

CHAPTER 8

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

This chapter provides an overview of the economic and employment characteristics within Muhlenberg Township. A healthy economy provides not only needed goods and services, but also employment opportunities and tax revenues, which pay for public facilities and services. Economic development is fundamentally about enhancing the factors of productive capacity including land, labor, capital, and technology within a municipality or region. By utilizing resources and powers to reduce the risks and costs, which could prohibit investment, the public sector often has been responsible for setting the stage for employment-generating investment by the private sector. The public sector generally seeks to increase incomes, the number of jobs, and the productivity of resources within communities. The tools and strategies associated with effective economic development are vital to enhance a community's labor force, infrastructure, community facilities, economic structure and institutional capacity. This chapter will focus on the abilities to retain and expand economic development opportunities.

A. THE LOCAL ECONOMY

Historically, commercial and industrial growth has been considered vibrant and prosperous within Muhlenberg Township. Until recently, the residents within Berks County and surrounding areas had numerous employment opportunities within Muhlenberg Township. The following chart reflects the composition and ranking of the civilian labor force within Muhlenberg Township.

MUHLENBERG TOWNSHIP CIVILIAN LABOR FORCE COMPOSITION (2000)					
Occupation/Professional Trade	Muhlenberg Total	Muhlenberg Percentage	Muhlenberg Rank	Berks Co. Rank	Pennsylvania Rank
Manufacturing	2,238	27.9 %	1	1	2
Educational, health, social service	1,380	17.2 %	2	2	1
Retail trade	1,054	13.1 %	3	3	3
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodations, food service	513	6.4 %	4	6	5
Finance, insurance, real estate	503	6.3 %	5	5	6
Transportation, warehousing	499	6.2 %	6	8	8
Professional, administrative, scientific, management	498	6.2 %	7	4	4
Construction	396	4.9 %	8	7	7
Other services	296	3.7 %	9	9	9
Wholesale trade	258	3.2 %	10	10	11
Public administration	221	2.8 %	11	11	10
Information	96	1.2 %	12	13	12
Agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting and mining	71	0.9 %	13	12	13
<i>Source: United States Census Bureau, Census 2000</i>					

However, over the past few years the industrial sector has fell upon arduous economic times leaving the municipal tax base of Muhlenberg Township in a state of instability. As indicated in the previous chart, manufacturing has provided employment opportunities to 27.5 percent of residents within the total work force. In 1992, the major industrial employment centers within Muhlenberg Township included Carpenter Technology, Agere Systems, Met-Ed, NGK Metals and Exide Corporation. According to the Occupational Privilege Tax Records supplied by the Berks County Earned Income Tax Bureau, the following chart provides the top 25 employment centers within Muhlenberg Township for the year 2002.

MUHLENBERG TOWNSHIP TOP 25 EMPLOYERS (2002)			
Rank	Employment Center	Occupation/Professional Trade	Employees
1	Agere Systems	Manufacturer: electronics, telecommunications	1,801
2	Tempstar Staffing	Professional: temporary employment services	1,544
3	Met-Ed	Electric utility provider and administration	832
4	Wal-Mart	Retail trade and distribution: miscellaneous items	772
5	Berks County Intermediate Unit	Educational services and administration	677
6	Ancora Capital (Jetsort)	Information services: mail sorting	470
7	Muhlenberg School District	Educational services and administration	373
8	Sealed Air Corp. (Cryovac)	Manufacturer: foamed meat trays	331
9	United States Postal Service	Public Administration: mail delivery service	320
10	Power Packaging	Packaging and distribution: beverages	294
11	Boscov's Department Store	Retail trade and distribution: miscellaneous items	291
12	Carpenter Technology	Manufacturer: specialty steels	274
13	Clover Farms Dairy	Manufacturer: dairy products	272
14	Sam's Club	Retail trade and distribution: miscellaneous items	260
15	Lowe's Reading	Retail trade and distribution: home center	230
16	Elite Sportswear	Manufacturer: gymnastic and skating apparel	221
17	United Parcel Service	Distribution: mail and package delivery service	206
18	Tray-Pak Corporation	Manufacturer: plastic thermal forming	194
19	J C Penny	Retail trade and distribution: miscellaneous items	189
20	K-Mart	Retail trade and distribution: miscellaneous items	169
21	Bachman Company	Manufacturer: snack foods	168
22	Singer Equipment	Distributor: restaurant equipment	155
23	Giorgio Foods (Fresh Pack)	Manufacturer and distributor: mushrooms	120
24	World Electronics	Manufacturer and professional analysts: electronics	100
25	Muhlenberg Township	Municipal government services	75
<i>Source: Berks County Earned Income Bureau, 2002 Occupational Privilege Tax Records</i>			

