



Wyoming County

HEART & SOUL

Kaleidoscope of Communities

Action Report • 2024

Your **VOICE:**

Vision, Opportunity, Inclusion, Collaboration, Education



▲ Photo Courtesy of PA Route 6 Alliance

About Our *Funding*

Funding for Wyoming County Heart & Soul was provided by PA Humanities, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the PA Department of Community & Economic Development.

CELEBRATING



pa humanities



NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT
FOR THE
HUMANITIES



pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY
& ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

In-kind support was also provided by Community Heart & Soul and the PA Route 6 Alliance.

— Community —
Heart & Soul[®]





Introduction

Wyoming County Heart & Soul is excited to share our Community Action Report: “Your VOICE: Vision, Opportunity, Inclusion, Collaboration, Education.”

- V**ision
- O**ppportunity
- I**nclusion
- C**ollaboration
- E**ducation

This document is the culmination of more than two years of research. It summarizes our findings and provides a map for community planning. We do not take the credit for completing these community projects, but rather, provide the data, connections, and collaborations to help turn your ideas into reality. By sharing what we’ve learned, we hope to foster understanding and collaboration among our public, our partners, and our leaders.

About Wyoming County Heart & Soul



Wyoming County Heart & Soul is a PA Heart & Soul Community. As such, we are collaborators within our community. Our purpose is to put our residents first in the community development and planning process.

“We are collaborators within our community.”

Our vision is to capture the voices and ideas of those who live, work, and play throughout all our communities.

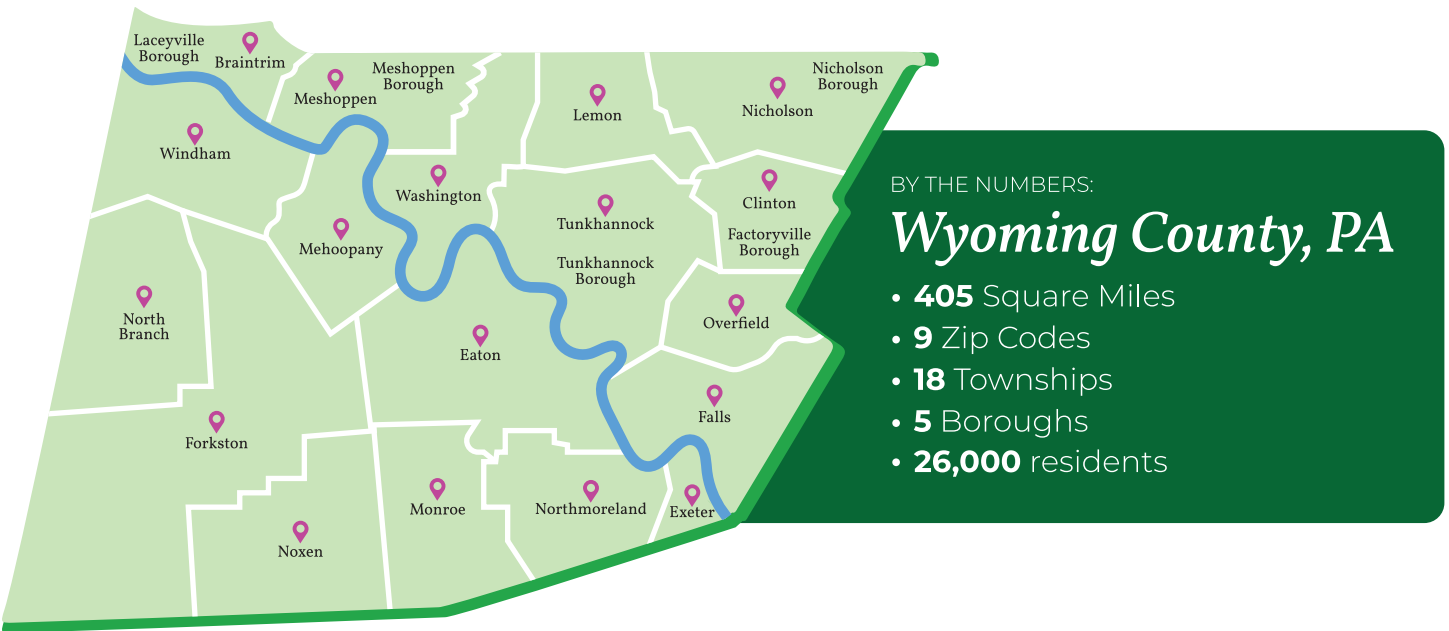
◀ “Wyoming County Painting 2” by Amy Colley



▲ Photo by George Clarke

The Community Heart & Soul® Approach

Community Heart & Soul® is a humanities-based approach to community and economic development. Started in Vermont by the Orton Family Foundation, this model has revitalized over 100 small cities and towns throughout the United States. Thanks to grant funding from PA Humanities, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the PA Department of Community & Economic Development, Wyoming County was able to embark on its own Community Heart & Soul® journey.



