

CHAPTER 10

ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The goal for economic development is to provide for additional light industrial, office and commercial development to enhance the region's tax base, provided such development occurs at designated appropriate locations, does not adversely affect the built and natural environment and the region's infrastructure, is compatible, attractive, and environment-friendly.

The objectives which have been established are:

- Provide land for and encourage additional environmentally responsible industrial and office development in the Route 422-Railroad corridor and along Route 662.
- Provide for managed, limited, attractive, additional commercial development in the Route 422 corridor.
- Encourage appropriate adaptive re-use of vacant and underutilized commercial and industrial properties.
- Encourage the retention and expansion of existing desirable businesses in the region.
- Encourage the continuation of agriculture as a component of the economy of the Townships.
- Work with the business community to identify ways of improving the region's business climate.
- Coordinate the location of businesses and transportation systems to limit traffic impacts on residential areas.
- Direct new business development to areas where it can be served by public sewer and water facilities.
- Encourage the enhancement of the aesthetics of the Route 422 corridor.
- Identify desired new businesses for the region.
- Assure commercial, office and industrial properties are properly maintained.

- Review the merits of tax abatement programs to attract businesses to the region.
- Retain, enhance and promote the historic and cultural heritage of the region as a means to promote tourism.
- Support agencies promoting economic development in the region.

Overall Strategy

Economic development is important to the Region. Enhanced tax revenue from business development can balance the residential share of the property tax base. Jobs can be created and maintained for local residents. The objective will be to not just provide any jobs, but family sustaining jobs in a variety of appropriate employment fields. But it is also critical that when economic development occurs, the natural environment must be protected and adequate infrastructure must be in place or put in place to accommodate the impacts of development. Businesses must be active participants in protecting the Region's resources and providing infrastructure improvements.

Commuting patterns in terms of minutes in commuting time for Exeter and St. Lawrence residents are closer to the pattern of the County as a whole and the State than the pattern for Amity Township. Likely because of the higher number of people residing in Amity and commuting to jobs in the greater Philadelphia region, longer commutes are more typical for Amity residents. Job creation within the Region could help reduce the length of commutes for some residents.

	<u>Travel Time in Minutes, 2000</u>					
	----- Percent of Commuters -----					
	<u>Under 15</u>	<u>15-29</u>	<u>30-44</u>	<u>45-59</u>	<u>60-89</u>	<u>90 or More</u>
Pennsylvania	30.4	36.1	18.4	7.6	4.9	2.6
Berks County	33.1	40.6	15.5	5.2	3.8	1.8
Amity Township	20.5	34.6	21.9	11.6	8.4	2.9
Exeter Township	28.5	49.7	10.7	5.2	4.4	1.8
St. Lawrence Borough	30.4	46.7	13.0	4.4	4.2	1.2

Source: U.S. Census

Cooperative efforts of municipalities, the County and County economic development agencies, businesses, legislators, educational institutions, and state government must continue if appropriate jobs are to be created in the Region. The Industrial Site Assessment, Berks County, PA prepared for Berks County identified the Route 422 corridor as having potential for additional economic development. Organizations within

the County which play a role in economic development include Berks County Community and Economic Development, Berks County Chamber of Commerce, Kutztown University Small Business Development Center, Berks County Industrial Development Authority, Berks Economic Partnership, Reading and Berks County Visitors Bureau, and Greater Berks Development Fund.

Areas considered appropriate for economic development have been identified on the Future Land Use Plan. Generally, such development is directed to the Route 422 corridor, a portion of the Route 562 corridor in St. Lawrence, a portion of the Route 662 corridor near Douglassville and in villages.

Economic development should be done right. Alternatives should be provided to strip commercial development. This can occur through well-planned developments, such as business and industrial parks, and interconnected and integrated commercial areas.

A mix of economic development is encouraged through a variety in types of zoning districts. A range of retail, office, service, and light industrial uses is envisioned.

Standards should be imposed by municipalities to improve the design and appearance of new development and redevelopment. Given the age of some of the commercial development within the 422 corridor and reduction in the amount of available sites, redevelopment in the corridor is likely. Standards for such redevelopment should be put in place.

Appropriate attention should be paid to landscaping, lighting, building design, buffering, signage, setbacks, screening, and pedestrian amenities. Development should be designed and constructed to meet environmental performance standards, eliminate adverse impacts on adjacent land uses, and minimize highway access safety hazards.

Within the Region, small business incubation; "green" tourism; light industrial, research and development, high technology, office and service development to supplement existing and additional commercial development; and retention of existing and additional desirable businesses and industries would be appropriate.