Based upon the information contained on the previous pages, the following observations can be made concerning the employment composition and characteristics of Muhlenberg Township:

1. The employment composition has become more diversified over the past 50 years. This could be attributed to emerging technologies, expansion of the retail markets, improvements to the transportation system, technological advancements, enhancements to communications network, and the downsizing of manufacturing centers.
2. Manufacturing continues to be the leading occupation within Muhlenberg Township. However, according to the United States Census Bureau, the manufacturing sector has experienced a rapid decline in the percentage of workers. In 1960, 49.9 percent of the workforce was employed in the manufacturing sector. In 1980, 38.0 percent of the workforce was employed in the manufacturing sector. In 2000, 27.9 percent of the workforce was employed in the manufacturing sector. This trend is compatible to the overall trends of Berks County and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.
3. Over the past few years, Agere Systems, NGK Metals, Carpenter Technology have announced that the employment composition will be significantly reduced or eliminated. As a direct result, the employment composition for the manufacturing sector within Muhlenberg Township and Berks County will most likely see another decline as part of the 2010 census.
4. Over the past 40 years, the employment composition of Muhlenberg Township has experienced considerable percentage increases in retail trade, educational services, professional services and specialty services. This trend could be attributed to a shift in the employment composition, new residents with occupations other than manufacturing, and the amount of commercial development that has taken place along Business Route 222 and Route 61.
5. According to the United States Census Bureau, the average travel to work for residents within Muhlenberg Township is 17.3 minutes. This amount of travel time is significantly less as compared to all of Berks County (22.3 minutes) and for Pennsylvania (25.2 minutes). It could be concluded that a considerable portion of the workforce resides within Muhlenberg Township.

Based upon these observations, Muhlenberg Township must develop an economic development plan that will retain existing businesses, provide opportunities for emerging growth industries, maintain a sound tax base, and evaluate programs that will assist with the implementation of the economic development goals, objectives and polices (as outlined in Chapter 2 of this Plan). The balance of this chapter will provide specific focus on these planning objectives.



B. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & EMPLOYMENT PROJECTIONS

In 1997, the PRO-BERKS Alliance was established as a partnership of government and the private sector to address economic issues and needs within Berks County. The Alliance has a 22-member Board which includes, the Berks County Board of County Commissioners, Mayor of Reading, Berks County Chamber of Commerce, Greater Berks Development Fund, Business Executives Forum, and Workforce Investment Board. During this time the consulting firms Leak-Goforth Company, LLC, and URBANOMICS, Inc, were retained as a joint venture team by Berks County on behalf of PRO-BERKS Alliance to assess and recommend industrial site needs and economic development opportunities within Berks County. The Industrial Site Assessment Report for Berks County was completed in June of 2001, and is to serve as the strategy for economic and industrial development as part of the Berks County Comprehensive Plan.

Based upon the assessment of community needs, a review of economic conditions, and an evaluation of potential industrial sites within Berks County, the consultants for the Industrial Site Assessment Report recommended the following eight (8) target industry clusters:

- Food and Beverage Products
- Packaging Materials and Equipment
- Drugs and Biotechnology
- Communications Equipment and Electronics
- Industrial Parts and Equipment
- Medical Equipment and Supplies
- Corporate and Information Services
- Distribution and Warehousing

The Industrial Site Assessment Report provides a list of specific land uses that are recommended to serve as sub-classes for each of the targeted industries listed above. In addition, the consultants have concluded that economic development opportunities should be available for spin-offs, suppliers and subsidiaries of each of the targeted industry.

