

THE 2002 CHESTER COUNTY COUNTRYSIDE EXCHANGE
A PROGRAM OF GLYNWOOD CENTER
Sponsored by the Chester County 2020 Trust

Phoenixville Region, Pennsylvania

The Countryside Exchange brings together international teams of volunteer professionals to work with communities on their most important issues. Those issues usually center on conservation and economic development. The Exchange is a catalyst. It uses a visit by an objective team of “outsiders” to identify a wide range of potential solutions, create diverse coalitions, spur the emergence of new leaders and inspire collaborative action. The community also benefits from new ideas, networks and information that it can use to help shape its future.

Since 1987, 100 communities in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Japan have hosted a Countryside Exchange. Over 750 professionals from England, Scotland, Wales, the United States, Canada, Japan, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Australia have participated as team members.

How Does the Exchange Work?

Communities are selected to participate in the Countryside Exchange through a competitive application process. Applications are evaluated based on such criteria as the depth of interest within the community, existing leadership and leadership skills and the strength and diversity of community members supporting the application. Applicants must also demonstrate flexibility, a willingness to learn new skills and processes and show commitment to working as a team and to developing a community based implementation strategy after the Exchange.

Once a community is selected, a Local Organizing Committee (LOC) is formed. The LOC is crucial to the success of the Exchange and must include a representative cross section of the community - business owners, farmers, developers, elected officials, conservationists and “average citizens.” The LOC identifies and refines the questions that the Exchange team will address. It also plans the Exchange week itinerary, takes care of logistics and handles publicity. After the Exchange, the LOC helps initiate implementation efforts.

The Exchange Team

Glynwood Center draws upon its extensive international network to form teams consisting of six to eight experienced professionals. Each team is international and interdisciplinary in its makeup. Team members are selected by matching a candidate’s expertise with the issues identified by the community. In order to ensure that teams are objective, participants must have had no previous connection to the host community.

The team spends a very intense week in the community. A full itinerary of issue oriented roundtables, presentations, tours, panel discussions and community gatherings gives the team an opportunity to speak with many residents, officials and organizations. The week culminates with the team presenting

its observations and ideas at a public forum. A summary report is also published to assist the community with implementation.

Implementation

After the Exchange week, the team report is distributed throughout the community as a first step toward developing an implementation strategy. Most Exchange reports include some forty recommendations and determining priorities is one of the most important tasks facing the community. Glynwood Center and the Chester County 2020 Trust will continue to provide support during this period and offer a training workshop in early 2003 to help the communities develop a strategic action plan for implementation. Glynwood maintains contact with its “Family of Exchange Communities” through its web site, www.glynwood.org, Update Newsletter, database and ongoing personal contact.

The Results

Just as communities vary, so do the results of each Exchange. Some team recommendations may be broad, others very specific. Some may be small-scale projects that can be implemented quickly. Others may be larger, requiring a policy change, a significant philosophical shift – and time. In some cases, the Exchange may trigger a change that the community widely acknowledged was needed. The report may articulate an issue that leads to community discussion and an alternate solution. What most Exchange communities share in common is that the new and strengthened partnerships, expanded leadership base and collaborative action cultivated through the Exchange pay dividends long into the future.

THE EXCHANGE IN THE PHOENIXVILLE REGION, PENNSYLVANIA

COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION

The Phoenixville Region is composed of the Borough of Phoenixville and the Townships of Charlestown, East Pikeland, East Vincent, Schuylkill, and West Vincent. The region covers approximately 70 square miles in northeastern Chester County and is situated along the Schuylkill River. Within the Schuylkill River watershed, the municipalities cover portions of the sub-basins of the French Creek, Pickering Creek, Stony Run, and Valley Creek. The total population for this area was 41,013 in 2000.

Pennsylvania Routes 23, 29, 100, 113, 401 and 724 traverse the region and connect to the Pennsylvania Turnpike. U.S. Routes 202 and 422 provide access to the major development centers of King of Prussia, Great Valley and Exton. This proximity creates increased demands for new housing, retail and employments centers, and related infrastructure, on each of the region's rural municipalities. At the same time, the region's urban areas, which already contain the infrastructure, are experiencing declines in population and their economic base.

Comprised of an industrial based urban area (Phoenixville Borough) and five rural/suburban municipalities, the Phoenixville Region is faced with both urban revitalization and sprawling development issues. While Phoenixville has struggled with the reduction in their economic base, as industrial and commercial uses have closed or migrated to other areas, the surrounding rural areas have faced intense development pressure that has resulted in the loss of agricultural lands, open space, and natural resources. From 1990 to 2000, Phoenixville experienced a population decline of 2 percent, while the population of the surrounding five Townships increased 28 percent. Based on the Chester County 1996-2020 Comprehensive Plan Policy Element "Landscapes", if current land use trends continue, the amount of developed land will increase 107% in the Owen J. Roberts School District (of which East Vincent and West Vincent Townships are members), 48% in the Great Valley School District (Charlestown Township), and 43% in the Phoenixville School District (Phoenixville Borough, East Pikeland and Schuylkill Townships).

The region was formed as a result of discussions initiated by West Vincent Township starting in November, 2000 in an attempt to organize support for regional planning under recently enacted amendments to the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (Acts 67 and 68). The current composition of the Phoenixville Region was determined by member interest and the desire of these municipalities to take advantage of Acts 67 and 68 by focusing regional planning on the urban center of Phoenixville. An Intergovernmental Cooperation Planning Agreement and ordinance in accordance with the Intergovernmental Cooperation Act and Municipalities Planning Code have been prepared and are currently being advertised for adoption by the individual municipalities in the Region.

Following the final execution of the Intergovernmental Cooperation Planning the municipalities will be contract with a consultant to develop a regional comprehensive plan. The identification of the region's historical, cultural, scenic and natural resources; farms and agricultural areas; appropriate development patterns; existing and potential economic stimuli; and regional initiatives will be accomplished during this regional planning process.

Upon completion of this regional plan, it is anticipated that the members will enter into a Cooperative Implementation Agreement in accordance with the Municipalities Planning Code to amend their individual zoning ordinances for consistency with the regional comprehensive plan.

COMMUNITY ISSUES

- 1. How can the economic base of the region's urban area, Phoenixville Borough, be revived and sustained; while also improving the economic viability and character of the area's existing highway commercial strip development?**
 - a. What type and mix of retail and services uses are needed to help revitalize the downtown and create a regional economic center?
 - b. How can employment opportunities be increased in the Borough?
 - c. How can the existing suburban shopping areas be improved and maintained while limiting the competition with downtown businesses?

- 2. How can the economic viability of agriculture in our region be strengthened?**
 - a. How can a dialogue be developed between farmers and residential homeowners to reinforce the value and necessity of agriculture and its practices?
 - b. How can cooperation among farmers be improved?
 - c. How can the support and preservation of agriculture be improved through the local planning and regulatory process?

- 3. How can a community identity be developed in a diverse and dynamic area such as the Phoenixville Region to maximize the benefits of regional planning?**
 - a. How can new residential development and sustainable communities be located and designed so as to avoid the sense of isolation and the lack of integration into the community?
 - b. What ownership, legal, and maintenance options are most effective in providing public access to common open space in cluster developments?

