

# MUNICIPALITY OF NORRISTOWN DRAFT HERITAGE ACTION PLAN



AUGUST 2013

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# **NORRISTOWN HERITAGE ACTION PLAN**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Purpose**

The Municipality of Norristown is fortunate to have maintained the majority of its urban fabric over the past 200 years. Its sites still hold vast potential for redevelopment and revitalization. Additionally, the Municipality has the potential for business growth through new and existing enterprises, focusing on recreation and heritage tourism. This effort includes harnessing the sizable cyclist market, which utilizes the Schuylkill River Trail on a daily basis and funneling them to the downtown area to experience Norristown's history and be served by its unique shops.

Many studies have been conducted to help the Municipality strategize ways to enhance business and further access to heritage resources. Key studies include *The Milner Report; Study and Design Guidelines for Norristown*, by John Milner Associates of West Chester, PA, *The Lafayette Street Land Use Access Study*, by Edward and Kelcey, *The Norristown Revitalization Strategy* by Abeles Phillips, Preiss and Shapiro, Inc. and updated by Urban Partners, *The Dekalb Street Two Way Study*, by McMahon Engineers & Planners, *the Riverfront Park Master Plan*, by Johnson, Mirmiran & Johnson of York, PA, *Swede Street Connector Project*, which was conducted by KAIROS Design Group of Camp Hill, Pennsylvania and the ongoing *Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Study* by Real Estate Strategies Inc. of Paoli, to mention but a few. The Municipality intends to partner with select entities through the Heritage Action Plan and forthcoming Program to assist in capturing key tourism markets in the region. This process will be driven with the help of a Consultant who will assist in completing an analysis of heritage assets and how to best harness these assets or resources, so as to make Norristown a heritage destination. An important part of this effort is to become an official part of the Schuylkill River National Heritage Area's "Heritage Towns and Trails Tour."

## VISION AND MISSION STATEMENT

The purpose of the *Norristown Heritage Action Plan* is to lay the ground work that will allow for eventual utilization of the Municipality's infrastructure as a linked interpretive experience that connects historical, cultural, architectural, and recreational resources. This is designed to revitalize and redevelop downtown Norristown with a specific focus on economic and business development through heritage tourism.

**Vision Statement:** Norristown is a Municipality looking towards the future without forgetting its past; an entity that desires to establish itself as a business friendly town that welcomes new business and encourages the growth and success of our current business community while preserving its rich cultural history. It's a place where new cultures interact, adapt, and meld to create a continually evolving social experience, which spreads out to other places in the region. Norristown is an action-oriented place that responds to new challenges by reflecting the combined ideas, trends, personalities and achievements of times past, present, and future. Together with our partners and stakeholders, Norristown is determined to promote its unique heritage resources and expand our tourism opportunities. This will be accomplished by harnessing existing resources and building on infrastructure assets such as public transportation, our strategic location near major highways, green building and Smart Growth, trails and parks for recreation, as well as strong links to the Schuylkill River and our inviting downtown. All of these things will provide a great quality of life for residents and visitors alike encouraging a live, work, and play lifestyle.

**Mission Statement:** To bring partners together and actively promote heritage resources in Norristown, creating linkages between these resources and the Schuylkill River Trail system. This includes the downtown as a center for the heritage program with its rich diversity, ethnic restaurants, historical, cultural, and recreational resources, commuter connections, and visual and performing arts venues. Norristown will insure the continued preservation, enhancement, and promotion of the Municipality's heritage resources through active support of the heritage program.

## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

### Management and Administration

*GOAL 1: Maintain and, where applicable, improve heritage related infrastructure.*

- Establish, maintain and enhance existing community facilities and services, as regional assets. These will include assets such as transportation infrastructure, Municipal Hall, Police and fire stations, schools, Municipal parking facilities, parks and recreation buildings and other civic spaces through public private partnerships.
- Maintain and enhance existing parks, recreational areas, and trails - upgrade the landscaping and expand programs for all age groups as these are part of Norristown's interpretive network and link to the downtown river and trail
- Create and enhance the signage program in the Municipal park system that provides way-finding and environmental educational messages to include heritage interpretation.
- Continue to fund the Historic Façade program for eligible commercial properties in the historic districts of Norristown. (See appendices for additional information)
- Continue to fund the Owner Occupied Housing Rehabilitation program so as to insure that historic properties do not fall into disrepair.
- Regular Training for the Historic Architectural Review Board as they continue to review applications for improvements to properties in the HARB Districts, to ensure that they continue to be a part of the revitalization efforts and reuse of properties.
- Hire a consultant to complete a heritage analysis that will involve partnering with private and public interests, and assist in accessing, steering and promoting the heritage program.

*GOAL 2: Work with partners to actively manage heritage infrastructure in the Municipality.*

- Explore partnerships with the PA Horticultural Society, Morris Arboretum, and other similar organizations with expertise in landscape design and urban forestry.
- Protect maintain, and reforest existing parks and stream corridors.
- Explore new trail connections between parks and linkages with neighboring communities and the County trail system.
- Work with the County on developing the Transfer station/Trail center located at the southeast corner of Lafayette and Dekalb Street.
- Establish connections from the Schuylkill river trail to the proposed Chester Valley Trail.
- Continue to partner with the Montgomery County Historic Preservation Society in funding, enhancing and protecting potential heritage preserves in Norristown that include the Selma Mansion and properties listed in the Milner Report as key structures.
- Explore the possibility of connecting the Historic Montgomery Cemetery to amenities along the Schuylkill River via Hamilton Street.

### **Stewardship of Heritage Resources**

*GOAL 1: Assess heritage resources in Norristown.*

- Work with a consultant team to assess the viability of Norristown's resources for heritage tourism as well as what steps may be needed to create a viable resource base.
- Participate in a Reconnection Study through a partnership with the Schuylkill River Greenway Association so as to help promote Heritage tourism.
- Re-examine the West and Central Historic district boundary and HARB districts, to ensure that Norristown's Historic boundaries are protected and ensure that they allow for sustainability.
- Explore opportunities for training for the Historic Architectural Review Board to ensure that they remain in tune with the revitalization efforts in addition to current trends.

*GOAL 2: Protect and preserve historic and cultural resources in Norristown.*

- Maintain the character and charm of the historic districts and stimulate new economic development within these areas.
- Discourage demolition of viable buildings.
- Promote the adaptive reuse of buildings.
- Encourage restoration of historic buildings to maintain the traditional character of the residential neighborhoods.
- Continue the Historic Façade program for commercial properties.
- Continue the Owner Occupied Housing Rehabilitation.

### **Interpretation of Heritage Resources**

*GOAL 1: Develop existing and potential heritage resources for tourism.*

- Promote heritage tourism with both public and private support.
- Enrich the quality of life in Norristown through historical and cultural resource development and hospitality training.
- Promote Norristown as a cultural node in the region.
- Actively promote the local visual and performing arts venues.
- Increase the number of cultural and arts programs for all ages.
- Promote local hospitality services.
- Promote the Selma mansion as a potential museum/discovery center.

*GOAL 2: Strengthen Downtown Norristown's Core by harnessing existing opportunities.*

- Increase efforts in attracting and recruiting new businesses into the downtown by becoming a welcoming stop for trail users.
- Create linkages between the trail users and the downtown.
- Increase water recreation activities and tie them to the downtown.
- Create linkages between the regional rail and the downtown.
- Create linkages between the Norristown Transportation Center and the downtown.

- Promote Norristown as a walkable community.
- Support development opportunities that generate tax-ratables so that programs and operations can be improved.
- Strengthen and rebrand Norristown's image to that of a community that is diverse, has a unique historic town character, a potential heritage destination and great access to public transportation.
- Work directly with businesses and organizations that represent business as a public/private coalition.

*GOAL 3: Raising public and private awareness of the Municipality's heritage efforts.*

- Initiate a communications strategy in order to obtain constructive feedback from stakeholders in the community on the potential of a heritage plan and program.
- Hold public meetings and adopt strategies extracted from the stakeholder feedback sessions.
- Implement a marketing campaign for Norristown and its potential as a heritage site.
- Place advertisements on Septa trains/buses, and regional newspapers, install street furniture with campaign logos, place campaign posters/signs at businesses.
- Tie branding campaign to new initiatives.
- Promote a Heritage Festival while enhancing or building on the existing festivals and cultural events.
- Complete assessment of potential heritage resources.

