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HOUSE DEMOCRATIC POLICY COMMITTEE

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**House of Representatives**  
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
HARRISBURG

**HOUSE DEMOCRATIC POLICY COMMITTEE ROUNDTABLE**

**Topic: Community Planning**

**Tom Ridge Environmental Center – Erie, PA**

**March 21, 2018**

**AGENDA**

3:00 p.m. Welcome and Opening Remarks

3:10 p.m. Discussion with Panelists:

- Kathy Dahlkemper  
Erie County Executive
- Amy Murdock  
Planning Director, Erie County
- Mark Nicholson, P.E.  
Civil Engineer Manager, Pennsylvania Department of Transportation
- Joe Schember  
City of Erie Mayor
- Kathy Wyrosdick  
Planning Director, City of Erie
- John Morgan  
Millcreek Township Supervisor
- Matt Waldinger  
Director of Planning and Development, Millcreek Township

4:50 p.m. Closing Remarks

Pennsylvania House Democratic Policy Committee  
Roundtable: Community and Economic  
Revitalization

## Planning in Erie County: Coordinated Local, County, and State Priorities for Investment

John Morgan, Supervisor Millcreek Township  
Joe Schember, Mayor City of Erie  
Kathy Dahlkemper, Erie County Executive

Amy Murdock, Erie County Planning  
Mark Nicholson, PennDOT  
Kathy Wyrosdick, City of Erie  
Matt Waldinger, Millcreek Township

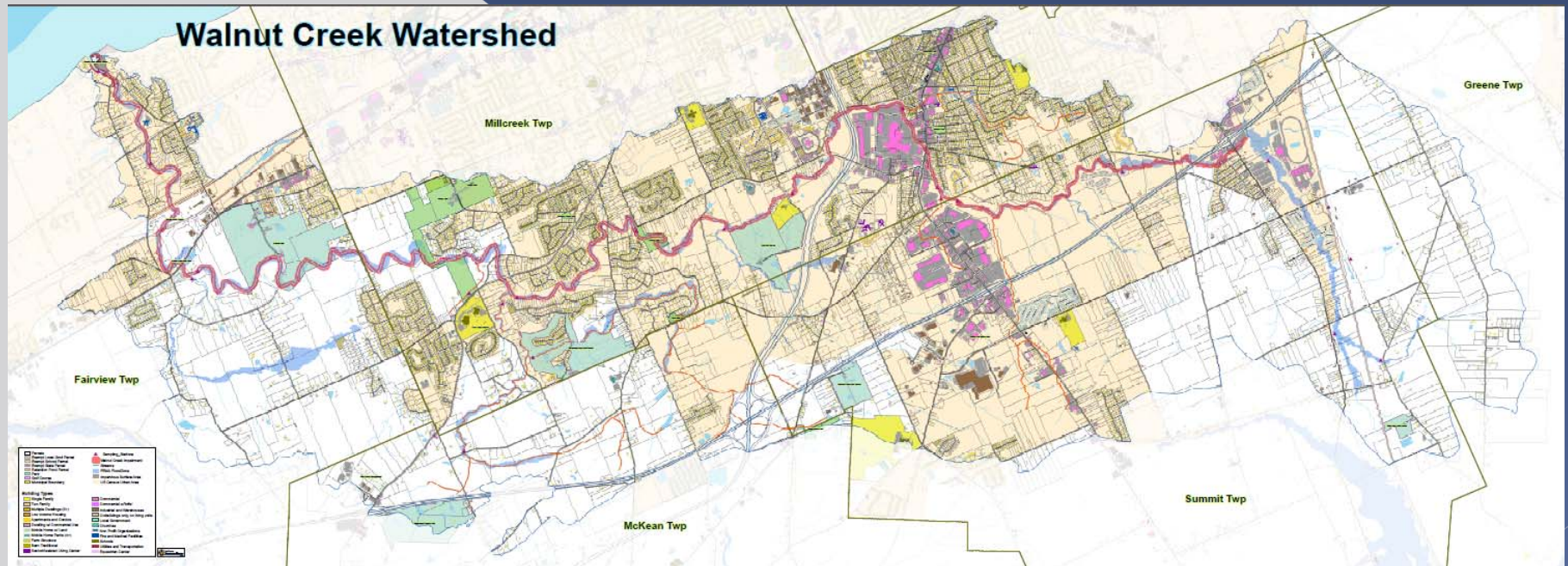
# Erie County Municipal Assistance Program

- ◎ Assist Municipalities in identifying priorities for investment through:
  - Comprehensive Planning
  - Zoning
  - Master Site Planning
  - Additional Program Support As Needed
    - Ex. Municipal Stormwater Assistance Program

# Erie County Municipal Assistance Program

- Incorporate municipal priorities in Erie County Planning Processes and Services:
  - Long Range Transportation Plan/MPO
  - Parks, Trails, and Recreation Plan
  - Municipal Stormwater Assistance Program

