



Chester County's Economic Development Strategy 2018 Progress Report



Chester County
**Economic
Development
Council**

Summary Overview

In the fall of 2014, implementing a recommendation of Landscapes 2, Chester County established VISTA 2025 as its ten year economic development strategy.

With five goals and an ambitious list of strategies, VISTA 2025 laid out an action agenda to support the County's economic health while maintaining the "quality of place" that makes Chester County so attractive.

Implementation began in earnest in 2015 and this reports describes the progress to date.

Background



Current Economic Indicators

Chester County currently has one of the largest county economies in the United States. It is also projected to be the fastest growing county in southeastern Pennsylvania in terms of population and jobs over the thirty years from 2015 to 2045, adding more than 146,000 new residents and 87,000 new jobs.

Current Economic Indicators

Chester County has one of the largest county level economies in the United States ranking in the top 5%.

\$31.4 Billion Economy
(Chester County GDP*)

*Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the total value of goods and services produced by an economy



Current Economic Indicators

SEPA Forecasted Population Growth

(2015-2045)

	2015 Population Estimate	2045 Population Projection	Absolute Change	Percentage Change
Bucks	627,367	699,498	72,131	11.5%
Chester	515,939	662,283	146,344	28.4%
Delaware	563,894	587,037	23,143	4.1%
Montgomery	819,264	932,820	113,556	13.9%
Philadelphia	1,567,443	1,696,133	128,690	8.2%

Source: DVRPC



Current Economic Indicators

SEPA Forecasted Employment Growth

(2015-2045)

	2015 Employment Estimate	2045 Employment Forecast	Absolute Change (2015-2045)	Percentage Change (2015-2045)
Bucks	322,731	361,124	38,393	11.9%
Chester	309,605	397,405	87,800	28.4%
Delaware	268,054	279,050	10,996	4.1%
Montgomery	582,443	664,385	1,942	14.1%
Philadelphia	772,847	836,825	63,978	8.3%

Source: DVRPC



Quality of Place

In parallel with this growth, Chester County residents and businesses have a strong appreciation for open space and the environment.

In fact, Chester County has preserved 28% of its land as open space and maintained its incomparable natural environment.

Qualities Most Valued By Chester County Residents



Balance

How can the County continue to grow its economy to create employment opportunities for its current and future residents and still balance that progress with the desire to preserve its beauty and close connection with the natural environment?

VISTA 2025 was designed to meet this challenge of balancing progress and preservation.

VISTA 2025



VISTA2025

VISTA 2025 is a Chester County public-private partnership effort that is focused on creating and implementing an economic development strategy for the county.

Its fundamental premise is that progress and preservation are complementary elements of a strategy that will support economic health while maintaining the “sense of place” that makes Chester County so attractive to residents and businesses.

VISTA 2025 Goals

1. Quality of Place
2. Workforce and Talent
3. Industry Clusters
4. Innovation Culture
5. Infrastructure

Progress



Implementation

VISTA 2025 identified a number of strategies that would contribute to the achievement of the five goals.

What follows is a sampling of the progress made toward those five goals.

Goal #1

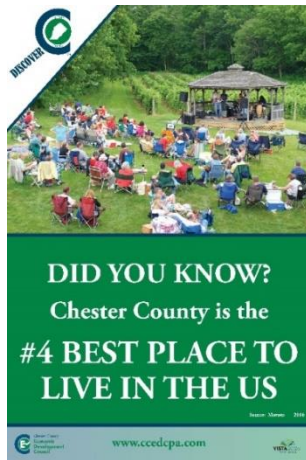
Maintain and enhance quality of place as a key component of economic health.

Progress – Goal #1

Strategy 1.1.1 – Document the value of “quality of place”

Results: Independent validations of Chester County’s “quality of place” are consistently assembled and included in County marketing activities. A “Discover Chester County” brand was established and is promoted through a series of “Did you Know?” posters highlighting Chester County accolades.

Impact: Improved recognition by employers and employees of the benefits of a Chester County location.



