

# PLANNING PERSPECTIVES



Focusing on Planning in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania

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## County Adopts Montco 2040: A Shared Vision

The Montgomery County Commissioners unanimously adopted *Montco 2040: A Shared Vision* on January 15, 2015. This new comprehensive plan, which will shape the future of Montgomery County to the year 2040, contains three major themes: Connected Communities, Sustainable Places, and Vibrant Economy. These themes were developed after analyzing current conditions and emerging trends, contained in *Montgomery County Today*, the background document of the plan, and incorporating input received from thousands of residents and a diverse 28-member steering committee.

The Connected Communities theme focuses on the public's expressed desire to be connected and part of a broader community. A key role for the county is to help these connections occur beyond local municipal boundaries. Topics in this theme include collaboration among stakeholders, improved transportation choices, trails and greenways that connect multiple places, and vibrant downtowns and destinations.

The Sustainable Places theme looks at the many wonderful neighborhoods and communities in the county and the existing natural environment. It focuses on the need for these places to be sustained and enhanced in a long-lasting and effective way. Theme topics include modernized infrastructure network, improved stormwater management, protected natural resources, opportunities for healthy lifestyles, diverse housing choices, and enhanced community character.

The Vibrant Economy theme focuses on the critical importance of a strong economy for all places in the county. With a vibrant economy, residents can earn and spend more, governments can make needed infrastructure improvements,

and businesses can grow. Theme topics include improved transportation access, focused development, attraction and retention of businesses, flexibly adapting to changing market conditions, and marketing of assets.

The next step for this important comprehensive plan is implementation. The county has prepared a [2015 implementation guide](#) that incorporates proposed actions by county departments and partners. The county will annually release a new implementation guide and a report showing progress on the measurables listed in the plan.

"Montco 2040 will truly be a shared vision, one that was created with the input of Montgomery County residents, our hard-working steering committee, and our talented planning staff. This will be a living document that won't just sit on a shelf, but will play a major role in creating the Montgomery County citizens would like to see take shape over the next few decades," said Josh Shapiro, Chair of the Montgomery County Board of Commissioners.



## MCPC Welcomes New Board Member

The Montgomery County Commissioners have appointed Steven N. Kline to the Montgomery County Planning Commission Board. Steven is owner of Regan Kline Cross Architects LLC. He graduated from Temple University in 1989 with a NCARB accredited

Bachelor of Architecture degree and received registration in 1994. Steven serves as Vice President of the Board of Commissioners in Abington Township. He has served on the Code Enforcement, Land Development, Public Works, Public Safety, and Pension Committees and is chairman of the Finance Committee. He served on the Old York Road Corridor Improvement Study, as co-chair of the Abington Comprehensive Plan Committee, and currently serves as chairman of the Zoning Ordinance Re-write Committee. Steven lives in Abington Township with his wife, Janet, and his children, Sam and Bekah. He is an avid bicyclist who has participated in the annual American Cancer Society Bike-A-Thon for the past five years. He also enjoys cross-country skiing, hiking, kayaking, and anything else outdoors.



## New Year's Resolution: Get Money for Parks, Trails, and Open Space Preservation

There are several open space preservation, trail development, and park improvement grant opportunities well suited to the needs of Montgomery County communities. Below are six great grant programs available to all municipalities in the county. Please contact our office if you need assistance in applying for any of these grants. We also will provide [letters indicating consistency](#) of the projects with our new comprehensive plan.

### Community Conservation Partnership Grants (C2P2) Grants

These grants, administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, fund a variety of projects including park and natural area property acquisition, trail development, development and improvement of parks and playgrounds, park master plans, and greenway plans. Generally, the grants provide 50 percent of project funds. In certain cases, up to 80 percent funding can be available. Funding for this grant program is provided through the Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Fund; PA Environmental Stewardship Fund; PA Snowmobile/ATV Fund, the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund; and the Pennsylvania Recreational Trails Program. The deadline for online grant applications is April 16. [Program guidelines and access to grant applications](#)

### Act 13 Greenways, Trails and Recreation Program (GTRP) Grants

Act 13, enacted in 2012, establishes a fund of money from impact fees on unconventional gas wells with output beyond 90,000 cubic feet per day. The Act 13 monies, known as the Marcellus Legacy Fund, are used for a variety of purposes including conservation grants administered by the Commonwealth Financing Authority working with the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. Municipalities are eligible for grants that fund the planning, acquisition, development, rehabilitation, and

repair of greenways, recreational trails, open space, parks, and beautification projects. Grants are awarded to eligible applicants for projects that do not exceed \$250,000. In most cases, grants require a 50 percent local match of the total project cost. The application deadline for this program is June 30, 2015 for consideration at the September 2015 CFA board meeting..

