

2024

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

А Н Н О В Г К Е Ь О К Л





Director's Message

Greetings!

2024 was a successful year, and 2025 looks even more promising as BCPC Staff prepare a new, state-of-the-art Comprehensive Plan. Stay tuned for updates on how you can get involved in shaping Berks County's future. But first, let's review 2024.

Last year, BCPC Staff worked on various projects and partnered with multiple agencies to improve life in Berks County. Efforts included Joint Comprehensive Plans, the Long-Range Transportation Plan, the Local Technical Assistance Program, the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, Subdivision Plan Reviews, Zoning Text Amendments, and Demographic Analysis.

Day-to-day, BCPC supports County agencies, the Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority (SRPRA), and other key organizations like the Berks Area Regional Transportation Authority (BARTA), the Berks Redevelopment Authority (BRDA), and the Berks Industrial Development Authority (BerksIDA). Staff also collaborate with state agencies, including PennDOT, the PA Department of Community and Economic Development, and the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

Local stakeholders play a vital role in the planning process, including the Greater Reading Chamber Alliance (GRCA), the Reading-Berks Association of Realtors (R-BAR), the Center for Excellence in Local Government (CELG), the Berks County Smart Growth Alliance, the Berks County Sewer and Water Association (BCSWA), Berks Nature, and the Multiple Separate Storm Sewer System Steering Committee (MS4). BCPC Staff are also active with the American Planning Association, the Planning Directors Association of Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania Municipal Planning Education Institute (PMPEI), and the Pennsylvania Economic Development Association (PEDA), all while working with boroughs and townships across the County.

Whew! that's a mouthful, and we do it all gladly

Our motto is "coming together and working together to achieve success." We continue to strive for excellence in all we do!

2025 Objectives

Producing a new and improved County Comprehensive Plan

Assisting multiple townships and boroughs with Joint Comprehensive Plans

Implementing Year 3 of Imagine Berks

Assisting with the implementation of Growing Berks

Updating the Long-Range Transportation Plan

Planning a Building the Boroughs Event in the Fall

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2024 Reading MPO Staff Coordination, Collaboration and Participation

Eastern Pennsylvania Freight Infrastructure Study FFY 2025-2028

Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

Development of Long Range Transportation Plan

RATS Federal Certification Review

Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority

Franklin Street Station Working Group Trip to Drexel University

PA House Transportation Committee Meeting

Mpact Transit and Community Conference

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BCPC Out and About

National Agricultural Day: Bobb's Mill Visit

Exeter School District Career Day

NPC24, Minneapolis Minnesota

PA APA Conference - Erie

Preserved Farm Tour

Residence at Village Greens

Berks Nature: State-of-the-Environment Breakfast

2024 Statewide Active Transportation Summit

SWAG Bus

Discover AG Podcast Live

GRCA Annual Picnic

New Skate Park

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Annual Budget

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Staffing

Department Heads

Team Building

Welcome Thiago Almeida

BCPC Board Members

BCPC Staff

IMAGINE BERKS Implementation



When IMAGINE BERKS was first launched in 2022, we knew we would soon be incorporating the Greenway, Park, and Recreation Plan's goals related to the placemaking focus area of IMAGINE BERKS. Putting that Plan into action involves a \$500k County investment in the plan to enhance recreation opportunities, promote health and wellbeing, and ensure inclusivity for all residents.

In 2023, 11 projects throughout the County's five planning regions were provided funds. The projects included everything from Riparian buffer repairs along the Saucony Creek Trail to the construction of a Storywalk in Mohnton Borough.



Providing outdoor recreation and entertainment opportunities is an essential piece of placemaking. However, not everyone is always able to enjoy these activities or amenities. The Splash Pad for Davey, a project which helps remove barriers for people of all ages and abilities to stay cool during the summer, highlighted the need for this.

The Reading Public Museum, trails are used heavily year round. Due to their popularity, maintenance and upgrades to the facilities are needed from time to time. In 2023, over 50,000 people utilized the Wyomissing Creek Trail system where the pedestrian bridge is located.

These two projects help highlight the community needs being filled across the wide range of outdoor recreation opportunities. Stay connected with IMAGINE Berks and keep up with the updates to the Greenways, Parks and Recreation Plan!

Building the Boroughs



On October 3rd, Planning Commission Staff along with their Imagine Berks colleagues at GRCA, RDA, BerksIDA, and RBAR hosted almost 90 attendees at the "Building the Boroughs: Developing Housing Choices" forum at the Perkins Student Center on the Penn State Berks Campus. Attendees gathered to hear presentations about the need for housing development and how they can best plan and financially prepare to address that need.

The program was kicked off by Chancellor Radha Pyati, who gave us a warm welcome. The County's four Main Street Managers and the Downtown Coordinator for Reading gave updates on what's happening in their localities. Jaime Perez and Mark Mohn presented on the state of the housing market and Joan London provided an overview of how to remediate blighted properties.



E. Jean Krack, Phoenixville Borough Manager and David Boelker, Phoenixville Borough Planning Director and Zoning Officer discussed the success of revitalization in the Borough with development of additional residential units after much planning and coordination. DCED Regional Director Fadia Halma provided an overview of funding opportunities for the County and all municipalities.

This was a very successful event. BCPC Staff look forward to collaborating with Pam Menet, Community and Economic Development to help the County's housing needs.





Planning Advice: Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure

Electric vehicles (EVs) are becoming increasingly common on roads and in garages across Berks County. Incentives for individuals, businesses, states, and local governments have expanded through tax incentives and funding with the passage of the federal Inflation Reduction Act. Many major auto makers have even planned to stop selling gasoline powered vehicles by 2040. How can Berks County residents and municipalities be better prepared for this shift?

The American Planning Association (APA) states that "The transforming market has implications for communities and for local governments, including land-use and development changes that need to be addressed in policy, programs, and regulation. In particular, planners and local government decision makers need to consider the land-use implications of the extensive build-out of EV charging infrastructure that is a necessary part of this new technology." These implications and needs are explored in the October 2022 issue of Zoning Practice released by the APA.

Building codes, parking ordinances, and zoning ordinances can influence EV infrastructure by creating design standards, requiring a minimum number of EV-ready spaces for new construction, or allowing EV charger installation as part of zoning ordinances. By addressing provisions for EV chargers, municipalities and project developers can spend less time and money on projects through a quicker approval process.

Multiple resources were explored regarding these needs including, but not limited to, guidance provided by the Sustainable Energy Action Committee (SEAC), PennDOT's EV Model Ordinance Toolkit, and best practices identified by the APA. As a result, Berks County Planning Commission staff recommends that municipalities in the County consider the following recommendations when preparing for the shift to electric vehicles (EVs).

