

2021

A N N U A L R E P O R T
A N N O U N C E M E N T



WELCOME FROM DAVID



Greetings!

The Berks County Planning Commission has a new Logo, new Planning Commissioners, new staff, and a new lease on our mission to be recognized as an award-winning planning agency. Staff has committed to reaching the goal of implementing best practices in every facet of our work program.

Ongoing, day to day operations continued unimpeded, the COVID-19 Pandemic notwithstanding. Teleworking and flex hours have enabled staff to be even more productive and judicious with their time. Subdivision reviews, zoning text amendments, and various special studies and projects were all supported by the work of GIS (Geographic Information System) staff.

Highlights of the year include hiring a Design Planner to improve the quality of our presentations and increase our social media presence. Rick Royer joined the team at the BCPC in December. Mr. Royer has years' experience and has a degree certificate from Bradley Academy for the Visual Arts. Rick will be enhancing the presentation of Planning Commission documents to bring more awareness to the work services the BCPC staff provides.



This year we held our first annual Planning Commissioners Social event held on the Colebrookdale Railroad. Municipal officials, Secretaries and Managers from the entire county were welcomed to join the Planning Commission Board Members and Staff on the beautiful scenic trip. The event allowed for interaction and discussion about County and Municipal issues as well as intermunicipal networking among attendees.

Finally, because Berks County is committed to leadership development, Ashley and I were given the opportunity to attend the National Association of County's Professional Leadership Academy. This training emphasized the power of a positive mindset and the principles of positive leadership. Additionally, the primary takeaway from this training was the emphasis on the way a true leader engages and empowers their team. Ashley and I believe this training has provided content that has allowed BCPC Staff to leverage gained skills to better plan, execute and sustain positive change.



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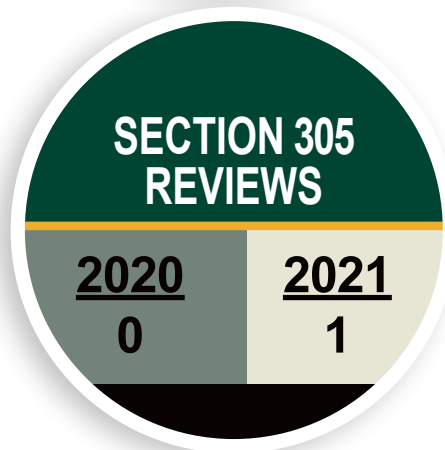


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COMMUNITY PLANNING

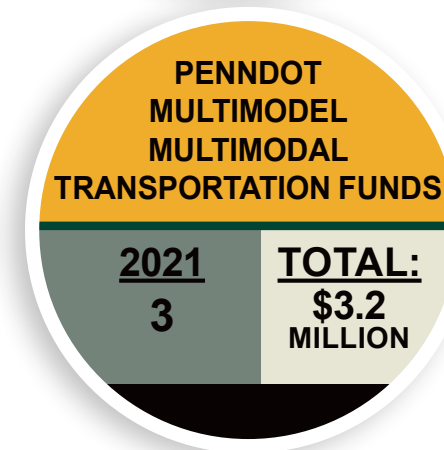
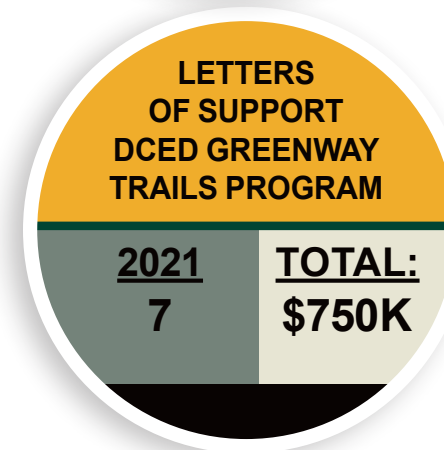
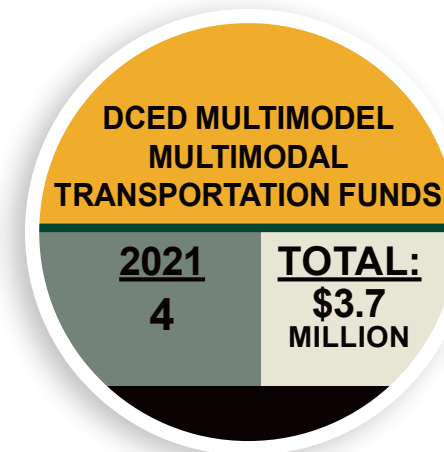
Under the requirements of the MPC the Planning Commission shall be given the opportunity to review all proposed municipal zoning amendments, subdivision and land development ordinance amendments and comprehensive plans. Staff reviewed 35 zoning amendments in 2021. Staff reviews the proposed zoning amendments for conformity with the County Comprehensive plan. Zoning amendment reviews in 2021 saw amendments relating to wireless communication facilities, solar energy and medical marijuana. In 2021, Staff reviewed 2 comprehensive plans.

Additionally, Staff conducts several other reviews which includes reviews for Agricultural Security Areas (ASA), Act 67/68 Permitting Reviews, ACT 537 Sewage Facility plans as well as Section 305 reviews regarding the closure of a municipal school facility. BCPC Staff also reviewed a Tax Incremental Financing District (TIF). The proposed TIF district was for the extension of public water and sewer service to a large long-time vacant parcel in Amity Township. Finally, a Planned Residential Development (PRD) in Tilden Township was reviewed.



COMMUNITY FUNDING SUPPORT

Each year the Planning Commission staff and Planning Commission board review and provide letters of support for various grant requests to the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) and PennDOT. These letters of support provide an extra boost to the municipalities and non-profits which are seeking financial assistance for various projects such as environmental conservation, municipal water and wastewater infrastructure improvements and recreational improvements. Seven of the requests were for funding from the DCED Greenway Recreation and Trail program and totaled a request of \$750,000. Additionally, letters of support were provided for important transportation related projects in Boyertown Borough, Ontelaunee Township and Kutztown Borough. The funding for these requests was provided through both the DCED Multimodal Transportation funds and PennDOT Multimodal Transportation Funds.



