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Working & Doing Business in Bloomsburg

Sustainable development is defined by the United Nations as development that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.¹ By translation, sustainable economic development means providing diverse job opportunities for present and future citizens, while respecting the natural and cultural resources that give identity to the community and may drive future economies. The emphasis on both present and future economies requires progressive thinking about business retention and new business development, an available and adaptable workforce, and a “business-friendly” environment.

Summary of Public Input on Current Conditions

Positives

- Bloomsburg has a local hospital, a comfort to many University student parents, as well as a nearby regional medical center.
- The Town has a variety of restaurants and eateries
- The Regional Technology Center, with the assistance of the Columbia-Montour Chamber of Commerce, acts as a small business incubator.
- Regionally identified target industries may provide a focus to economic and business development in the Bloomsburg area.

Negatives

- The Town’s largest manufacturer, Reiter Automotive, and several other businesses are located in the floodplain. These enterprises have experienced significant property damage as a result of repeated flood events.
- More family sustaining jobs are needed in Bloomsburg and the surrounding area.

Continued

- The labor market is tight in Bloomsburg; relatively few people are available and qualified for the open positions.

¹ United Nations. 1987. "[Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development.](#)" General Assembly Resolution 42/187, 11 December 1987. Retrieved: 2007-04-12

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- Traditional daytime business hours, particularly in the retail market, may not align with contemporary student and resident free time for shopping.

Opportunities

- The energy industry is expanding in rural central Pennsylvania. Emerging job opportunities may offer increased potential for personal income and draw area workers away from their current positions. Opportunities in the construction field are short to mid term, however, public services may not be prepared to accommodate near term rapid growth followed by rapid decline.
 - The University may be a feasible partner for downtown development.
 - Employers may be able to assist with housing initiatives.
 - A few well placed, well designed anchor stores may strengthen downtown.
-

The Town of Bloomsburg has many positive attributes that serve as a basis for sustainable economic growth, including excellent access to local, regional and national markets, several mature and developing industry “clusters”, and a downtown business district that has been designated as a Main Street Community. At the same time, there are conditions that may prevent the Town from realizing greater economic prosperity, including a workforce that is not prepared for a modern technology-based workplace or not willing to perform physical labor, as well as a perception that the Town doesn’t offer enough “things to do” for employees and their families.

Goal: *Bloomsburg is a community where...*

1. community partners provide quality educational services, programs, and facilities for all ages from childhood through workforce preparation to continuing education
2. leading and emerging industries shape and are shaped by area initiatives, entrepreneurial opportunities, and business assistance.

We will achieve our goals if we...

1. Focus on retaining existing businesses and growing new ones.
2. Foster and promote intergovernmental cooperation.
3. Support the growth and development of the region’s workforce to meet the needs of a technology based workplace. (Refer to Chapter 7, Lifelong Learning in Bloomsburg)
4. Foster and promote a “business-friendly” environment in the Town of Bloomsburg.
5. Recognize energy production as a natural resource based industry.
6. Foster a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship.

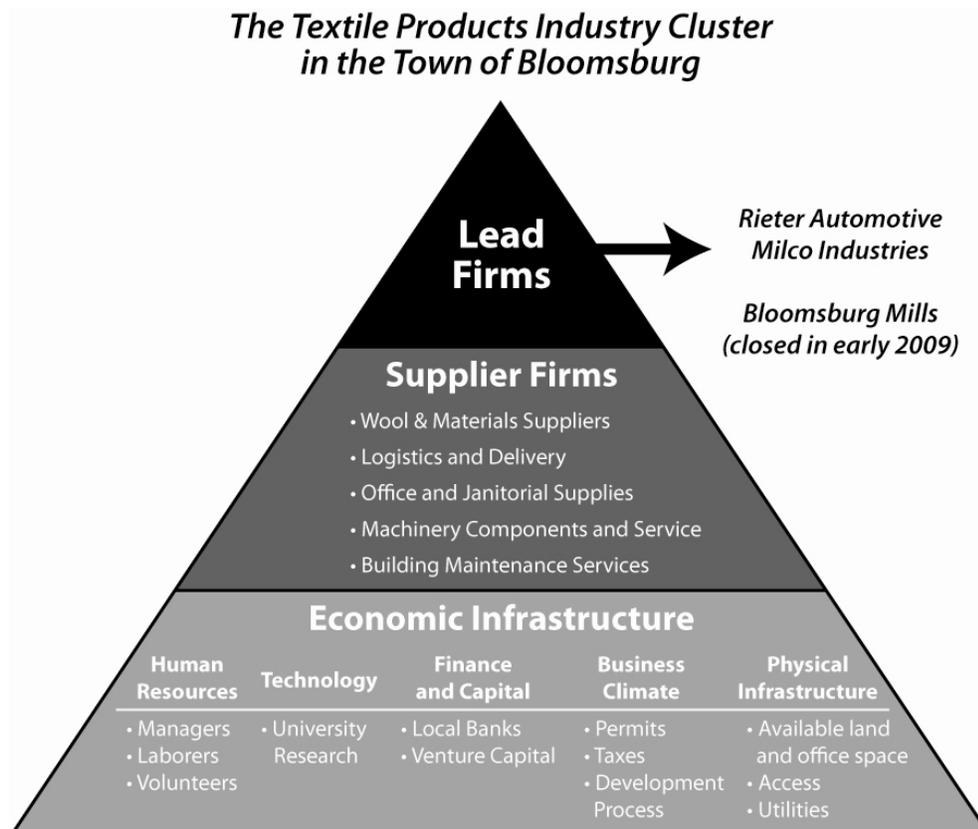
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Retain existing businesses and growing developing clusters

