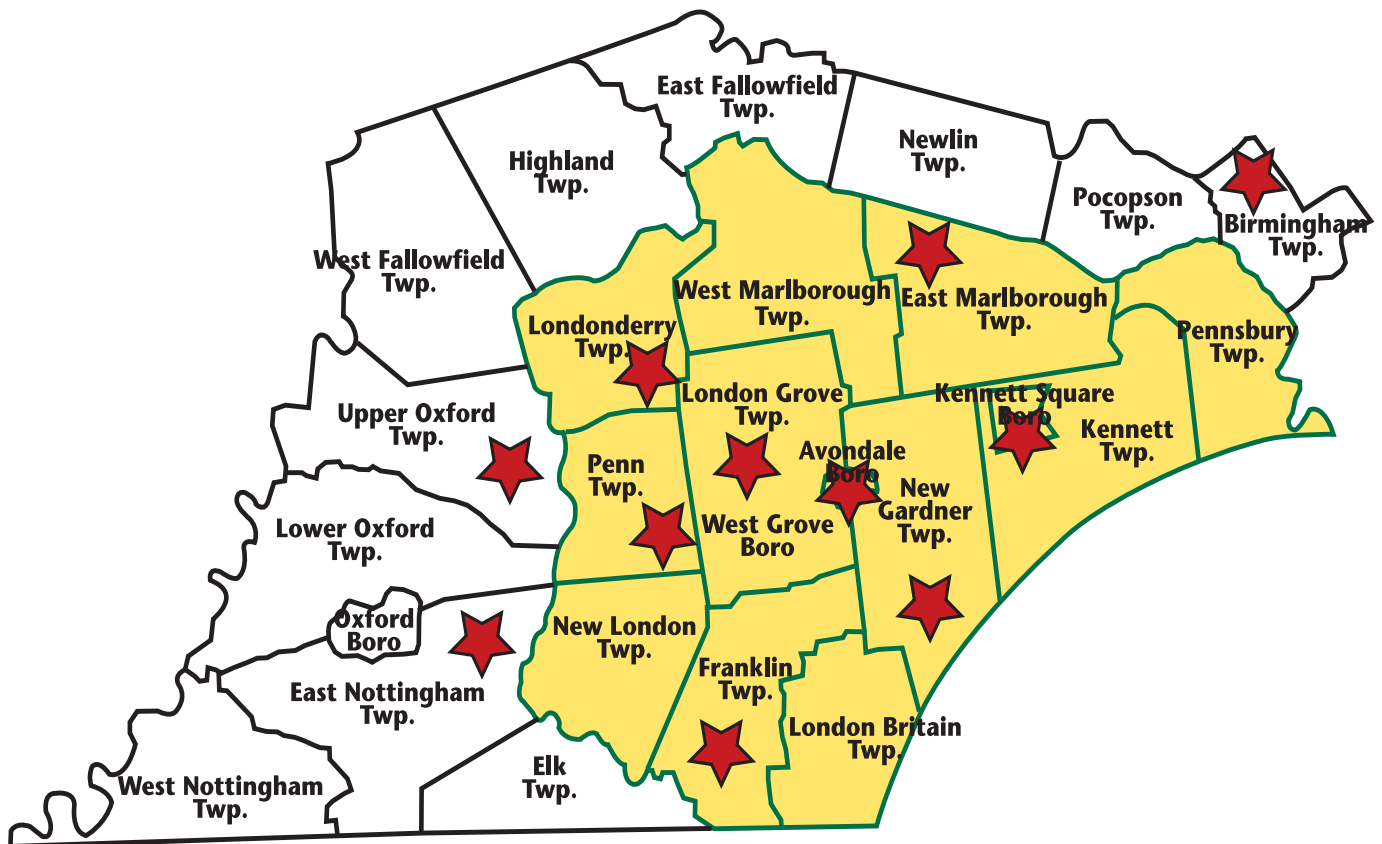


MUNICIPAL COMMUNITY CONVERSATION

for Southern Chester County

■
Chester County 2020
Southern Chester County Chamber of Commerce
hosted by
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December 2009



Chester County 2020: Finding Common Ground with Uncommon Resolve

Traffic On Your Roads

Ronald Bailey, executive director of the Chester County Planning Commission, spoke at the CC2020 Route One Corridor Conversation in May, 2008. Mr. Bailey provided an overview of the current and anticipated conditions along the corridor, emphasizing the critical need to coordinate transportation and land planning. Bailey states, "The Federal Highway Administration projects that truck traffic on Pennsylvania highways, including Routes 1, 41, 30, and 202, will double by the year 2035. These dramatic increases are made worse by the fact that the Federal Highway Trust Fund, a major source of funds for highway improvements, had a deficit of over a billion dollars by October, 2010. Although Route 1 functions well today as a limited access highway, at each interchange, some more than others, congestion is growing. Most of these interchanges were built to rural highway standards and were not designed to handle suburban traffic volumes. As such, they are liable to fail in the future — emphasizing the need for careful, visionary planning that considers the long term ramifications of every decision.