BCPC STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS
Related to Planning and Zoning, Each Municipality Should:

1. Address EV chargers in comprehensive plans, supporting plans, zoning codes, and design guidelines that equitably serve the community, keeping in mind residents who do not have access to dedicated off-street parking.
2. Discuss EV infrastructure in the beginning stages of the land development process with developers.
3. Coordinate with the local electric utility provider on grid capacity and consider opportunities to install electric vehicle charging infrastructure as streets are rebuilt or as utility lines are improved.
4. Enact an EV charger readiness ordinance or building code requirement that clearly specifies requirements for new development, inventory existing and proposed locations of public EV charging infrastructure.
5. Adopt zoning language that defines the terms and requirements associated with EV charging.
6. Classify EV chargers as an accessory use to a site, allowable in all zones, where EV chargers are a primary use, allow them as an approved use that is not subject to a conditional use permit and zoning review.
7. Identify which levels and locations of EV charging may be approved administratively, and clearly identify those exceptions that require more involved approval.

Related to Parking Requirements, Each Municipality Should:

1. Allow spots with EV charging and charger-ready parking spaces to count toward minimum parking standards.
2. Allow for EV charging-related equipment in parking space minimums if it cannot be accommodated outside the parking area.
3. Update parking ordinances to restrict parking in EV charging spaces to charging EVs and enforce the ordinances with clear signage including citation information.
4. Count wheelchair accessible EV charging spaces as two standard parking spaces to allow for a wider spot and landing zone.
5. Require wheelchair accessible EV chargers be placed on an accessible route to the entrance of the facility.
6. Require clear signage and proper lighting to increase the convenience and safety of those who are charging EVs.

For more information visit: bit.ly/BCPC_EV

Zoning

New Processes (zoning and saldo ordinance amendment submissions)

Staff produced a Planning Advice containing recommended zoning regulations for electronic vehicle charging infrastructure.

Beginning July 1st, 2024, the Berks County Planning Commission began requesting that all municipalities submit all proposed ordinance amendments and adopted amendments with tracked changes. Tracked changes are a way of organizing and writing text that shows changes that have been made to the text. It is a notable function found in Microsoft Word, but it can be accomplished in various ways.

A common example is utilizing "redlined changes", whereby both the existing text that is being edited is shown crossed-out in red, and the new text that is to be added/changed is shown in red. If text is to be deleted with nothing replaced, it would simply be crossed out in red. Utilizing tracked changes is an efficient way of allowing someone to read a document and clearly identify changes that are being made to it, especially for the purpose of reviews. By requesting this procedural change, we hope to be able to provide the municipalities with more efficient services and thorough review comments for consideration in their land-use decision-making processes.

2024 Joint Comprehensive Plan Program Update

2024 was an exciting year for joint planning! In May, Berks County was awarded four (4) Municipal Assistance Program (MAP) Grants by the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic (DCED) totaling \$85,883. Combined, these projects represent 15 municipalities and their communities: (1) Douglass Township joining St. Lawrence Borough, Exeter, and Amity Townships, (2) Fleetwood, Maiden creek, and Richmond updating a previous plan, (3) Topton Borough, District, and Rockland Townships updating the Eastern Berks Joint Comprehensive Plan, and (4) Lenhartsville and Kutztown Boroughs and Maxatawny, Greenwich, and Albany Townships coming together for the first time with the Northeastern Berks Joint Comprehensive Plan.

Douglass and Fleetwood-Maiden creek-Richmond followed in September and October. Together, the plans reached approximate 1500 County residents in their initial stages of public outreach so far.

For 2024, BCPC added online mapping options to joint comprehensive plan development. This will enable municipalities to have interactive maps with a wider array of data available than on paper. They will have the option to zoom to areas within their joint planning region, select layers to display, and make PDF or print maps to include in information packets for public meetings, grant applications, and more.

Those plans in progress are expected to be adopted beginning with Eastern Berks in the Fall of 2025, followed by the rest in late-2025/early-2026.

The Eastern Berks Joint Comprehensive Plan was the first to kick off in July 2024 with their inaugural advisory committee meeting. St. Lawrence-Exeter-Amity-

ACT 247 Zoning Reviews

Under the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (Act 247), municipalities must submit any proposed revisions/amendments to their zoning ordinances/maps to the Berks County Planning Commission for review and comment. During 2024, the County Planning Commission reviewed

52 proposed zoning ordinance/map amendments

for our local municipalities. Topics included solar energy facilities, small wireless facilities, short-term rentals, anaerobic digesters, noise requirements, and more.

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 needed for land development projects.

Staff reviewed **232** of these in 2024.

Letters of Consistency

The Berks County Planning Commission wrote

35 Letters of Consistency

These letters document projects aligned with the Planning Commission's adopted plans and are often required or helpful for securing grant funding. Funding sources include DCED, PennDOT, DCNR, CFA, and others. Projects range from park and recreation upgrades to active transportation plans, municipal building improvements, joint comprehensive plans, and multi-modal enhancements.



Land Development



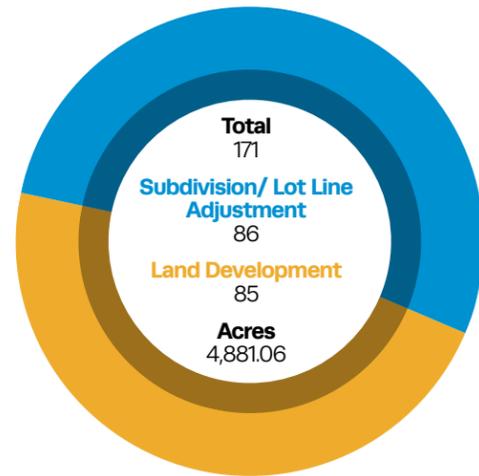
Subdivision & Land Development Report

January – December 2024

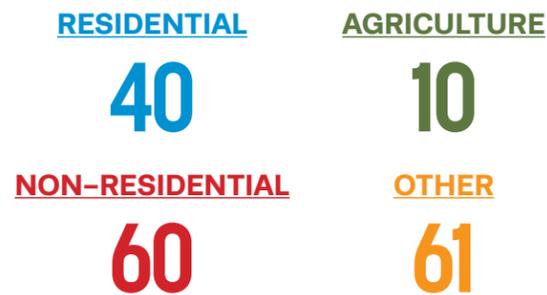
Berks County Planning Commission



Plans Reviewed



Types of Plans Reviewed



*Other includes Annexations, Municipal, Recreation, etc.
*Please refer to Monthly Subdivision Review Activity Report for details.

Types of Residential Development: 1,825 Total Housing Units



Non-Residential Development: 5,937,479 Total Sq. Ft.



