

# CHARLESTOWN TOWNSHIP

## 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

### 10<sup>th</sup> Edition



## ACCOMPLISHMENTS & NOTABLE EVENTS

Published by the Board of Supervisors:

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction .....	3
I. Organization & Administration.....	3
II. Advisory Boards, Commissions and Committees.....	6
III. Building & Code Enforcement .....	7
IV. Engineering .....	9
V. Environmental .....	11
VI. Finance.....	14
VII. Historical.....	19
VIII. Legislation.....	20
IX. Parks, Open Space & Trails .....	22
X. Planning.....	31
XI. Public Safety .....	37
XII. Roads & Public Works .....	39
XIII. Utilities .....	41
XIV. Waste & Recycling.....	42
XV. Zoning .....	43
XVI. Miscellaneous .....	44
XVII. Index to Abbreviations.....	49



Established 1737

*Cover photo by J.C. Raulston, July 1976, Garden at Swiss Pines. Published with permission from the North Carolina State University, J.C. Raulston Arboretum.*

## INTRODUCTION

The information contained in the following pages is a summary of the municipal activity occurring in Charlestown Township in 2023. The purpose of this report is to highlight Township accomplishments and noteworthy events during the past year. The details of the monthly business of the Board of Supervisors, its appointed boards, commissions and committees, and the daily activities of the Township staff can be examined through the meeting minutes, annual budget, financial statements, codes and permit reports, subdivision & land development files, monthly financial reports and numerous other records available on our website at [www.charlestown.pa.us](http://www.charlestown.pa.us).

### I. ORGANIZATION & ADMINISTRATION

#### Contact Information

Office Hours:  
Monday thru Friday  
9:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M.

(610) 240-0326 Phone  
(610) 240-0328 Fax

Mailing Address/Physical Location:  
11 General Warren Blvd. Suite 1  
Malvern, PA 19355

[manager@charlestown.pa.us](mailto:manager@charlestown.pa.us)  
Website: [www.charlestown.pa.us](http://www.charlestown.pa.us)

#### Charlestown Township Statistics

**Total Area:** 12.515 square miles (8,015 acres)

**Charlestown is served by several post offices:** Devault (19432), Chester Springs (19425), Malvern (19355) and Phoenixville (19460)

#### **Land by Percentage & Acres:**

Residential	16.7%	1,339 acres
Non-Residential	10.8%	866 acres
Agricultural	31.6%	2,452 acres
Wooded	38.3%	3,150 acres
Vacant/Water	2.6%	208 acres

**School District:** Great Valley School District

#### **Demographics (2020 Census):**

Population: 6,001  
Pop. Density: 545 per square mile  
Households: 2,172

#### **Roads:**

27.47 miles of Township roads  
29.95 miles of state roads

## **Administration**

The Township office staff, consisting of 3 individuals, handled approximately 1,605 phone calls and received 410 visitors in 2023. An estimated 18,423 emails (not including spam) were received, and 6,903 were sent. 70 right to know requests were filed and the requested documents were all provided within the required deadlines. Notary services were provided for 48 documents. 647 PA One Call tickets were processed.

The following individuals comprised the Township Staff for 2023:

Chris Heleniak, Township Manager/Secretary and Emergency Management Coordinator  
(beginning July 5, 2023 for EOC)  
Linda M. Csete, Township Treasurer/Admin  
Beth Martin, Permit Coordinator/Assistant Township Secretary  
Lisa Gardner, Recording Secretary  
Michael Allen, Staff Planner  
Tim Hubbard, Public Property & Safety Coordinator, including the positions of Fire Marshal,  
Assistant Zoning Officer and Emergency Management Coordinator to June 13, 2023  
Mark Koenig, Fire Marshal and Property Coordinator beginning July 5, 2023, Code Enforcement  
Officer and Assistant Zoning Officer beginning Nov. 6, 2023  
Jim Thompson, Project Manager/Roadmaster  
Mark Cabot, Public Works Assistant and Animal Control Officer  
Paul Jorgensen, Parks Assistant  
Cheryl Jorgensen, Parks Assistant

The following consultants were appointed or re-appointed for 2023:

Auditor	Barbacane, Thornton & Co.
Building Code Official (BCO)	Keystone Municipal Services for permits
Construction Consultant	Robert Dettore, J.D. Bravo Co.
Engineering & Zoning Officer	Daniel T. Wright, P.E., Montrose Environmental
Historical Architect	Dale Frens, Patterhrn Ives
Land Planner	Thomas J. Comitta
Open Space Monitoring	Ed Theurkauf
Solicitor – Legal Counsel	Mark P. Thompson, Esq. Lamb, McErlane, PC.
Solicitor – Planning Commission/Special Counsel	Wendy McLean, Esq.
Solicitor – Zoning Hearing Board	William Hagner, Esq.
Tax Collector – Earned Income and Local Services	Keystone Collections
Tax Collector – Real Estate	Chester County Treasurer
Traffic Engineer	Traffic Planning & Design

### **Communications**

- **Annual Report:** First developed for 2014, the Board intends to continue publishing an annual report to inform its residents and businesses of notable events and accomplishments in the prior year.
- **Facebook:** The Parks & Recreation Board continued its presence on Facebook to organize and promote recreational activities available in the Township and to feature its annual Charlestown Community Day event. A Social Media policy was adopted by the Board in 2016 and remains in effect.
- **Meetings:** The Township follows the Sunshine Rules as amended in 2021 under Act 65, posting all agendas at least 24 hours prior to any meeting, and adding new matters only after a vote to do so by the Board or Commission is taken, followed by a posting of the revised agenda.
- **Newsletters:** The Board of Supervisors published four newsletters mailed to all households and businesses in the Township.
- **Website:** Improvements and updates continued weekly to the [www.charlestown.pa.us](http://www.charlestown.pa.us) site and subscribers received a weekly update of new posts. Special notices and items of interest were emailed to subscribers as needed. PDF-fillable building permit applications and a variety of associated forms were updated. The contract with web designer Allen Underkofler was renewed in November for an additional year.

## **I. ADVISORY BOARDS, COMMISSIONS & COMMITTEES**

Charlestown Township is extremely fortunate to have so many knowledgeable, talented and enthusiastic residents willing to donate a great many hours of their time to serving the community.

The following individuals were appointed or re-appointed during 2023:

Charles Buck, Brightside Community Garden Coordinator  
Michael Richter, Design Review Committee  
Charlie Philips, Design Review Committee  
Tom Comitta, Design Review Committee  
Meg Solomon, Environmental Advisory Committee  
Stephanie Yocum, Environmental Advisory Committee  
Ashley Piatek, Environmental Advisory Committee Alternate  
Anuradha Soundararajan, Environmental Advisory Committee  
Cindy Thompson Historical Commission/HARB as licensed realtor  
Makinlee Fox, Parks & Recreation Board starting July 5, 2023  
Scott Ammerman, Parks & Recreation Board starting July 5, 2023  
Hugh Willig, Phoenixville Regional Planning Commission  
Michael Richter, Phoenixville Regional Planning Commission  
Bill Westhafer, Phoenixville Regional Planning Commission as Alternate  
Dan Walker, Planning Commission  
Dan Ghosh, Planning Commission Alternate  
Tim Hubbard, Uniform Construction Code Board of Appeals to June 13, 2023  
Mark Koenig, Uniform Construction Code Board of Appeals starting Aug. 7, 2023  
David Greer - 6 member Valley Forge Sewer Authority Board  
John Horstmann, Vacancy Board  
Michael Bowell, Zoning Hearing Board



### III. BUILDING & CODE ENFORCEMENT

Keystone Municipal Services provided plan review and inspection services for 2023.

A summary of building permit activity in 2023 is provided below:

	NO. OF PERMITS	CONSTRUCTION COST
COMMERCIAL: ALTERATIONS/FIT OUT	2	88,000
RESIDENTIAL: ADDITIONS	2	260,000
RESIDENTIAL: ALTERATIONS	8	1,234,780
RESIDENTIAL: BARN	3	1,722,000
RESIDENTIAL: BASEMENTS/BASEMENT EGRESS	9	193,000
RESIDENTIAL: BATHROOM	2	29,100
RESIDENTIAL: DECKS	12	586,432
RESIDENTIAL: ELECTRICAL & GENERATORS	33	198,000
RESIDENTIAL: GARAGE	6	902,000
RESIDENTIAL: HVAC	8	48,000
RESIDENTIAL: KITCHEN	5	198,542
RESIDENTIAL: PATIOS	1	150,000
RESIDENTIAL: POOLS & POOL HOUSES, HOT TUBS	8	644,748
RESIDENTIAL: PLUMBING	6	31,000
RESIDENTIAL: ROOFS	5	87,181
RESIDENTIAL: NEW HOMES	41	15,356,530
RESIDENTIAL: SOLAR HEATING SYSTEM	3	33,144
RESIDENTIAL: STUCCO & VENEERS	1	86,516
<b>TOTALS:</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>\$21,848,973</b>

### **Uniform Construction Code Board of Appeals**

The UCC Board of Appeals conducts hearings and makes decisions on appeals based on a building permit applicant's claim that, in the Zoning Officer's review and approval/denial of the application, the true intent of the UCC has been incorrectly interpreted, that the provisions of the Code do not fully apply in their situation, or that an equivalent form of construction is to be used.

Members of the Board of Appeals are qualified by training and experience on matters pertaining to building construction. This includes licensure as an architect or engineer, experience in the construction industry, or a combination of training/experience as an inspector or plan reviewer. No appeals were filed in 2023.