[Application information](#)

### PECO Green Region Program Grant

For the past 10 years, PECO has provided local grant funding to advance various types of open space preservation, trail development, park improvement, and conservation projects throughout Philadelphia and the four suburban counties. These grants cannot exceed \$10,000 but can be matched with a variety of funding sources including in-kind services. The grant application deadline is March 27.

[Grant applications and program guidelines](#)

### Schuylkill River Restoration Fund Grant

The Schuylkill River Restoration Fund grant program was established through a unique public-private partnership with Exleon Corporation, Aqua Pennsylvania, and the Philadelphia Water Department. Grants are administered by the Schuylkill River Heritage Area. The purpose of these grants is to reduce stormwater and agriculture pollution in the Schuylkill River. Though this grant program focuses on the protection of the Schuylkill River water quality, it does provide funding for land transaction assistance as well as funding for public open space improvement activities such as natural area restorations and stream bank improvements. [Grant program information](#)

### Schuylkill River Heritage Towns and Tours

Eligible communities along the Schuylkill River may qualify for grant funding to plan and implement various projects that would better connect local businesses with the Schuylkill River Trail and other river amenities. Through this grant program, funds can be obtained for signage, trails, and other types of green infrastructure that enhance vital riverfront connections. [Grant information](#)

### Building the Circuit Regional Trails Program Grant

The William Penn Foundation recently renewed its commitment to fund the development of the Circuit, Greater Philadelphia's Regional Trail Network. The program, called Building the Circuit, is administered by DVRPC and will fund planning, design, and construction of multiuse trails in greater Philadelphia that fill gaps within the designated Circuit. [Grant program information](#)



*Proposed transportation improvements in the Fort Washington Business Park will enhance roadways and improve safe biking and walking opportunities.*

## Transportation Funding in Montgomery County

In 2014, 50 new transportation grants totaling \$36,162,594, were awarded throughout Montgomery County to improve mobility. Many of the 12 grant funding sources were established through the passage of [Act 89](#) by the Pennsylvania General Assembly in November 2013. Other funds came from federal sources and from the Marcellus Legacy Fund. Approved projects awarded to the county, municipalities, and private entities were located throughout the county. The grants will be used for pedestrian and bike mobility improvements, bridge reconstruction, traffic signals, intersection improvements, and other unique initiatives that support future transportation. These projects are in addition to the many highway and transportation improvements that will be made in Montgomery County under the region's adopted Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

Several projects, primarily funded from the federal [Transportation Alternatives Program \(TAP\)](#) and [Pennsylvania multimodal funds](#), will improve walking and biking around the county. Both Lansdale and Pottstown are proposing significant sidewalk improvement projects to complement other revitalization efforts. In addition, the Montgomery County Planning Commission was successful in obtaining a grant to perform a countywide walkability plan, which will be worked on this year. Multiple grants were obtained by Upper Dublin and Upper Merion to make needed mobility improvements in the Fort Washington Office Park and King of Prussia Business Center, respectively.

Funding was approved for the rehabilitation or replacement of 18 bridges scattered throughout Montgomery County. Many of these bridge projects will be completed through innovative strategies developed under Act 89 including the PennDOT [Public-Private Partnerships](#) and bridge-bundling initiatives.

To move traffic through the county more efficiently and safely, several grants were awarded to upgrade traffic signals around the county. Most of these upgrades will involve the installation of energy-efficient LED lights.

Some unique transportation projects include the relocation of an historic railroad depot in Pottstown to serve the new Secret Valley excursion rail line, improvements to the Montgomery County Trail Junction Center in Norristown, sound barriers along the Pennsylvania Turnpike in Worcester, and a riverfront plan for Conshohocken and Whitemarsh.



## Highlights of New Laws That May Impact Planning in Montgomery County

The General Assembly formally adjourned the 2013-14 Legislative Session on November 12, 2014 and ended a legislative year with few new laws that will impact planning in the Commonwealth. [A total of 204 laws were enacted in 2014](#), yet only one of them amends the *Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code*. Some of the new laws enacted in 2014 include:

### Anti-Stream Buffers

[House Bill 1565](#) (Act 162) is a law that environmental groups say weakens the current Department of Environmental Protection requirements for stream buffers in Special Protection Watersheds. This law only impacts two streams in Montgomery County (Valley Creek and Unami Creek). [Additional Information](#)

### Veto of Climate Plan

[House Bill 2354](#) (Act 175) authorizes one House of the General Assembly to veto any greenhouse gas emission reduction plan required by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. It was signed into law as Act 175. [Additional Information](#)