- Chester County is the healthiest, wealthiest, happiest, and best-educated county in Pennsylvania
- West Chester – Best College Town in the US and Winner Great American Main Street Award
- Paoli - #8 Best Place to Retire in PA
- 5 of the Best 25 Suburbs for Millennials – Chesterbrook, Exton, Lionville, East Whiteland Township, Phoenixville
- Top School in PA – Downingtown STEM Academy and the top district is Tredyffrin/Easttown
- Best Botanical Garden in the US – Longwood Gardens
- Chesterbrook is the #2 Best Place to Live in the US



Progress – Goal #1

Strategy 1.1.1 – Document the value of “quality of place”

Results: VISTA.Today was launched as a daily, web-based news service telling the good news of Chester County from all aspects of commerce, culture and community.

Impact: Enhanced ability to share positive Chester County message with the broader community.



Subscribers grew from 4,890 at launch to 20,000
Visitors to site grew from 20,000 to nearly 100,000/month
44 Affiliate Partners support VISTA.Today

Progress – Goal #1

Strategy 1.3.3 – Continue funding support for the county’s award winning natural areas preservation program

Results: 28 % of the County’s total land area has been preserved heading to an established 2019 goal of 30%. 2015 and 2016 saw 2,475 acres preserved. Chester County now has over 205 square miles of preserved land which is larger than the entire area of the City of Philadelphia (134 square miles).

Impact: Additions to preserved natural and agricultural areas enhance “quality of place” and the overall attractiveness of Chester County



Progress – Goal #1

Strategy 1.4.1 – Establish a task force working with municipalities to develop approaches that allow Chester County’s suburban office parks to adapt to changing market realities and the growing demand for mixed-use development and lifestyle centers

Results: The Chester County Planning Commission established the Commercial Landscapes Task Force to examine the challenges facing four commercial real estate categories: office parks, brownfields, greyfields and transit-oriented development. Four separate reports on each topic area were produced.

Impact: The reports provide guidance and recommendations to local governments and developers about how to address the changing market realities impacting the future of commercial real estate in Chester County



Progress – Goal #1

Strategy 1.4.2 – Develop and distribute “tools” to help municipalities forge new approaches that will lead to successful adaptations of the traditional suburban office park

Results: The Chester County Planning Commission established the Commercial Landscapes Task Force to examine the challenges facing four commercial real estate categories: office parks, brownfields, greyfields and transit-oriented development. Four separate reports on each topic area were produced.

Impact: The reports provide guidance and recommendations to local governments and developers about how to address the changing market realities impacting the future of commercial real estate in Chester County



Progress – Goal #1

Strategy 1.7.1 - Provide a new source of funding to assist Chester County communities to prepare local economic development strategies

Results: Chester County Planning Commission's Vision Partnership Planning (VPP) program emphasized its availability to fund economic development strategies

Results: VPP program used to fund Kennett Square Borough/Kennett Township economic development strategy.

Impact: Empowers Chester County communities to take a more active role in understanding and shaping their local economies.



Progress – Goal #1

Strategy 1.8.1 - Convene an event/create a forum for all county boroughs to discuss borough economic development issues

Results: Through a partnership between the Chester County Department of Community Development, the Chester County Planning Commission and the Chester County Economic Development Council, a series of Urban Center Forums were held in West Chester, Kennett Square, Downingtown, and Phoenixville

Impact: The forums provided opportunities for Chester County's urban centers to access critical economic development information and share challenges and responses with each other.

SAVE THE DATE!



Urban Center Forum:
Building and Implementing an
Economic Strategy in Your Town

When: Tuesday, September 15th—4:00 pm to 7:00 pm
Where: Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA
Who: Chester County Urban Centers, Local, State, and Federal Elected Officials, County Departments, local Main Street Managers, local Chambers of Commerce, local businesses
What: As a component of VISTA 2025 (Chester County's Economic Development strategy), the Urban Center forum is a call-to-action to the sixteen urban centers on how to establish and implement an economic development strategy in their towns
Learn:

- The importance of economic development
- Urban center's role in economic development
- Unique strategies for unique communities
- Steps to get to a successful urban center

Dinner will be provided at this free event
Please RSVP Laurie Smith: 610.344.6900 or lsmith@chesco.org



Progress – Goal #1

Strategy 1.8.4 – Assist the boroughs with the development of appropriate strategies and implementation assistance

Results: Through Chester County's Community Revitalization Program (CRP), over \$55 million in infrastructure investments have been made in the County's boroughs. 2015, 2016 and 2017 saw over \$6.65 million of that total go to the fifteen county boroughs

Impact: The CRP investment in infrastructure has helped position the boroughs of the County to effectively respond to the emerging desirability of walkable downtowns.