# Erie County Municipal Assistance Program



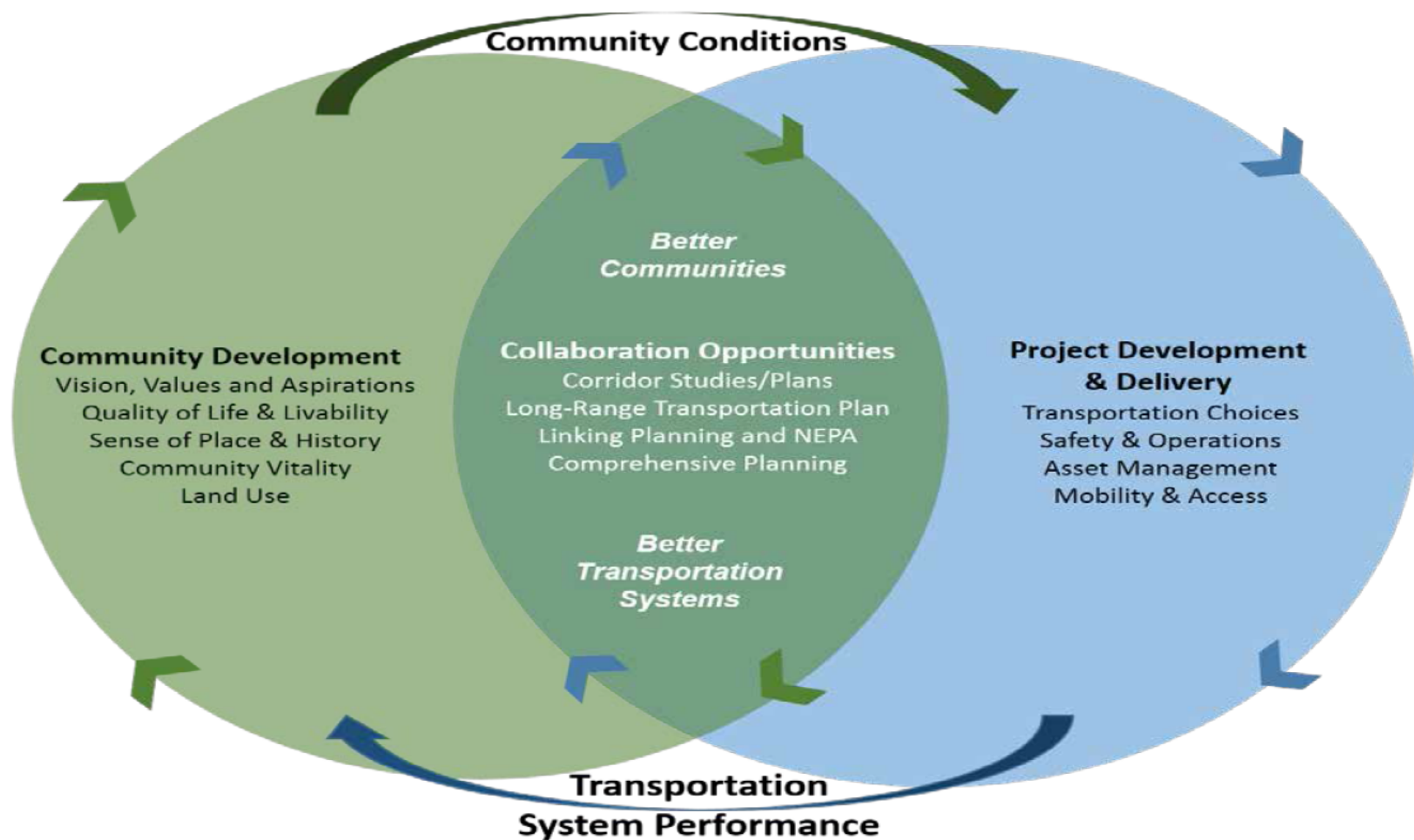
# PennDOT Connects

- PennDOT Policy that requires PennDOT District Offices and Planning Partners (RPO/MPO) to meet with Local Gov't on ALL new projects starting with the 2017 TIP.
- Goal is to identify community needs/goals/issues early in project planning (Planning and NEPA) and to help them achieve them through transportation improvement projects.

# PennDOT Connects



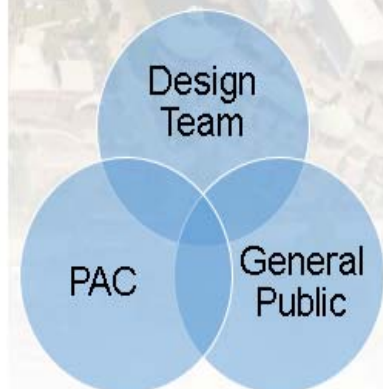
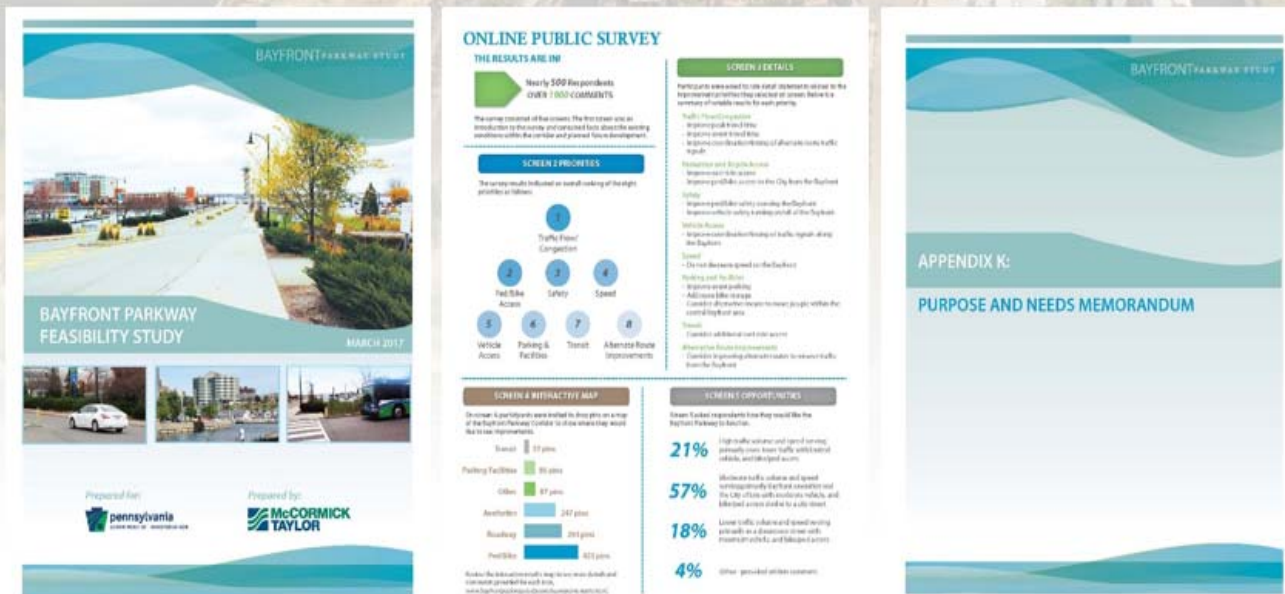
## Planning & Engineering 360°





