Specific Plan

Keystone Employment & Economic Plan (KEEP)

May 23, 2018
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Keystone Employment & Economic Plan (KEEP)  
Specific Plan

Introduction

This Specific Plan provides a vision of “what is possible” for redevelopment of the Keystone Boulevard corridor in Pottstown Borough and West Pottsgrove Township. The plan creates a development concept that is endorsed by the governing bodies of the two municipalities. This concept is described and illustrated, and is followed by recommendations for implementation, including principles for development, to be incorporated in a subsequent zoning amendment.

Why is a Specific Plan Being Created?

The Municipalities Planning Code (MPC, PA Act 247, Section 1106) states that “participating municipalities shall have authority to adopt a specific plan for the systematic implementation of a county or multimunicipal comprehensive plan for any nonresidential part of the area covered by the plan.”

The goal of the Specific Plan is to implement the goals of the “Memorandum of Understanding (see below).

Involved Parties

This planning effort was initiated by Pottstown Area Industrial Development, Inc. (PAID), Pottstown Borough, West Pottsgrove Township and local land owners. An informal planning group, consisting of representatives of property owners and local governments, discussed preliminary economic development and infrastructure goals for Keystone Boulevard. PAID then applied for and received funding from the Local Share Account (state gaming revenue) from the Commonwealth Financing Authority to fund the planning effort for the Specific Plan and Request for Interest. Matching funds were obtained from Montgomery County Redevelopment Authority.

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and Project Goals

Then, in 2013, Pottstown Borough and West Pottsgrove drew up a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) [See Appendix 1, 2] to promote economic development on the KEEP project site. As stated in the MOU, the expressed goals are to create a new and vibrant employment center located in the municipalities of Pottstown Borough and West Pottsgrove Township that maximizes the redevelopment area’s potential through public private partnerships. Redevelopment shall include, but is not limited to, any or all of the following nonresidential* uses:

1. Commercial and retail development
2. Office development
3. Industrial uses,
4. Research and development uses, and
5. Supporting recreation uses.

* Note: Subsequent to the drafting of the MOU, the KEEP Oversight Committee expanded the KEEP goal to include mixed-use development which might include any of the uses above, as well as residential development (provided the latter meets specified standards).
The municipalities then organized an Oversight Committee to implement the goals of the MOU. The Oversight Committee. This Committee consists of two representatives from each municipality, with one member of each municipality consisting of a member of the governing body. The Oversight Committee also includes a representative from Montgomery County, (PAID), and additional members as approved by the Participants. The Committee is co-chaired by an elected official of each municipality’s governing body (“Co-Chairs”). Other key participants in the work of the Oversight Committee include(d) Montgomery County Planning Commission (MCPC), Bursich Engineers, A.D. Marble & Co. (Environmental Consultants) and Montgomery County Commerce Department.

**Past Economic Development Studies and Plans**

Numerous economic development studies, plans and initiatives have been undertaken in the past 15 years in the Pottstown Region. Some of the most relevant, more recent plans include the following:

**Regional Market Assessment, by Tischler Bise (2012) see Appendix**

In 2012, Tischler Bise prepared a “Regional Market Assessment” for the Pottstown Metropolitan Regional Planning Committee. The Assessment [see Appendix 3] investigated the amount and type of development that could occur in the Pottstown Region by 2031. It found that one major opportunity results from “the linkage and use of agricultural production and the natural resources for research and potential product development, including potential manufacturing” [p.43]. And it found that product assembly was another major opportunity. The study used certain factors to assess which product assembly activities were most promising, including the following:

- The opportunity to use existing, underutilized infrastructure
- The ability to capitalize on location at the center of the east coast population mass and on reasonably priced land.
- The ability to enhance employment while not damaging the natural environment.
- The potential to enhance tourism.

It identified manufacture of kayaks and canoes, bicycles, light aircraft, and scooters as “key products,” based on the above and other criteria. It noted that “the Pottstown Region offers an advantageous location for almost all consumer oriented product assemblage,” based in part on its central east coast location and affordable land. The assessment noted the opportunity for alternative energy development due to the proximity of one of the largest energy companies in the country (Exelon, in Limerick), along with its existing and potential linkages. And the assessment emphasize the opportunities for developing activities and jobs related to visitor-based natural, historic and cultural resources. It estimated the following demand for nonresidential space in the Pottstown Region by 2031:

- **Industrial**: 1.7 million square feet. Regarding Industrial Development: the Regional Market Study emphasized the numerous characteristics of the Pottstown Region which would be attractive to industrial land users: location with good access to the market along the eastern seaboard, by road, rail and air; reasonably priced land and available utilities. The study identified an opportunity for research and potential product development in the field of agriculture and natural resources. It also recommended consideration be given to “assemblage and related industrial activity”, and specifically targeted the following fields for this:
  - Light Aircraft (growing market segment)
  - Scooters (growing with changed economic conditions)
  - Bicycles, kayaks and canoes (link to Pottstown Region's recreation or tourism opportunities)
– Alternative energy. The study noted that opportunities exist because of the presence of Exelon nearby in Limerick and the existing and potential resulting linkages. It noted that wind energy capacity in the state is much greater than supply. It noted that the growth rate of installed solar energy systems is expected to quadruple. And it noted that the Stowe Power Production Plant uses renewable biomass energy, which can be used to produce or manufacture formerly virgin wood based products.

• **Research & development (R & D):** 500,000 square feet. The assessment estimated that about 2,000 jobs could be directly created. It noted that, “Pay scale and skill levels of most direct employees would be higher than those associated with potential other opportunities, such as retail and related services.” “Pottstown has the necessary pieces to form partnerships and establish stronger entrepreneurship to foster the activity. While not likely to evolve for a five to ten year period from pursuit, the implications of supporting this niche for employment and related space is substantial.”

• **Office:** 400,000 square feet

The Assessment identified what is now the KEEP project site as the “Riverfront/Industrial” development area, and proposed implementing economic development tools in the area; it also mapped the extension of Keystone Boulevard. It noted that residential development could be explored, and pointed out that there was “a lack of product/market choices in the borough.” It identified the following development options for the Keystone Boulevard area:

• Higher education – facilities expansions (linked to MontCo Community College or others associated with R & D activity).
• R & D incubator space
• Consumer product assembly
• Medical-oriented service office space and facilities
• Tourism. The study noted that the region can participate in cultural, natural, historic, and agricultural resource-based tourism; this in turn would complement the food services industry.

