

Economic Development

INTRODUCTION

The Economic Development Element provides the policy context for continued economic development and prosperity in the Centre Region. In 2010 and 2011, the Centre Region, with the assistance of a consultant, BBP & Associates, prepared the Centre Region Economic Development Assessment for the Region. The COG Transportation and Land Use Committee provided oversight during preparation of the economic development assessment. The COG General Forum accepted the recommendations of the economic development assessment at its August 22, 2011, meeting.

This Plan Element incorporates the 12 short-term, mid-term, and long-term recommendations in the economic development assessment, as accepted by the COG General Forum. Short-term recommendations in the economic development assessment should be implemented with existing regional and municipal resources. Mid- and long-term recommendations may require additional resources, including additional staff expertise and financial resources. The economic development assessment requires additional deliberation with the COG General Forum prior to initiating any mid- or long-term recommendations. One goal, and supporting objective and policies have been added.

The Centre Region has the luxury of launching economic development efforts from a position of strength. The Region can build from a highly educated population, low unemployment rate, and high quality of life.

The recommendations from the Centre Region Economic Development Assessment are not included in this draft document because they previously were accepted by the COG General Forum. An electronic copy of the document is available for review at: www.crcog.net/planning. The Economic Development Element is organized into the following sections:

- **Key Issues and Findings**
- **Centre Region Economic Development Assessment Recommendations**
 - **Short-term Recommendations**
 - **Mid-term Recommendations**
 - **Long-term Recommendations**
 - **Phasing**
- **Goals, Objectives, and Policies**
 - **Economic Sustainability**

KEY ISSUES AND FINDINGS *(from the Centre Region Economic Development Assessment)*

The objective of the Centre Region Economic Development Assessment was to prepare a series of recommendations and implementation actions that help define a cohesive regional economic development policy for the Centre Region. The report provides a series of recommendations to implement over a number of years.

Since its formation, COG has not been an active participant in economic development issues or policy in the Region. The economic development assessment was the first of its kind for the COG, and it attempts to forge a better-defined and more comprehensive regional approach to economic development in the Centre Region. Currently, some

municipalities have formed business associations or industrial development authorities to address individual needs. Others, such as the Borough of State College, have formed redevelopment authorities and downtown improvement districts to assist with specific development and redevelopment issues. These efforts have helped with individual municipal economic development goals, but do not address other gaps in the economic development system or practical implementation steps to achieve broader goals throughout the Region.

Some of the information collected for the economic development assessment along with stakeholder interviews revealed many strengths in the Region and many successful economic development endeavors. The information, however, also revealed that in practice, the economic development process at times was perceived as disjointed, inefficient, and often bureaucratic. It is important to build a path to economic success that embraces regional strengths and cooperation and recognizes implementation actions that can result in achieving the goals of the assessment.

CENTRE REGION ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ASSESSMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

The economic development assessment broadens the approach and clarifies the path to successful economic development activities in the Region by addressing several specific areas where changes can improve existing practices to facilitate economic development. The results of the economic development assessment do not establish a grand vision for economic development but do provide a series of steps to identify strategies and provide an implementation program to accomplish the following four tasks.

1. Encourage the reuse, redevelopment, or revitalization of underutilized properties in the Region. This subtask identified specific sites, such as Hills Plaza, Westerly Plaza, Northland Center, West College, and North Atherton Corridors, or other commercial sites; and industrial sites, such as Corning, Murata Erie, and Rutgers-Nease. Existing regulatory barriers to revitalization efforts should be identified, as well as partnering opportunities for incentives, site improvements, and other methods of encouraging redevelopment.
2. Identify the key economic, natural, cultural, and demographic trends of the Region and prepare a list of businesses or business clusters that would leverage those trends to help create sustainable jobs over the next 30 years. Link those trends to strengths, such as education and research resources at Penn State University.
3. Identify ways to strengthen the working relationships among COG, Centre Region municipalities, Centre County, and Chamber of Business and Industry for Centre County and Centre County Industrial Development Corporation, specifically to standardize how business prospects are tracked and how specific information is collected and released to attract potential business prospects.
4. Identify potential businesses, business clusters, or users for the high-quality beneficial reuse water provided by the University Area Joint Authority.

The recommendations from the Centre Region Economic Development Assessment are divided into short-, mid-, and long-term priorities, and are summarized on the following page.

Short-term Recommendations

The short-term recommendations will have the most immediate and catalytic effect on cooperative economic development in the Centre Region. Nearly all the recommendations below are important tools to be used as the foundation for mid- and long-term goals and serve to broaden the Region's competitiveness in the economic development arena. These goals help to elevate the importance of economic development with COG members, begin to forge longer-term relationships and partnerships, and consider strengthening business retention and expansion efforts. Short-term goals also encourage the municipalities and COG to review the existing regulatory environment and customer-service practices in the context of improving the business climate in the Region.

The CRPA prepared a Best Practices Guide for Development Review and Permitting that provides municipal leaders with an assortment of tools, all aimed at making permitting more predictable, consistent, and efficient without compromising local jurisdiction or endangering the standard of review.

