

2022

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

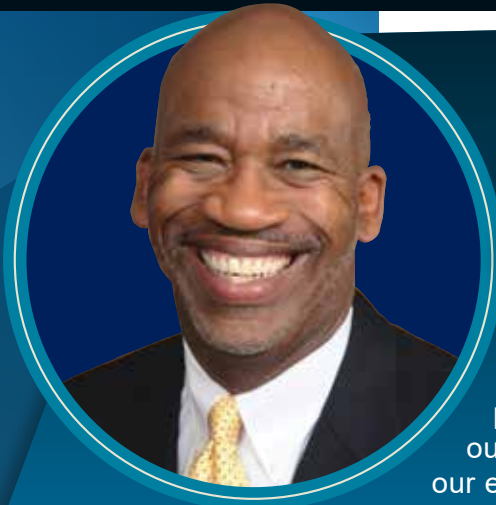


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2 0 2 2 M I L E S T O N E S



Greetings!

As the Executive Director, my goal is to foster a team of highly skilled professionals who strive to be an award-winning Planning agency. To achieve this goal, the mission of the staff and the Planning Commission Board members is to embrace a bold vision for the County. This will require convening the widest array of partners to inform and facilitate data-driven decision-making. Since our focus is on connection and collaboration, here is a photo essay of our engagement with our partners in 2022.

The County Commissioners supported the BCPC Staff with the adoption of the Imagine Berks and the Greenway, Park and Recreation Plan. Additionally, the Commissioners coordinated with the Staff on multiple projects including the creation of the Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority, research and reviews of the former Exide plant clean-up, and the county bridge program.

JANUARY '22

Brittany Antunes joined the Department in the role of Office Support V taking over for Pauline Klopp.



Director Hunter and Senior Transportation Planner Alan Piper were instrumental in assisting with the establishment of the Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority (SRPRA). The Authority Board is comprised of elected officials from Berks, Montgomery and Chester Counties and the City of Reading and is a shining example of planning collaboration across jurisdictional lines.

FEBRUARY '22



Director Hunter and Assistant Director, Ashley Showers went on a tour of the Folino Winery with Commissioner Michael Rivera and members of the GRCA Staff.

APRIL '22



On a cold day in April, staff visited the Gauker farm in Richmond Township.

2 0 2 2 M I L E S T O N E S

MAY '22



Director Hunter attended NPC22, the American Planning Association's National Conference in San Diego and was honored to meet incoming APA President Angela Brooks and several other planners of color.



Director Hunter was asked to serve on the President's Council of the Natural Lands Trust, a partner with Berks County which seeks to preserve scenic lands in the region. Here he is pictured with President Oliver Bass (third from right) and others from the Natural Lands Trust.

JUNE '22



Director Hunter was one of the speakers at the League of Women Voters Housing Forum at Albright College along with Brittany Baker Shurr from the Reading Berks Association of Realtors and Professor Dr. Kennon Rice, Associate Professor of Sociology and Director of their Urban Affairs Program.

JULY '22



The Reading Area Transportation Study's Long Range Transportation Plan along with their Transportation Improvement Plan were adopted.

2022 MILESTONES

AUGUST '22



BCPC Staff worked with the Community and Economic Development Director Pamela Shupp Menet, and other stakeholders to produce the Imagine Berks Strategic Economic Development Action Plan which was adopted by the County Commissioners.



Staff accompanied Berks County Commissioners Christian Leinbach and Kevin Barnhardt on a tour of the completed Rookery at Berks Nature given by Director Kim Murphy.

SEPTEMBER '22



Director Hunter traveled to State College to attend a course and became a certified trainer for the PA Municipal Planning Education Institute. Adding this credential to the Department opens up additional opportunities for education and outreach efforts.

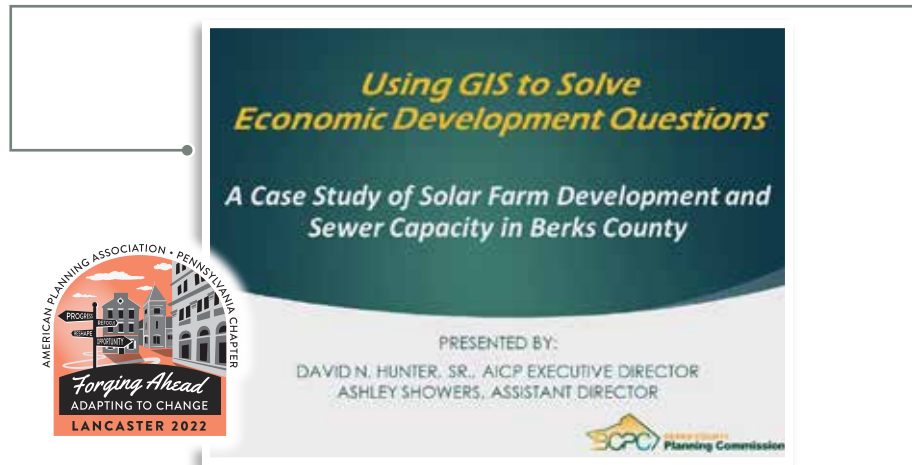
OCTOBER '22



A delegation from Berks County and Reading met with Senator Bob Casey at the Saucony Creek Brewery to discuss the restoration of passenger rail from Philadelphia to Reading.

