# Pottstown, PA

**POTTSTOWN, PA**

ULI ADVISORY SERVICES

**OCTOBER 20-25, 2019**

# About the Urban Land Institute

**ULI Mission**: to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide

- A multi-disciplinary membership organization with more than 45,000 members in private enterprise and public service

- What the Urban Land Institute does:
  - Conducts Research
  - Provides a forum for sharing of **best practices**
  - Writes, edits, and publishes **books** and **magazines**
  - Organizes and conducts **meetings**
  - Directs outreach programs
  - Conducts **Advisory Service Panels**



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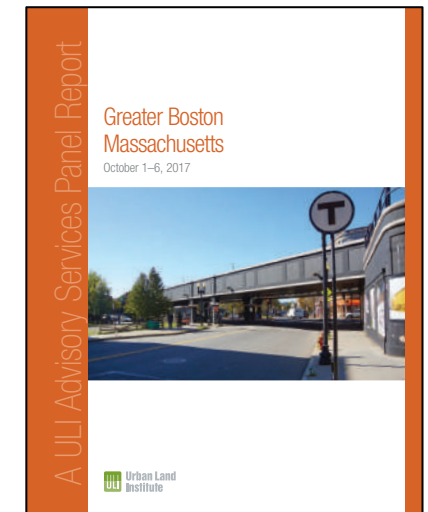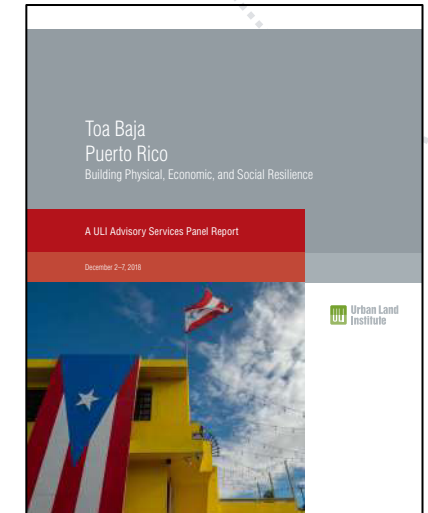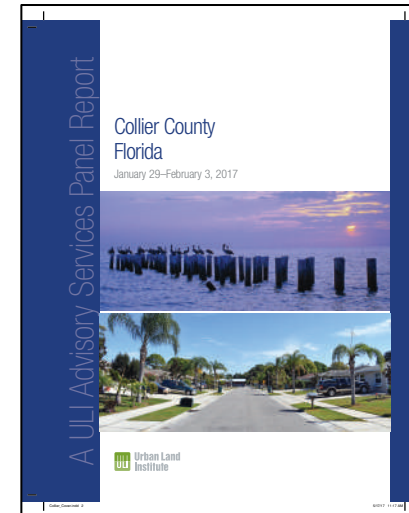
# ADVISORY SERVICE PANELS

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# ULI Panelists and Staff

Selected for their subject matter expertise to provide **objective, volunteer** recommendations

**Mike Higbee (Panel Chair)**

Vice President, Economic Development and Community Resiliency

Thomas P. Miller and Associates

**Brittany Campagna**

President

Inner City Investments

**James Hardy**

Deputy Mayor, Integrated Development, Chief of Staff

City of Akron

**Jeremy Hurlbutt, AICP**

Master Planner

Prince George's County Planning Department

**Emma Littlejohn**

President

emma + co

**Donna Schumacher**

Architect

Donna Schumacher Architecture

**Kyle Talente**

Vice President & Principal

RKG Associates, Inc.

## ULI Staff

***Deb Kerson Bilek***

*Vice President, Advisory Services*

***Kelsey Steffen***

*Director, Advisory Services*

***Carly Bushong***

*Director, Meeting & Events*

## ULI Project Writer

***Rebecca Gale***

*Journalist*

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# Panel Charge

- Catalytic Projects
- Comprehensive Strategy for Job Enabling
- Financing and Implementation Strategies for Success
- Craft a Dynamic Housing Strategy for Current Residents and the Regional Workforce

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# It is Clear that Pottstown:

- Is not shrinking from the difficult hand it has been dealt
- Has the leadership to make great things happen
- Has limited in local resources given job at hand
- Must be efficient and focused in order to address key priorities and make measurable progress



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# Essential Tasks

- Improve, upgrade, and build new Infrastructure

- Prepare residents for living wage jobs

- Invest in education

- Stabilize, renovate, and diversify housing stock

- Clearly define role as a regional hub

# In Order to Accomplish, Pottstown must:

- Engage

- Plan

- Focus

- Organize

- Partner

- Innovate



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*"Cities need old buildings so badly it is probably impossible for vigorous streets and districts to grow without them.... for really new ideas of any kind—no matter how ultimately profitable or otherwise successful some of them might prove to be—there is no leeway for such chancy trial, error and experimentation in the high-overhead economy of new construction. Old ideas can sometimes use new buildings. New ideas must use old buildings."*

- Jane Jacobs, Sociologist
Famous for citizen-led and grassroots planning

Fredericksburg, VA
(Population 19,500)

Frederick, MD
(Population 52,200)

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Mission and Cohesion

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# Creating a Cohesive Mission

Challenge

- The Borough of Pottstown lacks a unified vision for economic development directly reflecting needs of residents
- The political leadership, institutional stakeholders, and residents are not operating under one mission driving the borough to reach economic success or create a cohesive identity to shape itself to become "the primary hub of the region"

As a result:

- Key stakeholders are unable to effectively execute a coordinated approach
- Lack of basic organizational infrastructure guiding leadership initiatives

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# Creating a Cohesive Mission

Goal 1: Create a clear, cohesive mission reflecting the economic development needs of the community encompassing both community input and buy-in

**Recommendation:** Create a formal process to gather local borough data as well as establish mission, and receive resident and key stakeholder input

- Employ an outside institution to generate-needs assessment

- Target Business and institutions that generate desirability to live, work, and invest in Pottstown

- Task PAID to organize groups that directly reflects the community voice, political leadership, and institutional stakeholders



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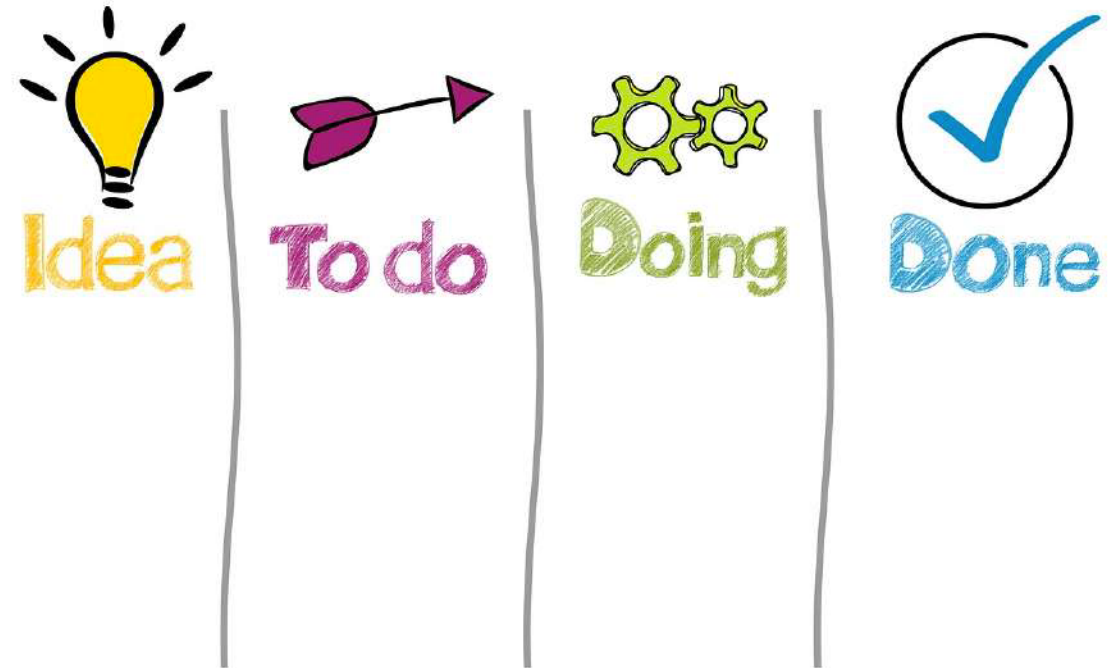
# Creating a Cohesive Mission