**Fiscal Impact Analysis, by Tischler Bise (2012)**

The Fiscal Impact Analysis [see Appendix 4] noted that more growth produced greater fiscal impacts for Pottstown Borough, although it may trigger the need for additional parks to maintain the existing parks level of service. It noted that it was important for West Pottsgrove to transition away from the revenue structure it had at the time, so as to ensure that growth leads not to fiscal deficits, but to positive fiscal impacts. At the time, the revenue structure still reflected the township’s reliance on its capital reserve from the (now closed) Pottstown Landfill.

**Industrial Zone Transportation Access Study, by Rettew (2012)**

This study [see Appendix 5] was prepared for Pottstown Borough and West Pottsgrove Township. It recommended a development scenario comprised of:

• Heavy (294,650 s.f.) and light manufacturing and processing (383,000 s.f.)
• Offices (size TBD)
• Water-related commercial /light manufacturing (size TBD) and related open space
• Hotel (75,000 s.f.)
• Pedestrian trails (sketch includes “interpretive trail”)
• Recreation fields (70 Ac.)
• Waterfront access
The study also estimated costs for the extension of Keystone Boulevard and related improvements (note: the estimate in the study was significantly higher than that in this Specific Plan), and prepared conceptual land use plans.

Pottstown Economic Development Strategic Plan (2008), by Gannett Fleming

This plan recommended the redevelopment of properties along Keystone Boulevard, particularly with job-producing manufacturing firms. It identified initiation of redevelopment of the Keystone Opportunity Zone as a high priority for the Borough. It delineated another goal to “identify suitable location for market-rate urban-style housing and market to developers.” KEEP Project Site: Background and Characteristics
KEEP Project Site: Background and Characteristics

The KEEP Project Site consists of approximately 255 acres, including 13 different parcels. It is generally bounded to the west by South Grosstown Road, to the south by the Schuylkill River, to the east by PA 100, and on the north by the Norfolk Southern rail line. See “Site Aerial” on p.2. The location of the Project Site is ideal …” The location of the Project Site is ideal for many reasons for future users of the site—whether they generate employment, accelerate economic development or help provide modern, high-end housing in an underrepresented segment of the residential market.

The site has excellent highway access from U.S. 422, PA 100, Grosstown Road and High Street [see “Transportation”, below], it has access to the Norfolk Southern freight railroad, and one of the most beloved trails in Pennsylvania—the Schuylkill River Trail—runs through the middle of the site. Historic, revitalizing and walkable Pottstown, with its active arts & culture life is only minutes away; numerous parks and a greatly expanded local trail system are proximate, and the beautiful Schuylkill River and its recreation opportunities lie on the southern periphery of the site. Other recreational amenities of note include a planned Conservation-Passive Recreation area on the Schuylkill River just south of the KEEP Project Site that will be created by PennDOT as part of a wetland mitigation project (this site will be connected to the KEEP Project Site by trails), and a pond in the middle of the KEEP Project Site. The Montgomery County Community College and its new Sustainability and Innovation Hub are located blocks away. The site offers land at an attractive price considering that it is part of the Philadelphia Metropolitan Area and its market, along with all of its business, education, recreation, entertainment, and transportation amenities.
A set of fully engineered plans identifying existing features and showing conceptual road, grading and stormwater improvements was prepared by Bursich.
Transportation

Roads [for more information on roads, see the Supplemental Narrative Appendix 10, Site Plans Appendix 9 and Appendix 12, Keystone Boulevard Cost Estimate].

Access to the Project Site from U.S. 422 (and its connection to King of Prussia to the east, and Reading to the west) will be greatly improved after Keystone Boulevard is extended to Old Reading Pike. This access will be enhanced even further when the (ongoing) reconfiguration of U.S. 422’s “S-curve” (which will improve highway safety) and reconstruction of the Stowe interchange is finished in 2020. The KEEP Project Site already benefits from access to U.S. 422 at the Hanover Street interchange in Pottstown. The Project Site also has close access to PA 100, which provides access to Exton to the south and to the Lehigh Valley area to the north.

Old Reading Pike realignment. A recent study completed for the area (the Industrial Zone Transportation Access Study (2012)) recognized that Keystone Boulevard properties might further benefit from the extension of Keystone Boulevard if Old Reading Pike is realigned. Doing so would allow Old Reading Pike west of Keystone Boulevard to flow seamlessly into Keystone Boulevard, thus making it even faster for vehicular traffic to get between Keystone Boulevard and U.S. 422. [see western portion of Alternate 2, from Industrial Zone Transportation Access Study Appendix 7]

U.S. 422. PennDOT is making significant improvements to the Stowe Interchange and is smoothing the highway’s curve in the interest of improved safety. Completion is expected in 2020 [See Appendix 15: Stowe Interchange Alignment Plan]. This project is being undertaken independently of the KEEP project and will require no additional financing. However, the interchange and curve improvements project will directly benefit the KEEP site, making access safer and more direct. A wetland mitigation project is being undertaken as a result of this project. The project will take place between the interchange and the Schuylkill River, and will provide a natural conservation and recreation area. It will potentially include bird watching, boat ramps, and trails linking the site to the Schuylkill River Trail and the KEEP Project site.

If, upon reaching Grosstown Road, traffic would turn right, it would quickly reach High Street a major regional thoroughfare. Traffic driving east on Keystone Boulevard quickly reaches College Drive, the Montgomery County Community College and downtown Pottstown. The Hanover Street interchange of US 422 is only a couple minutes drive farther.

Freight Rail. Consultations with Norfolk Southern and preliminary study indicates that rail service to several portions of the KEEP Project Site may be feasible by using existing Norfolk Southern rail sidings to the north and extending them into the site. Norfolk Southern is the owner/operator of the Harrisburg Line, a Class 1 double-stack capable railroad running along the Schuylkill River through Pottstown Borough and West Pottsgrove Township. The Stowe Yards, a switching/transfer center, are located to the north and contiguous to the KEEP Project Site. The location of the through tracks is on the far side of the yard from the Project Site; therefore, such through tracks would not conflict with new sidings or extensions of existing sidings into the Project Site.