As part of the overall their overall assessment, the consultants for the Industrial Site Assessment Report evaluated recent growth trends for selected industries within the United States, as published by the United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. These employment projections should be utilized as background analysis by Muhlenberg Township when formulating key components of the Economic Development Plan and Future Land Use Plan for this Comprehensive Plan Update. In addition, this information should be utilized as a guide for selecting land uses for industrial zoning districts. The following chart provides the employment projections (based upon selected industrial growth indicators) for the United States for the years 1998 to 2008.

U.S. EMPLOYMENT PROJECTIONS FOR SELECTED INDUSTRIES (1998 – 2008)					
SELECTED INDUSTRIES	SIC Code	U.S. Total Employment		Projected Values (1998 - 2008)	
		1998	2008	Total Change	Annual Growth
AGRICULTURE					
Farm Production	01, 02	2,106,000	1,729,000	- 377,000	- 2.0 %
MANUFACTURING					
Food and Beverage Products	20	1,686,000	1,721,000	+ 35,000	0.2 %
Bakery Products	205	206,000	197,000	- 10,000	- 0.5 %
Sugar/Confectionery Products	206	97,000	93,000	- 4,000	- 0.4 %
Dairy Products	202	140,000	124,000	- 16,000	- 1.2 %
Meat Products	201	494,000	570,000	+ 76,000	1.4 %
Misc. Food Products (snacks)	209	178,000	197,000	+ 19,000	1.0 %
Beverages	208	182,000	165,000	- 18,000	- 0.9 %
Textiles and Apparel	22, 23	1,361,000	1,087,000	- 274,000	- 2.1 %
Weaving and Thread Mills	221	320,000	251,000	- 69,000	- 2.4 %
Knitting Mills	225	159,000	128,000	- 32,000	- 2.2 %
Misc. Fabricated Textiles	239	216,000	236,000	+ 20,000	0.9 %
Apparel	23	547,000	350,000	- 197,000	- 3.5 %
Paper and Paper Products	26	675,000	674,000	- 1,000	Negligible
Misc. Converted Paper Prod.	267	241,000	252,000	+ 11,000	0.4 %
Paperboard Containers	265	219,000	236,000	+ 17,000	0.7 %
Chemicals and Allied Products	28	1,043,000	1,043,000	0	0.0 %
Plastic Materials, Synthetics	282	157,000	141,000	- 16,000	- 1.0 %
Drugs	283	279,000	309,000	+ 30,000	1.0 %
Rubber and Plastic Products	30	1,009,000	1,130,000	+ 121,000	1.1 %
Misc. Plastic Products	308	740,000	865,000	+ 125,000	1.6 %
Metals and Metal Products	33, 34	2,213,000	2,197,000	- 6,000	Negligible
Screw Machine Products	345	107,000	105,000	- 2,000	- 0.2 %
Forgings and Stampings	346	257,000	250,000	- 7,000	- 0.2 %
Non-Ferrous Castings	336	93,000	99,000	+ 6,000	0.6 %
Misc. Fabricated Metal	349	268,000	275,000	+ 7,000	0.3 %
Machinery and Equipment	35	2,203,000	2,197,000	- 6,000	Negligible
General industrial Machinery	356	269,000	273,000	+ 4,000	0.1 %
Refrig. & Service Ind. Mach.	358	200,000	216,000	+ 16,000	0.8 %
Special Industry Machinery	355	179,000	187,000	+ 8,000	0.4 %
Computers, Office Equipment	357	379,000	368,000	- 11,000	- 0.3 %
Electronics, Elect. Equipment	36	1,704,000	1,773,000	+ 69,000	0.4 %
Electrical Industrial Apparatus	362	153,000	122,000	- 31,000	- 2.3 %
Electrical Components/Access	367	660,000	820,000	+ 160,000	2.2 %

