

Rethinking the Woolwich Township (NJ) Regional Center



An Urban Land Institute
Technical Assistance Panel
July 22-23, 2014



On behalf of



Table of Contents	1	About ULI – the Urban Land Institute
	1	Introduction to Woolwich Township
	2	Preserving Farmland and the Transfer of Development Rights Program
	3	Key Issues
	4	Recommendations
	8	Summary
	9	Stakeholders Interviewed
	10	Technical Assistance Panelists

About ULI – the Urban Land Institute

The Urban Land Institute (ULI) was established in 1936 as a nonprofit educational and research institute and is supported by 32,000 members representing all aspects of land use and development disciplines. ULI's mission is to provide responsible leadership in the use of land in order to enhance the total environment and to create and sustain thriving communities.

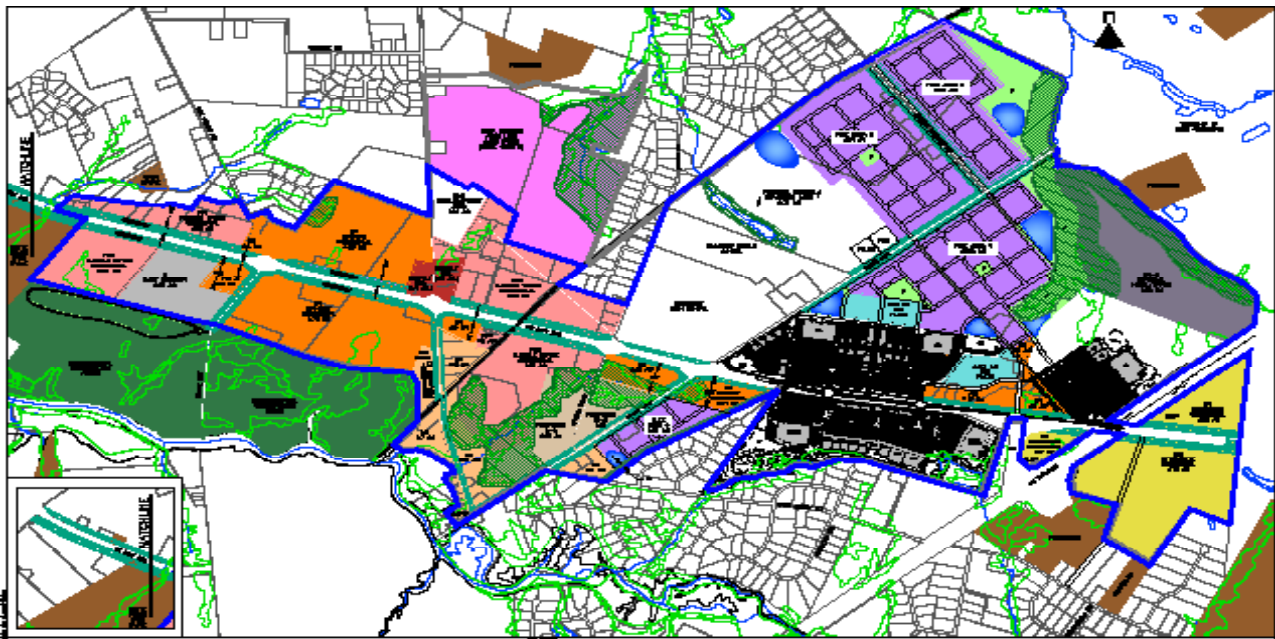
For more than 50 years, ULI has provided guidance to nonprofits and municipalities seeking solutions to land use challenges. At the regional level, ULI Philadelphia offers Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs) which bring together objective planners, developers, lenders, architects, and related professionals to evaluate specific needs and make recommendations on implementation in an atmosphere free of politics and preconceptions. ULI member and non-member professionals provide their expertise in a voluntary capacity and each has signed an agreement to avoid current or potential conflicts of interest.

Introduction to Woolwich Township

Woolwich Township is located in Gloucester County, New Jersey, approximately 20 miles southwest of Philadelphia. The area has a rich agricultural heritage and many of the properties in the Township have been farmed by the same families for generations. Field crops such as soybeans, squash and tomatoes are abundant as are seasonal farm stands. Recently the area has seen an increase in viniculture and several wineries have opened.