2022 MILESTONES

OCTOBER '22



Executive Director, Hunter and Assistant Director, Ashley Showers attended the PA Chapter of the American Planning Association Conference in Lancaster. They also presented their own session titled, Using GIS to Solve Economic Development Questions - A Case Study of Solar Farm Development and Sewer Capacity in Berks County.

Additionally, Professors Moira Conway and Allison Conway presented their session titled, E-Commerce Warehousing in Berks County: Examining the Transportation and Economic Impacts.

NOVEMBER '22



Staff helped Tami Hildebrand celebrate her retirement from the County's Department of Agriculture after 25 years of service and dedication.

DECEMBER '22



Another highlight of 2022 were a number of Berks County Smart Growth Alliance meetings. Staff hosted a dessert social in December. Pictured are Director Hunter, Laura Mursch, Intergovernmental Affairs Planner III and SGA Secretary, Planning Commission Chair Jodi Gauker, incoming PC Secretary Lisa Weaver and incoming PC Vice Chair Chris Spohn.



The Planning Commission Staff were thrilled to close out the year with the adoption of the Berks County Greenway, Parks and Recreation Plan. Staff looks forward to carrying out implementation of this plan in 2023.

2022 REVIEW ACTIVITY



ACT 247 Reviews

Under the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (Act 247), municipalities must submit any proposed revisions/amendments to their zoning ordinance/map to the Berks County Planning Commission for review and comment. During 2022, the County Planning Commission reviewed 38 proposed zoning ordinance/map amendments for our local municipalities. While most of the submissions involved minor amendments, we reviewed one with comprehensive amendments to the entire zoning ordinance, as well as 6 involving zoning map amendments. Topics included renewable energy facilities, small wireless facilities, mixed-use provisions, form-based provisions, supplemental requirements for various age-related housing developments, agritainment, outdoor dining, parking, signs, area/yard/height amendments among others.

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 land development projects need. Staff reviewed 108 of these in 2022.



Agricultural Security Area Creation/Modifications

Five submissions to municipal Agricultural Security Areas (ASA), were reviewed by planning staff. Of the five submissions, three were in Albany Township, one was in Windsor Township and one in Washington Township. In Ontelaunee Township, there was a proposal for the creation of a new municipal ASA involving 256.69 acres.

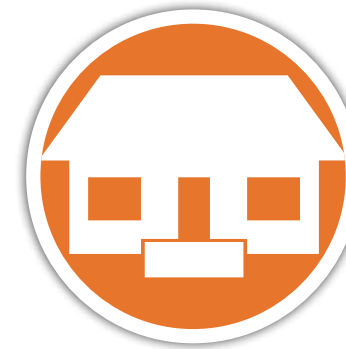
Intergovernmental Reviews under Executive Order 12372

Three notifications of applications seeking federal funds were submitted during 2022 for comment. PennTAP submitted two applications to EPA for Pollution Prevention Grants involving Energy Efficiency Assessments and Pollution Prevention Training for Pennsylvania Industries. PaDCNR applied for funding from EPA to implement watershed forestry best management practices throughout Pennsylvania's portion of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

