

Phoenixville Area Chamber of Commerce – State of the County of Chester
June 13, 2017
Talking points

- Thank you for the chance to be here today, and I bring greetings from my fellow Commissioners, Terence and Kathi
- Share with you today a brief “State of Chester County” – our challenges, and our programs and plans that will help us to remain the healthiest, best educated and wealthiest county in the Commonwealth.

Managing Growth and Preservation – Landscapes3 and VISTA 2025

- Chester County has been one of the fastest growing counties in the Commonwealth, and we continue to be projected as the fastest growing in terms of population and jobs.
- It presents us with our biggest challenge....but also our biggest opportunities.
- As I note this, I ask you to keep the number “30” in mind....
- According to the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission – DVRPC – in the **30 years** from 2015 to 2045...
- ...Chester County will experience a population increase of **30 percent**.
- In number terms – we’re predicted to move from 516,000 people to 662,000 people – an increase of 146,000 people!
- So that means....
- ...our county will be looking to fill **30 percent** more jobs – 87,000...in the next 30 years
- ...and housing units will need to increase by **30 percent** – or 55,000 more dwellings...in the next 30 years
- So we need to continue to be smart in how we manage this.
- In everything, we PLAN. Twenty years ago we planned for the needs of today, and it has helped us to be a leader state-wide and nationally.
- Now we’re planning for the needs and different dynamics of Chester County **30 years** from now.

- Last year, Landscapes3 was launched, and throughout this year we are completing the public process and beginning to develop the strategic vision that we help us in our 30 year plan.
- If you haven't yet done so, I strongly encourage you to complete the Landscapes3 public survey, which can be found at www.chescoplanning.org.
- Overall, Landscapes3 will remain committed to open space preservation and aiding our agricultural segment, while encouraging economic development in the areas that make planning sense.
- **VISTA 2025** – the economic development strategy borne out of Landscapes2 – is helping us to be mindful of our balance between progress and preservation as we focus on economic development.
- Now in year-three of the ten year plan, we remain focused on activities and plans in our five goal areas
 - Quality of Place
 - Workforce and Talent
 - Industry Clusters
 - Innovation Culture and
 - Infrastructure.
- We've made lots of progress so far, especially on high priority strategies like the Urban Centers Forum...
- ...which of course includes Phoenixville...
- ...as well as a Workforce Summit, the Take the Pulse Survey (backed by this Chamber of Commerce as well as all the others in the County)...
- ...and an annual Tech360 conference held for technology professionals to network and exchange ideas.

Transportation –

- Another challenge that comes with growth – transportation – can feel like a slow process.
- ...but I assure you that we're working with SEPTA, Amtrak, PennDOT and community organizations, behind the scenes, to keep transportation projects happening.
 - Ground breaking for phase one improvements at the Paoli Train Station happened earlier this year
 - Construction continues on the Exton Train Station and in Coatesville...
 - ...and SEPTA is even looking at final designs for a West Chester Branch extension of three additional miles to a new station in Wawa.
- Another transportation priority is the upgrading of our highways, and current efforts include:

- Continued improvement on Route 202...
 - ...Completing the reconstruction of Route 422 around Pottstown...
 - Upgrading the Route 30 bypass...
 - And the Rebuilding of Route 1....
- PennDOT is also addressing very important safety improvements including Route 100 north of the Turnpike interchange to Pottstown...
- ...and intersection bottlenecks, bridges and trails including the Schuylkill River Trail and Chester Valley Trail.

Biggest issues in Harrisburg...

- The State House of Representatives recently passed HB 218 which includes cuts in Courts, Human Services, Health and Housing assistance...
- ...Nearly \$60 million in cuts for courts and criminal justice programs that could likely increase our jail population...
- ...and these cuts do not come with relief from any mandates –
- Counties would be forced to continue providing the services on county property tax dollars, while regulated and controlled by state policy.
- These cuts could reverse the significant gains made by the State and counties
- Cuts are also exacerbated by potential federal cuts – particularly with regard to community development...
- ...and the uncertain future of Medicaid expansion which supports a significant amount of mental health and addiction treatment.

Biggest issues in Washington DC...

- The elimination of Community Development Block Grant funding that comes through the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)...
- What does this mean for Chester County?
- Over the past 10 years, Chester County has received over \$21 million in funding from Community Development Block Grants.
- ...Of that, the county has effectively used nearly \$15 million in funds to support many worthwhile community organizations and county departments that directly serve clients...

- ..for housing rehabilitation programs, employment skills, food and nutrition programs, emergency shelter, transitional housing and home-based health services.
- And over the past 10 years, we have also directed \$7 million in CDBG funds to support many municipalities with necessary infrastructure improvements...
- All of this funding has gone to communities like Phoenixville where –
 - In 2015 we completed comprehensive interior renovation at Good Samaritan Shelter...
 - We funded infrastructure improvements in the area of Starr Street and Second Avenue...
 - ...and this year, will begin infrastructure improvements on the Main Street Trestle Bridge.
- In fact, since our Community Revitalization Program began in 2002, the Borough of Phoenixville has applied for, and successfully received more than \$6.2 million for infrastructure and streetscape projects.
- And approval for PETRA's "Steel Town Village" affordable housing development has been given, so it will soon go out to contract.
- Elimination of the federal CDBG program – which has been in place for 42 years nationally – will, as with all budget cuts – severely impact our plans in developing our urban centers and the services we provide to some of our most vulnerable citizens.

