GREATER READING
CHAMBER & ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

STRATEGIC THEMES

1: READING MATTERS

- ✓ High unemployment – but surplus labor supply
- ✓ High poverty – but concentration of new business start-ups
- ✓ Good infrastructure – investments in roads & bridges, office building & adaptive re-use projects

Short-Term Strategies:

- Re-boot Relationship with Mayor & City Administration; collaborate on major economic development projects

- Downtown Revitalization
  - Reading Downtown Improvement District
  - Main Street Program
  - Downtown Partnership Model
  - Major projects – Abraham Lincoln Apartments, Callowhill Buildings, 503 & 505 Penn Street
  - Free/Low Cost – High Speed Wi-Fi access for Downtown Core
  - Support mixed-use commercial/residential projects to promote Downtown as a 24/7 community

Short-Term Strategies (cont'd):

- Identify secondary development area –
  - 18th Ward
  - College Heights
    - Major Projects: World Cycling League Velodrome

- Examine West Reading Main Street model for replication

2: BUSINESS CONCERNS – WORKFORCE

- ✓ Business will leave the area if they cannot replace their skilled workforce
- ✓ Activating surplus labor supply challenge – concentration in Reading
- ✓ Disconnected youth focus
- ✓ Strong vocational training capacity - needs to be better leveraged
  - ✓ RACC/Schmidt Center
  - ✓ 3 Career & Technical Education High Schools

2: BUSINESS CONCERNS – WORKFORCE

Short-Term Strategies:

- *Workforce & Education Coordinator – New Position*

- Coordination of Efforts
  - Berks County Intermediate Unit (BCIU)
  - 3 Career & Technical Education High Schools
  - Workforce Development Board
  - 5 Colleges/Universities

- Increased marketing of manufacturing careers & increased utilization of manufacturing training assets

2: BUSINESS CONCERNS – WORKFORCE

Short-Term Strategies:

- Examination of growth sector challenges beyond manufacturing in Berks County
  - Healthcare
  - Construction
  - Business/Financial Services
  - Retail
- Expand corporate/incumbent worker training options @ Center for Business Excellence
  - Ex. Launching a Public Speaking & Communications Seminar for Professional Staff

3: INCREASE FOCUS ON: BUSINESS EXPANSION SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

- ✓ (Chamber) has lost focus on small businesses & entrepreneurs
- ✓ Small business concentration in Reading is Latino businesses
- ✓ Mid-sized businesses face challenges to growth

3: INCREASE FOCUS ON: BUSINESS EXPANSION SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Short-Term Strategies:

- *Small Business Development / Latino Outreach Coordinator – New Position*

- With GBDF, develop more flexible financing options for Minority/Latino Business Community;
  - Currently, $400,000 available through the Pennsylvania Minority Business Development Authority

- Re-purpose Catalyst Co-Working Space @ Center for Business Excellence

3: INCREASE FOCUS ON: BUSINESS EXPANSION SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Short-Term Strategies:

- Expand *Business Expansion & Growth* Program administered under GREP; Seek to align, where appropriate, GBDF financing to GREP projects that focus on job creation & expansion opportunities

- Consider offering more targeted (industry-specific) & regional networking events through the Chamber

- Co-location of Latino Chamber of Commerce at GRCEDC offices as a first step to formal collaboration

4: IMPROVE BUSINESS ATTRACTION OUTCOMES

- ✓ Increase efforts to create shovel-ready sites throughout Berks County
- ✓ Improve data collection & research activities tied to marketing efforts

4: IMPROVE BUSINESS ATTRACTION OUTCOMES

Short-Term Strategies:

- *Coordinator of Data Analytics & Research – New Position*
- Publish & disseminate original research & studies – Collaborate w/ colleges where appropriate
- Better align Chamber Advocacy Program w/ GREP Goals & Objectives
  - Gail Landis, SVP, Government & Community Affairs

4: IMPROVE BUSINESS ATTRACTION OUTCOMES

Short-Term Strategies:

- Outreach to regional investors in more localized markets:
  - NYC
  - Philly
  - Baltimore
  - Lehigh
  - Lancaster

- Advocate & support BCIDA efforts to build a spec building @ Berks Park 183

4: IMPROVE BUSINESS ATTRACTION OUTCOMES

- Advocate for infrastructure improvements at major industrial sites

- Transportation & Reading-Bridges utilize Public Private Partnerships to advocate for infrastructure improvements i.e. 222N & 422 West Shore Bypass to keep our economy vibrant

5: CHANGE PERCEPTIONS

- ✓ Combating the tendency to focus on the negatives
- ✓ Improving “Quality of Place” perception
- ✓ Retention/Attraction of millennials

5: CHANGE NEGATIVE PERCEPTION

Strategies:

- Develop positive public messaging themes; emphasis on lifestyle themes
  - 2 Quality Healthcare Systems
  - World class Preforming Arts Center + Santander Arena
  - Renowned Museum
  - 2 Minor League Sports Teams
  - Cycling Culture
  - Outdoor Recreation
  - DoubleTree
  - Proximity to Philadelphia, NYC, Baltimore, DC

- Continued support for GREP talent attraction video production
  - Target 1: recent college graduates
  - Target 2: 30+ aged professionals

5: CHANGE PERCEPTIONS

Strategies:

- Develop strategies for attracting & retaining young professionals
  - Coordinated campaign to keep college grads in Berks
- Enlist support of groups like the Greater Reading Young Professionals (GRYP) to lead messaging efforts
- Support housing & community development efforts in Reading being led by Berks Alliance

6: COLLABORATION/INTEGRATION

- ✓ Ongoing discussions with Berks Alliance on strategic partnership development
- ✓ Coordination with other Chambers in Berks County & regional partners in other Counties

6: COLLABORATION/INTEGRATION

- Affiliate Membership Agreements (Chamber)
  - Reading-Berks Realtors Association (RBAR)
  - Latino Chamber
- Regional Partnerships around Advocacy Agenda
  - York County Economic Alliance
  - Harrisburg Regional Chamber & CREDC
  - Lancaster Chamber
- Reading Penn Street Market – example in partnership
  - Reading Downtown Improvement District
  - GRCEDC
  - Berks Agricultural Resource Network (BARN)
  - Berks County Community Foundation

6: COLLABORATION/INTEGRATION

- Total Berks County initiative; leverage & support existing initiatives
  - Building a Better Boyertown
  - Hamburg – Our Town Foundation
  - Kutztown Partnership

Randy Peers | President & CEO
RPeers@GreaterReadingChamber.org
+1 610 898 7771