



Shared Strategies for a Stronger Region

JUNE 2018



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ALLEGHENIES AHEAD

Alleghenies Ahead

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INTRODUCTION

We need jobs. Jobs will fix our problems.”

We can’t find workers for the jobs we have.”

These two statements echo across the Southern Alleghenies and shape many of the public and private discussions about what ails the region and what will make its communities and families stronger.

They seem contradictory and often lead to frustrating chicken-or-egg conversations. Do we need to create jobs to attract workers, or do we need a good workforce standing at the ready? Is it both? What does it mean to create jobs anyway, and why can’t we just land the next Volkswagen plant or steal some companies from Maryland?

These are not contradictory statements, however. Instead, they reflect a reality that regions across the country have been grappling with for decades. Jobs that many parts of the Southern Alleghenies used to rely on in manufacturing, energy, and transportation – offering excellent wages in the postwar era to workers with a high school diploma or less – have mostly vanished and are not returning. This void is strongly felt in the form of empty or distressed houses and families that struggle to get by with low-wage jobs and lowered expectations.

On the other hand – and in stark contrast – the portion of our region’s workforce that is skilled is in high demand and able to live very comfortably in affordable communities. As Baby Boomers continue their transition to retirement, though, there won’t be enough of these workers. This will create a shortage of electricians, nurses, plumbers, doctors, engineers, managers, farmers, and a wide range of other skillsets that businesses, institutions, and residents in the region rely on. These shortages are due, in part, to the decades of outmigration caused by previous economic ebbs and the thousands of people who don’t live here today because their parents or grandparents moved out in 1972, 1985, or more recently.

So, what is there to do that hasn’t already been done to deal with limited economic opportunities for workers with few or outdated skills and a looming shortage

of skilled workers across the region’s economy? Why is there a nagging sense that decades of investment in highways, workforce training, industrial development, and numerous other initiatives haven’t fundamentally ‘fixed’ these issues? Why can’t we just create good jobs and use them to lure people back?

All good questions. It’s important, though, to acknowledge that creating jobs isn’t something that counties, cities, boroughs, or other public entities can do – outside of hiring people to maintain water systems, roads, courts, and perform other services for the public. Aside from just hiring people, the public sector’s role is limited to the task of directing limited resources and adopting policies that create the conditions that increase the likelihood that jobs will be created by the private sector and that skilled workers will have a greater probability of being retained in or attracted to our region.

The work needed to create these conditions in 2020 or 2030 – the investments we make in ourselves and our communities, in other words – will likely not resemble efforts made in previous eras. The work will require new financial and policy tools to accomplish certain goals, but it will also – and perhaps more importantly – require a change of attitude. Embracing risk and collaboration are central to the work of successful regions in the 21st Century.

Alleghenies Ahead is a collaborative effort to develop and implement strategies that will increase the region’s chances to create jobs, increase the region’s capacity to compete for households who have choices, and become a region of stronger and more vital communities. Alleghenies Ahead recognizes that no single project or issue or entity can do this – that it requires attention on multiple fronts that haven’t traditionally been connected to the problem of job creation or household attraction such as housing, recreation, and technology. Businesses and families have countless options today, and helping them choose the Southern Alleghenies is something that every investment and policy decision in the region – from whether to renovate a middle school, to the design of a Dollar General on Main Street – stands to influence.

Guided by the principle to “plan regionally



and implement locally,” the counties of Bedford, Blair, Cambria, Fulton, Huntingdon, and Somerset are working together on Alleghenies Ahead – Pennsylvania’s largest comprehensive planning and implementation effort – to pave the way for collaboration and joint action in a region where many opportunities and challenges are shared.

Also shared by the region are numerous opportunities and assets that already make the region competitive, contribute to a high quality of life, and provide a strong base to build around.

A collection of **natural landscapes and outdoor recreational opportunities** that are equaled by few places in the eastern United States.

Excellent school systems that reflect a longstanding commitment to education as a basis for upward mobility.

A rich **agricultural heritage** that remains vital today.

Proximity to the economic and cultural hubs of Pittsburgh, Baltimore/Washington, and State College – providing residents with easy access to major metropolitan assets.

Historic cities and boroughs with growing potential at a time of renewed interest in neighborhood living.

INTRODUCTION

How to Use This Document

Alleghenies Ahead provides a framework for making decisions and prioritizing actions in ways that best respond to key issues and the region's core values. Local governments and institutions at all levels – from regional to local – can use the framework to align their actions with those of other entities and to ensure that their actions are helping to contribute to stronger, more competitive communities.

In addition to its decision-making framework, Alleghenies Ahead also identifies specific priorities and actions to implement. But rather than serving as a static to-do list, these priorities and actions are intended to be regularly revisited and evaluated. Conditions change over time, after all, and priorities in 2022 could be different from priorities in 2018.



Trends and Conditions

What are the most important trends shaping the region and its communities today – and how do they influence the region's ability to compete and thrive? This section defines the region's demographic disadvantage – especially its rapidly aging population – and the market conditions that inhibit investment by local governments.



Critical Issues

What are the biggest issues facing the region and how do they relate to the ability of communities to compete for households and businesses – especially those that have options? This section describes seven “Big Things” that have relevance across the region.



Values and Principles

Decisions are made everyday by public and private entities throughout the region on matters big and small. What values and principles can help in coordinating decision-making for collective impact?

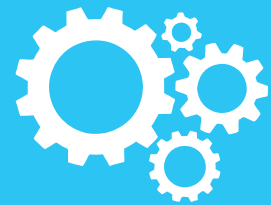
This section identifies core values that are then distilled into four principles for decision-making: (1) Our region must first look within; (2) Our region must work together; (3) Our region must protect its natural beauty and historic character; (4) Our region must support creativity.



Setting Priorities

The financial and human resources needed to make progress on critical issues and position the region to better compete for businesses and households are limited. Channeling these resources in a focused way – rather than spreading them thin to little effect – is not only wise but necessary.

This section identifies current priorities in the region and each county – areas where counties and communities are able and willing to dedicate the resources necessary to translate ideas into action.



Taking Action

What will be done to make progress on our priorities, and why? What outcomes will we seek and measure? Who will be accountable? What resources will they tap into? When will the work be done? This section identifies the specific activities to be undertaken at the local and regional levels.

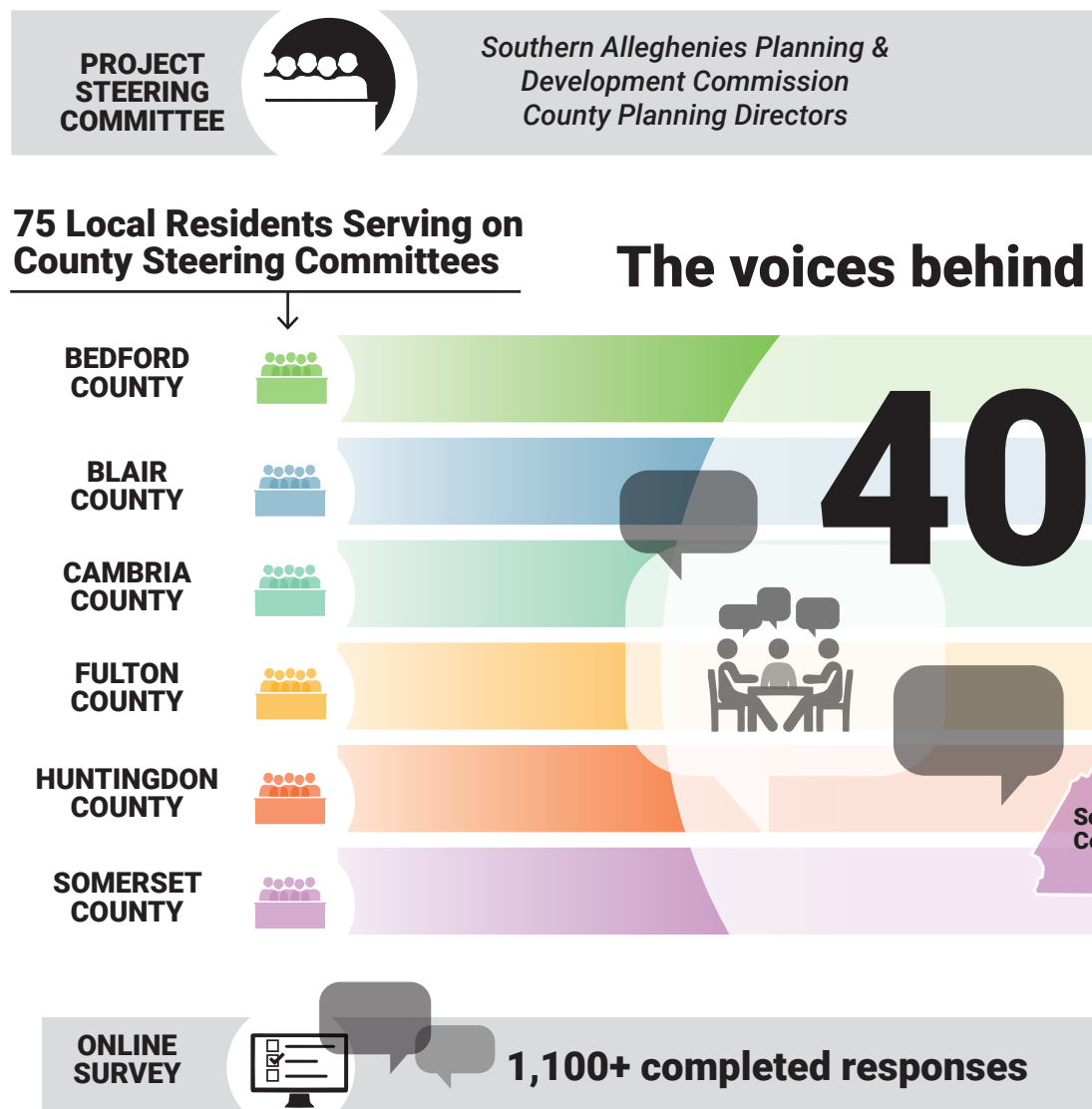
INTRODUCTION

Forging Alleghenies Ahead

Alleghenies Ahead has been shaped by contributions from individuals throughout the region – including 75 residents serving on six county-level steering committees. They, in turn, engaged over 400 of their friends, neighbors, colleagues, and family members in “kitchen table conversations” to discuss the state of their communities, their core values, and how they make decisions.

The work of steering committee members was supplemented by an online survey, a week of open house events throughout the region, and small stakeholder meetings with leaders in key sectors.

But the work of Alleghenies Ahead – implementing strategies in the coming years that address critical issues and make the region more competitive – will be ongoing. Honest dialogue about resource allocation, priorities, and trade-offs will be essential as residents and their elected leaders are faced with decisions both foreseeable and unforeseeable.



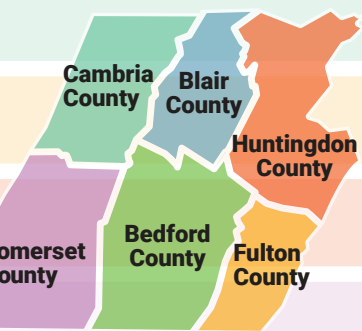
Consultant Team



Coordination, facilitation, and research support

Alleghenies Ahead

0+ Participants in kitchen table conversations



Trends and Conditions

What trends and conditions are essential for us to address through our decisions and investments?



Our quality of life is great. Our schools are excellent. We're close to big cities, but not too close. My family is rooted here.

Ask almost anyone in the Southern Alleghenies region about why they live here or what's working in the region's favor, and you're likely to hear one or more of these sentiments.

You're also likely to get a list of what isn't working or what threatens the health and viability of their communities. It might be jobs. It might be taxes and regulation. It might be the children or grandchildren who live two states away. It might be a dozen or more other things that people find discouraging, even as they acknowledge the region's many advantages.

So, what are the most important underlying trends and conditions to be aware of in the Southern Alleghenies – and to address through actions taken on a daily basis in communities throughout the region? Two overarching trends stand out for the impact they are having, or will likely have, on the region's long-term competitiveness and economic health:

1

Demographic Disadvantage

The region's rapid aging is a problem not because of who lives here today – but who doesn't live here today. The relative smallness of the region's younger generations, whittled down by decades of out-migration, has significant implications for labor markets, housing markets, and the sustainability of critical services.

2

Varying Implementation Capacity

Six counties and over 230 local jurisdictions make decisions and investments that influence their own competitiveness and that of the region. But many of these jurisdictions – especially cities and boroughs – have little capacity to invest in ways that are likely to make them more attractive to households and businesses that have options and can locate anywhere.

1 Demographic Disadvantage

The aging of the region's population isn't a new phenomenon.

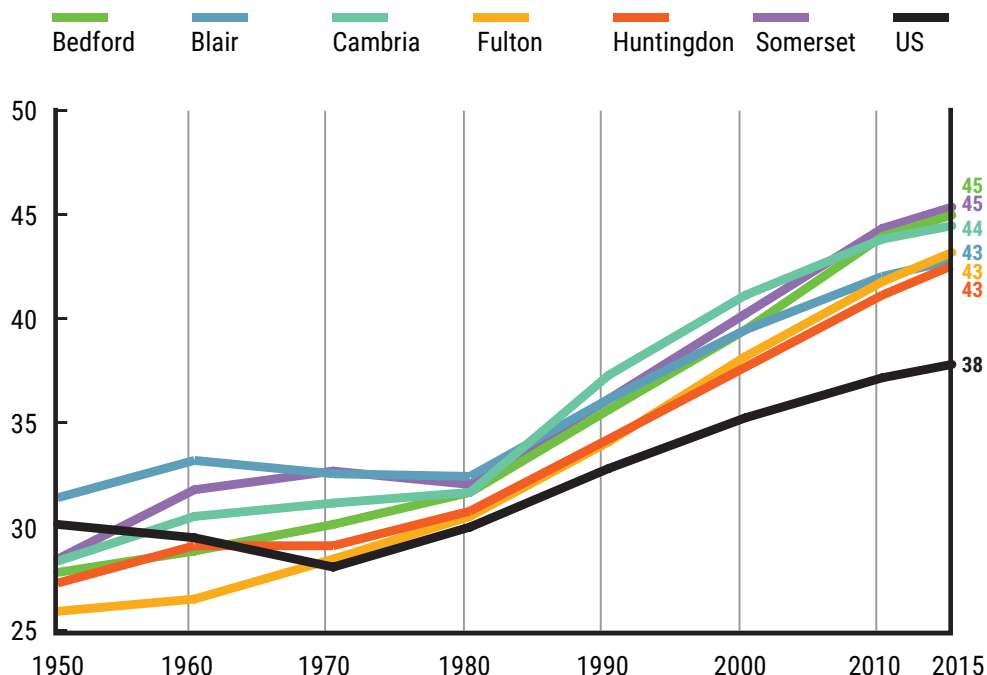
The median age of every county in the region has been higher than the national median since 1970. And since 1980, the region's population has been getting older at a faster rate than the rest of the country.

In the past, this could be shrugged off as an inevitable and perhaps even benign consequence of longer life expectancies. But the aging of the region doesn't merely reflect the fact that people are getting older and living longer. It also reflects the relative smallness of the region's younger generations – a gap that could have significant implications for the region's labor and housing markets in the near future.

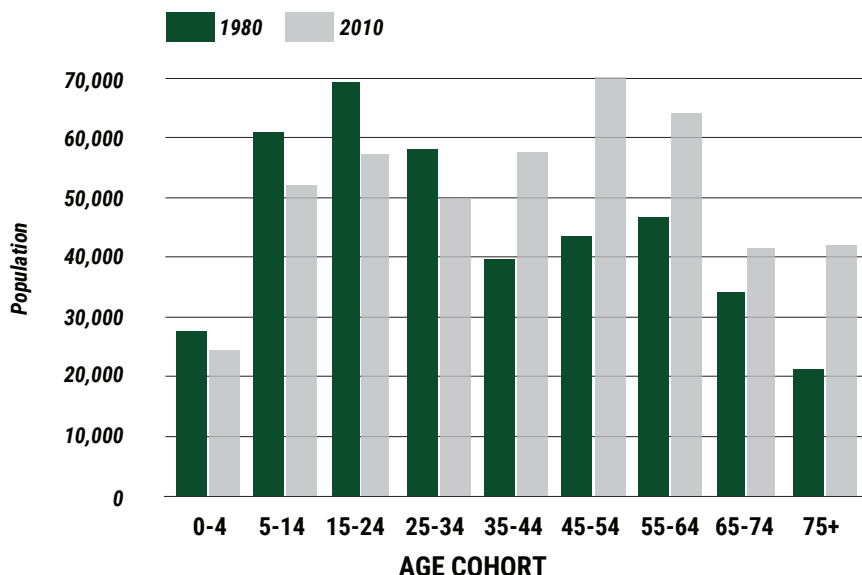
As this population age diagram demonstrates, populations above 35 all grew dramatically between 1980 and 2010 as Baby Boomers, Gen Xers, and their parents aged. Meanwhile, age cohorts below 35 all shrank during the same period – despite Millennials now forming the largest single generational block in the U.S.

The influence of the region's Baby Boomers at a time when most are still in the workforce and at the peak of their earning potential (the last Baby Boomers will turn 65 in 2029) can be seen in recent economic data. Median household incomes in all six counties have either kept pace with or outpaced statewide income performance since 2000 – an unlikely scenario if the region had had thousands more early-career workers in the labor force.

Median Age by County, 1950-2015



Regional Population by Age Group, 1980 VS 2010



Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

TRENDS AND CONDITIONS

The stunted size of the region's younger age cohorts is further expressed by vital statistics.

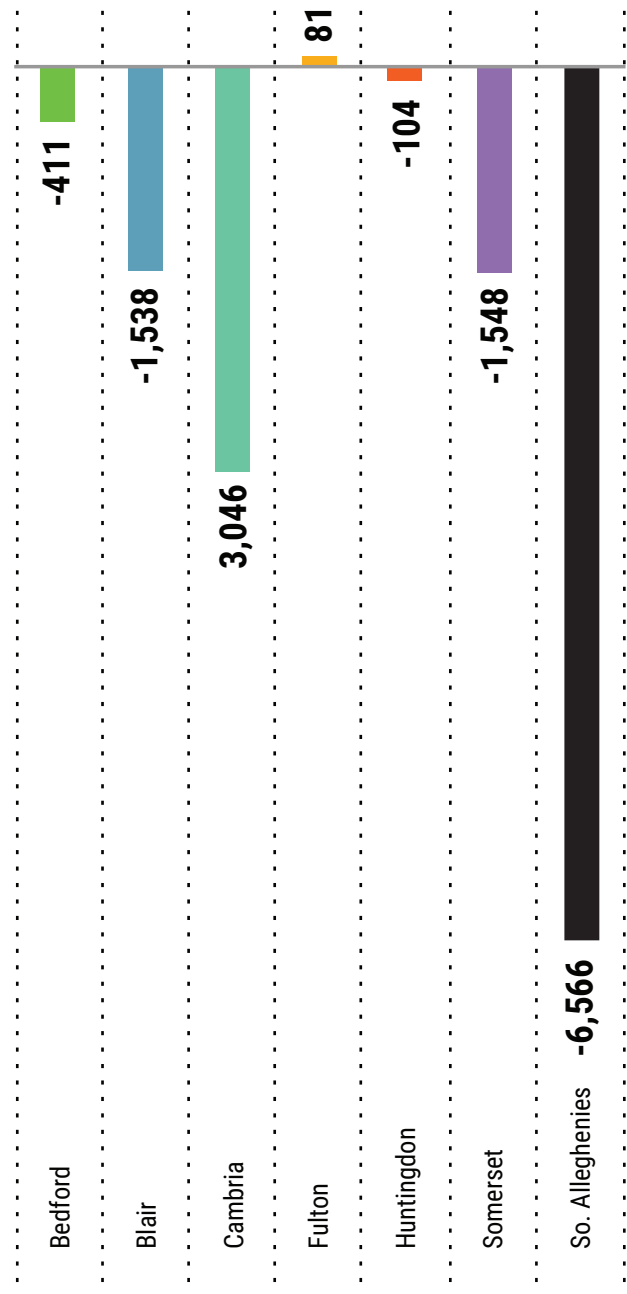
For example, the number of deaths have exceeded births in five of the region's six counties since 2010, resulting in over 6,500 more deaths than births overall. The region's birth rate – now 9.7 births per 1,000 residents – is well below the U.S. average of 12.3 and similar to rates found in Slovakia, Latvia, and other rapidly aging countries.

Migration patterns also reflect the widening demographic gap, in part because younger adults (especially those under

30) are more mobile and more likely to move from one place to another than older households. Between 2010 and 2016, all six counties in the region experienced a net out-migration of residents to other parts of the U.S., with a net regional loss of just over 10,000 residents. And unlike the rest of Pennsylvania, immigration from other countries to the Southern Alleghenies was too small to offset domestic losses.

A significant part of the region's demographic gap is much harder to measure – the people who were never born here to begin with because of out-migration in past decades. The gap coming into focus today is the cumulative result of decades of population loss or stagnancy.

**Natural Population Change Since 2010
(births minus deaths)**

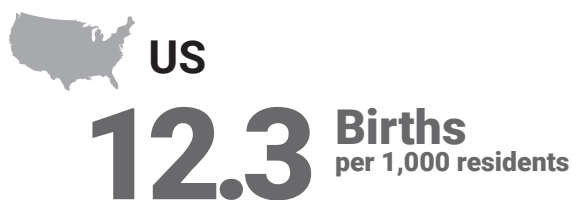


**6,500 more
deaths than births
in the region since 2010**

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Components of Population Change.









TRENDS AND CONDITIONS

Birth Rate, 2016



Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

Migration Patterns, 2010-2016

		Domestic Migration (within US)	International Migration
	Pennsylvania	-183,614	195,038
	Bedford	-1,035	32
	Blair	-1,252	213
	Cambria	-6,057	336
	Fulton	-250	30
	Huntingdon	-406	164
	Somerset	-1,214	194
	So. Alleghenies	-10,214	969

10,200

more people moved out
of the region's counties to
other parts of the country
than moved in. Nationally,
younger adults are the
most mobile age group.

Only 969

people moved to the region
from another country — not
nearly enough to offset
domestic losses.

TRENDS AND CONDITIONS

LOOMING: Troubling Labor Shortages

A consistent message from employers in the region is this: they have a hard time finding workers to fill available jobs.

The region's demographic disadvantage is likely to make this even more difficult in the coming decade, across most economic sectors and at most skill levels.

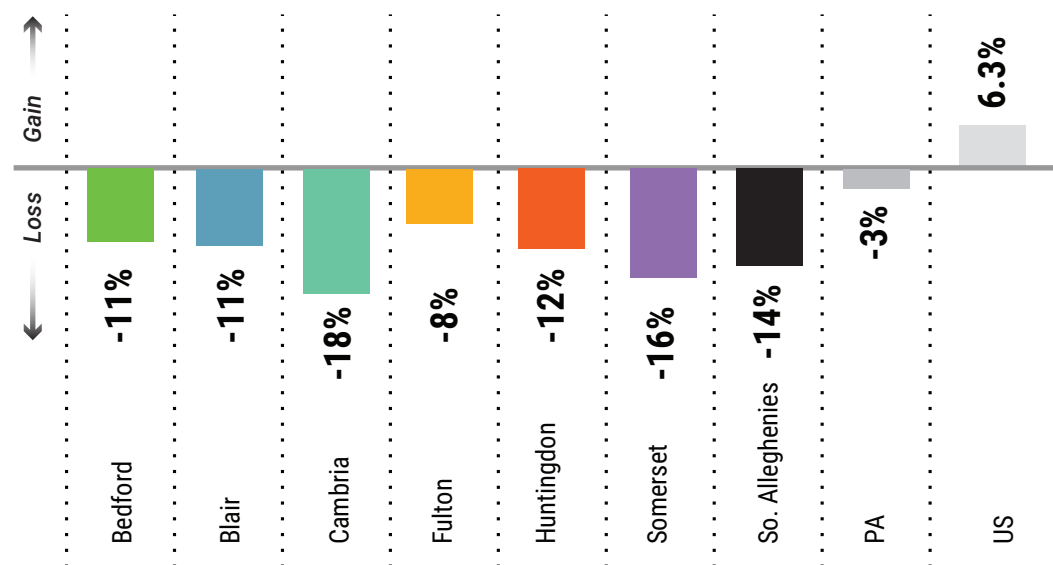
The labor force in prime working age (25-54) has fallen steeply in each county since 2000 despite rising nationally by 6%. Additionally, workers over 55 are nearing 30% of the workforce in the region, a dramatic shift from 2000 when only 10% of jobs were held by workers of that age.

Who will work in hospitals, schools, factories, restaurants, offices, fire departments, and other work settings in the coming years if the number of people leaving the workforce exceeds the pool of younger workers?

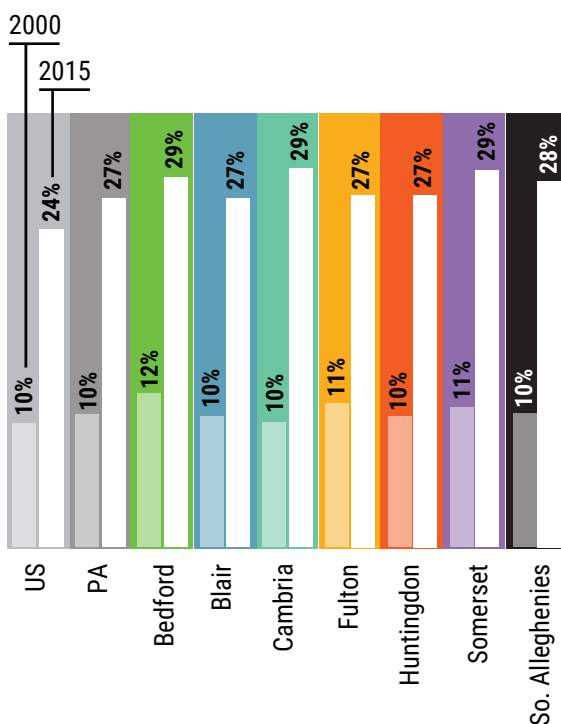
Will the region be able to attract enough younger workers from elsewhere?

Will companies want to operate here if they lack confidence in a ready labor supply?

% Change in Civilian Labor Force Aged 25-54 Between 2000 and 2015



Percentage of Civilian Labor Force Age 55+



Young Adults (Ages 25-34) with College Degrees as a Percentage of the Adult Population

	2000	2015
U.S.	5.2	5.8
Pennsylvania	4.8	5.9
Bedford	1.9	2.3
Blair	3.0	4.0
Cambria	2.6	3.3
Fulton	1.9	2.3
Huntingdon	2.2	2.0
Somerset	2.2	2.5
Pittsburgh Area	6.1	8.2

Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

TRENDS AND CONDITIONS**LOOMING: Worsening Housing Glut**

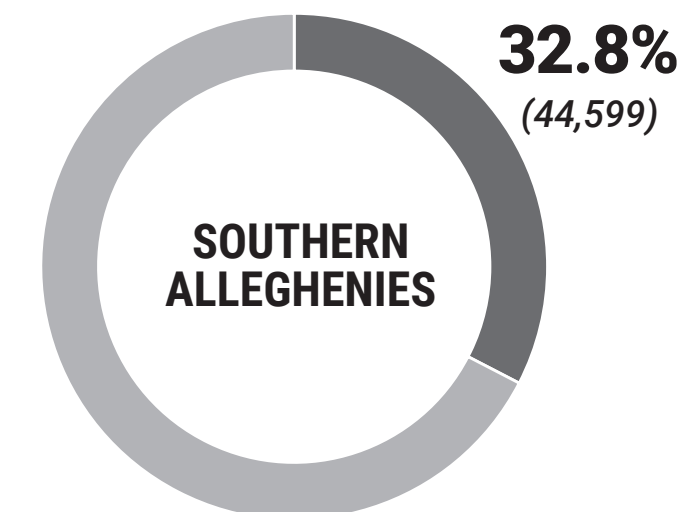
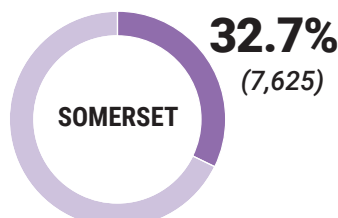
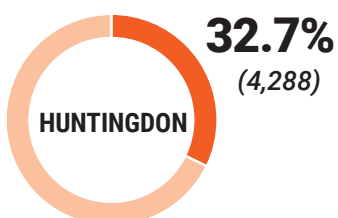
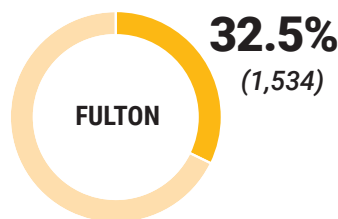
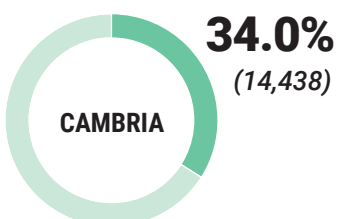
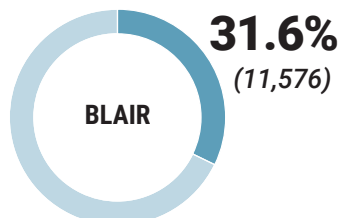
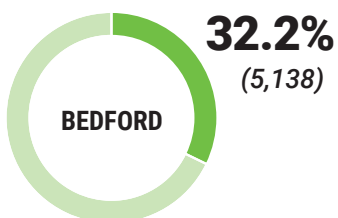
One-third of all homeowners in the Southern Alleghenies region are age 65 or older. Collectively, they own nearly 45,000 homes.

Even a region with a growing population and strong housing demand would struggle to deal with the level of housing succession faced by the Southern Alleghenies. With almost 11,000 currently abandoned housing units across the region and relatively stagnant housing markets, the challenge facing the region is considerable.

Who will buy these houses as they land on the market – especially houses that have significant levels of deferred maintenance?

To what extent will prices be depressed by excessive supply – and what effect will that have on development of new housing stock and reinvestment by current owners?

If abandoned houses proliferate, will communities be able to respond to contain the damage to confidence and surrounding property values?

% of Homeowners Age 65+, 2015**What needs to be addressed?**

The region needs to attract and retain younger households at a time when every other region is trying to do the same thing.