"Increased highway traffic will pose increased traffic demands on secondary roads that run through the neighboring municipalities. Managing this traffic should be of serious concern to every municipality along the corridor and represents an ideal opportunity to initiate effective multi-municipal planning and cooperation. Much of the growth in traffic volumes are the result of suburban land patterns that have occurred since *Landscapes*, the County's long range policy plan was adopted in 1996. Although suburban development was projected around urban centers, the reality is that there has been a great deal of leapfrogging as land prices have risen and development has been pushed into the more rural areas. The overall result has exerted stress on highways that were not intended for suburban traffic, at the same time that there was an increase in trucking along many of the same routes.

"The reality of too little highway construction funding is hitting every area of the

County. In the recently adopted Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) for the Delaware Valley, the basis for federal highway and bridge funding, many critical projects are being delayed. Bridges have become the consuming focus and priority of Penn DOT. Even so, only 25 of the more than 117 structurally deficient bridges in Chester County are programmed for reconstruction in the TIP during the next 4 years. At this rate of spending, it would take 19 years just to replace the structurally deficient bridges, with no money available for highway or intersection improvements. When the highway projects are finally awarded, they will contribute to congestion while construction is under way.

"Development has moved steadily into the southern Chester County municipalities from Delaware and Philadelphia, each project contributing to more traffic congestion in the absence of any effective public transportation options. In the late '60s when the Route 1 by-pass was constructed, Chester County resisted the idea that it might be considered part of the Philadelphia region — and at that time, it wasn't. As late as 1996 when the *Landscapes* was adopted, much of the southern half of the county was still predominantly rural. However, the release of the 2000 Census showed the Philadelphia Metropolitan Area extending westward into southern Chester County. Since 2000, sewer and water lines have been extended and thousands of subdivision lots have been created, changing the formerly rural character of several townships into a suburban landscape. The early 2000s should have served as the wake up years for managing growth, and yet the mindset was still country, resisting the idea that the area would become a suburban destination. It only took the developers' discovery of less expensive land costs to change the landscape — virtually overnight. There is no shortage of challenges facing these neighboring municipalities, but they can still claim a narrow window of opportunity through closer cooperation."

Community Conversations and Productive Partnerships

The Southern Chester County Chamber of Commerce in partnership with Chester County 2020 held a Community Conversation to address effective community cooperation. These Conversations bring together municipal officials and volunteers to discover the positive values of sharing information and planning cooperatively. They often take place at the municipal level, but may also be regional — and offer the potential for multi-municipal planning.

With CC2020 Community Conversations, the stakeholders communicate, strengthen their sense of shared community, and identify the value of common ground. We explore the future with the participants, helping them to speak the language of understanding and cooperation.

This meeting held a Conversation with 21 participants from 11 municipalities. The CC2020 staff was surprised by the range of interests and backgrounds: economy in the small urban or rural township; decades of residence or/and newly arrived; ethnic diversity; and volunteers with municipal experience. As the groups evolved, it was intriguing to find more common ground; a commitment to the preservation of the quality of life – throughout southern Chester County.

Those who live and work in this region of Chester County share mutual interest in economic stability and a healthy sense of community. This evening produced newly-met neighbors crossing municipal lines, discovering one another's strengths and challenges. Without exception, CC2020 has discovered that Community Conversations are always interesting. Good things happen.

This Community Conversation addressed concerns about open space, sprawl, agriculture, and transportation within the broad corridor from north of Kennett Square to Oxford. The participants were municipal officials, planning commission members and residents from the Boroughs of Avondale, Kennett Square, and Oxford, and the Townships of London Grove, E. Marlborough, Penn, New Garden, Upper Oxford, Birmingham, Franklin, and Londonderry, and board members of the Southern Chester County Chamber of Commerce (SCCCC). Discussion focused on shared challenges and opportunities with particular high interest in land and transportation planning.