U.S. EMPLOYMENT PROJECTIONS FOR SELECTED INDUSTRIES (1998 – 2008)					
SELECTED INDUSTRIES	SIC Code	U.S. Total Employment		Projected Values (1998 - 2008)	
		1998	2008	Total Change	Annual Growth
Elect. Lighting, Wiring Equip.	364	183,000	157,000	- 26,000	- 1.5 %
Communications Equipment	366	282,000	302,000	+ 20,000	0.7 %
Transportation Equipment	37	1,884,000	1,988,000	+ 104,000	0.5 %
Motor Vehicles Equipment	371	990,000	940,000	- 50,000	- 0.5 %
Motor Vehicle Parts/Supplies	3714	518,000	537,000	+ 19,000	0.4 %
Instruments/Related Products	38	868,000	887,000	+ 19,000	0.2 %
Measuring/Control Devices	382	304,000	300,000	- 4,000	- 0.1 %
Medical Equipment/Supplies	384	279,000	347,000	+ 56,000	1.8 %
DISTRIBUTION					
Trucking and Warehousing	42	1,745,000	1,944,000	+ 199,000	1.1 %
Trucking	421	1,579,000	1,744,000	+ 165,000	1.0 %
Warehousing and Storage	422	166,000	200,000	+ 34,000	1.9 %
Wholesale Trade	50, 51	6,831,000	7,330,000	+ 499,000	0.7 %
Groceries and Related Products	514	922,000	987,000	+ 61,000	0.7 %
SERVICES					
Finance and Insurance	60-67	7,408,000	8,367,000	+ 960,000	1.2 %
Security, Commodity Brokers	62	645,000	900,000	+ 255,000	3.4 %
Insurance Carriers	63	1,597,000	1,751,000	+ 154,000	0.9 %
Business and Other Services	73, 87	11,821,000	17,474,000	+ 6,653,000	4.0 %
Computer and Data Processing	737	1,599,000	3,471,000	+ 1,872,000	9.0 %
Research and Testing Services	873	614,000	861,000	+ 247,000	3.4 %
Note 1: SIC refers to Standard Industrial Classification Note 2: All calculations and percentages have been rounded to the nearest 100,000 (count) or decimal point					
<i>Source: United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, November of 1999, as revised March of 2000</i>					

The information presented in the chart referenced above, provides the employment projections based upon selected industrial growth indicators within the United States for the years 1998 to 2008. In order to monitor these projected values, recent growth trends for selective industrial sectors should also be examined. Based upon information concerning growth trends supplied by the McGraw Hill Companies and the United States Department of Commerce in 2000, microelectronics, communications equipment, information services, computers (software and hardware), pharmaceuticals, medical equipment, auto parts, food products, electrical equipment, and industrial components, all had significant annual increases between the years of 1996 and 2000. However, these recent trends do not completely reflect the economic turbulence that has occurred within the United States over the past few years. The emerging industrial markets must be carefully compared to the steady industrial markets, especially if financial or preferential incentives will be utilized to target that industry.

C. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES AND PROGRAMS

There are numerous economic development resources and programs that are available to assist Muhlenberg Township with the implementation of this Comprehensive Plan. The following economic development resources and programs are offered through local, county, state and federal agencies.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES

Pennsylvania Economic Development Association (PEDA): PEDA is the unified organization for individuals whose livelihood involves responsibilities for area development. Examples of typical members include county/regional economic developers, state economic development employees, utility executives whose primary responsibility is area development, industrial development authority directors, operators of industrial incubators, chamber of commerce executives, and municipal directors of development.

Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED): The mission of the DCED is to foster opportunities for businesses and communities to succeed and thrive in a global economy, thereby enabling Pennsylvania to achieve a superior quality of life. In an effort to ensure growth and development within communities across Pennsylvania, the DCED Customer Service Center assists residents and businesses with inquiries and programs that specifically provide assistance for community and economic development.

Technology 21 Initiative: The Technology 21 provides Pennsylvania's high-tech leaders with designing a comprehensive, industry-led strategy to ensure Pennsylvania's place as a technology leader in the new economy. This initiative was developed to seek industry input as to what is needed from state government in order for high-tech firms to succeed in today's environment. Technology 21 members were organized around six (6) broadly defined industry clusters including: advanced manufacturing; advanced materials; agribusiness; biotechnology; environmental technology; and information technology.