PLANNING INITIATIVES



In 2021, the Smart Growth Alliance (SGA) voted to continue advocating smart growth in Berks County using the ten smart growth principals. The SGA is a gathering of approximately 30 organizations committed to implementing the principles of Smart Growth in Berks County and is integral to linking together the City of Reading, Townships and Borough leaders with other partners, including the Greater Reading Chamber Alliance, the Center for Excellence in Local Government, and the Berks Municipal Partnership.

The SGA adopted a county collage to promote unity within the organization as well as the relevance of the Alliance in the County.



In 2021, the Alliance formed a subcommittee dedicated to tackling housing issues in Berks County. While the Smart Growth Alliance meets on a quarterly basis, the Housing Subcommittee tends to meet every 1-2 months as needed.

The Housing Subcommittee established goals for Berks including: proposing Countywide Housing Policies for recommendation to the Berks County Commissioners, the City of Reading and Countywide municipal officials, preparing an actionable housing plan that supports the implementation of the proposed policies to include: the cost ranges that are needed, identifying housing options for a variety of incomes such as affordable, supportive and market rate, streamlining the approval process and align locations for new construction with Future Growth areas in the Comprehensive Plan, improving vacant and or blighted properties.

The subcommittee conducted a market housing analysis examining the area's income and what types of housing stock is afforded with that income. They identified a potential need for a tax assessment policy change regarding the timing of a property's reassessment within new developments and have strongly advocated for change to the current assessment policy. The group has identified a need for a housing plan and housing planner.



In 2021, BCPC engaged in several strategic initiatives, namely the formation of the Imagine Berks Economic Strategic Plan, the Tri County Regional Passenger Rail Authority and an E-Commerce Study with professors from Kutztown University and the City University of New York.



Staff formally kicked off the Greenway, Park and Recreation Plan update by conducting a countywide survey regarding recreational needs and wants as well as forming the Plan's Advisory Committee. The update is being completed in collaboration with the County Parks and Recreation staff along with funding from DCNR.

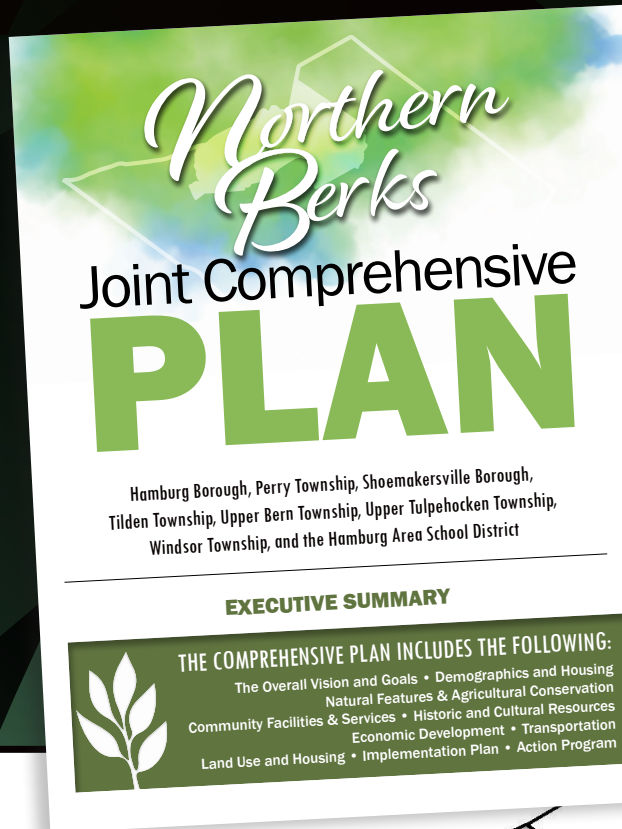
In addition, staff met regularly with the Main Street managers from Boyertown, Kutztown, Hamburg and West Reading to encourage main street renewal in our larger Boroughs.

Staff continued to support the Mount Penn Preserve (MP3), the MS4 Steering Committee and the Uniform Construction Code Appeals Board.

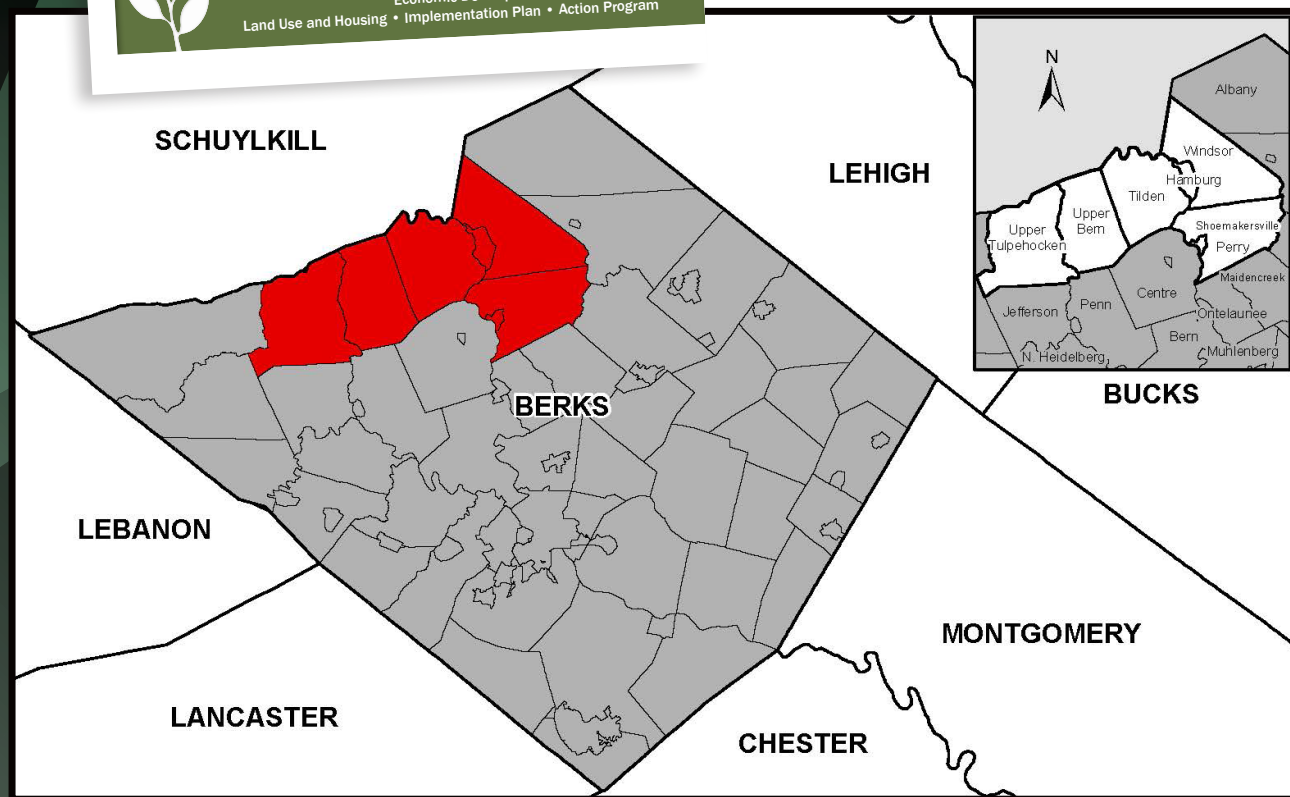
Our motto, "Coming together and working together to achieve success" has become more relevant than ever. Staff is dedicated to bridging gaps and breaking down silos that divide agencies and organizations and municipalities. Our goal is to engage and solicit discussion to address issues of mutual concern, including housing and health care, farmland preservation and blight remediation, and walkability and recreational equity.