1. Optimize and articulate the land-development approval and permitting process.
2. Establish a single point of contact at the Centre Regional Planning Agency for new company prospects and a tracking system to monitor the disposition of prospects.
3. Participate in and support educational and training seminars covering economic development issues including, but not limited to: government's role in economic development, financing and funding mechanisms, value and strategies for public/private partnerships, and an overview of the development and permitting process.
4. Work with Penn State University, Chamber of Business and Industry for Centre County, municipalities, and others to encourage commercialization and technology transfer.
5. Establish a regular meeting of regional and municipal government representatives to identify and address regulatory, customer service, and business climate issues in the Region.

Mid-term Recommendations

The mid-term recommendations generally focus on geographic areas and tools where economic development initiatives could strengthen prosperity in the Region by redeveloping underutilized areas, preserving sensitive areas, improving educational opportunities relating to economic development tools, retaining and expanding existing businesses, and using existing infrastructure to attract business. Implementation of these recommendations will take longer because of the complexity of the public/private partnerships needed to make these efforts successful. Also, the Region has historically weathered economic downturns in good shape, resulting in fewer economic development resources and a lower priority for economic development issues on the public policy agenda.

6. Consider a comprehensive Business Retention and Expansion strategy.
7. Encourage the revitalization of aged commercial centers and brownfields.
8. Work with the Centre County Industrial Development Corporation to promote an inventory of buildings and sites, and develop a database to track them.
9. Preserve agricultural land, support the viability of agriculture, and recognize the importance of agriculture to a healthy and diverse economy.

Long-term Recommendations

These recommendations are important to the overall economic development strength and growth of the Centre Region, but will have the least immediate and direct impact on the community. Nonetheless, the recommendations are important projects that will contribute to economic prosperity in the Region. They are considered long-term goals only within the context of the other recommendations, not as individual recommendations. For example, improvement of technology transfer with Penn State University can have a long-lasting and positive influence in the Region. This recommendation, however, would potentially require staff capacity well beyond COG's current number and would require organizational changes requiring COG policy changes before key implementation actions could begin.

10. Pursue new business clusters, including those that can utilize beneficial reuse water from the UAJA.
11. Participate in and support the Downtown Vision and Strategic Plan.
12. Diversify the economic base and create employment opportunities for Penn State University graduates and faculty/staff family members (i.e., spouses of individuals who relocate with the University).

Phasing

The Centre Region Economic Development Assessment recommends a three-phase implementation of the recommendations, as described below. After each phase of implementation, COG, Centre Region municipalities, and other key stakeholders should reassess the priority of the recommendations, their timing, and the implementation strategy. An economic development plan is a living document that must be reviewed and revisited often as market and economic changes occur.

- **Short Term** – Initiate and carry out the Short-term Recommendations
 - Monitor and benchmark the effectiveness/success along the way
- **Mid Term** – Hold a “Decision Point” session to review the results of the Short-term and plan for the implementation of the Mid-term Recommendations
 - Re-rank (if necessary) the Mid-term Recommendations
 - Initiate and carry out the Mid-term Recommendations
- **Long Term** – Hold a “Decision Point” session to review the results of the Short- and Mid-term and plan for the implementation of the Long-term Recommendations
 - Re-rank (if necessary) the Long-term Recommendations
 - Initiate and carry out the Long-term Recommendations



There are a number of business assistance and funding/finance programs available for small businesses in the Region.

GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND POLICIES

Economic Sustainability

The Economic Sustainability goal was developed after the Centre Region Economic Development Assessment was accepted by the COG General Forum. It is included here to reinforce the connection among economic development, land use, and sustainability of the Region.

GOAL 1 - A diversity of employment opportunities and economic generators support and sustain the Centre Region while minimizing the impact on community resources. [Source: New Goal, Centre Regional Planning Agency Staff]

Objective 1.1

The Centre Region municipalities should assist in the recruitment of businesses to the area that will make employment opportunities available to the Centre Region's residents.

Policy 1.1.1

Existing resources, such as available land, existing infrastructure, and Beneficial Reuse water, should be used to market the Centre Region to high-tech and environmentally conscious companies.

Policy 1.1.2

The Centre Region should work with existing agencies, such as the Chamber of Business and Industry for Centre County, the SEDA-COG, and local partners, to recruit environmentally conscious and high-tech businesses (such as nanotechnology, micro-electronics manufacturing, and pharmaceutical manufacturing) to the Centre Region.

Policy 1.1.3

The Centre Region should work with Penn State University to promote research that is being conducted to encourage environmentally conscious and high-tech businesses (such as nanotechnology, micro-electronics manufacturing, and pharmaceutical manufacturing) to locate in the Centre Region.

Objective 1.2

Barriers to job creation and economic development should be identified and remediated.

Policy 1.2.1

The Centre Region municipalities should work with the Centre Regional Planning Agency to implement aspects of the Centre Region Economic Development Assessment that was completed in 2011.