The Township completely surrounds Swedesboro Borough, often referred to as “the hole in the doughnut.” Although the two municipalities operate independently, they share some services including a volunteer fire department. In discussions about the planned Woolwich Township Regional Center, it is important to note that Swedesboro is adjacent to the Center's southern border.

To preserve prime farmland undergoing rapid development pressures, Woolwich Township has designated an area for mixed-use, compact development, referred to as the Woolwich Township Regional Center, outlined below in blue.



Another key component of the Township's landscape is the New Jersey Turnpike, which intersects the Township. Turnpike Exit 2, located at the eastern side of the Regional Center, is the last exit to remain largely undeveloped. Other than as an origination and destination for traffic, the Turnpike and its exit have had little development impact to adjacent land in the Township. Route 322 is another story. This federal highway bisects the Township and is the only east-west corridor with easy access to heavily traveled highways such as I-295 in New Jersey, Route 55 and the New Jersey Turnpike, as well as the Commodore Barry Bridge, I-95, and the Blue Route (Route 476) connecting South Jersey to Philadelphia and its suburbs. The two-lane Route 322 carries heavy truck traffic year-round. Particularly in the summer, traffic to and from the Jersey Shore is, in the words of many residents, "a nightmare." Route 322 and Kings Highway intersect in the heart of the planned Regional Center.



Intersection of Route 322 and Kings Highway.

Although many longtime residents continue to work in agriculture, many of the Township's more recent residents are employed in Pennsylvania's Delaware, Chester and Philadelphia counties, as access to major highways and Delaware River bridges is convenient. Woolwich's affordable and diverse housing stock,

rural landscape and excellent public schools are also appealing to families. Both the Kingsway Middle School and Kingsway High School are within the boundaries of the Regional Center.

Preserving Farmland and the Transfer of Development Rights Program

In the United States 2000 Census, the Woolwich Township population was 3,032 but the following decade saw explosive population growth. By the 2010 Census, more than 10,000 residents were recorded, and as of 2013, the population had reached 11,258. Just prior to the 2008 recession, the Township made national headlines as the fastest-growing community in the northeastern United States; it remains one of the fastest growing municipalities in the region.

Not wanting to become "the poster child for sprawl," and desirous of maintaining the area's rural landscape and prime farmland, the Township adopted a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program in 2008. With the TDR, comprehensive design standards and land use controls in place, the Township received a state-endorsed "Smart Growth Center" designation for an area of 1,576 acres—the area now referred to as the Regional Center.

Under the terms of the TDR program, the Township designated "sending" and "receiving" areas. Sending areas are those the Township wants to preserve—prime farmland. Receiving areas have been designated for development, both commercial and residential. Each sending area is assigned credits based on a complex formula that factors in how many units could have been built on the land pre-TDR, including consideration of environmental constraints. Developers can then purchase credits, which enable them to build at higher densities than would normally be permitted in the established receiving area. Once an owner sells credits, that property is

permanently preserved and can no longer be developed; the credits are then transferred to the receiving area. To facilitate development under the TDR process, the Township plans to establish a TDR “bank” which would enable credits to be purchased with assistance from the State.

Another major consideration and impediment in discussions about the Regional Center is its current lack of water and sewer service. Woolwich Township has been proactive in researching a long-term solution. At the time of the TAP, negotiations were proceeding to create a public-private partnership with Aqua New Jersey, the water-sewer franchise-holder, that would provide required water and sewer service for the Regional Center. In preparation for developing Woolwich Commons, the first phase of major retail development in the Center, The Wolfson Group has already secured the necessary EDUs (Equivalent Dwelling Units) for use from neighboring Logan Township. But if Woolwich Township’s negotiations with Aqua New Jersey are successful, there will be ample capacity to meet the needs of the entire center and all three phases of Wolfson’s retail development.

