

2021 ANNUAL REPORT





Chairman's MESSAGE

Implementing the plan

The Chester County Planning Commission is pleased to submit the annual report for the calendar year 2021. After a very challenging 2020, the Planning Commission settled into a hybrid work environment in 2021, with a combination of remote and in-person coordination and meetings. The Planning Commission focused on implementation of the six goal areas of *Landscapes3*: Preserve, Protect, Appreciate, Live, Prosper, and Connect.

PRESERVE: This year proved to be a successful one for open space preservation with nearly 30% of the county protected by early 2021. Significant preservation efforts continued with the protection of the beautiful 577 acre Glenroy farm situated along the east side of Octoraro Creek in Lower Oxford and West Nottingham townships.

PROTECT: The Protect highlight for this year was the adoption of the *Chester County Climate Action Plan* by the County Commissioners in October 2021. The Climate Action Plan provides a blueprint for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing energy efficiency at County government facilities and community-wide.

APPRECIATE: After being fully remote in 2020, the popular Town Tours and Village Walks shifted to a combination of in-person and virtual events highlighting the county's role in the Underground Railroad and coordinating with Juneteenth celebrations. A 250th Committee was established to help with Chester County's celebration of the nation's 250th anniversary in 2026.

LIVE: The annual A+ Homes forum, sponsored by the county Housing Choices Committee, focused on "Missing Middle Housing" which includes more moderately priced and harder to find housing types such as duplexes, twins, and smaller single-family homes. The Planning Commission also released two new housing guides to help municipalities plan for affordably-priced and aging-friendly homes.

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



PROSPER: The *Chester County Agricultural Economic Strategic Plan*, prepared by the Agricultural Development Council, identifies a wide range of strategies to support the county's evolving agricultural industry. The theme of the annual Urban Centers forum was "Great, Green, and Growing Small Towns" with presentations on permeable paving, urban forests, street trees, and green infrastructure.

CONNECT: The county adopted a new *Complete Streets Policy* in 2021 to facilitate safe and convenient travel for all users whether they are driving, walking, biking, or taking public transit. Trail planning included extending the Chester Valley Trail to the east, connecting the Struble Trail to Marsh Creek State Park, and examining options for additional trails and sidewalks in southern Chester County.

Information about these efforts, and many more, such as the county's new *Suburban Landscapes Design Guide*, are 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 2022 to make Chester County the best place to live, work, and play.

Very respectfully,

Kevin C. Kerr, Chairman

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. Despite the pandemic, the county is making solid progress on a wide range of its goals and metrics, and most new growth is concentrated in the county's urban, suburban, and rural centers.

To achieve the vision shown in the Landscapes map, the Planning Commission is creating design guides for each landscape. In 2021, staff completed a third guide, the *Suburban Landscapes Design Guide*. This document illustrates how new development in the county's suburban areas can be compatible with existing neighborhoods while fostering walkability and preservation.

To help municipalities with growth management, the Planning Commission's websites features a wide range of new eTools, such as smart growth principles, performance zoning, brownfield redevelopment, greyfield redevelopment, and transit oriented development.

Development Consistency with Landscapes3

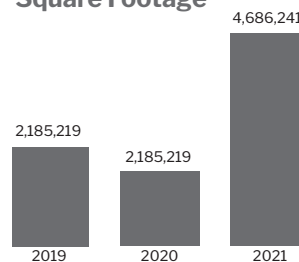
Consistency with the *Landscapes Map* is part of the Act 247 review process for proposed subdivisions, land developments, ordinances, and plans. In 2021, 98 percent of all relevant subdivision and land development plan submissions were consistent with *Landscapes3*. Approximately 97 percent of proposed dwelling units were in *Landscapes3* growth areas. For nonresidential proposals,

76 percent of the square footage was in growth areas. While this was a lower percentage from the previous two years, the non-residential development proposals in the Rural and Agricultural landscapes were consistent with *Landscapes3*, mostly comprising agricultural uses, industrial uses, or institutional uses.