### **Marketing and Outreach**

*GOAL 1: Insure a way finding system that includes heritage related infrastructure and attractions.*

- Continue to maintain and enhance the existing wayfinding signage program throughout Norristown.
- Strengthen the gateway treatments at all entryways to the Municipality.

- Implement the branding signage program proposed as part of the Norristown marketing strategy.
- Refine the Way finding signage system to include historic and cultural sites.
- Reduce signage clutter of freestanding signs.
- Establish an interpretive sustainable signage project that will allow for signage at significant historic structures, sites, natural features and also designate cultural and political features.
- Establish a formal partnership with PennDOT to permit signs on state highways through Norristown.

*GOAL 2: Strengthen the Downtown Norristown Core by harnessing existing opportunities.*

- Increase efforts in attracting and recruiting new businesses into the downtown by becoming a welcoming stop for trail users.
- Create linkages to invite trail users into the downtown.
- Increase water recreation activities and tie them to the downtown.
- Setup bicycle racks in strategic locations of the downtown for use by cyclists.
- Historic preservation of commercial properties.
- Find appropriate reuse for key vacant and underutilized properties.
- Encourage the development of new restaurants, shops and entertainment venues, to support cultural and heritage destinations.

### **Economic Development Initiatives**

*Goal 1: Attract and keep businesses in the downtown.*

- Provide tax incentives, grants or loans to help businesses locate in the downtown.
- Inventory potential development sites that can be accessed through a website.
- Create a Business Improvement District for the downtown that will help offset costs.

- Take advantage of local training programs to ensure that local businesses hire locally.
- Streamline the development process through one stop process and updating the Zoning ordinance.

### *Goal 2: Improve Norristown Housing*

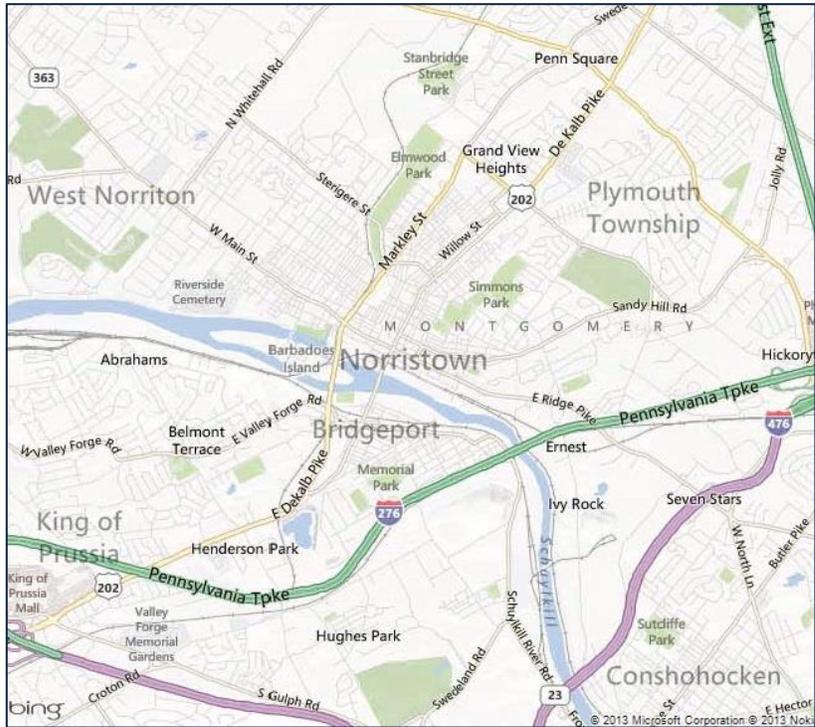
- Increase homeownership and encourage the development of market rate housing in the downtown and near the transportation center so as to stabilize ownership and help up-keep historic structures and facades from any potential deterioration. This can also be done through concentrated code enforcement.
- Preserve historically significant homes from demolition.
- Reduce the number of multifamily conversions in residential districts and increase the number of reconversions of multi-unit dwellings back to single family in residential districts. This will ensure preservation of potential heritage assets.
- Establish a live where you work program by providing incentives to both employees and employers.

### *Goal 3: Improve Norristown's Public Infrastructure*

- Continue improving and maintaining the new streetscapes and ensuring that improvements are historically correct.
- Encourage walking among downtown destinations by adding crosswalks at every signalized intersection for safety.
- Implement traffic calming so as to slow down vehicle traffic, encourage pedestrian safety and give an opportunity for motorists to see businesses.

## BACKGROUND

**Location:** Norristown is located on the Schuylkill River in central southeastern Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. The Municipality is the County Seat. Total area is approximately 3.6 square miles. Norristown was and is one of the largest of a series of river boroughs that forms the industrial base for the County. Norristown is 6 miles northwest of the city limits of Philadelphia on the Schuylkill River.



**Norristown Location Map**

Source: Bing Maps

**Demographics:** Norristown's population in 2000 was 31,282. As of the 2010 U.S. Census, the population was 34,324. In 2011, Norristown's population was 34,369. This represents a 9.9% increase from 2000. There were 17,128 males (49.8%) and 17,241 females (50.2%). The median age is 31.2 years. It is 43.3 years in Pennsylvania. The 2010 U.S. Census indicates that Norristown's population was 40.9% White; 35.9% African American; 28.3% Hispanic; 0.4% Native American; 2.1% Asian; 0.1% Native Hawaiian; and 4.6% two or more races. Norristown has a large and growing Hispanic population.

In 2009, Norristown's estimated median household income is \$41,850, slightly less than Pennsylvania's median household income of \$49,520. Estimated per capita income is \$19,433. Median house value in Norristown is \$149,914 as compared to Pennsylvania, which is \$164,700. As of 2012, unemployment is 8.7%. Construction is the largest

industry in Norristown (16%), followed by Administration (14%); Manufacturing (14%); Retail Trade (12%); Accommodations/Food Services (9%); Health Care/Social Assistance (6%); and Educational Services (5%).

Source: City-Data; <http://www.city-data.com/city/Norristown-Pennsylvania.html>

**Transportation:** Norristown also has one of the richest public transit assets in the five-county Philadelphia Suburbs. The community has three regional rail stops, 500-car SEPTA parking garage, a high-speed line, a major transit bus hub, and an inter-city bus station – all within walking distance to residential and commercial areas of Norristown, in particular the downtown business district.

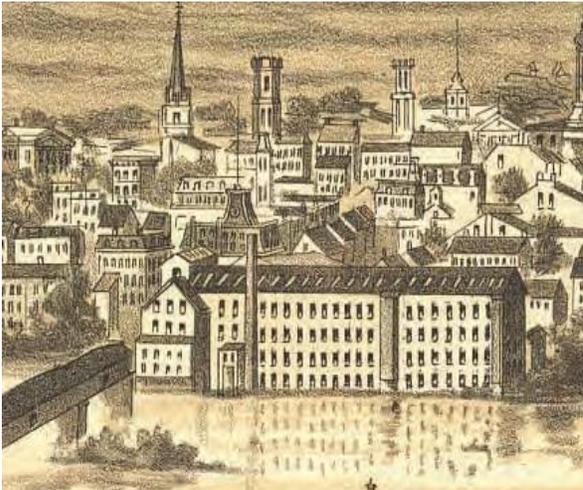
Major transportation projects that have been in planning for years are finally ready for construction. Phase I of the Lafayette Street Corridor is set for construction in 2012. This first phase consists of new road connecting Ford Street in Norristown to Conshohocken Road in Plymouth Township. Phase II construction will begin in 2015 and involves widening Lafayette Street to create a broad boulevard from Ford Street into the heart of Norristown. Phase III will connect the corridor at Conshohocken Road to a new PA Turnpike interchange. This major transportation improvement program will eventually directly connect Norristown to the PA Turnpike and so “open up” Norristown’s central business district in much the same way Conshohocken was made more accessible through the construction of 476 more than 20 years ago.

The reconstruction of Markley Street (Route 202) is set to begin in 2013. The project will widen this major transportation route through Norristown, enhancing vehicular traffic. At the same time the addition of amenities such as street trees, rain gardens and pedestrian lighting will create a more pleasant residential and commercial environment.

On top of these initiatives, a plan to make DeKalb Street two-way has recently been endorsed by the Municipal Council. Just as the Lafayette Street Corridor will create new access to the east, creating two-way traffic on DeKalb Street will open up Norristown to traffic from the north, creating another vital connection between the downtown and the surrounding suburbs.

**Government:** Norristown is the County Seat of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. Norristown was formerly a Borough operating under Pennsylvania's Borough Code.