A business or industry cluster is a system of interconnected businesses, suppliers, and associated institutions in a particular field. The term was introduced in the 1990s by Harvard Business School professor Michael Porter and has become a standard unit for analyzing a region's economic prospects. Business clusters are a more strategic approach to economic development than just attracting the next big company because they exchange ideas regularly through daily business communications, leading to innovation, which is essential to economic growth.

In Bloomsburg, the Textile Products Manufacturing cluster is perhaps the most prominent cluster. The graphic below provides a general idea of how a cluster of businesses is structured, using the textile products industry as an example.



Source: Gannett Fleming, Inc.

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Lead firms in this cluster located in Bloomsburg include Reiter Automotive, Milco Industries, and Bloomsburg Mills, Inc. (closed 2009), as well as Bloomsburg Carpet Industries located outside of Town. These firms are supported by a variety of supplier firms, which provide raw materials, propriety equipment, or support services, such as payroll, office supplies or janitorial services. Underlying the various businesses is the economic infrastructure - key components that are essential to productivity, but the specifics of which vary depending upon the cluster, as shown in the figure above. Other manufacturing clusters in the area include food manufacturing, wood product manufacturing, and fabricated metal product manufacturing and may have a similar economic infrastructure but somewhat different supplier firms.

Recommendations:

W.1. Work with local, area and regional businesses to identify and develop the economic infrastructure needed to be competitive in the global economy. Facilitate discussion to identify:

- a. Common needs in the areas of human resources, technology research, finance and capital, business climate, and physical infrastructure.
- b. Common types of suppliers who may be located outside the area; such discussion may lead to the business opportunity to provide supplies/services locally.

Knowing and understanding the needs of the local business community is the first step in meeting them. In addition to a strong workforce with appropriate skills, businesses also need access to financing and venture capital. The University and SEDA-COG play critical roles in these areas. The Town should focus on ensuring that tax rates are competitive and that the process for establishing, owning, and operating a business in Town is fair and predictable.

W.2. Continue to work closely with SEDA-COG to focus economic development dollars on activities that will enhance the growth and development of regional industry clusters. SEDA-COG offers a wide range of direct services to Central Pennsylvania's business and industrial community including business development financing and assistance with exports and government sales. They also offer PA SourceNet, a business-to-business e-commerce service; and the Business Retention and

“Location is more, not less, important in the age of globalization...it creates sources of competitive advantage that reside in the local environment and which favor firms that are firmly embedded in the local clusters.”

Christian Ketels,
European Union

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Expansion Program (BREP), providing resources to help companies keep doing business in Pennsylvania. Resources include the Export Development Assistance program, which provides technical and other support to businesses seeking to export their products, and the Energizing Our Region Seminars, which focus on renewable and energy efficient technologies and practices.

- W.3. Expand land zoned for mid size businesses. Real estate to accommodate a mid sized business, e.g. 12,000-14,000 square feet for roughly 100 employees is limited. The Town may want to use a master rehabilitation/redevelopment plan approach to assemble multiple parcels, redesign the site, and contract its construction. Annville Township, Lebanon County is using this approach to revitalize one quadrant of its square.**



- W.4. Convene the area's economic development partners on a regular basis to review economic development activities to avoid redundancy as well as to ensure that programs and funding activities are meeting the needs of the local business community.**

Lead Partners: Columbia-Montour Chamber of Commerce, Mayor of Bloomsburg, Bloomsburg Town Council

Support Partners: SEDA-COG, University of Bloomsburg, Bloomsburg Hospital and other local business leaders, Town of Bloomsburg, Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc., Center for Rural Entrepreneurship, Ben Franklin Technology Partners, and local business leaders

