

### Economics by the Numbers

Number of employed Town residents 16 years and over	6,198
working in education, 2000	1,212
Number of Town residents working in accommodation and food services, 2000	772
Number of Town residents working in manufacturing, 2000	696
Number of Town residents working in health care, 2000	676
Total employment of Bloomsburg businesses, 2000	9,489
Employment of Bloomsburg businesses as percent of County employment, 2000	26%
Percent of Bloomsburg business workers who live in Town, 2000	28%
Total employment of Columbia County businesses, 2006	36,806
Trend in total employment, 1990-2006	4,800
Private employment as percent of total employment, 2006	82%
Businesses from Columbia County's Top 50 Employers located in Bloomsburg	13
Columbia County industries with employments higher than the national average	19

### Introduction

The inventory and analysis of Bloomsburg's labor forces and economic resources is an important component of the comprehensive planning process. The growth and sustainability of the Town and the surrounding area is largely dependent on the existing economic structure, including its relationship to regional and national market conditions. Areas having sound economic structure possess the potential for continued growth and development. As employment opportunities increase, the population and general development activity of an area, including total wages and salaries paid, also increases. The resulting increase in disposable income increases demand for goods and services within the area, thus strengthening the local economy.

The following profile inventories regional, area and local economic characteristics, including resident workforce, industrial sectors, and downtown revitalization. Data from the US Census Bureau, the Bureau of Economic Analysis, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, as well as interviews and local information have been used to develop the profile.

## Resident Workforce

### Employment Status

- In 2000, 56 percent of residents 16 years and over were in the labor force.
- At 6.1 percent, Bloomsburg had nearly twice the unemployment rate of the state and a percentage of residents not in the labor force 6 points higher than the state; both statistics reflect the abundance of full-time students at Bloomsburg University.
- As of July 2008, unemployment for the Bloomsburg-Berwick micropolitan statistical area was 5.5 percent, and for Columbia County, 5.7 percent. 2008 data was not available for Bloomsburg alone.
- Of the 27 armed services members in Columbia County, 20 were from Bloomsburg as a result of the University's ROTC program.

Bloomsburg's employments status figures for residents in the armed forces, unemployed and not in the labor force were largely influenced by the presence of Bloomsburg Univeristy.

**Table 1: Employment Status, 2000**

Employment Status	Bloomsburg		Columbia County		Pennsylvania	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Population 16 years and over	11,068	100.0	52,499	100.0	9,693,040	100.0
In labor force	6,198	56.0	32,403	61.7	6,000,512	61.9
Armed forces	20	0.2	27	0.1	7,626	0.1
Civilian labor force	6,178	55.8	32,376	61.7	5,992,886	61.8
Employed	5,500	49.7	30,006	57.2	5,653,500	58.3
Unemployed	678	6.1	2,370	4.5	339,386	3.5
Percent of civilian labor force	-	11.0	-	7.3	-	5.7
Not in labor force	4,870	44.0	20,096	38.3	3,692,528	38.1

Source: US Census, 2000

### Industries that Employ Residents

- The leading employment industries of Bloomsburg's resident workers were: education steady at around 1,200 employed from Bloomsburg since 1990; accommodation and food services with 772 jobs; retail trade with 722; manufacturing with 696 jobs; and healthcare and social assistance with 676 jobs.
- Industries that grew significantly since 1990 include: construction, +153 jobs; healthcare and social assistance, +99 jobs; public administration, +41 jobs; and wholesale trade, +17 jobs. The information industry, which wasn't noted in the 1990 census, had 160 jobs in 2000.
- Employment of Bloomsburg resident workers in the agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting industry declined significantly from 47 to 16. The seven resident workers employed in the mining industry in 1990 changed industries or relocated by 2000. The retail trade industry lost 386 jobs since 2000.<sup>1</sup>
- The Bloomsburg Fair is temporarily the largest employer in Town during the last week of September. The fair employs around 4,000 people for the week, mostly local residents. Approximately 1,200 vendors attend the event each year, each employing up to 20 local workers. Two school districts suspend classes for this week, making many teachers and school district workers available for these temporary positions.

The leading employment industries of Bloomsburg's resident workers were: education; accommodation and food services; retail trade; manufacturing; and healthcare and social assistance, though retail trade and manufacturing declined from 1990-2000.

<sup>1</sup> US Census 2000

# Economic Profile

## Town of Bloomsburg Comprehensive Plan

**Table 2: Employment by Industry, 2000**

<b>Employed civilian population 16 years and over</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent of Total</b>
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	16	<1%
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting	16	<1%
Mining	0	0%
Construction	197	4%
Manufacturing	696	13%
Wholesale trade	105	2%
Retail trade	722	13%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	64	1%
Transportation and warehousing	37	1%
Utilities	27	<1%
Information	160	3%
Finance, insurance, real estate, and rental and leasing	136	2%
Finance and insurance	97	2%
Real estate and rental and leasing	39	1%
Professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services	205	4%
Professional, scientific, and technical services	118	2%
Management of companies and enterprises	0	0%
Administrative and support and waste management services	87	2%
Educational, health, and social services	1,888	34%
Educational services	1,212	22%
Health care and social assistance	676	12%
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food services	910	17%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation	138	3%
Accommodation and food services	772	14%
Other services (except public administration)	246	4%
Public administration	155	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,500</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: US Census, 2000

# Economic Profile

## Town of Bloomsburg Comprehensive Plan

### Occupation

- The majority of Bloomsburg occupational base was in the Sales and Office sector, followed respectively by Service, and management and professional careers. The smallest occupational base in Bloomsburg was in farming, fishing and forestry jobs, which was also true of the County and the State.
- Bloomsburg had only half the percentage of manufacturing jobs held by Columbia County resident workers, and 25 percent less than the state. Additionally, the have less jobs in production, transportation, and material moving than the county does.

Bloomsburg's resident workers held far more service and government jobs on average than the county or state.

**Table 3: Employment by Occupation, 2000**

Occupation	Bloomsburg	Columbia County	Pennsylvania
Management, Professional and related	23.4	23.7	32.6
Service	26.0	16.2	14.8
Sales and Office	31.1	25.4	27.0
Farming, Fishing and Forestry	0.1	0.9	0.5
Construction, Extraction, and Maintenance.	4.9	9.5	8.9
Production, Transportation, and Material Moving	14.5	24.4	16.3
Agr. and Forestry	0.3	1.7	1.0
Manufacturing	12.7	24.1	16.0
Government	19.1	12.6	11.3

Source: US Census, 2000

### Workplace Location versus Place of Residence<sup>2</sup>

- More than half of the workers who live in Bloomsburg also work in Bloomsburg.
- Of the 6810 inbound commuters coming to Bloomsburg to work, 1425 reside in adjacent townships but the largest numbers come from non-adjacent Columbia County municipalities.
- Of the 2504 out-bound commuters, the majority work outside of the neighboring municipalities, either within Columbia County or outside of it.

Bloomsburg is an employment center for Columbia County residents, as evidenced by the large numbers of inbound commuters. If work schedule are similar, traffic congestion could result during peak inbound and outbound times.

