

2023

A N N U A L R E P O R T
А Н Н О У Г К Е Ь О К Л



Coming Together & Working Together
to Achieve Success!

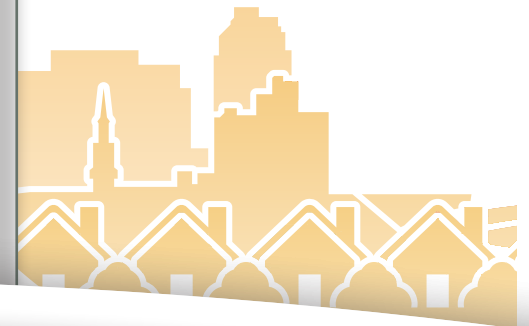


Director's Message



Greetings!

The Berks County Planning Commission (BCPC) had an exciting and productive 2023. From Imagine Berks implementation, to continued support of transportation initiatives via the Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority, sharing information with our municipalities through our Solar Advice document and supporting the inclusion of properties surrounding the former Exide Plant onto the EPA's Superfund National Priorities List, our staff touched all facets of planning. I hope you explore our annual report which highlights all the places BCPC has visited, plans we have completed, and programs we administered. I certainly appreciate all the hard work and long hours that the Planning Staff put in to make 2023 one for the books.



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BCPC Out and About

Fleetwood Lofts Ribbon Cutting

American Planning Association National Conference

Pennsylvania Chapter of the American

Planning Association Conference

BCPC Staff Meets With PennDOT Secretary and State Representative Guzman

Pennsylvania Downtown Center

Annual Statewide Conference

WeConservePA Land Conservation Conference

WeConservePA Greenway Trail Summit

Berks Agricultural Resource Network's (B.A.R.N.) Annual Meeting

Berks County MS4 Steering Committee

Agriculture and Natural Resources Career & Job Fair

Berks Heim Story Trail

Schuylkill River Trail and Auburn Bridge Ribbon Cutting

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Branding and Marketing

BCPC Marketing

Data Hub

IMAGINE BERKS Implementation

From February to June of 2023, Berks County Planning Commission (BCPC) staff, with partners from Greater Reading Chamber Alliance (GRCA), Berks County Industrial Development Authority (BCIDA), Reading Berks Association of Realtors (RBAR), and Berks County Redevelopment Authority (BCRA), conducted the Capitalizing on your Municipality's Opportunities dinners. From as far north as Albany Township, south to Caernarvon Township, east to Hereford Township and west to Bethel Township, BCPC was able to connect with the majority of municipalities and school districts through a series of emails, phone calls, and dinners to discuss various planning issues ranging from housing and commercial development to preservation and quality of life improvements.



The Imagine Berks Strategic Economic Development Action Plan Regional Meetings

9
Meetings

300
Total in Attendance

58
Municipalities Represented

70
Responses to Municipal Phone Survey

13
School Districts Represented

10 Joint Comprehensive Plan Updates Discussed

Top Five Topics Discussed

- 1** Land Use
- 2** Intergovernmental Cooperation/ Participation
- 3** Housing
- 4** Community Facilities
- 5** Planning

Many municipalities expressed interest in regularly collaborating with the County on an annual basis.



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Housing



Including housing as part of the Imagine Berks Strategic Economic Development Action Plan was extremely important. So much so, that a designated housing planner position was created to implement the actions of the housing focus area. Jaime Perez was hired to fill this position and provides the following information as a behind-the-scenes view of housing in Berks County.

The housing market in 2023 experienced a range of challenges and shifts, characterized by a complex interplay of economic factors, including high mortgage rates, a slowdown in home sales and construction, and persistent affordability issues. Here's a summary of the key trends observed throughout the year:



1 | Mortgage Rates and Affordability:

Mortgage rates reached over

 **8%**

for the first time in more than two decades, significantly impacting affordability and straining budgets. The high rates led to a decrease in homebuying activity and contributed to a slowdown in the market. The average monthly mortgage payment reached record highs, growing more than twice as fast as wages, exacerbating the housing affordability crisis.

2 | Home Sales and Prices:

Despite the high mortgage rates, home prices remained elevated as buyers competed for historically low levels of inventory, the median sales price in Berks County peaked at

\$275,000

in June for 2023. Home sales experienced declines due to low inventory. Lack of supply can stunt the growth of value in housing which relies upon comparison sales data to evidence valuations, typically 6 months of comparison data is needed. A lack of comparison data can negatively effect home values.



3 | Rental Market Dynamics:



The rental market experienced a notable slowdown, leading to flat pricing amid low vacancy rates. While flat pricing persists, average rent prices remain historically high and are worsening the affordability crisis as households remain cost burdened. Adding more units to the market could relieve some pressure and aid in restoring a healthy housing cycle.

4 | Construction Trends:



Home building has not truly recovered from the effects of the great recession of 2007. It appeared that new construction was poised to make an impact on the housing market leading into the pandemic with conditions ripe for home builders but post-pandemic, there was a significant drop in single-family homebuilding, largely due to rising construction material costs, workforce shortages, and regulatory barriers that add time to the development cycle. Conversely, multifamily construction surged to the highest levels since the mid-1980s across our region.

5 | Economic Resilience:



The housing market along with the economy at large did demonstrate tremendous resilience, despite high inflation, interest rates, and other economic pressures. However, the housing market remains constrained by the lack of supply and affordability issues. Increasing inventory and redevelopment efforts addressing aging housing stock will be necessary to increase the economic mobility of households and expand housing choice across the spectrum.

Overall, 2023 was marked by a series of economic and market challenges that affected both the housing market's trajectory and the broader economic landscape. High mortgage rates, affordability issues, in concert with supply and demand factors contributed to a year of adjustment and reflection for the housing sector.

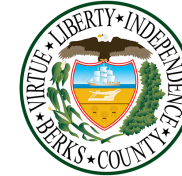
The Planning Commission Subdivision and Land Development Staff prepare a Subdivision and Land Development Report for our monthly Board Meetings. The Subdivision and Land Development Report depicts the subdivision and land development plans that have come to our office from the Municipalities for the official ACT 247 review. The report shows the number of plans received and reviewed, whether they are for a residential or non-residential use such as a commercial/retail building. Additionally, the report shows you which municipality the project is located.



Subdivision & Land Development Report

January 01, 2023 – December 29, 2023

Berks County Planning Commission



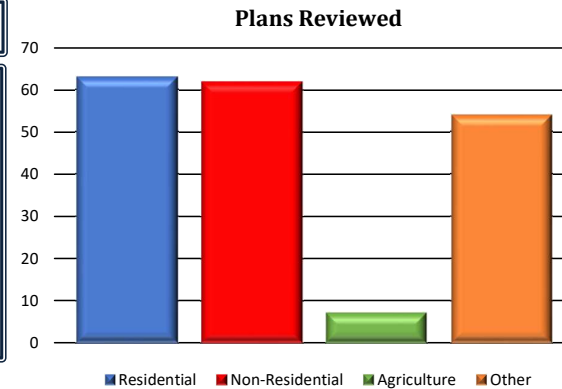
Types of New Development

Housing: 1,892 Total Units

Single Family Detached 451	Mobile Homes 62
Apartment 838	Semi Detached 98
Townhouse 443	

Type of Plans Reviewed

Total	186
Subdivision/ Lot Line Adjustment	118
Land Development	68
Acres	3,227.3



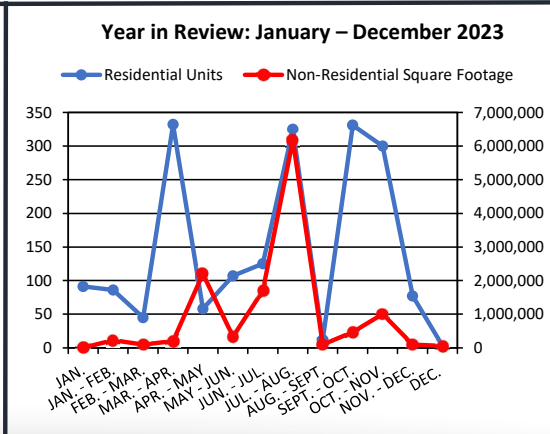
*Other includes Annexations, Municipal, Recreation, etc.
*Please refer to Monthly Subdivision Review Activity Report for details.