Funding Sources: Not applicable

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The Bloomsburg University and the Education Cluster

The Bloomsburg University is the lead firm of one of the fastest growing industry clusters in the country - Education and Knowledge Creation. According to a recent study entitled *Leveraging Colleges and Universities for Urban Economic Revitalization: An Action Agenda*, “urban academic institutions are...well positioned to spur economic revitalization ...in great part because they are sizeable businesses anchored in current locations”.² After numerous interviews and surveys with over 100 professionals and 10 university presidents to better understand the economic development potential of a local university, the study team identified “six areas where colleges and universities can have meaningful impact on job and business growth....”³ These include:

- **Purchaser:** Directing even a small portion of a university’s spending to local companies can have a significant impact on the economy. For example, Bloomsburg University’s 2004 purchasing of goods and services injected over \$7.7 million into the Columbia County economy.⁴
- **Employer (and Resident Recruiter):** In 2007, Bloomsburg University employed 932 persons in a wide range of positions from administrators, faculty and clerical staff to paraprofessionals, skilled craftsmen, and service and maintenance workers. Some positions can be filled with area recruitment. Others require a national search for subject matter expertise that in some cases has led to the selection of a nearby resident. Some University staff were area residents before their employment with the University, but nearly all are area residents who spend their incomes on products and services in Bloomsburg or the region upon their employment.
- **Real Estate Developer:** As a university grows, it can anchor revitalization, particularly in areas that may appear too risky for the private sector. Bloomsburg University’s Community Government Association led the conversion of the blighted Sesame Street student apartment building to the Honeysuckle Student Holdings.

² “*Leveraging Colleges and Universities for Urban Economic Revitalization: An Action Agenda*”, Initiative for a Competitive Inner City (ICIC) and CEOs for Cities; Accessed online 2008 (data cited in this publication are from the National Center for Education Statistics).

³ Ibid.

⁴ “*The Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education - Economic Impact on the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*”, 2006, accessed from www.passhe.edu on January 27, 2009.

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- **Incubator:** Offering services to support start-up companies and expedite research commercialization. The Bloomsburg Regional Technology Center is a local example of a successful incubator that brought together the Bloomsburg University, Bucknell University, and Susquehanna University, as well as Ben Franklin Technology Partners, Geisinger Medical Center, and the Columbia Alliance for Economic Growth to support the development of new business enterprises. The state's Keystone Innovation Zone (KIZ) program supports these kinds of activities with state tax incentives.
- **Advisor/Network Builder:** Channeling university expertise to increase local business capacity or improve the local business environment. At Bloomsburg University, this effort is not limited to the formal efforts of the institution but also includes the support provided to students, such as Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE), to organize their own efforts to help entrepreneurs succeed in starting new businesses. Bloomsburg University's Institute for Interactive Technologies (IIT) is another example of a unique service agency that provides consulting, training and multimedia development services to the university, corporations, government agencies, and other educational institutions. The IIT is a consortium of faculty, staff and graduate students in Bloomsburg University's Instructional Technology program. This strategic relationship offers opportunities for faculty and staff to mentor students in practical "hands-on" experiences as they apply theoretical knowledge to real world projects.
- **Workforce Developer:** Addressing local and area workforce needs through educational programs and network building opportunities. Bloomsburg University's Division of Corporate and Continuing Education is just one example of how they currently fill the role of workforce developer. It specializes in assessing the training needs of the area workforce, and working with companies to customize training programs that are responsive to the development of their incumbent workforce. Other examples are discussed in more detail in the Lifelong Learning section of the plan.

Bloomsburg University is already a key economic development partner in each of these areas. Moving forward, the Town of Bloomsburg should continue to explore ways to leverage the role of the University, understanding that success will require strong partnerships between the Town, the University, and the business community.

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Among the advisory programs and services that universities offer, the *Leveraging* study highlighted opportunities for:

- Faculty members to serve on the boards of local companies or offer expert advice.
- Staff members to offer highly specialized skills, such as finance, accounting, information technology, and administration.
- Students to consult or intern at local companies.
- Universities to offer special centers, e.g. Small Business or Entrepreneurship Centers, that specialize in training and educational programs, consulting, and research.

These programs and services can connect local companies to important business networks. Universities and colleges often provide a forum for businesses to meet with each other. They also provide access to alumni and business networks.

The study notes that business advisory programs can target individual companies or the overall business environment in which businesses have to compete. These programs can focus on company-specific issues such as company strategy, sales, logistics, marketing, and accounting operations. They can also focus on business environment issues such as availability of land, access to capital, transportation or telecom infrastructure, or tax and regulatory environment.

