

Charting a
Brighter
Future for All
**The Time
is Now**

A Comprehensive Action Plan
of the YorkCounts Commission

February 2004



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D. Reed Anderson & Ernest Waters —

YorkCounts Co-Chairs

Donald Gogniat, Larry Miller, & William Simpson
— **YorkCounts Task Force Chairs**

Katie Bell, Vernon Bracey, Felicia Dell, David Hawk, Jack Kay, Lucy Kniseley, Jackie Kramer, Eric Menzer, Carole Register, Larry Richardson, Ryan Sattler, William Simpson, State Rep. Stephen Stetler, George Waldner, & Craig Zumbrun — **Action Team Leaders**

Community Development Task Force: Cathy Ash, Dave Arnold, Mary Anne Bacas, Katie Bell, Judy Blakey, Kim Brown, Tony Campisi, Barb Carbaugh, Ray Crenshaw, Brenda Daniels, David Danneberger, Sally Dixon, John Docktor, Tom Foust, Don Gogniat, Rabbi Irwin Goldenberg, Tom Gross, Michael Hady, David Hawk, Katie Herrington, Barry Jones, Kristen Keech, Paul Keiser, George Lenkner, William Leonard, David McCullough, Lori Mitrick, Evelyn Newman, Michael Newsome, Stuart Pullen, Larry Richardson, Ryan Sattler, Stephanie Seaton, Richard Seim, Robert Simpson, Steve Snell, Jack Sommer, State Senator Mike Waugh, & Robert Woods

Economic Development Task Force: Louis J. Appell, Jr., Darrell Auterson, Bruce Bartels, David Bode, Tom Bogart, Richard Boyd, Tom Brant, Richard Brown, Ophelia Chambliss, Leo Cooper, Felicia Dell, Scott Dempwolf, Eugene DePasquale, Tom Donley, George Glatfelter, Mike Goodling, Greg Gruendler, Jorge Hidalgo, Bert Hill, Scott Hittie, Austin Hunt, Sara Hunt, Mike Jefferson, Jack Kay, Mark Kimmel, Anne Kinsley, Lucy Kniseley, Jackie Kramer, Loren Kroh, Gary

Laird, Harold Maley, Michael March, KC McCleary, Jim McGinnis, Hugh McPherson, Norm Meiskey, Larry Miller, Don O'Shell, Mario Pirritano, Alex Ramos, Mike Rice, Joanne Riley, Pat Schaub, Sharon Sheppard, Ken Slaysman, Mike Smeltzer, Carolyn Steinhauser, State Rep. Stephen Stetler, Fred Uffelman, Joe Wagman, George Waldner, Mike Warehime, Tom Wolf, Larry Yanover, & Craig Zumbrun

Education Task Force: Mary Lou Alsentzer, Vernon Bracey, Mayor John Brenner, Sam Bressi, Warren Bulette, Leo Cooper, Emily Cortes-Torrado, Chris Echterling, Traci Foster, Randy Freedman, Beth Gill-MacDonald, Dennis Hetzel, Mayor Margret Hormel, Mike Jefferson, Jeffrey Kirkland, James Kraft, Carlos Lopez, Larry Macaluso, State Rep. Beverly Mackereth, Kathy McDonald, Dave Meckley, Eric Menzer, Gail Nourse, Robert Pullo, Carole Register, Chris Reilly, Joel Rodney, State Rep. Stan Saylor, William Simpson, State Rep. Bruce Smith, Chuck Thomas, Jeff Varnes, Bryan Wade, Susan Weeks, & Berwood Yost

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Charting a Brighter Future for All The Time is Now

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Prologue

“For York County, community excellence is still within easy reach. ‘Easy,’ that is, not in political terms but in ready solutions.”

David Rusk

Harnessing ‘Ready Solutions’

No more fitting statement sets the stage for the mission that has guided, and continues to guide, the work of the YorkCounts Commission. The findings issued in both the

2002 report, “Rusk II: A Challenge to Change,” and the original 1996 Rusk Report underscored an urgent need for change in core areas of York County life to address problems stemming from economic and racial disparity, concentration of poverty, and fragmented land use. Those broad areas have implications in the every day lives of York Countians – in school, in work, in community.

If Rusk’s report had ended with a statement about eroding quality of life, the proverbial glass would have seemed half empty and the challenge near insurmountable. Fortunately, the report did not end there, but with a positive reminder of the potential that makes excellence within reach, and the challenge to achieve it.

YorkCounts, made up of people who believe that excellence is within reach, took its cue from that challenge. This comprehensive report is about those ready solutions, not in the sense of prescribed answers, but in recommendations for ways to begin rallying people at every level – from elected officials, to businesses, organizations, leaders, volunteers and grassroots – to become stakeholders who will execute those recommendations. The time is now, and it is up to us, to take these initiatives to task, to mobilize participation, and to move forward.

The time is now because the consequences to York County of not acting now are too great and too imminent. And it is up to us because the “challenge to change” has been placed squarely on our

table. These challenges will not fix themselves, and we have harnessed too much energy and momentum to sidestep or overlook the problems and leave them for future generations.

The idea of “ready solutions” is not as simple as it may sound. That phrase is not meant to imply a set of prescriptive remedies or easy answers. The recommendations made in this report are, rather, a jumping-off point, a tool, a “roadmap” of research that will motivate and guide the community in this mission called YorkCounts.