Goal 2: Establish Pottstown's role in the region by understanding its market reach and identify three economic pillars to build upon

By doing so, this will shape the direction of the steering committee to execute the vision

**Recommendation:** Understand the realistic market potential

Begin at identifying and fully leveraging assets

- Analyze the socioeconomics, real estate markets, and market competitiveness

- Create attainable, actionable, and measurable goals for desired outcomes

- Determine what is viable and feasible within the borough



S M A R T

Specific   Measurable   Attainable   Relevant   Time Based

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# Creating a Cohesive Mission

Goal 3: Connect the mission with the market

**Recommendation:** Make the mission a tangible plan

- Create a plan that addresses specific community desire through specific actions that dovetail the vision with what is attainable

- Align the mission with the community

- Seek public, private, partnership for those development projects where market reality and community vision are not aligned
  - Regulatory changes
  - Financial investments
  - Utilization of public assets

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# Creating a Cohesive Mission

Let's look at other plans… Elkhart, Indiana

- Economy (late 1800's): manufacturing

- Implement a Vibrant Community Action Agenda. Prioritized projects, policy, and program

- Designed downtown communities that are walkable and nested in desirable amenities generating a new cultural experience

- Built technological infrastructure attracting a growing skilled workforce
  - Public transportation & diversified housing
  - Creative educational opportunities
  - Familial support systems

- Celebrated their environmental assets

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# Economic Development

rehabilitating

# Economic Development

Data Collection

- **Challenge:** Economic development decisions are being made with imperfect data.
- **Goal:** Implement procedures to collect, process, and synthesize data to inform decisions
- **Actions:** Collect and maintain
  - Socioeconomic
  - Building and land
  - Real estate market and financial
  - Project/prospect management

# Economic Development

Business Retention and Expansion

- **Challenge:** There are insufficient efforts focused on engaging existing businesses

- **Goal:** Be more proactive in business retention and expansion efforts by providing value-add assistance to companies struggling to succeed, have operational or workforce challenges, or need assistance in expansion

- **Actions:**
  - Implement an annual business survey
  - Establish monthly business retention and expansion (BRE) visit minimums
  - Coordinate with partners (i.e. MCCC) on outreach efforts
  - Provide liaison assistance to businesses that need technical expertise
  - Establish a part-time ombudsman position to assist navigating the Borough's approval and permitting processes

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# Economic Development

## Collaboration

- **Challenge:** Information sharing and collaboration is inconsistent, leading to challenges in messaging and efficient action
- **Goal:** To improve proactive coordination with implementation partners (local, regional, and state) while increasing engagement with the real estate professionals operating in the marketplace
- **Actions:**
  - Quarterly or semi-annual coordination meetings with
    - Economic development colleagues in surrounding municipalities
    - Municipal planning and economic development staff
  - Quarterly networking events for business owners and investors
  - Annual networking event for real estate investors and developers
  - Explore roles for PAID and Hobart's Run to add value to the investors forum

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# Economic Development

Implementation

- **Challenge:** There are several organizations involved in economic development activities with little or no overarching coordination

- **Goal:** To clearly define which entity that is the point of contact and coordinator for all economic development initiatives

- **Actions:**
  - Define PAID, and by proxy the executive director, as the primary point of contact for all business retention, expansion, and recruitment efforts
  - Outreach to all partners and stakeholders to reinforce this decision and establish buy-in
  - Market a communication strategy for partners, existing businesses, and prospective project representatives to direct them to communicate with the PAID executive director on all BRE efforts
  - Have PAID document the primary reasons for choosing (or not choosing) Pottstown as a place to do business

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# Economic Development

Community Engagement

- **Challenge:** Community knowledge and understanding of the purpose and machinations of economic development is inconsistent

- **Goal:** To create a comprehensive, consistent community outreach strategy

- **Actions:**
    - Host annual town hall meetings
    - Disseminate info through social media and other no-cost mediums
    - Create and distribute monthly newsletter that provides updates on economic development events, successes, and challenges
    - Present to 8-10 community groups each year on what economic development is, how it works, and community value
    - Create an informational "Economic Development 101" video
    - Implement a volunteer development program to build capacity in advocates, ambassadors, and mentors
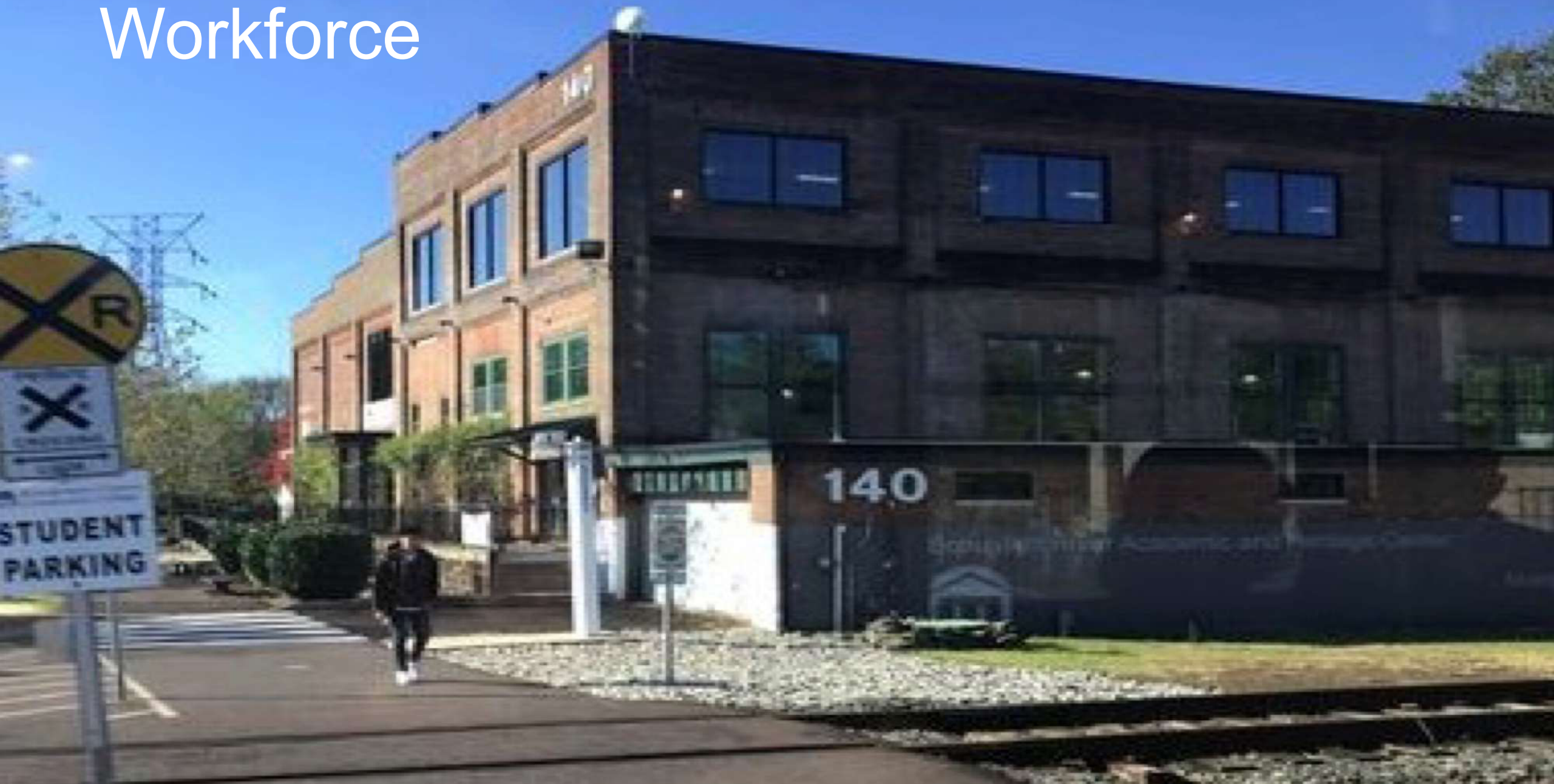
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Workforce

# Workforce

Some Pottstown residents lack the skills to compete for, and fulfill, jobs in the current and future economy

**Challenge:**

- Pottstown's current high school graduation rate sits at 67%, and reading and math proficiency at 55% and 40% respectively (Source: US News and World Reports)

- 2017 American Community Survey shows that 16.3% of residents 18-24 do not have a high school diploma or GED

- That number jumps to 24.4% for males

If the borough is to become an attractive place for business growth. The workforce must be prepared for jobs that increasingly require digital skills and post-secondary training.

