

# EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF PLANNING

*Chester County, Pennsylvania*



EXECUTIVE  
RECRUITMENT  
PROVIDED BY





## THE COMMUNITY

Chester County and its 550,000 residents enjoy a high quality of life with outstanding employment and educational opportunities, coupled with an array of performing arts and cultural venues, museums, historical sites, world-renowned gardens, recreational offerings, and an eclectic mixture of dining, microbreweries, and wine tasting options. Referred to locally as “Chesco,” the County includes the City of Coatesville, 15 Boroughs, 57 Townships, and numerous other communities within its 762 square miles and is part of Philadelphia’s 6.2 million metropolitan area population. Chester County is the fastest-growing county in southeastern Pennsylvania, with 100,000 projected new residents by 2050.

Accessible by the nearby Philadelphia International Airport and the Pennsylvania Turnpike (Interstate 76), and US Routes 1, 30, 202, and 322, the County’s convenient location provides easy access to the City of Philadelphia as well as to other metropolitan areas including Wilmington, Delaware to the southeast, Trenton, New Jersey to the northeast, and Baltimore, Maryland to the southwest.

One of the three original counties formed by William Penn in November 1682, Chester County did not become an inland county until 1789. Its name derives from Cheshire (i.e., Chester-shire), England, from which many of its early settlers came. West Chester, the county seat since 1788, was incorporated as a Borough on March 28, 1799. It was named for Chester,

the older county seat (now in Delaware County), which in turn derived its name from the shire town of Cheshire.

The County’s rich history can be experienced by visiting the Brandywine Battlefield Park and by learning about the area’s prominent role and important stops for freedom seekers on their way north with Underground Railroad Stations located at West Chester, Phoenixville, Oxford, and Kennett Square. The Longwood Progressive Meeting became a beacon to reformers throughout the United States for movements such as the abolition of slavery, women’s rights, and temperance. Visitors and speakers to the meeting house included Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, Susan B. Anthony, Sojourner Truth, and more. Today, the building houses the Brandywine Valley Tourism Information Center and serves as the starting point for the Kennett Underground Railroad history tours. Architectural history can also be seen by driving through the region to view and photograph its numerous covered bridges that line the County’s Brandywine Valley countryside.

Chester County offers a litany of recreational opportunities including Valley Forge National Historical Park, Marsh Creek, and French Creek State Parks, six County Parks, and the Chester Valley Trail, Struble Trail, and Schuylkill River Trail, two of which connect with adjoining Counties. Other area tourist attractions include the world-renowned Longwood Gardens and its

## THE COMMUNITY *continued*

Festival of Fountains, the Jenkins Arboretum & Garden, American Helicopter Museum & Education Center, People's Light & Theater, The Colonial Theatre, Brandywine Ballet, the Antique Ice Tool Museum, Treehouse World, West Chester Railroad, and the Winterthur Museum Garden & Library.

Residents and visitors alike also enjoy participating in the region's numerous celebrations and festivals and events including the Kennett Square Mushroom Festival (Chester County is the Mushroom Capital of the world, as 50% of the fresh mushrooms consumed in the United States are grown in the area), Strawberry Festival, Turks Head Music Festival, Devon Horse Show, Ludwig's Corner Horse Show and Country Fair, Plantation Field International Horse Trials, Chester County Balloon Festival, "Blobfest" (in celebration of the movie "The Blob"), Brandywine Hills Point-to-Point Races, Willowdale Steeplechase, Radnor Hunt Races, Chester County Hospital Polo Cup, Summerfest Air Show, Benchmark Twilight Cycling Classic, Chester County Restaurant Festival, and the seasonal Longwood Christmas, Yuletide at Winterthur and A Brandywine Christmas.

A high percentage of residents work in professional occupations, resulting in Chester County attaining the highest median household income in Pennsylvania. The County has strong employment centers in agriculture, finance and insurance, information technology, management of companies and enterprises, and professional, scientific, and technical services. Over 50% of jobs are in the top five industries – health care, professional and technical services, retail, finance and insurance, and manufacturing. The County's major employers include the Vanguard Group, QVC Network, Chester County Hospital, County of Chester, Giant Food Stores, Main Line Hospitals, Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education, Devereux Foundation, Downingtown School District, Janssen Research & Development, Siemens Medical Solutions USA, Herr Foods, The Pyle Corporation, Communications Test Design, and Cleveland-Cliffs, Inc.