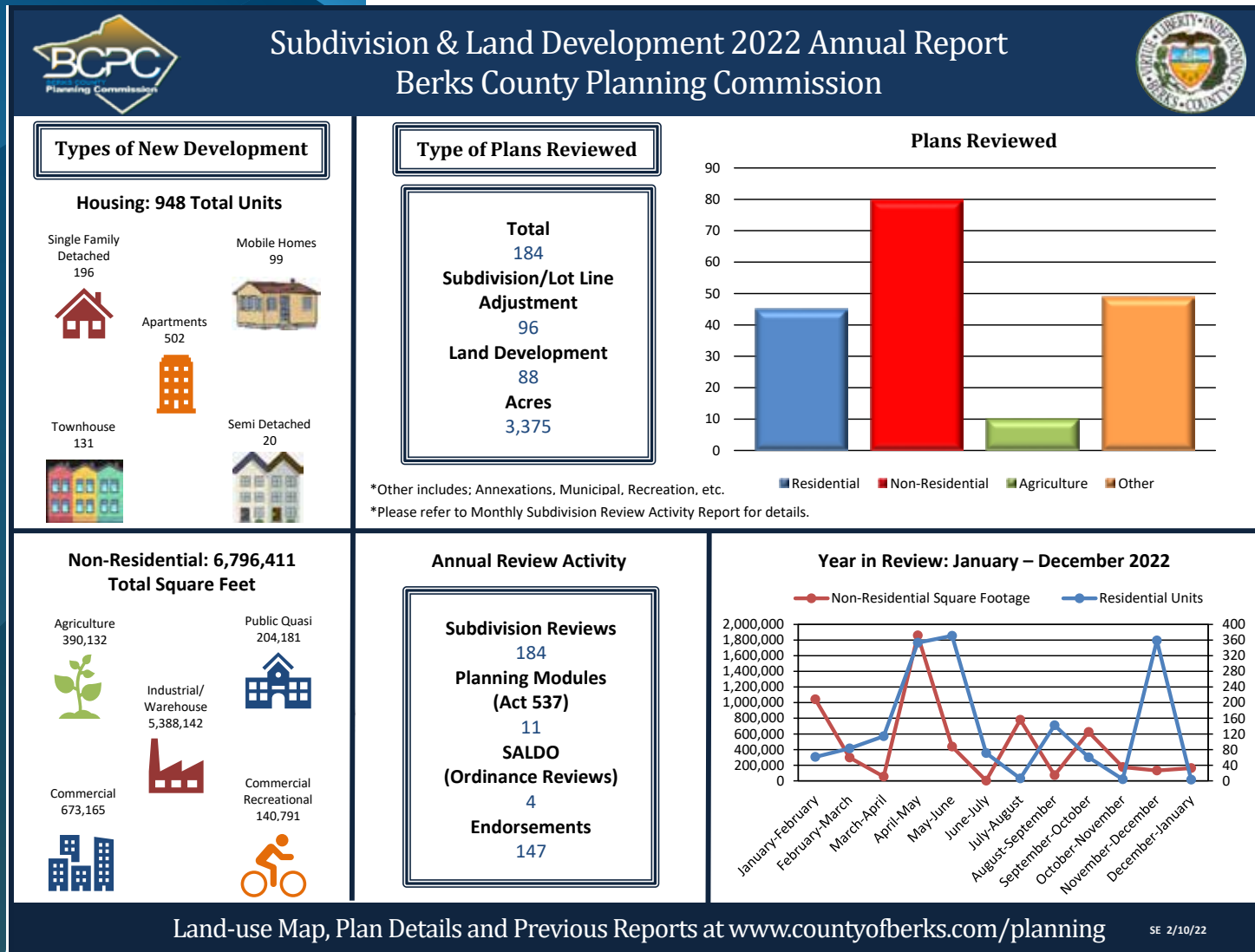


Acquisition and Disposition of Blighted Property Reviews

The Berks County Redevelopment Authority requested the review of four properties under this program-two properties in Cumru Township, one property in Maiden Creek Township, and one property in Mount Penn Borough. The Planning Commission conducts these reviews for consistency with the comprehensive plan specifically at the proposed reuse redevelopment of blighted properties.



2022 SUBDIVISION AND LAND DEVELOPMENT PLAN REVIEWS



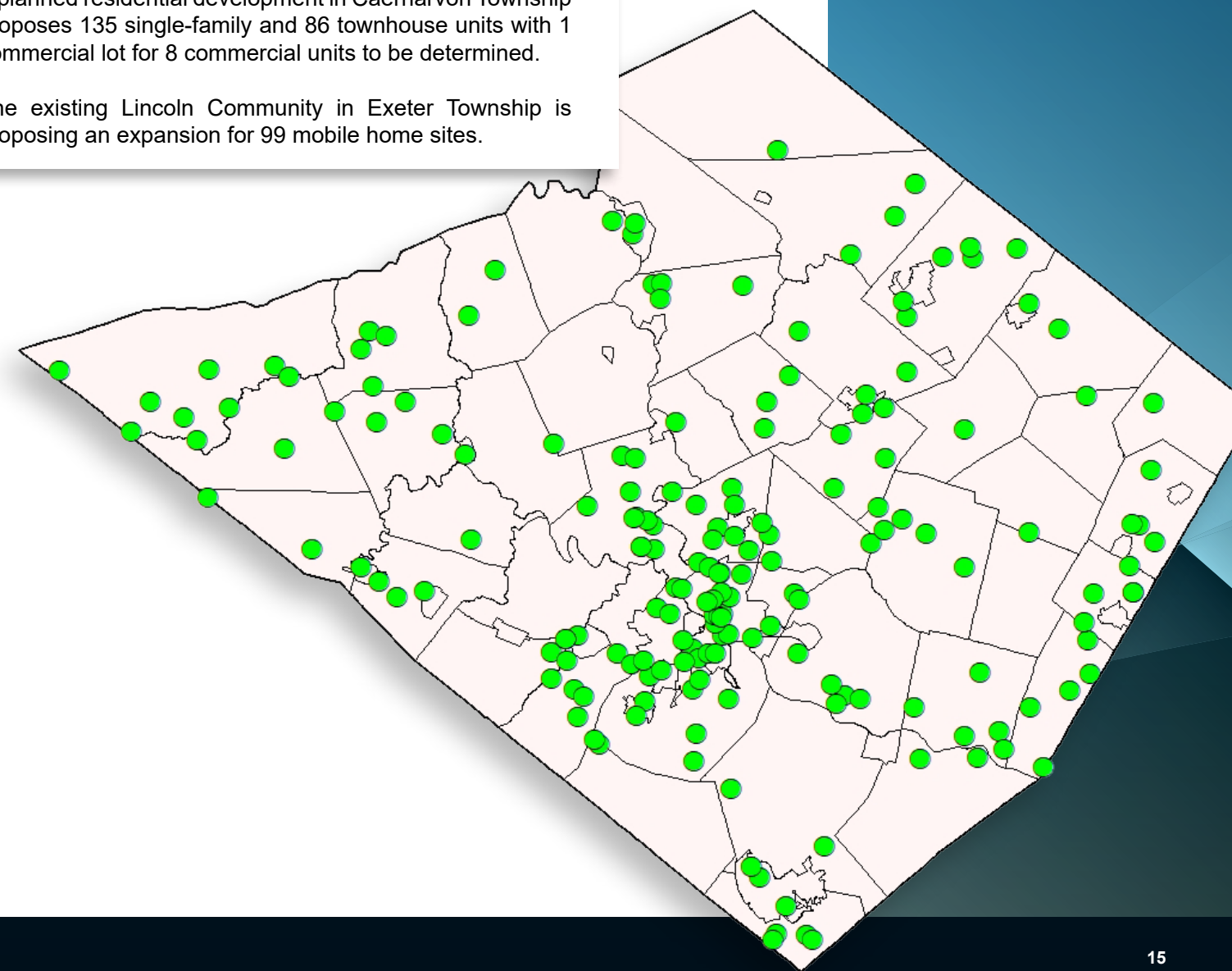
Commercial related projects:

8 plans were related to self-storage facilities
 3 projects for conversions of existing structures into self-storage facilities
 1 project for the expansion of an existing facility
 4 new projects.

