

**CHESTER
CITY
VISION
2000**

Section Two
General Community



Comprehensive Plan & Economic Development Strategy 1994

SECTION TWO

GENERAL COMMUNITY

HISTORY

Chester has experienced the exuberance and the agony of each of the three stages of development - growth, stabilization, and decline. During the last 100 years, Chester has evolved from a boom town, one of the nation's foremost shipbuilding centers and major employment center, to a city that is now listed as one of the most distressed cities in the nation.

Originally called Upland, Chester was given its current name by William Penn in 1682. Chester, currently the only city in Delaware County, was incorporated as a city in 1866. For most of the next century, Chester experienced steady population growth fueled by employment growth in the shipbuilding, textile, and manufacturing industries. By 1870 Chester was considered one of the nation's greatest shipbuilding areas.

During the early 1900's, Chester experienced its first major growth period stimulated by World War I. The population grew significantly from 38,000 in 1910 to 58,000 in 1920 as people moved into the city to fill the many jobs generated by the war. Chester manufacturers produced oil, tools, engines,

and steel. The city's thirty textile mills led the area in value of production. Chester was on its way to becoming the manufacturing and employment center for Delaware County. The city had attracted such industries as Scott Paper, Sun Oil Company, Baldwin Locomotive, Ford Motor Company and numerous other industries.

The rapid expansion of Chester's industrial base and the need for workers to support this growth provided many jobs in Chester City and vicinity. The job growth also created a demand for housing and other services. Houses were built rapidly and in close proximity to the large manufacturing buildings and highways. Houses in fact were intermingled with industry and formed a typical land use pattern that was common for this time period.

Stores and commercial buildings were built at street intersections along major highways to serve the nearby residents. A major retail area including a variety of commercial uses, department stores and amusement establishments was developed in an area commonly known as "downtown". The downtown area became the major shopping district not only for city residents but for residents in adjacent communities. While this growth of industrial

and commercial activity and construction of small houses were taking place in the southern part of the city and close to the river, there was another part of the city that was also being developed, a more affluent area north of Ninth street and east of Edgmont. Houses here were larger and located on bigger lots, and there was a clear separation between residential and non-residential uses.

After this initial growth and during the depression years, economic development activity stabilized. Between 1920 and 1940, the city gained only 1255 new residents or an increase of 0.2 percent. Manufacturing employment dropped significantly and Chester as well as the rest of the country was experiencing lean times.

World War II, however, stimulated a second period of growth. The number of manufacturing jobs increased and the demand for more housing grew. Throughout this industrial growth spurt, the city's housing stock was stretched to accommodate a large part of the expanded labor force generated by new construction and conversion. Demand for houses was greater than supply and in many cases overcrowding was evident. The city's available land for development had all but disappeared.

By 1950, Chester had peaked with a population of 66,039 persons. While Chester was becoming fully developed the adjacent suburban communities became more physically accessible as highways were being improved and new single family homes were being built. Delaware County was in a major growth spurt as urban sprawl was spreading very rapidly.

In the mid 1950s, Chester began its decline, and many social and economic characteristics were changing faster than the city could adjust. The first major change was

that the buildings and manufacturing equipment became old and obsolete and caused many industries to close. Then, over the next three decades 20,000 persons migrated out of the city. In 1961, Ford Motor Company, a major employer, closed its operation and moved out of the city. Many other major industries followed. In the 1960s and into the 1970s, other changes became noticeable, including a fundamental restructuring of the nation's economy from manufacturing to a service orientation. While other areas began to make the necessary transition to a service base, many old manufacturing areas like Chester had a more difficult time adjusting to the change. The riverfront and other industrial areas in Chester began to deteriorate and many jobs were lost. The economic realignments are still being played out and continue to have a devastating impact on Chester's economy and on the people who live in the city.

Another noticeable change was in the city's population composition. The city experienced a change in racial composition at an unprecedented rate, due to a large out-migration of the white population. The city's minority population increased from 21,274 in 1960 to 26,924 in 1990. The number of whites decreased from 42,384 to 13,045 during the same period, which means 69.2 percent of the white population left Chester, while the minority population grew 26.5 percent or just over 1 percent each year. At the same time the minority population was increasing, the number of jobs decreased. From 1972 to 1982 employment within the city decreased by 27.4 percent.

