

PLANNING PERSPECTIVES



Focusing on Planning in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania

JULY 2015—Volume 13, Issue 3



Schuylkill River Trail Wins Title of Best Urban Trail!

The Schuylkill River Trail won first place in a contest by *USA Today* that asked readers to vote for the 10 Best Urban Trails among 20 trail systems located near major cities in the USA. On July 28, the Montgomery County Commissioners opened the 1.5-mile restored Schuylkill River Canal Tow Path in Mont Clare completing the popular 18-mile section of the Schuylkill River Trail from Philadelphia through Conshohocken, Norristown, and Valley Forge National Historical Park to Mont Clare. Montgomery County is also working on the completion of the trail in the Pottstown area. Other sections of the Schuylkill River Trail have been developed in Philadelphia and in Chester, Berks, and Schuylkill County in order to complete the proposed 115-mile trail from Pottsville in Schuylkill County to the Delaware River in Philadelphia.



Parc Apartments, a new Toll Brothers and Brandywine Realty development in Plymouth Township

Housing Construction Up 7 Percent in Montco

The recently released report on housing units built shows a total of 1,584 new housing units completed in Montgomery

County in 2014, an increase of 7 percent over the prior year. The 677 new multifamily housing units completed in 2014 were the primary reason for the overall housing increase. This multifamily trend is fueled by several apartment projects and is likely to continue in the next few years as apartments appear to be a popular housing choice. While both single-family detached and attached home construction decreased from the year before, totals were still consistent with production over the last five years in those categories.

New residential construction is good for the county. It provides more housing choices and serves to stimulate the redevelopment of older towns. It also brings economic growth through more jobs, consumer spending, and tax revenue. New residential construction in 2014 represents approximately \$221 million of additional taxable property value.

The characteristics of new single-family detached homes built in 2014 continue to show a trend of smaller homes and even smaller lot sizes compared to ten years ago. Also a majority of homes built in 2014 were constructed in growth areas defined in *Montco 2040: A Shared Vision*, Montgomery County's new, nationally awarded comprehensive plan. [Full report](#)

Median Housing Prices Increase in Montco

The report on *2014 Median Prices for Housing* shows the median housing sales price grew in 2014 for the second year

in a row. Though the number of market-rate sales declined slightly, it still remained the second highest total since 2007. Montgomery County had 9,670 market-rate sales of homes in 2014 with a median sales price of \$269,900, a 1.1 percent increase from the year before. Low interest rates and a growing number of people looking to purchase a home contribute to the stability of the housing market. Other local factors, such as diverse employment opportunities, stable neighborhoods, great school districts, attractive public amenities such as park and recreation facilities, and efficient transportation systems, make housing in Montgomery County even more attractive.

The increase in sales prices cannot be attributed to just one type of housing. The median sales price for single-family detached and single-family attached both increased, while multifamily homes declined in 2014. Single-family detached home prices went up by 1.6 percent, and attached



home prices rose by 0.9 percent. The median sales price for multifamily units has declined over the last four years partially due to the surging apartment rental market that has resulted in very few new owner-occupied multifamily projects being built.

In 2014, the median sales price for existing units was \$260,000—an increase of 2.0 percent from 2013. The median sales price of all new units built and sold in 2014 was \$389,348. This was a 3.8 percent increase from the 2013 median, but there were fewer new units being sold across all housing type categories. New single-family detached homes increased by 6.5 percent to a median sales price of \$447,295, while new single-family attached homes dropped 3.6 percent to \$321,844.

Forty-one municipalities in the county experienced an increase in overall median housing sales price, yet median sales prices for municipalities should be considered carefully since there may be a limited number of sales in any one municipality. The amount of new homes or different housing types can dramatically influence the median price. [Full report](#)



New Target store in King of Prussia

2014 Nonresidential Development Construction Report

In 2014, nonresidential construction in Montgomery County declined to just over 700,000 square feet. This represents a drop of 42 percent from the prior year. However, the decline in construction is countered by four straight years of job growth in the county. Businesses are finding ways to produce more while using less space, and vacancy rates for the suburban Philadelphia market have dropped over the last year in office, industrial, and retail sectors.

The commercial sector represented a strong majority of all nonresidential development with over 73 percent of the total square footage in 2014. Commercial development, which includes retail and consumer services and hotels, was the only major category to have increased from the year before with over half a million square feet of development. A new

Target store in King of Prussia (Upper Merion Township), followed by two hotels in Towamencin and Montgomery Townships, were the largest projects built in 2014.

Office development was the next most active sector. The new building on the campus of SEI Investments in Upper Providence Township and a medical office building in the Linfield Corporate Center in Limerick Township were the largest new office projects. In 2014, only 23,000 square feet of institutional development was completed, a historically low amount. Likewise, industrial development was extremely low this past year.

