



**VISTA 2025 Goal 1:**

***Maintain and enhance “quality of place” as a key component of economic health***

**Goal 1 Team Meeting**

**December 15, 2016**

**Meeting Notes**

**Team Members Attending:** W. Boulton Alexander, Michael Cotter, Ellen Ferretti, Don Hannum, Beth Harper-Briglia, Ernie Hollings, Roger Huggins, Michelle Kichline, Molly Morrison, Todd Pohlig, John Theilacker, Craig Styer

**Also Attending:** Pat Bokovitz, Bill Gladden, Brian O’Leary, David Sciocchetti

**Michelle Kichline**

Welcomed all team members and invited everyone to introduce themselves. Requested comments on meeting notes from previous meeting. None were received.

**David Sciocchetti**

Presented the draft VISTA 2025 progress report and invited feedback on current content and any additions or changes.

**Don Hannum**

Referring to the efforts in Coatesville, asked if the Wells Fargo Regional Foundation grant for Coatesville was at risk as a result of recent problems at Wells Fargo and was advised that it was not.

**Michelle Kichline**

Moved the discussion to take the open space issues and challenges agenda item in advance of other agenda items.

**Bill Gladden**

Provided a PowerPoint presentation of many aspects of open space preservation in Chester County. Noted that the County has had a Department of Open Space since 2004. Indicated that the County has set a goal of permanently preserving 30% of its land as some form of open space including agriculture. Commented that significant progress has been made on that goal (currently at 26.7%) with the help of excellent partners like the Natural Lands Trust. Added that the County funded efforts have worked very well with the state funding programs.

Described the focus of the program on achieving a critical mass of connected open spaces. Described the Bryn Coed preservation efforts as an excellent example of the challenges of the process, noting the importance of a patient landowner.

Stated that Chester County has just over 1,700 farms, approximately 500 of which are preserved. Commented that there is as much as a 100 farm backlog.

Described the use of GIS analysis as one of the measures used to identify land parcels that might be candidates for preservation funding. Noted that follow up might include letters to landowners describing programs and inviting participation.

In response to question, noted that early outreach efforts are not intended to pressure potential candidates for preservation. Added that efforts intensify, and partners in the open space preservation efforts may be brought in, after some level of interest on the part of the landowner is expressed. Described East Coventry example where 1,880 acres are actively being worked on, another 2,100 acres are pending and a future 2,500 acres could be added later.

**Bo Alexander**

Suggested that the County may pass its 30% goal and was interested in what happens then.

**Michelle Kichline**

Responded that this is a very important issue for the County. Suggested that when the 30% goal is reached the County will then have to evaluate what comes next. Issues impacting that decision could include the ability to continue funding the current programs, the number of interested landowners, the recommendations that emerge from Landscapes 3 and other considerations.

**Brian O’Leary**

Added that Landscapes 3 will be examining this issue as it moves through the comprehensive planning process.

**Bill Gladden**

Noted that \$215 million has been paid to Chester County farm land owners for farmland preservation since 1989, adding that \$101 million has come from the County programs.

Described an Ohio State study that surveyed the impacts of farmland preservation. Noted that uses of the proceeds from selling development rights include paying off debt and acquiring additional land.

**Don Hannum**

Asked if anything like the Ohio State study has been done in Pennsylvania and was advised that it had not.

**Ellen Ferretti**

Suggested that there was some interest in a study in Pennsylvania.

**Bill Gladden**

Commented on the Crebilly Farm situation. Noted this as an example of the challenge of meeting the objectives of the property owners and the critical importance of patient owners to allow the resources for acquisition to be assembled. Added that the successful Bryn Coed preservation was the culmination of ten years of effort. Noted that each opportunity has its own issues that need to be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

**Todd Pohlig**

Commented that this is often a generational change issue as properties pass from one generation to another.

**Beth Harper Briglia**

Asked about the change in County funding for open space in one of the tables in the PowerPoint.

**Bill Gladden**

Responded that it was the result of the great recession which required that the County stretch out the timeline for achieving its goal.

**Beth Harper Briglia**

Asked about the prospects for future funding.

**Molly Morrison**

Noted that state funding had declined from \$200 million to \$50 million over a ten year period and that given state budget pressures will be a challenge to sustain. Added that some legislators were pushing for Growing Greener 3 legislation supported by a Growing Greener coalition for the upcoming budget year. Added that the County will likely be influenced by Landscapes 3 and that local government have been a bright spot as many of them have gotten in the game. And are at the table on preservation investments. Noted that the Bryn Coed effort had 6 or 7 funding sources.

**Ellen Ferretti**

Commented that there had been some discussion of dedicated funding to be derived from real estate transfer taxes.

**Michelle Kichline**

Moved to the next agenda item noting that the local focus called for in VISTA 2025 strategy 1.7.1 on funding for local economic development thinking was important and asked Brian O’Leary to describe the Kennett Square process.

**Brian O’Leary**

Described the Chester County Planning Commission’s Vision Partnership Program (VPP) which was originally designed to help implement some of the recommendation of Landscapes and Landscapes 2 by providing grants to municipalities for a wide range of planning related activities. Noted that over \$6 million had been awarded since its inception and that 68 of the county’s 73 municipalities had participated in the program. Added that the program currently allocates \$250,000 on an annual basis.

Described how the program had helped to limit sprawl, citing 10,000 fewer acres of development, 25 miles of trails and significant urban revitalization as by-products of the program. Commented on how it complemented the county’s Community Revitalization Program (CRP).

**Pat Bokovitz**

Commented that the CRP program had contributed to the ability of the urban areas to handle additional growth and contributed to a measured growth in the overall real estate assessment in the County’s urban areas.

**Brian O’Leary**

Described the Kennett Square VPP funded effort that included Kennett Township in a process to assess demographic and market dynamics affecting Kennett, clarify challenges and opportunities and look at six specific areas and their development

potential with a focus on concentrating growth in or near the Borough. Added that Oxford Borough was utilizing the VPP for economic development related activities as well.

**David Sciocchetti**

Commented that this slightly more expansive target area for growth in the Kennett Square effort made it more likely that the Landscapes 3 goal of encouraging growth in the County's urban areas could be successful.

**Todd Pohlig**

Noted that the Landscapes 3 goal of having growth occur in or near the urban centers has the challenge of getting agreement from the urban centers and their school districts.

**Michael Cotter**

Noted that one of the challenges facing West Chester is the price of housing in the Borough and its impact on the ability to attract and retain millennials, including new faculty for West Chester University. Questioned whether this was an issues being looked at as part of future growth of urban areas.

**Pat Bokovitz**

Responded that this issue of workforce housing was a countywide challenge that is resulting in some workers being squeezed out of the County housing market.

**Brian O' Leary**

Noted that there was a Chester County Housing Options Task Force looking to address this issue but cautioned about the potential for a Not In My Back Yard (NIMBY) type response.

**Todd Pohlig**

Suggested that some of that reaction was based on a lack of understanding of the importance of this housing component and suggested that a new way to describe it might be appropriate.

**Ernie Hollings**

Added that a marketing effort for this housing sector might make some sense.

**David Sciocchetti**

Noted that discussions on various approaches to the “Return on Environment” issue in Chester County were being looked at.

**Molly Morrison**

Thanked all members for attending and participating and adjourned the meeting.