PLANNING INITIATIVES



Staff completed the draft update to the Northern Berks Regional Joint Comprehensive Plan. The original plan included the municipalities of Hamburg Borough, Strausstown Borough, Tilden Township, Upper Bern Township, Upper Tulpehocken Township and Windsor Township. The new update includes adding all of the municipalities in the Hamburg Area School District. The new plan includes: Hamburg Borough, Shoemakersville Borough, Tilden Township, Upper Bern Township, Upper Tulpehocken Township, Windsor Township, Perry Township and the Hamburg Area School District. Committee meetings started in June 2020 and have been ongoing monthly during plan development. The plan is currently in the hands of municipal leadership to complete the adoption process.



Staff coordinated with Muhlenberg Township and Laureldale Borough on an update to their municipal comprehensive plan. The municipalities and county signed the required documentation allowing BCPC to start the project. Currently in the information and data gathering stage with respect to demographics, housing and economy of the region. This project has a timeframe of 18 months and a draft plan should be completed by June 2023.

READING AREA TRANSPORTATION STUDY

The Reading Area Transportation Study (RATS) is the regional transportation planning organization for the Reading, Pennsylvania metropolitan area. The Reading Metropolitan Planning Organization covers all of Berks County. RATS is comprised of two committees - the Technical Committee and the Coordinating Committee. The Technical Committee reviews items brought before the group and recommends actions to the Coordinating Committee. RATS facilitates the regional, performance based planning process that serves as the basis for spending state and federal transportation funds for improvements to streets, highways, bridges, public transit, bicycle and pedestrian networks allocated to Berks County. The transportation planning staff of the Berks County Planning Commission serves as the technical staff to RATS. The staff coordinates and administers these committees, their meetings and leads development of the package of federally required MPO products.

	2020	2021
Technical Committee Meetings	4	5
Coordinating Committee Meetings	3	5
Joint Technical/Committee Meetings	3	1

Reading MPO Collaboration and Accomplishments

- Provided information on transportation plans and projects to municipalities, elected officials, general public, business community and the media
- Coordinated and participated in PennDOT Connects project level meetings with municipalities, Project Scoping Field Views and Plans Displays
- Coordinated with other MPO's in the conduct of the South-Central PA Truck Parking Summit in March
- Worked cooperatively with 4 other MPOs (Lackawanna/ Luzerne, Lebanon, Lehigh Valley, and NEPA) in the creation of the Eastern PA Regional Freight Alliance with the intent of contracting for developing a regional freight plan in 2022.
- Attended the Virtual PennDOT Planning Partners Meeting sessions in October and November
- Coordinated with PennDOT and the Federal Highway Administration regarding the deployment of the I-81 / I-78 Alternative Fuels Corridor Plan in October
- Participated as Board member / Chairman of the Susquehanna Regional Transportation Partnership providing Transportation Demand Management services throughout a 9-county region via contact with consultant AECOM doing business as Commuter Services of PA.
- Reading MPO staff participated on the PennDOT Connects Steering Committee, PennDOT Financial Guidance Work Group, PA Interagency Consultation Work Group (Air Quality Conformity), and PennDOT Planning Partners Annual Meeting Steering Committee.
- Conducted the MPO Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside (TASA) project selection process in conjunction with PennDOT
- Prepared updated mapping related to the 2020 Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan
- Participated in numerous other conferences and training sessions related to the development and implementation of the transportation program

READING AREA TRANSPORTATION STUDY

Reports Prepared /Approved by RATS in 2021

January	PM 1 (Safety) Performance Measure Targets (2021)
January	PM 2 (Highway and Bridge) and PM 3 (Operations) Performance Measure Targets
March	USDOT Transportation Management Area (TMA) Planning Certification Review of Reading Area Transportation Study TMA
May	Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) Funded Project Selection Process
July	FTA Compliant Title VI Program
July	Reading MPO Nondiscrimination Policy
September	South Central Transit Authority Transit Asset Management Plan and Performance Measure Targets
September	South Central Transit Authority Safety Plan and Performance Measure Targets
November	PM1 (Safety) Performance Measure Targets (2022)
December	Annual List of Obligated Projects for Federal Fiscal Year 2020

Issues Impacting Transportation

COVID continued to impact transportation and commuting patterns with additional employers and employees embracing work from home business models.

The continued growth in the Warehousing / Distribution and Fulfillment Center sector of the economy has led to increases in truck traffic across the region particularly along the I-78 corridor but also extending into the Reading urban area and along the PA 61, PA 183 and US 222 corridors.

Funding for Infrastructure was a major item at both the Federal and State levels. After years of debate, the Federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act was signed into law on November 15, 2021. Along with investments in other infrastructure vital to our communities, this legislation significantly increased the federal share of funding for transportation yielding increases of over 30% for Berks County when compared to prior legislation for highways, bridges and transit. It also contains new programs focusing on the strategic deployment of publicly accessible electric vehicle charging infrastructure and resiliency in dealing with the impacts of climate change.