Several universities in Pennsylvania offer advisory programs and services aimed at assisting local businesses. For example, Indiana University of Pennsylvania's (IUP) Eberly College of Business and Information Technology offers advisory programs and services such as:

- The Small Business Development Center (SBDC), which offers free consulting services to existing and start-up businesses and entrepreneurs on environmental management, in-depth consulting assistance, international business, product development center, and technology commercialization.
- The Excellence in Entrepreneurial Leadership Center (ExcEL), which creates entrepreneurial opportunities by leveraging IUP's relationship with community and business partners to provide businesses assistance and learning opportunities for aspiring entrepreneurs.

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- The Small Business Institute (SBI), which provides business support services to local businesses and other organizations through the efforts of highly skilled and motivated undergraduate and MBA students teamed with experienced faculty members with professional consulting backgrounds in areas such as management, marketing, information technology, and finance.

Lehigh University offers a similar menu of advisory programs and services, yet two of the Lehigh University's programs differ from IUP's in that they focus on specific areas or types of businesses. The Benjamin Franklin Technology Partners of Northeastern Pennsylvania (BFTP) focuses on providing technology assistance to businesses. This program has a three-pronged approach to business development: help develop early-stage, technology-oriented businesses; help established manufacturers apply new technology and business practices; and promote infrastructure that fosters a favorable business environment. The Manufacturing Resource Center (MRC) helps small and mid-size manufacturers to improve productivity and competitiveness through training, seminars, and networking.

Although Bloomsburg University has several advisory programs in place, it should consider adding additional advisory programs to broaden and enhance educational opportunities and research applications for students and faculty. In doing so, the university should select advisory projects that play to the strengths of the university and align with the needs of the business community. Additional centers should narrow the focus of their services since general services are already provided by the existing programs. For example, since the county's economy includes a large Textile Products Manufacturing cluster, the university could establish a center specializing in assisting local manufacturing companies, similar to Lehigh University's Manufacturing Resource Center.

As additional centers are considered, two issues should be addressed. The first issue is that many schools and departments within the university, besides the College of Business and Corporate and Continuing Education Division, are underutilized for their expertise. The university should engage students and faculty from a variety of schools and departments within the university, as appropriate to the area's business community. The second issue is that the university has several advisory programs which focus on individual company issues, but few that

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focus on business environment issues. Therefore, the university should incorporate its business environment expertise in advisory programs.

When developing new advisory programs or improving existing advisory programs, the university should consider possible pitfalls to ensure programs are effective. One pitfall of advisory programs includes fragmented student and faculty participation resulting from the fact that student involvement may be limited to a single academic term. It is important to note that business concerns cannot always be fully understood or resolved within a short window of time. Another pitfall is that students and faculty may spend insufficient time identifying core issues and clarifying expectations. As a result, the university should manage students, staff, and faculty engagements rigorously from the beginning to the end of a project. This can be achieved by assigning oversight staff with management expertise to coordinate and monitor a program; matching the appropriate students, staff, or faculty advisors to businesses; and clearly outlining deliverables and managing timelines.

Recommendations:

- W.5. Enhance and expand the university's existing advisory programs to assist local businesses and government organizations as well as broaden and enhance educational opportunities and research applications for university students and faculty.**
- W.6. Ensure new and existing advisory programs are effective by designing them to avoid systematic pitfalls.**

Lead Partners: University of Bloomsburg

Support Partners: Local business community

Funding Sources: University budget

The Downtown Business District

Bloomsburg's Downtown Business District also serves an important function in the Town's economy. In some ways, it could be considered a retail industry cluster, although it functions more generally as part of the economic infrastructure. More importantly, it offers an authentic shopping experience for those looking for merchandise they can touch and feel and for more personal customer service.

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Local commitment to the renewal of downtown Bloomsburg began in 1979 with the organization of the Revitalization Steering Committee. In 1982, Bloomsburg Revitalization, Inc. was established to administer a revolving loan fund for downtown businesses. Specialty stores and boutiques were the anchor of downtown in the 1980s and 1990s after the department stores moved to the mall when the Town was designated as a Main Street Community. This five-year program provided grants to the Town “to help a community’s downtown economic development effort through the establishment of a local organization dedicated to downtown revitalization and the management of downtown revitalization efforts by hiring a full-time professional downtown coordinator.”⁵ Demonstrated success has enabled the Town to mature to Achiever Community status in the Main Street Program and grants continue to sustain the façade improvement program.