<sup>2</sup> US Census 2000

# Economic Profile

## Town of Bloomsburg Comprehensive Plan

**Table 4: Place of Work (Bloomsburg, PA) vs. Place of Residence, 2000**

Workplace	Residence	Count	Percent
Bloomsburg	Bloomsburg Town, Columbia County	2679	28
	Hemlock Township, Columbia County	305	3
	Montour Township, Columbia County	199	2
	Mount Pleasant Township, Columbia County	222	2
	Scott Township, Columbia County	699	7
	Elsewhere in Columbia County	3554	37
	Outside of Columbia County	1831	19
<b>Total</b>		<b>9489</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: US Census, 2000

**Table 5: Place of Residence (Bloomsburg, PA) vs. Place of Work, 2000**

Residence	Workplace	Count	Percent
Bloomsburg	Bloomsburg Town, Columbia County	2679	52
	Hemlock Township, Columbia County	93	2
	Montour Township, Columbia County	116	2
	Mount Pleasant Township, Columbia County	0	0
	Scott Township, Columbia County	489	9
	Elsewhere in Columbia County	889	17
	Outside of Columbia County	917	18
<b>Total</b>		<b>5183</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: US Census, 2000

### Income

- Most Bloomsburg families earn or receive between \$25,000 and \$74,999 in annual income.

**Table 6**

Income in 1999	Bloomsburg Households		Bloomsburg Families		County Family	State Family
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Percent	Percent
Less than \$10,000	747	18.2	140	7.5	4.0	5.0
\$10,000 to \$14,999	551	13.4	124	6.6	5.0	4.0
\$15,000 to \$24,999	766	18.6	237	12.7	14.0	11.0
\$25,000 to \$34,999	514	12.5	272	14.6	16.0	13.0
\$35,000 to \$49,999	616	15.0	392	21.0	23.0	18.0
\$50,000 to \$74,999	537	13.1	421	22.5	22.0	23.0
\$75,000 to \$99,999	196	4.8	132	7.1	9.0	12.0
\$100,000 to \$149,000	121	2.9	99	5.3	5.0	9.0
\$150,000 to \$199,999	40	1.0	27	1.4	1.0	2.0
\$200,000 or more	24	0.6	24	1.3	1.0	2.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,112</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>1,868</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Median income	\$24,868	N/A	\$39,806	N/A	\$41,398	\$49,184
Per capita income	\$12,819	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Source: US Census, 2000

# Economic Profile

## Town of Bloomsburg Comprehensive Plan

- The distribution of household income was significantly different from county and state figures, due to the influence of University students living in town. The distribution of family income, however, was similar to county and state figures.
- Bloomsburg had slightly a higher percentage of families at the higher end of the income spectrum than Columbia County but lower figures than the state.
- Bloomsburg's median income was 96 percent of the county's median income and 81 percent of the state's in median income in 1999.

Income for families living in Bloomsburg lags behind income received by county and state families.

### Poverty

- Bloomsburg had 31.2 percent of residents living below poverty in 1999; the rate was more than double the rates in both Columbia County and the state.
- Further examination by the age of householder and household type (married couple, other family, or nonfamily) shows that student residents strongly influence this percentage, as the percentages of older households below poverty are similar to, though still slightly higher than, county and state figures.

The numbers and percentage of residents below poverty was largely, but not exclusively due to students of Bloomsburg University.

**Table 7 Percentage of Population Below Poverty in 1999 by Resident Population and by Household**

	Bloomsburg	Berwick	Columbia County	Pennsylvania
Total Residents For whom poverty status is determined	9,477	10,403	60,324	11,879,950
<i>Percent of Residents living below poverty</i>	<i>31.2%</i>	<i>14.9%</i>	<i>13.1%</i>	<i>11.0%</i>
Total Households	4,112	4,599	24,982	4,779,186
<b>Householder under 25 years</b>	<b>13.7%</b>	<b>1.3%</b>	<b>2.9%</b>	<b>1.5%</b>
Married couple	0.2%	0.0%	0.1%	0.1%
Other family	0.6%	0.8%	0.5%	0.5%
Nonfamily	12.9%	0.5%	2.4%	0.9%
<b>Householder 25 to 44 years</b>	<b>5.3%</b>	<b>5.3%</b>	<b>3.6%</b>	<b>3.9%</b>
Married couple	0.5%	1.0%	0.9%	0.9%
Other family	1.7%	2.3%	1.4%	1.9%
Nonfamily	3.1%	2.0%	1.3%	1.1%
<b>Householder 44 to 64 years</b>	<b>4.0%</b>	<b>3.4%</b>	<b>3.0%</b>	<b>2.9%</b>
Married couple	0.3%	0.5%	0.6%	0.6%
Other family	0.6%	0.2%	0.5%	0.6%
Nonfamily	3.1%	2.7%	1.8%	1.7%
<b>Householder 65 years and over</b>	<b>3.7%</b>	<b>3.2%</b>	<b>2.9%</b>	<b>2.6%</b>
Married couple	0.6%	0.8%	0.6%	0.4%
Other family	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%
Nonfamily	2.9%	2.2%	2.1%	2.1%

Source: US Census, 2000

## Regional and County Economy

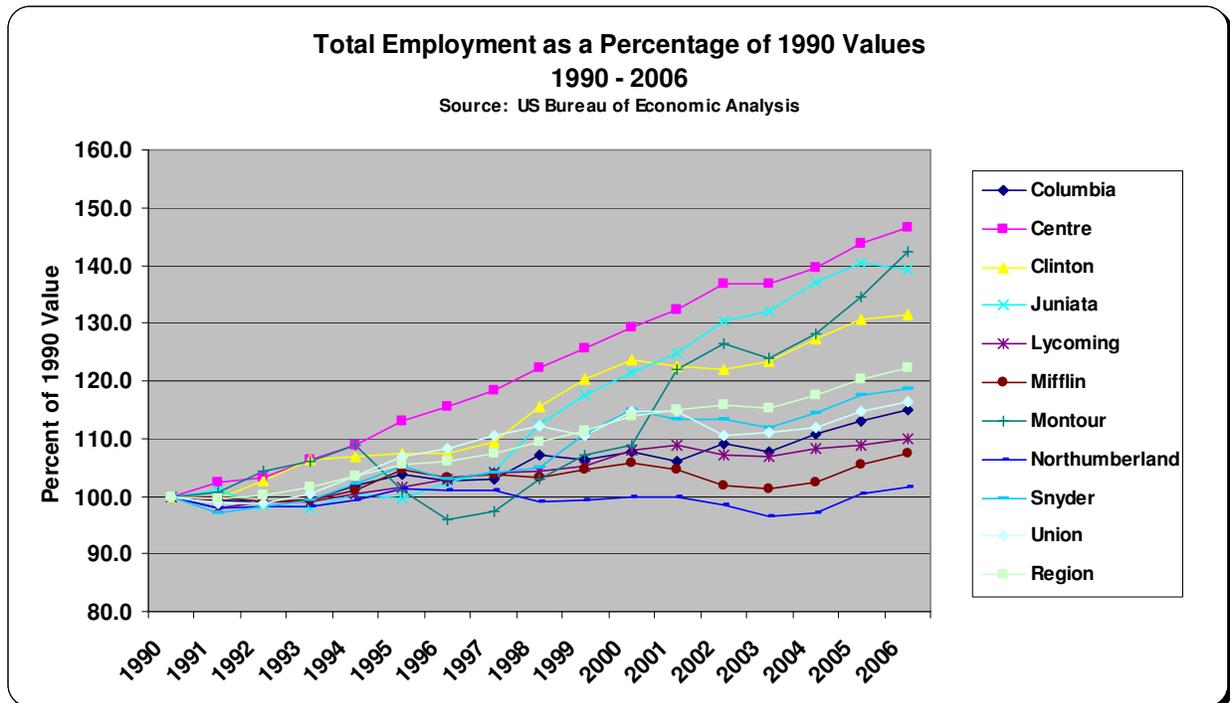
This profile of the regional and county economy begins with a review of employment trends and then looks at the economic structure of the 10-county Susquehanna Valley region that includes Columbia, Centre, Clinton, Juniata, Lycoming, Mifflin, Montour, Northumberland, Snyder and Union Counties. It looks at employment in terms of the place of work, that is, workers employed in each of the counties, regardless of where those employees live.