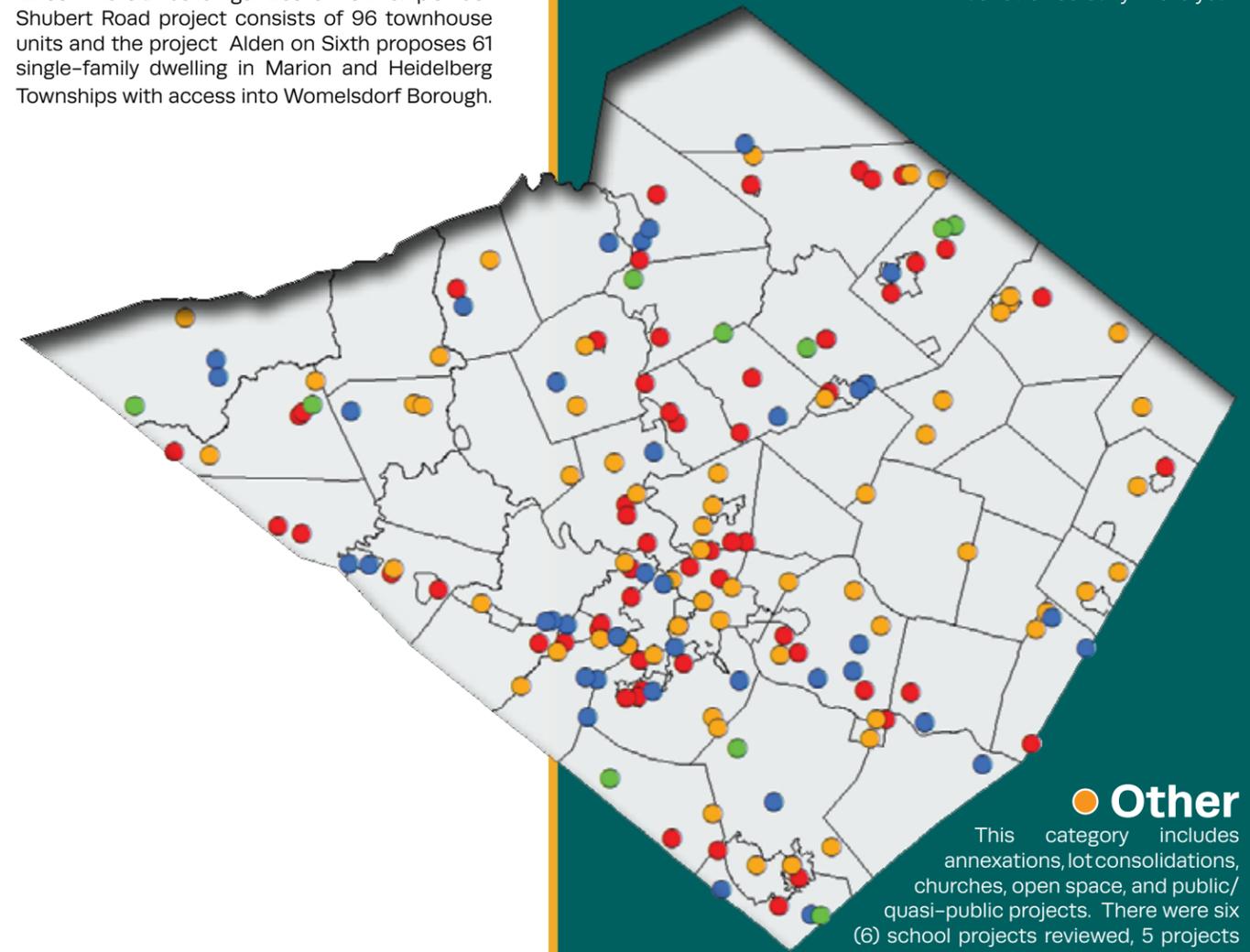
COUNTY	PLANS REVIEWED	HOUSING UNITS REVIEWED
Lehigh Valley	479	6,388
Lancaster	297	2,483
Montgomery	308	2,015
Lebanon	89	2,015
Berks	171	1,825
Chester	201	1,484

Residential

In 2024, Berks County saw a variety of housing proposals the largest being a mixed-use proposal called Broadcast District at Spring Township, Spring Township, with 785 total residential units, single-family, townhomes and apartments, and 12 commercial buildings. Bethel Township's 1931 Shubert Road project consists of 96 townhouse units and the project Alden on Sixth proposes 61 single-family dwelling in Marion and Heidelberg Townships with access into Womelsdorf Borough.

Non-Residential

The Tower Behavioral Health Campus was reviewed for a 27,000 square foot 2-story building addition. Several fast food and fuel/convenience stores were reviewed for rebuilds. A new warehouse project, GLC Lehigh Valley West, in Greenwich Township proposes 2 buildings totaling 1,293,000 square feet was reviewed early in the year.



Other

This category includes annexations, lot consolidations, churches, open space, and public/quasi-public projects. There were six (6) school projects reviewed, 5 projects for public schools and 1 project for a private school. Three (3) projects are for new schools, a K-3 Center in the Antietam School District, a new 5 & 6 grade building in the Muhlenberg School District and a new Lincoln Park Elementary (K-5) in the Wilson School District. Three (3) building addition projects are proposed: one for the Reading School District's Thomas Ford Elementary School, the Wilson School District's Southern Middle School and the Rehrersburg Christina School, a private school.

Agriculture

Nine (9) Agricultural plans were reviewed in 2024. Four (4) plans were for subdivisions. Four (4) plans were for poultry operations that will increase the number of barns by 6, and a plan for an Anerobic Digester facility in Caernarvon Township was reviewed.

Outreach Efforts

Facebook facebook.com/berkspcp

The Berks County Planning Commission maintains a Facebook page to keep residents and municipalities informed about important updates and events happening across the County. The page shares information on local activities, local government policies, and occasional state-level decisions that may impact the community. It also serves as a resource for municipalities, providing updates on planning initiatives, policy changes, and other relevant information. Followers can stay up to date on upcoming meetings, newsletters, holiday closures, and other County-related announcements. By providing these updates in one convenient place, the commission ensures that both residents and local governments have easy access to the latest news and developments affecting Berks County.

336 + **35**
2023 Followers 2024 New Followers

371
Followers

E-Flash

The Berks County Planning Commission publishes a monthly newsletter, E-Flash, to keep residents and municipalities informed about its latest initiatives and activities. Released mid-month, E-Flash highlights the commission's work, including attended public meetings, events, and field research. It also shares upcoming events from partner organizations and provides learning opportunities, such as webinars and in-person sessions. By offering these updates in one accessible format, E-Flash helps keep the community and local governments engaged with planning efforts and opportunities across Berks County.