Finally, following State requirements, the Township reviewed its TDR program at five years, in 2013. Various factors -- fallout from the recession, loss of credits due to traditional farmland preservation methods, expired options on key parcels -- have compelled the Township to re-examine the original plans for the Regional Center. This has included rethinking the location of the Regional Center’s central, pedestrian section. In anticipation of its required Master Plan re-examination later in 2014, the Township engaged ULI Philadelphia to take a fresh look at the issues and make recommendations to achieve the Township’s goals.

Key Issues

Woolwich Township asked the Panel to consider the Regional Center with regard to four key areas.

- **Land Use:** What are the most appropriate land uses for specific locations within the Regional Center, and what can the Township do to encourage and support mixed use?
- **Walkability/Design:** What can the Township do to integrate residential areas with surrounding uses, promote pedestrian safety and multi-modal transportation?
- **Marketing Woolwich as a Regional Destination:** How can the Township include and integrate its natural assets?
- **Incentives, Mechanisms and Programs:** What public financial incentives should be pursued to attract businesses and create the partnerships needed to execute the required infrastructure improvements?



Woolwich Commons, the first phase of major retail development in the Center.

Recommendations

In general, the Panel believes that the most recent plan for the Regional Center (see page 1) is a great improvement over the previous version and offers recommendations to answer the Township's questions and inform a productive re-examination of the Master Plan.

Land Use

The Panel recommends that the TDR program receiving areas within the Regional Center be limited to residential uses only to simplify the program. The Regional Center would have four main areas as described below:

- **Mixed-Use Walkable:** In general, when thinking about "mixed-use," the Township should think of "side-by-side" mixed-use, not a vertical application. Specifically, the Panel rotated Flex Area 3 so that more of this residential area borders Kings Highway, the land designated for potential school expansion, and recommends tucking playing fields behind the residential. By doing so, residential use would be closer to both schools and retail. Having residential within walking distance of schools and retail will strongly advance the Township's goal of creating a truly walkable Center.
- **Small Box Industrial:** The Township's current 60-acre area of small box industrial buildings north of Route 322 (FOC Flexible Office Commercial) appears to be functioning well. The Panel recommends expanding that area north to create a larger park for small box industrial use. With nearby Pureland Industrial Park, the largest of its kind on the East Coast, having vacancies, the Woolwich park could make small box industrial its niche, rather than competing with Pureland; allowing outside storage would give the Woolwich park an additional market advantage.



Present industrial park.

- **Low-Impact Rural/Institutional:** West of Kings Highway, Route 322 is currently designated for Highway Commercial and Flexible Office Commercial, with some Light Industrial. The Panel sees this as an area in which to leverage Woolwich's agricultural heritage within the sustainable farm-to-table concept. In the category of Low-Impact Rural/Institutional, the Panel envisions a mixture of farm stands, small production facilities for artisanal foods like honey and canned products, as well as some institutional uses. It was recommended that the Township could approach nearby and rapidly-growing Rowan University about establishing a satellite campus for its agriculture program.
- **Hotel and Office:** Finally, the Panel recommends that the Township re-align the currently designated Hotel/Office use (RC-3) with the Interstate parcels, keeping all commercial use adjacent to the Turnpike and using the area closest to other planned residential uses as additional residential or parkland.