It is unlikely that Pottstown will "grow its way out" of this problem. Borough population has been flat for at least a decade, and even with growth in the surrounding region it is not realistic to believe that talent attraction alone will solve this systemic challenge. The good news is that innate talent is not determined by race, gender, or zip code.

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# Workforce

Some Pottstown residents lack the skills to compete for, and fulfill, jobs in the current and future economy

**Goal:** Prioritize Pottstown's most valuable asset – it's people

**Recommendation:** Focus on, and resource, a community-wide, comprehensive workforce initiative

TriCounty Community Network (TCN), led by Holly Parker, has capacity as a backbone organization to this initiative in conjunction with PAID

So far they have identified the following gaps:

- Centralized recruitment, intake, and placement of Pottstown residents into the most appropriate service provider

- Data collection and data sharing

- Job coaching and post-employment services

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# Workforce

Some Pottstown residents lack the skills to compete for, and fulfill, jobs in the current and future economy

**Actions:**

- Support TCN as the backbone organization, in fully developing a workforce initiative complete with clear and discrete goals and metrics

- <u>All</u> providers <u>must</u> be required to work towards said goals and metrics in order to obtain support from local funders and/or TCN

- Such metrics might include bold goals as well as micro-targets

- Decisions like these should be made by collaborating entities through a formal, professionally facilitated process led by TCN

- The initiative should include existing programs and partners such as
    - Pottstown Early Action for Kindergarten Readiness (PEAK)
    - MontCoWorks – Montgomery County Intermediate Unit
    - Non-profit providers
    - Pottstown School District
    - Montgomery County Community College
    - The Hill School
    - Regional employers

- Panelists heard a lack of clear, attainable employment pathways for youth and adults
    - Community should consider the College and Career Academy model

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# Housing

# Housing Challenge

The Pottstown housing stock is difficult to sell and/or rent

- Age
- Deferred maintenance
- Property taxes
- Not a market of choice
- Community perception
- Location
- Infrastucture





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# Housing Strategy

Goal 1: Increase occupancy, decrease vacancy, increase homeownership rate
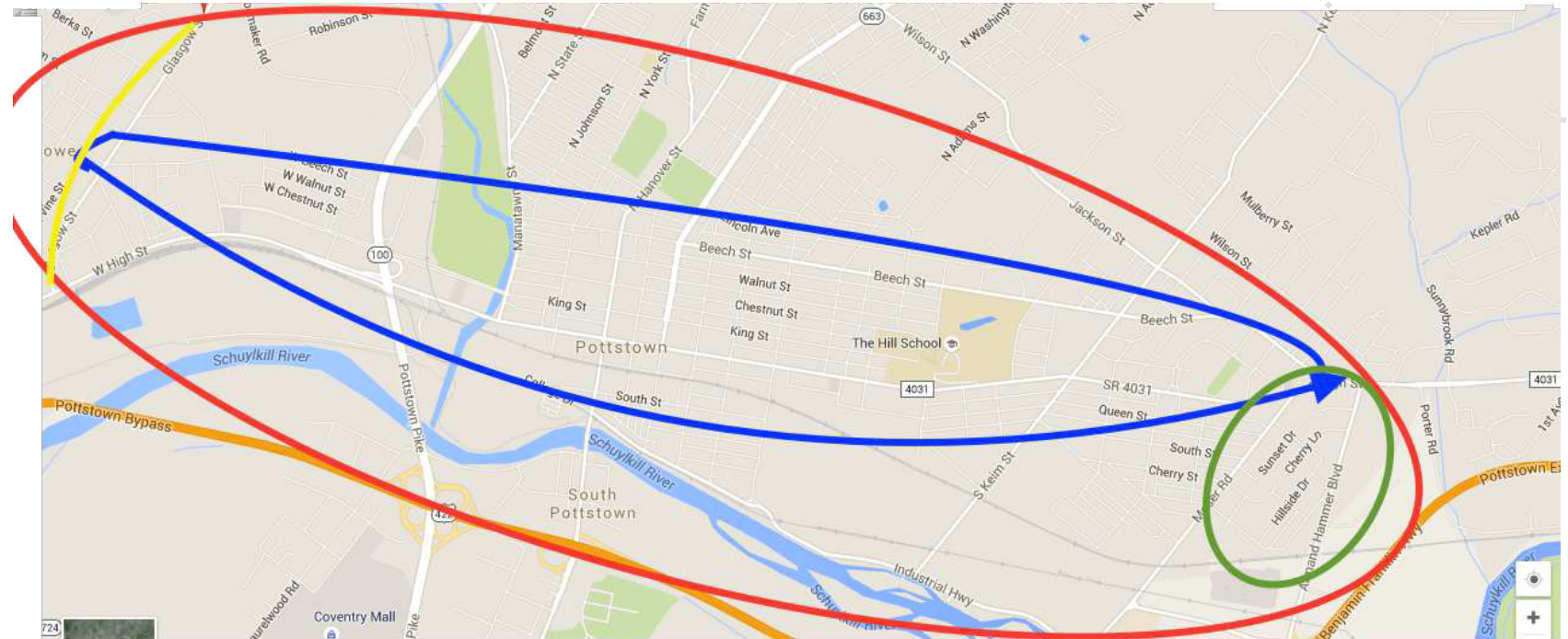
- Housing Inventory Plan
- Historic Properties
- New Construction Opportunities
  - Multifamily Rental Mixed Use
  - Residential  For Sale Condominiums
  - Co-living, SROs, and Community Housing
  - Student housing
- Housing Co Located Services
  - Daycare
  - Grocery center/food co-op, addressing food insecurity and the scarcity of retail grocery options
  - Community and co-working space or other social service options
  - Other nonprofits offering supportive services to residents



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# Housing Strategy

## Goal 2: Grow Housing Inventory

- Mixed use: new and old

- Opportunity Zone development

- Streamline code & inspection process

- Land banks

- Promote affordability



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# Housing Strategy

Goal 3: Create Housing Resource Center

- Resources: showcase the housing and real estate options for Pottstown
    - Housing inventory directory
    - Include market and below-market housing investment opportunities
    - Provide active available rental and for sale options
    - Provide development and redevelopment guideline
    - Represent all housing entities
    - Blighted property – from Borough and Land Banks resources
    - Real estate brokers, both locally and nationally, would be able to access it

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# Housing Strategy

Goal 3: Create Housing Resource Center

- Location
  - Downtown in a high visibility area
  - Comprehensive web site
- Sponsor: Housing Coalition and/or PAID
  - A full-time staff person is required
  - Opportunity for intern program, sponsored by a university, ULI, or other Masters in Real Estate Development (MRED) program

# Housing Strategy

Goal 4: Improve Housing Stock

**Recommendation:** Identify lending partners

- Loan types
  - First time purchasers
  - Live/Work Property specific
  - Owner-Occupied Rental
  - Customized home equity lines
- Land Bank/Community Land Trust
- Downtown Banks
  - Tomkins VIST Bank
  - Wells Fargo
  - Harleysville National Bank
  - National Penn
  - Patriot Bank
  - Fulton



