

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Nittany Valley Region



Photo: Titan Energy Park, the former Bolton Metals, on Axemann Road in Spring Township is located in a Keystone Opportunity Zone.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Nittany Valley Region, in cooperation with the Centre County Planning and Community Development Office and the Chamber of Business and Industry, will jointly develop methods and procedures to bring in quality employers, deliver speedy approvals for new business and industry, help to retain existing companies, and find new uses for abandoned and vacant properties.

Issues & Implementation Strategies

The 10-year review and update of the Nittany Valley Joint Planning Commission’s Comprehensive Plan will address both **issues** and **implementation strategies** to resolve these issues. Some issues will be carried over from the 2004 adopted plan. Other issues were added after discussion and recommendation made by the Nittany Valley Joint Planning Commission (NVJPC).

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VACANT AND ABANDONED PROPERTIES

ISSUE Vacant and abandoned properties are a blight to the community and do not contribute to the local tax base.

BACKGROUND Between 2011 and 2014, the Nittany Valley Joint Planning Commission collected and provided vacant and abandoned property information to Centre County’s Underutilized Site Inventory. This inventory was made available on the County’s website and listed commercial and industrial structures with re-use potential. The County’s inventory was part of the countywide economic development initiatives to pursue redevelopment options first instead of new construction. The Nittany Valley municipalities and elected officials were proactive and forthcoming with information so the Nittany Valley’s portion of the inventory grew very quickly. In 2015, under direction from the Centre County Chamber of Business and Industry, the Underutilized Site Inventory transitioned into the Centre County Site Finder. The inventory broadened to include both underused structures and vacant lots available for development. As part of the region’s comprehensive plan update, the municipalities again provided building and land information for the Centre County Site Finder.

DATA As of May 2016, there are 15 structures with reuse potential and 83 developable lots in the Nittany Valley Region. These sites can be viewed online at <http://gissites.co.centre.pa.us/java/CCSiteFinder>. The site is maintained by the County’s GIS Office and is linked to the Chamber of Business and Industry’s website <http://www.cbicc.org>.

- GOALS**
- (1) *Provide opportunities for new business locations or locations for existing businesses that are expanding.*
 - (2) *Reuse and redevelop vacant and partially vacant properties to increase the local tax base, utilize existing infrastructure, and practice in-fill development.*

IMPLEMENTATION Check off all actions towards completing implementation.

- | | | |
|----------------|---|--|
| ACTIONS | ✓ | Continue to inventory vacant/abandoned properties and industrial/business park lots for listing on the Centre County Site Finder. |
| | ✓ | Inform the Centre County Planning and Community Development Office (CCPCDO) when a property becomes available or should be removed. |
| | ✓ | Provide at minimum basic information (owner’s name, location, address, etc.) to CCPCDO staff. |
| | ✓ | Offer feedback to the CCPCDO regarding the Centre County Site Finder, such as search parameters, page navigation and extracting data. |
| | ✓ | Use the Site Finder as a tool when working with businesses interested in expansion or relocation. |

HIGHWAY COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

ISSUE	Franchise and strip mall commercial is best suited along major highway corridors where related activities (traffic congestion, storage/warehousing facilities, promotional signage, etc.) can be accommodated.
BACKGROUND	The 2004 Regional Comprehensive Plan addressed the need in creating multiple commercial zoning districts (Chapter XI, Future Land Use, page 210). The need for more commercial zones is to not only preserve the historic character of Bellefonte’s central business district but also to allow commercial opportunities to develop in the townships. The completion of Interstate 99 opened access to available lands and increased visibility at key interchanges. Because the townships had available lands near the interstate, officials could better define what types of businesses could locate there. This approach allows a degree of business clustering and industry focus.
DATA	Addressed and inventoried in the 2004 Regional Comprehensive Plan with referenced pages: Highway Commercial Zone (page 218); Interchange Commercial Zone (page 220); and Regional Commercial Zone (page 221).
GOALS	<p>(1) <i>Support the establishment and expansion of appropriate and/ or targeted businesses in the highway commercial zones to spur regional economic development in a “context sensitive design”.</i></p> <p>(2) <i>Reduce planning and construction costs by revising zoning ordinance language with more flexible standards for site improvements like parking and landscaping.</i></p>

IMPLEMENTATION Check off all actions towards completing implementation.

