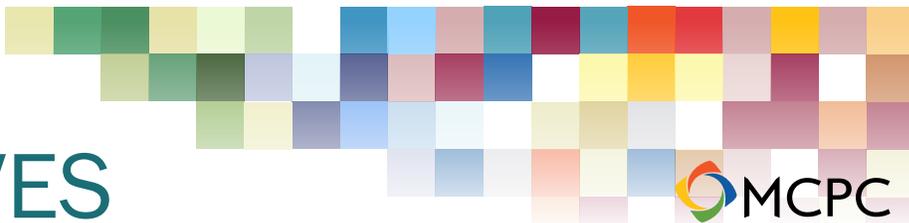


# PLANNING PERSPECTIVES



Focusing on Planning in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania

JUNE 2014—Volume 12, Issue 2

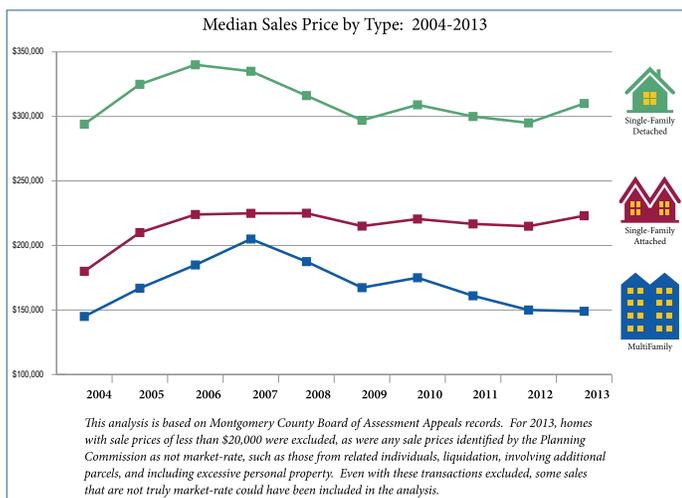


## Median Housing Sales Price Increases in 2013

The *Montgomery County Median Prices for Housing Report 2013*, released on May 14, shows a 4.7 increase from 2012. The 2013 median housing sales price in the county was \$267,000. This was a dramatic change from the past six years when housing prices declined in five of those years. The 9,895 housing sales recorded in 2013 represented an increase of 13.3 percent from 2012 and were the highest number sales since 2007, the year of the housing market collapse in the United States.

Single-family detached and single-family attached housing experienced price increases of 5.1 percent and 3.8 percent, with multifamily housing declining 0.7 percent. The increase in median housing prices was widespread with only 17 of the 62 municipalities with declining median sale prices.

The median price for new houses increased 13.4 percent to \$375,165 in 2013. This is the first time the median prices for new houses increased since 2006. New single-family attached housing grew by 16.6 percent, and single-family detached houses



gained by 5.2 percent. Multifamily housing, with only 28 sales, recorded a 10.1 percent increase.

The median sales price for existing housing rose 2.8 percent. Single-family detached and attached housing grew by 5.3 and 4 percent. The median sales price for multifamily housing remained unchanged.

With the increases in real estate activity experienced this year and the strength of housing value in the county, housing price appreciation should continue. It appears that more new developments are being started throughout the county and that houses are selling more rapidly in existing neighborhoods.

## Meet Our New Board Members

### Robert E. Blue Jr.

Bob has been the President of Robert E. Blue Consulting Engineers P.C. for the past 27 years. He has a BS Civil Engineering, AD in Architectural Design/Civil Engineering from Temple University along with a Certificate of Honor for his outstanding achievements in civil engineering, land planning, and land surveying. He has been qualified as an expert witness before zoning hearing boards in Chester, Bucks, and Montgomery Counties.



His honors include Pennsylvania Society of Land Surveyors for excellence in the Professional Land Surveying Field including ALTA/ASCM, Boundary Retracement Topographic and Specialty Land Surveys as well as National Society of Professional Surveyors 2nd Place 2011 for ALTA/ASCM Survey. He is involved with organizations such as PSPE, PLS, NSPE, and HBA Political Action Committee. Bob resides in Towamencin Township.