From 1960 to 1990, the city also experienced a commercial decline. As the white population moved out to find better jobs and newer housing, the stores and amusement establishments closed and moved

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From 1960 to 1990, the city also experienced a commercial decline. As the white population moved out to find better jobs and newer housing, the stores and amusement establishments closed and moved

from the downtown area. This action created vacant and boarded up commercial buildings which caused considerable deterioration to the downtown area with a negative impact on the city's real estate.

As we move into the 1990s, the population is predominantly black and the city of Chester is still a city combating many problems. But, despite the present situation, Chester continues to possess many of the attributes that made it desirable in the early part of the century. Chester's location is ideal for growth and expansion of new businesses in the region. It has existing infrastructure, a skilled and semi-skilled labor force, direct and indirect access to major transportation arteries and to interstate highway systems, including I-95, I-476 the Commodore Barry Bridge, Route 322 and linkage to both the Pennsylvania and New Jersey Turnpike. The city is served by two major railroad lines and other commuter bus and train lines. The Delaware River offers access to cargo ships and other water related opportunities. The Philadelphia International Airport is only minutes away. Few cities in this region offer such an advantageous location.

Culturally, the city is rich with history and includes many significant facts and events: in 1682 William Penn named this settlement Chester; Pennsylvania's first court was held in Chester and the court house is still standing; the first National Bank in the county was located in Chester; the city was a critical section of the underground railroad for run away slaves; and, it is the home of the college attended by Nobel Peace Prize recipient, the late Martin Luther King, Jr. But beyond these attributes, Chester has great strengths and opportunities. Scott Paper Company, Dee Paper Company, Fidelity Bank, Medfords' food products and many other successful com-

panies have reinvested millions of dollars in the community. Widener University is a major learning institution and provides many resources for community use. But most of all, the strength of Chester lies in the attitudes and desires of the many residents and organizations developing a vision and seeking ways to improve the standards of living for all of those who work and live in Chester.

GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION

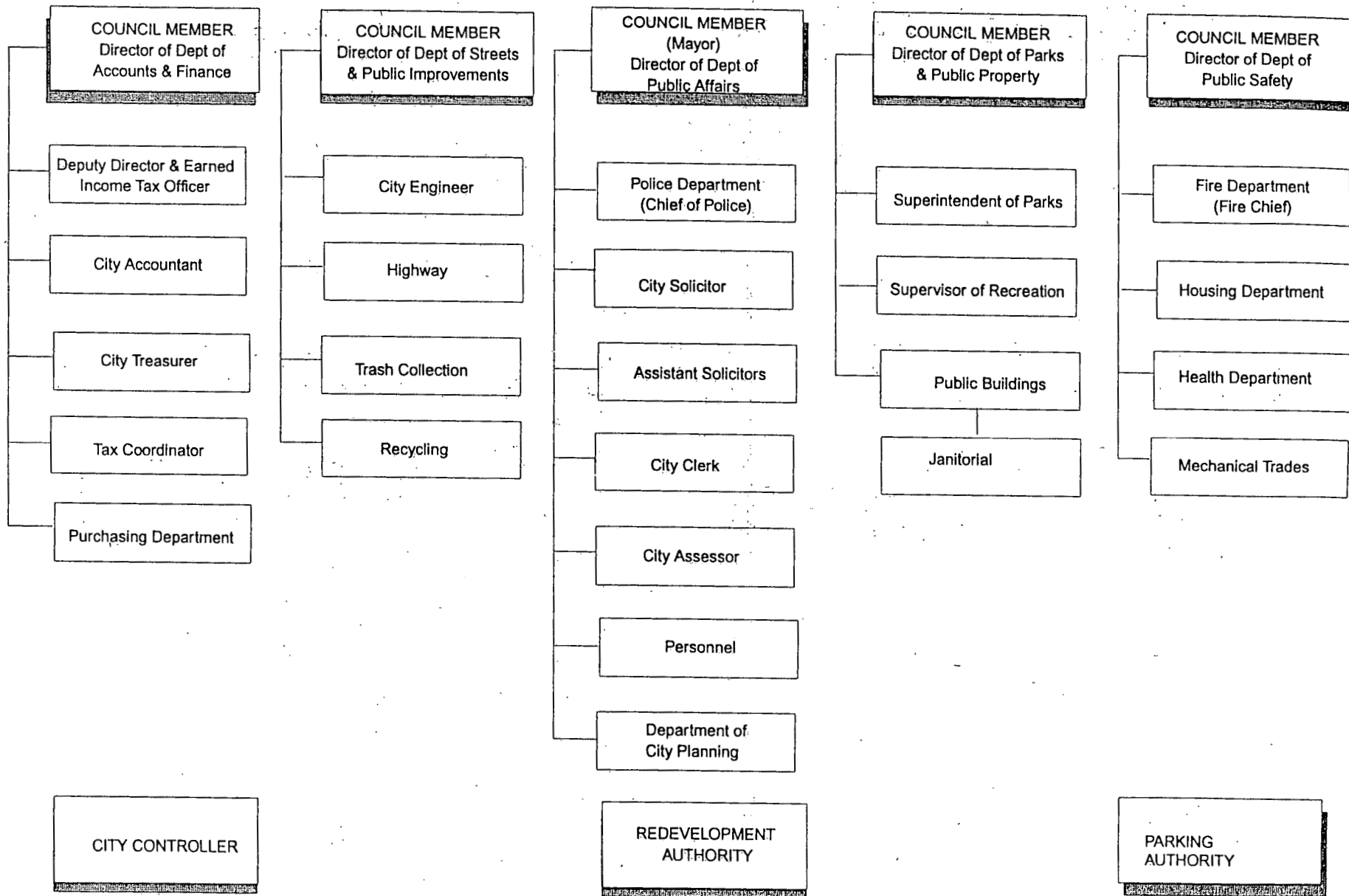
Chester City, a Third Class City, was approved by the citizens on April 22, 1980 as a Home Rule Charter Community. Under the Home Rule form of government, the city council has been given all the legislative powers to create ordinances, rules and regulations so the city can provide for the health, safety and well-being of its citizens.

The city council consists of a five member council which is elected at large to serve for four year staggered terms. One council member is elected under the title of mayor. The mayor presides at the city council meetings and has full voting rights. The council holds regular public meetings on the second and fourth Thursday of the month.

The council, by resolution has had prepared an Administrative Code which provides for the administrative organization of the city government. The Code would allow the council members to serve as department heads for the five municipal departments. However, the Code has yet to be officially adopted by council.

Figure GC-1 shows the organizational structure of the city.

CITY OF CHESTER ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANIZATION



SOURCE: Chester City Solicitor

PREPARED BY: RDC INSTITUTE, INC.

FIGURE GC-1

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Chester city during the last three decades has experienced a decline in housing and population. Because of less industry, vanishing jobs, and a diminishing tax base the social ills of an urban area have become more visible. Therefore, it has become increasingly important for those individuals involved in programs for housing, community facilities, and economic development to have accurate information about the existing conditions of their environment. Accurate knowledge of the city's population and housing characteristics is important in assessing the city's needs and for planning improvement and development programs. Listed below is the current data identifying the existing conditions related to the city's demographics.

THE POPULATION

There are approximately 8,720 persons per sq. mile living in Chester. Although Chester is not the most densely populated community in Delaware County, it is by far more densely populated than the riverfront corridor communities and Delaware County as a whole. Table GC-1 presents a breakdown of persons per square mile and persons per square acre by riverfront communities and Delaware County as a whole.

