

CHAPTER 3 - NORTHAMPTON TOWNSHIP PLANNING PROCESS

The planning and development of the Northampton Township Master Trail and Bicycle Plan consisted of several phases including:

- Formation of a steering committee to oversee the development of the plan;
- Development of the goals for the planning study;
- Review of previous planning efforts and studies;
- Creation of a community profile;
- Identification of proposed trail and bicycle facilities;
- A prioritization of the proposed trails and bicycle facilities;
- Development and review of the draft plan by the steering committee; and
- Public review and comment period.

STEERING COMMITTEE

The development of the plan was overseen by a steering committee comprised of Northampton Township supervisors, township employees, the township engineer and the township solicitor.

Barry Moore	Township Supervisor
Eileen Silver	Township Supervisor
Frank O'Donnell	Township Supervisor
Kimberly Rose	Township Supervisor
Adam Selisker	Township Supervisor
Bob Pellegrino	Township Manager
William Wert	Assistant Township Manager
Michael Solomon	Township Zoning Officer
Amanda Fuller	Township Engineer
Kurt Schroeder	Township Engineer
Joseph W. Pizzo	Township Solicitor
Bucks County Planning Commission	Planning Consultant

Primary responsibilities of the committee included:

- Defining the goals and objectives for the trails and bicycle network;
- Assisting in the development of the community profile by providing input on existing conditions and other relevant information;
- Identifying the overall scope and goals for the planning study itself;
- Generating ideas for possible trail routes; and
- Reviewing the findings and recommendations of the trail and bicycle facilities plan.

The Steering Committee met a total of six times. A summary of the key discussion items from each meeting are noted below. Full meeting agendas and meetings are included in Appendix B.

February 5, 2019

At the first meeting of the Steering Committee, the two primary tasks undertaken included defining the scope and goals for the planning study itself, and identification of planning areas within the township.

PLANNING STUDY GOALS

- Identify preferred trail and bicycle routes;
- Identify opportunities and constraints to the development of those routes;
- Develop an understanding of the potential costs associated with trail and bicycle facility development;
- Identify implementation strategies;
- Address concerns relative to crime and the impact on property values; and
- Explore and identify potential sources of funding

In addition to these specific planning study goals, additional items that the committee requested be included as part of the planning process were:

- Providing the safest trail and bicycle facilities for all users regardless of age or ability.
- Emphasizing connections, specifically to parks, recreation centers, schools, and commercial centers.
- Utilizing existing sidewalks to control cost and reach all portions of the township.
- Ensuring that bike lanes are as safe as possible.
- Exploring opportunities for establishing trails on the AQUA PA/Churchville Reservoir property.
- Identifying the potential for a trail or bicycle facilities along Newtown Richboro Road, including making use of the old alignment of Newtown Richboro Road to connect to the trail crossing under Newtown Richboro Road at Neshaminy Creek to provide access to Tyler State Park.
- Exploring alignment options for a shared use trail between Holland Road and Buck Road.