Any such rail sidings will need to consider environmental constraints, as well as topography and vertical grade requirements. Further evaluation and coordination with Norfolk Southern would be required [for more information on freight rail, see Appendix 10 the Supplemental Narrative, Appendix 9 Site Plans and Appendix 14, Railroad Siding Budget].
The Colebrookdale Railroad is a scenic railroad that travels from Pottstown’s Memorial Park to Boyertown. The railroad has expressed a willingness to consider arrangements with Norfolk Southern to provide the latter with the right to use Colebrookdale Railroad tracks for turning of engines or temporary storing of rail cars. This provides additional utility to freight rail users and makes freight rail even more beneficial to future land uses on Keystone Boulevard.

**Trail Connections.** The Schuylkill River Trail (SRT), one of the most popular trails in the Philadelphia Metropolitan Area.

It provides excellent, scenic recreation opportunities, with connections to multiple downtowns, parks (including Pottstown Memorial Park, Valley Forge National Park and the future parkland proximate to the KEEP project site that will be created as part of the wetland mitigation project related to the Stowe interchange reconstruction), connecting trails and bike routes and other points of interest. The SRT is currently located alongside the built portion of Keystone Boulevard; it moves into the center of the PECO easement after Keystone Boulevard’s current dead end, as the trail proceeds west to its crossing of Grosstown Road. As mentioned above under “Roads”, the trail would need to be slightly relocated, so that it makes room for the extension of Keystone Boulevard. The trail would be moved to the side of the extension. The SRT is a great amenity for the users of the KEEP Project Site. It adds to quality of life for future residents living in, or employees working on the Project Site. The trail is wide, paved, and multipurpose. To the east, it can be used to access historic downtown Pottstown and Riverfront Park; Pottstown offers many arts, recreation dining and services that would be a draw for future employers and residents.

The Schuylkill River Trail will soon connect the KEEP Project Site to Phoenixville, King of Prussia and Philadelphia. To the west, the trail connects to Reading, and is planned to be extended to Schuylkill County.

The KEEP project calls for a local pathway network to interconnect land uses on-site with the Schuylkill River Trail, which is planned to eventually serve as the conduit for accessing an extensive planned local trail system, which will extend throughout Pottstown and West Pottsgrove, as well as adjacent municipalities. The Greater Pottstown Trails Feasibility Study (2018) http://uptownship.org/images/pdf/TCTrailsStudy.pdf proposed the trail network, which includes the “Lower West Trail”, which would connect the KEEP Project Site to points north by way of Grosstown Road (including parks, a brewpub and distillery, and the Colebrookdale Scenic Railroad). For the trails proposed by the study, see Greater Pottstown Trails Map, right.
**Land Use**

The KEEP Project Site includes multiple properties that are vacant or underutilized. Much of the land uses in the KEEP project site are or were industrial ones. These included a range of industrial uses, including the manufacture of silk, boilers, iron pipe fittings and iron goods; commercial design; an iron and brass foundry; scrap metal recycling/salvage yard; an industrial waste treatment plant and residual waste landfill [for more information on past land uses and their ramifications, see p.6 of the Environmental Overview Appendix 8].

Some challenges to future development of the KEEP project site are the environmental ramifications of past industrial uses, including the need for potential environmental studies or site remediation. However, this study has built on numerous past studies to assemble relevant information, by property, for future site users—giving developers a head start on the process.

**Existing Land Use**

[Map of Keystone Employment and Economic Plan (KEEP) Existing Land Use]
The Regional Market

The KEEP project site has a prime location with respect to the regional market. It has excellent transportation access, located between the Stowe and Hanover Street interchanges on PA 422 (one which is being extensively upgraded, along with significant realignment of the highway’s curve to improve safety). The site also has excellent access to PA 100. The site is located adjacent to a heavily-traveled section of the Norfolk Southern freight railroad where a yard exists. Rail spurs have been constructed in the past to uses along Keystone Boulevard; additional spurs could be constructed as needed. It also has good access to the Pottstown Municipal Airport and Pottstown-Limerick Airport, and is located less than 50 miles from Philadelphia International (PHL).

Broadly speaking, the KEEP project site is situated in the middle of the east coast and the tremendous population and market which it hosts. The project site’s central location puts it within easy shipping distance of much of the nation’s consumers.
Highest and Best Use(s) Determination

The Oversight Committee and MCPC determined the highest and best use for the KEEP project based on consideration of various factors. These included:

- The project site’s location, characteristics, and its unique combination of assets and liabilities.
- Real estate market feasibility of current and future aspirational uses (note that the “aspirational” aspect would become “feasible” after constructing the extension of Keystone Boulevard).
- Planning goals (municipal, regional and county), including those defined by MONTCO2040: A Shared Vision, the Pottstown Metropolitan Regional Comprehensive Plan and the Pottstown Borough Comprehensive Plan…” Specifically. Some of the most important goals of the KEEP project are reuse and redevelopment of land in the KEEP project site in West Pottsgrove and Pottstown and contribution to revitalization of downtown Pottstown.
- Minimization of negative impacts (such as those to the Pottsgrove and Pottstown School Districts.

Research with commercial realtors, discussion among planning and economic development professionals, and use of MCPC real estate background information indicate that currently, the project site is considered economically viable for a distribution center and warehousing as-is, without recommended improvements that this plan calls for. In fact, this plan calls for completely changing the development dynamic. but these would not generate much economic development or revitalization. However, there are numerous features of the site, transportation network and location that could make it competitive in the future for aspirational uses including limited industrial, research & development, offices and apartments could become so.

