



VISTA 2025 Goal 1:

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

Goal 1 Team Meeting

September 29, 2017

Meeting Notes

Team Members Attending: W. Boulton Alexander, Lou Beccaria, Kimberly Brumbaugh, Michael Chain, Denise Day, Beth Harper-Briglia, Claudia Hellebush, Susan Marshall, Molly Morrison, Todd Pohlig, Stephanie Stevens

Also Attending: Daniel Arbucias, Jan Bowers, Marybeth DiVincenzo, Bill Gladden, James Logan, David Sciocchetti

Molly Morrison

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

Indicated that the meeting agenda focused on two specific strategies that address natural resource issues including items like flood control. Added that Chester County was the only county in Pennsylvania with a Water Resources Authority. Introduced Jan Bowers as Director of that authority.

Jan Bowers

Described the role of the Water Resources Authority in flood management and storm water management. Commented that part of this process is working to keep people out of harm's way during flooding and storm water problems. Noted that it is a Water Resources Authority and not a Water Authority because it does not produce drinking water, but rather works with water as it exists in nature.

Commented that as a result of Landscapes 2 sprawl in Chester County has been limited with 10,000 fewer acres developed than had been anticipated while 40,000 more people than expected moved into the county. Added that the county's urban centers have been energized and 92,000 additional acres of open space have been preserved, now totaling 27% of the county.

Indicated that going forward, almost 150,000 additional people are expected to take up residence in Chester County by 2045 and they will require approximately 55,000 new housing units.

Stated that this growth will require more water supplies and more wastewater management. Noted that efforts to strengthen the resiliency of Chester County will be need including:

- Reducing stormwater runoff and flooding
- Protecting and restoring water quality of streams and water supply sources
- Protecting and managing flood plains
- Reducing flood risks through mitigation
- Integration of planning and natural resource management

Described regulatory requirements in these areas to be mostly state or federal with some aspects controlled by municipal ordinances.

Described specific Chester County economic benefits resulting from preservation as indicated in 2011 DVRPC report titled Return on Environment.

Described an array of benefits of open space including:

- Protection of riparian lands and flood plains
- Reduced runoff from forested and vegetated lands
- Reduced pollution from forested and vegetated lands
- Improved water quality through protection of lands draining to “first order streams”

Discussed the importance of protecting water supplies. Noted that 80% of Chester County lands drain to sources of surface water intakes for public water supplies and that County streams and groundwater provide approximately 31 billion gallons per year of water supplies. Added that approximately two-thirds of the County is served by public water systems. Stated that the vast majority of Chester County water comes from Chester County sources. Stated that additional water supply planning will be part of an update after Landscapes 3 is completed.

Molly Morrison

Asked about the impacts on water supply of adding another 150,000 people. Response was that there is additional capacity and that people and uses adjust.

Bo Alexander

Asked what percentage of the 31 billion gallons is put back into the system. Response was about 95%.

Jan Bowers

Explained that the sources of the County water supply have issues that need to be addressed. Noted that of the six county water supply reservoirs, two are impaired and that 69% of the streams are impaired to some level including such things as too much

silt or a nitrate level that is too high and requires treatment before use. Added that county water supplies are very good but that stream impairments raise costs for providers and consumers to meet drinking water supplies.

Claudia Hellebush

Asked how we compare to neighboring counties. Response was that 100% of Delaware County streams are impaired.

Kim Brumbaugh

Asked about people with wells and the quality of their water. Response was that well owners need to sample their water annually to assure quality.

Susan Marshall

Asked about disaster preparedness and recovery. Response was that the Water Resources Authority works closely with County emergency services on hazard mitigation and effective response planning.

Jan Bowers

Noted that the Chester Water resources Authority owns and manages five regional flood control facilities, four on the Brandywine Creek and the Marsh Creek dam that provide flood protection to over 4,000 properties. Added that it would cost upwards of \$100 million to replace these dams.

Noted that new flood plain insurance maps became effective in September of 2017. Explained that in Chester County 4,900 buildings are in the 100 year flood plain and are at risk of flooding. Noted that 72 County municipalities participate in the National Flood Insurance Program, 68 of the 72 have approved flood plain ordinances and over 1,500 flood plain insurance policies are in effect in the County.

Explained the importance of the difference between mitigation and flood control indicated that open space is part of flood protection. Noted that natural resources

infrastructure is one of the least expensive ways to reduce flooding. Cited minimal maintenance costs, no rehabilitation costs, reduced overall recovery costs, improved ability to recover, reduced people and structures “in harm’s way” and other benefits of considering natural resources as a resilient buffer for communities. Highlighted the \$50 million 2011 DVRPC calculation of economic benefits of protected open space in Chester County.

Added that protected natural resources strengthen our resiliency and ability to recover from natural disasters. Briefly described Resilient! Chester County, part of a national effort to support community level resiliency planning and preparation.

Molly Morrison

Commented that another aspect of the Return on Environment concept is the value of “quality of place” which adds value to a locality by making it more attractive to residents, workers and businesses. Introduced Carole De Wolf to describe one element of the Chester County quality of place.

Carol De Wolf

Described the Schuylkill Highlands Conservation Landscape Initiative. Noted that it was a four state initiative that had its roots in the Hopewell Big Woods, 73,000 acres of unbroken forest, the largest unbroken forest between Washington, DC and New York.

Explained that the initiative, managed by the Natural Lands Trust was the result of an initial collaboration between the Trust and the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to promote the area within the Schuylkill Highlands as a cultural, recreational, and natural heritage destination. Described how the project is intended to serve as a demonstration of how regional assets can be conserved by developing compatible economic development based upon place-based recreational and cultural tourism.

Explained that \$26.9 million had been secured in various grants for land acquisition, planning, development and protection as part of the overall program. Indicated that these funding efforts had had positive impacts on the local communities. Explained that Mini Grants were available under the program for local projects that used the grant to leverage additional funding. Described several projects funded with Mini Grants. Indicated that \$1.6 million had been awarded in Mini grant funding.

Described some of the elements of the overall area experience including Hopewell Furnace.

Noted that part of the effort was to target towns and villages linking the presence of the natural areas to tourism and related economic activity. Noted a successful “Promoting the Village” effort in St. Peters that included pop up venues, nature based walks, music venues and 4,000 people.

Commented on the Colebrookdale Tourist Railroad and its Secret Valley Line that bring 20 to 30 thousand people annually to the area for multi-day stays.

Noted that Phoenixville had so much going on, in terms of things that work and may be transferable, including First Fridays, Blobfest and Firebird Festival as well as the Blackrock Sanctuary. Added that Phoenixville is the hub of all trails with significant trail connections.

Commented that Spring City has incredible potential.

Molly Morrison

Noted the need to continue to attract talent to Chester County by creating an environment that includes trails and other things that they like. Added that the connection between this kind of effort and VISTA 2025 was very strong.

James Logan

Asked about the timing for DCNR Mini Grants grant opportunities and was advised that it was flexible.

Molly Morrison

Noted that while the Schuylkill Highlands Initiative started with the Hopewell Big Woods, that initial effort acted as a springboard to a range of activities with connections to local and area economies. Added that funding for one aspect of the effort becomes leverage for another aspect, mentioning how the first Forest Legacy Grant led to branding, marketing and tourism related efforts.

David Sciocchetti

Suggested that there may be opportunities to partner with the Brandywine Conference and Visitors Bureau to further build on the existing Schuylkill Highlands efforts as part of the 724 initiative.

Carol De Wolf

Responded that to date top down efforts have not been the most successful approach, adding that working with local communities has been what has worked best.