Greater Berks Development Fund (GBDF): The GBDF is a community development fund, supported by both the public and the private sectors. The mission of the GBDF is to guide relocation, financing and other business hurdles as well as help arrange low interest loans, tax credits and development assistance programs for qualified businesses. Among the incentive programs, the GBDF participated in the Keystone Opportunity Zone initiative, providing 12 year tax relief to businesses locating in the zones. In addition, the GBDF maintains a complete inventory of available commercial and industrial space (10,000 square feet and above) and can arrange financing programs.

Berks County Chamber of Commerce (BCCC): The BCCC is a not-for-profit association of business people dedicated to the ideal of total community development while promoting and preserving the uniquely American system of free enterprise and individual incentive and initiative. The mission statement of the BCCC is to empower the ever-expanding local economy through professional and educational programs strengthening the Chamber's standing as the area's comprehensive business and community resource. The vision of the BCCC is to be Pennsylvania's premier business advocate Chamber of Commerce by providing state-of-the-art services that promote a healthy, thriving, competitive business community.

Reading/Berks Economic Partnership: The Reading/Berks Economic Partnership is an organization, which has succeeded the PRO-Berks Alliance, has been established as a nonprofit organization, supported by contributions from the public and private sectors members, and investors. This organization has been established to lead economic development efforts within Berks County, focusing on image building and business attraction, improving the business environment and business retention, and promoting public support and community readiness. The Reading/Berks Economic Partnership has established the following goals and objectives:

- To Promote new revenue-producing capital investments in plant and equipment through the attraction of new business and industry and the modernization and expansion of existing business and industry.
- To promote diversification and growth of jobs, which fit and upgrade skills of the current workforce and provide sustainable quality employment opportunities for future generations.
- To promote local actions needed to improve the competitiveness of Berks County to share in future regional and national economic growth through attraction and retention of business and industry.
- To promote growth of business and industry compatible with the quality of life and physical environment of Berks County, and consistent with the infrastructure and fiscal capacity.

Berks County Community Development Office: The Community Development Office engages in the administration of grants from various federal, state and local programs. The primary programs include the Federal Community Block Grant Program, Federal Home Investment Partnership Program, Federal Emergency Shelters Grant Program, State Housing and Community Development Program, and Affordable Housing Program. The Community Development Office cooperates with various offices and agencies within Berks County.

Berks County Community and Economic Development Office: The Community and Economic Development Office coordinates efforts between local, county, state and federal officials in order to promote community and economic development within Berks County. Recently, the office oversaw the preparation and development of the Industrial Site Assessment Report, which is a strategy for economic development within Berks County. The Community and Economic Development Office is expected to play a vital role in the implementation strategies recommended within the Industrial Site Assessment Report, particularly those related to planning work associated with the food industry park and innovation park, as well as other effort to expand the community product within Berks County.

Berks County Industrial Development Authority (BCIDA): The BCIDA is governed by a five (5) member board appointed by the Berks County Board of Commissioners. The BCIDA is non-profit economic development organization, which encourages balanced economic growth within Berks County. The objective of the BCIDA is to encourage and promote the economic growth and prosperity within Berks County. To accomplish this objective, the BCIDA coordinates its efforts with local, county, state and federal agencies to facilitate economic growth and development within Berks County.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Keystone Opportunity Zones (KOZ): KOZ's are defined parcels within specific areas with greatly reduced or no tax burden for property owners, residents and businesses. KOZ's have been designated by local communities and approved by the state. As part of the procedures required to establish a KOZ, a partnership must be established between the community and the state and local taxing bodies, including school districts, economic development agencies and community organizations. Over 10,000 new jobs have been created through the KOZ's between 1999 and 2002, and it is anticipated that the number of new jobs will grow in the future. To be considered as a Keystone Opportunity Zone, a site must have:

- Displayed through a vision or strategy statement how this property through targeted growth could impact the property positively;
- Displayed evidence of adverse economic and socioeconomic conditions within the proposed zone such as high poverty rates, high unemployment rates, percentage of abandoned or underutilized property, and/or population loss;
- Passed binding resolutions or ordinances forgoing certain taxes; this included school districts, county and municipal governments;
- Public and private commitment of resources;
- Linkages to regional community and economic development activities including Team Pennsylvania and initiatives under the DCED's Center for Community Building;
- A written plan discussing the implementation of quality school improvements and local crime reduction measures; and
- A demonstrated cooperation with surrounding municipalities

Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance Act (LERTA): LERTA is an act established by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in 1977 to allow local taxing bodies the ability to temporarily exempt any improvements to certain deteriorated industrial, commercial, and other business properties located within a designated deteriorated area. The local taxing body then can gradually decrease the amount of exemption over a period of time (maximum period 10-years), until the taxes have no exemption. The objectives of the program are to promote growth and revitalization efforts to enhance the local tax base over a given period of time.

