

Landscapes

Chester County

Pennsylvania

PROGRESS REPORT 2004

Technical Report

Indicators Process

- **The Chester County Planning Commission (CCPC) initially considered approximately 120 possible indicators for use in monitoring *LANDSCAPES*. This list was reduced by using the four basic tests of a good indicator identified by Maureen Hart in *Guide to Sustainable Community Indicators*, QLA/Atlantic Center for the Environment, 1995:**

Indicator Test

Relevant: An indicator must relate to the goals of *LANDSCAPES* and indicate whether or not we are moving in the right direction with regard to a specific aspect of the Plan.

Indicator Test

Understandable: An indicator must be meaningful to anyone reviewing the measure and we must know what the indicator is telling us.

Indicator Test

Reliable: An indicator must be based on accurate data that is collected and reported in the same manner every year.

Indicator Test

Timely: An indicator must be available on an annual basis and it must provide information when there is still time to correct the problem.

The Landscapes Index

Using these tests, the County selected eighteen indicators in seven categories related to the goals of *LANDSCAPES*. The CCPC has used these indicators to create the Landscapes Index.

- An index is a means to condense the ups and downs of many different factors into a single measure.
- An index is also useful because it allows comparison among different types of measures.

Calculation of the Index

Each of the eighteen indicators has base year data to serve as a starting point for measuring a trend and developing the Landscapes Index. The base year is intended to be 1996, the year *LANDSCAPES* was adopted. Eleven of the indicators have 1996 as the base year. The remaining seven indicators have a different base year, either 1995, 1997, or 1998, because 1996 data were not available when the index was created.

Performance of Indicators

Positive indicators—Several indicators have shown noteworthy progress from the previous year:

- ***Protected farmland*** went from 238 to 256 with 1,226 new acres of farmland protected. The agricultural land preservation program activity remains at a high level. The other indicators in the Preserved Land Sub-Index, Eased Land and Park Land, also had increases in the amount of land protected.
- ***Proposed housing units consistent with LANDSCAPES*** improved from 84 to 121.
- ***Residential loans in urban areas*** went from 105 to 114.
- ***Farm production*** increased from 103 to 118, the highest value ever for this indicator.
- ***Municipal volunteerism*** had a large increase from 111 to 118, indicating more people are serving their municipalities.

Performance of Indicators

Negative Indicators—Several indicators raise concerns because they are below 100 and have declined in the past year:

- ***Non-residential development consistent with LANDSCAPES*** dropped to 90 and was below 100 for the third consecutive year after three years above 100. This indicates an increasing percentage of proposed non-residential development in the “Rural” landscape.
- ***Housing affordability*** declined slightly due to increasing housing prices, property taxes, and mortgage insurance.
- ***Job growth*** experienced an actual loss in jobs across most employment sectors, not just a decline in the rate of growth. This County experience was similar to national and state statistics. There does not appear to be a specific weakness in the County economy.