

# Greene County FUTURES FORUM

Oct 29, 4-6pm, Greene County Career & Technology Center



## PANEL DISCUSSION

### Regional Perspectives on Economic Development Opportunities

*Ben Bush, Vice President of Public Affairs, Allegheny Conference on Community Development*

*Andy Walker, Executive Director, Meadville Community Revitalization Corporation*

*Moderated by Megan Ziegler, CEO of the SWPA Municipal Project Hub*

**Please introduce your work. What are 1–2 successes you're most proud of?**

**Ben:** The biggest success for Forward Lawrence has been coalition-building among state, federal, and local elected officials to support and fund redevelopment projects (e.g., business park redeveloped with 20-year debt decreased). This has entailed working with business site brokers through incentives, LETRA, and others. Identifying development opportunities relies on a strong understanding of strengths and assets in Lawrence County.

**Andy:** The main focus of Meadville Community Redevelopment Corporation (MCRC) is to revitalize downtown Meadville and serve as the “developer of last resort.” Work focuses on engagement, marketing, placemaking, business development, data collection, and building rehabilitation. The MCRC acts as a kickstarter to make business endeavors profitable for entrepreneurs.

**How did you organize internally to make these successes possible?**

**Ben:** Forward Lawrence is an umbrella organization that is a merger of the Industrial Development Corporation, Chamber of Commerce, and Lawrence County Economic Development Corporation. Each entity maintained their board and restructured their bylaws and cooperation agreements for alignment. They collaborate via a shared services agreement. Employees have branching responsibilities for each organization. The Chamber of Commerce kept their tax-exempt status. The organization is funded through various income streams through the county, the chamber's membership fees, foundation funding, and a plan to maintain self-funding.

**“The biggest success for Forward Lawrence has been coalition-building...”**

**Ben Bush**

**How did you organize internally to make these successes possible?**

**Andy:** Through investment from RMK Mellon, developed an organization solely focused on the revitalization of downtown Meadville. Started as a unified group, but later reworked into a CDC. Funding from the private sector is via “benevolent investments.”

**What partnerships are essential to your success?**

**Ben:** Partnerships among the business communities are crucial since they decide where and what to invest. Developing relationships with public officials who want to focus on growth is also essential. And lasting, strong relationships with anchor institutions like universities, schools, etc. is key.

**Andy:** We gathered the relevant stakeholders through conducting a Meadville revitalization commitment. This engaged businesspeople, volunteers at the redevelopment authority, and others. The strong relationship between the college and the city for community development was essential.

***“Finding the right person with the correct connections that’s trusted within communities is essential.”***

***Andy Walker***

**How did you build trust and credibility to become a change-maker in your community?**

**Ben:** Assembling a strong team internally to support the coalition. Building a strong coalition that can build consensus among stakeholders. Execution of the plan is crucial in building credibility.

**Andy:** It’s vital to build credibility to have an independent organization. Finding the right person with the correct connections that’s trusted within communities is essential. And building an operation model that sustains the organization for the long term through revenue generation, through fees for services, etc.

## **Future Laddering Activity**

### **Top visions for Greene County:**

- *Create and build community vitality*
- *Create a community that people want to live in and supports a strong tax base*
- *Population growth*
- *Increase opportunities while maintaining rural identities*
- *Overcome being stuck” to get to action*

### **Top ideas to make it happen**

- *Attract 30-year-olds who grew up here*
- *Economic Gardening - Grow from within*
- *Create more entry-level homes*
- *Diversify the energy sector and industry tax revenue*
- *Create a downtown merchant board*

**Group 1: Emily Brown (facilitator), Julie, Courtney, Dave C, Corby, Andy, Bailey, Jeanine, Henry**

WHY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a more stable tax base</li> <li>• Stronger community ties (mom friends, kids, civic groups, etc.)</li> <li>• Safety</li> <li>• Strengthened sense of love and appreciation for community, higher civic commitment</li> <li>• Increased quality of life and vitality in community</li> </ul>	WHY
WHY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bring younger fresher ideas for development</li> <li>• Bring ideas from other places that incoming people have been living</li> <li>• Beautiful neighborhoods</li> <li>• Churches/community groups/schools benefit</li> <li>• More diverse entertainment options</li> </ul>	WHY
WHY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic benefits: revenue for businesses, tax revenue</li> <li>• Help people be more stable financially and able to further invest</li> <li>• More home ownership</li> <li>• Keep housing market active</li> <li>• Build more houses</li> <li>• Encourage people to return to Greene County</li> </ul>	WHY
GOAL	<h2>INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT</h2>	GOAL
HOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High quality and cheaper childcare options</li> <li>• Grants for home/neighborhood beautification</li> <li>• Exceptional schools</li> <li>• Build waterside housing</li> <li>• Newer affordable housing</li> <li>• Create destinations people can see themselves in - e.g. spaces for activity, parks, etc.</li> </ul>	HOW
HOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tax abatement for a period, for families with young children, or other qualifiers</li> <li>• Code enforcement</li> <li>• Assess tax structure (school, income taxes)</li> <li>• Entrepreneurial support</li> <li>• Identify, recruit, and support small businesses</li> <li>• Create networks for business owners to plug into</li> </ul>	HOW
HOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First time homebuyer credits, buy-to-own programs that are specific to certain industries/employment</li> <li>• Business property tax reduction based on # of employees</li> <li>• Training on how to take advantage of voucher programs</li> </ul>	HOW

