

**County of Berks
Commissioners' Workshop Agenda
September 9, 2025**

Christian Y. Leinbach, Commissioner, Chair
Michael S. Rivera, Commissioner
Dante Santoni, Jr., Commissioner
Kevin S. Barnhardt, Chief Operations Officer
Christine M. Sadler, Esq., County Solicitor
Jessica Blauser, Deputy Chief Clerk

NOTICE:

Public comment will be accepted in person. Please include your first name, last name and municipality for all comments. Any comments without name and municipality will not be considered. The meeting comment period is limited to a total of 30 minutes. This time period may be extended at the discretion of the Board. Please be concise. Comments that are germane to County business will be read during the meeting and should not be considered to be interactive dialogue with the Commissioners. The County Solicitor shall be the final arbiter of whether a comment is germane and should be read. Any Commissioner response to public comment will be done at the discretion of the Commissioners.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Approve the June 10, 2025, Operations meeting minutes.

PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS

AGENDA ITEMS

1. Wendy Pennington, Benefits Manager; Jessica Weaknecht, Chief Human Resources Officer; Kristin Scheffler, Human Resource Assistant along with Pete Kareha SVP, Employee Benefits Consultant and Rich Gulliver, Employee Benefits Consultant will be presenting the 2026 Health Care Renewal.
2. Human Resources, Legal, and Facilities – County Employee Policy discussion
 - a. Vehicle Use
 - b. Vehicle Rental
 - c. Travel and Expense Reimbursement
 - d. Political Activity

PUBLIC COMMENT

ADJOURNMENT

Berks County Operations Agenda
Meeting Minutes - Tuesday, June 10, 2025
9:30 am

The Berks County Board of Commissioners met on Tuesday, June 10, 2025, at 9:30 a.m. in the Commissioners' Boardroom, 13th floor of the Berks County Services Center, and via Microsoft Teams Live and YouTube Live pursuant to due notice to Board members and the public.

Commissioner Chair Christian Y. Leinbach called the meeting to order, with Commissioner Michael S. Rivera and Commissioner Dante Santoni in attendance. Also present were Christine Sadler, Esq., County Solicitor, Kevin S. Barnhardt, Chief Operations Officer, and Amanda Bentzel, Chief Clerk.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The May 27, 2025, Operations Meeting Minutes were approved as presented.

PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS

No Comments.

Pam Menet, Director of Community and Economic Development, presented on housing in Berks County, including a housing study as part of IMAGINE Berks

Pam spoke on the housing challenges in Berks County that cross all income sectors. There are not enough homes to meet the demands.

When the IMAGINE Berks plan was adopted, we referenced that housing had become an important piece for economic developers to consider as it has a direct impact on access to talent, creating stable communities and provides living spaces for not just new residents, but our growing families in Berks County.

If a family has pulled together the financial resources to purchase and afford a home, but have little choice regarding the type, quality, or location of housing. It is further recognition that we need to focus on allowing a range of housing types across our County.

This isn't just a question of financial resources and subsidies; it involves zoning, which may make it hard to build housing in places that people want to live, near jobs, shopping, parks, schools, maybe near their families. Single-family zoning and minimum lot sizes can make it hard to build, add significant development costs, and result in a product that is an unattainable price point for our families in the county who earn an opportunity wage or higher.

The data showed us in IMAGINE Berks that 5,612 units of underproduction (2021) and 6,607 units of underproduction (2023).

Strategies and Action Steps include assessing and addressing the mismatch between housing stock and housing demand, including age, price point, type, and location. Promote adaptive reuse and redevelopment of obsolete commercial and industrial properties. Prioritize a staff position to develop and coordinate housing strategies, plans, and rehabilitation programs. This also includes creating a housing investment program to accelerate the development of attainable and accessible housing and leverage other financial resources with an identified Return on Investment (ROI)

Residential units that have been reviewed by the County and are going through the approval process with the local municipalities. Over the five-year period between 2021 and 2024, 2,138 residential units were reviewed. 60% of the residential reviews (over 1,000) were apartments.

