

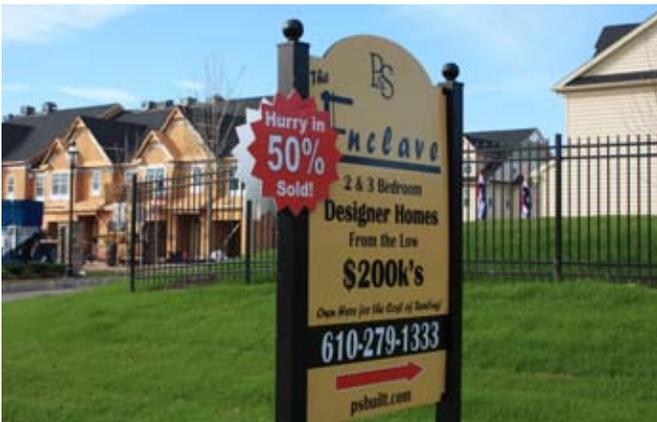
# PLANNING PERSPECTIVES

Focusing on Planning in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania

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## Median House Prices Fall in 2011



The Montgomery County Median Prices for Housing Report 2011, released on May 9, shows that the median house sales price dropped 1.9 percent last year to \$260,000. The median housing price has now dropped to the same level as it was in 2005. Though housing prices had increased 4.7 percent in 2010, they have been dropping since 2007.

All types of housing experienced housing price drops, with multifamily housing declining the most. The drop in median housing prices was also widespread, occurring in 50 of the 62 municipalities.

The median price for new houses dropped 6.3 percent to \$321,540 in 2011. This is a continuation of the new housing price decline experienced since 2006. Part of this decline is a reflection of the fact that smaller and more attached unit housing is currently being developed.

The number of houses sold in 2011 dropped by 7.4 percent, continuing a decline in sales for the sixth straight year. Only 7,525 units were sold at a market rate level in 2011—the lowest total since at least 1999 and about half of the number of houses that were typically sold each year throughout the early part of the last decade.

## Meet Our Newest Board Members



**Marc D. Jonas, Esquire** is recently appointed chair of the Montgomery County Planning Commission Board. He is a shareholder of Eastburn and Gray, P.C., attorneys at law, with offices in Blue Bell, Montgomery County, and Doylestown, Bucks County. Marc is co-chair of the firm's real estate and land use group. Marc has served as trustee of the Abington Health Foundation for many years. He has been recognized by his peers as a Pennsylvania Super Lawyer, and he has been selected by U.S. News as a "Best Lawyer" in land use and zoning law for the Philadelphia Metropolitan area. Marc is a member of the Pennsylvania Montgomery Bar Association and chairs the Montgomery Bar Association Real Estate Committee. He is a resident of Blue Bell.



**Jill Blumhardt** is Senior II Project Manager at AMEC Environment & Infrastructure, Inc. (AMEC). She is Vice President of the Lower Moreland Township Board of Commissioners. She also is a board member of the Pennypack Ecological Restoration Trust and is board liaison to the Lower Moreland Township Recreation Board and a member of the Huntingdon Valley Fire Committee. Jill resides in Huntingdon Valley/Lower Moreland Township with her husband Steve and three young children.



**Reverend John H. West, III** has been the Pastor of the Siloam Baptist Church of Norristown for over 18 years. During his tenure, there has been a significant increase in membership, community programs, and ministries. He has also served as a board member of Hedwig House, as a member of the Burnside School Committee of the Norristown Area School District, and as President of the Greater Norristown Area Ministerium. Reverend West and his wife reside in East Norriton Township.

## MCPC Model Ordinance Series Wins National Planning Award



*Brian O'Leary, section chief: county planning, accepts the Award of Excellence in the Best Practices category for our commission's model ordinance series at the American Planning Association Conference in April.*

The Montgomery County Planning Commission recently received an Award of Excellence in the Best Practices category for our [model ordinance series](#) at the American Planning Association Conference held in Los Angeles. The prestigious national award was presented on April 15 by the [American Planning Association \(APA\)](#), [County Planning Division \(CPD\)](#) and its sister organization, the [National Association of County Planners \(NACP\)](#). Two other counties, Mecklenberg County in North Carolina and Westchester County in New York, also received awards.

The model ordinance series was selected for the Award of Excellence since it provides a comprehensive and easy-to-use set of tools for the county and its municipalities to foster sound land use development. Each model ordinance document includes a guidebook that provides the user with an explanation of the pertinent land use issues to be addressed by the model. The layout of each document makes it easy to understand the purpose of various standards and criteria used in the model and how to modify them to better meet local concerns. Numerous photographs and illustrations are included to provide a clear understanding of design elements important in shaping ordinances to meet local needs. Various forms of computer-simulated site design are used to illustrate key design concepts within each model. Effective aerial photograph illustrations clearly depict suitable locations for types of land uses and how individual development projects can be designed to achieve overall community goals.

## Report Focuses on Characteristics of Households

Information about new households can be important in planning for services to be provided by municipalities and school districts and for estimating the fiscal impacts from new development. Using information from the 2010 Census, our planners were able to examine the county's population living in housing built between 2000 and 2010. This information provides a better understanding of the types of families occupying various types of housing such as single-family detached, attached, and multifamily. We have compiled this information in a report: [Characteristics of the Population in New and Existing Housing Units](#).



The new household characteristic information is useful in making forecasts about growth, community composition, and the impact of new development on local school enrollment. Often times, local opposition arises against denser townhouse or multifamily development due to concerns about various impacts including an expected increase in the number of schoolchildren. As this report demonstrates, the number of schoolchildren likely to originate from new townhouse or multifamily houses is a fraction of what is likely from less dense single-family detached housing. With better numbers to make these forecasts, municipalities and school districts can make estimates about the fiscal impact of new development. Information about the age and family composition of new residents also may be useful in better understanding future home buyer trends.

The report uses a similar method as a report developed 10 years ago based on the 2000 census. By comparing the results of the two studies, some observations can be made about household characteristic trends over the past decade.

## Design Series Highlights Sustainable Design



[Planning by Design](#) is an educational series that promotes design awareness and offers practical design solutions to site planning issues in our communities. Each issue explores a specific design topic through comprehensive content and illustrative examples and includes additional resources.

Our most recent issues have focused on sustainable design. They offer innovative concepts to managing storm water in our communities while providing community greening and other benefits. These issues include green roofs, green streets, green parking lots, sustainable paving, and shading parking lots. Previous issues have explored topics such as street trees, traffic calming, storm water management, pedestrian amenities, and woodland edge treatments. Future topics include infill design standards, streetscape elements, landscape buffering, community gardens, farmers' markets, form based zoning, and innovative street tree plantings.

## Check Out Our Latest Model Ordinance Village Residential District



At one time, most people who lived outside of cities resided in towns and villages. In addition to offering access to various goods and services, local villages and towns offered a sense of

place to their residents. Over the last several decades, new residential areas have been developed in a suburban style away from cities, towns, and villages. Yet in the past decade there has been a growing interest among home buyers to return to village and town settings. The only problem is that in many cases these styles of development cannot be built under many municipal development codes.

To assist municipalities in making this type of housing available once again, we recently published our latest model ordinance—[Creating a Village Community: Village Residential District](#). This model zoning district allows a mix of higher-density housing organized and designed in a way that establishes a small town sense of community. It provides zoning regulations and design guidelines to create traditional residential developments that form walkable and neighborly communities with a focus on common open space and diverse housing options.

### Montgomery County Planning Commission

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

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