



# Bucks2040 Vision Plan

Draft | Fall 2023

**DRAFT PLAN**



**BCPC**  
Bucks County Planning Commission





# Bucks2040 Vision Plan

A Comprehensive Plan and Vision Document  
for Bucks County, Pennsylvania



Adopted by the Bucks County Board of Commissioners \_\_\_\_\_

Prepared by the Bucks County Planning Commission



**BCPC**

Bucks County Planning Commission



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Bucks County Planning Commission



## From the Executive Director

Welcome to **Bucks2040** *Building Our Future, Together*, our new comprehensive plan for Bucks County. As this plan's initial document, the **Bucks2040** Vision Plan represents a body of planning work spanning three years and charts a vision for the next decade and beyond.

To understand our future, we must acknowledge our past. The Bucks County Planning Commission (BCPC) was created in 1951 as a response to the expansive development of Levittown and lower Bucks County. Concerns over rapidly disappearing farmland and the transformation of the lower County from a rural landscape to a semi-urban area necessitated a land use planning initiative.

Ten years later the county adopted its first comprehensive plan. This plan would serve as a guide for future land use and growth expectations. It was visionary and held the distinction of being the first countywide comprehensive plan to be adopted in the Commonwealth. It was broad-reaching and bold in its predictions for future growth centers, planning for growth and development into the year 1980.

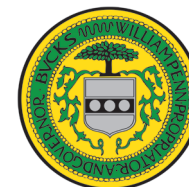
When the plan was adopted, only 65 square miles, or 10.4 percent of the county, were considered developed. Sixty-two years later 312 square miles, or 41 percent of the county, are considered developed. The landmark 1926 United States Supreme Court ruling, *Village of Euclid v. Ambler Realty Co.*, set the stage for the "Euclidean" zoning ordinances that would govern our county's growth, then and now. That ruling enabled municipalities to separate land uses and spread them out by implementing zoning districts. The 1961 comprehensive



plan identified the effect of this zoning as "sprawl" and "scatteration" and this pattern continued to be a theme in subsequent county comprehensive plans, including our most recent plan, **Bucks County Comprehensive Plan (2011)**.

With an eye toward the future, we are revisiting our comprehensive plan process and are creating the **Bucks2040** Vision Plan. Where the 1961 plan sought to predict growth and provide guidance for future development patterns, the **Bucks2040** plan ushers in a new type of plan which is "resident issue" focused. As an "implementable plan," the **Bucks2040** Vision Plan recognizes that planning is a living process. We will place less emphasis on the production of a static document and more emphasis on active, ongoing public engagement to identify and address issues of importance. Our work on these issues will be ongoing and forward-looking, well beyond the compilation of this vision plan document.

Many of the development goals identified in the 1961 plan remain true today. The objectives of the 1961 plan correlate directly to what we've learned through our **Bucks2040** public and stakeholder engagement: the need for protecting natural resources and open space, managing sprawl, providing attainable housing for all, and economic vitality, remain just as important today as they did 62 years ago.

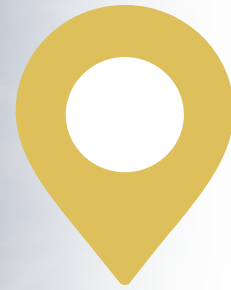
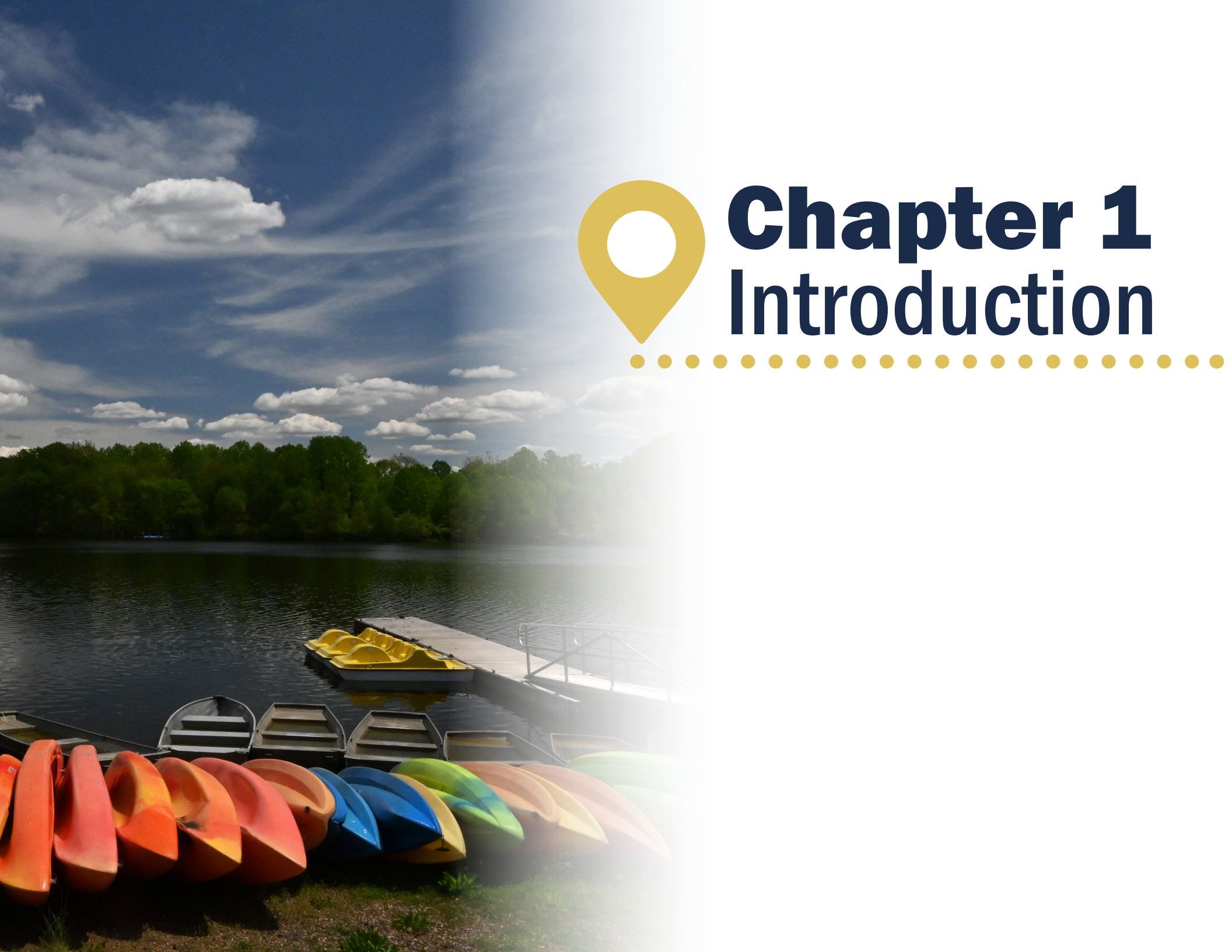


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# Chapter 1

## Introduction







**Bucks2040:** *Building Our Future, Together*, Bucks County's new and updated comprehensive plan forms a shared vision for the county and sets a direction for its policies and programs. **Bucks2040** focuses on the issues most important to resident quality of life and shows how planning can help our communities achieve better land use outcomes.

This document, **Bucks2040** Vision Plan, serves as an introduction to the process and issues of focus for the **Bucks2040** comprehensive plan. The **Bucks2040** Vision Plan is intended to inform and frame the discussion of our shared future, so that we may continue to engage with our stakeholders and collectively decide on practical and measurable strategies for achieving our goals.





## How This Plan is Different

Comprehensive plans are land use policy guides, helping communities make plans and decisions on priorities such as zoning, open space preservation, and water resources planning. The role of a county comprehensive plan is to educate, coordinate, and provide common direction for municipalities and other stakeholders in land use and planning issues of regional importance.

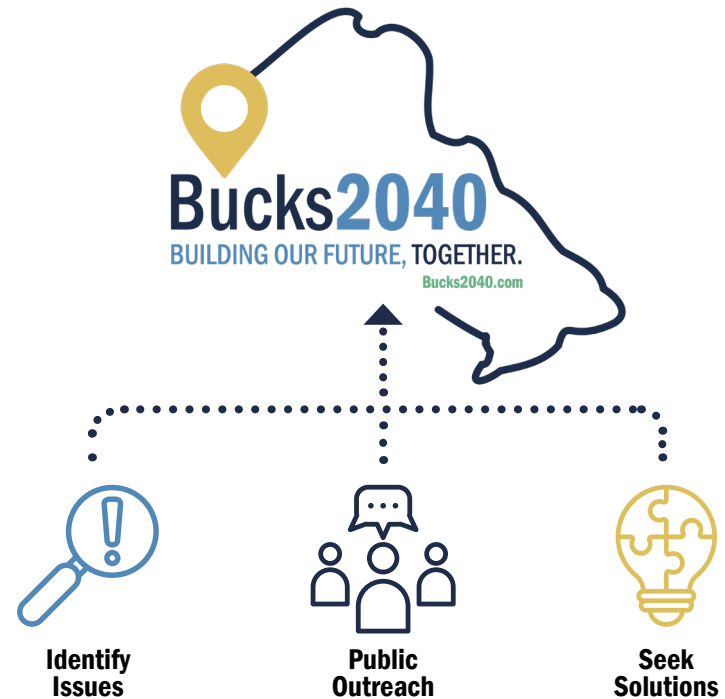
Comprehensive plans are developed in accordance with the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (PaMPC), which is the state enabling legislation that governs planning, zoning, and subdivision and land development in Pennsylvania. The PaMPC prescribes subplans or “elements” to be included in a community’s comprehensive plan (e.g., a plan for land use, a plan for housing, and a plan for historic preservation).

Most comprehensive plans are developed in a “top-down” approach with the plan direction determined mostly by the governing bodies, planning commissions, and support staff of the municipality or county. Each planning element is given equal weight so critical community issues can be left competing with less urgent priorities. Traditional comprehensive plans try to tackle everything at once, and the plans are often overly broad and have unrealistic action items. After adoption many of these comprehensive plans sit on a shelf – never to be consulted – until when it comes time to develop a new plan.

**Bucks2040** is different in that it is an “implementable” comprehensive plan. Implementable comprehensive plans seek to identify solutions to land use problems through a community-based planning process. An implementable plan is structured around the issues most important to

the community rather than traditional comprehensive plan elements. The plan vision and policies for implementable comprehensive plans are products of considered community outreach, including surveys, workshops, and stakeholder meetings. The successful outcome of an implementable plan enables an ongoing planning process as the product, not a document that sits idly on a bookshelf.

## Implementable Plan Process





**238,830**  
HOUSEHOLDS



**646,538**  
RESIDENTS



**6**  
HOSPITALS



**9**  
COLLEGES AND  
UNIVERSITIES



**14**  
SCHOOL DISTRICTS



**54**  
MUNICIPALITIES



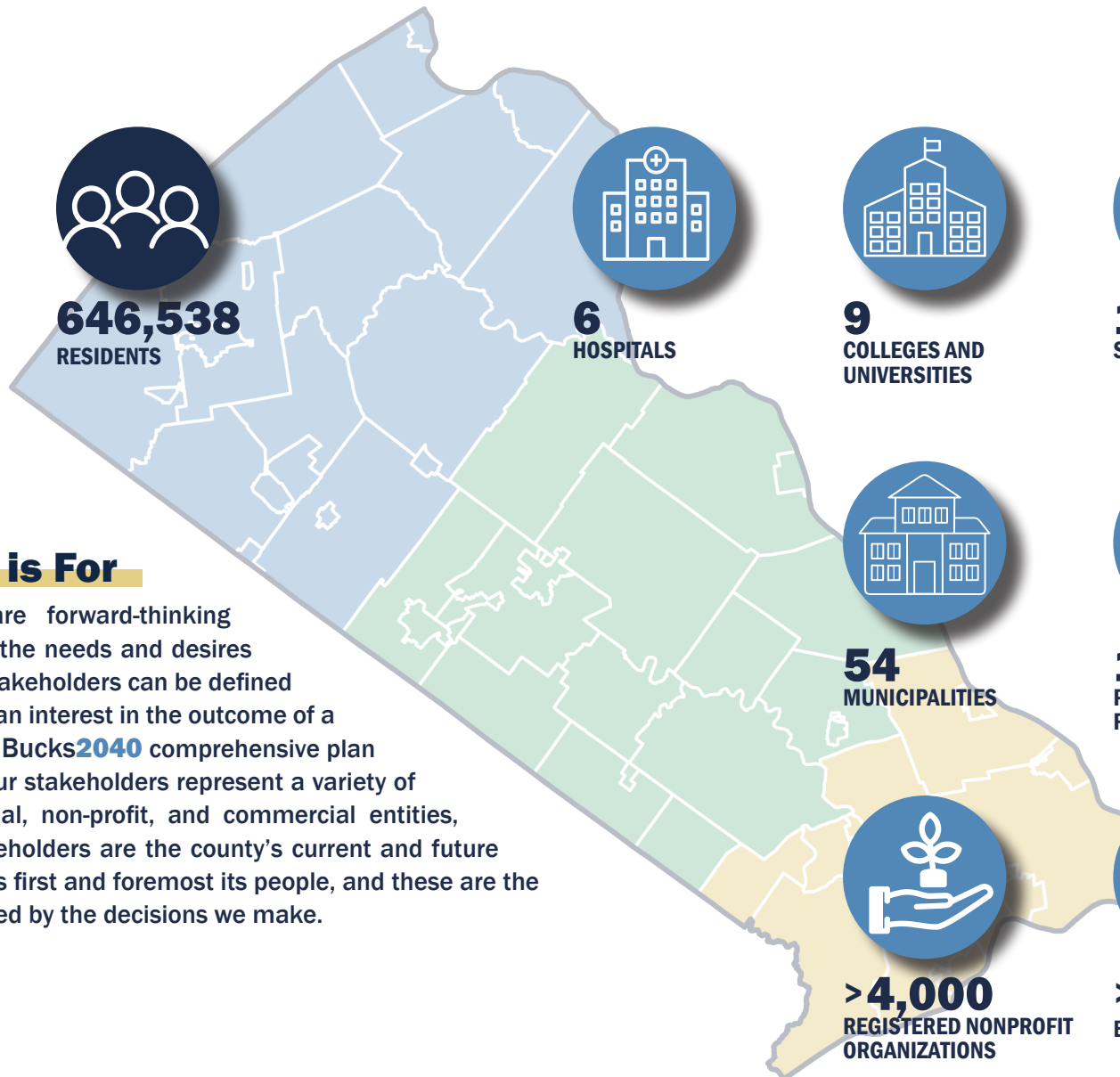
**162**  
POLICE, FIRE, AND  
RESCUE PROVIDERS



**> 4,000**  
REGISTERED NONPROFIT  
ORGANIZATIONS



**> 19,000**  
BUSINESSES

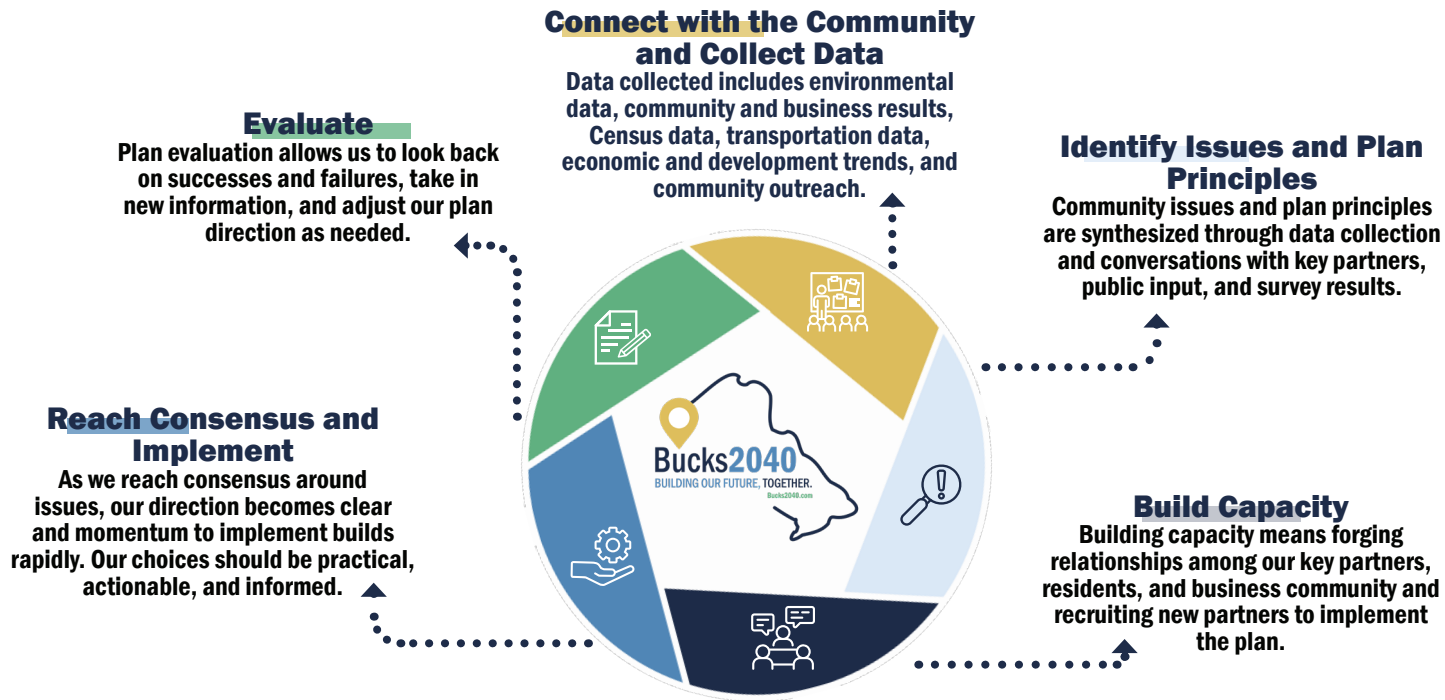


## Who This Plan is For

Comprehensive plans are forward-thinking and intended to plan for the needs and desires of future stakeholders. Stakeholders can be defined as a person or party with an interest in the outcome of a decision or direction. The Bucks2040 comprehensive plan understands that while our stakeholders represent a variety of governmental, institutional, non-profit, and commercial entities, our most important stakeholders are the county's current and future residents. Bucks County is first and foremost its people, and these are the stakeholders most affected by the decisions we make.