## Employment Trends

Total employment trends, both private and government employment, in the region indicate that the number of jobs grew by just over 22 percent between 1990 and 2006. However, job growth was not consistent across the region. Figure 1 illustrates the growth in employment for the region and each county as a percentage of 1990 levels.

- Columbia County experienced a 15 percent increase or 4,800 new jobs - a “middle of the pack” increase.

Figure 1



Regional job growth in the private sector was 18 percent between 1990 and 2006 as shown in Figure 2.

- Columbia County’s private sector employment increased by approximately 11 percent.

Job growth in the government sector within the region was significant - almost a 52 percent increase between 1990 and 2006. Data is shown in Figure 3.

- Columbia County has a substantial increase of 42 percent.

Figure 2

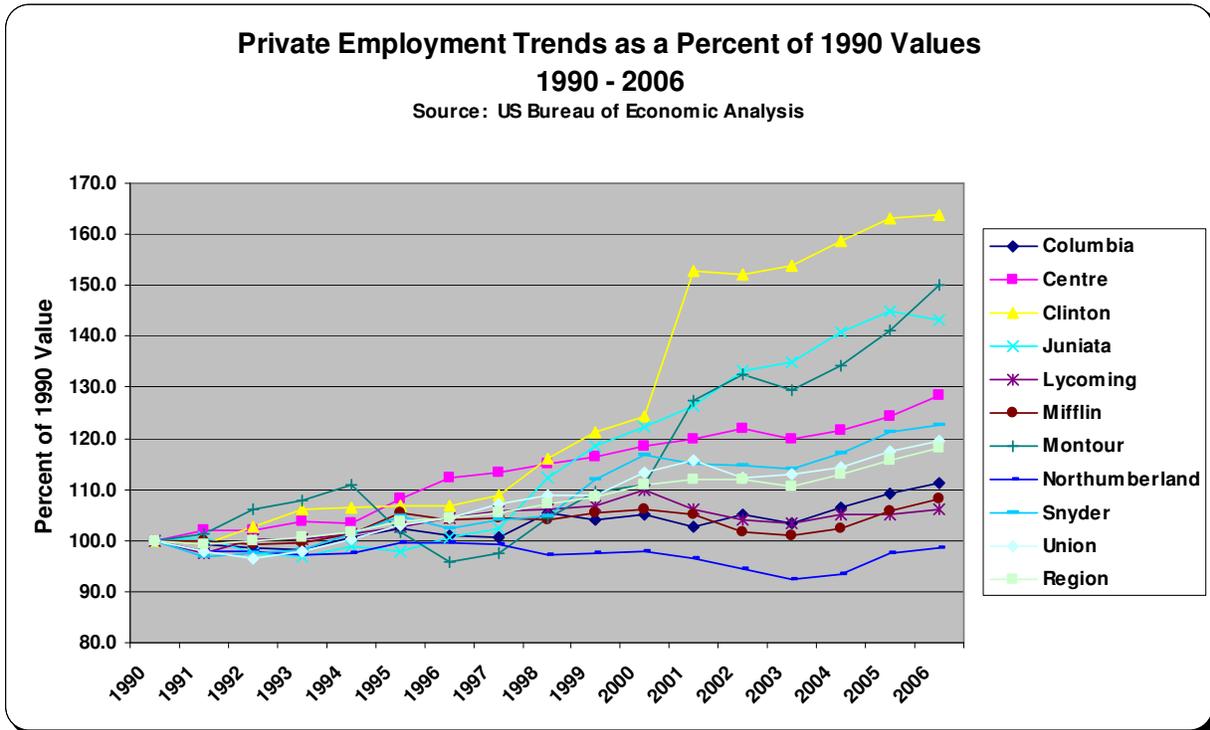
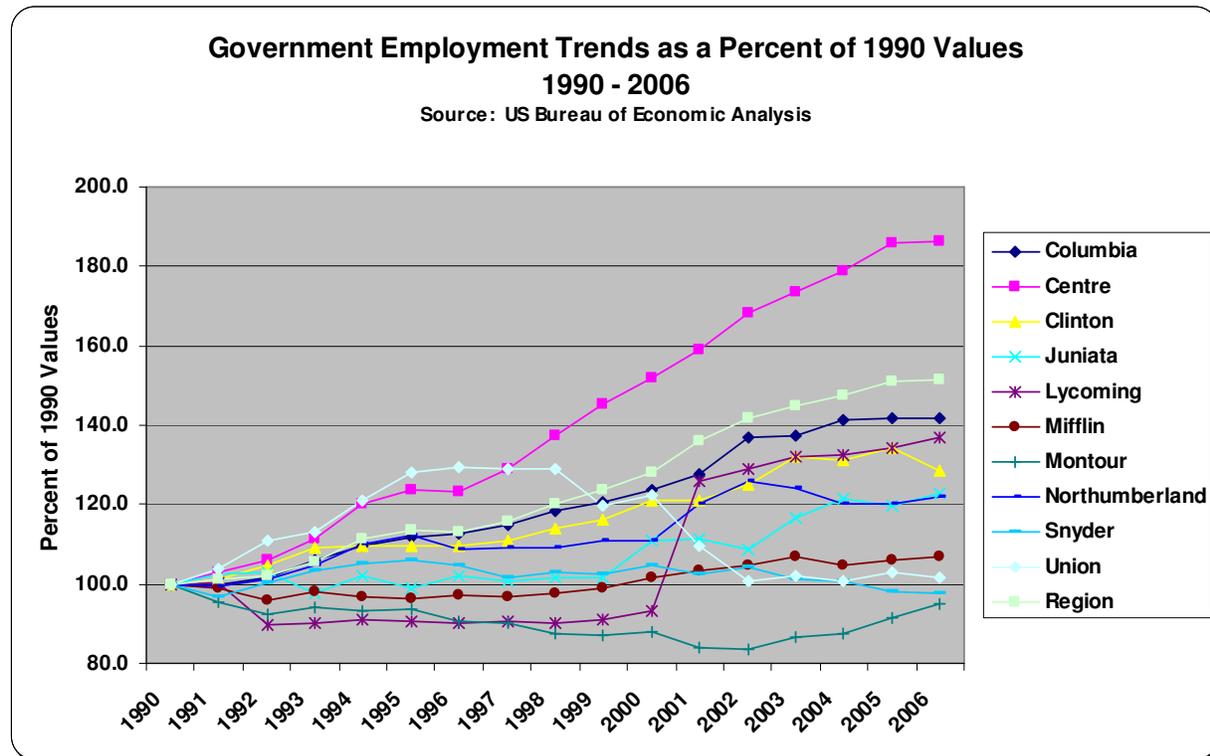