Non-Residential: 12,668,776 Total Square Feet

Agriculture 338,474	Public Quasi 593
Industrial/Warehouse 11,876,292	Commercial Recreational 0
Commercial 453,417	

Annual Review Activity

Subdivision Reviews	186
Planning Modules (Act 537)	12
SALDO (Ordinance Reviews)	6
Endorsements	143



Residential ●

For the year 2023, the County has received proposals for 944 more residential units compared to the previous year. Moreover, about 30 or more municipalities had at least one proposed housing development. The County's most rural Townships such as Penn, District, and Tulpehocken did not receive any proposed residential subdivision land development plan submissions.

Non-Residential ●

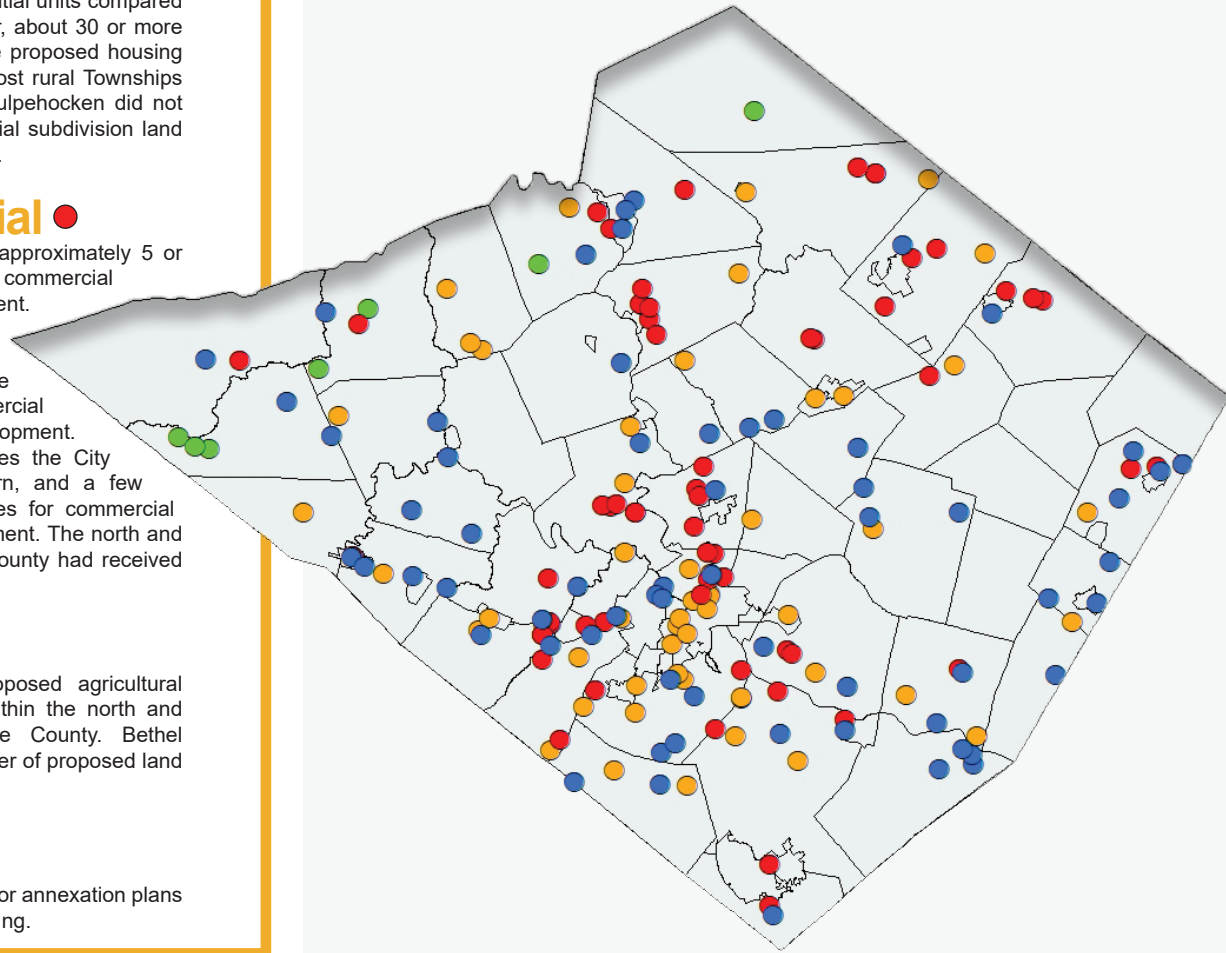
Along the Route 61 corridor, approximately 5 or more sites are proposed for commercial and/or industrial land development. Additionally, along the 422 corridor both east and west have also received at least one or more proposals for commercial and/or industrial land development. The Metro area which includes the City of Reading, Muhlenberg, Bern, and a few others had more than 10 sites for commercial and/or industrial land development. The north and northeastern portions of the County had received 16 or more proposals.

Agriculture ●

The greatest number of proposed agricultural land development is found within the north and northwestern portions of the County. Bethel township had the largest number of proposed land developments in this category.

Other ●

Staff reviewed subdivision and/or annexation plans for ten sites in the City of Reading.



In 2023,
Berks County
added **475** new
housing units
to the tax base

These units consisted of various dwelling types such as apartments, single-family detached homes and townhomes.

2.8 MIL square feet
of non-residential development

was added to the tax base in 2023. This square footage is comprised of commercial/retail facilities, self-storage units as well as industrial facility expansions and warehouses.

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ACT 247 Zoning Reviews

Under the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (Act 247), municipalities must submit any proposed revisions/amendments to their zoning ordinances/maps to the Berks County Planning Commission for review and comment. During 2023, the County Planning Commission reviewed

45 proposed zoning ordinance/map amendments

for our local municipalities. Topics included solar energy facilities, small wireless facilities, short-term rentals, anaerobic digesters, noise requirements, and more.

ACT 67, 68 and Chapter 102 Reviews

Planning Commission Staff provide these reviews based on consistency with the Comprehensive Plan. These reviews are directly related to permits needed for land development projects.

Staff reviewed **214** of these in 2023.



Letters of Consistency

The Berks County Planning Commission wrote

28 letters of consistency from _____
22 municipalities and other agencies in 2023.

These letters serve to document projects that achieve consistency with one or more of the Planning Commission's formally adopted plans, and they are either helpful or required for applicants to receive grant funding for projects. The funding sources came from the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED), PennDOT, the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), the Commonwealth Financing Authority (CFA), and more. Projects included park and recreation improvements and maintenance, active transportation plans, municipal building upgraded and maintenance, joint comp plan funding, multi-modal improvements, and more. The total amount of grant funding requested from these 28 review letters was over

▲ **\$5 MIL.**

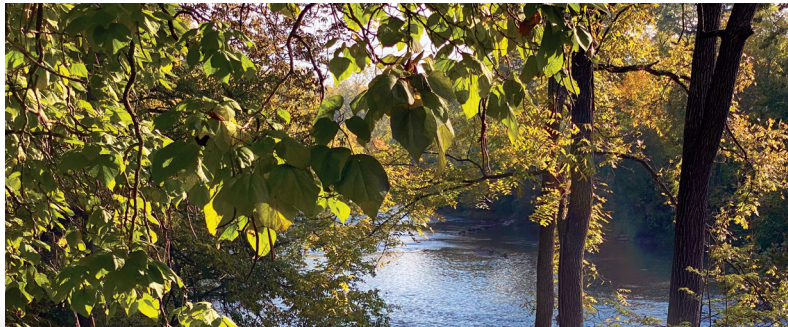
BCPC does not regularly track how many of these projects are awarded.



Placemaking Implementation Projects

In the first year of implementation of Imagine Berks, several planning staff members worked to identify recreation and natural resources projects which capture the actions of the Placemaking focus area and the goals and actions of the 2022 Berks County Greenway, Park and Recreation plan. Specifically, the team reviewed projects which looked at enhancing park system activities and recreational programming to ensure a mix of activities that appeal to ALL ages, cultures, and abilities as well as enhance recreational amenities to fit the needs and expectations of underserved communities and/or populations. Additionally, it was important to include projects which support the creation of walking and biking networks that provide safe, efficient, and close to home access to recreation and other arts, cultural and economic centers which encourage healthy behavior in communities.

A total of \$250,000 was allocated and awarded by the County Commissioners to 11 projects throughout the County. Projects which were selected included riparian buffer repair along the Saucony Creek trail, preparation and completion of a park masterplan in Topton Borough, preparation and completion of engineering plans for a kayak launch and trailhead along the Schuylkill River Trail, preparation and completion of engineering plans for repair of a pedestrian bridge along the Wyomissing Creek trail, and the installation of an ADA accessible splash pad in Womelsdorf Borough. The awardees have until December 2024 to complete their projects.