948
Readers

79
Average Monthly Readers



Planning Chats

In 2024, the Planning Commission developed a new video segment called Planning Chats. This upcoming series will feature Commission members offering brief, accessible overviews on a variety of County planning topics, such as traffic, development, recreation, and partnerships with local municipalities. Planning Chats aims to engage the community and provide insight into the work happening across Berks County. Look for the launch of this segment in 2025.



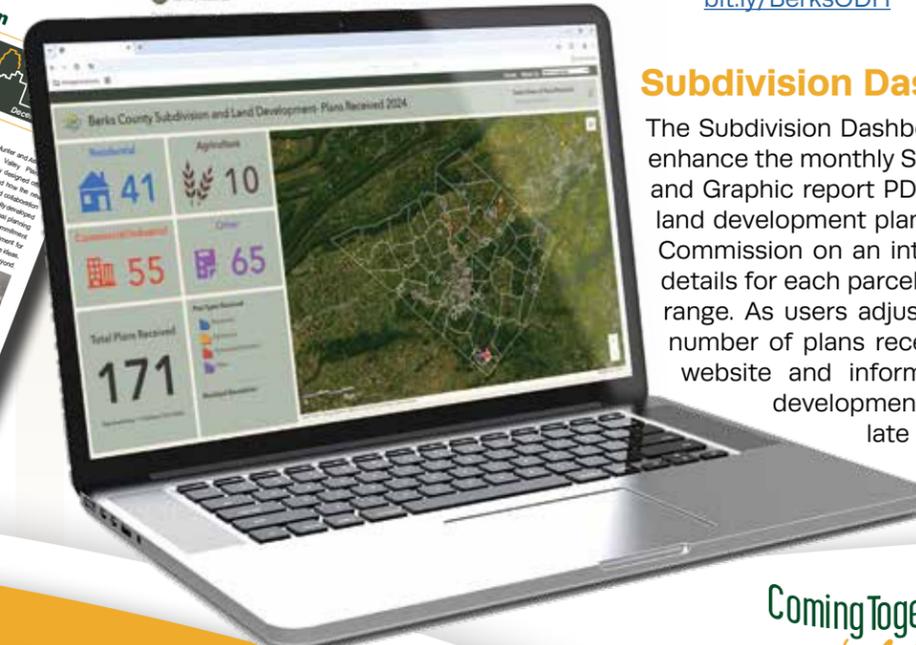
Website Improvements

A comprehensive redesign of our website allows for more creativity, a more intuitive, user-friendly experience while enhancing its visual appeal. This is to improve accessibility, navigation, and overall functionality. www.berkspa.gov/departments/planning-commission



Data Portal

The Berks County Data Hub is an important online resource that provides valuable data and tools for residents, businesses, and visitors. Created by the County of Berks, it promotes transparency, accountability, and economic growth through open access to information. The Berks County Planning Commission manages GIS data, meeting minutes, and other key documents, updating the archive regularly. We invite you to explore the Data Hub for both current and historical information. You can access it here bit.ly/BerksODH



Subdivision Dashboard

The Subdivision Dashboard is an interactive online tool that will enhance the monthly Subdivision and Land Development Review and Graphic report PDF. It allows users to view subdivision and land development plans received by the Berks County Planning Commission on an interactive map. Users can see application details for each parcel and filter plans by a specific date or date range. As users adjust the dates, the dashboard updates the number of plans received. It also provides links to the BCPC website and information about the subdivision and land development process. The dashboard was created in late 2024 and will be launched in mid 2025.

Transportation

Reading Area Transportation Study

The Reading Area Transportation Study (RATS) is the regional Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Reading (PA) metropolitan area and the balance of Berks County. RATS is comprised of two committees – the Technical Committee and the Coordinating Committee which are independent of, but coordinate with, both Berks County and the Berks County Planning Commission. The Technical Committee reviews items brought before the group and provides recommendations for items that require formal actions by the Coordinating Committee.

RATS facilitates the regional performance-based planning process that serves as the basis for spending State and Federal transportation funds allocated for improvements to streets, highways, bridges, public transit, and bicycle and pedestrian networks throughout the County. The transportation planning Staff of the Berks County Planning Commission also serves as the Staff to the MPO.

During 2024, the Coordinating Committee met 5 times, the Technical Committee met 5 times, the Technical and Coordinating Committee met once jointly, and there was one special meeting held for a presentation on the Eastern PA Alliance Freight Infrastructure Plan.

2024 Reading MPO Staff Coordination, Collaboration and Participation

Staff Participation

- PennDOT Connects Steering Committee
- PA Interagency Consultation Work Group (Air Quality Conformity)
- Pennsylvania Hazard Mitigation Plan Steering Committee
- PennDOT's Annual Planning Partners Conference

South Central Transit Authority (SCTA) is in the Transit Development Plan (TDP). The SCTA Board accepted their SCTA TDP '23 Final Transit Development Plan at their March 20, 2024, Board meeting.

Susquehanna Regional Transportation Partnership (SRTP) providing Transportation Demand Services throughout a 9-County region.
www.commutepa.org

Staff conducted nearly

88

traffic counts

in support of both PennDOT's Traffic Monitoring System and the Berks County bridge program and verified roadway inventories and performance measures on approximately

165

Highway Performance Monitoring System (HPMS) sample sections

5

TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETINGS

5

COORDINATING COMMITTEE MEETINGS

1

JOINT COORDINATING AND TECHNICAL COMMITTEES MEETING



Eastern Pennsylvania Freight Infrastructure Study

RATS Staff, along with the neighboring Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and the help of a consultant, finished the Eastern Pennsylvania Freight Infrastructure Plan. The project commenced in late 2022 and included coordination between the five MPOs – 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).

One of the major outcomes of the plan was the formal creation of the Eastern Pennsylvania Freight Alliance (EPFA). The EPFA is a 10-County region that includes the five member MPOs listed above. Because this region is one of the fastest-growing freight handling regions in the country, home to rapid development and redevelopment for warehouse and distribution functions, the group was formed to address issues associated with that development and implement recommendations that come out the Plan.

The Eastern PA Freight Infrastructure Plan is a blueprint for future investments and policies aimed at mitigating the impacts of freight traffic within the region, while also managing the expected continued expansion of freight uses within Eastern Pennsylvania.

The Plan was supported through an inclusive outreach program that included input from agency partners, industry and economic development decisionmakers, as well as the public through a survey that received more than 4,200 responses.



FFY 2025–2028

Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) update process began in March of 2023 in conjunction with the State Transportation Commission's (STC) Twelve-Year Program Update Public Comment Period. Throughout 2023, the Reading MPO Staff conducted outreach to both the public and municipalities to gather input on current issues and needs at that time. After receiving and reviewing responses, MPO Staff met with PennDOT and coordinated with South Central Transit Authority (SCTA) to establish proposed highway, bridge and transit project lists. The Reading MPO endorsed the Draft FFY 2025–2028 TIP highway, bridge and transit project listing in December 2023.