## Not Just a Plan, But a Process



The purpose of the **Bucks2040** Vision Plan is to establish the principles, priority issues and the direction of **Bucks2040**. However, the process by which we engage our partners is far more critical to the success of **Bucks2040** than any document we produce. This plan is a documentation of the steps taken toward identifying and understanding the needs of our Bucks County stakeholders.

The **Bucks2040** comprehensive plan is an ongoing conversation with Bucks County residents, community leaders, and other stakeholders and does not end with the adoption of this planning document. Building on our shared values of equity, sustainability, resilience, and health and well-being, we will continue to identify common issues, develop coalitions, and tackle real-world problems together.

# How We Listened



Connecting with our communities is a key part of the Bucks2040 planning process. During the first step of our plan process (Connect with the Community and Collect Data) we conducted a variety of outreach and listening activities, including...

- Promoting Bucks2040 through social media and newsletter articles
- Developing a Bucks2040 webpage where residents and other stakeholders could learn about the plan and comment on it
- Hosting open house meetings in the three county subregions to meet with residents and local officials and directly gather community opinion
- Surveying over 1,000 residents and 400 businesses for their opinions on a variety of community and business issues
- Meeting with over 200 participants from municipal, non-profit, institutional, business, and public agency partners to talk about Bucks2040 and learn about their perspective on the county's planning, land use, transportation, economic, and other quality-of-life issues

“BCPC Executive Director Evan Stone, speaks with former BCPC Deputy Director, Richard Cylinder at one of the Bucks2040 open house meetings.

Mr. Cylinder was a co-author of the county's first comprehensive plan in 1961 and still resides in the county.





## Survey Results Summary

Public comment we received on questions we asked our resident and business communities during our outreach gave insights into their concerns, values, and hopes for Bucks County. What we heard from our residents and business communities can be summarized into common themes:

### Business Survey



*The biggest challenges Bucks County will face in the next five to ten years:*

*What factors most negatively impacted the ability to start up, operate and/or generate business in Bucks County?*



Workforce



Regulation/  
Policy



Workforce



COVID



COVID  
Resiliency



School



Funding



Business  
Environment

### Resident Survey



*My action item for the Bucks2040 Comprehensive Plan would be...*

*What is something you consider to be important to the future of Bucks County?*



Energy



Open Space



Infrastructure



Open Space



Development



Services



Housing



Development



Funding



Regulation/  
Policy



Walkability



Business



## Plan Principles

Plan principles provide a way of ensuring decision-making embodies a community’s values, ethics, and desired vision of the future. When a new direction for the county is considered — whether funding, programming, or policy — we can ask the question of whether the decision we are making is in keeping with our plan principles. If not, we should reconsider and adjust in a way that reflects these core values.

The Bucks2040 plan principles can help make sure we’re on the right path by holding a mirror to our choices as we take actions that affect our future. Our plan principles for Bucks2040 are: .....



### Equity

The just and fair inclusion into a society in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential.



### Sustainability

Meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.



### Resilience

The ability of a community to anticipate risk, limit impact, and build capacity to face change in an uncertain world.



### Health and Well-Being

The social, economic, environmental, cultural, and political conditions people need to thrive.





# Chapter 2

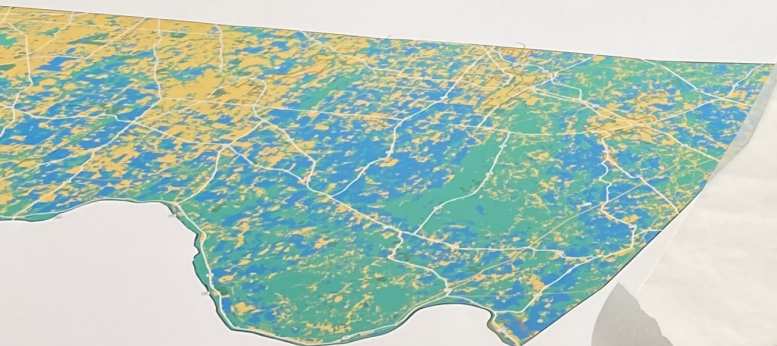
## Where We Are





## A Decade of Change

The Bucks County Planning Commission last updated its comprehensive plan in 2011. The 2011 plan embodied the policies of smart growth, resource preservation, and sound economic development to provide a simple, yet clear direction for Bucks County.



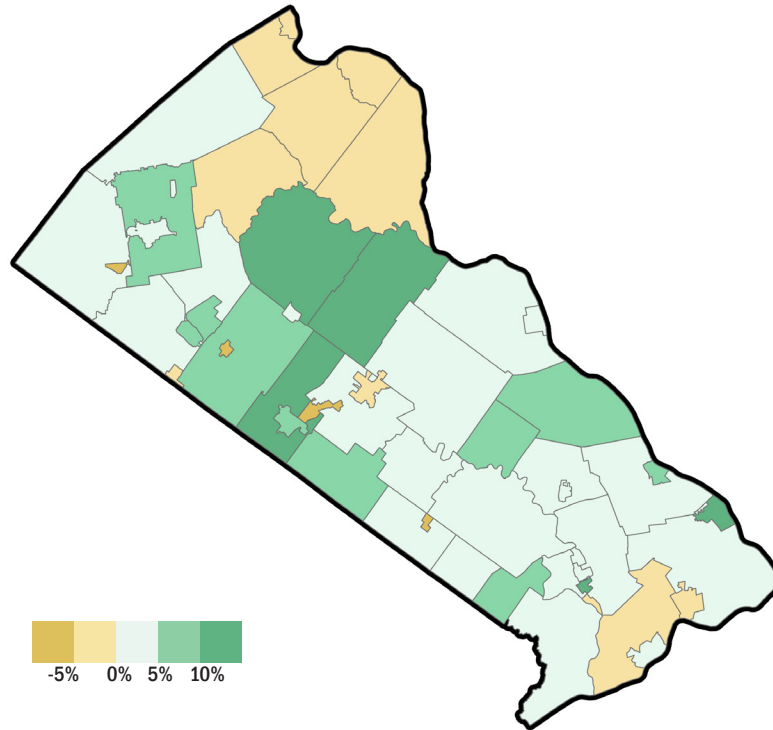
Since the adoption of the *Bucks County Comprehensive Plan Update (2011)*, the BCPC has:

- Updated **17** municipal comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances and **3** downtown revitalization plans.
- Worked with **32** of the county's 54 municipalities under the **Bucks County Municipal Economic Development Initiative (MEDI)**.
- Completed **2 Transportation and Community Development Initiative studies** and the **Upper Bucks Public Transportation Feasibility Study (2022)**.
- Preserved almost **6,500** acres of farmland and **1,500** acres of open space (2011-2023).
- Developed the **Bucks County Open Space and Greenways Plan (2012)**, conducted five countywide trail studies and three municipal trail plans
- Constructed **11.4** miles of county trails, with an additional **11.8** miles in the pipeline
- Developed and launched the **Bucks County Maps and Data Portal**, providing downloadable datasets on parcel boundaries municipal boundaries, impervious surfaces, floodplains, streams, and subwatersheds
- Established the new **Sustainability** planning section of the BCPC
- Updated the **Bucks County Hazard Mitigation Plan (2021)** and **Bucks County, Pennsylvania, 2018-2028 Municipal Waste Management Plan (2018)**, and initiated the **Bucks County Climate Action Plan** and **Bucks County Operations Sustainability Plan**.



## Our Changing Population

Population, 2010 - 2020



### Racial and Ethnic Diversity

	2010	2020	
White alone	544,733	521,575	↓ -4.0%
Black or African American alone	18,970	25,277	↑ 17.8%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	644	531	↓ -29.2%
Asian alone	13,545	35,053	↑ 46.7%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone	141	143	↑ 3.6%
Some Other Race alone	563	2,512	↑ 209%
Population of two or more races	5,034	21,677	↑ 164%
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	14,005	39,770	↑ 48.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>597,635</b>	<b>646,538</b>	<b>↑ 3.4%</b>

**37.5%** ..... **42.2%**  
Residents 25+ with Bachelor's Degree or higher

**14.1%** .. **18.7%**  
Residents 65+

**\$74,828** .. **\$93,181**  
Median Household Income

**41** .. **44**  
Median Age

**4.9%** .. **5.6%**  
Poverty Rate

**2010** | **2020**

Source: US ACS Estimates 2010 and 2020, US Census 2010 and 2020.



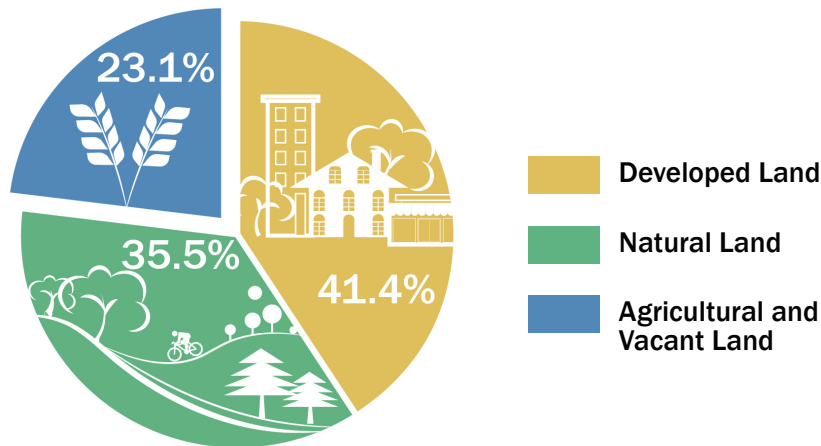
## Our Changing Land Use

Land use is how people have shaped and managed the natural and built environment. Land use data can provide insights into how the county's landscape has changed through time.

Bucks County has 397,700 acres of land in total: 41.4 percent comprise developed land, including residential, commercial, industrial, institutional, transportation, and utility land use; 35.5 percent comprise preserved open space, recreational, and natural resource-restricted land use. The remaining 23.1 percent are agricultural and vacant land use.

Between 1990 and 2023 developed land increased by 42 percent and agricultural and vacant land use decreased by one-third. Over 88 percent of the increase in residential land use can be accounted for by single-family residential development.

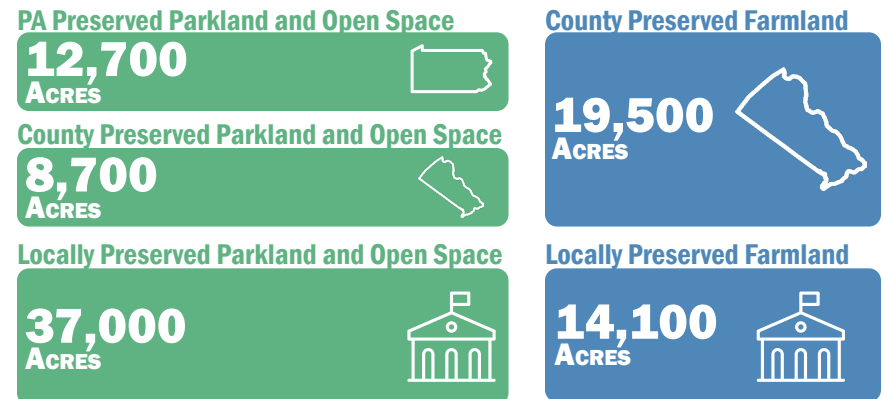
### Bucks County Land Use 2023



## Preservation Success

County and municipal open space and agricultural land preservation programs have been instrumental in preserving the county's natural and agricultural legacy. Open space preservation has also been an effective tool in slowing suburban sprawl. Since the inception of the Bucks County Agricultural Preservation Program (BCAPP) in 1989, the county and its municipal partners have preserved over 19,500 acres of farmland through this program. Local preservation initiatives have been even more successful, preserving another 14,100 acres of farmland and 37,000 acres of parkland.

### Bucks County Total Preserved Land 2023



“Bucks County has preserved over **92,000 acres**, about **23 percent** of the county's total land.



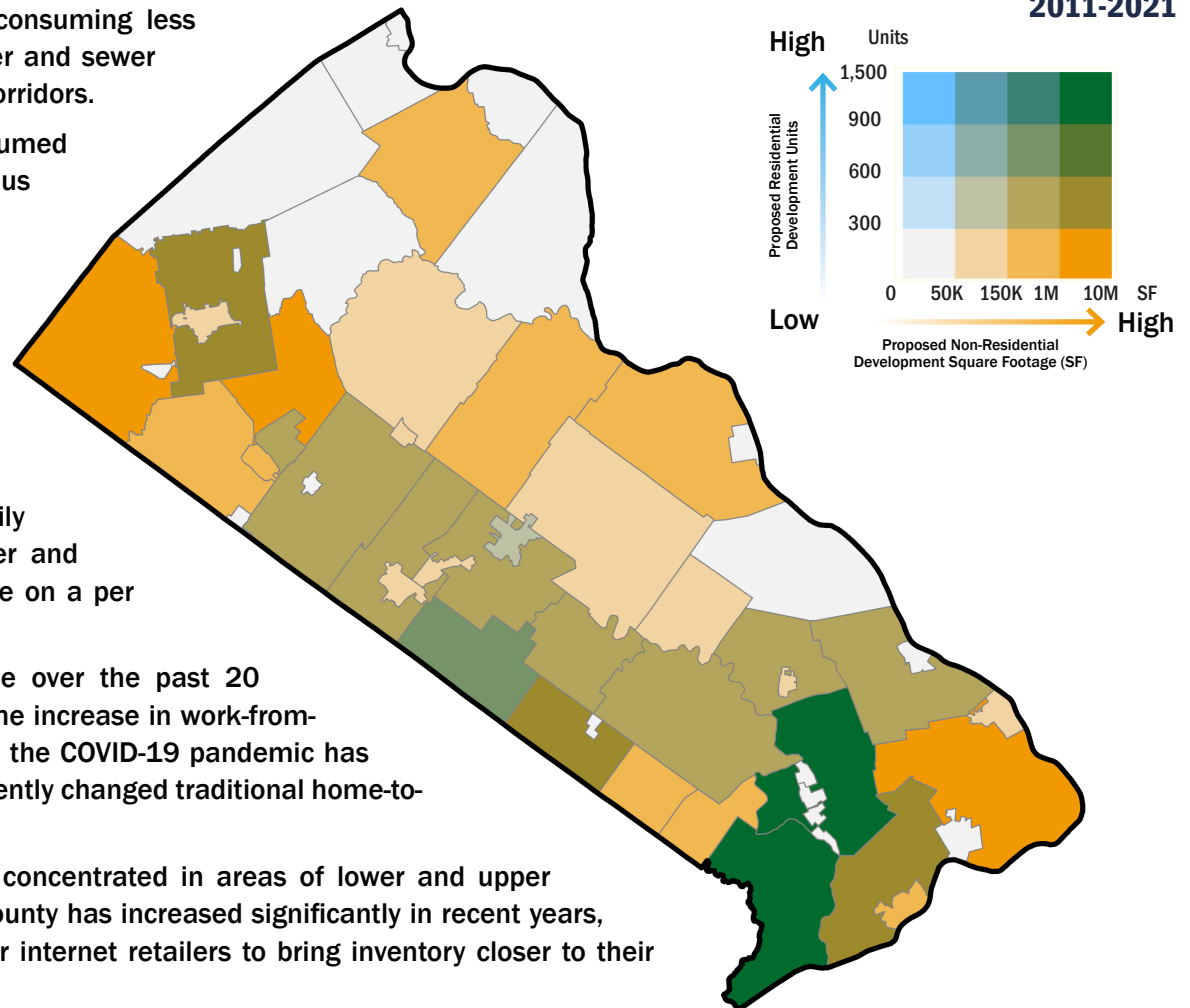
## Patterns of Growth

Development has evolved since the mid-2000s, consuming less land and concentrating in municipalities with water and sewer infrastructure and access to major transportation corridors.