Progress – Goal #1

Strategy 1.9.1 – Develop programs/incentives to attract new, high density downtown investment

Results: Through Chester County's Community Revitalization Program (CRP), over \$6 million in infrastructure investments have been made in the City since 2002. 2015, 2016 and 2017 saw \$1,300,000 of that total committed to downtown revitalization activities.

Impact: The CRP investment in infrastructure has helped position the City of Coatesville to more effectively respond to the emerging desirability of walkable downtowns.

Progress – Goal #1

Strategy 1.9.2 - Identify new options for increasing the City's capacity to support economic development

Results: Chester County and the Coatesville Area Partners for Progress (CAPP) have partnered to fund a new City Economic Development Administrator as part of a 2nd Century Alliance initiative.

Impact: Provides the City of Coatesville with professional support to develop and implement economic development strategies and to initiate and respond to development opportunities.



Progress – Goal #1

Strategy 1.9.2 - Identify new options for increasing the City's capacity to support economic development

Results: The Chester County Economic Development Foundation (CCEDF) was initially awarded a \$100,000 Neighborhood Planning grant from the Wells Fargo Regional Foundation which was used to develop a “resident driven” neighborhood plan for downtown Coatesville. That plan has now been approved for a \$500,000 implementation grant from Wells Fargo. Partners in this effort include:

2nd Century Alliance
Chester County Economic Development Foundation
County of Chester
City of Coatesville
Coatesville Area Partners for Progress



Impact: The award of the grant and the development of the plan will help ensure that Coatesville's residents are engaged in the revitalization of the City.

Implements a high priority strategy

Goal #2

Position Chester County as a magnet for attracting talent and as a model for building an employer-ready workforce

Progress – Goal #2

Strategy 2.1.1 - Convene a summit to focus on critical Chester County workforce issues

Results: Led by CCEDC and the County Workforce Development team, a Workforce Summit was held in October 2015, bringing together 110 leaders from business, education, economic development, and workforce.

Impact: The summit focused attention on critical links between educators and employers in the ongoing efforts to maintain and grow the Chester County workforce.



Progress – Goal #2

Strategy 2.1.1 - Convene a summit to focus on critical Chester County workforce issues

Results: The Workforce Summit identified nine action items to help guide subsequent workforce efforts.

Impact: Identification of the nine action items has focused energy and resources on consensus driven activities.

1. Developing model mentorship and internship programs
2. Tapping into virtual networks used by freelance workers
3. Creating more “Learn and Earn” programs
4. Target career exploration to provide application-based opportunities
5. Connecting job responsibilities with needs
6. Expanding school advisory boards to include more business leaders
7. Improving information on employment in high priority industries
8. Addressing affordable housing and transportation
9. Developing a talent mining program to capture institutional knowledge



Progress – Goal #2

Strategy 2.2.1 - Determine possible sources of support for additional incumbent worker training

Results: Through the collaborative efforts of DCD and CCEDC, since 2014, 4,368 employees were trained from more than 293 companies and more than \$4,300,000 in funding was secured for partnerships and incumbent worker training in key industries.

Impact: This initiative has helped build resilience in the County workforce by upgrading the skill sets of existing workers.



Progress – Goal #2

Strategy 2.4.2 - Hold annual career days for local high schools focused on advanced technology and middle skill jobs

Results: More than 15,000 students have been served since 2014 at multiple CCEDC events including: Girls Exploring Tomorrow's Technology (GETT), the What's So Cool About Manufacturing video contest, Techies Day, and Career Exploration Showcases and Career Fairs.

Impact: These events and activities continue to provide hands on learning opportunities and to expose Chester County students to a wider range of quality career and job opportunities.



Progress – Goal #2

Strategy 2.6.1 Expand/improve outreach efforts and build strong connections with employers through new workforce initiatives

Results: PA CareerLink totaled 15,062 visits in 2015, an increase of 28.8% over 2014. 2016 saw even more foot traffic with 17,095 visits, a 13.3% increase over 2015.