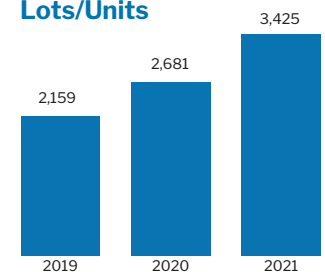
Overall, development proposals generally trended upward in comparison to previous years. The number of plans reviewed increased from 163 to 188 and the number of proposed residential lots/units (excluding second reviews) increased from 2,681 in 2020 to 3,425 in 2021. Of note, the number of townhouse lots/ units increased from 676 to 1,159.

The proposed non-residential square footage (excluding second reviews) increased significantly from 1,643,502 square feet in 2020 to 4,686,241 in 2021. Industrial square footage increased from 502,718 square feet to 2,922,208 square feet. This was the first year since 2007 the Planning Commission reviewed more than four million square feet of non-residential structural square footage.

Proposed Non-residential Square Footage



Proposed Lots/Units



The Suburban Landscapes Design Guide illustrates best practices for new development.



VISION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

Partnering with Municipalities

The Vision Partnership Program (VPP) is one of the county's primary means of partnering with municipalities to encourage smart growth and effective preservation. The VPP has two components: county consulting services and cash grants. For county consulting services, Planning Commission staff members act as planning consultants to municipalities. Four of these county-consultant projects were completed in 2021.

The cash grant program provides reimbursable cash grants to municipalities to hire a private planning consultant, with the county providing a grant monitor to support the project and assure it implements *Landscapes3*. Five of these projects were completed in 2021.

Elverson's active transportation plan identifies community enhancements to enable residents and visitors to navigate the community without the need for an automobile.



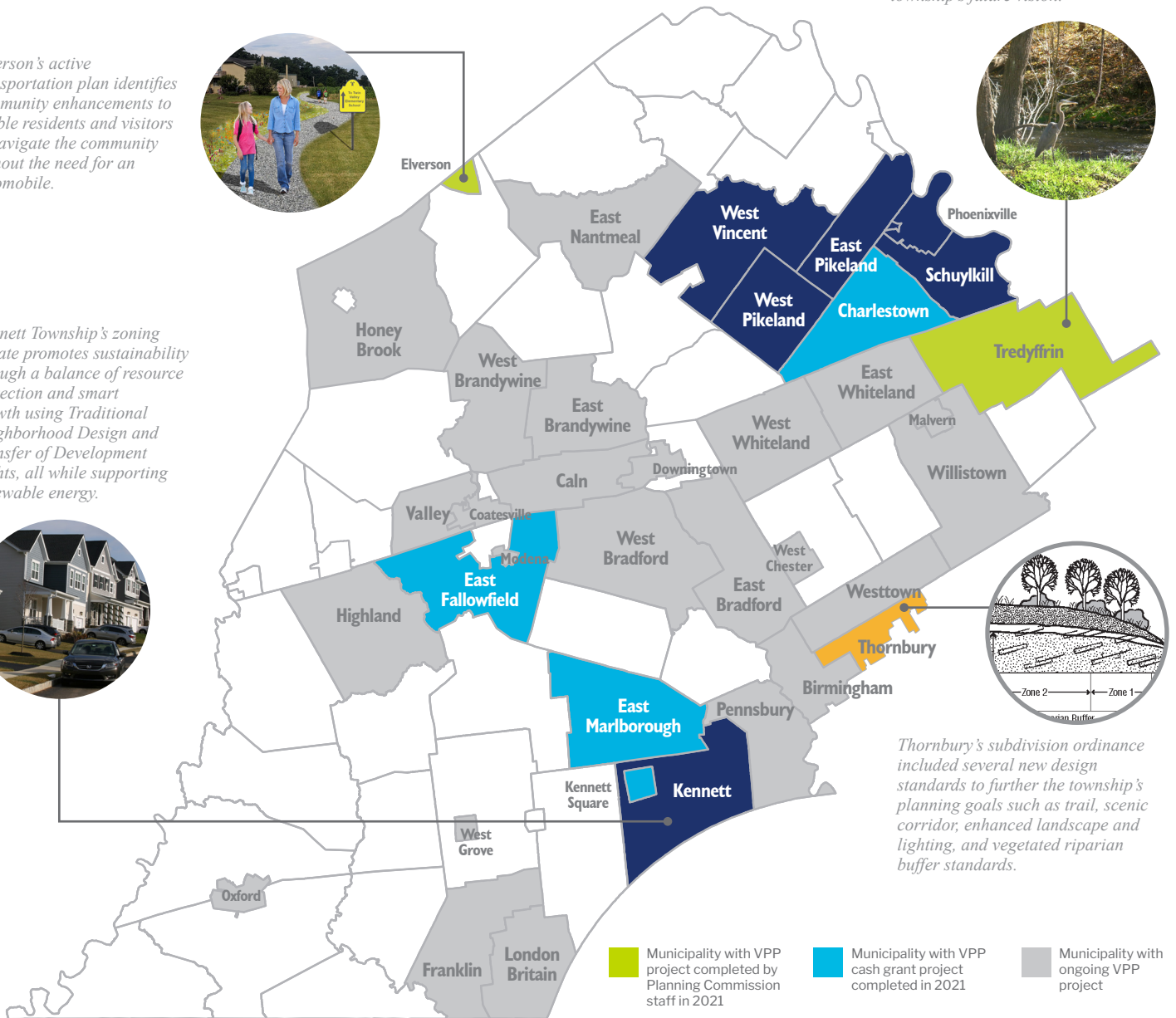
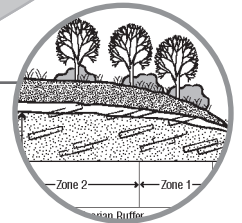
Kennett Township's zoning update promotes sustainability through a balance of resource protection and smart growth using Traditional Neighborhood Design and Transfer of Development Rights, all while supporting renewable energy.



