**Project Summary**

The Cumberland County Planning Department (CCPD) can be reached at 717.240.5381

The “Planning Commission University” PCU was developed to address the professional development needs of the municipal planning commissions in the county. The citizen planners appointed to municipal planning commissions come from a variety of backgrounds and often are not afforded basic training on the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of their new position. Similarly, experienced planning commission members may understand their basic duties, but do not have access to the tools and techniques that can transform their planning commission and take it to the next level of effectiveness. PCU provides a unique blend of the ”basic” and “advanced” instruction needed by rookie and veteran planning commission members alike.

The course, fully developed and presented by the CCPD staff, had 25 registrants for its inaugural session in2011 and was met with rave reviews. In 2012, the CCPD conducted a second session of PCU, dubbed “PCU 2.0”, which was attended by 23 registrants and included updated content and support materials. Based upon course positive feedback, the CCPD intends to offer PCU annually.

PCU included three sessions that covered the following topics:

* Session 1
	+ Basic Planning Commission Member Orientation – Covers the authorization to plan, PC structure, why planning is important, planning tools primer and a brief review of PC roles and responsibilities.
	+ Subdivision and Land Development Plan Review – Provides a hand-on overview of how to review S/LD plans using real plans submitted in the county.
* Session 2
	+ Ordinance Amendment Review – Teaches attendees how to thoroughly review proposed amendments to local ordinances.
	+ Comprehensive Plans – Reviews the components of a comprehensive plan, its importance as a policy document, and provides detail on how to keep comp plans fresh and dynamic.
* Session 3
	+ Planning Commission Administration – Provides recommendations on how to effectively prepare for, run, document, and communicate the results of a municipal planning commission meeting. Discussion also centered on how to recruit and select new PC members.
	+ Emerging Issues – Discusses current planning topics, as suggested by attendees, and considers the local implications of each topic. Farmland preservation, transportation planning, alternative energy, and historic preservation were areas of focus in the first 2 courses.

The CCPD developed a course handbook and CD to supplement the classroom teaching. These “take home” resources included electronic copies of planning guidance documents and best practice examples provided by municipalities from throughout the county. PCU graduates left the course equipped with the knowledge and tools needed to make an immediate difference in their community.

PCU also served an important networking function as attendees were introduced to the CCPD staff that serves the county’s 33 municipalities with planning technical assistance. Not only did PCU graduates leave armed with new information and ideas, they also left knowing that they had a staff of certified planners standing ready and willing to assist them on virtually any planning related task.