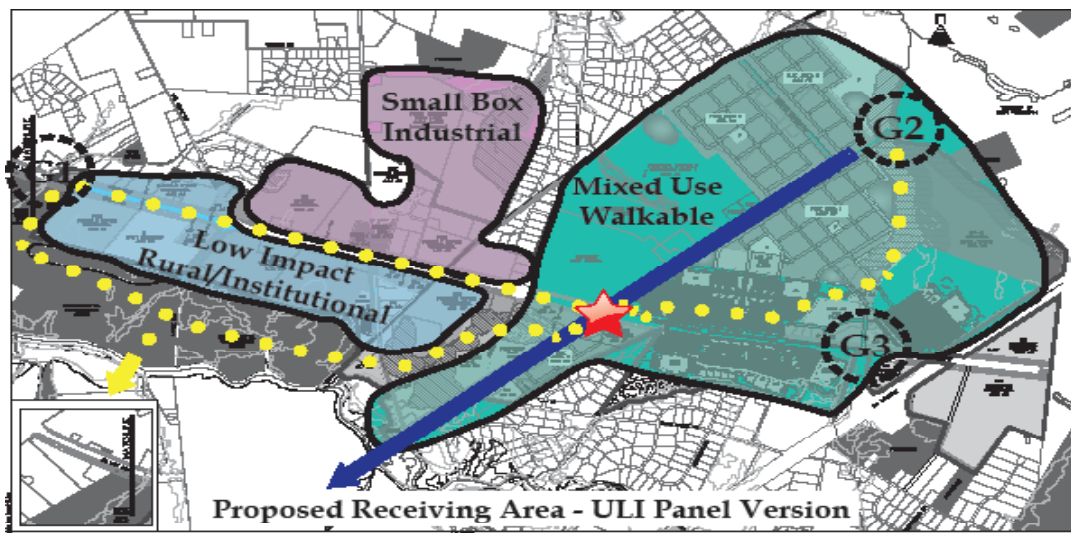
Walkability/Design

The feeling and the look of the Regional Center will be pivotal to its success; therefore the Panel bundled pedestrian connectivity and architectural design. Panelists were pleased to hear that the Township is planning to incorporate "complete streets" concepts of safety and accessibility.

- **Pedestrian Connectivity:** The Panel recommends a trail network to wind through the entire Center and connect the various areas. Beginning in the Environmental Conservation area along Raccoon Creek, this trail network would roughly parallel Route 322, pass through the major intersection of 322 and Kings Highway, move northeast through the Main Street complex and up and behind the residential area (Flex Area 1), ending at the top of Kings Highway. Since natural resources already exist, the area now shown as RC-3 Regional Hotel/Office would become a parks and recreation area. Retail use should connect to residential areas and parks.

In particular, it is important that the future phase of the Wolfson development, the Main Street complex, offer pedestrian access on all sides. Pedestrian-friendly streetscapes will do the most to foster connectivity. To that end, the Panel had several specific suggestions:

- o Make the intersection of Kings Highway and Route 322 the primary intersection and focal point. For safety, include a pedestrian island as part of the intersection's design.
- o Design Kings Highway with pedestrians in mind: keep the scale of facades pedestrian-friendly; consider on-street parking as a buffer between traffic and pedestrians.
- o Design Route 322 with a "parkway aesthetic" by installing landscaped medians rather than concrete median barriers. The 100-foot greenway could include biking and walking paths and be designed with berms and landscaping to give it a trail-like feel; the Route 202 Parkway in Montgomery and Bucks Counties, PA was cited as a good example.



o Create three gateways for the Regional Center: one each at the western end of Route 322, at the eastern end of 322 at the proposed Woolwich Crossing and at the northern end of Kings Highway. These gateways would be key to the Regional Center's branding.

- **Architectural Design:** The Panel recommends that the Township carefully review and possibly revise its design guidelines for the Center with an emphasis on quality standards, rather than prescribing specific materials. With regard to the Township's "Zoning Regulations and Design Standards" document, there are many inconsistencies which will make interpretation and enforcement difficult.

The Panel also suggested that guidelines be more "market sensitive" given the long timeframes of development. National retailers like Wal-Mart and Kohl's have standard architectural templates and, when reasonably pressed, can show flexibility, and the Township will need some flexibility as well. The Township should engage the development community as soon as possible as it develops and refines guidelines.

Marketing Woolwich as a Regional Destination

- **Market Analysis:** A Real Estate Market Analysis (REMA) or similar study should be conducted to provide realistic expectations for the right mix of retail and commercial use in the Regional Center and light industrial uses along US 322 and to determine a unique market niche. At each phase the Township should remain consistent towards its long-term goal of connecting community elements to create a true mixed-use and walkable town center.

- **Market Evolution:** Completion of The Wolfson Group's first planned retail complex, Woolwich Commons, which is expected to break ground in late 2014, will inform

subsequent development plans for Woolwich Crossing and Main Street. More rooftops will be needed to support those phases. Moving forward, consistent branding of the Regional Center will be key. The Township's determination to preserve its farmland and farming heritage make agriculture seem a natural direction for a strong brand identity.

