

# MONTGOMERY AWARDS

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*2014 Award Winner*



## **FORT WASHINGTON OFFICE PARK RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURE** Upper Dublin Township

The Fort Washington Office Park Resilient Infrastructure project received a 2014 Montgomery Award for creative vision, environmental mitigation, economic reinvestment, and successful collaboration. This innovative project, involving substantial investment and a comprehensive approach to the sustainable redevelopment of a significant regional office park, will achieve a major community vision.

### **Background**

The Fort Washington Office Park, located at the intersection of the Pennsylvania Turnpike and Route 309, is a major employment center for the township. This 536-acre office park, containing 6 million square feet of building area and over 15,000 employees, is an important source of tax revenue for the community. The park consists mostly of office and light industrial uses. Approximately 65 percent



of the office park, developed in the late 1950s before modern floodplain management requirements, is located within the 100-year floodplain. In recent years, it has faced challenges including serious flooding that has led to loss of life, substantial property damage, and rising office vacancies. The park has also struggled with excessive storm water runoff, the design of its transportation and pedestrian circulation system, and a lack of identity. Over the past several years, Upper Dublin has invested substantial resources to provide solutions to these challenges.

## Creative Planning Vision

To help revitalize this important office park, multiple studies were completed. A 2008 study by Temple University's Center for Sustainable Communities (CSC) provided a comprehensive analysis of the flooding of the area and created a sustainable redevelopment plan. Subsequent engineering studies focused on extensive storm water and transportation improvements and zoning solutions allowing sustainable and mixed-use development and a transfer of development rights program. In 2010, the township adopted its first comprehensive plan, which identified the revitalization of the office park as a top priority. The plan incorporated many of the recommendations contained in the Temple study.

## Environmental Mitigation

One of the initial resiliency projects resulting from these studies was the construction of two large flood retarding structures (FRS). These structures were designed to capture storm water during severe rain events and reduce downstream flooding. Constructed along the Pine Run and Rapp Run, two streams located upstream from the park on township property, these

structures will reduce the number of buildings faced with flooding during major storms by 40 percent and will help to reduce impacts on neighboring communities. These innovative dam structures consist of a reinforced concrete labyrinth spillway with abutments on either side. The Pine Run structure is 834 feet in length and Rapp Run is 720 feet; both have 12-foot-high concrete walls. They were designed to slowly release runoff to allow infiltration into the ground and streams, limiting the frequency, intensity, and duration of flooding. Both structures have extensive landscaping with wetland plantings and over 750 new trees. A flood warning system was also developed. Each structure incorporates a pedestrian bridge that connects to surrounding areas. The township received an \$11.83 million H2O PA grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) for the design and construction of the structures—the largest non-state agency grant in the H2O PA Program. The project received national recognition when *Storm Water Solutions* magazine named the project a 2013 Top Storm Water and Erosion Control Project.

## Innovative Zoning

In addition to the flood structures, the township needed a way to move development out of the most flood-prone areas of the office park. A transfer of development rights program (TDR) was proposed as an incentive for property owners to relocate from the floodplain. The township adopted a TDR Ordinance in 2013 to allow TDR property owners who relocate a building out of the floodplain to receive incentive credits to incorporate mixed-use development and increase density, height, and type of uses. This TDR program is the first of its kind to encourage economic development over land preservation.



## Transportation Improvements

Another goal was to improve and create a multimodal transportation system enhanced by greening and streetscape improvements. As a first step, the township initiated transportation studies to identify necessary improvements. Many roadways and bridges, including Virginia Drive, the park's major thoroughfare, are prone to flooding. The studies proposed redesigning and rebuilding Virginia Drive. This included raising the roadway and bridges out of the floodplain, incorporating storm water management facilities, and narrowing the roadway from four lanes to three, providing a turning lane and accommodating bicyclists and pedestrians. To provide more convenient access to the park, the township envisions a new slip ramp at the Fort Washington Interchange and has been working with the turnpike commission and Montgomery County to upgrade to a full movement interchange from Virginia Drive to the park. The township has taken the lead in completing a portion of Montgomery County's Cross County trail through the office park, with a future connection to nearby Fort Washington train station. Streetscape improvements, including greening elements and gateways and wayfinding signage, create an appealing identity for the office park.

## Collaborative Initiatives

Other collaborative initiatives include a new Steering Committee on Redevelopment and Economic Investment (CORE), which makes recommendations on park redevelopment issues. A recent successful initiative, involving a strong public partnership and long-term



visioning, was the approval of a \$30 million open space acquisition ballot strongly supported by 65 percent of the community. These funds could be used to acquire frequently flooded parcels as open space. The township is also considering establishing a transportation development district to help raise funds for transportation improvements throughout the park. Currently, the township is evaluating existing detention basins to improve storm water performance and has taken over ownership and maintenance of many privately owned basins to create an integrated system.

Upper Dublin Township has provided a creative re-imagining of Fort Washington Office Park for the twenty-first century. This exceptional project, with its creative planning vision, sustainable design principles, and successful initiatives provides the initial groundwork for reinvestment to create a vibrant office park in the community.

## Location

Intersection of the Pennsylvania Turnpike and Route 309  
Upper Dublin Township  
Montgomery County, PA

## Project Data

### Land use

Office/light manufacturing

### Zoning

TDR – Transfer of Development Rights – Mixed-Use Overlay

### Tract area

536 acres

## Key Features

- Environmentally sensitive/sustainable design
- Redevelopment
- Economic impacts
- Collaborative effort

## Owner/Developer

Upper Dublin Township  
801 Loch Alsh Avenue  
Fort Washington, PA 19034

## Construction Manager

D'Huy Engineering, Inc.  
One East Broad Street, Suite 310  
Bethlehem, PA 18018

## Engineer

URS Corporation  
625 West Ridge Pike, Suite E-100  
Conshohocken, PA 19428

## Contractor

Allan A Meyers  
1805 Berks Road  
P.O. Box 98  
Worcester, PA 19490

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