The content reflects a mobilized effort of people who could not help but respond to the challenge. The voices that resonate in this report are those of the people who make up the YorkCounts Commission and the 13 action teams. It is the voice of their own convictions, and countless hours of thought, brain power, expertise and collaboration that have gone into crafting and suggesting ‘ready solutions’ to stop the erosion of quality of life in York County and start the renewal process.

Quality of life – three simple words – not so simple to achieve. Change for the better will require a willingness to change, to take active steps toward change, but change is a small price to pay for such high stakes – our immediate future, our children’s futures, and their children’s futures, futures for generations to come. Some change will happen immediately, with benefits realized almost right away. Other change will happen slowly over months, or even years. Other, more deeply rooted and complex systems may require years and years of chipping away, with significant benefit not to be measurable in this lifetime. But the urgency remains – the time to plant the seed of change is now. And it is up to us all.

Explaining the Approach

The presentation of this report reflects another significant milestone in the life of YorkCounts. In 1999, a YorkCounts partnership was born out of the collective efforts of six organizations – Better York, Healthy York County Coalition, United Way of York County, WellSpan Health, York County Chamber of Commerce, and York Foundation – who had the foresight to commission a body of research as a “starting point” for change. That research yielded 57 indicators used to measure the quality of life in York County, and in 2001, the results were compiled in an Indicators Report, “YorkCounts: Defining Our Future in York County.”

Since then, the YorkCounts Commission has worked diligently in the next steps toward change. This report summarizes the work of 13 action teams, who identified, dissected and analyzed initiatives that are executable and can bring about positive change. The teams produced recommendations for moving forward and implementing an action plan.

The synthesis of 13 individual action team perspectives takes on a new synergy and moves forward as a cohesive plan, consisting of broad major initiatives with interlocking themes — a comprehensive economic development strategy, regional collaboration in place of localized planning, diversity at work in communities, and advancing YorkCounts into the future. These initiatives will reflect the convergence of the specific efforts and recommendations of each action team to accomplish a greater overall good.

The call to action delivered in this report would never have happened without input from the YorkCounts Commission and the action teams that formed to conduct this community planning process. Each team’s findings were in-depth and expert, and their individual reports, while not included in their entirety in this edition of the report, will be available for those who want or need greater detail. The original wording and context of key recommendations have been respectfully retained as closely possible within this condensed framework.

Recurring and overlapping themes weave throughout the report because these initiatives and their implications inevitably interconnect, much like the threads of a finely woven fabric. The finished product is of enormously greater value than individual spools of threads, but each thread is essential to the design and durability of the end result. While the analogy may seem oversimplified, it makes an astute point. This plan is the loom, the tool that facilitates the process; the themes are the threads that interweave to yield an intricate well-crafted “fabric,” an outcome that will require the work of many figurative weavers.

To succeed, the finished product must reach from one end of York County to the other. The actions that will prompt systemic change are not stand-alone actions. They interconnect, reinforce each other, and work together because that is what it takes to build and improve a community.

A singular focus among York County’s 72 municipalities will not get the job done. The time is now to think outside those individual interests and cultivate wide-ranging solutions to control sprawl, provide more equitable housing, educational and job opportunities, especially for those living in impoverished pockets of York County, and cultivate more diverse neighborhoods, workplaces, and schools. The problems are intricately interconnected; therefore, so must the solutions be.

Once these broad-based initiatives begin to take root, results will show up over time in direct and ancillary ways throughout York County, not just a few select pockets. Collaborative efforts among county and municipal officials to control sprawl will help reverse the declining quality of life in older boroughs and in the city, where the worsening problems of poverty and racial segregation have become self-perpetuating cycles. Broad-based economic growth must replace pockets of economic decline.

Only then can more disparate areas of York County become more viable for homeowners and businesses, which can lead to more diverse make-up of our communities, schools, and places of work. Greater diversity has far-reaching implications in today’s young people becoming more accepting and tolerant leaders of tomorrow.

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These kinds of broad outcomes that bridge social, economic and political divides will not happen as a result of singular, localized efforts, but rather as collaborative efforts between county and local governments partnering together and with city government, public and private community partners, and the community at large. Only then will York County look and feel like a better place with a higher quality of life.

Working together, we can arrive together at “real solutions” that make a better York County – for everyone.

That’s what YorkCounts is all about.

Charting a Brighter Future for All

- *The YorkCounts Community Action Plan envisions a county:*
- *That is made up of people of increasingly diverse cultural, racial and ethnic backgrounds who live in harmony with one another;*
- *That better combines vital cities and towns with open spaces and a healthy natural environment;*
- *That attracts increasing numbers of able persons to volunteer for service on leadership boards and to seek election to local governing bodies;*
- *That creates and pursues a carefully crafted economic development strategy to raise living standards while enhancing other aspects of the quality of life;*
- *That offers improved educational opportunities to address residents' goals for child care, K-12 schools, after-school programs and workforce development;*
- *That provides greater access to first-class health services for all; and*
- *That is a safer setting for family and community life.*

YorkCounts Action Plan

I. Cultivate a Broad Commitment to a Shared Economic Development Plan

In order to sustain and enhance the quality of life in York County, an economic development strategy must be embraced, one that engages participation from all areas of the county and represents all walks of life. While achieving a col-

laborative economic development plan is a major initiative in its own right, this goal is one of the unifying themes that runs throughout the report. The work of creating an economic development plan that works for all of York County has explicit implications in every other effort.