In January 2024, MPO Staff through coordinated efforts between PennDOT and MPO Staff added the following:

- **Air Quality Conformity Report**
- **Environmental Justice Summary**

The Air Quality Conformity Report ensures that Federal funding and approval are awarded to transportation activities that are consistent with air quality goals. Under the Clean Air Act Amendments (CAAA) of 1990, transportation and air quality modeling procedures must be coordinated to ensure that the transportation programs are consistent with the area's applicable State Implementation Plan (SIP). The TIP and Long Range Transportation Plan were tested for conformity and found to meet all requirements.

The Environmental Justice Summary uses standard data sets and methodology provided by PennDOT to assess project impacts on minorities and low-income populations. The report found no disproportionately high or adverse effects to minority and low-income populations throughout Berks County.

The FFY 2025–2028 TIP was adopted by the Reading Area Transportation Study Coordinating Committee on May 16, 2024. The US Department of Transportation approved the TIP on September 27, 2024. It covers the four-year period from October 1, 2024, through September 30, 2028.

The TIP contains the following:

- **112 highway, bridge and transit projects totaling \$365,803,185**
- **95 projects valued at \$284,194,806 addressing the highway system and bridges**
- **17 projects valued at \$81,608,379 addressing the transit system.**

There is also a statewide Interstate Management Program that is separate from the regional TIP. Two projects located in Berks County with a value of \$13,942,000 are included in that program.

MAJOR PROJECTS

included in the program:

3 projects

improving pavement, bridges and safety on PA 61 in northern Berks

3 projects

improving intersections and safety on PA 12 between Reading and PA 73

3 projects

improving congestion and safety on Papermill Road in Wyomissing Borough

Reconstruction

of the U.S. 422 and PA 724 intersection in Sinking Spring

5 mile

widening of U.S. 222 North in Maiden Creek and Richmond Townships

Completion of design and beginning of construction of Phase 1 of the U.S. 422 West Shore Bypass project, including reconstruction of both the Penn Avenue and Lancaster Avenue interchanges

Development of Long Range Transportation Plan Continues

The Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) examines socioeconomic trends that affect travel, the current state of the County transportation network, and describes multimodal transportation strategies to address identified transportation needs. The plan outlines the region's long-range transportation vision and projects the transportation needs of the County at least 20 years into the future to meet Federal requirements and to receive Federal funding. The LRTP must be updated every four years and projects identified in the plan are incorporated into the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

As part of the development process, State and Federal regulations require MPOs to establish a Steering Committee to provide input and feedback on the LRTP development process and review/comment on draft work tasks. The first LRTP Steering Committee meeting was held on August 19, 2024, with 19 participants including Staff representing RATS, Berks County Planning Commission, PennDOT District 5-0, PennDOT Central Office, Abilities in Motion, Reading Regional Airport Authority, South Central Transit Authority (SCTA), Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority (SRPRA), Burns Logistics Specialists, and Schuylkill River Greenways National Heritage Area. At this meeting, an overview of the LRTP was presented, roles and responsibilities of the Steering Committee were discussed, and the next steps in the development process were identified. As part of the next steps in the development of the LRTP, future public outreach efforts were reviewed and discussed.

In an effort to gather public input on the existing Vision Statement, Goals, and Objectives in the LRTP, 4 in-person public outreach meetings and 1 virtual public outreach meeting were held in October 2024. General feedback from those meetings included making minor edits to some of the wording in the Vision Statement, Goals, and Objectives as well as condensing some of the Goals and Objectives to make them more understandable. Current issues and needs were also discussed at the public outreach meetings. The survey responses provided were generally consistent with the discussions at the public outreach meetings. In total, 15 survey responses were received.

The second LRTP Steering Committee meeting was held on November 18, 2024, where Staff reviewed with the Committee the outcomes of the public outreach meetings and survey results.

For more information on the LRTP development process, please visit County of Berks – DRAFT FFY 2027–2050 Long Range Transportation Plan Portal

RATS Federal Certification Review

Every four years Federal agencies (FHWA, FTA, and EPA) conduct a Federal Certification Review for the RATS MPO where they review the MPO's planning processes and documents for compliance with Federal laws and regulations. The USDOT Secretary must certify that the Reading MPO is performing its duties consistent with Federal statutes and regulations.

The review process includes a site visit, review of all the MPO's planning products, and preparation of a report that summarizes the review. The site visit for the Reading MPO was held on October 30th and 31st of 2024 with a follow-up meeting on November 12, 2024.

The review focused on the overall planning process, the Long Range Transportation Plan, Transportation Improvement Program, transit planning as coordinated with South Central Transit Authority, the Reading MPO's public participation and outreach processes, and the MPO's safety planning and transportation operations which include freight planning and congestion management. The review team also hosted a public meeting on October 31, 2024, where the public provided opinions relating to their interactions with the Reading MPO.

The final report will document the entire review process. It will also identify Commendations for innovative, highly effective, and/or well thought out practices and procedures, Recommendations for improving existing compliant activities and, if necessary, Corrective Actions for addressing non-compliant activities. The results of the review will be received in early Spring 2025.

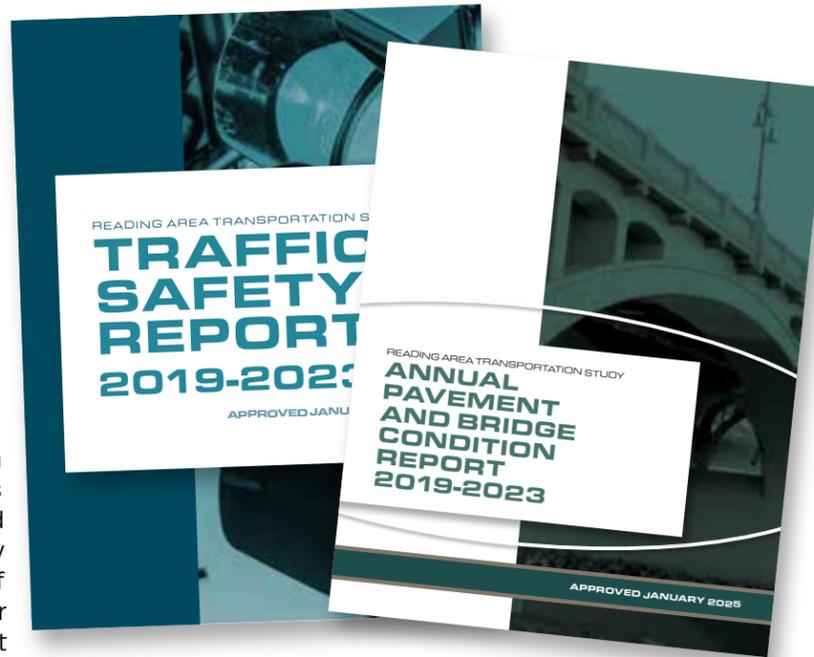
Transportation Reports

During 2024, the 2019–2023 editions of both the Reading Area Transportation Study (RATS) Annual Pavement and Bridge Condition Report and RATS Annual Traffic Safety Report were under development. These reports were created as a way to monitor our existing resources and system conditions to help inform our Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) and Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Both reports provide valuable information as a part of the performance-based planning and programming process and performance measures.