TRENDS AND CONDITIONS**2 Varying Implementation Capacity**

Strong levels of demand for real estate and services are an indication that a place is competitive – that households and businesses want to be there and invest there. When demand is strong, property values rise, the tax base expands, and a **community's ability to invest in itself and shape its own future grows.**

Using several indicators of demand and market strength, **five types of local markets have been identified** in the Southern Alleghenies region and reflect wide variations in local capacity to invest proactively in themselves. Only a few communities in the region are truly competitive today and exhibit strong levels of demand. Many more have more moderate levels of demand and are vulnerable to decline in the coming decade, or have low levels of demand.

Competing for younger households and entrepreneurs, or encouraging existing businesses to expand, requires investments in assets that people and businesses seek. Where demand is low, capacity to become more competitive is also low.

FIVE MARKET TYPES**Competitive Markets**

These are the places where households and businesses with options – that can choose almost any location in the region – are choosing to be. Demand is strong, household incomes are strong, and levels of private and public investment are healthy – making these markets ever more desirable.

Implementation and Investment Capacity:
HIGH

Stable Markets

These are not the most competitive markets in the region, but they are still doing well. Prices are rising at a healthy pace, vacancy and abandonment are minimal, and household incomes are strong.

Implementation and Investment Capacity:
MODERATE

Note: The county maps on the following pages (18-23) describe general market conditions in each municipality using the categories described above. These were determined through an equal weighting of the following indicators of demand: Population Change (2000-2015), Median Home Value vs. PA Median (2015), Median Home Value Change Relative to PA Medians (2000-2015), Housing Abandonment Rate (2015), Median Household Income vs. PA (2015), Median Household Income Change Relative to PA Medians (2000-2015), % of Residents Receiving SSI Income (2015), and % Receiving Public Assistance and/or SNAP (2015).



What needs to be addressed?

Counties and communities need to **coordinate** and invest limited resources in ways that will make themselves more marketable and competitive – and that requires **focus and prioritization.**

At-risk Markets

These communities are in the middle – demand for housing is neither strong nor weak. Household incomes and poverty rates are about average for Pennsylvania. In a region that isn't growing, though, these markets are at risk of slipping due to the region's demographic disadvantages and may have limited means to deal with the fallout.

**Implementation and
Investment Capacity:
SLIPPING**

Weak Markets

The region's weak markets may have been stable through most of the 20th century, but aging building stocks with growing levels of deferred maintenance have been stunting demand, dampening prices, and leading to growing concentrations of households with low incomes and few options. Tax bases are stagnant and limit local capacity to attract investment.

**Implementation and
Investment Capacity:
TROUBLED**

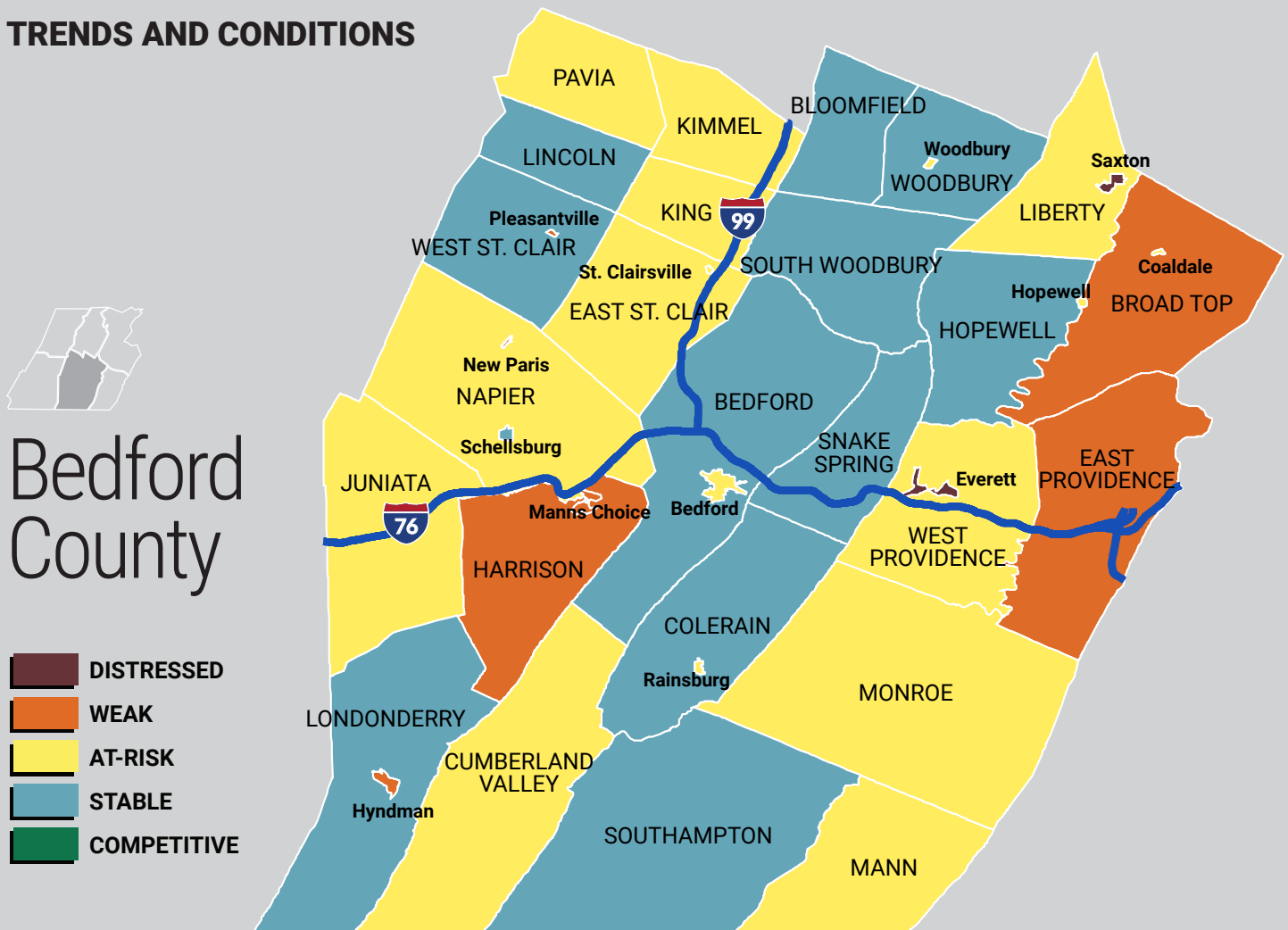
Distressed Markets

Demand has been weak for a prolonged period in these markets, resulting in high vacancy rates, low property values, and high concentrations of impoverished households that have few options. Perceptions of high risk keep private investment at a minimum.

**Implementation and
Investment Capacity:
SEVERELY
CHALLENGED**



TRENDS AND CONDITIONS



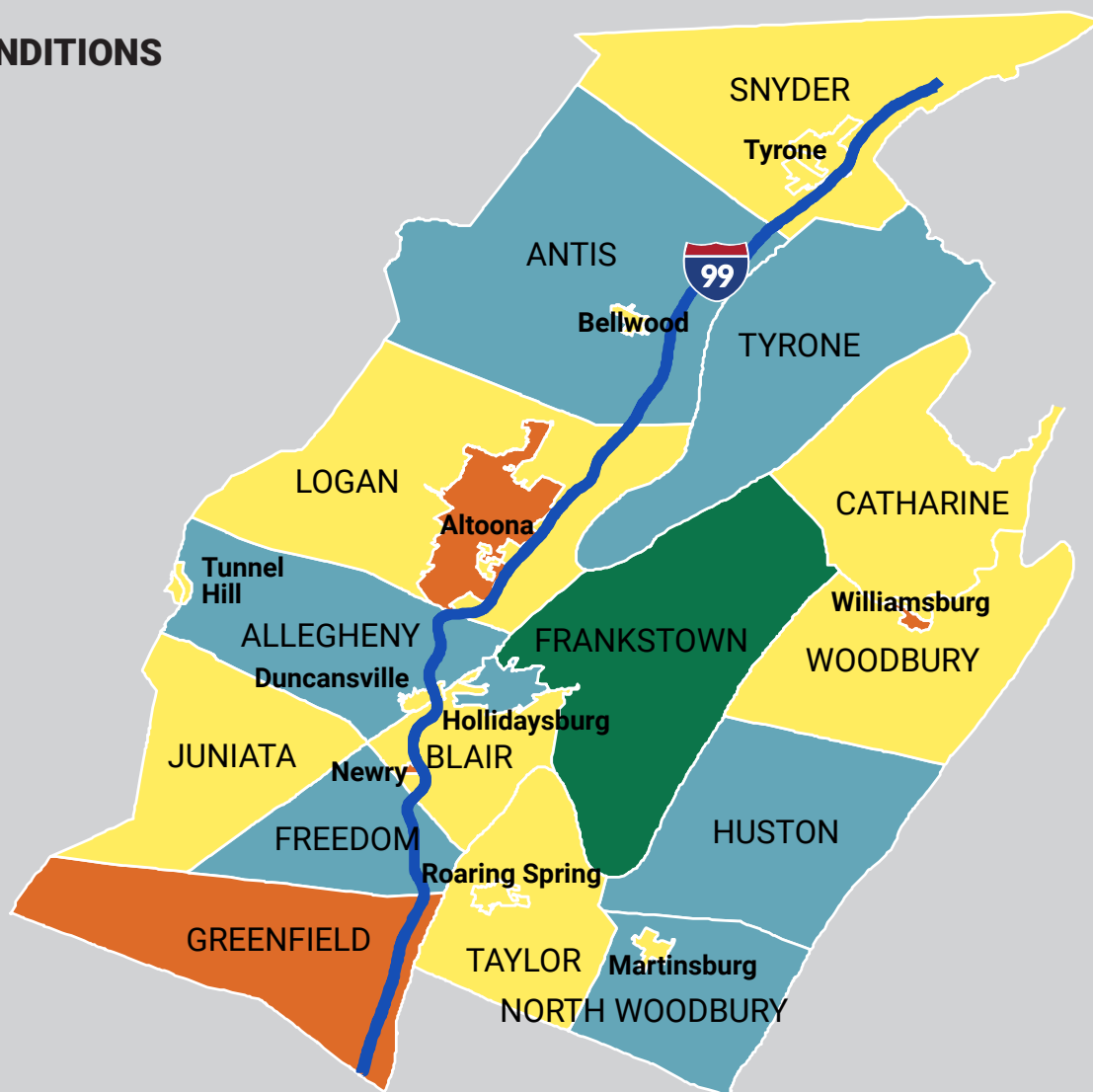
Bedford borough has one of the region's most vibrant and charming central business districts. ***To what extent can this be an engine to draw new households and businesses to the borough and county?***

A column of stable rural townships runs north-south through the center of the county. Some have strong agricultural sectors, others are buoyed by retirees and second homes. ***What will farm succession and age-based housing turnover do to their stability?***

Several boroughs have weak or distressed markets and very little capacity to stimulate demand. ***Who will invest in them and buy houses there? Do any of them have assets to preserve and build demand around?***

TRENDS AND CONDITIONS

Blair County



Frankstown is one of the strongest markets in the entire region. ***For it and other suburban markets surrounding Altoona, what adaptations will be necessary as homes and infrastructure age?***

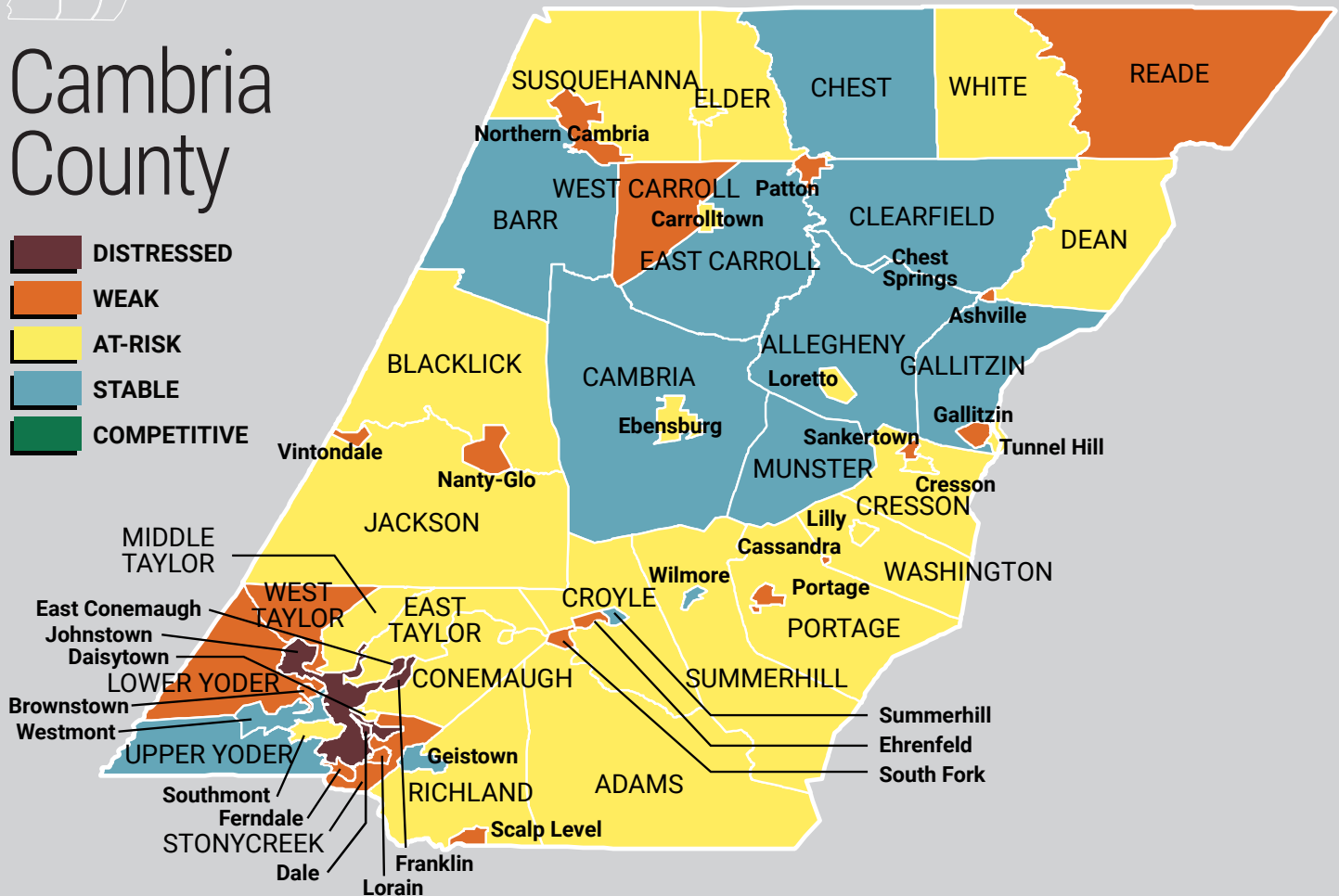
As a group, Blair County's boroughs have stronger markets and more capacity than boroughs in other counties – led by a very stable Hollidaysburg. ***What investments do they need to make, and what risks should they take, to get stronger?***

Altoona is out from under its Act 47 “financially distressed” status, but remains a fundamentally weak market. ***What will it take to make Altoona a ‘community of choice’ in Blair County?***

TRENDS AND CONDITIONS



Cambria County



Extreme political fragmentation has created a patchwork of stable, vulnerable, and distressed markets in close proximity around Johnstown. ***Can blight and abandonment in this area be addressed in a way that spurs reinvestment around key assets?***

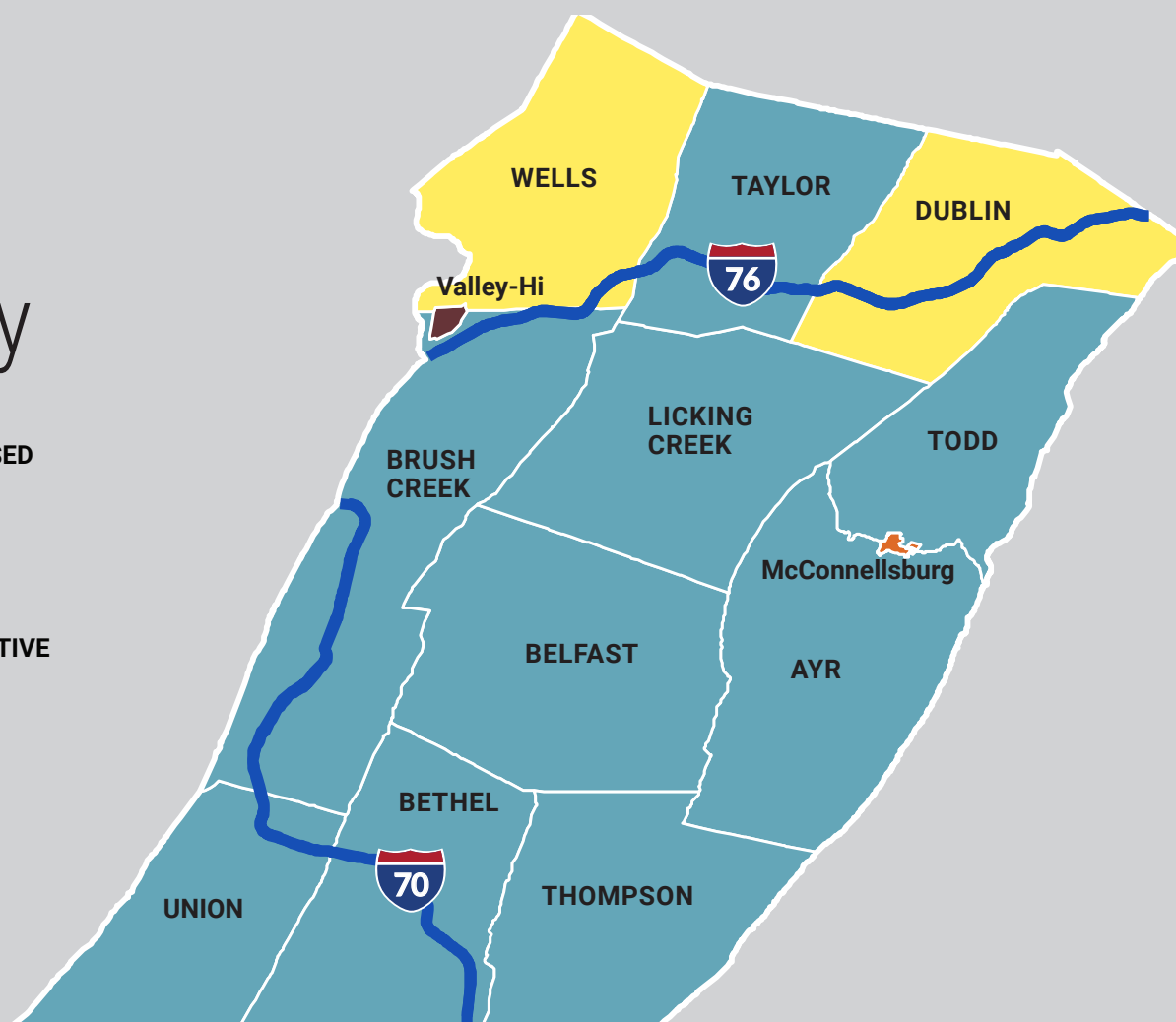
Central Cambria County – centered around Ebensburg – is generally stable. ***What investments will keep these communities stable and help them compete with nearby Indiana?***

There are numerous weak and distressed boroughs with nominal tax bases. ***Which ones will pursue merger or consolidation to bolster their financial capacities? Which ones are destined to keep shrinking – and is that okay?***

TRENDS AND CONDITIONS



Fulton County



Fulton County is rural and mostly stable, helped in recent years by demand filtering across the Maryland border. A small population historically means that the county isn't confronted with issues of oversupply.

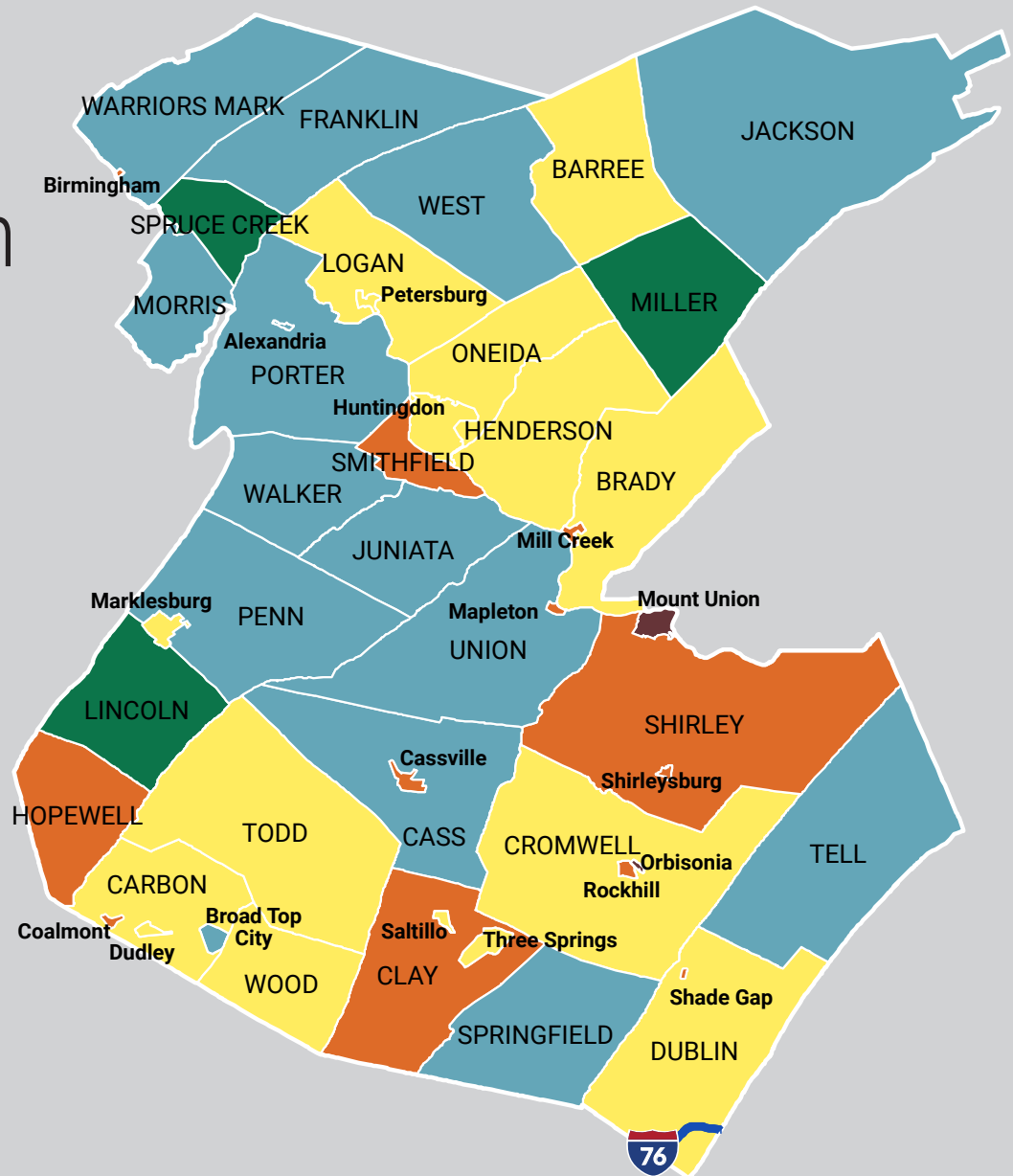
McConnellsborg – the county's lone population center – is a key asset and important for retaining skilled workers and essential services. It is also a weak market. ***What investments will help to stimulate demand and make it one of the region's more vital boroughs?***

What happens if JLG Industries downsizes or leaves? What can be done to diversify a vulnerable economy?

TRENDS AND CONDITIONS



Huntingdon County



The historic fabric of Huntingdon borough is remarkably well-preserved. ***What can be done to boost investment in this asset and bolster the borough's finances?***

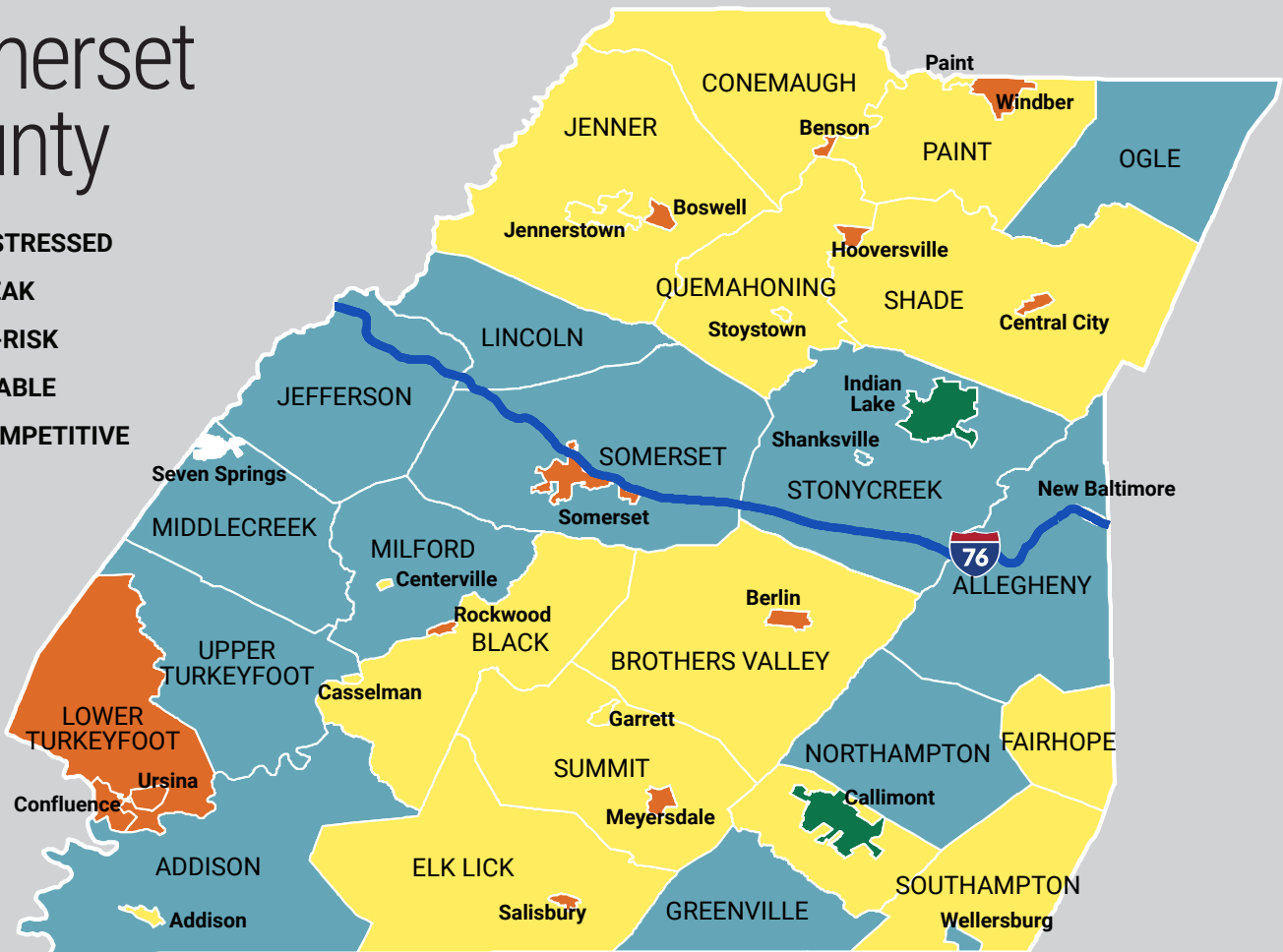
Raystown Lake is a major economic driver. ***How can the lake experience be enhanced and better tied to the economies of surrounding boroughs?***

Can strong demand in nearby State College be coaxed into at-risk markets in northern Huntingdon County? How?

TRENDS AND CONDITIONS



Somerset County



Most of the county's boroughs have weak levels of demand and investment. ***What collaborations with neighbors or each other will boost their capacity?***

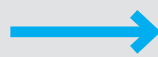
Downtown Somerset is well positioned to serve tourists and residents as a vibrant, mixed-use hub. ***Why hasn't this happened yet, and what can it learn from successful peers in the region?***

Proximity to Pittsburgh is an asset – what can the county do to leverage it?

TRENDS AND CONDITIONS

The Bottom Line

Competing for younger households and expanding our ability to invest in ourselves –this is what we need to address through the decisions we make on a daily, monthly, and yearly basis.



Will the decisions we make...



...increase the likelihood that **young skilled workers** who live here will want to stay here?

...increase the likelihood that **young skilled workers** who don't live here will choose to move here?

...increase the likelihood that **entrepreneurs** will start businesses here?

...improve our **financial capacity** to invest in ourselves?

...improve our **community's ability** to make **trade-offs** that make us stronger?

What kinds of actions will help us compete for younger households and expand our ability to invest in ourselves?

It depends, of course, on the matter at hand...

Is our **housing stock** appealing?

How do our **recreational and cultural opportunities** stack up?

Are we **wired to compete**?

More broadly, what do we need to get right to make households and businesses more likely to stay and thrive here, or to move here from somewhere else?

Critical Issues



Broadband and Cellular Service



Collaboration and Coordination



Agriculture



Housing and Blight



Recreational Amenities and Natural Assets



Business and Workforce Development



Public Health and Safety



Transportation

Critical Issues



What critical issues are having the biggest impact on the vitality and prospects of the Southern Alleghenies -- and how do these issues influence the region's ability or inability to compete for younger households and build financially sustainable communities?

Seven critical issues stand out for being relevant to some degree in each county – and as issues where the region is already experiencing some level of progress to build from.



Broadband and Cellular Service



Adequate internet speeds are essential to competing in the 21st Century, connecting otherwise isolated areas to a global economy.

Collaboration and Coordination



The region's ability to implement its priorities and maintain critical assets is tied to how well a variety of partners work together.

Business and Workforce Development



A healthier job market and more dynamic business environment is a key to limiting out-migration and stimulating healthy levels of in-migration.

Housing and Blight



Blighted and chronically vacant properties are a drag on the market and limit the levels of investment in new or existing housing stock.



Recreational Amenities and Natural Assets



The region's recreational amenities – which often intersect with its natural assets – play an increasingly vital role in attracting investment by contributing to the lifestyle options that help the region compete for households and visitors.

Agriculture



Agriculture is the region's single largest active land use and could play a significant role in the development of a diverse local food economy.