Almost all of the nonresidential development in 2014 was constructed in the designated growth areas identified in the *Montco 2040: A Shared Vision*, Montgomery County's new comprehensive plan. Most of this development occurred as infill or expansions within already developed areas.

Throughout 2014 and in the beginning of 2015, several new large nonresidential projects have been proposed, and construction activity seems to be more robust in many parts of the county. As a result, there are expectations that the nonresidential development activity in the next few years will be greater than 2014.



Left: Valerie A. Arkoosh, MD, MPH, Vice Chair, Montgomery County Commissioners; Right: Jody L. Holton, AICP, MCPC Executive Director

Montco Receives Two Leadership Awards

Montgomery County received two 2015 Leadership Awards from the Greater Valley Forge Transportation Management Association (GVFTMA) at the organization's 25th annual meeting on May 11. Valerie A. Arkoosh, MD, MPH, Vice Chair, Montgomery County Commissioners, accepted the 2015 Founders Award for Montgomery County. Jody L. Holton, AICP, MCPC Executive Director, accepted the 2015 Planning Award for *Montco 2040: A Shared Vision*, Montgomery County's new comprehensive plan. The GVFTMA Leadership Awards recognize exceptional leaders and projects that support Transportation Demand Management (TDM) best practices within our region.

Save the Dates for Three Planning Smarter Events!

Montco 2040 Theme – Sustainable Places **Establishing Green and Sustainable Parking Lots**



September 30 – 4:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.
Arborcrest
721 Arbor Way • Blue Bell, PA 19422
[REGISTER TODAY!](#)

Join us to learn how effective landscaping, smart layout and design, and innovative pavement surfaces can transform parking lots into an attractive amenity that can reduce stormwater runoff and maintain moderate temperatures. We'll explore great examples of green and sustainable parking lots in the region.

Montco 2040 – Land Use Vision **Attracting Great New Transit-Oriented Housing**



October 6 – 6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.
[The Courts at Spring Mill Station](#)
1100 E. Hector Street • Conshohocken, PA 19428
[REGISTER TODAY!](#)

Come hear about transit-oriented housing that is being developed for young professionals and older adults looking for new forms of rental housing near transit facilities to enhance their access to employment and downtown Philadelphia. These new apartments are also being located near trails, the Schuylkill River, and other recreation facilities. They come with features such as structured parking, common rooms, fitness centers, and luxury pool areas.

Montco2040 Theme – Connected Communities **Walk Montco**



October 26 – 10:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
[Ambler Theater](#)
108 E Butler Ave • Ambler, PA 19002
[REGISTER TODAY!](#)

New design tools are needed to transform our communities to make them safer for pedestrians. Join us to hear national experts speak about proven strategies that have been used around the country to enable more pedestrian mobility. Montgomery County's walkability plan will be released at this event.



Tony Nichols, Vice President of Liberty Property Trust, addresses participants at the Revitalizing Business Parks seminar

Montco Adopts Turnpike Corridor Reinvestment Study

The [Turnpike Corridor Reinvestment Study](#)—one of many local initiatives designed to guide the future revitalization of business parks in Montgomery County—was recently adopted by the Montgomery County planning Commission Board and the Montgomery County Commissioners.

The draft study was first presented at our May 6 business park revitalization seminar in Upper Dublin Township, which featured presentations and a panel of business and design professionals with extensive experience in reinventing business parks. Approximately 75 people attended the seminar, which focused on effective strategies for bringing new life to older business parks such as strategic infrastructure improvements, new development and zoning codes, marketing, and improved mobility and access.

The Turnpike Corridor Reinvestment Project recommends municipal zoning changes to allow mixed uses and more activity in business parks as well as better access to the Pennsylvania Turnpike. Three new interchanges are proposed at Henderson Road in Upper Merion, Ridge Pike in Plymouth Township, and Welsh Road in Upper Dublin. Significant improvements are also proposed for Valley Forge, Fort Washington, Virginia Drive, and Willow Grove interchanges. MCPC will continue to work with its partners and the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission to make these proposed interchange improvements a reality. [More on the Turnpike Corridor Reinvestment Project](#)



Planning on Two Feet: Form-Based Zoning with a Focus on Narberth Borough

Narberth Borough proved to be the ideal setting for a very successful “planning on two feet” forum on form-based zoning, which was attended by approximately 50 people. Narberth Borough currently is considering the adoption of a complete form-based zoning code. Being a fully walkable, safe, friendly town with attractive housing, a SEPTA Train Station (along the Main Line), and a vibrant downtown, it was an ideal community to conduct walking tours to discuss the potential impact of a form-based code.