Therefore it is frequently referred to as a borough but it has been a home rule municipality since 1986. This includes a Home Rule Charter with a city-manager/council form of government. There are seven-council members for the municipality, which is part of the 6<sup>th</sup> Congressional.



**Historical Summary:** Norristown is named for Isaac Norris, a member of the colonial Pennsylvania legislature. It was incorporated as a borough in 1812 and grew significantly between 1853 and 1909. By 1940, it was the most populous borough in Pennsylvania with 38,181 people. As of the 2010 U.S. Census, the population was 34,324, indicating a slight post World War II decline.

“Olympians, soldiers and abolitionists have all hailed from the bustling streets of Norristown. Beginning as a modest seventeenth-century settlement along the Schuylkill River, Norristown became an industrial boomtown and attracted waves of immigrants to its forges, railways and mills. "The Biggest Borough in the World," was once Norristown's self-proclaimed slogan and quite easily could have been referred to as the original "City of Big Shoulders," considering the industrious nature of the town.

The Dutch, Welsh, and English were the first to arrive in this area in the early 1600s. When Montgomery County was established in 1784, the Town of Norris was quickly formed as the county seat. The Borough of Norristown was established on March 31, 1812. The first official day of business was conducted on May 1, 1812, and after an election of officers, the first act of council was to have the town clerk keep and possess a common seal. Twenty-one years later, the beehive that adorns the common seal was created by David Kneas, an engraver for the U.S. Mint.

Fervet Opus, which is Latin for 'the work boils,' was chosen as the slogan. From its humble beginnings, Norristown seemed on a path of perpetual growth. Like many other urban areas throughout the United States, Norristown was left behind by the advent of

the suburban mall. Through a period of decline, Norristown has maintained its character and is showing solid signs of revitalization. Olympians can still be found among our streets, and the sleepy seventeenth-century settlement has transformed itself into a modern twenty-first century destination. For more information on the history of Norristown and Montgomery County, please visit the [Historical Society website](#).



Norristown's key historical resource is Selma Mansion located at 1301 West Airy Street was built by Andrew Porter in 1794. Mr. Porter was commissioned a captain in 1776 by the Continental Congress. He was assigned to the frigate Effingham during the Revolutionary War, becoming one

of the founders of the U.S. Marine Corps, and eventually attaining the rank of brigade general. Selma (Gaelic for "High Seat") was the boyhood home of his sons David Rittenhouse Porter, who served as governor of Pennsylvania from 1839-1845 and James Madison Porter, Secretary of War under President John Tyler and founder of Lafayette College in Easton. Selma was acquired by [The Norristown Preservation Society](#) in 2006 with the hope of restoration.

In conclusion, Norristown is an important historical center along the Schuylkill River. It is also surrounded by history. For example, Valley Forge National Park is located nearby and readily accessible by trail and road. On an interesting note, Norristown has a rich modern history related to music and the arts. For example, it was the birthplace of jazz bass virtuoso Jaco Pastorius. He is best known for his work with *Weather Report* but also played with numerous celebrity musicians during the 1970's and 80's including Joni Mitchell.

The development and integration of Norristown's diversity ranging from its history, to its social economics and culture, present an opportunity to make it a Heritage destination. Norristown is home to a regional transit center, through the Norristown Transportation

Center which is the terminus of the local high speed rail line connecting the Municipality to Philadelphia and city markets. This is in addition to it being an intermodal transit facility, with long distance bus transit in addition to regional rail and bus services. As such, it continues to enjoy ready access to regional populations that allow for the marketing of its heritage, and diverse culture that encompasses food, music and the arts.

## PARTNERSHIPS

### Active and Potential Partners

The Municipality of Norristown will be building on the momentum established through the Norristown Bicentennial celebrations of 2012, prior to which was the establishment of the DeKalb Street Avenue of the Arts and subsequently the Arts Hill District. Efforts to bring together community resources and assets and utilize them to create a variety of programs and activities through these partnerships will continue.

The table below (Table 1) identifies additional partners, their status as potential or active partners, and their roles and responsibilities as part of the Norristown Heritage Action Plan:

<b>ORGANIZATION</b>	<b>ADDRESS</b>	<b>CONTACT INFO</b>	<b>STATUS</b>	<b>ROLES</b>
Municipality of Norristown	235 East Airy St, Norristown PA 19401	Jayne Musonye <a href="mailto:jmusonye@norristown.org">jmusonye@norristown.org</a>	Active	i, ii, iii, iv, v, vi, vii, ix, x
Montgomery County Planning Commission	P.O. Box 311, Norristown PA 19401	Beth Pilling <a href="mailto:Bpilling@montcopa.org">Bpilling@montcopa.org</a>	Active	i, iii, iv, v, vi, x
Center Theater	203 DeKalb St, Norristown PA 19401	Fran Doyle thecentretheater@aol.com	Active	iii, v, vii, viii, x
Theater Horizon	401 DeKalb St, Norristown PA 19401	Erin Reilly erin@theatrehorizon.org	Active	iii, v, vii, viii, x
Norristown Public Library	1001 Powell St,	Kathleen Arnold-Yerger 610.278.5100	Potential	iii, iv, v, vii, x

<b>ORGANIZATION</b>	<b>ADDRESS</b>	<b>CONTACT INFO</b>	<b>STATUS</b>	<b>ROLES</b>
Norristown Arts Building	Norristown PA 19401 619 West Washington St, Norristown PA 19401	Timothy Hawkesworth Tim@NABarts.com	Potential	iii, iv, v, vi, viii, x
Real Estate Strategies	Real Estate Strategies, Inc./RES Advisors 63 Chestnut Road, Suite 6 Paoli, PA 19301	Elizabeth Beckett EBeckett@resadvisors.com	Active	i, ii, vi, vii
Elmwood Park Zoo	1661 Harding Blvd, Norristown PA 19401	Al Zone azone@elmwoodparkzoo.org	Active	iii, iv, v, x
Montgomery County Historic Preservation Society	1654 DeKalb St, Norristown PA 19401	Beth Pilling contactus@hsmcpa.org	Potential	iii, iv, v, vii, viii
Norristown Arts Council	401 DeKalb St, Norristown PA 19401	Rich Rogers President@norristownartshill.org	Potential	iii, iv, v, vii, viii
Greater Norristown Corporation (GNC)	2605 Egypt Road, Trooper PA 19403	Kevin Homer khomer@homergroup.com	Active	iii, iv, v, vii, viii
Montgomery Foundation	2 West Lafayette St, Norristown, PA 19401	Virginia Frantz execoffice@mcfoundationinc.org	Potential	ii, iv, v, vii, ix
SEPTA	1234 Market Street, 9th fl. Philadelphia PA 19107	Mark Cassel MCassel@septa.org	Potential	iii, iv, v, vii, ix, x
GVFTMA (Greater Valley Forge Transportation Management)	1012 W. 8th Ave, Suite A King of Prussia, PA 19406	Kyle Guie KGuie@gvftma.com	Potential	i, iii, iv, v, vii, x
Schuylkill River Heritage Area	140 College Drive, Pottstown, PA	<a href="http://www.schuylkillriver.org">www.schuylkillriver.org</a>	Active	i,iii,iv,v,vi,vii,x
Department of Conservation and	Harrisburg, PA	Newpa.com	Active	i,ii,

Natural Resources				
Norristown Small Business Assistance Center	208 Dekalb St, Suite 301 Norristown PA 19401	Ron Story rstory@norristown.org <a href="http://www.norristownsbac.org">www.norristownsbac.org</a>	Active	i, ii, iii, iv, v, vi,
Department of Community and Economic Development	Harrisburg, PA	Newpa.com	Active	ii

**Key: Partner Roles**

- i - Technical Assistant
- ii - Funding

- iii - Information
- iv - General Support
- v - Collaborative Skills
- vi - Professional Expertise
- vii - Marketing Assistance

- viii - Volunteers
- ix - Space
- x - Tourism Assistance

The Municipality of Norristown Planning Department or assignee will spearhead the heritage program once the plan is completed and adopted by the Municipality. As part of this process, a needs analysis will be completed to determine the Heritage Plan feasibility, viability and sustainability through a consultant. The Municipality of Norristown Planning Department will continue to be the conduit for grant funds and will be responsible to funders for any disbursements and closeouts as with any other grants that come into the Municipality.