Tredyffrin's comprehensive plan emphasizes sustainability and green practices as a core element of the township's future vision.



Thornbury's subdivision ordinance included several new design standards to further the township's planning goals such as trail, scenic corridor, enhanced landscape and lighting, and vegetated riparian buffer standards.





How We PRESERVE

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

In 2021 Natural Lands announced the protection of Sproat Farm, which consists of nearly 42 acres of land in northern New Garden Township.

Open Space Preservation

At the start of 2021, 144,000 acres, or nearly 30% of the county, was protected open space, according to the Planning Commission's [annual tracking](#) of land preservation by the Department of Parks and Preservation, land trusts, municipalities, and other preservation partners. Many new properties were preserved during 2021, such as the 577 acre Glenroy farm along Octararo Creek or the 42-acre Sproat Farm in New Garden Township.

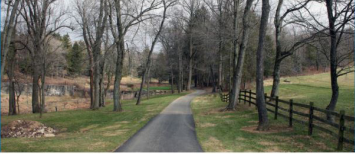
29.7%

of the county is protected open space

Open Space eTools


To help municipalities preserve open space, county staff expanded and updated the Planning Commission's suite of [eTools](#). These included agricultural easements, conservation easements, greenways, parkland dedication, urban green spaces, and transfer of development rights.

Greenways
A greenway is a corridor of undeveloped land, usually along a stream or ridgeline, which creates a continuous corridor, providing environmental, wildlife habitat, water resources, and possible recreational benefits.



Home » Municipal Corner » eTools » Greenways

How it Works
 Get Started
 Examples

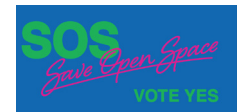


How it Works
A greenway can be thought of as a string of pearls — where the "string" represents a corridor of undeveloped land and the "pearls" are the resources they connect, like parks, forest patches, or village centers. Greenways often follow naturally-occurring corridors like waterways or ridgelines, but they can also be created through redevelopment. A greenway can also be a trail, a wildlife corridor created from an abandoned railway, utility or other right-of-way. Rail trails, such as the Chester Valley Trails are some of the most common forms of greenway.

Benefits
Wildlife Habitat
Greenways provide contiguous habitat, allowing for healthier wildlife and movement and migration of species.

Open Space Summit

The open space summit was held again in 2021, albeit virtually, and focused on municipal support of open space preservation, with experts speaking about municipal financing of open space, agricultural preservation, and conservation tools.



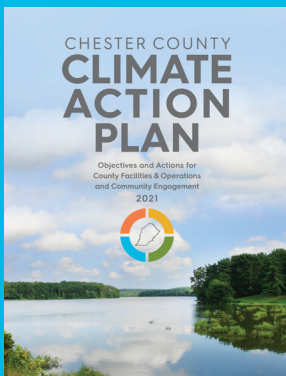
To encourage continued expansion of the network of protected open space, the Planning Commission unveiled an updated bumper sticker graphic reminiscent of the first one created over 30 years ago.



