



TICKET TO TOMORROW

A Kennett Square
Community Conversation
June 12, 2008

*A partnership program of
Chester County 2020 and the
Borough of
Kennett Square*

Community Conversations and Productive Partnerships

Community Conversations are distinctive among Chester County 2020's programs that support effective community cooperation. They are especially helpful in creating understanding among people who may not have found common ground easy to identify. When people of varying backgrounds and experience come together, the results are always interesting; every Community Conversation produces welcome surprises. These bonuses may include a wide range of agreement about "what should be done" as well as recognition of the value of exploring issues that, in one way or another, affect the everyone's daily lives. While Community Conversations are most often held at the municipal level, they can also be regional or involve a single topic such as transportation or housing.

The products of any Conversation are notably related to the current, ten-year review of *Landscapes*, Chester County's nationally recognized comprehensive plan. For all that the preservation programs, municipalities, land trusts and other non-profit entities have accomplished in contributing to the fulfillment of *Landscapes'* open space and farmland preservation goals, critical topics remain that are currently being addressed by the highly diverse *Landscapes2* Steering Committee. Significant policy drafts have been developed around urban center revitalization, affordable homes, infrastructure, transportation, and long-term environmental outcomes – each one relating directly to the issues that the Kennett Borough and regional residents raised for discussion at the Conversation.

No municipality has remained untouched by the region's often dramatic population increases. Since 2000, more than 50,000 new residents have chosen Chester County as their home, considerably ahead of projections. This growth inevitably adds to the financial challenges for municipalities, the county and school districts.

Individual Conversations exhibit certain definite characteristics This one attracted a remarkably well-balanced mix: age groupings that spanned young to elderly; ethnic, cultural, racial, and economic diversity; business, private citizens and government representatives as well. Long time residents lent historical perspective while others were among the relatively new arrivals to the community. Together, they rolled up their collective sleeves and went to work. In reviewing the expressions of trends, goals and recommendations, a pervasive preference for productive action emerged loud and clear.



Historically, the Kennett region has experienced its moments of euphoria and optimism, doubt and contention. A typical small town, no matter how attractive, has its ups and downs, its push-pull moments of large and small power struggles. Stir in an ever-changing multi-cultural landscape, strong Quaker traditions, entrepreneurial ambitions, and this semi-rural region with a small easily defined urban center was comfortable being off the radar screen. The looming but oft-ignored thunderclouds of development pressures were long perceived as being somewhere else. The Borough Council deserves credit for recognizing that as elected officials, their record will be far

stronger for having invited citizens of all ages and backgrounds to share responsibility and apply their knowledge, experience and creativity to preserving the best elements of this community. At the end of the one report included the following statement: “Kennett Square is larger than the body of land it sits on. Let’s broaden our base, grow it with ideas and projects.” This meeting stands as an important first step.

The Borough of Kennett Square has experienced more in the way of Community Conversations, at times under other names, than most communities. In 2002, C 2020’s Chester County Countryside Exchange came to the Kennett Region with the Kennett Area Regional Planning Commission as the support organization. A team of international planning consultant spent an entire, intensive week looking at the region, its challenges and potential. Previously there had been considerable public input at similar meetings focusing on the library and the Kennett Common. Then, in spring 2007, a team of graduate students from Pratt Institute arrived and with CC2020 produced a report titled “Kennett Revisited: A 5-Year Review.” Some of their observations and suggested action items are included in this report under Chester County 2020 Comments. A printable copy of the full report may be requested at www.CC2020.org. As one result of these activities, regional residents are relatively familiar with the format, and certainly at the June 12 event lost no time diving into the process with enthusiasm.

2

No one has all the answers; however, each one of you reading this report may have contributed a small but important piece of the jigsaw puzzle. In dealing with one another respectfully, in not working the issues but looking for common ground, solutions do emerge.

Setting the Scene

CC2020 Consultants Mary Anna Ralph and George Fasic filled the role of facilitators for the Kennett Borough Community Conversation. Several members of Chester County 2020’s Advisory Board served as volunteers supporting the Conversation. Two additional members were participants, regional residents themselves and representing a business and active involvement with Historic Kennett Square. Chester County 2020’s executive director, Nancy Mohr, shared a personal message as a resident of this regional community:

“Similar to you who live and work in the Borough and the surrounding townships, I consider Kennett Square my home town, too. Mutual interest in and support for a healthy sense of community and economic stability are the important investments you make by joining this Conversation. We all struggle with schedules that are full and overflowing but you deserve a “well done” for having set aside the time and energy to be here – to not only identify the issues that must be faced to strengthen the growing sense of community, but more importantly to find solutions that will contribute to Kennett’s bright future – in all its cultural, historical, ethnic and economic diversity. The work you produce will serve as a tangible planning resource. The solutions that surface this evening will be your solutions. Each of us benefits from the amazing resources of expertise, creativity, caring and energy present in the region. This Conversation offers an opportunity to say thank you, to contribute in return.”