Residential related projects:

Reviewed 10 projects with apartment units proposed.
 The Rowe Tract in Alsace Township proposes 9 – 3-story buildings totaling 184 units;
 6 conversion projects for apartments in the City of Reading totaling 161 apartment units.

The Magnolia Green Development
 A planned residential development in Caernarvon Township proposes 135 single-family and 86 townhouse units with 1 commercial lot for 8 commercial units to be determined.
 The existing Lincoln Community in Exeter Township is proposing an expansion for 99 mobile home sites.



Total plans reviewed 2022 - 184
Total Housing Units Reviewed - 948
Total Non-Residential Square Footage Reviewed 6,796,411

Agricultural related plans reviewed

5 plans were related to poultry operations:
 3 projects for chicken operations and 2 projects for duck operations.

Industrial related projects reviewed:

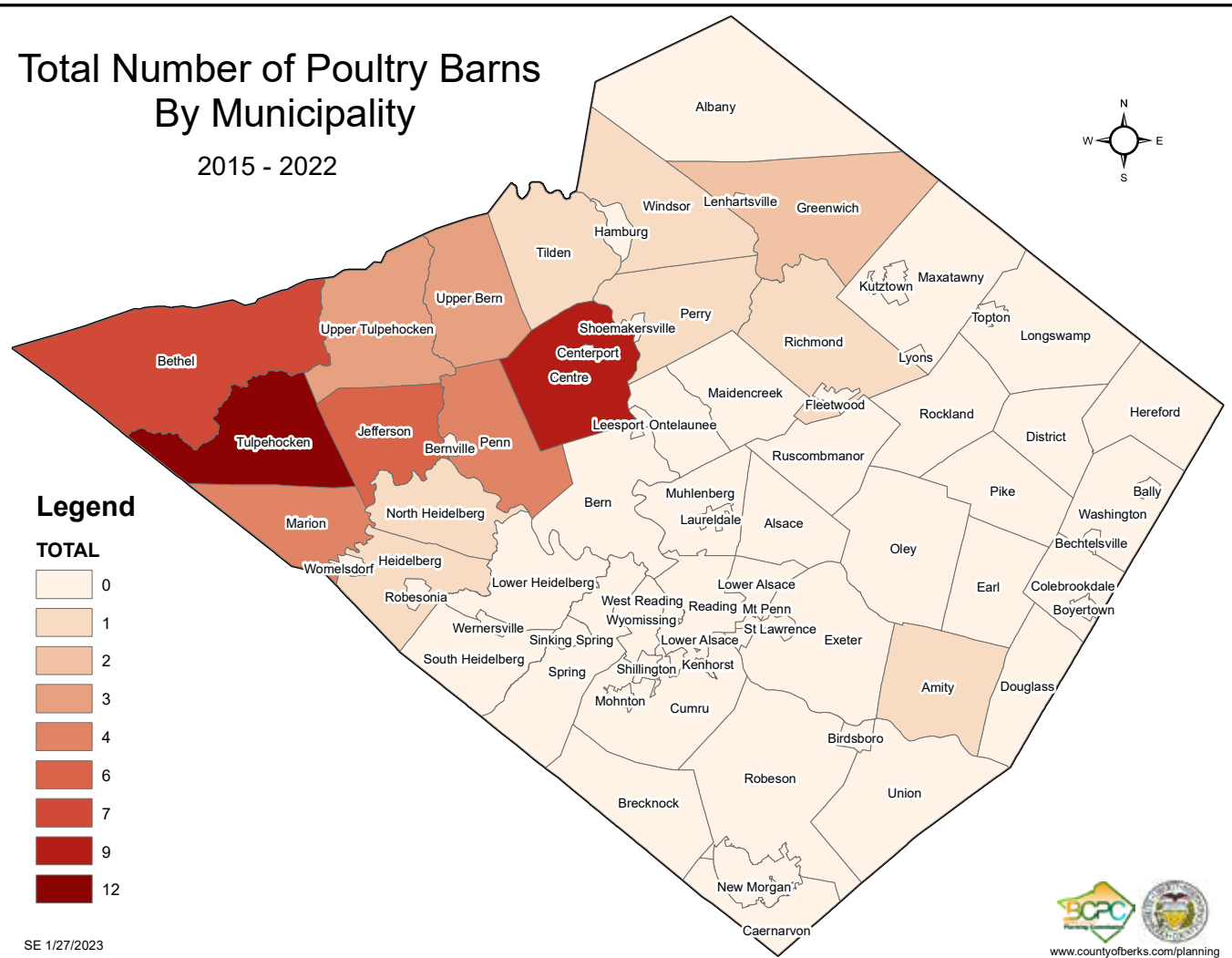
8 plans reviewed for warehouse projects
 2 proposals in Bethel Township along the I-78 corridor
 3 projects in Maxatawny Township
 1 project on the eastern side of Kutztown Borough
 2 projects north of Route 222