New single-family homes — which, by far, have consumed the most farmland and vacant land over the previous decades — are now less commonly proposed. Between 1991 and 2006, over 74,000 housing units were proposed for development, and 58 percent of these units were single-family homes. Over the next 16 years about 16,000 units were proposed, and only 25 percent of these homes were single-family dwellings, with the remaining dwelling types consisting of twins, townhouses, and multifamily housing. These housing types rely on public water and sewer service and are much less land consumptive on a per unit basis.

The demand for office space has been negligible over the past 20 years, due to overbuilding in the 1980s and 90s. The increase in work-from-home arrangements for knowledge workers due to the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated office vacancies and may have permanently changed traditional home-to-office commuting patterns.

Warehouse and commercial development mostly concentrated in areas of lower and upper Bucks County. Proposed warehouse space in the county has increased significantly in recent years, fueled by growth in e-commerce and the desire for internet retailers to bring inventory closer to their customer base.





# Chapter 3

# The Issues



## Issues and Priorities Towards 2040

**Bucks2040** identifies seven issues of greatest importance to Bucks County as we move toward the year 2040. Common themes run across issues, including expanding opportunity, making connections, improving what we have, and anticipating new challenges. Each issue also reflects our plan principles of Equity, Sustainability, Resilience, and Health and Well-Being. Our issues for **Bucks2040** are:



### Make Housing More Attainable

Attainable housing is housing that is affordable for a broad segment of people, such as first-time home buyers, working-class professionals, veterans, and seniors.



### Promote Economic Opportunity

Our well-developed economy is a key component of the high quality of life enjoyed by Bucks County residents. How we plan and zone our communities has a large influence on where people live and work, where businesses locate, and the nature and quality of economic growth.



### Expand Our Travel Options

The desire for a well-functioning and equitable transportation system is broadly supported by public officials, business and industry, institutions, and residents alike. By expanding travel options, we can help as many residents as possible get where they need and want to go.



### Act on Climate Change

Extreme weather and rising global temperatures will be the major challenge for the world as we move into the 21st Century. Bucks County residents and other county stakeholders are concerned about flooding, other natural disasters, and taking action to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels and lower carbon emissions.



### Improve Our Infrastructure

Infrastructure includes our transportation system (road, rail, and port), water system (stormwater management, wastewater disposal, and water supply), and energy systems (generation and delivery). Our regional infrastructure is of critical importance for the economic, health, and quality of life benefits it provides to our communities.



### Enhance Our Parks and Trails

Parks, trails, and other recreational opportunities are strongly linked to residents' sense of well-being and quality of life. Recreational amenities promote time outdoors and physically and socially connect our communities.



### Protect Our Farmland and Natural Resources

Bucks County is most closely identified with its scenic vistas, unique natural resources, and rural way of life. Widespread support for open space and agricultural land preservation has made possible the protection of thousands of acres of vulnerable resources.

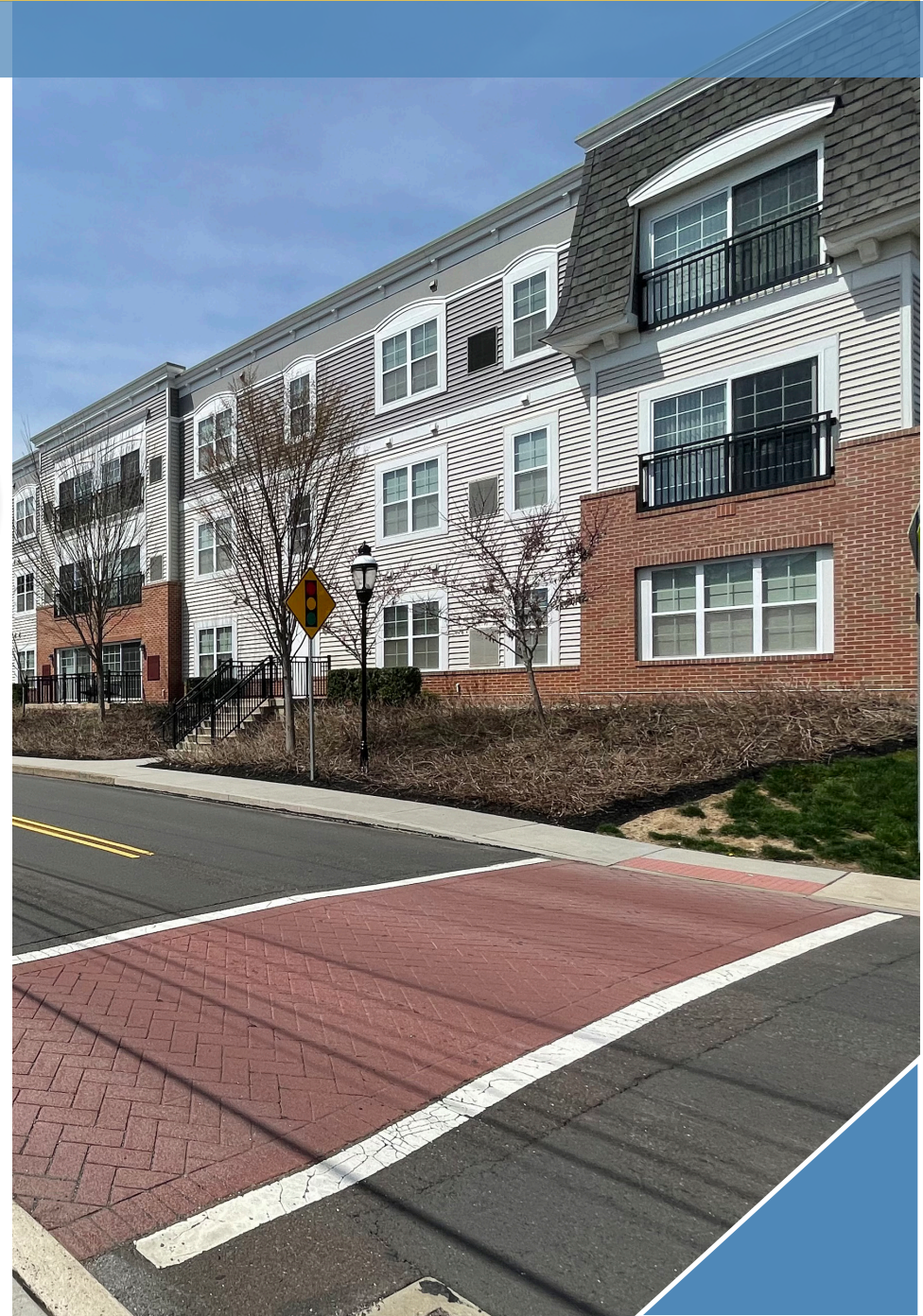


# Make Housing More Attainable



For many people looking to establish roots in their community, housing has become increasingly out of reach. During the COVID-19 pandemic, housing prices in Bucks County skyrocketed, fueled by low interest rates, rising demand, and an unwillingness by potential sellers to put their houses on the market due to uncertainty.

**“Attainable housing”** can be broadly defined as economically affordable housing specifically marketed to working individuals and families whose incomes are too high for subsidized housing and are priced out of market-rate options in terms of rent or home ownership. Attainable housing is housing that is affordable for a broad segment of people, such as first-time home buyers, working-class professionals, veterans, and seniors, regardless of age, physical ability, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or religious beliefs. In general, attainable housing takes the form of multifamily housing, townhouses, twins, accessory dwelling units (ADUs), and smaller singles.







## Why Is This Important?

Attainable housing is the backbone of a strong economy and community. Bucks County businesses require a pool of skilled workers to fill new opportunities for expanding operations or jobs left by retiring workers. When skilled workers leave the county for housing and job opportunities elsewhere (known as “brain drain”), the viability of Bucks County businesses is jeopardized. Housing for seniors, such as apartments and accessory dwellings, allows aging seniors to live independently in their same community. Attainable housing also reduces homelessness for lower-income families and veterans. Fundamentally, homelessness is caused by the rising affordability gap in a community. Increasing the supply of starter-homes allows housing prices to stabilize throughout the lower end of the market.

Ensuring a future where housing is attainable to working class families ensures a future where families of all incomes have their basic needs met, resulting in a more prosperous, safer, and healthier Bucks County.



### What We Heard

from our Resident Survey

68%

support or strongly support developing new homes and community guidelines to support senior living and aging in place.

48%

support or strongly support allowing different housing types within the same development plan,

46%

support or strongly support permitting homeowners to construct or convert ADUs.

44%

support or strongly support developing housing for a range of incomes.



## Data and Trends

Housing attainability is primarily a supply issue. There simply aren't enough homes to meet the demand for housing. The Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation (FreddieMac) relates a nationwide housing shortage that is worsening and not expected to abate any time soon. This shortage is most significant in the area of starter homes, compounded by increased demand, lack of housing unit production, and the inability to fund down payments due to rising prices. The report notes:

- The share of entry-level homes in overall construction declined from 40 percent in the early 1980s to around 7 percent in 2019
- 72 million millennials (25 – 40 Years old) are entering the housing market (about one third of U.S. population)
- An estimated 3.8 million home shortage in 2018

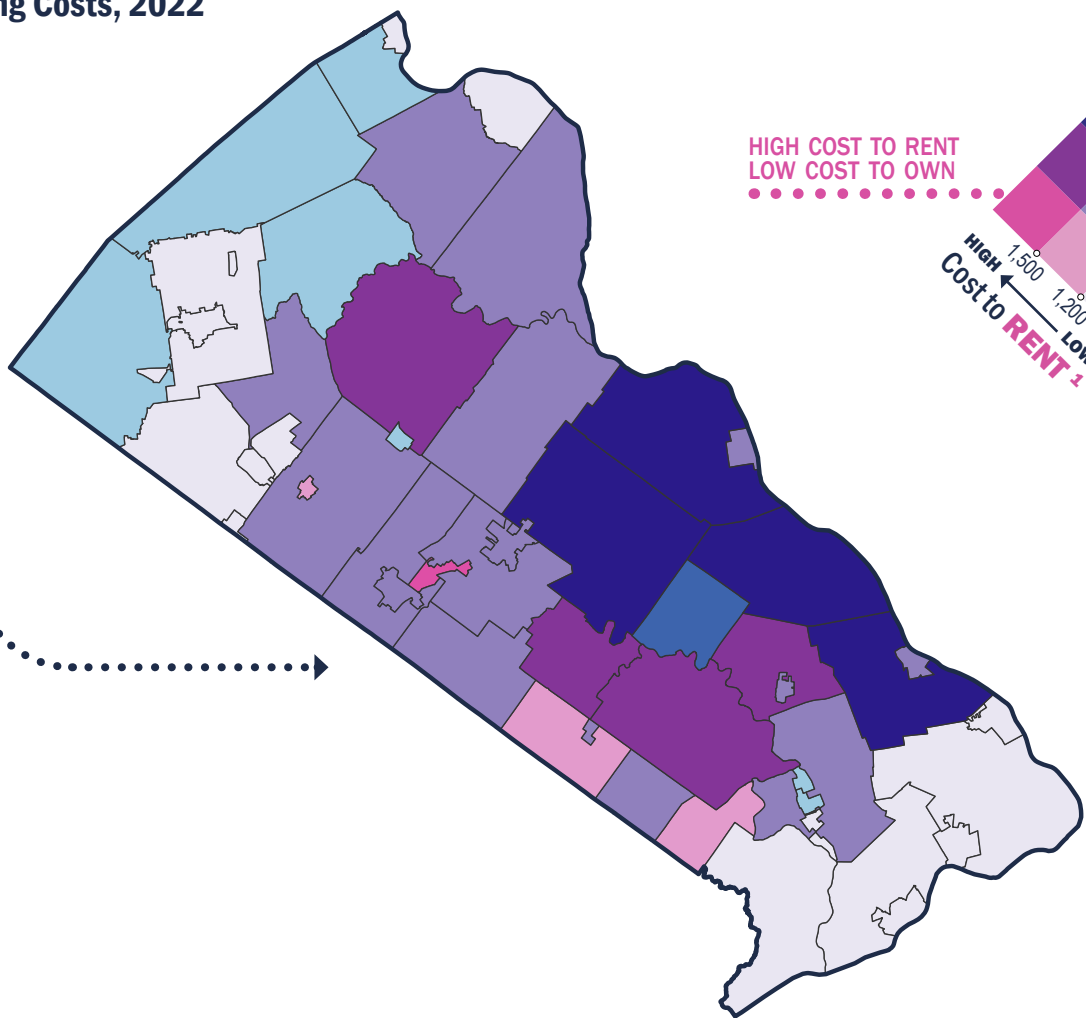
How we regulate housing through zoning also plays a role in the shortage of entry-level homes. Data gathered by the BCPC shows that over 67 percent of Bucks County is zoned primarily for single-family residential uses. No other attainable house type is permitted in these zoning districts, except for ADUs (in most cases). However, most ordinances place limits on the construction of ADUs — only family members are permitted to occupy the structure and dimensional requirements can be restrictive. Only 21 percent of Bucks County land is zoned for attainable house types, but much of this land is located in zoning districts already occupied by development.

The relative housing costs for both renters and homeowners varies throughout Bucks County. The map to the right highlights areas in which costs to rent and to own were comparably high or low. ....





## Housing Costs, 2022



• HIGH COST TO RENT  
• HIGH COST TO OWN

HIGH COST TO RENT  
LOW COST TO OWN

LOW COST TO RENT  
HIGH COST TO OWN



### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Cost includes the contract rent plus the estimated average monthly cost of utilities (electricity, gas, and water and sewer) and fuels (oil, coal, kerosene, wood, etc.).

<sup>2</sup> Cost includes monthly sum of payments for mortgages, deeds of trust, contracts to purchase, or similar debts on the property (including payments for the first mortgage, second mortgages, home equity loans, and other junior mortgages); real estate taxes; fire, hazard, and flood insurance on the property; utilities (electricity, gas, and water and sewer); and fuels (oil, coal, kerosene, wood, etc.). It also includes, where appropriate, the monthly condominium fee for condominiums and mobile home costs (installment loan payments, personal property taxes, site rent, registration fees, and license fees).



## Challenges



- 1. Market Constraints**

Due to current market conditions and limited supply of developable land, developers can charge premium prices for attainable housing types. Potential buyers can be squeezed out, causing them to remain in the rental market and adding more upward pressure to rental prices.
- 2. Zoning Considerations**

Zoning regulations limit the areas of the county where attainable housing can be built. Setbacks, lot sizes, and minimum parking regulations further limit the number of dwellings a site can accommodate. This has market consequences for the supply and demand of attainable housing.
- 3. Public Backing**

Support for attainable housing among residents can be lukewarm. People like the idea of attainable housing as long as it's built somewhere else.
- 4. Development Costs**

The development process can be costly. Land costs, consultant and permitting fees, building materials and supplies, and financing add significantly to project costs.





## Opportunities and Directions

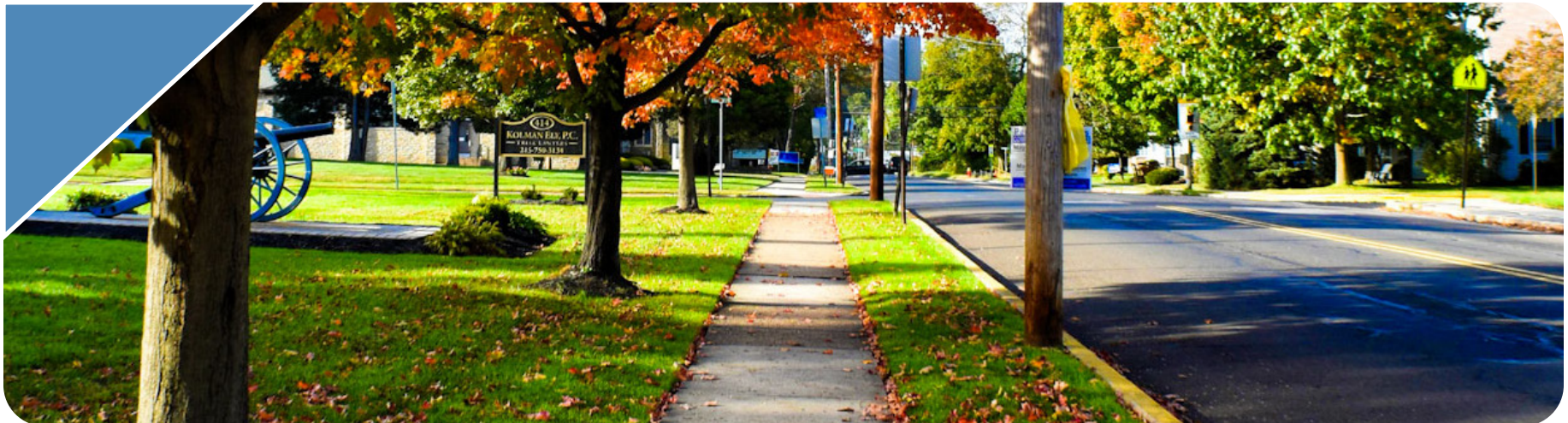
**Municipal comprehensive planning** can be the first step in setting policies that are supportive of attainable housing. A comprehensive plan can:

- Examine where attainable house types are permitted, whether enough land is zoned for them, and whether an adequate minimum density is provided.
- Ensure mixed-use development is permitted in commercial centers and near transit.
- Consider policies that encourage the construction of ADUs.
- Develop policies that support senior living and aging in place.