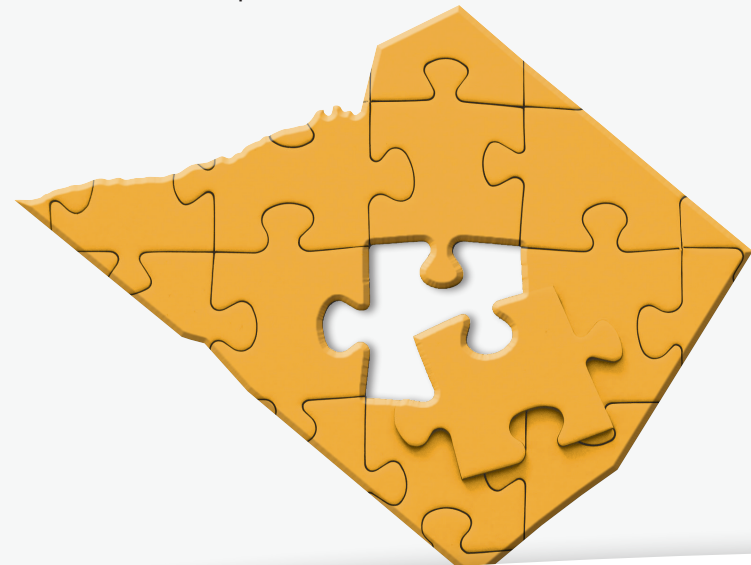


Joint Comprehensive Planning Program

As a result of the Imagine Berks Regional Meetings, many municipalities have begun a proactive approach to planning their future. BCPC received inquiries to update or form ten (10) different joint comprehensive plans representing up to 38 municipalities in Berks County.

In the Fall of 2023, BCPC staff submitted two (2) applications to the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development Municipal Assistance Program Grant to aid in funding two (2) new joint comprehensive plans: Northeastern Berks, representing Albany, Greenwich, and Maxatawny Townships and Lenhartsville and Kutztown Boroughs and St. Lawrence-Exeter-Amity-Douglass Comprehensive Plan.

In the Spring of 2024 staff will apply for two (2) more updates: Fleetwood-Maidencreek-Richmond and Eastern Berks Joint Comprehensive Plans.



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Data

2020 Decennial Census

The use and review of demographic data plays a vital role in Planning practice. In a world that is increasingly defined by various 'metrics', the use of data has become more important than ever before. We examine data to see where the population is growing (or shrinking), getting younger or older, richer or poorer, or increasingly diverse. What type of skills do people have, are their earnings keeping up with housing costs, is the type of housing being built appropriate for regional incomes? These are just a sample of questions for which we use data in planning for land uses, transportation facilities, educational needs, housing growth, and a multitude of other planning-related topics.

430,449 Persons
Total Population
\$72,000
Median Household Income
\$37,723
Per Capita Income

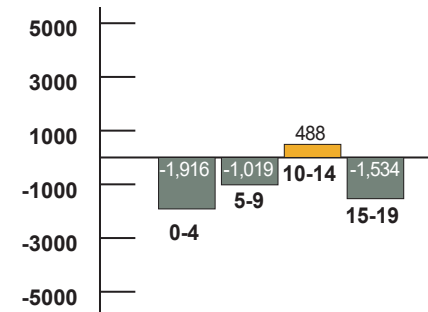
Source - 2022 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table DP-05

Youth

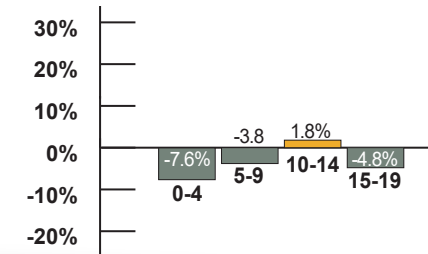


After reviewing the 2020 information against 2010, some notable differences and trends can be noted. One is lower population in the 0-4 and 5-9 age groups. This is indicative of lower birth rates and, therefore, fewer persons to replace those who age into the 10-14 year and 15-19 year age groups (which also lost populations). There was an overall decrease of 3,981 persons in the 0-19 year age groups. This has implications for the 19 school districts that serve Berks County, as many of them added facilities and staff in the 1990s and 2000s to handle (then) growth. Previous analysis completed using the PL 94-171 (Legislative Redistricting Data) now show that 13 of the 19 lost student-age (0-18 years) populations.

Number Change in 5-Year Age Groups, Berks County: 2010 & 2020 Decennial Censuses



Percentage Change in 5-Year Age Groups, Berks County: 2010 & 2020 Decennial Censuses

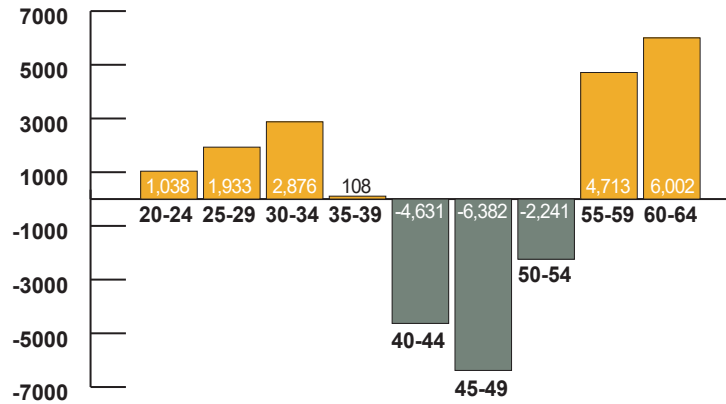




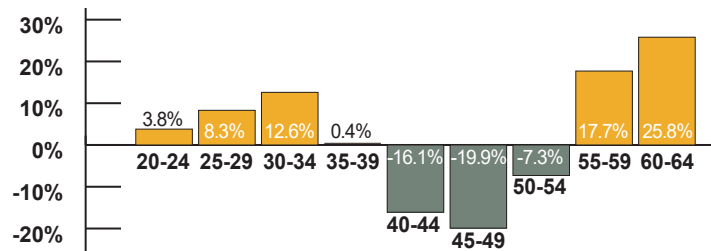
Workforce

The overall working population (20-64 years) grew by a modest 3,416 persons, or only 1.4 percent. Overall growth in this segment has economic benefits for the County. However, certain sub-segments need to be examined further. The 20-39 year age group, consisting of younger entrants into the workforce and those engaged in secondary education, grew by 5,955 persons (+6.0%) since 2010. These are the people who will sustain the workforce into the future and who will need skills training and experience. Unfortunately, this growth is offset by the loss of 13,254 (-14.5%) persons in the 40-54 year age group. These persons can be considered among the more experienced part of the workforce and should be depended on to replace recent and upcoming retirees along with mentoring the younger members of the workforce. The 55-64 year age group grew by 10,715 persons (+21.5%) between 2010 and 2020. While the large growth of the more 'senior' members of the workforce is positive, it also means that there are that many persons potentially leaving the workforce within the next five to 15 years as they retire.

**Number Change
in 5-Year Age Groups,
Berks County:
2010 & 2020
Decennial Censuses**



**Percentage Change
in 5-Year Age Groups,
Berks County:
2010 & 2020
Decennial Censuses**

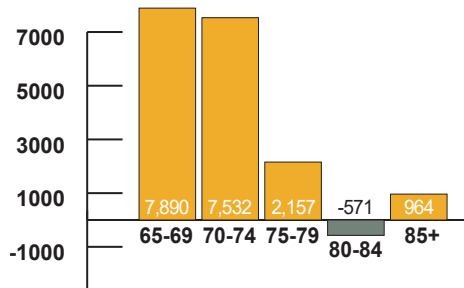




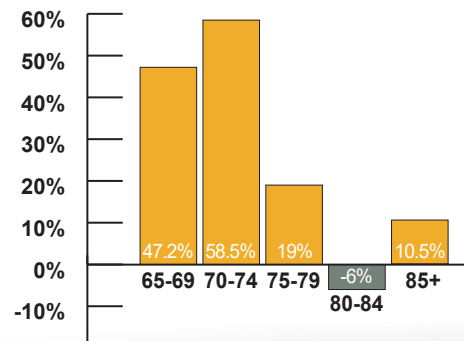
Retired

Berks County is growing increasingly older. 17,972 persons were added to the 65 and older age groups since 2010, an astounding 30.2% increase. Almost 18.1% of the County's population is aged 65 and older, up from 14.5% in 2010. The 'older' elderly population – ages 75 and over – grew by 2,550 persons. As this entire segment of the population continues to grow, they bring with them increased demands on elder living and care, transportation, and goods/services targeted specifically to the elderly.