## IV ENGINEERING



The following projects/tasks undertaken by the Township Engineer are in addition to review of Subdivision & Land Development Plans as outlined in Section III, Planning and in addition to zoning and SLDO Ordinance reviews, conditional use application reviews, and construction and E & S permit inspection.

### **Act 167 – Stormwater Management**

The Township Engineer, Daniel Wright, P.E. continued the Township program to monitor outfalls as previously mapped. PA Act 167 mandates that municipalities adopt the stormwater management standards prescribed by it, also entitled the Stormwater Management Planning Act.

The Engineer performed the annual inspections of stormwater management systems overseen by HOAs and development management companies. This program includes any developments that were required to obtain an NPDES permit for construction, and only applies to later projects as a Best Management Practice.

Additional compliance measures required by the DEP for the next MS-4 period were proposed by the Engineer, primarily to be comprised of an infiltration basin at the Township's Phoenixville Pike property that sits below the PA Turnpike. The 60' x 45' proposed basin was approved in concept by the Supervisors with design to take place in 2023 and construction in 2024. This will allow the Township to demonstrate compliance within the required 4 year reporting period. The revised Pollutant Reduction Plan was advertised as required in July for public comments. No comments were received and the plan was subsequently submitted to the DEP for approval. The annual MS-4 report was completed by the Township Engineer and Stormwater Management Coordinator and submitted by the 9/30/23 deadline.

### **Developer Escrow Releases**

The Engineer reviewed and signed off on escrow release requests for developments under construction in accordance with their financial security agreements throughout the year. The Board of Supervisors approved releases for The Meadows, Spring Oak, Devault Village, and Pickering Crossing in 2023.

### **Planning Modules**

The Pennsylvania Sewage Facilities Act (Act 537, as amended) requires that sewage facilities planning be conducted for any new residential or commercial developments that will generate sewage. Sewage facilities planning is a process that will determine if the Township's existing sewage collection, conveyance, and treatment facilities have the capacity to handle sewage flow from proposed developments. The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PADEP), Chester County, and the Township are all involved in the review and approval process. A Planning Module for the Pellegrini residence on Charlestown Road was approved for transmission to the DEP in December and DEP final approval is pending.

### **Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission (PTC) Maintenance Facility Improvement Plan**

The PTC continued construction on its new Devault Maintenance Facility and coordinated with the Engineer on stormwater plan review and facility layout. A conservation easement for approximately 18 acres of the property is required per one of the conditions of land development approval. Negotiations on the agreement, including the French & Pickering Creeks Conservation Trust as a third party, will continue into 2024. Construction of the facility is expected to conclude in 2024 as well.

### **Quarry Activities**

The Engineer monitored Independence Construction Materials blasting reports that are sent to the DEP and addressed residents' concerns.

### **Road Improvement Project**

The Engineer oversaw Improvements to selected Township roads including Three Ponds Lane and the Pickering Spur. Long Asphalt was the contractor for the paving project. Annual road maintenance contractor Cedar Springs Construction performed the shoulder rebuild on the Pickering Spur.

## V. ENVIRONMENTAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The EAC advises the Supervisors on environmental issues, the protection and preservation of natural resources, and the possible uses of open land, along with providing educational materials and outreach to businesses and residents of the Township on matters such as recycling, stormwater and septic system management, and pipeline safety.

The Committee performed the following tasks in 2023:

1. Provided activities in support of birds for Charlestown's application to the Pennsylvania Audubon Society to become a Bird Town, which was accepted in January.
2. Researched the science-based, policy, economic, and health effects of synthetic turf in a report with recommendations to Board of Supervisors.
3. EAC was approved by PennDOT to adopt Charlestown Road for semiannual clean-ups. The first cleanup was on Saturday, Sept. 16<sup>th</sup> with a group of 5 volunteers. Flagger Force was engaged to keep them safe while working along the roadway.
4. Participated in the annual Earth Day clean up.
5. A Lenape name was accepted by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) of the creek previously called Hartman's Run: Mushpekat Creek. The EAC began the process to propose a Lenape name to the USGS for the unnamed tributary of French Creek found in Charlestown Park, and consulted with several Lenape tribes including the Delaware Tribe of Indians in Oklahoma. The name was provided by Jeremy Johnson, the Cultural Education Director of the Delaware Tribe of Indians in Bartlesville, OK after consultation with the Tribal community. The proposed stream name, Kwiamwis Siputët, which means "Hawk Creek", will be published if approved by the USGS.
6. Established an Alkaline Battery collection program with collection sites set up at the Township Office and Devault Post Office.
7. Discussed the need for an arborist with the Roadmaster to assess and possibly treat white pines showing evidence of disease in notable public areas of Charlestown.



8. Conducted several workdays of maintenance of trees and shrubs planted in riparian buffers of the headwaters of Pigeon Run at Brightside Farm Park and Deerfield HOA common space. Evaluated the riparian area of the unnamed tributary of French Creek in Charlestown Park as a possible site for restoration and planted two red maples with agreement from the Parks and Recreation Board.
9. Member Anu Soundararajan presented a PowerPoint on Single Use Plastics to the Supervisors at their Sept. 5<sup>th</sup> meeting after which the EAC was tasked with working with the Planning Commission on a draft ordinance to ban single use plastics in the commercial districts.
10. Presented Charlestown EAC activities at WeConservePA at the winter (state-wide) and summer (regional) EAC conferences.
11. Community education:
  - a. On Pennsylvania Native Species Day, a series of activities for children and adults in Charlestown was undertaken, and was published on the PA Dept. of Agriculture Native Species Day website.
  - b. Implemented a program for Charlestown Day 2023 that provided free native plants to Charlestown residents who removed invasive plants from their properties.
  - c. Educated residents about the benefits of the grassland and meadows restoration of Brightside Farm Park by RES at PA Native Species Day and in Nature News.
  - d. Continued to publish Nature News newsletter for residents who seek environmental information and notifications of education and volunteer activities sponsored by the EAC.
12. Contributed Township newsletter articles:
  - a. The Ruby Throated Hummingbird
  - b. Whitetail Deer [What to do When You Hit a Deer When Driving]
  - c. Charlestown Day EAC information on ecologic and environmental programs
  - d. Native Plant Offer [Recognizing native and nonnative noxious plant species]
  - e. Charlestown EAC Adopts a Highway
  - f. Take-Aways from November Wildlife Talk
  - g. Salt Pollution
13. Contacted the Buckeye Energy Pipeline regarding concerns about the stability of the pipe containing petroleum product that lies on the stream bed of Pickering Creek near the ice dam. Continued to monitor pipeline information including Federal Energy Regulatory Commission

(FERC) responses related to Adelphia's project to repurpose its existing pipeline into high pressure natural gas pipelines as residents have a concern about the integrity of the pipes and design life.

14. Grants:

- a. Brought a grant opportunity to the Supervisors from the Stroud Water Research Center, which, if approved by the Center, will plant and maintain a riparian buffer on Pickering Creek without cost to the Township.
- b. Brought an active grant opportunity to Charlestown residents and HOAs to have trees planted and maintained for three years without cost to the resident, offered by the Stroud Water Research Center.

15. Staffed an EAC table at the Charlestown polling station for Election Day 2023, to provide education and to survey resident interest in an ordinance to eliminate single-use plastic items/bags.

## VI. FINANCE

### Auditing

The Board of Supervisors appointed Barbacane, Thornton & Company, LLP to perform the Annual Audit for 2022. This firm performs a comprehensive audit of all Township accounts and prepares the Department of Community & Economic Development Municipal Annual Audit and Financial Report to be filed with the state by April 15<sup>th</sup> each year.

In addition to this full audit, audits are performed by the State Auditor General's Office on the Liquid Fuels Fund (bi-ennially), Pension Fund (tri-ennially), and Workers' Compensation (annually).

The previous year's financial report was posted with Dun & Bradstreet, Moody's and the EMMA database as required for the bond program. It was also posted on the Township website.

### Budgeting

The Charlestown Township Board of Supervisors approved the 2023 budget at its December 2022 meeting. The 2023 budget consisted of nine separate funds: General, Liquid Fuels, ARPA, 2 Capital Funds and 4 Special Funds. All tax rates remained the same as in 2022.



The **General Fund** represents the principal operating fund for the Township, including fire protection, road maintenance and improvements, planning, zoning, code enforcement, permit inspections, engineering, legal, and administration. The 2023 General Fund Budget was balanced as required under the Second Class Township Code without the need for a property tax increase.

Receipts for the **State Liquid Fuels Fund** are provided by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania from gasoline taxes disbursed annually to all municipalities in the state. The receipts are based upon Township road miles and population. Use of the fund is limited to road maintenance, including snow removal, reconstruction, and related equipment purchases.

The **Open Space Capital Fund** is funded from the open space tax (1/2 of 1% on earned income) pursuant to PA Act 153 (Open Space Preservation Act) and from the general earned income tax (1/2 of 1% on earned income). The open space tax revenue may only be expended on the acquisition of interests in real property and costs associated with those acquisitions. For the 2023 budget, the Supervisors used the majority of the receipts from the general earned income tax for open space acquisition, historic preservation, and property improvements. A portion of the non-encumbered EIT tax was transferred to the General Capital Fund to pay for the office fit-out and road improvements.

The **General Fund Capital Fund** is funded from real estate taxes and a portion of the unencumbered EIT taxes. The only expenditures in 2023 were for road improvements and the new office fit-out.