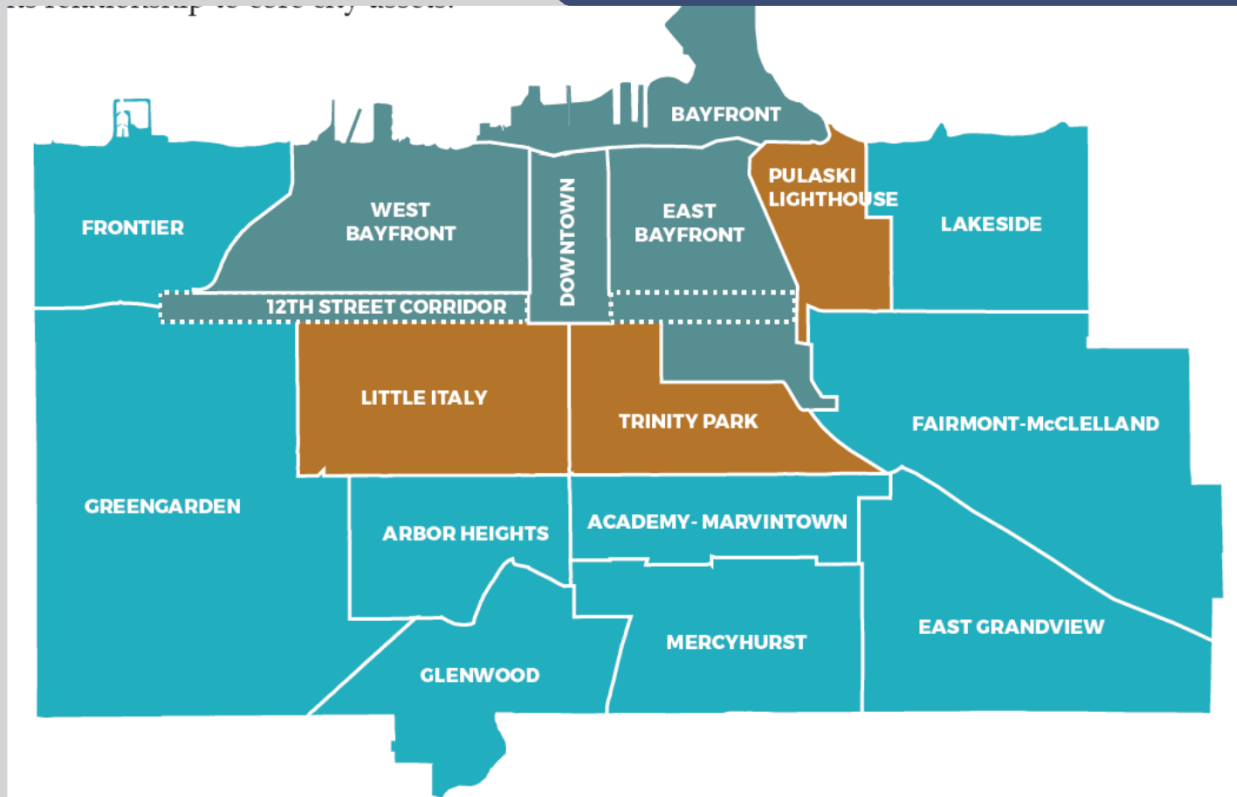
# PennDOT Connects

# Bayfront Parkway Feasibility Study





# City of Erie Priorities: Erie Refocused

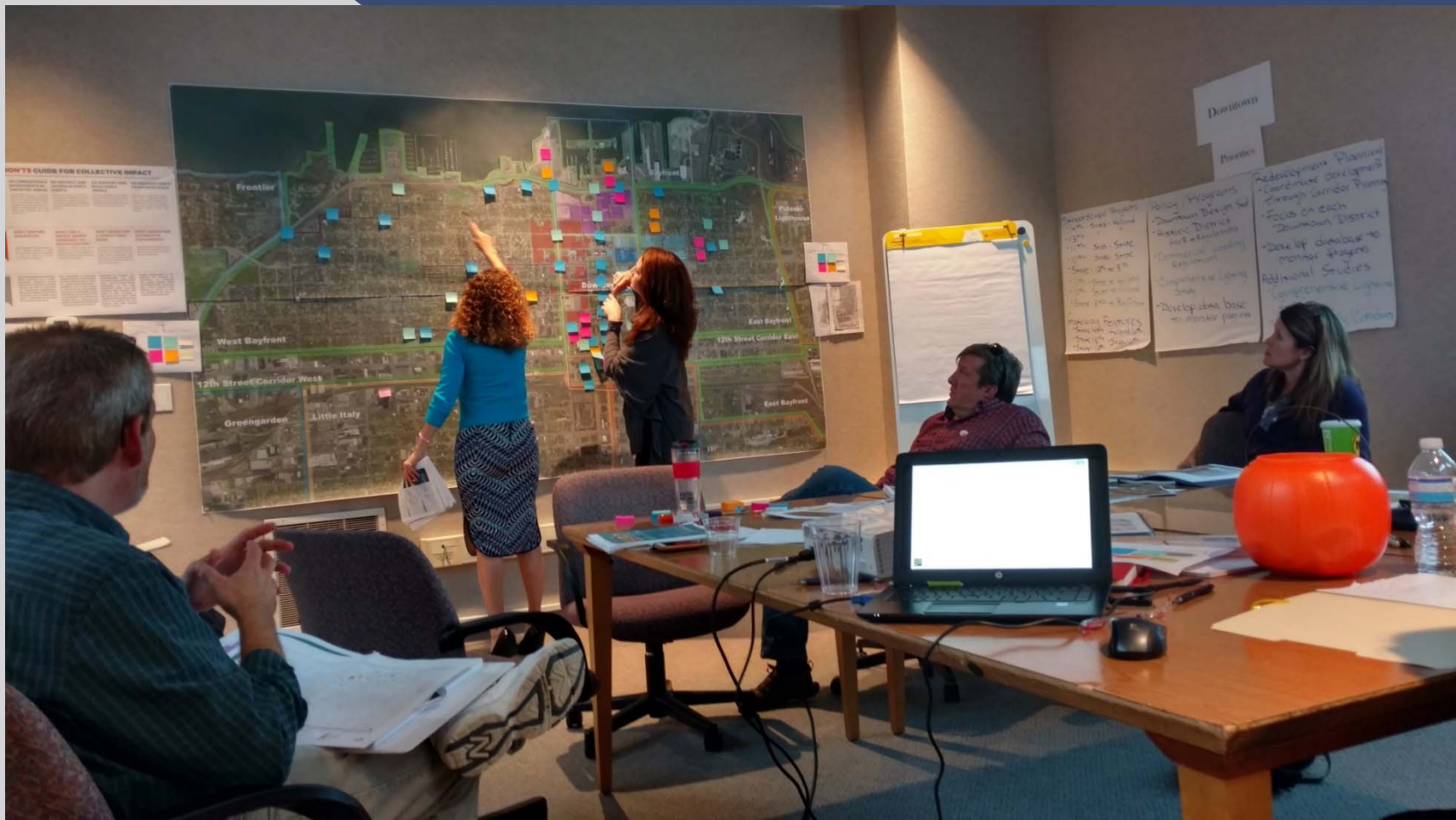


**CORE STRENGTHENING**

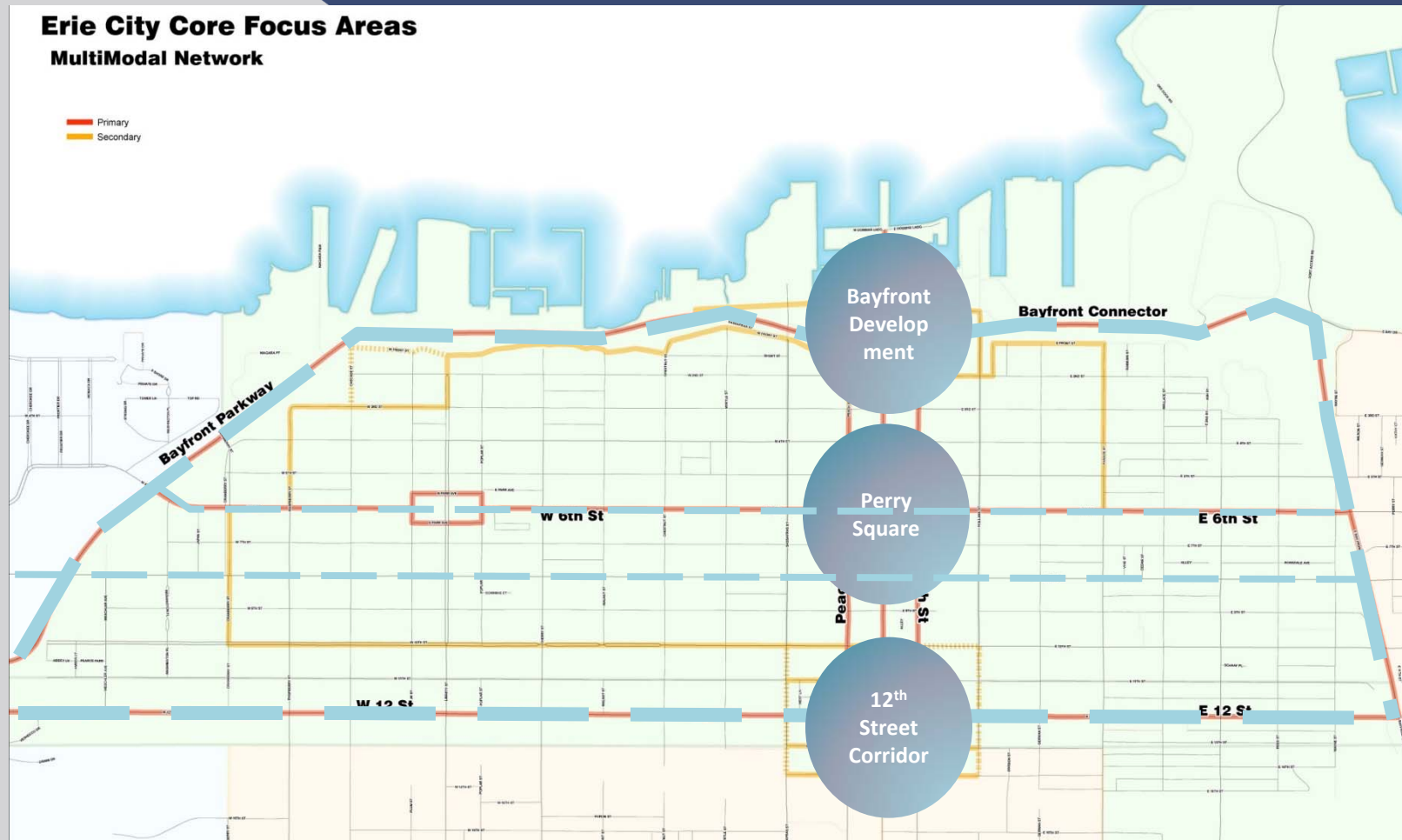
**NEIGHBORHOOD  
STRENGTHENING**