Number Change in 5-Year Age Groups, Berks County: 2010 & 2020 Decennial Censuses



Percentage Change in 5-Year Age Groups, Berks County: 2010 & 2020 Decennial Censuses



Conclusions

- School Districts should be cognizant of lower numbers of youth and plan accordingly.
- Workforce development efforts should include increasing the number of persons able to work.
- Providers of services to the elderly will continue to have increasing demands for their services.

2023 Annual Budget

Annually, the Berks County Board of Commissioners approve the budget for the Planning Department staff and related expenses. The BCPC also receives revenues from a variety of government agencies and fees. The table depicts the 2023 approved budget for both revenues and expenses as well as the actual revenues and expenses.



	2023 Approved Budget	2023 Actual Budget
PERSONNEL EXPENSES		
Wages – Staff	\$987,354	\$1,001,858.04
Wages – Part time no benefits	\$26,181	\$0
FICA	\$89,932	\$88,033.32
Fringe	\$376,311	\$391,297.31
Sub Total – Personnel	\$1,479,778	\$1,481,188.67

OPERATING EXPENSE		
Sub Total – Operating	\$206,956	\$162,447.72
Building Indirect Costs	\$64,674	\$64,674
Other Indirect Costs	\$215,234	\$215,234
Sub Total – Indirect	\$486,864	\$442,355.72
Total Budgeted Expenditures	\$1,966,642	\$1,923,544.39

REVENUE		
CDBG	\$120,000	\$120,000
FTA Revenue	\$109,000	\$88,843
RATS State Revenue	\$60,000	\$64,803
RATS Federal Revenue	\$435,000	\$471,446
BCMS4 Cooperative Ed Program	\$8,300	\$13,592
UCC Fees	\$12,000	\$3,925
Joint Comprehensive Plan Updates	\$15,086	\$16,430
SALDO Fees	\$100,000	\$105,277
SALDO Recording Fee	\$1,400	\$1,430
Total Budgeted Revenues	\$885,746	\$439,212

Reading Area Transportation Study

The Reading Area Transportation Study (RATS) is the regional Metropolitan Planning Area (MPO) for the Reading (PA) metropolitan area. This provides transportation planning coverage for all of Berks County. RATS is comprised of two committees – the Technical Committee and the Coordinating Committee which are independent of, but coordinate with, both Berks County and the Berks County Planning Commission. The Technical Committee reviews items brought before the group and (provides recommendations for items that require formal actions) by the Coordinating Committee. RATS facilitates the regional performance-based planning process that serves as the basis for spending State and Federal transportation funds allocated for improvements

2023 Reading MPO Staff Coordination, Collaboration and Participation

During the duration of 2023, Reading Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)/ BCPC Transportation Staff provided information on transportation plans, projects and funding to municipalities, elected officials, the general public, business community and the media. Staff also continued coordination and collaboration with PennDOT Connects through their project level meetings with municipalities, Project Scoping Field Views and Plans Displays.

Additionally, Staff participated in the PennDOT Connects Steering Committee, PennDOT Financial Guidance Work Group, PA Interagency Consultation Work Group (Air Quality Conformity), Pennsylvania Hazard Mitigation Plan Steering Committee, and PennDOT's Annual Planning Partners Conference.

to streets, highways, bridges, public transit, and bicycle and pedestrian networks throughout the County. The transportation planning staff of the Berks County Planning Commission also serves as the staff to the MPO. They coordinate and administer these committees, their meetings, and lead development of the package of State and Federally required transportation planning products. These services are supported through funding provided by the Federal, State and County governments.

During 2023, the Coordinating Committee met 4 times, the Coordinating Committee and Technical Committees met jointly 3 times, and the Technical Committee met 5 times.

Staff worked in partnership with the South Central Transit Authority in the preparation of their Transit Development Plan charting a new direction for public transportation services provided by the Berks Area Regional Transportation Authority (BARTA) and the Reading Regional Airport Authority in the development of their long range and capital improvement plans.

In closing, Staff had the pleasure to serve as both Board Members and Chairman of the Susquehanna Regional Transportation Partnership providing Transportation Demand Management services throughout a 9-County region via contract with a consultant (AECOM) doing business as Commuter Services of PA (now Commute PA) www.commutepa.org

Staff conducted nearly

100

traffic counts

in support of both PennDOT's Traffic Monitoring System and the Berks County bridge program and verified roadway inventories and performance measures on approximately

167

Highway Performance Monitoring System (HPMS) sample sections.

5

TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETINGS

4

COORDINATING COMMITTEE MEETINGS

3

JOINT COORDINATING AND TECHNICAL COMMITTEES MEETINGS

**Reports Prepared/Approved by
Reading Area Transportation Study
in 2023**

JANUARY

PennDOT Performance Measures and Targets for PM1 (Highway Safety)

South Central Transit Authority Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan Update and Performance Measure Targets

MARCH

Reading MPO Title VI Program

PennDOT Performance Measures and Targets for PM-2 (Pavement and Bridge Conditions) and PM-3 (Travel Reliability and the Effectiveness of the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) Program)

MAY

RATS Annual Pavement and Bridge Condition Report

RATS Traffic Safety Report

SEPTEMBER

SCTA FY 2024 Transit Asset Management Plan Performance Measures and Targets

RATS Public Participation Plan

RATS Limited English Proficiency Plan

NOVEMBER

Congestion Management Process

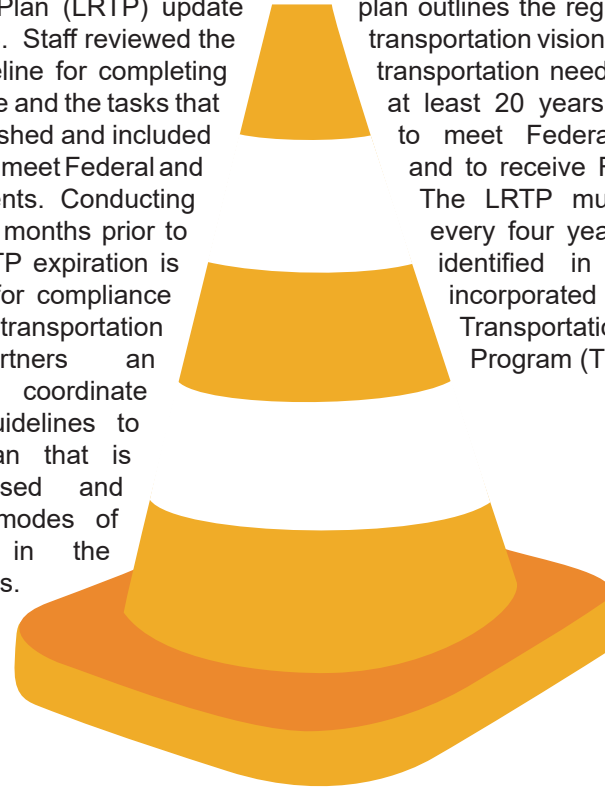
DECEMBER

Annual List of Federally Obligated Projects for FFY 2023

Process To Create New Long Range Transportation Plan Kicks Off

Reading MPO staff met virtually with transportation partners from PennDOT District 5-0, PennDOT Central Office, Federal Highway Administration, and South Central Transit Authority to kick off the FFY 2027-2050 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) update in October 2023. Staff reviewed the anticipated timeline for completing the LRTP update and the tasks that will be accomplished and included in the process to meet Federal and State requirements. Conducting the meeting 30 months prior to the current LRTP expiration is a requirement for compliance and provides transportation planning partners an opportunity to coordinate and review guidelines to produce a plan that is performance-based and considers all modes of transportation in the planning process.

The LRTP examines socioeconomic trends that affect travel, the current State of the County transportation network, and describes multimodal transportation strategies to address identified transportation needs. The plan outlines the region's long-range transportation vision and projects the transportation needs of the County at least 20 years into the future to meet Federal requirements and to receive Federal funding. The LRTP must be updated every four years and projects identified in the plan are incorporated into the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).



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FFY 2025-2028 Transportation Improvement Program Development Begins

The Reading MPO FFY 2025-2028 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) update began in March 2023 in conjunction with the State Transportation Commission's (STC) Twelve-Year Program Update Public Comment Period. MPO staff conducted outreach and provided information and links to the STC's online survey and public meeting via email, Facebook, and the Berks County Planning Commission website. The STC provides the Reading MPO with the responses to the survey that apply to Berks County. There were 109 Berks County affiliated responses.