A **Recreational Fee-in-Lieu Fund** holds funds paid by developers who chose this option over providing open space and recreation in their subdivision and land development plan. These funds and any new funds collected will be used to enhance recreation at selected alternate locations such as the Brightside Farm, Jenkins Park, and Charlestown Park.

A **Stormwater Management Fund** has been in place for the Whitehorse at Charlestown development since 1997. The developer opted for this escrow arrangement rather than form a Homeowners Association. No funds have been expended since the fund was set up.

A **Transportation Fund** was established in 2016 under Act 209 allowing for impact fees from developers to be used for future traffic improvements. No funds have been expended from the fund through 2023.

A **Fire Loss Escrow Fund** was opened in January 2023 to hold funds in escrow for a Phoenixville Pike property that had suffered a fire loss. Per the Township's ordinance, the funds are provided by the owner's insurance company and held until the building is either restored and ready to be occupied, or, in the case of a total loss, demolished. The funds were returned at the completion of the project.

**Federal COVID relief funds** were received in 2021 and 2022. A plan for the use of these funds, which must be done in accordance with federal and state procedures and auditing requirements, was included in the 2023 Budget to use \$100,000 for a contribution to the Great Valley Community Organization's Community Center. All funds must be expended by 12/31/24, with \$255,921 remaining along with any additional interest accrued.

Budget amendments were adopted by Resolution at the May 1st Supervisors' meeting. Amendments take place in order to adjust revenue numbers and re-apportion expenditures as actual receipts and expenses become known.

The **Long Term Financial Plan** first developed in 2016 was revised for 2023-2027. The plan is utilized as an internal guide and was updated in the fall as one of the tools used in preparing the 2023 budget, particularly for capital improvement projects.

The Budget Work Session was held October 16<sup>th</sup> and a final draft was prepared prior to the November 6<sup>th</sup> Board of Supervisors meeting at which time it was approved for advertising. The final 2024 budget was adopted on December 4<sup>th</sup>.

The **Swiss Pines Fund** was opened in November 2023 after the Township acquired Swiss Pines and surrounding parcels from the Bartschi Foundation and Bumeder estate. They are to be used solely for the maintenance and improvement of these nine parcels.

## **Finance**

The Township currently maintains a Standard & Poors Rating of AA-, an excellent rating for a municipality of its size.

In July, the C.D. with First Resource Bank matured and the Township reinvested the funds in a new C.D. at 5.5% interest.

The Township continued to utilize ADP payroll services for the handling of semi-weekly payroll.

The Manager, Treasurer and Property Coordinator had numerous meetings with FEMA representatives to obtain funds to reimburse costs of repair of damage to the Pickering Trail footbridge at the Ice Dam from Sept. 2021's Hurricane IDA in the amount of \$24,941.24. Design work will be completed in early 2024, then permits will be obtained prior to going out to bid in Spring 2024.

The second American Rescue Plan annual report was filed by the April 30<sup>th</sup> deadline. The Township has opted to take the standard project approach, which provides the most flexibility for use of the funds and has simpler reporting requirements. The report indicates that half of the funds were expended on emergency services in 2022. A \$100,000 contribution was made to the Great Valley Community Organization in 2023.

## **Taxes**

### **Real Estate Taxes**

The Board of Supervisors accepted Chester County's proposal to continue property tax billing and collection services for 2023 following a successful transition to their services in January 2013.

In November, the Supervisors signed a contract with Keystone Collections to take over real estate tax collection beginning in 2024. This change was primarily due to a notice from the County that their proposed fees for 2024 would be a substantial increase from 2023.

The Township's .75 mil real estate tax has been unchanged since 2003.

In December, the Charlestown Supervisors adopted a resolution deputizing Keystone Collections to perform real estate tax collection on our behalf beginning in 2024.



#### Earned Income Tax & Local Services Tax

The Township is a member of the Chester County Tax Collection Committee with the Treasurer attending committee meetings semi-monthly as Charlestown's voting member. This countywide committee has the jurisdiction to oversee the collections of earned income and local services taxes for all taxing authorities within the county. Keystone Collections Group continues to be the contracted tax collection service for these taxes.

#### Transfer Taxes

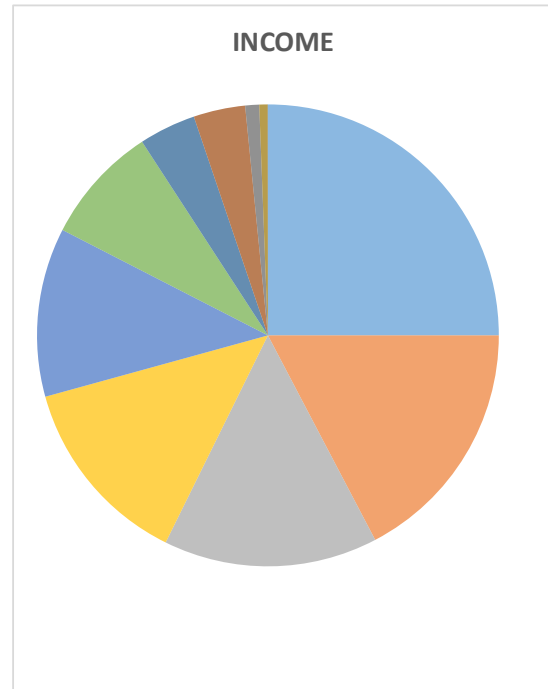
The Township receives ½% from real property transfers.

## 2023 Revenue & Expenditures – All Funds \*

### All Funds Income 2023

Earned Income Tax	5,407,459	47.5%
Receipt of Swiss Pines Assets	2,805,944	24.6%
Dividends	792,544	7.0%
Real Estate Tax	548,590	4.8%
Real Estate Transfer Tax	475,314	4.2%
Permit Fees	425,369	3.7%
Application & Review Fees	374,782	3.3%
State & County Rev. & Grant	262,454	2.3%
Local Services Tax	126,077	1.1%
Cable Franchises	114,830	1.0%
Federal Revenues & Grants	30,976	0.3%
Rents & Recreat. Use Fees	18,552	0.2%
Fines & Forfeits	450	0.0%

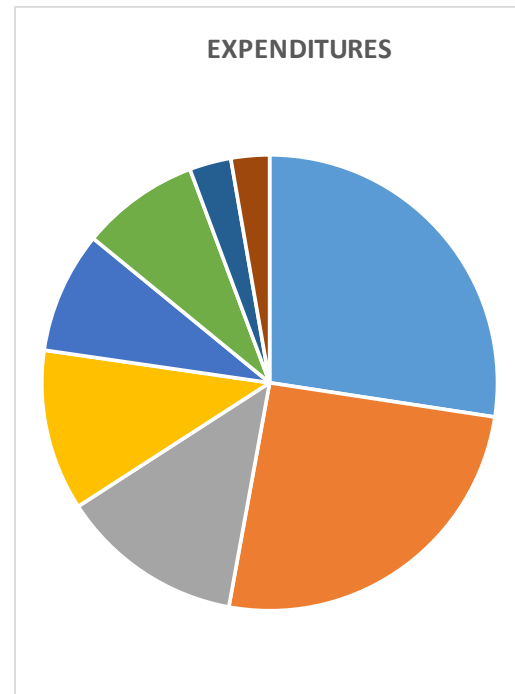
**Total: 11,383,341 100%**



### All Funds Expenditures 2023

Road Maint & Improvement	1,082,659	23.6%
Bonds & Notes	1,006,089	22.0%
Public Safety	513,900	11.2%
Administration	450,915	9.8%
New Office Fit out	340,803	7.4%
Parks & Recreation	331,836	7.2%
Municipal Office	116,645	2.5%
Donations	108,001	2.4%
Permit Review & Inspection	104,552	2.3%
Charge to Applicants	90,677	2.0%
Engineering	73,748	1.6%
Zoning	70,832	1.5%
Insurance	70,059	1.5%
Legal	55,590	1.2%
Environment and Open Sp	50,084	1.1%
Historical Resources	49,139	1.1%
Internet & Website	30,856	0.7%
Easements & Acquisitions	17,838	0.4%
Planning	13,827	0.3%
Recycling & Waste Mgmt	1,057	0.0%

**Total: 4,579,107**



\* Data is for General Reference Only: Audited figures will be available after March 15<sup>th</sup>

## VII. HISTORICAL

The Historical Commission/HARB reviews subdivision and land development plans in the Historic District comprising parts of Church Road, Pickering Dam Road, and Charlestown Road as well as serving as a resource to homeowners seeking advice regarding additions/alterations for historic homes and properties outside of the District with professional support from consultant Dale Frens and Carol Quigley of Patterhrn Ives.

Projects addressed in 2023 included:

- The Historic Resource Atlas Project, which concluded in 2022, was followed in 2023 by 17 site visits during April, July, and November to numerous prospective properties to determine if they are suitable for adding to the Historic Resources List. Once this list is finalized, the Historical Commission will propose amendments to the Historical Resource Ordinance.



*Above: Autumn scene at the Charlestown Mill, photo by George Csete*

- Monitored Spring Clean-up and on-going maintenance of the landscaping at the Mill by GreenWeavers Landscaping.
- Stephen Miller completed repairs to the windows at Charlestown Mill.

## **VIII. LEGISLATION**

### *Ordinances*

The following ordinances were adopted in 2023:

223-2023 Amendment to the Definitions section of the Zoning Ordinance to allow for an existing structure with separate utilities to be considered an accessory dwelling unit, provided the property is more than 20 acres in size and is subject to a conservation easement.