MCPC evaluated numerous land uses for viability and desirability. These included:

- Light Industrial (with few negative impacts on surrounding areas) or Advanced Manufacturing (associated with a strong reliance on sophisticated computer or automated technology)
- Research & Development (R&D)
- Office
- Apartments or Multifamily Condominiums
- Recreation
- Retail or Hotel
- Warehouse or distribution center
- Medical Marijuana

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) recognized that the success of this effort will be affected by the extension of Keystone Boulevard, by the remediation of floodplain limitations, and by the reconstruction of the Grosstown Road and Armand Hammer Boulevard Interchanges on U.S. 422.
Light Industrial or Advanced Manufacturing are aspirational future land uses for the KEEP project site. Planned physical improvements will make what is the “aspirational” of today the “reality” of tomorrow. They have greater potential than most other uses considered to generate economic development and a positive fiscal impact. Such industrial users would likely place a premium on the site’s location in the highly-populated Boston-Washington corridor, in the Philadelphia Metropolitan Area, with excellent and upgraded access to two high-volume state highways, with freight railroad access, in an area buffered from single-family residential neighborhoods by PA 100 and 422, the Norfolk Southern Railroad and the Schuylkill River. Additionally, as with R&D, the presence of the Community College offers the prospect of corporate-academic linkages or tech transfer. A relationship could be established whereby students benefit from training at industrial firms, while the firms benefit from resources and applied research of the college and its Sustainability and Innovation Hub, as well as by a trained local workforce.
Research & Development (R&D) is a use recommended by the Specific Plan. Research & Development is a use recommended by the Specific Plan. Research & Development shares some characteristics with both office and limited industrial uses. A research & development use could benefit from a relationship with the Montgomery County Community College, located practically next door. This might allow a private research firm to benefit from the applied research of the community college and its Sustainability and Innovation Hub, while an R&D firm could provide internship and training opportunities for students of the community college. R&D would likely generate positive fiscal impacts, have a beneficial impact on the Community College, and create well-paying jobs for highly educated workers. This population segment could have an important effect on downtown revitalization and support for the arts.

The office market in the area has been depressed for some time. However, the demand for office uses could rise in future years; therefore, it is considered a potential future aspirational use for the KEEP site, and it is recommended in this Specific Plan. Office users may indeed be interested in the KEEP site and its location, its transportation access, its mixed-use nature (located with residential, R&D and light industrial uses), its location along the Schuylkill River Trail and views to the river and its natural riparian areas, and its proximity to revitalizing downtown Pottstown.

Apartments or Multifamily Condominiums (High-End). The Specific Plan recommends a mixed use development, including high-end apartments. Apartments would be limited to no more than 40% of total building footprints of the KEEP Project Site, to ensure that nonresidential, employment-generating uses are preserved as a major land use in the Project Site. Zoning adopted
to implement the Specific Plan would be required to demand high-quality, attractive building and site design for apartments to ensure a positive impact on the image of the project site as well as the wider Pottstown-West Pottsgrove area. Such a residential product would have only minimal impact on the school districts, as MCPC has found that new apartment projects generate only 0.06 school-aged students per unit. And on the positive side, such a development would create additional housing choice for prospective residents of the Pottstown Metropolitan Area by adding a new product type to the residential market. It would have a positive effect on the area’s image, and could supply upwardly mobile or mature households with disposable income and their spending power for the benefit of the local business district.

**Recreation.** MCPC and the Oversight Committee evaluated recreation uses, including indoor private recreation and outdoor public recreation. This use scored higher than other uses in terms of desirability and appropriate location. However, the economic return (fiscal impacts, jobs generated) from a recreation use is not significant, particularly when compared with other potential uses. For that reason, recreation uses were not considered to be one of the highest and best uses. However, recreation uses will continue to have a strong presence in this area. The Schuylkill River Trail traverses the project site, this Specific Plan recommends creating a network of pedestrian connections throughout the site and interlinking with the Trail, and the ongoing improvements to the Stowe Interchange will lead to creation of a publicly-accessible natural area between the Schuylkill River and the new interchange (the natural area will be connected to the KEEP site by walking trails and a bike route).

**Retail or Hotel Development.** The project site was not considered an ideal location for retail or hotel development. The retail market is oversaturated. More competitive sites in the region exist; for large shopping centers, there are existing sites such as Philadelphia Premium Outlets and numerous others that have the advantage of being located more centrally within the Philadelphia Metropolitan Area. Although there is an interest in the community in attracting new hotels to the area, the KEEP site is not considered an ideal location for such a use. Generally, it was felt that hotels would be more suitable for a site that is more visible, and located even closer to downtown Pottstown. There is also a concern that retail development in this location, such as entertainment, dining, specialty retail or hotel could compete with businesses in downtown Pottstown and detract from its revitalization potential.

**Warehouse or Distribution Center.** A couple of uses considered most viable for the KEEP project site in the near future are warehouse and distribution centers. However, the economic and fiscal return from these uses would be quite low. These would not be the highest and best uses—especially given recommended public investment for the extension of Keystone Boulevard.

**Medical Marijuana.** This plan recognizes that an application was filed for a medical marijuana grower permit for a location within the KEEP project site. In many ways, this use would be appropriate for the area -- it would generate jobs and place no burden on the school districts. This use depends on the approval of an application for a limited number of permits. It is uncertain what the likelihood of such a permit being issued for a location in the KEEP project site in the future, and the Specific Plan does not include a medical marijuana use in the conceptual land use plan. Although, a medical marijuana grower facility could fit in easily with the uses recommended for the KEEP site by this Specific Plan, it is questionable whether this type of use would generate the return on investment necessary to justify public investment in Keystone Boulevard’s extension.
Recommended Infrastructure Improvements.

This plan recommends constructing the Keystone Boulevard Extension. This 4,500 linear foot extension of Keystone Boulevard would extend the boulevard west to Old Reading Pike. This alignment runs along the PECO right-of-way, following the route of the existing Schuylkill River Trail. Benefits of this alignment include maximization of buildable area, no need to cross wetlands, and no need to acquire right-of-way. One of the only obstacles is the need to slightly relocate the existing Schuylkill River Trail (this would involve moving the trail out of the path of the boulevard extension, and reconstructing it to the side of future boulevard extension). Two road alignment alternatives were considered, but rejected since they were not as beneficial as the alignment described above. The proposed extension’s elevation was designed to minimize impact on the floodway and floodplain.

Horizontal and vertical alignments of Keystone Boulevard were provided by Bursich. The existing Keystone Boulevard could not be raised, since it is located in a floodway. The extension of Keystone Boulevard would include 600 feet that would affect the floodway. The proposed grading of this part of the road’s extension was designed to minimize the impact on the floodway. To the west, the elevation of the road’s extension would be designed so that it would be just above that of the 100 year floodplain.