Figure 3



### Top 50 Employers in Columbia County

Ten of Columbia County's top 50 employers are located or based in Bloomsburg.<sup>3</sup> These rankings reflect the largest employers ranked by total number of employees regardless of full- or part-time status. Employers must be covered under the state or federal unemployment compensation (UC) system to be included. Several other major employers of Bloomsburg resident workers are located in adjacent municipalities.

1. **Bloomsburg University**
2. Wise Foods Inc
3. Del Monte Corporation
4. **Reiter Automotive Systems**
5. CHS Berwick Hospital Corp
6. Berwick Area School District
7. **Kawneer Company Inc.**
8. Wal-Mart Associates Inc
9. **Bloomsburg Hospital**
10. RR Donnelly & Sons
11. Berwick Offray, LLC
12. Central Columbia School District
13. Metropolitan Trucking
14. **Bloomsburg Area School District**
15. Weis Markets Inc
16. Giant Food Stores LLC
17. Southern Columbia School
18. **State Government (All State Employment Except Pennsylvania State University, Septa And The System Of Higher Education)**
19. DT Keystone Distribution RLLLP
20. K-Fab Inc
21. Berwick Management LLC
22. **Columbia County**
23. Benton Foundry Inc
24. **Bloomsburg Carpet Industries**
25. David J Thompson Mailing Corp
26. Press-Enterprise Inc
27. Impress USA Inc
28. Ict Group Inc
29. Millville Area School District
30. Ambulatory Health Services Inc
31. Specialty Brands, LP
32. **Milco Industries Inc**
33. Federal Government
34. Benton Area School District
35. Cheetah Chassis Corporation
36. **Luzerne County Community College**
37. QSL Enterprises Ltd
38. Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit
39. Kleerdex Company LLC
40. G & B Specialties Inc
41. Steve Shannon Tire Company Inc
42. Decorator Industries Inc.
43. **Bloomsburg Mills Inc. (closed In 2009)**
44. The Home Depot USA Inc
45. Consolidated Container Company LP
46. **First Columbia Bank & Trust Co**
47. R & K Foods Of Pa Ltd
48. **First Keystone National Bank**
49. Orangeville Leasing
50. AML Development Corporation

In addition to these Columbia County employers, there are several out-of-county employers, such as the Geisinger Medical Center in Danville, that employ a significant number of Bloomsburg residents.

### Industrial Structure

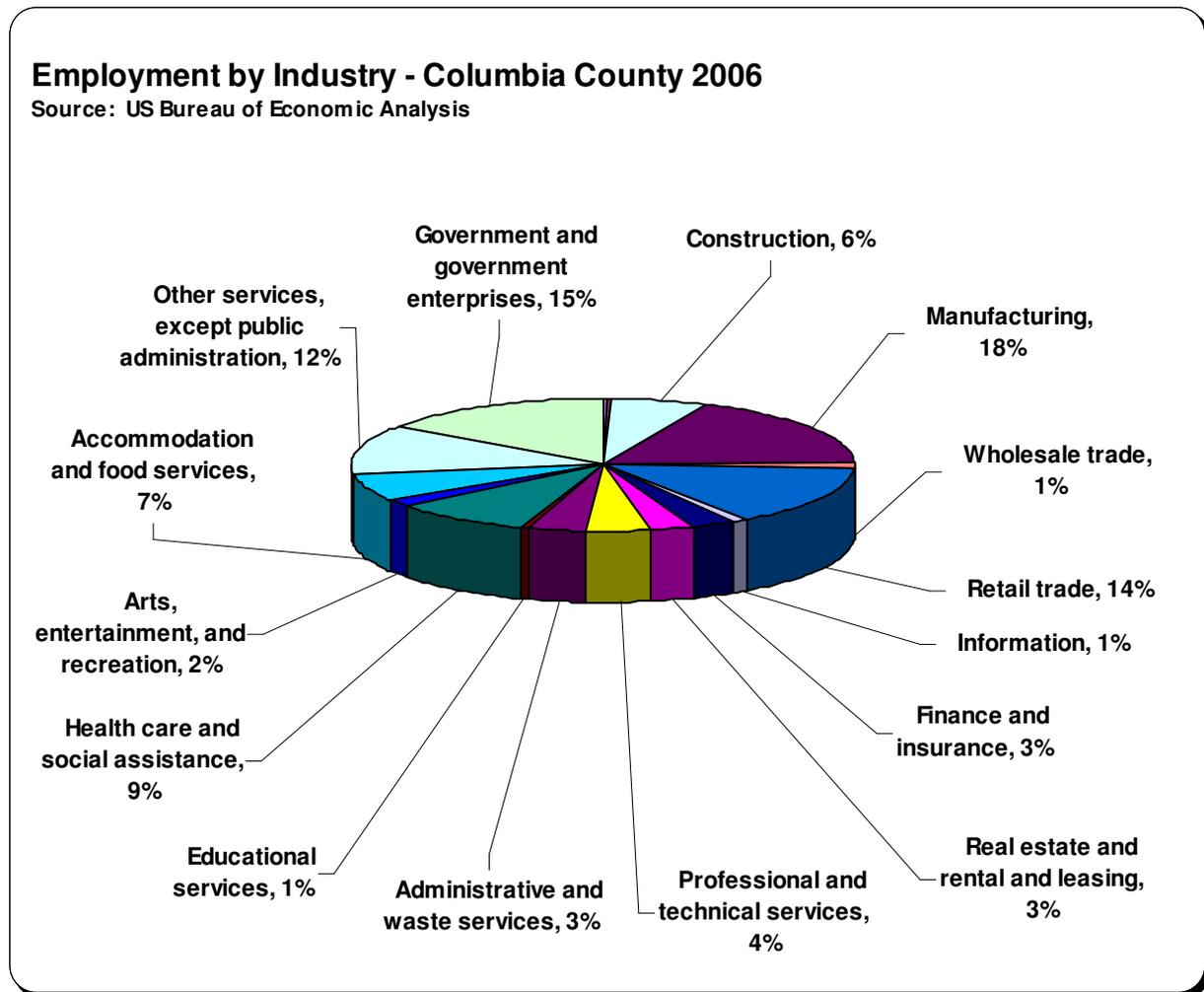
An examination of the industrial structure of the region begins with a look at employment and earnings in broadly defined sectors. A review of trends in key sectors follows. It concludes with a close up view of more narrowly defined industrial categories that have special prominence in Columbia County's economy.