How We PROTECT

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

The Cool Valley Preserve in Tredyffrin Township consists of 33 acres of meadows, woodlands, and trails.



GOAL
80%
reduction of GHG emissions in the county by 2050

Climate Action Plan ^{NEW}

The county adopted a new *Climate Action Plan* that highlights county actions and advocacy that can help reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This plan was prepared by the Planning Commission, working with the Environmental and Energy Advisory Board and using a state-supported initial template.



Chester County will reduce community-wide waste-related greenhouse gas emissions.

Spring Workshop

The draft plan was the focus of a spring workshop on the Protect goal. The virtual meeting was attended by more than 150 individuals who tuned in to listen and provide feedback on the county's efforts towards climate action planning.

Natural Resource Municipal Outreach

In conjunction with the completion of many natural resource eTools and after an analysis of municipal natural resource codes, the Planning Commission contacted all 73 county municipalities about natural resource protection, offering to assist a number of municipalities in updating their codes.



Renewable Energy Web Area

The county has already begun implementing its *Climate Action Plan* on a variety of fronts, including the Planning Commission's updated renewable energy web area, which includes links and information on solar, geothermal, and wind energy.





How We APPRECIATE

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

The Historic Tredyffrin Barn and Jones Log Barn Living History Center showcases farm life in the 18th-century in Chester County.

America 250PA Chester County Commission ^{NEW}

In anticipation of the nation's 250th anniversary in 2026, the county created the [America 250PA Chester County Commission](#) that will help the county's historic sites prepare for the upcoming semiquincentennial.

Historic Preservation Training

As part of ongoing efforts to share information and resources, the Planning Commission held a municipal leadership luncheon on historic preservation tools in cooperation with the county's historic preservation network.

Interpreting the Brandywine Battlefield

The Planning Commission facilitated the installation of three Brandywine Battlefield historic markers in 2021, which are funded by the PA Society of the Sons of the Revolution and its Color Guard. So far, six of an intended fifteen municipal signs have been installed.



Westtown Township unveiled a new historic marker recognizing the importance of the September 11, 1777 Battle of Brandywine.

Journeying Toward Freedom

The county's diverse past and role in the Underground Railroad were featured in the seven virtual and in-person **Town Tours and Village Walks**. In recognition

of Juneteenth, the tours kicked off with a presentation by Bill Kashatus on William Still and the Underground Railroad.



673

total participants attended either the virtual or in-person tours in 2021

Town Tours & Village Walks





How We LIVE

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

3,400 residential units were proposed in 2021, the second highest total in the last ten years.

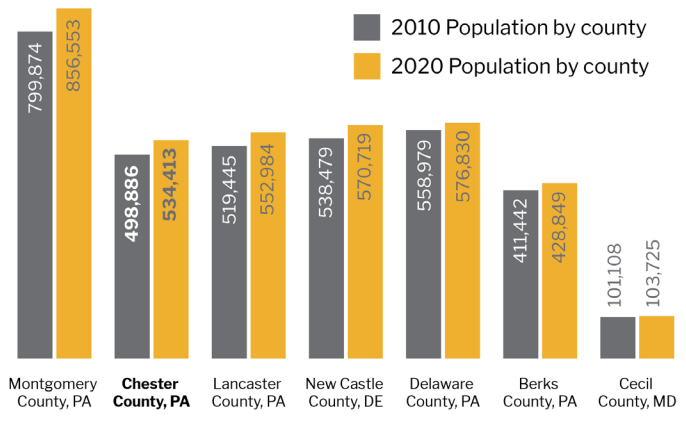
Housing Data

The annual [Housing Report](#) indicated the median housing value in 2020 rose to \$375,000, a 3.1% increase over the prior year. A total of 1,732 units were built in 2020, with 31% of these single-family detached, 34% single-family attached, and 36% multifamily.

1,732
new housing units
were built in 2020

2020 Census Results

The 2020 US Census information was released in the fall of 2021 and shows that the county's 2020 population was 534,413 people, a 7.1% percent increase from 2010. A summary of county and municipal [census information](#) is available on the Planning Commission website.