Identifying and Rating the Issues

Community Conversations begin with identification of critical issues, the issues that will inform discussion and the search for valid solutions. In this instance, the suggestions were so plentiful that it seemed appropriate to involve the audience in refining them, to combine those that were closely related and did not separate easily; they needed to be addressed in “units.” In reality, few of the revitalization and quality of life issues stand alone. The interrelationships speak to the essence of community that begs for understanding and cooperative action.



The issues were projected on a screen and then transferred from the screen to large sheets of paper. The participants were instructed to indicate the five issues they considered most important by placing colored dots next to their choices. (Placing all the dots on a single issue was not allowed.) With only five dots to spread around, choices were not always easy. When it came down to priorities, 5 closely related, multi-faceted items attracted the largest concentrations of dots. The selection of the top-rated issues doesn't mean the lower scoring issues don't have community importance; they just earn a lower place on the list of “pay attention to this – now.”

The highest ranked issues served as departure points for discussion in each breakout group. Overlap was inevitable for none of these issues exists in a vacuum. The participants were organized into breakout groups of 8-10, pre-assigned to reflect community diversity. They were joined by CC2020 board members and staff and volunteers as observers and sources of information or advice when requested. The format produced thought-provoking ideas as well as interesting anecdotal material.

Breakout discussion revolved around 1) regional & local trends and their potential impacts on these issues, 2) priority values, 3) opportunities to work together, 4) anticipated accomplishments and benefits, 5) potential barriers and how to deal with them, 6) the important players in making good things happen and developing action items to support the solutions.

Top rated issues

- Diverse downtown reflecting citizens' needs, improving business opportunities and reflecting community's needs 40
- Public safety, sidewalks, neighborhood respect, infrastructure, quality of performance 30
- Seek solutions for Post Office/Library issues 23
- Making the most of brownfield development, affordable housing opportunities addressed regionally 17
- Borough-wide parking management, shuttle transportation, residential & downtown 14

The Remaining Issues

- Promote/cultivate community & respect: neighbor to neighbor & at home 13
- Generational interaction – community support for all ages 12
- Affordable family activity opportunities: Publicize existing recreational opportunities 11
- Need for intercultural understanding 9
- Active regional comprehensive planning 7
- How to sustain volunteerism, especially firefighters! 6
- Home improvement support – hands on, financial, educational, incentives 5
- Building/housing code interpretation/enforcement 4

- Environmental/energy efficiency action-global warming-community greening 3
- Equitable immigration solutions 2
- Overcrowded housing-use program resources 2
- Noise pollution (boomboxes) 2
- School district support: priority 1
- Truck traffic 1
- Harness boomer power
- Alternate emergency alarm
- Mushroom house beautification

Regional and Local Trends

The larger, more sprawling townships tend to be more aware of and respond to outside pressures on their quality of life. However, the specific borough focus was very strong in this part of the exercise. In talking about the future of the Borough, even though regional residents were part of the process, the trends are seen as affecting daily life in the urban center.

1. 'Buy local' trends help; transportation costs can hurt; parking issues are important
2. Revitalization site of 25 acres attracting attention for resident services, improved tax base, senior housing and parking. (Partial brownfield.)
3. Environmentally responsible planning. More attention to good options.
4. Regional new construction at low prices.
5. Nearby urban downtowns are successful.
6. Aging population needs appropriate housing.
7. Shortage of affordable workforce housing.
8. More local entertainment/recreation needed. Age & family-oriented.
9. Traffic problems increasing.
10. High gas prices and limited parking; big employers bring a larger share of cars.
11. Increased multi-generational interest in living in borough.
12. Regional development pressures.
13. Changing economy.
14. Revitalization of small town Main Streets.
15. Availability of public transportation - SCOOT and ROVER.
16. Limited transportation choices causing citizens to invent unsafe alternatives, like walking along the railroad tracks to reach the New Garden Shopping Center.

4

Priority Values

Substantial agreement was exhibited among the participants about the importance of priority values that determine the preservation or loss of much that both attracts new residents and makes long-term residents want to remain in the area.

1. Attracting customers to Kennett Square.
2. Improving the tax base with business growth.
3. Increase quality housing.
4. Affordable, accessible housing for workforce and seniors.
5. Keeping the community close and involved with the library; as an anchor and a source of community vitality.
6. Expanded Senior services as more quality housing is created to retain seniors.
7. Better accessibility to parking.
8. Respect for diversity: individual, generational, cultural, economic.
9. Safe sidewalks.
10. Green space.

11. Defining and understanding community's needs.
12. Appropriate leadership that welcomes resident involvement.
13. Increase property values in borough by drawing more visitors to town center.
14. Publicize existing transportation resources; improve sidewalks/access to encourage walking/biking.
15. Recreational opportunities for all generations' needs.
16. Equitable immigration policies
17. Library and Post Office in the Borough
18. Less reliance on the automobile.



The Combined Elements of the Preferred future:

The suggested preferences for the Borough's future tumbled over one another; the list filled quickly. Easy to suggest, but the challenges will lie in the accomplishing. That is why a conversation marks a beginning rather than a conclusion.