Bloomsburg Business District Vision Statement

Bloomsburg...a historic town with modern

- Style
- Attitude
- Vision
- Vibrancy
- Youth

SAVVY

*Downtown Visioning Report
for the Bloomsburg Business District, 2007*



Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc. (DBI) was established in 2006 as the Town’s local organization dedicated to downtown revitalization. Since its inception, DBI has launched a website, developed a vision for downtown, and established and revised its five-year strategy. DBI has also completed a downtown market survey with the help of the University. It is currently working on a downtown “Recruitment Package” and has plans to offer educational sessions, such as “Marketing your Business” and “Effective Window Displays” to help new businesses. DBI has also been instrumental in the promotion of many special

⁵ www.NewPA.com, Main Street Program home page

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events, such as the Renaissance Jamboree and Santa's Cottage, which are designed to draw citizens and visitors to the downtown.

Recommendations:

W.7. Ensure continued funding for a downtown manager for Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc. so that it can continue to assist and market the downtown business community.

Lead Partners: Town Council

Support Partners: Local business community

Funding Sources: Business Improvement District

The Industry of Student Housing



With the University as the largest employer, its customer base creates a large demand for off-campus student housing. As the University has grown, the proportion of student housing, largely rental properties, has also grown, through the conservation of single family homes to multi-unit homes and through new construction. The amount, timing and intensity of this use needs to be regulated as any other land use in the Town. Type and quality are other factors that should be considered to maintain

long term, market rate housing.

Recommendations:

W.8. Limit student housing to select areas of Town to preserve some neighborhoods for non-student residents.

W.9. Consider methods to encourage landlords to improve renter housing stock. The intended outcome is well-constructed, well-maintained properties that meet the needs of student and non-student renters.

W.10. Develop and adopt design and/or performance standards for student housing. Standards that control the building form (what it looks like) could be accomplished through form-based codes, an innovative approach to land use and land development regulations. Performance standards

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could address screening, noise, light, parking, and other factors by requiring that the construction meet minimum thresholds. Under performance standards, the means of meeting the threshold is not regulated, simply the outcome.

Lead Partners: Town Council

Support Partners: Student housing developers

Funding Sources: Land Use Planning and Technical Assistance Program (DCED), Town budget

Developing Industry Clusters

Clusters that are not fully established yet have the potential to increase wealth in the area include Tourism and Health Care/Life Sciences.

Tourism

Bloomsburg is well positioned to take advantage of the Heritage and Outdoor Recreation Tourism markets, particularly since businesses in this cluster build on the region's natural capital, that is the historic and natural resources that make the region unique. The Town's historic district, especially its downtown, its Fairgrounds, its proximity to the Susquehanna River and the Susquehanna Greenway, and its many cultural amenities, such as the Bloomsburg Theatre Ensemble and Children's



Museum, create a strong hub for the further growth and development of the Tourism cluster. New businesses that would cater to tourists might offer guided tours of the area, specialty “home grown” products, and high quality dining, lodging, and shopping opportunities. A growing community of artisans and the “college town” atmosphere are also known to attract visitors.

Recommendations:

W.11. Champion intergovernmental cooperation for the development of the North Branch Canal Trail. In order to provide a strong infrastructure that can sustain the growth and development of the economy, local governments will need to work together over the long haul.

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North Branch Canal Trail
A Demonstration Project of the Susquehanna Greenway

PROJECT DESCRIPTION
North Branch Canal Trail - A Regional Trail System
A feasibility study will evaluate ownership, rights-of-way, environmental, engineering, and design issues of the North Branch Canal corridor.
• An initial trail section is under construction along Fishing Creek, near Bloomsburg and will be followed by phased trail implementation.

Identify and Construct a Prioritized Trail Segment
• A segment linking Rupert and Catawissa is a construction priority.
• Trail alignment will follow the historic North Branch Pennsylvania Canal and Susquehanna River.
• Trail surface will include crushed stone suitable for walking and mountain biking.

Trail Enhancements for a Quality Recreational Experience
• Wooden benches can provide restful places to enjoy the natural scenery.
• Interpretive signage can guide and direct visitors, while educating them about local history and ecology.

Encourage Multiple Modes of Transportation
• The North Branch Canal Trail will offer a new, fun, and healthy way to travel between communities for pedestrians, joggers, and bicycles.
• Using the trail for commuting contributes to improved air quality, community health and quality of life.

LOCAL SIGNIFICANCE
Construction of the Rupert to Catawissa trail segment will build recognition and support for the development of the entire trail system. It will provide local residents with a unique setting in which to enjoy the area's natural environment. It will also allow visitors to connect with the important heritage of the canal, including the creation and demise of the canal system and the subsequent rise of the railroad.