Bursich calculated that the probable costs of earthwork, fill, erosion, construction of the extension of Keystone Boulevard, and stormwater management combined would be $22.5 million [see Appendix 13: Earthwork, Fill, Erosion Stormwater Management and Permit Costs]. Stormwater management costs were estimated to be $4.6 million, including $322,000 for stormwater management for the extension of Keystone Boulevard and the relocated Schuylkill River Trail (see Appendix 11: Stormwater Management Costs --costs are provided per property). The cost of extending Keystone Boulevard was estimated to be $5.2 million (when accounting for prevailing wage).

Current Terminus of Keystone Boulevard, on KEEP Project Site
Concept Plan.

See Appendix 17, below, for the conceptual land use plan for the KEEP Project Site. The Concept Plan assumes the extension of Keystone Boulevard is constructed and a redevelopment mixture of light industrial or advanced manufacturing, office or research & development, and apartment or multifamily condominium uses.
Industrial Uses.

As mentioned above, the plan includes light industrial uses in the concept plan. This plan recognizes that light industrial uses are currently an “aspirational” use. The KEEP project site has a history of industrial uses. Although the market does not currently support new industrial uses, it is highly conceivable that it will do so in the future—especially after the boulevard is extended. Industrial users would be most likely to benefit from having access to freight rail and excellent highway access (including two interchanges with limited-access state highways—one of which is currently being improved). Industrial users could benefit from a potential relationship with the adjacent Montgomery County Community College-West Campus. As mentioned above, the presence of the Community College offers the prospect of corporate-academic linkages or tech transfer. A relationship could be established whereby students benefit from training at industrial firms, while the firms benefit from resources and applied research of the college and its Sustainability and Innovation Hub, as well as by a local workforce trained by the Community College (industrial firms might well find it advantageous to locate in an area so close to the Hub, where students work with robotics and 3D printing, and have space allocated for mentorship programs).

Allow industrial uses in the KEEP Project site would preserve a significant area as valuable for industrial development at a time when many municipalities are making it more and more difficult to find land where zoning accommodates this use. The industrial sector of the economy is undergoing dramatic change due to technological innovations such as those within advanced manufacturing, including advanced sensing (sensor-based product tracking using GPS), 3D printing (which experts believe will lead to quieter, cleaner factories), digital manufacturing (uses IT to cut costs and increase efficiencies; customization potential may lead manufacturers to locate closer to consumers) and robotics (which requires a workforce with engineers and technicians) [Source: Wial]. Industrial uses also have a chance of generating a significant economic return.

Industrial uses are increasingly being viewed as compatible with residential uses (often as a combination of less intensive industrial uses with multifamily residential uses), and have been pursued by cities such as Philadelphia and Wilmington. Such a combination may have one of the best opportunities for cleanup and redevelopment of former industrial areas.

Office or Research & Development (R&D) Uses.

As with industrial uses, office or R&D are included in the concept plan, while recognizing that these, too, are “aspirational uses”. They could be part of a mix including apartments, given the changing real estate market over time, and the continued revitalization of Pottstown, they may become so in the future.

The flexibility of accommodating these different uses would allow the KEEP site to adapt to changing market conditions. If the industrial or R&D sectors do not develop on-site over time, the stage is set for an office campus to develop, as part of a mixed residential-office community. Employees of any of the above uses would benefit from the location and nearby amenities. For lunch, employees of industrial, R&D or office firms could take a stroll on the Schuylkill River and on-site trails, walk into downtown Pottstown, or walk to the future natural recreation area to be constructed along the river.
as part of the Stowe interchange mitigation project. After work, employees might well spend their money patronizing dining, arts and entertainment in Pottstown. Employees might consider renting an upscale apartment on the project site as well, taking part in a “live-work” experience.

**Multifamily Uses (Upscale Apartments).**

The Specific Plan allows up to forty percent of the KEEP Project Site building footprints to be developed for apartments. These apartments would be required to meet zoning standards ensuring a high level of design, contributing to the “sense of place” and positive image both of the KEEP site and to Pottstown Borough and West Pottsgrove Township as a whole.

The Conceptual Plan and Renderings illustrates a potential development on the KEEP project site. They illustrate the following:

- 12 buildings total on 29.5 net acres (net of environmental conservation area).
- Light Industrial/Research & Development/Office comprising 175,000 s.f. in seven, one-to-two story buildings.
- Residential. High-end apartments; 175 units in five, five-story buildings.
- Total building footprint: 222,000 s.f. Total green area: 526,661 s.f.
• A formal, preserved green space/village green.
• Preserved natural features (wetland, floodway), with a pedestrian path system.
• Direct access to the Schuylkill River Trail.
• An on-site railroad siding from the adjacent Norfolk Southern line.
• Ample parking.
• Over 40% of site preserved as pervious/green area for landscaping, stormwater management and passive recreation.
Keystone Economic & Employment Plan

Conceptual Land Use Plan

- Residential Uses (Apartments, “High-End”)
- Nonresidential Uses (Industrial, Office, R&D)
- Ancillary Uses

SWM = Stormwater Management

- Schuylkill River Trail
- Potential Siding
- Community College, Downtown
- Stowe Interchange
- Schuylkill River
- Property Line
- Keystone Blvd
- Norfolk Southern
- High St

The diagram illustrates the plan for land use with specific indications for residential, nonresidential, and ancillary uses. The Schuylkill River Trail, Potential Siding, and other landmarks are also highlighted.
Public Return on Investment (ROI)

MCPC calculated fiscal impacts based on a maximum buildout scenario of 1,808 apartments and 1.8 million square feet of nonresidential development. The nonresidential development was assumed to include 50% industrial space and 50% office or research & development (R&D) space.