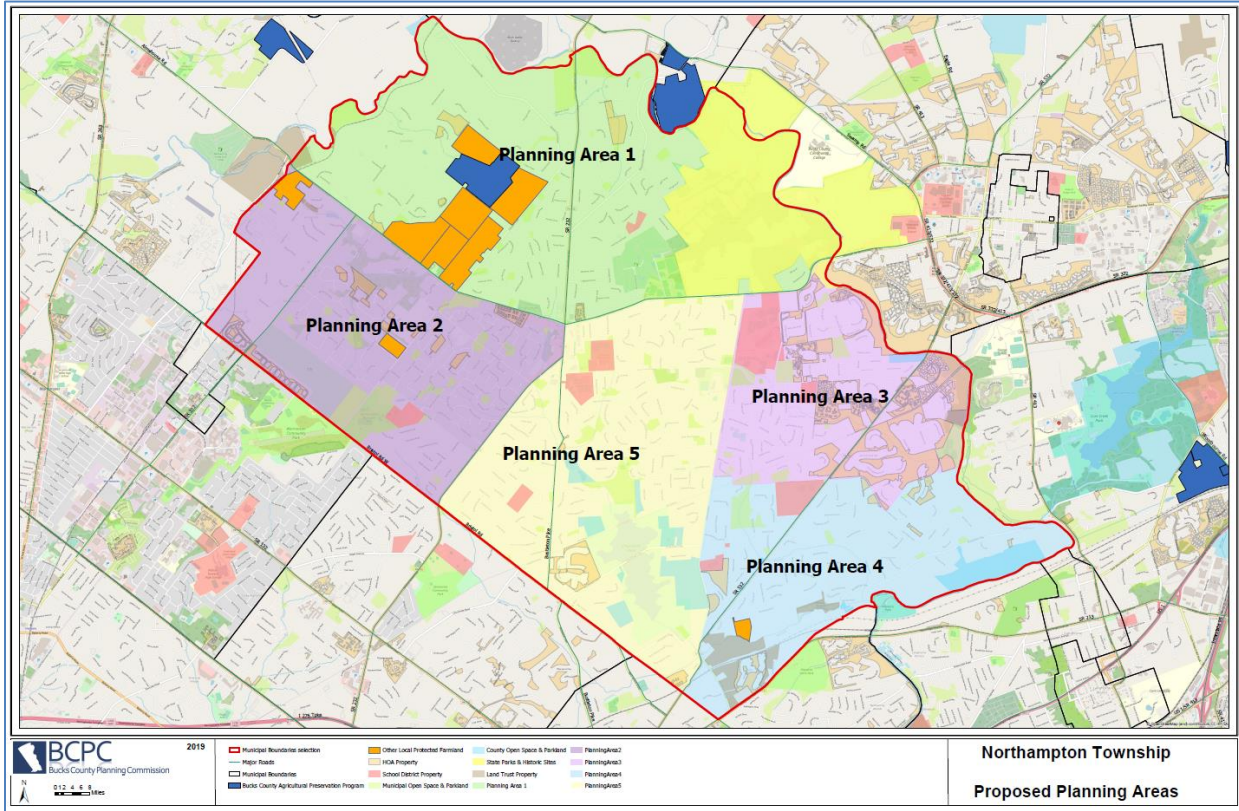
IDENTIFICATION OF PLANNING AREAS

Recognizing the unique characteristics of various areas of the township, including the extent of development, topography, concentration of resources, transportation network, etc., the steering committee agreed that planning process should be conducted for five separate areas within the township:

TABLE 1 – PLANNING AREA BOUNDARIES

	North Boundary	South Boundary	West Boundary	East Boundary
Area 1	Neshaminy Creek	Almshouse & Newtown-Richboro Roads	Neshaminy Creek & municipal boundary with Warwick Township	Neshaminy Creek
Area 2	Almshouse Road	Bristol Road	Municipal Boundary with Warwick Township	PA Route 232
Area 3	Newtown-Richboro Road	East Holland Road & Stoney Ford Road	Holland Road	Neshaminy Creek
Area 4	East Holland Road & Stoney Ford Road	Neshaminy Creek, Municipal Boundary with Lower Southampton Township, Bristol Road and PA Route 213	Holland Road & PA Route 532	Neshaminy Creek
Area 5	Newtown-Richboro Road	Bristol Road	PA Route 232	Holland Road

MAP 1 – PROPOSED PLANNING AREAS



The features of each planning area, and the proposed trails and bicycle facilities are detailed in Chapter 4.

The remaining five steering committee meetings focused on reviewing potential trail and bike routes as identified by the Bucks County Planning Commission based on specific criteria. At each of these planning meetings, the proposed trails and bicycle routes for one of the five planning areas was presented by the planning consultant. The steering committee then provided feedback and suggestions on the trails and bicycle facilities presented, to ensure that the proposed trails and bicycle facilities being proposed met the needs of Northampton Township residents.

March 5, 2019

A total of nineteen (19) trails and bicycle facilities were proposed and discussed, along with several neighborhood bike routes, for Planning Area 1. Specific follow-up items requested included:

- Assessing the potential for a connection between Route 232 and Hatboro Road.
- Determining if bicycle sharrows can be established along Worthington Mill Road from Second Street Pike to the bridge over the Neshaminy Creek.
- Review the proposed road widening plan for the area of Newtown-Richboro Road at Second Street Pike (Route 232) to determine if bike lanes could be incorporated.

March 26, 2019

The seven (7) trails and bicycle facilities, and numerous neighborhood bike routes, proposed for Planning Area 2 were reviewed and discussed. Specific discussion items included:

- Although the use of the Spring Mill Country Club site to connect the Poet’s Walk community to the rest of the township trail and bicycle facilities network was discussed and discarded, an alternative

connection via a sidewalk along Bristol Road extending from the Poet's Walk neighborhood to Hatboro Road was discussed.

- Specific to Hatboro Road, extending from Almshouse Road to Bristol Road, although the speed limit is 35 mph, which meets the requirement for bicycle sharrows, the County is not recommending bicycle sharrows due to the Average Daily Traffic counts exceeding 10,000.
- Due to the lack of a bridge, and the expense associated with the cost to construct one, it would not be possible to establish a connection between the two segments of Inland Road in the neighborhoods of Hidden Meadows and Traymore Manor.

