

2023 ANNUAL REPORT



CHESTER COUNTY
Planning
COMMISSION



Chairman's MESSAGE



Michael Heberg, Chair

Implementing the Plan

The Chester County Planning Commission is pleased to submit the annual report for the calendar year 2023. The Planning Commission had another successful year of implementing *Landscapes3* which hit its 5th anniversary this year. Highlights under the *Landscapes3* goal areas of Preserve, Protect, Appreciate, Live, Prosper, and Connect include:

PRESERVE: Open space preservation continued with 149,000 acres, or 31% of the county, preserved at the start of 2023. Additional protected agricultural and conservation land was added throughout the year. Chester County was honored to receive an award from the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association recognizing its achievements in open space preservation planning.

PROTECT: The Sustainability Summit attended by over 300 people was a highlight of the year's planning events. New online resources focused on the protection of the county's trees and woodlands and on providing homeowners' associations information for implementing sustainable practices.

APPRECIATE: A newly created *Heritage Tourism Plan* provides a framework for encouraging visitors to explore the county's remarkable array of historic sites. The popular Town Tours and Village Walks focused on the county's agricultural heritage and were attended by over 1,500 participants. Planning continued with the Chester County America250 PA Commission to commemorate the many facets of America's founding.

LIVE: The annual housing report showed yet another dramatic increase in home prices of 11% over the prior year. The Planning Commission continued to strive for attractive, affordably-priced, aging-friendly, adaptable, and accessible homes through its A+ Housing Forum and Starter Home Initiative.

PROSPER: The Planning Commission improved its method of providing economic data through the creation of the "Chester County Economy Dashboard" which allows for ongoing updates of this vital information. The annual *Chester County Farm Guide* continued to provide a comprehensive listing of the many options for buying locally produced farm products.

CONNECT: The year ended with exciting news that the Schuylkill River Passenger Authority's proposal to restore service to Phoenixville, Pottstown, and Reading can proceed to the planning and engineering phase, increasing the possibility of service restoration to these communities. Both a draft County Public Transportation Plan and Trail Plan were mostly completed in 2023.

2023 was another very busy year for the Planning Commission and on behalf of the Board I would like to thank the staff for their hard work and ongoing commitment to the County and our quality of place. These efforts, and many more, are highlighted in this annual report and available on the Planning Commission's website, chescoplanning.org, which contains a wealth of information on planning topics, mapping, tools, and upcoming events. We look forward to working with our many partners in 2024 in keeping Chester County a great place to live and work.

Very respectfully,

Michael C. Heberg, Chairman

Board members

The Chester County Planning Commission is a nine-member advisory board appointed by the board of County Commissioners.



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



Roberta Consentino



Stephanie Duncan



Douglas A. Fasick, DC



Matthew Hammond, P.E.



Molly Morrison



Andy Wright, AICP, PP, PTP



Angela Thompson-Lobb

Achieving the VISION



How We PRESERVE	How We LIVE
How We PROTECT	How We PROSPER
How We APPRECIATE	How We CONNECT

Implementing Landscapes3

The Planning Commission's work program is guided by *Landscapes3*, Chester County's comprehensive plan, which seeks to balance growth and preservation. This is particularly important nowadays, when there is so much residential development pressure in the county.

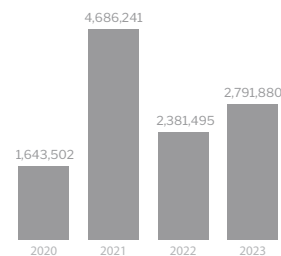
To achieve the vision shown in the Landscapes map, the Planning Commission is creating design guides for each landscape. In 2023, staff completed a fifth guide, the *Rural Landscapes Design Guide*. This document illustrates how rural areas can be protected and how the impact of new development can be minimized.

Development Proposals and Landscapes3

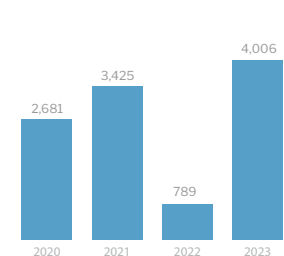
Consistency with the Landscapes Map and the planning principles in *Landscapes3* is part of the Act 247 review process for subdivisions, land developments, ordinances, and plans. In 2023, 99 percent of all relevant subdivision and land development plan submissions were consistent with *Landscapes3*. Approximately 97 percent of proposed dwelling units were in *Landscapes3* growth areas. For nonresidential proposals, 88 percent of the square footage was in growth areas. For ordinance and comprehensive plan submissions in 2023, 97 percent were consistent with *Landscapes3*.