A SAMPLE ITINERARY:

THREE DAYS FROM THE PHOENIXVILLE EXCHANGE

Friday, October 18

Tour of Phoenixville's Main Street

Tour Old "Warehouse District"

Business Forum

Developing Cultural Centers Discussion

Sunday, October 20

Meeting with the Equestrian Community

Tour of a Farm in Transition

Meet the Farmers for a Potluck and Pig Roast

Land Trust and Municipal Efforts to Support Agriculture

Monday, October 21

Tour of Two Threatened Farms in Region
Local Community Supported Agriculture Meeting
Development Pressures Facing the Region Discussion
Forum on Sustainable Farming

THE PHOENIXVILLE REGION EXCHANGE TEAM

Ross Haddow has been a professional farm manager for nineteen years. He currently manages a large (4,200 acres) estate in Eastern England (Norfolk) consisting of mixed arable, horticulture and livestock farming, forestry, conservation, set-aside and gravel extraction, plus some 50 properties including the village pub. There is a further 1,800 acres of contract and share farming.

Ross is an active member of a range of area and regional farming bodies including the National Farmers' Union (NFU) (Vice Chairman, Norfolk Branch); a number of specialist NFU sub-committees; the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group; the Mid-Norfolk Farmers Buying Group; the Norfolk and Waveney Machinery Ring; Training Group, grain and potato growers co-operatives, and the Norfolk Farm and Education Link Committee.

Eve Holberg is a senior economic planner with Peter J. Smith & Company, Inc., a Buffalo, N.Y. and Fort Erie, Ontario-based urban planning and landscape architecture firm. She works with municipal clients on market and feasibility analyses, economic development, tourism and downtown revitalization strategies. Prior to joining the firm, Eve worked in downtown development. She served as director of downtown development in Watertown, NY for three years and was also a member of the professional staff of the Rochester Downtown Development Corporation. Even has a background in print journalism and worked for daily and weekly newspapers in N.Y. and Vermont. She is a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners.

Bryan McGrath is a professional planner with twelve years of experience in rural areas of southern Scotland. He currently works within the Economic Development Team, concentrating on policy and strategy work. His current focus is on the development of innovative integrated rural development strategies; agricultural diversification; area regeneration, and on methodologies for broadening the involvement of communities, and particularly the lay public, in community development.

Bryan works closely with other organizations in partnership projects to develop new initiatives: recently for example the development of a “brand” and associated marketing strategy for the Scottish Borders. He also manages the development of a multi-language website to support the Borders’ textiles industry.

Henry Oliver is the Head of Planning and Local Government for the Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE), which has been the leading campaigning body in defence of rural England against the encroachment of urban and industrial sprawl and uncontrolled housing development. It exists to promote the beauty, tranquillity and diversity of the English countryside and to work for the more sustainable use of land and other natural resources in town and country. Henry is a professional planner, a member of the Royal Town Planning Institute, and holds a master’s degree in Civic Design. He has worked as a planner for local authorities in a county town, a metropolitan borough on the fringe of a major conurbation and a remote group of islands north of Scotland.

With the CPRE, Henry is responsible for a campaign on public participation in the planning system; where and how housing development should be provided; urban density and regeneration; and

improved development planning procedures. He worked with the responsible Government department, a major social development foundation and a national regeneration agency to produce and disseminate a joint report, *Sustainable Urban Extensions*, and subsequently took a lead role in promoting an approach to greenfield development advocated by the Report that requires intensive involvement by the widest possible range of participants.

Wyn Roberts is the Area Development Manager for the Welsh Development Agency (WDA), the agency responsible for encouraging and supporting new enterprises and economic regeneration in urban and rural areas throughout Wales. Wyn began his career as a geologist, studying and working in the U.K. and Canada before qualifying as a Chartered Town Planner. With the WDA, he now manages the forward planning, delivery and financial expenditure for Area Development projects within the County of Denbighshire in North Wales. His responsibilities include coordinating the Agency's activities in a rural area in which the agriculture is largely dairy farming. This role involves adopting a strategic approach to working in partnership with the public, private and voluntary sectors.

Wyn also contributes specialist knowledge and advice within the Area Development Team, the North Division and nationally across the whole Agency. Recently he has been involved in the establishment of the innovative Small Towns and Village Enterprise initiative and he has a leading role in developing transport policies within the North Division.

Jacques Roumen is a consultant with Buitenkans, a private firm in the Netherlands that works with farmers and others in rural areas on issues including agricultural diversification (solar power), empowerment of young farmers and rural change. He is often called upon to assist farmers who are suffering from "burn-out" and considering transitioning from agriculture to other forms of employment. He specializes in coaching and consensus building.

Shawna Stonehouse is an Organizational Development Specialist with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food where she works with field staff and rural communities to organize grass-roots economic development initiatives. Recently, Shawna developed a Downtown Revitalization resource for Ontario communities and is currently developing web-based resources for community readiness, project management and evaluation. She has extensive international experience and served as Managing Director for Investment Focus Ltd., Asia where she designed training courses in economic development for emerging markets: China, Vietnam, India and the Mekong region. Shawna is also very active in her community where she is working on reviving a defunct mall and reworking plans for a new library to make it more community and youth friendly.

Philip Street is Director of Planning at the New York State Tug Hill Commission, a state agency that provides planning services, economic and community development assistance and other types of technical assistance to 62 rural town and village governments and five multi-community councils of governments in the upstate New York area between Lake Ontario and the Adirondacks. Philip is responsible for the planning services program which includes assisting communities with the preparation of comprehensive plans and development regulations, assistance with project reviews, and the training of local officials. Philip has a Masters of Regional Planning from Pennsylvania State University, and has completed his Masters of Public Administration course work at Pennsylvania State's Institute of Public Administration. He is a charter member of the American Institute of Certified Planners.

An important aspect of the NYS Tug Hill Commission program is encouraging communities to work cooperatively on planning and community development issues. Philip has assisted in the development of numerous multi-community planning and regulatory programs involving various combinations of multi-

town or town/village arrangements. Philip also developed the planning and administrative procedures for the implementation of the Tug Hill Reserve Act by the Cooperative Tug Hill Council, a 15-town council of governments in the core of Tug Hill, an effort to protect special areas from development by state and local government agencies.

EXCHANGE TEAM REPORT

ISSUE ONE: ECONOMIC REVITALIZATION OF PHOENIXVILLE REGION

BUSINESS RETENTION, EXPANSION AND RECRUITMENT OBSERVATIONS:

The Borough's urban area is a pleasant place in which to live and work. Despite the gradual loss of jobs in the heavy industry sector since the 1950's, the Borough has not lost its quality of life – the streets are clean, and well-maintained and the housing stock is generally in good order with most residents taking pride in their properties.

Due to the loss of industry in the Region, the Team believes the Borough's economic base is weak. A Region's economic base is measured by the amount of goods and services that it exports, as exports are regarded as the engine of economic growth. As most residents do not work within the Region, its future is vulnerable to the decisions of employers over which it has no jurisdiction. For instance, if a major employer in King of Prussia moved its operations because it was unhappy with taxation or available labor force in Montgomery County, its employees who live in the Phoenixville region would move, leaving behind empty homes and possibly affecting property values. However, if that employer were in the Phoenixville area, local government would be able to work with it to find a solution and keep the employees in the area.