One example where broad-based economic development is essential is in regional solutions initiatives, detailed in the next section of the report, specifically in terms of land use planning. As municipalities join forces to address the problem of sprawl by taking a more regional approach to land use planning, disparate areas will benefit and become more attractive to homeowners and businesses. Residential and commercial growth impact the tax base, spur economic development, and foster diversity as different areas of York County, both in the suburbs and the city, open up and become more feasible and attractive for a broader range of people to inhabit and establish businesses.

The interconnection between economic development and regional planning is what differentiates this effort from individual fragmented efforts that have taken off in the past and fallen short of their intended goals. A shared economic development plan that dovetails with other initiatives makes the difference because it gets city, county, and local officials working with each other and with their residents and communities in new ways to achieve new broad-reaching outcomes.

Why is a shared economic development plan important?

First, a shared economic development strategy is needed to sustain and enhance the quality of life for all of York County, without limitation of physi-

cal or demographic boundaries. This economic development strategy, driven by passionate leaders, must grow out of a vision to adapt proactively to broad trends affecting manufacturing, agriculture, and service industries; to uplift the disenfranchised and provide hope and opportunity; to ensure equitable job market and business ownership opportunities; and to provide improving economic circumstances for all who live in York County.

Secondly, a shared economic development strategy constitutes a more effective approach to workforce development. A structured workforce development effort is needed to organize programs that maximize not only the wealth of untapped human potential in York County, but also the loosely connected workforce development efforts already in place.

Programs that link local employers and employees, educational and training resources, and community organizations will produce an environment that is able to attract and retain a productive workforce, sustain the economic development effort, and create greater diversity at all levels of employment. This approach to workforce development reinforces existing businesses and stimulates new ones, sustains existing jobs and provides new job opportunities, with special attention to minority representation.

Third, the workforce development effort goes hand-in-hand with other incentives that must be developed to confront the unique economic challenges and circumstances that exist in urban cores. Special incentives must focus on the areas of York County, particularly in the city, overwhelmed by severe financial stress and physical decline so that these areas and the people who live in them can participate in and benefit from broad-based economic development strategies and growth.

Finally, a shared economic development strategy must serve to break the cycle of poverty within the city and other communities. Strongly concentrated pockets of poverty, economic disparities between urban cores and outlying areas, and obvious inequities in housing opportunities draw divisive racial and class lines between the city and communities that make up York County.

A. Design and implement a county-wide economic development strategy.

The critical role of a comprehensive economic development strategy to the success of other initiatives, and its integral function within those initiatives, has been explicitly introduced. The nuts and bolts of what such a plan would look like and what it would be intended to accomplish in the YorkCounts framework is a lengthier, more intricate explanation.

The Economic Development Task Force and the Comprehensive Economic Development Action Team partnered with a private consulting organization to compile a detailed comprehensive economic development strategy. As with other individual action team reports, that plan in its entirety or in an executive summary format will be available upon request for those who wish to consult that level of detail.

For the purpose at hand, a paraphrased summary of six key goals identified in the comprehensive economic development plan follows:

1. Grow jobs in industries showing greatest potential for growth. Strengthen growth in those industries through new partnerships, and implement a targeted business recruitment marketing plan.
2. Bolster and retain existing businesses and attract new businesses to York County. Create a favorable business climate with ample customer service-oriented business support services.
3. Invest in logistical elements of the business environment. Enhance technological infrastructure for existing and new economy businesses; provide optimal highway and roadway systems to better accommodate businesses; and create favorable industrial development through land/building development.
4. Enhance the competitive positioning of business in York County. Continually improve entrepreneurial development programs, and develop better linkages between industry and workforce development to cultivate a more highly skilled workforce that can increase business efficiency and meet the demands of jobs in the new economy.
5. Attract and retain creative workers with higher educational achievement and specialized skills in growth industries. Retain college-educated York County natives among the workforce, and develop amenities to attract such people to York County.
6. Mobilize support for county-wide economic development strategy.

Those goals translate into the following supporting tasks and tactics:

- Support all efforts for municipalities to consolidate functions, avoid duplication of services, and develop comprehensive land use plans for York County.
- Build on and leverage educational resources to develop technology and innovation centers, and take advantage of new State initiatives for partnerships with colleges and universities.
- Emphasize elements that attract talented, creative individuals and dynamic companies, such as arts, entertainment and recreation attractions.
- Create new jobs to replace declining job sectors. Develop a strong, distinct identity for York County, building on its rich historic heritage.

- Undertake creative initiatives to take advantage of core strengths, such as the NutriCore Initiative, Keystone Incentive Zone, and health care initiatives.
- Strengthen local, regional, national and international alliances to advance York County.
- Support a comprehensive educational system to produce a competitive workforce.

B. Develop and implement a unified system of workforce development.

All the right pieces are in place for effective workforce development, but the lack of a coordinated effort means that valuable resources, such as funding, information exchange and collaboration, are inconsistent and under-utilized.

