

Editorial: Reviving our cities**By - 11/23/2007**

Municipal and civic leaders in York and Lancaster took their first steps this month in unveiling visions to rejuvenate their cities. These steps are long overdue and provide area businesses and residents hope that their local leaders are looking at ways to spur economic development by improving the conditions of their urban centers.

Metro-York, the collection of community leaders trying to improve the quality of life in York and the surrounding municipalities, unveiled an ambitious agenda calling for a laundry list of changes and reforms that would dramatically reshape the economic environment for businesses that operate in the York area. We've supported Metro-York's work so far, and these recommendations offer a road map for dealing with the fragmented local government structure and the poverty of the city.

On the municipal side, leaders want to find a new way of collecting taxes, one that moves away from what it calls "the winners and losers" of property taxes. They offered as one alternative a tax-sharing plan that would spread tax revenue across the entire Metro-York region. They called for strengthening regional planning in a way that brings the best municipal plans together under one regional comprehensive plan. That plan would guide land-use, infrastructure and transportation decisions.

On the education side, they called for investing \$30 million over 10 years on programs that target at-risk urban youth. A new county office of workforce development would have a goal of offering education and training programs for the city's underemployed, low-income pool of young workers.

Kurt Weber, a York County business owner, correctly pointed out that there should be accountability. Weber told Business Journal Staff Writer David Dagan that he wants to know there are clear benchmarks and a system for measuring results from the spending.

We agree. But we have confidence in this group. Bill Simpson and Eric Menzer and the others involved have a stellar track record in business and in service to community. We believe they will make sure it's done right.

In Lancaster, the same type of forward-thinking has taken root. Business owners and residents in the southwestern and northeastern quadrant of the city have long felt slighted as they watched other neighborhoods receive attention from City Hall and developers. The biggest areas of growth have been the new (and successful) ballpark, the transformation of the Harrisburg Pike corridor near Franklin & Marshall College, and the areas close to downtown.

The city's plan, as unveiled by Mayor Rick Gray, is a vision for all or portions of five neighborhoods as recognized by the National Register of Historic Places: Cabbage Hill, Prospect Heights, West End, and portions of South Side and the southernmost portion of Chestnut Hill. This is a follow-up of the city's proposal for the northeastern neighborhoods, released this summer. The plan calls for enhancing open spaces, taking advantage of residential and mixed-use infill possibilities, providing redevelopment incentives and recognition for green projects, and improving litter control. The vision also offers ideas on traffic and parking improvements.

Both proposals are forward-thinking efforts by community leaders to provide their local businesses with the opportunity to prosper in their urban centers. Central Pennsylvania's cities all have neighborhoods that have suffered years of neglect; it's long past time to reverse that. These initiatives will foster economic growth, especially for the small businesses and entrepreneurs that spend their hard-earned dollars making our local communities special places to live.