

# PLANNING PERSPECTIVES



Focusing on Planning in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania

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## Introducing Our Newest Board Member

We are pleased to introduce Shari Shapiro, Esq., LEED AP, who joined the MCPC Board several months ago and was recruited as a presenter for our April 21 solar energy event at her very first board meeting! Shari represents Uber as its head of Public Affairs for Pennsylvania and Delaware. Prior to working for Uber, Shari was a policy consultant specializing in energy efficiency and building codes, and the CEO of iVocate, a technology platform for managing advocacy initiatives. She is a research affiliate with the University of Pennsylvania Program on Regulation and an adjunct professor in the Master's of Public Policy Program at Drexel University. Shari was a recipient of the 2009 "Lawyer on the Fast Track" designation by the Pennsylvania Legal Intelligencer, which is given to the top lawyers under 40 in Pennsylvania. She is associated with several organizations and is a published author. From 2007-2015, she was publisher of the Green Building Law Blog, a popular blog on legal and policy issues related to sustainability and energy efficiency, which was the winner the American Bar Association Journal "Blawg 100" for 2009, given to the top 100 legal blogs of the year. Shari is a resident of Lower Merion Township.

## Seven Projects Receive Montco 2040 Implementation Grants

On June 16, the Montgomery County Commissioners announced that [seven projects](#) in the county will receive Montco 2040 Implementation Grants. The grants are part of an exciting new program aimed at implementing the new county comprehensive plan, [Montco 2040: A Shared Vision](#). The program is intended to assist municipalities in making targeted physical improvements that achieve real progress toward the goals of the plan and the plan's themes of Connected Communities, Sustainable Places, and Vibrant Economy.



This is the first round of funding for the 2016 program cycle, and the seven grant awards account for \$706,440 out of the available \$1 million program balance for 2016. The county received 15 applications, totaling over \$1.6 million in requests, from municipalities during this first round. Applicants that did not receive an award will still be considered during the next round of funding. A committee consisting of members of the MCPC Board and interdepartmental county staff will meet again next month to recommend additional grant awards with the remaining 2016 program balance. The seven projects that received grants are highlighted below:

### Abington Township

Abington will install a bump-out curb extension for one of its most prominent intersections at Old York Road and The Fairway to slow traffic and improve safety.

### Collegetown Borough

Collegetown will install a new traffic signal at the corner of Main and Sixth Streets to increase pedestrian safety at this intersection.

### Douglas Township

Douglas will retrofit an existing municipal parking lot adjacent to the township building and Douglas Park to make the lot more green and sustainable.

### Hatfield Township

Hatfield will build additional segments onto its existing trail system to connect township recreational facilities, a business park, residential areas, and the county's Liberty Bell Trail in Hatfield Borough.

### Lower Moreland Township

Lower Moreland will construct a sidewalk along the south side of Welsh Road between Lieberman Drive and Valley Road to connect residents to the Pennypack Trail, SEPTA Bethayres Station, and the Bethayres commercial district.

### Upper Moreland Township

Upper Moreland will construct a new pedestrian crossing at York and Davisville Roads in the Willow Grove Redevelopment Area to create a better and safer connection between commercial areas and the SEPTA Willow Grove Station.

### Upper Salford Township

Upper Salford will acquire a conservation and trail easement over the Shirk-Hutt woods area of the Hutt Farm, which has been identified as a rich and diverse ecosystem in need of conservation. The easement will allow for a trail from Upper Salford Park to the Spring Mount recreation area and will ultimately connect to the county's Perkiomen Trail.

Visit [www.montcopa.org/Montco2040GrantProgram](http://www.montcopa.org/Montco2040GrantProgram) for more on the Montco 2040 Implementation Grant Program and the grant recipients.

## Housing Strong in Montgomery County

The housing industry in Montgomery County is very strong as evidenced by numbers found in two recent MCPC reports. The [2015 Median Prices for Housing report](#) indicates that the value of housing has outpaced inflation over the past year. The number of houses sold substantially increased in 2015 as well, indicating there are plenty of homebuyers looking to live in Montgomery County. On the supply side, the [2015 Housing Units Built report](#) shows that last year was the third straight year the number of new housing units built increased. The 1,838 total units built in 2015 represented the highest number of units built since 2008. Many of these units were constructed in developments that had started just prior to or during the recession that began in 2007.