1. True community representation on annual borough projects. Get people involved.
2. Expand library to Post Office space and move post office behind library. Perhaps on W. Cypress with senior and affordable housing behind.
3. Create public space by the Borough Hall;
4. Alleviate parking shortage
 - Underground
 - Underground parking – build on top
 - Multi-storey parking
5. Downtown pharmacy
6. Young people – athletic recreation; 20 acres NVF for children's activities, bowling alley, theater, skating rink, and other entertainment/mixed use.
7. Former ShurFine property as 6 acres of mixed use; – open space area, park-like.
8. Efficient use of water supply and treatment and waste disposal.
9. Use of cost effective 'green' building strategies.
10. Library in the borough. Council working with the library to find solutions, hopefully in town.
11. Retail along State Street and Cypress – YMCA to NVF site.
12. Maintain access to government services in downtown area.
13. Reduced property tax for seniors;
14. Integrated police station/court;
15. Motion sensors in alleys.
16. Teenage recreation.
17. Trolley service.
18. Improved communication with legislators, borough council, government agencies.
19. Neighborhood education to assure consensus and financial support.
20. Security: reduce gang activity, publicize positive steps.
21. Keep speed limits to 25 mph.
22. A major Borough project each year, with community partners.
23. Active, sustained sense of community – from which everyone benefits.
24. Good uses for the Alvin Building as a community resource.
25. Kennett more biker friendly. Bike stands, lanes.
26. Improved community life that is inclusive of all residents.
27. Better transportation connections with the rest of the Kennett Region and other communities like West Chester.

Potential accomplishments and benefits

1. People would stay in town; people won't want to move.
2. More jobs.
3. Respect for differences.
4. Controlled traffic.
5. Shopping needs met in downtown.
6. Increased diversity.
7. Less sprawl; less need to drive.
8. Borough improvements benefit business, residents, and tax base.
9. New and old stores, stable tax base, walkable community.
10. Additional well-designed parking will increase flow to businesses and relieve pressure on residential streets
11. Safe, well-maintained streets, bike/walkways will relieve auto-burden
12. Extended commercial area with businesses heavily dependent upon truck deliveries located at the outskirts.
13. Well-planned neighborhoods that will meet community needs, produce tax revenue and provide local attractions with less driving.



Potential barriers

A pervasive need for effective, consistent, open communication forms the background for the barriers. If that option is kept in mind as the basis for moving ahead, a number of the barriers may not develop.

6

1. Resident opposition.
2. Absence of mutual respect.
3. Challenge of getting people involved, and keeping them involved.
4. Lots of ideas but overworked volunteers.
5. Only partial support for borough-wide plan, looking for example, at 'cleanup' as opposed to carefully planned development.
6. Rumors.
7. Assumptions.
8. Too much uninformed input.
9. Bilingual population as an obstacle to consensus.
10. Egos.
11. Unwillingness to change existing structures.
12. Ability to attract grants and other funding.
13. Time required to complete projects.
14. Mixed agendas.
15. Limited vision.
16. Poor communications.
17. Current ordinances and their enforcement.
18. Absence of borough action.
19. Taxpayers' reluctance to support spending.
20. Absentee landlords.
21. Diversity makes it difficult to reach consensus.
22. Ordinances that roadblock rather than support. Inconsistent enforcement.
23. Exclusion instead of inclusion.

Unresolved differences

1. Library uptown/downtown/in town.
2. Understanding the difference between comprehensive plan and infrastructure plan.

3. Parking.
4. Borough Council members need to “carry the torch,” continue work already initiated, not recreate the wheel with each election. Commit to continuity.
5. Negative impact of parking tickets for visitors/customers to Kennett.
6. Red tape that discourages new businesses.
7. Extensive time required by project planning and financing.

Ways to work together:

- Listen to one another.
- Community Conversations.
- Raise awareness of community events.
- Effective communication.
- Sound financial proposals.
- Visionary leadership.
- Provide motivation to believe in and buy into the community vision.
- Hire professionals to listen, respond and guide revitalization.
- Working with government agencies as partners, not adversaries.
- Comprehensive planning.
- Regular community meetings.
- Bilingual bus drivers.
- Publicizing efforts and accomplishments
- Make revitalization “cool.”
- Work closely with State and Congressional representatives.

Suggested action items: what do we want in common?

1. More events like this!
2. Plan for a sustainable urban setting that will benefit the community in perpetuity.
3. Keep Kennett Square a ‘hub’; respect the ‘model’ of the town as it was 60 years ago
4. Obtain agreement on vision. Create a balanced comprehensive plan with professional guidance.
5. Identify quality incentives to retain existing businesses and attract the new ones you want to see in town.
6. Create a comprehensive parking plan that enriches the quality of life in the town center.
7. Create and respect public areas for recreation and commerce
8. More recycling.
9. Attracting younger people as community activists.
10. Help the library grow, make it larger, more accessible.
11. Regular communication to update and include all players.
12. More publicity about the good things happening, the resources that support improved quality of life.
13. Develop neighborhood activities that help neighbors know one another.
14. Support employment of legal immigrants.
15. Develop specific ways for the community to support the police department, as partners.
16. Develop an overall plan to integrate the police station, district court, borough services.
17. Utilize the potential synergy between the library and the Y.
18. Have the Borough accept responsibility for the sidewalks, especially on busy streets.
19. Well-lighted bicycle-walking path to the New Garden Shopping Center.
20. Better signage.
21. Meters marked appropriately (3 hours, 6 hours, “free on weekends”).