Phoenixville borough does not have a sufficient range of employment opportunities for its residents. The mean travel to work time is twenty-seven minutes for residents, which suggests that the majority of workers commute to other townships within and beyond the study region for employment. Business development and job creation are key factors in developing healthy and vibrant communities. Depending on the community's economy, anywhere from 40 to 90% of new jobs come from existing businesses. However, given the comparative weak economic base of the Region, new businesses will need to be recruited to the area to build the economic base and provide the basis for future growth.

The key to the area's long-term economic prosperity and environmental sustainability will depend on the ability of the Region to retain and further encourage mixed employment uses. Like a typical Rust Belt downtown, Phoenixville's fortunes are linked to the industrial base of the community. Now that the industrial base has dispersed, new sources of economic activity need to be developed.

The community has worked hard to stabilize and restore the Phoenix Iron Company Foundry. The community raised more than \$1 million through public and private partnerships to complete the project to date. The building is a proud symbol for Phoenixville, for the cultural heritage it represents and for the community pride and spirit that has saved the building.

A visitor's center with interpretive displays is planned for the front 3,000 square feet of the 13,500-square-foot building. A use for the balance of the building has yet to be determined. The building could

accommodate up to roughly 20,000 square feet of space with the addition of two upper levels in the center section and one on each of the wings.

It is the Team's observation that so far the Foundry restoration project has showed great promise, even without a permanent paying tenant. The last existing timbered crane in the US is saved intact in the Foundry, as are the blast furnaces. A selection of Phoenix columns will be attractively placed on the plaza outside the Foundry building.

The Team understands that it is critical that funding be raised to maintain the Foundry structure and that at least six (possibly up to as many as 15) full-time jobs need to be developed to satisfy the job-generation requirements of the historic preservation grant from the National Park Service that helped to save the structure.

The Delta Organization has worked diligently to develop a workable Master Plan for the 123-acre French Creek Center. Office, residential, open space and commercial opportunities are all identified within this plan. This exciting project can help to develop jobs and economic opportunity within the Borough and beyond. The potential development of a light rail system could be an exciting addition to the Center.

The Team understands that Borough Council has approved the French Creek Center Master Plan and that the approval process involved a lengthy negotiation. The developer and Council are to be congratulated for their commitment to the project. The Team is confident that as the revitalization of Phoenixville unfolds, additional opportunities will present themselves, particularly in the tourism and visitor industry. This project has taken years to come to the present point and while local stakeholders are understandably anxious to see it progress, its size dictates that it should move forward in phases only as market conditions dictate.

There is no economic development strategy in place for the Borough or the region. The Team perceives this as a weakness. An economic development strategy would help the borough plan and pursue the development it wants, rather than simply reacting against the development it would prefer to block.

BUSINESS RETENTION, EXPANSION AND RECRUITMENT RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Form a joint economic development committee with representative membership from all 6 municipalities. It should be structured in a similar fashion to the joint planning committee. The committee's first task should be to develop a strategic economic development plan for the region. There should also be a liaison sub-committee comprised of members from the planning and economic development committees that would assure consistency between the plans. For the purposes of the strategic economic development plan, the committee should seek to:
 - Collect and track employment data from all employers in the region;
 - Survey local businesses to collect economic data and to identify any "red flag" issues that may be restricting business growth in the area, or threatening the continued presence of employers in the region;
 - Develop a method of response to "red flag" issues that threaten any imminent loss of employment;
 - Conduct an analysis of local businesses to spot strengths and opportunities for strategic growth in key sectors. Use techniques such as location quotient and shift share analysis to identify leading and lagging sectors. A location quotient analysis would compare

Phoenixville Region employment data to Pennsylvania (or Chester County) to determine how the local economy is comprised. Shift share analysis would examine the changes in the economy over time to determine the leading, lagging and emerging sectors within the local economy;

- Conduct a study to determine where residents are spending their income and consider how to improve the retail mix in the Region;
- Attract companies in the sectors identified as current or emerging strengths:
 - Establish a specific area or industrial park to accommodate targeted companies;
 - Streamline approval processes;
 - Create strategic alliances with local training institutions to meet the labour needs of targeted industries;
 - Hold regular sector luncheons and/or meetings to provide informal opportunities for networking and discussion between businesses and local officials;
 - Identify key expenditure patterns to determine the ideal complementary mix of retailers in the downtown and fringe areas.
- Ensure that Phoenixville retains control of the use of the Foundry building. Allowing the Foundry to pass out of community control would preclude its future use as a community resource and center for the arts, culture and family activities.
 - PAEDCO needs to create additional partnerships with both the public and private sector to increase its funding options, stimulate discussion, conduct further research and plan the Foundry's future use;
 - Hold additional meetings with the National Park Service and representatives of the Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office to consider possible interpretive ideas, to strategize and to keep them informed of proposals as they emerge. One possible idea to create is a dramatic interpretive display that gives visitors a tangible taste of the heat, light, noise and smells associated with a working foundry;
 - Ensure that the Foundry has a strong connection to the French Creek and French Creek Trail system. Bike racks, benches and other amenities should be included; and
 - Research the viability of developing one central museum and interpretive center for the history of the local area, with the Foundry as a possible site location. A top quality local history museum focusing on children and families within a 50-mile primary market area could prove to be catalytic for Phoenixville. Such a resource will succeed only if it offers something unanticipated and available in no other place. With the public-private support of the museum, it could increase the viability of the Foundry.
- The Developer of the French Creek Center and the Borough Council should resolve to maintain flexibility in the Center's plan throughout the remainder of the process so as not to miss significant additional development opportunities, including:
 - Adding a themed restaurant which could incorporate a brew pub, but which must be family friendly;
 - Providing accommodations – Phoenixville has no hotel of note; and
 - Developing a conference center.
 - The project's proximity to French Creek is one of the Master Plan's potential strong points. Opportunities to reinforce this strength should be seized. They might include:
 - Development of a public festival area;
 - Dramatic lighting of the new Gay Street Bridge;

- Placement of residential development next to French Creek (closer proximity to downtown) and provision for multiple use throughout, including the area designated for office development to maximise activity in the downtown; and
 - Development of semi-permanent market sheds for the Farmers Market at Main Street and French Creek. These structures can be moved or demolished as the development pattern dictates – or permanently established if the market flourishes.
- Make sure that all emerging economic development initiatives are consistent with the Region’s plan. Such initiatives should include business retention, recruitment and expansion, downtown revitalization and tourism development.

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION OBSERVATIONS:

While the extent of the downtown area is relatively large, the number and mix of operating businesses is disproportionately small to the Borough’s population base. The vision for the downtown revitalization program is to establish and portray Phoenixville as a regional magnet for shopping, arts, culture and entertainment. There is some residential stock in the downtown core, but the commercial office space is modest, mainly located off the two main arteries (Main and Bridge), accommodating mostly smaller commercial enterprises.

