

Introduction

1. Study Purpose, Goals, and Objectives

In January 2003, the Borough of Pottstown, Montgomery County, and North Coventry Township, Chester County formed an inter-municipal committee to examine methods to physically, economically, socially, and aesthetically reconnect their two communities using a shared Schuylkill River Heritage as a focus.

In the spring of 2003, the committee applied for and received a grant from the Schuylkill River State Heritage Area to fund a study to examine these concepts. Heritage Area funding is from the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR). State funding was matched by each municipality and by developer John Wolfington, who has purchased and is redeveloping the Mrs. Smith's Pie site, located along the river in Pottstown.



View of the Schuylkill River in Pottstown.

In the fall of 2003, a request for qualifications was issued for a consultant to complete the study. Three consultant teams were selected to submit proposals and were interviewed. The team of Simone Jaffe Collins Landscape Architecture in association with Urban Partners was selected to work with the inter-municipal committee to complete the work.

Introduction

The study examines “reconnections” between the two communities through improved pedestrian and bicycle pathways, improved vehicular access, improved access to and use of the Schuylkill River, open space preservation, economic development, aesthetic improvements, and preservation of each community’s heritage - all geared toward enhancing the quality of life. The study will estimate costs for proposed improvements and identify possible sources of funding, and will create a strategy to fund and implement study recommendations. The study area is identified as the area contained within a two-mile radius of the Hanover Street Bridge, although it was agreed that the study should focus on areas closer to the river.



North Coventry Township streetscape.

(See Figure 1.2)

The Reconnections Committee identified the following goals for the study:

- Inventory the cultural, social, educational, historical, environmental and recreational resources in the study area;
- Identify the physical and psychological barriers that separate the two communities;
- Develop and implement a public education and participation process for the study;
- Propose ways and means to remove the barriers, improve existing linkages, and create new user-friendly linkages within and between the two communities;
- Propose ways and means to improve visual and aesthetic aspects of buildings, facilities and walkways within the study area that will help create a sense of connectedness;
- Propose ways and means to incorporate the river as a more dominant feature that connects, rather than divides, both communities;
- Help the communities choose a preferred alternative from a selection of possible alternatives;
- Draft a plan that is acceptable to both communities and that facilitates implementation;
- Integrate the recommendations with existing municipal comprehensive plans and revitalization strategies;
- Outline every potential “reconnection” between the two municipalities; and
- Identify potential funding sources for implementation.



Borough of Pottstown streetscape.

The study and the resultant recommendations will provide the Borough of Pottstown and North Coventry Township with a planning and guidance document for implementing improvements over a period of years.

The Study will provide municipal officials with recommendations for future community improvements and will be a valuable information source for other community initiatives and will form the basis for future funding requests. The Reconnections Study was designed to have maximum flexibility so that as new ideas surface, refinements to the plan can be made.

2. Regional Context and Municipal Background

North Coventry Township, Chester County, and the Borough of Pottstown, Montgomery County, are contiguous municipalities, separated by the Schuylkill River. The Borough of Pottstown is located in the northwest corner of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania along the Schuylkill River. (See Figure 1.1) The Borough comprises 4.89 square miles and is populated by 21,859 residents. The character of the Borough is primarily urban. Residential areas of low to medium-high density are the predominant active land use. Commercial uses are primarily located along the High Street corridor, the Borough's "main street". Borough industrial lands are primarily located in the eastern side of the Borough along the riverfront. These include the former site of Bethlehem Steel. Other Borough industry is located in its northwest corner, off the Rt. 100 corridor. Since the 1970's, the Borough witnessed a gradual decline in its role as a major industrial community, a trend consistent with the entire northeastern United States. Suburban land development has drawn away residents and businesses that were once located in Pottstown's thriving downtown business district.

The Borough has acquired a significant amount of riverfront property that forms an extensive greenway, with Memorial and Riverfront Parks as its centerpiece. The Pottstown Parks and Recreation Department operates and maintains a total of sixteen (16) facilities including one community center. The parks throughout the borough encompass 108 acres, with Riverfront and Memorial Parks comprising 96 of those acres (89%).

North Coventry Township is located across the Schuylkill River in Chester County. The character of the Township is primarily agricultural and suburban residential, with areas of commercial development located primarily along Route 100, Route 724, and Hanover Street corridors. The Township is approximately 11 square miles in area and has a population of 7,381.

Introduction

Within North Coventry Township, there are several historic villages: Kenilworth; South Pottstown; Cedarville; and Pottstown Landing. Pottstown Landing was listed on the National Historic Register in 2001. Each village reflects a mix of architectural styles that gives each a unique identity. North Coventry Township has approximately 205 acres of public parks and open space. The parks include River Park and the Wampler Complex, both located on the river near the center of the study area. Kenilworth park is a 22-acre park located off of Route 724 near the eastern boundary of the Township.



Kenilworth Village - North Coventry Township.