Financial Benefits (Fiscal/Economic Impacts)

MCPC calculated that the total annual fiscal impacts from the KEEP project would be $10 million. This includes:

- $4.59 million for the Pottstown School District and $3.21 million for the Pottsgrove School District (a relatively low 108 school-aged children would be generated between both school districts combined).
- $1.21 million for Pottstown Borough and $212,000 for West Pottsgrove Township (variation occurs due to tax rates and location of developable land). "Marketing the Pottstown Region,” written by Tischler Bise in 2012, noted that, “less growth is better for West Pottsgrove; however, because of its current revenue structure, changes to the land use mix have minimal effect on fiscal conditions. For West Pottsgrove, a mix of remedies including tax rate increases, implementation of other revenue sources, and changes to level of service will help address fiscal sustainability.”
- $698,000 for Montgomery County revenue.

Jobs Created

MCPC calculates that the KEEP project would result in approximately 5,400 jobs created; 3,100 in Pottstown and 2,300 in West Pottsgrove. One scenario examined resulted in an estimated 1,900 new office jobs and 1,200 industrial jobs in Pottstown, and 1,400 office jobs and 900 industrial jobs in West Pottsgrove. See Appendix 20 Other Impacts.
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| Grand Total                      |              |           |                  |                    |                     |                   |                   |                         |                           |                          |                           |              |
|                                  |              |           |                  |                    |                     |                   |                   |                         |                           |                          |                           |              |
| Total, Pottstown Muni Revenue    |              |           |                  |                    |                     |                   |                   |                         |                           |                          |                           | $1,209,629    |
| Total, West Potts Muni Revenue   |              |           |                  |                    |                     |                   |                   |                         |                           |                          |                           | $211,819      |
| Total, Pottstown SD              |              |           |                  |                    |                     |                   |                   |                         |                           |                          |                           | $4,592,692    |
| Grand Total, Pottsgrove SD       |              |           |                  |                    |                     |                   |                   |                         |                           |                          |                           | $3,208,039    |
Private ROI (Profit)

Note: A detailed summary of costs is provided in Appendices 11 through 14.

Methodology. The KEEP project site is one that has significant uncertainties. These include those related to contamination and the extent of remediation needed, those related to mitigation related to disturbance of wetlands and fill in the floodway, the potential presence of archaeological resources and the changing demand for and technology inherent in some of the aspirational uses that this Specific Plan recommends pursuing. Thus, this plan focused on the “cost premium” of developing on the KEEP project site. The “cost premium” is the amount that would need to be eliminated, in total, or to a large extent, with public financing or innovative financing mechanisms. Doing so would make the KEEP site competitive with other “greenfield” sites not partially located in the floodway. This figure tells decision makers and developers the additional cost that development on the KEEP project site would currently cost, compared with a site that does not require fill, and with all infrastructure and roadways already in place.

The cost premium was initially estimated to be $68,500 per acre [see Appendix 21 Cost Premium]. To put this in perspective, this would mean that the development shown on the conceptual development sketch would have a cost premium of just over $2 million (29.5 net acres X $68,500 premium/acre = $2,022,000). Fortuitously, however, fill for the project is available at no cost. This fill was recently excavated as part of the U.S. 422 Stowe interchange improvement project, adjacent to the KEEP Project Site. As a result of the free fill, the cost premium dropped to $12,000 per acre.

Public Sector Support. The public sector, including but not limited to municipal, regional, county and state government, is committed to doing what it can to significantly lower the cost premium of the KEEP Project. Through the efforts of PAID and governments at different levels, meetings have been organized discussion has been facilitated with the construction sector to pursue the acquisition of free fill for the KEEP Project, which would eliminate most of the cost premium.

Redevelopment of brownfields is beneficial by cleaning up real or perceived contaminated sites, reusing existing infrastructure and as an alternative to sprawl.
**Principles for Development.**

The following principles establish the vision for subsequent ordinances implementing the details of the Specific Plan. The exact requirements of the implementing ordinances will be determined by the municipalities, and may be adjusted as appropriate, to incorporate ideas proposed by the development community. However, the implementing ordinances but will be generally consistent with these principles.

**Intent**

These principles will:

- Promote economic development
- Accommodate a flexible range of selected uses
- Ensure that any residential uses proposed are limited to a portion of the Project Site as part of a wider mix of uses
- Require residential, office, mixed uses and streetscapes to meet high design standards
- Emphasize connections to the Schuylkill River Trail and development that is interconnected by an on-site pedestrian network
- Ensure adequate landscaping, green area, stormwater best management practices
- Provide standards for provision and design of common open space
- Use the bonus mechanism to incentivize desirable site features

**Land Uses**

Land Uses may consist of the following:

- Light Industrial
- Research & Development (R&D)
- Office
- Multifamily
- Parks & Open Space
- Mixed Uses. Buildings may include a mix of any of the above uses, with the exception that multifamily uses may only share a building with office uses.
- Retail.
- Service Uses, only when accessory to the uses listed above.

**Mix of Uses.**

In the interest of ensuring that a substantial proportion of developable land in the KEEP Project Site is allocated for uses that generate employment and/or promote economic development, the maximum percentage of building footprints allocated to residential uses shall not exceed 40%, as measured over the entire KEEP Project Site.
Building Design

- Entrance. Each building shall have at least one main entrance that faces the street, an internal access drive, or common open space that is bounded on all sides by a streets, access drives, or buildings. The main entrance(s) shall be accentuated with at two of the following features:
  - Recessed entrance
  - Protruding;
  - Canopy;
  - Portico;
  - Overhang;
  - Transom window
  - Decorative surround

- Roofs: All rooftop HVAC, mechanical or other equipment shall be fully screened from view from ground level within 500' by these features.

- Articulation. Buildings shall make use of 3’ horizontal articulation (horizontal setback or projection) at least once per 100 linear feet, and vertical articulation of at least 3’ at least once per 100 linear feet.

- Length. Maximum residential, office or mixed residential-office building length: 150’. Other land uses may have longer facades, but shall use architectural features to break up the perceived mass of the building and add visual interest. In addition to building articulation requirements, above, for buildings over 150’, additional features shall be required. This may include a tower projecting at least 5 feet above the roof level, or may include materials used at no more than 50’ intervals along the façade, including a change in the building materials or material treatments, canopies, windows or decorative tilework.

- Windows. Windows shall comprise between 35%-70% of each building façade for residential or office uses. Residential or office buildings may not utilize reflective, black or smoked glass for windows.