ACTIONS	<input type="checkbox"/>	Review the current uses allowed in the commercial zones.
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Research and identify business types that the region would like to target.
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Determine if these businesses fit with current zoning and, <i>if not</i>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Amend zoning to include targeted businesses types as permitted and/ or conditional uses, depending on the commercial zoning district.

	<input type="checkbox"/>	Review standards for items such as parking and landscaping.
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Research and prepare scenarios for adjustments to parking spaces and incorporating landscaping into storm water facilities.
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Determine which adjustments best fit the future land use and economic development goals.
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Revise zoning language to reflect these scenarios.

MARKETING THE REGION

ISSUE The Nittany Valley Region needs to market its quality of life amenities to attract prospective businesses in order to diversify local goods and services, and sell the skills and knowledge of the regional labor force to create new employment opportunities.

BACKGROUND The Nittany Valley Joint Planning Commission (NVJPC) discussed marketing the region as part of the ten-year comprehensive plan review process in late 2015. While the NVJPC recognized county-wide marketing efforts by the Chamber of Businesses and Industry, commission members desired to promote the Nittany Valley independent of other agency's efforts. In turn, products and/ or promotional materials developed by the NVJPC could be delivered to these other agencies as part of county-wide marketing to attract out-of-county businesses.

DATA The Nittany Valley Region is the second fastest growing area in the County after the Centre Region. Between 2000 and 2010, Nittany Valley's population grew 15.8% (U.S. Census Bureau's Decennial Census, Table DP-01). Labor force participation rates among adults age 16 and over have historically been higher on average than the County's rate by as much as ten percent (Nittany Valley Region Fact Sheet, <http://www.centrecountypa.gov/DocumentCenter/View/1639>). Home prices have remained relatively stable (Centre County Realtors Association, <http://ccarinc.realtor>) and additional workforce housing was constructed (<http://bellefontemews.rentpmi.com>); these factors make the Nittany Valley a more affordable region in which to live. Three (3) industrial/business parks offer local tax abatement status under the Commonwealth's Keystone Opportunity and Innovation Zone efforts: Penn Eagle Industrial Park, Benner Commerce Park, and Titan Energy Park (<http://www.titanenergypark.com>). The Bellefonte Area School District (<http://www.basd.net>) and the Central Pennsylvania Institute (CPI) of Science and Technology (<http://www.cpi.edu>) continue a close working relationship to coordinate efforts for current high school students enrolled in vocational programs.

GOAL *Develop ready-to-go marketing material that highlight (1) the school district and CPI, (2) labor force educational attainment and occupations, (3) housing options, (4) recreation and leisure, and (5) available buildings and land.*

IMPLEMENTATION Check off all actions towards completing implementation.

ACTIONS	
	Determine what method and/ or manner of delivery is most appropriate (hard copy brochure, electronic brochure, website, etc.) for marketing purposes.
	Discuss and receive input from partners and let the partners provide data if available.
	Compile draft marketing material for review.
	Finalize material with guidance from partners.
	Post and/ or place final marketing material at the appropriate location.

LAND DEVELOPMENT REVIEW PROCESS

ISSUE Land development activity (and thus related economic activity) may be deterred due to a lengthy land development plan approval timeline and a review process that is perceived as complicated.

BACKGROUND Section V of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (<http://mpc.landuselawinpa.com/MPCCode.pdf>) outlines provisions for the jurisdiction, contents, timeline and enactment of a subdivision and land development plan review process. The MPC grants the agency performing the review (either municipal or county) up to a 90-day process. In that time frame, the developer submits the plan, acquires permits and letters, and awaits final approval from the planning commission. However, the MPC also grants flexibility in the time frame so that an agency can set realistic deadlines if there are delays from the permitting organizations or companies which provide letters. A 3-month timeline (90 days) for land development plan approval is viewed as both lengthy and costly. The County, the Chamber of Business and Industry, and other agencies have explored an expedited review process timeline for Berks County, Pennsylvania. Berks County’s Joint Express Approval Process (JEAP) contains adaptable steps that are MPC compliant and reduce the plan approval process timeline.

