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County of Berks – Press Release

Berks County Commissioners adopt IMAGINE Berks Strategic Economic Development Action Plan

Reading, PA— 8/2/2022 — The Berks County Commissioners formally adopted the Strategic Economic Development Action Plan for the County, known as IMAGINE Berks, today during the board’s Operations meeting. This plan will guide policy, investments, and actions over the next five years in six key focus areas: Business & Industry Growth, Small Business & Entrepreneurship, Infrastructure & Land Use, Talent & Economic Mobility, Housing, and Placemaking. These economic development focus areas are each defined by goals, strategies, and desired outcomes that were developed through data analysis and community engagement.

Throughout the nearly year-long process of creating the IMAGINE Berks plan, a team made up of the County’s planning and development staff and partners worked on gathering feedback from community members and business leaders. The planning team included: Pamela Shupp Menet, Director of Community and Economic Development; Derek Harris, Economic Development Coordinator; David Hunter, Executive Director of the Berks County Planning Commission; Ashley Showers, Assistant Director of the Berks County Planning Commission; Ken Pick, Executive Director of the Berks County Redevelopment Authority; and Jeremy Zaborowski, Executive Director of the Berks County Industrial Development Authority. Led by the economic development consulting firm Fourth Economy, the team focused on broad outreach and engagement with the community. Previous plans were also referenced and included to build upon and learn from the past.

“It was intentional for this plan to be as inclusive as possible so that practical and impactful strategies could be implemented to benefit the entire Berks County community,” said Commissioner Kevin Barnhardt.

Prior to the plan’s formal adoption, the Commissioners supported and approved several programs and projects that will be implemented during the first year. The Commissioners approved [supporting PA Americana Region’s marketing efforts](#) with \$450,000 worth of funding on behalf of the placemaking strategies outlined in the IMAGINE Berks plan. The Commissioners also approved \$100,000 for [the Financial Lending & Innovation Collaborative \(FLIC\) at Alvernia University’s O’Pake Institute](#) to help micro and small businesses access capital and support the Small Business and Entrepreneurship action steps of the plan.

Finally, more than \$5.7 million of grant funds awarded through the County’s 2022 grant program went to legacy projects that directly align with the Year 1 implementation activities in the IMAGINE Berks plan. These projects ranged from expanding water and sewer infrastructure and supporting agribusiness and food access to enhancing community gathering space in our townships and boroughs.

“We are excited by our ability to effectively and strategically focus economic development resources and positively impact our residents and our communities,” said Shupp Menet. “The plan’s viewpoint of enhanced coordination and cooperation with our partners is key to our successful economic future.”

For more information and to sign up for updates on the plan, please visit the IMAGINE Berks website at www.IMAGINEBerks.org.

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