On the state side, in March 2021 Governor Wolf created the Transportation Revenue Options Commission and charged it with developing a comprehensive, strategic proposal for addressing the multimodal transportation funding needs of Pennsylvania while reducing / eliminating the reliance on state gas taxes. A broad range of options were recommended for consideration. One of these options envisions the collection of tolls at 9 major new Interstate bridge replacements across the state, including the I-78 bridge at Lenhartsville under the State's Public Private Partnership Program. This proposal has been challenged and it is still to be decided if it will be implemented.

Transportation staff will be incorporating these increases and new programs into the updates of the Long-Range Transportation Plan and the Transportation Improvement Program which will be adopted in 2022.

Local Technical Assistance Program



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 Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP) training sessions during the 2021 calendar year. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated closures and protocols we only held one in-person class. Classes were able to resume in-person starting in November of 2021. A single class was held on November 9th at the Berks County Agricultural Center. The rest of the classes were offered in a digital/virtual format. These classes were marketed to local municipalities

2021 COURSE TOPICS	Stop Signs and Intersection Traffic Control (RS2-S17-C1)	Risk Management Strategies (RS-S04-C2)	Pavement Markings: Applications & Maintenance (RS-S11-C1)	Salt and Snow Management (RS2-M19-A2)
	Active Transportation (RS2-S22-C1)	Seal Coat (RS-M25-A1)	Stormwater Facility Operation & Maintenance (RS-M09-A1)	Project Oversight (RS2-M21-A1)
				Road Surface Management

2021 ANNUAL BUDGET

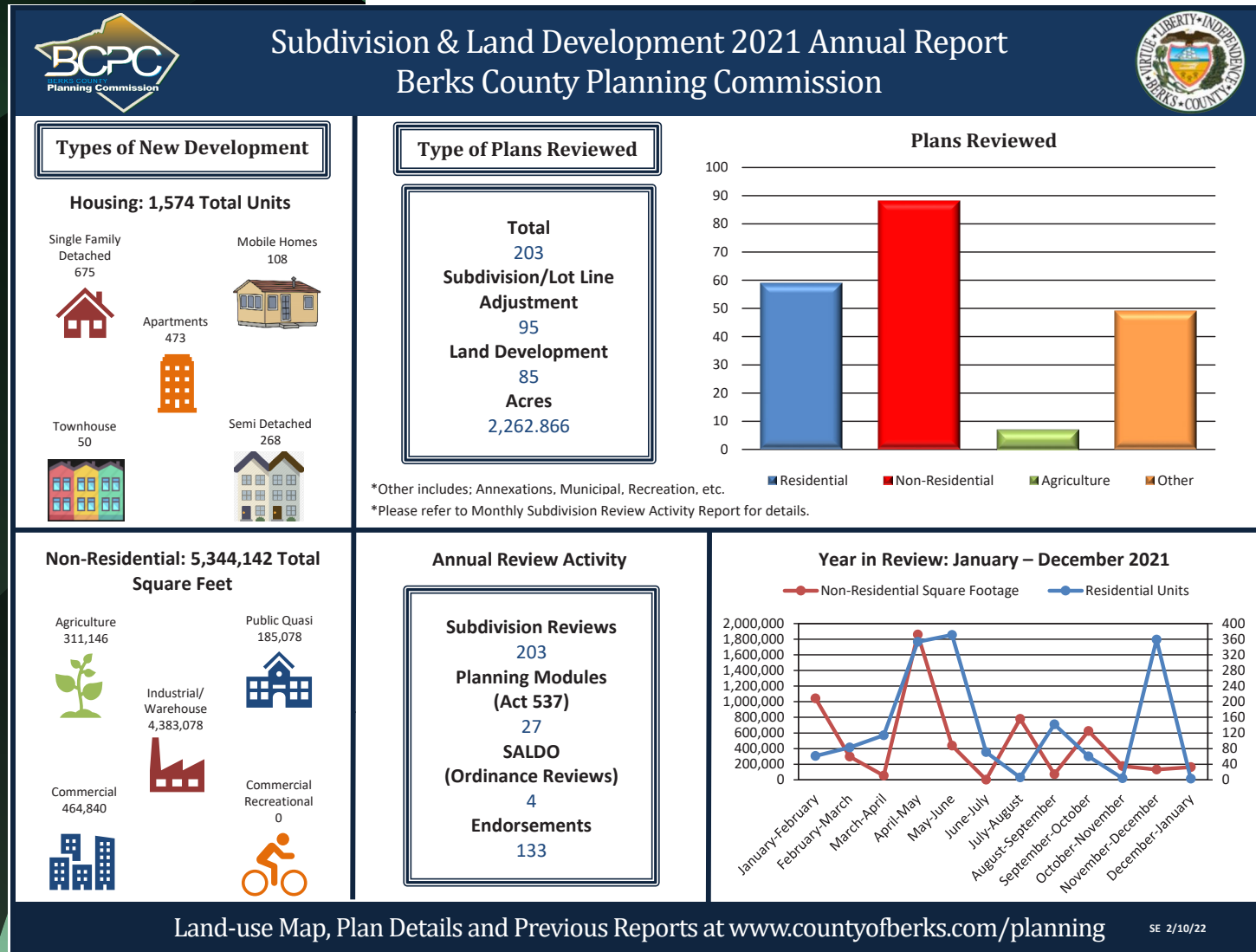


Annually, the Berks County Board of Commissioners approve the budget for the Planning Department staff and related expenses. The BCPC also receives revenues from a variety of government agencies and fees. The table depicts the 2021 approved budget for both revenues and expenses as well as the actual revenues and expenses.