22. Take advantage of all available federal and state grants.
23. Move out-of-town cars off neighborhood streets and back to the business district.
24. Publicize SCOOT and ROVER with their schedules in the Kennett Paper.
25. Televisе planning meetings. Better to attend by tv than not at all.
26. One of the groups provided details about a “downtown idea,” suggesting that Historic Kennett Square and Genesis partner as a local commerce development team to create a business co-operative in the

large building at State and Broad Streets. The concept projects an assortment of vendors sharing rental space for varying lengths of time. It would function as a “service court” that might include:

- A CSA pickup in the winter.
- Shoe repair.
- Pet walker/grooming.
- School supplies.
- Hardware and gardening supplies (with advance orders)
- Consignment/thrift store.
- Movie theater.

The project would support Historic Kennett Square’s goal of attracting a variety of businesses; possibly appeal to grantmakers; allow the farmers’ market a presence after the regular growing season (with community garden participation); serve as a gathering place for special functions and entertainment; maintain the lively Buy Local campaign and keep dollars in Kennett. Allied activities could be those at The Garage and the YMCA with opportunities to employ youth, perhaps among others those from the prayerful coffeehouse at the Church of the Advent. Networking with other communities would be encouraged. Obstacles might be the need to be bi-lingual, accessing grants, recruiting minority-owned businesses and those already mentioned over-worked volunteers.

How to get there

- More productive dialogue around planning.
- Enlist the leadership from among those who have experience and want to work with the diverse culture of this community.
- Developers’ initiatives plus incentive & coordination w/Borough plus communication w/residents.
- Incentivize Borough. What does the council have to gain by being proactive?
- Communicate with residents, frequently and with clarity.
- Keep talking!
- Borough: seek out and take advantage of government grants.
- Kennett Square must attract and serve all generations.
- Parking!
- Communication to update and include all players. Emphasize teamwork.
- Safe transportation alternatives.

Important Players

- Everyone who cares about the future of Kennett Square
- Volunteers
- Municipal officials
- Business owners
- Residents
- Investors

- Planners
- Superfund agencies
- Experienced corporate leadership
- Grant writers
- Historic Kennett Square
- Community/block representatives
- Borough Council
- Genesis
- Exelon



Findings Generated by the Conversation

1. Business initiatives seemed to attract more conversation than housing. And yet there was certainly concern about affordable workforce housing and homes for seniors who want to live in the Borough.
2. Taxes were discussed in the context of seniors being forced from their homes or low income people who fixed up their houses and then found their taxes increasing so that they couldn't remain in them. Questions were posed about the possibility of tax abatement to encourage homeowner improvement of existing homes. Only one group stated opposition to additional low income or affordable level home construction.
3. There was substantial mention of retaining the library and post office (at least the retail component) in the borough with plenty of parking.
4. New employment opportunities were considered at a similar level of importance as affordable housing.
5. There was recognition of the need to bring the Latino residents into the broader community. Several groups became more aware of the reality that the Latinos' cultural background does not prepare them to express opinions, or become community participants. Given encouragement, they will eventually feel comfortable as active contributors to the quality of life in the Borough.
6. The suggestion for a steadily running Longwood Village to New Garden Shopping Center trolley showed great appeal. The challenge is the funding. Need for creative ideas, public-private partnerships.
7. There is significant interest in maintaining a multi-generational community where the interaction enriches all.
8. The Community Conversation demonstrated the benefits of meeting new people in the town you already thought you knew.
9. Overcrowded housing surfaced as a topic within a topic, but failed to generate practical solutions. May well be worth a mini-conversation.
10. From an economic standpoint, the balance between home town needs and the economic elements that attract tourists must be carefully crafted.
11. Higher fuel costs will enhance the appeal of walkable Kennett Square.
12. Considered change will create a value-added Kennett Square. Change is not always welcome, but having choices is far better than just letting things happen.
13. Tractor-trailers crept into several conversations – their intrusiveness in terms of sidewalk conversations and dining. Once New Garden completes the re-engineered intersection at Newark Road and Baltimore Pike, many (but not all) of the larger trucks will no longer travel through the Borough on the way to destinations west of the Borough.



Chester County 2020 Observations and Suggestions

Overall

Clearly, the participants valued the Conversation opportunity and would like to see it repeated in both large and small editions. Once some of the action items have been addressed it will be productive to return to the Conversation, assess what has been accomplished and assign new priorities to keep the momentum going.

