



*Charting the Future for  
Pennsylvania's Municipalities*

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# A MESSAGE FROM THE LEAGUE'S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



**O**n behalf of The League's Officers, Board of Directors, and staff, it is an honor to present our ENVISION 2032 publication.

**Engaging municipal leaders in a 10-year visioning initiative emerged as a priority during The League's strategic planning process.** In response, over the past 12 months, we have surveyed local leaders, conducted seven regional forums, and identified innovative practices throughout the Commonwealth.

We are pleased to offer this forward-looking view of the comprehensive issues impacting our local communities and to shine a light on the innovative ideas and solutions municipalities are already employing.

Although none of us truly knows what the future holds, we are 100% certain that local leaders will face the future with collective intellect, industriousness, and innovation.

Elected and appointed officials in cities, boroughs, and townships in urban, rural, and suburban communities throughout Pennsylvania are confident and creative in their approaches to tackling long-standing structural and economic challenges.

**ENVISION 2032 is an honest attempt to think ahead by offering local leaders an ongoing opportunity to share ideas and solutions to improve operations, enhance efficiencies and work together to make long-lasting positive changes to help communities succeed.**

We've already seen how empowering this initiative has been to participants, and we plan to continue ENVISION 2032 activities in the coming years. We hope you'll join in.

Thank you to our Board of Directors, staff, and local leaders throughout Pennsylvania for playing central roles in this journey. We are constantly impressed by the incredible work you are doing, and we are eager to see what our collective future holds.

With best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John S. Brenner". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "John" being more prominent.

John S. Brenner  
Executive Director  
Pennsylvania Municipal League



# INTRODUCTION

## What will life in the Commonwealth be like in 2032?

Will everyone have a safe, comfortable, affordable place to live? Will there be enough living-wage jobs? Will quality education and opportunity be accessible to all? Will we have achieved greater equality? How will our lives be transformed by new technology, changing demographics, and unforeseen developments?

While it has never been possible to predict or control the future, we know that it is powerfully shaped by the choices and decisions we make, collectively and individually. And we recognize that the quality of people's daily lives is largely determined by how their neighborhoods and communities are organized, managed, and governed.

Out of necessity, the past few years have demanded that municipal leaders focus their attention on immediate issues and challenges. They also recognize that engaging in longer-term thinking and planning is essential. In support of those efforts, The League's strategic plan, adopted in 2021, called for the association to be a catalyst for developing a forward-looking vision for Pennsylvania's municipalities.

## The ENVISION 2032 Initiative was designed to create a 10-year vision for the Commonwealth's municipalities.

In a year-long process, we endeavored to address several key questions: How are municipalities changing or needing to change? What systems and approaches must be transformed? How might the roles of municipalities evolve over the next decade? What will municipalities need to achieve optimal outcomes?

## Priority Areas

- ◆ Infrastructure
- ◆ Community Development
- ◆ Economic Vitality
- ◆ Equity and Civic Engagement
- ◆ Municipal Finance
- ◆ Public Health and Safety
- ◆ Sustainability

**ENVISION 2032 activities began in Fall 2021 with a survey of municipal leaders throughout Pennsylvania.** A total of 115 League members, Municipal Managers, and Township Commissioners responded, representing the perspectives of 84 different municipalities. Respondents candidly shared their concerns and priorities for the future, along with their current and planned actions.

**Regional forums brought leaders together in Spring 2022.** Building on the information and insights from the survey, The League convened seven regional forums across the Commonwealth, that were attended by more than 200 municipal leaders, representatives of state and regional agencies, business partners, and special guests. The forums featured presentations by local leaders from municipalities that are modeling problem-solving and innovation in the priority areas that surfaced through the survey.

Forum participants engaged in lively and candid facilitated discussions, describing their challenges and perceived opportunities at both local and state levels, brainstorming and debating the best ways to address them, and sharing promising practices.

Several overarching themes emerged from the forum discussions that serve as guiding principles:

- ◆ Preserving local autonomy and decision-making.
- ◆ Seeking and building more collaborations and partnerships.
- ◆ Embracing technology and modernizing all facets of municipal operations.
- ◆ Supporting a civic culture of innovation, equity, and sustainability.
- ◆ Fostering more diverse leadership.
- ◆ Actively communicating with and nurturing positive working relationships between local governments and the Commonwealth.



**A summary of Pennsylvania municipal leaders' collective vision for 2032 follows.** It is both a snapshot in time and a preview of things to come. It reflects a shared belief that our Commonwealth is fundamentally strong and an unwavering commitment to meeting our challenges, honoring our proud legacy, and doing what it takes to create a bright future for all Commonwealth communities.

**This publication is not the end of ENVISION 2032.** Rather, it is the jumping-off point to the next phase. The League will keep its finger on the pulse of municipal innovation and solutions and continue to serve as a nexus for sharing and collaboration among local leaders. We encourage you to visit the ENVISION 2032 section of our website, [pml.org](http://pml.org), to find the latest information about the initiative and a growing library of resources.

We look forward to your involvement!

# INFRASTRUCTURE

*"We are headed for  
a perfect storm."*

**T**he topic of infrastructure is uppermost in the minds of municipal leaders across the Commonwealth.

In The League's survey, aging infrastructure tops the list of future concerns for their communities, and 84% reported that they are currently engaged in major infrastructure projects.

As they look to the future, municipal leaders report troubling indicators that the Commonwealth is heading toward a confluence of serious challenges. They predict that increasingly severe weather events will further stress aging infrastructure, and that insufficient financial resources, including the end of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding, will seriously inhibit modernization efforts. They believe avoiding this scenario will require stretching every available dollar for maximum impact, while identifying and introducing new approaches and funding sources.

Municipal leaders agree that longer-term thinking must guide decision-making and that we must avoid the temporary or short-term fixes that have plagued our communities for decades. Policies and practices moving forward must protect flexibility and local discretion so that municipal governments can decide how to marshal and deploy their resources in ways that best suit their communities.

## Aging infrastructure tops the list of concerns cited by municipal leaders.

- Pennsylvania Municipal League's  
2021 ENVISION survey



### Infrastructure Defined

Infrastructure encompasses the physical assets that keep municipalities running:

- Ensuring the smooth flow of people, goods, and services via bridges, roads, highways, and public transportation.
- Maintaining uninterrupted delivery of power and energy through modern, well-functioning utilities.
- Safely removing snow, stormwater, and sewage and ensuring the supply of clean, healthy water to everyone.
- Maximizing the free flow of communication via advanced broadband and telecommunications networks.





## TODAY'S REALITIES

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Two seminal reports shed light on the challenges facing the Commonwealth:

- ◆ **The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE)** gave Pennsylvania an overall C- grade on its 2018 Infrastructure Report Card, a level defined as “Mediocre, Requires Attention.” The C- grade was unchanged from its previous 2014 report, underscoring that the Commonwealth has some of the oldest infrastructure in the country and needs improvements. Implementing Act 89, which was signed into law in 2013, has resulted in over 2,600 new transportation projects, yet only raised the “Roads” grade from D- to D+, which ASCE defines as “Poor: At Risk.” Of the remaining categories assessed, another six received D grades (Bridges, Stormwater, Wastewater, Drinking Water, Transit, and Inland Waterways), and eight received grades of C (Aviation, Dams, Energy, Levees, Passenger Rail, Ports, Schools, and Solid Waste). Only three categories (Parks & Recreation, Freight Rail, and Hazardous Waste) received grades of B, defined as “Good, Adequate For Now.”
- ◆ **The Pennsylvania Transportation Revenue Options Commission (TROC)**, established by Governor Tom Wolf in 2021, conducted a comprehensive assessment of the current status and funding of the Commonwealth’s multimodal transportation system. Their analysis revealed that gas taxes, which historically were fair and provided a sustainable funding source for highways and bridges, are now antiquated and inadequate. Although the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) continuously works to streamline costs, its annual budget would have to more than double (from \$8.8 billion to \$18.5 billion) to cover the growing tax revenue shortfall, maintain and upgrade highways, and make necessary investments in public transportation, aviation, rail freight, ports, bicycle, and pedestrian facilities. The commission concluded it is imperative to develop significant, sustainable new sources of revenue.

