

TOWN CENTER NEWS

Summer 2014

A quarterly newsletter on revitalization
and economic development in
Montgomery County's traditional towns



WALKABILITY IN THE COUNTY'S TOWNS

We don't walk as much as we used to – or perhaps we don't walk as much as we'd like. Most people work far from their homes – and take transit or a car to get there. Corner groceries have yielded to out-of-the way supermarkets. And neighborhood schools have been replaced by bigger school campuses that make walking to school a challenge, if not completely unsafe.

What to do? Most people want to be able to walk – to a friend's house, to get something to eat, to drop off a library book, or just to get some exercise. Fostering neighborhoods that are easily walkable is important for a variety of reasons:

- It's good for our health! Obesity, and related diseases like diabetes affect us more than we'd like to admit! This makes promoting healthy lifestyles – and making it easy to have a healthy lifestyle – more important than ever.
- It's good for the environment! If we can stay out of our cars, we increase our local air quality by reducing vehicle emissions.
- It fosters safety! Pedestrians and bicyclists frequently don't have a safe place to go – a sidewalk, marked crosswalk, or wide shoulder – when it comes to travelling on high-traffic roads.
- It allows people of all ages to get to where they need to go! Mobility is important for everyone, from the county's aging population to young residents pushing baby strollers or wanting a more walkable lifestyle.
- It saves money! Walking, other than the cost of a comfortable pair of shoes, is pretty much free.

What makes for a more pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly community? Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Sidewalks should be a priority – not something to be waived from new development. Fill gaps in your local sidewalk network. Make sure sidewalks are level and easily traversed.
- Compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act is important – and also the law. Corner ramps, truncated domes, and ladder crosswalks help make the built environment more easily navigable for everyone, not just people with disabilities.



Walkability audit in Collegeville

- Intersections are important! Smart pedestrian planning utilizes tools like bump outs, clearly marked crosswalks, and pedestrian refuge islands to make crossing the street safer.
- Developments should be designed with pedestrians in mind – instead of only cars. Buildings should directly face streets with front doors and appealing facades.
- Bike amenities matter too. Encouraging bicycling through safe bike lanes, ample bike parking, and workplace amenities like showers will get commuters out of their cars and onto their bikes when the weather permits.

Although the county's town centers are generally walkable places, they can have problems and poor connections to the overall community. To jumpstart local walkability planning efforts, the Montgomery County Planning Commission has begun to offer "walkability audits", recently completing one in Collegeville borough. We are also planning to prepare a walkability plan for the county and will be looking for partners to conduct walkability audits for access to a school, a downtown, a train station, and a suburban commercial strip.



For additional information, contact the Montgomery County Planning Commission at 610-278-3722
or visit www.montcopa.org/planning

MONTCO 2040: A SHARED VISION

The county is completing a draft comprehensive plan that creates a vision for the future. This plan is organized around three themes – Connected Communities, Sustainable Places, and Vibrant Economy. The plan, which will be available for review at www.montcopa.org/Montco2040, is focused on directing new employment and mixed use development to existing places, like the county's town centers.



A specific goal of the plan is to “Support strong downtowns and community destinations, including mixed use areas, arts and culture focal points, libraries, and other gathering places.” Other goals, such as focusing new growth where existing development and infrastructure already exist, support this goal and will support the county's town centers.

The county welcomes comments, which can be made directly on the comprehensive plan website at www.montcopa.org/Montco2040.

CHEERS TO MONTGOMERY COUNTY

Beer aficionados rejoice! The Philadelphia region may be in the midst of a “golden age” of craft brewing, and Montgomery County is leading the way. Last month, the *Inquirer* held its fifth annual Brewvitational and crowned six breweries as champions in its blind taste test. Four of the six were from Montgomery County, including Sly Fox Brewing Co. (Pottstown), Round Guys Brewing Co. (Lansdale), Tired Hands Brewing Co. (Ardmore), and Forest And Main Brewing Co. (Ambler). These award winners share something in common besides knowing how to make a fine IPA, saison, or pilsner – they are all located in Boroughs or along Main Street Town Center areas.

Brewpubs are gaining in popularity with their focus on highly customized brewing recipes and expanded dining menus that often go beyond plain bar food. They can create new buzz in a town center, appealing to both fine drink purveyors and restaurant-goers. Other new brewpubs in Montgomery County include the Appalachian Brewing Company (Collegeville), Prism Brewing Company (outside North Wales), Barren Hill Tavern & Brewery (Lafayette Hill in Whitmarsh), and the Conshohocken Brewing Company (Conshohocken). Later this year, a new Iron Hill Brewery location in Ardmore and the Guild Hall Brewing Company in Jenkintown will be joining the throng of breweries in our county.



 **check out what's happening!**



Creative MontCo recently displayed the fruits of its ArtBox Competition at the Norristown Arts Hill Festival, which was a great day to spend outdoors

with some of the amazing artists and performers that call Montgomery County home. What's an ArtBox? These are old newspaper honor boxes, generously donated by the Philadelphia Inquirer and Daily News, which have been reimagined into something new. Boxes included lending libraries, soda can tab collection to benefit Ronald McDonald House, information kiosks, school pride projects, an airplane, and business promotion tools. Overall, this was a great collection of boxes and a fantastic first time out for this idea. This is surely something that could be replicated elsewhere – so if you're interested, get in touch with Anne Leavitt-Gruberger at aleavitt@montcopa.org.



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