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Introduction

To paraphrase the words of Abraham Lincoln, the 16th president of the United States, "We are testing whether or not this region, or any region will long endure." The regional economic development planning process is designed to "endure" this region far into the future, beyond various crises, and well beyond the depressed state the region was forty years ago. The process is designed to ensure "regional domestic tranquility." To accomplish this, EDCNP has taken a number of steps to go beyond the normal OEDP and Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) process. While incorporating all of the requirements found in the guidelines and regulations dealing with OEDP and CEDS, EDCNP has taken other steps which have benefited the economic development planning process and have involved a team of players and participants across a seven county region of 965,000 people with urban, suburban, and rural characteristics.

Bounded by the Delaware River on the east and the states of New Jersey and New York, the southern tier of New York State on the north, the rural central Pennsylvania region of the west, and the Lehigh Valley Metropolitan area (Allentown, Bethlehem, and Easton) on the south, the region was cut off from the outside world for many decades. It lost 250,000 people between 1930 and 1970, literally a large city. Those who left were all the employables, generally ages 25 to 44. What existed in those years was basically an anthracite coal economy, and as these jobs deteriorated and left, depression hit Northeastern Pennsylvania.

Furthermore, while many of these jobs were eventually replaced by the needle trade industry (men's and women's clothing), that industry, too, has left the region, mainly due to the importation of foreign products competing with this formerly domestic industry.

From a regional perspective, many people feel that Northeastern Pennsylvania has made the most "startling regional economic comeback in the history of the United States." This is due to the inspired leadership, which created in the late 1950s and beyond, the community and industrial park movement in the United States, community industrial funds contributed to by employers and employees, and to a large extent the most famous Commonwealth economic development program, the Pennsylvania Industrial Development Authority (PIDA).

Additionally, the region includes a tourist and travel development industry second to none with the Pocono Mountains being located within Northeastern Pennsylvania. This industry sector contributes over 30,000 jobs and is calculated as a \$2.2 billion industry in the region, currently.

Another astonishing characteristic is that within this region there are 267 local governments, 7 county governments, and a tremendous number of special authorities and nonprofit organizations. In fact, Pennsylvania has more local governments than any other state except Illinois and has more special authorities and nonprofit organizations than any other state. It also represents the cradle of American history with Northeastern Pennsylvania being the birthplace of the industrial revolution.

Today, the economic base of Northeastern Pennsylvania is extremely diversified without reliance on a single industry sector, with the largest employer being a military installation, Tobyhanna Army Depot. There are significant manufacturing operations although this is dissipating, with the growth of the service sector representing more than 50% of all jobs in Northeastern Pennsylvania.

The Regional Visioning Process (NEPA 2000)

In 1989, a group of community leaders gathered in the EDCNP conference room to discuss the visioning of Northeastern Pennsylvania. As a result of this meeting, a Steering Committee was selected after 500 letters had been circulated across Northeastern Pennsylvania requesting participation. Representatives of the private and public sectors served on this Committee which was chaired by Jack Walsh, a previous President of EDCNP. Jack Walsh was the former President and CEO of WVIA TV & Radio, the regional public television and radio station. Several months of planning for the visioning process occurred, selection of a name (NEPA 2000), and a draft proposal was prepared, which selected the option of using the resources of the four Penn State regional campuses serving Northeastern Pennsylvania including Wilkes-Barre, Scranton, Hazleton, and Schuylkill Haven, as a way to reach out to the regional community. Additionally, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, a legislative-funded agency to help promote rural development across Pennsylvania, had a grant program that was subsequently tapped for approximately \$37,000 since that organization had promoted the opportunity for visioning in different communities across

Pennsylvania.

The EDCNP was the lead organization with respect to the regional visioning process. It coordinated the work of the four Penn State regional campuses, administered and managed the Center for Rural Pennsylvania grant, and contributed its own financial resources through the basic ARC and basic EDA grant program and its dues paying members to carry out a major work program component that spread across almost three years of intensive work relative to the regional visioning process.