# INFRASTRUCTURE

## MOVING FORWARD

Municipal leaders generally agree that:

### **We must leverage federal and state opportunities to address infrastructure needs.**

- ◆ The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act the federal government enacted in November 2021 will provide significant assistance over the next five years. The bill will bring an estimated \$17.8 billion to Pennsylvania, primarily for highway and bridge repairs, as well as public transportation, electric vehicle charging networks, broadband, clean water, and airport projects.
- ◆ ASCE recommends that Pennsylvania's counties utilize the Act 89 provision to empower revenue collection at the local level. It also encourages municipalities to prioritize maintaining and replacing locally owned and operated water systems and support legislation encouraging localities to align user fees with the true costs of treating, delivering, and managing water and wastewater.
- ◆ The TROC report lays out a three-phased plan to raise additional revenues for necessary transportation improvements, starting with \$3.5 billion in the first year and reaching \$11.5 billion in five years. New revenue sources include an integrated set of options such as mileage-based user fees, corridor and managed lane tolling, redirection of state police funding, vehicle and other fees, as well as vehicle, gas, and jet fuel taxes.



### **We can't go it alone.**

Nearly 80% of respondents to The League's survey reported they are already working to increase coordination and partnerships with neighboring municipalities and regional governments and shared that they anticipate doing more in the future.

**One exemplary collaboration seeks to restore passenger rail service between Reading and Philadelphia.** The Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority was formed in 2022 by Berks, Chester, and Montgomery counties and comprises three appointees from each county, including mayors

from the City of Reading and the Borough of Phoenixville. The Authority can pursue funding, enter into agreements, and partner with state and federal agencies to help bring the rail services to fruition. Authority leaders predict that passenger rail service in Reading, Pottstown, and Phoenixville could generate more than \$1 billion in new property development and existing property value increases, which translates to thousands of jobs and the expansion of local and federal tax bases over the next 30 years.

**A new regional consortium, SWPA Connected, brings together the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission (SPC), Carnegie Mellon University (CMU), Allies for Children, and a diverse group of regional and local partners.** As part of their efforts to ensure equitable, affordable, reliable broadband internet access across the region, SWPA's Connected initiative produced a Connectivity Roadmap that aims to help regional and local leaders develop and prioritize projects and programs to improve connectivity in the region. The project focuses on 10 Pennsylvania counties and the City of Pittsburgh.





## Municipalities In Action

- ◆ **Pittsburgh gears up to use ARPA funds.** When American Rescue Plan funds were allocated to Pittsburgh in March 2021, the City Council slated nearly 50% of the total amount received for capital projects, which translates to a \$150 million investment over four years. Priorities include replacing all lead lines used by the water authority, supporting the city's lead poisoning prevention efforts, making green fleet improvements, installing 8,000 new street lights, adding pedestrian bridges, and upgrading the facilities at several recreation centers and schools. Plus, the city will create seven "Avenues of Hope" to bring new life to neighborhood business districts in Pittsburgh's historically Black and diverse communities.
- ◆ **Lewisburg Borough's Bull Run Greenway named as a 2022 Great Public Space by the American Planning Association.** The restoration project at Hufnagle Park includes a playground that honors local volunteers and first responders. The project is funded through federal and state grants and received a significant in-kind play equipment donation from Playworld.



## POLICY PERSPECTIVES

We strongly urge the Commonwealth to make infrastructure an immediate and sustained priority for the state. In doing so, state government leaders need to understand that municipalities take on immense expenses to address critical infrastructure needs. These costs are significantly higher than municipalities' operating budgets and require new funding streams, such as having the ability to generate local funding or access low-interest loans.

The League supports:

- ◆ An infrastructure development program for municipalities that combines the fiscal resources of state and federal programs, general fund appropriations, and state bond authority, and features low or no interest loans.
- ◆ Statewide funding that encourages joint efforts by stakeholders, including municipal partnerships, to more effectively upgrade systems and make optimal use of available funds.

The League also encourages the Commonwealth to review and streamline its local project permitting processes across its agencies to achieve more efficient and timely reviews and permitting of local infrastructure projects.



## MUNICIPAL FINANCE

*“Mounting pressures call for bold solutions.”*

**A**chieving and maintaining financial stability is a paramount issue facing local governments. Top concerns cited by municipal leaders during the ENVISION forums included: contending with rising costs due to inflation, pensions and other legacy costs, unfunded mandates, as well as the growing need to finance infrastructure repairs and improvements and pay for professional fire and emergency services that can no longer rely on volunteers.

Support is growing for cost-sharing approaches, with more than 54% of respondents to The League’s 2021 survey reporting they are actively addressing how to equitably share the costs of public safety and infrastructure across all users. And 8 in 10 municipalities also say they currently engage in regional problem-solving efforts or plan to do so.

Local leaders share a sense of urgency that now is the time to modernize the financial tools available to municipalities. Well over half of the survey respondents are actively advocating or planning to advocate for updates to Pennsylvania’s municipal finance laws and practices to prevent municipal distress. A recurring theme at the ENVISION Forums was a call for a major overhaul of the state’s local tax structure to open up possibilities for more sustainable, locally controlled sources of revenue.

## TODAY'S REALITIES

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- ◆ **Passing balanced budgets is increasingly challenging for Pennsylvania's municipalities.** Rising costs, particularly those related to maintaining adequate public safety and emergency services, often force municipalities to tap their reserves as they simultaneously work to increase efficiencies and productivity within every department. Many are making decisions regarding whether to lease or sell their assets. Regional approaches to cost sharing are also being developed, with promising results for the longer term.
- ◆ **Municipalities are pursuing additional short and long-term revenue sources to address funding gaps.** Local governments are prioritizing efforts to qualify for and access the remaining ARPA funds and obtain one-time project funding that Pennsylvania will receive through the 2021 federal Infrastructure and Jobs Act. Given limited alternatives for raising funding, many municipalities are focusing on the primary tool under local control: real estate taxes. They are engaging in local and county efforts to update property valuation and reassessment practices to be more accurate and predictable.
- ◆ **Momentum is building for an overhaul of the state tax system.** Since 1965, Pennsylvania's municipalities have operated under the provisions of the Local Tax Enabling Act, which prescribes how local authorities can collect fees and taxes. The Pennsylvania Economy League (PEL), considered Pennsylvania's premier public policy think tank, undertook a comprehensive study and evaluation of the Commonwealth's tax structure. The PEL report, issued in 2022, documents a wide range of outdated and inequitable statutes and regulations that severely limit the ability of local municipalities to generate revenues that can keep up with rising costs and meet the needs of communities that have experienced unprecedented levels of change in their demographics and economic base.

## MOVING FORWARD

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Municipalities' plans to restore or maintain financial health include:

- ◆ Engaging in formal long-term fiscal planning.
- ◆ Introducing more sophisticated financial tools and technology.
- ◆ Continuing to explore creative solutions to regional cost sharing.
- ◆ Working with counties to make property re-assessment a routine and automatic function.
- ◆ Considering the possibility of transitioning to Home Rule.