**STABILIZATION**

# City of Erie Priorities: Working Together

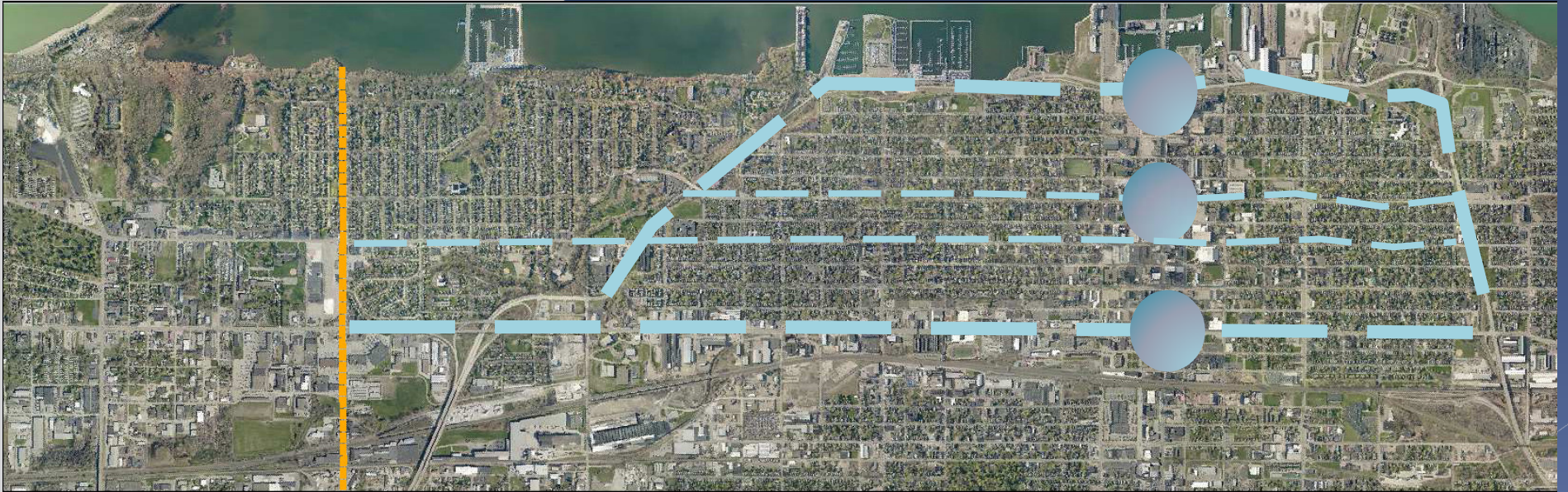


# City of Erie Priorities: Placemaking to Support City and Region





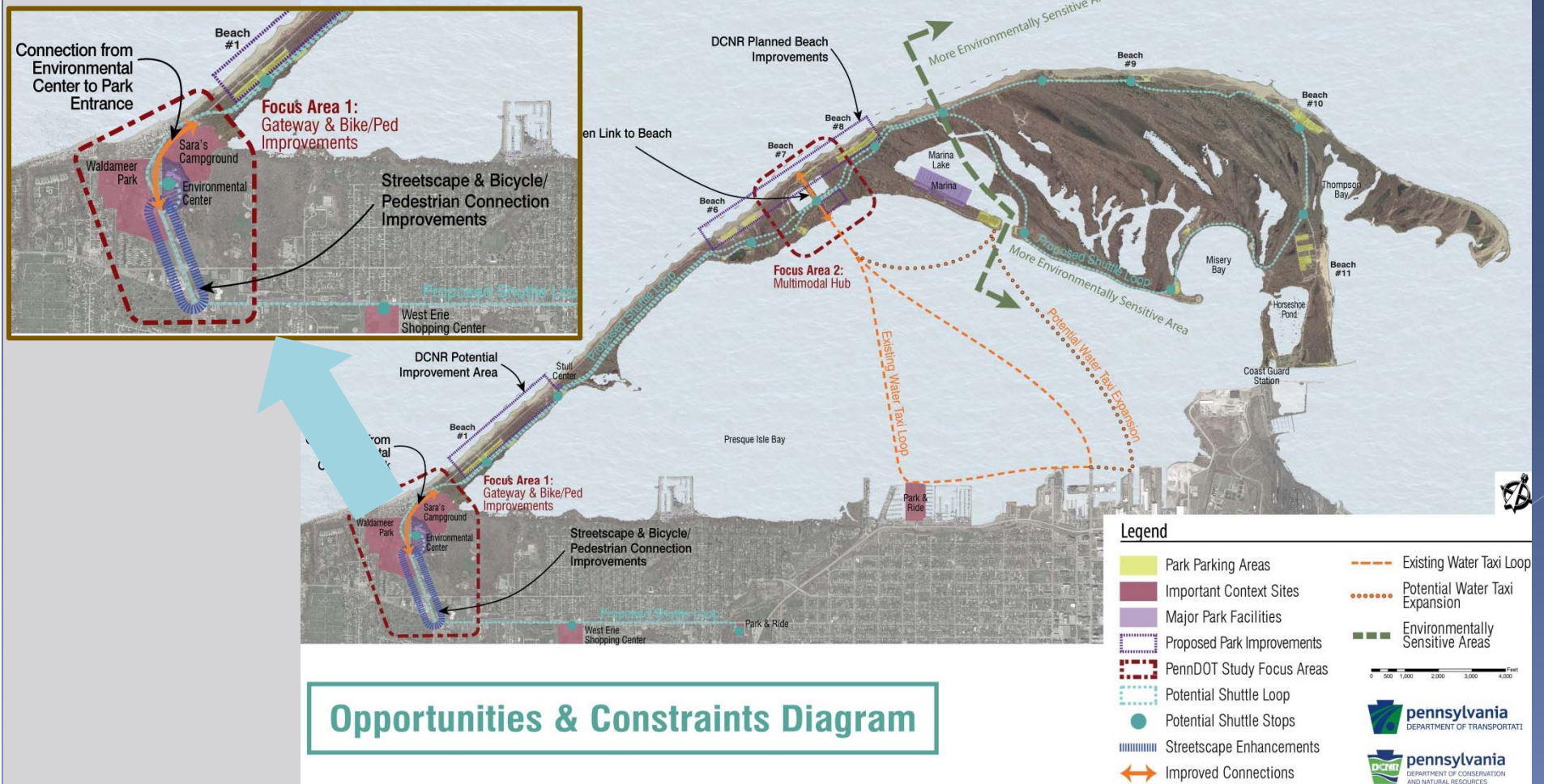
# City of Erie Priorities: Regional Approach