Creation of an oversight entity, the Office of Workforce Development, would streamline efforts to accomplish the following objectives:

- Develop a system to assess the County’s workforce skill development needs.
- Identify redundancies, gaps, and the “fit” of current efforts in the context of business needs and the county-wide economic development plan.
- Develop ways to link education systems and training resources with workforce development programs to ensure that programs respond to current and future needs of County employers.
- Identify and develop resources to drive strategies for cultivating a diverse workforce that aligns with the County’s strategic economic needs.
- Cultivate a workforce environment that recognizes the need for and value of lifelong learning and skills development.

C. Build vital urban cores.

A disproportionate number of people, many of whom are minority groups, live in urban cores and smaller municipalities where they dwell in second-rate housing, have little or no access to health care, and face very limited educational and job opportunities. Before a shared economic development strategy can translate into “economic self-empowerment” for these people, urban core neighborhoods must be improved and suburban sprawl must be reined in so that diverse neighborhoods can spring up and sustain themselves.

Special initiatives must be developed, with broad backing from both private and public sectors, to focus on the areas of extreme financial strain and physical decline in York County. The following actions are examples of recommendations to begin the process of improving those areas:

1. Establish redevelopment-friendly policies and procedures which will encourage private and public reinvestment.

Removing tax barriers and code obstacles that deter reinvestment and redevelopment will help restore interest from and develop a core confidence among private and public investors, community social capital, and other stakeholders.

2. Clean up and dress up York’s urban centers and neighborhoods.

Maintaining community infrastructure is at the heart of this recommendation, which necessarily begins with identifying and prioritizing areas in need of maintenance and repair, and addressing litter and trash management issues to create cleaner streets and neighborhoods.

Other recommendations involve ongoing programs to support beautification and preservation efforts, such as the “York Beautiful” research project, funded by York Foundation, and the

Codorus Creek development effort already underway to create a cultural, recreation, entertainment hub with residential and commercial appeal in the city. Continuing to promote sports and recreation assets, such as the Heritage Rail Trail County Park and the Memorial Park Ice Rink, will enhance community appeal to existing and prospective companies and their employees.

3. Improve housing stock and increase homeownership and affordable housing opportunities.

Use the focus on urban sprawl (as outlined in the Rusk Report) to build a consensus on addressing the needs of distressed areas by adoption of county policies.

Those policies would include prioritizing county funding and grant funded improvements on the basis of economic diversification; exploring the use of zoning, impact fees, and other land use tools to foster mixed income housing and desired development; and exploring the implementation of a real estate tax or other transaction-based fee to help potential buyers overcome objections to moving into the city or other distressed areas.

Develop housing initiatives that would favorably impact segregated housing patterns in York County. Two initiatives were identified to help York County become a more integrated, open, and inclusive community:

Support community-based programs with a goal of 100 new or rehabilitated homes over the next five years.

Support the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and York Housing Authority (YHA) Five-Year Plan.

4. Assure adequate utility capacity exists for the 21st century.

Ensure that adequate utility resources exist to support new uses and development. Conduct long-term strategic utility planning, accounting for future development opportunities that would require utility infrastructure upgrades.

D. Develop a healthy, skilled, productive workforce.

This recommendation focuses on the premise that adequate and equitable investments in education today yield dividends in the workforce and society of tomorrow. In order for the children of York County to fulfill their potential and become contributing members of society in later years, they must have equitable access to high-quality education, beginning in early childhood.

Each level of education presents its own implications and funding issues, addressed in the following recommendations:

1. Publicly fund early childhood education for needy children attending accredited centers.
 - Advocate for county and state funding to support voluntary preschool education for financially needy 3- and 4-year-olds who are attending an accredited early childhood education program.
 - Convene focus groups to develop a county-wide set of school readiness criteria.
 - Track factors that support the relationship between early childhood education, school readiness, and later school success.
2. Ensure equitable and adequate per-student public funding for K-12.

Public funding for K-12 will be provided at a level that is adequate to provide quality education through a taxation system that is equitable to taxpayers. Educators and elected officials at all levels will be held accountable for the quality of education delivered and for the efficiency of school operations.

- Advocate for additional state funding which would cover 50 percent of “actual instructional expense” based on student enrollments and actual cost of instruction.
- Advocate for additional state funding for “non-basic educational expenses,” which include special education, students who live in poverty, and students with limited English proficiency.
- Advocate for property tax reform which would shift emphasis from reliance on residential property taxes to the ability to pay through personal income tax.
- Create a county-wide commercial/industrial tax base for the support of public schools.
- Create a York County Council of School Districts.
- Consider and pursue strategies for minimizing capital costs of publicly funded projects.

3. Curb brain-drain.

“Brain-drain” is the term used to describe the trend for young people to leave York County to pursue further education after high school, yet not return to work and reinvest in the community after completing their education. The trend poses a shortage of highly educated, skilled workers needed in York County’s economy and growing business community.

A YorkCounts scholarship program is recommended to offer incentive to York County students, encouraging them to pursue higher education in a vocation vital to York County’s future and to work in York County upon completion of their post-secondary studies.

II. Design and Test Innovative Strategies for County/Local Government Collaboration

This broad initiative proposes regional solutions in the form of collaboration among county and local governments to address municipal management, social, and economic issues. These solutions are necessary because

York County has,

in some respects, boxed itself into 72 municipal boundaries. Fragmented land use planning, worsening sprawl, uncontrolled growth, and unrestricted use of natural resources all pose serious threats to the quality of life in York County and the sustainability of its communities. These trends, however, can be reversed, and York County can begin to reap the rewards of collective communication and cooperation among the different regions and populations of York County.