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.paworkstats.state.pa.us/reports/colu\\_t50.pdf](http://www.paworkstats.state.pa.us/reports/colu_t50.pdf), report dated November 19, 2008.

## Employment and Earnings by Industry

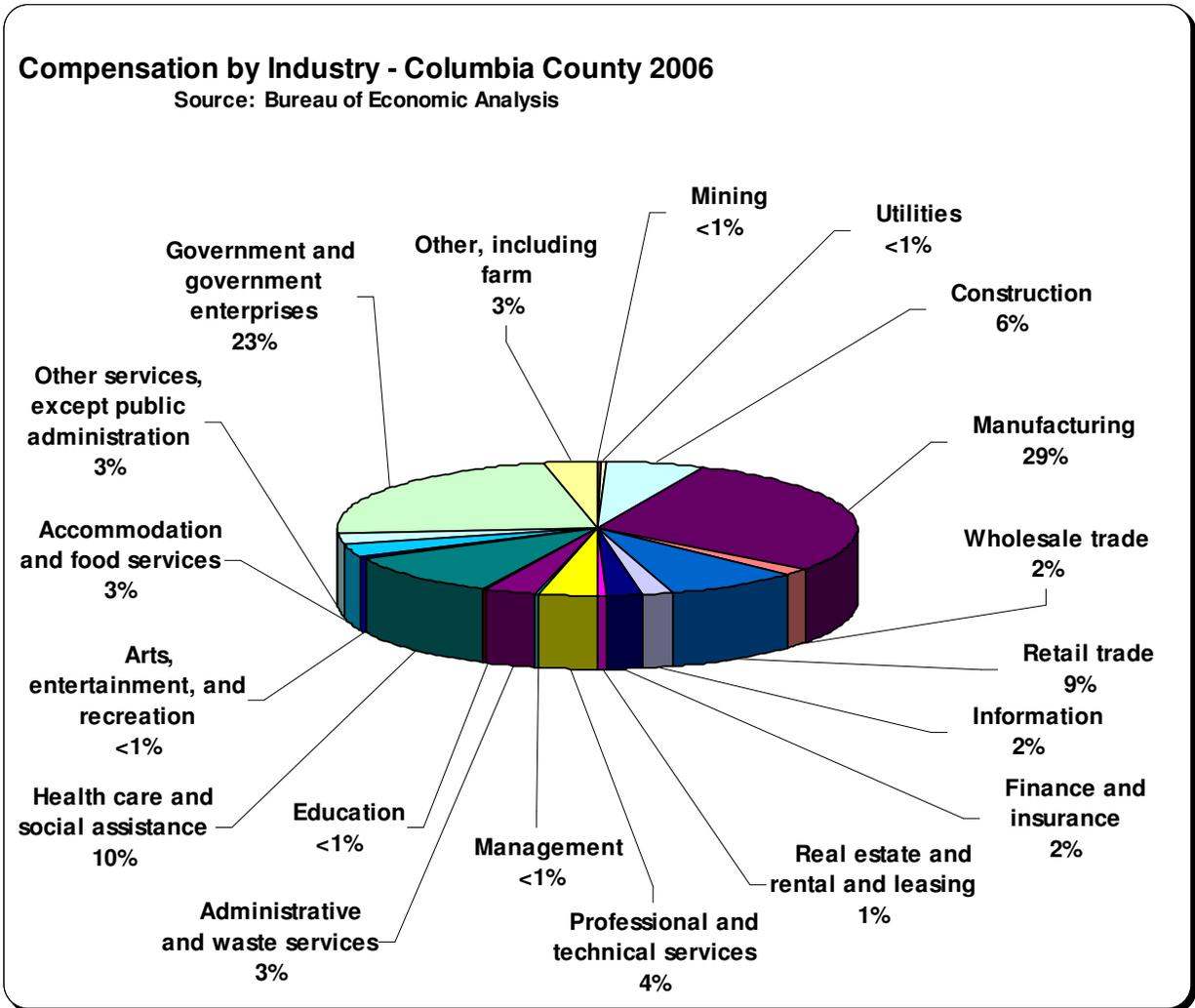
As shown in Figure 4, 18 percent of the 36,806 jobs in Columbia County were in the manufacturing sector; 15 percent in the government and government enterprises sector; and approximately 14 percent in the retail trade sector. An additional 12 percent of the jobs were within the “other” services sector, which was comprised primarily of personal services, such as a hair salons and dry cleaning establishments. These four industrial sectors account for almost 60 percent of the jobs within the County.

Figure 4



However, compensation by industry, that is the total amount of compensation paid to employees, illustrates the importance of the government and manufacturing sectors to the County. According to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, over 52 percent of the total amount of compensation paid by businesses to their employees comes from these two sectors, yet they only represent 33 percent of the jobs. In contrast, the retail and other services sectors, which account for 26 percent of jobs, provide only 12 percent of total compensation.

Figure 5



### Detailed Industrial Sector Analysis

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics provides employment information at a more detailed level<sup>4</sup> than the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, but only for the private sector. Table 8 lists the top ten industries in Columbia County as a percentage of private employment in 2007.

As shown, the food services and drinking places, food manufacturing, and fabricated metal product manufacturing industries account for the highest percentage of employment in the county. There are approximately 37 industrial categories for which data was either not disclosed, or not calculated for Columbia County, including hospitals, performing arts, and eleven different manufacturing categories.

<sup>4</sup> The US Bureau of Labor Statistics uses the North American Industrial Classification System (NAICS), which categorizes businesses in varying degrees of detail, from 2-digit to 6-digit classifications. The information used here is at the 3-digit level. The Bureau of Economic Analysis uses the 2-digit level, which also corresponds to the 2000 Census classifications. More information on the NAICS can be found at the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics website, <http://www.bls.gov/bls/naics.htm>.

**Table 8: Top 10 Industries by Percentage of Private Employment, 2007**

Top 10 Industries	Columbia County	Pennsylvania	U.S.
Food services and drinking places	9.15%	7.36%	8.35%
Food manufacturing	7.27%	1.39%	1.29%
Fabricated metal product manufacturing	5.12%	1.85%	1.36%
Textile product mills	4.31%	0.11%	0.14%
Ambulatory health care services	4.11%	5.27%	4.80%
Professional and Technical Services	4.08%	6.31%	6.69%
Food and beverage stores	3.84%	2.87%	2.50%
Administrative and support services	3.53%	5.48%	7.05%
Specialty trade contractors	3.49%	3.35%	4.22%
General merchandise stores	3.43%	2.31%	2.65%

Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics

The Bureau of Labor Statistics also uses a statistical tool known as the Location Quotient (LQ) to gauge the importance of an industry to an area, by calculating the level of specialization within industrial employment. The location quotient allows a comparison of Columbia County’s economy to the United States economy by calculating the ratio of the category’s percentage of employment in Columbia County to its percentage of employment in the United States. Industries with a location quotient greater than one are more highly represented in the county than they are in the nation. A location quotient well over one suggests that the county “specializes” in that industry. Traditionally, a location quotient over one indicates that the industry is likely one in which the specified geography exports product outside its borders, providing a source of income coming into the region.

