

# TOWN CENTER NEWS

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

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## **INSTITUTIONAL BUILDINGS CONTINUE TO SERVE OUR COMMUNITIES THROUGH ADAPTIVE REUSE**

The county is home to more than 2,100 places of worship, schools, hospitals, and government buildings, primarily located in residential and downtown neighborhoods. Their purpose, location, and distinctive architectural design have shaped them as centers of community life. When these buildings close, they leave behind underutilized properties in the heart of our communities. Through adaptive reuse, these buildings are being given a new life.

Some municipalities have begun to plan for institutional reuse by enacting ordinances to allow for compatible new uses, such as residential and retail, and many examples of successful adaptive reuse can be found throughout the county. The recent revitalization of two landmark properties—Norristown's former Humane Fire Company and Trappe Borough's former Middle School—will bring economic and social benefits that enhance the tax base, demonstrate economic vitality, preserve heritage, and promote healthy, walkable communities.

The innovative transformation of Norristown's Humane Fire Company No. 1 into a micro-distillery preserves a key building in Norristown's Historic Downtown District. Norristown had long identified the brick building, built in 1887 on East Main Street and Green Street, as worthy of preservation and began marketing it for commercial reuse when the fire company consolidated services and left the building in 2012. In 2014, a local micro-distiller, John George, purchased the building and established Five Saints Distilling. The conversion relied on a partnership with the Municipality of Norristown to secure two important grants: a \$100,000 Community Development Block Grant and a \$7,400 Historic Façade Improvement Grant. Fire company memorabilia, including historic photographs and helmets, were preserved and are on display in the tasting room. Phase I was completed in 2016, and today food trucks and live music enliven the tasting room and sidewalk, drawing tourists and locals to the historic East Main Street Corridor.

The former Perkiomen Valley Middle School is being converted from a vacant, deteriorating building into unique

housing in the heart of Trappe Borough. The school was built by the Works Progress Administration in 1939 on First Avenue and was closed by the Perkiomen Valley School District in 1996 following the school's relocation and consolidation to a new, modern building outside of the borough. The borough and community prioritized keeping the school building, which is one block from Trappe's Main Street and neighbors the Historic Speaker's House, but for many years very few developers had interest in reusing it. In 2014, a local developer, Jerry Gorski, presented an option that was favorable to the community, which was to reuse the school building as condominiums. A rezoning permitted reuse as condos through conditional use. The redevelopment will result in 30 new 2-bedroom condominium units in the school, and 20 single-family homes built on the former athletic fields. The school, which was considered a permanent feature of the community, will remain a significant property in Trappe Borough.



*The former Perkiomen Valley Middle School's transformation into new homes will bring new life into this community fixture.*

MCPC's new guidebook, [\*Rethinking Institutional Properties – Embracing Our Past and Investing in Our Future\*](#), highlights these two examples and two additional case studies in the county and provides Best Practice guidelines and resources that can be used by communities to assist in preparing for the changing landscape of institutional properties while realizing their community vision.



For additional information, contact the Montgomery County Planning Commission at 610-278-3722 or visit [www.montcopa.org/planning](http://www.montcopa.org/planning)

## UPDATES ON THE MONTCO 2040 IMPLEMENTATION GRANT PROGRAM

The inaugural year of the Montco 2040 Implementation Grant Program was a resounding success, and the good news is that it will be back for a whole new cycle in 2017! Its popularity also made for a competitive funding scenario. Out of 19 applications, 14 grants were awarded. The successful projects include three green parking lot retrofits, two pedestrian safety improvements, and four trail/sidewalk connection projects. Stormwater improvements, a new public park/conservation easement,



Grant funding for 2017 includes new support for downtowns and community destinations.

and even a downtown mural installation rounded out the 2016 class of grant awards. The program is living up to its mission of assisting municipalities in their efforts to implement the county comprehensive plan.

Beyond 2016, we're forging ahead with the second year of the grant program. Please note—there will no longer be a rolling application deadline! The deadline for the first round of funding will be March 1, 2017. If funds are still available after the first round, the second round deadline will be July 1, 2017. Also of note to our town center communities, the program has a new focus category in 2017 centered around the support of downtowns and community destinations. This category opens up opportunities to improve a downtown with public gathering spaces, urban greening, pocket parks, or any number of possibilities that focus on public space or the identity of a downtown.

Please visit the homepage of the county comprehensive plan at [www.montcopa.org/Montco2040](http://www.montcopa.org/Montco2040) for more information on the Montco 2040 Implementation Grant Program.



## Check Out *WHAT'S NEW WITH DATA*

For those of you who are the number-crunching sort, data are important and necessary parts of your job. But knowing where to find it can be tough! Here are a couple of good resources that can help you with your forecasting and grant writing.

- [The MCPC Data Portal](#). The planning commission publishes a lot of reports throughout the year on topics as varied as housing prices, new construction, shopping center expansions, and population statistics. Our data portal has all of this information in one easy-to-use spot—with the ability to sort data by municipality, compare information with countywide statistics, or just zero in on a particular municipality to see all of the available data.
- [DVRPC Municipal Data Navigator](#). The Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission offers data on

an even broader level, giving access to information that covers its nine-county region (but also down to a municipal level). On this page, one can access census information as well as employment projections, population projections, and vehicle crash statistics for the region. Also available on DVRPC's website are [traffic counts](#) and [GIS data](#) for making maps.

- For even more mapping data, check out [PASDA - Pennsylvania Spatial Data Access](#).
- The [Montgomery County Health Department](#) also provides data to the public on vital statistics like births, deaths, and disease incidence.
- Last but not least, the county's Commerce Department hosts a Market Statistics page with lots of information about the [local economy and labor market](#).



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