- **Program the Space Ahead of Development:** The Township can start right away to create events that draw people to Woolwich and get them accustomed to thinking of the Regional Center as a place for entertainment and activities: wine tastings, farmers' markets, harvest festivals, for example. Programming should support the agricultural heritage of the area and eco-tourism, and reinforce branding. The Township should establish a land bank for temporary uses around the Center such as a driving range, miniature golf course, go-cart track and similar short-term destinations.

Financial Incentives, Mechanisms and Programs

- **Water and Sewer:** Since a long-term solution to providing water and sewer service to the Regional Center and future development remains unresolved, the Township should continue to take the lead on this issue. Although conveying to another township's treatment plant is an option for Woolwich, the Panel urged Woolwich to "control its own destiny." The Panel strongly recommends a public-private partnership with water-sewer franchise-holder Aqua New Jersey, and citing unique State Planning Commission-approved smart growth (TDR) purposes in applying for Board of Public Utilities approvals.

- **TDR:** The Panel made several recommendations for program improvement:

- o Use the TDR program for residential development only, as the benefits of increased density are primarily applicable to residential development in the near term, and the obligation to purchase TDR credits complicates and may inhibit development.

- o Pursue the establishment of a municipal TDR bank, a public-private partnership that would facilitate development. This is an idea that Woolwich is currently investigating and that the Panel supports. With funding assistance from the State, Woolwich could purchase credits from the sending area, bank them and sell them to developers as needed. Developers would find it more efficient to purchase the credits from the TDR bank rather than negotiating with individual land owners.

- o Consider a pay-as-you-go model for credits. With the establishment of a TDR bank, it would be possible and more cost-effective for a residential developer to pay for necessary credits as units are sold, rather than paying for the entire block of credits before breaking ground.

- **Additional Recommendations**

- o Develop a Request for Proposal (RFP) for the abandoned 14.47-acre Army NIKE missile site, which once was responsible for protecting the Philadelphia area against possible attacks during the Cold War era. The Panel recommends that the Township pursue its idea of a themed micro-brewery but thought the site might have other applications as well.

- o Explore public funding programs that support various transportation improvements such as TIGER grants (U.S. Department of Transportation's Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery) and New Jersey Department of Transportation's Transportation Alternatives Program.

Summary

The Panel believes the Township has a unique opportunity to make significant and workable improvements to the planned Regional Center and applauds its pro-active efforts. Summarizing the preceding pages, ULI Philadelphia recommends the following:

- Reconfigure the Center to form three core areas: Mixed Use Walkable, Small Box Industrial and Low-Impact Rural/Institutional, see page 5.
- Tie natural resources to the Center with a trail system that transects the retail center.
- Make the intersection of Kings Highway and Route 322 the Regional Center's focal point; design Kings Highway's streetscape for a safe pedestrian experience; design Route 322 with a parkway aesthetic and a shared use path; employ "complete streets" concepts.
- Create gateways to the Center at either end of Route 322 and at the northern side of Kings Highway.
- Engage the development community in rethinking design guidelines to promote quality design within the context of the local housing market's capacity to absorb the additional associated costs.
- Provide pedestrian access on all sides of the planned Main Street complex.
- As the Regional Center evolves, maintain a focus on the long-term vision and make commercial areas the highest quality practical.
- Leverage Woolwich Township's rich agricultural heritage in branding.
- Plan community-oriented programming in advance of development.
- Township to secure its destiny by working with Aqua New Jersey to resolve critical water and sewer issues necessary for the development it seeks.
- Use TDR credits for residential development only.
- Establish TDR bank.
- Allow developers to buy TDR credits as residential units are sold.
- Develop RFP for former NIKE missile site.
- Consider state and federal funding programs to support transportation improvements.