The area's educational needs are met by the County's 12 public school districts and three career and technical high schools. Additionally, the County is served by numerous charter and private schools for K-12 students. Higher educational providers within the County include the West Chester University of Pennsylvania, Lincoln University, Cheney University, Immaculata University, University of Valley Forge, and the Delaware County Community College campuses. Other higher education opportunities include Temple University, University of Pennsylvania, LaSalle University, Drexel University, Saint Joseph's University, University of the Sciences, Philadelphia Academy of the Fine Arts, The Restaurant School at Walnut Hill, Penn State Great Valley School of Graduate Professional Studies, and more.

Chester County residents benefit from convenient access to medical facilities, including the Chester County Hospital (Penn Medicine), Paoli Hospital (Main Line Health), Phoenixville Hospital, and Coatesville VA Medical Center, as well as being in close proximity to other Philadelphia area medical specialty providers.

The County's median income is \$117,000, with a median home sale price of \$492,000.



# CHESTER COUNTY MISSION STATEMENT

*The mission of the Chester County Government is to provide high-quality, fiscally responsible services to the citizens and visitors of Chester County through efficient and cost-effective operations so they can live, work, and raise a family in a thriving community.*

## COUNTY GOALS

### **Health & Human Services:**

*Protect vulnerable people in the community while promoting healthy choices.*

### **Public Safety:**

*Ensure safe and secure communities.*

### **Economy:**

*Support the growth and development of a strong and vibrant economy for all residents.*

### **Financial Management:**

*Continue to exercise sound financial management and maintain the County's financial strength while minimizing the property tax burden.*

### **Governance:**

*Pursue excellence through exceptional customer service, transparency, accountability, and innovation.*

### **Growth, Preservation & Environment:**

*Manage growth and land use to preserve and optimize quality of life, effective transportation, and environmental assets for future generations*

## AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS

*National Honor for Performance Management Leadership (2022)*

*Healthiest County (2022)*

*Top 10 Digital County (5th time in the top 10)*

*Best School Districts in Pennsylvania - 7 in Chester County (2022)*

*25 Best Places to Live in PA- #1 Chesterbrook + 7 other Chester County Towns (2022)*

*25 Best Places to Raise a Family in PA - Chesterbrook #1 + 6 other Chester County Towns (2022)*

*Best Place to Retire (2021)*

*Wealthiest county in PA (2019)*

*Top 50 richest counties in the US (2021)*

*Counties where residents earn the most investment income – Chester County 2nd in PA (2021)*

*Top 10 Trails in PA - SRT (2021)*

*Wealthiest zip codes in Philadelphia Region – Chester County has 8 of 50 (2020)*

*Lowest credit card debt - 2nd in PA (2022)*

*Six of Pennsylvania's Top 50 Scoring School Districts (2022)*

*NACo Achievement Award for Chester County Youth Center and Brandywine Valley SPCA SAFE Program Partnership*

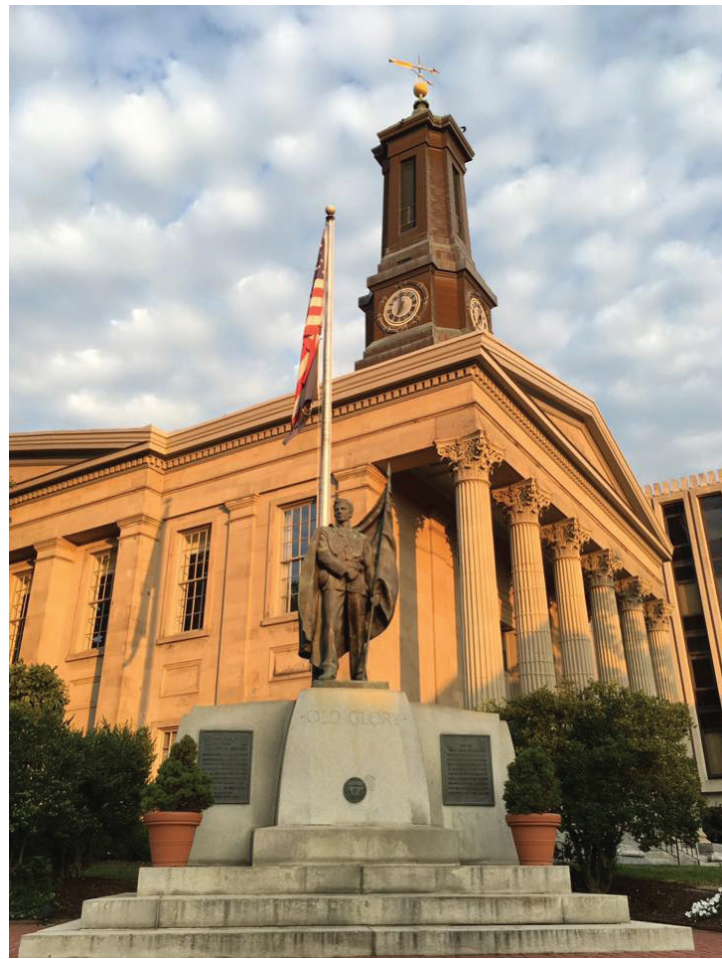
*NACo Achievement Award for Fresh Start Juvenile Expungement Program*