Small Business Alliance: The Small Business Alliance is a local non-profit membership group dedicated to bringing small businesses together to help each other grow. Members are encouraged to be actively involved in helping other member companies through networking and the exchange of services. Full membership is open to any individual or business with 25 or fewer permanent, full-time employees. Larger organizations may join the Small Business Alliance as associate members. The Small Business Alliance provides its members with immediate, tangible benefits such as discounts on business services and products.

Industrial Sites Reuse Program (ISRP): The ISRP offers grants and low interest loan packages through Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development to perform an environmental assessment and remediation work at former industrial sites. This ISRP is offered to public entities, private nonprofit economic development entities, and companies involved in reuse of former industrial land that did not cause or contribute to environmental contamination. Funds from the ISRP may be utilized for Phase I, II or III environmental assessments as well as for remediation of hazardous substances on the site.

Infrastructure Development Program (IDP): The IDP offers grants and low interest loan packages through Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development for public and private infrastructure improvements. The IDP is offered to municipalities, industrial development authorities and corporations, municipal authorities, redevelopment authorities and local development districts may apply for IDP assistance on behalf of eligible private companies engaged in the following enterprises: agriculture, industrial, manufacturing, research and development, and export services or real estate developers who are developing sites for eligible private companies. Eligible uses include transportation facilities and airports; clearing and preparation of land and environmental remediation; water and sewer systems; energy facilities; parking facilities; storm sewers; bridges and waterways; rail facilities; port facilities at former industrial sites only.

Opportunity Grant Program (OGP): The OGP offers grant packages through the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development to create or preserve jobs. The OGP is offered to businesses, IDCs and municipalities on behalf of businesses that will create or preserve a significant number of jobs within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Eligible activities include manufacturing; industrial; research and development; agricultural processors; export services; and businesses establishing a national or regional headquarters

New Communities/Enterprise Zone Program: This program offers grant packages through the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development to financially disadvantaged communities for preparing and implementing business development strategies within municipal Enterprise Zones. The New Communities/Enterprise Zone Program is offered to municipalities, redevelopment authorities and nonprofit economic development organizations. Eligible uses include business development strategy preparation, revolving fund business loans and program administration.

Team Pennsylvania Business Resource Network (BRN): The BRN is a collaborative tool and data source for employers, job creators and economic developers providing comprehensive access to state, local, and regional information critical in making decisions about location, expansion, and workforce development.

Economic Development Initiative (EDI): EDI provides grants to local governments to enhance both the security of loans guaranteed through the Section 108 Loan Program and the feasibility of the economic development and revitalization projects they finance. EDI has been the catalyst in the expanded use of loans through the Section 108 Program, one of the most potent public investment tools that HUD offers to local governments. HUD awards EDI funds as competitive project grants, to be used in conjunction with Section 108 loan commitments. EDI grant funds can only be used in projects also assisted by the Section 108 Loan Program; such projects may involve activities such as property acquisition; rehabilitation of publicly owned property; housing rehabilitation; economic development activities; acquisition, construction, reconstruction, or installation of public facilities; and other public site improvements.

Brownfields Economic Development Initiative (BEDI): BEDI is one of the key competitive grant programs that HUD administers to stimulate and promote economic and community development activities under Section 108(q) of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, as amended. BEDI is designed to assist communities with the redevelopment of abandoned, idled and underused industrial and commercial facilities with expansion and redevelopment of sites that have potential environmental risks. BEDI funds are used to stimulate economic and employment opportunities through the revitalization projects. The funds are used as the stimulus for local governments and private sector parties to commence redevelopment or continue phased redevelopment efforts on brownfields sites where either perceived or actual environmental conditions are known and redevelopment plans exist.