DATA More on Berks County’s JEAP is available at the Greater Reading Economic Partnership (<http://www.greaterreading.com>). The County’s Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance is available at <https://pa-centrecounty.civicplus.com/index.aspx?NID=635>.

- GOALS**
- (1) *Expedite the land development review process by truncating the timeline for approval.*
 - (2) *Remove inconsistencies between Municipality’s and the County’s land development process.*

IMPLEMENTATION Check off all actions towards completing implementation.

ACTIONS		Review the land development approval process timelines for the Municipalities and the County.
		Determine which approval steps can take place more concurrently or could be truncated.
		Compile draft timeline approval scenarios for discussion.
		Formalize an adjusted land development approval process timeline.

		Review and compare land development standards for the Municipalities and the County.
		Determine which standards can be adjusted, updated, or regulated under zoning to prevent inconsistencies.
		Compile updated land development regulations for discussion.
		Formalize more consistent development standards between the County and the Municipalities.

Step 1. Pre-Submission Meeting

Attendees: applicant/developer, consultant, municipal engineer, municipal zoning officer, County Conservation District, PennDOT, Planning Staff.

Purpose: Developer introduces project. Attendees assist developer to ensure they have all necessary information to move project through as quickly as possible.

Step 2. Plan Submission to County

When: Plans typically submitted the 1st Thursday of every month for consideration at next month's Planning Commission meeting.

Timeframe: The County has 90 days in accordance with state law from the next Planning Commission meeting to approve the plan.

Process: Staff reviews the plan and submits comments to the applicant's agent within the timeframe. Allows applicant's agent time to address any plan deficiencies and acquire required permits.

Step 3. County Planning Subcommittee Review

Attendees: Members of the Planning Commission and, the applicant/developer and their consultants are encouraged to attend.

Purpose: Informal review to address any issues and submit comments before the plan is reviewed at the Planning Commission meeting.

Timeframe: Comments are typically forwarded to consultant in 1-2 days.

Permit approvals:

- Water authority
- Sewer authority
- PA Department of Environmental Protection
- Township: Zoning, engineer, storm water, and other ordinances, if applicable
- PennDOT

This is not an all inclusive list.

Step 4. County Planning Commission Approval

Purpose: Formal review by the Commission covers all plan requirements and outlines any deficiencies the developer must address. These deficiencies may be missing items on the plan or required permit approvals not obtained from agencies outside Centre County jurisdiction.

Results: The Planning Commission can vote to grant final approval, conditional final approval, or can table the plan until all deficiencies are corrected.

Submission Checklist

- Completed application form, signed by applicant or authorized agent
- Processing Fee Payment (Plan and Sewage Planning Modules review)
- Appropriate number of plan prints
- Sanitary sewage disposal report
- DEP sewage planning module (draft)
- Approval notice from the municipal zoning officer
- Letters of intent to provide utility

- services
- Private right-of-way and/or utility easement documents (draft)
- Memorandum of Understanding for construction of required improvements/Payment of municipal engineer's fees
- Engineering details
- Deed restrictions/protective covenants (draft)
- Owners Association Agreement (draft)

- Improvement surety package (draft)
- PennDOT review (traffic study, highway occupancy permit, or municipal requirements)
- Postal service review

This is only an example of items required upon plan submission. Please contact the Centre County Planning and Community Development Office prior to any land development/subdivision activities to ensure county ordinance compliance and assistance.

AGRIBUSINESS COMMUNITY

ISSUE Agriculture as a primary industry and in the form of ag-related products and services is a complex and diverse community that adds value to the local economy yet, is not always fully supported because agribusiness community linkages are misunderstood.

