

A generation ago, the people of Chester County recognized the value of open space preservation to maintain the distinctive character of the place. Our living cultural landscape continually evolves as history is made, and is a priceless asset for residents and visitors alike. Our pride of place is expressed through actions that maintain both legacy and vitality. The vision which began with the Open Space Referendum in the 1970's has been reaffirmed in the county comprehensive plans that began with Landscapes in 1996. In 2009, Landscapes2 continued the focus of balancing growth with open space preservation. The recently adopted Landscapes3 plan makes stronger connections between a wider set of goal areas. Specifically, in Preserve, Protect and Appreciate open spaces, natural and historic resources are strongly linked to creating the sense of place, and quality of life we all enjoy.

Historic resources imbue an enhanced level of meaning to our landscapes and environment. Far from being isolated moments, they are part of the core experience of authenticity that characterizes so much of the county in urban, suburban and rural landscapes. Interpretations can change, and that only increases the need to have the authentic heritage available as the point of reference. The layers of meaning help us relate to constants and to change. They also send a powerful message about a resilient mix of cultures, traditions and artifacts that continue to leave their mark on the region.

Heritage is something we experience every day and almost everywhere. It can be taken for granted. If we are thinking about heritage and heritage tourism, who are the guides? ***They are us!*** The historic sites, the volunteer historical commissions, historical societies, municipal and county governments are all stewards and ambassadors of heritage. There is a strong grass roots tradition of heritage activism in Chester County, and now it's time get this new coalition organized around some core goals, many of which are part of Landscapes3. The plan has six goal areas which are all related, but the goal section titled "Appreciate" describes the

objectives and recommendations for historic resources and landscapes. Appreciate is an active word describing positive engagement without being tied to a specific manner. Authentic is another word that comes up often in descriptions of places and things since authenticity is not something that can be re-created. It is an essential part of the historic preservation experience and it cannot exist without careful stewardship and sustained funding support. Landscapes3 summarizes the goal of Appreciate as *“the preservation of the historic resources and landscapes that define our cultural heritage to inspire the future through tangible connections to our shared past.”* In addition to the tangible connections preservation provides, there is a greater shared benefit of connection to place and each other.

In the implementation and recommendations section of the plan, two recommendations stand out for the group here tonight:

- **Foster creation of historic funding programs**
- **Expand heritage tourism programs**

In the recent past, there were a greater number of dedicated funding streams for planning, bricks and mortar, and event related activities for qualified sites and organizations. We’ve assembled here to look at what has changed in funding sources and priorities. The Comprehensive Plans have also evolved to reflect changing needs and pressures.

It’s worth a quick look into some recent research into heritage tourism because that topic area has become a big tent for many programs and organizations. It also has a lot to say about how we should be thinking about our surroundings and all the levels of value and meaning that they bring to our lives.

The National Trust formalized its cultural heritage tourism definition as follows:

Cultural heritage tourism is traveling to experience the places, artifacts and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present. It includes cultural, historic, and natural resources.

Cultural heritage tourism utilizes existing assets-the built environment, natural landscapes, and cultural resources-delivered as experiences to tell the stories of the people who settled, live, work, and play there, past to present.

Tangible cultural heritage, including movable cultural heritage (paintings, sculptures, coins, and manuscripts), immovable cultural heritage (monuments, archaeological sites, and historic sites).

Intangible cultural heritage (oral traditions, performing arts, rituals, and language)

“Place” is key to destination branding, but it is also something that should be organic and easily understood. It is part of the authenticity. The terms tourist and visitor are almost interchangeable and their experiences share much in common with residents. Everyone is affected by feeling like they are in someplace special.

To quote a recent study:

Preservation and protection of cultural and historic resources includes not only the physical upkeep of buildings and structures but also establishing an ethic of stewardship. Cultivating appreciation and respect for heritage and culture starts with local leaders and residents, then spills over to visitors. Without this local pride of place, the historical fabric of a community may be lost if it is not valued. Sound preservation policies and practices are essential to ensure that the foundation of the past is available for the appreciation of future generations. Local stakeholders must adopt a stewardship philosophy to safeguard and sustain the present resources to ensure that they are appropriately cared for and available to current and future visitors.

While man-made attractions and resorts are important industry and economic generators, destinations utilizing their own local distinctive (built, cultural, and natural) assets gain a competitive edge as the combined collection of authentic products cannot be mass-produced or replicated in other locations.

Tourists (or residents), therefore, must journey to this site or destination for a firsthand authentic experience. Cultural heritage tourism can also foster additional quality of life benefits for residents through the subsequent generation of new programs, activities, and attractions.

Existing physical assets-historic buildings and landscapes-often provide the foundation for adaptive development and are the basis for telling the distinctive story of a place. (Another high priority recommendation in Landscapes3)

Cultural heritage tourism also has the potential to rejuvenate communities and stimulate the recognition and investment in the creative economy of an area. These social benefits often transfer to greater appreciation of and support for local artists, entrepreneurs, and other creative sectors. Other notable benefits of cultural heritage tourism include:

- *Elevated brand awareness due to external recognition and accolades*
- *Preservation and conservation of local, unique resources*
- *Retention of authentic character, providing a balance between community and tourism*

That extended quotation shows that our interests are not unusual and we do not need to blaze a completely new trail.

We're here today because the time is right to start acting on the recommendations of the comprehensive plan.

We're here today because we know that by working together, we can show the value our living cultural landscapes bring to residents and visitors.

We're here today because we care, and we have the attention of those besides us, who can make a real difference.