Most importantly, the regional visioning function was the first such type of activity in Northeastern Pennsylvania's history. Today, there are twelve visioning projects in the region either at the county or sub-county area level, that includes all of the counties in the region, which EDCNP feels makes Northeastern Pennsylvania have more such visioning projects than any other region of the United States. It is a sharp change from the past when jobs became the single focused activity of the region without much attention to what the future might hold.

The regional visioning process included five focus group meetings on different topics of importance to regional visioning, such as governmental fragmentation, economic development, human resources, and others. Each of the focus groups was sponsored by a Penn State regional campus and/or EDCNP. Gathered in one room were leaders on these particular topics, and each of the meetings were scattered in different locations across Northeastern Pennsylvania. The results of the focus groups were written up and made available to all participants as well as others and were incorporated as part of the results of the regional visioning process.

Additionally, the results of the regional visioning process were made part of the Overall Economic Development Program (OEDP), particularly the five year update that had been prepared in 1992 as a guideline for what the region might be like and might achieve over the next five years. It was used, and continues to be used, as part of the CEDS process. Many recommendations came about as a result of the regional visioning process, and they have been updated periodically. The regional visioning analysis and actions were published in 17 small (3 to 33 pages) volumes.

Annual State of the Region Report

As part of the EDCNP OEDP (CEDS), we include information from an Annual State of the Region report which has been published by the Council for 28 years. This innovative and unique document is one of the most popular best sellers of EDCNP publications. It is used by planners, developers, private sector, public sector, and nonprofit sector organizations to incorporate current thinking regarding the state of the region in whatever planning and documentation

evaluations are accomplished.

The Annual State of the Region report becomes a key component of the planning process used annually in the region. Each year, a special term is designated as being the type of year expected in the region. For example, it is easy to identify the year 2000 as "The Year of The Millennium." In prior years, depending upon each situation, the region has been characterized as "A Year of Transition," "A Year of Century Vision," showcasing the twelve visioning projects in the region, and much more.

In late January of each year, a State of the Region message is issued with a special regional news conference, to tie closely to the Annual State of the Union and the Annual Governor's State of the State messages. When fourth quarter statistics are available from the prior year, EDCNP publishes the State of the Region report, usually in April of each year.

Information from the State of the Region report is then transferred into the CEDS. The State of the Region document provides economic statistics to show how the current year relates to prior years, but most importantly, the State of the Region document includes a ten to twelve page analysis of the State of the Region, thus incorporating both quantitative and qualitative assessments.

The State of the Region report does not provide a comprehensive analytical model nor does it pretend to cover all characteristics and activities happening, or proposed to happen, throughout the region. What it does offer is the insights of the professional staff of EDCNP, relative to the kinds of important events that transpired in the past year, and it begins to process information and factors which are likely to dictate what will happen in the upcoming year. For example, in 1995, perhaps the most unique and inspired event, was the placement of the largest employer in the region, Tobyhanna Army Depot, on the closure list for the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission (BRAC). Much of the Council's attention was placed upon this 3400 employee facility with the 1996 State of The Region report emphasizing what had occurred in 1995 through a Regional Blue Ribbon Task Force managed by EDCNP to help remove the Depot from the closure list with some perspective given in the 1996 year to what might occur with respect to new jobs actually being added to the Tobyhanna Army Depot complement as a result of BRAC decisions for McClellan Air Force Base in Sacramento, California. Another example would be the 1998 State of the Region report that talked about the potential that existed for the designation of Keystone Opportunity Zones in Pennsylvania and their impact on the region and the subsequent review of 1998 prospects, which defined specific areas within the region as Opportunity Zones and the potential for new jobs.

Regional Economic Summit and Regional Leadership Forum

As a very specific follow-up to the regional visioning process, EDCNP spent a

year in planning the implementation of a Regional Economic Summit Conference. This Summit was held on October 9, 1997, and featured three major presentations and eleven panel presentations. At the end of the day, the local public television station, WVIA, at the resort site in the Pocono Mountains where the Summit was held, shot a one hour presentation, highlighting several of the speakers at the conference and presenting information on the results of the Summit. This one hour program was televised a number of times on WVIA and thus reached a good portion of the Northeastern Pennsylvania population. Furthermore, as a result of the Summit, a summary was prepared using a futuristic overleaf that included not only the Economic Summit results, but the results of a Regional Leadership Forum held on April 2, 1998.