### *Resolutions*

1021-23 Independent Auditor Appointment

1022-23 Appoint Tim Hubbard to UCC Board

1023-23 Appoint Michael Bowell to ZHB

1024-23 Name Depositories for 2023

1025-23 Credit Card Policy

1026-23 Designating Emergency Service Providers

1027-23 2023 Fee Schedule

1028-23 Recreational Fee-in-Lieu Schedule

1029-23 Authorizing the Manager to execute PennDOT's Electronic Access Agreement

1030-23 DNCR Grant Authorization for Jenkins Park

1031-23 Order of Business and Public Participation Policy for Supervisors meetings

1032-23 Resolution Authorizing the signing of the penndot traffic signal maintenance agreement

1033-23 Amendment to 2023 Budget #1

1034-23 Records Retention Disposal #14

1035-23 Approve Acquisition of Open Space – Alleva Property

1036-23 Appoint Mark Koenig to UCC Board of Appeals

1037-23 Update Credit Card Policy 2023

1038-23 Recognizing Tom Comitta 50 Years

1039-23 Easement Acquisition under Lands Act – Nesspor

1040-23 Re-adoption of Emergency Operations Plan

1041-23 Records Retention Disposal #15

1042-23 Appointment of Keystone Collections as Deputy Tax Collector

1043-23 Establishing Attorneys Fees for Delinquent Real Estate Tax Collections and Claims

1044-23 Pellegrini Planning Module

1045-23 Tax Levy Resolution

1046-23 Adoption of 2024 Budget



## IX. PARKS, OPEN SPACE & TRAILS

Dan Mount was elected Chairman for 2023. The Parks and Recreation Board advises the Board of Supervisors on matters of recreational policy and the development and maintenance of parks and trails in the Township, including the 44 acre Charlestown Park on Township Line Road, the 75 acre Brightside Farm Park, the future Jenkins Park on Valley Hill Road, the Pickering Trail between Charlestown Road and Route 29, and other recreational and open space.

The Parks and Recreation Board's activities in 2023 included:



*Above: "The Last Hurrah" Autumn at Charlestown Park,  
photo by George Csete*

- Monitored park, field use and road event permits for various individuals and groups, including numerous special events, various scout events, and church, company, and school picnics. 244 reservations were made for the pavilions in 2023, exceeding 229 in the previous year.
- Updated Facebook postings to highlight special events and keeping the public informed of both existing facilities and improvements planned or underway.

- Repairs to the observation deck at the Wetlands Overlook were completed.



- Worked with the Healthy Kids Running Group for their seventh season at the Park. The Group hosted their spring and fall 6-week Sunday sessions for over 100 children.
- Continued work with the Great Valley Mountain Bike Club, which educates its ~50 members on proper trail use. The Club performs clean up at Brightside Farm twice a season as a "thank" you for the use of the property.
- Coordinated with the Phoenixville Marian Youth Club (PMYC) and Phoenixville Area Soccer Club (PASC). These groups hold franchise agreements with the Township for the use of the playing fields at Charlestown Park in exchange for



maintaining those fields and providing hundreds of area children the opportunity to participate in soccer, football, field hockey and lacrosse. The PMYC football program saw a great increase in participation after they changed from contact to flag football.



- Fields at Charlestown Park, Photo by George Csete

- Discussed improvements for the PMYC clubhouse building, which is owned by the Township. In August, the Board voted to donate \$28,500 to the PMYC to be used for new siding, windows and doors for the building.
- Coordinated with the EAC on Weed Warrior/invasive species management on various Township properties.
- Recommended approval of Theurkauf & Associates' plan for the future Jenkins Park, which consists of 16 acres along Valley Hill Road. The development of the Park will be modest in response to comments from the public at several public meetings.

The plan includes:

- An 8 foot wide trail paved for multi-use that connects to the parking lot for universal accessibility with a shorter ADA trail
- Picnic pavilion with tables
- Nature study area
- Meadow that will create wildlife habitat for pollinators and birds
- Nature playground that will use natural materials
- Preservation of the mature forest, mitigation of the impacts of paved surfaces, and implementation of restoration strategies that will improve site ecology such as invasive species management
- Subsurface Stormwater management under the meadow
- Bollards or gates to close the park from dusk to dawn
- One way entrance and modestly sized parking lot located as required by PennDOT

The Supervisors approved the plan in February and bid documents were prepared by the Township Engineer. The cost was estimated at \$446,000. Theurkauf & Associates assisted with a grant application to the DCNR 2023 Community Conservation Partnership grant for partial funding. As of December 31<sup>st</sup>, the Township was still awaiting news on the outcome of the application.

- A Memorial Day event hosted by the Parks & Recreation Board along with the Charlestown Historical Society was held on May 29<sup>th</sup> at the Charlestown Cemetery, which predates the Revolutionary War.
- Six Free Summer Concerts were sponsored jointly by the Parks & Recreation Board and Charlestown Historical Society and featured bands at two locations during the season:

July 6<sup>th</sup> – One Man Dog at Charlestown Park

July 20<sup>th</sup> – West Philadelphia Orchestra at Charlestown Park

July 27<sup>th</sup> - Bluegrass music from Borderline at Brightside Farm Park

Aug. 3<sup>rd</sup> - The Mighty Manatees Band at Charlestown Park

Aug. 10<sup>th</sup> – Brian Fitzzy at Charlestown Park , canceled due to weather

Aug. 17<sup>th</sup> – Gypsy Fuzz at Charlestown Park



The concerts were arranged by Makinlee Fox of Go Fox LLC.

- In December, a Proposed Events Calendar for 2024 was reviewed and will be finalized early in the new year.

### **Brightside Farm Park**

The farmhouse lease with the current renters was renewed for an additional year with no rent increase since an adjustment was made in 2022.

Sixty garden plots were leased at the community gardens, which continue to be very popular with our residents. The Gardeners' group has a closed Facebook page for those interested in sharing garden related information.

Dan Walker installed a second kestrel box in 2023 following the success of the first box last year that attracted a courting pair producing 4 eggs, some or all of which successfully hatched and fledged. Kestrels are not commonly found in Southeastern PA.



*At right: Kestrel eggs in a kestrel box at Brightside, photo by Andy Motel.*





The Supervisors continued with the ten-year Grassland Bird Sanctuary Plan with RES Landscaping.

*At left: Vesper Sparrow photo by Kayann Cassidy. The Vesper Sparrow is a grassland species not commonly seen in Southeastern PA due to the rarity of the grassland habitat they require.*

In February 2023, the hedgerows were removed. Any herbicides used by RES were applied by licensed, experienced professionals according to labels, safety sheets, and industry accepted best practices. Eradication of invasive species and their seed stock was crucial to optimizing habitat to promote growth of native seed.

After controlling the invasive species, a native grassland seed mix was drill seeded. The hedgerow areas were seeded with the same mix as the grasslands. Maintenance includes spot treatment of invasives over the first three growing seasons along with strategically timed, selective mowing. All oak and hickory trees were protected, along with all older, open-form native trees. Few trees on site are older than 80 years and these will be maintained. This conversion to savanna should result in approximately 60% openness and 40% canopy closure (retained second-growth trees), with clustered plantings of native shrubs.

These proposed enhancements will develop over time and be managed in concert with the PA Game Commission's observations and professional recommendations. RES's plan will increase the suitability of the onsite grasslands and improve other features of the site, including an increase in native insect diversity, foraging habitat for reptiles and amphibians, increased small mammal population diversity and abundance, soil character development, added protection of the riparian buffers, and stormwater mitigation.

Following the completion of Phase I, the Board accepted RES' 4/22/23 proposal in the amount of \$163,503 staged over two years for Phase II of the Brightside Farm Grassland Bird Sanctuary project. Jessie Buckner of RES provided an update of the program during this meeting. Phase II work began in the fall.

Three Reports were prepared by RES during 2023 including: Ecoassessment Report January 2023, Ecological Restoration Plan January 2023 and the RES PowerPoint from February 6, 2023 Presentation at the Board of Supervisors Meeting.

In December, three fallen outbuildings were cleaned up and removed by Aquilante Construction along with various other debris areas. Mr. Aquilante also removed two broken gates at the cow barn and replaced them with two new 12 foot steel gates. No trespassing signs were posted in areas beyond the walking trail where the public is not permitted for operational and safety reasons.



## BIRD TOWN PENNSYLVANIA

At the February 6<sup>th</sup> meeting, Ms. Heidi Shiver, Birdtown Pennsylvania President, presented the Board of Supervisors with an award for the Township achieving the status of Birdtown USA. She presented the Chairperson with an official Certificate of Recognition along with plaques and signage indicating Charlestown Township had been approved as a Birdtown USA community. The signage was installed at Brightside Farm Park and Charlestown Park along with several roadside locations.

A nature photography session was offered by the Valley Forge Audubon Society on April 30<sup>th</sup> as the Township's first special Birdtown event.