Excluding second reviews, the Planning Commission reviewed 211 subdivision and land development plan submissions in 2023, a four percent increase from the number of plans reviewed in 2022 (202). Notably, the number of proposed residential lots/units for the entire county increased substantially, from 789 in 2022 to 4,006, which is the highest total in the last decade. Apartment units accounted for 47 percent of all proposed residential development in 2023. Proposed nonresidential structural square footage increased from 2,381,495 in 2022 to 2,791,888 in 2023, which is the second highest total over the last decade.

Proposed Non-residential Square Footage



Proposed Lots/Units



The Rural Landscapes Design Guide illustrates best practices for maintaining low density development patterns and conservation of agricultural lands and sensitive environmental resources.



VISION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

Advancing community planning initiatives since 1996

Municipal Partnerships

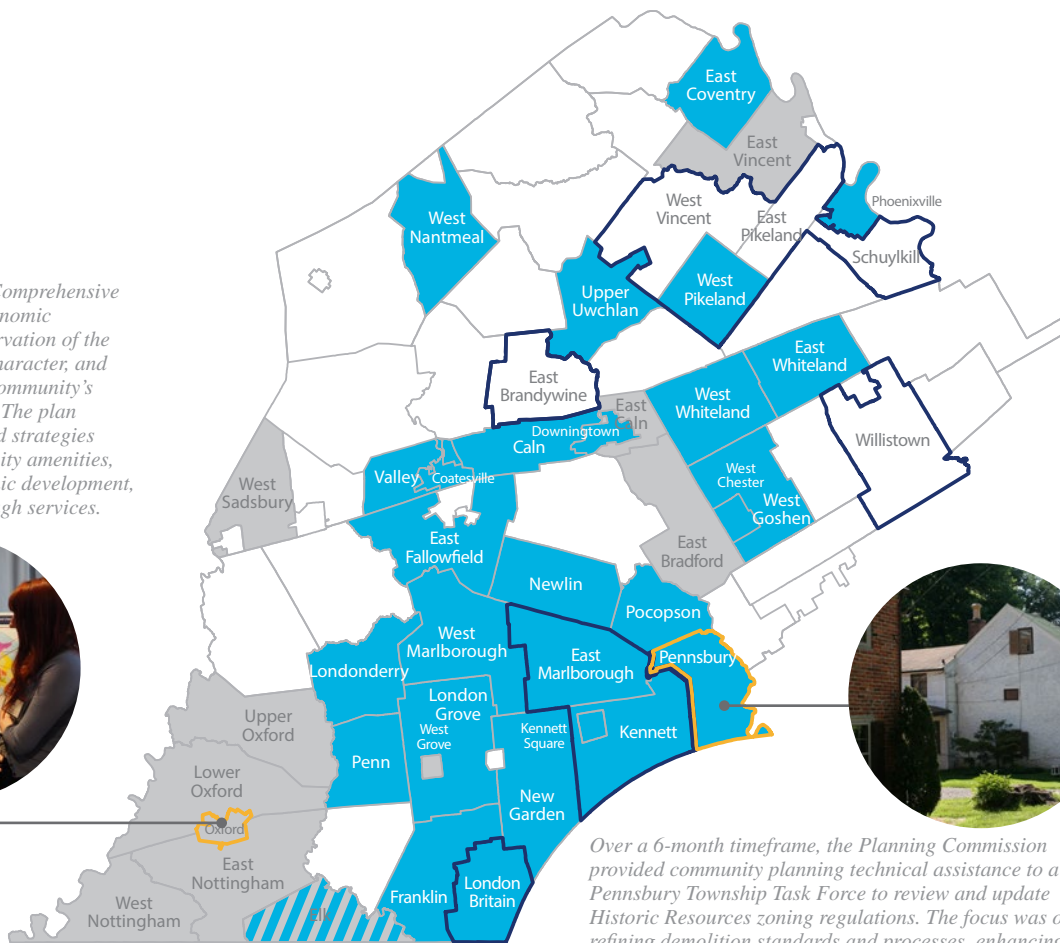
Grant funding and technical assistance provided to municipalities through Chester County's Vision Partnership Program (VPP) support implementation of Landscapes3 by facilitating municipal comprehensive plan updates, ordinance revisions, and special studies. There may be 30 or more active VPP projects at any time, and Chester County Planning Commission staff is involved in all of these as either project lead or as monitor to a professional planning consultant selected by the municipality. Seven projects, including two multi-municipal projects, were completed in 2023.

