

**THE 2002 COUNTRYSIDE EXCHANGE**  
**A PROGRAM OF GLYNWOOD CENTER**  
**Sponsored by Chester County 2020 Trust**

**OXFORD AREA, 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 towards 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 communities develop a strategic action plan for implementation. Glynwood maintains contact with its “Family of Exchange Communities” through its web site, [www.glynwood.org](http://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 OXFORD AREA, PENNSYLVANIA**

## **COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION**

The Oxford Area (Townships of East Nottingham, West Nottingham, Elk, Lower Oxford, and Upper Oxford and the Borough of Oxford) is located in the southwestern section of Chester County, Pennsylvania.

Major, undeveloped landscape features in this area include extensive agricultural uses (e.g., feed crops, pasture), as well as steeply wooded slopes, wetlands, and floodplains situated along streams. Residential development patterns range from rural residential farmettes to single family subdivisions to urban, downtown Oxford. Additional development is comprised of commercial, industrial, and institutional uses.

Route 1 bisects the Oxford Area, providing a major north-south connection between Interstate 95 in Maryland and the major urban areas of eastern Chester County and beyond (e.g., Philadelphia, PA; Wilmington, DE). Significant secondary roads include Pennsylvania Routes 10, 272 and 472.

The western sections of the Oxford Area are drained by the Octoraro Creek, a tributary of the Susquehanna River. The remainder of the area is drained by a number of smaller waterways, including Big Elk Creek. All of these flow directly into the Chesapeake Bay.

## **RESOURCE PROTECTION**

The Oxford Area has extensive natural resources that have been used and relied on by generations of landowners. The combined soil, water, vegetative, and cultural resources form the natural fabric of the area's landscape. A number of Oxford Area landowners have agreed to the placement of conservation easements on their land; a total of 4,048 acres (or 7.8 percent of the total land area) is under permanent protection.

## **SOILS**

Generally, the area's soils are naturally fertile and well drained, creating optimal agricultural conditions. For example, Chester County ranks farmland soils based on their productivity. Over 50 percent of the area's soils are found within the second highest ranking; almost 80 percent of the area's soils are included in the top four categories.

Another measure of agricultural extent and productivity is the land within Agricultural Security Areas (providing legal protections to farmers.) These blocks of farmland are found throughout the six participating municipalities. These agricultural security areas generally coincide with the extent of high value soils described in the previous paragraph.

## WATER

In the Oxford Area, aquifers supply the majority of the area's residents and businesses with water, for drinking and other uses. With respect to surface water, the Oxford Area is drained by several major stream systems that are tributary to the Chesapeake Bay.

## VEGETATIVE

Our forested buffers (riparian buffers) along creeks have particularly high value in terms of wildlife habitat and water quality improvement. Other wooded areas, especially where they are in close proximity to developed and cleared agricultural lands, provide a diversity of cover and habitat for wildlife species. These species range from large mammals (e.g., white tail deer) to small animals such as rodents and songbirds.

## CULTURAL

The Oxford Area's cultural resources include its scenic (e.g., rolling hills of farm fields with wooded hedgerows and stream valleys) assets. This also includes historic resources such as country farmsteads and architecturally significant buildings in Oxford Borough.

## LAND USE, POPULATION, AND ECONOMICS

A strong argument could be made that the municipalities within the Oxford Area are in the path of growth, one of several tests established by the Commonwealth courts to determine whether a fair share of regional growth and development should be accommodated. A municipality within this path, that has developable land, is expected to provide for all types of residential development including its fair share of higher density residential uses such as multi-family dwellings and mobile home parks.

## COMMUNITY ISSUES

- 1. What can be done to retain existing businesses and attract new businesses to downtown Oxford?**
  - How can the downtown business district meet the needs of, and make itself more visible to, the expanding bedroom community that surrounds it?
  - How do we identify niche markets that will be good matches for our mix of existing businesses?
  - How can the municipalities of the Oxford Area support downtown business growth and revitalization?
  - How might new and existing recreational activities (for all age groups) promote downtown revitalization? What are some potential new recreational activities?
  
- 2. How can the municipalities of the Oxford Area create a strategy/plan to sustain and enhance our agricultural industry and retain farmland?**

- How do we keep and support our farming community and what can we do to make farming more profitable?
- How do we resolve differences between newcomers and established farmers?
- How do we find the balance between land stewardship and accommodating the pressure of commercial and residential development? Or, how do we encourage and reward commitments to land stewardship to create a balance with the understandable desire to maximize financial returns by selling one's farm?
- What tools are available to our municipalities to help ensure that land development will not overburden infrastructure (e.g., water supply, roads and sewage)?
- How can we increase communication and education for property owners about options for land conservation?

**3. How do we overcome the stumbling blocks and bring municipal officials together to develop and implement a regional comprehensive plan?**

- What are effective strategies and zoning options that simultaneously permit responsible development and open space conservation?