**The 2022 PEL report makes a powerful case for revamping the Commonwealth's fundamental approach to fiscal health and stability.** The current system requires waiting until communities are in a downward spiral and then only provides temporary tools. Going forward, it will be essential to understand the "big picture" causes of systemic, structural distress and work to break the cycle. Potential models outlined in the report involve eliminating or raising rate caps, increasing flat fees, using non-resident options, and conducting regular property assessments.



## Municipalities In Action

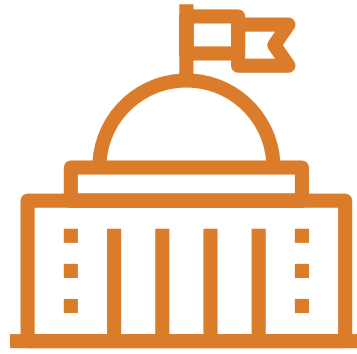
- ◆ **Several boroughs in Pennsylvania and towns in Ohio have joined together to add electric generation to their public power systems.** Pennsylvania Municipal Electric Association members are investing in new equipment that will be installed in cooperation with American Municipal Power (a nonprofit joint action agency). The regional and interstate project will provide systemwide peak hour electricity, reducing demand and lowering costs for 27 communities.
- ◆ **The City of Erie found a way to avoid significantly raising taxes.** By negotiating a prepayment of the Erie Water Authority's lease through 2060, the city received a sum that enabled it to pay down more than half its municipal debt, invest in a business development fund to bring more jobs and people to Erie, and save the city's budget over \$1 million per year.
- ◆ **The City of Easton was on the verge of filing for Act 47 in 2007, when it adopted a Home Rule charter.** It aimed to "secure honest, efficient, accountable local self-government that builds a system of professionalized, efficient and fiscally sound management." Since then, the city has achieved fiscal stability, which includes 12 straight years with no increase in real estate taxes and regular year-end surpluses. An economic development program brought over \$800 million in public and private investment and created hundreds of new jobs. The city's population is growing for the first time in nearly five decades.
- ◆ **The City of Altoona became the quickest municipality to exit Act 47 in 2017.** In a 5-year collaboration involving elected officials, city staff, and DCED, the city implemented a multifaceted recovery plan that included a detailed housing strategy to address blight, upgrading the city's administrative and technology capabilities, and an investment plan that transformed the downtown into an attractive business district. One of their most pivotal decisions was not selling their water and sewer systems for a one-time gain. Instead, they created a new, ongoing revenue source by negotiating a long-term lease of this vital asset.
- ◆ **The City of Harrisburg will soon fully exit Act 47 and, in 2022, reported its first budget surplus, with no tax or fee increases for residents.** Leaders attribute the city's progress to disciplined implementation of the comprehensive Harrisburg Strong Plan, filed in 2013. The plan included establishing funds to cover long-term, unfunded healthcare costs for retired city workers and creating a new regional transportation authority.





### About Act 47

Act 47 provides a safety net for severely distressed municipalities. The Act applies to municipalities with three years of deficits of one percent or more, expenditures exceeding revenues, and decreased quality and quantity of municipal services. A DCED team oversees the development of a recovery plan, arranges loans, and can grant waivers to allow changes in the collection of fees and taxes. As of September 2022, 18 municipalities have successfully exited Act 47 status since its inception, and twelve are currently operating under its provisions.



## POLICY PERSPECTIVES

We call on the Commonwealth to establish policies that seek to prevent municipal fiscal distress.

The League supports:

- ◆ Modernizing our local taxing structure to accomplish positive change for local communities.
- ◆ Alleviating the inequities of hosting large percentages of tax-exempt entities.
- ◆ Invigorating land-locked tax bases to benefit struggling core communities.
- ◆ Streamlining municipal processes to get properties back on the tax rolls (e.g., reselling properties with delinquent real estate taxes).
- ◆ Adopting the recommended models outlined in the 2022 PEL report.

The League encourages municipalities to explore cost-sharing with neighboring communities and counties for infrastructure and services. While structuring these agreements requires effort, it may prove to be time well spent, as costs are projected to rise significantly in the coming years.

For communities whose circumstances have changed in ways that make their current municipal codes insufficient, converting to a Home Rule charter may be a prudent choice to consider.





## EQUITY AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

*"We get stronger by working together."*

**M**unicipal leaders place a high value on residents taking an active role in their communities. When residents are informed and understand what their local government does, they are better able to access available services, contribute ideas, make their voices heard, and see the value of their tax dollars.

**The Commonwealth's demographics continue to evolve and point to a future that will present both opportunities and challenges.** The Pennsylvania State Data Center projects that, by the end of the decade, the percentage of young people will decline somewhat, making it even more essential to draw them into active civic participation so they become knowledgeable voters and future leaders.

PSDC also reports that from 2010 to 2021, Pennsylvania's ethnic diversity has increased, with the percentage of indigenous and people of color growing from 20% to 25%, led primarily by the Hispanic population and proportionately more Asian and Black residents. This shift is projected to continue and underscores the importance of finding common ground and building solid connections among diverse community members.

ENVISION Forum participants shared powerful examples of community planning and problem-solving informed and guided by individuals and groups with diverse backgrounds and life experiences. They universally agreed that municipalities of all types and sizes benefit when their residents, businesses, and other community stakeholders actively participate in building healthy, thriving places for everyone to live, work, and play.

## TODAY'S REALITIES

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**Across Pennsylvania, municipalities are taking steps to advance Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in their communities.** The events of the past several years raised awareness throughout the nation about systemic racism and moved DEI to the forefront. Increasingly, local governments are committing to undertaking honest and thoughtful reviews of their policies, procedures, and operations and making substantive changes to eliminate racial disparities, heal racial divisions, and build more equitable communities.

**Most municipalities are actively addressing equity and civic engagement.** The League's recent survey revealed that:

- ◆ 82% actively involve residents in their municipality's decisions and activities.
- ◆ 64% are helping build relationships and connections among residents from diverse ethnic, cultural, religious, and socioeconomic groups.
- ◆ 63% embed DEI as core principles in their community's policies and operations.
- ◆ 59% are building awareness and understanding among residents regarding civic issues, rights, and responsibilities.

**A perennial question is taking on new urgency: How to engage young people?** By 2032, Gen X will be on center stage, and the entire Baby Boomer generation will have passed into retirement age. Accordingly, ENVISION Forum participants underscored the importance of engaging Millennials, Gen Z, and Gen Alpha, whose generational era began in 2010, in local governing, planning, and problem-solving. Doing so means that civic engagement and outreach strategies must be adjusted, and new methods developed to better align with how different age cohorts consume information, communicate and interact.

## MOVING FORWARD

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**Municipal leaders who participated in the ENVISION Forums expressed a strong desire to invest in and gain the benefits of an engaged, diverse populace.** Their plans include:

- ◆ Increasing the use of multiple languages to reflect those spoken in their communities.
- ◆ Enhancing public communication, including using multiple channels to reach different age and ethnic groups.
- ◆ Deepening their own efforts to create fair and equitable workplaces.
- ◆ Modeling access and consistent quality in service delivery.
- ◆ Helping to foster a climate of DEI by sponsoring programs that celebrate diversity, encourage honest conversations, and share proven practices that strengthen communities.
- ◆ Taking on a more significant role in stimulating youth engagement and preparing future leaders – possibly through a League-developed program.