Missing Middle Housing Forum

The county's **Housing Choices Committee** sponsored the annual A+ Homes forum, which focused on Missing Middle Housing. This more affordably-priced housing falls somewhere between big single-family homes and large apartment buildings and might consist of duplexes, twins, townhouses, cottage courts, and other less-frequently seen housing.



At the event, Sarah Peck, of Progressive New Homes, and Nannette Whitset of South Media Neighbors United, spoke about their experience working together on a new development.

Housing Guides ^{NEW}

As part of the county's ongoing A+ Homes initiative, the Planning Commission released two **housing guides**:





How We PROSPER

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

The 2021 Urban Centers Forum occurred in Oxford Borough and focused on green infrastructure.

Urban Centers Forum

In October, the Planning Commission held its Urban Centers Forum in Oxford, with a theme of Great, Green, and Growing Small Towns. Local experts spoke on topics like permeable paving, stream protection fees, roundabouts, urban forests, street trees, and green infrastructure.

The Chester County Economy Report

The Planning Commission, in partnership with the Chester County Economic Development Council, prepared the second annual report on the county's economy. This report continues to show that the county has a strong and diverse economy, with particular strength in management of companies, finance, professional and technical services, and agriculture.

Nonresidential Construction

The county's *Nonresidential Construction Report* showed that nonresidential construction was moderate in 2020, with about 960,000 square feet built, with more than half of this space institutional. During 2021, there was significant new industrial and warehousing development proposed in the county.

960,000

square feet of non residential construction in 2020

Agricultural Economic Development

Working with a consultant, the Agricultural Development Council prepared the *Chester County Agricultural Economic Development Strategic Plan*, which has a range of recommendations, such as developing the farm of the future, catalyzing the industrial hemp sector, or preparing farms for carbon credit markets.



The plan involved interviews with farmers, agribusinesses, and policymakers.

Agriculture Award Winners

The Chester County Commissioners and the Ag Council presented the 2021 Chester County Farmer of the Year award to Darryl King, owner-operator of Manor Hill Farms in West Grove.

Betsy MacCauley (Atglen, PA) received the 2021 Duncan Allison Distinguished Service to Agriculture Award in recognition of her over 30 years of volunteer service to the agriculture industry.





How We CONNECT

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

The Planning Commission inventoried the transportation improvement needs for the county's 73 municipalities.

Transportation Priority Projects

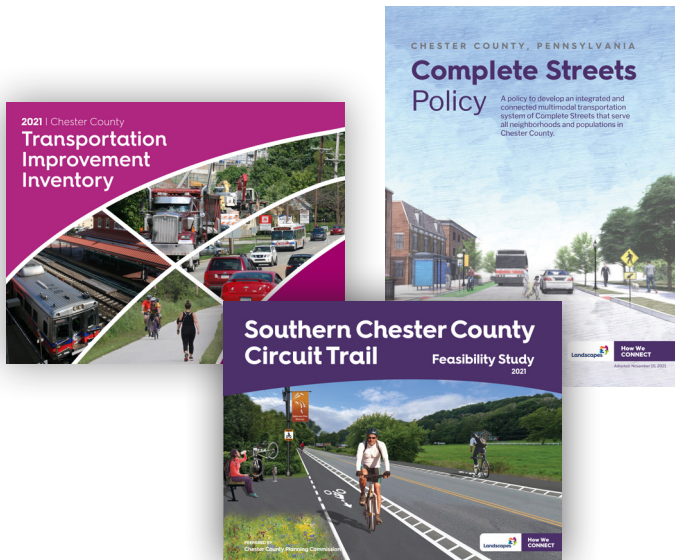
Planning Commission staff continuously advocates for transportation funding for the county, and, every two years, works with the county commissioners and state legislators to identify the highest priority transportation projects in the [Transportation Priority Projects](#) brochure.

Transportation Improvements Inventory

The county's biannual [Transportation Improvements Inventory](#) shows that there are plenty of roadway, bridge, bicycle, pedestrian, freight, and transit projects around the county, with a total of 529 projects with an estimated overall cost of \$4.52 billion.

