

For Release Wednesday, 3/1/2023

County of Berks – Press Release

County Commissioners hear 6-month update on IMAGINE Berks strategic economic plan

Reading, PA— 3/1/2023 — The Berks County Commissioners received an update Tuesday from the County’s Economic Development Team about the activity underway for the IMAGINE Berks Strategic Economic Development Plan. The plan is the culmination of a year-long process that began in August 2021 and ended with the plan being formally adopted by the Board of Commissioners in August 2022.

“With continued involvement from more than 75 residents and 35 partners, the Year 1 Action steps in the plan are actively being implemented,” said Pamela Shupp Menet, Director of Community and Economic Development.

Since the plan’s adoption, County staff have identified resources of more than \$27 million through direct County, federal, state and private sources to support activity in all of the plan’s six focus areas. The focus areas are:

- Business & Industry Growth
- Small Business & Entrepreneurship
- Infrastructure & Land Use
- Talent & Economic Mobility
- Housing
- Placemaking

These projects are spread throughout the county and represent everything from trail connections and recreation projects to investments in the county’s Main Streets, support for high-priority jobs, increased capacity for youth and senior activities and small business lending. Other key programs and projects include designating \$5 million to establish a Berks County

Infrastructure Fund that will allow municipalities to access funds for improvements on sites in their community to help attract new investment and allocating \$6.3 million for broadband development and education.

Implementation Teams made up of residents, business and community leaders and County partners are meeting regularly to better define roles and resources and to exchange information that increases knowledge, strengthens strategies and creates connections to get the best possible outcomes.

“A plan that ends up on the shelf is of little use to anyone,” Commissioners Chair Christian Y. Leinbach said. “IMAGINE Berks is not about a document, it’s about action and the future of Berks County. In the first six months, it is clear that the IMAGINE Berks strategy is about positive economic growth here in Berks County. It is equally true that the engagement and accountability with business, community leaders and our residents is what makes this plan a successful economic map for our future.”

The County’s Economic Development team will give an annual report to the community in August 2023 to ensure that the strategies and action steps are accountable and measurable against identified outcomes and process metrics identified in the plan.

The County continues to prioritize communicating the IMAGINE Berks plan to the community. To learn more and get the latest information, check out www.IMAGINEBerks.org. If you are interested in having someone speak to your group about IMAGINE Berks, please contact Derek Harris, Economic Development Coordinator, at dharris@countyofberks.com.

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