**Zoning ordinances** are the regulatory frameworks that implement municipal land use policy. The supply of attainable housing will in large part be affected by permitted uses in each zoning district, permitted densities, setbacks, and minimum parking standards.

**Density bonuses**, which provide an increase in dwelling units per acre, can help communities ensure better development outcomes. Increased landscaping, green buildings, park and trail development, and community facilities are just a few examples of added value municipalities have received from developers.

**Adequate infrastructure**, including sewer and water, is critical to supporting attainable housing. Municipalities should ensure water supply plans and Act 537 sewage facilities plans are updated to meet attainable housing goals.





## Promote Economic Opportunity



How we plan and zone our communities contributes greatly to the nature and quality of both physical and economic growth. Land use and transportation policy and spending priorities have consequences for where businesses locate, where people live and how they get to jobs, and how goods and service are exchanged and accessed. Effective land use policy understands the economic factors underpinning a community's development, including the values, desires, and needs of residents, workers, and businesses.





## Why Is This Important?

Economic opportunity allows communities to grow and thrive. Bucks County residents are dependent on their local economy to provide family-sustaining jobs, access to goods and services, and opportunities to expand or open new businesses. Support for a thriving local economy includes sound infrastructure (transportation, water, sewer, communication, and energy), a transportation system that efficiently and equitably moves people and goods, and a regulatory system that protects resources and people while providing a fair process for business development.

Redevelopment of older buildings that once were industrial, office, or retail space is vital to the county's economy. Redevelopment reduces blight and creates jobs in those areas where the closing of large to medium sized industries has had a negative impact on the economy. Various tax credits, such as historic preservation tax credits and programs like Keystone Opportunity Zones, Enterprise Zones and brownfields remediation funding can assist with redevelopment of underused and vacant buildings and properties.



## What We Heard from our Resident Survey

- 78%** indicate they can't find skilled/qualified workers.
- 49%** indicate they have plans to expand in the next five years.
- 22%** were uncertain whether they would reduce the amount of space for their business due to telework/work from home, while **13** percent said they would reduce space.
- 21%** indicate that they would continue to offer telework as an option for their employees after the pandemic, **15** percent won't be able to do so, and **44** percent are uncertain.

## What We Heard from our Business Survey

The Highest Rated Factors for...

### Locating business in Bucks County...

- "Low crime rate"
- "Quality of life/community appeal for employees"

### Supporting business in Bucks County...

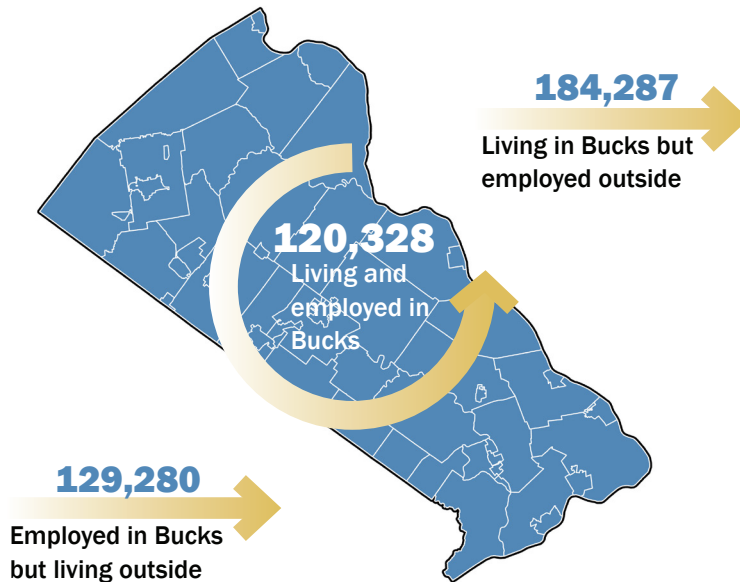
- "Energy resilience/stable power grid"
- "Roads and traffic control"
- "Adequate and conveniently located parking"
- "Technology upgrades"
- "Availability of skilled/educated workforce"



## Data and Trends

[The Bucks County Transition Team Final Report](#) identified the county's economic strengths as: a high quality of life, good schools, proximity to major cities, pool of talent, arts and culture, physical beauty, safe place to live, arts and history, and low tax base. Weaknesses identified include: a lack of economic development coordination, disparate geography, fragmented county transportation, a lack of population diversity, lack of large companies as economic drivers, and a difficulty in attracting and retaining a younger population.

### Bucks County Inflow and Outflow Workers, 2020



Source: onthemap, 2020.

In 2022 tourism generated \$1.2 billion in economic impact and supported 27,800 jobs in the leisure and hospitality industry. The preservation and conservation of resources adds to the county's tourism economy and ensures that open space and historic resources are available so that the tourism industry in Bucks County can continue to thrive.

Industry categories with the most establishments in the county include the Construction, Retail Trade, Professional and Technical Services, Healthcare and Social Assistance, and Accommodation and Food Services industries. Over half Bucks County's workers are employed in the Healthcare and Social Assistance, Retail Trade, Manufacturing, and Accommodation and Food Services industries.

Bucks County has the highest level of net out-commuting (59.3 percent) in the southeast Pennsylvania region. Bucks County's workforce is older. The median age of the Bucks County workforce is 44 compared to the regional median age of 40, and this gap is expected to increase.

Growth in e-commerce has accelerated the demand for warehouse space across the country. Bucks County is experiencing record growth in proposed square footage in industrial space, as e-tailers look to bring inventory closer to their customer base.

Vacancies remain high in both retail commercial and office space. After a glut of office space was developed between the 1980s and early 2000s, little office space has been developed in Bucks County.

Communities tend to over-zone for retail and office space because this type of development can pay for itself in terms of tax revenues over the cost of services.





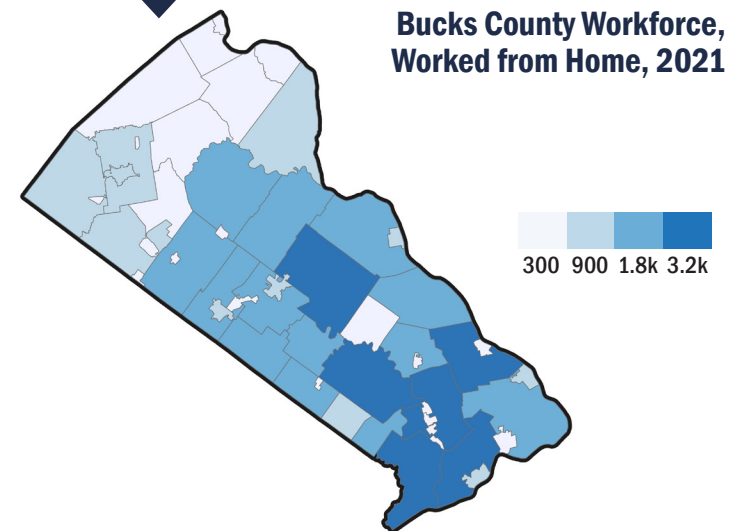
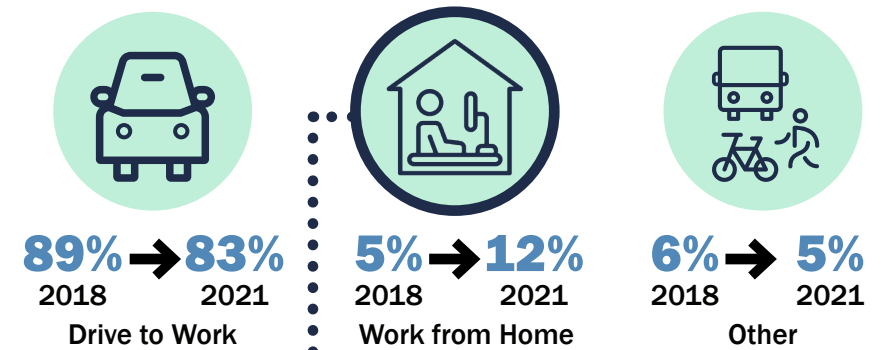
## Pandemic Era Changes in Working Patterns

Commuting patterns changed significantly after COVID-19. The number of residents who work from home rose 7 percent over the 2018 - 2021 period. Accordingly, the number of workers who drove to work fell 6 percent during this same period.

In central and lower Bucks, workers working from home doubled in most of the townships, while upper Bucks had a lesser increase in the rates of remote work. Remote workers are most prevalent in lower Bucks County municipalities, such as Lower Makefield, Northampton, Bensalem, and Middletown townships.



## Shifting Landscape of How We Work





## Challenges



- 1. Workforce Development**  
Workforce development, including recruiting, training, and maintaining workers. Providing opportunities for an older workforce.
- 2. Permitting**  
Development and business permitting is expensive and can be difficult to navigate.
- 3. Transportation Options**  
Partially due to funding, public transportation is limited or non-existent in most parts of the county.
- 4. Housing Attainability**  
Housing for first-time home buyers, working class professionals, veterans, and disabled individuals is increasingly unattainable due to rising prices and limited supply of attainable units.
- 5. Parking**  
Minimum parking requirements for commercial and warehouse uses vary greatly from community to community and create an oversupply of parking, wasting land and additional economic opportunity.

- 6. Child and Elder Care**  
Child and elder care is expensive and quality care is difficult to find.
- 7. Addressing Vacancy**  
Finding new uses for underused and vacant retail, office, and industrial areas. Redevelopment of these areas may require that hazardous materials be removed.





## Opportunities and Directions

Responsiveness to new economic trends requires flexibility and adaptability in land use planning. This can include creating spaces where new businesses can grow, understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the county's industrial centers, and allowing for businesses and residential uses to develop together.

**Mixed-use development**, such as healthcare, recreational, and multifamily residential uses in high density zoning districts expands housing opportunities, job opportunities, and creates alternatives to driving.

**Travel options**, such as transit, micro-transit, walking, and bicycling result in a more equitable and sustainable economy. Using these options to get to work is not dependent on using a car resulting in more job opportunities for everyone.

**High density residential development** in commercially zoned locations along key transportation corridors can provide better accessibility to jobs.

**Reduced parking requirements** can decrease development costs and allow denser, more walkable development.

**Blight remediation and revitalization** results in a healthy economy and can improve mental and physical well-being.

**Redevelopment of vacant and contaminated sites** is a complementary strategy to land preservation. The EPA's brownfields grant program can assist with redevelopment of properties and buildings where hazardous materials may be preventing reuse and revitalization. Economic development programs, such as the Pennsylvania Opportunity Zone and Enterprise Zone, can also assist with the redevelopment of the county's vacant industrial and commercial sites.

**Historic preservation** provides many economic benefits, including increased property values, downtown revitalization, tourism activity, job creation, and tax revenue generation. Historic preservation tax incentives for commercial properties are available as an economic redevelopment tool to revitalize older underused buildings.





## Expand Our Travel Options



Bucks County's transportation network has played a significant role in the county's history. For the last 80 years, the county's car-oriented infrastructure has supported suburban commercial and residential growth. However, it has made large sections of the county inaccessible to individuals without a car and has significantly contributed to the suburban expansion of the county.

Ensuring that the transportation network serves all segments of the county's population and economy will be critical to the long-term vitality of Bucks County and the region.





## Why Is This Important?

Transportation and circulation are a vital part of every community. Where we live, work, vacation, and shop are all impacted by our access to the transportation network.

Our transportation system is the product of many decades worth of prior investment decisions, along with locational choices. Our communities were developed, in most part, based upon the transportation systems developed many years ago. For example, the communities of New Hope, Riegelsville, and Yardley were developed in large part due to their location along the Delaware Canal System. Perkasio, Sellersville and Quakertown were developed due to the railroad system that developed along this route. Levittown grew because it was easily accessible from Route 1 and later Interstate 95. These examples all share one common trait: at the time these communities were founded, they were supported by the premier form of transportation for that time. Using the most modern form of transportation typically means better circulation and greater mobility for residents. This, in turn, means greater access to economic growth and opportunity to raise one's standard of living.

Expectations of the transportation network are slowly changing. While previous decades focused on the movement of cars, there has been increased interest in places that are centrally located, walkable, and bikeable. An aging population will also require transportation options because as people age, they'll require alternatives to car ownership. For this reason, it is critical to integrate new and underused ways of getting around into our current auto-oriented network.

## What We Heard

from our Resident Survey

76%

were satisfied or very satisfied with access to interstate highways.

74%

felt safe or very safe driving in their cars on interstates or highways.

68%

were satisfied or very satisfied with the flow of traffic on neighborhood streets.

31%

felt safe traveling by bicycle on streets.

30%

were satisfied or very satisfied with the availability of public transportation.

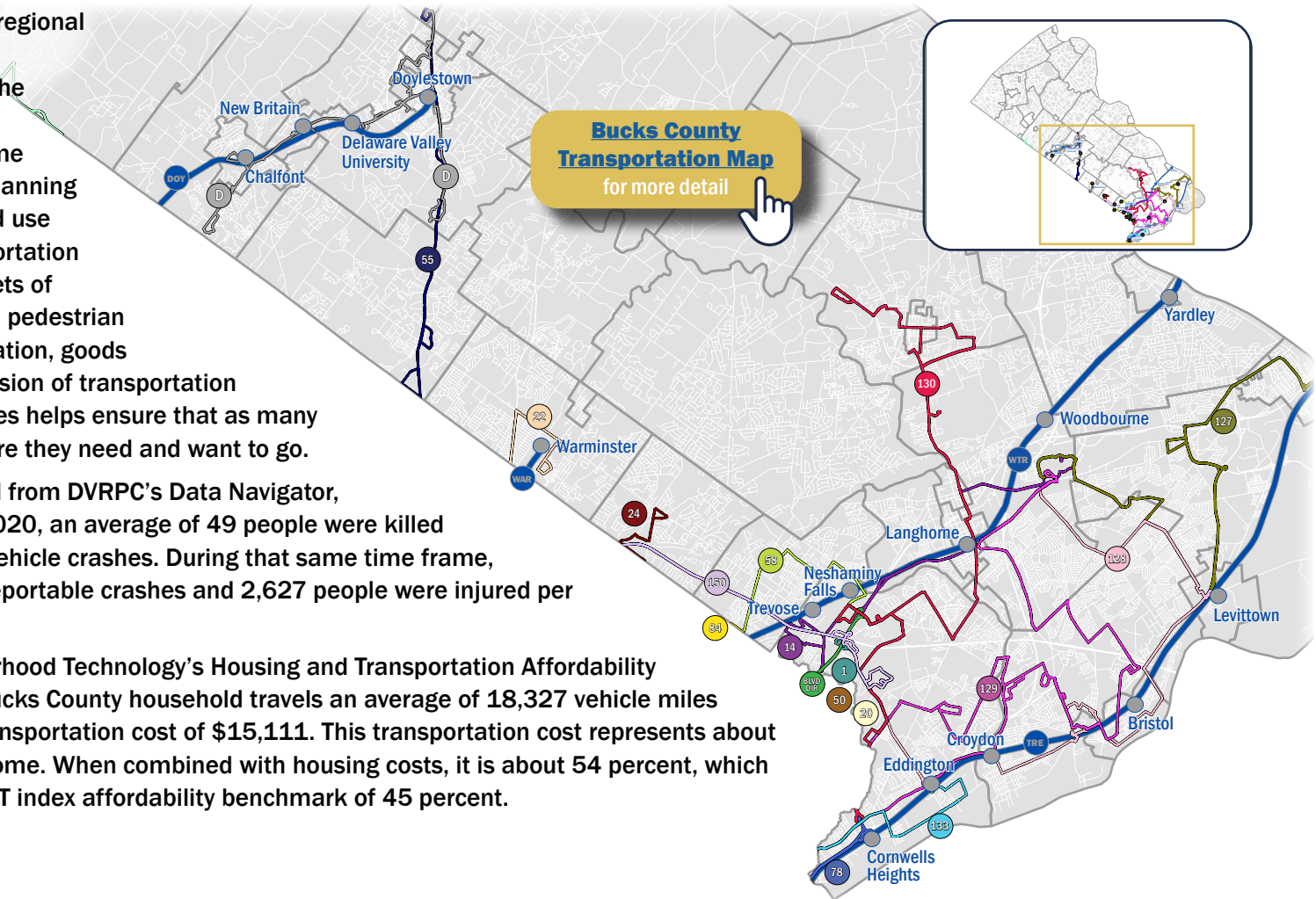


## Data and Trends

The transportation issues facing Bucks County range from local needs to regional priorities. Previous transportation planning efforts revolved around the theory of moving as many cars as possible in the least amount of time possible. Today's transportation planning understands the function and land use impacts of transportation. Transportation planning must encompass all facets of mobility, including highway safety, pedestrian mobility, cyclists, public transportation, goods movement and aviation. The provision of transportation options to residents and businesses helps ensure that as many residents as possible can get where they need and want to go.