Apartment units continue to be a hot housing choice in more developed portions of the county including Plymouth Meeting, Conshohocken, Lower Merion, Upper Merion, and the US Route 422 Corridor. Multifamily housing units, primarily apartments, will continue to be the most popular housing choice as many more multifamily apartments are expected to be completed this year and into next year. Though the number of new single-family detached units has declined from the numbers of over a decade ago, new single-family detached housing in the right location sells well and is still being proposed in many locations. Likewise, different forms of attached housing—townhouses and carriage homes—provide attractive housing at more affordable prices in vibrant areas of the county.

As housing continues to grow in value, home builders will continue to offer new housing choices. Much of the robust nature of the housing industry can be attributed to the quality of life provided in many communities in the county that attract new homebuyers. This quality of life results from good transportation access to jobs and shopping, proximity of desired community assets such as parks and trails, great schools, and responsible government, among other things.



## Promoting Renewable Energy

MCPC has been busy working with municipal, state, and regional partners to promote renewable energy ordinances, permitting, and educational best practices. Our award-winning, educational [Renewable Energy series](#) has assisted many Montgomery County municipalities in the development of renewable energy ordinances. We also partnered with the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) on a number of renewable energy projects, including the [Renewable Energy Ordinance Frameworks](#) that serve as model ordinance language for solar, wind, and geothermal ordinances. We have recently partnered with DVRPC and Delaware County on their Solar Ready program efforts to promote solar ordinance work and permitting best practices.

On April 21, MCPC offered an informative workshop at Towamencin Township, which was attended by over 25 people, to discuss community tools for enabling solar energy and promoting energy efficiency. Valerie A. Arkoosh, MD, MPH, Vice Chair of the Montgomery County Commissioners, kicked off the evening which featured keynote speaker Larry Schweiger, President and CEO of PennFuture, who gave an outstanding presentation. The event also featured an exceptional panel of legal and energy professionals who shared a variety of information with the participants. Presentations from the workshop are available at [www.montcopa.org/PlanningSmarter](http://www.montcopa.org/PlanningSmarter).



## MCPC Assists all 62 Municipalities with Floodplain Ordinance Updates

MCPC, under contract with the Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors (PSATS) and the Pennsylvania Department of Commerce and Economic Development (DCED), successfully assisted all 62 county municipalities in updating their floodplain ordinances to comply with Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) requirements. The process began last September when FEMA certified the completion of new flood insurance maps covering the county with a letter of final determination.

Due to the complexity of this effort, the county planning staff performed 123 reviews (approximately two for each municipality) of municipal floodplain regulations. Nearly half of the municipalities used the recently prepared [Montgomery County Floodplain Model Ordinance](#). Others used a model prepared by DCED.



## Community Planning Highlights

### Form-Based Zoning Adopted in Narberth Borough

At the end of April, Narberth Borough adopted a unique form-based zoning ordinance and became one of the first communities in Pennsylvania to embrace this unique zoning

approach. The code was prepared by MCPC staff who worked closely with the Narberth Borough Planning Commission and Narberth Borough Council over the past five years.

Narberth's zoning ordinance was originally adopted in 1924 when Narberth became the first borough in Pennsylvania and first municipality in Montgomery County to enact zoning. Over the past decade, community leaders felt the original code, which was based on an abstract system of organizing land uses and general dimensional standards, did not adequately protect the early 20th-century character of the town that residents cherish.

In creating the new form-based code, MCPC conducted street-by-street surveys of Narberth's existing built environment and offered numerous public workshops. The new code establishes six zoning districts in which the type of structures allowed and their overall form and density are derived from the existing community development pattern around them. This contextual design-focused approach complements the current fabric of each neighborhood, preserving existing structures and enabling some flexibility and creativity in the design and types of uses within new developments. Last summer MCPC offered a workshop and walking tour of Narberth to showcase its form-based zoning efforts.

### New Community Planning Assistance Contracts

The [Montgomery County Community Planning Assistance Contract Program](#) recently gained two new contracted municipalities—North Wales Borough and Plymouth Township. The program offers technical assistance in fields such as comprehensive planning, zoning, land use, transportation, landscape design, and economic development on a fee-for-service basis. The program currently offers professional planning services to 32 contracted municipalities and 4 regional contracts.