*Distinguished Budget Presentation Award – Government Finance Officer Association (GFOA)*

# GOVERNANCE & ORGANIZATION

Chester County operates under a Commission form of government with the three-member Board of Commissioners constituting the chief governing body of the organization. The Board, together with its executive staff, manages the large and diverse organization whose mission is to provide quality government services in an efficient, cost-effective manner. Elected every four years on an at-large basis, the Board of Commissioners are responsible for policy making, fiscal management, and the administration of county affairs.

The County provides a wide array of local government services with a FY 2024 Annual Consolidated Budget of roughly \$683 million (\$201 million General Fund), supported in part with an ad valorem property tax of 4.551 mills. It is the only Pennsylvania county to hold a AAA credit rating from all three major credit rating agencies and one of only 53 counties in the United States with such a distinction. County services are provided by about 2,400 full-time and 174 part-time positions.



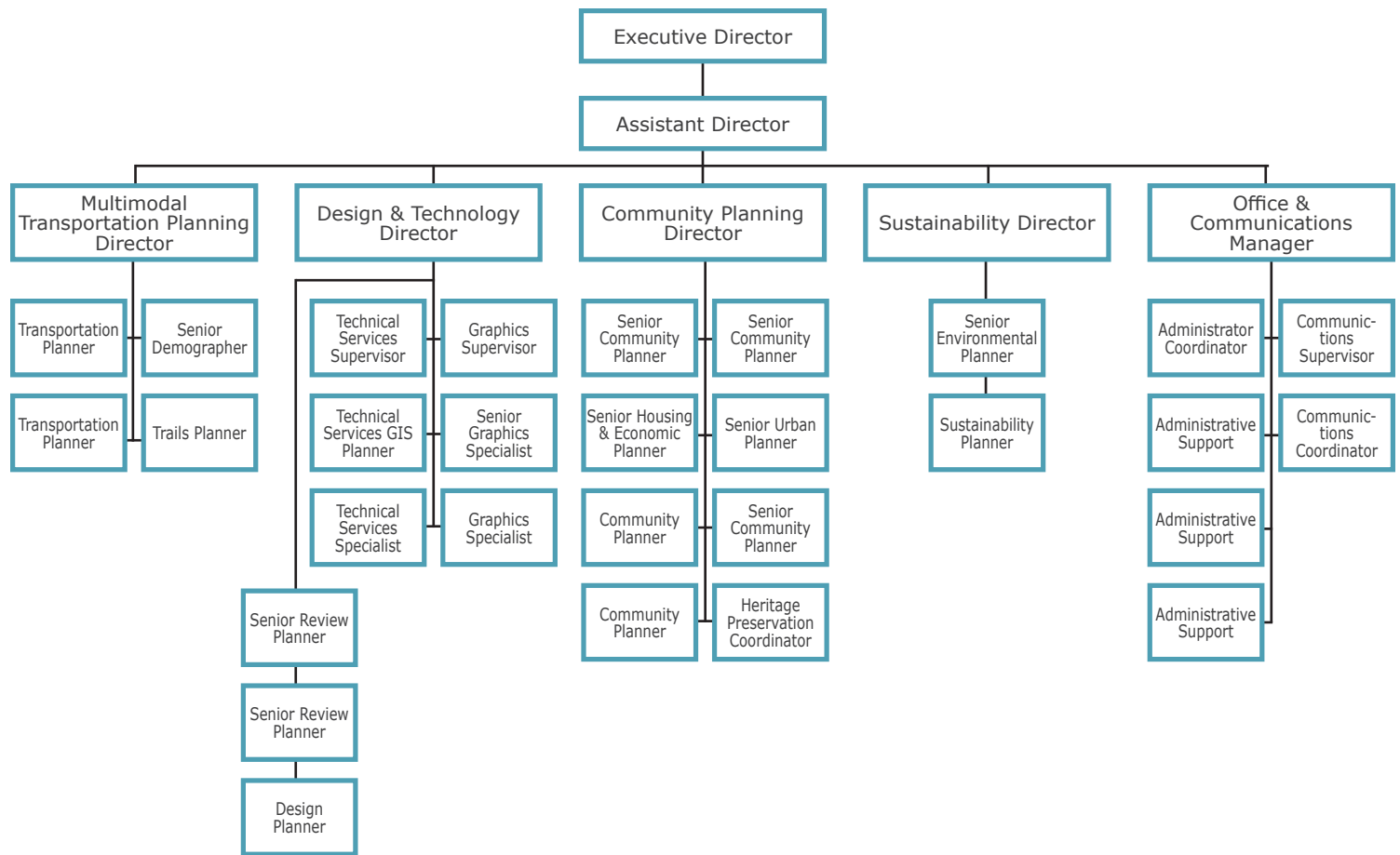
## ABOUT THE POSITION

The Executive Director of Planning is responsible for leading, implementing and managing all programs, staff, and budgets for the County Planning Commission and Environmental and Energy Advisory Board. The position is also responsible for providing the highest technical level of assistance to County Commissioners.

Direct reports to the Executive Director of Planning include the following positions: Assistant Director, Multimodal Transportation Planning Director, Design & Technology Director, Community Planning Director, Sustainability Director, and Office & Communications Manager. In total, the Planning Department is staffed with 36 FTE's (including the Executive Director) and is supported with an annual budget of approximately \$3.8 million.

A summary of the Executive Director of Planning responsibilities includes the following:

- Manage the preparation and implementation of the county comprehensive plan.
- Prepare and oversee Annual Work Program and tasks related to community planning, economic development, housing, open space, historic preservation, trails, transportation, environmental protection, agriculture, and general planning.
- Consult with administrators to discuss the overall intent of programs or projects and determine broad guidelines for studies.
- Prepare and monitor the Planning Department budget.
- Provide direct technical assistance to the Commissioners on planning and transportation issues.