Tourism will play a role in the economy of the Region, and the municipalities should continue to discuss the role that tourism should play in the Regional economy and the appropriate types of tourism to encourage in the Region. Protecting the natural, cultural, historic, architectural, and recreational resources and landscapes will enable tourism based on natural and cultural, recreation, educational and family activities. County and regional agencies can be worked with to support regionally-defined goals for tourism. The municipalities should work with the Schuylkill River Greenway Association in implementation of the Schuylkill Heritage Corridor management plan. The Schuylkill River trail, Route 422 driving route, reception area at the Daniel Boone Homestead, and

tour routes of agricultural areas in the corridor are elements of the Plan. The City of Reading is now planning to enhance its riverfront areas. Montgomery County wishes to build a Greenway Community along the Schuylkill River. It would be appropriate for this Region to likewise incorporate the Schuylkill River into the life of the Region.

Improvement and revitalization of existing developed areas will become more important to maintaining an economically vital Region. This includes such efforts as addressing transportation concerns in the Region and improving streetscapes. If the roads in the Region are too congested, some businesses may locate elsewhere. Route 422 improvements and access management are particularly crucial. If commercial areas are allowed to deteriorate in appearance, this will affect decisions to locate in the Region and the types of businesses which will locate. Streetscape programs along commercial areas of Route 422, 562, and 662 can enhance these corridors.

The Region does contain some vacant and underutilized commercial and industrial sites. Appropriate economic utilization of these properties is supported through cooperative efforts with economic development agencies, and programs of PADCED which offer financial incentives for re-use of old buildings and tax lien forgiveness to "recycle" buildings. It is possible to work with the Berks County Industrial Development Authority to secure funding for infrastructure improvements to support economic development.

It is important to address the needs of existing businesses in the Region. They should be consulted regarding their concerns and needs. The Chamber of Commerce and Berks County Career link can help local businesses, facilitate networking, and foster professional development. Suppliers of existing businesses and businesses related to existing businesses in the Region should be encouraged to locate in the Region.

St. Lawrence Borough does not have a true downtown or commercial core. Most commercial development has occurred along Route 422 near Route 562, along Route 562 (St. Lawrence Avenue) near Route 422 (particularly the Antietam Valley Shopping Center), Prospect Street, and Oley Turnpike Road. The remainder of St. Lawrence Avenue is mixed use or residential in character.

Along Prospect Street and Oley Turnpike Road there is underutilized land. The Borough should monitor opportunities in the long-term future to develop a commercial core/downtown along St. Lawrence Avenue, Prospect Street, and Oley Turnpike Road area as businesses age and or change.

Douglaville is the largest concentrated village in the Region, but opportunities for enhancing village character are limited because of substantial through-traffic along Route 422 and the busy Route 422 - Route 662 intersection. Over the long term, road improvements, the potential for the Schuylkill Valley Metro, and the aging and changing

of businesses could improve chances to build upon village character and the cluster of historic sites in the village. Opportunities for village enhancement should be monitored.

Given the rapid rate of suburbanization of Amity and Exeter Townships, it is sometimes difficult to maintain historic sites, community character, and a sense of place when development decisions are made shortsightedly for "economic" reasons. In the long run, a region can benefit economically from demanding attractive development and maintaining a sense of uniqueness.

A "Sense of Place" is critical in any economic and community planning effort. To say that there is a sense of place is to say that there is a location which is distinctive, to which people attach meaning, where there is a sense of a physically defined area, and where past and future experiences can be shared with other people.

To maintain a sense of place, it is necessary to maintain human scale and provide places for people to live, work and play safely and securely. Particularly in the Borough and settled communities, this involves maintaining pedestrian scale, recognizing streets are for people not just for cars, providing adequate parking opportunities, providing for trees and attractive streetscapes, and encouraging humane architecture which is pleasing to and does not overwhelm people. Throughout the Region, it is necessary to provide safe neighborhoods; provide convenience to jobs and necessary services; provide opportunities for human interaction by providing for open space, recreation, public places, pedestrian ways and sitting areas, community facilities and special events; providing diversity and experience in sensory involvement; providing awareness of history; maintaining unique characteristics; and recognizing the boundaries of the community.

Encouraging development that enhances the visual character of the Route 422 Corridor makes economic sense, as it can help prevent decline of the area in the future. Design principles for commercial and industrial development are critical to the long-term economic health of the region. Such design principles would result in continuity in the design of development along the corridor and take into account such factors as signage, screening, landscaping, setbacks, architecture and streetscape improvements.