Follow-up items for Planning Area 2 included:

- Review the alignment of the trail that connects Maureen Welsh Elementary to the Northampton Municipal Park.
- Assess the potential for a bike-friendly connection at the intersection of Hatboro and Almshouse roads to connect Highland Farms to Tanner Brothers Dairy.

April 9, 2019

This meeting was a discussion of the trails and bicycle facilities proposed for Planning Area 3 including the Neshaminy Greenway Trail, the proposed widening of the sidewalk on the Council Rock South High School property, and along Holland Road between East Holland and Middle Holland Roads. However, the majority of the meeting focused on the Newtown Rail Trail, with a particular focus on the section located between Holland Road and Buck Road. More specifically, the committee agreed that the intent was to identify an alignment for a continuous shared use trail in the area. The various alignment options presented included:

- A shared use trail located exclusively within the SEPTA right-of-way from Holland Road to the Neshaminy Creek Bridge;
- A shared use trail located within the SEPTA right-of-way from Holland Road to the southwest end of Spring Avenue where the trail would leave the SEPTA right-of-way and detour onto the Bucks County Roses property before rejoining the SEPTA right-of-way at the SEPTA bridge over Buck Road and continue east within the SEPTA right-of-way to the Neshaminy Creek; and
- A shared use trail within the SEPTA right-of-way between Holland Road and East Holland Road, connecting to bicycle lanes and sidewalks along East Holland Road up to Old Jordan Road where it would connect to a shared use trail, replacing the existing sidewalk, along the frontage of Holland Middle and Hillcrest Elementary schools, then proceed northeasterly on a shared use trail along the northwest side of Buck Road, eventually reconnecting to the SEPTA right-of-way at the SEPTA bridge over Buck Road, continuing east to the Neshaminy Creek.

The merits, pros and cons, engineering challenges, and cost implications of each were discussed extensively. The key takeaways included:

- The only alignment for a continuous shared use trail from Holland Road to Buck Road is the proposed alignment within the former SEPTA-owned Fox Chase-Newtown rail corridor.
- The shared use trail within the SEPTA right-of-way provides the safest user experience for all types of users while also being the most cost effective.
- The discussion relative to the possibility of placing continuous shared use trails along East Holland Road and Buck Road started with an overview of the minimum right-of-way needed for establishing a trail adjacent to an existing roadway. The minimum right-of-way for placing a 10 foot wide trail adjacent to a two-lane road was cited as 60 feet, or 30 feet from the centerline of the road. This is based upon approximately 29 feet being needed for the travel lanes, buffer, trail and shoulder combined:
 - 12 foot wide travel lane
 - 5 foot wide buffer required between the trail and travel lane
 - 10 foot wide trail
 - 1-2 foot wide shoulder on non-buffered side of trail

- East Holland Road - It would be possible to develop a shared use trail along portions of East Holland Road, primarily on township-owned open space and school district property, but other constraints such as limited right-of-way width, the presence of buildings and structures close to the road, and slopes and utility poles adjacent to the road where the trail would need to be placed, would prevent the establishment of a continuous shared use trail along the full extent of East Holland Road.
- Buck Road - Two possible alignments were discussed.
 1. **Southeast side of Buck Road** - This alignment was determined to not be feasible due to the presence of steep slopes and the presence of an unnamed tributary to the Neshaminy Creek at the SEPTA railroad bridge.
 2. **Northwest side of Buck Road** - This alignment is technically feasible but will require significant engineering and involve partnering with both PennDOT and the Hills at Northampton HOA for acquiring the right-of-way needed. More specifically, the existing travel lanes and emergency breakdown/turn lanes would need to be realigned so that the existing emergency lane would become the northbound travel lane, the existing northbound travel lane would become the new southbound travel lane, and the area occupied by the existing southbound lane, combined with the existing right-of-way, would become the area for the trail.
- Everyone agreed that the potential facilities along East Holland and Buck roads did not provide the highest level of safety for all user groups including walkers, hikers, and casual bicyclists. However, although recognizing that the safety provided is not the same as that provided by a continuous off-road shared use trail, the inclusion of these facilities could improve safety for experienced bicycle riders so these facilities are included as complementary facilities to the Newtown Rail Trail.
- Everyone agreed on the benefit of placing the trail adjacent to the SEPTA right-of-way on the Bucks County Roses property versus staying within the SEPTA right-of-way.