**4. How can we ensure that the central, physical location and campus setting of our schools remains an anchor for our growing community?**

- How can we use the central location of the school campus to reinforce/enhance efforts of downtown revitalization?
- How do we expand the commercial and industrial tax base to support the school district without contributing to sprawl and losing our rural atmosphere?
- How can we use our collective commitment to the school district to encourage our municipalities to adopt mutually consistent and supportive economic growth policies?

**A SAMPLE ITINERARY:**

**THREE DAYS FROM THE OXFORD AREA EXCHANGE**

*Thursday, October 17*

Meeting with the Oxford Area Chamber of Commerce

Lunch with Oxford Borough Council members, Planning Commissioners and Mayor

Meeting with Neighborhood Services

Dinner with the Lions Club

*Saturday, October 19*

Roundtable discussion with Oxford Women's Club, TOPS, Girl Scouts and local female officials

Lunch with the Oxford Area Recreation Authority

Driving tour of region

Farm tour and dinner with farmers

*Monday, October 21*

Meeting with Upper Oxford Township Supervisors and Planning Commissioners

Meeting with Realtors and Developers

Dinner with East Nottingham Township Supervisors and Planning Commissioners

#### **THE OXFORD AREA EXCHANGE TEAM**

**Jerome Barton** is a Hydro-geologist with the Environment Agency in the U.K., the equivalent of the E.P.A. in the United States. His work involves reviewing groundwater and land contamination risk assessments and advising on the contamination implications of land development, particularly in the contexts of landfill development and brownfield development. In addition, Jerome reviews agricultural and waste management issues that relate to groundwater. He has extensive experience involving the implications of land development.

**Roger Hemming** is Project Coordinator for the Scottish Borders Rural Partnership (SBRP), a partnership of 18 key local organizations that aim to promote local community based development. He is responsible for developing the partnership which aims to ensure the best possible delivery of services to the rural communities of the Scottish Borders. Roger has many years of experience with rural youth work and handles a small community development caseload helping address issues such as local rural regeneration, community capacity building and out migration of youth. The partnership has piloted the use of a mobile base to deliver services to the more isolated areas not normally served.

**Karen Humphries** is a Field Officer for a Rural Community Council in Herefordshire and Worcestershire counties in England, where she works for a rural regeneration project. The focus of her work is to help rural community groups carry out appraisals, identify needs and plan, fund and carry out community self-help projects. She also identifies funding sources and organizes training courses for both community groups and service providers. A Landscape Designer by training she has been involved in Village Design Statements, an established technique to involve local communities in developing design criteria for their neighborhoods and to strengthen local identity.

**Ron Kilburn**, a retired judge and prosecutor, is now the principal of his own consulting firm in Vermont that provides historic, environmental, legal, and preservation services to a variety of clients. He was primarily responsible for the preservation, relocation and restoration of a circa 1875 train station that was scheduled for demolition and is actively involved in the conversion of the station to a railroad museum and community meeting space. He has worked strategically to involve the community's youth in a variety of projects including the construction of a walkway to the River from the historic railroad depot, the creation of two river overlooks and a platform. Ron is also a mediator and arbitrator.

**Frank Shaw** has over 30 years of professional experience in resources management, water conservation, land-use planning, parks operation, heritage tourism and program management with the Ontario Public Service. He has served as managing executive with several Ontario ministries, conservation authorities and agencies including the Hamilton Region Conservation Authority (HRCA), St. Lawrence Parks Commission (SLPC) and Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC). As Executive Director for the NEC, he was responsible for implementing a provincially approved land-use plan for Ontario's Niagara Escarpment including policy development, regulations, permits and legislation improvement. Frank enjoys working with local boards, councils and other community organizations in developing long-term visions for a sustainable future through open dialogue, teamwork and practical action. He recently participated as a volunteer consultant in a community/government initiative to develop a land use plan to protect natural resources and regulate urban development on the Oak Ridges Moraine. Frank is an active member of the Oak Ridges Land Trust. Frank is also co-owner of the family century farm and a managed heritage forest.

**David Sillett** is a Senior Rural Development Adviser with the U.K. government Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. He works as part of a technical team that delivers funding through the England Rural Development Programme, and manages a team of four advisers. He previously ran an agricultural contracting business and was managing partner in a family farm. David was a District Agent for the Forum of Private Business (a lobbying and support organization for independently owned businesses). Among his recent achievements has been a major farm diversification project based on farm tourism, which has secured government funding.

**Jeanne Stinson** has been the State Coordinator of the Kansas Main Street program since 1993 and currently works with 24 designated Main Street cities and 40 Partnership cities regarding downtown redevelopment projects. Through the Kansas Main Street program, Jeanne helps designated cities identify market niches, using existing businesses and other assets as the foundation for developing a re-development plan; capitalize on downtown's history and identify the resources of the community itself. Before becoming involved in downtown development, Jeanne worked as the Director of Hutchinson, Kansas Convention and Visitors Bureau; where she worked with a diverse set of attractions, from Amish farms and shops to the Kansas Cosmosphere and Space Center.