The Pennsylvania Economic Stimulus Package has been recently passed. Opportunities for the Region created with such programs as Business in Our Sites and Tax Increment Financing Guarantee Program should be reviewed. Programs in the Package include:

- Business in our Sites
- Building PA
- New Pennsylvania Venture Guarantee Program
- New Pennsylvania Venture Capital Investment Program
- First Industries Fund

Core Industries
Second Stage Loan Program
TIF Guarantee Program
Infrastructure and Facilities Improvement Program
Keystone Innovation Zones
Section 108 Loan Pool
Elm Street

The recent elements of the package are:

- Business in Our Sites will offer flexible loans and grants for local municipalities and their economic development partners to create future business growth and attract opportunities through the acquisition and preparation of key sites for development. The program would provide communities with grants and loans of up to \$250,000 to pay for the reclamation of industrial land.
- Building PA will provide funding for the development of real estate assets within the Commonwealth. Funds will be loaned to private investors and foundations looking to match funds to facilitate projects within the Commonwealth.
- New PA Venture Guarantee Program will allow the Commonwealth to more actively partner with the investment community by structuring a program that provides guarantees to venture capital companies interested in Pennsylvania businesses. These guarantees will provide increased capital for Pennsylvania businesses to grow and create jobs.
- New PA Venture Capital Investment Program will provide capital to Pennsylvania-focused venture capital companies that agree to match those funds and make investments in Pennsylvania businesses.
- First Industries Fund. First Industries will provide grants, low-interest loan financing and loan guarantees for agriculture and tourism.
- 2nd Stage Loan Program will provide guarantees for bank loans to second stage manufacturers and technology companies for working capital and other financing needs. Targeted toward manufacturing, advanced technology and biotechnology, these funds will support growth in these sectors.

- Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Guarantee Program. Through TIF, communities can borrow funds for projects that will develop blighted areas and then repay those borrowed monies through the new tax revenues that will be generated as a result of the development. A combination of technical assistance and loan guarantee assistance is proposed to encourage small communities to utilize this program.
- Infrastructure & Facilities Improvement Program is a multi-year grant program that will provide grants to certain issuers of debt in order to assist with the payment of debt service.

The Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development is the primary contact for most of these programs.

Obviously, there is a lot that can be done to promote economic development in the Region. One difficulty is coordinating such efforts. The municipalities typically do not have available manpower to devote solely to economic development. Municipal officials and staffs may get together to discuss specific projects. Just as there can be regional open space and recreation committees and a regional planning committee, consideration should be given to appointing a regional economic development committee. Such a committee could be charged with aiding the governing bodies in further defining economic development goals and objectives for the Region, fleshing out steps to achieve those goals and objectives, targeting the government programs to be used for implementation, and forging the partnerships necessary to participate in those programs.

Areas have been set aside for industrial and commercial development in the Future Land Use Plan. Opportunities for commercial development are found throughout the Route 422 corridor, and nearby portions of Routes 562 and 662. Industrial areas are found along Route 422 Business and Bypass, Lincoln Road, and Old Swede Road. A next step should be to see how the economic development programs available can be used in the areas set aside for economic development in the Region.

GENERAL APPROACH TO STRENGTHENING CENTERS AND CORRIDORS

The key elements of programs to strengthen centers, such as Main Street Programs, are outlined below. These elements could be used in enhancing commercial cores, such as in St. Lawrence and Douglassville, and in established corridors such as the Route 422 corridor.

- **Improving the image by enhancing physical appearance, as appropriate**

This includes enhancing the appearance of buildings, street lights, window displays, parking areas, signs, sidewalks, benches, landscaping, trash receptacles, utility poles and lines, and graphics. Design in the area should recognize existing

desirable physical elements, be compatible with the area's character, and be unified.

- **Securing consensus and cooperation among the groups that are involved in economic development**

Parties which should be involved include Borough and Township officials, business people, bankers, real estate agents, customers, the media, residents and civic groups.

- **Promoting the Centers and Corridors**

The unique characteristics should be promoted to customers, investors, existing businesses, and potential new businesses. A positive image can be fostered through appropriate special events, and other programs. A brochure promoting businesses can be prepared.

- **Strengthening the Economy of the Centers and Corridors**

If the economy is strong, it is possible to maintain and upgrade the buildings in the existing communities. Existing businesses should be helped to expand; new businesses should be recruited; and increased use of any underutilized buildings should be promoted.

- **Affecting Attitudes Towards the Centers and Corridors**

Consumers and investors have more positive attitudes as they see changes taking place such as building improvement projects and new street furniture. Owners of buildings will be more likely to make improvements to their buildings.