These alignments are discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

April 23, 2019

A total of twenty-seven (27) proposed trails and bicycle facilities, and numerous neighborhood bike routes, proposed for Planning Area 4 were reviewed and discussed. Specific discussion items included:

- The challenges of establishing a trail, running along Ironworks and Mill Creeks, from Churchville Reservoir to Playwicki Park, including steep slopes, property easements needed, and wetlands were discussed.
- The opportunity to connect several neighborhoods via a trail along Buck Road, extending from Holland Road to Briarwood Drive, with a connection to the existing trail on the Holland Middle School and Hillcrest Elementary School properties, was presented.

Following a review of the proposed trails and bicycle routes, and the extensive network being proposed for the township in total, concerns were raised relative to the potential costs associated with developing the network. The planning consultant advised the committee of the following:

- Many of the facilities reviewed and proposed are in the form of bicycle sharrows, sidewalks and neighborhood bike routes. The committee was then reminded that these are all significantly less expensive than dedicated bike lanes, and shared use trails.
- Neighborhood bike routes would simply require the use of signs to steer bicyclists in the appropriate direction.
- Some of the proposed trail segments, such as the SEPTA corridor, would be developed by the County.
- The costs for certain trail segments could be transferred to developers as part of the development or redevelopment process.
- Many of the shared use trail segments proposed are very short in length.
- The development of this network is a long-term project.

May 14, 2019

A total of thirty one (31) trails and bicycle facilities were proposed and discussed, along with several neighborhood bike routes, for Planning Area 5. Key trails highlighted and discussed included:

- Newtown Rail Trail, and proposed connector trails, between Bristol Road and Holland Road;
- Churchville Lane including a proposed floating bridge/boardwalk over the reservoir running adjacent to Churchville Lane;
- Opportunities for trails on the AQUA PA/Churchville Reservoir property;
- Bicycle sharrows along Upper Holland Road between Bustleton Pike and Holland Road; and,
- A combination of bicycle lanes and a shared use trail along Lower Holland Road between Chapel Drive and Holland Road.

There was also discussion regarding the lack of a proposed trail along Ironworks Creek on properties owned by Bucks County and Northampton Township located between the Green Valley and Pheasant Run neighborhoods, extending from Lower Holland Road to Elm Avenue. While recognizing that the upper stretch of this area off of Lower Holland Road has an existing access road that is already used as a trail to access the pond located approximately 1,100 feet southeast, extending the trail in this area and beyond would be very costly due to the significant amount of wetlands in the area.

A township-wide map showing all of the proposed trails and bicycle facilities was also presented as a reminder of the overall connectivity to be created via this proposed network, and to assess any potential gaps in the proposed network.

No specific follow-up items were identified relative to specific trails or bicycle facilities. The township did request some time to review the proposed trails and bicycle facilities but authorized the planning consultant to move forward with the development of the planning study document.

REVIEW OF PRIOR PLANNING EFFORTS AND STUDIES

To ensure consistency between this Plan and other related planning efforts, the following related plans were reviewed, and where applicable, their recommendations incorporated into the development of this plan.

Bucks County Bicycle Master Plan (2012)

- Identifies two connections within Northampton Township. Connections are defined as routes that provide or have an opportunity to provide a safe bicycle facility for both transportation and recreational purposes. The connections include:
 - The Neshaminy Creek Greenway (along the Neshaminy Creek)
 - State Route 532

Northampton Township Comprehensive Plan (2018)

- Encourages the use of bike paths and sidewalks to reduce trips of under 2 miles.

Northampton Township Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Plan Update (2018)

- Establish accessible pedestrian and bicycle routes between parks, schools, and other community nodes.
- Encourage alternative modes of transportation throughout the township
- Establish ordinance/design standards for pedestrian/bicycle routes in accordance with PennDOT Standards

Richboro Village Master Plan (2018)

- Recommends the implementation of a complete streets program for the Village of Richboro, such style of development is consistent with bike-friendly community design.

Holland Village Master Plan (2014)

- Identifies the potential of bike lanes to run along Buck Road through the Village of Holland

Churchville to Playwicki Park (2008)

- Sets a vision to link the Churchville Nature Center to Playwicki Park via a greenway that roughly parallels the Mill and Neshaminy Creeks.

Northampton Township Sidewalk Prioritization Study (2005)

- Recommends the use of trails to address several needs:
 - Serve as a connection for the mobility impaired to enjoy the recreation facilities the township offers
 - Use unpaved trails in passive parks as an environmental resource protection strategy
 - Identifies the bicycling as a aspirational activity for all age groups from 6 to 65+ to combat inactivity
- Developed a list of key connections, implementation timeline, and focus areas to expand to sidewalk network within the township. This study can help supplement and fill the gaps with in the township's sidewalk network.