Form-based zoning enables municipalities to grow and change, yet preserve and protect the qualities that make them so livable. The concept involves a design-oriented zoning regulation approach to achieve a specific physical form in new development that will fit into an existing neighborhood rather than an approach for achieving a separation of land uses as the organizing principle.

Participants heard presentations on the motivations for Narberth to consider this approach to protecting the qualities of the borough, the process of developing the draft ordinance and generally how it is structured, the history of form-based zoning, and the realities of the real estate market and how the development community can work with design-oriented ordinances and guidelines.

Following the presentations, two tour groups walked through Narberth Borough viewing sites for reuse of older houses on large lots as office and light retail, diverse housing types coexisting along the same street, adaptive reuse of historic religious and institutional buildings, and a classic

small-town commercial area. The tour enabled participants to explore some of the important design details that are essential under a successful form-based zoning ordinance.



MCPC Board Hits the Road

The Montgomery County Planning Commission Board toured several sites in Plymouth,Whitemarsh,and Springfield Townships on July 8 as part of its regular monthly meeting. The board started its tour with a quick walk around the new Cold Point Village townhouse development led by developer Sal Paone, Jr. Then it was off in the bus to see parts of the proposed Cross County Trail Route and Ridge Pike reconstruction project. Stopping at the Morris Arboretum, the board was treated to an interesting tour of the newly established wetland area along Paper Mill Run by Dr. Paul Meyer, Morris Arboretum Executive Director. Paul also gave the board a quick look at the LEED platinum horticulture center building at the Morris Arboretum, which received a Montgomery Award in 2011. The board toured through the 450-acre preserved Erdenheim Farm property and future Wissahickon Trail corridor before stopping off for a closer look at the newly established Dixon Meadow natural area where they met designers Rick Collier and David Cavanaugh along with Whitemarsh Township Manager Rick Mellor and township planner Charlie Guttenplan. The last stop on the tour was the newly constructed Parc Apartments on Plymouth Road where the board got a first-hand look at some apartment models and amenities before holding a brief public meeting there.

MCPC Participates in Bike-to-Work Day

On May 15, National Bike-to-Work Day, MCPC staff once again demonstrated that Montgomery County residents can get safely to work on two wheels without burning an ounce of gas. As part of the Bike-to-Work Day celebration, the Greater Valley Forge Transportation Management Association hosted an informative early morning bike event at Valley Forge National Historical Park. The event included bike repairs performed by a local bike store, a SEPTA bus to demonstrate how easy it is to use the



bike racks at the front of the bus, information about safe bike riding, and speeches by area leaders including Montgomery County Board of Commissioners Chair Josh Shapiro and Vice Chair Valerie Arkoosh. MCPC staff riding this year included Jody Holton, Michael Stokes, Drew Shaw, Matt Schelly, and David Clifford. With trail expansions currently taking place in Montgomery County, biking to work will be getting a lot easier and safer in the future.

Meet Our New Staff Members!



Janet Aruicci
*Senior Multimodal
Transportation Planner*

Janet is a certified planner who has recently moved from Michigan to Pennsylvania. She has 8 years of experience working in public transportation and regional planning, from Arizona to Ohio and now Pennsylvania. From Phoenix to the Philadelphia region, Janet is passionate about improving mobility options for everyone. She holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Kansas and a Master's Degree in Urban and Regional Planning from Michigan State University. In her spare time, Janet enjoys traveling, hiking, and photography.



Lauren Van Dyk
Community Planner

Lauren is a native of southeastern Pennsylvania. She recently earned a M.S. in Community and Regional Planning from Temple University, where she expanded upon her undergraduate degree in Sustainable Development from Appalachian State University in North Carolina. Through her academic, professional, and personal experiences, Lauren has cultivated a strong commitment to public service, sound planning, and sustainability. Lauren serves as a Community Planner for Ambler, Narberth, and Red Hill Boroughs.



Matthew Popek
Transportation Planner

Born in East Norriton and raised in King of Prussia, Matt holds a bachelor's degree from Penn State University in geography and a Masters of Science in Community and Regional Planning from Temple University. Matthew is a member of the Upper Merion Township Planning Commission and has assisted in the preparation of the Upper Merion Township Parks and Recreation Master Plan and the school district facilities process. Matthew is already hard at work on various highway and transit projects throughout the county. In his spare time, Matthew enjoys singing with a community choir and strategically rooting for all Philadelphia sports franchises.



Troy Woodyard
Senior Graphic Designer

Troy has extensive professional experience working with both print and web-based design media. Prior to coming to MCPC, he worked as both a designer and project manager developing visual identities and marketing materials for corporate, nonprofit, and small businesses. Troy was raised in Cheltenham Township and has returned to Montgomery County to raise his young family in Cheltenham.



Montgomery County Planning Commission
P.O. Box 311, Norristown, PA 19404-0311

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