- Represent the County at meetings, conventions, and other forums to promote program objectives.
- Attend Chester County Planning Commission (CCPC) Board Committee and monthly Public Board Meetings.
- Coordinate with state, federal, and regional agencies, legislators, local partners, municipalities, and other county departments (e.g., EPA, FHWA, FTA, DCED, PennDot, DEP, DVRPC, SEPTA, etc.).
- Coordinate with the private sector (e.g., homebuilders, Chambers of Commerce, Homeowners Associations, Development Councils, etc.).
- Maintain, review and document state-mandated reviews, including Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (Act 247), Pennsylvania Sewage Facilities Act (Act 537), Agricultural Security Areas, Public Utilities Commission.
- Review, evaluate and approve materials for publication and distribution.
- Oversee communications and marketing, including the website, social media, and events.
- Organize data from all sources provided with proposals such as environmental impact statements, construction specifications or budget and staffing estimates to determine additional data requirements.
- Oversee personnel management and development.



## CHESTER COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION MISSION STATEMENT

*The mission of the Chester County Planning Commission is to provide future growth and preservation plans to citizens, so that they can enjoy a Chester County that is historic, green, mobile, and prosperous.*



# RECENT PLANNING COMMISSION AWARDS & RECOGNITION

## 2023

- Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association (Award for Projects, Programs, and Practices) - Recognition of Chester County's Open Space Protection Planning Program which has played an integral role in the countywide preservation of open space, farmland, and natural features.
- TMACC Travel Demand Management (TDM) Member Award - Recognition of the Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority, formed between Chester, Berks, and Montgomery Counties to reestablish passenger rail service between Reading and Philadelphia.
- GVFTMA TDM Advocate (Diamond Level) - Recognition of Chester County for implementing programs that promote commuting alternatives that improve the environment and quality of life for employees and the community.

## 2022

- TMACC Travel Demand Management (TDM) Member Award - Recognition of Chester County for implementing programs that reduce single occupancy vehicle use and promote sustainability.
- GVFTMA TDM Advocate - Recognition of Chester County for implementing programs that reduce single occupancy vehicle use and promote sustainability.