## **EXCHANGE TEAM REPORT**

### **INTRODUCTION - CREATING THE ATMOSPHERE FOR ACTION**

From October 16 – 24, 2002, the Oxford Area Countryside Exchange team visited the Townships of East Nottingham, West Nottingham, Elk, Lower Oxford and Upper Oxford and the Borough of Oxford. The community asked the team to help them find ways to bring and retain businesses in downtown Oxford, sustain and enhance the agricultural industry and preserve farmland, develop and implement a regional comprehensive plan and ensure that the schools remain an anchor for the community. The team was

composed of seven professionals who had not met before and who were not being paid for their services. Their role was to provide an independent, fresh perspective on the questions identified by the LOC and not to be influenced by any factions or interest groups.

During the week, the team attended 32 meetings and spoke with over 360 community residents. One hundred forty people attended the team's public presentation on October 23<sup>rd</sup>. During the week, the team evolved the opinion that the community must strengthen their capacity to work together by addressing the "ten building blocks" that create a real atmosphere for shared community action and cementing these blocks together with the 3Cs – communication, cooperation and commitment.

Communities who can help themselves, "model communities", exhibit ten attributes which create a positive atmosphere in the community and form a foundation for action and success. These attributes are **Caring, Active and Organized, Pride, Safe, Environmental, Sustainable, Skills, Influential, Fair & Just and Learning**. These ten attributes serve as "building blocks" that, when put together, create a foundation upon which a community can build its future. These attributes or indicators were developed by the Northern Ireland Department of Community Development and are used by the Scottish Community Development Council to objectively assess communities interested in their Better Community Development program.

Model communities also cement their building blocks together into a solid foundation by using the "three Cs" – communication, cooperation and commitment to action.

1. **Communicate your interests.** Share your desires, your views and your needs with each other. Communication begins with careful listening. As one of your Amish citizens told us, "God gave us two ears and one mouth so we can listen twice as much as we speak." Good advice for all of us!
2. **Cooperate and seek common ground.** Share your values; compare ideas and work together to develop a vision and strategy for the future.
3. **Commit to act as a team.** Volunteer - put your caring, sharing and helping attitudes to work to build a strong and vital community.

### **CONTINUE THE PROCESS - IT HAS BEGUN**

The Countryside Exchange team's visit has challenged the community to create an atmosphere for action. The team believes that the Oxford Area has the capacity to become a "model community" and that process has already begun.

The Oxford area has many strengths and residents must build upon its positive attributes. Existing good practices must be identified, shared and adopted. Through the efforts of dedicated local officials and volunteers, the Oxford Area can create a vital community built on trust, understanding and respect for everyone.



## **ISSUE ONE: DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION**

### **OBSERVATIONS:**

Perhaps the most important single piece of information that must be developed and shared with the broader community is the vision of Oxford Mainstreet, Inc. (OMI). It appears that in the past Downtown Oxford was considered the commercial and social center of the community. Today, it seems that the general citizenry has disconnected from the district. In addition, the geographic boundaries of the downtown are not clear. There are opportunities to encourage communication and cooperation among community leaders, local organizations and citizens to develop a defined course of action that will enhance downtown. We heard from many in the community that OMI is being looked to for leadership, to facilitate these opportunities.

The downtown district, as a whole lacks a cohesive “image” with the citizens. It is not seen as a “district” or “community center”, but rather as a collection of individual businesses and buildings that may or may not be relevant to an individual citizen.

Prior to initiating a successful business recruitment program, the leadership of the commercial center must set the stage. Setting the stage will make recruitment efforts, once initiated, more likely to be successful. The retail market analysis completed by OMI is the cornerstone of sound programs designed to enhance the viability of the commercial district.

Both real and perceived issues regarding parking, truck traffic and pedestrian safety may be a stumbling block for downtown redevelopment.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- The current OMI vision statement is more a statement of purpose than a clearly defined statement of what the organization is trying to develop in the district. A vision statement should help the citizens understand what is planned and serve as a rallying point for action in the district. Revisit your vision and make sure it clearly defines and communicates what you are striving to achieve.
- Explore opportunities to develop activities that will physically and emotionally connect citizens with the downtown. Support development of businesses and organizations that will encourage social interaction within the district. For example:
  - Create Social Centers: library; movie house; ethnic restaurants; mixed use development (housing, business, arts and entertainment).
  - Promote Youth activities: Lighthouse/Other youth gathering spots; Youth Main Street Program; school to business program; High School community service requirement (volunteer opportunities).
  - Serve as a central clearing house for community activities: Develop a community calendar or “What’s Up” column.