## BB&T, SunTrust And NCRC Announce $60 Billion Community Investment Commitment For New Truist Bank
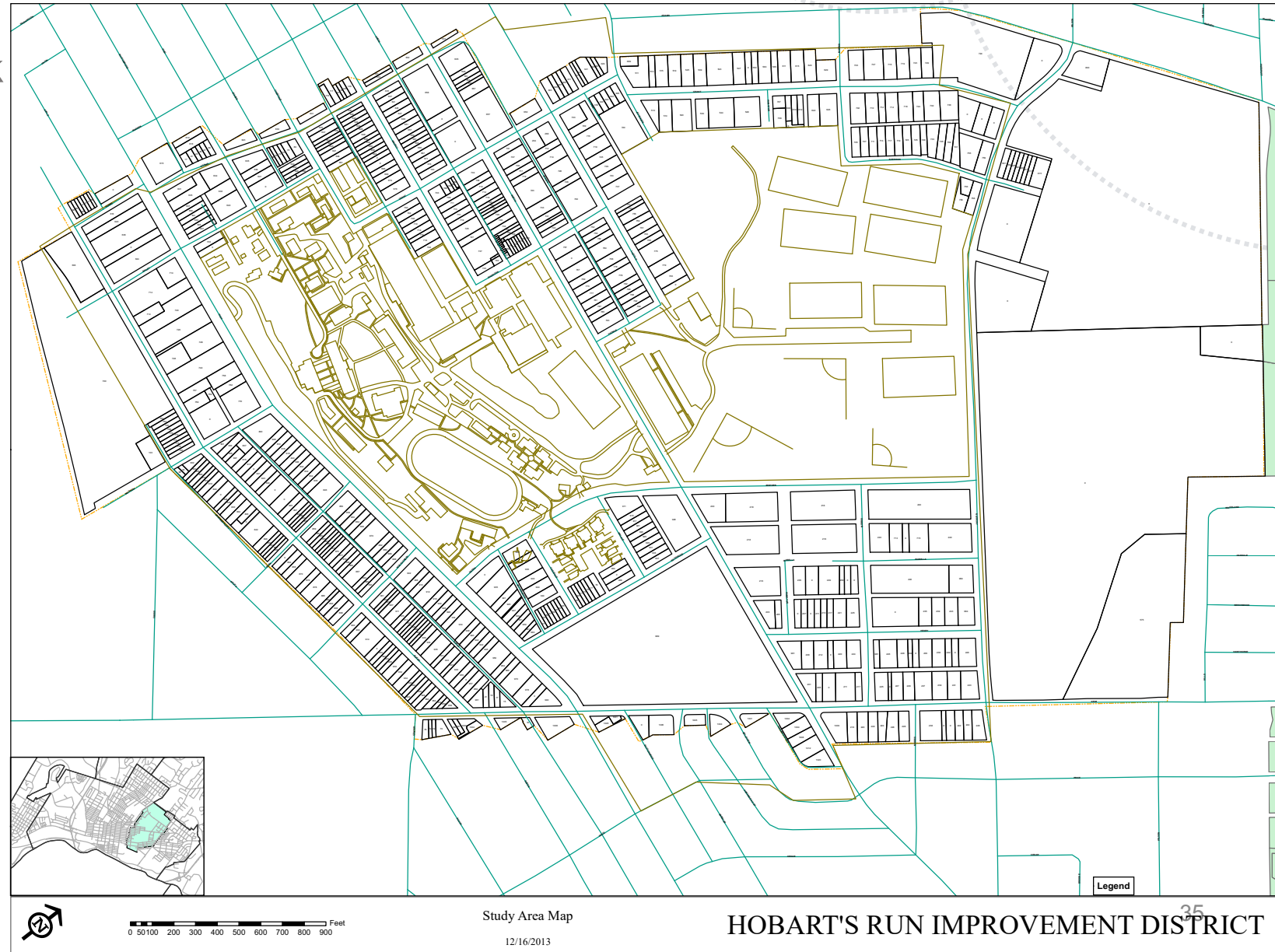
By NCRC / July 16, 2019 / Press Releases

https://ncrc.org/bbt-suntrust-and-ncrc-announce-60-billion-community-investment-commitment-for-new-truist-bank/

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# Housing Strategy

## Goal 4: Improve Housing Stock

**Affordable Housing Organizations**

- Genesis Housing Corporation

- Hobart's Run/The Hill School

- Habitat for Humanity

- Mosaic Community Land Trust

- Aclamo

- Montgomery Housing Authority

- Cluster of Religious Organizations

- The Housing Coalition



Study Area Map

12/16/2013

0 50 100 200 300 400 500 600 700 800 900 Feet

Legend

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HOBART'S RUN IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT

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# Housing Strategy

Goal 5: Identify and diversify funding tools

- Opportunity Zones

- Tax Increment Financing (TIF)

- New Market Tax Credits for housing, job and workforce, and education

- Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) via HUD

- Leverage Montgomery Housing Authority, Genesis Housing Corporation and other housing organizations as partners on developments and financing
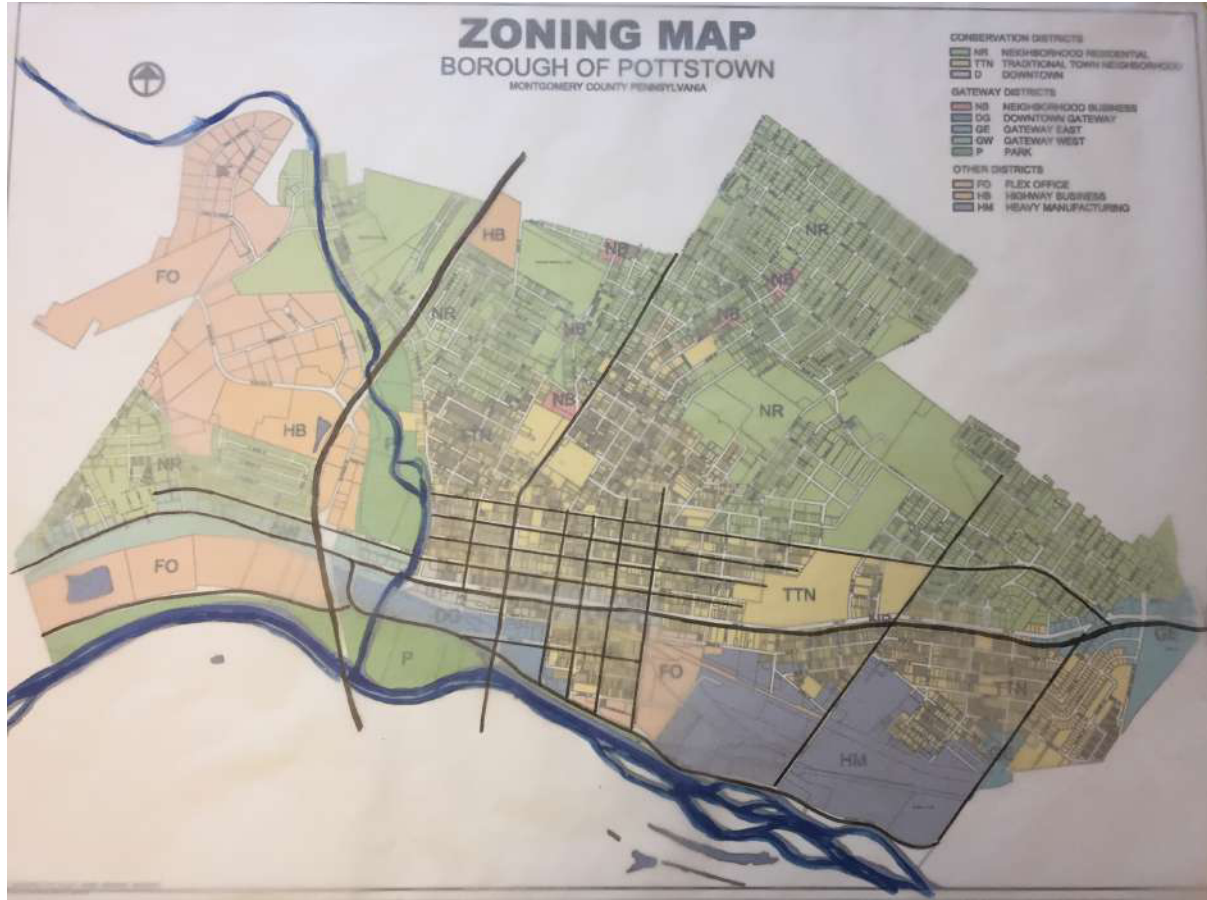
- Section 42 tax credits (federal)