	2021 Approved Budget	2021 Actual Budget
Wages – Staff	\$1,057,234	\$1,057,234
Wages – Part time no benefits	\$44,117	\$0
FICA	\$82,601	\$70,463
Fringe	\$406,521	\$290,878
Sub Total – Personnel	\$1,590,473	\$1,317,361
OPERATING EXPENSE		
Sub Total – Operating	\$146,200	\$130,809.62
Building Indirect Costs	\$148,529	\$148,529
Other Indirect Costs	\$196,567	\$196,567
Sub Total – Indirect	\$345,096	\$345,096
Total Budgeted Expenditures	\$2,054,769	\$1,747,790
REVENUE (See Notes Below)		
CDBG	\$120,000	\$120,000
FTA Revenue	\$108,000	\$104,911.24
RATS State Revenue	\$62,000	\$57,093.08
RATS Federal Revenue	\$419,500	\$382,960.24
BCMS4 Cooperative Ed Program	\$8,500	\$8,318.60
UCC Fees	\$9,800	\$11,400
Joint Comprehensive Plan Updates	\$12,590	\$18,396.95
SALDO Fees	\$76,000	\$118,445
Maps Other	\$100	\$302
SALDO Recording Fee	\$1,100	\$1,350
Total Budgeted Revenues	\$817,590	\$823,177.11

SUBDIVISION & LAND DEVELOPMENT



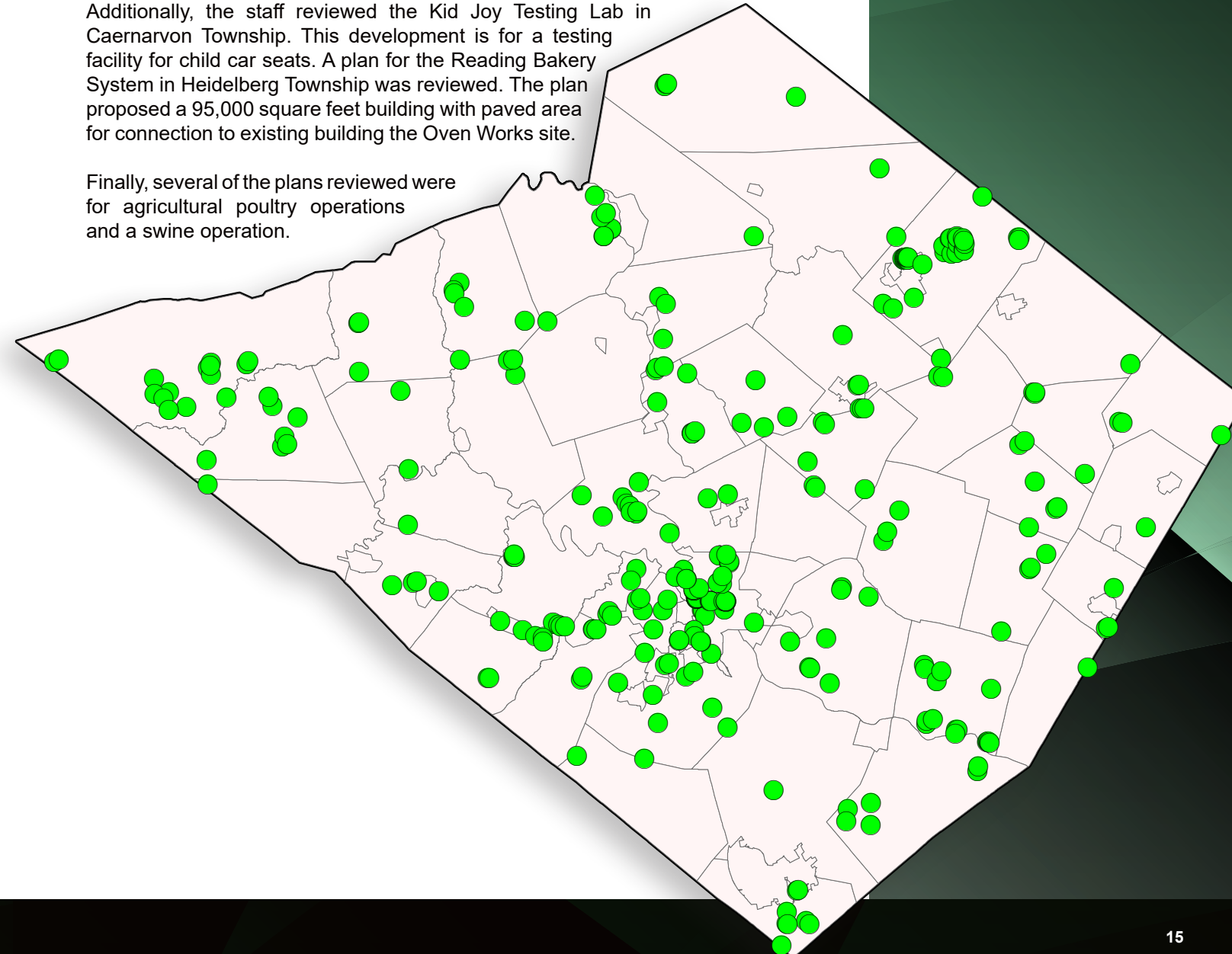
Of the 203 reviews completed in 2021, the following are a few residential developments projects which will have impacts on the County: Madison Walk in Colebrookdale Township. The plan proposes 68 semi-detached units on 19.42 acres in Berks County. The remaining 50+/- acres of development proposes single-family, semi-detached and townhomes which will be located into the adjacent parcels which extend into Montgomery County.

Leaf Creek Farm in Amity Township. The plan proposes an Age restricted community with 339 single-family units and a clubhouse.

Epting Tract in Ontelaunee Township and Leesport Boroug. The development proposed in the Township limits of the site; was shown as 11 - 3-story apartment buildings of varying units - totaling 219 units.

Additionally, the staff reviewed the Kid Joy Testing Lab in Caernarvon Township. This development is for a testing facility for child car seats. A plan for the Reading Bakery System in Heidelberg Township was reviewed. The plan proposed a 95,000 square feet building with paved area for connection to existing building the Oven Works site.

Finally, several of the plans reviewed were for agricultural poultry operations and a swine operation.



Developers and landowners submitted 203 subdivision plans and the BCPC reviewed all of them. Every development plan filed in any of the County's 72 municipalities is evaluated to determine whether it is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan for the region. Individual municipalities make the final decisions on whether the plans are approved, but the BCPC's comments and recommendations from the review process help the municipality, landowner or developer to enhance or improve the plans before the project begins construction. The graphics and statistics shown above depict the subdivision activity in 2021. Specifically, the types of subdivision plans Staff reviewed, what type of uses were proposed on the plans reviewed and how much square footage those uses will encompass once they are built. The map to the right depicts the locations of subdivision activity.

