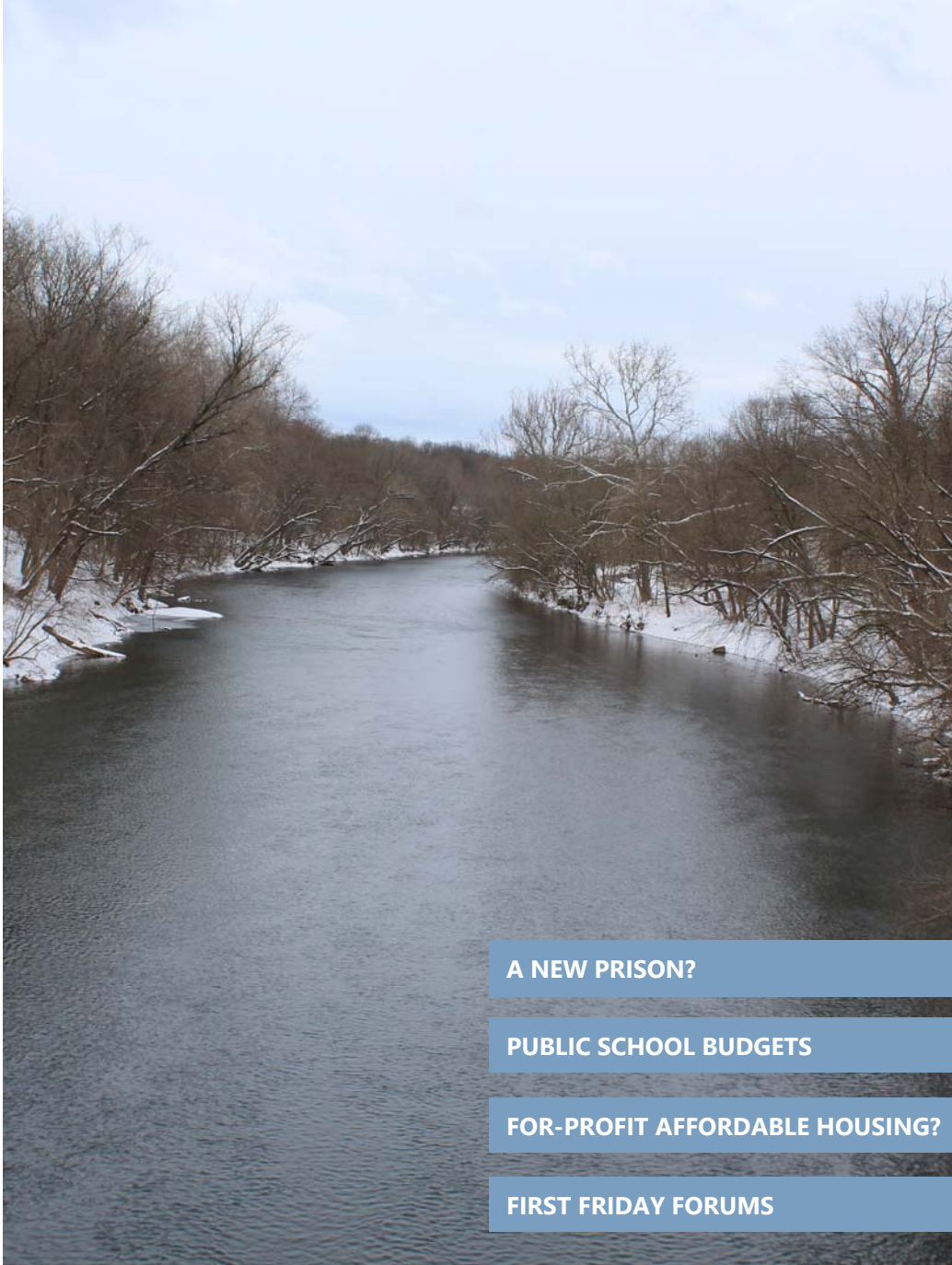


Winter 2021

Hourglass Quarterly



A NEW PRISON?

PUBLIC SCHOOL BUDGETS

FOR-PROFIT AFFORDABLE HOUSING?

FIRST FRIDAY FORUMS

Thank you to the sponsor of this edition of the Hourglass Quarterly:



(717) 397-8282
777 East Ross Street
Lancaster, PA 17602

Wickersham Construction and
Engineering, Inc. is a Proud
Sponsor of the Hourglass

Letter from the Executive Director

Hello,

What do prisons, education, and affordable housing all have in common? They are all topics that will have profound impacts on Lancaster County's future and are featured in this Winter 2021 edition of the Hourglass Quarterly.



The first article in this newsletter, "A New Prison?", examines the need for Lancaster County to build a new prison and invites the reader to be creative in thinking about how the prison might be designed.