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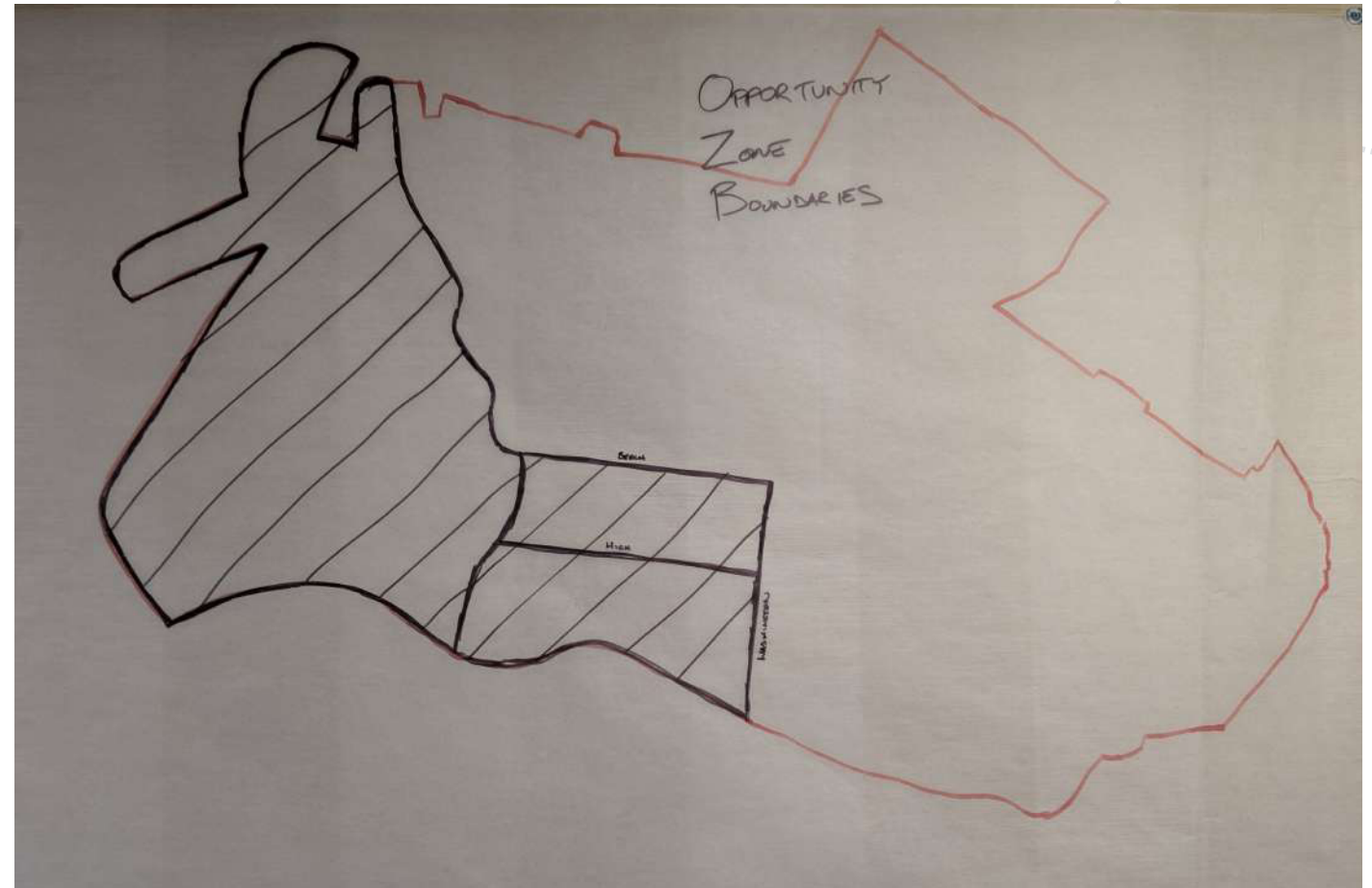
Catalytic Projects

# Catalytic projects

Tasked with identifying a "catalytic, innovative economic development project that jumpstarts growth"
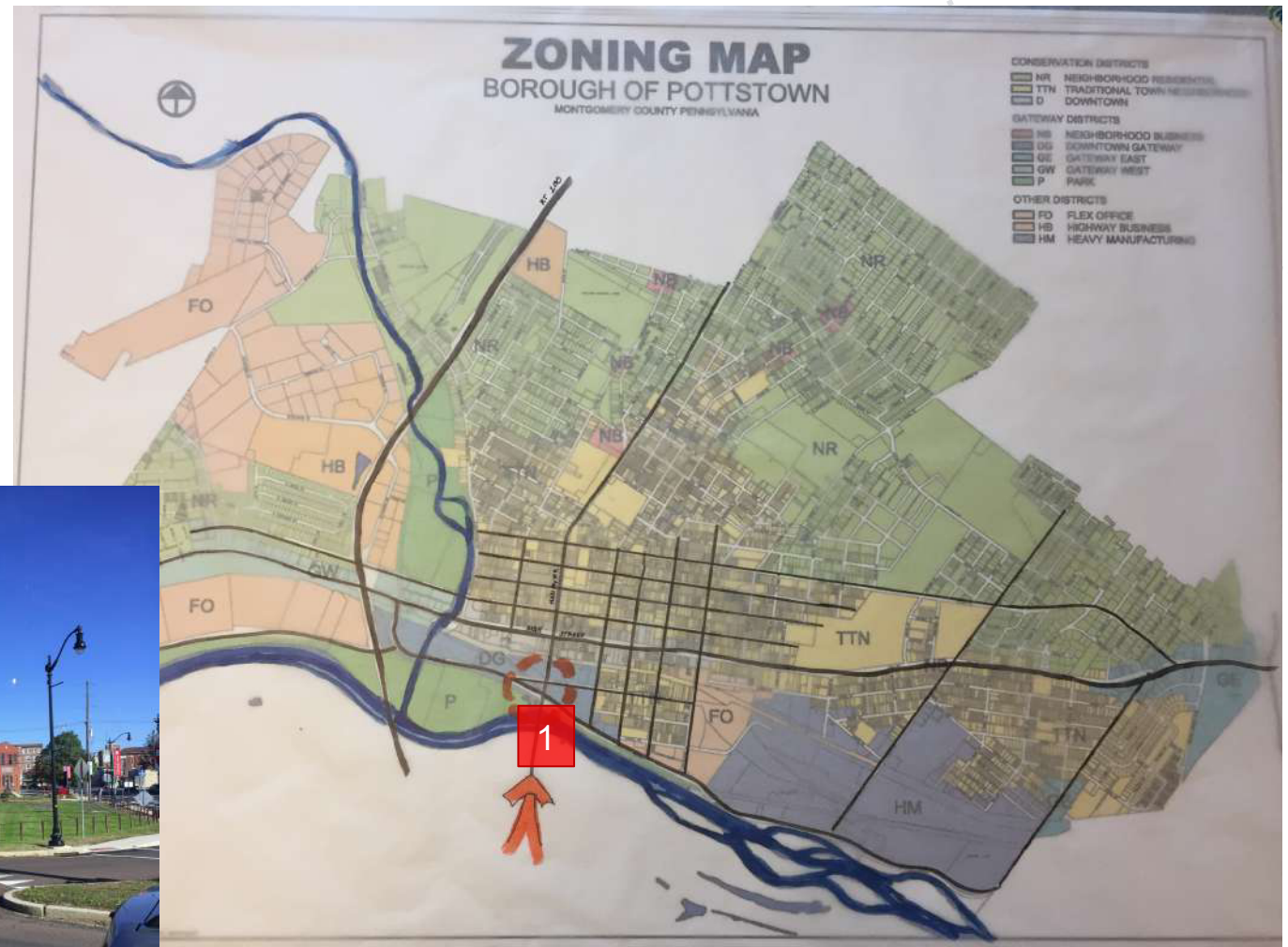