The opening of the Pottstown Expressway, Rt. 422, in the spring of 1985, connected Pottstown and North Coventry with the Pennsylvania Turnpike, the Schuylkill Expressway (I-76), and later the Blue Route (I-476). This has created the Rt. 422 growth corridor, a corridor from King of Prussia to Pottstown, one of the most rapidly developing suburban areas in the region.

3. Description of the Study Area

The project study area is a defined 2-mile radius from the Hanover Street Bridge. The total study area is approximately 12.5 square miles. Within this area exists much of the physical, social, economic and cultural fabric of both municipalities and includes a variety of residential neighborhoods, retail shopping and commercial areas, the seats of both local governments, schools, a community college, historic districts and cultural resources, churches, businesses and industries, and municipal parks.

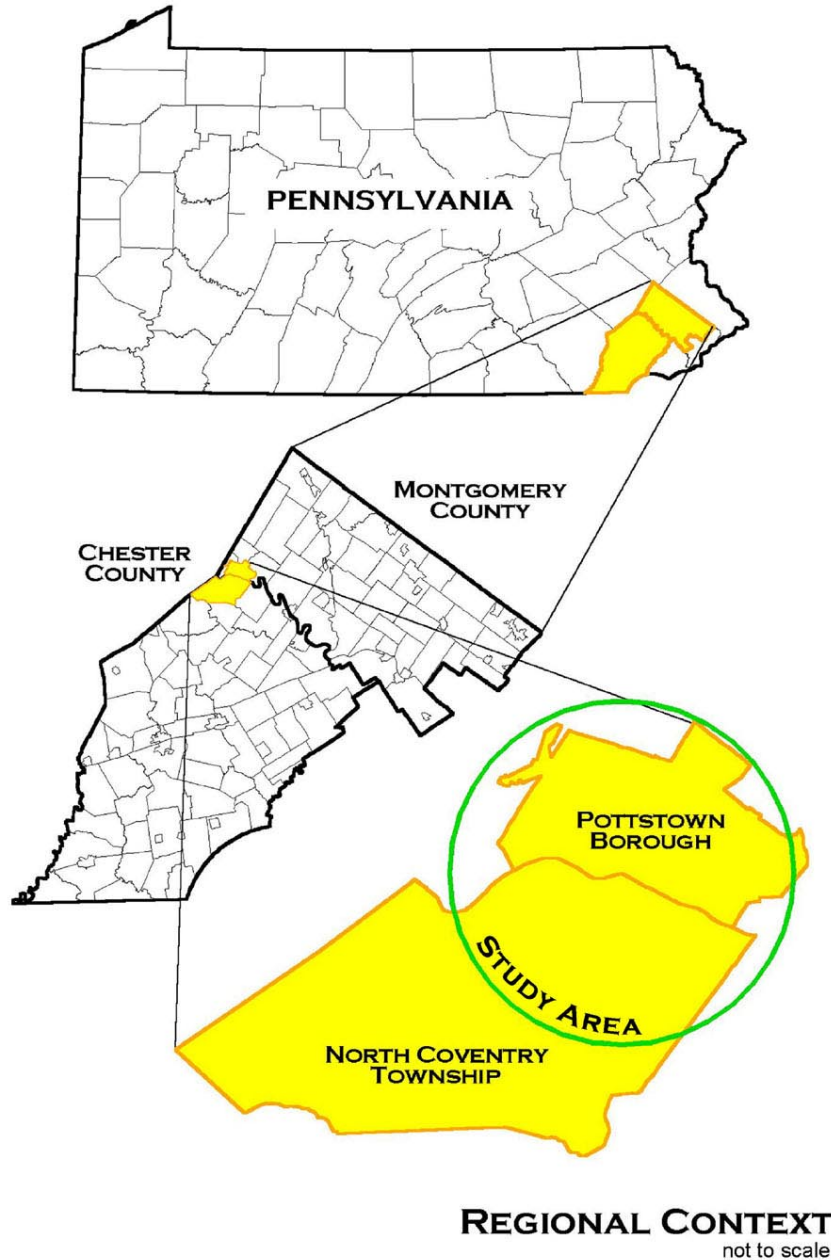


Figure 1.1: Regional Context Map.

4. Public Participation Summary

Public participation was a critical component of the Reconnections Study. The public participation process was designed to inform the public about the project, solicit suggestions from citizens, and address any questions, comments, or concerns about the study and its recommendations.

Reconnections Committee

A project committee was formed from officials and citizens from both municipalities. Reconnections committee meetings took place with the consultant on November 19, 2003, December 1, 2003, January 14, 2004, February 2, 2003, March 1, 2004, and April 5, 2004.

Public Meetings

Three public meetings were scheduled during the seven-month planning process. Public Meeting #1 was held on January 20, 2004 at the North Coventry Fire Hall, and focused on site analysis findings, reconnection goals, programming, and gathering initial ideas from the community. Meeting #2 was held at Montgomery County Community College in Pottstown on March 29, 2004 to present preliminary project recommendations and the draft report. Meeting #3 took place on May 17, 2004 at the North Coventry Fire Hall and included a presentation of the final master plan. Attendance records, agendas and notes from each of these meetings are included in the appendix of this report.