According to information obtained from DVRPC's Data Navigator, between the years of 2016 and 2020, an average of 49 people were killed annually in Bucks County due to vehicle crashes. During that same time frame, there were an average of 5,265 reportable crashes and 2,627 people were injured per year in those crashes.

Data from the Center for Neighborhood Technology's Housing and Transportation Affordability Index (H&T Index) shows that a Bucks County household travels an average of 18,327 vehicle miles per year resulting in an annual transportation cost of \$15,111. This transportation cost represents about 21 percent of their household income. When combined with housing costs, it is about 54 percent, which is significantly higher than the H&T index affordability benchmark of 45 percent.







## Challenges



- 1. Decentralization**  
Transportation is very decentralized and under ownership and control of many agencies, including state, local, authorities and private companies. Each makes decisions regarding the system with an eye to their own requirements, not necessarily the good of the entire system.
- 2. Revenue Constraints**  
Maintaining a state of good repair is difficult due to financial constraints; more fuel-efficient vehicles and electric vehicles are reducing gas tax revenues.
- 3. Car Culture**  
Most people in the county prefer to drive over other options, as land patterns have made driving the easiest way to get around.
- 4. Truck Traffic**  
The rise in online shopping has led to an increase of truck traffic on all roads.
- 5. Safety**  
Despite an increased emphasis on safety, driver behavior continues to influence the overall safety and reliability of our roads.

- 6. Last Mile Problem**  
Completing the last mile of transit trips (transit stop to home) is difficult as much of the county is low density, which makes those areas difficult to serve with public transportation.
- 7. Auto-Oriented Infrastructure**  
Auto-oriented infrastructure forces continued investment in auto-oriented infrastructure, resulting in less resources to make alternative forms of transportation high functioning.







## Opportunities and Directions

**Walkable and bicycle-friendly communities** are increasingly popular with young adults, growing families, and new retirees. Walking and bicycling have social, physical, and mental health benefits beyond just getting people from place to place.

**The subdivision and land development process** offers opportunities to integrate public transit and connections to a municipality's pedestrian and bicycle network. Municipal zoning and subdivision and land development ordinances that are crafted to provide density and services around transit and promote walking and bicycling throughout the community enables choice in how people get around.

**Green infrastructure**, landscaping, and streetscape elements can add context to roads and transportation projects.

**Traffic calming measures** are designed to reduce speed and volume of traffic on roads to enhance road safety. These measures include speed humps, roundabouts, narrower lanes, improved pedestrian crossings, and better visibility at critical points. By encouraging lower speeds, traffic calming reduces the likelihood and severity of accidents. Traffic calming prioritizes pedestrian safety, promotes driver attentiveness, and creates a more inviting environment for non-motorized transportation.

**Complete Streets** is a process and approach to transportation planning that considers all users of the road and reimagines what a successful street looks like. **Vision Zero** seeks to eliminate all traffic fatalities and severe injuries, while increasing safe, healthy, equitable mobility for all. Both these approaches prioritize safety, human-centered design, accessibility, shared responsibility, public engagement, and data-driven approaches.

**Context sensitive solutions** is an approach to advancing transportation programs and projects in a collaborative manner and in a way that fits into the community and environment. This approach aims for more effective, sustainable, and contextually relevant outcomes.

**The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law** contains funding opportunities for municipalities to address safety concerns within their road network.

**PennDOT's Connects Program** works with municipalities to install bike-friendly infrastructure. Municipalities can fund the installation of bike lanes through this program.

**PennDOT's Highway Safety Improvement Program** works with municipalities to install highway safety features. Municipalities can fund the installation of highway safety features, including roundabouts through this program.

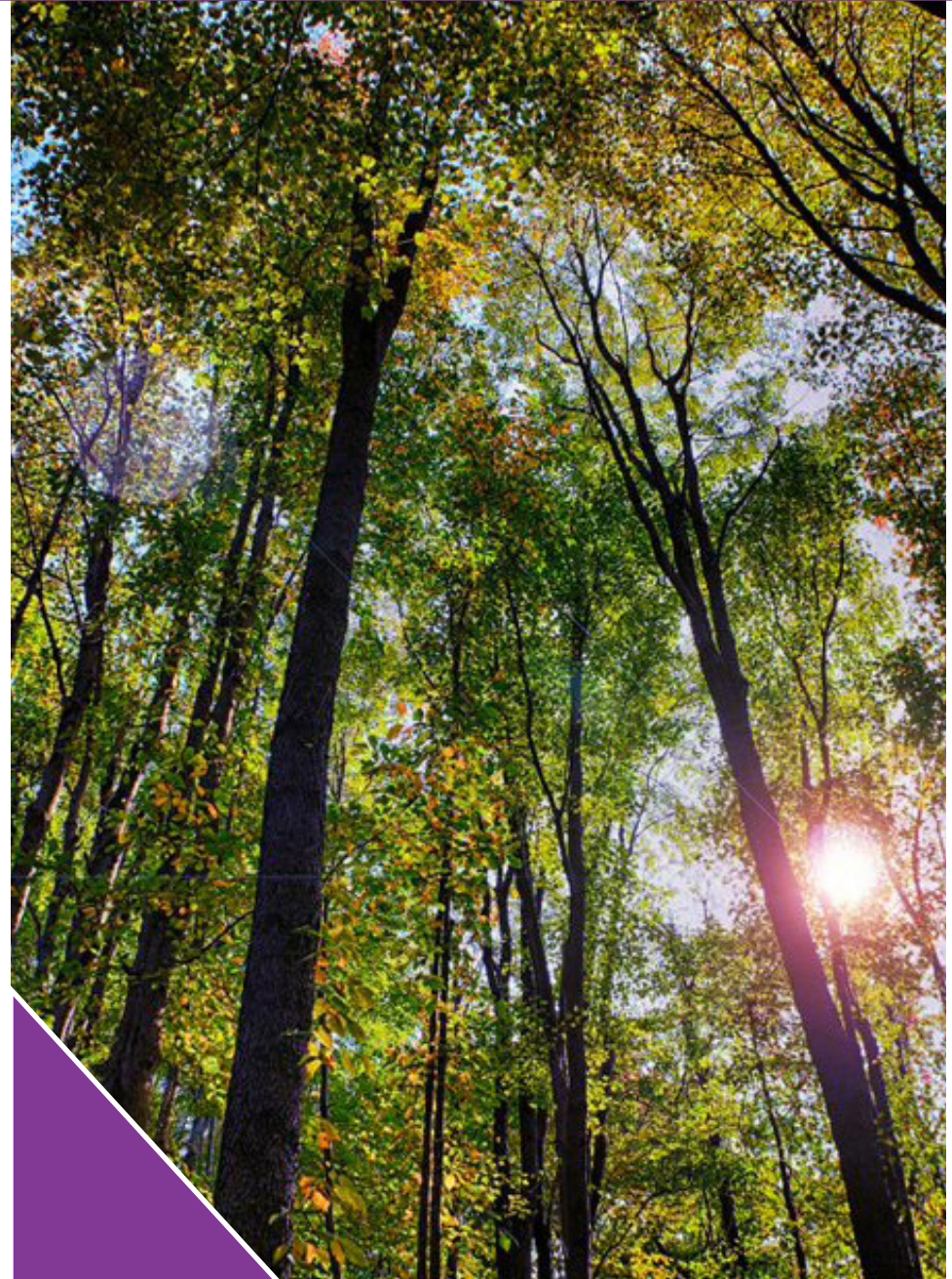




## Act on Climate Change

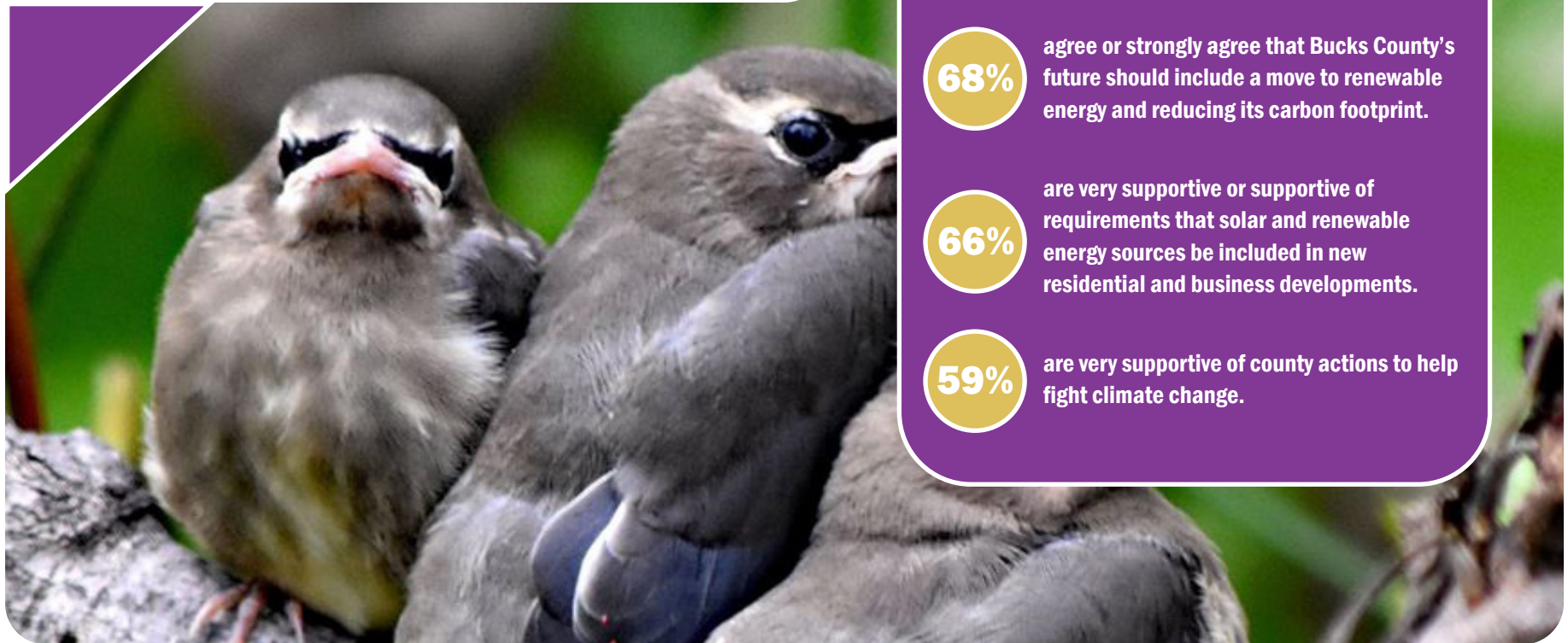


Bucks County's climate is changing due to rising global greenhouse gas emissions and temperatures, which has consequences for our environment, economy, and quality of life. In the Pennsylvania Climate Impacts Assessment report, the number of days over 90 degrees could be between 60 to 80 days within the next 50 years, up from our current 10 to 30 days. Prolonged heat exposure and heat waves can be deadly and pose a significant risk to our communities. High intensity rain events are also predicted to increase significantly, which can overwhelm stormwater systems and cause flooding even in areas outside the floodplain. Both mitigation and adaptation strategies need to be considered as we seek to become resilient to the implications of climate change.



## Why Is This Important?

Climate change will have significant impacts on human health, environmental sustainability, natural disaster risks, economic stability, and vulnerable communities. By reducing greenhouse gas emissions, we can improve public health outcomes, preserve biodiversity, reduce the risk of natural disasters, support long-term economic growth, and promote environmental justice. This issue requires global cooperation and a concerted effort from individuals, governments, and businesses to mitigate its effects and ensure a sustainable future.



## What We Heard

from our Resident Survey

**91%**

agree or strongly agree that Bucks County's future should include access to clean air and water.

**68%**

agree or strongly agree that Bucks County's future should include a move to renewable energy and reducing its carbon footprint.

**66%**

are very supportive or supportive of requirements that solar and renewable energy sources be included in new residential and business developments.

**59%**

are very supportive of county actions to help fight climate change.



## Data and Trends

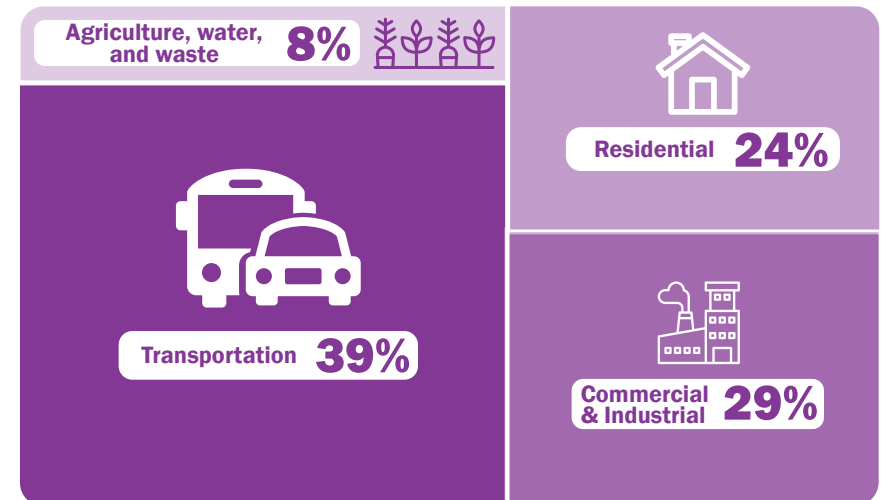
Bucks County is emitting approximately 6 million metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent per year, with the top three emission sources being transportation emissions, commercial and industrial energy use, and residential energy use. These emissions not only contribute to global climate change but also to poor regional air quality.



According to the 2022 State of the Air Report by the American Lung Association, of the 36 counties in Pennsylvania given a grade for High Ozone Days, Bucks County was one of only three to receive an F (failing) grade. While the county's air quality has improved over the last few decades, the county remains at an F rating. Poor air quality impacts health and increases medical costs to those affected.

In a special report by the Pennsylvania auditor general, it was shown climate change costs the state of Pennsylvania hundreds of millions of dollars, sometimes in a single year, in infrastructure damages from increasingly intense and frequent storms. As Pennsylvania gets warmer and wetter, it faces increased flooding, more heat and respiratory deaths, increased instances of disease and pests, as well as disruptions to our agricultural system.

### CO<sub>2</sub> Emission Sources Across Bucks County (2019)



## Challenges



- 1. Climate Change Impacts**  
 The impacts of climate change broadly affect our society and include rising temperatures, extreme weather events, changes in precipitation patterns, biodiversity loss, and economic and public health impacts.
- 2. Targeting Improvements**  
 The size, scale, and unpredictability of climate change events makes targeted improvements difficult. Infrastructure, such as stormwater management systems, must be broadly upgraded to meet climate impacts.
- 3. Infrastructure Costs**  
 High demand and slow increases in availability of green energy infrastructure and supply chain disruptions can cause costs to increase significantly.
- 4. Vulnerable Communities**  
 Climate change will disproportionately impact vulnerable communities, as these communities often lack the physical and social infrastructure to withstand its effects. Equity and environmental justice considerations should be incorporated into clean energy and hazard mitigation projects.

- 5. Stakeholder Coordination**  
 Meeting the challenge of climate change will require local governments to work collaboratively with other stakeholders, including businesses, community groups, the Commonwealth, and the federal government. This will require a commitment to long-term planning, ongoing monitoring and evaluation, and a willingness to adapt and evolve strategies over time.





## Opportunities and Directions

Broad policy initiatives at all levels of government will be necessary to meet emission goals. [The Pennsylvania Climate Action Plan](#) is a comprehensive framework designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and mitigate the impacts of climate change in the state. Following the Commonwealth's lead, Bucks County is developing a climate action plan and a sustainability plan to improve the sustainability of county operations. This will allow the county to focus on the needs and opportunities specific to Bucks County to achieve climate goals more effectively and efficiently.

In 2021, the Bucks County Board of Commissioners signed the [“Ready for 100 Resolution,”](#) which proclaimed the county's commitment to transition the county's vehicle fleet to 100 percent renewable energy sources by 2030, transition to 100 percent clean renewable electricity by 2035, and transition to 100 percent clean renewable heating and transportation energy by 2050.