Nevertheless, Phoenixville’s downtown has a definite charm, with a number of small independent retail outlets. This charm contrasts to the blander “Anytown, Anywhere America” feel of the outlying suburban commercial strip developments. However, the downtown retail economy appears to be fragile and if current shopping trends continue, its long-term future as a zone of any significant retail activity will be under severe threat. There are a number of vacant properties, some of which are unkempt. Such properties tend to discourage new businesses from establishing in or relocating to the downtown area.

The Borough is fortunate to have a number of ongoing private and/or publicly sponsored initiatives. These include programs to address some of the problems within Phoenixville’s urban core such as the Main Street program, the Anchor Building Program and the Community Revitalization program.

The area also benefits from a wealth of enthusiastic volunteers who are involved in a range of activities from the Phoenixville Historical Society to those who have worked hard and given their time to be involved in PAEDCO (Phoenixville Area Economic Development Corporation). To date, the organization has been successful in securing sufficient grant aid to restore the exterior of the Phoenix Foundry in the town center.

Like most downtown areas of its type, Phoenixville does not have major retailers or national chain stores. A few retailers have been in the area for many years and are downtown boosters, but the sector needs to be strengthened if it is to survive and prosper.

The majority of Borough residents to whom the Team spoke, believe that the Borough is beginning to experience an upward trend in its economic fortune and are positive about its future. After years of decline, reducing population, retail shrinkage and lack of commercial investment, the last few years have seen new investment within the urban center and attracted people back to the area.

Downtown is a participant in the national Main Street Program, and the local program is funded through a public/private partnership between the State of Pennsylvania and a local foundation. The partnership was founded in 2000 and will run through 2005.

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Harness the strength of volunteer efforts to promote, with the Main Street program. – For example:
 - Inform, educate and celebrate the Borough’s industrial heritage through educational events and heritage days – excellent ways to get people into the downtown area to spend and contribute to strengthening the economy;
 - Organise an event to celebrate the diversity of regional food production such as a “Taste of Phoenixville” in partnership with the local restaurants and Community Supported Agriculture schemes;
 - Expand the “Blob” festival – while this is a niche event, it could contribute towards the efforts being undertaken to refurbish and revitalise the Colonial Theatre, as well as bringing in further tourist dollars; and
 - Make a downtown site (e.g. the local history museum/or new Foundry building) into the administrative center for local Revolutionary War interpretation of the Phoenixville Region, including in-town walking and self-guided driving tours linking to the Valley Forge Historic Park.
- The Main Street program should be expanded to include the entire core downtown area (including any proposed new retail areas). This will ensure an adequate area from which membership can be drawn and a financial base created for any future downtown association or business improvement area to implement downtown development projects;
- Brand the program “The Phoenix Arises” which can be used as a rallying cry for the Region;
- Explore developing a Keystone Opportunity Zone (a state sponsored economic incentive area) within Phoenixville;
- Develop and fund a micro-enterprise revolving loan program to make below-market loans to retail entrepreneurs to ensure adequate capitalization of new ventures;
- Phoenixville Borough Council should emphasize downtown building and property maintenance code enforcement;
- Develop a detailed market analysis for downtown’s market area in order to identify underserved retail market niches;
- Identify potential retail tenants from existing retail operations in identified niches throughout Chester County and the greater region;
- Create a critical mass of new retail by leveraging a commitment of tenancy to attract other retailers;
- The downtown manager is developing the broad base of support for downtown development. As the sunset year for the program’s funding nears, additional support for continued funding will be necessary to make a seamless transition. Development of a Business Improvement District or other self-funding mechanism is an excellent way to fund the long-term vision for downtown.
- The downtown’s façade improvement program is an excellent service to which property owners seem to be responding. Streetscape improvements are also a priority. Invest in blooming and trailing plants. Attractive landscaping will add immeasurably to the downtown atmosphere.

- Use the new downtown logo in streetscape enhancements and throughout the downtown on ash and trash receptacles, planters, brackets for hanging baskets, benches and other enhancements.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION AND TOURISM OBSERVATIONS:

Tourism and visitor industry development are missed opportunities throughout the Phoenixville Region. The development of the tourism sector in the Phoenixville Region is potentially catalytic. In 1999, tourism in Chester County generated 8,900 direct jobs. Almost 4,500 additional jobs were created through the impact of tourist activity and the multiplier effect of tourism expenditure in the local economy. Overall, this sector accounted for 4.9 percent of employment in the county.

The Phoenixville Region is in the heart of Revolutionary War territory. Valley Forge is nearby and the rolling hills are dotted with beautiful homes from the time of the founding of the nation. Few of the historic homes observed and visited by the Team acknowledged historic significance of any kind, and except for participation in annual historic homes tours, access is limited. In addition, there appeared to be little local knowledge of, or interest, in the area's historical significance.

While downtown Phoenixville has a National Register Historic District, the Team observed little coordinated historic preservation in the surrounding region. Some historic preservation seems to be taking place in the countryside as part of residential development and is taking place at the inclination of the developer and without the supervision of the Pennsylvania SHPO or US Department of the Interior. These sites and houses become in a way a tacit part of the residential subdivision in which they are incorporated. Lacking markers and highway signs, these wonderful structures have become anonymous. Of significance was the fact that the historic Majolica factory was developed without any thought of how to preserve and capitalize on the pottery.

It is the feeling of the Team that the region has squandered a major tourism, historic preservation and economic development opportunity by failing to designate and establish scenic byways; interpret local history through signage, maps and self-guided tour mechanisms; and to provide amenities and services for tourists.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION AND TOURISM RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Develop a strategic plan incorporating scenic, historic preservation and tourism strategies to leverage the tourism currently taking place around Valley Forge and to increase new visitorship to the Region. This is an important component for the Region's economic strategy.
- Inventory historic homes and catalogue their connection to the history of the Country.
- Include strong policies and guidelines in the Comprehensive Plan that address the need for historic designation and preservation;
- Erect historic markers at points of interest including:
 - Revolutionary War sites including the western advance of the British troops during the Revolutionary War;
 - The Underground Railroad; and

- Historic farms and homes that contribute to the beauty of the landscape.
- Develop self-guided tours including printed brochures, CDs and cassettes.
- Develop school curricula that highlight local history and include this as part of an American history course.

“FRINGE” DEVELOPMENT OBSERVATIONS:

Phoenixville is an attractive, relatively dense urban settlement with a charming historic downtown. The fringe areas of Phoenixville serve as the region’s center for goods and services. Some fringe areas of Phoenixville feature dispersed, low-density commercial areas that are unattractive and somewhat marginal.

The focus for revitalizing the fringe areas should be on establishing “hard” edges, and attractive shopping experiences that draw shoppers and visitors into the core. Downtown merchants cannot compete with the “big box” retailers outside of the core. They can, however, provide complementary goods and services, extraordinary customer service and information. The key to ensuring success of both areas is for each area to acknowledge and become informed on the other.

“FRINGE” DEVELOPMENT OBSERVATIONS:

- Establish intentional gateways with sufficient themed signage.
- Include specific reference to “Downtown” on directional signage.
- Provide informational kiosks in suburban shopping areas to publicize downtown shopping and events.
- Educate personnel in outlying retail establishments about the goods and services available downtown so that they can refer shoppers.
- Include the fringe establishments in downtown and chamber networking events.
- Vigorously enforce zoning, property maintenance and building code ordinances.
- Ensure that incentives are available for small start-up operations are focused on the downtown and are adequately publicized.

