

October 16, 2008 Workshop - RESULTS

Direction and Goals discussed under Bloomsburg as a Place

1) Issue - Flood hazard

- a) Draft Goal: A safe community where citizens and public services are prepared to respond to emergencies and hazards.
- b) Signs of progress
 - i) New alarm system is in place
 - ii) NIMS – National Incident Management System
 - (1) FEMA requires for each municipality to have NIMS
 - (2) Requires training, but officials and staff (Town and University) change regularly
 - (3) Some online training, other is classroom training
- c) Specifics/worst case scenario - Most recent flood broke water main, stopping local water supply. This hazard reduces the value of homes in Town.
- d) Needs: More Assistance, More Hands
 - i) Need for – more transportation/trucks and “movers” to get furniture, appliances, and other possessions to upper floors or higher ground out of Town
 - ii) Need for – more firefighters or other volunteers to assist with the above – town/fire might provide lodging at fire hall, food, etc. during this service.
 - iii) Need for – a list of residents with power boats to assist with rescue/evacuation (Already done by county and other EMS)

2) Opportunity – Redevelopment

- a) Draft Goal: A safe community where redevelopment maintains vibrant activity and distinct architecture through sustainable techniques.
- b) Needs
 - i) Re-evaluate historic district; retain downtown (Market Street, 5th Street, Main and East); other areas could have less stringent regulations.
 - ii) Willing, qualified volunteers for the HARB (and other committees)
 - iii) Recognition - Chamber gives annual awards for quality redevelopment.
- c) Challenge/barrier - Redevelopment by increasing permissible building heights is limited by the airport hazard zoning (need geometric review, might be assumed).

3) New Issue – Safety from Gang Activity spilling over from Williamsport and Hazleton

- a) Contributing factors that make Bloomsburg a soft target
 - i) I-80 provides easy access/through travel
 - ii) College students with disposable income and lots of high end electronics
- b) The cycle – Declining downtown, increasing vacancy, lower income/desperation, decreasing tax base, lower revenue for police services
- c) Key words for a Goal: Protect – Proactive – Preserve - Evaluate/Monitor
- d) Need to address is sooner than later.
 - i) Cost will come later, and be higher. Recovery will be limited.
 - ii) Soft strategies aren't enough, need to be tough, might be costly
- e) Comment: Increase in calls for police service during fair week? Minor increase in calls, but not significant in number, severity or any increase in response time. Per Police chief

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- f) Comment: Ice and snow conditions cause safety concerns for children walking to school and vehicles.
 - i) Specifically in the vicinity of 11th and the railroad
 - ii) Public works service has improved over the years.

4) Issue - Traffic and Parking (discussed in various groups and compiled under Place)

- a) Traffic on US 11 moves well as a result of recent PennDOT improvements, but now it doesn't stop, which may be hurting businesses. In some ways, the improvements have made it more dangerous to walk/bike in town.
 - i) Some communities are looking at a two lane road with diagonal parking in their downtown areas, which may be an alternative solution.
 - ii) There are concerns that if I-80 were tolled, even more truck traffic would be forced onto US 11 in the Town.
- b) There are many people who work in Bloomsburg but live in the surrounding townships. This has implications for traffic and parking.
- c) In town deliveries are an issue for some businesses, as many of the delivery trucks are unable to get to the rear entrances.
- d) Parking
 - i) Student parking downtown
 - 700 spaces for students (\$150 per semester)
 - Parking permits
 - ii) Some businesses have left town because of parking issues. Some believe it is time to think more radically about how to deal with parking in town.
- e) Transit Alternatives
 - i) Shippensburg Transit model
 - (i) University, Town, Hospital
 - ii) Former North Branch Bus
 - Operated between Berwick, Bloomsburg and Danville
 - Should include the newer commercial areas around Buckhorn
 - iii) Greyhound "terminal" – shelter
 - Welcome people rather than dropping off at a remote parking lot
 - Parking should be downtown

5) Navigating Bloomsburg - Signage

- a) Way marking to events and attractions
- b) Way finding to parking
- c) Welcome signs convey a visitor friendly community

Direction and Goals discussed under Living in Bloomsburg

1) Asset – Safety

- a) Why is Bloomsburg Safe? Strong police department
- b) Needs– funding, staffing to keep strong