Other institutions in York County that will realize greater benefit from regional solutions approaches include school districts, and public and environmental health.

Why the need for county/local government collaboration?

To bring about effective meaningful change in the economic and social structure of York County, a more cohesive system of managing funds, services and natural resources must be developed. The system must cross local boundaries and focus on the collective good that can result for York County.

While several key areas stand to gain from the practice of regional planning, the number one priority for true regional thought is county-wide land use planning and management, including adoption of county-wide zoning policies to replace outdated municipal ones.

Uncontrolled growth and sprawl that has emerged over the last five decades has resulted in suburban sprawl, swiftly increasing bedroom communities, under-utilized brown field sites, unrestricted use of natural resources, and unplanned land use. These trends create conditions that pose a serious threat to the quality of life in York County and the sustainability of its communities. York County cannot afford to continue its current pace of uncoordinated development, land use, and natural resource management. A regional approach to preservation and development must be applied to support sustainable, diverse communities, discourage sprawl, and enhance economic growth.

York County's school districts are another significant stakeholder in regional collaboration. To serve the educational needs of York County, school districts must advocate for public funding and equitable access to a high-quality education for all. Collaborating together, school districts can combine resources and resolve issues that cross district lines and exceed what individual districts could accomplish alone.

Public health and environmental issues also need to be addressed at the county level. Statistics are on the rise indicating that York Countians are making increasingly poor health and lifestyle choices, not better ones. These personal health issues and conditions – obesity, drug use, tobacco use, poor lifestyle choices, poor parenting skills, and poor financial management and fundamental life skills – seriously impact individuals, families, communities, and the entire county, both socially and economically. York County is less likely to attract progressive businesses and residents as long as these conditions go unmanaged. Addressing health issues such as these is challenging without a unifying organization or agency, such as a county health department.

Ready Solutions in Municipal/County Collaboration

A. Promote and facilitate regional solutions, including proposals to:

1. Develop and implement a municipal collaboration model regarding land use planning.

A coordinated regional approach to sustainable land use, infrastructure and natural resource planning must be taken to counter the negative effects of worsening sprawl conditions and unplanned land use. Regional collaboration will more clearly define areas that should be preserved and those that should be targeted for development.

The following actions are recommended to promote and facilitate regional solutions to land use planning:

- Develop and implement a model of land use planning structure in York County, utilizing the best principles of true regional thinking – regional zoning, urban growth boundaries, and transferable development rights.
 - Secure commitment of York County Commissioners, York County Planning Commission, and the Department of Community and Economic Development to champion and support the modeling and implementation effort.
 - Open York County’s 72 municipalities to the shared goal of integrated, inclusive communities by encouraging support of Councils of Governments (COGs) as a means of addressing regional planning and zoning efforts, and improving quality, diversity, and inter-municipal cooperation in York County.
2. Develop and deliver tools and training.
 - Education and advocacy strategies to promote responsible, sustainable natural resource and land use planning.
 - A communication strategy to define a message for identified target audiences, helping them understand their roles in natural resource and land use planning. Create delivery partnerships and the appropriate communication media for conveying the message to key audiences.
 - The appropriate technical assistance resources that can best help facilitate regional collaboration. For example, a “resource toolkit” to aid this effort would consist of a laundry list of policies that need to be addressed to promote a smart growth movement.

B. Foster school district cooperation and restructuring initiatives.

The regional strategies approach will provide collaborative benefits to school districts, just as they will to municipalities.

The following actions are recommended to provide collaborative regional solutions which can benefit all school districts in York County:

1. Establish a county-wide commercial/industrial tax base to support York County public schools.

Tax all commercial and industrial property on a single, county-wide basis. The revenue generated through the county-wide levy would be shared equitably among all school districts. This tax would replace individual property taxes for commercial and industrial property owners only. Advocate for property tax reform, shifting emphasis from property taxes to personal income tax.

2. Coordinate an all-county education summit.

Institute an All-County Education Summit that seeks solutions, opens lines of communication, develops leadership, enhances school-community relations, and promotes innovation and collaboration, with the goals of achieving continuous improvement in student performance and equitable access to quality education.

3. Implement functional collaborations.

Much equity and efficiency could be realized through the functional consolidation of school district programs, services and general operations.

Create a York County Council of School Districts, which would function as a voluntary organization of districts, assembled to foster a cooperative approach to resolving problems, setting policies, and developing plans and programs that are common and regional. The goal of the Council would be to combine resources to resolve issues that cross district boundaries and surpass individual districts' capabilities and resources, while allowing districts to retain their current governance structure and authority.

Ready Solutions in Public and Environmental Health

C. Institute a comprehensive county role in environmental and public health issues.

A county-wide public health department would provide a single local resource and organizational structure for better managing the public health concerns that affect York County residents.

1. Create a County Public Health Department

A wide range of public health functions can be administered under a county health department, including personal health services provided by public health nurses, environmental health services provided by public health experts, and health promotion and disease prevention by health educators, along with administrative support.

Establishment of a county health department is integral to other major initiatives (such as economic development) by improving overall living conditions in low-income areas, where increased health risks (such as childhood lead poisoning) are more concentrated.