Often, Community Heart & Soul® focuses on one particular town. Our grant proposal was unique as we chose to include our entire county. Wyoming County is geographically large, spanning 405 square miles and nine zip codes. However, our county population is approximately 26,000 residents, which is comparable to many of the towns that participate in Community Heart & Soul®.

We decided to build engagement not just in an individual town, but throughout the county as a whole. We believe this will accomplish a more socially, culturally, and economically vibrant community, and establish a stronger sense of Wyoming County pride.

Our Guiding Tenets

In everything we do, we aim to:



Involve Everyone

Community Heart & Soul® is resident-driven, meaning that everyone in the community can share their input and help shape our area's future.



Tenet in Action:

We sought out the voices that do not normally have a say in public policy. Over the course of two years, we attended 35 community events and heard input from over 2,000 residents from all walks of life.



Focus on What Matters Most

We collected data across the county. No matter where we went, residents loved the same five themes: Nature, People, Community, Rural Life, and Recreation.



Tenet in Action:

These themes formed the basis for our Heart & Soul statements and our action ideas.

◀ Photo by Janie Stabinsky



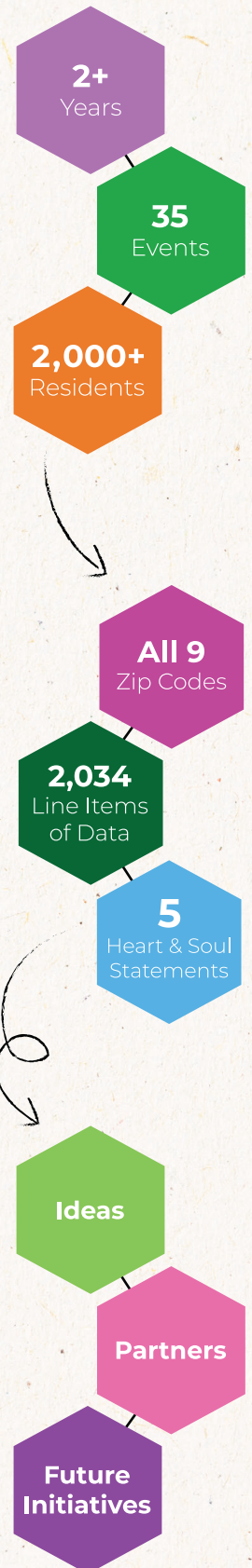
Play the Long Game

Heart & Soul is an ongoing process, not a one-time project.



Tenet in Action:

Our Stewardship Team continues to listen to ideas, form partnerships, and guide future initiatives.





▲ Photo Courtesy of Endless Mountains Visitors Bureau (EMVB)

Project Timeline

Volunteer Team Created
March 2021

Surveys of Thin Data:

- July 24, 2021 : River Day
- Aug 3, 2021: Inter Agency Council Meeting
- Aug 7, 2021: Christy Mathewson Day Factoryville
- **Aug 12, 2021:** Girl Scout Cookie Sundae Forkston
- Aug 25, 2021: Wyoming County Chamber of Commerce
- Sept 1-6, 2021: Wyoming County Fair
- Sep 11, 2021: EMPO Rendezvous
- Sep 12, 2021: Nicholson Bridge Day
- Sep 18, 2021: Touch a Truck at Lazybrook
- Sep 24, 2021: Laceyville Fancy Fair
- Oct 2, 2021: Noxen Harvest Fest
- Feb 10, 2022: Kiwanis Meeting



2021

2022

Story Gathering:

- Community Conversations Story Shares:
 - Oct 29, 2021
 - Nov 6, 2021
 - Nov 3, 2021
 - May 4, 2022



Heart & Soul Kaleidoscope of Communities Launch
July 23, 2021





Idea Prioritizing:

- Jul 22, 2023: River Day
- Aug 30-Sept 4, 2023: Wyoming County Fair
- Sep 9, 2023: EMPO Rendezvous
- Sep 16, 2023: Touch A Truck