- Strengthen the Downtown through strategic investments
- Entrepreneurial Development
- Enhancing the recreation tourism market
- Utilizing Innovative Financing Tools

# Catalytic Projects
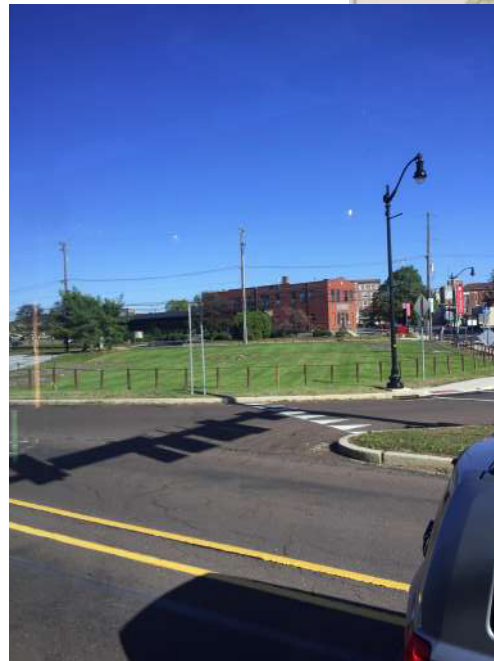
Riverfront Gateway

- Gateway Signage
- Develop Hess Site
- Link Downtown to Riverfront Park and MCC (Montgomery County Community College)



South Shore Riverfront Park, Pittsburgh, PA





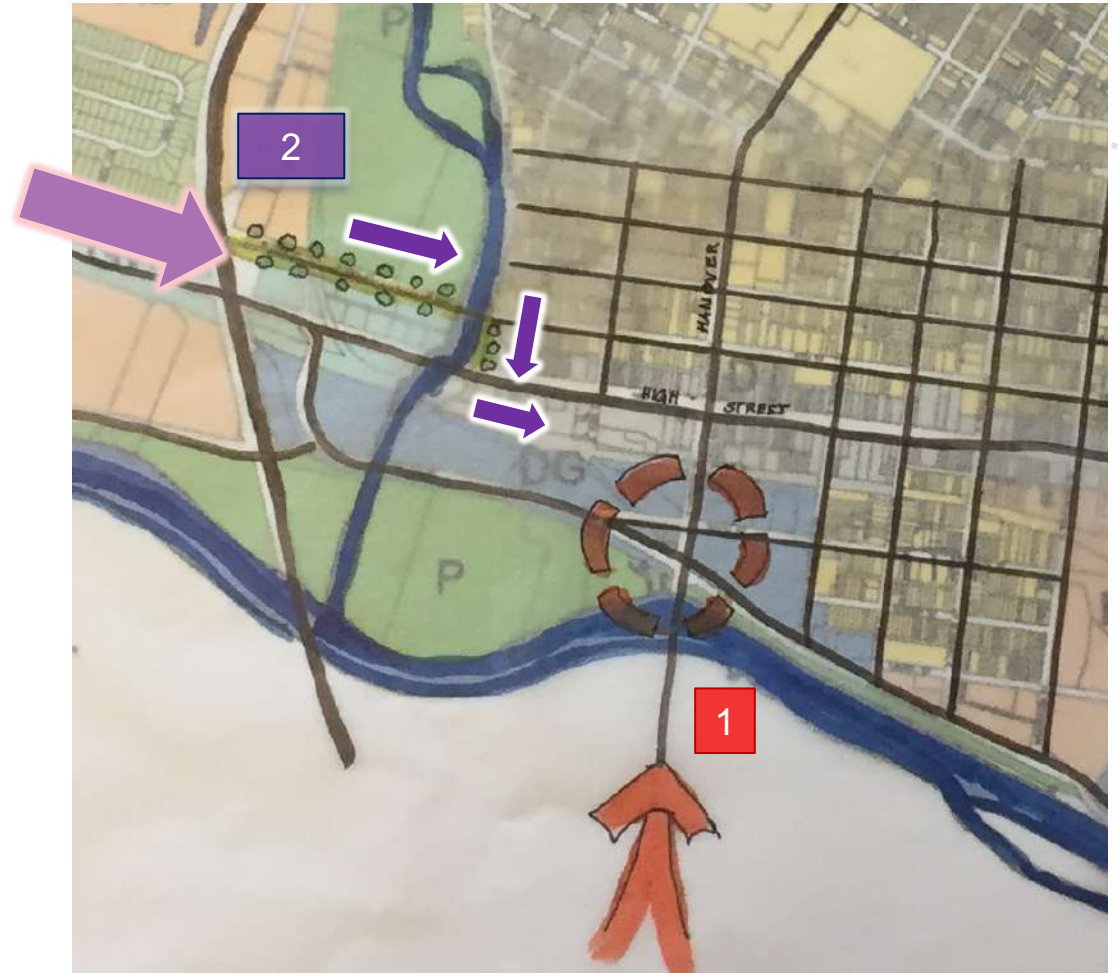**Urban Land Institute**
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# Catalytic Projects

Tourism and Recreation District/Western Gateway

- Develop street scape and pedestrian connection from Route 100 to High Street
  - Gateway Signage
  - Wayfinding Signage
  - Sidewalks



Example of classic architecture, San Francisco, CA

# Catalytic Projects

Tourism and Recreation District/Western Gateway

- Focus development around public and recreation facilities
    - Connection between Memorial and Riverfront Parks
    - Centralized lodging



Eddy Commons,
South Bend, IN

Mill River Park Carousel,
Stamford, CT

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# Catalytic Projects

Enhancing the recreation tourism market

- Sports complex in eastern portion of KEEP site

- Capitalize on Schuylkill River Greenway's master plan

- Connect downtown to the river

Sports Complex,
Erie County, PA

Icehouse
Amphitheater,
Lexington, SC

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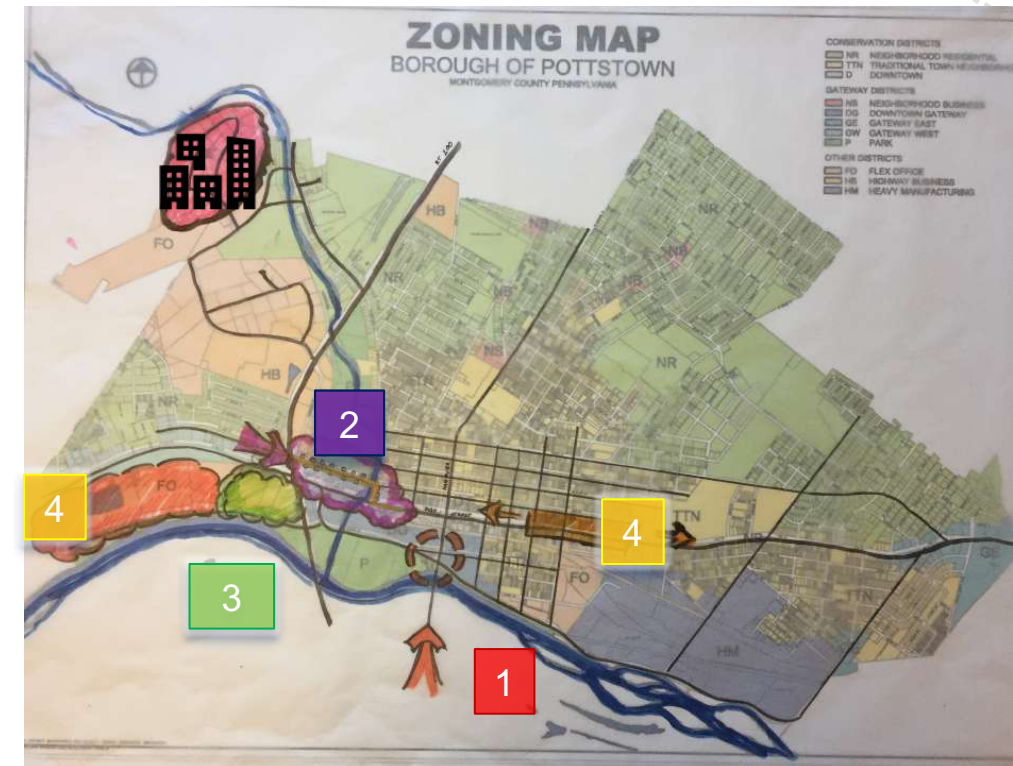
# Catalytic Projects