BACKGROUND The 2004 Regional Comprehensive Plan listed a goal for Marion and Walker Townships to encourage rural businesses (Chapter II, Community Development Goals, page 7). We return to this idea with updated Agricultural Census data and a countywide driven-effort to assess the needs of and provide support to the Agribusiness Community. A better understanding of the Community’s components and interrelationships will help local officials determine what measures should be taken to support Agribusinesses.

DATA Agricultural production takes form in the number of farms and farm products generated, inputs to farms, and businesses that process farm products. Agricultural consumption focuses on delivering food to consumers. Farm preservation is an important tool to supporting agricultural production (protecting the “food source”). Centre County ranks 21st among the state’s 67 counties in the number of farms and, to date, nearly 5,000 acres are in permanent agriculture easements. Farms in permanent easements were initially enrolled in an agricultural security area (ASA). The ASA program is a cooperative effort between the municipality and the landowner to recognize and allow standard farm practices without restriction from nuisance ordinances.

PRODUCTION AGRICULTURE ECONOMY 2012		CONSUMPTION AG EMPLOYMENT 2012/ % of all Ag Employment	
Total Farms	1,146	Food service/drinking places	5,483 (63%)
Total Sales (\$1,000)	\$91,581	Food/beverage stores	1,614 (18%)
Farm Labor Payroll (\$1,000)	\$9,253	Grocery/Food wholesalers	38 (0.4%)
PRODUCTION AG EMPLOYMENT 2012/ % of all Ag Employment		Total Consumption Employment	7,135 (82%)
Farm employment	1,262 (14%)	8,737 Total Agriculture-Related Jobs	
Forestry/Logging	30 (0.3%)		
Ag/forestry support	68 (0.8%)		
Food manufacturers	183 (2%)		
Wood product manufacturers	59 (0.7%)		
Total Production Employment	1,602 (18%)		

GOALS

- (1) *Support agriculture and ag-related businesses in many forms that benefits both producers and consumers.*
- (2) *Continue to participate in the Agricultural Security Areas Program.*

IMPLEMENTATION Check off all actions towards completing implementation.

ACTIONS		<p>Explore activities that encourage agriculture including agritourism, food cooperatives and farmers’ markets, linking producers to local culinary, and agribusiness services.</p> <p>Assess if the activity is suited and if it should be developed, retained, or expanded.</p> <p>Identify and employ what action supports the activity (allowed use in zoning, networking, etc.)</p>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	<input type="checkbox"/>	

BROADBAND INTERNET

ISSUE The lack of broadband internet services to parts of the Nittany Valley Region inhibits economic development because access to information is vital for business start-ups and expanding companies, government and education, and households.

BACKGROUND The 2004 Plan addressed Telecommunications Technology with the goal to “explore the development of telecommunications technology (including broadband) as a means of serving economic development” (Chapter IX, Public Utilities, pages 158 and 159). The Planning Commission returned to this conversation because there are areas of Nittany Valley still not adequately served by broadband internet.

DATA The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) defines broadband as the speed at which data is transferred with an internet connection, measured in megabytes per second (Mbps). The FCC changed the measurable threshold speed in 2015 to 25Mbps download speed and 3 Mbps upload speed. Redefining the threshold not only set a new industry standard but it also removed large geographic areas in Centre County from broadband status. As more devices become “internet” enabled and more internet-enabled devices are connected to a network, the likelihood of the FCC changing the speed definition again is very possible. For more information regarding internet technology types and coverage areas, please refer to the Communications and Information Technology Chapter of Centre County’s Comprehensive Plan.

- GOALS**
- (1) Consider using the internet network services of the KINBER fiber optic line that is located in Nittany Valley, if deemed financially feasible and sustainable with enough partners.
 - (2) Determine municipal-level tools to expand telecommunications infrastructure to “future proof” the needed broadband capacity for the region.

IMPLEMENTATION Check off all actions towards completing implementation.

- ACTIONS**
- Inventory** and **map** the location of potential partners in that would benefit from using KINBER services (education, government, public safety, industry) in proximity to the fiber optic line.
 - Reach out** to and **discuss** with the KINBER representatives viable options to gain a connection, at a point of service pole.
 - Open discussions** with potential partners to gage their interest and level of commitment.
 - Work** with KINBER representatives to study the feasibility of gaining access to the network.

