



American Planning Association
Pennsylvania Chapter

Making Great Communities Happen

Media Contact:

Kim Gusic
Chapter Administrator
717-671-4510
www.planningpa.org
info@planningpa.org

October 16, 2023

Scranton, PA – On October 16, 2023, the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association (PA Chapter of APA) held its Annual Awards Luncheon in Scranton, PA where over 300 attendees celebrated the esteemed award winners of this year’s highly competitive program.

The following awards were presented:

Award for a Plan

**West Ward Choice Neighborhood Plan
Easton Housing Authority**

The Choice Neighborhoods Initiative is a Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) program that employs a comprehensive approach to neighborhood transformation by revitalizing distressed public and/or assisted housing and catalyzing critical improvements in the neighborhood. In 2020, the Easton Housing Authority, in partnership with the Greater Easton Development Partnership and the City of Easton were awarded a Choice Neighborhoods Planning Grant. The plan built upon the 2019 Neighborhood Plan, targeting three core areas for redevelopment and updating and adapting previous planning efforts to focus on the core goals of People, Housing and Neighborhood. A strategy of community engagement was to employ three Housing Authority residents to serve as community ambassadors. Trained and coached on engagement techniques, the ambassadors have become “champions” for the plan. Residents were further involved in working group meetings, community meetings, youth engagement and needs assessment surveys. The resulting plan goes beyond bricks and mortar to address broader issues such as education, health, safety, economic development and other supportive services. Early success. During the planning process \$150,000 was allocated for community-defined early action projects. These included little free libraries, a community garden, and a neighborhood gateway signage initiative. The plan also led to the successful award of a \$1.1 million state grant to fund a community bike works club and “safe routes to school” program! Perhaps most impactful thus far, the plan has led to the strategic acquisition of two properties. The first site, adjacent to an existing apartment development, will permit new construction to expand the number of affordable and mixed-income housing units. The second site is a former large nursing home. This site will allow for the partnership to move forward with a build-first strategy for 50 units, before demolishing any existing Housing Authority units. What’s being said. HUD acknowledged the efforts of the team to refine a considerable amount of work and include possible financing plans, a mix of incomes, a mix of uses and recreational amenities in several compelling design solutions. The Committee concurred noting that the plan was reflective of an emphasis on community design, practical with the inclusion of actions, partners, timeframe, and probable costs and graphically visually imaginative.

Award for a Project, Program or Practice

The Tri-County Regional Planning Commission Planning Toolkit Tri-County Regional Planning Commission

The Commission sought to improve upon its existing toolkit to provide clear, concise and current information on planning topics to planners, solicitors, elected or appointed officials and the public. Serving three counties in South Central Pennsylvania, with a wide variety of urban, suburban and rural issues, there wasn't a place providing a one stop shop for quick references, technical guides and model ordinances. The commission began their study by tracking existing "hits" on the toolkit website, then surveying over 70 municipalities and hosting two conference sessions to solicit planner's input at the 2020 and 2021 APA PA Conferences. This resulted in identification and prioritization of approximately 40 planning topics, from traditional topics to current trends, including short-term rentals, accessory dwelling units, tiny houses, food trucks, drones and e-scooters and e-bikes. The Commission drafted two-page fact sheets for each topic providing easy to understand background information, pros and cons and resources and examples; most of which include hyperlinks for a more in-depth dive. The commission also integrated an, "interested in a topic not included here" feature to track emerging trends and to manage overall content. Effectiveness. The toolkit was launched in 2022, and to date has received over 2,000 hits. This interest has translated into a number of municipalities seeking assistance from the commission to update their zoning, subdivision and land development and other ordinances. The site has also become a resource for professors and students studying and modeling planning principles, and planners statewide, who use the content as part of their community outreach. The committee stated, "great access to planning, a toolkit that addresses current planning issues, is accessible, includes success stories and is highly transferrable."

Award for a Project, Program or Practice

Chester County Open Space Protection Planning Program Chester County Planning Commission

Prompted by a rapid loss of farm land and open space, Chester County's Open Space Protection Programs began in the late 1980s, with the State's first referendum to preserve open space. Since then, policies and practices aligned with public support and continuous funding has positioned Chester County as a statewide leader in land preservation and smart growth. *Landscapes 3*, established in 2018, is the updated comprehensive plan and seeks to advance the protection and stewardship of open space, farmland, and natural and cultural features to realize economic, ecological, and quality of life benefits. Early on in the implementation process, the county sought to reframe the narrative and provide a quantitative understanding of the economic value of open space by publishing, *Return on Environment*. Recognizing the value of carbon sequestration and storage, and to reduce the county's carbon footprint, the county adopted the *Climate Action Plan*. To support municipalities, preservation organizations, government agencies and landowners, the county developed an interactive map, which explores where open space is being planned and where best to focus efforts. The map is coupled with a toolkit to provide guidance on agricultural zoning, conservation subdivision regulations and transfer of development rights. Recognizing that 12% of the county's open space is protected by HOAs, the county developed the *Conservation Subdivision Design Guide*, with a principal goal of encouraging development proposals with high recreational, scenic and ecological value. Instituted in the 1990s, and in high demand today, the county provides funding for open space plans and ordinances, provided that they implement the policies of *Landscapes 3*. In 2019, Chester County celebrated the 30th Anniversary of its open Space Program. In 2021, the county reached the milestone of 30% protected open space, or the preservation of 148,000 acres and counting! In 2023, 78% of municipalities have adopted open space plans! The committee highlighted an excellent website, materials and community engagement, and noted that perhaps as equally compelling is the spectacular demonstration of support, as evidenced in support letters from partner organizations.

Award for a Leader – Citizen Planner

Dulcie Flaharty, Vice Chair Montgomery County Planning Commission

Common among many Citizen Planners, Dulcie's path to the planning profession came through her interest in open space preservation. A passionate conservationist, Dulcie was instrumental in the founding of the 1993 Montgomery County Land Trust, later to be merged with Natural Lands. In this role, she has been responsible for creating conservation easements on over 47 properties, permanent protection of nearly 3,000 acres of land and provided educational outreach to over 1,800 municipal leaders. Equally significant has been her advocacy to pass Montgomery County's first Open Space Program; leading voter turnout to pass, in every municipality, a referendum to have Commissioners spend money on open space and a ballot initiative to earmark \$150 million toward the effort! Beyond conservation, Dulcie's foray into Planning began with serving as a Member of the Board of the Montgomery County Planning Commission, where she currently serves as Vice-Chair. Dulcie also served as a Member of the Steering Committee for *Montco 2040*, which included developing the county's current comprehensive plan. Dulcie has served the planning community regionally as Member of the Board of Directors for the Valley Forge Tourism and Convention Board and statewide as a Member of the Board and Policy Committee of the Pennsylvania Land Trust Association. Summarizing accolades from her peers, Dulcie's 30 plus years of service to planning can best be described with her more recent successes. These include participating in the publication of *Return on Environment: the Economic Impact of Protected Open Space in Montgomery County* and lobbying for changes to a Pennsylvania Law that had enabled eminent domain of land thought to be permanently preserved, thereby saving Stoneleigh, a 42-acre natural garden property in Villanova. What the Committee had to say. Her educational outreach work plus land conservation has had a significant impact to the county. She clearly has the support of the Montgomery County Planning Staff, is viewed as a partner by elected and appointed officials and is an advocate for the greater public good; a difference maker!

###

For more information about the PA Chapter of APA, or to obtain contact information for local award winners, please contact Kim Gusic at 717-671-4510 or info@planningpa.org. The website address is www.planningpa.org.