2) Asset/Issue - Walkability

- a) Why/how?
 - i) Vast sidewalk network
 - ii) Mix of land uses permitted
 - (1) Maintain traditional “mixed-use” development patterns
 - (2) Provide affordable housing
 - (3) Workers homes
 - iii) Parking lots – good turnover
- b) Issues:
 - i) Sequence of new lights for pedestrians
 - o They are getting used to it
 - o Improved traffic flow – PennDOT tweaking – well defined
 - ii) Some sidewalks need to be replaced
 - iii) Some sidewalks need a cross walk

3) Issue - Managing community among different lifestyles

- a) Densities of student housing – intimidating to some

4) Comment: Lack of transit

- o Existing fixed route in place (paratransit/University)

5) Comment: Why isn't Bloomsburg a town in which professionals wish to live?

6) Historic District

- a) HARB in place

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Direction and Goals discussed under Working and Doing Business in Bloomsburg

DRAFT Goal: “Sustainable economic growth that allows the citizens of Bloomsburg to earn higher incomes and enjoy a better quality of life”

1) Issue - Labor Pool

- a) Most agreed that the goal is OK, but some employers are having difficulty finding employees with the right skills and who *want* to work in Bloomsburg.
 - Windsor Foods has new contract w/ Pizza Hut; pay starts at \$12.00; few applicants
 - Rieter Automotive has difficulty recruiting qualified professionals/managers due to perception that Bloomsburg is in the “middle of nowhere”.

2) Opportunity with Long Term Impact - Emerging Energy Jobs

- a) PPL is looking for support for their plans for a new reactor. Some feel the Town should be supportive as these are high-wage jobs, which will benefit the entire region.
- b) Natural gas drilling could be on the horizon for Columbia County. There are concerns about how to plan for the “boom-bust” that could result, since natural gas wells have a life span of about 10 years.

3) Issue - Flood protection

- a) Flood protection for industrial areas is needed. Threat of floods is a deterrent for new businesses and may be keeping existing businesses from expanding, including the Fairgrounds.

4) Other Issues that affect business

- a) There is no large meeting space (capacity of 500+) in Town, which precludes hosting conferences and other large/regional shows and events.
- b) Some feel that the length of time needed for the development approval process has had a negative impact on business development; particularly in the historic areas.
 - While codes have been updated recently, it may be appropriate to review them in light of their impact on business development.
 - It may be appropriate to re-evaluate the boundaries of the historic district. Some think that they should be East Street, Market Street, 5th Street and Main St.
 - Some feel there is a need for better coordination between the Town and the Historic Area Review Board during the development approval process.

5) Assets/Opportunities – Facilities: Airport and University

- a) Some feel that expansion of the Municipal Airport would support business development in the Town; however, the runway needs to be extended. This requires close coordination with Scott Township, who is not willing to discuss this.

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- b) The University can be a strong partner in the growth and development of the Town. However, the Town needs to be consistent in their approach as to what the role of the University should be in this respect.

6) Other Opportunities for Stimulating Economic Development

- a) Employer assisted housing
- b) Welcome Bloomsburg University student cards at downtown businesses
- c) Use the Coles building as a University Bookstore
- d) Target an “anchor” store for downtown.
- e) The Fairgrounds could be a good location for a regional conference center or a high-end RV park if the flooding issue were addressed.

Direction and Goals discussed under Lifelong Learning in Bloomsburg

Draft Goal: High quality educational facilities, services, and programs available to meet the wide range of needs in the community.

1) Assets (in addition to those listed on the meeting handout)

- a) Preschool
 - Columbia County Childhood Development Center – located on 5th Street; possibly owned by the town
 - Bloomsburg University Day Care
 - Magic Carpet Day Care
 - YMCA Day Care
 - YMCA Children’s Programs
 - Head Start Programs
- b) Elementary & Secondary
 - Learning for Life – boy scouts program offered to middle school students; offers lessons in career development and life skills
 - Girl Scouts Program – provided at each elementary school
 - Keystone Cyber School – charter school that recently moved out of the area
 - YMCA Youth Programs
 - School Counts Program – a program offered at the area’s public schools to reward students for good behavior and attendance
- c) College & Professional
 - BU Non-degree for-credit classes open to people of all ages, including seniors and retirees
 - IT mini-courses and certificate programs are really picking up due to a new instructor in the department
 - BTE partnership