Public Health and Safety



Health outcomes are poor in much of the region and drug abuse has emerged as one of the major health threats to residents from all walks of life. This affects overall well-being as well as labor force engagement and family stability.

Transportation



For decades, expansion of transportation networks was an important focus, driven by a need to reduce isolation, boost economic opportunities, and improve safety. Today, preserving and maintaining this system is a priority and a challenge.



Broadband and Cellular Service

Broadband and cellular services that are reliable and high quality are essential to economic competitiveness and even public safety – and anecdotes abound about their shortcomings in the Southern Alleghenies.

More needs to be learned about service levels and quality, but recent federal data on fixed broadband services reveal a common urban/rural split, with higher levels of access to high speeds in the more populous counties – with universal access to 25mbps service achieved, in part, through the availability of satellite-based internet. Even in those more populous counties, however, competition and consumer choice are much lower than the national average.

Broadband access and speeds have been improving year after year across the Southern Alleghenies, but **the region risks falling well behind the pace of communities that are quickly moving forward and achieving speeds measured in gigabytes per second**, including Pittsburgh, State College, Harrisburg, and Bethlehem. Although mountainous terrain and low population densities make such service uneconomical for much of the region at this time, targeted upgrades must be pursued.

People who work from home and can live almost anywhere – a population that increasingly relies on broadband and should be a key part of the region's economic future – grew by 20% in Pennsylvania between 2009 and 2015, and by 14% nationally. In this region, however, the number actually fell by 1.8% and now accounts for 3.2% of all workers compared to 4.4% nationally. Better broadband will be needed to grow this workforce.

The Link to Demographic Disadvantages

For younger households and most businesses today, access to high speed internet and reliable cell service is an expectation not unlike electricity. **Places that don't have it cannot be competitive.**

The Link to Varying Implementation Capacity

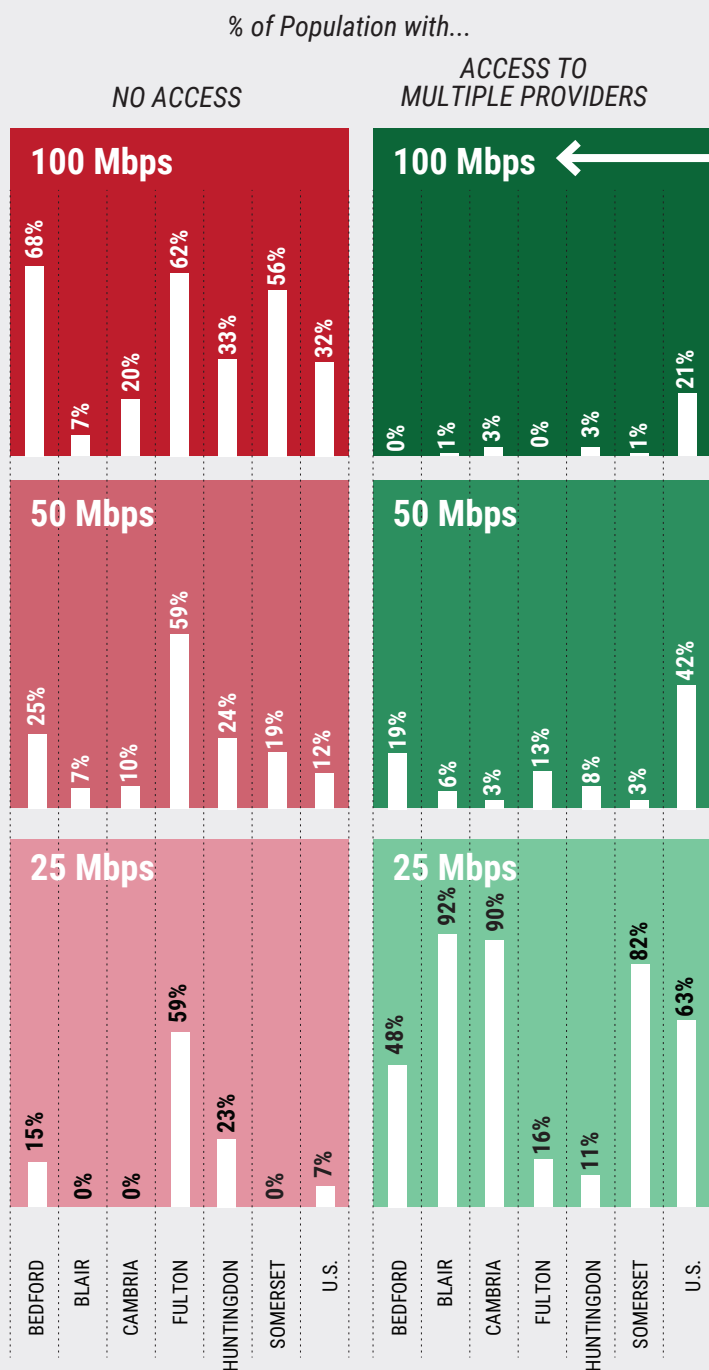
Local capacity to negotiate with service providers or stimulate new infrastructure is limited, making county- and region- level action a necessity.

PROGRESS BEING MADE

Somerset County, in a partnership with state and federal partners, is installing a 22-mile fiber optic line in 2018-19 to improve broadband service to industrial parks and adjacent customers.



Fixed Broadband Access by Speed and Level of Competition



Access to internet speeds of 100 Mbps (which New York State has set as a near-universal goal) is limited in the region's most rural areas, while competition among high speed service providers is low throughout the region – much lower than national averages.

Cell Service and Safety

Two train derailments in Hyndman in 2017 highlighted the public safety risks posed by some of the region's cellular service gaps, especially the limits they place on communication with and between residents during emergencies. Identifying the most critical gaps and working with service providers to find solutions will do much to alleviate future risks.



Photo Credit: Pennsylvania Sky Ops



Collaboration and Coordination

The region's ability to implement its priorities and maintain critical assets is tied to how well a variety of partners work together. Many issues cut across municipal boundaries and require productive working relationships between multiple entities and sectors.

The presence of **237 municipalities in the region**, many of which have very limited staffing and financial capacity – and even struggle to maintain state-required boards and administrative duties – make this challenging. Compounding this challenge are numerous additional entities, including 170 special-purpose districts (such as fire, water, and sewer districts) and 43 school districts, that bring the total number of service-providing entities in the region (including the counties themselves) to 456. This equates to one entity for every 1,000 residents.

There are success stories in the region that demonstrate a capacity for high-level coordination and inter-municipal cooperation. But there is also considerable frustration that this doesn't happen often enough.

The Link to Demographic Disadvantages

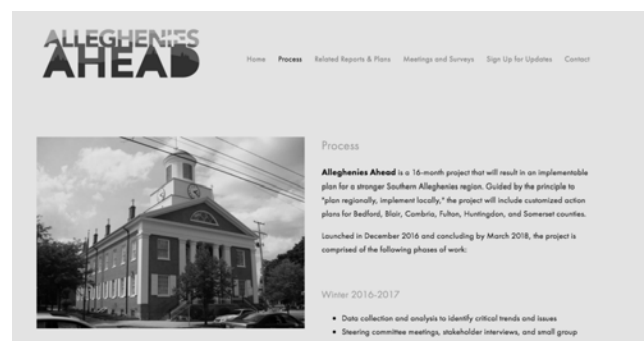
Retirements, looming labor force shortages, and stagnant tax bases make partnerships and structural change not only desirable but necessary.

The Link to Varying Implementation Capacity

Collaborations that bring together the expertise and resources of multiple communities and sectors makes implementation of almost any initiative more likely to happen and more likely to succeed over time.

PROGRESS BEING MADE

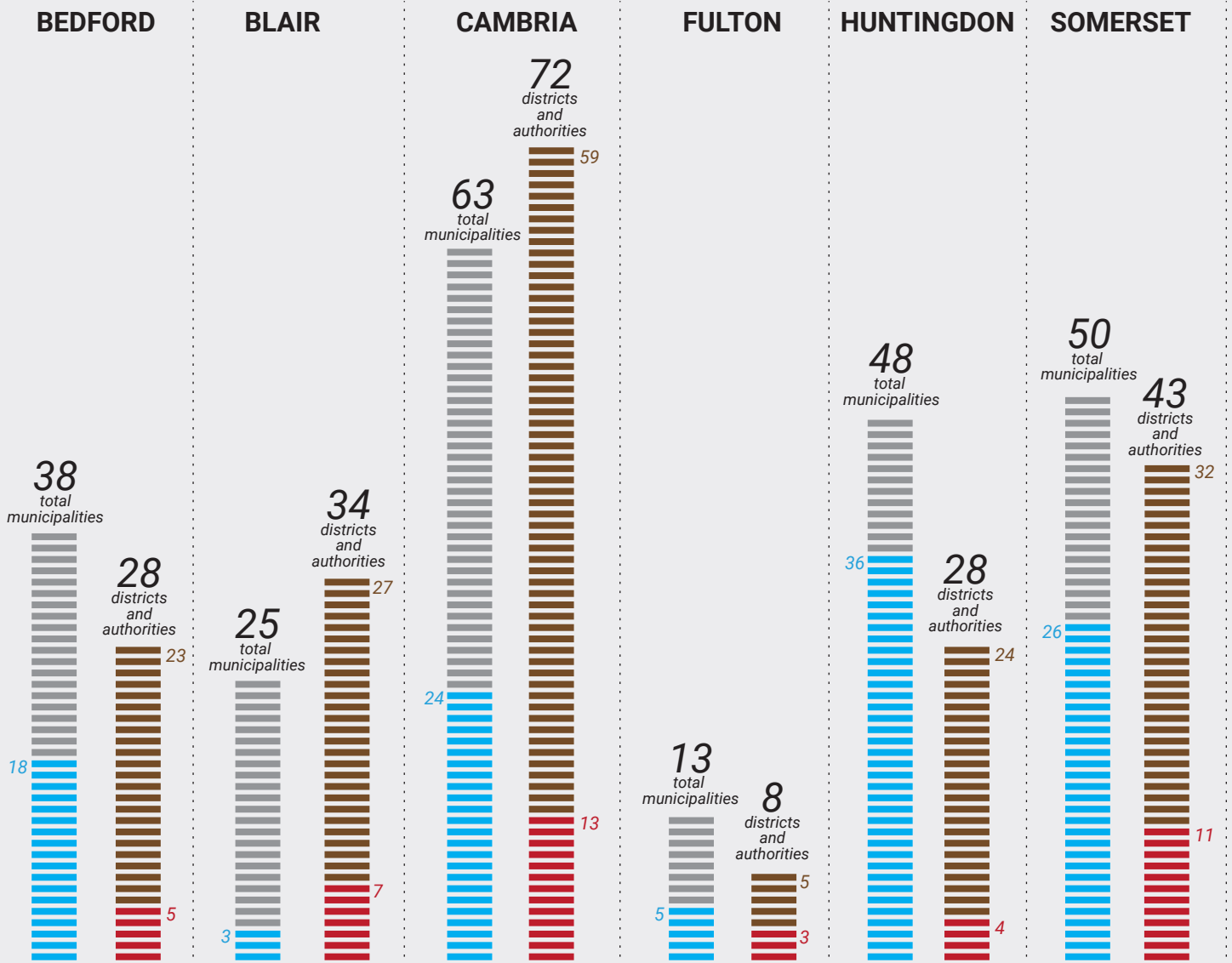
Alleghenies Ahead represents acknowledgement by all six counties in the region about the importance of collaboration and the potential power of a unified regional voice on certain issues.



Number of Municipalities and Other Public Jurisdictions in the Southern Alleghenies



237 Municipalities
 114 Municipalities with Population Below 1,000
 43 School Districts
 170 Other Districts and Authorities





Business and Workforce Development

The region experienced a net loss of 5,800 private sector jobs (a fall of almost 4%) between 2006 and 2015, with four of the six counties shedding jobs. The number of business establishments also fell during that period, in all six counties, by a combined 800 firms.

The 7% drop in total business establishments between 2006 and 2015 underscored a pattern perhaps more troubling than the loss of jobs: relatively low levels of the economic dynamism needed to create new (often small) businesses in the wake of inevitable business failures. Census data on business births and deaths in 2012-13 revealed, for example, that 10% of businesses across the U.S. were newly born (a year old or less) compared to 8.2% in Pennsylvania and just 6.1% in the Southern Alleghenies region. During the same period of analysis, 114 more businesses died in the region than were started.

A healthier job market is key to limiting out-migration and stimulating healthy levels of in-migration, and traditional tools of economic development in the region are critical to achieving this. Emerging tools that connect entrepreneurs with each other and with advice from mentors are increasingly important, and have already showed promise through the new StartUp Alleghenies initiative.

Quality of life factors – such as the variety and quality of leisure activities – is also essential for business development and retention today. With thriving metropolitan areas nearby, the lifestyle assets of the Southern Alleghenies will frequently play a deciding role for entrepreneurs choosing between this and other regions.

The Link to Demographic Disadvantages

Despite job losses, many employers indicate difficulty with filling the jobs they have – a situation that will worsen as the workforce continues to age. Attracting new workers to the region will be central to retaining current businesses, let alone growing new ones.

The Link to Varying Implementation Capacity

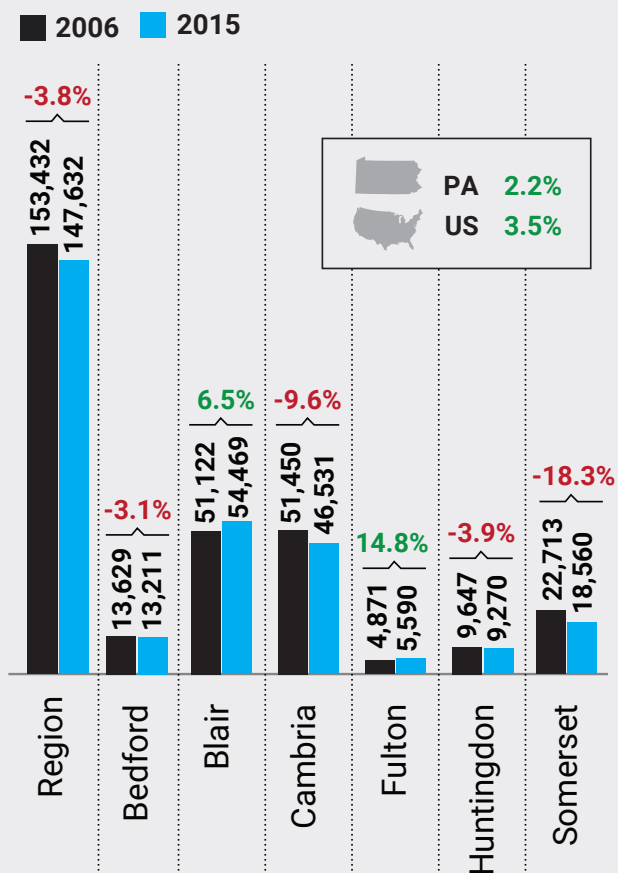
Creating the conditions for job development means investing strongly in the services and infrastructure that businesses expect – and that their skilled workers will expect.

PROGRESS BEING MADE

StartUp Alleghenies was launched in 2017 in Blair, Cambria, and Somerset counties to recruit and cultivate local entrepreneurs. Expansion of the program to all six counties is planned.



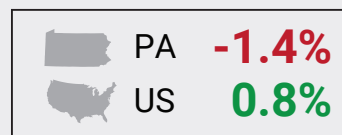
Number of Jobs, 2006 vs 2015



Source: County Business Patterns; excludes most government employees, railroad employees, and self-employed persons

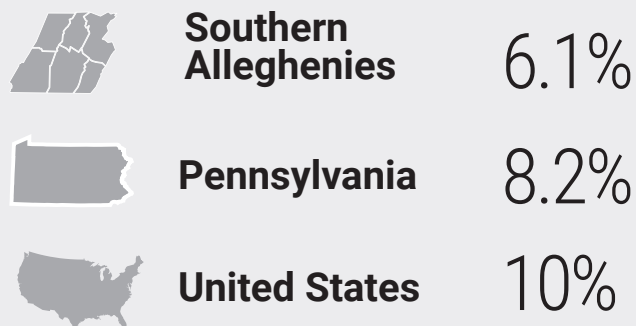
Number of Establishments, 2006 and 2015

	2006	2015	
Bedford	1,100	→ 1,050	-4.5%
Blair	3,334	→ 3,191	-4.3%
Cambria	3,558	→ 3,194	-10.2%
Fulton	313	→ 264	-15.7%
Huntingdon	844	→ 821	-2.7%
Somerset	1,868	→ 1,707	-8.6%



Source: County Business Patterns

New businesses (one year or younger) as a share of all businesses, 2012-13



Source: U.S. Census, Statistics of U.S. Businesses (SUSB)



Agriculture

Agriculture is the region's single largest active land use – with over 4,900 farms covering nearly 40% of the region's land and generating annual crop sales that surpass \$500 million.

The size and nature of the sector varies from county to county and includes everything from dairy (the largest commodity, by value, in all counties except Cambria) and other goods that serve national and international markets, as well as organic farms that serve local and regional niches.

While access to capital and labor and the cultivation of younger farmers are longstanding issues, opportunities are numerous. The sector is a central part of the region's identity that could play an increasingly important role in small business development (through internet sales of local food products) and Main Street activity (restaurants and farmers markets).

While threats to farmland from non-agricultural development are limited in most parts of the region, land use conflicts are not unheard of – especially where industrial-scale operations (such as concentrated animal feeding operations, or CAFOs) have been proposed recently, or where residents unaccustomed to farming odors move from urban to rural areas. Such conflicts often occur in an environment where land use regulation is nonexistent.

The Link to Demographic Disadvantages

Generational succession is an issue for agriculture across the U.S. – but even more so in regions with a diminished base of young people.

The Link to Varying Implementation Capacity







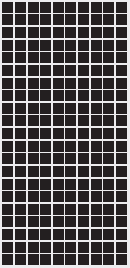
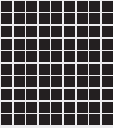
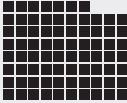
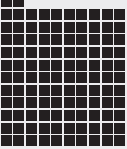
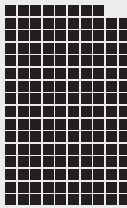
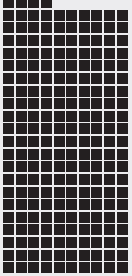





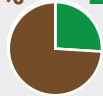






Rural agricultural townships and the boroughs that service them are facing some of the most acute struggles to fill decision-making boards and fund investments in aging infrastructure.

PROGRESS BEING MADE

Across all six counties, 100 farms covering over 15,000 acres have been protected by Pennsylvania's Easement Purchase Program since 1989. At the same time, over 500,000 acres of farmland have been given favorable assessments under the Clean and Green Program.



Agricultural Land and Production Measures, 2012

	BEDFORD	BLAIR	CAMBRIA	FULTON	HUNTINGDON	SOMERSET
# of Farms	 1,210	 525	 551	 656	 833	 1,140
% Change, 2007-2012	↑ 3%	0%	↓ -16%	↑ 8%	↓ -10%	↓ -1%
# of acres farmed	209,795 	90,117 	76,889 	112,210 	158,300 	214,581 
% Change, 2007-2012	↓ -1%	↑ 3%	↓ -13%	↑ 8%	↑ 7%	↑ 4%
Median farm acreage	108	82	76	110	104	118
Share of production value as livestock as crops	70%  30%	84%  16%	44%  56%	75%  25%	81%  19%	74%  26%
Average market value of products sold per farm	\$101,504 	\$205,146 	\$59,240 	\$80,754 	\$112,248 	\$91,411 



Housing and Blight

Decades of soft real estate market conditions in much of the region – resulting from population loss or very tepid growth – has dampened investment in most types of housing. Relatively low rents and prices make the region extremely affordable for the vast majority of households, but they discourage healthy levels of reinvestment by owners and slow the production of new housing products.

Part of attracting and retaining households with skilled workers today is having high-quality, move-in ready housing units that match modern tastes and needs. But both the rental and ownership opportunities in the region for households making at least \$50,000 are limited – putting many current households in the position of renting or owning housing that is a poor fit for their purchasing power. For a household considering a move to the region, this lack of options may have a significant influence on their decision.

Underinvestment in housing and low demand are expressed over time by a deteriorating housing stock and blighted properties – which drag down surrounding property values, threaten quality of life for occupants and neighbors, and provide a bad first impression for visitors and prospective residents. And at the end of the road for such properties is vacancy and abandonment. There are currently **11,500 abandoned housing units across the region, ranging from 4% to 7% of housing in each county.**

The Link to Demographic Disadvantages

Attracting and retaining younger households will be challenging if available housing is a poor match for their needs and blight discourages them from investing.

The Link to Varying Implementation Capacity

Removing blighted properties and stimulating the production of new market-rate housing is critical for the region's competitiveness. But very few communities have the resources or expertise to do this on their own.

PROGRESS BEING MADE

Cambria and Somerset counties adopted Act 152 in 2017 to make more resources available to demolish blighted buildings throughout the county.

More than a dozen market-rate apartments have been developed in downtown Altoona since 2015, introducing a much-needed housing product and boosting downtown-wide revitalization efforts.



Two interrelated housing trends that undermine the region's competitiveness

1

Too much housing that is rapidly **deteriorating from years of underinvestment**, dampening the overall market

24,000

owner-occupied homes in the region (17% of the stock) are valued at \$50,000 or less

Homes values reflect limited marketability due to poor quality, deferred maintenance, or very limited demand in location.

20,000

rental units in the region (50% of the rental stock) rent for \$600 or less per month

Rents are broadly affordable, but generally too low for property owners to invest strongly in improvements and modernization.



11,500

housing units are abandoned across the region, ranging from 4% to 7% of housing in each county

2

Too few options to **meet the needs of middle- and upper-income households**, who settle for inferior alternatives or choose to live elsewhere



71,000



OWNERS

home-owning households in the region make \$50,000 or more and can afford a home priced at \$150,000 or greater.

Only 44,000

homes in the region are valued at \$150,000 or more.

**MISMATCH OF
27,000
HOMES**

13,000



RENTERS

renting households in the region make \$50,000 or more and can afford rent of at least \$1,250 per month.

Only 1,400

rental units in the region are priced at \$1,250 or greater.

**MISMATCH OF
11,600
APARTMENTS**



Recreational Amenities and Natural Assets

The region's recreational amenities play an important role in attracting investment to the region by contributing to the set of lifestyle options that will make the Southern Alleghenies competitive to businesses and households that could locate almost anywhere. Parks, trails, rivers, museums, and restaurants – and everything in between – make the region attractive to tourists and bolster the service economy, but their role in making the region a good place to live is of foremost importance.

The region's natural environment, in particular, presents a unique opportunity – **few places in the United States with such proximity to major population centers have a comparable range of accessible outdoor assets.** Protecting these assets and connecting them to the region's communities is work that must continue.

Within the region's population centers, a handful of historic downtown areas currently stand out as providing high-quality experiences and amenities to both residents and visitors. Carefully designed and maintained spaces, as well as special events, are attracting private investment and businesses to these areas – boosting the range of things to do and making them increasingly desirable places to be. Continuing this progress in the region's best downtowns – and spreading good design and investment practices to others – will be essential for boosting quality of life.

The Link to Demographic Disadvantages

For younger households that have options, quality of life often plays a decisive role in choosing where to live and put down roots.

The Link to Varying Implementation Capacity

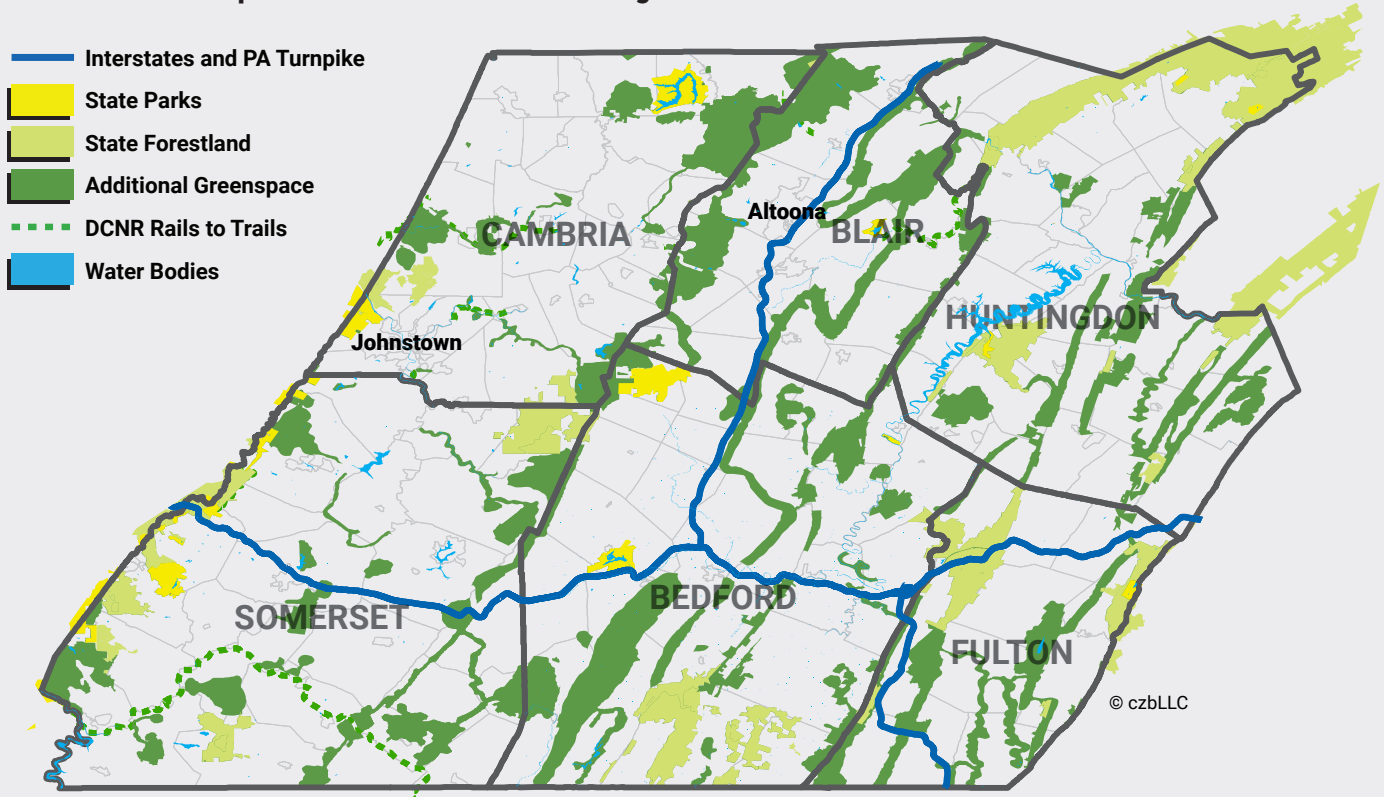
Consistently high-quality assets are important for growing the region's reputation for quality of life. Well-maintained outdoor assets, and great Main Streets to complement them, require a high level of care-taking and investment.

PROGRESS BEING MADE

The Old Pennsylvania Pike (TOPP), running between Bedford and Fulton counties, is an ongoing effort to convert an abandoned highway and tunnel system into a one-of-a-kind recreational asset.



Parks and natural spaces across the Southern Alleghenies



High-quality downtown experiences





Public Health and Safety

Quality of life is closely tied to a population's health and well-being.

Statistics compiled by the national County Health Rankings project reveal that four of the region's six counties ranked in the bottom half among counties in Pennsylvania on overall health outcomes (including rates of premature death, incidence of poor physical and mental health, and low birthweights), while all six counties ranked in the bottom half on health factors (behaviors and habits that influence health, including alcohol and drug use).

The poor health issues indicated by these rankings have wide ranging impacts – on the quality of life and outlook of families in the region, on labor force participation, and on demand for health care and emergency services.

These health rankings are reflected in disability statistics for the region. In all six counties the proportion of adults between ages 18 and 64 who are disabled exceeds national and state averages. Overall, 14.1% of working-age adults in the region are disabled compared to 10.3% nationally. While the difference may seem small, it equates to nearly 10,000 more disabled adults than if the region matched the national rate.

Responses to poor health rankings run the gamut from substance abuse prevention and treatment, to promotion of active lifestyles and good health habits, to investments in health care delivery systems – all of which require careful and sustained coordination to be effective.

The Link to Demographic Disadvantages

As the region's health care and emergency services workforce ages, attracting and retaining personnel to fill critical roles will be a challenge – and an indication of how well the region is competing for younger households generally.

The Link to Varying Implementation Capacity

Changes in rural health care delivery, combined with rapidly aging populations, may require adaptations that most communities are ill-prepared for.

PROGRESS BEING MADE

Operation Our Town in Altoona and Blair County represents a multi-sector partnership to address drug addiction and violence.



Rankings for Health Outcomes and Factors (out of 67 counties)

Health Outcomes








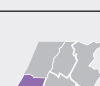
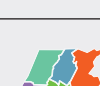


Health Factors



Source: County Health Rankings 2017

Note: "Health Outcomes" encompass such measures as rates of premature death, incidence of poor physical and mental health, and low birthweights. "Health Factors" reflect the prevalence of behaviors and habits that influence health outcomes, including alcohol and drug use.

Disability Rate of Population Ages 18 to 64, 2016

	BEDFORD	14.8%
	BLAIR	14.1%
	CAMBRIA	14.7%
	FULTON	12.5%
	HUNTINGDON	13.2%
	SOMERSET	13.2%
	SOUTHERN ALLEGHENIES	14.1%
	PA	11.1%
	US	10.3%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-year estimate

**Critical
Issues**

The health factors (behaviors and habits) that affect health outcomes can be influenced by public policies and investments related to economic opportunity, recreation, transportation, and other issues prioritized by Alleghenies Ahead.



Transportation

A century's-worth of public investment in roads and highways has given the region an extensive transportation system that traverses some of the most challenging terrain in the eastern U.S. and includes almost 9,000 miles of roadway – the distance between Altoona and Auckland, New Zealand.

For decades, expansion was an important focus, driven by a need to reduce isolation, boost economic opportunities, and improve safety. Today, preserving and maintaining this system is a priority and a challenge. Approximately 55% of the region's road miles are local responsibilities. When not maintained at a consistently high level, they have the potential to dampen the confidence of current and potential residents and businesses – limiting private investment that is needed to support maintenance budgets.