The comparative growth rate in population from 1900 to 1990 for Chester city, the six municipality riverfront corridor group (1) surrounding Chester and Delaware County as a whole is indicated in Table GC-2. As shown, Chester city's population for 1990 is 41,856 persons, a decline of 8.6 percent from its 1980 population. During the same period, the riverfront corridor municipali-

TABLE GC-1
CHESTER CITY & VICINITY
POPULATION DENSITY

Municipality	1990	1980	Square Miles	Acres	1990	1990
	Persons	Persons			Persons Per Sq. Mi.	Persons Per Acre
Chester City	41,856	45,794	4.77	3,053	8,775	13.71
Riverfront Corridor	46,532	49,095	14.85	9,503	3,133	4.90
Eddystone	2,446	2,555	0.96	614	2,548	3.98
Lower Chichester	3,660	3,784	1.06	678	3,453	5.40
Marcus Hook	2,546	2,638	1.14	730	2,233	3.49
Ridley Twp	31,169	33,771	5.18	3,315	6,017	9.40
Tinicum	4,440	4,291	5.53	3,539	803	1.25
Trainer	2,271	2,056	0.98	627	2,317	3.62
Delaware County	547,651	565,023	184.43	118,035	2,969	4.64

SOURCE: 1990 Census of Population and Housing,

Prepared By: RDC Institute, Inc.

ties and Delaware County as a whole declined in population by 5.2 percent and 1.3 percent respectively. This decrease in Delaware County was a result of several factors. They are:

- Delaware County has little available land for new residential development.
- Available vacant land is zoned for low density development.
- The number of households containing a single person increased.

The population of Chester peaked in 1950 at 66,039 persons. During the next three decades, from 1960 to 1990, the city's population declined to a little over 41,000, a loss of 34 percent. This loss was considerably higher than the rate of population loss

for the riverfront corridor (12.25 %) and Delaware County as whole (1%). The decline in Chester's total population is attributable to its existing conditions, including the closing and relocation of city businesses and industries, especially during the 1960s and 1970s. Simply stated, many residents left the city for better job opportunities and newer housing in more urbane surroundings.

While Chester had the largest decline (8.6%), other municipalities in the corridor had declines ranging from a low of 3.3 percent to a high of 7.7 percent. Table GC-3 is presented in order to show how Chester's population trend relates to other riverfront communities.

TABLE GC-2
CHESTER CITY & VICINITY
POPULATION GROWTH
1900 - 1990

YEAR	CHESTER CITY		RIVERFRONT CORRIDOR		DELAWARE CO.	
	NO.	% Change	NO.	% Change	NO.	% Change
1900	33,988	-	5,855	-	94,762	-
1910	38,537	13.4	8,070	37.8	117,906	24.4
1920	58,030	50.6	19,784	145.2	173,084	46.8
1930	59,164	2.0	24,358	23.1	280,264	61.9
1940	59,285	0.2	23,873	-2.0	310,756	10.0
1950	66,039	11.4	34,322	43.7	414,234	33.3
1960	63,658	-3.6	53,236	55.1	553,154	33.5
1970	56,331	-11.5	56,083	5.4	603,456	9.1
1980	45,794	-18.7	49,095	-12.5	555,023	-8.0
1990	41,856	-8.6	46,532	-5.2	547,651	-1.3

SOURCE: U.S. Decennial of Population
1990 Census of Population & Housing

PREPARED BY: RDC Institute, Inc.

TABLE GC-3
CHESTER CITY & VICINITY
POPULATION TRENDS (1980 - 1990)

AREA	1980	1990	% Change
Chester City	45,794	41,856	-8.6%
Riverfront Corridor	49,095	46,532	-5.2%
Eddystone	2,555	2,446	-4.3%
Lower Chichester	3,784	3,660	-3.3%
Marcus Hook	2,638	2,546	3.5%
Ridley Twp	33,771	31,169	-7.7%
Tinicum	4,291	4,440	3.5%
Trainer	2,056	2,271	10.5%
Delaware County	555,023	547,651	

SOURCE: 1990 Census of Population and Housing

PREPARED BY: RDC Institute, Inc.

(1) For comparative purposes we have formed a municipal riverfront corridor group. This group consists of six (6) municipalities that either have frontage on the Delaware River, are bisected by I-95 or have direct access to Rt. 291. This riverfront corridor group consists of Eddystone Boro., Lower Chichester Twp., Marcus Hook Boro., Ridley Twp., Tinicum Twp., and Trainer Boro.