More than 1,000 employers annually engaged in Industry Partnerships since 2014.

Impact: Additional outreach helps better link Chester County workers with support services and job opportunities.



Goal #3

Expand business attraction and retention efforts with a focus on targeted industry clusters

Progress – Goal #3

Strategy 3.1.2 - Prepare and administer an annual “Take the Pulse” business survey

Results: The initial *Take the Pulse* survey was conducted in 2016 to gauge business leaders views of business climate, economic trends, and growth estimates. A second annual survey was completed in 2017 and a third is in process for 2018.

Impact: The “Take the Pulse” survey provides information to help understand the direction of the Chester County economy and the issues important to business leaders.



Progress – Goal #3

Strategy 3.2.1 - Establish a Chester County joint messaging strategy and marketing theme that can be used as part of the marketing efforts by all county agencies

Results: The VISTA 2025 Goal 3 Team developed a list of Chester County competitive advantages and grouped them under a set of marketing themes. These themes will permeate marketing efforts and marketing materials used to market the County and will be used by VISTA Stakeholders to supplement their marketing efforts.

Impact: The joint messaging strategy and common marketing themes provide a consistent basis for telling the Chester County story for everyone engaged in marketing the County.

Progress – Goal #3

Strategy 3.2.2 - Develop a set of marketing materials that incorporate the joint marketing theme, including the “quality of place” message, targeted at general new business investment prospects

Results: The Chester County Economic Development Council, in collaboration with Chester County, developed a general marketing piece that highlights the county competitive advantages and the joint marketing themes

Impact: Provides a key tool for telling the Chester County story to current and prospective employers and employees.



Data as of July, 2018



VISTA2025

Progress & Preservation

Implements a high priority strategy

Progress – Goal #3

Strategy 3.2.3 - Develop marketing materials that speak directly to the needs of Chester County's targeted industry clusters

Results: The Chester County Economic Development Council developed a series of industry specific marketing pieces that focus on the strengths of the county in the targeted industry clusters

Impact: These marketing pieces provide key data to help attract and retain targeted industry clusters.

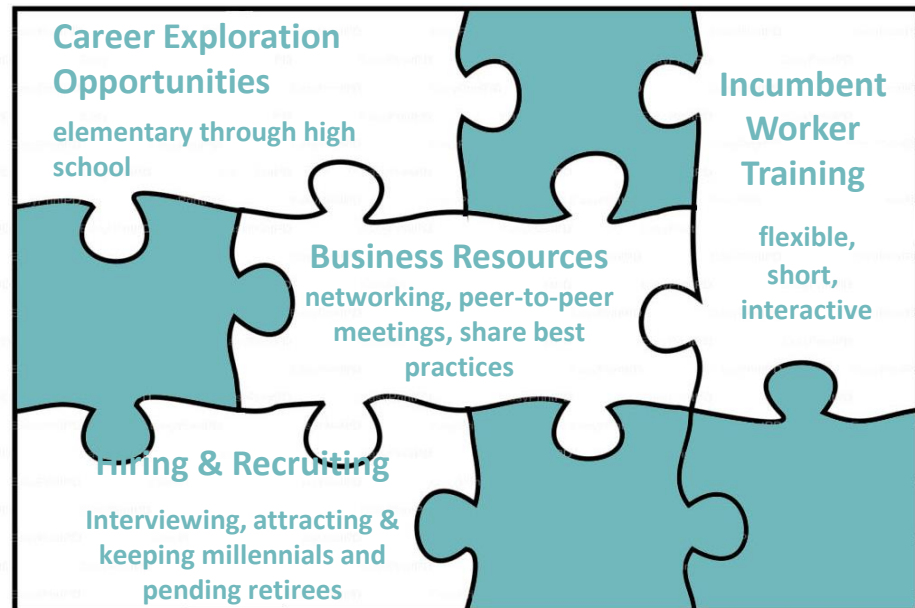


Progress – Goal #3

Strategy 3.4.1 - Expand current industry cluster partnership programs and services beyond workforce issues to address industry needs and concerns

Results: A Sector Strategies Advisory Council was formed by CCEDC to facilitate cross Industry dialogue to better address common business challenges and help develop collaborative solutions.