Bridge conditions are an indicator of this challenge in the state and the region, despite notable gains in recent years. 18% of the region's bridges are rated as structurally deficient. While this matches the rate statewide, it is far higher than the national rate of 9%.

Catching up on maintenance presents an opportunity to re-think elements of the transportation system, including how its design supports or hinders efforts to improve downtowns, accommodate recreational uses and alternatives to cars, and respond to new technologies. PennDOT Connects – with its emphasis on engaging local partners and users in determining system design and function – is a solid step in that direction.

Another element of transportation that is being re-thought in communities across the country –and that has the potential to support a number of regional goals – is public transit. Aging populations, changing lifestyle preferences, and a need to better connect households to economic opportunity make this an important issue in both urban and rural areas. Perennial issues related to cost remain a barrier to significant service expansion. But rapidly changing technologies could change the nature of transit considerably in the near-future, and the region should be prepared to lead the way on adapting to these opportunities.

The Link to Demographic Disadvantages

The region's transportation networks need to adapt to the needs of an aging population and provide modal options that will help attract and retain younger residents. Meeting both needs will often involve similar strategies.

The Link to Varying Implementation Capacity

Keeping up with maintenance of local roads and infrastructure will be a challenge – but falling behind will further dampen private sector confidence and erode public investment capacity.














PROGRESS BEING MADE

Blair and Cambria counties have both adopted local Act 89 ordinances to provide an additional stream of transportation funding for local projects.

The Southern Alleghenies Rural Planning Organization (RPO) adopted a regional bike and pedestrian plan to guide the development of active transportation infrastructure in the region's rural counties.



Road Mileage, Bridges and Commuting Characteristics by County

								
	BEDFORD	BLAIR	CAMBRIA	FULTON	HUNTINGDON	SOMERSET	PA	U.S.
Road Mileage by Maintaining Jurisdiction, 2016 								
<i>PennDOT, Turnpike and Other Agencies</i>	875	470	740	362	661	951		
<i>Local/Municipal</i>	919	753	1,030	324	633	1,263		
Bridges, 2017 								
<i>Total Bridges</i>	411	336	283	155	241	435	22,779	615,002
<i>Bridges rated structurally deficient</i>	73	52	48	32	42	82	4,173	54,560
└ as a % of total bridges	17.8%	15.5%	17.0%	20.6%	17.4%	18.9%	18.3%	8.9%
Commuting Characteristics, 2016								
 <i>Drive alone</i>	81.2%	82.6%	83.2%	78.2%	78.3%	82.6%		
 <i>Carpool</i>	9.7%	9.2%	9.0%	14.7%	10.7%	9.3%		
 <i>Other modes</i>	4.5%	2.5%	2.6%	3.6%	7.2%	3.8%		



The share of structurally deficient bridges in the region has been declining thanks to recent infusions of state funding. Limited resources, however, will require some difficult choices in coming years regarding how to prioritize bridge and road improvements. Which bridges and roads are most critical to economic competitiveness and public safety? Which ones are less so, and what is gained or given up by downsizing infrastructure networks?

CRITICAL ISSUES

How do we move forward on these critical issues?

Making progress on the region's critical issues, and in ways that directly address the region's need to attract younger households and build its implementation capacity, requires that attention be paid to two broad areas of work: technical and adaptive.

Technical challenges are those best solved by fine-tuning existing systems using known policy or financial tools. These may include the creation of specific revenue streams to fund an initiative, establishing a position or entity to carry out specific work, or enacting regulatory ordinances to accomplish a desired outcome. The county action plans for Alleghenies Ahead have numerous examples of technical work.

Adaptive challenges, by contrast, generally require a shift in the community, often characterized by the work of letting go of old assumptions and habits and replacing them with new learnings and new approaches. When made, such behavioral changes can – and very often do – result in dramatic forward progress towards important community goals.

In the Southern Alleghenies region, behavioral adaptations – away from ingrained ways of thinking that have stifled forward progress in the past – are an essential part of addressing the region's critical issues. Some of the region's most counter-productive habits include the following:

HABITS TO OVERCOME

Not investing and expecting to get ahead.

In many places, there's a general unwillingness to invest at levels that will help re-position a community to compete for households and businesses – for fear that raising taxes will be unpopular or will hurt the community's competitiveness. You can't expect to realize a return, though, if you invest too little or not at all.

And you can't expect others to invest in your community if you're unwilling to invest in it yourself.

Cost shifting and blame shifting.

The unwillingness of some communities to invest in themselves is combined with an expectation that Harrisburg and Washington should do more for the region, with money from elsewhere often central to the conversations about how to address key issues. The onus is too often placed elsewhere.

Contradictory actions and values.

Self-reliance and independence is genuinely valued in the region – without question. But it's a value that doesn't align with the tendency to look toward Harrisburg or Washington first. And while live-and-let-live is a common attitude, it comes into tension with some not-in-my-backyard impulses.

Risk aversion.

The fear of failure in the region is acute, despite a sense that parts of the region have very little to lose from taking risks. This is expressed in the unwillingness to place bets with local money. This isn't because there's a shortage of people with the skills and risk tolerance to push concepts toward reality – there are plenty of thriving enterprises across the region that prove the opposite. But the flack people get if they attempt something risky in the public sphere is considerable. There's little incentive for the region's biggest risk-takers to take their focus away from their own enterprises and enter such an arena.

Values and Principles

DECISIONS TO MAKE IN COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE SOUTHERN ALLEGHENIES



VALUES AND PRINCIPLES APPLIED



ACTIONS THAT ALIGN WITH VALUES AND PRINCIPLES MOVE FORWARD



The region's communities are shaped by countless decisions made by hundreds of different boards, commissions, and committees. On what basis do they make these decisions, and is there any way to coordinate decision-making – to the extent possible – so that they have a positive cumulative effect on the region's ability to compete?

A set of core values and principles are central to consistent and coherent decision-making. They serve as a filter for evaluating whether an action does or does not align with what a community believes in and is trying to achieve.

These core values for our region reflect values expressed across all six counties. The planning principles reflect those values and the key issues we seek to address.

VALUES & PRINCIPLES

What are core values?

- Deeply held beliefs that are widely shared
- Characteristics that define how people view themselves and their community
- Things that people will fight vigorously to preserve, strengthen, or achieve
- Building blocks for a vision of the future – “what are we working towards?”



We value our families, our strong social connections, and our neighbors

Our families, friends, civic clubs, and faith traditions make our communities strong, resilient, and neighborly.

We aspire to improve how we treat newcomers, outsiders, and those of diverse backgrounds – to make them feel more welcome and part of our communities and social networks.

We value independence and self-reliance

Living here has taught us the value of hard work, of adapting to overcome adversity, and the dignity of self-determination.

We are responsible for our future and for the heavy-lifting that will be needed to achieve our goals.

We value our natural resources and connections to the land

Our land shapes our communities, our way of life, and the opportunities that lie ahead.

We aspire to continue improving how we treat our environment and our natural landscapes.

We value our heritage and the sense of identity it provides

Our history, buildings, institutions, and traditions give our communities a strong and unique sense of place.

We aspire to improve as stewards of the assets left to us by previous generations.

VALUES & PRINCIPLES

What are planning principles?



- A by-product of core values and prevailing conditions
- A basis for making decisions about our community that align with our values, our vision for the future, and what we're building from

We will...**We will not...****We must first look within**

We will invest in what we want to improve or change.

We will leverage our ingenuity to seize opportunities and address challenges.

We will protect and strengthen assets that give our region value.

We will not look to Washington or Harrisburg to fix our problems – we will look to them as partners in realizing our own vision.

We will not sell ourselves short by setting a low bar for what's acceptable and what we can achieve.

We must work together

We will make collaboration central to how we get things done.

We will actively look for common ground.

We will embrace the perspectives and contributions of those who are new to the region or who come from diverse backgrounds.

We will not see our political boundaries as limitations to whom we work with or how problems are addressed.

We will not exclude or isolate newcomers from decision-making.

We must protect our region's natural beauty and historic character

We will nurture the economic and cultural value of our natural landscapes.

We will preserve and strengthen our agricultural heritage as a fundamental part of our region's sustainability and character.

We will promote high-quality design and upkeep in our communities.

We will create environments that promote active and healthy lifestyles – in nature and in our communities.

We will not evaluate opportunities based purely on economic gain.

We will not make choices that deface our natural or built environments without careful consideration of alternatives.

We must support creativity

We will encourage risk-taking by individuals and organizations because inventiveness is part of our independent streak.

We will accept that nothing is guaranteed and that breaking new ground is part of our heritage.

We will not simply dismiss or criticize something that doesn't work – we will learn from it and move forward.

VALUES & PRINCIPLES

Applying the Values and Principles



Land use and development patterns of the past century or more have a profound impact on the region today. They strongly influence how the region's communities look, how they function, and how they compete for households and businesses with varied preferences and needs in the 21st Century.

Although policies that shape land use and development have regional impacts, deciding 'what

goes where' – via such tools as zoning and development standards, and through the location of public facilities and investments – rests largely with the region's local governments.

Alleghenies Ahead does not provide explicit land use or investment recommendations to municipalities. But the recent trends, core values, and planning principles described by Alleghenies Ahead do provide

context to aid local councils and commissions with decision-making, so that policy and investment choices can be made in ways that reinforce regional goals and the work of municipalities across the six counties. The following questions represent simple checklists that can be applied to a broad range of big and small decisions.

We must first look within

Are we putting enough of our own resources into this action to demonstrate to others that we're willing to invest in ourselves?

If we expect someone else to pay the bill, are we comfortable giving up control over how or when it gets done?

Are we setting or upholding high standards for our community through this action?

Are there past experiences we need to learn from to increase the likelihood of success?

Are we using all of the policy and regulatory tools at our disposal to shape the future we want to achieve?

How does this decision impact what we are trying to achieve? Will it encourage the right investments in the right places?

We must work together

Is everyone who should be involved actually involved with this decision or action?

If we're seeking different or better outcomes, what traditional boundaries (political or otherwise) should we be crossing?

Do all parties agree about what problem needs solving and what outcomes are being sought?

Are we willing to stand alongside our partners when the going gets tough?

If we lack the fiscal or staff capacity to do something that we think is important, what partners do we need to involve, or what partnerships should be built and lead?

We must protect our region's natural beauty and historic character

Does this action 'do no harm' to natural and historic assets?

Does this action have an impact on a Main Street or downtown area? If it does, does it make it stronger and more vibrant?

Are we balancing short-term financial considerations with longer-term considerations about asset stewardship?

Will this action build our capacity to invest in our assets?

Are we using all of the policy and regulatory tools at our disposal to protect and strengthen our assets?

We must support creativity

Does this action express a willingness to take risks – to accept that nothing is guaranteed?

Are we prepared to learn from our actions and adjust course if needed?

If this action represents business-as-usual, are we really expecting to see different results?

Are we getting input or feedback from people who have fresh eyes on this matter?

If there is resistance to doing things differently, what is at the root of that resistance? How can we address these concerns productively?

Setting Priorities



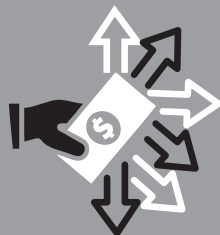
Why Prioritize?

On any given day in the Southern Alleghenies, the routine business of filling potholes, fixing culverts, responding to fires, replacing water mains, and any number of other activities that keep communities running are being tended to. The agencies tending to them all have ways of prioritizing their work – of deciding how to deploy limited time, attention, and resources to best meet their duties.

So too, when thinking long-term and strategically, must counties and regions choose how to channel and coordinate limited resources. The danger of not prioritizing, and not making prioritization a standard part of public decision-making, is two-fold:

Spreading resources too thin for impact

Trying to tackle every issue that deserves attention is the natural impulse of anyone who wants to improve their community. But doing so poses the danger of not giving anything the resources needed to actually make a sustainable difference. Everything gets some attention, but nothing is done well.



Creating a lack of discipline around choices and consequences

Life is about making choices and living with the consequences of those choices. If a community wants more of something, it has to pay for it or give something else up in return. If it chooses not to invest in an asset, the decline of that asset must be accepted as par for the course. And if there is no stomach to choose priorities, the consequence is a lack of focus that undermines progress on critical issues.



Our Priorities

What requires our focused attention as we work to overcome our **demographic disadvantages** and **capacity limitations**? Which areas of work – if addressed at a high level – will best position our communities to compete for households and business?

During 2017, the steering committees in the six counties identified priorities around which to develop detailed action plans. They did so with an understanding that priorities can – and should – change over time as conditions change, but that focus is necessary at any given time to ensure that ideas become actions.

PROCESS



Among the seven critical issues identified through Alleghenies Ahead, three of those issues

– **Broadband and Cellular Service, Collaboration and Coordination, and Business and Workforce**



Development – arose as priorities that are well-suited for collective action at the regional level. Priorities likely to entail more localized implementation efforts were also identified, though considerable potential for regional sharing of best practices exists on all fronts.

Though they represent a certain level of focus, these priorities are themselves quite broad and require further definition of outcomes, aims, and opportunities for intervention in the context of each county. This level of detail is contained in the Action Plan for each county.

REGIONAL PRIORITIES



Broadband and Cellular Service



Collaboration and Coordination



Business and Workforce Development



Priorities with high potential for action and advocacy at the regional level

COUNTY PRIORITIES



Bedford County

Broadband and Cellular Service



Collaboration and Coordination



Business and Workforce Development



Recreational Amenities and Natural Assets



Public Health and Safety



Blair County

Broadband and Cellular Service



Collaboration and Coordination



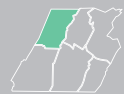
Agriculture



Housing and Blight



Public Health and Safety



Cambria County

Broadband and Cellular Service



Collaboration and Coordination



Business and Workforce Development



Transportation



Housing and Blight



Recreational Amenities and Natural Assets



Fulton County

Broadband and Cellular Service



Collaboration and Coordination



Business and Workforce Development



Agriculture



Recreational Amenities and Natural Assets



Huntington County

Broadband and Cellular Service



Collaboration and Coordination



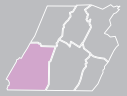
Business and Workforce Development



Housing and Blight



Recreational Amenities and Natural Assets



Somerset County

Broadband and Cellular Service



Collaboration and Coordination



Business and Workforce Development



Housing and Blight



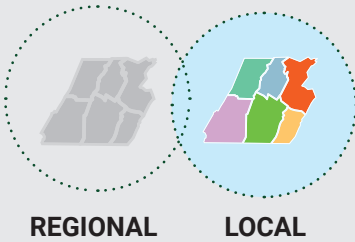
Recreational Amenities and Natural Assets



Priorities for county and local action informed by regional best practices

SETTING PRIORITIES

Toolbox Overview

**The Region's Toolbox - A Glimpse**

Translating broad priorities into specific actions is another layer of prioritization – of choosing, for example, to focus on four feasible initiatives to support business development rather than being paralyzed by dozens of potential options. Detailed action plans for each county (in Section 6 of this plan) reflect carefully considered choices to use specific policy or programmatic tools to make progress toward positive outcomes.

The following is a broad overview of the kinds of tools and activities contained in the county action plans. Some tools and activities – especially those related to regional priorities – will be used collectively, with all or multiple counties contributing to the same action. Most will be wielded in a more localized fashion, but will nonetheless represent opportunities for local experience (of what worked or didn't work) to inform ongoing and future work throughout the region.

A Glimpse at Collective Priorities and Actions**Broadband and Cellular Service**

REGIONAL Convene a task force of county representatives and industry experts to determine appropriate action steps
Coordinate planning and project management at a regional level

LOCAL Engage service providers in proactive conversations about investments and service gaps

Collaboration and Coordination

REGIONAL Provide legal and financial guidance to support local collaborations

LOCAL Engage local government officials in conversations about collaboration and best practices
Create or strengthen local government associations to spur greater communication and collaboration

Business and Workforce Development

REGIONAL Support entrepreneurial activity through initiatives such as StartUp Alleghenies

LOCAL Invest in downtowns to support business development

A Glimpse at Localized Priorities and Actions

Housing and Blight



Expand resources for targeted blight removal
(Cambria, Huntingdon, Somerset)

Create strategies to stimulate production of market-rate housing
(Blair, Cambria, Huntingdon)

Recreational Amenities and Natural Assets



Promote greater local usage of outdoor recreational assets
(Cambria)

Invest in the improvement and expansion of targeted recreational assets
(multiple counties)

Form a consortium of Main Street advocates to make borough centers a more vital amenity for residents and visitors
(Huntingdon, Somerset)

Public Health



Convene a multi-sector task force on addictions
(Bedford)

Create model development codes to support pedestrian-friendly environments
(Blair)

Promote use of parks and trails for personal health
(Blair)

Agriculture



Improve access to capital for upgrading farm equipment and technology
(Blair, Fulton)

Expand processing capacity to boost production of value-added food products
(Fulton)

Transportation



Preserve existing roadways in a state of good repair and improve structurally deficient bridges (Cambria; part of other planning initiatives in multiple counties)

Accommodate and expand recreational uses of transportation infrastructure
(Cambria; part of other planning initiatives in multiple counties)

Taking Action

CYCLE OF IMPLEMENTATION AND EXPERIMENTATION



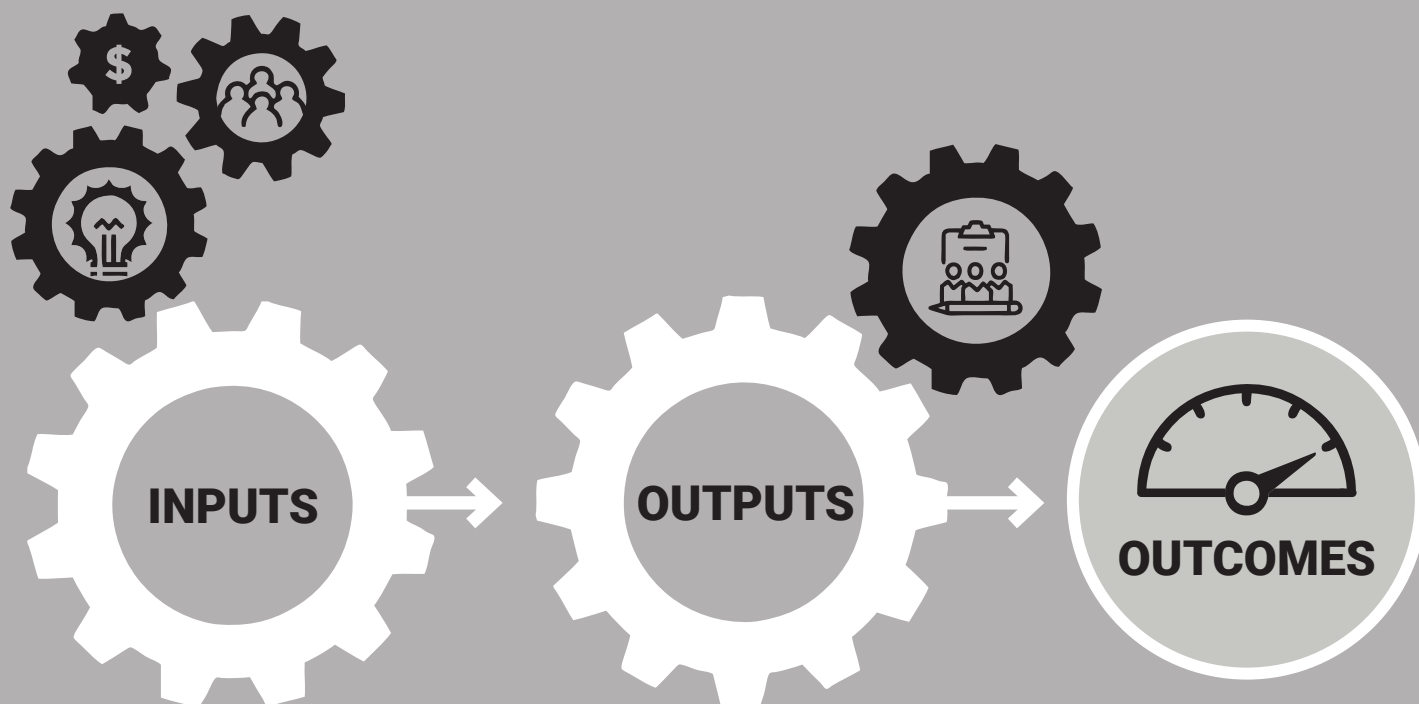
Addressing priorities in ways that lead to actual progress – this is what entities across the region set out to do every day. *But how do we know if our work is accomplishing what we want it to, rather than just being action for action’s sake? What do we do if we determine that something has been less effective than we thought it might be? What if a new opportunity comes along and we need to decide whether it makes sense to shift attention and resources?*

The updateable action plans for Alleghenies Ahead – for guiding implementation of specific activities at the regional and county levels – are based on a simple structure. Whatever the priority might be, there must be clarity about the outcomes being sought – about what a project or activity is intended to influence, why that’s important, and how progress can be measured. Outcomes, then, represent both an endpoint for implementation but also the starting point for action planning.

Once outcomes have been defined, specific activities (or outputs) that can reasonably be expected to achieve the outcomes must be identified, along with the resources (inputs) that are needed to activate the chosen projects or initiatives. Insufficient attention to the inputs – the funding, the staff capacity, and everything else that feeds into the outputs – is usually why actions stall.

This section presents the action plans for regional and county priorities, using **outcomes**, **outputs**, and **inputs** as a structure for continuously refining and updating the plans. This intentional cycle of assessing outcomes and updating action plans and priorities – something that should occur annually – recognizes that no single project or list of projects is a guaranteed solution that will achieve desired outcomes once and for all. Improving the likelihood of positive outcomes requires a commitment to experimentation, honest assessments of project impact, and changing course as needed to reflect new opportunities and evolving conditions.

Building Blocks of Action Planning



What resources will we need to take action?

- *Funding*
- *Staff capacity*
- *Technical knowledge*
- *Willingness to do something differently or behave differently*

What will we do or produce with our inputs?

- *A specific project or series of projects*
- *A program that serves a specific function*
- *A change in how a service is provided or overseen*
- *Something done locally or in collaboration with others*

**What are we trying to achieve?
How will we know if we're making progress?**

- *A specific metric will have moved in the right direction*
- *A particular condition will have been achieved or alleviated – making a community stronger and more competitive*

Bedford County



ACTION PLAN



**Broadband
and Cellular
Service**



**Collaboration
and
Coordination**



**Business and
Workforce
Development**



**Recreational
Amenities and
Natural Assets**



**Public Health
and Safety**



Bedford County Steering Committee

Beth Anderson, inSite Design Solutions, LLC

Sean Bardell, Howard Hanna Realty

Jim Bittner, Gateway Enterprises

Denny Clark, West Providence Township
Planning Commission

Dave Cubbison, Bedford County
Department of Emergency Management

Aaron Craig, Lehman Engineers

Nancy Folk, Hope for Hyndman Charter
School

Ernest Fuller, Bedford County Planning
Commission

Ian Frederick, PennStress

Dorothy Krupa, DCNR

Kellie Goodman Shaffer, Bedford
County Chamber of Commerce

Tonya Grimes, Downtown Bedford, Inc.

Robert Haynes, Omni Bedford Springs
Resort

Laura Jackson, Woodland Owners of the
Southern Alleghenies

Josh Lang, County Commissioner

Jennifer Lentz-Kovacs, Bedford County
Conservation District

Mark Pennabaker, Bedford Area School
District

Dean Shuller, Bedford County Sanitary
Corp. and Bedford Township Supervisor

Bette Slayton, Bedford County
Development Agency

Dennis Tice, Bedford County Visitors
Bureau

Stacey Tice, Center for Community Action

Chris Turner, Everett Area School District



Please Note:

- The projects and initiatives identified in this action plan are numbered for organizational purposes only and are not ranked in order of importance. Where sequencing of a project is necessary – one following the completion of another – this is noted under the description of project timing.
- Many of the action items identify resources in general terms by the types of resources necessary (financial or otherwise) or by the likely contributors. If a project requires a financial commitment and specific dollar amounts are not listed, they are unknown at this time and must be determined through further planning by project partners.
- This action plan is intended to bring focused attention to projects and initiatives that can be expected to contribute to the realization of desired outcomes. As with any community action plan, it must be recognized that no single project or list of projects represents a guaranteed solution to a community's challenges. Improving the likelihood of success requires a commitment to experimentation, honest assessments of project impact, and regular refinements to the action plan to reflect new opportunities and evolving conditions.

BEDFORD COUNTY ACTION PLAN**PRIORITY****Broadband and Cell Service****OUTCOMES SOUGHT**

Broadband and telecommunications services are expanded around and beyond key institutions, population centers, and economic assets, resulting in enhanced marketability and competitiveness of the county and/or improved public safety.

The Link to Demographic Disadvantages

For younger households and most businesses today, access to high speed internet and reliable cell service is an expectation not unlike electricity. Places that don't have it cannot be competitive.

The Link to Varying Implementation Capacity

Local capacity to negotiate with service providers or stimulate new infrastructure is limited, making county- and region- level action a necessity.

**INPUTS****Knowledge:**

Identify existing private infrastructure networks and the locations of major customers or groups of customers. Determine existing and desired levels of service.

Management Capacity:

Organize public-private partnerships around addressing service improvements and expansions in areas of sufficient or potential demand. Troubleshoot public safety gaps through partnerships with service providers and public agencies.

Capital:

Allocate public resources to help cover cost gaps that preclude priority service expansion by market forces alone.

**OUTPUTS**

Public private partnerships complete projects (fiber installation, cell tower development, etc.) that resolve critical service gaps.



ACTION ITEMS

	WHAT?	WHY?	WHO?	WHAT RESOURCES?	WHEN?
1	Establish regional broadband and cell service task force	Progress on this regional priority will require long-term coordination to determine appropriate action steps and oversee their implementation. Examples of steps currently being explored include items A and B below.	County planning commissions, SAPDC, and subject-matter experts	Dedication of time by task force participants	Spring 2018 and ongoing
a	Infrastructure Inventory, Customer Survey, and Identification of Anchor Customers	Working with private service providers to expand service and coverage requires knowledge of existing public and private infrastructure, current levels of service, and the presence of anchor users (schools, hospitals, companies) whose demand for service can be pooled and used as a base for expansion.	SAPDC with support from participating counties	\$50,000 estimated for regional inventory and survey (\$7,500 to \$10,000 commitment from Bedford County)	Complete asset inventory, customer survey, and anchor identification by October 2018
b	Hire tele-communications project manager at SAPDC	As areas of potential service expansion are identified, capacity will be needed to negotiate with service providers, perform customer/user outreach, and manage projects that involve public-private partnerships.	SAPDC with support from participating counties	County contributes \$10,000 to \$20,000 per year to SAPDC, depending on participation of other counties.	Timing and nature of work dependent on action item 1
2	Broadband Outreach and Aggregation	Through Act 183, areas with no or very limited internet service can aggregate customer demand and request service through completion of a Bona Fide Retail Request Program. Services are provided if sufficient demand is proven.	Information on the Act 183 process can be distributed by the Bedford County Planning Commission for dissemination by local governments.	Time of staff and elected officials to inform constituents about aggregation process	2018-2019

BEDFORD COUNTY ACTION PLAN**PRIORITY****Collaboration and Coordination****OUTCOMES SOUGHT**

Service improvements and/or savings realized by collaborating municipalities; improved services and efficiencies result in enhanced marketability and competitiveness of the county.

The Link to Demographic Disadvantages

Retirements, looming labor force shortages, and stagnant tax bases make partnerships and structural change not only desirable but necessary.

The Link to Varying Implementation Capacity

Collaborations that bring together the expertise and resources of multiple communities and sectors makes implementation of almost any initiative more likely to happen and more likely to succeed over time.

**INPUTS****Will to collaborate:**

The political will to overcome territorial instincts in order to broker inter-municipal agreements and partnerships around critical services.

Capital:

Savings may ultimately accrue from collaboration, but sometimes there are up-front costs that need to be covered.

Process know-how and guidance:

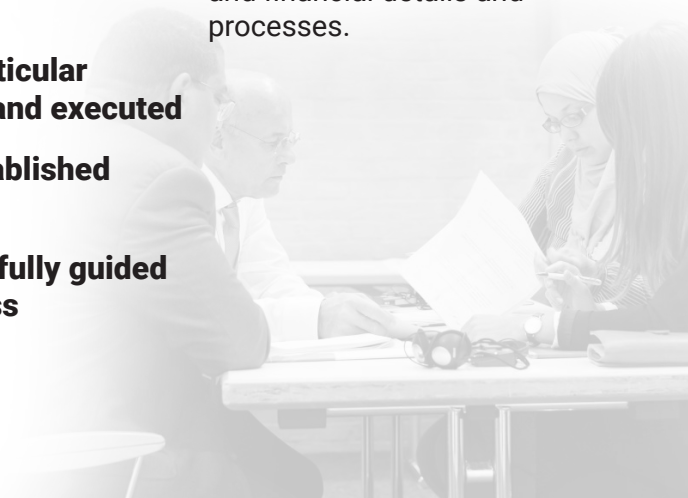
Drafting inter-municipal agreements, consolidating municipalities, or establishing regional service districts requires the navigation of legal and financial details and processes.

**OUTPUTS**

Inter-municipal agreements to share particular resources and capacities are developed and executed

Multi-municipal service districts are established around critical services

Self-selected municipalities are successfully guided through the merger/consolidation process



ACTION ITEMS

	WHAT?	WHY?	WHO?	WHAT RESOURCES?	WHEN?
1	County grants facilitator	Demand for grant writing and management in Bedford County exceeds current capacity for these services. A dedicated grants facilitator would fill this capacity for the county and its partners, including local governments.	Bedford County	Funded by county, with a fee-for-service model to offset costs	Create, fund, and fill position by December 2018
<div> MODEL TO CONSIDER <p>Cambria County Grants Facilitator</p> <p><i>Cambria County has paid for a full-time grants facilitator since 2010 – a position charged with seeking funding from public and private sources to support projects throughout the county and to inform municipalities and organizations about grant opportunities.</i></p> </div>					
2	Legal and financial guidance for collaboration	Executing inter-municipal agreements, forming regional service districts, and exploring structural changes to local government often requires a level of legal and financial expertise that isn't readily available to local governments.	SAPDC	Commitment of SAPDC in-house expertise and retainers to provide legal and financial guidance	2018
3	Outreach and education	Sharing information about local and regional best practices in problem solving and service delivery, as well as the costs/benefits of intermunicipal cooperation, can help stimulate greater levels of collaboration.	Bedford County Planning Commission; Bedford County Township Officials Association; private sector leaders	Commitment of staff time	2018
4	Coordinated Marketing Initiative	The effectiveness of all efforts to market Bedford County could be improved through greater coordination of messaging and strategy – so that marketing for economic development, tourism, and other purposes reinforce each other.	Bedford County, BCDA, BCVB, Chamber, DBI	Commitment of time by coordinating agencies Use new county website as a central tool for this initiative	2018

BEDFORD COUNTY ACTION PLAN**PRIORITY**

Business and Workforce Development

**OUTCOMES SOUGHT**

Business creation and retention rates improve; number of small businesses grows; growth in net number of jobs and capital investments; entrepreneurial activity is more visible; risk-taking becomes more widely accepted; increase in labor force participation.