### Rachel Yoka, LEED AP, CNU-A

Rachel is Vice President of Program Development at the International Parking Institute. She has spearheaded the sustainability movement in the parking industry, leading the development of the first industry-specific rating system for sustainability in parking structures, which will be released this June. Rachel, a frequent author and speaker, was selected by the International Parking Institute as the "Parking Professional of the Year" in 2012. A graduate of the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service, she has held positions in consulting, engineering, architecture, and construction firms with a focus on marketing and brand development. Rachel has devoted time to multiple nonprofit organizations. In 2013, she campaigned for and



was named “Woman of the Year” with the Eastern Pennsylvania Chapter of the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society. In 2014, she was named as a “40 Under 40” by the *Philadelphia Business Journal*, which honors 40 up-and-coming professionals in their respective fields who have achieved both personal and professional success.

## Join Us for the June 18 Community Walkability Workshop

Sometimes the best way to learn about things is from first-hand experience. During our walkability workshop, you’ll have an opportunity to learn about what makes a community more walkable by getting out and walking around Collegeville.

We are offering two identical workshop sessions on June 18. One is 2:00 to 4:00 p.m., and the other is 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. Each session will kick off with a short interactive presentation that covers the basic principles and advanced concepts of walkability and how to make your community more inviting to pedestrians.

On the hour-long walking audit, we’ll tour parts of Collegeville Borough to examine opportunities and impediments to safe



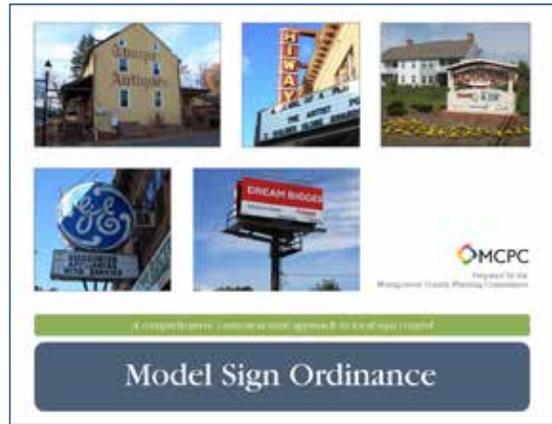
pedestrian travel. After the walk, we’ll return to Collegeville Borough Hall where each participant can share suggestions and concerns about the walking route in order to develop strategies for walkability improvements. Participants will receive a walkability report developed by MCPC staff.

Please [register](#) early since both sessions will be limited to only 20 participants to safely conduct the walking portion of the workshop.

## New Model Sign Ordinance

Signs are everywhere, and they play an important role in our daily lives. Among other things, they inform us about new products and services, direct us to where we need to go, warn us about dangers, and identify places and buildings. Yet, signs that are inappropriately designed or located in the wrong place can have a negative impact on our communities. Effective sign control plays an important role in protecting community character, maintaining vibrant local businesses, and enhancing traffic safety.

Our recently prepared [model sign ordinance](#) released in April contains strategies that enable the constitutional principles of free speech and content neutrality while managing signage at an appropriate scale, location, context sensitivity, and digital



display. It attempts to balance the signage needed for vibrant local businesses with the overall impact that inappropriate signage can have on community health, safety, and general welfare.

The thorough research performed in developing the model ordinance is described in a report that contains many photographs depicting various types of signage. Regulations are described by sign type as well as the appropriate zoning district in which they are placed. The model ordinance provides up-to-date standards for all types of digital display signs, which are becoming more prevalent in our communities. Due to recent court cases involving free speech, new strategies are offered for the regulation of smaller non-permanent signs. The ordinance also touches on the impact of state and federal laws and strategies for enforcement.

Over 50 people attended our two-hour workshop on the new model sign ordinance at the Plymouth Township Building on April 24. Participants heard excellent remarks from a panel consisting of a legal expert, Joseph J. McGrory, Jr., Esq., Hamburg, Rubin, Mullin, Maxwell, & Lupin, PC; a local code enforcement officer, John Ernst, AIA, Lansdale Borough Director of Community Development; and a Main Street manager, Stephen M. Barth, Main Street Hatboro Manager. MCPC staff members and authors of the report, Marley Bice and Meredith Trego, described important elements of the ordinance and answered questions.

## Spring Is a Busy Time for Planners

After a long and cold winter, things are really heating up around here. In addition to completing all of our regular work assignments, our planning staff has been very busy volunteering a lot of their time and energy to enhance our county.

Brian O’Leary and Michael Stokes presented a very popular session on *Hot Planning Topics* in 2014 at the Annual Convention of the Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors in Hershey PA on April 14.