The Annual Traffic Safety Report builds on the data provided by PennDOT for the PM1 Safety Measures. These measures assess safety on all public roads and define a strategic approach that uses system information to make investment and policy decisions to achieve national performance goals. RATS plans and programs projects in support of the PennDOT safety targets utilizing a safe system approach. The goal of this report is to identify ways to reduce the number of crashes on Berks County roadways and prevent fatalities and serious injuries through the examination of crash trends and identification and programming of mitigation strategies.

The Annual Pavement and Bridge Condition Report expands on the data provided by PennDOT for the PM2 Pavement and Bridge Measures. These measures assess the conditions of pavement and bridges on the National Highway System (NHS). As Reading MPO's interests extend beyond those included in PennDOT's Performance Measure Annual Reports, the data was analyzed not only for road and bridge groups for PennDOT-owned assets but also for Local Federal Aid (LFA) roads and locally owned bridges.

Berks County Scorecards based on the Pennsylvania Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP) Priority Emphasis Areas and Safety Focus Areas have been created for both fatalities and suspected serious injuries. Berks County Scorecards have also been created based on pavement and bridge condition Performance Measures.



New to the Traffic Safety Report is the addition of Actual Values for the 2019–2023 Reading MPO Supporting Performance Measure Targets. Overall, RATS met the targets for both Number of Serious Injuries and Serious Injury Rate. The other 3 targets (Number of Fatalities, Fatality Rate, and Number of Non-motorized Fatalities and Serious Injuries) were not met. A summary of the findings for both the Traffic Safety Report and the Pavement and Bridge Report can be found in the Executive Summary at the beginning of the reports.

To gain a better understanding on traffic safety as well as road and bridge conditions across Berks County, you can view both of these plans here:

[Traffic Safety Report](#)
[Annual Pavement and Bridge Condition Report](#)



Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP)

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 a total of eight Local Technical Assistance (LTAP) training sessions during the 2024 calendar year.

The following is a list of the classes held in 2024:

- Public Works Safety
- Road Surface Management
- Seal Coat
- Pavement Markings:
- Applications and Maintenance VII
- Municipal Stormwater
- Facilities Program
- Stormwater Control Measures O & M
- Winter Maintenance Planning
- Winter Maintenance

8 TOTAL CLASSES

193 TOTAL REGISTRATIONS

149 TOTAL ATTENDED

19 MUNICIPALITIES REPRESENTED
OUT OF 72

7 COUNTIES REPRESENTED

Luzerne, Lehigh, Lebanon, Lancaster, Dauphin, Montgomery, Schuylkill



Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority

Arguably the highlight of 2024 for the SRPRA was the October meeting held in person at the Saucony Creek Franklin Street Station Brewpub in Downtown Reading on Monday, October 28th. The meeting was followed by a catered reception organized by the Berks County Planning Commission in partnership with the City of Reading and the Greater Reading Chamber alliance (GRCA).

SRPRA Board members came from their respective municipalities, including Berks, Chester, and Montgomery Counties, and Pottstown and Phoenixville Boroughs as well as the City of Reading. Over 100 stakeholders, including local and state elected officials and community leaders, attended to hear updates on the plan to establish reliable passenger rail service connecting Reading, Pottstown, and Phoenixville with Philadelphia and beyond. By all accounts, the gathering was a huge success and a huge step forward to securing public support for the restoration of passenger rail service to Reading.

One highlight was an update from the Federal Railroad Administration on the SRPRA's progress through the Corridor Identification and Development Program (CIDP). Key presentations were delivered by:

- **Barbara Moreno**, from the Federal Railroad Administration
- **Joe Barr**, Director of Network Development–East at Amtrak
- **Aaron C. Gantz**, Economic Development Director for the GRCA
- **Jack Gombach**, Managing Director for the City of Reading

each offering insights into the rail project's next steps and anticipated impact.

Authority Executive Director Tom Frawley and the SRPRA also recognized Brian O'Leary, Executive Director of the Chester County Planning Commission, for his dedicated service as a founding member of the SRPRA Board and to extend heartfelt congratulations on his well-deserved retirement. For more information about the Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority,

please visit gosrpra.com



Franklin Street Station Working Group Trip to Drexel University

A delegation of stakeholders from Reading and Berks County, traveled to Drexel University to meet with the president of Drexel University, John Fry. President Fry and his seasoned and experienced Staff shared keen insights and valuable historical experiences that will help guide Transit Oriented Development around the planned station.

The Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority is planning for the restoration of passenger rail service from Philadelphia to Reading. The trip to Drexel was instructive for the delegation as we are organizing the effort to redevelop downtown Reading, especially around the passenger train station.

The delegation included Aaron C. Gantz, Debra Millman and other Staff from the Greater Reading Chamber of Commerce, Tom Frawley, Jeremy Zaborowski, Mark Mohn, Jaime Perez, Sara Hailstone, Simon Wongolo, Jerome Skrincoski and Dave Myers from the Berks Alliance.



PA House Transportation Committee

Tom Frawley, Executive Director of the SRPRA and Director Hunter testified before the PA House Transportation Committee regarding the restoration of passenger rail from Philadelphia to Reading. This was the first time this House Committee has held a hearing in Reading at City Hall. Berks County Commissioner Michael Rivera, MBA, also sat on the panel. Majority Chair Edward Neilson is actually from Director Hunter's neck of the woods, West Mt. Airy! State Secretary of Transportation Mike Carroll and Deputy Secretary for Multimodal Transportation Meredith Biggica were also in attendance along with members of City Council and State Representatives Johnny Cepeda-Freytiz and Manny Guzman.



Mpact Transit and Community Conference

Director Hunter spent a great day in Philly with colleagues, Lucine Sihelnik and Thomas Frawley at the Mpact Transit + Community Conference's. Regional Day Tom Frawley and our consultant presented plans for the restoration of passenger rail service between Reading and Philadelphia via Pottstown and Phoenixville and a proposed Transit Oriented Development Overlay District in Reading.