Efforts to leverage support for a county health department should emphasize the following implications:

- Broad scope of functions, particularly with environmental issues, such as water testing, sanitation issues, and food protection.
- Support of overall regionalization efforts.
- Opportunities for grant funding and state match monies from the Department of Health.

2. Initiate the passage of a County bond issue for land preservation, and set aside funds within the bond issue for a regional municipal planning grant program.

Provide an incentive program for municipalities to participate in regional planning. Create a coalition, possibly led by YorkCounts, to convince County commissioners to float a bond, or at least put a bond to a vote, which would provide funds to seed the incentive.

A regional approach to sustainable land use and natural resource planning is essential. York County must carefully plan for and coordinate land and natural resource use in ways that support sustainable, diverse communities and discourage sprawl.

The desired outcome is to procure a bond issue that would:

- Provide additional funding for farm, natural lands, and open space preservation as well as land acquisition.
- Implement an incentive program that would provide grant money through the York County Planning Commission (YCPC) to municipalities that institute regional planning practices. The grant monies would be earmarked for cooperative planning efforts throughout the County.

III. Foster Racially and Culturally Diverse Communities

“Our vision is of a county that is made up of people of increasingly diverse cultural, racial and ethnic backgrounds who live in harmony with one another.”

YorkCounts Commission vision statement

Making that singular vision a reality is at the heart of an expan-

sive effort to erase divisive lines that run through the communities, schools, and interrelations of people throughout York County.

York County ranks as one of the most racially segregated communities in the country, according to the 2002 “Rusk Report II: The Challenge to Change.” Rusk points out that York County has four times more poor whites than poor blacks and Latinos combined, but how those populations are concentrated or dispersed is even more telling — 80 percent of poor whites live in middle-class communities scattered across York County; 70 percent of poor minorities live clustered in York City’s poverty-stricken neighborhoods, the urban cores.

The Need for Diversity – A Community Imperative

The attitudes and perceptions that contribute to prejudice and bigotry are the most destructive and divisive in the York County community.

Racial, economic, and cultural diversity contribute to learning, understanding, communication, and neighborhood character. If opportunities for interaction, communication, and understanding between the various groups and individuals of York County are not created and sustained, York County and the City of York will not thrive, and their potential to become truly progressive places will be lost.

Embracing diversity is an urgent need for students and young people of York County who must be prepared to succeed in a global economy where hatred and intolerance are unacceptable. Schools must play a part in fostering diversity. Teaching students to value, tolerate, and accept each other’s differences is an important commitment on the part of all school districts in the county.

Granted, schools alone cannot solve the problem. Sprawling development in suburban communities has isolated the poor to the city, where prices of homes are more within reach. Changes in housing policy will go a long way toward breaking the cycle of poverty and making York County neighborhoods and schools less racially segregated.

Ready Solutions in Housing

A. Propose and advocate for policies to encourage mixed income housing opportunities.

1. Use the focus on urban sprawl as outlined in the Rusk Report to build a consensus on addressing the needs of distressed areas by adoption of county policies.

Those policies would include prioritizing county funding and grant funded improvements on the basis of economic diversification; exploring the use of zoning, impact fees, and other land use tools to foster mixed income housing and desired development; and exploring the implementation of a real estate tax or other transaction-based fee to help potential buyers overcome objections to moving into the city or other distressed areas.

2. Support community-based housing programs with a goal of 100 new or rehabilitated homes over the next five years.

Enlist a broad base of support from business leaders, municipal officials, and volunteers from York County's faith communities who come from different faith traditions and racially-varied congregations to form home builder teams.

3. Support the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the York Housing Authority (YHA) five-year plan, whose mission is to: serve the needs of low-income, very low-income and extremely-low income families in the YHA jurisdiction with adequate and affordable housing, economic opportunity and suitable living environment.

4. Support and promote the Council of Governments (COGS) as a means to improve the quality and diversity in York County.

COGS enable a group of municipalities to work together on programs of mutual interest. The help of business and political leaders will be sought to formalize inter-municipal cooperation through COGS.

COGS can foster diversity by incorporating diversity, equity, inclusiveness and fairness into programs. COGS can advance regional solutions by addressing comprehensive regional planning efforts and zoning codes, actions which will directly impact the quality and quantity of affordable housing.

Ready Solutions in Schools

B. Systematize and institutionalize diversity education and leadership programs, with emphasis on K-12.

Every school in York County will devise teaching opportunities to systematically and consistently expose students to programs teaching tolerance and the value of diversity, a tolerance that is evident in all school environments themselves.

1. Create an environment that is conducive to a diverse experience.

Recommended steps to foster that environment include: educating school boards on the value of bias-free, culturally sensitive environments; promoting more diversity training for teachers by offering incentives in the form of Act 48 credits; identify ways for districts to measure their progress toward becoming bias-free; identify technical, financial or other resources to help implement system or environment changes; implement ways for teachers to network with each other in their own schools and with teachers from other districts to form a ‘diversity awareness network.’

2. Institutionalize the effort to promote and provide diversity education in the York community, with particular emphasis on K-12 education institutions.

- Create a “hub” resource – such as a ‘Center for Diversity Advocacy and Education’ — to build the case to school districts and administrators for diversity education programs. Strengthen existing diversity programs. Measure program outcomes to determine effectiveness.
- Engage community-based programs to create an initiative designed to establish personal relationships between diverse groups of students. Target K-12 teachers, existing youth programs, and faith community groups that can help initiate and foster these kinds of relationships.
- Engage the faith community, including both cleric and lay people, in meaningful dialogue about ways to break down barriers not only between individuals, but also between the different religions and faiths represented in York County.