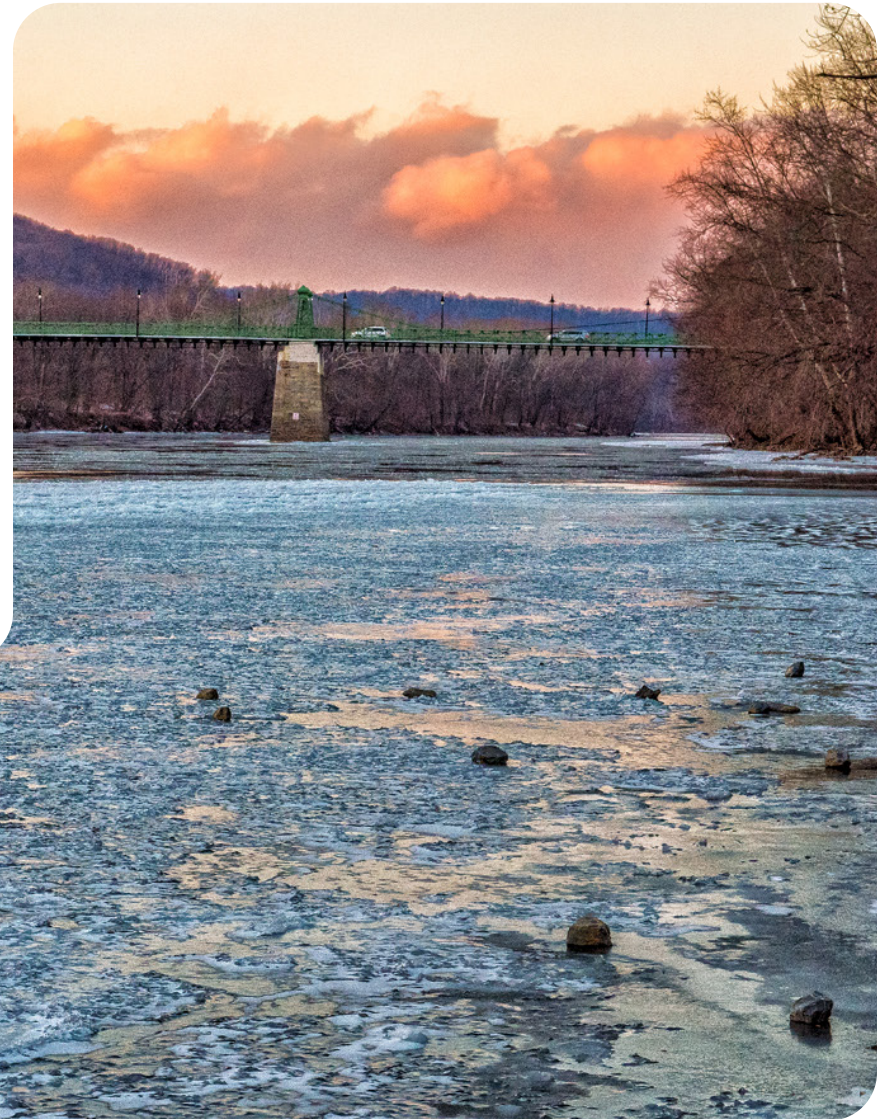
[Local climate action plans](#) have been developed by several Bucks County municipalities through grants available through PaDEP and the U.S. Department of Energy.



**Increasing transportation options**, such as biking, walking, and public transit, not only help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but have public health and equity benefits and are supportive of good land use planning.

**Natural resource protection**, including the preservation and protection of forests, wetlands, and coastal areas, can help mitigate the impacts of climate change by providing carbon sequestration, soil conservation, and areas for floodwater.

**Hazard mitigation planning** enables local communities to build resilience in their communities by preparing for and responding to the impacts of climate change, such as extreme weather events, sea level rise, and drought. The ***Bucks County Hazard Mitigation Plan (2021)*** identifies risks to people, property, and the environment and defines mitigation strategies to reduce these vulnerabilities. All 54 Bucks County municipalities participated in the planning process.





## Improve Our Infrastructure



Infrastructure are the basic physical structures and systems that serve our county. Our water, transportation, and energy infrastructure have a limited lifespan before replacement is required and need periodic maintenance to ensure their function.

Infrastructure mitigates human impacts on our environment and forms the foundation of our economy and high quality of life.

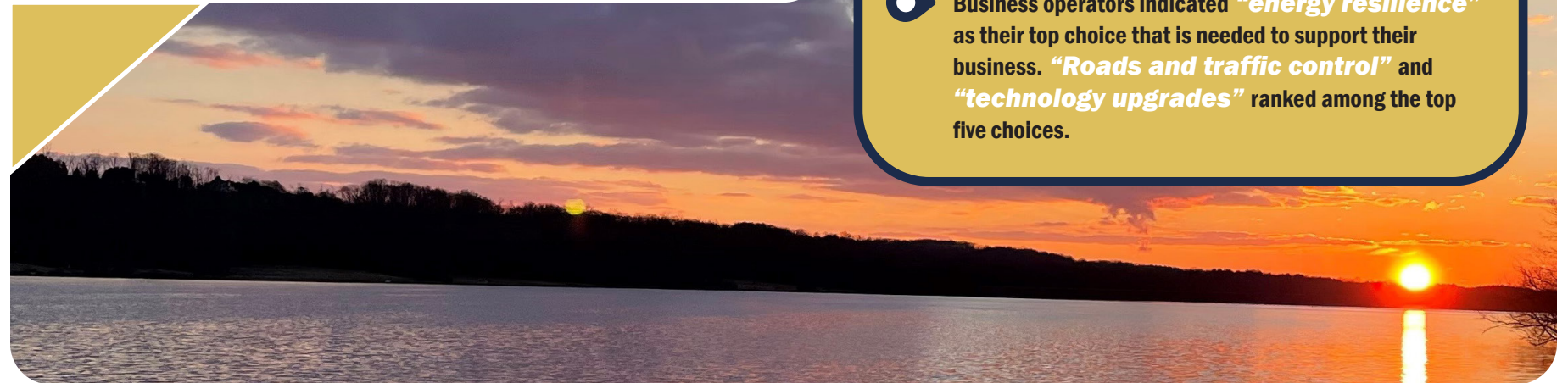






## Why Is This Important?

Infrastructure is a critical component of the Bucks2040 Vision Plan, touching on all plan issues. Bucks County faced significant challenges in 2021 due to extreme weather events, which caused disruptions to the economy and left many residents without power or housing for extended periods. Water infrastructure is crucial for human health and safety, economic development, and environmental sustainability, providing safe drinking water, a reliable water supply, and protecting aquatic ecosystems. Transportation infrastructure enables the movement of goods and people, supports economic growth, and connects communities. Energy infrastructure is vital for providing reliable, affordable, and sustainable energy, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and promoting a transition to clean energy sources. Development and maintenance of these infrastructures are key to enhancing community resiliency, protecting the public's health and safety, addressing climate change, transitioning to clean energy sources, and promoting economic growth.



### What We Heard

from our Resident Survey

- Residents ranked **“access to clean water and air”** as their top choice for Community Vision, while **“a move to renewable energy and reducing the carbon footprint”** ranked as their number five choice.

### What We Heard

from our Business Survey

- Business operators indicated **“energy resilience”** as their top choice that is needed to support their business. **“Roads and traffic control”** and **“technology upgrades”** ranked among the top five choices.



## Data and Trends

Infrastructure, as put forward in this plan, includes water, transportation, and energy infrastructure. In its 2022 Report Card for Pennsylvania's Infrastructure, the American Society of Civil Engineers grades Pennsylvania's infrastructure as a C-, noting that the state has some of the oldest infrastructure in the nation and that substantial maintenance backlogs have accrued in several areas, as recent investment runs into new challenges, such as inflation and resiliency to climate change. Indeed, the Bucks County Transition Team Report, issued in June 2020, emphasized the importance of maintaining the county's infrastructure in relation to bridges and roads, public transit, parks, energy facilities, and stormwater management.

## Water Infrastructure

Water infrastructure includes the facilities, pipes, and systems that source and supply clean drinking water for residents, convey and dispose of wastewater through on-lot, community, and public sewage disposal systems, and manage and convey stormwater runoff to waterways after rainstorms.

- Water mains in Pennsylvania cities are increasing in average age, with the rate of repair/replacement lagging substantially behind the rate required to maintain pipes at their recommended service life.
- Statewide funding gaps between water and wastewater system revenues and what will be needed over the next 10 years to address repairs and upgrade systems is significant. The Pennsylvania Water and Wastewater Gap Study (2015) estimates this gap to be \$10.2 billion for drinking water and \$8.4 billion for wastewater (without raising user rates).

- PaDEP has labeled almost 28,000 miles of rivers and streams in Pennsylvania impaired for water supply, aquatic life, recreation, or fish consumption. In Bucks County, about 799 miles of streams have been classified as impaired, about 69 percent of the county's total stream mileage.

According to the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency, there are approximately 140 dams in Bucks County, ranging in size, ownership, and purpose (water supply, flood control, and recreation). The *Bucks County 2021 Hazard Mitigation Plan Update* designated dam failure as one of 22 hazards but assessed it as "low risk."

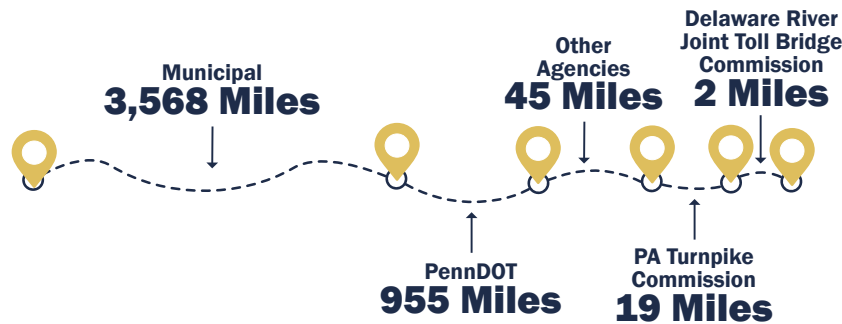




## Road and Bridge Infrastructure

Road and bridge infrastructure are critical components as to how we travel and how goods are transported through the county.

### Bucks Road Ownership (Miles)



About \$30 million is required on an annual basis to maintain the county's roadways. Road rehabilitation costs about \$910,000 per mile and traffic signals cost upwards of \$200,000 to be replaced.

### Bucks Bridge Ownership (Number)



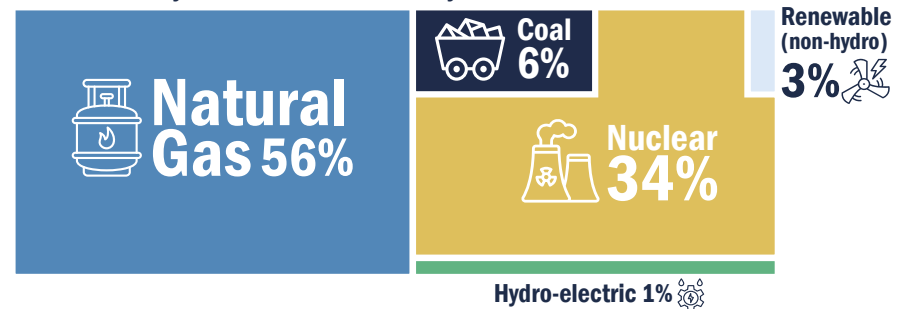
Nearly one-quarter of Bucks County roadways and 17 percent of its bridges are in poor condition. Bucks County passed an ordinance in 2015 under Act 89 which allows the county to collect a \$5 registration fee to be used to fund repairs to county-owned bridges.

## Energy Infrastructure

Energy infrastructure refers to the physical components, systems, and facilities necessary to produce, store, transmit, and distribute energy. This includes power plants, pipelines, transmission lines, substations, storage facilities, and distribution networks for various forms of energy, such as electricity, natural gas, oil, and renewable sources like wind and solar.

- In Pennsylvania, over half of the net electricity generated is from natural gas, with renewables generating 5 percent and nuclear generating 34 percent of the state's electricity generated. There is limited electricity generation from within Bucks County (natural gas and landfill gas).
- Electricity demand over the next decade is projected to increase by 2 percent, including growth in vehicle electrification.
- Much of the transmission and distribution infrastructure in Pennsylvania was constructed in the 1950s and 1960s; upgrades are needed to maintain reliable operations and adapt to new power generation sources like wind, solar and natural gas.

### Net Electricity Generation in Pennsylvania





## Challenges



- 1. PFAS**

PFAS contamination has affected several Bucks and Montgomery County communities, infiltrating private and public wells. Long-term PFAS exposure has been linked to health problems and some cancers. Although PaDEP now requires testing for PFAS and has set limits on the amount of acceptable contamination, these chemicals remain in certain groundwater areas.
- 2. Stormwater Management Planning**

Management of stormwater runoff is conducted site by site, under the development regulations of the municipality. However, causes of local flooding often cross municipal boundaries and it can be difficult to coordinate resources toward mitigating the problem.
- 3. Local Roadway Funding**

Funding for the operation and maintenance of roadways at the local level relies mainly on the liquid fuels tax. This money is distributed to local municipalities in proportion to the eligible roadway mileage in each municipality. With the rise in the popularity of electric vehicles (and associated decrease in tax revenue), alternatives to this tax must be explored, including a vehicle miles traveled tax (VMT).
- 4. Alternative Energy Transition**

Transitioning from fossil fuels to alternative energy sources for electricity generation offers the greatest potential for reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. This will require considerable public investment (with estimates as high as \$100 billion) in resource and transmission planning and development at both the grid and distributed levels to ensure a reliable and resilient grid to supply energy.
- 5. Hazard Mitigation Planning**

Infrastructure is vulnerable to natural and human-made hazards, including extreme weather, flooding, high winds, landslides, terrorism, and cyber-attacks. The Bucks County Hazard Mitigation Plan (2021) identifies risks to people, property (including infrastructure), and the environment and defines a mitigation strategy to reduce these vulnerabilities.
- 6. Intergovernmental Cooperation**

Transportation and energy infrastructure is coordinated on the state and federal level. Local needs must be effectively communicated to these authorities.



## Opportunities and Directions

**The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act** will enable Pennsylvania to receive billions of dollars in aid to repair and rebuild our roads and bridges, improve safety, improve transit, build a network of EV chargers, and modernize rail. State and local governments will also be eligible for competitive grant programs.

**Green infrastructure** can help manage stormwater runoff and reduce flooding, improve water quality, recharge groundwater, enhance urban aesthetics, and increase recreational opportunities. It can also mitigate urban heat island effects and provide numerous environmental and social benefits.

**Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM)** is a holistic and participatory approach to managing water supply, wastewater, and stormwater systems. IWRM focuses on the water cycle as a single connected system and promotes coordinated development and management of water, land, and related resources. It aims to balance the competing demands of water users and promote sustainable use of water resources while maintaining quality and availability for future generations.

**Distributed energy resources (DERs)** can help ensure grid reliability and flexibility. DERs, such as small-scale solar panels, batteries, energy-efficient buildings, and demand response technologies, can be used to produce and distribute energy closer to the point of consumption, reducing the need for complex regional infrastructure and avoiding expensive transmission and distribution infrastructure investments.

**Soft costs for solar photovoltaic systems (PV)**, which include permitting and inspection fees, customer acquisition, and utility

interconnection, can make up a significant proportion of the total installed cost of a PV system. Local governments can play a crucial role in reducing soft costs by adopting supportive zoning, permitting, and inspection practices that simplify the process and lower installation expenses.

Bucks County is **updating and consolidating its nine separate stormwater management plans** into a single countywide plan to gain control over each watershed plan and ensure municipalities are using updated PaDEP standards.

Bucks County is teaming up with Delaware, Chester, and Montgomery Counties to create the **Sustainable Energy Partnership of Southeast Pennsylvania (SEPSPA)**. The formation of SEPSPA will enable all member counties to purchase renewable energy throughout the year at the best rates. The SEPSPA model is scalable, and the goal is to include other energy consumers such as municipalities, school districts, and various authorities in the partnership.