CONFERENCES AND TRAINING



Pittsburgh Skyline as viewed from the Duquesne Incline

Mobile Workshop: Planning Pittsburgh

A walking field trip that summarized 150 years of planning in Pittsburgh's downtown. A visual narrative addressed Pittsburgh's need for infrastructural improvements during the early 20th century transition from rail to automobile. The field trip also emphasized 21st century planning adjustments that occurred since the commercial core's shift away from retail/office and more towards office/mixed-use residential.



Photo: PPG Place- 5.5 acres, 3 city block site of office and retail space.



Photo: Intersection of Blvd of the Allies and Market St- blighted property in the last block of the original market district. The transition to the use of the automobile resulted in the development of new infrastructure projects, including one of the main arteries in Pittsburgh, the Blvd of the Allies. The creation of this road ultimately wedged the original market district between its border and the Monongahela River causing part of the decline of this area as it is today.



Heinz Dinosaur statue at PPG Place

BCPC Staff attended the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association's 2021 Annual Conference in Pittsburgh. The conference was held October 17th to October 19th at the Sheraton at Station Square with mobile workshop options at Pittsburgh's riverfront, on Mt. Washington, and in Pittsburgh's downtown. The theme for this year's conference was "Bridge to an Uncertain Future". Featured speakers included Lance Chimka (Allegheny County Economic Development), Katharine Kelleman (Port Authority of Allegheny County), and Vincent Valdes (Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission) who discussed planning, development, and economics in building a regional network for healthy and vibrant municipalities, cities, and communities in Pennsylvania. Additional speakers were, Joe Minicozzi, AICP (Urban3) who addressed the economics of land use decisions and tax policies and its implications on inequality and Ariam Ford, MCP (Grounded Strategies) who presented how neighborhood-scale green stormwater infrastructure can improve community health and quality of life while also working towards environmental justice. Additionally, staff attended educational sessions focused on a wide variety of timely topics such as successful community outreach, nature-based placemaking and economic, social and environmental benefits of open space, and neighborhood stability through community land trusts.



Point State Park seen from the Tribute to Children -Fred Rogers Memorial, North Shore



Reception: Grand Concourse

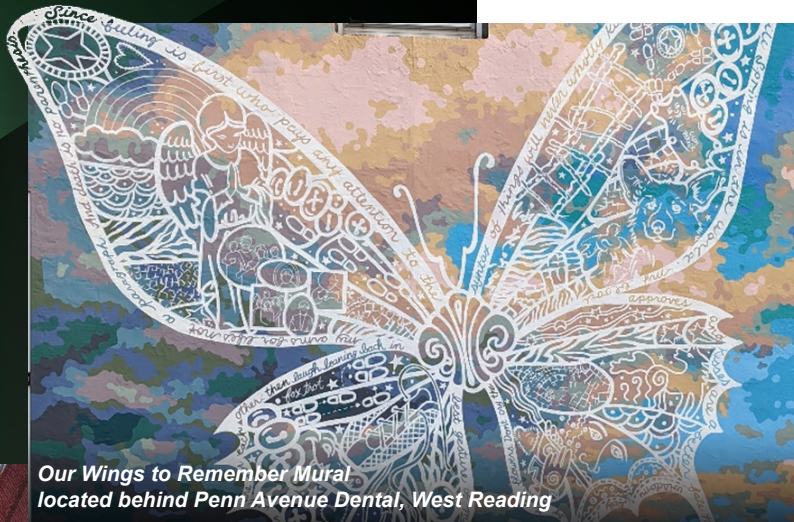
The PA APA reception was held in an 80,000sqft historical landmark of the Pittsburgh and Lake Erie Railroad Station that was built in 1901. The Concourse was a major hub for transportation and travel in the eastern United States. The Grand Concourse was renovated into a restaurant in 1978.



Pittsburgh Streetcar #1724, Heinz Museum

CONFERENCES AND TRAINING

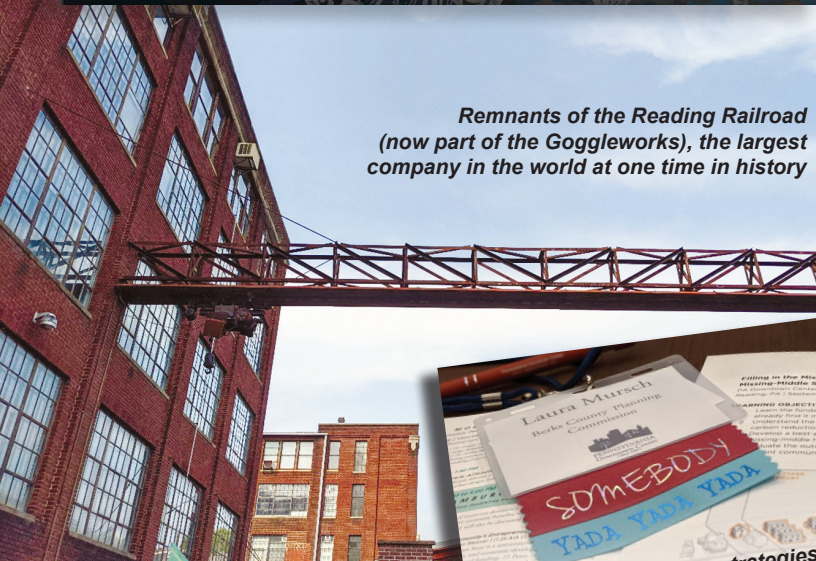
Pennsylvania Downtown Center 2021 Annual Statewide Conference- Downtown Reading