- Materials. Facades shall utilize a mix of materials. Front facades of shall be comprised of at least three (3) predominant materials for residential or office buildings and two (2) predominant materials for other buildings. Side and rear facades shall be comprised of at least two materials. Each of the materials used to count towards this requirement shall comprise at least 15% of each building façade. Each building shall be accentuated by at least three design elements from [list specified]. Facades shall not include unfinished cinder block.

- At least 30% of residential units shall have balconies.

- Separation Distance. Industrial or R&D uses shall be separated by at least 200 feet from residential or mixed residential-office buildings (for buildings over 35 feet in height, one additional foot of setback shall be required for each foot in height over 35 feet).

- Minimum building setback from street: 20 feet.

- Maximum building height:
  - Office, Multifamily and mixed Office-Multifamily Use: five (5) stories nor 70’, whichever is greater.
  - Light Industrial or R&D Uses: 40’.

- Renderings. For Residential or office buildings, renderings/elevations shall be submitted for review to determine compliance with these standards with or prior to land development plan submission.
Sidewalks, crosswalks and trails.

- All building entrances shall be connected by a continuous, safe pedestrian walkway-crosswalk network to the Schuylkill River Trail and all other buildings on the property within 500’.
- Sidewalks shall be at least six feet wide.
- Sidewalks and trails are required along the street and access drives.
- Decorative Verge or Tree Lawn. Sidewalks in front of residential or office buildings shall include a decorative verge between the curb and the sidewalk for the length of the sidewalk, consisting of plantings and decorative paving. Sidewalks connecting buildings to the street shall also utilize such a verge.
- Crosswalks shall be highly-visible, by painting using the ladder, hatched or zebra design; or they shall use decorative paving.

Pedestrian and Bicycling Accommodations.

- A continuous pedestrian network shall connect all buildings; parking areas and the Schuylkill River Trail (SRT). Properties not directly abutting the SRT shall establish a separate pedestrian connection to adjacent properties.
- Ample bicycle parking spaces are to be provided. At a minimum, this shall consist of one (1) space per every 15,000 s.f. of gross floor area. Sheltered bike racks and bike lockers are encouraged.

Common Open Space.

- Plazas or Village Greens. Each residential development (including those in mixed-use projects) shall provide common open space in an amount equal to a minimum of 10% of the property’s developable area. Common open space shall:
  - Take the form of a village green(s) and/or plaza(s).
  - Be clearly distinguished from private space by boundaries such as roads, access drives, trails or sidewalks, landscaping or decorative fences.
  - Should be located in a prominent, highly-visible location (specifications to be defined further).
  - Shall be connected to the sidewalk and trail network.
Grade shall not exceed 8%.

A plaza should include an amenity such as a fountain, public art, pavilion, or gazebo (to be defined further), and shall have at least 40% of its surface area planted with trees, shrubs, and groundcover. Further specifications should address minimum seating, waste receptacles and bike racks.

Further specifications should define the minimum dimensions (width, length or diameter).

### Signage.

- Should be generally consistent with the standards in the MCPC Model Sign Ordinance. Nonresidential uses should be generally consistent with “Signs in General Commercial and Industrial Districts”, while residential uses should be generally consistent with standards in “Signs in Residential Districts” or “Signs in Main Street Districts.”
- Signs for residential, office, or mixed uses including office or residential uses shall be pedestrian-scaled, not exceeding 12’ in height.
- Sign Area: not more than 2 s.f. of sign area per linear foot of building façade facing a public street or parking lot.
- Illuminated signs shall utilize light font or images on a dark background.

### Parking.

- Shall be set back at least ten feet from buildings.
- At least one pedestrian route of at least five feet in width shall be provided and aligned within the parking lot with the main entry of a building to facilitate pedestrian movement. Clear separation/division from vehicular areas with landscaping, a change in grade, or a change in surface material shall be provided.

### Other Dimensional Criteria.

- Minimum green area: 20%.
- Minimum lot size: 30,000 s.f.
- Minimum lot width: 150’.
- Minimum lot depth: 100’.
- Minimum parking and access drive setback from a public street or Schuylkill P Trail (SRT): 30’. The public street/SRT setback area shall be maintained as green area.
- Minimizing Curb Cuts: Vehicular access points on the street shall be separated by at least 400’. No one property shall have more than two vehicular access points on Keystone Boulevard or Old Reading Pike, and properties are encouraged to share vehicular access.

### Landscaping.

Consistent standards will be developed that will be at least as strong as the landscaping requirements in the participating municipalities codes. The intent of the landscaping standards is to create as attractive a view and as modern a progressive image for the KEEP Project Site, Pottstown Borough and West Pottsgrove as possible, particularly as viewed from the residential uses, the Schuylkill River Trail, Keystone Boulevard, Old Reading Pike, U.S. 422, PA 100, and Grosstown Road. At a minimum, landscaping requirements will ensure:
Parking lot landscaping will be ample, and will include a generous amount of landscaped islands, infiltration strips,

Buffers: to mitigate the impact of industrial uses on residential uses and Pottstown’s park land located between the Schuylkill River and Keystone Boulevard, and to mitigate the impact of the railroad, U.S. 422 and PA 100 on residential uses.

Screens: use of vegetative or decorative fences/walls to screen views of trash, loading, headlights of parked/parking cars and similar site elements.

Shade trees: substantial shade tree plantings to enhance the image of the KEEP Project Site, provide shade for users of trails, sidewalks common open space and parking lots.

Stormwater best management practices: to ensure that impacts to sensitive natural areas are limited, and to establish a progressive, modern image of for the KEEP Project Site.

Other Requirements.

In the interest of establishing a cutting-edge, progressive image for future development of the KEEP site, bonuses will incentivize the provision of desirable amenities and site features including green roofs, alternative energy use, and LEED-certified buildings. Lighting. For the lighting of predominantly horizontal surfaces, such as pedestrian walkways, building entrances, sidewalks, and surface parking areas, fixtures shall be aimed straight down and shall be full cutoff or fully shielded.

The intensity and uniformity of lighting shall be in accordance with the Illuminating Engineering Society of North America (IESNA) Lighting Handbook, 9th edition or most recent edition, and relevant IESNA Recommended Practices.