**Structural changes are already underway.** Numerous municipalities have established dedicated municipal positions for civic engagement, and several have formed Human Relations Commissions with representation from all genders, races, ages, and socioeconomic groups, to ensure full implementation of directives within their communities.

Municipalities are finding answers, guidance, and support for their DEI efforts from a growing body of resources, including the Race, Equity and Leadership (REAL) Program created by the National League of Cities.

# EQUITY AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

## Municipalities In Action



- ◆ **The Municipality of Norristown developed an engagement platform that serves as a central hub for sharing information and gathering feedback.** The *Norristown Buzz* is open to all residents, and is where they can find information on a wide range of projects, get announcements of public meetings, vote on and prioritize options for project actions and add their ideas and comments.



- ◆ **The Borough of Doylestown became one of Pennsylvania's first municipalities to establish a Human Relations Commission (HRC).** Its creation was a powerful symbol affirming that local government has an essential role in eliminating discrimination and ensuring that people of all races, gender identities, and sexual orientations are treated fairly and equally within a community. Since its inception in 2010, the HRC has become a catalyst for inclusive civic engagement and fostering meaningful dialog. It has helped make inclusivity a norm of borough life through its educational programs and its support of local organizations that sponsor the Pride Festival and provide respectful forums for discussing issues of equity in local schools and other community settings.

- ◆ **The City of St. Mary's launched its "My St. Mary's" mobile app in 2021 to connect its 12,000 residents to their city government.**

Using a customizable platform called My Civic, the app enables residents to engage in two-way communication with departments on a comprehensive range of topics, from snow and graffiti removal to connecting directly with city services and businesses. It also serves as a portal for bill payment, surveys, resident feedback, push notifications, and interactive GIS maps.



- ◆ **Upper Chichester Township adopted Community Heart & Soul,** an engagement program embraced by small towns and cities across the nation. This resident-driven process focuses on identifying what residents love most about their community, what future they want for it, and how to achieve it. In Upper Chichester Township, residents' statements about what they value about their community and their recommendations for positive change were officially adopted by the town council and are being used to guide town planning.



- ◆ **The City of Allentown is actively recognizing and engaging its large Spanish-speaking population.** In addition to publishing its website in Spanish and English, the Police Department offers a Spanish edition of their Citizens Police Academy to help Spanish-speaking residents build personal connections with police officers and increase their understanding of the department's policies and procedures. In 2020, Allentown elected its first Hispanic mayor, who is launching additional initiatives.



- ◆ **The City of Lancaster established a Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Engagement in 2018, led by the city's first-ever Director of Neighborhood Engagement.** Initiatives include a Neighborhood Leaders Academy, a cross-departmental working group to address neighborhood concerns, and collaborations with local community groups to ensure that its new civic engagement platform, *Engage Lancaster*, is user-friendly, multilingual, and incorporates both digital and traditional forms of communication that are inclusive of all residents.



## POLICY PERSPECTIVES

The League encourages and supports all efforts to enact legislation that promotes and protects equal rights, opportunity, and access for all people in Pennsylvania.

At the local level, The League supports including language in municipal policies and ordinances that requires the principles of equity and inclusion to be followed, along with measures to ensure transparency and accountability in implementing them.

The League believes that residents will be more likely to act as supportive, engaged community members when they witness the inclusive work of their local elected leaders in vital areas such as housing, safety, commerce, healthcare, education, and transportation.





## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

*"It's all about quality of life."*

**M**unicipal leaders throughout the Commonwealth know what it takes to provide desirable, livable communities for their residents. They've learned that doing so requires safe, welcoming neighborhoods with quality housing suitable for varying income levels and all phases of residents' lives. Plus, residents need ready access to shopping districts, recreational, cultural and educational amenities, and other public facilities.

**As local leaders determine what's needed to ensure that their communities thrive in the decades ahead, providing high-quality, affordable housing stands out as a top priority.**

The League's survey found that 41% of leaders view housing as one of their primary concerns for the next ten years, and two-thirds reported that they are either actively working on or making plans to meet their community's housing needs. Concurrently, they are focusing on eliminating or repurposing blighted properties and supporting new development and revitalization that will enhance the overall quality of life and expand their municipality's tax base by attracting and retaining residents from across the demographic spectrum.

### Blight Defined

Blight encompasses vacant lots, abandoned buildings and houses in derelict or dangerous condition. Environmental contamination can be included in blight. Blight can refer to smaller property nuisances including overgrown lawns, uncollected litter, graffiti, inadequate street lighting and a general lack of concern for the appearance of a structure or neighborhood element.

Source: Act 79, 2019



## TODAY'S REALITIES

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Several generational shifts and other factors are impacting community development:

- ◆ **Pennsylvania's population growth is slowing.** The Center for Rural Pennsylvania projects a modest population growth of about 4% over the next ten years.
- ◆ **Only two age cohorts are growing.** Like the rest of the country, the Commonwealth's population is aging. According to the Pennsylvania State Data Center (PSDC), the fastest growing segment of Pennsylvania's population over the past ten years has been people between the ages of 65-74. This trend is projected to accelerate over the next ten years. It will likely increase the demand for senior housing options, along with affordable cultural and health services for those on fixed incomes. The only other age group that grew as a percent of the population over the past ten years was young adults between the ages of 25-39. This group has generally proven to be more mobile and inclined to rent apartments, lofts, and other housing types versus purchasing homes.
- ◆ **Population distribution is shifting from urban to suburban.** A Pennsylvania Economy League's 2022 report shows that in 1960, most Pennsylvanians lived in urban cities and boroughs. Today, the opposite is true, with 56% residing in townships. Second-class townships have experienced the highest growth, often attracting more affluent city-dwellers seeking larger lots and newer construction.
- ◆ **Blight is increasing, yet many communities lack buildable space.** Municipalities of all types report significant numbers of deteriorating and blighted properties. Many are dealing with housing built before 1950. In 2020, the US Census classified 10% of housing units as vacant. The negative impacts of blighted property are well-documented and include decreases in surrounding property values and tax revenue and increases in safety hazards and crime. Compounding these challenges is scarce buildable space for infill or other uses, which many municipalities face.

## MOVING FORWARD

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**Municipal leaders who participated in the ENVISION Forums expressed their commitment to bringing new energy to their communities by:**

- ◆ Objectively assessing the status of properties in their community, gathering input regarding which housing types, community activities, and amenities are important to residents, and preparing and implementing detailed action plans to create them.
- ◆ Using creative approaches to redevelop and repurpose vacant or blighted properties.
- ◆ Addressing pedestrian connectivity via rail trails, walking paths, pedestrian bridges, and other solutions.
- ◆ Increasing activities that appeal to younger people and facilitate community connections (e.g., sports leagues, youth organizations).
- ◆ Using the tools included in legislation, such as the Neighborhood Blight Reclamation and Revitalization Act and the Whole Home Repairs Act, to fight blight and address code violations.
- ◆ Working closely with community stakeholders to create inclusive, welcoming neighborhoods.
- ◆ Training and dedicating municipal staff to sustain community and neighborhood efforts.
- ◆ Recognizing and promoting the unique character of communities to residents, potential residents, and visitors.
- ◆ Monitoring population and demographic trends and adjusting community development activities accordingly.

# COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

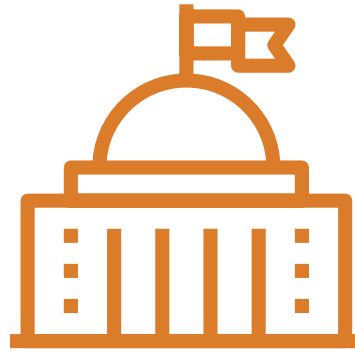
## Municipalities In Action



- ◆ **A Blueprint for Success: The Renaissance of the City of Pittsburgh.** Under the leadership of its mayor, the city developed an 8-Point Community Development Plan to ensure Pittsburgh is an excellent place to live and work. To inform the city's Neighborhood Housing Initiative, they conducted an analysis revealing that 62% of its housing stock was built before 1939, making it some of the oldest in the nation. In addition, they identified a range of other housing challenges that needed addressing, including weak building code ordinances and enforcement, a lack of housing for seniors, few modern apartments or lofts, and a very high percentage of housing rentals versus ownership. The city established a Blighted Property Board, which led a strategic planning process to build community support and create a phased plan for developing residential and commercial properties. As the plan's implementation progresses, the city is steadily improving the quality and scope of its housing offerings while preserving the charm and character of its neighborhoods.
- ◆ **City of Erie's tax abatement program stimulates growth in housing.** Erie's Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance program, known as LERTA, is an agreement reached through a collaborative negotiation process with the county and school districts to delay tax increases city-wide on residential development for ten years. Three years in, the program has already exceeded expectations with more than \$160 million in new home construction real estate permits issued.



- ◆ **Homestead Borough gets re-energized.** Led by a mayor and manager who reflect and embrace the community's cultural and ethnic diversity, this former steel town embodies a can-do spirit. A streamlined, business-friendly environment attracts investment and encourages local residents to open shops and restaurants and create living spaces that revitalize the historic downtown area. Decades of population decline are reversing as people of all ages and backgrounds, including the children and grandchildren of Homestead's steelworkers, choose to call it home.



## POLICY PERSPECTIVES

The League calls on the Commonwealth to adopt policies that permit municipalities to develop appropriate housing for all their residents and provide the assistance needed to address blight and maintain aging housing stock.

We encourage the ongoing funding of innovative legislation such as the Whole Home Repairs Act that combines resources for homeowners and small businesses under a single umbrella:

- ◆ Providing grants and loans to make needed repairs.
- ◆ Hiring staff to help residents identify and access available help.
- ◆ Helping to develop a professional workforce trained in home repair and weatherization.

In addition, The League supports continued and expanded funding of the Commonwealth's housing and development programs, including preserving historic housing districts, creating low-income and market-rate housing to meet the array of needs, and developing a funding source for demolishing blighted and abandoned properties.

**Over the past few decades, home ownership across the Commonwealth has held constant at about 69%.**

Source: 2020 US Census  
for Pennsylvania

## ENERGY Projects

The following recommended projects will help Millvale achieve the Borough's 2030 goals, while making a visible statement of Millvale's commitment to sustainability.

SOLAR FARM SUPPLIES  
COMMUNITY SOURCING



### SOLAR FARM & CO-OP

A large solar farm in Millvale would be installed and connected to the utility grid. The energy produced would be community-shared through a solar co-op.

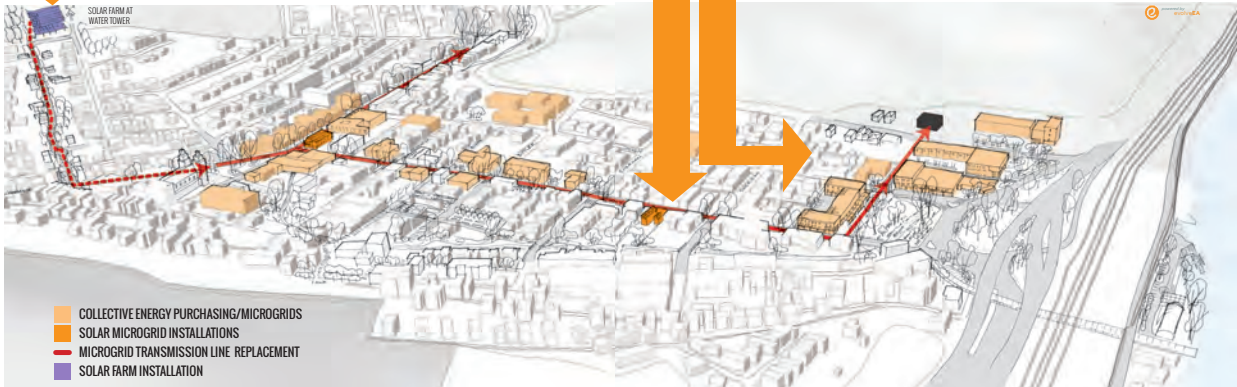
UPDATED TRANSMISSION LINES  
ALLOW BUILDINGS TO SAVE ENERGY

ROOFTOP SOLAR INSTALLATIONS  
POWER MICROGRIDS



### GREEN BUSINESS DISTRICT

Millvale's downtown businesses would begin purchasing green power or establish an energy micro-grid to pool resources and complete energy efficient retrofits to existing buildings.



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MILLVALE PIVOT ECODEDISTRICT PLANNING 2.0

MILLVALE PIVOT ECODEDISTRICT PLANNING 2.0

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# SUSTAINABILITY

*"Ensuring that our actions today lead to healthy, sustainable communities."*

**T**he definition of sustainability has evolved significantly since the term became widely used by the environmental movement when human threats to the planet came into focus in the 1970s. Today, sustainability is more broadly defined as creating economically viable, socially equitable, and ecologically integrated conditions that ensure present and future generations can survive and thrive.

**For municipalities, sustainability means setting and pursuing long-term goals that create environmental, community, and financial stability.** Increasingly, municipalities of all sizes are engaging in sustainable planning to navigate and balance their communities' growth, ensure all residents have access to opportunities, and maintain environmentally responsible and equitable practices.

Municipal leaders participating in The League's ENVISION Forums echoed the importance of demonstrating strong leadership by advancing sustainable principles in every facet of their communities. They recognize that using sustainability as a strategic framework enables municipalities to holistically address economic development, environmental protection, and social equity.

**Sustainability is a foundational value system that is multifaceted, crosscutting and interwoven throughout every aspect of municipal life.**



## TODAY'S REALITIES

Maintaining economic stability and growth while creating sustainable, livable communities for all is challenging for municipalities as they work to understand and address ever-shifting conditions.

### **The Commonwealth, which set the standard for government-led action in 1999 with its Growing Greener initiative, continues to lead.**

In its first two phases, Growing Greener I and II saw investments of close to \$2 billion in environmental projects, though funding slowed over time. The current phase, Growing Greener III, is injecting \$500 million of American Rescue Plan Act funds into the 2022 state budget to conserve land and water resources and restore damaged waterways and land. Growing Greener III funding also provides one-time funding for programs to green community downtowns and neighborhoods, enhance urban waterways and riverfronts, preserve historic structures and landscapes, and create parks, recreation areas, greenways, and trails.

### **Sustainable PA helps municipalities make systemic changes to protect quality of life for future generations.**

In 2013, The League joined with Sustainable Pittsburgh to create a signature project, Sustainable PA. Modeled on the approach that helped transform the former steel town and the Southern Pennsylvania region into a globally recognized face of the sustainability revolution, Sustainable PA offers a certification program that aligns with national and international standards. It lays out a detailed roadmap for addressing community engagement and resilience, energy production and consumption, land use and housing, water resource protection and conservation, waste and materials management, municipal operations, and transportation.

Hundreds of municipalities have engaged with the program, and 120 municipalities are currently certified, representing 3.4 million residents. The program has proven effective in helping communities reach their long-term goals and, in the process, save money, conserve resources, and encourage innovation. Sustainable PA was officially recognized in 2016 by Pennsylvania's Department of Community and Economic Development, which now asks municipal governments seeking funding to indicate their certification levels.

