

## **Economic plan prepares York County for smart growth**

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York County leaders this year will begin to implement their first countywide [economic development plan](#), which addresses economic development and growth management within the county.

Employees of the [York County Planning Commission](#) and the [York County Economic Development Corp.](#), together with a steering committee of local officials and businesspeople, have been working for the past year to create the plan.

The 10-year plan assesses the local and regional economy, determines the type of economic growth and target industries suitable for the county, and outlines strategies to pursue such economic growth and industries.

The document is being proposed as an addition to the [York County Comprehensive Plan](#). Comprehensive plans are documents that guide municipalities as they try to balance development with the preservation of natural and cultural resources. Various components are updated each year. Some of those components were created as early as 1997.

Public comment is being accepted through June 22 for the draft of the economic development plan. The county commissioners are expected to consider adoption of the plan during their July 8 meeting.

The county's diverse housing stock and recreational offerings have made the area desirable for residential development. The plan should help the county avoid becoming a bedroom community for Baltimore and Harrisburg, according to the executive summary of the plan.

Throughout the planning and research process, people across the county expressed a desire to make sure development was occurring in areas where it could be supported and thrive, said Felicia Dell, executive director of the York County Planning Commission. People were interested in making sure that economic development wasn't pursued merely to create more jobs, but that it took place in areas where that particular industry would be successful, too, she said. Residents also were interested in filling in the areas that already have been designated for economic development, such as industrial parks, before trying to develop new areas, she said.

Officials found that the county has strong rural, agricultural and manufacturing sectors, but a shift toward the service sector is beginning to take place, as well, she said.

The city of York and West York borough was one area that showed a high interest in downtown revitalization, including community development and adding a mix of business opportunities. Community members showed an interest in concentrating on locating startup businesses downtown and using the area as an incubator until firms grow large and strong enough to relocate, Dell said. Hanover had similar interests, she said.

The process helped the team discover that the county's strongest industries are logistics and transportation, energy, biomedical, and advanced materials and diversified manufacturing related to vehicles and vehicles equipment.

They also found that some industries that are not strong national performers have thrived in the county,

including agriculture and food production, building and construction, and advanced materials and diversified manufacturing related to metal and metal fabrication and printing. These are industries the county will focus on retaining, she said.

The county should focus on renewable-energy business-development opportunities, Dell said. And it should continue to foster growth of the health care, business and financial services, and technical-education sectors.

While some communities are looking to stay out of the limelight of economic development, others are interested in taking advantage of the industry clusters that exist, as well as promoting their rail-freight access and other infrastructure-related offerings, she said.

“We know we have a lower cost of living, reasonable access to markets in the mid-Atlantic, a good workforce with a lot of different skills within the community, but are we taking advantage of that competitive position we’re in?” Dell asked. “I think that is what this plan is really going to help us do.”

The growth-management portion is an important component of the economic development plan, said Pam Shellenberger, chief of long-range planning for the planning commission. The county’s growth areas include York city and its surrounding municipalities, the Shrewsbury area along the southern portion of the Interstate 83 corridor, the Fairview Township area along the northern end of the I-83 corridor, the Dillsburg area along Route 15, and the greater Hanover area.

“With the economy the way it is, we feel the economic development plan is a very important piece that we needed to have in place,” Shellenberger said.

The commission’s job will be to work with municipalities to make sure they have the zoning policies, sewer and water capacity and other necessary elements lined up to support the kind of development they want to attract. The economic development group will be responsible for attracting the kinds of businesses that are in line with local offerings and that might thrive here, she said.

“This plan will help us work in closer cooperation with the planning commission on the county level and with municipal leaders on local level,” said Darrell Auterson, president and chief executive officer of the YCEDC. “I think it’s really brought the county closer together, and it’s a document that will certainly set some very proactive policies for the county going forward, but the real test is going to be the implementation.”

While the plan includes an outline for implementation, members of the economic development agency and the county’s planning commission will meet in July to create a detailed strategy.

The goal of the process was to help county officials figure out how to plan for smart growth, Auterson said. He said he was surprised to find there are a number of opportunities for development in areas of the county where infrastructure is already available to support growth. The groups were able to learn a lot about parts of the county they weren’t familiar with, he said.

“We have ample amount of land available for the development of residential and commercial and industrial properties,” he said. “We do need to do a better job of planning the absorption of undeveloped land in the county and preserving as much as possible ...there were lessons that we definitely learned throughout the process.”