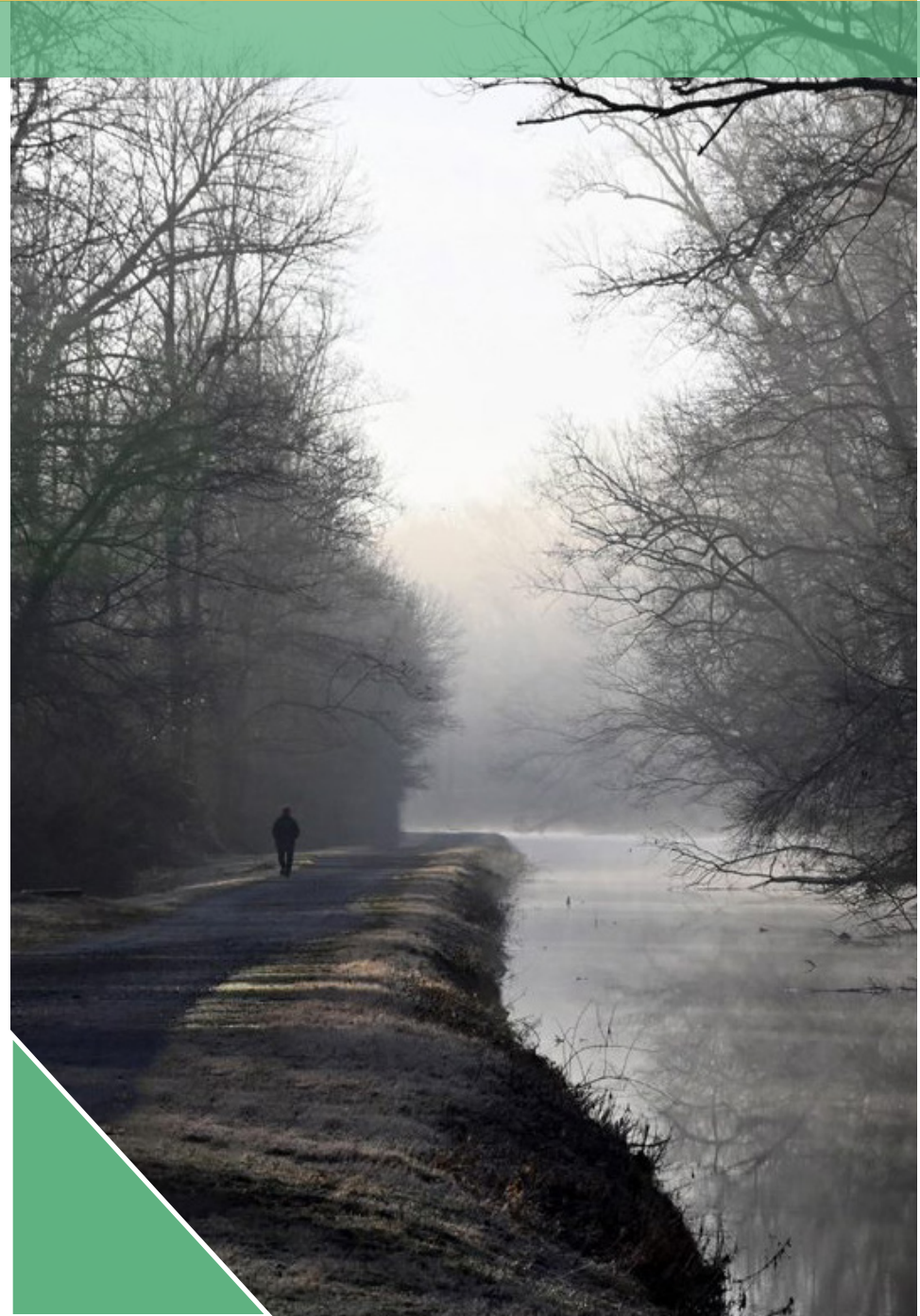


## Enhance our Parks and Trails



Parks and trails provide space for people to play, socialize, exercise and are a reprieve from the stresses of our modern society. They are effective when they are accessible, well-maintained, and provide amenities that are desired by their community.

The COVID-19 pandemic increased demand for recreational opportunities with better amenities. Capitalizing on the renewed interest in parks and trails while managing the challenges of funding, staffing, and asset management, will require a comprehensive evaluation of how to plan, build, and maintain Bucks County's parks and trails more effectively.





## Why Is This Important?

Parks can help preserve natural habitat, reduce pollution, and provide gathering places for community and cultural events, such as festivals, concerts, and sporting events. Trails offer the opportunity to engage in physical activity in a safe, natural environment and can provide an alternative mode of transportation to nearby destinations. Parks and trails can have positive economic impacts on a community by attracting visitors, creating jobs in the recreation and hospitality industries, and increasing property values. Finally, parks and trails promote active and healthy lifestyles. As large portions of Bucks County's population enter retirement age, providing amenities that promote physical activity and social interaction will be greatly valued by the county's residents.

Continued development of parks and trails will help make the future of Bucks County one that ensures easy access to socialization, recreation, and movement. In turn this will create communities that are welcoming and foster a sense of place.



## What We Heard

from our Resident Survey

The quality of parks and recreation services ranks as **the most important** county service.

- 84%** are satisfied with parks and recreational facilities.
- 80%** view parks as an important reason to live in Bucks County.
- 76%** report feeling safe riding their bike on trails within the County.
- 75%** agree that there should be more trails constructed within Bucks County.



## Data and Trends

Data from national organizations and state agencies have continued to point to one consistent trend—parks and trails are popular and the public desires to see more of them. A 2022 study from the Rails to Trail Conservancy found that trail use is 45 percent higher than trail use in 2019. Further, trail use increased 9.5 percent between 2021 and 2022. Also, a 2021 poll from the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources found that 86 percent of all respondents felt that parks and trails were critical to their mental well-being during the height of the pandemic.

At the state level, state park visits increased 26.6 percent between 2019 and 2020, further highlighting the importance of parks during this time. The 2021 Pennsylvania DCNR poll also found that 75 percent of respondents think that local and state governments should prioritize parks, trails, and open space.



There are 60 different public and private operators of trails found throughout Bucks County. Though there are both public and private trails, most are publicly operated by some form of government entity. Parks are split between county, municipal, state, and private parks. Municipal parks dominate the landscape and account for 137 parks dispersed among 25 municipalities.

### Trail and Parks Overview

**505 Miles** of trails across the county...



**188 Parks** across the county...

#### Trail Ownership



#### Park Ownership







## Challenges



- 1. Funding Vulnerability**  
Parks and trails are often one of the first assets to receive funding cuts, despite their popularity.
- 2. Maintenance**  
Maintenance of parks and recreational amenities often covers large areas or extends for long distances.
- 3. Staffing**  
Finding and keeping qualified staff to oversee, maintain, and program parks has been increasingly difficult for many park and recreation organizations.
- 4. Material Costs**  
The cost of materials is rising, making both the development and maintenance of these amenities challenging to conduct. Because of lingering pandemic effects, supply chain uncertainty, and inflation the cost of construction and maintenance materials are rising, which inhibits these agencies' ability to property develop and maintain parks and trails.
- 6. Regional Cooperation**  
Making trails easily accessible and connected to amenities and surrounding communities can be difficult. Each municipality has its own ideas and plans for where and when to develop trail and pedestrian amenities.

- 5. Stakeholder Coordination**  
Planners must coordinate with multiple stakeholders to address right-of-way issues for many trail projects. Acquisition of property to build parks and trails can be a lengthy process as planners need to work with landowners and stakeholders to ensure the development of these amenities aligns with community needs.





## Opportunities and Directions

The **land development process** can assist with the installation of trails and pathways. Subdivision and land development regulations can require a developer to place pathways and trails along adjacent streets or help provide right-of-way through a property for trails shown on county and municipal trails plans.

**Standardized trail development** can help ensure access and safety. The Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (ASHTO) Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities serves as the standard for all Pennsylvania agencies developing bicycle and pedestrian amenities.

**Electric bicycles** give more people the opportunity to ride trails as they require less physical exertion than traditional bikes.

**“People-first planning”** can advance the development of trail and pedestrian amenities. Examples of these plans and policies include bike plans, active transportation plans, multimodal planning, and complete streets.

**Municipal parks and recreation plans** can guide park development as well as establish funding, maintenance, and acquisition strategies.

Parks and trails can be viewed as elements of a larger, **interconnected public realm** that also includes streets, museums, libraries, stormwater systems, and other civic infrastructure. Park and trail planning can be integrated into other public realm plans, such as long-range transportation plans, stormwater plans, habitat conservation plans, and hazard mitigation plans.

**Digital and traditional media platforms** can help connect park and recreation facilities to volunteer groups and individuals and foster local stewardship.

**Technology** can also be used to enhance the experience of park visitors. QR codes for mobile devices that link maps and guides or connect the user to payment systems for rentals can increase access and useability.

The Bucks County Department of Parks and Recreation is **updating its comprehensive plan** to guide the future of the Bucks County park system. This plan will be a collaborative effort involving community input, expert insights, and a commitment to preserving and enhancing the county’s parks.

### Our Park and Trail Vision







# Protect Our Farmland and Natural Resources



Much of Bucks County is defined by its scenic character, unique natural resources, and rural way of life. Local efforts to preserve natural and agricultural resources have had great success, yet by many measurements, our shared legacy continues to diminish. Development of green spaces occurs because people and businesses are attracted to Bucks County's open spaces and high quality of life. Indeed, the roots of land preservation in Bucks County were established during the late 1960s when the county began to recognize that postwar suburbanization was changing the landscape and that the areas that defined the character of Bucks County might be lost. But despite our preservation accomplishments, challenges remain as to how we ensure our natural and agricultural legacy remains a viable and fundamental part of the county's landscape.





## What We Heard

from our Resident Survey

**80%**

rate the availability of parks and open spaces as extremely important or very important.

**86%**

agree or strongly agree that Bucks County's future should include the preservation of farmland.

**91%**

agree or strongly agree that Bucks County's future should include the preservation of open space.

**91%**

agree or strongly agree that Bucks County's future should include the protection of natural and historic resources that are unique to Bucks County.

## Why Is This Important?

Agricultural and natural resource protection helps ensure the availability of these resources for current and future generations. Conservation and management practices prevent overexploitation, depletion, and degradation of agricultural and natural lands. Resource protection can maintain the health and productivity of ecosystems, support local food production, promote economic development, mitigate the effects of climate change, and preserve cultural and recreational values. Resource protection is an essential part of long-term environmental, social, and economic sustainability.



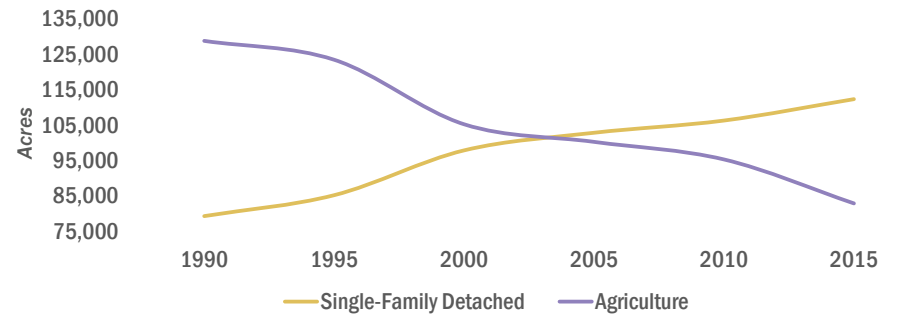
## Data and Trends

The arrival of European settlers drastically changed the county's ecological landscape. Clear-cutting for farmland and development and the introduction of non-native insects, plants, and diseases has drastically reduced the original forest canopy that stretched over almost the entire county. Today, only 30 percent of Bucks County's total land use can be classified as wooded, and much of this land is isolated and fragmented.

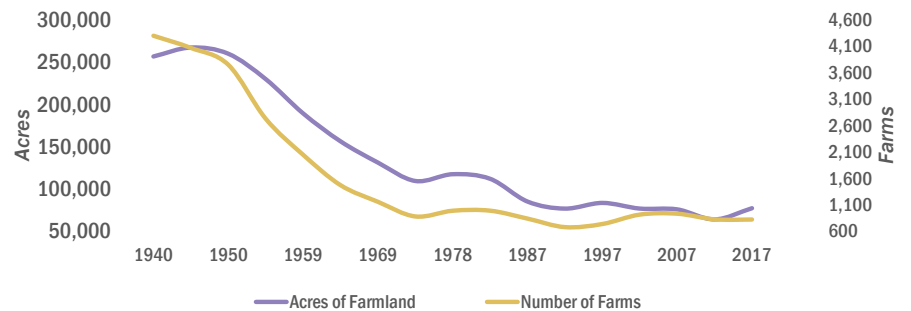
The *Pennsylvania Natural Areas Inventory Update (2011)* reports that 282 plant species classified as endangered, threatened, rare, extirpated, undetermined, special populations, or watch list in Pennsylvania have been found in Bucks County over the years. Over 100 have not been collected in Bucks County in over 50 years and are probably no longer present.



### Bucks County Land Use Change 1990 - 2015



### Bucks County Farms and Farmland 1940 - 2017



Changing agricultural economics and the construction of U.S. Steel and Levittown in the 1950s kicked off a long period of rapid development of Bucks County's farmland, during which the county lost over 150,000 acres of farmland to development. In 1950 Bucks County had 3,751 farms; a decade later this dropped to 2,049, and as of 2017, less than 1,000 farms dot the landscape.



There are significant economic benefits to preserved open space. ***Return on Environment: The Economic Impact of Protected Open Space in Southeastern Pennsylvania (2011)*** reports that protected open space has added:

- \$16.3 billion to the southeastern Pennsylvania's housing stock
- \$240 million in annual property and transfer tax revenue for local governments
- \$133 million in costs avoided as a result of the natural provision of environmental services, such as flood mitigation, pollution removal, and habitat conservation. About \$61 million of this total is provided in the form of carbon storage in trees on protected open space
- \$577 million in annual benefit for residents who recreate on protected open space
- 6,900 jobs created on or as a result of protected open space in the five-county region





## Challenges



### 1. **Public Vs. Private Interests**

Landowners are legally permitted to have some economic use of their property. In Pennsylvania, every municipal zoning ordinance must provide for basic forms of housing and all institutional, commercial, and industrial uses. Land use policy must balance economic development and property rights with resource value and site constraints.

### 2. **Land Consumption Patterns**

Land consumption is more than dwellings and commercial and industrial buildings. Developed areas dedicate land resources to parking, stormwater areas, and common open space.

### 3. **Wildlife Conservation**

Species habits have become fragmented and isolated due to development, decreasing the viability of wildlife and increasing conflicts with humans. The abundance of deer has devastated forest habitat throughout the county.

### 4. **Invasive and Non-Native Species**

Invasive, non-native species of plants and animals have also impacted the integrity of natural habitats in Bucks County. While some invasives are widespread and have clearly become a permanent part of the landscape, others are in early enough stages of invasion that control efforts could be effective.

### 5. **Economic Development**

Land preservation programs have been very successful in many areas of the county, effectively slowing sprawl in these areas. However, land development can be a positive in a community, providing new homes and businesses, new taxes, and local jobs.

### 7. **Future of Farming**

The 2022 Census of Agriculture estimates the average age of farm producers to be 57.5 years. Many farmers see their property as a way of funding their retirement. Accordingly, young farmers looking for farmland are unable to afford its high cost.

### 8. **Climate Change Considerations**

Climate change will have significant effects on farming and the natural environment: changes in temperature and precipitation patterns, extreme weather, such as floods, droughts, and wildfires, increases in disease and pests, and disruptions in ecological systems will potentially decrease crop productivity and the health of wildlife habitat.





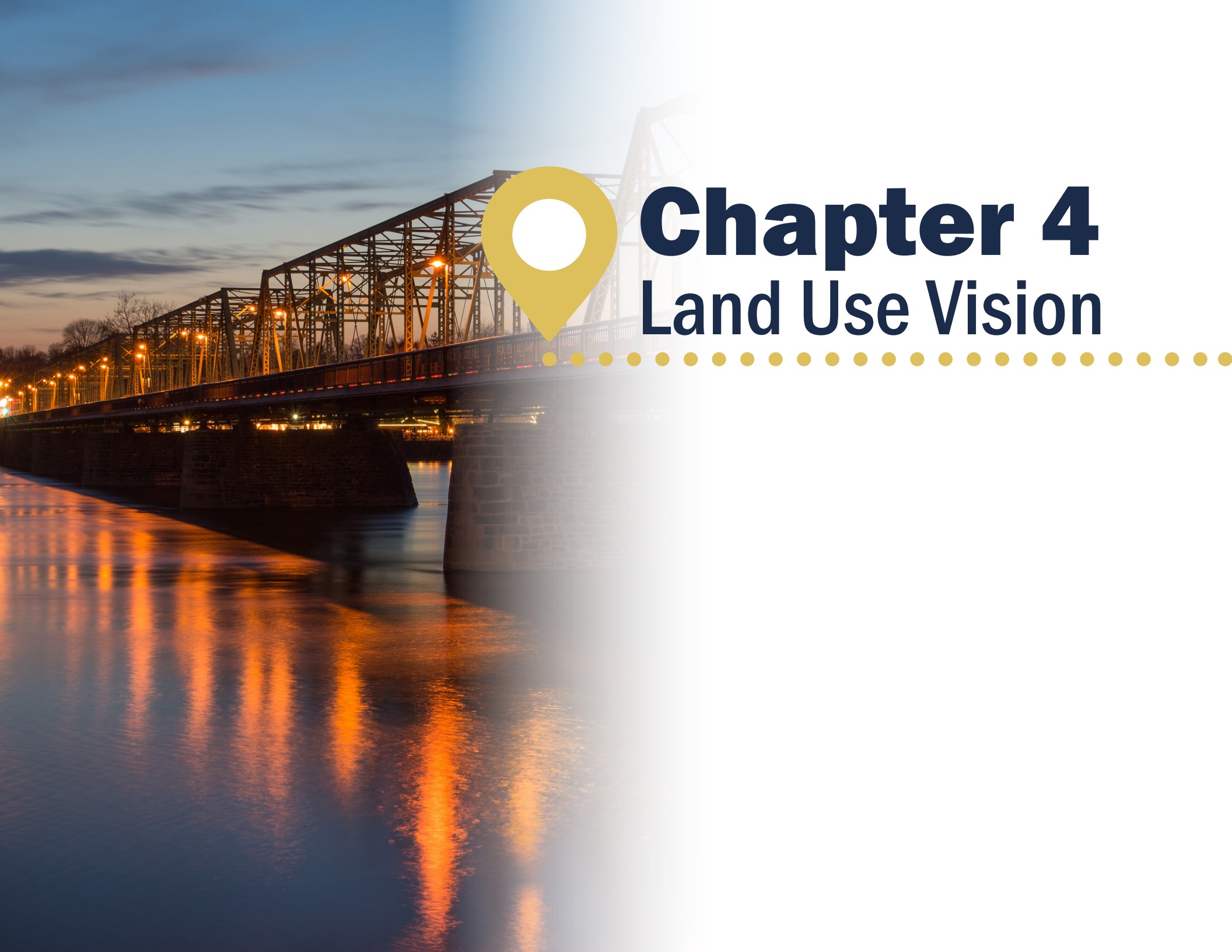
## Opportunities and Directions

**Sustainable agricultural practices**, including soil health management, water management, reduced use of pesticides and fertilizers, and the use of cover crops to improve soil health and prevent erosion, can help our farms become more climate-friendly and reduce impacts on our environment.