The Link to Demographic Disadvantages

Despite job losses, many employers indicate difficulty with filling the jobs they have – a situation that will worsen as the workforce continues to age. Attracting new workers to the region will be central to retaining current businesses, let alone growing new ones.

The Link to Varying Implementation Capacity

Creating the conditions for job development means investing strongly in the services and infrastructure that businesses expect – and that their skilled workers will expect.

**INPUTS****Partnerships:**

Collaboration with other counties and agencies in the Southern Alleghenies on small business development and entrepreneurship; strengthening relationships between public sector agencies and local businesses.

Capacity:

Staff capacity to coordinate economic development initiatives related to small business cultivation and technical assistance.

Space:

Committing existing or new facilities as space for small businesses and entrepreneurs.

**OUTPUTS**

Participation in Startup Alleghenies to grow entrepreneurs into successful businesses.

Development of additional high-quality spec space to serve current and anticipated demand.



ACTION ITEMS

	WHAT?	WHY?	WHO?	WHAT RESOURCES?	WHEN?
1	StartUp Alleghenies	Currently underway in Blair, Cambria, and Somerset counties, this program is designed to cultivate the talents of home-grown entrepreneurs to spur new business activity.	SAPDC, Bedford County Development Association	SAPDC provides centralized systems and grant funding for program; BCDA provides office space for entrepreneurship coach and identifies post-grant funding for coach position	2018-2019
2	Expansion of industrial park spec space	There is limited space remaining in ready-to-lease facilities in Bedford County, making it increasingly difficult to accommodate new and expanding businesses.	Bedford County Development Association	Equity from BCDA property sales to leverage funds from EDA, ARC, and/or USDA; RCAP	2019-2020
3	Biotech Incubator	Lampire Biological Laboratories in Everett, a biotech career program at the Tech Center, and a large and continuously modernizing agricultural sector provide a cluster of assets for cultivating small biotech businesses.	Bedford County Development Association, with advisement from Lampire Biological Laboratories	Equity from BCDA property sales to leverage funds from EDA, ARC, and/or USDA; RCAP	2019-2020
4	Russell House – Business & Education Center	Flexible and shared workspaces for small businesses, along with technical support services, will grow downtown Bedford's capacity to be an incubator for business development in the county.	Bedford County Chamber of Commerce as lead with numerous partners	\$1.23 million (30% from Chamber and local donors; 50% from Economic Development Administration; 20% from Appalachia Regional Commission)	2019 (est.)

BEDFORD COUNTY ACTION PLAN**PRIORITY**

Recreational Amenities and Natural Assets

**OUTCOMES SOUGHT**

Growth in home-based workers and residents under age 40; growth in number of unique visits to Bedford County; growth in property values, business variety, and investment in targeted borough centers.

The Link to Demographic Disadvantages

For younger households that have options, quality of life often plays a decisive role in choosing where to live and put down roots.

The Link to Varying Implementation Capacity

Local capacity to negotiate with service providers or stimulate new infrastructure is limited, making county- and region- level action a necessity.

**INPUTS****Capacity:**

Staff capacity to coordinate improvements and programming at key assets.

Partnerships:

Private sector partners to development and maintain businesses and services that support utilization of key assets.

Capital:

Funding for improved recreational infrastructure and maintenance, as well as investments to market existing recreational and cultural assets.

**OUTPUTS**

New or improved recreational amenities to attract people to live in and visit Bedford County

Protection and utilization of natural assets for both environmental and economic gain



ACTION ITEMS

	WHAT?	WHY?	WHO?	WHAT RESOURCES?	WHEN?
1	Recreation Improvement Fund	A recreation improvement fund capitalized by local resources will allow Bedford County to expedite priority projects and compete for state and federal matching funds.	Bedford County	Begin capitalizing the fund with Act 13 (Marcellus Shale) revenue.	2020 and onward
	MODEL TO CONSIDER	Roanoke County (VA) Capital Improvement Incentive Fund <i>Roanoke County dedicates resources annually to match funds raised by non-profits, individuals, and corporations to improve public recreation facilities (such as improvements to trails, lighting, ballfields, restrooms, and landscaping).</i>			
2	Heritage Trail, Phase 2	Extension of the Heritage Trail from Bedford Borough to Old Bedford Village and Friendship Village will connect key recreational and qualify of life assets.	Bedford Joint Municipal Authority	\$2.5 million (DCED Multi-modal transportation fund and other sources)	2018-2019
3	The Old Pennsylvania Pike	Conversion of the abandoned Turnpike and its tunnels into a multi-modal trail will create a one-of-a-kind destination for recreational tourists and a regional quality of life asset.	Southern Alleghenies Conservancy; The Old PA Pike Authority	RACP authorization of \$8 million; additional state, federal, and private sources to be identified in pending master plan	2018-2019
4	Huntingdon – Broad Top Trail	Continued extension of trail north to Huntingdon County.	Broad Top Township Supervisors	In-kind resources provided by Broad Top Township; PennDOT TAP	2018-2020
5	Mid State Trail improvements in Bedford County	Route and safety improvements to the Mid State Trail in Bedford County will enhance a 500+ mile network and add to Bedford County's marketability as a hiking destination.	Mid State Trail Association, with cooperation from PennDOT and property owners	\$10,000 in private donations to MSTA; time commitment by MSTA volunteers	2018-2019
6	Agricultural Easement Purchases	State resources have been used, and are available, to preserve agricultural land. Staff and volunteer time needs to be dedicated to pursue and finalize easement purchases with willing land owners.	Bedford County Conservation District; Bedford County Planning Commission	Dedication of staff and volunteer time	2018 and onward

BEDFORD COUNTY ACTION PLAN**PRIORITY****Public Health and Safety****OUTCOMES SOUGHT**

County health rankings improve; rate of drug- and alcohol-related fatalities and crimes falls; labor force participation improves; disability rates fall for working-age residents.

The Link to Demographic Disadvantages

As the region's health care and emergency services workforce ages, attracting and retaining personnel to fill critical roles will be a challenge – and an indication of how well the region is competing for younger households generally.

The Link to Varying Implementation Capacity

Changes in rural health care delivery, combined with rapidly aging populations, may require adaptations that most communities are ill-prepared for.

**INPUTS****Facilitation Capacity:**

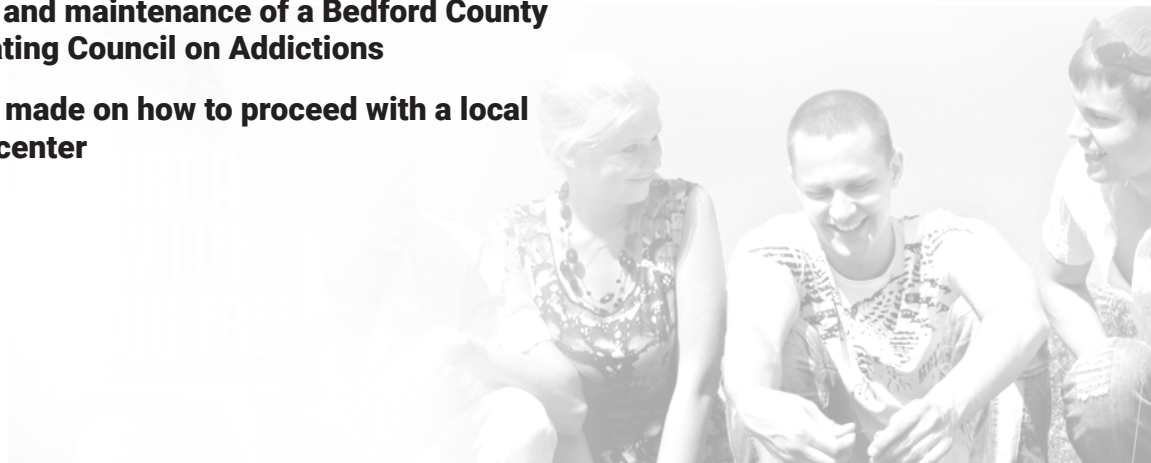
Ability and authority to convene multiple sectors in a productive and on-going dialogue about the extent and nature of the drug and alcohol addiction problem in Bedford County, monitor/assess existing interventions to prevent and treat addiction, and investigate or lead new interventions.

Research and partnership development:

The work of understanding potential alternatives to a traditional hospital-based obstetrics unit, as well as the partners needed to provide those alternatives.

**OUTPUTS****Creation and maintenance of a Bedford County Coordinating Council on Addictions**

Decision made on how to proceed with a local birthing center



ACTION ITEMS

	WHAT?	WHY?	WHO?	WHAT RESOURCES?	WHEN?
1	Bedford County Coordinating Council on Addiction	Bringing multiple sectors together to coordinate service delivery, share information, and educate the wider public will ensure that decision-making and perceptions are based on a sound understanding of addiction and best practices for addressing the impact of addiction on families and communities.	<p>Broaden the role of the advisory council maintained by Personal Solutions, Inc. (Bedford County's Single County Authority) to encompass this initiative. Encourage participation by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PA Department of Health • UPMC Bedford Memorial • Local school districts • Local pharmacy sector • Local businesses and employers • County Correctional Facility and law enforcement • E.X.I.T. Program • Human services agencies 	Secure in-kind or cash commitments from the county, the Department of Health, and local healthcare entities to organize and facilitate meetings, including an annual meeting / strategy session led by healthcare management experts.	2018
2	Birthing Center Advisory Committee and Plan	The end of full-time obstetric services at UPMC Bedford Memorial has started a discussion about how to provide local alternatives for county families. An advisory committee will research alternative models and recommend a course of action.	Empanel an advisory committee with representation from all potential partners and relevant sectors.	Advisory Committee will identify funding models for implementation based on findings; Committee will utilize Health Needs Assessment for Bedford County as an information resource	2018 (advisory committee work) 2019-20 (implementation)

Blair County

ACTION PLAN



**Broadband
and Cellular
Service**



**Collaboration
and
Coordination**



Agriculture



**Housing
and Blight**



**Public
Health
and Safety**



Blair County Steering Committee

Pat Baechle, Baechle Architects

Bruce Erb, County Commissioner

Donna J. Fisher, Blair County Conservation District

Nicole Germaux, CONTACT Altoona

Donna Gority, Retired County Commissioner

Rodney Green, Roaring Spring Borough

Coleen Heim, Healthy Blair County Coalition

Jim Hudack, Blair County Social Services

Mark Ickes, Explore Altoona

Christie Jordan, DiVersity Salon & Spa

Lucas Martsof, Antis Township

David W. McFarland, III, Blair Planning

Steve McKnight, Altoona-Blair County Development Corporation

Cassandra Schmick, Logan Township

Lee Slusser, City of Altoona

Linda Smith, Spring Cove School District

Eric Wolf, AMTRAN



Please Note:

- The projects and initiatives identified in this action plan are numbered for organizational purposes only and are not ranked in order of importance. Where sequencing of a project is necessary – one following the completion of another – this is noted under the description of project timing.
- Many of the action items identify resources in general terms by the types of resources necessary (financial or otherwise) or by the likely contributors. If a project requires a financial commitment and specific dollar amounts are not listed, they are unknown at this time and must be determined through further planning by project partners.
- This action plan is intended to bring focused attention to projects and initiatives that can be expected to contribute to the realization of desired outcomes. As with any community action plan, it must be recognized that no single project or list of projects represents a guaranteed solution to a community's challenges. Improving the likelihood of success requires a commitment to experimentation, honest assessments of project impact, and regular refinements to the action plan to reflect new opportunities and evolving conditions.

BLAIR COUNTY ACTION PLAN**PRIORITY****Broadband and Cell Service****OUTCOMES SOUGHT**

Critical broadband and cell coverage gaps are identified and filled, resulting in a reliable network and enhanced marketability and competitiveness of the county and/or improved public safety.

The Link to Demographic Disadvantages

For younger households and most businesses today, access to high speed internet and reliable cell service is an expectation not unlike electricity. Places that don't have it cannot be competitive.

The Link to Varying Implementation Capacity

Local capacity to negotiate with service providers or stimulate new infrastructure is limited, making county- and region- level action a necessity.

**INPUTS****Knowledge:**

Identify broadband and cell coverage gaps through (1) an inventory of well-known and documented gaps, and/or (2) a comprehensive survey of existing levels of service. In particular, identify gaps that do the most to undermine the county's ability to compete for businesses and households or that present a high risk to public safety.

Management Capacity:

Organize public-private partnerships around addressing each high priority gap to pinpoint options and select a course of action tailored to the location.

Capital:

Allocate public resources to cover the cost gaps that preclude the private sector from addressing gaps on its own.

**OUTPUTS**

Public private partnerships complete projects (fiber installation, cell tower development, etc.) that resolve critical service gaps

Improvements will position the network to adapt to changing technologies



ACTION ITEMS

	WHAT?	WHY?	WHO?	WHAT RESOURCES?	WHEN?
1	Establish regional broadband and cell service task force	Progress on this regional priority will require long-term coordination to determine appropriate action steps and oversee their implementation. Examples of steps currently being explored include items A and B below.	County planning commissions, SAPDC, and subject-matter experts	Dedication of time by task force participants	Spring 2018 and ongoing
a	Infrastructure Inventory, Customer Survey, and Identification of Anchor Customers	Working with private service providers to expand service and coverage requires knowledge of existing public and private infrastructure, current levels of service, and the presence of anchor users (schools, hospitals, companies) whose demand for service can be pooled and used as a base for expansion.	SAPDC with support from participating counties	\$50,000 estimated for regional inventory and survey (\$7,500 to \$10,000 commitment from Blair County)	Complete asset inventory, customer survey, and anchor identification by October 2018
b	Hire tele-communications project manager at SAPDC	As areas of potential service expansion are identified, capacity will be needed to negotiate with service providers, perform customer/user outreach, and manage projects that involve public-private partnerships.	SAPDC with support from participating counties; potential for funding partnership with DCED	County contributes \$10,000 to \$20,000 per year to SAPDC, depending on participation of other counties.	Timing and nature of work dependent on needs identified by action item 1a
2	Broadband Outreach and Aggregation	Through Act 183, areas with no or very limited internet service can aggregate customer demand and request service through completion of a Bona Fide Retail Request Program. Services are provided if sufficient demand is proven.	Information on the Act 183 process can be distributed by the Bedford County Planning Commission for dissemination by local governments.	Time of staff and elected officials to inform constituents about aggregation process	2018-2019

BLAIR COUNTY ACTION PLAN**PRIORITY**

Collaboration and Coordination

**OUTCOMES SOUGHT**

Service improvements and/or savings realized by collaborating municipalities; reduction in number of low-capacity and low-function units of government; improved services and efficiencies result in enhanced marketability and competitiveness of the county.

The Link to Demographic Disadvantages

Retirements, looming labor force shortages, and stagnant tax bases make partnerships and structural change not only desirable but necessary.

The Link to Varying Implementation Capacity

Collaborations that bring together the expertise and resources of multiple communities and sectors makes implementation of almost any initiative more likely to happen and more likely to succeed over time.

**INPUTS****Will to collaborate:**

The political will to overcome territorial instincts in order to broker inter-municipal agreements and partnerships around critical services.

Capital:

Savings may ultimately accrue from collaboration, but sometimes there are up-front costs that need to be covered.

Process know-how and guidance:

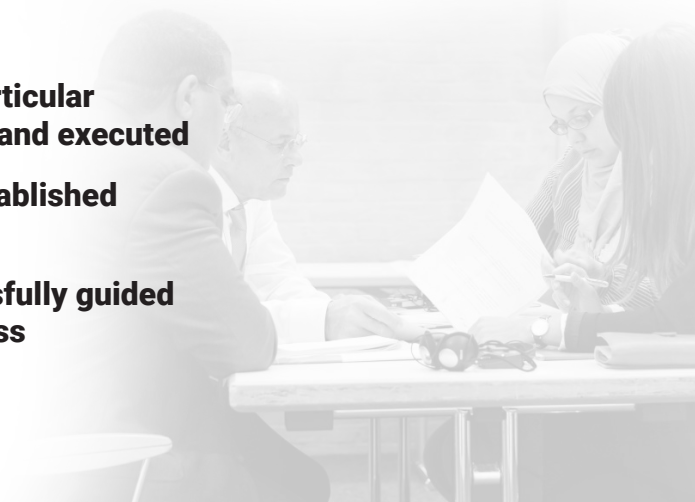
Drafting inter-municipal agreements, consolidating municipalities, or establishing regional service districts requires the navigation of legal and financial details and processes.

**OUTPUTS**

Inter-municipal agreements to share particular resources and capacities are developed and executed

Multi-municipal service districts are established around critical services

Self-selected municipalities are successfully guided through the merger/consolidation process



ACTION ITEMS

	WHAT?	WHY?	WHO?	WHAT RESOURCES?	WHEN?
1	Evaluate opportunities for shared services, consolidation, and potential effectiveness of a Council of Governments (COG)	Evaluate opportunities for shared services, consolidation, and potential effectiveness of a Council of Governments (COG) to leverage municipal purchasing and reduce costs associated with things like government administrative/professional services, overhead, and code enforcement.	Blair County Government Advisory Committee, in coordination with the Blair County Chamber of Commerce, and ABCD Corp	Commitment of staff time	2018
2	Outreach and education to municipalities, businesses, and the general public	Sharing information about local and regional best practices in problem solving and service delivery, as well as the costs/benefits of merging or consolidating services, can help stimulate greater levels of collaboration and save costs. Build on what was discussed during the process to develop the County Hazard Mitigation Plan.	Blair Planning, Blair County Chamber of Commerce, ABCD Corp, Explore Altoona – annual Main Street round table	Commitment of staff time, resources identified in the Hazard Mitigation Plan	2018
3	Establish matching grant program to incentivize inter-municipal agreements and service sharing	A financial incentive, when combined with legal and financial guidance could initiate a greater willingness for inter-municipal agreements and service sharing. The private sector has a vested interest to improve government efficiencies.	Blair County Chamber of Commerce, Blair Planning, ABCD Corp	Private sector financial resources, Commitment of staff time	2019
a	Legal and financial guidance for collaboration	Executing inter-municipal agreements, forming regional service districts, and exploring municipal merger/consolidation often requires a level of legal and financial expertise that isn't readily available to local governments.	SAPDC, DCED	Commitment of SAPDC in-house expertise and retainers to provide legal and financial guidance; additional guidance from DCED	Timing and nature of work dependent on action item 3

BLAIR COUNTY ACTION PLAN**PRIORITY****Agriculture****OUTCOMES SOUGHT**

A growing percentage of agricultural lands are preserved; local food economy (small scale production, processing, and retail/experiencing) becomes a bigger part of the overall economy; diversification of agricultural sector to lesson vulnerabilities and capitalize on emerging technologies; bring healthy food to local communities.

The Link to Demographic Disadvantages

Generational succession is an issue for agriculture across the U.S. – but even more so in regions with a diminished base of young people.

The Link to Varying Implementation Capacity

Rural agricultural townships and the boroughs that service them are facing some of the most acute struggles to fill decision-making boards and fund investments in aging infrastructure.

**INPUTS****Will to collaborate:**

The County, Penn State Extension, Blair County Conservation District, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau, and other local and regional stakeholders must work together to identify and prioritize key agricultural issues.

Training and Education:

Training and exposure for farmers on the use of technology and best practices for more efficient and profitable farming techniques.

Labor:

Affordable and dependable skilled workers.

Capital:

Develop a loan program for investments in advanced technologies and practice.

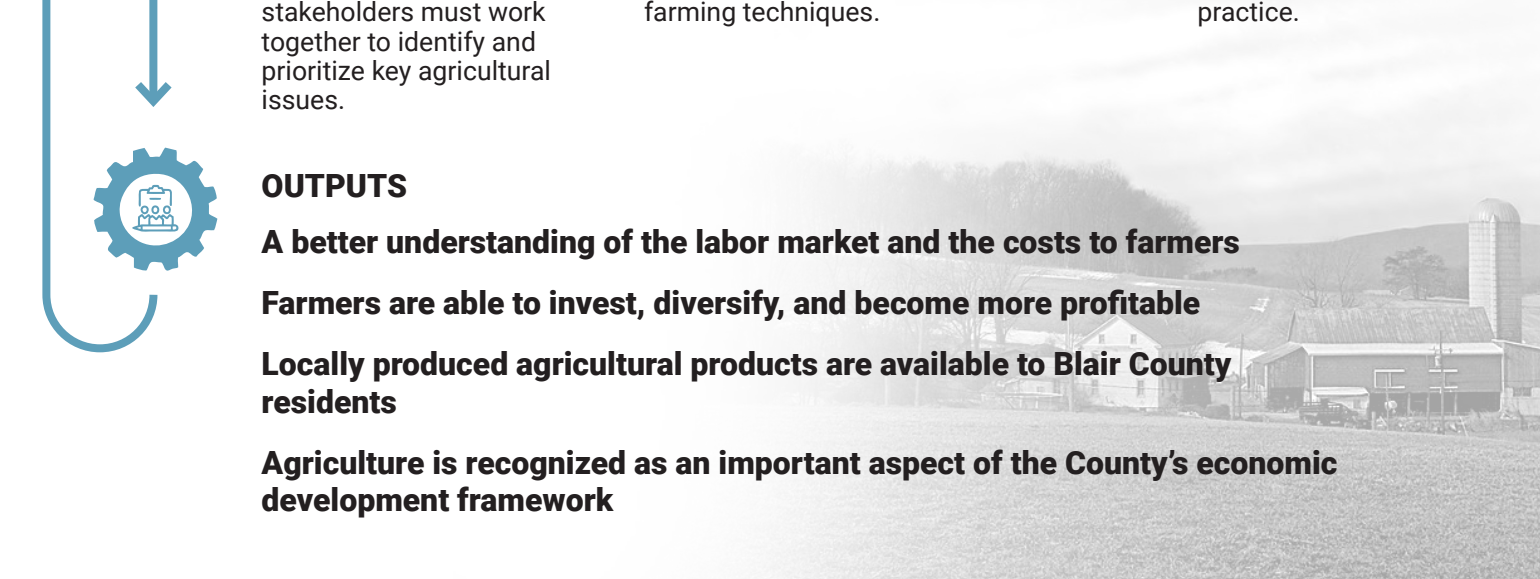
**OUTPUTS**

A better understanding of the labor market and the costs to farmers

Farmers are able to invest, diversify, and become more profitable

Locally produced agricultural products are available to Blair County residents

Agriculture is recognized as an important aspect of the County's economic development framework



ACTION ITEMS

	WHAT?	WHY?	WHO?	WHAT RESOURCES?	WHEN?
1	Include agriculture representation in County economic development agency	Including representation in the economic development discussions could help to expand the local reach and help to diversify farming in Blair County.	Conservation District, ABCD Corp	Commitment of staff time	Initiate mid 2018 and complete by 2019
2	Actively recruit new facilities to diversify agriculture in Blair County	Facilities including but not limited to a USDA Certified processing facilities for dairy products (yogurt, cheese, etc.) will help to expand the value-added capacity of the local farming community.	ABCD Corp, Conservation District	Commitment of staff time	Timing dependent on 1
3	Develop Altoona as an agricultural hub	A central hub for local restaurants, farmers markets, accommodations and agri-tourism events will promote Blair County's agriculture and add to the vibrancy of downtown.	Explore Altoona, Blair County Chamber of Commerce, Conservation District, ABCD Corp	\$5,000 annually to promote, organize, etc. Sponsors and donations could play a role	Initiate mid 2018
MODEL TO CONSIDER		Farm to Fork Ithaca (NY) <i>The Ithaca/Tompkins County Convention & Visitors Bureau's Farm to Fork Ithaca initiative helps to build linkages between restaurants, farms, residents, and visitors. These connections promote economic interactions between producers and consumers at a local and regional level.</i>			
4	Collaborate with agricultural lenders to provide low-interest loans to farmers	To provide access to capital and expertise for technological advancements and agri-business.	Conservation District, ABCD Corp	Commitment of staff time	Timing dependent on 1
5	Explore the development of a agricultural worker placement agency	Farmers have reported having difficulty attracting and retaining skilled farm workers. A placement agency would help to connect farmers with skilled permanent and temporary workers.	SAPDC and CareerLink to coordinate and incentivize with local industrial placement agencies, private sector providers, and other agricultural stakeholders	Commitment of staff time, financial resources for start-up TBD	Initiate 2019
6	Involve municipal and foundation support of easement purchases	Expanding the Purchase Agricultural Conservation Easements (PACE) program to include local municipal and a public/private foundation and conservancy participation would provide additional opportunities for protecting agricultural land.	Conservation District to coordinate with private sector and local municipalities	Commitment of staff time	Initiate 2018

BLAIR COUNTY ACTION PLAN**PRIORITY**

Housing and Blight

**OUTCOMES SOUGHT**

The housing market across the county to be balanced and for different parts of the county to have contributions to make towards a “full housing ladder”. Variety and quality of housing options expands; demand revealed by incentivized production lowers perceptions of risk and stimulates more interest from developers; businesses have an easier time recruiting new workers due to improved housing options - competitiveness improves; housing needs of lower income households are met

The Link to Demographic Disadvantages

Attracting and retaining younger households will be challenging if available housing is a poor match for their needs and blight discourages them from investing.

The Link to Varying Implementation Capacity

Removing blighted properties and stimulating the production of new market-rate housing is critical for the region’s competitiveness. But very few communities have the resources or expertise to do this on their own.

**INPUTS****Will to intervene:**

The political will to incentivize and, if necessary, subsidize the production of missing housing products.

Capital:

Funding for infrastructure, tax abatement, or other incentives to help bring to market.

Rehabilitation:

Target abandoned and underutilized properties that could exert substantial negative impacts on the market.

Incentives:

Property upgrades in middle strength areas of the county and for missing products (new homes at certain price points.

Code Enforcement:

Target key areas

**OUTPUTS**

Number of new market-rate rental units added each year (with the goal of about XX per year)

Growth in the young adult population in Blair County.



ACTION ITEMS

	WHAT?	WHY?	WHO?	WHAT RESOURCES?	WHEN?
1	Evaluate the use of municipal financing incentives and tax abatement tools	There are several tools that should be considered to help lower the perception of risk and stimulate more interest from developers in housing development - (Tax Increment Financing districts (TIF), Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance (LERTA), Business Improvement Districts (BID)	Blair County Commissioners, municipal / government bodies, schools districts, ABCD Corp	Commitment of staff time Blair Planning, ABCD Corp, municipal / government bodies, schools districts	Initiate late 2018 / early 2019
2	Develop a financial model to incentivize market-rate apartments, townhouses, and ADA accessible single-family homes	To help lower risk and stimulate interest from developers in housing development. ADA accessible single-family homes in the \$125k-\$250K range	Blair Planning, ABCD Corp	TBD once evaluation of model	Initiate 2019
3	Revitalize existing neighborhoods with a mix of infill and rehabilitated units.	The intent is to “kick start” the development of housing products that are not currently found in Blair County but are needed to accommodate people looking for market rate rental housing and middle market single-family homes. Target walkable neighborhoods that are in close proximity to goods and services.	Blair Planning, ABCD Corp, local municipalities, local property owners, and developers	TBD once evaluation of project program and incentives needed	Initiate 2019

BLAIR COUNTY ACTION PLAN**PRIORITY****Public Health and Safety****OUTCOMES SOUGHT**

County health rankings improve; rate of drug-related deaths falls; labor force participation improves; disability rates fall for working age residents; and physical activity continues to improve.

The Link to Demographic Disadvantages

As the region's health care and emergency services workforce ages, attracting and retaining personnel to fill critical roles will be a challenge – and an indication of how well the region is competing for younger households generally.

The Link to Varying Implementation Capacity

Changes in rural health care delivery, combined with rapidly aging populations, may require adaptations that most communities are ill-prepared for.

**INPUTS****Capacity:**

Staff capacity to coordinate programming and improvements.

Will to change:

The political will to overcome territorial instincts and status-quo in order to take necessary action.

Partnerships and coordination:

Public and not-for-profit agencies working together to identify and address key community health issues.

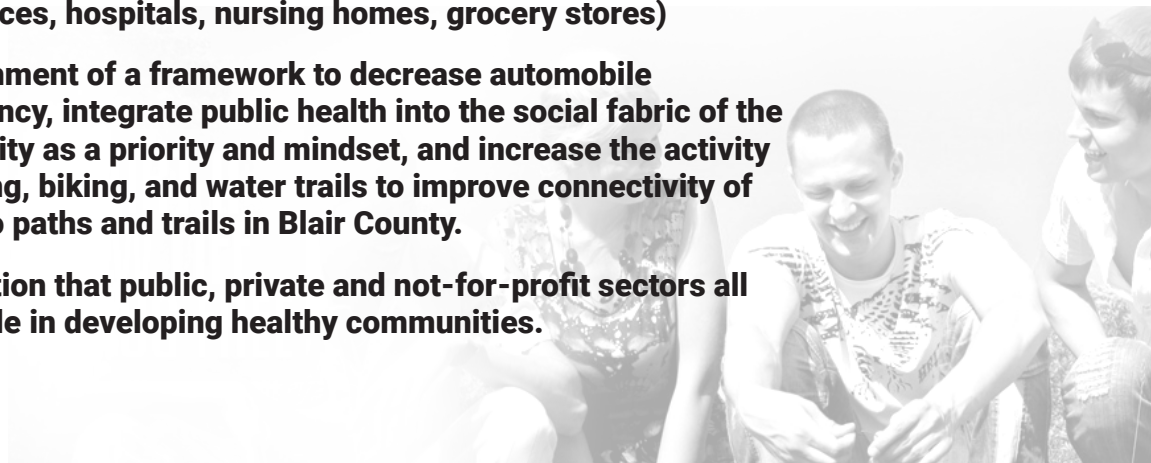
**OUTPUTS**

Development of a stable public health framework.