The Regional Leadership Forum was designed to highlight the type and kinds of leadership required in the 21st century to make Northeastern Pennsylvania economically and quality-of-life competitive. Among the featured speakers was the former Pennsylvania Lieutenant Governor William Scranton, III, who is a regional resident.

The results of this leadership forum were particularly emphasized by the presentation of Michael Fairbanks, a former regional resident who is co-leader of the Monitor Company from Cambridge, Massachusetts. Fairbanks stunned the audience at both the Regional Economic Summit Conference and the Regional Leadership Forum with an astonishing portrayal of Northeastern Pennsylvania's future, if certain actions were taken to truly make the region competitive in a global setting. He created the atmosphere around which individuals and organizations attending these events could participate actively in taking the results of the functions and applying those to regional situations.

EDCNP has used the results of these conferences and forums as part of its strategy to make the CEDS a living document rather than one whose meaning and purpose does not last beyond one news release.

The CEDS Process

The CEDS process used by EDCNP is based upon a foundation of continuing economic development planning. In other words, the planning process does not begin nor does it end with preparation of a document. The Council's Work Plan Committee serves as the sounding board for the preparation of the economic development plan annually and makes its recommendations to the EDCNP Board of Directors. Periodically, questionnaire surveys were taken of the Work Plan Committee and the EDCNP Board of Directors to determine their specific thoughts and ideas relative to the priorities within the region. The Work Plan Committee consists of key members of the regional community, representing the private and public sectors. The document is prepared by the regional economist on the staff with a review by the Council's development director, deputy director,

and executive director.

In the five-year cycle when a full CEDS document is prepared, there are really two documents. One document meets the criteria of the CEDS process and is submitted to EDA for review and approval. Once that has been accomplished, the document is then reviewed again and turned into a more public statement for dissemination across Northeastern Pennsylvania. In this manner, the document continues to become a "living" economic development planning process which is designed for use by the general public as well as regional officials, consultants, and others who need to have the information contained in the strategy.

Another characteristic is that the document is designed to be "strategic" in nature. Periodically questions are posed of a strategic nature to determine how the region should be interacting with the state, the nation, and the global community. This is an important consideration since international trade and exporting has become a critical component of the Council's work program since the late 1970s.

The Public Process

Each year, the county commissioners of the seven county region pass resolutions authorizing reaffirmation of their participation as a member of the Regional Economic Development District. News releases, media appearances on television or radio, and presentations are often completed by the EDCNP executive director or other staff and highlight the EDCNP planning process.

Furthermore, in late January of each year, as part of the State of The Region message, a major news conference is convened to present the information to the media in order to use their talents and resources to extend the message across Northeastern Pennsylvania.

Additionally, when the State of The Region report is published in April of each year, news releases are mailed to the media concerning the information found in that report.

Lessons Learned

The following represent some of the lessons learned as part of the EDCNP economic development planning process:

- The State of the Region report has become the most popular report issued by EDCNP. Its use within the overall economic development process or CEDS is an important factor in having a consistent framework around which CEDS can be made more meaningful to the public.
- Regional visioning is not just an academic exercise. Its usefulness in the CEDS process is to serve as an important way to encourage regional community leaders to consistently think about the region's future. It does,

however, take considerable staff resources and fiscal assistance to make it meaningful.

- Constant communications with the media regarding the role of economic development districts and the information contained in the strategy document is critical. Use of as many techniques as possible to enhance public use of the information should include news conferences, news releases, appropriate public reports, and as many other techniques as proven useful in a particular region.
- The private sector is as important as the public sector in the planning process. Making sure that all sectors of the economy are wisely involved makes the document much more meaningful.