Stakeholders Interviewed

Susan Adelizzi-Schmidt, Owner, Suasion Communications Group.
Nick Asselta, President, Aqua NJ.
Ken Atkinson, Director, Gloucester County Office of Land Preservation.
David Bizuga, Manager, Roadway Design Group, NJ Department of Transportation.
Matthew Blake, Director of Community Development, Woolwich Township, NJ.
Timothy Brill, Planning Manager, NJ Department of Agriculture, State Agriculture Development Committee.
Marc D. Brookman, Partner, Duane Morris LLP.
Rick Brown, Planner, NJ Department of Environmental Protection.
Steven Bruder, Planner, NJ Department of Agriculture, State Agriculture Development.
Jane DiBella, Administrator/Clerk, Woolwich Township, NJ.
Alex Elefante, Deputy Mayor, Woolwich Township, NJ.
Wilson Encarnacion, Owner, Royal Pacific Enterprises.
Mark Fruits, Zoning Officer, Woolwich Township, NJ.
Karl Hartkopf, Director, NJ Office for Planning Advocacy.
James Hartling, Partner, Urban Partners.
Tarika Holdbrook, Member, Woolwich Business Development Committee.
Gil Justice, business owner/developer
J. Timothy Kernan, President, Kernan Consulting Engineers.
Chuck Lafferty, Owner, US Drop Forge Co.
Ron Lafferty, Jr., Owner, Pennsylvania Machine Works, Inc.
Dr. James Lavender, Superintendent, Kingsway Regional School District.
Jessica Lucas, Data Processing Technician, Transportation Planning, Gloucester County Planning Office.
Samuel Maccarone, Mayor, Woolwich Township, NJ.
Ashwin Patel, local business owner.
Jaymish Patel, local business owner.
Prakesh Patel, local business owner.
Susan Payne, Executive Director, NJ Department of Agriculture, State Agriculture Development Committee.
Helene Rubin, Section Chief, Community Transportation Planning Assistance, NJ Department of Transportation.
Michael Schurr, Owner, US Drop Forge Co.
Alan Schwager, Chairman, Woolwich Township Joint Land Use Board.
Peter Simone, President, Simone Collins Landscape Architecture
Kenneth Spiegle, Manager, Major Access, NJ Department of Transportation.
Juanita Thornton, Member, Woolwich Business Development Committee.
Blair Tolbard, Member, Woolwich Business Development Committee.
Erica Voll, Member, Woolwich Business Development Committee.
Steven B. Wolfson, President, Wolfson Group Incorporated.

Technical Assistance Panelists

Patty Elkins, PP, AICP

TAP Co-Chair

Deputy Director of Policy, Planning and Programs, Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission

Ms. Elkins has been with Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission since 1992. Currently she oversees long-range planning and DVRPC's transportation improvement program, environmental and smart growth planning, economic, demographic and GIS analyses, as well as the Commission's newer initiatives in energy, climate change and food system planning. Ms. Elkins received her BA in Anthropology from the University of Pennsylvania and her Master of City Planning degree, with a Certificate in Appropriate Technology for Developing Countries, from Penn.

Rich Wilson

TAP Co-chair

Vice President, Arcadia Land Company

Mr. Wilson leads development and advisory efforts on behalf of Arcadia and its consulting clients. In addition to providing entitlements analysis, market research, land development feasibility and development management services, Mr. Wilson has served clients in downtown and public space management through Arcadia's cooperative arrangement with BRV Corporation. Prior to Arcadia, Mr. Wilson was a landscape architect and urban designer with HNTB Corporation's Urban Design and Planning group in Dallas, Texas, where he was involved with numerous large scale projects requiring high levels of public involvement. He lives in walkable Ambler, Pennsylvania with his wife, Kristi and their three children.

Christine Carpenter

Senior Vice President, Sun National Bank

Ms. Carpenter received her undergraduate degree in Marketing from Temple University in 1992, followed by her graduate degree,

MBA in Finance from Temple University in 1998. Ms. Carpenter has more than 20 years of experience in real estate, from management, construction, project management, construction and project finance to underwriting and lending.