## MOVING FORWARD

### **Municipal leaders are stepping up.**

Local governments' commitment was evident in The League's recent survey, where 92% of respondents reported that their community is actively addressing or making plans to enhance water, air quality, recycling, and other environmental concerns.

ENVISION Forum participants are prioritizing projects that span municipal activities and services, including:

- ◆ Adopting 10-year energy goals, with milestones and accountability.
- ◆ Evolving recycling approaches and increasing public understanding of how to recycle.
- ◆ Increasing energy efficiency through partnerships with utilities.
- ◆ Building infrastructure for refueling stations.
- ◆ Converting police vehicles to electric.
- ◆ Prioritizing the development of "green economy" components.
- ◆ Establishing EcoDistricts.

### **Defining EcoDistricts**

EcoDistricts are broadly defined as areas within a municipality that are engaged in holistic, sustainable planning at the neighborhood scale.

### **Sustainable PA is expanding to meet municipal needs.**

In response to the growing focus on municipal sustainability, the program is continually adding new tools and services. Participating municipalities now have enhanced capabilities for setting goals and tracking progress against certification requirements. The program has also increased its focus on equity and added more technical assistance and mentorship services. "Sprints," an innovative competitions program in specific sustainability categories, was recently introduced to encourage timely action. Plans are in motion to establish regional sustainability hubs where community leaders can convene to discuss the issues they are facing, and offer internships to engage the next generation of environmental leaders.





## Municipalities In Action

### ◆ **Millvale Borough embraces sustainability.**

Located in a low-to-middle income industrial zone, Millvale was caught in the great economic shift of the 1970s. The Borough struggled with poor air quality, job loss, economic downturns, flooding, and lack of healthy food access. A decade ago, a grassroots partnership formed with the Borough government, community leaders, local developers, architects, and nonprofits. Together, they created the Millvale Pivot Plan to transform the community. The plan included establishing the area's first sustainable library and innovative food hubs, and constructing solar arrays, bioswales, community gardens, and composting facilities.

In 2016, Millvale took a major step toward full sustainability by implementing a rigorous protocol to become a Certified EcoDistrict. Grounded in the imperatives of equity, resilience, and climate protection, Millvale launched numerous initiatives to foster prosperity, health, connectivity, green infrastructure, and resource regeneration. Notable examples include volunteer-led community gardens that will provide 95% of the food for nearby restaurants; repurposing the historic Moose Lodge to a multifunctional facility that houses coworking, a shared commercial kitchen, event and artist-in-residence spaces; creating the Allegheny Solar Cooperative to democratize solar ownership and provide solar energy to local businesses and organizations; and, opening alternative waterway transportation connections via a Kayak Commuter Hub.



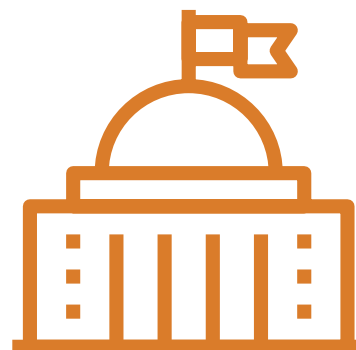
◆ **Forest Hills Borough pursues net zero carbon emissions.** In 2020, the Forest Hills Borough Council proclaimed that it would adhere to the goals of the 2015 Paris Climate Accord by achieving net zero carbon emissions across the community by 2050. They built an innovative green facility to house a new public library, police station, community room, and council chambers. The new complex is a community centerpiece, showcasing green architecture and construction. Notable features include passive solar design and a photovoltaic roof that displace 150 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> annually, plus bioswales, rain gardens, and permeable paving that are designed to deliver a 64% reduction in 100-year storm water releases.

◆ **Happy trails in Lower Merion Township.** A Growing Greener II grant awarded by the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources enabled Lower Merion Township to further develop the Cynwyd Heritage Trail in Montgomery County in 2015. The grant funded trailhead improvements, including adding a primary 12-foot wide asphalt path

and a narrower secondary walking path constructed of crushed gravel. The trail has become a regional favorite with connections to the Schuylkill River Trail and the Mainline Greenway.



- ◆ **West Norriton Township partners with Villanova University.** In 2019, West Norriton Township signed on to the Sierra Club's *Ready for 100 Initiative*, resolving to transition to 100% renewable energy sources for the township vehicle fleet by 2030, supply 100% renewably sourced electricity by 2035, and use 100% clean energy for heating and transportation equipment by 2050. To achieve its ambitious agenda, the township's council enlisted the support of Villanova's Resilient Innovation through Sustainable Engineering (RISE) Forum. RISE led the township through a rigorous process of energy audits, scenario comparisons, and cost-benefit analyses of myriad options. The recommendations helped the township identify and prioritize its steps going forward. Thus far, the township has held public education Green Day events, installed electric charging stations, transitioned their emergency fleets to electric vehicles, and added rooftop solar.



## POLICY PERSPECTIVES

We encourage the Commonwealth to remain firmly committed to developing legislation and initiatives to strengthen multi-state, state, regional, and local sustainability efforts.

The League strongly supports these actions and urges that they allow for flexibility and creativity by local municipalities and include technical and financial assistance where needed.

The League also supports the development of comprehensive regional plans to prepare for natural disasters and ensure continuity of shared infrastructure, along with joint commitments for stewardship of shared natural and historic resources.

At the local level, The League believes municipalities must embed sustainability principles in all their long-term planning efforts.



## PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY

*"We need to look at public health and safety through a fresh lens."*

**In The League's recent survey, Pennsylvania's municipal leaders identified public safety as one of their top five concerns for the future.** What's more, throughout the ENVISION Forums, leaders from municipalities of all sizes and locations consistently raised one issue: While historically it made sense to run single-purpose departments for fire, police, healthcare, and mental health services, today, these functions have become tightly interconnected. Accordingly, a new, integrated definition and approach to public health and safety are needed.

While there is a long-held perception of local governments as proudly independent and resistant to partnering, change has come. Half of the municipalities in The League's survey are already participating in inter-municipal cooperation to provide police, fire, or emergency medical services, and another 30% are planning to do so.

### A Time Like No Other

The early 2020s proved to be a period of historic change in the public health and safety domains. The COVID-19 pandemic became the most extreme public health crisis of the past hundred years, resulting in the loss of nearly 50,000 lives across the Commonwealth during its first two years alone. During the same period, the racial justice movement and calls for police reform following the killing of George Floyd had far-reaching societal impacts not seen since the 1960s.

## TODAY'S REALITIES

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- ◆ **Local approaches to safety and justice are transforming.** Community leaders and law enforcement agencies across the Commonwealth are working to increase transparency, update training programs and policies, recruit and hire officers who reflect the communities they serve, reduce use-of-force incidents, and increase accountability. At the same time, municipalities are trying new methods to handle encounters involving mental health, drug addiction, and domestic violence situations more effectively.
- ◆ **Volunteer fire and emergency services are in crisis.** Many municipalities, particularly those in rural areas, are grappling with an urgent reality: volunteer fire departments may no longer be a sustainable model. In 2018, the Senate Resolution 6 (SR6) Commission's analysis led to the recommendation that communities consider transitioning from heavy reliance on part-time fire and paramedic volunteers to hybrid models staffed mainly by trained career professionals, to improve the delivery of emergency services. The fiscal impact of this shift is of paramount concern for many localities.
- ◆ **Municipalities are joining forces.** How vital services are delivered and paid for is undergoing a paradigm shift. Municipal leaders are grappling with how to downsize or restructure their departments and develop robust recruitment, training, and retention efforts to avert gaps in essential services. The financial and operational implications are profound, propelling many municipalities to pursue shared solutions within their regions.