TABLE GC-4
CHESTER CITY & VICINITY
AGE DISTRIBUTION 1990

AREA	TOTAL	Under 5	Percent	5-17	Percent	18-64	Percent	65+	Percent
Chester City	41,856	3,892	9.30	7,861	18.78	24,304	58.07	5,799	13.85
Riverfront Corridor	46,532	3,414	7.34	7,479	16.07	28,442	60.70	7,197	15.47
Eddystone	2,446	175	7.15	399	16.31	1,437	58.75	435	17.78
Lower Chichester	3,660	332	9.07	739	20.19	2,211	60.41	378	10.33
Marcus Hook	2,546	232	9.11	452	17.75	1,525	59.90	337	13.24
Ridley Twp	31,169	2,190	7.03	4,833	15.51	19,110	61.31	5,036	16.16
Tinicum	4,440	305	6.87	660	14.86	2,816	63.42	695	14.84
Trainer	2,271	180	7.93	396	17.44	1,343	59.14	352	15.50
Delaware Co.	547,651	382,266	6.99	88,344	16.13	336,109	61.37	84,932	15.51

SOURCE: 1990 Census of Population & Housing

PREPARED BY: RDC Institute, Inc.

AGE

The age distribution of Chester city's population is significant, particularly in determining the types of municipal facilities and services needed to meet the needs of the city's residents. Since the city currently has an unemployment rate of 8.5 percent which is relatively high compared to the county's 6.5 percent (based on December 1992, figures), it is important to know the number of new persons entering the labor market.

Chester city's median age is 30.4 years which is less than Delaware County as whole which is 34.6 years. Usually, those municipalities which were the first to be developed were the ones which tend to have the greatest proportion of senior citizens. Municipalities which experienced growth usually have a younger population with fewer senior citizens. In Chester's case, though Chester is an old and established community, it had a higher percentage of younger population with fewer senior citizens. In addition, Chester has a large quantity of public housing, housing with low rents and housing with moderate to low sales prices — these factors tend to attract families with younger children.

The age bracket between 18 and 64 is the working age group and has the greatest impact on the city in terms of municipal services and facilities. The vast majority of Chester's population is in this age bracket. In 1990 there were 24,304 persons or 58 percent of Chester's population in the 18 to 64 age bracket.

Also, compared to Delaware County and the other riverfront communities, Chester in 1990 had a higher percentage of residents in the under 5 (9.30%) and 15-17

(18.7%) age brackets and a smaller percentage of residents older than 65 (Table GC-4). The implication of such a trend is that while services and facilities for the older population should not be neglected, a primary emphasis of city efforts should be directed to working age population and to the city's youth.

RACE

During the period 1960-1990, the racial composition of the population shifted from largely white to predominantly black, with this racial transition most pronounced in the area south of I-95. The majority of the white population lives in the area north of I-95, east of Rt. 352 where the housing and neighborhoods are more stable. From 1960-1990, the white population decreased by more than 67 percent while the black population increased by 22 percent. This trend has decreased the white population from 42,384 persons (more than the city's current population) in 1960 to 13,392 in 1990. The black population increased from 21,208 persons in 1960 to 27,276 persons in 1990. The Hispanic and Asian population increased slightly and now account for 4% of the city's population. Table GC-5 illustrates the racial composition in more detail.

Currently, Chester has a higher percentage of blacks (64%) than other riverfront communities (2.8%) and the county as a whole (11%). Although there is a greater dispersal of racial minorities in the county in 1990 than in 1980, there still is a greater concentration of blacks in Chester than in any other municipality in the county. Historically, blacks and other minorities have located in urban areas where the employment opportunities are more diverse and housing is more affordable.

EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

It was reported in December of 1992 by the Department of Labor and Industry that Chester city had an unemployment rate of 8.5 percent compared to 6.5 percent for Delaware County as a whole and 7.3 percent for the state of Pennsylvania. Although the economy seems to be recovering, the employment situation in Chester still remains sluggish and unemployment rates are higher than in adjacent communities.