ISSUE TWO: IMPROVING THE ECONOMIC VIABILITY OF AGRICULTURE

OBSERVATIONS:

Chester County is the second largest farming county in Pennsylvania. Today there are about 1,700 farms, although 10 years ago there were over 2,000 farms. The downward trend in the number of

farms will continue in the future. However, it should be noted that the number of farms is not reducing because of an amalgamation of smaller units, as is the trend elsewhere in agriculture. Instead, it is the result of the pressure for development in the suburban areas.

Agriculture today is a global business that is dominated by large multi-national firms and large producers. The global markets are heavily influenced by European Union and U.S. Federal Government commodity price interventions. These interventions help support farmers and also keep food prices low and stable in the western world. However, they also distort world markets and favor large scale, intensive production.

The economic and market conditions within which farmers operate would be challenging for any business. Local farms have some of the highest fixed costs in the country, particularly for land and labor, further limiting their economic viability. The costs of their inputs have been rising year after year; however, the crop prices that are paid have been flat or declining for more than 30 years. Many farms are servicing large debts, experiencing stagnant or falling farm incomes and are unlikely to see any rise in farm commodity prices in the long term. This is the reality of farming in the U.K. and Europe just as much as here in the U.S.A.

The land in Chester County is extremely rich, productive farmland. Much of the land in the eastern parts of the County has now been developed – an irreversible loss of an important natural resource. Agriculture provides very few direct and indirect jobs in the area and anecdotal evidence suggests that it makes only a small contribution to the area's Gross Domestic Product. In many ways, farmers can be seen as countryside managers with an important role in protecting the local landscape.

Farmers in the County are struggling for survival. Some of them have become quite innovative to avoid going out of business. A substantial and uniquely innovative initiative is the CSA (Community Supported Agriculture), which is attractive to an increasing section of environmentally aware urban oriented people. The Team met several successful CSA vegetable farmers, but only one that is rooted in a traditional dairy farm. There are also successful local diversification schemes including hay rides, home-selling, local restaurant, and farmers market. Consumers and farmers meet each other in the equestrian field and they work well together. Working for their common interest binds them closely.

There is a relatively small group of farmers in the region; approximately 125 farms in a region with 40,000 residents. Most of the farms in the area are small (100 acres or less) and this has a direct impact on their viability under current market conditions. There is little interest in the new generation to be a farmer. There are enough jobs available for the new generation without farming.

American farmers are traditionally highly independent and locally focused. This is exaggerated in the study area by the isolation caused by extensive urbanization and development. These farmers have little contact with neighboring farmers and very limited access to new advanced technology, which results in poor near market awareness and a feeling of isolation.

We saw no evidence of a farmers' union or lobby group. The rapid development in the area and the high turnover of the population will compound existing problems. There is a need for representation at all levels – local, county, and state.

All farmers spoke of the static or declining prices for their commodity products (milk, maize, etc.) Most farmers are close to realizing negative returns, with increasing overdrafts, and suffering from a particularly dry year in 2002. Farmers seem very reluctant to consider other production or market

opportunities. However, the large, wealthy, local population offers many and diverse exciting new opportunities, as seen at the Milky Way Farm.

Farmers appeared to be buying independently, making little use of economy of scale or planned purchasing. Farmers also appeared to be selling independently, leaving themselves at a disadvantage in the market.

The rapid development in the study area is leading to an increasing demand for public access to the rural environment. This presents opportunities (tourism) and threats (nuisance complaints, damage). In order to support agriculture in the Phoenixville Region, there is a need to ensure that there is actually some land available for agricultural activity. There are a number of tools available to the municipalities to protect land for agricultural use.

Chester County has one of the best farm land preservation programs in the state with approximately 75,000 acres of land under permanent easement. Agricultural easements have been used effectively in the study area to protect agricultural land from development. These easements currently cover a small proportion of the agricultural land area. Securing easements relies on landowners being willing to restrict the future use, and also future value, of their properties. There are a number of programs that operate in the County to encourage and fund agricultural easements. These are supported by the County and municipalities, and a variety of not-for-profit organizations. Demand for agricultural easement is strong in some areas. There has been some experience of farms on eased land going out of business and also changing ownership. Monitoring and enforcing easements is likely to become a more important, and time consuming activity, in the future as more property changes hands.

If areas of farmland can be protected they become ‘green lungs’ in the area as it becomes more built up. It is beneficial for the preserved land to continue to be farmed, rather than simply left as open space or worse, becoming a manicured lawn.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Develop a rural development strategy/regional land use plan for Northern Chester County. The strategy would pull together policies and ideas from existing documents to provide a more coherent, coordinated approach to development in the Region. It should be produced on a partnership basis with public agencies, municipalities and not for profit organizations involved in its development. Local farmers, residents and other interested organizations should be involved in the process of developing the strategy – so that its implementation will be more effective. In this strategy, agriculture is not more or less important than other elements of rural development. Agriculture concerns maybe only 100 families in the study area. This sector is, however, facing major challenges and will need external support and assistance. For that reason it is important to avoid a simple “agriculture only” strategy. The basis of the Rural Development Strategy must be an entrepreneurship oriented philosophy. This strategy needs a steering committee with the right people (decision makers, budget holders and visionaries) from all sectors of the Rural Community. For more information see Appendix 1 - description of the Dutch method “Wide Mind Entrepreneurship”.
- Create an Identity for the region. Aspects of the identity may include:
 - A brand for regional products (like Parma ham in Italy) – perhaps “The Phoenix Arises”;

- Promote local products to consumers at a variety of venues: supermarkets, farmers markets, farm stands. Actively promote the region's brand through the media.
- Include the identity as part of the Rural Development strategy.
- Widen the CSA concept:
 - Exchange ideas / co-operation between CSA farmers and develop a common quality system;
 - Enlarge package of food products;
 - Widen education activities for young people; and
 - Include horse riding as part of the CSA package.
- Introduce and educate residents about the value of farmland by promoting events such as:
 - Pop music festival;
 - Art in the countryside;
 - Summer fairs;
 - Youth camping site/ outdoor training;
 - Theatre festival in open air on farm locations ; and
 - Regional products as a basis for a gastronomy festival.
- Join or form a Farmers Union to raise public awareness and provide technical support at all levels.
- There are many ways to promote excellence and best practice among farmers. Some techniques are relatively low cost (Farm Visits) and others will require funding (Consultancy). However, most farmers are hard pressed for time and therefore, many of these initiatives need to be started by a professional who has the trust and confidence of the farming community, is innovative, and excellent in networking/ lobbying. Examples include:

Agricultural school or college
 Demonstration / Open Farm (Leaf)
 Bench Marking Information
 Farmers Club
 Farm Visits
 Independent Consultancy
 Focus Groups
 Levy for R&D and advertising.
 Farm Walks
 Excursions
 Farmer of the Year.

Exchange Visits
 Peer Experience
 Technology
 Animal / Crop Husbandry
 IT
 Machinery / Power
 Competitions
 Celebration of achievement
 Farm competition
 Produce & Livestock Shows
 Diversification of the Year, etc

- Put farmers in touch with market research and highlight examples of successful diversification projects. Farmers will also need access to grant money, business planning, budgeting, and cash flow planning. A low cost loan facility may be needed too. Chester County Economic Development Council is working with the agricultural community, but has only just begun.