The second article, "Public School Budgets" highlights a report from the Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials regarding the impact of COVID-19 on public education budgets. Spoiler alert: It's been a challenge, especially with staffing needs and increased tuition costs for cyber charter schools.

Our final article, "For-Profit Affordable Housing" showcases the work of housing advocates in Charlotte, North Carolina who propagate affordable housing without any subsidies. This phenomenon, known as "Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing" is being used as a way to maintain existing affordable housing while combating displacement that is oftentimes associated with gentrification.

To cap off this edition of the Quarterly, we have included summaries of recent First Friday Forums. We have been extremely fortunate to be able to feature a wide variety of speakers and presenters at these forums and are excited to share them with you.

We hope you find this edition of the Hourglass Quarterly informative and thought provoking.

Happy reading!

Jonathan Russell
Executive Director

A NEW PRISON?

Designing a Lancaster County Prison

The verdict is in: The Lancaster County Prison is on its last legs. Portions of the structure date back to 1851, with the most modern section built in the 1990s. The building is in poor condition and presents a myriad of challenges to the prison staff and inmates. Jean Bickmire, head of Have a Heart for Persons in the Criminal Justice System, said in a column in LNP, "Conditions are awful: excessive heat in the summer and extreme cold in the winter because of a heating, ventilation and air conditioning system that is inefficient and can't be rectified. Current staff members do the best they can, but they cannot control the rodents that come in after hard rains, or the water that leaks through the ceiling into the electrical fixtures. When outdated fixtures break, more expensive custom-made replacements must be ordered. Portions of the facility are closed because they cannot be used."

It seems as though the Lancaster County Prison Board, comprised of the Lancaster County Commissioners, agrees. "I think everyone agrees that a new prison will be needed in the near future" said Commissioner Parsons at the Hourglass January First Friday Forum. At the August 20, 2020 prison board meeting, Commissioner Leh-

man indicated that COVID-19 has further exposed the flaws of the jail and, "exacerbated the weakness of the facility and made it so much harder to manage a facility like this." All signs point to a new prison coming to Lancaster.



The building of a new prison is not insignificant and will have lasting impacts. Portions of the current prison have been with us for 170 years! When building a new prison, it is imperative that we design a prison that not only functions to house inmates in a safe and secure manner, the prison must facilitate the rehabilitation and reentry of prisoners back into society. In addition to the wonderful work undertaken by social service agencies and prison staff to prepare inmates for a return to civilian life, the building itself can play a crucial role in this rehabilitation process.

The most ubiquitous prison designs isolate prisoners from the outside world and from each other. This isolation, it turns out, works counter to reintroducing people back into society. Brutally functional designs and



the use of cold, hard materials both inflict psychological harm on inmates and staff, and symbolically shape and reflect the public perception of prisoners as cold, hardened criminals

So what might Lancaster County consider when designing a new prison? Prison design architects have many different ideas. Kenneth Ricci, designer of the award winning Union County Juvenile Detention Center in NJ says, "Environment cues behavior. You maximize safety by designing for good sight lines, reasonable decibel levels, and daylight and exterior views, especially of nature, which measurably reduces adrenaline levels." The facility he designed is a one-room-deep building with all spaces wrapped around a 1 acre glass walled courtyard. Other effective prison designs include acoustic engineering and secure glass as opposed to metal bars on windows and doors.



Union County Juvenile Detention Center.
Credit: JINGOLI

The Architectural Review publication highlighted the innovative work of Sweden. "In Sweden the emphasis is on evidence-based rehabilitation rather than on punitive incarceration. Intensive social work takes place in stylishly furnished prisons, which feature common areas and are frequently open to the outside world – the essential rationale being that hermetically sealing people off from society can only create unproductive sociopaths. The incarceration rate is relatively low, as is recidivism (40 per cent, around half the rate of the rest of Europe)."

While examples from other countries might not be a perfect fit for our criminal justice system, an examination of best practices used in prison design is well worth the investment. This is an opportunity for Lancaster County to yet again lead the state and the Country by example.

"Typology: Prison", By Tom Wilkinson. The Architectural Review, June 11, 2018.

"Architecture and Prison Reform", By Jerry Adler. Architectural Record, March 4, 2019.



PUBLIC SCHOOL BUDGETS

COVID-19 Makes an Impact

COVID-19's impact on public school district's budgets has been varied and unequal according to a new report from the Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials. Throughout the state, school districts' budgets have been effected differently depending on their location, the assessed value of property in their borders, and the increases in costs needed to continue to provide educational instruction remotely.