The two major occupations for residents in the city in 1990 (as shown in Table GC-6) were administrative support including clerical and service type occupations. The

administrative support category showed a 21 percent increase over the 1980 figures. While service type occupations continue to be a major occupation for Chester residents, the city experienced a 2.7 percent decrease in the number of residents employed in this field between 1980 and 1990. Other significant increases for local residents occurred in Professional specialty (41.5%), Executive, Managerial (42%), Sales (27.9%) and Transportation (19%).

The largest occupational loss for Chester residents was private household occupations. These occupations including gardeners, maids and chauffeurs, declined by approximately 46 percent. Other significant losses were machine operators (45%), precision production (22.8%) and handlers,

TABLE GC-5
CHESTER CITY & VICINITY
RACIAL COMPOSITION 1990

AREA	TOTAL	WHITE	Percent	BLACK	Percent	HISPANIC	Percent	OTHER	Percent
Chester City	41,856	13,045	31.17	26,924	64.33	1,579	3.77	308	.74
Riverfront									
Corridor	46,532	44,537	95.71	1,324	2.85	330	.71	341	.73
Eddystone	2,446	2,410	98.53	7	.29	23	.94	6	.25
Lower Chichester	3,660	3,538	96.67	71	1.94	48	1.31	3	.08
Marcus Hook	2,546	2,390	93.87	120	4.71	20	.79	16	.63
Ridley Twp	31,169	29,679	95.22	1,005	31.71	194	.62	291	.93
Tinicum	4,440	4,398	99.05	4	.09	16	.36	22	.50
Trainer	2,271	2,122	93.44	114	5.15	29	1.28	3	.13
Delaware Co.	547,651	470,258	85.87	60,688	11.08	5,998	1.10	10,707	1.96

SOURCE: 1990 Census of Population & Housing

PREPARED BY: RDC Institute, Inc.

helpers and laborers (29%). These categories describe the kind of work the person does on a job. The Chester residents with these occupations may not be entirely employed by industries located in Chester City. Thus, Chester residents employed, 16 years and older, declined by 1.2 percent between 1980 and 1990 for the various occupations listed in Table GC-6. These instabilities in Chester's residents occupations are a reflection of not only local, but national economic changes, including a

national trend of major employment opportunities shifting from the manufacturing sector to the service sector. Further discussion of Chester's employment situation can be found in the Economic Development Strategy.

In terms of educational characteristics, in 1990 62.2 percent of Chester's residents graduated from high school, while 7.7 percent graduated from college with a bachelor's degree or higher. This is an increase over 1980 in which 49.1 percent graduated

TABLE GC-6

CHESTER CITY

OCCUPATIONS (1980 - 1990)

(Residents Employed 16 years and older)

OCCUPATION	1980	1990	% Change
Executive, administrative, and managerial	664	945	42%
Professional specialty	1185	1677	41.5%
Technicians and related support	485	547	12.7%
Sales occupations	816	1044	27.9%
Administrative support occupation, including clerical	2841	3440	21%
Private household occupations	217	117	-46%
Protective service occupations	513	475	-7.4%
Service occupations	3216	3128	-2.7%
Farming, forestry and fishing	80	72	-10%
Precision production, craft, and repair	1868	1441	-22.8%
Machine operators, assemblers, and inspectors	2178	1199	-45%
Transportation and material moving	669	796	19%
Handlers, equipment cleaners, helpers, and laborers	1181	834	-29%
TOTAL	15,913	15,715	-1.2%

SOURCE: 1990 Census of Population and Housing

PREPARED BY: RDC Institute

from high school and 4.9 percent graduated from college. In comparison, 81.4 percent of residents in Delaware County as a whole graduated from high school and 24.8 percent graduated from college with a bachelor's degree or higher.

Although Chester residents still lag behind the County in higher education achievements, there have been significant increases in high school and college graduates from 1980 to 1990. If this positive trend continues it should translate into improved employment opportunities and income gains for Chester residents.

SUMMARY

As demonstrated by the city's changing demographic and employment patterns, Chester remains in a dynamic state. Policies for the future of the city must be based on an understanding of what has gone before, but also on a reasoned analysis of what is feasible in the future. The remainder of this document will examine five major elements of the city in some detail and will make recommendations in each of these areas.