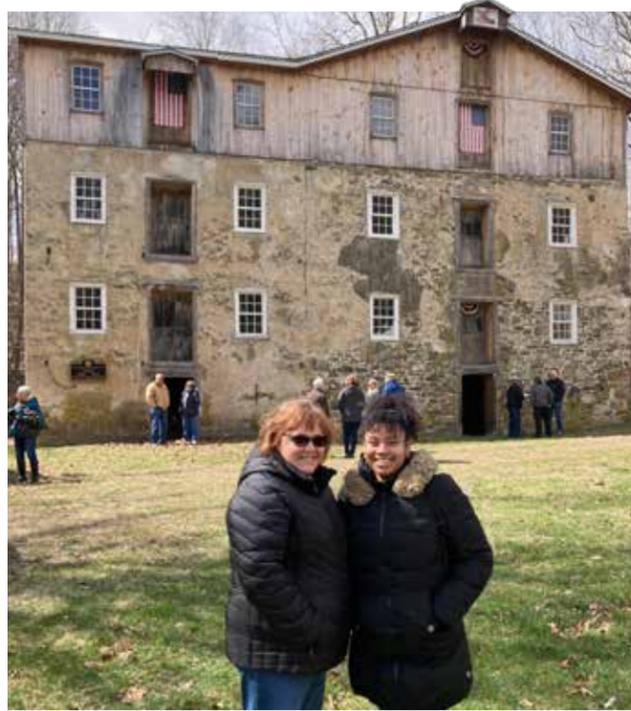
We made several good connections and even ran into, literally almost ran into developer and friend Jason Duckworth walking down Market Street.

LET'S ALL GET ON BOARD AND BRING THE TRAIN BACK TO

Reading!

Coming Together & Working Together
to Achieve Success!

BCPC Out & About



National Agricultural Day: Bobb's Mill Visit

BCPC Staff attended the National Agricultural Day presentation in Boyertown, PA, hosted by the Berks County Agriculture Department. The presentation was by PA Craftsmen Construction Co., a small local company with a two-man team who love restoring historic structures. The presentation consisted of visuals and narration on the process for preserving the historic Bobb's Mill located in Boyertown, PA. Bobb's Mill was in very bad condition and was one storm away from being destroyed. The project started in the summer of 2021 and while many renovations have been done, there is still much more to go.

In celebration of the National Agricultural Day celebration, it also included a visit to the site where the Bobb's mill is located and its surroundings. The site consisted of the 3 buildings – a dwelling, a barn, and the Bobb's Mill. Plans are to use it as an educational center in the future after restoration is completed.



Exeter School District Career Day

On March 22nd, Assistant Director, Ashley Showers was invited to discuss what it means to be a Planner with Exeter School District fourth graders. The Career Day event hosted 100+ fourth graders to learn about careers and career pathways. In addition to representing the Planning Commission, Ashley shared the importance of clean stormwater with the children. The children were able to explore other careers such as an operating room nurse, a graphic designer, a meteorologist, police detective and author. Partners in attendance at the Career Day were Berks Career and Technology Center as well as CareerLink.



NPC24, Minneapolis Minnesota

Executive Director David Hunter attended NPC24, the American Planning Association's National Conference in the Midwest. He reported that he attended some outstanding sessions on using best practices for comprehensive plan updates. As always, Director Hunter enjoyed time networking with fellow planners from across the Country, including Mitch Silver, former President of APA, and Antione Bryant, Managing Director of Gensler Detroit and former Planning Director for the City of Detroit.

PA APA Conference – Erie

Director Hunter was energized and inspired at the 2024 PA Chapter of the American Planning Association (APA) Conference in Erie. He was privileged to be surrounded by great planners such as State President Leah Eppinger, AICP, Ed LeClear, AICP, EDFP, Laura Ludwig and "KP", Kirsten Primm.

Also, Jeff Raykes and Director Hunter are the Co-Chairs of the PA APA Student Engagement Committee and they hosted the session "So You Want to be a Planner" with Trajan Jones who is also the host of a new podcast called City Vision which gives a great peak into planning.

Finally, the Lehigh Valley/Berks Section – APA Pennsylvania Chapter President Craig Beavers, CFM, CZO got the local contingent together for a pic at the Planners Social held at The Brewerrie At Union Station, a great example of adaptive reuse. Finally, Director Hunter was privileged to present Patty Elks with the Distinguished Planner of the year Award.





Preserved Farm Tour

Executive Director, David Hunter along with Assistant Director, Ashley Showers and Design Planner, Rick Royer had the opportunity to join then Deputy Director, Kim Fies from the Department of Agriculture on her annual easement monitoring visits. The County has preserved 828 farms that supply crops of feed corn, fruits and vegetables as well as livestock and poultry to the region and abroad.

These monitoring visits support the preservation program by connecting with the farm owners and engaging with them to understand their farming operations. The visits provided great insight into the diversified agricultural economy we have in the County. The information captured in the discussions were incorporated into the County's Ag Study called "Growing Berks."



Residence at Village Greens

BCPC Staff were invited to attend the Grand Opening and Ribbon Cutting for the Residence at Village Greens, the County's latest senior living complex located in Sinking Spring. The state-of-the-art, 130,000-square-foot building sits on land that is considered a historical haven in the region. The senior living community's 131 units will include 60 Independent Living, 51 Personal Care and 20 Memory Care apartments. The new community features spacious private residences in a variety of layouts.

The Residence at Village Greens offers Independent Living without a buy-in option. Some other amenities include restaurant-style dining, a fitness center, theater, beauty salon, sun rooms, a golf putting green and large community rooms. The senior living community also has cutting-edge safety and convenience technology. Staff were privileged to meet the developers, Michael Murchie, Managing Partner, Weathervane Capital Partners and Larry Rouvelas, CEO of IntegraCare. @ Terri Sanelli, Executive Operations Officer, and Heidi Lyons, Community Relations Director, were gracious hosts.



Berks Nature State-of-the-Environment Breakfast

Berks Nature is a local non-profit dedicated to protecting natural resources and providing environmental education. Their annual State of the Environment breakfast was held at the DoubleTree Hotel in Reading, with several BCPC Staff in attendance. Executive Director David Hunter spoke about BCPC's work and emphasized the importance of collaboration in planning. An exercise and brief discussion highlighted the land use decision-making process in Pennsylvania.

Attendees participated in a hands-on activity to create zoning districts on a map, showing the challenges of planning communities and balancing different land uses. The event also marked Berks Nature's 50th anniversary and celebrated the 50 community conversations held throughout the year to help shape the organization's future. BCPC values its partnership with Berks Nature and looks forward to continued collaboration.