In addition, the Reading MPO solicited municipalities for project recommendations in May 2023. Municipalities submitted a total of 9 new project recommendations located in Cumru Township, Greenwich Township, Union Township, Upper Tulpehocken Township, Wyomissing Borough, and Mohnton Borough.

After reviewing both the survey and municipal responses received, MPO staff met with PennDOT to review projects on the existing (FFY 2023) TIP, update the current scope of work and cost estimates for carry-over projects, and review new candidate projects. The MPO also coordinated with South Central Transit Authority (SCTA) to review and establish a list of proposed Transit projects for FFY 2025-2028. The Reading MPO endorsed the Draft FFY 2025-2028 TIP highway, bridge and transit project listing in December, 2023.

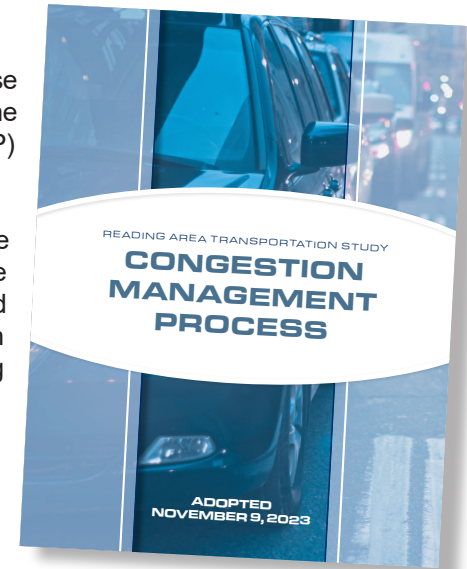
Per Federal regulations, the TIP is required to be updated every other year and covers a four-year period. The list of projects in the TIP must be financially constrained to the amount of funds that are expected to be available. The TIP is a culmination of the transportation planning process and represents a consensus among State and regional officials as to what near term improvements to pursue. Further development of the draft TIP and additional public outreach will occur in the Spring of 2024. Formal adoption by the Reading MPO is anticipated in May 2024.

Congestion Management Process Report

In November 2023, the Reading Area Transportation Study (RATS) / Berks County Planning Commission staff completed an update to their 2016 Congestion Management Process (CMP) report. Congestion on the road network has negative impacts on the efficient and safe movement of people, goods, and services throughout the region. The CMP is used by County planners to continually monitor and assess congestion on the higher order State and interState road network throughout Berks County. The CMP is a performance based process that can help planners manage existing travel facilities by identifying the type, location, and duration of congestion problems within

the transportation system. Ultimately, planners use this process to help feed needed projects into the County’s Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) and Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

Over time, the CMP is updated to include projects that have been implemented. With the implementation of new projects and continued evaluation through the CMP, RATS/BCPC can monitor the system and continue prioritizing improvements that have the biggest impacts on mitigating congestion.



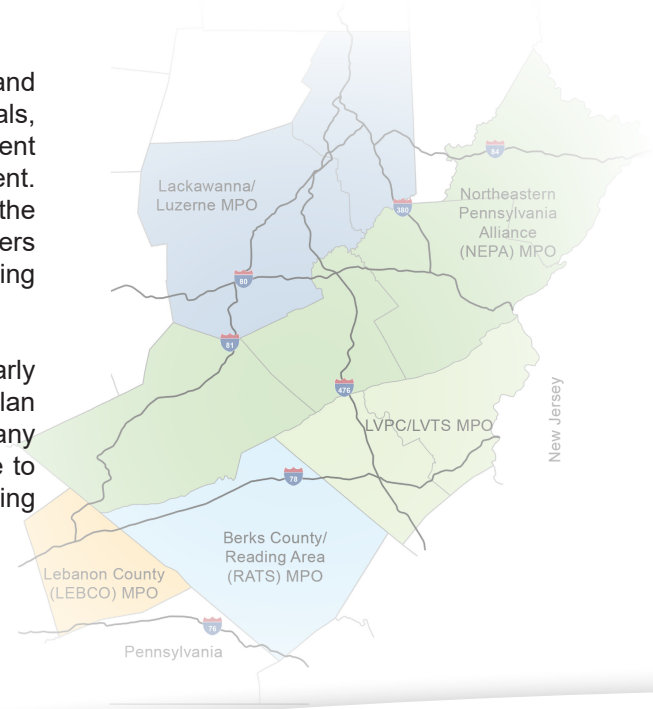
Eastern Pennsylvania Freight Alliance Freight Infrastructure Study

RATS staff has had continued involvement in the Eastern PA Freight Infrastructure Study. In late 2022 the project began and includes five Metropolitan Planning Organizations - Lehigh Valley Transportation Study (LVTS), **Reading Area Transportation Study (RATS)**, Lackawanna-Luzerne Transportation Study (LLTS), Lebanon County Metropolitan Planning Organization (LEBCO), and the Northeast Pennsylvania Alliance (NEPA).

To date, the consultant for the project has held five area focus group sessions within each MPO region. These sessions consisted of virtual and in-person stakeholder interviews to solicit input into the process. Stakeholders represented

individuals from the local shipping and trucking industry, municipal officials, PennDOT officials, economic development representatives, and law enforcement. Information was gathered on what the biggest challenges are for freight providers within the region as well as what is working well and what is not.

The project is due to be complete in early spring of 2024. When complete, the plan will provide strategies to mitigate the many impacts the region is experiencing due to the ever-increasing amount of trucks using the regional transportation network.



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Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP)

The Reading Area Transportation Study (RATS) partnered with PennDOT to assist in administering the Statewide Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP) here in Berks County. LTAP has allowed RATS to provide relevant and necessary training opportunities to our local municipalities. The instruction sessions and training materials provided by the LTAP trainers and technical experts provide participants opportunities to stay up-to-date regarding new Federal/State laws and regulations addressing road maintenance and safety. LTAP also provides information about new technologies beneficial to asset and infrastructure maintenance and management.

Staff coordinated and marketed a total of eight Local Technical Assistance (LTAP) training sessions during the 2023 calendar year.

The following is a list of the classes held in 2023:

1. Local Road Safety Plans
2. Temporary Traffic Control
3. Roadside Vegetation Control
4. Traffic Signs Basics
5. Project Estimating Using Mathematical Principles
6. Erosion and Sediment Control
7. Micro-Surfacing and Ultra-Thin Friction Course (UTFC)
8. Drainage: The Keys to Roads that Last

195 | TOTAL REGISTERED

159 | TOTAL ATTENDED

14 | MUNICIPALITIES REPRESENTED
OUT OF 72

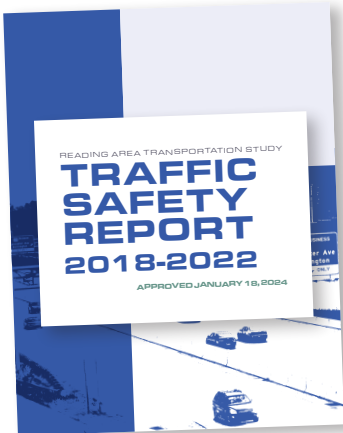
Attendees originated from: Hamburg, Ontelaunee, Leesport, Upper Tulpehocken, Jefferson, Alsace, St. Lawrence, South Heidelberg, Union, Bern, Reading, Fleetwood, Caernarvon, Sinking Spring

7 | COUNTIES REPRESENTED

Attendees originated from neighboring counties: Cumberland, Montgomery, Lehigh, Lancaster, Chester, Dauphin, York

Transportation Reports

During 2023, the 2017-2021 and 2018-2022 editions of the Reading Area Transportation Study (RATS) Annual Pavement and Bridge Condition Report and RATS Annual Traffic Safety Report were completed. These reports were created as a new way to monitor our existing resources and system conditions to help inform our Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) and Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Both reports provide valuable information as a part of the performance-based planning and programming process and performance measures.