The following mounting heights shall prevail: 1. Full cutoff fixtures with 44,000 lumens lamps maximum, in parking lots, the fixture mounting height of not more than 20 feet above the finished grade (AFG). 2. Full cutoff fixtures with 115,000 lumens lamps maximum shall be permitted only in large (100 spaces or more) commercial, institutional, and industrial parking lots except when the facility is adjacent to a residential district or use or an environmentally sensitive area—not less than 25 feet or more than 30 feet AFG. Mounting heights of 25 feet-30 feet shall not be permitted when located less than 100 feet from a residential district or use.
Implementation/Public-Private Partnership

The preceding sections provided a vision for the redevelopment of the Keystone Employment & Economic Plan (KEEP) Project Site. They made recommendations for and illustrated future land uses, reviewed financial benefits and underscored how critical it is to construct Keystone Boulevard and created principles shaping future zoning for the site. This section describes the steps necessary to adopt and implement this plan, and gauge interest by the development community. It then provides a list of potential funding mechanisms that should be considered as part of the necessary pursuit of funding critical to eliminate the cost premium and make the project viable from a developer’s standpoint.

Phasing

**Phase 1: Specific Plan Adoption.** The first phase of public implementation for the Specific Plan will be for the Pottstown Regional Planning Committee to conduct a consistency review, evaluate the Specific Plan, and then be given the opportunity to adopt it. The Pottstown Regional Planning Committee has been kept abreast of the KEEP Project as it has evolved. The Committee is supportive of the KEEP project; in fact, the project was developed to be consistent with the Future Land Use goals of the Pottstown Regional Comprehensive Plan. Next, the municipalities of Pottstown and West Pottsgrove will have the opportunity to adopt the Specific Plan.

**Phase 2: Zoning or Freestanding Ordinance.** The municipalities of West Pottsgrove and Pottstown will then have the opportunity to develop zoning or a freestanding ordinance to implement the Specific Plan. The zoning needs to be consistent with the Specific Plan, but this will give the municipalities the opportunity to refine the development regulations and its details. Any zoning ordinance will need to undergo a consistency review by the Regional Planning Committee to ensure that the final ordinance is consistent with the Regional Comprehensive Plan. West Pottsgrove Township and Pottstown Borough will then have the opportunity to adopt the zoning or freestanding ordinance to fully implement the plan’s provisions.

**Phase 3: Request for Information (RFI).** Private implementation of the Specific Plan would begin when developers express interest in projects for the KEEP project site. The KEEP Oversight Committee would review and evaluate developer submissions and consider which proposals would best achieve the goals of the KEEP project. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) will be completed and adopted by Pottstown Borough and West Pottsgrove Township, saying that the two municipalities will continue working to advance the KEEP project. Such measures may include pursuit of public funding and committing employee staff time.
Capital Improvements

The construction of the extension of Keystone Boulevard westward to Old Reading and Grosstown Roads would lead to an increase in municipal revenues; that, in turn, would trigger the pursuit of public financing. The extension of the boulevard is the infrastructure keystone of the KEEP Project. The $5.2 million (accounting for prevailing wage) estimated by Bursich that is required to construct the extension (including sewer and water line extension, and slight relocation of the Schuylkill River Trail) will need to be provided by the public sector in the form of grants, loans or capital expenditures. Potential sources of funding include:

- Grants (public sector). There are various state and federal grants and loans available for funding redevelopment of the KEEP Project Site. These include funding programs for economic development, industrial site/brownfields remediation and reuse, trails, infrastructure and transportation.
  - For transportation improvements, such as the extension of Keystone Boulevard, one of the best sources would be the Multimodal Transportation Fund (MTF) http://www.penndot.gov/ProjectAndPrograms/MultimodalProgram/Pages/default.aspx
  - (one round is administered by PennDOT; and one by the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) after selection by the Commonwealth Financing Authority (CFA).
  - Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Brownfields grant program, including assessments, cleanup and workforce development for residents of brownfields communities: https://www.epa.gov/brownfields/types-brownfields-grant-funding
  - Railroad. The potential for constructing a freight railroad spur from the adjacent Norfolk Southern Railroad is one of the features of the site that may make it attractive for industrial space users. The cost of constructing one such spur was estimated by Bursich as being approximately $655,000. Funding for this expense could be pursued from PennDOT’s Rail Freight Assistance Program (RFAP).
  - DCED is a prime source for funding for purposes such as economic development, infrastructure, and industrial redevelopment. For a comprehensive list of DCED funding programs for businesses, see: https://dced.pa.gov/programs-funding/program-funding-matrices/
  - Pennvest is a source for low-interest loans for brownfield redevelopment. http://www.pennvest.pa.gov/Pages/Mission.aspx
  - The recently enacted federal “Tax Cuts and Jobs Act” created “Qualified Opportunity Zones” (QOZ), which offer tax benefits to investors for investing capital gains in low-income community census tracts. This initiated new federal spending on economic development, workforce development, infrastructure and investment in startup businesses. Pottstown qualifies as a QOZ. https://dced.pa.gov/programs-funding/federal-funding-opportunities/qualified-opportunity-zones/
  - Redevelopment Assistance Capital Grant (RACP), administered by the Pennsylvania Office of the Budget.
  - Open Space and Trails. Bursich estimated that the cost for the modest alignment relocation of the Schuylkill River Trail would be $177,000 (to move the trail out of the future path of Keystone Boulevard). Appropriate funding programs include:
    - Transportation Alternatives Program (PennDOT)
o Community Conservation Partnerships (C2P2) (DCNR)

o Multimodal Transportation Fund (PennDOT or Commonwealth Financing Agency/Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED))

- TIF: Tax Increment Financing (TIF) will be considered for the KEEP Project Site, as another way of raising revenue for infrastructure improvements. The added increment in property tax revenue resulting from redevelopment of the Keystone Boulevard area would be used to retire debt service on bonds issued to raise funding for infrastructure improvements and generate redevelopment momentum in the area. The Commonwealth Financing Authority (CFA) administers a TIF Loan Guarantee Program that would also be of assistance.

- Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance (LERTA) is a state program that will be considered for nonresidential development in the KEEP Project Site. LERTA promotes revitalization of deterioriated areas by exempting from school, municipal and/or county taxes, new construction and improvements to certain deterioriated industrial, commercial and other business property.