Pennsylvania Downtown Center (PDC): The PDC provides local and community groups with the techniques and strategies they need to recapture or sustain their downtown as a vibrant civic, social and economic center of activity. PDC's field outreach program visits and/or consults with hundreds of communities each year, giving them a broad menu of tools, training and workshops to revitalize their downtown, central business district or main street. Participants in the programs are trained throughout their five-year state funding cycle. PDC's field training includes, but is not limited to: community assessment, strategic planning, marketing, program organization, historical preservation, development strategies and community visioning.

Pennsylvania Economic Development Regional Grant Program: This program is designed to provide assistance for local and/or regional economic development agencies to conduct advertising, public relations and other promotional programs associated with the attraction and/or retention of businesses in their region. A maximum of \$10,000 per county is available, providing that it is a cooperative effort between multiple counties. The concept of the grant is to encourage local economic development groups to work regionally. The applications must demonstrate a tie-in to a regional plan or the marketing plan of the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development.



D. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN

In order to implement the community planning goals, objectives and policies for economic development established in Chapter 2, the following strategies are recommended:

Existing Economic Development Planning

1. Retain and expand existing businesses to preserve a sound tax base and provide employment opportunities within Berks County. Solicit the assistance of public agencies specializing in community and economic development including the Reading/Berks Economic Partnership, Berks County Community and Economic Development Office, Berks County Industrial Development Authority and Berks County Chamber of Commerce.
2. Maintain an inventory of commercial and industrial sites within Muhlenberg Township. As part of this effort, employ a summer planning or engineering intern to conduct a land use survey of Muhlenberg Township every five (5) years.
3. Enhance communications among business, government, and the public to address issues that have an impact on the retention and expansion of business and industry. Host periodic meetings with representatives of the business community in an effort to build relationships and to monitor needs.
4. Prepare and issue a survey to the local business community to ascertain information on how local government officials can better serve them in the future.
5. Identify the needs of the business community and what it believes necessary to improve the business climate within Muhlenberg Township. Host periodic meetings with representatives of the local business community in an effort to build relationships and to monitor needs. As part of these meetings, invite economic development specialist from the public and private sectors.
6. Continuously monitor the business community's workforce needs, identify workforce deficiencies, and support the education/workforce development system in providing for a skilled, adaptable, and competitive workforce.
7. Promote the occupancy of vacant commercial uses and the development of existing commercial shopping centers such as the Fairgrounds Square Mall, Maderia Plaza, Muhlenberg Shopping Plaza, North Reading Plaza and Penn Plaza.

Future Economic Development Planning

8. Continue to monitor the progress of this economic development plan to determine if the initiatives that have been outlined are being achieved. Schedule an annual meeting with representatives of the Reading/Berks Economic Partnership, Berks County Community and Economic Development Office, Berks County Industrial Development Authority and Berks County Chamber of Commerce to evaluate economic development programs and funding opportunities.

9. Become actively involved as a public sector member (municipal representative) on the Reading/Berks Economic Partnership.
10. Consider financial and tax incentive programs such as Keystone Opportunity Zones (KOZ) or Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance Act (LERTA) that could assist with retaining and attracting commercial and industrial uses within Muhlenberg Township. Coordination with county and state officials is advised to learn all of the benefits and disadvantages of KOZ, LERTA or other tax incentive programs.
11. Promote adaptive reuse and revitalization efforts for abandoned commercial and industrial sites. Muhlenberg Township has recently passed a zoning amendment, which establishes a zoning overlay district to permit the planned reuse, division and/or redevelopment of existing buildings, structures and land areas within the Light Industrial (LI) and Heavy Industrial (HI) Zoning Districts, subject to special requirements. These provisions should be evaluated to determine if they are effective and if special provisions should be considered for commercial zones.
12. Pursue economic development targets that will build upon the existing commercial and industrial base, as well as position Muhlenberg Township to become a player in the growing and emerging technology-based markets and services sectors of the regional and national economies.
13. Evaluate programs and funding opportunities that enhance the appearance of the gateways and main arteries within Muhlenberg Township. Develop a Transportation Enhancement Plan for Business Route 222, Route 61 and Kutztown Road, in an effort to consider landscaping, pedestrian circulation, public transportation, lighting, visual effects and other beautification efforts.