Long Term Goals

- Explore and be ready to respond to development proposals for the rest of the KEEP site
- Activate the whole High Street Corridor
  - Focus on the 400 block and east to Hospital
  - Connect the gateways
- Continue to support and market the Circle of Progress



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# Catalytic Projects

Entrepreneurial Development

- Start with general entrepreneur program to help see specific target market
- Attract business ideas to establish and flourish in Pottstown
  - Young
  - Minority
- Connect and market to higher education
- Provide physical space for cost and idea sharing
  - Incubator/Co-work
- Develop tool and educate
  - Investor strategy
  - Opportunity zone
  - Establishes Tax Increment Finance (TIF) District around the downtown



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Proactive Marketing

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# Proactive Marketing

**Challenges:**

- Negative perceptions which lead to misrepresentation of the borough to the greater community

- Lack of understanding of assets which leads to lost opportunities and significant assets being overlooked

- Mixed amorphous message which leads to lost traction due to conflicting information and messaging

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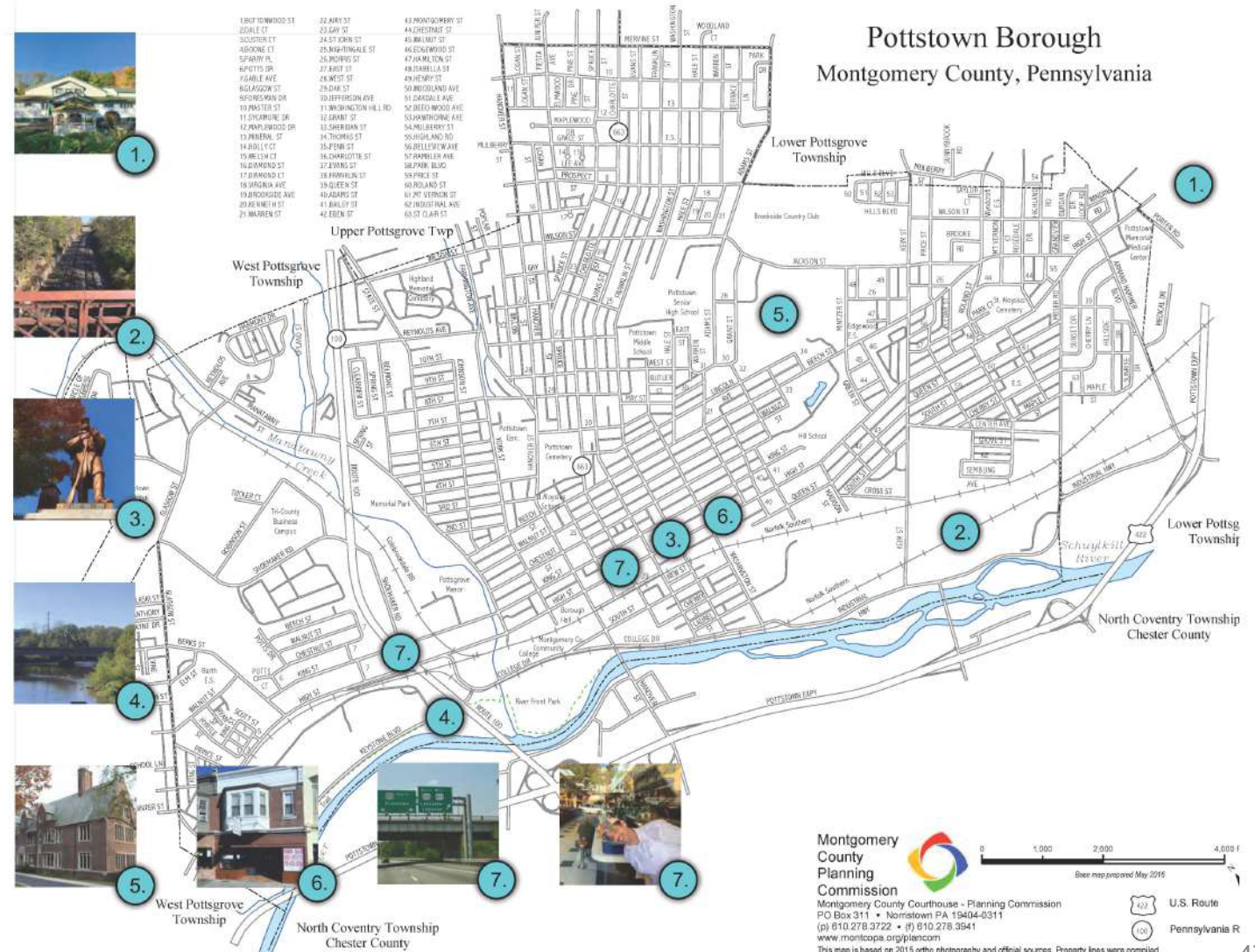# Proactive Marketing

Goal 1: Define a clear concise and unified message which aligns with Pottstown's mission and economic development goals

**Recommendation:**

- Create an asset map

- Define tangible goals with timeline to measure progress

- Periodic review toward alignment with marketing

- Consistent measuring of future opportunities against the brand

# Proactive Marketing

Goal 2: Communicate message to target audience

**Recommendations:**

- Define target audience to align with mission and economic development goals
    - Businesses – to attract future investors
    - Retail – to engage and entice sports and entertainment-based business patrons
    - Community – to inspire and coalesce
    - Residential – to attract new members of the community

- Create formal marketing program
    - Hire professionals to assist with strategies, implementations
    - Align message to target to focused audience
    - Tell your best story, focus a clear and consistent message

- Define media strategy focusing on no-cost mediums
    - Instagram
    - Wikipedia
    - Facebook
    - Twitter
    - LinkedIn



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# Proactive Marketing

Goal 3: Place branding to strengthen and invigorate community resources

**Recommendations:**

- Create prominent markers to easily communicate place-brand in landscape
  - Riverfront Gateway
  - Water Tower
  - TREC
  - Circle of Progress Industrial office center
- Pedestrian scale signage to communicate brand on the streets
  - Banners for Main Street
  - Small scale signs to identify assets
- Coalesce temporary events around brand such as
  - Holiday Lights
  - Go Fourth!
  - Octoberfest



Place branding in Columbus, OH

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Organizational Capacity

Pottstown, PA — October 2019

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# Organization and Capacity

The leadership structure in Pottstown is amorphous, and a culture of silos prevents effective coordination

**Challenge:** It's clear to panelists that the institutional leadership in Pottstown has a collaborative spirit, and that there is a shared desire to seed economic growth and prosperity for the borough. Nevertheless, panelists observed a strong desire to streamline leadership so that decisions can effectively be made and carried out, but also observed a lack of awareness for how to streamline and effectuate decisions. There is a lack of efficiency and effectiveness to decision-making.