- Provide citizen participation opportunities (volunteer development). Conduct a skills audit so that you can match your volunteers with appropriate projects.
- The development and use of a consistent logo and tag line for the district will assist the community as a whole in identifying with the downtown. The OMI must be sure that they have considered the diversity of the population and what the district offers in terms of goods and services and compared that with what the market place desires. The logo and tag line must serve as a visual identifier for the district and appeal to the emotions of the viewer. Care must be taken to make sure the identifier truly represents the district – not the borough as a whole.
- As part of the overall image development, encourage historic preservation of existing buildings. The existing grant program is a good start, but the district also needs to educate the general public about the importance of preserving the historic fiber of the community.
- In order to develop the image of a full-service shopping and professional services center, stores in the downtown must adjust shopping hours. Businesses must be open when customers are available.
- The downtown should become the central location for community celebrations, particularly those that celebrate heritage, the ethnic and cultural diversity that reflects the citizenry of the community. Activities could include opportunities for interaction with youth, seniors and families with diverse backgrounds.
- Develop a “Welcome to Downtown” packet to be widely distributed to new residents of the borough and surrounding townships. It should include an introduction to the district as well as a description of the goods, services and recreational opportunities available. Consider giving a free gift that must be picked up at a store in the district.
- Encourage individual businesses to leave display window lights on at night and encourage the borough to repair existing streetlights and make additions where necessary.
- The young people who are using the district for a gathering place in the evening may cause the perception of an unsafe environment for shoppers and strollers. Consider working with the community to develop a center that would provide a comfortable place to meet and opportunities for cultural exchange.
- The OMI should also develop the following attributes or processes that will reinforce their efforts to retain and recruit businesses:
  - A pro-business/pro quality attitude on the part of both public and private sectors;
  - A spirit of cooperation among community leaders in both the public and private sectors;

- Open communications among community leaders, local organizations, and citizens involved in the effort;
  - A realistic understanding of the local economic outlook and local economic potentials ;
  - A realistic understanding of the local business needs and concerns;
  - A method of discussing and addressing business needs and concerns; and
  - A well defined course of action that allows the community to resolve business needs in ways that strengthen existing business.
- Provide ongoing training opportunities for both existing and new businesses on topics such as merchandising, computer skills, e-commerce, inventory techniques, business plan development and customer service skills.
  - Develop a user-friendly signage program. This could include way-finding (directional) signs, plaques to identify buildings of special historical significance, information boards and well defined entrances to the downtown district. Take care not to clutter up the area with signs. They should be developed to enhance the scale and image of the district and be of the highest quality.
  - Explore opportunities to develop parking areas that are specially designated for people who live and work in the district. This will leave on-street parking open for customers. Additionally, work with the Borough to enforce parking regulations.
  - Cooperate with the Borough to identify ways to change truck routes, traffic calming opportunities and other transportation and enforcement issues.
  - Develop and nurture relationships with community partners and stakeholders such as downtown businesses; the Borough and Townships; police; schools; churches; library; YMCA; Chamber of Commerce; Lincoln University; Amish & “English” farmers and ethnic groups.
  - Using the Vo-Tech program. Ensure that students graduating from High School have skills that match employers’ needs.

## **ISSUE TWO: ENVIRONMENT, AGRICULTURE AND FARMLAND**

### **ENVIRONMENT OBSERVATIONS:**

There appears to be limited awareness of and concern for sustainable development in the area, particularly for environmental sustainability. There is an embryonic environmental action movement in the community, but it has limited coordination and focus. There are, however, some examples of close working relationships between public and private organizations that support the environment, for example, the Octoraro Watershed Associations and the Octoraro Water Authority. There is also some private land stewardship collaborative work being done between the Conservation District and the

Octoraro / Elk Watersheds Association to conserve drinking water. The Watershed Associations have an award winning plan, but limited regulatory tools to achieve their objectives.

There is a critical groundwater resource issue throughout Chester County, which is not generally appreciated. Data from the Chester County Board of Commissioners and Chester County Water Resources Authority has shown that at the time of the Exchange 12 out of 20 monitoring wells in Chester County are below the “Drought Emergency Water Level.” This could be explained by the current drought in the area, but it begs the larger question, “Could this become more common without sustainable planning, and how much worse will it be in the next drought?” It is clear that any future development will affect aquifer recharge and must be carefully monitored.

Township planners are encouraging development that they see to be appropriate in their township, but little consideration is given to the potential change in municipal sewage effluent which may result from commercial and industrial growth. DEP is monitoring groundwater level and quality around spray irrigation fields, but Township officials may not be aware of the effects that their planning decisions have in this regard. Nitrate is also acknowledged as a problem in terms of groundwater pollution in the Oxford Area.

There are Water Resources Codes, Legislation, and a Well Drillers Code in draft.

#### AGRICULTURE AND FARMLAND OBSERVATIONS:

Residential development in the Oxford area is causing a rapid irreversible loss of high quality farmland. The continued presence of farmland in the area is heavily dependent on individual farmers resisting the financial temptation to sell their land for residential development. Current initiatives and efforts to “stem the tide” are little more than damage limitation exercises. There is also a misguided perception by some residents that the Amish can be relied on to be custodians of the landscape indefinitely. Although farms appear to be valued for aesthetic reasons, they are not appreciated for their food production and ecological values.

Farmers feel besieged by regulators and as a result they often perceive guidance on environmental and conservation issues as a threat. This is particularly strong due to Pennsylvania’s pride in individual property rights and a property owner’s ability to operate without external “interference”.

Newcomers moving into the area do not appear to have realistic expectations about living in a farming community. Reasons for moving into “rural” areas include a perception that there are certain “values” deriving from living in proximity to farming landscapes, but newcomers often have little understanding of what is required to maintain the rural character and the essential role that farming plays. To address this problem, some farmers have been proactive, educating their neighbors about their operations and also learning about the neighbors’ concerns. For example, one farmer produced an information pack that he delivered to his neighbors which contained information on crop

cultivation and the pesticides and fertilizers being used. Some form of farming festival might act as a catalyst to understanding.