P O U L T R Y B A R N S



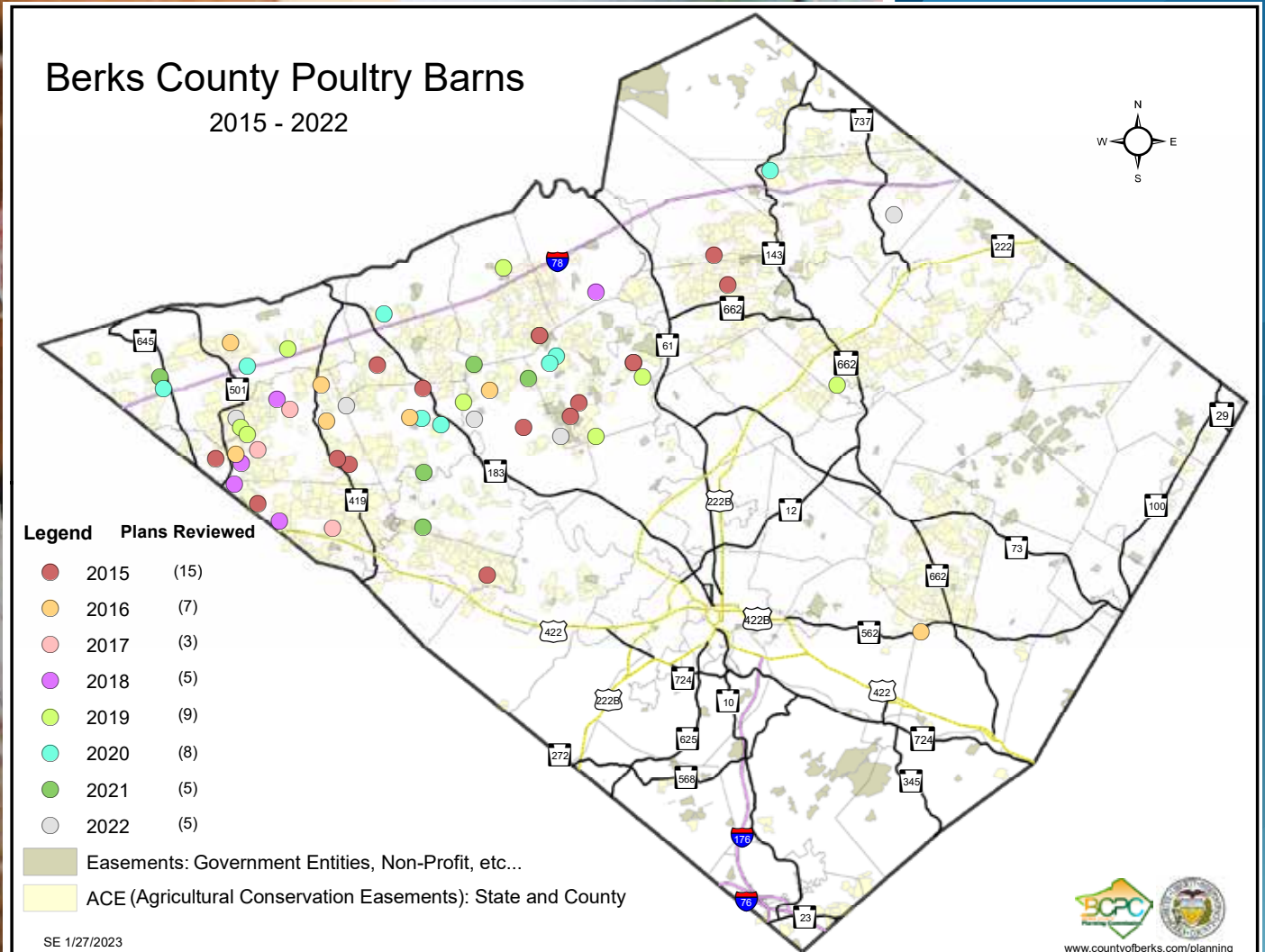
Total Number of Poultry Barns By Municipality

2015 - 2022



Berks County Poultry Barns

2015 - 2022



Planning Commission Staff has been tracking the number of poultry operations in the county for the last several years. The agricultural economy of the county is comprised of different products and the poultry sector is one of those products

The map above identifies the location of each poultry barn developed by each year. The map to the left identifies the number of poultry barns by municipality.

The northwest region of the county has the largest number of Poultry Barns.

The Poultry Barns supply many products for Bell & Evans, a poultry processor in Lebanon County.

2022 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 2022 approved budget for both revenues and expenses as well as the actual revenues and expenses.



	2022 Approved Budget	2022 Actual Budget
Wages – Staff	\$1,090,894	\$988,561
Wages – Part time no benefits	\$24,770	\$0
FICA	\$83,675	\$72,649
Fringe	\$382,043	\$381,829
Sub Total – Personnel	\$1,581,382	\$1,443,039
OPERATING EXPENSE		
Sub Total – Operating	\$149,103	\$121,753.44
Building Indirect Costs	\$163,433	\$163,433
Other Indirect Costs	\$201,068	\$201,068
Sub Total – Indirect	\$364,501	\$364,501
Total Budgeted Expenditures	\$2,151,237	\$1,927,087
REVENUE (See Notes Below)		
CDBG	\$120,000	\$120,000
FTA Revenue	\$106,000	\$93,954.61
RATS State Revenue	\$62,000	\$57,340.98
RATS Federal Revenue	\$413,000	\$387,833.37
BCMS4 Cooperative Ed Program	\$8,500	\$6,693.15
UCC Fees	\$14,700	\$13,200
Joint Comprehensive Plan Updates	\$30,172	\$25,791.89
SALDO Fees	\$120,000	\$98,410
Maps Other	\$100	\$28
SALDO Recording Fee	\$1,250	\$1,460
Total Budgeted Revenues	\$933,472	\$804,712

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, and 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. They coordinate and administer these committees, their meetings and lead development of the package of state and federally required MPO products.