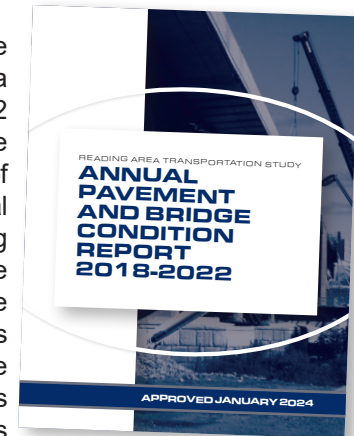
The Annual Traffic Safety Report builds on the data provided by PennDOT for the PM1 Safety Measures. These measures assess safety on all public roads and define a strategic approach that uses system information to make investment and policy decisions to achieve national performance goals. RATS plans and programs projects in support of the PennDOT safety targets utilizing a safe system approach. The goal of this report is to identify ways to reduce the number of crashes on Berks

County roadways and prevent fatalities and serious injuries through the examination of crash trends and identification and programming of mitigation strategies. Berks County Scorecards based on the Pennsylvania Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP) Priority Emphasis Areas and Safety Focus Areas have been created for both fatalities and suspected serious injuries. The second edition of this report (2018-2022) had important table additions. New to the Traffic Safety Report is the addition of a table that identifies the predominant collision type for roadway segments where more than 20 reportable crashes occurred. As well, a table that identifies projects that are programmed on the current Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) that include elements of safety as part of the overall goal that the project aims to address is included in the report.



The Annual Pavement and Bridge Condition Report expands on the data provided by PennDOT for the PM2 Pavement and Bridge Measures. These measures assess the conditions of pavement and bridges on the National Highway System (NHS). As Reading MPO's interests extend beyond those included in PennDOT's Performance Measure Annual Reports, the data was analyzed not only for road and bridge groups for PennDOT-owned assets but Local Federal Aid (LFA) roads

and locally owned bridges. Berks County Scorecards have also been created based on pavement and bridge condition Performance Measures. The second edition of this report (2018-2022) had important table additions. New to the Pavement and Bridge Condition Report is the addition of the Reading MPO 2022 Poor Condition Pavement Table with TIP Projects Identified and the Reading MPO 2022 Poor Condition Bridge Table with TIP Projects Identified. The addition of these tables to this report will provide Reading MPO Planners with the full list of all Poor Condition Bridges and Pavements within Berks County along with associated projects, or the lack thereof, which aids in determining which poor condition assets should be improved.





Regional Transportation Authority (but still BARTA) to reflect their expanded area of coverage. In December 2014, the South Central Transit Authority (SCTA) was formed to direct operations of both BARTA and Lancaster County's Red Rose Transit Authority.

On Monday, October 2, 2023, Berks County transportation planners Alan Piper and Michael Golembiewski joined current and prior BARTA executives and staff to celebrate their 50th anniversary of providing public transportation services to Berks County at the Saucony Creek Brewpub in Reading's historic Franklin Street station. Also in attendance were representatives from the City of Reading, County of Berks, PennDOT's Bureau of Public Transportation and the Federal Transit Administration.

The Berks Area Reading Transportation Authority (BARTA) was created in 1973. BARTA began operations on October 8, 1973 following their purchase of the assets of the former Reading Bus Company, Inc. Their Special Services (shared ride) division was formed in 1978. In 2010, BARTA became a County authority and their name was officially changed to the Berks Area

Over the years, BARTA has proven to be an innovator in technology (buses powered by compressed natural gas beginning in 1992 and hybrid electric beginning in 2009) and investments in the community. BARTA was a strong proponent of reopening the pedestrian mall on Penn Street in Reading to traffic and installing bus shelters and bus berths in 1993. In 2002, they opened the BARTA Transportation Center at 8th and Cherry Street and three years later in 2005 opened the BARTA Park-n-Transit Parking Garage. Using Federal grants, BARTA refurbished and re-opened Reading's Franklin Street station in 2013 after it had been vacant for 30 years.



2023
BARTA Provided

1.1 MIL RIDES

OVER 19 ROUTES
on its fixed route buses

OVER 79K RIDES
on its shared ride services

Also in 2023, the SCTA initiated an update of their Transit Development Plan which will evaluate current services for both the BARTA and Red Rose systems and make recommendations of potential service improvements. SCTA anticipates adopting the findings of this plan in early 2024.

Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority

The Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority (SRPRA), established on June 16, 2022, is committed to the restoration of passenger rail service from Reading to Philadelphia. The Authority Board is comprised of three members each from Berks, Chester and Montgomery Counties, including a County Commissioner, the County Planning Director, and the mayors from Phoenixville, Pottstown and Reading. Restoring passenger rail service to Reading is a complex process that requires the commitment and coordination of multiple stakeholders at the local, State, and Federal level. The SRPRA is building upon the lessons learned from the studies of years past and is primarily focused on partnering with Amtrak as the proposed operator and participating in the Federal Railroad Administration's (FRA) Intercity Passenger Rail Corridor Identification and Development Program.

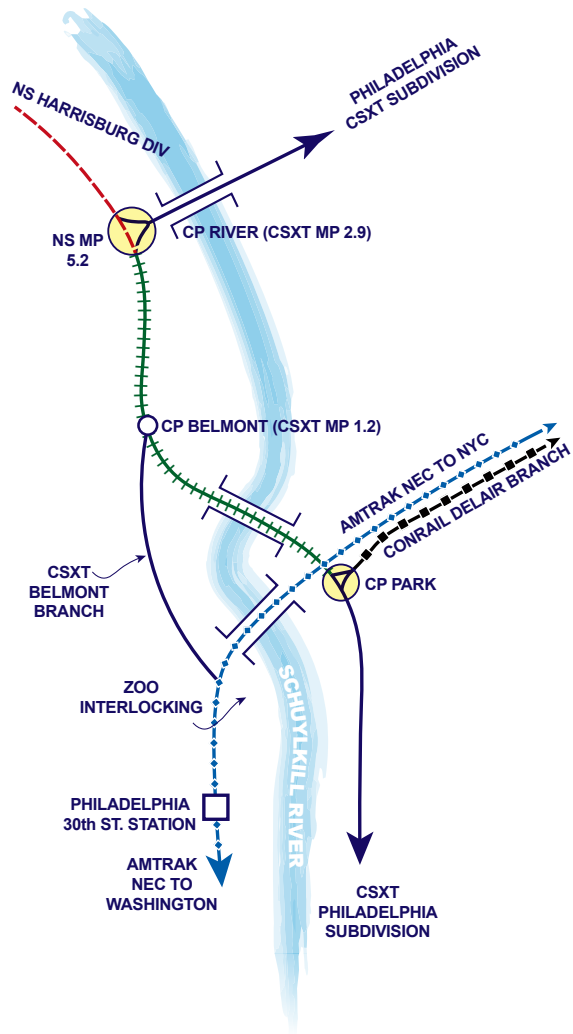
At the end of 2023, the application by the SRPRA for the Reading to Philadelphia Intercity Passenger Rail Project was

READING
POTTSTOWN
PHOENIXVILLE
PHILADELPHIA

accepted into the FRA Federal Corridor Identification Program with an initial award of \$500,000. This is a major step in bringing intercity passenger rail service to Berks, Montgomery, and Chester Counties.

Meetings have been held with key stakeholders, including Amtrak, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT), the anticipated host railroads including Norfolk Southern, and the municipal governments, sponsor organizations and advocacy groups along the Reading — Philadelphia Corridor segment.

In addition to reestablishing rail service, BCPC's Transportation staff have been integral in evaluating potential locations for a rail station suitable for Amtrak intercity passenger train operations. The role of the Authority regarding stations is the subject of a formal policy, and the Authority has endorsed the use of all applicable Amtrak standards in the station planning and development process.