CREATION OF A COMMUNITY PROFILE

To ensure that the trails and bicycle network addresses the specific needs of the Northampton Township community, part of the plan development process consisted of developing a Northampton Township Community Profile. This profile, which is contained in Chapter 3 of this study, provided an overview of the community by analyzing and inventorying several aspects of the community including:

- Context of the community in the region;
- Land Use characteristics;
- Demographics;
- Natural Features including water resources, woodlands, topography, riparian corridors, floodplains, and agricultural lands;
- Man-Made Features including the road network, utility corridors, existing trails, commercial districts, schools, and parks and open space; and
- Historic Resources.

IDENTIFICATION OF PROPOSED TRAILS AND BICYCLE FACILITIES

As discussed previously, the proposed trails and bicycle facilities identified in this document were derived from discussions between the township Board of Supervisors, township staff, and the Bucks County Planning Commission.

Key factors considered in identifying potential trails and bicycle facilities included:

- Establishing connectivity to adjacent neighborhoods, commercial areas, park and recreational sites, historic resources, and schools;
- Ensuring that routes are safe and well protected;
- Utilizing sidewalks and existing trails to maximize the network's efficacy;
- Ensuring that network can accommodate a variety of different age groups and user abilities; and
- Designing trail and bicycle facilities to minimize future maintenance requirements.

To assess the feasibility of each proposed trail and bicycle facility, and to identify potential constraints and opportunities, a variety of approaches were used including:

- Site visits and field work;
- Bucks County Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping;
- Aerial photography; and
- An assessment of the roads network in terms of right-of-way width, pavement width, speed limits, and average daily traffic to determine the opportunity for sidepath trails, bicycle lanes and bicycle sharrows.

While all of the trails and bicycle facilities proposed are technically possible to develop, township officials need to consider a variety of factors in determining those to be developed including safety, the needs and concerns of adjacent residents, and the ability of the township to fund the costs. Additionally, it should be noted that the development of a township-wide trail and bicycle facilities network is a long-term project given the need to identify sources of funding for both construction and ongoing maintenance of the trails, the time involved in negotiating trail easements where needed, the safety concerns needing to be addressed as well as the engineering and permitting process involved.

PRIORITIZATION OF PROPOSED TRAILS AND BICYCLE FACILITIES

The planning process identified 116 different potential trail segments and bicycle facilities, 8 new sidewalk segments, and 52 Neighborhood Bike Routes. Given the magnitude and complexity of such a proposed network, and to assist in implementation of the plan, the next step in the planning process involved the development of a system to prioritize these various segments for implementation.

The system used to evaluate each trail segment consisted of four steps:

1. Identification of key criteria reflective of the goals of the network including:

- Magnitude of cost to Northampton Township;
- Ownership of the right-of-way or property on which the trail or bike facility would be located;
- Presence of environmental constraints or extensive engineering requirements;
- Connectivity to neighborhoods as reflected by housing counts;
- Connectivity to schools;
- Connectivity to commercial areas;
- Connectivity to parks, existing trails, senior centers and libraries;
- Connectivity to other proposed trails and bicycle facilities;
- User safety

2. Consolidation of trail segments

The 116 different trail segments were consolidated into larger segments to represent more cohesive trails. For example, a proposed trail along Buck Road, initially consisting of 9 separate segments, reflective of different placements, right-of-way ownership, etc. were consolidated into one trail segment for evaluation. The consolidation process resulted in 52 consolidated trail and bicycle facilities to be evaluated. Similarly, the two different alignment options for the Newtown Rail Trail each consisted of between 8 to 9 segments.

3. Evaluation/Scoring of each consolidated trail

These consolidated trails were then evaluated and scored against the key criteria identified. The higher the score the more likely the trail would be considered a priority trail for the township. The top performing trails were then reviewed again by staff to ensure they helped attain the overarching goals identified in this plan. This final review then identified the arterial segments that should be priority trails and bicycle facilities for the township. Characteristics of higher and lower scoring trails are outlined in the following table:

TABLE 2 - CHARACTERISTICS OF HIGHER AND LOWER SCORING TRAILS

Higher Scoring Trails	Lower Scoring Trails
Providing a high degree of user safety	Low degree of user safety
Providing greater connectivity	Isolated or little connectivity
Lower to moderate cost to township	High direct cost to township
Public ownership of right-of-way / limited need for easements	Requires an easement
Lack of environmental constraints / significant engineering needed	Significant environmental impacts or obstacles

Ranking of Trails – The identification of the top priority trails and bicycle facilities, including specifics on each is included in Chapter 5. Full details of the prioritization and ranking process are included in Appendix C.