During 2022, the Coordinating Committee met twice, the Coordinating and Technical Committees met jointly five times, and the Technical Committee met five times.



Reading MPO Collaboration and Accomplishments

- Provided information on transportation plans and projects to municipalities, elected officials, general public, business community and media.
- Coordinated and participated in PennDOT Connects project level meetings with municipalities, Project Scoping Field Views and Plans Displays.
- Provided outreach to municipalities regarding state and federal transportation funding program opportunities.
- Worked with the other MPO members of the Eastern PA Freight Alliance (Lackawanna/ Luzerne, Lebanon, Lehigh Valley and NEPA) in the selection of a consultant (WSP USA) to conduct a regional freight plan with an estimated completion of late 2023.
- Participated as Board Members and Chairman of the Susquehanna Regional Transportation Partnership providing Transportation Demand Management services throughout a 9-county region via a contract with consultant AECOM doing business as Commuter Services of PA.
- MPO staff participated in the PennDOT Connects Steering Committee, PennDOT Financial Guidance Work Group, PA Interagency Consultation Work Group (Air Quality Conformity), Pennsylvania Statewide Hazard Mitigation Plan Steering Committee and PennDOT Planning Partners Annual Meeting Steering Committee
- Attended PennDOT's annual Planning Partners Conference in State College
- Staff coordinated with the Tri-County Passenger Rail Committee and later the Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority in their efforts to restore passenger rail service between Reading and Philadelphia and points beyond.
- Coordinated with municipalities along the PA 183 corridor in northwestern Berks County to identify safety issues and develop solutions for incorporation into local and state plans.
- Participated on the Steering Committee for the City of Reading Active Transportation Plan
- Coordinated with the Reading Regional Airport Authority in the development of their Strategic Plan
- Participated in many other conferences and training sessions related to both the development and implementation of the transportation program and education on emerging issues / legislation.

Reports Prepared / Approved by RATS in 2022

January	FFY 2022-2024 Unified Planning Work Program
March	Population and Employment Projections for 2025, 2030, 2035, 2040, and 2045
July	CMAQ Traffic Congestion System Performance Management Addendums for both the Reading, PA and Allentown-Bethlehem-Easton, PA-NJ Urbanized Areas PM3 Reading Urbanized Area Targets for CMAQ Congestion Measures Air Quality Conformity Analysis Report – Reading MPO FFY 2023-2026 Transportation Improvement Program and 2045 Long Range Transportation Plan FFY 2023-2045 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) FFY 2023-2026 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) FFY 2023 Environmental Justice Summary
September	PM3 Allentown-Bethlehem-Easton, PA-NJ Urbanized Area Targets for CMAQ Congestion Measures
November	Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Transportation Plan for Berks County South Central Transit Authority Transit Asset Management Plan Performance Targets
December	Annual List of Federally Obligated Projects for FFY 2022

READING AREA TRANSPORTATION STUDY

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.

In 2022 the LTAP program was again offering in-person training sessions throughout the state. Prior to this, LTAP was only offering virtual training opportunities because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff coordinated and marketed a total of six Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP) training sessions during the 2022 calendar year. The following is a list of the classes held in 2022:

- AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADA)
- ASPHALT ROADS COMMON MAINTENANCE PROBLEMS
- SPEED LIMITS AND SPEED MANAGEMENT
- INTRODUCTION TO TRAFFIC STUDIES
- PEDESTRIANS AND CROSSWALKS
- WINTER MAINTENANCE

Freight Study – Berks County is in a unique geographic position. The County is situated between two of the largest markets on the east coast – the City of Philadelphia to the southeast and New York City to the northeast. As consumers increasingly rely on using the internet for purchases as opposed to traditional brick-and-mortar storefronts, the “last mile” shipping/distribution network is critical to keeping up with demand and increases overall efficiencies. Because of this change in consumer purchasing habits, the county’s location, relatively low cost of land, and the robust network of roads and highways that connect these major east coast markets, Berks County, as well as the rest of the Lehigh Valley, have become a desirable location for the warehouse industry.

Transportation planners in Berks County recognize that this increase in warehouse development not only has implications on land use and the environment but also the transportation infrastructure of the region. The Reading Area Transportation Study (RATS) staff, along with our partners in neighboring jurisdictions, decided it was time to comprehensively evaluate the freight network and determine its effects on the overall transportation system.

In late 2021, the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission spearheaded the creation of the Eastern Pennsylvania Freight Alliance to build a multi-regional coalition to work with state and federal agencies to better understand freight movements, so a strategy can be developed to reduce freight’s impact on the transportation network, land use, environment and ultimately quality of life in nearly 400 municipalities in the alliance.

The five Metropolitan Planning Organizations joining together on the project are the 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).

In 2022, WSP USA was selected as the consultant to begin drafting the Eastern Pennsylvania Freight Plan using a grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration. When completed, 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 system. The plan is to be completed in 2023.