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- Audiology doctorate program is unique and offers a certified clinic to all area residents
 - Young Professionals Organization
 - Bloomsburg University lecture series advertised to area residents
 - SUNCOM – a post-secondary school program for students with special needs; located on West 9th Street
- d) Retirement & Senior
- YMCA Senior Programs and Services
 - Bloomsburg University lecture series advertised to area residents

2) Actions, Investments, Initiatives:

- a) Develop a closer relationship with Bloomsburg University in regards to education and increase public awareness of educational facilities, services, and programs available in the area.
- Partner with schools, Bloomsburg University, and other educational organizations in the area to develop and maintain a webpage as part of the town's official website that will serve as a central location for up-to-date, accurate information on educational facilities, programs and services available to residents in the area, and provides corresponding web links for those resources where possible.
 - Develop and maintain an "event" calendar as part of this new webpage that includes educational/cultural events offered by Bloomsburg University and other educational organizations, and provide corresponding web links for those events where possible, including a web link to the Bloomsburg University's webpage or calendar. (Bloomsburg University is in the process of updating its webpage to make it more navigable and user friendly. The town may want to coordinate its efforts with them.)
 - Encourage Bloomsburg University to advertise its facilities, events, programs, and services, such as guest lectures, feature films, mini-courses, celebrity artists, etc., outside the university community so that town residents are aware of the opportunities immediately available to them.
 - Inform residents that Bloomsburg University's Andross Library is open to the general public.
- b) Continue and support the Public Library's efforts to transform their facility into a community center or comfortable meeting place for civic activities through various improvements and renovations.
- c) Explore the opportunities to expand the graduate program at Bloomsburg University and assess what potential impacts the expansion may have on the town in terms of increased enrollment and growth.
- d) Increase the number scholarship opportunities available to graduate students in the area. Most scholarship opportunities currently offered in the area are geared toward undergraduates.

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3) Measures of Success:

- a) Improved test scores
- b) Establishment of new programs and partnerships
- c) Establishment of a new webpage as part of the town's website that contains information on the community's educational resources
- d) Increased enrollment (BU's average growth rate is about 1% each year)

Direction and Goals discussed under Relaxing In and Visiting Bloomsburg

Draft GOAL: Diverse and high quality recreational facilities, programs and services to meet the various interests and needs of the community.

1) Asset – Park

- a) Well maintained and enjoyed by the community
- b) No issues with the park
- c) Park master plan is well received – a long term plan for the park
- d) Additional desire for a boat launch and camping area at the park
- e) Canoe/kayak rental business would be nice if there was a boat launch
 - o There could be University rowing teams
- f) Tying community trails together is another potential project
 - o Currently one section between the trails is only accessible by using streets
 - o Measure of success – more users of the park

2) Asset – Airport

- a) Airport is getting more use by business and industry
- b) Public awareness of the airport is increasing, but people don't feel like the airport is a public area.
 - o These websites have info about how to bring about public awareness and marketing info
 - EAA – Experimental aircraft association
 - AOPA – airport owners and pilots association website
- c) There is a lot of historic value in the airport terminal.
- d) Currently the airport is expanding the runway and hangar
 - o The airport would like further expansion to receive small jets; this would require extension into Scott Township, which is not supportive
- e) Needs:
 - o 24 hour pump, along with restrooms and a telephone
 - o Money for infrastructure improvements – long term investment
 - o Marketing of events
 - o Public transit connection to the airport for events
 - Taxis not available on weekends is a problem for the elderly
- f) Opportunity to look at ways that the airport can fit more economically into the community for business and recreation
- g) Measure of success – more public events held at the airport

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3) Fairgrounds

- a) The Fairgrounds are used more than they used to be
 - o Website with calendar of their events
- b) No need for increased use because they already have events nearly every weekend there.
- c) Needs
 - i) tie together events at the airport and the fairgrounds
- d) Measure of success – increased number of people at more events throughout the year

4) Community Calendar

- a) No notable complaints
- b) The airport may be interested in posting events on the the County Visitors Bureau Calendar
- c) Chamber of Commerce is not welcoming to all its members
- d) Measure of success – more events posted on the calendar by more organizations

5) Other assets for relaxing/visiting mentioned in PLACE

- a) Bloomsburg Theatre Ensemble – BTE
- b) Swimming pool
- c) University theatre productions