And on to the Conversation

The rules were easy:

- Approach the Conversation with an open mind.
- Show respect for the ideas of others.
- Be willing to think “outside the box;” to listen and learn.

Identifying and Rating the Issues

The Conversation began with the identification of issues that participants considered important. As issues were articulated, they were displayed on a large screen. The total list of identified issues was then printed out on posters and mounted on easels. Each participant received 5 adhesive “dot” labels. Each participant reviewed the issues posted, and affixed one dot each to the 5 issues that he and she considered most important. The accumulation of participants' dots on the posters prioritized the issues. CC2020 staff counted dots to determine the top rated issues while the four work groups got acquainted, shared a light supper and prepared for the work sessions. After dots were tallied, CC2020 staff displayed the 5 highest rated issues as starting points for



discussion in the four work groups. CC2020 board members, staff and SCCCC volunteers were observers and sources of information when requested.

The Top Rated Issues as identified by the participants and displayed, with their “dot” counts:

- 27 Planning to counter sprawl
- 21 Open space preservation
- 17 Storm water management
- 13 Ag land preservation
- 11 Route 41 - transportation



In a Community Conversation, lower rated issues are important, though emphasis is placed on the issues with more accumulated votes.

The Lower Rated Issues, with their “dot” counts:

- 9 Road maintenance
- 8 Traffic issues
- 8 Transportation choices – public, walk, bike
- 8 Public safety
- 7 Transportation resources: PennDot
- 2 Recreational opportunities
- 2 Neighbor-to-neighbor respect
- 2 Low turnout at public meetings
- 1 Shared recreation facilities
- 1 Affordable housing
- 1 Regional planning opportunities
- 1 Respect for diversity
- 1 Education quality, performance

A discussion outline 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) important players in making good things happen.

Regional and Local Trends

The work groups were invited to summarize the trends they perceived in the immediate surrounding region. An assessment of current trends provides context for work groups’ efforts. This was a generalized discussion, as the work group members were unfamiliar with each other’s challenges and opportunities. The trends are shown as recorded by the work groups.

Funding

- There is a serious shortage of available funding

Transportation

- Traffic is a huge problem- heavy trucks and passenger vehicles along Rt.1 and around Longwood
- Toughkenamon across from the airport is another congestion trouble spot
- PennDOT has to become a partner
- Use enforcement – police give tickets to enforce speed limits
- State and township roads can’t handle the volume and increasing maintenance occurs

Sprawl

- The trend of development is towards sprawl – with suburban growth, not “urban infill.”
- Should we attempt to develop in boroughs instead of townships in “urban infill?”
- Infrastructure cost is lower in urban centers. Will next “boom” be in urban areas? How will this affect affordable housing?
- If sprawl is controlled how will this influence the challenges of MS4 (storm water management), road maintenance, and schools
- Urban trends for affordable housing — or no?
- Mixed use: a tool to counteract sprawl?
- Majority of the municipalities represented in the Conversation are bedroom communities with 90% of the people working outside the local region

Priority Values

Each group envisioned a preferred future in the region. The priority values are listed as recorded by the work groups.

Economy

- More employment opportunities within the municipalities. Less through-traffic within the municipalities, with more business visitors as well as tourists.
- Diversity of services, population, business types, employment
- Local services for local people
- Attractions, commercial and cultural, to draw business and tourist activity
- Walkable areas
- Less traffic (certainly no more)
- No more building

Diversity

- Owner-occupied properties
- Quality of life a community priority for all citizens
- Mixed-use housing

Sprawl

- Sense of community is more difficult to achieve in townships than boroughs, because of sprawl
- Manage growth/control sprawl

Ways to work together:

- Current and future technology, the value of communication and cooperation
- Compromise
- Affordable and workforce housing with non-profit developers
- More meetings like this one for a start
- Elm Street projects
- Thinking outside the box

Preferred future developed by the group/ personal vision:

- Clean and green
- Public transportation – train service with connecting buses
- Affordable housing
- Mixed-use housing, walking areas
- Infill development; direct growth toward boroughs

Anticipated accomplishments and benefits/if vision was fulfilled:

- Encourage outreach text messaging
- Establish a commuter rail system
- New/enhanced public transportation
- Less fuel consumption



- More sense of community without nimby ['not in my back yard'] attitudes
- Reduced/more efficient infrastructure
- Less wasteful spending for municipalities
- Cooperation, with recognition of positive aspects of diversity rather than entrenched interests
- More financial investment for this end of Chester County to promote employment and build tax base
- Financial and legislative support and cooperation at all levels



How to get there:

- Public community awareness
- Technology: calling systems, websites/Internet/"linked in," Facebook, encourage outreach text messaging
- Awareness and education, internet and email
- Encourage a review of ordinances
- Incentive opportunities for commercial, industrial employers

Unresolved differences:

- Differing levels of awareness of the value of quality of life to communities
- Cost

Suggested Action Items: what do we want in common?