## MOVING FORWARD

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**Municipal leaders attending the ENVISION Forums strongly agreed that protecting their communities' health, safety, security, and resiliency is paramount.** They concur that additional services and personnel are needed in all health and safety-related departments and that adopting a more regional approach is often beneficial. Beyond tapping into all available state and grant funding to expand their capacity, municipalities' plans include:

- ◆ Anticipating and planning for the possibility of needing to move away from relying on volunteer fire and EMT services.
- ◆ Engaging in more local and regional collaborations.
- ◆ Developing interdisciplinary training that encompasses health, mental health, and other fields for police and first responders.
- ◆ Conducting communications campaigns to change public perceptions and restore trust in police departments.

**In 2018, the SR6 Commission developed an extensive list of recommendations to address shortages in emergency and fire services.**

The recommendations are in response to demands for round-the-clock coverage, faster response times, and more-arduous certifications that come at a time when volunteerism is impacted by residents' ever-growing home, family, and career obligations. The recommendations include increasing funding sources, promoting regionalization of services, and developing initiatives to attract and support emergency service personnel.






## Municipalities In Action



- ◆ **Drone technology delivers positive results for the Western Berks Fire Department (WBFD).** Serving four municipalities with a combination of career and volunteer members, the WBFD responds to about 1,000 calls annually. To combat dwindling emergency staffing, firefighters proposed an innovative approach – using drones to supplement and assist in high-risk incidents. A drone was purchased using an equipment grant from the Pennsylvania State Fire Commissioners. Community demonstrations generated enthusiasm and private donations that enabled the department to add a thermal/zoom camera and lighting system. The results have been dramatic from its first deployment, when it located a missing older adult in a several hundred-acre cornfield within 20 minutes. The drone team has been called to dozens of emergency incidents and public events and has assisted fire, police, SWAT, and search and rescue operations in three counties. Successes range from supporting ground fire operations and finding lost children in crowds to providing intelligence to incident commanders dealing with barricaded and armed subjects, which has informed decision-making and helped keep first responders safe.

- ◆ **The City of Altoona revamped its police recruitment and training.** Like other localities, recruiting and retaining police officers in Altoona has become much more difficult. In response, the City has implemented an extensive field training program for all police officers that enter the workforce. Recruits are supervised by Field Training Officers skilled in adult learning and receive specialized training in critical areas such as de-escalation and addiction/overdose recognition, using scenario and virtual reality teaching methods.
- ◆ **The City of Franklin focuses on domestic violence.** Funded with grants from the Federal Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and Pennsylvania's Stop Violence Against Women fund, the Venango County District Attorney's Office is working to strengthen the criminal justice system's response to violence against women and to support and enhance services for victims. The program facilitates collaborative community response among city and county law enforcement, judicial offices, and victim and health services. Together, they offer multidisciplinary professional training and provide an array of services to residents, including victim resource kits that include a secure smartphone, whistle, and other items to protect the privacy and safety of those at risk of violence.
- ◆ **Living well in Bethel Park Municipality.** As a participant in *Live Well Allegheny*, an initiative of the Allegheny County Health Department, Bethel Park is actively working to improve its residents' health and wellness.





The municipality hosts outreach and educational activities, including a Wellness Summit in collaboration with the local school district and a monthly Speaker Series featuring experts on various health and life skills topics. Originally formatted as live events, the speaker program successfully transitioned to virtual during the pandemic, which has expanded audience reach to as many as 1,700 viewers.



◆ **Lower Merion Township uses virtual reality to enhance law enforcement training.**

The township's police department received a federal grant to acquire an advanced virtual reality training simulator that they use to help first responders hone their de-escalation and crisis intervention skills. The training program combines classroom learning with virtual reality scenarios developed by police officers and mental health and social services professionals across the county. Participants report that the method enables them to practice active listening, empathy, and rapport building more frequently, in the context of situations they may encounter.



## POLICY PERSPECTIVES

The Commonwealth must recognize the high cost of providing public health and safety services and optimize funding sources for county and municipal governments. As the COVID pandemic illustrates, there is also a pressing need to prepare for future public health crises.

To ensure essential public health and safety functions are fully maintained in the coming years, The League supports:

- ◆ Making concerted efforts to reduce the costs of providing full-time public safety by revising collective bargaining laws and reforming public safety pensions to achieve more predictability.
- ◆ Avoiding additional cost mandates directed at the local level.
- ◆ Incentivizing regional intergovernmental agreements among police and fire departments to encourage cooperative equipment purchasing, eliminating service duplication, and reducing training and other costs.
- ◆ Permanently authorizing grant programs for the purchase or repair of equipment, construction or renovation of facilities, and firefighter training.
- ◆ Increasing dedicated funding from the state to support all aspects of public safety.
- ◆ Closely coordinating state and federal public health administration with local agencies and roles.



## ECONOMIC VITALITY

*“We must make Pennsylvania economically competitive. We can’t lose that battle.”*

**T**hroughout much of its history, industrial manufacturing was the backbone of Pennsylvania’s economy. Local leaders today are aggressively working to attract new businesses and industries, create satisfying and well-paying jobs, and encourage economic activities in their communities.

Although there is no one-size-fits-all approach to achieving economic sustainability, municipal leaders have a general consensus that vibrant economies require a robust ecosystem of business, education, community, and cultural resources. Accordingly, attracting and retaining businesses, jobs, and workforce development top their lists of current and future challenges and priorities.

Over the long term, municipal leaders believe that success will largely hinge on their ability to nurture and grow vibrant communities that attract residents, employers, and visitors.

**85% of municipalities who responded to The League’s survey are currently investing in economic development to build and sustain a robust local economy or are planning to do so.**

## TODAY'S REALITIES

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Data consistently shows that Pennsylvania's fundamental economic base is in transition. Many municipalities across the Commonwealth are experiencing population loss, with associated threats of school and business closures and shrinking tax bases.

- ◆ **More than 99% of the Commonwealth's businesses are classified as small.** Pennsylvania mirrors the country, as businesses with fewer than 500 employees dominate its economy. According to the US Small Business Administration's 2022 Small Business Profiles report, there are nearly 1.1 million small businesses in Pennsylvania, accounting for 46.3% of all workers. Moreover, 80% of these businesses are sole proprietorships with no other employees. Turnover is also ongoing: Over 33,000 small businesses opened in one year, and more than 28,000 closed.
- ◆ **Industries of the future call Pennsylvania home.** A robust entrepreneurial culture consistently attracts investment in biotech, life sciences, robotics, and artificial intelligence innovations. Of particular note is Highly Automated Vehicle (HAV) technology, for which Pennsylvania has become a national hub, attracting billions of investment dollars. The future of the driverless vehicle industry is being fast-tracked by two significant pieces of legislation:
  - » The federal **Inflation Reduction Act** combines significant investment in research and manufacturing of electric vehicles and HAV infrastructure with large consumer incentives and rebates.
  - » **SB 965**, which is currently under review by the Senate Transportation Committee, will modernize Pennsylvania's Vehicle Code by authorizing driverless testing and deployment of HAVs by companies and research institutions.
- ◆ **There are signs that Pennsylvania's business image is improving.** CNBC's June 2022 index of America's Top States for Doing Business ranks Pennsylvania #17 overall—the first time the Commonwealth has made it into the index's top 20 in the past decade. The analysis is composed of 88 different metrics in 10 areas of competitiveness.
- ◆ **The Commonwealth possesses a unique combination of strengths.** Of particular note:
  - » **World-class R&D universities** that attract and produce a vast talent pool.
  - » **Geography** that places manufacturers and other companies within a day's drive of 40% of the US population and 60% of the Canadian population.
  - » **Comparatively affordable cost of living** in relation to others in the tri-state area. The 2021 Annual Composite Cost of Living Index produced by the Missouri Economic Research and Information Center (MERIC) places Pennsylvania in the middle of US states, at 29th. Comparatively, Pennsylvania is significantly more affordable than either New Jersey (#42) or New York (#49). The index analyzes costs for groceries, housing, utilities, transportation, and health, among other measures.
  - » **Abundant tourism and recreational options** that include newly restored parks, one-of-a-kind historical attractions, and an ever-expanding lineup of cultural and entertainment amenities.