## RESOURCES AND LINKS

**Background:** The Municipality of Norristown contains two historic districts; the Central Norristown Historic District and the West Norristown (West End) Historic District. As of November 23, 1984, both of these districts were listed on the National Register of Historic Places. (See map A) Generally, these two Historic districts reflect the developed area of Norristown as it existed in the decade between 1910 to 1920. The impact of the automobile and the electric trolley began to be felt during this decade, permitting development of the more distant areas of the Municipality and leaving behind vacant parcels of land that were developed during later periods. This can be observed in today's street scenes with clusters of houses that date from 1930 to 1940 and neighbors of buildings from the turn of the century or earlier. Two such examples are along the 1100 block of Swede Street and the 1200 block of Pine Street. However, the boundaries of the Historic Districts were drawn to include areas that grew adjacent to one another in a regularly expanding pattern of development. Consequently, most post-1920 development is not included.

The Central Norristown Historic District includes areas of contiguous development from 1800 to 1910. The West End District covers the years from 1850 to 1920. The boundaries generally follow existing property lines and the inside curb line along streets and alleys. Although, the boundaries define areas of relatively high architectural integrity, they do not include all significant individual or group structures in the Municipality. Many of these structures possess outstanding architectural and historical value but their location prohibits them from being included in either of the Districts. Such structures may be individually eligible for the National Register and are listed as part of Table 2 that identifies Key Heritage Resources. The Municipality of Norristown has a Historic Architectural Review Board (HARB) that ensures that any improvements in these Districts adhere to preservation standards, local policies and regulations in place for the historic districts.

**Tourism Support Resources:** As seen in the link for map A below, Norristown is endowed with numerous sites and structures that form the core nucleus of Norristown's heritage resources. The bulk of these resources are private as seen in the map below but with collaboration with the owners, there is the anticipation that these property owners will become partners as either individual stakeholders or through the existing Norristown Business Association.

**MAP A (Historic District Map):** [Page 36, figure 22](#) of the Norristown Open space Plan provides access to the Norristown Historic District, and the HARB area is delineated as well.

**Key Heritage Resources:** The Central Norristown Historic District (see Map A above) encompasses over 245 acres and contains over 1,900 structures within 40 square blocks. Only 60 structures within the district have been identified as not being a representation of the 1910 street scene. The core of the Municipality is the Courthouse square and the first four blocks of East Main Street, an area which contains such significant structures as the Courthouse (1855), the county Prison (1851), the Odd Fellows Hall (1850), and the Egolf Building (1893). The first four blocks of East Main Street were excluded from the District because of extensive demolition and some new construction. Consequently, the original "Town of Norris", which was bounded by Cherry St, Green St, Airy and Lafayette Street, is only partially included in the District.

Immediately west of this core are the modest early 19<sup>th</sup> Century dwellings along Penn and Ann Streets. These are among the earliest row dwellings in the Municipality, dating from the early 1800s. To the north of the downtown core along Swede and DeKalb Streets, the District includes the most imposing houses in the Municipality, built in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century architectural styles of Greek Revival, Queen Ann, second Empire, Italianate and Colonial Revival.

The West Norristown Historic District is an outstanding example of late 19<sup>th</sup> Century/early 20<sup>th</sup> Century residential community, and is a showcase of Victorian and late Victorian era building styles. It is made up of approximately 1700 structures, including individual row and duplex units, within a 32 square block area. Only 20 structures have been classified as not contributing to the District's historical and Architectural significance. While row houses predominate, there are many semi-detached houses as well, with an occasional free-standing house on some blocks. A few structures predate the major development periods, displaying deep setbacks, steep gabled roofs, and unusual materials such as slate and wood siding. Detached dwellings dominate only the two blocks of West Main Street between Haws Avenue and Noble Street. This overwhelming number of brick rows and twins gives the district a strong urban residential character that continues to be maintained specifically through the HARB process.

The historic districts are critical as a heritage resource in that they encompass numerous sites and structures as seen in table (2) two below, that could be ideal for heritage tourism. Not all these resources are open to the public and quite a bit of collaboration with the help of a consultant, would need to go into the process so as to establish potential staging areas for events, and investment areas for interpretive venue development related to history and culture. However, the resources open to the public could go a long way in acting as staging areas for the privately owned potential resources.

<b>TABLE 2: NORRISTOWN – HISTORIC/CULTURAL RESOURCES</b>						
<b>ID</b>	<b>RESOURCE</b>	<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>DATE</b>	<b>CONDITION</b>	<b>CONTRIBUTION</b>	<b>PROJECT(S)</b>
01	Selma Mansion	Airy Street, Norristown PA 19401	1787	Undergoing renovations	Public/Historic: Museum, education, interpretation, historic	Restoration and preservation of building for use as a museum.
02	Schuylkill River Trail	Schuylkill River	n/a	Excellent	Public/Recreational: Cycling, walking, running	Part of County trail system; Interpretive signage program for the Norristown trail system.
03	Underground Rail	Norristown	TBD	To be determined	Public/Historic	Needs research
04	Central Norristown Historic District	Central Norristown	1800 - 1910	Maintained through HARB	Historical, cultural, architectural; Public/Private/business	Historic façade restoration and preservation through HARB
05	West Norristown Historic District	West End	1850-1920	Maintained through HARB	Historical, cultural, architectural; Public/Private/business	Historic Façade Restoration through HARB
06	Norristown Friends Meeting House	Swede Street, Norristown PA 19401	1852	Excellent	Private/Historic:	Restoration and preservation.
07	Buttonwood Row Houses	500 block Buttonwood St, Norristown PA 19401	Circa 1782	Excellent	Private/Historic: Oldest row houses in town built for mill workers.	Restoration and preservation through HARB
08	Corson House	Main and Cherry St, Norristown PA 19401	Circa 1770	Excellent	Private/Historic: Oldest building in Norristown surviving from Isaac Norris's Norristown Plantation.	Preservation of building
09	Montgomery County Seat	Airy & Swede Street, Norristown PA 19401	1852, 1875 & 1970	Excellent	Public/Historic	Preservation of County government seat building
10	Tremont Cemetery	Piazza and Angelo St, Norristown, PA	1850 - 1970	Good	Private/Historic; used by visitors for family history. Special memorial for veterans, and civil war.	Maintenance of Cemetery
11	Montgomery Cemetery	Hartranft Ave, Norristown, PA	1849 - present	Good	Private/Historic; used by visitors for family history, special memorial for veterans and civil war.	Maintenance of Cemetery.
<b>ID</b>	<b>RESOURCE</b>	<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>DATE</b>	<b>CONDITION</b>	<b>CONTRIBUTION</b>	<b>PROJECT(S)</b>
12	Arts Hill District	401 DeKalb St./DeKalb Street Corridor Norristown,	2009	Excellent	Arts/Entertainment	Festivals, Promotion of the arts,

		PA 19401				
13	Montgomery County Prison	35 East Airy St, Norristown, PA	1851	Minimally maintained	Programing that could contribute to a diverse audience.	Restoration and preservation of building for potential tours and use as museum.
<b>ID</b>	<b>RESOURCE</b>	<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>DATE</b>	<b>CONDITION</b>	<b>CONTRIBUTION</b>	<b>PROJECT(S)</b>
14	The Globe Knitting Mills	660 & 694 East Main St	1898	Excellent	Private/Plumbing supplies warehouse and office building	Preservation of building
15	David Rittenhouse Junior High School	1705 Locust Street	1927	Excellent	Public building used as a junior high school	Preservation of building
16	General Thomas J. Stewart Memorial Armory	(Police Athletic League) 340 Harding Blvd	1927-1928	Excellent	Private/Public partnership/Recreational	Preservation of building
17	Historical Society of Montgomery County	1654 DeKalb St	1953	Excellent	Private/Public: preservation of regional heritage and history	Programing, historical tours and other awareness activities.
18	Elmwood Park Zoo	1601 Harding Blvd	1924	Excellent	Public/Recreational	Expansion
19	Norristown Farm Park	Steriger and Stanbridge St	Circa 1800	Excellent	Public/Recreational	Preservation

**Recreational Resources:** In addition to the above heritage resources, the Municipality is richly endowed with a system of trails, parks, and playgrounds throughout its boundaries with a number of goals in place through its open space plan to preserve and create linkages to them. Trails include the Schuylkill River Trail, the Norristown Farm Park Connector and several trails within the Norristown Farm Park. These trails are an important asset for the following reasons:

- They provide an alternate way for people to travel short or even long distances.
- They provide a place for exercise and enjoyment of nature and the built environment.
- They tie together open space sites inside and outside of the Municipality as well as other destinations such as schools and shopping districts.
- They can be used by anyone of any age group.
- They can accommodate multiple modes of transportation including walking, biking and skating.
- They can go where cars cannot, including parks and close to river.