GOALS
• Develop a regional trail that creates connections between the river towns of Northumberland, Danville, Bloomsburg, and Berwick.
• Preserve the natural character of the canal corridor and protect environmentally sensitive areas.
• Utilize trail design guidelines that enhance the historic canal romances while achieving the recreational and educational mission of the Susquehanna Greenway.
• Use design elements that celebrate the history of the canal system and its valued role in the state's transportation system.
• Provide opportunities for outdoor activities to people of all ages.
• Create an attraction that will be utilized by residents and draw visitors to stimulate the local economy.

REGIONAL SIGNIFICANCE
This project will connect portions of the canal and township to a regional trail system, connecting future greenway projects in river communities, such as parks, historic sites, and recreation centers. The canal trail vision, when realized, will link to proposed trail systems such as the Luzerne County's Susquehanna Warrior Trail and the Sunbury Riverfront in Northumberland. As an attraction, the project will enhance local economies by drawing visitors to learn about the region's history and unique river communities.

AGENCIES
and Municipal Councils
• \$200,000 Feasibility Study
• \$175,000 Pre-Engineering
• \$115,000 Trail Design
• \$250-\$300,000 Trail Construction (2 miles)
• \$750,000 - \$900,000

ESTIMATED COST

SCHEDULE
Feasibility Study 2009 - 2010
Pre-engineering/Trail Design 2010 - 2012
Construction 2012

GREENWAY OBJECTIVES ACHIEVED
Community
Economy
Environment
Education
Recreation

W.12. Eliminate one lane of traffic on the southeast corner of the Market/Main intersection to make room for the farmer's market. Since there is no right turn on red, moving the parking over by one lane width would have little impact on drivers. That would make room for some shade trees, benches and for the farmer's market.

W.13. Partner with the University and the local business community (Bloomsburg Fair Association, Bloomsburg Hospital, and Geisinger) to explore the market demand for a downtown hotel with or without conference facilities. It appears that both lodging and conference facilities are lacking in their ability to meet local and area needs. At present, Econo Lodge, Holiday Inn Express, Hampton Inn and Budget Host Patriot Inn are all located within five miles of Town, yet are largely oriented to the highway traveler, not the downtown visitor. Bloomsburg University does offer facilities and lodging for conference events but only during the summer months. A downtown hotel should cater to downtown and area visitors and a conference facility should be able to host the area's business networking events, conferences, technology fairs, and

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indoor cultural and community events. Far more investigation is needed to determine if and how the Bloomsburg area could sustain a hotel as well as how the location, historic character, and ownership/management could make it successful. As one example, Pottsville redeveloped a former industrial warehouse into a downtown hotel and may have insights and lessons learned to offer another community.

The National Trust Historic Hotels of America (HHA) is a program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. HHA has identified more than 200 quality hotels that have faithfully maintained their historic architecture and ambience. HHA may be a source of guidance on architectural preservation as well as niche marketing.

Historic Hotels of America
1875 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Suite 1115
Washington, DC 20009
e-mail: hha@preferredhotelgroup.com
web: www.historichotels.org

Lead Partners: Town of Bloomsburg, Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc.

Support Partners: SEDA-COG, University of Bloomsburg, Bloomsburg Hospital and other local business leaders, Columbia-Montour Chamber of Commerce, Center for Rural Entrepreneurship, Ben Franklin Technology Partners, and local business leaders

Funding Sources: Ben Franklin Technology Partners, Community Development Bank, Community Economic Development Loan, Export Financing Program, First Industries Fund, Job Creation Tax Credit, Town Budget, Local Banks

Health Care/Life Sciences

The Health Care/Life Sciences cluster also has potential to generate new wealth in the community given the presence of the Bloomsburg Hospital and the many health science programs offered at the University. Businesses that provide services and products for an aging population will continue to be in ever greater demand as the baby boomers begin to retire. Strong working relationships between Bloomsburg Hospital and the University could lead to new research and innovative technologies that could be brought to market in an incubator setting in the Town.



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While the Town of Bloomsburg is not in a position to directly create jobs within these clusters, it is able to support the growth and development of the businesses that will create new jobs by ensuring the economic infrastructure is in place to meet the needs of existing and potential supplier and lead firms. The following specific actions are recommended to foster the expansion of existing industry clusters and the growth of developing clusters that have the potential to bring new wealth to the Town of Bloomsburg.

Recommendations:

W.14. Work with the Bloomsburg Hospital and health care community to identify the economic infrastructure needed to be competitive.