Specific tasks to help maintain economic vitality can include:

- Helping businesses identify new sales opportunities
- Promoting the centers and corridors as cohesive shopping areas to market groups
- Listing potential new businesses
- Keeping track of prospective businesses
- Improving the quality of businesses by helping them be more customer responsive and competitive

- Having coordinated business hours that meet consumer needs. Encourage businesses to work together
- Encouraging attractive window and interior merchandise displays
- Maintaining information on the centers
- Marketing and promoting businesses
- Conduct an advertising campaign
- Helping to maintain existing businesses and encouraging patronage of those businesses
- Working with financial institutions to establish loan pools
- Maintaining a good working relationship between public and private sectors
- Finding new uses for any underutilized or vacant buildings
- Recruiting businesses to complement the retail and service mix
- Identifying sources of grants for physical improvements or providing matching grants for such improvements
- Assuring promotional activities create a consistent, positive image consistent with community characteristics and history
- Scheduling events to bring people into the community on a regular basis
- Understanding the region's history
- Managing parking spaces
- Managing growth within the entire Region
- Working with developers to assure attractive, well-planned development
- Enhancing alternatives to auto traffic, including enhanced transit service and enhanced transit hubs with shelters, parking areas, and pedestrian walkways
- Landscaping standards

- Enhancing the pedestrian system and coordinating with open space and recreation and greenway planning
- Managing road corridors
- Protecting remaining natural resources
- Encouraging appropriate mixed use
- Incorporating open space, natural features and public spaces so they are visible and accessible, in order to humanize areas
- Addressing parking needs
- Recognizing the assets and defining characteristics of a center or corridor and enhancing and building upon those features. Examples are building stock, variety of available services, walkability, and traditional development patterns.

In conjunction with center/corridor improvement programs, an economic development strategy table like the following could be prepared.

Economic Development Incentive	Economic Development Task →															
	Lighting Improvements	Sidewalk/Curb Improvements	Cross Walk Unique Identifier	Establish New Traffic Patterns/Traffic Improvements	Additional Trash Receptacles	Tree Replacement/Planting Program	Color Selection Coordination	Size Selection Coordination	Style Selection Coordination	Bandwidth Improvements	Overhead to Underground Conversion/Placement	Directional Signage	Deferred or Excused Payment Requirement	Commercial Development Recruitment	Create and Advertise Community Venues	Promote Adaptive Reuse Opportunities
Main Street Revitalization	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X		X	X	X
Additional Parking Improvements	X	X		X								X				
Recreation Program Expansion	X	X			X	X					X	X			X	
Public Safety Improvements	X	X	X	X	X						X					
Façade Coordination/Design/Specification							X		X							
Signage Coordination							X	X	X							
Trash/Debris Increased					X											
Communication/Internet Enhancements										X	X			X		
Flat-pad Ready to Build Sites										X	X			X		
Tax Abatement Programs													X	X		X
Utility Incentives										X				X		X
Tourism Recognition													X		X	
Transportation Access				X												

As development occurs in the Region, consideration should be given to the following:

- respecting architectural traditions of the Region
- retaining the character and integrity of historic neighborhoods and buildings
- retaining a sense of place in neighborhoods and business areas
- enhancing gateways to the Region
- limiting building heights to what is deemed appropriate and consistent with existing buildings
- addressing parking needs in business areas
- attracting commercial uses which enhance the commercial character of the Region
- providing greenspace
- encouraging owner-occupation, controlling conversions, and addressing parking needs in residential areas
- making the centers more walkable and bikeable
- protecting the character of historic areas
- providing people-oriented spaces
- encouraging building facades in character with centers
- having appropriate signage control
- coordinating business hours and meeting demands of customers
- enhancing stream-side areas, providing parkland along creeks utilizing greenways and trails to draw people to the region
- Connecting to trails and bikeways throughout the Region and facilitating wayfinding

This Plan is concerned with preserving the quality of life and conserving and enhancing the special features of the Region, assuring that the municipalities will remain attractive communities in which to live and work. This will be accomplished by managing the pace, quality, and location of development, while preserving natural features, agricultural areas, residential neighborhoods, historic resources, open space, and greenway corridors. The intent of the Plan is to balance economic growth with providing open land, maintaining the quality of life, and managing traffic. The Townships and the Borough wish to retain and enhance their character and uniqueness in the face of impacts of growth in the Region, while providing for reasonable and appropriate economic development at locations designated in the Future Land Use Plan.

Economic vitality can be approached directly, such as providing land for commercial and industrial development, providing opportunities for adaptive reuse of older buildings, fostering municipal/business partnerships to support the business community, marketing opportunities within the area, strengthening the streetscape of the commercial areas, and strengthening entry images at entrances to the municipalities. This is not the entire solution, however.

Planning to achieve a desirable quality of life makes economic sense, as it can encourage additional investment in the area. Preserving community history and culture helps maintain a sense of place and attracts people and businesses to the area.