Increased access to local healthy food in public places (workplaces, hospitals, nursing homes, grocery stores)

Establishment of a framework to decrease automobile dependency, integrate public health into the social fabric of the community as a priority and mindset, and increase the activity of walking, biking, and water trails to improve connectivity of non-auto paths and trails in Blair County.

Recognition that public, private and not-for-profit sectors all play a role in developing healthy communities.



ACTION ITEMS

	WHAT?	WHY?	WHO?	WHAT RESOURCES?	WHEN?
1	Develop a mobile farm market / coop to bring locally grown healthy food to County residents	Increasing the presence and visibility of locally grown food and other products and activities produced by Blair County farmers will promote local farmers and provide access to healthy food.	Blair Planning, Conservation District, private sponsors	\$5,000 annually to promote, organize, etc. Sponsors and donations could play a role	Initiate 2019
2	Explore with law enforcement to develop a regional mobile prescription drug take-back/ collection program	A region-wide mobile program could be coordinated with the County District Attorney / Sheriff in all 6 counties to heighten awareness and get more drugs off the streets.	SAPDC, participating County Commissioners, District Attorney and Sheriff, Blair Drug and Alcohol Partnerships	TBD	Initiate mid 2018
3	Complete a County active transportation plan or bicycle and pedestrian master plan	A dedicated plan to build and connect bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure and set policy to encourage more active communities. It should also include a model complete streets policy and coordinate with existing and planned trails and connections.	Blair Planning, local municipalities (municipal planners), Blair Bicycle Club, Allegheny Trailrunners, Allegheny Hiking Club, and other local clubs and organizations	Commitment of time by coordinating agencies	Initiate 2018
4	Develop model land development regulations and public health policies	To address aesthetics and safety of the physical environment, encourage mixed-use development, street continuity and connectivity, residential density and proximity to businesses, schools, recreation, etc. Calibrate based on local context.	Blair Planning, Healthy Blair County Coalition, local municipalities (municipal planners)	Commitment of staff time	Initiate 2019
5	Market, promote, and preserve local trails, pedestrian routes/facilities and other recreational destinations/facilities	The effectiveness and use of trails and routes could be improved through greater coordination of messaging and marketing.	Blair Planning, Healthy Blair County Coalition, Explore Altoona	\$5,000 annually to promote, organize, etc. Sponsors and donations could play a role	Initiate 2018, ongoing

Cambria County



ACTION PLAN



**Broadband
and Cellular
Service**



**Collaboration
and
Coordination**



**Business and
Workforce
Development**



**Recreational
Amenities
and Natural
Assets**



**Housing and
Blight**



Transportation



Cambria County Steering Committee

Matt Barczak, Northern Cambria Area
Business Alliance

Jim Benshoff, Benshoff Farms of New
Germany

Edwin Bowser, Forest Hills School District

Randy Choby, Resident

Jeff Dick, PA CareerLink, Cambria &
Somerset County

Matt Heider, Resident

Christina Hines, 1st Summit Bank

Donell Jacoby, Conemaugh Valley Board of
Education

Frank Janakovic, Mayor, City of Johnstown

Rev. Sylvia King, City of Johnstown
Council Member

Heath Long, Resident

Ben Lusk, Penn State University, College
of Agriculture

Grace Markum, High Impact²
Consulting/The UPS Store
Ebensburg

Eric Miller, Mayor of Summerhill
Borough

Dr. Larry Nulton, Ph.D., Nulton Aviation
Services, Inc.

Debra Orner, Cambria Regional
Chamber of Commerce

Mark Pasquerilla, Crown American

Ron Rovanseck, Cambria County Planning
Commission

John W. Sumrada, Conemaugh Township
Planning Commission

Martin Westrick, Westrick Supply
Center

Susan Whisler, Southern
Alleghenies Planning & Development
Commission

John Wozniak, Former PA State Senator,
35th District

Jami Zipf, Resident



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CAMBRIA COUNTY ACTION PLAN**PRIORITY****Broadband and Cell Service****OUTCOMES SOUGHT**

Broadband and telecommunications services are expanded around and beyond key institutions, population centers, and economic assets, resulting in enhanced marketability and competitiveness of the county and/or improved public safety.

The Link to Demographic Disadvantages

For younger households and most businesses today, access to high speed internet and reliable cell service is an expectation not unlike electricity. Places that don't have it cannot be competitive.

The Link to Varying Implementation Capacity

Local capacity to negotiate with service providers or stimulate new infrastructure is limited, making county- and region- level action a necessity.

**INPUTS****Knowledge:**

Identify existing private infrastructure networks and the locations of major customers or groups of customers. Determine existing and desired levels of service.

Management Capacity:

Organize public-private partnerships around addressing service improvements and expansions in areas of sufficient or potential demand. Troubleshoot public safety gaps through partnerships with service providers and public agencies.

Capital:

Allocate public resources to help cover cost gaps that preclude priority service expansion by market forces alone.

**OUTPUTS**

Public private partnerships complete projects (fiber installation, cell tower development, etc.) that expand coverage and quality of service.



ACTION ITEMS

	WHAT?	WHY?	WHO?	WHAT RESOURCES?	WHEN?
1	Establish regional broadband and cell service task force	Progress on this regional priority will require long-term coordination to determine appropriate action steps and oversee their implementation. Examples of steps currently being explored include items A and B below.	Cambria County Planning Commission, SAPDC, and subject-matter experts	Dedication of time by task force participants	Spring 2018 and ongoing
a	Infrastructure Inventory, Customer Survey, and Identification of Anchor Customers	Working with private service providers to expand service and coverage requires knowledge of existing public and private infrastructure, current levels of service, and the presence of anchor users (schools, hospitals, companies) whose demand for service can be pooled and used as a base for expansion.	SAPDC with support from participating counties; potential for funding partnership with DCED	\$50,000 estimated for regional inventory and survey (\$7,500 to \$10,000 commitment from Cambria County)	Complete asset inventory, customer survey, and anchor identification by end of 2018
b	Hire tele-communications project manager at SAPDC	As areas of potential service expansion are identified, capacity will be needed to negotiate with service providers, perform customer/user outreach, and manage projects that involve public-private partnerships.	SAPDC with support from participating counties; potential for funding partnership with DCED	County contributes \$10,000 to \$20,000 per year to SAPDC, depending on participation of other counties.	Timing and nature of work dependent on needs identified by action item 1a

CAMBRIA COUNTY ACTION PLAN**PRIORITY****Collaboration and Coordination****OUTCOMES SOUGHT**

Service improvements and/or savings realized by collaborating municipalities; reduction in number of low-capacity and low-function units of government; improved services and efficiencies result in enhanced marketability and competitiveness of the county.

The Link to Demographic Disadvantages

Retirements, looming labor force shortages, and stagnant tax bases make partnerships and structural change not only desirable but necessary.

The Link to Varying Implementation Capacity

Collaborations that bring together the expertise and resources of multiple communities and sectors makes implementation of almost any initiative more likely to happen and more likely to succeed over time.

**INPUTS****Will to collaborate:**

The political will to overcome territorial instincts in order to broker inter-municipal agreements and partnerships around critical services.

Capital:

Savings may ultimately accrue from collaboration, but sometimes there are up-front costs that need to be covered.

Process know-how and guidance:

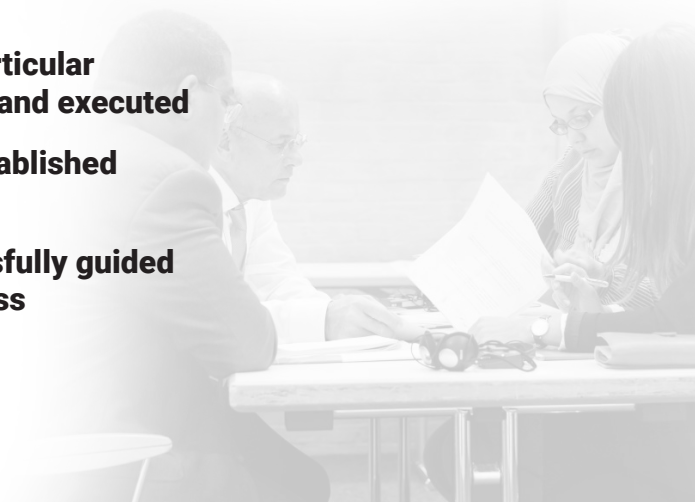
Drafting inter-municipal agreements, consolidating municipalities, or establishing regional service districts requires the navigation of legal and financial details and processes.

**OUTPUTS**

Inter-municipal agreements to share particular resources and capacities are developed and executed

Multi-municipal service districts are established around critical services

Self-selected municipalities are successfully guided through the merger/consolidation process



ACTION ITEMS

	WHAT?	WHY?	WHO?	WHAT RESOURCES?	WHEN?
1	Legal and financial guidance for collaboration	Executing inter-municipal agreements, forming regional service districts, and exploring municipal merger/consolidation often requires a level of legal and financial expertise that isn't readily available to local governments.	SAPDC, DCED	Commitment of SAPDC in-house expertise and retainers to provide legal and financial guidance; additional guidance from DCED	2018
2	Outreach and education	Sharing information about local and regional best practices in problem solving and service delivery, as well as the costs/benefits of merging or consolidating low-functioning units of government, can help stimulate greater levels of collaboration.	Cambria County Planning Commission; Council of Governments; private sector leaders; elected officials; PennDOT	Commitment of staff time; PennDOT Connects process	2018
3	Establish matching grant program to incentivize inter-municipal agreements and service sharing	A financial incentive, when combined with legal and financial guidance could initiate a greater willingness for inter-municipal agreements and service sharing, especially when start-up costs are involved.	Cambria County Planning Commission; Greater Johnstown-Cambria County Chamber of Commerce	Pair county funds with private sector commitments to establish a pool for matching grants	2019

CAMBRIA COUNTY ACTION PLAN**PRIORITY**

Business and Workforce Development

**OUTCOMES SOUGHT**

Business creation rates improve and number of small businesses grows; growth in net number of jobs; entrepreneurial activity is more visible; risk-taking becomes more widely accepted; increase in labor force participation.

The Link to Demographic Disadvantages

Despite job losses, many employers indicate difficulty with filling the jobs they have – a situation that will worsen as the workforce continues to age. Attracting new workers to the region will be central to retaining current businesses, let alone growing new ones.

The Link to Varying Implementation Capacity

Creating the conditions for job development means investing strongly in the services and infrastructure that businesses expect – and that their skilled workers will expect.

**INPUTS****Partnerships:**

Collaboration with other counties and agencies in the Southern Alleghenies on small business development and entrepreneurship.

Will to collaborate:

The political will to overcome territorial instincts in order to efficiently and effectively recruit, retain, and cultivate businesses.

Capacity:

Staff capacity to coordinate economic development initiatives related to small business cultivation and technical assistance.

**OUTPUTS**

Establish a high-quality and well-coordinated marketing effort in Cambria County.

Follow-through with commitments to Startup Alleghenies and shared-use kitchen as long-term efforts to cultivate local entrepreneurs and build a stronger and growing base of small businesses.



ACTION ITEMS

	WHAT?	WHY?	WHO?	WHAT RESOURCES?	WHEN?
1	Coordinated Branding and Marketing Initiative	The effectiveness of all efforts to market Cambria County would be improved by greater coordination. A consistent and effective message around quality of life, recreational assets, and economic opportunities should be developed and used to promote the county to a range of audiences.	Lead by Greater Johnstown/Cambria County Convention & Visitors Bureau	Commitment of staff time and existing marketing budgets of partnering agencies	Initiated in 2017 and ongoing
2	Streamline Regulatory Processes	Land development processes vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction and are often difficult to navigate. To make the process more consistent and predictable, work with county and local stakeholders to consider the value of a countywide land development ordinance and an online information clearinghouse.	Lead by Cambria County Planning Commission	Commitment of staff time by CCPC	2018-2019
3	Identify Workforce Development Opportunities	Workforce shortages are a growing concern, making the retention and utilization of local workers a critical economic issue. Expand engagement between vocational schools and employers to identify ways to improve graduate retention, and remove barriers to the re-employment of remediated individuals with criminal backgrounds.	Coordinated by Cambria County Planning Commission and Workforce Development Board	Commitment of staff time by CCPC and WIB	2018 and ongoing
4	Support and grow the StartUp Alleghenies initiative	Currently underway in Blair, Cambria, and Somerset counties, this program is designed to cultivate the talents of home-grown entrepreneurs to spur new business activity.	JARI; Ben Franklin Technology Partners of Central and Northern PA; SAPDC	In-kind contributions from local economic development agencies; federal and state grants; long-term local commitment to retaining entrepreneurial coaching capacity	Ongoing
5	Coordination and expansion of agritourism	Agritourism has a strong tradition in Cambria County (tours, farm heritage days, harvest festivals) and can serve as a supplement to farm incomes, and a boost to local quality of life and food culture. Strong coordination of agritourism activities and marketing will grow the impact of these efforts.	Farm owners; Cambria County Farm Bureau; 4H; Penn State Extension	Coordination of existing resources and capacity, supplemented by a small budget for targeted marketing	Initiate in 2019

CAMBRIA COUNTY ACTION PLAN**PRIORITY**

Recreational Amenities and Natural Assets

**OUTCOMES SOUGHT**

Growth in home-based workers and residents under age 40; growth in number of unique visits to Cambria County; growth in property values, business variety, and investment in targeted borough and city centers through prioritized bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure investments.

The Link to Demographic Disadvantages

For younger households that have options, quality of life often plays a decisive role in choosing where to live and put down roots.

The Link to Varying Implementation Capacity

Local capacity to negotiate with service providers or stimulate new infrastructure is limited, making county- and region- level action a necessity.

**INPUTS****Capacity:**

Staff capacity to coordinate transportation improvements and programming at key assets. Enhanced communication between PennDOT and project focused volunteer/community groups.

Partnerships:

Private sector partners to develop and maintain businesses and services that support utilization of key bicycle, sidewalk, trail, waterway and other assets.

Capital:

Funding for improved recreational and transportation infrastructure and maintenance, as well as investments to market existing transportation, recreational and cultural assets.

**OUTPUTS**

Cultivation of business activity and transportation amenities (sidewalks, bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure) in traditional community centers (Johnstown and boroughs) that improves vitality, quality of life and transportation options for local residents while enhancing the appeal of nearby outdoor transportation based recreational assets (symbiotic relationships between Main Streets and recreational assets).

Stronger coordination of marketing to support higher utilization (local and regional) of recreational and transportation assets.

ACTION ITEMS

	WHAT?	WHY?	WHO?	WHAT RESOURCES?	WHEN?
1	Promote recreational assets to local users	<p>Maintaining a strong and growing network of recreational assets depends on a healthy base of local users and advocates. Many county residents are unaware of what's in their own backyard or think of them only as tourism destinations.</p> <p>As a component of a countywide marketing and branding initiative (see Business and Workforce Development), tools used to reach local audiences – signage, apps, websites – could service multiple purposes.</p>	Johnstown Cambria County CVB; Cambria County Conservation and Recreation Authority (CCCRA); PennDOT	<p>Dedicate a portion of existing promotion budgets to target local audiences.</p> <p>PennDOT resources to enhance signage opportunities</p>	2019 and ongoing
2	Targeted expansion of recreational opportunities in Northern Cambria County	<p>A more fully developed and utilized set of outdoor recreational assets in the northern part of the county will help to make the county's entire recreation network more rich and comprehensive.</p> <p>Integration of existing assets such as Duman Lake and Prince Gallitzin State Park with trails (such as the proposed Patton to Carrolltown trail) and promotion of multi-function concepts such as "Bike to Fish" represent opportunities to build a strong foundation.</p>	CCCRA; PennDOT; Northern Cambria Community Development Corporation	Use existing sources of CCCRA capital to leverage state funds	2019 and ongoing
3	Develop an 'Adventure Sport' degree or certificate program	Making the most of the county's outdoor assets will require a workforce that knows how to deliver positive experiences to residents and visitors through services that complement the assets. An 'Adventure Sport' program, such as the one at Garrett College and Frostburg State University in Maryland, can help develop these skills and inspire students who already have first-hand experience with the county's parks and trails.	UPJ and other institutions of higher learning; CCCRA; Johnstown Cambria County CVB	Staff time of project partners to assess feasibility and develop a plan to achieve required accreditations	2020

CAMBRIA COUNTY ACTION PLAN

PRIORITY

Housing and Blight



OUTCOMES SOUGHT

Non-seasonal vacancy rates begin to decline from the current 7% towards a healthier 4%; property values and reinvestment levels improve in areas where intervention occurs; first impressions and investor confidence improves in key areas; new market-rate products are added to the housing supply.

The Link to Demographic Disadvantages

Attracting and retaining younger households will be challenging if available housing is a poor match for their needs and blight discourages them from investing.

The Link to Varying Implementation Capacity

Removing blighted properties and stimulating the production of new market-rate housing is critical for the region's competitiveness. But very few communities have the resources or expertise to do this on their own.



INPUTS

Coordination and Partnerships:

The county and municipalities must work together to identify and prioritize problem properties. Private sector partners are needed to rehab/reuse salvageable properties.

Project Management Capacity:

Each property identified for intervention – whether demolition or redevelopment – becomes a distinct project that needs to be managed to a successful conclusion.

Capital:

Allocate public resources to cover demolition costs or support rehabilitation.



OUTPUTS

Severely blighted and obsolete properties are acquired and demolished.

Salvageable or historic properties are transitioned to new owners and renovated.



ACTION ITEMS

	WHAT?	WHY?	WHO?	WHAT RESOURCES?	WHEN?
1	Stepped-up demolition pace: 80 to 100 properties per year	Demolition at a scale that will begin to stabilize the severe imbalance of supply and demand is an investment in a healthy and functional housing market. If the pace is sustained over time and targets properties that do the most damage to investor and homeowner confidence, it can help rebuild eroding tax bases and expand the financial capacity of local governments.	Cambria County Redevelopment Authority; Johnstown Redevelopment Authority; Blight Task Force	Take existing commitments to demolition (from Act 152 revenue and CDBG) and allocate an additional \$750,000 per year towards demolition and project management. (Additional resource options: bond proceeds, general fund allocations, philanthropic contributions)	Achieve 80 to 100 demolitions countywide during 2019
2	Develop a financial model to incentivize market-rate apartments, townhouses, and ADA accessible single-family homes	Market-rate housing is risky in a weak housing market where the rents and prices that the market will bear are less than what developers/investors need to make a project feasible. This results in an increasingly outdated supply that makes the county less competitive for new households or businesses that need to attract outside talent. Market-rate housing products that support local development and redevelopment goals, including downtown revitalization.	Cambria County Planning Commission, Cambria County Redevelopment Authority, Johnstown Redevelopment Authority	Depending on model chosen, this effort may require that a loan and grant fund be capitalized (by public and private sources) to assist eligible projects and that necessary tax abatement tools be enacted.	Initiate 2019

CAMBRIA COUNTY ACTION PLAN**PRIORITY****Transportation****OUTCOMES SOUGHT**

Cambria County's transportation system requires a certain focus on system preservation to serve and support its local communities and economy. Yet, local stakeholders desire a modern transportation system - one that supports a broad range of practical choices for travel, goods movement, access to markets and recreational opportunities.

The Link to Demographic Disadvantages

The region's transportation networks need to adapt to the needs of an aging population and provide modal options that will help attract and retain younger residents. Meeting both needs will often involve similar strategies.

The Link to Varying Implementation Capacity

Keeping up with maintenance of local roads and infrastructure will be a challenge – but falling behind will further dampen private sector confidence and erode public investment capacity.

**INPUTS****Will to collaborate:**

Strong connections exist at the County level through the Cambria County Metropolitan Planning Organization. The Cambria County Chamber of Commerce Transportation Committee is an emerging voice for the business community to prioritize its support of transportation investments.

Capital:

Through the Cambria County Metropolitan Planning Organization, PennDot provides the bulk of the region's transportation construction funding. Prioritization and planning for future investments is performed through the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) at the County level and State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) at the state level. Local stakeholders and state agencies provide funding as local match to prioritize and plan for future investments.

Process know-how and guidance:

PennDot and the Cambria County Planning Commission, as MPO secretary, assist local communities through established relationships as well as the new PennDot Connects process.

**OUTPUTS**

Projects that enhance opportunities for local business and industry to access regional markets.

Increased recreation based transportation such as trails, sidewalks, waterway access and greenways.

Transit system that enhances workforce development opportunities, municipal connectivity and transportation choices.



ACTION ITEMS

	WHAT?	WHY?	WHO?	WHAT RESOURCES?	WHEN?
1	System Preservation	Safety of the traveling public is overarching priority of PennDOT and local stakeholders. Projects will address structurally deficient bridges on the state highway system and maintain roadway pavement conditions in a "state of good repair."	PennDOT; Cambria County Metropolitan Planning Organization; Local Municipalities	Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) funding through PennDOT	2018 forward
2	Recreation Based Transportation Projects	Recreational amenities, most often transportation based, are key to attracting and retaining younger skilled workers necessary to maintain and advance the County's workforce. Also key to improvement of health and well being of county residents.	Cambria County Conservation and Recreation Authority; PennDOT; County Recreational Stakeholders	Commitment of staff time; Cambria County Planning Commission facilitating PennDOT Connects process with appropriate project based volunteer groups. 2018 County Bike/Ped Plan Update will identify and prioritize project needs and locations.	2018 forward
	Enhanced and Expanded Transit Connectivity	Service to additional civic and employment destinations, and extended weekend and evening service, will increase ridership and revenue. Development and infrastructure planning for transit service with appropriate turning radii, bus pull-offs, standards for road construction, sidewalks from door to street.	CamTran; PennDOT; Cambria County Planning Commission; Cambria County MPO	Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) funding through PennDOT	2018 forward

Fulton County

ACTION PLAN



**Broadband
and Cellular
Service**



**Collaboration
and
Coordination**



**Business and
Workforce
Development**



Agriculture



**Recreational
Amenities and
Natural Assets**



Fulton County Steering Committee

Jim Delaplaine, Business owner

Julie Dovey, Fulton County Family Partnership

Jeremy Fletcher, Fulton County Planning Commission

Marlin "Sonny" Harr, Ayr Township Supervisor

Marjorie Hudson, Ayr Township resident

Dan Leese, Fulton County Farm Bureau

Rodney McCray, Fulton County Commissioner

Neill Miller, Fulton County Conservation District

Seleen Shives, Fulton County Conservation District

Kim Slee, Fulton County Medical Center

Bob Swadley, Thompson Township Supervisor



Please Note:

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- Many of the action items identify resources in general terms by the types of resources necessary (financial or otherwise) or by the likely contributors. If a project requires a financial commitment and specific dollar amounts are not listed, they are unknown at this time and must be determined through further planning by project partners.
- This action plan is intended to bring focused attention to projects and initiatives that can be expected to contribute to the realization of desired outcomes. As with any community action plan, it must be recognized that no single project or list of projects represents a guaranteed solution to a community's challenges. Improving the likelihood of success requires a commitment to experimentation, honest assessments of project impact, and regular refinements to the action plan to reflect new opportunities and evolving conditions.

FULTON COUNTY ACTION PLAN**PRIORITY****Broadband and Cell Service****OUTCOMES SOUGHT**

Broadband and telecommunications services are expanded around and beyond key institutions, population centers, and economic assets, resulting in enhanced marketability and competitiveness of the county and/or improved public safety.

The Link to Demographic Disadvantages

For younger households and most businesses today, access to high speed internet and reliable cell service is an expectation not unlike electricity. Places that don't have it cannot be competitive.

The Link to Varying Implementation Capacity

Local capacity to negotiate with service providers or stimulate new infrastructure is limited, making county- and region- level action a necessity.

**INPUTS****Knowledge:**

Identify existing private infrastructure networks and the locations of major customers or groups of customers. Determine existing and desired levels of service.

Management Capacity:

Organize public-private partnerships around addressing service improvements and expansions in areas of sufficient or potential demand. Troubleshoot public safety gaps through partnerships with service providers and public agencies.

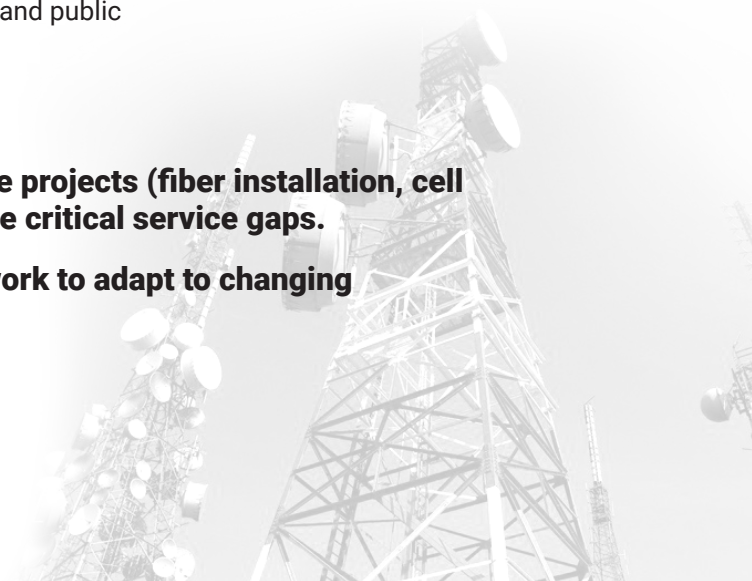
Capital:

Allocate public resources to help cover cost gaps that preclude priority service expansion by market forces alone.

**OUTPUTS**

Public private partnerships complete projects (fiber installation, cell tower development, etc.) that resolve critical service gaps.

Improvements will position the network to adapt to changing technologies



ACTION ITEMS

	WHAT?	WHY?	WHO?	WHAT RESOURCES?	WHEN?
1	Establish regional broadband and cell service task force	Progress on this regional priority will require long-term coordination to determine appropriate action steps and oversee their implementation. Task Force can lobby on behalf of rural communities. Examples of steps currently being explored include items A and B below.	County planning commissions, SAPDC, and subject-matter experts	Dedication of time by task force participants	Spring 2018 and ongoing
a	Infrastructure Inventory, Customer Survey, and Identification of Anchor Customers	Working with private service providers to expand service and coverage requires knowledge of existing public and private infrastructure, current levels of service, and the presence of anchor users (schools, hospitals, companies) whose demand for service can be pooled and used as a base for expansion.	SAPDC with support from participating counties; potential for funding partnership with DCED	\$50,000 estimated for regional inventory and survey (\$7,500 to \$10,000 commitment from Fulton County)	Complete asset inventory, customer survey, and anchor identification by end of 2018
b	Hire tele-communications project manager at SAPDC	As areas of potential service expansion are identified, capacity will be needed to negotiate with service providers, perform customer/user outreach, and manage projects that involve public-private partnerships.	SAPDC with support from participating counties; potential for funding partnership with DCED	County contributes \$10,000 to \$20,000 per year to SAPDC, depending on participation of other counties.	Timing and nature of work dependent on needs identified by action item 1a
2	Broadband Outreach and Aggregation	Through Act 183, areas with no or very limited internet service can aggregate customer demand and request service through completion of a Bona Fide Retail Request Program. Services are provided if sufficient demand is proven.	Information on the Act 183 process can be distributed by the County Planning Commission for dissemination by local governments.	Time of staff and elected officials to inform constituents about aggregation process.	2018-2019

FULTON COUNTY ACTION PLAN**PRIORITY****Collaboration and Coordination****OUTCOMES SOUGHT**

Service improvements and/or savings realized by collaborating municipalities; reduction in number of low-capacity and low-function units of government; improved services and efficiencies result in enhanced marketability and competitiveness of the county.

The Link to Demographic Disadvantages

Retirements, looming labor force shortages, and stagnant tax bases make partnerships and structural change not only desirable but necessary.

The Link to Varying Implementation Capacity

Collaborations that bring together the expertise and resources of multiple communities and sectors makes implementation of almost any initiative more likely to happen and more likely to succeed over time.

**INPUTS****Will to collaborate:**

The political will to overcome territorial instincts in order to broker inter-municipal agreements and partnerships around critical services.

Capital:

Savings may ultimately accrue from collaboration, but sometimes there are up-front costs that need to be covered.

Process know-how and guidance:

Drafting inter-municipal agreements, consolidating municipalities, or establishing regional service districts requires the navigation of legal and financial details and processes.

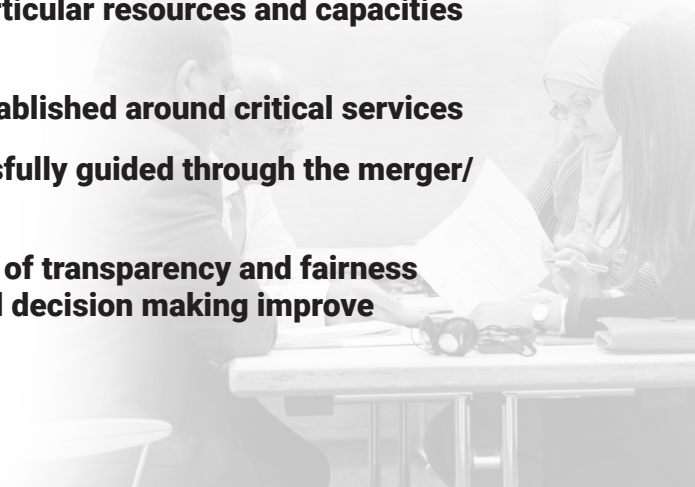
**OUTPUTS**

Inter-municipal agreements to share particular resources and capacities are developed and executed

Multi-municipal service districts are established around critical services

Self-selected municipalities are successfully guided through the merger/consolidation process

Residents' and stakeholders' perception of transparency and fairness about the local government process and decision making improve



ACTION ITEMS

	WHAT?	WHY?	WHO?	WHAT RESOURCES?	WHEN?
1	Outreach and education	Sharing information about local and regional best practices in problem solving and service delivery, as well as the costs/benefits of merging or consolidating low-functioning units of government, can help stimulate greater levels of collaboration.	Fulton County Planning Commission	Commitment of staff time	2018
2	Identify and approach potential candidates for merger or consolidation	Low-capacity and/or low-functioning units of government are often an unnecessary burden on tax payers. Shared services or consolidation could lead to greater efficiencies and opportunities for investment.	Fulton County Planning Commission, local municipalities	Commitment of staff time and coordinating agencies	2019
a	Legal and financial guidance for collaboration	Executing inter-municipal agreements, forming regional service districts, and exploring municipal merger/consolidation often requires a level of legal and financial expertise that isn't readily available to local governments.	SAPDC, DCED	Commitment of SAPDC in-house expertise and retainers to provide legal and financial guidance; additional guidance from DCED	Timing and nature of work dependent on action item 2
3	Satellite office for SAPDC in Fulton County	Fulton County needs assistance with economic development, grant writing and other planning related activities. Utilizing the staff and expertise at SAPDC could be an effective alternative to hiring full time county staff. The idea would be for SAPDC to have a staff member in Fulton County for a specified number of hours per week.	Fulton County Planning Commission,	Commitment of local resources to pay for SAPDC staff time in Fulton County. Details regarding cost, office space, etc. need to be fleshed out. Costs could include approximately \$20,000 per year.	Initiate discussions in 2018 with office staffed in 2019

FULTON COUNTY ACTION PLAN**PRIORITY**

Business and Workforce Development

**OUTCOMES SOUGHT**

Business creation rates improve; growth in net number of jobs; entrepreneurial activity is more visible; risk-taking becomes more widely accepted; increase in labor force participation; number of long-term unfilled jobs fall.