**Group 2: Megan Ziegler (facilitator), Betsy, Steve, Chuck, Cassy, Stacey, Jennifer, Ben S.**

WHY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep people and social capital + build a stronger tax base</li> <li>• Enhancing community to offer a better quality of life</li> <li>• Create a community we want to live in and that attracts others</li> <li>• Safeguard economy from changes</li> </ul>	WHY
WHY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More public services</li> <li>• Next generation can stay here and find jobs</li> <li>• More recreational options</li> </ul>	WHY
WHY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expanded tax base</li> <li>• Keep money local (don't need to go to Morgantown or Washington to shop)</li> <li>• Keep people and homes here</li> <li>• Retain and grow population</li> </ul>	WHY
GOAL	<p><b>ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION AND JOB CREATION</b></p>	GOAL
HOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a coalition of the willing</li> <li>• Create pipelines for successful business growth</li> <li>• Align education resources</li> <li>• Education opportunities to attract employers</li> <li>• Supporting new businesses and entrepreneurs</li> </ul>	HOW
HOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incubators and accelerator programs</li> <li>• Identify incentives and barriers at each level (county, state, muni)</li> <li>• Have a dedicated person to lead efforts</li> <li>• Update zoning to spur economic development</li> </ul>	HOW
HOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic gardening: Inventory of existing businesses - targeted for growth</li> <li>• Employee skillset survey</li> <li>• Map out employers and suppliers; identify who can co-locate</li> </ul>	HOW

**Group 3: Eric Macadangdang (facilitator), Amy Hopkins, Karl Hursey, Ben McMillen, JoAnn Marshall, Tyler Tanner**

WHY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase tax base and quality of life</li> </ul>	WHY
WHY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tax revenue</li> <li>• To grow population</li> <li>• Retain and gain population</li> <li>• Aging in place</li> </ul>	WHY
WHY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing diversity besides student housing</li> <li>• Better resourced school districts</li> <li>• Existing housing stock in poor condition</li> </ul>	WHY
GOAL	<p><b>INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT: Emphasis on housing stock, longer-term housing options</b></p>	GOAL
HOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More job opportunities</li> <li>• Retain graduates in Greene</li> <li>• Work with university</li> <li>• Different price points for different needs</li> </ul>	HOW
HOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lower tax barrier to develop (policy)</li> <li>• Entry-level development</li> </ul>	HOW
HOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Streamlined permitting and clear roles/expectations</li> <li>• Incentivize denser and higher-quality housing, esp. For those starting a business</li> </ul>	HOW

**Group 4: Katie Grimm (facilitator), Tyler, Cheryl, John Throgmorton, Chuck Trump, Jared, Brandon Morrison, Sheila Stewart, Joe Brodack, Kevin Paul**

WHY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More opportunity while preserving rural beauty</li> </ul>	WHY
GOAL	<p><b>SUSTAINED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING DEVELOPMENT</b></p>	GOAL
HOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shift mindset of “good ol’ boys club” and victim mentality</li> <li>• Take advantage of more scrappy mindset via collaborations</li> <li>• Attract local businesses to enable safe streets and aging in place</li> <li>• Leverage location and proximity to highway</li> </ul>	HOW
HOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asset-based development - start with what we have</li> <li>• Restaurants other than fast food</li> </ul>	HOW
HOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advertise low cost of living and proximity of Uniontown, Morgantown, and Washington</li> <li>• Increase broadband speed through satellite and public education campaign</li> <li>• Diversify energy sector and utilize energy we have to bolster new manufacturing technology...specifically combined cycle gas turbines</li> <li>• Consolidated school districts to save on expenses</li> </ul>	HOW

## Group 5: Sarah SanGiovanni (facilitator), David Bailey, Bethany

WHY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thriving, healthy community</li> <li>• Lifting up successes and each other</li> </ul>	WHY
WHY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not reinventing the wheel</li> <li>• Supporting small businesses and aligning with their values</li> <li>• Creating cohesion between organizations and eliminating the negatives</li> <li>• Clear and accountable purpose</li> <li>• Organizational clarity</li> <li>• Too much fragmentation - organizationally and geographically</li> <li>• We don't need full consensus or perfect efficiency to make a difference</li> </ul>	WHY
WHY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More focused use of resources</li> <li>• More focused priorities enabling low-hanging-fruit wins</li> <li>• Build momentum and trust via success</li> <li>• Breaking through to action! Overcoming being "stuck"</li> <li>• Accepting that a critical level has been reached and action must be taken in a timely manner</li> </ul>	WHY
GOAL	<h1>COORDINATED ACTION</h1>	GOAL
HOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nourish community commitment rooted in agriculture tradition</li> <li>• New leadership and voices through restructuring</li> <li>• Identify assets to build them up</li> </ul>	HOW
HOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Central organization to rally united cause and build buy-in</li> <li>• Better connect businesses to borough council</li> <li>• High Street focus for university vitality</li> <li>• </li> </ul>	HOW
HOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Downtown merchants board</li> <li>• Make the case for engagement to business owners</li> <li>• Support for creating gathering places (collaborative ownership models?)</li> <li>• Facade program - e.g., hot rods building</li> <li>• Have more "how" conversations together</li> </ul>	HOW

# Greene County Futures Forum



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*This event was held by the Greene County Community Foundation, Waynesburg University, and the Greene County Industrial Development Corporation. The Southwestern Pennsylvania Municipal Project Hub, a regional nonprofit focused on economic development and investment, is a supporting partner. This work is funded by the Heinz Foundation.*