Preserving the Municipality's existing parks by making them safe, useable and accessible will assist in enhancing and highlighting some of these additional resources as listed in table (3) three below.

<b>TABLE 3: NORRISTOWN RECREATIONAL RESOURCES</b>			
ID	PARK NAME	LOCATION	FACILITIES
01	Elmwood Park	Harding Blvd, Norristown, PA	4 Baseball/softball fields, basketball court, playground, Band shell, Picnic Facilities, Zoo, 2 Bocce Courts, Football fields, soccer fields, volleyball courts, bathrooms.
02	Simmons Park	E. Oak Street, Norristown, PA	Multipurpose field with Basketball courts, soccer, baseball, Stream corridor, walking trail.
03	Martin Luther King Memorial Park	E. Oak Street, Norristown, PA	Amphitheater, walking trail loop, playground equipment, Gazebo, picnic grove, stream corridor, MLK monument, water feature.
04	Riverfront Park	Haws Avenue, Norristown, PA	Two Boat ramps, potential location for the dragon boat, fishing dock, picnic area.
05	Bartasch Park	High St and Linda Lane, Norristown, PA	Two baseball fields, soccer field, playground equipment, stream corridor.
06	McCann Park	Piazza Street, Norristown, PA	Baseball field, Basketball court, playground equipment, Picnic area, vista of Schuylkill river corridor.
07	Engro Park	Basin St, Norristown, PA	Walking trail, quasi dog park.
08	Crawford Park	Main St. & Stony Creek, Norristown, PA	Basketball Court, Playground equipment, Picnic area.
09	Albert P. Parker Memorial Park	Cherry St, Norristown, PA	Basketball court, playground equipment.
10	Skag Cottman Park	Basin Street, Norristown, PA	Baseball field, soccer field, stream corridor.
11	Norristown Farm Park	Stanbridge St., Norristown, PA	Trails
12	Thomas Barone Park	Buttonwood St. Norristown, PA	Pocket park
13	Washington Street Park	Washington St, Norristown, PA	Pocket park
14	Marshall Commons	Marshall St, Norristown, PA	Walking trail, pocket park.
15	Poley Park	Marshall & Corson St, Norristown, PA	Monument and parking area.
16	Courthouse Square	Main & Swede St, Norristown, PA	Picnic Area
17	Schuylkill River Trail	Southern boundary of Norristown	Walking, Biking and recreational trail

**Contributing Resources:** Norristown has several private commercial sites and structures that contribute historically and architecturally to its heritage as highlighted in the tables and maps under this section. As such, there is the possibility for future opportunities that may exist in terms of access to these assets and resources. As part of the plan, Norristown will closely monitor them and through the establishing of partnerships with the owners with the help of a consultant, harness these opportunities as potential attractions that could become accessible to the public as heritage sites.

## INTERPRETATION AND MARKETING

**Cultural Events and Partners:** The Montgomery County Cultural Center, Center Theatre, Iron Age Theatre Company, Theater Horizon and Centre Theater, are Norristown's cultural pioneers and partners. These cultural centers are all located in the Norristown Avenue of the Arts along DeKalb Street, and fall under the auspices of the Arts Hill Council, which was formed in 2007 with the mission of developing, promoting and sustaining the Norristown Arts Hill as a culturally and economically vibrant community destination. The purpose is to attract and support existing and new artists, cultural organizations, and related creative businesses that will directly contribute to the economic revitalization of the Municipality. The success of the Avenue of the Arts or Arts Hill continues to depend on the active participation of residents, businesses and attraction of patrons who contribute to making this a destination with an identity.



For the past three years Norristown has been home to the Arts Hill Festival which has attracted many to the Municipality. Many patrons are Schuylkill River Trail users that are attracted to the event due to the sights, sounds and smells of the event which has included many live performance arts acts, and multiple food vendors. The direct marketing of the event to patrons of

the trail could draw even greater visitation to the event. Many other events are underway and are being proposed within Norristown that could aid further with the Municipality’s economic resurgence as well as transforming it to a cultural hub within the metropolitan area.

**Outreach:** In the last three years leading up to the bicentennial celebration by the Municipality in 2012, the Norristown stepped up the number of events and festivals in the Municipality, in an effort to draw in large crowds and showcase the community. The plan is to continue to maintain these events, festivals and activities so as to highlight and showcase the community’s diversity while generating support for the existing businesses. These events festivals and activities have proven very successful and Norristown will continue to build on them so as to generate additional interest as it attempts to vitalize its rich heritage. In an effort to maintain and expand on these successes, the plan to bring all the partners in a needs analysis forum, hire a consultant and explore other ways of highlighting the existing resources, and ensuring that the community can generate additional interest and gain a larger share of the tourism market in the region, which will also help drive its economic revitalization efforts. Table four (4) identifies additional events how they have functioned and potential outcomes as part of the Norristown Heritage Action Plan.

<b>TABLE 4: NORRISTOWN – EVENTS, FESTIVALS AND ACTIVITIES</b>				
<b>ID</b>	<b>EVENT</b>	<b>ADDRESS</b>	<b>CONTACT</b>	<b>ACTIONS/PROJECTS</b>
01	Stony Creek Anglers	P.O. Box 566 Eagleville, PA 19408	Charles Wood, President www.stonycreekanglers.org 610.291.1361	Cleanup of stony creek. Community pride initiative. Exposure/outreach – family event
02	Norristown Arts Hill Festival on DeKalb Street	401 DeKalb St., Norristown PA 19401	Rich Rogers, President President@norristownartshill.org	Exposure/outreach – Venue for promotion
03	Theatre Horizon	401 DeKalb Street, Norristown, PA 19401	Erin Reilly erin@theatrehorizon.org	Exposure/outreach – Presents plays on a regular basis
04	The Center Theatre	Montgomery County Cultural Center, 208 DeKalb St, Norristown, PA 19401	Fran Doyle <a href="http://www.thecentertheatre.org">www.thecentertheatre.org</a>	Exposure/outreach – Presents plays on a regular basis

05	Zoo Carnival and other	1661 Harding Blvd, Norristown, PA 19401	Al Zone 610.506.0334 azone@elmwoodparkzoo.org	Exposure/outreach – large draw of people from outside.
06	Summertime concert series at bandshell	Elmwood Park Bandshell, Harding blvd. Norristown PA.	Bill Plichta 610.270.0467	Exposure/Outreach – Held throughout the summer.
07	Summer Camps	235 East Airy St, Norristown PA 19401	Bill Plichta 610.270.0467	Exposure/Outreach – Held throughout the summer.
08	Bocce Tournaments	Elmwood Park, Harding Blvd, Norristown PA 19401	David Fusco 610.275.5454	Community Pride cultural initiative and Exposure/Outreach – Family and cultural Event
09	Fireworks – July 4th	Elmwood Park, Harding Blvd., Norristown PA 19401	Public Works 610.270.1437	Community Pride Initiative -
10	5K Run – July 4th	Norristown and East Norriton, PA 19401	Bill Plichta 610.270.0467	Community Pride Initiative
11	Parade and two concerts with activities and vendors – July 4 <sup>th</sup>	Elmwood Park Bandshell, Norristown, PA	Bill Plichta 610.270.0467	Community Pride Initiative
12	International Festival on West Marshall St.	West Marshall St Norristown PA 19401	Beatriz Nunez, Norristown Hispanic Business Association	Community Pride cultural initiative and Exposure/Outreach – Family and cultural Event
<b>ID</b>	<b>EVENT</b>	<b>ADDRESS</b>	<b>CONTACT</b>	<b>ACTIONS/PROJECTS</b>
13	Bike Race at Elmwood Park	Elmwood Park Bandshell, Norristown PA	Bill Plichta 610.270.0467	Publicize and expand program
14	Car Show	Main Street, Norristown PA 19401	Chief Willie Richet 610.270.0474	Exposure/Outreach – Annual event. A good venue for promotion of your organization.
15	Mexican Independence Day	Astor Plaza, West Marshall St,	Sue Suriano 973.460.0270	Community Pride cultural Initiative and Exposure/outreach –