## Approximately 100 Attend Ridge Pike Improvement Project Open House

Many citizens attended an open house focused on the Crescent Avenue to Northwestern Avenue segment of the [Ridge Pike Improvement Project](#) on June 20 at the Whitemarsh

Township building. Attendees had an opportunity to view conceptual plan displays, hear a presentation, and discuss the project with project team members. Ridge Pike, which is owned by Montgomery County from Norristown to Philadelphia, provides access to I-476 (the Blue Route) as well as numerous commercial centers. The 5 miles between Norristown and Philadelphia carry between 20,000 and 30,000 cars daily. The Ridge Pike Improvement Project, which is divided into several manageable segments for engineering and construction, will help relieve congestion and improve safety. The project includes adding new signals and turn lanes as well as an additional eastbound through lane between Church Road and Manor Road, upgrading stormwater management facilities, and adding sidewalks and bus shelters throughout the corridor. A major goal of the project is to retain the existing character of the area along the corridor while upgrading the roadway.

environment, and local food availability in Montgomery County. For more information on this important program, visit [www.montcopa.org/FarmlandProgram](http://www.montcopa.org/FarmlandProgram).



*J. Ladaan and Anne D. Moyer farm in Salford Township*

## Two More Farms Permanently Preserved in Montgomery County

Montgomery County has added two more farms to its growing list of farms permanently preserved under the Montgomery County Agricultural Land Preservation Program (commonly known as the farmland preservation program). Montgomery County is one of 58 counties participating in this voluntary state program. The two newest preserved farms are the George E. Leidig Jr. and Eleanor Vallone farm, a 54-acre crop and horse operation in New Hanover Township, and the J. Ladaan and Anne D. Moyer farm, a 50-acre crop farm in Salford Township. The preservation of these farms helps to implement the land use vision plan in *Montco 2040: A Shared Vision*. The county's farmland preservation program, which began in 1990, has preserved 157 farms totaling 9,230 acres in the county. Farming has not only played a significant role in Montgomery County's history, it is also integral to the county's sustainable future. The preservation of farmland and farming is important for the economy,



*George E. Leidig Jr. and Eleanor Vallone farm in New Hanover Township*



## New Guide Highlights Farmers' Markets and Farm Stands in Montgomery County

Montgomery County has about 600 farms and over 800,000 people to feed. With all of these local consumers, many Montgomery County farms are focused on providing local residents with produce, meat, dairy products, and treats such as honey. To help connect county residents with the farmers, MCPC has published an updated local food guide called "[Direct from the Farm: A Guide to Buying Local in Montgomery County](#)." This attractive publication provides locations and product details for 12 farmers' markets and 59 farms where residents can purchase locally grown food and other products. The Montgomery County Farm Bureau and Penn State Cooperative Extension partnered with MCPC in developing this informative guide.



## Celebrating Earth Day

MCPC participated in Campus Sustainability Month and Earth Day at both the Pottstown and Blue Bell campuses of the Montgomery County Community College (MCCC). MCPC's exhibit table focused on our sustainability publications and also on recycling. We were one of dozens of exhibitors who enjoyed meeting students, faculty, and others and sharing information and insights on two beautiful spring days.



## Bike to Work Day

Fortunately one of the few sunny and pleasant days in May was Bike to Work Day on May 20. On that morning, a large contingent from Montgomery County, led by Valerie A. Arkoosh, MD, PHD, Vice Chair of the Montgomery County Commissioners, pedaled from the Norristown Transportation Center to the Visitor's Center at Valley Forge National Historical Park to join with Chester County representatives in a bike to work celebration sponsored by the Greater Valley Forge Transportation Management Association. During the event, Montgomery County Commissioners Val Arkoosh and Joseph Gale both discussed the importance of bicycling as a form of transportation and a great way to maintain health and fitness. Jody Holton, Drew Shaw, and Michael Stokes, the three representatives from MCPC, were energized by the exercise, friendly conversation, and great weather at the start of their workday. Safe bicycle mobility will be the focus of the Bike Montco Plan, a countywide bicycle plan update, to be developed later this year.