There is significant pressure on farms to increase/maintain revenues, which has resulted in larger farming operations, and more intensive systems, particularly livestock. Some townships have specifically zoned to allow farmers to conduct operations for secondary incomes on their land. Inheritance tax is cited by farmers as a major obstacle to retaining farmland for agricultural use.

Farmers consider farming lobby groups to be focused on large “west” farmers, and not on more local issues. There appears to be very limited cooperation between non-Amish farmers.

#### ENVIRONMENT, AGRICULTURE AND FARMLAND RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The strength of any movement lies in its size, influence and organization. It may be beneficial for likeminded organizations to pool resources and jointly lobby to have a greater impact on local issues. Focusing on particular issues such as the watersheds is critical, but these issues must always be considered in the context of the wider environment.
- The Watershed Associations are becoming increasingly aware of the need to become politically active. It may be advantageous to develop a lobbying and influencing strategy, which could include collaboration with similar interest groups out of the Oxford area.
- All Township Supervisors, residents and Planning Commissioners, should ensure that potential impacts from development are adequately assessed in order to pre-empt groundwater pollution. In an area so dependent on groundwater supplies, there is no room for complacency in the planning process.
- Examine the impact of intensive livestock on the environment and water quality. Such operations may cause serious water pollution incidents that impact on water supplies and possibly result in a serious deterioration in farmer / non farmer relations.
- The existence, in draft form, of Water Resources Codes, Legislation, and a Well Drillers Code is a significant step forward in terms of managing the water resources of the Oxford Area. However, a common understanding of the new guidance and regulatory tools must be developed. Oxford area residents should familiarize themselves with this new information and examine it for implications within their areas of influence.
- Townships should require an impact assessment of any new wells on the existing water supply. Test pumping of a new well to assess the impact on neighboring wells is a simple process. If the expertise is not available locally, seek advice from literature, the internet or the U.S.G.S. Test pumping need not cost anything. In the

U.K., this test is a pre-requisite for any new well – if you will damage someone else’s existing water supply, you can’t have your new well.

- Water resources do not stop at township or borough boundaries. Examples of effective collaboration and cooperation such as the work being done by the Octoraro Watershed Associations and the Octoraro Water Authority should be widely publicized as a model of how common interests can bring together a critical mass of people to tackle key issues.
- Some townships are concerned that the subdivisions for housing will need to be increased in size to accommodate larger drainage fields in hard to drain areas. Encourage forward planning in terms of negotiation with developers, or enacting ordinances that require innovative techniques be implemented such as sand mounds, communal sewerage or the increased use of package treatment plants with river discharges (assuming adequate dilution is available). Consultation with townships across, and outside the Oxford Area may encourage new solutions and best practice on these issues.
- Encourage dialogue between environmental groups and farmers to raise the residents’ awareness of how important and valuable the natural environment is. There are particular issues of concern, for example the “nuisance” or damaging effects of the local deer population, which could possibly be addressed on an Area or County basis. Similar initiatives are in operation in the U.K. For information contact [www.woodnet.uk.com/previous.htm#deer](http://www.woodnet.uk.com/previous.htm#deer). This could result in benefits both to the local environment and to local residents / farmers.
- Farmers should take advantage of financial opportunities that are linked to environmental improvements, for example, access to grants in return for improving management practices, or reducing operating costs by limiting pesticide/fertilizer usage. Information that may be useful in this regard can be accessed via the U.K.’s Linking Environment and Farming (LEAF) initiative. A more localized example is Norfolk Arable Land Management Initiative (NALMI). While these funding sources are particular to the U.K., there may be similar opportunities in the U.S. Contact the U.S.D.A., Natural Resources Conservation Service. There is a State Representative in every state. If environmental improvements are to be achieved, it is essential that farmers “own” the issues and willingly co-operate.
- Farmers should develop a regional nutrient management plan to reduce nitrate loading. Support is available from the County to develop these plans.
- Farmers should develop strong links with schools. For example, use Future Farmers for America (FFA) as a vehicle, and the “Adopt a kid” scheme. Developing such links with children often facilitates constructive interaction with parents, which in turn improves relations between farmers and residents.

- Develop a long term strategic plan for farmland preservation that is connected to the Chester County Landscapes plan.
- The existing links between the local communities and the Amish farmers (e.g. farmers' markets) should be strengthened to improve the financial viability of the Amish farmers' businesses. This will reduce the financial pressure on the Amish and the likelihood of their relocating to other areas (e.g. Kentucky).
- Farmers should explore the potential to generate additional revenue through eco-tourism activities. Such activities could contribute to a broader farming financial base, while developing a wider understanding of the importance of farming in the environment.
- Supervisors should examine the zoning ordinances and consider the benefits of rezoning to allow secondary incomes for farmers. For example, do the ordinances prohibit bed and breakfast operations, agri-tourism ventures such as roadside stands or pick-your-own? Profitable farmers are much less likely to sell their land to developers.
- Explore ways for farmers and locals to work together on collaborative projects. For example:
  - Teach farmers computer skills and build their networking skills.
  - Arrange social / fund raising events within the Oxford farming community.
- Review the way that farmland is taxed. Farmland is valued at its highest use for inheritance tax purposes, giving rise to large tax liabilities. Farmers should be encouraged to take steps to reduce their tax liabilities using methods that are already available within the current tax regime. Lobby for change in tax law, particularly with regard to inheritance taxes for farmers.
- Local farmers should be encouraged to cooperate and take joint ownership of the key issues. This will enable them to have an effective corporate voice on local issues.