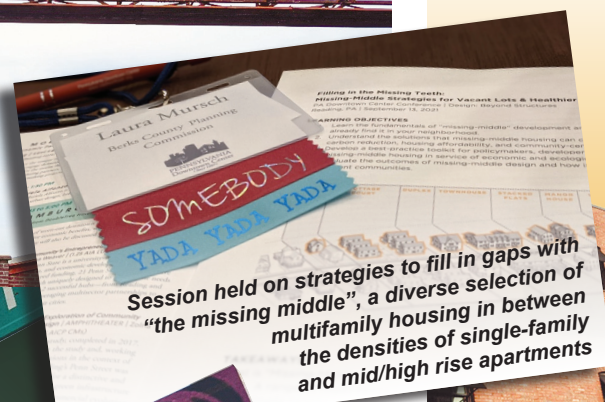
Our Wings to Remember Mural located behind Penn Avenue Dental, West Reading

Staff attended the Pennsylvania Downtown Center Conference from September 12th to September 15th held in downtown Reading at the Doubletree Hotel. Much of the discussions centered on strategies for communities to tackle blight and further create a sense of place. Another reoccurring theme centered on how communities could attract new residents while combating the displacement of current residents. Staff also participated in mobile workshops highlighting the Colebrookdale Railroad in Boyertown, the Goggleworks Center for the Arts in Reading, a downtown walking tour of Reading, and a mural walk throughout West Reading.

Having originally been planned for 2020 and postponed to 2021 due to COVID-19 concerns, awards were given for both years. Locally the West Reading Motor Club received a 2020 Townie Award for "Physical Improvements and Design" for individual façade rehabilitation at their property located in the former A-Z Building on Penn Avenue in the Borough. Additionally, Our Town Foundation (Hamburg Borough) and Building a Better Boyertown were recognized in 2021 as nationally accredited Main Street America programs.



Remnants of the Reading Railroad (now part of the Goggleworks), the largest company in the world at one time in history

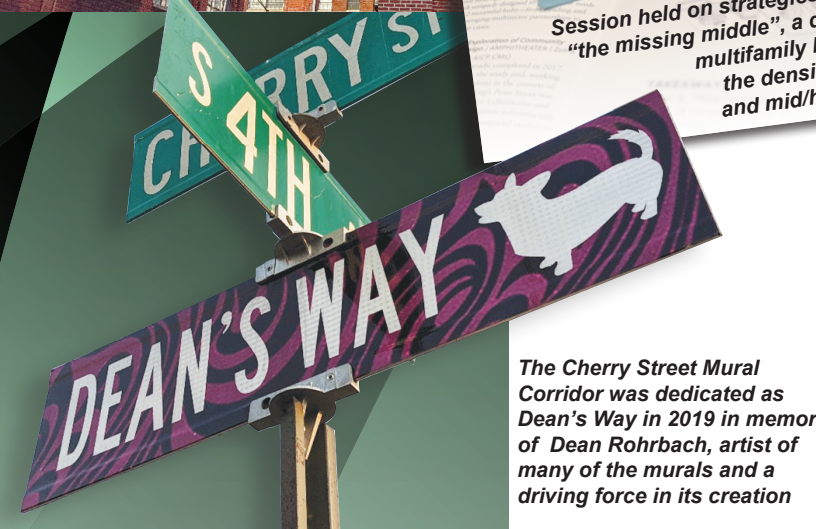


Session held on strategies to fill in gaps with "the missing middle", a diverse selection of multifamily housing in between the densities of single-family and mid/high rise apartments

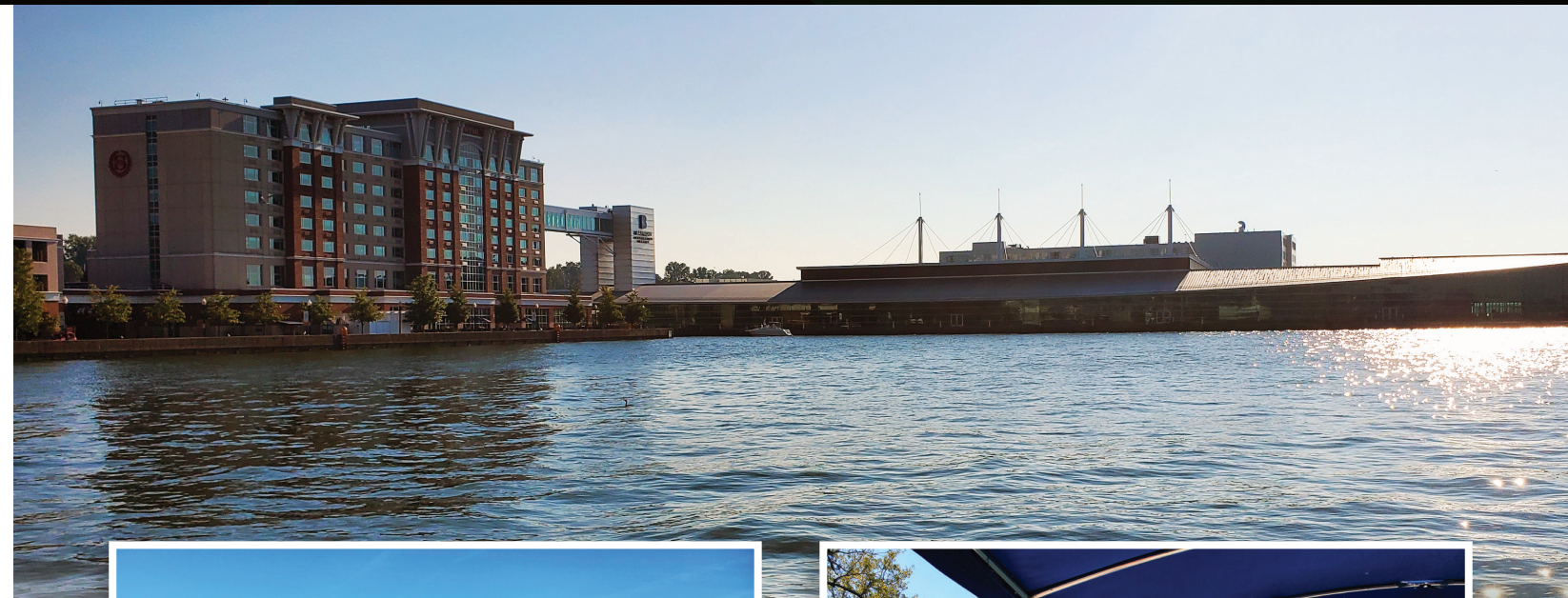


Mark Ratcliffe, West Reading Main Street Manager, welcomes a crowd for the mural walk outside the West Reading Motor Club

Staff also had time to mingle with likeminded attendees both as attendees themselves and as a vendor representing BCPC. Connections made with speakers such as Mayor Michael Lombardo (Pittston), Mayor Rodney Redcay (Denver Borough), and Commissioner Ray D'Agostino (Lancaster County) have spurred follow up discussions virtually with staff and other local community leaders.