# Millcreek Township Priorities: Gateway to Presque Isle

## PRESQUE ISLE STATE PARK IMPROVEMENTS

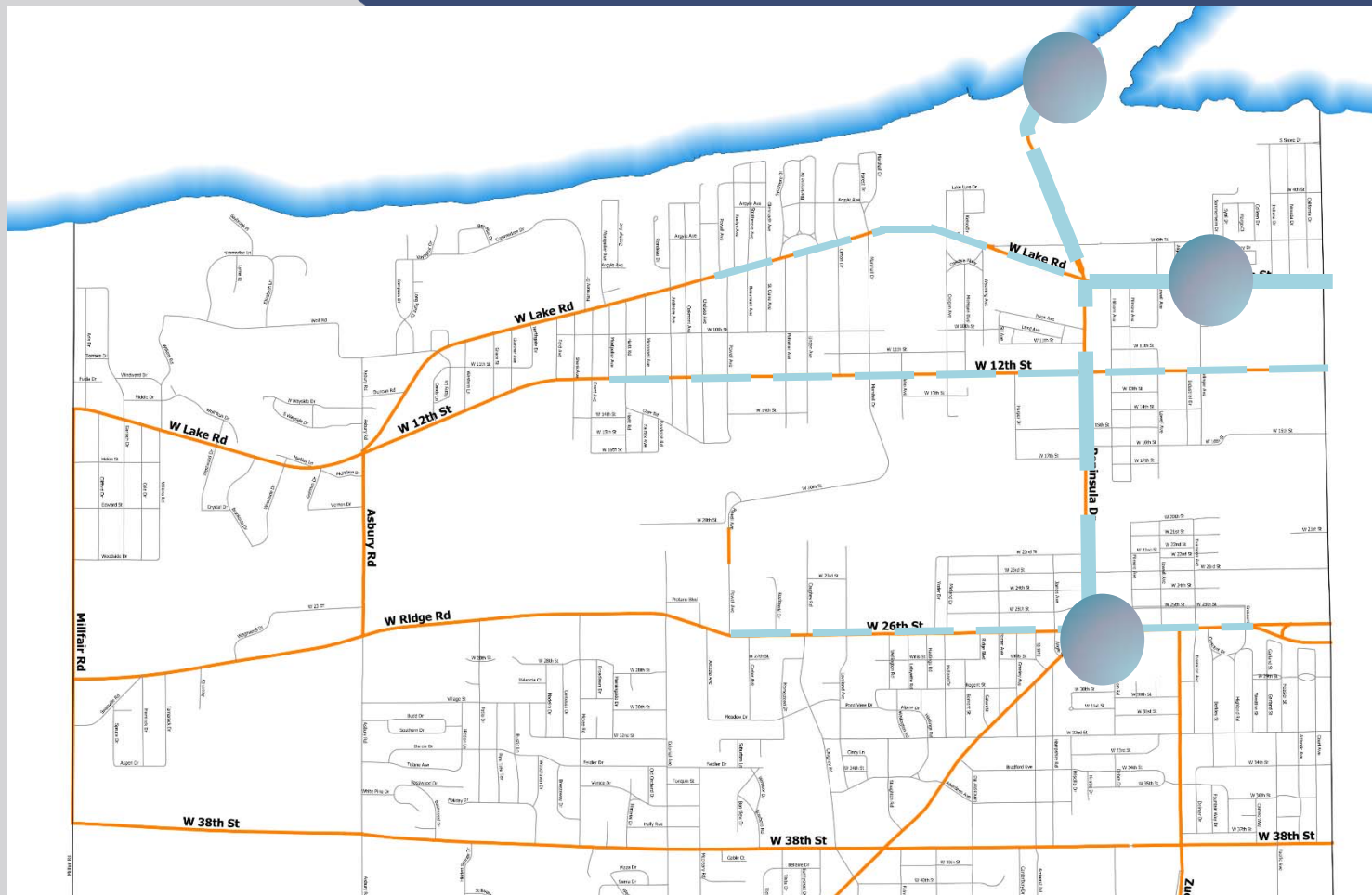


# Millcreek Township Priorities: Gateway to Presque Isle

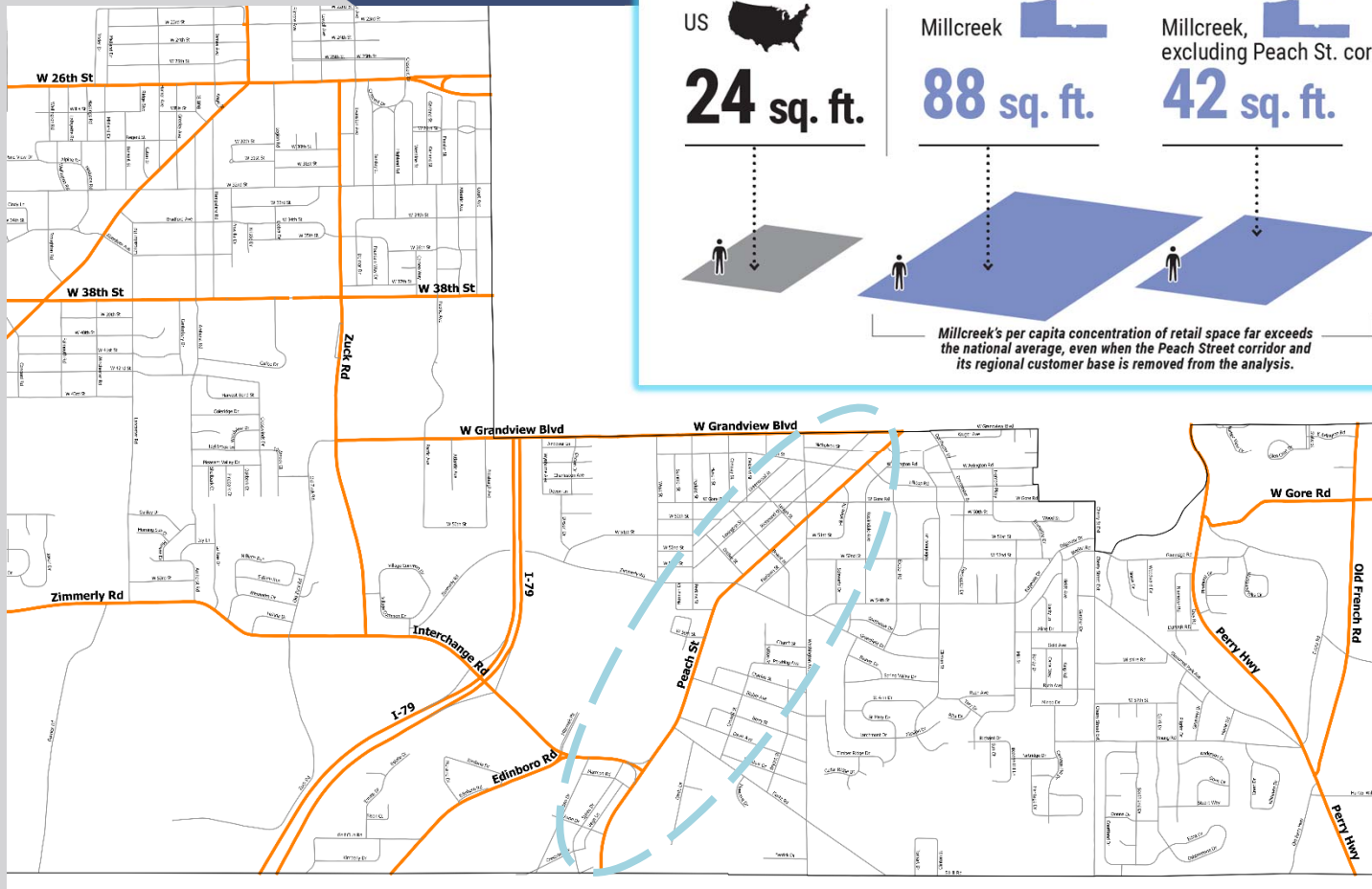




# Millcreek Township Priorities: Improve Commercial Corridors



# Millcreek Township Priorities: Support Business Development



# Coordinated Priorities

- 8<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor
- 12<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor
- Presque Isle and Bayfront Connections

# Coordinated Priorities





# Lessons Learned

- Pennsylvania lacks support and funding for comprehensive planning initiatives although they have proven to be essential to improving communities.
- Pennsylvania grant programs lack a process to connect projects to plans which would help to ensure community buy-in and success.
- Tackling issues of blight falls to public sector entities using public funds.

# Where Support is Needed

- Support funding for projects that are part of a coordinated planning effort
  - RACP
  - Greenways Funding including DCED
  - Multi-Modal Funds
  - EPA Assistance for Brownfield Redevelopment
  - Transportation Funding
- Expand the Municipal Planning Code Act to require comprehensive plans at the local level
- Support House Bill 1481 Support for Amending the act of August 15, 1961 that increases the threshold for prevailing wage.
- Consider the impact of shifting the tax burden from property taxes to sales taxes on the already fragile retail sector, especially in regions that draw customers from other states.
- Support dedicated funding for the Industrial Site Reuse (ISR) Program





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Kathy Dahlkemper  
*County Executive*

Amy R. Murdock  
*Interim Director*

**Testimony for March 21, 2018 House Democratic Policy Committee Hearing**

**Opening Remarks:**

**Kathy Dahlkemper, County Executive**

As the County Executive, I have the pleasure of working alongside many of our local elected officials, regional entities, and state agencies to advocate for and move forward collaborative priorities of our region. The latest written collection of these priorities is in Destination Erie. Since completion of this planning document in 2015, Erie County has moved forward with several of its recommendations, including working toward expanding broadband internet coverage and improving community health. The County has formed a committee with local internet and utility providers to identify barriers to expanded broadband service and determine solutions for expanded service. The County is also working toward improving the region's health outcomes through the Blue Zones initiative. The staff in the Erie County Department of Planning continues to carry out the recommendation of the Municipal Assistance program, where staff provides planning support to our municipalities. Through these efforts, we work closely with our municipalities to develop coordinated priorities for investment in our region.

**Erie County Department of Planning:**

**Amy Murdock, Interim Director**

The Erie County Department of Planning's Municipal Assistance Program, a recommendation of Destination Erie, provides our municipalities with technical assistance for planning initiatives, resulting in increased public and private investment throughout the County. This program gives municipalities access to staff, tools, and resources to successfully identify and implement priorities of their communities.

Since 2016, this program has provided support to comprehensive planning efforts in the City of Erie, Millcreek Township, Summit Township, and now Albion Borough. The City's Comprehensive Plan, Erie Refocused, was funded through programs administered by the Erie County Department of Planning. For other municipalities, the department has provided staffing, GIS, and graphic support, and in the case of Albion Borough, the department is completing the entire planning process with in house resources. Staff has also developed a model zoning ordinance, and assisted Union City Borough, Union Township, Venango Township, LeBoeuf Township through the zoning update and adoption processes.