## Montco Trail Challenge

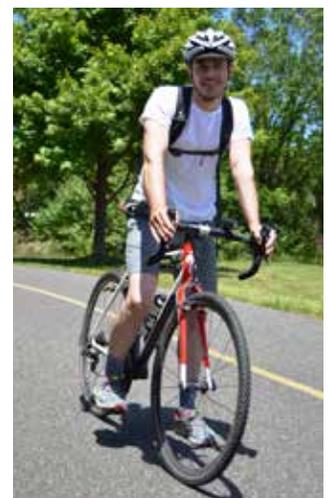
MCPC and the Montgomery County Health Department staffed the Get Out and Go Montco tent along the Schuylkill River Trail on June 4, National Trails Day, to provide cold water and information about the launch of the new and exciting [Montco Trail Challenge](#). The Montco Trail Challenge highlights ten different trail systems in the county. Through this challenge, residents are encouraged to get out and explore the county's trails, which offer opportunities to maintain a healthy lifestyle. After visiting the trails, participants can report their findings online or at one of five park offices or ranger stations. Medals will be awarded to those completing five or more trails and correctly identifying each trail marker.

## Meet Our New Trail Program Manager

Henry Stroud, the new Montgomery County Trail Program Manager, started work on June 6. Henry will manage the design and construction of new county trails and work with the Montgomery County Parks, Trails, and Historic Sites Division in managing existing trails. One of his first jobs will be an up-to-date trail system assets inventory.

Henry, a native of Sebastopol, California, developed a love for the outdoors while growing up on an apple farm. He has been interested in trails for as long as he can remember—for his senior project in high school he built a mountain bike trail linking several farms near his house. For the last four years, Henry oversaw trail construction in Wissahickon Valley Park, Philadelphia.

Henry is a graduate of the University of Minnesota with a Master's of Urban and Regional Planning and is a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners. His professional interests include trail planning, land management, and open space protection. Outside of work, Henry is an avid rock climber, cyclist, and spy novel aficionado. We are happy to have him on our MCPC team!





(L-R) Jody L. Holton, AICP, MCPC Executive Director; Donna Caramenico, Drew Shaw, and Elizabeth Emlen (missing from the photo is Kevin Chavous)

## MCPC Staff to Receive Service Pins

Four MCPC staff members will receive pins for their dedicated service to Montgomery County. Drew Shaw, Section Chief of Environmental Planning, will receive a pin for 30 years of service. Donna Caramenico, Recycling Associate, will receive a 25-year pin. Elizabeth Emlen, who recently retired from MCPC, will receive a pin for 20 years of service. Kevin Chavous, Planner, will receive a 15-year pin. Congratulations to everyone for their years of service to Montgomery County!

## Elizabeth Emlen Retires

For over two decades many farms in Montgomery County were preserved as the result of the county's very dedicated Senior Farmland Preservation Administrator, Elizabeth Emlen, who retired on June 17. Elizabeth arrived at MCPC in April 1997 with a degree in agriculture from Cornell University and experience assisting farmers in Ecuador while in the Peace Corps and in New York State as the farm agent in Fulton County. Her passion for agriculture began at an early age when she was a member of 4-H while growing up in Ambler. During her career in Montgomery County, she was responsible for preserving 6,456 acres on 125 farms. Elizabeth worked closely with farmers, members of the Montgomery County Agricultural Lands Preservation Board, the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, municipalities, and conservation organizations to ensure that all of the best farms in Montgomery County would remain in farming forever. As an agricultural professional who was respected by her peers, Elizabeth held several prominent positions on statewide agriculture boards and committees. In her retirement, she will continue to live on a farm in western Montgomery County and occasionally travel. Though she may be retired from the county, don't be surprised to see Elizabeth remain an active member in local farming organizations. Best wishes Elizabeth!



Front row (L-R): Jody L. Holton, AICP, MCPC Executive Director; Steve Zbyszinski; Christine Hassinger; and Lucinda Bartley and back row: MCPC Intern Program coordinators Maggie Dobbs, Community Planner, and Brian Olszak, Community Planner

## Our Summer Interns

MCPC is pleased to have three excellent interns, all interested in a planning career, volunteering their time and knowledge while gaining practical planning experience. Our staff appreciates the assistance offered by our interns on a variety of projects. This summer's interns are Lucinda Bartley, a resident of Jenkintown who is seeking a Master's of Landscape Architecture from Temple University; Christine Hassinger of Collegeville who is pursuing a BA degree in architectural studies from Boston University; and Steve Zbyszinski from Norristown, who is working on a degree in geography and planning at Bloomsburg University. Thanks for all of your great work everyone!



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