Facilitate discussion to identify:

- c. Common needs in the areas of human resources, technology research, finance and capital, business climate, and physical infrastructure.
- d. Common types of suppliers who may be located outside the area; such discussion may lead to the business opportunity to provide supplies/services locally.

Lead Partners: Columbia-Montour Chamber of Commerce

Support Partners: SEDA-COG, Bloomsburg Hospital and other health care providers, Center for Rural Entrepreneurship, Ben Franklin Technology Partners

Funding Sources: Not applicable

Foster and promote a “Business Friendly” Environment



Existing and prospective businesses need to know that Bloomsburg values its business community. In order to sustain economic development, the Town has to be known as more than a college town. It has to be known for being genuinely interested in the success of businesses at all stages of development from entrepreneurs in start-up, to emerging leaders in growing ventures, to seasoned professionals in expansion, and finally to mature companies. This genuine support comes from appreciating the struggles of business development and doing what is possible to enable success.

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The Town can still meet its obligations for protecting the health, safety and welfare of the community while giving equal attention to prosperity.

Recommendations:

- W.15. Continue to recognize outstanding members of the local business community through Chamber awards and other acknowledgements.**
- W.16. Create an “Open for Business” or similar link on the Town’s webpage that provides access to information, support, training, and capital resources for new and existing businesses.** Pennsylvania has taken this approach and launched Pennsylvania Open for Business site, <http://www.paopen4business.state.pa.us>, a “one stop” access to business information. Entrepreneurs can explore financial options, download many of the important forms necessary to start and expand a business, and electronically register a business with the Pennsylvania Departments of Labor and Industry, Revenue, and State. Fairfax County, Virginia’s site, http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpsm/osb/four_phases.htm, approaches entrepreneurs and business owners at their individual stages of business development and tailors links to these needs.
- W.17. Create a local regulatory environment that supports the development of target industry clusters** by ensuring that the following are available to meet each industry’s specific needs.
- a. Predictable development process, in terms of timely reviews and specified fees.
 - b. Reasonable length of time for the permitting process.
- W.18. Create a competitive local tax environment.** Maintain and expand use of state incentives, e.g. KIZ and KOZ designations, as appropriate. Use local tax relief programs to make business start-up and expansion more affordable. Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance (LERTA) provides for temporary local tax relief (county, municipal, and school district) on the value of property improvements in a designated area. Tax Increment Financing (TIF), authorized in the Commonwealth in 1990, aims to assist in the development, redevelopment, and revitalization of both brownfield and greenfield sites.
- W.19. Seek funding to create a rent subsidy program for tenants at the Bloomsburg Technology Center.** The cost of professional office space

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can be a barrier to a small start-up business. Yet location and appearance can speak volumes to potential clients. The Tech Center offers both. Rental rates at the Tech Center have been at or near market value since it opened in (year). Short term rent subsidies could increase long term occupancy and business development.

- W.20. Take the lead in educating residents and local officials (or bringing speakers to the area to learn) about the opportunities and benefits of working together,** such as cost and revenue sharing, in order to market the area's assets to new and expanding business ventures.

Lead Partners: Town of Bloomsburg

Support Partners: Columbia/Montour Chamber of Commerce, Local Businesses

Funding Sources: University Research Funding, Tax Increment Financing Guarantee Program, Small Business First, PennWorks, Pollution Prevention Assistance; Land Use Planning and Technical Assistance Program

Recognize Energy Production as a Natural Resource Based Industry

As stated in Chapter 2, recent innovations, such as deep well drilling, horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing, have made the Marcellus Shale formation, which underlies much of the Central and Western portions of Pennsylvania, a more practical and economical source of natural gas. These advances in extraction technology in conjunction with rising oil and natural gas prices encouraged many energy producers to increase gas exploration activities in the Commonwealth. Some Pennsylvanians saw this innovation as an opportunity to cash in on a vast, untapped resource, while others recalled the environmental impacts of previous boom-and-bust resource-based industries. As oil prices fell through late 2008, gas exploration activity also declined, providing an opportunity to project and evaluate the short and long term environmental and community benefits and costs of this resource-based, resource impacting energy industry. Similar evaluation should be given to nuclear and wind energy production as these energy industries also operate in the region.

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The construction of natural gas pipelines, wind turbines, or nuclear facility expansions in the region represents economic opportunity (jobs, wages/benefits) for a few years, while the operation and maintenance of wells and the development of a supply chain of product and service providers represent longer term economic gain. Subsequent questions arise: if construction workers are hired from the existing workforce, perhaps for greater compensation than they receive today, which employers are most likely to lose workers? If workers are hired from outside the region, how will the region accommodate the short term growth in population, public services, water/sewer demand, etc. knowing that new residents may not be permanent and population growth may peak then quickly decline. The potential for substantial population growth in the region implies the need for intergovernmental cooperation and regional planning to provide future residents with adequate public infrastructure and services.