- Employment opportunities
- Getting PennDOT to become a "partner"
- More enforcement of existing laws re: planning and public safety
- Explore regional rail opportunities
- More conservative in (approving) improving developments
- Encourage municipalities to consider changing inappropriate regulations, inappropriate zoning ordinances
- Identify funding or create funding to implement vision
- Foster public awareness
- Identify or create tax incentives
- Encourage funding sources- for owner-occupied dwellings

Important Players

Total agreement was expressed about the important players. There is a role for nearly everyone, though some roles are naturally more concentrated and time consuming (for instance, serving as a municipal official or member of the planning commission). Every important player has the ability to contribute to progress in any or all of the solutions.

Municipal officials
Residents
Business community
Professional consultants
Developers: getting them to pay for important improvements
Everyone working together

County officials
State Legislators
Planning commissions: CCPC and local
Non-profit developers
Property owners
Employers/employees

Community Conversation Generated Findings

1. Willingness to recognize strengths and weaknesses of the overall community.
2. Quality of life is a top priority.
3. Participants value a sense of community: it's not "just words."
4. Effort is needed to foster the community's sense of its own worth.
5. Concurrent sprawl and the growth of "bedroom communities" discourage a sense of local identity.
6. Communication and cooperation across the entire community are key to success.
7. Community Conversations promote communication and a sense of community.
8. The community needs to identify prospective partners and engage them in strategic planning; include legislators in the process.
9. Partners want priorities and a wise sequence of actions.
10. Traffic volume and road maintenance are huge problems at major intersections and across the region. PennDOT is an essential partner.
11. Encourage infill development within the boroughs.
12. Encourage creative, "outside-the-box" thinking.
13. Promote increased financial investment in the region.

Chester County 2020 Observations

1. This Community Conversation demonstrated the value of discovering shared challenges and opportunities. The Conversation highlighted the potential benefits of multi-municipal cooperation, and the advantages of engaging with partners and regional collaboration.
2. The combined issues facing the 11 communities are rarely isolated. Clearly, the most critical challenges exist around traffic and urban sprawl.
3. Consider this group of Conversation participants as a new informal multi-municipal committee that could meet regularly, or as needed if a special issue arises that can benefit from group conversational effort. A successful example is the monthly Western Chester County Region (WCCR) Conversation. WCCR member participants include officials from the townships and boroughs around Coatesville; the City of Coatesville serves as monthly host. Regular guests at WCCR Conversations include Chester County 2020, staff from government agencies, local businesses and non-profits, and representatives from public utilities. The WCCR Conversations are in their 6th year of well attended monthly meetings. A Southern Chester County Region Conversation, like the WCCR Conversation, could take place regularly at times that suit the municipalities. CC2020, acting as facilitator, would provide advance agenda reminders and distribute minutes after each meeting. Agendas would reflect new issues as they emerge. Experience has shown that an issues-solutions format promotes the most productive monthly discussions.
4. Develop an on-going of list of opportunities for productive cooperation. Be creative; nothing is impossible with energy and good will.
5. Work to understand your current municipal comprehensive plans and zoning – and those of your neighbor municipalities.
6. Try to understand one another's issues; work together to identify and prioritize them openly.
7. Consider the Chester County Vision Partnership Program and what it can do for multi-municipal planning projects.



8. A developer isn't always a "bad guy." Use developers' goals to support yours. This is possible if you have a clear vision of your community's future.
9. Explore opportunities for obtaining services in common. Utilizing formal or informal Councils of Government (COG) can save cable negotiations, shared police, materials, equipment, etc.
10. Encourage participation in the Master Planner Program (MPP). The 3 short courses are invaluable for volunteer or elected municipal officials, engaged citizens, or professionals concerned with land use and planning issues. MPP is a partnership offering from CC2020, the Chester County Planning Commission, West Chester University, and the Octorara School District.