Ready Solutions in Human Relations

C. Establish a York County Human Relations Commission.

The mission of the proposed York County Human Relations Commission is to aggressively advance the cause of equal rights and eliminate discrimination of all types through education, outreach programs, community relations and authorized enforcement.

The benefits in creating a York County Human Relations Commission to serve all county residents include: outreach and education opportunities, accessibility, fair and impartial mediation, the opportunity to move beyond the County’s racist past, and to the opportunity to enhance York County’s image as it develops a new, more positive identity.

IV. Catalyze Leadership to Embrace the YorkCounts Vision and Agenda

Political apathy is a pervasive problem in York County evidenced by lack of participation and engagement in the political system.

Informed political participation is essential for policy makers to make decisions that meet the needs of a community and its citizens. Participation

must be a community value to enable democracy to work and achieve its utmost potential.

York County's extremely low level of political participation, both among voters and those run-

ning for office, was one indicator that contributed to York's ranking of having lower levels of social capital than other communities like York, according to a social capital study published in 2001.

Why is political participation and public service important to YorkCounts?

The York County envisioned by the YorkCounts Commission cannot come to be in the apathetic environment that exists now. Dramatic changes must occur in people's attitudes, government legislation and organizational systems. Supporters of the YorkCounts vision and agenda must be diligent in their communication efforts to spark community dialogue, shape public opinion, and in turn, shape public policy.

A. Encourage County Commissioners to expand their vision and exercise leadership to advance the YorkCounts agenda.

Several major recommendations in the YorkCounts Action Plan call for County Commissioner leadership, engagement, and support. Those outcomes include:

1. Office of Workforce Development

The Office of Workforce Development must have a requisite amount of authority to ensure that stakeholders are likely to cooperate with the Office's requests and initiatives. The YorkCounts successor entity should ensure that it and the Office of Workforce Development are appropriately acknowledged by the York County Commissioners.

2. County Health Department

Submit a proposal for creating a York County Health Department to York County Commissioners, calling for their endorsement and willingness to lead the implementation process.

3. Land Use

A coalition will form to convince York County Commissioners to float a bond or place a bond issue on the ballot to fund regional land use initiatives.

4. Regional Solutions

Secure the commitment of York County Commissioners, York County Planning Commission and the Department of Community and Economic Development to champion and support regional collaboration models and implementation efforts.

5. County Human Relations Commission

Secure the commitment of York County Commissioners to endorse the establishment of a County Human Relations Commission and to actively support the enforcement of its mission and outreach efforts.

B. Build and institutionalize a communication strategy to keep the YorkCounts agenda before the public, influence public opinion, shape policy agendas and motivate voters.

Develop a communication plan that instills good citizenship and challenges York County residents to become more involved in the community and the political process as voters and/or candidates.

The communication plan must meet the objective of keeping the YorkCounts agenda alive in public and political forums to influence public opinion and frame public policy. It must be relevant, practical, and clearly express why YorkCounts matters. The following attributes will be incorporated into the communication strategy:

- The plan inspires greater civic participation.
- The plan educates, communicates, and positions YorkCounts as agent of change for turning apathy into action.
- The message will enlighten residents on how their local neighborhood or township concerns may have an impact on a larger scale, which will inspire greater involvement.

- The message relays a better understanding of county-wide issues, which generates greater and better-informed political participation.
- Increased communication between elected officials and constituents will help allay misconceptions of politicians and the political process and prompt greater involvement.

C. Continue and strengthen infrastructure to support YorkCounts initiatives.

1. Institutionalize YorkCounts.
 - Develop and put in place mechanisms to ensure that the YorkCounts process and conclusions remain ongoing, active, relevant and current, and continue to facilitate implementation of the YorkCounts Action Plan.
 - Leverage the YorkCounts agenda to create buy-in from other organizations whose focus or activities revolve around the community to ensure that YorkCounts initiatives, recommendations and priorities are considered.

Conclusion

Defining what this report is and what it is not as a parting thought bears repeating for clarity's sake. This report is the work of the YorkCounts Commission. It documents the hard work of the Commission's 100-plus participants who spent 12 months thinking deeply about the important issues of our community.

This report serves as a roadmap, a tool for identifying and describing the direction for the first steps. It has proved, so far, a useful way to organize what we need to do to accomplish real solutions to some of our most pressing challenges. This report invites many and varied stakeholders to embrace the plan and take responsibility for various pieces of work.

The entire YorkCounts Commission and everyone involved behind the scenes of this effort are fully aware that no one group, action team, or organization has the magic answer. What this report is not is the final word on how to tackle each of the issues. Instead, it offers background, perspective, and possible approaches for those who will take on the work of moving the agenda forward. The 'solutions' represent recommendations, suggestions, and examples. They really are not solutions until they are put to the test and proven successful, a process that predictably involves repeated attempts, trial and error, and loads of tenacity.

Several central messages, though repeated, are important to underscore. First, many of the issues are interdependent. In particular, the implications of how we address the issues of diversity, land use, and economic development are interwoven and run virtually throughout the entire report.