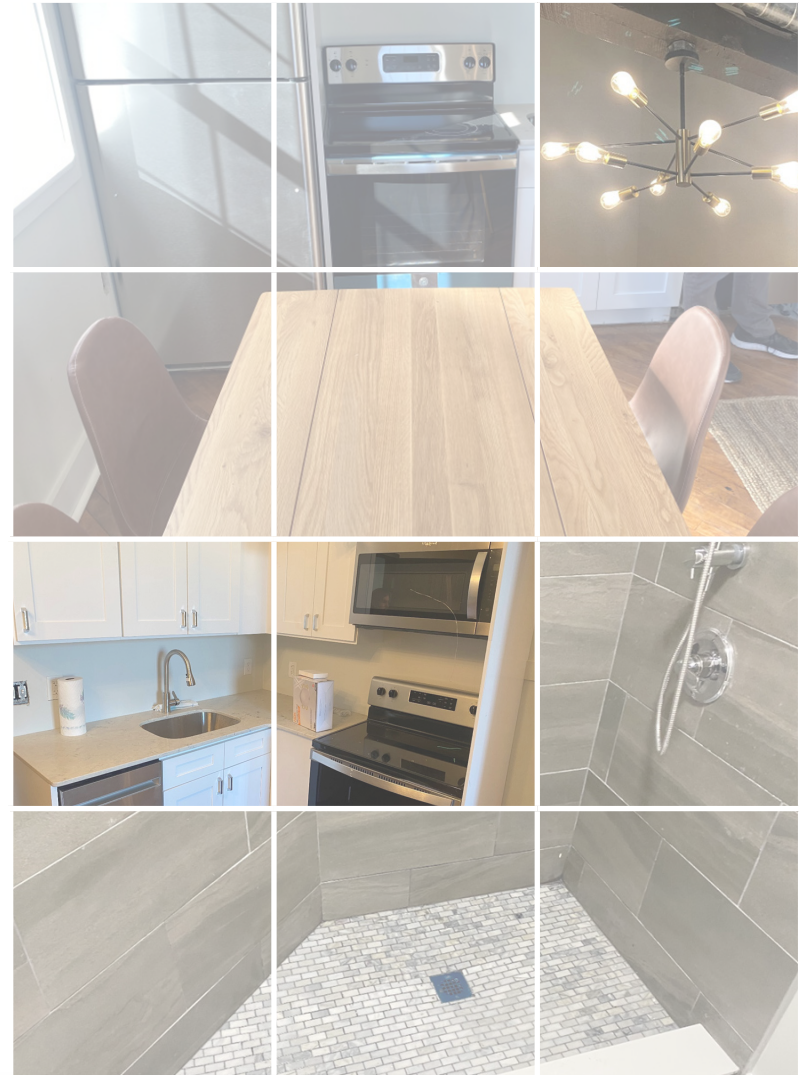
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BCPC Out and About

Fleetwood Lofts Ribbon Cutting



Staff attended the open house for the newly built Fleetwood Lofts apartments. Twenty (20) apartments ranging in size from 350 – 650 square feet have been built in a former industrial building in Fleetwood Borough. Units have hardwood floors and vaulted ceilings to create a larger feel to their footprints. Once fully occupied, the developer intends to renovate the larger on-site building to include eighty (80) additional units with retail space on the ground level that will complement the needs of the residents above. Fleetwood Lofts was awarded the 2023 Smart Growth Award later in the year as well.



American Planning Association National Conference



In April, Executive Director Hunter organized a Mobile Workshop sponsored by the Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority (SRPRA) to Phoenixville, Pottstown and Reading. The Delegates attending the American Planning Association's NPC23 Conference in Philly were wined (almost) and dined and treated like the honored guests they were. Berks, Chester and Montgomery County officials came together for a total team effort.

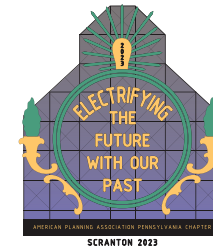


Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association Conference



American Planning Association Pennsylvania Chapter

Executive Director Hunter was privileged to moderate a panel at the Annual PA American Planning Association Conference in Scranton in October with Student Engagement Co-Chair, Jeff Raykes. The session focused on student engagement and young professional development. The all-star panel included, BCPC Assistant Director Ashley Showers, Janai Williams Smith, Amanda Schumacher, Jason Graves and Matthew Edmond. The students and young professionals were eager and energetic and by all accounts left the session encouraged in having a fulfilling career as a Planner.



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BCPC Staff Meets With PennDOT Secretary Michael Carroll And State Representative Manny Guzman

Reading MPO staff and Berks County Planning Commission Executive Director, David Hunter, were invited to participate and discuss transportation issues in several Berks County municipalities with PennDOT Secretary of Transportation Mike Carroll at State Representative Manny Guzman's office in July 2023. The participants included several representatives from local municipalities, business leaders, PennDOT representatives and local officials. After discussing transportation issues and the current State of funding for transportation projects, participants toured several of the locations that local officials and representatives identified as areas of potential concern. The Reading MPO staff and PennDOT staff continue to coordinate and collaborate to incorporate the locations identified by local officials into the FFY 2025-2028 TIP update.



Pennsylvania Downtown Center Annual Statewide Conference



Staff attended the Pennsylvania Downtown Center Conference from June 25 to June 28 held in downtown Scranton at the Hilton Conference Center. The conference's theme for 2023 revolved around Pennsylvania's downtowns being part of the solution to the ongoing housing crisis. Staff also participated in mobile workshops highlighting the Residential Adaptive Reuse in Downtown Scranton turning outdated and unused buildings into modern mixed-use spaces. Staff also toured nearby Pittston where sculptures and murals have transformed the city's downtown into a funky art destination, the Elm Street Neighborhoods of South and West Scranton where streetscape and business façade enhancements have encouraged positive growth throughout the working-class communities, and a train ride from the Silk Mill project in downtown Hawley to Keystone Main Street Honesdale. Classroom sessions included valuable information on the grant application process, fair housing zoning, and a block-by-block approach to revitalization and infill development. Luncheon keynote was provided by Dan Parolek, champion of the international "missing middle" housing movement and co-founder of the non-profit think tank, Form-Based Code Institute.



Pennsylvania Downtown Center Annual Statewide Conference Townie Awards



BCPC staff also attended the 2023 Townie Awards where the Keith Haring Fitness Court project lead by Kutztown University of Pennsylvania and the Kutztown Community Partnership received an award for Organizational Excellence and Community Partnership. Located at the corner of Baldy Street and Normal Avenue, the fitness court features a 32' x 35' outdoor bodyweight circuit training system with 30 fitness elements. Accepting the award were Dr. Duane Crider, professor of Sport Management, and Jordan Davis, sport management intern who oversaw Keith Haring Day.



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WeConserve PA Land Conservation Conference



The 2023 WeConserve Land Conservation Conference took place in downtown Reading at the Doubletree by Hilton and was attended by 357 conservation minded people. Assistant Director Ashley Showers was a member of the planning committee and collaborated with Amanda Burkard-Sell of the County Agriculture Department, Jennifer Brooks with the Berks County Conservation District and Jeremy Haymaker of Berks Nature to facilitate two mobile workshops

The first workshop hosted 30 attendees and was a showcase of the various agricultural businesses and facilities that the County is host to. The mobile tour included stops at the Wild Fox Farm a hemp producer, Manatawny Winery and Butter Valley Organics.



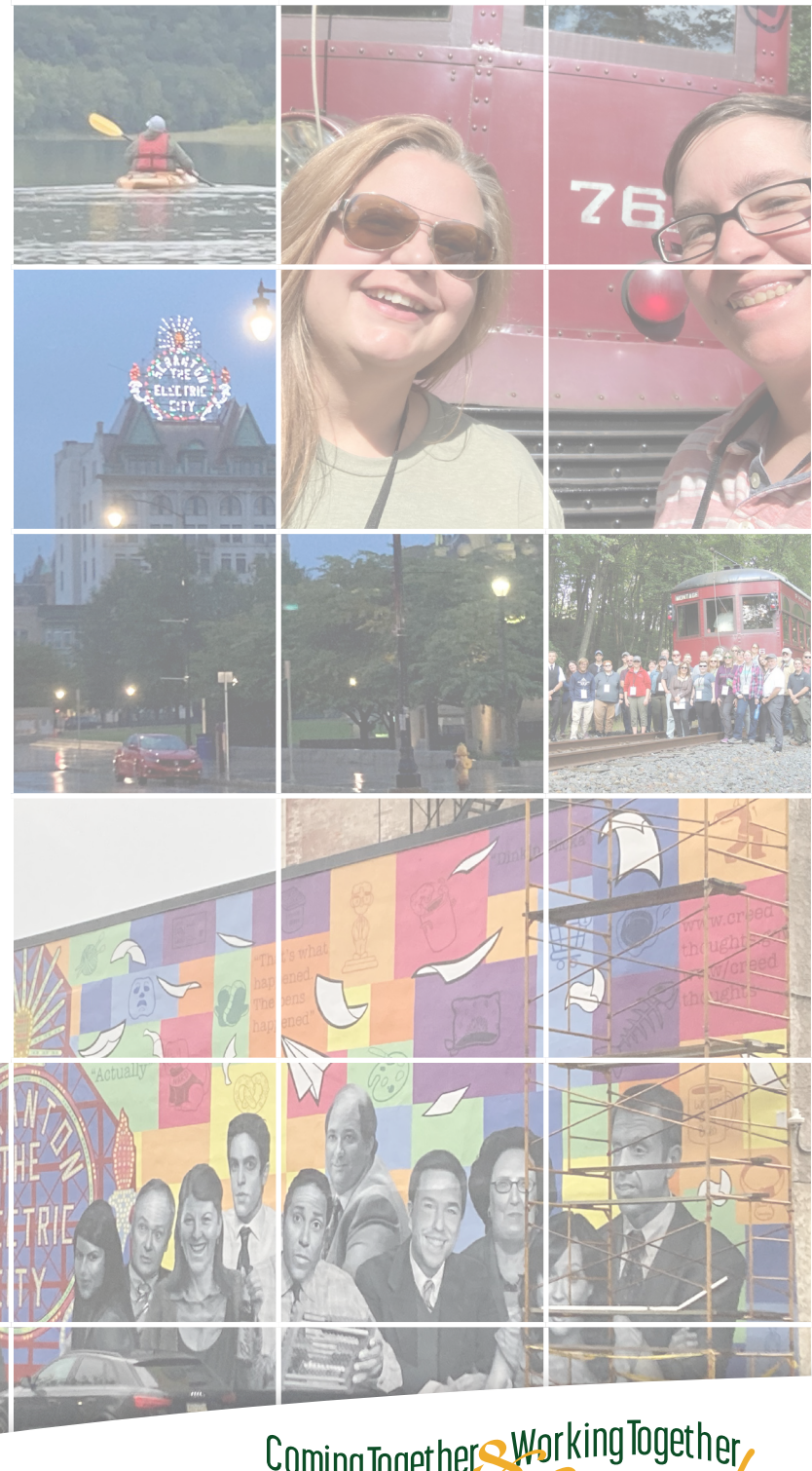
The second workshop toured the Mount Penn Preserve to discuss the various conservation efforts taking place on the mountain. 33 attendees toured the County owned Antietam Lake Park, City owned Englemans Park as well as the William Penn Fire Tower.