Table 9 lists each of the industries in Columbia County with an LQ greater than one and their respective location quotients in four other central PA counties. Comparative data from other counties an evaluation of how Columbia County compares to its neighbors in the each of the subsectors listed above, helping to indicate whether the county has a distinctive specialty or is part of a regional specialization.

Based on this information, textile product mills and textile mills were the top two industries in the county. Reiter Automotive, Bloomsburg Carpet Industries, and Bloomsburg (closed in 2009) contribute to these economic specialties. The county also shows specialization in a number of other manufacturing sectors, including food products, wood products, and fabricated metal products. High location quotients in manufacturing sectors are not surprising, as manufacturing typically exports its products.

# Economic Profile

## Town of Bloomsburg Comprehensive Plan

**Table 9: Industries in Columbia County with a Location Quotient Greater than One, 2007**

Industry	Columbia	Lycoming	Montour	Northumberland	Union
Textile product mills	30.9	ND	ND	ND	ND
Textile mills	5.64	ND	ND	8.84	ND
Food manufacturing	5.62	1.76	ND	5.31	0.15
Wood product manufacturing	4.40	4.67	ND	8.65	9.29
Fabricated metal product manufacturing	3.76	1.87	ND	0.99	1.41
Truck transportation	2.21	0.73	ND	2.85	1.71
Plastics and rubber products manufacturing	1.97	5.31	ND	0.99	ND
Transit and ground passenger transportation	1.94	0.79	1.62	2.42	ND
Building material and garden supply stores	1.75	1.03	ND	0.84	0.99
Gasoline stations	1.74	1.00	0.67	1.67	1.59
Food and beverage stores	1.54	1.54	0.84	1.35	1.28
Motor vehicle and parts dealers	1.36	1.27	0.45	1.05	0.82
Nursing and residential care facilities	1.30	1.61	1.70	2.34	2.61
General merchandise stores	1.29	0.98	ND	0.65	ND
Health and personal care stores	1.28	1.02	0.88	1.21	0.51
Waste management and remediation services	1.17	0.56	ND	2.01	ND
Membership associations and organizations	1.17	1.47	0.40	1.69	0.78
Food services and drinking places	1.10	0.87	0.44	0.66	1.52
Non-store retailers	1.09	0.90	ND	1.14	ND

Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics; ND= No Data

Note that an industry may comprise a minor percentage of the county's economy yet still have a high location quotient. That is, the location quotient measures specialization, not prominence in the economy.

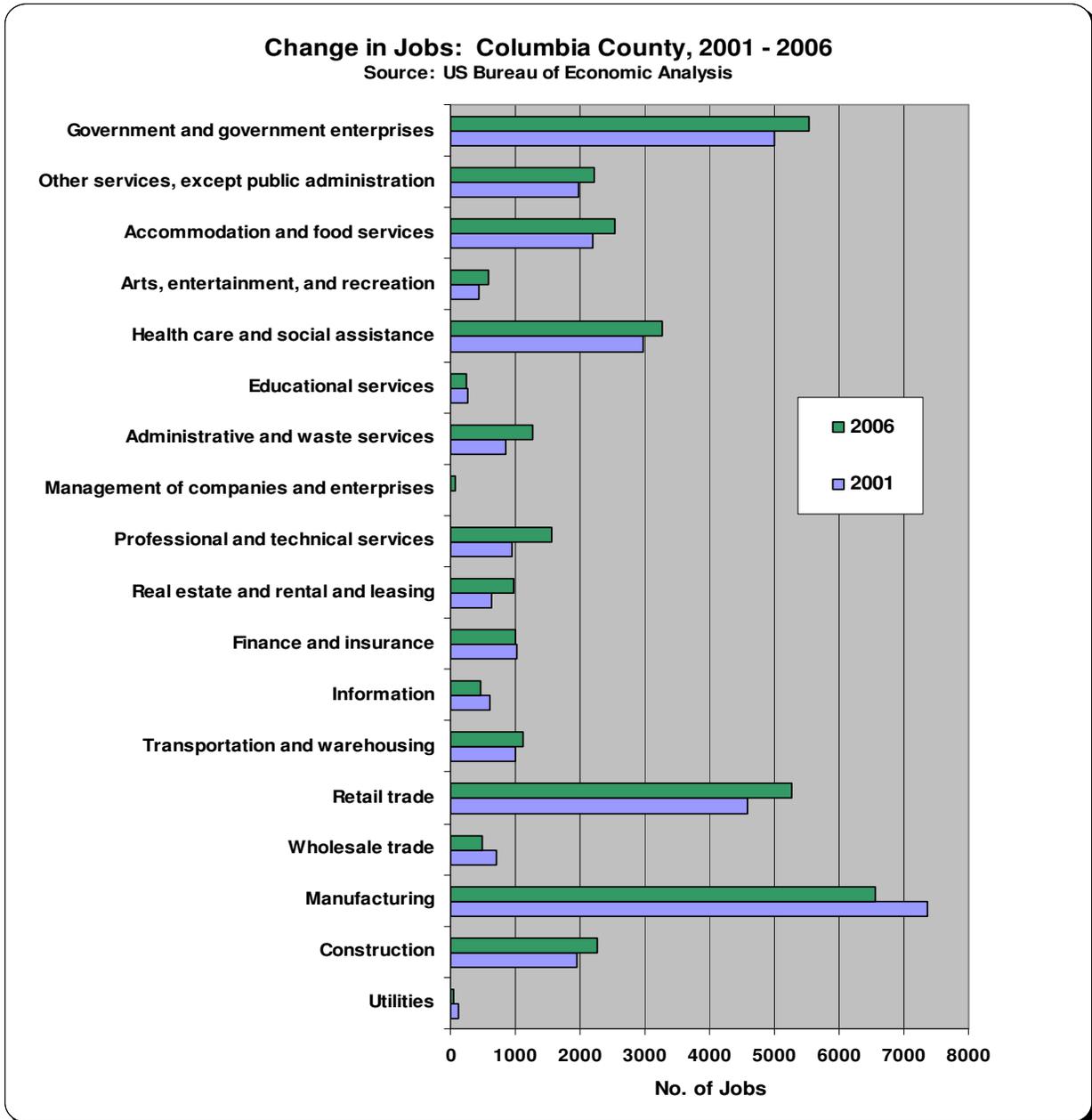
Industries that are especially important to the Columbia County economy—that are high in both employment and location quotient—include:

- Textile product mills as discussed above,
- Food manufacturing, reflecting the presence of Wise Foods and Del Monte Corporation, which were ranked # 2 and #5 respectively among the top 50 employers in Columbia County according to the PA Center for Workforce Information and Analysis, and
- Fabricated Metal Products, reflecting the presence of a number of companies, including Benton Foundry, Inc. and Absolute Welding and Fabrication.