Value Statement Sharing/Vetting:

- May 22, 2022: Celebration @ The Dietrich Theater
- Jun 19, 2022: Rattlesnake Roundup Noxen
- Jun 25, 2022: Founders Day Tunkhannock
- Aug 31-Sept 5, 2022: Wyoming County Fair

2023

Idea Gathering:

- Apr 1, 2023: Dinner & Conversation Nicholson UMC
- Apr 10, 2023: Change over Time Tool Business and Professional Women
- May 2, 2023: Mehoopany Lunch & Conversation @ HANDS
- May 11, 2023: Kiwanis Change Over Time Tool
- May 13, 2023: Dinner & Conversation Noxen Grove Pavilion
- May 20, 2023: Dinner & Conversation Mill City Assembly of God Event Space
- Jun 6, 2023: Inter Agency Council
- Jun 8, 2023: Rotary Idea Sharing



Statement Proclamations:

- Sept 2023: Wyoming County Association of Township Officials
- Oct 2023: Wyoming County Commissioners



Process & Methods

The Community Heart & Soul® model consists of four phases: **Imagine, Connect, Plan, and Act.**

Phase 1: *Imagine*



In Phase 1, the Wyoming County Heart & Soul team formed to build awareness, interest, and commitment in the community. Our first step was to build our team, a dedicated group of volunteers who represent a wide range of communities, industries, interests, and organizations throughout Wyoming County.

Our Grant Partners:

- Jen Danifo, *PA Humanities*
- Candace Hillyard, *PA Route 6 Alliance*
- Alice Trowbridge, *Certified Community Heart & Soul® Coach*
- Joan Wagner, *Community Heart & Soul®*

Our Team Members:

- **Project Leader:** Deborah Shurtleff, *Cloverknoll LLC*
- **Project Administrator:** Samantha Shurtleff, *Northern Tier Regional Planning Development Commission*
- **Core Team:**
 - Cassandra Bell, *Seven Loaves Soup Kitchen*
 - William Brennan, *Community Advocate*
 - Cain Chamberlin, *Endless Mountains Heritage Region*
 - Lynnelle Farber, *Wyoming County Planner*
 - Ernie King, *Wyoming County Commissioner*
 - Amy Paciej-Woodruff, *Marywood University*

- Zoey Powers, *Tunkhannock Area School District Student*
- Jill Robinson, *Endless Mountains Visitors Bureau*
- Tim Robinson, *Moodus Media*
- Erica Rogler, *Wyoming County Cultural Center/ Dietrich Theater*
- Jean Ruhf, *Endless Mountains Visitors Bureau*
- Daniel Shurtleff, *Amazon*
- Gina Suydam, *Wyoming County Chamber of Commerce*

Our Team Volunteers:

- Jeremy Conrad, *Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield*
- Denise Ebersole, *Liberty University*
- Taylor Finan, *The Finan Detail*
- Warren Howeler, *The Rocket-Courier*
- Kristen Huff, *Wyoming County United Way*
- Joan Jenkins, *Community Advocate*
- Lauren Jenkins, *Bartron Supply*
- Ben Robinson, *Stone House Retirement Income Planners*
- Allison Schultz, *Wyoming County Chamber of Commerce*
- Russell Shurtleff, *Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*

• **Story Listening Volunteers:**

- Omar Camacho
- Mary Pratt
- Ginny Miner
- Nikki Stone
- Hal Pratt
- Margie Young

Next, we created social media pages and developed a website (www.wyomingcountyproud.com) to spread the word.

To make sure we truly involved everyone, we developed a community network analysis and determined the “unheard voices” of Wyoming County. We partnered with local organizations to

learn which groups typically do not have a say in community planning and how to connect with them. Examples of “unheard voices” included seasonal residents, veterans, ethnic groups, and aspiration communities including the hungry, homeless, and addicted.

On July 23, 2021, we hosted our official launch event at the Wyoming County Chamber of Commerce. Representatives from the county’s eighteen townships and five boroughs were invited so each community knew they were included in Heart & Soul.

Phase 2: *Connect*



In Phase 2, the team gathered stories from residents to learn what matters most. We collected “thin data” through short, open-ended surveys.