Issues that welcome business community support

- There are two challenges that Chester County in general – and we, as County government – are turning to you for help....
- **First is the decline in volunteer emergency responders -**
- The decline in emergency response volunteers – those that man our fire and EMS stations – has reached a crisis level....
- Not just here, but across the state and the nation.
- In 1976, Pennsylvania had a total of 300,000 volunteer firefighters.
- Today, that number is 50,000.
- In Chester County we currently have 5,000 first responders that cover fire, EMS and police – many of which are volunteers.

- Why? We all experience it. We lead busier lives...both parents in a family work...children are shuttled to sporting events and other activities...teens play video games rather than hang out at the fire house.
- Volunteers are one of the most critical problems facing agencies today...
- ...and they are one of the most cost effective solutions to the ever-increasing cost of providing quality emergency response services to our communities.
- We're working on the problem – together with emergency responders and municipal officials...
- It will take time, and it will take money – if you want to know more, contact Bobby Kagel, the Director of our Department of Emergency Services.

Second – Volunteer help needed for Election Days

- Seeking help from county business community through the Professional Civic Partnership Program.
- County has 228 precincts and we need a small army of poll workers to make sure the voters of our county can efficiently cast their ballots.
- Looking for civic-minded individuals to assist us in making Election Day run smoothly.
- The concept for the program originated as part of the County's first leadership development program...
- ...It's a non-partisan effort – and we're asking all local businesses to allow employees to act as poll workers...
- ...without having to take a vacation day to do so.
- A great way to show your commitment to the democratic process in Chester County!
- If you're interested – let us know!

Finally – two great initiatives that I want to share with you.... And again, ask for support

WalkWorks ChesCo:

- As I already mentioned, Chester County is the healthiest county in Pennsylvania.

- Last year we became aware of the Healthy Cities/Counties Challenge which is sponsored by the Aetna Foundation, the American Public Health Association and the National Association of Counties.
- The Challenge is a \$1.5 million prize competition that asks small and mid-sized US cities and counties to compete to be the “healthiest”.
- It’s a two year competition with the selected cities and counties developing practical, evidence-based strategies to improve measurable health outcomes and promote health and wellness, equity and social interaction.
- We knew this was something that Chester County could do!
- More than 400 cities and counties applied throughout the nation to be part of the Challenge.
- 50 were selected...
- ...and, as you may have guessed, Chester County is one of those 50!
- The program we outlined in our application is **WalkWorks ChesCo!** – getting Chester County residents walking – to the level of ONE BILLION steps by the end of this year, and even more next year!
- ...Because even though we’re the healthiest county in the state, one in four Chester County adults is classified as obese...
- ...One in four children in the county is considered overweight or obese.
- ...And half of us in the County participate in physical activity less than three times a week.
- WalkWorks ChesCo is providing more opportunities – and more encouragement – for physical activity.
- Physical activity that is easy...that only requires a pair of sneakers or comfortable walking shoes...
- ...and that can be done the minute we walk out our front door... Or even inside our home if the weather doesn’t cooperate.
- We have set up a WalkWorks ChesCo! website that allows you to register and add your steps to our cause...
- ...and the website links to Fitbits and most walking apps, so your steps can be updated automatically, or you can manually enter the number of steps you walk each day.

- And importantly – for any of you who already have Workplace Wellness programs, WalkWorks ChesCo is a great addition...
- ...and if you don't yet have a formal wellness program for your organization, WalkWorks ChesCo is an easy way to begin!
- We officially launched WalkWorks in April...
- And we've already logged over 370 million steps! Well on the way to our 1 billion target for 2017.
- There is even a "Phoenixville Summer Walking Challenge" team set up that is open for all Phoenixville residents to join. ...
- It just takes a few minutes to register, and I know that people like Borough Manager Jean Krack – already a Summer Walking Challenge team member – will appreciate your contributions!
- The website address is www.chesco.org/walkworks.

Finally – Opioid and Heroin Crisis/Color 5K

- It's no secret that the Opioid and Heroin crisis is a great concern plaguing the nation...
- ...and it is a concern that we, as a county, have been cooperatively addressing for some time.
- Although the number of people abusing opioids and using heroin in Chester County is less than other sections of the Commonwealth and the nation...
- ...we still need to provide education – across the board – and help our citizens.
- Opioids are being abused by young and old, rich and poor, urban and rural...
- ...and as we all know, abuse of these prescription drugs has opened the door to heroin use, because it is cheaper and easier to obtain.
- I honestly believe that this crisis has, in one way or another, affected everyone in this room – through friends or family, neighbors or work colleagues...
- ...often through a connection that we would least expect.
- A few years ago, Chester County established the Overdose Prevention Task Force – led by the Commissioners, the District Attorney's Office, our Health Department and our Department of Drug and Alcohol Services.

- Together, and with the help and support of many community agencies and organizations, we are:
- Taking a strong stance in the arrest and prosecution of individuals who deal the drugs...
- ...and are increasing public awareness in schools...
- Through our Department of Drug and Alcohol Services, we are making an effort to ensure access to appropriate drug treatment is available.
- Through our Health Department, we are focusing on the education of doctors and other healthcare providers on opiate prescribing practices...
- ...and together we have been hosting symposiums on overdose prevention and the control of prescription opioids.
- And, as many of you know, last November we hosted a Color 5k run to raise funds to help fight this epidemic.
- ...In our first year, 780 people took part in the Color 5k and together with generous sponsorship we raised \$25,000 for the development of warm hand-off programs in Chester County hospitals.
- We plan to hold our second Color 5k again this November, and I unashamedly ask for your support – through sponsorship, or to bring a team to run or walk the event, in support of this very worthwhile cause.
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