

PLANNING PERSPECTIVES

Focusing on Planning in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania

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Proposed Development Beginning a Slow Recovery



The number of proposed developments in Montgomery County increased slightly in 2012, reversing a downward trend started in 2004. Our commission received 383 total proposals in 2012, an 11 percent increase from the previous year. The number of proposed residential units increased slightly while the square footage of proposed nonresidential construction dropped to the lowest level since 1970. The 562 acres of land proposed for new development in 2012 was an increase from the 543 acres in 2011 (the lowest annual total since at least 1970).

The 2,027 residential units proposed was a slight increase from the 1,924 units proposed in 2011. Most of these units were from a few large multifamily developments that appear to be targeted for the rental market. Attached residential units increased by 71 percent from 2011. Single-family detached units continued to be the smaller share of proposed residential units with only 205. This is a continuation of the trend away from single-family home submissions, which had been a significant housing choice prior to the housing market collapse.

Over 99 percent of the proposed housing units were located within the growth or developed areas designated 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 declined to 637,192 square feet, the lowest level in decades. Commercial proposals accounted for almost half of the nonresidential square footage, but there were simply no big projects from any sector to help boost the overall total.

The number of new development proposals has remained low due to the economy and a large inventory of development projects that are currently approved or in process. The worst appears to be behind us, but future growth in development activity is expected to be gradual until the economy fully recovers. View the [2012 Annual Summary of Subdivision, Land Development, and Zoning Activity](#).

Melissa R. Gilbert Appointed to Planning Board



On February 21, the Montgomery County Board of Commissioners appointed Melissa R. Gilbert to our planning commission board to fill a vacancy left by the resignation of Mary Jo Daley, who recently began her term in the Pennsylvania General Assembly. Melissa is a professor at Temple University and the interim chair of the Geography and Urban Studies Program. She is also president of the Lower Merion School District Board. Melissa earned her Ph.D. at Clark University in the department of geography. She is a leading researcher and expert in feminist and critical race studies, social action, and urban geography. She recently coauthored a book entitled *Information and Communication Technology Geographies: Strategies for Bridging the Digital Divide*. Melissa resides in Narberth Borough.

Register for The Course in Community Planning



The Montgomery County Planning Commission is sponsoring The Course in Community Planning in three Tuesday sessions on April 16, 23, and 30 in Community Room A,B,C of the Upper Dublin Township building, 801 Loch Alsh Avenue, Fort Washington, from 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. This course, developed through the Pennsylvania Municipal Planning Education Institute, provides a comprehensive overview of all local planning functions and responsibilities under the *Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code*. The course addresses a variety of topics with expert instruction from two local professional planners and informative group exercises. It is designed for new and veteran planning commissioners, local elected and appointed officials, and various professionals involved in local planning. For further information, contact [Rita McKelvey](#) at 610-278-3753. [Online registration](#) | [Course brochure](#)

Renewable Energy Model Ordinance



Many municipalities in the county do not have ordinances to guide the development of renewable energy systems. They either force individuals seeking to utilize renewable energy technologies to go through a lengthy process of obtaining variances or exceptions to the zoning code or ignore the issue all together. One route leads to considerable

time delays, increased project costs, and increased strain on limited municipal resources, while ignoring it may result in unintended impacts to neighbors and the community as a whole.

Over the past two years, the Montgomery County Planning Commission staff has assisted the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) in the development of the Renewable Energy Ordinance Frameworks. The frameworks were created to serve as a resource for municipalities to develop appropriate land use controls that address the siting of small-scale renewable energy systems, including solar photovoltaic, small wind (<100kW), and geothermal in their community. Their purpose is to provide clear, consistent guidance on how to construct renewable energy ordinances that are consistent with state laws, are not overly restrictive or contradictory to the nature of renewable energy systems, and promote safe and sound community development. These frameworks will be updated regularly as municipalities in the region develop ordinances and as more information about renewable energy systems becomes available. For more information, visit www.dvrpc.org/energyclimate/aeowg.htm.

Some Changes Out of Harrisburg



There are new requirements for discarding electronic devices in Pennsylvania. This [law](#), which took effect on January 24, prohibits consumers from throwing away certain electronic devices with their trash. Household electronic devices covered by this law include televisions, computers and monitors, laptop computers, and various accessory items. Several drop-off events are being established around the county to collect these items for proper recycling. For more information, see the [county recycling Web site](#).

The [Wireless Broadband Collocation Act](#) streamlines the process for some wireless facilities. Under this law, certain additions or modifications to existing wireless facilities or support structures would only be reviewed as building permits and not be subject to land development review or zoning requirements.

Two amendments were made to the *Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code* in 2012. One amendment, former [House Bill 1718](#), modified and further clarified the process

to address disputed review and inspection fees for a subdivision or land development. The [other amendment](#), passed in July, requires municipalities to send a monthly report to their school district itemizing pending subdivision and land development projects. In certain circumstances, it also requires notification to the operators or the wastewater treatment facilities serving a property so they can comment on the proposed development.

The Pennsylvania General Assembly also established the authority to enter into [public private transportation partnerships](#) as a mechanism for expediting needed infrastructure. The assembly also authorized the [land bank](#) as a tool for municipalities to facilitate the redevelopment of old abandoned properties.

Service Milestones Achieved by Staff



(L-R) Leslie S. Richards, Vice Chair of the Montgomery County Board of Commissioners, Eric Jarrell; David Clifford, Robert Cartier, Brian O'Leary

Four Montgomery County Planning Commission staff members were awarded service pins by Commissioner Leslie Richards at the February planning board meeting. Staff members honored included Brian O'Leary, chief of county planning, for 25 years of service; Eric Jarrell, assistant section chief of community planning, for 20 years; Robert Cartier, GIS cartographer, for 15 years; and David Clifford, open space planner, for 10 years.



Montgomery County Planning Commission
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