### Stormwater Management

[Senate Bill 1255](#) (Act 123) provides additional stormwater management options for municipal authorities. [Additional Information](#)

## Public Disaster Grants

[Senate Bill 720](#) (Act 187) establishes a new Public Disaster Assistance Grant Program. [Additional Information](#)

## Energy Efficiency Technology

[House Bill 1672](#) (Act 165) provides for testing of energy efficiency technologies. [Additional Information](#)

## Geospatial Board

[Senate Bill 771](#) (Act 178) establishes the State Geospatial Coordinating Board. [Additional Information](#)

## Local Recreation Fees

[House Bill 1052](#) (Act 135) further authorizes uses for local recreation fees. This bill amends Section 503 (11) of the *Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code* to enable municipalities to use recreation fees for certain park maintenance purposes in addition to acquisition of park land and construction of park facilities. [Additional Information](#)

## Electronic Ordinance Submission to the County

[House Bill 1529](#) (governing townships of the second class) (Act 2), [House Bill 1081](#) (governing townships of the first class) (Act 11) and [House Bill 1719](#) (governing boroughs) (Act 37) provide for the transmission of municipally enacted laws from boroughs, townships of the second class, and townships of the first class to the county through electronic means if the county elects to use electronic ordinance storage. The boroughs amendment is embodied in an entire rewrite of the borough code with other amendments. The county law library is the official county depository of local ordinances.

## Eminent Domain Fees

[Senate Bill 1096](#) (Act 120) would limit fees paid for certain appraisal and legal costs during the eminent domain process.

## Agriculture Buildings

[House Bill 1440](#) (Act 159) exempts “high tunnel” or “hoop houses” from the PA Building Codes. These temporary buildings are often used in the growing of early spring produce crops on farms.



## Meet Our New Community Planners

Both Donna Fabry and Brian Olszak, who recently joined our staff as community planners, graduated from Temple University with an M.S. in community and regional planning. Donna, a resident of Conshohocken, has spent the last four years at a private consulting company working with FEMA on flood risk mapping. In 2009 she worked as an intern for the county. Brian most recently served as an adjunct instructor at Temple University teaching courses in Geographic Information Systems (GIS). He is a resident of Glenside and serves as President of the Philadelphia Orchard Project. We are extremely glad to have these very bright and energetic planners on our staff.



*(L-R) Donna Caramenico, Recycling Associate; Veronica Harris, Recycling Manager*

## Recycling Returns to MCPC

After the Waste System Authority of Montgomery County was dissolved, the county recycling program management duties were returned to the planning commission. Veronica Harris, Recycling Manager, and Donna Caramenico, Recycling Associate, have moved into our office to continue to provide recycling and special waste collection services to the county.

Veronica has an extensive background in environmental education, renewable energy, and marketing. Donna held

several positions with the authority and previously worked in other county departments.

Veronica oversees the day-to-day operations of the Montgomery County recycling office. She operates the county's recycling hotline 610-278-3618 and [website](#) and provides recycling assistance, information, and education to all county municipalities, residents, and businesses. In addition, she also manages the county's popular household hazardous waste and electronics collection programs and other special waste management events.



(L-R) Dulcie Flaharty, *Interim Chair, Montgomery County Planning Commission Board*; Meredith Trego, *Senior Planner*; Brandon Rudd, *Senior Planner*; Marley Bice, *Senior Planner*; Jody Holton, *MCPC Executive Director*.

## Three Planners Promoted

In December, Marley Bice, Brandon Rudd, and Meredith Trego were promoted to Senior Planner. All three began their careers at the Montgomery County Planning Commission in 2012 as planners in the Community Planning Section. In addition to managing several municipal contacts, they have all contributed to other important planning projects. Last year, Marley and Meredith finished a model sign ordinance, which received a [planning excellence award](#) from the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association. Both Marley and Meredith have given several presentations on signage control and are recognized as experts on the topic. Brandon Rudd led very popular walkability audits in Collegeville last summer and has initiated walkability audits in other communities. He will be a valuable member of the staff for the countywide walkability study, which will be performed this year. Congratulations Marley, Brandon, and Meredith!

## Community Planning Spotlight

Whitpain Township is updating its comprehensive plan. The next Town Hall meetings are listed below:

- *February 25, 7 p.m.*  
Town Hall Meeting #2 - Environmental Factors  
Manor House at Prophecy Creek,  
205 W. Skippack Pike, Ambler, PA
- *March 11, 7 p.m.*  
Town Hall Meeting #3 - Economic Factors  
Arborcrest Corporate Campus

For more information, visit <http://www.whitpaintownship.net>.



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