According to a Notice of Determination for Natural Gas Well Development Projects distributed in October 2008 by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, effective October 15, 2008, all natural gas well development projects in the Susquehanna River Basin targeting the Marcellus or Utica Shale formations for gas exploration or extraction, and involving the withdrawal or consumptive use of waters of the basin, are subject to Susquehanna River Basin Commission (SRBC) review and approval. As at least one of the reviewing agencies for environmental impacts from natural gas extraction projects, the SRBC is one place for elected officials and citizens to take questions, comments and concerns about the impacts of drilling. At the same time, such impacts may introduce new opportunities to reduce or mitigate such impacts through applied technology, i.e. new businesses.

The Susquehanna River Basin Commission's mission is to enhance public welfare through comprehensive planning, water supply allocation, and management of the water resources of the Susquehanna River Basin.

Therefore, the SRBC works to: reduce damages caused by floods; provide for the reasonable and sustained development and use of surface and ground water; protect and restore fisheries, wetlands and aquatic habitat; protect water quality and instream uses; and ensure future availability of flows to the Chesapeake Bay.

Source: www.srbc.net

Recommendations:

W.21. Include links to Geology.com and srbc.net on the Town's website to provide residents with access to information about the drilling process, permitting, and water issues surrounding drilling for Marcellus Shale Gas.

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Although not likely given the lack of available land in Town, residents should have access to all public information about the drilling process and its environmental and community impacts.

W.22. Work closely with SRBC and surrounding governments to monitor drilling activity and its impact on the region. SRBC maintains a map and other documentation of such activities on its website (www.srbc.net).

Lead Partners: Town of Bloomsburg

Support Partners: Columbia/Montour Chamber of Commerce, Susquehanna River Basin Commission

Funding Sources: Town Budget

Foster a Culture of Innovation and Entrepreneurship



Recent research shows that more than 70 percent of all new jobs are created by entrepreneurs⁶. It also shows that innovation – the successful development and marketing of new products – is crucial to survival in today’s economy. The following strategies are based on the work of the Central Appalachian Network (CAN), which has been working for over fifteen years to build healthy and sustainable economies in some of the most economically distressed counties in Appalachia. While the Town of

Bloomsburg is not in such dire economic straits as some of the communities that CAN has worked with, CAN’s recommendations regarding innovation and entrepreneurship are very appropriate for sustainable economic development.

Recommendations:

W.23. Work closely with SEDA-COG, the Columbia Montour Visitors Bureau, the Susquehanna Greenways Partnership, and other regional marketing organizations to identify and promote niche markets that local businesses can fill by building on natural and cultural assets. Natural capital entrepreneurship is based on the sustainable use of forests, farmland, and other natural resources and includes businesses

⁶ “Strategies for Sustainable Entrepreneurship”, Central Appalachian Network. The complete publication is available online at www.cannetwork.org.

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that focus on ecotourism, outdoor recreation, and adding value to agricultural and wood products. Place-based entrepreneurship draws on the beauty and unique history of the area, including traditional crafts and music.

- W.24. Build a supportive environment for entrepreneurs.** The Town of Bloomsburg needs to become a community where local leaders encourage residents to consider entrepreneurship as a viable career path and recognize successful start-up businesses. The Greater Susquehanna Keystone Innovation Zone, which is based in the Regional Technology Center in Downtown, administers a number of programs to support entrepreneurs. In addition, residents should “Buy Local” whenever possible to provide ongoing support for their local businesses and fellow citizens. SEDA-COG’s “Buy Fresh, Buy Local” has been instrumental in furthering support for local farmers and other producers of goods and services, while its Susquehanna Artist and Artisan Project has begun to create a regional support network for local artisans to develop and market their products. Also, providing mentoring, educational opportunities, and funding pools further enhances the support network needed for new businesses.
- W.25. Seek dedicated funding for a full-time position to market the Regional Technology Center.**
- W.26. Establish seed money for small innovation projects.**

Lead Partners: Town of Bloomsburg, Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc.

Support Partners: SEDA-COG, University of Bloomsburg, Bloomsburg Hospital and other local business leaders, Columbia-Montour Chamber of Commerce, Center for Rural Entrepreneurship, Ben Franklin Technology Partners, and local business leaders

Funding Sources: Ben Franklin Technology Partners, Community Development Bank, Community Economic Development Loan, Export Financing Program, First Industries Fund, Job Creation Tax Credit, Town Budget, Local Banks

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