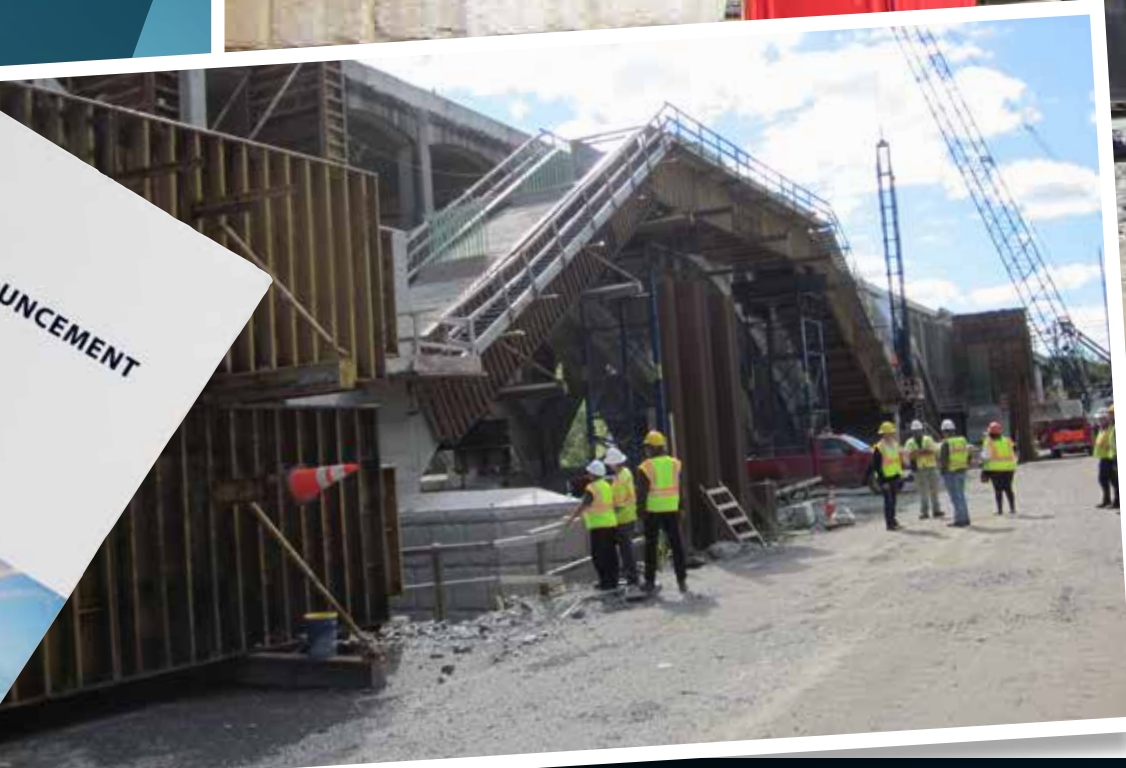


Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan – RATS staff, along with representatives from the local transit provider (SCTA/BARTA), completed an update to the 2013 CPT-HS Transportation Plan. The purpose of this plan/update is to continue to help to improve transportation services for persons with disabilities and older adults in Berks County through a better coordinated transportation system. The preparation of this plan is required by federal transportation regulations and provides a framework for the development of projects to address the transportation needs of these targeted populations and ensures that RATS and its public transportation and human services agencies coordinate their federally funded transportation resources.



I-78 BRIDGE VISIT

RATS members Donna Reed (City of Reading, PA), Sam Kalbach (1st Class Townships-Township of Cumru), and Tom McKeon (Berks County Planning Commission) joined staff members, PennDOT representatives, and project consultants with J.D. Eckman for an update and field view of the progress made on the I-78-Rt 61 Bridge Replacement project in Hamburg Borough and Tilden Township. The project involves the reconstruction of the I-78 and Route 61 Interchange including the bridge replacement and widening of two I-78 mainline bridges at an estimated cost of approximately \$125 million. The project is anticipated to be completed in 2025. Throughout the project construction, the Schuylkill River Trail remains accessible and traversable through the use of temporary fencing and shipping containers.





In 2022, the Smart Growth Alliance met with a number of presenters from various industries and entities that discussed a diverse amount of topics with the group. Gwen Didden and Stacy Keppen introduced the Berks County and Reading Housing Authorities to the group, sharing information on their scopes and similar missions. Glenn Worgan shared the Buttonwood Gateway Project, a 47-unit affordable income development that already received over 500 applicants before the project had completed. Angie Williamson and Ken Weinstein introduced the group to a more out-of-the-box program called Jumpstart which addresses blight remediation while teaching budding entrepreneurs and prospective homeowners that otherwise may not be able to afford a home the necessary skills to rehabilitate such properties. What is clear after hearing from all these presenters was that there is an incredible need for market-rate and affordable housing in Berks and throughout the nation.

The SGA also met in person for the first time in two years since the COVID virus created a need for online meetings. SGA held a holiday meeting in the Commissioner's Board Room with decorations and snacks. County Commissioner Chairman Leinbach presented the progress made by the Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority to the group, and Chip Bilger, Chairman of the Berks County Water and Sewer Association, provided an update to the progress of the county water and sewer capacity analysis.