### **ISSUE THREE: MUNICIPAL AND REGIONAL PLANNING**

#### **OBSERVATIONS:**

Pennsylvania legislation prescribes the powers and duties of local government and the State's planning code sets the requirements for planning. Land use planning is the responsibility of local government. The Pennsylvania Code does not require municipalities to work together to create regional plans. Additionally, there are no requirements for consistency or concurrency review between municipalities or between municipalities and the County. There is, however, incentive funding available from the State and County to encourage local and multi-municipal planning. Strong lobby groups

have proven to be formidable opponents to reforming the State's planning codes because of the perceived effect on property and development rights. The Associations of Township Supervisors provides an opportunity to pursue policy and program initiatives at the County and State level.

Chester County has developed Landscapes 2020, a comprehensive policy plan that provides a vision and framework to manage future growth. While the townships and boroughs of the Oxford Area have signed agreements to update their local plans in accordance with Landscapes 2020, local officials and residents seem to be unaware of the potential benefits provided in the plan and few townships have made any real progress toward achieving the Landscapes' vision.

The Oxford Area is a logical and easily identifiable unit on which to base multi-municipal planning and has some previous history of this from the mid 1960's. While there is a general perception among officials and residents that multi-municipal planning is necessary to resolve issues which affect the whole Oxford area, there is an absence of leadership in developing an Oxford Area Multi-municipal Comprehensive Plan. The County Plan – Landscapes 2020 – presents an opportunity and basis for co-operation in developing such a plan.

At current development rates, the Oxford Area will be a suburban landscape in only ten years. Many of the Area's official plans and zoning ordinances were developed before the area came under such extensive development pressure and are therefore unable to deal with the impacts of this growth. Rather than approaching the issue of growth and its impacts in a comprehensive manner, zoning ordinances are being amended on a piece meal basis to accommodate new development proposals. Additionally, as there is no requirement that zoning be consistent between municipalities, incompatible but adjacent land uses often lead to conflict or "border wars". The absence of consistent standards across municipalities is allowing developers to exploit the "weakest links".

Developers are not covering the full (and often hidden) costs of development, particularly in terms of additional infrastructure and community services. As a result, municipal tax rates are forced to increase to cover the additional expenses. Only a few municipalities are introducing development impact conditions, e.g., natural resource protection, water management, provision of infrastructure and amenities, and considering the "downstream" costs of development such as roads, fire services and schools. Few municipalities have tested the impact of their development conditions in law.

Supervisors are proud of their tradition of independence in local governance. However, they admit that the workload and complexity of local municipal business is growing beyond the capacity of the staff. These part time officials and volunteers are challenged to keep up with the complexity, number and scope of new development proposals. In addition, the team heard from several municipal leaders that they do not have enough time to work together on Oxford Area and Countywide issues. As a result, development decisions which may have a wider, regional impact such as schools and transportation are dealt with in isolation of the larger context.



There is a wealth of planning guides, technical resources, advice and grants to support local municipal planning and administration, but residents and municipal officials are often challenged to find time to participate in such education programs. The training workshops and education programs are not always available at times, locations and in formats which are accessible to the wider community.

There needs to be a willingness, at all levels, to actively co-operate and communicate – not only for those involved in the planning process, but also by leaders in the wider community – the church, business leader and special interest groups. There is a perception shared by many newcomers that their ideas are not welcome with long time residents, while long-term residents feel that the newcomers don't respect Oxford Area customs, history and rural way of life. Everyone wants to be the “last to arrive” in the rural Oxford landscape and then to “keep it that way”! Community leaders must take the risk of getting together and being champions to facilitate dialogue, allowing perceptions and attitudes to become more positive, unified and confident in moving forward. This dialogue will not only help to build trust, but will also help to establish a real sense of community and a commitment to implement a shared vision for the Oxford Area.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Revise state and county legislation to require planning concurrency and consistency. Lobby for changes to taxation legislation. Make sure development impact fees are legal.
- Convene a meeting of municipal leaders to discuss common issues and concerns and investigate the legislative changes that will be necessary to promote and support managed growth on a fair and just tax base in the Oxford Area. Develop a strategy to promote State Legislative change, where needed, to meet the changing needs of Pennsylvanian communities.
- Chester County should accelerate its efforts to implement the vision of Landscapes 2020 – to “preserve and enhance the unique character of Chester County Landscapes by concentrating growth in the most appropriate areas.” The County must actively pursue its Action Plan by providing leadership, planning assistance and incentives. The County should champion Landscapes 2020, while encouraging municipal officers, volunteers and Oxford Area residents to become stakeholders in the process.
- Oxford Area municipal leaders (Supervisors, Planning Commissioners, and Zoning Officers) should meet to begin a dialogue about co-operative planning and to discuss both formal and informal networks and structures. At this meeting, they could discuss some of the Oxford Area's longstanding development issues – transportation, schools etc. – and to begin to move towards a shared understanding of the problems and opportunities.
- Hire a planning consultant to provide leadership, guidance and technical advice for the Oxford Area. The consultant could build working relationships with and between

the Oxford Area Townships and provide an independent overview of the whole Oxford Area.