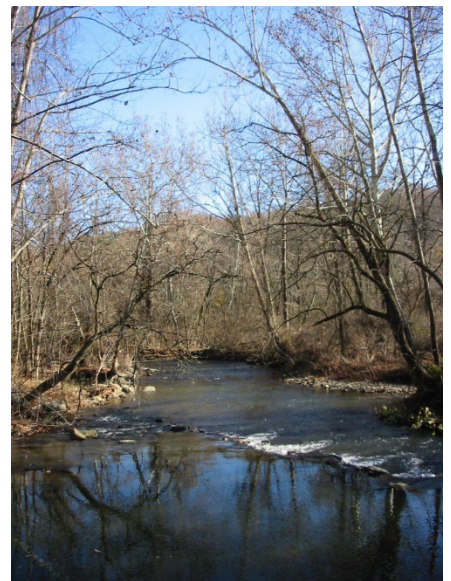
Charlestown's Birdtown Chapter hosted "Birding for Beginners, Including Kids and Everyone Else" on Wednesday, May 31, 2023 from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm at Brightside Farm Park.

*At left: The purple martin condos installed in April 2023 quickly found tenants. Photo by Cindi Underhill.*

### Pickering Trail

At the request of EAC member Pete Goodman, the Stroud Water Research Center's Calen Wylie conducted an assessment of an area of the Pickering Trail, which was determined to be a good candidate for stream bank restoration. The Supervisors provided a letter of commitment for the Stroud Water Research Center to include with their Growing Greener Grant for stream bank restoration at this location. If the grant is approved, Stroud would plant trees including bay magnolias, oaks, and sycamores and handle maintenance for three years. The EAC was tasked with developing a maintenance plan following that initial planting and maintenance period moving forward.

*At right: a view of the creek from the Pickering Trail by George Csete*



*Charlestown Park continues to be extremely popular with visitors. \_ (pano photo by G. Csete)*



**Monitoring and Enforcement Program for Open Space** - The Township continued its program with consultant Ed Theurkauf to perform stormwater management inspections semi-annually for Homeowners Associations, private properties, and Township owned open space and stormwater facilities, assessing the criteria of invasive species, erosion, and functionality. This monitoring also helps fulfill our requirements under Act 167. Dan Wright reviewed engineering inspection reports submitted on behalf of homeowners' associations and private owners of stormwater management facilities.

**Open Space Maintenance** – The contracts with Tree Service and Charlestown Landscaping auto-renewed on 3/31/2023.

### **Open Space Acquisitions**

In 2023, negotiations were held to acquire an easement on the Alleva Property consisting of 20.5 acres near Merlin and Pikeland Roads. The easement, which will be placed with the French & Pickering Creeks Conservation Trust, will be finalized in 2024.

### **Auchincloss Easement Modification**

The Supervisors approved a request for amendment of the easement on parcel #35-3-75.1 at 3050 Hollow Road to allow the construction of a home and barn on the property in an area outside of the original easement restrictions, which was agreeable the French and Pickering Trust, and their Land Preservation Board.

### **Balderson Tract**

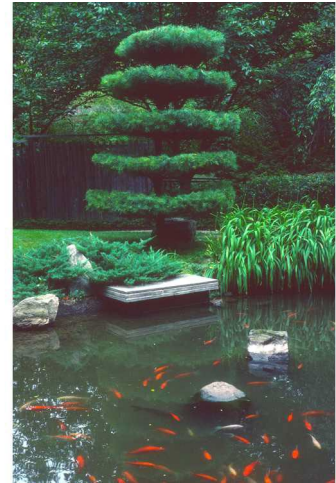
Charlestown, jointly with East Whiteland Township, continued to work toward an acquisition of the 142 acre "Balderson" Tract owned by Spring Ridge Management and located across from the Great Valley High School. The Charlestown section borders Charlestown Oaks. 57 acres are in Charlestown.

### Kendig Property

The Open Land Conservancy received donated property of approximately 10 acres across from Jenkins Park on Valley Hill Road, formerly the Kendig property in East Whiteland Township. The EAC will coordinate with the Parks & Recreation Board, which is developing a park plan for the Jenkins property.

## *Acquisition of Swiss Pines*

The properties owned by the Bartschi Foundation, including Swiss Pines, had a storied background since Arnold Bartschi purchased the property in 1957 and began development of the Japanese garden along with English gardens. He formed the Bartschi Foundation in 1960 and opened the gardens to the public in the 1960's, where they were a major regional attraction for decades. In the years leading up to his passing in 1996, the properties began to decline until the gardens were eventually closed to the public. Upon the death of trustee Henriette Bumeder in 2018, the Township began working with the current directors of the Foundation to obtain ownership of Swiss Pines, its surrounding properties, and their assets. In July 2022, the PA Attorney General filed a petition to transfer the Bartschi Foundation assets to the Township.



*Above right: July 1976 Photo by J.C. Raulston*

On July 27, 2023, the Chester County Court of Common Pleas, Orphan's Court Division approved a settlement agreement providing for the transfer of the 220-acre Swiss Pines property from its current owners, the Bartschi Foundation and Estate of Henriette Bumeder, to Charlestown Township. The formal acquisition and settlement took place on November 7th.

Our eventual goal is to stabilize & rehabilitate the structures on the property where financially feasible and renovate the public areas so that once again, this unique place may be opened for the public's enjoyment. Grant funding, along with the cash assets of the Bartschi Foundation, will be used to the extent possible for this project.

### Former Volpi Property

The Supervisors approved a proposal from Charlestown Landscaping at their July 5<sup>th</sup> meeting to remove brush along the frontage of this 40 acre property along with cleaning the sediment along the curb line to improve the appearance of the vacant site.





### Morris Award

Charlestown Township was selected by the French & Pickering Creeks Trust to receive their first ever Morris Award. Named for Sam and Eleanor Morris, both instrumental in the creation of the Trust, the award was presented at the F & P's Easement Landowner Appreciation gathering on September 15.

The award was presented for extraordinary conservation achievements from the years 2018 through 2022. During that period, the Supervisors, in concert with the French & Pickering Creeks Trust and 11 separate property owners, entered into easement agreements. Over 400 acres were preserved just in these 4 years, bringing the total acreage of preserved land to 3,100+ acres, 40% of the total acreage in the Township. *Photo by Tom Baldwin.*

### Trails

Township nature trails include the Horse-Shoe, Pickering, Pickering Dam, Thompson, and McDevitt Trails. Paved trails are featured at Brightside Farm Park and Charlestown Park.

In February, the Supervisors approved a donation of \$1,500 toward the cost of printing the 26<sup>th</sup> edition of the Horse-Shoe Trail Guidebook.

The Township obtained FEMA funding to repair the footbridge, bridge including the ramp to the bridge.

Construction will take place in the spring of 2024.



*Above: A View of the creek along the Pickering Dam Trail -photo by G. Csete*

At their March meeting, Parks & Rec hosted Scott Ammerman, the Northeastern Program Manager for Tread Lightly! He discussed resources for trail cleanups, including overgrowth, trash removal, and signage and offered to supply volunteers with personal protective equipment. Mr. Ammerman was later appointed to the Parks and Recreation Board and focuses on the trails. Difficulties along the McDevitt Trail were identified, particularly the need for directional signage on the two PECO clearings and the creation of a clearer path along the tree line.

Roadmaster Jim Thompson performed clean up along the Thompson Trail off Union Hill Road, popular with equestrians.

All trails were visited and many of the repairs were undertaken by volunteer groups.

Professional tree removal services were needed for fallen trees on the various trails, including the Horse-Shoe Trail, Pickering Dam and McDevitt Trails. Diseased ash trees were removed at the Charlestown Cemetery, a major task requiring the use of a crane to protect the ground and stone wall. Mowing service was provided for the Pickering and Pickering Dam Trails. The Parks & Recreation Board hosted a clean-up day on November 4<sup>th</sup> along the Pickering Dam Trail.

### **Charlestown Day Committee**

The Committee, led by the Parks & Recreation Board's Stephanie Robinson and organizer Makinlee Fox organized the ninth annual Charlestown Day event held on September 30<sup>th</sup>. Proceeds went to Friends of Charlestown, which provides funding for local non-profit groups. A 5-K Race was held at 8:00 a.m. with the rest of the day's activities beginning at 9:00 a.m. Makinlee Fox of Go Fox Productions developed vendor and sponsor flyers, yard signs and social media material to promote the event.

Photos of the day's events were taken by the Township webmaster, Allen Underkofler.



## X. PLANNING

### Planning Commission

The Planning Commission performs a variety of important services for Township citizens, developers, and businesses. They advise on the planning and implementation of the Township's Comprehensive Plan and related policies and ordinances along with the following tasks:

- Review and propose amendments to the Township Comprehensive Plan and other planning instruments including the subdivision/land development ordinance (SLDO), zoning ordinance and other related ordinances.
- Analyze petitions and requests proposing to rezone land in the Township
- Conduct technical reviews with the help of their consultants and make recommendations on land development and subdivision plan applications
- Maintain maps and data regarding land and property in the Township
- Oversee other projects at the request of the Board of Supervisors

Following is a detailed list of matters reviewed during 2023.

#### *Subdivisions & Land Developments*

The following subdivision/land development applications were reviewed by the Planning Commission in 2023. Review comments, when requested, were prepared by the Township Planner, Engineer and Solicitor.

**SD #423-20R Beyond Meat** – Preliminary Plan for expansion of the Beyond Meat processing plant at 1 Fillippo Way, approved by the Supervisors on Jan. 3<sup>rd</sup>.

**SD #428-22 Greene-Marks** – Subdivision plan for 3 lot subdivision of 9 acres at 4219 Howell Road. A recommendation to approve the Preliminary Plan was made on Jan. 10<sup>th</sup> by the Planning Commission, with the Supervisors approving the application on February 6<sup>th</sup>. The final plan was approved on Aug. 7<sup>th</sup>.