Edward Fox

Regional Planning Coordinator, Burlington County Bridge Commission, County Department of Economic Development and Regional Planning

In his current position since 2008, Mr. Fox's duties include preparation and implementation of Northern Burlington County's growth and preservation plan and Joint Land Use Study for Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst area. He provides technical support to citizens, businesses, municipal and county government agencies on a number of smart growth planning and sustainability issues and has provided professional support for the River Route regional strategic revitalization plan. He was previously planning director for the Camden County Improvement Authority; area planner for New Jersey Department of Community Affairs' Office of Smart Growth, State Planning; and a professional planner with Remington & Vernick Engineers.

Richard Linderman, EAIA, NCARB, LEED AP

President, Linderman Group Architects

Mr. Linderman is an architect registered in five states and certified by National Council of Architectural Registration Boards. He has over 50 years of experience with commercial design. He is a member of the International Code Council and was certified by them as an accessibility plans examiner and inspector in 2003. Additionally he has been certified by Pennsylvania as an accessibility plans examiner/inspector and also as a building code official. His professional skills include building code interpretation, rehabilitation of existing buildings, urban revitalization, construction oversight, scheduling and budget control. Mr. Linderman formed Linderman Group Architects in 1980 and has worked on projects that range from restaurants to an international airport.

Daniel Miles, PhD

Director, Econsult Solutions, Inc.

At Econsult Solutions, Dr. Miles leads economic analysis projects across a variety of sectors and industries. Prior to joining ESI, Dr. Miles was a senior economist in the New York office of Oxford Economics where he led a multinational team of economists based in New York, Belfast and London. From 2008 to 2011, he was an associate at Econsult Corporation. During his time at the firm, Dr. Miles contributed to a number of studies, including evaluating the financial feasibility and economic impact of using tolls to finance transportation infrastructure improvements, estimating the economic value of permanently preserved open space, modeling the impact of changes in Philadelphia's business tax system, and estimating the economic impact of changes in stormwater billing methods of a major US city.

Brian O'Leary, AICP

Section Chief, County Planning, Montgomery County Planning Commission

Mr. O'Leary has over 25 years of experience in community planning. In his current position he works on smart growth, land use, comprehensive planning, revitalization, housing, demographics, farmland preservation, zoning, and arts and culture. Mr. O'Leary has a BA in international relations from Johns Hopkins University and an MBA in real estate/urban land studies from Temple University. He is currently president of the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association; a board member of the Delaware Valley Smart Growth Alliance; and a member of Lower Merion Township's Planning Commission.

Bryan Proska

Project Manager, Traffic Planning and Design, Inc.

Traffic Planning and Design, Inc. is a transportation engineering firm serving public and private sector clients throughout the mid-Atlantic region; Mr. Proska's expertise includes traffic engineering and transportation planning. Since joining TPD in 2006 he has been actively involved in large-scale redevelopment projects throughout the region, particularly in urban locations. Mr. Proska,

a licensed professional engineer in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, holds a bachelor's degree in civil engineering from Pennsylvania State University and is currently pursuing a master's degree in transportation engineering from New Jersey Institute of Technology.

David M. Ricci

Partner, The Flynn Company

Mr. Ricci joined The Flynn Company in November 1988 and is the company's senior representative in the New Jersey region. His responsibilities include oversight of acquisition and development opportunities, leasing and sales within major business parks, and the representation of tenants and build-to-suit clients. Since joining The Flynn Company, Mr. Ricci has participated in the ownership of properties valued in excess of \$125 million and has been responsible for the leasing of over 21 million square feet of office, warehouse and industrial space. Mr. Ricci is a past Chair of ULI's Philadelphia District Council and sits on ULI's global Small Scale Development Council.

Garett Shiner

President, Balashine Properties

Mr. Shiner serves as President of Balashine Properties, a local commercial real estate investment firm, focusing on Class A office space acquisitions and management in the Greater Philadelphia area. He is responsible for investigation of potential properties, working with investor's requests, overseeing all financial and legal requirements, and supervision of daily business operations. Prior to founding Balashine Properties, he spent more than 12 years in the commercial construction industry, first as a project manager, then director of purchasing, with involvement in the full construction process including estimating, buyout, project management, contract administration, project closeout and job cost analysis. Mr. Shiner also provides business consulting to small construction firms looking to improve their operations. He holds a bachelor's degree in Commerce and Engineering from Drexel University.



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