

Land Use and Growth Management Profile

Chester County is located approximately 15 miles west of Philadelphia and is bounded by the Pennsylvania counties of Lancaster, Berks, Montgomery, and Delaware, the Maryland county of Cecil, and the Delaware county of New Castle. Elevations in the County range from 1,071 feet in the Welsh Mountains to 70 feet along the Schuylkill River at the Montgomery County line. Chester County is 762 square miles or approximately 487,500 acres in size. Approximately one-third of the acreage is farmland according to the 1997 U.S. Census of Agriculture.

The County is one of the three original counties created by William Penn in 1682. Within the shadow of Philadelphia, the County includes 73 municipalities, consisting of one city, 15 boroughs, and 57 townships. Chester County is the seventh most populous county in the state at 433,501 persons, according to the 2000 Census.

Existing Land Use Conditions

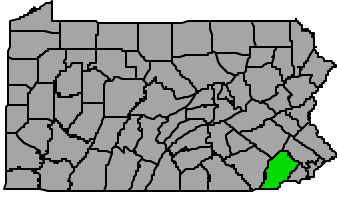
Approximately 72 percent of the County's total land area is undeveloped with 70.7 percent of this total devoted to forest and agricultural uses.

Development in Chester County has roots that can be traced back hundreds of years. As one of the counties that constitute the Philadelphia metropolitan area, it is both densely populated at its eastern end and rural in character in the western end. While much of the County's growth can be

attributed to its proximity to Philadelphia, Chester is also at the mid-point between New York City and Washington, D.C. The County has been attractive to businesses due to its educated workforce, a very high quality of life, and efficient access to the largest market area on the East Coast. Much of the development in the last 20 years has occurred as single-family detached housing units that have consumed large swaths of land. This trend has also included a steady gradual increase in the amount of land per new home. Such development has caused open space and farmland to disappear at an increasingly rapid pace.

Key Land Use Issues

- ☑ **Chester County is challenged by local municipal land use decisions that are inconsistent with the County's Comprehensive Plan.** There continues to be a proliferation of large-lot development that is inconsistent with the County's comprehensive plan, but which meets local zoning requirements. Additionally, public utilities are expanded into areas that are not consistent with the County Comprehensive Plan and sometimes are not even consistent with local municipal comprehensive plans and visions.
- ☑ **Chester County's development pressure is largely residential in nature.** Residential development represents a majority of the development activity in Chester County. Some of the residential development is



Land Use and Growth Management Profile

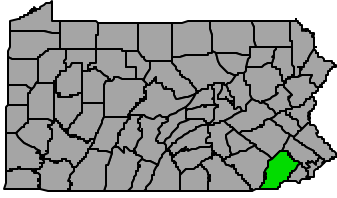
precipitated by the outward migration of commercial/business development further into the suburbs. Other development is affected by activities taking place across its boundaries, such as continued commercial development and lack of available land in New Castle County, Delaware. This has caused a noticeable increase in housing construction in the southern portion of Chester County. Additionally, the County is a popular migration destination for former residents of Delaware and Montgomery counties. This in-migration is likely due to the fact that Chester County remains a desirable place to live and work, is relatively accessible to other areas of the metropolitan region, and still has rural character that attracts residents. Additionally, its well-known proactive preservation policies and practices help to retain a very attractive quality-of-life in the County.

- ☑ **Chester County aggressively pursues agricultural preservation.** The County continues to be one of the leading participants in the State's Agricultural Easement Program and could possibly participate at higher levels if additional state funding was available. Chester County has initiated its own easement purchase program for the northern area of the County in order to include farmland that does not meet the State's criteria for receiving funds. This comes in the form of "challenge grants" from participating municipalities that provide funds to match County dollars.

- ☑ **Highway development continues to have an impact on the path of growth.** Improvements in highway access have an influence on "how far out" people are willing to locate. However, given the location of many of the proposed developments in recent years, the necessity of easy access to high quality roads is not as significant as it once was. From a commercial perspective, the Routes 202 and 30 corridors continue to be a focus of development. The PA Route 100 corridor in the area of the PA Turnpike Downingtown Interchange has received considerable attention in recent years.
- ☑ **Watershed and water resource protection is a high priority for Chester County.** In 2002, Chester County adopted the first comprehensive water resources management plan in the state, entitled *Watersheds*. Chester County is one of the first and may be the only Pennsylvania county to have a Water Resources Authority to deal with water resources and watershed issues.

Land Use Planning Activities

- ☑ **Chester County offers incentives for multi-municipal planning efforts.** Chester County has been encouraging municipalities to plan at a regional level for over 20 years. The programs established under Chester County's comprehensive plan, entitled *Landscapes*, reinforce this position by offering higher levels of funding to municipalities that work together. Presently, there are five



Land Use and Growth Management Profile

active regional planning groups and one joint-municipal planning program.

- ☑ **Chester County has developed a community revitalization component to its *Landscapes* program.** The County is encouraging older urban centers to develop plans to revitalize their downtowns. The program is known as the “Urban Centers Revitalization Plan,” and it offers financial support to the boroughs and one city in the County to hire a consultant to prepare a revitalization plan. The purpose of the plan is to establish a clear strategy for revitalization that will guide a community’s redevelopment and reinvestment efforts. As of the end of 2003, 12 plans have been completed and adopted. Three more are underway. The County is also providing funding for some of the implementation projects that have resulted from the plans.
- ☑ **Chester County is also working to preserve its remaining rural character.** The County is working with municipalities to implement innovative development and resource protection techniques such as Effective Agricultural Zoning and cluster/conservation design development. Effective Agricultural Zoning creates zoning districts that promote the viability of agricultural operations. Cluster/conservation design development preserves over 50 percent of a site as open space.