**SD #430-22 Stillittano** – Lot combination plan for 2 lots at 3041 Hollow Rd, approved by the Supervisors on February 6<sup>th</sup>. A waiver to permit above ground stormwater management facilities was granted on March 6<sup>th</sup>.

**SD #431-22 Alleva** – Lot combination on Honeysuckle Lane, the purpose of which is to facilitate the purchase of a conservation easement on the property. The plan was approved on April 3<sup>rd</sup>.

**SD #432-23 Chucktown** – Preliminary/Final Land Development Plan for a 5,100 sq. ft. office/warehouse building in an NC-1 district property on the south side of Phoenixville Pike, west of the PA Turnpike, remains pending.

**SK #01-23 Hoops** – Sketch plan for 3 lot subdivision on Tyrone Road, withdrawn due to deed restriction against further subdivision.

### *Conditional Uses*

The following conditional use applications were reviewed in 2023:

**CU-2022-4** Seven Star Pharmaceutical – The Supervisors approved the application for laboratory use in the LI-1 zoning district on Jan. 3<sup>rd</sup>.

**CU-2023-1** Dougherty – The Supervisors approved the application for equestrian use on Hillsover Lane on August 7<sup>th</sup>. The HARB reviewed documentation submitted by the owners on a 1972 barn they wished to demolish in order to build a new barn. They provided a letter to the Supervisors stating their determination that this barn was not a historic structure and may be removed without obtaining a Certificate of Appropriateness.

**Of Note:** In April, The Board of Supervisors approved a negotiated settlement agreement with the PA Turnpike Commission, which amended several conditions of an approval granted in 2021.

### *General Planning Matters*

Additional activities performed in 2023 included the following:

- Elected Michael Richter as Chairman and Matt Rogers as Vice Chairman. Wendy McLean, Esq. was appointed as Solicitor to the Planning Commission.
- Provided input to the Manager and Treasurer for the Long-Term Financial Plan on projects for 2023 – 2027.
- Planning Commission member Dan Walker, along with the Township Manager, attended quarterly meetings with the Great Valley School District office along with the other municipalities in the district to provide data on future development to gauge the impact on the schools.



- Waiver request by Molly Concannon to permit construction of a detached garage in a side yard at her 3005 Sidley Hill Road property approved by the Supervisors on Jan. 3<sup>rd</sup>.
- Waiver request by David Danilowicz to permit the construction of a detached 24 x 24' garage in his front yard setback at 516 Conestoga Road. Approved by the Supervisors on March 6<sup>th</sup>.
- An ordinance was drafted to amend text and add design standards for small wireless facilities. The Planning Commission recommended the draft with proposed revisions at their August 8<sup>th</sup> meeting. Following completion of the revisions, the ordinance will be considered for adoption in 2024.
- Reviewed the Chester County Planning Commission's TII (Transportation Inventory) list and added 11 road areas to the list, which was communicated to the County by Traffic Planning & Design.

### **Design Review Committee**

The Design Review Committee oversees the detailed design process of the Traditional Neighborhood Development District (TND), which is a compact, neighborhood driven multi-use district located in the area of Charlestown Township known as Devault.

The TND District was created in 2004 as a proactive means of mitigating the impact of market forces that would lead to more intensive commercial and industrial uses following the construction of the Turnpike Slip Ramp in East Whiteland Township. The Design Review Committee includes one member of the Planning Commission, one member of the Board of Supervisors, and the Township Planning Consultant. The DRC reviews applications for land development in the TND District, focusing on the developer's specific Graphic Design Guidelines, which must comply with the key design elements specified by the Township. The Committee also reviews requests for material and product substitutions that arise as development is underway and is actively involved in the aesthetics of public improvements in the district.

Pickering Crossing (Charlestown Road and Route 29) was completed in early 2023 and the final construction escrow was released. Spring Oak (Whitehorse Road) construction was completed by mid-year. The second phase of Spring Oak, Devault Village has had permits issued for all the twin units, with some single units still to be constructed.

Last year, a grant application was submitted to the Commonwealth Financing Authority for sidewalk installation, pedestrian signal upgrades, and crosswalk improvements at the Morehall Road (SR 29) and Yellow Springs Road intersection. The grant was approved in March 2023 for \$177,417, covering nearly the entire project cost of \$178,025. The project will go out to bid in early 2024 with construction to follow.

## **Transportation Advisory Committee**

The Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) relies on the 2014 Transportation Capital Improvements Plan, which is required by Act 209, to enable a municipality to provide for transportation capital improvements through the imposition of impact fees upon new development. No new fees were assessed in 2023.

## **Phoenixville Regional Planning Committee**

Members include the Townships of Charlestown, Schuylkill, East Pikeland, West Pikeland, and West Vincent along with the Borough of Phoenixville. The Committee performs reviews of proposed zoning amendments and selected subdivision and land development plans for its members. The Regional Planning Commission has an advisory status like that of the Chester County Planning Commission, and the review period runs concurrently with the CCPC's review.

Along with the other members, Charlestown continued to work together under the implementation agreement that outlines the strategy for the members to plan their future by directing growth into designated growth areas and into older communities for revitalization while maximizing the efficient use of the public infrastructure. Focus is also placed on preserving the Region's historic sites, rural areas and natural resources.

Dan Walker was Charlestown's representative on the PRPC's trail committee, which was created in 2022.

## **Phoenixville Region Multi-Modal Transportation Plan**

The region includes Phoenixville Borough and Upper Providence, West Vincent, East Pikeland, Schuylkill and Charlestown Townships. The Plan consists of evaluation of existing conditions for walking, biking, and mass transit, and developed goals and recommendations. The plan outlines implementation strategies to enhance alternate means of transportation for commuters other than single occupancy vehicles.

Two projects located in Charlestown are identified on the Plan, which continue to be priorities moving forward:



### **The Devault Rail to Trail Project**

Two aspects of the project have been completed. The first was the Devault Trail Feasibility Study, published in 2014. The second step was the finalization of the Devault Trail Activation plan in 2022. This plan set forth recommendations for the appropriate groups (and structure) to acquire, own, and manage the future trail, and serves as a catalyst for the immediate next

stages in the process: the formation of a working group for the inter-municipal agreement and the property research and engineering steps that continue to push the trail project forward.

The third step will be to apply for a DVPRC grant with assistance from TMAAC. The grant application will cover these steps of the activation plan:

1. Title Searches
2. Study of environmental conditions
3. Structural conditions
4. Preparation of a Master Plan

The Manager and Treasurer met via Teams with TMAAC's Tim Phelps and John Meisel on May 23<sup>rd</sup> to discuss upcoming meetings with the Open Space Institute (OSI), who contacted Norfolk Southern about an acquisition deal for the Devault Trail. OSI may be able to assist with the acquisition process and grant funding. Land trust involvement is also possible.

TMAAC confirmed the County is maintaining its position that they are not interested in ownership even if the acquisition is completely funded. Likewise they are not interested in taking on a maintenance role.

The current concept for ownership remains an intermunicipal agreement, with each municipality owning their own section of the trail and maintaining it.

Follow up meetings were held June 14<sup>th</sup> and Sept. 6<sup>th</sup>. The Open Space Institute offered assistance in navigating the waters with Norfolk Southern. They also have access to funding and can take on the appraisal and environmental assessment processes. The next step is to order a title search and obtain an appraisal. It's believed that all the property is owned fee simple by Norfolk Southern.

#### PA29 Narrow Bridge

The current configuration of the road at this point causes traffic to slow/back up at peak times thus motivating motorists to favor other roads traversing the Township. If the bridge is determined to be structurally deficient, then federal funds may be available for replacement and widening.

#### **Traffic Planning**

The firm Traffic Planning & Design served as traffic engineering consultant. The Township worked with consultants Traffic Planning & Design on two major intersection improvement projects.

In 2019, TPD obtained a DVRPC grant for \$2,110,000 following placement of the Route 401 & Valley Hill Road intersection on the CMAQ list (Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program). The project will begin in Spring 2024 and will include channelization improvements and the addition of left turn lanes on Route 401 for both northbound and southbound traffic.

Plans to improve the intersection of Phoenixville Pike and Yellow Springs/Sidley Roads by adding left turn lanes on Phoenixville Pike in both directions and a right turn lane from Sidley onto Phoenixville Pike continued during 2023. Charlestown worked with East Whiteland Township, and they pledged to contribute \$150,000 each to reach the total project amount of \$999,307, of which a DCED multi-modal grant of \$699,307 was awarded in 2022. As design work continued in 2023, additional costs were identified that will require additional contribution from the two townships. Negotiations for easements on several properties adjacent to the intersection may cause delay to the construction start date, now anticipated for early 2025. The Manager attended a meeting on December 12<sup>th</sup> at East Whiteland Township where officials met with the affected East Whiteland residents.

With a grant award of \$177,417 from the Commonwealth Financing Authority to install sidewalks, pedestrian signal upgrades, and crosswalk improvements at the Morehall Road (SR 29) and Yellow Springs Road intersection, planning will continue into 2024.

## XI. PUBLIC SAFETY

- **Police Services:** Charlestown Township is served by the Pennsylvania State Police, from Troop J, the Embreeville Barracks with Captain Robert C. Wagner, station commander.
- **Fire Companies and Ambulance Services:** Charlestown Township is served by two fire departments, the East Whiteland Volunteer Fire Association, the Kimberton Fire Company (fire) along with the and West End Fire Company (ambulance).