	Celebration	Norristown PA 19401		family and cultural event.
16	911 Heroes Run (Summer) 5k and 1 mile run/walk.	Gretz Beer company, Norristown PA 19401	Norristown@911Heroesrun.org	Publicize and expand program.
17	Unity Day	MLK Park and Pavilion, E. Oak and Arch St, Norristown PA	Paula Robinson 610.277.5198	Community Pride cultural initiative and Exposure/Outreach – Family and cultural Event
18	The Feasts	Holy Saviour Club MSS (Maria SS Del Soccorso di Sciacca)	Jim Serratore 610.812.1107 Jim Catagnus 610.733.7181	Community Pride cultural initiative and Exposure/Outreach – Family and cultural Event. Annual feast and procession in summer.
19	Christopher Columbus Celebration	Columbus Monument Harding Blvd, Norristown PA 19401	Hank Cisco 610-272-2329	Publicize and expand program
20	Egyptian Festival	St George Coptic Orthodox Church, DeKalb St, Norristown PA	Father Mina Shaheid 610-272-7615	Community Pride cultural initiative and Exposure/Outreach – Family and cultural Event
<b>ID</b>	<b>EVENT</b>	<b>ADDRESS</b>	<b>CONTACT</b>	<b>ACTIONS/PROJECTS</b>
21	Hogs for Heroes	Elmwood Park and Bandshell, Harding Blvd, Norristown PA	Gerry Donaghy 610-656-4920	Publicize and expand program
22	Dragon Boat Race	Riverfront Park, Haws Ave, Norristown PA	Robin Parker <a href="mailto:dragonboatcrew@gmail.com">dragonboatcrew@gmail.com</a>	Publicize and expand program
23	Las Posadas	West Marshall St, Norristown PA	Telemondo – Bey Nunez 484.994.3120	Community Pride cultural initiative and Exposure/Outreach – Family and cultural Event
24	History Day	Selma Mansion 1301 W Airy	Bill Ward NPS@norristownpreservationsociety.org.	Publicize and expand program

		St Norristown PA		
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**Interpretation:** One of the interpretive historic sites in the Municipality of Norristown is the Montgomery County Historical Society and parts of the Norristown Farm Park. The Municipality installed a Way finding System which directs commuters/visitors to notable sites in town such as the Montgomery County Courthouse, Norristown Municipal Hall, and various parks around the Municipality. Each of the aforementioned sites, while highlighted for vehicular traffic, is not as clearly defined for users of the trail. Additionally the cultural sites are not highlighted on the signage system. The Municipality of Norristown desires to be able to effectively market cultural and institutional sites to commuters, pedestrians, and trail users and will be working with its partners to identify and define these various sites. Historic sites and structures form the basic product of tourism, and without these sites and structures being open to the public in Norristown, we cannot consider it be a true heritage tourism destination or area. So as to maximize heritage tourism, the Municipality will have to work with existing resources and slowly expand new offerings over time. The ultimate purpose is to reconnect the people and businesses with the Schuylkill River and the existing rich history will be utilized to promote heritage related economic development initiatives.

For this to be a success, it will also involve hiring and working with a professional consultant to garner ideas from the partners and establish the following as part of the workings of the interpretive system:

- Explain the historical and cultural significance of resources through a set of pre-established themes thus enhancing visitor understanding.
- Provide an assessment of the physical and virtual resources needed to tell the Norristown story, which will add to the visitor’s interactive experience as a means of entertainment.
- Communicate the unique story of Norristown’s resource(s) to visitors through various physical means, which could be through visitor signs explaining the history of a specific site(s) or landscape design to aid in the understanding of site layout.
- Communicate the unique story of Norristown’s resource(s) to visitors through various virtual means, which could be through audio guides or even modern heritage

applications for I-Phones and I-Pads (i.e. interpretation provided via the internet for the “remote” visitor or “cyberspace” visitor).

It is the goal of the Municipality to ensure that the existing trail linkage system that provides pedestrian and non-motorized vehicle access to all open space and recreation areas will be expanded upon for access to other potential heritage resources as detailed in this plan. Also in certain situations, these areas will provide interior trails or paths. These would provide residents and visitors with further opportunities for walking or biking to the pertinent sites. A good example of this type of trail is the Norristown Farm Park Connector, which has a way-finding system installed.

Two exceptions to this rule may be the Schuylkill River Trail and the Saw Mill Run Trail. The Schuylkill River Trail is a paved multi-purpose trail extending from Philadelphia to Lower Providence Township, where it becomes the Perkiomen Trail and links to Upper Hanover Township. It extends along the entire southern border of Norristown, increasing pedestrian and non-motorized vehicle access to the County Seat. The Municipality views this trail as a significant recreational amenity and access point, and desires to improve accessibility to it, with connectivity to the other potential resources. The Saw Mill Run Trail is another opportunity that could be a linkage to potential resources.

In addition to local linkages, identification of other linkages on a regional level will help contribute to Norristown’s desire and vision for Municipal wide trail system that connects all the potential heritage resources. Efforts to create linkages to heritage resources could be prioritized into two categories: short-term and long-term priorities. Linkages in the short-term priorities category will be planned within the next two to five years, while the long-term priorities within five to ten years. Map B, below highlights some of these linkages and how they could be maximized upon for access potential heritage resources.

**MAP B – (Linkages)** [Page 40, figure 33](#), of the Norristown Open Space Plan, represents potential short term and long term linkages to resources, through the Norristown trail system.

**Marketing and Branding:** The marketing plan for the Norristown Heritage Action Plan is going to incorporate a number of activities that will allow for a real world experience for potential heritage tourists to experience Norristown through the lens of history and

culture. These activities as listed below will be developed with the help of a consultant, who will analyze what is currently in place in terms of successes and failures and how these can be built upon to make this a comprehensive experience:

- Art galleries and theaters;
- Historic sites and structures, communities and landmarks;
- Natural scenes and parks;
- Cultural events, festivals and fairs;
- Architectural and archaeological treasures.

The Municipality of Norristown is in the process of working on a Transit Oriented Development Study by Real Estate Strategies, of Paoli. The project will include an inventory and market analysis of key vacant and underutilized parcels in the downtown that are ripe for redevelopment, suggesting potential uses and reuses. Information on available commercial, office, retail and residential space in the target area will be developed and presented. Demographic and market information for Norristown and the immediate region will be presented. Information on incentive programs will be incorporated. Finally, several Requests for Proposals will be drafted for key redevelopment locations. The RFP will be used to market key vacant and underutilized properties in a format that is easy to convey the TOD vision for the downtown and provides site specific information that developers need to evaluate an investment opportunity.

A third component of the marketing initiative will be a focus on Norristown success stories and our rich heritage. There are a sizable number of private, semi-public and public businesses and key potential Heritage Resources that call Norristown home. Harnessing these assets through partnerships, will be a key part of the Norristown story that is frequently unrecognized both within the Municipality, but more importantly outside Norristown's borders.

Additionally, the Municipality in partnership with the County and Septa are completing a pedestrian gateway [concept plan](#), connecting the Norristown Transportation Center (NTC) to the downtown and the Montgomery County Courthouse. The concept features traffic calming designed to facilitate pedestrian traffic in this busy center of County

government and draw people from the NTC – and the Schuylkill River Trail – to the downtown.

Norristown plans to develop an interpretive heritage plan that will build on the ongoing marketing strategy study related to economic development and the attraction of visitors and new businesses into the community. Again this will entail working with a consultant to do an assessment of what is in place, whether it is working or not, and building on the successes of the existing marketing plan while learning from its failures so as to enhance heritage tourism. This process will also entail establishing both public and private partnerships with key players, and will involve the following:

- i) Heritage resources assessment which will analyze what already exists and what is needed
- ii) Interpretive plan that will include way-finding and signage systems in order to move tourists to places and services)
- iii) Local, regional and national Marketing and outreach planning
- iv) Branding and fabrication

The projected outcomes include the following:

- Build heritage attractions to enhance tourism and quality of life as well as promote sustainability.
- Create worthwhile initiatives that will increase tourism by using heritage attractions.
- Develop an organizational framework to “tap-into” the economic benefits of heritage preservation and tourism by linking resources to historic themes and a network of businesses, sites, structures, routes, trails, and recreation sites then marketing such sites to the broadest possible audience to achieve return on investment.

Norristown has an existing business development marketing plan that is made up of two tiers: The first target tier is tourist type visitors we want to attract to our town. We want them to attend events, visit the [Elmwood Park Zoo](#), and utilize our [bike trails](#) while contributing to the downtown economy. These are people that have never been to Norristown or even heard about the many activities we have to offer. We want to promote our diversity and many activities in our town. This tier will be expanded to

incorporate heritage destination sites and structures that will be highlighted once the analysis is completed by the consultant.

