

Community Heart & Soul®

— Guided by what matters most —

UPPER CHICHESTER, PENNSYLVANIA

POPULATION:
17,000

CHALLENGE:
Economic
development

FOCUS:
Community
identity and sense
of place

KEY TOOL:
Community
summits

Located in southeastern Pennsylvania, Upper Chichester Township is a quiet suburban community with a diverse population. Its residents enjoy short commutes to Philadelphia and Wilmington, as well as easy access to the many amenities of the greater Philadelphia area. Small businesses line the main roads offering opportunities for shopping, dining, and services. Community Heart & Soul provided a framework for engaging residents, strengthening community networks, and creating a shared vision for the township's future—one that everyone in the township can take pride in.

Upper Chichester “by the numbers”:

- Attended and/or hosted over 22 events and collected over 1,000 data points.
 - Interviewed over 400 Upper Chichester residents and business partners about what they love about the township and how to make it even better.
 - Over 100 participants attended a community-driven summit to draft the seven Upper Chichester Heart & Soul Value Statements.
 - Nine virtual “Chi Chats” hosted during the COVID-19 pandemic to engage residents in developing a community action plan.
- 30 Action Ideas generated reflecting what matters most to those who live, work, play, and worship in Upper Chichester Township.
 - Upper Chichester Board of Commissioners adopted the seven Upper Chichester Heart & Soul Value Statements and added the Community Report as an addendum to the Township Comprehensive Plan.

Local conditions:

In 2018, Upper Chichester Township sought to develop its commercial corridors while preserving its historic architecture, distinctive neighborhoods, and agricultural roots. Recognizing the need for stronger community connections and a shared vision for the future, township leaders and residents adopted Community Heart & Soul. This initiative aimed to unite various groups, including those often underrepresented, and address challenges like ensuring inclusivity and honoring the township's heritage. The timing was right to foster a community identity and strengthen the sense of place. Community Heart & Soul presented an opportunity to create a unified vision that respected the township's unique character.

Partnership:

Many local and state organizations contributed to the success of Upper Chichester Heart & Soul including Upper Chichester Township government and boards, the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, Community Action Agency of Delaware County, Upper Chichester Library, Upper Chichester Township Firehouses/EMT and Police, Chichester School District, Rotary, Chichester Business Association, the historical society, and local businesses.

PA Humanities in partnership with the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development bestowed a combined \$65,000 in grants to support Upper Chichester Heart & Soul. Upper

Chichester is part of a regional growing network of Pennsylvania towns called PA Heart & Soul, organized and supported by PA Humanities.

Volunteer and Community Response:

A small group of committed residents quickly grew into a proactive cross-section of residents that represented the diverse demographic of the Upper Chichester community. The Upper Chichester Heart & Soul team worked diligently to engage residents of all ages and backgrounds. For example, to reach students, the team hosted a “What Matters Most” contest for Upper Chi School District students and teachers. When the COVID-19 pandemic shut down occurred, Upper Chichester Heart & Soul used virtual “Chi Chat’s” to continue to engage residents.

Heart & Soul Outcomes:

In 2022 Upper Chichester Township Commissioners adopted the Upper Chichester Heart & Soul value statements as the guiding principles for decision-making within the township. This framework continues to be used during the planning process and has already led to positive outcomes:

- Upper Chichester Township was awarded a Governor's Award for Local Government Excellence in 2023 signifying their commitment to actively involving residents in the local decision-making processes through the efforts of the Community Heart & Soul program.
- Upper Chichester Township developed the Boothwyn Downtown Center plan as well as several other neighborhood plans using Heart & Soul principles for engaging the community.
- Board of Commissioners approved the Township's very first Master Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan (PROS) and funding has been secured to begin implementation.
- Upper Chichester Library partnered with the Township and is actively raising funds to repurpose an old firehouse, which will serve as the community’s first library to be part of the Delaware County Library System.
- Upper Chichester Township established a process to permit food trucks in response to community feedback about the need for more dining options.
- In 2024 the Chichester Heart & Soul organization was established to officially begin Phase 4 of the Heart & Soul process, “Take Action”. Chichester Heart & Soul hosts two neighborhood clean-up days per year satisfying one of the action items in the community report.