Chester County Planning Commission staff welcomes the opportunity to discuss potential projects with municipalities at any time. Projects selected for county consulting depend on staff availability, while cash grants are awarded through a competitive application process. The Chester County Commissioners allocate \$250,000 per year for VPP cash grants. Eight new VPP projects were accepted in 2023.

VPP Project Status

- Municipality with VPP project completed by Planning Commission staff in 2023.
- Municipality with VPP cash grant project completed in 2023.
- Other municipality with active Planning Commission staff VPP projects.
- Municipality with ongoing VPP cash grant project.

Oxford Borough's Comprehensive Plan prioritizes economic development, preservation of the borough's unique character, and celebration of the community's diverse population. The plan includes actions and strategies focused on community amenities, circulation, economic development, land use, and borough services.



Over a 6-month timeframe, the Planning Commission provided community planning technical assistance to a Pennsbury Township Task Force to review and update Historic Resources zoning regulations. The focus was on refining demolition standards and processes, enhancing demolition by neglect provisions, and providing additional adaptive reuse options.

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

Open Space Preservation

At the start of 2023, 149,000 acres, or nearly 31% of the county, was protected open space, according to the Planning Commission's [annual tracking](#) of land preservation by the county, land trusts, municipalities, and other preservation partners. Many new properties were preserved during 2023, such as a 102-acre conservation easement on Crebilly farm, the 44-acre Aguilar farm, and the 106-acre Loch Nairn golf club.

30.7% of the county is
protected
open space

Municipal Open Space Outreach

To encourage municipalities to preserve more open space, county staff provided each municipality with information on the status of their open space efforts while also identifying additional open space tools they might want to consider.



At the Open Space Summit, the Planning Commission and Parks + Preservation provided municipalities with information about the tools they can use to effectively implement their open space policies and goals.

Open Space Summit

The 2023 open space summit was structured as a municipal training session and featured planning consultants and municipal representatives describing specific projects. The topics covered included open space plans, park development, open space committees, trail development, and open space taxes.

Award for Open Space Initiatives

At its 2023 annual conference, the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association conveyed its Award for a Project, Program, or Practice to Chester County for the county's overall open space preservation initiatives, including the Planning Commission's many guides, studies, and outreach efforts.

How We PROTECT

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

Sustainability Summit

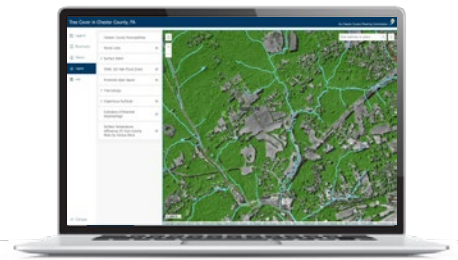
Over 300 people attended the county's first sustainability summit, which featured Ariella Maron, DVRPC's executive director, as well as many local sustainability success stories. Following the summit, the county hosted a suite of tours showcasing sustainability in action around Chester County.



At the Sustainability Summit, seven local organizations presented quick and inspiring stories of their work in a sustainability speed share presentation.

Woodlands and Tree Preservation Guidance

Because trees are so critical for environmental sustainability, the planning commission prepared a new online [woodlands and tree protection guide](#) that maps woodlands, lists funding programs, and describes various tools municipalities can use to protect and expand their tree cover.



The Tree Cover in Chester County Map is useful in determining where gaps exist in tree coverage and where tree planting efforts could have the most impact.

Solar Ordinance Inventory

To encourage appropriate solar power ordinances, county staff conducted an inventory of all 73 municipal zoning ordinances on their standards for accessory use solar facilities and principal use, grid-scale solar facilities. This information was then used to guide direct outreach to municipalities about best practices for regulating solar facilities.

Sustainable Practices of HOAs

To support the county's homeowner's associations, which manage over 18,000 acres of preserved open space, the planning commission created an online resource guide demonstrating how these associations can best manage stormwater, limit fertilizers, allow solar power facilities, encourage community gardens, convert lawns, plant riparian buffers, preserve historic buildings, and connect to nearby trail systems.

How We APPRECIATE

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

Village Preservation Guide

The Planning Commission prepared a new village preservation guide that includes best planning and design practices for preserving the county's 80 historic villages and hamlets.