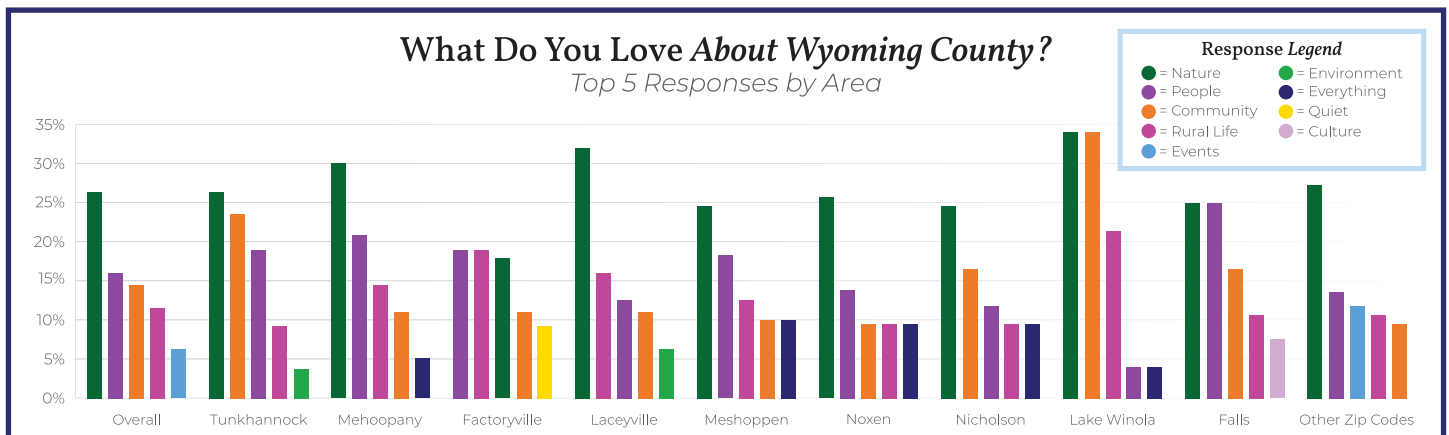
We gathered basic demographic information and asked questions. Overall, we attended 35 community events and collected 898 written surveys. Fifty-three survey participants offered to share their experiences in more detail at our story listening groups at the Dietrich Theater. Trained volunteers interviewed the participants and recorded key points as “thick data.”

BY THE NUMBERS:

County-wide *Data Collection:*

- **898** thin data surveys
- **53** thick data story shares
- **2,034** data points
- **5** statements
- **35** events
- **264** ideas
- **1,229** public priority votes

Photo by Janie Stabinsky





▲ Photo Courtesy of Keystone College

People are the *Purpose!*

We believe life is best surrounded by friendly, kind, caring, and generous People.
 Feeling supported and cherished by family and friends is meaningful to us.



▲ Top Right Photo by Jennifer Kozlansky @ High Horizons Farm. Other Photos Courtesy of EMVB

What We Heard

“Hospital, healthcare, and mental health services are vital.”

“We learn from student engagement, inclusion, diversity, and special needs.”

“One place to learn all that’s happening (events/government/alerts/offerings) is needed.”

What You Prioritized

- ★ Services
- ★ Education
- ★ Connecting
- ★ Volunteers



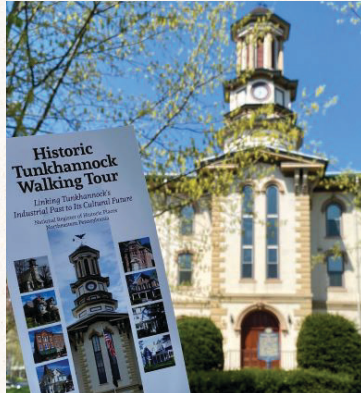
▲ On May 22, 2022 we held an event called "Heart & Soul Celebrates Wyoming County" at The Dietrich Theater. Photo by Tim Robinson Moodus Media LLC

Care in Our Communities!

We celebrate our small-town Communities that offer a safe, close-knit, and family-oriented hometown feel. We enjoy local events, small businesses, and access to arts and culture.

What We Heard

- “We love fairs, festivals, concerts, and small-town events.”
- “We support arts, culture, and historical venues.”
- “Senior centers and senior housing are important.”