Under this program, we have also developed a Municipal Stormwater Assistance Program, enabling our region to plan water resources according to watershed boundaries that are no longer limited by municipal jurisdictions. The program alleviates some of the financial burden on our municipalities as they work to comply with stormwater regulations. Through this program, we are mapping municipal stormwater infrastructure in GIS, working with municipalities to improve municipal land development processes, and providing regional education and outreach programs.

The Erie County Department of Planning looks forward to the opportunity to work with the newly formed Erie County Land Bank and incorporate developing local blight strategies as a segment of the Municipal Assistance Program. It is anticipated that County Planning will assist municipalities in developing tactics for combating blight in their communities. In many cases, these strategies may recommend significant investment in planning staff and land development resources as a preventative measure in order for taxing bodies to avoid the burden of future vacant and blighted properties. Much like preventative healthcare, it is often more cost effective to invest in planning resources that focus on blight prevention rather than be left with the cost of valueless property in need of demolition.

These robust planning processes have enabled municipalities to develop publicly vetted and achievable priorities, resulting in coordinated efforts with the County. As we work with these communities to identify priorities at a local level, we develop coordinated priorities as a region. The Erie County Department of Planning will approach its work with the principles of the "Implementable Plan," meaning the department will reevaluate these goals of its planning processes regularly to ensure they are achievable and consistent with the goals of our communities.

As a result of these coordinated efforts, our region has seen millions of dollars of public and private investment toward implementation of these community revitalization efforts. The Erie County Department of Planning looks forward to working with our municipalities to develop coordinated goals and improve quality of life in our region.

#### **Challenges:**

- 1. Pennsylvania lacks robust programming and funding to support comprehensive planning initiatives although they have proven to be essential to improving communities.** The Erie County Department of Planning currently has a waiting list of eleven (11) requests from our municipalities for assistance with comprehensive planning or zoning. This demonstrates a lack of capacity within our municipalities to invest in planning, and, under current staffing levels, it would take the county planning department at least four (4) years to complete these projects.
- 2. Pennsylvania grant programs lack a process to connect projects to plans which would help to ensure community buy-in and success.**  
Often grant applicants will cite language from a plan that makes a vague reference to the project application but is not true implementation of the plan.
- 3. Tackling issues of blight falls to public sector entities and taxing bodies and could be avoided in some cases with investment in planning and land development resources for our municipalities.**

#### **Requests:**

- 1. Support funding for comprehensive planning and local planning staff.**
- 2. Support funding for projects that are part of a coordinated planning effort.**
- 3. Expand the Municipal Planning Code Act to require comprehensive plans for municipalities.**

## **Testimony for 3/21/18 House Democratic Policy Committee Hearing**

**Prepared by: Mark A. Nicholson, P.E. – Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, District 1-0 Office**

Serving as a project manager for PennDOT District 1-0, I've had the opportunity to work within multiple municipalities throughout the six counties that District 1-0 serves. These municipalities have represented our most rural, to our most urbanized communities within northwest PA. My goal in writing this testimony is to stress the importance of both regional and local planning. Not only does planning help a community define their visions and goals, but it helps PennDOT and its Planning Partners align its transportation projects in a way to better serve communities with safer and more efficient transportation systems.