- In a market of declining commodity prices, strict cost control is required to maintain a margin. Reducing costs can be implemented by:-

Machinery Sharing – Machinery Rings.	Contract / Share Farming
Buying Groups	Price Sharing
Planned Purchasing	Bench Marking, Price Comp. & Awareness
- Share farming is already practiced in the study area. Models for buying groups and machinery rings exist in the U.K. and again the professional/consultant should help start up these initiatives. Bench marking information can be sought both within the area and from further away.
- Form a collaborative or cooperative marketing relationship with traders who can offer independent professional marketing with good local outlets, as well as options and futures trading, and international market understanding. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) also offers reduced financial risk.
- All farms should prepare and maintain farm biodiversity action plans. Awareness among farmers could be raised by the formation of a Farm & Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) with farmers, government, and environmental groups all represented. The group develops best practice models. In the U.K. there is also an organization called LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming), which has demonstration farms and farmers and promotes integrated farm management. Produce is sold under a LEAF label. Excellence could be promoted by regional awards. Farmers might also put emphasis on the poor environmental practice of developers, residents, and industry.
- Farmers should whole heartedly embrace all potential customers, and engage them in dialogue. This would include equestrianism, walkers, runners, cyclists, hunters, fishermen, and motor sports.
- Local municipalities and not-for-profit organizations should continue to work pro-actively to protect and preserve agriculture land in the Region. There may be opportunities for these organizations to work more closely together. For example, prepare a complete inventory of preserved land across the Region; and produce a Region-wide plan for acquiring farmland easements based on the approach taken by Charlestown Township.
 - Educate landowners and farmers about the various opportunities for agricultural easement and offer assistance in the process, when appropriate.
 - Speed-up decision making on easement applications. Due to the current pace of development significant areas of land are being developed each month.
 - Adopt new ordinances that require a community garden to be established as part of every new development. This would take the place of the current open space which is sterile, under utilized and unattractive in many of the developments visited by the Team.
 - Consider requiring the development of Community Supported Agriculture projects in new developments as a way of making productive use of open space. In instances where the municipality has taken over the open space area, the rent paid by the CSA could be used to buy other parcels of land for open space/recreation uses.

- Begin or continue a productive dialogue with developers in the area. It may be useful to work with the National Association of Home Builders to encourage local developers to adopt best practice in development design. There may be opportunities to work with the Association to develop new models of best practice for development in semi-rural areas.
- Adopt revised ordinances that discourage residential development in important agriculture areas. This action would be strengthened by the adoption of a region-wide approach.

ISSUE THREE: DEVELOPING A REGIONAL IDENTITY

OBSERVATIONS:

The Need for Statutory Reform

Pennsylvania's municipal planning enabling legislation (PMPC) and its system of local government combine to limit the ability to control suburban sprawl effectively. Attempts are being made by several townships to manage growth and maintain a low-density rural open space environment for their residents. The system, however, with no statutory requirements for coherent cross-boundary planning, has led to an exploited and over developed landscape, especially within the Chester County area.

It is clear that the townships are not in control of their destinies and are struggling with the haphazard impacts of land development. State statutes, and the court decisions defining them, undermine the ability of local governments to manage growth. Impediments to effective planning include the lack of concurrency requirements for the provision of municipal infrastructure, regardless of the existence of capital facility plans; the requirement for the provision of all land uses in a municipality regardless of the goals and objectives of the comprehensive plan; and the limited ability of a municipality to control overall density through lot size restrictions. The statutes do not authorize the use of growth boundaries to support density development and contain sprawl. Efforts should be made to amend the PMPC to provide for growth controls in high growth counties, as growth control legislation is neither applicable nor desirable throughout the entire State. Precedent is set for this by the existence of separate enabling legislation for the City of Philadelphia.

The Pennsylvania statutes do not provide for any local tax base sharing between municipalities or school districts. Developers often encourage municipalities to compete for benefits and thus there are often losers when concessions are made during the development negotiation process. Inter-municipal and inter-school district transfer to development right schemes appear to result in fiscal winners and losers. A municipal authority's desire for a higher density residential development is often compromised by the likelihood of subsequent higher taxes as school boards adjust their rates to reflect new population levels. Thus, tax base sharing would be helpful for leveling the playing field and allowing municipalities to share the benefits that can occur through regional land use controls.

The statutes should include provisions and incentives for township mergers and borough annexations. Smaller units of government help people feel that they have more control over their destiny because they know their local representatives, but strategic planning demands larger strategic units to plan for. Reducing the numbers of municipalities through a state wide local government reorganization would need diligent lobbying, over a long term, to effect any change. But success would enable areas of the State to be reconstituted into administrative units that better reflect the realities faced by 21st century planners and managers.

Communication and Cooperation

The most striking observation about the area's regional identity is the contrast between the strong feeling of identity and pride in the area among residents and the stark lack of any coherent force for representing their interests at the regional level. This leads to a situation where decisions that will have seriously detrimental consequences for the region are made with little or no input from the communities most affected. For example, the Atwater office development and associated slip-ramp on I-76 are likely to have damaging effects on the local environment, quality of life and protection of open space through pressure for new housing development and increased traffic on rural roads.

Two elements of collaboration are currently lacking: opportunities for communication and co-operation between municipalities; and a unified voice to promote and speak for the region externally. A number of existing and potential opportunities do not appear to be fully exploited at present. These relate to communication; promotion; communal spaces; and political collaboration.

The regional and local planning process would benefit enormously from recruitment of permanent, full-time qualified planning staff to lead and inform the process.

The team only saw Spring City and Pennhurst at the end of the week. Both represent golden opportunities for revitalization, historic building conservation and regional integration. The absence of a clear vision for both areas, integrated within the Comprehensive Regional Plan must be addressed.

Communications —

- **Television** – The Team understands that Phoenixville's television station reaches 80,000 households. This makes it a marketing and communication tool of considerable potential, both within and beyond the regional partners' boundaries.
- **Newspapers** - The Phoenix newspaper is the only local paper relating entirely to an area within the region. This is a source of potential to be exploited.
- **Township newsletters** – These seek to establish lines of communication with residents. These newsletters rely on the dedication and spare time of supervisors and/or volunteers.
- **Community survey tools** – The Team has seen little if any evidence of the use of survey tools to assess the population's needs and aspirations. The size of the individual areas and of the region as a whole should facilitate open channels of detailed communication, in both directions, between the municipalities and their local businesses and residents. Currently, the only form of dialogue appears to be through the complaints system.

Civic Spaces

Strong community identity requires civic spaces for public expression and development. The region lacks public spaces designed and used in such a way that local and regional identity might be focused and fostered. The only example that the Team saw was Reeves Park in Phoenixville. The Team was told about the benefits that resulted from community events attracting a mixed group of residents from within and outside the Borough.