The "School District Budget Report: The COVID Impact" report released in January 2021, included survey responses from public schools throughout the state. According to this survey, one of the largest impacts of the pandemic on school budgets has been the immense staffing challenges. 90% of respondents reported that it was very difficult to maintain professional staffing levels and almost 85% indicated that it was difficult to find substitute teachers. Part of this challenge lies with the need for increased staffing to manage parallel hybrid learning programs, where part of the class is in-person and part of the class is remote. Addi-



tionally, because of social-distance requirements, student to teacher ratios had to be adjusted, requiring additional staff. Additional challenges facing school districts include managing contracts with transportation companies and school lunch vendors.

Cyber charter schools continue to be a drain on public school resources. Before the pandemic, public schools were losing students to cyber charter schools and being forced to pay high costs for those students' tuition. COVID-19 has exacerbated this issue with more than 20,000 students leaving public schools to attend a cyber charter school since the beginning of the pandemic. This massive cyber charter school tuition increase is wreaking havoc on school district budgets for 2020-2021. Since the start of the 2019-2020 school year, public schools have seen their cyber charter school tuition obligations increase by approximately \$475 million for a total cost of over \$2.5 billion annually.

This increase in cyber charter tuition payments is even more concerning when compared to what it costs school districts to provide the same virtual education. A 2018 study by the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators found that in 2017-2018



"cyber charter tuition rates paid by local school districts range from a low of \$7,598 to a high of \$18,544." The report continues, "The vast majority of local school districts offering cyber learning options are spending \$5,000 or less annually to educate students through a local online learning option."

In response to the pandemic and this flock to cyber charter schools, many school districts have either created their own cyber charter programs, expanded on existing cyber offerings, or partnered with the local intermediate unit to provide remote education.

While significant financial aid from the federal government has kept school districts afloat, there is a strong understanding that this aid is temporary. According to the report, "The pandemic didn't create the underlying education funding crisis in Pennsylvania; it simply exposed the extent of the funding disparity that exists across 500 unique districts and their communities. While federal funds will provide a welcome and needed temporary relief for school districts into 2021-2022, there is no way out of the permanent cycle of school district and taxpayer stress unless federal funds are replaced, pandemic disparities are

remedied, public education is reimagined and there is a fundamental change in the way the state funds education. With no action, however, it's a race to the bottom, with the reincarnation of higher property taxes, cuts in personnel and reductions in educational programs."



Striking a balance between the needs of students, staff, teachers, parents, and taxpayers is tricky to manage for public schools without the impact of the pandemic. COVID-19 has served to underline the existing inequalities in Pennsylvania's educational system. Schools cannot solely rely on Federal and State aid to make it through this pandemic. In Lancaster County, schools will continue to need to reexamine their funding structures and work to avoid raising property taxes on property owners already struggling financially.

"School District Budget Report: The COVID Impact", Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials. January 2021.



FOR-PROFIT AFFORDABLE HOUSING?

A Study of NOAH in Charlotte, NC

As the pandemic continues to upend our lives and suppress the job market, many families are facing housing affordability concerns. The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development defines a family as being housing cost burdened if they are paying more than 30% of their monthly income on housing expenses. According to the American Community Survey Data from 2019 (before the pandemic), almost 27% of households in Lancaster County are cost burdened. That number jumps up to a whopping 47.78% for households that rent. This is not a new problem and has been exacerbated by the pandemic. This is also not a problem that is confined to Lancaster County. Communities throughout the country are working to find homes people can afford.

Charlotte, North Carolina is one of these places. In communities like Charlotte, the housing market has largely split into two categories: market rate housing built by profit-seeking private developers and affordable housing built with heavy subsidies by mission driven organizations. A third category has also been slowly working its way



into affordable housing discussions as a viable solution. Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing (NOAH) is affordable housing that does not require a government or nonprofit subsidy. Real Estate investor Mark Ethridge partnered with a group of local organizations and investors to create a pool of \$58 million to invest in NOAH. Called the Housing Impact Fund, the fund buys affordable units, fixes them up and manages the units while keeping rents low through a 20-year deed restriction that places legal rules on how the property can be used and priced. Compared to for-profit real estate investments with returns upwards of 15%, the return on investment in naturally occurring affordable housing is typically in the single digits. This requires a very patient investor who is willing to forgo a big payday in favor of long-term, stable returns.



A FastCompany article on the work of Ethridge and the group of investors provides an overview of the Housing



Impact Fund's first purchase .Lake Mist, cost \$18.5 million, including about \$4 million in financing from the city. With the \$58 million pool, the fund is targeting investment in around 1,500 units over the next two years, and Ethridge says several deals are currently in the works. Each property will have the same 20-year deed restriction, with 80% of units set aside for households earning less than the area median income.