Impact: This initiative provides a forum for discussion of county industry concerns.



Progress – Goal #3

Strategy 3.5.1 - Promote and expand business and economic development services to farmers

Results:

- Since 2014, 512 Chester County companies were served through the AgConnect Partnership. Of those, 442 were employers.
- \$7.8 M in Next Generation Farm loans were facilitated through Ag Connect with funding from PA Department of Agriculture

Impact: These initiatives help Chester County farmers build stronger businesses.



Progress – Goal #3

Strategy 3.5.6 - Continue County funding support for an agricultural land preservation program

Results: As the table below demonstrates, Chester County has continued its support for preservation of farm land adding 2,475 additional acres over the past two years.

	2015/2016
County funding	\$6,061,353
Non-county funding	\$11,513,632
Acres preserved	2,475 acres

Impact: This continued support helps ensure the availability of land to add to Chester County's agricultural base.



Progress – Goal #3

Strategy 3.7.1 – Expand financing programs for businesses looking to start, continue, expand, or locate in Chester County

Results:

- **\$2 million CCEDC revolving loan fund was created for projects that don't fit existing public financing programs**
- **\$277 million was provided in public financing for Chester County projects**

Impact: These efforts make critical capital available to Chester County companies.

Progress – Goal #3

Strategy 3.8 – Improve access to capital for start-ups and early stage business ventures

Results: Chester County has partnered with Ben Franklin Partners of Southeastern Pennsylvania on a co-investment initiative known as Venture Chesco to make as much as \$4 million available to start-ups and early stage technology companies.



Chester County has also provided a \$100,000 grant to support the Chester County Economic Development Council's Ideas x Innovation initiative (i2n). The grant will be used to enhance and strengthen the county's innovation ecosystem through i2n services to emerging tech companies

Impact: This effort will make critical early stage capital available to young Chester County companies and will raise the profile of Chester County as a place to start and grow a business.

Progress – Goal #3

Strategy 3.8.5 – Encourage and support local entrepreneurs to use Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) grants

Results: Companies in Chester County received more than \$35 million in Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) grants in 2015, 2016 and 2017.

Impact: The SBIR grant program provides critical early stage capital to help Chester County companies develop new technologies.



Progress – Goal #3

Strategy 3.8.1 - Fully utilize state and federal tax credit programs to support capitalization of early stage companies

Results: Emerging tech companies in Chester County received more than \$4.1 million in Keystone Innovation Zone tax credits over the last 3 years through the CCEDC's Ideas x Innovation (i2n) initiative.

Impact: The i2n initiative has provided critical early stage capital to more than 50 Chester County emerging technology companies.



A Chester County Economic Development Council initiative

NOTE: Fluctuation in number of companies assisted is reflective of program age restrictions and graduation of companies



VISTA2025

Progress & Preservation

Goal #4

**Establish an innovation culture that
supports entrepreneurship and
business growth**

Progress – Goal #4

Strategy 4.1.1 - Establish a higher education partnership to promote dialogue regarding college and university role in innovation and economic development

Results: Penn State University – Great Valley initiated REV up to identify opportunities for students and faculty to participate in innovation and entrepreneurship activities



Results: West Chester University launched an Entrepreneurship Week event featuring national speakers, high profile alumni and budding entrepreneurs pitching their ideas



Impact: These two efforts help build stronger connections between Chester County based higher education institutions and the County entrepreneurial community.

Progress – Goal #4

Strategy 4.3.1 - Add to the emerging location/space options that are supportive of start up and early stage companies

Results: Multiple incubators, innovation areas, and co-working spaces have been established to serve Chester County entrepreneurs:

- align.space
- AmpTech Commercialization Center
- Artisan Exchange
- Evolve IP Innovation Center
- Franklin Commons
- work2gether
- HeadRoom
- Innovation Center at Eagleview
- Uncommon Individual Foundation

Impact: These facilities provide a range of physical options for supported growth of young Chester County companies.

