOT |
| • Richard Esposito | AMTRAK |
| • Rob Henry | Greater Valley Forge TMA |
| • Mike Herron | TMA of Chester County |
| • Jerry Kane | SEPTA |
| • Gary Krapf | Krapf Coaches |
| • Peter Quinn | Greater Valley Forge TMA |
| • Fred Rothman | Chester County Cycling Coalition |
| • Hans van Naerssen | Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia |
| • Jack Weber | SCCOOT |

UTILITIES FOCUS GROUP

Meeting Date: February 23, 2007

Major Changes in the Past 10 Years

- Population growth and new technologies have increased overall demand for utilities.
- Per capita use of water and per capita generation of garbage has gone down due to new technology and public awareness.
- Illegal dumping is disappearing as people become better educated about the environment.
- Utilities are grouping services together. Internet, cell phones and cable TV companies are merging, and sewer and water companies are merging.
- New residents to Chester County who used to live in urban areas have an expectation that they will be able to have the kind of utility services they used to have, even when they move to rural areas.

Most Important Topics

- Under-designed Infrastructure – The existing infrastructure in most of Chester County was designed to serve rural communities and it has not kept pace with the high-tech needs of a County with a growing population and a high density of users.
- Aging Infrastructure - Even where the infrastructure meets the demands of the current population, the infrastructure, from sewer and water lines to the electric grid, is nearing the end of its normal life span and will need to be upgraded or replaced. This is common on the East Coast.
- Utilities must Accommodate New Technologies - To stay in business, utilities must adopt new technologies, such as mobile communications, fiber optic lines, recovering methane from landfills and drip irrigation. The rapid pace of change is likely to continue and flexibility is essential.
- Regional Planning is Needed for Utilities - Utilities typically serve or draw resources from multiple municipalities. Utilities already reactively plan on a regional basis. However, they would be better able to proactively coordinate service if there was regional land planning.

Other Important Issues

- Municipalities sometimes inadvertently promote utility expansion without intending to, such as when they forbid public drinking water systems but require fire hydrant service. Some municipalities promote on-lot septic in large developments, which means that all the systems will likely fail at the same time. This sets the stage for a public system being installed.
- Utility companies have to accommodate different policies in each municipality and changes that occur when a new set of supervisors is elected. Although the County sets regional policy, the municipalities retain the final authority, which makes regional planning weak.
- Utilities are being called upon to provide greater services to a growing population, but they are finding it harder to expand because of a lack of available land and also opposition from local governments and residents who do not want unattractive facilities built in their community.

- The state used to require regional planning for solid waste. In 1995, the Governor put restrictions on other states that were dumping into PA. That led to each municipality having more power to stop new dumps.
- There is a patchwork of sewer systems including on-lot, community plants, and public systems, which are all expanding and merging without a long-term plan.
- Utilities want to promote the planting of appropriate trees, but often the utilities end up cutting down trees that were planted in the wrong location.
- The PUC and municipalities regulate utilities, but they do not communicate with the utilities, which they and the utilities have both failed to pursue. Utilities are frustrated that there is no mechanism set up to promote this discussion.
- Educating residents, especially new residents from urban areas, on how to maintain their septic tanks is a serious effort that has major impacts. If enough systems fail due to mismanagement, there will be requests for public sewers to be built.
- There needs to be more outreach to inform the public that spray and drip irrigation is safe and good for the environment. There is a misperception that spray and drip fields are toxic when in fact they are safer than stream discharge.
- Many residents do not understand what it means to have a utility easement on their property. They plant trees or build sheds that are not permitted and pose problems for the utility infrastructure.

Possible Solutions to Issues/Problems

- There needs to be coordination between municipalities, developers and utilities rather than the attitude that utilities must be stopped cold or given free reign. Utilities need to be included at the beginning of the planning process rather than at the end. They need to work with developers to put utilities in a logical place.
- New technologies, green technologies, and more efficient use of resources may help reduce per capita water and electricity use and garbage generation.
- A centralized sewer system built out from urban centers would be more efficient and better for the environment than the current patchwork.
- Educating new residents on how to maintain a septic tank will reduce the likelihood that public sewers will need to be extended.
- Educating the public that spray and drip fields are safe and good for the environment will serve to improve the environment.

Priorities/Expectations for *Landscapes2*

- Developments should be connected to a regional sewage system, not individual systems.
- *Landscapes* should educate people about how utility infrastructure can benefit the ecology.
- *Landscapes* should have enough authority to direct local planning.
- *Landscapes* should include growth boundaries.
- Utilities should adopt *Landscapes* just like municipalities do.
- Utilities need a neutral mediator to resolve conflicts between them and municipalities.

Quotes:

- “On-lot sewage is the ultimate sprawl.”
- “You can’t control growth, only manage it.”
- “Zoning is only as good as the next group to get elected.”
- “We need to put some teeth into regional planning.”
- “We need to recycle water.”

Participants in the Utilities Focus Group

- Greg Cary PECO
- Barbara D'Angelo Wallace Township Municipal Authority
- Steve Farney Chester Water Authority
- Karl Kyriss Aqua Pennsylvania
- Ed Lennox Oxford Area Sewer Authority
- Stan Schuck Verizon
- Bill Stullken Southern Chester County Refuse Authority
- Steve Taggart Aqua Pennsylvania