Meanwhile, the participants in the Conversation have developed a long list of to-do possibilities that merit prioritizing, establishment of multi-constituent committees with definite tasks to complete. All of these should be addressed as relatively short term assignments to create action outlines that may include the following:

- Purpose/goal
- Assigned responsibility
- Tasks
- Desired outcomes
- Required resources: professional, volunteer, research
- Recommended partnerships
- Funding or no funding necessary
- Time frame
- Recommended action
- Progress Assessment and report

General

10

1. Continue (perhaps smaller) meetings like this one to define vision and confirm consensus around issues such as the Library's expansion plans, La Comunidad's capital campaign, immigration, Senior needs, the Intergen project, and the wide range of social and economic initiatives that are currently on the community wish list . In each instance, the leadership should be provided by the most involved organizations with the full potential for partnerships being explored.
2. Maintain communication through all levels (legislators, borough, employers, citizens) via web, hardcopy, meetings, block committees.
3. Seek out and use available resources for planning, funding, transportation, and services. Research the potential for economic development funding and the County Vision Partnership grants for planning and special projects.
4. Maximize the involvement of the regional community that considers Kennett Square their hometown. Get the word out to those who have yet to discover this treasure in their midst. The KARPC is already involved and can be instrumental in recruiting volunteers. Kennett Square is not an island; it is the hub of the region.
5. It was interesting to note that amid the many comments about improving the local economy, workforce housing, and transportation, there was no mention of the mushroom grower segment of the agricultural economy, the Latino workers and ancillary activities.
6. The most substantial capital is citizens' commitment to the community. If Kennett Square (and regional) residents want Kennett Square to succeed, the future must include respect for the needs of all.
7. Safety, transportation, and attracting people to Kennett Square are closely related. Safe, well-lit streets and walkways encourage walking and bicycling and make Kennett Square a more desirable destination; many of these measures don't require development, just fixing what is already in place.
8. Publicize the currently available transportation alternatives like SCOOT and ROVER

with reminders and schedules in the regional newspapers. Contact the Transportation Management Association of Chester County (TMACC) (610-993-0911)

9. Maintain and nurture the momentum of the Conversation process. Publicize the results so that the community beyond this conversation knows that something is being done.
10. Explore feasibility of establishing a well-lighted, safe bike-walkway along tracks to New Garden Shopping Center. This creates a transportation alternative at the same time it deals with an existing safety/crime problem.
11. Pursue active rail connection to Philadelphia and other urban centers. Not an easy task. The scarcity of Federal and State transportation funding dictates public-private partnerships.
12. A trolley-shuttle to the shopping centers at either end of town. Again the big question is funding. SCOOT and ROVER are always chasing financial support.
13. Encourage participation in the Master Planner Program as a partnership offering from CC2020, the Chester County Planning Commission, West Chester University's College of Business & Public Affairs and Department of Geography & Planning, and the Chester County Association of Township Officials (CCATO). These three annual short courses in planning are invaluable for any municipal official, member of a planning commission, municipal solicitor, developer, interested resident or professional planner who wants better understanding of planning regulation in the State. Information and on-line registration at info@CC202.org
14. Everyone can do something. Don't wait for volunteers. Ask people to do small, starter tasks. Success will provide the impetus to take on the next step. Accountability is important, but don't overload a committee. Make sure the end product is doable and carries a sense of accomplishment. Many small tasks add up to large victories.



Conclusions

The Kennett Square Borough Community Conversation set a new standard for enthusiasm and productivity, lending a particular level of excitement to the entire evening. The widely diverse gathering produced a rich menu of responses and possibilities. We look forward to supporting the officials, planning commission and residents as they move forward with their well-considered choices.

Congratulations. You, the community, have created an impressive product. We hope you use it well.

Sincerely,

Nancy Mohr
Executive Director

George Fasic, A.I.C.P.
Facilitator

MaryAnna Ralph, M.A.
Urban & Regional Planning
Facilitator



Additional Information from Kennett Revisited, a report issued in spring '07.

Graduate students from Pratt Institute, led by Ned Kaufmann, one of the original Countryside Exchange consultants worked with CC2020 and the KARPC. This report was intended to offer guidance to the members of the KARPC and was not widely distributed to the general public. However, segments of the report with relative to June 12, 2008 Conversation have been excerpted below.

Kaufman's goal was "for his students to take away a real-life, outside-the-classroom sense of what preservation/planning issues are really like in the communities where people actually live." Ned did not anticipate a simple take-away message. Immersion in the place, issues, institutions, and current attitudes would generate the substance of a multi-faceted report. Reflecting an on-going interest in this community, his personal goal was a product that would be helpful to future planning and tangible progress. An agreed-upon solution criteria as the students addressed the issues was "Does this promote a sense of place, provide or promote a common area?"

The project represented a partnership between the Kennett Area Regional Planning Commission (KARPC) and CC2020 in a mini-Countryside Exchange format. As the students participated in a series of community meetings and toured the borough and townships, they focused on:

- Complexity of the challenges
- Interrelationships that may exist among affordable housing, downtown revitalization, cultural development, and open-space protection.
- Patterns of support and non-support over the years since the Countryside Exchange
- Role of civic advocates in relationship to the exercise of leadership, consensus building, achievements.

12

Observations

In reviewing these observations, it is encouraging that progress has been made in the past year in addressing opportunities and concerns.