## Recent Trends, 2001-2006

Data from the US Bureau of Economic Analysis indicates that during the period from 2001 to 2006, the following industries experienced significant growth in employment in Columbia County: management of companies and enterprises (100 percent), professional and technical services (65 percent), real estate, rental and leasing (52 percent), and arts, entertainment, and recreation (33 percent). During this same time frame, industries that experienced significant losses include utilities (63 percent), wholesale trade (30 percent) and information (22 percent).

Figure 6



## Downtown Business District

The downtown commercial district extends from West Street to East Street on Main Street, and continues along East Street to 3<sup>rd</sup> Street. The downtown remains a center of local commercial activity catering largely to the University population with specialty retail and eateries. Modern retail franchises have shifted retail attention away from downtown and even from the Columbia Mall, constructed in 1987, and introduced big box retailers in Selinsgrove and Wilkes-Barre in the past 20 years. The recent downturn in the national economy has already dampened further retail development.

An inventory of downtown businesses was done on September 18, 2008. The inventory grouped businesses into categories and found that there were 39 professional businesses (offices, medical facilities etc.), 50 retail shops, 43 service establishments (salons, entertainment venues, laundromat, etc), 23 eateries, and 14 other establishments (public, religious, etc.). The inventory found that the downtown is thriving and busy, but there are available properties for new businesses.

Available properties in Bloomsburg are listed on the Columbia Montour Chamber of commerce website, <http://www.bloomsburg.org/mainstreetproperties.html>. At the time of this profile, three properties were available.

Table 10: Downtown Parcels and Size by Business Type

Business Type	# of Parcels	Acres
Civic	3	1.2
Government	3	1.2
Religious	2	1.4
Professional	15	2.3
Retail	20	2.8
Service	34	4.8
<i>Food/Drink</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>1.0</i>
Mixed Use	20	4.8
Residential	56	6.3
Parking	16	3.3
Vacant	5	0.6
Total	174	29.7

Source: Gannett Fleming, Inc. 2008

The majority of acreage in the downtown is devoted to Residential use, followed by Service and Mixed Use. Mixed use is the type of development seen along Main Street with shops and businesses on the first floor with apartments above. There is a healthy mix of business types in the downtown, including professional, retail, service, and restaurants. Only two percent of the downtown is vacant structures or lots.

## Planning for Downtown Vitality

### *Visioning Study*

In 2007, Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc. (DBI) became a designated Main Street Community. The Main Street Program is funded by the PA Department of Community and Economic Development to oversee downtown revitalization. The Bloomsburg Visioning Project, completed in 2007, set the stage for this

designation and now the DBI is working to implement the vision of Bloomsburg as a regional destination for cultural activities, dining and entertainment, and also as a community services hub.

## ***Survey***

A survey concerning downtown business issues was conducted in early 2006 by part of Downtown Bloomsburg Inc. with assistance from Dr. Bill Neese, a professor and chairperson from the Dept. of Marketing at Bloomsburg University. A summary of findings from this survey is shown below.

## ***Revitalization Plan***

Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc. established a five year revitalization plan in March of 2006. They set up a board composed of key stakeholders and selected officers. They selected a Downtown Manager and got non-profit status soon afterwards. They set up an Organization Committee to oversee projects and also rely on volunteers to get involved. The Organization Committee received several grants, including one for regional billboard advertising. It created a five-year revitalization strategy in January of 2007. A downtown profile is in the progress of being completed for a Main St. grant. This includes inventories, maps, surveys and data collection. There has been some fundraising done by the committee. The group is also working to build relationships with local businesses, community facilities, organizations, and non-profits.

The Economic Restructuring Committee is in the progress of recruiting new businesses to locate in the area and join Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc. They do this by offering small business training, helping find ideal spaces, making personal visits, and offering to promote the new business. The committee keeps an updated list of available properties in the Town.

The Promotion Committee developed a logo and slogan for the group. They also built and maintain the website. The Downtown Bloomsburg Image Campaign is pending, and they are in the process of producing and distributing Bloomsburg marketing materials. They are also in charge of planning events as well as partnering with existing events in proximity to downtown. They are in the process of forming a DBI Public Relations Campaign to advertise using radio, newsletter, press, as well as involving civic groups, local schools and government.

The fourth and final committee of Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc. is the Design Committee; its focus is beautification of the downtown area. They award certificates to downtown property owners who receive grants for façade improvements, or who create visually pleasing window and sidewalk displays. They are also in the course of recommending building improvements and promote façade grants to property owners. Due to their efforts, a “You Are Here” kiosk is pending, as are two community gathering place redesigns for Market Square and Courthouse Plaza. They also work with the Town Planning and Zoning Boards assisting with the Town comprehensive plan.

The group has done a lot to benefit downtown Bloomsburg already and they have much planned for the future of the community.

## Comments by Bill Neese concerning the DBI survey conducted during November 2006 in downtown Bloomsburg, PA

Overall, business owners and managers in downtown Bloomsburg are satisfied with their situation. This is not to say that there aren't challenges to successful business ownership and management. The top-three most significant challenges they report facing (in order) are expensive utilities, out-of-town competition, and in-town competition. As the following numbers indicate, these are not serious concerns for the vast majority of respondents:

- ▶ Only 21.18% rate expensive utilities as a major challenge; 32.94 as a minor challenge.
- ▶ Only 15.29% rate out-of-town competition as a major challenge; 28.24 as a minor challenge.
- ▶ Only 14.12% rate in-town competition as a major challenge; 24.71 as a minor challenge.

Vandalism, shoplifting and theft are rated as minor issues by approximately one-fourth of the owner managers polled, as are difficulty recruiting or retaining employees, expensive or unavailable inventory, and insufficient financing.

Shoppers are satisfied, too: 75% like the look and feel of downtown, 70% rate downtown salespeople as friendly and helpful, and 67% find that downtown salespeople know their products well. Six out of ten say that they can buy the basic necessities they need downtown, and the same percentage believe prices are fair. Well over half (54.44%) would recommend shopping downtown and an even larger number (56.07%) like to bring guests or visitors downtown.

However, local business owners and managers differ from shoppers in the downtown district in one key way: almost 78% of them agree that their business is open all the hours it needs to be, and less than 12% disagree. 37.65% claim they would be open longer if more sales were certain, but less than 13% would stay open longer if other businesses had longer hours. Shoppers have a different view. Less than half (47.90%) of the shoppers polled agree that downtown businesses are open when they want them to be, and almost 32% outright disagree with that statement.

When asked what community assets would make downtown Bloomsburg a better place, over 85% of these shoppers picked benches, 73.36% picked more green space, 71.26% said a sports facility, and almost 62% favor a walking trail. Over 75% of these shoppers report that they never come downtown to work, 58.64% never come downtown for personal or professional services, and over 55% never come downtown for entertainment. This last result potentially indicates opportunities for economic development in the area.

One major difference between these two groups concerns the need for a parking deck. Whereas 58.64% of the shoppers are in favor adding a parking deck, 74.44% of the workers cite a need. Differences among the owner managers, employees, and shoppers emerge concerning parking meters as well. Almost 33% of the owner manager group believes that the cost of parking meters hurts their business. However, less than 20% of the shoppers think parking meters are too expensive and only 21% of downtown employees think of expensive parking meters as a major challenge.

