

# PLANNING PERSPECTIVES

Focusing on Planning in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania

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## Steven L. Nelson Appointed as Acting Director of MCPC

On January 3, the Montgomery County Board of Commissioners appointed Steven L. Nelson as acting director of the planning commission. Steve brings a wealth of experience to this position, gained through his 26 years of service to the county. Prior to his new appointment, Steve served as the director of policy and deputy chief operating officer for the county. From 1985 through 1999, Steve was a member of the planning commission staff, being promoted several times to chief of the county planning section. Steve holds a master's degree in city planning from the University of Pennsylvania and a bachelor of arts in economics from Rutgers University. His professional affiliations include the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP), American Planning Association (APA), and Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association. Steve also is actively involved in numerous regional and community organizations.

## Proposed Development Slow but Showing Signs of Improvement



The number of proposed developments in Montgomery County dropped in 2011, continuing a downward trend started in 2004. Our commission received 344 new proposals in 2011, the lowest ever. The 543 acres of land proposed for new development in 2011 was also the lowest annual total since at least 1970.

Yet the 1,924 new residential units proposed was a substantial increase from the 345 units proposed in 2010. Most of these units were from a few large multifamily developments that appear to be targeted for the rental market. Attached residential units also grew by 196 percent to 249 in 2011. Only 141 of the proposed units were single-family detached units. This is a continuation of the trend away from single-family home submissions, which has been occurring over the last six years. Many of the municipalities that experienced the largest housing growth in the last two decades—Horsham, Upper Providence, Lower Salford, Hatfield, and Towamencin Townships—saw no new residential units proposed in 2011. Though the proposed residential numbers grew since 2010, the number of approved residential units actually decreased to 708, a 42 percent drop from last year.

All but 21 of the housing units proposed in the county were located in the designated growth areas or within existing development areas established in the Montgomery County comprehensive plan. Also, over 95 percent of the residential developments occurring within the growth areas and suburban developed areas had densities of over 1 dwelling unit per acre, which meets the criteria in the plan.

Nonresidential development increased to 1,561,335 square feet, the first increase in the last five years. Even still, this was well under the average square footage proposed in the last 10 years. Commercial, industrial, and institutional square footage all increased modestly. Office square footage dropped significantly to 27,426 square feet.

The decline in new submissions is a result of continuing economic conditions and a large inventory of development projects that are currently approved or in process. There are signs that new development construction will be increasing throughout the county over the next several years as the previously approved development projects get built. The number of new submissions should grow as well to meet future housing and nonresidential demand. View the [2011 Annual Summary of Subdivision, Land Development, and Zoning Activity](#).

### Three New Housing Inventories Available



Three new countywide housing inventories for multifamily and attached housing, mobile homes, and age-restricted housing were recently released. All three update inventories previously published by the planning commission.

The new countywide [inventory of multifamily and attached housing](#) includes renter- and owner-occupied attached developments and multifamily projects. These types of developments have accounted for over half of the housing units in the past four years. The inventory provides important characteristics of the more than 530 multifamily and attached housing developments that contain 56,400 housing units in the county.

The [mobile home inventory](#) lists the 21 mobile home parks located in the county, which contain a total of 3,166 mobile home units. The inventory also lists the municipal location of the 242 scattered mobile home sites in the county.

The current [age-restricted housing inventory](#) lists 103 age-restricted developments with more than 16,000 independent living units across the county. This total, comprised of both developments completed or significantly under construction, also includes independent units within the county's continuing care retirement communities. Because of the increasing population of seniors in the county, this type of housing remains popular even in the tough housing market. In 2010, 13 percent of the units built were age-restricted.

### Model Floodplain Ordinance Released



MCPC, working with the county conservation district, has developed model floodplain ordinances that will assist municipalities in preventing future flood loss and preserving floodplain resources. Once the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) approves new floodplain maps for Montgomery County later this year, municipalities will be required to update their floodplain ordinances. The four model floodplain ordinances have been prepared to match the ordinance requirements of each flood map category in the county. Models have been distributed on compact discs to enable easy use and are also available at [www.planning.montcopa.org/FloodplainOrdinance](http://www.planning.montcopa.org/FloodplainOrdinance).

## New Planning Assistance Contract Narberth Borough

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The Montgomery County Planning Commission recently started a new community planning assistance contract with Narberth Borough to undertake a comprehensive examination and rewriting of the borough's zoning code that will focus on the design of buildings and public spaces in addition to the geography of land uses. Through an innovative form-based zoning approach, Narberth will be able to grow and change while retaining the unique architectural character, walkable neighborhoods, and diverse businesses that make it such an attractive community. The planning commission staff will use geographic information systems (GIS) information and social media through the zoning development process to accurately capture the physical structure of the borough and the concerns of local residents and businesspeople.

## Register for The Course in Community Planning

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We are sponsoring *The Course in Community Planning*, which will be taught in three consecutive Tuesday sessions—April 3, 10, 17—in Freedom Hall of the [Upper Merion Township](#) building, 175 W. Valley Forge Road, King of Prussia, from 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.

The course is designed for both new and experienced participants. It covers the fundamental information that

municipal officials and planning commission members need to carry out their responsibilities and do an effective job. It addresses the role of planning in local government and how planning commissions relate to the governing body, zoning hearing board, and zoning officer. Specific topics include basic knowledge of the *Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code* (MPC), comprehensive planning, plan implementation (including zoning, subdivision, and land development regulation), official mapping, and how effective planning commissions approach their responsibilities.

The course was developed by the Pennsylvania Planning Association (PPA) and Penn State Extension Service through their training agency, the Pennsylvania Municipal Planning Education Institute (PMPEI), and is taught by certified PMPEI instructors. The PMPEI is an approved provider of continuing education by the PA Board of Certified Real Estate Appraisers, PA Real Estate Commission, PA Continuing Legal Education Board, and Penn State University.

The course is limited to 25 persons, and pre-registration is required. The registration fee is \$90 per person. A [course brochure and online registration](#) are available. We will be offering a zoning course and a subdivision and land development course in the fall. [Join our e-mail list](#) to receive notification of upcoming courses. For further information, contact [Rita McKelvey](#) 610.278.3753.

## Stay Connected

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We continually post important Montgomery County items on our [Facebook](#) page. Our [Web site](#) contains many new publications and searchable databases to help you understand more about planning and important planning issues. Please [stay connected](#) so we can communicate better with you.



### Montgomery County Planning Commission

P.O. Box 311  
Norristown, PA 19404-0311

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Steven L. Nelson, *Acting Director*