The Village Preservation Guide is full of pictures, maps, drawings, and ordinance citations from nearby villages that demonstrate that village preservation can be very successful here in Chester County.

Agricultural Heritage Tours

Many of the county's agricultural historic sites were recognized in this year's Town Tours and Village Walks, which had more than 1,500 attendees. The program kicked off at the West Chester United Methodist Church and highlighted the transition from Chester County's colonial farms to neighborhoods and agri-businesses.



In November, David Blackburn joined the Planning Commission staff as its new Heritage Preservation Coordinator.

Heritage Tourism Plan

The county's new Heritage Tourism Plan provides a framework for connecting and enhancing Chester County's many historic sites to encourage more visitation and cooperation.

Adaptive Reuse Guide

The upcoming on-line adaptive reuse guide provides zoning guidance on adaptive reuse of historic properties, as well as case studies of successful projects in urban, suburban, and rural settings.



How We LIVE

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

Housing Data

The annual *Housing Report* showed that there were significant changes in housing between 2021 and 2022. The median housing value in 2022 rose to \$466,000, an 11% increase over the prior year and, once again, the highest inflation-adjusted sales price ever for the county. A total of 2,537 units were built in 2022, with about a third of these multi-family, attached, and single-family detached.



SINGLE FAMILY
925 UNITS BUILT



SINGLE FAMILY ATTACHED
838 UNITS BUILT



MULTI-FAMILY
774 UNITS BUILT

A+ Homes Forum

The county's Housing Choices Committee sponsored the annual A+ Homes forum, where speakers discussed strategies and tools they use to talk to residents, developers, the business community, and municipalities about affordably-priced housing to minimize fear and encourage further creation of housing opportunities.

Reinvestment Strategies and Tools

The Planning Commission has developed a new resource which identifies [strategies and tools for municipalities](#) to encourage investment in areas that already have supportive infrastructure. In doing so, this balances the need for new development with open space preservation goals.



The Reinvestment Strategies and Tools website includes a Reinvestment Indicators Map to assist municipalities in locating areas best suited for reinvestment.

Starter Home Initiative

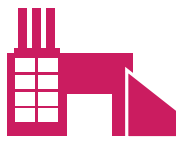
As part of the county's ongoing A+ Homes initiative, the planning commission began a Starter Home Initiative, which focused on local municipalities and actions they can take to encourage affordably-priced housing.



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

Nonresidential Construction

The county's *Nonresidential Construction Report* showed that nonresidential construction was moderate in 2022, with about 963,000 square feet built and with institutional and industrial development accounting for most of the new building square footage. One project, Avon Grove School District's high school, accounted for 296,000 square feet of the total.



INDUSTRIAL
324,151 SF BUILT



COMMERCIAL
221,310 SF BUILT



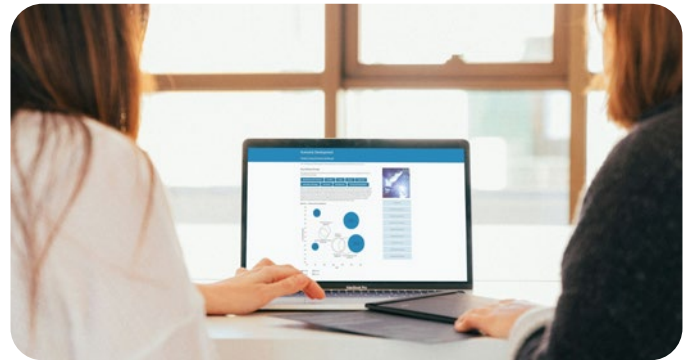
INSTITUTIONAL
420,952 SF BUILT



AGRICULTURAL
8,708 SF BUILT

Chester County Economy Dashboard

To keep data as fresh as possible, the annual county economy report has transitioned to a [dashboard](#) that describes resident characteristics, employment characteristics, business characteristics, gross domestic product data, real estate characteristics, and key industry groups. Overall, the county economy remains both strong and diverse.



The Chester County Economy Dashboard provides local economy data that can be used to guide economic growth for the county.

Urban Centers Forum

In October, the Planning Commission held its Urban Centers Forum in Downingtown, with a theme of historic preservation, which featured presentations on adaptive reuse and state preservation resources.