- Update the area's zoning ordinances to ensure that they are complementary across the whole Oxford Area.
- Municipalities should immediately convene a workshop for staff and volunteers to share best practices on issues such as development standards, application review and impact fees.
- Develop consistency standards for the Oxford Area so that developers do not exploit the "weakest link" in planning regulations. Conversely, steps should be taken to ensure that standards facilitate development more easily in some locations, in order to attract certain types of development in specific areas.
- Townships must recognize that there are "hidden costs" to development and explore opportunities to offset these expenses through development impact fees. Excellent examples of this already exist.
- Townships should make better use of the advisory services available for best practice and ensure that they have a comprehensive development review process which is owned by all stakeholders.
- The Townships should formally acknowledge the need for a co-operative approach to planning and renew their commitment to the idea and to taking early action. Multi-municipal Planning and co-operation is fundamental in overcoming the fragmented planning process and in creating a shared vision and consensus to resolve Oxford Area-wide issues, such as landscape preservation and urban sprawl.
- Form a multi-municipal planning network (informal) and/or commission (formal) for the Oxford Area. Municipal leaders in the Oxford Area already work together within the school district and they can use this as a starting point to develop a stronger and broader identity for the region.
- The Chester County Planning Commission and Chester County 2020 Trust should facilitate initial meetings with Townships to discuss the mutual benefits/problems of comprehensive planning and to "kick start" the process.
- Publicize successful examples of Township co-operation, such as the joint sewer, water and park projects. All these can be used as a springboard for further regional planning and teamwork.
- Planning teams, municipal officials, volunteers and citizens should take full advantage of the excellent planning tools and information provided by State, County, interest groups and professional associations within the Oxford Area. Conversely those producing such tools should actively ensure that these are easily accessible to

those who might use them. A better understanding of the planning tools available is key to producing good planning practice and good development decisions.

- Chester County Planning Commission and Chester 2020 should sponsor a series of planning workshops aimed at the general public and members of special interest groups. Other information could be provided in accessible forms such as videos and web sites. This should stimulate increased dialogue and encourage the general public to contribute to planning discussion and decision. This might also help to bring special skills into the local planning process, e.g. through members of special interest groups such as the Historical Society.
- The municipalities must increase their capacity (time, resources, and budget) to meet the increased workload and complexity of land use decision-making. More full time professional staff and community volunteers will increase the opportunity for dialogue, decision-making and planning for managed growth, both within and beyond each Township. This is needed before the Township staff and volunteers are overwhelmed by the pace of change. Many people are failing to plan ahead and are simply reacting to change rather than planning for it. The downstream impact of this fragmented approach to development will negatively affect landscape preservation and the community's quality of life.
- Municipalities should ensure that planning information is easily accessible to the public in local libraries, schools etc., and encourage and broaden citizen involvement in the local planning process. Individual planning applications should be better advertised. This would ensure that the process is "open" and provide opportunities for comment.
- The County should harness the considerable volunteer citizen support available through the County 2020 Trust and other related groups. Many of these volunteers have professional skills, energy and the enthusiasm to help drive the project forward, as well as the advantage of being "independent" from the County. These individuals could also help to develop stronger links between County and Townships.
- Chester County Planning Commission, Chester 2020 Trust and local municipalities should co-sponsor the development of a simple planning pack for residents, giving details of each Township's land uses and a description of the planning process. This would be particularly useful to new residents who may have experienced a different state system and to others involved in particular issues.
- Residents in the Oxford Area need to recognize the fact that, despite their differences, the community as a whole shares a common concern about the future of their area. Individual communities have a diversity of attitudes and perceptions about the area, but there is a real groundswell of opinion that the Oxford Area needs to address its future before it is too late. If harnessed this could be a powerful tool for change. Special interests, voluntary groups, residents (old and new), business people, farmers, realtors and developers should be encouraged to share their expertise, resources and

talents and to begin to engage in dialogue about the future of the area. This might also begin to combat the powerful and negative effects of rumor and misinformation. As a first step in continuing dialogue across community interests, the L.O.C. should consider facilitating a series of meetings around the Oxford Area with various groups to listen to the perceptions of all the stakeholders. You could call these meetings “A Listening Tour” with the objective of documenting everyone’s perceptions on what is needed to build a more cohesive community for the long term benefit of all Oxford Area stakeholders. Once completed, these perceptions and ideas should be compiled, shared and discussed widely. The findings of the Listening Tour can be used to develop consensus towards strategies for action. Listening and understanding are essential to building consensus and co-operation.