There is no precise prescription or formula for moving this agenda forward. It will require the active participation of many players, and will take creativity and new ways of thinking about the job at hand. We have a duty to communicate the YorkCounts agenda widely as a means of encouraging dialogue, inviting participation, and sustaining attention to the issues. Finally, implementation will be an ongoing process we will monitor as we watch for signposts of progress and new opportunities along the way.

What are the next steps?

The Future of YorkCounts

YorkCounts will continue to operate as a public-private collaborative, with the partner institutions continuing to provide leadership, financial support and important links to the broader community and beyond.

YorkCounts will continue to be housed at York College of Pennsylvania, and will benefit from the support of the College's substantial infrastructure and access to its extensive resources. Staff support will be provided by The York College Center for Community Engagement, a new entity forming within the College's academic affairs division.

YorkCounts will continue to track the 57 indicators introduced in the YorkCounts Indicator Report in order to monitor and measure progress toward a better quality of life in York County, and it will report regularly to the community.

YorkCounts will continue to work for change. It will learn from others and try new approaches. It will work through setbacks and be propelled by successes. It will find new allies and form new partnerships. It will confront huge obstacles and celebrate small achievements.

The YorkCounts Steering Committee will continue to provide leadership for the implementation phase. The Steering Committee's role will be to "make things happen," to mobilize institutions and broker engagement. The Steering Committee will craft and implement a comprehensive strategic communication plan. The Steering Committee will regularly assess the portfolio of initiatives and help focus attention on strategic opportunities for implementation. The culmination of their efforts will be to implement a convening mechanism, such as a county-wide summit, to bring together city, county, and municipal governments, economic development organizations, and nonprofit and private sector partners to officially introduce and launch the YorkCounts Action Plan.

To conclude with a few parting observations, the issues addressed in this report are not the only

things that need our attention in order for York County to prosper. But they do represent significant opportunities for our institutions and citizens to continue to work together on strengthening our community and improving our quality of life.

We hope that what you read in this report gives you confidence that we truly have reached a new level of collaboration in York County. The work reflected in this report shows that we can work together to set ambitious goals – and that we have the will to work together on ready solutions.

Perhaps our most important accomplishment has been the ability to engage a diverse group of

skilled and committed volunteers in an environment where they could and did work together on behalf of the whole community. Now, it is up to each of us to dedicate our resources and our will to achieving the objectives outlined in the report, and to mobilize others to join us in working on ready solutions for York County.

YorkCounts believes in the future of York County. We hope you will join us in that belief and in our work.

This document is a compilation of 12 individual action team reports. Contained in these individual reports are the primary items and issues identified in this document as well as supplementary recommendations and suggestions. These supplementary statements are intended to provide greater detail for the implementation work. Individual action team reports are available upon request. Please contact:

Kevin Myers
YorkCounts
York College of Pennsylvania
York, PA 17405-7199
(717) 815-6430
fax: (717) 849-1647
kwmyers@ycp.edu

Action Team reports focus on the following topics:

Comprehensive economic development strategy

Cycle of poverty within York City and other impoverished areas in York County

Diversity in York County communities

Diversity in York County schools and education systems

Economic distress and physical decline in York City and other older urban areas of the County

Education funding

Equity of educational opportunities

Health and human condition of York Countians

Land use, infrastructure, and natural resource planning

Political participation and public service

Regional and multi-municipal collaboration/cooperation

Workforce development

Our Team

Lead Organizations

A group of seven community organizations stepped forward to sponsor the YorkCounts project. These organizations are:



Better York

Better York is a civic organization dedicated to providing leadership on issues of importance to the economic prosperity and social well being of the City of York. Better York plays a non-partisan role in public policy debates, fosters public/private partnerships for community initiatives, and works wherever possible through existing organizations.

Healthy York County Coalition

Established in 1994, the Healthy York County Coalition works to bring together stakeholders from across the community and unite them in efforts to better York County. The Healthy York County Coalition addresses the concerns of community residents - identified through our community health assessments - and helps to build a better community for all who live, work and play in York County.

United Way of York County

United Way of York County seeks to create positive impact on human service conditions within York County. This is accomplished through conducting an annual campaign and allocating resources to support needed services; providing information and referral services; serving as a central resource for volunteer recruitment, deployment and training; enhancing quality early childhood education; and convening individuals and groups around issues of critical importance to York Countians.



WellSpan Health

WellSpan Health is an integrated health system serving more than 450,000 residents of York and Adams counties and northern Maryland. It includes such highly respected not-for-profit health care institutions as York Hospital, Gettysburg Hospital, York VNA Home Care and some of the area's leading physician practices. As a community-based, not-for-profit organization, WellSpan Health is dedicated to improving the health and well being of the people it serves.



York College of Pennsylvania

York College of Pennsylvania is a private-sector, independent institution of higher education, which focuses on offering baccalaureate degree programs in the arts and sciences, as well as professional programs. The College draws its 4,200 full-time undergraduate and 1500 part-time and graduate students from some 30 states and 15 foreign countries.



The York County Chamber of Commerce

The Chamber of Commerce is York County's largest and most experienced business and community development organization, with more than 2300 members employing 75,000 people. Since 1898, the Chamber has been leading the way for business in York County.



York Foundation

The York Foundation's mission is to enhance the quality of life for all York County's citizens, now and for generations to come, by building community endowment, responding to community needs through grant-making, and providing leadership on emerging community needs and opportunities.