The second target tier is the business community. Norristown desires to establish itself as a business friendly town that welcomes new business and encourages the growth and success of our current business community while preserving its rich cultural history. We want them to know about the [Enterprise Zone](#) designated area, the [micro loans](#) available to Small Businesses and the [Historic Façade Program](#), and to also be aware of the affordable commercial properties that are available in Norristown. Again this tier will be expanded upon with the concept of applying heritage tourism as an economic development tool and the potential of Norristown being a heritage destination.

The following are some of the mediums that are currently in place and will be expanded upon as part of the marketing plan that is proposed:

1. Social media has been a true marketing success. Norristown has been able to engage followers with real time events, notifications and dialogue with them. The addition of Facebook, Twitter and You tube to the roster has been a way of staying in the forefront with technology. The following has steadily increased with more interactions, references, information exchange and gathering and this will be expanded upon as part of the Heritage tourism marketing strategy (see <http://www.norristown.org>).
2. Monthly Electronic newsletter highlighting current events, municipal news, business opportunities and information from partners will also be expanded on to incorporate the promotion of Norristown as a heritage destination. The analysis may reveal the need to expand this even further but for now, the monthly time frame is being recommended (see <http://www.norristown.org>).
3. Branding: Norristown recently revamped its look from the traditional blue and white to one with richer and more vibrant colors. The color scheme is a representation of our rich and diverse community, and as part of the analysis, Norristown will develop a logo, slogan and color scheme that incorporates aspects of its potential as a heritage destination.
4. How to do business guide: A revised guide has been developed and printed to include the micro loan program, enterprise zone and the SBC. The updated guide

also includes a current fee schedule and a clearer process for opening a business in Norristown.

5. A new and improved website was created to be both informative and to be used as a marketing tool by the Municipality (<http://www.norristown.org>). Features include the following:
  - a) An interactive Google maps for highlighting available properties and development projects and dining opportunities.
  - b) Dedicated pages to the Arts like the Avenue of the Arts, Recreational activities like the bike trail and Elmwood Park Zoo and dining out at the wide array of available ethnic eateries.
  - c) A town calendar highlighting council meetings, public hearings and community events.
  - d) A photo gallery and video page archiving past events to capture all that is Norristown.
  - e) A Spanish language option for the growing Latino community as a way to bridging a cultural and communication gap.

These aspects of the website will be enhanced upon to incorporate heritage tourism once an analysis is completed to determine the Municipality's viability as a heritage destination.

**Implementation:** Norristown's heritage offering needs will need to be well-conceived and executed prior to large-scale and expensive marketing endeavors related to heritage tourism. As a result, detailed planning is going to be critical and in order to fortify this process, an analysis will need to be completed by a consultant who will have a strategic push for potential heritage sites, structures and events. This is proposed to be done through the following mediums:

Online Media:

1. Online AD in the local newspaper;
2. Online AD on Yahoo and other search engine;
3. Facebook impressions with targeted audiences.

Print Media:

1. A *Norristown Heritage Destination Brochure* with a map to be developed together with SHRA.

Advertisements:

1. SEPTA line advertising;
2. Digital billboards

Television:

1. Telemundo local advertising;
2. Comcast Spotlight advertising.

USB:

1. Promotional videos, power points and ads can be loaded on to a USB drive and given to targeted audiences.

Deliverables:

1. More views, likes and followers on social media. Also more engagement with Q & A and photo contests.
2. Ads targeted towards potential heritage tourists by utilizing visitor bureaus and various chambers in the region.
3. USB and cell phone scanning technology distribution to potential investors.

Promotion Strategy:

1. Submit articles in local outlets like the local online media and local newspaper.
2. Release press releases on a consistent basis.
3. Update the Website as often as possible.
4. More engagement on the social media sites.
5. An electronic newsletter for business only.
6. Once promotional videos are ready they can be used not only on our website and social media but also as a tool to send to potential investors and tourists.
7. In partnership with the owners, establish historic plaques that can be utilized to memorialize historic sites, including one that specifically identifies Norristown.

## MANAGING AND IMPROVING

**Heritage Management Platform:** The Municipality of Norristown Planning Department will be the initial primary lead on this plan, and hopes to expand the process to include additional stakeholders in the management process, once an analysis is completed by a heritage consultant. The managing and administration of this plan may ultimately end up being a public/private partnership. As part of the funding of this process, the consultant will also be charged with identifying funding sources for efforts that include the below as part of the Heritage Action Plan and program:

1. Building partnership consensus to enable implementation;
2. Prioritizing heritage resources to generate significant private investment; and
3. Seeking to achieve sustainability through public and private partnerships.

Once determined, the main role of the management entity will be to focus on four areas related to implementation. These four areas include: 1) oversight and governance; 2) partnership maintenance and development; 3) program and project implementation; and 4) ongoing operations and management. Management will be critical since creating benefits through the heritage program will be the driving economic force for the Action Plan. This will involve the following actions:

- Building effective partnerships, which will be the engine that will make the Heritage Area work and succeed. This will also include leveraging resources for mutual benefits.
- Obtaining government support, including financial and technical assistance, for local heritage initiatives.
- Building capacity by adding value to existing heritage offerings, while encouraging the creation of new offerings.
- Encouraging official and grassroots support for the plan and program.
- Promoting existing heritage-related businesses and the creation of new ones in the private sector.
- Developing heritage tourism products that maintain a viable experience, relying on resources and the stories behind those resources. This will entail focusing on the

sustainability and capacity of heritage tourism products so that marketing organizations partnering with Norristown will have a diverse product to market to consumers and in so doing, help improve the general quality of life for Norristown residents.

- Sustaining community identity in the Heritage Area to showcase local offerings and distinct resources. Resources, projects, attractions, and events are critical in the process of helping to highlight and celebrate the community's unique history and culture and share it with visitors.

**Project Selection Criteria:** As part of the programming for projects, Norristown will, with the help of a consultant, consider criteria such as whether the project will increase the tourism benefits, whether the project will create community and/or regional benefits, and also if the projects will be able to leverage private investments. These aspects will be critical and formative in leading up to the following programming aspects:

- Effective Resource Designation: Creating an area with well defined historic and cultural sites and structures that are or may be eligible for historic listing, tax credits, and other benefits. This process includes defining non-historic structures that may be critical for enhancing heritage tourism (i.e. modern visitor's centers, museums, businesses etc. that may not be located in an historic building).
- Public Investment: Developing criteria to establish a sound process for choosing projects now and in the future to meet the specific needs of the community and public and private interests.
- Private Investment: Creating an area with a high potential to leverage private investment. Private entities also must be prepared to commit resources to preservation and tourism development.
- Ongoing Program Incentives: Incentivizing through loans, grants, tax credits, and other benefits, whereby programs must be capable of producing measurable preservation and economic development returns to funding agencies; a Return on Investment.
- Leveraged Funding: Overlapping areas of focus to the maximum extent possible with other local, state, and federal "revitalization" designations to leverage funding. These areas of focus as laid out in the plan include the Historic District, the Elm Street area designation, the Enterprise Zone, and the Keystone Opportunity Zone.

- Data Collection for Monitoring and Improvements: Configuring an area to facilitate the collection of performance measurement.

**Monitoring Heritage Program Success:** Monitoring the success of the Heritage program is just as important as managing of the heritage program. On-the-ground success can be measured by the completion of projects both capital and non-capital. In particular, Norristown will ensure that projects are capable of generating heritage tourism at a minimum. This means ensuring that resources will be open to the public, can be easily accessed, and will add attractions to the heritage experience. Projects will be gauged against the following criteria:

1. Communications: This includes the image/brand for marketing and whether such a project(s) adds value to communications for outside visitors such as improved signage, way-finding mechanisms (maps, signs, etc.), kiosks, brochures, decals, marketing products, hospitality training etc.
2. Circulation: This means providing the means and ways to access attractions and move people, goods, and services in a comfortable manner. This may include hiking and biking trails, water trails, highways and roadway improvements, parking, convenient access to shopping through providing crosswalks at all signalized intersections.
3. Destination Attractions: This includes aesthetic improvements as well as increasing amenities and attractions including museums, interpretive centers, discovery and visitor centers, architectural treasures, archeological sites, historic downtown shopping, and most important visitor facilities and services such as bathrooms, a place to eat and sleep.