2024 Statewide Active Transportation Summit – "Crossing the Road"

In June, Planner Devon Hain attended the Statewide Active Transportation Summit in York. Sessions attended explored key elements of active transportation including trends of non motorized transportation users, funding, complete streets, regional planning, public engagement, equity, and how to use new technology and data to improve bicyclist safety. Examples of active transportation infrastructure and recent improvements were seen on the Walking Tour of Downtown York including cycle tracks, multi-use trails, sidewalks, crosswalks, Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons, walkable alleys, and the improved connections to the redesigned Rapid transit Downtown York Transfer Center. The discussion and exploration of these topics with other active transportation planners, engineers, and advocates provided valuable information to consider when planning for County and municipal level active transportation networks.



The SWAG Bus is here

On May 4th, The Berks County Conservation District revealed for the first time the SWAG Bus, which stands for Soil, Water and Agriculture. The SWAG Bus is a mobile educational center with many activities that kids and adults alike can parttake in. Highlights of the bus include an augmented reality sandbox along with other hands-on displays to interact with.

If you'd like more information or would like to book the bus, contact [Jennifer Brooks](#) at Berks County Conservation District.

Discover AG Podcast Live

Community and Economic Development Director Pam Menet shared this:

How do I express so many thanks for a fabulous evening with Discover Ag at Reading Area Community College Miller Center last Thursday? I will jump right in! Prior to Tara Vander Dussen and Natalie Kovarik sampling some of Berks County's finest food products, our pre-event goodies featured ACEC Farm and Market, PURE WILD TEA LLC, Allegheny Valley Farm, WayHar Farms, Milk Punch from the Berks Dairy Princess and Court, Tom Sturgis Pretzels Inc, AND a total fan favorite Uglies from Dieffenbach's Snacks.

What a way to celebrate LOCAL! Remember that at County of Berks, PA, we work to support Ag and Agri-businesses every day!



GRCA Annual Picnic

Executive Director, David Hunter, along with Assistant Director, Ashley Showers and Office Support V, Shailyn Hernandez attended The Greater Reading Chamber Alliance (GRCA) Annual Picnic, that brought together community members, businesses, and local leaders. The event provided a platform for team building, networking, and celebrating the successes of the year. Imagine Berks, a strategic initiative aimed at revitalizing the County, has identified placemaking as a key focus area. This initiative seeks to enhance the community's physical spaces, making them more attractive and functional for residents and visitors alike. The development and investment by the County into the Redner's Event Center through American Rescue Plan Funds and Imagine Berks Placemaking funds puts on display the implementation of Imagine Berks. Staff enjoyed a tour of the Redner's Event Center which provided the BCPC team a chance to brainstorm on public outreach events which could utilize the space.



New Skate Park Ramps Up Excitement

Reading Unveils New Skate Park with Grand Opening Celebration

It was an exciting day for the City of Reading and Berks County. The long-awaited Reading Skatepark at 600 Canal Street was officially opened following a ribbon-cutting ceremony. The park was made possible by the vision of the Reading Skatepark Association, and a number of public and private partners and elected officials. The completion of the skatepark also satisfies one of the goals of our Greenway, Park, and Recreation plan for the Metro area – which included supporting and completing the construction of the park. Congrats to all of the partners involved on creating this beautiful new skatepark for all to enjoy.



Data

2024 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 2023 approved budget for both revenues and expenses as well as the actual revenues and expenses.

	2024 Approved Budget	2024 Actual Budget
PERSONNEL EXPENSES		
Wages – Staff	\$202,551.00	\$189,034.00
Wages – Part time no benefits	\$1,005,703.00	\$889,230.00
FICA	\$90,619.00	\$79,413.00
Fringe	\$419,477.00	\$381,247.00
Sub Total – Personnel	\$1,718,350.00	\$1,538,924.00
OPERATING EXPENSE		
Sub Total – Operating	X	X
Building Indirect Costs	\$63,765.00	\$63,765.00
Other Indirect Costs	\$237,900.00	\$237,900.00
Sub Total – Indirect	\$301,665.00	\$301,665.00
Total Budgeted Expenditures	\$2,020,015.00	\$1,840,589.00
REVENUE		
CDBG	\$120,000.00	\$120,000.00
FTA Revenue	\$101,460.00	\$72,185.00
RATS State Revenue	\$60,000.00	\$59,326.00
RATS Federal Revenue	\$450,000.00	\$440,390.00
BCMS4 Cooperative Ed Program	\$8,300.00	\$11,255.00
UCC Fees	\$11,100.00	\$15,325.00
Joint Comprehensive Plan Updates	\$49,133.00	\$20,806.00
SALDO Fees	\$105,000.00	\$154,110.00
SALDO Recording Fee	\$1,500.00	\$4,300.00
Total Budgeted Revenues	\$906,493.00	\$897,697.00

Staffing



Department Heads

Department Heads and our Assistant Directors had a fun filled fellowship with our fearless leader, Pamela Shupp Menet AICP, CEcD at our Holiday Lunch. So enjoy working with colleagues Dan Fogarty, Amber Columbo, Kim Fies, Amanda Burkard-Sell, and of course my right hand, Ashley Showers.



BERKS COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPEMENT

Team Building



Berks Planning Summer Spot

In 2024, the Planning Commission held a creative team-building activity called the Berks Planning Summer Spot. Staff members took a laminated circle graphic with them on summer vacations or special trips and captured photos featuring the graphic in various locations. In the fall, the team gathered to share the photos during a Staff meeting, adding a fun twist by guessing who took each photo and where it was taken. The activity encouraged connection, and was a fun way to share vacation spots.



Welcome!

Thiago Almeida

Thiago is an urban planner and designer with a dual bachelor's degree in architecture and urban planning from Brazil's Federal University of Santa Maria and a master's in urban planning and design from the University of Georgia. His background includes work in asset-based community development, transportation studies, adaptive reuse of historic structures, land use, zoning reviews, and community engagement. His focus interests are urban design, housing, pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure, and geospatial analysis—bringing together design and policy insight to support more connected, sustainable, equitable, and resilient communities.

Since joining the Berks County Planning Commission in September 2024, Thiago has served as a Planner II/GIS professional, supporting geospatial data maintenance, analysis, and visualization. His approach combines technical skills with a commitment to people-centered design, helping to turn spatial data into tools for better planning and informed decision-making.

2024 BCPC Board Members



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CHAIR



LISA GONZALEZ
VICE-CHAIR



LEE C. OLSEN, AIA, NCARB
SECRETARY



GLENN R. KNOBLAUCH



THOMAS C. McKEON
AICP, CECD



SARAH PHILLIPS



DAVID MATTES



MIGUEL A. HERRERA



JODI L. GAUKER



DAVID N. HUNTER, AICP
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



DAVID N. PERIS
ASSISTANT
COUNTY SOLICITOR

2024 BCPC Staff



BERKS COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



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If you have business with the Planning Commission, please contact our office to schedule an appointment



Coming Together & Working Together
to Achieve Success!