Progress – Goal #4

Strategy 4.3.2 - Set the stage for a larger technology conference by initiating an industry speaker series

Results: Tech360 is a full-day innovative business technology conference – featuring tech education, leadership and innovation. The conference has been held annually for the past 4 years. TECH360 is an initiative of the Chester County Economic Development Council's ITAG and i2n programs.

Impact: This event helps maintain the vibrancy of the Chester County technology community.

TECH360°

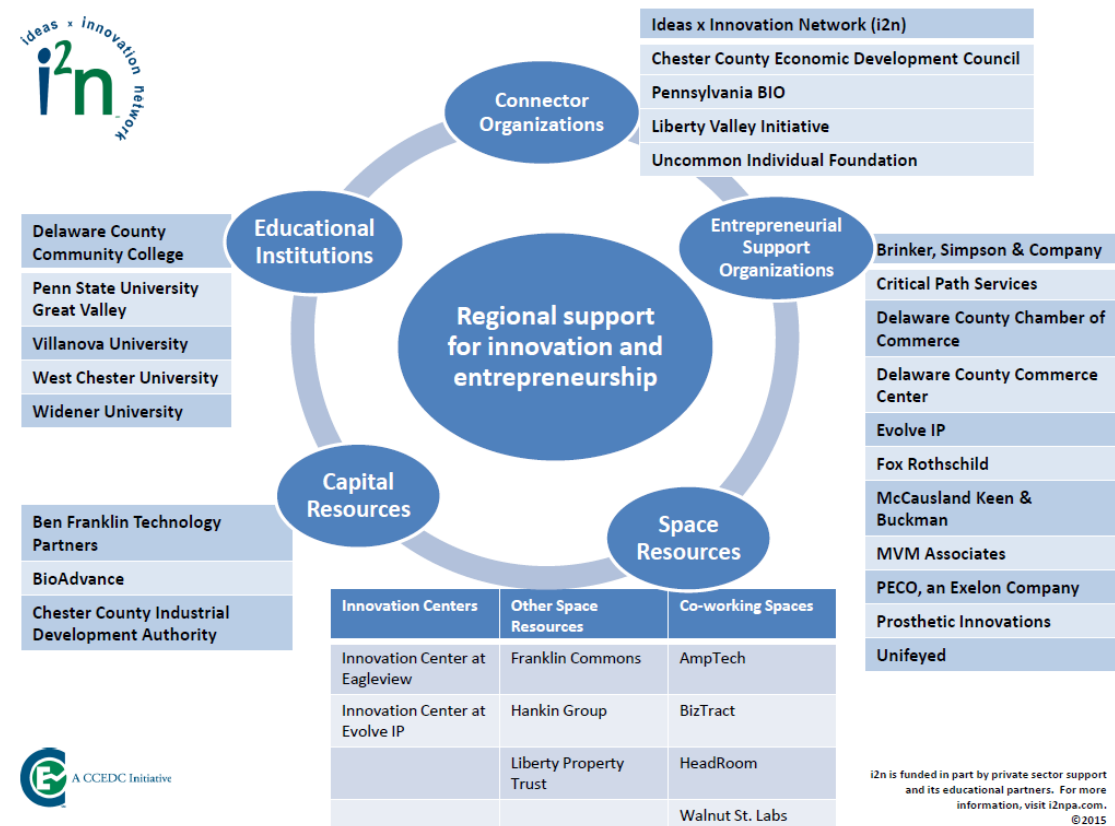


Progress – Goal #4

Strategy 4.3.8 - Create a relationship map for entrepreneurs documenting possible collaborative resources that can support business growth

Results: An Ecosystem Map was created for Chester County entrepreneurs to easily identify resources to help fuel their growth.

Impact: The map demonstrates the range of available support for Chester County entrepreneurs.



Goal #5

**Support critical infrastructure in
targeted corridors of opportunity**

Progress – Goal #5

Strategy 5.1.1 - Survey Chester County companies to help identify the top five transportation improvements that support economic development in targeted opportunity corridors

Results: The Take the Pulse survey conducted in 2016 and again in 2017 has helped identify key transportation needs in Chester County, including:

- The items rated as having the most negative effect were “public transportation” and “traffic congestion.”
- The primary challenges identified by area businesses include aspects related to “public transportation” and “traffic congestion” and to a somewhat lesser extent, the “permitting/municipal approval process,” “housing affordability” and “cost of land.”