Chester County Farm Guide

The Agricultural Development Council released its renamed [Chester County Farm Guide](#) at the beginning of the season. This magazine-style guide featured stories about Red Dog Market, Barnard's Orchard, sharing the road with farmer neighbors, and Avon Grove Charter School's Micro-Farm. In addition, it included the usual list and map of farms and other locations where residents can purchase locally produced agricultural products.



How We CONNECT

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

Transportation Project Planning

The county's biannual [Transportation Improvement Inventory](#) showed that Chester County has 534 needed transportation improvements, with a total estimated cost of \$4.55 billion. The county's highest priority projects were then identified in the biannual [Transportation Priority Projects](#) brochure.

Public Transportation Plan

The county's [Public Transportation Plan](#) draft materials show that passenger rail service should expand over the next decade, with SEPTA returning service to Coatesville and Amtrak providing service to Phoenixville. Many of the county's business parks will transition from fixed-route bus service to microtransit, which can provide door-to-door tailored service to riders.

Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority

In December, the Federal Railroad Administration announced that the [Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority's](#) proposed service to Phoenixville, Pottstown, and Reading was accepted into the federal Corridor ID program, which means planning and engineering can proceed for the restoration of passenger rail service to these communities.



The Planning Commission participated in the 10th annual Bike to Work Day, which helps promote biking and encourage the continued investment in multi-modal connections in our region.

County Trail Plan

Planning Commission staff completed draft [county trail plan](#) materials that identify potential trail linkages and highest priority trail projects, particularly trails that can connect to the Circuit Trails network.



*Photo Credit:
Geoffrey Cleary*



Director's MESSAGE



Brian N. O'Leary, AICP

Celebrating 5 Years of Landscapes3

Landscapes3, the county's comprehensive plan that balances growth and preservation, hit its fifth anniversary in November 2023! The past five years were very dramatic, with the 2020 pandemic disrupting virtually everything and everyone.

Nevertheless, *Landscapes3* has provided a resilient framework for the community and its planning work.

Despite the changes wrought by the pandemic, including the acceleration of many commuting, development, business, and demographic trends, progress has been made on a number of planning fronts, including public transportation, trails, historic preservation, open space preservation, acceptance of housing affordability issues, sustainability, and smart growth.

In 2024, we will continue this progress. We will focus on implementing *Landscapes3* and the many complementary plans prepared over the last couple of years, including climate action, public transportation, freight, trails, agricultural economic development, and heritage tourism plans. We will also continue pushing on historically challenging issues, like affordable housing, good design, and multi-modal transportation.

Finally, during the year, we expect to assess *Landscapes3* and its relevance to today's pressing issues, including climate change, struggling public transportation systems, strong development pressure, changing business real estate needs, and increased impacts from storms. It's going to be an exciting year for planning in Chester County!

Brian N. O'Leary, AICP
Executive Director

Major Initiatives in 2024:

- Future trends and *Landscapes3* report
- Mini municipal open space plans
- Sustainable practices in HOAs outreach
- Tree planting implementation
- Energy transitions in disadvantaged communities support
- Heritage interpretive network support
- Starter home initiative
- A+ homes adaptable and accessible guides
- Better bus stops project
- Municipal connector trail project
- Agricultural landscapes design guide

Budget

Expenditures	2021	2022	2023
Personnel Services	\$3,084,212	\$3,266,016	\$3,361,124
Materials & Services	\$237,251	\$170,416	\$187,135
Contributions, Grants, Subsidies	\$170,911	\$170,910	\$188,290
TOTAL	\$3,492,374	\$3,607,432	\$3,736,549

Revenues	2021	2022	2023
Federal	\$251,946	\$263,466	\$254,218
State	\$5,000	\$20,425	\$38,530
Local	\$48,701	\$45,475	\$63,056
Subdivision/Land Review Fees	\$211,770	\$175,849	\$233,118
Miscellaneous	\$11,822	\$1,250	\$12,650
TOTAL	\$529,238	\$506,465	\$601,572

* Remaining revenue comes from Chester County

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

Email
ccplanning@chesco.org

Web
www.chescoplanning.org

We're social! Follow us

 **Facebook**

 **X.com**

 **LinkedIn**

 **Flickr**

 **YouTube**

 **Instagram**

 **Threads**

Staff

Administration Services

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

Agricultural Development Council

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

Community Planning

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

* Former staff

Multimodal Transportation Planning

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

Sustainability Planning

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

Design & Technology

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



Josh Maxwell
Marian Moskowitz
Eric Roe