The Cherry Street Mural Corridor was dedicated as Dean's Way in 2019 in memory of Dean Rohrbach, artist of many of the murals and a driving force in its creation

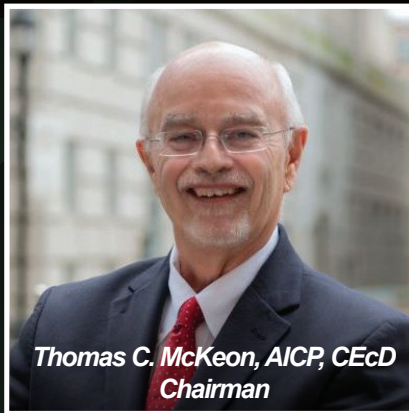


Assistant Director Ashley Showers along with Planners Devon Hain and Jamie Passon attended the WeConservePA Greenways and Trails Summit in Erie, Pa. The conference seeks to inspire improvements and expansion to PA's trail system, build peer networks

and celebrate successful projects connecting the public to land and water trails throughout the state. With the kickoff of the update to the County's Greenway, Park and Recreation Plan it was important for staff to attend the conference to learn new ideas and concepts to incorporate into the update. Conference sessions that were attended included ways to make trails inclusive based on user ability such as those visually impaired and equine trails. Additionally, staff was able to enjoy a mobile workshop which visited the beautiful Presque Isle State Park.



2021 BCPC BOARD MEMBERS

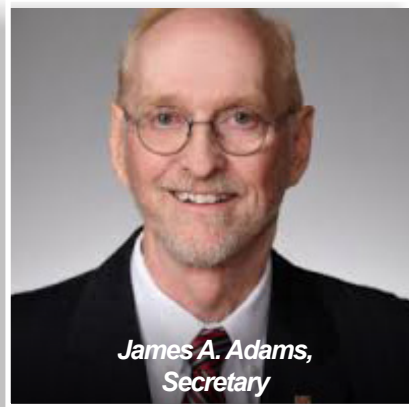


Thomas C. McKeon, AICP, CEcD
Chairman

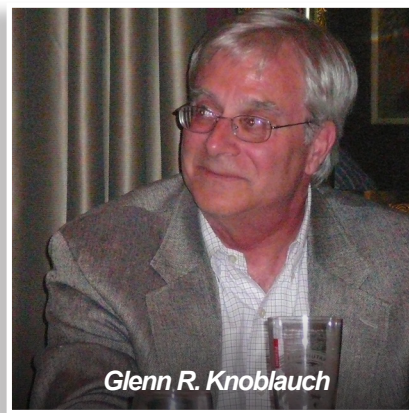
As mentioned previously, in 2021 the Planning Commission welcomed two new members to the Board, namely Mr. Christopher Spohn and Mr. David Turner. Both County Commissioner appointees bring a welcome piece of the planning structure with them. Mr. Spohn came from the Hamburg Area School District in his role as the Director of Operations and Project Development. Mr. Turner brings his knowledge of the utility sector of development representing First Energy/MetEd in his role as Manager of Regional External Affairs. The Board welcomes both gentlemen and looks forward to the wealth of experience that they bring and the value they add to planning in Berks County during their tenure.



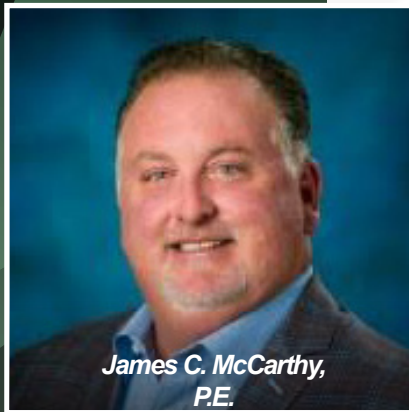
Jodi L. Gauker,
Vice-Chair



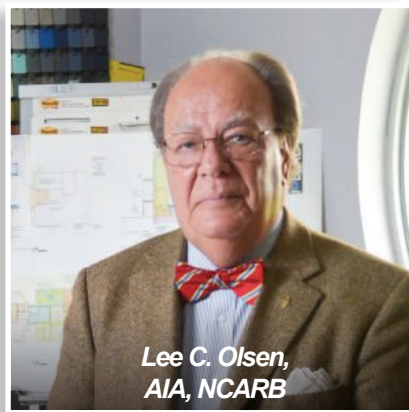
James A. Adams,
Secretary



Glenn R. Knoblauch



James C. McCarthy,
P.E.



Lee C. Olsen,
AIA, NCARB



Douglas Paul Rauch,
Esq.



Christopher J. Spohn



David H. Turner



Heidi B. Masano,
Esq., Acting Solicitor

BCPC STAFF



2021 BCPC STAFF

David N. Hunter, Sr., AICP, Executive Director	Jamie Passon, Planner II
Ashley Showers, Assistant Director	Amanda Timochenko, Planner II
Cheryl Auchenbach, Community Planner III	Devon Hain, Transportation Planner II
Alan Piper, Transportation Planner III	Laura Mursch, Planner II
Michelle Franklin, Subdivision Planner III	Shanice Ellison, Planner I
Matt McGough, Intergovernmental Planner III	Pauline Klopp, Office Support V
Beth Burkovich, GISP, GIS Analyst	Regina Zdradzinski, Office Support III
Michael Golembiewski, Transportation Modeler	Rick Royer, Design Planner



Finally, in late 2021 the BCPC learned of the retirement of our beloved Office Support V, Pauline Klopp. Mrs. Klopp was a 40-year employee of Berks County and served the entire time in the Planning Department. Pauline was the Board Secretary being responsible for the preparation of Board meeting minutes and agendas and the annual Department budget. The Planning Commission Board and Staff wish Pauline nothing but the best in this next chapter of her life.