## Business Environment and Amenities

### Available Land for Economic Development

One property (Aiken farm) is available for industrial/manufacturing development. The property is 91 acres and is bordered to the south by US 11 and to the north by I-80.<sup>5</sup>

### Bloomsburg Regional Technology Center

The Bloomsburg Regional Technology Center combines the beauty and elegance of a historic structure with the telecommunications infrastructure to handle the needs of any technology-driven enterprise. The Bloomsburg Regional Technology Center is located within the boundaries of the Greater Susquehanna Keystone Innovation Zone. The Keystone Innovation Zone program is intended to renew and focus our commitment to creating new technologies and new entrepreneurs - using our colleges and universities to deliver economic development opportunities throughout the Commonwealth.<sup>6</sup>

### Historic Architecture

Some of the buildings in Bloomsburg have historic architectural styles and details that set them apart from contemporary construction. Businesses located in these buildings can take advantage of their unique exterior to draw attention to themselves. This investment in the past keeps the buildings looking good and brings a charm to the downtown that makes walking around fun and interesting, which draws in customers and tourists. Preserving architectural details is important because it's hard to recreate them once they're gone.

### Airport

A community with an airport has an edge over a community that does not have one. An airport can bring in people and supplies more easily. There is a desire to expand the Airport runway, which would enable larger planes to use the facility.

### Railroad

The truck to rail transfer station in Bloomsburg is a hub for bringing products and supplies to area businesses, as well as shipping products out of the area.

### Bloomsburg University

Bloomsburg University is a pinnacle of the Town. For the downtown, the University students are a source of revenue. Businesses that appeal to college students are bound to do well in Bloomsburg.

### Health System

Bloomsburg Hospital and the other medical facilities in Bloomsburg help to create a healthy and well rounded community. They create jobs and serve patients, which in turn brings people into Bloomsburg from surrounding areas who may spend money at area businesses.

<sup>5</sup> <<http://www.pasitesearch.com>>

<sup>6</sup> Bloomsburg Regional Technology Center website, [http://www.bloomsburg.org/Alliance/technology\\_center.html](http://www.bloomsburg.org/Alliance/technology_center.html).

### Other Amenities

In addition to the diversity of businesses operating in town, there are a variety of cultural amenities, including the Children's Museum, the Alvina Krause Theatre, which hosts the Bloomsburg Theatre Ensemble, and the Bloomsburg Town Park. These features not only provide enjoyment for the residents of Bloomsburg and its environs, but also offer amenities in support of business recruitment and retention.

### Flood hazard

The downtown commercial area (east of Railroad Street) is not in the 100-year floodplain, so flood hazard is not an issue. There are however, a number of residential, industrial, commercial, and institutional properties that are located in the floodplain. Additionally, the fairgrounds are located in the floodplain, which is an issue especially since the biggest annual tourism event in Bloomsburg, the Bloomsburg Fair, occurs here.

### Tax Incentives

The PA Department of Community and Economic Development has designated land off Patterson Drive behind the recycling center as a Keystone Opportunity Zone; it was developed by Commercial Stainless. Bloomsburg University is included in the Greater Susquehanna Keystone Innovation Zone. These designations open doors to funding and technical assistance, as well as provide tax advantages for businesses locating within specific areas.

## Local Economic and Workforce Development Agencies

### Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc.

In March 2006, Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc. (DBI) was formed to champion revitalization in the Downtown. Its goal is to develop downtown Bloomsburg as a center of community activity and local commerce, using the National Trust for Historic Preservation Main Street program as a model. The associated committees and their activities were discussed above. They have achieved in doing a number of things to benefit the downtown, also mentioned, and continue to plan for more improvements. Opportunities are created when new businesses join because this brings new players and skills to the group.<sup>7</sup>

### Bloomsburg Area Industrial Development Association

The Bloomsburg Area IDA is an organization created by the Columbia Montour Chamber of Commerce in the 1950s to prevent economic stagnation. The organization is still active and growing. It continues to encourage and guide economic development in the community.

### Columbia Montour Chamber of Commerce

The Columbia Montour Chamber of Commerce, which is located on Market Street in Bloomsburg, is made up of approximately 400 member businesses and organizations. It includes firms from Bloomsburg, Danville, Berwick, Benton, Orangeville, Millville, Mifflinville, Elysburg, Catawissa and surrounding areas.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc. website, <http://www.bloomsburgdowntown.com/DBI.html>.

<sup>8</sup> <<http://www.columbiamontourchamber.com/chamberinfo.html>>

## Findings

- Bloomsburg University is the Town's largest employer and workforce development institution. It influences Bloomsburg's employment status figures for residents in the armed forces, the unemployed and those residents 16 years and over not in the labor force.
- The leading employment industries of Bloomsburg's resident workers were: education; accommodation and food services; retail trade; manufacturing; and healthcare and social assistance, though retail trade and manufacturing declined from 1990-2000.
- Bloomsburg's resident workers held far more service and government jobs on average than the county or state. Government and manufacturing jobs are particularly important to the economy because over 52 percent of the total amount of compensation paid by county businesses to their employees comes from these two sectors, yet they only represent 33 percent of the jobs.
- From a national perspective, Columbia County and its surrounding counties specialize in food, metal, and textile manufacturing, as well as transit/passenger and truck transportation and their suppliers to a somewhat lesser degree.
- Manufacturing facilities are at risk for flooding from Fishing Creek and the Susquehanna River; the downtown area lies outside the 100 year floodplain but can become nearly cut-off from transportation routes by surrounding floodwaters.
- The adjacent townships are not major employment locations for Bloomsburg residents. Bloomsburg is a major employment center for its residents and more strongly for the county as a whole.
- Income for families living in Bloomsburg lags behind income received by county and state families.
- The numbers and percentage of residents below poverty was largely, but not exclusively due to students of Bloomsburg University.
- Downtown and county wide business owners indicate that the available workforce lacks basic employment skills as well as industry specific entry level skills.
- Shoppers tend to visit downtown Bloomsburg solely for retail services. They frequent other locations for work, professional and personal services, and entertainment, though all are available in downtown. This may indicate an opportunity for additional business development in downtown.
- Shoppers are satisfied overall with the shopping environment. The addition of street furniture and green spaces is desirable, but not necessary. There are mixed perceptions of the need for additional parking downtown. Shoppers ranked additional parking as less important than benches, green spaces, a sports facility, and a walking trail. Business employees, however, feel that additional parking is needed.
- Downtown business owners and managers report concerns related to expensive utilities, retaining and recruiting qualified employees, and insufficient financing.
- Shoppers report that retail stores are not open during convenient hours.
- Competition from new growth in the surrounding townships has hurt the downtown business district. Big box retailers on Route 11 are causing a shift of consumers away from the downtown. This is a greater erosion than was caused in the late 1980's with the development of the Columbia Mall.
- Economic development agencies have successfully organized to create new business locations and foster a vibrant downtown business environment.
- The majority of parcels zoned for commercial and industrial development have been developed. The fairgrounds parcels are not developed for industrial uses are economically productive for the Town.
- The KOZ and KIZ state designations open doors to funding and technical assistance, as well as provide tax advantages for businesses locating within specific areas.