Marketing Plan

14. Develop a coordinated marketing plan to target desirable industries that will have a minimal impact on the environment, match employment opportunities to job skills, and contribute to a diversified economy. Coordinate efforts with representatives of the Reading/Berks Economic Partnership, Berks County Community and Economic Development Office, Berks County Industrial Development Authority and Berks County Chamber of Commerce.
15. Develop partnerships that endorse regional and intergovernmental cooperation. As part of this effort host periodic meetings with representatives of the Muhlenberg School District, adjacent municipalities and Berks County Planning Commission to evaluate planning opportunities that will assist with the implementation of this Comprehensive Plan.
16. Develop a municipal website to provide the business community with information concerning meetings, announcements, codes, maps, police, refuse collection, services and other vital news. The municipal website could also be utilized as a database providing a community profile and demographic information.
17. Publicize the accomplishments and success stories of the local business community. The municipal website should have a link that features the “local business of the month”.
18. Publicize the announcement of new businesses that have recently located within Muhlenberg Township. Coordinate efforts with the local media to create a positive image.

19. Develop and maintain an economic database, community profile, and website in an effort to promote a business friendly environment.
20. Continue to create an atmosphere that promotes and supports local entrepreneurial ventures and small business success within suburban and urban neighborhoods.
21. Coordinate various public and private economic development-related organizations to promote consistency with planned growth.

Infrastructure

22. Develop a Future Land Use Plan with focus on economic development and where there is adequate infrastructure to support commercial and industrial development.
23. Continue to improve and enhance the transportation system in coordination with local, county, state and federal agencies in an effort to attract and retain business. Planning efforts to improve accessibility and mobility to the commercial and industrial properties should be considered as a high priority and need.
24. Encourage nearby airports and heliports to play a vital role in economic development. As part of this process adopt appropriate development controls surrounding airports to ensure the safety of both the aircraft and those on the ground.
25. Continue to effectively provide recreational facilities, services and programs, which improve the quality of life making Muhlenberg Township an exceptional place to live and work. As part of this effort, encourage the local business community to become familiar with and utilize the park and recreation facilities within Muhlenberg Township.
26. Review programs and funding opportunities that may be available for infrastructure improvements to enhance the marketability of commercial and industrial sites. Coordinated efforts with county and state agencies to determine which economic development programs and funding opportunities would be beneficial to Muhlenberg Township.

Zoning and Codes

27. As part of the Future Land Use Plan, identify potential commercial and industrial areas for development that are consistent with the Muhlenberg Township Comprehensive Plan.
28. Identify, assess, and support the safe cleanup and productive reuse of environmentally contaminated sites and/or abandoned sites in a timely manner.
29. As part of adaptive reuse and revitalization efforts endorsed by this Comprehensive Plan Update, coordinate efforts between the property owner(s) and the appropriate county or state agencies to ensure that an environmental assessment of the site is completed through the Industrial Sites Reuse Program, as provided through the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development.

30. Continue to monitor existing industrial operations and expansion activities to determine that all uses and activities are environmentally compliant. As part of this process, conduct periodic site inspections or tours with the owners and managers of the site.
31. Continue to monitor the mushroom production facilities and operations. As part of this process, coordinate efforts with owners and operators of the facilities so that nuisances (odors) are limited and the mushroom production facilities are viewed with a more positive image.
32. Establish enterprise zoning districts to attract and/or retain commercial and industrial uses in an effort to maintain a sound tax base. As part of this process, evaluate interchange overlay districts that provide alternative development plans that are advantageous to the private development community as well as Muhlenberg Township.
33. Evaluate prototypical zoning and development regulations that provide unnecessary restrictions and/or limitations for existing businesses that wish to expand their operations or future businesses that are looking to develop in Muhlenberg Township. As part of this process, evaluate all municipal provisions that are related to subdivision and land development activity such as, but not limited to, access, off-street parking, building height, tract size, signs and buffer yards.