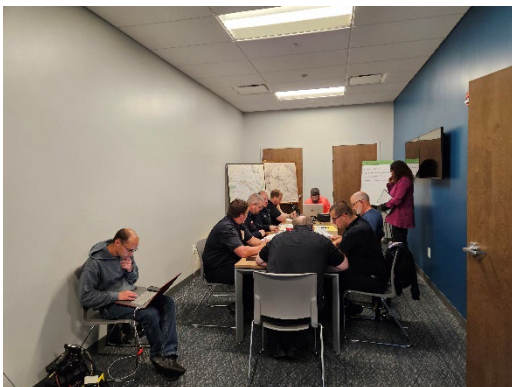
In addition, Uwchlan Ambulance Corps serves a small portion of the western part of the Township.

Kimberton/West End Fire Companies cover the northern portion of the Township while East Whiteland Volunteer Fire Association covers the southern area.



Charlestown holds two seats on the East Whiteland Volunteer Fire Association board, held in 2023 by Supervisor Kevin Kuhn, who has served on the board for 10 years. Township Manager Chris Heleniak was appointed in 2022 and continued to serve in 2023. This fire department has operated as a joint venture with Charlestown since its inception in 1952.

- Charlestown provides funding to the Fire Companies and Ambulance Services through annual contributions and by passing through the Firemen's Relief funds apportioned to the Township from the Commonwealth.



**Emergency Operations Center (EOC):** Charlestown re-adopted its Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) in November 2023. This plan is designed to provide prompt and effective emergency response procedures to be followed in the event of a major emergency or disaster to protect the health, safety and welfare of Charlestown residents. The Emergency Operations Center, located at the Township office, consists of computers, communications and other equipment to be used in the event of an emergency that might affect the residents of the Township.

The Fire Marshal and EOC Director attended quarterly training sessions for Emergency Management personnel provided through the County Department of Emergency Services, including hazard mitigation training, and participated in county DES Emergency Management Radio and Limerick Siren Tests.

The Biennial drill took place on November 16<sup>th</sup> . Participants included the Township Manager, who is also the EOC Coordinator, members of the staff and Board of Supervisors, and volunteers from the East Whiteland Fire Association. Charlestown passed its evaluation with both County Emergency Services and FEMA, which sent personnel to monitor our exercise.

- **Animal Control:** Charlestown was in the 5th year of its 5 year contract with the Brandywine SPCA to enforce the Dog Ordinance (dogs running at large) along with its other services for a five year period from 2019-2023. A new contract for 2024-2028 was approved on November 6<sup>th</sup>. The Township also has an Animal Control Officer to assist residents with animal trapping and removal. The Zoning Officer handles barking complaints.



- **Burning Regulations, Smoke Detectors and Fireplace Safety:** The Fire Marshal continued to provide information to the residents on the burning ordinance and advise on general safety practices.
- **False Alarms:** The Township continued to enforce its ordinance warning first time offenders of false fire alarms and assessing a fine for repeat false alarms. Warnings and fines were issued as needed.
- **Fireworks:** The Fire Marshal reviews any applications for fireworks displays.
- **Hazardous Materials:** The Fire Marshal consulted with businesses as needed regarding HazMat issues and registration requirements. Administration continued with annual registration of hazardous materials from township businesses as required by our ordinance.
- **Trespassing and Vandalism:** The Fire Marshal continued as ongoing liaison to the State Police to report and address trespassing and vandalism issues that occurred along trails and in areas adjacent to the PA Turnpike owned by various homeowners' associations.
- **PA One Call:** The Township continued its support and education outreach to remind residents and contractors to call 8-1-1 before they dig.

## **XII. PUBLIC WORKS**

The Five-Year Road Improvement Plan was reviewed and updated. Improvements for 2023 were undertaken for Three Ponds Lane and Pickering Spur.

Long's Asphalt was awarded the contract for the road improvement project. The Roadmaster accommodated various requests from residents and addressed their concerns while paving work was underway.

The Annual Road Maintenance contract was awarded to Cedar Springs Construction Company. Additional Improvements in 2023 performed included:

- Snow & Ice Removal throughout winter season
- Roadside mowing along Township roads
- Inlet and swale cleaning on Township Roads
- Shoulder repair on Blackberry Lane
- Extensive shoulder repair and culvert replacement on Buckwalter Rd
- Base repairs on Union Hill and Rees Roads
- Installation of two additional vane grates on Howell Road to alleviate water run off issues.
- Shoulder repairs along Mary Hill Road
- Shoulder repairs on Blackberry Road
- Replace 6" perf. Pipe with 50 lf of 8" pipe – Maryhill Road
- Shoulder Repairs and replace cross pipe with end section, pipe trench restoration on Pickering Spur
- Built up berm on Mary Hill Road, Newcomen Road, Wyndham Lane and Valley Hill Road
- Repair culvert damage on Pickering Road, shoulder restoration and backfill cross-over trench
- Sew cut and placement of 19 mm at cross-over and finish shoulder restoration on Pickering Spur
- Repair of several cross pipes and inlet/culvert reconstruction along Howell Road
- Replace cross pipe on Mine Road

Salt was purchased from American Rock Salt Company via the Co-Stars program rather than soliciting bids.

Spring and Fall clean-up and repairs included road sweeping, culvert and inlet clean outs, and pothole patching. Tree removal was performed throughout the year along many of the Township roads and the open space properties, including Aldham Road, Bell Circle, Blackberry Lane, Bodine Road, Buckwalter Road, Crown Oak, Howell Road, Lincoln Road, Pickering Spur, Rosewood Lane, Sidley Hill Road, and Union Hill Road, Wells Road, and downed limbs in Charlestown Park and the Pickering Preserve. Seven dead ash trees were removed from the Pickering Trail.

The Roadmaster was in contact with PennDOT for tree trimming and sight distance clearing along state roads and communicated numerous problems with trees and limbs on wires to PECO.

The Township Office continued to utilize PennDOT's online system for reporting road concerns where prompt attention was given in all situations reported. The system provides a tracking number and email notification when the reported problem has been resolved.

The Contract with Armour & Sons for signal service maintenance was extended for an additional year to end February 2024.

The Roadmaster continued to replace and install signage as outlined in the Township Sign Management Program, which was put into effect in March 2014 as mandated by the State and includes the assessment and maintenance of retro-reflectivity for regulatory and warning signs at or above the standards spelled out in the federal *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices*. Guard rail was repaired along Green Lane Road.

The Turnpike Commission's widening project construction began in April as they reconstruct and widen approximately four miles of the Turnpike between Milepost 312 (just west of the Downingtown Interchange) and Milepost 316 (near the Valley Hill Road overpass in Charlestown).

The existing four-lane roadway will be upgraded to six lanes. The project will also include construction of new stormwater facilities, and replacement areas for wetlands and streams. No sound barriers are being installed in Charlestown's section of this project.



### **XIII. UTILITIES**

#### **Public Water**

For those areas served by public water, Charlestown Township is served by Aqua PA.

#### **Public Sewer**

For those areas served by public sewer, Charlestown Township is part of the Valley Forge Sewer Authority.

The Valley Forge Sewer Authority was incorporated by Charlestown, East Pikeland and Schuylkill Townships in 1968 and is a utility owned by its customers. Its business is to recycle wastewater into clean water for stream discharge and to produce a specialized fertilizer product utilized by area farmers.

The Authority owns and operates 90 miles of collection line, 9 pump stations and a regional treatment plant, serving approximately 22,000 customers in nine Chester County municipalities: Charlestown Township, East Pikeland Township, Schuylkill Township, Easttown Township, East Whiteland Township, Malvern Borough, Tredyffrin Township and Willistown Township. Recently, the area was extended to include a portion of West Vincent Township.

## **XIV. WASTE & RECYCLING**

- **The Lanchester Landfill's** acceptance of electronic devices at no charge continued through December 2023 was promoted on the township's website and in newsletters.
- **Annual Recycling Meeting:** The County's annual Act 101 Workshop was held on November 9<sup>th</sup>. The Act 101 application for the annual recycling grant was submitted by the Sept. 30<sup>th</sup> deadline. The Recycling Ordinance was amended in February to be compliant with DEP regulations.
- **Participation in Chester County Household Hazardous Waste Program:** Charlestown Township once again joined this program that allowed Township residents to bring unwanted hazardous household, automotive products, home maintenance, lawn and pest control products to any of four collection events held throughout 2023. Pre-registration was required and made the drop off process run smoothly.
- **Prescription Pill Drop Off:** The locations throughout Chester County where prescription pills can be disposed of is posted on the website.
- **Battery disposal:** The EAC set up a box at the Township Office and Devault Post office for disposal of batteries. Both boxes were heavily used, with the batteries packed and shipped off to a recycling location.
- **Waste Hauler Private Subscription:** Charlestown Township licensed area haulers to collect trash and recyclables for residents and businesses in 2023. Property owners contract privately with the hauler of their choice for waste hauler services.
- **Yard Waste Disposal Drop-Off:** Charlestown continued its arrangement with the Borough of Phoenixville to have access to their yard waste drop off site at 18 South 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue in Phoenixville.

## **XV. ZONING**

### **Zoning Hearing Board**

The Charlestown Township Zoning Hearing Board is a three-member board of residents appointed by the Board of Supervisors. The Zoning Hearing Board is a quasi-judicial body that reviews appeals under the Township Zoning Ordinance. Applications to the Zoning Hearing Board are submitted to the Township Office, and hearings are scheduled on an as-needed basis.