*Lake Mist Development
Credit: Ascent Housing*

While this approach seems to be picking up steam in Charlotte, there are some detractors. Steve King writes in ShelterForce, "There is nothing natural about NOAH's affordability. This housing stock is most often found in lower-income neighborhoods and communities of color where decades of disinvestment and uneven development has unnaturally nurtured an "untapped market" ripe for speculative reinvestment. It may be unsubsidized and affordable for now, but it is also under-

maintained and precarious, with eviction and displacement a palpable, everyday threat." He continues, "While [NOAH] sounds benign, or even positive, it is a disaster waiting to happen for thousands of vulnerable households, as the prevailing system consistently fails to protect renters and empower them with viable alternatives to market-driven displacement"

These concerns can be valid and need to be taken into account when undertaking any affordable housing project. However, if implemented correctly, this investment model could have profound impacts on the way we approach affordable housing throughout the country.

"Charlotte may have Cracked the Code on Affordable Housing. Here's How." By Nate Berg. FastCompany, January 25, 2021.

"Thoughts on the Unnatural Occurrence of Cheap Housing." By Steve King. ShelterForce, April 25, 2017.



HOURGLASS FIRST FRIDAY FORUMS

Highlights From Recent Forums

November 6, 2020 - Public Health in Lancaster County

Panelists: Susan Baldrige (Executive Director, Partnership for Public Health), Brian Barnhart, PhD (Executive Director, IU-13), and Jeffrey Martin, MD (Chair, Department of Family and Community Medicine, Penn Medicine Lancaster General Hospital)



As the pandemic continues to affect how we live, work, and play the Hourglass was joined by Susan Baldrige, Brian Barnhart, and Dr. Jeffrey Martin to discuss public health in Lancaster County. As the

largest county in Pennsylvania without a public health department, many health experts say this has put us at a disadvantage in combating COVID-19. This forum explored some key questions including: What is a public health department? How would a public health department have helped Lancaster County during the pandemic? How has Lancaster responded to COVID-19 without a public health department? What might a public health department look like in Lancaster County?

To watch the forum in full, find it on our website: <https://hourglasslancaster.org/resources/first-friday-forums/>

December 4, 2020 - Lancaster Countywide Action Plan (CAP)

Panelists: Allyson Ladley Gibson (Coordinator, Lancaster Clean Water Partners), Gordon Hoover (CAP Coordinator Team and Lancaster Farmland Trust), Matt Kofroth (CAP Coordinator Team and Lancaster County Conservation District), and Joellyn Warren (CAP Coordinator Team and David Miller Associates)



Clean water is essential to the future health and wellbeing of Lancaster County. So who is leading the efforts to improve our water ways? At the December First Friday Forum we heard from the Lancaster Countywide Action Team, the group responsible for implementing the Countywide Action Plan which outlines Lancas-

FIRST FRIDAY FORUM SPONSOR



ter's path for achieving nitrogen and phosphorus reductions for clean and clear water throughout the county. The panelists discussed how the plan was developed and approved and how it is being implemented. They also discussed the current health of Lancaster County's water ways and shared some exciting examples of projects currently being implemented to combat the pollution of our streams and rivers.

"More than half of Lancaster County's 1,400 miles of streams are impaired."

To watch the forum in full, find it on our website: <https://hourglasslanaster.org/resources/first-friday-forums/>

January 8, 2021 - Lancaster County Commissioners

Presenter: Joshua Parson (Lancaster County Commissioner, Chairman), Ray D'Agostino (Lancaster County Commissioner, Vice-Chairman), and Craig Lehman (Lancaster County Commissioner)

The January First Friday Forum featured a conversation with the three Lancaster County Commissioners: Joshua Parsons, Ray D'Agostino, and Craig Lehman. The discussion touched on the Coronavirus Pandemic and how the county responded to it including their responses to establishing a county public health department. The commissioners also discussed their relationship with the City of Lancaster, the Lancaster County Prison and how the county will build a new facility, land use management in the county and agricultural preservation. The formal part of the conversation was followed by a lively question and answer session with the audience.



These forums took place virtually using the Zoom Webinar function. This not only allowed us to continue to host First Friday Forums during the pandemic, it also enabled us to record the presentations. We invite you to watch the videos of the forums in their entirety by visiting the Hourglass website at www.HourglassLancaster.org or the Hourglass YouTube page.

To attend forums like these, become an Hourglass member.



HOURLASS
922 N. Queen Street
Lancaster, PA 17603

The Hourglass champions and facilitates sound decision-making to continue Lancaster County's prosperity while maintaining its unique character and enviable quality of life.

As a trusted source for information, innovative ideas and insights, the Hourglass helps stakeholders, elected officials and citizens make more informed and enlightened decisions.

For more info:
www.hourglasslancaster.org
(717) 295-0755