Overall Conclusion

The participants in the Southern Chester County Region Community Conversation are a particularly well-informed set of stakeholders, through their public service and professional experience. This gives the Conversation process a "leg up" and formed a basis for prompt outcomes; it practically eliminates the tendency for productive efforts to be derailed by sound bites.

Consensus at the SCCCC Conversation centered on the goal of preserving the quality of life that continues to attract people to Southern Chester County. The participants expressed uniform willingness to engage in working partnerships, building a foundation that should be the first of many SCCCC Community Conversations.

The most easily achieved, most potentially productive outcome of the SCCCC Conversation would be to carry the Conversation on, on a regular basis as is done in the Western Chester County Region. Open, honest discussion and an understanding of the value of partnerships can set the stage for accomplishment without unduly burdening any one municipality. The Southern Chester County Region is a broad one, in area and in its diversity of needs and potential. It's asking a lot to expect full community representation at any one Conversation. It's not too much to expect full community participation over the course of a series of informal meetings staged through the year. Most importantly, the momentum generated at the December 3rd Conversation should not be allowed to languish. The best chance to profit from the efforts of the first SCCCC Community Conversation — is to build upon them.

Sincerely,

Nancy Mohr
President, Chester County 2020

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Landscapes2

Chester County's comprehensive plan, the newly *Landscapes2* was presented recently by the County Chester Commissioners. *Landscapes2* is the official, long-range policy plan for Chester County. Interested groups and neighbors from over the all county contributed to this two year process. The resulting plan establishes a dramatic blueprint for bringing growth and preservation together for Chester County by outlining three initiatives for guiding the future of the county. These initiatives are accomplished through the collective implementation of policies and actions as follows:

- Build working partnerships. The county will join with municipal governments and stakeholders to develop productive partnerships that champion specific actions to achieve the vision of *Landscapes2*.
- Create sustainable communities. The county will work with the state and municipal governments, and other partners to build and enhance sustainable communities within designated growth areas. The county will advocate for a green sustainable future.
- Preservation programs, municipalities, land trusts and other non-profit entities will contribute to the future fulfillment of *Landscapes2*. Critical topics addressed in *Landscapes2* include diverse open space and farmland preservation goals, urban center revitalization, affordable homes, infrastructure, transportation, and long-term environmental outcomes.





Chester County 2020: Finding Common Ground with Uncommon Resolve

Chester County 2020 concentrates on the landscape of people who call this county their home. CC2020's contribution is to engage the community in respecting the past, dealing with the present, and planning for the future. Each area is critical to the quality of daily life – for us, our children and their children.

Community Conversations stand as CC2020's branded means of working with the wide range of diversity across the county.

- Productive dialogue develops solutions and action plans in response to critical issues.
- Cooperation and a heightened sense of community is rewarding for everyone involved.
- CC2020's Conversation and summit reports contributed to the research producing policy statements for *Landscapes2*.
- The Chester County Planning Commission is a highly valued partner whenever and wherever planning principles serve as important resources.
- Every Community Conversation is the product of a community partnership.

Master Planner Program

A partnership of Chester County 2020, 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) offers the 2009/2010 series of Master Planner Program courses.

- The three-session seminars began in October with in Community Planning, just finished the Zoning in March '10, and Land Development and Subdivision in May 6, 13, and 20.
- All classes are taught by certified professional planners. They have received glowing reviews
- Continuing education credits are available, including those for lawyers and real estate professionals. Detailed information and on-line registration is available at www.CC2020.org.

Keep Farming First '10

- The enduring focus is on preserving the region's farmers and improving their economy.
- For the second year, Keep Farming First '10 was held in the heart of the County's most concentrated farmland preservation area, the Octorara Area High School campus off Route 41.
- The key subject was **"Agriculture in the Community: Its Value to the Local Economy."**
- The topics included: Business Approaches; Farming on Other Peoples' Land; Smart Farm Finances in Tough Economic Times; Planning for the Future of Agriculture; Township and Planning Perspectives; Awareness of Lyme Disease; Food Safety; New Strategies by the Mushroom Industry; Understanding Milk Prices; and the Horse Industry support of the local economy.
- For this 8th KFF the attendees were more engaged than ever.
- The presenting partners include Chester County 2020, Penn State Cooperative Extension-Chester County, Chester County Economic Development Council, and Chester County Agricultural Development Council.



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