The following Zoning Hearing Board applications were considered in 2023:

**2023-01 Pixley** – Withdrawn

**2023-02 Stauffer** – A request for a variance to permit the construction of a detached garage in steep and very steep slopes on Primrose Lane was denied on August 29<sup>th</sup>. The applicant filed an appeal on September 27<sup>th</sup> and a court date is expected in early 2024.

**2023-03 Hertzfeld** – Appeal from enforcement notice dated 10/18/23, or in the alternative to seek a variance to permit a commercial use on the property. A hearing will be held in 2024.

### **Zoning Officer**

As prescribed by the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code, Act 247, the Township Zoning Officer is the sole official responsible for enforcement of the zoning ordinance.

The primary means of managing land use activities is through municipal zoning. The public involvement in private land use matters and business activities in the Township typically begins with an application to the Township for a zoning permit, which is required for construction and other activities to verify and authorize the legal use of property in accordance with the zoning regulations.

The Zoning Officer has various enforcement and procedural duties that include:

- Determining compliance with the zoning ordinance for an applicant's proposed project or use,
- Responding to requests for service related to alleged illegal uses and activities,
- Coordinating enforcement actions and due process related to zoning enforcement,
- Participating in Zoning Hearing Board meetings in an official capacity and witnessing during appeals to his/her land use determinations.

## **XVI. MISCELLANEOUS**

### **Cable Franchise Renewal**

Negotiations with Verizon for renewal of the franchise agreement will continue into 2024. The agreement provides an annual fee as compensation for using public property in its rights-of-way for cable lines.

### **Cell Tower at Charlestown Park**

The Township Manager and Supervisors met with company representatives in October to discuss a proposal to construct a cell phone tower at Charlestown Park. A boundary survey was ordered to accurately define the area following the initial land transfer from the federal government in 1976. During the course of research, the Solicitor determined that the Park is restricted from allowing a cell tower due to conditions imposed as part of various grant awards for improvements through the years, causing the proposal to be withdrawn from consideration.

### **Codification of Ordinances**

Codification services continued with General Code. Since a full codification of ordinances was undertaken in 2021, only those ordinances adopted in 2023 were appended to the Code this year. Tools are available for the planning commission, supervisors, consultants and Township personnel to make and track various notes that aid in the ordinance review process.

### **Continuing Training and Education**

Township staff attended webinars hosted by the Pennsylvania State Association of the Township Officials. The Township Manager attended the Pa State Association of Township Officials conference in Hershey.

### **Devault Gateway**

RES Great Lakes LLC (Resource Environmental Solutions), a prominent company in the industry that works with Longwood Gardens, continued to carry out its project schedule for the Basin Beautification Project along Route 29 and the Turnpike. Site preparation took place in 2022, and landscaping was installed in 2023.

### **Donations**

The Township provided its annual donations to Camp Cadet of Chester County and the Phoenixville Public Library. A donation of \$100,000 was made to the Great Valley Community Organization toward

its community center, using a portion of ARPA funds earmarked for this purpose. The GVCO serves the surrounding communities of East Whiteland, Willistown, and Charlestown.

### **Earth Day**



The Spring Earth Day event took place on April 15<sup>th</sup> and was overseen by the Environmental Advisory Committee. Residents volunteered to take part in safe-distanced clean up and park & trail enhancement activities. Bags, safety vests, sanitizer, and gloves were provided to volunteers.

In addition to the numerous bags of trash collected along the roadways, cleanups took place at the Brightside Farm, Charlestown Park, and along the many trails.

*At left: Photo by Karen Buzzi - Brownie Troop #480 and Girl Scout Troop #41233 cleaning up at Charlestown Park*

### **Adopt A Highway Program Successful - Charlestown Road Clean up Sept. 16<sup>th</sup>**

A big thank you to EAC member Dan Walker, who initiated the Adopt-a-Highway program with PennDOT for roadside clean up of Charlestown Road. Flagger Force was brought in to keep our volunteers safe while they collected 40 bags of trash in 3 hours. We thank Carol Armstrong, Pete Goodman, Dan Walker and son Carter Walker, and Anu Soundarajan for their efforts.



*Carter Walker, Dan Walker & Pete Goodman  
- photo by Anu Soundarajan*

### **Other Clean up Efforts**

Pfizer promotes a corporate program incentivizing its employees to provide community service. Pfizer donates \$20.00 for every employee volunteer hour to a non-profit organization of their choice. In September, resident Thomas Yang cleaned up an area of Phoenixville Pike under the Turnpike underpass that routinely sees a great deal of litter.



### **Great Valley Nature Center**

In 2020, the Board of Supervisors adopted a resolution to move forward with plans to secure the Great Valley Nature Center property since the Board of Directors of the Nature Center dissolved its organization in 2017.

This began a multi-step transaction in coordination with The French & Pickering Creeks Conservation Trust (F&PCCT), which took on the debt with Phoenixville Federal Bank & Trust and is in the process of having ownership transferred to them.

Progress has been slow. Since they hold a deed restriction on the property, the F&PCCT will lift the restriction requiring the property be used only as an educational facility. The next step is for the Township to purchase the property from the Trust. The

Trust will use those funds to renovate and fit-out the barn for their corporate offices under a long term lease arrangement. *- photo by Carol Armstrong*

This will be a long term project and the intent will be to eventually place a conservation easement on the property, secure a tenant/caretaker for the house, and expand the nature trails on the property to restore the public's enjoyment of this unique gem.

### **Human Resources**

The Supervisors approved the revised Employee Handbook on Jan. 3<sup>rd</sup>.

### **Office Fit-Out Completion**

Although the new township offices were substantially completed in November 2022, a number of items were finished during 2023 including the installation of signage, AV equipment and access control. A counter was installed at reception and the historic signage banner was repaired, completing the project.

### **Permit Procedures**

Staff Planner Mike Allen and Permit Coordinator Beth Martin continued development of a tracking system for permits issued to properties in the TND zoning districts, which require enhanced design oversight.

### **Pipeline Concerns**

While there is no proposed construction on the pipeline in Charlestown, the Environmental Advisory Committee continued to monitor the Adelpia Gateway Project. The pipeline traverses the Brightside Farm along with numerous private properties.

### **Risk Management Program**

The Township continued its association with Simkiss & Block to procure cost effective insurance coverage for auto, commercial, terrorism, public officials coverage, treasurer's and manager's bonding, umbrella and employee practices. The insurance market proved challenging in 2023, and the current coverage was extended 60 days in order to seek additional quotes, which were not forthcoming after considerable effort from our Manager and insurance broker to obtain them. The proposal from Travelers Insurance was accepted at a cost comparable to the previous term's policies.

In August, the Manager met with representatives from the Delaware Valley Insurance Trust (DVIT) to obtain details on how to apply for membership in 2024 should that be the best option moving forward.

### **Scanning Services, File Management and Records Retention**

The Township continued scanning documents using DocuPhase's cloud-based document management software. Scantek handled the majority of scanning work, although some documents were uploaded by staff. Commercial and Residential building permits, subdivision files, and decisions from the zoning hearing board, HARB, and conditional use applications are all in the system along with all available conservation easement documents. More recent documents for 2020 to present are on file at the Township Office and are sent for scanning once the application or project has closed out. We now have the capability of downloading a "property file" that includes all applications and decisions relating to a specific parcel.

The staff continued the process of reviewing files in offsite storage to determine those of no further administrative value. This saves in storage costs and also helps to identify those records to be preserved to make older, but still relevant, information more accessible.

Township files are securely backed up on a cloud based system.

### **Septage Management**

The Township continued to access Chester County Health Department's database to track the required pumping and inspection of all septic systems every three years.

## **Voters Services**

The Township provided details and links to information on how to apply for mail-in and absentee ballots as well as how to register to vote, in order to encourage residents to participate in the elections of 2023.



## **Government and Professional Affiliations**

Charlestown Township is a member of the following organizations:

Chester County Association of Township Supervisors (CCATO)  
Chester County Consortium of Managers  
Chester County Historical Preservation Network  
Chester County Secretaries in Government Association (CCSIGA)  
Chester County Tax Collection Committee  
Co-Stars (for purchasing)  
National Alliance of Preservation Commission  
Pennsylvania Parks and Recreation Society  
Phoenixville Regional Planning Commission  
Phoenixville Region Multi-Modal Transportation Committee  
Transportation Management Association of Chester County

A limited number of copies of this Annual Report are available upon request from the Township Office.



Index to Abbreviations Used in the Annual Report

ARPA	American Rescue Plan Act
CCPC	Chester County Planning Commission
CMAQ	Community Multiscale Air Quality Modeling System
DCNR	Department of Conservation & Natural Resources
DEP	Department of Environmental Protection
DVRPC	Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission
E&S	Erosion & Sedimentation Control
EOC	Emergency Operations Center
EOP	Emergency Operations Plan
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FERC	Federal Energy Regulatory Commission
GVCO	Great Valley Community Organization
HARB	Historical & Architectural Review Board
HOA	Homeowners Association
MS-4	Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System
NPDES	National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System
OSI	Open Space Institute
PADEP	Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection
PRPC	Phoenixville Regional Planning Commission
RES	Resource Environmental Solutions
SALDO	Subdivision & Land Development Ordinance
SPCA	Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
TAC	Transportation Advisory Committee
TMACC	Transportation Management Association of Chester County
TND	Traditional Neighborhood Development
TPD	Traffic Planning & Design



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