Impact: Maintains a focus on the infrastructure issues that are important to the business community and that may impact location decisions.

Progress – Goal #5

Strategy 5.2.1 - Identify and support Transit Oriented Development (TOD) opportunities in communities with stations on the Keystone Corridor

Results: Coatesville –An interagency task force has met monthly to address and resolve the issues related to the proposed Coatesville train station TOD. Work has begun on the streetscape leading to the station from downtown and plans are being finalized for new platforms, a new access road, new parking and new private investment at the station.

Results: Downingtown – Coordinated efforts have resulted in a proposed \$100 million TOD project at the Downingtown station

Results: CCPC completed the Commercial Landscapes Task Force report series that included a report on TOD development

Impact: Provides an alternative to sprawl, strengthens urban centers and builds on a major Chester County transportation asset.

Progress – Goal #5

Strategy 5.4.2 – Complete the proposed multi-modal study of the western Route 30 bypass corridor to identify traffic and transit issues and options.

Results: Using a Chester County Vision Partnership Planning (VPP) grant and a TCDI grant from DVRPC, a coordinated multimodal transportation and future land use plan for the Route 30 corridor was developed. The process was initiated and led by six sponsoring municipalities and the Western Chester County Chamber of Commerce.

Impact: Provides guidance for upgrades and improvements to the Route 30 Bypass corridor.



Progress – Goal #5

Strategy 5.8.1 - Assist Route 724 communities with the development of appropriate strategies and implementation assistance to encourage economic development on approved development sites in corridor communities

Results: Through the joint efforts of Chester County and CCEDC, a series of meetings with municipal leaders and stakeholders along the Route 724 corridor has led to a map of sites targeted for development or redevelopment.

Impact: This new effort will call attention to and direct resources to key economic development challenges and opportunities along Route 724.



Route 724 Regional Initiative Stakeholders Breakfast

Wednesday, May 10

8:00 am Breakfast and Registration

8:30 am to 10:00 am Program

Coventry Mall Community Room

351 W. Schuylkill Road • Pottstown, PA19465

Complimentary breakfast sponsored by Coventry Mall

The Chester County Economic Development Council (CCEDC) and TriCounty Area Chamber of Commerce invite you to join us for a roundtable discussion regarding the Route 724 Regional Initiative highlighting:

- Local & regional planning along the 724 corridor
- Regional communities facing townships and municipalities
- Business opportunities and needs
- Developing a strategic focus for the 724 corridor

REMARKS:

- Michele Kichline - Chair, Chester County Commissioners
- Gary Smith - President and CEO, Chester County Economic Development Council
- Brian O'Leary - Chester County Planning Commission
- Rob Henry - Executive Director, GVF
- Tim Phelps - Executive Director, TMACC
- Updates from township managers and business leaders



About the Route 724 Regional Initiative:

The PA Route 724 Task Force was formed in 2004 to identify challenges, partnerships, and opportunities in the region.

The task force's main goal is to advance the economic landscape of the participating townships by implementing their vision. Stakeholders work jointly on the initiative to develop a plan that will have a strong and positive impact.

For more information,

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Eileen Dautrich
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eileen@tricountyareachamber.com

REGISTRATION: <https://724breakfast.eventbrite.com>



Progress – Goal #5

Strategy 5.12.1 - Develop list of key Chester County airport improvements that will contribute to economic growth

Results: \$2,000,000 RACP approved to assist with airport related infrastructure and ongoing dialogue underway regarding issues and challenges facing the Chester County airport.

Impact: This effort seeks to build on the economic potential of the Chester County airport.



VISTA 2025 Goal Teams

It is important to note that the implementation process is being guided and assisted by Goal Teams, one for each VISTA 2025 goal, that meet quarterly to review strategy progress and guide future activities.

Goal teams are comprised of a mix of companies, institutions and government departments, each having a public and private sector co-chair.

Conclusion

Much has been accomplished but much remains to be done to maintain and improve the County's economic health and to continue to balance progress and preservation.

Implementation of the strategies identified in VISTA 2025 continues.

Contributing Partners