Complete Streets Policy ^{NEW}

The county adopted a new [Complete Streets Policy](#) that highlights how streets can facilitate travel in a safe, convenient, and comfortable manner for all users regardless of their transportation mode.



Transportation Forum

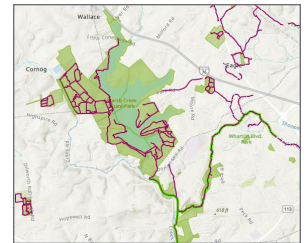
In September, the Planning Commission virtually hosted its annual forum titled "Drivers, Deliveries & Dollars." The forum provided updates on transportation planning, construction projects, and funding options.



Ongoing Trail Planning

The county continued planning for trails, including extending the Chester Valley Trail to the west, supporting additional trails and sidewalks in southern Chester County, and connecting the Struble Trail to Marsh Creek State Park. As part of these efforts, the Planning Commission released a new interactive trail map for the county.

The Chester County Trailfinder is an interactive map that identifies existing trails in the county.



21.4

miles of multi-use trails, sidewalks and bike lanes were added since 2019



Director's MESSAGE

Moving Forward in Uncertain Times

With the ongoing pandemic and resulting economic dislocation, it remains challenging to predict how our built and natural environments will be affected. Currently, there is more housing demand, less affordable housing, more industrial development, less traffic during rush hour, and less public transit ridership. The impacts of climate change with more severe and localized storms also seems to be increasing. We will see how these trends evolve, but, whatever the trends end up being, *Landscapes3*, Chester County's comprehensive plan, provides a strong framework for smart growth and effective preservation as we prepare for an uncertain future.

In 2022, the Chester County Planning Commission will continue to implement the goals of *Landscapes3* through the initiatives listed on the right. In response to current trends, we will put extra emphasis on a few initiatives. Because of growth pressure, we will redouble our preservation activities with efforts like a municipal open space initiative, a village preservation guide, and woodlands and tree conservation guides. Because of the current economic uncertainty, we'll help with economic development planning, begin implementing the new ag economic strategic plan, and support a historic site tourism plan. Because of housing cost issues, we'll examine actions the county can take and identify where the best locations for new housing might be. Because of climate change, we'll be preparing a new county trail plan, providing guidance on solar power, and implementing the new *Climate Action Plan*.

Working together, we can help prepare Chester County for whatever planning challenges come our way in 2022 and beyond.

Brian N. O'Leary
 Brian N. O'Leary, AICP
 Executive Director



Major 2022 initiatives

Here are a few major initiatives we'll be pursuing in 2022:

- Municipal open space outreach
- Village preservation guide
- Woodland and tree conservation and preservation
- Economic development planning
- Ag economic strategic plan implementation
- Historic tourism plan support
- County workforce housing analysis
- Accessible housing locations guide
- County-wide trail master plan
- Climate action plan
- Solar power guide and model ordinance
- Clean and sustainable energy support and outreach
- Vision partnership program grants and technical assistance
- Support of 250th Celebration Committee
- Phase two of an updated public transportation plan
- Rural center design guide

Budget

Expenditures	2019	2020	2021
Personnel Services	\$3,046,147	\$3,053,094	\$3,084,212
Materials & Services	\$205,825	\$147,001	\$237,251
Contributions, Grants, Subsidies	\$174,669	\$170,910	\$170,911
TOTAL	\$3,426,641	\$3,371,005	\$3,492,374

Revenues	2019	2020	2021
Federal	\$317,115	\$246,498	\$251,946
State	\$5,000	\$0	\$5,000
Local	\$129,754	\$329,224	\$48,701
Subdivision/Land Review Fees	\$187,980	\$182,450	\$211,770
Miscellaneous	\$865	\$108	\$11,822
TOTAL	\$640,713	\$758,279	\$529,238

* 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

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Community Planning Director
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 Kevin Myers, *Urban Planner*
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 Jeannine Speirs, *Community Planner*

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Environment & Infrastructure Director
 Brian Donovan, AICP, *Transportation Planner*
 Rachael Griffith, RLA, AICP
Trails and Open Space Planner
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 Carolyn Conwell, AICP, *Environmental Planner*
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 Ian Mix, *Graphics Specialist*
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* Former staff