- The L.O.C. should consider sponsoring a series of workshops for all Oxford Area groups on Landscapes 2020, the powers and duties of municipal government, planning codes and best practice in managing growth and development impact. These workshops could be called “A Learning Tour” with the objective being to improve awareness of the tools for and benefits of regional planning.

#### **ISSUE FOUR: USING EDUCATION TO ENSURE OXFORD AREA’S VIBRANCY**

##### **OBSERVATIONS:**

Throughout this section, “education” refers to a lifelong learning process that includes formal education as well as opportunities to affect an experience, draw out learning points and build new skills.

Quality education is a concern for all municipalities in the Oxford Area and an excellent example of the way that an issue can be addressed on a multi-municipal basis.

The team met with many people including soon-to-be High School graduates, women, Hispanics, Asians and retired people. It was clear that these individuals had many latent talents that could be developed through life-long learning opportunities. There are also young people who have talents and are interested in the future in the Oxford Area. They need to be included in the community and their opinions valued.

In Scotland, the “Prince’s Trust”, Social Inclusion Partnerships and the local Education Authority work separately and together to ensure that personalized learning programs, which are relevant to area employers, are provided for those interested in vocational training.

##### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Appoint a senior level professional as “Community Education Tutor” whose job would be to foster school/community relations. One project could be to establish a “Community Learning Partnership” that consists of education providers, students of

continuing education and representatives of leisure and recreation programs. The goal of the Partnership would be to ensure the existence and relevancy of recreational, personal and social opportunities for all residents. Parents and business representatives would be welcomed to the school throughout the year – even to learn alongside pupils in the classes.

- Include in the Continuing Education Program English as a Second Language, crafts, computers, adult literacy and math competency. Township Supervisors, Borough Councilors and the staff of voluntary organizations could all benefit from a variety of human resource courses including “committee skills training”, “representing your community”, “working in partnerships”, advertising and managing staff.
- Reach out to the ethnic communities in the Oxford Area and celebrate their cultures. Hispanics, African Americans and Asian communities have traditions, events and value systems that could enrich local culture if nurtured and openly celebrated.
- Develop Lincoln University’s mentoring for pupils program. This is an excellent program which demonstrates that the African-American population has a significant contribution to make to the Oxford Area. This may lead to further initiatives.
- Develop an “Oxford Area Education Forum” for pupils, parents, teachers, business, government and other interested people to enable everyone to share their thoughts and build understanding, trust and appreciation.
- Encourage the school to be a catalyst for social inclusion.
- Use the High School move as an opportunity for the School Board, Borough and Townships to work together and to demonstrate the benefits of cooperation.
- Use the re-location of the High School as an opportunity to examine its contribution to the area. The School’s move could provide an opportunity to launch some of the recommendations listed above.
- Consider creating “village schools” to foster “genuine communities”. A village school is frequently a vital facet of a community – providing facilities, enabling community involvement and fostering pride.
- Involve young people when creating youth facilities. Such actions will build youth self confidence. Youth involvement will also ensure the facilities are used.
- Consider developing a youth activities park on the school campus in order to provide safe / hassle free place for youth to “hang out” (evolve socially acceptable behavior).
- Encourage and nurture youth initiatives so that youthful enthusiasm is harnessed for community benefit.

## CONCLUSION

Ready! Set! Go! Well, maybe not quite yet. We encourage you to slow down, take a deep breath and celebrate the first steps that you have taken as a community. This brief respite will allow you to re-generate, continue dialogue and prepare yourselves for the work ahead. The visit by the Exchange Team is only one step in a long journey – the next step and the ones after are yours.

Our team firmly believes that the Oxford Area has the capacity to develop and fulfill its own vision of a model community. We hope you will seriously consider using the building blocks concept as a tool.

You are both the architects and the carpenters of your community. You can learn more about municipal structure, planning, best practice and managing growth. You can be champions and lead by example. You can find the common interests and shared values on which to build strategies and actions. The question remains – will you work together to develop a blueprint that is mutually beneficial so that your “house” is built on a firm foundation, with room for everyone? Or, will you stand by and watch others build haphazardly and end up with a house that is uninhabitable?

The decision is yours.

There is no magic when it comes to developing community. We cannot reach into our pockets and scatter about a bit of fairy dust to make everything beautiful and perfect. The reality is that you already know both the problems and the solutions. Now is the time to stop looking at each other with suspicion while waiting for someone else to ‘fix’ what is wrong. Dedicate yourselves to getting involved – in both planning and implementing change. The team can’t make the Oxford Area a livable, accepting, safe, comfortable environment – but you can make a real difference!

You must adopt an attitude of self-help. Don’t wait for others to lead; begin to lead yourselves. “If you need a helping hand, look at the end of your arm.”

Stop wasting your time and energy with complaining, blaming, and complacency. As a young lady from Lincoln University said “What is complaining going to get you? In all the time spent complaining, I could have done something great.”

You can – you will do great things – begin now!