The redevelopment of Phoenixville does not preclude opportunities to create an internal or external space that could form a new civic focus for the Borough and the wider region. The Foundry restoration plans include a small amount of formal public space and a major extension of the trail network along French Creek. The trail and linear park will play a useful role, but are essentially designed as informal recreational – rather than civic – space. The Team was shown no plan to create a large formal public space; however, the Foundry itself could form a focus for civic activity, but is expected to house commercial uses. Most of the site surrounding the Foundry is earmarked for car parking.

Politics

The cooperative agreement between the municipalities benefits from good objectives and a representative membership (including elected members). The importance of decisions and developments in other areas and at other levels to what happens in the region, leads us to observe that the external identity of the regional arrangement is at least as important (if not more important than) the internal, especially in the long term. The regional grouping needs an identity and voice to influence decisions at neighboring municipality, County and State levels. Quick wins would help to establish support for the new arrangements and provide the confidence to develop them further. Cooperation could usefully encompass not only planning, but also other issues.

While the planning process greatly benefits from lay input, the more expert participants are the more effective they can be. Local politicians and advisors (supervisors and commission members), would benefit from training in planning principles, tools and techniques.

Regional Profile

The region's external identity has the potential to be not only an advocacy tool, but also a means of promoting the identity and profile of the region. The team has observed considerable unexplored potential for developing a regional identity and capitalizing on tourism (especially historical sites), landscape, open space, recreation and food.

Shared Services

Regional planning will bring the opportunity for shared service provision. Shared services may result in economies of scale due to increased purchasing power and elimination of duplication. Transportation planning and road maintenance might be an initial area to explore for shared service agreements. Furthermore, due to the larger jurisdiction of the Region, the hiring of Regional staff such as planner, solicitor and Chief Administrative Officer could be feasible.

Isolated Residential Developments

It appears that residential development patterns historically began as small, scattered agricultural crossroads settlements and isolated residences in the several townships. This development was paralleled by larger neighborhoods of traditional nineteenth century urban design in the company settlement of Phoenixville. The Phoenixville neighborhoods are characterized by small lots on a traditional, highly interconnected street grid with sidewalks. Many of the homes are in "row" or "townhouse" configuration with zero side lot lines and areas of larger homes on lots with relatively small side yard in a compact form. Interspersed among the homes are civic gathering spaces such as the several churches and Reeves Park. These neighborhoods were designed to be highly "walkable" for the employees of the local steel industry.

The post World War II development pattern has been entirely different. Isolated automobile-dependent subdivisions throughout the countryside predominate. These subdivisions are generally single family homes and feature large, often over-designed roads, which lack trees, sidewalks or pedestrian amenities of any type. These developments often incorporate large “cluster” open spaces within or around them. These open spaces are often designed as buffer spaces that isolate the development from neighboring parcels of land and provide small “green” viewsheds. The designated open space in some developments doubles as drainage, which limits its recreational value. Even those subdivisions that incorporate sidewalks provide no place to walk to, as they are far from civic and commercial locations, and do not have pedestrian connections outside the development.

Even in the Borough, recent land development is automobile-oriented, featuring dead-end streets and lacking in pedestrian amenities or connections to civic spaces. Developments on the urban fringe of the Borough neither connect to nor integrate with the grid street pattern of the prior development. Even higher density townhouse developments feature large areas of open spaces around them. The original high-density “walkable” community pattern of the Borough has been truncated, with no apparent intentions of expanding it. This results in the same isolated and disjunctive pattern of land use that is found in the Townships.

There are many planning tools offered by the statutes, and perhaps the transfer of development rights (TDR) zoning tool as authorized under Article VI of the PMPC is the most effective means of locating residential development in the most appropriate areas. This tool shows promising means of both locating development in appropriate locations while simultaneously sharing some of the windfall profits of development with land owners in areas reserved for lower-densities. But, while the TDR tool is useful for directing residential development to desired locations, it does nothing to guarantee that the development is designed in a useful configuration once it is built out. If the design of the development is not properly dealt with, the result will simply be a high-density dysfunctional area in place of a low-density dysfunctional area.

The basic concepts for the design of integrated, livable communities are as follows:

- Development should be based on the neighborhood as the basic unit of development. In larger developments, neighborhoods should be interconnected.
- The size of neighborhoods should be based on the five-minute walk. Employment opportunities and neighborhood goods and services should be available within a five-minute-walk (400 yard radius).
- Secondary units of development should be commercial traffic corridors and districts, and environmentally sensitive areas such as river corridors.
- Development should be mixed use in terms of both a residential/commercial mix, and residences for various incomes.
- The road system should feature high interconnectivity, at a scale which prioritizes the needs of pedestrians and cyclists.
- The character and extent of public spaces should be defined by buildings.
- Civic buildings should command prominent and accessible central sites.

Design standards such as these listed above may be implemented through using the Traditional Neighborhood Development authority as put forth in Article VII-A of the PMPC.

Sustainability

The residential development built in the past 50 years, has been of questionable sustainability – economically, socially and environmentally. Development has been focused of late on supplying housing to middle and upper income residents. Affordable housing for purchase and affordable apartments for rent appear to be in short supply. Many employees in the region are priced out of regional accommodations. This is beginning to create a problem for local business as low cost labor becomes increasingly scarce within the region. Severe enough shortages of affordable labor could result in business losses in the region and the resulting loss of jobs and services.

The social ramifications of the physical development pattern also present sustainability problems. Most new residential development has been in disconnected, inward facing subdivision pods, generally lacking in formal civic or public meeting places and allowing only chance encounters between neighbors. Newer developments have segregated the population into small, isolated sub-communities. These communities often involve home-owners associations that provide little in the way of community services or cohesion. Residents have little contact with township government and appear alienated from any existing social environment in the region. The physical isolation of residents makes social community extremely difficult.

The environmental consequence of recent residential development also presents sustainability challenges. The sheer scale of recent development has serious impacts on groundwater volumes and quality as impervious surface coverage diverts rainwater from groundwater recharge. The decline of the water table can have significant negative consequences as the majority of the development in the region depends on drilled wells for water. This, coupled with several recent droughts has led to significant groundwater depletion in the area. Continued development will only exacerbate this situation.

The energy dependency of this development pattern is also a sustainability issue. Every residential development in the region that was built during the past 50 years depends entirely on cheap gasoline prices because, in order to shop and work, people must travel to locationally segregated commercial and employment centers. Sometimes these distances are quite substantial, even outside of the region entirely. An almost insignificant proportion of the residents have any alternative whatsoever to automobile transport. Should the price of the gasoline dramatically rise, it could cause the value of these developments to decline significantly. Additionally, these developments are quite energy intensive - to mow huge lawns and heat large homes.

Another sustainability issue is loss of animal habitat. The huge loss of open space in recent years has displaced deer, beaver, various birds and innumerable other animals from local habitat. Not only has this resulted in a loss of biodiversity, it has impacted the quality of life for many residents as recreational hunting lands have succumbed to housing tracts.

Providing, Owning and Maintaining Open Space

The team observed a number of approaches to providing, owning and maintaining open space in new developments. Many have incorporated large expanses of open space, which is of questionable value, both inside and on the edges. Clustering, designed to reduce sprawl and maintain the character of northern Chester County, has been used in such a way that it has been ineffective in the reduction of sprawl. Instead, the same area of land has been occupied by development, but part of it has been in the form of significant chunks of manicured lawn. We think “rural landscapes” is a better term than “open space” for defining the asset the community wishes to protect. The broad definition of “open space” in

Living Landscapes (which include lawns and yards) is, in the Team's view, inappropriate for guiding rural landscape protection.