## 2019

- Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association (Award for Plans) - Recognition of Landscapes3, Chester County's comprehensive plan that seeks to balance preservation and growth across the county's landscapes.
- County Planning Division of APA and the National Association of County Planners (Award of Excellence in the Comprehensive Plan - Large Jurisdiction Category) - Recognition of Landscapes3, Chester County's newly adopted comprehensive plan that seeks to balance preservation and growth across the county's landscapes in six goal areas: Preserve, Protect, Appreciate, Live, Prosper, and Connect.
- National Association of Counties (Achievement Award in the Planning Category) - Recognition of Landscapes3, Chester County's newly adopted comprehensive plan, as an innovative and effective county government program that strengthens services for residents.
- GVFTMA (Planning Leadership Award) - Recognition of Chester County's continued support of smart transportation investments which was further validated through the adoption of Landscapes3.



# CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

**Revised Comprehensive Plan:** The County's current Comprehensive Plan, Landscapes3, was adopted in 2018 with a commitment to balancing growth and preservation while embracing the unique characteristics that make Chester County a cherished place to live, work, and play. Per State requirements, the County's Comprehensive Plan will need to be updated by 2028, and the successor Executive Director of Planning will be involved in shepherding the successor plan, including whether the successor document will be developed in-house or through the assistance of a planning consulting firm.

**Growth Management:** Chester County is the fastest-growing county in southeastern Pennsylvania, with 100,000 projected new residents by 2050. Although the County does not have direct zoning authority, which is the responsibility of each of the 73 local governmental units within the County, the Planning Commission plays an important influencing role in providing an ideal comprehensive view in progressive growth management strategies and related preferred development patterns, infrastructure, transportation, and recreational assets to ensure the current high quality of life will be enjoyed by future residents of the County.

**Vision Partnership Program (VPP):** Chester County provides grant funding and technical assistance to municipalities through its Vision Partnership Program to support implementation of the County's Comprehensive Plan (Landscapes3) to assist in municipal comprehensive plan updates, ordinance revisions, and special studies. The Chester County Commissioners allocate approximately \$250,000 per year for VPP cash grants. Historically, the County may have 30-plus active VPP projects running simultaneously, with Planning Commission staff involved in all of the projects as either project lead or as monitor to a professional planning consultant selected by the municipality.

**Open Space Preservation:** Chester County residents truly value the benefits of open lands, stewardship, and the environmental and economic contributions associated with the preservation of open space in the form of farms, preserves, parks, and trails as their commitment to sustaining natural resources, quality of life, and sense of place. Currently, roughly 151,000 acres, or over 31% of Chester County is protected open space, through land preservation by the County, land trusts, municipalities, and other preservation partners. The Planning Commission works closely with County's Parks & Preservation Department and with local municipalities and partners to encourage and expand the preservation of open space for passive recreational, multimodal trail systems, and agricultural purposes. In support of this effort, the County is nearing the issuance of \$10 million in bonds for future open space initiatives.





## Goals

Landscapes3 has six goal areas for achieving the vision. These goal areas include objectives and detailed recommendations that provide guidance to the county and its partners.

PRESERVE

PROTECT

APPRECIATE

LIVE

PROSPER

CONNECT

## CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES *continued*

**Transportation Planning:** The County's biannual Transportation Improvement Inventory highlighted over 500 necessary transportation improvements, with a total estimated cost of \$4.55 billion. Another related transportation need is for the expansion of passenger rail service over the next decade, with SEPTA returning service to Coatesville and Amtrak providing service to Phoenixville. Additionally, the Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority with proposed service to Phoenixville, Pottstown, and Reading was recently accepted into the Federal Corridor ID program, resulting in the commencement of planning and engineering for the restoration of passenger rail service to these communities.

**Affordable Housing Pilot Projects:** Similar to many communities, Chester County faces an increasingly difficult challenge in the availability of affordable workforce housing options. The County is currently exploring a land bank, a Starter Home Initiative (focused on local municipalities and actions to encourage affordably priced housing), and other potential pilot projects and programs to encourage the development of affordable housing opportunities to promote a live-work-play environment for current and future residents.