What You Prioritized

- ★ Business
- ★ Facilities
- ★ Events
- ★ Arts & Culture

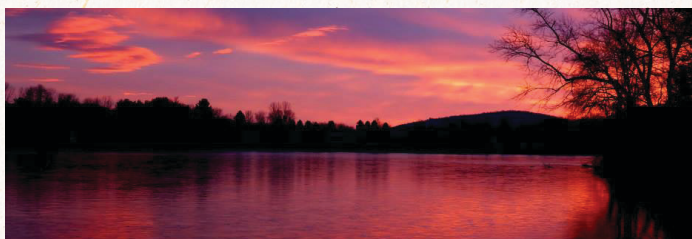
▲ Photos Courtesy of EMVB



▲ Photo by Janie Stabinsky

Love our *Landscapes and Lifestyle!*

We value our Rural Lifestyle with beautiful farms, scenery, and quiet, open spaces that create feelings of calm, freedom, and peacefulness.



▲ Landscape Photos by Janie Stabinsky, Cow Photo Courtesy of EMVB

What We Heard

“Farmland preservation is important. We need to utilize agritourism and manage forestry. We like our trees.”

“Quiet, rural spaces with open lands are valued. We need to limit overdevelopment.”

“We need better road maintenance and traffic control through small towns to make them feel safer.”

What You Prioritized

- ★ Transportation
- ★ Quality of Life
- ★ Communication
- ★ Agriculture



▲ Photo Courtesy of EMVB

Revel in *Outdoor Recreation!*

We enjoy varied outdoor Recreation opportunities in our pristine natural surroundings. By supporting and creating trails, parks, preserves, and activities, we recognize that environmental stewardship benefits healthy living.

What We Heard

“Public lands to enjoy the outdoors, including a state park, public forests, state gameland access, conservancy properties, and community parks are important to us.”

“A Recreation Board utilizing public funding would facilitate our Greenways, Trails, and Open Spaces Plan, maintenance, and increased availability of public spaces.”

“Promoting ecotourism with advertising, signage, and adult and youth programming would be advantageous.”

What You Prioritized

- ★ Trails
- ★ Parks
- ★ Governance
- ★ Tourism



▲ Photos Courtesy of Endless Mountain Outfitters (Top) and EMVB

Phase 3: Plan



In Phase 3, we asked residents for ideas on how to correlate the Heart & Soul statements into real-world actions. We hosted “Dinner & Conversation” events where we invited the public to share their ideas and enjoy a free meal.



During summer 2023, we held events in Nicholson, Mehoopany, Noxen, and Mill City. We gathered the action ideas using Community Heart & Soul’s® Change Over Time Tool, an interactive chart that encourages participants to discuss the past, present, and future of their community. Then, they brainstormed action ideas to help preserve and enhance each of our five statements. We recorded every action idea in a master spreadsheet.

The Dinner & Conversation events attracted a wide variety of residents. For example, our event in Nicholson drew more senior citizens, while our event in Mill City included many students from the local church’s teen program. From the Dinner & Conversation events, we collected 264 action ideas.

Our team organized the data by ranking each idea on a low-medium-high scale in terms of impact (who and what would benefit) and feasibility (effort, resources, and costs involved). We also identified action ideas that were already completed or underway.

Based on our rankings, we created a list of **27 highly impactful, highly feasible focus action areas**. All other ideas are saved in our data for future reference. These ideas remain important to Wyoming County; they may just need more time or resources to come to fruition.

We returned to the community to ask them to vote on their favorite action ideas. In fall 2023, we set up booths at local events including the Wyoming County Fair, Touch a Truck at Lazybrook Park, and the Endless Mountains Primitive Outdoorsmen Muzzleloader Rendezvous. We displayed the **27** action areas on posterboards and asked attendees to vote on their favorites. Over 1,000 votes revealed we should focus in the following order:



1. Nature Projects

involving waterways, preservation, scenery, and stewardship



2. Rural Life Projects

encompassing quality of life, architecture, transportation, and communication



3. Recreation Projects

including parks, trails, tourism, and governance



4. Community Projects

embracing events, arts and culture, facilities, and business



5. People Projects

comprising education, services, volunteers, and connections

Resident Ideas

● = Happening or In Discussion
✓ = Completed

- Offer incentives for private property care and cleanup.
- Promote a youth focus on nature and environmental education.
- Create public environmental education opportunities.
- Schedule guided walks, hikes, and waterway adventures.
- Create an information network to find rural county resources.
- Provide reliable internet and cellular service.
- Increase public transportation by adding after-school bus runs, ride-sharing opportunities, and senior and low-income options.
- ✓ Designate a State Park in Wyoming County.
- ✓ Allow public access to Miller Mountain.
- Create additional walking, hiking, and biking trails.
- Develop community connector trails.
- Build Rail with Trail between Tunkhannock and Vosburg Neck State Park.
- Expand the Trolley Trail to Lake Winola.
- Promote ecotourism.
- Commit public and private funding to recreational opportunities, including the use of Act 13 Marcellus legacy funds.
- Create park maintenance jobs.
- Develop public access to creeks for swimming, kayaking, and canoeing.
- Increase outreach, recognition, and promotion of small businesses.
- Stimulate job creation through new restaurants, retail stores, grocers, art venues, and entrepreneurial businesses.
- Develop facilities for bowling, pickleball, basketball, multi-use fields, a youth center, and a skate park.
- Install community gardens.
- ✓ Enhance Nicholson Train Station History Center.
- Hold festivals and picnics to gather with neighbors.
- Provide senior center outreach to rural locations.
- Develop intergenerational gatherings and youth-mentor connections.
- Subsidize childcare and youth sports, events, and club costs.
- Provide companionship and technology training for seniors.



The Howland Preserve has become Wyoming County's first state park: Vosburg Neck State Park. Photo by EMVB.





▲ Mural Painting at River Day.

Phase 4: Act



In the final phase, the community officially adopted the Heart & Soul statements. They will now be incorporated into comprehensive plans, and used to guide future policies and decisions.

The Wyoming County Commissioners issued a Proclamation recognizing our Heart & Soul statements as a framework for local decision makers and strategic planning activities. At the Wyoming County Association of Township Officials annual meeting, leaders representing every municipality adopted the statements. This shows our leaders' commitment to Heart & Soul and what our residents care about.

Next, we identified key partners who could help turn the action plans into reality. Many community leaders and organizations are already hard at work. In turn, we provide the data they need to validate their work, obtain grant money, and plan for future implementation.

Our work doesn't end at Phase 4. Our Stewardship Team continues to monitor the action ideas' progress, work with our key partners, listen to new ideas, and celebrate the county's achievements. We strive to ensure that Community Heart & Soul® becomes embedded in the community and guides our future.

Join Us!

Our Stewardship Team meets quarterly. We're always welcoming **new members**, **updates about community projects** and **new ideas!**

Photo by Janie Stabinsky



To join, contact **Deb Shurtleff** at **clover@ptd.net**.



▲ Photo by Janie Stabinsky

Our Collaborators and Partners

With our collaborators and partners, your ideas are put into action.

The Conservation Fund

Countryside Conservancy

Creek Junction Park

Endless Mountains Heritage Region

Endless Mountains Visitors Bureau

Factoryville Borough Clinton Township
Joint Municipal Park

Friends of Howland Preserve

HANDS of Wyoming County

Lazybrook Park

Nicholson Heritage Association

North Branch Land Trust

Pennsylvania Department of Conservation
and Natural Resources

Pennsylvania Department of Community
and Economic Development

Reading Blue Mountain
& Northern Railroad

Riverside Park

Route 6 Alliance

State Representative Tina Pickett

State Representative Karen Boback

State Senator Lisa Baker

Tunkhannock Public Library

Tunkhannock Rotary

United States Congressman Dan Meuser

United States Senator Robert P. Casey Jr.
Williams

Wyoming County Chamber of Commerce

Wyoming County Commissioners
Rick Wilbur, Tom Henry, and Ernie King

Wyoming County Community Alliance

Wyoming County Community Health Foundation

Wyoming County Community Healthcare

Wyoming County Courts, Juvenile Services
and Probation Department

Wyoming County Cultural Center
at the Dietrich Theater

Wyoming County Municipal Governments
of 18 Townships and 5 Boroughs

Wyoming County Planning Office Greenways,
Trails and Open Space Plan

Cover Photo by Jeff Mitchell Photos

Back Cover Photo by Tim Robinson Moodus Media LLC



Thank You!

Thank you so much to our grant partners, collaborators, team, volunteers, story sharers, photographers, and public community members who made our research, this document, and the outcomes possible!

Our work is ongoing, so if you have any questions, ideas, or feedback, please get in touch with us.



Wyoming County Heart & Soul



clover@ptd.net



Scan to visit our website:

www.wyomingcountyproud.com

“The true beauty of Wyoming County lies not in one specific area,
but in a colorful combination—residents of rural towns and
neighborhoods united in the single splendor of a

Kaleidoscope of Communities.”