Do we have housing that is accessible? What is available as opposed to what you can afford? Only 2.6% of all units in Berks County were built in 2010 or later, while 25% of all units were built in 1939 or earlier.

When considering higher-end housing, the county's proximity to the Philadelphia metro area keeps construction costs high while lower household incomes prevent builders from extracting the same value, which discourages new development. Furthermore, current local planning and zoning have not allowed for the development of housing that matches new household formation patterns and housing demand, such as condos and attached developments.

The lack of higher-value owner housing increases demand and cost of limited housing options in the middle of the market, increasing competition and exacerbating accessibility and affordability challenges.

In IMAGINE Berks, we highlighted what was known as "opportunity jobs", jobs that provide a living wage and benefits. This is the amount a household must earn, before taxes, to support a family of three with two adults and one child, in which one adult is working.

The baseline set in 2020 was \$63,546 or \$30.55 per hour. The updated number for 2025 is now \$80,246.40 or \$38.58. We looked at the job market to see what types of jobs meet this criteria.

Each of these job titles represents the mean listed wage from Chmura Analytics as of June 1, 2025.

Pam went over a handful of examples to include:

Elementary & Middle School Teachers: \$78,600

Electricians: \$77,000

First-Line Supervisor Maintenance Operations: \$82,200

Police: \$87,900

Health Information Technologists: \$76,700

Registered Nurses: \$96,700

For home ownership, the median sales price of a home in Berks County is \$285,000. Looking at the mortgage payment calculator, an individual would just be able to afford only their mortgage with monthly payments at 7.5% interest rate makes the monthly payment over \$2,000.

In rentals, we see that prices also continue to be challenging. At \$2,000 a month, a 2-bedroom, 1.5-bathroom apartment is close to the top of the range for the housing budget.

There have been housing redevelopments that align with our commitment to redevelopment and attainable housing. Providing housing options in various areas of the County close to employment centers.

The Whole-Home Repairs Program was created by the PA DCED and administered locally by the Berks County Redevelopment Authority. This program aimed at preserving existing housing stock through repairs of deteriorated interior or exterior issues.

Berks County received \$2.872 million for rehabilitation (and 200 + applications) with 139 projects being completed to date. Conversations are underway to continue the program using other funds.

How do we move forward? With data and with our partners. A scope of work for the Housing and Market Needs Assessment is underway.

The intent of the study will be to provide critical and detailed empirical information about the inventory, housing resources and supportive services, opportunity for partnerships, and direction.

Identified as a focus are in IMAGINE Berks, and a component piece of our new comprehensive Plan that is currently underway. As you know, the comprehensive plan plays an important role in future land use, both policy, best practices, and ordinances. Pam stated that incorporating the most up-to-date data and information from the housing study into the comprehensive plan and into Imagine Berks, the information will affect our strategies, action steps and policies related to housing and meet the goal that was identified in the Imagine Berks Plan. The county's need for new housing and developed housing that is accessible and attainable, all while considering smart growth and continuing our commitment to agriculture.

Commissioner Leinbach stated he spoke with the Home Builders Association and would like to be involved and mentioned that there seems to be an anti-development sentiment in Berks County.

Commissioner Rivera stated that there are many challenges over the last several years and the ability for people to purchase homes with an increase in rent. He mentioned that there is also an increase in first-time homelessness because of the lack of affordable housing. We need to that speak with developers from surrounding counties to see why other counties are being developed but not Berks County.

Commissioner Santoni mentioned that the housing crisis is seen nationwide and questioned how difficult it is to go directly to developers with a plan.

Pam stated that not only will nonprofits need to get involved, but also housing authorities, private developers, home builders, and the Realtors Association, to bring in good data. She has started an outreach to the various departments, and how resources play a role in supporting housing.

The Commissioners thanked Pam for her presentation today.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No comments.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Commissioner Leinbach adjourned the meeting at 10:02 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jessica Blauser, Deputy Chief Clerk