# ECONOMIC VITALITY

## MOVING FORWARD

Municipal leaders agree that government, business, and educational stakeholders must work creatively together to elevate Pennsylvania's overall standing as a business and job-friendly state.

**ENVISION forum attendees also expressed the firm conviction that local municipalities have the potential to meet the moment.** They are confident in their abilities to capitalize on their communities' unique assets and potential.

Forum participants identified a range of economic development priorities they will focus on in the coming years, including:

- ◆ Developing comprehensive plans for economic development.
- ◆ Modernizing their business districts.
- ◆ Creating more programs to help small businesses start, grow, and thrive.
- ◆ Partnering with industry and educational institutions to support workforce development and create business and innovation incubators and laboratories.
- ◆ Developing outreach programs to attract and retain young professionals and families.
- ◆ Instituting policies to ensure equitable development and wealth generation opportunities.
- ◆ Creating tax and other incentives to stimulate private sector business investment.
- ◆ Increasing marketing and promotion to bolster retail activity and tourism.

**"We need to be able to capitalize on entrepreneurs, including small tech start-ups, to come to our city to work and live. High-speed internet is essential."**

– ENVISION Forum Participant

## Municipalities In Action



- ◆ **The City of Allentown benefits from the Commonwealth's first Neighborhood Improvement Zone (NIZ).** The NIZ is a special taxing district that encourages development and revitalization. The NIZ consists of approximately 128 acres in downtown Allentown and the Waterfront district. It has stimulated over \$1 billion in real estate development, including several mixed-use buildings featuring office space, retail, and restaurants, a luxury hotel, and 10,000 seat arena that hosts concerts and is the home ice for the Lehigh Valley Phantoms, the Philadelphia Flyers hockey farm team.
- ◆ **The Borough of State College goes all in for its businesses.** Its Downtown State College Improvement District's far-reaching efforts include sponsoring special events that create a stronger sense of place, advocating for business and property owners, augmenting security, and operating a "Clean Team" to ensure the area is inviting. The Borough dedicated \$500,000 of its ARPA funds to providing small business grants. It also established a Redevelopment Authority that assists with projects such as a



restaurant incubator, long-term resident housing, and a boutique hotel. Zoning incentives encourage new developments to incorporate public art, and zoning amendments have enabled investments in infrastructure to make its downtown more walkable and bikeable.

- ◆ **Carnegie Mellon University is helping cement Pittsburgh's place as a world hub for next-level research and innovation.** Examples include:
  - » **Metro21: Smart Cities Institute**, which works with civic partners and leaders in rural and metropolitan communities to develop and deploy innovative technologies and policies to solve local challenges such as access to clean air and water, safe mobility, smart infrastructure, net zero energy, and equitable economic prosperity.
  - » **Robotics Institute**, an incubator that has produced numerous spinoff ventures, including Roadbotics Inc, which Michelin acquired. The company uses machine vision and learning to help cities monitor, map, and assess the condition of their roads and infrastructure in real-time.
  - » Scientists from the university's **Human-Computer Interaction Institute** founded Zensors, a computer vision technology platform that analyzes images from existing building cameras to monitor crowd flow and occupancy. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the company opened its platform at no cost to stores, governments, hospitals, and essential businesses to help monitor social distancing and protect public health.



## POLICY PERSPECTIVES

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The Commonwealth plays an essential role in economic growth and sustainability by supporting economic initiatives that offer grants, loans, loan guarantees, matching funds, technical and business assistance, workforce education, marketing, and promotion.

The League supports the continuation of such programs, which are vital as Pennsylvania moves from an economy built on smokestack industries to fostering industries built on science, technology, engineering, art, and mathematics (STEAM).

To be business-friendly and compete for future jobs, all levels of the Commonwealth's government must work together. Doing so will enable municipalities to offer family-sustaining employment and create a favorable economic climate for all.



*Charting the Future for  
Pennsylvania's Municipalities*

## THANK YOU!

We gratefully acknowledge the seven municipalities that so graciously hosted ENVISION 2032 forums.

And we offer special thanks to our presenters for sharing their communities' best and most promising practices. Hearing first-hand from elected officials, municipal managers, police and fire leadership, and their talented teams set the stage for substantive discussion during the forums. Your plans and innovations are already sparking fresh thinking in communities across the Commonwealth.

### **Northcentral ENVISION 2032 Forum State College | March 31, 2022**

*Field Training for Police Officers*

Manager Omar Strohm and Chief Joe Merrill,  
City of Altoona

*Modernizing Communication*

Manager Joe Fleming, City of St. Marys

### **Northeast ENVISION 2032 Forum Scranton | April 1, 2022**

*Planning for a Brighter Fiscal Future*

Larry West, Business Administrator,  
City of Scranton

Abe Amorós presenting on behalf of  
the City of Lancaster

*Fighting Blight – Rehabilitation Efforts in Pittston*

Mayor Michael Lombardo, City of Pittston

### **Northwest Envision 2032 Forum Franklin | April 20, 2022**

*City/County Collaboration on STOP Violence  
Against Women*

Mayor Doug Baker, City of Franklin

*Erie's Economic Rebound*

Mayor Joseph Schember, City of Erie

### **Southwest #1 ENVISION 2032 Forum Cranberry Township | April 21, 2022**

*New Net Zero Borough Building,  
Photovoltaic Energy Supply*

Patricia DeMarco, Ph.D., Council VP,  
Forest Hills Borough

*Going Green with West Norriton Township  
and Villanova University*

Jason Bobst, Manager/Secretary,  
West Norriton Township

### **Southwest #2 ENVISION 2032 Forum Upper St. Clair Township | April 22, 2022**

*"Live Well" Speaker Series and Community Grants*

Laurence Christian, Manager, Municipality of Bethel Park

*Homestead Roundtable*

Mayor John Burwell & Vanessa McCarthy-Johnson,  
Manager, Homestead Borough

### **Southcentral ENVISION 2032 Forum Harrisburg | May 5, 2022**

*Fighting Blight – Rehabilitation Efforts in Pittston*

Mayor Michael Lombardo, City of Pittston

*Orton Family Foundation —*

*Community Heart & Soul Program*

George Needles, Manager, Upper Chichester

### **Southeast ENVISION 2032 Forum Phoenixville and Upper Providence Township | May 6, 2022**

*Virtual Reality Police Training in De-Escalation*

Ernie McNeely, Manager, Lower Merion Township

Maddie Lewis, Police Officer, Lower Merion Township

*Building a Stronger and More Equitable Lancaster*

Milzy Carrasco, Director of Neighborhood Engagement,  
City of Lancaster

Thank you to The League's Board of Directors and our staff for your visionary leadership and your role in making ENVISION 2032 a reality.

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