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- Review** land development requirements to determine if these regulations make provisions for expanding infrastructure, such as underground conduit in new developments.
 - Review** zoning ordinances to determine if they make provisions to address telecommunications infrastructure, such as the distributed antennae systems.

KEYSTONE OPPORTUNITY PROGRAMS

ISSUE Establishing new or extending existing Keystone Opportunity Programs in the Nittany Valley would increase the Region’s marketability by providing tax reduction and/or tax credits to businesses at various stages of development.

BACKGROUND Keystone Opportunity Zones (KOZ) and Keystone Opportunity Expansion Zones (KOEZ) are geographic areas that can provide specific state and local tax benefits. The goal of the KOZ/KOEZ program is to revive economically distressed urban and rural communities with one of the most powerful market-based incentives – eliminating taxes. Pennsylvania businesses relocating to a KOZ/KOEZ must either: Increase their full-time employment by 20% within the first full year of operation, or make a 10% capital investment in the KOZ/KOEZ property based on their prior year’s gross revenues. Eligibility for benefits is based upon annual certification. In order to receive benefits, any entity applying must be compliant with all local and state taxes and building and zoning codes. The tax benefits available under KOZ and KOEZ programs may be available through Dec. 31, 2020. The Keystone Innovative Zone (KIZ) is an incentive program based on tax credits. Similar to a KOZ/KOEZ, there is a defined geography but the eligibility requirements are different. For-profit business entities 1) located within the geographic boundaries of a particular KIZ, 2) in operation less than 8 years, 3) operating within one of the KIZ targeted industry segments or sectors, 4) and meeting any other requirements as specified by the PA Department of Community and Economic Development. The KIZ Tax Credit must first be applied against the KIZ company’s own tax liability under Articles III (Personal Income Tax), IV (Corporate Net Income Tax), or VI (Capital Stock – Franchise Tax) of the Pennsylvania Tax Reform Code of 1971. Unused KIZ Tax Credits may applied against the tax liability of the KIZ company for up to five years from date the KIZ Tax Credit is issued or may be reassigned/sold to another taxpayer.

DATA To date, three Nittany Valley locations are in a Keystone Opportunity Program: (1) Titan Energy Park, KOEZ; (2) Penn Eagle Industrial Park (KIZ); and (3) four lots in the Benner Commerce Park.

- GOALS**
- (1) *Encourage the expansion of the KIZ geography for Benner Commerce Park by recommending inclusion of all lots.*
 - (2) *Identify other locations in close proximity to key transportation corridors and supporting infrastructure that should be considered for future zones.*

IMPLEMENTATION Check off all actions towards completing implementation.

- ACTIONS**
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|--|---|
| | Inventory and map potential locations including the existing businesses that would benefit from a KOZ or KIZ designation. |
| | Work with the Regional KOZ and KIZ Coordinators to determine the feasibility of either new zones or expanded zones. |
| | Discuss and determine if moving forward with a KOZ/KIZ application is viable. |
| | Seek assistance from the KOZ/KIZ Coordinators to move designation process forward. |

IMPLEMENTATION

REFERENCES

Nittany Valley Region Comprehensive Plan 2004. Available online at <https://pa-centrecounty.civicplus.com/DocumentCenter/View/373>.

Economic Development Chapter of the Centre County Comprehensive Plan Phase II. Available online at <http://www.centrecountypa.gov/index.aspx?nid=212>.

Issue	Responsible Party	Status
Vacant and Abandoned Properties	All Municipalities	C
Highway Commercial Zoning	All Municipalities	N
Marketing the Region	All Municipalities	N
Land Development Review Process	Bellefonte Borough, Benner and Spring Townships and coordination from Centre County	N
Agribusiness Community	Benner, Marion and Walker Townships	N
Broadband Internet	All Municipalities	N
Keystone Opportunity Programs	Bellefonte, Benner, Spring	N

N = Not started O = on going C = complete

NOTES

The Planning Commission provided underutilized site information in 2016