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# Organization and Capacity

The leadership structure in Pottstown is amorphous, and a culture of silos prevents effective coordination

**Goal:**

- Empower the institutional leadership of Pottstown to become more effectively organized

**Recommendation:**

- As the designated entity that promotes commercial and industrial development, PAID should remain the lead convener

- In order to embolden leadership, however, panelists recommend leveraging its Board of Directors and increasing staff capacity to achieve greater impact

# Organization and Capacity

The leadership structure in Pottstown is amorphous, and a culture of silos prevents effective coordination

**Actions:**

- Increase staff capacity within specific disciplines
  - Real estate development
  - Development finance
  - Housing
  - Business retention and expansion
  - Research
- Establish transparent accountability metrics for PAID staff, and the organization as a whole, aligned with the strategic recommendations

- Leverage board
  - Add additional voices to the board from housing, workforce, and resident-led entities, ensuring always that the private sector retains a majority of seats
- Establish 5-year growth strategy for PAID
  - Institutional leadership should collectively approach The Wharton School-Philadelphia, Fox School of Business at Temple, or Villanova College of Business and establish a partnership utilizing students/faculty to fill gaps in expertise
  - Plug into ULI Philadelphia member base
  - Establish a vested board through contributions

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# Organization and Capacity

It is hard to do business in Pottstown

**Challenge:**

- Panelists repeatedly heard from stakeholders that currently, it is hard to do business in Pottstown

- This is not intentional

- It's due, in part, to contradictory policies, and a general lack of clarity for which government entity – the Borough, the County, or the State – is responsible for creating and enforcing regulations

- Stakeholders noted onerous inspection processes, significant wait-times for plans and permitting approvals, and an imbalanced enforcement procedure for land-owners and developers



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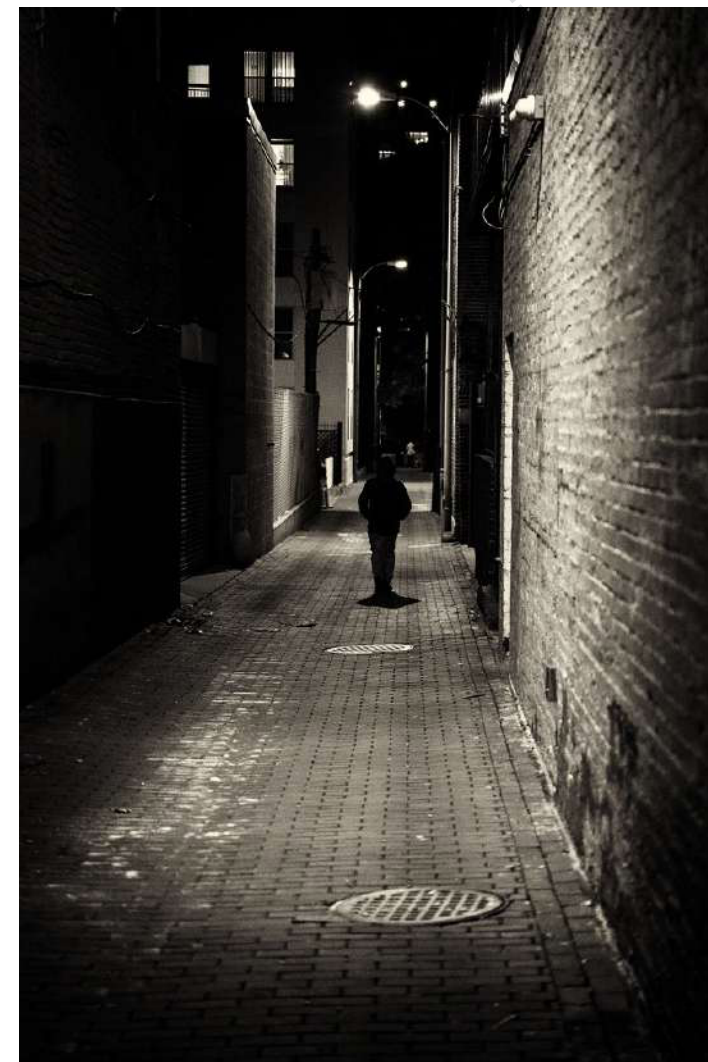
# Organization and Capacity

It is hard to do business in Pottstown

**Goal:**

- Become the Borough of "Yes," offering an efficient and transparent experience to businesses, property owners, and investors

**Recommendation:**

- Continue to eliminate inefficiencies and inconsistencies from Borough plans and permitting process, bring clarity to the all regulations impacting development



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# Organization and Capacity

It is hard to do business in Pottstown

**Actions:**

- Contract with Villanova University faculty to conduct a Lean Six Sigma Kaizen Event, mapping the current plans and permitting process and streamline it

- Consider concurrent review processes, expedited reviews for an upcharge, administrative approval

- Create a development toolkit that maps who to call and how to invest and build in Pottstown

- Hire a development ombudsman

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# Organization and Capacity

Budget challenges and competing interests

**Challenge:**

Many critical anchor institutions in Pottstown are experiencing budget challenges related to meeting their mission. Additionally, panelists heard that the majority of non-profits in the borough compete with each other for the same existing dollars as opposed to bringing new dollars into the community.

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# Organization and Capacity

Budget challenges and competing interests

**Goal:**

- Align available resources to fund critical priorities

**Recommendation:**

- Community must facilitate a hard conversation about their current approaches to funding, where dollars are going, and if they are happy with current outcomes

- Thoughtful, evidence-based recommendations require significant resources

- Tough decisions will need to be made regarding the order in which to tackle them, and how to resource them properly

- It is clear that it will be necessary to redeploy existing funding and resources in order to be successful

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# Organization and Capacity

Budget challenges and competing interests

**Actions:**

- PAID Board of Directors undertakes a transparent process to,
  - Evaluate and prioritize the strategic recommendations contained in this report
  - Evaluate current community-wide resource and funding deployment against those priorities
  - Transform current funding models and redeploy to resource priority initiatives properly

- Aggressively research and apply for external grants to support the priorities
  - Including, but limited to, U.S. Economic Development Agency Office of Innovation and Entrepreneurship, The Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, Commonwealth Financing Authority
- Establish a grants manager position within PAID to facilitate and complete applications
- Consider new development financing methods
  - Tax Increment Financing (TIF); establish a local Opportunity Zone Fund; Pennsylvania Historic Tax Credit Program; Federal Historic Tax Credit Program; establish a local revolving loan fund

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# Summary and Next Steps

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# Back of the Napkin Budget

1st SWAG

KEY ASSUMPTIONS

- Program and Improvements – 1-8 years of expense

- Some Program Expenses –  1X

- Some Program Expenses – Ongoing

- Public and Private Sources to Support up to 8 Year Budget

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# Physical Improvements – Total Estimated - $61,000,000

Local $$s -          $25,010,000

External $$'s -   $35,990,000

# One Time Expenses – Total Estimated - $740,000

Local $$s -          $495,800

External $$s -   $244,200

# On-going Expenses – Total Estimated - $520,000

Local $$s -          $239,200

External $$s -   $280,800

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# An Ambitious Agenda

Consistent with our scope!

- Does not get accomplished overnight
- Community building is a team sport
- We can all learn from others





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# In Summary….

As President and CEO of United Way of Metropolitan Dallas, YPO member Jennifer Sampson as reported by Kevin Daum, Inc – This Morning Newsletter

1. **"We before me" –** Planning and priorities set by "we" superseded those set by "me."

2. **"Change the way things are" –** "A community is a living organism." "It's either declining or improving; there's no steady-state in a community."

3. **"Fail fast; fail forward" –** "There is no silver bullet for any societal problem facing our world today. So we need to try lots of solutions, and some will fail. Fail in the direction of more information. Fail in the direction of informing the community."

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4.  **Embrace discomfort. The impossible is possible –** "Upsetting colleagues and community groups is uncomfortable."

5.  **"To thine own self be true" – "**We build community by being in the community."

6.  **Luck is when preparation meets opportunity –** "Lucky breaks happen when people come together, identify problems together, posit solutions together--and work like crazy to be ready for the opportunity that may come."

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# Finally

On Ignoring the Problem:

*"…That's a failed community on the largest scale. But it's also the possible end game of decades of indifference to the child who reached adulthood unable to read, or the elderly woman who hasn't enough to eat two blocks from a grocery store, or the family who cannot hand off to its next generation a better life than the one they have. I don't want to live in the world with those warning signs as societal markers."*

- Jennifer Sampson, President and CEO of United Way of Metropolitan Dallas

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# Q&A

Thank you!

*https://americas.uli.org/programs/advisory-services/*

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