- Stronger support for the bigger regional picture is possible via a better supported KARPC. KARPC should fill a leadership role for many of the recommendations.
- The Borough's "Common" plan, an early regional vision, should be revisited with the goal of preserving essential elements before independent development prevents coordination and appropriate zoning for the area. The entire area from Broad to Willow Streets should be addressed.
- The Weinstein site and existing public garage are considered preferred sites for expanded parking.
- The effect of improved parking should be considered for its role in retaining and expanding the library.
- The potential for moving the distribution area of the post office should be addressed, with the intention to maintain the retail operation in the town center.
- During the Countryside Exchange, a primary recommendation involved the creation of public space, a true center of town which Kennett has never enjoyed – with the following considerations:
 - a) Does the Borough comprehensive plan promote a focus or sense of place; does it

- promote those uses identified as belonging in a hub?
- b) What types of uses would strengthen the function of Kennett Borough as a community hub?
- c) A strategic approach for improving the focus on Kennett Square as the hub should be pursued.
- d) Zoning should be consistent with the comprehensive plan in defining describing the location and general plan for the common place / hub and the composition of this place.



- Until now, there has been a notable lack of strategic approach/planning; too much fragmentation. Cooperative planning is important.
- The Borough needs to serve as the regional cultural center to attract matching funds.
- The regional public sewer capacity needs to be expanded. A study is underway to develop a plan of action that involves Kennett Township, Kennett Square Borough, and New Garden Township.
- Affordable homes for young professionals and low income families is a critical need, in the Kennett region as well as across the county. A serious question: how to keep them affordable.
- Seamless inclusion of the Hispanic residents in the regional community will allow them to take part in strengthening the community and contributing the improvement of the over all standard of living. Education of new Hispanic residents represents a longer term asset.
- The 2002 Countryside Exchange received little notice in the local press which weakened the opportunity to generate enthusiasm and the necessary volunteers to move forward with the recommendations. Good press relations and agreement about common interests and good people doing good things are important.
- It is not difficult to imagine Kennett Square as a regional hub. Elements of a strong urban center already exist:

1. Business

Southern Chester County Chamber of Commerce has its office in Kennett Square and the borough is in the center of the Chamber's membership area. The Chamber's annual Holiday Business Card Exchange is always held in Kennett Square. The Kennett Square Business Services Center is in Kennett Square, created in partnership with the Chamber.

2. Culture

Kennett is the natural hub for cultural activities because it already has institutions such as the library, many non-profits, and the youth garage. It lacks a cultural center with arts training and a performance auditorium. These would make the most sense in Kennett Square because related entities such as library, restaurants, shops are already here. Kennett is the natural hub for festivals such as the Mushroom Festival, Brew Fest, Cinco De Mayo, Park events. It is the regional attraction for a walkable town where it is possible to park once and walk to shops, restaurants, the library, post office, Borough Hall.

- It is important to focus on one or more projects that carry the prospect of short term success to generate confidence about the solutions to the tougher questions.

Goals

- Establish the future of the NVF site, and its potential future role in meeting the demand for affordable and senior homes.
- Engage business entities in branding their support for the community. (Example, Verizon, Harrington's, First Federal and the free concert series at Anson Nixon Park)
- Parking for shoppers and visitors needs to be a well-considered priority.
- Productive collaboration with the library with broad recognition of the interrelated



community anticipation of a larger facility and expanded services.

Student Findings

Quality of life

- Based on the original report on the Kennett Region written by the international team, the student team was pleasantly surprised by beauty of the downtown area. Much work has obviously been done, and it is a very quaint town that has experienced noticeable economic improvement.
- As one student commented, “Kennett Square is a very charming place with tons of character and potential. I found the diversity of the town very life-affirming. The fact that these ethnically varied groups of people live in such close proximity is quite cool.”
- For some, even an affordable home is out of their range or requires too much maintenance. Rental opportunities are important. The NVF site has major potential in this area of concern.
- Kennett seems to be beginning to accept the Latino community. This is evidenced by their successful businesses downtown.

Historic Preservation

- Kennett Square Borough rightly claims a large National Register historic district. It’s clear that there is a special character and “sense of place” which is derived from its harmonious collection of the borough’s historic buildings. The students expressed concern its future for the following reasons:
 1. During the May meetings, architects and planners explained that a “zoning overlay” protects the historic district and that all changes must be approved by the Architectural Review Board. However, no one was able to explain what would happen if a property owner decided to tear down an existing house to build a “McMansion” on his/her property; basically, a slice of a subdivision dropped into the historic district. There is no protection for properties on the National Register.
 2. This is a national trend effecting neighborhoods around the country and we fear that, if laws are left unchanged, Kennett might be at risk. With the growing development pressure on Kennett it’s virtually inevitable that this situation will present itself. Neighborhoods all around the country have been caught off-guard by a wave of tear-downs and the irreversible alteration of historic areas.
- It appears that Kennett Square is overdue for an inventory of historically significant buildings.
- Apparently, to receive a permit the applicant has to go to three different places. This encourages people to do the work without the permit. There must be a way to streamline the process. If one of the goals is to set up a stronger Historic Preservation Ordinance the steps that a homeowner must take to conform should be streamlined.
- The revitalization of “main street” has been a tremendous success and the preservation of the borough’s built fabric was integral to its current renaissance.