The Link to Demographic Disadvantages

Despite job losses, many employers indicate difficulty with filling the jobs they have – a situation that will worsen as the workforce continues to age. Attracting new workers to the region will be central to retaining current businesses, let alone growing new ones.

The Link to Varying Implementation Capacity

Creating the conditions for job development means investing strongly in the services and infrastructure that businesses expect – and that their skilled workers will expect.

**INPUTS****Capacity:**

Staff capacity to coordinate economic development initiatives

Will to collaborate:

The political will to overcome territorial instincts and status-quo in order to establish a County department or agency dedicated to economic development.

Partnerships:

Private sector partners to development and maintain businesses and services that cater to both local residents and visitors.

Capital:

Funding for improved infrastructure needed for development in Warfordsburg.

**OUTPUTS**

Fulton County economic development agency dedicated to promoting the county's assets, coordinating business activities, and attracting new investment

"Main Street" program for McConnellburg established to build promotional capacity, coordinate programming, and attract new investment

Economic development agency partners with County and private sector to access and develop needed infrastructure



ACTION ITEMS

	WHAT?	WHY?	WHO?	WHAT RESOURCES?	WHEN?
1	Restructure/ Revamp Fulton County economic development organization responsible for County-wide business development	A proactive approach to economic development could lead to a diversified tax base, jobs, and/or additional goods and services available to local residents.	County commissioners, advised by planning commission This could include repositioning the Fulton Industrial Development Association (FIDA).	Capitalize an Economic Development Fund through bond proceeds and/or a dedicated revenue stream.	Initiate 2019
2	Work with land owners to leverage the Interstate 70 corridor and attract new business / development in Warfordsburg	Interstate 70 is underutilized in Fulton County. The interchange at Warfordsburg provides economic development opportunities that should be explored including but not limited to business park development, light industrial, and lodging.	Revamped or repositioned Fulton Industrial Development Association (FIDA). Coordination with local property owners.	Staff of the new Fulton County economic development organization or repositioned Fulton Industrial Development Association (FIDA).	Initiate mid 2018
3	Leverage state grants for improvements to downtown McConnellsburg	Improvements (infrastructure, redevelopment of critical sites, planning, etc.). to downtown will require significant resources. State and Federal grants could help to leverage private sector investment.	Fulton County Planning Commission to coordinate with Borough, SAPDC	Commitment of time by coordinating agencies.	Initiate 2018
4	Develop “Main Street” and downtown revitalization initiative (e.g. National Main Street Center’s Four-Point Approach)	As the County seat, McConnellsburg has a rich history as a significant economic and cultural resource. However, it is suffering from disinvestment. Young adults and seniors provide opportunity for revitalization.	SAPDC to coordinate with the Fulton County Planning Commission, Borough of McConnellsburg, Chamber of Commerce & Tourism and the Chambers of the Alleghenies.	County and Borough to contribute to regional main street manager and/or revitalization initiative.	Initiate 2019

FULTON COUNTY ACTION PLAN**PRIORITY****Agriculture****OUTCOMES SOUGHT**

Agriculture sector's output or profitability stabilizes and expands; local food economy (small scale production, processing, and retail/ experiencing) becomes a bigger part of the overall economy; diversification of agricultural sector to lesson vulnerabilities and capitalize on emerging technologies and markets.

The Link to Demographic Disadvantages

Generational succession is an issue for agriculture across the U.S. – but even more so in regions with a diminished base of young people.

The Link to Varying Implementation Capacity

Rural agricultural townships and the boroughs that service them are facing some of the most acute struggles to fill decision-making boards and fund investments in aging infrastructure.

**INPUTS****Coordination and Partnerships:**

The County, Penn State Extension, Fulton County Conservation District, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau, and other local and regional stakeholders must work together to identify and prioritize key agricultural issues.

Training and Education:

Training and exposure for farmers on the use of technology and best management practices for more efficient and profitable farming techniques.

Labor:

Affordable and dependable skilled workers.

Capital:

A dedicated farm loan program for investments in advanced technologies and practices.

**OUTPUTS**

A better understanding of the labor market and the costs to farmers

Farmers are able to invest, diversify, and become more profitable

Locally produced agricultural products are available to Fulton County residents

Agriculture is recognized as an important aspect of the County's economic development framework

A better understanding of the value of agriculture to Fulton County, in all its forms

ACTION ITEMS

	WHAT?	WHY?	WHO?	WHAT RESOURCES?	WHEN?
1	Include agriculture representation in County economic development agency	Including representation in the economic development discussions could help to expand the local reach and help to diversify farming in Fulton County.	Revamped or repositioned Fulton Industrial Development Association, Inc. (FIDA)	Commitment of staff time by new ED agency or FIDA	Initiate mid 2018 and complete by 2019
2	Actively recruit new processing facilities to locate in Fulton County	Facilities including but not limited to a USDA Certified processing facility for pork and poultry will help to expand the value-added capacity of the local farming community.	Revamped or repositioned Fulton Industrial Development Association, Inc. (FIDA), Conservation District, Penn State Coop Extension	Commitment of staff time by new ED agency or FIDA	Timing dependent on 1
3	Develop a public campaign to educate and raise public awareness and appreciation of County farmers	Increasing the presence and visibility of locally grown food and other products and activities produced by Fulton County farmers will promote local farmers as businesses and provide access to healthy food.	County commissioners, advised by planning commission, Conservation District, Penn State Coop Extension, and local farming stakeholders	2,500 annually	Initiate mid 2018
4	Collaborate with agricultural lenders to provide low-interest loans to farmers	To provide access to capital and expertise for technological advancements and agri-business.	Revamped or repositioned Fulton Industrial Development Association, Inc. (FIDA), and Conservation District	Commitment of staff time by new ED agency or FIDA	Timing dependent on 1

FULTON COUNTY ACTION PLAN**PRIORITY**

Recreational Amenities and Natural Assets

**OUTCOMES SOUGHT**

Growth in usage of recreational assets by locals and visitors; overall quality of facilities is consistent and strong; businesses connected to serving visitors and recreational needs thrive and expand; growth in home-based workers and residents under age 40; growth in number and variety of businesses in selected borough centers; growth in property values and private investment in borough centers; improved attraction/retention of middle and upper income households.

The Link to Demographic Disadvantages

For younger households that have options, quality of life often plays a decisive role in choosing where to live and put down roots.

The Link to Varying Implementation Capacity

Local capacity to negotiate with service providers or stimulate new infrastructure is limited, making county- and region- level action a necessity.

**INPUTS****Capacity:**

Staff capacity to coordinate programming and improvements

Partnerships:

Private sector partners to development and maintain businesses and services that cater to both local residents and visitors.

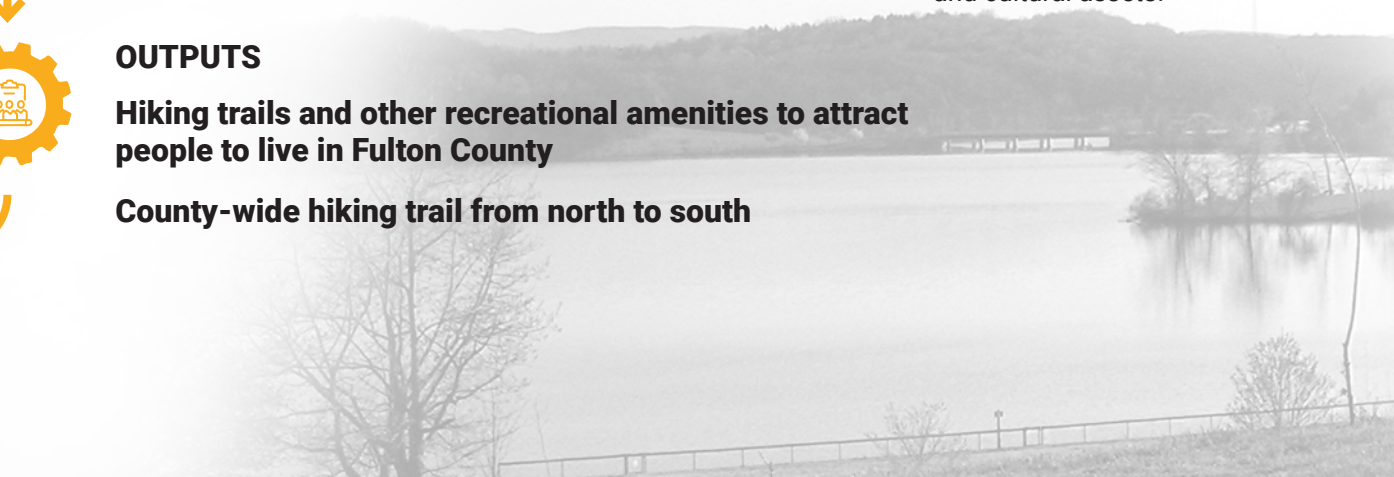
Capital:

Funding for improved recreation infrastructure and maintenance, as well as investments to improve and market existing recreational and cultural assets.

**OUTPUTS**

Hiking trails and other recreational amenities to attract people to live in Fulton County

County-wide hiking trail from north to south



ACTION ITEMS

	WHAT?	WHY?	WHO?	WHAT RESOURCES?	WHEN?
1	Trail feasibility study for a county-wide north-south trail	Although the Tuscarora Trail is a well established hiking trail a Fulton County multi-use trail for hiking, snowmobiling, horseback riding, etc. could diversify recreational opportunities for residents as well as visitors.	County commissioners, advised by planning commission and Fulton County Chamber of Commerce & Tourism	Approximately \$25,000 as a 50% local grant match. The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) is a potential funding source.	Initiate 2019
2	Coordinate and cooperate with other Southern Alleghenies counties and chamber of commerce and tourism agencies to market both private and public recreational and cultural destinations	The State Game Lands in Fulton County are a tremendous asset for hiking, hunting and other outdoor recreational activities. The lands contains nearly 6,000 acres including a 200 acre lake. This could lead to private sector businesses opportunities for outfitters, ziplining and canopy tours, nature retreats, etc. Work with the State to expand access to State lands.	New Fulton County economic development organization to coordinate with the Fulton County Chamber of Commerce & Tourism	Staff of the new Fulton County economic development organization and the Fulton County Chamber of Commerce & Tourism.	Initiate mid 2018
3	Coordinate with Bedford County on The Old Pennsylvania Pike	Conversion of the abandoned Turnpike and its tunnels into a multi-modal trail will create a one-of-a-kind destination for recreational tourists and a regional quality of life asset.	Southern Alleghenies Conservancy; The Old PA Pike Authority	RACP authorization of \$8 million; additional state, federal, and private sources to be identified in pending master plan	2018-2019

Huntingdon County

ACTION PLAN



**Broadband
and Cellular
Service**



**Collaboration
and
Coordination**



**Business and
Workforce
Development**



**Housing and
Blight**



**Recreational
Amenities and
Natural Assets**



Huntingdon County Steering Committee

Greg Anderson, Standing Stone Coffee Company

Terry Anderson, Juniata College Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership

Brittney Baker Shurr, Pennsylvania Association of Realtors

Ilona Ballreich, Penn State Sustainable Communities Collaborative

Robert Benson, Huntingdon County Planning Commission

Ken Burton, Mount Union Area School District

Phil Cahill, Huntingdon County Planning Commission

Jeremy Crouse, Huntingdon County Planning Commission

Fred Foster, Huntingdon Area School District

David Gardner, APEX Realty Group

Ryan Gibboney, Relnvision Huntingdon

Chris Gildea, J.C. Blair Memorial Hospital

Pamela Grugan, Juniata Valley School District

Nicole Houck, Huntingdon Borough Council

Jim Hyslop, Standing Stone Consulting

Travis Lee, Huntingdon Area High School

Nancy McNamara, Huntingdon County Planning Commission

Larry Mutti, Huntingdon County Planning Commission

Matthew Price, Huntingdon County Visitor's Bureau

Ron Rabena, Huntingdon County Planning Commission

Robert Reitman, Huntingdon County Business & Industry

Rick Rogers, Mount Union Veterans of Foreign Wars

Mark Sather, Huntingdon County Commissioner

Angie Thompson, Thompson's Candle Company and Gage Mansion Bed & Breakfast

James Troha, PhD, Juniata College

Fran Vaughn, Mutual Benefit Group

Scott Walls, Huntingdon County Commissioner



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HUNTINGDON COUNTY ACTION PLAN**PRIORITY****Broadband and Cell Service****OUTCOMES SOUGHT**

Critical broadband and cell coverage gaps are identified and filled, resulting in a reliable network and enhanced marketability and competitiveness of the county and/or improved public safety and education.

The Link to Demographic Disadvantages

For younger households and most businesses today, access to high speed internet and reliable cell service is an expectation not unlike electricity. Places that don't have it cannot be competitive.

The Link to Varying Implementation Capacity

Local capacity to negotiate with service providers or stimulate new infrastructure is limited, making county- and region- level action a necessity.

INPUTS**Knowledge:**

Identify broadband and cell coverage gaps through (1) an inventory of well-known and documented gaps, and/or (2) a comprehensive survey of existing levels of service. In particular, identify gaps that do the most to undermine the county's ability to compete for businesses and households or that present a high risk to public safety.

Management Capacity:

Organize public-private partnerships around addressing each high priority gap to pinpoint options and select a course of action tailored to the location.

Capital:

Allocate public resources to cover the cost gaps that preclude the private sector from addressing gaps on its own.

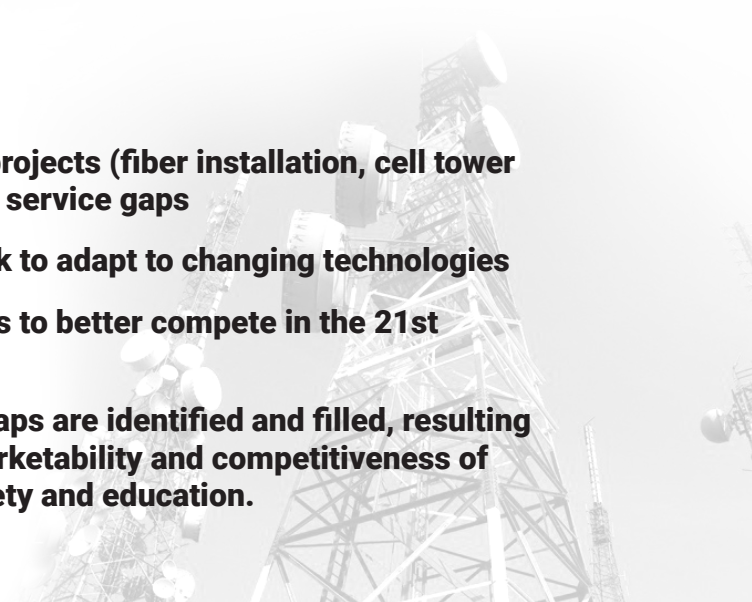
OUTPUTS

Public private partnerships complete projects (fiber installation, cell tower development, etc.) that resolve critical service gaps

Improvements will position the network to adapt to changing technologies

Collaboration with educational partners to better compete in the 21st Century economy

Critical broadband and cell coverage gaps are identified and filled, resulting in a reliable network and enhanced marketability and competitiveness of the county and/or improved public safety and education.



ACTION ITEMS

	WHAT?	WHY?	WHO?	WHAT RESOURCES?	WHEN?
1	Establish regional broadband and cell service task force	Progress on this regional priority will require long-term coordination to determine appropriate action steps and oversee their implementation. Task Force can lobby on behalf of rural communities. Examples of steps currently being explored include items A and B below.	County planning commissions, SAPDC, and subject-matter experts	Dedication of time by task force participants	Spring 2018 and ongoing
a	Infrastructure Inventory, Customer Survey, and Identification of Anchor Customers	Working with private service providers to expand service and coverage requires knowledge of existing public and private infrastructure, current levels of service, and the presence of anchor users (schools, hospitals, companies) whose demand for service can be pooled and used as a base for expansion.	SAPDC with support from participating counties; potential for funding partnership with DCED	\$50,000 estimated for regional inventory and survey (\$7,500 to \$10,000 commitment from Huntingdon County)	Complete asset inventory, customer survey, and anchor identification by end of 2018
b	Hire tele-communications project manager at SAPDC	As areas of potential service expansion are identified, capacity will be needed to negotiate with service providers, perform customer/user outreach, and manage projects that involve public-private partnerships.	SAPDC with support from participating counties; potential for funding partnership with DCED	County contributes \$10,000 to \$20,000 per year to SAPDC, depending on participation of other counties.	Timing and nature of work dependent on needs identified by action item 1a
2	Broadband Outreach and Aggregation	Through Act 183, areas with no or very limited internet service can aggregate customer demand and request service through completion of a Bona Fide Retail Request Program. Services are provided if sufficient demand is proven.	Information on the Act 183 process can be distributed by the County Planning Commission for dissemination by local governments.	Time of staff and elected officials to inform constituents about aggregation process.	2018-2019

HUNTINGDON COUNTY ACTION PLAN**PRIORITY****Collaboration and Coordination****OUTCOMES SOUGHT**

Service improvements and/or savings realized by collaborating municipalities; reduction in low-capacity and low-function units of government; improved services and efficiencies result in enhanced marketability and competitiveness of the county; improved functioning and collaboration among both private and public organizations.

The Link to Demographic Disadvantages

Retirements, looming labor force shortages, and stagnant tax bases make partnerships and structural change not only desirable but necessary.

The Link to Varying Implementation Capacity

Collaborations that bring together the expertise and resources of multiple communities and sectors makes implementation of almost any initiative more likely to happen and more likely to succeed over time.

INPUTS**Will to collaborate:**

The political will to overcome territorial instincts in order to broker inter-municipal agreements and partnerships around critical services.

Capital:

Savings may ultimately accrue from collaboration, but sometimes there are up-front costs that need to be covered.

Process know-how and guidance:

Drafting inter-municipal agreements, consolidating municipalities, or establishing regional service districts requires the navigation of legal and financial details and processes.

OUTPUTS

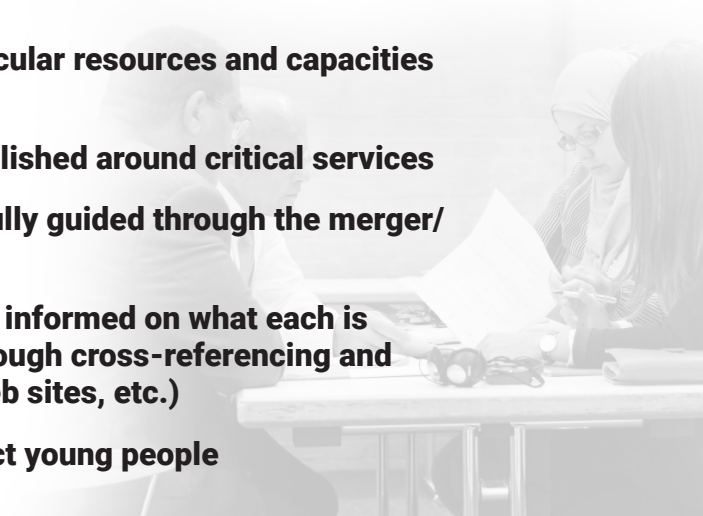
Inter-municipal agreements to share particular resources and capacities are developed and executed

Multi-municipal service districts are established around critical services

Self-selected municipalities are successfully guided through the merger/consolidation process

Local and regional stakeholders are better informed on what each is doing due to improved communication through cross-referencing and linking (e.g. newsletters, social media, web sites, etc.)

Improvements will help to retain and attract young people



ACTION ITEMS

	WHAT?	WHY?	WHO?	WHAT RESOURCES?	WHEN?
1	Evaluate opportunities for shared services, consolidation, and potential effectiveness of a Council of Governments (COG)	Develop Advisory Committee to evaluate opportunities for shared services, consolidation, and potential effectiveness of a Council of Governments (COG) to leverage municipal purchasing and reduce costs associated with things like overhead, roadway maintenance, and code enforcement.	Huntingdon County Planning Commission, County Associations of Township Officials, Councils of Governments (COG)	Commitment of staff time	2018
2	Outreach and education	Sharing information about local and regional best practices in problem solving and service delivery, as well as the costs/benefits of sharing/merging or consolidating services, can help stimulate greater levels of collaboration and save costs.	Huntingdon County Planning Commission, Advisory Committee from above, HCBI, SAPDC, Leadership Huntingdon County	Commitment of staff time	2018
a	Promote Huntingdon County outside of region	Once progress has been made and quality-of-life improves a concerted effort should be made to promote Huntingdon County as an attractive and affordable place to live and work.	HCBI, SAPDC, Leadership Huntingdon County, Huntingdon County Board of Realtors, County Visitors Bureau, etc.	\$5,000 annually to promote, organize, etc. Sponsors and donations could play a role	TBD
3	Establish matching grant program to incentivize inter-municipal agreements and service sharing	A financial incentive, when combined with legal and financial guidance could initiate a greater willingness for inter-municipal agreements and service sharing. The private sector has a vested interest to improve government efficiencies. An incentive program could require participation in a educational/training session by SAPDC.	HCBI, SAPDC	Private sector financial resources, Commitment of staff time	2019
a	Legal and financial guidance for collaboration	Executing inter-municipal agreements, forming regional service districts, and exploring municipal merger/consolidation often requires a level of legal and financial expertise that isn't readily available to local governments.	SAPDC	Commitment of SAPDC in-house expertise and retainers to provide legal and financial guidance	Timing and nature of work dependent on action item 3

HUNTINGDON COUNTY ACTION PLAN**PRIORITY**

Recreational Amenities and Natural Assets

**OUTCOMES SOUGHT**

Growth in usage of recreational assets by locals and visitors; overall quality of facilities is consistent and strong; businesses connected to serving visitors and recreational needs thrive and expand; growth in home-based workers and residents under age 40; growth in number and variety of businesses in selected borough centers; growth in property values and private investment in borough centers; preservation of historic and cultural buildings and sites; and improved attraction/retention of middle and upper income households.

The Link to Demographic Disadvantages

For younger households that have options, quality of life often plays a decisive role in choosing where to live and put down roots.

The Link to Varying Implementation Capacity

Local capacity to negotiate with service providers or stimulate new infrastructure is limited, making county- and region- level action a necessity.

**INPUTS****Capacity:**

Staff capacity to coordinate programming and improvements

Partnerships:

Private sector partners to development and maintain businesses and services that cater to both local residents and visitors.

Capital:

Funding for improved recreation infrastructure and maintenance, as well as investments to improve and market existing recreational and cultural assets.

OUTPUTS

Hiking trails and other recreational amenities to attract people to live in Huntingdon County

Increase the number of visitors in shoulder season

Increase the number of businesses focused on 3 and 4 seasons

More types of users can be accommodated

Balance between recreational opportunities / amenities and economic / business progress

Improvements will help to retain and attract young people



ACTION ITEMS

	WHAT?	WHY?	WHO?	WHAT RESOURCES?	WHEN?
1	Implement the regional active transportation plan or bicycle and pedestrian master plan at the local level.	Build and connect bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure and set policy to encourage more active communities. Should also include a model complete streets policy and coordinate with existing and planned trails and connections.	Huntingdon County Planning Commission, Active Transportation Committee and other local stakeholders	County staff time, volunteers, and local project related resources as necessary.	Initiate 2018
a	Analyze and prioritize gaps in trail network to improve connections to downtowns and commercial nodes.	Closing gaps in the network will improve the trail system as both a recreational and transportation asset and provide trail users access to local businesses.	Huntingdon County Planning Commission, Active Transportation Committee, property owners, and other local stakeholders	County staff time, volunteers, and local project related resources as necessary.	Initiate 2018
b	Implement Main Line Canal Greenway Trail and the September 11th Memorial Trail.	The trails illustrate the Main Line Canal's legacy, preserving the heritage of the people and places that make Pennsylvania unique, and recognizing the national significance of Pennsylvania in the 9/11 memorial.	Huntingdon County Planning Commission, Active Transportation Committee, Main Line Trail Committee, and other local stakeholders	County staff time, volunteers, and local project related resources as necessary.	Initiate 2018
c	Complete trail around Lake Raystown and connect to Huntingdon Borough.	It will be economically and recreationally beneficial to connect residents and visitors to local businesses.	Huntingdon County Planning Commission, Active Transportation Committee, property owners, and other local stakeholders	County staff time, volunteers, and local project related resources as necessary.	Initiate 2018
2	Coordinate a fund dedicated for the development, maintenance, and marketing of recreational and cultural assets.	Maintain a stream of revenue to boost the development, maintenance, and marketing of recreational and cultural assets.	Huntingdon County Commissioners, County Visitors Bureau, County Chamber of Commerce, Arts Council, Historical Society, and other stakeholders	Rely on existing staff, hotel tax, Act 13 funds, SAPDC, CDBG, and other eligible funds..	Initiate mid 2018
	MODEL TO CONSIDER	Cambria County Hotel Tax <i>Act 18 of 2016 gave 57 counties, including Huntingdon, the authority to raise their hotel taxes to a maximum of 5%, with proceeds dedicated to tourism promotion. Cambria County did this in 2016 and the hotel tax now provides over \$600,000 per year to support countywide marketing efforts.</i>			
3	Work with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, State, and local municipalities to expand the permitted recreational uses of public lands including equestrian, snowmobile, ATV, etc.	Expanding the use of Federal, State, and local public lands will diversify the recreational offerings within the County, could expand the shoulder tourism season.	Huntingdon County Commissioners, Huntingdon County Planning Commission, Huntingdon County Visitors Bureau	Rely on existing staff. Determine funds needed to support improvements.	Initiate mid 2018

HUNTINGDON COUNTY ACTION PLAN**PRIORITY**

Business and Workforce Development

**OUTCOMES SOUGHT**

Business creation rates improve; growth in net number of jobs; entrepreneurial activity is more visible; risk-taking becomes more widely accepted; increase in labor force participation; number of long-term unfilled jobs fall.

The Link to Demographic Disadvantages

Despite job losses, many employers indicate difficulty with filling the jobs they have – a situation that will worsen as the workforce continues to age. Attracting new workers to the region will be central to retaining current businesses, let alone growing new ones.

The Link to Varying Implementation Capacity

Creating the conditions for job development means investing strongly in the services and infrastructure that businesses expect – and that their skilled workers will expect.

**INPUTS****Capacity:**

Staff capacity to coordinate economic development initiatives related to small business cultivation and technical assistance.

Partnerships:

Private sector partners to development and maintain businesses and services that cater to both local residents and visitors.

OUTPUTS

Increase in number of new businesses and expansion of existing businesses

“Main Street” program for downtown Huntingdon established to build promotional capacity, coordinate programming, and attract new investment. Expand to other boroughs.

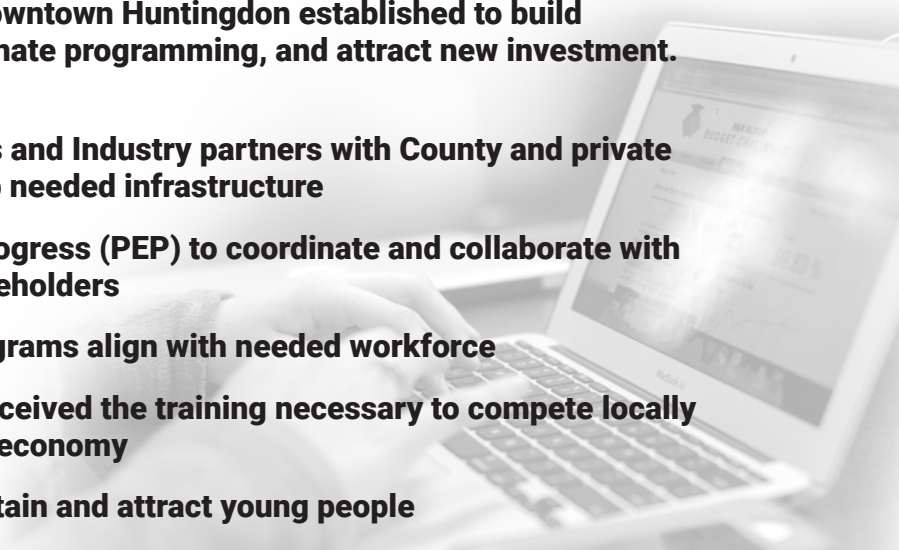
Huntingdon County Business and Industry partners with County and private sector to access and develop needed infrastructure

Partnership for Economic Progress (PEP) to coordinate and collaborate with other local and regional stakeholders

Educational training and programs align with needed workforce

Workforce has proactively received the training necessary to compete locally and in a 21st Century global economy

Improvements will help to retain and attract young people



ACTION ITEMS

	WHAT?	WHY?	WHO?	WHAT RESOURCES?	WHEN?
1	Strengthen locally owned farms by diversifying their products and services.	<p>There is significant uncertainty in the agricultural sector, especially regarding milk prices. Local farmers should look to diversify their products and services in order to remain competitive. Local farmers are important in preserving open space and cultural resources.</p> <p>In addition, recruiting additional facilities including but not limited to a USDA Certified processing facilities for dairy products (yogurt, cheese, etc.) will help to expand the value-added capacity of the local farming community.</p>	Huntingdon County planning Commission, Huntingdon County Farm Bureau, Huntingdon County Conservation District, Huntingdon County Business and Industry, Inc, Huntingdon County Career and Technology Center, and other agricultural stakeholders	Commitment of staff time	Initiate mid 2018
a	Explore the development of a educational / training program for farmers to learn about new technologies and business opportunities.	To provide training and access to expertise for technological advancements and agri-business. Explore opportunities to expand agricultural offerings, especially in downtown centers with farm-to-table / fork-to-table programs.	SAPDC, Huntingdon County Farm Bureau, Huntingdon County Business and Industry, Inc, Huntingdon County Career and Technology Center, Juniata College, Huntingdon County Local Food Association etc.	Commitment of staff time	Initiate 2019
	MODEL TO CONSIDER	<p>Farm to Fork Ithaca (NY)</p> <p><i>The Ithaca/Tompkins County Convention & Visitors Bureau's Farm to Fork Ithaca initiative helps to build linkages between restaurants, farms, residents, and visitors. These connections promote economic interactions between producers and consumers at a local and regional level.</i></p>			
b	Explore the development of a agricultural worker placement agency.	Farmers have reported having difficulty attracting and retaining skilled farm workers. A placement agency would help to connect farmers with skilled permanent and temporary workers.	SAPDC and CareerLink to coordinate with local industrial placement agencies, private sector providers, and other agricultural stakeholders	Commitment of staff time	Initiate 2020
2	Collaborate with the school districts and Juniata College to develop a student shadow program with local businesses	Job-shadowing is recognized as an important career-exploration activity for middle-school and high-school students. Shadowing helps students see how their textbook learning can be applied in the real world.	CareerLink, Huntingdon County Business and Industry, Inc, Huntingdon County Career and Technology Center, Juniata College, etc.	Commitment of staff time	Initiate mid 2018

ACTION ITEMS, CONT'D.