The Municipality intends to monitor the heritage program by including the following performance measures:

- Employment Indicators: Developing a system that provides for the total number of jobs at the inception of the first year Heritage Area and monitoring of these indicators for reporting after Year one.
- Accommodations: Determining local hotel, motel, bed and breakfast taxes etc. collected. Heritage partners will work with local hotels, motels, B&B's, inns, etc. to acquire visitation statistics, including length of stay. This will be accomplished

through partnerships or periodic surveys and polling. Any other detailed information on user habits and preferences that can be acquired also is recommended.

- Tourism Impacts: Collecting general visitation statistics including visitor profiles, admission and amusement taxes collected, museum visits, events, parks and recreation area site visits, etc. Information will be collected every three or five years. This type of report is useful to gauge tourism trends and patterns. The first study will act as a baseline for future studies.
- Purchases and Sales: Acquire local business sales data through partnerships with the private sector.
- Construction Activities: Obtain construction data for building permits issued. The more important information is to gauge which ones were for rehabilitation, restoration, and/or adaptive reuse efforts.
- Private Sector Business/Job Creation: Obtain business data from state and economic development entities and agencies operating in the area. This will include the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce and the Latino Chamber of Commerce, the Norristown Business Association and the West Marshall Street Merchants Association. With the help of a consultant, Norristown will distinguish heritage-related businesses, specifically those that are reusing or are located in historic buildings.
- Interpretation and Education: Gauging interpretive venues to determine existing and new facilities and offerings for interpretation and education.
- Protected Resources: Monitoring preservation activities in the Heritage Area requires partnerships with government, preservation and conservation organizations, and businesses and property owners. Steps toward providing protection will not only include the continued rehabilitation or restoration of historic sites and structures but also the development of additional local plans, policies, processes, and regulations that facilitate heritage preservation and adaptive reuse. This will include expanding on the existing design guidelines for those structures that are currently in the Historic Architectural Review Board (HARB) district to include heritage sites and structures.
- Event Attendance and Economic Impacts: Monitor events in Norristown to acquire statistics for visitation and economic impact in order to plot future program improvements and enhancements.

## IMPLEMENTATION

Norristown needs to develop a series of plans related to heritage tourism and infrastructure prior to initiating the Municipality's program. This includes the following:

1. A full heritage resources and tourism readiness assessment study, including a detailed analysis of properties and structures that can be used with heritage tourism. This plan will include public, private, and semi-public establishments (i.e. businesses, museums, staging centers, parks and recreation areas, residential streetscapes etc.). The study will highlight issues and opportunities for implementation, including housing, commercial façades and streetscapes, and development related components.
2. An Interpretive/marketing analysis for tourism, including advertising, will be prepared, once heritage resources have been studied and a full inventory is available. This plan will focus on cohesively linking all resources to major municipal assets and public/private service offerings. This plan also will uncover the Municipality's core story, themes, and key linkages. Interpretive information will be incorporated into existing marketing plans and mechanisms. Heritage products will be developed around the Interpretive and Marketing Plans.

In this regard, the Municipality of Norristown intends to put out a Request for Proposals (RFP) for a professional consultant with experience in developing Heritage tourism in other communities. This consultant will be charged with working on an assessment of the resources that exist in Norristown as highlighted in this Action Plan and establishing how these resources can be harnessed, made accessible to the public, marketing of these assets through a more detailed interpretive and marketing plan through branding, and helping make Norristown become a heritage destination.

**Recommendations/Actions:** In an effort to develop a successful Heritage Action Plan, this document lays out a foundation that can be built upon based on the following implementation actions and recommendations, with the ultimate goal being that of Norristown becoming a heritage destination:

Years 1 – 3 (2014 to 2017)

1. Seek official approval of the Heritage Action Plan and Program from Municipal officials, partners, and the Schuylkill River National Heritage Area and Greenway (SRHA).
2. Work with a local consultant to start the process of bringing all the potential partners together in an effort to ignite excitement about heritage tourism and promote Norristown as a potential heritage destination. Convene a workshop with the stakeholders, and make them aware of the Heritage Action Plan and Program in order to better coordinate projects, activities, and events and coordinate efforts, and implementation of the Heritage Action Plan and Program. Partnerships include a sizable number of private, semi-public and public businesses and key potential Heritage Resources that call Norristown home. Harnessing these assets through partnerships, will be a key part of the Norristown story that is frequently unrecognized both within the Municipality, but more importantly outside Norristown's borders. A steering committee will be formed to guide the heritage planning efforts.
3. Hire a professional consultant to establish a needs analysis of the highlighted potential heritage resources and establish how the Municipality can harness them to its advantage, making Norristown a heritage destination. This study will include a historic district boundary analysis as part of the process. It also will include initiating a historic plaque program, while commemorating the Underground Railroad and other similar historic resources.
4. Hire a professional consultant to develop an interpretive plan for heritage resources once a clear inventory is established. The project will entail developing an interpretive plan that will drive the process while opening these resources up for public access through actual linkages. Stories, themes, and products will be developed during this project. Following the interpretive plan, marketing plans will be updated to include heritage tourism.

5. Complete the updates to the Municipality of Norristown's Way-finding Signage System so as to provide a directional and destination guide to aid visitors, trail users, tourists and cultural organizations following the heritage plan development. This project will also assist organizations with cohesive branding and marketing of existing and potential assets.
6. Seek assistance and funding to create a tour brochure for users of the trail along the Schuylkill River directing them to the different assets in Norristown, in both paper and electronic application formats. This will enable everyone to have "then and now" interpretive information and photography about Norristown's Historic District and the places that link the past with the present
7. Continue the partnership between the Norristown Historical Society and the Municipality of Norristown and other groups and organizations to participate in initiatives and projects that showcase the community's resources and assets.
8. Preserve heritage resources in Norristown by working with the Norristown Preservation Society, the Norristown Historic Architectural Review Board, and other stakeholders.
9. Continue working on improving the various issues facing the downtown historic district including access, vacancies, and parking.
10. Continue working with the Arts Council and all the other cultural and community partners in Norristown to develop a "Community Calendar" so that each organization's activities and events are coordinated, supported, and adequately publicized by other partner organizations.
11. Continue infrastructure improvements to the existing parks and playgrounds, and creation of linkages and signage of the trail systems that exist in these parks that will link these resources together and to some of the other regional trails, specifically the Schuylkill River trail.
12. Coordinate electronic publicity resources with the various organizations within Norristown so that activities and special events will be made known to the public

utilizing the existing resources that include the electronic billboards, Comcast and Verizon local TV channels, and the Norristown Municipal website.

13. Continue working with partners in the Norristown Community, to promote events, festivals, and activities related to heritage tourism, where and when appropriate.
14. Partner with the Norristown Hispanic Business Association and the Norristown Business Association in creating maintaining and participating in a First Friday Program.
15. Consider all programs and projects that will assist the Municipality of Norristown to expand its outreach and marketing potential. This includes further integrating the Heritage Plan and Program into marketing for heritage tourism.

At the end of this three-year period, Norristown will re-evaluate the Heritage Plan and Program. This will be part of the periodic review and update to the Plan to reflect new realities and opportunities.

## APPENDICES

<http://www.city-data.com/city/Norristown-Pennsylvania.html>

[http://norristown.org/discover-norristown/our-history \(copyright 2010\)](http://norristown.org/discover-norristown/our-history)

[Norristown Economic Revitalization Strategy Updated 2009](#)

[Norristown Open Space Plan, 2005](#)

[Norristown Comprehensive Plan, 2010](#)

[Norristown Riverfront Master Plan](#)

[Dekalb Street Two Way Study](#)

[The Montgomery County Cultural Center](#)

[The Iron Age Theatre](#)

[Theatre Horizon](#)

[The Norristown Arts Hill](#)

[The Lafayette Street Land Use study brochure](#)

[Norristown Historic Façade Program](#)

<http://norristown.org/uploads/building-code-enforcement/harbdistrictmap.pdf>

[Build your business here](#)

[Business and Community videos](#)

[Norristown Transportation Center Concept Plan](#)

[Enterprise Zone](#)

[Micro Loan Financing](#)

[Norristown Transportation Center Intermodal study and concept plan](#)

[Elmwood Park Zoo](#)

[Norristown Schuylkill River Trail Head](#)

[The Norristown Preservation Society](#)

[Historical society of Montgomery County](#)

[The Milner Report: Survey and Design Guidelines for Norristown, PA](#)