Importance of cooperation

- Regarding concerns about affordable homes, the Mexican immigrant situation, parking, and the future location of the library, Kennett’s governing bodies and concerned citizens seem to be at an impasse.
- As graduate students with limited life experience in planning, we concede that some of the ideas thrown out during our visit may be unrealistic. However, since these problems have remained unresolved for so many years, it is time to reexamine the solutions.

Library

- The fact that the library represents a public gathering space right there in the middle of the Square makes so much sense. Places like libraries (places which are free for all people to use) can have such a positive affect on the nature of a community. The library's current site allows everyone to use it. The town needs the library and the library needs to expand. A site needs to be established that will benefit both parties.
- It would seem that compromises are necessary on all fronts. City (borough) planning and city (borough) initiated projects are never 100% successful; each project has advantages and disadvantages. If positive change is to be made, compromise is critical. Everyone needs to realize that there will not be unanimous agreement about the benefits of a given solution but that, for the greater good, something has to be done. Within the complicated Pennsylvania system of government, more energy needs to be applied to finding ways to meet goals within the system.



Affordable housing

- In addition to providing affordable homes, affordable housing in the form of apartment buildings should also be considered. They do not have to be large or house many tenants. Parking can be included under the building, or on the ground floor with 3 floors above it. shortage of affordable housing. It allows for the use of properties that may be too expensive for an individual to maintain. The fear of multifamily housing is unfounded. Many historic houses have found new life as multifamily housing and the approach can work well to provide badly needed apartment units while maintaining the historic quality of the building.
- Beware the pitfalls of gentrification. Those who lived and ran businesses downtown during the “bad old days” deserve to not be displaced by rising rents.
- Examine Tax Increment Financing as a way to help offset some of the cost improving public infrastructures? Berwyn II has had much success with TIF districts. The old NVF plant, talked about a site for senior housing, seems like a great area for a TIF District.
- It would seem that compromises are necessary on all fronts. City (borough) planning and city (borough) initiated projects are never 100% successful; each project has advantages and disadvantages. If positive change is to be made, compromise is critical. Everyone needs to realize that there will not be unanimous agreement about the benefits of a given solution but that, for the greater good, something has to be done. Within the complicated Pennsylvania system of government, more energy needs to be applied to finding ways to meet goals within the system.

Diversity

- La Comunidad deserves more support as they try to understand the needs and desires of the Hispanic community. If this constituency is working many jobs, as was mentioned, and is trying to provide for their families then it is not surprising that they do not attend community meetings or take a voluntary role in town decision making. If you truly care about their vision for their future, you must go to them.

Parking

Although parking was high on the priority list for the June Conversation and there has been a great deal attention paid to the possibilities for solving the problems, it is interesting to read the “outside take” on a topic that has consumed much energy over the years.



- Since more on-street parking is the most unlikely to appear people must either adapt to using a structure or they stop driving their cars in town. Ask them and let them decide what is more important to them.
- At one meeting there was a comment that underground parking is not an option in Kennett. If parking is such a huge issue and people want to park at the front door of their destination, going underground with parking may be the only way to avoid turning the aesthetic of the town to that of a huge shopping mall.

- Most people drive simply because they are too far from town to walk or ride bikes. How could it be more feasible for people not to drive? It seems that there is resistance to walking, even for a few blocks. People need to understand that the downtown is not a strip mall and if it were to take on this quality, much of the charm that has been achieved through the success of the Main Street program would disappear.
- If new parking needs to be achieved maybe turn some of the parking lots into garages, but with retail on the street level.
- Consider placing bike racks around town. There are several pockets of housing near downtown, and if those residents were encouraged to bike to the library, for example, it may ease the burden on parking.
- Encourage walking. Make sure that there are sidewalks that are in good repair and, better still, aesthetically pleasing. Maybe a “walk or bike to work” promotion could be implemented during the summer months.
- It seems, failing all else, that there is ample space for parking lots within a few blocks of the downtown area. A parking plan needs to be comprehensive, not an ill-defined patchwork.
- Environmental issues are often overlooked in plans for urban centers. Aesthetics are important but green architecture rules should also apply. For instance, if a parking garage is a valid option, consider including “green” roofs.

Historic preservation

- Gather a group of people interested in historic preservation to examine the existing laws in light of the hypothetical scenario of replacing historic buildings and make the necessary adjustments to prevent tear-downs.
- Conduct a survey of historic buildings.
- Combining the affordable homes issue with historic preservation, within the historic district the potential is available for a developer to combine federal historic rehabilitation tax credits with federal low income housing tax credits to create affordable rental units in existing buildings. If Kennett wants to avoid becoming a victim of its own success, area planners and preservationists need to educate developers about this and other ways to leverage federal historic tax credits so that preservation is an obvious option for the inevitable development pressures.
- Signs let you know when you enter the historic district but none when you reach the area that was used for the Underground Railroad or even the potter’s house. In many cities they change the street signs as well as place historical markers that tell the story of the area. Sometimes these signs are on the historic house but when homeowners do not want to accept the signs, they have been mounted on posts on the sidewalk.
- Several cities that have experienced growth have established historic preservation ordinances that have teeth. Aspen, Colorado and Charleston, South Carolina are two examples that might provide guidance and inspiration on how to customize Kennett Square.