The responsibilities for planning largely falls on three parties: 1) Rural and Metropolitan Planning Organizations that lead the efforts for the development of Long Range Transportation Plans, 2) PennDOT can evaluate transportation corridor operations and issues through Transportation and Land Use Studies and more comprehensive mobility planning, and 3) Municipalities that define their goals and visions through Comprehensive Plans. Good planning and coordination is needed to ensure that the plans and studies align with each other, which helps the planning partners and PennDOT to allocate funds and resources for future projects. It should be noted that PennDOT is encouraged by the FHWA to focus on asset management and performance management when identifying project priorities.

There are unfortunate cases where lack of municipal planning is apparent and the communities are faced with day to day challenges. Within our District, corridors exist where business owners, residents, and commuters complain of speeding, safety concerns, and inability to access roadways due to congestion and lack of controlled access. While PennDOT and the Planning Partners are trying to help communities with corridor improvements, the need for investment could have been avoided, or at least minimized had land use and transportation planning existed. Contrary to many beliefs, PennDOT does not control/approve land use and has limited regulatory control over access management. Marginal Access Roads, common and controlled access points, and land development ordinances including transportation improvement requirements could have been defined by comprehensive plans and may have alleviated the issues that exist in these corridors.

To aid in planning and coordination, Secretary Leslie Richards initiated a new approach to project development known as "PennDOT Connects." The primary goal behind this initiative was to build relationships between PennDOT and the communities that the transportation system serves. Meetings between the District Staff, Municipal leaders, and Planning Organizations are held early in project development to discuss the goals of the projects, project purpose and needs, community goals for land use and transportation, and ultimately to further define success within the scope of the transportation projects.

Where proactive planning exists, PennDOT and Planner partners are working with the municipalities to understand the plans and goals for their communities. Within Erie County, the Erie Metropolitan Planning Organization supported the Bayfront Parkway Study that studied the operations of the corridor and future needs for improvement based upon planned development. Additionally, the City of Erie through its comprehensive plan, "Erie Refocused", emphasized the needs for better connection between its downtown core area, the Bayfront, and adjoining neighborhoods. This resulted in the Bayfront Parkway Improvement Project which is currently underway and will be used to make improvements to meet the desired needs of the community for improved connections for all modes of transportation, while also working in collaboration with the private sector to support planned developments and economic growth.

In summary, local planning is essential in helping communities create their own visions and goals, while also helping PennDOT with its goals for providing safe and efficient transportation systems in the communities they serve. While County planning offices and Regional Planning partners are trying to help municipalities, limited resources and funding may be inhibiting their efforts and leaving the municipalities short of achieving the full potential for their community.

**Katherine Wyrosdick, Planning Director, City of Erie**  
**Testimony for the 3/21/2018 House Democratic Policy Committee Hearing**

Good afternoon, I am the Planning Director for the City of Erie under the newly elected Mayor, Joe Schember. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the House Democratic Policy Committee regarding areas that will help support the City of Erie, its effort to revitalizing our community and implement our first comprehensive plan, Erie Refocused. Today we are presenting to the Committee and showcasing the benefits of municipal collaboration and most importantly how community planning plays a critical role in leading to a renewed community.

Previous testimony has touched on the importance of local planning which will lead to better outcomes and more sustainable revitalization efforts. The City supports the Commonwealth in advancing and advocating for funding and training for communities to effectively plan for their future and tying funding programs to well vetted local planning efforts.

In addition, I wanted to specifically address 2 areas of immediate concern for the City and its focus on blight. The first identifies the need for modifications to the current prevailing wage requirement for residential projects and the second, continuation of dedicated funding for the ISR program.

1. The applicability of Pennsylvania Prevailing Wages for housing rehabilitation projects.

The City of Erie and its agencies rely on programs such as CDBG, HOME, and LHRD in order to address the issues of blight and our aging housing stock. However, these federally funded programs include requirements for the training and certification of contractors performing these activities (with regulation and enforcement by the PA Dept. of Labor & Industry). The City and the Erie Redevelopment Authority works diligently to encourage small businesses to participate in these programs; however, despite our on-going efforts, including financial subsidies, to increase the number of contractors (and workers) trained to meet the certification requirements, there are currently only four (4) certified contractors within Erie County. For the most part, these contractors are small firms with working owners who employ predominately minority and refugee individuals.

Typically, the expenditure of federal funds are subject to the Davis-Bacon Act which prescribes prevailing wage rates; however federal statutes exclude certain residential rehabilitation activities from being subject to Davis-Bacon – namely assistance provided to 7 units or less (CDBG) or less than 12 units (HOME). The PA Department of Labor and Industry has asserted that regardless of the federal exemptions, all publicly-funded projects in excess of \$25,000 are subject to the PA Prevailing Wage Act (even in instances where private funds are available to reduce the public expenditure below the \$25,000 threshold).

As you can imagine, the costs associated with rehabilitating our aging housing stock increase on an annual basis. Although our typical projects are completed for less than \$25,000, it is with greater frequency that we encounter projects which require more than \$25,000 in rehabilitation work. The imposition of prevailing wage requirements makes it difficult, and usually impossible, for us to obtain competitive bids from the limited pool of qualified contractors – not only because of the increased administrative burden, but also due to the increased financing costs associated with significantly higher labor costs which must be advanced by the contractor. Increased project costs caused by the payment of prevailing wages also reduces the number of households we are able to assist.

As a case in point, we are currently working with a family living in a City of Erie home they purchased in

2010. The family has grown to include two children (both of which have been diagnosed with elevated blood lead levels) and a third child is expected soon. Our estimated costs to mitigate the lead-based paint hazards in the home exceed \$30,000, without allowing for prevailing wage rates. The payment of prevailing wage rates will likely increase the overall cost to \$40,000 or more. In all likelihood, we will not be able to properly assist this family which will cause further deterioration to the residence and greater risk of serious lead poisoning to the young children residing there.

We do not disagree with DLI's interpretation of the existing statute and subsequent case law, but would implore the legislature to enact some reasonable exclusion for housing rehabilitation activities so that agencies such as ours (and our area's most vulnerable residents) can realize the maximum benefit from the dwindling funds available for housing rehabilitation.

House Bill 1481 Support for Amending the act of August 15, 1961 (P.L.987, No.442), entitled "An act relating to public works contracts; providing for prevailing wages; imposing duties upon the Secretary of Labor and Industry; providing remedies, penalties and repealing existing laws," further providing for definitions. We support passage of this amendment which will allow for residential projects with fewer than 8 units to be exempt from prevailing wage requirements.