To celebrate Earth Day, Executive Director Jody Holton and other staff members joined Commissioner Josh Shapiro and several Girl Scouts and Parks Division staff in planting



25 trees in Lower Perkiomen Valley Park on April 26. The new shade trees will greatly improve the area along the Perkiomen Trail near the existing parking lot on New Mill Road. In addition to Jody, Michael Stokes, Drew Shaw, Beth Pilling, Matt Schelly, and Rita McKelvey planted trees.

Over 7,000 students descended upon Temple University's Ambler campus for EarthFest 2014 on April 25 to learn about their environment. Many of these students stopped by a booth sponsored by the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association staffed by Anne Leavitt-Gruberger and Rita McKelvey.



Brian O'Leary, MCPC Chief of County Planning and President of the PA Chapter of the American Planning Association, attended the American Planning Association Conference in Atlanta April 26–30.

The planning commission contributed to the successful 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Norristown Arts Hill Festival on May 3. Brian O'Leary and Anne Leavitt-Gruberger played important roles in organizing the ArtBox Competition sponsored by Creative Montco, which was featured at the festival. Pete Pizzo, MCPC Chief of Graphics, contributed a finely designed art box showcasing Norristown. That art box is now a popular fixture at the Norristown government office. Planning Commission Board member Dulcie Flaharty served as one of the art box judges.

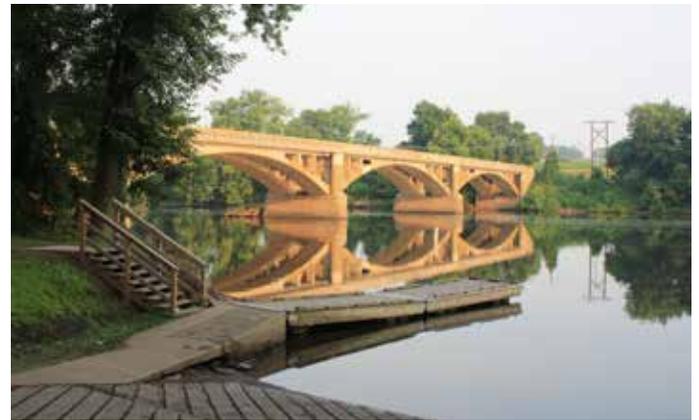


## Schuylkill River Named 2014 River of the Year

The Schuylkill River, which was nominated by the Montgomery County Planning Commission staff, has been selected overwhelmingly as Pennsylvania's River of the Year. This is the second time our river has achieved this statewide recognition.



The Montgomery County comprehensive plan recognizes the 42-mile stretch of the Schuylkill River through Montgomery County as an important greenway that provides recreation and economic development opportunities. The Schuylkill River Trail, which travels along the length of the county, provides great vistas of the river. Public recreation access is available at several locations including Montgomery County's Schuylkill Canal and Upper Schuylkill Valley Park.



Lots of interesting things are happening along the river. In addition to its increased use as a recreational resource for southeastern Pennsylvania, the river seems to be a catalyst for new development and business within river towns. New residential development along the river has been a popular choice in Conshohocken, Royersford, West Norriton, and Pottstown. Additional development projects have been proposed or are under construction along the river in Lower Merion, Whitmarsh, Upper Merion, and Bridgeport. The dramatic Manayunk Bridge between Philadelphia and Lower Merion will be transformed later this year to provide a unique trail experience and connection to the Cynwyd Heritage Trail.

During the first week in June, the Schuylkill River Heritage Area will be sponsoring its popular seven-day [Schuylkill River Sojourn](#). Representatives of the county will paddle with others along the river from Royersford into the Schuylkill Canal.



## Congratulations Matt!

Matt Edmond, Principal Planner, received a Top TDM (Transportation Demand Management) Professional Award from the Greater Valley Forge Transportation Management Association. The award was part of the association's May 12 annual meeting. It recognizes leaders under 40 within the transportation industry. Congratulations to Matt and the other award recipients.



*Matt Edmond (third from the right in front row) is pictured with fellow recipients of the Top TDM Professional Award.*

## Bike to Work Day a Success

The Montgomery County staff teamed up with the Greater Valley Forge TMA and the PA Department of Environmental Protection staff in another successful Bike to Work Day on May 21. Planning Commission staff members Drew Shaw, David Clifford, and Michael Stokes biked to work with Executive Director Jody Holton despite the rain. Beth Pilling and Juliana Guarna played an invaluable role in staffing the new county "Get Out and Go Montco" exhibitor tent at the Bike to Work Day celebration held at the Norristown Transportation Center.



### Montgomery County Planning Commission

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

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