Staff met with the mayor and manager of Fleetwood Borough for a tour of their downtown. Fleetwood Mayor Tammy Gore, Borough Council Vice President Pete Merkel, and Manager Chris Young showed BCPC staff around Main Street and beyond, highlighting business moves and upgrades as well as the work done to their municipal parking lot and pocket park. Later staff toured the Fleetwood Loft Apartments under development and learned about the joint effort between the Borough and the property owner/developer to redevelop an underutilized historic property in the Borough into a mixed-use development that will benefit all of Fleetwood. Lastly, BCPC met with staff at Fleetwood Sound Company, a division of Oswalds Mill Audio (OMA), a company that specializes in ultra-high end audio speakers. One of their speaker systems is named after the Borough and its automaker past, Fleetwood DeVille's. They are crafted by hand in the Borough from sustainable and local Pennsylvania woods.



CONFERENCES AND TRAINING



In March, Assistant Director Showers and Planner Jamie Passon attended the WeConserve PA Land Conservation Conference in Adams County. Adams County's major draw is the Gettysburg battle grounds. Sessions at the conference which provided insight into the planning work the Commission staff carries out included the Economics of Agriculture and Its Influence on Farmland Preservation, Promoting Economic Development Through Trails and Connectivity and Climate Change - Linking PA's Important Places and Habitats



The 2022 APA PA Annual Conference

The 2022 APA PA Annual Conference was held in Lancaster from October 2nd through the 4th. Staff attended the opening Keynote and Pitkin Lecture on October 3rd with topics focused on the impacts of the pandemic on walkable urbanism and everyday life. Devon Hain, Transportation Planner II, attended sessions focused on active transportation and planning for electric vehicle infrastructure. Laura Mursch, Intergovernmental Affairs Planner III, attended sessions focused on multi-municipal planning and creating implementable comprehensive plans. Connections made at the event have opened doors to new processes and new funding options to continue the joint planning program and information from these sessions was put to practice to provide additional active transportation funding information to municipalities, identify potential electric vehicle charging sites, and prepare for future NEVI funding.



Branding

Since the beginning of 2022, The Berks County Planning Commission started branding the Department with a logo and slogan. From that point on, the BCPC adds their logo to letterheads and multiple projects that associate with their line of work. Having the logo pronounced is giving the Department recognition and distinction for those who follow the Department's work. The Planning Commission started adding their logo to apparel for the employees to look cohesive while displaying the brand at public functions. BCPC has also been assisting other departments with their branding. Collaboration is also a key when branding. When combining identities, they share their followings in hope that each can gain a new audience and create larger exposures.

The BCPC offered it's graphics and branding service to other departments and partners which lead to various designs of logos and maps for the Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority, a rebranding of the Mount Penn Preserve logo along with event promotions. Additionally, two vehicle wrap designs were created for the Berks County Conservation District. Executing these designs demonstrates the Department's goal of excellence in collaboration, better public messaging and outreach.

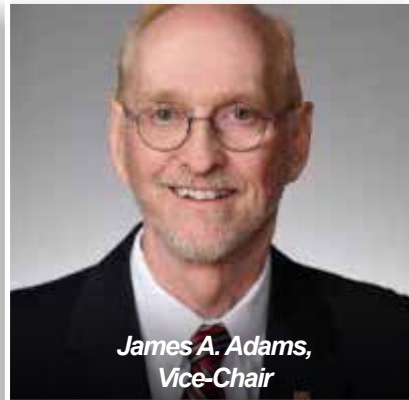


2022 BCPC BOARD MEMBERS

BCPC STAFF



*Jodi L. Gauker,
Chair*



*James A. Adams,
Vice-Chair*



*Christopher J. Spohn
Secretary*



Glenn R. Knoblauch



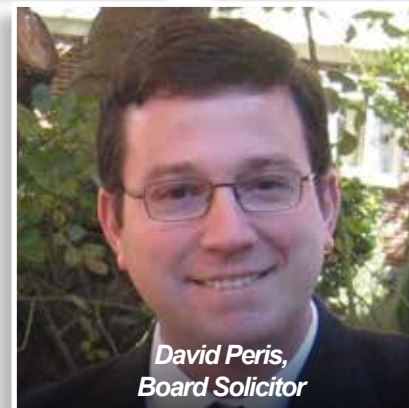
*James C. McCarthy,
P.E.*



*Thomas C. McKeon,
AICP, CECd*



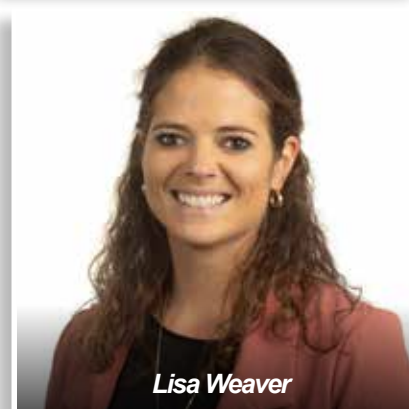
*Lee C. Olsen,
AIA, NCARB*



*David Peris,
Board Solicitor*



David H. Turner



Lisa Weaver



2022 BCPC STAFF

David N. Hunter, Sr.,
AICP, Executive Director

Ashley Showers,
Assistant Director

Cheryl Auchenbach,
Community Planner III

Jamie Passon,
Planner II

Alan Piper,
Transportation Planner III

Amanda Timochenko,
Planner II

Michelle Franklin,
Subdivision Planner III

Devon Hain,
Transportation Planner II

Matt McGough,
Transportation Planner III

Taylor Lawrence,
Planner II

Laura Mursch,
Intergovernmental Planner III

Shanice Ellison,
Planner I

Beth Burkovich,
GISP, GIS Analyst

Brittany Antunes,
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Michael Golembiewski,
Transportation Modeler

Rick Royer,
Design Planner