**Sustainability:** The County recently established a Sustainability Division within the Planning Department to provide leadership in championing a vision of sustainability, and implementing the County's 2021 Climate Action Plan. The Division serves as a technical source of information on sustainable practices and programs for local governments, businesses, agriculture partners, and homeowner associations in the areas of stormwater management, fertilizers, solar power facilities, encouragement of community gardens, conversion of lawns, planting riparian buffers, preserving historic buildings, and connectivity to trail systems.

**Historic Preservation:** Given Chester County's rich history, the Planning Commission encourages historic preservation through technical guidance for area local governments to support best planning and design practices for preserving the County's historic villages and hamlets. Other related initiatives include agriculture heritage tours and a new Heritage Tourism Plan to provide a framework for connecting and enhancing Chester County's historic sites to encourage more visitation and cooperation.

# IDEAL CANDIDATE

Chester County seeks a visionary and creative Executive Director of Planning who is passionate about progressive planning principles and has the keen ability to develop long-range plans and future projects with area planning and transportation partners. The successful candidate will have a functional understanding in a variety of practices including long-range planning, balancing growth with preservation, open space acquisition and management, affordable housing, sustainability programs, multi-modal transportation, and Transit Oriented Development.

The successor Executive Director of Planning should be well versed in transportation and land use issues in both urbanized and agricultural environments and be able to gather, study, and analyze data and other relevant transportation- and planning-related information. The ability to develop effective working relationships with Planning Commission Members, Board of County Commissioners, and fostering intergovernmental relations with the 73 local government planning and administrative officials within the County, regional planning boards/commissions, agricultural and economic development partners, and local, state, and federal planning and transportation agencies is critical. As a subject matter expert on planning matters, the new Executive Director will be able to skillfully communicate and present technical information effectively, visually, verbally, and in writing to a wide variety of socio-economic-educational audiences and be comfortable serving as a diplomatic spokesperson and advocate for Chester County planning initiatives in public forums and with the media.

The chosen candidate will be accessible and serve as a coach and mentor to Planning Department employees and be experienced in providing effective guidance and oversight to personnel and departmental leadership to support a high-performing team of professionals. The successor Executive Director will have the ability to direct and work through subordinates to establish policies, set priorities, resolve conflicts, and render decisions in administering or managing all or part of the activities of the Planning Commission. Budget and project management experience is desired, as is experience and comfort in working in hybrid office-remote work environments.

## EDUCATION & EXPERIENCE

A master's degree from an accredited college or university in planning, geography, political science, economics, landscape architecture, or other related field is required, coupled with ten (10) or more years of applied, supervisory experience in planning fields (i.e., community, environmental, plan review, transportation, etc.) Candidates with an equivalent combination of education, training, and experience will also be considered. Membership in the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) strongly preferred.

The final selected candidate must also possess or be able to obtain a valid driver's license. Residency is not required for the position; however, it is desired that the Executive Director of Planning live within a reasonable commuting distance to the County offices in West Chester, Pennsylvania.



# COMPENSATION & BENEFITS

Chester County offers a competitive salary based upon qualifications and experience with a desired starting salary range of \$120,186 - \$150,234. The County provides a generous benefits program including health, dental, vision, pre-tax spending accounts, life insurance and long-term disability, paid vacation, personal days, sick leave, and other professional development assistance. Employees participate in the County's Defined Benefit Retirement Plan with a 6% employee contribution, with an additional optional 457 deferred compensation plan available.



## APPLICATION PROCESS

[Please apply online](#)

For more information on this position contact:

**Doug Thomas, Executive Vice President**  
[DouglasThomas@GovernmentResource.com](mailto:DouglasThomas@GovernmentResource.com)  
863-860-9314



*Chester County is an Equal Opportunity Employer and values diversity in its workforce. Applicants selected as finalists for this position will be subject to a comprehensive background check.*

## RESOURCES

**County website**  
[chesco.org](http://chesco.org)

**Planning Commission Service Brochure**  
[chescoplanning.org/Publications/PDF/ServicesBrochure-2024.pdf](http://chescoplanning.org/Publications/PDF/ServicesBrochure-2024.pdf)

**Planning Commission 2023 Annual Report**  
[chescoplanning.org/aboutus/AnnualReports/2023-AnnualReport.pdf](http://chescoplanning.org/aboutus/AnnualReports/2023-AnnualReport.pdf)

**Landscapes 3 Comprehensive Plan**  
[chescoplanning.org/Landscapes3/0-Home.cfm](http://chescoplanning.org/Landscapes3/0-Home.cfm)