## 2. Dedicated funding for the Industrial Site Reuse Program.

The Industrial Sites Reuse (ISR) Program provides grants and low-interest loans for environmental assessments and remediation. The program is designed to foster the cleanup of environmental contamination at industrial sites, thereby bringing blighted land into productive reuse. This vital funding, provided through the PA Department of Community and Economic Development and supported by PA DEP, has helped Erie County remediate over 15 properties, many of which have been put back into productive reuse and helped to create family sustaining jobs. However, with the continued decline of traditional manufacturing, as evidenced by the continuing move of GE from the area, the City of Erie will be burdened with task of shuttered sites in need of remediation.

We are seeing a resurgence in Erie for a new economy, one based on technology and innovation and we are cultivating this energy through coordinated efforts. As these industries grow, the need for sites capable of supporting advanced technology, cyber security, and IIOT programs will require reuse of our underutilized industrial sites. We want to encourage reuse and revitalization efforts in the City to ensure that we are being good stewards of our land and our environment. This will also support the revitalization of our neighborhoods by providing new jobs near residential areas, increase in property value and taxes to fund our schools, as well as create a healthier community.

The ISR program has had dedicated funding for decades from the Capital Stock and Foreign Franchise Tax. However, this tax was eliminated at the end of 2016 and no new funding source has been identified and dedicated to ensure that the ISR program continues. Without a dedicated funding source, we fear that this program will be reduced or eliminated putting the brownfield program in jeopardy. Funding at the federal level through EPA is also questionable, leaving these sites to sit idle and putting the burden of clean up and remediation on the local government and its agencies. We encourage the Commonwealth to find a new funding source for the ISR program so that our work to revitalize our City and to continue to implement our local planning efforts.

Any assistance you can provide would be greatly appreciated. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or would like to discuss this matter further.



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**Testimony for March 21, 2018 House Democratic Policy Committee Hearing**

**Opening Remarks:**

**John E. Morgan, AICP, Chair, Millcreek Township Board of Supervisors**

Good afternoon, Representatives. On behalf of the Millcreek Township Board of Supervisors and our partners with us today, welcome to our Township and thank you for the opportunity to share with you some of the crucial development initiatives that we have been working on here in the Greater Erie Metro Area.

In addition to serving as an elected official, I have had the privilege of working professionally on projects and programs in our community with each member of our panel today. As a Certified Planner myself with over a decade of experience working here in Erie County, I can honestly say that I am excited to be a part of the culture change occurring in our region right now.

For the first time in recent memory our local leaders have collectively embraced coordinated community planning, have sought out meaningful and sustainable intergovernmental collaboration, and have finally recognized the value of investing local resources in dedicated professional planners. In fact, today you'll hear from Millcreek Township's first ever Director of Planning and Development, and the City of Erie's first Planning Director in a generation.

Our testimony to you here is also a testimony to our community's culture change. Today the two largest municipalities in Northwest Pennsylvania, the City of Erie and Millcreek Township, will testify, not as competing interests, but as a single voice for the shared priorities and concerns of our community. And with us, you'll hear from representatives of the County of Erie and the Pennsylvania DOT, organizations who have rededicated themselves to be true partners with us in local government to advance our shared community goals.

We trust that after today, you'll also join us as partners in advancing our local vision for our greater region.

**Department of Planning and Development  
Matthew Waldinger, Director**

Millcreek Township is nearing completion of an implementable comprehensive plan. We have branded the initiative "Embrace Millcreek" to encourage community ownership and encourage the public to follow the arc of planning from initial discussion, to issue identification, solution formation, and final implementation. Significant efforts have been made to include resident participation through online surveys and public meetings.

This process of engagement has resulted in five focus areas that have been identified and vetted by the community. These include creating a distinctive and high-quality gateway district to Presque Isle, positioning commercial corridors for adaptation and redevelopment, and supporting business development.

Presque Isle State Park is the gem of Pennsylvania's state park system and draws over four million annual visitors to its beaches, trails, and pristine natural areas. During community conversations the important role that the park plays in the essential identity of northwest Pennsylvania was echoed repeatedly. Creating a distinctive and high-quality Gateway to Presque Isle District is important for Millcreek and the entire region. We are pleased that PennDOT and the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources are in the

planning stages to improve multimodal connections between the City of Erie, Millcreek Township, and Presque Isle. These proposals include increasing the number and frequency of ferry stops between the city and the park, instituting shuttle service to reduce automobile traffic, and an enhanced connection to the park from the Tom Ridge Environmental Center. A proposed extension of the multi-use trail from the park entrance to West 8<sup>th</sup> Street will provide vital safety upgrades for pedestrians and bicyclists. We ask for your support of this project as it moves from the planning stages to construction.

Embrace Millcreek envisions extending the Gateway to Presque Isle District along Peninsula Drive to West 26<sup>th</sup> Street, enhancing the streetscape and giving motorists cues that they are approaching an important regional asset. Also included in the Gateway District is West 8<sup>th</sup> Street from Peninsula Drive to the Millcreek/Erie border. This area is experiencing a resurgence, fueled by local small business investment. These property owners seek to participate in a public/private partnership to create "West Eighth Street Marketplace," featuring sidewalks and bicycle facilities as well as streetscape amenities. These will be designed to complement the roadway improvements the city is completing on West 8<sup>th</sup> from the Bayfront Parkway to the Millcreek Township line. When both projects are complete, a multimodal network will exist from the Bayfront District, along the Bayfront Parkway and West Eighth Street to Peninsula Drive, connecting seamlessly to the park's multi-use trail.

Other key corridors need to be repositioned to adapt to changes in the retail climate, to improve multimodal facilities, and to create a sense of identity for Millcreek. Peninsula Drive is a common thread connecting West 8<sup>th</sup> Street, West 12<sup>th</sup> Street, and West 26<sup>th</sup> Street. The Gateway to Presque Isle district will influence their developing identity, creating a sense of place for Millcreek. These roads are all state highways so the Township will need a strong partnership with PennDOT and is an area where the PennDOT Connects process will prove extremely valuable. In addition, Millcreek will be seeking multimodal grants and RACP funding to accomplish these corridor goals. Your support when these matters are before you would be greatly appreciated.

Millcreek is committed to supporting business development. We are concerned with the vulnerability of the retail sector as indicated by national trends. There is 84 square feet of retail space for each resident of Millcreek, a figure that is over three and half times the national average of 24 square feet per capita. Currently one third of all jobs in Millcreek are provided by retail and the ancillary hospitality sector.

The Millcreek Mall serves as the anchor for a Peach Street retail district that extends south to Interstate 90 in Summit Township. There are reasons to believe that this district may fare better than many as it acts as a regional retail destination and does not have the competition that many metro areas face. An important segment of this customer base is made up of shoppers from nearby states and Canadian provinces. These visitors are attracted to the area in large part due to favorable tax rates and tax exemptions on clothing. As statewide property tax relief or elimination is debated, various increases to sales taxes and the elimination of certain exemptions have been discussed. When evaluating tax policies, we ask that you consider the impacts that these shifted burdens will have on this large sector of our region's economy.

Supporting business development also includes collaborating with the City of Erie and others in the economic strategy for the region. Shared planning leads to a regional vision and signals to public and private interests that money spent in Erie County is a good investment.

We are excited for the future of Millcreek and the entire region. We welcome the cooperation between local municipalities, the County of Erie, and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as we transform into a desirable 21<sup>st</sup>-century community for our residents and an attractive destination for visitors. Thank you for your support of these goals.