3	Leverage state grants for improvements to downtown Huntingdon and Mount Union	Improvements (infrastructure, redevelopment of critical sites, planning, etc.) to downtown will require significant resources. State and Federal grants could help to leverage private sector investment.	Huntingdon County Planning Commission to coordinate with Boroughs, Huntingdon County Business and Industry, Inc.	Commitment of time by coordinating agencies. Could require local money for grant matches	Initiate 2018
4	Develop “Main Street” and downtown revitalization initiative (e.g. National Main Street Center’s Four-Point Approach)	The Boroughs have a rich history as a significant economic and cultural resources. However, they are suffering from disinvestment. Young adults and seniors provide opportunity for revitalization. A focus on specialty shops and boutiques would provide a unique regional niche. Coordinate with recreational and cultural assets action plan.	SAPDC to coordinate with the Huntingdon County, Boroughs of Huntingdon and Mount Union, Chambers of the Alleghenies	County and Boroughs to contribute to regional main street manager and/or revitalization initiative.	Initiate 2019
	MODEL TO CONSIDER	Main Street Oakland County (MI) <i>This is the oldest countywide Main Street program in the country and uses the Four Point Approach to Main Street revitalization promoted by the National Main Street Center. County staff assist local Main Street coordinators.</i>			
5	Develop entrepreneurial program to educate people on how to start a business.	Help the Huntingdon community and economy by educating local community members as to the value of entrepreneurship and help them understand how to start and maintain a business.	Juniata College, Huntingdon County Business and Industry, Inc, Penn State, Huntingdon County Planning Commission	Commitment of staff time, \$12,000	Initiate 2018 and running by mid-2019
6	Identify and implement roadway, rail, and other infrastructure improvements to accommodate freight movement.	Huntingdon County does not currently have adequate infrastructure to accommodate the expansion of moving freight. Discussions regarding highways development and an intermodal rail center have been discussed.	Huntingdon County Planning Commission, Huntingdon County Commissioners, PennDOT, Rail Authority, Huntingdon County Business and Industry, Inc. and other necessary stakeholders.	Commitment of staff time, other local resources TBD	Initiate 2018

HUNTINGDON COUNTY ACTION PLAN**PRIORITY****Housing and Blight****OUTCOMES SOUGHT**

The housing market across the county to be balanced and for different parts of the county to have contributions to make towards a “full housing ladder”. Variety and quality of housing options expands; demand revealed by subsidized production lowers perceptions of risk and stimulates more interest from developers; businesses have an easier time recruiting new workers due to improved housing options - competitiveness improves; non-seasonal vacancy rates remain stable at around 4%; property values improve in areas where intervention occurs.

The Link to Demographic Disadvantages

Attracting and retaining younger households will be challenging if available housing is a poor match for their needs and blight discourages them from investing.

The Link to Varying Implementation Capacity

Removing blighted properties and stimulating the production of new market-rate housing is critical for the region’s competitiveness. But very few communities have the resources or expertise to do this on their own.

INPUTS**Will to intervene:**

The political will to incentivize and, if necessary, subsidize the production of missing housing products.

Coordination and Partnerships:

The county and municipalities must work together to identify and prioritize problem properties. Private sector partners are needed to rehab/reuse salvageable properties.

Project Management Capacity:

Each property identified for intervention – whether demolition or redevelopment – becomes a distinct project that needs to be managed to successful conclusion.

Capital:

Allocate public resources to cover demolition costs and for infrastructure, tax abatement, or other incentives to help bring to market.

Demolition:

Target abandoned properties that are exerting substantial negative impacts on the market

Code Enforcement:

Target key areas

OUTPUTS

Number of new market-rate rental units added each year (with the goal of about 8 per year).

Growth in the young adult population in Huntingdon County.

Severely blighted and obsolete properties are acquired and demolished.

Salvageable or historic properties are transitioned to new owners and renovated.

Growth in existing and new businesses in Borough centers as a result of improved housing for young adult population.

Improvements will help to retain and attract young people.



ACTION ITEMS

	WHAT?	WHY?	WHO?	WHAT RESOURCES?	WHEN?
1	Evaluate the use of municipal financing and tax abatement tools	There are several tools that should be considered to help lower the perception of risk and stimulate more interest from developers in housing development - (Tax Increment Financing districts (TIF), Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance (LERTA), Business Improvement Districts (BID)	Huntingdon County Commissioners in collaboration with the Huntingdon County Planning Commission, Huntingdon County Board of Realtors	Commitment of staff time	Initiate late 2018 / early 2019
2	Develop a financial model to incentivize market-rate apartments, townhouses, and ADA accessible single-family homes	To help lower the perception of risk and stimulate more interest from developers in housing development. ADA accessible single-family homes in the \$125K-\$200K range	Huntingdon County Planning Commission to convene a committee with representation from the Huntingdon County Business and Industry, Huntingdon County Board of Realtors, and local lenders	TBD once evaluation of model	Initiate 2019
3	Develop a financial model to incentivize the rehabilitation of underutilized or vacant commercial and mixed-use buildings	There are many buildings within and outside the Boroughs that need improvements and are likely to sit dormant unless some form of incentive is used to entice investors. Financing and tax abatement tools should be considered.	Huntingdon County Planning Commission to convene a committee with representation from the Huntingdon County Business and Industry, Huntingdon County Board of Realtors, and local lenders	TBD once evaluation of model	Initiate 2019
	MODEL TO CONSIDER	Erie Downtown Development Corporation <i>A consortium of local banks, foundations, and corporations founded EDDC in 2017 to support downtown development goals. This includes the establishment of an equity fund to invest in private mixed-income residential projects in new or redeveloped downtown buildings.</i>			

ACTION ITEMS, CONT'D.

4	Capitalize a blight intervention program - pass Act 137 of 1992 and 152 of 2016.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To create a stream of funding for blight intervention - this would place a \$15 fee on deed recordings to support rehabilitation and demolition activity and provide a revenue stream of roughly \$50,000 per year. • Coordinate with recreational and cultural assets action plan. 	Huntingdon County Commissioners in collaboration with the Huntingdon County Planning Commission and the Huntingdon County Board of Realtors	Commitment of staff time	Timing and nature of work dependent on action item 3
a	Explore the development of a educational / training program for farmers to learn about new technologies and business opportunities.	<p>Charge the Agency with coordinating stepped-up blight removal efforts and ensure that staff capacity is sufficient to handle this charge. The Agency would:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with the county and municipalities to identify and prioritize problem properties. Set a goal of intervening at five locations per year – with a particular focus on tax delinquent properties that can be transferred to Agency. • In collaboration with municipalities, manage the demolition of severely blighted and obsolete properties. • For salvageable properties or historic assets, issue RFPs to attract capable new owners. Use proceeds from sale to underwrite other blight interventions. 	Huntingdon County Commissioners in collaboration with the Huntingdon County Planning Commission, other partnering communities, Center for Community Action, and the Huntingdon County Board of Realtors	TBD	Timing and nature of work dependent on action item 3

Somerset County

ACTION PLAN



**Broadband
and Cellular
Service**



**Collaboration
and
Coordination**



**Business and
Workforce
Development**



**Housing and
Blight**



**Recreational
Amenities and
Natural Assets**



Somerset County Steering Committee

Sharon Ackerman, Register of Wills

Ron Aldom, Somerset County Chamber of Commerce

Chris Burtner, North American Hoganas, Inc.

Matthew Coldwell, AK Coal

Regina Coughenour, Somerset, Inc.

Dennis Hutchison, PA Farm Bureau

Don Miller, Somerset Township

Josh Miller, Somerset County Economic Development Council

Cassie Moon, Somerset Trust Company

John Vatauvuk, Somerset County Commissioner

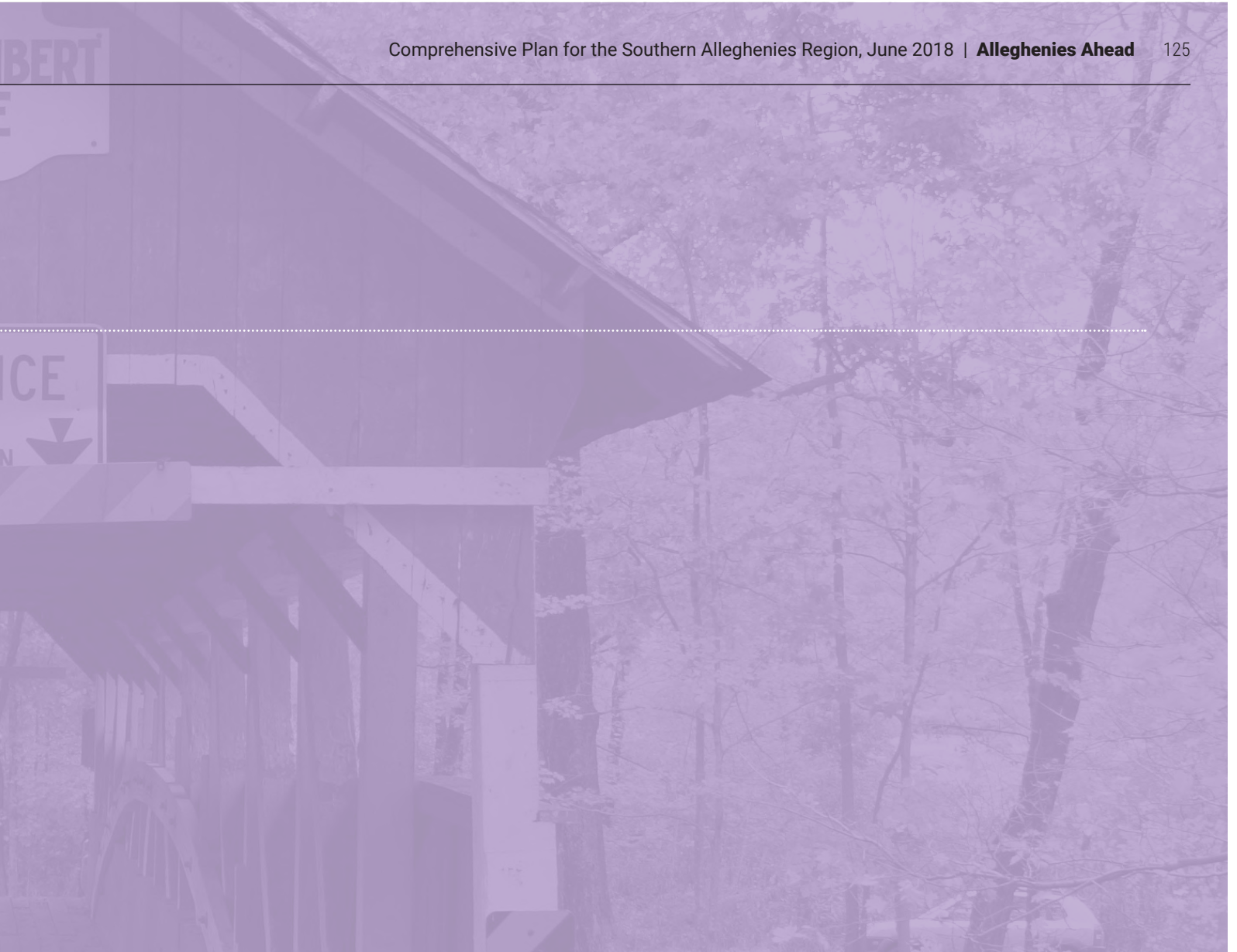
Jon Wahl, Somerset Planning & Engineering

Gerald Walker, Somerset County Commissioner

Greg Walker, Stonycreek Township

Gary Wetterberg, Planning Commission

James Yoder, Somerset County Commissioner



Please Note:

- The projects and initiatives identified in this action plan are numbered for organizational purposes only and are not ranked in order of importance. Where sequencing of a project is necessary – one following the completion of another – this is noted under the description of project timing.
- Many of the action items identify resources in general terms by the types of resources necessary (financial or otherwise) or by the likely contributors. If a project requires a financial commitment and specific dollar amounts are not listed, they are unknown at this time and must be determined through further planning by project partners.
- This action plan is intended to bring focused attention to projects and initiatives that can be expected to contribute to the realization of desired outcomes. As with any community action plan, it must be recognized that no single project or list of projects represents a guaranteed solution to a community's challenges. Improving the likelihood of success requires a commitment to experimentation, honest assessments of project impact, and regular refinements to the action plan to reflect new opportunities and evolving conditions.

SOMERSET COUNTY ACTION PLAN**PRIORITY****Broadband and Cell Service****OUTCOMES SOUGHT**

Broadband and telecommunications services are expanded around and beyond key institutions, population centers, and economic assets, resulting in enhanced marketability and competitiveness of the county and/or improved public safety.

The Link to Demographic Disadvantages

For younger households and most businesses today, access to high speed internet and reliable cell service is an expectation not unlike electricity. Places that don't have it cannot be competitive.

The Link to Varying Implementation Capacity

Local capacity to negotiate with service providers or stimulate new infrastructure is limited, making county- and region- level action a necessity.

**INPUTS****Knowledge:**

Identify existing private infrastructure networks and the locations of major customers or groups of customers. Determine existing and desired levels of service.

Management Capacity:

Organize public-private partnerships around addressing service improvements and expansions in areas of sufficient or potential demand. Troubleshoot public safety gaps through partnerships with service providers and public agencies.

Capital:

Allocate public resources to help cover cost gaps that preclude priority service expansion by market forces alone.

**OUTPUTS**

Public private partnerships complete projects (fiber installation, cell tower development, etc.) that expand coverage and quality of service.



ACTION ITEMS

	WHAT?	WHY?	WHO?	WHAT RESOURCES?	WHEN?
1	Complete the current 22-mile fiber optic project	With federal and state assistance, Somerset County is making significant strides to boost broadband speeds at key industrial sites, which will also benefit nearby households.	Somerset County and SAPDC	\$1.5 million in secured federal and state funding	Start 2018 Finish 2019
2	Establish regional broadband and cell service task force	Progress on this regional priority will require long-term coordination to determine appropriate action steps and oversee their implementation. Examples of steps currently being explored include items 2A and 2B below.	County planning commissions, SAPDC, and subject-matter experts	Dedication of time by task force participants	Spring 2018 and ongoing
a	Infrastructure Inventory, Customer Survey, and Identification of Anchor Customers	Working with private service providers to expand service and coverage requires knowledge of existing public and private infrastructure, current levels of service, and the presence of anchor users (schools, hospitals, companies) whose demand for service can be pooled and used as a base for expansion.	SAPDC with support from participating counties; potential for funding partnership with DCED	\$50,000 estimated for regional inventory and survey (\$7,500 to \$10,000 commitment from Somerset County)	Complete asset inventory, customer survey, and anchor identification by end of 2018
b	Hire tele-communications project manager at SAPDC	As areas of potential service expansion are identified, capacity will be needed to negotiate with service providers, perform customer/user outreach, and manage projects that involve public-private partnerships.	SAPDC with support from participating counties; potential for funding partnership with DCED	County contributes \$10,000 to \$20,000 per year to SAPDC, depending on participation of other counties.	Timing and nature of work dependent on needs identified by action item 2a

SOMERSET COUNTY ACTION PLAN**PRIORITY****Collaboration and Coordination****OUTCOMES SOUGHT**

Service improvements and/or savings realized by collaborating municipalities; reduction in number of low-capacity and low-function units of government; improved services and efficiencies result in enhanced marketability and competitiveness of the county.

The Link to Demographic Disadvantages

Retirements, looming labor force shortages, and stagnant tax bases make partnerships and structural change not only desirable but necessary.

The Link to Varying Implementation Capacity

Collaborations that bring together the expertise and resources of multiple communities and sectors makes implementation of almost any initiative more likely to happen and more likely to succeed over time.

**INPUTS****Will to collaborate:**

The political will to overcome territorial instincts in order to broker inter-municipal agreements and partnerships around critical services.

Capital:

Savings may ultimately accrue from collaboration, but sometimes there are up-front costs that need to be covered.

Process know-how and guidance:

Drafting inter-municipal agreements, consolidating municipalities, or establishing regional service districts requires the navigation of legal and financial details and processes.

**OUTPUTS**

Inter-municipal agreements to share particular resources and capacities are developed and executed

Multi-municipal service districts are established around critical services

Self-selected municipalities are successfully guided through the merger/consolidation process



ACTION ITEMS

	WHAT?	WHY?	WHO?	WHAT RESOURCES?	WHEN?
1	Legal and financial guidance for collaboration	Executing inter-municipal agreements, forming regional service districts, and exploring municipal merger/consolidation often requires a level of legal and financial expertise that isn't readily available to local governments.	SAPDC, DCED	Commitment of SAPDC in-house expertise and retainers to provide legal and financial guidance; additional guidance from DCED	2018 and ongoing
2	Outreach and education	<p>Sharing information about local and regional best practices in problem solving and service delivery, as well as the costs/benefits of collaboration or consolidation, can help stimulate action by townships and boroughs.</p> <p>While collaboration must ultimately be self-driven at the local level, advocacy by civic leaders and the private sector is often necessary to support proactive changes to municipal operations.</p>	<p>Township and borough associations; fire and ambulance associations; school boards; state municipal associations;</p> <p>Somerset County Planning Commission; public and private sector leaders</p>	Commitment of staff and volunteer time to communicate best practices and inform local officials about options for collaboration	2018 and ongoing
3	Establish matching grant program to incentivize inter-municipal agreements and service sharing	A financial incentive, when combined with legal and financial guidance could initiate a greater willingness for inter-municipal agreements and service sharing, especially when start-up costs are involved.	Somerset County; Private Foundations	Pair county funds with private sector commitments to establish a pool for matching grants	Begin in 2019

SOMERSET COUNTY ACTION PLAN

PRIORITY

Housing and Blight



OUTCOMES SOUGHT

Non-seasonal vacancy rates remain stable at around 4%; property values improve in areas where intervention occurs; first impressions and investor confidence improves in key areas.

The Link to Demographic Disadvantages

Attracting and retaining younger households will be challenging if available housing is a poor match for their needs and blight discourages them from investing.

The Link to Varying Implementation Capacity

Removing blighted properties and stimulating the production of new market-rate housing is critical for the region's competitiveness. But very few communities have the resources or expertise to do this on their own.



INPUTS

Coordination and Partnerships:

The county and municipalities must work together to identify and prioritize problem properties. Private sector partners are needed to rehab/reuse salvageable properties.

Project Management Capacity:

Each property identified for intervention – whether demolition or redevelopment – becomes a distinct project that needs to be managed to a successful conclusion.

Capital:

Allocate public resources to cover demolition costs or support rehabilitation.



OUTPUTS

Severely blighted and obsolete properties are acquired and demolished.

Salvageable or historic properties are transitioned to new owners and renovated.



ACTION ITEMS

	WHAT?	WHY?	WHO?	WHAT RESOURCES?	WHEN?
1	Demolition of five to seven blighted properties per year	<p>Identifying five to seven blighted properties per year – properties that threaten community assets and hamper investment – will allow Somerset County to deal with this issue at a realistic but meaningful pace.</p> <p>A collaborative countywide process for identifying priority properties, especially those that can be easily acquired for back taxes, will build capacity for collaboration on other issues.</p>	Somerset County Redevelopment Authority; new Problem Property Identification Committee	<p>\$50,000 to \$75,000 per year dedicated to demolishing five to seven properties per year.</p> <p>(Revenue stream can be achieved through local adoption of Act 152.)</p> <p>Allocation of staff time and capacity by SCRA and municipalities that participate on the ad hoc committee.</p>	Initiate before June 2018
2	Negotiated sale of endangered but salvageable properties	<p>Intervening with salvageable tax foreclosed properties in sensitive locations – where there is a public interest in guiding the transfer of the properties to capable owners with sound redevelopment plans – can significantly decrease the risk that a property will become or remain blighted.</p> <p>For such properties, an open RFP process leading to a negotiated sale offers greater control than the tax auction.</p>	<p>Somerset County Redevelopment Authority; new Problem Property Identification Committee</p> <p>For-profit and non-profit sector redevelopment partners</p>	Allocation of staff time and capacity by SCRA and municipalities that participate on the ad hoc committee.	Initiate property identification process before December 2018

SOMERSET COUNTY ACTION PLAN**PRIORITY**

Recreational Amenities and Natural Assets

**OUTCOMES SOUGHT**

Growth in home-based workers and residents under age 40; growth in property values, business variety, and investment in targeted borough centers; growth in number of unique visits to Somerset County; higher utilization of Pittsburgh cultural assets by county residents.

The Link to Demographic Disadvantages

For younger households that have options, quality of life often plays a decisive role in choosing where to live and put down roots.

The Link to Varying Implementation Capacity

Local capacity to negotiate with service providers or stimulate new infrastructure is limited, making county- and region- level action a necessity.

**INPUTS****Capital:**

Funding for improved infrastructure and maintenance in borough centers, as well as investments to improve existing cultural and recreational assets.

Capacity:

Staff capacity to coordinate programming and improvements in borough centers.

Partnerships:

Private sector partners to develop and maintain businesses and services that cater to both local residents and visitors.

**OUTPUTS**

County-level "Main Street" program established to build promotional capacity, coordinate programming, and attract new investment.



ACTION ITEMS

	WHAT?	WHY?	WHO?	WHAT RESOURCES?	WHEN?
1	Convene a county-wide "Main Street" coalition	<p>Somerset County's boroughs have the potential to be vital centers of culture and small business activity that contribute substantially to the county's attractiveness to tourists and residents.</p> <p>Getting to that level requires a higher level of programming, marketing, investment, and planning than currently exists. A coalition of existing Main Street organizations from throughout the county can identify areas of collaboration and resource sharing while advocating for local and state investments in borough centers.</p>	<p>Somerset, Inc., merchant's groups in Meyersdale, Windber Confluence, and elsewhere; Somerset County Planning Commission</p> <p>Identify boroughs and organizations willing to contribute as coalition partners.</p>	<p>In-kind resources of coalition partners to leverage private and public investments in operating capacity and projects.</p> <p>Partner with Laurel Highlands Visitors Bureau on joint marketing initiatives.</p>	2018 and ongoing
2	Somerset Lake Park	<p>The realization of Somerset Lake's potential as a natural and recreational asset for the county has been in the works for years, with incremental progress made since the development of a master plan in 2006.</p> <p>Completing the community's vision for Somerset Lake will establish a high quality and versatile recreational asset in the county's largest population center, boosting the county's ability to attract and retain residents and visitors.</p>	<p>Somerset County; Somerset County Conservancy; Somerset Lake Action Committee</p> <p>Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission; County Parks and Recreation Board</p>	<p>Secure resources to complete the Master Plan through Act 13 revenue, county general fund allocations, donor solicitations from SCC, foundation support, and DCNR.</p>	Ongoing
3	County Tourism Committee	<p>Somerset County has numerous recreational assets and entities that promote those assets. Coordinating efforts to improve and promote these assets – and linking them to other county priorities – will maximize their impact on the county's economy and communities.</p>	<p>Somerset County Chamber of Commerce; Laurel Highlands Visitors Bureau</p>	<p>Commitment of time for coordination by committee partners</p>	Ongoing
4	Implement the region's Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan (2016) at the local level	<p>Building and connecting bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, and setting policies to encourage more active communities, will bolster the marketability and livability of Somerset County's communities as well as connecting residents and visitors to the county's numerous recreation assets.</p>	<p>Somerset County Planning Commission; County Parks and Recreation Board</p>	<p>County staff time, volunteers, and local financial resources, as necessary, to leverage state and federal resources</p>	2018 and ongoing

ACTION ITEMS, CONT'D.

5	Establish Trust Fund to insure long-term operation of current water treatment systems and to support development of additional systems	Somerset County watersheds have been damaged by man-made pollution such as abandoned mine drainage (AMD) for over 100 years, reducing recreational and sustainable economic opportunities. Because of public sector and volunteer initiatives to reduce pollution, water quality has been improving. There are currently 23 AMD passive treatment systems that must be maintained in perpetuity and additional projects must be designed, funded and constructed to continue to address unabated pollution sources.	Somerset Conservation District, Stonycreek-Conemaugh River Improvement Project, Somerset County Conservancy, PA Association of Conservation Districts Technical Assistance Group, County watershed associations, PA Fish and Boat Commission, PADEP, Federal Office of Surface Mining, Somerset County Commissioners	Use multi-sector partnerships to obtain federal, state, local, and corporate resources	2018 and ongoing
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SOMERSET COUNTY ACTION PLAN**PRIORITY**

Business and Workforce Development

**OUTCOMES SOUGHT**

Business creation and retention rates improve; number of small businesses grows; growth in net number of jobs and capital investments; entrepreneurial activity is more visible; risk-taking becomes more widely accepted; increase in labor force participation; tax bases grow stronger in communities along Route 219 and other areas of investment.

The Link to Demographic Disadvantages

Despite job losses, many employers indicate difficulty with filling the jobs they have – a situation that will worsen as the workforce continues to age. Attracting new workers to the region will be central to retaining current businesses, let alone growing new ones.

The Link to Varying Implementation Capacity

Creating the conditions for job development means investing strongly in the services and infrastructure that businesses expect – and that their skilled workers will expect.

**INPUTS****Partnerships:**

Collaboration with other counties and agencies in the Southern Alleghenies on small business development and entrepreneurship; strengthening relationships between public sector agencies and local businesses.

Capacity:

Staff capacity to coordinate economic development initiatives related to small business cultivation and technical assistance.

Space:

Committing existing or new facilities as space for small businesses and entrepreneurs.

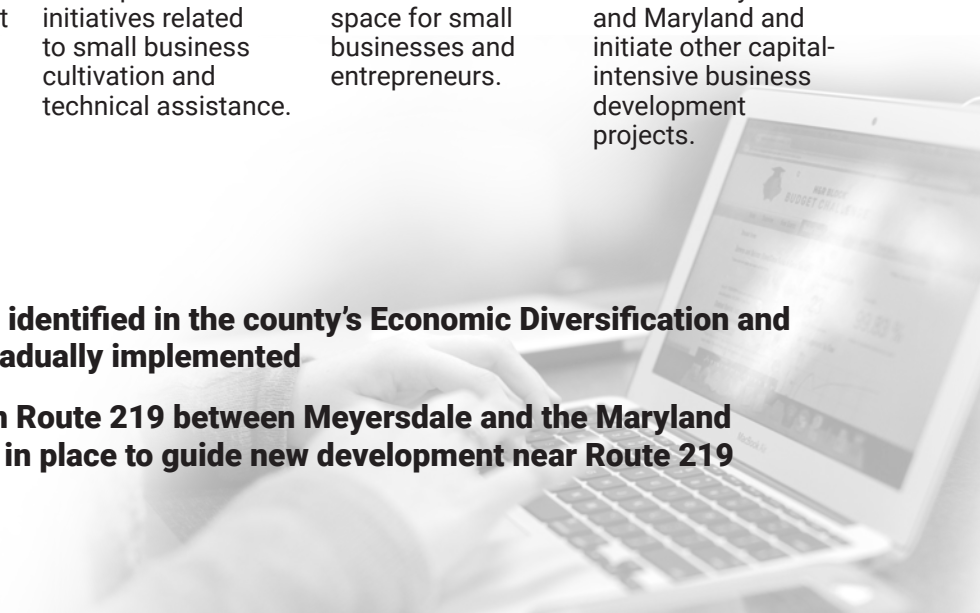
Capital:

Resources to complete Route 219 between Meyersdale and Maryland and initiate other capital-intensive business development projects.

**OUTPUTS**

Programs and projects identified in the county's Economic Diversification and Growth Strategy are gradually implemented

Construction begins on Route 219 between Meyersdale and the Maryland line, with corridor plan in place to guide new development near Route 219



ACTION ITEMS

	WHAT?	WHY?	WHO?	WHAT RESOURCES?	WHEN?
1	Economic Diversification and Growth Strategy Implementation	Strategy adopted in 2016 in the wake of continued job losses in the energy sector provides guidance on specific collaborative efforts to bolster business development in the tourism, ag/food, healthcare, and manufacturing sectors – with a particular focus on cultivating entrepreneurs and small businesses.	Somerset County Economic Development Council (lead); public and private sector partners	Private, state, and federal grants; in-kind and funding contributions by local private and public sector partners	Ongoing
2	Secure funding for Route 219 completion from Meyersdale to Maryland	Completion of Route 219 between Meyersdale and Maryland will connect the Turnpike with I-68 and create a high speed north-south corridor through the entire county.	Somerset County with support from North/South Appalachian Highway Coalition and Continental 1	PennDOT and USDOT	Lobbying effort ongoing
3	Route 219 Corridor Development and Enhancement Plan	<p>The plan would identify development conditions along the corridor and recommend policies and investments to realize and maximize economic returns from the highway's completion.</p> <p>Use specific findings and local commitments to advocate for highway construction funds.</p>	Somerset County Planning Commission; corridor communities	\$100,000 from public and private contributors	2019

Shared Strategies for a Stronger Region

JUNE 2018



ALLEGHENIES
AHEAD