**Technology in farming** has the potential to reduce costs and provide additional income to farming operations. This includes agrivoltaics (placing solar panels and grazing lands together) and precision crop management using sensor data and artificial intelligence.

The values of open space and nature aren't confined to rural and natural resource areas. We can incorporate these values and resource functions into the urban environment through **landscaped and connected green spaces**. Examples include street tree plantings, rain gardens, linear parks, and parklets.

**Tourism of rural attractions** and natural and historical sites is a critical part of the county's economy. Resources have economic value in addition to their ecological and social value.



# **Chapter 4**

## **Land Use Vision**





“

Land use is how people have shaped and managed the natural and built environment. Land use planning seeks to order land use in efficient ways to reach a community defined vision. This vision is implemented broadly through policy documents like comprehensive, hazard mitigation, climate action, transportation, and recreation plans and, more specifically, through regulations like zoning and subdivision and land development ordinances.

The Bucks**2040** Land Use Vision provides a broad framework for land use planning in Bucks County and establishes visions of the future that are in keeping with the plan’s principles. This land use vision seeks to promote equity by ensuring that all members of the community have equal access to resources and opportunities, prioritizing sustainability by minimizing our impact on the environment, building resilience by understanding risk and designing for the long-term, and fostering health and well-being by creating spaces that promote physical activity and mental health.

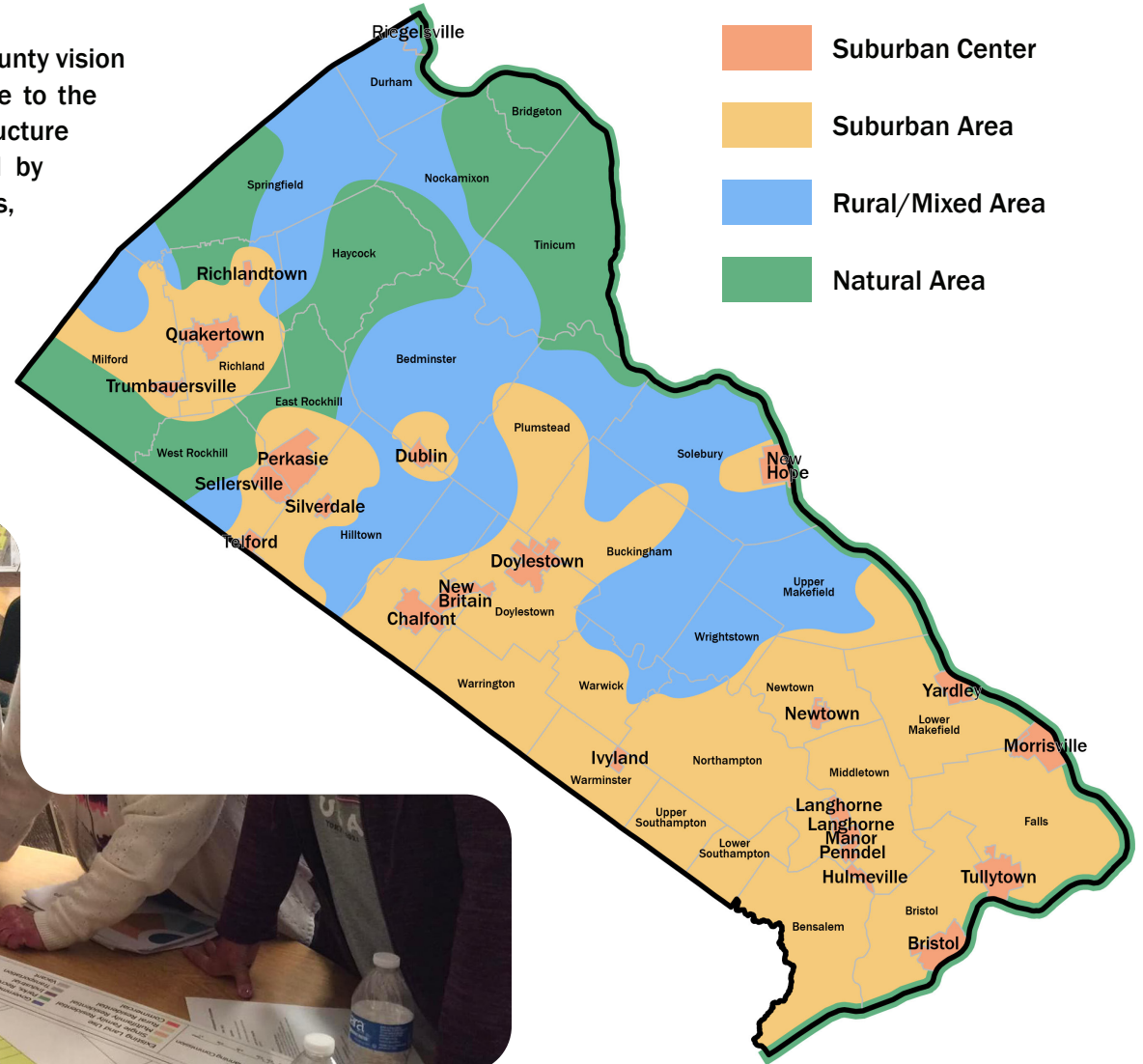




## Land Use Vision Map

The purpose of the Land Use Vision Map is to provide a county vision of land use to ensure future development is appropriate to the character, resource capability, and supporting infrastructure of the area. The Land Use Vision Map was developed by identifying land use characteristics, natural resources, water and sewer infrastructure, and transportation infrastructure. Also considered were population and development trends, county planning documents, and municipal comprehensive plans and zoning.

Four general land use categories are identified on the map: **Suburban Center**, **Suburban Area**, **Rural/Mixed Area**, and **Natural Area**.





## Suburban Center

These areas are boroughs located within Suburban Areas. These centers have unique history, character, and sense of place and serve as regional centers, providing goods, services, and jobs for people throughout county.

Development and redevelopment in Suburban Centers should continue to include compact and efficient development, a mixture of uses, a variety of transportation options (including transit), walkable neighborhoods, distinctive communities with a strong sense of place, and a range of housing opportunities.



## Suburban Area

These areas are made up of the post-World War II suburbs of lower Bucks, central Bucks suburbs, and the Perkasio/Sellersville and Quakertown areas of upper Bucks County.

New development should be steered towards underutilized sites (e.g., brownfields or vacant shopping centers), should be compact and built where existing infrastructure is adequate, and be designed with an emphasis on access control, streetscape appearance, pedestrian travel and safety.



## Rural/Mixed Area

These areas contain the rural character that many people identify Bucks County with. Land use consists of primarily rural residential and agricultural uses along with significant areas of natural resources. Infrastructure is not fully developed in these areas (especially public sewer service) and is not expected to expand into these areas, making significant development unlikely.

Development and redevelopment here should be focused toward serving local needs rather than regional needs.



## Natural Area

These areas include greenway corridors, recreation areas, preserved farmland, significant water bodies, and conservation landscapes as identified in the Natural Areas Inventory of Bucks County, 2011. These features are indispensable to the county's quality of life, providing essential services such as flood control, pollution remediation, water supply, and species habitat.



# The BIG Ideas

The Bucks**2040** Vision Plan offers us the opportunity to imagine a better future for all Bucks Countians. Each chapter of this plan details a plan priority, why it is important, challenges surrounding the issue, and opportunities and directions for the future. These chapters present many common themes which can be synthesized into big ideas that provide a clearer picture of what we strive for toward the year 2040.



## Our Principles in the Land Use Vision

The Bucks2040 Vision Plan identifies the principles of equity, sustainability, resilience, and health and well-being as the core values of the Bucks2040 Comprehensive Plan. How we choose to regulate, use, and protect land should reflect those values, and with these decisions, we should understand the long-term consequences of our actions.



### Equity

Equity in land use planning prioritizes planning for the pedestrian, supporting public transit, ensuring local decisions and ordinances provide for fair outcomes, and making housing more attainable.



### Sustainability

Sustainable land use allows for economic growth but understands the limits of our resources, including water resources, species habitat, and areas susceptible to hazards, and works with natural patterns rather than against them.



### Resilience

Resilience in land use planning aims to understand risks, limit impacts, and build capacity to meet future challenges. Resilience is a key idea in meeting the long-term demands of community maintenance and safety and is especially relevant in addressing the impacts of climate change.



### Health and Well-Being

Quality of life is dependent on individual and community health and well-being. A healthy community is one where its residents have clean air to breathe and water to drink, decent homes, safe neighborhoods, opportunities for education and physical activity, a safe and connected transportation system, and quality and accessible health care.



# 1.



## People-First Planning

Too often land use planning focuses on buildings, cars, roads, and infrastructure over the needs of people. People-first planning considers the social, mental, and physical health of people first, before considering the physical systems of a site or community.



## Complete Streets

Complete streets is an urban planning and transportation design approach that aims to create streets that prioritize the safety and accessibility of all users, including pedestrians, cyclists, public transit users, and motorists. Complete streets policy is one of designing a roadway for all users, not just cars. Complete streets typically include features such as sidewalks, crosswalks, dedicated bike lanes, road diets, and traffic calming measures to enhance safety and convenience for everyone.

Complete streets policies promote active transportation, reduce traffic congestion, and improve air quality, improving health and quality of life. Complete streets principles are integrated into transportation policies and planning processes to ensure that future street designs consider the diverse needs of users and establish a safe and efficient transportation network.







# 2.



## Interconnectivity

Bucks County operates within a framework of connected systems. Our water supply, wastewater disposal, and stormwater management systems function within the natural water cycle. Our transportation system is a complex network of highways, rail, local roads, bike lanes, and pedestrian paths. Where we live, work, and shop is the result of land use patterns established over the long history of Bucks County. A change in one part of these systems can have consequences for other parts of the systems. For example, increasing road capacity by adding lanes can provide temporary congestion relief but can induce more drivers to use that route to get to the places they need and want to go. Recognizing interconnectivity in our systems helps us to make better choices in land use planning.



## Green Infrastructure

Green infrastructure refers to the network of natural and semi-natural features in urban and rural environments. Green infrastructure can be employed at many scales: from a regional network of open spaces, parks, and natural corridors to a canopy of trees in a neighborhood to a rain garden in a backyard. Green infrastructure provides environmental and social benefits, including recreational opportunities, supporting biodiversity, improving air quality and stormwater management, and contributing to the overall well-being of residents. Green infrastructure both mimics and supports our natural systems, providing species habitat, providing groundwater recharge and flood control, and reducing carbon in the atmosphere.





# 3.



## Opportunity

A well-functioning society seeks to extend opportunity rather than limit it, whether that opportunity is educational, recreational, or economic. Opportunity can provide a sense of pride, fairness, and autonomy. Opportunity drives material and social progress. Opportunity in land use planning marshals resources in creative ways to help all members of the community, regardless of capability or social standing.



## Accessory Dwelling Units

Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) are smaller, independent housing units located on the same lot as a single-family dwelling. Whether it be an above-the-garage apartment, a basement in-law suite, or a detached carriage house, an ADU has its own separate entrance, kitchen, bathroom, bedroom, and living space. ADUs can be found anywhere, from city streets to suburban neighborhoods, to rural areas, and can be converted from existing structures or built from new construction.

ADUs offer younger generations affordable entry-level housing choices, allow for empty nesters to downsize, can provide supplemental income to homeowners looking to rent their property, can house a caregiver, a nanny, or family members in need, and are beneficial for older generations who wish to remain in their communities to “age in place.”





# 4.



## Regulatory Flexibility

Zoning has had a tremendous impact on the county’s landscape. While well-intended, zoning contributes to land consumption through generous setbacks, lot size requirements, and parking space minimums. Moreover, by separating land uses, we further commit to a car-oriented transportation system (and its related infrastructure costs) by placing distance between people’s homes and places they need to go. Flexibility in land use planning seeks to coordinate housing, jobs, and services. Flexibility challenges assumptions about incompatibility and the assumptions behind land use regulation.



## Parking Reform

Land consumption is much more than houses and commercial and industrial buildings. Developed areas dedicate land resources to parking, stormwater areas, setbacks, and common open space. Parking is particularly wasteful—overly generous parking regulations in Bucks County have resulted in thousands of acres of parking areas that are rarely or never used. Many communities across the U.S. have reduced, or in some cases, wholly eliminated minimum parking requirements. These communities have found that by reforming their parking regulations they can reduce the development costs of providing parking, increase economic opportunity by increasing land use efficiency, and enhance the walkability of their communities.





# 5.



## Process Over Plans

Good planning starts with the knowledge that we don't have all the answers and that change can only happen by engaging and recruiting stakeholders into the process. A plan is only as good as its implicit values and the actions taken to implement the ideas within it. A plan becomes effective because it resonates with the community and political will is created to move forward with its ideas. By emphasizing process over plans, we can be adapt to changing conditions and community needs.



## Implementable Comprehensive Planning

The implementable comprehensive plan seeks to identify solutions to local and regional problems through a community-based planning process. An implementable plan bases its structure around the issues most important to the community, rather than traditional comprehensive plan elements. By putting these issues at the forefront of the comprehensive plan and collaborating with the public and stakeholders to help solve them, real progress becomes possible. The comprehensive plan document is only important in that it memorializes the decisions made during the comprehensive planning process.





# 6.



## Regional Cooperation, Local Action

The priorities detailed in this plan extend beyond municipal and county borders. Regional cooperation and local action needs community support, a regulatory framework, and reliable funding. Hazard mitigation planning, multi-municipal planning and zoning, regional police and emergency services departments, transportation planning, and natural resource and wildlife conservation are just a few examples of regional cooperation and local action. Progress on big issues can be incremental, so political will and long-term vision are also critical to the success of regional initiatives. But great things can only be accomplished if we trust each other and work together for a common future.



### Multi-Municipal Planning

Bucks County has two of the longest running examples of municipal cooperation in Pennsylvania. Officially established in 1983, the Newtown Area Joint Zoning Council (the “Jointure”) currently comprises Newtown Township, Upper Makefield Township, and Wrightstown Township. Authorized by the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (PaMPC), joint planning and zoning among these neighboring municipalities allows for collective consideration and action on issues of regional importance. It also legally permits zoning requirements to be applied across the whole Jointure instead of each municipality having to provide for every land use separately.

The Quakertown Area Planning Committee (QAPC) is a joint planning group consisting of six municipalities in the Upper Bucks County region (the townships of Haycock, Milford and Richland and the boroughs of Quakertown, Richlandtown and Trumbauersville) and the Quakertown Community School District. Formed in 1972, the QAPC group tackles land use, transportation, open space, and service and facility issues, making it possible to effectively plan for major initiatives and improvements that involve more than one municipality.



## Looking Ahead

Vision. Vision can be defined as “the ability to think about or plan the future with imagination or wisdom.” We believe the **Bucks2040** Vision Plan embodies this meaning and purpose. Our wisdom comes from listening to and analyzing the issues we heard from our stakeholders. Our imagination allows us to see beyond the traditional comprehensive plan model and to embrace a new, implementable planning approach. Together our wisdom and our imagination align in conversations about what we want our County to be and how we might get there.

We are not finished; we are just beginning. We look forward to working with our residents and community partners as we continue these conversations and the comprehensive plan process toward the year 2040.

Get involved, stay involved. Our implementable plan process does not work without you.

Have comments, questions, or concerns on **Bucks2040** or issues affecting your community? Please let us know. Email us at [Bucks2040@buckscounty.org](mailto:Bucks2040@buckscounty.org) or call us at (215) 345-3400.







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