Miscellaneous

- Regarding planning training, members of the Planning Commission and the municipal officials (all over the region) should be encouraged to take courses, perhaps the Master Planner courses offered by CC2020 or the American Planning Association (APA). Education in planning makes it possible to be proactive in planning rather than being forced into a reactive mode when things happen.
- Create community gardens in different area of the historic district. This can encourage more community interactions.
- Try a scavenger hunt around the Square to teach people about the history of the community. Area business could pass out clues. Designate different stops that are important to the past and future of Kennett perhaps around the underground railroad, the ice cream store, the library, etc. Send the hunt down the pathway to the park. Hold a festival or community party at the lake in the park.
- The Art Stroll has been so successful; why not expand it – maybe even to the park, perhaps on the day of the Scavenger hunt. Chattanooga TN has a market every Sunday that features local foods, art and music. I think Kennett might enjoy something like this. www.chattanooga.com. So many artists are moving to the area and it would be nice if Kennett capitalized on this interest. How about “Create Art” days where people can gather and create art, learn about art, take lessons in art.



Everyone involved in *Revisiting Kennett* expressed appreciation for the generosity of the members of the Kennett Area Regional Planning Commission, borough officials and staff, and the community committee in briefing the students about progress on the Countryside Exchange recommendations, conducting tours and answering a virtually endless number of questions. Without exception the students enjoyed their regional exploration and the hospitality of the residents – and hope to return one day to once again view the progress.

Chester County 2020

Nancy Mohr, Executive Director
George Fasic, A.I.C.P, Planning Consultant
Ned Kaufman, Ph.D

Pratt Institute Graduate Students:

David Ball
Lisa Buckley
Shannon Haltiwanger
Keenan Hughes
Jen Moon
Katie Nolan
Yasuyuki Mizushiro

Landscapes, Chester County's landmark comprehensive plan, is the product of a county-wide vision for the future, one that set benchmarks for progress in saving open space and farmland as well as support for sustainable urban centers. Today *Landscapes* is undergoing a ten-year review by a highly diverse, multi-constituency steering committee. In addition to continuing support and concern for open space and farmland preservation, other critical components are urban center revitalization, affordable homes, infrastructure, transportation, and long-term environmental outcomes. Few municipalities have escaped the impact of the dramatic population increases. Between April 2000 and June 2006, more than 49,000 new residents arrived in the county, considerably ahead of projections and increasing the financial challenges for municipalities, the County, and school districts. Every county resident can keep track of the progress of the Planning Commission staff and steering committee by visiting www.Landscapes2.org

The Chester County 2020 Community Conversation Partnerships

Chester County 2020 is all about partnerships. Among the most important are those with the county's municipalities. Community Conversations may target specific topics like transportation or affordable homes. However, perhaps the most valuable are those that engage local residents in helping to design the future of their communities. Reports from previous Conversations may be requested without charge in pdf form. Check the website for the list of reports. www.CC2020.org

18

We encourage every municipality to become a CC2020 partner. The process is designed to be simple and highly productive. You may have participated in a previous Community Conversations and already know the productive nature of bringing diverse groups of citizens together to discuss critical issues. Give us a call at 610-696-3180 or email info@CC2020.org for further information.

Every Conversation begins with identification of the trends and issues people consider important to the municipality's future – first on a large screen for all to see as they are listed, then transferred to large sheets of paper taped to the wall for easy viewing. Personal priorities are indicated as participants place colored dots next to their top five choices. The ratings capture “most important,” but that doesn't mean that other issues don't count; they just earn a lower place on the list of “pay attention to this - now.”

Breaking into pre-assigned groups of 8-10, the teams work to develop solutions for the top-ranked issues. In focusing on the future, they address a number of tasks:

1. Create the preferred future for the region and the potential areas of cooperation. What should be provided? What should be preserved?
2. What are the priority values?
3. List the anticipated accomplishments/benefits of your plan.
4. List the anticipated barriers that must be overcome and the opportunities that are available.
5. How can you and others work together?
6. Suggested action items: what do we want in common?
7. How to get there.
8. Important players.

The groups prepare and share reports that reflect the discussions and emergence of common ground. A comprehensive final report, printed and distributed by Chester County 2020, draws from the group reports.

CC2020 volunteers & staff

Mary Anna Ralph
George Fasic
George Asimos
Kate Damsgaard
John B. Hannum, Jr.
William Stevens

Partnerships

Chester County 2020 is grateful to the annual partners whose support is important to all our programs but especially to the Community Conversations. For 2008, they include:

- PECO
- Saul Ewing LLP
- J.D. Wood & Co.
- Bryn Mawr Trust Company
- Fulton Bank
- Herr's Foods, Inc.
- The Michael & Nancy Pia Foundation

A Pennsylvania DCED grant sponsored by Senator Dominic Pileggi also helped to defray the cost of the Kennett Conversation.



Conversation, Community and Conservation

Chester County 2020

28 W. Market Street
West Chester, PA 19382
www.CC2020.org