The provision (amount, ownership, maintenance, and access) of open space should be decided on the basis of the use for which it is intended. Where the intention is primarily to reduce the extent of built development (i.e. to minimize sprawl), the extent of the site itself needs to be minimized by concentrating development rights for the site (as well as any Transferred Development Rights) on a portion of the site. The character and use for the remainder should be conserved. In many cases, this will mean retaining a farmland use. This has several advantages:

- Preventing suburbanization of open land;
- Keeping options open for the productive use of open land; and
- Sparing Homeowners' Associations the burden of ownership and responsibility for tracts of open land.

The team was encouraged by the progress made by West Vincent Township in implementing this approach and strongly endorses the Community Plan approach being developed in Charlestown as complementary tools.

Developments should also incorporate open space that functions as a recreational resource for the residents and other users. The use and maintenance of such space will be strongly influenced by its design of the space and surroundings. The team saw numerous examples of developments where open space and parks are an afterthought, not incorporated into the overall design, often making them a peripheral irrelevance. Great efforts need to be made to integrate open space within the design of new development.

The dense network of country roads (including dirt roads) in the area lends itself to low-intensity recreation. One approach, adopted in the U.K., selects networks of quiet roads where there is a flat hierarchy of users (car drivers, horseback riders, cyclists, walkers).

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- It is essential that the municipalities of the Phoenixville Region use their collective voice to lobby for and influence appropriate changes to state legislation. Such reform will give them the tools to more effectively manage the external forces of growth and development that are driving change in the region.
- Prioritize the establishment of an external identity and voice for the regional group. This could be done by appointing a coordinator/manager/spokesman to play an advocacy role for the region, or by establishing an elected regional board to coordinate progress across the six municipalities.
- Hire a permanent, full-time qualified professional planner to spearhead the multi-municipal regional planning project.
- Hire a permanent, full-time, qualified planner for each municipality to lead and oversee planning policy and practice at the local level and give continuity.

- Apply professional design and production standards to Township newsletters to increase their appeal, and produce them on a regular basis.
- Use community survey tools to open up two-way channels of communication between residents, local businesses and the municipalities.
- Appoint a regional coordinator/communicator. Use the local newspaper and television and other media to create an identity for the region, develop its profile and collate and disseminate information among participating municipalities.
- Explore the potential for developing, establishing and promoting a regional identity, perhaps including an identifiable regional brand to apply to landscape, tourism and local foods.
- Pursue the creation of a new civic space through the revitalization program in Phoenixville to provide a public focus for the whole region.
- Persuade Spring City to join the Region as soon as possible.
- Examine areas where shared service provision would be feasible. Road maintenance and transportation planning is suggested as an initial area to pursue.
- As the region creates its regional plan, determine the appropriate locations for higher density development and open space.
- Enact the policy that new residential development may not be developed in isolation, but in the context of the surrounding landscape, community fabric and in concert with the location of civic, commercial, cultural and employment spaces.
- Pursue multi-community zoning that incorporates the TDR tool as a means of locating higher density development in appropriate areas and protecting environmentally sensitive areas, farmland, significant historic landscapes and other open spaces.
- Implement livable development design, taking advantage of the Traditional Neighborhood Development authority in the PMPC. Focus on the pattern of streets and the location of public buildings and civic spaces. Implement these requirements through local zoning and subdivision laws to ensure that future land development is not isolated, but is integrated with a larger pattern of community development.
- The region should include residential units that are affordable to lower income residents in order to prevent the out migration of critical labor resources from the region.
- Residential developments should be designed to be integrated with the community and not to be socially isolated.
- Residential developments should be designed with as little impervious surface as possible relative to the intensity of the development and carefully located so as to ensure groundwater recharge.

- Residential developments should be designed to be less automobile dependent, support pedestrian traffic, connected to public transit when available and integrated with employment and shopping opportunities.
- Residential developments should consume as little animal habitat as possible and recreate destroyed habitat in other areas whenever possible.
- Develop and implement a criteria-based checklist to standardize the form and extent of open space provision in new developments based on the intended use.
- Preventing sprawl for long-term conservation of the rural landscape should be the prime objective of minimizing the footprint of development through clustering and higher densities. Such space should be kept clearly separate, given over to the municipality and for a rural use (e.g. agriculture). The entire region should adopt the approach to open space management that is currently being pursued in West Vincent.
- Design all open space for the use of residents and other occupiers of a development as an integral part of the layout, with reference to principles of security, centrality, flexible use, and through routes.
- Plan and design open space within developments as part of a wider network of recreational space to maximize the cumulative benefits throughout the region.
- Promote and exploit the ecological potential of open space through new zoning ordinances and conditioned development approvals to require the restoration and creation of native vegetation and habitats.
- Develop a plan to protect the recreational use of open space that is adopted and implemented by the region. Opportunities to maintain and extend recreational opportunities (e.g. by opening or rerouting walking/riding/cycling trails) should be fully considered as an integral part of zoning requirements and decisions.
- The official mapping power as provided in the Article IV of PMPC, and now being pursued by Charlestown Township, should be used in conjunction with a comprehensive regional open space plan to prevent the development of strategically important lands prior to subdivision.
- The region should consider approaches to recreational use of rural roads such as the Quiet Lanes approach pioneered in the U.K.

Appendix 1

"WIDE MIND ENTREPRENEURSHIP" - A METHOD FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The willingness to change is a start.

Situation now:

- Agricultural production for low free-market prices
- Consciousness of environmental pollution in an urban region
- Need for open space
- Need for recreation/ leisure-time space

Need for change in mind (awareness) and from that to practice

A challenge for

1. Boards (authorities) / policy and
2. Users of the rural areas (farmers/ people that live in the countryside)

This fundamental change asks for a proper method.

Parts of a method

We built up experience in a method founded on the philosophy of Jung. We translated this method as "Wide Mind Entrepreneurship"

The basis:

1. There must be a well-rooted local group that wishes to change the situation.
2. The members in this group oversee the step from defensive thinking to offensive thinking (they experienced this process themselves).
3. This group believes in the value of public-private co-operation.
4. This public-private co-operation works out a strategy or masterplan and raises funds for stimulating rural people in their process of change.
5. The process of stimulating is done by a local Innovation Assistant and his/her personal coach.
6. The person that dares to take on an initiative stays responsible for the project. He is supported by the Assistant. The first 12 hours of consultation are free.
7. The initiatives are anonymously discussed in the public-private steering group. All initiatives get stimulating advice.
8. As an exception, the Innovation assistant can take initiatives him /herself if backed by his steering group.

What results you can expect?

- Renewal in the public-part of the stimulating group (awareness about what initiatives need "space" in private sector.
- Board members get in touch with that what rural people really want, they learn to listen and to think with positive oriented people.
- Renewal in social sense: Rural people get again into contact with each other and local interest groups
- Renewal in economical sense: market orientated rural businesses get rooted.

This method was worked out in rural Areas in the Netherlands (more information is available)