WeConservePA Greenways and Trails Summit



In September, Planners Laura Mursch and Devon Hain attended the WeConserve PA Greenways and Trails Summit in Scranton. Local assets explored related to content covered by the summit included downtown Scranton, the Historic Scranton Iron Furnaces, the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail, Vosburg Neck State Park, and the Scranton Eco Trolley which transported attendees to the 436-acre Laurel Line Forest, which was added to the Pinchot State Forest just an hour earlier through proper conservation and partnership! Best practices when planning for greenways, trails, and conservation were covered through sessions that focused on active transportation, healthy community movements, connecting communities, the economic impacts of outdoor recreation, public participation and much more! Speakers included officials DCNR Secretary Cindy Adams Dunn, PennDOT Secretary Mike Carroll, and Director of Outdoor Recreation Nathan Reigner.



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Berks Agricultural Resource Network's (B.A.R.N.) Annual Meeting:



In March, Assistant Director Ashley Showers attended the annual meeting of B.A.R.N at the Oley Valley High School. The Oley Valley Future Farmers of America provided a facility tour, highlighting the school's agriculture education program which includes a food science lab, veterinary medicine program and plant science and horticulture. Understanding the diverse educational opportunities for Berks County students is important for our economic development goals in retaining and training our next generations.



Berks County MS4 Steering Committee



In October of 2023, Assistant Director, Ashley Showers and Planner II, Taylor Lawrence hosted a training in collaboration with the Pennsylvania Environmental Council (PEC) for members of the Berks County MS4 Steering Committee. The training discussed Nature-Based Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI) and Operation/Maintenance Practices with 33 attendees that also enjoyed a walking tour of Berks Nature's Nature Place campus to reinforce real world application of GSI.



Agriculture and Natural Resources Career & Job Fair



Assistant Director, Ashley Showers and Office Support V, Shailyn Hernandez attended the Agriculture & Natural Resources Career & Job Fair on Thursday November 9th. During the fair, BCPC staff was able to engage with 100 plus students from several of the County's School Districts including Kutztown, Tulpehocken, Conrad Weiser, Reading, Boyertown, and Wilson. The students were at the fair to gain information on agencies in the County that have career pathways that include agricultural and natural resources-based positions.



Berks Heim Story Trail



BCPC Staff were invited to attend the Grand Opening/Ribbon cutting for the Berks County Public Libraries Story Trail at the Berks Heim facility. We applaud this new story trail, as it aligns with different goals within our plans.



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Schuylkill River Trail Auburn Bridge Ribbon Cutting



Executive Director, David Hunter was joined by Assistant Director, Ashley Showers at the ribbon cutting ceremony for the Auburn Bridge section of the Schuylkill River Trail. The bridge completed a decades long project which included numerous partners such as the Schuylkill River Greenways NHA, Schuylkill Headwaters Association, Federal office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement, Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, The William Penn Foundation, PA DEP Bureau of Abandoned Mine Reclamation, Schuylkill County and private land owners Jeanne and Kenneth Porter. Our attendance at the ceremony was important to show our continued support for the completing of the remaining trail gaps of the Schuylkill River Trail. This project is one big leap in more to come in facilitating a trail which runs the entire length of the Schuylkill river from Schuylkill County to the City of Philadelphia. To visit this new section of the trail, and to see the latest trail map, please go to the Schuylkill River Greenways site at:

schuylkillriver.org/schuylkill-river-trail/



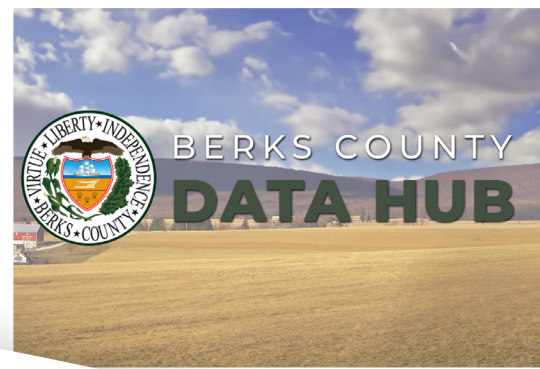
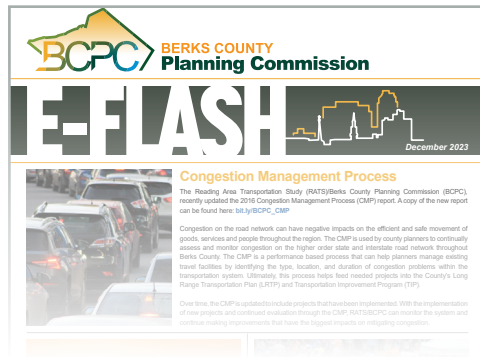
Branding and Marketing

BCPC Marketing

2023 saw the expansion of branding and graphic design support for BCPC. Specifically, support was provided to internal County departments to continue the consistency of messaging and branding through the creation of logo's for the Department of Agriculture and the Workforce Development Board. In addition to the logo creation, images and templates were created to be used on both Department's stationaries, newsletters and business cards.

Marketing the Department in 2023 was accomplished through the utilization of our Department Facebook page as well as purchasing a banner and tablecloth for use at conferences, trainings and other events. Specifically, having a dedicated staff member creating and posting content to the Facebook page

drove the awareness of the Department and our role in the development occurring in our communities. Additionally, our Department EFLASH newsletter went through a refresh. The EFLASH serves as the regular information sharing outlet between the Planning office and municipalities, solicitors, engineers, and other partners at large. Specifically, we share information about recently completed plans in the Department as well as reminders on planning processes from the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code. Looking to 2024, the EFLASH will be sent monthly and will include regular information on subdivision and land development plans the Department has reviewed in addition to upcoming events and programs being hosted by the Department or partners.



A digital public platform for community engagement was established by the County of Berks called the Berks County Data Hub. It allows for the review and exploration of data and applications deemed significant to the citizens and businesses as well as the visitors to Berks County. This site allows the County to reach its goals of providing access to information that engages citizens, encourages

transparency, provides accountability, and promotes economic opportunities. The Berks County Planning Commission currently has GIS data and meeting minutes available for download and will continue to add additional data and documents to the Data Hub moving forward. You can visit the Data Hub by visiting the following link: bit.ly/BerksODH



2023 Berks County Commissioners



Christian Y. Leinbach
Commissioner, Chair



Michael S. Rivera
Commissioner, Vice-Chair



Lucine Sihelnik
Commissioner

2023 BCPC Board Members



Jodi L. Gauker
Chairwoman



Christopher J. Spohn
Vice-Chair



Lisa Weaver
Secretary



Glenn R. Knoblauch



James C. McCarthy
P.E.



Thomas C. McKeon
AICP, CECd



Lee C. Olsen
AIA, NCARB



David H. Turner



Miguel A. Herrera



David N. Hunter, Sr.
AICP, Executive Director



David N. Peris
Assistant County Solicitor

2023 BCPC Staff

BERKS COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



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If you have business with the Planning Commission, please contact our office to schedule an appointment

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