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- ▶ Chester County Planning Commission
- ▶ Chester County Department of Community Development
- ▶ Housing Choices Committee of Chester County

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CASE STUDY

A Community Approach to Affordable Housing

PHOENIXVILLE, PA

The Phoenixville community is taking a proactive approach to address significant increases in home prices, rents, and displacement.

CHALLENGES

The Borough of Phoenixville has experienced significant reinvestment, redevelopment, and growth since the late 2000s, which followed a period of decline in the wake of the closure of the Phoenix Iron Works in 1984. As the Borough has become a more attractive place for individuals and families to reside, property values and, in turn, home prices and rents have been on a steady upward trajectory. This has resulted in a steady decline in affordably-priced housing as well as increasing displacement of long-time residents who can no longer afford to live in Phoenixville.

In 2017, in response to this issue, Phoenixville Borough Council authorized the Borough manager to chair a task force charged with developing strategies to address affordable housing in the Borough.

“ Phoenixville community leaders understand the benefits of having a diverse community and are committed to increase both awareness of the need and affordable housing options to improve the well-being of the whole community.”

- Kris Keller
Executive Director
Orion Communities



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STRATEGIES

The Affordable Housing Task Force, made up of affordable housing developers, governmental officials, landlords, residents, and charitable service providers identified the following strategies:

- ▶ Improve methods of identifying affordable housing needs by different groups.
- ▶ Maximize the use of current housing resources.
- ▶ Explore the creation of new local housing resources and other funding options.
- ▶ Establish regional affordable housing goals and an implementation strategy.
- ▶ Establish a public education program.

Photo (l to r): Keith Burress, President, Orion Communities Board of Directors and Kris Keller, Executive Director, Orion Communities. Mr. Burress and Ms. Keller both also serve as members of the Phoenixville Council on Affordable Housing.

“ Affordable housing has become a national crisis. Often the first challenge is to help the community recognize the need for housing for the elderly, low income families, young people starting out, and individuals with disabilities. Phoenixville leaders are gaining an understanding of the need and helping to raise awareness so we can continue to have the diverse community we all love.”

- Kris Keller
Executive Director
Orion Communities



ACTIONS AND RESULTS

In 2018, the Affordable Housing Task Force evolved into the Phoenixville Council on Affordable Housing. The council is an independent entity working to implement the task force's strategies. Below are highlights of major actions to date.



Public-Private Partnership

As land costs are one of the most significant barriers to the provision of affordable housing, Phoenixville entered into an agreement with The Hankin Group to develop the former site of the Borough Streets Department at 115 Buchanan Street into 50 units of affordable rental housing for seniors. In exchange for the affordable units, the Borough provided the land through a Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA) Deed Restricted 35-year

delayed payment. The willingness of the Borough to provide the property for construction at essentially no cost allowed the developer to commit to a project with only affordable units.

Single House Initiative

Since the Borough has a significant amount of existing housing, the council recognized this as an opportunity to create affordable housing units. Working in conjunction with the Phoenixville Community Health Foundation, the council helped develop a grant program to assist property buyers in reducing the overall mortgage repayment. In exchange for this grant, the property owner enters into an agreement with the Foundation to cap rents at \$800 per month. The end result is the preservation of affordable units within already existing housing.

Raising Awareness

In addition to their on-the-ground efforts, the council actively promotes the importance of affordable housing and regularly presents its strategic approach to other advocacy, non-profit, and governmental entities. This effort has inspired other municipalities to consider similar methods in addressing affordable housing challenges.

View the Phoenixville Council on Affordable Housing's video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q4iNuBMPxxc

How to Create an Affordable Housing Task Force: <http://phoenixville.org/DocumentCenter/View/843/Creating-an-Affordable-Housing-Council-Guidelines-PDF?bidId=>